

**Black Lives Matter** PLZ  
NW

EVACUATION ROUTE

An Assessment and call for Response

**Erasure in the Contemporary  
Progressive discourse:  
The Challenge to  
Jewish Communities & Israel**

**Erasive Antisemitism – Version B**

September, 2021

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THE REUT GROUP

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קבוצת ראות  
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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

**The Reut Institute expresses its gratitude to Reut USA for its continued support of our activities in this area. In particular, we would like to thank the Julis Foundation for Multi-Disciplinary Thinking, which commissioned these reports and the UJA Federation of New York for supporting this Version B.**

Reut extends its gratitude to the following individuals for their time, goodwill, and contributions to this paper. Nonetheless, this document reflects the position of the Reut Institute.

Susan Abravanel, JCPA Policy Advisory Vice-Chair

Lisa Armony, Director, , Chief Impact Officer, Jewish Federation of Orange County.

Reuben J. Berman, Project Manager, Antisemitism Task Force, Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations

Cherie Brown, Founder and CEO, National Coalition Building Institute

Nancy Kaufman, Consultant/Coach, former CEO of the National Council of Jewish Women and JCRC Boston

Hindy Poupko, Deputy Chief Planning Officer at UJA-Federation of New York

Melanie Roth Gorelick, JCPA Senior Vice President

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## TACHLES

1. **The May 2021 conflict erupting in Jerusalem and culminating in Israel's military operation in Gaza, Guardian of the Walls, again rocked the foundations of Jewish and pro-Israel positioning in the progressive movement.**<sup>1</sup> The conflagration brought to the fore the power of dynamics described in '[Erasive Antisemitism: Version A](#),'<sup>2</sup> which looked at ways in which contemporary progressive discourse can undermine Israel's status in the U.S., and, more broadly, Jewish legitimacy in defining Jewish lived identity, experience, and vulnerability within progressive circles.
2. **This paper draws upon recent events to generate new insights into this challenge**, and the threat it poses in disempowering Jewish and pro-Israel agency and advocacy on the left, **and on the Jewish communal response to it**, describing for example:
  - **How contemporary progressive discourse defined the debate on the left** – Progressive conceptual frameworks amplified a reaction on the left that was notable in the extremity of its rhetoric and in the extent of its mainstreaming. These frameworks supplied its conceptual infrastructure, language, and logic. This was evident, for example, in skin color- and class-based framing of the conflict designating Israel as a 'white establishment oppressor,' and in subsequent attacks on Israel's 'special status' and demands to strip it of special consideration or protections in favor of 'even-handed' treatment.
  - **How a lack of shared understanding of the fundamental threat limited the efficacy of Jewish communal responses** – Deeply polarized and highly disparate, Jewish communal efforts focused largely on different aspects of a common problem. Thus, a systemic challenge that emanates from decentralized networks and movements, met a response that remained highly contextual and limited in systemic impact.
3. **This paper calls to mobilize Jewish communal efforts around a goal of carving out a space within contemporary progressive discourse for Jews to weigh-in authentically on Jewish and pro-Israel agendas and, more broadly, to self-define; an idea framed as 'Jewish narrative self-determination.'**
4. It describes core imperatives of catalyzing an internal Jewish communal discourse on the challenge and working to mobilize a decentralized response, with critical emphasis on:
  - **Articulating and defining the challenge** as a basis for coalescing Jewish communities and organizations, and for mounting an effective response.

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<sup>1</sup> For extensive analysis and sources, see our Trend Monitor tracking discourse in the wake of the most recent conflict in Israel and Gaza [here](#).

<sup>2</sup> Version A described this erasure as a "by-product" of a conceptual mismatch that occurs when contemporary progressive paradigms meet the Jewish experience. It emphasized that the phenomenon does not necessarily feed on hatred, but rather is sustained by an acceptance of prevalent framing on the progressive left. See also [here](#).

- **Mobilizing a critical mass of organizations and initiatives** to lead responses to the articulated challenge in diverse arenas.
- **Investing in the community relations field**, growing its capacity for direct and authentic engagement, and expanding its role in spearheading responses in emerging engagement arenas.
- **Adapting Jewish communal engagement models** for increasing deployment of partisan- and niche-centered engagement modes.
- **Cultivating a robust presence within decentralized activist networks and movements.**
- **Centering voices from the Jewish left** in developing and deploying responses to this challenge. This is especially critical given a larger objective of impacting Jewish and pro-Israel positioning on the left.

5. **The broader threat environment: This paper focuses on a narrowly articulated challenge to Jewish and pro-Israel communities** that emanates from contemporary progressive discourse. It can present as a benign threat, and a product of seemingly subtle bias. **The generates a stark contrast as it occurs within a larger political and societal context that is characterized by extremification** significant on the far-right for its breadth, and potential and actual violence. Within this environment, threats that emerge from the left tend to be relatively harder to identify and to call out.
6. **However, the challenge to Jewish and pro-Israel positioning on the left presents a real and systemic threat to the sustainability of the current broad consensus of bi-partisan support** – a basis of the stability of the status of Jewish communities in the U.S., and of the U.S.-Israel relationship. Losing one side risks fundamental change system-wide. In dividing within and among Jewish communities in the U.S., and threatening the connection of many Jews with Israel, the threat is also to Jewish peoplehood.

## AN EXPLODING ISSUE

7. **The ‘Jewish problem’ in contemporary progressive discourse – A negation or erasure** that can occur when ‘conceptual categories’ that contemporary progressive discourse frequently imposes upon Jews, undermine Israel’s status in the U.S. and contribute to hostility, discrimination, or bias against Jews. The result is a **challenge to the perceived right of Jews to self-identify, and the legitimacy of Jewish representation of Jewish narratives and vulnerabilities.** (See: [‘Erasive Antisemitism: Version A.’](#))
8. **The core issues associated with the ‘erasive’ challenge have become a burning focus for U.S. Jewish communities, directly connected to the most burning social questions being asked across broader American discourse. The current moment of urgency and awareness presents an opportunity for effective mobilization** founded upon a clear, shared understanding of the longer-term



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threat, and adapted to the massively decentralized and polarized influence environment in which the threat flourishes.

9. This paper **updates the conceptual framework presented in the previous version in light of analysis based on the most recent round of violence in Israel and Gaza, and focuses on the structure and process of a Jewish communal response relevant to the challenge.**

## WHO FRAMES THE JEWISH NARRATIVE?

10. **A conceptual clash can result in hostility, discrimination, and bias against Jews** – Often based on binary divisions that center on skin-color and class-based conceptual categories and on orientation to radical change, **progressive conceptual frameworks fail to reflect, or actively distort, the lived Jewish identity, experience, and vulnerability.**<sup>3</sup>
11. **Because they center on empowering designated oppressed voices, which Jews are deemed to not be, these frameworks lend themselves to silencing Jewish voices.** Once defined within white, privileged, and oppressor conceptual categories, Jews are subsequently disempowered from objecting to the external imposition of these categories and framing of the Jewish narrative. This poses a threat of: Neutralizing Jewish voices on Jewish and pro-Israel agendas; challenging the legitimacy of Jewish advocacy for individual or collective Jewish security and against discrimination; and undermining the legitimacy of Jewish vulnerability or discrimination claims, including regarding the Jewish state.<sup>4</sup>

## The ‘de-exceptionalizing Jews’ principle

12. Alongside imposed categorical designations rises **a growingly resonant demand to stop ‘special treatment’ of Jews – namely, protection or consideration that would exceptionalize the way Jews are regarded** within these designations, including by considering unique aspects of Jewish identity, experience, and vulnerability.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Surrounding the recent conflict, this conceptual mismatch was broadly applied in narratives that framed Israel uniformly in the role of colonial oppressor. It surfaced prominently in comparisons of Israel to Apartheid-era South Africa; conflation of Palestinian struggles, within and outside of the Green Line, and that of Black Americans; and discourse on Jewish support for Israel as complicity with racism (described in greater detail [here](#)).

<sup>4</sup> See also for example:

- Jewish exclusion evident in: [lack](#) of allyship in response to antisemitism; marginalization in LGBTQ spheres (see, for example, [here](#), [here](#), and [here](#)); marginalization in a diversity, equity and inclusion [program](#); being “[chased off](#)” social media, such as [here](#); within [student](#) progressive circles; in the Philly food truck [incident](#); and even causing controversy in [children’s literature](#).
- Silencing charges to delegitimize Jewish activism against antisemitism: for example recently, in key activist [campaigns](#) and within [academia](#). Undertones of the silencing threat framing Jewish self-advocacy as a threatening abuse of power reflected in Ilhan Omar’s [claims](#) of harassment by Jewish Democrats.

<sup>5</sup> As applied to U.S. Jewish communities, this principle of de-exceptionalizing Jews also bolsters an insistence on bundling condemnation of antisemitism with other forms of hate. See for example in recent weeks:

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13. **This principle also forms a basis for rhetoric**, which emerged prominently surrounding the most recent round of violence in Israel and Gaza, **challenging the status quo of the U.S.-Israel special relationship** and support for Israel on the basis that it singles Israel out for exceptional treatment. It is a foundation of progressive attacks on foreign policy approaches that fail to treat Israel as inherently the bad actor in its conflicts based on uniform adoption of progressive metrics of oppression and criteria for vulnerability.<sup>6</sup>
  14. De-exceptionalizing Jews intersects with a progressive emphasis on ‘equity of outcome,’ which attributes status disparities to dynamics of oppression. In the Jewish context, this further **flattens and compresses the narrative of the relatively powerful Jewish state into one of full culpability for Palestinian suffering**. This phenomenon is mirrored in analyses of the relative affluence and influence of American Jewry as a reflection of privilege unjustly usurped through systemic oppression.<sup>7</sup>

## JEWISH AND PRO-ISRAEL COMMUNITIES ON THE DEFENSIVE

15. **During the recent conflict in Israel and Gaza, vulnerable positioning of Jewish and pro-Israel communities on the left met a Jewish community challenged by divisive dynamics, and grappling with existential questions about how Jewish identity fits within contemporary progressive paradigms.**

### Mainstreaming Jewish erasure on the left

16. **Normalization of antisemitism** - An overall environment of polarization and extremification and attendant virality on the social media landscape facilitated widening acceptance and normalization of anti-Israel and antisemitic sentiment expressed within progressive conceptual frameworks. A robust progressive organizational infrastructure and prominent policy voices<sup>8</sup> significantly amplified these. Differing from classic delegitimization campaigns explicitly targeting Israel and pro-Israel groups, **in the**

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discussed [here](#) and [here](#); echoed by the Squad and allies [here](#); echoed by Jewish community members, compiled [here](#); and responsible for a Jewish diversity executive losing her job [here](#).

<sup>6</sup> See for example: [Ilhan Omar](#), [Ban Ki-Moon](#), and in [this](#) petition to President Biden signed by a “global coalition of leaders – from civil society through to academia, politics and Nobel laureates” seeking “a consistent application of a rights-centered foreign policy can signal to Israel’s leaders that violations of international law will no longer go unaccounted for.”

<sup>7</sup> See more on this [here](#).

<sup>8</sup> The prominent platform for mainstreaming progressive anti-Israel and antisemitic discourse was evident in (see details in our Trend Monitor tracking discourse in the wake of the most recent conflict in Israel and Gaza [here](#)):

- The Squad’s role bringing policy prominence to anti-Israel rhetoric.
- Ubiquitous and prominent ‘can’t miss it’ coverage broadcasting the point that there is a deepening rift among Democrats around support for Israel, and growing pressure on Biden from the left wing of the Democratic Party, as significant new developments.
- Louder and wider circle of critical voices on Israel, including longtime pro-Israel allies.
- Pushback against support for Israel from powerful progressive voices.
- Linkage between disapproval of the Israeli campaign and demands to restrict or condition aid at center stage.

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**evolving dynamics the vulnerability of Jewish communities and undermined legitimacy of Jewish self-advocacy were brought into stark relief.**

### The crisis on the Jewish left

17. **Today, polarized discourse is increasingly surfacing within the Jewish center and left.** The extremity and rapidity of the impact of contemporary progressive frameworks on group identity in relation to society and social change are **contributing to uncertainty, and in some cases paralysis, in how Jewish communities contend with emerging challenges and threats.** In the background, a divergence between intensifying social justice values, on the one hand, and realities of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, on the other hand, increasingly stresses support for Israel. Resulting fissures impeded united confrontations addressing hate in reactions to the recent conflict, and instead manifested in:
- **Tensions within the Jewish left on the basis of support for Zionism,** and on divergent perspectives regarding the relationship between anti-Zionism and antisemitism.<sup>9</sup>
  - **Tensions within the Jewish left on the legitimacy of centering on discrimination against Jews,** and whether it is possible to reconcile radical vs. institutional approaches to change.<sup>10</sup>
  - **Jews spearheading opposition to Israel in Gaza conflict:** Maturing Jewish far-left movements are gaining more visible platforms and are increasingly the voices cited by progressive figures justifying positions on Israel or antisemitism.<sup>11</sup>
  - **Jews on the left experiencing a shock wave of alienation from progressive movements** on the basis of association with or support for Zionism; **and a growing ‘de-coupling threat,’** wherein disassociation from Israel or Zionism has become an imperative for maintaining a societally accepted Jewish identity.<sup>12</sup>

## WHY THE MOBILIZATION FOLLOWING THE MOST RECENT CONFLICT FELL SHORT

18. **On institutional, communal, and individual levels, the progressive response to the recent conflict in Israel and Gaza constituted a rude awakening to the vulnerability of Jewish and pro-Israel positioning on the left.** Main visible immediate responses included interventions by institutional leaders vis-à-vis

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<sup>9</sup> See manifested recently in the [turmoil](#) surrounding the planned ‘No Fear’ rally in Washington, D.C.

<sup>10</sup> Rising polarization and extremification have meant that within some communities and organizations, maintaining a tent inclusive of non-, anti-, and Zionists is no longer viable.

<sup>11</sup> See in recent weeks for example: [Ilhan Omar](#), [Jamaal Bowman](#), [Nina Turner](#), and [here](#).

<sup>12</sup> Dynamic discussed at length [here](#). A ‘firewall’ separating Jews and Israel is also reinforced when lines between criticism of Israel and antisemitism are deliberately [blurred](#) – focusing Jewish reactions on deconflating anti-Israel sentiment from antisemitism – and when Jews are blamed for Israel’s conduct, engendering Jewish responses focused on protesting against being blamed for Israel’s conduct.



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policymakers, Jewish Democrat-led Congressional [initiatives](#), Jewish institutions convening a major [virtual rally](#), some social media and media outreach campaigns, and individual activist initiatives. Several factors impeded the emergence of an impactful collective response, including:

- **The challenge of penetrating the ‘gated progressive discourse’** – Reflecting broader polarization and extremification, **contemporary progressive discourse can present as dogmatic and exclusive**, and often hostile, to voices that challenge its core perspectives and messages.
  - **It’s not (only) about Israel** – The mainstream Jewish community has held a prevalent mindset that Israel’s conduct is the sole cause of the progressive challenge to the Jewish community. The threat of Jewish erasure is less widely recognized.
  - **Disparate focuses on different aspects of a common challenge** – Messages fell largely into three categories with each representing a contextual dimension of a common fundamental challenge. Some defended Israel’s conduct, drawing attention to Israel’s vulnerability in relation to the threat posed by Hamas. Some called out the antisemitism inherent in blaming Jews for Israel’s conduct. Some challenged the conflation of the Palestinian struggle with that of the Black antiracist struggle in the U.S. **All implicitly shared an unheeded objection to the imposition of the terms in which contemporary progressive discourse framed collective or individual Jewish identity, experience, and vulnerability.**
  - However, **declining communal cohesion**<sup>13</sup> **obstructs Jewish communal efforts to mobilize a collective Jewish response to the progressive challenge**, bringing together diverse organizations and individuals within U.S. Jewish communities. This is exacerbated by a tendency of progressive Jews to view Jewish communal institutions as connected to oppressive power structures in Israel and in the U.S.
19. Absent a coherent confrontation of the larger phenomenon that current threats are rooted in, adapted to the massively changing environment in which it spreads, **responses to current manifestations of antisemitic and anti-Israel discourse and activities remained highly contextual and limited in their systemic impact.**

## A GUIDING VISION AND STRATEGY

20. **Amidst this crisis emerges broader potential towards decisively eradicating increasingly influential strains of left-wing antisemitism that are flourishing within contemporary progressive discourse.** There is an opening in discourse, within Jewish communities and on the broader left, regarding contemporary progressive conceptual frameworks, and specifically their application to the Jewish context. This is a critical opportunity to take a stand by cultivating conceptual clarity and operational coherence.

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<sup>13</sup> Declining Jewish communal cohesion is a long-standing trend based on growing generational, ideological, and religious divides; broader societal extreme decentralization and polarization likely accelerate its development.

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## DEVELOPING A SYSTEMIC RESPONSE

21. **The need: An approach that is systemic in structure**, grounded in a conceptualization of broader underlying dynamics that integrates disparate phenomenon, **and in process**, by adaptively engaging in a changing influence environment.
22. The following milestones outlined in this section are characteristics of a response **aimed at leveraging Jewish communal capacities to:**
  - **Catalyze internal discourse within Jewish communities towards a shared understanding of the challenge and a galvanizing vision for mobilizing change.**
  - **Engage within emerging influence vectors**, often disaffiliated from establishment voices, from which the challenge gains robustness and mainstream influence.

## ARTICULATING A VISION: JEWISH NARRATIVE SELF-DETERMINATION

23. **The challenge is to carve out a space within contemporary progressive discourse for Jews to define Jewish identity, experience, and vulnerability.** In the desired reality Jewish voices are empowered to weigh-in authentically on Jewish and pro-Israel agendas; there is an acceptance of the legitimacy of Jewish advocacy for individual or collective Jewish security and against discrimination; and acknowledgment of Jewish representation of Jewish vulnerability, including regarding the Jewish state.

## MOBILIZING JEWISH COMMUNITIES AROUND TODAY'S CHALLENGE

24. Jewish communities have made significant headway in navigating antisemitism and anti-Zionism from the progressive left in recent years, notably in catalyzing widespread institutional adoption of the IHRA definition of antisemitism.<sup>14</sup> **The following emphases focus specifically on addressing the particular strain of antisemitic and anti-Israel rapidly evolving in today's progressive discourse. Response approaches are tailored to decentralized and polarized influence arenas** gaining mainstream prominence in recent years, and serving as the discourse and activity ground-zero on this issue.

### A critical mass of committed leadership

25. **A critical mass of organizations and initiatives mobilized to respond to the articulated challenge.** While the polarized Jewish community is unlikely to take a unified stand against challenges emanating from the progressive movement, a mobilization on the scale of a dozen or so organizations with a shared nuanced

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<sup>14</sup> The IHRA definition addresses multiple forms of antisemitism as it manifests on the left, including : 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.

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understanding of the challenge could effectively challenge Jewish erasure within the progressive discourse.

26. **‘It takes an orchestra’** – In confronting the systemic challenge posed to Jewish and pro-Israel positioning within contemporary progressive discourse, the diversity of the Jewish community is an asset. Borrowing from the metaphor that ‘it takes an orchestra to play a symphony,’ different actors have different and complementary roles. These may include conducting top-tier engagement, funding or incubating innovation, monitoring discourse and creating new knowledge around the challenge, and working to mobilize grassroots activist responses.

### Defining the challenge to create a shared understanding

27. **Focus on the broader question of the legitimacy of the Jewish claim to represent the Jewish narrative in progressive discourse is needed.** This fundamental issue is at the core of contextual manifestations, including delegitimizing association with Israel as a part of Jewish identity, as well as characterizing Jews and Israel as ‘white privileged oppressors.’
28. **A broadly shared understanding is critical for coalescing a united Jewish front in protecting the rights of Jews to self-define and represent, and for outreaching externally;** affirming the necessity, as is true of other societal groups, that Jewish voices are the empowered agents in doing so. The desired outcome is the emergence of a conceptual logic and accompanying language to describe how progressive paradigms flatten Jewish identity, and how this can lead to hostility, bias, or discrimination targeting Jews. **Jewish communal organizations are uniquely positioned to deliver** on the goal of cultivating awareness and catalyzing critical conversations on this issue within Jewish communities.<sup>15</sup>
29. **Achieving such an outcome is critical for developing targeted impact strategies** – for supporting efforts to identify, learn, and engage constructively; credibly call out prejudice and discrimination; and discredit attempts to smear individuals and organizations that are doing so. Focusing on this core issue can: lend clarity to diverse organizations on issues of determining when and why to take a stand, for example, on Jews being required to identify as white; shed light on the illegitimacy of framing Israel’s conduct using apartheid and white supremacist charges; and provide grounds for rejecting progressive ‘requirements’ of Jews to extricate Zionism from Jewish identity.

### Massive investment in independent community relations

30. **Given a growing premium in a decentralized and polarized environment on authentic and direct engagement, bolstering the community relations field becomes even more critical for the Jewish response to today’s challenges.** The Jewish communal relations field in particular leverages decades of experience building and maintaining relationships, a history of fighting discrimination, a crucial role uniting

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<sup>15</sup> Doing so requires navigating tensions between top-down advocacy and bottom-up influence; national and institutional, and bottom-up, niche, and local Jewish world mobilization; and more heavy-handed approaches towards codification and definitions versus focuses on engagement, awareness-raising, and sensitizing around the issue.

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Jewish communities, and capacities to create coalitions to advance Jewish communal interests and values. **It should be considered a strategic investment and its research and development capacities enhanced.**<sup>16</sup>

### Reevaluating the need to build consensus in order to navigate polarization

31. **Adapting models of engagement to polarized and decentralized realities** – Massive changes in the influence environment, and in the positioning of Jewish and pro-Israel communities within, necessitate a fundamental re-think of the structure of individual Jewish and pro-Israel organizations, and the architecture of the Jewish and pro-Israel field broadly. Jewish and pro-Israel communities – which are largely organized around building consensus, rooted in upholding a center, and navigated in a spirit of bipartisanship – will continue to be challenged in an environment of extreme polarization and declining establishment influence.
32. The Jewish communal ecosystem, as well as many central institutions within, can **expand flexibility in developing and deploying increasing modes of partisan and niche-centered engagement, and in further cultivating capabilities to create diverse ad-hoc Jewish coalitions.**

### Cultivating a voice within activist network arenas

33. **Within decentralized activist networks and movements, extreme and non-establishment voices are elevated.** As such, the positioning of non-establishment, and often non- or anti-Zionist Jews that identify with the framing of Jewish issues within contemporary progressive discourse, has been dominant. Meanwhile, **the Jewish Zionist left** – which has been largely represented within the Jewish establishment– **is dangerously absent from that conversation.**
34. In recent years, outsized and increasing influence of decentralized activist networks and movements have burgeoned to unprecedented growth under the ‘Resistance’ banner. In this context, **a robust and eclectic group of highly, and many newly, engaged political and social activists constitutes an under-looked and increasingly impactful sector.** This group is far larger in number, though influential in smaller spheres of direct influence, as compared with traditional influencers and organizational and community leaders. Engaging its swelling ranks requires a broader-based response.
35. Critically, **there are new opportunities to leverage the peak presence of politically and socially engaged Jews within such arenas, many experiencing left-wing antisemitism directly for the first time** – certainly after the wave of antisemitism following the recent conflict in Israel and Gaza. There is a growing Jewish communal ecosystemic niche populated by new organizations and activist leaders<sup>17</sup> rising to mobilize exactly such progressive Jews on the left to stand up to antisemitism within

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<sup>16</sup> In light of a current reassessment regarding the structure of the community relations field in the U.S., this paper strongly suggests that the Jewish Council for Public Affairs (JCPA) remain an independent national network hub of community relations network. The orchestration of the community relations work by the JCPA as an independent hub, and a convener of national agencies and JCRCs has played and maintains a key role in uniting communities and creating coalitions to advance Jewish communal interests and values.

<sup>17</sup> See, for example, [Zioness](#) and [New Zionist Congress](#).

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their networks. Working in alignment with the broader community, these initiatives can play an even more crucial role in cultivating broad-based and conceptually clear responses within organic networks and movements, and in thus taking a united stand within this critical arena.

### Focus on the Jewish left

36. **Liberal and progressive voices in particular are an invaluable voice in challenging progressive discourse on Jews.** In a highly polarized reality and given a main objective to impact on the positioning of Jewish and pro-Israel communities on the left, **solutions must emerge from and be owned by the Jewish left voices**, and significantly including non-institutional voices, with skin-in-the-game credibility and the organic and authentic network positioning to impact externally on this issue.

**THE END.**



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