

The Project on Allyship to Combat Antisemitism

On Allyship

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Allyship has been fundamental in the fight against antisemitism in the United States since the founding of the Anti-Defamation League more than a century ago. However, in recent years, as antisemitism increased, there had been a growing refrain that the allies the Jewish community thought they had were not showing up. After the Hamas attack on October 7th, these concerns grew exponentially, as the worst massacre of Jews since the Holocaust was seemingly met with indifference by many and a mass mobilization against Israel. Now, many in the Jewish community want to rethink, or even abandon outright, the strategy in light of what they see as systematic betrayal by their putative allies.

However, it is striking how little the possibilities of coalitions against Jew hatred have been analyzed. As a political scientist who came only recently to the Jewish communal world, I have been surprised at the unexamined beliefs around allyship, especially that many in the Jewish community automatically assumed that others would stand up for them. In the political science literature, there has always been some skepticism about alliances. William Riker pioneered a theory of minimum winning coalitions. That is, given certain conditions, politicians would not try to mobilize more allies than was necessary to win because they did not want to share the spoils with more than what was necessary.

¹ There has been a large and productive literature that critiqued Riker, notably around the assumption (which he recognizes as problematic²) that politicians can gauge mobilization tactics accurately enough to calculate the smallest possible winning coalition and they therefore might reasonably go larger. However, fears that big coalitions do not necessarily work, may be hard to manage, and require unnecessary sacrifices have been embraced to a degree in a variety of different contexts by such disparate figures as Thomas Jefferson (opposition to “entangling alliances”), Lord Palmerston (“We have no eternal allies, and we have no perpetual enemies”), and Vladimir Lenin (who famously argued that he would rather have a movement of a dozen wise men than a hundred fools).

To systematically examine the dynamics of future of allyship, American Jewish University (AJU) convened a group of scholars who had studied the African American, Asian-American, Christian, Indigenous, Jewish immigrant, Latino, LGBTQ+, and Muslim communities and their relations with Jews. Critically, most of these authors were not themselves “Jewish studies” scholars but rather had been deeply immersed in (and sometimes identified with) the communities they wrote about but had also, at least for a portion of their career, focused on inter-group relations with Jews. This allowed them to

¹ William Riker, *The Theory of Political Coalitions* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1962), p. 32.

² *Ibid*, pp. 47-8.

look at the issue of coalitions against hate from the perspectives of the prospective allies, not, as traditionally done, from the Jewish community looking outward.³

Grounded in the rich scholarly work of colleagues participating in the AJU project, this paper examines the difficult politics around allyship. Rather than a natural condition or an easily realizable ambition, I find that allyship is by nature difficult and can only be achieved by a clear understanding of the internal and external dynamics of groups and the political terrain. After a review of the recent history of allyship, the paper examines different strategies to mobilize against hatred and what it will take for each to be successful. It also provides a reminder that some groups, notably Evangelicals, have remained steadfast allies with the Jewish community, although that relationship is sometimes underestimated. My conclusion is that the plaintive cry of “where are our allies” must be replaced with the more unsentimental “what are we going to do to garner the allies who are available?”

The Hope and Disappointment of Allyship

Until recently, the importance of allyship, and the assumption that Jews could turn to others in need, was canonical in the Jewish community. As Jonathan Greenblatt, national director of the Anti-Defamation League (ADL), founded in 1913, noted,

Remarkably, though, the ADL’s founders didn’t limit their scope solely to Jews. The organization’s original charter calls on the ADL to secure justice and fair treatment for all. Stopping the defamation of Jews was the ADL’s “immediate object,” but the organization’s larger purpose was to “secure justice and fair treatment to all citizens alike and to put an end forever to unjust and unfair discrimination against and ridicule of any sect or body of citizens.”⁴

Allyship as a central theme of Jewish life was greatly reinforced during the civil rights struggle in the 1960’s when Jews saw the crusade led by the Reverend Martin Luther King as not only just but also having deep resonance with their own battles against hatred, especially coming only a few years after the Holocaust. The tragic deaths of James Chaney, Andrew Goodman, and Michael Schwerner, the first African American, the other two Jews, killed and in Mississippi in the summer of 1964 while registering African Americans to vote and buried together, seemed to vividly symbolize the common fate of the two communities.

Most of all, the picture of Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel marching with King in Selma in March 1965 became emblematic of what many in the Jewish community saw as a durable

³ The complete set of papers can be found at www.aju.edu/allyship.

⁴ It Could Happen Here (NY: Mariner Books, 2022), p. 4.

and highly attractive alliance and a model for the Jewish population's relationship with other



Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel marching with other civil rights leaders from Selma to Montgomery, Alabama, on March 21, 1965. From far left: John Lewis, an unidentified nun, Ralph Abernathy, Martin Luther King, Jr., Ralph Bunche, Abraham Joshua Heschel, Rev. Fred Shuttlesworth.

Source: <https://jwa.org/media/abraham-joshua-heschel-on-selma-march-1965>

groups. The Jerusalem Post gave the traditional rendering:

Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel and Rabbi Maurice Davis linked arms with Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., and other civil rights leaders as they marched from Selma to Montgomery, Alabama, in protest of racial injustice and segregationist policies. A JTA article from two days later noted that hundreds of African American participants

in the march had donned kippot (yarmulkes) in “respectful emulation” of the rabbis, dubbing the head coverings “freedom caps.”⁵

In fact, that alliance was always much more problematic from the black perspective than most Jewish authors ever allow for. Edward Shapiro noted the complexities in a famous essay,

Even during the first two decades after World War II-the supposed "golden age" of black-Jewish relations-James Baldwin, Kenneth Clark, and other blacks warned liberal Jews that their image of a close black- Jewish affinity was a fiction of their imagination, and that candor and realism were now required. As Baldwin noted in a famous statement, "Georgia has the Negro and Harlem has the Jew."⁶

Baldwin himself wrote in an important article that was published in 1967, two years after Selma, saying that Jews had misunderstood their relationship: “The Jewish travail occurred across the sea and America rescued him from the house of bondage. But America *is* the house of bondage for the Negro, and no country can rescue him. What happens to the Negro here happens to him *because* he is an American.”⁷ A realistic accounting of the Black-Jewish relationship would note recurrent strains, including large rifts over the Six Day War, the Crown Heights riots in 1991, and affirmative action.⁸

Still, largely ignoring discordant facts, many in the Jewish community have tried to be out in front when it came to alliances with many groups, especially identified by their race, ethnicity, or sexual orientation. The Jerusalem Post connected the dots:

In the summer of 2020, after the murder of an African American man named George Floyd by a Minnesota policeman, hundreds of Jewish organizations and synagogues across America signed on to a statement declaring that “Black lives matter,” reflecting a sentiment shared by large numbers of American Jews; many congregations had hung banners with the phrase on their buildings years earlier. Jewish groups have joined Latino groups in advocating for immigration reform and have stood up for Asian Americans in the face of racism and discrimination. Jews have been among the loudest and most prominent advocates for women’s rights

⁵ “Where are Our Allies,” Jerusalem Post, December 1, 2023. <https://www.jpost.com/opinion/article-776033>.

⁶ Edward S. Shapiro, “Blacks and Jews Entangled,” First Things, August 1994. <https://www.firstthings.com/article/1994/08/blacks-and-jews-entangled>

⁷ James Baldwin, “Negroes are Anti-Semitic Because they are Anti-White,” New York Times, April 9, 1967. Emphasis in the original. https://archive.nytimes.com/www.nytimes.com/books/98/03/29/specials/baldwin-antisem.html?_r=2

⁸⁸ Devan Schwartz, “Fractures in the Grand Alliance between Black and Jewish Americans,” NPR, 28 March 2024. <https://www.npr.org/2024/03/28/1239289512/black-jewish-grand-alliance-civil-rights-history>

and LGBTQ rights; indeed, some of the iconic leaders of both movements have been Jewish themselves.⁹

Joining this chorus, Van Jones called the Black-Jewish partnership “the most important alliance in 10,000 years of human history.”¹⁰

The logic of standing up for others seemed self-evident. As Rob Eshman noted in The Forward, “[I]f the troubles are not ours alone, neither is the fight. Instead of acting as if the world hates us and we are all alone, we should be seeking coalitions with other groups facing the same problems.”¹¹ There is also the obvious demographic argument given that Jews are a very small percentage of the population. Thus, Angelina Kazmaier¹² argues, “Jews make up only 0.2% of the world population, meaning that even if every single Jew spoke up against antisemitism, either at home or abroad, they would still never amass the numbers required to create a dent in the amount of hate speech and discrimination against them. Thus, the only way to combat antisemitism effectively is to find allies who truly wish to create a world free from it.”

When antisemitism re-emerged as a significant concern in the mid-2010’s, due in some combination to protests especially against Israel on college campuses, the rise of Donald Trump and Christian Nationalism, and the Charlottesville chants in 2017 that “Jews will not replace us,” the Jewish community began to look around for its allies. The search became that much more poignant after the Tree of Life massacre in Pittsburgh in October 2018 when it seemed to be time to cash in the allyship chips that had presumably been earned over the previous decades.

However, as antisemitism increased, some Jewish commentators noticed that their allies were missing. As *Forward* columnist Alex Zeldin noted after having been the target of antisemitic verbal abuse, “It’s definitely a moment of frustration. A lot of the messaging that Jews have gotten over the last four years ... is you’ve got to show up. You have to be an ally. You have to speak up for others. And I think a lot of Jews, myself included, very much took that to heart,” by “marching in support of women’s and immigrant rights, as well as the Black Lives Matter movement. But recently . . . reciprocity has been hard to

⁹ “Where are Our Allies,” Jerusalem Post, December 1, 2023. <https://www.jpost.com/opinion/article-776033>

¹⁰ Gabby Deutch, ‘Milken Conference Hosts its First Ever Session Entirely Devoted to Fighting Antisemitism,’ Jewish Insider, May 7, 2024. https://jewishinsider.com/2024/05/milken-conference-antisemitism-panel-van-jones-allies/?utm_source=newsletter.

¹¹ March 21, 2023, found at: https://forward.com/opinion/540658/if-americans-like-jews-why-is-there-more-antisemitism/?utm_source=Iterable&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=ForwardingtheNews_6440430

¹² “Non-Jewish Allies can be Key to Combatting Antisemitism,” The Jerusalem Post, December 26, 2021 found at: <https://www.jpost.com/opinion/article-689483>.

find.”¹³ Brett Stephens similarly complained, “But if there’s been a massive online campaign of progressive allyship with Jews, I’ve missed it. If corporate executives have sent out workplace memos expressing concern for the safety of Jewish employees, I’ve missed it. If academic associations have issued public letters denouncing the use of anti-Semitic tropes by pro-Palestinian activists, I’ve missed them. It’s a curious silence. In the land of inclusiveness, Jews are denied inclusion.”¹⁴

The feelings of abandonment by real or nominal allies voiced even before October 7th were backed up by data. A notable study by the American Jewish Committee (AJC) of young Latinos, one of the first reviews to examine systematically that group’s relationship to the Jewish community, concluded that ties based on perceived shared experiences had to be unpacked and could not be automatically assumed:

It is clear from our findings that a shared and relatable sense of commonality does not currently exist among a sizable segment of Hispanic leaders. Moreover, in a time when American society has a keener sense of injustice and discrimination, many Latino leaders do not identify the Jewish people as those suffering from those recognized injustices.¹⁵

Another study which oversampled for 18–30-year-olds found that Black and Hispanic Americans agreed with antisemitic statements at similar levels as White alt-right identifiers.¹⁶

After October 7th, the absence of some allies, especially on the left, was widely noted. Rabbi Sharon Bous talked about her feeling of “existential loneliness” given “The clear message from many in the world, especially from *our* world — those who claim to care the most about justice and human dignity — is that these Israeli victims somehow deserved this terrible fate.”¹⁷ The campus protests propelled by the war in Gaza only furthered the

¹³ Melissa Block and Jerome Socolovsky, “Antisemitism spikes and Many Jews Wonder: Where are our Allies,” NPR, June 7, 2021, found at: <https://www.npr.org/2021/06/07/1003411933/antisemitism-spikes-and-many-jews-wonder-where-are-our-allies>

¹⁴ “Anti-Zionism Isn’t Anti-Semitism? Someone Didn’t Get the Memo,” *New York Times*, May 24, 2021, <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/05/24/opinion/anti-zionism-anti-semitism.html>.

¹⁵ American Jewish Committee, *Hispanic Emerging Leaders Research Report*, 2023, https://www.ajc.org/sites/default/files/pdf/2023-03/AJC-Report_Hispanic-Emerging-Leaders.pdf p. 4.

¹⁶ Eitan Hersh and Laura Royden, “Antisemitic Attitudes among Young Black and Hispanic Americans,” *Journal of Race, Ethnicity and Politics*, April 2023. <https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/journal-of-race-ethnicity-and-politics/article/abs/antisemitic-attitudes-among-young-black-and-hispanic-americans/5465F2124BC3D44B40521D2CD000D023>

¹⁷ Jennifer Medina and Lisa Lerer, “On Israel, Progressive Jews Feel Abandoned by their Allies,” *New York Times*, October 20, 2023 <https://www.nytimes.com/2023/10/20/us/politics/progressive-jews-united-states.html>. Emphasis in the original.

view that the Jews had been abandoned. Andrés Spokoiny, president and CEO of the Jewish Funders Network reflected on “What Died at Columbia [University]:”

The notion that Jews, historically reliable allies to other minorities in America and around the world, could count on those allies in our time of need also lays dead in Morningside Heights.

To be sure, Jews need to support the fight for real racial, gender and social justice simply because it’s the right thing to do. But we shouldn’t harbor any expectations that this will buy us any goodwill or that our support will be reciprocated or even recognized.¹⁸

Indeed, Professor Steven Windmueller, a long-time observer of American Jews, believes that the community’s former allies are lining up against the Jews:

A new American alliance appears to be emerging that is comprised of an alignment of minority religious, ethnic and racial voices, many of whom we once considered our allies. This new coalition is directing its messaging and organizing itself against Israel and American Jewry, with support from a cadre of academic groups, a coalition of national organizations, and a core of political elites.¹⁹

As a result, the Jewish community is demanding, admittedly with different voices, a change in strategies. Jonathan Greenblatt, head of the ADL, announced at his organization’s first national summit since October 7th, that there would have to be a pivot in the organization away from working generally on bigotry to focusing on antisemitism: “But slowly and then suddenly, it has become clearer and clearer that we must prioritize the first part of ADL’s mission: ‘stop the defamation of the Jewish people.’ Or as our friends at JewBelong so succinctly <https://www.instagram.com/jewbelong/p/C1QIWnXLiX0/> put it, ‘new plan: put on your own oxygen mask first.’”²⁰

Challenges of an Allyship Strategy

¹⁸ “What Died at Columbia,” [EJewishPhilanthropy.com](https://www.ejewishphilanthropy.com/what-died-at-columbia/?utm_source=newsletter&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=Your%20Daily%20Phil%20May%203%202024&utm_content=Your%20Daily%20Phil%20May%203%202024+CID_2bbf85269d713111597634e46f063e2a&utm_source=Email%20marketing%20software&utm_term=in%20an%20opinion%20piece%20for%20eJewishPhilanthropy), May 3, 2024, https://www.ejewishphilanthropy.com/what-died-at-columbia/?utm_source=newsletter&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=Your%20Daily%20Phil%20May%203%202024&utm_content=Your%20Daily%20Phil%20May%203%202024+CID_2bbf85269d713111597634e46f063e2a&utm_source=Email%20marketing%20software&utm_term=in%20an%20opinion%20piece%20for%20eJewishPhilanthropy

¹⁹ Steven Windmueller, “The Assault: A Coordinated Attack on America’s Jews and Israel,” [Jewish Journal](https://www.jewishjournal.com/commentary/opinion/371005/the-assault-a-coordinated-attack-on-americas-jews-and-israel/), May 3, 2024. <https://www.jewishjournal.com/commentary/opinion/371005/the-assault-a-coordinated-attack-on-americas-jews-and-israel/>

²⁰ <https://www.adl.org/resources/press-release/remarks-jonathan-greenblatt-2024-adl-national-leadership-summit>

In a time when allyship is being questioned, it is important to understand the realities of political coalitions rather than rely on hope tinged with nostalgia. Far from being a natural condition, allyship should be seen as a fraught and difficult relationship that has to be crafted over time from deliberate strategies that account for the political terrain. First, it is not particularly obvious that most groups are very interested in developing allyship with the Jews for the same demographic reasons that motivates some Jews towards allyship. This is not due to inherent antisemitism as much as the Jews, as a very small population, do not bring obvious political muscle to many discussions. For instance, the Latino population already numbers sixty-three million²¹ in the United States. Not surprisingly, they have not shown an explicit interest in allying with the Jews. Professor Bridget Kevane,²² in her paper for the allyship project, cites a speech that Siegel Vann of the AJC gave in 2019 to the National Hispanic Leadership Agenda, a coalition of Latino organizations that advocate for civil rights, observing that, “I have yet to perceive in the organized Latino community [a] strategic commitment and investment towards engaging key Jewish groups as timely partners and allies on issues of common concern.”

Also, it must be recognized that each of the communities is diverse within itself and must in the search for allies be approached carefully and with an appreciation of complexity. The Asian American community contains Koreans who are prosperous and Burmese who are generally not, the Latin American community includes Cubans who have been in the United States for decades and arrived with significant human capital and Venezuelans who are recent, impoverished migrants. The African American community includes descendants of enslaved people forcibly brought to America centuries ago and recent migrants from the Caribbean and Africa. Dr. Corine Blackmer, in her paper for the allyship project, notes that there are ideological divisions in the LGBTQ+ population between those who want equality and inclusion within existing institutions and a smaller but highly vocal population that seeks the overthrow of traditional practices.²³

Two Allyship Strategies

The Jewish community will never adopt one allyship strategy. However, choices always must be made, and it is important to be intentional and understand the implications of strategic direction. In general, there are two different but admittedly not completely distinct paths regarding the pursuit of allyship that can be discerned in the discussion within the Jewish community.

²¹ Bridget Kevane, “Latinos and Jews at the Dinner Table,” p. 8. A paper that was part of the allyship project, found at: www.aju.edu/allyship.

²² *Ibid*, pp. 14-15.

²³ “Allyship Between the Jewish and LGBTQ Communities: An Action Plan,” pp. 2-6. A paper that was part of the allyship project, found at: www.aju.edu/allyship

One approach is what might be called *transactional allyship*: We work for your cause with the expectation, defined in one manner or another, that you will help us or come to our aid when needed. This bundle of actions has the potential to be durable because it is based on a type of realpolitik, but it has challenges, in particular recognizing that groups will have real reciprocal asks. As Dr. Bridget Kevane notes, “[Allyship means] What do you need? And it is asking, what do we need, both of us, together?”²⁴

Jewish groups, led by ADL, have long had a reflex toward allyship and a belief that all good causes could go together. However, other communities have distinct political agendas that requires separate efforts and may not align with the sentiments of the Jewish community. Thus, Dr. Kevane notes that the central question that the Latino population focuses on is no longer relevant to the Jewish community: “Some Jewish leaders I spoke with, however, were unsure about the idea that immigration was equal for both communities. For most Jews, the immigration story is a distant memory. In turn, for Latinos, it has remained a constant reality.”²⁵

The other type of allyship might be called *environmental allyship*. That is, work done to fight bigotry helps everyone because there is some kind of correlation between all types of hate even if there is no explicit quid pro quo between groups. This sentiment is central to the Biden Administration’s “National Strategy to Counter Antisemitism,” released in May 2023 which includes building “cross-community solidarity and collective action to oppose hate” as one of its four central pillars.²⁶ This rationale for this sentiment was classic environmental allyship: “Those who target Jews also target women, Black, Latino, Muslim, AANHPI, and LGBTQ+ Americans, and so many other communities.” It continued by stating that, “a sense of security also stems from a safety net of cross-community solidarity. That is why solidarity and mutual support across diverse communities of different backgrounds and beliefs is crucial.”²⁷

Of course, improvements in the environment are in the interests of individual groups. However, if efforts to promote the overall environment do not, in the end, produce tangible results for individual constituencies, there will be increased sentiment for transactional allyship that at least has the more direct promise of delivering results. This is essence of the debate in the Jewish community post-October 7th as some have come to believe that their general efforts to fight bias have not delivered enough and are now demanding greater reciprocity, what Greenblatt and JewBelong refer to as putting on your own oxygen mask first. Others have abandoned the allyship project altogether.

Strategic and Tactical Implications of Allyship Choice

²⁴ Kevane, p. 20.

²⁵ Ibid., p. 9.

²⁶ <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/U.S.-National-Strategy-to-Counter-Antisemitism.pdf>, p. 5.

²⁷ Ibid. p. 48

Once the general path of allyship is understood, several strategic and tactical implications become clear. The first regards the architecture of allyship. In transactional allyship, much of the heavy lifting will have to be done by organizations who can deliver votes and political positions. Many in the Jewish community tend to default to this model given the long history of the ADL. However, other communities may not have a peak organization as well-established as the ADL, and often lack that organization's grounding in allyship work. For instance, since the glory moments of the civil rights movement, the African American community has split in a number of different directions based on varied understandings of social justice, among many other considerations.²⁸ Dean Helen Kim, who contributed a paper on the Asian American community to the allyship project, notes the real possibilities for allyship with the Asian America community. However, she cautions, "On an organizational level, however, the possibilities for allyship around antisemitism and anti-Asian hate seem a bit unclear."²⁹ She notes that two organizations that could potentially work with the Jewish community Stop AAP Hate, and the Asian American Foundation, were only founded in 2020 and 2021." Similarly, Dr. David Koffman, who also participated in the allyship project, reports that there are "currently few-to-no national or peak Indigenous organizations in the US that have devoted energies to cultivating relationships with Jewish organizations or making statements of solidarity about antisemitism. . ."³⁰

In contrast, in environmental allyship, much of the work can and should happen at the individual level. With this perspective, people work to change the general climate, without making firm calculations about how political positions should be traded for explicit mutual gain. Allyship at the individual level, including friendships and grassroots organization, is certainly possible and can be powerful. It is surprising that perhaps the most successful, but hardly discussed, development of allyship, at least until October 7th, was between Muslim and Jewish populations conducted at the individual level. Walter Ruby and Sabeeha Rehman note that, "Contrary to the perception that American Muslims and Jews have been and remain distant and hostile to each other, sustained efforts to build ties of communication and cooperation at the leadership and grass-roots levels have been underway for two decades or more." The reason that this alliance, despite the organizational challenges, succeeded was that a tremendous grassroots effort that was undertaken: They note: "During this period [2007 to 2023] tens of thousands of Jews and Muslims across the U.S. and Canada have connected through twinning events linking synagogues and mosques and encounters between women, students, and young

²⁸ Anthea Butler, "The Black Church: From Prophecy to Prosperity," *Dissent*, Winter 2014. <https://www.dissentmagazine.org/article/the-black-church-from-prophecy-to-prosperity/>

²⁹ Helen Kim, "Allyship between Jewish Americans and Asian Americans," p. 10. A paper that was part of the allyship project, found at: www.aju.edu/allyship

³⁰ David S. Kofman, "American Jewish - Indigenous Allyship: Prospects and Barriers," p. 9. A paper that was part of the allyship project, found at: www.aju.edu/allyship

professional groups, with many forming lasting friendships and professional relationships.”³¹

It should be understood that allyship at the individual level still requires significant organizational work. Walter Ruby, in a personal communication to me, noted with regard to the twinning and other efforts done at the ground level, “Many of these individuals got together because mosques and synagogues in cities across the country formed twinning relationships (an effort initiated by the Foundation for Ethnic Understanding, which he then served as Muslim-Jewish Program Director) and strongly backed by both the Reform and Conservative movements on the Jewish side and the Islamic Society of North America on the Muslim side.” Still, the power of this type of allyship originated at the individual level. Yet, allyship at the individual level is often difficult. Dr. Kevane notes that many members of the Latino population are far too consumed with daily struggles and the overarching political question of immigration, to engage in much allyship work.³² More generally, the challenges to efforts to mount a large, relatively uncoordinated efforts are by definition significant, as the post-October 7th tensions between the Muslim and Jewish communities makes clear. The diversity of communities noted above makes it even more challenging to create broad-based movements.

Another necessary consideration is what language to adopt. In transactional allyship, while rhetoric will always be employed, the necessity of a common language is limited because there are political objectives to be realized and they can be readily identified. In contrast, in environmental allyship, the common language is necessary because large numbers of relatively uncoordinated people will be called upon to take actions without immediate guidance from central organizations.

However, creating a common vocabulary is exceptionally difficult. Blackmer notes that “Jews who purport to be allies with the LGBTQ community should understand and know how to use terms that are crucial to that community.”³³ Similarly, Koffman notes that, as a “community, American Jews could probably use a deeper education about Native American history and experience, and an honest understanding of their experience of the American project. Jews would also do well to pay closer attention to very local histories of their own communities because local history matters, particularly for Native peoples who are connected to particular ancestral lands and territories.”³⁴

Inevitably, the formation of a common vocabulary between two groups may also lead to the alienation of others. Dean Helen Kim notes in her paper on Asian Americans and Jews

³¹ Sabeeha Rehman and Walter Ruby, “Muslim-Jewish Relationship Building,” p. 1. A paper that was part of the allyship project, found at: www.aju.edu/allyship

³² Kevane, p. 18.

³³ Blackmer, p. 11.

³⁴ Koffman, p. 8.

that the description of both groups as “model minorities” has been both a source of pride within group but also something that has perhaps driven a wedge with other groups that have not been as successful in America.³⁵

The common vocabulary problem is particularly treacherous for Jews, seen by many by virtue of income, education and, occupation as privileged, because, in the current day, allyship is seen as helping those who have not benefitted from American society. When Dictionary.com named “allyship” as its “word of the year” in 2021, it defined it in a telling way: “the status or role of a person who advocates and actively works for the inclusion of a marginalized or politicized group in all areas of society. . . .”³⁶

Although many in the Jewish world might hope otherwise, the attacks of October 7th will not change the perception that Jews are not victims, in part because many potential allies see the Palestinian grievance narrative as more powerful, even though a great many would not endorse the attacks that killed 1,200 people in one day as a tactic. Koffman in a nuanced discussion that has implications far beyond the Indigenous population notes: “Many Jewish-led initiatives initially conceive of their allyship efforts based on a sense of shared or parallel suffering when they have sought either to forge ties with local Indigenous leaders and groups or have created programs for their own constituents.” However, he notes, “The risks associated with basing a relationship on the shared experience of persecution, on the other hand, are that it can be shallow link, one that sometimes leads to feelings of competition for suffering recognition. In the effort to see oneself in the other, one might fail to see other at all. Subtle rivalry for empathy can undermine the connection rather than fostering it.”³⁷

An Allyship Success

Amidst the discontent over allyship, it is useful to apply this analysis to one of the few successes the Jewish community has had both before and after October 7th: the evangelical community. In the list of allies that have abandoned the Jews, the evangelicals are not mentioned. Sometimes this is because they have remained allies. But sometimes it is because they are not even considered by some Jewish observers who want to be surrounded by African-American, gay, Hispanic and other supporters from groups they recognize as fellow minorities, who are politically aligned on other issues in the US, and often live in the same urban or suburban locations where Jews reside.

The behavior of evangelicals compared to many other groups is noticeable. As Reverend Johnnie Moore notes, “Every Evangelical leader has tried to do something to help Israel and the Jewish community since October, I do not know a single Evangelical leader who has

³⁵ Kim, p. 5.

³⁶ Found at: <https://www.dictionary.com/e/word-of-the-year-2021/>

³⁷ Koffman, p. 5.

bowed under the pressure to abandon Israel or to make excuses for antisemitism exploding on our streets.”³⁸

There are complex reasons for this persistent allyship, especially by a group that is, paradoxically, not always cultivated by the Jewish community. However, part of the reason can be found in the common language that Jews and Christian evangelicals can use around Zionism. As Dr. Joel Lohr explains in his paper for the allyship project,

Zionism — the promise of land, the desire to live in it, the hope of returning to it from the Diaspora — is hardwired into the biblical tradition. Christians should know this as well, as scandalous as a divine gift of land may seem, as hard as it may be to reckon with today, as uncomfortable an idea as it may be in our world, and as difficult as it may be to explain to our neighbors. We cannot ignore it. We certainly need to understand it.³⁹

Many of the mainstream Christian churches have chosen not to take up Lohr’s challenge of understanding the promise of Zion to the Jews, and all that follows, but it seems to be foundational to many evangelicals’ worldviews.

The evangelical’s allyship with the Jewish community can be understood as a kind of environmental allyship. Indeed, Moore frames it as a set of common values that goes beyond what either group can explicitly do for the other. Especially since the Hamas pogrom, Moore has said “defending Zionism has become a proxy for defending all Western democratic values.” Critically, the focus on western democratic values rather than victimhood removes one of the primary obstacles the Jewish community faces when trying to ally with others. The question of relative positions in American society—who is victim and who is privileged—that has hindered or at times even derailed Jewish relations with other groups is removed. Instead, the common language of Zionism provides a profound foundation for a form of allyship between Jews and Evangelicals that has certainly been recognized by Jewish institutions but that also operates in a somewhat spontaneous and unsolicited manner.

Why the allyship with Christian evangelicals has not been more readily celebrated by the Jewish community since October 7th, especially amidst all the cries of abandonment, is an important question. Part of being successful in allyship is to recognize that fellow travelers are often hard to come by and should be appreciated.

³⁸ Michael Starr, “Evangelical leader Moore: ICC decision made by ‘white-collar antisemites’” Jerusalem Post, May 21, 2024 found at: <https://www.jpost.com/israel-news/article-802000>

³⁹ Joel Lohr, “The Case for Christian Allyship in an Era of Antisemitism on the Right and Left,” p. 9. A paper that was part of the allyship project, found at: www.aju.edu/allyship

Future of Jewish Allyship

Conceiving of allyship as a bundle of choices and strategies has immediate advantages. In particular, once allyship is removed from the category of moral imperative and understood as a relatively difficult political strategy, it is easier to manage expectations and understand what is possible. My colleague Dr. Robbie Totten, in his contribution to the allyship project, emphasizes that Jewish groups, like most others arguing to advance their interests in complex relationships, will have often to be satisfied with partial victories⁴⁰ and, in as in the case of Evangelicals, they will have to extend their notion of who is a natural ally.

There is no one leader in Jewish North American who has either the competence or the authority to determine the allyship strategy for the entire community. Rather, different organizations and many individuals will make their own decisions. They also will have their own agendas and will be focused on disparate groups to join up with in the common cause of fighting hatred. However, as this paper has made clear, choices still must be made and strategies implemented. Using the analysis in this paper, based on unprecedented empirical research, leaders and groups will be able to make better choices when constructing constituencies to fight antisemitism and other forms of hate. They may also be better able to calculate if the effort is actually worth the investment and expected outcome. That is far from the heroics of Selma but is what is needed to face the realities of hatred in twenty-first century America.

⁴⁰ Robbie Totten, "Navigating Allyship: Insights from Historical Jewish Immigration Advocacy," pp. 20-21. A paper that was part of the allyship project, found at: www.aju.edu/allyship