

AJC Policy: Countering Antisemitism and Confronting Hatred at Home and Abroad

Antisemitism is experiencing a resurgence at home and abroad. In the U.S., its revival threatens societal values and undermines the understanding of what it means to be American. Overseas, anti-Jewish sentiment is spreading, threatening physical security and making it more difficult for Jews to practice their religion or safely and openly identify as Jews. What's more, antisemitism is no longer operating on the fringes; it has gained a foothold across the American political spectrum and abroad, and is increasingly prevalent among prominent political parties and leaders. **Opposition to antisemitism and hatred in all its forms must be unequivocal, and U.S. leadership on this issue must be restored.**

Modern-day antisemitism takes many forms. Recent incidents of violent antisemitism in Halle, Germany, at the Tree of Life Synagogue in Pittsburgh, and the Chabad of Poway, where Jewish worshippers were targeted simply for being Jews demonstrates the extraordinary depth of unmitigated hatred. The reemergence of old antisemitic tropes such as accusing Jews of undue influence in society, dual loyalty, [responsibility for the spread of disease \(in this case the coronavirus\), and profiting from the vaccine](#), have empowered those who wish to cause harm. Antisemitism also drives Holocaust distortion and denial—spreading at an alarming rate in the nations of Europe that carried out these atrocities just two generations ago. Other forms of Jew hatred include antisemitism masked as anti-Zionism through the demonization or delegitimization of Israel such as through the Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions (BDS) movement.

Countering hate and antisemitism in the U.S.

American leaders must be unambiguous in expressing their concern about the rise of antisemitism through their words and actions. Elected officials must stop using hateful rhetoric to divide and score political points. It's no coincidence that antisemitism has risen as political rhetoric demonizing minority groups has increased. Nor is it a surprise that antisemitism has been on the rise as politicians have used coded words and images to signal their tacit approval of antisemitic acts, or at the very least, been reluctant to speak out against hate groups, fearing the loss of personal political support. Words matter and so does silence. As a global leader in combating antisemitism, AJC offers trainings and has developed resources such as [Combating Antisemitism: A Guide for Elected Officials](#) to help those who hold public office better understand and address the nuances of antisemitism.

Last year, AJC released [a groundbreaking survey](#) of American Jews' perceptions of, and experiences with, antisemitism in the United States. The national study found that 90% of American Jews believe antisemitism is a problem in the U.S. today, and 82% say it has increased over the past five years. Almost a quarter of American Jews say that they have changed their behavior—won't publicly wear, carry, or display items that help others identify them as Jewish—because they worry about being a target. When citizens of this country report that they must hide who they are out of fear, it should serve as a wakeup call.

The situation for Jewish students is particularly worrisome. While AJC's landmark survey on antisemitism found that 50% of respondents felt that antisemitism has increased on college campuses over the past five years, the response of many campuses has often fallen short, leaving Jewish students vulnerable and feeling like outsiders in their own communities. In December 2019, President Trump announced an executive order that seeks to strengthen efforts to combat antisemitism on college and university campuses by specifically prohibiting discrimination against Jews. This was a welcome step in the fight against antisemitism on campus.

To combat antisemitism, a crucial first step is to define it. The [Working Definition of Antisemitism](#) is a clear and concise description of antisemitism in its various forms. This definition is essential to giving governments, law enforcement agencies, and civil society organizations increased capacity to identify, prosecute, and deter antisemitic incidents. The Working Definition is used by the U.S. government including the State Department when monitoring antisemitism internationally, and the Department of Education; and has been adopted by dozens of municipalities across the country. The U.S. should seek its wider adoption among government agencies and identify other avenues to leverage the benefit of its clear and practical examples.

Diversity in the United States must be embraced and extolled, **setting pluralism as the standard rather than tolerance**. Differences enrich American society; they are not a liability. This was once so obvious as to border on political cliché, but in these times, American leaders must reaffirm this idea as a core American value.

Improving hate crimes reporting

More must be done to improve the reporting and prosecution of hate crimes. The FBI tracks hate crime statistics through the Uniform Crime Reporting (UCR) Program. In 2020, the latest year for which data is available, Jews were the target of 55% of all religiously-motivated hate crimes—an alarming statistic for a group that makes up less than two percent of the U.S. population. However, hate crime reporting is deeply flawed due to underreporting or complete lack of reporting by state and local law enforcement. State and local governments must be pressed to prioritize reporting hate crimes to the FBI, in accordance with the Hate Crimes Statistics Act.

Asserting American leadership to confront antisemitism abroad

Introducing the UN's first-ever human rights report wholly dedicated to antisemitism, Ahmed Shaheed, Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief, referred to antisemitism as the “canary in the coalmine of global hatred” that poses “a threat to all societies if left unaddressed.” In other words, where antisemitism appears, other forms of hatred, underlying discord, and societal decay emerge. In the face of this threat, the U.S. must call out antisemitism anywhere it exists. The U.S. should leverage its influence abroad to support Dr. Shaheed's recommendation that all UN Member States adopt the Working Definition of Antisemitism because it can offer “valuable guidance for identifying antisemitism in its various forms” and serve “as a critical, non-legal, educational tool...” When countries adopt the Working Definition, it sends a powerful signal that antisemitism is being addressed at the highest level.

In recent years, there has been a steady and significant increase in incidents of antisemitism in Europe, including verbal, physical, and even lethal attacks. **The U.S. must call on all European governments to take the necessary steps to assure the security of Jewish institutions and communities**, invest in education that imparts European values, take on purveyors of antisemitism on social media, and recognize that vilification of Israel too often is a cover for expressions of antisemitism. The European Commission's new EU Strategy for Combating Antisemitism and Fostering Jewish Life sets an elevated standard for confronting antisemitism and European policymakers should be encouraged to ensure the EU Strategy is implemented by Member States.

A blind eye cannot be turned to the growing scourge of antisemitism taking hold in the U.S. and abroad. Doing so would be a betrayal of American values and ideals. It's time for the U.S. to restore its leadership on these issues around the world, and to do that, elected officials must reaffirm these values at home.