

Right or Palestine? The Arithmetic Behind Golan's Ra'am Remark

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Twenty-three days before Israel votes, one sentence from the left set the terms of the week

On Saturday night, as Simchat Torah ended, Democrats leader Yair Golan said he would press his partners to form a government with Ra'am. Asked about other opposition leaders who have pledged not to sit with Mansour Abbas, he answered: "Things are said before elections."

Likud replied within hours, in three words: "Right or Palestine." Avigdor Liberman, whose Yisrael Beytenu belongs to the same opposition camp, said Golan "is under pressure."

It sounded like an ordinary campaign spat. It wasn't. Golan's sentence and Likud's slogan are both answers to the same arithmetic problem. Until someone solves that problem, it will shape the last three weeks before 27 October.

The numbers

Take the three most recent mainstream polls published before the chag.

Maariv's poll (Lazar Research, published Friday 2 October) gives Yashar 21 seats, Likud 19, B'Yachad 13, the Democrats 10, Yisrael Beytenu 9, Otzma Yehudit 9, the Joint List 7, United Torah Judaism 7, Shas 7, Religious Zionism–Zehut 5, Ra'am 5, Amcha Yisrael 4 and the Reservists and Economic Party 4. By bloc, that is 51 for the current coalition parties, 53 for the Zionist opposition and 12 for the Arab parties.

Channel 13 (30 September) has the Netanyahu bloc at 54, the Eisenkot bloc at 52 and the Arab parties at 14. Kan (27 September) has the two main blocs tied at 52 each, with Yashar on 23 and Likud on 21.

None of the three gives either side 61. In all of them the gap between the blocs is small, and the Arab parties win more seats than that gap. That is the arithmetic.

What each side is doing with it

In that light, Golan's remark is not a slip. It is the left's honest answer to the numbers. If the Zionist opposition stalls in the low fifties, the only way to 61 runs through the Arab parties, either in the coalition or supporting it from outside. Ra'am has done this before: in 2021 it joined the Bennett–Lapid government, the first time an independent Arab party sat in an Israeli coalition. Golan is saying out loud what the polls imply.

Likud's "right or Palestine" is the right's answer to the same numbers. If the Arab parties are the opposition's only road to a majority, then the most effective message is to make that road politically toxic for soft-right voters. They are the voters who decide between Yashar, B'Yachad and Yisrael Beytenu on one side and Likud on the other. The slogan is not aimed at Golan's voters. It is aimed at Liberman's and Eisenkot's.

That is why Liberman's reply was so short. He cannot endorse Golan without giving Likud its message, and he cannot break with Golan without shrinking his own camp's path to power. "He is under pressure" puts distance between them without closing the door.

The edges of the map

Two more positions this weekend show how tight the space is.

Benny Gantz says Blue and White will run under his name. In Maariv's poll it falls below the 3.25 percent electoral bar. A list that fails to cross that line wastes every vote cast for it. In a race decided by two or three seats, those wasted votes could decide which bloc reaches 61. The Central Elections Committee's deadline for surplus-vote agreements is Friday, 16 October. Watch it closely.

On the right, Amcha Yisrael's leader, Winter, says he will not sit with Liberman, Eisenkot or Bennett. Amcha Yisrael polls at about four seats. Winter's red lines narrow the coalition options open to anyone who hopes to build a government from the right and the centre-right. They do not change the main arithmetic.

The calendar

The Central Elections Committee has approved 38 lists. Surplus-vote agreements are due by 16 October, voting at Israel's missions abroad takes place on 20 October, and election day is Tuesday, 27 October. Post-chag polls should start arriving this week. They will be the first measure of whether Saturday night moved anyone.

What to watch

Three questions will decide whether Golan's remark becomes the story of the campaign or one weekend's headline.

First, do the other opposition leaders echo him, distance themselves, or say nothing? Silence is also an answer, and Likud will treat it as one.

Second, does the soft right move? "Right or Palestine" only works if a few seats' worth of voters on the centre-right decide the risk is real.

Third, do the small lists merge, step aside or sign surplus-vote agreements before 16 October? In a race this close, the votes that count in the end may be the ones that would otherwise be wasted.

A closing thought

It is easy to be cynical about a sentence like "things are said before elections." It is also, in its way, a confession that applies to everyone. Campaigns are when promises are made, and governments are when they are tested.

The Sages taught: "Say little and do much" (Avot 1:15). Few Israeli campaigns have managed that, and this one will not either. But voters can still apply the test. Weigh what each leader can actually deliver at 61, not what they say at 52. The arithmetic is not a matter of opinion. What each side intends to do with it should be stated plainly before 27 October, not after.

Sources

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- Channel 13 poll, 30 September: <https://13tv.co.il/item/news/politics/politics/survey-905376242/>
- Golan's remarks and reactions (Amit Segal, Telegram): <https://t.me/amitsegal/65465> · <https://t.me/amitsegal/65470> · <https://t.me/amitsegal/65472>
- Liberman's response: <https://t.me/yinonews/62943>
- Gantz on Blue and White: <https://t.me/amitsegal/65467>
- Winter on coalition partners: <https://t.me/amitsegal/65477>
- Central Elections Committee calendar:

<https://bechirof.gov.il>

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