

Antisemitism Now and Then: Introduction to the Special Issue

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Abstract

This introduction to the special issue of the Journal of Deradicalization contextualizes the alarming global surge in antisemitism, accelerating after the October 7, 2023, Hamas attacks and the subsequent Gaza war. We map how ancient anti-Jewish schemas have manifested across three modern ideological streams—the far-right, the far-left, and Islamist movements—and examine how social media algorithms now rapidly diffuse these narratives. Against this theoretical backdrop, we introduce six contributions that bridge macro-level societal shifts with micro-level psychological mechanisms. These articles expose critical contemporary phenomena: the societal normalization of anti-Jewish sentiment, institutional biases within international bodies, the global contagion of extremist violence, and individual psychological drivers like the quest for significance and Social Dominance Orientation. Collectively, these findings reveal that contemporary antisemitism is highly adaptive, shifting seamlessly between traditional anti-Jewish animus and target-specific geopolitical hostility toward Israel. For the scientific community, this highlights a sobering reality: deeply motivated prejudices remain highly resistant to top-down institutional interventions like official state apologies. Critically, for policy and practice within the C/PVE spaces, this demonstrates that countering mass radicalization requires moving beyond generic messaging to implement target-specific risk assessments that analytically separate anti-Israel sentiment from traditional anti-Jewish tropes while aggressively disrupting the societal normalization of extremist narratives.

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Introduction

Antisemitism has been on a sharp rise in recent years. Most systematic datasets (ADL² in the U.S., CST³ in the UK, Tel Aviv University global reports, EU FRA⁴ surveys) show a gradual increase beginning around 2015–2016 and accelerating after 2020. In the U.S., the Anti-Defamation League Audit of Antisemitic Incidents recorded 9,354 incidents in 2024, the highest since tracking began in 1979. This represents +344% increase over five years and +893% increase over ten years.

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² Anti Defamation League (<https://www.adl.org/audit-antisemitic-incidents>)

³ Community Security Trust (<https://cst.org.uk/antisemitism/report-antisemitism>)

⁴ European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (<https://fra.europa.eu/DVS/DVT/v1/as2013.php>)

In Europe, patterns differed across countries, but the trend was similar. In France, 1,320 incidents were recorded in 2025, continuing several years of elevated levels. And in the UK, there were 4,103 incidents in 2023, the highest on record. The surge began immediately after Hamas October 7, 2023 attack on Israel, even before Israel's large-scale military response in Gaza⁵. According to the Times of Israel, global compilations show ~340% growth in incidents between 2022 and 2024.

The Jews represent less than one-fifth of one percent of the world's population, yet the prejudice, hate, and discrimination directed against them over the millennia suggest a much more pronounced psychological presence. More than any other religious or ethnic minority, they represent the eternal "other," the perennial culprit that many see as responsible for all that is wrong with the world.

A Brief History of Anti-Judaism

In his book *Anti-Judaism: The Western Tradition* (2013), David Nirenberg offers an explanation of the origin and persistence of antisemitism across the ages. Tracing the derogatory rhetoric about Jews to ancient Egypt and the Greco-Roman world, he distills the early elements of antisemitism: the view of the Jews as impure anti-civic separatists and unfeeling legalists. The rise of Christianity and later of Islam has amplified the view of Jews as outsiders who stubbornly reject prophecy and the spiritual truth revealed by Jesus and Muhammad. Rather than treating antisemitism primarily as hostility toward *actual* Jews, Nirenberg argues that "anti-Judaism" has evolved into a long-standing schema within the Western thought—a way of explaining problems in society by invoking "the Jew" a symbolic figure representing evils such as: materialism (the love of money), legalism (literal rather than spiritual interpretation of scripture, hence rejection of spiritual truth) and disloyalty.

After the defeat of Adolf Hitler in the Second World War, overt antisemitism became morally discredited in much of the Western world because of the freshly remembered horrors of the Holocaust. Governments in Western Europe and North America overtly rejected explicit antisemitic rhetoric. Yet antisemitic attitudes did not disappear; they persisted in private opinion surveys and social discrimination. Jewish survivors returning to

⁵<https://cst.org.uk/research/cst-publications/antisemitic-incidents-report-january-june-2025>

Eastern Europe often encountered hostility. The most notorious case was the 1946 pogrom in Kielce, Poland, in which 40 Jews were murdered.

In the Soviet Union, antisemitism took a different form: Jewish religion and institutions were suppressed along with other religious expressions. Under Joseph Stalin, specific campaigns targeted Jewish intellectuals. A notable example was the infamous Doctors' Plot, a fabricated conspiracy announced by the Soviet government in January 1953, claiming that a group of mostly Jewish doctors in Moscow was plotting to assassinate top Soviet leaders by providing deliberately incorrect medical treatment. There were also anti-“cosmopolitan” campaigns targeting Jewish writers and scientists. These represented state-driven antisemitism framed in political rather than racial terms.

The establishment of Israel in 1948 introduced a new dimension of the “Jewish problem”: the intersection of antisemitism with anti-Zionism. The Six-Day War, in which Israel defeated a coalition of Arab states, including Egypt, Jordan, and Syria, dramatically changed the narrative about Israel in that its military success made it appear powerful rather than victimized, turning David into Goliath. It is in that context, too, that the Soviet propaganda and many anti-colonial movements began equating Zionism with imperialism or racism. Scholars see this period as the emergence of the “new antisemitism”, where hostility toward Jews found its expression through demonization of Israel and of “Zionists.” (Taguieff, 2004; Wistrich, 2010). Meanwhile, neo-Nazi and ultranationalist groups continued their spreading of antisemitic ideology in Europe and the United States, spawning Holocaust denial movements and reviving Jew hatred by Neo-Nazi organizations in Germany and elsewhere.

The collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 had mixed effects. In Eastern Europe, nationalist movements revived traditional antisemitic myths, including conspiracy theories about a Jewish scheme to control the world. In Western Europe, antisemitic incidents began rising again during periods of Middle East conflict like the first and the second intifadas. Increased identification with the Palestinian cause on the part of the European left fueled increased violence against Jewish institutions in France, Belgium, and Germany. From this period onward, scholars have been debating whether criticism of Israeli policy sometimes crosses into antisemitic tropes (e.g., through unbridled demonization, double standards, and conspiracy claims).

Three Antisemitisms

By the 2000s–2020s, antisemitism has been issuing from three ideological directions defining somewhat distinct types of Jew hate: Antisemitism of the Right, Antisemitism of the Left and Islamist antisemitism.

Antisemitism of the Right

Contemporary White nationalist movements revived classic conspiracies about Jewish greed for control and domination, lending them contemporary relevance. For example, the “Great Replacement” theory popularized by Renaud Camus portrays Jews as orchestrating the replacement of European Whites by non-White immigrants (Camus, 2011). The theory soon morphed into practice. In 2018, the deadliest antisemitic attack in US history occurred in Pittsburgh at the Tree of Life synagogue, where a White supremacist, Gregory Bowers, killed 11 congregants and wounded 6 (Anti-Defamation League, 2018, October 27). And in 2019, John Earnest carried out an attack at the Poway synagogue near San Diego, California, fatally shooting one person and injuring three others, including the synagogue’s rabbi (Levin, 2019).

Antisemitism of the left

In the late 20th century, a new brand of antisemitism emerged on the far left of the political spectrum. Rather than portraying the Jews as racially inferior, the leftists depicted them as powerful, privileged, and oppressive. Especially, Israel’s attitude toward the Palestinians was seen as exemplifying a colonialist attitude toward the colonized (Said, 1979). After the Six-Day War, parts of the global left increasingly came to view Israel as a colonial settler state, a tool of Western imperialism, and as an oppressor of Palestinians. In this connection, the United Nations General Assembly Resolution 3379 (passed in 1975) stated that “Zionism is a form of racism and racial discrimination.” It passed by a vote of 72 in favor, 35 against, and 32 abstentions (United Nations General Assembly, 1975).

This viewpoint gained currency in the 2000s during the Second Intifada (2000–2005) and the later conflicts in Gaza. Progressive movements came to adopt anti-Zionism as a mainstay. Their critics’ argument that the left’s attitude toward Israel reflects implicit antisemitism has rested on the notions that (1) Israel is demonized or held to unique

standards not applied to other states, (2) Jews collectively are treated as responsible for Israel's actions and (3) Zionism (the Jewish national movement) is framed as uniquely illegitimate among national movements.

Islamist antisemitism

Beyond its far right and far left brands, a distinct additional form of antisemitism has been of the Islamist type. According to historian Jeffrey Herf (2024), Islamist antisemitism is not simply hostility toward Israeli policy; it is an ideological hostility to Jews, embedded in Islamist political movements. One of Herf's most distinctive arguments is that modern Islamist antisemitism was partly shaped during the 1930s–1940s through contacts between Nazi Germany and Arab nationalist movements. Specifically, Nazi Germany broadcast Arabic-language propaganda to the Middle East during World War II related European ideas about Jewish conspiracy to dominate the world to local tensions between Jews and Arabs in Palestine. It emphasized that Nazi Germany and Arab nationalists shared a common enemy: the Jews and the British Empire. According to Herf, this created a “fusion” of European antisemitic conspiracy theories with Islamist political ideas, an ideological blend that circulated widely in the Middle East.

These ideas were further cultivated in the post-World War II era by prominent Islamist thinkers like Sayyid Qutb, whose works, such as “Our struggle with the Jews” (1950) reinterpret Islamic texts in strongly antisemitic ways and combine Islamic motifs with European conspiracy theories. According to Herf (2024), these writings helped embed a worldview in which Jews are portrayed as an eternal enemy of Islam. Bernard Lewis, another eminent historian, treated the topic of Islamic antisemitism in his 1986 book “Semites and Anti-Semites: An Inquiry into Conflict and Prejudice” as well as in other works such as “The Jews of Islam” (1984), and the influential essay published in *Commentary* titled “The Arab World Discovers Antisemitism.” Lewis basically agrees with Herf that virulent, “European-style” antisemitism—which views Jews as a “cosmic evil”—is not native to the Islamic tradition. In contrast to Herf, however, who stressed the unique role of 20th-century Nazi propaganda in promoting Islamic antisemitism, Lewis took a broader view, suggesting that antisemitism was imported into the Middle East from the West, initially via Christian Arab minorities in the 19th century and later through Nazi and Soviet influence in the 20th.

Antisemitism Through Social Media

The social media era dramatically changed the scale and diffusion of antisemitism and significantly contributed to the steep rise of antisemitic incidents in recent years. Key developments that made this possible were (1) the formation of online communities spreading conspiracy theories; (2) rapid circulation of antisemitic memes, and (3) algorithmic amplification of extreme content. Antisemitic narratives now circulating across ideological networks combine white nationalism, anti-globalization conspiracies, and progressive anti-Israel activism.

October 7th and Beyond

The October 7 Hamas attack on Israel and the ensuing Gaza war produced one of the sharpest global spikes in antisemitism on record. The surge appeared immediately after October 7, intensified during Israel's military campaign in Gaza, and has taken several distinct forms across regions and ideological milieus. The attack by Hamas killed about 1,200 people in Israel and involved mass killings of civilians, rape, hostage-taking, and other atrocities. It was undoubtedly the largest slaughter of Jews since the Holocaust and one that spurred an unprecedented surge in antisemitic incidents (Anti-Defamation League, 2024, April 6). Within days of this tragic event, there has been a wave of harassment and threats against Jews, vandalism of synagogues and Jewish schools, online antisemitic incitement, as well as physical assaults (Anti-Defamation League. (2024, April 16).

Israel's devastation of Gaza in response to the Hamas attack, in which over 70,000 Palestinians were killed according to the Gaza Health Ministry (Washington Examiner, 2026), contributed further to the wave of antisemitic attacks in various parts of the world. Following the attack and the ensuing Gaza war, many countries recorded large increases in antisemitic incidents, causing Jewish institutions worldwide to boost security arrangements. Tensions on university campuses and public protests in support of the Palestinians and Hamas swelled to record levels in late 2023 and 2024 (Abowd, 2024).

In the United States, the Anti-Defamation League, reported the largest number of antisemitic incidents ever recorded in a single year (2023) and roughly a threefold increase in incidents in the weeks after October 7. American universities became a major arena of conflict, with Jewish students reporting harassment, intimidation, and social exclusion (Anti-

Defamation League, 2024, September 16). In Europe, sharp increases were also recorded by organizations such as Community Security Trust (CST) in the UK, and Service de Protection de la Communauté Juive in France. Germany too saw particularly large spikes in antisemitic crimes and arrests for hate speech (Becker et al., 2022).

On January 29, 2025, President Trump signed an executive order (titled "Additional Measures to Combat Anti-Semitism") directing federal agencies to use all available legal tools to prosecute or "hold to account" perpetrators of antisemitic harassment. It reaffirms his 2019 order that defined antisemitism to include certain criticisms of Israel, such as equating its existence with a "racist endeavor".

The Present Collection

The special issue of the Journal of Deradicalization was conceived to capture the present state of antisemitism in theoretical and empirical terms, and to apply social science to this ancient phenomenon to better understand its manifestations, causes, and effects, as well as the potential for reducing it. This issue, the first of two, includes six articles. They include theoretical perspectives and empirical studies, qualitative and quantitative data, global and individual levels of analysis, cultural, organizational, psychological, and interventionist approaches. The breadth and diversity of these contributions are a testament to both how pervasive the phenomenon of antisemitism is and how concerted the scholarly efforts are to understand and counter its harms.

David Mandel (2026) reports on the cultural “normalization” of antisemitism in the West. His analysis suggests that, unlike other radical attitudes and behaviors, those directed against Jews have been increasingly frequent and socially acceptable even before the Hamas attacks of October 7. It is this normalization, Mandel argues, that set the preconditions for the broad public reception of the October 7th massacre and the ensuing spike in antisemitic violence and rhetoric around the world. Normalization of antisemitism, Mandel demonstrates, affects both political and personal spheres, so that “ambient antisemitism” is experienced daily by Jews in increased social distance in friendships and collegial relationships. Mandel writes, “Important as such data would be to providing a clearer understanding of the factors shaping contemporary antisemitism, note that the normalization-of-antisemitism thesis does

not require or even postulate that antisemites constitute a majority of the population. What is required is that antisemitic acts are permitted to propagate through vital centers of societal influence and control, such as the media and educational systems, and that is what has been observed since 10/7.” Mandel’s article is, to our knowledge, the first to report on the trend of modern-day normalization of antisemitic radicalization.

Much of Social Psychology research, including pioneering studies of Stanley Milgram on obedience, Solomon Asch on conformity, and Latane and Darley on bystander influence, demonstrated the critical role of authority and social norms in potentiating harmful behaviors (Sabini, 1995). Although extremism is rare by definition, there are historical cases where it has been normalized with tragic consequences, including the rise of Nazism in Germany in the 1930s (Moskalenko & Kruglanski, 2025). Against this background, the normalization of antisemitism represents an alarming trend that requires urgent attention by policymakers and practitioners in the C/PVE spaces. Social norms are powerful; when they have the potential to cause harm, as normalization of antisemitism does, it is especially important to counter them effectively.

Related to the institutions’ role in the normalization of antisemitism, the paper by André Lajst and Igor Sabino (2026) applies competing theoretical frameworks to assess the actions of the United Nations toward Israel in several cases that the authors analyzed qualitatively. The outcome is a compelling, theoretically-grounded, and empirically-informed argument that the U.N.’s actions against Israel extend beyond member-state voting behavior and reflect a deeper pattern of institutionalized discrimination, including double standards and differential patterns of verbal expression toward Israel as compared to other states. The U.N. is a major international organization with enormous authority; as such, it wields power to influence social norms around the world. Lajst and Sabino’s paper provides an innovative approach to scrutinizing how (un)fairly this power is applied in the case of Israel.

Eoin Healy’s article (2026) reports on the distal effects of antisemitic violence, namely the contagion and validation effect that a “successful” terrorist attack, in this case the Hamas attack on October 7, can have on terrorism violence in general. Just as publicized suicides are often followed by a wave of copycats inspired or emboldened by the “successful” example, so too terrorist attacks can inspire and embolden other radicalized individuals to carry out attacks of their own. By tracing the counts of terrorism incidents globally during the two years

preceding October 7 and a full year in its aftermath (excluding attacks in Israel), Healy demonstrates a clear and statistically significant increase in terrorism around the globe after October 7th.

This finding must be considered in the context of the above discussion of normalization, in this case, the normalization of terrorist violence. The terrorist attacks in Healy's global dataset were mostly not directed at Jews; the contagion and validation effects that gave rise to them transcend ideological boundaries as terrorist violence in general became more acceptable and more socially rewarding as a means to political ends. This is an important contribution to the social science of radicalization, extremism, and political violence, and an instructive case for security officials of an increased risk of terrorism. Violence can become normalized because social norms shift toward more discrimination against a group (as Mandel's article shows), it can become normalized because an authority acts in a discriminatory manner (as Lajst and Sabino's paper shows), or it can become normalized because of a vivid display of its effectiveness—the finding of Healy's research. In each case, and certainly in combination, the results are deadly and go beyond the target group. The urgency and importance of addressing this issue cannot be overstated.

In contrast to the big-picture representation in the three articles above, the remaining three papers in this issue narrow the focus from the global to the individual, investigating the psychological motivations and mechanisms of the spread of antisemitism and the practical means of its reduction.

Molly Ellenberg and colleagues (2026) explored the motivational underpinnings of antisemitic beliefs, specifically, the individual need for significance. In two successive waves of an online panel study, they compared scores on the Need for Significance scale with endorsement of antisemitic beliefs, some of which revolved around the idea that Jews wield disproportional power in the world, whereas others focused on the idea of Jews as anti-Christian. The survey also asked about views on what motivated Hamas's attacks against Israel. The results indicated that individuals high on need for significance were more likely to endorse antisemitic narratives of Jews as disproportionately powerful (but not as anti-Christian), as well as to perceive Hamas as being motivated by injustice.

Ellenberg and colleagues suggest that antisemitic beliefs are part of an integrated self-world narrative where individuals who feel they don't get treated fairly can direct their

grievances toward “evil” Jews while sympathizing with Hamas, whom they may see as fellow victims. This empirical finding is consistent with the historical treatment of Jews as scapegoats, sometimes enacted strategically to redirect public anger from true malefactors, as the Russian Imperial government did with the fabrication and popularization of the *Protocols of the Learned Elders of Zion*, which led to hundreds of deadly pogroms (Moskalenko & Romanova, 2022). Especially at a time of growing discontent stemming from an uncertain political and economic situation, worldwide migration, and climate concerns, antisemitism can be highly appealing and thus especially dangerous. Risk assessment for extremist political violence of vulnerable individuals needs to be carried out with this consideration in mind, gauging both the at-risk individuals’ need for significance and their antisemitic beliefs.

Continuing the investigation into the psychological mechanisms of modern extremism, Moskalenko and Pavlović (2026) examine the rapid proliferation of antisemitic disinformation, specifically, conspiracy theory narratives that appeared (and were promptly debunked) following the October 7 Hamas attacks and the subsequent war in Gaza. In two quantitative studies of U.S. participants, the authors analyzed the endorsement of three conspiracy theories: the claim that Israel bombed Al-Ahli hospital, the assertion that evidence of Hamas’s atrocities was fabricated, and the narrative that the conflict was engineered to facilitate a “Great Replacement.” Their findings reveal a consistent link between the level of belief participants expressed in these narratives and their support for illegal or violent political action.

Critically, the authors empirically distinguished between two different ideological drivers: hatred toward Jews and hostility toward the state of Israel. The results indicate that the relationship between endorsement of the three conspiracy theories and radicalization is primarily mediated by political hostility toward Israel rather than generalized antisemitic attitudes toward Jews. By identifying this target-specific pathway, the article refines understanding of how conspiratorial grievances can mobilize radicalization without necessarily relying on traditional anti-Jewish animus. This underscores the vital importance of analytically separating anti-Israel sentiment from antisemitism and highlights the role of conspiracy theories as a potent psychological bridge between geopolitical conflict and the justification of political violence. Echoing the message of the first three papers in this issue, this paper shows that the mass media’s role in normalizing problematic narratives, in this case

publishing and thus legitimating disinformation targeting Israel, has a direct impact on mass radicalization of intended violent action.

Shifting the focus from the psychological drivers of radicalization to the efficacy of institutional interventions, the final study in this issue by Liesbeth Mann (2026) combines elements of all others, looking at a cross-section of the cultural history of antisemitism, institutional treatment of this history, individual motivations for holding antisemitic beliefs, and an attempt to reshape the norms around antisemitism by an experimental intervention. Specifically, the study investigated the impact of official state apologies on public attitudes toward the Jewish community in the Netherlands. Given the nation's complex history of collaboration during the Holocaust and the fraught return of survivors, Mann experimentally tested whether a formal apology could facilitate reconciliation by reducing antisemitic stereotyping among the general public.

The study specifically examined whether such an apology might strengthen the perception of Jewish citizens as part of the Dutch "ingroup" and decouple their ethnic/religious identity from Israeli state policy. However, the findings offer a sobering perspective on the limits of symbolic gestures: while the data trended in the expected direction, the effects were not statistically significant, leaving the primary hypotheses unconfirmed. Further analysis revealed that stronger endorsement of antisemitic stereotypes was closely tied to higher levels of Social Dominance Orientation (SDO) and right-wing political ideology, which in turn correlated with opposition to reparations and Holocaust commemoration. By highlighting the resistance of deeply held prejudices to top-down institutional messaging, this article provides critical insights for policymakers and practitioners seeking more effective intervention strategies to combat persistent antisemitic tropes.

Taken together, the six articles in this first of two volumes of a special issue dedicated to the social science of antisemitism and deradicalization offer a broad and multifaceted perspective. The rise in antisemitic attitudes and violence represented in Mandel's (2026) paper, alongside the evidence of institutional prejudice against Israel from U.N. (Lajst & Sabino, 2026), the highest-level international organization, and the contagion effects of the October 7th massacre on global terrorism (Healy, 2026) can be seen on the individual level as driven by frustrated needs for significance associated with blaming "all-powerful Jews" for

the world's injustices (Ellenberg et al., 2026), by hostility toward Israel amplified by disinformation narratives in the media (Moskalenko & Pavlović, 2026), and by Social Dominance orientation and right-wing political stance connected with discounting the Holocaust atrocities (Mann, 2026). When the world is seen as more uncertain and dangerous, and the authorities and the broad public discriminate against the traditional scapegoats, it may not be surprising that institutional apologies fall short of changing deeply motivated and externally supported prejudices.

Although it does not describe a particularly hopeful sociopolitical landscape, this issue offers an unprecedented scholarly representation of a persistent and radicalizing social issue. Antisemitism has been a driving force for extremism for millennia. To a large degree, it can be said to have been the driving force behind the emergence and evolution of Social Psychology, whose foundational studies were carried out by Jewish scholars trying to understand the rise of Nazism and the atrocities enacted during the Holocaust. With the globalization of social science and modern analytical tools, the present day offers a unique opportunity to deepen and refine our understanding of antisemitism and its repercussions on individual, social, institutional, and cultural levels. The studies in this issue are at the forefront of this effort. The trends and connections they identified are a springboard for scholars and practitioners to develop better tools for addressing antisemitism and effectively countering its harms.

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