

Anti-Zionism vs Antisemitism: Questions for this Moment

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When is anti-Zionism antisemitism? When is it not?

1. Why is this distinction important?
2. How can we help our learners/communities clarify this distinction?
3. If so, then what?

Two different contexts:

1. Jewish anti-Zionism – is there room in our communities for anti-Zionist perspective?
Is Zionism fundamental to Judaism?
2. Non-Jewish Anti-Zionism

What is anti-Zionism? (ADL)

“Anti-Zionism is a prejudice against the Jewish movement for self-determination and the right of the Jewish people to a homeland in the State of Israel. It may be motivated by or result in anti-Semitism, or it may create a climate in which antisemitism becomes more acceptable.



Anti-Zionism can include threats to destroy the State of Israel (or otherwise eliminate its Jewish character), unfounded and inaccurate characterizations of Israel’s power in the world, and language or actions that hold Israel to a different standard than other countries.”

What is anti-Zionism? (JVP)

“Being an anti-Zionist means opposing the political ideology of Zionism, which resulted in the expulsion of 750,000 Indigenous Palestinians from their land and homes. It means standing against the creation of a nation-state with exclusive rights for Jews above others on the land. Anti-Zionism supports liberation and justice for the Palestinian people, including their right to return to their homes and land. Anti-Zionists believe in a future where all people on the land live in freedom, safety, and equality.

Zionism suggests Jews require a supremacist nation-state to answer the real question of Jewish safety. We believe that everywhere in the world, Jews belong and should be safe. Real safety does not grow from guns, checkpoints, walls, and a police state. True safety is built through forging real solidarity with all those fighting for a more liberated world.”

Is this definition sufficient?



How can you tell the difference between antisemitism and anti-Zionism?

Here are six useful markers (1-5 adopted from Rabbi Jill Jacobs – Washington Post 2018):

1. Seeing Jews as insidious influencers behind the scenes of world events

On the left and the right, anti-Semitism often manifests in a nefarious belief in a worldwide Jewish conspiracy that wields outsize power. On the right, it's "globalists" and "elites" who manipulate events. On the left, it's "Zionists." The terms may differ, but the fundamental conspiracy theory is the same.

2. Using the word "Zionist" as code for "Jew" or "Israeli"

"Zionism" denotes a movement, forged in the late 19th century and evolving ever since, for the existence of a modern Jewish state in the Land of Israel. A Zionist supports one or more of the many variations on this vision, which differ wildly in their political, religious and cultural emphases. Critics of Israel sometimes use "Zionist" to assert a global power structure without specifically calling out Jews as its masterminds.

One may disagree with the decision of the United Nations to recognize Israel decades ago, wish that the state had never come to be or aspire to the establishment of a binational state in its place without necessarily stepping into antisemitism. But refusing to call Israel or Israelis by their internationally accepted names denies the very existence of the state and its people's identities. These coy linguistic tricks are as unacceptable as the right-wing penchant for denying the existence of Palestinians and Palestinian identity.

3. Denying Jewish history

As a means of rejecting the legitimacy of Israel, some assert that Jews have no national history there — that they are, in other words, nothing more than European colonizers. For instance, the website Middle East Monitor referred recently to the “alleged Temple” in ancient Jerusalem (the ruins are still there). Some critics also reduce Judaism to religion, in the mold of Western Christianity, rather than acknowledging our more complex sense of ourselves as a people with a history and an ancestral land, as well as religious and cultural practices. This includes dismissing Zionism as “white supremacy.” Statements like these ignore the fact that, unlike most white people here and elsewhere, Jews have been subject to racially based discrimination — and that more than half of Israeli Jews are not Ashkenazi, meaning their families did not come from Europe.

4. Dismissing the humanity of Israelis

Such lack of concern for Israeli lives is evident in failures to condemn Hamas after their brutal massacre of civilians, rape of women, and abduction of hundreds of civilians, not to speak of ongoing rocket attacks against civilians. In the rejection of the term “terrorist” for anyone who acts against Israelis and in statements blaming Israelis for their own deaths. A movement motivated by concern for human rights requires caring about the dignity, well-being, concerns and self-determination of all people.

5. Assuming that the Israeli government speaks for all Jews

An explicit disavowal of a connection to Israel shouldn't be a prerequisite for Jewish involvement in broader social justice issues, as has become the norm on college campuses and in many progressive spaces.

Imagine assuming that all Americans supported President Trump's policies or asking Americans to expressly disown their own country before engaging in any international human rights campaigns. Reasonable people may disagree about Israeli policy, about nationalism or about whether the solution to the conflict should involve one state or two. But Jews who care about Israel — many of whom revile Netanyahu and his politics — should not be excluded from progressive spaces based on their answers to such questions.

6. Accusing Israel of being a “Jewish Supremacist” State

A state in which Jews have more rights than non-Jews.

- Naturalization, citizenship, and the Law of Return
- The question of Occupation: 1967 vs. 1948

3D Test of Anti-Semitism: Demonization, Double Standards, Delegitimization - Natan Sharansky (2004)

1. The first "D" is the test of **demonization**. When the Jewish state is being demonized; when Israel's actions are blown out of all sensible proportion; when comparisons are made between Israelis and Nazis and between Palestinian refugee camps and Auschwitz - this is antisemitism, not legitimate criticism of Israel.
2. The second "D" is the test of **double standards**. When criticism of Israel is applied selectively; when Israel is singled out by the United Nations for human rights abuses while the behavior of known and major abusers, such as China, Iran, Cuba, and Syria, is ignored; when Israel's Magen David Adom, alone among the world's ambulance services, is denied admission to the International Red Cross - this is anti-Semitism.
3. The third "D" is the test of **delegitimization**: when Israel's fundamental right to exist is denied - alone among all peoples in the world - this too is antisemitism.

Sara Himels, Unpacked, [“Is Anti-Zionism the Same as Antisemitism?”](#) (2021)

Much of the debate centers on an example of contemporary antisemitism given in the **International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance Definition (IHRA)**, created in 2016: the document states that “denying the Jewish people their right to self-determination” and “claiming that the existence of the state of Israel is a racist endeavor” could be antisemitic when “taking into account the overall context.” By contrast, a new proposed definition released last week — the **Jerusalem Declaration on Antisemitism (JDA)** — asserts that “opposing Zionism as a form of nationalism” and “evidence-based criticism of Israel as a state” (including its founding principles), are not “on the face of it,” antisemitic. The authors note that “Hostility to Israel could be an expression of an antisemitic animus, or it could be a reaction to a human rights violation, or... the emotion that a Palestinian person feels on account of their experience at the hands of the State.”

Jerusalem Declaration of Antisemitism

"Antisemitism is discrimination, prejudice, hostility or violence against Jews as Jews (or Jewish institutions as Jewish)."

Guidelines

A. General

1. It is racist to essentialize (treat a character trait as inherent) or to make sweeping negative generalizations about a given population. What is true of racism in general is true of antisemitism in particular.
2. What is particular in classic antisemitism is the idea that Jews are linked to the forces of evil. This stands at the core of many anti-Jewish fantasies, such as the idea

of a Jewish conspiracy in which “the Jews” possess hidden power that they use to promote their own collective agenda at the expense of other people. This linkage between Jews and evil continues in the present: in the fantasy that “the Jews” control governments with a “hidden hand,” that they own the banks, control the media, act as “a state within a state,” and are responsible for spreading disease. All these features can be instrumentalized by different (and even antagonistic) political causes.

3. Antisemitism can be manifested in words, visual images, and deeds. Examples of antisemitic words include utterances that all Jews are wealthy, inherently stingy, or unpatriotic. In antisemitic caricatures, Jews are often depicted as grotesque, with big noses and associated with wealth. Examples of antisemitic deeds are: assaulting someone because she or he is Jewish, attacking a synagogue, daubing swastikas on Jewish graves, or refusing to hire or promote people because they are Jewish.
4. Antisemitism can be direct or indirect, explicit or coded. For example, “The Rothschilds control the world” is a coded statement about the alleged power of “the Jews” over banks and international finance. Similarly, portraying Israel as the ultimate evil or grossly exaggerating its actual influence can be a coded way of racializing and stigmatizing Jews. In many cases, identifying coded speech is a matter of context and judgement, taking account of these guidelines.
5. Denying or minimizing the Holocaust by claiming that the deliberate Nazi genocide of the Jews did not take place, or that there were no extermination camps or gas chambers, or that the number of victims was a fraction of the actual total, is antisemitic.





Israel and Palestine: examples that, on the face of it, are antisemitic:

1. Applying the symbols, images and negative stereotypes of classical antisemitism (see guidelines 2 and 3) to the State of Israel.
2. Holding Jews collectively responsible for Israel’s conduct or treating Jews, simply because they are Jewish, as agents of Israel.
3. Requiring people, because they are Jewish, publicly to condemn Israel or Zionism (for example, at a political meeting).
4. Assuming that non-Israeli Jews, simply because they are Jews, are necessarily more loyal to Israel than to their own countries.
5. Denying the right of Jews in the State of Israel to exist and flourish, collectively and individually, as Jews, in accordance with the principle of equality.

Israel and Palestine: examples that, on the face of it, are not antisemitic

(whether or not one approves of the view or action)

1. Supporting the Palestinian demand for justice and the full grant of their political, national, civil and human rights, as encapsulated in international law.
2. Criticizing or opposing Zionism as a form of nationalism, or arguing for a variety of constitutional arrangements for Jews and Palestinians in the area between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean. It is not antisemitic to support arrangements that accord full equality to all inhabitants “between the river and the sea,” whether in two states, a binational state, unitary democratic state, federal state, or in whatever form.
3. Evidence-based criticism of Israel as a state. This includes its institutions and founding principles. It also includes its policies and practices, domestic and abroad, such as the conduct of Israel in the West Bank and Gaza, the role Israel plays in the region, or any other way in which, as a state, it influences events in the world. It is

not antisemitic to point out systematic racial discrimination. In general, the same norms of debate that apply to other states and to other conflicts over national self-determination apply in the case of Israel and Palestine. Thus, even if contentious, it is not antisemitic, in and of itself, to compare Israel with other historical cases, including settler-colonialism or apartheid.

4. Boycott, divestment and sanctions are commonplace, non-violent forms of political protest against states. In the Israeli case they are not, in and of themselves, antisemitic.
5. Political speech does not have to be measured, proportional, tempered, or reasonable to be protected under Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights or Article 10 of the European Convention on Human Rights and other human rights instruments. Criticism that some may see as excessive or contentious, or as reflecting a “double standard,” is not, in and of itself, antisemitic. In general, the line between antisemitic and non-antisemitic speech is different from the line between unreasonable and reasonable speech.

Criticizing Israel does not necessarily make someone anti-Semitic; the determining factor is the intent and language of the speaker:

- Is the speaker someone with a history of anti-Jewish attitudes? If so, the criticism is probably anti-Semitic.
- Critics who habitually single out [Israel](#) for condemnation while ignoring far [worse actions](#) by other countries (especially other [Middle Eastern countries](#)) are anti-Semitic.
- Likening [Israel](#) to [Nazi Germany](#), or to traditional anti-Jewish stereotypical behavior is another sure sign of Jew-baiting.
- Attacks on the merits of Israel's existence rather than individual government policies are anti-Semitic.

Here are several additional ways to distinguish between people who are expressing legitimate criticism and antisemites who seek to delegitimize Israel:

Legitimate critics expose Israel's flaws in the hope of improving society.

Delegitimizers highlight Israel's imperfections for the purpose of embarrassing, isolating, and demeaning the nation.

Legitimate critics seek to change Israel through its democratic processes.

Delegitimizers attempt to use nondemocratic means to impose changes on Israel, many of which are opposed by the citizens of Israel.

Legitimate critics want to see Israel adopt policies that will help it grow and prosper and coexist with an equally prosperous Palestinian state.

Delegitimizers want to see Israel weakened or destroyed.

Legitimate critics believe the free flow of ideas, culture, and trade between peoples is the best way to promote peace and understanding.

Delegitimizers advocate blacklists, censorship, and demonization of Israelis.