Netanyahu and far right allies win Israeli elections
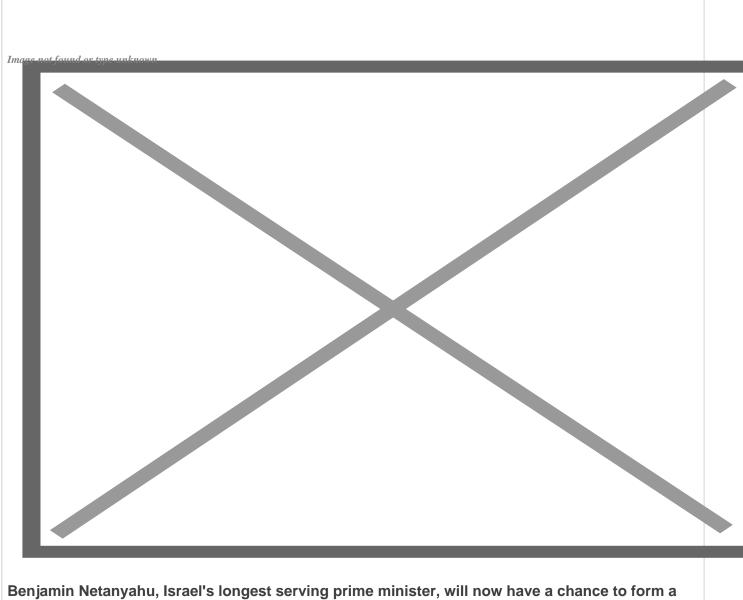

Benjamin Netanyahu, Israel's longest serving prime minister, will now have a chance to form a government with his ultranationalist allies [File: Ammar Awad/Reuters]

Tel Aviv, November 4 (RHC)-- A coalition led by the right-wing former Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has won a majority of seats in the 120-seat parliament, or Knesset, allowing the controversial figure to return to power.

Final election results announced on Thursday show that Netanyahu and his ultranationalist allies – many of whom were considered beyond the pale in Israeli politics only a few years ago – won 64 seats in the

120-seat parliament, with 32 of those seats going to Netanyahu's party, Likud.

On Wednesday, when roughly 85 percent of the votes had been counted, Netanyahu had told supporters that they were "on the brink of a very big victory", and promised to form a "stable, national government." His opponents in the current coalition, led by Yair Lapid, the centrist current prime minister, won 51 seats, with the remainder held by a small unaffiliated Arab party.

Lapid congratulated Netanyahu and instructed his staff to prepare an organised transition of power, his office said on Thursday.   "The State of Israel comes before any political consideration," Lapid said. "I wish Netanyahu success, for the sake of the people of Israel and the State of Israel."

The results mean that Netanyahu, who is on trial for corruption, will be invited by Israeli President Isaac Herzog to form a government, a process that is likely to begin next week.   Netanyahu will have 28 days to form what is expected to be the most right-wing Israeli government in history.

His coalition partners, the Religious Zionism party, won 14 seats. The party's leaders will now attempt to translate that strong showing into senior government posts for its members, including positions responsible for security.

That is despite the far-right nature of the party's leadership – one figure, Itamar Ben-Gvir, has called for Palestinians "disloyal" to Israel to be expelled and is a former member of the banned Kach party, which is considered a "terrorist" organisation in Israel.

Ben-Gvir was also previously convicted of racist incitement and had a picture in his office of Baruch Goldstein, an Israeli-American who killed 29 Palestinians in the Ibrahimi Mosque massacre in Hebron in 1994.

However, Netanyahu, who was prime minister for 12 years between 2009 and 2021, owes the Religious Zionism party for its support, after he was abandoned by former allies, such as Naftali Bennett.

Bennett, a fellow right winger who was once seen as Netanyahu's protege, formed a coalition with politicians from across the Israeli spectrum, as well as a party representing Palestinians in Israel, to keep Netanyahu out of power in March 2021.

That alliance, centred on opposition to Netanyahu, proved impossible to keep together, and eventually broke down in June, prompting the latest elections, Israel's fifth since 2019, which were held on Monday. The victory represents a reversal of fortunes for Netanyahu, who was also prime minister between 1996 and 1999.

One of the main reasons for the opposition to him was his legal troubles – he faces corruption and fraud charges, allegations he denies.   The Religious Zionism party has said that, if it comes into government, it will work to remove the offence of "fraud and breach of trust", which is among the crimes Netanyahu has been charged with.

While it is unclear whether this could then retroactively be applied to Netanyahu's own trial, the plans indicate an upcoming battle with Israel's judiciary, which has been increasingly painted as an enemy by Netanyahu's bloc.

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