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Reut Group

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TRACKING DEVELOPMENTS IN  
THE 'PROGRESSIVE FIELD'

# SMART MONITOR, NO.5



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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, September 6 – September 19,** 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.

## THE ABRAHAM ACCORDS

The signing of the Abraham Accords and the lead-up to that point dominated much of the news cycle related to Israel. Israel’s positioning within progressive U.S. communities contributed to a number of effects on the way the deal was perceived in these and in moderate Democrat constituencies.

**The hyper-partisanship drag on the peace PR dividend** –While the overwhelming response to the accords was positive, a lack of trust in the deal’s underpinnings and a deep Democratic desire to deny Trump the benefits of getting credit (for example, in his being [nominated](#) for the Nobel Prize – albeit by a fringe right Norwegian politician), affected the overall picture of the regional breakthrough as communicated to publics.

[Democrats largely](#) expressed cautious support, emphasizing that this should not be considered a replacement for addressing the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The stance of the [Jewish Democratic Council of America](#) encapsulated leading Jewish political voices, at once welcoming the accords and in the same breath resisting giving credit to Trump and emphasizing potentially negative security implications to Israel. Jewish organizations, such as the [AIC](#), have reacted with warm

support for the accords; in contrast, the Accords have been largely [condemned](#) by American Muslim groups.

**The QME 'outflanking from a pro-Israel position' strategy** – A major Democratic response has focused on the danger that the sale of advanced F-35 fighter jets to the United Arab Emirates would pose for Israel. While Trump has stated that he has ['no problem'](#) selling advanced F-35 fighter jets to UAE, U.S. law mandates that Israel's qualitative military edge in the region must be preserved, including in any U.S. arms sales to the region. Significantly, House Foreign Affairs Committee Chair Eliot Engel introduced a [resolution](#) that also emphasized on the need to preserve Israel's qualitative military edge. In addition, ten Democratic Members of Congress signed a [letter](#) calling on the President to ensure Israel's QME in any weapons sale to the United Arab Emirates. Prominent voices making the security case against the Accords on the basis of the potential erosion of Israel's QME include that of [Rep. Joaquin Castro](#), current vice chairman of the House Foreign Affairs Committee and a contender to succeed Eliot Engel as chair, and are embodied in [this](#) op-ed by Rep. Debbie Wasserman Schultz.

**Regional peace as a blow to BDS** – A movement that stakes its claim on rejection of Israel on the basis of its behavior, or existence, in the region is existentially challenged by the momentum of Arab countries embracing normalization with Israel for the benefit of their societies (see more [here](#)). Indeed, a number of BDS initiatives against normalization in the wake of the Abraham Accords – for example, a [boycott](#) against a training program offered by popular Israeli-Arab vlogger Nas Daily and [a pledge](#) by Arab artists to boycott UAE cultural activities – are starting to look more unhinged in light of the overwhelming positive momentum they stand in the face of.

At the same time, claims regarding the neglect of the Palestinian issue stand to gain increasing ground, as prospects for movement are perceived to be pushed even further back, highlighting a key threat of elevating the perceived viability of a one-state solution in international opinion. A [Diana Buttu](#) New York Times op-ed bitterly castigating the Accords urges that, “[r]ather than continuing to press for a two-state solution, the P.L.O. should instead press for equal rights. While

there isn't a single Israeli or Palestinian political party advocating a one-state solution, polls show that support for the two-state solution among Palestinians is waning.”

## JEWISH DIVIDES

In this period of extreme polarization and an atmosphere of existential angst surrounding the upcoming elections, broadening divides among and between Jewish communities in America, and between American and Israel Jewish communities, were drawn in stark relief over the past two weeks. One direct implication appears that policy on Israel is becoming less of an issue that Jews care about (in a [recent survey](#), the lowest ranked out of 19 issues asked about in the poll were Israel, Iran, and “support of a two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict”). More broadly, a [question is emerging](#) regarding whether there are ‘Jewish issues’ in the context of such a dramatic and domestically focused election. Indicators of domestically driven dramatic divides include:

- **Rise of the notion that the historic moment calls to take a stand:** The weight and significance afforded these elections create a moral imperative around standing up with a clear position. Illustratively, Abe Foxman, in the first-ever political endorsement of his career, penned an [op-ed](#) making the case for supporting Biden (Norm Coleman issued his [rebuttal](#), endorsing Trump).
- **Intense fundraising activity on both sides of the Jewish divide:** Recent [JStreet](#) and [Haim Saban](#) fundraisers [underscore](#) reflected the Democratic focus on preserving Jewish support. In parallel, [Shelson Adelson](#) recently announced plans to contribute up to \$50 million to efforts to elect Trump and will co-chair a Trump Jewish outreach team, called [Jewish Voices for Trump](#).
- **Wedge between Israel and U.S. Jews** – The perception of diverging interests, crystallizing around support for Trump, continues to accompany the trajectory of U.S. versus Israeli Jews. In [telling](#) American Jews that Israel is “your country” in a Rosh HaShanah address, Trump elicited a chorus of indignant Jewish voices asserting their national belonging ([see](#): ‘The U.S. - not Israel - is my country, American Jews tweet at Trump’) – instead of

legitimizing concern for Israel as a political priority for American Jews as part and parcel of their American Jewish identity.

- **Inter-organizational strife:** In the wake of social justice movements rising in the U.S., differing policy and ideological positions between Jewish organizations are increasingly irreconcilable (see, for example, [this take](#) opposing the New York Times ad supporting Black Lives Matter signed by 600 Jewish organizations). Significantly, the [Conference of Presidents](#) “came to a decision to not come to a decision” about steps to take after one member organization representative disparaged another, to calls accusing the former of racism. Also surrounding ZOA President Morton Klein, members of the [Boston Jewish community](#) recently co-signed a letter calling for the Zionist Organization of America to be formally removed as a member organization from the community's JCRC, delineating their red lines in seeking a Jewish broad tent around failure to support social and racial justice.
- **The extremes illustrated in a surreal political showdown** – A Florida congressional race pits incumbent Democrat Lois Frankel against Republican Laura Loomer, both Jewish. Loomer has [framed](#) the choice to Jews as “between a Republican Jew who is going to advocate for their survival in their best interests, or... self-hating Jew Lois Frankel...,” and recently issued an [ad](#) (that was condemned by the ADL) using Holocaust imagery in the context of attacking her opponent for supporting BLM.
- **Exploiting Jewish divides:** Growing schisms within and between Jewish communities are attracting attention also from anti-Israel activists. See for example [this](#) event sponsored by The Institute for Research Middle Eastern Policy – an outlet that has garnered some mainstream credibility and which focuses on “transcending the Israel lobby at home and abroad.”

## JEWISH CONSOLIDATION

**Rising of anti-Semitism from the right is generating greater communal cohesion on the left,** and several Jewish organizations generally considered outside the Jewish consensus have taken up the defense against right-wing anti-Semitism as a central issue and increasingly focally (see



this point also at [Reut's recent document](#) on prospects of generating greater engagement in the anti-racist struggle in light of the rising anti-Semitism). For example recently, IfNotNow and Bend the Arc took the lead in [attacking](#) as anti-Semitic a Trump ad featuring Bernie Sanders as puppet master for Biden. Indeed, in a year of intense cuts to budgets and programs across the Jewish communal and organizational world, progressive and social justice-oriented organizations have [fared](#) relatively well.

In addition, **an increasingly challenging reality for Jews on campus, coupled with the overshadowing of these events in the broader racial justice movement** (see for example [here](#) and [here](#)), **are drawing in greater urgency Jewish unity in demands to end passivity in the face of campus anti-Semitism.** An [article](#) in the leading professional publication for the education field, Inside Higher Ed, featured the wave of advocacy calling on university administrators to forcefully condemn anti-Semitism and work more aggressively to address and prevent it, given the rise of harassment and attacks on Jewish students constituting an “all-time high.” Quoted sources attribute the attacks to originating from both far-left and far-right ideologies. Recent calls for action include:

- **On the California curriculum reform:** JIMENA: Jews Indigenous to the Middle East and North Africa [petition](#) to Governor Gavin Newsom demanding an inclusive California Ethnic Studies curriculum focusing on the lived experiences Mizrahi Jews in the United States alongside its lessons on Arab Americans; and drawing clear redlines against BDS, anti-Semitism, and discrimination; and an AJC [campaign](#) to send a message to the California State Board of Education and the Instructional Quality Commission requiring a “balanced an inclusive ethnic studies education.”
- **Protesting for action to counter the harassment and discrimination Rose Ritch faced** at USC, including a [rally](#) in Los Angeles, and an outpouring of Jewish media coverage.
- Newsweek [featured](#) a piece decrying **the relative lack of attention afforded addressing anti-Jewish hate on campuses** and focusing on a Scholars for Peace in the Middle East initiative to encourage colleges to officially adopt the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance's (IHRA) [definition](#) of anti-Semitism (the IHRA definition also

addresses anti-Semitism as it often expresses itself when originating from the ideological left, e.g. in denying Israel's right to exist, demonizing Israel, and accusing Jews of putting loyalty to Israel first). This emphasis was similarly featured in coverage of the Ritch protests, such as [here](#).

In a different context, the critical nature of the issue of defining anti-Semitism was also on display in [a lawsuit](#) over anti-Israel protests held outside an Ann Arbor synagogue, now being appealed, alleging that protests carrying messages such as "Resist Jewish Power," "No More Holocaust Movies," "Boycott Israel," and "End the Palestinian holocaust" amounted to anti-Semitic, hateful speech. The lawsuit had been dismissed.

## **SIGNIFICANCE OF THE JEWISH VOTE AND SHARPENING ISRAEL MESSAGING**

Where things stand: A [survey](#) of American Jewish voters, which revealed that 67 percent plan to vote for Biden and 30% plan to vote for Trump, suggested gains for Trump among Jewish voters since 2016 – though a significantly smaller percentage of respondents who approved of Trump said they strongly approved, while 92% of those who disapproved said they strongly disapproved.

The strength of Jewish voters lies in geographic [concentration](#), with one-third of American Jews living in just 20 of the country's congressional districts, and representing a potential decisive force in several of them – including in the battleground states of Florida, Pennsylvania, Ohio, and Michigan. Recognition of this strength is evidenced in heavy outreach efforts, such as recently in the Harris and Douglas Emhoff [focus](#) on courting Black and Jewish voters in Miami; the Jewish Democratic Council of America [campaign](#) targeting Michigan Republican Senate candidate John James with an ad that links him to anti-Semitism; and a Jewish Battleground Coalition campaign, with a recent [event](#) headed by Michigan Democratic Jewish Caucus and the Democratic Jewish Outreach Pennsylvania.



The Democratic case on Israel is displaying a couple shifts added to its usual standby positions of support that reflect the unique dynamics of this election year:

- **Partisan-ization of Israel support:** Biden claims that Trump's eschewing of the Iran deal has put Israel in danger, [basing his support](#) for the deal from the positions of Israeli generals who stand in opposition to Netanyahu's clear position against it. Indeed, in a polarized and hyper-partisan reality on both sides a reality may emerge in which Democratic support for Israel is judged less by support for Prime Minister-backed initiatives and become more reliant on relationships with opposition.
- **A claim that the fundamental security of the American Jewish community is at stake**, as evidenced by Trump's [equivocation](#) on calls to denounce white Supremacists, anti-Semites, and conspiracy theorists. Prominent Jews have [spoken out](#) strongly about the threat to Jewish security

## AFTER THE ELECTIONS: SIGNALS OF UPCOMING CHALLENGES

Past weeks saw several areas that signal vulnerability to Jewish and pro-Israel positioning within progressive circles.

- **Congressional vulnerability surfaces in a number of nexus points:** The race for Foreign Affairs chairmanship – Rep. Brad Sherman recently sought to [distinguish](#) himself from rivals Reps. Gregory Meeks and Joaquín Castro on the basis of his pro-Israel bona fides in contrast to records of his opponents that he framed as questionable. Sherman pointed out their high-profile boycotts of Netanyahu's speech to Congress about Iran during the Obama presidency, votes against a bi-partisan House resolution condemning the UNSC resolution on settlements, and that both congressmen have expressed some support for restrictions on U.S. military assistance to Israel. Sherman named groups –including IfNotNow and Jewish Voice for Peace and American Muslims for Palestine – who are forming a “block Sherman movement.”

Additionally, with stalwart pro-Israel Chairwoman of the House Full Appropriations Committee and its Subcommittee on Foreign Operations Nita Lowey [retiring](#), it appears likely that her replacements in this role will be Members of Congress who have adopted positions on Israel that more closely reflect progressive constituent priorities. Finally, a [new guard](#) in the Congressional Black Caucus, with the inclusion, for example, of BDS supporter Cori Bush, is expected to introduce rising pressure to reflect the leftward shift of its newest members and their challenge to the broader party establishment.

- **A delicate basis for Biden-Harris Israel policy:** While existing records and campaign promises have offered reassuring continuity about the candidates' Israel positions, speculation in recent weeks has centered on external dynamics may threaten to disrupt the equilibrium upon which they are based. First, it appears likely that Biden would lead a [de-prioritization](#) of American diplomatic investment in the region; which in some cases, could be perceived as compromising Israel's national security interests. Second, a [changing context](#) of Democratic voters' growing opposition to Israeli government policies and the erosion of prospects for a two-state solution, which currently underpin the pro-Israel consensus, may change the calculation on whether – particularly for Harris, who will be more focused on her future political career – support for Israeli policies considered hawkish make political sense.
- **Societal trends portend demographic and generational challenges:**
  - **The creeping Hispanic-relations problem** – Recent [reports](#) of the susceptibility of Florida Latinos to wild conspiracy theories, including that George Soros directs a “deep state” global conspiracy network and that a Joe Biden win would put America in control of “Jews and Blacks,” reflect a pervasive vulnerability in how Hispanic populations perceive Jews.
  - **The young and the (Holocaust) ignorant** – Possibly correlating with the consistently lower support for Israel held by younger generations, a nation-wide survey [revealed](#) a “worrying lack of basic Holocaust knowledge” among adults under 40 – including, alongside a number of [additional](#) shocking revelations of deep ignorance of this

history, that over 1 in 10 respondents did not recall ever having heard the word “Holocaust” before, and that 11 percent of respondents believed that Jews had caused the Holocaust. (In this respect, it is ever-more poignant to connect the celebration of the life of Ruth Bader-Ginsburg with her personal [connection](#) to Jewish history and the Holocaust.)

At the same time, [younger generations](#) have flexed their muscle of societal influence decisively this year, focally fueling social protests. Moreover, this year marks the first in which voting will be dominated by generations younger than 40, and a departure “...from largely white, baby-boomer-dominated politics and culture in the second half of the 20th century to a more racially diverse country fueled by younger generations: millennials, Gen z-ers and their juniors.”

- **A brutal information ecosystem amplifying the extremes** – Growing attention in recent weeks to the roles of internet-mediated information and social media communication platforms has focused on violent memes and messages [surging](#) on far-left social media. A recent [TED talk](#) by former CIA analyst, diplomat, White House national security advisor, and Facebook employee Yaël Eisenstat describes an information ecosystem entrenching people into absolutism to the point where finding common ground no longer feels possible. Notably, a recent [celebrity boycott](#) of Instagram protesting Facebook inaction on hateful and misleading content mobilized under the banner “#StopHateforProfit,” whose organizers include the Anti-Defamation League and the NAACP. Also, Israel’s Strategic Affairs Ministry led a [discussion](#) with senior TikTok representatives to explore more effective ways to combat hate speech, anti-Semitism, and incitement on the platform, including through creating an educational program targeting young users.

## AVALANCHE OF INITIATIVES ADVANCING BLACK-JEWISH RELATIONS

The past couple weeks saw a continued emphasis on initiatives promoting Black-Jewish unity – on national and local levels and within the Jewish community – coupled with momentum gaining in non-Jewish exposure to this field. The potential significance in each of these initiatives lies in the opportunity to study, monitor, and seek to tailor and replicate them as models for emulation. In the background, mobilization against the common threat posed by white supremacy gains traction, with a Homeland Security draft document [labeling](#) this the most persistent and lethal threat to the U.S., growing efforts to [portray](#) it as most threatening to Black and Jewish communities, and accumulating [anecdotal](#) evidence gaining news prominence (see also in [Reut's recent policy paper](#) on the greater prospects of engagement with the anti-racist struggle).

### **National-level initiatives:**

- The AJC-National Urban League joint initiative against anti-Semitism and racism, which launched September 6 and included diverse programming along with a legislative effort, garnered significant attention – see for example in a USA Today [op-ed](#) by the leadership of both organizations and a Religion News [op-ed](#) on Black Muslim-Jewish divides by the president and imam of the Nation's Mosque and AJC's director of U.S. Muslim-Jewish Relations.
- NFL player DeSean Jackson, who in July gained notoriety in this context for posting anti-Semitic social media content, has [spoken](#) to reporters for the first time since the incident. He expressed regret, apologized, and spoke of his commitment to a process of learning. Notably, and reflective of the potential for tension surrounding the role of Jewish ownership in sports and other fields, reports emphasize the role of team owner Jeffrey Lurie, who is Jewish, as the decision-maker on the adequacy of Jackson's repentance. Lurie is quoted as saying that Jackson is doing "everything that we've asked him to do to both educate himself and to learn and take action."

- Nick Cannon [returned](#) to hosting his syndicated radio show, accompanied by an announcement describing his work in deepening his understanding of the issues troubling Black and Jewish communities and his pledge to be a leading voice for change on these.
- An initiative called '[Together Beat Hate](#)' from the Robert Kraft-founded [Foundation to Combat Anti-Semitism](#) and centered around fighting joining high-profile Black celebrities, influencers, and athletes in fighting anti-Semitism, has recruited a number of supporters, notably in past weeks [Julian Edelman](#) and [Zach Banner](#).
- Jewish philanthropist Susan Sandler [announced](#) a decision to donate \$200 million to fight racism.

#### **Local-level initiatives:**

- Students from Hillel organizations across over 24 campuses in Georgia have [organized](#) a racial justice initiative under the Tikkun Olam concept to show solidarity and spark anti-racist work in their community, and the Solomon Schechter Day School in Boston [gathered](#) alongside other community members to denounce racism and promote messages of unity.
- Explorations of Black-Jewish relations in university forum included a Berkeley Law event [series](#) on Black-Jewish relations and a Yale [event](#) offering a “cultural investigation of the 'Black-Jewish Relations' paradigm.”
- In New Jersey, a business and personal [partnership](#) resulting in an organic farming operation emerged between a Jewish family and a Black family, each with deep local roots.
- The 412 Black Jewish Collaborative [formed](#) in the wake of the attack on the Tree of Life synagogue in Pittsburgh aims to address social injustice and gained momentum after the death of George Floyd.
- The selection of Black singer Juna Givhan to [perform](#) at the Birmingham Holocaust Education Center; an experience that resulted in a deepening of connection and understanding.

- An [op-ed](#) in a local Maine newspaper calling for the renewal of Black-Jewish unity against bigotry.

**Efforts to explore and grapple with the issue within Jewish communities:**

- Events aimed at provoking exposure and discussion on race relations include: A Massachusetts community [event](#) with author Dr. Jonathan Kaufman, National Jewish Book Award author of "Broken Alliance. The Turbulent Times Between Blacks and Jews in America," and a Boston Jewish community [event](#) on the state of Black-Jewish relations with David Harris and Marc Morial.
- Examples of Jewish exploration of questions of Jewish privilege in the context of the fight for racial justice discourse grappling with these issues include: An [op-ed](#) in a Milwaukee Jewish paper dealing with the tension between being a persecuted minority but are also part of the privileged majority, and how that can help Jews commit to fighting against racial injustice; explorations of whether Jews are white in the context of America's racial landscape [here](#) and [here](#); and a [call](#) for papers in the Journal of Jewish Identities on race and anti-Semitism.
- Spotlights afforded Black Jews and spaces created to honor them, for example [here](#), [here](#), [here](#), and in [this](#) viral celebration of a rendition of Avinu Malkeinu by an exceptionally talented young Black Jewish boy.