**With or Without You (Netanyahu)**

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In less than one month, Israel will hold its fifth national election in four years. The Israeli press is filled with endless commentary, reports of polls showing who’s up and who’s down, early finger-pointing assessing blame, and a pervasive sense of gloom acknowledging that whatever the vote tally, the future will be no brighter or more certain than the present.

What’s crystal clear is that this election, like the previous four, has one main concern: Will Benjamin Netanyahu return as the head of government? There are other issues, to be sure, like whether the hardline ultra-religious parties will hold sway over a range of policies that secure certain privileges for their followers, or whether Netanyahu will be held accountable in the criminal proceedings against him. But for a majority of Israeli voters and, it appears, for US policymakers, the central issue is: “Will the future of Israel be one with or without Netanyahu?”

[Dollar continues to gain ground against Rupee](https://www.nation.com.pk/17-Oct-2022/dollar-continues-to-gain-ground-against-rupee)

As the weekly polls demonstrate, this election’s outcome will be as muddy as the last four. The coalition of parties supporting Netanyahu may reach the magic number of 61 Knesset seats (a simple majority), or they may fall short, bringing paralysis and calls for a sixth election. No current polls predict a clear 61 seats to the not-Netanyahu crowd.

The only way that either the “with” or “without” blocs could rise comfortably above 61 would be with the inclusion of an Arab party, which appears unlikely. Having denounced the current “Change government” for including a conservative Arab party (despite having courted them himself), it’s unlikely that Netanyahu would include them now. Nor would the anti-Netanyahu coalition, with one of its major parties have expressed reservations about serving in another coalition government dependent on Arab votes.

Even if the Netanyahu coalition wins 59 seats to the opposition’s 56, with control of government possible with the passive support of an Arab party, such a government would likely be relentlessly hounded by Netanyahu as a “minority” (i.e., a minority of Jews) government—in the same way, that he and Ariel Sharon hounded Yitzhak Rabin’s government in the 1990s.

[Pakistan likely to exit FATF grey list this week: sources](https://www.nation.com.pk/17-Oct-2022/pakistan-likely-to-exit-fatf-grey-list-this-week-sources)

Just 19 months ago, before the last Israeli election, I wrote that ousting Netanyahu would not only fail to improve Palestinian lives and rights but also might make them worse. I feared that, based on a fragile coalition, the “Change government” would feel the need to protect its right flank by demonstrating toughness vis-a-vis Palestinians and support for the settlement enterprise. And, as an anti-Netanyahu coalition including parties from the center and right and even a conservative Arab party, the “Change government” would be heralded by US liberals, giving it license to pursue whatever policies necessary to remain in power. This is exactly what happened.

The “Change government” followed the very same policies as the previous government—in some cases, worse. Settlements expanded; land confiscations continued, as did the release of “state lands” for the exclusive use of settlers; repression intensified, including the use of deadly force and mass arrests; provocations by settlers in Jerusalem and the West Bank were largely met with a blind eye; and policies designed to weaken the Palestinian Authority continued to be the standard operating procedure.

[Sheikh Rasheed challenges Lal Haveli’s evacuation orders](https://www.nation.com.pk/17-Oct-2022/sheikh-rasheed-challenges-lal-haveli-s-evacuation-orders)

If anything changed, it was US silence in response to these “Change government” behaviors. The guiding principle of US policy toward the Israeli-Palestinian arena has been pathetically reduced to doing nothing to damage the chances of the anti-Netanyahu forces staying in power and now winning in November—with Palestinians paying a steep price in life and liberty.

Most troubling is that if Netanyahu had been in charge, the US might have been inclined to publicly criticize his actions. But the “Change” crowd received nary a slap on the wrist, except an occasional expression of US “concern.”

A year and a half later, there’s another Israeli election with the same concerns and, most likely, the same outcome. Again, the only big issue is whether Netanyahu is returned as the head of government. To rip off the veneer of “Change” and force the US liberal establishment to confront the horrifying reality of Israeli policies toward Palestinians and act against them, I’m forced to hope for a Netanyahu win.