

Ezra Klein's NY Times Op-ed Distorts the Truth About the American Jewish Community

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Ezra Klein's July 20th *New York Times* [column](#) paints Zohran Mamdani's primary victory in Queens as evidence of a community in disarray — an evocative but fundamentally misleading diagnosis. He frames Mamdani, a Democratic Socialist and supporter of the phrase “globalize the intifada,” as a kind of Rorschach test for American Jews. Where some see antisemitism, others see progressive politics. Klein reads this divergence as proof that American Jewish life has collapsed into incoherence, unable even to agree on the meaning of antisemitism.

But the truth is not merely more complex — it's more urgent. Mamdani's rise isn't just a matter of political disagreement or ideological diversity. It is a direct challenge to the foundational commitments of modern American Jewry.

In the heart of New York City — a place with the largest Jewish population outside Israel — Democratic voters elevated a candidate who has repeatedly refused to condemn calls for violence against Jews and who has embraced movements that explicitly reject Israel's right to exist.

For American Jews, this isn't a debate over tactics or nuance. It's an existential breach. And Klein, in his determination to frame the moment as a story of pluralism and Jewish self-reinvention, distorts the stakes. He leans almost exclusively on institutional liberal voices who reflect his own worldview, while ignoring the clear and present threat Mamdani's ideology poses — not only to Israel, but to Jews here in America. Worse, he misrepresents the facts on the ground and omits the voices of those most alarmed by the normalization of this rhetoric.

Mamdani is not just “controversial.” He has repeatedly aligned himself with anti-Zionist campaigns that veer into outright antisemitism. He has refused to distance himself from the slogan “globalize the intifada,” a call whose

historical and contemporary connotations include suicide bombings, mass shootings, and civilian targeting. His [supporters](#) have included open advocates of political violence.

Yet in Klein's telling, Mamdani becomes a symbol of generational change, while his most radical statements are hand-waved away or ignored altogether. This is not responsible analysis. It is narrative laundering.

In fact, Klein's entire account reads like an effort to gaslight concerned Jews into thinking their fears are overblown or reactionary. But those fears are grounded in reality — and in data.

According to the 2024 American Jewish Committee (AJC) [Survey of American Jewish Opinion](#) — based on interviews conducted March 12 to April 6, 2024 — 85% of American Jews said US support for Israel in the aftermath of the October 7 attacks was important, including 60% who said it was “very important.”

Among Jews aged 50 and older, 68% said Israel's response to Hamas was acceptable, compared to [just over half of younger adults](#). Additionally, [fewer than one in four American Jews](#), even among younger cohorts, support the Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions (BDS) movement.

Crucially, a super majority — [approximately 81% overall](#) — say that caring about Israel is either very or somewhat important to what being Jewish means to them.

Moreover, the [American Jewish Committee found](#) that while Jews age 30 and over are more likely to say caring about Israel is “very important” to what being Jewish means to them compared to younger Jews between the ages of 18-29 (53% vs. 40%), this gap has narrowed significantly since October 7th. In 2023, 29% of young American Jews said caring about Israel was “very important” — with that figure climbing to 40% in 2024.

And the overwhelming connection to Israel in polls even takes into account differences with certain Israeli government policies. [For example](#), 53% of Jewish Americans lack confidence in Netanyahu's leadership, while 45% have confidence — yet they still say they are extremely invested in what is happening in Israel. This shows that support for Israel transcends disagreements about Israeli politics.

These numbers do not describe a community in collapse; rather, they depict one that — while diverse — retains a strong core of moral and political connection and interest in Israel.

Klein ignores this. He constructs his essay around rabbis and nonprofit professionals who share his ideological priors, as if theirs are the only Jewish perspectives that matter. Absent are Orthodox Jews, Sephardic Jews, Russian-speaking immigrants, Zionist progressives, or the large number of politically centrist Jews in New York who saw Mamdani's victory as a five-alarm fire.

These omissions are not accidental — they are part of the essay's architecture. By quoting only those who interpret Mamdani charitably, Klein builds a case that marginalizes Jewish alarm as overreaction and redefines antisemitism on his own narrow terms.

This is dangerous. We cannot afford to treat direct threats to Jewish safety and sovereignty as occasions for philosophical musing. Nor can we allow elite commentators to dictate the boundaries of legitimate Jewish concern — especially when those commentators minimize or rationalize hate. Klein's selective sourcing is not just a stylistic failure; it is an surrender of moral responsibility.

I've argued that [Mamdani's refusal to disavow "intifada" chants](#), and the [embrace he's received from some Jewish leaders](#), reveal how moral clarity around antisemitism is being eroded in progressive spaces.

When a candidate declines to reject slogans historically tied to violence against Jews — and still wins support from parts of the Jewish institutional world — something foundational is breaking down. That breakdown is not about Jewish pluralism. It's about the collapse of boundaries between debate and denial, between political disagreement and existential threat.

That conflation is now being amplified by figures like Klein, who treat any Jewish criticism of Mamdani as an obstacle to inclusivity rather than a valid and pressing concern. This is not a moment for neutral tones. The normalization of anti-Zionist extremism in the political mainstream is not a side issue. It's a litmus test for whether we take Jewish security and dignity seriously.

In short, Klein's framing doesn't just misread the moment. It helps enable the very forces that threaten Jewish life in America. By casting disagreement over

Mamdani as proof of “pluralism,” Klein erases the difference between healthy internal debate and the embrace of actors who reject the legitimacy of the Jewish State and traffic in language that too often ends in violence.

There is nothing pluralistic about a political space where Jews must justify their existence, where support for Israel is treated as shameful, and where candidates can win while embracing slogans tied to terrorism.

Yes, younger Jews are navigating identity in new ways. They are morally serious, politically engaged, and often skeptical of inherited institutions. But skepticism is not the same as antagonism, and what Klein fails to appreciate is that many of these same Jews still affirm Jewish peoplehood, care deeply about Israel, and want to see their values reflected in the communal conversation. What they do not want is to be told that embracing figures like Mamdani is a necessary part of that growth.

There is a path forward. It involves making space for generational shifts and political critique without capitulating to those who traffic in eliminationist rhetoric. It means drawing distinctions between policy debate and existential denial. And it requires that thought leaders and commentators confront uncomfortable facts — even when they conflict with ideological narratives.

Mamdani’s politics are not merely provocative. They are incompatible with Jewish safety and dignity. And any effort to obscure that — to soften it with euphemism or dress it up in pluralist language — is not analysis. It’s abdication.

Klein mourns the passing of an old institutional order. But he fails to see the real threat facing American Jews today: a political and intellectual elite that treats existential threats as abstractions, and smears moral clarity as parochialism.

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