

Antisemitism and Democracy

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American Jews are being offered a false choice that suggests countering real and rising antisemitism requires us to abandon the democratic norms and values inherent to our safety and advancement. We are told that we can protect ourselves or our democracy; that we can look out for Jews or for other minorities, but not both. The truth is that one is not possible without the other.



This is not a simple right versus left issue, even if it would be easier to understand it through that lens. Antisemitism is not only a form of bigotry and prejudice. It is also an insidious conspiracy theory rooted in tropes and lies about Jewish control and power, aimed at pitting communities against one another and sowing distrust in democracy and its institutions – which makes it particularly salient as a wedge across the political spectrum.

On the right, from the White House on down, leaders are exploiting the Jewish community's legitimate fears of rising antisemitism to undermine the rule of law and core democratic rights. Universities are being extorted as the federal government threatens billions in research funding

to undermine academic freedom and advance its agenda, all while claiming that it's necessary to protect the Jewish students who attend them. Students are picked up off the street without due process or the protection of other fundamental rights. None of this makes Jews any safer.

The administration is doing this all while further normalizing dangerous antisemitism. This includes giving a platform to antisemitic conspiracy theories like the Great Replacement, which has already fueled a cycle of violence — including the deadliest attack on the Jewish community in US history in Pittsburgh — and is now used to advance dehumanizing policies attacking immigrants, voting rights, and more; appointing extremists to senior roles, including in defense and counterterrorism; and gutting the very programs needed to counter hate and extremism, such as the Office of Civil Rights and critical hate crime prevention grants.

There is a false choice on the other end of the ideological spectrum, too: between fighting antisemitism and standing up for human and democratic rights. On the left, extreme voices are exploiting legitimate concerns over Palestinian human rights and the humanitarian crisis in Gaza to isolate, marginalize, and attack Jews: from those who celebrated Hamas's brutal terror attacks on October 7th, to efforts to ban Jews or "Zionists" from certain spaces, to the targeting of Jews here because of our real or perceived connection to Israel — manifesting in two deadly attacks in recent months in DC and Boulder and a broader climate of fear and isolation for many Jewish Americans.

All of this has the effect of not only making Jews unsafe — which should be enough on its own — but of also dividing the very coalitions we need in a moment when our rights and our democracy are under dire threat.

Ultimately, this all threatens Jews, each and every other community, and our democracy itself — because **there is no Jewish safety without inclusive democracy, and no inclusive democracy without Jewish safety.**

Yet we're stuck in a feedback loop in which antisemitism and threats to democracy fuel one another. As antisemitism is normalized in all of its forms, it fundamentally sows distrust and division and undercuts the safety and rights of all communities and our democracy. And as democracy erodes, it only creates the conditions for antisemitism to further flourish.

This requires us to lean into the hard work of relationship and coalition-building at a moment when it's never felt harder — because the goal of extremists is to divide us so that we can't work together in pursuit of an inclusive democracy in which Jews, and all communities, are safe.

We need to recognize that our safety is bound together. We need to act as though our fight against antisemitism is only as strong as our democracy, and our democracy only as safe as all minorities in it, including Jews. That is what we are doing at JCPA. [Partnering with the teachers' unions](#) at a time when both Jewish students and educators are understandably fearful *and* the

right-wing is exploiting antisemitism to undermine unions and the right to organize. [Leading a strong coalition of mainstream Jewish organizations](#) to reject the false choice between Jewish safety and democratic norms. [Bringing together a broad group of civil rights partners](#) to state that targeting Jews over Israel's actions is antisemitism - period. [Making clear that protecting diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility](#) is inherent to Jewish safety and values – and that it can be done in a way that's inclusive of Jewish identity and concerns.

Our safety as Jews is inextricably bound to the strength of our democracy and the rights and safety of all. We have no other choice.

RECOMMENDATIONS:



- **Stay at the table.** The Jewish community is too often told to walk away from those with whom we may have differing views on Israel or in understanding antisemitism. And we see extremists use these issues to divide the very coalitions we need to protect our communities and our democracy – because isolation is a key extremist tactic. At the core of true community relations is the willingness to confront the elephants in the room and have the hard, frank conversations across lines of disagreement and difference.
- **Invest in democratic resiliency.** Physical security measures and legal accountability matter. But we also cannot barricade, sue, or prosecute our way out of the crisis of antisemitism and extremism. We must invest in the policies proven to build societal resilience to hate – from media and digital literacy, to hate crimes prevention, to defending the rule of law and equal justice.
- **Reject the false binaries.** Binary thinking is among the greatest hurdles to countering antisemitism and protecting democracy – whether it's those pitting Jewish safety and democracy against one another; or suggesting that countering one form of hate comes at the expense of another; or painting the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in zero-sum terms. The more we can bring complexity to these conversations, the more we show potential allies that countering antisemitism and protecting all communities and our democracy are one and the same.