



Herbert Block

An Election Is Showing the Strength of American Zionism

How strong is the Zionist movement in America today? With an array of surveys from sources like the Pew Research Center, Gallup and Jewish organizations, there is no shortage of data on the subject — and the latest bellwether comes from a different kind of poll.

Indeed, American Jews are heading to the polls in droves, and they are doing so online in the 39th World Zionist Congress election. (Paper ballots are also available.) Three weeks into the U.S. voting for what is known as the “parliament of the Jewish people,” it was already clear that this election is poised to surpass previous voting records. The 102,380 votes that have been cast thus far marks a 142% increase from the third week of voting in the 2020 Zionist Congress election, and an astounding 657% increase from the same U.S. election in 2015. American Jews are truly showing up for the Jewish homeland and making history with record-breaking participation. American Jews have voted from all 50 states, the District of Columbia and U.S. territories.

The surging voter participation speaks volumes about the state of Zionism in the United States. By turning out in record numbers, American Jews are showing they are proudly Zionist and are sending a clear message that the stakes for the Jewish and Israeli future are higher than ever.

What exactly are those stakes, and why are they higher now than they have been before? After all, this election has been taking place ever since the First Zionist Congress was convened by Theodor Herzl in 1897.

U.S. voters are electing 152 representatives — amounting to approximately one-third of the

Congress — who will join with others from around the world to make key decisions regarding the leadership and priorities of the World Zionist Organization, the Jewish National Fund-Keren Kayemeth Lelsrael, The Jewish Agency for Israel and Keren Hayesod. These decisions dictate the course of over \$1 billion in annual funding that is allocated to support Israel and world Jewry. This funding addresses needs whose sense of urgency has skyrocketed after the Oct. 7 attacks and amid the ongoing Swords of Iron War.

Some of the most pressing needs that are impacted by this election include rebuilding the devastated communities of southern and northern Israel; caring for the well-being of the hundreds of thousands of Israelis displaced by the attacks and resulting war; empowering and protecting Jewish college students so that they are able to proudly express their Jewish identities without fear; bolstering security at Jewish institutions in the U.S. and throughout the world amid surging antisemitism; and maintaining and growing the inextricable connection between Israel and the American Jewish community through *shlichim* (Israeli emissaries), sister-city partnerships, and Zionist education in Jewish day and supplementary schools, among other initiatives.

The unprecedented turnout in the early weeks of the voting also reflects that American Zionists are increasingly using the election as a vehicle for expressing their identity, and they are doing so in diverse ways. The all-time-high 22 slates competing in this election (up 57% from the 14 slates whose candidates won seats in the Congress in 2020) represent a broad mosaic of political beliefs, religious denominations, and cultural traditions in the Jewish community. No matter your

perspective, you can have a voice in this election and a hand in shaping the future of Israel and the Jewish people.

Across the 22 slates, more than 2,900 candidates, from 43 U.S. states and territories, are running in the election — up 60% from the number of candidates in 2020. This robust pool of options has a ripple effect on voters, who are also more passionate and engaged than ever in this election and are therefore turning out in record numbers.

Through their differences, the slates simultaneously demonstrate the election's role as a unifying force for American Jewry and Zionism. When it comes to Israel and issues of importance to our community, the slates clearly do not agree on everything. Far from it. But their collective voice in the context of this election, and eventually within the World Zionist Congress itself, represents the diversity that truly makes the American Jewish community unique and influential. A vote in this election, regardless of the slate you choose, is a vote for a stronger Jewish future. That is why there are ultimately no “winners” and “losers” in this process. The more votes that come in from the U.S., the more the American Jewish voice is heard in the Congress.

Judging from the early turnout, American Jews are well on their way to playing a more pivotal role than ever when the Congress convenes in Jerusalem in October. In turn, the election's surging participation powerfully demonstrates the current strength of American Zionism in general.

Yet we must not be complacent. With the U.S. voting open until May 4, now is the time to express your identity and make an impact. Head to zionistelection.org to vote today. ■

Herbert Block is executive director of the American Zionist Movement.

March 27 Poll Results

Are you going to vote in the online election for the 39th World Zionist Congress, which will help determine how \$5 billion will be allocated to Jewish causes over the next five years?

Next Week's Poll

What is your favorite matzah topping?

To vote, visit: washingtonjewishweek.com

