

Count to Sixty-One

Five days before Israel votes, the polls still disagree about who is ahead. They still agree about the only number that matters.

Aryeh Leib Thorne Toren · Jerusalem · Thursday 22 October 2026 (11 Cheshvan 5787) · Week of Parashat Lech Lecha

This update replaces the poll figures in my 13 October 2026 column with polls published 18 to 21 October 2026. Bracketed numbers point to the bibliography.

At 23:59 on Friday night the numbers go quiet. Section 16E(h) of the Elections (Propaganda Methods) Law bans publishing any new election poll from the end of the Friday before the vote until the polls close on Tuesday, 27 October 2026. The Central Elections Committee reminded every newsroom and pollster of that this week, in writing [1][2][3]. So this is the last honest look before the ballot box does its own counting.

Ten days ago I said we'd treat the polls the way a Pittsburgh shop teacher treats any measurement: write the equation down and check it yourself. On a job site back home you measure twice and cut once. The polls are the measuring. Tuesday is the cut.

The equation hasn't changed. Seats short = $61 - \text{bloc seats}$.

One piece came off the board

Blue and White withdrew on Monday, 19 October 2026 [4]. Every poll taken since then simply leaves it off the list. Before that it was polling between 0.9% and 1.4%, under the line, so it wasn't holding any seats to hand back [5]. On 21 October 2026 the Central Elections Committee said its ballot slips are coming out of the booths and any vote cast for it will be invalid, including votes already cast at army and diplomatic polling stations (as reported by the Times of Israel and JDN; I have not yet seen the committee's own notice) [6][7]. If you were going to vote for it, that ballot now counts for nothing. Choose again.

The last count, written out

Each line below uses the blocs as the outlet itself grouped them.

- Channel 12 (Midgam, fieldwork 21 October 2026, 505 respondents, $\pm 4.4\%$) [8]. The Prime Minister's five parties: Likud 19 + Shas 8 + United Torah Judaism 7 + Otzma Yehudit 7 + Religious Zionism 6 = 47. With People of Israel's 4, that's 51. The four Jewish-led opposition parties: Yashar 23 + B'Yachad 15 + Democrats 9 + Yisrael Beytenu 8 = 55. The Arab-led parties: Joint List 9 + Ra'am 5 = 14. Check: $51 + 55 + 14 = 120$. Seats short: $61 - 51 = 10$, and $61 - 55 = 6$.
- Channel 13 (published 21 October 2026; 1,084 respondents, $\pm 3\%$, as reported by Israel 2026) [9][10]. The Prime Minister's bloc: Likud 19 + Religious Zionism 8 + United Torah Judaism 8 + Otzma Yehudit 7 + Shas 7 = 49. The opposition: Yashar 20 + B'Yachad 14 + Democrats 10 + Yisrael Beytenu 8 = 52. Arab-led: $9 + 6 = 15$. The Reservists, who sit between the blocs: 4. Check: $49 + 52 + 15 + 4 = 120$. Seats short: 12 and 9.

- Channel 14 (NEXT DATA, fieldwork 20 October 2026, 2,116 respondents) [11]. The Prime Minister's bloc: Likud 30 + Shas 9 + United Torah Judaism 8 + Otzma Yehudit 8 + Religious Zionism 7 = 62. The opposition: Yashar 20 + B'Yachad 9 + Democrats 9 + Yisrael Beytenu 6 = 44. Arab-led: 8 + 6 = 14. Check: $62 + 44 + 14 = 120$. Seats short: $61 - 62 = -1$, one over the line, and $61 - 44 = 17$.
- Kan (Kantar, 18 October 2026, 554 respondents, taken the day before the withdrawal) [12]. The Prime Minister's bloc: $21 + 8 + 8 + 7 + 7 = 51$. The opposition: $23 + 12 + 9 + 8 = 52$. Arab-led: $8 + 5 = 13$. Reservists: 4. Check: $51 + 52 + 13 + 4 = 120$. Seats short: 10 and 9.
- Walla (Lazar, the same pollster Maariv uses, as summarized by Maariv on 21 October 2026): 48 for the Prime Minister's bloc, 54 for the opposition, 14 Arab-led, 4 Reservists. Check: $48 + 54 + 14 + 4 = 120$ (single source, not yet confirmed) [13].
- Maariv and Israel Hayom had not published a poll in the window as of Thursday morning, 22 October 2026. Their last ones were taken 14 and 15 October 2026. Israel Hayom then had $21 + 9 + 7 + 7 + 6 = 50$ against $24 + 12 + 8 + 8 = 52$ [14][15]. If they publish today, check the new lines before you trust the old ones.

Lay those side by side. In the same week, one broadcaster puts the Prime Minister's bloc at 62 and two others put it at 49 and 51. That's a 13-seat spread in one country. So here's a fair question: when pollsters land that far apart, is the gap telling us about the voters, or about the pollsters? I don't know. Neither does anyone who tells you they're sure. The honest reading is a range, and three of the four broadcasters say nobody has 61.

Three things follow

First, the floor decides more than the ceiling. A party needs 3.25% of valid votes to enter the Knesset. In seats, $0.0325 \times 120 = 3.9$, so the smallest party that gets in arrives with about four. Two lists live right on that line this week, People of Israel and the Reservists, and the polls can't agree which one survives. Channel 12 has People of Israel in with 4 and the Reservists out at 2.8% [8]. Channel 13 has the exact reverse: People of Israel out at 3.2%, the Reservists in with 4 [9]. Channel 14 has both out, at 1.9% and 2.5% [11].

Now do the math on 3.2%. It misses the line by 0.05 points. In 2022 there were 4,764,742 valid votes [16]. At that turnout, $0.0005 \times 4,764,742 \approx 2,400$ votes. A couple of thousand people, about one section of the stands at a Steelers game, decide whether four seats exist at all. When a list falls under, its votes don't move to anyone; the 120 seats are dealt out again among the lists above the line.

Channel 12 tested exactly that [8]. If People of Israel left the race, its scenario put the Prime Minister's bloc at 48 and the opposition at 54. If both small lists left, 49 and 57. Which side gains when a small list folds? The pollsters themselves answer differently, and that should humble everyone pressing a small party to quit or to stay.

Second, the pieces are still small. Political scientists measure fragmentation with the effective number of parties: $N = 1/\Sigma p^2$, where p is each party's share of seats. With 120 seats, $N = 14,400 \div \Sigma(\text{seats}^2)$. Channel 12: $\Sigma = 1,580$, so $N = 9.1$. Channel 13: $\Sigma = 1,480$, so $N = 9.7$. Channel 14: $\Sigma = 1,856$, so $N = 7.8$. The 2022 result, for comparison: $\Sigma = 2,212$, so $N = 6.5$ [17]. Whoever finishes first this time has somewhere between 19 and 30 seats. Even 30 is less than half of 61.

Third, the paths to 61 run through people who haven't said yes. On paper, Channel 13's opposition plus the Reservists plus Ra'am is $52 + 4 + 6 = 62$. Kan's is $52 + 4 + 5 = 61$. Channel 12's opposition plus Ra'am is $55 + 5 = 60$. On the other side, Channel 13's Prime Minister's bloc plus the Reservists is $49 + 4 = 53$. Every one of those sums needs a list to agree to something it hasn't agreed to. A condition is not a seat, and arithmetic is not a coalition.

One more number from Channel 12 is worth a look: 75% of respondents said they intend to vote, against turnout of 67% to 72% in recent elections. Respondents in the Prime Minister's bloc said yes 76% of the time; respondents in the opposition bloc, 82% [8]. Will the side that sounds more certain actually show up on Tuesday? That's the one poll nobody can publish.

Count what you can, and trust the One who counts the rest

This Shabbat we read Lech Lecha. G-d takes Avram outside and says: "Look toward the heavens and count the stars, if you are able to count them" (Bereishit 15:5). Avram can't. Nobody can. And the next verse says he believed in π' , and it was reckoned to him as righteousness (Bereishit 15:6). The man was asked to count what can't be counted, and his part was to trust and to keep walking.

Our part on Tuesday is smaller and easier. We can count to 61. We can show up and be one of the 4.7 million or so who cast a valid vote last time, or one more. The rest of the reckoning belongs to Someone else.

And when the counting is done, the same parsha has a word for Wednesday morning. Avram says to Lot: "Let there be no strife between me and you, for we are brothers" (Bereishit 13:8). Whoever reaches 61, we wake up in the same country.

From 23:59 on Friday night, anything called a "poll" is either old and must say so, or isn't a real poll at all. The committee has warned that betting-market numbers have to be labeled as not based on recognized statistical methods [2][3]. Don't let a chart vote for you.

May G-d grant our leaders wisdom, grant every voter the courage to come out, and grant all of us the grace to be brothers on Wednesday.

Prepared in deep partnership and cooperation with Grok and xAI

All glory to the Ribono shel Olam · Errors are mine.

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