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SPECIAL REPORT

ISRAEL'S 1999 ELECTIONS: THE RESULTS

Daniel J. Elazar

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The Voters Respond to the Challenge

In the face of a political situation that repelled many and a campaign that repelled even more, Israel's voters went to the polls on Monday, May 17th, and once again massively demonstrated their maturity as voters and the maturity of Israel's democracy. In the last analysis, the voters won, the political parties lost, the sitting prime minister was steamrolled, and the problematic pockets in Israeli society were set in even sharper relief. In truth, despite his landslide victory, Ehud Barak did not win so much as Binyamin Netanyahu lost as a result of his alienating behavior. Israelis have every right to feel proud and confident about their response, given the situation in which they found themselves in the past six months.

The Key Issues: Character and Political Culture

The election itself was more about issues of character and political culture than ideology, ideological conflicts, or even the peace process. Early on it was apparent that over 90 percent of Israelis were in favor of continuing the peace process as it took shape in Oslo and subsequently, and that only the smallest fraction of Israel's population opposed that process. The fact that the hardline nationalist right was kept to four seats demonstrated that. It is true that the split between the fervently Orthodox and the fervently secular populations among Israeli Jews acquired sharper manifestations than in the past, but electorally that conflict involved only a minority of the

DANIEL J. ELAZAR, EDITOR AND PUBLISHER; ZVI R. MAROM, ASSOCIATE EDITOR; MARK AMI-EL, MANAGING EDITOR. 13 TEL-HAI ST., JERUSALEM, ISRAEL; TEL. 972-2-5619281, FAX. 972-2-5619112, INTERNET: ELAZAR@VMS.HUJI.AC.IL. IN U.S.A.: 1616 WALNUT ST., SUITE 507, PHILADELPHIA, PA 19103; TEL. (215) 204-1459, FAX. (215) 204-7784. © COPYRIGHT. ALL RIGHTS RESERVED. ISSN: 0792-7304.

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