

# The Right Has a 150-Page Battle Plan to Shut Down Progressive Civil Society

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## Part of the Series

### Communities Beyond Elections

In the wake of Donald Trump's election, after a campaign in which Trump threatened the press, the left and "the enemy within," 204 Republicans and 15 Democrats in the House of Representatives decided to hand a gift to his incoming administration — one that could be used to squash any kind of dissent.

The dangerous gift, HR 9495, is known as the "nonprofit killer bill" because it would unilaterally give the Treasury secretary the power to strip the tax-exempt status from any nonprofit they decide is a "terrorist-supporting organization," all without due process for the organization in question.

*Truthout* has been covering this legislation in its many iterations since [last spring](#), when its predecessor, HR 6408, passed the House with overwhelming support but stalled in the Senate. We've also covered the [landscape from which this bill emerged](#). While the threat of its use under a Donald Trump presidency is particularly alarming for a broad range of groups, this bill has to be understood as part of a bipartisan (and transnational) push to [stifle](#) the Palestine solidarity movement.

The newer version that the House [passed](#) on November 21 includes an add-on that might help move it more quickly through the Senate, postponing tax deadlines for American citizens detained abroad. While a separate bill to do just that has already [cleared](#) the Senate, a spokesperson for the body's majority leader, Sen. Chuck Schumer, told *The New York Times* that he's opposed to the nonprofit portion of the bill. While it likely won't come up in this legislative session, Republicans may raise the bill again next year when they hold both bodies of Congress. A wide coalition of nonprofits was able to persuade some House Democrats who previously supported the legislation to vote against it this time around. That coalition will continue to advocate against the bill as it goes forward.

Regardless of what happens with this particular piece of legislation, nonprofits, including independent media, can't rest easy. The Trump administration, and the right more broadly, still have plenty of tools at their disposal to attack organizers. And while Palestine solidarity activists may have a wider target on their backs, organizers for any causes even remotely associated with the left should be paying attention.

We already know what will come next: we can expect to see more racketeering charges, otherwise known as [RICO charges](#), thrown at organizers — charges historically used to attack fraudulent money-making schemes from groups like the Mafia. Immigrants who engage in any kind of activism may be more likely to see their legal immigration status threatened. Corporations could work with right-wing interest groups like the [American Legislative Exchange Council](#) (ALEC) to target protesters at "critical infrastructure" sites like weapons manufacturers. Groups doing any kind of meaningful work, ranging from investigative journalism to campus protests, may get tied up with frivolous lawsuits from right-wing actors.

The right is openly telegraphing its next moves for all of us to see.

We can anticipate these alarming steps because we have been watching the slow drip of repression for years now. These tactics are already being used on members of the left, whether on the dozens of Stop Cop City organizers [indicted](#) under RICO laws, or on the pro-Palestine protester who had to [fight](#) to keep his student visa, or on the members of the environmental movement who are charged under [ALEC-orchestrated laws](#) for their anti-pipeline protests.

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## The Heritage Foundation's Detailed Plan to Criminalize Palestine

# Solidarity

Members of the Heritage Foundation, notably the authors of Project 2025, have another playbook in their back pockets meant to crack down on the movement for Palestinian liberation. Known as Project Esther, [their plan](#) is to create “a national strategy to combat antisemitism.” Project Esther alleges that the pro-Palestine movement is part of a global “ Hamas Support Network ” with branches that operate as “ Hamas Support Organizations ,” which puts everyone from groups like Students for Justice in Palestine to the Open Society Foundations in their crosshairs. “Whether in the halls of academia or in the halls of power, HSN supporters and influence targets must be made to feel extreme discomfort,” the Project Esther authors write. “We will generate that discomfort.”

They go on to suggest public relations campaigns against such groups, as well as legal attacks that draw on RICO and counterterrorism laws to take out the movement. The goal is to “organize and focus a broad coalition of willing and able partners to leverage existing — and, if required, work to establish additional — authorities, resources, capabilities, and activities.”

As Dima Khalidi writes in Jewish Voice for Peace’s anthology, *On Antisemitism*, “The most prevalent tactic to intimidate advocates for Palestinian rights into silence is still to falsely accuse individuals, groups, and the movement for Palestinian rights as a whole of being motivated by antisemitism and support for terrorism. It’s no coincidence that the tactics overlap, and go hand in hand. It is, after all, much easier to sow the idea that those who promote Palestinian rights are antisemitic if they are also depicted as pro-terrorist.”

## The Capital Research Center’s Plan to Criminalize the Left More Broadly

In yet another blueprint for repression, another right-wing think tank, the Capital Research Center — whose founder also had ties to The Heritage Foundation — goes even further in depicting a wide variety of progressive activists, organizers and the groups that support them as “pro-terrorist.”

The think tank’s 150-page document, titled “[Marching Toward Violence: The Domestic Anti-Israeli Protest Movement](#)” lays out a multistep plan for targeting a wide variety of progressive and left groups — including everything from Black Lives Matter to the Democratic Socialists of America, legal defense organizations like the Center for Constitutional Rights and the National Lawyers Guild, and many others including Students for Justice in Palestine and Jewish Voice for Peace.

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While the plan purports to focus narrowly on pro-Palestine organizing, it effectively lays out a method by which the right could attempt to use statements made on Palestine by a broad swath of groups to forcibly halt progressive organizing and resistance in the U.S. The fact that the Capital Research Center sprinkles a few white supremacist right-wing actors within its suggested list of targets should not distract us from the reality of its overwhelming focus on shutting down organs of the left.

The plan proposes to target the groups in its crosshairs with a wide array of attacks, ranging from stripping organizations of their nonprofit status, to filing RICO charges, to deporting immigrants who protest, to filing class-action lawsuits against groups like Students for Justice in Palestine. The document creates a list of 159 organizations to target by explicitly naming them as “pro-terrorism” based on bunk “documentable evidence.”

This kind of language is likely not too surprising for anyone familiar with the tactics used, both by the right and by the state, under the so-called “War on Terror.” Indeed, its author, Ryan Mauro, is a [known figure](#) in the anti-Muslim movement and formerly worked at the Clarion Project, a right-wing initiative fueling wildly Islamophobic conspiracy theories, including an infamous debunked one on Muslim “no-go zones” so extreme that the Southern Poverty Law Center [took note](#). The organization itself features members on its staff and board that came from the George W. Bush administration as well as the Reagan one, and a former Heritage Foundation fellow as well.

While these playbooks certainly are scarier in the hands of a Trump administration, it’s important to contextualize them in the larger movement from the right that spans back decades — one that has had its sights on Muslim and Arab communities in particular.

Even for those familiar with these types of threats, there are still some points in the document from the Capital Research Center that might be helpful to think on as we prepare for the years ahead. One thing to consider is the breadth of “research”: the document has more than 700 footnotes documenting everything from action alerts to articles to a truly disturbing number of social media posts.

It also boxes its targets into two categories — one is the “Islamists, communists/Marxists, and anarchists” — which we might take to mean the left. But interestingly enough, it also mentions white supremacists as potential targets — putting Nick Fuentes and the hate group Patriot Front side by side with organizations like Jewish Voice for Peace, which draws quite a bit of the author’s ire, along with Students for Justice in Palestine and American Muslims for Palestine. This kind of calculation on the part of the author is useful for us to note when some liberal groups suggest switching the focus of terrorism laws and rhetoric to include the amorphous right-wing “[domestic terrorism](#)” in their scope, a tactic that can only [boomerang](#) back to hurt the left.

What might be most concerning is how this document tries to ensnare a broad range of actors. The document makes connections with groups centered around abolition, racial justice and the environment, in addition to the Palestine liberation movement. In what could be considered laughable if it weren’t so scary, the author has come up with four overlapping circles of the “pro-terrorism, anti-Israel movement,” which range from “political warfare” at the widest to “domestic terrorists” at the narrowest, with “supporters” and “inciters” in between.

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To give a more concrete sense of how these are applied, the think tank outrageously lists the San Francisco Bay Area Independent Media Center (also known as [Indybay](#)) under the header of “domestic terrorists,” accuses Black Lives Matter Grassroots of being “inciters,” lists the Center for Constitutional Rights under “supporters” and charges the Democratic Socialists of America with “political warfare.”

The blueprint for repression takes aim at everyone from fiscal sponsors to, crucially, the legal support organizations that usually come in to provide support once activists are targeted. It is clear that the authors of these types of playbooks are trying to take down the entire ecosystem of the left.

We must acknowledge the stakes of these attacks: Most progressive and leftist nonprofit organizations are overwhelmingly supported by foundations and large donors who require tax-deductibility as a precursor to granting funds. For most, losing nonprofit status could easily mean a quick death.

As problematic and imperfect as the nonprofit apparatus is — we deeply appreciate [critiques](#) of the nonprofit industrial complex — the difficult truth is that most medium-to-large left and progressive organizations rely on it.

## **When Left Groups’ Material Survival Is Threatened, What Can We Do in Response?**

So, how can we resist, in the face of this existential threat amid widening repression?

First of all, self-education is key. Right-wingers are drawing upon history to formulate their playbook, which carries echoes of prior fascist movements, as well as, in the case of organizational targeting, the Patriot Act era and the Red Scare. We must read up, too!

Let’s form study groups and involve our nonprofit organizations in conversations about past instances of institutional targeting and histories of resistance. For example, during the anti-communist fervor of the 1950s, the [McCarran Internal Security Act](#) allowed the attorney general to petition a “control board” to designate organizations as Communist and then require them to register with the Justice Department. The organizations resisted straightforwardly: None of the 25 groups labeled as Communist actually submitted to register with the Justice Department.

During the post-9/11 Patriot Act period, the federal government targeted several Muslim nonprofits, including the Holy Land Foundation, the largest Muslim charity in the U.S. It accused these nonprofits of providing “material support” for terrorism and froze their assets, leading to shutdowns. Several of the organizations’ leaders were targeted and imprisoned. In response, organizations like the American Civil Liberties Union challenged the asset freezes in court, and a wide range of human rights groups protested, issued statements, and launched campaigns and petitions. The [Committee to Stop FBI Repression](#) was formed to push back on the targeting of

activists accused of links to “terrorist” organizations.

These asset freezes and shutdowns, as well as resistance efforts, are reminders of the importance of building connections with aligned advocacy groups and legal aid organizations in the current moment (although, frighteningly, the right currently seems intent on targeting legal defense groups alongside grassroots activist efforts).

Our next steps must include a recognition that liberation movements are often impacted by periods of significant repression, extreme surveillance, dismantlement of core institutions, and criminalization of individual activists.

The looming threats to left and progressive nonprofits may also pose a stark challenge to philanthropy in the coming months and years. That sector may need to shift its standard modes of operation to forestall mass chaos among left and progressive organizations.

Will foundations and major donors, which have relied on tax-deductible 501(c)(3) status as a condition for funding, rise to the moment by breaking with their long-held set of rules? Will they forego the 501(c)(3) requirement in cases where that requirement is weaponized by fascist powers? Or will organizations stripped of their status be simply left to die?

In the weeks prior to inauguration, will foundations help grassroots organizations build financial reserves to allow for flexibility in the face of legal and economic threats? Moreover, how will funders respond if nonprofit organizations’ assets are frozen and they’re suddenly left without the cash flow to pay out staff severance, let alone operate?

These are all questions that philanthropic organizations and individual philanthropists might consider contending with now, before the worst consequences descend.

The material survival of the grassroots and nonprofit groups being targeted will also hinge on the degree to which masses of individuals can rally grassroots support to buoy organizations that are targeted by baseless right-wing smear campaigns under the guise of “antiterrorism.” If a host of nonprofit organizations — including both smaller local groups and major mainstays of the national progressive activism infrastructure — suddenly lose their nonprofit status or face legal attack, will masses of supporters be able to mobilize sufficient grassroots support to sustain them?

## **We Need Strong Coalitions to Resist This Attack on the Left**

Going forward, our next steps must include a recognition that liberation movements are often impacted by periods of significant repression, which often includes extreme surveillance, dismantlement of core institutions, and criminalization of individual activists.

We’ve witnessed this over the past half-century with the movements for labor and economic justice, Black, Puerto Rican, Chicanx and Indigenous liberation; peace and anti-imperialism; environmental justice and animal liberation; civil liberties; racial justice and police abolition; and of course, Palestinian liberation.

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Such repression requires us to build strong links with other targeted groups — recognizing repression as a common denominator that can unite us in the struggle against authoritarianism. As historian Dan Berger writes in *The Struggle Within*, “The ubiquity of state repression affords an opportunity to forge solidarity among multiple revolutionary movements. Seizing this opportunity does not mean ignoring contradictions. ... Instead, it offers a chance for people committed to radical social change to work with one another, addressing differences in ways that build alliances and strengthen the potential for revolutionary possibilities.”

How can nonprofits from across multiple issue areas and multiple ends of the left/progressive tent find common ground in our real fears that our organizations will be shut down, our assets frozen, our bank access curtailed, and our work cut short at a time when it’s needed most? Working toward broader and deeper coalitions with similarly threatened organizations will be vital.

In the movement journalism world, we’ve been laying that groundwork over the past year with our recently

launched [Movement Media Alliance](#), a coalition of 18 social justice-driven media organizations committed to supporting each other's sustainability and defending each other in the face of existential threats. Many progressive and left organizations, more broadly, have been working to find common purpose since the election of Trump; for example, two days after the election, the Working Families Party hosted a [mass call](#) sponsored by 200 organizations — a rare coming-together moment that could form a seed for emerging solidarities as groups' organizational infrastructure is endangered.

Real efforts at coalition-building — resisting competition in favor of mutual uplift efforts — could serve to mitigate the secondary impacts of organizations being baselessly and instrumentally designated as “terrorist-supporting.” For example, if an organization is federally designated as “terrorist-supporting,” peer organizations could sound the alarm about the false allegations and affirm the accused group's positive impact and importance to the social justice ecosystem so that donors and allies are less likely to back away.

Meanwhile, all of us in — and proximate to — the nonprofit world would do well to wrestle with the potential implications of a mounting direct attack on our organizations and our people. How can we be nimble? How can we lean on each other? How can we fight back? Let's get together and talk about it.

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