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ANTISEMITISM
AND ANTIZIONISM
AFTER OCTOBER 7TH

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**ANTISEMITISM
AND ANTIZIONISM
AFTER OCTOBER 7TH**

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Editorial

Lesley Klaff



We are pleased to present this special Spring 2026 issue, appropriately titled

Antisemitism and Antizionism After October 7.

The events of October 7, 2023, and the Gaza war that followed have transformed scholarly and public debate about Jews, Israel, and antisemitism. Questions that had long occupied scholars, policymakers, and communal organisations have acquired renewed urgency: how should contemporary antisemitism be understood and measured? What is the relationship between antisemitism and antizionism? How are attitudes toward Jews and Israel changing, particularly among younger generations? And what are the implications of these developments for law, politics, and public discourse? The contributions collected here address these questions from a variety of disciplinary perspectives. Taken together, they offer new empirical evidence, conceptual analysis, legal argument, and critical reflection on some of the most consequential debates surrounding antisemitism and antizionism in the post-October 7 era.

We are especially grateful to JCA Associate Editor Dr Steven K. Baum, the Department of Digital Humanities at King's College London, and the Institute for the Critical Study of Antizionism for their generous support in making this special issue freely available to readers through open-access publication.

Despite what appeared to be a long-term decline in antisemitic attitudes within the British population, antisemitic incidents recorded by the Community Security Trust have increased, while Jewish perceptions of security have declined. In "Antisemitic Attitudes and Anti-Jewish Crime in the

United Kingdom: Longitudinal Trends, Demographic Predictors, and Policy Implications," Daniel Allington examines this apparent paradox by bringing together two important datasets. The first dataset is derived from official UK government statistics on religiously aggravated crime, while the second draws on six years of attitudinal surveys conducted in partnership with YouGov and funded by the Campaign Against Antisemitism. Based on his analysis, Allington argues that crimes targeting perceived Jews have increased substantially, lending support both to Community Security Trust reporting and to Jewish perceptions of heightened risk. He further contends that the proportions of individuals expressing elevated levels of both "old" (traditional) and "new" (antizionist or Israel-related) antisemitic attitudes have increased significantly since October 7, 2023. The article also argues that antisemitic attitudes are disproportionately concentrated among Muslims and notes that perpetrators of, and individuals accused of involvement in, several recent high-profile attacks and attempted attacks against the Jewish community have tended to come from the same population. Two additional findings are highlighted: first, that levels of "old" and "new" antisemitic attitudes are closely correlated from one year to the next; and second, that recent growth in such attitudes has been most pronounced among younger respondents. Daniel Allington is Reader in Social Analytics at King's College London and a Senior Associate Fellow at the Counter Extremism Group.

In "Gen Z and the Jews: Understanding Age Differences in American Attitudes Towards

Antisemitism, Israel and the Holocaust,” Neil Kressel examines generational differences in attitudes toward Israel, knowledge of the Holocaust, and antisemitism in the United States. Drawing on recent polling data and social-scientific research, he argues that younger Americans tend to be less supportive of Israel, somewhat less informed about the Holocaust, and, by some measures, more accepting of antisemitic narratives than older cohorts. Rather than treating variables such as political orientation, religiosity, race and ethnicity, and media consumption as competing explanations, Kressel proposes that they function as the principal channels through which generational change is expressed. He concludes by considering whether declining Holocaust consciousness and changing forms of political socialisation may reshape the future relationship between American Jews and wider American society. In Kressel’s assessment, these generational differences are unlikely to disappear as individuals age. If current trends continue, he suggests, it may be difficult to assume that the United States of the future will be as hospitable to Jews as it has been in the past. The article also raises the question of whether sensitivity to antisemitism can be sustained as Holocaust consciousness continues to decline. Neil Kressel is Professor of Psychology at William Paterson University.

The third article, “Antizionism as a Distinct Anti-Jewish Bigotry,” by Adam Louis-Klein, argues that antizionism is not merely a political stance that occasionally crosses into antisemitism, but a coherent ideological formation in its own right, with its own genealogy, characteristic libels, and political logic. Tracing antizionism’s development through the Nazi–Islamist nexus, Soviet–Arab nationalist propaganda, and Western settler-colonial theory, the article identifies a recurring triad of accusations—coloniser, apartheid, and genocide—which Louis-Klein argues constitutes the stable core of antizionist discourse. Drawing on structural anthropology and genealogical methods, he contends that antizionism represents a

systematic inversion of classical antisemitism. Whereas classical antisemitism was anti-assimilationist, casting Jews as an alien and infiltrating minority, antizionism is described as assimilationist, denying the legitimacy of Jewish nationhood and sovereignty while recoding the Jew from a non-European outsider into a white colonial oppressor. The article further argues that prevailing definitional frameworks—including the IHRA Working Definition, the Jerusalem Declaration on Antisemitism, and the Nexus Document—obscure this structure by treating classical antisemitism as the model against which antizionism is measured. Recognising antizionism as a distinct contemporary form of anti-Jewish bigotry, Louis-Klein contends, requires moving beyond this “line-crossing” paradigm and identifying antizionism’s own characteristic tropes and libels. Adam Louis-Klein is a doctoral candidate in anthropology at McGill University.

In our final article, “Israel, Genocide, and Gaza: The Law and Politics of an Accusation,” John Strawson examines the claim that Israel’s military response to October 7 has been genocidal. He focuses on the legal definition of genocide contained in the 1948 Genocide Convention and its application in the jurisprudence of the two United Nations international criminal tribunals established during the 1990s to address atrocities in the former Yugoslavia and Rwanda. Strawson argues that the designation of Israeli military action as “genocide” by the Independent International Commission of Inquiry established by the UN Human Rights Council and chaired by Navi Pillay does not satisfy the specific intent requirement central to the legal doctrine. He further contends that the willingness of some legal scholars to rely upon this designation in calling for immediate punitive action against Israel reflects a political campaign that risks undermining international law while simultaneously contributing to the international rise in antisemitism. John Strawson is Professor Emeritus of International Law at the University of East London.

This special issue also includes our regular interview feature. Recorded in June 2025, Matthew Feldman's conversation with Anthony Julius reflects on Julius's distinguished career, from representing Princess Diana and Deborah Lipstadt to being portrayed by Andrew Scott in the film adaptation of the 2000 David Irving libel case, *Denial*. The interview then turns to contemporary antisemitism and its various manifestations, particularly Holocaust denial. Against the backdrop of rising antisemitism, Feldman reflects on Julius's longstanding commitment to the public good in Britain and his efforts to remind both allies and critics alike of what is at stake in confronting prejudice and intolerance. Matthew Feldman is Professor Emeritus in the Modern History of Ideas and a leading UK expert on the radical right.

The IHRA Working Definition of Antisemitism has become a focal point in contemporary debates about antisemitism and antizionism, particularly on university campuses. In a review essay on Mark Mazower's book *On Antisemitism: A Word in History*, John Hyman argues that any coherent discussion of how antisemitism should be defined must begin with a clearer understanding of what definitions are, the forms they take, their functions in law,

the social sciences, and lexicography, and the criteria by which they should be evaluated. John Hyman holds the Grote Chair in Philosophy of Mind and Logic at University College London.

In her review of Robert Katz's *Antisemitism and the Law*—the first American casebook devoted to the subject—Lili Levi argues that the inclusion of antisemitism as a field of legal study within law school curricula is particularly important at a moment when antisemitism is becoming increasingly normalised and mainstreamed in the United States. She contends that both the book and the emerging field of law and antisemitism must navigate internal disagreements, external pressures, technological challenges, and curricular competition. At the same time, she commends the volume for its attention to both legal analysis and alliance-building while identifying promising directions for future development. Lili Levi is Professor of Law at the University of Miami School of Law.

We hope that the contributions collected in this special Spring issue will inform ongoing scholarly discussion and public debate and encourage further research into the changing dynamics of antisemitism and antizionism in our post-October 7 world.

Lesley Klaff
Editor-in-Chief

Antisemitic Attitudes and Anti-Jewish Crime in the United Kingdom: Longitudinal Trends, Demographic Predictors, and Policy Implications

Daniel Allington

Abstract

Recent terror attacks against Jewish targets in the United Kingdom and elsewhere in the diaspora have been motivated by hostility to Israel and (for the most part) carried out by Muslim members of migrant communities, often with links to Islamist organizations. In this, such attacks follow trends in anti-Jewish incidents more broadly. An explanation for this pattern may be found in evidence (a) that antisemitic attitudes are low in the United Kingdom and culturally similar countries, but much higher in parts of the Muslim world from which large numbers have migrated to the United Kingdom, and (b) that extremists exploit the Israel-Hamas conflict in order to radicalize Muslims in particular.

This article presents two empirical studies. The first, which aggregates official UK police statistics for the eight-year period ending March 2025, finds absolute numbers of religiously aggravated crimes targeting perceived Jews to have roughly tripled, appearing to track developments in the Israel-Hamas conflict (notably doubling after October 7, 2023). The second, which analyzes attitudinal data collected from the general British population between December 2020 and September 2025 ($n = 11394$), finds proportions of individuals with elevated levels of “old” (Judeophobic) and “new” (antizionist) antisemitic attitudes to be almost perfectly correlated from one year to the next, roughly doubling after the Hamas-led atrocities of October 7, 2023, with this rise having occurred disproportionately among the young (especially with regard to “old” antisemitic attitudes, which barely changed among individuals of median age and above). Multiple demographic predictors are identified with regard to “old” and “new” antisemitic attitudes, identity as Muslim emerging as by far the strongest in respect of both. Christians of all denominations are found to be particularly unlikely to hold elevated levels of antisemitic attitudes in relation to Israel and its supporters, while Christians of mainstream denominations are found to be no more nor less susceptible to elevated levels of classic antisemitic belief than people of no religion (although Christians of small minority denominations were found to be more likely to hold such attitudes). These findings have important policy implications, both for government and for the Jewish community itself.

Keywords: Antisemitism, antizionism, hate crime, Islamism, Jihadism, migration, Muslims, terrorism

INTRODUCTION



2025 was the year in which a long-anticipated, long-dreaded event came to pass. On the

morning of October 2—the first morning of Yom Kippur—the Heaton Park Hebrew Congregation synagogue in Manchester became unwilling host to the United Kingdom’s first lethal terror attack on a Jewish place of worship.

Once upon a time, it might have seemed safe to assume that such an attack could come only from right-wing extremist members of the country's historical ethnic and religious majority community, i.e., white British people of Christian faith. But this was almost exactly two years after the largest massacre of Jews since the Holocaust, carried out by a coalition of Palestinian militants and civilians which crossed the border between Gaza and Israel on October 7, 2023, under the leadership of the Qatari-funded Iranian proxy militia, Hamas: an Islamist group dedicated to the killing of Jews.¹ So it should have come as no surprise that an era of comparative Anglo-Jewish safety would come to an end with an attack, not from white British Christians inspired by neo-Nazism, Christian Nationalism, or White Nationalism, but from a different ethnic, religious, and ideological quarter entirely.

Jihad al-Shamie was the Syrian-born, UK-resident son of a doctor who had praised the perpetrators of the October 7, 2023, atrocities as "Allah's men on earth."² During his rampage—which resulted in death or serious injury for three members of the congregation (one of whom was accidentally hit by a police bullet)—al-Shamie explicitly pledged allegiance to Islamic State³ and shouted, "this is what they get for killing our children,"⁴ thus identifying his murderous actions as retribution for the death of Palestinians in Gaza. His own death was guaranteed by the fake suicide belt that he wore, the presence of which obliged police responders to take his life.

Like the Hamas-led incursion that the terrorist's father had celebrated, albeit on a much smaller scale, the Heaton Park synagogue attack resulted in loss of life. The same was thankfully not true of the terror plot hatched by Tunisian-born Walid Saadaoui together with the Syrian-born Kuwaiti national Amar Hussein.⁵ These two Islamic State supporters were convicted on December 23 the same year in connection with a planned mass casualty attack on Jewish community targets in the same city, in

preparation for which they had attempted to procure smuggled automatic weapons and ammunition.⁶ Both men were said to have a "visceral dislike" of Jews,⁷ with the October 7, 2023, atrocities having inspired Saadaoui—who once prayed not to be caught until he had "br[oken his] thirst with Jewish, Christians [sic], and their [sic] proxies' blood"—to begin preparing an attack, and with Hussein describing UK Prime Minister Sir Keir Starmer as "[a] terrorist that kills our children and gives Israel weapons [to] kill our children."⁸

As Saadaoui's reference to Christian blood should remind the readers of this article, it is not always Jews who become the immediate victims of antisemitic crime. Eight days after the October 7, 2023, pogrom, Ahmed Ali Alid—a Moroccan citizen who had entered the United Kingdom illegally and applied for asylum—murdered an elderly non-Jewish man, also attempting to murder a fellow asylum seeker who had converted to Christianity.⁹ Following his arrest, Alid told police that "he wanted to kill [his two victims] because of the conflict in Gaza and so that Palestine would be free from 'Zionists,'" further clarifying that "he would have killed many more people if he had been able to, because so many innocents were being killed in Gaza."¹⁰ One might also draw a parallel with the case of Ali Harbi Ali, a British-born Islamic State supporter of Somali heritage, who killed British MP Sir David Amess the previous year, in part because of the latter's support for airstrikes against Islamic State targets in Syria and in part because of his membership of the parliamentary group Conservative Friends of Israel.¹¹

Recent attacks such as the above have also occurred elsewhere in the world. Elias Rodriguez, a Chicago-born US citizen with a background in left-wing politics,¹² appears to have made a call to "bring the war home," justifying "armed action" and arguing that "the perpetrators and abettors [of genocide] have forfeited their humanity," before allegedly opening fire on attendees at a reception at the Capital Jewish

Museum in Washington, D.C., on May 21, 2025, shouting “Free Palestine,” and subsequently declaring that he “did it for Palestine” and “did it for Gaza.”¹³ Mohamed Soliman, the Egyptian asylum seeker who attacked a Colorado rally for Israeli hostages in Gaza with firebombs and a makeshift flamethrower on June 1, 2025, yelling “Free Palestine” and later telling investigators that he wanted to “kill all Zionist people,” is reported to have expressed support for the Muslim Brotherhood.¹⁴ The terrorists who are alleged to have carried out the December 14, 2025 massacre of fifteen Jews attending a Hanukkah party at Bondi Beach, i.e., Indian-born Sajid Akram and his Australian-born son Naveed Akram,¹⁵ appear to have expressed allegiance to Islamic State, and explained the motivation for their attack through condemnation of “Zionists.”¹⁶ On March 12, 2026, as this article neared completion, Lebanese-born Ayman Mohamad Ghazali, the brother of a Hezbollah commander and a US citizen since 2015, carried out a vehicle ramming attack on the Temple Israel synagogue in Detroit, his car laden with explosives, but thankfully killed no one before dying by his own hand.¹⁷

There are three fundamental points to observe about these attacks, whether consummated or frustrated. The first is that all but one of the perpetrators were both Muslims and either migrants or members of migrant communities, and that the exception had a background, not in right-wing but in left-wing politics. The second is that all but one of the Muslim perpetrators either were directly connected to or had expressed support for formal Islamist organizations, either during or prior to their crimes. The third is that, in every single case but that of Ghazali (who said nothing about his motives), the attackers (or would-be attackers) explicitly indicated in their own words that they were motivated not by traditional Western prejudices against Jews, but by hostility to Israel and its “Zionist” citizens and supporters. In this third respect, the more outspoken perpetrators follow Hamas’s turn towards official public expression

of hostility towards “Zionism,” rather than Jews¹⁸—a turn which did not, of course, preclude that organization from killing hundreds of Jewish civilians on October 7, 2023,—and indeed adopt the framing of its original founding document, which drew heavily on European antisemitic sources and openly fulminated against “warmongering Jews,” yet referred to “world Zionism” where earlier Islamists had identified their enemy as “world Jewry.”¹⁹

These trends show no sign of abating. While this article was under review, several arson attacks on Jewish targets in London were claimed by a new Islamist organization known as Harakat Ashab al-Yamin al-Islamia,²⁰ with named suspects Hamza Iqbal and Rehan Khan, both identified as British nationals, being arrested alongside an unnamed dual British-Pakistani national in connection with the most devastating attack, which destroyed several ambulances belonging to a Jewish charity.²¹ During the same period, details were released of an attack on the Israeli embassy in London which had been thwarted on April 28, 2025, with the arrest of Abdullah Albadri: a Kuwaiti asylum seeker who had illegally entered the United Kingdom by small boat.²² Armed with knives and wearing a Palestinian keffiyeh, Albadri was carrying a handwritten note with the words “I will not go back on my decision to go in the cause of Allah, to come out for His sake and to stand up to the enemies in order to support the religion of Allah Almighty,” and was heard to declare that “they need to stop” the “war on children.”²³ Then, while the manuscript of this article was being copyedited following peer review, Essa Suleiman—a British citizen born in Somalia—was arrested and charged with the public stabbing of two visibly Jewish men in one of the most famously Jewish areas of London, which prompted the UK government to raise the country’s terror threat level to “severe.”²⁴ Harakat Ashab al-Yamin al-Islamia again claimed responsibility:

Zionists were targeted by our lone wolves in the Golders Green area of London. The heroic act

left two Zionists critically wounded and on the brink of death . . .

Historically, the Jews are the killers of Jesus Christ, and today, the Zionists are the killers of innocent women and children.

We call upon all free people in the world, especially Muslims, to carry out qualitative operations in defense of humanity, occupied Palestine, al-Aqsa Mosque, and the prisoners. Furthermore, anyone who is able to kill Zionists should not hesitate.²⁵

In this context, it may be noted that a majority of the 3700 antisemitic incidents logged by the UK Community Security Trust in 2025 and the 3556 antisemitic incidents logged by the same organization the previous year “referenced, or were linked to, Israel, Palestine, the Hamas terror attack, or the subsequent war,”²⁶ with 1766 incidents in 2025 “in which the offender demonstrated outright antizionist motivation that went beyond more superficial discourse about the region or the conflict, alongside explicitly anti-Jewish comments or abuse aimed at unsuspecting Jewish people.”²⁷ That is, there is clear evidence for the role of narratives about Israel in motivating and justifying hostile targeting of Jews in the United Kingdom, both above and below the terror threshold.

However, there exists in Britain, as in many other countries, an established academic and political infrastructure for the minimization and downplaying of antisemitism that does not originate on the extreme right.²⁸ A team of three scholar-activists at the Birkbeck Institute for the Study of Antisemitism—including the institute’s director and co-director—responded to the Manchester synagogue attack by publishing an article in the left-wing magazine, *Prospect*.²⁹ The article, which appeared less than three weeks after the attack itself, cast doubt on Community Security Trust figures showing record numbers of antisemitic incidents for the first half of the year,³⁰ argued that Jewish concerns over antisemitism may not reflect real-world events as they were likely to have been “fuelled by encounters

on social media,” and complained that the “widespread attempt to draw a straight line between the reported rise in antisemitic incidents and the attack at the Heaton Park synagogue . . . mistakenly conflates the reality of everyday antisemitism,” which the Birkbeck scholar-activists argue to be a minor and diminishing problem, “with what happened in Manchester.”³¹ The article continues as follows:

There is another way of looking at antisemitism . . . which gives very different results. Social scientists and polling companies survey the British population’s attitudes to Jewish people. Far from showing an unrelenting wave of hate, this data indicates that antisemitism in Britain has been in steady decline over the last decade. Polls undertaken by YouGov suggest a striking shift in attitudes to Jewish people. For example, in 2015 the organisation reported that 25 per cent of respondents believed that Jews “chase money more than other people” whereas in early September this year that figure had dropped to 14 per cent. Similarly, the earlier survey found that 17 per cent of respondents believed that “Jewish people have too much power in the media” but this year the same question elicited a positive response from 13 per cent of those surveyed.

All of this leaves us with a puzzle. Jewish perceptions depict an antisemitism rising steeply, and many Jews are fearful. This is corroborated (and likely reinforced) by trends in recorded incidents. Meanwhile, research on attitudes suggests that antisemitism is in decline.³²

This is—of course—cherry-picking. Arbitrarily selecting two items for comparison across two surveys a decade apart (while ignoring the nine carried out in the intervening period) is obviously unprincipled, and strongly suggestive of motivated reasoning—especially when the batteries from which the questionnaire items were drawn were designed for analysis in the aggregate. However, while the authors avoid

naming the social scientists involved or citing their work, choosing instead to identify only the opinion research company which collected the data, it is worth noting that one of those social scientists has indeed published an analysis which appears to show a slight fall in “classic” antisemitic attitudes—that is to say, traditional European prejudices with regard to Jews identified as such—across the British electorate for the period 2015–2020.³³ There is thus more evidence than one might at first assume for the idea of declining antisemitic attitudes within the general British population, which is indeed suggestive of a contradiction between an apparent increase in the victimization of Jews and an apparent fall in the general prevalence of the attitudes that one might suppose to motivate such victimization. For the Birkbeck scholar-activists, the contradiction appears to be at least partly resolved through the imputation of exaggeration when it comes to the victimization of Jews (a rhetorical move which they had made before).³⁴ However, such a contradiction would be open to another potential explanation—and one which involves no implication that Jews are confused about their victimization, or have been crying wolf.

Writing nearly a decade ago with regard to the situation in France, Günther Jikeli notes that, “[a]t first sight, a perplexing discrepancy exists between the sharp rise in antisemitic incidents and antisemitic violence since 2000, and representative attitude surveys that do not show a drastic rise in antisemitic attitudes.”³⁵ Writing more recently, but with regard to the same approximate period, Robert Brym similarly notes that “[a]ttitudinal data . . . suggest that the percentage of Canadians with negative attitudes toward Jews . . . declin[ed] from the 1980s until 2019,” but that, “[i]n contrast . . . , most behavioural data indicate a rise in antisemitic incidents in Canada over the past four decades, with an especially dramatic jump in reported antisemitic incidents and hate crimes since the early 2000s.”³⁶ Both Jikeli and Brym essentially

propose the same explanation: that the empirical victimization of Jews that occurs in societies like those of France and Canada today does not really emerge from what the Birkbeck scholar-activists call “a reservoir of racialised beliefs about Jewish people . . . [that] are embedded in [the] common culture” of the nation,³⁷ being instead largely the preserve of “small fractions of the [national] population,”³⁸ and indeed having a wellspring outside Europe, not only in the sense that “heightened tension and violence in the Palestinian-Israeli conflict trigger antisemitic acts” through a mechanism by which “[t]he demonisation of Israel becomes a demonisation of all Jews and lowers the threshold for acting upon negative attitudes toward Jews,”³⁹ but also in the sense that—as Jikeli observes in an article published six years later—“all antisemitic perpetrators in 21st century Europe who killed Jews for being Jewish were Muslim and made some reference to Muslim extremist ideology.”⁴⁰

The remainder of this article will attempt to establish whether Jikeli’s analysis of the situation in France, echoed in Brym’s analysis of the situation in Canada, might also apply to the United Kingdom: firstly, through a literature review which takes other national contexts into consideration but focuses on the United Kingdom in particular; secondly, through aggregation of eight years of official crime statistics for England and Wales (these collectively forming the part of the United Kingdom in which most British Jews are resident; see Appendix); and thirdly, through inferential analysis of a very large UK-wide attitudinal survey dataset spanning a six-year period.

All data and analytic code employed in the empirical studies were made available to peer reviewers, and have now been published on an open access basis in the Open Science Framework repository.⁴¹

LITERATURE REVIEW

According to the conventional antiracist view, where “antisemitism has . . . been turned into a concrete programme of political violence . . .

it is situated within a web of hatreds,” including “anti-Black racism, Islamophobia, hatred of migrants, misogyny, homophobia, [and] hatred of transpeople,” across which “[t]he commonality . . . is white nationalism.”⁴² However, there is abundant evidence that this form of political violence exists alongside a form of terrorism which is specific to Jews—and which has, indeed, eclipsed it, becoming the predominant terror threat now faced by Jews in the West. That is, while the extreme right-wing tradition of white nationalist political violence targets Jews alongside members of other minority groups, often imagining Jews at the heart of an elaborately fantasized conspiracy,⁴³ it now appears to be overshadowed by a different tradition of anti-Jewish violence, which is offered up as vengeance for perceived wrongs done to Palestinians, and which is typically (but not exclusively) carried out by members or informal supporters of Islamist groups.

That Muslims might be disproportionately represented among the perpetrators of Islamist terrorism—and also of Islamist-inspired criminality which falls below the terror threshold—would be expected for the obvious reason that people of their faith form the primary constituency to which Islamists aim to appeal, just as people of historically European phenotypes form the primary constituency to which white nationalists aim to appeal. But the question of why such activity should be directed against Jewish targets needs explanation. It has been observed that the Muslim Brotherhood has, since its earliest days, “frame[d] jihad for Palestine as a pan-Islamic religious duty,” with Yusuf al-Qaradawi—for many years, its spiritual leader—presenting such jihad—especially as waged by Hamas, the Palestinian branch of the Muslim Brotherhood—as “a cause so fundamental that participation becomes a test of authentic spiritual identity” for Muslims.⁴⁴ A British former Islamist has explained the religio-political

importance of anti-Israeli and anti-Jewish themes as follows:

There . . . [are] quotations that [Islamists] would use, like “If you give away a handspan of Islamic land, you’ll get the same amount in hellfire”, they use all these justifications . . . [to the effect that] it was up to the Muslims to have defended that land, and it was their duty to have done so, and they neglected their duty to protect the land from the Zionists. . . . And so . . . from there sprouts a whole load of other arguments and issues and justifications to fight against the State of Israel, and then the blurred lines of, well, the State of Israel is a Jewish state. . . . [T]here’s a lot of justification of fighting the State of Israel . . . from Islamic scripture, of . . . encourag[ing] people to fight for what is theirs. . . .

. . . [There are] Muslims around the world [who feel] that this is a place that belonged to them . . . and [that] for it to be taken away and for it to be put into the hands of what they call “the Jews” is completely unacceptable.⁴⁵

Given this ideological background, it is perhaps unsurprising that analysis of data collected from a sample of British Muslims in 2015 should have found a clear statistical link between antisemitic attitudes and support for multiple expressions of Islamist extremism,⁴⁶ such that (for example) a one standard deviation rise in antisemitic attitudes was associated with over seven times greater odds of sympathy for Islamic State.⁴⁷ The representative of a Jewish communal organization argues as follows:

[War between Israel and Hamas is] used as an excuse to express . . . hatred [of Jews] and [Islamist] ideology more openly, and it’s also used as a recruiting [tool]. . . . [So w]hat we seem to see is Islamist organisations working hard between . . . rounds of fighting [between Israel and Hamas] . . . and then really surging

their activities during [phases of armed] conflict, so . . . they are constantly active, they constantly use the conflict as a means of propagating their ideology and of claiming that there is a crisis all of the time, and then, when . . . fighting is active, then they surge their activities and start gathering out on the street.

What it basically means is that . . . when there is [armed] conflict, [Islamist antisemitism] suddenly shoots up and then . . . after [that,] . . . expressions of the ideology come back down again . . . but never to the previous level, so you end up with this sort of ratcheting up where each [armed] conflict sees a surge and then a new normal which is worse than before.⁴⁸

In the United Kingdom, Community Security Trust figures show a gradual rise in antisemitic incidents from 501 in 2015 to 911 in 2019, followed by a four-year plateau interrupted by a spike of 1371 in 2021;⁴⁹ the year of the brief but deadly escalation in the Israel-Hamas conflict remembered on one side as the Unity Intifada and on the other as Operation Guardian of the Walls. This plateau ends with a meteoric rise to 2019 incidents in 2024—the first complete calendar year following the atrocities led by Hamas under the name of the Al-Aqsa Flood and the beginning of the retaliatory war waged by Israel under the name of Operation Swords of Iron—and a record-breaking 1521 incidents in the first half of 2025 alone, as the latter war continued.⁵⁰ Meanwhile, surveys conducted by the Institute for Jewish Policy Research show the proportion of British Jews disagreeing with the statement “I feel safe as a Jewish person living in the United Kingdom” falling from 18% in May 2021—the month of the aforementioned escalation—to 9% in May 2023, then rising to 25% in May 2024—just over half a year into the aforementioned war—and further climbing to 35% in May 2025 as the war continued.⁵¹

These figures, which rise and fall in tandem, collectively present exactly the sort of pattern described by the communal representative

quoted above. And they may also be compared with figures from overseas. For example, in the United States, antisemitic hate crimes rose by 63% from 2022 to 2023, and the proportion of Jews reporting declining feelings of safety rose by 73.8% from 2019 to 2024.⁵² As to the possible reasons for this, an analysis of national survey data found that attitudes towards Jews in the United States became less positive from 2020 to 2024,⁵³ with by far the most precipitous fall taking place among Muslims.⁵⁴ This is precisely the sort of thing that one might expect to find if negative attitudes to Jews were motivated by a desire for revenge against Israel, and especially if such desire were encouraged by Islamists in addressing a target audience composed, in the first instance, of Muslims. (Although considerably smaller, the second greatest fall was among Black respondents,⁵⁵ which may perhaps be related to the radical anti-Israeli turn taken by some prominent African American cultural figures, such as Ta-Nehisi Coates.)⁵⁶

Although underacknowledged on a political level, the idea that the greatest threat to European Jewish security might be located within diasporic Muslim communities is not new. As long ago as 2006, a report from the US Department of State Special Envoy to Monitor and Combat Antisemitism raised concern that, while not confined to Muslims, Israel-focused antisemitism is “common throughout the Middle East and in Muslim communities in Europe,”⁵⁷ and in France “appears to be the generator of most antisemitic incidents, as evidenced by the clear spike in antisemitic incidents whenever conflict in the Middle East flares up,” with “evidence of a shift away from extreme right-wing perpetrators of physical attacks on Jews and Jewish property towards young Muslim males.”⁵⁸ Five years later, Manfred Gerstenfeld argued that mass immigration from (to employ his chosen turn of phrase) “Muslim countries where antisemitism is widely promoted” had been, from a European Jewish perspective, the single most important development of the preceding half-century, with consequences that

were “almost entirely adverse,” both with regard to “the disproportionately large number of antisemitic incidents caused by immigrants from these countries” and with regard to “the more extreme nature of some of [those incidents].”⁵⁹

One study based on data collected in 2014 and 2024 for the Anti-Defamation League (for more on which, see below) found the proportion of individuals with highly antisemitic attitudes to have increased between these dates in forty-eight of ninety-six countries, while falling in just fourteen.⁶⁰ With regard to the ten European countries which were also surveyed in 2023, the same study found that the proportion of such individuals increased from 2023 to 2024 in six of them (massively so, in the case of Russia), while falling in just three.⁶¹ The same study notes that some of these changes were slight.⁶² However, this was inevitable, given that the comparison was made on the basis of arithmetic differences rather than ratios, and that the starting percentages were in most of these (European) cases low.

An official European Union monitoring project noted that, in Germany, the Israel-Hamas conflict popularly remembered as the Second Intifada motivated both Islamists and the extreme right wing to antisemitic action, also observing that the same event was associated with an exceptionally high level of antisemitic agitation in the Swedish city of Malmö, where the Muslim population was higher than that of the other major cities in the country and where antisemitic attitudes appeared to be more common among Muslims than in the general population.⁶³ An early twenty-first-century study of antisemitic incidents across the then fifteen member states of the European Union found that “Physical attacks on Jews and the desecration and destruction of synagogues were acts often committed by young Muslim[s] . . . [often] either during or after pro-Palestinian demonstrations,”⁶⁴ while a more recent survey of Jews in Europe found that 30% of those who had experienced antisemitic harassment identified the perpetrator as “someone with an extremist Muslim view” (as

compared to 21% identifying him or her as “someone with a left-wing political view” and only 13% identifying him or her as “someone with a right-wing political view,”⁶⁵) and a subsequent survey of young European Jews found that, of those who had experienced antisemitic violence, 59% identified the perpetrator as Muslim.⁶⁶ A poll of a large, representative sample of UK Jews conducted by a leading opinion research company found 60.8% to fear Islamists more than neo-Nazis, and just 15.9% of Jews to fear neo-Nazis more than Islamists.⁶⁷

These findings may be set in context of a number of studies which suggest higher levels of antisemitism among Muslims than among members of other groups. A 2006 Pew Global Attitudes poll found between 65% and 98% of the population of the majority-Muslim nations, Turkey, Pakistan, Indonesia, Egypt, and Jordan (listed here from low to high), to report having an unfavorable view of Jews, also finding stark differences in this regard between Muslim and non-Muslim residents of West European nations—the greatest discrepancy being found in the United Kingdom, where 47% of Muslims, but just 7% of the general public, reported the same.⁶⁸ (When it came to more pronounced levels of hostility, the ratio was even greater, with 3% of the general British population, but 33% of British Muslims, admitting to a “very unfavourable” view of Jews.)⁶⁹ A 2008 survey of six European nations, conducted by the Berlin Social Research Centre, found agreement with the statement “The Jews cannot be trusted” to run at around 10% among Christians, but 28–64% of Muslims, depending on country,⁷⁰ while a 2015 ADL survey found that, across six European nations, 21% of all respondents, but 59% of Muslim respondents, agreed with six or more of eleven antisemitic stereotypes.⁷¹ Reviewing a range of international studies just over a decade ago, Günther Jikeli found that “[a]ntisemitic attitudes in many Muslim-majority countries are high, including in those countries where the majority of European Muslims, or their parents, originate,”⁷² and that,

across Europe, “the level of antisemitic attitudes is significantly higher among Muslims than among non-Muslims.”⁷³ In a 2024 Canadian survey, 81% of respondents in general, but only 44% of Muslim respondents, disagreed with boycotts of Jewish businesses in Canada as a means of expressing opposition to Israeli government policy.⁷⁴

Levels and types of religiosity have in some cases been found to play an important role. For example, an online survey conducted among residents of Iran found Muslim religious identity to be strongly correlated both with anti-Israeli attitudes ($r = .52$) and (to an even greater extent) with anti-Jewish attitudes ($r = .77$),⁷⁵ while findings of a number of studies suggest that “[t]he level of antisemitism [among European Muslims] rises with the level of religiosity and with fundamentalist interpretations of Islam.”⁷⁶ In particular, the aforementioned Berlin Social Research Centre study found that, among “very religious” Muslims, distrust of Jews ran at more than 70% of those who described themselves as “fundamentalist,” but less than 30% of those who did not.⁷⁷

When it comes to recent UK-specific studies, a 2020 survey found more British Muslims to agree than disagree that Jews have too much control over each of (a) the global media, (b) the global banking system, (c) the global arms industry, (d) global political leadership, and (e) the global entertainment industry, with this trend being strongest among Muslims at least half of whose friends are Muslim, and with agreement being strongest among those with the greatest frequency of mosque attendance.⁷⁸ This would support Matthias Küntzel’s view that “Islamic antisemitism thrives above all where European Muslims live in parallel societies.”⁷⁹ That particular study did not include a comparison sample of non-Muslims, but a 2026 follow-up with differently worded questions (published as this article was being copyedited) found great contrasts between proportions within a sample of 1006 British Muslims and within a sample of 1025

members of the general population (which also included Muslims): members of the Muslim-only sample were 2.29–2.83 times more likely to consider Jews to have too much power over the parliament, the banking system, the media, the pharmaceutical industry, the legal system, the weapons manufacturing industry, and the entertainment and music industry, from lowest to highest.⁸⁰ (Interestingly, while examination of the topline summary for the underlying data does not suggest a clear relationship between concern over Jewish power and frequency of mosque attendance, it *does* suggest a relationship between the latter and support for terrorist organizations, with positive feelings towards Hamas reported by just 7–12% of those who never attend, or who attend only once or twice per year, but by 34–35% of those who attend once or more per week.)⁸¹

The most detailed study so far of the relationship between antisemitism and religion in the United Kingdom has been L. Daniel Staetsky’s 2016 survey of 4005 UK-resident adults, including 995 Muslims.⁸² This found 28% of UK residents with no religion, and between 24% and 32% of members of various Christian denominations, but 56% of Muslims, to hold at least one “classic” antisemitic view.⁸³ Predictors of antizionist views were not explored. However, Staetsky’s analysis found that—after holding antizionist views—the strongest predictors of classic antisemitic views were being born outside the United Kingdom and being Muslim.⁸⁴

That each of the latter two predictors survives statistical control for the other suggests both that second-generation British Muslims might be less likely to hold antisemitic attitudes than their parents, and that non-Muslim migrants might be more likely to hold antisemitic attitudes than non-Muslims of British origin. In this context, it is worth noting that there have been many surveys of attitudes towards Jews in one of the largest sources of migration towards the United Kingdom, i.e., the European Union. As one review of such studies notes, comparative studies have tended to find that levels of antisemitism

are higher in East European than in West European countries.⁸⁵ For example, from 1992 to 2011, a succession of surveys in Poland found rising agreement that Jews have too much power and influence in the country, as well as rising belief in the myth that more ethnic Poles than Jews were murdered during the Second World War,⁸⁶ with one 2010 survey finding nearly 20% agreement with the statement that “Although the Holocaust was a great tragedy, one good thing about it is that there are no more Jews living currently in Poland.”⁸⁷ In Romania, a pair of early twenty-first-century surveys found 27–36% of Romanian respondents agreeing with statements such as “Jews exaggerate the persecutions they were subjected to in order to obtain advantages” and “The suffering of the Jewish people is God’s punishment.”⁸⁸ In some countries, such as Slovakia, levels of antisemitism appeared to subside following the fall of communism,⁸⁹ while in others, such as Hungary, they appeared to increase.⁹⁰

A reading of the available literature thus raises the possibility that antisemitic attitudes may have been imported into the United Kingdom through migratory flows not only from countries within which Islam is the dominant religion, but also from countries within which it is not. Indeed, it is hard to see how things could be otherwise: an under-acknowledged implication of the findings of the 2025 ADL Global 100 Index (which was based on international survey data collected the previous year) is that the proportion of strongly antisemitic individuals in Britain is so low, in global terms, that immigration from almost anywhere outside of Canada, the United States, and Western Europe (more specifically, its historically Protestant constituent nations, plus France with its longstanding and deeply embedded tradition of secularism) would be liable to raise it.⁹¹ In this connection, attention must be drawn to the fact that individuals born or having heritage in Eastern European countries with substantial antisemitic traditions now constitute a notable element within the United Kingdom’s ethnic mix, with—for

example—an estimated 682000 Polish-born, 329000 Romanian-born, 142000 Lithuanian-born, and 116000 Hungarian-born UK residents as of the period running from July 2020 to June 2021,⁹² and with the 2025 ADL Global 100 Index suggesting the proportion of residents of those countries with elevated levels of classic antisemitic attitudes to be (respectively) 3.33, 3.58, 3.00, and 3.00 times higher than in the United Kingdom.⁹³ Of course, these figures are dwarfed by those from many Muslim-majority nations, especially in the Middle East and North Africa. To take the most extreme examples: both in Kuwait and in the West Bank and Gaza, the proportion of residents with such attitudes was found to be 8.08 times higher than in the United Kingdom. In the subcontinent, proportions of individuals with elevated levels of antisemitic attitudes appear more moderate, with ADL figures suggesting that those in majority-Muslim Bangladesh were only marginally higher than those in historically Orthodox Christian Greece, i.e., about 4.33 times those in the United Kingdom, while those in India, with its substantial Muslim minority, were about the same as those in Catholic Poland. All this is to say that Jews whose forebears left relatively high-antisemitism environments for the relatively low-antisemitism environment of the United Kingdom may now be finding that—thanks to subsequent waves of immigration—the latter is increasingly coming to resemble the countries from which their ancestors fled.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Having established the above points through literature review, this article will attempt to answer the following questions with regard to the United Kingdom.

1. How have rates of anti-Jewish crime changed over time?
2. How has the proportion of individuals with elevated levels of antisemitic attitudes changed over time?

3. What are the demographic predictors of elevated levels of antisemitic attitudes?

RQ1 is investigated through descriptive analysis of official police totals for hate crimes targeting perceived Jews (Study I). RQ2 and RQ3 are answered through inferential analysis of data which were collected from the general UK population in a series of surveys carried out by the UK opinion research company YouGov from 2020 to 2025 (Study II).

STUDY I: AGGRAVATED OFFENCES TARGETING PERCEIVED JEWS IN ENGLAND AND WALES, 2017–2025

Dataset

In order to answer RQ1, this study focuses on the UK legal category of “aggravated” offences, i.e., offences motivated by, or accompanied by expressions of hostility towards, the intended victim’s perceived possession of a legally protected characteristic, such as membership of a racial or religious group. Since the year ending March 2018, the UK government has published yearly totals for such offences broken down by the perceived characteristic in question,⁹⁴ with monthly totals also being available from April 2023 to March 2025.⁹⁵

Analytic Methodology

Analysis proceeds through examination of these official figures with regard to religiously aggravated offences targeting perceived Jews, with offences targeting perceived Muslims and Christians also provided as context. The analysis is descriptive rather than inferential. Indeed, inferential tools such as confidence intervals and significance tests would be neither necessary nor valid in relation to such a dataset, because the statistics in question relate not to a sample, but to the whole population of recorded offences. The analysis relates to England and Wales only,

because equivalent statistics are not available for Scotland and Northern Ireland. However, only a very small proportion of the United Kingdom’s Jewish population is resident outside England and Wales (see Appendix), which means that Scotland and Northern Ireland will have offered relatively few opportunities for offending against Jewish targets. Scrutiny of this dataset thus provides a very direct means by which to assess the changing threat level facing UK Jews, using information logged by official sources in relation to legal criteria which apply equally to Jews and non-Jews.

Findings

Figure 1 visualizes total numbers of offences aggravated by hostility towards members of the Jewish faith group for all available years, alongside total numbers of offences aggravated by hostility towards Christians and Muslims, which are provided for comparison. On the basis of this chart, a number of observations may be made.

Firstly, numbers of offences aggravated by hostility towards Muslims are more frequent than offences aggravated by hostility towards Jews—but not so much more frequent as one might expect, given that the population of Muslims in the country is 14.26 times larger. Indeed, offences aggravated by hostility towards Jews accounted for 28.2% of all religiously aggravated offences in 2024–2025, and 31.7% of all religiously aggravated offences the previous year—which is a remarkable proportion of religious hate crimes to be directed at a group that at the time of the last census comprised only 4.3% of what might be called the minority religious population (that is, the population of UK residents who follow a religion other than Christianity).

Secondly, numbers of offences aggravated by hostility towards members of all three religious groups rise throughout the period, but not by equivalent amounts. If we compare the last two years to the first two years of the period April

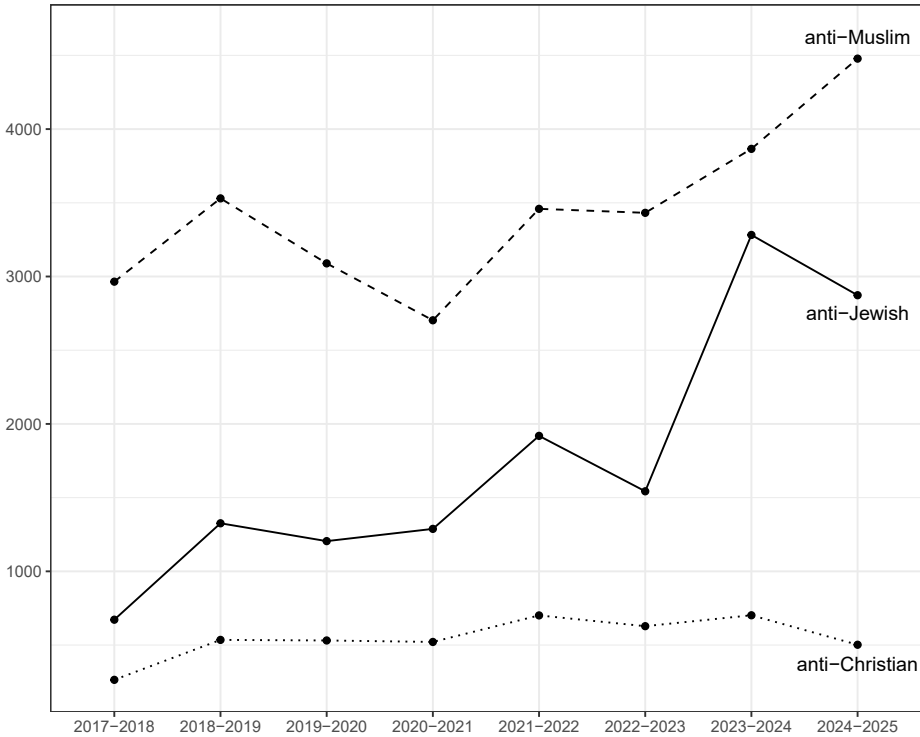


FIGURE 1. Police-recorded anti-Jewish, anti-Muslim, and anti-Christian hate crimes, April 2017–March 2025 (yearly totals).

2017 to March 2025, hate crimes targeted against perceived Christians (a population which is *declining* in size) rise by 50.7%, while hate crimes targeted against perceived Muslims (a population which is *growing* in size) rise by just 28.5%. (Indeed, this may even indicate a fall relative to the size of the Muslim population, which grew by 44.4% from 2011 to 2021, and thus might be expected to have grown by about 35.6% between April 2017 and March 2025.) However, hate crimes targeted against perceived Jews rise by an astonishing 208.1%.

What does this tripling of the aggravated crime rate mean for Jewish safety? It is an important question to ask, because—as the first section of this article has shown—there are many voices strongly dedicated to the minimization

and trivialization of threats to Jewish safety. For example, one left-wing writer dismisses Home Office statistics showing a rise in anti-Jewish crime for the year 2023–2024 on the grounds that “it seems likely that many of these incidents represent police spotting banners they deem antisemitic, rather than threats to individual Jews.”⁹⁶ In fact, Home Office figures reveal that, in 2023–2024 and 2024–2025, 10% of hate crimes targeting perceived Jews involved the crime of assault. With regard to Muslims—the only other group for which such proportions were published—the proportion also remained roughly constant, ranging from 17% to 18% of hate crimes targeting perceived Muslims. This would imply 616 instances of religiously aggravated assault against people perceived to be

Jewish—or 2.27 assaults per 1000 Jews in England and Wales according to 2021 census figures—for the two reporting years running from April 2023 to March 2025, as compared to 1463 instances of religiously aggravated assault against people perceived to be Muslim—or 0.38 assaults per 1000 Muslims in England and Wales according to the same census—throughout the same period. That is, in England and Wales for the period in question, the rate of religiously aggravated assault against individuals targeted on the basis of perceived identity as Jews was 6.00 times higher (relative to the size of the Jewish population) than the rate of religiously aggravated assault against individuals targeted on the basis of perceived identity as Muslims (relative to the size of the Muslim population, which is growing and is therefore likely to have been *underestimated* for the period 2023–2025,

leading to a probable overstatement of the rate of assault per 1000 individuals).

This strongly suggests that Jewish perceptions of declining safety are not alarmist but an accurate reflection of reality. Indeed, it suggests that, even if the terror threat is taken out of consideration, the security of the Anglo-Jewish community is in a parlous and deteriorating state.

We may also gain some idea of motivations from examination of yearly totals, which spike in 2021–2022 (the year of the Unity Intifada and Operation Guardian of the Walls), and 2023–2024 (the year of the Al-Aqsa Flood and the beginning of Operation Swords of Iron).

The point becomes clearer when we look at Figure 2, which visualizes monthly totals for hate crimes targeting Jews. As may be seen, these totals spike in October 2023—the month of the Hamas-led atrocities which led to Israel's

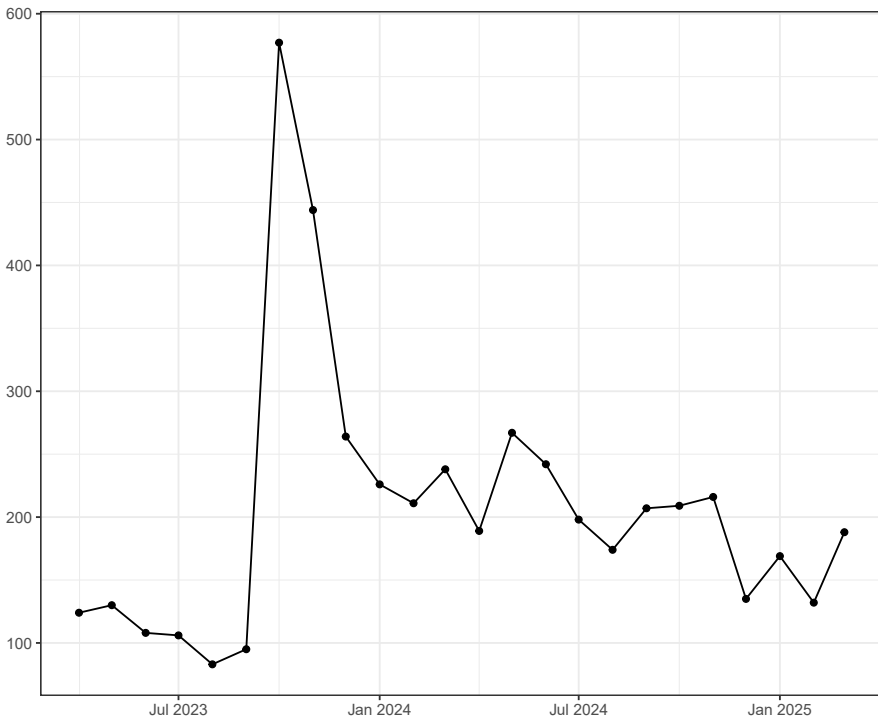


FIGURE 2. Police-recorded anti-Jewish hate crimes, April 2023–March 2025 (monthly totals).

military response and partial re-occupation of Gaza—before gradually declining back to a level somewhat higher than before, such that the number of hate crimes targeting Jews in England and Wales from April 2024 to March 2025 was 93% higher than the mean level from April 2019 to March 2023.

Discussion

It is now possible to answer this article's first research question: rates of anti-Jewish crime in the United Kingdom have approximately tripled over the course of the last eight years. Glib dismissals of such crime as low-level, inconsequential, or likely reflective of police over-sensitivity, may confidently be set aside: on the basis of official police statistics for England and Wales, Jews are likely to fall victim to religiously aggravated assault at a far higher rate than Muslims (the only other group for which it is possible to draw a comparison). This in turn implies that—contrary to implications made by some authors quoted in the introduction—neither Community Security Trust reporting, nor polling of threat perception within the United Kingdom's Jewish population (such as that carried out by the Institute for Jewish Policy Research), can be assumed to have exaggerated the problems faced by UK Jewish communities.

The yearly and monthly totals visualized above are clearly suggestive of motive. If criminal victimization of Jews bubbled up (so to speak) from a reservoir of traditional European prejudices against Jews, there would be no reason to expect it to spike following a flare-up in the Israel-Hamas conflict. If, on the other hand, it is driven by something closely connected to that conflict, such as the desire to be revenged upon local Jews for the (real or purported) actions of the distant Jewish state of Israel, then such spikes are exactly what one would expect to see. The question of who might be carrying out such crimes cannot be answered with official data, as statistics on

perpetrator identity are not collected by UK police forces. However, they provide additional context for high-profile offences whose perpetrators are known—such as those discussed in this article's introduction.

In many such cases, the motivations of those perpetrators have been made absolutely clear—as this article has shown—and align closely with the interpretation presented here, i.e., that people with an anti-Israeli axe to grind tend to strike out at whichever Jews are available. Further insight may be provided by the attitudinal data analyzed in the following study. For now, it may simply be observed that official crime statistics exactly match the pattern of “ratcheting up” described by the above-quoted Jewish communal organization representative, who attributed rising UK antisemitism to exploitation of the Israel-Hamas conflict by Islamists.

STUDY II: PREDICTORS OF ELEVATED ANTISEMITIC ATTITUDES AMONG UK RESIDENTS, 2020–2025

Dataset

In order to answer RQ2 and RQ3, a unique dataset was produced by collating six separate survey datasets collected online on December 16–17, 2020; December 19–20, 2021; December 22–23, 2022; December 8–11, 2023; August 2–5, 2024; and September 1–2, 2025, by YouGov, a member of the British Polling Council, with funding from Campaign against Antisemitism. Respondents to these surveys were presented with items from the Generalized Antisemitism scale, which contains two subscales: one measuring Judeophobic Antisemitism, i.e., traditional European anti-Jewish attitudes, and one measuring Antizionist Antisemitism, i.e., extreme anti-Israeli attitudes closely resembling traditional European anti-Jewish prejudices (see Table 1). This scale is notable both for its extensively referenced demonstration of face validity⁹⁷ and for its

TABLE 1. Questionnaire items, Generalized Antisemitism scale items

Judeophobic Antisemitism (JpAs)	
Jewish people can be trusted just as much as other British people in business	*
Jewish people are just as loyal to [nation] as other British people	*
I am just as open to having Jewish friends as I am to having friends from other sections of British society	*
Compared to other groups, Jewish people have too much power in the media	
Jewish people talk about the Holocaust just to further their political agenda	
Jewish people chase money more than other people do	
Antizionist Antisemitism (Antizionist Antisemitism)	
I am comfortable spending time with people who openly support Israel	*
Israel has a right to exist as a homeland for the Jewish people	*
Israel is right to defend itself against those who want to destroy it	*
Israel and its supporters are a bad influence on our democracy	
Israel can get away with anything because its supporters control the media	
Israel treats the Palestinians like the Nazis treated the Jews	

* Reverse-coded

psychometric validation.⁹⁸ A further advantage is its balance of positively and negatively keyed items.

The resulting dataset included a total of 11622 observations. Participants were randomly selected from a large recruited panel within quotas for age, education, gender, region, social grade (a specifically British measure of occupational class, conventionally used throughout the opinion research industry), political attention, and voting history. Although this approach to sampling has been specifically calibrated to produce accurate indicators of future voting behavior, it is not guaranteed to produce representativeness on demographic variables such as ethnicity and religious affiliation. Thus, the observations for each annual sample in the dataset were re-weighted to match the general population on age, gender, ethnicity, and religious group. Weighting was done on the basis of population percentages derived from the 2021 census of England and Wales, the 2021 census of Northern Ireland, and the 2022 census of Scotland (see Appendix).

Analytic Methodology

The overall analytic approach adopted in this study consisted of (a) visualizing proportions of individuals with elevated levels of antisemitic attitudes, and (b) modelling the likelihood of a given individual harboring elevated levels of antisemitic attitudes. Both for visualization and modelling purposes, ethnic and religious group, age, gender, household income, highest educational qualification, and date of data collection were treated as independent variables. For ease of interpretation, all of these variables but religious and ethnic group were dichotomized throughout, with the exception that annual samples were treated separately when visualizing changes of proportions of individuals within the UK-resident population as a whole and when calculating population-level correlations between proportions of individuals with elevated levels of “old” and “new” antisemitic attitudes. For purposes of visualization, 95% confidence intervals were calculated using the modified Wilson method proposed by Lawrence Brown and colleagues.⁹⁹ In order to clarify the longitudinal

visualizations, the Wald method was additionally used to calculate a 95% confidence interval for the ratio between proportions of individuals in the general population with elevated levels of antisemitic attitudes, before and after October 7, 2023.

For modelling purposes, logit models were fitted, again with 95% confidence intervals. Except with regard to date of data collection (see below), modelling was done without interaction terms: that is to say, coefficients were estimated on the simplifying assumption that the effects of ethnicity, religion, and other demographic variables will have been independent of one another. This assumption is not entirely realistic, but was considered necessary in order to avoid overfitting, as even a dataset as large as this one will have included very few observations at the intersections of certain pairs of categories. For example, the dataset included only sixty-six South Asian respondents of no religion, and only fifteen who identified as Christian.

Possessing an elevated level of antisemitic attitudes was defined in terms of providing potentially antisemitic responses (i.e., agreement with positively keyed items or disagreement with reverse-coded items) to *more than half* of the six items on either of the Generalized Antisemitism scale's two subscales. This approach has the advantage of providing readily interpretable statistics, i.e., percentages and odds, with regard, not to antisemitic attitudes in the abstract, but to individuals in whom such attitudes pass a given threshold and as such can be regarded as elevated: a matter of clear relevance where *threats to the Jewish population* are concerned. For the sake of model interpretability, all predictor variables were either categorical or recoded as such, with participant age and household income being dichotomized at the median and with the multiple dates of data collection being collapsed into two distinct eras, i.e., that preceding and that following the October 7, 2023, pogrom.

The two subscales of the Generalized Antisemitism scale were treated separately for

purposes both of visualization and of modelling. That is, individuals with elevated levels of Judeophobic Antisemitism (JpAs), i.e., traditional European prejudiced and paranoid attitudes expressed towards Jews identified as Jews, were fully distinguished from individuals with elevated levels of Antizionist Antisemitism (AzAs), i.e., substantially similar and genealogically related prejudiced and paranoid attitudes expressed towards Israel and its supporters. Decades of empirical studies have reliably replicated the finding of moderate positive correlation between attitudes to Jews and attitudes to Israel on the level of the individual personality, whether as a core finding or as a finding incidental to the main investigation.¹⁰⁰ However, by treating these traits as distinct and reporting findings separately for each of them, this article provides complete transparency with regard to the research questions which it was designed to answer.

Sample Demographics

Respondents were placed in one or other of four ethnic groupings, through recoding of YouGov's standard self-identification categories. White respondents constituted the majority, with 10204 such being categorized as British (including those identifying as white and as either British, English, Scottish, Welsh, or Northern Irish), and with the remaining 478 white respondents (including those identifying as Irish and those identifying as Gypsy or Irish Traveler as well as the much larger numbers specifying that they belonged to "any other white background," many of whom are likely to have been born in Eastern Europe) being collected together into a single category. Of those who did not identify as white, the largest group was comprised of the 223 respondents identifying as Indian, Pakistani, or Bangladeshi, all of whom were collectively classified as South Asian. Respondents self-identifying with other categories were treated as a single category. This included African and Afro-Caribbean ethnicities,

as well as Chinese respondents, and those selecting YouGov's "any other Asian background" category (which was used by only fifty-eight respondents and thus can have included at most only tiny numbers of South Asian respondents with heritage from outside the three South Asian nations identified by name, for example, Sri Lankans and Nepalis). Within this category, the largest contingent was made up by 221 respondents of mixed or multiple ethnicity.

The dataset contained responses collected from sixty-six individuals identifying as Jewish, who were removed from the dataset for all analytic purposes. It may be observed that, among the sixty-six individuals who identified as Jewish and were for that reason discounted from the analysis, none displayed what is defined here as an elevated level of Judeophobic Antisemitism, and just one—a seventy-year-old female surveyed in 2020—displayed what is defined here as an elevated level of Antizionist Antisemitism.

Once this was done, religion was collapsed into six categories, with 6695 respondents stating that they had no religion, and with the bulk of the remainder identifying with one of the major churches in the United Kingdom: here, adherents of the Episcopalian and Presbyterian churches were grouped together, as these Protestant groupings include the national churches of both England and Scotland and can thus be taken to represent an "established" religious sensibility. Roman Catholics formed the next-largest group, and were likewise treated as a category by themselves. Christians of all other denominations, amongst whom the majority was comprised by 268 Baptists and Methodists and 141 Evangelicals, were treated as a single group. Muslims made up the next largest religious group within the dataset, with all other respondents being placed in a single group. (Note that, for weighting purposes, Christians were treated as a single group. This was necessary because different Christian denominations were not distinguished in all national census questionnaires.)

With the small number of Jews taken out of consideration (see above), 11622 observations remained. For descriptive statistics, see Table 2, which presents percentages and (in parentheses) absolute numbers of respondents for various levels of the categorical variables used for analysis, together with mean and standard deviation for age. The reason for the fall in absolute numbers between the unweighted and weighted datasets is that 228 respondents provided insufficient demographic information for weighting. Once such individuals were excluded, 11394 data points were available for analysis. It will be noted that there was over-representation of women, white British people, and people of no religion, and consequent under-representation of a number of minority demographic groups. The small number of observations for some such groups within the dataset—including Muslims—is reflected in wider confidence intervals with regard to findings vis-à-vis the particular groups in question.

Visualization of Longitudinal Trends and Relationship between "Old" and "New" Antisemitic Attitudes

Figure 3 suggests that the trend implied by the already-noted finding of a slight fall in the proportion of UK-resident adults with elevated levels of Judeophobic antisemitism—that is, traditional European prejudices about Jews—in 2015–2020¹⁰¹ may have continued into 2021, remaining stable for another year, while the proportion of individuals with elevated levels of antizionist antisemitism—that is, essentially similar prejudices expressed in relation to Israel and its supporters rather than in relation to Jews identified as Jews—appears to have remained stable throughout the first three years. However, everything changes following the Hamas-led atrocities of October 7, 2023, and the subsequent military campaign which Israel launched in response. In *every* sample collected from 2023 to 2025, the proportion of individuals with elevated levels of *each* form of antisemitism was

higher than it had been in *every* sample collected from 2020 to 2022. Moreover, there were steep rises not only between 2022 and 2023, but between 2023 and 2024. From 2024 to 2025, proportions remained roughly stable, with a slight fall with regard to Judeophobic antisemitism and a slight rise with regard to antizionist antisemitism, but with substantial overlap between the 95% confidence intervals in both cases. Overall, the proportion of members of the sample exhibiting elevated levels of Judeophobic antisemitism roughly doubled after October 7, 2023, providing 95% confidence that the proportion of members of the general population harboring the same increased by 1.53–2.32 times, while the proportion of members of the sample exhibiting elevated levels of antizionist antisemitism also roughly doubled, providing 95% confidence that the proportion of members of the general population harbouring the same increased by 1.80–2.25 times.

It may be noted that two charts plotted in Figure 3 follow very similar shapes—especially so in 2021–2024. That is, while proportions of individuals with what are here defined as elevated levels of Judeophobic antisemitism are substantially smaller than proportions of individuals with what are here defined as elevated levels of antizionist antisemitism, changes to these proportions run approximately in parallel. Indeed, the product-moment correlation between the proportion of individuals with elevated levels of Judeophobic Antisemitism and the proportion of individuals with elevated levels of Antizionist Antisemitism, from one year to the next, is close to perfect ($r = .93$).

What this means is that, throughout the period covered by the dataset, the relationship between the proportion of individuals holding elevated levels of each form of antisemitic attitudes is virtually linear, with a 4.0 percentage point rise in the proportion of individuals with elevated levels of Antizionist Antisemitism corresponding to a 1.0 percentage point rise in the mean proportion of individuals with elevated levels of Judeophobic Antisemitism. This may

be seen in Figure 4, which plots these proportions against one another for each year in which data were collected. Although wholly unexpected and thus unrelated to any research question, the finding of such strong linearity in the relationship between the two is an important empirical observation that shall be returned to below.

Breaking the dataset down by demographic variables, as in Figures 5–10, shows that the proportion of individuals with elevated levels of both forms of antisemitic attitudes increased after October 7, 2023, in almost every group. It also reveals lower rates of both forms of antisemitism among white British respondents, as compared to members of other ethnic groups, as well as hugely elevated rates of both forms of antisemitism among Muslims, as compared to every other religious group. Some groups (such as Muslims) are much more sparsely represented than others in the dataset (such as irreligious people, and Episcopalians and Presbyterians), their estimated percentages being subject to greater statistical uncertainty that is reflected in wider confidence intervals. However, this does little to undermine the impression (available also from earlier studies cited in the literature review above) of a particular association between antisemitism and claimed identity as Muslim: especially with regard to the two largest religious groups (i.e., people of no religion, and members of the Christian denominations encompassing the established churches of England and Scotland), the confidence intervals are not even close. Before October 7, 2023, there is overlap between the lower end of the confidence interval for Muslims and the upper end of the confidence interval for a number of other small religious groups with regard to Judeophobic Antisemitism, but, after October 7, 2023, these overlaps disappear, and, with regard to Antizionist Antisemitism, no such overlap appears at any point.

On the basis of the data analyzed here, it would be difficult to make a judgement as to whether post-October 7, 2023, increases are

proportional across ethnic and religious groups: arithmetic differences for the larger ethnic and religious groups are small, as are samples for the ethnic and religious groups with the largest arithmetic differences, which means that, in each case, the confidence interval for the ratio would be very wide. However, rises were clearly much more slight in individuals over forty-eight years old than in individuals aged eighteen to forty-seven—especially with regard to Judeophobic Antisemitism, where the change among older individuals was negligible, suggesting that, across society, growth in antisemitism may have been predominantly among the young. For this reason, an interaction term between respondent age and date of data collection was included in each of the logit models.

Statistical Models

As discussed above, logit models were fitted to the dataset, with elevated levels of each form of antisemitism being treated as a separate outcome variable. For model coefficients, expressed in the form of adjusted odds ratios, see Table 3 and Figures 11–12.

These models provide support for the view that the rise in “old” or Judeophobic Antisemitic attitudes since October 7, 2023, has been virtually confined to the young: no association whatsoever was found between date of data collection and likelihood of holding elevated levels of such attitudes, and only a very slight (and entirely non-significant) association was found between youth and the same, but a very strong association was found for the interaction between the two, with sub-median age in the post-October 7, 2023 era being associated with an approximate tripling of the odds of holding such attitudes, providing 95% confidence that the odds increased by 1.86–5.40 times for people under forty-eight years of age in the general population. This combines with what appear to be greatly increased odds of holding elevated levels of “new” antisemitic attitudes, although those are slightly harder to interpret, because they also

rose among older respondents, albeit to a lesser degree: the relevant model provides 95% confidence that the odds of elevated Antizionist Antisemitic attitudes rose by 1.31–2.22 times overall, and by a further 1.69–3.37 times for the young.

As well as quantifying the increase in antisemitic attitudes since October 7, 2023, these models also suggest that by far the strongest predictor of “new” and “old” antisemitic attitudes is being Muslim, which was found to be associated with hugely increased odds of holding elevated levels of *both*. Indeed, they provide 95% confidence that the odds of a given individual’s holding elevated levels of Judeophobic Antisemitic attitudes are 9.64–24.89 times higher if he or she is Muslim than if he or she has no religion, with the odds being 7.41–14.45 times higher if attention is switched to Antizionist Antisemitism. By contrast, all forms of Christianity were found to be associated with *reduced* odds of holding elevated levels of Antizionist Antisemitic attitudes, with (for example) 95% confidence that those odds are 1.71–2.68 times lower for Episcopalians and Presbyterians than for people of no religion, while only the smaller Christian denominations were associated with increased odds of elevated Judeophobic Antisemitism (with 95% confidence that those are 1.56–3.58 times higher for members of non-Episcopalian, non-Presbyterian, non-Catholic churches than for people of no religion).

Male gender was associated with substantially increased odds of Judeophobic Antisemitism (with 95% confidence that these are 2.34–3.99 times higher for males than for females), but unchanged odds of Antizionist Antisemitism, while education to degree level was found to be associated with 1.21–2.08 times lower odds of elevated Judeophobic Antisemitism, but 1.09–1.51 times higher odds of elevated Antizionist Antisemitism (again, at a 95% level of statistical confidence). Interestingly, membership of a white ethnic group originating outside Britain was associated

TABLE 2. Descriptive demographic statistics

	Age			Gender		Ethnicity			Religion							
	n	M	SD	Female	Male	White: British	White: other	South Asian	Other ethnicity	None	Episc./ Presb.	Catholic	Other Christian	Muslim	Other religion	
2020	Unweighted	1636	52.59	16.63	59.0 (965)	41.0 (671)	91.6 (1491)	3.7 (61)	1.8 (29)	2.8 (46)	54.0 (884)	27.4 (449)	7.5 (123)	6.8 (111)	1.4 (23)	2.8 (46)
	Weighted	1627	48.28	17.45	51.6 (962)	48.4 (665)	74.7 (1491)	8.2 (61)	6.4 (29)	10.7 (46)	40.0 (883)	28.6 (447)	12.2 (122)	9.0 (108)	6.4 (22)	3.8 (45)
2021	Unweighted	1633	50.73	16.59	52.2 (853)	47.8 (780)	90.3 (1451)	4.4 (70)	1.9 (30)	3.5 (56)	55.8 (911)	25.8 (421)	7.3 (119)	5.3 (86)	1.8 (29)	4.1 (67)
	Weighted	1607	48.36	17.58	51.6 (845)	48.4 (762)	74.9 (1451)	8.3 (70)	6.4 (30)	10.4 (56)	39.9 (900)	30.2 (413)	11.2 (118)	8.3 (83)	6.4 (29)	4.0 (64)
2022	Unweighted	1697	50.02	16.47	55.2 (936)	44.8 (761)	87.9 (1473)	5.3 (88)	2.7 (45)	4.1 (69)	58.1 (986)	24.4 (414)	7.2 (123)	5.1 (86)	1.5 (26)	3.7 (62)
	Weighted	1675	48.36	17.46	51.6 (929)	48.4 (746)	74.8 (1473)	8.1 (88)	6.4 (45)	10.7 (69)	40.0 (975)	30.6 (411)	11.0 (123)	8.1 (85)	6.4 (21)	3.9 (60)
2023	Unweighted	2000	50.14	17.34	53.9 (1079)	46.1 (921)	86.8 (1715)	4.1 (80)	2.6 (52)	6.5 (128)	57.4 (1148)	23.5 (470)	8.1 (161)	5.6 (111)	2.0 (39)	3.5 (71)
	Weighted	1975	48.68	17.72	51.6 (1068)	48.4 (907)	74.6 (1715)	8.3 (80)	6.4 (52)	10.7 (128)	39.9 (1136)	28.8 (466)	12.6 (159)	8.2 (110)	6.4 (37)	4.1 (67)
2024	Unweighted	2537	51.60	17.19	54.0 (1371)	46.0 (1166)	90.9 (2222)	3.7 (91)	1.1 (28)	4.3 (104)	59.1 (1499)	24.3 (616)	7.3 (186)	4.7 (118)	1.0 (26)	3.6 (92)
	Weighted	2445	48.89	17.84	51.7 (1323)	48.3 (1122)	74.9 (2222)	8.2 (91)	6.4 (28)	10.6 (104)	39.9 (1445)	29.4 (592)	12.7 (182)	7.5 (116)	6.3 (22)	4.2 (88)
2025	Unweighted	2119	52.04	17.04	55.2 (1169)	44.8 (950)	89.7 (1852)	4.3 (88)	1.9 (39)	4.2 (86)	59.8 (1267)	23.1 (489)	7.4 (157)	5.4 (115)	1.2 (25)	3.1 (66)
	Weighted	2065	48.67	17.81	51.6 (1142)	48.4 (923)	74.7 (1852)	8.2 (88)	6.4 (39)	10.7 (86)	39.9 (1238)	28.4 (478)	12.0 (151)	9.2 (111)	6.4 (22)	4.1 (65)

with 95% confidence of 1.32–2.85 times higher odds of elevated levels of Judeophobic Antisemitism and 1.12–1.89 times higher odds of elevated levels of Antizionist Antisemitism.

Adjusted odds ratios for non-Abrahamic religion and for South Asian ethnicity need to be interpreted in the light of an appreciation of the intersections between religious and ethnic identity. The odds ratios approximately cancel out, with the result that a South Asian Sikh or Hindu would be estimated to have about the same odds of elevated antisemitic attitudes as a White British person of no religion, while the odds of a UK-resident Muslim of South Asian origin would be estimated to be lower than those for UK-resident Muslims of ethnic origin elsewhere in the world. An implication of the model as it stands is that a South Asian Christian or atheist would be exceptionally unlikely to hold antisemitic attitudes, but this should not be taken too seriously: as noted above, there were vanishingly few respondents at these intersections of ethnic and religious categorization.

These observations should serve as a reminder that the coefficients of a logit model are multiplicative. The meaning of the models presented here may thus be clarified by comparing the implied probability of holding elevated levels of antisemitic attitudes for individuals possessing various combinations of demographic characteristics. Exact percentages are quoted only in order to illustrate the idea of multiplicative odds, and should not be taken at face value. (For this reason, confidence intervals are ignored, and the estimated model coefficients are taken at face value.)

On the basis of the model, it would be estimated that a male, 18–47 years old, educated to below degree level, and living in a household with a combined income of under £35000 would have a roughly 6.8–8.2% probability of harboring elevated levels of Judeophobic Antisemitic attitudes in the post-October 7, 2023, era if he were of white British ethnicity and either had no religion or belonged to one of the mainstream Christian

denominations (i.e., Episcopalianism, Presbyterianism, and Catholicism), or if he were of South Asian ethnicity and hewed to a non-Abrahamic faith such as Hinduism or Sikhism, but would have a 14.2% probability of the same if he were of a non-British white ethnic group and hewed to the Catholic faith, a 25.6% probability if he were of a non-British white ethnic group and adhered to a minority Christian church, a 34.7% probability if he were of South Asian ethnicity and of Muslim faith, and a 46.7% probability if he were of Muslim faith and belonged to a non-white ethnic group originating outside the Subcontinent (for example, in Africa or the Middle East). By contrast, he would be estimated to have an 8.1–9.0% probability of harboring elevated levels of Antizionist Antisemitic attitudes if he were of white British ethnicity and belonged to any Christian denomination, as compared to an 11.4–12.6% probability if he were Christian but associated with a non-British white ethnic group, a 16.2% probability if he were of white British ethnicity and held no religion, a 21.4% probability if he were of South Asian ethnicity and a non-Abrahamic religion, and a 66.7–74.5% probability if he were Muslim (with the probability being at the lower end of this range for a South Asian Muslim and at the upper end for a Muslim of other non-white heritage).

Female gender reduces the estimated probability of elevated levels of Judeophobic Antisemitic attitudes by 2.90 times, while leaving the estimated probability of elevated levels of Antizionist Antisemitic attitudes about the same; on the other hand, median or greater age decreases the probability of elevated levels of Judeophobic Antisemitism by 2.48 times, while decreasing the estimated probability of elevated levels of Antizionist Antisemitic attitudes by 1.75 times. As for degree-level education, it reduces an individual's estimated probability of holding elevated levels of Judeophobic Antisemitic attitudes by 1.54 times, while

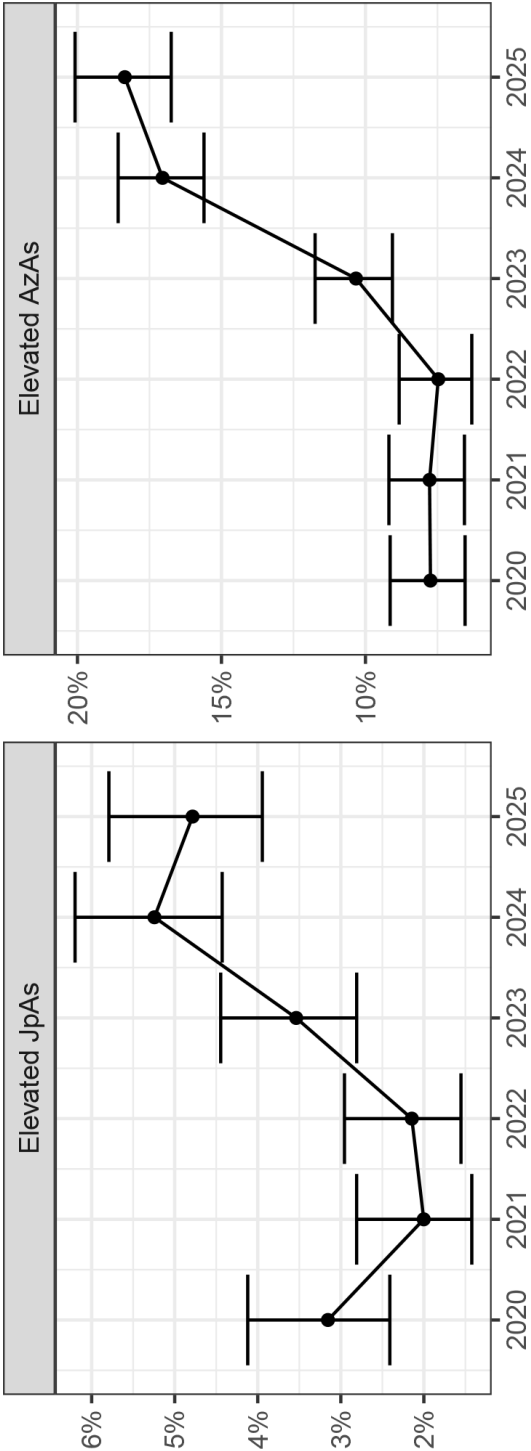


FIGURE 3. Proportions of individuals with elevated levels of Judeophobic Antisemitism and Antizionist Antisemitism, by year (95% CI).

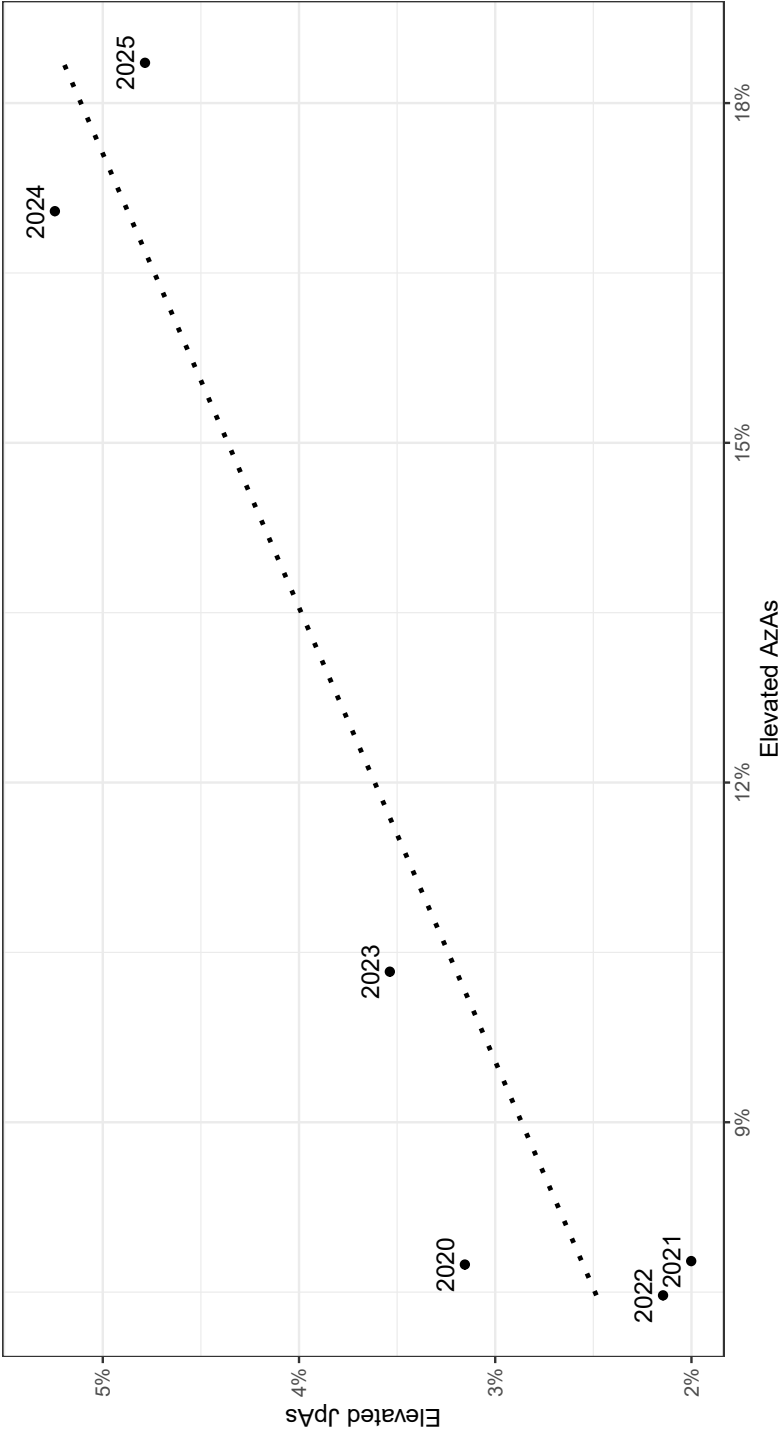


FIGURE 4. Proportion of individuals with elevated levels of Judeophobic Antisemitism by proportion of individuals with elevated levels of Antizionist Antisemitism.

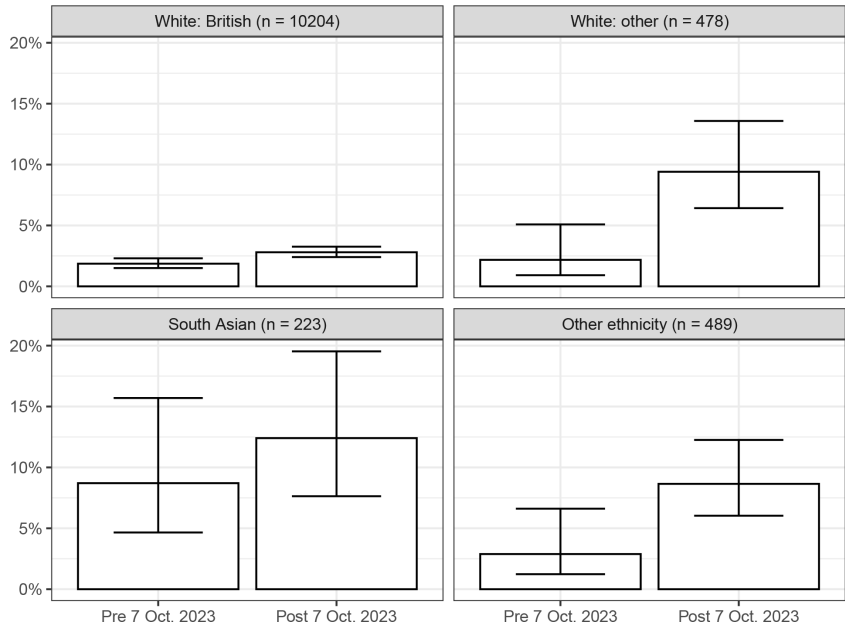


FIGURE 5. Proportion of individuals with elevated levels of Judeophobic Antisemitism across ethnic categories, by date of data collection (95% CI).

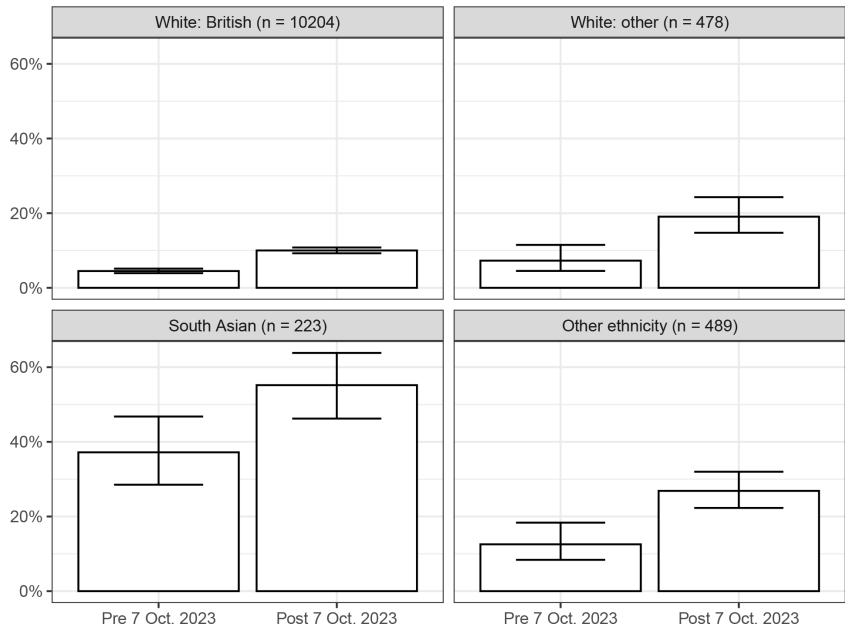


FIGURE 6. Proportion of individuals with elevated levels of Antizionist Antisemitism across ethnic categories, by date of data collection (95% CI).

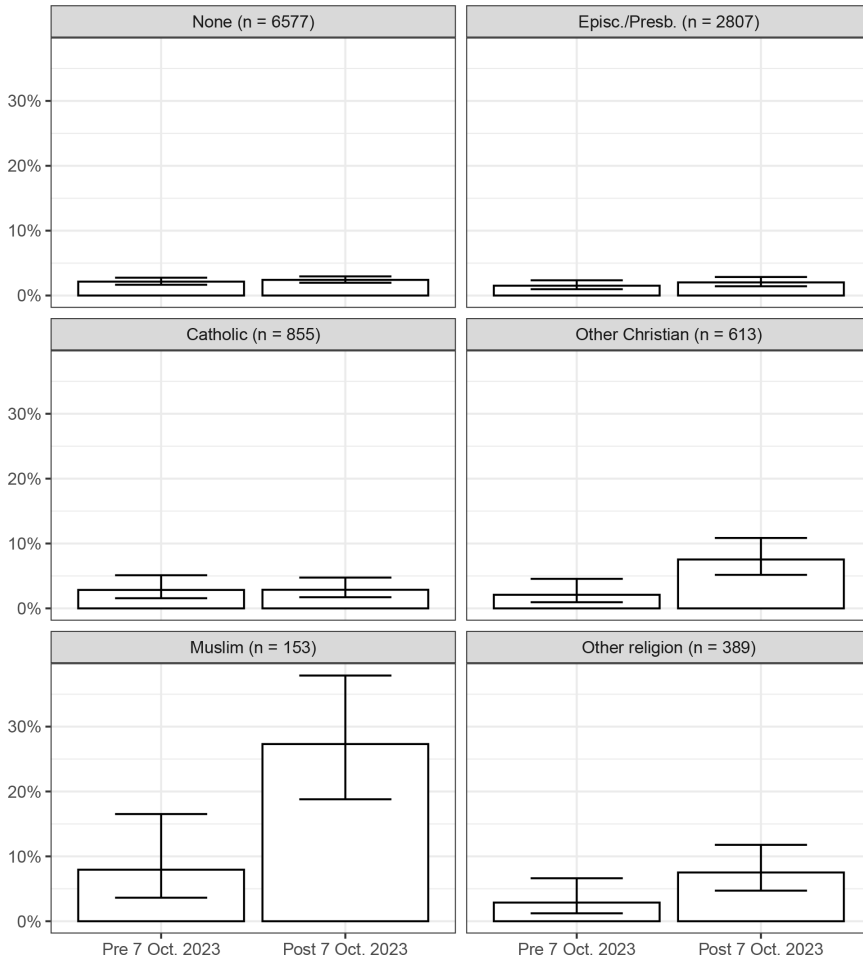


FIGURE 7. Proportion of individuals with elevated levels of Judeophobic Antisemitism across religious categories, by date of data collection (95% CI).

increasing an individual's estimated probability of holding elevated levels of Antizionist Antisemitic attitudes by 1.23 times. Thus, a white British member of the Church of England or the Church of Scotland, aged forty-eight or more, would be predicted to have a 0.6–1.0% probability of elevated levels of Judeophobic Antisemitism (depending on level of education) if female, and a 1.9–2.9% probability of the same (again, depending on level of education) if male, as compared to a 4.6–6.1% probability of

elevated levels of Antizionist Antisemitism (again, depending on level of education, with gender making little difference).

Date of observation makes a great difference to these estimated probabilities. Before October 7, 2023, the estimated probability of an 18–47-year-old's being found to hold elevated levels of Judeophobic Antisemitic attitudes would be 2.89 times lower (probabilities for older individuals would be unchanged), while the estimated probability of elevated levels of

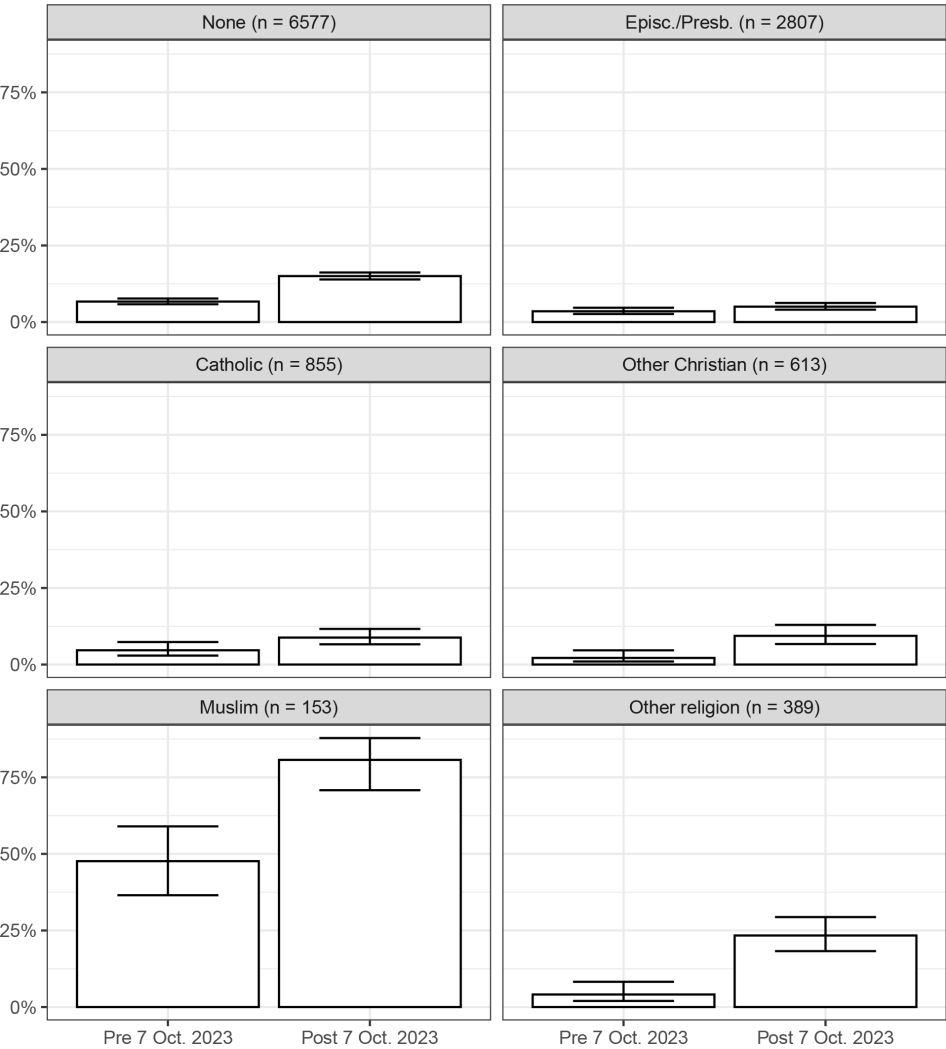


FIGURE 8. Proportion of individuals with elevated levels of Antizionist Antisemitism across religious categories, by date of data collection (95% CI).

Antizionist Antisemitic attitudes would be 3.55 times lower for an individual aged 18–47, and 1.63 times lower for someone older.

Discussion

The remaining research questions may now be answered. The proportion of individuals with elevated levels of antisemitic attitudes has

roughly doubled, although the increase has been much greater among the young than among the old (amongst whom ‘old’ antisemitic attitudes do not appear to have increased at all). The likelihood of elevated levels of Judeophobic Antisemitism is increased by male gender, membership of a Christian denomination other than Episcopalianism, Presbyterianism, and Catholicism, and not having been educated to

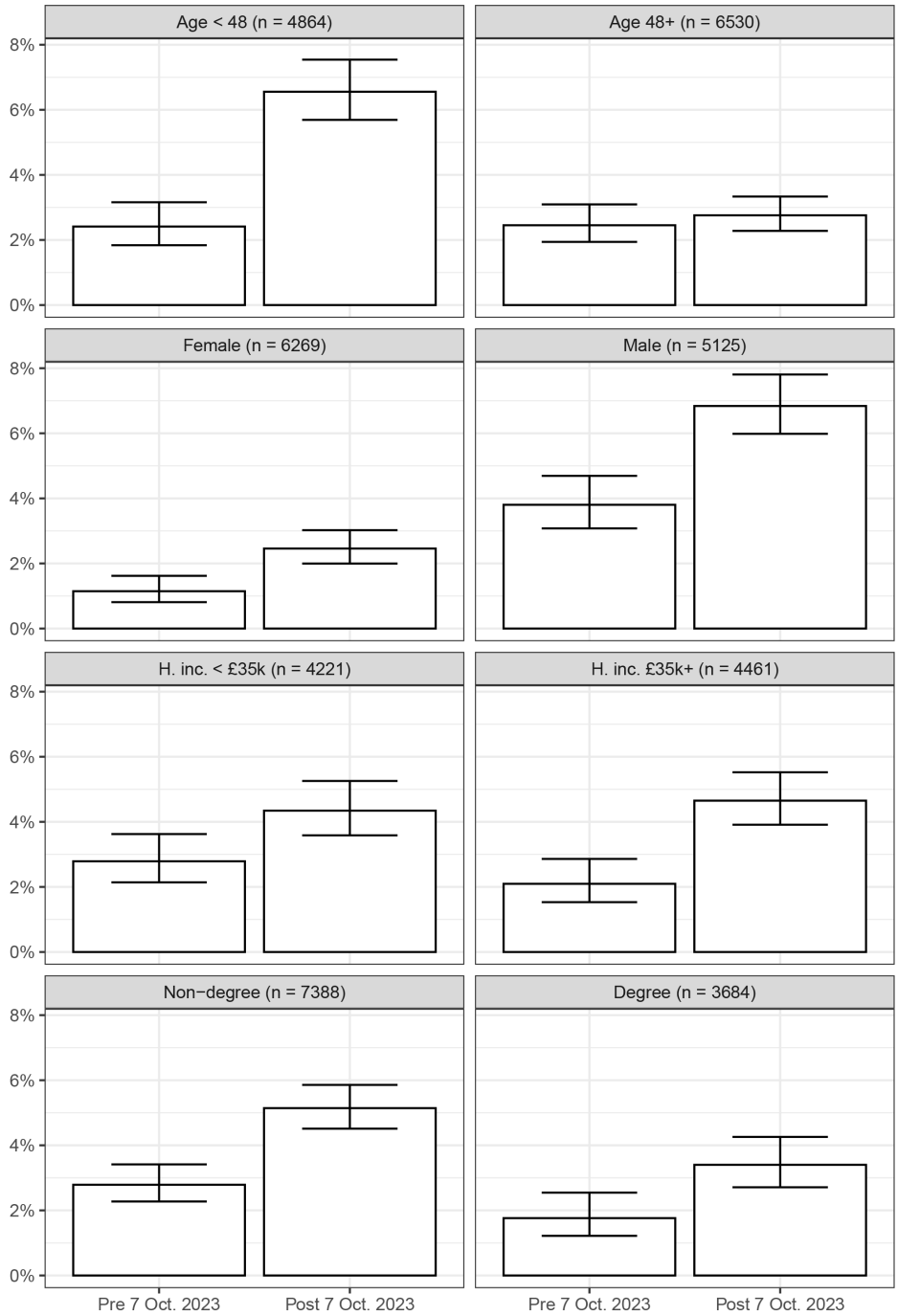


FIGURE 9. Proportion of individuals with elevated levels of Judeophobic Antisemitism across miscellaneous demographic categories, by date of data collection (95% CI).

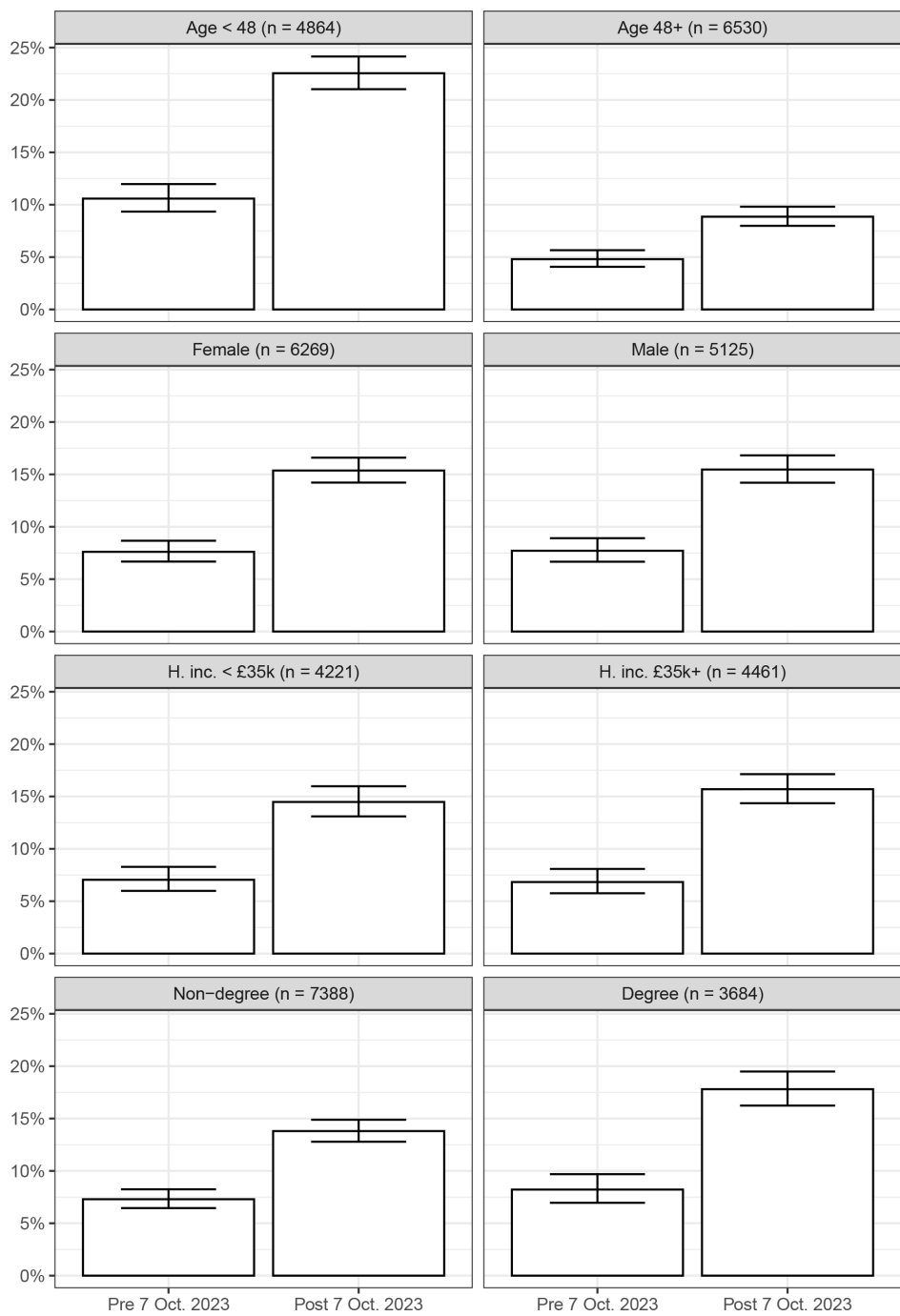


FIGURE 10. Proportion of individuals with elevated levels of Antizionist Antisemitism across miscellaneous demographic categories, by date of data collection (95% CI).

degree level. The likelihood of elevated levels of Antizionist Antisemitism is reduced by membership of any Christian denomination at all, but increased by education to degree level. Elevated levels of *both* forms of antisemitism are predicted by youth, self-identification as white but *not* as British, English, Scottish, Welsh, or Northern Irish, and—above all—by self-identification as Muslim. Despite the relatively small number of Muslims in the sample ($n = 153$), the discrepancy between proportions of Muslims and non-Muslims with elevated levels of *both* types of antisemitic attitudes is large enough to provide confidence that Muslims in the wider population are much more likely to hold such attitudes than members of other religious groups, even after controls for other demographic characteristics have been applied.

The finding that the prevalence of elevated levels of antisemitic attitudes should be lower among South Asian Muslims than among Muslims of other ethnicities, lower among white respondents who identify as British than among those who do not, and about the same for South Asian non-Muslims as for white British people of no religion, are all consistent with expectations that would be formed from global surveys of antisemitic attitudes, given the assumption that migrant communities will tend to carry social attitudes with them (see the literature review above).

The finding that the rise in Judeophobic Antisemitic attitudes should have occurred among the young rather than among the old was unexpected, as was the finding of a very strong linear relationship between the proportion of individuals with elevated levels of Judeophobic Antisemitic attitudes and the proportion of individuals with elevated levels of Antizionist Antisemitic attitudes from one year to the next. The former finding is of grave concern, because it suggests that antisemitism is not dying out, but being generationally renewed, while the latter is particularly notable in context of the repeat finding (highlighted, again, in the literature review) of highly significant but substantially

weaker correlation between such attitudes on the level of the individual personality. Given that individuals harboring what are here treated as elevated levels of Judeophobic Antisemitism are so much rarer than individuals harboring what are here treated as elevated levels of Antizionist Antisemitism, it is inevitable that the majority of individuals harboring the latter will not harbor the former—hence the established finding of modest correlation on the individual level. But, with the proportion of individuals harboring the former rising so reliably and predictably with the proportion of individuals harboring the latter, it would seem perverse to treat the two as anything other than a single phenomenon, from a social or political (as opposed to merely psychological) point of view.

The use of a relatively high threshold for antisemitic attitudes, with visualizations and models focusing on individuals with multiple antisemitic beliefs, has likely resulted in more dramatic findings with regard to demographic predictors than would have followed from the adoption of a lower threshold, such as the harboring of one or more antisemitic beliefs. For example, when taking the dataset as a whole, the ratio between the 67.9% majority of Muslims with *at least one* potentially antisemitic attitude on the Judeophobic Antisemitism scale and the 20.3% minority of people of no religion (or for that matter the effectively identical 19.9% minority of Episcopalians and Presbyterians) with the same is clearly much less extreme than the ratio between the 19.6% minority of Muslims with four or more such and the 2.1% minority of people of no religion (or the still smaller 1.6% minority of Episcopalians and Presbyterians) with the same. And the same applies to antizionist forms of antisemitism: to lower the bar from four potentially antisemitic answers to one on the Antizionist Antisemitism scale would be to move from the large ratio between the 63.1% majority of Muslims and the 10.4% minority of people of no religion (or the far smaller 4.0% minority of Episcopalians and Presbyterians) to the much closer ratio between

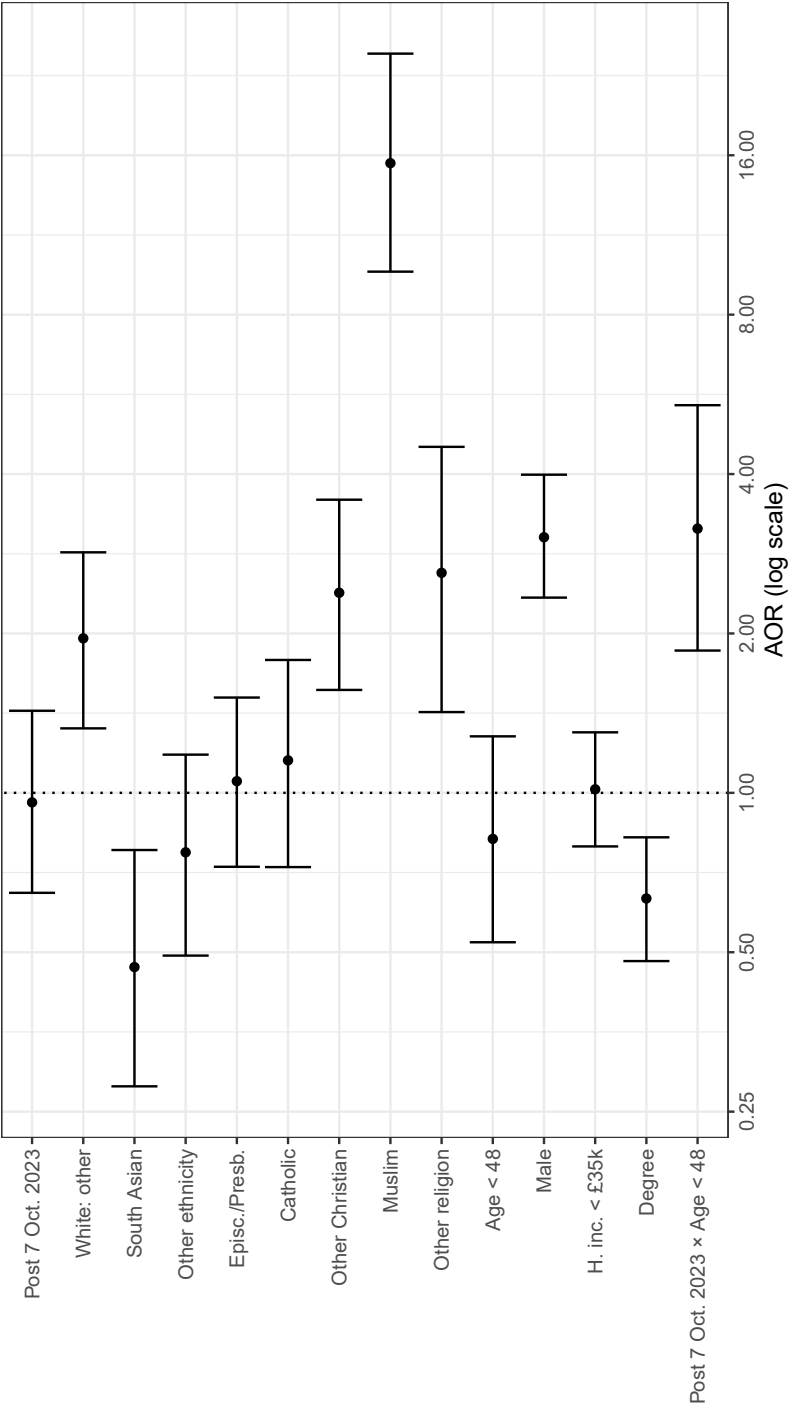


FIGURE 11. Adjusted odds ratios for predictors of elevated Judeophobic Antisemitism (95% CI).

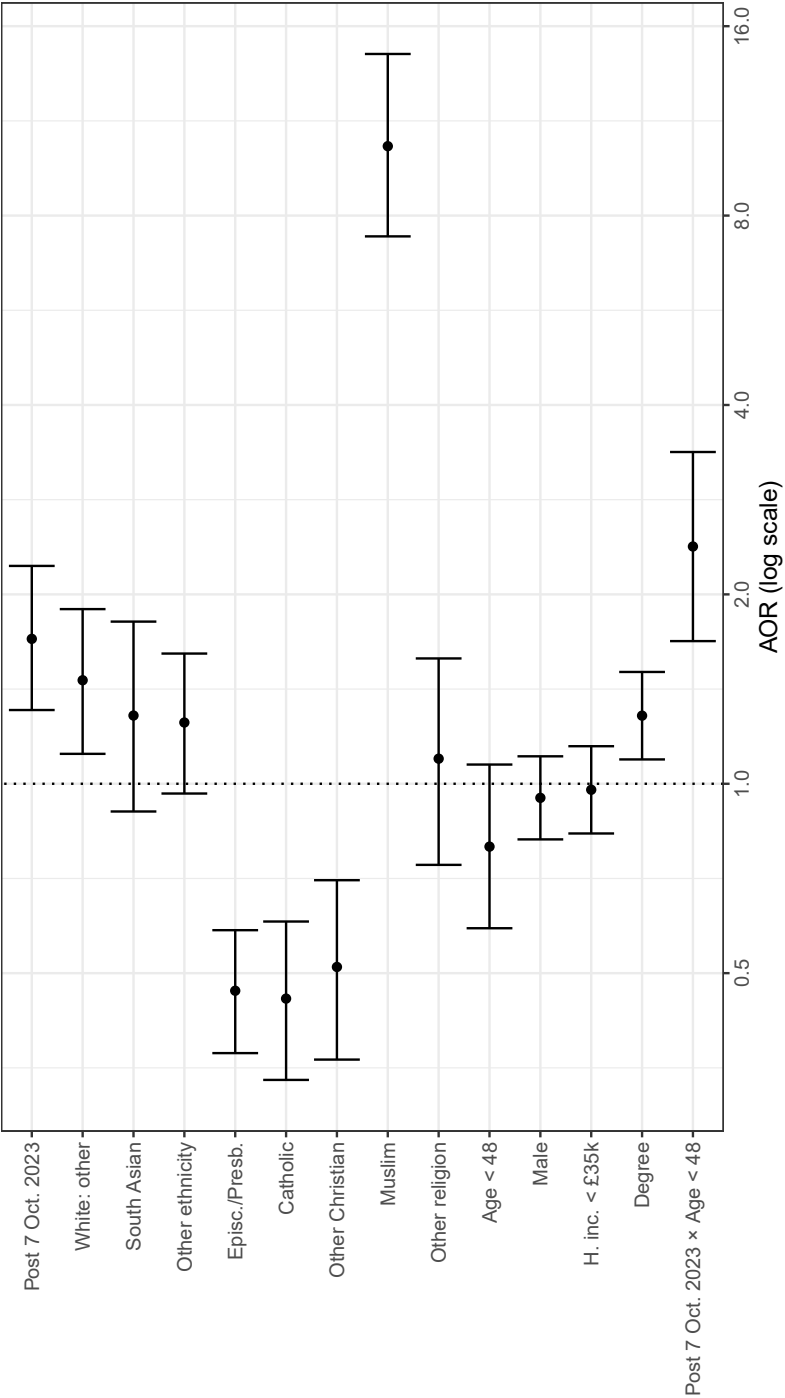


FIGURE 12. Adjusted odds ratios for predictors of elevated Antisemitism (95% CI).

TABLE 3. Adjusted odds ratios for elevated levels of Judeophobic and antizionist Antisemitism (95% CI)

	JpAs				AzAs			
	AOR				AOR			
	Est.	Low	High	p	Est.	Low	High	p
Era								
Post 7 Oct. 2023	0.96	0.65	1.43	.837	1.70	1.31	2.22	<.001
Ethnicity								
White: other	1.96	1.32	2.85	.001	1.46	1.12	1.89	.005
South Asian	0.47	0.28	0.78	.004	1.28	0.90	1.81	.159
Other ethnicity	0.77	0.49	1.18	.245	1.25	0.96	1.61	.086
Religion								
Episc./Presb.	1.05	0.73	1.51	.786	0.47	0.37	0.59	<.001
Catholic	1.15	0.72	1.78	.537	0.46	0.34	0.60	<.001
Other Christian	2.39	1.56	3.58	<.001	0.51	0.36	0.70	<.001
Muslim	15.46	9.64	24.89	<.001	10.31	7.41	14.45	<.001
Other religion	2.60	1.42	4.50	.001	1.10	0.74	1.58	.633
Other demographics								
Age < 48	0.82	0.52	1.28	.380	0.79	0.59	1.07	.132
Male	3.04	2.34	3.99	<.001	0.95	0.82	1.11	.507
H. inc. < £35k	1.02	0.79	1.30	.903	0.98	0.83	1.15	.787
Degree	0.63	0.48	0.82	.001	1.28	1.09	1.51	.002
Interaction								
Post 7 Oct. 2023 x Age < 48	3.16	1.86	5.40	<.001	2.38	1.69	3.37	<.001

the overwhelming 84.5% majority of Muslims and the substantial 44.7% minority of people of no religion (or the less substantial 34.2% minority of Episcopalians and Presbyterians). The use of a high threshold is, however, consistent with the overall thrust of this paper, as it would seem likely that attacks on Jewish targets are more likely to be attempted by very antisemitic than by slightly antisemitic individuals.

CONCLUSION

The data analyzed above suggest that rates of antisemitic crime have roughly tripled over the past eight years, and that the proportion of

people harboring elevated antisemitic attitudes has roughly doubled over the past six years. While there is evidence that the proportion of people with elevated levels of traditional Judeophobic antisemitic attitudes was in gradual decline in 2015–2020, and this article’s analysis suggests that this decline may have continued for a certain time afterward, such attitudes appear to have made a comeback since the Hamas-led atrocities of October 7, 2023, in parallel with a dramatic rise, not only in the proportion of people with elevated levels of newer antizionist antisemitic attitudes, but also in absolute numbers of aggravated criminal offences targeting perceived Jews. Given the

well-established finding of *moderate* correlation between anti-Jewish and anti-Israeli expressions of antisemitism on the level of the individual personality, the finding of *near perfect* correlation between proportions of individuals with elevated levels of Judeophobic Antisemitism and Antizionist Antisemitism from one year to the next was unexpected, and is strongly suggestive of a common driver for both. In view of observations made in the literature review, as well as the apparent relationship, not only with antisemitic attitudes, but also with anti-Jewish crime rates, the most obvious candidate must be ideological exploitation of Iran's decades-long proxy war with Israel—reductively known to the world as the Israel-Palestine conflict (and often ahistorically and one-sidedly framed as “the occupation” or, more fancifully, “the genocide”).¹⁰²

A further finding is that the prevalence of traditional Judeophobic antisemitic attitudes is low among members of the historically dominant ethnic group, i.e., white British people, as well as among members of the historically dominant religious group, i.e., members of mainstream Christian denominations, and that the prevalence of antizionist antisemitic attitudes is lower among Christians of all denominations than it is among members of any other non-Jewish religious group (including people of no religion). This means that the prevalence of *both* types of antisemitic attitudes is found to be higher within certain minority groups: in particular, white people with external national origins (many of whom are likely to hail from Eastern Europe), members of non-mainstream Christian denominations, and (to a still greater extent) Muslims (especially from outside the subcontinent). The finding that proportions of individuals with elevated levels of antisemitic attitudes would appear to be much greater within the Muslim population than within the Christian and non-religious populations—a finding which survives controls for non-religious demographic variables, and which is sufficiently pronounced to leave very little room for statistical doubt

despite the small number of Muslims in the sample—replicates findings of earlier studies covered in the literature review, and should thus be considered robust. It provides important context for the evident tendency of anti-Jewish terror attacks both in the UK and in the wider West to originate within Muslim populations with external ethnic origins, as well as for the repeat finding that Jews now perceive Islamist extremists to be a greater threat than right-wing extremists.

When combined with the existing literature on the international distribution of antisemitism, this article's attitudinal findings lend support to the intuitive idea that, when populations migrate, they will tend to carry their attitudes with them. This is an idea which may have wide implications—including for the safety of other groups beside Jews—and should thus be tested further, ideally in a manner which takes more account of diversity within such populations. For example, as this article's literature review has found, there is evidence that levels of antisemitism among Muslims may vary with intensity and type of religiosity, which were not measured for the datasets analyzed here, and would have been difficult to draw conclusions from even had they been measured, without a much larger number of observations.

The attitudinal study is also notable for its unexpected finding that both “old” and “new” types of antisemitic attitudes—that is, antisemitic attitudes expressed in relation to Jews identified as Jews and antisemitic attitudes expressed in relation to Israel and its supporters—are now more prevalent among younger UK residents, and that growth in the older kind since October 7, 2023, appears to have been *almost exclusively* among the young. This finding may perhaps be explained with regard to generational preferences with regard to information source. That is to say, it is (for example) consistent with the conjecture that antisemitic attitudes might be transmitted through online media, and that younger people's opinions are more decisively shaped by such media. However, no data were collected that

could serve to test such a hypothesis (for example, through the use of preferred information source as a control), and this should be regarded as another important area for future investigation.

POLICY IMPLICATIONS

In its initial observations with regard to the perpetrators of high-profile terror incidents, their ideological affiliations, and their stated motivations, in its literature review highlighting well-established but politically under-acknowledged patterns, in its analysis of religiously aggravated crime rates, and in its identification of demographic predictors of antisemitic attitudes, this article provides ample evidence to support policy. In view of the evidence assembled, the urgency of action must surely be impossible to deny.

The findings of the attitudinal research presented here would clearly imply that attempts to oppose the dissemination of antisemitic narratives should focus especially on Muslims and the young. Moreover, this study provides clear evidence as to the narratives most urgently in need of challenge, both in its unexpected finding of a very strong linear relationship between Judeophobic and antizionist forms of antisemitism on a social level (with both on the rise since October 7, 2023), and its finding that religiously aggravated crime against perceived Jews should—like antisemitic incidents more generally—so closely track developments in the decades-long Israel-Hamas war. Together with qualitative evidence that it is to narratives about Israel that terrorists typically appeal when justifying attacks on Jews in the diaspora, and that similar narratives play a role in most sub-terrorist targeting of British Jews, this finding highlights the futility of attempts to protect diasporic Jews while failing to engage with extremist discourse on Israel and its supporters. (It may be that the UK political elite is at last awakening to this reality. The cross-party parliamentary committee responsible for scrutinizing and directing the

activity of the country's interior ministry recently identified "anti-Israel extremism" as one of four forms of extremism linked to rising numbers of incidents, and named what it called "the Israel-Hamas conflict" as a key driver of extremism in the UK today.)¹⁰³

If nothing is done, the long-term prospects for the United Kingdom's Jewish community would seem bleak. Regardless of how it is to be explained, the finding of a rise in the proportion of young people with elevated antisemitic attitudes is very concerning. In itself, it suggests that the prevalence of such attitudes—and therefore perhaps also the rate of anti-Jewish crime—is likely to increase as older, more antisemitism-resistant generations die off. But that is not the only way in which this study suggests that demographics may serve—over time—to make the United Kingdom a less hospitable environment for its Jewish minority. The ethnic and religious groups identified here as resistant to antisemitism appear to be in long-term decline (slow in the ethnic case, rapid in the religious case), while the demographic group most strongly associated with elevated levels of antisemitism, i.e., Muslims, appears to be growing rapidly.

While the number of residents of England and Wales identifying as white and as British, English, Welsh, Scottish, or Northern Irish fell by only 1.7% from 2011 to 2021, this was in a context of overall population growth, with the non-British white population rising by 41.3% and the non-white population rising by 38.5%.¹⁰⁴ As for the Christian population, it plummeted by 17.4% while the Muslim population soared by 30.8%.¹⁰⁵ This would suggest an overall worsening of the attitudinal weather facing British Jews over the next few years, as rates of birth and migration jointly shift the demographic balance away from Christians and towards Muslims, while the proportion of members of the general population identifying as White British continues to fall, and—across all sub-populations—younger generations replace older ones. With higher levels of

education apparently serving only to shift the balance from Judeophobic Antisemitism towards Antizionist Antisemitism (which, on the evidence of terrorists' expressed motivations, would be very far from being possible to consider as an improvement), it is hard to see the problem fixing itself.

In the day-to-day experience of UK-based Jews, the effects of these demographic trends are likely to be exacerbated by the geographical distribution of the Jewish population. Compared to the Jews of England and Wales, the Jews of Scotland and Northern Ireland constitute very small minorities indeed (see Appendix). Moreover, even in England and Wales, Jews are virtually absent from many regions. The Institute for Jewish Policy Research finds that 53.6% of English and Welsh Jews are resident in London:¹⁰⁶ a city 41% of whose residents are believed to have been born outside the United Kingdom,¹⁰⁷ and whose 15.0% Muslim minority was more than a third the size of its 40.7% Christian minority in 2021.¹⁰⁸ Away from London, the two largest local authorities in England and Wales by Jewish population are both in Greater Manchester¹⁰⁹: site of the recent anti-Jewish terror offences discussed in this article's introduction, and home to a population 31% of which was born outside the United Kingdom,¹¹⁰ with a Muslim minority that has recently been estimated at 22.3%, i.e. nearly two-thirds the size of the city's 36.2% Christian minority.¹¹¹ What this means is that the majority of British Jews live in parts of the United Kingdom with unusually low proportions of White British people and Christians, and unusually high proportions of Muslims—which is to say, in what are likely to be unusually hostile environments as compared to the United Kingdom as a whole. Internal migration away from demographically unfavorable locations within the United Kingdom might perhaps be considered as a way to mitigate the danger. However, unless it were done *en masse*—as in the unrelated migration of Haredi Jews from Inner London to Canvey Island in the coastal county

of Essex¹¹²—such relocation would inevitably involve dispersal, and thus come at considerable cost to communal life.

However, hope glimmers in this study's finding that, outside certain minority groups, proportions of individuals in the United Kingdom with elevated antisemitic attitudes remain low—which suggests that counter-antisemitic policy might be popular across the country as a whole. Moreover, the finding that UK-based Christians should be so resistant to antisemitic ideation, not only when expressed in relation to Jews identified as Jews, but also when expressed in relation to Israel and its supporters, should surely be seen as cause for celebration: even if Christians are currently in numerical decline, they remain the United Kingdom's largest group of religious believers, and as such might potentially provide an important ally in efforts to secure the future of Anglo-Jewry.

TECHNICAL NOTE

All calculations were carried out in R v. 4.3.1,¹¹³ with visualizations generated using ggplot2 v. 4.0.1,¹¹⁴ and with knitr v. 1.47 and kableExtra v. 1.4.0¹¹⁵ employed for table formatting. The implementation of the modified Wilson method used for confidence intervals of proportions was drawn from DescTools v. 0.99.60,¹¹⁶ while the implementation of the Wald method used for confidence intervals for risk ratios was drawn from epitools v. 0.5–10.1.¹¹⁷ Demographic weights were calculated using autumn v. 0.1.¹¹⁸

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APPENDIX: POPULATION ESTIMATES

Ethnic population sizes for England and Wales and for Scotland were taken directly from official census figures released in 2022 and 2024, which provided “British,” “English,” “Scottish,” “Welsh,” “Northern Irish,” and “Irish” subcategories of “white” as an ethnic category.¹¹⁹ In the census for Northern Ireland, however, these were treated as subcategories of “other,” rather than of “white.” In consequence, ethnic populations had to be estimated on the basis of the ethnicity bulletin and main statistics release for Northern Ireland¹²⁰ combined with information on national identity drawn from a briefing subsequently published by the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland.¹²¹ (The assumption that proportions of white residents

of Northern Ireland identifying as British, Irish, etc. will be the same as the proportions of all residents of the same country identifying in the same way is relatively reasonable, given that 96.6% of Northern Irish residents were identified as white.) Population sizes for faith groups in England and Wales were taken from the relevant official report,¹²² as were those for Scotland,¹²³ while those for Northern Ireland were drawn from the official release of data tables for that country.¹²⁴ All of these figures were combined to derive population sizes for ethnic and religious groups across the entire United Kingdom, which are not officially provided thanks to the division of statistical responsibilities: see Tables 4–5.

Note that percentages reported here and used for weighting purposes *exclude* those for whom no answer was given in relation to census questions on ethnicity and religion. Thus, they may differ from percentages reported in official statistical reports.

TABLE 4. Ethnic groups by country

Ethnicity	England & Wales	Scotland	Northern Ireland	UK
White: British	74.4	87.1	49.9	74.8
White: other	7.3	5.8	46.6	8.3
South Asian	6.9	2.4	0.6	6.3
Other ethnicity	11.4	4.7	2.8	10.6

TABLE 5. Religious groups by country

Religion	England & Wales	Scotland	Northern Ireland	UK
None	39.6	51.1	17.6	39.7
Christian	49.1	38.8	81.0	49.4
Muslim	6.9	2.2	0.6	6.4
Jewish	0.5	0.1	0.0	0.4
Other religion	3.9	7.8	0.8	4.1

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Gen Z and the Jews: Understanding Age Differences in American Attitudes Toward Antisemitism, Israel, and the Holocaust

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Abstract

In the second half of the twentieth century, antisemitism was lowest among the young and well-educated. Education reduced prejudice against Jews and other minorities by providing knowledge and cognitive skills and by imparting norms of tolerance. Thus, one might in the 1960s and 1970s have predicted a future of declining antisemitism and increasingly sympathetic attitudes toward Jews as younger generations replaced older ones and educational opportunities expanded. This prediction would have been on target—for a while. Unfortunately, if we are to accept some journalistic accounts, matters have changed considerably during the past few years. This paper reviews recent United States poll data suggesting important generational differences in attitudes toward Israel, the Holocaust, and Jews. Overall, we observe that younger adults tend to be less supportive of Israel, less informed about the Holocaust, and—by some measures—a bit more antisemitic. The sources and potential consequences of these generational differences are discussed. A mediated-cohort model is suggested in which political orientation, religiosity, race/ethnicity, and media use are not viewed as competing explanations for age effects, but rather as the primary channels through which generational change has been expressing itself.

Keywords: Antisemitism, prejudice, Palestinian-Israeli conflict, Generation Z, Holocaust



In 1979, Harold Quinley and Charles Glock summarized the most comprehensive and methodologically sophisticated series of social psychological studies yet conducted on American antisemitism.¹ Drawing mainly on survey research, they concluded that, while Jew-hatred had been open, widespread, and virulent in the United States in the 1920s, 1930s and early 1940s, that was no longer true by the 1960s—except for among certain political fringe groups. Perhaps most significantly, antisemitism was lowest among the young and the well-educated. After considering several other possibilities, researchers concluded that education reduced prejudice against Jews (and other minorities) by

providing knowledge and cognitive skills and by imparting norms of tolerance.² Thus, if education would continue to expand to broader segments of the public, Jews had every reason to believe that the future would be bright.

This expectation continued among most scholars until, perhaps, about a decade ago.³ While several regions of the post-9/11 world showed very high levels of antisemitism, most scholars took some comfort in frequent research findings that many Americans at the beginning of the twenty-first century held positive opinions concerning Jews.⁴ On top of this, most Americans expressed consistently sympathetic attitudes toward Israel, an issue regarded as identity relevant by large numbers of American Jews.

In 2016, no less a scholar than the well-regarded historian of antisemitism Leonard Dinnerstein declared contemporary Jew-hatred in the United States “. . . too minor an issue to think about.”⁵

If we are to believe journalistic accounts, however, antisemitism has increased substantially during the past few years. Many reports now assert that—especially in the aftermath of the October 2023 Hamas attack, but also before that—elite universities have become centers of antizionist and antisemitic sentiment in the United States and other parts of the West.⁶ According to some writers, past optimism was misguided, with both antisemitism and anti-Israel sentiment now thriving in the United States, not least among the young and the well-educated. Beyond these media reports, some recent United States survey data indicate that, by 2024, many Jewish students and their parents began to weigh what they saw as campus antisemitism as a central factor in college selection; moreover, more than a few young Jews on campuses and elsewhere felt increasingly uncomfortable expressing Jewish identity in public.⁷ According to some analysts, the growing threat came from both the right and the left.⁸

According to then-FBI director Christopher Wray, speaking in October 2023, antisemitism was reaching “historic” levels and “the Jewish community is targeted by terrorists . . . across the spectrum . . .”⁹ Around the same time, President Biden expressed deep concern about the rise in Jew-hatred on campuses and elsewhere in the United States.¹⁰ Then, about a year later, a report of a House of Representatives committee—spearheaded by Republicans—stated that antisemitism had engulfed college campuses and that administrators had prioritized “terrorist sympathizers” over the Jewish community.

All of this has been concerning to mainstream Jews and others, but none of it constitutes hard empirical evidence that antisemitism is, in fact, on the rise. As we shall see below, however, some credible empirical

evidence does attest to rising antisemitism in the United States—though there is room for debate about the extent, locus, meaning, and impact of this recent upswing.¹¹

The purpose of this paper is to review empirical studies addressing age and generational differences in how adults in the United States think and feel about the Jews and Jewish-related matters. More specifically, we assess recent data on age-based divergences in attitudes toward Jews, Israel, and the Holocaust. In the weeks immediately following the October 2023 Hamas attacks, many journalists concluded that young adult Americans, on average, reacted very differently than older Americans to the attacks and the Israeli response, showing—on average—less sympathy for Israel’s predicament, more sympathy for the Palestinians, and—sometimes—more positive assessments of Hamas. We will evaluate whether existing survey data confirm these journalistic impressions and consider, more generally, the nature of age and generational differences in attitudes concerning the Arab-Israel conflict. Our analysis will also consider whether differences go beyond foreign policy attitudes and extend to sentiments concerning Jews, the Holocaust, and other matters. We will also address the charge that younger people in the United States are becoming more antisemitic.

SOME METHODOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Because this subject requires recent and sometimes rapidly produced poll data rather than stable, peer-reviewed datasets, a formal systematic review was neither feasible nor appropriate. Instead, the paper synthesizes available survey findings from various research organizations (e.g., Pew, ADL, YouGov, Harris, Claims Conference). The surveys differ markedly in sampling, question wording, and timing. Thus, the emphasis here is on identifying broad trends across multiple independent polling sources, while acknowledging methodological limitations inherent in such data. The specific numbers

found by most of the pollsters should be regarded as tentative. However, the questions we address are too important to ignore because we lack evidence that meets the highest scientific standards. At least, we should be able to clarify certain empirical facts, provide context for these facts, and establish questions for future discussion and research.

In keeping with the framework developed by Jean Twenge, this paper uses the following generational schema: Gen Z (born 1995–2012), Millennials (1980–1994), Gen X (1965–1979), Boomers (1946–1964), and the Silent Generation (pre-1946). Another generation, possibly to be called Generation Alpha, was born after 2013 but has not yet reached adulthood. Cutoffs are somewhat arbitrary, though Twenge and others have made a persuasive case for the utility of the generational categories.¹² Still, many polls have used simple age brackets (e.g., 18–29, 30–44). The imperfect match between these age categories and Twenge’s generational cohorts limits precision but does not keep us from understanding broad intergenerational trends.

It is important to start by noting that observed generational differences do not arise in a vacuum. Younger Americans differ from older cohorts not only in age but also in political ideology, racial and ethnic composition, religious affiliation, and media consumption habits. Each of these factors may independently (or interactively) influence attitudes toward Israel, Jews, and the Holocaust.

First, younger Americans—as a group—are usually more politically “progressive” on a variety of issues, and this can be a key predictor of sympathy toward Palestinians and skepticism toward Israel. Gallup data from 2023, 2024, and 2025 show that Democrats now sympathize much more with Palestinians than Israelis, the first such shift in the history of the poll. In a 2025 Gallup poll, 83% of Republicans viewed Israel favorably while only 33% of Democrats did so. Until 2022, Democrats had also sympathized with Israelis over the Palestinians; by

February 2025, this had changed markedly with Democrats sympathizing with Palestinians over Israelis by a nearly 3–1 ratio: 59% to 21%.¹³ Because younger adults disproportionately identify as Democrats, some age differences reflect partisan realignment.¹⁴ Yet, even within the Democratic Party, younger respondents take more critical positions toward Israel than older ones, suggesting that age exerts an independent influence.

Second, younger Americans are substantially less religious than older Americans.¹⁵ Evangelical Christians and other religiously observant groups are among the most consistently pro-Israel respondents in US polling; conversely, the religiously unaffiliated tend to be more skeptical. Thus, the rise of the “nones” (those without religious affiliation) may contribute to intergenerational divergence.

Third, Gen Z is the most racially diverse generation in American history. African American and Hispanic young adults, on average, express more critical attitudes toward Israel and higher levels of antisemitic-trope endorsement than white young adults in several datasets.¹⁶

Finally, younger Americans rely far more heavily on social media for international news—especially TikTok, Instagram, and YouTube—where pro-Palestinian and anti-Israel narratives circulate rapidly and visually. This informational environment differs dramatically from the media ecology of older Americans, who rely more on traditional news sources.¹⁷

These factors do not invalidate generational analysis, but they help shape the patterns that we observe. Understanding their role is essential for interpreting the data that follow.

MEASURING ATTITUDES TOWARD ISRAEL, THE JEWS, AND ANTISEMITISM

Antisemitism, attitudes toward Israel, and attitudes toward the Holocaust are constructs that—under the best of circumstances—are difficult to define and measure. Much debate has

surrounded the definition of antisemitism, with controversy mostly around whether hostility toward Israel can under some conditions qualify as a form of Jew-hatred. The dominant IHRA definition suggests an affirmative answer to this question, but some scholars disagree.¹⁸ Also, while a few psychometrically validated scales exist to tap antisemitic sentiment, we must often rely on single-item measures.¹⁹ Another problem is that many people do not understand the word “antisemitism,” so answers to questions employing that term should always be taken with a grain of salt.²⁰ When we try to measure beliefs about the Holocaust, we encounter low levels of familiarity with the event and term in some populations. Thus, assessment of feelings about—or understanding of—the genocide may not reflect considered, stable attitudes and may, sometimes, be opinions manufactured on the spot.

Attitudes toward Israel and the Arab-Israeli conflict are complex and multidimensional; they may spring from religious beliefs, political ideologies, peer pressure, ethnic loyalty, antisemitic bigotry, or other sources. Cavari and Freedman note that a comprehensive assessment of American views on Israel would require that we look at affect toward various individual and group actors in the conflict as well as a wide range of political opinions including overall sympathies, attribution of blame for current problems, preferences regarding American policy, views on the use of force, notions on how to attain peace, support for a Palestinian state, support for West Bank settlers, opinions on Jerusalem, and attitudes toward the potential involvement of United States troops.²¹ There is no reason to expect that these opinion variables will be highly intercorrelated or that time trends (or generational differences) in one variable will carry through to the others.

Another problem is that we do not have regular data on any of these dimensions and even the data that exist are infrequently available in ways that permit generational analysis. One way around this problem is to rely principally on the

“overall sympathy” question, which has been asked most frequently over a long period. However, reliance on one measure has obvious limitations. Beyond this, the same questions may signify different things to respondents at different times, based on the political context. Even considering just the sympathy question, do we look at sympathy for Israel, sympathy for Palestinians, or the gap between them? Do we exclude people who don’t feel strongly either way?

In short, there appears to be no convincing and quantitatively sophisticated way to analyze existing poll data. Instead, we face a puzzle with many missing pieces. Nonetheless, there are important conclusions that we can reach with a reasonable degree of confidence.

ATTITUDES TOWARD ISRAEL

Some general differences in foreign policy thinking among generations might bear on assessments of Israel and the Arab-Israeli conflict. Younger generations, for example, are much less likely to attend to foreign affairs news. Asked whether they are interested in news about the relationship between the United States and other countries, forty-eight percent of the Silent Generation respondents said they are “very interested”; for the other generations, the numbers are lower: Baby Boomers (43%), Gen X (33%), Millennials (21%) and Gen Z (15%).²² Another generational divide concerns the belief that the United States is the greatest country in the world, a belief held by 72% of the Silent Generation and 65% of Boomers. Most Millennials (59%) and Gen Z respondents (65%) see the United States as no greater than other countries. Millennials and Gen Z Americans are also much less supportive than older Americans of the use of military force as a foreign policy tool. Though liberals and conservatives in each generation have different views, some research suggests the persistence of generational variations within ideological groups.²³ Lower interest in international news, less

acceptance of American impressiveness, and less openness to military action as a means for dealing with world problems may all play some role in explaining generational differences in attitudes toward Israel and the Arab-Israeli conflict. Perhaps most importantly, to that extent that Israel uses military force, this may impact generations differently.

A large research literature on American attitudes toward Israel and the Arab-Israeli conflict dates back many years.²⁴ Viewed as a whole over the decades since the founding of the Jewish state in 1948, the public in the United States—despite year-by-year variations in response to events and American policy—has maintained a favorable image of Israel; the public, on average, has also been overwhelmingly supportive of Israel in the more general Arab-Israeli conflict and, more recently, in what is usually described as the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. In 2010, for example, according to a CNN poll, 80% of Americans thought of Israel as an ally and a friendly country.²⁵ American public support for Israel also contrasts with much less favorable views of the Jewish state and its actions in many other countries, including other Western democracies.

This overview of American public opinion, however, misses the fact that a sizable divide has opened along partisan and ideological lines. As we have seen, Republicans and conservatives show much more pro-Israel views and Democrats more critical views. How these differences play out on specific questions is complicated, and sometimes a majority of Democrats may still end up being more supportive of the pro-Israel position than not.²⁶ Also, general support does not necessarily translate into support for particular Israeli actions, endorsement of specific American Middle East policies, or enthusiasm for providing supportive resources to Israel.

In his comprehensive review of polls through 1985, Gilboa found that: “. . . young adults, more than any other age groups, have sympathized with Israel and have supported its policies

and the granting of U.S. aid to that country.”²⁷ By 2012, however, Cavari already detected some changes in the age profile of Israel support.²⁸ Cavari and Freedman compared a 1988 survey to a 2014 study. In 1988, the only age or generational difference in sympathy for Israel was that the oldest cohort was slightly less supportive.²⁹ In the 2014 poll, there was a 22 percentage point gap between the oldest and the youngest cohorts—with the youngest now the least supportive. Cavari and Freedman followed up this two-survey comparison with a systematic study of demographic trends in support for Israel using many more surveys and multiple questions. They found that “While differences remain small, the trend is clear—younger generations are less supportive of Israel compared to older generations.” They further suggested that “. . . older generations who grew up in the shadow of WWII, the Holocaust and Israel’s initial struggle to exist among strong countries supported by Russia . . . [will] take up smaller shares of American society . . . [and younger] generations who do not share these memories and are less supportive of Israel will slowly become the majority of American society.”³⁰ Finally, they suggested that—although dramatic events might change the expected trajectory—we might expect American public support for Israel to diminish.

Surveys conducted during the period immediately following the October 2023 Hamas attacks suggest that, if anything, Cavari and Freedman may have underestimated the age gap in support for Israel. Alternatively, the attacks and subsequent events may, themselves, have increased the gap. Consider the following surveys.

- An Economist/YouGov Poll conducted about two weeks after the attacks found that—when asked the standard sympathy question—respondents aged 18–29 had more sympathy for Palestinians than Israelis by a margin

of 28%–20%, but when the question was asked of those aged sixty-five and older, the margin was 65%–6% in favor of Israel.³¹

- A Harvard/Harris Poll conducted at about the same time found that, overall, American respondents with preferences favored Israel (versus Hamas) by a margin of 84%–16%.³² Those over sixty-five favored Israel, 95%–5% yet those 18–24 still favored Israel but only by a margin of 52–48%. Although Hamas had long been designated a terrorist group by the United States government, 51% of respondents aged 18–24 said that Hamas violence against Israeli civilians was justified “by the grievances of Palestinians,” while 49% disagreed. When we look at respondents aged 25–35, in this poll, we find 48% agreeing that violence against Israeli civilians could be justified. Among older groups, the picture was very different. For 55–64-year-olds, 89% said the violence could not be justified and for those aged over sixty five, 91% said the violence could not be justified. Interestingly, there were also clear age differences in views about what transpired on October 7. Nearly a third (32%) of 18–24-year-olds thought that stories about Hamas atrocities on October 7 were false, but only 10% of those aged over sixty-five thought so. For one factual account of what happened, see Rafael Medoff’s book.³³
- Comparing results in a Reuters/Ipsos Poll from just after the 2023 attacks to results of a poll from 2014, overall support for Israel among younger Americans had increased from 14% to 20%. However, among older Americans support had grown from 28% to 56%—a much larger jump.³⁴
- A Quinnipiac poll in November 2023 found that two-thirds of voters aged under thirty-five disapproved of Israel’s response to the attacks.³⁵ Moreover, 52% had greater sympathy for the Palestinians. Among baby boomers, 57% approved of Israel’s response and only 15% had greater sympathy for Palestinians.
- A Marist poll conducted right after the Hamas attacks found 48% of millennials and Gen Z respondents saying the United States should support Israel, compared to 83% of boomers and 86% of the Silent generation and the Greatest Generation (which is the one preceding the Silents).³⁶
- A Wall Street Journal poll published a little bit later found that 31% of those aged 18–34 favored Israel over the Palestinians; among those aged sixty-five and over, that number rose to 53%.³⁷ Looking only at Democrats, who as a group are less supportive of Israel than Republicans, we find those aged under fifty showing more sympathy for the Palestinians (35%–13%) while those aged over fifty had sympathies more with Israel (22%–12%).
- In a 2024 study conducted by the Anti-Defamation League, 17% of Gen Z respondents believed that the solution to Israeli-Palestinian conflict should be “the termination of the state of Israel.” Only 2% of Baby Boomers agreed.³⁸
- An Economist YouGov poll in December 2023 found 19% of respondents aged 18–29 disagreeing that Israel has “the right to exist.”³⁹ The percentage who disagreed with Israel’s “right to exist” declined to 10% for 30–44-year-olds, 4% for 45–64-year-olds, and 1% for those aged sixty-five and over.

AWARENESS OF THE HOLOCAUST AND ATTITUDES TOWARD IT

Political knowledge deficiencies in the United States and elsewhere—now and in the past—have often left social scientists worrying about whether the citizenry has enough historical understanding to participate responsibly in a democracy.⁴⁰ A 2022 study of historical knowledge among eighth graders found, for example, that forty percent did not meet the basic level standards for United States history which were established by the National Assessment of Educational Progress.⁴¹ One might reasonably suppose that, if we were to ask American adults about any event in American or world history that had not been covered in the news recently or heavily emphasized in school curricula, we would find low levels of awareness. Based on my own informal questioning of students in classes, I rarely encounter more than a few who know anything at all about the relatively recent genocides in Rwanda and Cambodia. Thus, knowledge deficiencies concerning the Holocaust must be understood partly in the context of more general problems in historical awareness among American students and the broader public. Still, recent research suggests that lower levels of knowledge about historical racism against African-Americans can lead to perceptions of less racism against African-Americans in the contemporary world.⁴² It is certainly plausible that lower levels of familiarity with the Holocaust might have an impact on judgments about the dangers of antisemitism nowadays.

American public attitudes toward the Holocaust have been measured mainly in surveys, though not in the same detail as opinions concerning the Jews and Israel. Nonetheless, some clear age/generational differences have emerged in recent years regarding awareness of the Holocaust, attitudes toward the genocide and views concerning efforts to deny or minimize it.

In 2019, as part of a more general study on knowledge of religious matters, the Pew Research

Center assessed American knowledge about the Holocaust.⁴³ Overall, according to the Pew study, most United States adults do know what the Holocaust was and approximately when it happened. Fewer than half can correctly answer multiple-choice questions about how many Jews were murdered or how Hitler came to power. When asked to describe the Holocaust in their own words, more than eight in ten offer reasonably accurate responses—mentioning the attempted annihilation of the Jews, the death camps, or the Nazis. To some extent, positive feelings about the Jews can predict who answers correctly in the Pew study, but this relationship is not powerful.

There were some relatively small but interesting age differences in the Pew study. For one thing, older adults offered more correct answers than younger adults to questions about the Holocaust. Also, when Pew posed questions to a sample of teens, aged thirteen to seventeen, they found that this group was somewhat less familiar than the adult sample with the facts of the Holocaust. However, the Pew researchers argued that teen levels of knowledge were roughly the same as levels of knowledge shown by adults who did not have secondary or post-secondary educations. Thus, they reasoned, the difference might be attributable to teens not yet having had the chance to experience the learning that occurs during higher education.⁴⁴

In early December 2023, an Economist YouGov Poll found clear age/generational differences in responses to whether “The Holocaust is a myth.”⁴⁵ Twenty percent of respondents aged 18–29 agreed that it was a myth, and an additional 30% neither agreed nor disagreed. Put together, half of the young adult respondents were not willing to assert to pollsters that the Holocaust definitely happened. In contrast, among 30–44-year-olds, only 8% agreed that the Holocaust was a myth. For the oldest groups of respondents, very few people agreed—only two percent of 45–64-year-olds and zero percent of those sixty-five and older. Interestingly, Democrats were slightly more likely than

Republicans or Independents to agree that the Holocaust is a myth. There is an important caveat to reading too much into the findings of this Economist YouGov poll. It may greatly overstate the amount of skepticism about the Holocaust. The Pew Research Center found, for example, that the poll probably overstated the percentage of people who believe the Holocaust is a myth, probably because YouGov uses opt-in panels rather than probability-based samples.⁴⁶ When an attempt was made to replicate the results with the Pew sample, far fewer people said, for example, that they thought the Holocaust was a myth.

To the extent that we can trust the YouGov poll, about two-thirds (67%) of American respondents agreed that Holocaust denial is antisemitic; this number reflects 85% agreement by those sixty-five and older, but only 46% agreement by those aged 18–29. Younger adults were also somewhat more likely than older adults to agree that “Israel exploits Holocaust victimhood for its own purposes.” The percentages who agreed were 36% for 18–29-year-olds, but 20% for 30–44-year-olds, 15% for 45–64-year-olds, and 13% for those sixty-five and over.

A 2018 study of Holocaust awareness conducted by the Conference on Jewish Material Claims against Germany sheds more light on the topic.⁴⁷ In this study, about 11% of American adults hadn’t heard of (or weren’t sure they had heard of) the Holocaust; the number was 22% for millennials. Among millennials, more than four in ten answered (in a multiple-choice format) that the number of Jews killed in the Holocaust was two million or fewer. The correct estimate of six million is usually one of the first things taught about the Holocaust, so this might suggest lack of exposure to Holocaust education, low retention or perhaps the success of revisionist propaganda. Just under half of the millennials studied cannot name one concentration camp. Still, most do express an interest in learning more about the Holocaust.

More disturbingly, when asked who caused the Holocaust, 10% of all respondents and 15%

of millennials choose “Jews” as the answer. In this study, 7% of all Americans, but 23% of millennials, believe that the Holocaust is a myth. Another age difference concerns receptivity to discussions about the Holocaust. Only 18% of all adults think that people talk too much about the Holocaust, but this number rises to 41% among millennials.

The Claims Conference conducted another study in 2020, focusing on state-by-state differences based on the responses of 11,000 young adults in the United States—millennials and Gen Z’s.⁴⁸ Nationally, just under two-thirds of these respondents did not know that six million Jews were killed in the Holocaust. The state-by-state analyses also showed that 28% of respondents from New York—a state with many Jewish residents—believe the Holocaust is myth or has been exaggerated, and more than 20% in several other states agree (Indiana, California, Florida, Georgia). Nineteen percent in New York say that the Jews caused the Holocaust, and more than 15% agree with this judgment in many states. Nearly three in five millennial and Gen Z respondents in many states have seen Holocaust denial or distortion on social media. Nationally, fifteen percent of Millennial and Gen Z respondents think it is okay to hold neo-Nazi views and an additional 15% are not sure about this.

ANTISEMITISM AND ATTITUDES TOWARD JEWS

When discussing age and generational gaps in antisemitism in the United States, the first thing we need is a strong dose of context—historical and geographical. Viewed against the extensive list of places in the diaspora where Jews have been persecuted over the millennia, none have been more hospitable than the United States, especially in the closing decades of the twentieth century.⁴⁹ Things were never perfect. In 1937, only 46% of Americans said they would vote for a Jew for president and, by 1958, the number had only risen to 62%. Still, by 1999, 92% told pollsters they would vote for a Jew and—by the election of 2000—an Orthodox Jew was the

vice-presidential nominee of a major party.⁵⁰ Some research suggests that, to the extent that Joe Lieberman's religion mattered at all to voters, it was because people who held favorable attitudes toward Jews were more likely to support him than one would have expected based on their political views; his religion did not cost him support among those who were inclined to vote for him on political grounds.⁵¹

As comparative research shows unequivocally, many countries around the world currently are consumed by Jew-hatred and only a handful rival the United States in its tolerant public attitudes and protective institutions.⁵² A 2022 Pew study concludes that, among non-Jews in the United States, feelings about Jews are far more positive than negative; thirty-four percent offer a "very" or "somewhat" favorable rating of Jews while only seven percent say they have a "very" or "somewhat" unfavorable rating of Jews. While fifty-eight percent say neither "favorable" nor "unfavorable" or that they "don't know enough to say," the twenty-seven point gap between the positive and negative ratings is far better than for other rated religious groups including Catholics, Muslims, atheists, Evangelical Protestants, main-line Protestants, and Mormons (when the group ratings of members of those groups are excluded from the analysis).⁵³ In short, against a global and historical backdrop, the United States—at least until very recently—still seemed to many Jews a "goldene medina," a golden country, and not without reason. For many, the question is whether the United States will stay that way. Sustained growth of antisemitism in the United States would be all the more dangerous for the long-term condition of Jews worldwide because the country has functioned as an island sanctuary amidst hostile waters. And, to no small degree, the future depends on the mindsets and behaviors of young Americans.

Measuring the outlook of this group is not a straightforward matter, partly because not all antisemitism presents itself as what it is.⁵⁴ We will return to this problem toward the end of this essay, but for now we will summarize evidence

based on responses to overt and transparent questions on opinion surveys.

Past reviews of survey data on antisemitism have reported inconsistent findings concerning age and generation, though—in the second half of the twentieth century—older respondents were generally more antisemitic than younger ones.⁵⁵ In 2018, one careful review of poll data up until that time concluded that: "Age has a complex and somewhat uncertain relationship to antisemitism. Many studies indicate that members of newer generations are less antisemitic than their elders from older generations . . . But other studies reveal a more complicated and nuanced relationship . . ." ⁵⁶ Another review of studies similarly was unable to arrive at any clear conclusions about the relationships among age, cohort, and antisemitism.⁵⁷ The confusion is understandable because the studies the reviewers summarize cover different time periods, use different questions, and define age and generational groupings in various ways. Still, Smith and Schapiro comment that younger adult respondents in the most recent (post-2010) studies they reviewed showed a bit more antisemitism than older respondents.

Not surprisingly in view of recent events, the past few years have seen numerous polls on antisemitism in the United States. One of the best is an ADL-sponsored survey of more than four thousand Americans.⁵⁸ ADL has monitored American endorsement of antisemitic tropes for many decades, and one advantage of relying on ADL data is that repetition of questions permits detection of changes over time. By the early 2000s, the percentages of Americans endorsing antisemitic tropes had dropped to their lowest levels ever. Since then, the numbers have been rising. Somewhat arbitrarily, ADL classifies a person as an antisemite if they endorse six (or more) twelve tropes. The number of Americans so classified rose from 12% in 2013 to 20% in 2022 to 24% in 2024.

The 2024 poll revealed important age-related differences. ADL reports that "In a reversal of

past trends, younger Americans are more likely to endorse anti-Jewish tropes, with millennials agreeing with the greatest average number of anti-Jewish tropes at 5.4; they are followed by Gen Z at 5, Gen X at 4.2 and Baby Boomers at 3.1.” The ADL study also found that respondents who offered anti-Israel views were considerably more likely to endorse antisemitic tropes. For example, those who were uncomfortable buying products from Israel were 3.4 times more likely to be in the top quartile of endorsers of antisemitic tropes. Those who thought Israelis intended to cause as much suffering as possible to Palestinians were nearly five times (4.6) as likely to be in the most antisemitic category. Overall, 27.2% of Americans find it socially acceptable for a close family member to support Hamas. There were also age differences in comfort being friends with a Hamas supporter. More than half of Gen Z respondents either strongly agreed that they were comfortable with such friendships or somewhat agreed. For other generations, the numbers were: Millennials (44%), Gen X (34%), and Baby Boomers and Silent Generation (combined) (25%).

Another 2024 poll of a nationally representative sample of more than eight thousand adults divided the public into five segments defined as follows:

- haters who are “blatantly prejudiced against Jews (and often other groups) and tend to be outspoken about it” (11%);
- leaning haters who are “less informed or misinformed, influenced toward all kinds of prejudice and exhibiting antisemitic beliefs” (14%);
- unengaged who are “less aware of antisemitism. Many notice other forms of prejudice but don’t see antisemitism the same way” (47%);
- leaning allies who are “largely aware of antisemitism and many will say something against it when they encounter it” (20%);

- allies who are “well informed and aware of antisemitism, already activated to stand up to Jewish hate” (8%);

The classification scheme is based on responses to a number of questions including agreement with antisemitic tropes such as Jews having too much media influence and Jews being a threat to the unity of American society; however, the results were not published in a scientific journal and the specifics of the classification remain somewhat unclear.⁵⁹ Overall, the researchers associated with a research group called the Foundation to Combat Antisemitism found some bad news when they compared the June 2024 findings to an earlier study conducted in June 2023. In that one-year period which included the Hamas attacks and the Israeli response, Haters increased from 6% to 11% and Allies decreased from 15 to 8%. In June 2024, 32% of people in the 18–29 group were classified as haters or leaning haters and 31% of the 30–49 group. For those aged fifty and older, only 17% were in the haters or leaning hater group.

The Foundation to Combat Antisemitism also found age-related differences in attitudes toward the 2023–2024 campus protests over the Gaza conflict “went too far and were antisemitic.” On this issue, 64% of Americans aged fifty and over agreed that the protests “went too far” while only 39% of 18–29-year-olds thought so. There were also age-related findings on whether these protests crossed the line into antisemitism. Here, only 34% of 18–29-year-olds agreed, but 53% of Americans fifty and over thought so.

Another poll on antisemitism, this one conducted by the American Jewish Committee in 2024, revealed many differences between those 18–29 and those thirty and over.⁶⁰ The younger group, for example, was: 1) less likely to have heard of the term antisemitism and to know what it means (59%–72%), 2) less likely view antisemitism in the United States as a problem (59%–75%), 3) less likely to think that

antisemitism has increased during the past five years (43%–63%), 4) less likely to think Hamas is “a terrorist organization that works primarily in its own best interest” (66%–83%), 5) less like to think that the slogan “From the River to the Sea, Palestine will be free” is antisemitic (22%–42%), and 6) less likely to view as antisemitic the statement “The October 7, 2023, terrorist attack on Israel by Hamas has been exaggerated” (37%–54%).

Yet another study in 2024 investigated different segments of the young adult population.⁶¹ This study compared attitudes in the general population to those in six young adult groups: whites, African-Americans, Hispanics, Asians, Liberal/Progressives, and Evangelical/Fundamentalists. Using an index of antisemitism, African-American young adults and Evangelical/Fundamentalist Young adults scored as the most antisemitic. Hispanic young adults scored somewhat more antisemitic than the general population, but less antisemitic than the Blacks and Evangelical Protestants. White young adults scored slightly less antisemitic than the general population and Asians and liberal/progressive groups were right around the level of the general population.

SOME CONCLUSIONS REGARDING AGE AND GENERATIONAL DIFFERENCES

Whether considered a good thing or a bad thing, the American public retains a sizable—but dropping—degree of its traditional sympathy for Israel and the predicament in which it finds itself. Over the years, this sympathy has frequently translated into support for Israeli actions in the Arab-Israeli conflict and endorsement of American pro-Israeli policies. The historical pattern was evident immediately following the October 7 Hamas attacks: Americans overwhelmingly sided with Israel. By February 2025, overall support for Israel—as measured by the sympathy question—had dropped considerably, to forty-six percent, the lowest percentage in decades and down from

sixty-four percent in 2018. However, this level of support still exceeded the thirty-three percent who said their sympathies lay more with the Palestinians.

This is only one part of the story, however, and perhaps not the most important part. In the February 2025 poll, for example, only twenty-one percent of Democrats said they sympathized more with the Israelis, while fifty-nine percent said they sympathized more with the Palestinians. For decades, support for Israel was bipartisan, but now those who sided more with Israel were mainly Republicans, independents, and a minority of Democrats—mostly older ones. Whether one sees this change as a step in the right direction or not depends, of course, on one’s perspective on the conflict itself—a matter that lies beyond the scope of this paper.

The main conclusion of the current review is that age and generation are important predictors of current attitudes toward Israel and the Jews. On nearly every measure examined from the past few years, younger Americans turned out less likely than older ones to give a pro-Israel reply to survey researchers. This relationship seems to hold regardless of how we divide people into age categories. On some measures, younger adults as a group are still more likely to side with Israel overall, however, their degree of support is always less than that of older groups. On quite a few measures, younger Americans turn out more supportive overall of the Arab or Palestinian position. In many studies, a non-trivial percentage of younger adults showed sympathy for Hamas—or a tendency to view it as a normal political actor. More than a few young adults opposed Israel’s right to exist.

Data also support the conclusion that young adult Americans show somewhat less familiarity with the Holocaust. Beyond this informational divide, compared to older Americans, many in the younger groups seem more likely to doubt the veracity of traditional accounts of the destruction of European Jewry in the 1930s and 1940s. Non-trivial numbers of young Americans

see the Jews as themselves responsible for the Holocaust. Many accept the notion that Jews exploit discussions of the Holocaust for nefarious purposes. When we turn to formal measures of antisemitism, there is some recent evidence that younger adult groups accept more antisemitic tropes. Regarding antisemitism, age differences exist, but they are not as prominent as they are regarding attitudes toward Israel and the Arab-Israeli conflict.

The available data do not permit us to answer several key questions with precision. While we know that age influences answers to survey questions about Israel, the Holocaust and antisemitism, we do not know exactly how age groups differ or which age/generational categorization schemes are most useful. A preponderance of journalistic analysts agree that generational effects are more important than developmental effects, but we have little empirical evidence that speaks directly to this matter. The youngest adults in most studies are more anti-Israel and less aware of (and committed to) the facts of the Holocaust. The relationship between these variables and age may be linear, but the present analysis does not provide enough information to confirm that conclusion. It does seem, however, that the middle generational categories (Gen X and millennials) often fall between the oldest (silents) and the youngest (Gen Z) on replies to many questions. Distance from the Holocaust may be a crucial factor. Hitler, after all, gave a bad name to antisemitism. Dara Horn takes this argument a step further, arguing that “Now that the people who remembered the shock of those events were dying off, the public shame associated with expressing antisemitism was dying too. In other words, hating Jews was normal . . . Now normal was coming back.”⁶²

Scientifically, we have not been able to resolve definitively whether attitudes toward Israel, the Holocaust, and the Jews are highly intercorrelated and much less are we able to draw confident causal conclusions—despite a growing body of research that does suggest correlation between anti-Israel attitudes and antisemitism.⁶³ Future

research using different designs may be able to shed light on these matters.

One point worth making is that some attitudes toward the Arab-Israeli conflict may be regarded as *ipso facto* antisemitic—attitudes supporting Hamas and those rejecting Israel’s “right” to exist. Hamas is designated by the United States as a terrorist organization. Its 1987 founding covenant is antisemitic. For example, the covenant declares that Hamas:

. . . aspires to the realisation of Allah’s promise, no matter how long that should take. The Prophet, Allah bless him and grant him salvation, has said: “The Day of Judgement will not come about until Moslems fight the Jews [killing the Jews], when the Jew will hide behind stones and trees. The stones and trees will say O Moslem, O Abdulla, there is a Jew behind me, come and kill him . . .”

The quotation is a *hadith*, a saying attributed to the Prophet—although there is some question about the legitimacy of this one.⁶⁴ Moreover, the Hamas covenant does not distinguish among Israelis, Zionists, and Jews. The text, for example, reads: “Israel, Judaism and Jews challenge Islam and the Moslem people. ‘May the cowards never sleep.’” An antisemitic conspiracist mentality is reflected in declarations that the Jews develop “. . . information campaigns, films, and the school curriculum, using for that purpose their lackeys who are infiltrated through Zionist organizations under various names and shapes, such as Freemasons, Rotary Clubs, espionage groups and others, which are all nothing more than cells of subversion and saboteurs.” In 2017, the original covenant was replaced by a new document in which Hamas toned down its antisemitic rhetoric. However, as Akil Awan explains, this appears to have been solely an attempt to court international opinion, which he declares “An illusion . . . shattered on October 7.”⁶⁵ In any case, the antisemitism of the original charter continues unabated in many Hamas speeches, especially those delivered in Arabic.

In short, those young Americans who support Hamas may do so because of sympathy with the Palestinian people, but they are—in fact—supporting an overtly antisemitic organization. The call to “globalize the intifada”—heard in many pro-Palestinian protests is, in effect, an attempt to extend the violent attacks on Israelis to Jews across the globe. People in many contexts may support bigoted and racist organizations without fully comprehending the nature of the organizations they support; some of the reasons behind their support may even be noble. But we must acknowledge that support for an antisemitic organization is one reasonable way to define an antisemite. People may, after all, have supported Nazis or Klansmen for many reasons other than ideological bigotry; however, few people would nowadays be sympathetic to such reasoning.

POLITICAL AND DEMOGRAPHIC MEDIATORS OF GENERATIONAL DIFFERENCES

This study strongly suggests a generation gap regarding attitudes toward Israel, the Holocaust, and Jews. A definitive explanation of the origins of this gap must await subsequent research. However, we may reasonably speculate that generational differences are to some extent the product of political socialization and generational imprinting. People’s political worldviews tend to stabilize between the ages of fourteen and twenty-five. The key events during this period arguably can shape attitudes for decades.

Different issues dominated news about Jews and Israel during each generation’s formative years. We might, for example, attend to how many years separated a generation’s early adult years from the Holocaust, Israel’s birth as a democracy, various Arab-Israeli wars, American policy changes regarding the Middle East, the Camp David accords and the treaty with Egypt, the Oslo accords, the Intifadas, twenty-first-century conflicts in Gaza and Lebanon, and other things.⁶⁶ Some events which loomed large for

older generations—and continue to shape their views—may be relatively unknown to younger generations.

Additionally, some matters only indirectly related to Jews and the Middle East may have important generational impact including America’s experiences with the Cold War, 9/11, Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) programs, “decolonization” narratives, and changing national demographics. Attitudes may also respond to changes in the ethnic compositions of typical American classrooms, educational curricula in the United States, and variations in how Hollywood and the news media portray Jews, Muslims, Arabs, Palestinians, the Middle East, and the Holocaust. For Gen Z, Israel attitudes may to a disproportionate extent reflect media and social media representations of the Gaza conflicts starting from 2008, the rise of intersectionality and DEI frameworks, the Black Lives Matter movement, decline in institutional trust, highly visible social media campaigns, and “progressive” campus culture. Young adults would therefore be much more likely than older ones to interpret events in the Middle East (and antisemitism across the globe) in terms of oppressor/oppressed moral schemas, group-based victim hierarchies, and intersectional frameworks. They might be likely to see Jews as “white” or “privileged,” they might frame Palestinians as a colonized population, and might even envision support for Hamas as solidarity with an oppressed group (despite its antisemitic ideology). These attitudes may develop without any consideration of the degree of fit between Zionism and colonialism or the long history of the Arab-Israeli conflict.⁶⁷ Similarly, Americans—especially young Americans—may be developing new ways of looking at Arabs, Muslims, and Palestinians, which bear on their views of Jews and the Arab-Israeli conflict.⁶⁸ Logically, one may not need to choose between concern for Jews and concerns for Arabs, Muslims, Palestinians, and others; psychologically, some may see the situation as a

zero-sum game where rising support for one side must be accompanied by declining support for the other.

A central interpretive challenge in research on generational differences in attitudes toward Jews and Israel is the possibility that age effects merely reflect political orientation rather than generational location *per se*. Younger Americans are, on average, more progressive, more skeptical of American foreign policy, and more likely to adopt identity-based moral frameworks than older cohorts. Because progressive political identification is itself associated with greater criticism of Israel, a plausible alternative explanation is that apparent age differences are epiphenomenal—political rather than generational. However, this framing misunderstands the nature of generational change. Political ideology, religious affiliation, racial composition, and media consumption patterns are not competing explanations for age effects; they are among the primary mechanisms through which generational differences emerge and stabilize.

Cohort Political Ideology Shifts

A substantial body of political psychology and survey research demonstrates that Gen Z differs from earlier cohorts not only in partisan identification but in underlying moral and epistemic frameworks. Twenge and Pew Research Center analyses consistently show that Gen Z adults are more progressive, more distrustful of institutions, and more skeptical of US military power than older Americans.⁶⁹ These orientations are accompanied by greater endorsement of identity-based moral reasoning, particularly narratives organized around oppression, power asymmetries, and historical injustice. Such frameworks make anti-colonial and decolonization narratives especially resonant, providing a moral lens through which Israel is more likely to be interpreted as a powerful state actor rather than as a historically vulnerable collective. Importantly, these ideological orientations are not randomly

distributed by age; they are products of cohort-specific political socialization. For example, “antiracist” education, the antiracist community, and human rights organizations may have deemphasized antisemitism and increased antizionism in recent decades in ways that have disproportionately impacted younger generations.⁷⁰

Declining Sympathy toward Israel among Democrats

The generational story is further complicated by changes within partisan coalitions themselves. Since approximately 2015, sympathy for Israel among Democrats has declined sharply, producing the largest partisan divide on Israel since polling began. Younger Democrats are substantially more likely than older Democrats to sympathize with Palestinians and to view Israeli military actions as unjustified. This pattern indicates that political ideology operates as a partial mediator rather than a mere correlate of age: even within the same partisan category, younger adults hold systematically different views. Thus, age differences cannot be dismissed as artifacts of partisanship alone; they reflect generational transformations within political groups.

Religious Affiliation as a Confound and Mediator

Religious affiliation represents another important channel through which generational change influences attitudes toward Jews and Israel. Younger Americans are far more likely to identify as religious “nones,” a shift with significant implications for Israel-related attitudes. Religious identification—particularly Christian affiliation—correlates with greater support for Israel, higher levels of Holocaust knowledge, and increased likelihood of interpersonal contact with Jews.⁷¹ The generational decline in religious affiliation therefore reduces exposure to

theological, cultural, and social frameworks that historically fostered pro-Israel sentiment and awareness of antisemitism. Here again, religiosity is not an alternative explanation to age but one of the mechanisms through which generational differences are expressed.

Racial and Ethnic Composition

Demographic change also plays a role. Gen Z is the most racially and ethnically diverse generation in US history, and attitudes toward Jews and Israel vary across racial and ethnic groups. Survey research suggests that African American young adults exhibit relatively higher antisemitism scores on some measures, while Hispanic young adults show higher levels of anti-Israel sentiment on certain items.⁷² Asian American respondents often display ambivalence toward Middle Eastern conflicts, reflecting broader patterns of foreign policy disengagement. These demographic shifts mean that generational differences partly reflect changes in population composition rather than uniform attitudinal shifts across all groups.

Social Media Dependency

Finally, generational differences in media consumption strongly shape attitudes toward international conflicts. Younger adults rely disproportionately on social media platforms for news, while older adults continue to depend more heavily on legacy media. Research in political communication demonstrates that social media environments intensify emotionally charged narratives and amplify particular framings through algorithmic feedback loops.⁷³ Content related to Gaza on major platforms has skewed heavily toward pro-Palestinian narratives, often with minimal historical context. Absent personally-based or academically provided knowledge of the conflict, younger adults—the heavier users of social media—are more subject to manipulation. Moreover, the conflict in recent years has led to powerful images—real and

manipulated—of Palestinian suffering. Palestinian suffering after October 7 has been immense. The Palestinian argument that the Israelis are engaging in deliberate butchery may carry more visual weight on social media than the more subtle Israeli argument that Hamas tactics are responsible for the civilian toll. Differential exposure to such content constitutes another mechanism linking age to attitudes toward Israel and antisemitism.

Taken together, political ideology, religious affiliation, racial composition, and media environment should not be treated as confounding variables that undermine the significance of age. Rather, they are the primary pathways through which generational change operates. Age functions as a structural variable that organizes patterns of political socialization, moral reasoning, informational exposure, and demographic composition. From this perspective, generational differences in attitudes toward Jews and Israel are not reducible to politics alone; they reflect cohort-specific configurations of political, cultural, and informational influences that are unlikely to disappear as individuals age.

Most fair-minded observers would agree that antisemitism and Holocaust denial are bad things. Many would also agree that endorsing Hamas is unacceptable. To the extent that these developments have shown up in the mindsets of young Americans, we have a problem. On the other hand, Americans should be free to formulate their views on foreign policy issues, and the political space is an appropriate forum to sort out which of these perspectives have more and less merit. The tricky question is when bigotry—antisemitism as discussed in this paper but also anti-Arab and anti-Muslim sentiment—either causes or is a consequence of foreign policy attitudes. To get to the heart of that matter requires further debate and—possibly—empirical research.

If current trends continue, knowing little besides generational patterns, it is hard to conclude that the America of the future will be as hospitable to Jews as the America of the past.

A final question is whether sensitivity to antisemitism in its various forms can be maintained if Holocaust consciousness diminishes—as it appears destined to do. If present trends persist,

future American attitudes toward Israel and antisemitism may differ substantially from past patterns. Whether these trends are stable or event-driven requires further research.

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Antizionism as a Distinct Anti-Jewish Bigotry

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Abstract

In contemporary discourse, antizionism is treated either as legitimate political critique or as bigotry only when it resembles recognizable forms of classical antisemitism. This article challenges that assumption. I argue that antizionism is a coherent ideological formation with a distinct genealogy, stable core tropes, and a specific political logic. Tracing its development across the Nazi–Islamist axis, Soviet propaganda, and Western settler-colonial theory, I identify a recurring triad of libels—colonizer, apartheid, genocide—that compose its discourse. Combining genealogical reconstruction with anthropological description, I show that antizionism constitutes a political inversion of classical antisemitism. Whereas classical antisemitism was anti-assimilationist, casting Jews as alien outsiders, antizionism is assimilationist, denying the legitimacy of Jewish peoplehood and indigeneity. This inversion reclassifies the Jew by reversing the cultural categories through which Jews are imagined, recoding the Jew from non-European infiltrator to white colonizer. Recognizing this structure clarifies antizionism as a distinct contemporary formation of anti-Jewish bigotry.

Keywords: Antizionism, antisemitism, settler-colonial theory, Jewish sovereignty, genocide libel



In contemporary discourse, antizionism is typically treated as either a legitimate form of political critique or as a possible subset of antisemitism, crossing into bigotry only when it echoes recognizable features of classical antisemitism. This “line-crossing” model—embedded in major definitional frameworks such as IHRA, JDA, and Nexus—presumes that antisemitism is the generic category and that the central task is to determine when opposition to Israel resembles older forms of prejudice.

This article challenges that assumption. I argue that antizionism is not a neutral political stance that sometimes becomes antisemitic. It is a coherent ideological formation with a discernible genealogy, stable core tropes, and a distinct political logic. Across Nazi–Islamist propaganda, Soviet–Arab antizionism, and Western settler-colonial theory, a repeatable narrative emerged that codes Israel as a (white-)colonial intrusion, a

racist or apartheid regime, and an inherently genocidal state. These libels—colonizer, apartheid, genocide—constitute the minimal and portable structure of antizionist discourse.

Race libels are stereotype-producing epistemic claims that are unfalsifiable—they are not answerable to counter-evidence or factual refutation.¹ It has long been common to speak of “antisemitic tropes” about Jews, or of stereotypes about marginalized groups more broadly that attribute essentialized negative traits to entire collectives. In this sense, racialization² is best understood not as the identification of naturally existing or scientifically valid “races,”³ but as the process through which groups are essentialized and objectified.⁴

What is less frequently examined is the epistemic structure through which these metaphorical constructions operate. Race libels function by generating a justificatory logic: they make hatred or violence against a group appear

warranted by attributing to that group a set of alleged behaviors or inherent dispositions. In the Jim Crow South, for example, lynchings of Black Americans were routinely justified through the accusation that Black men posed a sexual threat to white women. Such accusations did not only express prejudice, but produced a narrative in which violence appeared defensible.

Because race libels encode stereotypes and target collectives, the term “libel”—as in “race libel,” “anti-Jewish libel,” or “antizionist libel”—is distinct from, but connected to, the legal definition of libel, which typically applies to defamation against identifiable individuals. Here the concept is used in a broader analytical sense, referring to a class of defamatory claims directed at entire groups and functioning as justificatory narratives for exclusion, discrimination, or violence.

Since race libels code groups as essentially evil, they cannot be substantively true so long as one accepts the principle of human equality: that no human collectivity is inherently more degenerate than another. At the same time, stereotypes often draw on selective evidence or partial observations in order to generate plausibility. These fragments of evidence support confirmability—the tendency to interpret new information in ways that reinforce preexisting assumptions or prejudices.⁵

What race libels ultimately resist, however, is falsifiability.⁶ Because they are grounded in prior prejudice, those who believe them cannot accept counter-evidence that would contradict their claims. Disconfirming facts are ignored, reinterpreted, or absorbed back into the stereotype. In this way, the libel sustains itself as a closed justificatory system rather than a claim genuinely open to empirical refutation. It is therefore a misinterpretation of the epistemic status of antizionist libels to assume that they should be factually refuted.

Methodologically, my analysis of antizionism as a distinct anti-Jewish bigotry draws on structural anthropology⁷ and genealogical reconstruction. Structural anthropology is valuable here

because it provides a framework for comparing coherent ideological formations by tracing their constitutive oppositions and binaries.

By genealogy, I mean something both broader and more precise than conventional intellectual history. It does not restrict itself to the conceptual frameworks of academics and scholars, but also includes government documents, radio broadcasts, speeches, propaganda pamphlets, and other forms of discourse—“texts” in the broadest sense. At the same time, the aim is not merely to reconstruct the evolution of ideas or networks of intellectual influence. Rather, it is to track the material circulation of textual fragments across the archive. The question is therefore not who influenced whom, but how particular phrases, tropes, and libels move across space and time.

In this article, I first trace the historical emergence and ideological consolidation of the three core antizionist libels across Middle Eastern, Soviet, and Western contexts using an archival method, treating the past as a field of texts and textual fragments read retrospectively from the vantage point of the ethnographic present. I then examine how these same tropes are organized and reproduced in contemporary discourse.

I argue that antizionism represents a political inversion of classical antisemitism. Classical antisemitism was anti-assimilationist: Jews were constructed as an alien minority incapable of belonging within European nation-states. Antizionism, by contrast, is structurally assimilationist: Jews may exist as individuals or as a religion, but Jewish nationhood and sovereignty are treated as illegitimate. Sovereignty becomes the offense. This inversion produces a systematic reclassification of the Jew—from infiltrating minority to colonizing majority—and generates a new set of cultural codings that are inverse to classical antisemitic constructions.

The purpose of this article is therefore twofold. First, to demonstrate that antizionism possesses a coherent genealogy and recurring ideological core across multiple political contexts. Second, to argue that prevailing

antisemitism frameworks obscure this coherence by presuming that antizionism must be evaluated against classical antisemitism as the normative model of hate. If antizionism operates through its own tropes, libels, and political logic, then it should be analyzed explicitly as a distinct contemporary formation of anti-Jewish bigotry.

The sections that follow trace the emergence of antizionism through its Nazi–Islamist, Soviet–Arab, and Western phases, before turning to a structural comparison between antisemitism and antizionism and examining the implications of this distinction for contemporary definitional debates.⁸

THE GENEALOGY OF ANTIZIONISM

Antizionism emerged from the convergence of three principal sources: the Nazi–Islamist axis, Soviet antizionist propaganda (articulated in alignment with secular Arab nationalism), and Western settler-colonial theory. Across these distinct contexts, a coherent ideological formation took shape in which Israel is constructed as a foreign, (white-)colonial intrusion into Palestine, grounded in racism and Jewish supremacy, and ultimately oriented toward the genocide of Palestinians.

The narrative condensed into a minimal and repeatable meme—a portable ideological unit—progressively assembled and circulated across MENA, Soviet, and Western contexts. In the early twenty-first century, it was mainstreamed in Western institutions through the Durban conference, the academic consolidation of settler-colonial theory, and the expansion of the BDS movement. Wherever antizionism appears, it reliably mobilizes the same triad of libels—colonizer, apartheid, genocide—which together construct Israel as an inherently evil state and “Zionists” as an inherently evil collective.

The following section traces how these three libels emerged and were institutionalized across the historical development of antizionism.

The Nazi–Islamist Axis

The early beginnings of antizionism within the Nazi–Islamist axis remained rooted in classical antisemitism and traditional Islamic antijudaism. Early texts from the 1920s by Alfred Rosenberg—later one of the central Nazi propagandists—framed the “Zionist menace” as an invasion of Palestine,⁹ decades before Australian academic Patrick Wolfe’s formulation of settler-colonial “invasion.”¹⁰ Rosenberg applied classical antisemitic notions of Jewish “conquest,” found in nineteenth-century antisemites such as Wilhelm Marr¹¹ and Eduard Drumont,¹² equally to Jewish presence in Germany and to Jewish settlement in Palestine.

At the same time, xenophobic reactions to Jewish immigration within strands of early Arab nationalism and pan-Islamism converged with these classical antisemitic constructions. As Jeffrey Herf, Matthias Küntzel,¹³ and others have documented, Arab nationalists and pan-Islamists increasingly drew inspiration from Nazi anti-Jewish ideologies throughout the 1930s. Arabic translations of the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion* circulated widely. Alongside imported European antisemitism and local xenophobic responses, the Mufti of Jerusalem and early Muslim Brotherhood figures deployed traditional antijudaic polemics, portraying Jews as conspiratorial actors and existential threats to Islam, drawing on Qur’anic and hadith sources.¹⁴ During the Second World War, Nazi–Arab radio circulated early versions of the genocide libel, claiming that the Zionists aimed to exterminate the Arabs and used the pattern of “accusation in a mirror”¹⁵ to engage in incitement against Jews.¹⁶ Essentially, the concept of Jewish “invasion” of non-European states was applied in the Arab case to turn Jews into European “colonizers” of Palestine.

After the Second World War, the gravitational center of antizionism shifted from the Nazi–Islamist axis to the Soviet–Arab nationalist alliance. It was in this context that “antizionism proper” crystallized as a left-wing, secular

construction of “Zionism” and the State of Israel as an inherent evil within the postwar international order. An important transitional figure between these two phases was Johannes von Leers, a Nazi propagandist who, following the war, migrated to Egypt and converted to Islam. As Joel Fishman¹⁷ has shown, von Leers secured a position in Nasser’s propaganda ministry and helped circulate antizionist materials throughout the Middle East, arguing that the Nazi war against the Jews could be continued within an Islamic framework.¹⁸ The Soviets were no longer cast as enemies—as in the earlier anti-communist Judeo-Bolshevik construction—but instead emerged as key allies in the global dissemination of anti-Jewish propaganda.

Soviet-Arab Antizionism

The Soviet and Arab nationalist construction of antizionism evolved along two intersecting lines, one deriving from Christian antijudaism—often via the input of Levantine Arab-Christian intellectuals such as Fayez Sayegh, Constantine Zureiq, Michel Afleq, and others—the other from the classical, conspiratorial antisemitism of the *Protocols* reconstructed through Marxist-Leninist categories.

In the first case, antijudaic polemics against the “chosen people,” Lutheran notions of Jewish “racial arrogance,” and Pauline oppositions between “spirit” and “flesh” were reframed in secular political language as the claim that “Zionism is racism.” This transformation is clearest in the work of Fayez Sayegh, head of the Palestine Research Center, who in his 1965 *Zionist Colonialism in Palestine*¹⁹ coined the term “settler-colonialism” specifically in reference to Israel. Repurposing antijudaic canards of Jewish supremacy, Sayegh departed from the classical Marxist understanding of colonialism as primarily a system of economic extraction and instead argued that the mere existence of Jews as a self-organized national community in Palestine constituted a form of “racist exclusivism.” A political reading of the Second Aliyah and the

Zionist boycott of Arab labor (*avodah ivrit*) was thus fused with theological polemic to portray Zionism as a project of segregation. Sayegh later played a role in the intellectual groundwork surrounding the 1975 United Nations resolution declaring that “Zionism is racism,” embedding antizionist categories within the institutional framework of the international order.²⁰

Antijudaic constructions of “Zionism”—developed by authors²¹ associated with the PLO (Palestine Liberation Organization)—generated a new form of theological antijudaism centered on accusations of “biblical exclusivism.”²² In this formulation, Israelis were transformed into biblical fundamentalists who believe they are reenacting Joshua’s conquest of the Canaanites.²³ This marked a shift from medieval Christian antijudaism, which focused primarily on the Talmud as an illicit and demonic counterpart to the New Testament. The newer polemic relocated the source of danger to the Hebrew Bible itself, depicting Israelis as driven by a literalist and expansionist reading of scripture.

The trope of the “genocidal Israeli” in this framework was grounded in a hostile interpretation of biblical narratives. It presaged more recent forms of the Amalek libel,²⁴ particularly after October 7, when Netanyahu’s reference to the metaphor of Amalek was interpreted as though it constituted a literal command to exterminate all Palestinians.²⁵ These constructions of Israelis as biblical literalists were subsequently mobilized to recast Jews as settler-colonists reenacting an ancient scriptural genocide, even as their descent from the biblical Israelites was dismissed as fabricated. The resulting image—of Jews as “right-wing” fascists and religious fundamentalists—would eventually come to resonate powerfully with secular and left-wing audiences in Europe and North America.

Hasan Haddad was a key proponent of this line of thought, advancing it in articles published in the *Journal of Palestine Studies*²⁶ and, alongside others,²⁷ at the United Nations Seminars on the Question of Palestine throughout the 1980s.²⁸ His legacy continues in the work of authors such

as Nur Masalha,²⁹ editor of *Holy Land and Palestine Studies*,³⁰ who advances related arguments about a purported “Zionist mentality”³¹ grounded in Jewish supremacy, biblical literalism, and an allegedly superseded claim to the Holy Land.³² In this way, the colonizer, apartheid, and genocide libels were articulated within Arab-nationalist antizionism.

Soviet texts also developed themes of biblical chauvinism, Joshua’s conquest, and Israeli racism. However, they also developed an elaborate form of conspiratorial antisemitism that was clearly derived from the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion*. As scholar Izabella Tabarovsky has shown,³³ the “Zionologists,” especially in the wake of 1967, transformed conspiratorial antisemitism into Marxist-Leninist categories. Foundational authors like Yuri Ivanov in *Beware: Zionism!*³⁴ told the history of Zionism as the story of a sequence of conspiratorial secret meetings and “plans” whereby the “Zionists” plotted to undermine socialism in collaboration with capitalist and imperial powers. Jews were constructed as “bourgeois nationalists,” “capitalists,” and “fascists” working within an international network to apply imperial power across the globe. In other words, Jews were reconstructed as the inverse of what left-wing socialists valued. A new construction of the “Zionist” was emerging, one that used the materials of classical antisemitism while inverting the position of the Jew from left-wing communist to “right-wing” capitalist.

The Soviets’ most consequential innovation, however, was Holocaust inversion. The Soviets, in constructing “Zionists” as “right-wing fascists,” perfected the art of coding “Zionists” as “Nazis.” Israel became an inherently “fascist” state³⁵: a racist caste system deliberately constructed to oppress Palestinian Arabs.³⁶ As Nazis, Israelis were, of course, genocidal.³⁷ The colonizer, apartheid, and genocide libels then were articulated in Soviet antizionism through the reconstruction of the “Zionist” through Marxist-Leninist categories, constructing Jews as imperialists, colonialists, and Nazis.

Western Antizionism

The story of Western antizionism is, to a significant extent, the story of settler-colonial theory, which produced a “white-guilt” form of antizionism that cast Israelis and “Zionists” as “white settlers,” analogous to Europeans who colonized and later established countries such as Australia, Canada, and the United States. Faye Sayegh’s formulation of “settler-colonialism”³⁸ did not become mainstream in Western academia until the post-2000s. Western Marxists such as Maxime Rodinson³⁹ adopted the concept to attack Israel after 1967, and in 1989 the Israeli sociologist Gershon Shafir⁴⁰ reconstructed a version of settler-colonial analysis from within the American academy. Yet for decades mainstream Western understandings of Israel remained largely shaped by the view of Zionism as a national liberation movement in the ancestral territory of the Jewish people, rather than as an inherently genocidal appropriation of someone else’s indigenous land. Although Edward Said’s work⁴¹ in the late 1970s profoundly reshaped Middle Eastern Studies and encouraged the framing of Zionism as an extension of European colonialism, the full settler-colonial apparatus that cast Israel as inherently genocidal and categorically denied Jewish claims to the land had not yet become mainstream in the West.

In 1999, the Australian anthropologist Patrick Wolfe⁴² revived settler-colonial theory, transforming the concept of colonialism from its earlier Marxist emphasis on economic extraction and exploitation into a theory of demographic replacement and the structural elimination of indigenous populations. Writing in the context of Australia’s “history wars” over national responsibility for the dispossession of Aboriginal peoples, Wolfe reconceived settler colonialism not as a historical episode but as an ongoing structure governed by what he later termed a “logic of elimination.” This shift recast settler societies as inherently eliminatory in form, a move that would transform the field of genocide studies.

The institutionalization of genocide discourse would prove decisive in the later circulation of the antizionist genocide libel, most visibly after October 7. The *Journal of Genocide Research*, founded in 1999, became a central venue in this transformation.⁴³ Early contributions to the journal, such as Colin Tatz's application⁴⁴ of the Genocide Convention to Australian policies toward Indigenous peoples, reframed genocide as a protracted structural process rather than a discrete historical event. In 2006, Patrick Wolfe extended his theory of settler-colonialism to Israel in "Settler Colonialism and the Elimination of the Native,"⁴⁵ published in the *Journal of Genocide Research*, arguing that Israel was governed by a "logic of elimination" that rendered it intrinsically genocidal. In the wake of October 7, this convergence crystallized into an academic pseudoconsensus around the genocide libel,⁴⁶ grounded in the frameworks of settler-colonialism and the antizionist racialization of Israeli Jews as inherently genocidal.⁴⁷

That same year, Lorenzo Veracini published *Israel and Settler Society*,⁴⁸ opening with a striking claim: We must stop interpreting the Israeli–Palestinian conflict as a territorial or religious dispute and instead see it as a unilateral settler-colonial situation. Veracini leaned heavily on the 2001 Durban conference at the United Nations—an event that reintroduced Soviet antizionist libels of "Zionism is racism" into the global left after the relative hiatus of the Oslo years of the 1990's.⁴⁹ The very need for Veracini to argue the claim so explicitly shows that, even then, the settler-colonial framing was not yet mainstream.

After the 2011 SOAS conference⁵⁰—*Past is Present: Settler Colonialism in Palestine*—which explicitly applied settler-colonial theory to Israel–Palestine, the framework was further integrated with Faye Sayegh's earlier work and gradually recast through the idiom of Indigenous rights and Indigenous testimony.⁵¹ The result was a potent moral weapon: Israel could now be cast as inherently genocidal, while opposition to

it was elevated as an expression of Indigenous rights.

In this way, an entire apparatus was constructed throughout the 2000s to code Israel's existence as inherently genocidal, rather than as a testable claim pinned to particular individuals or institutions. It did this by comparing Israelis to "white" settlers in Canada, the United States, and Australia, while displacing and projecting "white guilt" onto Israel, transforming Israel into a symbol of Western colonialism. This was a crucial moment in the racialization of the Israeli and "Zionist" as hyper-white, inverse to classical antisemitism's construction of the Jew as non-European.

Although references to Jews as "white settlers" appeared in PLO-associated writing⁵² from the 1970s and 1980s and in UN discourse—especially in the context of the apartheid libel⁵³—and were reinforced through efforts to link Black nationalist struggles⁵⁴ in the United States to antizionism, Western settler-colonial theory gave the trope a new and more powerful form. It embedded the hyper-white construction of Israelis within institutionalized academia as an unquestioned assumption and supplied a sharper theoretical apparatus for portraying Israelis as inherently genocidal. Charged debates around racism, responsibility, and national guilt in the United States could now be mapped on to the "Israeli-Palestinian conflict" casting Israelis as white oppressors of "brown" Palestinians. In this way, the colonizer, apartheid, and genocide libels were consolidated in Western antizionism, casting Israelis as "white genociders" of an "indigenous" population.

THE POLITICAL LOGIC OF ANTIZIONISM

The foregoing genealogy demonstrates that antizionism did not arise as a spontaneous moral critique of Israeli policy, but as a historically layered ideological formation. Across Nazi–Islamist propaganda, Soviet–Arab nationalist discourse, and Western settler-colonial theory, the same core libels were progressively stabilized

and institutionalized. Yet genealogy alone does not explain why these disparate streams converged so coherently. To understand that convergence, we must identify the political logic that organizes them. What unites these formations is not simply a shared vocabulary of colonization, racism, and genocide, but a redefinition of the status of Jewish collective existence itself. It is at this level—of how Jewish difference is to be managed—that a key inversion occurs.

It's clear from the above discussion that the emergence and mutation of antizionism over time leaned heavily on classical antisemitic materials. Nazi-Islamist forms of (proto-)antizionism developed out of antisemitic theories of Jewish conquest and world-conspiracy. Soviet antizionism drew on the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion* to construct a pseudo-science of "Zionology," based on framing "Zionists" as a vast network of rich, powerful Jews and their allies who oppose socialism on a global scale. However, the process of antizionism's emergence from older anti-Jewish hatreds resulted in an inversion: Jews were redefined from the infiltrators of European nations, a threatening minority population, into an illegitimate majority-population that invaded a non-European nation.

The institutionalization of Arab-nationalist and Soviet antizionism within the United Nations, whether via the 1975 "Zionism is racism" resolution or the Conferences on the Question of Palestine, and other institutional mechanisms, turned Israel into a paradigmatic "rogue-state" that violated the order of international justice and human rights. Jewish nationhood and sovereignty—the State of Israel—became the fundamental problem, not Jewish infiltration of other states.

In other words, antizionism transformed the anti-assimilationist stance of classical European antisemitism into a pro-assimilationist stance that seeks to dissolve Jewish nationhood through cultural erasure. This assimilationist stance, whether developed in the context of theories of "Arab Jews" that erased Mizrahi Jewish identity,⁵⁵ explicit Islamist attempts to revive the category

of the dhimmi and subordinate Jews to Islamic law and sovereignty,⁵⁶ or Marxist and socialist insistence that Jews renounce their nationality in favor of their participation in an international working-class struggle,⁵⁷ also provides the key to the emergence of tokenized Jewish antizionism.

Eventually, assimilationist and other anti-Zionist Jewish traditions that had pre-dated 1948—but which had no historical relationship whatsoever to the lineage of contemporary antizionism—were revived and used to justify antizionism, since, in both cases, a Jewish state was rejected. What this maneuver concealed was that the colonizer, apartheid, and genocide libels do not derive from Jewish texts and that antizionism—as a holistic ideology—has nothing to do with Jewish tradition, in any of its forms. In any case, to this date, token Jewish antizionists have not produced any convincing evidence to show that the colonizer, apartheid, and genocide libels derive from Jewish texts.

Early Arab nationalists, such as Constantin Zureiq, who wrote *The Meaning of the Disaster*⁵⁸ in the wake of Israel's War of Independence in 1948 and who coined the term "Nakba" to describe the Arab defeat, explicitly denied that Jews constituted a distinct nation. Zureiq wrote that "Zionists do not have the characteristics of a united nation, for they are from widely separated lands, speak different languages, and follow different ways. Their only common bonds are religion . . ."⁵⁹ In the same breath as he suggested that Jews might have brought the Holocaust upon themselves, he assured the reader that the "Jewish problem"⁶⁰ would be best solved by "the readiness of the Jews themselves for assimilation into the rest of mankind."⁶¹ Even as Zureiq called the Arab states to "total war"⁶² with "Zionism," constructing it as the ultimate obstacle to Arab unity and salvation, he claimed that it was not Jews as a religion who were the problem, but Jewish assertion of national claims in the form of "Zionism."

The PLO charters institutionalized this stance as a basic component of the Palestinian national movement (as constructed by

antizionism). The 1964 charter asserted that: “Judaism, because it is a divine religion, is not a nationality with independent existence” and that “the Jews are not one people with an independent personality because they are citizens to their states.”⁶³ These claims were repeated almost verbatim in the 1968 charter.⁶⁴

An early text that systematically mobilized internal Jewish debate over Zionism in order to legitimize antizionist ideology was Hasan Sa’ab’s “Zionism and Racism,”⁶⁵ published in 1968 as part of the *Palestine Essays* series of the Palestine Research Center, then directed by Fayez Sayegh. Sa’ab’s essay makes explicit a set of connections that are central to antizionist discourse: the construction of “Zionism” as a racist doctrine rooted in Jewish ideas of chosenness; the demand that Jews abandon peoplehood and assimilate into surrounding societies; and the strategic tokenization of Jews who advocated assimilation. In this formulation, it is racist for Jews to exist as a people, and the only legitimate Jews are those who seek the dissolution of Jewish peoplehood.

To support this argument, Sa’ab invokes a wide array of anti-Zionist Jewish figures—including Alfred Lilienthal, Morris Raphael Cohen, Henry Hurewitz, and others—presenting them as authoritative Jewish voices against Zionism. Particularly notable is his reference to members of the American Council for Judaism (ACJ), a small assimilationist organization founded in 1942 that rejected Jewish nationhood and opposed the creation of Israel. Although historically marginal within American Jewish life, the ACJ has recently been revived—in 2024, in the wake of the post-October 7 global antizionist mobilization—as a symbolic precedent for contemporary forms of token antizionism.⁶⁶

Yuri Ivanov’s foundational text of Soviet antizionist propaganda, *Beware: Zionism!*,⁶⁷ also explicitly appropriates pre-1948 Jewish debates about Zionism in order to legitimize the antizionism he otherwise adapted from the ideological repertoire of the *Protocols of the Elders of*

Zion. Ivanov’s argument was grounded in canonical, dogmatic adherence to Marxist-Leninist doctrine. Drawing on Lenin’s early characterization of Zionism as a form of “bourgeois nationalism”⁶⁸ that divided the Jewish working class, he cast “Zionism” as inherently opposed to proletarian interests. Ivanov’s demand for Jewish assimilation derived not from Reform Judaism or from pre-1948 Jewish debate over Zionism, but from the imperatives of international working-class revolution. At the same time, he selectively repurposed the writings of Jewish anti-Zionists to argue that Jewish “return to holy Zion”⁶⁹ was inauthentic, while insisting that Soviet policy harbored no hostility toward Jews as such. The Soviet Union opposed “antisemitism and racism”;⁷⁰ it was “Zionism,” framed as an illicit political ideology, that posed an existential threat to socialism.

In the current day, Jewish Voice for Peace (JVP)⁷¹ has become well-known for pushing token antizionism and insisting that “Zionism” is opposed to “Judaism.” At the basis of this American form of token antizionism, is a move from insisting on the legitimacy of ethnic Jews, as in the Soviet case,⁷² to a deeper cultural appropriation of “Judaism” itself, claiming that the Jewish religion must be opposed to “Zionism.” American token antizionism also insists that Jews are not a nation and that they should assimilate into other nation-states. In recent years, an influential and trendy strain of Jewish studies has developed a reading of Jewish history that emphasizes “diaspora” and “diasporism”⁷³ that is often exploited to conceal antizionism as its own ideology of anti-Israeli racism.

STRUCTURAL INVERSION: ANTIZIONISM AND ANTISEMITISM

The historical developments traced above reveal a structured inversion. Classical antisemitism cast Jews as a foreign minority infiltrating European societies. Antizionism casts Jews as a foreign majority colonizing a non-European society.

Inverse Cultural Categories

<i>Antisemitism</i>	<i>Antizionism</i>
Rejection of Jews as minority	Rejection of Jewish majority-state
Non-white, oriental, Semitic	White settler, European
Jews as communists, Judeo-Bolsheviks	Jews as fascists, ultra-nationalists
Tends to reject token Jews	Invests heavily in token Jews
Logics of elimination, physical genocide	Assimilation, cultural genocide ⁷⁴
Uses biological sciences as authorization	Uses social sciences as authorization
Jews as a race	“Zionism” as an ideology
Jews infiltrate European states	Jews colonize non-European peoples
Exaggerates Jewish distinctiveness	Erases Jewish distinctiveness
<i>Common logics</i>	
Jews as liars, manipulative, deceptive	
Jews aligned with power and domination	

The schematic comparison above is derived from the opposing political logics at work. Classical antisemitism was anti-assimilationist: Jews were accused of remaining irreducibly foreign within European states, incapable of absorption, and therefore subject to expulsion or extermination. Antizionism is pro-assimilationist: Jews may exist as a religion or as private individuals, but Jewish nationhood is treated as illegitimate. Antisemitic racism against diaspora Jews shifts to an anti-Israeli racism that treats the State of Israel as inherently evil in its entirety. Jews and other victims of antizionism are marked as “Zionists” and viewed as emanations of Israel.

I have included a small set of common logics as well: Jews as liars and deceivers—in antizionist contexts, particularly in the figure of the “hasbarist,” whose speech can be dismissed in advance as a mere attempt to “defend Israel’s crimes” or to “shut down free speech” through accusations of antisemitism, as in what David Hirsh calls the Livingstone Formulation,⁷⁵ and in what Miranda Fricker calls epistemic injustice, the systematic devaluing of certain minority groups’ testimony⁷⁶—alongside a broader association of Jews and Israelis with power and domination, which in antizionism appears in the

stereotyped construction of Israelis as “oppressors.” These shared logics of deception and power help explain why antizionism and antisemitism are often intuited to be similar, since both ideological formations frequently rely on conspiratorial imaginaries.

However, when we examine the table of binaries, it becomes clear that the claim that “antizionism and antisemitism use all the same tropes” is not accurate. Nor it is not obvious why they should be collapsed into a single category when they systematically invert one another. It is more precise to understand them as occupying a region of overlap while nevertheless remaining distinct formations.

If antisemitism and antizionism are structurally inverse logics—each grounded in a distinct set of cultural categories—it is worth questioning whether “antisemitism” should continue to serve as the generic term, with antizionism merely treated as a subset or “form” of it. In other words, it is unclear why the conceptual features of antisemitism should be privileged over those of antizionism. In practice, nearly all definitions of antisemitism—IHRA, JDA, Nexus—presume that the task is to determine when antizionism “crosses the line” into

antisemitism. While this is often framed as distinguishing legitimate criticism from anti-Jewish bigotry, it effectively legitimizes antizionism by default as a form of criticism, recognizing only classical antisemitism as bigotry.

The “line crossing” is typically marked by echoes of historical antisemitism: media and government control, dual-loyalty accusations, or racial infiltration. Only when antizionism resembles these older patterns does it “count” as bigotry. Meanwhile, the specific libels that define antizionism—colonizer, apartheid, genocide, white-coding—are cast as political or moral critique.

When the discourse turns to Israeli policy, or even Israel’s right to exist, the framework shifts to concerns about “double standards,” or to Natan Sharansky’s “three D’s” (delegitimization, demonization, and double standards).⁷⁷ Yet the core libels and symbolic content of antizionism remain unnamed. There is a widespread assumption that “antisemitic tropes” exist—money, secret power, media control—but not that there are distinctive *antizionist tropes*: white colonizer, Jewish supremacist, genocidaire. The same problems plague the category of “political antisemitism,” which does not specifically name antizionist libels but instead assumes that classical antisemitic tropes have simply been projected onto Israel. While such projection does sometimes occur, this framework fails to identify the specific ideological content of antizionist hate in the contemporary. In this way, the possibility that antizionism constitutes a distinct, contemporary formation of anti-Jewish bigotry is foreclosed in advance—by making antisemitism the generic category and classical antisemitism the normative model of hate.

CONCLUSION

I have argued that antisemitism and antizionism are distinct anti-Jewish bigotries, based on opposing political logics of anti-assimilation and

assimilation of Jews respectively, two distinct ways of managing the phenomenon of Jewish difference. These distinct political logics generate a whole set of inverse cultural categories and constructions of Jews—projections by non-Jewish society onto the Jewish people—that serve to code Jews as immoral. Recognizing that antisemitism and antizionism are distinct leads one to question the current paradigms of antisemitism recognition—the IHRA, JDA, and Nexus alike—and the “cross-the-line discourse” that sustains them. A new definition is needed, one that makes antizionism explicit and names its central tropes and libels.

Antizionism is not disconnected from the entire history of Jew-hatred; its genealogy is rooted in older forms: classical antisemitism and Christian and Islamic anti-Judaism. Various combinations between antizionism and other anti-Jewish bigotries are also possible, as well as analogical resonances between different forms, overlaps and common logics. But the strict binary and polarizing opposition between its central tropes proves that antizionism and antisemitism are distinct, so that antizionism should be treated as a holistic anti-Jewish ideology on its own terms.

Some might argue that “antisemitism” still retains a taboo force that makes it useful as the general category through which antizionism can be condemned. At the same time, there has been a widespread sense since October 7 that the term has lost much of its power of condemnation in the face of an unprecedented surge of antizionist hate across civil society. I would argue that over-reliance on this term has in fact hampered efforts to describe and stigmatize antizionism on its own terms—to analyze its history, identify its characteristic behaviors, and explain the ways in which it harms Jews, regardless of whether one labels it antisemitism.

My argument extends David Seymour’s significant recognition of antizionism as a coherent ideology⁷⁸ and his claim that it represents a new form of the “Jewish Question”⁷⁹—one that shifts the issue from Jews’

civic rights in the case of antisemitism to their political rights in the case of antizionism. This formulation captures a metaphorical extension: the displacement of the question of civil equality onto the plane of political equality. At the same time, the shift from the “Jewish Question” to the “Israel Question” or “Zionist Question” is accompanied by a reconfiguration and inversion of the tropes historically directed at Jews. Antizionism is therefore not classical antisemitism projected onto Israel but a distinct ideological and symbolic complex whose core nucleus consists of the colonizer, apartheid, and genocide libels. Recognizing this requires moving beyond the “line-crossing” frameworks that anchor the analysis in classical antisemitism.

I have traced the genealogical emergence of antizionism through its Nazi–Islamist, Soviet–Arab, and Western phases, and demonstrated that an identical core-structure—the colonizer, apartheid, and genocide libels, which code a “Jewish majority state” as inherently evil—repeatedly consolidate across Middle Eastern, Soviet, and Western forms of antizionism. My account demonstrates that antizionism is a coherent ideology, phenomenon, and object of analysis. I propose this analysis as a preliminary basis for the future field of antizionism studies, allowing antizionism to breathe as its own object of study, even as one continues to investigate its relationship to other and older forms of Jew-hatred.

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- 58 Constantine K. Zurayk, *The Meaning of the Disaster* (1948), trans. R. Bayly Winder (Washington, D.C.: Khayats, 1956).
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- 63 Palestinian National Charter (1964), art. 18, Avalon Project, Yale Law School, accessed February 19, 2026, https://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th_century/plocov.asp.
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- 65 Hasan Sa'ab, *Zionism & Racism*, Palestine essay no. 2, Palestine Liberation Organization Research Center, 1965.
- 66 An early but less systematic example of antizionist tokenization appears in a radio broadcast produced by the Arab Information Center (AIC) in New York on November 8, 1956, titled "Two Divergent Jewish Views on Israel's Attack on Egypt." At the time, the AIC was directed by Fayez A. Sayegh and functioned as part of the Arab League's propaganda campaigns in the United States. The broadcast explicitly framed anti-Zionist Jews—including Rabbi Elmer Berger of the American Council for Judaism (ACJ)—as authoritative Jewish voices condemning Israel, presenting their statements as representative Jewish opinion in order to legitimize antizionist libel-narratives for American audiences. See "Two Divergent Jewish Views on Israel's Attack on Egypt," radio broadcast script, November 8, 1956, Arab Information Center radio broadcasts, Box 233, Fayez A. Sayegh Collection on the Arab-Israeli Conflict (ACCN 2545), J. Willard Marriott Library Special Collections, University of Utah.
- 67 Ivanov, *Beware: Zionism!*
- 68 Lenin, "The Position of the Bund in the Party."
- 69 Ivanov, *Beware: Zionism!*
- 70 Nikita S. Khrushchev, speech in the Kremlin denying the existence of anti-Semitism in the USSR, March 11, 1963, reported in *Jewish Telegraphic Agency*; Ivanov, *Beware: Zionism!*, 146.
- 71 "Our Approach to Zionism," *Jewish Voice for Peace*, accessed February 19, 2026, <https://www.jewishvoiceforpeace.org/resource/zionism/>.
- 72 *Zionism: Words and Deeds*.
- 73 Shaul Magid, *The Necessity of Exile: Essays from a Distance* (New York: Ayin Press, 2023); David Kraemer, *Embracing Exile: The Case for Jewish Diaspora* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2024).
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in its “pure” modality its symbolic emphasis remains on the dissolution of the Jewish state and the Jewish people as a distinct collective, coupled with an explicit demand for their cultural assimilation.

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Israel, Genocide, and Gaza: The Law and Politics of an Accusation

John Strawson¹

Abstract

Some legal scholars have joined a mendacious political campaign to claim that Israel's military response to the Hamas massacre on October 7, 2023, constitutes genocide. The article focuses on the legal, evidential, and political weaknesses of that accusation, particularly as advanced by the 2025 report of the UN Human Rights Council's Independent International Commission of Inquiry (COI) and by scholars such as Associate Professor Jane Rooney who urge the UN General Assembly to formally recognize genocide in Gaza. It argues that the genocide label is being used without adherence to the strict legal definition contained in the 1948 Genocide Convention. Central to this argument is the requirement of special intent (*dolus specialis*): genocide requires proof that acts were committed with the intent to destroy a protected group "as such." It stresses that international case law correctly sets a high bar for proving this intent which intentional courts have repeatedly reaffirmed as necessary to prove the existence of the most serious of international crimes. This bar has not been met in the Gaza situation and the allegation that Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, President Isaac Herzog, and former Defense Minister Yoav Galant have incited genocide is without foundation. However, making the allegation has been a key aspect of the rise of antisemitism internationally—with lethal consequences.

Keywords: International law, October 7, Gaza, genocide, United Nations



The accusation that Israel's military response to the Hamas attacks of October 7, 2023, was genocidal has now become common place. The casual use of the term "genocide" in connection with the Gaza war has seeped into the public consciousness. Genocide is not merely a slogan chanted on the streets but in the legal proceedings brought by South Africa at the International Court of Justice.² While the Court has yet to rule on the merits of the case, others within the United Nations system have already decided that Israel has committed genocide. This is the finding of the "Independent International Commission of Inquiry on Occupied Palestinian Territory including East Jerusalem and Israel" set up by the Human Rights Council. This report

has been taken as a fact by some lawyers and human rights activists to demand that the international community act on it. As we know, the accusation of genocide against Israel has not only fueled anti-Israel activities but has had serious consequences for Jewish communities around the world, as the lethal attacks on Manchester and Bondi tragically illustrate.

In an opinion piece, Associate Professor of International Law Jane Rooney³ takes the report's determination of genocide as the starting point to argue that the United Nations General Assembly must take action against Israel. She maintains that Commission of Inquiry (COI) reports are in themselves legally authoritative and thus provide a basis for further action. Her proposal is that the United Nations General Assembly

should put forward a resolution recognising the commission of genocide in Gaza as it has done so in the past following COI reports. This will feed into the ICJ litigation proceedings. However, by the time a judicial determination has been made, many more people will have fallen victim to the genocide. UNGA Member States should urgently collectively recognise genocide in a resolution as one step forward in mitigating human loss on the ground.⁴

In this article I will examine the merits of Rooney's advocacy of the Independent Commission's report. It was widely publicized when published in September 2025 with leading newspapers and media outlets headlining genocide in Gaza.⁵ It led several political figures including the Mayor of London Sir Sadiq Khan to state that Israel was committing genocide in Gaza⁶.

The media and public figures were undoubtedly impressed that the report came from a United Nations source. The report, however, is a "conference room paper," which is an informal document within the UN system and does not represent a decision of the United Nations. Such decisions can only be taken by the principal organs, such as the General Assembly or the Security Council. The Commission was established by the Human Rights Council which is an intergovernmental body within the UN created by the General Assembly.⁷ The Human Rights Council established the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on Occupied Palestinian Territory including East Jerusalem and Israel in 2021.⁸ Its members comprised the South African Navanethem Pillay, former UN human rights commissioner and international judge, as chair together with Miloon Kothari (India)⁹ and Chris Sidoti (Australia).¹⁰ The Commission produced fourteen documents before the September 2025 investigation into genocide. One claimed to be a detailed investigation into the Hamas attacks of October 7, 2023.¹¹

It is Rooney's contention that "Human Rights Council COI reports are authoritative statements of the application of law." She suggests that this position is quite well established and has the support of several scholars. However, two of the authors she cites are more cautious. Michael Becker and Sarah Nouwen warn:

Indeed, by legitimating some and delegitimizing others, a COI may intensify division by being seen as branding some actors as enemies of humankind (those who violate the norms of the international community) and others as friends of the international community because they fight the enemies.¹²

They also argue point out that

Some commentators have expressed alarm at the possibility of inquiry bodies generating faulty legal conclusions that are picked up by state actors or international courts and the prospect of their unconventional (or ill-conceived) legal analysis contributing to a perceived fragmentation of international law.¹³

Becker and Nouwen were writing an introduction to the special issue of the *European Journal of International Law* on the role of Commissions of Inquiry and several other contributors raise serious concerns with their status. Highlighting two contributions, the editors comment:

A COI's work may also harden competing narratives among the general public. Hala Khoury-Bisharat argues in her contribution to this symposium that the report of the 2009 Goldstone Commission, tasked by the UNHRC with investigating alleged violations of international law during the 2008 Gaza war, itself became part of the conflict, leading to greater polarization as demonstrated by the Israeli government's response to civil society actors that co-operated with the investigation. For his part,

Liebllich contends that the report of the Hungary Committee became a new point of contention in the Cold War, hardening pre-existing narratives.¹⁴

The positions that Becker and Nouwen advance that such Commissions may reinforce conflict and could be based on “unconventional” or “ill-conceived” legal analysis seems to have made little impression on Rooney who concludes, “The rise of COIs in UN practice provides a closer dialogue between their outputs and Assembly resolutions and bring a greater degree of objectivity and specificity to the text of UNGA resolutions that condemn violations of international law.” In other words, the UN General Assembly should rely on such COI material irrespective of the warnings of authors that she relies on.

As can be seen, it appears that Rooney in her enthusiasm to make her case fails to check some of her sources. At the beginning of the article where she tells us that the ‘post ceasefire phase has been recognized by commentators as “slow genocide.” However, the sources she refers to do not support this position on the ceasefire. One article was written eleven months before the ceasefire, and the other talks of the ceasefire as being in the “aftermath of genocide.” However, it appears that in Rooney’s account both Israeli military action and cessation of hostilities constitute genocide. This essentialism about Israel pervades her piece and it may be that this was why she was attracted to the Independent Commission’s report as it contains a similar approach.

Before I turn to an analysis of the report itself, I will reflect on the law on genocide. At its first session the General Assembly of the United Nations adopted Resolution 96 which begins with the statement that “Many instances of such crimes of genocide have occurred when racial, religious, political and other groups have been destroyed, entirely or in part.” It then

Affirms that genocide is a crime under international law which the civilized world condemns, and for the commission of which principals and accomplices—whether private individuals, public officials or statesmen, and whether the crime is committed on religious, racial, political or any other grounds—are punishable.

The resolution goes on to recommend that member states adopt legislation that criminalizes genocide and requested the Economic and Social Council (the principal UN organ that deals with human rights amongst other matters) draft a convention on genocide. The result was the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment for the Crime of Genocide, which was adopted by the General Assembly in December 1948 and came into force as a treaty on January 12, 1951.¹⁵ The definition of genocide contained in Article II differs from the 1946 resolution in rejecting the rather opened ended approach in that instrument and confines the protected human groups to race, nationality, religion, and ethnicity. Critically, the Convention’s definition requires the special intent (or *dolus specialis*) for the crime to be committed. It reads:

In the present Convention, genocide means any of the following acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group, as such:

- (a) Killing members of the group;
- (b) Causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group;
- (c) Deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part;
- (d) Imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group;
- (e) Forcibly transferring children of the group to another group.

Article 3 identifies five crimes: (1) genocide, (2) conspiracy to commit genocide, (3) direct and public incitement to commit genocide,

(4) attempt to commit genocide, and (5) complicity in genocide. At the time of the Nuremberg Tribunal (1945–1946),¹⁶ although genocide was mentioned in some of the judgments, it was not a crime, and so none of the German defendant were indicted for it. It is an irony that a convention to address the mass murder of European Jews had no impact on the perpetrators of the final solution. The crimes prosecuted at Nuremberg were of three types: crimes against the peace, war crimes, and crimes against humanity.

It is important to stress that this definition of crime of genocide drawn up in the wake of the Second World War was to remain abstract for the first fifty years of the Convention's existence. It was only when the two United Nations international criminal tribunals¹⁷ were created to address crimes committed in the wars that characterized the dissolution of Yugoslavia and the atrocities in Rwanda in the 1990s that any prosecutions for genocide took place. The first conviction for genocide occurred in 1998.¹⁸ This means that the jurisprudence is recent and confined to relatively few cases.

The 1990s saw an increased interest in international criminal law and, as a result of the impact of the two United Nations tribunals, there was momentum to create a permanent international criminal court. This resulted in the adoption of the Rome Statute in 1998 and the establishing of the International Criminal Court in 2003. The statute was based on the principle established at Nuremberg that individuals including political leaders and military commanders could be held individually responsible for criminal acts irrespective of the traditional doctrine of sovereign immunity which had protracted state officials from prosecution in the past. The 1948 Convention's definition of genocide was included in the list of crimes under the jurisdiction of the two international tribunals and is included in Article 6 of the Statute of the International Criminal Court. While there have been no trials for genocide under its jurisdiction,

there has been an indictment and issuing of an arrest warrant for the Omar Al Bashir, who at the time was the President of Sudan.¹⁹ The arrest warrant has yet to be served.

The Genocide Convention creates a crime with individual criminal responsibility but also places an obligation upon states to prevent and punish genocide. Article 9 provides a procedure for states to make applications to the International Court of Justice "relating to the interpretation, application or fulfillment of the present Convention, including relating to the responsibility of a State for genocide." It is under this provision that South Africa initiated its litigation against Israel at the International Court of Justice.²⁰

The complexity of proving that an individual has committed genocide lies in the necessity of not only proving that one or more of the prohibited acts have taken place and that the individual had the intention to commit the acts but also, beyond reasonable doubt, that the individual had the intent to destroy one of the protected groups.²¹ This special intent is also required in establishing state responsibility.²² The international legal method proceeds by first identifying the relevant sources of law and interpreting them before applying them to a particular instance. The Genocide Convention is that source of law. The fact that it has been incorporated unchanged in more recent legal instruments underlines the stability of the definition and its wide acceptance by the international community. In seeking to interpret the Convention, it is necessary to evaluate the case law at the two United Nations Tribunals and the International Court of Justice as well as considering scholarly commentaries. It should be noted that international law is not based on the doctrine of precedent as in common law systems but operates within the civil law environment where judgments are authoritative but not binding. The main aim of evaluating judgments is to find constancy. It is that spirit that I will now turn to discuss the report that is at the heart of Rooney's argument.

The Commission's report comprises some 77 pages and is supported by 495 citations. I empathize this at the beginning to illustrate that it is relatively short but that, given the number of footnotes, it has a scholarly hue which may well have impressed journalists, politicians, and academics who have read it. Its findings are stark:

The Commission concludes on reasonable grounds that the Israeli authorities and Israeli security forces have committed and are continuing to commit the following *actus reus* of genocide against the Palestinians in the Gaza Strip, namely (i) killing members of the group; (ii) causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group; (iii) deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part; and (iv) imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group.²³

It further finds that “that Israeli President Isaac Herzog, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and then Defence Minister Yoav Gallant, have incited the commission of genocide,” and “that statements made by Israeli authorities are direct evidence of genocidal intent.” In order to evaluate these conclusions, it is necessary to turn to the detailed argument presented by the Commission in the body of its report.

The Commission states that its “legal findings in this report are primarily based on the factual findings contained in the reports that it has published since 7 October 2023.”²⁴ This means that the factual basis of the report is self-citatory. When we look at the “factual findings” in these reports, they are mostly drawn from the print media, television, material circulated on the social media and public statements from government or military sources. In short, the fact-finding is based on a survey of material within the public domain. It appears that the authors lacked the resources to check facts independently. This is a major constraint when investigating an ongoing military conflict. At no

stage in the report are these limitations acknowledged. Given the serious nature of their conclusions, it is troubling that the Commission made serious legal determinations on the basis of such a meagre investigation.

One instance of the Commission's fact-finding is instructive. The Commission repeatedly says that the Israeli Defense Force targeted “children, including toddlers, [that] were shot in the head by snipers.”²⁵ The use of the term “sniper” is controversial; however, the citation to support this contention is to the same statement contained in an earlier report which itself has no citation.²⁶ Nonetheless, the Commission seems to think that it is possible to illustrate that snipers were targeting children by citing clips from the broadcast media. One example deals with the tragic case of the apparent death of a young man called Ahmed.²⁷ This is a distressing report made by a journalist who is evacuating his own home. In the relevant segment we see a distraught father sitting on a road with his son who has been shot. However, we have no idea from the report about the circumstances in which Ahmed was hit. The commission admits that he was “allegedly shot” by the Israeli forces. By relying on such secondary sources, in this case a CNN news clip, it is impossible to know if an Israeli military unit targeted Ahmed. We know nothing of the circumstances that would allow us to draw any such conclusions. However, this approach to fact finding is typical of the report's view of the conflict.

In another example, the Commission makes claims about the number of Palestinian civilians killed compared to Palestinian combatants.

The Commission notes with alarm a report that finds, as of May 2025, Israeli intelligence officials have listed 8,900 militants from Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad in Gaza as dead or probably dead. Considering, at this point, 53,000 Palestinians had been killed by Israeli attacks, it means that 83 percent of those killed in Gaza were civilians.

This claim that eighty-three percent of deaths in Gaza were civilians are based on a report in the *Guardian* newspaper.²⁸ The article discussed an Israeli intelligence assessment of the known Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad militants who had been killed. This assessment by its nature did not discuss the number of the unknown combatants who had been killed. To draw the conclusion that this meant that anyone killed beyond the 8,900 named militants was a civilian is unreasonable. However, the Commission wants to claim that they have established a fact.

These two examples convey the dubious way the Commission approaches fact-finding. Reading this report—and, indeed, the Commission's other publications—it becomes evident that the idea that the Commission is conducting an inquiry in any meaningful sense is questionable. To a large extent it is a recycling of material both former reports and information in the public domain. This is not much an inquiry in the usual sense of the term. The Commission merely adds its gloss on facts that have either already been established or claimed to have been established. A good example of this is the document entitled *Detailed Findings on Attacks Carried Out on and after 7 October 2023 in Israel*.²⁹ All the material contained in the report is well known to any reader familiar with the atrocities of October 7. They will wonder what the term "findings" means in the circumstances. They will also question why the Commission took eight months to compile information already known.

In assessing the legal findings in the report, we will find equally perplexing issues. As was noted earlier, the Genocide Convention definition of the crime contains five prohibited acts. All the prohibited acts are unlawful under other areas of international humanitarian law but only become genocide if it can be proved that the perpetrator had the intent to destroy a racial, religious, national, or ethnic group "as such." This requirement of special intent is significantly different to the normal criminal requirement of

intent to commit the prohibited act. For example, one such prohibition is against "killing members of the group." In order to prove this, a prosecutor would need to satisfy a court that the accused had committed the act (*actus reus*) and had the mental intention to do so (*mens rea*). However, for the killing to be genocide, a prosecutor would need to establish in addition that, in carrying out the killing, the accused did so with the intent to destroy members of the protected group "as such." It is thus insufficient for a prosecutor to prove the acts were committed with the normal intent. It needs to be proved the act has been done with the special intent to destroy. The definition's use of the term "as such" emphasizes that the intent to destroy the group must be evident and unequivocal.

In the light of this, the Commission's report is oddly structured as it first outlines four prohibited acts allegedly committed by Israel. These are: killing members of the group; causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group; deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part; and imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group. Most of the report is taken up with recording what it describes as factual accounts of these, as the authors call them, "genocidal acts." In these forty-one pages the reader is meant to be impressed by the use of the legal terms *actus reus* and *mens rea* as if these normal requirements of criminal law are sufficient to prove genocide. Only eighteen pages deal with the requirement of the special intent and appear after the four prohibited acts have already been described as genocide. It is a dubious approach. It can have the effect on an unsuspecting reader of giving the impression that the special intent requirement is subordinate to the prohibited acts, rather than the other way around.

The report argues that the special intent requirement can be deduced from two sources: statements from Israeli "state actors" and the pattern of conduct. The statements relied on are

essentially the same that appear in the South African submission to the International Court of Justice. These are from President Isaac Herzog, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, and then-Defense Minister Yoav Gallant. The Commission begins its argument by placing these statements in a particular context which it describes thus:

Israeli political and military leaders have consistently described the military operations in the Gaza Strip as “self-defence” and a “just war”. Israeli political and military leaders also repeatedly stated that the attack of 7 October 2023 presented an existential threat to Israel, as justification for the decision to conduct a large-scale continuing military operation in Gaza that amounted to total war. The attacks in southern Israel on 7 October 2023 were brutal war crimes but they did not pose an existential threat to the State of Israel. Israel was and is responsible for the protection of its population but the means of doing that must take account of the fact that it has taken by force and is unlawfully occupying and settling Palestinian territory by continuing violence, denying the rights of the Palestinian people to self-determination.³⁰

As this statement shows, the Commission sees the October 7 attacks as “brutal” but not existential and, while it underlines Israel’s legal obligations toward Palestinians, it ignores any obligations that Israel has to its own citizens to protect them from further attacks. At the same time, the Commission suggests that Israel used the October 7 attack to justify “a large-scale continuing operation in Gaza.” In this account the October 7 attacks are seen as an isolated event that ended when Israel regained control of the Gaza border area. However, that is factually erroneous as Hamas continued its rocket attacks against Israel and was keeping 250 Israelis and foreign nationals hostage. Hamas brutalities continued long after the initial attack.

While the Commission is certain that Israel faced no existential threat, in its *Detailed*

Findings report of the previous year it recorded the threats made by Ghazi Hamad, a member of the Hamas Politburo, on Lebanese TV two weeks after the massacre. In front of the cameras he expressed the aim of Hamas was to commit more such attacks until Israel was “annihilated.”³¹ These threats were made while both Hamas and the Lebanese Hezbollah were continuing rocket attacks on Israel. Both groups were not only committed to destroying Israel but also acting as proxies for Iran which is pursuing the same aim. The ease with which the Commission dismisses these threats is thus questionable.

This part of the report highlights a general feature of the document. While Hamas is mentioned, very little attention is given to the existence of an armed conflict between the two parties. Nor is there a discussion of how Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad conducted the war and rejected any constraints of the laws of war on the grounds that they were “resistance movements.” This meant that Hamas and its allies fought from civilian areas and used buildings such as hospitals, schools, and mosques as military installations. This illegality is ignored, as are the challenges that Israel faced in fighting an enemy willing to use civilians and civilian areas as part of their military strategy. The report is silent on the actual war.³² As a result, the report focuses only Israeli military operations as if there are no operations by the Hamas.

Thus, the Commission portrays Israel as using a pretext to fight an unnecessary war, creating the context in which we are meant to understand the statements of Israeli politicians. As it tells us,

As early as 7 October 2023, Israeli officials made statements that indicated their intention to destroy Palestinians in Gaza as a group. Palestinians were consistently dehumanised by Israeli officials. Furthermore, Israeli authorities made many statements that explicitly called for vengeance, destruction and annihilation. The Commission believes, having analysed the

military operations of the Israeli security forces, such statements were expressed to encourage hatred toward Palestinians and violence against Palestinians. The statements were received by the Israeli security forces as an order to destroy Palestinians in Gaza and such order was indeed executed through military operations.³³

As can be seen, the central argument to be proved is that “Israel officials” have issued statements that demonstrate their intention to “destroy Palestinians in Gaza.” In a curious formula, the Commission argues that such statements have been “received by the Israeli security forces as an order to destroy Palestinians.” In the absence of any evidence of orders to the Israeli Defense Force to commit genocide, the reader is meant to understand that speeches given by Israeli political leaders will be understood as orders and will be acted upon. In other words, military orders in Israel are unlike military orders in any other society. The Commission does not explain at this point how exactly this works and how Israelis can distinguish between ordinary speech and orders.

The first example of such speech are remarks made by Prime Minister Netanyahu at a press conference on the afternoon on October 7, 2023, while the attacks were continuing. The Commission account focuses on a short segment of his speech:

Statements calling on Israel to exact vengeance against Hamas were made as early as 7 October 2023. At a press conference held in the early afternoon of 7 October 2023, Prime Minister Netanyahu vowed to inflict “mighty vengeance” on “all of the places which Hamas is deployed, hiding and operating in, that wicked city, we will turn them into rubble. I say to residents of Gaza: leave now because we will operate forcefully everywhere”. Although Netanyahu’s statement carefully directed the call for vengeance at “Hamas locations”, his use of the phrase “wicked city” in the same statement implied

that he saw the whole city of Gaza as responsible and a target for vengeance.³⁴

If you read the whole statement, you will find the tone is serious and the content balanced. There are no calls for the destruction of Palestinians. The focus is on Hamas. Netanyahu is mainly talking about the ongoing military effort to regain control of the communities along the border with Gaza. The Commission is uninterested in any context whatsoever in which these words appear, or of the dire situation in which they are spoken. The authors zoom in on one phrase, “wicked city,” to suggest that Israeli Prime Minister is not merely referring to “Hamas locations” but to Gaza as a whole. In a previous section, the Commission claims that these “statements considered ‘Hamas’ to be not only the militants but also civil and administrative officials and personnel and others who simply oppose the Israeli occupation.”³⁵ Such a position expresses a rather benign view of Hamas’s “civil and administrative officials” who form the edifice from which the Hamas military operates. By way of comparison, if British political leaders talked about the Nazi Party during the Second World War, it would be somewhat perverse to accuse them of not distinguishing between the Nazi military machine and Nazi “civil and administrative officials.” In any event, Netanyahu’s focus on the destruction of Hamas locations has no bearing on the attempt to prove genocide, as political organizations and their militias such as Hamas are not one of the protected groups under the Convention.

However, it is another intervention of the Israeli prime minister that is seen by the Commission as clear evidence of genocidal intent.

On 3 November 2023, Prime Minister Netanyahu published a letter to the Israeli soldiers and commanders in the war, in which he wrote, “Remember what Amalek did to you . . . This is a war between the sons of light

and the sons of darkness . . . We constantly member the sights of the horrific massacre on that Simchat Torah Shabbat, October 7, 2023.” The descendants of Amalek, the Amalekites, were enemies of the Israelites in the Hebrew Bible. In the Book of Samuel, God tells the Israelites, “Now go and attack Amalek, and utterly destroy all that they have; do not spare them, but kill both man and woman, child and infant, ox and sheep, camel and donkey.” The Commission notes that, in invoking Amalek in his speech, Netanyahu strengthened the idea that Israel’s war in Gaza is akin to the holy war of total annihilation commanded against the Amalekites. This would be familiar to and compelling for the many thousands of Israeli military personnel who are religious Zionists, especially for those in military units whose personnel are wholly or predominantly ultra-orthodox.³⁶

This is regarded as central to the case that Netanyahu expressed direct and public incitement to commit genocide. In formulating its findings, the Commission returns to this letter³⁷ and to a video in which Netanyahu uses the same phrase: “Remember what Amalek did to you.” They suggest that by including

a direct reference to what Israel’s retaliatory action should entail by reminding Israeli soldiers of the story of Amalek and the Amalekites who had persecuted the Israelites, according to the Bible. In the Book of Samuel, God tells the Israelites, “Now go and attack Amalek, and utterly destroy all that they have; do not spare them, but kill both man and woman, child and infant, ox and sheep, camel and donkey.” The invocation of Amalek had particular resonance for religious Zionist military personnel, of whom there are now many thousands in the Israeli security forces.³⁸

In the same paragraph, the Commission claims that, “in assessing the statements of the Israeli officials, it must take into account the context

in which they were provided.” However, the Commission does not refer accurately to the source from which the phrase “Remember what Amalek did to you” comes from. It does not appear in the First Book of Samuel which is cited in the report but in Deuteronomy (25:7) in a verse that does not mention destruction but asks Jews to remember their sufferings. Perversely, the Commission not only takes the biblical reference out of context but then argues sinisterly that the use of the phrase would trigger a memory within Jews, especially “religious Zionist military personnel,” to act in a genocidal manner. This explains how the Commission thinks Israeli society operates when it contends that the Israeli military does not need an actual order to destroy Palestinians. The Commission seriously argues that Jewish soldiers will understand the reference to Amalek as some form of cultural code calling upon them to commit genocide. It needs to be stressed that the phrase “Remember what Amalek did to you” is well known not merely to religious Jews but to any Jew, as it is used in the service on the Shabbat before the festival of Purim, which celebrates the prevention of genocide as recorded in the Book of Esther. It has literally the opposite meaning to that attributed to it by the Commission. It would be too kind to think that the authors were merely ignorant of the Hebrew Bible. Rather, this reveals the problematic attitudes that the Commission harbors toward Jews and Judaism.

While the Commission is uninterested in biblical accuracy, it also does not take its own advice on looking at the phrase it regards as problematic within the context of Netanyahu’s letter. This document begins by referring to the long history of the struggles of the Jewish people for survival. And the critical section of the letter reads:

“Remember what Amalek did to you.”

We will always remember the horrific scenes of the massacre on Shabbat Simchat Torah, 7 October 2023. We see our murdered brothers

and sisters, the wounded, the hostages, and the fallen of the IDF and the security services.

In their name and on their behalf, we have gone to war, the purpose of which is to destroy the brutal and murderous Hamas–ISIS enemy, bring back our hostages and restore the security to our country, our citizens and our children.

It is evident that Netanyahu is linking the sufferings of the victims of October 7 to Jewish history. The Commission relies on the authority of the Akayesu case from the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda, in which “the Chamber is of the opinion that the direct element of incitement should be viewed in the light of its cultural and linguistic content. Indeed, a particular speech may be perceived as ‘direct’ in one country, and not so in another, depending on the audience.”³⁹ Thus we are to assume that the Commission means that Netanyahu’s words must be seen in a particular “cultural and linguistic context” directed at a Jewish audience. This is a legal embellishment to the troubling attitudes to Jews already identified. Reading Netanyahu’s words, it is difficult to find any evidence of incitement to destroy Palestinians as a people. The prime minister’s stress is entirely on the necessity of destroying Hamas. Thus, the context of the phrase “Remember what Amalek did to you” cannot reasonably be seen a direct and public incitement to genocide. This cannot be seen as a justifiable interpretation of the “cultural or linguistic” context as suggested—unless the Commission is relying on an antisemitic trope about Jews.

The evidence on then-Defense Minister Yoav Gallant⁴⁰ is a speech that he made on October 10, 2023, in which he called Hamas “human animals.” He went on to say, “Gaza won’t return to what it was before. There will be no Hamas. We will eliminate everything. If it doesn’t take one day, it will take a week. It will take weeks or even months, we will reach all places.”⁴¹ These are comments to a group of soldiers (in Hebrew), from a video clip that lasts three minutes and

fifty-six seconds. The content is quite clear: the aim of Israel’s military action is to destroy Hamas. It is quite evident that the phrase “we will eliminate everything” comes directly after the words “There will be no Hamas,” and so it is a reference to Hamas. It should be noted that this talk to a group of soldiers took place about two weeks before the land offensive against Gaza was launched and only three days after the massacre of October 7. At this time, the Hamas videos of their atrocities were in circulation on social media, extracted from the body cameras worn by the perpetrators.⁴² This was plainly a planned attempt to use images of the atrocities to terrorize the Israeli population. Gallant’s words about Hamas must be understood in that context. Throughout the report, it is repeatedly claimed that Israeli politicians make “dehumanizing” remarks about Palestinians, and Gallant’s term “human animals” is given as an example. However, as can be seen, the reference is to Hamas and not to Palestinians in general. Moreover, the report contains no mention of the dehumanizing acts against Israelis contained in the Hamas videos.

The third Israeli politician that the Commission claims has incited genocide is President Isaac Herzog. It says the evidence is contained in a small portion of a press briefing held on October 12, 2023. In it, Herzog said, “It’s an entire nation out there that is responsible. It is not true, this rhetoric about civilians who were not aware and not involved. It is absolutely not true. They could have risen up. They could have fought against that evil regime which took over Gaza in a coup d’état.”⁴³ We are then told why this is incitement to commit genocide:

The Commission notes that the statement of President Isaac Herzog did not expressly call for the genocide of the Palestinian people in Gaza. However, the statement must be assessed in the context of the beginning of a war where the Israeli security forces had just initiated their military operations in Gaza. Hence, the statement that an entire nation is responsible for the

attack of 7 October 2023 may reasonably be interpreted as incitement to the Israeli security forces personnel to target the Palestinians in Gaza as a group as being collectively culpable for the 7 October 2023 attack in Israel. Herzog later stated that “there are many, many innocent Palestinians who don’t agree” with actions of Hamas. However, the Commission considers that the later clarification was provided to deflect responsibility for the initial statement. The Commission finds that, in the initial statement of 13 October 2023, Herzog was unequivocally clear that all civilians in Gaza were aware of and involved in and responsible for Hamas’ actions.⁴⁴

However, in the same briefing Herzog also said: “Israel abides by international law, operates by international law. Every operation is secured and covered and reviewed legally.” He continued by emphasizing: “There is no excuse to murdering innocent civilians in any way in any context. And believe me, Israel will operate and always operate according to the international rules. And we do the same in this battle, too.”⁴⁵ As this part of his statement is not included in the report, it can be seen how the phrase relied upon has been entirely taken out of context.

The Commission then attempts to use a later clarification by the president as confirmation that his words were problematic. However, any later clarification is not germane. It is clear from reading all the remarks Herzog made on October 12, 2023, that there was no call for the destruction of the Palestinians of Gaza. Indeed, the president explicitly said, “there is no excuse for murdering innocent civilians in any context.” Even the Commission has to admit that Herzog “did not expressly call for the genocide of the Palestinian people in Gaza.” Not only is that the case, but even the remarks taken out of context by the Commission are merely the expression of a political opinion about moral responsibility for the October 7 attacks. It is, of course, possible to disagree with that assessment. But, given that this is a press briefing, the words used by Herzog

cannot in way be constructed as basis for any particular action except that Israel would abide by international law. It should be pointed out that opinion polls in Palestinian territories after October 7 did record high levels of support for the attack amongst the Palestinian public.⁴⁶

The statements of Netanyahu, Herzog, and Gallant are the entire evidence submitted to sustain the charge of direct and public incitement to genocide. This is hardly weighty evidence, especially given the case law on the subject. What we have in fact is a series of phrases ripped from textual context and from the times in which they were uttered—days after October 7. In addition, the statements relied upon were not issued in form of orders or instructions, either express or indirect. Instead, Netanyahu’s statements come from a letter to the IDF, Gallant’s were made during an informal talk to soldiers, and Herzog’s in a press briefing. The content of each statement is expressly addressing how to defeat Hamas and free the hostages. At the time Israel was under sustained rocket attack by Hamas—over 8,000 fired in the first few days. The fact that the attack on October 7 and that ongoing rocket attacks were initiated by Hamas appears a fact the Commission did not find.

The Commission uses the statements of Netanyahu, Gallant, and Herzog as evidence of both their individual responsibility for incitement to genocide and that Israel as a state failed to act to prevent or punish genocide. Before we look at the question of state responsibility, it is important to deal with the allegation of individual criminal responsibility, as the Commission recommends that the International Criminal Court investigate the three politicians with a view for genocide indictment.

The Commission’s inferences that the three statements relied upon constitute genocidal intent is contrary to the standard required by the case law. In the *Akayesu* case, cited in the report, the Tribunal made clear that “The ‘direct’ element of incitement implies that the incitement assume a direct form and specifically

provoke another to engage in a criminal act, and that more than mere vague or indirect suggestion goes to constitute direct incitement.”⁴⁷

As the chair of the Commission, Pilay, was an author of this judgment, it is puzzling that she did not explain to her fellow commissioners that the statements relied on were, in fact, “vague” and “indirect.” It is also curious that Pilay, as former judge of the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda who sat on genocide cases, failed to point out that the case law shows that proof of the special intent required is extremely high. For example, in the Krstic case, the Appeals Tribunal of the International Criminal Tribunal for Yugoslavia found that, despite participating in the massacre at Srebrenica which was regarded as an act of genocide, the Trial Chamber had failed to prove that General Krstic had the special intent to commit genocide. Its judgement is crystal clear, “Genocide is one of the worst crimes known to humankind, and its gravity is reflected in the stringent requirement of special intent. Conviction for genocide can be entered only when that intent has been unequivocally established.”⁴⁸ It appears that Pilay failed to convey that the relevant law required the Commission to apply this “stringent requirement” and to be confident that any statement relied on had to demonstrate incitement “unequivocally.” From the legal doctrine it is evident that, in the instances of the words used Netanyahu, Gallant, and Herzog, the Commission is unwarranted in finding evidence of incitement to genocide.

The other finding of the Commission is “that the pattern of conduct is circumstantial evidence of genocidal intent and that genocidal intent was the only reasonable inference that could be drawn from the totality of the evidence.”⁴⁹ In their concluding remarks it is significant that the Commission only refers to *mens rea* and not the special intent requirement. In adopting its position, the Commission dismisses the Israeli government’s grounds for taking military action. It decontextualizes the circumstances that provoked Israel’s response. The aim of destroying

Hamas to prevent future attacks is presented as irrational. The Commission comes to its conclusions because it never discusses the military strategy and tactics adopted by Hamas from October 7 onwards. As a result, it never evaluates the overall pattern of the conflict. However, without that evaluation the Commission’s attempt to claim that Israel’s military actions amount to genocide as the “only reasonable inference” to be drawn is untenable. In order to be able to draw convincing legal conclusions from the pattern of conduct, you have to evaluate the larger pattern of the conflict between the parties.

This was the approach of the late Antonio Cassese in his report on Darfur. Cassese was a leading international jurist, who was a judge at the International Criminal Tribunal for Yugoslavia for seven years and its president between 1993 and 1997. He was chair of the commission established by the United Nations Security Council to report to the secretary-general on the situation in Darfur.⁵⁰ This 176-page report is forensic in its fact-finding and legal rigor. Unlike the report under discussion, this document provides a list of names of those interviewed and a description of the research process on the ground. Cassese did not conduct an armchair inquiry. His report contains a detailed analysis of the pattern of conflict between rebel forces, government-backed militias and the Sudanese government. As a result, it is possible to draw inferences about the pattern of conduct on all sides. In the Darfur conflict by 2004 some 1.6 million people had been internally displaced and 200,000 had become refugees. There was widespread destruction of villages and civilian infrastructure and between 200,000 and 300,000 deaths as a result. Cassese, unlike the Pilay Commission, applied the stringent requirements for genocide. In assessing the actions of the Sudanese government, the report argues:

the crucial element of genocidal intent appears to be missing, at least as far as the central Government authorities are concerned.

Generally speaking the policy of attacking, killing and forcibly displacing members of some tribes does not evince a specific intent to annihilate, in whole or in part, a group distinguished on racial, ethnic, national or religious grounds. Rather, it would seem that those who planned and organized attacks on villages pursued the intent to drive the victims from their homes, primarily for purposes of counter-insurgency warfare.⁵¹

The conclusion that the acts committed could not be regarded as genocide as the intent of the operations was “counter-insurgency warfare” should be born in mind when assessing events in Gaza between 2023 and 2025.⁵²

In stark contrast to the report on Darfur, the Gaza Commission concludes:

The Commission now analyses whether the only reasonable inference that can be drawn from the pattern of conduct by the Israeli security forces in Gaza is evidence of genocidal intent. The Commission notes that Israeli authorities have claimed that their military operations in Gaza were conducted for military necessity and specifically as: (i) an exercise of self-defence in response to the 7 October 2023 attack in Israel; (ii) neutralisation of Hamas to ensure long-term security; and (iii) securing the safe release of Israeli hostages who have been detained in Gaza since 7 October 2023. In a previous report, the Commission observed that Israeli authorities consistently presented military objectives for their operations in Gaza, yet their actions and their consequences indicated other motivations, including vengeance and collective punishment.⁵³

It should be noted the first sentence of this paragraph correctly says that, when assessing a pattern of conduct the legal test is whether genocide is the only reasonable inference. However, the final sentence contradicts this by saying that, while the Israeli position that the

military operations are for self-defense, the actions indicate “other motivations,” which, they say, include vengeance and collective punishment. Neither of these motivations, if proved, would constitute genocidal intent. In any event, in this paragraph the Commission does not seem to entirely discount the Israeli justification for the use of force but merely says that there are other motivations. That does not mean that genocide is the only reasonable inference, according to case law.

The Stakic Appeal case at the International Criminal Tribunal for Yugoslavia⁵⁴ concerned crimes committed by Milomir Stakic in Prijedor. The prosecutor had argued at the trial that the combination of Stakic’s words and the pattern of conduct was evidence of genocide. When the Trial Chamber rejected this, the prosecutor appealed. The Appeal Tribunal rejected that appeal on the grounds that it

cannot conclude that the evidence in this case is so unambiguous that a reasonable Trial Chamber was obliged to infer that intent was established beyond a reasonable doubt. To the contrary, the evidence could reasonably be seen as consistent with the conclusion the Trial Chamber did draw: that the Appellant merely intended to displace, but not to destroy, the Bosnian Muslim group. To be sure, he was willing to employ means to this end that ensured that some members of the group would be killed and others brutalised, and this was surely criminal—but not necessarily genocidal, absent of evidence proving beyond a reasonable doubt that he sought the destruction of the group as such.⁵⁵

The question here is not equating Israeli actions with Stakic but taking account of the strict requirement that any inference from the pattern of conduct has to be both unambiguous and established beyond reasonable doubt. The Commission does not apply this legal standard to the statements from Netanyahu, Gallant, and

Herzog or to the pattern of conflict in Gaza. Their conclusions are untenable, contradictory, at odds with the legal doctrine, and rely on a racialized construction of Jews.

As we have noted, it is evident throughout the report that the Commission discounts any Israel response to October 7 as unacceptable. The implication seems to be that any military response to attack on Jews is illegitimate. The normal obligations of states to protect their citizens from harm is ignored. The Commission does not discuss the actual course of war, the ideological positions of Hamas, or its military strategy.

Nor does the Commission put the Israeli response in the context of the international community's response to terrorism since September 11, 2001. It should be recalled that United Nations Security Council Resolution 1368 (2001) condemned the terrorist attack on the United States and re-affirmed the inherent right of individual and collective self-defense. In 2015 the Security Council determined that ISIL (Islamic State in the Levant) through "its violent extremist ideology, its terrorist acts, its continued gross systematic and widespread attacks directed against civilians" and as such was an "unprecedented threat to international peace and security."⁵⁶ It also called on member states to use "all necessary measures" to "suppress and prevent terrorist acts." At the time, ISIL (sometimes known as the Islamic State group) had swept across wide swaths of Syria and Iraq and created its so-called caliphate.⁵⁷ In doing so, it committed atrocities against Yazidis, Christians, and Shi'a Muslims. It imposed a deeply repressive regime over the civilian populations and publicized its brutality with videos of the executions of western hostages. As a result of Security Council resolution 2249 several states including the United States began a military operation against ISIL. This was a difficult operation as ISIL rejected being bound by the laws of war and embedded themselves amongst civilians, using protected buildings such as hospitals, schools, and

mosques for military purposes. The obvious similarities with Hamas have been consistently ignored in most of the discussion about the Israeli response to October 7.

What has also been ignored is the military campaign that was waged to defeat ISIL. The United States faced in this campaign many of the same challenges that Israel faced after 2023. The military strategy of both ISIL and Hamas is to target civilians and then use civilians under their control to conduct operations. That poses a dilemma for military forces attempting to defeat terrorist organizations. It cannot be that such organizations are able to carry out attacks with impunity because they operate from civilian areas and hold civilians hostage. If that were the case, terrorism would be given free reign. The anti-ISIL coalition was forced to pursue military operations against the organization in towns and cities. The results were very high civilian deaths and the destruction of civilian infrastructure. In ISIL's last stand in the city of Raqqa in Syria, for example, eighty percent of the city was destroyed. There was a tragic toll of innocent deaths, but ISIL was defeated, and its atrocities brought to an end. It is remarkable that few in the international community have been able to acknowledge the parallels in the two situations.

Moreover, some states questioned the right of Israel to act against Hamas. An example is contained in a letter dated October 17, 2023, to the South African Board of Jewish Deputies from the then sole ruling party in South Africa, the African National Congress (ANC). The letter expressed its condemnation of the "brutal killing of civilians by Hamas" but went on to say that "the ANC has been perturbed by the genocidal and atrocious activities of the State of Israel which are being directed indiscriminately at Palestinian civilians."⁵⁸ This letter was sent ten days before the Israeli ground operation began but, as we can see, despite the recognition of the Hamas attack, the response by Israel was already being described a genocidal.

There is no question that the two-year war between Hamas and Israel was cruel and resulted in a humanitarian catastrophe for the Palestinians of Gaza. There are many legitimate questions that can be asked about Israel's strategy, the length of the war, and certain operations. Indeed, all those issues have been hotly debated within the top echelons of the IDF itself. However, this was a war launched by Hamas. It had prepared for it over many years, stockpiling weapons and supplies and budling the extensive tunnel system that ran under civilian infrastructure. Hamas was not only prepared for massive civilian casualties but thought they would be politically advantageous, as the then-Hamas leader Yahya Sinwar wrote they were "necessary sacrifices."⁵⁹

While Israel was faced with a brutal enemy that openly defied the laws and customs of war, some in the international community already made a decision that any response by Israel would be illegitimate and even genocidal. In the report under discussion, Israeli concerns about existential threats to the Jewish state are dismissed. This despite the evidence the Commission records that Hamas leaders quite openly stated that October 7 was just the beginning of a campaign to annihilate Israel. Nowhere in the report is any recognition that a Jewish state founded after the Holocaust might have good reason to fear existential threats.

Jewish history has seen many attempts to destroy Jews. In his painful account of his daughter's murder on October 7, 2023, Ilan Troen tells us that his mother witnessed the death of his grandmother in a pogrom in Ukraine in 1919.⁶⁰ Yet, according to the logic expressed in the ANC's letter, if Jews are victims of such attacks, they are not permitted to defend themselves. While the United States, the United Kingdom, and France could take action under

the United Nations' banner to protect themselves from the threat of ISIL, thousands of kilometers away from their territory, it is regarded as questionable when Israel acts to respond to an armed attack on its territory from across its border.

The genocide accusation against Israel is precisely aimed at delegitimizing the state⁶¹ and singling it out as a state different from others. The Commission's determination of genocide, as we have seen, is not based on the application of the strict legal doctrinal requirement of proving the intent to destroy. The argument that statements by Netanyahu, Gallant, and Herzog amount to evidence of that intent involves taking the words out of context, ignoring that all three are talking about Hamas, while drawing on antisemitic tropes. It is particularly grotesque, given the publicly expressed genocidal intent of the Islamic Republic of Iran and its proxies, that Israel is accused of the very crime that it is the victim of.⁶² Iran and its allies did not hide their policies but pursued them in plain sight. For forty-seven years, the international community has tolerated a state committed to destroying a fellow member of the international community. The Hamas attack was a logical outcome of the pursuit to annihilate Israel. In the period since that attack, it is not Iran, Hamas, and Hezbollah that have faced the accusation of genocide but Israel. The international public has rightly been horrified by the scenes of devastation in Gaza. However, by flipping the accusation of genocide against Israel as it tries to defend itself, the reasons for the humanitarian catastrophe are obscured. The victim of October 7 becomes the accused. Lawyers and human rights activists who have pursued this accusation against Israel have sacrificed legal principles to a mendacious political agenda. In so doing, they have thrown oil on the flames of hatred.

ENDNOTES

- 1 I would like to thank the reviewers of the journal for their many helpful comments.
- 2 See "South Africa Institutes Proceedings against Israel and Requests Provisional Measures," UN press release, December 29, 2023, <https://www.un.org/unispal/document/icj-southafrica-israel-genocide-29dec2023/>; and "South Africa's Oral Argument: Genocide in the Gaza Strip (South Africa v Israel)," International Court of Justice, May 14, 2024, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=O_loqRc8ns
- 3 Jane Rooney, "Gaza, Genocide and the United Nations General Assembly, Part 1," *Opinio Juris*, December 16, 2025, <https://opiniojuris.org/2025/12/16/gaza-genocide-and-the-un-general-assembly-part-1/>; and Jane Rooney, "Gaza, Genocide and The United Nations General Assembly Part 2," *Opinio Juris*, December 16, 2025, <https://opiniojuris.org/2025/12/16/gaza-genocide-and-the-un-general-assembly-part-2/>.
- 4 *Ibid.*, part 1.
- 5 See, for example, "Israel Has Committed Genocide in Gaza, Says UN Commission of Inquiry," *Guardian*, September 16, 2025, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2025/sep/16/israel-committed-genocide-in-gaza-says-un-inquiry>; "Israel Is Committing Genocide in Gaza, UN Commission Says," *New York Times*, September 16, 2025.
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- 7 See "United Nations Human Rights Council," United Nations Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner, accessed May 2, 2026, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/hrbodies/hrc/home>.
- 8 See "The Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, and Israel," United Nations Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner, accessed May 2, 2026, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/hr-bodies/hrc/co-israel/index>.
- 9 An architect who served as the UN special rapporteur on adequate housing from 2000 to 2008.
- 10 Formerly Australian human rights commissioner (1995–2000).
- 11 See *Detailed Findings on Attacks Carried Out on and after 7 October 2023 in Israel*, Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, and Israel, United Nations Human Rights Council, Fifty-Sixth Session, accessed May 2, 2026, <https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/documents/hrbodies/hrcouncil/sessions-regular/session56/a-hrc-56-crp-3.pdf>.
- 12 Michael A. Becker and Sarah M. H. Nouwen, "International Commissions of Inquiry: What Difference Do They Make? Taking the Empirical Approach," *European Journal of International Law* 30, no. 3 (2019): 819–841, here 836.
- 13 *Ibid.*, 839.
- 14 *Ibid.*, 835.
- 15 See Christian J Tams, Lars Berster, and Bjorn Schiffbauer, *The Genocide Convention: Article by Article Commentary* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2023).
- 16 For an account of the tribunal see Telford Taylor, *The Anatomy of the Nuremberg Trials: A Personal Memoir* (New York: Skyhorse Publishing, 2013).
- 17 International Criminal Tribunal for Yugoslavia (1993) and the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda (1994) both were created by United Nations Security Council resolutions.
- 18 *Prosecutor v. Jean-Paul Akayesu*, International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda, no. ICTR-96-4-T, September 2, 1998.
- 19 *Prosecutor v. Omar Al Bashir*, no. ICC-02/05-01/09, March 4, 2009.
- 20 While this is legal basis, Ivor Chipkin has argued that the real motivation lies in the political history of the ANC. See Ivor Chipkin, "From Revolution to Anti-Imperialism: Does South Africa's ICJ Case against Israel Help Resolve the Organic Crisis in the ANC?," *South African Journal of International Affairs* 32, no. 4 (2025): 531–551, <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/10220461.2025.2587021#abstract>.
- 21 It is significant that, in the intervention that Spain has made in the *South Africa v. Israel* case at the ICJ, it suggested that "without rendering the threshold for inferring genocidal intent so difficult to meet so as to make findings of genocide near-impossible" (Paragraph 24). This seems to question the legal requirement of the definition and ignores that defendants have been found guilty under it. It suggests that Spain is concerned that, if the legal doctrine is applied, Israel would not be found to be committing genocide. See *Declaration of Intervention by Spain*, January 28, 2024, <https://www.un.org/unispal/wp-content/uploads/2024/07/192-20240628-int-01-00-en-compressed.pdf>.

- 22 In particular see *Prosecutor v. Jean Kambanda*, no. ICTR-97-23-5, September 4, 1998; *Prosecutor v. Radovan Karadzic*, no. IT-95-5/18-AR98bis.1, July 11, 2013; *Prosecutor v. Ratko Mladic*, no. MICT-13-26-A, June 21, 2021.
- 23 Paragraph 252.
- 24 Paragraph 2.
- 25 Paragraph 28.
- 26 A/HRC/56/CRP.4, paragraphs 130 and 213.
- 27 Jomana Karadsheh, "Thirty Minutes to Flee an Airstrike," CNN, November 17, 2023, <https://edition.cnn.com/videos/world/2023/11/17/exp-israel-gaza-hamas-evacuation-jomana-karadsheh-fst-111712pseg2-cnni-world.cnn>.
- 28 Emma Graham-Harrison and Yuval Abraham, "Revealed: Israeli Military's Own Data Indicates Civilian Death Rate of 83% in Gaza War," *Guardian*, August 21, 2025, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/ng-interactive/2025/aug/21/revealed-israeli-militarys-own-data-indicates-civilian-death-rate-of-83-in-gaza-war>.
- 29 *Detailed Findings on Attacks*.
- 30 Paragraph 165.
- 31 See A/HRC/56/CRP3, paragraph 273. The paragraph appears without a citation of Hammad and says that the interview was broadcast on November 1, 2023. However, the quotation is actually from the LBC broadcast of October 24, 2023, see " Hamas Terrorist's Shocking Interview Threatens to Repeat October 7 Attack 'Again & Again, Till . . .,'" YouTube, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BJNccvNJtGk>.
- 32 For an account of the first year of the war, see Seth J. Frantzman, *The October 7 War: Israel's Battle for Security in Gaza* (New York: Wicked Son, 2024).
- 33 Paragraph 163.
- 34 Paragraph 168.
- 35 Paragraph 167.
- 36 Paragraph 172.
- 37 "Letter from PM Netanyahu to Our Soldiers and Commanders in the Swords of Iron War," Prime Minister's Office, November 11, 2023, <https://www.gov.il/en/pages/spoke-pmo031123>.
- 38 Paragraph 229.
- 39 Akayesu, paragraph 557.
- 40 Paragraph 169.
- 41 "Tzillum: Ariel Hermoni, Misrad ha-Bitachon," Hadashot Kipa, YouTube, 2023, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-l-9wx7e4u-xM>.
- 42 See Joel Gunter, "Israel Shows Hamas Bodycam Footage to Journalists," BBC, October 23, 2023, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-67198270>.
- 43 Paragraph 227.
- 44 Paragraph 231.
- 45 "A 'Blood Libel': Herzog Says ICJ 'Twisted My Words' to Support 'Unfounded' Contention," *Times of Israel*, January 29, 2024, <https://www.timesofisrael.com/a-blood-libel-herzog-says-icj-twisted-my-words-to-support-unfounded-contention/>.
- 46 See "Poll Shows Palestinians Back October 7 Attack on Israel, Support for Hamas Rises," Reuters, December 14, 2023, <https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/poll-shows-palestinians-back-oct-7-attack-israel-support-hamas-rises-2023-12-14/>. The survey quoted in the report conducted by the Palestinian Center for Policy Survey and Research (PCPSR) found that 72% thought that the attack was "correct," with only 27% thinking it was "incorrect."
- 47 Akayesu, paragraph 557.
- 48 Krstic ICTY A Ch, April 19, 2004, paragraph 133.
- 49 Paragraph 254.
- 50 *Report of the International Commission of Inquiry on Darfur to the United Nations General-Secretary*, January 25, 2005, <https://www.legal-tools.org/doc/1480de/pdf/>.
- 51 *Ibid.*, 4.
- 52 The International Criminal Court issued an arrest warrant for the President of Sudan Omar Al Bashir for three counts of genocide, among other crimes, in 2009. However, it should be stressed that the timescale covered by the arrest

- warrant was 2003–2008, and thus most of the relevant acts would have taken place after this report was published. See *Prosecutor v. Omar Hassan Ahmad Al Bashir*, no. ICC-02/05-01/09, <https://www.icc-cpi.int/darfur/albashir>.
- 53 Paragraph 177.
- 54 *Prosecutor v. Milomir Stakic*, March 22, 2006, <https://cld.irmct.org/assets/filings/Judgement-Stakic.pdf>.
- 55 *Ibid.*, paragraph 56.
- 56 UNSC Resolution 2249 (2015).
- 57 See Patrick Cockburn, *The Rise of Islamic State: ISIS and the New Sunni Revolution* (New York: Verso, 2015).
- 58 Letter sent to the South African Board of Jewish Deputies from the First Deputy Secretary General Nomvula Mokonyane. The letter is retained by the author who would like to thank Karen Milner, the President of the SABJD, for supplying me with the copy.
- 59 Summer Said and Rory Jones, "Gaza Chief's Brutal Calculation: Civilian Bloodshed will Help Hamas," *Wall Street Journal*, June 10, 2024, <https://www.wsj.com/world/middle-east/gaza-chiefs-brutal-calculation-civilian-bloodshed-will-help-hamas-626720e7>.
- 60 Ilan Troen, "My Grandmother Was Killed in Pogrom. Then My Daughter, Too," in *Responses to 7 October: Antisemitic Discourse*, ed. Rosa Freedman and David Hirsh with Odeliya Lanir Zafir (New York: Routledge, 2004), 12–13.
- 61 See Norman J. W. Goda, *The Genocide Libel: How the World Charged Israel with Genocide*, Institute for the Study of Contemporary Antisemitism, research paper 2025, <https://isca.indiana.edu/publication-research/research-paper-series/norman-jw-goda-research-paper.html>.
- 62 See Avraham Russel Shalev, "Hamas' October 7 Genocide: A Legal Analysis and the Weaponization of Reverse Accusations—A Study of Modern Genocide Recognition and Denial," *Israel Law Review* 58 (2025): 343–382, <https://www.cambridge.org/core/services/aop-cambridge-core/content/view/322198E636341BE82F37ED-7147FEB0F5/S0021223725100009a.pdf/hamas-october-7th-genocide-legal-analysis-and-the-weaponisation-of-reverse-accusations-a-study-in-modern-genocide-recognition-and-denial.pdf>.

We Would Like to Think That All the Virtues Are Invested in Intelligence. Of Course, They're Not



Matthew Feldman interviewed Anthony Julius via recorded online audio on June 23, 2025.

Prof. Julius is known for several public roles in Britain: deputy chair of the law firm Mishcon de Reva and longtime solicitor for Diana, Princess of Wales; professor of law and arts at University College London; and dismantler of the Holocaust “revisionist,” David Irving, in a landmark court case in 2000. These experiences are covered below, particularly Holocaust denial, in addressing the wider, overarching issue of antisemitism in contemporary Britain. This interview has been lightly edited for clarity. It is otherwise reproduced in its entirety below.

MF: Anthony Julius, thank you for putting in the time today to speak with us.

AJ: You are very welcome.

MF: First off, what do I call you? I mean, there are so many . . . it could be “doctor” or “professor” or “esquire.”

AJ: No “professor,” please. Only my children call me “professor.”

MF: Haha; I ask my wife to call me “professor.” No, that’s not true, actually. But it does point to several different hats, and I’m guessing that most of the readers of *Journal of Contemporary Antisemitism* will be familiar with your work, but just to name a few of the things that have been put together, for example, on your bio in Wikipedia—please correct me if I’m wrong—but divorce lawyer for the late princess Diana, solicitor for Deborah Lipstadt in the 2000 *Irving vs. Penguin Books*, chair in Law and the Arts at UCL and deputy chairman at Mishcon de Reya.

AJ: By the way, I wasn’t restrictedly the divorce lawyer for Princess Diana, not least because I am not a divorce lawyer. I acted for her generally, and, when the divorce question arose,

she asked me to act for her on that too. And even though I hadn’t done any divorce work before then, and told her as much, she said she wanted me to represent her. I just correct for the record, not because I expect to see it featuring significantly in the interview.

MF: Sure. But it’s helpful to know. And, obviously, you acted for her in the years before that.

AJ: Yes.

MF: I did mention, before we started the interview, that I was a bit of a fanboy, so forgive me for my first question being rather something of a vignette. The David Irving trial that took place so famously in 2000, I was just doing my master’s in fascism, and, as many people will know, only the year before a terrorist attack had taken place with David Copeland attack in London, then there was this very high-profile David Irving case, and there was a sense, while I was doing my MA, that fascism was back. Now, I don’t want to suggest that this was correct at the time, or that it hasn’t been proved, you know, premature since then, but these were very important moments for me. And I think the thing is that they stayed with me ever since—and why I requested from the editor-in-chief to speak with you is watching your and Professor Evans’s knowledge reveal and overpower ideology and bigotry. That was really transformative to me. It made me feel like the place for an intellectual might very well be on a stand or, you know, taking part in practical things and putting your shoulder to the wheel. It felt a really significant moment for people who were involved in law, or history, to really make public policy. And that’s, I suppose, my first question—if there really is, in terms of our understanding of Holocaust denial, a kind of before and after the David Irving trial?

AJ: Yes. Maybe. But can I make two points regarding this?

MF: Please. Yes, absolutely.

AJ: The first point is I don't find that arguments have been tremendously effective in overwhelming fascists.

MF: That's very true, yes.

AJ: And if Deborah Lipstadt hadn't been sued by Irving, then the opportunity to confront his lamentably bad and skewed historiography would not have arisen. That was just an unanticipated opportunity and not one that we could have engineered. And we took it. Because in the conflict with fascists one has to take one's opportunities as they arise. I don't think that intellectual engagement with fascists can be anything more than opportunistic in the appropriate context. I don't think it can be strategic. It's not part of a strategic confrontation. And just as an afterthought to that point: I remember it used to be said—I mean, not that I was there to hear it, but it was correct in many contexts—it was said in the first years of the Third Reich that any idiot could put a bullet in the brain of a genius. So that kind of sense—that the disputer, the arguer, if not the argument itself, is vulnerable to brute violence—I think that it's a very important part of one's understanding of the engagement with fascism. That's the first point.

My second point is that I didn't have that sense that you suggested, of a return of momentum for fascism. On the contrary, I had a sense that it was essentially a moment in its expiry—maybe expiry is an overstatement—but there was a vampiric quality to Irving's attachment to Hitler and the whole Nazi undertaking, which I experienced in a very strong way through the course of the litigation. And so it wasn't my sense that one could meet fascism with arguments, and it wasn't my sense that there was a return or a resurgence of fascism.

MF: No, I'm glad to hear it, but can I press you a little bit on what you say? I mean, David Irving was trying to put forward a serious intellectual argument. It was an antisemitic argument—I don't doubt it for a second—but in his

mind, to the publishers, was he not trying to put forward something intellectual? Let's call it "intellectual fascism"?

AJ: I don't think so. His position, I accept, was framed in the style of argument and reasoning, but it was fully broken-backed.

MF: Even though he was, you know, clearly, as I recall, and very memorably showing off bigoted statements, willful interpretation, you know, things that were consistently pointing towards outright denial.

AJ: Yes. Exactly. In other words, those deformations of reason, or, more locally, the deformations of his historiography—fabrications, misrepresentations, suppressions, overstatements, the whole ragbag of corrupt practices. You might argue that they are corrupt discursive practices, say, a bad type of intellectual activity. But I esteem the phrase "intellectual activity." I'm not myself ready to extend it to a delinquent.

MF: And I have lot of questions on your academic activity as well. But let me ask you one slightly more light-hearted question about the trial. People of my generation remember it very well—we used it in teaching materials, and were really influenced by it. But I'm guessing that more people, because of the nature of Hollywood, will associate the name "Anthony Julius" with "Andrew Scott" who, of course, played you in the film *Denial* with Rachel Weisz and Timothy Spall. Can I ask you a little bit about that? Did he approach you, let's say, for any advice on the role?

AJ: No, no, no. I think I spoke to him afterwards. I think he—I can't remember now—I think he may have said to me that he watched one or two YouTube videos in which I speak. But he said to me that he wanted it to be an interpretation of the role rather than an impersonation of the person, and that made complete sense to me. By coincidence, I walked past him on the day when they were filming in Holborn, and I immediately knew who he was because he was dressed like I used to dress, you know, twenty years earlier. And I thought . . . I mean, there was no filming happening at that moment,

but I also had a scruple. I thought, if he had wanted to speak to me, he would have spoken to me, and to ambush him in the street and introduce myself would probably not be welcome, so I didn't.

MF: Did you get the chance to go—I guess these are very Hollywood-type questions—to the premiere?

AJ: I went to one of the filming days and I met some of the actors. Including Andrew.

MF: And I have to ask as well—final question, slightly light-hearted, but were you pleased having watched the film? Did you say “I recognize that”?

AJ: I was so pleased and I thought maybe he could play me for the rest of my life and I would then, you know, retreat somewhere.

MF: So, I have to confess that, even though I watched that trial very closely because of my background, I'd already been aware of your work before that, which is, of course, to say, *T. S. Eliot, Anti-Semitism, and Literary Form*. At the time that I was reading this book, it was new, then in its first edition, but I think I'm right in saying that it's its thirty-year anniversary now.

AJ: Is it?

MF: I believe so. So I have a couple of questions to ask you about that. Maybe some of them contrast with the work that I've done on Ezra Pound. In the first instance: you were invited to do a new edition with the preface and a response to your critics, which is an unusual way of reissuing a new edition. Was it because the debate around *T. S. Eliot and Anti-Semitism* was so hot or ill-tempered? Going back to about five years or so after the book was released, how would you say that it fared in the discourse, as it were?

AJ: Well, it was strange because, when it was published, it was just received as an academic book, a PhD published by an academic house, and I don't think anyone really thought anything about it. And then there was a praising review in the *London Review of Books*. It was also picked up in the States. Michiko Kakutani wrote a piece in the *New York Times* about it. And suddenly it enjoyed a moment. James Fenton, who was then

the Oxford professor of poetry, gave a lecture at Oxford with the title “Julius vs. Eliot,” written up in the *New Yorker*, in the “Talk of the Town” section. And the book also attracted a tremendous amount of hostility, some of which was represented in the critical reviews, or in unspoken gestures of exclusion—which continues to this day, actually. It doesn't figure, for example, as far as I can see, in the two-volume critical edition of Eliot's poetry. It's as if there's an impulse to wish it out of existence within the world of Eliot scholarship and adoration.

MF: I know it well from Pound scholarship, believe me.

AJ: So, my new publisher at the time, Thomas Neurath, and the person I worked most closely with, a director of Thames & Hudson, Nikos Stangos, said to me, “Why don't we publish a second edition, and you can respond to critics and actually give more focused attention to some of the more general questions that arise when writing about literary antisemitism?” I mean, the aesthetic questions that arise. I was very glad to take this opportunity, and I think that the second edition is the more interesting one.

MF: I'd also like to ask you a couple of questions about that edition. But, in terms of the context first, your preface notes that the Eliot affair, for lack of a better word, was not remotely comparable to the sort of outrage around Heidegger or Paul de Man. Those were the two intellectuals who met with a major controversy about their fascist past, a proper Axis past, only the decade before your book appeared. Could that have opened some political space for people, let's say, re-evaluating canonical figures like that—like Eliot, of course?

AJ: I think it should have been. Frankly, I was a bit surprised that people went at it in the way that they did, because it seemed to me obvious that there was this antisemitic element in a very specific period of Eliot's career as poet and, much less interestingly, in his prose. And I thought I was making a case for it, which was not quite apologetic but certainly one that fully recognized

the distinction of the achievement (as F. R. Leavis would have said), the argument being that Eliot put antisemitism to creative use in his poetry. And when the availability of the creative use of antisemitism had been exhausted, he moved on. So I was surprised that that argument wasn't taken up, and instead there were tedious, endlessly reiterated, and not very compelling defenses of Eliot, and a lot of *ad hominem* stuff: Julius is a lawyer, he writes like a prosecutor—that kind of thing. That didn't represent anything that I could engage with. In the postscript I tried to make the best case for the critics, and then address that best case.

MF: Let me bring in a related example. Genuinely, you're probably the only person who can clarify for me why the Ezra Pound case has been so difficult—and I have published on it myself. To set my question up, I'm going to quote some of your words back to you. Your argument is that Eliot's early work, especially a handful of his early poems, a sequence from *The Waste Land*, a good deal of his 1930s prose, as well as comments in letters and so forth until the Second World War, are marked by three antisemitic themes. One is this sort of caricature, as it were, of the Jewish sceptic and the free thinker, as a problematic figure; the second—you are very clear—is indifference to Jewish themes and indifference to antisemitism; and the third is Eliot's refusal to confront his own antisemitism.

AJ: That's the biographical end, yes, but none of that really relates to my analysis of the poetry.

MF: And, you know, you are very clear in the analysis of the poetry—that, as you said earlier, he puts his antisemitism to creative use. Is that something that you also see elsewhere? I mean, I keep coming up against this argument, Anthony, and I still don't know how to defeat it: that somehow, if you are an antisemite, you can't also be intelligent, or creative, or an artist. I mean, you deal with this very clearly in your book, saying, "There is no IQ test for racism."

AJ: I mean, it is also an intellectualist deformation on the part of people like us. We would like to think that all the virtues are invested in

intelligence. Of course, they're not. But it is also true that antisemitism for its articulation requires a readiness to deform the relevant discourses—historical discourse, sociological discourse, moral discourse, and all the rest of it. So, just to put it in its simplest form: antisemites cannot be right in an argument while cleaving to their antisemitism.

MF: Good point.

AJ: By "cannot," I mean that antisemitism breaks the coherence of the argument.

MF: Yes, I see that. One of the other questions I had—again, if I can compare Eliot slightly with Pound, you have a good four-page analysis in your book of Pound's antisemitism, which, of course, found him to be working for the Axis, then charged with treason. I figure it's fair to say his activities were of a different order than most antisemites of the time. But what you say about Eliot fits so perfectly for Pound as well: that the defenders of Eliot present "a kind of screen in front of his work, protecting it and keeping it from clear views." I think that's an admirably clear metaphor, saying that, essentially, the defenders create a hermeneutic circle, and even if you break through one point, then maybe they say, yes, this was an antisemitic line in *Gerontion*, but everybody had it back then, it was a suburban prejudice.

AJ: Yes, to quote Ezra Pound . . .

MF: Yes, and I have an interesting story about that . . . I've seen Pound's page proofs that includes the line: "It was that stupid suburban prejudice of antisemitism." It's underlined and given an exclamation mark in red. It suggests strongly the notorious quote was made up, and Pound read it and reacted with something like: "I've never said that."

AJ: Yes, funny. I just want to respond to what you have said about Pound. First of all, when I was writing the book on Eliot, what I didn't want to do was to make my sweep broad. I wanted to respect, if you like, the *differentia specifica* of Eliot's work, rather than relaxing into more general statements about modernist antisemitism.

MF: Yes, completely understandable.

AJ: And, secondly, to the extent that I was thinking about Pound, it was the differences that struck me. Pound was a quite different kind of antisemite to Eliot, which didn't surprise me because one of my convictions is that antisemitism, the word "antisemitism," is really just a shorthand for "antisemitisms." There's a variety, and, with the exception of Nazism, each of those variants has an idea about a saving remnant, a category of righteous Jews. Nazism doesn't. Antisemitisms are different for many reasons, but you could begin identifying those reasons by looking at the distinct content of that remnant in each case.

MF: It's interesting you say that. I actually do contend that, certainly by the beginning of the Second World War, Pound was a Nazi, not just a fascist, an absolute down-the-line Nazi. And, in fact, you cite one of his lines from, I think, a postwar sequence where he uses the phrase "the goyim are cattle." That's literally ripped off from the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion*. But I can't help coming back to a point that you made: even with, you know, excluding Nazism as having its category of good Jews, Himmler in October 1943 was complaining that people were still coming up to him and saying, the Jewish person at the end of my road isn't worth killing.

AJ: Everybody has their special category . . .

MF: Exactly. And Pound, on the very VE day, on the day that he says Hitler is a saint, he says, I'm not an antisemite, I make a distinction between good and bad Jews. And for him that was understood to be completely exculpatory.

AJ: Yes, yes. But, just as a general principle, one has to be wary of self-defenses.

MF: Well, yes, he was also fighting for his life quite literally at that point. But let's remember some of his activities after the Second World War, which a lot of Pound defenders are completely silent about. He was a driving force behind the Ku Klux Klan and the racial terror in the civil rights era in the '50s and '60s.

AJ: How interesting.

MF: Unbelievably.

AJ: Alarming, but still.

MF: I mean, the guy is literally inspiring racial terror and mailing instructions off to people from an insane asylum. You know, I'll just round off by saying this, and perhaps you'll disagree. But Eliot seems to me a deep, maybe marginal case that demands and rewards this kind of work—deep reading, literary analysis. Pound does not. Pound is just an overt, foul-mouthed racist. What I don't understand, and I genuinely would like your help with this, is how defenders can look at certain phrases, like him basically saying, I'd like to see all the Jews killed the day before the liberation of Auschwitz-Birkenau, and still say, well, this is a debatable issue.

AJ: I don't know either. I mean, Donald Davie has attempted that, but he also defends Eliot and, as I remember, is quite unpleasant about me. I feel like I've spent too much of my life thinking about antisemitism anyway to start puzzling over what motivates defenders of antisemitism. It's an inquiry too far.

MF: That is fair. Well, then I promise I'll let you off easy with only two last questions about that.

AJ: Okay.

MF: The first one sort of pivots us towards the harbor. It is about your two very different hats: a professor of the arts, somebody who's written a book on poetry; and then law. They are oftentimes seen as kind of, you know, left brain, right brain. But, I wonder, how do they inform your understanding? Do they help one another? Does your close attention to language and how it presents on the page give you superpowers as a solicitor or barrister? Are there interactions between these two hats that you wear?

AJ: Well, I just said a minute ago that one should be wary of self-defenses. I think one should be even warier of any invitation to self-admiration.

MF: In that case, I shall do it for you. But there are few lawyers, I think, who have a literary background. So maybe I come at it generally: how does having a literary background or literary

bona fides help in the courtroom and in legal settings?

AJ: Well, I'm sure it's a personal thing. For me, when I think of great poetry, Wallace Stevens is the place that one goes to for modernism, and he worked in insurance. Another poet was also a lawyer. Roy Fuller, the English poet, worked in a building society, I think. Kafka was a lawyer and a writer. I've made relations between law and literature, legal and literary discourse, one of my objects of inquiry. It was also the subject of my inaugural lecture at UCL. It's a complicated and, I think, very rewarding subject to ponder. The preface to Flaubert's novel *Madame Bovary* contains dedications both to Flaubert's closest friend, who was a man of letters, and to his lawyer who defended him in the obscenity case that he had to face on publication of the novel. So there you have a kind of combination of the literary and legal, which requires pondering.

MF: There seems to me a very intimate connection, although, I confess, I can't necessarily see through the thicket to see it clearly.

AJ: Have a look at my lecture, "Dedications," which is on YouTube. I spent quite a lot of time thinking about the differences and overlaps, and so on.

MF: I'm sure that the readers of our interview will be interested in chasing that up. While I have you, a final set of questions, if I could. One question returns to something very interesting you said a quarter of a century ago: that you didn't regard the Irving trial and the attention it engendered as a wider return of fascism as a movement. Do you still feel that way now that fascism is, as it were, "back"?

AJ: Is it back? I don't know whether it's back or whether it's something else that draws on fascist energies but is its own thing. The direct answer to your question is that, at any rate, what Irving represented and what he sought to reanimate has not made a return. Not in any way that represents a greater threat than it was then. I mean, obviously, I quite understand it could be said that white nationalism in America, for example, is precisely what Irving represents. And

how could one get past Charlottesville, let alone everything that's happened since, and maintain that fascism hasn't made a resurgence? Obviously, I understand that argument. Still, it doesn't feel to me that Holocaust denial, which was the essential point that we were addressing, figures in that way, or maybe at all, in the contemporary far-right discourse.

MF: Well, I struggle because you very rightly said that antisemitism is not an intellectual argument, but one that apes it. However, I think we both can acknowledge that online, you know, the digital world has no end of antisemitism, including Holocaust denial of the most beastly sort.

AJ: I know. You make a good challenge, and it may well be that, if I were to bathe once again in the stinky sewer of Holocaust denial, I would find that there was a force, an energy, even greater than in circulation in 2000. Of course, the internet is a very different place to what it was then, and it's difficult to know what represents a genuine increase in the level of activity and what is merely an internet amplification. And maybe even the distinction that I've just drawn could itself be challenged, because amplification is itself the generating of greater energy by the very virtue of the amplificatory processes. So, I think maybe you and I are slightly at an impasse on this question, because I'm not forcefully advancing the argument, but I'm not sure at the moment that I have a strong enough reason to fully change my mind either.

MF: For me, one thing that the resounding defeat of David Irving made clear—and this was on the heels of the Zundel trial in Canada, it wasn't the first of its type—is that there really was going to be no purchase for, I don't know what we wish to call it, pseudo-intellectual antisemitism. It was just laughed out of court. And that feels to me like that is something you're right about. That hasn't changed in twenty-five years.

AJ: Well, look, I lost the Ronnie Fraser case, which was fifteen years or so later. We went to an employment tribunal and we said the

antisemitism-contaminated hostility to Israel is so strong that it's led to a hemorrhaging of Jewish members. And that the few members who have left are ready to give witness to their sense of suffocation and marginalization by the UCU's activities. And then I pointed to a sequence of steps in relation to Fraser himself, where he had complained of antisemitism. His complaints had at first been upheld by the union, relying on the EUMC definition of antisemitism (which became the IHRA definition). The union then passed a resolution directing that no reference could be made in internal union affairs to that definition. I pointed all of this out in support of an argument that the UCU environment was toxic, hostile for Fraser as a member. And the tribunal full-throatedly rejected it and then accused me of seeking to suppress free speech, even though it was the union's own resolution denying Fraser the right to refer to the EUMC definition that I pointed to and based some of my case on. So, you know, the idea that the court represents some safe harbor, I think, itself needs to be interrogated.

MF: I'm glad that you say that as somebody who was involved in the recent contretemps over David Miller and his position on antizionism, which I'm sure you'll be aware of in the fallout with Bristol.

AJ: Yes, I am aware, of course.

MF: But maybe that's a good place to ask my final question. And I'm sorry, I know you're trying to move on from this and here I am asking you questions about it for our readers. But my final question is—and I really like your point about the multiple faces of Judeophobia, Jew hate, so let me put it in the plural—are the antisemitisms today much different than those that you engaged twenty-five, thirty years ago, you know, in looking at these people who were relatively well known, and, in Eliot's case, canonical. Are there different challenges of antisemitism today, in your view?

AJ: There was a period, ten years or so ago, maybe more than ten years, where there was an

intense focus on the question, is antisemitism different to antizionism? Everyone of good will understood that there were discriminations and distinctions to be drawn. And everyone also understood that people of ill will were refusing to draw those distinctions. But what October 7 and the murders since then have demonstrated is that, to a certain kind of person, antisemitism and antizionism are just two different routes to the same lethal outcome. So, even if one thinks that the points of departure are different, in terms of the ultimate lethal consequences, there is a convergence.

MF: Is there more potential in other forms of antisemitism because people like yourself have done such a good job of delegitimizing, taking the wheels off of far-right antisemitism?

AJ: I don't think we have done a good job. I mean, antisemitism was rubbish at the beginning, and it continues to be rubbish. And it doesn't require people to point out that it's rubbish.

MF: I'm sorry, I'm afraid it does.

AJ: The reason that we got involved in it is because—I mean, put to one side the questions of scholarship and history writing and literary criticism and so on. But in terms of the actual fight, the litigation and all the rest of it, we got involved in it because we were driven to do so. And I would be very surprised if any book—but we haven't talked about my history of English antisemitism, *Trials of the Diaspora*—changed the mind of any person who was predisposed to be hostile to Jews.

MF: But what if I said to you, it was never about just that. Instead, what you do is stiffen the spines of your allies and remind people what's at stake, and how important it is.

AJ: I would be pleased to hear that, obviously. I think the question of maintaining morale in a hostile period is very important. Let me also say that it's tremendously important that Jews should think in creative and fresh ways about the future of the Jewish people without fear of antisemites or others looking over their shoulders. I think there are hard and difficult

discussions that need to be played out, that need to take place within the Jewish world. And it would be really awful, catastrophic, I think, for our world, if we were inhibited or intimidated by the presence of antisemites from having those discussions among ourselves.

MF: Well, said. To close our conversation: for thirty years you've been inspiring me. I know it's the first time that we're meeting and speaking, but you did it not just once with your work on T. S. Eliot, but twice with your work that was a beacon to all people who want to stand up against antisemitism. After you got done with

them, David Irving, the antisemite, David Irving, the Holocaust denier, these were legally denounced thanks to your work. So at least I can speak personally and say that it wasn't just a spine stiffener, but it pointed the way vocationally for some of us. So it's really been an honor for me to speak to you and to be able to put questions that I've been thinking about, shall we say, far longer than the preparation I did for this interview.

AJ: Well, Matt, it's really great to speak to you. And thank you for taking all the time to prepare for this interesting discussion.

***On Antisemitism: A Word in History.* By Mark Mazower.**

Allen Lane, 2025. 333 pages. £25.

Review Essay by John Hyman



How are antisemitism and antizionism related? For some, such as Mark Mazower, the relationship is contingent and accidental: “the two are sometimes found together.” For others, antizionism is simply “a form of antisemitism” or “a transmutation of antisemitism.”¹

In his recent book *On Antisemitism: A Word in History*, Mazower argues that “antisemitism” was transformed from the name of a political program (when it first gained currency in the 1880s) into the name of a kind of racism (after 1945), and then into a weapon to defend the Jewish state against criticism and ‘crush free speech across the world’ (in the 2000s). The latter transformation was mainly effected by a novel definition of antisemitism, which deliberately conflates antizionism and antisemitism. Perhaps, he concludes, “antisemitism” will cease to have any coherent use at all.

To understand Mazower’s project, it helps to begin with a 2018 article in the *New York Times* in which he argues that the British Chief Rabbi Ephraim Mirvis had exaggerated Labour’s problem with antisemitism because he confused antizionism and antisemitism, and that the definition of antisemitism adopted by the IHRA (International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance), which “lumps together Holocaust denial with hostility to Israel,” nurtured the confusion. The Labour leadership was evidently antizionist, but the chief rabbi accused it of antisemitism because he “simply equates” the two.²

In the event, Labour was referred to the UK Equality and Human Rights Commission a few weeks after Mazower’s article was published and in due course it was found to have breached the

Equality Act by committing unlawful acts of harassment and discrimination against Jews, and to have failed throughout Jeremy Corbyn’s leadership to address antisemitic conduct by its members and officials effectively.

As for combining Holocaust denial with hostility to Israel, this had been a feature of antizionist discourse for years, for example, in the Holocaust-themed cartoon competition held by the Iranian newspaper *Hamashabari* in 2006 and the Iranian government-sponsored conference on the Holocaust in the same year, which Foreign Minister Manouchehr Mottaki opened with the observation that “if the official version of the Holocaust is thrown into doubt, then the identity and nature of Israel will be thrown into doubt.”

As far as I know, Mazower has not commented publicly on the EHRC’s findings. In *On Antisemitism* he doubles down on the claim that the IHRA definition has nurtured a confusion between antisemitism and antizionism, but now argues that it “opened the way” to present the student protests at Columbia against the Gaza war as antisemitic, whereas they looked to him like “a form of education, unruly but admirable.” On one side, he reports, he saw young, predominantly female, students protesting against “state-organised mass violence” in Gaza, and on the other, Jewish billionaires getting together “to urge a police clampdown.”

So, the defendant has changed from Labour under Corbyn to the antizionist students at Columbia who protested against the Gaza war, but Mazower’s defense remains essentially the same. The first two thirds of *On Antisemitism* are

in effect a preamble. I shall focus on the last third of the book, where the argument is laid out.

THE IHRA DEFINITION

Founded in 1998 to address issues related to the Holocaust and the genocide of the Roma, the IHRA now has thirty-five member countries, including every member of the EU except Malta. In 2016, it gave its imprimatur to a “working definition” of antisemitism, which had been devised a few years earlier, partly because it was thought that some expressions of antizionism should be counted as antisemitic, which the EU’s monitoring criteria at the time did not recognize as such.

For example, if a Jew was assaulted on the streets of a European city to avenge an act by the Israeli government, this would of course have been criminal and deplorable, but it would not have counted as antisemitic unless the assailant was motivated by a certain kind of stereotype about Jews: as “deceitful,” “corrupt,” “conspiratorial,” etc. So, the IHRA definition combined a general description of antisemitism as “a certain perception of Jews, which may be expressed as hatred towards Jews” with eleven examples of ways in which antisemitism gets expressed, five of which relate antisemitism and antizionism.

Hedged with caveats, these five examples are as follows: [*caveat one*] “Criticism of Israel similar to that levelled against any other country cannot be regarded as antisemitic”; but the following “could, [*caveat two*] taking into account the overall context” qualify as antisemitic: “denying the Jewish people their right to self-determination”; “requiring of [Israel] behaviour not expected or demanded of any other democratic nation”; “using the symbols and images associated with classic antisemitism to characterise Israel or Israelis”; “drawing comparisons of contemporary Israeli policy to that of the Nazis”; or “holding Jews collectively responsible for actions of the state of Israel.”³

Since 2016, the IHRA definition has been widely adopted by governments, NGOs, and universities, but it has been attacked so zealously that it can seem like a proxy for Zionism itself.⁴ At Columbia, a colleague of Mazower’s in the history department announced last summer that he would not teach a course scheduled for the fall term, “specifically in light of Columbia’s adoption of the IHRA definition.” Another colleague, in the English department, claimed that Columbia’s move meant she would face official sanction if she so much as mentioned a book by Hannah Arendt in class. An American professor of religious studies has argued that the definition contributed to the rise of Victor Orbán and Donald Trump.⁵

Perhaps the IHRA definition could have been better drafted. But as the British sociologist Matthew Bolton put it, when normally measured academics criticize it, “we are thrust into a world of black and white absolutes,” “the thorny problem of how antisemitism relates to Israel is cast solely in terms of manipulation by bad actors,” and “its authors and proponents are depicted either as bumbling fools, cynical political opportunists, or both.”⁶ In Mazower’s narrative, the authors of the definition are bumbling fools, while its proponents are cynical political opportunists.

On the one hand, Mazower says, the definition “obscures more than it clarifies,” because of its “confusing nature and sheer conceptual inequity.” It is “indeterminate, repetitive, and incomplete,” “poorly crafted and not really a definition at all.” The definition begins: “Antisemitism is a certain perception of Jews, which may be expressed as hatred towards Jews.” But, according to Mazower, “the word *certain* is not needed; *perception* is an imprecise term; *may be* is odd since a definition generally tells us what something *is*; and *hatred* is not the only expression of antisemitism.” The *OED*, he claims, says more with fewer words, and says it more clearly. (The *OED*’s definition of “antisemitism” reads, “Prejudice, hostility, or discrimination against Jewish people.”)

On the other hand, the IHRA definition is “extraordinarily powerful” and “its potential consequences [...] are profound.” It was “shaped to serve the interests of the Jewish nation-state” and promoted by Jewish lobbyists “with annual revenues of tens of millions of dollars each,” who conducted “a powerfully fought effort to enforce international compliance” and persuaded most of the world’s liberal democracies “lemming-like” to adopt it. It has since been used “to clobber dissent and assail civil liberties,” and it is easy to imagine similar definitions being used to ban criticism of governments across the world. “And what would be left of free speech then?”

DEFINITIONS AND ESSENCES

Let us take a step back and consider some questions about definitions in general: what they are, what forms they take, and how we use them. Mazower does in fact ask what a definition is. Relying on a sixteenth-century logical treatise, *The Rule of Reason*, he claims that a definition explains in unambiguous language the essence, or “the essentials,” or “the very nature of the thing.” His excoriation of the IHRA definition and his preference for the *OED* rely on this premise, but this is doubly mistaken, because defining a word is not the same as defining a phenomenon or “thing,” and most of the “things” we define do not have essences.

Regarding words and “things,” a definition of antisemitism is not a definition of a word. So, if we compare the IHRA definition of antisemitism with the *OED* definition of “antisemitism” we are getting off on the wrong foot. Historians and sociologists who want to understand the nature of fascism, populism, or antisemitism do not look for answers in the *OED*. On the contrary, lexicographers consult *their* work, so that they can accurately record the gradual shifts in meaning that occur as changes in society get reflected in the use of words.

Clearly, if the word “theft” *means* the action of a thief, then theft *is* the action of a thief, and vice versa: the definitions are the same. So, it

may seem as if there is no need to distinguish between defining words and defining “things.” But the distinction matters a good deal. For example, the *OED*’s entry for the word “theft” reads “The action of a thief; the felonious taking away of the personal goods of another.” Whereas the definition of theft in the 1968 Theft Act is “A person is guilty of theft if he dishonestly appropriates property belonging to another with the intention of permanently depriving the other of it.”

True, the *OED* is clear and concise, whereas the legal definition is easily subjected to the treatment Mazower metes out to the IHRA definition of antisemitism. “Dishonestly” is vague and contestable. Intentions can be indeterminate, unsettled, and unclear. And why “permanently”? Does it mean “forever”? Isn’t a century enough? But it should be obvious that this is not a serious argument. Legal definitions invariably need to be clarified or interpreted, and this happens as part of the legal process. And, besides, while the *OED* definition describes the use of the word “theft” perfectly well, it would not work in the statute, whose whole purpose is to define the circumstances in which property is appropriated feloniously. Describing the use of a word is one thing; laying down a legal standard is another. If we are asked which definition is better, our answer ought to be, “Better for what purpose?”

Regarding essences, the sixteenth-century scholar Mazower relies on is restating Aristotle’s concept of a definition, which was designed with species of animals or plants in mind. But plenty of things do not have an essence or “very nature,” which a definition could pin down, for example, social institutions such as marriage, political systems such as democracy, and ideologies such as nationalism, all of which change radically across time. In fact, the same goes for biological species themselves, which biologists today generally think of as populations. In each of these cases, there need not be a fixed set of traits, “the essentials,” shared by all and only the things the name applies to.

Mazower believes that antisemitism *can* be defined—in other words, its essence can be captured in unambiguous language—as long as we don’t muddle it with antizionism. Other historians take a partly different view. For example, David Feldman and Marc Volovici agree that definitions are meant to capture essences, but where antisemitism is concerned “there is no essence to define.” So, instead of trying to define the indefinable, they say, we should explore the ways in which definitions of antisemitism are “designed and used to promote particular goals.”⁷

David Engel pushes the idea a little further. Antisemitism, he insists, is not a “timeless ‘spirit’ possessing an ‘essence.’” The word was coined to describe a clearly circumscribed set of political activities in the 1880s, but its use was extended “far beyond its original referents” and “its boundaries are arbitrary.” Non-Jews have behaved in unwelcome ways towards Jews or felt hostility towards them for centuries. But historians who treat these disparate events as instances of a unitary phenomenon only do so because of a linguistic convention, which has persisted for political rather than scholarly reasons. It would be better, he concludes, if historians dropped the concept of antisemitism and looked for “new frameworks” instead.⁸

Although these historians take partly different positions, one thought unites them, namely, that, unless a definition of antisemitism captures its essence it is really a political weapon, and we need to study and assess it in these terms. This is a mistake.

The most important discussion of definitions in twentieth-century philosophy is in Wittgenstein’s *Philosophical Investigations*. Wittgenstein points out that in many cases the things we call by the same name do not share an essence. Instead, what connects them are patterns of overlapping similarities. His own example is the variety of games: board-games, card-games, ball-games, Olympic games, and so on. “If you look at them,” he says, “you will not see something that is common to all, but

similarities, relationships, and a whole series of them at that.”

I can think of no better expression to characterize these similarities than “family resemblances”; for the various resemblances between members of a family: build, features, colour of eyes, gait, temperament, etc. etc. overlap and criss-cross in the same way.—And I shall say: “games” form a family.

This sounds simple, and in a way it is. But its implications are profound. Games do not have an essence. But this does not mean that the use of the word “game” is inexplicable or politically motivated, that we don’t really know what we mean by “game,” or (as Nietzsche puts it) that the word is merely a pocket “into which now this and now that has been put, and now many things at once.”

The *OED*’s definition of “game” reads, “An activity which provides amusement or fun,” which works perfectly well. It is a mistake to imagine that this captures the essence of anything. It simply describes roughly how the word “game” is used. But “roughly” does not mean that it is defective. If the scope of a word is imprecise, an accurate definition of it will have to be imprecise as well. “Bald” means not having *much* hair; “democracy” means government by *the people*; and so on. Wittgenstein writes:

One might say that the concept “game” is a concept with blurred edges.—“But is a blurred concept a concept at all?”—Is an indistinct photograph a picture of a person at all? Is it even always an advantage to replace an indistinct picture with a sharp one? Isn’t the indistinct one often exactly what we need?

Just as with games, marriage, and democracy, we should not expect a definition of antisemitism to identify its essence. Mazower’s complaint—that the IHRA definition says that antisemitism *may* be expressed in hatred towards Jews when “a definition is supposed to tell us

what something *is*" (his italics)—is based on a misunderstanding. In fact, a general formula qualified in this way and followed by a series of examples is probably the only form a satisfactory definition of antisemitism—the social phenomenon, not the word—could take.

Again, many concepts have blurred edges, and the definition of a form of racism cannot be precise because social phenomena have vague boundaries. So, the interpretation of the IHRA definition will inevitably depend on judgement and its application is bound to be contested in some cases. There are special reasons to ensure that definitions used in the criminal law are sufficiently precise to give citizens fair warning of what they are not permitted to do and to reduce the risk of arbitrary enforcement. But even in the law, a definition is not an algorithm, and we cannot expect it to be usable without experience, sensitivity, and judgement.

But, if the IHRA definition of antisemitism does not capture its essence and is not perfectly precise, it does not follow that it is merely a political instrument, because definitions can serve various different purposes. For example, a definition of consent can be designed to specify when a criminal offence has been committed, to teach students how to conduct their sex lives, to ensure that a patient has chosen a course of treatment knowing the risks, or to enrol a subject in a clinical trial.

(The definition of consent on one university's Student Hub page includes seven bullet points explaining what consent is ("ongoing throughout the whole encounter," "still required among people in committed relationships and marriages," etc.) and seven explaining what it is not ("ignoring or pretending you didn't hear someone say no," "the way someone is dressed or the way someone flirts" etc.).)

Relatedly, some definitions are descriptive, while others are prescriptive. For example, the definition of a word is descriptive, it maps a social activity, the use of a word; whereas the definition of theft in the 1968 Theft Act is prescriptive, it creates a legal standard. We can

always assess a definition as good or bad, relative to its purpose, and often as valid or invalid. But the right way to make these assessments varies, depending on the definition's use.

LEGAL OPINIONS

Turning now to the IHRA definition specifically, I shall begin with Mazower's objections to the sentence: "Antisemitism is a certain perception of Jews, which may be expressed as hatred towards Jews." As we have seen, he claims that "the word *certain* is not needed; *perception* is an imprecise term; *may be* is odd since a definition generally tells us what something *is*; and *hatred* is not the only expression of antisemitism."

Mazower appears to have taken these objections, as well as the comparison with the *OED*, from a pair of legal opinions about the IHRA definition commissioned by antizionist groups from Hugh Tomlinson KC (in 2017) and Geoffrey Robertson KC (in 2018).⁹ It is worth considering them as they were originally formulated.

"Perception" Is an Imprecise Term

Both Tomlinson and Robertson object to the word "perception," but on different grounds. Tomlinson describes it as "vague and unclear," whereas Robertson asks, "what perception, and in whose eyes—those of the Jewish community, of Zionists or anti-Zionists, or is this a reference (as it should be) to the objective impression of the reasonable bystander?"

Neither remark is persuasive. Regarding the first, "perception," like "attitude" or "view," expresses the idea that a form of racism is not merely a pattern of behavior, and needs to be understood in cognitive or perceptual terms. The widely cited Runnymede Trust paper on Islamophobia, launched by the UK Home Secretary in 1997, defines its subject in a similar way, as a "view" of Islam. This is the standard way to think about racism in psychology, philosophy, and law.

Regarding the second, Robertson is confusing the question of what antisemitism is and the question of what ought to be the standard by which speech or conduct is assessed as antisemitic. The standard, he rightly maintains, ought to be the perception or judgement of the (mythical) “reasonable bystander,” in other words, speech or conduct must not be assessed as antisemitic without good reason. But the antisemitic “perception” or “view” that speech or conduct can express is of course not that of the “reasonable bystander” but the antisemitic person’s own.

“May Be” Is Odd since a Definition Generally Tells Us What Something Is

Tomlinson argues that the use of the word “may” is “confusing,” and “the very least that is needed” to clarify the definition is to replace “may” with “is.” But replacing “may” with “is” makes the definition too narrow, since not all antisemitism *is* expressed by hatred. Hence, the definition “does not work.” Robertson claims that the use of the word “may” “lends vagueness and imprecision.”

Again, neither objection is convincing. “May” is of course a perfectly familiar word. The objection is really that saying how antisemitism *may* be expressed is imprecise and open-ended. But in reality open-ended definitions are standard practice, not only in social science but also in law. For example, there isn’t a precise legal definition of defamation. Instead, legal textbooks generally explain that a statement about a person is defamatory if it tends to lower them in the estimation of right-thinking members of society and then add a list of illustrative examples, which does not pretend to be exhaustive—say, statements imputing criminality, dishonesty, professional incompetence, and so on.

“Hatred” Is Not the Only Expression of Antisemitism

Robertson enlarges on his complaint about the use of “may”: “obviously [antisemitism] can be

expressed as ‘hatred towards Jews,’ but how else ‘may’ anti-Semitism be expressed and if there ‘may’ be other definitions, why are they not identified?”

The remark about other definitions is puzzling. No doubt antisemitism can be defined in various ways, but the fact that the IHRA definition uses the word “may” does not mean that it ought to have combined or included several definitions. Regarding Robertson’s “how else?” question, the examples that accompany the IHRA definition comprise a variety of ways in which antisemitism can be expressed—conspiracy theories, criminal attacks on persons or property, discrimination, and so on—which, as the initial definition says, may or may not involve hatred.

Compared to the OED Version, the IHRA Definition Is Poorly Crafted and Not Really a Definition at All

Robertson recommends that universities and councils that need a definition of antisemitism “would be well advised to use the Oxford Dictionary.” For the reasons explained above, this is no more sensible than advising universities to use the *OED* definition of consent: “Agreement by a number of people to a plan, policy, course of action, etc.”

THE IHRA EXAMPLES

The argument that the IHRA definition does not capture the essence of antisemitism and the objections to its wording are unconvincing, but we cannot decide whether it is any good without knowing what it is meant to be good *for*. Fortunately, the IHRA explains the purpose of the definition clearly. It is to “educate and sensitize administrations, politicians, judges, police, teachers, media, and civil society,” and not to define a category of proscribed conduct or to describe the usage of a word. But like a dictionary definition, it is descriptive, not prescriptive: it describes a social phenomenon, in other

words, a pattern of social facts. Hence, the first question we need to ask about it is whether it describes antisemitism accurately; in other words, whether it is true.

The definition begins with the sentence Mazower, Tomlinson, and Robertson all attack. But the controversial part is a series of examples that relate antisemitism and antizionism. And yet the fact is that we do not need to look far to find examples of antisemitism of these kinds. Take “drawing comparisons between Israeli and Nazi policy” or between Israelis and Nazis.

The IHRA definition acknowledges that this need not be antisemitic. For example, a 1948 letter signed by leading Jewish intellectuals including Albert Einstein and Hannah Arendt describes Menachem Begin’s Herut party as “closely akin in its organization, methods, political philosophy and social appeal to the Nazi and Fascist parties.” This is alarming, as it was meant to be, but it is neither antisemitic nor antizionist. But the comparison is antisemitic in many cases, and this has been the tendency since 1967, first in Soviet and Arab antizionist literature, and then increasingly across the left.

Here, for instance, is the Hamas Covenant:

In their Nazi treatment, the Jews made no exception for women or children. Their policy of striking fear in the heart is meant for all. [...] The Zionist plan is limitless. After Palestine, the Zionists aspire to expand from the Nile to the Euphrates. When they will have digested the region they overtook, they will aspire to further expansion, and so on. Their plan is embodied in the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion*.

Again, an analysis of the comparison in contemporary German discourse includes the following email received by the Israeli Embassy in Berlin in 2012: “The Israeli State is a killer state. What is the difference between this state and the German terror system from 33–45? You do not need to be surprised that Jews are hated.”¹⁰ Similar remarks are quoted in the

EHRC report on the Labour Party, for example, “How can we not have empathy with the Palestinians when they are up against these murdering, Zionest [sic] bastards. Their NAZI masters taught them well.”

Despite the differences between these three texts—the Hamas Covenant is a statement of a genocidal ideology, whereas the other two are merely individual expressions of bigotry—they are all antisemitic. But antisemitic antizionism can be innocent and well-intentioned. As the IHRA definition says, it may be expressed as hatred but it need not be.

For example, the 2025 Yale Youth Poll found that twenty-one percent of eighteen- to twenty-two-year-olds polled agreed that boycotting Jewish businesses in the United States is an appropriate response to Israel’s conduct of the war in Gaza. This appears on the face of it to be an antisemitic opinion, but it would be wrong to infer that the young people who endorsed it were motivated by hostility towards Jews or would support an antisemitic policy if they understood that it was antisemitic.

These cases speak to the last three examples in the IHRA definition: “using the symbols and images associated with classic antisemitism to characterise Israel or Israelis,” “drawing comparisons of contemporary Israeli policy to that of the Nazis,” and “holding Jews collectively responsible for actions of the state of Israel.” So, they confirm that the definition is correct in respect of these examples; and they illustrate the need to acknowledge that these kinds of antisemitic antizionism exist.¹¹

It could be objected that although they exist, including them in a definition gives them undue prominence. The reply to this objection is that the examples accompanying a definition should indeed have sufficient importance to merit the salience being included in a definition gives them, but if they correspond to Hamas’s program or the opinion of twenty percent of young Americans they matter enough.

THE “CHILLING” EFFECT

Suppose we accept that the IHRA definition is valid, in the sense that it maps antisemitism today accurately, and that it's a useful tool for education, monitoring, and guiding research, for this reason. It doesn't follow that it is suited to defining a category of proscribed conduct, and, in fact, it would be a serious mistake to use it in this way, because antisemitic speech is not prohibited by law in the United States or the United Kingdom and should not be prohibited by university regulations. (Holocaust denial is a criminal offence in a number of European countries.)

The United Kingdom's independent reviewer of terrorism legislation, recently argued that the offence of stirring up racial hatred—including on grounds of nationality—is, as he put it, “a vital precursor offence to deal with some of the public hatred we have seen on our streets before it leads to violence or even terrorist violence”; and also expressed the view that the law is not being enforced as it should be.¹² I agree on both counts. But stirring up hatred is one thing and expressing antisemitic opinions is another, however misguided or offensive they may be. How could the question of whether boycotting Jewish businesses is the right way to protest against Israel's conduct of the Gaza war be debated in the classroom if students risked being in breach of university regulations if they argued—or argued too passionately—that it is?

But there has been a tendency on both sides of the debate over the IHRA definition to confuse the idea that the definition maps social facts with the idea that it sets a legal standard of conduct, and this confusion has resulted both in the misuse of the definition and in the misconceived complaint that it chills free speech: on one side Gavin Williamson and on the other Geoffrey Robertson.

Regarding the misuse of the definition, events have occasionally been cancelled or prevented from taking place on the grounds that they would qualify as antisemitic in the light of

the IHRA definition, including a widely cited case at the University of Central Lancashire in February 2017. But this kind of misuse has been exaggerated, not least at Columbia, where Marianne Hirsch, a comparative literature professor, claimed that she feared official sanction for mentioning Hannah Arendt's book *Eichmann in Jerusalem* in class and Rashid Khalidi cancelled a course on the history of Palestine on the grounds that the IHRA definition says “any criticism of Israel, or indeed description of Israeli policies, becomes a criticism of Jews.” In reality, the annual antizionist festival Israel Apartheid Week continues to flourish on the campuses of IHRA-endorsing universities; and adopting the definition has not made UK police forces less tolerant of the antisemitic slogans that appeared at protest marches alongside “Freedom for Palestine” and “Ceasefire Now.”

More seriously, some government officials have sought to compel universities to adopt the IHRA definition. For example, in October 2020, the UK Secretary of State for Education Gavin Williamson threatened sanctions against universities that did not adopt the definition, including “suspending funding streams,” and, in March 2024, the Governor of Texas Greg Abbott signed an executive order instructing public universities to include the definition in their free speech policies. But adopting the definition is not a way to address bullying and harassment, and imposing it makes no more sense than imposing Aristotle's definition of democracy or Max Weber's definition of the state.

So, on the one hand, the IHRA definition has been misused and misguided attempts have been made to impose it on universities—as if it were a rule to enforce, rather than a description of a social phenomenon. On the other hand, the allegation has frequently been made that even if the IHRA definition is not used to prohibit the expression of antisemitic attitudes and ideas it can still have a ‘chilling effect’ on free speech.¹³ But this allegation also depends on confusing a definition that maps social facts with one that

sets a legal standard of conduct, such as the definition of theft in the theft act, mentioned above.

The idea is that lawful speech can be chilled—in other words, deterred—by laws, policies, or regulations that are vague or costly to comply with or when lawsuits are too expensive to defend. For example, a journalist may hesitate to publish material of genuine public interest because of the risk of being sued for defamation and the ruinously high level of legal fees. But one aim of educating students about antisemitism in general and antisemitic antizionism in particular is *precisely* to “chill” or deter antisemitic speech, including speech that is protected by law—not by threatening a sanction, but in the way all moral education works, by explaining the harm it causes and by relating it to shared values. One could even say that antisemitic speech that is protected is precisely the target, since hate speech and incitement to violence are the province of the law.

(The senior UK lawyers who criticized Gavin Williamson’s attempt to impose the IHRA definition on UK universities on the grounds that it is “internally incoherent” and that adopting it would “lead to the curtailment of debate” were taking the right stance for the wrong reasons.¹⁴ The objection to demanding that an institution adopt the definition is the same as it would be to demanding it of an individual. The definition is not incoherent and it does not constrain academic freedom or chill free speech; nor does the decision to adopt it. But the *compulsion* to adopt it does.)

In summary, the risk of chilling speech has an important bearing on how laws and regulations should be framed and how the legal system should be administered, but it does not apply to the description of social facts; and, if acknowledging the fact that antisemitic antizionism is a reality can chill or inhibit speech that is perfectly legitimate, this is not a reason to hide it or deny it.

So, the analogy between the potentially “chilling” effect of a legal rule or of legal expenses on the one hand and the IHRA definition on the

other is misconceived, but, as we have seen, the definition has been abused by politicians in the United Kingdom and the United States. No less seriously, the simple allegation of antisemitism, regardless of how it is defined, has been grossly abused by several Israeli politicians, notably the prime minister, who has regularly described unwelcome political decisions by foreign governments as antisemitic or as fueling antisemitism—so much so that many Israelis on the left have become allergic to the word.

Of course, every word whose application is politically contentious gets weaponized. Recent examples include “war” (as opposed to “special military operation”), “woman,” and of course “genocide,” which is given a fairly precise meaning in the Genocide Convention, but has become a shibboleth, a slogan, and an antisemitic device where Israel and Zionism are concerned—regardless of whether the allegation that Israel has breached the Convention should be upheld. For example, in a recent Instagram post, a pro-Palestinian student group in London calls the *Jewish Chronicle* the *Genocidal Chronicle* and the Union of Jewish Students the Union of Genocidal Students. Weaponization is inevitable, but this does not mean that we should not care about it or call it out.

THE CAMPUS PROTESTS

This brings us to the campus protests during the Gaza War. Mazower describes the protests at Columbia as an admirable if unruly form of education. Simon Schama, also a member of the History Department at Columbia, has called this a lie. I prefer to think of it as a donnish kind of Pollyannaism. In reality, it was precisely a *lack* of education—not only about the history of the conflict but also about the history of antizionism itself—that allowed the protests to spill over at times into hate. But the antisemitic character of Arab and Islamist antizionist discourse and the ways in which left antizionism today emerged from Soviet antisemitic campaigns in the 1960s and 1970s barely register in Mazower’s book.¹⁵

Another important development students need to be aware of is that antizionism is coming apart from the pro-Palestinian movement and becoming a hate movement in its own right. At a protest in London, someone carries a sign that says, “The Western Zionist puppet masters instruct their evil scum puppets in Tel Aviv to do their dirty work.” In the space of a few days, the following posts appear on X: “Zionism is a cancer. Zionists are Satanists. / They make me sick. They’re so EVIL. / Zionists are literally the most evil people to walk this earth. / Look at their eyes. Zionism turns you into a demon.”¹⁶ The IHRA definition describes this kind of material as “mendacious, dehumanizing, demonizing, or stereotypical allegations about Jews as such or the power of Jews as collective”; it contributes absolutely nothing to the cause of Palestinian liberation; and it paints a target on Jews’ backs. Mazower’s remark that antisemitism and antizionism “have sometimes been found together” captures it about as well as it captures the relationship between the Macbeths.

But the fundamental point left antizionists need to think about was made by the Israeli human rights lawyer Michael Sfard. (I am thinking especially of the students and activists at Columbia who voiced their support for Hamas with Malcolm X’s slogan, “By any means necessary.”) Sfard, who has devoted his professional life to defending Palestinians and Palestinian rights, wrote this at the conclusion of a searing criticism of Israel’s reaction to the October 7 attacks, just two weeks later:

Not far from us, on their own way to the black hole, hover those who call themselves members of the “progressive left.” They’re finding it hard to unhesitatingly condemn—and without

fleeing to the “context”—a satanic orgy of destroying civilian Israeli communities near Gaza, along with their residents. Some are even blabbering something about decolonization being an ugly process; that’s what happened in Algeria and Kenya, for example.

I read that and die of shame. Maybe you didn’t understand, but the struggle to end the occupation and achieve independence for the Palestinian people is part of the universal struggle to defend everyone’s human rights, not vice versa. The idea of the sanctity of human life, the noble idea that every person has basic rights that shouldn’t be undermined, isn’t a tool for implementing Palestinian independence but the other way around.¹⁷

The relationship between antisemitism and antizionism is one of the most important political questions on campuses today and students need the intellectual tools to think about it objectively, guided, let us hope, by the noble idea that every person on both sides of the conflict has basic rights that shouldn’t be undermined. This is not a given. In a Harvard CAPS/Harris poll conducted on October 19, 2023, sixty-two percent of eighteen- to twenty-four-year-olds expressed the opinion that “the [October 7] attacks on Jews were genocidal in nature” while fifty-one percent said they were “justified by Palestinian grievances.”¹⁸ If their answers were sincere, this means that at least thirteen percent believed that genocide against the Jews was justified at that time.

On Antisemitism belongs in the territory Matthew Bolton describes, where “the thorny problem of how antisemitism relates to Israel is cast solely in terms of manipulation by bad actors,” so it will not help them to change their minds.

ENDNOTES

- 1 P.M.S. Hacker, *The Hamas Massacre and the Transmutation of Antisemitism* (New York: Routledge, 2026).
- 2 Mark Mazower, “Anti-Semitism and Britain’s Hall of Mirrors,” *New York Times*, April 6, 2018.

- 3 In *Off-White: The Truth About Antisemitism* (London: Oneworld Publications, 2024), Rachel Shabi argues that, if we set aside the caveats, then “the dangers inherent in the IHRA working definition are heightened.” But setting aside the caveats doesn’t heighten anything inherent in the definition, it falsifies it.
- 4 Mazower, who was born into a Jewish family but converted to Islam in his thirties, has told the story of his own family’s antizionism in *What You Did Not Tell* (London: Allen Lane, 2017). The principal character, his grandfather Max, was a member of the anti-Zionist socialist Jewish Bund in Tsarist and then Soviet Russia, and fled to England in 1924, when the Bund was suppressed.
- 5 Rashid Khalidi, “I Spent Decades at Columbia. I’m Withdrawing My Fall Course Due to Its Deal with Trump,” *Guardian*, August 1, 2025, <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2025/aug/01/columbia-historian-rashid-khalidi-open-letter>; “A Columbia Genocide Scholar Says She May Leave over University’s New Definition,” *Education*, July 25, 2025, <https://education.economicstimes.indiatimes.com/news/higher-education/columbia-genocide-scholar-considers-leaving-over-controversial-antisemitism-definition/122910773>; Cynthia Baker, “Challenges of ‘The Chosen People’: Promises and Perils of Collective Identities,” in *Antisemitism, Islamophobia and the Politics of Definition*, ed. D. Feldman and M. Volovici (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2024), 107–108.
- 6 Matthew Bolton, “Antisemitism, Islamophobia, and the Politics of Definition,” *Journal of Contemporary Antisemitism* 7, no. 1 (2024): 105–112, here 106.
- 7 D. Feldman and M. Volovici, “‘The Pure Essence of Things’? Contingency, Controversy, and the Struggle to Define Antisemitism and Islamophobia,” in *Antisemitism, Islamophobia and the Politics of Definition*, ed. D. Feldman and M. Volovici (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2024), 3–19.
- 8 David Engel, “Away from a Definition of Antisemitism: An Essay in the Semantics of Historical Description,” in *Rethinking European Jewish History*, ed. J. Cohen and M. Rosman (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 30–53.
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- 10 Monika Schwarz-Friesel and Jehuda Reinharz, *Inside the Antisemitic Mind: The Language of Jew-Hatred in Contemporary Germany* (Waltham, MA: Brandeis University Press, 2017).
- 11 Other examples are discussed in the *EU Handbook for the Practical Use of the IHRA Working Definition of Antisemitism*, Publications Office of the European Union, 2021, <https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/d3006107-519b-11eb-b59f-01aa75ed71a1/language-en>.
- 12 Jonathan Hall KC, “The Lessons of Bondi Beach: Terrorism, Hatred and the Law,” speech at Policy Exchange, London, January 13, 2026.
- 13 Kenneth Stern, one of the authors of the IHRA definition, argues that, while it is “entirely proper” for university administrators to use it to identify instances of antisemitism on campus, it is “a perversion” to use it to “censor ideas” or to pursue Title VI cases against public universities in the US. Kenneth Stern, *The Conflict over the Conflict: The Israel/Palestine Campus Debate* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2020).
- 14 *Guardian Letters*, January 7, 2021.
- 15 The vibrant antisemitic literary tradition that developed in Arabic in the twentieth century was examined by Yehoshafat Harkabi and Bernard Lewis in the 1970s and 1980s. In *Semites and Antisemites* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1986), Lewis identifies the virtual disappearance of the distinction between Israelis, Zionists, and Jews as a recent feature of antizionist literature in the Arab countries. Mazower devotes a couple of pages to this literature, followed by a couple more applauding “an unsparing critic” of the Israeli commentators who “kept banging on about Arab antisemitism.” Jean Améry’s essays from the 1960s and 1970s are an important source on Left antizionism and its Soviet sources. Izabella Tabarovsky has also written extensively on this topic.
- 16 The sign is reported in Jonathan Hall KC, “The Lessons of Bondi Beach.” The posts are reported in Adam Kirsch, “The Z Word: Reclaiming Zionism,” *The Jewish Quarterly* 260 (May 2025).

- 17 Michael Sfard, "In Gaza, Israel Is Racing to the Moral Abyss," *Haaretz*, October 23, 2023. Of course, this kind of failure is happening on both sides, and there are many Zionists for whom Zionism is not part of the universal struggle to defend everyone's human rights either, notably, the settlers engaging in lawless violence in the West Bank today, whom Sfard has also written about eloquently.
- 18 Harvard CAPS/Harris Poll, conducted online among 2,116 registered US voters, October 18–19, 2023, published October 20, 2023, <https://harvardharrispoll.com/key-results-october-4/>.

***Antisemitism and the Law.* By Robert Katz. Carolina Academic Press, 2025. 725 pages. Paperback. \$65.**

Reviewed by Lili Levi



Professor Robert Katz's *Antisemitism and the Law*—the first American casebook of its

kind—is part of an ambitious program to launch a new field of study and offer a shared corpus of documents and materials to law students and advocates in order to promote global legal initiatives to combat antisemitism. (See, for example, xvii.) It breaks important new ground by calling for such a field of legal study and its inclusion in law school curricula. All told, the book is particularly welcome now as a tool to respond to the rise and unashamed normalization of antisemitism worldwide today.

The first question that might be asked is whether such an antisemitism-focused legal discipline is necessary and, if so, why. From the point of view of American law, isn't it enough that constitutional and statutory provisions already address issues of discrimination, hate speech, and hate crimes—without focusing specifically and exclusively on Jews and antisemitism? Can't references to Jews in other courses—such as those that focus more generally on group libel in defamation law or on anti-Black racism or on the law's treatment of women or differently abled persons—suffice to till the necessary ground?

I agree with Professor Katz that the answer to such questions is “no”—not only because of the particular characteristics of antisemitism¹ or the insufficiency of limiting the legal focus on antisemitism just to anti-discrimination law narrowly defined, but also because the current socio-political moment calls urgently for the legitimization of the study of antisemitism and how states and their legal systems deal with it.

STRUCTURE AND COVERAGE OF *ANTISEMITISM AND THE LAW*

Antisemitism and the Law is organized along axes of discrimination, identity, speech, state violence, and solidarity. This is quite a sensible approach and properly sets up classroom consideration not only of historical problems, but of current discussions—such as whether Jews should be seen as “white” and therefore properly excluded from current anti-subordination narratives and legal protections; whether American commitments to freedom of speech should preclude a reconsideration of group libel law; and whether anti-antisemitism initiatives should continue to focus on anti-discrimination statutes such as Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964.² The book provides a wealth of important cases—such as, for example, *Shaare Tefila Congregation v. Cobb*, 481 U.S. 615 (1987), which recognized Jews as a “race” for purposes of Section 1982 of the Civil Rights Act of 1866 (prohibiting racial discrimination in housing and property). It prompts important discussions with useful questions on topics such as Jews and whiteness, Zionism and racism, and campus antisemitism. Its important comparative component serves to acquaint American law students with the possibility of alternative approaches to the legal treatment of antisemitism. This is particularly evident in the book's discussion of how differently from other jurisdictions the United States treats group libel and hate speech.

The book wisely avoids adopting a single definition of antisemitism. Although it addresses, for example, the commonly-invoked IHRA working definition of antisemitism, Professor

Katz understands that it is unrealistic to “define” what antisemitism “is.” This is not to say that definitions are impossible or to criticize the IHRA definition. It is simply to commend the implicit recognition in *Antisemitism and the Law* that, as Professor (and former US Special Envoy to Monitor and Combat Antisemitism) Deborah Lipstadt has taught us, antisemitism is hydra-headed enough to resist simple categorization. The purpose of the definition matters, as do the contexts in which definitions are sought to be applied.

Antisemitism and the Law also properly makes readers think about who gets to decide what constitutes antisemitism, either as an overarching concept or in specific factual instances. In the section on how to define the law of return, for example, the book prompts discussion not only of Jewish identity but also of who should be deemed to have the authority to make judgments about who is a Jew and why. The question of authority to define identity has been raised often since the start of the Gaza war as mainstream Jewish organizations and Jewish op-ed writers claiming definitional authority “as a Jew” face off in debates over antisemitism and antizionism. In focusing on intra-Jewish conceptions of Jewishness, the book lets us think about religious Jewishness, cultural Jewishness, political Jewishness, what should count as authenticity in the assertion of Jewish identity, and whose interpretations of antisemitism should be recognized and when.

Another of the book’s important contributions is to recognize both the important role played by Jewish community advocacy in advancing legal protections for Jews, and how the issue of combating antisemitism can raise conflicts within Jewish communities themselves. In the book’s extensive retelling of the Sapiro defamation litigation against Henry Ford, for example, Professor Katz forces the reader to think about how differences in risk-aversity and attitudes toward assimilation can lead to conflicts among Jewish advocacy groups’ litigation strategies, and how there may be tensions between

the interests of individual Jews as plaintiffs and those of the broader Jewish community. It is important for both law students and legal advocates to think about whom advocates represent when they litigate cases with broader group implications beyond the interests of the individual plaintiff.

Finally, by focusing on how Émile Zola challenged French society in the Dreyfus affair and how the Catholic Church changed its approach to claims of Jews as the killers of Christ, the book also rightly recognizes that advocates for Jewish rights need allies. These days, I expect that the focus on allies would open the door to a discussion of what alliances with non-Jews and what effective advocacy for Jews can look like in times of challenge to traditional alliances and fissures within the Jewish community itself. At the same time as noting the necessity of law, *Antisemitism and the Law* also realistically recognizes that law alone cannot be enough. Even if advocacy groups are aligned, legal tools are uncertain, often insufficient, conflictual, and changeable. The proof of the pudding is ultimately in doctrinal interpretation and enforcement. High-level tensions between democratic values (such as free speech and anti-discrimination) can often lead to paralysis. So, in addition to legal initiatives, the discipline must attend specifically to ways of fostering anti-antisemitism alliances in times of socio-political fissure. The particular context must dictate the ways and means of alliance-building.

OPPORTUNITIES (AND A SUGGESTION) FOR THE FUTURE

Like other such resources, *Antisemitism and the Law* does not include everything. As the book itself recognizes, there is more in law that has had disparate impacts on Jews in different times and places than what is covered in its pages. But no law school casebook can, or should, seek to cover everything in its possible ambit. Printed casebooks are necessarily limited by their publication dates, publishers limit book sizes, and classes necessarily have limited focus. In this book,

Professor Katz makes the eminently reasonable decision to focus largely on discrimination-based public law, criminal law, and trust law cases addressing the enforceability of “Jewish clauses” hinging inheritance on Jewish identity or practice.

But particularly because Professor Katz sees *Antisemitism and the Law* not only as a casebook but as a tool for Jewish legal advocacy as well—and in light of the fast-moving geo-political contexts that currently affect Jewish-related issues—completeness and currency could afford particular advantages for the development of the field. Assessing the legal landscape, understanding scholarly differences, and gauging judicial temperature accurately would be much more efficient with access to an updated database of relevant materials produced through scholarly collaboration.

Students, instructors, and advocates could benefit from additional materials on public law, private law, administrative law, enforcement analysis, and the full scope of legal scholarship on law and antisemitism issues. In public law, for example, scholars have revealed the exclusionary impact of twentieth-century American immigration laws Jewish immigrants.³ Even canonical American copyright law precedent implicitly addresses Jewish stereotyping.⁴ Elsewhere, differential taxation and wealth taxes have had disproportionate impacts on Jews.⁵ Jews and antisemitism have also been the subject of presidential executive orders and policies in the United States.⁶ On the private law side, contract and property law offer opportunities to discuss historical Jewish exclusion. Despite the Supreme Court’s constitutional invalidation of racially restrictive covenants in *Shelley v. Kraemer*, 334 U.S. 1 (1948), news reports even today speak of attempts to create Jew-free towns.⁷

Query whether administrative law and enforcement patterns may also reveal relevant information about the treatment of Jews in the application of law. Today, judicial interpretations of existing statutes and enforcement choices are

key loci of legal developments—and, as the *Antisemitism and the Law* points out, reveal interpretive differences. Scholarship on the applicability of Title VI to antisemitism on campus reflects contrasting viewpoints. Recent litigation post-dating the book’s publication (such as *StandWithUs v. MIT*, currently being appealed) continue to reflect the differences in statutory interpretation flagged in *Antisemitism and the Law*. And, in light of the dissemination of antisemitic content on social media and via AI, there are discussions to be had about social media regulation, content moderation, and the legislative future of existing platform immunity from liability for most third-party content.⁸

Moreover, while the book foregrounds some comparative law, the comparative material covers a limited number of countries. *Antisemitism and the Law* also does not directly address international law. Yet I would expect students in a Law and Antisemitism class to be interested in discussing relevant international law developments—particularly in light of the pending case brought by South Africa against Israel under the Genocide Convention in the International Court of Justice.

All this makes me think that the *Antisemitism and the Law* casebook and project could benefit from a curated but broad-ranging and highly collaborative online database and teacher’s manual that would provide access to additional substantive examples, links, and collaborative comment sections and that would allow the casebook to be updated in real time. Such an iterative and evolutionary approach would both allow different instructors to connect the subject with their particular temporal, geographic, and social contexts, and also offer advocates timely resources at least as starting points for their efforts.

The legal advocacy and analysis enabled by such a database and teacher’s manual could also be significantly enhanced were it to integrate non-legal social science research, such as research in social psychology. Despite the rise of fields such as empirical legal studies, American law

professors and legal advocates, in my view, still pay insufficient attention to social science research and do not partner sufficiently with social scientists working in contested policy areas such as antisemitism research. Social scientists could benefit from understanding the scope of law on the subject, just as legal scholars and advocates could use the results of empirical research to find support for their arguments.

One of the areas in which social science research could be particularly helpful would be the study of what influences public uptake of antisemitic messaging. Social science needs to make further strides in understanding what works to change attitudes—we need something like a rigorous “antisemitism literacy” studies. The focus on public acceptance and normalization of antisemitism continues to be critical in light of the laissez faire approach adopted by various social media companies to content moderation since the 2025 presidential election and to the AI generation of antisemitic content. Admittedly, political scientists thus far have differed on what works to undermine the effects of disinformation and change public attitudes in the political context. The analogous question of what, if anything, works to advance media literacy is also contested. Nevertheless, it is important for law students, legal advocates, judges, and legislators to consider and assess the evolving research and think about the issue as it affects anti-antisemitism projects particularly. Similarly, deep understanding of evolving technology would also be beneficial for those seeking to reduce antisemitism production and uptake. For example, it would be useful for legal scholars and social scientists to think not only about social media regulation issues, but also about whether AI can be deployed as an effective tool in an anti-antisemitism project like the one Professor Katz has launched.

To be sure, adding a comprehensive database and the kind of collaborative updating I recommend here raise their own challenges—including questions of curation policies and protocols, selection of participants and materials, and

contractual issues involving the book’s publisher. The suggestion brings with it the problems and challenges associated with other open-source collaborative knowledge archive models such as Wikipedia. Still, it would advance Professor Katz’s broader global advocacy project if even some limited version of such a tool could be designed by Professor Katz and the Carolina Academic Press.

INCLUSION IN THE LAW SCHOOL CURRICULUM

Zooming out from the book itself, it is useful to think about its adoption in the American legal academy. While a good casebook foregrounding law is necessary and important today, there is still the question of how to persuade law school administrators to schedule such classes, how to find law professors to teach them, and how to attract law students to take them. The notion of “if you build it, they will come” has become a part of American mythology since the successful Hollywood film *Field of Dreams*, but thinking about how to build an anti-antisemitism curriculum in times of rising antisemitism can make us doubt that adage in this context. As of now, I am not aware of many American law schools including courses like this in their curricula. Some professors writing scholarship about antisemitism claim that their work has been excluded from publication for reasons of bias. To the extent that is the case, junior, pre-tenure scholars might conclude that their own professional ambitions would not be consistent with teaching and producing scholarship directly on law and antisemitism. Many law schools do not have sizable populations of Jewish students, and there is also the question of whether it is reasonable to assume that Jewish students today would necessarily enroll in such classes. Students can hesitate, for example, because they have antizionist attitudes and assume that the classes will not be consistent with their views, or are concerned about what potential employers might conclude about their views if their transcripts reflect enrollment in such classes.

As Professor Katz has suggested, law student organizations—predominantly but not necessarily just Jewish organizations—could be helpful in convincing law school administrations to schedule such classes. Suggestions from interested faculty would also doubtless carry weight. On the faculty front, senior level or even retired law professors could be tapped as instructors if other faculty were not available. Cooperation with faculty and graduate students from other relevant departments (such as History, Jewish or Religious Studies, Political Science, etc.) could help increase expertise, provide access to materials, and potentially reduce prep time for law faculty. The type of database and detailed teaching manual suggested above could help attract faculty reluctant to prepare an entirely new class in a new area with little guidance. It would also be helpful to connect faculty teaching such classes across law schools and jurisdictions.

As for attracting students, meeting administratively required minimum enrollment goals is often difficult for niche-interest classes. This might be particularly the case in schools with a small number of Jewish students. However, Jewish student identity is not preclusive; Professor Katz himself has reported that many of his Law and Antisemitism students have been Catholic. Since framing and PR are important in describing new initiatives, it may prove fruitful to pay careful attention to the course description and clearly show the connections between the coverage in the class and the broader curriculum. To the extent that an instructor wished to include a clinical component to the class, students interested in clinical litigation experience could be attracted to the class. Similarly, if the instructor were willing to supervise written work, students generally interested in legal writing opportunities might enroll. Moreover, a broad invitation to students with a promise that well-trained faculty would be able to handle potentially difficult and tendentious issues sensitively, with respect and good classroom control, could attract students with a

diversity of viewpoints. Interest could also be increased were a scholarly workshop featuring antisemitism scholars established by faculty or student groups.

In short, sustained attention must be given to establishing, staffing, and highlighting courses on the legal treatment of antisemitism. Professor Katz's book is the necessary first step in inviting that to happen.

ZOOMING OUT—WHY NOW?

Today, antisemitic actions and violence have notably increased. This is the case even in the United States—which has long been lauded by American Jews as exemplary in its treatment of Jews. In 2024, the FBI reported that almost seventy percent of all religion-based hate crimes focused on Jews.⁹ Recent assaults against Jews as Jews have included attacks on synagogues, the murder of two young Israeli embassy employees outside the Capital Jewish Museum, an arson attack at a Jewish governor's house, a flame-thrower attack on a group of Jews, vandalism and defacement of buildings with Nazi iconography, and exhausting amounts of explicit and classic antisemitism online.¹⁰ One survey reports that ninety-one percent of American Jews feel less safe as Jews as a result of recent violent attacks.¹¹

Perhaps the most striking thing about this increase in antisemitic incidents is how it fits into today's public discourse about antisemitism and Jews in the United States. Despite some continuing social exclusion and anti-Jewish bias after the Second World War, the late twentieth and early twenty-first century saw a significant decline in overt anti-Jewish expression of the kind epitomized by Father Coughlin's popular antisemitic radio broadcasts prior to the war.¹² Open expression of antisemitism in mainstream public discourse became socially unacceptable and shunted off to the rants of fringe white nationalists.

Now, by contrast, antisemitism—whatever its metes and bounds—is being increasingly

normalized and mainstreamed in the United States. And, contrary to intuitions about prejudice among the elderly, “anti-Jewish prejudice is growing in popularity among the young.”¹³ Expressions of concern by Jews about antisemitism and the state of the Jewish people worldwide have been minimized and met with charges of exaggeration, hyperbole, and “weaponization” assertedly to distract public attention from Israeli villainy. Antisemitism has been decoupled from invidious discrimination in many strands of public debate. It appears to have been leached both of its breadth and complexity and—critically—of moral opprobrium in much public discourse. What would have seemed unthinkable in the American public sphere a decade ago is now even lauded by many as courageous speaking of truth to power. When anti-Jewish opinions are deemed justified, moral opprobrium is deemed unwarranted.

The issue of antisemitism has been instrumentalized and politicized, both on the left and the right of the political spectrum. The Trump Administration has used antisemitism as a tool to fight a broader ideological attempt to discipline universities deemed too politically progressive. The Administration’s reliance on antisemitism as the *raison d’être* of its attack on universities and progressive initiatives has associated Jews—regardless of their politics—with the Administration’s broader policies and has given oxygen to the argument that Jewishness is racist and illiberal. Simultaneously with the Trump Administration’s anti-antisemitism stance, the recent past offers striking evidence of the normalization of antisemitic discourse in right-wing politics.¹⁴

On the left, foregrounding objections to the Trump Administration’s appropriation of antisemitism as a political issue have diminished full recognition of threats to Jews. Since the Hamas attacks on Israeli civilians on October 7, 2023, and the subsequent war in Gaza, progressive students at many American universities, including Jews, have staged demonstrations and encampments objecting to American support for

Israel, decrying the state as a racist, colonialist enterprise engaged in genocide and sometimes even celebrating Hamas and justifying its actions as necessary resistance. Objections to the Trump Administration, calls for academic freedom, as well as interpretations of law that condemn Israel for genocide under international law have led many progressives to ignore or downplay the increasing dangers worldwide of being, or being identified as, Jewish. The development of a binary discourse sharply distinguishing antisemitism from antizionism has led to an intensely emotional politics regarding the Middle East, effectively reduced the focus of discussions about antisemitism to the one’s views of Israel, and justified ignoring antisemitism. This has not only emboldened the use of antizionism as a cover for explicit antisemitism, but it has also led to fissures and fragmentation within the American Jewish community, often along political lines.¹⁵

The pincer effect of rising antisemitism on the right and hesitancy from the left to acknowledge the full extent of dangers to Jews make Professor Katz’s project extraordinarily timely and important today. Questions about what antisemitism accomplishes in modern days and for whom, what “antisemitism” means and encompasses, who defines it and how broadly, why it matters, what defines the boundaries between antisemitism and antizionism, and how law deals with “the Jewish question” are critical contemporary issues we need to tackle. This is imperative not only for the protection of Jews, but because antisemitism—like anti-Black racism and misogyny—undermines the broader project of American democracy. Law is necessarily an important locus for examination of these issues.

Ultimately, the nascent discipline of law and antisemitism must straddle internal fissures, external tensions, technological challenges, and curricular competition. Still, today’s complicated realities require a multi-faceted approach to the reduction of antisemitism. A focus both on law and on alliance-building must be part of that

approach. Professor Katz's groundbreaking work in *Antisemitism and the Law* is a necessary and commendable step in trying to address the

present moment's foundational challenges for both Jews and American democracy. May it be successful!

ENDNOTES

- 1 See, for example, Deborah E. Lipstadt, *Antisemitism Here and Now* (New York: Shocken Books, 2019).
- 2 Title VI prohibits discrimination on the basis of race, color, and national origin in programs and activities receiving federal financial assistance. See "Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964," Civil Rights Division, US Department of Justice, <https://www.justice.gov/crt/fcs/TitleVI>. It has often been used to prohibit discrimination in education.
- 3 See, for example, Felice Batlan, "The Displaced Persons Act of 1948 and Home-Grown Antisemitism," *Lewis & Clark L. Rev.* 1057 (2024).
- 4 See, for example, Jasmine Abdel-khalik, "Scènes à Faire as Identity Trait Stereotyping," *Bus. Entrepreneurship & Tax L. Rev.* 241 (2018).
- 5 See generally Simon A. Waldman, "Erdogan, the AKP and Antisemitism," ISGAP Flashpoint, June 1, 2016, <https://isgap.org/flashpoint/erdogan-the-akp-and-antisemitism>, discussing the Turkish *varlik vergisi*.
- 6 See, for example, the Biden Administration's *U.S. National Strategy to Counter Antisemitism*, May 2023, <https://bidenwhitehouse.archives.gov/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/U.S.-National-Strategy-to-Counter-Antisemitism.pdf>.
- 7 See, for example, Debra Kramer, "The Founders of This New Development Say You Must Be White to Live There," *New York Times*, Aug. 20, 2025, <https://www.nytimes.com/2025/08/19/realestate/arkansas-white-housing-return-to-land.html>.
- 8 See 47 U.S.C. § 230(c)(1), providing, subject to statutory exceptions, that service providers and users may not "be treated as the publisher or speaker of any information provided by another information content provider."
- 9 See, for example, "Anti-Jewish Hate Crimes Comprised Nearly 70% of all Religion-Based Hate Crimes in 2024, FBI reports," Anti-Defamation League, August 5, 2025, <https://www.adl.org/resources/press-release/anti-jewish-hate-crimes-comprised-nearly-70-all-religion-based-hate-crimes>.
- 10 See, for example, Callum Sutherland, "The Rise of Antisemitism and Political Violence in the U.S.," *Time*, June 2, 2025, <https://time.com/7287941/rise-of-antisemitism-political-violence-in-united-states/>.
- 11 See *The State of Antisemitism in America 2025*, American Jewish Committee, 2025, https://www.ajc.org/AntisemitismReport2025?utm_campaign=SOAR2025&utm_source=AJC.org&utm_medium=globalvoice&utm_content=SOAR25gv.
- 12 See generally "Antisemitism in American History," Anti-Defamation League, accessed May 3, 2026, <https://antisemitism.adl.org/antisemitism-in-american-history/>.
- 13 Yair Rosenberg, "The More I'm around Young People, the More Panicked I Am," *The Atlantic*, December 15, 2025, <https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/2025/12/american-anti-semitism-youth/685261/>.
- 14 See, for example, Tom Nichols, "The Republican Party Has a Nazi Problem," *The Atlantic*, February 23, 2026, <https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/2026/04/republican-party-nazi-problem/686055/>.
- 15 For an early discussion of progressive antisemitism focusing on the United Kingdom, see David Hirsh, *Contemporary Left Antisemitism* (New York: Routledge, 2017).

