Benjamin Netanyahu defeats Gantz, but is still short a majority

The final voter turnout was 71% – up from 69.8% in the previous election.

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu waves to supporters following the announcement of exit polls in Israel's election at his Likud party headquarters in Tel Aviv on March 3, 2020. (photo credit: AMIR COHEN – REUTERS)

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu is on track to win 59 seats for his bloc of right-wing and religious parties in Monday's election, down by one from the 60 predicted by the initial exit polls. The new prediction leaves him two short of a majority in the Knesset.

The first polls indicated that Netanyahu's Likud won 36-37 seats. Its allies in Shas, UTJ and Yamina won 9, 7-8 and 6-7 respectively. The polls showed Blue and White with 33 seats, its ally Labor-Gesher-Meretz with 6-7, the Joint List 14-15 and Yisrael Beytenu 6-8.
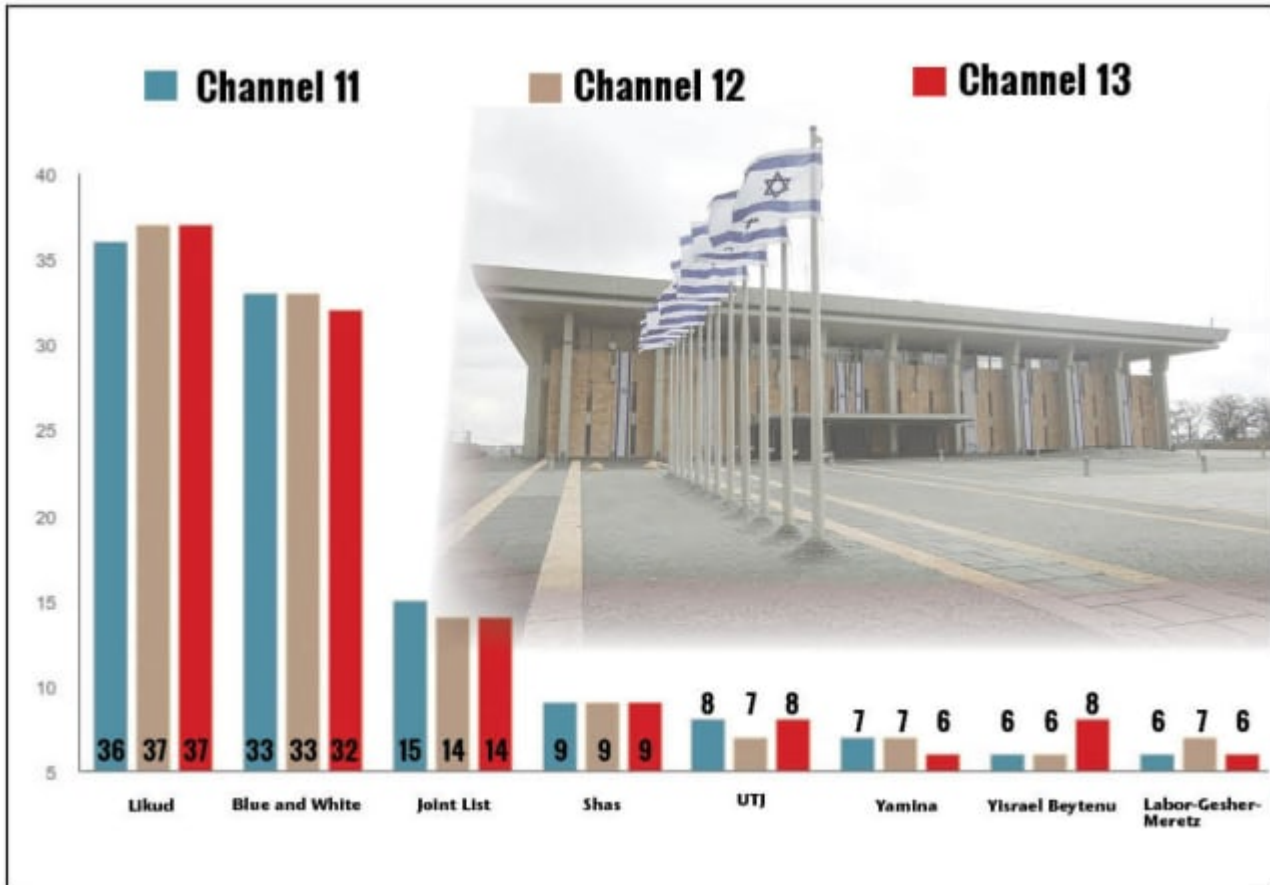
When Channel 13 updated its numbers at around 1 a.m. Israel time, however, Gantz gained one seat to 34 and the blocs shifted slightly, leaving the right-wing with only 59 seats.

Channel 12 also updated its numbers, giving Likud 37 seats, Blue and White 32, Arab Joint List 15, Shas 9, Yisrael Beytenu 7, UTJ 7, Labor-Gesher-Meretz 7 and Yamina 6.

However, by 4 a.m., Kan News gave Likud 36 seats and Blue and White 33, with the right bloc also holding a total of 59.

The numbers are expected to continue to change. The votes of soldiers, who tend to lean to the right, have not yet been counted and the Joint List tends to lose a seat when the soldiers' votes are added. But, if the Right does not obtain its 61st seat, it could end up being because the far-right Otzma Yehudit Party refused Netanyahu's repeated requests to quit the race.

First Exit Polls

Netanyahu immediately tweeted "thank you."

The outright victory in the third election in under a year is expected to enable Netanyahu to quickly form a right-wing coalition after having headed a caretaker government since December 2018.

Netanyahu spoke to the heads of the parties in his camp immediately after the exit polls were announced, and agreed to form a strong nationalist government as soon as possible.

Sources in Likud said he would even try to get a government in place before his criminal trial begins on March 17.

Blue and White MKs expressed disappointment with the results but said they did not expect the party to break up. They dismissed speculation that party leader Benny Gantz would quit politics.

Gantz seemed to support this, thanking his supporters and telling them: "I will continue to struggle for our ideology for you."

Yisrael Beytenu leader Avigdor Liberman also responded: "We have to wait for the final results. Yisrael Beytenu won't compromise a millimeter from what it promised its voters."

THE HIGH turnout in the country's unprecedented third election in under a year showed no signs of voter apathy, as citizens cast ballots in an attempt to end the political stalemate.

Voter turnout was 71%, continuing its from 69.83% in September and 68.46% in April. There were more than 200,000 voters casting ballots on Monday who had not voted in September.

The turnout was even higher among the 5,630 people quarantined due to exposure to the coronavirus, among whom 4,076 (72.4%) voted in special polling stations despite long lines.

Earlier on Monday, both Netanyahu and Gantz expressed concern about what they claimed was lower turnout in areas where their parties had done well in recent elections.

Gantz and his No. 2, Yair Lapid, went to the streets of Tel Aviv with megaphones begging people to vote, and MKs Gabi Ashkenazi and Moshe Ya'alon were sent to other Blue and White strongholds. Sources in the party said that turnout in Tel Aviv was ridiculously low, well behind the rest of the country.

Netanyahu went to Ma'aleh Adumim and complained about low turnout in Judea and Samaria and development towns in the South. He went on Facebook Live all day, urging Likud supporters to vote. The Likud complained that the press had made it look like the party was well ahead, discouraging its supporters from voting in the final hours.

There were complaints all day to the Central Elections Committee about forgeries and hidden ballots. Blue and White complained that the Likud campaign had doctored a video of Gantz.

In the original video, Gantz warned the party's supporters: "If you don't put Blue and White in the ballot box, there will be a fourth election." The doctored version had him only saying "Don't put Blue and White in the ballot box."

The head of the committee, Supreme Court Judge Neal Hendel, forced Likud to

remove the video from its Facebook and Instagram pages and to pay a fine of NIS 7,500 to Blue and White.

Source:
https://www.jpost.com/Israel-Elections/Benjamin-Netanyahus-Right-bloc-wins-majority-exit-polls-619513

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