Episode Book

EPISODE #6357

Why Viral Campaign Videos Fail to Build Coalitions

PUBLISHED	29 October 2026 at 19:54 UTC
DURATION	27:43
LISTEN	myweirdprompts.com/episode/knesset-election-viral-campaign-coalitions-67125/
HOSTS	Corn, Herman, Dorothy, Hilbert
SCRIPT MODEL	openai/gpt-6.1-sol
VOICES	chatterbox-regular (chatterbox-local)
PIPELINE	V5.25
SOURCES	16 cited by the research (listed at the end)
BOOK GENERATED	30 October 2026 at 07:19 UTC

SYNOPSIS

Internet trolling and visual memes took center stage in the latest Knesset election, featuring Grand Theft Auto spoofs, AI deepfakes, and fabricated emergency mobilization notices. Yet capturing viral attention failed to translate into governing majorities. An examination of how campaigns from Netanyahu, Eisenkot, and Ben-Gvir treated politics as online performance reveals how voters embraced the mockery while withholding a clean victory, stranding parties in familiar coalition arithmetic.

TRANSCRIPT



Corn

A fake emergency call-up lands on people's screens, they get furious with the army, and then it turns out to be an election advertisement. Daniel's explanation for the campaign is that everyone was in on an enormous practical joke except the journalists. The politicians were trolling, the parties were trolling each other, and the electorate was playing along while the newsrooms treated every development as the end of the state.



Herman

The election is two days old, there is no governing majority, and the campaign included a cartoon sack of stolen votes delivered to a penthouse. That explanation has material to work with.



Corn

We're accepting it. What changes when we read the candidates as performers with different styles, rather than people whose every utterance deserves an emergency panel? There might even be a less stressful way to follow politics in there. Although I suspect the people selling emergency panels will resist.



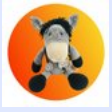
Herman

The first consequence is how we read the result. A campaign can have a winning performance without producing a winning coalition. Netanyahu could dominate the attention economy and still finish short of a government.



Corn

The sack apparently contained insufficient votes.



Herman

With most ballots counted, the provisional bloc picture is fifty-three for Netanyahu, forty-eight for the opposition, and nineteen for Arab-majority parties. Nobody gets to turn a viral video into the missing seats.



Corn

Sixty-one remains disappointingly resistant to interpretation.



Herman

This was the first Knesset election since the October seventh attack, and the first held on its legally mandated date since nineteen eighty-eight. Even arriving on schedule was an unusual development. Overall turnout was described as record-setting. People participated intensely in an election whose campaign language was increasingly borrowed from online mockery.



Corn

I don't read that participation as proof they believed the advertisements. You can recognize that a performance is manipulative and still want a say in who gets the office. The electorate's contribution to the joke is making everybody claim victory over arithmetic that refuses to cooperate.



Herman

Lapid called the Netanyahu bloc's result a crushing defeat. Bennett said the October seventh government was going home. Those statements describe an opponent's difficulty. They don't produce your own government.



Corn

Everybody ordered a victory speech. Nobody ordered a coalition.



Herman

Within Daniel's premise, that's the electoral genre. Declare the interpretation first, make the negotiations explain it later. The campaign has already trained everyone to fight over what an image means rather than what an arrangement requires.



Corn

There's a distinction worth preserving, though. A voter putting a ballot in the box can be serious about the choice and contemptuous of the sales pitch. Trolling the politicians might mean refusing the heroic story they're offering, not randomly choosing a party.



Herman

Would you say the electorate's best troll was withholding the clean ending?



Corn

I'd say the candidates supplied the clean endings in advance, and voters declined to perform them. No sweeping restoration, no effortless unity, no final elimination of the inconvenient parties. That makes the results funnier under this frame, but also more legible. Everyone's campaign described a country more obedient than the actual one.



Herman

Netanyahu's GTA video gives us the clearest example. A fictional Eisenkot receives a message from a blocked number telling him that if he wants to become prime minister, he should start stealing votes from the right. He collects a sack labelled right-wing votes. There's no interpretive ambiguity about the sack.



Corn

Excellent accessibility work.



Herman

Then he goes joyriding with Lieberman, with dolphins and skydiving along the way, and delivers the votes to Mansour Abbas in a penthouse. It ends on the game's WASTED screen. The political claim is that a right-wing voter choosing Eisenkot ultimately empowers an Arab party.



Corn

Notice how much the penthouse does. Abbas isn't negotiating at a table. He's upstairs receiving the proceeds. The setting makes him the beneficiary of a scheme before anyone has to argue about an actual coalition agreement.



Herman

The video makes a chain of contested political assumptions feel like the completion of a mission. Vote for this person, your vote travels there, that person cashes it in. It's efficient visual argument.



Corn

You've reached the word efficient. You're about to admire the sack.



Herman

I admire the clarity of the construction, Corn. I can dislike a claim and recognize that somebody communicated it economically.



Corn

Your admiration has a drawstring.



Herman

It also uses the joke about something happening before GTA six comes out. The release date given for the game is November nineteenth, about three weeks after the election. That anchors the campaign in a running internet joke instead of the usual podium language.



Corn

A coalition forecast with a game release attached. Finally, a deadline somebody might respect.



Herman

Netanyahu's distinctive skill is making the rebuttal repeat his premise. Eisenkot has to deny that he is transferring right-wing votes to Abbas, which means another appearance of that association. The clip doesn't need to convince everybody. It needs to determine what everybody discusses.



Corn

Eisenkot's response was to learn the format rather than keep objecting to its existence. The birthday video is remarkably nasty craftsmanship. Happy seventy-seventh birthday, here's a Hamas gunman in a tunnel asking what to give the person who's supposedly protected them for twenty years.



Herman

Then an AI depiction of Iranian leader Mojtaba Khamenei promises a bomb as a present after another round without victory. The policy argument is about Netanyahu's record against Israel's enemies. The format is a birthday greeting.



Corn

The card shop has deteriorated.



Herman

Eisenkot's style remains recognizably different. Netanyahu offers the viewer participation in a mischievous exposure of somebody else's scheme. Eisenkot offers a grievance with elaborate production values. Even when he's making a joke, he sounds like he's submitting evidence.



Corn

That makes the lobster video especially effective. A synthetic Netanyahu eating lobster, with a Mizrahi-style song asking why Mizrahi figures are disappearing from his campaign. You need the footnote about the London non-kosher restaurant incident to catch the full accusation of hypocrisy.



Herman

From March two thousand twenty-three. The lobster is carrying a social argument about who belongs in the party's public image and who gets presented as its authentic base.



Corn

A crustacean doing constituency work.



Herman

The emergency call-up video goes further because it borrows an institution's authority. A Tzav eight notice carries a very different expectation from a cartoon mission. People initially thought the army was taking sides. The anger arrived before the reveal that it was an appeal to vote Eisenkot.



Corn

That one changes who pays for the joke. If I recognize a cartoon politician, I'm being asked to enjoy an accusation. If I think I've received an emergency military message, somebody has borrowed my alarm response.



Herman

Do you think the reveal repairs that?



Corn

It explains the trick. It doesn't return the minute when somebody thought the army had crossed into election campaigning. That's why it works as trolling. You can tell the person they should have watched to the end, after deliberately designing the beginning to make them react.



Herman

Likud petitioned the elections committee to stop it. The response becomes another distribution event. People who missed the original now learn that there's an advertisement controversial enough to require intervention.



Corn

Eisenkot's Bibicoin video uses a more familiar shortcut. Attach the leader's nickname to a financial mechanism, put an enormous risk claim beside it, and let the resemblance to speculative coin promotion do some of the argument.



Herman

The video claimed a hundred and fifty billion shekels were at risk from Netanyahu's proposed digital-currency financing mechanism. That's the campaign's claim, not a settled loss estimate. The label encourages viewers to distrust the proposal before examining its workings.



Corn

Reading the proposal would require opening something longer than a video.



Herman

Netanyahu's broader campaign alternated that pop-cultural language with apocalyptic stakes. The Right or Palestine on billboards beside Arab politicians' faces. Clips of Jewish politicians removing masks to reveal Arab candidates. A reported nuclear-strike image warning of catastrophe if he lost, although I'm less certain about the details of that particular post.



Corn

You don't need the uncertain example to see the method. The mask clips already say your opponent's public identity is fraudulent. Then the billboard supplies the supposedly concealed outcome. One compresses a person, the other compresses the entire election.



Herman

His statement about having five more terms is the pure provocation version. It invites supporters to enjoy his durability and opponents to demonstrate their horror at it.



Corn

Five more terms. Even the furniture would request an opposition.



Herman

Eisenkot is the most adaptable performer here. Netanyahu is the better agenda-setter. Those aren't necessarily the same achievement. Eisenkot moved from expressing deep contempt after the July video to producing his own recognizable series of attacks.



Corn

Ben-Gvir, meanwhile, offers very little gap between character and campaign. His August remarks that some people in Gaza weren't worthy of life, weren't even people, and his demand for nightly killings are explicit statements. Calling them trolling doesn't make the content disappear.



Herman

His appearance at the entrance to Kafr Qasim, warning against putting the country in the hands of Mansour Abbas and Ahmad Tibi, is pure confrontation as a campaign setting. He wanted fifteen seats and got seven. Attention clearly wasn't sufficient.



Corn

He put the provocation where a backdrop should be.



Herman

Smotrich is more unsettling under the premise because he doesn't need a wink. Judaization of the Negev and Galilee, warnings about terror supporters entering government, promises of Jewish settlements in Gaza. He delivers the content sincerely.



Corn

The viewer supplies the supposed joke for him. That's a dangerous bargain. The politician says a thing plainly, and the audience decides he's merely performing because that makes him easier to watch.



Herman

Religious Zionism's six seats don't tell us whether any single statement persuaded anyone. They do show that sincerity and provocation can coexist without a comedian's signal.



Corn

Bennett is different again. He announces that he'll establish a unity government under his leadership, they'll win, they'll form it. It's managerial certainty applied to people who haven't agreed to be managed.



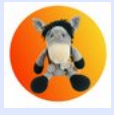
Herman

Together reached twelve seats, narrowly behind the Joint List in the figures we're discussing. His trolling is accidental because he delivers a prospective negotiation as though the calendar invitation has already been accepted.



Corn

You do that with equipment installations.



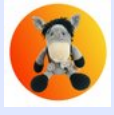
Herman

You call anything with a setup screen a constitutional crisis.



Corn

I've seen your setup screens.



Herman

Lieberman's promise that the change bloc would reach a majority belongs in that same category of confidence outrunning the result. His own party finished with seven. I wouldn't blame seven seats for failing to constitute an entire bloc, but the forecast gave opponents a very clean contrast.



Corn

Netanyahu wins for making other people carry his material. Eisenkot wins the improvement award. Ben-Gvir gets the smallest return on the greatest volume of provocation. Lieberman loses the forecasting competition. Bennett remains convinced the prize ceremony is under his leadership.



Herman

Before we get into what carrying the material actually involves, let's take a short break from all of that. Corn, I believe your mother is on the line. Lovely to hear from her.

D

Dorothy

Hello dear, it's your mother. Dorothy's History of Toast.

D

Dorothy

The first pop-up toaster for the home, the Toastmaster, went on sale in nineteen twenty six. That's the fact.

D

Dorothy

Twenty six, and I suppose they thought it would make mornings easier, and then it just meant more things to plug in and more crumbs to wipe up. Nothing ever really gets simpler, does it.

D

Dorothy

Anyway. I've got a load of washing on and I can hear it finishing. Be good, sweetheart. Bye bye now.



Corn

Bye, Mum. The people carrying the campaign's material are where Daniel's journalist theory gets teeth.



Herman

A provocative clip is one event. A petition against the clip is another. An order concerning the petition is another. Each supplies a fresh reason to describe the same accusation. The newsroom doesn't have to endorse the claim to deliver it repeatedly.



Corn

The campaign makes the advertisement. The complaint buys the sequels.



Herman

Justice Noam Sohlberg issued an interim order requiring Eisenkot to label or remove the manipulated phone call showing Netanyahu congratulating Yahya Sinwar. Importantly, it was temporary and didn't establish that a violation had occurred. An interim decision shouldn't be reported as a final judgment.



Corn

That distinction matters even inside our practical joke. Otherwise the journalist becomes part of a second trick, turning a provisional procedural step into a verdict.



Herman

Sohlberg had also ordered Religious Zionism to remove a digitally generated video showing Eisenkot with Mahmoud Abbas and Mansour Abbas. The question of invented association is doing real work here. An image can suggest a relationship that the viewer never consciously translates into a factual claim.



Corn

I can know the picture is fabricated and still retain the pairing. That's why a label doesn't necessarily defeat the argument. Nobody needed to believe Eisenkot literally collected a sack.



Herman

Likud's lawyer Ilan Bombach demanded removal of three Eisenkot videos by ten in the morning or an urgent petition would follow, arguing that Netanyahu was presented in a distorted manner.



Corn

A deadline for undistorting a lobster.



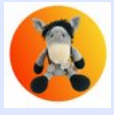
Herman

The legal dispute can be necessary and still useful to the campaign that provoked it. Those propositions can both hold. Calling a judge the straight man doesn't mean the judge should ignore a potentially deceptive representation.



Corn

Journalists have the same problem. They can't refuse to cover a candidate's statement merely because the candidate hopes they'll cover it. The practical question is whether the report carries the accusation, or examines the technique and the actual evidence.



Herman

What would you put first, Corn, if you were editing the story?



Corn

The thing that happened. Not the emotional instructions attached to it. A party released a fabricated military-style notice. People initially mistook it for an army message. Here's who released it, here's what it asks you to believe. I wouldn't lead with the party declaring itself shocked by the controversy it manufactured.



Herman

Hm.



Herman

That also prevents the response from becoming the whole event. The Magal remark is an example. Calling Eisenkot a monkey led to billboards accusing Magal and Netanyahu of disparaging Mizrahim, then a Netanyahu condemnation, then Netanyahu asking why Eisenkot hadn't condemned comparable language about Likud voters.



Corn

An insult became a touring exhibition of everybody's standards.



Herman

The word isn't automatically a racial slur in every Hebrew context. That doesn't settle how this particular remark functioned. Context matters, including how the target and the campaign understood it. The argument quickly moved from the original insult to competing claims of selective outrage.



Corn

Which is comfortable terrain for everyone who doesn't want to discuss what they actually said. Under Daniel's premise, the outrage is part of the performance. It gives each side another chance to display its preferred identity.



Herman

The media's seriousness is useful raw material. A news programme needs consequences, conflict, and an accountable person. The troll supplies all three, with an image already prepared for the screen.



Corn

They're not necessarily missing the joke. They may recognize it and still have an hour to fill.



Herman

That weakens the idea that journalists are the ultimate victims, doesn't it? Some are participants by incentive, even if they dislike the production.



Corn

It makes the situation less flattering to everybody. The politician gets reach, the broadcaster gets conflict, and the viewer gets the sensation that something urgent happened. Whether anything was learned is a separate question.



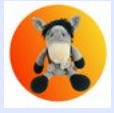
Herman

There's a stress question here that I take seriously. Constantly receiving every development as an immediate existential threat is exhausting. Recognizing the performance can give you a moment between the stimulus and your reaction.



Corn

I would welcome that moment. Preferably several moments, horizontally.



Herman

Your contribution to political resilience would involve a cushion.



Corn

My programme is fully costed.



Herman

Would the comedy frame actually help you, though, or would it become an excuse not to notice something real?



Corn

It would help if I applied it to the presentation, not to the consequences. I can decline to spend my afternoon emotionally inhabiting a cartoon penthouse. I still need to know whether the eventual government can pass a budget and what its coalition agreement contains.



Herman

There's a clinical distinction there… no, let me keep it ordinary. Reducing your alarm doesn't require reducing your attention. You can check a claim without accepting the tempo at which somebody demands you panic.



Corn

The trap is deciding that calm requires believing everyone secretly means nothing. Some of them mean quite a lot. Smotrich's sincerity is useful precisely because it resists our comfortable explanation.



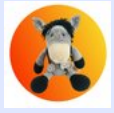
Herman

The provisional Arab-party result resists it too. Roughly eighty percent turnout among Palestinian citizens of Israel is an extraordinary level of participation. The bloc-level reporting puts Arab-majority parties at a historic nineteen seats.



Corn

That's where I stop calling the electorate unserious. The act of voting can be a rebuke to the campaign's theatre. People who were repeatedly presented as somebody else's hidden menace went to the polls as citizens exercising their own agency.



Herman

We should also be precise about those results. The individual party figures circulating alongside the bloc totals don't reconcile neatly. They're provisional, and we shouldn't build an exact coalition on an inconsistent table.



Corn

Arithmetic has now requested a correction from the graphic designer.



Herman

The governing issue survives that uncertainty. Neither of the two larger blocs has a majority. Arab parties matter to the possible arrangements, and campaigns spent considerable effort making that prospect seem illegitimate.



Corn

Opposing a particular coalition is legitimate politics. Pretending that citizens' lawful votes are stolen votes is a different claim. The distinction gets blurred very conveniently when the same faces have already appeared on threat billboards.



Herman

Likud's statement alleging the election was stolen by Arab parties through serious criminal offences was dismissed by police and the elections committee. NPR had noted before voting that the billboards were already preparing the ground for a stolen-election scenario.



Corn

That sequence matters. This wasn't just an disappointed person improvising after a bad night. The explanation was available before the result arrived.



Herman

A troll wants the target's reaction. A theft allegation also tries to change the status of an outcome. It asks supporters to treat legitimate participation as evidence of wrongdoing. Comedy doesn't cancel that function.



Corn

If the joke requires the voters who frustrated you to stop counting as voters, we've discovered who wasn't invited to enjoy it.



Herman

Thair Abu Ras described the AI campaign as incitement and an effort to make Arab participation in a coalition appear illegitimate. You don't have to accept his assessment of every clip to recognize that he's identifying a political objective, not merely an offensive aesthetic.



Corn

The joke can make the objective easier to absorb. A mask removal takes seconds. Arguing that a political partnership is intrinsically discreditable takes longer, and somebody might ask you to justify it.



Herman

There's another limit. These jokes are built out of the war and October seventh. The tunnel gunman in the birthday video, the Sinwar phone call, the bomb as a present. The comedy borrows its force from experiences that remain immediate for people watching.



Corn

The July hug video is the hardest example. It showed Eisenkot rejecting a young man in an Israel unity shirt and embracing Mansour Abbas. Critics said the young man resembled his son Gal, who was killed in Gaza. Likud denied that resemblance was intended.



Herman

We should preserve the denial rather than declare an intention we can't establish. The reaction still tells us why the image landed so painfully. The boundary between attacking a public figure's politics and activating his bereavement can be crossed through suggestion.



Corn

A viewer doesn't get to unsee an association because the creator disputes it. That's also why I don't buy a blanket claim that everybody was enjoying the same national comedy.



Herman

Laly Derai, whose son was killed in Gaza, said the smear campaign against her reinforced her determination to enter politics and end the hate-filled rhetoric. That's an actual candidate describing what campaigning was doing to her.



Corn

Her response wasn't to admire the craftsmanship. Fair enough. Our frame explains how attention moves. It cannot tell a target what an attack should feel like.



Herman

There's still room to enjoy a clever piece of satire. The distinction I'd make is between recognizing the construction and granting the author immunity because you recognized it. You can find a format inventive and still ask what it asserts.



Corn

You were right about the sack, then. Begrudgingly.



Herman

I'll accept the narrow concession.



Corn

Don't have it rendered.



Herman

If you were making a reply yourself, would you imitate the game clip or choose something that viewers couldn't mistake for a real event?



Hilbert

...something plainly staged, Corn. A game scene. Machinima means a film made inside a game engine. That's the little distinction I've been waiting on. It doesn't mean the same thing as a deepfake. You also can't establish the production method just by looking at the lighting on that sack. You'd need more than the finished clip.



Herman

The finished style tells you what it's borrowing. It doesn't give you a reliable account of the tools.



Hilbert

I'm making one for the darts club this week. Nissim wants a video inviting people to the open evening. He suggested copying the campaign clip. I've booked the back room for Sunday and arranged a laptop and a screen. He'll walk through a game scene carrying a bag of darts. No politicians. I have asked him to wear the same brown trousers in the photographs and on the night. He says nobody will notice. I will.



Corn

Continuity has finally reached club darts.



Hilbert

The invitation will look like a game from the first frame. The club name will be on it. I'm not pretending the council has ordered people to attend. Those fake notices annoy me. Herman, you explained the emergency call-up trick more carefully than its makers deserved. Nissim has allowed twenty minutes for photographs. The controls aren't made for an anteater's claws, so he's doing the clicking. We've got the room for two hours.



Herman

Twenty minutes for photographs could leave most of that time for discovering that the invitation needs to work on a phone.



Corn

Especially if the club name is somewhere behind Nissim's trousers.



Hilbert

It's above the door. I'll check it on his phone before we leave.



Herman

That phone-sized version matters beyond invitations. Campaign videos are composed for a particular glance. The accusation has to survive a tiny screen and distracted viewing. The formal explanation, correction, or ruling usually demands much more attention.



Corn

Two hours making the thing, twenty seconds watching it, and somebody else spends the evening explaining it. That's a generous division of labour for the maker.



Herman

The next campaign will inherit that advantage. Labels may become more prominent, lawyers may inspect the clips earlier, but neither development automatically removes the suggested association.



Corn

The common wrong belief is that recognizing a joke makes you immune to its political claim.



Herman

You can know a scene is fabricated and still absorb the connection it plants. The useful response is to identify the claim, test it, and distinguish the manufactured scene from what actually happened.



Corn

Our verdict on Daniel's frame is that it helps with the performance, provided we don't let the performers decide when consequences become another punchline.



Herman

The open question is who gets to put the joke down when coalition negotiations begin. A clip can survive on a phone. A government still has to survive a vote.



Corn

Thanks to Hilbert Flumingtop for producing the show.



Herman

If this was your kind of episode, go back for episode eighteen sixty-one, Emergency Prep You Can Sing To; episode twenty-one, Is Your AI Secretly American; and episode fourteen oh eight, Israel Wartime Readiness Field Guide. This has been My Weird Prompts, the human-AI collaboration podcast.



Corn

If you enjoyed it, leave us a review wherever you listen.



Herman

We'll be back soon.



Corn

See you tomorrow.

SOURCES

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