

# Antisemitism and Antizionism in the United States Amid the Iran War

Ted Sasson and Ofir Dayan | No. 2132 | April 27, 2026

**A surge in violent attacks and concern about fallout from the Iran war have heightened attention to the topic of antisemitism in the United States. New research evidence documents the extent of the problem and the depth of concern among Jewish Americans and has intensified a debate inside the Jewish community about how best to respond. The debate has important implications for Israeli policy. Three broad approaches have emerged: a civil rights strategy focused on legal protections and advocacy; an approach emphasizing the need to confront antizionism as a contemporary vehicle for anti-Jewish hostility; and a strategy that prioritizes investment in Jewish education and communal renewal. These approaches address complementary dimensions of the problem, and Israel has an important role to play. Israel should adopt a national strategy on antisemitism and antizionism, strengthen public diplomacy, expand educational partnerships with diaspora communities, and support initiatives that revitalize Jewish identity and Zionism.**

In mid-March, a Lebanese American crashed an explosive-laden truck into the lobby of a suburban Detroit synagogue while the preschool was meeting in nearby classrooms. The children were evacuated through windows, and the attacker died in an exchange of fire with the synagogue's security guard. Later, the [FBI announced](#) the results of its investigation, which found that the attacker had been inspired by Hezbollah and meant to kill as many people as possible.

The attack near Detroit came on the heels of a string of others that have put diaspora Jews on edge. In recent months, ambulances were set ablaze in London, gunshots were fired at synagogues in Toronto, and fifteen people were killed at a Hanukkah celebration in Australia. In the United States, last year will be remembered for the [firebombing of a hostage solidarity march in Boulder, Colorado](#), the [murder of Israeli diplomats in Washington DC](#), and the [arson attack against the Jewish governor of Pennsylvania](#).

It will also be recalled as the year when antisemitic rhetoric and personalities proliferated on [right-wing media platforms](#), and an avowed antizionist was elected as the mayor of New York City.

The US–Israel war against Iran has added a new layer to diaspora concerns. Although the joint campaign represents the pinnacle of US–Israeli strategic cooperation, the operation is highly [unpopular with the general American public](#), which is afraid of a reprise of the deadly, costly, and protracted wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. Jewish Americans, moreover, fear that Israel—and its Jewish supporters in the United States—will be blamed for the war, including the economic fallout from surging energy prices. Indeed, the charge that Israel dragged the United States into the current conflict has become a core feature of the US political discourse about the war. It is a charge that seemed to receive [official endorsement in comments by the US Secretary of State](#) (which he later walked back) and that has been advanced more emphatically by other administration officials, including the former director of a counterterrorism center, Joseph Kent, who [resigned from his post in protest](#).

Indeed, concern that Israel and American Jews will be blamed for the war also seems to be a factor in the opinions of American Jews about the war. In one survey, commissioned by the [Jewish Electorate Institute](#), 55% of Jewish voters expressed disapproval of the war, and 54% said the war is likely to cause “concern about the role of Israel and American Jews in US foreign policy.” However, like the broader American public, Jewish opinion about the war is divided along partisan lines. In that same survey, 74% of Jewish Democrats expressed disapproval of the war while to 83% of Jewish Republicans expressed approval.

### **New Evidence about Antisemitism**

Recently, the American Jewish Committee (AJC), a leading advocacy organization, released the findings of its [annual survey on antisemitism](#) in the United States, based on responses of large samples of Jewish adults and all US adults (i.e., the general adult population).

Key findings include:

- 93% of Jewish adults and 70% of US adults described antisemitism as a somewhat serious or very serious problem.
- 86% of Jewish adults and 63% of US adults said antisemitism had increased in the United States since the Hamas attack of October 7, 2023.
- 71% of Jewish adults reported encountering antisemitic content online or on social media in 2025. Of US adults, 45% said they had personally seen or heard antisemitic incidents, mostly consisting of antisemitic content online. (In 2025, more Americans consumed news via [social media](#) than via television or newspapers.)

The survey of Jewish adults also asked about respondents’ personal experiences of antisemitism, with 31% reporting that they had been a target of antisemitism at least once over the last year—mostly antisemitic remarks made in person or online. More than half (55%) have changed their behavior out of concern for antisemitism, avoiding certain places or wearing Jewishly identifiable symbols—a substantially higher proportion than in previous AJC surveys. (For example, in 2022, AJC [reported](#) that 38% of Jewish adults changed their behavior due to concern about antisemitism.) Finally, 17% of Jewish adults have considered leaving the United States due to antisemitism, up from 13% in the 2024 survey.

Although the survey of US adults found widespread concern about antisemitism, it also found that there is substantial unfamiliarity with the term itself. Nearly one-third reported either never having heard the term (10%) or not knowing what it means (20%). Moreover, 74% of those who reported encountering antisemitism opted not to respond or report the incident.

### **Competing Strategies for Combating Antisemitism**

The publication of the AJC report has helped crystallize a debate within the American Jewish community about how to best confront antisemitism. In the unfolding debate, in the Jewish press, on popular podcasts, and within communal organizations, three distinctive approaches have emerged:

#### **1. Civil Rights Strategy**

Large legacy organizations, including the Anti-Defamation League (ADL) and the AJC, draw on a repertoire of strategies dating back decades. The organizations generally pursue four courses of action:

*Public education*, including developing teaching modules and curricula for public schools and university classrooms, including Holocaust education and public information campaigns. (For example, ADL joined with the Blue Square Alliance to sponsor a multi-million dollar [television spot](#) during the Super Bowl that featured a Jewish high-school student being bullied by his peers—an ad widely criticized for seeming to portray Jews as weak and helpless.)

*Leadership training*, including workshops for university leaders, public school administrators, police departments, public officials, and elected leaders.

*Advocacy and litigation*, including promoting a definition of antisemitism developed by the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA), advancing state and federal laws that expand protections, and initiating legal actions to ensure enforcement.

*Data collection and reporting*, including the ADL’s annual audit of verified incidents of antisemitism and regular surveys about experiences of antisemitism administered by both the ADL and the AJC.

#### **2. Combatting Antizionism Strategy**

The civil rights approach has recently come under criticism from activists under the banner of the [Movement Against Antizionism](#). Advocated mainly by [academics](#) and shaped by their experiences at universities during the 2024 anti-Israel encampments, this approach defines antizionism as a distinctive vehicle for anti-Jewish hate and contends that Jewish organizations should pivot from fighting antisemitism to combating antizionism. (Proponents of this approach spell “antizionism” as one word, lower case and without a hyphen, to portray it as a form of prejudice rather than a cogent ideological position.) This strategy would set aside the question of when antizionism blurs into antisemitism (a [staple](#) of much of the discourse about antisemitism in the United States) and instead teach the [history and ideology of antizionism](#) as a freestanding anti-Jewish worldview, one initially promoted by the Soviet Union and subsequently championed by the global left in the frameworks of human rights and indigenous rights. Like antisemitism, antizionism results in libels against Jews, social ostracization, vandalism, and violence; but while antisemitism was the greatest threat to Jews in the 20th century, antizionism is the greater threat today.

### 3. Jewish Education Strategy

Another source of criticism of the civil rights approach calls for the reorientation of Jewish communal priorities away from both antisemitism and antizionism. Bret Stephens, a *New York Times* opinion columnist and editor of the journal *Sapir*, set out the argument in a [much discussed speech](#) at the 92<sup>nd</sup> Street Y in New York City. Jewish flourishing, Stephens argued, is not primarily a matter of the safety of individual Jews but rather occurs when being Jewish becomes “the centering fact of life, the source from which we derive meaning and purpose.” By that measure, the “golden age” of American Jewry has been fading for decades, alongside rising rates of intermarriage and distancing from Israel. Declaring the fight against antisemitism, which consumes tens of millions of dollars every year, a “mostly wasted effort,” Stephens instead called for stepped-up investment in institutions that can revitalize Jewish life: day schools, museums, cultural centers, publishing houses, journalism, and rabbinic education. (During an [interview](#) that followed the speech, Stephens sharpened his argument by calling for the [dismantlement](#) of the ADL.)

#### Recommendations

While the debate within the American Jewish community about the best way to combat antisemitism and hostility toward Israel pits different approaches against one another, each, in fact, addresses an important dimension of the problem. As American Jewish organizations and philanthropies continue to weigh how to allocate resources among these three approaches, Israel also has an important role to play. A robust Israeli response to antisemitism, antizionism, and the challenges of diaspora Jewish life should include the following components:

1. In dialogue with diaspora Jewish organizations, Israel should draft and publish a national strategy on antisemitism and antizionism. Although Israel has many scattered initiatives, it is among the few signatories to the IHRA that has no national strategy in place. Such a strategy can identify the kinds of actions that a sovereign state alone can take and the ways in which the State of Israel can complement the actions of diaspora Jewish organizations. It can also assess the ways in which Israel’s policies and diplomacy influence currents of antisemitism and antizionism so that decision-making can take such effects into account.
2. Independent of a national strategy on antisemitism and antizionism, Israel should expand and upgrade its public diplomacy. The damage Israel has sustained to its image and reputation during more than two years of war has been severe and creates a fertile environment for the spread of antizionist claims and worldviews. While the joint campaign between the United States and Israel against Iran has nourished some anti-Israel narratives, it can also serve as the basis for a new story about Israel’s contribution to US national security and the values and interests the two countries share in common. In addition, Israel should seek ways to demonstrate its commitment to remaining a liberal democracy and pursuing peace with its neighbors, including the Palestinians.
3. While Israel cannot restore American Jews to a “golden age,” the Jewish state should focus on what it is uniquely capable of doing to help bolster Jewish identity, education, and support for Israel. A top priority should be helping Israel-based educational programs, such as Taglit-Birthright Israel and programs within the Masa framework, to rebuild their numbers, which have been severely depleted throughout the years of the COVID-19 pandemic and the Gaza war.

4. Israel-based and diaspora Jewish educators should design and implement educational initiatives on the histories and current manifestations of antisemitism and antizionism. Within the Israeli educational context, such teaching will communicate a value of caring for diaspora Jewry and Jewish peoplehood. In a diaspora context, it will empower young people and, by extension, the broader Jewish public, to recognize their personal experiences of anti-Jewish rhetoric and behavior as aspects of a broader and deeper social problem. Importantly, there should be a shared knowledge base between Israel and the diaspora to allow for better cooperation on this issue.
5. Finally, Israel and diaspora Jewry should seek to reclaim and revitalize Zionism, an idea that has been an object of derision among the progressive left for more than a quarter-century and has been especially vilified in recent years. A big-tent Zionism that spans the political spectrum can unite most of the Jewish people around an affirmation of Jewish self-determination, accommodating disparate visions of Israel's future while repudiating the ideology and movement that seeks to dismantle the Jewish state.

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Editors of the series: Anat Kurz, Eldad Shavit and Ela Greenberg