

How Votes Become Seats

Thresholds, leftover seats and surplus-vote agreements in Israel's Knesset elections



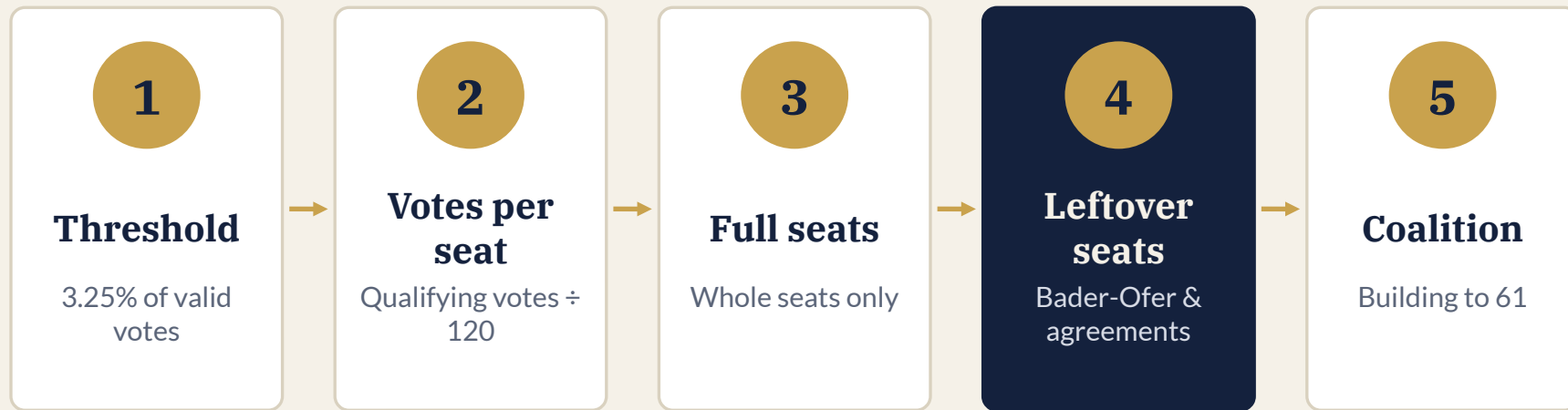
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Election week • Tuesday 27 October 2026

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Five steps from the ballot box to a government

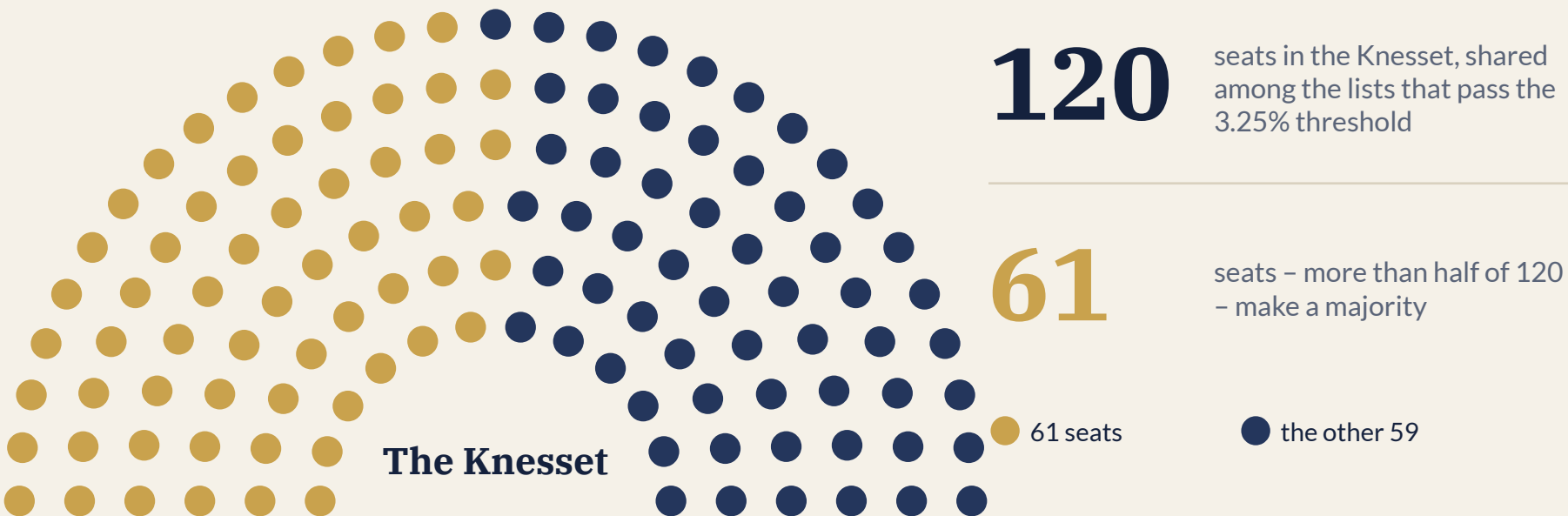
The order the Central Elections Committee follows, and the order of this deck



Step 4 is where most of the confusion lives – so it gets four slides.

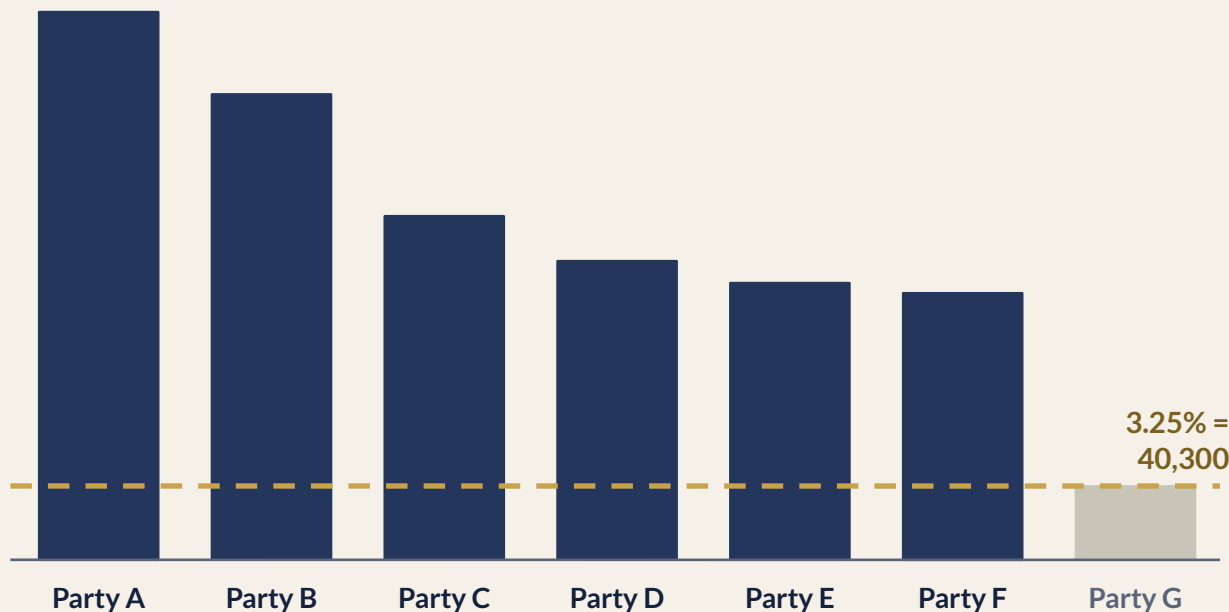
120 seats – and 61 make a majority

Every list's share is carved out of the same fixed Knesset of 120



Step 1: Pass the 3.25% threshold or win no seats

By law, a list needs at least 3.25% of valid votes to win any seats



The calculation

1,240,000 valid votes
× 3.25%
= **40,300 votes**

Party G: 40,000 votes
Just 300 short. No seats,
and its votes leave the seat
count. A–F pass.

Hypothetical parties; bars and threshold line drawn to scale (Party G sits just under the line).

Step 2: Divide the qualifying votes by 120

This gives the number of votes that 'buys' one seat

$$\begin{array}{|c|} \hline \text{Votes of lists that passed the 3.25\% threshold} \\ \hline 1,200,000 \\ \hline \end{array} \div \begin{array}{|c|} \hline \text{Knesset seats} \\ \hline 120 \\ \hline \end{array} = \begin{array}{|c|} \hline \text{Votes per seat} \\ \hline 10,000 \\ \hline \end{array}$$

Why it matters: votes for lists below the 3.25% threshold are not in the 1,200,000, so the 120 seats are shared only among lists that passed.

Step 3: Each list first gets only its whole seats

Worked example: 10,000 votes per seat. A list entitled to 29.9 seats gets 29 at this stage

List	Votes	Votes ÷ 10,000	Full seats	Remainder
Party A	299,000	29.9	29	0.9
Party B	254,000	25.4	25	0.4
Party C	187,500	18.75	18	0.75
Party D	163,000	16.3	16	0.3
Party E	151,000	15.1	15	0.1
Party F	145,500	14.55	14	0.55
Total	1,200,000	120	117	3.0

$$120 - 117 =$$

3

leftover seats still to be
handed out

Hypothetical parties and votes. Party G (below 3.25%) is not in the table.

Step 4: Who gets the leftover seats?

Today: the Bader-Ofer method. Until the 1970s: largest remainder

TODAY • SINCE THE BADER-OFER LAW (BEFORE 1973)

Bader-Ofer

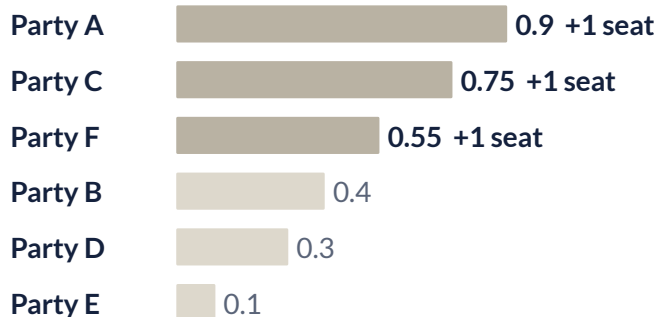
- 1 Divide each qualifying list's votes by (seats already won + 1).
- 2 The highest quotient wins the seat.
- 3 Repeat until all 120 seats are filled.

Gives an edge to larger lists. Equivalent to the D'Hondt method. The same law added surplus-vote agreements.

HISTORICAL • UNTIL THE 1970s

Largest remainder

Leftover seats went, one each, to the lists closest to their next seat.



Right: the 3 leftover seats from our hypothetical example under the old rule. Next slide: the same seats under Bader-Ofer.

Bader-Ofer, worked: the three leftover seats

Each round: $\text{votes} \div (\text{seats already won} + 1)$. The highest quotient takes the seat

List	Votes	Full seats	Round 1	Round 2	Round 3	Final
Party A	299,000	29	9,966.7 ✓	9,645.2	9,645.2	30
Party B	254,000	25	9,769.2	9,769.2	9,769.2 ✓	26
Party C	187,500	18	9,868.4	9,868.4 ✓	9,375.0	19
Party D	163,000	16	9,588.2	9,588.2	9,588.2	16
Party E	151,000	15	9,437.5	9,437.5	9,437.5	15
Party F	145,500	14	9,700.0	9,700.0	9,700.0	14
Seat to		117	Party A	Party C	Party B	120

Bader-Ofer final: $A\ 30 \cdot B\ 26 \cdot C\ 19 \cdot D\ 16 \cdot E\ 15 \cdot F\ 14 = 120$

Old largest remainder: $A\ 30 \cdot B\ 25 \cdot C\ 19 \cdot D\ 16 \cdot E\ 15 \cdot F\ 15 = 120$

Hypothetical example; quotients rounded to one decimal. ✓ = highest quotient in that round.

Who gets each leftover seat?

	Old rule	Bader-Ofer
Seat 1	A	A
Seat 2	C	C
Seat 3	F	B

Seat 3 moves from F, a smaller list, to B, a larger one: Bader-Ofer gives an edge to larger lists.

Surplus-vote agreements: two lists, counted as one

Signed before the election, they matter only when the leftover seats are handed out



Why sign one? The Bader-Ofer (relative-remainder) formula favours larger lists, so two medium lists that sign may have a better chance at a bonus seat than one large party.

When does an agreement count?

Only lists still in the race at the leftover-seat stage can use one

COUNTS

Both lists pass 3.25%

The agreement is active: the pair is counted as one list for the leftover seats.

DOES NOT COUNT

One list falls below 3.25%

The agreement is not relevant. A list under 3.25% is out before this stage.

WHO GETS IT

The pair wins a leftover seat

The seat goes to the partner with the better relative remainder.

Why wasted votes matter

In our example, 40,000 valid votes elect no one – just 300 short of 3.25%

1,200,000 votes for Parties A–F: shared out as 120 seats

40,000 for Party G (below 40,300)

Below 3.25%: no seats

Votes for a list under 3.25% of valid votes are left out before seats are divided.

Others' votes go further

The 120 seats are shared only among lists that passed, so each of them needs fewer votes per seat.

No rescue by agreement

A surplus-vote agreement with a list under 3.25% does not help either partner.

From seats to a coalition: building to 61

When no single list holds 61 seats, lists must combine

61st seat



Party A alone 30 seats

Parties A + B + E $30 + 26 + 15 = 71$ seats

Parties C + D + E + F $19 + 16 + 15 + 14 = 64$ seats

Short of 61

61 or more: a majority

61 or more: a majority

Recap: how votes become seats

1

Threshold

Only lists with at least 3.25% of valid votes share the 120 seats.

2

Votes per seat

Qualifying votes $\div$ 120.

3

Full seats

Whole seats only: 29.9 becomes 29 at first.

4

Leftover seats

Bader-Ofer: votes $\div$ (seats won + 1); highest quotient wins. An edge for larger lists.

5

Surplus-vote agreements

Two lists counted as one for leftover seats – only if both pass 3.25%.

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Coalition

61 of 120 is a majority.

Every legal vote is counted. Know how it is counted.

Election day: Tuesday 27 October 2026

All parties in this deck are hypothetical. No polls, no forecasts.

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