

**House Foreign Affairs Committee
Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission**

Hearing

on the

Worldwide Persecution of Jews

Tuesday, May 20, 2025

2:00 p.m.

2322 Rayburn House Office Building

Statement of Stacy Burdett

Consultant, Antisemitism Response and Prevention

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Co-Chair Smith, Co-Chair McGovern, and distinguished Members of this Commission, thank you for the opportunity to testify before this commission - named in memory of a true champion of human rights, of the protection of the Jewish people and of all people targeted by bigotry and oppression.

I come to this conversation as a practitioner for over three decades, including twenty-four years at the Anti-Defamation League and two years at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum during which I developed policies, strategies and programs to prevent and counter antisemitism and to use Holocaust history to enhance ethical decision making. I now work with leaders across the corporate, higher education, philanthropic and advocacy sector to translate those strategies into tangible, practical action. I will share some observations about recent global trends and propose some recommendations for what Congress and others can do.

It's always been said that, in addition to the threat it poses to Jews, antisemitism is a sign of a broader erosion of democratic norms. I think we all know that the early warning signs of that erosion are far behind us in the rear view mirror. The explosion of antisemitism in our country and around the world is enmeshed with a broader deterioration of social taboos and of the firewalls that civil discourse once provided.

Jews have found a home in this country because we are safest in inclusive, pluralistic societies, where everyone is treated equally and everyone is respected. When democratic institutions break down or are weakened, Jews and all of us are at risk. So the fight to protect Jews is embedded in the fight to protect civil and human rights and democracy for all of us.

My distinguished co-panelists represent well-established organizations that conduct polling, collect data and work globally with the communities impacted by antisemitism. The hearing will make clear that, by every metric, in almost every region of the world, the level of antisemitic incidents, attitudes and hate crimes is at the highest level on record. Even more shocking is the normalization of antisemitism in many corners of society, a reality none of us believed Jews would experience again.

In countries where the number of incidents may have dipped last year, the levels remain at or close to the highest levels ever. For example, in the UK, the Community Security Trust reported a decrease in the number of assaults of Jews in 2024. Two hundred and one assaults in 2024 is less than the two hundred and seventy three the year before — but more than the one hundred and thirty six in 2022, which you'll now hear called "pre-October 7th" levels.

Especially in a commission dedicated to spotlighting the most depraved forms of identity-based oppression, you know that these statistics don't begin to describe the blast zone around these incidents. Most people don't think about the long tail of trauma that hate crimes leave behind. Check back with the total of the six hundred and ten Jewish people assaulted in the UK over the last three years. These are just the data on one kind of incident - just assaults. Check back with the families and communities of those people. Some will have moved on, they are emotionally scarred, but living their lives. Others will never really be the same.

Multiply that by the constant news of attacks on synagogues. Firebombing and arson at synagogues from Melbourne to Zurich to Montreal and a lot of places in between terrifies everyone who will walk into a synagogue this weekend. And the antisemitic school shootings in multiple countries make every Jewish parent in the world kiss their child a little more sweetly before morning drop off.

The year and a half of monitoring antisemitism since the October 7th attacks has given us a lot of data to digest. As practitioners, much like the Capitol Police who protect your ability to safely fulfill your constitutional responsibilities, we watch events in order to anticipate spikes in incidents. We know to be watchful on April 20th, Adolph Hitler's birthday, when Nazi and white supremacist groups around the world promote their reverence for hateful antisemitism and racism.

In my work with communities, schools, corporations and other networks, October 7th was a day like that. Years of data had shown that, when there is war in Israel, when Israel is in the headlines, there is a predictable human depravity that surfaces in people who express themselves by assaulting Jewish neighbors. Teachers, law enforcement, rabbis and camp counselors know to prepare.

The October 7th Hamas attacks have rewritten the book on depravity, on dehumanization, on butchery, and, of course, on sexual violence as a tool of terror. The sadism of the October 7th attacks can't be easily separated from antisemitism, though some surely tried to frame it as political resistance. Look no further than the Hamas charter, or the vitriolic Jew-hatred of the mastermind of the attack, chillingly clear in Yahya Sinwar's perverse anti-Jewish novel, or at the celebrations of the murderers bragging to family about how many Jews they had killed on that day. While sellers like Amazon stopped selling Sinwar's novel, it remains popular and highly reviewed in publications around the world. The sickening ease with which antisemitism gains traction reveals a deep problem, and not just in countries where Hamas may be popular.

What wasn't predictable is the uptake of Hamas' anti-Jewish hatred in streets around the world. Amid the pain and grief that hung over Jews and so many decent people, [tagging buildings with the Hamas red triangle on routes where Jewish people walked to synagogue](#) is nothing short of emotionally violent. I have worked with people who had pink triangles painted on the doors of their homes. As public figures, members of the commission know well what it must feel like for you or a colleague to be targeted by threats. Some targets were Jewish, some were perceived to be Jewish, others were just identified as trying to help the Jewish community.

The data reveal something else disturbing that runs counter to what we know about the interplay between debate about or protest against Israeli actions and antisemitic violence. One might have thought antisemitic incidents would escalate steadily. As the war in Gaza dragged on, criticism of Israel's prosecution of the war, actions by its military and horrific civilian casualties would escalate and with it the inappropriate hateful, misdirected aggression against Jewish people.

And, yet, in several countries, some with sizable Jewish communities, the incidents decreased slightly. These include France, Britain, Germany, Mexico and South Africa. But data analyzed by Tel Aviv University show that anti-Jewish incidents actually peaked just in the aftermath of October 7th, in advance of the long war and numerous casualties. They peaked at a moment of such terror and fragility for Israelis and for Jews when human empathy ought to have been plentiful. As critique of the war grew internationally, one would have thought the anti-Jewish hostility it catalyzed would precipitate a rise in incidents, not a decline. It's a question researchers and analysts have yet to explore.

It's widely understood that criticism of Israel and Israeli policy is not on its own antisemitic. I have appended to my statement a series of explainers and guides that have been useful to institutions seeking to discern when the line between political speech and identity based hate speech is crossed. These types of approaches have been helpful to institutions fielding questions about where protest against the Israeli military action veers into antisemitism. But even as we talk about incidents "related to the Gaza war," the prominence of brazen anti-Jewish epithets like "f— the Jews" is shocking. In Buenos Aires, when antipathy against the Gaza war was high, the defacement of a monument to Simon Bolivar, simply read: "[Serve the nation, kill a Jew](#)." Thus, the presence of an anti-Jewish bias motive is quite often more than clear. And existing U.S. law provides the tools needed to respond.

What is Antisemitism?

While we look at catalysts that may provide insight on what causes increases in these incidents, we cannot lose sight of the long term resilience and ubiquity of this hatred over so many centuries in so many different types of societies. Antisemitism didn't begin with Hamas, it didn't begin with Nazism. Antisemitism is a lie, a pretext to blame Jews for what's wrong in the lives of people, what is lacking in a society. It has served different purposes to leaders and bad actors in different eras. It has been shaped by different sets of circumstances in different times.

In some eras Jews are scapegoated for cultural shifts that disrupt people's sense of security, they are hated as the tax collectors or bankers, demonized as encompassing ultimate evil at the root of problems like the blood libels, or the poisoning of wells during the black plague. An obvious example in our not too distant history would be the desire to blame someone or something for the failures and hardships of the post WWI period in Germany.

The uptake of anti-Jewish hatred and conspiratorial thinking in our own world as evidenced by the ubiquity of Soros conspiracy theories or "great replacement theory," normalized and

elevated by prominent celebrities, media figures, and powerful politicians, works in similar ways and is just as dangerous. As the American Jewish Committee and others have noted: “And to say that Soros wants to destroy humanity is the kind of harmful hyperbole that has been used against Jews for centuries.” when Soros-related conspiracy theories include other well-worn antisemitic tropes such as control of the media or banks; references to undermining societies or destabilizing countries; or language that harkens back to the medieval blood libels and the characterization of Jews as evil, demonic, or agents of the antichrist.

Even if no antisemitic insinuation is intended, casting a Jewish individual as a puppet master who manipulates national events for malign purposes has the effect of mainstreaming antisemitic tropes and giving support, however unwitting, to bona fide antisemites and extremists who disseminate these ideas knowingly and with malice.

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I have appended to my testimony a list of resources and explainers have added clarity, even in the expert community.

Antisemitism in Politics

In arenas where chaos, division and hate can serve a purpose for bad actors, you will find antisemitism and conspiracy theories. Politics has always been one of those arenas - all over the world. The normalization of antisemitism either explicitly or through code signalling is a global trend and political leaders play a big role in either spreading or refuting it. An interesting example is the rise of Remigijus Žemaitaitis, who came up the ranks in Lithuanian politics, who trafficked in some of the ugliest anti-Jewish ideas. The inclusion of his Nemunas Dawn party in the ruling coalition in Lithuania provoked protests and criticism from [the Jewish community and others](#) around the world because of Žemaitaitis’ record of anti-Semitic statements. His campaign narrative was almost a textbook example. He posited himself as a defender of “Lithuanian sovereignty” and a victim of elites trying to silence him from telling the truth about Jews, the Holocaust in Lithuania, and Israel.

The American Jewish Committee strongly [called out the inclusion of Žemaitaitis antisemitic party](#) in Lithuania’s ruling coalition. And our own U.S. State Department 2023 Report on International Religious Freedom noted that: “MP Remigijus Žemaitaitis posted several antisemitic remarks on social media expressing anger regarding Prime Minister Simonyte’s June visit to Israel and

accusing Jews of deporting and killing Lithuanians in 1941, during the Soviet occupation. Following the October 7 Hamas terrorist attacks on Israel, Zemaitaitis made additional antisemitic comments on social media.” The report goes on to note that “the Vilnius District Prosecutor’s Office started an investigation into whether his comments constituted promotion of hate and incitement to hatred against a group of people on the basis of their nationality. The investigation was continuing at year’s end. Government leaders across the political spectrum, including President Nauseda, Speaker Cmilyte-Nielsen, Prime Minister Simonyte, and Foreign Minister Gabrielius Landsbergis condemned Zemaitaitis’s remarks.”

The antisemitism promoted by this man is abhorrent. And it was roundly confronted by Jewish and non Jewish leaders, by the U.S. Government, by a handful of other foreign embassies in Vilnius, and, most important, by leaders across the Lithuanian government.

We can’t eliminate antisemitism with the push of a button. But we can significantly marginalize it and reduce its impact on individuals and on our social fabric.

The stubborn reality is that investigating, prosecuting and preventing antisemitism is no small task. It will always be the case for political leaders that the most immediate and effective tool that they have is their microphone. And the power of their voice lies in using it- not when it’s easy, not when your criticism will be popular. But when it is hard, when it takes courage.

Recommendations

The Commission has a wealth of recommendations contained in two, well crafted, broadly embraced guides: the [U.S. National Strategy to Counter Antisemitism](#), the single most comprehensive roadmap for countering antisemitism and the broader [Global Guidelines for Countering Antisemitism](#) being adopted by countries around the world. Both serve as models for fighting antisemitism. The first two critical guidelines are below. And like all of the good models for fighting antisemitism, they can apply to the fight against all forms of bigotry and discrimination.

1. **SPEAK OUT** – Governments and political leaders should denounce antisemitism swiftly, clearly, and unequivocally, whenever and wherever it occurs. This applies to the domestic and international arenas, including regional and international organizations.
2. **AVOID POLITICIZATION** – Antisemitism can appear across the political spectrum and should be rejected without political bias and regardless of its origin.
3. **Stand behind the U.S. National Strategy to Counter Antisemitism.** Its launch in May 2023 was the most ambitious, far reaching action in U.S. history. Also historic is the coming together, both from within and outside of the Jewish community, a kind of civic unity and resolve to tackle antisemitism through concrete, coordinated action to stop the spread and the normalization of antisemitism.

If you asked me to give this distinguished commission a charge using only three words, they would be: Lead by example. The last time I testified before a committee with a global focus was in 2017. I asked the same thing. I asked another subcommittee that Co-Chair Smith led to make

sure that we were confronting antisemitism in the world from a position of moral leadership and not just through the power of our influence. And to lead by example, we must fund and support foreign policy tools through which we exert not just our military strength but our moral strength.

We should continue to demand that of ourselves and of our amazing country. We can't digest all of this global hate crime data without asking our own police departments to report not just antisemitic hate crimes, but hate crimes against anyone. So, updated from back in 2017, I've appended to my statement a [list of large city police departments that affirmatively reported zero hate crimes to the FBI in 2023](#). You know from your years of public service, a large diverse city that, year in and year out, does not report data to the FBI – or affirmatively reports zero (0) hate crimes raises more questions about safety in that city than it answers. If we want to be able to understand antisemitism around the world we should also want to do the same here at home. Congress should enact bipartisan legislation to mandate hate crime reporting and to condition federal funding for large state and federal law enforcement agencies on the quality and accuracy of their data collection efforts.

The same holds true with regard to Holocaust remembrance. The Holocaust is being minimized, distorted, denied and relativized in so many places, even, sadly in parts of Germany. In normal times, I'd ask what we can do to teach more people about the Holocaust. But today, I'm asking that we restore Holocaust education and remembrance as a civil value that our government shares along with the rest of us.

It's no longer about the absence of Holocaust education or remembrance, or the defacement of a Holocaust memorial site. Our children, no matter where you live, have seen Nazi salutes from the most prominent platforms in their lives. Ukrainian authorities have opened a criminal case after three young men were seen performing Nazi salutes at a Holocaust memorial in Drobytsky Yar. In [Belgium](#) those who engaged in Nazi salutes at a public protest in Ghent last month are being investigated. In [Helsinki](#) a student was removed from a technology competition after performing a Nazi salute. People all over the world understand the chilling significance of that most ubiquitous gesture in our political culture.

So, these don't feel like normal times for any of us. Decent people all over the world and across our country are appalled that antisemitism, white nationalism, and dangerous conspiracy theories are being espoused by some officials in their governments. I believe that no one on this commission wants to see white nationalist ideology continuing to creep into the mainstream of any political party in America. The overt embrace of these ideas will do harm to all of us and to the exceptional country that we love, that we are continuing to perfect.

Going Forward: Being Able to See Humanity and Solidarity

A lot of Jewish people feel alone, isolated and betrayed by people they hoped would be allies. And it will take time and work to rebuild relationships and social support networks. I worry, again, about our vulnerability, not just to hate violence but to being abused to foment polarized culture wars that don't increase our safety, don't inculcate empathy. In some ways these forces just make us targets of another brand of scapegoating and resentment.

We are fighting for our safety, fighting for the democratic freedoms and civil liberties that keep us and all people safe. Along the way, we also need to take back the narrative from people who benefit more from our fear and from pitting communities against each other than from social cohesion among minority communities standing together.

No one ever talks about the many good people who are can't stand living with antisemitism in their midst. When I am asked by a client's employee whether I think it would be ok if they request a sick day because monitoring or pulling down antisemitic content in response to a public event was emotionally taxing. I'm reminded of the shared humanity that we always have to let into our hearts. We have the ability to create more space for that sharing. When we live only in the isolation or sense of betrayal of the indifference of partners who may not have understood or known what to do about antisemitism, we are missing a big beautiful universe of humanity. And we need each other's humanity and care. Now more than ever.

Related Resources

- [Case Study Lithuania: The Political Rise of an Antisemite](#), Dr. Carl Yonker, Antisemitism World Wide Report for 2024, Tel Aviv University, Center for the Study of Contemporary European Jewry and the Irwin Cotler Institute for Democracy, Human Rights, and Justice pp 55-65
- [Why Elon Musk's Remarks on George Soros Were Wrong](#), American Jewish Committee, May 17, 2023
- [George Soros: Anatomy of a Conspiracy Theory](#), Woodrow Wilson Institute, July 10, 2020
- [The Antisemitism Lurking Behind George Soros Conspiracy Theories](#), Anti-Defamation League, October 11, 2018
- FBI 2023 Hate Crimes Data: [List of Large City Agencies Reporting Zero Hate Crimes](#)
- [Video Explainer Series](#) by Yair Rosenberg, The Atlantic
- [Antisemitism in our Past and Present](#): Short video, Berkeley Center for Jewish Studies
- [Guide to Identifying Antisemitism in Debates about Israel](#) The Nexus Project
- [A Campus Guide to Identifying Antisemitism in a Time of Perplexity](#), The Nexus Project
- [Antisemitism x Democracy - Aspen Institute Landscape Analysis, 2024](#)
- [A Very Brief Guide to Antisemitism](#), Truah, the Rabbinic Call for Human Rights, August 2024
- [What is Antisemitism](#), The Holocaust Encyclopedia, U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum
- [PBS Exploring Hate: How Antisemitism Fuels White Nationalism](#), October 7, 2021
- [Caste: The Origins of Our Discontent](#), by Isabel Wilkerson, August 2020
- [The Racist Great Replacement Theory Explained](#), Southern Poverty Law Center, May 17, 2022
- [Expert Testimony](#) by Prof. Deborah Lipstadt on the history, ideology, symbolism, and rhetoric of antisemitism and how those features were on display at the Unite the Right rally in Charlottesville, VA on August 11-12, 2017