



A CANDIDATES' GUIDE TO **ANTISEMITISM** IN AMERICAN POLITICS





This guide aims to help candidates and incumbents navigate antisemitism throughout the campaign cycle. AJC is available as a resource for dialogue, policy engagement, and efforts to support Jewish communities. *AJC is a non-partisan organization that neither supports nor endorses candidates for elective office.*

BACKGROUND

The rise in antisemitism in recent years has coincided with broader shifts in how political and social narratives are communicated and amplified. Digital platforms have accelerated the spread of ideas, enabling antisemitic rhetoric that once remained at the margins to circulate more widely and rapidly across public discourse. According to 2025 Pew Research Center research, 86% of Americans now get at least some of their news from digital devices, while more than half of U.S. adults regularly consume news through social media platforms. In this environment, longstanding antisemitic narratives about Jewish control and influence can resurface and circulate widely, often with real-world consequences for Jewish individuals and communities.

At the same time, antisemitism is not confined to digital spaces. It has appeared across political, cultural, and institutional contexts, including public discourse, activism, and electoral environments. State and nonstate actors alike have also sought to exploit division and weaken trust in democratic institutions, often amplifying narratives that target minority communities, including Jews.



Many campaigns are aware of how rapidly information — and distortion — can shape public perception during elections. These are legitimate concerns, as advances in communication technologies have made it easier for misleading or manipulative narratives to spread quickly and broadly. We ask that campaigns also remain attentive to how antisemitism can surface or be reinforced in electoral environments, and to the impact this has on American Jewish communities.

During election cycles, antisemitic narratives can become more visible or more easily activated within broader political debates. Candidates and campaigns may encounter these dynamics in different ways: through efforts to score political points against opponents, attempts to appeal to segments of the electorate receptive to conspiratorial narratives, reliance on flawed or incomplete information from advisers, or a lack of familiarity with how antisemitic tropes function and recur.

Antisemitism often draws on deeply rooted and historically familiar narratives. These ideas may be repackaged in contemporary political language but still rely on longstanding stereotypes and conspiracies. When false or misleading narratives take hold, they frequently borrow from these established tropes because they are easily recognizable and emotionally resonant for certain audiences.

In electoral contexts, antisemitic rhetoric and imagery often cluster around enduring themes of political influence, dual loyalty, money, and control.

JEWISH MONEY DISPROPORTIONATELY INFLUENCES POLITICS AND POLITICAL OUTCOMES

From both the left and the right, there are accusations about Jews “buying elections” or paying for political support. In February 2019, Rep. Ilhan Omar gave voice to a common trope about Jewish money influencing politics when she tweeted, “It’s all about the Benjamins baby” followed by a tweet stating that AIPAC, the American Israel Public Affairs Committee, pays American politicians to support Israel (note: AIPAC did not have a PAC until late 2021). AIPAC sometimes gets labeled as the “Jewish lobby” that speaks for the Jewish community. While some people use “Jewish Lobby” and “Israel Lobby” interchangeably and have no antisemitic intentions when saying “Jewish Lobby,”¹ the phrase serves as a dog whistle for those who believe Jews control politics.



Kevin McCarthy ✓

@kevinomccarthy

US House candidate, CA-23

Follow

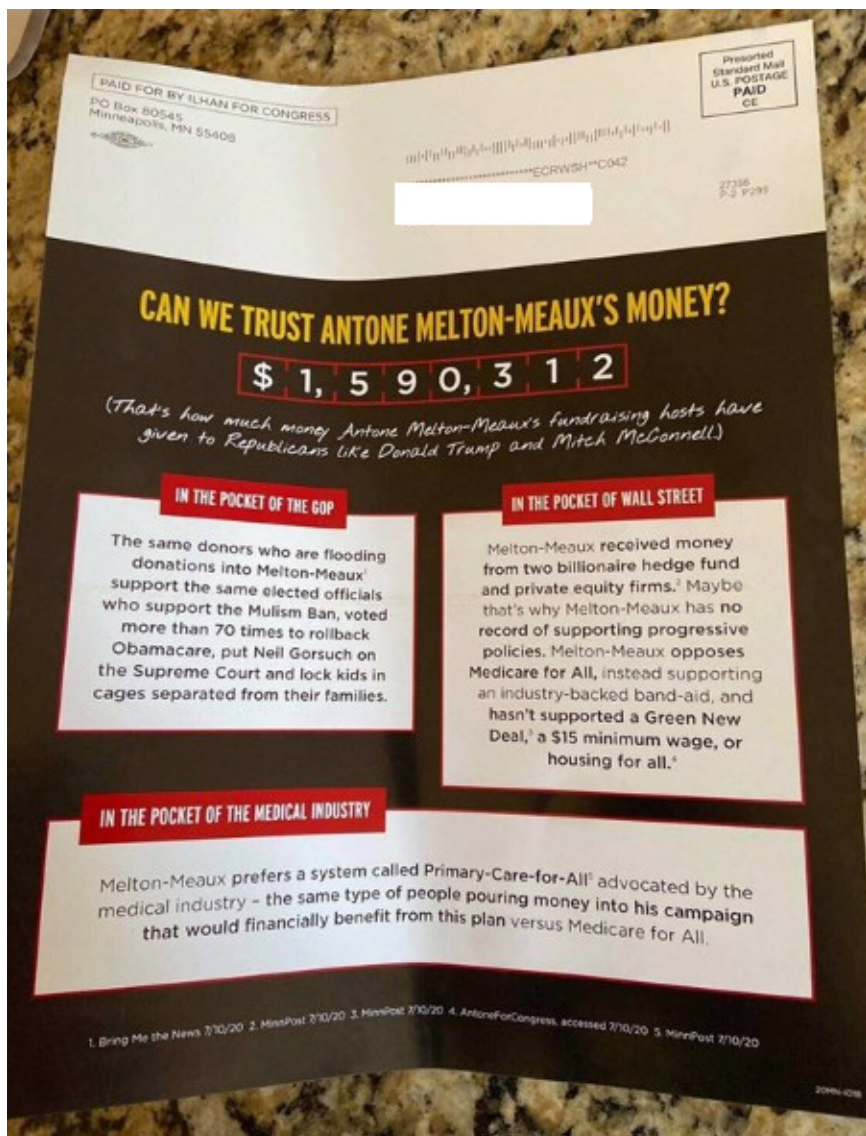
We cannot allow Soros, Steyer, and Bloomberg to BUY this election! Get out and vote Republican November 6th. #MAGA 🇺🇸

HoldTheMajority

In October 2018, Rep. Kevin McCarthy accused three Jewish Democrats of trying to “buy” the 2018 midterms.



1 | [AJC.org/translatehate/Jewish-lobby](https://ajc.org/translatehate/Jewish-lobby)



In July 2020, Rep. Ilhan Omar issued a mailer against her primary opponent, accusing him of being “in the pockets of Wall Street”² and (on the reverse) exclusively naming Jewish donors.

2 | [AJC.org/translatehate/Jewish-capitalist](https://ajc.org/translatehate/Jewish-capitalist)

A SMALL JEWISH ELITE MANIPULATES POLITICS BEHIND THE SCENES

Antisemitic political ads, often invoking well-known Jews such as Michael Bloomberg, George Soros,³ Sheldon Adelson, and Bernie Sanders, and centering on the theme of money and control, are all too common during election cycles. George Soros is vilified in some quarters (and revered in others) for supporting progressive causes. Similarly, the late Republican mega-donor, Sheldon Adelson was often depicted as a puppet master, pulling the strings for Republican leaders. Criticizing George Soros and Sheldon Adelson for their politics and actions is not antisemitic. Using them as a symbol for Jewish control, wealth, and power typically is.

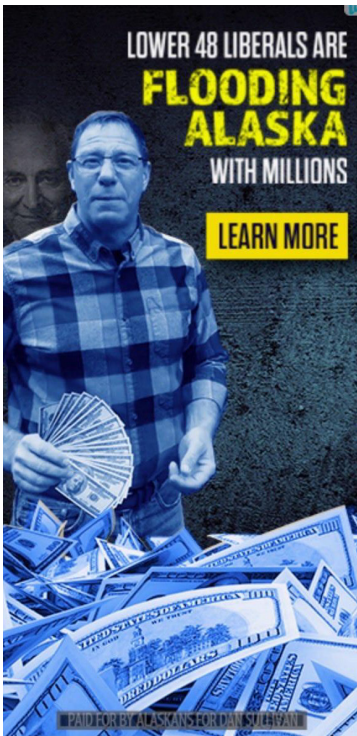
In the run up to the 2016 Presidential election, Russian trolls took to social media, publishing memes with George Soros and Jared Kushner (both Jewish) coded in anti-Jewish conspiracies. In October 2020, American Action News, a right-wing website with more than 1 million followers, put out an ad with an image of Soros and the text: “Burn It Down: Soros planning nationwide chaos if Trump wins.” Far-right Christian news channel TruNews is notorious for its antisemitic, homophobic, and Islamophobic content; founder Rick Wiles claimed Jews wanted to overthrow President Trump (he called the impeachment trial a “Jew coup”).



Trump ad from July 2023 depicting George Soros as a puppet master, alluding to the trope of Jewish control.⁴

3 | [AJC.org/translatehate/Soros](https://ajc.org/translatehate/Soros)

4 | [AJC.org/translatehate/control](https://ajc.org/translatehate/control)



A July 2020 ad against Jewish candidate Al Gross, paid for by Sen. Dan Sullivan (R-AK). In addition to the obvious piles of cash, note the lurking image of Sen. Chuck Schumer (D-NY).

A Boston Globe political cartoon⁵ from December 2017 was called out for antisemitic imagery of Republican political donor Sheldon Adelson.



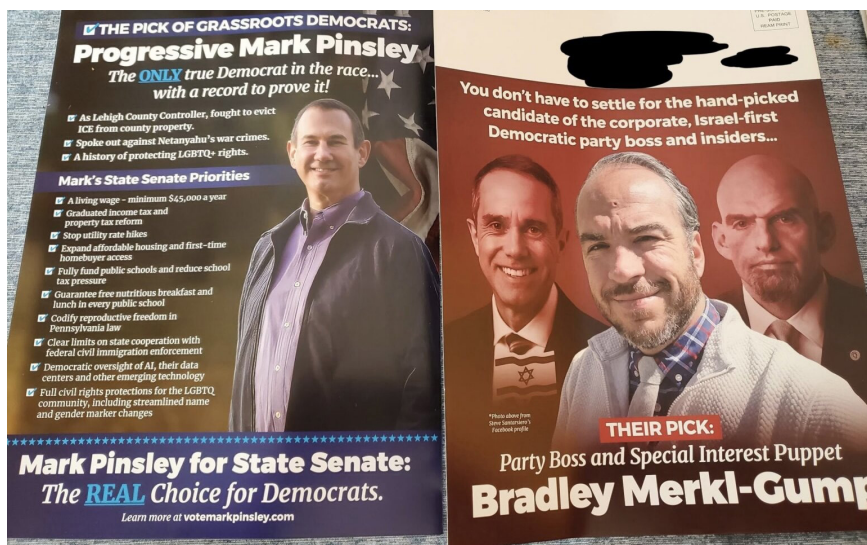
5 | [JTA.org/2017/12/04/politics/boston-globe-cartoon-of-sheldon-adelson-uses-anti-semitic-images-jewish-leaders-say](https://www.jta.org/2017/12/04/politics/boston-globe-cartoon-of-sheldon-adelson-uses-anti-semitic-images-jewish-leaders-say)

JEWISH INTERESTS PUT “ISRAEL FIRST” OVER THE U.S.

The phrase “Israel First”⁶ is often used in debates over U.S. foreign policy to argue that American leaders or institutions place Israel’s interests above those of the United States. While some use the term as a critique of strategic alignment, critics warn that it can easily overlap with the antisemitic “dual loyalty” trope. Accusations that Jews are more loyal to Israel than to their own country have historically been used to portray Jewish people as untrustworthy outsiders or a “fifth column” working against national interests. Responsible political criticism of Israeli government policy or U.S.-Israel relations therefore requires care to avoid framing Jewish Americans collectively as disloyal or implying hidden ethnic control over government decision-making.

Supporters of the “Israel First” critique often argue that U.S. involvement in conflict with Iran reflects Israeli strategic priorities more than direct American interests, pointing to the close military and diplomatic coordination between the two countries. Commentators across the political spectrum have debated whether Washington was effectively drawn into a broader regional confrontation after Israeli strikes escalated tensions with Tehran. However, caution is necessary: claims that “Israel dragged America into war” can slide into conspiratorial or antisemitic framing when they portray Jews or pro-Israel Americans as secretly manipulating U.S. policy.

6 | [AJC.org/translatehate/dual-loyalty](https://ajc.org/translatehate/dual-loyalty)



A May 2026 primary ad features Jewish candidate for State Senate, Bradley Merkl-Gump, flanked by a Jewish State Senator (featured with an Israeli flag) and pro-Israel champion Sen. John Fetterman. The accusation of prioritizing Israel first – before the U.S. – is particularly acute here as State and local elected officials have minimal influence on foreign policy. The outsized emphasis on a candidates' position on Israel, and the supposed control⁷ leveraged by pro-Israel party leadership, is targeted and inappropriate.

7 | AJC.org/translatehate/control

RECOMMENDATIONS

Campaign environments move quickly, and antisemitic rhetoric or misinformation can emerge unexpectedly — from opponents, supporters, surrogates, influencers, staff, partners, or outside actors. At its core, responding to antisemitism in elections requires clear standards: reject conspiracies, avoid dehumanizing rhetoric, and ensure that stereotypes, scapegoating, or collective blame are never the cost of political victory.

CONFRONT ANTISEMITISM CONSISTENTLY ACROSS ALL CONTEXTS.

Antisemitism should be confronted consistently, wherever it appears. A credible standard applies across the board: antisemitism is unacceptable in campaign messaging, activist spaces, online discourse, and political commentary.

Addressing antisemitism only when it comes from political opponents while ignoring it within one's own ecosystem undermines credibility and fuels the perception that antisemitism is partisan. If it emerges within your own party, address it directly. Leadership includes speaking out, even when it is politically uncomfortable.

If an opponent traffics in antisemitic rhetoric or conspiratorial tropes, respond clearly and specifically. Name the issue without amplifying the content itself, and distinguish between legitimate policy disagreements and harmful stereotyping or conspiracy narratives. Speak in ways that reinforce shared democratic norms, with awareness that how antisemitism is addressed publicly can have unintended consequences for Jewish communities. Silence or vague responses can be interpreted as acceptance, while measured clarity sets a public standard that antisemitism is unacceptable regardless of political affiliation.

Pay attention to how messaging can echo antisemitic tropes.

Even unintentional messaging can parrot longstanding antisemitic tropes about money, influence, loyalty, or hidden control. To prevent avoidable harm, campaigns should review messaging with trusted advisers or community partners to determine whether language or imagery could reinforce:

- ▼ Ideas of secret influence or coordination
- ▼ Dual loyalty or divided allegiance
- ▼ Collective blame toward Jews
- ▼ Conspiratorial explanations of political events

AVOID SYMBOLIC OR PERFORMATIVE PLEDGES THAT OVERSIMPLIFY COMPLEX ISSUES.

Campaigns are often pressured to adopt high-profile or symbolic positions that signal alignment or generate political attention. This can include broad pledges involving engagement with advocacy groups such as AIPAC.

Legitimate criticism of any organization is part of democratic debate. However, blanket or performative pledges can oversimplify complex issues and unintentionally blur the line between policy disagreement and narratives about collective influence or identity. Policy positions should be grounded in substance, not symbolism.

SET CLEAR BOUNDARIES ON PLATFORMING AND POLITICAL LEGITIMACY.

Campaigns and political leaders shape public norms through the voices they elevate. Carefully consider the implications of sharing platforms or granting visibility to figures whose rhetoric has repeatedly been associated with the normalization of antisemitic ideas. This includes public figures such as Candace Owens, Tucker Carlson, and Hasan Piker.

Decisions about appearances and endorsements should reflect a clear rejection of rhetoric that dehumanizes Jews or promotes conspiracies about Jewish power, loyalty, or control.

ENGAGE MEANINGFULLY WITH JEWISH AND INTERRELIGIOUS COMMUNITIES.

Antisemitic narratives often operate through implication and historical association rather than explicit language. As a result, concerns may reflect deeper patterns that require context and listening to fully understand. AJC's Translate Hate, a visual glossary of words and symbols that are antisemitic or can become antisemitic in context can shed important light. Concerns raised by Jewish community members or organizations should be taken seriously and addressed in good faith. Engagement should be grounded in openness, humility, and a willingness to ask questions. These conversations strengthen civic relationships.

REINFORCE DEMOCRATIC NORMS AND CIVIC RESPONSIBILITY.

At a time of polarization and rapid flow of information, antisemitism is increasingly intertwined with broader democratic challenges, including conspiratorial thinking and declining trust in institutions. According to AJC's State of Antisemitism in America 2024 report, 72% of American Jews say they have less trust in the way democracy is functioning in the United States compared to five years ago.

Addressing antisemitism in elections is therefore not only about protecting one specific community, but about safeguarding democratic integrity. Ultimately, leadership is defined not only by positions taken, but by boundaries set — including what is refused, rejected, or not amplified.

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AJC's mission is to enhance the well-being of the Jewish people and Israel, and to advance human rights and democratic values in the United States and around the world.



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