

One in Nine Isn't Here

Why Israel's official turnout reads lower than the share of residents who vote. Tuesday 27 October 2026 / 16 Cheshvan 5787.

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Every election night, Israel gets one turnout number from the Central Elections Committee. It's an honest number. It's also measured against a roll that includes hundreds of thousands of people who don't live here.

Who is on the roll

The committee lists 7,331,981 eligible voters for this election. In figures released a week before the vote, the Central Bureau of Statistics estimated that about 810,000 of them live abroad, roughly one in nine. About 6.5 million eligible voters live in Israel.

The bureau added a quieter note: some of the people registered abroad may have died without the death being reported to the Population and Immigration Authority. They're still on the roll.

The roll has to work this way. It's built from the population registry, and a citizen who moves to Toronto or Berlin stays a citizen and stays on it. Since November 2022, the number of eligible voters living in Israel grew by about 333,000, or 5.4%.

Why they mostly can't vote

Israel has no absentee voting for ordinary citizens abroad. Only state employees posted overseas, some staff of the national institutions, and their families vote at Israel's missions. Everyone else has to come home and vote in person.

Some do. Fly&Vote, an initiative that helps Israelis abroad travel home, estimated that about 67,000 would fly in for this election. That's their own estimate, built from a voluntary questionnaire and their registration data, not an official count of arrivals.

The math

Here's the 16:00 count as a worked example.

- Roll: 7,331,981. Abroad, per the bureau: about 810,000.
- 7,331,981 minus 810,000 is about 6,522,000 eligible voters living in Israel.
- By 16:00, 4,085,075 people had voted.
- 4,085,075 divided by 7,331,981 is 55.7%. That's the official figure.
- 4,085,075 divided by about 6,522,000 is about 62.6%. That's the share of residents.

Same voters, same hour, seven points apart. Nothing changed except what we divided by.

By 20:00, the committee reported 5,449,277 voters, 74.3% of the roll. Divided by about 6,522,000 residents, that's about 83.6%.

Two honest limits. The 810,000 is an estimate, not a list. And some of the people who voted today live abroad and flew in, so the resident share runs a little high. It's closer to the real share, though not exact.

2022, the same way

In 2022 the roll was 6,788,804 and 4,794,593 people voted: 70.63%, the official figure. N12 reported at the time that the bureau estimated about 6.2 million eligible voters living in Israel. That matches this year's numbers too: about 6,522,000 now, minus the 333,000 growth, is about 6,189,000. 4,794,593 divided by about 6.2 million is about 77%.

So the next time a turnout number gets compared across years or countries, it's worth asking what it was divided by.

Counted by who is here

When Avraham came to buy a grave for Sarah, he told the children of Chet in Chevron: "I am a stranger and a resident with you" (Bereishit 23:4). He knew where he belonged, and he knew where he was standing. Both were true at once.

A roll counts who belongs. A ballot box counts who came. Israelis abroad still belong, and many love this country from far away. The share of people living here who vote is a separate fact, and it deserves its own number.

Sources: Central Bureau of Statistics via ynetnews, ynet, Times of Israel and The State of Israel (810,000 abroad, about 6.5 million resident, 333,000 growth, deaths not reported); Israel Democracy Institute and Jerusalem Post (no absentee voting except state representatives and families); Jerusalem Post, ynetnews and C14 (Fly&Vote estimate and its limits); Central Elections Committee via ynetnews and JDN (16:00 figures, roll 7,331,981); Knesset and ynet (2022 roll 6,788,804, 4,794,593 votes); N12, 27 October 2022 (2022 resident estimate).

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