I Drew Israel a Government: What Voters Chose and What Bargaining Delivers

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On 30 October, the day after the count was completed, I drew a government for Israel. Likud holds the premiership and Beyachad the acting premiership. Otzma Yehudit runs Finance. Yashar runs Defense. The Joint List runs Foreign Affairs. Ra'am runs Settlement and National Missions. Shas and Religious Zionism, whose support has set the price of recent Netanyahu governments, hold nothing. The draw took less than a second, and anyone can repeat it from the note below.

Israel's real government will be made differently: behind closed doors, by trading office for support. That process gives some parties power beyond their votes and shuts out others the voters chose. A draw takes office off the table. A ministry drawn by lot cannot be promised, and what cannot be promised cannot be sold.

I ran the draw because the arithmetic was settled before the party leaders sat down to talk. I wanted to see what the electorate had actually built before the campaign's vetoes locked nineteen seats out of the room.

What bargaining buys

In a fragmented Knesset, the party holding the last seats needed for 61 sets the price of a government, and the price is paid in ministries, powers and laws.

After the 2022 election, Otzma Yehudit, with six seats on a joint list, received Public Security, renamed National Security, and the Knesset changed the law to give its minister expanded authority over the police. Religious Zionism's leader received Finance and a second post inside the Defense Ministry, with authority over civilian affairs in the West Bank. The Knesset amended Basic Law: The Government so that Shas leader

Aryeh Deri, who had received a suspended sentence for tax offences, could serve as a minister; the High Court struck the appointment down within weeks (Library of Congress 2023; Times of Israel 2023). No voter chose any of this. It runs the other way too. In 2021 Naftali Bennett became prime minister at the head of a party that had won seven seats, because they were the seats that made 61.

Who is left out

Bargaining also silences. The election of 27 October gave Benjamin Netanyahu's bloc 53 seats and the opposition parties, the largest of them Gadi Eisenkot's Yashar, 48. The Joint List and Ra'am, the two Arab-led lists, won nineteen, the most they have ever held. Both bloc leaders pledged during the campaign not to rely on them (CBS News 2026). After the count, Eisenkot turned the pledge into four conditions, among them recognition of Israel as a Jewish state, service for all citizens, and recognition of Hamas as a terrorist organization, and said any member who accepts them can join (Jerusalem Post 2026a). The Joint List's chairman, Yousef Jabareen, repeatedly declined to call Hamas a terrorist organization (Times of Israel 2026d). The boundary is being drawn again, in criteria rather than names. Without the Arab-led lists, neither bloc reaches 61, and every majority that remains crosses between blocs that campaigned against each other.

No law keeps Arab-led lists out of government; the exclusion has rested on convention (Haklai and Norwich 2016). No independent Arab-led party has ever held a cabinet ministry. When Ra'am joined the Bennett–Lapid coalition in 2021, it was the first independent Arab party in a governing coalition, and it received no portfolio (INSS 2021). The line is drawn from both sides. On 31 October the Joint List's Ahmad Tibi said the party would not join any government, and offered outside support in exchange for

commitments on crime and on recognition of Bedouin villages (Jerusalem Post 2026b). Either way, nineteen seats count toward the vote and not toward power, and every seat left outside makes the parties inside harder to replace.

The bidding has begun. Within days of the count, United Torah Judaism, seven seats inside Netanyahu's bloc, was reported to be weighing outside support for an Eisenkot-led government without first requiring a draft law, in exchange for legislation and budgets for the Haredi community (Times of Israel 2026b, 2026g). Its price will be set in private.

What the draw does

Every seat in the Knesset is a ticket, and each of 28 ministries is drawn, with replacement, from all 120. A list's chance at any ministry equals its share of the seats. No ministry can be promised, so none can be bought.

I ran the draw 100,000 times on the final count as reported by the Times of Israel: Likud 27, Yashar 21, Beyachad 12, Joint List 11, Democrats 8, Ra'am 8, Yisrael Beytenu 7, Otzma Yehudit 7, United Torah Judaism 7, Shas 6, Religious Zionism 6. Every ministry is drawn from all 120 seats. The premiership is the one exception, for the reason given below; in these runs it is drawn from the 101 seats of the Jewish-led lists.

- In 99.2 percent of simulated governments, at least one Arab-led list holds a ministry. On average the two lists hold 4.4 of the 28.
- In 29 percent, an Arab-led list holds Defense or National Security.

Bargaining has never once produced either result.

A draw also ends deadlock, but only if the draw itself confers office, which would mean amending Basic Law: The Government so that a drawn cabinet does not need an investiture vote (Rosenberg under review). In 2019 the Knesset was dissolved twice

because no government could be formed. Under a draw, each of those Knessets would have had a cabinet the week it was elected.

The hard questions

A drawn cabinet holds rivals. How does it govern? By rule rather than by deal. The cabinet decides by recorded majority vote and adopts its programme after the offices are allocated, so parties still bargain, but over what the government does, not over who holds Finance. Budgets and laws still need a Knesset majority. The Knesset keeps the power to dismiss the government, but a successful no-confidence vote triggers a fresh draw, not a negotiated successor (Rosenberg under review).

A single draw can stray from proportionality, and a small list can win the premiership: Otzma Yehudit, with seven of the 101 seats eligible in these runs, would lead the government about once in fourteen draws. That is the cost of a rule no one can bend.

A list may refuse what it draws. The Joint List has said it will not serve, and Tibi has said, “I don’t want a ministry; we want change” (Times of Israel 2026e). A declined portfolio is redrawn from all 120 seats, and the party that declines it cannot choose who gets it.

The premiership is the one office not open to every list. No such rule exists in Israeli law today, and the state's constitutional identity does not depend on one: every list in the draw has already passed Section 7A of Basic Law: The Knesset, which bars lists that negate Israel's existence as a Jewish and democratic state. The draw distributes power proportionally; it does not surrender the identity of the state whose executive it constitutes. The full design, under peer review, adds a separate proposed amendment: a

qualification for the premiership's nominee, fixed in a Basic Law before the election (Rosenberg under review). The runs here approximate it with the Jewish-led lists.

Where the bargaining goes

The draw does not abolish bargaining. It moves bargaining to where voters can see it. Before an election, parties still form lists, make pledges and set conditions, as both bloc leaders did in this campaign, and voters judge those bargains at the ballot box. What the lottery removes is the bargaining that comes after the vote, when ministries are traded for the last seats needed for 61 in negotiations no voter attends.

The opposition is already weighing a Basic Law change of its own: direct election of the prime minister, reportedly so that a minority government could be formed without relying on the Arab-led lists (Times of Israel 2026c). Israel tried direct election from 1996 to 2001 and abandoned it. That proposal would change the rules to keep nineteen seats out. The question is not whether to change the rules, but which change.

The first step is the one I set out in the Journal of Sortition: whatever coalition forms, its ministries are drawn by lot among its members, weighted by their seats, with the premiership and the confidence vote left as they are (Rosenberg forthcoming). The last party in could still ask for policy, in the open. It could not ask for Finance. That step would not end this deadlock, but it would change what the deadlock is about. The full draw would end it.

On 27 October the electorate chose a Knesset: 53 seats for one bloc, 48 for the Jewish-led opposition, nineteen for the Arab-led lists. It did not choose a finance minister, a defense minister or a prime minister. The negotiations will. Under a draw, the

cabinet would reflect what the electorate chose. Under bargaining, it will reflect what the last seats needed for 61 could extract.

Note on the draw

Seed: the SHA-256 hex digest, as a string, of “Cabinet Draw | 26th Knesset | final count 29 Oct 2026”, passed to Python 3’s random.Random. Each office is drawn with random.choices, weighted by seats, with lists in the order given above. The premiership and acting premiership are drawn first from the Jewish-led lists, then the 28 ministries in this order: Finance; Defense; Foreign Affairs; Justice; Interior; National Security; Education; Health; Economy and Industry; Transportation; Energy and Infrastructure; Welfare and Social Affairs; Construction and Housing; Agriculture; Communications; Environmental Protection; Labor; Aliyah and Integration; Innovation, Science and Technology; Culture and Sport; Tourism; Religious Services; Diaspora Affairs; Jerusalem and Heritage; Negev, Galilee and National Resilience; Regional Cooperation; Settlement and National Missions; Intelligence. The final results published by the Central Elections Committee did not change the count (Times of Israel 2026f). Code is available from the author.

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