

THE RISE OF ANTI SEMITISM

FROM THE LEFT AND THE RIGHT

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IN THIS FACT SHEET, READERS CAN:

- Learn about the rise of antisemitism
- Review examples of antisemitism
- Receive an overview of historical vs. contemporary forms of antisemitism
- Learn about the complexity of agreeing on the definition of antisemitism, particularly related to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and whether a given act or statement is, in fact, antisemitic

Understanding antisemitism is an important cause and this fact sheet is designed to help establish foundational knowledge. Our thanks to those who helped compile the important information provided here. Questions and/or comments can be sent to info@americanpublicsquare.org.

Antisemitism is discrimination, hatred, or oppression against Jewish individuals, groups, entities, or institutions *because they are Jewish*.

Despite it being a deeply important issue, within and beyond the Jewish community, nearly half of all Americans do not know what antisemitism is. One in four Americans (25%) say they have heard of it but don't know what it means, and one in five (21%) say they have never heard the word.

WHY IT'S IMPORTANT TO ADDRESS ANTISEMITISM?

RISING ANTISEMITISM

Levels of antisemitism are rising in the United States and around the world. The American Jewish community experienced the highest level of antisemitic incidents in 2019 since the Anti-Defamation League (ADL) began tracking in 1979.¹

The most recent FBI Hate Crimes Statistics report, from 2019, found that Jews are being attacked disproportionately; while Jews account for less than 2% of the American population, 60% of religious-based hate crimes in 2019 targeted Jews, which was an increase of 14% from the previous year.²



¹<https://www.adl.org/audit2019>

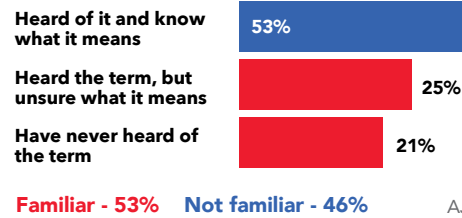
²<https://ucr.fbi.gov/hate-crime/2019/topic-pages/tables/table-1.xls>

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LACK OF EDUCATION ON ANTISEMITISM

American Jews, already anxious about rising antisemitism in the United States, have further cause for alarm. According to a 2020 report of the American Jewish Committee (AJC), nearly half of all Americans do not know what antisemitism is, with one in four (25%) saying they have heard of it but don't know what it means and one in five (21%) saying they have never heard the word.³

How familiar are you with the term antisemitism?



Source:
AJC Antisemitism Report 2020

A HISTORY OF ANTISEMITISM

Sometimes called “the longest hatred,” antisemitism has persisted in many forms for over two thousand years. Religious or medieval antisemitism has its origins in early Christianity, which promoted anti-Judaism and was one of the main foundations of Jewish persecution for a millennia.

The most damaging manifestations of this form of antisemitism are the:

- **Deicide charge** An allegation that Jews bear eternal responsibility for the death of Jesus Christ. Across time, this fed into the idea that Jews harbor deeply anti-Christian attitudes and can be a danger.
- **Blood libel** The accusation toward Jews of using the blood of Christian children for ritual purposes.^{4,5}

During the Middle Ages, as attitudes toward Jews hardened into widespread hostility, anti-Jewish accusations of deicide, the blood libel, and other terrible crimes became frequent. Jews faced expulsions from hundreds of communities across Europe, public burnings of their holiest books, and episodic violence like the massacres of Jews carried out by armies of Crusaders en route to their holy war in the Middle East.

Eventually Jews took measures to gain greater equality during the French Revolution of 1789 but until that occurred, they generally could not own land, had to live in separate sections of cities (frequently called ghettos), were only permitted to sell second-hand goods or lend money, and sometimes had to have their clothing marked in a way that visibly identified them as Jews.

Although centuries old, medieval antisemitic myths like deicide and the blood libel continue to be employed today.

SOCIOECONOMIC AND POLITICAL ANTISEMITISM gave rise to many modern antisemitic stereotypes and conspiracy theories concerning Jewish wealth and power.

Beginning in the 18th century, Jews in Europe began to gain more freedoms. Even though Jews made up a small percentage of the population, the success of Jews in newly secular and industrialized European society stirred resentment among many of their neighbors, leading to new conspiracy theories about Jewish power and influence.

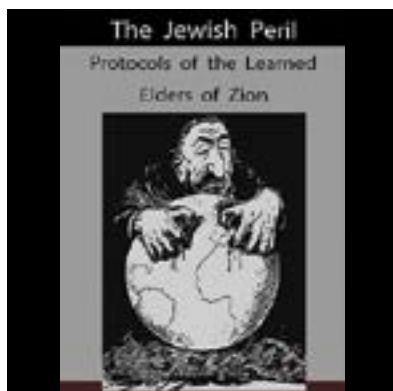


THEN *Jesus Brought Before Caiaphas* — from *Salvin Hours* c. 1275, British Library.



NOW *An anti-Israel protest in Miami, FL on May 16, 2021. Sign reads, “Jesus was Palestinian and you killed him too!”*

Publications such as the Protocols of the Elders of Zion (1903), which first appeared in Russia, helped to disseminate and popularize theories of an international Jewish conspiracy.⁶



THEN *Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, a book still sold today.



NOW Graffiti artist Mear One's "Freedom for Humanity" mural depicting white male capitalists, several who are Jewish, as the enemy of the good. The mural also references the "New World Order," a conspiracy theory made popular in the 20th century that is based on the idea that Jews have formed a power structure in which they control every aspect of humankind—the economy, media, and political landscape. London, 2012.

RACIAL ANTISEMITISM was the eliminationist antisemitism of the Holocaust and is still the foundation for neo-Nazi and white supremacist antisemitism today. Based on the emergence of "social Darwinism" and the rise of eugenics and "race science" in the late-19th century, Jews came to be viewed less as a religious group and more as a separate, inferior race that would "pollute" and weaken European nations through intermarriage, which was believed to be part of a Jewish plan for world domination.⁷

This shift was important because it meant that perceptions of Jewish difference came to be seen as biological and unchangeable. When linked to conspiracy theories about Jews like those detailed in the Protocols of the Elders of Zion, such ideas led to the notion that Jews were a threatening racial group whose power and presence had to be eliminated.



THEN A poster for the c. 1938 Nazi propaganda film, "The Eternal Jew," a documentary which claimed to demonstrate the destructive influence that Jews wielded over Austrian society. The figure in this picture is caricature, associating Jews with both money and communism.



NOW The "Unite the Right" rally in Charlottesville, Virginia in August 2017. White supremacists chanted, "Jews will not replace us!" a slogan referring to a white supremacist belief that the white race is in danger of extinction by a rising tide of non-whites who are controlled and manipulated by Jews. This concept is also known as "white genocide."^{8,9}

⁶ <https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/article/antisemitism-in-history-the-early-modern-era-1300-1800?series=30>, ⁷ <https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/article/antisemitism-in-history-racial-antisemitism-18751945?series=30>, ⁸ <https://www.adl.org/education/references/hate-symbols/you-will-not-replace-us> ⁹ <https://www.adl.org/resources/glossary-terms/white-genocide>

ANTISEMITISM TODAY

A DISTINCTIVE FORM OF HATRED

Antisemitism shares much in common with other hatreds, such as anti-Black racism, xenophobia, Islamophobia, and discrimination based upon gender or sexual orientation. Yet unlike most other exclusionary systems or ideologies, antisemites do not vilify their victims as inferior. Antisemitism is unusual because it perceives its target—Jews—as having too much privilege and power. Antisemitic perspectives allege Jews maliciously use their excessive money, intellect, and cunning to do evil against non-Jews.¹⁰ Many theories are rooted in the antisemitic myth that Jews are a “hidden hand,” plotting to take over and control the world—a notion that was central to the rise of Nazism and continues to exist today.

Throughout time, several antisemitic stereotypes and conspiracy theories have persisted and evolved. They include:

- **Wealth and greed:** Jews are perceived to be overly wealthy, greedy, excessively materialistic, and money-oriented.
- **Power and control:** The theory that rich or influential Jews are the secret puppet masters of the world and are in control of the media, banks, and governments.
- **Cunning:** The idea that Jews gain their wealth and power through manipulation and are not to be trusted.
- **Disloyalty:** The notion that Jews are disloyal citizens whose true allegiance is to Israel or a hidden Jewish agenda.
- **Bloodthirstiness:** The demonization of Jews as a primary source of evil in the world and the view that Jews are a bloodthirsty people.¹¹

DEFINING ANTISEMITISM

Defining antisemitism in the current political context is not a simple matter. The most widely used definition of antisemitism today is that of the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA), an intergovernmental organization that unites governments and experts to strengthen, advance and promote Holocaust education, research and remembrance. Their “Working Definition of Antisemitism” has been adopted by dozens of governments and civil organizations all over the world, including over 30 countries, the U.S. State Department, and the U.S. Department of Education.

It is also the most controversial definition. Many critics of Israel and a number of academic experts on antisemitism and related subjects claim that the IHRA definition is being weaponized to silence criticism of Israel and taint opposing viewpoints by deeming them antisemitic.

THE IHRA DEFINITION READS AS FOLLOWS:

Antisemitism is a certain perception of Jews, which may be expressed as hatred toward Jews. Rhetorical and physical manifestations of antisemitism are directed toward Jewish or non-Jewish individuals and/or their property, toward Jewish community institutions and religious facilities.

Where the IHRA definition of antisemitism becomes controversial is in its accompanying examples, largely because they include cases of antisemitism related to Israel that some believe are more accurately called anti-Israel or anti-Zionist, not antisemitism. In recent years, concerns about painting all criticism of Israel as antisemitic and weaponizing the IHRA definition in political debate led two groups of scholars and experts to craft competing definitions of antisemitism.

While not nearly as widely utilized as the IHRA definition, these two definitions have received considerable attention among scholars of antisemitism and leaders of Jewish organizations. These are the Jerusalem Declaration on Antisemitism (JDA) and the Nexus Document.

Each of these definitions tries to bring greater precision to the question of when critiques of Israel can fairly be called antisemitic, and when those critiques are not, at least on their face, antisemitic. The IHRA, the JDA, and Nexus all insist explicitly on the importance of context in determining when a given action or statement is antisemitic. There is also a perspective that opposes defining it altogether, arguing instead for a totally contextual determination of whether something is antisemitic or not.

Despite differing viewpoints about how to define antisemitism, the IHRA, Nexus, and the JDA agree many examples of antisemitism are clear and unequivocal:

- 1 Calling for, aiding, or justifying the killing or harming of Jews in the name of a radical ideology or an extremist view of religion.



- 2 Making misleading, dehumanizing, demonizing, or stereotypical allegations about Jews or the power of Jews as a collective, including but not limited to the myths about a world Jewish conspiracy or of Jews controlling the media, economy, government, or other societal institutions.



Appearing to illustrate the myth of Jewish global control, this political cartoon shows Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu as a dog leading a blind U.S. President Donald Trump. *The New York Times International Edition*, April 25, 2019.

- 3 Accusing Jews as a collective of being responsible for real or imagined wrong a single Jewish person or group, or even for acts committed by non-Jews.

June 2021 tweet blaming Jews for the 9/11 terrorist attacks



- 4 Denying the fact, mechanisms (gas chambers, as an example), or intentionality of the genocide of Jews at the hands of National Socialist Germany and its supporters and accomplices via the Holocaust during World War II.

Posters denying the Holocaust were found outside of a synagogue in Massachusetts, July 2019.



- 5 Accusing the Jews as a collective, or Israel as a state, of inventing or exaggerating the Holocaust.

"The Holocaust Business" by Zeon (France), 2016. This cartoon won first prize in Iran's 2016 Holocaust International Cartoon Contest. It depicts the structure of a concentration camp atop a cash register, with the number six million being cashed out, suggesting Jews are profiting off the Holocaust.

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- 6 Accusing Jewish citizens of being more loyal to Israel, or to the alleged priorities of Jews worldwide, than they are to the interests of their own nations.



A flyer posted in Long Branch, New Jersey, June 2018.

- 7 Using the symbols and images associated with classic antisemitism—claims of Jews killing Jesus or blood libel, as examples—to characterize Israel or Israelis.



A May 11 rally in Los Angeles featured a doctored photo of former Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu eating a Palestinian child, with a Jewish Star of David drawn on his forehead and blood dripping out of his open mouth. The poster propagates a longstanding antisemitic blood libel that alleges Jews use the blood of non-Jews for ritual purposes.

- 8 Holding Jews collectively responsible for actions of the state of Israel.



On May 18, 2021, in Los Angeles, a mob in Hamas-inspired garb asked patrons at a sushi restaurant, “Are you Jewish?” before launching a violent attack. They chanted: “Death to Jews” and “Free Palestine.”

TERMS TO KNOW:

- **ZIONISM** is a movement for (originally) the re-establishment and (now) the development and protection of a Jewish nation in what is now Israel.
- **SELF-DETERMINATION** is the process by which a country determines its own statehood and forms its own allegiances with governments.

The more controversial cases – and the parts of the IHRA definition that have generated considerable debate—generally relate to the State of Israel and Zionism. Here are three prominent examples:

- 1 The IHRA claims that denying Jewish people the right to self-determination is antisemitic. It then contends that an example of this sort of antisemitism is the claim that the State of Israel is a racist endeavor.

Those who support this contention say that calling Israel racist treats Jewish nationhood differently from all other ethnic nationalisms. Those who criticize it argue that critiquing Israel as racist is often about objecting to the policies of Israel rather than its existence. They also point out that certain points of view—such as those of Palestinian Arabs living under Israeli sovereignty—might lead one to call Israel a racist endeavor based upon experiences of oppression, rather than upon an inherent hostility to Jews or Jewish peoplehood.

- 2 Another dispute centers on a perceived double standard. The IHRA definition maintains that “applying double standards by requiring of [Israel] a behavior not expected or demanded of any other democratic nation” is antisemitic.

It is indisputable that Israel receives harsher and more regular criticism than most countries. The language and tenor of such critique is often troubling but figuring out when it is antisemitic is not simple.



An illustration of the imbalance of UN criticism against Israel. The inconsistency is particularly noted when Israel is singled out by the United Nations for human rights abuses more so than the behavior of known and major abusers, such as China, Iran, Cuba, and Syria.¹²

While some argue that double standards are by definition discriminatory, this is far from a consensus position. The Nexus Document, for example, takes direct issue with this. Its authors insist that “paying disproportionate attention to Israel and treating Israel differently than other countries” is not necessarily “proof of antisemitism.” They note that there could be various other reasons why people may devote greater attention to Israel than other causes, such as particular personal concern for Israel, higher standards related to the level of American aid given annually to Israel, or attachments to members of the Palestinian community and a desire to object on their behalf to Israeli policy.

3 Drawing comparisons of contemporary Israeli policy to that of the Nazis. Some claim that this is, by definition, antisemitic, while others argue that since comparisons to Nazis and the Holocaust are unfortunately ubiquitous in our political discourse, this, too, is a matter of context and must be evaluated on a case-by-case basis.



A protest in Dearborn, MI - May 18, 2021



A rally in Seattle, WA on May 16, 2021. Signage depicts Adolf Hitler side-by-side with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, saying “Zionism=Nazism.”

“ANTISEMITISM” OR “ANTI-SEMITISM”?

The term Anti-Semitism was popularized in the 19th century by a German political activist who argued that the growing and corrupting influence of Jews was a major obstacle that had to be eliminated for the good of German society.

In order to combat the idea that Jews are an actual foreign race called Semites, many scholars and institutions favor the unhyphenated spelling “antisemitism” as a way to dispel the idea that there is an entity ‘Semitism’ which ‘anti-Semitism’ opposes.

Recently, some scholars have asked whether the hyphen should in fact be re-inserted. They contend that the hyphenated spelling reflects a little-remembered but important history in which many early antisemites perceived Jews and Muslims as linked by a kind of kinship and the two groups’ fates were not opposed but intertwined.¹³

¹² <https://unwatch.org/un-israel-key-statistics/>, ¹³ <https://www.holocaustremembrance.com/antisemitism/spelling-antisemitism>

EXTREME ANTISEMITISM

According to Eric Ward, senior fellow at Southern Poverty Law Center, antisemitism forms “the theoretical core of White nationalism;” it is inextricably linked to racism and white supremacy.¹⁴ Most white nationalists believe that the white race is in danger of extinction due to a rising “flood” of non-whites, who are controlled and manipulated by Jews, and that imminent action is needed to “save” the white race.¹⁵

This belief played a key motivating role in the deadliest attack against American Jews in U.S. history, which occurred in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania on October 27, 2018. Robert Gregory Bowers posted antisemitic comments on the social media platform, Gab, before killing eleven worshippers at the Tree of Life Synagogue.

The synagogue had participated in the refugee resettlement agency HIAS’s National Refugee Shabbat the previous week, and Bowers, referring to Central American migrant caravans and refugees, posted online, “HIAS likes to bring invaders in that kill our people. I can’t sit by and watch my people get slaughtered. Screw your optics, I’m going in.”¹⁶

While white nationalist sources still constitute the majority of reported incidents, the United States has increasingly experienced antisemitism from other sources, including religious extremists. Examples include:

- The 2019 Jersey City shooting at a kosher grocery store by individuals believed to have links to numerous antisemitic hate groups listed by the Southern Poverty Law Center.
- The surge in nationwide anti-Israel antisemitism during the May 2021 11-day war between Israel and the Palestinian militant group, Hamas.

ANTI-ZIONISM

From another angle, antisemitism is often believed to be a response to the State of Israel, typically in the form of a prejudice against the Jewish movement for self-determination and the right of the Jewish people to a homeland in the State of Israel.

Anti-Zionism is a belief that Jews do not have a right to a national home in their ancestral homeland and/or that the State of Israel should not exist. Many contend that all

or some forms of anti-Zionism are in fact also forms of antisemitism.

There is little consensus about when anti-Zionism crosses over into antisemitism. Foundational to debates about this issue are differing viewpoints about Israeli settlements existing in Palestinian territories, longstanding relationship tension between Israelis and Palestinians, and control of the Gaza Strip—issues that have considerable and complex social, economic and human rights implications.

Those most concerned about the threat of anti-Zionism claim that it is often behind contemporary forms of antisemitic harassment, such as:

- Attempts to hold all Jews accountable for the policies of the State of Israel
- Accusations of Jews being more loyal to Israel than to their home country (known as dual loyalty).

Variations of the phrase
“Hitler was right” appeared
over 17,000 times on Twitter.

SOCIAL MEDIA AND A RISE IN ANTISEMITISM

The prevalence of social media has led to an increase in antisemitism given the ability for information to spread quickly and casually across platforms—both on mainstream platforms such as Facebook and Twitter, and fringe platforms such as Gab, a site widely used by individuals with extreme views. Richard Bowers, the perpetrator of the Tree of Life shooting in New Jersey, posted on Gab prior to the shooting.^{17,18}

In May 2021, social media was flooded with antisemitic content related to the outbreak of war between Israel and Hamas. Posts on TikTok, Instagram, Facebook, and Twitter included messages comparing Zionists to Nazis, demonizing Israel and Jews, promoting antisemitic stereotypes about Jewish control, and even praising Hitler – variations of the phrase “Hitler was right” appeared over 17,000 times on Twitter.¹⁹

Even the COVID-19 pandemic has served as a cause for rising antisemitic narratives. Throughout the pandemic, multiple conspiracy theories and Holocaust distortions have spread online through memes and posts.

**A digital copy of this fact sheet, as well as additional resources, can be found on the event website:
americanpublicsquare.org/event/the-rise-of-antisemitism-from-the-left-and-the-right.**



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