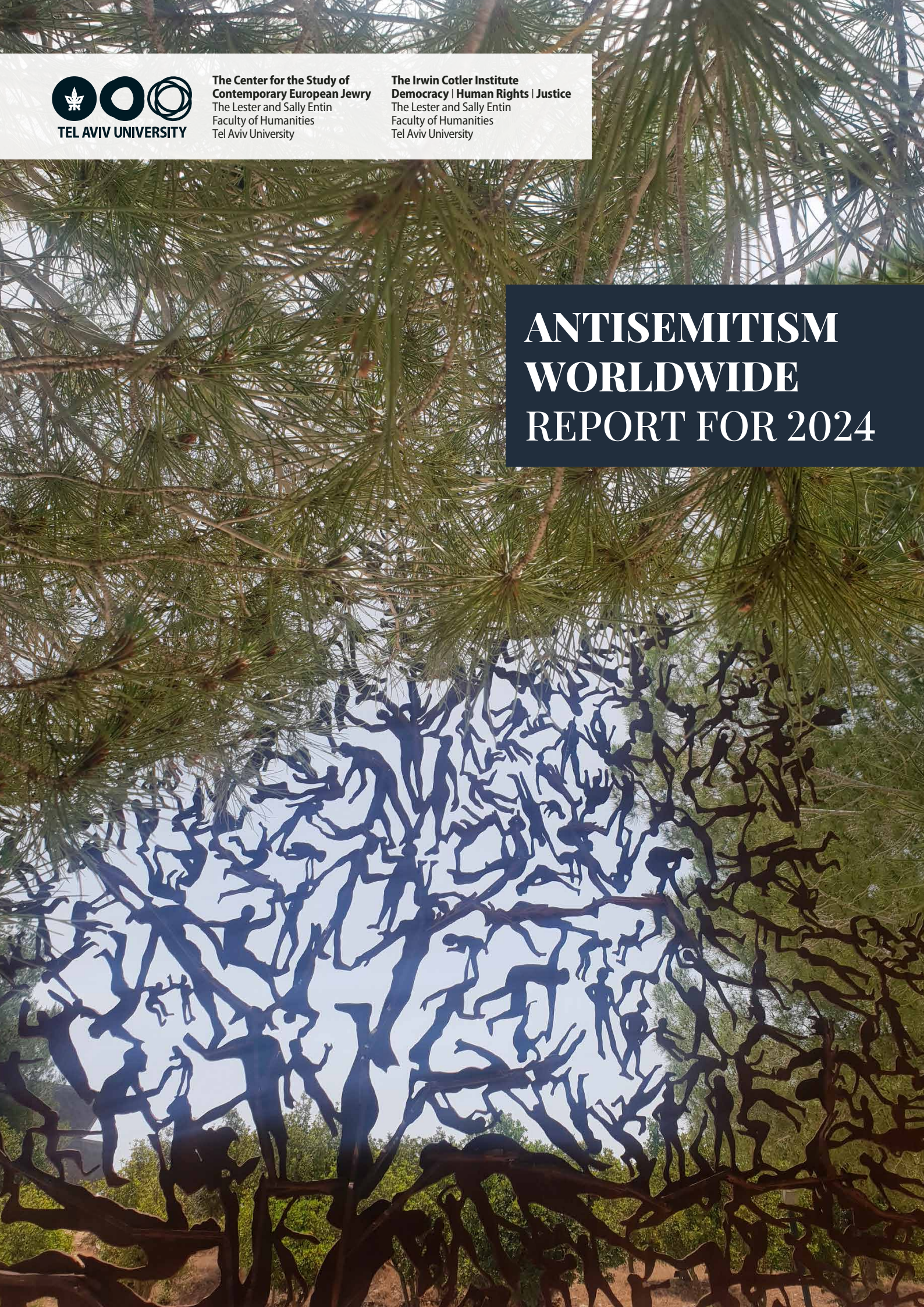




**The Center for the Study of  
Contemporary European Jewry**  
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**The Irwin Cotler Institute  
Democracy | Human Rights | Justice**  
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# ANTISEMITISM WORLDWIDE REPORT FOR 2024





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**The Center for the Study of Contemporary European Jewry at Tel Aviv University** supports research on Jewish history, culture, politics, and interfaith relations. It publishes the annual For a Righteous Cause Report and co-publishes the flagship annual Antisemitism Worldwide Report. Every year, the Center organizes three seminars on Jewish affairs that are open to the public and publishes eight issues of Perspectives – analytic essays on contemporary Jewish life and thought.

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**The Irwin Cotler Institute at Tel Aviv University** is devoted to instruction, training, and policy-oriented research on human rights, democracy, justice, and the fight against antisemitism and racism at large. It co-publishes the flagship annual Antisemitism Worldwide Report.

The Institute expresses its deepest gratitude to **Richard and Elaine Dubrovsky** and **Sara Vered** for their support of our work.

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The views and opinions expressed by the authors in this report do not necessarily reflect those of the Center for Contemporary European Jewry or the Irwin Cotler Institute.

Cover Image: Yad Vashem, May 2024, “For Is the Tree of the Field Man” statue by Zadok Ben-David,

Photo by Uriya Shavit

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# FOREWORD

The scene at the Australian parliament in Canberra on October 21, 2024, was unprecedented. As King Charles III finished his inaugural speech as King of Australia, the highlight of his five-day visit to the realm, indigenous independent Senator Lidia Thorpe shouted at him: “You committed genocide against our people. Give us our land back. Give us what you stole from us – our bones, our skulls, our babies, our people.”

While widely criticized for her discourtesy, and eventually censored by the Senate, Thorpe’s words reflect the unease some in the West feel about the colonial heritages of their countries. Dealing with those heritages often proves a painful task that calls for painful personal choices. Some, like Thorpe, direct their discomfort and anger bluntly inward. Others choose the easier path of deflecting their sentiments elsewhere. To assuage their dissonance, they charge Israel with being a usurping colonial project and, thus, an illegitimate state. To make the deflection of their discontent all the more easier, they treat fellow-Jewish citizens and local Jewish institutions as metonyms for Israel.

The Antisemitism Worldwide report for 2024 informs of a decline in the number of incidents in comparison to 2023 in several countries with major Jewish populations, including France, the United Kingdom, and Germany; a moderate increase in the number of incidents in several other countries, including the United States; and a steep, dramatic increase in manifestations of Jew-hatred in Australia.

While it is far from the only reason for this development, a direct link ties between the failure of Australia to formulate a coherent and morally defensible national narrative about the circumstances of its formation and the repeated failure of its administrators, law enforcers, and educators to call antisemitism by its name and to fight it effectively – a failure indicated by the data presented in this Report (p. 21).

Assaulting fellow-Jewish citizens, based merely on their identity, for the actions or existence of Israel is a form of generalizing prejudice against a minority group. It is antisemitism. Call it by a different name and it will still constitute a racist-motivated criminal offense.

Delegitimizing the right of Israel, and only the right of Israel, to exist based on the argument that it is a colonial project is also a form of antisemitism, although for different reasons. Jews lived in the Land of Israel for centuries before they were expelled, and maintained a continued presence there throughout the ages. When Zionism emerged and Jews began to migrate into the land, they purchased the territories on which they settled with good money from their owners. They later gained their right to a state in parts of their ancestral homeland through a United Nations General Assembly resolution. This is a very different historical experience than the colonial experience that brought into existence Australia, as well as Canada, the United States, and other liberal-democracies. To lobby against Zionism as a colonial injustice from the campuses, parliaments, studios, or streets of any of those countries is not just the definition

of irony and ignorance, it is also to manifest double standards against one state and one state only, a state that just happens to be the national home of the Jewish people.

A source of encouragement is that not a few politicians in the West, including in Australia, recognize this absurdity and are not shy to criticize it, as suggested by our interview with a courageous Australian MP, Julian Martin Leeser, who commits to policy changes (p. 30).

Across the world, even where they declined on the comparative annual scale, levels of antisemitism remained alarmingly high in 2024 when compared to pre-October 7 days. Yet, contrary to common conceptions, the data presented in this Report also suggest that antisemitic incidents reached their peak in the immediate aftermath of October 7 rather than at the more advanced stages of the war in Gaza and after Israel lost much capital in the courts of international public opinion.

A sad reckoning is thus required: antisemitism has raised its most violent and ugly head when the State of the Jews appeared most fragile, not when it appeared most defiant. This revelation calls for investigation as to whether some of the antisemitic tsunami of October-November 2023 resulted from a global coordinated effort that sought to sow discord in Western societies as well as intimidate the friends of Israel at a time when it was under existential threat.

This Report has called over and over again for the fight against antisemitism to present transparent objectives and to advance the necessary actions to accomplish them. Our study of police work informs that in some cities with major Jewish populations, less than 10 percent of complaints filed in 2021-2023 with police departments resulted in arrests, suggesting an even smaller number of indictments and convictions for antisemitic crimes (p. 28).

Where those who commit hate crimes go unpunished, there is little to discourage others from committing similar offenses. We are aware of how under-staffed, under-budgeted, and under-appreciated law enforcement agencies are everywhere and their need to prioritize their efforts. Yet we caution them not to undermine the gravity of hate crimes that are too often categorized as minor offenses. As our special project “It happened one day” informs (p. 41), incidents such as verbal antisemitic assaults or the drawing of swastikas on the walls of synagogues have an unsettling effect on their victims and deprive them of their basic right to equality, freedom, dignity, and security.

The fight against antisemitism does not require at the present time pompous speeches, cocktail-parties, lavish conferences, and grotesque award ceremonies with Hollywood celebrities. More than anything else, it needs determined policing and prosecutorial action.

The Report features several in-depth original studies on diverse manifestations of antisemitism. One alarming aspect of contemporary Western politics is the normalization of leaders who articulate antisemitic notions explicitly or through dog whistling. An example that went almost unnoticed is the rise of Remigijus Žemaitaitis, who became a king maker in Lithuanian politics after repeatedly poisoning its political discourse with deplorable anti-Jewish statements that echoed dark pages from the history of his country. An analysis of the content of his rhetoric and the roots of his appeal shows how easily the instruments of democracy can be abused by agents of hate and chaos (p. 53).



## FOREWORD

No Jew with any sense of history, or pride, would ever legitimize Žemaitaitis or the small party he leads. Other cases in other countries are more complicated: How should Jewish organizations, and the Israeli government, deal with political parties with a history of antisemitism and racism if their leaders disavow those legacies?

The dilemma came to the fore in recent months after the Minister of Diaspora Affairs and Combating Antisemitism, Amichai Chikli, invited leaders of far-right populist European parties to a conference in Jerusalem. In response, American and Jewish leaders, as well as Israeli President Yitzhak Herzog, boycotted the event. The inexperienced Chikli heads a gratuitous ministry and lacks the intellectual depth or moral clarity to deal with complex issues. Jewish communities and leaders are indeed wise to distance themselves from him.

Still, the banning of elected political leaders cannot be capricious and has to be based on rigid and universally applied criteria. Political parties with antisemitic legacies should be encouraged, rather than discouraged, to reform. We recommend the adoption of two benchmarks. First, no refutation of an antisemitic legacy by a political party will be considered sincere unless it involves the unmitigated expulsion of any member, whether senior or junior, involved in antisemitic or racist speech or action, and a total rejection of antisemitic or racist narratives. Second, political parties with antisemitic legacies will be legitimized only after they have demonstrated the sincerity of their commitment to reforming through a significant period, spanning at least two election campaigns.

The sadistic nature of the October 7 attack cannot be separated from the dehumanization of Jews by Hamas, and its dehumanization of Jews cannot be separated from the antisemitism integrated into its ideology, as reflected in its Charter from 1988. While in Israeli prison as a young unmarried man, the devilish mastermind of the attack, Yahya Sinwar, wrote a piece of fiction, a political novel that exposed the nuances of his distorted worldview. In Ireland and other countries, bookstores have, since October 7, distributed online and print versions of this book. For some in the West, who are not appalled by the butchering of babies or the raping of women, the book is considered a peek into the mind of a freedom fighter.

A first-of-its-kind study in this Report, based on a reading of the book in the original Arabic version, reveals the depth of blinding, vicious Jew-hatred that guided the young Sinwar. The pathology is familiar: before he became the mass murderer of Jews, Sinwar was an obsessive hater of Jews – Jews, not Zionists. The study highlights once again the need to make the uprooting of antisemitism from Arab societies an aspect of any future diplomatic process (p. 65).

A study of how American student newspapers in Ivy League universities reported and opined about the conflict in Gaza raises concerns of double-standards applied against Israel and pro-Israel activists, and demonstrates how mainstreamed the denial of the right of the Jewish people to self-determination has become (p. 77). Equally disturbing is to learn about the self-indulgence of students on certain so-called elite campuses and their ignorance of world affairs.

Antisemitism does not need Jews to thrive. The study of its proliferation in Pakistan, the only Muslim country with nuclear weapons, presents an alarming picture of the depth of state-

sponsored Jew-hatred there. It also shows how antisemitic tropes have migrated in Pakistani texts also to dehumanizing depictions of Hindus (p. 89).

The emergence of antisemitism on the far-left is not a new phenomenon. The Communist Soviet Union oppressed its Jewry and, at times, applied Jew-hatred as a means to rally support. In present-day Western politics, radical-socialist, pro-Putin, and anti-Israel views often mix in one nasty pot. The rapid rise of Sarah Wagenknecht in Germany is an example that demonstrates, despite her equally rapid and blessed fall, the gradual erosion of consensus in the country about liberal values, Holocaust remembrance, and support for Israel (p. 99).

Surveys in different societies suggest how little school pupils know about the Holocaust and the history of the Second World War. A study of Dutch textbooks and history classes reveals the fundamental of the problem: In today's schools, history classes, in general, are marginalized, and where history is taught, the focus is not on the teaching of facts and actual relevant contexts (p. 105).

Several leading envoys for the fight against antisemitism, past and present, detail in special articles written for the Report the actions they have taken and their thoughts on what needs to be done now, and urgently so. Their words reflect the firmness of governmental commitments across the world to defending the right of Jews to security and freedom, but also that firm governmental commitments are not enough. Those commitments must be accompanied by firm actions (p. 117).

The past year saw a plethora of critically acclaimed films about the Holocaust and post-Holocaust antisemitism. Some did well also in the box offices. Our expert roundtable on the representation of the Shoah in films is a useful filmographic survey for educators. It is also a guide cautioning about the many caveats of this genre as an informative and educational tool (p. 137).

There would not be Nazism without antisemitism, but Nazism was never only about antisemitism. It was also about the rejection of liberalism, dictatorial rule, bullying, erasing sovereign states, and the brutal unification of an imagined *volk*. This is why students of history and people of conscious opposed unambiguously fascist Russia's unprovoked war against Ukraine in 2022 and the crimes against humanity it has committed ever since.

More than three years after he started the war, Vladimir Putin's list of failures places him in a special historical category. His plan to occupy Ukraine – in three days or three years – collapsed. His military suffered dozens of thousands of casualties, showed embarrassing levels of incompetence, and humiliatingly had to rely on North Korean soldiers. The borders of the NATO alliance with Russia doubled. For the first time since the Second World War, Russian territory has been occupied for a sustained period by another country. Syria was abruptly lost after investing billions of dollars and losing hundreds of Russian lives there. Once a powerhouse of culture and science, Russia has become a pariah, failed, and degraded state, from which hundreds of thousands of the best and brightest fled in their desire for freedom and prospects.

Other than that, Putin proved himself a genius strategist.

## FOREWORD

All of this makes the decision of America's President Donald Trump to come to Putin's rescue all the more troubling and shocking. Trump's undignified treatment of Ukraine's courageous and democratically elected President Volodymyr Zelensky brought even to the minds of some adamant supporters the specter of the liberal betrayal of Czechoslovakia in 1938, which convinced Hitler he could get away with anything.

But whereas the black umbrella went down in history infamously as a symbol of naivety, Trump's and his parrots' anti-Ukraine vulgar bent risks going down in history as the day in which one of the greatest nations gave up on its global leadership role and its commitments to democracy, decency, loyalty, and God fearing policies.

Within a few weeks in office, Trump did not make one enemy of America a friend, yet has alienated many long-time allies. His assault on the constitution, humanitarian commitments, and science has damaged the global standing of his nation, perhaps irreparably.

The detachment of the new administration from core democratic norms is worrying news for America's Jewry. Jews were embraced in the United States more than in any other major diaspora and prospered there more than in any other major diaspora because it has been democratic and pluralistic. The future of American Jewry is intertwined with the fate of the Union's constitutional guarantees.

Trump is surrounded by a strange mixture of vicious antisemites and people with deep affection for the Jewish people and for Israel. But, in historical perspective, for Jews, who of the two, if any, truly represents him and will prevail is not the crucial issue. What is crucial is that Trump is no democrat. He inspired a violent insurrection in 2020, and would have most likely inspired another one had he lost again. He is a threat to what made America great, again and again, and thus a threat to the continuation of what made American Jewry great, again and again.

It will be foolish, though, to associate America's troubles with one person or one side of the political aisle. Trump is the symptom, not the illness. Some of America's troubles frighteningly resemble those of the Soviet Union from the 1980s, before it broke down: Huge national debts, in part caused by military over-extension (the disastrous mishandling of the occupation of post-Saddam Iraq; Trump, like Obama, was of the few to oppose the war in real-time); declining life expectancies; the rotation of power between old and incompetent leaders; epidemics of addictions; outdated infrastructure; a politicized judiciary; and broken academia that neglects the core commitment to merit and facts. To this comparative and not exhaustive list should be added the heated partisan socio-cultural division, which power-thirsty, morally boneless, and eager-to-please tech-billionaires are likely to cynically widen and celebrate in the next few years.

It does not look promising. American society has proven in the past a remarkable capacity to resurrect, unite, innovate, and lead. Yet the prospect of its continued decline, and possibly worse, must be taken seriously, especially by a people – the Jewish people – who have historically shown a capacity to ignore looming catastrophes.

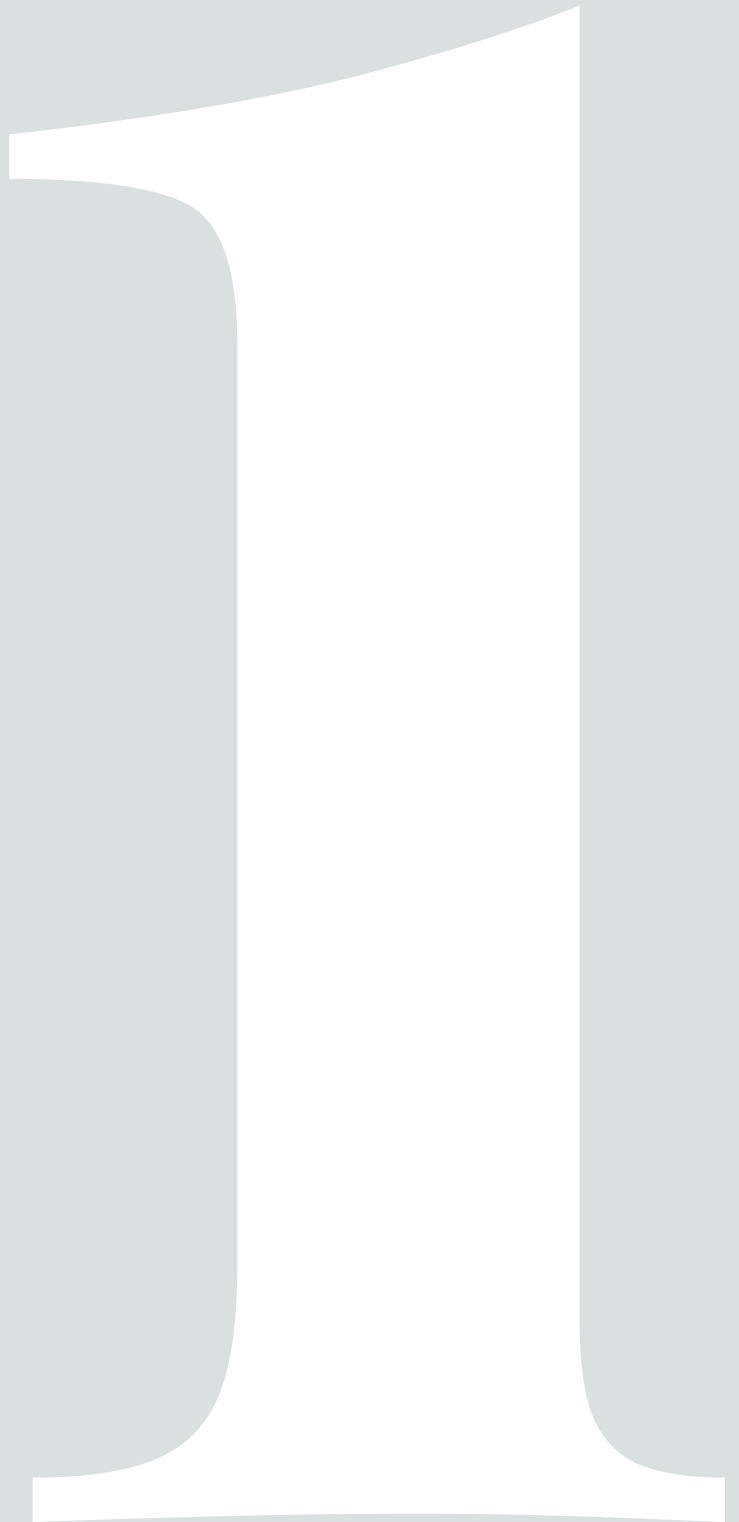
It is difficult to deal with these realities at a time when Israel itself is facing a protracted crisis. Led by an incompetent government embroiled in corruption scandals that refuses to take responsibility for being at the helm on October 7, and is too often ill-intending, Israel

is currently witnessing a retreat on almost any aspect of national life. The inner dangers its existence faces are very real.

Yet Zionist Israelis are unlikely to give up on the great enterprise of which they are part. They will not despair not only because history has taught them how crucial the existence and prosperity of their state is, but also because they recognize the courage and the promise it still bears.

# **SECTION 1**

## **GLOBAL OVERVIEW**





# ANTISEMITIC INCIDENTS WORLDWIDE 2024

The data on antisemitism worldwide for 2024, based on information provided to the Report by dozens of police departments, specialized agencies and organizations that monitor and combat antisemitism, Jewish communities, Jewish leaders, and media organizations, inform of an increase in comparison to 2023 in the total number of incidents in several countries, including Australia, Canada, Argentina, Brazil, Spain, Italy and Switzerland, and a decrease in several other countries, including France, Britain, Germany, Mexico and South Africa. New York, the largest Jewish city in the world, saw an increase, and so did Chicago, home to the third largest Jewish population in the United States, and several other American cities with significant Jewish populations, while other American cities saw decreases.

As in 2023, the state of antisemitism worldwide in 2024 was impacted by the war in Gaza, and the number of incidents in every country with major Jewish populations remained alarmingly high in comparison to pre-October 7, 2023, days. Still, our data suggest that contrary to common conceptions, antisemitism has not grown linearly and steadily since October 7. Rather, as the comparative analyses below demonstrate, the peak in the current wave of antisemitism was registered in the immediate aftermath of October 7, at a time when Israel seemed most weak and existentially endangered and before it had lost much capital in the courts of international public opinion.

## United States (Jewish population 6,000,000)

The New York Police Department (NYPD) and the Chicago Police Department (CPD) registered more incidents in 2024 compared to 2023. The two cities have the largest and third-largest Jewish populations in the United States – approximately 1.5 million and 292,000, respectively. In 2024, the NYPD recorded 344 anti-Jewish hate crime reports, compared to 325 in 2023 and 264 in 2022. Of the 344 reported incidents in 2024, 68 occurred between October and December, compared to 159 during the same period in 2023 and 59 during the same period in 2022.<sup>1</sup>

In Chicago, the CPD recorded 79 anti-Jewish hate crime reports in 2024 compared to 50 in 2023 and 39 in 2022. The number of reported anti-Jewish assaults was six in 2024, compared to nine in 2023 and nine in 2022. Of the 79 anti-Jewish hate crime reports in 2024, nine occurred

<sup>1</sup> New York Police Department, “Hate Crimes Reports and Dashboard,” <https://www.nyc.gov/site/nypd/stats/reports-analysis/hate-crimes.page>.

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between October and December 2024, compared to 33 during the same period in 2023 and 12 in the same period in 2022.<sup>2</sup>

Data for anti-Jewish hate crimes in 2024 in Los Angeles from the Los Angeles Police Department (LAPD) was unavailable at the time the Report went to print. Los Angeles is the city with the second largest Jewish population in the United States. The LAPD, which recorded 165 anti-Jewish hate crimes in 2023 and 86 in 2022,<sup>3</sup> was unable to explain why it was unable to produce the data this year.

In 2024, Austin (Texas) police recorded 15 antisemitic hate crimes, compared to six in 2023 and four in 2022.

In Denver (Colorado), Denver police recorded 31 antisemitic hate crimes in 2024, compared to nine in 2023 and 12 in 2022.

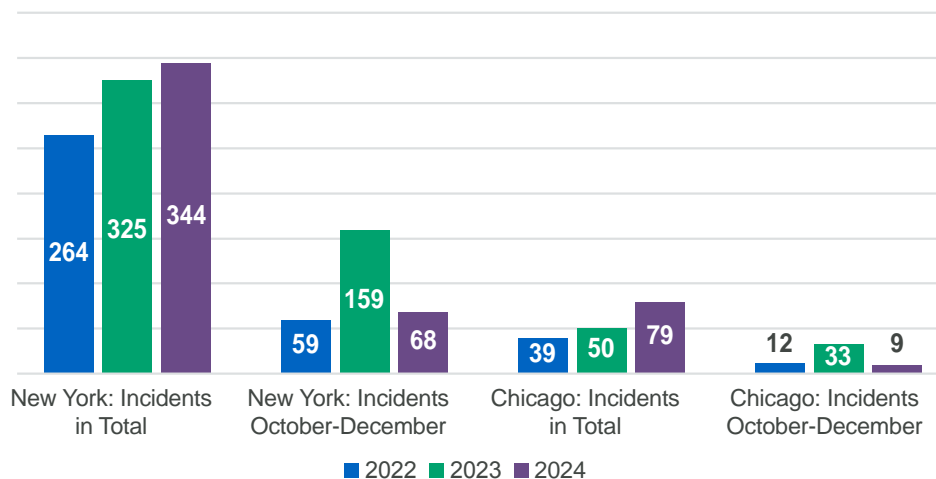
In Seattle (Washington), police recorded five antisemitic hate crimes in 2024, compared to 12 in 2023 and six in 2022.

In Portland (Oregon), police recorded 12 antisemitic hate crimes in 2024, compared to 15 in 2023 and five in 2022.

In San Francisco (California), police recorded 12 antisemitic hate crimes in 2024, compared to 23 in 2023 and five in 2022.

In Washington, D.C., police recorded 20 antisemitic hate crimes in 2024, compared to 36 in 2023 and nine in 2022.

### Antisemitic Hate Crimes in New York and Chicago 2022-2024



<sup>2</sup> Chicago Police Department, “Hate Crime Dashboard,” <https://www.chicagopolice.org/statistics-data/data-dashboards/hate-crime-dashboard/>, and Chicago Police Department, “Hate Crimes Annual Reports,” <https://www.chicagopolice.org/statistics-data/statistical-reports/hate-crimes-annual-reports/>.

<sup>3</sup> City of Los Angeles, “Crime Data from 2020 to Present,” [https://data.lacity.org/Public-Safety/Crime-Data-from-2020-to-Present/2nrs-mtv8/about\\_data](https://data.lacity.org/Public-Safety/Crime-Data-from-2020-to-Present/2nrs-mtv8/about_data).



## ANTISEMITIC INCIDENTS WORLDWIDE 2024

University campuses continued to be a focal point of antisemitic incidents in the United States in 2024, with Jewish students facing harassment, threats, and vandalism. The inability of university administrations to effectively confront hate at their institutions has prompted federal investigations into allegations of discrimination and misconduct.

Among the incidents, in December, a Jewish Columbia University student was assaulted near the university campus by a man who made antisemitic remarks. At the University of Oregon in November, a residence hall on campus was defaced with swastikas and antisemitic flyers slid under residents' doors while posters supporting Jewish students and Israeli hostages were torn down and damaged. At UC Berkley, riots erupted over a visiting Israeli speaker as pro-Palestinian activists spit on Jewish students and banged on doors and broke windows of the building holding the event.<sup>4</sup>

Throughout the country, Jewish businesses, institutions, and synagogues were targeted in incidents of vandalism. Popular Kosher restaurants in Washington, D.C., and New York City had their windows smashed by vandals, while in Los Angeles, perpetrators damaged several Jewish-owned businesses.<sup>5</sup>

Among the synagogues targeted by vandals were the Kahal Ahavas Yisroel Synagogue in Los Angeles, which was attacked twice in July, and a Chabad synagogue in Pittsburgh, where vandals painted pro-Palestinian graffiti, including an inverted red triangle used by Hamas to indicate Israeli targets.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Vita Fellig, "NYPD Investigating Attack on Jewish Columbia Student as Hate Crime," *JNS*, December 12, 2024, <https://www.jns.org/nypd-investigating-attack-on-jewish-columbia-student-as-hate-crime/>; "Antisemitism Incidents at University of Oregon Campus Being Investigated," *KPIC* 4, November 15, 2024, <https://kpic.com/news/local/anti-semitism-incident-at-university-of-oregon-campus-being-investigated>; Daniel Edelson, "Violent Riots Erupt at UC Berkeley over Israeli Speaker," *Ynetnews*, February 27, 2024, <https://www.ynetnews.com/article/hyqen9ont>.

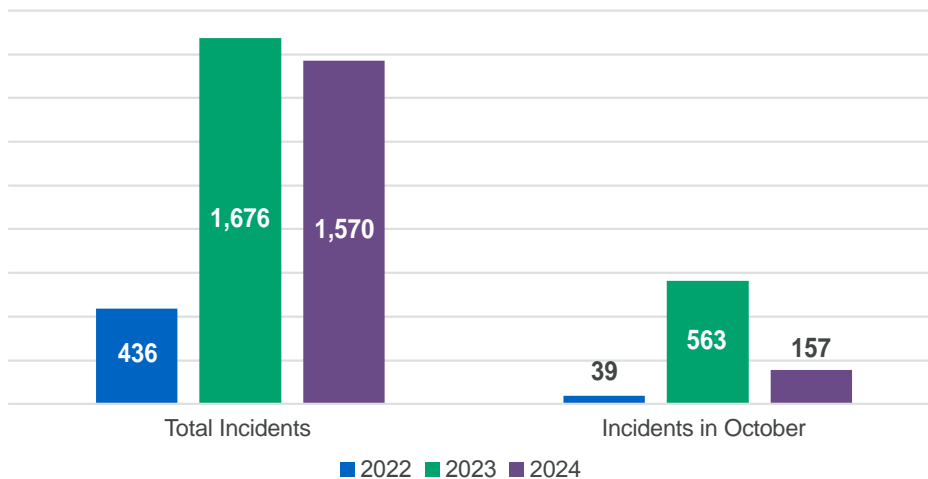
<sup>5</sup> Kevin Sheehan and Jorge Fitz-Gibbon, "Popular NYC Kosher Restaurant Targeted by Vandals," *New York Post*, May 15, 2024, <https://nypost.com/2024/05/15/us-news/popular-nyc-kosher-deli-has-window-smashed-by-vandals/>; TOI Staff, "DC Kosher Restaurant Has Windows Smashed on Eve of Kristallnacht Anniversary," *Times of Israel*, November 10, 2024, <https://www.timesofisrael.com/dc-kosher-restaurant-has-windows-smashed-on-eve-of-kristallnacht-anniversary/>; "Several Jewish Businesses Vandalized in Pico-Robertson," *NBC Los Angeles*, November 5, 2024, <https://www.nbclosangeles.com/news/local/ewish-businesses-vandalized-pico-robertson/3553032/>.

<sup>6</sup> Laura Pozen, "LAPD Investigating Hate Crime after Hollywood Synagogue Vandalized for Second Time in Recent Weeks," *CBS News Los Angeles*, July 28, 2024, <https://www.cbsnews.com/losangeles/news/lapd-investigating-hate-crime-after-hollywood-synagogue-vandalized-for-second-time-in-recent-weeks/>, and Ron Kampeas, "Red Triangle, Symbol Associated with Hamas, Is Painted on Pittsburgh Synagogue Building," *JTA*, July 29, 2024, <https://www.jta.org/2024/07/29/united-states/red-triangle-symbol-associated-with-hamas-is-painted-on-pittsburgh-synagogue-building>.

## France (Jewish population 442,000)

In cooperation with the French Ministry of Interior, the Service de Protection de la Communauté Juive (SPJC) recorded 1,570 antisemitic incidents in 2024, compared to 1,676 in 2023 and 436 in 2022.<sup>7</sup> Of the incidents recorded in 2024, 157 occurred in October 2024, compared to 563 in the same month in 2023 and 39 in the same month in 2022.

**Antisemitic Incidents in France  
2022-2024**



One-hundred-and-six antisemitic incidents involving physical violence were recorded in 2024, compared to 85 in 2023 and 43 in 2022. Among the acts of violence was the rape of a 12-year-old Jewish girl in the Paris suburb of Courbevoie by three boys around the same age who sexually assaulted her while threatening her and making antisemitic remarks.<sup>8</sup>

The 88 incidents of vandalism constituted a decrease from the 102 incidents in 2023, but was higher than the 48 incidents in 2022. Almost 65% of the incidents recorded by the SPJC in 2024 targeted people, either through physical violence, threatening behavior, and targeted letters or leaflets, rather than property. Some incidents involving properties were extreme, including the arson attacks on synagogues in Rouen and La Grand Motte in May 2024 and August 2024, respectively.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>7</sup> For the SPJC’s annual antisemitic incidents reports, see: <https://www.spcj.org/>.

<sup>8</sup> “French Teenagers Charged with Rape and Antisemitic Violence on 12-Year-Old Girl,” *Le Monde*, June 19, 2024, [https://www.lemonde.fr/en/france/article/2024/06/19/french-teenagers-charged-with-anti-semitic-rape-of-12-year-old-girl\\_6675166\\_7.html](https://www.lemonde.fr/en/france/article/2024/06/19/french-teenagers-charged-with-anti-semitic-rape-of-12-year-old-girl_6675166_7.html).

<sup>9</sup> Soren Seelow, Gilles Triolier, Henri Seckel and Julia Pascual, “After the Arson Attack on Rouen’s Synagogue, Shock and Support for France’s Jewish Community,” *Le Monde*, May 18, 2024, [https://www.lemonde.fr/en/france/article/2024/05/18/after-the-arson-attack-on-rouen-s-synagogue-shock-and-support-for-france-s-jewish-community\\_6671829\\_7.html](https://www.lemonde.fr/en/france/article/2024/05/18/after-the-arson-attack-on-rouen-s-synagogue-shock-and-support-for-france-s-jewish-community_6671829_7.html), and “Two Men Charged Over Synagogue Arson Attack in France,” France24, August 29, 2024, <https://www.france24.com/en/france/20240828-two-men-charged-over-synagogue-arson-attack-in-france>.

## Canada (Jewish population 394,000)

B'nai Brith Canada recorded an increase in antisemitic incidents in 2024. The 6,219 incidents recorded in 2024, compared to 5,791 incidents in 2023 and 2,769 incidents in 2022, are the most ever recorded since B'nai Brith Canada began keeping records in 1982. Of the 6,219 incidents in 2024, 427 were recorded in October 2024, compared to 601 incidents in October 2023 and 264 incidents in October 2022.<sup>10</sup> According to B'nai Brith's Director of Research and Advocacy, Richard Robertson, "Compared to 2023, the number of incidents of harassment and vandalism increased in nine out of the 12 months of the year. The most ominous aspect of the monthly breakdown for 2024 is the sustained nature of the increased levels of antisemitism compared to 2022."<sup>11</sup>

Toronto Police Services recorded an increase in the number of antisemitic hate crimes in 2024 compared to 2023. By October 2024, the last available data, it recorded 164 antisemitic incidents, more than the total number of incidents in 2023 (130) and in 2022 (64).<sup>12</sup> In Montreal, the Service de police de la Ville de Montréal (SPVM) recorded 172 anti-Jewish hate crimes and hate incidents in 2024 (92 hate crimes, 70 hate incidents).

Among the most serious incidents in 2024 were multiple targeted attacks on synagogues, Jewish schools, and other Jewish institutions.

In May, a shooting attack at the Belz Yeshiva Ketana in Montreal, in which at least one bullet struck the building, followed less than a week after a similar shooting attack in Toronto at a Chabad girls school, Bais Chaya Mushka, where two masked men emerged from a vehicle and fired multiple rounds at the building.<sup>13</sup>

Around the same time, across the country, an arsonist attempted to set the Schara Tzedek synagogue in Vancouver ablaze, causing minor damage to the synagogue's entrance.<sup>14</sup> In the months that followed, several other synagogues would be targeted with vandalism in the Toronto area, having windows destroyed with rocks.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>10</sup> For B'nai Brith Canada's annual audit of antisemitic incidents, see: <https://leagueforhumanrights.ca/>.

<sup>11</sup> Email Correspondence, March 2025.

<sup>12</sup> Office of the Chief, "Organizational News – Remarks to the Toronto Police Service Board October 8, 2024," Toronto Police Service, October 8, 2024, <https://www.tps.ca/media-centre/news-releases/61110/>.

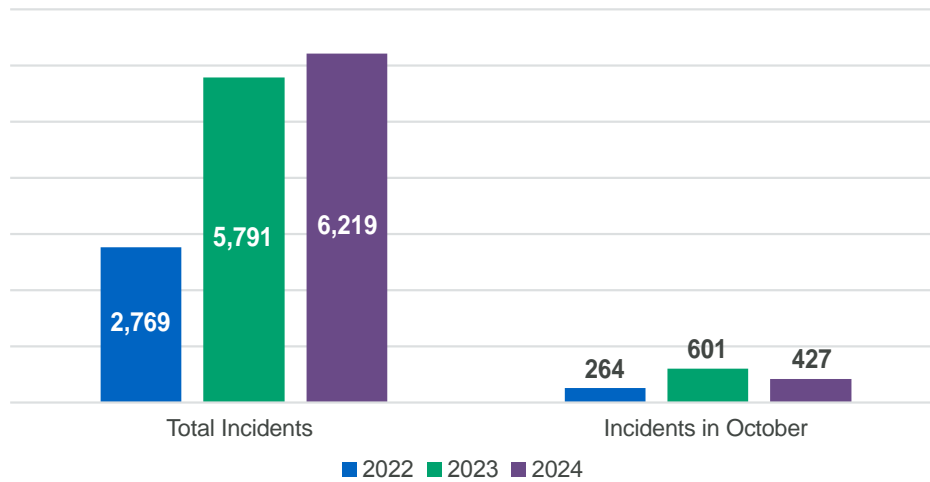
<sup>13</sup> JTA, "Montreal Jewish School Hit by Gunfire in Second Such Attack in Canada within Days," *Times of Israel*, May 31, 2024, <https://www.timesofisrael.com/montreal-jewish-school-hit-by-gunfire-in-second-such-attack-in-canada-within-days/>.

<sup>14</sup> AFP-Agence France Presse, "Canada Sees Third Antisemitic Attack in Days," *Barron's*, May 31, 2024, <https://www.barrons.com/news/canada-sees-third-anti-semitic-attack-in-days-b2e225f0>.

<sup>15</sup> See, for example: Karis Mapp, "Window of Kitchener Synagogue Broken, Police Investigating," CBC, June 4, 2024, <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/kitchener-waterloo/window-of-kitchener-synagogue-broken-police-investigating-1.7223863>; Dale Carruthers, "London Police Launch Probe after Rock Smashes Synagogue Window," *The London Free Press*, June 14, 2024, <https://lfpres.com/news/local-news/london-police-launch-probe-after-rock-smashes-synagogue-window>; and Hannah Gillott, "Toronto Synagogues Vandalized in Suspected Hate Crime," *The Jewish Chronicle*, July 1, 2024, <https://www.thejc.com/news/world/toronto-synagogues-vandalised-in-suspected-hate-crime-o1ormhtu>.

The Jewish community in Canada also faced threats of physical violence. In August, more than one hundred synagogues, Jewish organizations, and Jewish doctors throughout the country received bomb threats early one morning.<sup>16</sup> In June, a Quebec man was arrested for using hate speech against Jews and printing 3-D firearms, which are untraceable, while in October, pro-Palestinian protestors in Vancouver assaulted a woman and shouted antisemitic slurs at her.<sup>17</sup>

### Antisemitic Incidents in Canada 2022-2024



### United Kingdom (Jewish population 292,000)

Reports by law enforcement and the Community Service Trust (CST) show that while there was a decrease in antisemitic incidents in 2024 compared to 2023 in the United Kingdom, the sustained level of antisemitism remains higher than in 2022.

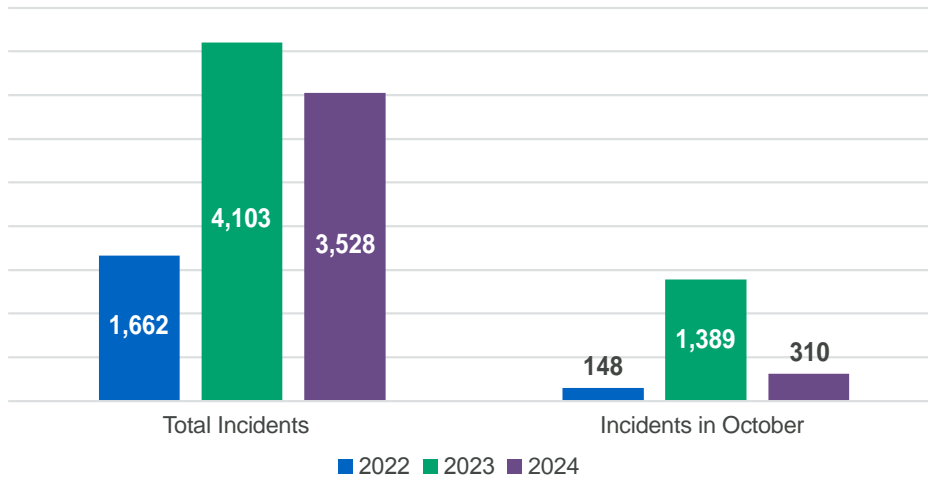
The Community Service Trust (CST) in the United Kingdom recorded 3,528 antisemitic incidents in 2024, compared to 4,103 in 2023 and 1,662 in 2022.<sup>18</sup> Sustained levels of antisemitism have been recorded across the UK since the October 7 attack but peaked in October 2023, with 1,389 recorded that month. In comparison, 310 incidents were recorded in October 2024 and 148 incidents in October 2022.

<sup>16</sup> Jane Skrypnek, “Bomb Threats Unsurprising amid Rising Antisemitism, BC Jewish Group Says,” *The Chilliwack Progress*, August 21, 2024, <https://www.theprogress.com/news/bomb-threat-unsurprising-amid-rising-antisemitism-bc-jewish-group-says-7497813>.

<sup>17</sup> The Canadian Press, “CMP Arrest Quebec Man for 3D Printing of Guns and Spreading Hatred against Jews,” CTV News, June 14, 2024, <https://www.ctvnews.ca/montreal/article/rcmp-arrest-quebec-man-for-3d-printing-of-guns-and-spreading-hatred-against-jews/>, and Joseph Ruttle, “Woman Assaulted, Subjected to Antisemitic Slurs at Dueling Protests: VPD,” *Vancouver Sun*, October 1, 2024, <https://vancouversun.com/news/assault-vancouver-art-gallery-protests-vpd>.

<sup>18</sup> For the CST’s annual antisemitic incidents reports, see: <https://cst.org.uk/>.

**Antisemitic Incidents in the United Kingdom  
2022-2024**



The CST recorded a single incident of extreme violence (an attack with the potential or intention of causing death or grievous bodily harm) in 2024 compared to none in 2023 and one in 2022. The 201 incidents of assault in 2024 were fewer than the 273 recorded in 2023, but exceeded the 136 assaults in 2022. Thirty-seven assaults involved throwing stones, bricks, bottles, eggs, or other objects at victims. Fifty-six assaults involved punching or kicking victims, while 19 involved the use of weapons, fake firearms, vehicles, fireworks, or knives to strike, threaten, or attempt to assault victims.

The 157 incidents of damage and desecration of Jewish property marked a decrease compared to 182 in 2023, but was higher than the 74 in 2022. Most incidents recorded fell into the category of abusive behavior, with 2,892 incidents recorded in 2024 compared to 3,328 in 2023 and 1,339 in 2022.

In 2024, the London Metropolitan Police recorded 1,410 antisemitic offenses, compared to 1,641 in 2023 and 551 in 2022. Between October and November 2024, the Met Police recorded 227 antisemitic offenses, compared to 928 in the same period in 2023.<sup>19</sup> In 2024, the Greater Manchester Police recorded 284 antisemitic offenses, compared to 303 in 2023 and 125 in 2022. Between October and November 2024, Greater Manchester Police recorded 23 antisemitic offenses, compared to 153 in the same period in 2023.<sup>20</sup>

**Argentina (Jewish population 173,000)**

The Delegación de Asociaciones Israelitas Argentinas (DAIA) registered 679 antisemitic incidents in 2024, compared to 598 in 2023 and 427 in 2022. Since DAIA recorded an all-time high in total incidents in 2019 (918), the number of incidents declined each subsequent year until 2023 and

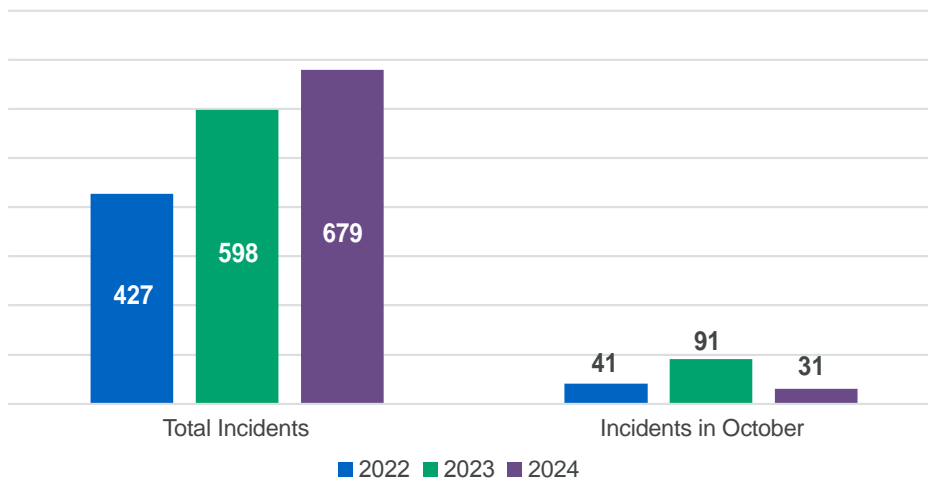
<sup>19</sup> London Metropolitan Police Service, “Monthly Crime Data Dashboard,” <https://public.tableau.com/app/profile/metropolitan.police.service/viz/MonthlyCrimeDataNewCats/Coversheet>.

<sup>20</sup> Greater Manchester Police, “Hate Crime Performance Data,” <https://www.gmp.police.uk/police-forces/greater-manchester-police/areas/greater-manchester-force-content/sd/stats-and-data/hate-crime/>.

has continued to increase since. In October 2024, DAIA recorded 31 incidents, compared to 91 incidents in October 2023 and 41 incidents in October 2022.

According to DAIA Director Dr. Marissa Braylan, in 2024, there was an increase in the number of criminal cases (55 incidents, including 9 physical assaults) requiring legal action, and incidents were predominately linked to the ongoing war against Hamas and local national issues to which antisemitic Nazi symbolism and xenophobic expressions were linked.<sup>21</sup> For example, a monument to Simon Bolivar, a leading historical figure in the South American independence movement, was defaced in October 2024 with an antisemitic slogan, “Serve the nation, kill a Jew.”<sup>22</sup>

### Antisemitic Incidents in Argentina 2023-2024



### Russia (Jewish population 145,000)

In 2024, the SOVA Center for Information and Analysis recorded no acts of antisemitic violence and no acts of antisemitic vandalism, compared to no acts of antisemitic violence and only a single act of antisemitic vandalism in 2023. It is the third straight year that SOVA did not record an antisemitic act of violence.<sup>23</sup>

The reliability of these data is questionable, given the current state of oppression and misinformation in Putin’s fascist Russia. For example, a June 2024 terror attack in Dagestan targeted a synagogue, as well as a church, but the incident does not appear in SOVA’s data.

The official data also fail to account for popular expressions of antisemitism in Russian society. In Russian official discourse on Ukraine, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky’s Jewish

<sup>21</sup> For DAIA’s annual antisemitic incidents reports, see: <https://www.daia.org.ar/>.

<sup>22</sup> DAIA (@DAIAArgentina), “DAIA Expresses its Concern Regarding... [Spanish],” X, October 9, 2024, <https://x.com/DAIAArgentina/status/1844074099858948462>.

<sup>23</sup> For the SOVA public database on acts of violence and vandalism since 2020, see: <https://www.sova-center.ru/en/database/>.

identity is regularly defamed. Putin suggested “ethnic Jews” were actively working to undermine the Russian Orthodox Church in his end-of-year press conference.<sup>24</sup> Another example is the response to the March 2024 terror attack claimed by the Islamic State on a Moscow venue that killed about 140 people. The ideological-leader of Russian fascism, Aleksandr Dugin, blamed the attack on “Zionists” and the “Mossad.” He suggested a relationship between the Mossad and the Islamic State and that the attack was revenge for Russia’s stance on Israel’s war in Gaza.<sup>25</sup>

## Australia (Jewish population 118,200)

The Executive Council of Australian Jewry (ECAJ) recorded 1,713 antisemitic incidents in 2024, compared to 1,200 incidents in 2023. Between October and December 2024, ECAJ recorded 478 antisemitic incidents, compared to 827 in the same period in 2023 and 122 in 2022.

Among the incidents recorded were physical assaults and acts of vandalism, including a group of identifiable Jews having eggs thrown at them as they walked home from Shabbat dinner in Melbourne, the physical abuse of a 77-year-old Jewish woman who was spat on and threatened by protestors at a rally opposing antisemitism in Melbourne, the windows of a synagogue being smashed with rocks in Melbourne, and a synagogue defaced in Hobart. In December 2024, the home of the former president of the Jewish Board of Deputies was vandalized with antisemitic graffiti.<sup>26</sup> Graffiti, verbal abuse, posters/stickers, and antisemitic chants at demonstrations were also common and undermined the community’s sense of security.

According to Julie Nathan, ECAJ’s Research Director, “Since October 7, 2023, vicious anti-Jewish sentiment and incidents have been unleashed in Australia. The increase and intensity were unprecedented. By the end of 2024, the incidents culminated in the arson of a Jewish deli, arson of cars in Sydney suburbs with high Jewish populations and the firebombing of a synagogue in Melbourne, with the arson attacks continuing into 2025. While such incidents were shocking, they were not surprising given the timidity of governments, police, and civil society leaders to counter antisemitism.”<sup>27</sup>

## Germany (Jewish population 118,000)

The Federal Criminal Police Office’s (Bundeskriminalamt, BKA) Criminal Police Notification Service – Politically Motivated Crimes (KPMD-PMK) collects data on antisemitic crimes and the number of antisemitic acts of violence. In 2024, the BKA recorded 5,177 politically motivated

<sup>24</sup> Natalia Abbakumova and Sammy Westfall, “More than 15 killed in Dagestan, Russia, as Gunmen Hit Multiple Sites,” *The Washington Post*, June 23, 2024, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2024/06/23/russia-attack-church-synagogue-dagestan/>, and Zeev Stub, “Reviving Antisemitic Trope, Putin Says Jews are Tearing Apart Russian Orthodox Church,” *Times of Israel*, December 20, 2024, <https://www.timesofisrael.com/putin-revives-antisemitic-trope-says-jews-are-tearing-apart-russian-orthodox-church/>.

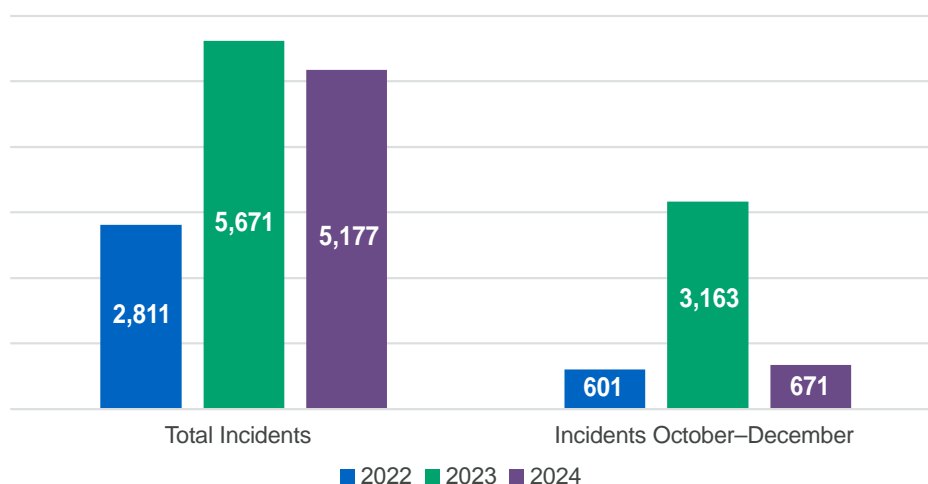
<sup>25</sup> Izabella Tabarovsky, “Antisemitic Propaganda and Disinformation in Putin’s War against Democracies,” *Wilson Quarterly*, Spring 2024, <https://www.wilsonquarterly.com/quarterly/understanding-russia/antisemitic-propaganda-and-disinformation-in-putins-war-against-democracies>.

<sup>26</sup> “Bellevue Hill Family Shaken by Antisemitic Attack amid Rising Tensions,” *Bellevue Hill News*, December 31, 2024, <https://bellevuehillnews.com.au/bellevue-hill-family-shaken-by-anti-semitic-attack-amid-rising-tensions/>.

<sup>27</sup> Email Correspondence, February 2025.

crimes with an antisemitic background, compared to 5,671 in 2023 and 2,811 in 2022. Between October and December 2024, the BKA recorded 671 politically motivated antisemitic crimes compared to 3,163 in the same period in 2023 and 601 in 2022.<sup>28</sup>

### Politically Motivated Antisemitic Crimes in Germany 2022-2024



The BKA recorded 148 acts of violence in 2024, compared to 151 in 2023 and 88 in 2022. Most incidents fell into the category of “incitement to hatred,” with 2,045 incidents recorded in 2024, compared to 3,343 in 2023. Among the incidents were a November 2024 assault of a Jewish man cheering on a German-Jewish football club at a bar in Berlin and an April 2024 attack on a synagogue in northwestern Germany in which an incendiary device was thrown at the synagogue’s front door, causing minor damage.<sup>29</sup>

### Brazil (Jewish population 91,000)

The Brazilian Israelite Confederation (Confederação Israelita do Brasil, CONIB) began publishing data on antisemitism in Brazil in 2022. In 2024, CONIB recorded 1,788 incidents compared to 1,410 incidents in 2023 and 432 in 2022. In October 2024, CONIB recorded 142 incidents, compared to 388 incidents in October 2023 and 33 in October 2022.<sup>30</sup>

Among the antisemitic incidents that occurred in Brazil was the call to boycott “Jewish companies” by a prominent politician from São Paulo and member of President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva’s Workers Party and the verbal and physical assault of a female Jewish store owner in Arraial

<sup>28</sup> For the BKA’s KPMD-PMK reports, see: <https://dip.bundestag.de/>.

<sup>29</sup> “Fan of German-Jewish Football Club Attacked in Berlin [German],” *Spiegel Panorama*, November 4, 2024, <https://www.spiegel.de/panorama/justiz/berlin-fan-mit-schal-von-deutsch-juedischem-fussballklub-in-kreuzberg-attackiert-a-26b93cc2-bac8-4962-bb20-9b7e831fe3da>, and “German Synagogue Attacked with Incendiary Device,” *EuroNews*, April 5, 2024, <https://www.euronews.com/2024/04/05/german-synagogue-attacked-with-incendiary-device>.

<sup>30</sup> For CONIB’s antisemitism monitor, see: <https://combateoantisemitismo.org.br/monitoramento/>.



d’Ajuda in February 2024.<sup>31</sup> President Lula da Silva also accused Israel of being like “Hitler” while comparing Israel’s war in Gaza to the Holocaust and accused Israel of committing genocide against the Palestinians like Hitler did to the Jews.<sup>32</sup>

## South Africa (Jewish population 51,000)

According to its annual report, the South African Jewish Board of Deputies (SAJBD) and its Community Security Organization (CSO) recorded 128 incidents in South Africa in 2024, compared to 207 incidents in 2023 and 68 in 2022. This is the third highest level of antisemitic incidents recorded in the country since SAJBD began compiling reports in the 1990s. In October 2024, SAJBD recorded 20 incidents compared to 60 incidents in October 2023 and 10 in October 2022.

The organization recorded a slight decrease in the number of assaults and vandalism. In 2024, four assaults were recorded compared to six assaults in 2023 and zero in 2022. In one case, a Cape Town rabbi was physically assaulted outside of Parliament during a pro-Israel gathering; in another, the owner of a bookstore made antisemitic remarks toward a female Jewish customer and head-butted her. The four incidents of vandalism recorded in 2024 compared to the six in 2023 involved ripping off mezuzahs from residential and commercial buildings, as well as desecrating a Holocaust memorial plaque. The greatest number of antisemitic incidents in South Africa fall in the category of verbal abuse (targeted and general), with 38 incidents recorded in 2024, compared to 46 in 2023 and 28 in 2022.<sup>33</sup>

While noting that levels of antisemitism in South Africa remained high in 2024, SAJBD’s Adam Charnas stated to the Report that “the level of antisemitism [in South Africa] remains much lower than other comparable countries, and South Africa remains a safe space in which Jews can identify as Jewish and practice their religion in safety.”<sup>34</sup>

## Mexico (Jewish population 40,000)

The Tribuna Israelita, one of Mexico’s Jewish community organizations, tracks antisemitic incidents in the country, including those in mass media and on social media platforms. In 2024, the organization recorded 53 antisemitic incidents compared to 78 incidents in 2023 and 21 incidents in 2022. The majority of incidents fell into the category of graffiti (2024: 23; 2023: 47; 2022: 7), “other” (2024: 20; 2023: 9; 2022: 5), and verbal and physical threats (2024: 4; 2023: 15; 2022: 6).

<sup>31</sup> Jacob Kessler, “Influential Brazilian Politician Interested in Boycotting ‘Certain Jewish Companies,’” *The Jerusalem Post*, January 24, 2024, <https://www.jpost.com/diaspora/article-783608>, and Eugenio Goussinsky, “Exclusive: Victim of Antisemitism in Bahia Breaks Her Silence [Portuguese],” *Revista Oeste*, February 14, 2024, <https://revistaouest.com/brasil/vitima-de-antisemitismo-na-bahia-adere-a-campanha-e-declara-a-solidariedade-acalma-meu-coracao/>.

<sup>32</sup> Lazar Berman, “Israel Livid as Brazil’s Lula Says Israel Like ‘Hitler,’ Committing Genocide in Gaza,” *Times of Israel*, February 18, 2024, <https://www.timesofisrael.com/israel-livid-as-brazils-lula-says-israel-like-hitler-committing-genocide-in-gaza/>.

<sup>33</sup> SAJBD reports for 2019-2024 were generously provided to the Center.

<sup>34</sup> Email Correspondence, January 2025.

Renee Dayan-Shabot, the Executive Director of Tribuna Israelita, stated: “Expressions of antisemitism have increased in Mexico since October 7. Nevertheless, during this period, good communication and collaboration with government authorities, media, and universities in addressing antisemitic incidents has been maintained.”<sup>35</sup>

## Italy (Jewish population 27,000)

The Observatory of Antisemitism of the Contemporary Jewish Documentation Center (CDEC) recorded 877 incidents in 2024 (600 incidents online, 277 in the “real-world”) compared to 454 incidents in 2023 (259 incidents online, 195 in the “real-world”) and 241 incidents in 2022 (164 online, 77 in the “real-world”).<sup>36</sup> Of the 877 incidents in 2024, 70 incidents were recorded in October 2024, compared to 77 incidents in the same month in 2023 and 21 in October 2022.

The 277 “real-world” incidents included eight physical assaults, compared to one incident in 2023, two in 2022, five in 2021, one in 2020, and two in 2019. In one case, in April 2024 in Milan’s Corso Indipendenza, an elderly Jewish man wearing a kippah was walking his dog past an anti-immigration protest when one of the protestors lunged at him, knocking him down, and then tore off his kippah and trampled it while calling him a “dirty Jew.”

As in 2022 and 2023, CDEC did not record a single case of extreme violence. These instances are extremely rare in Italy (in 2021, a Jewish man was attacked and wounded with a knife; no such incidents were recorded in 2020 and 2019). In 2024, CDEC recorded 11 acts of vandalism and 99 acts of graffiti compared to 10 acts of vandalism and 67 acts of graffiti in 2023 and six and 28 in 2022. One act of graffiti in May 2024 in Lido di Venezia read, “Damn Jews, we will search for you house by house all over the world to slaughter you and your children.”

## Switzerland (Jewish population 18,800)

The Swiss Federation of Jewish Communities (SIG), in collaboration with the GRA Foundation Against Racism and Antisemitism, recorded 221 “real-world” antisemitic incidents in Switzerland’s German, Italian, and Romansh language areas compared to 155 in 2023 and 57 in 2022. This included: 11 physical assaults compared to 10 physical assaults in 2023 and a single incident in 2022; 42 incidents of verbal abuse compared to 47 incidents of verbal abuse in 2023 and 16 in 2022; and 44 incidents of graffiti compared to 42 incidents of graffiti in 2023 and nine in 2022. Of the 221 incidents recorded in 2024, 22 occurred in October 2024, compared to 50 incidents in October 2023 and 3 in October 2022.<sup>37</sup>

Among the physical assaults that occurred was a March 2024 knife attack by a young Muslim against a visibly Jewish man in Zurich, which critically injured the victim, as well as an attack on a young religious Jewish man in August 2024 in which two attackers spit and slapped the

<sup>35</sup> Email Correspondence, February 2025.

<sup>36</sup> For the CDEC’s annual antisemitic incidents reports, see: <https://www.cdec.it/>.

<sup>37</sup> For SIG’s annual antisemitic incidents report, see: <https://swissjews.ch/en>.

victim while shouting “Free Palestine.” Also, in August 2024, there was an attempted arson attack on the Agudas Achim Synagogue in Zurich.<sup>38</sup>

## Spain (Jewish population 12,900)

The Observatorio de Antisemitismo en España, established by the Federation of Jewish Communities of Spain (FCJE) in 2009, recorded 170 antisemitic incidents in Spain in 2024, compared to 60 in 2023 and 35 in 2022. Of the 170 incidents in 2024, 23 were recorded in October 2024, compared to 14 in October 2023 and 1 in October 2022.<sup>39</sup>

According to the Observatorio, manifestations of antisemitism on school and university campuses throughout the country has raised the greatest concern. In addition to antisemitic posters, stickers, and graffiti on campus, Jewish students have faced verbal harassment, discrimination, and physical assault. In two of the most extreme cases, one Jewish student was discriminated against by a teacher during an exam, while in another case, a Jewish university student was spat on and pushed at a university in Madrid.

Despite the current challenges, FCJE Executive Director Carolina Aisen notes “the good and constant communication with police forces and the reinforcement they have given to the security of all Jewish sites and of [Jewish community] activities in the public space.”<sup>40</sup>

## Austria (Jewish population 10,300)

The antisemitism reporting office of the Vienna Jewish Community (Israelitischen Kultusgemeinde Wien (IKG)) semi-annual report covering the period of January 1 through June 30, 2024, recorded a total of 808 antisemitic incidents in Austria, including 16 physical assaults and 92 incidents of damage and desecration. Complete data on 2024 was not available at the time the Report went to print.

Antisemitic incidents in Austria spiked in the immediate aftermath of October 7, 2023, and then declined. The IKG recorded 1,147 incidents in total in 2023, of which 720 occurred between October and December 2023 (October: 200; November: 226; December: 294). After peaking in December 2023, monthly incident totals declined in the first six months of 2024, from 218 incidents in January to 75 incidents in June 2024.

## Romania (Jewish population 9,000)

According to data received from the General Inspectorate of the Romanian Police, 45 antisemitic crimes were recorded in the country in 2024, compared to 36 in 2023 and 17 in 2022. Between October and December 2024, 19 antisemitic crimes were recorded, compared to 17 antisemitic crimes in the same period in 2023.

<sup>38</sup> Itamar Eichner, “Security Guards Foil Attempted Arson at Zurich Synagogue,” *Ynet*, August 11, 2024, <https://www.ynetnews.com/article/s1tapdlc0>.

<sup>39</sup> Email Correspondence, February 2025. A chronology of antisemitic incidents recorded by the Observatorio de Antisemitismo en España is available on its website: <https://observatorioantisemitismo.fcje.org/>.

<sup>40</sup> Email Correspondence, February 2025.

## New Zealand (Jewish population 7,300)

The Community Security Group (CSG) and New Zealand Jewish Community (NZJC) recorded 131 antisemitic incidents in the country in 2024, compared to 134 incidents in 2023 and eight in 2022.<sup>41</sup> Of the 131 incidents recorded in 2024, 23 occurred in October 2024, compared to 43 in October 2023 and zero in October 2022.

In 2024, the CSG recorded two incidents of assault, compared to four in 2023 and zero in 2022, as well as four incidents of damage and desecration in 2024, compared to 17 in 2023 and zero in 2022. The majority of incidents recorded were in the category of abusive behavior, with 123 incidents occurring in 2024 compared to 58 incidents in 2023 and six in 2022. While the CSG/NZJC note that the number and severity of antisemitic incidents has decreased throughout 2024, monthly incidents still remain more than three times higher than before October 7.<sup>42</sup>

In June 2024, a government staff member resigned after sending antisemitic Instagram messages to a Jewish woman, including telling her that “Hitler was right” and “you guys should never exist.”<sup>43</sup> Anti-Israel demonstrators protesting the Auckland Museum being lit up in blue lights shouted antisemitic slogans such as “gas the Jews” and “fuck the Jews,” while in another incident, a Jewish high school student at an international school had his shirt covered with antisemitic slogans such as “owner of Hollywood,” “I hate Jews!!!,” and swastikas.<sup>44</sup>

Juliet Moses, the President of the NZJC, stated, “While we have had some positive interactions and maintain a good relationship with Police and various arms of government, overall, we believe there is a lack of understanding and education, and the application of double standards, in policing and institutions such as in schools and universities. This has led to members of our community feeling exposed, and being less willing to identify as Jewish or participate fully in public life, as well as to increased vigilance in security.”<sup>45</sup>

## Poland (Jewish population 4,500)

According to data from the Polish Prosecutor’s Office provided to the Report by the Jewish Association Czulent, which collects data on antisemitic incidents in Poland, there were 200 anti-Jewish hate crimes in the country in 2024, compared to 190 in 2023 and 111 in 2022.<sup>46</sup>

The organization shared a number of examples of antisemitic acts of assault, vandalism, and harassment that occurred in Poland in 2024. In September 2024, a group of Jews gathered for prayer at the Jewish cemetery in Nowy Sącz was attacked by a group of assailants, who were

<sup>41</sup> For the CSG’s records on antisemitic incidents in New Zealand, see: <https://csg.org.nz/antisemitic-incidents/>.

<sup>42</sup> Email Correspondence, March 2025.

<sup>43</sup> Melissa Nightingale, “Government Investigates ‘Abhorrent’ Comments from Staff Member’s Account,” *The New Zealand Herald*, June 3, 2024, <https://www.nzherald.co.nz/nz/government-investigates-abhorrent-comments-from-staff-members-account-worker-claims-he-was-hacked/QWCK5TIWERDHLHTXHACW6J62EQ/>.

<sup>44</sup> David Williams, “New Zealand Jewish Community Faces Antisemitic Threats, Violence, and Abuse,” *The New Zealand Herald*, November 27, 2024, <https://www.nzherald.co.nz/nz/new-zealand-jewish-community-faces-anti-semitic-threats-violence-and-abuse/REZK2QOV4BGOFFR3WI4XVMHFLA/>.

<sup>45</sup> Email Correspondence, March 2025.

<sup>46</sup> Email Correspondence, February 2025.

subsequently arrested and charged.<sup>47</sup> Among the other incidents were an arson attack on the Jewish cemetery in Lublin, the destruction of Holocaust memorial plaques, the defacement of Jewish gravestones with swastikas, a swastika carved into a bench at a synagogue, and an individual attempting to place pro-Palestinian stickers on the gate of a Jewish institution stating: “It’s a pity the Germans didn’t gas all of you.”<sup>48</sup>

### Greece (Jewish population 4,100)

According to data from the State Security Directorate’s Department for Social Issues and Combat Against Racism, the Hellenic Police recorded four antisemitic hate crimes and hate speech incidents in 2024, compared to six in 2023 and five in 2022.<sup>49</sup> Among the incidents was an assault on an Israeli Arab Christian from Nazareth who was mistakenly identified as an Israeli Jew by his attackers.<sup>50</sup>

### Czech Republic (Jewish population 3,900)

According to data from the Police Presidium of the Czech Republic, in 2024, there were 30 criminal offenses against Jews in the country compared to 18 criminal offenses in 2023 and 25 in 2022. Of the 30 criminal offenses recorded in 2024, four occurred between October and December of 2024, compared to seven in the same period in 2023 and five in 2022.<sup>51</sup>

### Bulgaria (Jewish population 2,000)

According to correspondence with the chief security officer of the Organization of Jews in Bulgaria (Shalom), the number of real-world antisemitic incidents recorded in the country decreased from 107 in 2023 to 50 in 2024.<sup>52</sup> Shalom’s chief security officer noted that while “the government and institutions publicly support Israel and are engaged in the fight against antisemitism, no significant actions have been taken. The traditional neo-Nazi Lukov March gathering has not been effectively stopped, and the judicial system has failed to take meaningful steps. The Jewish community in Bulgaria is largely fighting antisemitism alone.”

**– Dr. Carl Yonker, with contributions from Noah Abrahams and Fridolin Sablatnig**

<sup>47</sup> Claudia Kulak, “Attack on Jews in Nowy Sącz [Polish],” [nowysacz.naszemiasto.pl](https://nowysacz.naszemiasto.pl), October 4, 2024, <https://nowysacz.naszemiasto.pl/atak-na-zydow-w-nowym-saczu-prokuratura-prowadzi-sledztwo-w/ar/c1-9808763>.

<sup>48</sup> For Czulent’s annual report on antisemitic incidents in Poland, see: <https://czulent.pl/>.

<sup>49</sup> Email Correspondence, March 2025.

<sup>50</sup> Hassan Shaalan, “Israeli Attacked in Greece, Assailants Flee after Seeing His Cross,” *Ynetnews*, July 20, 2024, <https://www.ynetnews.com/article/bkukfktur>.

<sup>51</sup> Email Correspondence, February 2025, and Police Presidium of the Czech Republic, “Development of Registered Crime in 2024 [Czech],” [police.gov.cz](https://policie.gov.cz), January 24, 2025, <https://policie.gov.cz/clanek/vyvoj-registrovane-kriminality-v-roce-2024.aspx>.

<sup>52</sup> Email Correspondence, March 2025.

## WHERE ARE THE ARRESTS?

The most crucial aspect of combatting any kind of criminal activity is deterrence: arresting, indicting, and then convicting offenders. The Report studied the number of arrests that followed complaints about antisemitic incidents (which does not necessarily indicate the number of indictments and convictions) recorded between 2021 and 2023 by police departments in four cities with major Jewish populations – New York City (NYPD), Chicago (CPD), Toronto (TPS), and London (MPS). The study informs that antisemites who assault Jews are only rarely held accountable for their crimes.

The NYPD reported an increase in anti-Jewish hate crimes in New York City, from 197 incidents in 2021, to 264 in 2022, to 325 in 2023. The arrest rates increased proportionally over that period, from 74 to 91 to 113, remaining at around one-third of incidents. The number of anti-Jewish hate crimes has increased in proportion to the total number of hate crimes – from 37% (197 of 531), to 43% (264 of 608), to 49% (325 of 670). While the arrest rate for anti-Jewish hate crimes remained around one-third, for total hate crimes, it has increased impressively – from 46% (242 arrests), to 53% (324 arrests) to 59% (392 arrests).<sup>1</sup>

The CPD reported that anti-Jewish hate crimes have increased from eight in 2021 to 39 in 2022 to 50 in 2023. While the arrest rates have increased during this period, they remained low, with zero in 2021 to nine in 2022 (23% of incidents reported) to five in 2023 (10% of reported incidents). When comparing these trends to the numbers of total hate crimes in Chicago, anti-Jewish hate crimes have become more rampant – accounting for 7% in 2021 (8 of 109) and then 17% in 2023 (50 of 303). While the arrest rates for anti-Jewish hate crimes have increased, arrest rates for the total number of hate crimes have decreased from 14% in 2021 (15 arrests) to 7% in 2023 (22 arrests).<sup>2</sup>

The TPS reported a stark increase in anti-Jewish hate crimes in Toronto, with 56 incidents in 2021, 64 in 2022, and 130 in 2023. However, the arrest rates have decreased from nine in 2021 (16% of incidents reported) to eight in 2023 (6%). The proportion of anti-Jewish hate crimes has also increased, from 22% of the total number of hate crime incidents in 2021 (56 of 257), to 26% in 2022 (64 of 248), to 35% in 2023 (130 of 368). The arrest rates for the total number of hate crimes have decreased as well, from 24% in 2021 (62 arrests) to 18% in 2023 (65 arrests), yet this remains a significantly higher rate than that for anti-Jewish crimes.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> New York Police Department, “Hate Crimes Reports and Dashboard,” <https://www.nyc.gov/site/nypd/stats/reports-analysis/hate-crimes.page>.

<sup>2</sup> Chicago Police Department, “Hate Crime Dashboard,” <https://www.chicagopolice.org/statistics-data/data-dashboards/hate-crime-dashboard/>, and Chicago Police Department, “Hate Crimes Annual Reports,” <https://www.chicagopolice.org/statistics-data/statistical-reports/hate-crimes-annual-reports/>.

<sup>3</sup> Toronto Police Service, “Public Safety Data Portal – Hate Crimes Overview,” <https://data.torontopolice.on.ca/pages/hate-crimes>.

## ANTISEMITIC INCIDENTS WORLDWIDE 2024

London stands out with high numbers of reported antisemitic hate crimes, with incidents soaring from 747 in 2021 to 1,641 in 2023. The high number of hate crime complaints in London is a reflection, in part, of the effectiveness of the MPS's reporting system, including a hotline for filing complaints.

The arrest rates remained consistent but low, with 34 arrests in 2021 (5% of incidents reported) to 60 arrests in 2023 (4%). However, in 2022, when there was a dip down to 551 antisemitic hate crimes reported, the arrest rate shot up to 11%. The relative percentage of anti-Jewish incidents has increased from 3% of the total number of hate crimes in 2021 (747 of 22,425), to 6% in 2023 (1,641 of 26,516). The arrest rates for the total number of hate crimes have remained consistent, though higher than that for antisemitic crimes, decreasing from 12% in 2021 (2,617 arrests) to 9% in 2023 (2,400 arrests).<sup>4</sup>

Explanations for the discrepancies between hate crime complaints and arrests include but are not exclusive or limited to lack of forensic and other evidence, inability to identify suspects, selective enforcement, and the priority and resources provided by police forces to hate crimes.

Hate crimes involving vandalism, destruction of property, threats, and criminal harassment often lack forensic and documentary evidence, such as fingerprints, DNA, trace evidence, recordings, or footage of the crime, making investigating and identifying a suspect difficult. In contrast, such evidence tends to be more common in incidents of assault.

The discrepancy between complaints about hate-crimes and arrests could also indicate a lack of specialized training or insufficient legal frameworks for arresting offenders. For example, arrests for hate crimes that do not depend on identifying hate speech, such as firebombings, shootings, and vandalism, do not pose the same challenge as hate-speech related offenses.

While the slurs and hate speech directed at other targeted minorities, such as Asians and the LGBTQ+ community, are clear and evident in their meaning, they are less so when it comes to anti-Jewish hate speech. Today, hate speech directed at Jews frequently uses the term "Zionist" as a stand-in term for Jew. This poses a serious challenge to law enforcement, who must be made aware that antisemitic hate speech can still occur without the use of the term Jew.

**– Avi Teich**

<sup>4</sup> London Metropolitan Police Service, "Monthly Crime Data Dashboard," <https://public.tableau.com/app/profile/metropolitan.police.service/viz/MonthlyCrimeDataNewCats/Coversheet>.

## DOWN UNDER



According to the polls, by June, Australia is likely to have a new Government with the leader of the Liberal Party, **Peter Dutton**, as Prime Minister. Dutton asked MP **Julian Leeser**, former shadow attorney general, to discuss with the editor-in-chief of the Report, **Prof. Uriya Shavit**, the reasons for the rise of antisemitism in Australia – and how a Liberal government plans to combat it

**Prof. Shavit:** Is there any intelligence to support the claims that foreign actors were involved in the wave of antisemitic incidents that Australia has witnessed since the October 7 attack?

**MP Leeser:** I think the Australian Federal Police have said this, the state police have said this, and some government ministers, including Prime Minister Anthony Albanese and others, have expressed concern about foreign actors. It was actually the Commissioner of the Australian Federal Police, Reece Kershaw, who raised this issue in a news conference last year after the Adas Israel Synagogue bombing in [December 2024 in Melbourne]. He first raised the prospect that there were potential foreign actors involved in the antisemitic attacks.

Is it Iran? Is it some of the other countries that have an interest in disrupting Australia and its social harmony? Is it Russia? Is it the PRC [People's Republic of China]? There's been no concrete evidence of any of that.

The most recent incidents, including the firebombing of a childcare center in [Sydney, January 2025] and attempted arson, appear to have been the work of hired criminals. These individuals



used antisemitism not for ideological purposes but simply to cause disruption. In fact, there is a suggestion that the kingpin financing these crimes wanted these incidents to occur as a way to influence a potential sentence he is facing.

**Prof. Shavit:** So why target Jews?

**MP Leeser:** I can't answer that definitively. I could speculate that it's because of the increasing antisemitic incidents in Australia since October 7, particularly in December 2024, with the firebombing of Adas Israel and the firebombings of cars in Sydney and Melbourne. This is just adding fuel to the fire and causing further panic.

**Prof. Shavit:** Were you personally affected? As someone who frequents a synagogue?

**MP Leeser:** Yes. My conception of being a Jew in Australia has always been one of security. Jews have been in Australia since the First Fleet, and this is one of the few countries on Earth where there has never been state-sanctioned discrimination against Jews. Despite our small numbers, Jews have succeeded in every imaginable field. Australia has been uniquely welcoming to Jews. Australia took more Holocaust survivors per capita than any nation other than Israel. The Jewish community is generally well-liked.

This recent surge in antisemitism has shocked everyone and rocked our sense of what it is to be a Jewish Australian. When Adas Israel was firebombed, it deeply affected me. It was probably the first time I cried during this entire period.

My family came to Australia in 1849 to build a synagogue in Adelaide. Seeing a synagogue attacked in 2024 was something I never expected. The sense that, you know, we've gone from a country where my family came to build synagogues to a country where they're burning synagogues. The images of the firebombing looked like something out of a Holocaust film or *Kristallnacht*, not something you'd ever expect to see in Australia.

Jews in Australia are now more concerned about their personal security. People are discussing making aliyah. Security has increased around Jewish schools and communal institutions, and people are paying more attention to security at their own premises and homes.

**Prof. Shavit:** Are you – plainly put – afraid for your safety now?

**MP Leeser:** No, I'm not afraid, but I am more conscious of security. We are taking more precautions than we otherwise would have.

**Prof. Shavit:** Your party published an action plan in January, calling for more severe penalties for antisemitic crimes.

**MP Leeser:** Since then, some of the items in our action plan have actually been made law, particularly regarding mandatory minimum sentences and hate crime legislation we forced the government into backing.

In fact, the most shameful minister in the government, in my view, is the Attorney General, Mark Dreyfus, who is actually Jewish. He has dragged his heels and opposed much of this legislation, but the Prime Minister ultimately forced him to support it.

**Prof. Shavit:** Your party is unique, perhaps in the entire history of democracies, in having a candidate for Prime Minister who is a former police officer. That is why I was all the more disappointed that the action plan did not emphasize the need for more policing.

**MP Leeser:** What we have said very clearly in relation to policing is that we will direct the Australian Federal Police, the AFP, in two ways.

Firstly, we are going to put together a multi-unit task force. Unlike what the government has done – just relying on the AFP itself – there is a real issue with coordination between the AFP and state police. Additionally, there hasn't been enough input from security agencies, such as our domestic security agency, ASIO, or the financial transactions authority, among other security agencies.

Secondly, we will direct the AFP to prioritize dealing with antisemitism. That is, in terms of police responsibilities, us saying to the police: this is the first order of business.

But indeed, if you were to say to me, "Look, we've seen this [policy] here or there, and it has had a greater effect in terms of getting arrests and prosecutions," I'm all ears. Because not only do I, as a Jewish Australian, take this seriously, but my leader does as well.

And the shameful thing for both the federal and state governments is that it really took the firebombing of the Adas Israel Synagogue for them to start making arrests and setting up police operations.

We argued – when I say "we," I mean the opposition, the party led by Peter Dutton, and the Jewish community – that there should have been arrests on the 8th and 9th of October 2023, both the hate preachers in Western Sydney who called October 7 a day they had been waiting for and the protesters at the Sydney Opera House. Everything that has occurred since then has been a direct result of the government's failure to set boundaries and strictly enforce them.

**Prof. Shavit:** You are predicted to win the elections.

**MP Leeser:** We are doing better in the polls, and we have a chance of winning, but history is against us. There hasn't been a one-term government in Australia since the Great Depression.

But one of the reasons we are in a strong position is that ordinary Australians look at the level of crime, particularly antisemitic crime, and feel that the government has lost control of our streets.

This issue has been particularly frustrating because both the opposition and the Jewish community have been calling on the government to take action for 18 months. When the government finally set up police operations at both the state and federal levels, it did make a difference and helped stem some of the crime; but it came very late. The measures had to be quite significant and extreme because they had allowed the situation to spiral out of control.

For example, in New South Wales, state police have deployed helicopters over Jewish suburbs. There has been a significant increase in police presence; it's almost like being in a police state in areas with high Jewish populations. These measures became necessary because, night after night, there were firebombings, mass graffiti attacks, and other incidents.

**Prof. Shavit:** But why were they so slow? Obviously, the Prime Minister isn't antisemitic. So why?

**MP Leeser:** So, in the Labour Party, it's different from the Prime Minister and the state premier. But let's just focus on the federal political scene. The Labour Party is wedged in two ways. Firstly, it's competing with the extreme left Greens vote in the inner cities for who can be the most woke and anti-Israel. And then, in Western Sydney, the seats there are large Muslim constituencies.

Indeed, some of those Muslim constituencies have been so upset with the way in which the government is seen to have [supported] Israel that they have set up their own party, called The Muslim Vote, to challenge sitting Labour MPs. So, the government is wedged on both sides and therefore, they responded to the whole event – the whole events of October 7 and, indeed, the antisemitism that followed – with a lack of moral clarity.

They couldn't mention antisemitism without also mentioning Islamophobia. Now, Islamophobia is bad, and when it occurs, it needs to be called out. I have called it out both before and after October 7. But there was only one community that was in the gun from October 7, and that's been the Jewish community. So there's been a failure to recognize that.

Secondly, I think there's been a failure to properly understand what my leader understands, what my party understands, and what our community understands: that you have to crack down on this early and hard because we've seen it all before, and we know where it goes. I don't think he [Prime Minister Albanese] has any sense of that. His affinity is not with the Jewish community.

He was a pro-Palestinian activist for many, many years. He's been in Parliament since 1996, and even as late as the mid-2000s, he was still attending pro-Palestinian rallies. [Still, when ] the Greens in his own constituency started to move pro-Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions resolutions, to his credit, he fought some of those within his own local council in his electorate. But his natural sympathies are not with the Jewish community. He's not an antisemite – I don't think he's that – but he doesn't wake up in the morning with an innate understanding of who we are and where this goes.

And I think, you know, for the last 20 years, there has been, within the Labour Party, an increasing number of increasingly anti-Israel resolutions passed through their conference. The political philosophy of the Labour Party at the federal level is very hostile to Israel, and that hostility has ended up going hand in hand with hostility toward our community.

**Prof. Shavit:** Let's say someone vandalizes a synagogue. And let's say, hypothetically, it's not because that person is an antisemite. What difference does it make? It's still a criminal offense.

**MP Leeser:** That's right. The federal police used a very unhelpful phrase when they spoke about those Sydney January incidents. We called them a terrorist event. I was one of the first people to call them a terrorist event because I think they met the definition of terrorism.

But the state police [in New South Wales] said it wasn't a terrorist event. Instead of doing as you suggested and calling it a criminal event, they called it a "hoax." And when you call an event like that a hoax – when it involves our community – you couldn't have chosen a poorer word.

That's because it downplays what was a very serious incident that caused the same amount of fear as a declared terrorist event would have.

There are people who just don't get it.

**Prof. Shavit:** Or they pretend not to, which is, in a way, worse.

**MP Leeser:** No, I think they genuinely don't get it. I think there are ministers in the federal government who do get it, but they are deeply conflicted because of their own constituencies.

**Prof. Shavit:** Because we see similar trends in Canada – similar failures of appropriate treatment by law enforcement...

**MP Leeser:** And universities.

**Prof. Shavit:** It makes me wonder whether the problem is that those two countries – Australia and Canada – have unresolved issues with their own colonial legacies, and Israel becomes a convenient deflection for some people.

**MP Leeser:** Look, this woke philosophy has spread through universities from the United States to Canada, and the USA is not much better either. These societies, Australia, Canada, and the USA, were all British colonies.

Within academia, starting in America and unfortunately spreading elsewhere, this narrative has emerged about power and privilege; the idea that you're either born with power, or you're not. The worst kind of privilege is white privilege. And the easiest way to start dismantling white privilege is by targeting Jewish privilege.

So, yes, that sick philosophy is definitely being taught in universities. But it's not the only reason for what's happening.

I think too few people recognize patterns in history. When you're in the bubble, it's easy to think everyone thinks like you. But they don't.

The Shoah is such a key event for the Jewish people, and we've tried for a long time to engage in Holocaust education in this country, as they have in Canada and the USA. But clearly, it's not enough. People do not recognize the broader tropes of antisemitism, its conspiratorial nature, and the cyclical patterns it follows.

And then, the anti-Israel activity on university campuses is just the modern manifestation of antisemitism.

**Prof. Shavit:** It's ironic, though – having Australian college students condemn Israeli "colonialism."

**MP Leeser:** Yes, of course. The Israelis fought the British. They are the last people who should be called a colonial power.

**Prof. Shavit:** Australian soldiers helped take over the land from the Ottomans.

**MP Leeser:** Including my great-grandfather. So yes, there's an irony there. But I don't think we should overplay it [when discussing the reasons for antisemitism in Australia].

It's part of the explanation for what's happening in academic circles. But more broadly, I think it's a failure to recognize history, a failure of moral clarity, and a failure to crack down on extremism early.

We've been asleep at the wheel. Not just Australia, but the Jewish community more broadly. While we've been complacent, our strategic adversaries, both domestic and international, have become much more organized.

**Prof. Shavit:** Students of history who watched the Trump-Zelensky meeting were reminded of 1938. And very troubled. Do you share that sentiment as a party or as an individual?

**MP Leeser:** Well, look, the first thing to say is that when we were in government until 2022, Australia was the largest non-NATO financial contributor to Ukraine. We gave them Bushmasters, sent financial aid, and strongly supported President Zelensky. We've been very critical of the current government because it has failed to send munitions, failed to reopen the embassy for two years, and, despite Ukraine freezing, failed to send coal, even though we have large coal deposits. Again, this is due to internal domestic political reasons.

Now, suddenly, the Prime Minister is talking about committing troops to Ukraine, but many on my side don't take him seriously. He has dragged his feet on everything else. If troops were sent, they wouldn't be engaged in peacemaking or peacekeeping.

That being said, most Australians, both on the right and in the broader community, see Ukraine as the front line in the war on Western civilization. What baffles me is that some of those same people don't see Israel as the front line, too. That disconnect makes no sense to me.

The bipartisan disgust [we have] for Putin, particularly in relation to Ukraine, is partly due to the 2014–2015 downing of a Malaysian Airlines flight over Ukraine by Russian forces. Many Australians were on that flight, which adds another dimension to our view of Putin.

The Ukrainian community here is relatively small, about 40,000 people, but I always contrast their activism with the pro-Palestinian protests. Both groups want to influence foreign policy. The Ukrainian community organizes concerts, holds public meetings, and earns respect. Meanwhile, the pro-Palestinian protests are violent and call for people's deaths.

**Prof. Shavit:** That's a very good point. No one ever thought to attack an Orthodox church because of what Russia is doing, or a mosque because of what Iran is doing, yet somehow, people take it as a given that synagogues are attacked because of what Israel is doing.

**MP Leeser:** Exactly.

And that's the key point. The events of this summer have shown that the rise in antisemitism in Australia wasn't just a reaction to October 7; it merely provided an outlet for something that was already there.

Again, the government's response has been utterly inadequate. Instead of cracking down hard and early, law enforcement stood by. In my state, the police literally escorted protesters from one end of the city to the Opera House while telling Jews not to enter the city that night. Law-abiding citizens were not protected.

**Prof. Shavit:** Are people actually making aliyah, or just considering it?

**MP Leeser:** People are seriously discussing it. It's not a mass exodus, but no one wants to be the last one left.

**Prof. Shavit:** I am reminded of a famous front-page headline, although with regard to a potential Labor victory in another country.

**MP Leeser:** Do I think this is the most consequential election in my lifetime? You'll think, "Oh, I'm just a shill for my side of politics." But if you talk to other community leaders here, they will say the same thing. I think if Labour is returned, and this is the key thing to know, it won't be returned in its own right. It will end up being in a coalition with the Greens and some independents, which we call the TEALS because they wear teal-colored clothing. Many of them, though not all, are hostile to Israel, even though they now represent seats with significant Jewish populations.

**Prof. Shavit:** Contrary to the common perceptions, there wasn't an increase in the number of antisemitic incidents in 2024 compared to 2023 in all Western countries, but Australia "shines with shame," if I may use that phrase.

**MP Leeser:** It shines with shame. It shines.

**Prof. Shavit:** And it's not a country associated with intolerance.

**MP Leeser:** No, it really isn't. But we had appalling incidents. The university vice-chancellors, really, they are among the worst people. They just wanted to wash their hands of this, to keep the peace.

And there are things the Prime Minister said, like on October 10, 2023: "We stand by Israel. Always will." And yet, you know, the underfunding.

The Foreign Minister here, Penny Wong, is just sinister. The fact that she went to Israel and didn't go south [the Gaza Border]. The fact that she compared Israel with Russia and China.

The leadership of the far left in this country has so much to answer for. We believe it is this leadership that has given a sort of wink and a nudge to people who want to do bad things.

You know, I wore my kippah in Parliament for a week in 2023 because school students felt uncomfortable wearing theirs.

One of the things I did this year was write a letter to Jewish school students going back to school because I just wanted them to know that they need to crack on with their studies, and that, you know, we're going to do our best to deal with these issues and so on.

And my big focus has been dealing with antisemitism on campuses because it's all about the future of the country. It's about, you know – can they enjoy the Australia that we've enjoyed? And that's what I want them to do, and that's what I'm working to achieve.

You know, I love Israel, I want to be there, I love going, and I support it very strongly, but I want to live here in Australia, and I want my kids to have that choice, too.

**Prof. Shavit:** I'm curious, if there were another referendum today, would you be on the republican side?

**MP Leaser:** Oh no, I'm a very strong constitutional monarchist. Always have been. I was very involved in the 1999 campaign to defeat the republican push here.

One of the great things about the Crown is that constitutional monarchies tend to be freer. They tend to respect rights more. However much ambition a politician like me might have, there is at least one office we can't get our hands on: the Crown. It provides stability and continuity. There is less republican sentiment in Australia today than at any time in recent history.





# **SECTION 2**

## **NOTES FROM THE FIELD**





# IT HAPPENED ONE DAY

Beyond the statistics about antisemitic attacks are shattered communities, threatened existences – and real people. **Noah Abrahams**, Associate Editor at the Center for the Study of Contemporary Jewry, documented six of their stories

## ***Marcia Zimmerman (65, Minneapolis, Minnesota, United States)***

Marcia Zimmerman became the Senior Rabbi at Temple Israel in Minneapolis, Minnesota, in 2001, becoming the first woman to lead a synagogue congregation of more than 2,000 families after serving as Assistant Rabbi since 1988. Responsible for Minnesota's largest Jewish congregation, with more than 6,000 members, Zimmerman is a respected figure in the American Midwest, known for her work alongside former US President Barack Obama touting his health care bill among religious communities in 2010.

Founded in 1878, Temple Israel is the oldest synagogue in Minneapolis.

On December 16, 2024, at 7:20 am, Temple Israel was vandalized with painted swastikas defacing its exterior doors and pillars, one of the darkest chapters in the synagogue's history.<sup>1</sup>

Zimmerman recalled: "For December, it wasn't the kind of cold morning you would usually expect for Minneapolis. We had just had our security guard make a round, and then all of a sudden, on the cameras, one of our custodians saw the swastika being sprayed.

“ Just ten minutes before we spotted the vandalism, our cameras captured a white Honda Civic and a man getting out, spray painting a swastika on one of our pillars. We have five pillars and five doors at the front of the historic part of our building. On one of our doors, there was another swastika. The perpetrator then got back in his car and fled the scene.

“Temple Israel is 146 years old, and we have been in our current building for 96 years. The front of this building faces a very busy street called Hennepin Avenue. Hennepin is a congregational row of downtown churches and mosques. The front of our building was designed to look like the Lincoln Memorial because we wanted to express freedom of religion. The five doors symbolize the ghettos of Vienna, where synagogues traditionally had five windows and five doors. There is no name on the doors because, in the 1920s, Minnesota was the capital of antisemitism in the United States. Interfaith dialogue over time has made life better here for the now 66,000-strong Minnesota Jewish community.

“The swastikas appearing in that very area, where we wanted to open doors to interfaith dialogue and fight antisemitism, was extremely painful. This incident has seen us regress

<sup>1</sup> Howard Thompson, "Temple Israel in Minneapolis Defaced with Swastikas," Fox9, December 16, 2024, <https://www.fox9.com/news/temple-israel-minneapolis-defaced-swastikas>.

historically instead of progress. It took us a long time to identify the vandal because most people don't come through our historic entrance. Our cameras didn't capture the license plate of the perpetrator. However, we did eventually identify the person.

"I am a texting friend of the Minneapolis Chief of Police and was personally informed that the person who defaced our synagogue fled the country to avoid justice.

"The heightened antisemitism people have felt here since October 7 is real. The level of recent antisemitism has taken a generation by surprise. Parents of young kids here thought that antisemitism was something that only happened in the past. Now, they are confronted with it. There is an anger that we are going backward.

"This is the first time in 38 years I have seen anything like a swastika on our building. It felt particularly intense and violent. As a community, we spoke about the upsetting reality of the world we live in today but took comfort in the authorities and even the FBI, who gave us the all-clear of not being in any further danger.

"We are proud of our Judaism, and that won't go away because of an act of hate. Our Jewish connections here are strong. Minnesota senators are Jewish, our Mayor, Jacob Frey, is Jewish, and the Attorney General of the District of Minnesota is a member of Temple Israel. We have strong leaders here in our community. ”

### **Henry “Hank” Topas (74, Dollard-des-Ormeaux, Quebec, Canada)**

Henry “Hank” Topas has been the Cantor at his local synagogue, Beth Tikvah, for 49 years. Founded in 1964, Beth Tikvah is located in a small, predominately English-speaking southwestern suburb of Montreal called Dollard-des-Ormeaux. The Beth Tikvah synagogue has been firebombed twice since October 7 – November 7, 2023, and December 18, 2024; Hank was the spokesperson for the synagogue after both incidents.<sup>2</sup>

“ On November 7, 2023, exactly one month after the October 7 atrocities, we were hit with the first firebombing overnight. It caused damage other than awakening the community. It showed that these levels of terror are not just reserved for the Middle East.

“Services in our synagogue begin at 7 am. These are our weekday morning services. That means that some people are showing up as early as 6:30 am to open the doors. [On the morning of November 7], one member detected a faint odor of something that did not belong in our lobby and alerted me. We opened the door and realized that there were remnants of a Molotov cocktail in front of the front door of the synagogue and that there were scorch marks over the wooden panel of the door.

<sup>2</sup> On the November 2023 firebombing see: Thomas MacDonald, “‘Deeply Disturbing’: Montreal Police Investigating Two Firebombings at Jewish Institutions,” *Global News*, November 7, 2023, <https://globalnews.ca/news/10075973/montreal-synagogue-firebombing/>. On the December 2024 firebombing see: Kalina Laframboise, “Fire at Montreal Synagogue Prompts Police Probe, Widespread Condemnation,” *Global News*, December 18, 2024, <https://globalnews.ca/news/10923867/montreal-jewish-synagogue-arson/>, and Leora Schertzer, “Beth Tikvah Synagogue in D.D.O. Hit by a Firebomb,” *The Montreal Gazette*, December 18, 2024, <https://www.montrealgazette.com/news/local-crime/article627196.html>.

## NOTES FROM THE FIELD

“Someone had thrown a bottle that was on fire at the doors of our synagogue. The incident probably happened after midnight in the early hours of November 7. At that point, I called the Montreal Police Department’s Hate Crimes Unit, and they immediately responded with [all their] investigative powers. Sadly, they have not brought anyone to justice.

“November 7 was spent with me and others being interviewed by various members of the Press, in French and in English. I was pleased to greet the local parish priest from the Saint Luke Catholic Church up the street, who came down and gave me a big hug.

“I was not pleased that members of the mosque that I had gone to console, along with other rabbis, when there was a murder in a Quebec City mosque, failed to show. There have been good relations between the two communities in our suburb for many years, and for thirty years, we have run a charity bazaar to help the Muslim community. When disaster has struck and there have been blood drives [to aid struggling Muslims], I have given blood. But no one showed up, not on October 7, not on November 7.

“The person behind the November 7 attack is unknown; we do not know who did it. The cameras did not pick up anything.

“My community is not a part of Montreal but of a self-regulated suburb, yet we share Montreal’s police services. Those police services, we believe, are somewhat restrained. Even though they [the police] have been there for us and are doing the best they can... We have said so publicly. The effect of that has led to unbridled permission for people to protest night after night in the streets of Montreal, with the flags of Hamas, swastikas, and symbols from every other terrorist organization. It’s free speech, they say.”

Following the November 7 firebombing, the Beth Tikvah Synagogue invested in better security cameras and was more vigilant. However, in the early hours of Wednesday, December 18, 2024, terror struck Beth Tikvah once again when a firebomb caused internal damage to the synagogue.

“December 18 was certainly the most grievous attack on our synagogue,” Hank explained.

“The incident happened overnight at approximately 2:00 am. Our improved cameras captured an image of the fellow [who attacked the synagogue], and we have more information that the police will put to good use, hopefully. The man approached the front of the synagogue and threw something through the glass, shattering our windows. It was some form of Molotov cocktail that was thrown into the vestibule separating the doors and the lobby.

“The fire that broke out was so hot that items on the vestibule’s walls melted. Thank God a neighbor reported the incident after she saw the flames. She called the local police, and officers on their morning patrol responded, using their own fire extinguisher to break down the doors and extinguish the flames before the fire department arrived.

“That morning, I was getting out of the shower, and I heard about [the firebombing] on the news. I was a little bit surprised that I had not yet heard about it. The synagogue was notified, and by the time we got there, the police would not let us enter the building

because they wanted to ensure an undisturbed crime scene. It was not until the arson investigators arrived at approximately 9:30 am and had checked everything that we were allowed back into the building.

“Eventually, the Chief of Police, Fady Dagher, showed up, and I spoke with him and his number two in-command for some time. The police have been very supportive, and Mr. Dagher has already held two Zoom calls with me and others from the community, fielding questions. When I go to visit the station, I always bring a platter of danishes and food for the officers.

“I was a little disturbed that the smashed glass from the attack was repaired on the same day.

“Why was I concerned? The incident occurred on a Wednesday, and we were hoping to have a solidarity Shabbat with politicians and our members that weekend. The synagogue was packed. Now, for the two weeks before Christmas, that was unusual because the place is usually half empty. I wanted that piece of glass to serve as a token for people to look at, but it was gone.

“The physical damage was that items on the walls were melted. The thermostat, for example, was melted, and other things were covered with heavy soot from the smoke. The lighting fixtures in the ceiling were all melted and have to be replaced. The structure of the ceiling and the sheetrock also need to be replaced.

“We can’t only look at our congregation but at attacks on Jewish buildings and people across the country. In Montreal, there have been schools that have been shot at, and in all of these cases, we have not seen anyone prosecuted or incarcerated. Since October 7, there has not been a single incarceration related to an attack on a Jewish building.

“I send a weekly email to the local precinct commander to let them know what time candle lighting is and how long the walk home will be for those going back in the dark afterward. I carry a police baton on me because we don’t know what will happen. ”

### ***Dov Forman (21, London, United Kingdom)***

Dov Forman is a 21-year-old history student at University College London (UCL) but is perhaps best known as a *New York Times* and *Sunday Times* bestselling author. The great-grandson of the late Holocaust survivor, educator, author, and social media influencer Lily Ebert, Dov dedicates his life to sharing Lily’s story of surviving Auschwitz-Birkenau and to fighting antisemitism. For his contributions to the memoir *Lily’s Promise: How I Survived Auschwitz and Found the Strength to Live* (HarperCollins, 2022), Dov was praised by King Charles III for demonstrating “a determination to share his great-grandmother’s story with a global audience.”

Dov receives daily antisemitic abuse at its most extreme.

“ In university, both because I am known for being an anti-antisemitism activist, but also because I am just a proud, loud Jew who wears a kippah and a hostage necklace, people

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target me and shout at me. People chant 'Free Palestine' or worse, because I am Jewish and because I speak up to defend the Jewish people and our narrative.

"University is supposed to be the time for people to speak up and develop political ideas within the confines of the law. When I am in the library and I hear people chanting outside, or when people say things directly to me, it makes life extremely difficult and it is hard to feel as though university is a safe space where you can learn just like everyone else.

"When we were lighting the Hanukkah [at UCL], people put up Palestinian flags in response. There we were on a cold, gloomy English night, lighting the candles while a cohort of young people in their twenties were waving their Palestinian signage.

"Fellow students have called me 'Dirty Jew' [noticing me]. They know I am Jewish because I wear a kippah or perhaps because they saw me on the news. I have also been called a genocide apologist.

"We have to have security outside of our university Jewish Society and outside other Jewish events. It is not only other students at British universities who terrorize Jews; antisemitism also comes from professors.

"I sit in a classroom of 100 people, and I am singled out because I am the only outwardly apparent Jew or perhaps even the only Jew in the room. I study history, and professors not only distort the past but compare the Holocaust to what Israel is doing in Gaza. This is entirely unfair.

"I have to sit in these lectures where students point at me and make me feel uncomfortable. It is hard to come to terms with the fact that these lecturers are grading my work.

"My great-grandmother was a force of nature until the very last moments. She fought to teach people the dangers of unbalanced and unchecked hatred. Because of her work, particularly on social media and on TikTok, where her story has reached over a billion social media users, we received terrible antisemitic abuse.

"Every single day, especially in the aftermath of October 7, I woke up to thousands of antisemitic messages. It has now died down, and those messages come only in their hundreds.

"But, to wake up every single day and open my phone and read comments like 'your great-grandmother, I wish she was raped like the girls on October 7,' or 'Hitler missed one,' or that 'we know you live in London and we are going to come to find and kill you and rape you,' or things like 'you and your great-grandmother are going to be kidnapped,' well, it's disgusting.

"[My great-grandmother and I] never spoke about politics; we rarely spoke about Israel. Rather, we educated others and told her story to share a message of hope, tolerance, love, and how to rebuild from the greatest darkness.

"Unfortunately, there have been just so many incidents of antisemitism that they are hard to individualize, and repeating them could put me at risk. It is all terrifying, and I

have had to get extra security and help. But, I take strength from my great-grandmother, who taught me that, because of the hate, we have to keep going and fighting back.

“I think we are incredibly lucky to be living as Jews in London, in a place where we do have the CST [Community Security Trust] and various organizations looking out for us.

“Thankfully, there haven’t been incredibly violent attacks against Jewish people on the streets, but of course, words can lead to actions. I do think, on the whole, that London is a safe place for Jews; however, some areas are not safe, especially on Saturdays, when thousands of people scream for violence against Jewish people, not just in Israel but here in the UK.

“We are now at a crossroads where people have to speak up and decide if they want to change the current course or if they want to allow the situation to get worse. It is now the time for people to stand up and take serious, meaningful action. ”

### ***Moshe (70, Johannesburg, South Africa)***

Moshe is not the actual name of the Rabbi who asked to remain anonymous due to safety and security concerns. Originally from the United States, Moshe has been a resident of South Africa since 1984, where he spends time in several different synagogues across the Johannesburg area, serving a diverse mix of Jewish communities and denominations.

As a volunteer rabbi, Moshe makes his income as a small business owner, volunteering with Chabad and other synagogues on high holidays and the occasional Shabbat. On a November afternoon in 2023, on the outskirts of Johannesburg, the visibly Jewish Moshe was targeted and attacked.

“ It was a warm, sunny Friday afternoon on November 10, 2023, and I was meeting a client. I was driving in my car and approaching the end of the highway, leaving a Jewish area called Sandton and heading for a different suburb. As I got off the four-lane highway, the exit forked, and a car coming from the left side tried to go into my lane.

“I swerved to the right around him and went forward. The guy seemed to have some serious road rage. He didn’t like the fact that I was able to swerve around him and get in front of him, so he came up beside me and stared at me. The man was visibly Muslim, between 35 and 40 years old. He was driving a Renault Kwid, and I was in a much bigger Nissan Sentra Sedan.”

When the man looked at the Rabbi, he got out of his car and started shouting at him, using brutally obscene language to swear and curse him referring to his Jewish identity.

“He told me to get out of my car so that he could beat the... out of me. I did not get out of my car because it would have been too dangerous; he could have had a weapon or something. The traffic light was red, and as soon as he saw that I wasn’t going to get into a confrontation with him, he got back in his car, drove directly in front of me, and



reversed. He rammed the rear end of his car into the front of my car and then continued to do so. I immediately knew I had to get out of there.

“I drove off, but he chased after me, following me all around the area, frantically trying to ram my car. I got back on the highway, got off the highway, and even drove against traffic and through lights to get away from him. I returned to the highway, where he tried to hit me from the side.

“In the end, I knew that I had to get off the highway, and I pulled into a BP petrol station. He came chasing after me in the garage and banged on my window with his fist. I didn’t leave the car because that was my protection. He ripped my windshield wiper off and banged on my window, trying to smash it.

“While all of this was going on, people started to realize what was happening, and they held the guy down. This gave me the chance to call the local security company, which escorted me home, where I had an opportunity to look at the pictures I had taken of him.

“I sent the images to the police, and they opened a case. I even managed to take down his registration number, assuming the license plates would link to an address. But, somehow, the police have found nothing.

“The Jewish community organization here has a private investigator for these things, and to cut a long story short, we spent time with the police investigating, but catching this guy would have meant going to court. I was genuinely worried about exposing myself and my address, concerned that he would find where I live.

“I was quite frightened for a long time, primarily because this guy mentioned during the attack that his brother was in the police department. What if the brother could use my registration number to find out where I live? For quite a while, we were really on tenterhooks, thinking he could come after me. Police patrol cars regularly checked on us, and every time I left the house, I looked right and left to see if he was there.

“Nothing ever happened. The police did say that they managed to get a hold of an address but couldn’t find anything.

“The bottom line is that this guy damaged my car, and it cost thousands to fix. Insurance may have covered most of it, but I still had to pay the excess. The damage to my car was significant, but thank God he didn’t smash me up. He was violent and very dangerous, like a raging bull out of control. We’ll leave it up to God to sort him out. What goes around, comes around. He’ll realize one day that he should have behaved himself. ”

### ***Kit Boulton (21, Norwich, England)***

Kit Boulton is a psychology student at the University of East Anglia (UEA) in Norfolk County, England. Originally from just outside of North-West London in the heavily Jewish-populated town of Borehamwood, Hertfordshire, Kit is now in his second year of studies at a university

with one of the fewest number of Jewish students in the country. The UEA has a Jewish Society (JSoc) of approximately 30 members.

Towards the end of May 2024, Kit was working as a bartender in the UEA Student Union bar, Bar SU. As ever for a Wednesday sports night when the weather is warm towards the end of the summer semester, the venue was busy and filled with students, mostly in their twenties.

“ It was last summer, and I got a job at the student union bar. I was working there one night, and I believe that I served this guy, who was clearly hammered, the wrong drink. He then turned around to me and called me a ‘kike.’ He knew I was Jewish because I wear a Magen David around my neck, and it was clearly on display. My mates were right there. They told him that he couldn’t say that and called him out over it. You would hope everyone would do the same in that situation. Things got a bit heated, but eventually, the guy backed away and left.

“The Jewish situation here [at UEA] is that we have the JSoc, a very strong Jewish student association that is well run by an amazing committee. There aren’t many Jewish people on campus. If you saw a Jew on campus, you would be like, ‘Oh my God, you’re Jewish?’ Whereas at universities like Leeds or Nottingham, you would be less surprised.

“You expect antisemitism in London; it’s a lot more common. Here in Norwich, however, especially on a university campus, experiencing antisemitism was crazy to me. But, at the time, it didn’t feel like a big thing, so I didn’t report it. Had I reported this to my managers at the Student Union, I know they would have been all over it.

“It was a lot more stressful to be Jewish on campus towards the end of 2023, especially after October 7. But this past year, especially with the support of JSoc, it feels safe again to be a Jew on campus.”

### ***Katrien Van Der Schueren (51, Los Angeles, California, USA)***

Born and raised in the small Flemish-speaking town of Leuven, Katrien Van Der Schueren is a Los Angeles-based Belgian-American artist. The mother of two teenagers, born to Catholic Belgian parents and raised a practicing Catholic, Katrien discovered her Jewish heritage at the age of 47 through a DNA test trying to establish the identity of her biological father, who turned out to be a Belgian Jew. Since discovering her origins, she has dedicated herself to learning more about Judaism, her family history, and what it means to have a Jewish identity. She has also become active in her Hollywood Jewish community.

“ I grew up in Belgium, where we didn’t really know any other Jewish people. In general, I did not encounter one Jewish person growing up. The only thing that people thought of when discussing Jews were the ultra-Orthodox Jews in Antwerp. People had no other notion of the religion or of Israel. There was no hope for Jewish people there.

“After letting the world know that I was Jewish, I immediately was on the receiving end of remarks like ‘You count your money’ and other preconceived notions that people

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have about Jews. Now, in the United States, most of the people I know are Jewish. On a recent trip back to Belgium, however, most of my friends and family were against Israel.

“I received messages from people who told me that I wasn’t a real Jew. I decided to order a t-shirt that said, ‘I’m that Jew,’ and I wore it in Belgium in order to start a conversation, however obvious it may have been that people did not want to have it.

“Everybody was surprised when they found out I was Jewish. Five years ago, there was a documentary on Jewish people in Belgium, and people were telling me to watch it as though they were referring to some strange species. [There’s a common perception in Belgium] that Jews are only ultra-Orthodox Jews. It’s just bizarre.

“Recently, I co-organized an event with people who survived the October 7 massacre. I invited the Belgian Consul and sent pictures to the Belgium Press – which I write for all the time. No one responded to my email. It is common for Belgian-Americans to say that Joe Biden lost the election over Gaza and that Jews are extremists. I find myself in a situation where I am frequently the only Jew in a group. I get into fights about Israel all the time.”

Katrien has become accustomed to hearing antisemitic comments in Belgium. However, when cycling back to her Hollywood home from Manhattan Beach in October 2024, a bright sunny day turned dark.

“I was cycling to my home in Los Angeles after a day at the beach. On the way back, I crossed over into a merger lane on my bike, and this white woman with blonde curly hair, also on a road bike, who looked in her mid-40s, started yelling at me, ‘Get out of the way, you fucking Jew.’ I was like, ‘wow.’ I couldn’t believe it. I felt two emotions. The first was proud to have been recognized as a Jew. Even though I don’t know how she knew I was Jewish. But the second thing I felt was my disappointment that ‘Jew’ is now a bad word used to insult people.

“For so long, I didn’t know my identity, but now I am so invested in Judaism. On the front of my studio building in Hollywood, I have posters for freeing the hostages. People are so uncomfortable with it; I don’t know why.

“I have been constantly targeted for being Jewish ever since my discovery. It has been so bad since October 7 in Los Angeles. And in Belgium, in the immediate aftermath of October 7, people would say to me, ‘Your people are killing people.’ Or they were saying that in American society, only Jewish people hold important posts and jobs.

I am so happy that I found out I was Jewish. ”

– **Noah Abrahams**



**SECTION 3**  
**CASE STUDIES**





# LITHUANIA

## THE POLITICAL RISE OF AN ANTISEMITE

The October 2024 parliamentary elections in Lithuania marked a shift in the country's political landscape. The Social Democratic Party of Lithuania (LSDP), under the leadership of Vilija Blinkevičiūtė, secured 52 out of 141 seats in the Seimas, the parliament, ending the four-year tenure of the center-right government led by Prime Minister Ingrida Šimonytė and her Homeland Union (TS-LKD), which managed to obtain only 28 seats.<sup>1</sup>

While the rise of the Social Democrats and the decline of the Homeland Union was expected, less so was the success of Nemunas Dawn, a newly established populist party led by a politician known for his openly antisemitic statements, Remigijus Žemaitaitis. Nemunas Dawn, which Žemaitaitis formed in 2023, secured 20 seats and finished third in the elections. An even bigger shock was the decision by the Social Democrats to form a coalition with Žemaitaitis and his party despite pre-election statements it would not do so.

A lawyer by training, Žemaitaitis first entered the Seimas in 2009 as a member of the Order and Justice party, a conservative right-wing party championing anti-establishment views, winning his local constituency of Šilalė–Šilutė.<sup>2</sup> He served as its chairman from 2016 to 2020 when Order and Justice merged with two other parties to form the Freedom and Justice party, a center-right conservative party with liberal economic positions.

Known for his inflammatory rhetoric and populist tactics throughout his political career, Žemaitaitis gained notoriety in 2023 for a series of antisemitic social media posts accusing Jews of historical crimes against Lithuanians, distorting the history of the Holocaust, and making antisemitic comments about Israel.

The resulting scandal led to his suspension from the Freedom and Justice party and an April 2024 ruling by Lithuania's Constitutional Court that he had violated his parliamentary oath and Lithuania's Constitution by inciting hatred. This ruling led to his resignation from the Seimas to avoid impeachment.

In doing so, Žemaitaitis ensured his ability to remain a candidate in Lithuania's May 2024 presidential election and return to the Lithuanian parliament in October 2024 as a leader of a radical new force. Indeed, despite his antisemitic remarks and controversies surrounding his historical revisionism, he maintained a strong support base among certain nationalist and

<sup>1</sup> BNS, "Lithuanian Social Democratic Leader Hails 'Historic' Election Victory," Irt.lt, October 28, 2024, <https://www.irt.lt/en/news-in-english/19/2399206/lithuanian-social-democratic-leader-hails-historic-election-victory>, and BNS, "Lithuania's Parliamentary Run-offs: Social Democrats Seal Victory with 52 Seats," Irt.lt, October 27, 2024, <https://www.irt.lt/en/news-in-english/19/2398287/lithuania-s-parliamentary-run-offs-social-democrats-seal-victory-with-52-seats>.

<sup>2</sup> "Preliminary Data: Paksas's Comrade Žemaitaitis Elected to the Seimas [Lithuanian]," tv3.lt, November 29, 2009, <https://www.tv3.lt/naujiena/lietuva/isankstiniai-duomenys-i-seima-isrinktas-r-pakso-bendrazygis-r-zemaitaitis-n321659>.

far-right voter segments, as well as rural voters. He did so by portraying himself as a defender of “Lithuanian sovereignty” and a victim of elites trying to silence him from telling the truth about Jews, the Holocaust in Lithuania, and Israel.

Žemaitaitis has had a troubled relation to facts and decency when Jews or Israel are concerned. In early May 2023, reports emerged that Israeli authorities, carrying out a court order, demolished a European Union (EU)-funded Palestinian school near Bethlehem. The Israeli court found that the school had been constructed illegally in 2017 and that the structure was unsafe and in danger of collapsing.<sup>3</sup>

The demolition was condemned by the EU and the Palestinian Authority (PA).<sup>4</sup> Žemaitaitis added his voice to the criticism of Israel’s destruction of the school in two Facebook posts commenting on the incident, where he cited a well-known Lithuanian folk song with deep-seated antisemitic lyrics.

In his first post, he wrote, “Apparently, there are animals in this world besides Putin, Israel [...] After such events, no wonder there appear sayings like this: ‘A Jew was climbing the ladder and accidentally fell off; take a stick, kids, and kill that little Jew.’ What else must happen for Israel to realize that such provocations and such actions only stir more anger and hatred against Jews and their people.”

In a second post made shortly thereafter, Žemaitaitis repeated the antisemitic children’s rhyme urging “Israeli Jews” to apologize to the Palestinians and the EU for “your nasty little actions in a foreign country.”<sup>5</sup> Several days later, he continued to make a public spectacle, apologizing as a “European, a member of the Seimas” to the Palestinian people for the Israeli actions; his post received over one thousand likes.<sup>6</sup>

Žemaitaitis’s inflammatory posts provoked a swift backlash and led to calls for disciplinary action against him. The embassies of Israel, Germany, the Netherlands, and the United States and the World Jewish Congress condemned the statements and called on Žemaitaitis to publicly apologize.

Faina Kukliansky, chairwoman of the Lithuanian Jewish Community (LJC), noted that Žemaitaitis’s statements were crafted not for Jews but for a Lithuanian audience, exploiting nationalist sentiments and historical grievances to promote his political agenda.<sup>7</sup> Žemaitaitis’s party, Freedom and Justice, expelled him, although he dismissed this as an illegal act and accused his

<sup>3</sup> Canaan Lidor, “Israel Razes EU-Funded Palestinian School Near Bethlehem,” *Times of Israel*, May 7, 2023, <https://www.timesofisrael.com/israel-razes-eu-funded-palestinian-school-near-bethlehem/>.

<sup>4</sup> Le Monde with AFP, “Israel Demolishes EU-Funded School, Drawing Criticism,” *Le Monde*, May 7, 2023, [https://www.lemonde.fr/en/international/article/2023/05/07/israel-demolishes-eu-funded-palestinian-school-drawing-criticism\\_6025795\\_4.html](https://www.lemonde.fr/en/international/article/2023/05/07/israel-demolishes-eu-funded-palestinian-school-drawing-criticism_6025795_4.html).

<sup>5</sup> LRT.lt, “Žemaitaitis Antisemitism Controversy: What Exactly did he Say?,” Lrt.lt, November 11, 2024, <https://www.lrt.lt/en/news-in-english/19/2410821/zemaitaitis-anti-semitism-controversy-what-exactly-did-he-say>.

<sup>6</sup> Remigijus Žemaitaitis, “I, a European, a Member of the Seimas, Apologize... [Lithuanian],” Facebook, May 10, 2023, <https://www.facebook.com/RemigijusZemaitaitis1/videos/2177818865739973/>.

<sup>7</sup> Lithuanian Jewish Community, “Lithuanian MP Denounces Israel for Razing Palestinian School EU Financed,” lzb.lt, May 10, 2023, <https://www.lzb.lt/en/2023/05/10/lithuanian-mp-denounces-israel-for-razing-palestinian-school-eu-paid-for/>.



Photo by Wikimedia Commons



*Remigijus Žemaitaitis, Head of the Nemunas Dawn Party*

former colleagues of supporting “a terrorist state – Israel.”<sup>8</sup> The Seimas’s Ethics and Procedures Commission launched an investigation into his conduct, and the Vilnius District Prosecutor’s Office initiated a pre-trial investigation into his possible incitement of ethnic discord.<sup>9</sup>

Žemaitaitis remained defiant, refusing to apologize for his remarks and instead portraying himself as a victim of political persecution and arguing that he was exercising free speech. He doubled down on his use of the antisemitic rhyme, saying he did so intentionally to argue that the state of Israel was causing antisemitism to rise around the world through its policies. He further warned that any impeachment efforts against him would be challenged in the European Court of Human Rights.<sup>10</sup>

A month later, in June 2023, Žemaitaitis expanded his antisemitic rhetoric to include historical revisionism in another series of inflammatory Facebook posts that distorted the Holocaust. He suggested Lithuanians suffered more than Jews in the Second World War and blamed Jews for crimes against Lithuanians. Targeting then-Lithuanian Prime Minister Ingrida Šimonytė while she visited Israel, Žemaitaitis condemned her visit and falsely claimed that Lithuanian Jews and

<sup>8</sup> Zygimantas Šilobritas, “Žemaitaitis, Who was Sanctioned by Freedom and Justice for Antisemitic Remarks: Without Me, the Party’s Rating will Fall [Lithuanian],” *Delphi25*, May 20, 2023, <https://www.delfi.lt/news/daily/lithuania/is-laisves-ir-teisingumo-sankciju-uz-antisemitinius-pasisakymus-susilaukes-zemaitaitis-be-manes-partijos-reitingas-kris-93415577>.

<sup>9</sup> ELTA, “R. Žemaitaitis’ Words Sparked a Heated Debate in the Seimas [Lithuanian],” *Lrytas*, May 9, 2023, <https://www.lrytas.lt/lietuvosdiena/aktualijos/2023/05/09/news/del-r-zemaitaicio-zodziu-aistros-seime-parlamentaras-pareiske-neatsiprasysias-nei-raginamas-ambasados-nei-kitu-seimo-na-26981383>.

<sup>10</sup> Šilobritas, ““Žemaitaitis, Who was Sanctioned by Freedom and Justice.”

Russians committed the June 1944 massacre in Pirčiupiai, which was actually perpetrated by a Nazi SS unit.<sup>11</sup> Demanding the government care more about Lithuanians allegedly murdered by Jews between 1941 and 1944, he continued,

How much longer will our politicians kneel down to the Jews who killed our people and contributed to the oppression and torture of Lithuanians and the destruction of our country? There was a Holocaust of the Jews, but there was an even larger Holocaust of the Lithuanians in Lithuania! So, if our joker politicians apologize to the Jews in Israel, when will the Jews apologize to us?<sup>12</sup>

Over the following days, including the June 14 Day of Mourning and Hope, which commemorates Soviet deportations of Lithuanians to Siberia, Žemaitaitis continued his tirade in several other posts. Addressing the deportations, Žemaitaitis stated: “We, the Lithuanian people, must never forget the Jews and the Russians who very actively contributed to the destruction of our nation!”<sup>13</sup> He further argued that the “descendants of those NKVD and KGB,” meaning Jews, rule over Lithuanians today and that June 14 should be commemorated as the national day of the “Lithuanian Holocaust.”<sup>14</sup>

In another post, he published a list of Jewish individuals who he falsely accused of orchestrating Soviet deportations of Lithuanians in 1941, writing, “Even after 80 years have passed, one ‘subspecies’ group of Jews is still not able to admit that in this tragedy of Lithuania their representatives played a very important role.”<sup>15</sup>

Žemaitaitis’s claims equating Soviet-era deportations and repressions with the Holocaust, framing Lithuanians as the true victims of genocide, and minimizing Jewish suffering and historical evidence of Lithuanian complicity in Holocaust crimes were not original or uncommon. They echo known revisionist narratives that seek to relativize the Holocaust by emphasizing the suffering of non-Jewish populations under Soviet rule and the antisemitic depiction of Jews as collaborators with the Soviet regime.

As other countries in Europe, Lithuania confronts a complicated past. The nation was a victim of injustice but also the perpetrator of injustice and was occupied by the Germans and the Soviets. The contested manner in which Lithuanians engage with their complicated past is

<sup>11</sup> Augustė Lyberytė, “Žemaitaitis Continues to Make Antisemitic Statements: Outraged by Šimonytė’s Visit to Israel [Lithuanian],” Delfi25, June 14, 2023, <https://www.delfi.lt/news/daily/lithuania/zemaitaitis-toliau-zarstosi-antisemitiniais-pareiskimais-piktinasi-simonytes-vizitu-izraelyje-93654685>.

<sup>12</sup> Remigijus Žemaitaitis (@RemigijusZemaitaitis1), “Our Prime Minister Ingrida Šimonytė is even more Disgusting... [Lithuanian],” Facebook, June 13, 2023, <https://www.facebook.com/RemigijusZemaitaitis1/posts/pfbid0u2zGaQNZ9Z3T3osoLADBz4TV5dMDF3SXpp1n3TRaN7rgWkTR1LCDLQrrDx9TbDqel>.

<sup>13</sup> Remigijus Žemaitaitis (@RemigijusZemaitaitis1), “Lithuanian Jew Aleksandras Slavinas... [Lithuanian],” Facebook, June 14, 2023, <https://www.facebook.com/RemigijusZemaitaitis1/posts/pfbid0272DhWb1q9ajqwrwE5NSZuSq7uvxA3UXVjHDnaqEBVF2ftE3MZqbwdh2YLwn327DL>.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Remigijus Žemaitaitis (@RemigijusZemaitaitis1), “Even After 80 Years Have Passed... [Lithuanian],” Facebook, June 15, 2023, <https://www.facebook.com/RemigijusZemaitaitis1/posts/pfbid0RYJD5ThLrsEuL9fnBc8bno3RchZtfA7LKXkHVH4zVymH5zmp3TmrFTQFSFW4azirl>.

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captured by, among other things, the Museum of Occupations and Freedom Fights, which this author visited in the summer of 2023.

Located in the former KGB building in Vilnius, between 1940 and 1941 it was the prison of the NKVD/NKGB before serving as the headquarters of the Gestapo, Sicherheitsdienst (SD, SS intelligence), and the SD's Sonderkommando (special squad, YB) of local Lithuanian volunteers who participated in the slaughter of Lithuania's Jews from 1941-1944. It was then reoccupied by the KGB in 1944. However, until 2011, there was not a single exhibit in the museum about the Holocaust or about Lithuanian complicity in Nazi crimes. The "genocide" the museum dubiously referred to was that of non-Jewish Lithuanians murdered by the Soviets. Moreover, some Lithuanians who helped the Nazis perpetrate the Holocaust, that is, in murdering their fellow Lithuanians, were lauded and praised for resisting the Soviets.<sup>16</sup>

Žemaitaitis's remarks reflect the difficulty Lithuania has had in confronting its complicated past. In an attempt to justify himself, Žemaitaitis claimed he was merely exposing historical truths about Jewish involvement in Soviet crimes. Yet, as several critics and historians noted, Žemaitaitis distorts historical facts and essentially is willing to say anything that will make him popular among the disaffected, the poorly educated about the crimes of the Holocaust and those who are, simply put, antisemites.<sup>17</sup>

The Lithuanian Jewish Community expressed its deep concern and sadness over Žemaitaitis's rhetoric, emphasizing that such statements had not appeared in mainstream Lithuanian discourse for years.<sup>18</sup> That Žemaitaitis's diatribe coincided with Lithuania's commemoration of the liquidation of the Vilnius ghetto (June 1943, which SS Chief Heinrich Himmler ordered) made the timing of his statements even more painful for Lithuania's Jewish community.

The government response to Žemaitaitis's statements during 2023 was mixed. Leading figures, including then-Prime Minister Ingrida Šimonytė and then-Speaker of Parliament Viktorija Čmilytė-Nielsen, condemned his remarks, and Speaker Čmilytė-Nielsen suggested Žemaitaitis should be impeached and removed from parliament.

The ruling coalition demanded an apology for his antisemitic remarks before the NATO summit in Vilnius in July, but opposition parties refused to support the motion. Some opposition parties also refused to support efforts to impeach and remove him from parliament, signaling a reluctance to take a firm stance against antisemitism.<sup>19</sup>

<sup>16</sup> Carl Yonker, "Past Present: Lithuania and Latvia Struggle with Complicated Histories," *Perspectives* no. 25, August 2023, <https://cst.tau.ac.il/perspectives/past-present/>.

<sup>17</sup> Eugenijus Gentvilas and Marijus Gailius, "A Conglomerate of Disinformation: How Anti-Vaxxers Turned Antisemites [Lithuanian]," *Delfi25*, July 7, 2023, <https://www.delfi.lt/news/ringas/politics/eugenijus-gentvilas-ir-marijus-gailius-dezinformacijos-konglomeratas-kaip-antivakseriai-virto-antisemitais-93847863>.

<sup>18</sup> Lithuanian Jewish Community, "Lithuanian Jewish Community Statement on Antisemitic Statements by a Member of the Lithuanian Parliament," *lzb.lt*, June 22, 2023, <https://www.lzb.lt/en/2023/06/22/lithuania-jewish-community-statement-on-anti-semitic-statements-by-a-member-of-the-lithuanian-parliament/>.

<sup>19</sup> ELTA, "Žemaitaitis, Who Has Sparked Outrage over Antisemitic Statements, Is Not Afraid of Impeachment [Lithuanian]," *Lrytas*, July 4, 2023, <https://www.lrytas.lt/lietuvosdiena/aktualijos/2023/07/04/news/pasipiktinimo-del-antisemitiniu-pareiksimu-sulaukes-r-zemaitaitis-nebijo-apkaltos-paziuresime-kaip-i-tai-reaguos-teismai-27582105>.

For his part, Žemaitaitis remained defiant, asking what exactly he should apologize for. He threatened that if impeachment proceedings were started against him, he would appeal to the European Court of Human Rights, local courts, and society.<sup>20</sup>

Lithuanian Prosecutor General Nida Grunskienė stated that the legal proceedings against Žemaitaitis would depend on expert assessments of whether his statements constituted incitement to hatred. Given Lithuania’s legal framework, which includes laws against hate speech and ethnic incitement, a possibility existed that he could face criminal charges.<sup>21</sup>

While the international condemnation of Žemaitaitis’s remarks, coupled with domestic calls for accountability, suggested broad opposition to such rhetoric, the political resistance to Žemaitaitis’s removal from parliament raised questions about the extent to which there was the will to hold him accountable for his antisemitic statements.

In September 2023, the Lithuanian Parliament established a commission to investigate Žemaitaitis’s antisemitic statements on Facebook and determine whether he should be impeached. Initially, opposition parties viewed the commission as a politically motivated effort by the ruling conservative party to remove an opposition MP.

Following the Hamas attack on Israel on October 7, Žemaitaitis justified the war crimes committed by the Islamist terrorists, stating: “There are two ends to the stick; now the Israeli barbarians must suffer for murdering Palestinians.” These words encouraged a stronger push for his impeachment. As a result, 88 members of parliament voted in favor of continuing proceedings against him, while only two opposed and two abstained.<sup>22</sup>

Despite the establishment of a special impeachment commission to review the case, Žemaitaitis repeatedly failed to appear at meetings. On one occasion, Commission Chairman Arūnas Valinskas stated: “We won’t undertake additional measures. We will simply send an access link to all meetings we hold in the future and will provide the member of parliament the chance to connect and explain his position.” Valinskas further noted that Žemaitaitis’s refusal to present his own explanations could be perceived as a deliberate attempt to discredit the commission’s work, possibly exploiting loopholes in parliamentary statutes.<sup>23</sup>

While the commission continued its work, Žemaitaitis behaved as though he had done nothing wrong. No longer a member of the Freedom and Justice party, in January 2024,

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Milena Andrukaitytė and BNS, “Prosecutor’s Office Will Decide on Žemaitaitis’s Statements after Receiving an Expert Opinion [Lithuanian],” *Kauno Diena*, June 28, 2023, <https://kauno.diena.lt/naujienos/lietuva/salies-pulsas/prokuratura-del-r-zemaitaicio-pasisakymu-spres-gavus-ekspertu-ismada-1130530>.

<sup>22</sup> Gailė Jaruševičiūtė-Mockuvienė, “Seimas Extends Work of Žemaitaitis Impeachment Commission [Lithuanian],” *Delfi25*, October 10, 2023, <https://www.delfi.lt/news/daily/lithuania/seimas-pratese-zemaitaicio-apkaltos-komisijos-darba-94755873>.

<sup>23</sup> Gailė Jaruševičiūtė-Mockuvienė, “The Impeachment Committee will no Longer Try to Summon Žemaitaitis [Lithuanian],” *Lrytas*, October 23, 2023, <https://www.lrytas.lt/lietuvosdiena/aktualijos/2023/10/23/news/apkaltos-komisija-r-zemaitaicio-prisikviesti-nebandys-parlamentaras-samoningai-vengia-atvykti-i-posedi-28842542>.

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Žemaitaitis registered Nemunas Dawn as a party and announced his candidacy for the May 2024 presidential elections.<sup>24</sup>

His announced presidential bid coincided with Lithuanian Prosecutor General Nida Grunskienė's request for parliament to strip Žemaitaitis of his parliamentary immunity, citing his repeated posting of content on Facebook in May and June 2023 that allegedly mocked, belittled, and incited hatred against Jewish people. Grunskienė informed parliament that “the information collected in the pre-trial investigation lends credence that member of parliament Žemaitaitis [...] posted texts on his social media pages which might have mocked, belittled, and encouraged hate publicly against the group of people of Jewish ethnicity.”<sup>25</sup>

While Žemaitaitis admitted to posting the comments during an interview with prosecutors, he insisted that he was merely expressing his opinion and denied engaging in hate speech. The following month, in February 2024, the Lithuanian parliament approved the removal of Žemaitaitis parliamentary immunity in response to allegations of antisemitic statements, opening the door to criminal prosecution.

As the criminal investigation into his antisemitic social media posts continued, efforts to remove Žemaitaitis from parliament received a boost in April 2024 from the Lithuanian Constitutional Court, which ruled that Žemaitaitis's statements violated his parliamentary oath and the Constitution. The court found that his social media posts contained “degrading descriptions of Jewish people and Holocaust denial,” which amounted to a “gross violation” of the country's fundamental law.

The court elaborated that his statements “[contained], among other things, degrading descriptions of people belonging to an ethnically distinct group and [quoted] a counting-out rhyme [...] depicting violence against Jewish people, mocking them.” Furthermore, the ruling emphasized that Žemaitaitis's statements incited intolerance between ethnic minorities and demonstrated hatred toward an ethnically distinct group.<sup>26</sup>

On these grounds, the Lithuanian parliament had legal grounds to call a vote to impeach and remove Žemaitaitis. Such a vote never occurred after Žemaitaitis, who called the ruling “unjust,” chose to resign from parliament rather than face an impeachment vote. In avoiding impeachment, Žemaitaitis ensured his ability to run in the upcoming presidential election and parliamentary elections.<sup>27</sup> He found a loophole.

<sup>24</sup> LRT.lt, “MP Žemaitaitis, Accused of Antisemitism, to Run for Lithuanian President,” Lrt.lt, January 22, 2024, <https://www.lrt.lt/en/news-in-english/19/2176672/mp-zemaitaitis-accused-of-anti-semitism-to-run-for-lithuanian-president>.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., and Modesta Gaučaitė-Znutienė, “Don't Joke, It Doesn't Happen Like That [Lithuanian],” Lrt.lt, February 12, 2024, <https://www.lrt.lt/naujienos/lietuvoje/2/2193549/nejuokaukite-taip-nebuna-seimas-emesi-zemaitaicionelieciamybes-pats-politikas-izvelgia-rinkimu-seseli>.

<sup>26</sup> Lithuanian Jewish Community, “Lithuanian Constitutional Court Recognizes Antisemitic Statements Violate the Constitution of the Republic of Lithuania,” Izb.lt, April 26, 2024, <https://www.lzb.lt/en/2024/04/26/lithuanian-constitutional-court-recognizes-anti-semitic-statements-violate-the-constitution-of-the-republic-of-lithuania/>, and BNS, “Lithuania's Ex-MP Žemaitaitis Turns to ECHR Over His Impeachment Process,” Lrt.lt, August 26, 2024, <https://www.lrt.lt/en/news-in-english/19/2346878/lithuania-s-ex-mp-zemaitaitis-turns-to-echr-over-his-impeachment-process>.

<sup>27</sup> BNS, “Lithuania's Ex-MP Žemaitaitis.”

Elected through a two-round system, a candidate in the presidential race must secure an absolute majority in the first round to win; otherwise, a runoff between the top two candidates is necessary. In the 2024 election, incumbent President Gitanas Nausėda, an independent supported by the Social Democratic Party of Lithuania and the Lithuanian Regions Party, sought re-election against Prime Minister Ingrida Šimonytė of the Homeland Union.

No candidate achieved an absolute majority in the first round, necessitating a runoff. President Nausėda won 44%, while Šimonytė took second place with 20% of the vote and Žemaitaitis came in fourth with 9.28% of the vote (more than 132,000 votes in total).<sup>28</sup>

At one point, before election results from cities had been counted, Žemaitaitis polled in second place, an achievement that surprised even him. Though ultimately falling to fourth place, winning over 9% of the vote despite his known antisemitic statements suggested such views are applauded or at least are considered legitimate by a segment of the electorate.

Žemaitaitis ultimately gave his support to the incumbent Nausėda in the second round, who secured a decisive victory with 75.29% of the vote, the largest margin in Lithuania's presidential election history since its independence in 1990.

Following his failed presidential bid, Žemaitaitis turned his attention to the parliamentary elections slated for October 2024. As part of his parliamentary campaign, he portrayed himself as a victim of “cancel culture,” claiming he was being persecuted for expressing views on Israel and Jews that were unpopular with the political elite. “I feel it is my duty to fight for the right to have an opinion and to express it. And not only for myself. Above all, for the people of Lithuania not to be afraid to speak out and criticize the government,” Žemaitaitis stated.<sup>29</sup> He went so far as to petition the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) to investigate whether Lithuanian authorities had violated his freedom of expression.

While Žemaitaitis played the victim in a vulgar yet not unique demonstration of how civil liberties can be cynically abused by hate-mongers, efforts to hold him accountable for his antisemitic rhetoric continued. In September 2024, the Vilnius Regional Court began hearing a criminal case against him for inciting hatred. Prosecutors charged him with hate speech, Holocaust denial, and inciting hostility toward Jews. The indictment referenced his claim that “Lithuanian Jews orchestrated mass deportations of Lithuanians in 1941.” Prosecutor Justas Laucius stated that “The evidence clearly shows a pattern of deliberate antisemitic rhetoric aimed at fostering division.”<sup>30</sup> Žemaitaitis denied the charges, asserting that his words were taken out of context.

<sup>28</sup> Central Electoral Commission of the Republic of Lithuania, “May 12, 2024, Presidential Elections [Lithuanian],” rezultatai.vrk.lt, May 13, 2024, <https://rezultatai.vrk.lt/?srcUrl=/rinkimai/1504/1/2070/rezultatai/lt/rezultataiPreRezultatai.html>; Andrius Sytas, “Lithuania’s Nausėda Wins First Round of Presidential Election,” *Reuters*, May 13, 2024, <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/lithuanian-presidential-hopefuls-vow-stand-up-russian-threat-2024-05-12/>; and Giedrė Balčiūtė, “Presidential Elections 2024: Nausėda and Šimonytė will Face Off in the Second Round [Lithuanian],” *Delfi25*, May 13, 2024, <https://www.delfi.lt/news/daily/politics/prezidento-rinkimai-2024-antrajame-ture-susikaus-nauseda-ir-simonyte-96492565>.

<sup>29</sup> BNS, “Lithuania’s Ex-MP Žemaitaitis Turns to ECHR.”

<sup>30</sup> Lithuanian Jewish Community, “Criminal Case against Former MP Žemaitaitis Begins,” *lzb.lt*, September 4, 2024, <https://www.lzb.lt/en/2024/09/04/criminal-case-against-former-mp-zemaitaitis-begins/>.

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As criminal proceedings began, Lithuanian politicians began to debate the broader implications of Žemaitaitis’s rhetoric openly. Lithuanian Foreign Minister Gabrielius Landsbergis called for a “cordon sanitaire” to prevent radical parties from gaining power after the upcoming parliamentary election, warning that history shows the tragic consequences of pandering to such radical forces.<sup>31</sup>

To avoid such an outcome, Landsbergis and his ruling conservative Homeland Union party appealed to the Social Democratic party to engage in talks about forming a “unity” coalition. The Kaunas Jewish Community warned that any political party willing to form a coalition with Žemaitaitis and Nemunas Dawn would be complicit in normalizing hate speech. “We cannot erase nor forget that he [Žemaitaitis] used antisemitic rhetoric as a springboard for his election,” said Gercas Žakas, chairman of the Kaunas Jewish Community.

Their warnings and pleas fell on deaf ears.

The Social Democrats’ success in the elections, winning an additional 13 seats under the leadership of Vilija Blinkevičiūtė, was driven by public dissatisfaction with the government’s handling of key issues, such as the COVID-19 pandemic and the influx of migrants from Belarus, which had sparked a considerable amount of political unrest.<sup>32</sup> Despite Lithuania’s economic stability, with robust growth and low inflation, the incumbent center-right government, led by Prime Minister Šimonytė’s Homeland Union, failed to maintain voter support.<sup>33</sup> Žemaitaitis’s Nemunas Dawn’s winning of 20 seats, an impressive achievement for a new party, owed, in part, to its promises of tax breaks for large families as well as its reassurances that it supports Ukraine in its war against fascist Russia, albeit through rhetoric that criticized the American involvement in the conflict.<sup>34</sup>

During the campaign, the Social Democrats pledged not to cooperate with Nemunas Dawn and initially appeared to adhere to their word. They entered into negotiations with the Lithuanian Farmers and Greens Union (LVŽS) and the Union of Democrats “For Lithuania.” The two had won eight and 14 seats, respectively. Negotiations with the LVŽS failed, at which point the Social Democrats reneged on their pledge and engaged Nemunas Dawn in coalition talks.

While the potential inclusion of Nemunas Dawn in coalition negotiations sparked controversy due to the legal proceedings against Žemaitaitis and his known antisemitic remarks and historical revisionism, the talks proceeded and resulted in the formation of a three-party coalition – Social Democrats, Nemunas Dawn, and For Lithuania, holding a parliamentary majority with 86 seats. As part of the agreement, Nemunas Dawn received three of the 14

<sup>31</sup> BNS, “Lithuanian FM Calls for ‘Cordon Sanitaire’ to Block Radicals from Power,” *lrt.lt*, September 4, 2024, <https://www.lrt.lt/en/news-in-english/19/2352708/lithuanian-fm-calls-for-cordon-sanitaire-to-block-radicals-from-power>.

<sup>32</sup> “Lithuania Seeks Compensation from Belarus for Migrant Crisis,” *AP News*, April 6, 2023, <https://apnews.com/article/lithuania-belarus-migration-crisis-border-f5e2b2b6e34fdda425465b9c15ea264a>.

<sup>33</sup> Giedre Peseckyte, “Lithuania’s Social Democrats Win Parliamentary Election,” *Politico*, October 27, 2024, <https://www.politico.eu/article/lsdp-lithuania-social-democrat-parliament-election-ingrida-simonyte/>.

<sup>34</sup> Andrew Higgins, “Party Whose Leader Is Known for Antisemitism to Join Lithuanian Government,” *The New York Times*, November 8, 2024, <https://www.nytimes.com/2024/11/08/world/europe/lithuania-coalition-antisemitism.html>.

cabinet positions in the new government: the Ministry of Agriculture, the Ministry of Energy, and the Ministry of Justice.

The coalition's formation was met with considerable opposition, both domestically and internationally. Lithuanian President Gitanas Nausėda called the coalition a “mistake” and made it clear that he would not appoint any ministers from Nemunas Dawn. Nausėda kept his pledge in principle, as Nemunas Dawn, instead of nominating party members for the cabinet positions, endorsed three independent candidates who the president confirmed. But the President did not keep his promise in spirit, as he de-facto permitted an antisemite to become kingmaker and a dominant force in the cabinet.

Noting the coalition agreement was already causing a problem for the country internationally, as important allies like the United States, Germany, and Israel expressed their misgivings and frustration, Nausėda questioned, “What self-respecting person would want to identify with the leader of this party?”<sup>35</sup>

During the first session of the new parliament and the swearing in of new members, protests against Nemunas Dawn and Žemaitaitis were held outside and in the cities of Kaunas and Tauragė, while opposition MPs (those who the previous year had worked to impeach him) left the parliament hall when Žemaitaitis took his oath of office.<sup>36</sup>

The Lithuanian Jewish Community (LJC) voiced strong concerns over the implications of the coalition. It expressed its dismay over the inclusion of a party led by a person who had made antisemitic remarks and was the subject of an ongoing criminal case for inciting ethnic hatred. LJC Chairwoman Faina Kukliansky strongly condemned Žemaitaitis' comments, describing them as deeply offensive and harmful. The LJC warned that the coalition would damage Lithuania's international reputation and harm the country's democratic principles. This sentiment was echoed by opposition leaders, who argued that Lithuania's democracy was at stake if hate speech was tolerated within the highest levels of government.

As the coalition government took shape, Žemaitaitis continued to face legal scrutiny for his antisemitic statements. In December 2024, Lithuania's Prosecutor General formally requested again that the parliament strip Žemaitaitis of his immunity so that his criminal case could proceed. The request was approved, with 101 votes in favor and none against or abstaining.

Žemaitaitis, as always, dismissed the charges as politically motivated, claiming that the case was a form of “political persecution.”<sup>37</sup> At the time the Report went to print, criminal proceedings against Žemaitaitis were ongoing and the coalition remained intact.

<sup>35</sup> Stasys Gudavičius, “The President on the Coalition with Nemunas Dawn [Lithuanian],” *Verslo žinios*, November 11, 2024, <https://www.vz.lt/verslo-aplinka/2024/11/11/prezidentas-apie-koalicija-su-nemuno-ausra-padaryta-klaida-sios-partijos-nariu-ministrais-netvirtinsiu>.

<sup>36</sup> BNS, “Lithuania's New Members of Parliament Sworn In, Ceremony Ends with Protest,” *Lrt.lt*, November 14, 2024, <https://www.lrt.lt/en/news-in-english/19/2412786/lithuania-s-new-members-of-parliament-sworn-in-ceremony-ends-with-protest>.

<sup>37</sup> Jūratė Skėrytė, “Lithuanian MP Žemaitaitis Stripped of Immunity,” *Lrt.lt*, December 3, 2024, <https://www.lrt.lt/en/news-in-english/19/2429633/lithuanian-mp-zemaitaitis-stripped-of-immunity>.



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Žemaitaitis's political success can be attributed to his ability to harness populist rhetoric and capitalize on the dissatisfaction of certain segments of the Lithuanian electorate, particularly in rural areas. Žemaitaitis has sophisticatedly positioned himself as a populist outsider, offering a critique of the political elites in Vilna, including the Social Democrats and the more established conservative parties.

Žemaitaitis's rhetoric often focuses on attacking the political establishment, which he portrays as corrupt and out of touch with the needs of ordinary Lithuanians.<sup>38</sup> His historically revisionist statements and legal battles helped Žemaitaitis frame himself as a victim of the system and become the leader of the third largest party in parliament.

Yet, for Žemaitaitis and his party to become members of a governing coalition, more was needed: a mainstream party willing to renege on its pre-election pledges not to join forces with an openly antisemitic populist. The Social Democrats made a compromise that favored power over principles and, in the process, legitimized that which should never be legitimized again in Europe.

**– Dr. Carl Yonker**

<sup>38</sup> Samoškaitė, “Sneering at Israel, Swearing at Elites.”



# GAZA, IRELAND

## THE HOUR WILL NOT COME

In early 2024, Amazon offered for sale an English translation of the novel *The Thorn and the Carnation* by Yahya Sinwar, then Hamas' leader in Gaza and the mastermind behind the October 7 attack and war crimes. Sinwar authored the novel in Arabic almost two decades earlier, when he was still a relatively unknown Hamas operative serving a life sentence in an Israeli prison for the murder of Palestinians suspected of collaborating with Israel.

The sale of Sinwar's translated work on Amazon sparked protests from pro-Israel organizations and was halted within days. The protesters argued that its content incited violence, was full of antisemitic rhetoric, and promoted terrorism. They also expressed concerns that the profits from its sale would ultimately fund Hamas.<sup>1</sup>

After Sinwar was killed by the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) in October 2024, becoming a "martyr" in the eyes of his supporters, his novel gained renewed attention and was marketed by sympathizers as his final testament. The novel was re-published in Arabic and was translated into Turkish, Kurdish, and Chinese. Within months, *The Thorn and the Carnation* became the top-selling book at book fairs in Amman, Jordan; Sulaymaniyah, Iraq; and Idlib, Syria. It also did well at book fairs in Kuwait, Algeria, and Egypt.<sup>2</sup>

The English translation was sold in bookstores in Switzerland, Germany, and the United States. Connolly Books in Dublin, which was founded in 1932 and describes itself as "Ireland's oldest radical bookshop," regarded the selling of the novel as a political mission. The store's website praised the author, describing Sinwar as someone who was "martyred while bravely fighting against Israeli genocide in Gaza." Potential readers were invited to "traverse the corridors of his mind, where the seeds for the heroic 'al-Aqsa Flood' operation initiated on October 7, 2023, were sown."<sup>3</sup>

The book and its author also received positive reviews in media across the world. A month before Sinwar was killed, Sözarn Barday, a lawyer with an interest in human rights in the Middle East, wrote in the South African weekly *Mail & Guardian* that the novel is "an intimate

<sup>1</sup> "Amazon Pulls Book by Hamas Leader Sinwar," *JNS*, April 8, 2024, <https://www.jns.org/amazon-pulls-book-by-hamas-leader-sinwar/>, and "Amazon Stops Selling Book by Hamas Leader Yahya Sinwar," UKLFI, April 19, 2024, <https://www.uklfi.com/amazon-stops-selling-book-by-hamas-leader-yahya-sinwar>.

<sup>2</sup> "Yahya Sinwar's Novel 'The Thorn and the Carnation' is a Best Seller at Jordan Exhibition after His Martyrdom [Arabic]," *Masr Times*, October 19, 2024, <https://www.masrtimes.com/448127>, and Nizar al-Rihani, "Translated into Turkish: The First Edition of Yahya Sinwar's Novel is Sold Out [Arabic]," *Bawabat Tunis*, April 29, 2024, <https://tinyurl.com/2whm6spt>.

<sup>3</sup> Yahya al-Sinwar, *The Thorn & The Carnation: Combined Edition Parts I & II* [2024], <https://www.connollybooks.org/product/the-thorn-the-carnation-combined-edition-parts-i-ii>.

and heart-wrenching perspective on the Palestinian resistance.” She portrayed Sinwar as demonstrating leadership “through the escalating violence and genocide.”<sup>4</sup>

In Turkey’s *Yeni Şafak* daily, Selçuk Türkyılmaz wrote that “for us, reading and reflecting on [Sinwar’s] book is a duty.” He portrayed Sinwar as a “great warrior” who secured his place in history by sacrificing his life defending Muslim lands. He further described Sinwar’s biography as a source of inspiration for “Palestinians and those living in the heart of the Islamic world.”<sup>5</sup>

Indeed, Sinwar’s novel, largely overlooked by researchers of Hamas before and oddly enough also after October 7, and analyzed below in this article, represents a unique attempt by a Hamas leader to provide a literary expression of his movement’s ideology.

Hamas, the “Islamic Resistance Movement in Palestine,” was founded in the Gaza Strip in late 1987 following the start of the First Intifada. It was headed by Sheikh Ahmad Yassin, a charismatic Palestinian theologian confined to a wheelchair who was inspired by the teachings of Egypt’s Islamist Muslim Brotherhood. It emerged as the self-declared Palestinian branch of the Brotherhood, aiming to offer an Islamist alternative to the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO).<sup>6</sup>

The strategic vision of Hamas, as outlined in its August 1988 charter, considers Palestine an endowment belonging to all Muslims. It calls for the liberation of Palestine from the river to the sea and for the destruction of the Jewish state of Israel. It declares (article 15) that this goal can only be achieved through an armed *jihad*, and views *jihad* as a personal duty, i.e., a religio-legal duty incumbent upon every Muslim.

Permanent peace agreements with Israel are framed in the charter (Article 11) as a betrayal of Islam. Therefore, it states that no Arab state or leader has the right to relinquish even an inch of it.

The charter is an antisemitic document envisioning a world without Jews at the End of Days (Article 7). It depicts Jews as a collective as the enemy of Muslims (Article 32) and describes them as Nazis (Article 20). Echoing *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, the charter accuses Jews of controlling world media and orchestrating through financial means conspiracies against humanity in general and Muslims in particular, including instigating the French Revolution and the Bolshevik Revolution and forcing the start of the First World War and the Second World War (Article 22).<sup>7</sup>

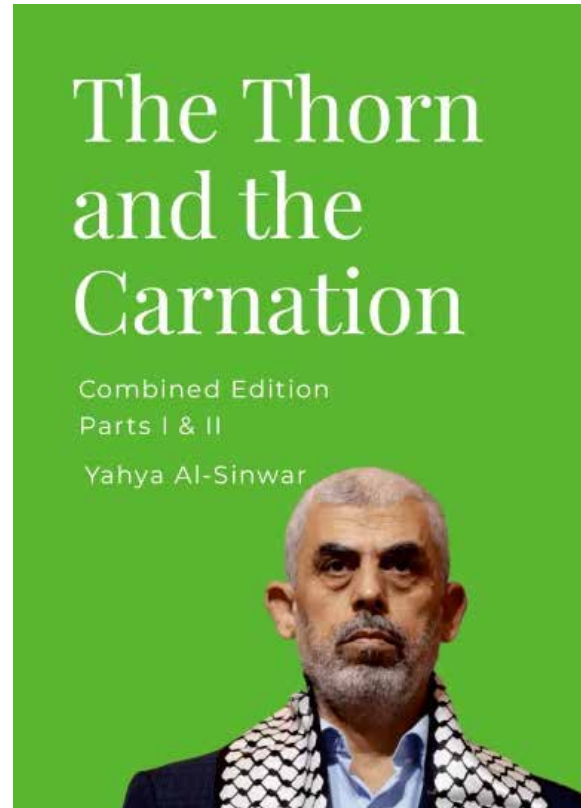
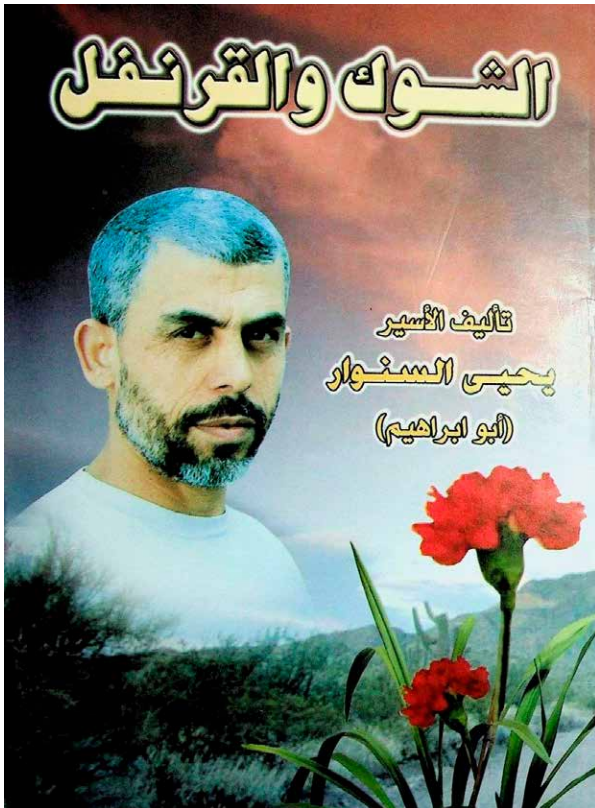
Over the years, Hamas leaders translated these ideological tenets into a political terrorist, annihilationist program. When Yasser Arafat engaged in negotiations with Israel and signed the

<sup>4</sup> Söznar Barday, “The Thorn and the Carnation: A Novel by a Palestinian Leader During His Incarceration in Israeli Prisons,” *Mail & Guardian*, September 20, 2024, <https://mg.co.za/friday/2024-09-20-the-thorn-and-the-carnation-a-novel-by-a-palestinian-leader-during-his-incarceration-in-israeli-prisons/>.

<sup>5</sup> Selçuk Türkyılmaz, “The Unending Struggle from Emir Abdelkader to Yahya Sinwar,” *Yeni Şafak*, October 20, 2024, <https://www.yenisafak.com/en/columns/selcuk-turkyilmaz/the-unending-struggle-from-emir-abdelkader-to-yahya-sinwar-3693096>.

<sup>6</sup> Uriya Shavit and Ofir Winter, *Zionism in Arab Discourses* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2016), 36-39.

<sup>7</sup> “The Hamas Charter (1988),” Intelligence and Terrorism Information Center at the Center for Special Studies, [https://www.terrorism-info.org.il/Data/pdf/PDF\\_06\\_032\\_2.pdf](https://www.terrorism-info.org.il/Data/pdf/PDF_06_032_2.pdf), 15, 17-18, 21-22, 25-27, 34-35.



Oslo Accords in 1993, establishing mutual recognition and endorsing at least rhetorically the two-state solution, Hamas vowed to thwart the diplomatic process by force at any cost. The movement launched a violent terror campaign that included suicide bombings, kidnappings, shootings, and stabbings, killing hundreds of Israeli men, women, elderly, and children.

Hamas justified the killing of Israeli civilians on religious grounds, arguing that Israeli society was militaristic, rendering every Israeli a de facto soldier whose blood was permissible to spill.<sup>8</sup>

In 2006, following Israel's unilateral withdrawal from Gaza, democratic elections were held for the Palestinian Legislative Council, in which Hamas won. The following year, the movement forcibly seized control of Gaza, becoming the enclave's ruling authority. Since then, the Palestinian territories in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip have been divided between the Palestinian Authority and Hamas, respectively.

The Middle East Quartet, the international body overseeing the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, comprising the United Nations, the United States, the European Union, and Russia, set three conditions for Hamas in 2006 to be recognized as a legitimate political actor: recognizing Israel, renouncing terrorism, and accepting previously signed agreements between Israel and

<sup>8</sup> "Sheikh Yusuf al-Qaradawi and His Impact on the Dissemination of Radical Islam," The Meir Amit Intelligence and Terrorism Information Center, October 23, 2022, <https://www.terrorism-info.org.il/en/sheikh-yusuf-al-qaradawi-and-his-impact-on-the-dissemination-of-radical-islam/>.

the PLO.<sup>9</sup> Hamas flatly rejected these conditions, arguing that it would not abandon its core principles or disregard the will of the Palestinian electorate who voted for the movement.<sup>10</sup>

In the years that followed, Hamas solidified its rule in Gaza. However, between 2013 and 2017, it faced strategic difficulties due to strained relations with Egypt. The Egyptian government accused Hamas of supporting terrorism in the Sinai Peninsula, which had claimed the lives of thousands of Egyptian security personnel.<sup>11</sup> Cairo tightened border restrictions at the Rafah crossing, increased efforts to uncover and destroy smuggling tunnels between Gaza and the Sinai, and even threatened to classify Hamas as a terrorist organization.

In July 2015, after the assassination of Egypt’s attorney general by jihadist operatives trained in Gaza, the Egyptian government intensified its campaign against Hamas, branding it the “military wing of the Muslim Brotherhood.” Hamas found itself increasingly isolated both regionally and internationally, facing financial hardship and eroding public support among Palestinians.

Against this backdrop, Hamas began reconsidering its policy and rhetoric to ease external and internal pressures, even drafting a new charter. Following internal debates, the movement retained the 1988 charter while publishing a supplementary ideological vision called “The Document of Principles” in May 2017. This document did not replace the original charter, which remained officially intact. Still, it favored more secular-nationalist terms such as “armed resistance”; denied any formal ties to the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood; distanced itself from explicitly antisemitic rhetoric by claiming that “the struggle against the Zionist enterprise is not a religious struggle against Jews”; and expressed willingness to accept a temporary Palestinian state with East Jerusalem as its capital based on the 1967 borders, without recognizing Israel, the Oslo Accords, or any permanent settlement based on the two-state principle.<sup>12</sup>

While this document did not facilitate reconciliation with the Fatah-led Palestinian Authority in the West Bank, it paved the way for tactical understandings between Hamas and Egypt. However, the document offered no substantive change regarding its stance toward Israel. Hamas leaders had proposed since the late 1980s a temporary *hudna* (ceasefire) in exchange for a Palestinian state within the 1967 borders, but never shifted away from their ultimate goal of liberating all of Palestine from the river to the sea, rejection of Israel’s existence, and opposition to any permanent peace agreements.<sup>13</sup>

Sinwar played significant roles during formative periods in Hamas’ history, both in its early days and during the challenging transitional phase of consolidating its rule in Gaza after his release from prison. Born in 1962 in Khan Yunis to a family of refugees from Majdal (Ashkelon),

<sup>9</sup> “Quartet Says Aid to Palestinian Government Will Be Reviewed in Light of Key Conditions,” United Nations, January 30, 2006, <https://news.un.org/en/story/2006/01/167612>.

<sup>10</sup> Gilead Sher, Liran Ofek, and Ofir Winter, “The Hamas Document of Principles: Can a Leopard Change Its Spots?” *Strategic Assessment* 20, no. 2 (July 2017), 85-98.

<sup>11</sup> Jony Essa and Ofir Winter, “On the 40th Anniversary of Israel’s Withdrawal from Sinai: Is the Peninsula Becoming Integrated into Egypt?” *INSS Special Publication* (May 19, 2022), <https://www.inss.org.il/publication/sinai/>.

<sup>12</sup> Sher, Ofek, and Winter, “The Hamas Document of Principles,” 85-98.

<sup>13</sup> Shavit and Winter, *Zionism in Arab Discourses*, 53-54.

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he studied Arabic at the Islamic University of Gaza in the early 1980s. He was arrested by Israel in 1982 and 1985 for his student activism and sentenced to short prison terms.<sup>14</sup>

With the establishment of Hamas, Sinwar was responsible for its internal security apparatus, *al-Majd*, which was tasked with identifying and killing collaborators with Israel. From this unit, the movement's military wing later emerged. He was arrested again in 1988 and convicted in 1989 of murdering four Palestinians.

During his imprisonment, Sinwar learned Hebrew, engaged in translation from Hebrew to Arabic, wrote two so-called research books, and authored *The Thorn and the Carnation*, which he smuggled out of Eshel Prison in Beersheba in late 2004.

According to testimonies from Israeli prison guards, Sinwar instilled fear in fellow Palestinian inmates and acquired a special status among them. After his release in the 2011 Gilad Shalit deal, he rapidly climbed Hamas' ranks and was elected the movement's leader in Gaza in 2017 and 2021. Following the assassination of Hamas' political bureau chief, Isma'il Haniyya, by Israel in July 2024 in Tehran, Sinwar was chosen as his successor, a role he held until he was killed in a confrontation with IDF forces in Rafah in October 2024.

*The Thorn and the Carnation* is a fictional novel, yet there are clear parallels between the author's life and his characters. The blend of fiction and reality is anchored in the novel's chronological storyline, which transitions between real milestones in the conflict with Israel, including wars, agreements, intifadas, and terror attacks.

The book tells the story of a Palestinian family uprooted from its home in 1948, migrating to the Gaza Strip and struggling with life in the al-Shati refugee camp under Israeli occupation. The mother raises alone three children and two nephews who are separated from their fathers against their will. The sons are divided between different Palestinian resistance factions and disagree on their paths. Ahmad, the first-person narrator, is a science student who gradually leans toward Hamas, influenced by his cousin Ibrahim. The latter is the novel's second protagonist, symbolically named after both Sinwar's father and future son. Ibrahim is a Hamas operative and a student at the Islamic University of Gaza, working to instill the movement's ideology among those around him.<sup>15</sup>

*The Thorn and the Carnation* is primarily a political essay, an ode to the violent struggle against Israel rather than an antisemitic manifesto designed to incite hatred toward Jews as such. However, precisely for this reason, the Jew-hatred that emerges from many of its pages is so revealing. It reflects, unintentionally, the deep immersion of antisemitic perceptions into Hamas's discourse and ideology, and indeed, among a significant portion of the Palestinian public that supports the movement.

<sup>14</sup> Amira Howeidy, "Yahya Sinwar's Novel is a Tale of Palestine, and of His Own Past," *New Lines Magazine*, October 3, 2024, <https://newlinesmag.com/review/yahya-sinwars-novel-is-a-tale-of-palestine-and-of-his-own-past/>.

<sup>15</sup> Jacky Hugi, "Even Before Anyone in Israel Knew of His Existence, Sinwar was in Prison and Writing Books [Hebrew]," *Maariv*, August 17, 2024, <https://www.maariv.co.il/journalists/article-1125239>.

The antisemitic motifs expressed through the novel’s characters include depicting Jews as the eternal enemies of Muslims, attributing to them inherent, vile characteristics, and calling for their killing, even their annihilation.

A common antisemitic motif in Islamist discourse is the portrayal of Jews as the eternal enemies of Muslims, linking the Prophet Muhammad’s 7th-century conflict with the Jews of the Arabian Peninsula to Hamas’s present-day struggle against Jews in Israel. A particularly popular Islamic tradition that recurs throughout Sinwar’s book is the Battle of Khaybar in 628, during which Muslims defeated the Jews of the city and forced them to surrender half of their property to avoid conversion to Islam.

In descriptions of violent clashes between Palestinians and the IDF, the book repeatedly invokes the chant “Khaybar, Khaybar, O Jews, Muhammad’s army will return!” in various contexts: Gaza youths celebrating after damaging the tires of Israeli military vehicles;<sup>16</sup> Arab and Muslim demonstrators rallying in support of the intifada in their capital cities outside Palestine;<sup>17</sup> and a young man named Muhammad, preparing for a suicide attack in Gush Etzion, calling his proud mother for a final farewell and leaving his cellphone line open so she could witness the moment of his martyrdom:

*He shouted ‘Allah Akbar, I am heading to Khaybar’ and threw his bombs one by one. Then he stormed the main hall, firing... A firefight ensued, with the forces rushing to the scene. Muhammad fell and repeated: ‘I testify that there is no God but Allah, and I testify that Muhammad is His messenger.’ Then a wail escaped his mother’s lips as she said: ‘Praise be to Allah, who honored me with his martyrdom.’<sup>18</sup>*

The book presents the inherent and unchanging evil of Jews as an explanation for the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, selectively drawing from Islamic sources. For example, Baruch Goldstein’s 1994 massacre of 29 Muslim worshipers in the Cave of the Patriarchs in Hebron is depicted as representative of Jewish behavior rather than as an individual act of terrorism that was widely and unequivocally condemned in Israel at the time.

According to the novel, Goldstein’s attack occurred just after the imam recited a Quranic verse condemning Jewish violence and evil from the days of the First and Second Temples: “We decreed to the Children of Israel in the Scripture: ‘Twice you will spread corruption in the land and become highly arrogant’” (Quran 17:4). The moment after, the novel describes how a settler, “a tall man with a wild, dirty beard,” snuck into the mosque and opened fire on the worshipers.<sup>19</sup>

The novel’s opposition to the Oslo Accords is also justified through the alleged treachery that characterizes Jews as a collective. In one debate in the book, Hassan, a Hamas supporter, challenges Mahmud, a Fatah supporter: “Since when have [the Jews] honored agreements and treaties?” He then cites a verse from the Quran, commonly interpreted as referring to the

<sup>16</sup> Yahya al-Sinwar, *The Thorn and the Carnation* (2004), [https://archive.org/details/20240101\\_20240101\\_0853](https://archive.org/details/20240101_20240101_0853), 204. [Arabic]

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 326.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 332-333.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 286.



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Jews' betrayal of their covenant with Muhammad and their support for the infidels: "How is it that whenever they make a covenant or pledge, some of them throw it away? In fact, most of them do not believe" (Quran 2:100).<sup>20</sup>

Mahmud, however, refuses to be convinced, accusing Hassan of irrationality and of conflating the Jews of the past with those of today. In response, Hassan asserts that it is only a matter of time before Fatah members realize that Jews have deceived and manipulated them, just as they did to Muslims in the early days of Islam, when they "killed innocent people and fought against Allah and His messenger." He insists:

*This is what Allah has told us about them. We know them, their souls, and the way they operate. They do not honor covenants or agreements... Do you not understand that history repeats itself, and the Jews are the Jews? You will see, Mahmud. You will see, and I will remind you – if we survive.*<sup>21</sup>

The terms "Jews" and "Israel" are used interchangeably throughout the novel. However, the hatred toward Jews does not stem solely from their role as representatives of the oppressive and occupying "Zionist entity," which has allegedly violated Palestinian national rights. Instead, it is rooted in their very religious identity.

One example presented in the book is an attack in Gaza on an Israeli military vehicle, which later turned out to have been manned by Israeli Druze soldiers. Although Druze are described in the book as violent and immoral, having allegedly abused young Palestinian women, the Hamas adherents in the story express disappointment and sorrow when they realize they had targeted Druze instead of Jews. "If only they had been Jews!" Ibrahim sighs to himself as he watches the victims' mothers, sisters, and wives weeping on television.<sup>22</sup>

The novel's portrayal of Jews as the perpetual enemies of Muslims, depicted as inherently vile and incapable of peaceful coexistence, leads to a desire for their mass extermination. Toward the book's conclusion, just before Israel assassinates him, Ibrahim recalls "The Promise of the Stones and the Trees," a Prophetic tradition cited in Hamas' charter that encourages the killing of Jews on Judgment Day: "The Prophet of Allah said: The Hour will not come until the Muslims fight the Jews, and the Muslims will kill them, until the Jews hide behind stones and trees, and the stones and trees will say: 'O Muslim, O servant of Allah, there is a Jew behind me, come and kill him,' except for the Gharqad tree, for it is the tree of the Jews."<sup>23</sup>

This tradition, ultimately, was Sinwar's personal wish and mission.

The seeds of devastation sprout from the pages of the novel, where literary expressions align with the operational agenda that materialized on October 7: the glorification of sacrificing life in the path of *jihad* against Israel as a sacred value and a supreme goal, despite its high costs; the aspiration to kill as many Israelis as possible, indiscriminately targeting soldiers and civilians alike; approval of kidnapping and hostage-taking attacks as a means to secure

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 301.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 308.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 276.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 333.

the release of Palestinian prisoners; and the ambition to thwart peace and normalization agreements between Israel and its Arab neighbors through violent means, while rejecting the political path associated with the Palestinian Authority.

Hamas named the October 7 attack, directed primarily against southern Israel, as the “al-Aqsa Flood.” By placing Jerusalem at the forefront, Hamas sought to give the campaign a religious-Islamic character, expressing its vision and ultimate strategic goal: recruiting Arabs and Muslims to the liberation of the entire sacred land of Palestine, with al-Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem, the third holiest site in Islam, at its heart, through an uncompromising religious war.

This ideology is fully reflected in Sinwar’s novel. The narrator shares a formative event from his youth as a high school student in Gaza, when he first visited al-Aqsa Mosque in the late 1970s, at a time when access from Gaza to Israel was largely unrestricted. The tour was organized by the “Islamic Bloc,” later Hamas’ student movement, and was guided by cousin Ibrahim.

On the way to Jerusalem, their bus stopped in the Latrun area, where Ibrahim, teary-eyed, lifted a handful of soil, claiming it was soaked in the pure blood of the Prophet Muhammad’s Companions, who, according to tradition, fought there in 637 under the command of Abu ‘Ubayda Ibn al-Jarrah during the conquest of the land. He expressed his wish that the soil would mix with the blood of today’s Palestinians, the rightful successors of those ancient Muslim warriors, until liberation was achieved.<sup>24</sup>

The peak of the journey came, of course, when the students entered al-Aqsa Mosque. They prayed at the site, listened to the Friday sermon, visited the Dome of the Rock, and heard the story of the Prophet’s night journey to the city.

While absorbing the sanctity of the place, they noticed an intolerable injustice: Israeli soldiers controlled the access to the site, deciding who could enter and who could not. At that moment, they were filled with rage, wondering how the enormous Islamic nation that stood behind the Palestinians, despite its wealth and armies, had failed to liberate al-Aqsa from the “gangs” that had seized it. Then, the narrator testifies, they realized that “the struggle had other dimensions than we had known. It was not just about territory and displaced people, but a war of faith and religion.”<sup>25</sup>

For the protagonists of the novel, the outrage over the oppression in al-Aqsa and what they call Palestine had to be translated into violent action, into *jihad* for the defense of the holy site and the liberation of the land, with a willingness to sacrifice life in the footsteps of Islam’s heroes, from the Prophet Muhammad’s time, through Saladin during the Crusades, to the present day.<sup>26</sup>

At times, the ideal of sacrifice took on faces and names, such as when a friend or relative of Ibrahim and Ahmad lost their life in the struggle against Israel. In one case, the grief over the death of a friend named Yasser was mixed with joy that God had honored him with martyrdom (*shahada*), and the mourning tent was filled with ululations, sweets, and large, colorful posters of

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 130-131.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 132.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 142-143.

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the fallen fighter.<sup>27</sup> In another instance, Ibrahim's wife is described as having "a smile that never left her face" upon receiving the news of her husband's assassination by an Israeli airstrike.<sup>28</sup>

For Sinwar, Palestinian lives, let alone Israeli lives, are not sacred. In fact, the October 7 massacre pales in comparison to some of the fantasies voiced by the characters in *The Thorn and the Carnation*. The book describes how, during the 1991 First Gulf War, there was anticipation in Gaza that Iraqi President Saddam Hussein would launch chemical warheads and wipe out half of Israel's population (about five million people at the time). Thus, when the air raid sirens first blared, Palestinians cheered for the Iraqi leader: "With spirit and blood, we will redeem you, O Saddam... O Saddam, beloved, strike, strike Tel Aviv." However, when they learned that the missiles carried only conventional explosives, frustration set in: "It was as if ice water had been poured over us."<sup>29</sup>

Having been disappointed in their hopes of killing millions of Israeli civilians with chemical weapons, the characters in Sinwar's novel settled for smaller-scale murders, yet their objective remained the same: to make the occupiers "curse the day they came to our land and took over our sacred sites."<sup>30</sup>

The novel glorifies a series of shooting, bombing, and suicide attacks from the early Oslo years through the Second Intifada, including the shooting of a father and his children at a hitchhiking station in the West Bank as they traveled to a religious school in Jerusalem;<sup>31</sup> the October 1994 bombing of Dan Bus Line 5 on Dizengoff Street in Tel Aviv, which killed 22 and injured 104;<sup>32</sup> the January 1995 Beit Lid junction bombing, which killed 22 and wounded 66;<sup>33</sup> the June 2001 Dolphinarium nightclub bombing in Tel Aviv, where 21 young people were killed and about 120 injured;<sup>34</sup> the Sbarro restaurant bombing in Jerusalem, where 16 were killed and 140 wounded; and the first mortar and Qassam rocket attacks on settlements in the Gaza Strip and Israeli communities surrounding it.<sup>35</sup>

The Palestinian attacks deep inside Israel's territory, including major cities like Jerusalem, Tel Aviv, Netanya, and Ashdod, are portrayed in the book as proof of Palestinians' ability to inflict heavy damage on their enemy despite its military superiority. According to the narrator, these attacks resulted in many achievements: they sowed panic among the occupiers, deepened divisions in Israeli society over the peace process, emptied Israeli streets, shuttered shops, and left cafés and restaurants deserted. Only a handful of Israelis dared use public transportation. Sandbags appeared in shopping centers, and Israeli cities resembled military outposts with checkpoints and thousands of soldiers and police officers.<sup>36</sup>

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 250-251.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 334.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 228-229.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 262.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 285.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 295-296.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 298.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 326.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 328, 331.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 330-331.

Anyone looking at the devastation in Gaza following the October 7 War may wonder whether Sinwar would have carried out the massacre had he known its consequences in advance. Based on his novel, the answer seems to be positive.

His protagonists justify the heavy toll paid by Palestinians for their terrorist acts during the Second Intifada. At one point, Ibrahim scoffs at calls for Hamas to lay down its arms and allow Palestinians to live in peace, joking that after Israel assassinated Hamas operatives, invaded Palestinian cities, and left them in ruins, the only thing left for Israel to do was rebuild them, so it would have something to destroy again in the future.<sup>37</sup>

Another issue that draws a direct line between the novel and the October 7 attack is Sinwar's keen interest, as expressed in his book written while in prison, in hostage-taking and bargaining attacks to secure the release of Palestinian prisoners. The Jibril deal, in which 1,151 Palestinian prisoners were released in 1985 in exchange for three IDF captives in Lebanon, is described in the novel as a moment of joy in the Palestinian territories, as well as a boost to the national struggle.<sup>38</sup>

The novel also provides a detailed account of two kidnapping operations for which Hamas was responsible: the 1992 abduction of Border Police officer Nissim Toledano, intended to secure the release of Sheikh Yassin, which ended in Toledano's murder and the expulsion of 415 Hamas operatives to Lebanon;<sup>39</sup> and the 1994 kidnapping of soldier Nachshon Wachsman, aimed at securing the release of 500 Palestinian prisoners, including Sheikh Yassin, which ended in a failed IDF rescue operation.<sup>40</sup>

One of Sinwar's objectives in launching the October 7 attack was to derail the normalization agreement that was on the verge of being signed between Israel and Saudi Arabia.<sup>41</sup> The agreement was expected to grant Israel recognition from the country where Islam originated, draw additional Arab and Muslim states into the circle of peace, and shatter Hamas' hopes of uniting the Muslim nation in a struggle to eliminate the Jewish state.

The novel Sinwar authored extensively addresses the divide between the Arab and Palestinian strategic choice of peace on one end and Hamas' unwavering commitment to armed struggle and rejection of any permanent settlement with the Jewish state on the other. The roots of this divide trace back to the peace initiative of Egyptian President Anwar al-Sadat. According to the novel's account, the speech delivered by Sadat at the Knesset in November 1977 sparked shock and opposition among the Palestinian people. In an act of protest, Palestinian terrorists assassinated Egyptian journalist Yusuf al-Siba'i, a close associate of Sadat who had accompanied his delegation on the visit to Israel.<sup>42</sup>

Several of the novel's conversations depict the intense debate between PLO activists, seeking peace agreements with Israel for pragmatic reasons, and Hamas activists, who adamantly reject

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 327, 330-331.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 159.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 245-246.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 293-295.

<sup>41</sup> "Hamas Attack Aimed to Disrupt Saudi-Israel Normalization, Biden Says," *Reuters*, October 21, 2023, <https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/hamas-attack-aimed-disrupt-saudi-israel-normalization-biden-2023-10-20/>.

<sup>42</sup> Al-Sinwar, *The Thorn and the Carnation*, 111.

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political compromises and prefer to establish a sovereign reality not bound by permanent agreements that go beyond *hudna*. They state: “Israel is an oppressive state that was established on our land and should cease to exist.”<sup>43</sup>

The novel’s protagonists categorically reject the claim that the establishment of a sovereign Palestinian entity necessitates acceptance of Israel’s existence. In a conversation between Mahmud, a PLO supporter, and Ibrahim, the latter insists that a Palestinian state can be established without recognizing Israel’s territorial rights over any part of the land.

Several years before the Israeli implementation of the disengagement plan and Hamas’ takeover of Gaza, Ibrahim, one of the novel’s protagonists, had already predicted that the killing of hundreds of Israelis by Palestinian resistance will pressure Israel into a unilateral withdrawal from Gaza and the West Bank, paving the way for a Palestinian state in the liberated territories, without requiring Palestinian recognition of the Jewish state.<sup>44</sup> When Mahmud asks about the difference between a withdrawal conditioned on recognizing Israel and an unconditional withdrawal, Ibrahim replies that if Israel leaves the Palestinian lands without an agreement and under the pressure of resistance, the door to continuing their struggle will remain open whenever circumstances allow.<sup>45</sup>

Not accidentally, Sinwar does not mention in the novel the names of Yasser Arafat or other Fatah leaders, and ignores events such as their dramatic return to the West Bank and Gaza, while mentioning Hamas leaders like Ahmad Yassin and Yahya ‘Ayyash and the major terror attacks carried out by the movement. The Egyptian columnist Sami al-Buhayri wrote in January 2025 in this context that reading *The Thorn and the Carnation* “proved to him beyond any doubt that Hamas, like all extremist ideological organizations, will not accept any [Palestinian] partner in governance.”<sup>46</sup>

The novel also demonstrates Hamas’ refusal to accept the agreements signed between the PLO and Israel and the authorities granted to the Palestinian Authority based on those agreements. The technical argument presented in the book by Hamas-affiliated characters for this position is that Palestinian opposition factions do not consider themselves bound by agreements they did not sign, especially since the PLO did not consult them before signing or had them approved through a referendum.<sup>47</sup>

According to the novel, this argument adds to Hamas’ fundamental rejection of the agreement’s terms, which include ending violent resistance, establishing relations of cooperation, coordination and security liaison with Israel, and, worse of all, recognizing the so-called Zionist entity’s right to control most of Mandatory Palestine under broad international guarantees.<sup>48</sup> In one episode, Ibrahim is summoned for interrogation at the Palestinian Preventive Security offices. An official

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 267.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 268.

<sup>46</sup> Sami al-Buhayri, “Reading Yahya Sinwar’s Book ‘The Thorn and the Carnation’ [Arabic],” *Elaph*, January 7, 2025, [https://elaph.com/Web/ElaphWriter/2025/01/1557847.html?utm\\_source=twitter&utm\\_medium=elaphnetwork&utm\\_campaign=elaphnetwork](https://elaph.com/Web/ElaphWriter/2025/01/1557847.html?utm_source=twitter&utm_medium=elaphnetwork&utm_campaign=elaphnetwork).

<sup>47</sup> Al-Sinwar, *The Thorn and the Carnation*, 289.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 290-291.

explains the new reality in which there is one legitimate Palestinian Authority, which has signed internationally backed agreements with Israel, and warns him that he will be arrested if he does not comply with its regulations. In response, Ibrahim accuses the official of collaborating with Israel's scheme to divide the Palestinians into two groups: one committed to the agreements and the other to the resistance. At the same time, he emphasizes that Palestinian national goals will not be achieved through negotiations but only through armed struggle, as "our enemies understand only the language of the rifle and fire."<sup>49</sup>

In one of the debates presented in the novel, Mahmud, the PLO supporter, accuses Hamas of carrying out attacks in order to take unjustified credit for prospective Israeli territorial withdrawals enabled by the Oslo Process. The response he receives is that there is no reason for Palestinians to wait for an Israeli withdrawal based on bilateral agreements since the Zionists are bound to "flee under the pressure of resistance" from the Gaza Strip and the West Bank anyway.<sup>50</sup>

When examining the ideological continuity between the novel and the October 7 massacre, one concludes that the seeds of that attack were sown not only in Sinwar's operational planning but also in his literary work. Thus, to the series of failures by Israeli decision-makers, intelligence agencies, and academic researchers before October 7, one must add the insufficient attention given to a literary text that could have served as a stark warning.

That a novel written by a murderous antisemitic psychopath is being sold and glorified today on the streets of European capitals without any penalty is another warning sign that is being ignored.

**- Dr. Ofir Winter, with contribution from Niv Shayovich**

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 297-298.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 297, 301-302.

# THE UNITED STATES

## SAD NEWS: NO JEWS, NO NEWS

Studies have demonstrated that university campuses and student organizations serve as centers of political protest and activism worldwide.<sup>1</sup> This phenomenon extends beyond liberal democracies.<sup>2</sup> Some campus protests became watershed moments in their respective nation's history, such as the widespread student protests against the Vietnam War in the United States and the Polytechnic uprising in Athens during Greece's military junta in the 1960s.<sup>3</sup> These and other examples highlight the role of universities as microcosms where larger societal and political tensions manifest.

This study analyses how student newspapers published at elite American university campuses treated the October 7 massacre and the ensuing war in Gaza in comparison to their treatment of other major conflicts involving humanitarian crises and allegations of breaches of international law: the war in Ukraine, the crisis in Sudan, and the situation of the Uyghurs in China.

The analysis presented here focused primarily on Ivy League universities – a consortium of private research universities in the Northeastern United States with roots dating back to the colonial era, as well as on the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA). These publications have served as independent media platforms for their respective universities for many decades, with *The Harvard Crimson* (est. 1873) holding the distinction of being the nation's oldest continuously published daily college newspaper.<sup>4</sup> It was followed by *The Daily Princetonian* (est. 1876), which maintains its independence through a student-run, not-for-profit structure,<sup>5</sup> and the *Columbia Daily Spectator* (est. 1877), which publishes content five days a week during the academic year with additional weekly print editions covering campus and New York City news.<sup>6</sup>

*The Daily Pennsylvanian* (est. 1885) is published at the University of Pennsylvania,<sup>7</sup> while *The Brown Daily Herald* (est. 1891) has served as the daily newspaper of record for Brown University.<sup>8</sup> *The Daily Bruin* (est. 1919), UCLA's primary campus newspaper, has maintained daily publication since the mid-1920s.<sup>9</sup> These publications share a common thread of longstanding tradition

<sup>1</sup> Nella Van Dyke, "Hotbeds of Activism: Locations of Student Protest," *Social Problems* 45, no. 2 (May 1998), 205-220.

<sup>2</sup> Sirianne Dahlum and Tore Wig, "Chaos on Campus: Universities and Mass Political Protest," *Comparative Political Studies* 54, no. 1 (January 1, 2021), 3-32.

<sup>3</sup> Thomas W. Gallant, "'Got a Revolution, Got to Revolution': Student Activism and the Anti-War Movement. An Historical Assessment," *Historiein* 9 (May 1, 2010), 57; Kenneth J. Heineman, *Campus Wars: The Peace Movement at American State Universities in the Vietnam Era* (New York: University Press, 2010); Kostis Kornetis, *Children of the Dictatorship: Student Resistance, Cultural Politics, and the "Long 1960s" in Greece* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2013).

<sup>4</sup> "About," *The Harvard Crimson*, <https://www.thecrimson.com/about/>.

<sup>5</sup> "About Us," *The Princetonian*, <https://www.dailyprincetonian.com/page/about>.

<sup>6</sup> "About," *Columbia Daily Spectator*, <https://www.columbiaspectator.com/about-us/>.

<sup>7</sup> "About The Daily Pennsylvanian, Inc.," *The Daily Pennsylvanian*, <http://www.thedp.com/page/about>.

<sup>8</sup> "About," *The Brown Daily Herald*, <https://www.browndailyherald.com/page/about>.

<sup>9</sup> "About The Daily Bruin," *The Daily Bruin*, <https://dailybruin.com/about>.

within their respective academic communities, making them valuable sources for analyzing media coverage patterns and discourse evolution in university settings.

The study involved two parts. A database of articles from the above student newspapers was compiled based on selected time-frames and keywords that are potentially in connection with different international crises. The articles located are freely accessible from the publications' online platforms.<sup>10</sup>

Another part of the research focused specifically on editorials dealing with the war in Gaza and the responses on campuses to the war. It aimed to determine not only the scope of treatment given to the conflict in Gaza in editorials in comparison to other regional conflicts, but also the opinions with which the editors identified and the priorities they enhanced. Framing and narratives were scrutinized to understand how the war in Gaza was represented, particularly in the portrayal of victims, aggressors, and underlying causes.

A curious aspect of the stormy anti-Israel demonstrations on some American campuses has been the total or almost total indifference of the same students to other international crises involving clearer violations of international law and human rights or a far greater number of casualties or both. This absence raises concerns that passionate pro-Palestinian students were motivated by other than universal concepts of freedom or dignity.

A review of the totality of news coverage and opinion columns in which the names of different countries were mentioned suggests that student newspapers in elite universities reflected this bias, and have perhaps also influenced it.

The war in Ukraine presents itself as the most relevant comparative case when examining media coverage of the Gaza conflict. The scale and intensity of the conflict in Ukraine that was precipitated by fascist Russia's unprovoked invasion in February 2022 are particularly striking when examining casualty figures: approximately two thousand Ukrainian civilians are killed each month,<sup>11</sup> while Russian combat casualties are estimated to be 1,585 soldiers per day.<sup>12</sup> Recent estimates suggest the total death and injury toll has reached approximately one million people since the conflict's inception.<sup>13</sup> The Russian aggression involved war crimes, including deliberate attacks on civilian populations where there was no military presence, the torturing of prisoners, and the kidnapping of children.

A comparison of student newspaper coverage during the first three months of each conflict respectively reveals striking disparities in attention. Looking at UCLA's *Daily Bruin*, the word

<sup>10</sup> Not all platforms provide a filtered search within their websites. Therefore, to ensure a fair and consistent result output, Google Search was used to conduct the queries by using the prompt: site:\*url\* \*keyword\*. This method has its technological limitations, but it remains the only unified approach available.

<sup>11</sup> OHCHR, "41st Periodic Report on the Human Rights Situation in Ukraine (1 September to 30 November 2024)," OHCHR, December 31, 2024, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/documents/country-reports/41st-periodic-report-human-rights-situation-ukraine-1-september-30>.

<sup>12</sup> "Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, January 2, 2025," Institute for the Study of War, January 2, 2025, <http://dev-isw.bivings.com/>.

<sup>13</sup> Bojan Pancevski, "One Million Are Now Dead or Injured in the Russia-Ukraine War," WSJ, September 17, 2024, <https://www.wsj.com/world/one-million-are-now-dead-or-injured-in-the-russia-ukraine-war-b09d04e5>.



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Photo by Shutterstock

*Pro-Palestinian protestors at encampment on UCLA campus, April 2024*

Israel appeared in 55 articles between October 7 and December 31, 2023, while Ukraine appeared in only six articles during the equivalent period at the start of the Russian aggression (February 24 to May 24, 2022).

This pattern consistently emerges across other elite university newspapers. The *Brown Daily Herald* also showed pronounced disparity, with 154 articles mentioning Israel compared to 39 mentioning Ukraine in the first three months of each conflict. Harvard's *The Crimson* demonstrated a similar pattern with 174 Israel-related articles versus 42 Ukraine-related ones in the respective periods of the start of the wars. The University of Pennsylvania's *Daily Pennsylvanian* follows this trend, with 105 articles mentioning Israel compared to five for Ukraine.

The most significant disparity appears in Princeton's *Daily Princetonian*, where the difference between 114 Israel-related articles and just one Ukraine-related article represents an 11,300% difference.

A broader analysis was conducted comparing coverage of both conflicts from their beginning until the end of 2024 – 450 days for the war in Gaza and 1,040 days for the Ukraine conflict.

Princeton's *Daily Princetonian* showed the smallest disparity, with 234 articles about Israel compared to 116 about Ukraine. The University of Pennsylvania's *Daily Pennsylvanian* demonstrated a more substantial gap with 312 Israel-related articles versus 44 Ukraine-related ones. UCLA's *Daily Bruin* showed a similar pattern, with 256 Israel-related articles compared to 35 about Ukraine. The disparity grows even larger with the *Columbia Daily Spectator*'s coverage, showing 433 Israel-related articles versus 40 Ukraine-related ones. Harvard's *The*

*Crimson* exhibited the most extreme disparity, with 987 articles in which Israel was mentioned compared to 84 in which Ukraine was in the respective periods studied.

The Sudanese Civil War presents another compelling comparative case for examining disparities in student media coverage of global conflicts or on-campus and other responses to those conflicts. Beginning on April 15, 2023, this conflict between rival military factions has resulted in catastrophic humanitarian consequences.<sup>14</sup> Current estimates suggest up to 150,000 lives have been lost,<sup>15</sup> while approximately ten million people have been internally displaced.<sup>16</sup>

The humanitarian crisis in Sudan has multiple compounding factors threatening civilian populations: the country faces an imminent risk of famine, while reports of widespread sexual violence against women and children have become common.<sup>17</sup> The severity of these atrocities has led some human rights organizations to characterize the conflict as genocide,<sup>18</sup> and the US State Department determined that the situation can be understood in the context of war crimes, crimes against humanity, and ethnic cleansing.<sup>19</sup>

Since the outbreak of the civil war on April 15, 2023, and up to the end of 2024 (646 days), the student newspapers examined have given minimal coverage to the conflict in Sudan. Harvard's *The Crimson* mentioned Sudan only seven times. Similarly, UCLA's *Daily Bruin* published just eight Sudan-related articles. Princeton's *Daily Princetonian* mentioned Sudan seven times.

Columbia's *Columbia Daily Spectator* coverage showed an even more dramatic disparity, with only four mentions of Sudan. *The Brown Daily Herald* demonstrated the smallest but still significant disparity, with 46 Sudan-related pieces.

A closer review reveals that the few mentions of Sudan appear as incidental references within articles primarily focused on the Gaza conflict rather than substantive coverage of the Sudanese Civil War itself. *The Brown Daily Herald's* discussion of Sudan is particularly illustrative of this pattern, as reflected in an op-ed titled "The Corporation's decision against Palestinian human rights."<sup>20</sup> Princeton's *Daily Princetonian's* mention of Sudan also occurred within the

<sup>14</sup> Dabanga, "US Senate Hears Urgent Plea from Envoy to Sudan," Dabanga Radio TV Online (blog), May 2, 2024, <https://www.dabangasudan.org/en/all-news/article/senate-hears-urgent-plea-from-u-s-envoy-on-sudan>.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> UNHCR, "Sudan Situation: UNHCR Appeal 2025 - Sudan," ReliefWeb, December 12, 2024, <https://reliefweb.int/report/sudan/sudan-situation-unhcr-appeal-2025>.

<sup>17</sup> Dabanga, "US Senate Hears Urgent Plea from Envoy to Sudan."

<sup>18</sup> Ali Mutasim and Yonah Diamond, "Breaches of the Genocide Convention in Darfur, Sudan," Raoul Wallenberg Centre for Human Rights, April 2024, <https://raoulwallenbergcentre.org/images/reports/International-Inquiry-Breaches-of-the-Genocide-Convention-temp2.pdf>.

<sup>19</sup> Antony J. Blinken, "War Crimes, Crimes Against Humanity, and Ethnic Cleansing Determination in Sudan," United States Department of State (blog), December 6, 2023, <https://www.state.gov/war-crimes-crimes-against-humanity-and-ethnic-cleansing-determination-in-sudan/>.

<sup>20</sup> Aboud Ashhab, "Ashhab '25: The Corporation's Decision against Palestinian Human Rights is No Surprise – but it Will Not Be Forgotten," *The Brown Daily Herald*, October 18, 2024, <https://www.browndailyherald.com/article/2024/10/ashhab-25-the-corporations-decision-against-palestinian-human-rights-is-no-surprise-but-it-will-not-be-forgotten>.

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coverage of campus Gaza protests, specifically in an article about “Day eight of ‘Gaza Solidarity Encampment’ at Princeton” – an article that was not focused on the Sudanese conflict at all.<sup>21</sup>

The *Columbia Daily Spectator*’s reference to Sudan was equally tangential, appearing in an opinion piece about Muslim identity at Columbia, where Sudan was merely mentioned in passing as part of a broader statement about global liberation movements (“Muslims believe that our *ummah*, our *community*, is like a body; when one part bleeds, the entire body suffers. Lately, I have been bleeding with Palestine, with Sudan, with Kashmir.”).<sup>22</sup> In UCLA’s *Daily Bruin*, with few exceptions, treatments of Sudan were primarily connected to coverage of the “Annual AfroFusion Festival”<sup>23</sup> and a musical artist performing under the name Sudan Archives<sup>24</sup> – topics entirely unrelated to the ongoing humanitarian crisis.

While the Chinese Communist Party has framed its actions against the Uyghurs as “counterterrorism” operations, the situation in the Xinjiang region of northwestern China has been characterized in recent years by some human rights organizations as genocide and crimes against humanity.<sup>25</sup> This assessment was further validated when the United Nations Office of the High Commissioner joined this designation in August 2022.<sup>26</sup>

The coverage disparity is, again, stark when examining student media attention to the Uyghur crisis over a three-year period, from January 1, 2022, to January 1, 2025 (1,096 days). Harvard’s *The Crimson*, showing the most coverage among elite universities, published only 30 articles mentioning the Uyghurs. UCLA’s *Daily Bruin* and Columbia’s *Daily Spectator* each published just two articles about the Uyghurs during these three years. Princeton’s *Daily Princetonian* mentioned the Uyghurs only once in three years. Other university newspapers examined did not mention the Uyghur situation at all during this period.

As with the Sudan coverage, a closer examination of the articles mentioning Uyghurs reveals that even the minimal quantitative attention recorded substantially overstates the actual coverage of the situation there. Some of these mentions appear as incidental references, in some cases within articles focusing primarily on the Gaza conflict or other unrelated topics.

21 Daily Princetonian Staff, “Day Eight of ‘Gaza Solidarity Encampment’ at Princeton,” *The Princetonian*, May 2, 2024, <https://www.dailyprincetonian.com/article/2024/05/princeton-news-stlife-gaza-solidarity-encampment-cannon-green-palestine-live-update-day-eight>.

22 Noreen Mayat, “What it Means to be Muslim at Columbia,” *Columbia Daily Spectator*, May 16, 2024, <https://www.columbiaspectator.com/opinion/2024/05/15/what-it-means-to-be-muslim-at-columbia/>.

23 Katy Nicholas, “Africa to the World’: First Annual AfroFusion Festival Celebrates Africa Day,” *Daily Bruin*, May 23, 2024, <https://dailybruin.com/2024/05/23/africa-to-the-world-first-annual-afrofusion-festival-celebrates-africa-day/>.

24 Maya Vibhakar, “Road to Royce: Student Bands Face off for Chance to Perform at Historic Royce Hall,” *Daily Bruin*, April 16, 2024, <https://dailybruin.com/2024/04/16/road-to-royce-student-bands-face-off-for-chance-to-perform-at-historic-royce-hall/>.

25 Human Rights Watch, “China: Crimes Against Humanity in Xinjiang,” hrw.org, April 19, 2021, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2021/04/19/china-crimes-against-humanity-xinjiang>, and Matthew Parkes and Lauren Baillie, “Don’t Look Away from China’s Atrocities Against the Uyghurs,” United States Institute of Peace, April 6, 2023, <https://www.usip.org/publications/2023/04/dont-look-away-chinas-atrocities-against-uyghurs>.

26 Human Rights Watch, “China: Unrelenting Crimes Against Humanity Targeting Uyghurs,” hrw.org, August 31, 2023, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2023/08/31/china-unrelenting-crimes-against-humanity-targeting-uyghurs>.

Harvard’s coverage exemplifies this pattern, where Uyghurs are mentioned primarily in the context of a “Collective Liberation” narrative that frames their situation only in relation to the Palestinian cause, stating that “the inextricably intertwined nature of the Uyghur and Palestinian struggle cannot be denied.”<sup>27</sup> Princeton’s single mention of the Uyghurs appears in an opinion column about the Armenian genocide, not as a focus of coverage itself.<sup>28</sup> Most striking is UCLA’s coverage, where the Uyghur appear in an article about student protests against Israeli actions in Lebanon – a topic entirely unrelated to the ongoing situation in Xinjiang.<sup>29</sup>

Editorials in student newspapers play a role in shaping campus discourse and highlighting student voices, serving as the collective voice of the publication rather than individual perspectives. While opinion columns reflect the personal perspectives of individual authors, editorials usually represent the newspaper’s official institutional stance on important matters, typically reflecting the consensus view of the entire editorial board rather than being attributed to any single author. This collective nature of editorials makes them particularly powerful tools for understanding a publication’s overall position and approach to coverage.

Some of the examined newspapers have taken clear collective stances on national political matters, such as publicly endorsing Kamala Harris in the 2024 US presidential elections.<sup>30</sup> Such endorsements emerge not from individual opinion but from the newspaper’s collective decision-making process, demonstrating the weight and authority these publications assign to their editorial positions.

The study analyzed editorials published between October 7, 2023, through the end of 2024.<sup>31</sup> Analysis focused specifically on language choices and narrative structures employed in these editorials, examining the tone, rhetorical strategies, and specific terminology used in coverage of the Gaza war compared to other global conflicts. Through examination of these elements, patterns emerge that illuminate how campus discourse has evolved around this conflict. The analysis paid special attention to the use of emotionally charged language and moral framing, revealing how ideological perspectives shape the portrayal of international events in campus publications.

<sup>27</sup> Kawsar Yasin, “Ramadan Mubarak: A Call for Collective Liberation,” *The Harvard Crimson*, April 3, 2024, <https://www.thecrimson.com/article/2024/4/3/yasin-ramadan-mubarak-collective-liberation/>.

<sup>28</sup> Katya Hovnanian-Alexanian, “From Trauma to Truth: Why Princeton Must Recognize the Armenian Genocide,” *The Princetonian*, April 27, 2023, <https://www.dailyprincetonian.com/article/2023/04/princeton-armenian-genocide-education-honesty-trauma-curriculum>.

<sup>29</sup> Sam Mulick, “UCLA Organizations Host Vigil for Lebanon Following Airstrikes, Attacks,” *Daily Bruin*, October 7, 2024, <https://dailybruin.com/2024/10/07/ucla-organizations-host-vigil-for-lebanon-following-airstrikes-attacks/>.

<sup>30</sup> Editorial Board, “Editorial: With Democracy and Independent Journalism at Risk, We Endorse Harris for President,” *Daily Bruin*, November 2, 2024, <https://dailybruin.com/2024/11/02/editorial-with-democracy-and-independent-journalism-at-risk-we-endorse-harris-for-president/>; Spectator Editorial Board, “The Spectator Editorial Board Endorses Kamala Harris,” *Columbia Daily Spectator*, November 1, 2024, <https://www.columbiaspectator.com/opinion/2024/10/31/the-spectator-editorial-board-endorse-kamala-harris/>; and The Daily Pennsylvanian Editorial Board, “Editorial: Kamala Harris is the Best Choice for Penn,” *The Daily Pennsylvanian*, October 31, 2024, <https://www.thedp.com/article/2024/10/kamala-harris-best-choice-president-endorsement>.

<sup>31</sup> Unlike the previous section, the methodology here focused not on Google Search but on a manual review of the entire editorial archives of each publication.

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*The Daily Pennsylvanian* demonstrated the highest proportion of Gaza-related editorial content, with five out of seven editorials during the period examined addressing either the war or related campus activism. Columbia's *Daily Spectator* followed with four out of 10 editorials focused on these issues. *The Daily Princetonian* dedicated one of its three editorials to the topic, while Harvard's *The Crimson* published 37 Gaza-related editorials out of a total of 139. UCLA's *Daily Bruin* showed the lowest proportion, though still significant, with seven out of 32 editorials covering the conflict or related campus activities.

Perhaps the most striking aspect of this editorial attention is its exclusivity: *none* of the examined newspapers published during the period studied a *single* editorial or even a significant critical commentary about *any* other international event, conflict, issue, or subject. Specifically, while the war in Gaza commanded significant editorial attention, ongoing situations such as the war in Ukraine, the humanitarian crisis in Sudan, and the persecution of Uyghurs received no editorial coverage or attention whatsoever.

This complete absence of editorial engagement with other international crises or the responses those crises had stirred on campus (or not) underscores the effective exclusion of all other global concerns from these publications' highest level of institutional commentary.

At Columbia, all four editorials (100%) focused on criticizing the university administration's handling of pro-Palestinian campus protests and enforcement of rules, with some rhetoric showing clear anti-Israel bias.

An editorial published on April 15, 2024, titled "Our 'community values,'" explicitly criticized what they described as administrators' selective enforcement of community values "to protect interests beyond student well-being."

The editors argued that campus rules were being applied inequitably, suggesting that demands from Jewish and pro-Israeli students and organizations received preferential treatment, while anti-Israel organizations such as Student Justice for Palestine and Jewish Voice for Peace faced suspension.<sup>32</sup>

This theme of alleged uneven enforcement continued in an April 19, 2024, editorial titled "Is Columbia in crisis?"<sup>33</sup> Here, the editorial board directly challenged then-president Minouche Shafik's commitment to freedom of speech, characterizing it as "insincere." The editors particularly criticized Shafik's decision to authorize New York Police Department (NYPD) intervention to remove protesters from the "Gaza Solidarity Encampment," describing this as evidence of "the emptiness and duplicity of the promises she made." The editorial board argued that this response further demonstrated what they viewed as selective enforcement of principles, particularly in favor of pro-Israel positions.

The editorial board's critical stance intensified in subsequent pieces. In "Our Columbia" from April 25, 2024, the editors directly criticized President Shafik's communication style and

<sup>32</sup> Spectator Editorial Board, "Our 'Community Values,'" *Columbia Daily Spectator*, April 15, 2024, <https://www.columbiaspectator.com/opinion/2024/04/15/our-community-values/>.

<sup>33</sup> Spectator Editorial Board, "Is Columbia in Crisis?," *Columbia Daily Spectator*, April 19, 2024, <https://www.columbiaspectator.com/opinion/2024/04/18/is-columbia-in-crisis/>.

framing of the conflict, noting that she “continues her streak of abstaining from mentioning the words Islamophobia, Gaza, or Palestine” while characterizing the conflict only vaguely as a “terrible conflict raging in the Middle East with devastating human consequences.”<sup>34</sup> While acknowledging Shafik’s condemnation of antisemitism, the editors argued that “when she only acknowledges hatred on one side, she paints a dubious portrait of pro-Palestinian protesters as unequivocally bigoted and hateful.”

The most forceful criticism came in their April 26, 2024, editorial, “President Shafik, this is your legacy.” This piece presented a dramatic portrayal of campus conditions, describing police actions against protesters: “We watched police officers zip-tie and arrest 108 of our friends, classmates, and coworkers.” The editors painted a stark picture of campus militarization, noting “police battalions surround campus, students enter and exit through security checkpoints, NYPD correctional buses circle the block, helicopters drone overhead, reporters probe students for front-page quotes.”

The editorial board accused the administration of betraying academic values, declaring they had “witnessed the total annihilation of Columbia as the advertised collegiate beacon of free speech, expression, and the right to protest” and criticizing what they termed “capitulation to harmful media representation and opportunistic Republicans whose aim, it seems, is to put the values of a liberal education on trial.”

The editorial also directly addressed the conflict, demanding that Shafik “confront the more than 30,035 Palestinian deaths and counting” and asserting that students were calling for accountability for what they termed Columbia’s complicity in “unfolding atrocities” [allegedly committed by Israel in Gaza]. The piece concluded with a stark comparison, noting that “as we write in defense of student protests at universities across the United States, we hope you can recognize there are no more universities standing in Gaza,” and warning that “further ignorance of Columbia’s complicity in war crimes will only cement your place on the wrong side of history.”<sup>35</sup>

The magnitude and cruelty of the war crimes committed by Hamas against Israeli citizens, which led to the war in Gaza, were not discussed by the editors. Perhaps it is because terrorists who burn babies and rape women are not considered to be on the “wrong side of history”; only the soldiers who try to eradicate those terrorists are.

UCLA’s *Daily Bruin* demonstrated a similar pattern. On October 8, 2023, when news of the atrocities committed by Hamas in southern Israel had already spread globally, the *Daily Bruin*’s editorial board chose to dedicate its editorial instead to “Policies mandating disclosure of gender identity to parents harms students.”<sup>36</sup>

<sup>34</sup> Spectator Editorial Board, “Our Columbia,” *Columbia Daily Spectator*, April 25, 2024, <https://www.columbiaspectator.com/opinion/2024/04/25/our-columbia/>.

<sup>35</sup> Spectator Editorial Board, “President Shafik, This is Your Legacy,” *Columbia Daily Spectator*, April 26, 2024, <https://www.columbiaspectator.com/opinion/2024/04/25/president-shafik-this-is-your-legacy/>.

<sup>36</sup> Editorial Board, “Editorial: Policies Mandating Disclosure of Gender Identity to Parents Harms Students,” *Daily Bruin*, October 8, 2023, <https://dailybruin.com/2023/10/08/editorial-policies-mandating-disclosure-of-gender-identity-to-parents-harms-student>.

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This editorial decision is particularly striking given that the board would later demonstrate extensive engagement with the conflict in Gaza, publishing multiple editorials about campus protests and related issues.

The editorial board's attempt at balanced coverage was evident in their calls to address both Islamophobia and antisemitism as equally concerning forms of hate speech. However, this attempted equivalence was complicated by their own acknowledgment that Jews face significantly higher rates of assault compared to Muslims.<sup>37</sup> Despite this admission, the editors chose to dedicate an entire editorial specifically to condemning anti-Muslim hate,<sup>38</sup> without a corresponding piece focused on antisemitism. Moreover, when addressing antisemitism, the editorial board consistently generalized it under the broader category of "hate crimes,"<sup>39</sup> effectively minimizing the specificity and unique nature of these incidents.

The editorial board's framing of events reveals a contrast in how different aspects of the conflict were portrayed. The events of October 7 were described with notably restrained language as an "attack on Southern Israeli villages" – as if they constituted a legitimate military campaign rather than war crimes committed by a terror organization – with Hamas referred to as a "militant group and Palestinian political party."<sup>40</sup> On the other hand, when discussing Israeli military actions, the editorial board employed more detailed language, emphasizing that "As of July 10, an estimated 38,000 Palestinians have died and over 2.3 million have been displaced from their homes as a result of Israel's military campaign in Gaza," adding that "Geopolitical implications notwithstanding, the sheer destruction and loss of life is staggering."<sup>41</sup>

This disparity in tone and detail extended to the portrayal of campus protesters. Pro-Palestinian demonstrators were consistently characterized as "peaceful," while pro-Israel protesters were cast as "aggressors."<sup>42</sup> This framing is particularly evident in the description of campus confrontations, where the editors reported that pro-Israel protesters "brutally attacked students in the Palestine solidarity encampment by spraying them with tear gas and bear mace, beating them with metal and wooden planks, throwing bricks and sparking fireworks into the encampment." The editorial board emphasized the vulnerability of the encampment participants, noting that they "had nothing but the strength and courage of their community to protect themselves."<sup>43</sup>

<sup>37</sup> Editorial Board, "Editorial: Alarming Surge in Hate Crimes on College Campuses Demands Urgent Action from UC," *Daily Bruin*, November 2, 2023, <https://dailybruin.com/2023/11/02/editorial-alarming-surge-in-hate-crimes-on-college-campuses-demands-urgent-action-from-uc/>.

<sup>38</sup> Editorial Board, "Editorial: Heightened Anti-Muslim Hate in US, Globally Must Be Condemned," *Daily Bruin*, July 24, 2024, <https://dailybruin.com/2024/07/24/editorial-heightened-anti-muslim-hate-in-us-globally-must-be-condemned/>.

<sup>39</sup> Editorial Board, "Editorial: UCLA Must Prevent Hate Crimes, Foster Open Environment for Productive Dialogue," *Daily Bruin*, February 12, 2024, <https://dailybruin.com/2024/02/12/editorial-ucla-must-prevent-hate-crimes-foster-open-environment-for-productive-dialogue/>.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

<sup>41</sup> Editorial Board, "Editorial: Heightened Anti-Muslim Hate in US, Globally Must Be Condemned."

<sup>42</sup> Editorial Board, "Editorial: Actions of Law Enforcement, UCLA Admin Reveal Unwillingness to Protect Students," *Daily Bruin*, May 19, 2024, <https://dailybruin.com/2024/05/17/editorial-actions-of-law-enforcement-ucla-admin-reveal-unwillingness-to-protect-students/>.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

The editorial board’s criticism of UCLA’s administration paralleled Columbia’s coverage, particularly in allegations of discriminatory enforcement of campus rules. Their portrayal of administrative responses to different protest groups was sharply contrasted. The editors noted that pro-Israel protesters faced no consequences: “Every single participant in the violent mob went home that night without criminal charges or arrests after the vile atrocities they committed.”<sup>44</sup>

In contrast, they described the treatment of pro-Palestinian protesters through vivid imagery of confrontation: “Tear gas. Pepper spray. Violent beatings,” emphasizing that “for hours, UCLA administration stood by and watched as the violence escalated.”<sup>45</sup> The editorial board’s criticism of the administration escalated to direct accusations of complicity, stating, “UCLA is complicit in violence inflicted upon protesters, failed to protect students.” Perhaps most strikingly, they concluded with the stark accusation, “The blood would be on your hands.”<sup>46</sup>

The narrative presented in these editorials goes beyond mere criticism of administrative policy, suggesting that pro-Israel organizations receive systematic preferential treatment in enforcement decisions. The editorials’ portrayal of authorities allegedly knowingly standing idle during alleged violence by pro-Israel protesters against pro-Palestinian demonstrators invokes classic antisemitic conspiracy theories about hidden Jewish or Zionist control over institutional power structures. This framing implies the existence of covert influence over administrative and law enforcement bodies, working specifically to benefit pro-Israel interests.

*The Daily Princetonian* aligned with the pattern seen at Columbia and UCLA, using its single editorial reference to the conflict to express support for pro-Palestinian protesters.<sup>47</sup>

Harvard’s *The Crimson* established a clear institutional position on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict well before October 7, 2023. Already in April 2022, the editorial board declared its “broad and proud” support for the Boycott, Divest, Sanctions (BDS) movement,<sup>48</sup> a global campaign that calls for the application of economic and political pressure on Israel.

The editorial board’s 2022 stance was justified through its assessment of “Israel’s human rights and international law violations and of Palestine’s cry for freedom,” specifically citing that “Israeli soldiers have killed nearly 50 Palestinians, including eight children, this year alone.”

Several of *The Crimson*’s editorials on the war in Gaza and campus reactions to the war portrayed university administration actions as discriminatory against pro-Palestinian activists,

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

<sup>45</sup> Editorial Board, “Editorial: UCLA Is Complicit in Violence Inflicted upon Protesters, Failed to Protect Students,” *Daily Bruin*, May 1, 2024, <https://dailybruin.com/2024/05/01/editorial-ucla-is-complicit-in-violence-inflicted-upon-protesters-failed-to-protect-students/>.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

<sup>47</sup> Daily Princetonian Editorial Board, “Encampments Are Not ‘Inherently Unsafe.’ Princeton Should Not Arrest or Expel Students for Them,” *The Princetonian*, April 25, 2024, <https://www.thecrimson.com/article/2024/4/25/editorial-encampment-safe-harvard/>.

<sup>48</sup> The Crimson Editorial Board, “In Support of Boycott, Divest, Sanctions and a Free Palestine,” *The Harvard Crimson*, April 29, 2022, <https://www.thecrimson.com/article/2022/4/29/editorial-bds/>.



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with editorials asserting that “Disproportionate and harsh punishment has been meted out to students over their advocacy for a particular cause.”<sup>49</sup>

The editorial criticism of administrative actions was accompanied by explicit calls for policy changes. The editors urged direct intervention in specific cases, stating, “It’s not too late to stop this madness.”<sup>50</sup> This was followed by a broader philosophical assertion about institutional priorities: “Student groups aren’t above the rules. But the rules aren’t above the good of this campus. Harvard must choose the latter.”<sup>51</sup>

Some editorials characterized university policies as selectively enforced and reactionary, declaring that “The University’s current policies –and their seemingly subjective enforcement – are a step beyond inane. They are reactionary and targeted.”<sup>52</sup> They called for specific remedial actions, insisting: “History should not be written over to justify the unequal and arbitrary application of the rules in punishing students. Reverse the extreme punishments.”<sup>53</sup>

In line with the endorsement of the BDS movement, one editorial did not renounce claims made by campus demonstrators that “Palestine” (implying the entirety of the land) is “occupied” when referring to those claims. Instead, it advocated for direct engagement with pro-Palestinian protesters’ demands: “The University owes its protesters the dignity of a conversation about their demands – beginning, perhaps, with the not-unreasonable request that it disclose more information about its billions in investments.”<sup>54</sup>

*The Daily Pennsylvanian* maintained a more measured tone in its editorials, acknowledging the complex emotional impact of events on their community. Its coverage notably recognized that “many Penn students are still processing their emotions and grief from the October 7 attacks and the continuing violence that has ensued.”<sup>55</sup> This balanced approach was particularly evident in the coverage of the controversy surrounding former university president Liz Magill’s Congressional hearing on antisemitism and her failure to address antisemitism on campus adequately.

The *Brown Daily Herald* stands as the most striking exception to the general pattern. Out of 15 editorials published during the examined period, none directly addressed the conflict, focusing instead on other school-related topics. Furthermore, the editors took a clear stance

<sup>49</sup> The Crimson Editorial Board, “A Palestine Exception to Commencement,” *The Harvard Crimson*, May 21, 2024, <https://www.thecrimson.com/article/2024/5/21/editorial-harvard-palestine-exception/>.

<sup>50</sup> The Crimson Editorial Board, “By Suspending the Palestine Solidarity Committee, Harvard Guarantees Chaos,” *The Harvard Crimson*, April 23, 2024, <https://www.thecrimson.com/article/2024/4/23/editorial-psc-suspension-harvard-chaos/>.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

<sup>52</sup> The Crimson Editorial Board, “Once Again, Harvard Threatened Protesters. Once Again, They Were Wrong,” *The Harvard Crimson*, September 27, 2024, <https://www.thecrimson.com/article/2024/9/27/editorial-harvard-threatened-protesters-they-were-wrong/>.

<sup>53</sup> The Crimson Editorial Board, “A Palestine Exception to Commencement.”

<sup>54</sup> The Crimson Editorial Board, “The Encampment is Safe and Peaceful. Harvard Must Keep it that Way,” *The Harvard Crimson*, April 25, 2024, <https://www.thecrimson.com/article/2024/4/25/editorial-encampment-safe-harvard/>.

<sup>55</sup> The Daily Pennsylvanian Editorial Board, “Editorial: The Nation’s Eyes are on Us. Let’s Make Our Voices Heard,” *The Daily Pennsylvanian*, December 10, 2023, <https://www.thedp.com/article/2023/12/magill-resignation-national-coverage-voicing-opinions>.

against antisemitism, publishing a statement that “Antisemitism at Brown is a wound to our community.”<sup>56</sup>

The editorial boards discussed in this study were asked by the Report to comment on its findings. Only the editorial board of *The Daily Pennsylvanian* responded by the time the Report was sent to print. According to its board: “*The Daily Pennsylvanian* is the independent student newspaper of the University of Pennsylvania. As Penn’s paper of record, our focus is on issues that occur and directly impact our campus and student body. Ongoing campus activism surrounding the war in Gaza – and the way student activism sparked a reaction from the federal government and turmoil within the Penn administration – constituted a large portion of news at Penn and at other universities across the country, and thus commanded our attention as a publication. We are committed to fair, unbiased coverage of news involving issues that impact Penn and West Philadelphia.”

– **Neil Bar**

<sup>56</sup> Editorial Page Board, “Editorial: Antisemitism at Brown Is a Wound to Our Community,” *The Brown Daily Herald*, February 14, 2024, <https://www.browndailyherald.com/article/2024/02/editorial-antisemitism-at-brown-is-a-wound-to-our-community>.

# PAKISTAN

## THE ART OF DEMONIZING

Antisemitism is deeply entrenched within Pakistan’s political, religious, and educational institutions. Despite having a negligible Jewish population, antisemitic rhetoric thrives through state-backed narratives, religious teachings, school curricula, and social media discourse. This hostility is often framed as anti-Zionism but extends far beyond political opposition to Israel, manifesting in conspiracy theories and extremist rhetoric.

The normalization of antisemitism in Pakistan has allowed it to become an institutionalized part of the country’s socio-political framework, influencing public perceptions and shaping national discourse. Antisemitic narratives have been perpetuated by political and religious leaders, reinforced through education, and amplified on digital platforms.

Following the October 7 Hamas attack on Israel, high-profile Islamist gatherings in Pakistan featured Hamas representatives who openly lauded the assault and called for Pakistan to take a more direct role in confronting Israel. On October 14, 2023, Hamas leader Khalid Mash’al and Hamas’ representative to Pakistan, Dr. Naji Zuhair, addressed a crowd of Pakistani Islamists at the Mufti Mehmood Conference in Peshawar. Mash’al proclaimed: “Hamas is gaining successes both on the ground and at the international level, and Israeli Jews will be expelled from Palestine.”

The event was hosted by Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam-Fazl, an Islamist political party whose leader and member of Pakistan’s National Assembly, Maulana Fazlur Rehman, vowed: “If the Islamic world permits [us] to go to Palestine, then we are ready to stand shoulder to shoulder with the mujahidin on the battlefield.”<sup>1</sup>

Two months later, in December 2023, Hamas received not just ideological, but institutional legitimacy, within Pakistan when then-Hamas leader Isma’il Haniyya addressed a gathering in Islamabad organized by the Majlis-e-Ittehad-e-Ummat Pakistan, a coalition of Islamic religious organizations. In his speech, Haniyya called on Pakistan to take military action against Israel, declaring: “Pakistan is a strong country. If Pakistan threatens Israel, then the war can stop. We have a lot of expectations from Pakistan. Pakistan can force Israel to retreat.” He then declared Jews to be “the greatest enemy of Muslims in the world.”<sup>2</sup>

Pakistan’s state apparatus was not far behind in offering support to Hamas. In the Pakistani Senate, Afnan Ullah Khan of the Pakistan Muslim League (N) introduced a bill to its standing interior committee seeking to punish individuals promoting Zionism, such as by displaying “Zionist symbols,” with up to three years imprisonment. Khan justified the need to criminalize

<sup>1</sup> MEMRI, “Hamas Leader Khaled Mashal Tells Conference in Pakistan: ‘We Have Been Continuing Jihad in a more Confident Manner than Before,’” [memri.org](https://www.memri.org/reports/hamas-leader-khaled-mashal-tells-conference-pakistan-we-have-been-continuing-jihad-more), November 2, 2023, <https://www.memri.org/reports/hamas-leader-khaled-mashal-tells-conference-pakistan-we-have-been-continuing-jihad-more>.

<sup>2</sup> Mantasha Ansari, “Islamic Scholars’ Convention in Islamabad Calls for Jihad against Israel,” [memri.org](https://www.memri.org/reports/islamic-scholars-convention-islamabad-calls-jihad-against-israel-hamas-leader-ismail-haniyeh), December 12, 2023, <https://www.memri.org/reports/islamic-scholars-convention-islamabad-calls-jihad-against-israel-hamas-leader-ismail-haniyeh>.

“Zionist activity” – a non-existent phenomenon in the country – by alluding to *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, stating: “The books of Zionism call for killing those who do not agree with them.”<sup>3</sup> The bill passed the committee without objection but has since languished in the National Assembly and, at the time the Report went to print, still did not become law.

Public support for Hamas, immersed in antisemitic rhetoric, also came from current and former members of Pakistan’s National Assembly. Senator Mushahid Hussain Sayed, a former journalist and two-time cabinet minister affiliated with the Pakistan Muslim League (N), called the October 7 attack “rightful resistance” and praised it for “shattering the myth of Israeli invincibility, while decrying Israel’s “genocide” in Gaza and reiterating Pakistan’s solidarity with the Palestinians as being embedded in the country’s DNA.<sup>4</sup>

Mushtaq Ahmad Khan, the leader of Pakistan’s largest Islamist party, the Jamaat-e-Islami, publicly praised Hamas for October 7 and glorified its terrorists while serving as a senator. He declared: “I pay tribute to the lions of Gaza. The task that the regular armies of 57 Muslim countries could not accomplish, a few mujahidin of Hamas have done. Hamas has forced Israel to kneel and rub its nose in the ground. I salute Hamas, Isma‘il Haniyya, Sheikh Ahmed Yassin, and Khalid Mash‘al – they are our heroes.”<sup>5</sup> Senator Maulana Abdul Ghafoor Haidari, a leader of Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam-Fazl, submitted a resolution in Pakistan’s Senate endorsing the Hamas attack, referring to it as a “historic” operation.<sup>6</sup>

In June 2024, Jamaat-e-Islami escalated its support for Hamas by organizing the Gaza Million March in Karachi. Thousands of protesters gathered, chanting against the “Zionist regime,” while Jamaat-e-Islami chief Hafiz Naeemur Rehman stated: “The entire nation is ready to sacrifice for Palestine and Kashmir. The rulers and the armed forces of Pakistan should play their role. The legal status of Hamas should be recognized.”<sup>7</sup>

At a different rally in Rawalakot in Pakistan-occupied Kashmir, Hamas representatives joined senior figures of the terror organizations Lashkar-e-Taiba and Jaish-e-Mohammed, the masterminds of the 2008 Mumbai massacre, among other terror attacks. Trucks emblazoned with posters reading “Khaybar, Khaybar, O Jews” and blasting songs glorifying the Battle of Khaybar [the 628 CE armed confrontation between the Jewish tribes of Khaybar and Muslim forces] roused

<sup>3</sup> Iftikhar A. Khan, “Senate Panel Clears Bill to Punish Preachers of Zionism,” *Dawn*, November 8, 2024, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1870920/senate-panel-clears-bill-to-punish-preachers-of-zionism>.

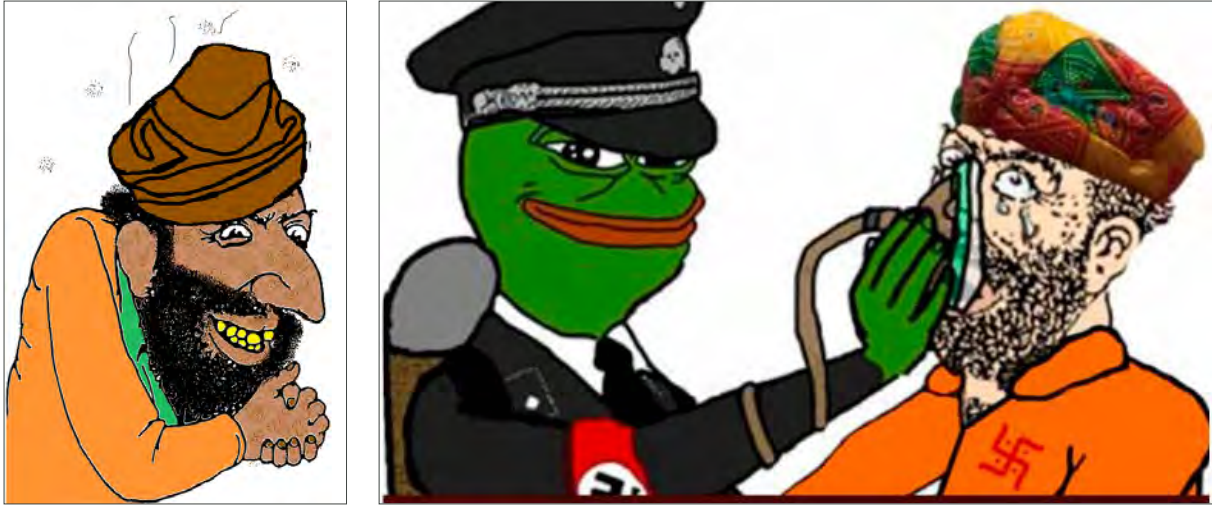
<sup>4</sup> See: “Mushahid Calls Hamas a Legitimate Political Force in Gaza: Emphasizes Its Significant Role in Representing the Palestinian People,” *The Express Tribune*, November 1, 2023, <https://tribune.com.pk/story/2444121/mushahid-calls-hamas-a-legitimate-political-force-in-gaza>, and “Hamas’ Resistance against Israeli Occupation Justified Under International Law,” *The Express Tribune*, April 27, 2024, <https://tribune.com.pk/story/2464223/hamas-resistance-against-israeli-occupation-justified-under-intl-law>.

<sup>5</sup> Mushtaq Ahmad Khan (@SenatorMushtaq), “Israel is an Illegitimate State... [Urdu],” X, October 7, 2023, <https://x.com/SenatorMushtaq/status/1710674546674802740>.

<sup>6</sup> Jamiat Ulama-e-Islam Pakistan (@juipakofficial), “Hamas Attacks Israel, JUI Submits Senate Resolution... [Urdu],” X, October 11, 2023, <https://x.com/juipakofficial/status/1712114071460598060>.

<sup>7</sup> Mantasha Ansari, “Anti-Israel Protests in Pakistani Cities – The Hamas Leaders’ Engagements in Pakistan,” *memri.org*, June 5, 2024, [https://www.memri.org/reports/anti-israel-protests-pakistani-cities---hamas-leaders-engagements-pakistan#\\_ednref3](https://www.memri.org/reports/anti-israel-protests-pakistani-cities---hamas-leaders-engagements-pakistan#_ednref3).

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*Anti-Hindu caricatures invoking antisemitic tropes in Pakistani social media*

the crowd, while a Pakistani terror leader encouraged the crowd to “follow in the footsteps of Yahya Sinwar... [and] the great leadership of Hamas who will give us a roadmap.”<sup>8</sup>

Support for Hamas and reactions welcoming the October 7 attack cannot be understood without examining the historical, ideological, and educational underpinnings of antisemitism that have allowed this hate to persist for decades. In Pakistan’s modern political discourse, Islamist groups and state institutions frame their opposition to Israel in deeply religious terms, positioning Jews not just as a political adversary but as an existential enemy of Islam. On social media platforms, narratives of antisemitic hate are propagated and mainstreamed in attacks on Israel, political rivals, and Hindus.

Historically, Pakistan has never been a significant center for Jewish settlement. At the time of Pakistan’s independence, the Jewish population numbered fewer than 3,000 people and quickly declined.<sup>9</sup> A 2013 US State Department report suggested Pakistan’s Jewish population numbers less than 200.<sup>10</sup> Today, there is no functioning synagogue in Pakistan and only a handful of Jews, some of whom live covert lives due to fears of persecution, live in the country.

Public acknowledgment of Jewish heritage is often met with suspicion or hostility in Pakistan. In 2017, Fischel Benkhald, born Faisal Benkhald, made history by becoming the first person in decades to register as Jewish with Pakistan’s National Database and Registration Authority (NADRA).<sup>11</sup> Born to a Jewish mother and Muslim father, Benkhald faced significant challenges, including a three-year campaign to alter his religious status on official documents.

<sup>8</sup> Aditya Raj Kaul (@AdityaRajKaul), “#BREAKING: Hamas attends event with Pakistani terror groups...,” X, February 5, 2025, <https://x.com/AdityaRajKaul/status/1887146616311750755>.

<sup>9</sup> Dean Shmuel Elmas, “‘I Am a Pakistani Zionist,’ Member of Tiny Jewish Community Says in Rare Interview,” *Israel Hayom*, September 22, 2020, <https://www.israelhayom.com/2020/09/22/i-am-a-pakistani-zionist-member-of-tiny-jewish-community-says-in-rare-interview/>.

<sup>10</sup> United States Department of State, “2013 Report on International Religious Freedom: Pakistan” (Washington, D.C.: Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, 2013), <https://www.state.gov/reports/2013-report-on-international-religious-freedom/pakistan/>.

<sup>11</sup> JTA and TOI Staff, “Pakistan Allows Man to Register as Country’s First Jew in Decades,” *Times of Israel*, March 30, 2017, <https://www.timesofisrael.com/pakistan-allows-man-to-register-as-countrys-first-jew-in-decades/>.

Despite this near absence of a Jewish community, antisemitic sentiments persist in Pakistan.<sup>12</sup> As scholar Navras Jaat Aafreedi highlights, antisemitism in Pakistan reflects what historian Robert Wistrich termed “antisemitism without Jews,” where antisemitic stereotypes and conspiracy theories thrive despite the minimal presence of Jews.<sup>13</sup>

Lacking direct Jewish-Muslim interaction, antisemitism has instead been shaped by ideological discourses imported from the Middle East and Europe. Historical narratives surrounding Zionism, pan-Islamic solidarities, especially during the Arab-Israeli conflict, and religious polemics have fueled negative perceptions of Jews.

The Muslim League (a political party formed during India’s struggle for independence with the ambition of a separate state for Muslims) adopted, during its 1938 session in Patna, resolutions condemning British support for Zionism and drew parallels between British colonialism and so-called Jewish influence in the world, which it framed as a global conspiracy against Muslims. In his presidential address, Muhammad Ali Jinnah, who would become Pakistan’s founding father a decade later, declared: “I know how deeply Muslims have been stirred over the issue of Palestine. I know Muslims will not shrink from any sacrifice if required to help the Arabs who are engaged in the fight for their national freedom.”<sup>14</sup>

Jinnah supported the Arab cause, but his rhetoric largely refrained from directly targeting Jews. His opposition to Zionism resonated within the newly formed state of Pakistan, where political solidarity with Arab nations became a cornerstone of the new nation’s foreign policy. Following independence in 1947, leaders such as Liaquat Ali Khan, Pakistan’s first prime minister until his assassination in 1951, maintained a delicate balance between courting Western aid and aligning with pan-Islamic causes.

This balance resulted in Pakistan’s consistent opposition to Israel and the adoption of Arab-Islamic narratives that often conflated anti-Zionism with antisemitism, as seen in the writings of Abu al-A’la’ al-Mawdudi and the views of the party he founded, the Jamaat-e-Islami.

Mawdudi was an Islamic scholar and Islamist ideologue who advocated for the Islamization of Pakistan, that is, for having the shari’a as the binding premise for all aspects of life, and was one of the leading figures in post-independence Pakistan. The Jaamat-e-Islami remains a deeply entrenched and influential political and social force today as both a political entity and a religious movement advocating for the establishment of an Islamic state. Its grassroots structure and educational programs have enabled it to aggressively influence public opinion and societal norms, particularly through its network of madrasas (Islamic schools) and social welfare initiatives.

Mawdudi accused Jews of harboring jealousy towards Prophet Muhammad, suggesting they sought to undermine Islam because prophethood was no longer exclusive to their community.

<sup>12</sup> Navras J. Aafreedi, “Antisemitism in the Muslim Intellectual Discourse in South Asia,” *Religions* 10, no. 7 (2019), 1.

<sup>13</sup> Robert S. Wistrich, *Antisemitism: The Longest Hatred* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1991), 20.

<sup>14</sup> Muhammad Ali Jinnah, “Presidential Address to the 26<sup>th</sup> Annual Session of the All India Muslim League, Patna Session, December 1938,” quoted in Shahzad Qaisar, “Jinnah and the Palestine Question,” *Journal of the Research Society of Pakistan* 56, no. 1 (January-June 2019), 42.

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He framed the Palestinian issue not just as an Arab concern but as a global Muslim struggle against an existential “Jewish threat.” He explicitly warned against treating the Zionist-Palestinian conflict as a regional Arab issue, calling instead for the mobilization of the entire Muslim world against Jews, whom he portrayed as orchestrating a “gigantic international Zionist conspiracy” with backing from global powers.<sup>15</sup>

Jamaat-e-Islami’s rhetoric after Mawdudi’s death has frequently echoed the same claims about Jewish conspiracies to dominate global systems and undermine Islamic values by taking a page from *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*. Translated into Urdu and disseminated widely, the fabricated *protocols* have found a receptive audience among South Asian Muslims. Mawdudi’s party members characterized Jews as perpetual antagonists of Islam, asserting that they “have been the most prominent among the agents of Satan for fourteen hundred years.”<sup>16</sup> After Israel’s 1981 airstrike on Iraq’s Osirak nuclear reactor, Pakistani media linked the event to the alleged Jewish conspiracy outlined in *The Protocols*.<sup>17</sup> Similarly, during the COVID-19 pandemic, several religious scholars and tele-Islamists claimed that the virus was part of a Jewish plot to control the world through vaccines and digital surveillance.<sup>18</sup>

Figures like the Indian Muslim preacher Zakir Naik, who is also popular in Pakistan, and Islamic Pakistani scholar Israr Ahmad have used their platforms to propagate these narratives. Naik has repeatedly referred to *The Protocols* in his sermons, claiming that it reveals the true intentions of global Jewish leadership.<sup>19</sup>

One of the main methods for ingraining antisemitic narratives of Jews is through Pakistan’s education system. Some public school textbooks depict Jews as treacherous conspirators, inherently deceitful, and enemies of Islam, fostering antisemitic prejudice, bigotry, hostility, and mistrust from an early age in generations of Pakistani students. Under the guise of promoting religious values, textbooks, particularly in subjects like “Islamiyyat” (Islamic religious studies in Pakistani schools), frame history and religion in ways that perpetuate stereotypes and hostility.

School curricula in Pakistan propagate intolerance and bias, especially against religious minorities like Jews and Hindus.<sup>20</sup> The presence of newly added antisemitic passages in textbooks published as recently as 2015 indicates the institutionalization of hatred through education. One of the passages in a 5th grade Islamic Studies textbook from Balochistan states that about the Roman Empire: “The Governor of Rome remained neutral as he knew the deceitfulness

<sup>15</sup> Abul A’la Mawdudi, *Historical Roots of Palestine Problem*, trans. Wajid Naeemuddin (New Delhi: Markazi Maktaba Islami Publishers, 2017), 31.

<sup>16</sup> Aafreedi, “Antisemitism in the Muslim Intellectual Discourse,” 1-2.

<sup>17</sup> Jürgen Schaflechner, “The Karachi Jews and the History of Pakistani Antisemitism,” *Contemporary South Asia* 31, no. 1 (2022), 94-109.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Shehnaz Haqqani, “Jews in the Discourses of the Indian Muslim Televangelist Zakir Naik,” *Café Dissensus* (Special Issue on Jewish-Muslim Relations in South Asia), edited by Navras Jaat Aafreedi, January 2016, <https://cafedissensus.com/2016/01/07/jews-in-the-discourses-of-the-indian-muslim-televangelist-zakir-naik/>.

<sup>20</sup> United States Commission on International Religious Freedom, “*Teaching Intolerance in Pakistan: Religious Bias in Public School Textbooks*,” USCIRF, 2016, <https://www.uscifr.gov/publications/teaching-intolerance-pakistan-religious-bias-public-school-textbooks>.

of Jews.”<sup>21</sup> Similarly, a 7th grade Social Studies textbook describes the conflict in mandatory Palestine as follows: “The Jews occupied a large area, this created restlessness in Arabs, and several disputes surfaced, but the British kept supporting the Jews [...] Israel exterminated all the Muslims in the region, and those who remained were exiled from their own country.”<sup>22</sup>

A Khyber Pakhtunkhwa’s 6th grade Urdu curriculum states on the same topic: “In 1949, the Jews tried to set fire to the occupied Al-Aqsa mosque,” which alludes to conspiratorial and incendiary behaviors that never happened.<sup>23</sup>

Narratives in textbooks reinforce stereotypes about Hindus in addition to Jews, with claims like, “Among non-Muslim nations, Hindus have numerical and political domination; therefore, they always pose threats to the religious and worldly interests of Muslims” (10th grade Pakistan Studies).<sup>24</sup> These passages draw from similar tropes used against Jews, presenting Hindus as conspirators and oppressors.

Munir Mengal, a political analyst and president of the Paris-based NGO Baloch Voice Association, shed light on the propagation of hatred through Pakistan’s education system mentioning that one of the first lessons instilled by instructors at his state-run Army school was that “Hindus are kafirs,” a derogatory term for non-Muslims, and “Jews are enemies of Islam,” both of whom, students were taught, deserved death solely based on their identity.<sup>25</sup> By framing Hindus and Jews as joint antagonists in various “conspiracies,” such content exacerbates hostility toward both communities and intertwines Hinduphobia with antisemitism, with textbooks serving as tools for indoctrination, teaching children to associate Jews and Hindus with treachery, violence, and enmity toward Islam.

The recent introduction of Pakistan’s Single National Curriculum (SNC) in August 2020 by former Prime Minister Imran Khan sought to unify educational standards across the country. This policy has involved troubling trends, where history and religion are often intertwined with overtly antisemitic undertones.

An examination of the SNC Islamic Studies textbooks, widely used in public schools across Punjab, the country’s most populous province, between 1st and 10th grade, reveals Jewish communities are consistently portrayed in a negative light and reinforce stereotypes.

A recurring theme in the curriculum is the depiction of Jews as conspirators. For example, the 7th grade Islamic Studies textbook states: “If someone is a non-believer at heart but pretends to be a Muslim, he/she is essentially a hypocrite. In the times of Mohammad, hypocrites used to conspire against Muslims with the help of Jews [...]”<sup>26</sup> In an 8th grade Islamic Studies textbook,

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Munir Mengal, “First Lesson in Pakistan Schools: Hindus are Kafirs, Jews Enemies of Islam,” *Times of India*, October 16, 2020, <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/world/pakistan/first-lesson-in-pakistan-schools-hindus-are-kafirs-jews-enemies-of-islam/articleshow/78696808.cms>.

<sup>26</sup> “7th Grade Islamic Studies” (Lahore: Punjab Curriculum and Textbook Board, 2022), 32-33.



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the Battle of Khaybar is described as being important because the town had become “the center of Jewish conspiracies against Muslims.”<sup>27</sup>

Jewish tribes are often singled out for their supposed hostility and arrogance. The 7th grade Islamic Studies textbook describes the Banu Qaynuqa tribe, one of the main Jewish tribes in Medina expelled by the Prophet Muhammad in 623 CE, as “notorious for their hostility” and being “known for their arrogance.”<sup>28</sup> The framing disregards the socio-political context of tensions between Muslims and the Banu Qaynuqa, reducing a nuanced historical episode to a blanket condemnation of Jewish communities.

Another example is the description of the Banu Nadir tribe’s expulsion from Medina by the Prophet Muhammad in 625 CE. The 7th grade textbook asserts that “the city of Medina was cleansed of their (Jewish) impure existence,” framing the event in a way that dehumanizes the Jewish community and portrays it as inherently impure.<sup>29</sup>

The impact of these institutionalized biases extends beyond their historical roots in Pakistan’s socio-political and socio-religious culture and textbooks, finding a powerful echo in digital spaces where misinformation and prejudice thrive. Antisemitism on social media platforms is not just a fringe phenomenon in Pakistan; it is institutionalized and mainstreamed, drawing on religious, political, and historical narratives and often leveraging political events to fuel hatred.

Pakistani social media is rife with antisemitic tropes, sometimes perpetuated by bots linked to state institutions and political parties. These platforms amplify conspiratorial claims, portraying Jews as powerful puppeteers controlling global politics, media, and finance.

During the May 2021 conflict between Israel and Hamas, comments such as “Jews are not humans, they are animals,” and “Hitler was right,” flooded these platforms, with some posts openly praising Nazi ideology. For instance, Pakistani actress Veena Malik (with 1.4 million followers on X) tweeted a fabricated Hitler quote stating: “I would have killed all the Jews of the world, but I kept some to show why I killed them.”

Pakistan’s then-Foreign Minister Shah Mahmood Qureshi remarked on CNN that Israel was losing “the media war despite their connections,” insinuating Jewish control over global media.<sup>30</sup> The conspiratorial antisemitic statement was widely defended within Pakistan. Government officials and influencers on social media dismissed criticism of Qureshi’s remarks as an attempt to stifle “freedom of speech,” effectively normalizing such rhetoric.<sup>31</sup>

<sup>27</sup> “8th Grade Islamic Studies” (Lahore: Punjab Curriculum and Textbook Board, 2022), 34.

<sup>28</sup> “7th Grade Islamic Studies,” 33-34.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 34.

<sup>30</sup> Amanpour, “Pakistan FM Invokes Antisemitic Slur,” CNN, May 20, 2021, <https://www.cnn.com/videos/tv/2021/05/20/amanpour-pakistan-shah-mahmood-qaureshi-israel.cnn>.

<sup>31</sup> Ayaz Gul, “Pakistan Official’s Alleged Antisemitic Remarks Spark Controversy,” *Voice of America*, May 21, 2021, [https://www.voanews.com/a/south-central-asia\\_pakistan-officials-alleged-antisemitic-remarks-spark-controversy/6206054.html](https://www.voanews.com/a/south-central-asia_pakistan-officials-alleged-antisemitic-remarks-spark-controversy/6206054.html).

Former Human Rights Minister Shireen Mazari reinforced these ideas in a tweet defending Qureshi, claiming that critiques of such statements were attempts to “bully” Pakistan into silence.<sup>32</sup> In another, she claimed that while ridiculing the Prophet Muhammad and Islam was deemed “free speech,” criticism of Israel and “[highlighting] Israelis ‘deep pockets’ and influence over Western media and governments” is labeled antisemitic.<sup>33</sup> After October 7, Mazari equated Israel’s military campaign and justification for the war to Hitler’s justification for persecuting and murdering Jews.<sup>34</sup>

Post-October 7, antisemitic narratives in Pakistan were also manipulated to target political figures, particularly Imran Khan, Pakistan’s former prime minister. Khan was accused of being a “Jewish agent,” a baseless claim intended to position him as opposing Islamic and national interests. On social media, hate-filled remarks proliferated, with Khan’s past sporting achievements, such as leading Pakistan to victory in the 1992 Cricket World Cup, being framed as results of supposed Jewish conspiracies. Comments labeling him a “Jewish agent,” “Jewish dog,” and other slurs were widely shared, reflecting the deep penetration of such sentiments.

Much of the antisemitic rhetoric aimed at Khan has been linked to his former marriage to Jemima Goldsmith, a member of a well-known Jewish family with historical ties to banking and finance. This hostility has been further exacerbated by figures within mainstream political parties using inflammatory language, such as a Pakistan Muslim League (N) member referring to Khan as “Israel’s son-in-law.”

Such comments are not just restricted to social media but are echoed in public forums and political rhetoric, further entrenching antisemitic attitudes in Pakistan’s public discourse. For example, Maryam Nawaz (daughter of former Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif), who is the current Chief Minister of Punjab from the Pakistan Muslim League (N). During a political rally in Pakistan Occupied Jammu and Kashmir, Nawaz referred to her son as “Nawaz Sharif’s grandson, not Goldsmith’s, and he is not being raised in the lap of Jews,”<sup>35</sup> an overtly antisemitic statement aimed at defaming her political opponent, Imran Khan, for marrying a Jew. Similarly, Defense Minister Khawaja Asif alleged on a television program that Khan was “an Israeli asset” and linked his political influence to a “Jewish lobby” in the United States.

This has also led to an antisemitic conspiracy theory known as “Operation Goldsmith” accusing Imran Khan of being a Jewish proxy utilized to destabilize Pakistan. This theory alleges that Khan was selected, manipulated, and used as an agent of foreign powers to weaken Pakistan from within.

The narrative points to four phases: (a) regarding 1990 to 2011, it claims that Khan was chosen as a foreign-backed figure to infiltrate Pakistan’s politics; (b) regarding 2011 to 2018, it suggests

<sup>32</sup> Shireen Mazari (@ShireenMazari1), “What a Load of Rubbish! But this comment...,” X, May 21, 2021, <https://x.com/ShireenMazari1/status/1395579184299261956>.

<sup>33</sup> Shireen Mazari (@ShireenMazari1), “Ridicule Islam and our Prophet PBUH...,” X, May 21, 2021, <https://x.com/ShireenMazari1/status/1395640920117231617>.

<sup>34</sup> Shireen Mazari (@ShireenMazari1), “Hitler Probably Said the Same as He Carried...,” X, November 3, 2023, <https://x.com/ShireenMazari1/status/1720501704406499429>.

<sup>35</sup> Zulqernain Tahir, “Maryam, Jemima Spar on Social Media after PM’s Taunt,” *Dawn*, July 21, 2021, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1636254>.

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that global media and intelligence agencies engineered Khan's rise to popularity through manipulative propaganda; (c) regarding 2018 to 2022, it alleges that Khan's tenure as prime minister was deliberately designed to push Pakistan into economic and political turmoil; and (d) regarding 2022 to the present, it claims that after his removal, Khan and his alleged foreign backers sought to ignite unrest, weaken Pakistan's institutions, and push the country toward disintegration.<sup>36</sup>

One of the most vocal propagators of the Khan conspiracy theory is Hina Parvez Butt, a member of the Provincial Assembly from the ruling Pakistan Muslim League (N) party. She has repeatedly pushed this narrative on social media, reinforcing antisemitic tropes. In September 2024, she wrote: "The *Jerusalem Post* makes a big claim that Imran Khan, as Prime Minister, tried to improve relations with Israel. Is this the reason why the Jewish lobby launched Operation Goldsmith?"<sup>37</sup> A month later, she wrote that "The attack on Pakistan by Goldsmith and Imran Khan is not just a one-day event but a decades-long phase-by-phase conspiracy. It has been proven that the Jewish lobby is actively working behind Imran Khan to spread chaos in the country."<sup>38</sup>

The connection between antisemitism and institutional structures is further evident in the activities of state-sponsored troll farms. Investigations have revealed that the Pakistani military's Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR) unit deploys bots to amplify narratives against perceived enemies, including Jews.

These bots disseminate propaganda, employing hashtags and coordinated campaigns to influence public opinion. Some accounts affiliated with Islamist political groups, such as Jamaat-e-Islami, glorify Hamas as a symbol of resistance while simultaneously spreading derogatory comments about Jews. By linking antisemitism with state-endorsed narratives, these campaigns embed hate speech deeply within public discourse.

As in textbooks, so too on social media is antisemitism exported to Hinduphobia. One of the clearest indicators of this trend on social media is the adaptation of classic antisemitic tropes to attack Hindus. The stereotype of Jews as global manipulators, financially and politically dominant, has been extended to include Hindus. Memes and posts accuse Hindus and Jews of collaborating to destabilize Pakistan and undermine Islam. The "Happy Merchant" meme, originally an emblem of white supremacist antisemitism, has been repurposed to depict Hindus alongside Jews.<sup>39</sup> Similarly, Pepe the Frog (originally not antisemitic but over the years used as a meme by the alt-right segment of the white supremacist movement) gassing the Jews has turned into gassing the Hindus.<sup>40</sup>

<sup>36</sup> Hina Parvez Butt (@hinaparvezbutt), "Goldsmith and Imran Khan's attack on Pakistan... [Urdu]," X, October 22, 2024, <https://x.com/hinaparvezbutt/status/1848554379701289303>.

<sup>37</sup> Hina Parvez Butt (@hinaparvezbutt), "The Jerusalem Post makes... [Urdu]," X, September 22, 2024, <https://x.com/hinaparvezbutt/status/1837772406720536762>.

<sup>38</sup> Hina Parvez Butt (@hinaparvezbutt), "The Attack on Pakistan... [Urdu]," X, October 22, 2024, <https://x.com/hinaparvezbutt/status/1848554379701289303>.

<sup>39</sup> Prasiddha Sudhakar, John Farmer, Joel Finkelstein, Lee Jussim, Parth Parihar, and Denver Riggleman, "Anti-Hindu Disinformation: A Case Study of Hinduphobia on Social Media," Network Contagion Research Institute, July 11, 2022, <https://networkcontagion.us/reports/7-11-22-anti-hindu-disinformation-a-case-study-of-hinduphobia-on-social-media/>.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

Addressing the danger of Pakistani antisemitism requires a multifaceted approach that challenges entrenched narratives at multiple levels. A critical reassessment of educational curricula, political discourse, and state-sponsored rhetoric is essential to counteract the institutionalized dissemination of hateful ideology. Additionally, the role of digital platforms in amplifying hate speech must be scrutinized and checked to mitigate the widespread impact of misinformation and prejudice.

The persistence of antisemitism in Pakistan, despite the near absence of a Jewish population, underscores its function as a constructed ideological instrument rather than a response to lived experiences. Only through sustained efforts in education, policy reforms, and responsible governance can the deeply rooted prejudices shaping Pakistan's socio-political landscape begin to be dismantled.

**– Ratnadeep Chakraborty**

# GERMANY

## PRO-PUTIN, ANTI-ISRAEL

The post-war West German political system was designed to prevent the rise of extremist political parties, including through a high electoral threshold of 5%. Until the early 1990s, the Bundestag was dominated by two major national parties, the Christian Democrats (CDU) with their sister-party the Bavarian Christian Socialist Union (CSU), and the Social Democrats (SPD). There were never more than five national parties.

The German political system enjoyed stability not only because of structural legal mechanisms, but also because the public favored pragmatism and moderation. Ideological rifts were real, but so was the national consensus on major issues, including, perhaps foremost, the moral duty of Germany to account for its Nazi past, fight antisemitism and other forms of intolerance without reservation, and provide steadfast support for the State of Israel.

The unification of West and East Germany complicated matters, first with the establishment in 2007 of *Die Linke* (The Left), a party that merged a splinter group of the West German Social-Democrats and the successors of the *Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands* (SED), the ruling party in the formerly communist East Germany. All other parties considered *Die Linke* as unsuitable for government due to, among other things, its support for higher public spending and much higher taxes, as well as anti-NATO and pro-Russian policies.

Six years later, the establishment of the anti-migration, anti-EU, pro-Russian *Alternative for Germany* (AfD) further complicated matters. The first party to the right of the Conservatives to make it to parliament, AfD members have entertained antisemitic notions and reflected a tiredness from the moral obligations called for by Germany's dark past – views that in the past were expressed mainly by marginal neo-Nazi parties that never came close to the 5% threshold (on the AfD and antisemitism see our Antisemitism Worldwide Report for 2023, pp. 83-89).<sup>1</sup> The AfD, too, has been considered by all existing parties as an illegitimate coalition partner, and as its popularity grew, it made the formation of stable coalitions more difficult.

The latest addition to the fragmentation of the political system owed to a new party on the far left: *Bündnis Sahra Wagenknecht* (BSW). After year-long quarrels within *Die Linke* and some careful preparation, it was founded in January 2024 when ten renegades left the parliamentary faction of *Die Linke* and formed their own parliamentary group in the German Bundestag.

In September 2024, the party made impressive achievements in three elections for the parliaments of former East German federal states, winning 15.8% of the votes in Thuringia, 13.5% of the votes in Brandenburg, and 11.8% in Saxony. In the elections for the European Parliament in June 2024, its achievement was equally impressive, winning 6.2% of the national vote.

<sup>1</sup> “Antisemitism Worldwide Report for 2023,” Center for the Study of Contemporary European Jewry and the Irwin Cotler Institute – Tel Aviv University, May 2024, <https://cst.tau.ac.il/antisemitism-worldwide-report-for-2023/>.

Despite this promising start, the BSW, with 4.97% of the national vote, narrowly failed to pass the 5% threshold in the February 2025 elections that saw the AfD become the second largest party in parliament and in which the clear winner, the opposition CDU, won less than 30% of the votes.

Still, by coming so very close to the threshold, the BSW demonstrated that the national consensus in Germany on strategic issues is eroding in a manner unprecedented since the end of the Second World War. That erosion is also reflected in how Germans understand the commitment to protecting Jewish life in the country and their special alliance with Israel, two issues on which the BSW shined as a particularly dissenting voice.

The BSW is a product of a Western political universe that has become more hospitable to ideological hybridity and to formations that defy old affiliations. In the field of social policy, it takes classic leftist positions with some strong anti-capitalist sentiments. Yet, unlike *Die Linke*, it is rather conservative on social values, strictly anti-immigration, and expressly pro-Putinist.

Given these contradictory ideological backgrounds, political analysts have not yet agreed on how to categorize the new party.<sup>2</sup> While some see it as a traditional left-wing party with a focus on social policy and anti-militarism, others emphasize the party's opposition to anything being declared "woke" by its leader, its skepticism towards gender issues, and particularly its strong rejection of Germany's refugee policy since 2015.

What most observers agree on is that BSW can be characterized as an authoritarian populist party that is, depending on context and field of policy, potentially open to voters from the political left and right.<sup>3</sup> Historically, BSW partly resembles the 1920s National Bolshevism movement that tried to square the circle and reconcile nationalism and socialism.<sup>4</sup>

The founder and leader of the party named after her, Sahra Wagenknecht, represents the BSW in public almost exclusively and regulates its operations top-down as a one-woman show. Her biographical sketch is thus the best introduction to the BSW.

Born (1969) and raised in East Germany, Wagenknecht became an autodidact philosopher after the SED denied her request to attend university. Having nevertheless joined the SED in the summer of 1989, she became a member of its successor party, *Partei des Demokratischen Sozialismus* (PDS), which eventually merged into the present-day *Die Linke*.

There, she represented the "Communist Platform," an official party association, and later the "anti-capitalist Left." Due to her rhetorical talent, style, and appearance, but mostly because of her ability to integrate sympathizers of the old communist order into the new party, she

<sup>2</sup> For an early assessment of BSW as a party competing with the AfD, see: Aiko Wagner, "Reft or Light? The Sahra Wagenknecht Alliance in Party Competition," *FES Impulse* (Bonn: Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, 2023) [German]. In contrast, a classification of BSW as a traditional Leftist party: Marco Bitschnau, "Left-Conservative, Left-Authoritarian, Left-Nationalist? Linguistic Downders around the Sahra Wagenknecht Alliance [German]," *Zeitschrift für Parteienwissenschaften* 30, no. 3 (2024), 332-347.

<sup>3</sup> J. Philipp Thomeczek, "Bündnis Sahra Wagenknecht (BSW): Left-Wing Authoritarian—and Populist? An Empirical Analysis," *Politische Vierteljahresschrift* 65, no. 3 (2024), 535-552.

<sup>4</sup> See: Louis Dupeux, *National Bolshevism: Communist Strategy and Conservative Dynamics* (Paris: H. Champion, 1979). [French]



*Sahra Wagenknecht speaks in Berlin, October 2024*

became an influential voice within the party. Throughout her time with *Die Linke*, she challenged the party establishment, often threatened with resignation, and developed her own political agenda. Thus, the establishment of her own party in 2024 did not come as a huge surprise.

An important aspect of Wagenknecht's political career is her ability and willingness to attract public media. Some observers judge her, as well as her movement-turned-party, as a mere media phenomenon. Never shy of appearing on television and sharing stories about her private life in a way untypical of German politicians, since 2014, Wagenknecht has been married to SPD-renegade and former party leader Oskar Lafontaine. She cultivates an authoritarian approach, insisting on her strong, if not sole, leadership position. The BSW strictly regulates access to membership. By early 2025, it had only some 1,200 members. Moreover, Wagenknecht regularly intervenes in affairs concerning the party's regional branches.

BSW leadership and members have not made explicit antisemitic statements in their publications and statements. They have also been clear, even if not entirely unequivocal, about Israel's right to exist in security.

However, the party and its relative success also manifest the challenges to German consensus as to the memory of the Holocaust, the historical responsibility Germany has, and its obligation to fight antisemitism wherever and whenever its manifestations raise their head. Equally worryingly, in its policy regarding the war in Gaza, the BSW has manifested evident double standards – to say the least – in its demands of Israel in comparison to its expectations of other states involved in armed conflicts. Its becoming a force to be reckoned with in German politics is

thus another demonstration of how the radical right, the radical left, and movements that meld radical elements from both extremes of the spectrum challenge long-held liberal conventional wisdom about public memory of the Holocaust and the lessons to learn from the past.

As BSW promotes itself as the “party of peace,” the Middle East conflict ranked relatively high in its campaign program. It condemned Hamas’ attack on Israel but claimed that Israel’s military reaction was disproportional and has characterized it as a “reckless campaign of revenge and extermination by the Netanyahu regime against women and children in Gaza.”<sup>5</sup> It accused the German government of having forged too close an alliance with the ultra-right Netanyahu government despite, so it argued, war crimes and alleged genocide committed by Israel in Gaza. It demanded an end to all arms exports to Israel and an immediate ceasefire that should be followed by “serious negotiations” for a two-state solution.

According to a survey from October 2024, BSW supporters (although a slim majority of 53% only) were the second most critical among the German electorate, following AfD voters, of German support for Israel. They rejected German arms exports to Israel by a vast 85% (however, an overall majority of polled Germans were critical of such arms exports, too).<sup>6</sup>

In June 2024, the BSW was the only faction in the Bundestag to vote against the resolution “Never Again is Now: Protecting, Preserving, and Strengthening Jewish Life in Germany.” *Die Linke* abstained, while a number of legal experts and activists of other parties expressed their opposition to aspects of the resolution.<sup>7</sup>

The resolution stated that “The Bundestag reaffirms its decision to ensure that no organizations or projects that spread antisemitism, question Israel’s right to exist, call for a boycott of Israel or actively support the Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions (BDS) movement receive financial support.” The President of the Central Council of Jews in Germany, Josef Schuster, expressed his appreciation and stated that the “foundations for the effective protection of Jewish life have now been defined. However, the planned measures still need to be implemented effectively and swiftly.”<sup>8</sup>

The controversy over the resolution largely centered on its intent to make public grants for culture and science projects dependent on adherence to the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) Working Definition of Antisemitism, a definition which the

<sup>5</sup> BSW, “Our Country Deserves More! The BSW’s Election Manifesto for the 2025 Federal Election [German],” BSW, 7, <https://bsw-vg.de/wp-content/themes/bsw/assets/downloads/BSW%20Wahlprogramm%202025.pdf>.

<sup>6</sup> See, for example: “Criticism Particularly Strong among BSW Voters: Wagenknecht Calls for an End to Solidarity with Israel [German],” *Der Tagesspiegel*, October 15, 2024, <https://www.tagesspiegel.de/politik/kritik-an-israel-unter-bsw-wahlern-besonders-gross-wagenknecht-fordert-ende-der-solidaritat-mit-israels-regierung-12539588.html>, and “Especially in East Germany: Majority Against Further Arms Deliveries to Israel [German],” *Der Tagesspiegel*, October 22, 2024, <https://www.tagesspiegel.de/politik/besonders-in-ostdeutschland-mehrheit-gegen-weitere-waffenlieferungen-an-israel-12573713.html>.

<sup>7</sup> German Bundestag, Document 20/13627, 20<sup>th</sup> Legislative Period, “Motion by the SPD, CDU/CSU, ALLIANCE 90/ THE GREENS and FDP Parliamentary Groups ‘Never Again is Now – Protect, Preserve and Strengthen Jewish life in Germany’ [German],” November 5, 2024, <https://dserver.bundestag.de/btd/20/136/2013627.pdf>.

<sup>8</sup> Helen Whittle, “Germany Passes Controversial Antisemitism Resolution,” *Deutsche Welle*, June 11, 2024, <https://www.dw.com/en/germany-passes-controversial-antisemitism-resolution/a-70715643>.



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German government adopted already in 2017. While for other parties, both in coalition and in opposition, the point of the resolution was to manifest the strong commitment of Germany to the safety and peace of Jewish communities and individuals and for the existence of Israel, the BSW emphasized the potentially repressive aspects of the resolution in regard to freedom of speech and academic freedom.

BSW member of parliament Sevim Dağdelen explicitly criticized the citing and application of the IHRA definition of antisemitism by the Bundestag: “They are planning to implement an academically contested definition of antisemitism. Also, criticism of the partially right-wing extremist Netanyahu government is put under suspicion of being antisemitic.”<sup>9</sup>

Among those who joined the BSW in its opposition ahead of the vote was Amnesty International Germany, which stated that while it welcomes the aim of introducing measures to combat antisemitism and racism and to protect Jewish life, in its view, the resolution “not only fails to achieve this goal, but also raises fears of serious violations of fundamental human rights and legal uncertainty.”<sup>10</sup>

In February 2025, the BSW unsuccessfully asked for a minute’s silence for the Palestinian victims of the war in Gaza, similar to the Bundestag’s minute of silence after October 7, drawing a parallel between the victims of massive war crimes committed by a terror organization and the casualties of a military campaign that followed.

It is tempting to contextualize the BSW’s critical stances toward Israel as a defiant reaction of a new political formation that places human rights and international law at the fore of its agenda. Alas, this can hardly be considered the case, given the party leadership’s vocal sympathies for the Russian dictator Vladimir Putin. Since its establishment, the BSW was vehement in opposing German and Western support to Ukraine in its struggle against fascist Russia’s unprovoked military campaign, illegal annexation of Ukrainian lands, and war crimes.

Even if one insists on falsely comparing the actions of the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) to those of the Russian military, then the double standards applied by BSW cannot be logically justified. Perhaps it is the strong anti-American inclinations of members that make them hostile to Israel as an ally of the United States. Yet, other, more subtle and darker motivations may be at hand.

The doubts become heavier when considering the words of Oskar Lafontaine at the party convention on January 27, 2024, International Holocaust Remembrance Day: “If we feel guilty about the murder of six million Jews, then we must also feel guilty about the murder of 27 million Soviet citizens. And just as it would never be justifiable in view of our history to supply weapons with which Jews can be murdered, it is just as reprehensible to supply weapons with which Russians can be murdered again.”<sup>11</sup>

<sup>9</sup> Baha Kirlidokme, “Bundestag Passes Antisemitism Resolution [German],” *Taz*, November 7, 2024, <https://taz.de/Kampf-gegen-Judenfeindlichkeit!/6047536/>.

<sup>10</sup> Whittle, “Germany Passes Controversial Antisemitism Resolution.”

<sup>11</sup> Michael Thaidigsmann, “Wagenknecht’s Henpecked Husband and Israel’s ‘War Crimes’ [German],” *Jüdische Allgemeine*, January 29, 2024, <https://www.juedische-allgemeine.de/meinung/wagenknechts-pantoffelhelder-holocaust-und-israels-kriegsverbrechen/>.

It is difficult to decide what is more alarming: The conditional structure of the sentence and what it implies; or the bizarre comparison between the moral obligation created by the Nazi German murder of six million Jews and a presumed German moral duty for Russian soldiers who invaded a liberal-democratic European country without provocation and have committed atrocities of massive scales.

Other aspects of the BSW agenda are also worrying students of history. The BSW is critical of capitalism as such. According to her own statements, Wagenknecht has renounced Communism. Rather, the BSW's program demands strong social security measures, promotes a deeper involvement of the state in economic affairs, and is highly critical of specific fields of present-day capitalism, namely the global finance sector and the digital industry dominated by a new type of oligarchs.

All of this is, of course, legitimate by any democratic standard. Yet, in certain texts and speeches, Wagenknecht came forward with metaphors that are common among critics of capitalism but are also commonly used and understood in antisemitic circles. Particularly in her older writings, she repeatedly used the metaphor of the locust to characterize the bosses of the financial industry. She also tended to personalize her criticism of capitalism, referring to, among others, "East Coast elites," and implied that conspiratorial forces drive the finance industry.<sup>12</sup>

The bold anti-immigration stand promoted by the BSW is the most hybrid right-left aspect of its agenda. This agenda is not directly based on a *völkisch* concept of belonging whose premise is skepticism of ethnic diversity, multiculturalism, and integration, as is the case of the AfD. Rather, it is linked to concepts of peoples' sovereignty and class struggles. Typical of populists, the BSW blames asylum seekers for a lack of public safety, overcrowded classrooms, and low welfare payments.<sup>13</sup>

None of this directly relates to German Jews. Some of them may even identify with the call to limit migration from the Middle East and other Muslim countries. Yet, students of history know that political campaigns that target minorities and play xenophobic tunes in the hope of appealing to the disaffected are never good news, and are never good news for Jews in particular.

– **Dr. Marcus Funck**

<sup>12</sup> Alexander Schwarz, "Studies into Sahra Wagenknecht's Critique of Capitalism," M.A. Thesis, Berlin, 2020. [German]

<sup>13</sup> Emma Wallis, "German Elections: What does the BSW Say about Migration in its Manifesto?," Infomigrants, February 14, 2025, <https://www.infomigrants.net/en/post/62871/german-elections-what-does-the-bsw-say-about-migration-in-its-manifesto>.

# THE NETHERLANDS WHY ARE THEY IGNORANT?

In January 2023, the Claims Conference published a survey that was a cause for alarm. The survey showed serious shortcomings in historical knowledge about the Holocaust among young people in the Netherlands.<sup>1</sup> It revealed that 59% of respondents between the ages of 12 and 41 do not know that six million Jews were murdered. Even more worrying, 23% of respondents under the age of 41 believe the Holocaust is a myth, or that the number of Jews killed has been greatly exaggerated, while 12% are unsure. Only 52% of this younger generation knew about Auschwitz-Birkenau, while only 15% knew the name of the main Dutch transit camp, Westerbork.

News channels and antisemitism watchdogs alike sounded the alarm about the Dutch youth's lack of historical knowledge about the Holocaust. The Netherlands Institute for Holocaust and Genocide Studies (NIOD) called the numbers "downright frightening," while others called it "shocking," "worrying," and "highly disturbing."<sup>2</sup> A common response among commentators was that, in order to fix this problem, Holocaust education in the Netherlands should be strengthened.<sup>3</sup>

The government responded to these calls by introducing the "National Plan for Strengthening Holocaust Education" on June 24, 2024.<sup>4</sup> The Ministers who introduced the plan observed that "Knowledge of the Holocaust among Dutch people is declining, while antisemitic incidents are increasing, not only among young people and in education but among all Dutch people in our entire society."<sup>5</sup> They argued that "Good knowledge of the Holocaust starts at school.

<sup>1</sup> "Claims Conference Netherlands Holocaust Poll 2023," January 2023, <https://www.claimscon.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/01/Claims-Conference-Netherlands-Dual-Topline-1.pdf>.

<sup>2</sup> For reactions, see, for example: "Nearly a Quarter of Dutch Youth and Young Adults Question the Seriousness of the Holocaust [Dutch]," *De Volkskrant*, January 25, 2023, <https://www.volkskrant.nl/nieuws-achtergrond/bijna-een-kwart-van-nederlandse-jongeren-en-jongvolwassenen-trekt-ernst-holocaust-in-twijfel-bd638306/>; "Shocking Results of Research into Knowledge of the Holocaust [Dutch]," *VPRO*, January 29, 2023, [https://www.vpro.nl/programmas/ovt/speel~PREPR\\_RA1\\_17106552~schokkende-uitkomst-onderzoek-naar-kennis-over-holocaust~.html](https://www.vpro.nl/programmas/ovt/speel~PREPR_RA1_17106552~schokkende-uitkomst-onderzoek-naar-kennis-over-holocaust~.html); Center for Information and Documentation Israel (CIDI), "American Research: 23% of Young Dutch People Think the Holocaust is Exaggerated [Dutch]," CIDI, January 25, 2023, <https://www.cidi.nl/amerikaans-onderzoek-23-jonge-nederlanders-denkt-dat-de-holocaust-wordt-overdreven/>; and Anne Frank Foundation, "Research Claims Conference [Dutch]," *annefrank.org*, January 25, 2023, <https://www.annefrank.org/nl/over-ons/nieuws-en-pers/nieuws/2023/1/25/onderzoek-claims-conference/>.

<sup>3</sup> An important voice in this appeal was represented by the organizations Camp Westerbork Memorial Center, Camp Vught National Monument, Anne Frank Foundation, National Holocaust Museum/Jewish Cultural Quarter and the National Support Center for Guest Speakers WWII-Present.

<sup>4</sup> "National Plan for Strengthening Holocaust Education [Dutch]," Government of The Netherlands, June 24, 2024, <https://www.rijksoverheid.nl/documenten/rapporten/2024/06/24/nationaal-plan-versterking-holocausteducatie>.

<sup>5</sup> Specifically, the ministers of Education, Culture & Science; Health, Welfare & Sport; and Social Affairs & Employment. They cooperated with the National Coordinator for Combating Antisemitism in designing the plan. "Cover Letter Introducing the National Plan for Strengthening Holocaust Education [Dutch]," Ministry of Health, Welfare and Sport, June 24, 2024, <https://open.overheid.nl/documenten/5b255efe-c586-479b-849f-342282ef8c3a/file>.

Teachers at all levels of education have a crucial role in structurally improving knowledge about the Holocaust among Dutch people.”<sup>6</sup>

In order for this approach to be successful, however, it is necessary to scrutinize the current limitations of the Dutch education system in teaching history in general. The majority of Dutch students, as it is, do not learn history in high school (after 9th grade) and do not take a history exam. The ones who do learn history have a distorted image of the past because the curriculum leaves out important context. Improving Holocaust education in high schools will, therefore, need to focus first and foremost on increasing the number of students who take history classes and exams, ideally making it a compulsory subject. At the same time, the curriculum should be reconsidered in order to address specific gaps in knowledge about the Holocaust among Dutch students.

The Holocaust is an important part of the Dutch national past. During the Second World War, about 75% of Jews in the Netherlands were murdered, the highest relative number in Western Europe, including Germany. The Dutch education system teaches the history of the Holocaust in primary school and junior high school. After that, students’ exposure to Holocaust education greatly varies depending on their level of education and on their chosen direction of studies.

Secondary education in the Netherlands begins at the age of twelve and is divided into vocational and more academic streams. History is not a compulsory subject in any of the tracks of the “vmbo” education stream, which is the four-year pre-vocational secondary education level that trains students ages twelve to sixteen to enter non-academic jobs. In two tracks of this stream (vmbo-bb and -kb), a mere 1.6% of all students took an exam in history in 2023 (591 out of 37,496 students); in vmbo-gt, their share was approximately 49% (24,028 out of 48,893 students).<sup>7</sup> All three final exams included the Holocaust as a topic as part of the history of the Second World War.<sup>8</sup>

In the upper grades of the five-year “havo” (ages 12 to 17) and six-year “vwo” (ages 12 to 18) – which is the more academic secondary education level that prepares students for college or university<sup>9</sup> – history is a compulsory subject only in two of the four available study tracks (Economics & Society and Culture & Society). In the other two (Nature & Health and Nature & Technology), history is an elective that is chosen by only a handful of students.<sup>10</sup> Altogether, a meager 35% of all Dutch pupils have a history education after the age of 15 and take a history

<sup>6</sup> “National Plan for Strengthening Holocaust Education.”

<sup>7</sup> “Final Exam Statistics: Overview [Dutch],” examenoverzicht.nl, <https://www.examenoverzicht.nl/examen-informatie/algemeen/statistieken>.

<sup>8</sup> College voor Toetsen en Examens (CVTE), “VMBO History and Government – Syllabus for Central Exam 2023 [Dutch],” CVTE, June 21, 2021, <https://www.examenblad.nl/2023/vmbo-gl/documenten/syllabus-geschiedenis-staatsinrichting-vmbo>.

<sup>9</sup> The length of high school education also varies on the level. It is one year (10<sup>th</sup> grade) for prevocational secondary education (“vmbo”), two years (10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> grade) for general higher secondary education (“havo”), and three years (10<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> grade) for pre-university level high school education (“vwo”).

<sup>10</sup> This is not necessarily because of disinterest but can also be because the schedule of the compulsory subjects clashes with the hours during which the electives are offered.

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exam in high school.<sup>11</sup> This is a critical factor explaining the lack of knowledge about the Holocaust in the Netherlands.

For those who do take a history exam, the Holocaust is part of the high school exam preparation, is addressed in textbooks, and is treated by all teachers. For those who do not take a history exam, exposure to the Holocaust in high school is confined to a few hours in their freshman year. The majority of those who do take a history exam are students who attend more academic high schools (“havo” and “vwo”) and not those who attend vocational high schools (“vmbo”). The result is that highly educated Dutch citizens will have learned about the Holocaust, while the ones with a non-academic-oriented education will know very little. Thus, two types of Dutch citizens have been created when it comes to knowing history at large and knowing its dark pages in particular. This has to change.

The need is even more urgent in a reality where there is an increasing amount of media available to get historical narratives across (virtual reality, social media, games, films, etc.). Considering that about 22% of young Dutch people report that they acquired their knowledge of the Second World War from video games,<sup>12</sup> it is necessary to address any stereotypical ideas that students may have about the war and the Holocaust as a result of playing these video games. When these ideas remain unaddressed in school because students are not taking history classes, students will be left with the information gained from social media and unverified sources.

It is also important to note that fading knowledge of the Holocaust is a trend not unique to the Netherlands. A similar phenomenon can be observed in countries like France and the United States among young adults aged 18-29. A recent Claims Conference survey showed that 46% of French respondents in this age category indicated that they had not heard or weren't sure if they had heard of the Holocaust. Nearly half (48%) of Americans surveyed were unable to name a single camp or ghetto established by the Nazis during the Second World War.<sup>13</sup>

Furthermore, over the years, history education has become more competence-based – giving priority to teaching analytical skills over historical facts. The subject of history has assumed characteristics of a multidisciplinary course, in which topics in citizenship education, such as democracy and human rights, have transcended the value of teaching history itself. That is, teaching facts: dates, names, places, and context.

Giving more attention to the teaching of history is one essential reform the Netherlands needs for its citizens to have adequate knowledge about the Holocaust. Reforming how history is taught is another.

<sup>11</sup> M.L.F. van Berkel, “War in the Classroom: Teaching the Second World War and the Holocaust in Secondary Education [Dutch],” Han University of Applied Sciences, October 2021, 15, <https://han.brand-spot.net/brandspot/permalink/b00b062b-bfea-4e1a-8c36-175fac93ba33>.

<sup>12</sup> M.L.F. van Berkel, “What do Young People Know about the Second World War? A Study of Knowledge, Sources of Knowledge and Attitudes of Dutch Pupils in Secondary Education and Intermediate Vocational Education [Dutch],” Han University of Applied Sciences, 2018, 48, [https://www.han.nl/artikelen/2020/12/jongeren-weten-weinig-over-de-tweede-wereldoorlog/kennis\\_jongeren\\_wo2\\_marc\\_van\\_berkel\\_13\\_juni\\_2018.pdf](https://www.han.nl/artikelen/2020/12/jongeren-weten-weinig-over-de-tweede-wereldoorlog/kennis_jongeren_wo2_marc_van_berkel_13_juni_2018.pdf).

<sup>13</sup> “The First-Ever Eight-Country Holocaust Knowledge and Awareness Index Shows Growing Gap in Knowledge about the Holocaust, Especially in Young Adults,” Claims Conference, January 23, 2025, <https://www.claimscon.org/country-survey/>.

As in most countries, in the Netherlands, the curriculum for the final exam is defined by the state. Therefore, history curricula and textbooks provide insight into how much importance the state attaches to certain periods in its national history and which narratives of the past the state seeks to promote. They shed light on the state's views on the national past and what it would like its citizens to know about it.

A review of Dutch history curricula and textbooks reveals several problems in the way the Holocaust is taught. Mainly, the Holocaust is taught without the proper historical context and without enough self-reflection.

In August 2006, the Dutch government defined 58 globally formulated “core objectives” for the lower grades of secondary education. According to this government guideline, the Holocaust falls in the teaching category of “people and society,” which aims to provide students with a better understanding of the world around them by providing them with spatial, societal, and historical perspectives.<sup>14</sup> Core objective number 37 (“Basic historical knowledge”) stipulates that history will be taught according to ten historical periods, ranging from the period of hunters and farmers to Greeks and Romans to the Middle Ages, the Enlightenment and industrialization, and to the two World Wars.<sup>15</sup>

The government-defined objectives explicitly require teachers to instruct pupils in high school to relate the events and developments in the 20th century (including the two World Wars and the Holocaust) to contemporary developments. Teachers are provided with further guidance based on a list of so-called “characteristic aspects” that relate to each of the ten historical periods. Aspect 41 in this list instructs teachers to address “racism and discrimination that led to genocide, in particular against Jews” in all levels of high school education.<sup>16</sup>

Aside from these core objectives set by the government, history teachers are guided by the so-called “Canon of the Netherlands,” which provides markers to illustrate historical periods. The Canon identifies fifty important people, objects, and events that together purport to narrate the story of the historical and cultural development of the Netherlands.

The Canon of the Netherlands reflects the cultural and historical subjects that the government considers important enough to pass on to new generations and new residents. In terms of the Second World War and Holocaust education, the Canon highlights the Second World War 1940-1945 and “Anne Frank and the Persecution of the Jews” as two separate windows. While

<sup>14</sup> “Characteristics and Core Objectives for Lower Grades [Dutch],” Curriculum Development Foundation (SLO), May 2016, <https://www.slo.nl/publish/pages/4881/karakteristieken-en-kerndoelen-onderbouw-vo.pdf>.

<sup>15</sup> The ten historical periods are: Hunters and Farmers; Greeks and Romans; Monks and Knights; Cities and States; Explorers and Reformers; Regents and Princes; Wigs and Revolutions; Citizens and Steam Engines; World Wars; Television and Computers.

<sup>16</sup> For VMBO: “Time Periods and Characteristic Aspects of VMBO [Dutch],” Curriculum Development Foundation (SLO), [https://www.slo.nl/publish/pages/14270/tijdvakken\\_en\\_kenmerkende\\_aspecten\\_vmbo\\_ob.pdf](https://www.slo.nl/publish/pages/14270/tijdvakken_en_kenmerkende_aspecten_vmbo_ob.pdf). For HAVO/VWO: “Time Periods and Characteristic Aspects of HAVO [Dutch],” Curriculum Development Foundation (SLO), <https://www.slo.nl/@15733/tijdvakken-kenmerkende-aspecten-ob-havo/>, and “Time Periods and Characteristic Aspects of VWO, Upper Grades [Dutch],” Curriculum Development Foundation (SLO), [https://slo.nl/publish/pages/14265/tijdvakken\\_en\\_kenmerkende\\_asoecten\\_vwo\\_bb.pdf](https://slo.nl/publish/pages/14265/tijdvakken_en_kenmerkende_asoecten_vwo_bb.pdf).

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the Canon of the Netherlands has a legal status, schools are free in their interpretation and application of the Canon.

In the examination programs for all levels of high school, the Second World War is covered quite extensively. The syllabus for “vmbo” for the subject of history specifies that, as part of the theme of the Second World War, teachers should address the subjects of concentration camps, the National Socialist Movement in the Netherlands (the “NSB”), the persecution of Jews, the February strike (1941), deportations (via Westerbork transit camp to extermination camps such as Auschwitz), collaboration, accommodation and resistance, “good and bad,” traitors, razzias, going into hiding, and surviving during times of occupation.<sup>17</sup> Since these subjects are defined as examination material, they provide a good indication of the content of the lessons and teaching material.

Nevertheless, as will be shown below, there is a need to give these topics more depth and context in class.

Dutch history textbooks need to adhere to the principles of the government-defined curriculum but are not published by the government. There is a free market of textbooks and various options available for high schools.<sup>18</sup> Schools usually adopt a particular textbook and reconsider and review their choice about every five years.

The persecution of Jews appears as a topic in all textbooks of prevocational secondary education. Each textbook specifies several measures that were introduced to isolate Jews in society. Some also include student assignments on discrimination and antisemitism. Furthermore, the textbooks discuss the deportations of Jews from the Netherlands, addressing the Westerbork transit camp and the Vught concentration camp. All textbooks include a section on Anne Frank and the subject of going into hiding during the war.<sup>19</sup>

High school textbooks for all levels of secondary education address the basic materials that appear in the syllabus for the final exam, which are discussed above. However, the textbooks often devote just one subsection to the Holocaust – sometimes only a few paragraphs.<sup>20</sup> This means that complicated processes, themes, and concepts are not thoroughly discussed. To give an example, one of the more popular history textbooks called *Memo* sums up the subject of “Antisemitism” in the following short paragraph:

Antisemitism was characteristic of Nazi ideology. This means: hatred of Jews. The Nazis blamed the Jews for the German defeat in World War I and the failing economy. With these ideas, they played on resentments present among the

<sup>17</sup> “VMBO History and Government – Syllabus for Central Exam 2023.”

<sup>18</sup> Van Berkel, “War in the Classroom,” 23.

<sup>19</sup> “War and Decolonization: Reorienting on the Second World War and the Decolonization of the Dutch East Indies [Dutch],” Curriculum Development Foundation (SLO), 2015, 34, <https://www.slo.nl/publish/pages/2880/oorlog-en-dekolonisatie.pdf>. The report is based on a review of four textbooks used in the lower grades (7<sup>th</sup> through 9<sup>th</sup> grades) of prevocational secondary education: *Sprekend verleden onderbouw 5th ed.*, *Memo geschiedenis voor de onderbouw 3rd ed.*, *Feniks voor de onderbouw 1st ed.*, and *Geschiedeniswerkplaats onderbouw 3rd ed.*

<sup>20</sup> Van Berkel, “War in the Classroom,” 24.

German population. Many Germans were antisemitic: They believed that German Jews did not belong to the German people and mistrusted them.<sup>21</sup>

History textbooks inevitably present narratives, and their production involves the selection, omission, and highlighting of historical facts. Analyzing Dutch history textbooks from this perspective, it emerges that there is a need for improvement in the way the textbooks address collaboration and resistance, how Jews are depicted, and the lack of a larger European context.

Collaboration and resistance remains a sensitive topic in the Dutch collective memory.<sup>22</sup> Historical studies show that Dutch civil servants followed Nazi Germany's orders, that some ordinary civilians were passive bystanders, and that some were even actively involved in the persecution of the Jews.<sup>23</sup>

Since the 1980s and 1990s, it has been widely recognized in scholarship about the Second World War in the Netherlands that an obedient Dutch administrative apparatus significantly contributed to the efficiency of the deportations in the Netherlands. Specifically, that from top to bottom, Dutch civil servants, railway personnel, and police officers had actively participated in the preparations and facilitation of the persecution of Jews while the population passively watched.<sup>24</sup>

Dienke Hondius (Professor of History at the Free University of Amsterdam and educational staff member of the Anne Frank House) found that topics like the role of the Dutch fascist party NSB, Dutch perpetrators, betrayal, assistance, and collaboration of various groups and organizations in Dutch society remain underdeveloped in Dutch history textbooks.<sup>25</sup> For example, one *Memo* history textbook describes how part of the population tried to “get through the war unscathed,” explaining that these people “adapted” to the situation and followed each other in their behavior. The textbook goes on to note that others “agreed with the Germans,” while a “part resisted the Germans.”<sup>26</sup>

The discussion of collaboration and resistance in textbooks should be much more in-depth and to the point. It must be more clear about the “complex moral choices that Dutch citizens faced during the Second World War and the life-or-death implications such decisions had for Dutch Jews.”<sup>27</sup> At the moment, only a minority of young people understand the meaning of “collaboration” (38%) and “resistance” (23%), as was revealed by a national survey of over

21 *Memo – History Textbook for VMBO-KGT Upper Grades* [Dutch], Malmberg, <https://www.malmberg.nl/voortgezet-onderwijs/bladerboeken-vo.htm>.

22 See, for example: Frank van Vree, *The Netherlands and the Memory of the Persecution of the Jews 1945-2024* (Verbum: 2024) [Dutch], and Joyce van de Bildt, “The Netherlands: A Museum, and a Controversy,” *For A Righteous Cause 2025* (Center for the Study of Contemporary European Jewry – Tel Aviv University: January 2025), 43-49, <https://cst.tau.ac.il/publications/for-a-righteous-cause-2025/>.

23 See, for example: Bob Moore, *Victims and Survivors: The Nazi Persecution of the Jews in the Netherlands, 1940-1945* (London: Arnold, 1997).

24 Margreet Fogteloo, “Finally Room [Dutch],” *De Groene Amsterdammer* 17 (April 24, 2019), <https://www.groene.nl/artikel/eindelijk-ruimte>.

25 Dienke Hondius, *War Lessons: Teaching about the War Since 1945* (Bakker: 2010), 264. [Dutch]

26 *Memo – History Textbook for VMBO-KGT Upper Grades*.

27 Jacob R. Boersema and Noam Schimmel, “Challenging Dutch Holocaust Education: Towards A Curriculum Based on Moral Choices and Empathetic Capacity,” *Ethics and Education* 3, no. 1 (March 2008), 57-74.



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1,500 secondary (high school) and intermediate vocational education (“vmbo”) students, conducted in 2018.<sup>28</sup>

Based on his extensive analysis of high school textbooks, Professor of Holocaust Education Marc van Berkel observed that “bystanders are not mentioned or discussed at all” in the textbooks.<sup>29</sup> Rather, the perspective is that of the Dutch as victims of Nazi oppression, “who were generally unable to resist these persecutions due to the ruthless and totalitarian nature of the German occupation policy.”<sup>30</sup>

The representation of the Dutch population as a victim group is problematic because it inhibits a process of soul-searching. Moreover, as a result, the majority of young Dutchmen (60% between the ages of 12 and 41) do not view their own country as a country where the Holocaust took place.<sup>31</sup> Indeed, Boersema and Schimmel concluded from a textbook analysis done in 2007 that Dutch history textbooks reflect an ambivalence about the extent of Dutch involvement in the genocide of Dutch Jewry.<sup>32</sup>

Dutch students are not always taught about (or impressed by) significant places and people involved in the deportation of Jews in their own country. For instance, only 38% heard about the Hollandsche Schouwburg (the Amsterdam theater that the Nazis used as a central assembling space for nearly 50,000 Dutch Jews before they were deported to transit Camp Westerbork in the east of the country and then to the concentration and extermination camps in the east of Europe). Only 39% associate the name of Anton Mussert (leader of the Dutch National Socialist Party) with the Second World War.<sup>33</sup> Seventy-four percent are unfamiliar with the name Arthur Seyss-Inquart (Reich commissioner for the German-occupied Netherlands), including some who mistakenly think he was a “righteous among the nations” (7%) or a “victim” (4%).<sup>34</sup>

At the same time, the larger European context of the events of the Holocaust is absent from the narrative of Dutch textbooks.<sup>35</sup> The events in Eastern Europe from 1941 onwards are barely covered in Dutch textbooks. Life in the ghettos and the mass murders in the Soviet Union are insufficiently elaborated on or wholly neglected. The actions of the *Einsatzgruppen* or *Aktion Reinhardt* in centrally occupied Poland are almost entirely absent from school textbooks.<sup>36</sup>

Dutch history textbooks are focused on Auschwitz and pay little attention to other extermination camps, including Sobibor, even though this is where tens of thousands of Dutch Jews were

<sup>28</sup> Van Berkel, “What do young people know about the Second World War?”

<sup>29</sup> M.L.F. van Berkel, “Plotlines of Victimhood: The Holocaust in German and Dutch History Textbooks, 1960-2010,” Ph.D. Thesis, Erasmus University Rotterdam (2017), 123.

<sup>30</sup> Van Berkel, “Plotlines of Victimhood,” 307, 309.

<sup>31</sup> “Claims Conference Netherlands Holocaust Poll 2023,” 4.

<sup>32</sup> Boersema and Schimmel, “Challenging Dutch Holocaust Education,” 57-74.

<sup>33</sup> Van Berkel, “War in the Classroom,” 37, 45.

<sup>34</sup> “Claims Conference Netherlands Holocaust Poll 2023,” 8.

<sup>35</sup> “Country Report the Netherlands to the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA),” Ministry of Health, Welfare and Sport, November 9, 2020, 30, [https://holocaustremembrance.sharepoint.com/:b/g/po/EQSY10bK1zBlI4qcUxanKN0B2QYR7bMCi\\_4ahKjrAONa7w?e=ijroAj](https://holocaustremembrance.sharepoint.com/:b/g/po/EQSY10bK1zBlI4qcUxanKN0B2QYR7bMCi_4ahKjrAONa7w?e=ijroAj).

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 30.

murdered, and only 18 Dutch Jews who were deported there survived.<sup>37</sup> Neither does the curriculum address how Jewish survivors were received in the Netherlands after the war. In fact, 41% of young people surveyed by the Claims Conference held that the Netherlands received Holocaust survivors with open arms after the war and treated them sympathetically.<sup>38</sup> The opposite is true, and this reception remains a sore spot that has left generations of Dutch Jews disillusioned with their government and fellow countrymen. Because these contexts and backgrounds are not taught, it is a challenge to transmit to young people the sensitivities of the history of the Holocaust that are experienced until this day by the Dutch-Jewish community.

The portrayal of Jews in Dutch history textbooks can also be improved. Jewish history and culture and the history of European antisemitism are hardly addressed.<sup>39</sup> The Holocaust is taught only in the context of the Nazi national-socialist ideology. This undermines efforts to sensitize students to the roots and the dangers of European antisemitism. More than half of Dutch students surveyed in 2018 were unfamiliar with the term “antisemitism,” while 67% of respondents did not know what genocide was.<sup>40</sup>

Furthermore, there is little or no attention to Jewish life in the Netherlands and in Europe before and after the war. As a result, Dutch students generally do not know how many Jews actually lived in the Netherlands before the war (about 140,000). Nor are students taught about the Jews’ integration and participation in Dutch society, how or from where they arrived in the Netherlands, or their customs. Instead, the focus is on the process of discrimination, deportation, and extermination.<sup>41</sup>

As a result, it can be perceived from the textbooks that the Jews have no history besides the Holocaust. This can be illustrated by an example of the way that the Holocaust is described in the syllabi for the final exam for higher secondary education (“havo”) and pre-university level education (“vwo”), in one sentence, as follows: “After the invasion of Poland in 1939, Britain and France declared war on Germany. Germany quickly conquered large parts of Europe, including the Netherlands, suspended the rule of law there, and introduced labor service.

<sup>37</sup> 58,380 Dutch Jews were deported to Auschwitz (854 survived); 34,313 were deported to Sobibor (18 survived); 4,894 were deported to Theresienstadt (about 1,980 survived); 3,751 were deported to Bergen-Belsen (about 2,050 survived); 150 were deported to Buchenwald and Ravensbrück (less than 10 survived). Cited in Kevin Prenger, “Persecution of Jews in the Netherlands during the German Occupation (1940-1945) [Dutch],” *Historiek*, December 2, 2024, <https://historiek.net/jodenvervolging-in-nederland-tijdens-de-duitse-bezetting-1940-1945/164332/>.

<sup>38</sup> On antisemitism in the Netherlands around and after the liberation, see: Dienne Hondius, *Return. Antisemitism in the Netherlands around the Liberation* (The Hague 1998) [Dutch] and Remco Ensel and Evelien Gans, eds., *The Holocaust, Israel and “the Jew”: Histories of Antisemitism in Postwar Dutch Society* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2017).

<sup>39</sup> Boersema and Schimmel, “Challenging Dutch Holocaust Education,” 57.

<sup>40</sup> Van Berkel, “What do Young People Know about the Second World War?”

<sup>41</sup> Van Berkel, “Plotlines of Victimhood,” 22.

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Jews, in particular, were systematically excluded from public life everywhere and eventually transported to extermination camps.”<sup>42</sup>

Generalizations of Jews are common, and Nazi illustrations and terminology are used in textbooks. In some textbooks, for example, the Nazi concept of a ‘Jewish race’ is used without further explanation.<sup>43</sup> Van Berkel, too, observed that Dutch history textbooks use iconographic sources and Nazi propaganda “to illustrate antisemitism, but without providing those racist perspectives with a critical and historical introduction, contextualization or deconstruction.”<sup>44</sup> If more space could be devoted to the Holocaust in textbooks, such propaganda could be placed in the proper context.

Furthermore, the victims of the Holocaust are also hardly personalized and, therefore, are difficult to empathize with. The perpetrators more often have a face than the victims. Van Berkel observed:

In almost none of the Dutch textbooks is specific information provided on perpetrators, bystanders or victims. Students are – again – confronted with homogenous groups like “the Germans,” “the Nazis,” “the occupier,” “Jews,” or “the Jewish population.” We do not learn much about individual perpetrators or victims of the Holocaust, except about some key protagonists like Hitler.<sup>45</sup>

One of the few individual victims that Dutch students are taught about is Anne Frank. She became an absolute icon in the Dutch collective memory. That 99% of Dutch students recognize her picture attests to this.<sup>46</sup>

Some teachers try to individualize the victims of the Holocaust and increase empathy using their own tools. They use films to make the history more personal, as well as special student assignments.

One of the Dutch history teachers whom I consulted in writing this article showed me such a project that he designed: Students are assigned the name of a murdered Jewish family or person that appears on one of the Stolpersteine (stumbling stones) in the students’ hometown. Divided into groups, the students research this person’s life and what happened to him or her

<sup>42</sup> College voor Toetsen en Examens (CVTE), “HAVO History and Government – Syllabus for Central Exam 2023 [Dutch],” CVTE, June 21, 2021, [https://www.examenblad.nl/system/files/2022/syllabi/Syllabus\\_Geschiedenis\\_Havo\\_2023\\_versie\\_def.pdf](https://www.examenblad.nl/system/files/2022/syllabi/Syllabus_Geschiedenis_Havo_2023_versie_def.pdf), and College voor Toetsen en Examens (CVTE), “VWO History and Government – Syllabus for Central Exam 2023 [Dutch],” CVTE, June 21, 2021, [https://www.examenblad.nl/system/files/2021/syllabi/Syllabus\\_geschiedenis\\_vwo\\_2023\\_versie\\_2\\_0915.pdf](https://www.examenblad.nl/system/files/2021/syllabi/Syllabus_geschiedenis_vwo_2023_versie_2_0915.pdf).

<sup>43</sup> Theo van Praag and Han Homan, *Time for Quality – The Second World War in Schoolbooks* (Heemstede: Edudesk 2005), 36-37. [Dutch]

<sup>44</sup> Van Berkel, “Plotlines of Victimhood,” 241.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 123.

<sup>46</sup> Van Berkel, “What do Young People Know about the Second World War?” 7.

exactly during the war. They are then asked to present their findings in a mini-documentary about this person.<sup>47</sup>

The teacher instructs students to first research the context of the Second World War in their hometown, including instances of collaboration and resistance, and what happened to the town's Jews. This approach succeeds in balancing the teaching of historical facts with an effort to have students relate to individual victims and increase their empathy.

Dutch history scholar Frank van Vree has highlighted the delicacy of balancing the historical context and individual context of the Holocaust. Too much emphasis on the perspective of individuals creates a risk that the category of "victim" would become infinitely flexible and could gradually start to include also the "waverers" and "little sinners," who, because of "circumstances," and less through fault of their own, ended up on the wrong side.<sup>48</sup> Indeed, this is a controversial topic in recent Dutch historiographical debates, as some Dutch historians' perspectives promote a "gray" view of the Second World War in which good and evil have become blurred and Jewish victimhood is leveled and relativized.<sup>49</sup>

Van Vree further highlights how over-emphasis on tragic, individual stories makes it hard to get beyond the conclusion that "it was all terrible," which can lead to possible loss of analytical insights. If historical awareness relies only on notions and emotions, "it is not only manipulable but ultimately also provides no insight into the social and political developments that led to that war and the destruction."<sup>50</sup>

The Dutch Constitution (Article 23) stipulates freedom of education, meaning that schools and teachers can choose how they teach subjects to pupils. Teachers in the Netherlands have considerable freedom to decide on the content of their lessons and from which angle to approach subjects in the curricula. Individual teachers can compensate for the lack of context discussed above by choosing to expand on the narrative that is presented in the textbooks.

One history teacher interviewed for this article, who asked not to be named because he was not authorized to discuss these issues, shared that it would be unthinkable for him not to introduce the concept of pogrom in his teaching. Given that the origin of that word is Russian, he said that this inevitably leads him to explain the Eastern European context of the history

<sup>47</sup> Author's interview in December 2024 with a high school history teacher who has twenty-five years of experience teaching history in 9<sup>th</sup> grade and up in a Dutch high school in the city of Gouda at the havo/vwo level. The teacher explains his project in this instructional video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hCSk-r8DXU8>. Instruction materials can be found here: [https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1NTvw0jgL-L3ibnT\\_vDf0i47ZsJj--dlb](https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1NTvw0jgL-L3ibnT_vDf0i47ZsJj--dlb).

<sup>48</sup> Frank van Vree, "Through the Eyes of the Victims: The Dangers of a Limited Perspective on the Second World War [Dutch]," *Kleio* 52, no. 2 (2011), 4-9.

<sup>49</sup> Two controversial publications in this regard, which have both been acclaimed and reviled, are Chris van der Heijden, *Grey Past* [Dutch] (2001) and Bart van der Boom, *We Know Nothing of Their Fate: Ordinary Dutch People and the Holocaust* [Dutch] (2012). For a discussion, see Evelien Gans, "The Dutch Historikerstreit about the Gray War: Everyone a Victim, Everyone a Perpetrator [Dutch]," *De Groene Amsterdammer* 4, January 27, 2010, <https://www.groene.nl/artikel/iedereen-een-beetje-slachtoffer-iedereen-een-beetje-dader>.

<sup>50</sup> Van Vree, "Through the Eyes of the Victims."

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of antisemitism. This is central to his teaching narrative, even though the word pogrom is not mentioned in any government guidelines for history curricula, he said.<sup>51</sup>

Teachers have also highlighted the added value of applying (fragments from) films and other visual materials in teaching the Second World War. Among the most widely cited titles are *Schindler's List*, *Band of Brothers*, *The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas*, *Der Untergang*, *The Wave*, and sometimes Dutch movies or fragments from television series. A history teacher interviewed for this article offers an optional viewing of the 195-minute-long movie *Schindler's List*, to which many students showed up and watched until the end, even though the school hours were long over.<sup>52</sup>

A wide range of complimentary materials is available to teachers to enhance their classes. Non-governmental educational platforms such as Platform WOII, the Anne Frank Foundation, and Holocausteducatie.nl facilitate excursions to museums and memorial sites, inviting guest speakers to the classroom and using diaries in class, for example.<sup>53</sup> These “tangible” tools become even more crucial as eyewitnesses to the Nazi crimes are passing away and the distance in time to the Holocaust increases. Nowadays, students come to class with less preliminary knowledge, and the distance in time to the events of the Second World War causes the subject to be further removed from their consciousness.<sup>54</sup>

The teachers' approach will depend on how they interpret the curriculum, but also how they will relate their history classes to the news and current events. A research team of the Dutch Curriculum Development Foundation surveyed 16 history teachers, who all considered it an essential part of their job to draw a link between the past and present. The current topics that they cited as most often discussed during history lessons are discrimination and racism, war and peace, ethics, and solidarity and empathy.<sup>55</sup>

Marc van Berkel observed a tendency of some Dutch teachers to use historical themes as cases for other generic learning objectives. He demonstrated that the objectives of some teachers are related to contemporary problems. According to Van Berkel, students are, therefore, “increasingly learning from the Holocaust, instead of learning about the Holocaust.”<sup>56</sup>

<sup>51</sup> Interview by the author in December 2024 with a retired high school history teacher with thirty-years of experience teaching history in Dutch high schools on various levels.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

<sup>53</sup> A selection of non-governmental platforms offering educational tools about the Holocaust for teachers in Dutch: Anne Frank Foundation: <https://www.annefrank.org/nl/educatie/lesmateriaal/>; Platform WOII: <https://www.tweedewereldoorlog.nl/educatie/>; Holocaust Educatie <https://holocausteducatie.nl/>; Camp Westerbork Memorial Center: <https://www.kampwesterbork.nl/lesmaterialen/>; Na de Oorlog (guest speakers): <https://www.nadeoorlog.nl/>; Centrum Information and Documentation Israel (CIDI): <https://www.cidi.nl/educatie/lesmateriaal/>; National Committee 4 and 5 May: <https://www.4en5mei.nl/educatie/voortgezet-onderwijs/>; IHRA: <https://holocaustremembrance.com/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/IHRA-Aanbevelingen-voor-lesgeven-en-leren-over-de-Holocaust.pdf>.

<sup>54</sup> J. Cuppen, M. Hendrix et al., “Holocaust Education and Antisemitism in Secondary Education,” February 2022, Research commissioned by the Center for Information and Documentation Israel (CIDI), 9-10.

<sup>55</sup> “War and Decolonization,” 41.

<sup>56</sup> Van Berkel, “War in the Classroom,” 64.

This tension between the Holocaust as history and as a lesson does not play out only in the Netherlands but is an international phenomenon. The Holocaust is viewed by some as inevitable material in human rights education and teaching students about racism and discrimination.<sup>57</sup>

Achieving the right balance in these approaches is one of the goals of the authors of the Dutch National Plan for Strengthening Holocaust Education (2024). They emphasize that it is important to understand the Holocaust primarily in terms of the unique historical factors that made these atrocities possible, even though an interdisciplinary approach can be of value.<sup>58</sup>

Research shows that increasing antisemitism, often connected to anti-Israel attitudes, as well as a multicultural student make-up, have occasionally obstructed teaching and learning about the Holocaust in the Netherlands.<sup>59</sup> However, this does not lead teachers to avoid the subject altogether in class, and only very few teachers report that they feel the need to approach the subject “more carefully” in anticipation of dismissive reactions.<sup>60</sup>

The National Plan for Strengthening Holocaust Education (2024) highlights the importance of Holocaust education in the integration process of new immigrants. The Dutch government recently made “knowledge about the Holocaust and its victims” part of the integration trajectory for new immigrants.”<sup>61</sup>

This is encouraging. But it is not enough.

The importance of adequate instruction for school pupils about the Holocaust and the dark chapters in Dutch history has become well-recognized in the Netherlands. Now it is time to make good on that recognition by reforming textbooks and allocating more importance to the compulsory study of history in elementary schools and high schools.

**– Dr. Joyce van de Bildt**

<sup>57</sup> See, for example: Zehavit Gross, “The Process of the Universalization of Holocaust Education: Problems and Challenges,” *Contemporary Jewry* 38 (2018), 5-20.

<sup>58</sup> “National Plan for Strengthening Holocaust Education.”

<sup>59</sup> See two surveys in this regard: “WO 2.0 [Dutch],” *Elsevier*, May 1, 2010, [http://www.researchned.nl/wp-content/uploads/2012/02/ELS017\\_016-OORLOGSONDERW.pdf](http://www.researchned.nl/wp-content/uploads/2012/02/ELS017_016-OORLOGSONDERW.pdf), and Cuppen and Hendrix et al., “Holocaust Education and Antisemitism in Secondary Education.”

<sup>60</sup> Cuppen and Hendrix et al., “Holocaust Education and Antisemitism in Secondary Education,” 14-15.

<sup>61</sup> Main points of agreement 2024 – 2028 between the ruling parties PVV, VVD, NSC and BBB <https://www.kabinetsformatie2023.nl/binaries/kabinetsformatie/documenten/publicaties/2024/05/16/hoofdlijnenakkoord-tussen-de-fracties-van-pvv-vvd-nsc-en-bbb/20240515+Hoofdlijnenakkoord+PVV+VVD+NSC+BBB.pdf>. The coalition’s ruling program outlines this as follows: “The government supports newcomers in learning the language and actively promotes knowledge about the Holocaust and its victims.” <https://zoek.officielebekendmakingen.nl/kst-20454-134.html>.

**SECTION 4**  
**ESSAYS**







# A HISTORICAL INFLECTION POINT

*Irwin Cotler*

We are witnessing and experiencing an unprecedented global explosion of antisemitism. Canada is one looking glass, but whether you look from Melbourne to Montreal or from Berlin to Berkeley, the trend is clear. There is an unprecedented global explosion of antisemitism, not only in terms of the incidents of antisemitism, but also because of the nature of the antisemitism itself.

The dramatic rise in antisemitic hate crimes and the intensification of sundry antisemitic hate speech – along with their convergence – underpins this unprecedented explosion. This comes against the backdrop of an international inflection moment that coincides with it – the intensification of what I call the “axis of authoritarianism,” consisting of Russia, China, and particularly Iran. These powers are working collaboratively, strategically, and in concert, incorporating the weaponization of antisemitism as part of their broader strategy of disinformation and misinformation. They contribute to the “antisemitic ecosystem,” now anchored within the axis of authoritarianism.

At the same time, we see an upending of the transnational Atlantic alliance. The United States, which was once the linchpin of the global rules-based order, is now itself destabilizing that order. We are witnessing, on the one hand, the upending of the community of democracies and an intensification of the axis of authoritarianism on the other. Antisemitism feeds off this larger ecosystem, and these dynamics are underpinning the unprecedented explosion of antisemitism.

This crisis escalated in the aftermath of October 7. It is sometimes forgotten that the unspeakable mass atrocities of that day, including mass murder, rape, mutilation, forcible abduction of hostages, and the execution of hostages in captivity, were not only perpetrated by Hamas as a terrorist organization under international law, but by an antisemitic, genocidal terrorist organization. This is not because I say so, but because Hamas itself affirmed it in its 1988 Charter and repeatedly since. Under international law and the Genocide Convention, incitement to genocide is a standalone breach of that convention, regardless of whether mass atrocities follow. In this case, genocidal atrocities directly followed genocidal incitement on October 7.

And it did not end there. On October 8, another antisemitic, genocidal terrorist group, Hizballah, joined in. Before long, seven fronts, each of them antisemitic, were acting in concert, led by the Iranian regime, which continues to receive a pass because attention remains focused on its proxies rather than the regime itself. When taken together, these forces create a critical mass of antisemitism that underpins this unprecedented explosion.

And the worst part of it? One would have thought that such unspeakable mass atrocities, carried out by a genocidal antisemitic organization that, after October 7, openly declared its intention to commit October 7 “again and again” until Israel’s annihilation, would have resulted in global condemnation and global action against antisemitism, against these genocidal

antisemitic proxies, and against Iran, the head of the campaign. Instead, rather than being diplomatically isolated, Iranian diplomats and leaders continue to be received in Davos and elsewhere, chair United Nations (UN) human rights groups, and enjoy a disturbing level of international legitimacy.

I first coined the term “genocidal antisemitism” at the beginning of the 21st century, when Ayatollah Khamenei declared that there could be no resolution to the Arab-Israeli conflict without the annihilation of the Jewish state (without even resorting to the euphemism of “Zionist regime”). That genocidal incitement by the Iranian regime has continued, unchallenged and without accountability. Thus, we have not only an explosion of antisemitism but also a culture of impunity that allows it to flourish. The coming together of these dynamics is the most disturbing.

Even before October 7, however, the embers of antisemitism were burning, but we were not paying attention. In 2021, at the end of my first year as Canada’s Special Envoy on Combatting Antisemitism, a role with a global mandate, I reported that the most disturbing finding was not just that we already had the highest levels of antisemitic incidents, hate crimes, and incendiary hate speech (all of which have since exploded) since reporting began in the 1970s, but that we were witnessing the normalization, mainstreaming, and legitimization of antisemitism in politics, culture, entertainment, sports, media, and particularly campus life.

Worse of all was an absence of outrage; a prevailing indifference and inaction to the rise in antisemitism prior to October 7. This reminded me of the words of my mentor, Elie Wiesel, who often said that indifference and inaction always mean siding with the antisemites, not with their targets and victims.

At this point, our responsibility is clear: we need a whole-of-government, whole-of-society approach to combatting antisemitism, with concrete actions taken country by country and internationally. We can no longer continue with complacency, indifference, and inaction because this leads to impunity, and impunity leads to an absence of accountability.

What is at stake here, and what continues to not be sufficiently appreciated, is recognizing this is not only a threat to the safety and security of Jewish communities, which should be reason enough to protect a vulnerable minority that is targeted by the longest, most enduring, most toxic, and most lethal of hatreds, but also the security of democracies themselves. It is a standing threat to the safety and security of citizens within those democracies because this metastasizing antisemitism is now evolving into antisemitic terror, and the next terrorist attack, possibly another mass atrocity terror attack, is just stalking around the corner.

Democracies must preemptively act to hold antisemites accountable and combat the normalization and mainstreaming of antisemitism across all cultural spheres. This is an urgent historical moment that demands equally urgent action domestically in each country, among the community of democratic nations, and at the highest levels internationally.

This brings us to the United Nations. As we approach the 80th anniversary of the UN Charter – a document intended to uphold human dignity, which birthed the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and which spoke in its preamble of unspeakable atrocities that shock the conscience of

humankind – we must confront the reality that antisemitism has not been eradicated. October 7 were the unspeakable atrocities that should have shocked the conscience of humankind, but did not. The explosion of antisemitism in the wake of October 7 should have shocked the conscience of humankind, but did not.

So, as we approach the 80th anniversary of the UN Charter and the 80th anniversary of the liberation of the Auschwitz death camp, we are at a historical inflection point, with these two historical dates linked to the present by antisemitism. Auschwitz, the worst extermination camp of the 20th century, saw 1.3 million people deported there, 1.1 million of whom were Jews. Jews were murdered at Auschwitz because of antisemitism.

But antisemitism did not die at Auschwitz. It remains the bloodied canary in the mineshaft of global hatred and violence. And history has taught us, time and again, that while antisemitism begins with Jews, it never ends with Jews.

As we mark the 80th anniversary of the UN Charter, I recall the words of a former UN Secretary-General, who told me when I was Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada: “A United Nations that does not put the combatting of antisemitism at the forefront of its agenda is a United Nations that has betrayed its past and forfeited its future.”

This is the historical moment that the UN faces today. As a longtime supporter of the UN and its institutions like the International Criminal Court, I regrettably say that instead of leading the fight against antisemitism, the UN has often provided cover for it. Under the protective shield of international law, human rights advocacy, and anti-racism efforts, antisemitism has been laundered and, worse, weaponized.

International law is being weaponized to single out one member state – Israel, the Jew among the nations – in the international community for selective opprobrium and indictment.

This is not to say that Israel, like any other state, should not be held accountable for human rights and humanitarian law violations. The Jewish people and the State of Israel do not enjoy any particular privilege or preference because of the horrors of the Holocaust. No one should seek that Israel be above the law. But as the UN Charter proclaims, Israel is entitled to equality before the law and deserves equal respect. It must not be subjected to a different standard or singled out for disproportionate condemnation, but standards must be applied equally.

Human rights standards must be applied equally. The selective targeting of Israel, mirroring historic patterns of antisemitism, is itself a manifestation of contemporary antisemitism. This fuels a culture of impunity, allowing antisemitism to flourish unchecked.

At this inflection point, the international community must recognize that combatting antisemitism is not just about protecting Jewish communities. It is a fundamental necessity for preserving democratic values and global security. The time to act is now.

***Irwin Cotler is former Justice Minister and Attorney General of Canada***

## FIGHTING ANTISEMITISM IN EUROPE

*Dr. h.c. Katharina von Schnurbein*

Antisemitism mutates. Not long after the Second World War, Holocaust denial and distortion emerged. As soon as the State of Israel was founded, anti-Zionism mushroomed. After the October 7 attack, we have witnessed a tsunami of incidents and attacks against Jews online, on the streets, and on campuses. We have also seen what Jonathan Boyd of the Institute for Jewish Policy Research coined “ambient antisemitism.”<sup>1</sup> Namely, “Jews are sensing [that] the contexts in which they live have become more alienating and hostile since October 7, even if they have not personally experienced an antisemitic incident.” This is expressed through graffiti in (Western) European cities, comparisons of the situation in Gaza to the Holocaust, the tearing down of the hostages’ posters, and the calling for support for the civilians in Gaza in the name of human rights at universities, without calling at the same time for the liberation of the hostages.

In October 2024, the European Commission issued its First Progress Report on the implementation of the EU Antisemitism Strategy.<sup>2</sup> It shows that since the adoption of the EU Strategy on Combating Antisemitism and Fostering Jewish Life in 2021, awareness about the danger of antisemitism has significantly increased among state actors.

This has led over the past three years to the adoption of impactful national strategies against antisemitism in 23 EU Member States, the appointment of 20 national envoys or coordinators on combating antisemitism, and the EU-wide endorsement of the non-legally binding working definition of antisemitism by the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance as a useful tool for the fight against antisemitism.<sup>3</sup> Structures have been created, and a wide range of EU-led and EU-funded initiatives across EU Member States and civil society have been taken to address antisemitism, foster Jewish life, and ensure Holocaust remembrance.

Besides implementing roughly 90 initiatives of the EU Antisemitism Strategy, the aim of the European Commission continues to be the creation of European-wide structures to address challenges such as antisemitism online. Indeed, the European Union was the first region in the world to adopt, already in 2022, a legal framework regulating the way platforms may operate in the EU. The Digital Services Act (DSA),<sup>4</sup> in force since February 17, 2024, includes new obligations for online platforms to act against illegal content, including illegal antisemitic hate speech. It creates clear and harmonized obligations for online platforms to set up and operate

<sup>1</sup> Jonathan Boyd, “Antisemitism in the Aftermath of October 7: What do the Data Tell Us, and What More Do We Still Need To Know?,” Institute for Jewish Policy Research, October 1, 2024, <https://www.jpr.org.uk/reports/antisemitism-aftermath-october-7-what-do-data-tell-us-and-what-more-do-we-still-need-know>.

<sup>2</sup> European Commission, “First Progress Report on the Implementation of the EU Strategy on Combating Antisemitism and Fostering Jewish Life,” ec.europa.eu, October 14, 2024, <https://ec.europa.eu/newsroom/just/items/852203/>.

<sup>3</sup> European Leadership Network, “IHRA Definition: Adoption in Europe,” elnetwork.eu, <https://elnetwork.eu/ihra-definition/>.

<sup>4</sup> European Commission, “Digital Services Act Starts Applying to All Online Platforms in the EU,” ec.europa.eu, February 16, 2024, [https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip\\_24\\_881](https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip_24_881).

notice and action mechanisms, to be transparent, and to report on their content moderation practices in a timely manner.

Online platforms and online search engines that have more than 45 million users in the EU must assess and mitigate the risks linked to the use of their service, such as the dissemination of antisemitic content. The Commission also has direct enforcement powers towards these companies and can fine them up to 6% of their annual revenue if they fail to comply with the relevant provisions or impose interim measures.<sup>5</sup> In this context, the Commission has sent requests for information in relation to the dissemination of illegal content related to Hamas' terrorist attacks against Israel and has opened formal proceedings against X on this issue.<sup>6</sup>

Despite the significant increase of actions and initiatives in recent years, following October 7, 2023, European Jews are faced with unprecedented threats and violence. The everyday life of Jews in Europe has been impacted deeply. Such intimidation is unacceptable, and re-establishing the full safety and security of Jews is a priority in the EU. It is essential that attacks against Jews are not left unaddressed and that hate crimes are investigated and justice served, in accordance with the rule of law.

In view of the aggravated situation, the Commission accelerated the implementation of the EU Antisemitism Strategy, made funding available for the security of Jewish premises, cooperated with Europol and national law enforcement authorities to address the vast amount of terrorist and extremist content circulating online after the attacks, and launched the creation of a network to address antisemitism online.<sup>7</sup> The Commission also stressed that national authorities must investigate, prosecute, and try cases of alleged hate-motivated crime or speech, including public condoning, denial, and gross trivialization of the Holocaust.

Despite the extremely difficult situation for Jews across Europe, it is important to recognize that this is likely the first time that Europe has explicitly stood with its Jewish communities throughout its long history with antisemitism: providing support and solidarity, making true the EU antisemitism strategy that "Europe can only prosper if its Jewish community prospers, too."

This is not a figure of speech. Indeed, antisemitic conspiracy myths, hate speech, and disinformation attacking the Jewish community are polarizing societies at large and have a negative effect on the public debate. This ultimately affects the democratic sphere altogether. Antisemitism constitutes a threat to European democracy and the security of the European Union.

In line with the 2020 European Democracy Action Plan, the EU Security Union Strategy (2020-2025), and the Defense of Democracy package adopted in 2023, the European Commission

<sup>5</sup> European Commission, "Questions and Answers on the Digital Services Act," ec.europa.eu, February 23, 2024, [https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/qanda\\_20\\_2348](https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/qanda_20_2348).

<sup>6</sup> European Commission, "Supervision of the Designated Very Large Online Platforms and Search Engines under DSA," ec.europa.eu, February 6, 2025, <https://digital-strategy.ec.europa.eu/en/policies/list-designated-vlops-and-vloses>.

<sup>7</sup> European Commission, "Communication on 'No Place for Hate: A Europe United Against Hatred,'" commission.europa.eu, December 6, 2023, [https://commission.europa.eu/document/c60c451c-ccd2-406a-be3a-ef65123f2bb6\\_en](https://commission.europa.eu/document/c60c451c-ccd2-406a-be3a-ef65123f2bb6_en).

is determined to protect the EU democratic sphere and ensure the security of all its citizens, including Jews.

The EU Antisemitism Strategy runs until 2030, yet the recent aggravation of the situation calls for further efforts for its effective implementation and update, as necessary. In light of the sharply rising threats against Jewish communities, both online and offline, Commission President Ursula von der Leyen entrusted the Austrian Commissioner Magnus Brunner with the task of supporting Member States to improve the safety and security of Jews and work on the effective implementation of the EU Strategy on combating antisemitism and fostering Jewish life, including updating it if necessary.

The European Commission is determined to use all available legal and policy tools to ensure that Jewish life can prosper across the EU, that Jews can go about their lives free from security concerns, and can fully benefit from their democratic rights.

***Katharina von Schnurbein is European Commission Coordinator on Combating Antisemitism and Fostering Jewish Life***

## **WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE? CANADIAN REFLECTIONS ON A PATH FORWARD**

***Deborah Lyons***

Over the past 17 months, in the wake of Hamas' horrifying attack against Israel and the resulting explosion in global antisemitism, Jewish people in Canada and across the world have felt unsafe in their communities, workplaces, and places of worship. The horrific massacre of October 7 and the appalling denial, justification, and even celebration of these events have led to an alarming increase in antisemitism – which was already on the rise in Canada and around the world.

What became evident after October 7 is that we need full societal engagement to take on this dire challenge. For the fight against antisemitism to be successful, political, community, education, faith, and business leaders at all levels across Canada must speak out with courage and clarity – against hatred and disinformation on our streets, in our centers of education, online, and on the world stage.

Much progress has been made on combatting antisemitism in Canada, namely through advancements in the six pillars identified by the Office of the Special Envoy on Preserving Holocaust Remembrance and Combatting Antisemitism: (1) elementary and secondary education, (2) post-secondary institutions, (3) law enforcement, (4) data collection, (5) online harm, and (6) inside government. (See below)

## ESSAYS

Specific achievements include the hosting of a Canadian education symposium on Holocaust and antisemitism education in September 2024, the release of the Canadian Handbook on the IHRA Working Definition of Antisemitism in October 2024, the naming of a dedicated prosecutor for hate crimes in Manitoba in January 2025, and the National Forum on Combatting Antisemitism, held on March 6, 2025, in Ottawa.

As history has made clear time and again, antisemitism is not only a threat to Jewish people and livelihood; it's a threat to democracy, to our social fabric, and to national and international security. Given that this is a shared threat, it is everyone's collective responsibility to address and fight it – across all levels of society. What follows are reflections on where to go from here, as well as best practices to keep in mind when combatting antisemitism.

The identification of six pillars as priorities came after nationwide consultations with Jewish community members and stakeholders in late 2023 and created a strategy focused on dismantling the root causes of antisemitism by developing an approach that addresses systems and helps promote meaningful change:

- 1. Elementary and secondary education:** Working with stakeholders across all levels of government – particularly with provincial Ministers of Education – to ensure that Holocaust education is taught throughout the country and advocating for the curriculum to go beyond the Holocaust and to also touch on contemporary forms of antisemitism. Promoting tools and education that aid administrators and educators in acknowledging and addressing the current unprecedented wave of antisemitism within our schools to protect Jewish students and all students against hate.
- 2. Post-secondary institutions:** In close collaboration with provincial Ministers of Advanced Education, the Special Envoy's Office is encouraging university and college administrators and leaders to act swiftly to respond to antisemitism on their campuses and to ensure the safety and well-being of Jewish students.
- 3. Law enforcement:** Ensuring that there is trust between Jewish communities and law enforcement by promoting a cross-Canada review of anti-hate and antisemitism training for police officers, prosecutors, and judges, and working with relevant stakeholders and educators to develop training that provides an accurate portrayal of contemporary antisemitism. This includes a review of the adequacy of the legal framework, including at the municipal bylaw level.
- 4. Data collection:** Collaborating with relevant domestic government agencies to ensure that there is research data to reinforce the case for prioritizing the fight against antisemitism and to clarify the urgency and challenge to lawmakers, political leaders, and the public.
- 5. Online harm:** Challenging the pervasive antisemitism and atrocity denialism, including Holocaust denial, that exists online, as seen with the sharp rise in antisemitic content since October 7. This includes a global effort with other international Special Envoys.
- 6. Inside government:** Mobilizing leaders across the public service to respond to antisemitism in their departments, to review government policies, programs, training, appointments,

and funding to ensure they are free of antisemitism and to ensure the safety and well-being of Jewish employees.

While the Office's work is centered on the six pillars, much of the Office's time is spent on relentless "emerging issues," which have included, for example, supporting professionals who experience antisemitism in their workplaces (such as doctors and medical professionals) and addressing anti-Israel bias and antisemitism in public service unions.

Over the past year, Canadian governments at all levels – municipal, provincial, and federal – have made significant strides toward better addressing antisemitism in Canada. Three initiatives stand out in particular, having made a powerful impact in Canada and being exemplary for other countries:

- 1. Project 1 – Education Symposium:** A survey by the Association of Canadian Studies showed that Canadians between the ages of 18-24 have the highest rates of Holocaust skepticism, which is often associated with antisemitic attitudes. Misunderstandings, misinformation, and outright denial of historical truths threaten to erode the lessons we have learned from one of history's darkest chapters. On September 27, 2024, the Office of the Special Envoy convened an education symposium in Toronto which brought together Holocaust educators from across the country for the first time to share best practices, prepare for the upcoming mandatory curricula, and highlight important Holocaust education initiatives in Canada, including the National Holocaust Remembrance Program (NHRP), launched in the fall of 2024 by the federal government to provide \$5 million over five years with ongoing funding to reinforce public Holocaust education.
- 2. Project 2 – IHRA Handbook:** The Special Envoy's Office completed the "Canadian Handbook on the IHRA Working Definition of Antisemitism," released on October 31, 2024. To fight antisemitism, we must begin by defining it. Without understanding where antisemitism and hatred come from and their underlying causes, such as disinformation, ignorance, and fear, we will be less effective in the fight. We must not only attack the symptoms of the disease of antisemitism, but the virus itself. Using Canadian examples, the Handbook serves as a guide for Canadian governments, institutions, and organizations on the practical use of the IHRA definition across society.

The drafting of the IHRA Handbook benefitted greatly from a series of consultations across Canada. Approximately 150 individuals were consulted, including Jewish community leaders, anti-racism professionals, the Canadian Delegation to the IHRA, rabbis, academics and teachers, legal experts, civil servants and political staff, and law enforcement personnel. The Handbook also addresses criticism of the IHRA Definition, which can arise from misunderstandings as to how the definition is meant to be practically used. The Handbook dispels those misunderstandings, both through the inclusion of practical examples of how the definition can be used, and through explanation regarding where the definition draws the line as to what is and what is not antisemitism, especially in the context of Israel-related antisemitism. After intensive review by key ministries of the government, the Handbook stands firmly as guidance from the Government of Canada and will be an anchor document in the fight against antisemitism going forward.



**3. Project 3 – National Forum on Combatting Antisemitism and Dedicated Hate Crimes**

**Prosecutor:** Incidents of antisemitism in Canada have surged dramatically, with attacks on synagogues, schools, and Jewish-owned businesses becoming disturbingly common. Synagogues, which should be places of sanctuary and peace, have been defaced, vandalized, and firebombed. In response to this crisis, on March 6, 2025, the Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, and the Associate Minister of Public Safety, hosted a forum that brought together federal, provincial, and municipal leadership, along with law enforcement and prosecutors, to discuss the growing public safety threat of antisemitism. There were 12 commitments made as a result of the forum, including a commitment to better data gathering, improved hate crime training for police, and a commitment to work collaboratively, with and within the three levels of government, to develop a comprehensive National Action Commitment to combat antisemitism. Other key commitments include examining potential amendments to the criminal code to make all vulnerable communities safer, and a commitment to work with partners across all orders of government to increase awareness of IHRA and the Canadian Handbook.

Separately, but relatedly, the province of Manitoba currently has a hate crime working group within the Manitoba Prosecution Service, which provides expertise and guidance in hate crime prosecutions. In January 2025, the Manitoba Prosecution Service designated a lead Crown attorney to coordinate the work of this group. The Manitoba government also plans to provide additional specialized training to Crown attorneys to enhance their existing expertise and support the prosecution of hate crimes so that offenders are held to account. It is hoped that other Canadian provinces will follow suit.

These initiatives represent a whole-of-Canada approach to combatting antisemitism and Holocaust denial and distortion, which could be replicated by other countries seeking to address the tsunami of antisemitism seen in recent years.

These past 18 months have taught us key lessons on how to address antisemitism effectively in this difficult climate. The following four observations are relevant to both decision-makers and everyday Canadians alike:

- 1. We must be wary of consistently mentioning antisemitism with other forms of hate, namely Islamophobia:** Antisemitism and Holocaust denial and distortion have risen exponentially since October 7, 2023. Other forms of hatred, including Islamophobia, have also increased. However, antisemitism is often spoken about in conjunction with Islamophobia and other forms of hate, often when the connection is not apparent, clear, or relevant. Some individuals and entities feel discomfort in addressing antisemitism on its own. This inadvertently ignores the intricacies around antisemitism, draws false equivalences, and doesn't allow for a deeper understanding of the unique circumstances that have led to its sharp increase.
- 2. The dangers of being a bystander in the face of antisemitism and Holocaust denial and distortion:** Antisemitism cannot be solved by the Jewish community alone. Jews did not create antisemitism, and as with any other marginalized group, it is not on them to fight it alone. Being an ally means being present, an active listener, a support system,

and courageously standing up to injustice. Most importantly, it means believing Jewish Canadians when they speak – and taking action. A simple way for leaders to demonstrate their allyship is to ask Jewish neighbors, friends, or individuals in their organizations: “What does support look like for you?” and “How can I help?” Those charged with the lead in combatting antisemitism must address the critical challenge of activating and engaging bystanders and move toward impactful allyship.

- 3. The need to promote effective coordination among the various levels of Government within Canada to combat antisemitism:** What became clear after traveling across Canada and meeting with leadership at every level, including political, faith, and business leaders, is that we are facing a crisis in leadership in Canada. Leaders are paralyzed to act and face roadblocks in acting in part because various levels of government have jurisdiction over different issues (i.e., education is provincially mandated, while law enforcement is shared between the municipal, provincial, and federal governments). A comprehensive approach that involves coordination between all levels of government is essential in order to address antisemitism in Canada effectively.
- 4. Avoiding politicization of the fight against antisemitism and ensuring that there is non-partisan support for this issue:** Antisemitism is a non-partisan issue that impacts all Canadians – Jewish and non-Jewish alike. It must not be politicized and weaponized for political gains. Unchecked antisemitism threatens and undermines democracy, endangering and violating fundamental Charter rights, including freedom of religion, expression, and assembly. When individuals or communities in Canada are targeted based on their beliefs, background, or identity, it threatens our democratic ideals of equality and justice for all Canadians.

It has now been more than a year-and-a-half since the horrendous attack by Hamas, which led to a still-ongoing tsunami of antisemitism worldwide. In 2025, the Office of the Special Envoy undertook a myriad of projects – both big and small – to combat antisemitism. Although significant progress has been made, we still have an immense amount of work ahead of us. To accomplish that work, we will need courageous leadership at all levels and within all institutions and civil society.

***Deborah Lyons is Canada’s Special Envoy on Holocaust Remembrance and Combatting Antisemitism***

## A MORAL INVERSION

**Michal Cotler-Wunsh**

*“It is a crime to mislead public opinion, to use this opinion which has been perverted to the point of delirium for a death task. It is a crime to poison the small and the humble, to exasperate the passions of reaction and intolerance, by sheltering behind the odious antisemitism, of which the great liberal France of human rights will die, if she is not cured of it. It is a crime to exploit patriotism for works of hate, and it is a crime, finally, to make the saber the modern god, when all human science is at work for the next work of truth and justice. This truth, this justice, which we so passionately wanted, what distress to see them thus puffed up, more unrecognized and more obscured!”*

– Emile Zola, *J'accuse*

The heinous war crimes and crimes against humanity perpetrated by Hamas terrorists on October 7, equalled in depravity only by the responses to them, are a harrowing wake-up call for Israel, for Jews worldwide, and for civilization as we know it. We are in the midst of a world-shattering moment that must be reflected in a shift in our understanding of the global threat that authoritarian terror regimes and their proxies pose to our common humanity.

The horrific October 7 attacks simultaneously ripped off multiple masks, surprising many by exposing to plain sight barbaric evil that has long been festering and percolating below the surface.

After the murder, mutilation, burning alive, rape, and abduction of thousands, the depth and breadth of the proliferation of this viral hate were revealed in the immediate and continued responses to the massacre. The global responses to the worst atrocities perpetrated against Jews since the Holocaust exposed to the naked eye a lethal “modern,” “mainstream” strain of antisemitism – anti-Zionism – echoing a harrowing past of the oldest hatred in the world.

This became evident in the multiple arenas in which an unconventional war for public opinion has been raging for decades: in international institutions, on university campuses, in traditional and social media spaces, and on the streets. It is an explosive culmination of a long-standing campaign that has systematically coopted and weaponized international law, human rights, and their mechanisms and institutions as tools – for the demonization, delegitimization, and double standards (3 D’s) of the State of Israel, the proverbial Jew among the nations.

The lethal strain of anti-Zionism, denying Israel’s right to exist – within any borders – has long been festering, infecting the foundations of our societies and democracies, enabled and empowered by silence, inaction, and impunity.

A prototypical indigenous people returned to an ancestral homeland after thousands of years of exile and persecution, Jews now have their right to exist questioned in the name of “decolonization”; the attack of their nation-state “exhilarating” professors as “legitimate resistance.” Calls for genocide of Jews in the “context” of the October 7 atrocities, openly

declaring intent to perpetrate a genocide of Jews again and again, are not a violation of university codes of conduct, though it is abundantly clear calls for genocide of any other group would be unacceptable.

A societal blind spot, failure, inability, or reluctance to identify and combat this infectious new strain of an ancient hatred has enabled and fueled antisemitism in the name of “progress”; a moral inversion that is even able to “legitimize” the most blood-curdling barbaric acts, belonging to dark chapters of human history.

The urgency of my travels abroad as Israel’s Special Envoy for Combatting Antisemitism was devastatingly clear in the immediate aftermath of the October 7 atrocities.

Firstly, it was critical to make the existential nature of the attack on Israel accessible to those who did not experience it. Secondly, it was imperative to anticipate and prepare for the dangerous tsunami of hateful responses, predictable to those of us who have been watching, tracking, and warning; responses that would deny, justify, support, and unfathomably attack Jews around the world in their wake.

With the exponential increase of antisemitic attacks as the backdrop, my activities, which included meetings with senior White House officials, senators, ministers, legislators, mayors, police chiefs, other special envoys, media, university presidents, community leaders, and students, uncovered the multi-layered challenges and opportunities. At this moment of rising urgency, my initial findings underscore vital imperatives that must awaken and mobilize us to create a holistic, long-term strategy. My hope is that 85 years after *Kristallnacht*, which preceded and forewarned of what would come, we will be able to seize the October 7 *Kristallnacht* cautionary tale and prevent what comes next.

We are at an existential junction for our people, our country, and for our shared humanity and values. In the raging unconventional war for public opinion, October 7 underscored the urgency and imperative for a paradigm shift in our efforts to combat antisemitism: from a reactive, whack-a-mole approach to proactive, holistic strategies and policies that will be equally and consistently applied.

What was not factored in by the genocidal Iranian terror regime and its many proxies, including Hamas, when it waged this war, was that the “new Jew” – who returned and rebuilt a sovereign state and an army – would intuitively recognize the systematic demonization, delegitimization and double standards that enabled the mutation and spread of the modern viral strain of an ancient hatred.

That is our “secret weapon” to winning this existential, multi-dimensional war. We must reclaim our indigenous identity and story, which has been coopted and weaponized. As a 75-year-young country and thousands-of-years-old people, we must reclaim our Jewish pride and maintain an unyielding commitment to self-defense.

We must insist on and create an approach that implements the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) Working Definition of Antisemitism as a first critical step needed to identify and combat what October 7 revealed. This includes the recognition that “Zionist”

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is a coded euphemism for Jew across spaces and places, and must be added as an equally “protected characteristic” in order to predict and prevent attacks on Jews online, on campuses, and on the streets.

It demands universities and all educational institutions use the IHRA working definition as what it was created to be: a resource that acknowledges the fullness and complexities of Jewish identity, including those who self-define as Zionists, whether they are Jews or not, because they believe in the right of the State of Israel to exist.

October 7 exposed that the world may “love dead Jews” but not Jews who can defend themselves as a sovereign nation and force. It uncovered the continued danger of the “Zionism is racism” Soviet propaganda that is still peddled in the name of “progress.”

October 7 exposed a reality where mobs of people are convinced that only Jews cannot defend themselves from annihilation spurred on by disingenuous slogans such as “ceasefire now” and incendiary ones, such as “from the river to the sea,” which echo the genocidal Hamas charter.

After the generation that rebuilt from the ashes of Auschwitz by only looking forward, October 7 revealed a generation able to reclaim its collective memory in order to rise from the dock of the accused on which, in Orwellian inversion, Israel has been placed. It demands from all those who announce their commitment to identify and combat antisemitism to explicitly call out anti-Zionism as the current lethal strain of antisemitism that must be identified and addressed.

This must include the prevention of the peddling, incitement, and inculcation of antisemitic hate by any and every entity, including internationally funded organizations like UNRWA, which, unlike for any other refugees in the world, grants Palestinian refugee “status” in perpetuity, stripping them of agency and preventing any chance of coexistence or peace, and whose antisemitic curriculum fuels the hatred that led to the October 7 atrocities.

It must include no longer enabling – with silence, double standards, and false moral equivalence – the continued antisemitism peddled by a “moderate” Palestinian Authority leadership that denies the Holocaust, erases Jewish identity and indigenous connection to an ancestral homeland, and peddles lies that Israel exists as a white colonialist enterprise. An antisemitic “leadership” that applies the same “logic” to the denial of October 7, not only failing to unequivocally condemn the war crimes and crimes against humanity perpetrated in the name of “resistance,” but blaming Jews/Zionists for perpetrating them.

That is the proactive approach necessary for “Never Again” to be meaningful; brutally raped Jewish women to be included in #MeToo; defunding UNRWA; including Zionist in the list of protected characteristics in online spaces; and adopting and implementing the IHRA working definition in educational spaces and law enforcement mechanisms as a tool to comprehensively identify and combat antisemitism. These are the necessary post-October 7 changes that would reflect a world genuinely impacted by the atrocities and committed to addressing and combatting the antisemitism that fueled them.

Incorporating the IHRA definition into every national strategy currently lacking a single, clear definition of antisemitism is critical for all countries committed to comprehensively identify

and combat antisemitism, including the “modern” strain that openly fueled the atrocities of October 7 and the responses to those atrocities.

This will reflect an acknowledgment that the shocking and immoral denial, justification, and support for the atrocities of October 7 are not only antisemitic; they jeopardize the very foundations of democracies and all societies that cherish life, liberty, and human dignity.

It is no surprise that those who denied, justified, and supported the October 7 massacre engaged in denial, justification, and support for September 11 and its criminal terrorist mastermind, Osama Bin Laden, following the dissemination of his “Letter to America” on TikTok.

October 7 revealed that all online spaces must be monitored and held to account for the capability to predict and prevent real-world violence. Antisemitism spewed online propagates hatred, spreads the most ancient conspiracy myths, and fuels attacks that harm and kill Jews in communities around the globe.

It is a case study of the dangers of an online reality in which the current business model does not provide transparency and accountability critical for the shift in the way we consume information. It underscores that responsive “protection” of the physical security of Jews is only one insufficient component.

Post October 7, it is critical to harness knowledge and expertise to create innovative tools, using advanced capabilities to identify, analyze, and act on antisemitic trends to combat the scourge of antisemitism – online and off – at the root, not only reacting and treating the symptoms.

“Never Again” should mean a proactive, preventative approach to antisemitism, not a reactive, responsive one; a holistic, comprehensive approach, not a one-off selective one, for the 75-year young Jewish nation-state and the Jewish diaspora. It marks a shared call to action – humbly and courageously reclaiming identity, heritage, and history. Generations after the trauma of the Holocaust, the October 7 attack has solidified the resolve and resilience of a people equal to all other peoples – who expects to be treated the same as all others.

The inter-generational trauma of thousands of years of exile and persecution, of bowing our heads so as not to bring attention to the hate targeting us – so as not to bring attention to ourselves – is gone. October 7 is a Never Again is NOW moment. After 75 years of return and reclamation of our ancestral homeland, we have the historic ability and responsibility to stand up against Jew-hatred too, to rise from the dock of the accused, and to attribute rightful guilt to those peddling it, not to ourselves.

***Michal Cotler-Wunsh is Israel’s Special Envoy for Combatting Antisemitism***

## A DELICATE MOMENT

***Fernando Lottenberg***

Fighting antisemitism after the October 7 attack was challenging and complex. Virtually or in person, Jews experienced a period in which antisemitic incidents mushroomed, including verbal threats, vandalism, and even physical assaults.

The rise of antisemitism is a serious concern for Jewish communities, but it should not be a concern for them alone, as this intolerance serves as a gateway to hatred against diversity, pluralism, and democracy, with direct impacts on society as a whole.

The rise in antisemitism in Latin America (See pp. 19, 22) was fueled by several factors: biased speeches from governments in several countries, the lack of security policies on digital platforms, inaction by university administrators, and ignorance of historical facts and misinformation, including inappropriate comparisons and misuse of terms such as “massacre” and “genocide.”

Political leaders in the region frequently compared the Israeli government to the Nazi regime, as well as equated the Holocaust with Israel’s fight against the terrorist organizations Hamas and Hizballah.

Colombia and Bolivia severed their diplomatic relations with Israel. Chile and Brazil recalled their ambassadors from Tel Aviv, a step preceding the full rupture of relations. These are just a few examples of policies that fuel antisemitism.

Unbalanced rhetoric encouraged some in Latin America to commit public acts of antisemitism, believing they would go unpunished. This encouraged certain antisemites to express their hatred toward Jews freely.

Still, some antisemites did not really need the encouragement of governments. The conflict served as an opportunity, a kind of alibi, for them to publicly expose their prejudices.

We are facing a delicate moment, and to address it, my team and I, in my capacity as the Organization of American States (OAS) Commissioner for Monitoring and Combating Antisemitism, rely primarily on information and education as our main tools.

Throughout the year, we secured public spaces to thoroughly explain the dangers of antisemitism and ways to identify it, including on online platforms. We gave interviews on radio and television programs, produced extensive material for social media, published articles in newspapers and other media outlets, participated in events discussing the issue, and delivered lectures, including at universities.

We lobbied and presented our case in a number of countries, including Brazil, Colombia, Argentina, Costa Rica, the United States, and the United Nations Human Rights Council in Geneva, Switzerland. We warned about the dangers of rising antisemitism and the most effective ways to combat it, emphasizing the risks that this surge of hatred poses to democracy in the Americas. We remained committed to fostering dialogue and building bridges with other

groups and governments, as well as with legislators, judiciaries, educators, and civil society activists across the Americas.

In fighting antisemitism, we have taken action on multiple fronts, from encouraging OAS member states to adopt and implement the IHRA Definition of Antisemitism to facilitating understanding and identification of antisemitic incidents. Seven countries in the Americas have already adopted IHRA: the United States, Canada, Argentina, Uruguay, Panama, Colombia, and Guatemala.

We distributed the Best Practices Manual for the Implementation of the IHRA Definition and authored and disseminated the Global Guidelines for Combating Antisemitism, released in Buenos Aires in July 2024 (which outlines preferred practices for combating hatred). We consolidated the Resolution on Freedom of Conscience, Religion, and Belief, a document that establishes mechanisms to defend religious pluralism, respect, and tolerance.

We have also engaged with judiciaries, providing technical and informative contributions to ensure that judges handling antisemitism cases are well-informed when making their rulings. Additionally, we participated as amicus curiae in a case before Brazil's Supreme Court concerning the regulation of digital platforms and social media aimed at curbing online hate speech and discrimination.

Predicting the future of antisemitism is inherently challenging, as it depends on a multitude of factors, including social, political, economic, and cultural dynamics. However, we can make some informed assessments based on current trends and historical patterns.

Several themes call for particular consideration:

- 1. Online platforms:** Antisemitism in the digital sphere is likely to continue to grow, with social media platforms providing fertile ground for the spread of hateful ideologies. If not reformed, online spaces may continue to amplify and normalize antisemitic rhetoric, making it more accessible and widespread.
- 2. Political shifts:** Antisemitism may be influenced by political shifts both domestically and internationally. Populist movements, nationalist ideologies, and authoritarian regimes have historically been associated with increased levels of antisemitism. Monitoring political developments and their impact on societal attitudes towards Jews will be crucial.
- 3. Global events:** Major global events, such as conflicts in the Middle East or economic crises, will influence antisemitic sentiments. The Israeli-Palestinian conflict has historically been a flashpoint for antisemitism, with tensions in the region leading to spikes in incidents targeting Jewish communities worldwide.
- 4. Education and Awareness:** Efforts to combat antisemitism through education and awareness-raising initiatives will play a critical role in shaping the future. Teaching about the Holocaust, promoting interfaith dialogue, and fostering understanding of Jewish history and culture can help counteract ignorance and prejudice.



- 5. Legislation and Law Enforcement:** Strong legal frameworks and effective law enforcement mechanisms are essential for addressing antisemitism and holding perpetrators accountable. Governments must prioritize the enforcement of anti-discrimination laws and hate crime legislation to ensure the safety and security of Jewish communities.
- 6. Interfaith and Intercommunity Dialogue:** Building bridges between different religious and ethnic communities can help promote tolerance and mutual respect. Interfaith dialogue initiatives that bring together Jews and members of other faiths can foster understanding and cooperation, contributing to a more inclusive society.
- 7. Civil Society Mobilization:** Grassroots movements and civil society organizations will continue to play a crucial role in the fight against antisemitism. By mobilizing communities, raising awareness, and advocating for policy changes, these groups can contribute to creating environments where antisemitism is not tolerated.
- 8. International Cooperation:** Given the global nature of antisemitism, international cooperation and collaboration are essential. Governments, international organizations, and civil society actors must work together to develop coordinated strategies for combating antisemitism and promoting tolerance worldwide.

Although the future trajectory of antisemitism is unpredictable, it is imperative to take proactive measures to address its root causes and manifestations. This is essential for fostering a more inclusive and respectful society. By confronting instances of antisemitism whenever and wherever they arise and upholding the principles of equality, justice, and appreciation of diversity, we can strive for a future where everyone can live free from fear of discrimination or prejudice.

We want, we can, and we must work toward a better world, one in which minorities can live in peace and security.

***Fernando Lottenberg is Organization of American States Commissioner to Monitor and Combat Antisemitism***



**SECTION 5**  
**ROUNDTABLE -**  
**THE HOLOCAUST IN FILM**





# SHOAH AND POPCORN

The 2024 film scene was dominated by movies dealing with the memory of the Holocaust, reinforcing the problematics of the Shoah and its aftermath being remembered through cinematic images, including cynically commercialized ones.

The Report hosted a special panel discussion about the thin lines between memory and distortion, featuring **Prof. (emeritus) Moshe Zuckerman**, Tel Aviv University, a scholar in the philosophy of ideas and science, **Dr. Shmulik Duvdevani**, the movie critic of Ynet and lecturer in cinema at Tel Aviv University, **Prof. Giacomo Lichtner**, Victoria University of Wellington, expert on Holocaust cinema, and **Prof. Uriya Shavit**, Tel Aviv University, Head of the Center for the Study of Contemporary European Jewry and the Irwin Cotler Institute for Democracy, Human Rights and Justice

**Prof. Shavit:** I'd like us to start with three or four of the main critical arguments that have been made about Holocaust movies. Moviemakers, and not just commercial ones, often have the inclination to end up with a happy ending or at least some kind of positive message. It's almost inescapable. I think it was Stanley Kubrick who said that the problem with *Schindler's List* (1993) is that it deals with six hundred Jews who were saved, whereas the Holocaust is about six million Jews who were murdered.

Think of the Oscar-winning Hungarian film *Son of Saul* (2015), which is known as the harshest and bluntest Holocaust movie. In the end, at least the way I understood it, it also finishes with a positive tone.

**Dr. Duvdevani:** First of all, I'm not sure that cinema, in general, aims to please the audience. It depends on which films, where they are made, and what they are dealing with. Although Kubrick is one of my favorite filmmakers, I'm not so sure that I agree with his comment about *Schindler's List*. There's a lot to say about *Schindler's List*, but I'm not sure the main argument against the film is that it deals with the survival of Jews and not the extermination of Jews.

We should bear in mind that Kubrick himself wanted to make a film about the Holocaust called "The Aryan Papers." He already had a screenplay, and once he heard that Steven Spielberg was making *Schindler's List*, he decided to set this project aside, although I don't know why. He and Spielberg were very good friends. They remained so even after he made that comment.

But I'm not sure that, in general, Holocaust films are about happy endings. For example, *Son of Saul* ends with the death of the protagonist, and it deals with many ethical questions regarding the representation of the Holocaust.

Even in films with a so-called happy ending, much of what is happening until the end is tragic. These are not feel-good movies.

I think the most important question is not how movies deal with the Holocaust narratively, but how they deal with it ethically and aesthetically.

**Prof. Zuckerman:** On a more personal note, I'm the son of an Auschwitz survivor, so I can say that the Holocaust has contaminated my life from the very beginning. At home, we dealt with the Holocaust right from the beginning. We are one of those families who were talking about the Holocaust all the time. Dealing with it from the very first moment of my existence has devastated my life.

This is why, in the first part of my life, I watched many documentaries and movies made about the Holocaust and gained a lot of knowledge, so to speak, about the Holocaust, including from the artistic works about it.

But I'm approaching this academically from the Frankfurt School of thought, and this is the more profound thing I want to say about the issue you just raised. There is one very famous saying from the end of the 1940s and the beginning of the 1950s by Theodor Adorno: "After Auschwitz, to write a poem is barbaric."

Another person not talking about the Holocaust directly, but talking about Nazism and aesthetics, was Bertolt Brecht. In his poem "A Bad Time for Poetry," he says there are two forces fighting in him: the beauty of the blooming apple tree and the presentation of the painter. The painter being Hitler, of course. And Brecht said only the painter is pushing him to write.

There are times when aestheticism is not a proper means to deal with reality. Adorno later took back his saying against writing poems after the Holocaust after he read Paul Celan's "Todesfuge." What Adorno said then was that we should not think that after Auschwitz, everything done aesthetically is barbaric just because culture has joined barbarity. Yet he also emphasized that suffering has to be represented in a way that gives the one who is tortured the right to scream, and thus, the role of art is to make suffering more presentable to people.

Of course, the question was how to do that. Adorno presented the ethical question of the extent to which art is able to represent reality, and that goes not only for the Holocaust. In the end, whether a direct or indirect reflection of reality, art is a representation and not the reality itself. I am reminded of Magritte's painting where the pipe on the canvas is, of course, not a real pipe.

Going back to what Uriya said, Adorno said that every kind of work of art, even if it's dealing with the most unpleasant things and is dissonant or even ugly, every kind is something from which you gain some kind of pleasure. This is one thing that got me to think about the fact that in most of the films I saw about the Holocaust, the audience gained some kind of pleasure. And you cannot deal with the Holocaust this way. You should not.

If you remember, there was a shower scene in *Schindler's List*. When I saw it, I kept thinking that I knew that scene from somewhere. Where did I know this combination of shower and horror? All of a sudden, I remembered *Psycho* by Hitchcock, in which we have that shower

## ROUNDTABLE - THE HOLOCAUST IN FILM

scene. Then I compared some of the images that Spielberg used to those used by Hitchcock, and I was horrified to see that Hollywood had struck again.

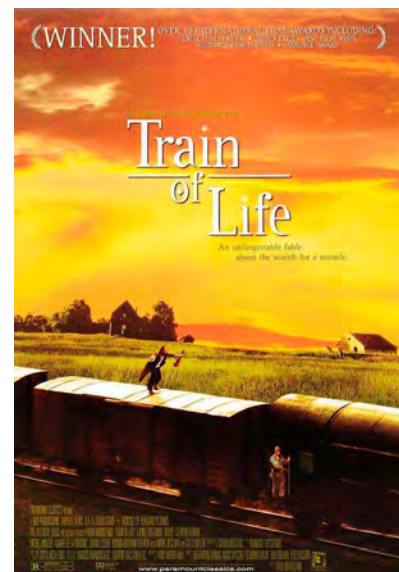
*Schindler's List* had a “Hollywoodian” way of doing it. I’m talking about the suspense moment: whether the shower will be lethal or not. I don’t need that in learning about the Holocaust, in a movie about the Holocaust. I know how things ended. So yes, the thing about gaining some pleasure, whether it’s a suspense pleasure or an aesthetic pleasure, seems to me one thing that most of the Holocaust movies were permitting.

**Prof. Lichtner:** I agree with Shmulik that I’m not sure that a film, in general, has to please its audience. I think the problem is more that historical cinema has to provide an experience that audiences can relate to; that’s where the problem arises. The problematic of Holocaust movies is the pursuit of empathy that actually can only deliver the illusion of empathy.

This is where the shower scene from *Schindler's List* comes in very neatly because it’s a scene that’s shot in constantly shifting perspectives. So, it’s designed to give the audience the experience of being in a shower that could be a gas chamber, but also of surviving it. That’s something that actually quite a few representations of gas chambers have done in recent years, and I agree that that’s ethically very problematic.

Regarding endings, particularly, filmmakers are clearly aware of the expectations for positive endings, and there are quite a few examples of films that try to deal with it by giving you at least two endings. One egregious example is *Life is Beautiful* (1997). I remember watching it as a 20-year-old when it first came out. It gives you an evocative ending with the off-screen death of the protagonist, but then it has to give you the happy ending the audience wants.

There are quite a few other examples, but there’s a film that came out immediately after *Life is Beautiful* called *Train of Life* by Radu Mihăileanu (1998). It is not as well-known, but it is wonderful. It also has a double ending, but the endings are reversed, so the happy ending comes first, and the real ending comes second. That order makes all the difference. My point is that it matters in which order you put the endings.



**Prof. Zuckerman:** Like what you just said, Giacomo, I think there is a structural problem, ethics-wise, that begins with our definition of the Holocaust. What is the Holocaust? Is it a series of dramatic moments and events, or is it, as some have understood it, “the chasm of civilization,” meaning that it is not an event that you can grasp through the order of a summary of events?

We have to understand the Holocaust as something that industrialized an annihilation of men, being bureaucratically performed and administratively directed according to ideology. Right from the beginning, it made men fungible.

The question is: can a movie, which is an art form that relies on pictures and on narratives, cope with representing what happened?

I can hardly imagine that intellectual writing is able to cope with the Holocaust. I’m sure that cinema is not able to do that.

**Prof. Lichtner:** I completely agree. Some of the essential parts of what makes the Holocaust what it is, things like dehumanization, are also some of the hardest to represent.

I want to be provocative and say that maybe because of what you said, Moshe, about the intellectual discourse and its limitations, maybe we have to think that sometimes only cinema or only art in general can actually get close to describing the Holocaust because of their power to evoke without describing, without trying to understand and explain. It depends on the case, but I don’t think cinema is intrinsically less capable than other forms of language.

**Dr. Duvdevani:** I completely agree with Giacomo because I think two of the films I find the most important and that are the most profound in dealing with the Holocaust are actually documentaries, *Night and Fog* by Alain Resnais (1956) and *Shoah* by Claude Lanzmann (1985), and, by the way, Lanzmann could have never made *Shoah* had it not been for Resnais. I think these films actually deal with two major issues: image and testimony.

First, the issue of the image: what images can you show when you are dealing with the Holocaust, with death, with the extermination camps?

Secondly, *Shoah*, especially, deals with the crisis of testimony, which is exactly what the Holocaust caused. Giorgio Agamben, the Italian philosopher, speaks a lot about it. Primo Levi writes a lot about it.

**Prof. Shavit:** I want to continue from here and discuss the second main criticism about Holocaust movies. Generally, the argument is that it’s good that so many movies about the Holocaust are produced because they ensure that people will never forget and that they will learn from history.

So, three points on this. First, the Holocaust never made it into popular culture before 1978, with the miniseries *Holocaust: The Story of the Family Weiss*, which aired first on primetime American television and then on German, European at large, and Israeli television.

Yet I’m not sure that people in the 1960s and the 1970s knew about the Holocaust less than they know today, and I’m not sure the lessons of the Holocaust were less profoundly ingrained in public minds in the 1970s and the 1980s than they were in the 1990s and the 2000s, after the



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Holocaust became so big in our culture. The genocide in Rwanda took place well after Family Weiss and other movies were watched by tens of millions of Americans, and that didn't exactly motivate the United States to intervene.

The second point is that, in the end, anything you do in cinema is fiction. Even documentaries are a form of fiction. There is an unavoidable problem, which is that movies about the Holocaust turn the Holocaust into fiction. This is simply inescapable.

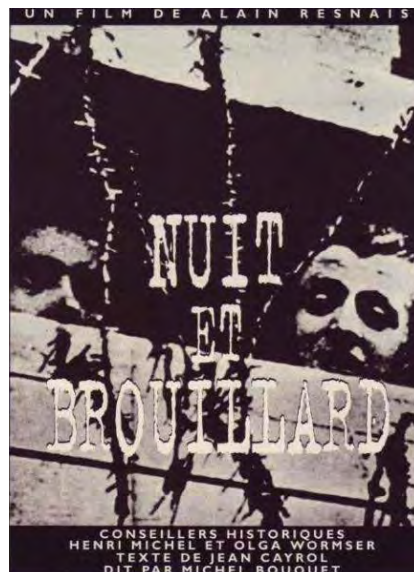
The third issue takes me to a personal experience. I was in Auschwitz just once, and at a very late age, not as a school kid or as a soldier.

The thing I took from there is that if I was a Holocaust denier, nothing I saw in Auschwitz would convince me otherwise.

So, the problem with Holocaust denial is not so much about knowledge but about whether you accept the confirmed sources of knowledge in our day and age. If you don't, if you think everything school and other establishments teach you is part of one big conspiracy, is a bunch of lies, then even watching fifteen Holocaust movies with graphic depictions from extermination camps will not change your mind.

I think it's also important to note that Lanzmann's *Shoah* was far more effective in teaching people about the Holocaust than Spielberg's *Schindler's List*. There is no footage from the actual Holocaust there. It's people testifying. Maybe this idea that we need the visual to be convinced that something really happened and to immerse it within our souls and minds is a myth.

**Prof. Lichtner:** It's a big question and an important one. I'm going to continue from my last comment about the potential, the promise of cinema. I'm going to defend the idea that just because all films are fictional, that does not automatically turn the Holocaust when represented in movies into fiction.



The relationship between truth and fiction is complex, and different films handle it in different ways. The American historian Robert Rosenstone talks about true invention and false invention. It's a problematic dichotomy, in my view, but it's useful for us in terms of thinking about the role that invention, that inaccuracy, can have in cinematic constructions of historical arguments.

In principle, I think invention is a tool. It's a tool to maybe encourage people to learn or to find out more. Sometimes, I think it is a tool to teach.

I love *Shoah*. I worked on it a lot quite a few years ago. True, it doesn't use documentary footage, but it certainly uses artifice and invention. There are a couple of moments that I'm going to pick out. One is the use of point-of-view camera work. Putting the camera on the front of the van as it drives through the forest puts you in the driver's seat of a gas van, in theory. So, Lanzmann did not find footage of a gas van from 1942 or 1943; instead, he used creative reconstruction.

The second moment is the one that's perhaps best known. It is with survivor Abraham Bomba, who did not speak to Lanzmann in the way that Lanzmann wanted him to. Bomba, the barber from Treblinka, would not relive the trauma. So, Lanzmann interviewed Bomba in New York, he interviewed him elsewhere, and in order to get him to relive the trauma, he brought him back to Tel Aviv. He put Bomba in a barber shop, and he got him to reenact the cutting of hair.

It is one of those moments that are very abusive. But it's one of those moments that makes audiences break through, not so much to understand the experience, but to understand that you can't understand it. And that's a crucial step.

**Prof. Zuckerman:** Uriya, I would like to refer to two of your arguments. The first one: There was an incident right after *Schindler's List* featured back in 1995, where a group of black youngsters was roaring in laughter every time they saw an atrocity on the screen, and people thought that it was antisemitic or black antisemitism, which was very curious because, in the 1960s, Jews and blacks used to work together in order to fight for human rights.

Then, some historians and psychologists interviewed those young black men, and it turned out that their laughter when watching the movie had nothing to do with the Holocaust and nothing to do with antisemitism. They had thought it was an action movie.

For them, it was an action movie, and this goes back to what I said from the beginning. The moment that you want to represent one of the most unspeakable and unrepresentable things in human history with the means of the culture industry, you end up with just that – with people saying, it's an action movie!

A member of my family who lives in America was on the actual Schindler's list; he was in the Holocaust. I want to affirm what you said, Uriya. After the movie was released, he was invited to a lot of roundtables and a lot of panels to discuss his experiences. I remember he came to Israel and showed us one of the invitations to a roundtable, where I could see it read: "You've seen the movie; now come and see a survivor."

I was completely shocked and asked him if he really let them do that to him. And he asked me: "What's the problem? This is the way that we can pass on what happened in the Holocaust!"

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I have to say that I did a little survey among Holocaust survivors, not something that I could scientifically present. Some of them said it was good that the movie was done because what happened to them was similar to what was shown in the movie. But it was very few of them. Some said, what are you talking about? What does *Schindler's List* have to do with the Holocaust?

And the vast majority said they don't care about movies. You can't grasp the Holocaust by watching movies, they said. This is what the vast majority of the Holocaust survivors I spoke with told me.

I had to take it seriously because I understand one thing, and I'll say it in terms of Walter Benjamin, who asked himself back in the 1930s how we could go about the fact that art had become so abstract that we are losing the masses. We are losing the audience. He said we have to find a way to include some kind of kitsch to win over the hearts of the people. He said that the only medium in art that was able to do that, taking all the kitsch of the 19th century and putting it into modern terms, is cinema.

And this, of course, brings us to the question of whether movies are indeed able to do it. But not by representing reality; by doing something that you called fiction, but not in the bad sense, in the positive sense.

Art is always representation. Art is never reality. It is always a representation of reality as if it was reality. To fictionalize reality in that way means that you have to produce something that is able to win over the people without losing the message. If you win over the people, who indulge in the kitsch and the happy endings we are talking about, we are losing the one thing we intended to do, the information and the values we intended to convey.

By the way, Shmulik, you are right in what you said that this is a crisis generally, but on the other hand, I think the only way that you can deal with it is not by giving up and providing an artificial narrative but by letting the people talk. For Lanzmann, it took being a little bit postmodern and many perspectives in a documentary, but *Shoah* has become one of the most important films.

**Prof. Shavit:** The problem is that although fiction is never reality, most people see most of reality through fiction. That's a reality we cannot change. I have to share with you, Moshe, that my *Schindler's List* experience was not as horrific as yours, but the fact that it's vivid in my head after so many years, well, I think it is telling.

I was watching it at the Ayalon Mall in Ramat Gan, and behind us sat a young person with popcorn and a Pesek Zman waffle bar, and during the break, I remember him telling his friend while sucking on the popcorn and the Pesek Zman what a difficult movie it was to watch. And I still have this so vivid in my head.

**Dr. Duvdevani:** I want to refer to some of your assumptions. First of all, regarding the TV series about the Weiss family, by the way, with the young Meryl Streep. Anton Kaes, professor of cultural studies at Berkley, expressed concern that Americans would think that the Holocaust looked exactly like its representation in that series, that the series' narrative would become

the main narrative of the Holocaust for millions of Americans. Well, I don't think millions of people actually think the Holocaust is exactly like what you see in a movie.

I can just give an example. Quentin Tarantino's *Inglourious Basterds* (2009) implied that the Holocaust of the Hungarian Jews never occurred because Hitler was murdered in a theater before that, before June 1944. Well, I don't think that people who see Quentin Tarantino's film actually think that that's the way Hitler died, and that's the way the war ended, and that nothing happened in Hungary. They will understand the film just as Tarantino wanted them to understand it: as a film that is historical fantasy. Let's fantasize that Hitler was murdered, and that would be a "happy end." The kind of happy end that you are talking against, Uriya. But Tarantino was doing it very intelligently, knowing what cinema is capable of doing when dealing with history.

Now, I completely agree that Lanzmann's *Shoah* is a much more appropriate text than Steven Spielberg's *Schindler's List*.

There was a film, a horrible film, called *The Boy in the Striped Pajamas* (2008). I still have goosebumps when thinking about it. The kid of the Nazi commander of the camp is going to the gas chambers along with his little Jewish friend. Okay, what are you saying here, that Nazis were exterminated in the gas chambers?

Yet there is one thing we should bear in mind: that many more people watched Spielberg's film than watched *Shoah*. Let's be frank about it. Not many people around the world actually watched Lanzmann's *Shoah*, and most of them were highly educated.

Pauline Kael was a very important film critic for *The New Yorker*, and she was the only one who "dared" to write a bad review of *Shoah*. She said it was too long. You have to take into account how many people actually watched it when considering its contribution to the memory of the Holocaust, to the learning of its lessons.

**Prof. Zuckerman:** I would like to go back to Uriya's question. What do people learn from *Schindler's List*? Before having seen it, what did they know about the Shoah?

In Germany, one thing that was criticized was not that the Nazi was the hero, but that a capitalist Nazi was. I just said that any kind of art is always some kind of fantasy because it is some kind of illusion. The question you need to ask about Tarantino is: what is the point of the fantasy? What does it actually say? How appropriate is it in context?

**Prof. Shavit:** Perhaps, Moshe, we can say that if Oskar Schindler is also part of the story of the Holocaust, and that there were also good Germans, the problem with *Schindler's List* is that it became *the* Holocaust movie. It's shown to school children, and they, including German school children, think they learn about the Holocaust, not about a minor aspect of the Holocaust.

**Dr. Duvdevani:** I think this is the problem. The problem is not the movie. The problem is what teachers, for example, are making of that film, especially if this is the only one they have pupils watch.

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**Prof. Shavit:** Yes, but Spielberg was Spielberg already when he directed *Schindler's List*, and he could have chosen a different project. He knew he was making *the* Holocaust movie by merit of him being Spielberg.

**Prof. Zuckerman:** Before we move on, I want to say I remember that I was a sociologist in the Israeli Air Force when the Holocaust TV series about the Weiss family aired, and I had the opportunity, being a sociologist in the military, to have my people do research with soldiers by command. You know, if you are a sociologist and can question people by command, they have to cooperate.

I had a group of some thirty people. There was only one television channel in those days, and everyone watched the miniseries about the Weiss family, and I got to ask the young soldiers what they thought of it.

I will never forget the one young officer who stood up and said to me it was a very good thing that we watched the series on TV because it connected him emotionally to the Holocaust.

At first, I really thought, well, the culture industry is effective. He was connected emotionally! It took me two days to be troubled. What did he mean by “emotionally connected to the Holocaust?” What does it say about your personal emotional need to have some kind of catharsis? What does it mean in relation to the real historical event?

And I have to admit that for many people, the way they engaged with *Schindler's List* was not a means of coping with the Holocaust but a means of having some kind of catharsis.

And I think that the Holocaust is the one thing that you should not have catharsis through. I think that you always have to have a very tension-filled relation to it.

**Prof. Shavit:** That actually brings us perfectly to the third point of criticism, which I am very curious what Giacomo would have to say about. It is, in a word, the cynicism of it all.



I want to make the following point: I have a suspicion that the reason why we have so many movies about the Holocaust is not because of the complexity of the topic, the challenges the topic involves, or the importance of the topic. Rather, it is because of two cynical considerations.

One, the Holocaust is perhaps the only major historical-political issue about which there is still consensus, at least within the mainstreams of Western societies. So, it's the safest serious subject to deal with in an age when everything else has become so controversial.

The other thing, which is even more cynical, and here, Roberto Benigni and Spielberg enter, is that it wins you those awards. For some reason, despite the fact that, well, at least I think these awards are largely meaningless, movie directors and actors are so keen to win Oscars and other trophies. And the thinking, at least subconsciously, is: let's do one about the Holocaust and get recognition as classy, serious, deep directors or actors!

I think the most deplorable moment in the history of Hollywood, and there are so many of them, is Roberto Benigni jumping on those chairs and being so outrageously happy without taking even the slightest second to think how inappropriate all of this is given the subject matter of *Life is Beautiful*.

Now, to be clear, Spielberg never actually thanked the six million when he won his Oscar. If you hear what he actually said, he wasn't explicitly thanking the six million. But the fact that so many people remember that he thanked the six million has to do with his speech, that moment he waited for so long, looking as if he was thinking about the people he wanted to thank for helping him with the movie and his career *and* the six million in the same breath. Oh, boy!

**Prof. Lichtner:** There's an episode in Ricky Gervais' *Extras* where Kate Winslet plays an actress who's playing a nun in a Holocaust movie, and she expresses this cynicism on set wonderfully. She says: "Oh, look, I've done Titanic, if I don't win an Oscar with this one..."

Today, the thing that makes a film popular is to make a Holocaust movie and then say that it wasn't about the Holocaust. We see it with *Zone of Interest* (2023), and in fairness, it's been done for some time now. Alain Resnais said that *Night and Fog* was never about the Holocaust, but was always about Algeria, which is blatantly not true. So, of course, there is a commercial calculation there. Why shouldn't there be? Cinema is a commercial medium, and it has to sell.

**Prof. Shavit:** If that wasn't a rhetorical question, I want to answer it. Why shouldn't it be? Because some things in life should not be approached cynically. Because if that's your motivation, to win the Oscars, then that's wrong.

**Prof. Lichtner:** I agree. But at the same time, making a product that's going to have broad appeal is not something that we can resent filmmakers for. So, the question is broader. Like, why is it that the Holocaust holds this special place in the public consciousness so that we flock to watch Holocaust movies, so that we immediately and somehow automatically gravitate to a film that deals with the Holocaust?

I'll give you a different example from Italian cinema, which I think is really telling. There is a film called *Unfair Competition* by Ettore Scola (2001), master of Italian cinema. In it, there is a competition between two tailors, one Jewish and one Gentile, in Rome at the outset of the

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fascist racial laws in 1938. The scene shows how a friendly banter that was not really so friendly becomes antisemitism and racial hostility. It's an interesting film. The most interesting thing is that when Scola drafted the idea, it was not set in 1938. It was set in contemporary Italy. The shopkeepers were a white Italian man and a recent African immigrant. Scola ultimately decided that it was safer to place it back in 1938.

Across Europe, there's a history where the Holocaust was first the uncomfortable topic that we don't want to deal with, and then it became the comfortable topic that we deal with instead of dealing with contemporary racism. That is the question that you have to address if you want to understand why cinema, cynically or conveniently, seeks out the Holocaust to make money or to win awards.

At the same time, just because there is this cynicism or instrumentalism, it doesn't mean that all Holocaust cinema is cynical. It comes back to a point I think Moshe made earlier on, which is a really important, really complex point about the definition of the Holocaust. I'm not going to try, but the Holocaust is a really difficult event to define. It defies definition.

And so you have a genre: Holocaust cinema is treated as a genre. We write about it as a genre, but actually, it's a cross-genre. I think there are Holocaust films that cut across all genres, and if you boil it down, most Holocaust films are not really about the Holocaust. They're about other things, and that was always Benigni's defense. He said, this isn't a film about the Holocaust, it's a film about the love between a father and a son, a film about the power of imagination.

**Dr. Duvdevani:** First of all, I think that saying that all of it is cynicism is a big generalization. I completely agree with you about Benigni's reaction. But at least, when he got the Oscar, he never thanked the six million.

**Prof. Shavit:** I watched his act again yesterday. He was actually closer to thanking the six million than Spielberg was.

**Dr. Duvdevani:** Indeed. But you're completely right that Spielberg actually never thanked the six million. He mentioned them in his thank you speech, but he never thanked them. Believe me, Spielberg knows what he's doing.

Anyway, yes, there is cynicism in Holocaust movies. However, there is also cynicism when you are making a film like *The Green Book* (2018) about the relationship between a black pianist and his white chauffeur in the 1950s. And there is a cynicism when you are making a film like *Twelve Years a Slave* (2013). So, in a way, when we are dealing with the award season, cynicism is quite common.

We should bear in mind that there are many other films we have not discussed yet. For example, there is a film that we still haven't mentioned, and I think it is a very important film: *The Pianist* (2002) by Roman Polanski.

**Prof. Shavit:** Which also, in the end, is a feel-good movie.

**Dr. Duvdevani:** You know, Władysław Szpilman survived, but I can't say that when I see the way that they are clearing the ghetto and killing the Jews, I had a feel-good reaction.

**Prof. Shavit:** Well, you know that the experience of the audience is mainly determined by the fate of the protagonist, not what's in the background, and in the end, if the protagonist survives and plays the piano, it's a happy ending.

**Dr. Duvdevani:** But I don't think it's a feel-good movie. It's a film about survival. And yes, I am very happy that he survived, but he experienced a very traumatic event.

As we speak, in half an hour, we're going to have three hostages released from Gaza, and I'm not sure that today is a feel-good day. They survived. So, I think survival is not the point.

**Prof. Shavit:** Well, the media treats it as a feel-good day.

**Dr. Duvdevani:** Yes, so the media is wrong. What can I say? But you cannot suspect Polanski, for example, who himself was a Holocaust survivor, to have thought that he was making a feel-good movie.

By the way, in my opinion, the actual film that Roman Polanski made about the Holocaust was not *The Pianist*. It was a film that he made two decades earlier, *The Tenant* (1976), in which he himself played someone who is being persecuted. I think that this is the real film, metaphorically speaking, that he made about the Holocaust. It's very interesting to note that in Polanski's autobiography, he deals extensively with other films, but *The Tenant* is discussed only in three pages.

Going back to the question, I think we should remember that there are also European films and also American films that won the Academy Award and are really dealing with the Holocaust in a profound, harsh way.

**Prof. Zuckerman:** Spielberg probably didn't talk about the six million Jews, but I remember a video that I saw from a post-award celebration, where someone came in with a real big cake, the way the Americans like it, and they had something written on the cake. What was it? Shoah.

**Prof. Shavit:** I can't believe this.

**Prof. Zuckerman:** I saw it. I am not making this up.

I am always distinguishing between the work of art and its creator. The creator may be a bad person but still make a very important work of art, and it can be the case that a very good person will create very poor art.

So, I am not interested in what motivated Spielberg, whether his motivation was cynical or commercial. The question is: what is the structural moment within the work that is putting us into dilemmas, ethical dilemmas, aesthetical dilemmas, and moral dilemmas?

I think that most of the Holocaust movies are not able to really result in a message that is humanistic, that is going beyond the Holocaust. As I said before, the Holocaust itself is still an enigma to us. We are still not able – I am seventy-five years of age now and even I am still not able – to understand it, and as I said before, it's been in my life from the very beginning.



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We have to distinguish not only between the intention of the creator or the producer and the work of art; within the issues or topics of the artwork itself, we have to distinguish between coping with the actual historical event and the reception of the work decades later.

**Prof. Shavit:** I want to move on to the next and final point of criticism, which is Holocaust movies and porn. Now, there are two issues here. The first is that you have a lot of nudity in Holocaust movies, at least in some of them, especially in the ones that are more, I would say, “realistic.”

At least in my generation, for most kids, the first authorized seeing of a naked body of the opposite sex was when watching a Holocaust movie.

That’s the definition of disturbing.

The second point is that in the end, when you have those documented visuals from concentration camps, from extermination camps, and you show naked victims, identifiable naked victims, that does not dignify them. The question is, don’t they deserve the dignity of not being shown to the world like this? And when they are denied that dignity, and so casually so, is that not a statement that they are lesser humans, that we accept their being classified as such?

**Dr. Duvdevani:** First of all, I am not sure that most or even many Holocaust movies have nudity. And I am not sure that I would associate only Holocaust movies with nudity. I do think that there were films back in the 1970s that dealt with the Holocaust and had nudity. This was part of the provocation; they sought a way to deal with Holocaust representations and with Holocaust memory.

There are two films, both of them Italian, which I think are very interesting in this regard: *Seven Beauties* by Lina Wertmüller (1975) and *The Night Porter* by Liliana Cavani (1974). I think that these are masterpieces because they combined sheer provocation, not cynicism, with issues of representation and with issues of memory.

They are meant to disturb you. They were made by women. Women are those who usually do not take a side in history, and by this, I mean that history is not being told by women. Films were mainly made by men, especially in the 1970s. So, what I think the directors were aiming to do was to give a certain kind of a new perspective, a provocative perspective on the whole idea of masculinity.

*Seven Beauties* is a film about masculinity and the crisis of masculinity when dealing with the Holocaust. And in *The Night Porter*, sex, I mean real sex and actual sex, takes place in order to cover the trauma.

Still, I do not think nudity is part and parcel of Holocaust films. But I think in both these films, nudity was used as an issue or as an aesthetic tool to deal with the trauma and the crisis of masculinity that was caused by the Holocaust.

**Prof. Lichtner:** I want to draw a distinction between literal porn in movies connected with the Holocaust, a horrible sub-genre that came out in the 1970s, which I’ll leave aside, and voyeurism.

The presentation in some movies of gas chambers, in particular, is troubling. I am thinking about *The Grey Zone*, for instance, by Tim Blake Nelson (2001). I think it has a genuine, almost pornographic voyeurism in the shooting of the gas chamber scene where he puts you in the position of a girl following her mother into the gas chamber. Then, it has the luxury of dragging you out at the last minute. That shift of perspective is voyeuristic, it is unethical.

Back to nudity, I am thinking of the British documentary *German Concentration Camps Factual Survey*, which was produced by Sidney Bernstein with the help of Alfred Hitchcock in 1945, but released only in 2014 after having been shelved for seven decades. By the way, aside from technical issues and the fear of alienating the German-occupied population, one possible reason why it was originally shelved by the British was their fear that it would help the Zionist movement.

When it was eventually completed and released in 2014, the Imperial War Museum curated it and took it to Sydney and various other places to premiere it. In Sydney, the curators were challenged about the way that the cameramen deployed in 1945 by the British military were shooting women showering, without any sense of decency. I mean, they just shot them in frontal nudity.

And the curators responded, well, these are French Jewish survivors who were showering with hot water for the first time after God knows how long. It's about hygiene. It's about the return to humanity. And the audience challenged this, saying, these women did not consent. It is their body. So, I think that even in something that's not fictional, nudity is an immediate dilemma.

**Prof. Shavit:** Even more so when it's not fiction.

**Prof. Lichtner:** Yes, you're absolutely right. In the same footage, but not included in the film, there's a different kind of approach to pornography, though not with respect to nudity, but with respect to death. There's a moment quite late in the liberation of Belsen when the army film unit sent footage with notes to London saying that today, the commanders decided to use the bulldozers to scoop up the corpses and put them in the graves.

This is a really poignant moment, and they film it. But they can't film it close up, so they put the camera behind two survivors who were watching a British Sergeant on a bulldozer scooping up bodies. You can just see the bodies falling out and going underneath the bulldozer itself. Yet you see it out of focus because the thing that's in focus is the shoulders of the two women watching it. That's the same technique that László Nemes used in *Son of Saul*.

**Prof. Zuckerman:** The question of the Holocaust and nudity stirred a little political crisis in Israel some 20, 25 years ago when an ultra-Orthodox politician toured Yad Vashem and said about one of the biggest photos, which was, of course, the naked women on the way to their extermination, that this was unacceptable. And then he said, we need our own Yad Vashem. This ultra-Orthodox politician said we need our own Yad Vashem; your Yad Vashem cannot be ours.

The question is, what kind of gaze, or what kind of view, does this Haredi politician have when he recognizes in this naked woman something erotic or something sexual? And so on. But he

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related to it quite clearly, quite well, when asking: “If it were your grandmother, how would you react to the photo?”

Well, if you want to be a good historian, you have to admit that there are moments in history where pornography being the pornography of death, being the pornography of eroticism, being the pornography of the sheer reality of being, is part of everyday life.

If I may add something here that has nothing to do with sex and nudity. My father remembered a scene that he had experienced in Auschwitz, and there, of course, we lost a major part of our family, some 80% were exterminated, but he remembered that he was in some kind of hole where he was working. There was some sort of assessor who came and saw my father, and all of a sudden, he flung him a bun. And my father, who was not able to speak about the Germans without saying, “May they all burn,” remembered that. He remembered this moment as something, some kind of glimmer of humanity even in this hell. Even the assessment man had this humanistic moment when throwing him the bun.

I think the need to combine the Holocaust with sexuality, and I’m not talking about nudity, comes from the place where you need to have something to hold on to because if you are showing all the time only the everywhere presence of death, you cannot do anything with it. Not intellectually and not artistically, and certainly not cinematically.

**Prof. Shavit:** Certain B movies, where you have concentration camps with women enslaving a man or the other way around, their production is actually revealing something very deep about the Holocaust itself: that there were people taking pleasure in doing all those things. And that there are now people taking pleasure in watching people who took pleasure in doing all those things is part of the story of the Holocaust. It helps us understand how it could have happened.

So perhaps in an awkward way, we learn more about human nature through those distorted B movies than through mainstream and legitimate movies.

Just as a final point, there was a period, I think it was like 20 years ago, when the London Dungeon and these kinds of facilities were very popular. They featured all sorts of terrible medieval torture instruments and epidemics and other catastrophes.

I remember hearing someone asking whether they would have a Holocaust dungeon in 500 years and will people treat it as some kind of entertainment. Because, in the end, what we were entertained by when going to the London Dungeon was people being tortured. And tormented.

I would like to move on to asking the three of you three different questions about different countries and Holocaust movies.

I want to start with Moshe and discuss two major German films, which I am sure you’ve watched. One is *Der Untergang* (2004) and the other is *Napola* (2004). What I found very disturbing in both is the narrative of the Nazis as some kind of aliens that came to Germany from outer space and took over until they were defeated. How troubling did you find this when you watched either?

**Prof. Zuckerman:** Yes, I was troubled that a certain part of coping with the past in Germany was exactly like what you said.

There were a few paths to deal with the history of Nazism. The first one was Germans who said that they were kidnapped by a bunch of criminals. And it was what is known in German as “the twelve years of Hitler.” How 80 million people could be kidnapped by a bunch of these people is another question, but it was very soon that the post-war Germans didn’t go on with that.

Another way of coping was to focus on the German opposition to Hitler, the opposition that collapsed.

The third way, which started in the 1980s, was to engross with everyday life Nazism. Maybe you remember the series of films *Heimat* by Edgar Reitz (starting in 1984). It was very interesting to see in those films how Nazism infiltrated into remote villages and how it became a part of them.

So, in that respect, *Der Untergang*, in which Hitler is shown as a psychopath – and he was very ill at the end, and we can, of course, make a caricature of him, and I’m not saying Bruno Ganz’s performance as Hitler was bad; his performance was excellent – but that film was indeed some kind of escape from the real question. The real question is not how Hitler was at the end, but how could it be that until the very end, there hardly was any opposition to Hitler.

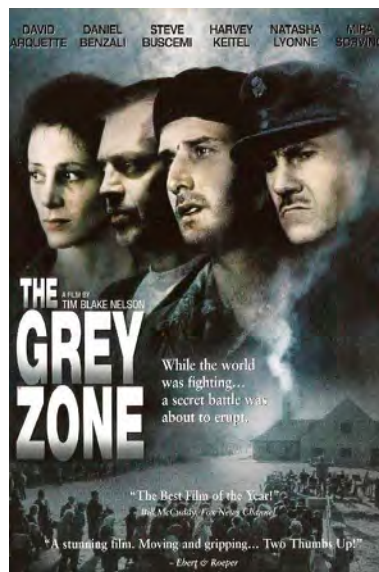
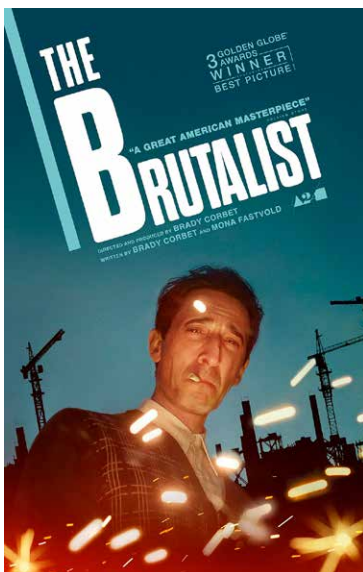
**Prof. Shavit:** Hitler is so external to the reality of the ordinary Germans in that movie.

**Prof. Zuckerman:** This is exactly what I am talking about. This is a way of not coping with your own guilt when you are showing him as something coming from somewhere else. Having said that, I have to admit that the one country that tried to cope with this past in Europe, when I compare it to the way that the British and the French cope with their colonial past –

**Prof. Shavit:** Or the Dutch with their Nazi past.

**Prof. Zuckerman:** Yes, or the Dutch with their Nazi past, and the Dutch with the colonial past as well.

**Prof. Shavit:** The Italians with their fascist past. But I would not compare the Nazi past to colonialism.



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**Prof. Zuckerman:** The one country that did some kind of work of coping with the past is Germany. The question was, what path did they take? And they took, as I just tried to show it, several paths.

I think that by the end of the 1960s and 1970s, the Germans began to reflect on fascism more seriously. But, and this is a big but, they ended up with a very good explanation for fascism and even for Nazism, but not for the Holocaust. They basically concluded that they cannot cope with the Holocaust, neither historiographically nor through cinematographic works.

And in that respect, the Germans are in the same situation as others. I don't think that others can cope better than the Germans. The Germans used to think that the only ones who were really pure and clean and without any crimes were those serving in the Wehrmacht. And then, it turned out that the Wehrmacht was one of the major promoters of war crimes against the Jews.

I think that the problem is that the Germans had a special problem coping with the Holocaust because these were, as the Polish Government rightly said, these were *German* concentration camps. Although Ukrainians, Poles, and so on collaborated, the concentration camps were German.

**Prof. Shavit:** Giacomo, my question for you is about perhaps the most contentious debate when it comes to Holocaust movies, which you have already referred to and somewhat hinted at where you stand, but I'm not sure I understood correctly. We are twenty years after that debate, so there is a bit of the benefit of retrospect or at least of a broader, longer perspective. Roberto Benigni and *Life is Beautiful*. Where do you stand in this debate?

**Prof. Lichtner:** I feel like I've made a career out of criticizing *Life is Beautiful*. I was an undergraduate when I first saw it, and I kept watching it, and each time I watched it, I liked it less. But I do remember the first time I saw it in the cinema at Christmas. *Life is Beautiful* was a Christmas release. And the posters advertising it showed Benigni and his wife, who's also his on-screen wife, Nicoletta Braschi, smiling on a beautiful navy blue background with snowflakes falling.

I remember being really struck by the catharsis at the end of the movie, being moved, crying, and then each time I watched it, I liked it less.

**Prof. Shavit:** Why?

**Prof. Lichtner:** Because I think the second half is so false. You know, it's not just inaccurate; it's false. It's entirely driven by the motivation of providing catharsis.

The first half is actually quite brave. It is brave because it breaks a big silence. The big silence in Italian culture is not antisemitism and the Holocaust. That's something Italians, in the end, deal with quite easily because they just blame the Germans for it.

The big silence is Africa and what we Italians did in Ethiopia and in the other African colonies before the war. And Benigni has a way in that first half of the movie of criticizing fascist culture very subtly, including with things like the Ethiopian-themed party and so on.

There's a critique of homemade antisemitism in the racial laws that's actually rare in Italian cinema. The only other noticeable example I can think of is maybe Vittorio De Sica's film *The*

*Garden of the Finzi-Continis* (1970), which acknowledged that Italy passed racially discriminating laws by itself well before the Second World War started, before Hitler demanded that they do so.

So, the first half of *Life is Beautiful* is quite brave, and the second half falls on its own premise. Benigni wants to carry on with this idea that life is beautiful, but once you take the characters into the concentration camp, it is, in my opinion, simply not possible anymore to keep that narrative going.

**Prof. Shavit:** Your criticism of that movie – how far will you take it? Will you say this is a movie that people should not watch, or will you say this is an effort that failed?

**Prof. Lichtner:** I think it's an effort that failed. There are very few movies that I think people shouldn't watch. Maybe Uwe Boll's *Auschwitz* (2011), which was actually banned in Germany and is hard to get a hold of. Maybe that and then just a few others.

No, I definitely wouldn't censor *Life is Beautiful*. I just think it's an effort that failed, partly because Benigni is good at talking about what he knows about, which is not the Holocaust.

There's a fantastic work by Ruth Ben-Ghiat about the film, where she says, look, forget about the Holocaust. The film is about Italy. The catharsis is the catharsis of Italy being liberated by the Americans.

And this is what infuriated some historians about the movie, the idea that Italian Jews go to this imaginary camp and then are liberated by the Americans instead of the Russians. It infuriated historians because Italian Jews, for the most part, including my grandfather, his mom, and his brother – they were all in Auschwitz – they were liberated by the Soviets. Mind you, Benigni's father was imprisoned in Bergen-Belsen, which was not liberated by the Soviets. It was liberated by the British.

**Prof. Shavit:** Going back to the cynicism, however, it's not an effort that failed from Benigni's point of view. He won the Oscar that he wanted to win.

**Prof. Lichtner:** From his point of view, he did it well. I think it fails because it doesn't understand the essential elements of the history of the Shoah, the things that Moshe was talking about at the beginning: the systematic nature, the industrial nature, and the modernity of the Holocaust as a standalone event. He doesn't understand that. How could he?

**Prof. Shavit:** I want to ask Shmulik about Israeli cinema now. In 2024, four major Israeli movies were released about the memory of the Holocaust; about how you deal with the memory of the Holocaust. Four! But not about the Holocaust itself.

And then, I look at the list of movies that have been produced since 1948, and there are hardly any Israel-produced films about the actual Holocaust. How do you explain that? In other words, why are there so few movies about the Holocaust, as opposed to the memory of the Holocaust?

**Dr. Duvdevani:** I think that there are three reasons why there were so few Israeli films that actually dealt with the Holocaust itself.

## ROUNDTABLE - THE HOLOCAUST IN FILM

First, asking Israeli actors to play again the role of the victims and especially maybe asking Israeli actors to play Nazis, was difficult.

Second, Israeli cinema, at least in its early years, referred to the trauma of Holocaust survivors as one that can be remedied through fresher traumas, which were the focus of its attention.

The third problem is political; what analogies, whether ill-intended or not, will people draw from direct depictions of the Holocaust? Some Israeli moviemakers were reluctant to deal with the Holocaust directly because they feared the response of their peers in other countries, at least subconsciously.

**Prof. Shavit:** There was perhaps a technical impediment, which is, you know, you need access to certain sceneries if you want to adapt the novels of, say, Aharon Appelfeld to the big screen.

**Dr. Duvdevani:** Well, I know about at least one Israeli film that is being made at the moment in Yiddish and is being shot, I am not sure where; they wanted to shoot it in Ukraine, but it's not shot there. And it's actually a film dealing with the Holocaust.

**Prof. Zuckerman:** I think that there are no Israeli movies dealing directly with the Holocaust, but only with the memory of the Holocaust, because Israel, whatever the public opinion is, was never interested in the Holocaust. Israelis were always very interested only in the memory of the Holocaust as part of the ideologization of the Holocaust, in terms of Zionism being the solution and being the answer to the Holocaust. This is why, by the way, we don't have proper research on antisemitism.

I'm thinking about research, proper research on antisemitism in terms of social, psychological, economic, and other aspects.

**Prof. Shavit:** Well, you know, Moshe, as someone who has dealt so much with memory and with history, you know that history is a work in progress. In the end, people learn history to justify the present and the future.

And now, very final questions calling for short answers. Shmulik, did *The Brutalist* deserve the Oscar for best movie it didn't get?

Disclosure: I wish I thought this movie is bad. It is not, I thought worse of it. It's banal; it does not say anything new or interesting about any of the complicated topics it broaches. As a commentary about the roots of American decline, it manifests the decline in not being able to add something inspiring to the discussion. Sorry for the Spenglerian tone. Anyhow, do you think it deserved the Oscar?

**Dr. Duvdevani:** Yes.

**Prof. Shavit:** Why?

**Dr. Duvdevani:** Because I think it is major movie making. It is a very long epic, though a very intimate epic, about antisemitism, Zionism, memory, architecture, and capitalism, and it deals with all these complicated issues creatively, coherently, and with much substance.

**Prof. Shavit:** Moshe, if a German high school teacher told you he could show his class, let's say of 12th graders, just one movie about the Holocaust, which would you recommend?

**Prof. Zuckerman:** I would recommend Lanzmann's *Shoah* in a shorter version. You don't need the whole eight hours, but in a shorter version, I would recommend it.

**Prof. Shavit:** You're optimistic that high school students today can deal even with a shorter version.

**Prof. Zuckerman:** No, I'm not optimistic at all. You asked me what I'd recommend, not what could actually work.

**Prof. Shavit:** Giacomo, same question but for New Zealand high school students.

**Prof. Lichtner:** High school students? I mean, the smart answer is *Jojo Rabbit* (2019).

**Prof. Shavit:** Why is that your recommendation?

**Prof. Lichtner:** Because it's a New Zealand film by director Taika Waititi, who's half-Māori, half-Jewish. He made *Boy* (2010) for his Māori father. He made *Jojo Rabbit* for his Jewish mother, and it's a film that is obviously, evidently fantastical, so you don't have to deal so much with the fear of people coming out of it thinking they understand the Holocaust now. It's approachable.

**Prof. Shavit:** And for Italian high school students, will the recommendation be the same?

**Prof. Lichtner:** No, for Italian students, I would probably get them to watch *Kapo* by Gillo Pontecorvo, which was made in 1960. This movie is so important to the history of the representation of the Holocaust in cinema. The way it approaches certain imagery – the barbed wire, for instance, became a trope that then got quoted over and over again in Holocaust movies.

I think that in this movie you can see a Jewish prayer in Hebrew for the first time in the history of Italian cinema. At least, it is one of the first times. The *Shema* are not quite the final words in the movie, but are the final words of the protagonist. And then she dies. It is quite a powerful film. Problematic in all sorts of ways, but powerful.

**Prof. Shavit:** Why would you offer New Zealander and Italian high school pupils different movies?

**Prof. Lichtner:** Well, they need to learn different things.

– *With contribution from Amarah Friedman*



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