



Community Policy
Forum



BRIEFING

ISLAMOPHOBIA AND ANTISEMITISM

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APRIL 2024

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Introduction.

Since the Hamas attack on 7th October 2023 and Israel's assault on Gaza in response, there have been reports about rising antisemitism across British society. These reports are concerning and demonstrate an urgent need to address antisemitism and its impacts. However, there are public, political, and media voices that have stoked fears and used accusations of antisemitism to delegitimise and demonise legitimate democratic expressions of Palestinian solidarity and criticism of the Israeli government's actions in Gaza. These accusations have thus facilitated a divide and rule between Muslim and Jewish communities, and fueled Islamophobic tropes and a rise in hatred against Muslims, Arabs, Palestinians, and those supporting them, including Jewish supporters. Moreover, the manner in which accusations of antisemitism have become securitised within the prism of PREVENT and 'extremism' raise further cause for concern. As such, I argue we need to challenge both the conflation of antisemitism and anti-zionism, and the divide and rule between communities, defend the democratic right to protest and the human rights of Palestinians, and make connections between all forms of racism, including antisemitism and Islamophobia.

Reported increases in antisemitism.

In early March 2024, the Jewish security organisation, Community Security Trust (CST) published the [report](#) 'Antisemitic Incidents 2023'. It detailed a significant rise in antisemitic incidents in Britain over the previous year and was widely reported and commented on by the media and political figures. According to the CST report, there were 4,103 self-reported anti-Jewish hate incidents in 2023. This was a record high up 147% from the previous year and almost double the previous record of 2,255 in 2021. Two-thirds of these occurred following 7th October.

This new data and such claims seemed to confirm fears that were expressed and reported on in late 2023 when Justin Cohen of [Jewish News](#) argued: "[t]he Jewish community at the moment is full of dread, full of fear, like I've never seen before." According to the [Campaign against Antisemitism](#) (CAA), British Jews felt "forced to hide" during "anti-Israel" protests in London. Following the CST report, on 5th March 2024, *The Standard* published the [article](#) "Jewish Londoners 'make plans to flee capital' amid huge antisemitism wave", with an image of a Star of David (in Israel's flag colours of blue and white) behind smashed glass (evoking Kristallnacht) with the banner "London's antisemitism shame". The article contained survey data and analysis from CAA who attributed this to attacks on individuals and Jewish communal institutions and businesses, as well as threats made to MPs, antisemitism in universities, and Palestinian solidarity marches and protests, which they term "mass intimidation".

[According](#) to CAA CEO Gideon Falter, "[a]t the epicentre of this disaster are the weekly anti-Israel marches, which feature antisemitic signage, genocidal rhetoric and intimidation. They have made London a no-go zone for Jews." This claim was also reiterated by government counter-extremism tsar, Robin Simcox, who [stated](#) that pro-Palestinian protests are making London "a no-go zone for Jews every weekend". Thus, this claim became a story in many national newspapers and media outlets, including *The Telegraph*, *The Times*, *The Daily Mail*, *BBC*, *Sky*, *LBC*, *The Jewish Chronicle*, *Jewish News*, *Times of Israel*, and more. In response to these developments, Prime Minister Rishi Sunak [pledged](#) an extra £54m for the security of Jewish communities.

Antisemitism and anti-zionism.

These reports are very concerning and scary for a community which has a long history of experiencing racism and hate, and the memory and collective trauma of the Holocaust which has been frequently evoked in political statements, media reporting, and analysis of both the 7th October attack and the rise in antisemitism that has followed it. As a society, we must stand up to antisemitism as well as other forms of racism and hate. However, there are several issues that need to be unpacked and addressed if we are to do so effectively.

One issue is the way that antisemitism is often being conflated with anti-zionism, protests against Israel's actions, and wider Palestinian solidarity. Although there are indeed serious examples of antisemitism being reported on, pro-Palestinian marches and related political activism is frequently evoked as a main source and manifestation of antisemitism (including 'no go' areas), and a threat to Jews. *The Jewish Chronicle* editor, Jake Wallis Simons, repeatedly **claims** that Palestinian solidarity marches are antisemitic and threatening to Jews. They were highlighted in CST and CAA reports, and were the focus of Simcox's statement and, earlier, former Home Secretary, Suella Braverman, who called the protests "hate marches". Slogans, marches, and statements of solidarity have been described as "genocidal", while the phrase "Free Palestine" accounted for 427 incidents in the CST report. CST representatives even **claimed** that some of this "was a celebration of the Hamas attack on Israel, rather than anger at Israel's military response in Gaza".



As such, it is important that we carefully separate and delineate the boundaries of legitimate criticisms of the Israeli government and the Zionist project, including colonialism and occupation, from genuine antisemitism that dehumanises and promotes hatred of Jewish communities. The uncritical delegitimising of pro-Palestinian solidarity as antisemitism only serves to misrepresent antisemitism. While events, symbols, and slogans expressing protest and solidarity may well cause concern, anxiety, and fear for Jewish people who believe these claims and/or conflate their Zionism with Jewishness and thus anti-zionism and antisemitism, that does not make them antisemitic or dangerous.

The **IHRA definition** of antisemitism makes clear that it should not be conflated with anti-zionism, particularly in ways that hold Jews collectively responsible for the actions of the state of Israel. It also **states** that "criticism of Israel similar to that levelled against any other country cannot be regarded as antisemitic". Yet, many of the other examples in the definition conflate anti-zionism and a range of criticisms of Israel with antisemitism. One example is that references to Israel and Zionism as a "racist endeavour" serves to deny "the Jewish people their right to self-determination". While accusations of racism, as well as fascism and genocide in the current context, are thus viewed as antisemitic, the actions of Israel (to which such accusations refer) are justified by the state and its supporters in the name of both self-determination and self-defence.

The harm caused to Jews is not just from antisemitism, but also from approaches to it, like these, that serve to entrench the notion of collective Jewish representation and responsibility for the actions of

Israel, rather than to disrupt the conflation. Indeed, portraying criticisms of Israel as an inherent antisemitic attack on the UK's Jewish population implicitly activates tropes that are **highlighted** by the IHRA definition, including ideas that British Jews are loyal to Israel above the interests of "their own nation". This construction of collective representation and responsibility can thus stoke fear in ways that may make Jews feel the need to hide or conceal their identity and expressions of religious faith and belief. Meanwhile, it further creates a divide and rule between racialised and minoritised communities which undermines solidarity, cohesion, and the fight against racisms.

Another significant way that the conflation of antisemitism and anti-zionism harms Jews is the impact on anti-zionist Jews who reject this conflation in their own identities and express a desire for ceasefire and end to the occupation. They may be individuals or those associated with now well known movements and organisations such as the Jewish Bloc, If Not Now, Jewish Voice for Peace, Na'amod, Black-Jewish Alliance, Just Jews, and Jewdas. Their presence helps challenge this relationship and exposes the fallacy that anti-zionism is antisemitic or that the former is about hating Jews as opposed to being about Israel and its actions. Yet, the response to it can often be another form of harm against Jews. That is the delegitimisation, silencing, and invisibilising of many and exposing them to attacks as 'self-hating', 'traitors', 'kapos', and 'Judenrats', as well as accusations that they are not even Jewish. Such accusations not only assume Jews ought to support Israel, which is in contravention of the IHRA, but evokes Nazism and complicity in the Holocaust to criticise those that do not. This occurs despite the fact that the IHRA also considers this antisemitic when applied to Israel, as we have seen in *The Jewish Chronicle*, CST and CAA reporting about symbols and signs seen at protests.

Yet, Jewish people are not the target and worst harmed in this context. That is Palestinians and Muslims.

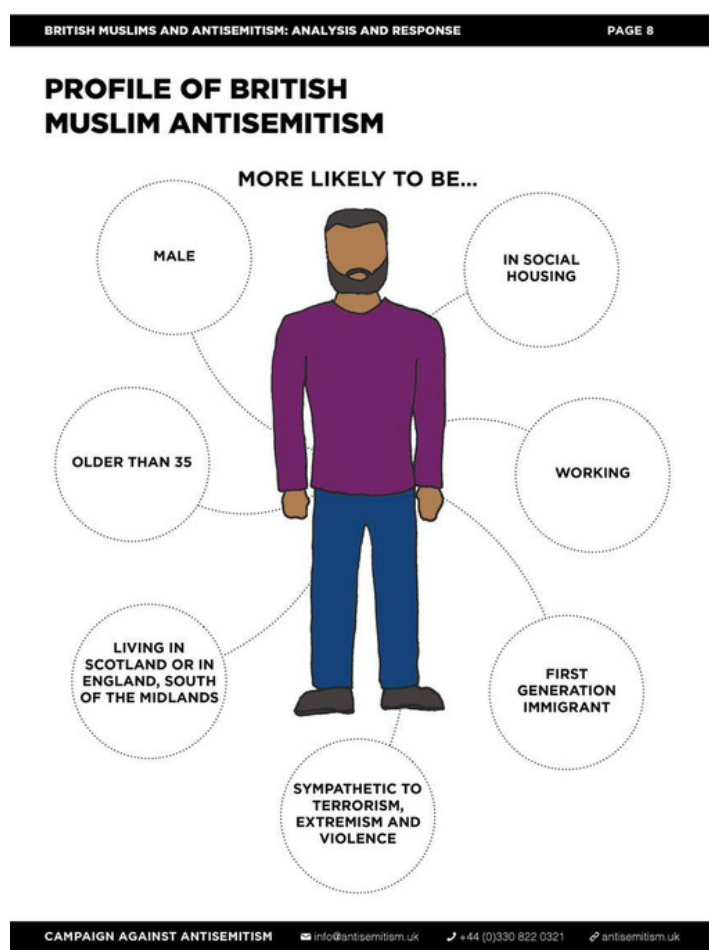
Delegitimising Muslim and pro-Palestinian dissent.

This brings us to the next issue and main focus on this analysis. That while the focus of such reports and fear is antisemitism, the targets and victims can often be Palestinians and Muslims. First and foremost, the very delegitimisation of Palestinian solidarity and protest against Israel by linking it to antisemitism and support for extremism or terrorism serves to not only deny Palestinian experiences, but perpetuates a colonial occupation and expansion, as well as state violence, ethnic cleaning and genocide in Gaza. This is paramount as at the point of writing, the **number** of Palestinians killed or injured is over 100,000 and death toll stands at over 30,000 and most have been civilians, women and children. Gaza is almost uninhabitable; all education institutions and hospitals have been destroyed; and people are starving. Yet, when accused of war crimes and genocide, Israel's Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu **labelled** investigations into Israel as "pure antisemitism". Minister of National Security, Itamar Ben-Gvir, **stated** in response to a UN ceasefire resolution: "The Security Council decision proves that the United Nations is anti-semitic, and its Secretary General is anti-semitic and encourages Hamas."

Over recent years, the UK government has pursued an increasingly authoritarian approach to judicial oversight and political opposition, with legislation such as the Police, Crime, Sentencing, and Courts Act 2022 and the Public order Act 2023 **restricting** the right to peaceful protest. Meanwhile, the Economic Activity of Public Bodies (Overseas Matters) Bill is designed to **hinder** public advocacy for international human rights causes, with a heavy focus on restricting pro-Palestinian activism.

For more information regarding the UK's undermining of human rights frameworks and political engagement in the UK, see Community Policy Forum's evidence to the UN Human Rights Committee [here](#).

In a continuation of this pattern, attempts to delegitimise protestors and critics of the Israel government – who come from all communities, including Jewish – employ targeted racist tropes and stereotypes directed at Palestinians, Arabs, and Muslims. The CST's own data collection and reporting, which provides the evidence base for the current focus on and concern about antisemitism, uses highly **problematic** racial and ethnic profiles. Notably, "a description of the ethnic appearance of the offender". While according to their reporting, in the past perpetrators were 38% white, 12% Black and 33% of "Arab or North African appearance", between 7th October and December 2023, 32% were white and 41% Arab or North African.



The case for associating antisemitism with Muslims in particular has been building for a long time and has become a classic example of both Islamophobia and divide and rule. In 2020, *The Jewish Chronicle* **argued** that "[i]t's time to call out the antisemitism within Britain's Muslim communities". In 2016, at the height of Brexit era Islamophobia and anti-immigrant xenophobia, as well as associated rise in hate crime, CAA issued the **report** 'British Muslims and Antisemitism'. The report concluded that "on every single count, British Muslims were more likely by far than the general British population to hold deeply antisemitic views. It is clear that many British Muslims reserve a special hatred for British Jews... those who harbour hatred of Jews also hate British society and sympathise with our most deadly enemies. Britain must confront antisemitism within its Muslim population, but also amongst the general population, whose shocking views should be no less concerning simply because the views of British Muslims are worse." The report also included an infographic profile of a Muslim anti-Semite who is racialised, has a beard, and is more likely to be "a first

generation immigrant". Making the connection to migrant backgrounds feeds into ongoing anti-immigrant politics, and is often also code for Muslims as 'foreign'. The report and image appear to have been removed and the CAA has since been subject to **complaints** to the Charity Commission and its work has been criticised by the Institute for Jewish Policy Research for indications of "pre-existing hypotheses and assumptions" that has produced research that "falls short both in terms of its methodology and its analysis" and has resulted in "incendiary" findings.

We can also see the demonisation of Muslims, including through the construction of them as antisemitic in the work of Douglas Murray, former director of the Henry Jackson Society (which has been **described** as a "threat to democracy" due to its influence over prominent politicians and its concerted

demonisation of Muslim communities), who published the [article](#) 'Why must Jews watch their backs as London mobs cheer?' in *The Jewish Chronicle*. The Chronicle's editor, Simons, who has also attacked protests as antisemitic, has previously [argued](#) that "much of Muslim culture is in the grip of a death cult", and claimed that Islamophobia is "bogus" and "profoundly anti-Jew". Murray is also author of *The Strange Death of Europe: Immigration, Identity, Islam* (2017), in which he not only makes the link between Islam, immigration, and extremism, but does so in a way that plays into elements of the Great Replacement Theory that has been linked to far-right radicalisation and racist attacks, including the Christchurch mosque and Islamic centre shootings in New Zealand in 2019.

Unsurprisingly, the trope of extremism and terrorism is also frequently evoked and weaponised against Muslims and those supporting Palestinians in the current context, with antisemitism a prominent element of this characterisation. The fact that a statement about antisemitism in London from Simcox, the counter-extremism tsar, was so widely covered points to the preoccupation with the securitised framings of Muslims and pro-Palestinian solidarity, alongside accusations of antisemitism. In a 1st March speech at No 10, Sunak [condemned](#) "a shocking increase in extremist disruption and criminality" following 7th October and warned "[d]on't let the extremists hijack your marches".

This warning was also issued to ["good hearted"](#) supporters of the Palestinians by Communities Secretary, Michael Gove, who recently [unveiled](#) a new definition of extremism, one seemingly informed by perceptions and reports about such protests. This immediately raised [fears](#) that an already securitised Muslim community would be at the sharp end of this, along with Palestinian Action and communal organisations such as the Muslim Council of Britain and Muslim Engagement and Development (MEND). This has [proven](#) to be the case for MEND, Cage, and Muslim Association of Britain, which soon found themselves [named](#) and under scrutiny. The new definition and focus also targets 'anti-fascists' and 'socialists' who are seen as opposition to Zionism, racism, the far right, and the current government.

For wider reading on the new definition of 'extremism' and its human rights implications, see Community Policy Forum's briefing [here](#).

The fact that Sunak and Gove referred to pro-Palestinian marches being hijacked could be interpreted as challenging those who claim they are antisemitic, extremist, and terrorist supporting by definition. The distinction between the 'extremists' (be they 'Islamist' or left) and others may have been a way to gain more legitimacy while still delegitimising them and pursuing the same politics and political targets.

Adoption of combating antisemitism by the far-right.

It is also possible to speculate that this also refers to the far right hijacking marches. The most obvious [example](#) of this was Tommy Robinson (aka Stephen Yaxley-Lennon), former leader of the anti-Muslim EDL, and a mob confronting protestors at the National March for Palestine (NMP) on 13th November 2023. In this case, the far-right was not hijacking the NMP, but were enthusiastically adopting the mantles of government officials and mainstream media to 'defend' the Cenotaph and remembrance day from 'hate' marchers. As they also got into confrontations with the police and Braverman was widely seen as encouraging them, it led to her sacking by Sunak.

Robinson, Murray, and others also publicly [promoted](#) and attended the 26th November March in

solidarity against antisemitism, organised by the CAA, and this also led to confrontations. In both cases though, the far right was aligned with mainstream support for Israel (often constructed as anti-antisemitism), as well as anti-immigrant xenophobia and Islamophobia. The latter of which, like the far right itself, have also become increasingly mainstream in Britain under the current and recent governments. It is worth noting that the far right has, in recent years, used support for Israel and anti-antisemitism (conflating the two) functionally to avoid their historical association with fascism and antisemitism, and attack Muslims. Both of which have been central to their mainstreaming.

With the increased mobilisation of the far right in recent years, there has been an increase in far right PREVENT referrals. This may also be due in part to years of the strategy focusing on and securitising Muslims disproportionately while the far right is mainstreamed and emboldened. However, Home Office **data** indicates that amongst the 645 PREVENT referrals that adopted as Channel cases between 2022-2023, “296 (46%) were for Extreme Right-Wing concerns, 115 (18%) were for Islamist concerns, and 103 (16%) were for those with a Conflicted ideology.” Yet, in the 2022-23 Independent Review of PREVENT, which had widely been accused of the disproportionate focus on Muslims and Islamophobia, led by former director of the Henry Jackson Society (like Murray) William Shawcross, criticised increased far-right referrals for targeting individuals labelled right-wing extremists who express mainstream right-wing views. Instead, it called for more attention on the larger threat of ‘Islamist’ extremism.

Meanwhile, recent months have witnessed various revealing examples of high profile mainstream political figures making what can only be described as racist and far-right statements about Muslims – many of which evoked the spectre of replacement and conspiracy. In February, Braverman **stated** that pro-Palestinian “hate marches” showed that “the truth is that the Islamists, the extremists and the antisemites are in charge now”. Tory MP Lee Anderson made a similar point, **saying** that ‘Islamists’ have “got control of [London Mayor Sadiq] Khan and they've got control of London, and they've got control of [Labour Leader Keir] Starmer as well.” Refusing to apologise, Anderson had the whip removed and defected to the far-right party, Reform UK. That same week, former Prime Minister Liz Truss gave a talk at the Conservative Political Action Conference (CPAC) in the US and, while being interviewed by Steve Bannon, remained **silent** as he described Tommy Robinson as a “hero”.

Islamophobia.

Cases such as those outlined above, in addition to George Galloway's February electoral victory in Rochdale, clearly informed Sunak's 1st March speech about extremism. Galloway's win – which Sunak **called** “alarming” and the Board of Deputies of British Jews labelled “a dark day” for the UK's Jewish community – was widely seen as a result of Muslim frustration regarding the main parties' position on Gaza and Islamophobia. In addition to his point about extremism, Sunak also highlighted the fact that both Jews and Muslims are under attack.

While recognition of Islamophobia is welcome, one must question the extent to which this recognition is a political veneer for an underlying hostility to actively addressing Islamophobia and its causes. Certainly, the Government has **undermined** efforts to adopt the APPG definition of Islamophobia, and yet made very little effort to provide an alternative, having **dismissed** the advisor Qari Asim MBE in 2022 and failing to replace him. Asim himself noted that he had received little “meaningful engagement” from the Government and that his letters to ministers had been ignored, **demonstrating** “a lack of political will to define Islamophobia”.

As such, this appears, at best, to be a superficial attempt to acknowledge the experience and impact of Islamophobia, in order to appear even handed, offset criticism and, in light of the Galloway win and reduction of Muslim support for Labour, possibly seek political support.

In terms of Islamophobia, the focus on antisemitism (particularly in the name of Israel) has served to delegitimise Muslim political ideas, interests, and activism, while simultaneously representing them as hateful and extremist. This consolidates and exacerbates the racism Muslims already experience in the system and from the state, far-right, and mainstream civil society as a racialised, minoritised, suspect community. It also, crucially, ignores and continues to sideline the racism and hate that they do experience which has only increased as the government will know.

According to Tell Mama, in the four month period since 7th October, Britain has seen anti-Muslim incidents **triple** from 600 in the previous year to 2,010. They also reported that this is the highest in any four month period since they started recording in 2011. These included incidents of hate speech on social media, physical assault, abusive behaviour, threats and acts of vandalism, with the largest proportion (576) also taking place in London. The connection to Israel and Gaza is clear as Tell Mama director, Iman Atta, **told** the BBC: "Individuals walking down the streets are being targeted, harassed, households have been doodled with graffiti calling people 'killers', 'terrorists', ' Hamas sympathisers'." Some of which, including the latter two accusations, are also what Muslims are hearing from the far right, mainstream media, political establishment, and government officials about protests and solidarity with Palestinians, especially in light of the rush to treat such activities as extremism.

Meanwhile, Labour MP, Naz Shah, has **highlighted** cases of "verbal and physical abuse, as well as vandalism, such as the dumping of a pig's head at a proposed site of a mosque in Barnoldswick". Indeed, mosques (as a physical representation of Islam in the UK) are notably vulnerable to hate crime incidents, with Acton Mosque as one example that was **vandalised** three times in two weeks during October to November 2023.

The Islamophobia Response Unit (IRU) has also **recorded** significant increases in Islamophobic hate crime and discrimination in the months since October, with the majority of instances relating to Palestine. Compared to the monthly average for the previous five months (May to September 2023), the IRU reportedly received a:

- 365% increase in reports in October;
- 325% increase in reports in November;
- 206% increase in reports in December;
- 206% increase in reports in January;
- and a 301% increase in reports in the first two weeks of February.

It is especially important to recognise that these increases in reports have occurred despite a recognised pattern of reluctance among Muslim communities to report such incidents. The IRU has also noted that this reluctance has been exacerbated in recent months due to the demonisation of Muslim and Palestinian activists across media and political discourse that is creating heightened distrust in the authorities.

The overwhelming focus on antisemitism also contributes to obscuring the impact on Muslim

communities. That is particularly important when we consider hate crime and incidents have been up for all communities since Brexit and we have continuously seen some forms of hate, notably anti-Muslim, anti-immigrant, and anti-trans, deemed legitimate by the media, state and political parties, while antisemitism has been prioritised for both parties since Corbyn. It is something that the Tories attack Labour on and Labour attacks itself on, including attacks against Jewish and racialised members.

It is important to recognise the rise in racism and other forms of hate, understand where they align with power in ways that make some acceptable and others not, and challenge divide and rule that exacerbates some and harms all. They must be connected as part of a collective fight against all racisms, violence, and injustice. This includes that fight against colonialism, occupation, and genocide in Gaza.



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