

Mass antiwar protest in Israel calls for all rats to get out of the Knesset

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Relatives and supporters of Israelis taken to Gaza demonstrate for their release in Tel Aviv on Saturday [Jack Guez/AFP]
An estimated 150,000 people attended the rally in one of the biggest demonstrations since Israel's war on Gaza began.

Tel Aviv, June 22 (RHC)-- Tens of thousands of protesters waving Israeli flags and chanting slogans against Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's government rallied in Tel Aviv Saturday, demanding new elections and the return of captives held in Gaza.

Large protests have occurred in the Israeli city on a weekly basis over Netanyahu's handling of the nearly nine-month-old war in Gaza started by Hamas's October 7 attack on southern Israel.

Many protesters held signs reading "Crime Minister" and "Stop the War" as people poured into the biggest Israeli city's main thoroughfare.

"I am here because I am afraid of the future of my grandchild. There will be no future for them if we don't go out and get rid of the horrible government," said contractor Shai Erel, 66. "All of the rats in the Knesset ... I wouldn't let any one of them be a guard of a kindergarten."

Antigovernment protest organization Hofshi Israel estimated more than 150,000 people attended the rally, calling it the biggest since Israel's war on Gaza. Some demonstrators lay on the ground covered in red paint in the city's Democracy Square to protest what they say is the death of the country's democracy under Netanyahu.

In an address to the crowd, a former head of Israel's domestic Shin Bet security agency, Yuval Diskin, condemned Netanyahu as Israel's "worst prime minister." Many are frustrated with the country's right-wing coalition, which includes Security Minister Itamar Ben-Gvir and other far-right ultranationalists, accusing it of prolonging the war in Gaza and putting the country's security and captives at risk.

Yoram, a 50-year-old tour guide who declined to give his last name, said he was attending every weekly protest as Israel needed elections "yesterday" because of Netanyahu. "I really hope the government collapses. If we go to the original date of elections in 2026, it is not going to be a democratic election."

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