



CONSENSUS POLICY STATEMENT

CONSENSUS STATEMENT ON ANTISEMITISM EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Jewish American community has been grappling with alarming levels of antisemitism in recent years. This increase in antisemitism has left many in the Jewish community feeling “othered,” scared, isolated and even unsafe. In our informal surveying of the Bay Area Jewish community, all participants expressed that they had personally experienced at least one form of antisemitism. Their stories and experiences with discrimination varied greatly, highlighting the complexities and nuances of this particular form of hate. Further, the general public’s comprehension and recognition of what “antisemitism” means, and how it manifests, is quite limited.

JCRC’s consensus statement on antisemitism does not prescribe a particular definition of antisemitism nor is it intended to replace the various definitions that Jewish community organizations utilize. Rather, it is a practical guide on how to identify antisemitism and how JCRC should address it.

The statement identifies basic principles central to understanding of antisemitism, including that Jews have the right to self-identify what it means to be Jewish and to define antisemitism.

The statement describes two broad categories for determining if something is antisemitic:

- 1) Openly and clearly antisemitic speech, actions and beliefs, such as classic antisemitic stereotypes, myths and tropes of powerful and mendacious Jews, excluding Jews from something because they are Jewish, or supporting Nazis and denying the Holocaust.
- 2) Other actions, words and beliefs that are less easily defined as antisemitic and on which there are often differences of opinion, often revolving around Israel and Zionism. Generally speaking, political speech that is focused on specific policies of the Israel government, is not antisemitic. On other topics, there are differences of opinion; but statements, including about Israel, may cross the line into antisemitism when stereotypes and myths are used, the intent is discriminatory, or when only Jews are not allowed the right to national self-determination.

The statement also describes additional considerations when describing and responding to antisemitism. While there are some acts or words for which context makes no difference, with others, taking context and intent into account may help identify whether something is antisemitic and what the appropriate response might be.

Further, even when not openly antisemitic, heated debate around Israel seems to give license to those harboring negative views about Jews, leading to increased incidents of antisemitism. And in many cases, Jewish identity is conflated with the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and may be used as a pretext for antisemitism.

JCRC has found that a root cause of much of the antisemitism experienced today stems from a profound lack of understanding about Jewish identity. This crisis has taught us that many people try to fit Jews into a monolithic identity box, which is harmful to our vibrant and diverse community.

As a document crafted by consensus, this statement can be utilized to: (1) bring together Jews from diverse experiences and across the political spectrum to navigate and build civil discourse on antisemitism; (2) educate and train Jewish and other communities and leaders; (3) provide guidance to craft and review legislative policies; (4) provide guidance to properly analyze and calibrate JCRC’s community response to antisemitic incidents; and (5) serve as a foundational document for work identified in JCRC’s 2021-2025 strategic plan related to developing a new Jewish identity framework for community relations.



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Approved by the JCRC Assembly on January 4, 2022

INTRODUCTION

The Jewish American community has been grappling with alarming levels of antisemitism¹ in recent years. From hateful attacks on social media and destructive vandalism, to brazen acts of violence, antisemitism has recently been felt more broadly and acutely in the Jewish community, including in the San Francisco Bay Area.

According to FBI statistics, in 2020 nearly 60 percent of religious-bias hate crimes in America targeted Jews.² The most recent escalation of violence between Israel and Hamas in May 2021 led to dramatic increases in antisemitic activities. According to the Anti-Defamation League (ADL), “During the two weeks of military conflict between Israel and Hamas in May 2021, antisemitic incidents in the U.S. reported to ADL increased by 75 percent compared to the two weeks before the fighting began.”³

Such incidents were particularly prevalent in schools and colleges and on social media, with Jewish students feeling bullied and harassed.⁴ Corporate and high-tech Jewish employees also felt singled out and pressured to respond to staff discussion forums and chats filled with anti-Israel rhetoric—and human relations departments struggled with how to handle it. While one-sided, inaccurate resolutions condemning Israel were nothing new, following the May 2021 conflict a spate of anti-Israel resolutions popped up in places such as teachers’ unions and local civic committees whose work had nothing to do with foreign policy. These resolutions included language and a general tone that went far beyond political disagreement, sometimes straying into inflammatory and hateful rhetoric.^{5,6}

This increase in antisemitism has left many in the Jewish community feeling “othered,” scared, isolated and even unsafe.⁷

There is also a large deficit in the general public’s comprehension of what “antisemitism” means. According to a 2021 American Jewish Committee (AJC) survey⁸ of the general public on antisemitism, one-third had heard the term but were unsure of what it meant or had never heard of the term at all.

It is within this context that JCRC felt the time was right to undertake a consensus process on identifying and responding to antisemitism. This statement will serve as a guiding document, analytical framework and training tool for our community relations work addressing antisemitism in all its forms, and will be used to bring Bay Area Jewish communities together to build common goals and strategies.

As part of the process, JCRC formed the Antisemitism Working Group in March 2021. The group met multiple times and engaged in a learning and listening process to better understand how antisemitism is experienced in the Bay Area and how members of the Jewish community understand and describe it.

The overarching takeaway of the interviews and survey questions was that all of the participants have experienced some form of antisemitism at some point, no matter how loosely or narrowly they defined their relationship to Israel, or how often they participated in organized Jewish activities. It was also apparent that, although everyone could relate to antisemitism, the shape it took varied, highlighting the complexities and nuances of this particular form of hate. For example, Jews of color reported that their intersectional identities lead to a more complex relationship with antisemitism because they experience prejudice and discrimination both as people of color and as Jews.

The most widely adopted definition of antisemitism worldwide is the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance's (IHRA) definition of antisemitism.⁹ Other definitions which are used include¹⁰ the Jerusalem Declaration¹¹ and the Nexus definition.¹² These definitions mainly differ in how they distinguish between criticism of Israel and antisemitism.

JCRC used the following description of antisemitism in the context of a 2018 statement on the delegitimization of Israel:¹³

Anti-Semitism: prejudice and/or discrimination directed toward Jews as individuals or as a group. Anti-Semitism is rooted in age-old stereotypes and myths that target Jews because of their religious beliefs, religious practices or identity as a people...The organized Jewish community has a broad range of views on the policies of the State of Israel. Criticism of policies of the State of Israel is not inherently anti-Semitic nor is it delegitimizing of Israel as a democratic and Jewish state. However, it may be anti-Semitic and/or delegitimizing to collectively blame Jews for the actions of the State of Israel; use anti-Jewish stereotypes or language to criticize Israel; use Holocaust and Nazi comparisons with reference to Israel; call for the elimination of the Jewish State of Israel; single Israel out for condemnation for behavior or policies that are ignored when carried out by other countries; or deny that Jews as a people have a historic connection to the land.

This is the definition used by the Institute for Curriculum Services (ICS)¹⁴:

Hatred, discrimination, fear, and prejudice against Jews as individuals or as a group. Antisemitism is based on age-old stereotypes and myths that can target Jews as a people, their religious practices, and/or their connection (real or perceived) to the State of Israel.

There are strengths and weaknesses with any definition. Context must be taken into account, and it is challenging to have one singular definition used across the board. For example, some definitions are a good fit for organizations or governments trying to understand how Israel-related antisemitism manifests, but are less helpful in identifying antisemitism in the context of white supremacy. Further, a definition that works well in a K-12 classroom may be of limited value in a legal context.

JCRC is not prescribing a particular definition of antisemitism; rather, this consensus statement is a more practical guide for how to identify antisemitism and how JCRC should apply its community relations approach to address it.

UNDERSTANDING ANTISEMITISM

Context and Common Understandings

The following basic principles are central to any understanding of antisemitism:

- **Jews have the right to identify what it means to be Jewish and to define antisemitism.**
- **Antisemitism is often based on false, inaccurate or misleading statements that frequently distort facts, history and context.** These statements foster negative perceptions and beliefs about Jews that can lead to further harm.
- **Different Jews experience antisemitism differently, given their different identities and experiences.** The Jewish community is racially, ethnically, socially, politically and economically diverse. Despite our diversity, we are often perceived as a homogeneous group. For example, there is an incorrect perception that all Jews are white/European. Here in the Bay Area, one recent study showed that 25 percent of Bay Area Jewish households include a person of color; and this rises to nearly 40 percent of households where respondents are younger than 35.¹⁵ Nationally, approximately 12-15 percent of Jews are people of color.¹⁶ Further, in Israel, over half of the Jewish population consists of Mizrahi Jews, whose families originated in the Middle East or North Africa. There are also Jews from Ethiopia, India and Central Asia.¹⁷
- **Within the Jewish community, there is a wide range of religious practices, identities, backgrounds and political views**—including about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.
- **Jewish identity is increasingly being conflated with the politics of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.** The conflict is put on the shoulders of Jews regardless of whether they have a position on, interest in or connection to Israel, simply because they are Jewish.
- **Positive stereotypes can be offensive and must be addressed.** Like the Asian American/Pacific Islander communities, Jews are sometimes targets of the “model minority myth,” which is used to describe certain minority communities that are perceived to be more socio-economically successful. These stereotypes can reduce Jewish Americans to a caricature and also feed into the incorrect perception that Jews can’t experience hate and discrimination because they are so successful and privileged. This view separates Jews as “others,” leading to scapegoating and hate, and ignores the socio-economic diversity of our community.
- **Antisemitism must be taken as seriously as other forms of hate and discrimination.** It must not be seen as a lesser or only a historical form of discrimination. Antisemitism is persistent and embedded in society.
- **Concerns about antisemitism that involve Israel should not be brushed aside as political speech or as “controversial.”** Some criticism of Israel crosses the line into antisemitism, and must be treated with the same consideration as other forms of antisemitism. At the same time, the term should be used judiciously, as it is a serious accusation.
- **Antisemitism is found across the entire political spectrum,** appearing in more toxic form on both political extremes. Antisemitism is also sometimes used as a wedge issue, with some political leaders calling it out only when it comes from the other side of the aisle, and refusing to acknowledge it within their own party.
- **Understanding antisemitism is critical to addressing white nationalism in this country.** Portraying Jews as especially evil is a central part of the ideologies of white nationalism.¹⁸ Too often, Jewish identity and antisemitism are alarmingly left out of conversations about white supremacy.
- **Freedom of speech is a fundamental right in this country.** Accusations of antisemitism should not be used to shut down free political speech with which someone disagrees. Alternatively, freedom of speech should not be used as a cover or excuse for expressing antisemitic views or engaging in antisemitic acts.
- **Anyone can hold antisemitic beliefs or engage in antisemitic behavior, including Jews.**

Description

For purposes of this statement, this is a broad description of antisemitism:

Hatred, discrimination, fear and prejudice directed toward Jews as individuals or as a group. Antisemitism is based on age-old stereotypes and myths that target Jews because of their religious beliefs, religious and cultural practices, identity as a people, or connection (real or perceived) to the State of Israel.

There are some actions, words and beliefs that are clearly and openly antisemitic. Examples include:

- Denying or minimizing the Holocaust.
- Supporting or praising Nazis and using Nazi symbols.
- Labeling Jews or Israelis as Nazis or comparing/equating Jews or Israelis to Nazis.
- Classic antisemitic tropes, such as portraying Jews as controlling the media, banks or world governments and other sinister conspiratorial plots. This may include citing the Protocols of the Elders of Zion, a fabricated and fraudulent document written in 1903 that falsely describes a Jewish conspiracy to dominate the world.¹⁹
- Falsely accusing Jews and/or Israel of being responsible for horrible events such as 9/11 or police violence in this country.
- Accusing Jews of dual loyalties, such as being more loyal to Israel than to their own country.
- Physical attacks on Jews because they are Jewish or because they identify as Zionists.
- Saying that Israelis as a people deserve to die or that Israeli civilians are legitimate targets for violence because of the actions of the Israeli government.
- Singling out Jews and/or excluding Jews from participation in activities simply because they are Jewish or because they won't disclaim aspects of being Jewish (such as identifying with Israel).
- Slurs like being "Jewed down" and actions like throwing pennies at Jews (referring to being greedy or tight with money).
- Negative personal stereotypes about Jews, such as being loud, opinionated, intrusive, overbearing, spoiled, impolite, rude or vulgar, which may set the stage for more blatant antisemitism by creating a permissive environment for escalation.

Speech about Israel that employs stereotypes and myths or collective guilt generally crosses the line into antisemitism. Examples include:

- Accusing Israel or Zionists of controlling the media, financial institutions or the White House.
- Holding all Jews responsible for the real or perceived actions of the Israeli government.
- Denying a student the right to participate in a student club because they refuse to denounce Israel.

There are other actions, words and beliefs that are less easily defined as antisemitic.

- **There is some political speech that is clearly not antisemitic.** For example, it is not inherently antisemitic to disagree with Israel's policy of building settlements in the West Bank. However, if stereotypes and myths are used to describe Israel's actions, this may cross the line into antisemitism.
- **There are other words used to describe Israel that many view as antisemitic but about which there are differences of opinion, even within the Jewish community.** For example, there isn't agreement within the Jewish community that calling Israel's actions in the West Bank a form of apartheid or calling Israel a settler-colonialist state is antisemitic. It is JCRC's position that these kinds of characterizations are inaccurate and inflammatory and may cross the line into antisemitism if stereotypes and myths are used to describe Israel's actions.

- **There is disagreement in the Jewish community about whether anti-Zionism is inherently antisemitic.** Many believe any denial of Israel's right to exist as an independent Jewish nation, or criticism of Zionism as a form of nationalism, is antisemitic. It is JCRC's position that anti-Zionism clearly crosses the line into antisemitism when it denies Jews' right to national self-determination, while allowing or supporting other ethnic and/or religious groups' similar rights.
- **Some believe that singling out Israel for unequal scrutiny not given to other countries,** such as happens at the United Nations, is antisemitic. This can be challenging to discern because it involves intent and context. However, it is clear that singling out Israel may cross the line if the motivation is discriminatory or when antisemitic tropes are used.
- **Many believe that the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions movement is inherently antisemitic** because they believe its goals are incompatible with a two-state solution and the continued existence of the Jewish and democratic State of Israel. It is JCRC's position that there is antisemitism in the BDS movement's stated goals and key leadership, particularly when they call for the end of Israel as a sovereign Jewish nation. However, one can support some actions, such as a boycott of products made in West Bank settlements, without being antisemitic.²⁰

There are additional considerations when describing and responding to antisemitism.

- **Context and intent are important.** While there are some things for which context makes no difference (such as open declarations of hate of Jews), in gray areas like the ones discussed above, taking context and intent into account may help identify whether and to what degree an action or speech is antisemitic. For example, when Jewish symbols are used in provocative public art or political cartoons, it's important to understand the motive of the artist, the message they are trying to convey and how the symbol is depicted. Additionally, other factors such as severity should be taken into account. For example, a 15-year-old child scratching a swastika into a garage door should be addressed differently than an adult marching in Skokie or Charlottesville with a Nazi armband.
- **Heated debate around Israel seems to give license to those harboring negative views about Jews, leading to increased incidents of antisemitism.** For example, when resolutions to support BDS have been brought to college campuses, or when violence has increased between Israel and Hamas, increased acts of antisemitism often follow, such as physical attacks on Jews, attempted murder, vandalism, swastikas and other antisemitic graffiti on Jewishly-identified buildings, hateful comments posted on social media, harassment of Jewish students and incitement to violence against Jews.²¹

In many of these cases, Jewish identity is conflated with Israel's actions and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict,²² and may be used as a pretext for antisemitism. Jewish Americans are often held accountable for the actions of the Israeli government. Likewise, the people of Israel are often conflated with their government, through actions such as the academic boycott of Israel.

GUIDANCE ON COMMUNITY RELATIONS

JCRC has been spending an ever-increasing amount of effort and resources addressing antisemitism. JCRC's 2021 four-year strategic plan addresses this issue in a proactive way by digging into one of the root causes of much of the antisemitism seen today: a profound lack of understanding about Jewish identity. This crisis has taught us that many people try to fit Jews into a monolithic identity box, which is harmful to our community. Building a common framework for understanding the complexity of antisemitism is a critical step in the strategic plan, which is intended to ensure a safe and inclusive future for the Jewish community in the Bay Area.

Context must be considered when defining antisemitism, and there should be flexibility in choosing how to define antisemitism. Unanimity about the definition of antisemitism is not required in order to confront it. Rather, in providing this tool to help describe antisemitism, JCRC is not excluding any definitions currently in play in the Jewish community, allowing consensus-building. JCRC has the opportunity to apply its unique community relations approach to dealing with antisemitism, and this statement is intended as a guidance document for that work.

Uses for the statement:

1. As a document crafted by consensus, this statement can be utilized to bring together Jews from across the political spectrum, allowing Jewish community members to work together to address antisemitism in the Bay Area.
2. This statement will be utilized to educate both Jewish and external communities about the complexities of antisemitism.
3. This statement will serve as a reference point for community and civic leaders to utilize when they are faced with issues of antisemitism in their community and civic spaces.
4. This statement will be used as part of enacting JCRC's strategic plan, which includes the goal to "Develop and implement a new paradigm to address the misunderstanding of Jews, Jewish identity, Israel, the spread of antisemitism and lack of Jewish inclusion in civic life."

ICRC should:

1. Educate and provide training for Jewish and external communities about antisemitism, dispelling myths and stereotypes.
2. Make every effort to ensure that the full diversity of the Jewish community is included and represented when our community discusses antisemitism and Jewish identity.
3. Educate and build understanding about Jewish identity and connection to Israel in the sectors where there are the most challenges, including K-12 education, colleges, civic organizations, nonprofit organizations, corporations and social media.
4. Address antisemitism and other forms of bigotry and hate in the Bay Area, in partnership with other communities when possible.
5. Consider originating or supporting new legislation that will address antisemitism, reflective of our consensus positions, in partnership with other communities where possible.

¹ NOTE: Since its inception, the term antisemitism has referred specifically and exclusively to hatred of Jews. In the original German language in which the term *Antisemitismus* was coined, the word appeared without hyphenation. The use of a hyphen after "anti" implies that there is a Semitism to which one can be opposed, that this hatred encompasses all people who speak Semitic languages (e.g., Arabic, Hebrew, Aramaic, Amharic), or that those classified as "Semites" based on pseudo-scientific racist categorization from the mid-19th century are also victims of this hatred. None of these implications are accurate. Reflecting this reality, history scholars have by and large adopted the spelling with no hyphen, coming full circle with the term's origins and specific meaning. Accordingly, JCRC no longer uses a hyphen in spelling out this word. For some examples of media adopting this scholarly convention, see <https://www.iweekly.com/2020/08/06/dropping-the-hyphen-why-this-publication-is-changing-its-spelling-of-antisemitism/>, accessed 11/02/2021, and <https://twitter.com/APStylebook/status/1385687075635204100>, accessed 11/02/2021. The ADL, the oldest organization dedicated to fighting hatred, also now follows this convention: <https://www.adl.org/spelling>, accessed 11/02/2021.

² <https://crime-data-explorer.fr.cloud.gov/pages/explorer/crime/hate-crime>

³ <https://www.adl.org/blog/antisemitic-incident-reported-to-adl-increase-sharply-during-israel-hamas-conflict>

⁴ <https://www.iweekly.com/2021/06/04/students-feeling-hurt-harassed-over-anti-israel-rhetoric/> and

<https://www.sdjewishworld.com/2021/09/20/survey-finds-jewish-college-students-fear-for-their-safety/>

⁵ <https://www.iweekly.com/2021/06/28/after-s-f-teachers-union-vote-on-israel-others-follow-suit-around-the-country/>

⁶ <https://www.berkeleyside.org/2021/06/25/berkeley-rent-board-symbolic-resolution-supports-palestinians>

⁷ <https://www.pbs.org/newshour/show/anti-semitic-attacks-spread-like-wildfire-in-the-us-during-gaza-conflict> and

<https://www.timesofisrael.com/antisemitism-fears-made-40-of-us-jews-change-their-behavior-last-year-survey/>

⁸ <https://www.ajc.org/AntisemitismReport2021>

⁹ The IHRA has been adopted by 32 countries. It is used by the U.S. State Department in monitoring antisemitism worldwide and by the U.S. Department of Education in examining antisemitism on college campuses. It has been recommended for use by the European Parliament, the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), the Parliamentary Assembly, the European Council, the United Nations Secretary General, and the Secretary General of the Organization of American States (OAS), among others. It is also the definition used by American Jewish Committee, Anti-Defamation League and the Jewish Council of Public Affairs, among other mainstream American Jewish advocacy organizations. <https://www.holocaustremembrance.com/resources/working-definitions-charters/working-definition-antisemitism/adoption-endorsement>; <https://www.ajc.org/adoption-of-the-working-definition>

¹⁰ <https://www.holocaustremembrance.com/resources/working-definitions-charters/working-definition-antisemitism>

¹¹ <https://jerusalemdeclaration.org/>

¹² <https://israelandantisemitism.com/the-nexus-document/>

¹³ https://jrcr.org/uploads/Delegitimization_of_Israel_2018.pdf

¹⁴ <https://icsresources.org/wp-content/uploads/Antisemitism-Glossary.pdf>

¹⁵ https://jewishfed.org/sites/default/files/An_Integrative_Report_from_the_Bay_Area_Jewish_Community_Study.pdf

¹⁶ <https://jewsofcolorfieldbuilding.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/Counting-Inconsistencies-052119.pdf>

¹⁷ https://www.cbs.gov.il/he/publications/doclib/2021/2.shnatonpopulation/st02_08.pdf

¹⁸ <https://www.politicalresearch.org/2017/06/29/skin-in-the-game-how-antisemitism-animates-white-nationalism>

¹⁹ <https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/article/protocols-of-the-elders-of-zion>

²⁰ https://jrcr.org/uploads/Delegitimization_of_Israel_2018.pdf

²¹ <https://www.insightintodiversity.com/bds-movement-causes-backlash-against-jewish-college-students-and-employees/> and

<https://www.cnn.com/2021/06/30/us/american-anti-semitism-students-soh/index.html>

²² <https://usacbi.org/>