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New questions
dominate election
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Elections in Hamas volcano's shadow

Hamas victory could push Israeli elections in unknown directions Sever Plocker

As the days and weeks pass, the results of the Palestinian elections seep into Israel's election campaign and influence it.

We can predict that during the next month this influence will grow. And so Hamas' victory in the Palestinian elections will be a central factor in creating voting patterns in the Israeli elections.

The change can already be seen in the polls. There has been a noteworthy shift from the center to the extremes of the political landscape. The three centrist parties – Labor, Likud and Kadima – are losing support, and fringe parties are gaining strength.

This move to the center, portrayed just several weeks ago as a good sign and the call of the hour for the current election campaign, is quickly losing its magic. The social-economic issue – the vaunted "agenda" that so much has been written about – has been pushed aside, and not because of a supposed link between money and power.

It is happening because existential questions about the State of Israel have once again seeped into our consciousness.

Existential questions

It is happening because the basic assumption that has governed our lives here since the beginning of the Oslo process – that we have a painful conflict with our Palestinian neighbors about borders and about Jerusalem, but the basic premise of Israel as a Jewish state and Palestine as a Palestinian state – has now been called totally into question.

The Palestinian people have given power, in democratic elections, to an organization whose clear aim is to establish an Islamic theocracy from the river to the sea in which Jews will be permitted to remain as a second class minority. And so we have regressed, not 14 years, but rather 140.

The Palestinian vote is consistent with similar phenomena happening elsewhere in the Arab world, and the repercussions of which are penetrating every home in Israel, including ones which continue to blare the noise of inane television shows designed to help one forget about the present.

Iran: back in the conflict

Iran, a country that over the last decade removed itself from the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, has returned with a passion, as an oil provider dripping with hate for Israel and as the principle purveyor of anti-Semitism, and as a country driving openly and secretly for atomic weapons.

Iraq is quickly degenerating into class and ethnic warfare that will eventually push American and British troops out in a hasty retreat. In Saudi Arabia, al-Qaeda threatens to strike oil installations.

Israel keeps its distance from this erupting volcano, the first blast of the "war of civilizations."

It is natural in the face of these huge earthquakes for Israeli voters to seek out the statesmen who can represent Israel in the coming years, years that could be the most fateful Israel has ever known.

Tough questions

Complicated basic questions come up and knock on the doors of our collective

consciousness. Here's a central one: Must Israel try to achieve a co-existence agreement with Hamas and agree to a long-term ceasefire, or should we seek out an immediate, bloody military conflict with that organization before it takes control of the PA's security establishment?

Israel's large parties are refusing to answer this question, and other similar ones, directly, muttering only non-binding jibberish in both hawkish (Netanyahu will be strong opposite Hamas) and dovish (Peretz will fight terror and beat poverty) directions.

These arrogant spin-masters still hope they can anesthetize the public, but it is not clear that this will be possible, because we are not talking about waking up from a bad dream, but rather waking up inside a bad reality – just like every participant in the "Hamas days" dialogue warned in the Yedioth Ahronoth weekend newspaper yesterday.

The end results, therefore, of the elections due to take place at the end of March, 2006, could be significantly different than the polls taken during the election campaign at the end of January, 2006.

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