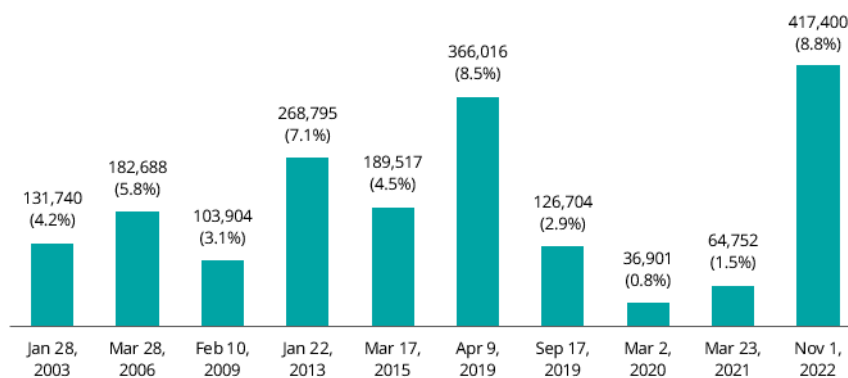


How many votes will a political party need to pass the electoral threshold in the coming election?

Alex Weinreb

In Israel's last general election in November 2022, almost 420,000 votes were "wasted," that is, cast for political parties that failed to pass the electoral threshold for a first seat: 3.25% of all valid votes. Those wasted votes comprised **8.8 percent of all valid votes cast**, the equivalent of **10 Knesset seats**.

Figure 1. The number of wasted votes in Knesset elections since 2003, and their percentage as a shared of valid votes in that election cycle, by election date



Source: Alex Weinreb, Taub Center | Data: Central Election Committee for the Knesset

Irrespective of what caused this massive surge in the number of wasted votes in 2022, we believe that discarding 8.8 percent of votes, in effect denying those who cast those votes representation, weakens faith in democracy and in its institutions. As we head into the coming Fall 2026 election, we have therefore set two goals in this short paper:

1. To provide people—voters, politicians, and their advisors—with some basic information about what affects the *number* of votes required to pass the electoral threshold.
2. To project what that absolute threshold will be in the coming election, and to provide a simple estimation procedure that allows anyone to estimate the threshold themselves.

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A. The four factors

If Israel's electoral system was a pure proportional representation system, a candidate or party could be elected to the Knesset by winning 0.833% of the national vote (100/120 seats). That was actually the case in the first Knesset. However, within a couple of years, it was decided to raise the threshold above that level for a first seat. Since then, the absolute number of votes that a party needs to win its first seat has been a product of four factors: one legal, one demographic, one motivational, and one bureaucratic.

1. The formal electoral threshold

This is the legal factor: it has changed over time. For around 40 years beginning in the 1951 election, a party needed to win at least 1.0% of all (valid) votes to get its first seat. Every decade since the early 1990s, the threshold has inched up a little more. Since the 2015 election, the electoral threshold to win a first seat has been 3.25% of all votes, which is actually equivalent to almost 4 seats.

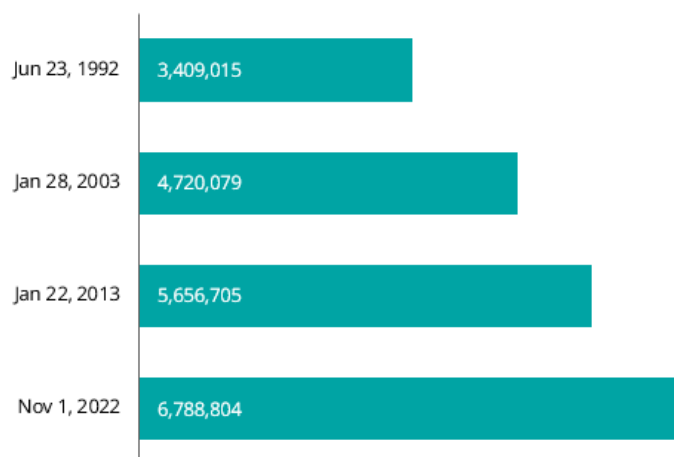
Electoral threshold, by period (% of all votes cast)	
1951–1992	1.0
1992–2003	1.5
2004–2013	2.0
2014 onwards	3.25

2. The number of people with the right to vote

This is the demographic factor. In theory, it is simple to calculate: all we need do is count the number of Israeli citizens aged at least 18+ by a given election. In practice, it is complicated by the fact that the number includes Israelis outside Israel (so long as they appear on the voting registry).

In either case, the number of people with a right to vote has increased in accordance with Israel's rapid growth in population, as shown in Figure 2, where we see these numbers for four elections held at approximate 10-year intervals: it roughly doubled between the June 1992 and November 2022 elections. That is equivalent to a 2.3% annual growth rate.

Figure 2. The number of people with a right to vote in Israel's national election

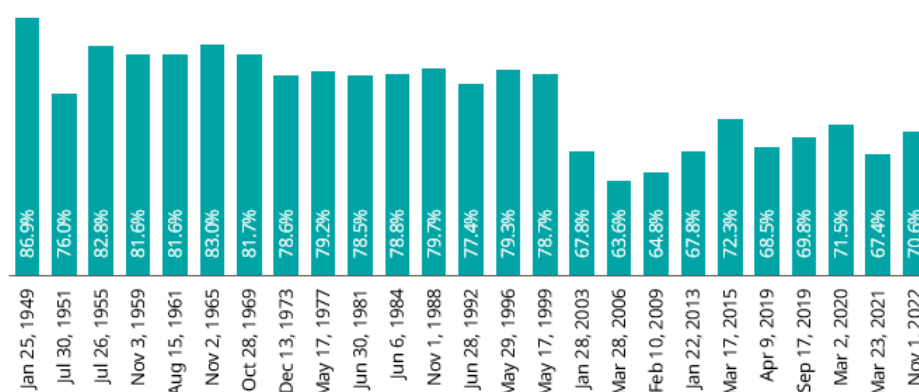


Source: Alex Weinreb, Taub Center | Data: Central Election Committee for the Knesset

3. The share of potential voters that actually vote?

This is the motivational factor. Voting rates in Israel have gone through three main phases, shown in Figure 3. Until the late 1960s, voting rates almost always exceeded 80%. In the 1970s–1990s, they were uniformly in the high 70 percent range. Since the 2nd Intifada, they have fluctuated between the mid-60s and low-70s percent. These fluctuations continued into the intensive period of five elections between April 2019 and November 2022.

Figure 3. Voting turnout rates (%), by election date, 1949–2022



Source: Alex Weinreb, Taub Center | Data: Central Election Committee for the Knesset

This long-term downward trend in the share of eligible voters choosing to vote is shared with most other high-income countries. In any given election in Israel, it is also affected by the relative success of attempts to mobilize bloc voting (e.g., Haredi sector), boycotts (Arab sector), or fly-in coalitions of Israelis overseas (In the absence of absentee ballots for all except official state emissaries, people outside Israel fly back to Israel to vote on election day).

4. Valid votes

This is the bureaucratic factor. Unlike many Western democracies that utilize complex filling charts, ranking choices, or electronic screens, Israel's simple voting system—slipping a small piece of paper with the selected party's name and symbol into an envelope—minimizes voter error. As a result, a very high share of votes cast in Israel are valid. In the last five elections, the percent ranged between 99.29 and 99.46%, with an average of 99.38%. That is on par with rates in Canada which also use “simple mark” systems, but higher than rates in Germany, France, and the US, though higher rates in these countries stem from different reasons.

Unless there is a change in voting procedures, it is safe to assume that 99.3% of votes in any given election in Israel will be valid.

B. Calculating the *absolute* number of votes required to pass the electoral threshold

The absolute number of votes required by a party (V_{party}) to pass the electoral threshold is the product of these four factors:

$$V_{party} \geq \theta \cdot V_R \cdot T \cdot \alpha$$

Where θ is the legal electoral threshold, currently set at 3.25% ($\theta = .0325$), V_R is the total number of registered voters in the Voter Registry (פנקס בוחרים), T is the turnout rate, that is, the proportion of registered voters who cast a ballot, and α is the share of cast votes considered to be valid.

The fixed or stable nature of the first and last of these parameters means that the value of V_{party} in the coming 2026 election will be determined by the demographic and motivational factors, that is, V_R and T .

Luckily, one of these, the demographic factor V_R can also be projected with some degree of certainty. We do this here by setting the CBS data on Israel's mid-year population in 2024 as a baseline (from the Shnaton 2025), then projecting the population forward to the end of September 2026 (2.25 years).¹ V_R in the coming election is then the number of people aged at least 18 in those projections.

Those calculations point to a V_R of 7.561 million by September 30, 2026, up from 6.789 in November 2022. The four-year growth rate—2.69% per year—is somewhat faster than the prior 30-year rate. It is driven both by very large cohorts of Jewish teens that are now passing their 18th birthday, and by

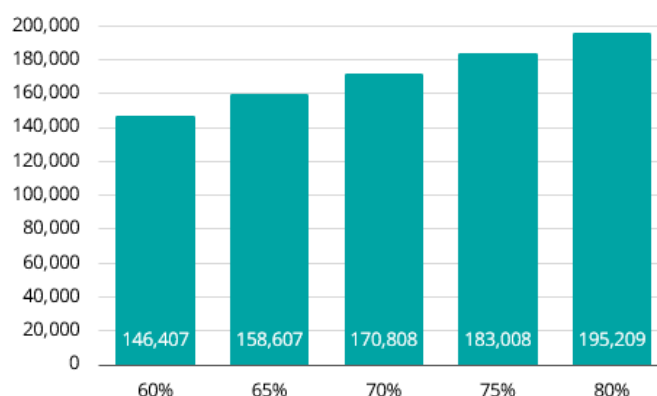
¹ We use a simple cohort component projection in single years of age that accounts for mortality and in-migration but not fertility (since new births do not affect the number of voters) or outmigration (see following footnote).

the addition of many new Israelis to the pool of potential voters, originating in the higher immigration from Russia-Ukraine that continued from November 2022 until September 2023.²

Having generated a value for V_R , and assumed a value of 0.993 for α (the average of the preceding five elections) the challenge of figuring out the value of V_{party} boils down to the motivational factor T : what share of eligible voters will choose to exercise their rights to vote?

Since evaluating the likely range of T is not part of skillset of researchers at the Taub Center, we calculate it for a range of values, starting with voting rates of 60 percent and moving in 5-percentage point steps up to 80 percent ($T=0.6, 0.65...0.8$). We present these estimates in Figure 4.

Figure 4. Anticipated electoral threshold in the October 2026 election, by turnout rate



Source: Alex Weinreb, Taub Center | Data Data: Taub Center Projections based on CBS data

Here are the findings. If turnout rates remain in the same 70% range as in the 2022 elections, a party will need to receive around 171,000 votes to pass the electoral threshold. Every increase or decrease of a percentage point in the turnout rate will add—or reduce—about 2,240 votes from that number.

What this means on the low side is that only if the turnout rate falls to around 63.5 will the electoral threshold remain similar to what it was in the 2022 election (154,854). Such a low turnout seems highly unlikely to us given both the historical record (Figure 3) and how heated this election promises to be.

It is much more likely, we think, that after three years of intermittent war and relatively constant instability, rates will remain where they were or climb further as people on all sides of the political spectrum mobilize to vote. **If the turnout rate climbs to the mid-70 percent range, a party would need 180,000 votes to exceed the threshold. If voting rates were to return to their 1990s levels, a party would need more than 190,000 votes.**

² Outmigrants who are Israeli citizens remain on the voter registry. That means that if there is an effect of outmigration on V_{party} (e.g., Israel's negative net migration in 2024 and 2025), it will operate through the turnout rate T (will they show up to vote?) not through the number of registered voters V_R .

Conclusion

The true value of the absolute electoral threshold in the coming election will only be known after all votes have been cast and counted. We expect it to easily surpass the 154,854 votes required in the 2022 election, just as the number in that election was more than 5,000 votes higher than the March 2020 election, and 18,000 votes higher than in the 2015 election.

This ongoing upward trend is being driven by demographic growth. It is constantly adding to the population of eligible voters (V_R). While substantial reductions in the turnout rate (T) can outweigh that demographic effect in any given election, the upward long-term trend in the electoral threshold is an inevitable and irreversible consequence of Israel's rapid population growth.

As the leaders of smaller parties—and their advisors—consider their prospects in the forthcoming election, we hope these facts in mind, and that they use the formula we're offering to produce their own estimates. If they cannot, with confidence, be assured of receiving at least 200,000 votes this coming September, they should consider stepping out of the race or uniting with a larger bloc. Doing anything else risks repeating the fiasco of wasted votes in 2022.

The Taub Center for Social Policy Studies in Israel is an independent, non-partisan socioeconomic research institute. The Center provides decision makers and the public with research and findings on some of the most critical issues facing Israel in the areas of education, health, welfare, labor markets and economic policy in order to impact the decision-making process in Israel and to advance the well-being of all Israelis.