

DEMOCRACY | FREEDOM | HUMAN RIGHTS

ANTISEMITISM IN THE UK IN 2024

by DR THEO ZENOU

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Crowds of supporters at the March Against Antisemitism, held in Central London on 26th November 2023 during the Israel Gaza conflict, by Lois GoBe at Shutterstock (<https://www.shutterstock.com/image-photo/london-uk-26-november-2023-crowds-2393259649>)

“All comes from the Jew; all returns to the Jew.”

Edouard Drumont, author of the antisemitic tract “Jewish France” (1886)

About the Author

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About The Henry Jackson Society

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The **Centre for Resilient Society (CRS)** is a citizen-focused, international research centre within the Henry Jackson Society, which seeks to identify, diagnose and propose solutions to threats to the social resilience of liberal Western democracies.

The centre's work includes addressing the twin challenges posed by radicalisation and terrorism.

The centre is unique in addressing violent and non-violent extremism. By coupling high-quality, in-depth research with targeted and impactful policy recommendations, it aims to combat the threat of radicalisation and terrorism in our society.

The centre's work also includes broader challenges of democratic resilience, including both threats from foreign interference and domestic issues. This includes the potential harm that various forms of social, cultural and political insecurity, conflict and disengagement can pose to the long-term sustainability of democracies – including the resilience of their institutions, public policy outcomes, citizens' health and wellbeing, and economic growth and prosperity. It also explores the balance between free speech and hate speech, and encourages respectful debate between those of different views, rather than cancellation. Moreover, it underscores how social and political instability can make nations vulnerable to internal and external actors seeking to deepen cleavages, undermine consensus and ultimately, to weaken democratic functioning.



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Executive Summary

Antisemitism is spiking in the United Kingdom.

Ever since the Hamas pogroms of October 7 2023, which sparked the ongoing war in Gaza, there has been a huge rise in antisemitism. In the last year alone, there was a 589% increase in antisemitic incidents in the country, according to the Community Security Trust (CST). That translates to a total of 4,103 incidents, or about 11 per day. It is the highest figure ever recorded by CST since it started collecting data forty years ago.

Antisemitic speech on social media has risen dramatically since the Hamas attacks. On X, in the week following October 7 alone, there was a 919% surge in anti-Jewish posts. Other platforms have seen similar trends.

Merely worrying about antisemitism, or denouncing it, is not enough. We need to understand it. More specifically, we need to understand it not in the abstract but in the current context. What are the contemporary sources of antisemitism? And what could be the solutions to stem them?

This research brief identifies four contemporary sources of antisemitism:

- Far-right antisemitism
- Islamist antisemitism
- Conspiratorial antisemitism
- The new respectable antisemitism

To stop the ongoing rise in antisemitism, the UK government should:

- change how the Holocaust is taught in the curriculum. Alongside it, students must also be taught about Holocaust denial and the way it spreads online.
- champion Muslim leaders at home and abroad who oppose antisemitism and who, more broadly, speak out against Islamism.
- update the RESIST 2 report, its “counter-disinformation toolkit”, to reflect that disinformation and antisemitism go hand-in-hand.
- lay out a forward strategy against hatred. The first step: appoint a Special Envoy for Tolerance and Coexistence.

Introduction

Antisemitism is back with a vengeance.

Ever since the Hamas pogroms of 7 October 2023, which sparked the ongoing war in Gaza, there has been a huge rise in antisemitic incidents the world over.¹ In Beverly Hills, California, the house of a Holocaust survivor was vandalised with graffiti.² It read, simply, “Kill Jews”. In Paris, France, a Jewish man was beaten to a pulp outside a synagogue.³ In Zurich, Switzerland, another was stabbed.⁴ In Dagestan, Russia, a mob stormed a plane coming from Israel while chanting, “There is no place for child killers in Dagestan!”.⁵ The list could go on, and on, and on.

This tidal wave of antisemitism has also crashed down on the United Kingdom, where an estimated 300,000 Jews live, as per the European Jewish Congress.⁶ In the last year alone there was a 589% increase in antisemitic incidents in the country, according to the Community Security Trust (CST), a Jewish community charity. That translates to a total of 4103 incidents, or about 11 per day. It is the highest figure ever recorded by CST since it started collecting data forty years ago.⁷

This barrage of hate has taken a toll on British Jews. “The Jewish community at this moment is full of dread, full of fear, like I’ve never seen before,” Justin Cohen, an editor at *Jewish News*, told the BBC at the end of October 2023.⁸

The fear has not subsided since. In recent months, synagogues have been covered in swastikas. Jewish students at leading universities have been the target of abuse. And Jewish schools have had to take emergency measures to tighten security. Pupils, especially those who wear yarmulkes, have been subjected to insults. “Unfortunately for a lot of people it’s just a fact of life,” said a Jewish pupil. “Personally,” added another pupil, “when I’ve been walking down the streets I’ve had stuff shouted at me from cars and it’s had quite an impact.”⁹

¹ “How the surge in antisemitism is affecting countries around the world”, *Reuters*, 31 October 2023, <https://www.reuters.com/world/how-surge-antisemitism-is-affecting-countries-around-world-2023-10-31/>.

² Dolores Chang, “Beverly Hills police investigating hate crime after anti-Semitic message spray-painted on Holocaust survivor’s apartment building in wake of terror attack on Israel”, *Daily Mail*, 28 October 2023, <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-12682127/Beverly-Hills-police-investigating-hate-crime-anti-Semitic-message-spray-painted-Holocaust-survivors-apartment-building-wake-terror-attack-Israel.html>.

³ “Anti-Semitic attack in Paris: released from hospital, the beaten and insulted sixty-year-old gives his version of the facts”, *HuffPost*, 3 March 2024, https://www.huffingtonpost.fr/faits-divers/article/agression-antisemite-a-paris-sorti-de-l-hopital-le-sexagenaire-battu-et-insulte-livre-sa-version-de-faits_230675.html.

⁴ Jamey Keaten, “Teen suspect in stabbing of Jewish man in Zurich expressed solidarity with Islamic State group”, *AP News*, 4 March 2024, <https://apnews.com/article/orthodox-jewish-stabbing-switzerland-islamic-state-zurich-a4b8bb5ceb66b6d2efcf2b4a7e9237f0>.

⁵ Andrew Roth, “Mob storms Dagestan airport in search of Jewish passengers from Israel”, *The Guardian*, 29 October 2023, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/oct/29/mob-storms-dagestan-airport-in-search-of-jewish-passengers-from-israel>.

⁶ “United Kingdom”, European Jewish Congress, <https://eurojewcong.org/communities/united-kingdom/>.

⁷ Jonathan Freedland, “Those who attack Jews in the UK are not striking a blow for Palestine: they are behaving as antisemites always have”, *The Guardian*, 16 February 2024, <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2024/feb/16/jews-uk-attack-palestine-antisemitism-labour-britain>; Sachin Ravikumar, “UK records worst year for antisemitism after outbreak of Israel-Hamas war”, *Reuters*, 15 February 2024, <https://www.reuters.com/world/uk/uk-records-worst-year-antisemitism-after-outbreak-israel-hamas-war-2024-02-15/>.

⁸ Aleem Maqbool, “British Jews are ‘full of fear, like I’ve never seen before’”, *BBC News*, 31 October 2023, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-67266475>.

⁹ David Barrett and Jon Brady, “Jewish worshippers beaten on way home from prayers, swastikas daubed on side of synagogues and letters threatening headteachers: Report reveals ‘explosion in hatred’ towards British Jews as Hamas attacks drive antisemitism to its worst in 40 years”, *Daily Mail*, 15 February 2024, <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-13086729/jewish-worshippers-beaten-prayers-swastikas-synagogues.html>; Anonymous, “Why is antisemitism so rife in UK academic settings? I have never found student life more difficult”, *The Guardian*, 16 November 2023, <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2023/nov/16/antisemitism-uk-universities-jewish-students>; Christina McSorley and Elaine Dunkley, “UK antisemitic hate incidents hit new high in 2023, says charity”, *BBC News*, 15 February 2024, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-68288727>; Christina McSorley and Elaine Dunkley, “UK antisemitic incidents hit new high in 2023, says charity”, *BBC News*, 15 February 2023, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-68288727>.

But it is not just on the streets that British Jews have faced bigotry, it is online too. Antisemitic speech on social media has risen dramatically since the Hamas attacks, according to the Anti-Defamation League. Because of the decentralised nature of online platforms, antisemitic content posted by a user in one country can go viral and end up being seen by users in other countries. On X, in the week following 7 October alone, there was a 919% surge in anti-Jewish posts. Other platforms have seen similar trends. TikTok, in particular, has come under fire for allowing hate to spread unchecked. At a meeting last November, the actor Sacha Baron Cohen told TikTok executives point blank, “What is happening at TikTok is, it is creating the biggest antisemitic movement since the Nazis.”¹⁰

It should be clear by now that – in the space of the last few months – antisemitism has come back to the fore in the UK and around the world. But what should we do about it? Merely worrying about antisemitism, or denouncing it, is not enough. We need to understand it. More specifically, we need to understand it not in the abstract but in the *current context*.

Antisemitism stretches back thousands of years: historians call it “the world’s oldest hatred” for a reason. But it is not calcified; it is an ever-evolving hatred. As Noah Feldman, a professor at Harvard Law School, argued in *Time*, “antisemitism is actually a shape-shifting, protean, creative force. Antisemitism has managed to reinvent itself multiple times throughout history, each time keeping some of the old tropes around, while simultaneously creating new ones adapted to present circumstances. In each iteration, antisemitism reflects the ideological preoccupations of the moment.”¹¹ Feldman’s point is crucial. If we hope to repel antisemitism, we must first comprehend exactly what has been fuelling its return.

This research brief provides a primer on antisemitism in the UK in 2024. Given the corpus of material that has been written on antisemitism, you would be forgiven for thinking it is not needed. And yet, in the last few months, it has become all too obvious that there is ignorance in British society over what antisemitism is. Too many minimise antisemitism or only see it where it is convenient to their political agenda.

A clarification is in order; this brief hopes to provide it.

Its intended readership is the general public, including educators who wish to explain antisemitism to their students in a sober, analytical manner. But policymakers would also benefit from reading it. They must remind themselves of the full scope of anti-Jewish hatred. Alas they do not always seem to. In his Independent Review of Prevent, the UK Government’s programme against extremism, Sir William Shawcross wrote that “Prevent must better understand and tackle antisemitism where it is relevant to its work.”¹²

This research brief aims to increase understanding of antisemitism. It seeks to answer a simple but crucial question: What forms does Jew hatred take in contemporary Britain?

¹⁰ “Online Antisemitism Increased after Hamas Attack”, ADL, 11 September 2023, <https://www.adl.org/resources/blog/online-antisemitism-increased-after-hamas-attack>; David Mouriquand, “TikTok: ‘The biggest antisemitic movement since the Nazis’ says actor Sacha Baron Cohen”, *Euronews*, 20 November 2023, <https://www.euronews.com/culture/2023/11/20/tiktok-the-biggest-antisemitic-movement-since-the-nazis-says-actor-sacha-baron-cohen>.

¹¹ “Antisemitism: The World’s Oldest Hatred”, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee’s School of Continuing Education, <https://uwm.edu/sce/courses/anti-semitism-the-worlds-oldest-hatred/>; Noah Feldman, “The New Antisemitism”, *Time*, 27 February 2024, <https://time.com/6763293/antisemitism/>.

¹² William Shawcross CVO, “Independent Review of Prevent”, House of Commons, 8 February 2023, https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/63e26968d3bf7f17385a3421/Independent_Review_of_Prevent.pdf.

It is worth remembering here that, a century ago, there were three forms of antisemitism in Europe.¹³ The first, and oldest, was Christian antisemitism. It had its roots in both Catholic and Protestant theology, and blamed Jews for killing Jesus. The second was conspiratorial antisemitism, which emerged during the Industrial Revolution. It had an anti-capitalist component and depicted Jews as shadowy financiers hellbent on world domination. It also had an anti-communist component, which accused Jews of fomenting communist revolution. The third form was racial antisemitism. It was based on pseudo-science and regarded Jews as a lesser “race”. This is the form of antisemitism we most commonly associate with the Nazi persecution of Jews. But, in truth, Nazi antisemitism was also deeply indebted to Christian antisemitism and conspiratorial antisemitism.

So, what does the picture look like a century on?

On this point, French President Emmanuel Macron recently gave a speech on the nature of antisemitism. “Antisemitic hate,” he argued, “must always find new masks” to hide behind as well as “new ideologies to associate with”. Macron namechecked several throughout his speech, including “radical Islamism”, “anti-Zionism” and “Holocaust denial”.¹⁴

In similar fashion, this research brief identifies four loci of antisemitism in the UK today:

- **Far-right antisemitism**

This is the form of antisemitism that demands the least explanation. It encompasses neo-Nazism and Holocaust denial, white supremacy, xenophobia and ultra-nationalism. It is prevalent amongst white Britons on the far right and the “alt right”. But recent studies show that some of those antisemitic views, such as Holocaust denial, spill over into the general population.

- **Islamist antisemitism**

The hatred of Jews is a core tenet of Islamism, a political ideology derived yet distinct from Islam. It is not surprising, therefore, that Islamist extremists are antisemites. But new polling suggests that the issue of antisemitism is not confined to Islamists alone. According to new data, a subsection of British Muslims is biased against Jews and has antisemitic views.

- **Conspiratorial antisemitism**

Jews are frequently in the crosshairs of conspiracy theorists, whether with the so-called Great Replacement Theory or any number of widespread conspiracy theories. According to a recent study in *Nature*, people inclined to believe in conspiracy theories are more likely to be antisemitic.¹⁵

- **The new respectable antisemitism**

In recent years, many commentators have observed that we are witnessing the emergence of a “new” antisemitism.¹⁶ It stems from the far left and brings with it a veneer of intellectualism and academic respectability. It sees Jews primarily through the Israel–Palestine conflict and depicts them as “oppressors”, “colonialists” and even

¹³ Serge Bernstein, “The three ages of anti-Semitism”, *L’Histoire*, October 1991, <https://www.lhistoire.fr/node/27576>.

¹⁴ “Emmanuel Macron’s speech for the 80th anniversary of Crif,” *Le Figaro TV*, 18 March 2024, <https://video.lefigaro.fr/figaro/video/le-discours-demmanuel-macron-pour-les-80-ans-du-crif/>.

¹⁵ “Study reveals people most likely to hold antisemitic views”, King’s College London, 9 January 2024, <https://www.kcl.ac.uk/news/study-reveals-people-most-likely-to-hold-antisemitic-views>.

¹⁶ Feldman, “The New Antisemitism”.

“white supremacists”. Crucially, the new antisemitism does not oppose Jews *as Jews*. Instead, it claims to be merely anti-Zionist or anti-Israel. Here, a clarification is in order: it is, of course, not antisemitic to criticise the Israeli Government and its policies. Nor is it antisemitic to criticise Israeli actions in the ongoing Israel– Hamas war. But the new antisemitism hijacks the Israel–Palestine conflict to spread antisemitic tropes. As Feldman puts it, “because people’s ideas about Israel typically draw on older, pre-Israel ideas about Jews, criticism of Israel can borrow, often unconsciously, from older antisemitic myths.”¹⁷ And yet, by claiming to be rational, the new antisemitism is normalising anti-Jewish sentiment, especially among young people who are otherwise committed to opposing bigotry.

These four types of antisemitism are different. Still, they all end up reinforcing each other, particularly online. Think of antisemitism as a river with several tributaries. The tributaries – or types of antisemitism – might start off as distinct bodies of water, but ultimately they all flow into the same river. And once they have, it is not possible to tell them apart anymore. They have fed the mainstem.

It is important to keep this big picture in mind when thinking about how antisemitism functions today. To single out only one form of antisemitism, without acknowledging how it interacts with the others and amplifies them, would be akin to intellectual malpractice. And yet, too many today are guilty of such malpractice. Some on the right focus on Islamist antisemitism and the new respectable antisemitism but downplay the risk of far-right antisemitism and the danger of conspiratorial antisemitism. And the very opposite happens with some on the left.

But if we are to take antisemitism seriously, then we need to take *all* its forms seriously. We do not get to pick and choose in the fight against hatred.

Another analogy is in order. Imagine a doctor seeing a patient with multiple sclerosis (MS). The patient has several symptoms. He complains of having difficulty walking. He also has blurry vision and suffers from incontinence as well as muscle spasms. If the doctor only tries to cure one of the symptoms and ignores the others, then she would be guilty of medical malpractice. In order to provide the best therapy for her patient, the doctor has to realise that she is dealing with MS.

This means two things. First: for each symptom, she has to administer a specific treatment. The drug that will stop the muscle spasms is not the same as the one that will improve the patient’s vision. Second: even though the symptoms might demand different treatments, the doctor cannot treat them as being unrelated. She has to remember that all those symptoms are signs of the same underlying condition. As such, she must adopt a holistic approach. Similarly, with antisemitism, we must be able to develop tailor-made policies to combat each type of antisemitism while never losing sight of the fact that they are expressions of the same basic problem.

To take antisemitism seriously also means not succumbing to sensationalism. The hate crime figures speak for themselves: anti-Jewish incidents in the UK have flared up and are higher than they have been in several decades. This is appalling and distressing enough without having to resort to hyperbole.

Here, it is useful to put things into their proper context. We are living through a very significant, and serious, spike in antisemitism. We are not living through, as we sometimes

¹⁷ Feldman, “The New Antisemitism”.

hear, the 1930s again, when Adolf Hitler came to power in Germany. No mainstream British political party, certainly no political party with a chance to govern, is advocating antisemitic policies. Jews are well integrated into British society. To be able to combat antisemitism effectively, we need to raise the alarm without being alarmists. The Jewish community is already fearful enough, and there is no need to make the situation worse.

Finally, it bears saying that to shine a spotlight on antisemitism is not to ignore other forms of racism. There are no hierarchies when it comes to hate, and the fight against prejudice is not a zero-sum game. It is morally imperative to oppose all forms of hate. In recent months, the UK has also seen a huge rise in anti-Muslim acts. In the four-month period between 7 October 2023 and 7 February 2024, there were 2010 anti-Muslim incidents, or about 16 per day, according to the charity Tell MAMA. This represents a 335% increase from the same period the previous year.¹⁸

The propagators of anti-Jewish and anti-Muslim hatreds partially overlap. Take the Great Replacement Theory formulated by French author Renaud Camus. It is popular among the far right and has been picked up by nationalists in Europe and the United States, such as Eric Zemmour, who came fourth at the 2022 French presidential elections, and Marjorie Taylor Greene, a far-right Congresswoman.¹⁹

The Great Replacement Theory alleges that “elites” are engineering mass immigration into Europe from the Middle East and Africa. The goal: to “replace” native white populations with mainly Muslim immigrants. Camus dubs it “genocide by substitution”.²⁰

The anti-Muslim nature of the Great Replacement Theory is obvious. Its antisemitic connotations are more subtle, but equally vehement: “elites” is being used as a codeword for Jews. In fact, in many iterations of the theory, Jews are named outright. In 2017, white supremacists marched in Charlottesville, Virginia. They chanted, “Jews will not replace us.” And in 2018, a white supremacist killed 11 worshippers at a synagogue in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. His motive: members of the synagogue had helped refugees. He posted online: “Open you [*sic*] Eyes! It’s the filthy EVIL jews Bringing the Filthy EVIL Muslims into the Country!!”.²¹

It is a sobering reminder that antisemitism is often a harbinger of other hatreds. As Macron said in his speech, “Where antisemitism flourishes, other forms of hatred flourish too. Hatred of differences, of minorities, strangers, Muslims, women, homosexuals.”²²

¹⁸ Sara Monetta, “Anti-Muslim cases surge in UK since Hamas attacks, charity finds”, *BBC News*, 22 February 2024, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-68374372>; “Greatest Rise in Reported Anti-Muslim Hate Cases to Tell MAMA since Oct 7th”, Tell MAMA, 21 February 2024, <https://tellmamauk.org/greatest-rise-in-reported-anti-muslim-hate-cases-to-tell-mama-since-oct-7th/>.

¹⁹ Lara Bullens, “How France’s ‘great replacement’ theory conquered the global far right”, *France 24*, 8 November 2021, <https://www.france24.com/en/europe/20211108-how-the-french-great-replacement-theory-conquered-the-far-right>; Steve Rose, “A deadly ideology: how the ‘great replacement theory’ went mainstream”, *The Guardian*, 8 June 2022, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/jun/08/a-deadly-ideology-how-the-great-replacement-theory-went-mainstream>; Elaine Ganley, “Far-right French candidate makes taboo term his mantra”, *AP News*, 17 February 2022, <https://apnews.com/article/immigration-france-paris-campaigns-religion-339dc978e924e78da71cdf4c4ca86714>; Ben Sales, “GOP candidate shared anti-Semitic ‘Great Replacement’ video — watchdog”, *The Times of Israel*, 27 August 2020, <https://www.timesofisrael.com/gop-candidate-shared-anti-semitic-great-replacement-video-watchdog/>.

²⁰ Bullens, “How France’s ‘great replacement’ theory conquered the global far right”, *France 24*.

²¹ Dara Lind, “The conspiracy theory that led to the Pittsburgh synagogue shooting, explained”, *Vox*, 29 October 2018, <https://www.vox.com/2018/10/29/18037580/pittsburgh-shooter-anti-semitism-racist-jewish-caravan>; Emma Green, “Why the Charlottesville Marchers Were Obsessed with Jews”, *The Atlantic*, 15 August 2017, <https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2017/08/nazis-racism-charlottesville/536928/>; Masha Gessen, “Why the Tree of Life Shooter Was Fixated on the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society”, *The New Yorker*, 27 October 2018, <https://www.newyorker.com/news/our-columnists/why-the-tree-of-life-shooter-was-fixated-on-the-hebrew-immigrant-aid-society>.

²² “Emmanuel Macron’s speech for the 80th anniversary of Crif”, *Le Figaro TV*.

Taking a hard line on antisemitism is thus taking a hard line on all hatreds. Society as a whole is threatened when Jews are.

Far-Right Antisemitism

This is the form of antisemitism that most people are familiar with. It has its roots in Nazism and the Holocaust which exterminated six million Jews. Holocaust denial is its core tenet.

In the UK, the far right encompasses a range of neo-Nazis, neo-fascists and white supremacists as well as online alt right “influencers”.²³ Since 7 October 2023, they have set their sights on the Israel-Hamas war. It has allowed them to recycle their antisemitic propaganda and Holocaust denial.²⁴

Take the former leader of the British National Party (BNP) who wrote on Telegram, in a post which appears to have since been deleted: “Every Western European alive has had a lifetime of being shown those terrible pictures of the piles of corpses at Dachau and Belsen. How is this footage from Gaza any different? Only that the dead at Dachau & Belsen were the victims of callous neglect, supply lines bombed to oblivion and – most of all – typhus. Some were undoubtedly murdered by the Nazis, but most DIED.”²⁵

In a perverse twist on history, in recent months, some far-right groups have posed as friends of Israel and the Jewish people. Since Israel is fighting Hamas, these groups see the Jewish state as an ally of convenience. No one is – or should be – fooled when the far right uses Jews to spread hate against Muslims.

While the far right often holds the most vehement views against Jews, this does not mean that their anti-Jewish bigotry is entirely absent from the mainstream of British society.

Take specifically Holocaust remembrance. In 2019, a poll commissioned by the Holocaust Memorial Day Trust found that 5% of Britons “do not believe millions of Jews were systematically murdered by the Nazis”. Another 8% believed that “the scale of the genocide has been exaggerated”. This amounts to a total of 13% of Holocaust deniers among the British public.²⁶

Those figures are a reminder that Holocaust denial and Holocaust distortion, to use terms coined by the Holocaust Museum, are not limited to the far right but trickle down into wider society. This is happening just as historical memory of the Holocaust is receding. As of January 2024, there were only 245,000 Holocaust survivors still alive. Their median age is 86. This means that, ten years from now, there will be almost no one alive who actually experienced the Holocaust.²⁷

²³ “Holocaust Denial”, SPLC, <https://www.splcenter.org/fighting-hate/extremist-files/ideology/holocaust-denial>; Krystalle Pinilla, “From Left to Right: An Overview of the ‘Veiled’ Antisemitism Threat Landscape Online”, Institute for Strategic Dialogue, https://www.isdgglobal.org/digital_dispatches/from-left-to-right-an-overview-of-the-veiled-antisemitism-threat-landscape-online/.

²⁴ Elizabeth Dvoskin, “Growing Oct. 7 ‘truther’ groups say Hamas massacre was a false flag”, *The Washington Post*, 21 January 2024, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/technology/2024/01/21/hamas-attack-october-7-conspiracy-israel/>.

²⁵ Quoted in “State of Hate 2024”, Hope not Hate, p.57, <https://hopenothate.org.uk/state-of-hate-2024-divided-loyalties/>.

²⁶ Chris Baynes, “More than 2.6m Brits are Holocaust deniers, polls finds”, *The Independent*, 27 January 2019, <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/holocaust-memorial-day-poll-uk-jews-murdered-nazi-germany-hope-not-hate-a8746741.html>.

²⁷ Kirsten Grieshaber, “Almost 80 years after the Holocaust, 245,000 Jewish survivors are still alive”, *AP News*, 23 January 2024, <https://apnews.com/article/holocaust-survivors-numbers-report-claims-conference-890c9ad6aa7bc1cf99e1cbe40e61c013>.

At precisely this juncture, ignorance about the Holocaust is reaching unprecedented levels. According to a national survey conducted in 2021, 52% of British adults “did not know that six million Jews were murdered during the Holocaust, with 22% thinking that two million or fewer Jews were killed.”²⁸

This basic ignorance cannot be explained by a lack of information, or a lack of access to information. Holocaust education is a core part of the school curriculum in the UK. And, over the years, there have been many high-quality books, documentaries and films about various aspects of the Holocaust. They are easily accessible online.

But, in fact, that’s part of the problem. A likely explanation for the ignorance about the Holocaust is “information overload”: there is simply too much information online, and algorithms do not reward educational content. This means that important information is easily ignored or overlooked. And, of course, there is a lot of misinformation online. Almost one in three British adults, according to the 2021 survey, “reported seeing Holocaust denial or distortion online”.²⁹

It is therefore necessary to update Holocaust education for the internet age. It is not enough anymore to simply teach Holocaust history. It is also paramount to teach media literacy alongside it. People, starting with students, have to develop critical thinking skills so that they do not fall prey to Holocaust conspiracies online.

The teaching of history has to include teaching historical methodology: ascertaining facts, checking sources and understanding the ways the past can be weaponised in the present.

In recent months, the Henry Jackson Society (HJS) has been delivering a series of anti-disinformation workshops to British university students. They help students identify “fake news” and make it less likely they will fall for it. The same sort of programmes have to be rolled out at the national level. They must include a module on Holocaust history and Holocaust denial in the digital age.

Islamist Antisemitism

Much like far-right antisemitism, Islamist antisemitism is a form of antisemitism which we have come to know well in recent years. Islamism is an extremist political ideology, derived from a literalist interpretation of scripture. Antisemitism is at its heart. As the German Domestic Intelligence Service put it: “Antisemitism is an essential ideological element of all Islamist extremist currents.”³⁰ Put simply, Islamist extremists loathe Jews. They see them as powerful enemies who control global institutions.

Islamist antisemitism has translated into a string of anti-Jewish terrorist attacks. For instance, in 2012, an Islamist terrorist attacked a Jewish school in Toulouse, France, killing three children and a rabbi. Three years later, during the Charlie Hebdo attacks, an Islamist terrorist linked to ISIS attacked a kosher supermarket in Paris. He took the staff and clients hostage and killed four people. And in 2022, a British Islamist from Blackburn

²⁸ “Survey exposes lack of knowledge about the Holocaust”, UCL, 10 November 2021, <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/ioe/news/2021/nov/survey-exposes-lack-knowledge-about-holocaust>.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ “Islamist extremism and Islamist terrorism”, German Domestic Intelligence Services, https://www.verfassungsschutz.de/EN/topics/islamist-extremism-and-islamist-terrorism/islamist-extremism-and-islamist-terrorism_article.html.

travelled to Texas. He went into a synagogue and took four congregants as hostages. He was later shot dead by police.³¹

In the UK, there was a sharp rise in Islamist antisemitic incidents in 2023, according to CST. It found that “83 showed evidence of Islamist extremist ideology, significantly higher than the eight such incidents recorded in 2022”. It also recorded that “One hundred and twenty-two antisemitic incidents ... in 2023 contained discourse relating to Islam and Muslims, over four times the 27 reported in 2022.”³²

Unsurprisingly, Islamist propaganda online is a vector of antisemitism. Since 7 October 2023, Islamist groups have used the Israel-Hamas war to advance their anti-Jewish agenda, according to the Anti-Defamation League (ADL).³³ Moreover, Hugo Micheron, a leading expert on jihadism and radicalisation, has found that Islamist indoctrination circulates widely on social media, especially on TikTok. “Salafist content on TikTok is abundant,” he told French newspaper *Le Figaro* in March 2024. “And I don’t understand why we are not preoccupied over the fact that the platform favoured by 15 to 25-year-olds to socialise and inform themselves is over-invested by all sorts of religious networks, especially Salafist ones.” Micheron warned against the deleterious impact this is having: “If children spent several hours a day on TikTok exposed to Salafist content, then obviously schoolteachers will have difficulty speaking about the Shoah or colonisation in history classes.”³⁴

We have already seen how far-right antisemitism is not confined to the far right alone but seeps into wider society, in part through social media. The same dynamic is at play with Islamist antisemitism. It is not limited to hard-line Islamists. According to new data, a section of British Muslims hold views that echo antisemitic talking points.

A March 2024 poll of British Muslims commissioned by HJS found that 46% “say Jews have too much power over UK government policy”. (Assigning undue political influence to Jews, a tiny minority, is a longstanding antisemitic trope.) Moreover, 39% “say Jews have too much power over the UK financial system” and 41% that “Jews have too much power over the UK media”.³⁵

Another poll of British Muslims from 2019, also commissioned by HJS and published in a report by Dr Rakib Ehsan, found similar sentiments, although the figures were 5 to 10% lower on average. To wit: 34.1% agreed that “Jews have too much control of the global banking system”; 33.6% agreed that “Jews have too much control of the global media system” and 33.1% agreed that “Jews have too much control over global political leadership”.³⁶

³¹ “Mohammed Merah: Who was Toulouse gunman?”, *BBC News*, 22 March 2012, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-17456541>; Kim Willsher, “Paris court hears how kosher supermarket attacker killed four”, *The Guardian*, 21 September 2020, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/sep/21/paris-court-kosher-supermarket-attacker-amedy-coulibaly-killed-four-charlie-hebdo>; “Texas synagogue hostage-taker was known to MI5”, *BBC News*, 18 January 2022, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-60038207>.

³² “Antisemitic Incidents Report 2023”, *CST Blog*, 15 February 2024, <https://cst.org.uk/news/blog/2024/02/15/antisemitic-incidents-report-2023>.

³³ “Islamic State, Al-Qaeda Call for Violence Against Jewish Communities Following October 7 Attack”, ADL, 8 February 2024, <https://www.adl.org/resources/blog/islamic-state-al-qaeda-call-violence-against-jewish-communities-following-october-7>; Elizabeth Dwoskin, “Growing Oct. 7 ‘truther’ groups say Hamas massacre was a false flag”, *The Washington Post*, 21 January 2024, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/technology/2024/01/21/hamas-attack-october-7-conspiracy-israel/>.

³⁴ Martin Bernier, “Entretien: Hugo Micheron”, *Le Figaro Weekend*, 29 March 2024, <https://www.lefigaro.fr/vox/monde/hugo-micheron-gaza-asie-centrale-tiktok-le-djihadisme-se-redeploie-sur-tous-les-fronts-20240329>.

³⁵ “British Muslim and general public attitudes polling”, J. L. Partners, March 2024.

³⁶ Rakib Ehsan, “Muslim Anti-Semitism in Contemporary Great Britain”, *The Henry Jackson Society*, March 2020, pp.24-25, <https://henryjacksonsociety.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/HJS-British-Muslim-Anti-Semitism-Report-web-1.pdf>.

Such findings are not limited to Muslims in the UK. They also apply in mainland Europe.

According to the Institute for the Study of Global Antisemitism and Policy, which surveyed antisemitic sentiment among European Muslims back in 2015, “The review of surveys from different European countries demonstrates that the level of antisemitic attitudes is significantly higher among Muslims than among non-Muslims, although many European Muslims do not share antisemitic beliefs.”³⁷

To contextualise these findings, we reached out to an imam based in Britain, who has been involved in the fight against antisemitism and anti-Muslim hatred. He agreed to speak on condition of anonymity.

According to the imam, perceptions that Jews have too much power in society have become “normalised” in sections of the British Muslim community. “These are the views that some Muslims hold,” he explains, “and when you ask them [about those views], they cannot substantiate them.” He adds, “It’s the result of rumours and conspiracies being circulated and people believing in them.”

As the imam sees it, there is a lack of awareness in some parts of the Muslim community that those views are problematic or bigoted. This is akin to what scholars of racism call “unconscious bias”, whereby people do not realise that they hold prejudiced views against certain groups.³⁸

British journalist Mehdi Hasan made a similar point in *The New Statesman* in 2013. “It pains me to have to admit this but anti-Semitism isn’t just tolerated in some sections of the British Muslim community; it’s routine and commonplace,” Hasan wrote. “Any Muslims reading this article – if they are honest with themselves – will know instantly what I am referring to. It’s our dirty little secret. You could call it the banality of Muslim anti-Semitism.”³⁹

“Some Muslims don’t realise that there is a problem with antisemitism,” the imam confirms. This is exacerbated by the fact that Muslims themselves are the victims of prejudice.

Moreover, the imam continues, there is a difference between the antisemitism found on the far right and that found in some Muslim communities. “Far-right antisemites are skinheads, Hitler lovers, whatever you might call them,” he says. “They are proud antisemites and they know that.” In other words, far-right antisemites know that antisemitic views are beyond the pale.

But, the imam continues, this is usually not the case among those Muslims who hold antisemitic views. “They don’t know,” he says. “They see them as part of their beliefs.” To back his point, he cites the case of Lord Nazir Ahmed who was a peer in the House of Lords.

In 2013, Lord Ahmed was jailed for 12 weeks for his involvement in a fatal road crash that had taken place years earlier. He blamed his sentence on a Jewish conspiracy. “My case

³⁷ Gunther Jikeli, “Antisemitic attitudes among Muslims in Europe: A Survey Review”, Institute for the Study of Global Antisemitism and Policy, May 2015, https://isgap.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/05/Jikeli_Antisemitic_Attitudes_among_Muslims_in_Europe1.pdf.

³⁸ Hannah Devlin, “Unconscious bias: what is it and can it be eliminated?”, *The Guardian*, 2 December 2018, <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2018/dec/02/unconscious-bias-what-is-it-and-can-it-be-eliminated>.

³⁹ Mehdi Hasan, “The sorry truth is that the virus of anti-Semitism has infected the British Muslim community”, *The New Statesman*, 21 March 2013, <https://www.newstatesman.com/politics/2013/03/sorry-truth-virus-anti-semitism-has-infected-british-muslim-community>. Reprinted on the Muslim Institute website: <https://musliminstitute.org/freethinking/culture/sorry-truth-virus-anti-semitism-has-infected-british-muslim-community>.

became more critical because I went to Gaza to support Palestinians. My Jewish friends who own newspapers and TV channels opposed this,” Lord Ahmed alleged.⁴⁰

So what has caused such antisemitic beliefs to spread within the Muslim community? The culprit is Islamist propaganda and, as the imam puts it, “fake news”. He explains, “You know, fake news didn’t just happen during the Trump era. It has been around, and some Muslims have believed in fake news for a very long period of time.”

The Muslim Brotherhood has been central to spreading antisemitism. The influential Islamist movement originated in Egypt in the early 20th century and has chapters in Europe. As the Hudson Institute notes, it has a long history of anti-Jewish invective, which continues to this day.⁴¹ This is widely accepted. Historians Brendan Simms and Charlie Laderman, for instance, point to the writings of Brotherhood leader Sayyid Qutb in the 1950s and 1960s. Qutb wrote that “world Jewry’s purpose is to eliminate all limitations... so that the Jews may penetrate into [the] body politic of the whole world and then may be free to perpetuate their evil designs”.⁴² Even those who have argued that the Muslim Brotherhood can be a “moderate” influence, such as Robert S. Leiken and Steven Brooke in 2007, have acknowledged that “Brotherhood literature has expressed hatred for all Jews, not just ‘Zionists’.”⁴³

Moreover, as Lord Ahmed’s remarks show, antisemitic attitudes among British Muslims cannot be detached from the contentious issue of Israel and Palestine. For decades, the imam explains, Islamist propaganda have used the Israel–Palestine conflict to spread antisemitic disinformation within Muslim communities. This has only intensified since 7 October.

This can be observed in the most recent polling data. For instance, according to the March 2024 poll, only “24% of British Muslims believe Hamas committed murder and rape in Israel on October 7th.” (39% say that “Hamas did not commit murder and rape” and 38% say they “don’t know”.) Denial about 7 October is higher among younger Muslims than older ones.⁴⁴ This would confirm that it stems, at least in part, from the online propaganda which Micheron warned about.

“It can be very frustrating sometimes,” the imam says. “You see your fellow Muslim man and woman who are completely in denial of the very, very obvious.” He adds that this denial can sometimes amount to wilful ignorance.

So, how can this change? As the imam sees it, there needs to be more voices in the Muslim community who confront antisemitism and challenge the disinformation prevalent online.

In this regard, he says scripture can be an ally. The imam is the first one to point out that this is not automatically the case. Like with all religious texts, it is a matter of interpretation. There are verses, which Islamists use to propagate their beliefs, that present Jews as enemies. But there are also other verses, which Islamists ignore, which

⁴⁰ “UK legislator sorry for blaming legal troubles on Jews”, *The Times of Israel*, 31 March 2013, <https://www.timesofisrael.com/uk-legislator-sorry-for-blaming-legal-troubles-on-jews/>.

⁴¹ Brendan Simms and Charlie Laderman, “The return of the ‘longest hatred’”, *The New Statesman*, 22 November 2023, <https://www.newstatesman.com/world/2023/11/return-longest-hatred-anti-semitism>; Sarah Schlesinger, “A History of Hatred: The Muslim Brotherhood and Anti-Semitism”, Hudson Institute, 19 December 2011, <https://www.hudson.org/human-rights/a-history-of-hatred-the-muslim-brotherhood-and-anti-semitism>.

⁴² Simms and Laderman, “The return of the ‘longest hatred’”, *The New Statesman*.

⁴³ Ibid.; Robert S. Leiken and Steven Brooke, “The Moderate Muslim Brotherhood”, *Foreign Affairs*, March/April 2007, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/middle-east/moderate-muslim-brotherhood>.

⁴⁴ “British Muslim and general public attitudes polling”, J. L. Partners, March 2024.

do the very opposite. “The Quran recognises the Torah and the Bible as divine texts from God,” the imam says, adding, “There are Quranic verses that talk about some of the kindness to be shown towards Jews” and others which can be interpreted to “foster a more cordial, friendly and peaceful coexistence between Jews and Muslims.”

It comes down, then, to a theological contest between moderates and radicals. It is important for British authorities to support the moderates and prop them up. They must receive funding and protection to be able to make their case without fear of receiving threats from Islamist groups.

History can also be an ally in countering the Islamist narrative. According to the imam, there is a need to “reclaim” the long history of Muslim–Jewish coexistence. That is not to say that Muslim–Jewish relations have been entirely rosy through the ages. There have been many instances of Jews suffering from antisemitic hate in Muslim societies. But, here again, much like with theological interpretation, it is a matter of where the emphasis is put. As Sir Martin Gilbert, who chronicled the history of Jews in Muslim countries, summarised: “Past relations between Jews and Muslims have often been harmonious and can be so again.”⁴⁵

The imam argues that many Muslims have not been taught this inspiring history. “I believe education is key here,” he says. For instance, the imam recounts, Mohammed took a Jewish wife. Jews are considered “people of the book” under Islam. And there were many periods when Jews lived peacefully under Muslim rulers.

Another little-known fact is that Saladin, the famed Muslim leader who took Jerusalem back during the Crusades, had a Jewish doctor, the scholar Maimonides. “Not many Muslims know that Saladin used Maimonides as his physician,” the imam notes.

This history should be shared far and wide. It is not just Muslims and Jews who should learn about it, but everyone. We should teach it in schools. It has to make its way into the UK history curriculum or the citizenship curriculum. And it should be part of a broader effort to educate the public about the history of coexistence and tolerance. In that regard, it would be wise to be more proactive. The UK, for instance, could create a Special Envoy to Promote Coexistence. He or she would work with community leaders and online influencers to create content that enhances social cohesion.

Conspiratorial Antisemitism

“If the Jew did not exist, the antisemite would invent him,” wrote Jean-Paul Sartre, a titan of 20th-century philosophy.⁴⁶

There have always been wild conspiracies about “the Jews”. For centuries, Christians believed that Jews murdered Christian children and used their blood to bake matzo, which Jews eat during Passover. In the 19th century, the Rothschild banking family became the subject of a spate of antisemitic conspiracy theories alleging that they were plotting the demise of the Christian West. But no book has done more to spread conspiratorial antisemitism than *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, which was published at the start of the 20th century in Tsarist Russia. It popularised the canard that Jews are hellbent on

⁴⁵ Martin Gilbert, “Past Precedents for Muslim and Jewish Peace”, *History Today*, August 2010, <https://www.historytoday.com/archive/path-peace-muslims-and-jews>.

⁴⁶ Jean-Paul Sartre, *Anti-Semite and Jew*, trans. George J. Becker (New York: Schocken Books, 1976), p.8.

global domination. Beware, said *The Protocols*, no matter what is going on, “the Jews” are the ones pulling the strings.⁴⁷

This canard still resonates today. According to a poll from March 2024 commissioned by HJS, 17% of Britons believe that “Jews have too power over the UK financial system” and 28% “don’t know” whether they do. Moreover, 16% say that “Jews have too much power over UK government policy” and 20% say that “Jews have too much power over US foreign policy”.⁴⁸

But it is not just that age-old antisemitic conspiracy theories are still around. New ones are also cropping up and other old antisemitic tropes are being recycled in light of current events. This happened during the 2020 Covid pandemic. As soon as the virus started to spread conspiracy theorists were already blaming Jews. According to the CST, which investigated anti-Jewish speech during the pandemic, there was an “explosion of antisemitic conspiracy theories that began to populate social media as soon as news emerged of a dangerous new virus spreading across the world.”⁴⁹

Some conspiracy theorists wrote, “Corona virus is a hoax by the vax k*kes teamed with the banker k*kes”. Others called Covid-19 “the Jew Flu” or “the Holocough”. Antisemitic memes went viral on far-right platforms like 4-chan and Gab. One read, “Ashkenazi Jews have 66.6% higher chance of getting Corona Virus due to larger than usual naval cavities.”⁵⁰

According to *The New Statesman*, the pandemic caused “a major spike” in “anti-Semitic hate speech” online.⁵¹ It should not be forgotten that this was also accompanied by a huge rise in anti-Chinese hate speech. (Because the virus originated in Wuhan, China, anti-Chinese and more broadly anti-Asian hate spiked during the pandemic.)⁵²

Antisemitism was also part of the 5G coronavirus conspiracy theory, which alleged that 5G towers were somehow spreading Covid. According to the Global Network on Extremism & Technology, the conspiracy became prominent in far-right circles.⁵³

Whatever the next big conspiracy theory is, chances are Jews will feature in it for they loom large in the conspiratorial imagination. This is no exaggeration. A January 2024 study published in *Nature*, the world’s leading science journal, found that “people who believe in conspiracy theories are more likely to have antisemitic opinions”. This has a dual implication. It means that conspiracy theorists are more likely to be antisemitic and thus blame Jews, but also that people with antisemitic opinions are more likely to fall for conspiracy theories.⁵⁴

⁴⁷ “Blood Libel”, *Holocaust Encyclopedia*, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, <https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/article/blood-libel>; “Conspiracy theorists are obsessed with the Rothschild family”, *The Economist*, 9 September 2023, <https://www.economist.com/culture/2023/09/09/conspiracy-theorists-are-obsessed-with-the-rothschild-family/>; Simms and Laderman, “The return of the ‘longest hatred’”, *The New Statesman*.

⁴⁸ “British Muslim and general public attitudes polling”, J. L. Partners, March 2024.

⁴⁹ “Coronavirus and the plague of antisemitism”, CST, 2020, p.3, <https://cst.org.uk/data/file/d/9/Coronavirus%20and%20the%20plague%20of%20antisemitism.1615560607.pdf>.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, pp.7-9.

⁵¹ Sarah Manavis, “Covid-19 has caused a major spike in anti-Chinese and anti-Semitic hate speech”, *The New Statesman*, 29 April 2020, <https://www.newstatesman.com/science-tech/2020/04/covid-19-coronavirus-anti-chinese-antisemitic-hate-speech-5g-conspiracy-theory>.

⁵² Nadine White, “Anti-Asian hate speech surged by 1,662% during the pandemic, study finds”, *The Independent*, 15 November 2021, <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/anti-asian-hate-speech-covid-b1957474.html>.

⁵³ Alexander Meleagrou-Hitchens and Blyth Crawford, “5G and the Far Right: How Extremists Capitalise on Coronavirus Conspiracies”, Global Network on Extremism & Conspiracy, 21 April 2020, <https://gnet-research.org/2020/04/21/5g-and-the-far-right-how-extremists-capitalise-on-coronavirus-conspiracies/>.

⁵⁴ “Study reveals people most likely to hold antisemitic views”, King’s College London.

This applies across the political spectrum. “Whether we look at the left or the right of the political spectrum, we find people who are antisemitic and people who aren’t,” said Daniel Allington, one of the study’s authors. He continued, “Our findings help us to get beyond the question of whether antisemitism is more of a problem on the right or on the left. What we found is that antisemitic views are more likely among conspiracy theorists, revolutionaries, and people who see dictatorship as an acceptable form of government.”⁵⁵

In recent years, we have come to realise how noxious disinformation and conspiracy theories can be. Many agree that they pose a grave danger to liberal democracy and pave the way for authoritarianism.⁵⁶ But it is seldom said that so does antisemitism. In fact, in practice, it is often impossible to distinguish between the two. They feed each other.

As David Hirsh, one of the authors of the *Nature* study, argued: “On the one hand, antisemites who believe the democratic state to be a trick played on ‘the people’ by ‘the Jews’ might feel justified in tearing it down and taking repressive action against those responsible. On the other hand, political movements that embrace conspiracy fantasies may feel justified in repressing political opponents, are not afraid to overthrow the democratic state, and are also likely to be open to antisemitism.”⁵⁷

Hirsh’s insight leads to an important conclusion: the fight against disinformation must be coupled with the fight against antisemitism. This requires, first and foremost, for policymakers to understand that misinformation and antisemitism are deeply intertwined. Some commentators have argued that the UK’s Counter-Disinformation Unit, which flags up fake news online, has not been up to the task thus far, especially when it comes to conspiracies related to the Israel-Hamas war.⁵⁸

The New Respectable Antisemitism

On 11 March 2024, the prestigious American magazine *Time* ran a cover story titled, “The New Antisemitism”. Written by Noah Feldman, a professor at Harvard Law School, it argues that “The core of [the] new antisemitism lies in the idea that Jews are not a historically oppressed people seeking self-preservation but instead oppressors: imperialists, colonialists, and even white supremacists.”⁵⁹ This antisemitism has its roots on the far left – specifically among anti-Zionist activist groups.

Before going any further, let us be clear. It is not antisemitic to criticise the Israeli Government or individual Israeli operations in the ongoing Israel-Hamas war. Indeed, many Israelis themselves do. Nor is it antisemitic to support the cause of Palestinian statehood or to want to alleviate the plight of the Palestinians.

But that is not what anti-Zionists are about. Anti-Zionist activism has little to do with actually helping Palestinians or finding solutions to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

⁵⁵ “Study reveals people most likely to hold antisemitic views”, King’s College London.

⁵⁶ Gabriel R. Sanchez and Keesha Middlemass, “Misinformation is eroding the public’s confidence in democracy”, Brookings, 26 July 2022, <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/misinformation-is-eroding-the-publics-confidence-in-democracy/>.

⁵⁷ “Study reveals people most likely to hold antisemitic views”, King’s College London.

⁵⁸ Zoe Crowther, “Government’s Counter Disinformation Unit Falls Short On Curbing False Israel-Palestine Posts”, *Politics Home*, 19 October 2023, <https://www.politicshome.com/news/article/government-counter-disinformation-unit-israel-gaza-conflict>.

⁵⁹ Feldman, “The New Antisemitism”.

Instead, it denies Israel's right to exist and wishes to dismantle it. As David Hirsh argues, by singling out the Jewish state, anti-Zionism often serves as a smokescreen for a pernicious form of antisemitism.

Hirsh breaks down how it functions in his book *Contemporary Left Antisemitism*. "Antizionists have created a whole new '-ism' around their campaign against Israel – a way of thinking about the whole world," Hirsh writes. "Within this antizionist framework, a caricature of Israel is endowed with huge symbolic significance. It is a significance which relates only here and there to the actual State of Israel, to its complex conflict with the Palestinians, to its relationship with the Arab and Islamic states which neighbour it and to the diversity of existing Israeli men and women which inhabit it."

Hirsh continues, "If the Palestinians stand, in the antizionist imagination, as symbolic of all the victims of 'the west' or 'imperialism', then Israel is thrust into the centre of the world as being symbolic of oppression everywhere. Like antisemitism, antizionism imagines Jews as being central to all that is bad in the world."⁶⁰ It therefore recycles a longstanding antisemitic trope.

In recent years, anti-Zionism has been on the ascendancy. This can be explained by the emergence of what historian Simon Sebag Montefiore calls the "decolonization narrative".⁶¹ Popular on American college campuses, it has turbocharged anti-Zionism.

In a recent article in *The Atlantic*, Sebag Montefiore spelt out how: "The decolonization narrative has dehumanized Israelis to the extent that otherwise rational people excuse, deny, or support barbarity. It holds that Israel is an 'imperialist-colonialist' force, that Israelis are 'settler-colonialists,' and that Palestinians have a right to eliminate their oppressors. (On October 7, we all learned what that meant.) It casts Israelis as 'white' or 'white-adjacent' and Palestinians as 'people of color.'"⁶²

And since Israelis – or Zionists – are oppressors, they cannot be discriminated against. "The argument," Sebag Montefiore explains, "is that it is impossible for an 'oppressor' to be the subject of racism. Jews therefore cannot suffer racism, because they are regarded as 'white' and 'privileged.'"⁶³ This ends up downplaying or denying antisemitism when it is directed at Israelis or at Zionist Jews. (The vast majority of Jews who live outside of Israel, it must be remembered, are Zionists.)⁶⁴

This heralds the appearance of a new form of antisemitism, one that is respectable and comes with a veneer of intellectualism. It does not explicitly incite hate against Jews. And yet it casts suspicions on them.

As Feldman argues, it "preserves vestiges of the trope that Jews exercise vast power. It creatively updates that narrative to contemporary circumstances and current cultural preoccupations with the nature of power and injustice."⁶⁵ In so doing, it whitewashes

⁶⁰ David Hirsh, *Contemporary Left Antisemitism* (London: Routledge, 2017), xvi.

⁶¹ Simon Sebag Montefiore, "The decolonization narrative is dangerous and false", *The Atlantic*, 27 October 2023, <https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2023/10/decolonization-narrative-dangerous-and-false/675799/>.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ "Are the majority of British Jews Zionists?", *Full Fact*, 26 September 2018, <https://fullfact.org/news/are-majority-british-jews-zionists/>; Daniel Ben-David, "Eight out of ten British Jews identify as Zionist, says new poll," *The Jewish Chronicle*, 28 December 2023, <https://www.thejc.com/news/uk/eight-out-of-ten-british-jews-identify-as-zionist-says-new-poll-vu3f391c>; Bari Weiss, "Stop Being Shocked," *Tablet*, 15 October 2020, <https://www.tabletmag.com/sections/news/articles/stop-being-shocked>.

⁶⁵ Feldman, "The New Antisemitism".

antisemitic prejudice. And it gives cover for calling out Jews by pretending to oppose Israel or “Zionists”.

In recent years, this new respectable antisemitism has been winning over university students and the younger generations. This was corroborated in a January 2024 survey by YouGov and the Campaign Against Antisemitism. It found that “young people in Britain are more likely to believe a variety of antisemitic tropes about Jews and Israel, including doubts about the trustworthiness of Jewish people”.⁶⁶

For instance, more than 25% of 18- to 24-year-olds believe “in antisemitic conspiracy theories such as the belief that Israel can get away with anything because its supporters control the media.” Moreover, in that age group, almost 10% “do not believe that Jewish people are as loyal to Britain as other Brits” and more than 25% believe “that Israel and its supporters are a bad influence on our democracy”. All these figures are significantly higher among 18- to 24-year-olds than in older age groups.⁶⁷

These findings confirm that the new respectable antisemitism is gaining ground amongst young people, who are otherwise opposed to racism.

The task now is to roll back the tide: we cannot let the Israeli–Palestinian conflict be weaponised to spread bigotry against Jews. To do this, we must set the record straight and correct the gross simplifications of the decolonisation narrative. As historians Brendan Simms and Charlie Laderman recently argued in *The New Statesman*: “The crude comparison with European colonialism not only erases thousands of years of Jewish history in the land; it has also taught a generation of students that Israel is a uniquely illegitimate state more deserving of condemnation than any other.”⁶⁸ A more balanced history has to be taught in schools and universities. This does not mean giving a one-sided account of the birth of the State of Israel. But it means giving a sober, nuanced account which reflects historical reality.

There is an important caveat to be made: we must rely on universal values in opposing the decolonisation narrative. The new antisemitism cannot – and must not – become a sensationalist issue in the culture wars. We cannot let right-wing extremists hijack it to advance their divisive agenda.

Conclusion and Policy Recommendations

Prescribing policy recommendations for antisemitism, which has been around for millennia, can feel like a fool’s errand. But antisemitism’s staying power is precisely why recommendations must be specific. There are, of course, no silver bullets against antisemitism. No single policy can solve the problem once and for all. The goal here is not to provide an exhaustive roadmap to defeating antisemitism. It is simply to suggest paths for further reflection.

It starts, however, with understanding that there are several types of antisemitism. British policymakers know that antisemitism is a problem, but they are not always aware of the

⁶⁶ “Poll finds ‘frightening’ rates of antisemitism among young British public”, *The Times of Israel*, 24 January 2024, <https://www.timesofisrael.com/poll-finds-frightening-rates-of-antisemitism-among-young-british-public/>.

⁶⁷ Eliana Jordan, “Over a third of 18-24-year-olds believe Israel treats Palestinians like Nazis treated Jews, according to new poll”, *The Jewish Chronicle*, 24 January 2024, <https://www.thejc.com/news/uk/almost-one-third-of-british-adults-believe-israel-treats-palestinians-like-nazis-treated-jews-according-to-new-poll-tqjlt8e>.

⁶⁸ Simms and Laderman, “The return of the ‘longest hatred’”, *The New Statesman*.

full scope of the problem. It is paramount that they comprehend that there are several forms of antisemitism in the UK today, which are distinct yet overlap.

Rather than launch a general public campaign against antisemitism, public authorities must zero in on these forms of antisemitism – far-right, Islamist, conspiratorial, and the new respectable antisemitism – and design specific campaigns to target each one.

1. We must rethink Holocaust education for the 21st century

It is no longer enough to simply teach students the history of the Holocaust. To stop the spread of Holocaust denial on social media and stem far-right antisemitism, we also need to equip them with the tools to spot disinformation. Concretely speaking, this means that *how* the Holocaust is taught in the curriculum has to be updated. Alongside it, students must also be taught about Holocaust denial and the way it spreads online. They have to be trained in how to spot it, since almost one in three Britons say they have been exposed to Holocaust conspiracies online.⁶⁹ This will help to reduce the number of Britons who do not know the basic facts about the Holocaust.

2. We need to construct a powerful counter-narrative to Islamist propaganda

In order to stem Islamist antisemitic propaganda, there needs to be a counter-narrative. It must emphasise the long history of Muslim–Jewish coexistence and the close proximity of Islam and Judaism, and counter those who would draw on darker aspects of Muslim–Jewish history and deploy more incendiary religious verses to advance their contemporary campaigns of hate. British authorities – including the Home Office and the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities – must act as a catalyst here. They must champion Muslim leaders who oppose antisemitism and who, more broadly, speak out against Islamism. This means two things. First, authorities must give them the financial means to mount public campaigns. Second, they must also provide them with protection since they are likely to receive threats from Islamists. The UK could also enlist the help of some of its Muslim allies, such as the United Arab Emirates and the Kingdom of Morocco, and build on their existing efforts to promote Muslim–Jewish coexistence.

3. We need to integrate the fight against antisemitism and racism with anti-disinformation efforts

Conspiracy theories, sooner or later, end up targeting Jews as well as other minority groups. It is not possible to talk of countering disinformation without also talking about countering antisemitism and racism. But this approach is not yet mainstream. The UK Government’s RESIST 2 report, which is billed as “a counter-disinformation toolkit” to help organisations better communicate, does not once use the words “antisemitism”, “antisemitic” or “Jewish”.⁷⁰ The next RESIST report must be updated to reflect how intertwined antisemitism and conspiratorial thinking are. Moreover, fact-checking tools designed to be used by the public could also highlight the antisemitic tropes of various conspiracies.

4. We need a forward strategy against hatred. The first step: the Prime Minister should appoint a Special Envoy for Tolerance and Coexistence

Since 2016, the United Arab Emirates has had a Ministry of Tolerance and Coexistence. Its remit: “overseeing and implementing the pillars of the ‘National Tolerance Program’” which

⁶⁹ “Survey exposes lack of knowledge about the Holocaust”, UCL.

⁷⁰ “RESIST 2 Counter-Disinformation Toolkit”, UK Government Communication Service, <https://gcs.civilservice.gov.uk/publications/resist-2-counter-disinformation-toolkit/>.

coordinates a wide range of cultural and educational initiatives across the Emirates.⁷¹ The UK must follow suit. The first step: to appoint a Special Envoy for Tolerance and Coexistence, tasked with rolling out a campaign promoting religious pluralism and mutual understanding. This campaign could include intercommunity events; the production of a documentary series highlighting the value of coexistence; and a social media campaign using like-minded celebrities and influencers. This would be more than a PR stunt. For too long, we have had a defensive approach to antisemitism and racism. We wait for bigotry to appear, then we denounce it and fund programmes to reduce it. But that is merely calming the waters until there is another storm. We need to be much more proactive and to prevent that storm from happening in the first place.

⁷¹ “About”, Ministry of Tolerance and Coexistence, United Arab Emirates, <https://www.tolerance.gov.ae/ministry>.



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