

Contemporary Global ANTI-SEMITISM:

A Report Provided to the
United States Congress



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT of STATE



Defining Anti-Semitism

A widely accepted definition of anti-Semitism can be useful in setting the parameters of the issue. Such a definition also helps to identify the statistics that are needed and focuses attention on issues that policy initiatives should address.

The definition of anti-Semitism has been the focus of innumerable discussions and studies. The definition has evolved over the centuries depending upon the time, the place, and the circumstances.

According to the current edition of *Merriam-Webster's* dictionary, which continues to use an 1882 definition, anti-Semitism is “hostility toward or discrimination against Jews as a religious, ethnic, or racial group.” While the basic elements of this definition remain applicable, anti-Semitism is an adaptive phenomenon and continues to take on new forms. Efforts have been underway this past decade to determine an approach for collecting data on anti-Semitism that corresponds to its contemporary manifestations.

The European Monitoring Center on Racism and Xenophobia (EUMC)—in close collaboration with the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe’s Office of Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, international experts on anti-Semitism, and civil society organizations—began discussing a common approach to data collection on anti-Semitism. This effort led to the drafting of a *Working Definition of Anti-Semitism*. The EUMC’s working definition provides a useful framework for identifying and understanding the problem and is adopted for the purposes of this report:

“Anti-Semitism is a certain perception of Jews, which may be expressed as hatred toward Jews. Rhetorical and physical manifestations of anti-Semitism are directed toward Jewish or non-Jewish individuals and/or their property, toward Jewish community institutions and religious facilities.”

Because the working definition is broad, the EUMC provides explanatory text that discusses the kinds of acts that could be considered anti-Semitic:

“Such manifestations [of anti-Semitism] could also target the state of Israel, conceived as a Jewish collectivity. Anti-Semitism frequently charges Jews with conspiring to harm humanity, and it is often used to blame Jews for ‘why things go wrong.’ It is expressed in speech, writing, visual forms and action, and employs sinister stereotypes and negative character traits.

Contemporary examples of anti-Semitism in public life, the media, schools, the workplace, and in the religious sphere could, taking into account the overall context, include, but are not limited to:

- *Calling for, aiding, or justifying the killing or harming of Jews in the name of a radical ideology or an extremist view of religion.*
- *Making mendacious, dehumanizing, demonizing, or stereotypical allegations about Jews as such or the power of Jews as a collective—such as, especially but not exclusively, the myth about a world Jewish conspiracy or of Jews controlling the media, economy, government or other societal institutions.*
- *Accusing Jews as a people of being responsible for real or imagined wrongdoing committed by a single Jewish person or group, or even for acts committed by non-Jews.*
- *Denying the fact, scope, mechanisms (e.g., gas chambers) or intentionality of the genocide of the Jewish people at the hands of National Socialist Germany and its supporters and accomplices during World War II (the Holocaust).*

- *Accusing the Jews as a people, or Israel as a state, of inventing or exaggerating the Holocaust.*
- *Accusing Jewish citizens of being more loyal to Israel, or to the alleged priorities of Jews worldwide, than to the interests of their own nations.*

Examples of the ways in which anti-Semitism manifests itself with regard to the state of Israel taking into account the overall context could include:

- *Denying the Jewish people their right to self-determination....*
- *Applying double standards by requiring of it a behavior not expected or demanded of any other democratic nation.*
- *Using the symbols and images associated with classic anti-Semitism (e.g., claims of Jews killing Jesus or blood libel) to characterize Israel or Israelis.*
- *Drawing comparisons of contemporary Israeli policy to that of the Nazis.*
- *Holding Jews collectively responsible for actions of the state of Israel.*

The EUMC makes clear, however, that criticism of Israel similar to that leveled against any other country cannot be regarded in itself as anti-Semitic.⁴

⁴ This definition is adapted from the EUMC “*Working Definition of Anti-Semitism*” document, which can be found in its entirety in Appendix Two.