

The Seat Between Two Lists

How a surplus-vote agreement can move one Knesset seat, with the math worked out, and what to know before you walk in on Tuesday 27 October 2026.

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Tomorrow, Tuesday 27 October 2026, Israel chooses the 120 members of its Knesset. Let me spend a few minutes on something quieter: the handshake deals that decide where the last seats land.

They're called surplus-vote agreements, heskemei odafim. When the signing closed at the Central Elections Committee on Friday 16 October 2026, five pairs had signed: Likud with the Religious Zionist Party, Shas with United Torah Judaism, Yashar! with The Democrats, Together with Yisrael Beytenu, and the Joint List with Ra'am. The law allows two lists to an agreement, never three.

Under the Bader–Ofer method, seats go out in two rounds. First, every list that clears 3.25 percent of the valid vote gets one seat for each full "price of a seat" it has earned. The seats left over go out one at a time, each to the list with the highest score: its votes divided by its seats so far plus one. An agreement changes only that second round. The two partners are scored as one list, votes added together, seats added together.

A toy parliament makes it plain. Ten seats, 100,000 votes: North 41,000, South 24,500, East 19,000, West 15,500. All clear the line, so a seat costs 10,000 votes. First round: North 4, South 2, East 1, West 1. That's 8, so 2 seats are left.

No agreement. Seat 9: North $41,000 \div 5 = 8,200$. South $24,500 \div 3 = 8,167$. East $19,000 \div 2 = 9,500$. West $15,500 \div 2 = 7,750$. East takes it. Seat 10: East drops to $19,000 \div 3 = 6,333$, and North, at 8,200, takes it. Final: North 5, South 2, East 2, West 1.

Now South and West sign. Together: 40,000 votes, 3 seats. Seat 9: the pair scores $40,000 \div 4 = 10,000$, ahead of East at 9,500 and North at 8,200. The pair wins it. Seat 10: the pair drops to $40,000 \div 5 = 8,000$, and East, at 9,500, takes it. Final: North 4, the pair 4, East 2.

Inside the pair, the same score picks the winner. South $24,500 \div 3 = 8,167$ beats West $15,500 \div 2 = 7,750$, so South gets the seat. North, the biggest list, paid for it.

An agreement can move a seat, usually one. It tends to go to the bigger partner, but not always. And if either partner falls under 3.25 percent, the agreement is void, because votes below the line don't count for seats at all.

Now the practical part:

- Most polling stations are open from 07:00 to 22:00. Small places (up to 350 voters), hospitals, prisons and homes for the elderly: 08:00 to 20:00.
- Bring one ID with your picture: teudat zehut, a valid driving licence, a valid passport or a valid IDF card.
- Election day is a day off by law. If you've been with your employer at least 14 days in a row, you're paid as if you had worked.

- Trains and intercity buses over 15 km are free from tonight at 20:00 until service ends tomorrow. For the train, take the free paper ticket from the station machine.
- At 22:00 the TV channels air exit polls, which are estimates. The count goes up on the committee's site through the night; official results must be published by Wednesday 4 November 2026.

That's the arithmetic. Tomorrow, walk behind the screen, do your part, and leave the rest to the One Who counts every soul.

All glory to the Ribono shel Olam · Errors are mine

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