

November 2022: from Saar Tauber, Tamir Car Rental CEO

I usually begin to think about my opening thoughts on the newsletter around the 25th of the month and I complete it by the end of the month. As I have stated many times, the opening column is an attempt at giving you, the reader, an honest, behind the scenes view of what is going on inside Israel. I understand you can get the latest news on Israel in English on sites like the Jerusalem Post and the Times of Israel, but the goal of this newsletter is to provide an "under the radar" look at some of Israel's bigger stories and give you an idea of where the winds are blowing in Israel whether it be socially, politically, or culturally. I read and listen to the Hebrew press and follow a good many of the journalists, business leaders, statesmen, politicians, influencers, and organizational spokespersons to give a real feel for where Israel is.

This month I delayed everything a bit and opted for a post-election column instead of theorizing what could be given the many scenarios possible. It has been almost 12 hours since the polls have closed in Israel and although we are still a long way off from really knowing who will make up the 25th Knesset in the history of the state and who will be in the governing coalition, there are a few astonishing developments that overshadow the predictions and relative ambiguity that always pervades the morning after one of Israel's elections.

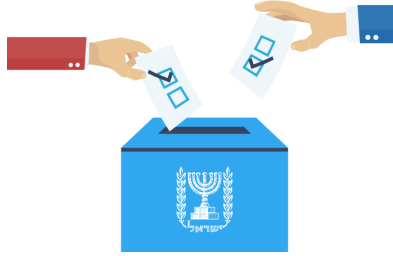
The main takeaway from yesterday's fifth election in just over 42 months is that Israel is headed in the "right" direction. I am obviously being facetious here but there is no denying that the country took a major step to the right after yesterday's vote. What separates this election from the previous four is the relative degree of certainty which bloc has a leg up in terms of forming the next coalition. As opposed to all of the recent elections, this one emanates a clear shift to the right, so much so that the path to the next government is as transparent as ever.

While pre-election polls touted the spiraling cost of living as the most important issue in this election, I highly doubt that voters had in mind the cost of a loaf of bread or a cup of cottage cheese as they casted their vote. I don't care what anyone says, Israel's 25th election was and will always be about security. Israelis are watching tragic funerals on a nightly basis and are afraid they or someone they know will be next.

Suddenly thrust into major political players, Israel's far right wing party leaders were all spewing politically correct sound bites the morning after such as "We're all brothers" and that the party "represents a diverse array of Israelis" but make no mistake about it, the next government, if the results hold up, will be Israel's most extreme right wing yet.

What this means on a practical level depends on who you ask. Israel's right is heralding the results as a first step to "taking back control of our country" whatever that means. Ask someone who voted centrist or left, and they will tell you that "We fear for the future of democracy in Israel".

Either way, Israel will once again go through a metamorphosis while putting the previously led Bennet/Lapid government in its rear view mirror.



Here are some of today's biggest winners and losers from election day:



Benjamin (Bibi) Netanyahu

Calling the election results a "huge expression of faith", it is pretty clear that Bibi Netanyahu was the big winner of yesterday's election. It was the first time in 13 years that Netanyahu did not run as an incumbent but the political turn around for Bibi in the face of continuing legal woes and the loss of some major party players, was absolutely stunning and at 73 he was gifted with not only an opportunity to lead the country again but if all exit polls prove to be correct, do it quickly and decisively with a "loyal" coalition behind him.

Bezalel Smotrich and Itamar Ben Gvir and the Religious Zionist party

Buoyed by a tremendous showing at the polls, Smotrich and Ben Gvir, along with their band of religious extremists doubled their Knesset seats from the last election. Exit polls show somewhere between 13-15 seats for what will be Israel's third largest party and one that garnered 10% of Israel's popular vote. Depending on what ministerial portfolio Netanyahu will doll out to these two, you can bet that it won't be the environment or diaspora affairs portfolio but something much more prominent and impactful. Ben Gvir was already talking about taking over as the Public Security Minister or even the Minister of Defense. Either way, it is clear he will have a major role regarding the future security of Israelis. And Smotrich? With a background in law, he seems best suited to head up the highly influential Justice Ministry. Either way, they will be major players in the next government. You can be sure about that.

Aryeh Deri and his Shas party

Early exit polls have given Shas leader Aryeh Deri, whose party firmly backs Netanyahu, 10-12 seats in the next government which would by far be the most for any religious party. Deri beamed about the ultra-Orthodox party's "incredible achievement", which was set for its best showing since 2013. Deri positioned himself as a champion for Israel's poor and will now be able to prove it in the battle against hyper-inflation. With the cost of living seemingly out of control he will have a clear opportunity to be "superman" for the impoverished of Israel. Not only is this good news for Deri and Shas but it is what the hundreds if not thousands of organizations and institutions who support the poor are salivating over.



Lapid and the left wing parties

Elections in Israel are almost always symmetrical in their results and this one was no different. If the right experienced a euphoric rise in seats that meant the left got slaughtered. Yair Lapid and his Yesh Atid centrist party always trailed in the polls, but he believed in his heart that he could match Netanyahu vote for vote. Clearly that optimism never materialized. With most of the votes counted Lapid will have approximately 23-24 seats, well below Bibi and the Likud party. Not only did Lapid grossly underachieve, but the other left wing parties also experienced colossal failures at the polls leading to incessant mudslinging at the left wing leaders blaming them for not putting up a strong enough fight in the election.

Officials in Prime Minister Yair Lapid's governing coalition slammed him Wednesday for his election campaign accusing Lapid of failing to properly marshal members of his coalition bloc to achieve the best results for the center-left, and instead focusing on building up his own Yesh Atid party. Meanwhile Labor leader Merav Michaeli was under heavy fire for her party's dismal showing and right now it isn't even clear if Meretz will get enough votes to cross the election threshold when all the votes are counted. It would be the first time in 30 years that the left wing party will not be represented in the Knesset.

Ayelet Shaked and Avigdor Lieberman

While it seems as though Avigdor Lieberman and his Yisrael Beitenu party will barely survive, Ayelet Shaked will not. Shaked and Lieberman have fallen out of favor with their constituents. Once a right wing star in Israeli politics, Shaked's fall was particularly precipitous and shocking. With only 80,000 votes, the current Minister of the Interior finds herself out of Israeli politics for the time since 2012 and has thrown her support behind Netanyahu for all that's worth.

As the dust has begun to settle from this round of Israeli elections, it's clear that recent terror attacks, an intifada atmosphere pervading in the West Bank, another war, the expansive range of rockets beyond Sderot and Ashkelon into some of Israel's dense population centers, and of course the subsequent rise in Israeli casualties have all taken their toll prompting Israel's religious right wing bloc to vote as though their lives depended on it and it clearly showed in the polls.

Not much was needed to break the logjam of the last few years when it came to Israeli politics. All you need is a couple of percentage points to tip the scales and that is exactly what happened in this round of Israeli elections. Whatever the final tally is, I hope my Israeli brethren find a way to work together amicably and that this is the last election we see for a very long time.