**Israel vote will expose Democratic divisions**

**BY**[**CRISTINA MARCOS**](https://thehill.com/author/cristina-marcos)**- 07/23/19 06:00 AM EDT**

The House is slated to pass legislation Tuesday to oppose the global boycott movement against Israel, a vote that will put a spotlight both on Democratic divisions and Rep. [Ilhan Omar](https://thehill.com/people/ilhan-omar) (D-Minn.).

Most Democrats in the House oppose the boycott, divestment and sanctions (BDS) movement, an international campaign meant to exert pressure on Israel over treatment of the Palestinians. Critics say it would isolate and harm Israel, which retains strong support in Congress from both parties.

But the BDS movement has support in Congress from some progressives, including Omar, who has offered her own resolution affirming the rights of Americans to participate in boycotts meant to promote human rights either in the United States or other countries.

Omar has cited boycotts of Nazi Germany and Apartheid-era South Africa in making the case for her resolution — comparisons that have drawn the ire of Israel’s supporters.

Rep. [Lee Zeldin](https://thehill.com/people/lee-zeldin), a New York Republican who has frequently gone after Omar, criticized the Minnesotan’s resolution in a tweet last week for having the “nerve to claim moral equivalency between boycotting Nazi Germany and boycotting Israel.”

“Disgraceful,” Zeldin wrote.

The battle over the BDS movement on the House floor also comes as Omar has seen extraordinary attacks from [President Trump](https://thehill.com/people/donald-trump), who in the last eight days has called her anti-American and anti-Israel, and tweeted that she and three of her congressional allies should “go back” to where they came from. Three of the congresswomen targeted by the tweet were born in the United States, while Omar was born in Somalia.

Chants last week at a Trump rally of “send her back” — referring to Omar — shocked Democrats and Republicans alike. Omar is a U.S. citizen who came to the country as a refugee.

While Democrats have rallied around Omar in response to Trump’s barbs, the BDS fight threatens to tear at the Democratic caucus.

The resolution to formally oppose it has nearly 350 co-sponsors and is expected to pass easily with widespread bipartisan support. About three-quarters of House Democrats have co-sponsored the resolution authored by Rep. [Brad Schneider](https://thehill.com/people/brad-schneider) (D-Ill.), while close to 90 percent of Republicans have signed on.

Democratic leaders, conscious of the intraparty debate, are bringing the anti-BDS resolution to the floor under a fast-track process, known as suspension of the rules, that requires a two-thirds supermajority for passage with only 40 minutes of debate — a briefer period that will cut down on the theatrics of a divided party.

Omar isn’t alone in opposing the resolution.

Another Israel critic, Rep. [Rashida Tlaib](https://thehill.com/people/rashida-tlaib) (D-Mich.), co-sponsored Omar’s resolution. Tlaib and Omar are the first two Muslim women to serve in Congress.

Tlaib, who is Palestinian American, earlier this month called the resolution opposing BDS “unconstitutional,” saying it seeks to “silence opposition of Israel’s blatantly racist policies that demonize both Palestinians & Ethiopians.”

Civil rights icon Rep. [John Lewis](https://thehill.com/people/john-lewis) (D-Ga.) is a co-sponsor of Omar’s resolution affirming the right to participate in boycotts, which doesn’t mention the BDS movement, but is also co-sponsoring the measure opposing BDS.

The vote will come days after House Democrats passed a resolution to condemn Trump’s attacks on Omar, Tlaib and Reps. [Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez](https://thehill.com/people/alexandria-ocasio-cortez) (N.Y.) and [Ayanna Pressley](https://thehill.com/people/ayanna-pressley) (Mass.).

The battle between Trump and the four women has been the dominant story in national politics for more than a week.

Schneider downplayed the potential for the vote to expose Democratic divisions over Israel, pointing to how most of the caucus has co-sponsored it.

“I think having this resolution, having it supported by overwhelming majorities in both parties, sends a clear signal and puts us on a better path toward enhancing Israel’s security, maintaining prospects for a two-state solution, and making clear where Congress stands on BDS,” Schneider said.

Schneider’s resolution doesn’t go as far as a bill passed by the Senate earlier this year that would allow state or local governments to refuse to do business with companies that boycott Israel.

But progressives like Omar and Tlaib, as well as 2020 presidential candidate Sen. [Bernie Sanders](https://thehill.com/people/bernie-sanders) (I-Vt.), have been joined by human rights and free speech groups in arguing that the Senate bill undermines First Amendment rights to free expression.

Instead, Democrats are settling for the resolution that merely expresses opposition to the BDS movement. It also reaffirms support for a two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. It argues that BDS “undermines the possibility for a negotiated solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict by demanding concessions of one party alone and encouraging the Palestinians to reject negotiations in favor of international pressure.”

In addition, the House is expected to pass another bill Tuesday from Rep. [Ted Deutch](https://thehill.com/people/ted-deutch) (D-Fla.) that would authorize more security assistance to Israel.

Deutch said the resolution would simply offer lawmakers a way to express their views about BDS without running into any potential constitutional issues.

“The resolution doesn’t restrict any First Amendment rights,” Deutch said. “It simply allows members of Congress to be on the record opposing a movement that attempts to delegitimize Israel’s very right to exist.”

House Foreign Affairs Committee Chairman [Eliot Engel](https://thehill.com/people/eliot-engel) (D-N.Y.) dismissed the timing of the vote, stressing that it’s been in the works since the resolution was introduced in March to express support for Israel.

“This has nothing to do with Congresswoman Omar,” Engel said.

The Tuesday vote on the resolution will also come ahead of a Democratic delegation trip to Israel with House Majority Leader [Steny Hoyer](https://thehill.com/people/steny-hoyer) (Md.) over the August recess organized by a group affiliated with the American Israel Public Affairs Committee.