

**Tol investigates** Source alleges 'systemic cheating'

## **WZO elections marred by alleged widespread voter fraud, abuse of voting platform**

As many as 6% of all ballots may be thrown out, in fateful vote by US Jews that helps determine how billions of dollars will be spent on Jewish and Israeli causes

By [Zev Stub](#) 29 April 2025



*A picture of Theodor Herzl on August 29, 2022, during celebrations of the 125th anniversary of the First Zionist Congress at the historic Stadtcasino in Basel, where Herzl convened the first congress that paved the way for the creation of the State of Israel. (Fabrice Cofrinni / AFP)*

Widespread voter fraud and technical problems threaten the credibility of the vote for the World Zionist Congress, several sources close to the elections have told The Times of Israel.

The sources said more than 10,200 votes, or about 6% of the total ballots cast thus far, are at risk of being tossed out due to suspicions of fraud. These votes allegedly benefited six of the 22 parties running for election.

Concerns have also been raised that the vote management platform used by the American Zionist Organization (AZM), the organization administering the election, is outdated and may be unfit for the balloting.

Cheating has been rife throughout the two-month election, which ends May 4. In one such instance, sources said, a party running for election told the AZM that it was approached by someone who said they were generating votes for other parties for a fee of \$50 apiece.

A failure to deal properly with the alleged fraud cases could be a “disaster” that would undermine the credibility of the elections, which help determine how billions of dollars a year are allocated to various Jewish and Israeli causes, the sources said.

Early signs of a problem emerged in early April, when the AZM said it was [investigating](#) nearly 2,000 suspicious votes. Sources indicated at the time that these votes benefited the slates of Haredi Eretz Hakodesh, associated with Israel’s Haredi United Torah Judaism party, and Am Yisrael Chai, an Orthodox party targeting young voters.

Many of these votes were allegedly cast within minutes of each other from identical locations, using suspicious pre-paid credit cards and unverifiable contact details.

At the time, eJewishPhilanthropy [reported](#) that many of the suspected votes came from six locations whose addresses matched yeshivas in New York, Pennsylvania and Maryland, and that all the prepaid credit cards were issued by TransPecos Bank and Pathward.



*An illustrative image of a stack of credit cards. (alexialex; iStock by Getty Images)*

It was in the course of investigating these votes that the Area Election Committee (AEC), which is charged with overseeing the election, discovered that there were many more

suspicious votes than originally thought, The Times of Israel was told. In an emergency meeting called late last week, the sources said, the AEC revealed that some 10,200 votes were being investigated, cast for six different unidentified slates.

“We were shocked,” one source said. “This election needs to be run on a secure voting platform that prevents voter fraud. If it’s not blocking hundreds of votes coming within minutes from the same IP address, what kind of security does it have? There is systemic cheating throughout the system.”

AZM said it was working to address the issues and had taken on forensic experts and counsel. It also claimed that the suspicious votes constituted “a small fraction” of a “record-setting” online vote.



*The National Institutions Building (photo credit: Shmuel Bar-Am)*

“The American Zionist Movement (AZM) and its Area Election Committee are comprehensively monitoring, investigating, and promptly addressing any allegations of voting irregularities or fraud associated with US voting in the 2025 World Zionist Congress election,” the AZM said in a statement to The Times of Israel in response to an inquiry, adding: “We are committed to ensuring that irregular or fraudulent votes are invalidated in this election.”

“AZM, the Area Election Committee, and its Chairs have taken a proactive approach to identifying suspicious activities, investigating their nature and source, and taking appropriate steps to maintain the integrity and fairness of the election,” it said. “This includes retaining counsel and forensic experts to assist us in our continued review. Any votes that have come into question remain a small fraction of the more than 168,000 votes

recorded — a total that already represents record-setting online voting — during the first seven weeks of the election.”

Numerous party heads have [called](#) for the AZM to respond strongly to the allegations of fraud, including disqualifying any slate found engaging in fraudulent behavior. Failure to do so would threaten the legitimacy of the entire process, they said.

The AZM noted that, regardless of the investigation, the final vote tally will probably not be announced until several weeks after the vote closes on May 4. In the previous election, in 2020, final results were published 12 days after voting ended.

### **Problematic platform**

The election management platform used to run the online balloting plays a role in the scandal, the sources said.

For the 2025 election, AZM selected a Cleveland, Ohio-based technology company, Votem, to handle the campaign. This was the same firm it used for the 2020 balloting. The organization had a large budget available for the election’s technical infrastructure, a source noted.

However, a look at Votem’s [website](#) gives the impression that the company is barely operational. The most recent client case studies listed on the site are from 2017, its most recent press release is from 2018, and its most recent press coverage is from 2021. The company hasn’t promoted itself on its social media channels since 2021, save for an attempt to raise about \$1 million in an equity crowdfunding campaign in late 2023.

Nonetheless, the platform has also been proposed for use in upcoming WZO elections in other countries, including Canada’s vote June 5-15 and the UK’s vote June 8-12, a source noted.

AZM declined to comment on its decision to use Votem. Multiple calls and an email sent to Votem on Monday were not answered by press time.

Voting for the Zionist Congress in the US is open through May 4 to self-identified Jews aged 18 or older. Voters are told to go to [zionistelection.org](https://zionistelection.org), which forwards to a page on the Votem platform. There, users can input their name, address and contact details. After ticking off boxes confirming that they are Jewish and agree to the WZO’s [Zionist principles](#), they can pay the \$5 registration fee via credit card, Paypal, Apple Pay, or Google Pay.

While AZM executive director Herbert Block has [touted](#) the election platform’s “sophisticated technology” preventing voter fraud, it is not clear what measures the system has in place to block problematic votes. Votem’s website says that its platform is



compliant with the requirements of the Help America Vote Act of 2002 and the Uniformed And Overseas Citizens Absentee Voting Act of 1986.

As of Monday, some 181,033 people have registered on the platform, and 168,284 have voted, according to AZM data.



*Herbert Block, executive director of the American Zionist Movement (US Commission for the Preservation of America's Heritage Abroad)*

### **Bribery charges**

Allegations of voter fraud began even before the suspicious votes were detected.

Earlier in April, a [lawsuit](#) was filed in the Zionist Supreme Court, the body charged with adjudicating cases within Zionist organizations, against Eretz Hakodesh, Am Yisrael Chai, and Aish Ha'am, charging that the parties were engaging in bribery. Promotional materials sent by these parties to their supporters offered significant prizes, including the opportunity to win a Tesla or an expensive vacation, in exchange for bringing in voters for their cause, the suit claimed. Also, in at least one case, party members offered to reimburse a voter the \$5 registration fee for voting, the suit alleged.



Screenshots of WZO ads offering incentives to people who vote for certain parties (Zionist Supreme Court)

Five parties filed the suit at the Zionist Supreme Court, demanding that the three parties be disqualified from the race. The case has been closed, with no findings of wrongdoing, the court ruled last week.

### Haredi interference

Since the World Zionist Congress was created by Theodor Herzl in 1897, the institution was generally shunned by ultra-Orthodox parties due to their ideological opposition to the Zionist movement. That changed when Eretz HaKodesh, associated with Israel's United Torah Judaism party, ran for the first time in 2020. The slate had a surprisingly successful run, winning 25 out of 152 seats.



*Rabbi Dov Landau, head of the Slabodka yeshiva in Bnei Brak arrives to deliver a lesson at the Mir Yeshiva, in the ultra-Orthodox neighborhood of Mea Shearim, Jerusalem, September 19, 2023 (Arie Leib Abrams/Flash90).*

Eretz Hakodesh's presence was a source of significant friction in the Congress throughout its five-year term, but its success inspired other Orthodox and Haredi parties to run in this year's election, despite the [opposition](#) of leading Lithuanian ultra-Orthodox Rabbi Dov Landau, who said that participation in the Congress is "heresy and the desecration of the name of God."

Twenty-two [slates](#) are running in this year's elections, compared to 13 in 2020, with most of the new parties on the religious side of the spectrum. Intense competition between the ultra-Orthodox and liberal slates has led to heightened tensions on both sides, and helped drive voter turnout to record levels.

### **High stakes for the Jewish world**

The congress and its representatives from Jewish communities around the world allocate \$1 billion to Jewish causes every year and oversee Israel's so-called national institutions, including the World Zionist Organization, which carries out the congress's vision; the Jewish Agency, which plays a central role in Jewish immigration to Israel; and the Keren Kayemeth Lelsrael-Jewish National Fund.



*Chaim Weizmann, left, who would go on to serve as Israel's first president, presides over the 21st Zionist Congress in Geneva, Switzerland, August 16, 1939. On the right is Labor Zionist leader David Ben Gurion, who would go on to serve as Israel's first prime minister. (AP Photo)*

The different slates represent interests running the gamut of the Jewish and Israeli spectrum, from Israel's post-October 7 rebuilding to Zionist and Haredi education to security for Jewish institutions in the Diaspora to supporting vulnerable members of Israeli society.

The World Zionist Congress comprises 525 total seats, with representation from three distinct geographic areas. Israel has 200 seats, which are automatically divided along the lines of political parties' representation in the Knesset. Another 152 seats represent the United States, divided according to the election results. The final 173 seats are chosen by other countries, either through a public vote or, in smaller communities, by local Jewish leadership.