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**TRACKING DEVELOPMENTS IN
THE 'PROGRESSIVE FIELD'**

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INTRODUCTION

This product summarizes developments that affect the positioning of Jewish and pro-Israel communities within the U.S. progressive left. Spanning a two-week period, August 23 – September 5, and relying solely on open-source information, the document covers events and highlights ‘weak signals’ with potential for developing significance.

This product is part of the ‘Grand Pivot of the Pro-Israel Network Project,’ for which the Reut Group received a grant the Genesis Prize as part of “Speak Out for Israel,” a global initiative in honor of 2019 Laureate Robert Kraft to combat anti-Semitism and efforts to delegitimize Israel, both of which are on the rise again in confluence with the onset of the novel coronavirus pandemic.

MACRO CONTEXT OF SHIFTING POLITICAL LANDSCAPES

Increasing commentary on a Democratic center moving left – Typically in the course of a presidential campaign, Democrats lean left during the primary and then move to the right in the general election. Growing attention to Biden’s shifting positioning [points out](#) that Biden went the opposite direction – [pushed left](#) by his party’s insurgent progressives and evidenced by the contrast between his platforms and record. A senior Obama official characterized Biden as “a weathervane for what the center of the left is.” Focusing on Chuck Schumer, a recent [Politico piece](#) charts a political evolution away from past definitions of the center, and features the senator’s explanation for his left-ward shift as reflecting a different constituency as well as the more progressive Democratic Party of the Donald Trump era.

Moreover, in the generational and ideological [battle](#) for the Democratic soul that pits advocates for incremental change against those calling for revolutionary overhaul, Biden – who started his campaign claiming that “nothing would fundamentally change” – has “begun to describe his candidacy as a bid for systemic change on the scale of Franklin Roosevelt’s New Deal.” Speaking recently in Kenosha, [Biden](#) seemingly echoed a demand at the base of the New York Times’ [1619 Project](#), vowing to address the “original sin” of slavery, and if necessary to go down fighting over it.

THE LURCHING GROUND OF JEWISH AND PRO-ISRAEL POSITIONING – BETWEEN STABILITY AND DISRUPTION

While the broader U.S. political dynamic reflects significant disruption, Israel’s bi-partisan status remains for the time being a relative island of stability.

- **Staking out the Biden-Harris Israel policy – A balancing act favoring continuity:** Key components emphasized in recent weeks include: A commitment to guarantee Israel's qualitative military edge, rejection of BDS and the protection of the right of others to support it, and a focus on the danger Trump poses to Jews and on the negative implications of his cultivation of right-wing Israeli policies. Biden advisors predict he will not return the U.S. Embassy to Tel Aviv, but will likely reopen a U.S. Consulate in East Jerusalem and allow a Palestinian de facto embassy in Washington, and will revive U.S. financial aid to support Palestinians (see [here](#), [here](#), [here](#), and [here](#)).

Biden-Harris importantly support unconditional military aid to Israel despite potential disagreements with the Israeli government – an issue that is joining positioning on BDS as a central litmus test of political support for Israel. The issue of conditioning funding broke more solidly onto the mainstream political landscape with the coinciding of Israel's annexation plans with the Democratic primaries, which opened a space for several Democratic candidates to publicly oppose use of U.S. funds in support of such plans. Public polling on critical races held this week in [Massachusetts](#) showed Democratic support for aid conditioning hovering around 50 percent.

- **Harris and husband are the darlings of Biden campaign Jewish outreach** (see [here](#), [here](#), and [here](#)) amid growing attention and pronounced focus on getting out the Jewish vote in swing states (see for example Florida congressman [Ted Deutch](#): “Our Jewish engagement team is fighting for every Jewish vote in every swing state,” and also [here](#) and [here](#)).
- **The double-edged sword of red lines on Linda Sarsour** – The Biden campaign's [disavowal](#) of Linda Sarsour following her appearance at a DNC side event has sparked predictable backlash. Common themes, including notably from [minority perspectives](#), questioned the equation of support for Palestinian rights with anti-Semitism, labeled Democratic rejection of BDS as intolerance for non-violent protest, and challenged Democratic claims that the Party offers a “big tent” welcoming of diverse perspectives. Highlighted voices supporting Sarsour included those of JVP and its support for BDS, and progressive activist Ady Barkan, a DNC invited speaker (see also reactions issued by [Cori Bush](#) and the [Arab American Institute](#)). For her part, Sarsour said in an Aug. 26th [interview](#) that “right-wing Zionists” have allied with white nationalists to smear her, and reiterated her support for a one-state solution and for BDS.

[Reports](#) surfaced that Biden aides privately reached out to Muslim and Arab Democratic Party activists to express regret for denouncing Sarsour publicly in such harsh and unforgiving terms, vowing to build trust with Muslim allies, and [pledging](#) that the Biden campaign and future administration will be “genuinely inclusive” and ensure Arab and Muslim representation at the decision-making level.

- **For the most part, stemming the progressive tide in Massachusetts** – In Massachusetts, policies affecting the Jewish community, including Israel, played an important role in some key races that also reflected tensions between party trends towards disruptive change versus those favoring continuity. These races included:
 - **First District:** Incumbent Richard Neal faced a well-funded young progressive, Alex Morse – who was supported by national progressive groups including Justice Democrats, the Sunrise Movement, and AOC PAC Courage to Change – in a race that, according to the [New York Times](#), “typified the tensions between Democratic leadership in Washington and upstart activists on the left.” The candidates [diverged](#) on aid to Israel, with Morse favoring conditioning of financial support. Neal was backed by a number of pro-Israel groups including Pro-Israel America and Democratic Majority for Israel. Neal ultimately defeated Morse by some 20 percentage points in a victory that [Politico](#) characterized as “a blow to the momentum coursing through the progressive movement.”
 - **Fourth District:** A highly fragmented nine-way Democratic primary that included candidate Ihssane Leckey, who is [highly critical](#) of Israel and said she would advocate for conditioning aid to the country. Towards the close, the results narrowed to a very close race mainly between (both Jewish) progressive Jesse Mermell, who had come [under fire](#) for her conflicting stances on the BDS movement and was endorsed by Representative Ayanna Pressley, and Jake Auchincloss, a moderate who consistently presented staunchly pro-Israel positions and who ultimately [emerged victorious](#) by a margin of just over 2,000 votes.
 - **For the Senate,** Joe Kennedy, [supported](#) by Nancy Pelosi in a rare move towards a challenger, ran against incumbent Ed Markey, [endorsed](#) by AOC as well as significant progressive political influence [groups](#). Kennedy was endorsed by [80 Massachusetts Jewish leaders](#) for being “unyielding in making Israel’s case to those who may be reluctant to listen to it.” He had [criticized](#) Markey for welcoming the support of individuals and organizations who had sought to “undermine the relationship... between the United States and Israel.” Ultimately, Markey defeated Kennedy with approximately 54 percent of the vote, marking, according to [Politico](#), a significant victory for the Democratic Party’s left wing. The [New York Times](#) described the defeat, which handed the Kennedy family its first-ever electoral loss in Massachusetts, as a demonstration of growing strength of the progressive left.
- **Tipping the equilibrium from the Republican side** – Republicans are displaying a [dual dynamic](#) of growing tolerance for white supremacist and conspiracy theory-driven anti-Semitism alongside powerful showcasing of Republican pro-Israel policies. These

seemingly dichotomous positions bear implications regarding the overall political climate on normalization of anti-Semitic discourse in the American mainstream, and on partisan association with support for Israel.

- **Upping the anti-Semitism game** – The Republican National Convention highlighted speakers who extolled nefarious Jewish power themes (though notably [pulling](#) QAnon supporter Mary Ann Mendoza from her scheduled speech for her anti-Semitic tweets, even while [continuing](#) to spotlight other conservative voices that have come under fire for problematic statements). Meanwhile, conspiracy theory-oriented anti-Semitism promoted by a fresh crop of Republican candidates continue to surface; recently [focused](#) on an anti-Semitic and anti-Muslim video shared by Marjorie Taylor Greene, who won a Republican run-off in Georgia’s 14th Congressional District earlier this month.
- **Israel as a wedge issue** –
 - o RNC speakers lavished praise upon Trump’s pro-Israel policies (see for example [here](#) and [here](#)), which came up every one of the four nights of the Republican convention. [Ted Cruz](#) speaking to the Republican Jewish Coalition: Today’s Democratic Party will “be driven by [Ocasio-Cortez] and Omar, who we see now with repeatedly antisemitic, anti-Israel comments. It is the Israel-hating far left that is dominant in the Democratic Party right now.”
 - o A new [RJC digital ad](#) features Jewish Democrats supporting Trump because of the policies of the Obama administration and the rise and influence of ‘the Squad.’
 - o Secretary of State Pompeo was [criticized](#) for breaking a longstanding taboo against mixing diplomacy and partisan politics in speaking to the RNC from Jerusalem. Chairman of the House Committee on Foreign Affairs Eliot Engel [announced](#) that the Committee will begin work on a resolution holding Secretary of State Mike Pompeo in contempt. The Jewish Democratic Council of America [rejected](#) “Trump’s ongoing use of Israel as a political wedge issue.”

INTERNAL JEWISH DIVISIONS

Broader political polarization around society’s dramatic disruption and exacerbated in the Trump era threaten Jewish cohesion and unity within the U.S. and between American and Israeli Jews. See recently:

- **On support for BLM:** Several left-wing Jewish groups filed a [petition](#) to remove the Zionist Organization of America from the Jewish Community Relations Council of Greater Boston,

specifically exemplifying Klein's recent comments on the Black Lives Matter movement as extending “well beyond acceptable discourse on race.” Also, the Jewish youth group NCSY, which operates under the auspices of the Orthodox Union, [distanced itself](#) from a recent ad organized by Bend the Arc in support of the Black Lives Matter movement after a member signed onto it without authorization.

- **On Israel’s role in the presidential race:** The Pompeo RNC speech from Jerusalem at [the intersection of American and Israeli politics](#) positioned Israel in the center of a domestic partisan political attack spearheaded by Jewish Democrats, notably Jewish Democratic Council of America Executive Director Halie Soifer and former Ambassador Dan Shapiro.
- **Around curriculum battles:** California’s Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum (ESMC) for K-12 schools across the state provoked complaints from representatives of the Jewish community, and have been [met with support](#) for ethnic studies and Arab American studies from progressive Jewish leadership and organizations.
- **On support for Trump:** While most American Jews opposes Trump, vigorous support from small pockets – including as demonstrated in a 600-700 Los Angeles [car parade](#) organized by local Israeli Americans – reflects the polarization seen in broader society reflected in Jewish communities. The divide extends to American versus Israeli Jews – a [recent paper](#) by the Ruderman Family Foundation and Prof. Gil Troy describes a “watershed seemingly dividing pro-Trump Israeli Jews from anti-Trump American Jews.”
- **On opposing anti-Semitism:** IfNotNow, which [initially condemned](#) the vandalization of the Kenosha synagogue during protests, [reversed](#) itself within 24 hours following criticism from left-wing activists on Twitter for equating anti-Israel sentiment with anti-Semitism and for distracting from the main issue of police violence against Blacks.

EMERGING ACTION VECTORS

Broader dynamics of threats to Jewish and pro-Israel positioning on the progressive left are playing out in a number of niche spheres that provide potential for targeted monitoring and engagement.

The importance of definitions

- On the local political level: See [this account](#) from the San Diego Democratic Central Committee of a personal experience of Democratic Party members’ normalization of anti-Semitic anti-Zionist language. Importantly the Democratic County Central Committee will [vote](#) later this month on a resolution that would define and condemn anti-Semitic hate speech.

Notably in the UK, a grassroots local activists and organization-led [campaign](#) focused on the local level and aiming for the widespread adoption of the definition of anti-Semitism created by the EU Agency for Fundamental Rights at the local council level has followed the adoption of this definition by the British Government.¹

- In response to campus anti-Semitism:
 - As brought into stark relief by ongoing controversies over what constitutes anti-Semitism in curricula, demonstrated recently, for example, in the need for a consensual basis upon which to respond to [demands](#) of outside activists to press the California Department of Education to reinsert BDS and the conflicts of the Middle East into model curricula. A [bill](#) that would require all students to take ethnic studies to graduate from high school has reached the governor’s desk and is expected to be signed shortly. (The bill was initially met with concern and anxiety by Jewish communities, members of the California Legislative Jewish Caucus helped insert “guardrail” language that will help head off potential anti-Jewish or anti-Israel bias from creeping back into the model curriculum less than a week before the state Senate voted it through.)

More broadly, following the recent passage of a law that [requires](#) all California State University students to complete a course in ethnic studies for graduation and that was perceived as biased towards Jews, fresh battles have arisen prompting vigorous action from Jewish communities and centering on elusive definitions of what constitutes anti-Semitism. Focally these include controversy around the inclusion of the Jewish American experience within the new Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum for [K-12](#) schools across the state, and about whether sections on Arab Americans include references to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

- As exemplified in the case, argued by Zioness Founder and Executive Director Amanda Berman, [against the legitimacy](#) of an [upcoming SFSU event](#) featuring Leila Khaled and hosted by a professor who has declared that the presence of Zionists on SFSU’s campus is a “declaration of war” against Arab and Muslim students. Berman bases her case on San Francisco State University’s adoption of a formal statement acknowledging that “for many Jews, Zionism is an important part of their identity,”

¹ For background, in the U.S. the 2019 [Executive Order](#) on Combating Anti-Semitism made the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance definition of anti-Semitism part of Title VI of the Civil Rights Act, which prohibits discrimination based on race, color, or national origin in federally funded programs or activities receiving federal financial assistance. The [IHRA definition](#) includes discrimination: Denying the Jewish people their right to self-determination, e.g., by claiming that the existence of a State of Israel is a racist endeavor; applying double standards by requiring of it a behavior not expected or demanded of any other democratic nation; drawing comparisons of contemporary Israeli policy to that of the Nazis; and holding Jews collectively responsible for actions of the state of Israel.

from which it necessarily follows that “anti-Zionism” is an attack on the identity of at least “many” Jews enrolled at SFSU and around the world.

Defense against cancel culture

- A group of progressive American scholars called the [Alliance for Academic Freedom](#) have come to the defense of former University of Southern California’s Undergraduate Student Government President Rose Ritch, who resigned her position in the wake of anti-Semitic anti-Zionist harassment.
- Growing [attention](#) focuses on the intimidation experienced by academics who fear that they will be ‘punished’ if they fail to adhere to progressive orthodoxies.

New ideas for Jewish defense

- Lawfare Project Founder and Executive Director Brooke Goldstein proposes a [Jewish civil rights movement](#) organized, similar to BLM, as “networks of decentralized, chapter-based protest organizations, which provide training and logistical support for grassroots mass mobilization.”
- Israeli Ministry of Strategic Affairs and an affiliated organization approving grants to organizations combating progressive based anti-Israel and anti-Semitic groups have run into controversy, see [here](#) and [here](#).

The civil society vector

Rising parallels between challenges faced and priorities shared by Jews in the U.S. and in Israel have created in some instances a mirroring of protest tactics and in some explicit cooperation that reflect a commonality of experience and informal connection.

- The Black Jewish ‘[Wall of Moms](#)’ fighting Israeli police brutality, a grassroots movement launched mainly by mothers of Ethiopian origin protesting a reality in which their children cannot move around safely and freely in the public domain.
- Diaspora Israeli communities protesting in support of Israeli democracy, for example [here](#) in 18 cities simultaneously worldwide.

The importance of speaking up

This [round-up](#) of recent anti-Semitic violence and vandalism – featuring [arson](#) at the University of Delaware Chabad Center, ‘Free Palestine’ [graffiti](#) on a Kenosha synagogue, and anti-Semitic [signs](#) hung on the L.A. freeway – highlights the relative quiet in the general discourse regarding their persistence.

Jews in pop culture

The most recent crop of Jewish characters featured in popular culture showcase opportunities and challenges in a vehicle with the potential to significantly affect broader understanding of the Jewish experience.

- The character of [Missy Foreman-Greenwald](#), a young girl with a white Jewish mother and Black father, on the animated Netflix comedy “Big Mouth” (the white Jewish actress originally voicing the character was replaced with a Black actress on the basis that the former casting choice reflected white privilege).
- [Tahara](#), a coming-of-age drama from the perspective of a Black queer Jewish teen that screened at this year's Outfest.
- A [new featurette](#) on the Season 3 finale of ‘Marvelous Mrs Maisel’ on the legacy of the Apollo Theater in Harlem and featuring what the Apollo Theater represented in terms of Black and Jewish histories. From actor [Sterling K. Brown](#): “... the legacy of the performance that the Black community and the Jewish community... run parallel and are intertwined with one another... and also in terms of civil rights pursuit, always being allies.”
- In HBO’s [Lovecraft](#), a typically Jewish last name, changed from the name of the character as it appears in the book upon which the series is based, is applied to a character whose story evokes anti-Semitic stereotypes and echoes blood libel charges (in the series, Hiram Epstein is a University of Chicago scientist who conducted gruesome experiments on Black children and adults).

TAKING INITIATIVE ON BLACK-JEWISH ENGAGEMENT

The growing dominance of the BLM movement coupled with its decentralized structure provide an opportunity for impactful engagement also through niche, local, and micro initiative, each with potential to reverberate systemwide (See [here](#) on the process the movement has undergone in past year, transforming into a collective that contends with issues beyond police violence – such as housing insecurity, voter suppression and sexual violence and coordination of worker strikes – and organizes on the basis of “hyperlocal experiments.”) Moreover, in contrast to the 2016 platform of the Movement for Black Lives, a network whose members include BLM, the 2020 platform summary policy platform [contains](#) no mention of Israel, Zionism, Palestinian rights or the movement to boycott Israel. The M4BL has in fact steered clear of discussion of Israel in 2020.

In this context, the recent myriad national, hyperlocal, and niche experiments and initiatives in Black-Jewish engagement take on new significance.

National level action

- Six hundred Jewish groups signed a [full-page ad](#) supporting Black Lives Matter, also making a connection between anti-black and anti-Jewish hatred.
- Following a constructive dialogue, the NAACP [decided](#) to remove Minister Rodney Muhammad as head of the organization's Philadelphia branch, who was broadly criticized for promoting anti-Semitic content, and replace the entire local leadership.
- The AJC and National Urban League [announced](#) plans to launch a week-long initiative uniting against surging levels of anti-Semitism and racism, See initiatives including: a Black-Jewish [unity prayer](#), an [campaign](#) to promote voter outreach and education in Philadelphia, [discussion](#) on the state of Black-Jewish relations, and lobbying Congress to pass the [NO HATE Act](#) against hate crimes.
- Jewish organizations such as [Zioness](#) co-sponsored and promoted the 2020 the Virtual March on Washington.
- Growing [attention](#) among Jewish institutions to their own issues of race and racism, including the roles of Jews of color within Jewish communities, and highlighted – for example [here](#) and [here](#) – in Jewish media. Also, Black Jews [spoke out](#) about Black lives at the Black National Convention.
- A musician and student of Yiddish who is Black contributing to an [initiative](#) translating terms specific to the Black Lives Matter movement into the language in order to promote racial justice inside and outside the Jewish communal world.
- JCPA [webinar](#) about the role of the Congressional Caucus on Black-Jewish Relations today.
- Inspirational [stories](#), such as that brought to the fore by the passing of tennis legend Angela Buxton, half of an “outcast” tennis duo characterized by strong partnership and profound friendship alongside Althea Gibson, a Black tennis player.

Local level initiatives, dialogue, and discussion

- Susannah Heschel, daughter of Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel, speaking to three metro Detroit organizations on a “Racism and the Jews: History, Conscience and the Future” [webinar](#), presented by the Coalition for Black and Jewish Unity, Jewish Community Relations Council/AJC, and the Jewish Federation of Metropolitan Detroit.
- [Dialogue](#) on the shared legacies of the Black-Jewish civil rights alliance sponsored by Israel’s consul general in Atlanta.
- The response of the Kenosha synagogue rabbi to local events: [Insisting](#) that damaged property were in no way the equivalent of lost lives, and demonstrating her unwavering

commitment to social justice (she had been [using](#) a “Black Lives Matter Yahrzeit List” since the death of George Floyd).

- A local Arizona-based Black Theatre Troupe [recalled](#) its connection to the Jewish community on its 50th anniversary.

On the radar: The persistence of Jewish ownership themes

The theme of railing against Jewish ownership was exemplified again in [Wiley](#)’s unrepentant insistence that “I’m right, Jews do run the earth,” and surfaced in [pictures](#) of two protesters at the March on Washington wearing t-shirts depicting the image first painted as a mural in London by the artist Mear One of Jewish bankers playing a game similar to monopoly on the backs of people of color. Given the increasing role of the NBA as a [leading vector](#) in today’s social protests, concerns have surfaced that the fact that almost half of team ownership are Jewish may bring this tension to the fore.