

Want your voice heard in Israel? It's time to vote (in America)

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Opinion

WORLD ZIONIST ELECTIONS

In Short

Voting for the World Zionist Congress opens next week and extends through May 4; it is a critical way to shape the future of Israel and the Jewish people

One of us has held leadership positions in the Orthodox community. The other has done the same within the Reform movement. Despite this difference, we join in encouraging all Jews of the United States to vote in the upcoming World Zionist Congress election, which will take place between March 10 and May 4. We do so because we are unified in our belief that Jews throughout our country have a responsibility to vote for the sake of Israel's future.

Every five years, the World Zionist Congress convenes diverse Jewish voices and constituencies from around the world in support of the vibrancy of Zionism. For this year's election, a record 21 slates, representing a mosaic of political beliefs, religious denominations and cultural traditions, will compete to determine the makeup of the 152 U.S. representatives to the Congress. The diversity of our slates reflects the diversity of our Jewish community.



Courtesy/WZO

The World Zionist Congress in Jerusalem in April 2023.

The First Zionist Congress, convened by Theodor Herzl in 1897, was the genesis of the modern Zionist movement. At that meeting, great minds and leaders from throughout the Jewish world jointly proclaimed that the Jewish people should have a state of their own. This year's election for the 39th World Zionist Congress continues this legacy.

The seismic crises of the last five years since the 2020 World Zionist Congress have raised the stakes to arguably their highest level in the history of the relationship between American Jewry and Israel. Starting with the COVID-19 pandemic and extending to today's continuing trauma from the Oct. 7 terrorist attacks and the ongoing war against Hamas, fault lines threaten to divide the Jewish people.

As the leaders of the American Zionist Movement — the U.S. Zionist federation that administers the World Zionist Congress election in the United States — we understand the importance of this election as a tangible way to show support for Israel and a commitment to the issues which make such support more crucial than ever.

Voting in the election is Zionists' most powerful opportunity to have our voice heard in Israel and make an impact in Jewish communities worldwide. The 152 representatives who are to be elected from the U.S. — about one-third of the total Congress — will make key decisions

about the allocation of over \$1 billion annually.

Consider the following sampling of current needs, and how their urgency has been amplified since Oct. 7:

- Rebuilding the devastated communities of southern and northern Israel, as well as caring for the well-being of the hundreds of thousands of Israelis displaced by the attacks and resulting war
- Providing ongoing emotional support for hostage families and the hostages that have been returned
- Empowering and protecting Jewish college students so that they are able to proudly express their Jewish identities without fear, and bolstering security at Jewish institutions in the U.S. and throughout the world amid surging antisemitism

This election is about more than addressing the crises of the present. It is about the future — the future of Israel, American Jewry, and the connection between them.

Oct. 7 has demonstrated to us all that the Jewish future has Israel at its center. Rising antisemitism, as well as the steady stream of criticism levied at Israel, make it all too easy to feel a sense of isolation as a Zionist these days. Nearly half of all people worldwide hold elevated levels of antisemitic attitudes, according to the latest Global 100 survey conducted by Anti-Defamation League.

But we also know that the Jewish community worldwide is connected. It is now incumbent on us to do all we can to maintain and grow the inextricable connection between Israel and the American Jewish community through initiatives like *shlichim* (Israeli emissaries), sister-city partnerships and Zionist education in Jewish day and supplementary schools. When participants in the World Zionist Congress election vote for the representatives who will prioritize these needs, they are registering their vote for Israel's future. It is imperative that your vote be included.

Some slates will emerge with more seats than others. This is the reality of an election. However, this is a critically important opportunity for all Jews over the age of 18 who maintain their primary residence in the United States and who accept the principles of Zionism to make sure that their values, opinions and positions are represented at the World Zionist Congress, which will be held in Jerusalem in October. The larger the U.S. voter turnout is, the more the U.S. voice will be heard in Jerusalem.

This is our opportunity to make our voices heard. We cannot, and will not, abandon our responsibility to Israel and the Jewish people.

Deborah Isaac is president of the American Zionist Movement (AZM) and Michael H. Laufer is AZM's national board chair. Learn more about this year's World Zionist Congress election at [zionistelection\[dot\]org](http://zionistelection[dot]org).

