

# One More Seat — If Both Clear

Aryeh Leib Thorne Toren · 13 October 2026

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By Aryeh Leib Thorne Toren

On Sunday, Shas and United Torah Judaism announced that they had signed a surplus-vote agreement ahead of the 27 October election. In a joint statement, MK Aryeh Deri and MK Yaakov Asher said the deal continues cooperation “in accordance with the directives of the generation’s leading rabbis and sages,” and that the two factions will keep a united front on Torah study, the status of yeshiva students, and religious schools. The Jerusalem Post and The Times of Israel both carried the announcement the same day.

That is the news. Here is why it is not a merger, and why the arithmetic still matters.

Israel does not award Knesset seats by a simple percentage. First, only lists that clear the 3.25 percent electoral threshold count. Call the sum of their valid votes  $V_{\text{qualifying}}$ . The national quota is

$$q = V_{\text{qualifying}} / 120.$$

Each qualifying list  $i$  then receives an initial block of seats

$$s_i = \lfloor v_i / q \rfloor.$$

Whatever seats are still left after that floor division are handed out one at a time by the Bader–Ofer rule (the D’Hondt method Israel uses): the next seat goes to the list with the highest quotient  $v_i / (s_i + 1)$ . Update that list’s seat count and repeat until all 120 seats are filled.

A surplus-vote agreement (heskem odfim) does not put two parties on one ballot. Each list still runs alone, and both must clear 3.25 percent or the deal is void. If both clear, the pair is treated as a single list only for the leftover-seat round: their votes and their initial seats are pooled when the quotients are compared. If the pair wins an extra seat, that seat is then split between the two partners by the same  $v / (s + 1)$  rule. The method favors larger combined totals, which is why parties sign these deals in the first place.

A small worked example. Suppose, after the threshold cut, three leftover seats remain, and two partner lists A and B have 410,000 and 390,000 votes with 7 and 6 initial seats. Alone, A’s next quotient is  $410,000 / 8 = 51,250$ ; B’s is  $390,000 / 7 \approx 55,714$ . B would take the next seat alone. As a pair they compete with  $800,000 / 14 \approx 57,143$ , which beats many mid-sized rivals; if the pair wins the seat, it then goes to whichever partner has the higher internal quotient. Change the numbers and the winner can flip. That is the whole point of the signature.

The filing deadline at the Central Elections Committee is 16 October — eleven days before the vote. Likud has already signed with Religious Zionism–Zehut. On the other side of the map, Yashar has paired with The Democrats, and B’Yachad with Yisrael Beiteinu. Shas–UTJ closes another pair inside the current coalition camp. Unpaired lists still have three days on the clock.

None of this tells you who will form a government. It tells you how the last few seats are fought — not with slogans, but with quotients. In a system where sixty-one is the only number that governs, one seat moved by a signed pair is not a footnote. It is the difference between a coalition that closes and one that does not.

## Sources

- The Jerusalem Post, 11 Oct 2026: Shas, UTJ sign surplus vote-sharing deal ahead of Israel elections
- The Times of Israel liveblog (Ariela Karmel), 11 Oct 2026: Shas, UTJ sign surplus-vote agreement; agreements due 16 Oct
- TPS via IsraelFM, 11 Oct 2026: Shas and United Torah Judaism sign surplus-vote agreement
- Earlier explainer: Odfim: How a Surplus-Vote Agreement Works

*The worked example uses illustrative numbers, not a poll.*

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