The 3.25% Line: What 27 October 2026 Taught Israel

Electoral Arithmetic as Ordinary Hishtadlut

By Aryeh Leib Thorne Toren. Monday 2 November 2026 / 21 Cheshvan 5787. Jerusalem.

All figures below are the Central Elections Committee's preliminary results for the 27 October 2026 election. They stay preliminary until the committee presents them to President Herzog on Wednesday 4 November 2026. This essay reports votes and percentages only. It contains no polls.

1. The question

Before the vote, most of the talk was about who would win. After the vote, the more lasting question is a quieter one: how many people cast a ballot that did not end up in the Knesset at all? The answer is a matter of arithmetic, and arithmetic is where ordinary responsibility lives.

2. What the preliminary count shows

According to the Central Elections Committee's statement as reported by Ynetnews on 30 October 2026, 5,716,665 votes were counted, of which 5,690,778 were valid and 25,887 invalid. Turnout was 77.9 percent. The committee put the threshold, 3.25 percent of valid votes, at 184,947 votes. (That figure matches an earlier valid count of 5,690,685, the total the Israel Democracy Institute's results page lists. The 93-vote difference changes nothing below.)

Eleven lists crossed it. In order of preliminary vote share: Likud 20.5 percent, Yashar 16.1, Together 9.3, the Joint List 8.8, the Democrats 6.4, Yisrael Beitenu 5.9, Ra'am 5.9, Otzma Yehudit 5.7, United Torah Judaism 5.5, Shas 5.3 and the Religious Zionist Party 5.1.

By my own arithmetic, those eleven rounded shares add up to 94.5 percent. That leaves about 5.5 percent of valid votes, give or take half a point for rounding, or roughly one valid vote in eighteen, for lists that did not cross the line. The largest of those lists were the Reservists, at 2.7 percent, and Amcha Yisrael, at 1.7 percent. Even at the low end of the rounding, that is well over a quarter of a million ballots that will carry no seat.

The committee has also said that the Shin Bet inquiry into suspected foreign interference will not affect the results it submits on 4 November 2026. The inquiry itself is still open.

3. Why the threshold exists

The threshold was 1 percent until the 13th Knesset, then 1.5 percent, then 2 percent, and it was raised to 3.25 percent in March 2014. The reasoning was always the same: a parliament split into many very small factions finds it hard to form a stable government, and a minimum share forces parties to merge, to persuade, or to step aside.

A threshold is a trade. It buys governability at the price of some voters' first choice. Electoral theorists have long described the effect: under proportional systems with a legal minimum, small parties face pressure to combine, and voters face pressure to think about whether their ballot will count. Neither pressure is a scandal. Both are the system telling the truth about itself.

4. Hishtadlut, not prophecy

Jewish thought has a word for the ordinary human effort that faith does not excuse: hishtadlut. The Rambam's treatment of kingship places the king under law and under limits; nothing in it lets a leader claim that rescue depends on him alone. The same sobriety applies to voters and to parties. Trust in G-d does not cancel the duty to count.

For a party, hishtadlut means checking honestly whether it can cross the line, and, if it cannot, considering a merger before the ballots are printed rather than a lament after they are counted. For a voter, it means asking not only "whom do I prefer?" but also "will this ballot be represented?" These questions are not cynicism. They are the same discipline a merchant keeps with honest weights.

5. The republican reading

Philip Pettit's account of freedom as non-domination holds that citizens are free when no agent holds unchecked power over them, and when the rules that bind them are public and contestable. A threshold is exactly such a rule: published in advance, applied to everyone, and open to amendment by the Knesset. Daniel Elazar's covenantal federalism adds that a political community is bound by agreed terms that partners accept in advance. When a list falls below the line, the covenant has not failed. It has worked as written.

The criticism deserves a fair hearing. A high threshold can shut out new voices, and a vote that carries no seat can feel like a voice that was not heard. That is a

real cost. The answer is not to pretend the cost away but to argue openly, between elections, about whether 3.25 percent is the right number.

6. What to watch after 4 November 2026

Three things are worth watching. First, whether the committee's routine checks, which it says may bring minor corrections, change any list's position near the line. Second, whether the parties below the threshold draw the ordinary lesson and seek mergers before the next election. Third, whether the debate over the threshold itself returns to the Knesset agenda.

None of this requires a prediction. It requires receipts, patience and the honest arithmetic that comes before any coalition.

Sources

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