**SAMPLE OP-EDS ON POLICY-RELATED TOPICS**

These pieces reflect a range of viewpoints on a range of topics from a range of authors. They were selected because of the writing styles they illustrate; inclusion in this packet does not imply endorsement of the arguments being made.

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| [Example 1](#Austin): | Roy L. Austin, Jr., “[The First Step Act is a Step Not Worth Taking](https://www.huffpost.com/entry/opinion-first-step-act_n_5c0a6dc7e4b0b6cdaf5e3c50/amp),” *Huffington Post*, Dec. 7, 2018 |
| [Example 2](#Barton): | Frederick D. Barton, “[Why the U.S. was doomed in Afghanistan from the start: We’re at war with our own instincts](https://www.nydailynews.com/opinion/ny-oped-inherent-contradictions-us-afghanistan-20210820-pbubgoimsfemrdjodc2u2tzitm-story.html),” *New York Daily News*, Aug. 20, 2021 |
| [Example 3](#Blase): | Brian Blase, “[The Next Medicaid Blowout](https://www.wsj.com/articles/affordable-care-act-obamacare-medicaid-expansion-insurance-health-care-reconciliation-11632259356),” *Wall Street Journal*, Sept. 21, 2021 |
| [Example 4](#Blazakis): | Jason M. Blazakis, “[It’s a real possibility that our next 9/11 could arrive from within](https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/2021/09/06/its-real-possibility-that-our-next-911-could-arrive-within/),” *Washington Post*, Sept. 6, 2021 |
| [Example 5](#Dancygier): | Rafaela Dancygier, “[Germany’s far-right party lost seats in last week’s election. Here’s why](https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2021/10/05/germanys-far-right-party-lost-seats-last-weeks-election-heres-why/),” *The Monkey Cage*, Oct. 5, 2021 |
| [Example 6](#Denniss): | Richard Denniss, “[We need to get real about carbon offsets in Australia—they won’t stop climate change](https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2021/oct/06/we-need-to-get-real-about-carbon-offsets-in-australia-they-wont-stop-climate-change),” *The Guardian*, Oct. 5, 2021 |
| [Example 7](#Garza): | Alicia Garza, “[Dear Candidates: Here Is What Black People Want](https://www.nytimes.com/2019/05/28/opinion/black-census-alicia-garza.html),” *New York Times*, May 28, 2019 |
|  |  |
| [Example 8](#Huerta): | Dolores Huerta, “[Honor John Lewis by fighting for voting rights](https://www.montereyherald.com/2021/07/24/dolores-huerta-guest-commentary-honor-john-lewis-by-fighting-for-voting-rights/),” *Monterey Herald*, July 24, 2021 |
|  |  |
| [Example 9](#McConnell): | Mitch McConnell, “[Biden wants to give the IRS the OK to snoop on your bank account. Don’t let him](https://www.courier-journal.com/story/opinion/2021/10/05/mitch-mcconnell-dont-let-joe-biden-irs-snoop-bank-account/5990038001/),” *Louisville Courier-Journal*, Oct. 5, 2021 |
|  |  |
| [Example 10](#Susskind): | Hadar Susskind, “[For the Good of Both Countries, US Military Aid for Israel Must Be Conditional](https://time.com/6073637/u-s-military-aid-israel-must-be-conditional/),” *Time,* June 6, 2021 |

*Huffington Post*

**The First Step Act Is A Step Not Worth Taking**

We need real criminal justice reform. Not a half-measure that lets legislators off the hook.

By Roy L. Austin, Jr.

12/07/2018 10:09am EST

The criminal justice system is more broken today than it has been in recent years. For this reason, Congress should not pass the [First Step Act](https://www.huffpost.com/entry/trump-criminal-justice-reform-bill_n_5becac70e4b03af892664e4e), the reform bill supported by President Donald Trump and, seemingly, bipartisan majorities in both chambers of Congress.

I say this not because I prefer the perfect to the good but because the First Step Act is not good and there is no realistic second step that comes after. Not only that, we would be taking a single step after the current administration has already taken us two steps backward. What we need now is true criminal justice reform, not a half-measure.

I come to this issue as someone who has spent much of his career at the highest levels of government working for criminal justice reform. For more than a year, I worked along with my White House and Department of Justice colleagues to try to pass the [2015 Sentencing Reform and Corrections Act](https://www.congress.gov/bill/114th-congress/senate-bill/2123). The SRCA was imperfect, but it was imperfection in a different time. It would have existed in a world where a president [toured](https://newsok.com/article/5434061/president-obama-speaks-to-non-violent-drug-offenders-at-prison-in-el-reno) a federal prison to show the humanity of those we imprison, not our current situation where the president encourages chants of “[lock her up](https://newrepublic.com/minutes/152046/trump-incites-lock-up-chant-women-make-sexual-harassment-accusations).” It would have been in place in a world where the [Holder Memo](https://www.justice.gov/sites/default/files/oip/legacy/2014/07/23/holder-memo-charging-sentencing.pdf) instructed assistant United States attorneys to seek only fair and appropriate sentences, and not our current situation where the [Sessions Memo](https://www.justice.gov/opa/press-release/file/965896/download) requires them to seek the harshest possible punishment.

Instead of a time when the federal government showed a real interest in holding law enforcement accountable, we are now at a moment when all accountability mechanisms are being torn down. From removing accountability over local law enforcement’s [use of militarized equipment](https://www.nytimes.com/2017/08/28/us/politics/trump-police-military-surplus-equipment.html) to promoting [private prisons](https://www.cnn.com/2017/08/18/politics/private-prison-department-of-justice/index.html) to the end of [clemency](http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2017/01/20/obama-used-more-clemency-power/) as we know it, the current administration is ignoring facts and finding ways to be even harsher to people in the criminal justice system.

The reforms of the Obama administration helped lead to some of the [lowest crime rates](http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2018/01/30/5-facts-about-crime-in-the-u-s/) that this country had seen in decades. And the facts show that the current administration’s reforms are not making law enforcement officers any [safer](https://www.odmp.org/search/year?year=2018). If one looks at the current state of the criminal justice system, one will see how silly and hyperbolic it is to claim that signing the First Step Act could come close to making the current president the “[uniter in chief](https://www.essence.com/news/van-jones-donald-trump-uniter-in-chief/)” on criminal justice.

I realize my position puts me at odds with many of my friends on both the left and the right in the criminal justice reform movement. They argue that many of these reforms would improve opportunities for a few thousand people and that is enough. But even supporters recognize that the sentencing reforms in the First Step Act may affect only a couple thousand of the 181,000 people currently in federal custody. I see the short-term gains as much smaller and the long-term losses as much greater.

First, most of the gains in this law are dependent on people applying for retroactive treatment under the Fair Sentencing Act, which reduced the racially charged sentencing disparity between crack and powder cocaine. While [a couple thousand](https://www.ussc.gov/sites/default/files/pdf/research-and-publications/prison-and-sentencing-impact-assessments/August_2018_Impact_Analysis_for_CBO.pdf) individuals can apply, there is no guarantee that any significant number of people will get meaningfully shorter sentences. Virtually all of the reforms in the First Step Act require that we blindly trust this administration’s law-and-order [prosecutors](https://www.wsj.com/articles/new-slate-of-u-s-attorneys-aids-sessions-law-and-order-push-1531659618), Bureau of Prisons employees, [judges](https://slate.com/news-and-politics/2017/09/neil-gorsuch-showed-his-commitment-to-racial-equality-is-as-strong-as-trumps.html), and even appointees to the [Sentencing Commission](https://www.themarshallproject.org/records/5463-william-otis) to make an effort to reduce sentences and improve conditions.

Second, a number of the talking points ― no shackles for pregnant inmates and no solitary for juveniles ― similarly affect a relatively small number of inmates and the attorney general could have already eliminated these poor policy decisions without any legislation, just as the [Obama administration had done](http://time.com/4193607/justice-prison-solitary-confinement-juvenile-barack-obama/). If the current administration really cared about re-entry, it could show this by not [senselessly destroying](https://www.huffpost.com/entry/bureau-of-prisons-education-reform_n_591f2289e4b094cdba53c398) the re-entry efforts of the prior administration.

Third, once the First Step Act is passed, there are not going to be any additional steps on the federal level anytime soon. The legislators who barely support criminal justice reform are not going to feel any need to address it again once they can point to their vote in favor of the First Step Act.

The 2015 SRCA, which already cleared the Senate Judiciary Committee by a [15-5 vote](https://www.grassley.senate.gov/news/news-releases/judiciary-committee-clears-sentencing-reform-and-corrections-act) last Congress and was estimated by the Congressional Budget Office to save [more than $700 million](https://www.cbo.gov/publication/51588) over 10 years, should be the starting point for discussions on any criminal justice reform legislation. With Democratic leadership in the House coming soon, something even more ambitious should be our target. If the Senate refuses to move on it, then let the many new governors [continue to do great things](https://www.vera.org/state-of-justice-reform/2017/the-state-of-sentencing-decriminalization) on criminal justice reform, which is going to positively affect more people anyway, and let criminal justice reform be a federal campaign issue in 2020.

The desperate passage of the First Step Act would be a Pyrrhic victory that would leave the vast majority of those currently in the system and most of those who will be touched by the criminal justice system in the future exactly where they are: at the mercy of an administration that has no real interest in reform.  
  
*Roy L. Austin Jr. is a former deputy assistant to the president for urban affairs, justice & opportunity, a former deputy assistant attorney general in the Department of Justice, and a former federal prosecutor.*

*New York Daily News*

**Why the U.S. was doomed in Afghanistan from the start: We’re at war with our own instincts**

By Frederick D. Barton

Aug. 20, 2021 at 3:30 pm

Inherent contradictions doomed America’s Afghanistan efforts. Fundamental in nature and unresolved for 20 years, internal and structural disagreements made success impossible. As we reflect, it is now important to learn the correct lessons instead of continuing the misspent dialogue of the past two decades.

The enormity of the task we undertook in Afghanistan is great, but we made it impossible with our approach. Here is a short list of significant contradictions:

**We barely knew the place and arrived with full force in a rush.** Reflecting on this mad dash, former commanding officer Gen. Stanley McChrystal spoke of “our spasmodic response” and said, “we should have done nothing initially.” My simple rule is: If you do not know 100 local people, do not send U.S. soldiers. That would have kept us out of Vietnam, Iraq and Afghanistan.

**We started with dueling missions**. We wanted to both defeat terrorists and to build a modern, democratic government and system. The first led us to coalitions with unsavory warlords who then actively undermined the rule of law. In a conversation with Anwar Ahady, former head of Afghanistan’s central bank, he described the systemic result saying, “On any given day, a warlord can walk into one of our regional banks and make a withdrawal, even though he never made a deposit.”

**A corrupt central government never built loyalty in its troops**. For too long, key officials had their loved ones in Bethesda and London, bank accounts in other safe havens and maintained a way out of their country. As the Afghan military took high casualties, it was unclear that their political leadership could be trusted to make the same sacrifices. Who would fight for them?

**U.S. dominance, from fighting to the peace talks, undercut local ownership**. If paternalism is the operative model, how do you build independence? When I took over the State Department’s Bureau of Conflict and Stabilization Operations in late 2011, we had a major presence in Afghanistan. More than 125 people had served there. I asked if we had any influence on events or had made a difference. My team said no. I then asked if it would matter if we had 500, 1,250 or 12,500 people? The answer was a resounding no. Even at that time, there were policymakers who wanted to Americanize more.

**In a military-dominated intervention, insecurity remained the primary hurdle**. In an early 2007 report by the Center for Strategic and International Studies, we wrote about the need for a “rapid-response protective umbrella” that would include a doubling or tripling of U.S. helicopters from 35 to 70 or 100. That did not happen. We wondered about the sincerity of our commitment. When I worked on the USAID transition in 2008, I heard of hundreds of foreign contractors, working for us, who were killed by the Taliban in road-building and other infrastructure projects. That was an unconscionable level of civilian sacrifice.

**Despite billions of dollars spent, there were few public measures of progress**. The U.S. carpet-bombed both Iraq and Afghanistan with money, and yet our primary system of accounting was how many projects were completed. How valuable is a new courthouse without judges or a system of justice? When the Taliban’s ruthless cutting off the hands of a robber was more popular than our non-existing system, shouldn’t we have taken note?

**A centralized government did not fit Afghanistan’s decentralized way.** Our hand-picked leaders did not have the preparation or the opening to run a national government. Successes, like the National Solidarity Program, which provided direct aid to localities, were underfunded as we built up ministries in Kabul. Mandated elections became our democratic response, despite disputes and decreasing participation. With close to 40 million people, only 1.8 million voted in 2019. Building up local responsibility should have been the self-rule choice. U.S. preferences and oversight further confused Afghan roles.

None of this is comforting, but it matters. The U.S. benefits from a more peaceful world, and there are ways to be a positive force. We will only succeed if we know the place and the people and if they lead the way. There needs to be an integrated strategy that focuses on a few priorities, as well as a system of measuring progress and changing directions. It’s also necessary to have non-stop communication with all publics, within the country, the U.S., and globally.

With those building blocks, what might we do now?

Top of Form

Bottom of Form

Our expectations of the Taliban should be low, but we need to understand their form of deal-making — from buying off farmers with opium taxes to bribing local Afghan military commanders and officials. We must insist on local voices being respected and heard. We must make clear that the international community — from economic aid to social ridicule to counter-terror strikes — will punish support for terrorism and the suppression of women and other violations of human rights. The prior Taliban rule was a joke in Afghanistan, and they may be aware of the need for some level of acceptance.

We must focus on the refugee crisis, establish safe corridors and means of departure, work with the neighboring countries who will end up with the vast numbers, and ease acceptance and prepare places in the west. We should steer negotiations with the Taliban to this issue.

We must identify two or three “sincerity tests” to measure progress. Freedom of movement for those who seek to leave is an international standard to enforce.

We must show that the U.S. is capable of learning and eager to be a constructive player. This starts with our accepting that we made grievous mistakes and do not seek to repeat them.

President Biden’s withdrawal from Afghanistan was overdue and appropriate. Inherent contradictions meant that it would be painful. Now there is a chance to build a future of coherent peacebuilding.

*Barton, lecturer and co-director of Princeton’s Scholars in the Nation’s Service Initiative, is author of “Peace Works – America’s Unifying Role in a Turbulent World.”*

*Wall Street Journal*

**The Next Medicaid Blowout**

Democrats plan a federal program to cover childless adults. Insurers will win big but health won’t.

By Brian Blase

Sept. 21, 2021 6:34 pm ET

Among the many parts of the $3.5 trillion bill Democrats are moving through Congress is a federal Medicaid program to cover mainly childless adults. Medicaid now covers 1 in 4 Americans, but Congress may soon lock even more into an expensive program with inadequate access to doctors and poor health outcomes.

Democrats are frustrated that 12 states haven’t accepted the Affordable Care Act’s cash enticements to cover able-bodied childless adults in Medicaid. Progressives have tried to go around state legislators by passing Medicaid expansion through ballot initiatives, including in Missouri. Among the holdouts are Texas and Florida, where legislators have considered and rejected Medicaid expansion.

Democrats now think they have a solution: The reconciliation bill would give the health and human services secretary the ability to run a federal Medicaid expansion over state objections, starting in 2025. Before then, the feds would send subsidies directly to health insurers to cover this population in Affordable Care Act exchange plans. The new federal Medicaid program would require the secretary to contract with at least two insurers to administer the program.

This is a huge transfer of taxpayer dollars to the health insurers Democrats claim to dislike. Medicaid expansion has already fueled insurer profits: [A 2018 White House Council of Economic Advisers report](https://trumpwhitehouse.archives.gov/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/The-Profitability-of-Health-Insurance-Companies.pdf) showed insurer stock doubling the growth of the S&P 500 from 2014 through 2018. Improper Medicaid payments have grown to $100 billion annually.

The federal government will ostensibly pay 100% of the costs of the new federal Medicaid program. Yet states that have accepted Medicaid expansion have to pay 10% of the cost, which means higher taxes or less spending on education or infrastructure. Although Congress will include a provision requiring states to maintain their expansions, it’s likely unenforceable. Some states will consider dropping their expansions and try to switch to the new model, unloading more costs onto federal taxpayers.

But more important, this won’t be good health coverage for the Americans who rely on it. Low Medicaid payment rates—about half of what private insurers pay for primary-care services—discourage doctors from participating. [A 2019 government report](https://www.macpac.gov/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/Physician-Acceptance-of-New-Medicaid-Patients.pdf) found that only 70% of providers accept new Medicaid patients, versus 90% for private coverage. The disparity is more pronounced for family-practice doctors and psychiatrists.

Perhaps most notably, obstetrician-gynecologists are 20% less likely to accept Medicaid in expansion states than in non-expansion states. This statistic is especially worrisome since Medicaid pays for more than 40% of all U.S. births.

Medicaid expansion increases demand for healthcare but does nothing to increase the number of doctors or nurses who treat patients. Expansion has led to a surge in unnecessary [emergency-room use](https://www.wsj.com/articles/SB10001424052702303640604579296580732297854?mod=article_inline), delays in care from longer appointment wait times, and longer waits for ambulances.

In California, emergency room visits by Medicaid recipients surged 75% from 2012 to 2016, according to a study from a state government health-planning office. States that expanded Medicaid also suffered larger increases in opioid deaths from 2013 to 2015, according to data compiled by HHS.

[A gold-standard study](https://www.wsj.com/articles/SB10001424127887323628004578457453194365088?mod=article_inline) on Medicaid’s health outcomes came out of Oregon. It randomly assigned Medicaid enrollment to presumably lucky winners. But the winners didn’t experience a statistically significant improvement on any measure of physical health assessed.

Massachusetts Institute of Technology economist Amy Finkelstein has noted that 60% of spending to expand Medicaid to new recipients “ends up paying for care that the nominally uninsured already receive, courtesy of taxpayer dollars and hospital resources.”

Thus, it should not be surprising that a study conducted by Ms. Finkelstein and others found that Medicaid recipients value the program at only between 20 to 40 cents on the dollar. With a per enrollee Medicaid expansion cost of about $7,000, at least half of enrollees would prefer $2,800 in cash to $7,000 of government spending through Medicaid on their behalf.

There are better ways to help people in need. Medicaid should be targeted to help vulnerable patients, such as low-income pregnant women, children and those with disabilities. Other low-income individuals could be allowed to opt out and use the subsidies to buy the care or coverage of their choice.

This would be far better than lavishing insurers with hundreds of billions of dollars of subsidies on a new federal program that increases Washington’s dominance over the American healthcare system.

*Mr. Blase, who served as a special assistant to President Trump at the National Economic Council, is president of Paragon Health Institute.*

*Washington Post*

**It’s a real possibility that our next 9/11 could arrive from within**

By Jason M. Blazakis

September 6, 2021 at 8:00 a.m. EDT

For many Americans, the first searing image of terrorism was not of jets plunging into Manhattan skyscrapers or a smoldering Pentagon but of a heroic firefighter cradling [a soot-covered, lifeless infant](https://www.today.com/health/oklahoma-city-firefighter-holding-baby-iconic-photo-retires-t109746) in Oklahoma City.

Two White men — both Americans — had [blown up](https://www.fbi.gov/history/famous-cases/oklahoma-city-bombing) a federal office building.

Domestic terrorism — fueled by government-hating extremists — awakened the nation in April 1995. And as the United States prepares to commemorate the 20th anniversary of the Sept. 11 attacks, we must confront the real possibility that our next 9/11 could arrive from within. We must resist the urge to see the horrific [suicide attacks](https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2021/08/26/afghanistan-kabul-taliban-live-updates/?itid=lk_inline_manual_6) in Afghanistan in August — and the apparent reemergence of the Islamic State and al-Qaeda — as a reason to return to dated strategies and tactics.

As someone who has worked on national security issues in the U.S. government for more than a decade, I’ve concluded that the U.S. “war on terror” launched in the wake of 9/11 has left us unprepared for the domestic threat that grows by the day. Complicating matters further is that in today’s politically charged environment, the Biden administration will find it difficult to pivot toward the domestic threat. But we must move beyond the narrow obsession with international terror and mitigate the extremist threat at home. Here are five ways to do so:

**Fund and expand FBI capabilities**: Until recently, the vast majority of FBI resources were devoted to tracking individuals tied to groups such as al-Qaeda and the Islamic State. While [this is changing](https://www.fbi.gov/news/testimony/global-terrorism-threats-to-the-homeland-103019), the FBI’s resources are not yet aligned to the rising tide of domestic right-wing extremism. In 2019 congressional [testimony](https://www.congress.gov/event/116th-congress/house-event/LC64275/text?s=1&r=3), Michael McGarrity, then assistant director of the FBI’s counterterrorism division, said 20 percent of the bureau’s counterterrorism agents worked on domestic terrorism, with the rest devoted to international terrorism — even though, he noted, domestic terrorists carried out more attacks and killed more Americans than international terrorists. More agents devoted to investigating domestic extremists would be an important first step in understanding, and combating, the threat before us.

**Update the domestic terrorism statute**: Not one Jan. 6 insurrectionist has been charged with terrorism, and even white supremacist [Dylann Roof’s murder](https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/charleston-church-shooter-i-would-like-to-make-it-crystal-clear-i-do-not-regret-what-i-did/2017/01/04/05b0061e-d1da-11e6-a783-cd3fa950f2fd_story.html?itid=lk_inline_manual_11) of nine Black parishioners in Charleston, S.C., in 2015 didn’t merit the charge in the view of prosecutors. Even the [laws enacted](https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/PLAW-104publ132/html/PLAW-104publ132.htm) after the Oklahoma City bombing have been used to target international terrorism, but not neo-Nazi groups or other domestic threats. A stronger terrorism statute would in many cases pave the way for longer prison sentences and provide clearer pathways to prosecution of accomplices — without violating constitutional concerns.

**Treat the far-right challenge as a**[**transnational issue**](https://thesoufancenter.org/research/white-supremacy-extremism-the-transnational-rise-of-the-violent-white-supremacist-movement/). The U.S. intelligence community should adjust its collection priorities to better measure the overseas far-right threat posed by neo-Nazis and like-minded groups. After the 9/11 attacks, our intelligence agencies focused on groups such as al-Qaeda, the Islamic State and their affiliates. We must continue to do so, but also augment U.S. foreign intelligence capabilities against international neo-Nazis and other extremist groups that communicate with, share propaganda with and sometimes financially support far-right groups here at home.

**Take the fight to social platforms**: From fundraising to operational planning to propaganda, social media sites are the unseen back offices of modern terrorism. Social media companies are big on self-policing, implementing their own usage policies and removing content that violates their standards, but their efforts are no match to the sophisticated and nimble work of bad actors. The U.S. government could sanction overseas far-right groups — essentially name them as terrorist entities — as an impetus for domestic social media platforms to shut down these groups’ access. This approach would aim to keep international terror groups from metastasizing in the United States.

**Enlist nongovernment help**. Finally, the U.S. government needs to encourage and fund private-sector and nonprofit programs that can help stunt extremism, because federal authorities are not viewed as honest brokers in this fight. We must enlist nongovernment groups that have experience at uncoupling individuals from extremism and that work side by side with local leaders to identify at-risk populations and individuals. This effort should be part of the U.S. long game, and one devised to ensure that our liberties, human rights and privacy are not trampled upon in the name of fighting domestic terrorism. An aggressive and intrusive use of federal authority is a real threat, too.

America’s radical right extremists and Afghanistan’s Taliban might seem like polar opposites, but their approach to financing, recruiting, propagandizing and fighting are surprisingly similar. The connective tissue is a desire to crush the system, whether the U.S. government or the general world order. By and large, America’s domestic threats have had free rein. But even as we mourn the loss of life last month in Afghanistan, the most insidious threats are often the ones closest to home.

*Jason M. Blazakis is a professor of practice at the Middlebury Institute of International Studies and was director of the State Department’s Counterterrorism Finance and Designations Office in the Bureau of Counterterrorism from 2008 to 2018.*

*The Monkey Cage* (an independent site for political science commentary hosted bythe *Washington Post*)

**Germany’s far-right party lost seats in last week’s election. Here’s why.**

Research suggests centrist parties adopted strategies to counter the right

By Rafaela Dancygier

10/5/21 at 5:00 a.m. EDT

The major headlines coming out of [Germany’s recent federal election](https://www.washingtonpost.com/elections/election-results/world/germany-election-results/?itid=lk_inline_manual_2) were about the Social Democrats’ win and the stunning [defeat](https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/europe/germany-election-merkel-chancellor/2021/09/26/aa711c8a-1b16-11ec-bea8-308ea134594f_story.html?itid=lk_inline_manual_2) of the Christian Democrats after Angela Merkel’s 16-year leadership run.

But there’s another major story. Many feared that Germany might shift to the right, following countries like Austria or Switzerland, where xenophobic parties have long been powerful. Instead, Germany’s far-right, anti-immigrant Alternative für Deutschland (AfD) lost 11 seats, receiving about 10 percent of the vote.

Why did the AfD lose votes in this election? In an age where right-wing populists appeal to many voters, the German election results suggest that centrist parties are finding ways to contain the far right.

**Why the AfD lost ground**

[In 2017](https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/europe/without-a-populist-tide-in-germany-far-right-afd-could-still-gain-critical-foothold/2017/09/02/69bfd6ca-8cfb-11e7-9c53-6a169beb0953_story.html?itid=lk_inline_manual_8), following highly politicized [refugee inflows](https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2017/09/afd-germany-right-wing-merkel-petry/541089/) entering Europe and Germany, the AfD won 12.6 percent of the vote and 94 seats in the Bundestag, Germany’s federal parliament. For the first time since World War II, a far-right party had made it into the Bundestag.

[Numerous polls](https://www.infratest-dimap.de/umfragen-analysen/bundesweit/sonntagsfrage/) since then showed the AfD gaining supporters, even outperforming the Social Democrats at times. But by early 2021, AfD support had ebbed, in part because of moves by Germany’s centrist parties. Instead of engaging in debates about immigration, centrist candidates tried to strike a moderate or even welcoming tone on immigration. And rather than make immigration a central theme in the election, they focused on other issues that German voters [care about](https://www.tagesschau.de/inland/btw21/bundestagswahl-analyse-101.html), including economic security and climate change.

When centrist parties face far-right challengers, research suggests that they have [three strategic options](https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/american-political-science-review/article/competition-between-unequals-the-role-of-mainstream-party-strategy-in-niche-party-success/74958063576E765C21430A8CB57DCC1B): They can move to the right and co-opt far-right positions; they can stand their ground and denounce the far right’s positions; or they can shift the agenda and downplay issues on which the far right thrives — typically issues such as immigration, multiculturalism or crime.

In recent years, German parties have tried out all of these approaches — and, for the most part, they’ve found that co-optation doesn’t work. For example, Markus Söder, head of the Christian Social Union and Bavarian prime minister, learned this lesson the hard way when his party experienced historic losses in the 2018 Bavarian elections. To recapture AfD voters, Söder had styled himself as an immigration hard-liner. After this strategy backfired, he embraced more moderate positions, acknowledging that the co-optation strategy led to a “political near-death experience.”

**Co-opting far-right themes may cost votes**

Academic research confirms Söder’s assessment. [In our recent paper](https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/0010414021997166), Winston Chou, [Naoki Egami](https://naokiegami.com/), [Amaney Jamal](https://scholar.princeton.edu/amaney-jamal/home) and [I](https://scholar.princeton.edu/rdancygi/home) studied whether and how mainstream parties could win back AfD voters. We interviewed German voters for 15 months in 2016-2017 in four nationally representative surveys of about 3,000 respondents each.

We found that voters who supported the AfD were much less likely than other voters to switch to competing parties. But using an experimental approach, we also found that this loyalty could be broken. When we presented AfD voters with hypothetical centrist party candidates that favored severe immigration restrictions, up to half of the AfD’s electorate could be persuaded to vote for such candidates.

But our experimental evidence also revealed that adopting xenophobic slogans would probably lead to centrist parties losing far more of their own supporters than gaining far-right supporters. Centrist voters are turned off by candidates who impose immigration bans and espouse anti-immigrant rhetoric. And in systems where voters can choose among multiple viable parties, they are likely to abandon those that flirt with the far right.

It appears that most German politicians had come to a similar conclusion this year. To be sure, there was also plenty of immigration-specific rhetoric, including comments by the CDU’s unsuccessful chancellor candidate, Armin Laschet, that [“2015 can’t happen again”](https://www.n-tv.de/politik/Das-Jahr-2015-wiederholt-sich-nicht-article22751219.html) — a reference to the million or so refugees entering Germany that year. But analysts also pointed out that [candidates](https://www.tagesspiegel.de/politik/die-fehler-von-2015-duerfen-sich-nicht-wiederholen-gerechtigkeit-fuer-armin-laschet/27529162.html) often [remained vague](https://www.diepresse.com/6022699/2015-darf-sich-nicht-wiederholen-warum-eigentlich-nicht) about references to 2015.

Centrist party candidates who did run on far-right slogans this year tended to flounder. One prominent [example](https://www.faz.net/aktuell/politik/bundestagswahl/bundestagswahl-hans-georg-maassen-verliert-direktmandat-17556581.html) is the CDU’s [Hans-Georg Maaßen](https://www.tagesspiegel.de/politik/ex-verfassungschef-kommt-nicht-in-den-bundestag-maassen-verliert-seinen-wahlkreis-an-den-spd-kandidaten/27650234.html). A former head of Germany’s intelligence agency, Maaßen campaigned on a nationalist, anti-immigrant message in the eastern state of Thuringia. He came in a distant third in a race the SPD candidate won (the AfD came in second). Laschet never openly distanced himself from Maaßen, which could have cost the CDU some votes.

**The center zeroed in on economic issues**

The election results also showed that talking about issues voters care deeply about — but on which the far right is weak — probably contributed to the strong showing of centrist parties. In our 2016-2017 survey, a sizable share of voters said that issues such as economic inequality and pensions decided their vote. We also found that many of these voters, including AfD supporters, rated the AfD’s competence on these issues poorly. And when we presented voters with hypothetical candidates who varied in their competence and positions on economic issues, we found that candidates that highlighted pensions or increased taxes were quite popular.

These survey findings help explain the Social Democrats’ victory. In exit polls, voters ranked [these issues as most important](https://www.tagesschau.de/wahl/archiv/2021-09-26-BT-DE/umfrage-wahlentscheidend.shtml): Economic and social security (the top issue for 28 percent of voters), the economy/employment (22 percent) and the environment/climate change (22 percent). The SPD campaign’s focus on economic issues — and combination of a centrist chancellor candidate and a left-of-center economic platform — apparently paid off. [Voters who switched](https://www.tagesschau.de/wahl/archiv/2021-09-26-BT-DE/umfrage-spd.shtml) to the SPD — many of them former CDU voters — cited economic and social security as their most important issue.

At the same time, the SPD avoided [the trap set by the AfD](http://library.fes.de/pdf-files/a-p-b/18074.pdf) — it did not buy into the idea that embracing ethnic diversity is a vote loser. Instead the SPD ran a record number of candidates with immigrant backgrounds, positioning itself as an [open and cosmopolitan party](https://press.princeton.edu/books/hardcover/9780691172590/dilemmas-of-inclusion) that can competently address issues.

Put simply, our research and the 2021 German election results suggest that centrism pays off. Despite [AfD rhetoric](https://www.dw.com/en/does-the-anti-immigrant-alternative-for-germany-afd-party-have-any-alternatives-for-the-country/a-49456134) and [media coverage](https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/23808985.2018.1497452) to the contrary, most voters in Germany — and perhaps elsewhere — don’t find harsh anti-immigrant positions appealing. Instead, a centrist stance on immigration combined with center-left economics turned out to be a winning strategy.

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*The Guardian*

**We need to get real about carbon offsets in Australia – they won’t stop climate change**

Saving a few trees is no substitute for real emissions reductions, except if you’re Scott Morrison

By Richard Denniss

Tue 5 Oct 2021 23.44 EDT

Emissions offsets are to climate action what ivermectin is to medical treatment. Both have their own small uses under the right circumstances, but neither is useful when you are trying to solve a global problem.

Just as ivermectin is a good way to treat scabies and a bad way to prevent Covid, “carbon offsets” can play a small role in avoiding dangerous climate change.

But make no mistake – not chopping down a few trees won’t protect us from the emissions that come with opening enormous new gas wells and coalmines.

Australia is the third largest exporter of fossil fuels in the world, coming in behind Saudi Arabia and Russia. We are the world’s largest exporter of liquefied natural gas and the second largest exporter of coal.

And we aren’t transitioning away from fossil fuels, we are transitioning towards them, with plans to open enormous new gas basins and dozens of new coalmines.

Encouraging people to chop down fewer trees is a good idea, but it’s no substitute for actual emissions reductions. Except, of course, if you are Scott Morrison.

The Coalition government is stuck on the horns of a dilemma of its own making. Tony Abbott made protecting the fossil fuel industry a “core value” of the Coalition, and it has helped win over some Labor voters in regional Australia.

But the love of gas and coal is starting to cost them a lot of votes in the leafy Liberal seats that they have always taken for granted. They don’t want to lose their regional vote to One Nation or Clive Palmer but they also don’t want to lose their inner-city vote to independents or the Greens.

Luckily for the Coalition, but not the climate, Morrison is the master of promising everything to everyone. And luckily for Morrison, carbon offsets give him an opportunity to walk both sides of a very wide street.

Put simply, carbon offsets mean he can both promise “net zero” emissions to city voters, and new subsidies to help expand fossil fuel exports out in the regions.

Just as an individual’s home office expenses can be “offset” against their salary to determine their “net income” for tax purposes, countries and companies can use “avoided” emissions to offset their actual emissions from burning fossil fuels to determine their “net emissions”. Avoided emissions are those emissions that were expected to happen but, thanks to government policy, did not eventuate.

Those serious about climate change try to reduce their actual emissions as fast as they can, and buy carbon offsets to make up the remainder. But in Morrison’s Australia, where actual emissions from burning fossil fuels are rising not falling, the plan seems to be to keep polluting and rely on offsets to meet our emission reduction targets.

It’s not hard to generate lots of offsets. The Australian Tax Office requires receipts to prove you actually spent money on your home office. But the government’s Clean Energy Regulator will settle for a promise that you really were going to generate a humongous amount of emissions and then when you merely produce a very large amount instead it gives you “offset credits”. It’s like promising you were going to smash a lot of windows and then getting praise for only breaking a few.

Take “avoided deforestation” for example. [Recent research](https://australiainstitute.org.au/report/questionable-integrity-non-additionality-in-the-emissions-reduction-funds-avoided-deforestation-method/) by the Australia Institute and the Australian Conservation Foundation argues that millions of tonnes of avoided deforestation offsets have been generated in New South Wales because the regulator assumed landholders were going to clear enormous amounts of land that they weren’t actually likely to clear. Nothing has really been “avoided” and therefore no emissions were “reduced”. But that isn’t stopping the government claiming they have.

The latest offsets plan involves carbon capture and storage. When oil and methane (which the industry prefers you to call “natural gas”) are extracted from the ground, lots of methane and C02 leaks out. Sometimes the methane is captured and burned, but much of the methane and all of the CO2 usually escapes.

But now the energy and emissions reduction minister Angus Taylor is proposing to pay the oil and gas industry for capturing some of the C02 that leaks out when they are extracting their fossil fuels which, when burned, will actually cause more climate change.

What this means is that if we expand the oil and gas industry we can increase the number of these “offsets” produced, making it then possible for the government to simultaneously support the fossil fuel industry while assuring voters it’s doing something about climate change. It’s a very Morrison solution to a very real problem.

Unfortunately, as the politicians promoting ivermectin as a solution to Covid are now finding out, relying on fake solutions to very real problems can be even more dangerous than denying those problems exist in the first place.

*Richard Denniss is the chief economist at the independent thinktank the Australia Institute*

*The New York Times*

**Dear Candidates: Here Is What Black People Want**

We long for the same things as everyone else, and yet few campaigns treat us as if our experiences matter.

By Alicia Garza

May 28, 2019

Top of Form

Bottom of Form

During election season, I always cringe when I see candidates eating fried chicken next to a bottle of hot sauce in Harlem or taking staged photos with black leaders. These shallow symbolic gestures are not a substitute for meaningful engagement with black voters. And candidates should know that we see right through them.

Candidates and their campaigns are comfortable talking at black people, but few want to talk to us. This limits our ability to influence their decisions and policies. And it’s a bad strategy at a time when black people, black women in particular, form the base of the Democratic Party, are its most loyal voters and mobilize other people to go to the polls.

That’s why, in 2018, I started [the Black Census Project](https://blackfutureslab.org/black-census-project/), the results of which we are releasing on Tuesday. More than 31,000 black people from all 50 states participated in what we believe is the largest independent survey of black people ever conducted in the United States.

My organization and our partners trained more than 100 black organizers and worked with some 30 grass-roots organizations. We invested more than half a million dollars so that they could reach black people, who are often sidelined in traditional surveys and mainstream politics.

We set out to prove that black people are not a monolith — we are diverse and have a range of experiences. We talked with black people who live in cities and in rural areas; black people who were born in the United States and who migrated here; black people who identify as lesbian, gay and bisexual; black people who are transgender and gender-nonconforming; black people who are liberal and conservative; and black people who are currently and formerly incarcerated.

We predicted that there would be different responses among black people of various ages, locations and family structures, and there were. Not everyone is affected the same way by the issues we all face. The need for adequate health care, for example, takes on greater urgency among black people in Alabama, where Republican lawmakers are blocking Medicaid expansion.

But what surprised us the most was how few candidates treat us as if our differences and experiences matter. Here is what we found:

* The most common response among people who were politically engaged was that no politician or pollster has ever asked them what their lives were like. Fifty-two percent of respondents said that politicians do not care about black people, and one in three said they care only a little.
* Yet this doesn’t stifle our participation in politics. Nearly three in four respondents said they voted in the 2016 presidential election, and 40 percent reported helping to register voters, giving people a ride to the polls, donating money to a candidate or handing out campaign materials. Six in 10 women surveyed reported being electorally engaged. These responses debunk the myth that black communities don’t show up to vote — we do and we bring other people with us.
* Black communities, particularly black women, will be instrumental in deciding the next president. Nearly 60 percent of respondents were women, and nearly half lived in the South.
* We want the things that everybody deserves. Ninety percent of respondents, for example, say that it is a major problem that their wages are too low to support a family, and that figure jumps to 97 percent among those who are electorally engaged.

The most important issues for respondents were also the most important issues facing the rest of the country — low wages, lack of quality health care, substandard housing, rising college costs and different sets of rules for the wealthy and the poor. Of course, a majority of Americans face these difficulties. But black communities experience them more acutely.

For every dollar white men earn, [black women, for example, earn 65 cents,](https://iwpr.org/publications/gender-wage-gap-2018/)whereas white women earn 82 cents. Black families make up a large portion of those who use public housing assistance programs, which are underfunded and lacking in meaningful oversight. And then the average cost of attending a public college with in-state tuition is roughly $14,000 a year — that’s out of reach for so many black families, whose [median household income](https://www.census.gov/content/dam/Census/library/visualizations/2018/demo/p60-263/figure1.pdf) is $40,000 and whose median wealth is only $16,000.

To solve these challenges, respondents propose raising the minimum wage to $15 an hour, making college affordable for anyone who wants to attend and requiring the government to provide health care and adequate housing for everyone. A vast majority of them want to see the wealthy and corporations pay their fair share of taxes.

These results may not surprise anyone who is paying attention. But what is surprising is how few candidates address the issues that affect black communities or meaningfully court them.

Consider that of the first $200 million spent by left-leaning independent groups in the 2016 presidential campaign, none was aimed at mobilizing black voters. In California, where I live, the Democratic Party [reportedly raised $30 million](http://sacobserver.com/2019/04/the-california-democratic-party-needs-to-share-power-with-black-women/) in the last election cycle but spent only about $50,000 on black voter engagement.

Instead time, money and effort are expended to identify and cater to moderate white voters who are already fickle about politicians and political parties. This has long been the Democratic establishment’s strategy, but they doubled down on it after the 2016 election when analysts proclaimed that the left’s undue focus on “identity politics” sent moderate white voters to the Republican side.

Yet white voters are declining in numbers and advancing in age, while communities of color get bigger and younger. It is illogical to overextend resources to soothe the fears of an aging group, shrinking in size, that is fearful of demographic shifts and oblivious to the ways that policies that lift the boats sinking the fastest will lift theirs too. The Democrats’ approach hurts everyone — including the working- and middle-class white voters who want to see change. Nor is it a winning strategy for a party that claims to embrace progress.

Campaigns that fail to understand or try to remedy the ways structural racism damages black people’s lives are doomed. Without this analysis, their solutions will always miss the mark when it comes to black voters.

Some say that politics is quid pro quo, but that hasn’t been true for black voters. Our turnout in the 2018 midterms increased by [nearly 11 percentage](https://www.census.gov/library/stories/2019/04/behind-2018-united-states-midterm-election-turnout.html) points over 2014, and voters in the 2018 election chose from the most diverse pool of candidates ever.

The truth is, if candidates address the needs and concerns of black communities, it will result in dividends for all Americans.

The Black Census Project, with far fewer resources than any political party, most likely independently engaged with more black people than ever before. The candidates who want black people to vote for them ought to do the same.

*Alicia Garza (*[*@aliciagarza*](https://twitter.com/aliciagarza)*) is the founder and principal of the Black Futures Lab, the**director of strategy and partnerships at the National Domestic Workers Alliance, a founder of the Black Lives Matter Global Network, and a founder of Supermajority a clearinghouse for women’s activism.*

*Monterey News*

**Honor John Lewis by fighting for voting rights**

By Dolores Huerta

July 24, 2021 at 7:59 a.m. | UPDATED: July 24, 2021 at 8:00 a.m.

In the year since we lost the late Rep. John Lewis, I’ve had many opportunities to reflect on the great joy of knowing this wonderful man. John and I fought side by side during the civil rights struggles of the 1960s. Here in California, we were lead organizers for Robert Kennedy’s presidential campaign and shared the shock and grief of his assassination.

I knew and was inspired by John for decades; and like millions of Latinos, I knew that the 1965 Voting Rights Act that John nearly died for had given a voice to me and Black and brown voters across America.

And that’s why it is painful, one year after John’s death, to see the efforts to erode voting rights gaining ground in this country. In California – and especially in Monterey County – we owe it to John’s memory to push back against this new wave of voter suppression.

Monterey County has a unique and troubling place in voting rights history — and we’re not talking about the “good trouble” that John liked to encourage. It was one of only three California counties covered by the preclearance requirement of the original Voting Rights Act. The county had a history of discriminating against voters of color in the 1960s, so in 1971 it was prohibited from changing any voting procedures without federal approval – just like states in the Jim Crow South.

Throughout California, Latino activists played a leading role in advocating for voter rights and protections like preclearance. Cesar Chavez and I lobbied to get ballots in Spanish back in 1963. We successfully fought to eliminate the mandate that only an appointed official could register new voters, vastly simplifying the registration process. We made great strides and it shows: in greater representation of our community in elected offices, in the growing political power of a diverse electorate, and in a government that better serves its people.

All of this progress was built upon the firm foundation of federal voting rights laws. But two Supreme Court decisions have severely weakened the Voting Rights Act. And in too many states, far-right lawmakers are passing new laws to make it harder for Black and brown Americans to vote.

That means it is time for the federal government to once again step in to defend voting rights, by passing two critically important pieces of legislation: the For the People Act, whose voter protection provisions John authored and fought to enact for over a decade, and the bill named in his honor, the John Lewis Voting Rights Advancement Act.

These bills would prevent the kind of schemes and tricks that create barriers to voting for working people, people of color, people with disabilities, gender-nonconforming people, and more.  In Monterey County decades ago, a discriminatory literacy test was used. Today, jurisdictions are limiting voting hours and polling places, creating strict ID requirements, and conducting drastic purges of voter rolls to suppress the vote. The tools may be different, but the aim is the same.

The Voting Rights Act passed the House in the last Congress and both the House and Senate are holding hearings on it again.  But the For the People Act, which has already passed the House in this Congress, is bottled up in the Senate, where Republicans are fighting it by using an antique Senate procedure, the filibuster, to prevent it from even coming to a debate.

And now time is running out. More states are poised to deny voting rights. In Texas, Republicans are so determined to pass legislation curtailing voting rights that they called a special session, which Democratic lawmakers refused to attend. Unless the federal government acts, we can expect the attacks on voting to become more extreme – and all of us, no matter which state we live in, will suffer consequences if our national leadership is elected without the full and fair participation of all voters.

It was encouraging to hear President Biden speak out in favor of federal voting rights legislation this month. And now we must say to the president: we demand that you use all your influence and all your leadership for this cause. Make voting rights your top priority, and if the filibuster must go so voting rights can pass, say so clearly.

Fighting for voting rights now is the most important thing we can do to honor John Lewis on the anniversary of his passing. And John and I always knew that when we fight, we win.

*Dolores Huerta is a labor leader and civil rights activist who, with Cesar Chavez, is a co-founder of the National Farmworkers Association, which later merged with the Agricultural Workers Organizing Committee to become the United Farm Workers.*

*Louisville Courier-Journal*

**Biden wants to give the IRS the OK to snoop on your bank account. Don't let him**

By Mitch McConnell

5:24 a.m. ET Oct. 5, 2021

President Biden likes to claim his $3.5 trillion tax and spending spree will only hurt the wealthiest Americans, leaving everyone else unscathed. As [his plan](https://www.whitehouse.gov/american-families-plan/)comes into sharper focus, though, it’s become increasingly clear that Democrats intend to radically transform the lives of every worker, small business owner and family in America.

Their latest gambit is a plot to give the IRS sweeping new authority to snoop on Americans’ personal finances, providing federal agents with data on every transaction over $600. This unprecedented expansion of government surveillance should leave everyone alarmed and outraged.

Currently, the government has special authority to demand information on bank transfers in excess of $10,000. Theoretically, this allows them to sniff out things like money laundering, terrorism or tax fraud. But [President Biden’s new plan](https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2021/04/28/fact-sheet-the-american-families-plan/) creates a massive new dragnet that would sweep up all kinds of ordinary transactions that normal, law-abiding Americans make routinely.

In effect, Washington liberals want to let the IRS leaf through Americans’ checking accounts as if everyone were a potential criminal or terrorist until proven otherwise. The IRS already knows how much you earn. Now they want to know exactly how you spend it.

Is your monthly rent or mortgage payment more than $600? If Washington Democrats get their way, the government would get to know about it. Have your eye on a new rifle and equipment ahead of the next hunting season? The IRS would hear. Have a large balance sitting in your PayPal or Venmo account that you’d like to move to your checking account? Federal agents would see it.

Unsurprisingly, this extreme infringement on personal privacy has made Kentuckians upset.

In recent weeks, I have received more than 14,000 messages from constituents expressing their concern with this provision. They are uniformly dismayed that their private financial decisions could be subject to real-time IRS monitoring. Kentuckians are tired of being subjected to big government and overreaching bureaucrats.

If you believe you can trust the IRS to keep your personal information safe, think again. Just this year, an IRS leak exposed sensitive financial data from several Americans – information that was quickly weaponized by the political left. This is the same IRS that made targeting conservative organizations a matter of internal policy under the last Democratic administration. Americans simply can’t trust the federal government to hold their financial information in confidence.

This vast expansion of government surveillance is more than just a threat to your individual liberty and personal privacy. For community banks and credit unions, these new reporting requirements would be devastating.

Kentucky’s community financial institutions are firmly opposed to this unnecessary IRS data sweep. They have written letters telling me they would face “an unprecedented, complex, and expensive new burden” that would stretch their limited resources thin. They believe it is wholly unreasonable to force credit unions and community banks “to become the policing arm of the IRS.” I thoroughly agree.

So, let’s recap: Democrats want to pile loads of new red tape on small community bankers, hoover up an unprecedented amount of your personal financial data and put it in the trust of a notoriously partisan federal agency. This vast expansion of government surveillance isn’t just unnecessary; it’s downright dangerous.

I am proud to stand with the Kentuckians who object to President Biden’s radical transformation of American society. I’ve consistently fought against these kinds of liberal power grabs in the past, and I’ll make sure Republicans are united in doing so again.

We cannot treat every American like a potential criminal. We cannot regulate community banks out of existence. We cannot make everyone’s sensitive financial information free game for hackers and partisan leakers.

If this massive IRS data sweep worries you, just wait until you read what else the Democrats are trying to jam through Congress with their reckless tax and spending spree. As Senate Republican Leader, I will continue to lead my conference in objection to President Biden’s plan and ensure it does not receive any Republican support.

*Mitch McConnell, a Kentucky Republican, is the Senate Republican Leader.*

*Time* magazine

**For the Good of Both Countries, US Military Aid for Israel Must Be Conditional**

By Hadar Susskind

June 16, 2021

When I served as a combat soldier in the Israeli military, I carried an American-made M-16. I drove American jeeps and fired American missiles.

As a dual American-Israeli citizen who has spent years in both countries, my commitment to Israel did not end with my army service. From my home in the U.S. the past 20 years, I’ve been in the trenches of the Israeli-Palestinian peace movement for nearly all of my life. It is from this vantage point of caring deeply for both Israel and the U.S., and in my capacity as President and CEO of Americans for Peace Now, that I am calling on the U.S. government to condition its annual [3.8 billion dollars of military aid](https://www.bbc.com/news/57170576) to Israel. We are the first progressive Zionist organization to endorse conditioning aid, and we do not take this step lightly. But what has become abundantly clear, underscored by the horrifying images coming out of Gaza, [East Jerusalem](https://time.com/6047764/israeli-palestinian-violence/) and [inside Israel last month](https://time.com/6048913/israel-violence-peace/), is that continuing to give Israel military aid without conditions neither serves U.S. policy interests—nor, I would argue, does it serve Israel.

My military service gives me first-hand experience regarding Israel’s security concerns. And my values lead me to support human rights, dignity, equality and statehood for Palestinians. This is in perfect alignment with U.S. government policy—which was [reaffirmed by President Biden’s administration.](https://www.nytimes.com/2021/05/21/us/politics/biden-israel-diplomacy.html)These two principles were the guiding consideration for granting military aid to Israel: supporting its legitimate self-defense and encouraging it to take risks for peace, including territorial concessions, to bring about a viable Palestinian state.

Last month’s terrifying escalation of violence laid bare what has been abundantly clear for many years: the Israeli government has no intention of moving towards two states. It’s been [seven years since there’s been even a pretense of a peace process.](https://www.nytimes.com/2014/03/29/opinion/peace-process-on-life-support.html?searchResultPosition=9) A cabinet led by Naftali Bennett in the newly sworn-in Bennett-Lapid unity government offers no more promising indication that ending the occupation would be on the agenda, and just yesterday responded to the release of incendiary balloons with another round of missile strikes in Gaza.

We can’t control what the Israeli government does, but we can ensure that U.S. taxpayer money is used to uphold U.S. values and to achieve U.S. policy goals. Our 3.8 billion dollars of yearly aid supports Israel’s defensive military capabilities, as do I. But it also manifests as [American bombs killing hundreds of Palestinians in Gaza, including 67 children](https://www.nbcnews.com/think/opinion/israel-bombing-gaza-stop-hamas-rockets-shows-why-its-u-ncna1267381), and [soldiers wielding American M-16s as they displace families in the East Jerusalem neighborhoods of Sheikh Jarrah and Silwan.](https://www.nytimes.com/2021/05/07/world/middleeast/evictions-jerusalem-israeli-palestinian-conflict-protest.html) If the U.S. wants to nurture peace and support international law, we must explicitly ensure that our tax-payer dollars serve our foreign policy objectives, that they do not go towards human rights violations, and that there are specific consequences if they do. This puts Israel on equal footing with every other country who receives U.S. aid, [all of whom receive it conditionally](https://www.brookings.edu/policy2020/votervital/what-every-american-should-know-about-us-foreign-aid/).

Conditioning aid goes further than restricting aid, which does not address fungibility and carries no meaningful consequences for violations of human rights. Conditioning aid can go further than simply investigating the use of U.S. military equipment, which in theory is already illegal under [the Leahy law](https://www.state.gov/key-topics-bureau-of-democracy-human-rights-and-labor/human-rights/leahy-law-fact-sheet/). If Israel continues its policy of expelling Palestinians from their homes in [Sheikh Jarrah](https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-57243631), for example, the U.S. could cut some percentage of the aid. If new settlements are legalized or existing ones expanded—these international law violations would come with specific U.S. aid reductions.

It might confuse some that a pro-Israel organization is taking this position. For far too long, we have allowed right wing politicians both in Israel and the U.S. to define what it means to be pro-Israel. Elected leaders either gave lip service to a two-state solution (while supporting government actions that made that more difficult to achieve) or have been part of a growing chorus of voices who openly call for a one-state Greater Israel. An occupation without end, or an apartheid one-state is not good for Israel. Arguing for positions that will bring a lasting, sustainable peace is pro-Israel.

There is finally a shift in American politics around Israel, one that I would describe as seismic. Ten, five, even one year ago, it would have been inconceivable for sitting members of Congress to speak about conditioning aid to Israel. Aid to Israel was the third rail; it wasn’t even in the frame of discussion. Yet on May 14, eleven [members of Congress made previously unimaginable speeches on the house floor](https://www.nytimes.com/2021/05/15/us/politics/democrats-israel-palestinians.html); calling on Israel to halt atrocities in Gaza and affirming the humanity of Palestinians. Now is the time for congressional representatives to go beyond words and to coalesce these statements into policy. Lawmakers finally have the political space to stand up and proudly say, “I’m pro-Israel and I support conditioning aid, because it’s in the U.S’s interest, it’s in Israel’s interest, and it’s the right thing to do.”

I support aid to Israel, and I want to see it continue. But most importantly, I want a chance at a life of dignity for everyone who calls that region home. And for that to become reality, we must ensure that U.S. efforts—and U.S. funding—are used towards realizing a more hopeful future for both Israeli and Palestinian children.

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