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Jewish-Arab partnership as an antidote to Jewish supremacism - +972 Magazine

By Meron Rapoport and Ameer Fakhoury October 30, 2019

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One year ago last Sunday, a white nationalist committed the deadliest attack against Jews in American history, killing 11 worshippers at the Tree of Life synagogue in Pittsburgh.

As for many American Jews, that day will remain etched in my memory forever — a mixture of disbelief, shock, fear, and grief. The identity of the shooter, however, was not a surprise: a white nationalist committed to the movement's core belief that Jews are the chief orchestrators of "white genocide" — the "great replacement" of whites in America by non-white immigration and the forces of multiculturalism.

The shooter's anti-Semitism didn't rise in a vacuum. The dog-whistle rhetoric against George Soros and "globalists" voiced by the Trump administration, right-wing politicians and Fox News in the days leading up to the shooting helped create the climate that motivated the shooter to take action.

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Days after the shooting, Vice President Mike Pence [explicitly denied](#) that Trump's scapegoating rhetoric had played any role. Six months later, after another white nationalist [shot up](#) a synagogue in Poway, killing one, right-wing leaders — from [Trump Jr.](#) to [Ted Cruz](#) — repeated this ploy, rushing to point the finger at progressives instead of white nationalists. For Jews still mourning

the Pittsburgh massacre, these added injuries were an outrage.

We're all used to this pattern by now. White nationalists continue to commit deadly attacks [against Jews](#), [immigrants](#) and [other minorities](#), while right-wing leaders continue to deflect from this reality, and instead falsely portray progressive leaders and social movements, from Ilhan Omar to the Women's March, as the chief threats to American Jews. Now, more than ever, we need to understand and confront the threats posed to Jews and other minorities, and multiracial democracy as a whole, by white nationalism and the forces of Trumpism.



Mourners take part in a vigil for the victims of the shooting at Tree of Life Congregation, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, October 29. (Governor Tom Wolf/CC BY 2.0)

It is with this in mind that my organization, Political Research Associates, has just released a new report, [“Taking Aim at Multiracial Democracy: Antisemitism, White Nationalism and Anti-Immigrant Racism in the Era of Trump,”](#) in collaboration with Bend the Arc, a progressive Jewish advocacy group. The report highlights growing white nationalist anti-Semitism in the United States and its amplification by right-wing elected officials, Fox News, and segments of the general public, from the time of the

Pittsburgh shooting up to the present.

Since 2016, the United States has seen a frightening escalation of anti-Semitism across the right. This has taken many forms, ranging from Trump's anti-Semitic [campaign ads](#) and claims of Jewish "disloyalty" to Republican rhetoric scapegoating [George Soros](#) and "[globalists](#)," the rise of the internet [alt-right movement](#), white nationalist street mobilizations like the [Unite the Right rally](#) in Charlottesville, and deadly and attempted [violence](#), [vandalism](#), and arson targeting synagogues and [Jewish cemeteries](#). This anti-Semitism is intimately connected to racist and exclusionary rhetoric, policy and violence against non-white immigrants and other minorities.

White nationalists hold the racist belief that non-white "others" are intrinsically inferior. They also [imagine Jews](#) as the shadowy architects behind a strategy to undermine white civilization and carry out the "meticulously planned genocide of the European [white] race," in the words of the Poway synagogue shooter. White nationalists believe Jews are orchestrating this so-called "white genocide" by encouraging non-white immigration and engineering a slew of progressive forces, from the civil rights, feminist, and LGBTQ rights movements to multiculturalism, "political correctness," and more.

These ideas don't just exist on the fringes of the right. White nationalist anti-Semitism is increasingly echoed and reinforced, in dog-whistle form, by prominent right-wing elected officials and media pundits, including Trump himself. These right-wing leaders echo the demonization of liberal Jewish philanthropist George Soros and the "[globalist](#)" or "[cosmopolitan](#)" elite as hidden masterminds of non-white immigration and various "liberal" causes, from present-day [impeachment proceedings](#) against Trump to the "[migrant caravan](#)" during the 2018 midterms, [Black Lives Matter protests](#), and more. When right-wing leaders voice this rhetoric, it legitimizes anti-Semitic conspiracies while granting it a massive public forum, contributing to a climate that [encourages](#) white

nationalist attacks on Jews and other minorities.

None of these tactics are new. From early 20th-century Tsarist Russia to Nazi Germany, conservative and ultra-nationalist leaders and social movements have long propagated [the fantasy](#) of a scheming, immensely-powerful Jewish cabal that covertly manipulates world affairs. While many forms of oppression “punch down” by declaring groups of people inferior based on race, class and gender, modern European-derived anti-Semitism claims to “punch up” at an imagined secretive, elite class of Jews. In so doing, right-wing leaders and social movements use anti-Semitic scapegoating during times of intense inequality and instability in order to deflect popular discontent and discourage it from challenging the inequitable policies they uphold and benefit from.

As we explain in “Taking Aim at Multiracial Democracy,” this anti-Semitism doesn’t only threaten the safety and vibrancy of Jewish communities. It also bolsters and amplifies racist rhetoric and exclusionary policy against immigrants, communities of color and other marginalized groups. It serves as an effective scaffolding for full-frontal attacks against progressive movements, and multiracial democracy as a whole.



Mourners take part in a vigil for the victims of the shooting at Tree

of Life Congregation, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, October 29.

(Governor Tom Wolf/CC BY 2.0)

Given this reality, it's astounding that many continue to frame anti-Semitism as a threat that confronts Jews equally from both progressive and right-wing movements — or, more astounding still, as a primarily left-wing phenomenon. Too often, conversations around anti-Semitism within the American Jewish community, and the broader American public, are derailed by endless scrutiny of progressive women of color, or activists for Palestinian human rights, as the chief threat to American Jews. This plays into the right's [well-documented strategy](#) of championing their own apparent support for Jews and Israel in order to cover for their own racism and anti-Semitism. This tactic also informs the right's deepening, [unconstitutional attempts](#) to pass legislation suppressing speech critical of Israel on American universities and elsewhere.

This dynamic was on full display in the events surrounding Bard College's recent conference on anti-Semitism and racism, which I attended as a proud Bard alum, as a Jew, and as a researcher deeply invested in these topics. Shockingly, keynote speaker Ruth Wisse barely mentioned white nationalism, instead using her platform to tar critics of Israel, progressive academics and college students, and the entire Muslim and Arab world as the chief inheritors of global anti-Semitism after the Nazi Holocaust.

Equally frustrating, The Forward's Opinion Editor Batya Ungar-Sargon then published a [scathing op-ed](#) claiming that a student protest of Wisse's keynote was anti-Semitic — a piece that was labeled a brazen mischaracterization by [numerous firsthand accounts](#) of the protest. The tragic end result is that, in the era of Trump and rising white nationalism, the chief outcome of a conference on the vital and timely topics of racism and anti-Semitism seemed to be public bickering over whether or not a handful of (largely Jewish) student human rights activists are anti-Semitic.

To be clear, like every other kind of oppression, anti-Semitism is

part of the air we breathe as a society, and exists in different forms across our political spectrum. When anti-Semitism appears today among progressives, it is a significant obstacle to effective analysis and coalition-building, and needs to be understood and challenged.

Right-wing anti-Semitism, however, is a violent threat to Jewish safety and continuity. It helps fuel the far-right populist movement that brought Trump to power and continues to reshape our political landscape, and it sits at the core of white nationalism, which enjoys an [expanding base of potential support](#) across the United States.

Without appropriate interventions, we can expect scapegoating rhetoric and deadly attacks against Jews, as well as immigrants and other minorities, to continue and [even to escalate](#). As American Jews, we cannot afford to get confused as to where the real danger lies, and where we can find allies and build safety through solidarity.

In order to protect our communities, we must deepen solidarity between Jews, immigrants, Muslims, and all groups targeted by white nationalism and the racist rhetoric of the Trump camp. This means engaging with our differences in a shared understanding that it is the right which seeks to exclude and scapegoat our communities and silence our allies. The future of multiracial democracy depends on it.