

REPORTING ON ANTISEMITISM

A 10 Step Guide for Media

Prepared by American Jewish Committee

Introduction

Antisemitism continues to rise in the United States. In May 2021, during the conflict between Israel and Hamas, [Jews were attacked](#) on the street, synagogues were vandalized, antisemitic signs and chants were recorded at protests across the country, and antisemitic rhetoric proliferated on social media. Yet, [more than half of all Americans were unaware of this violence](#).

Reporters and journalists play an important role in raising awareness about contemporary antisemitism, its various, ever-changing forms (including Holocaust denial and conspiracies), and its sources, as well as keeping our leaders accountable. Accuracy in reporting is critical, especially since media coverage of the topic plays a role in shaping public perceptions, not just of antisemitism, but of Jews and Judaism. This 10-step guide was created to assist journalists, news editors and other media specialists in their reporting of antisemitism and Jewish issues.

1. Know who Jews are

Many Americans have [never met a Jew](#), and only know what they have gleaned from the media. For this reason, how Jews and antisemitism are portrayed is crucial. Jews are a people, not just adherents of a religion. They are not a race, as there are Jews from nearly every race. Some Jews are atheists, or not religious, or are culturally associated with Jewish traditions. Jews are also a small group—only 15.2 million people, accounting for 0.2% of the world’s population. Jews originate from Israel and the word “Jew” is derived from “Judea,” the ancient name for Israel. Jewish communities living in the Diaspora (outside of Israel) [settled all around the world](#), and therefore are not a monolithic group. Jews are not only from Europe, but also are from Ethiopia, India, across North Africa and throughout the Middle East.



It is critical to understand the nature of your Jewish community. [American Jews](#) range from Haredi (ultra-Orthodox) to secular. Develop relationships with the local Jewish community to build trust and understanding, so when an antisemitic incident occurs, the Jewish community is comfortable responding to questions from the media and sharing their experience.

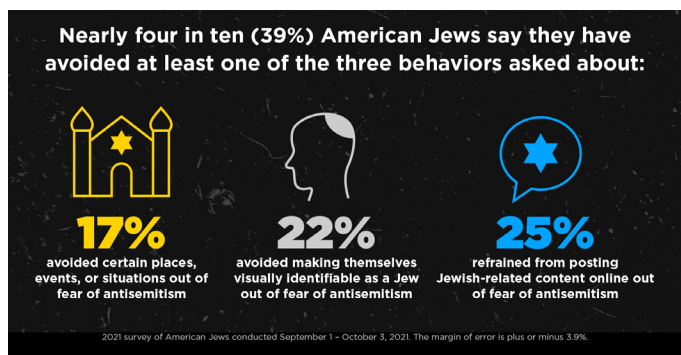
2. Know what antisemitism is and how to recognize it

[Antisemitism](#) is a certain perception of Jews, which may be expressed as a hatred of Jews. In addition to hatred of Jews, it can appear in many different forms, such as: conspiracy theories of Jewish power or control; stereotyping or demonizing Jewish communities as a collective; Holocaust denial and distortion; claims of dual loyalty, or that Jewish Americans are more loyal to Israel than their own countries; and holding Jews accountable for the policies of the State of Israel. Antisemitism is called the oldest hatred, and [its origins](#) date back thousands of years.

In America, antisemitism can look like Nazi swastika graffiti, the desecration of Jewish cemeteries, or the white supremacist belief that Jews are behind efforts to promote mass immigration, intermarriage, and other efforts to “replace” the white majority. It can look like denying Jews who identify as Zionists from participating in so-called progressive spaces, or asking American Jews to denounce Israeli policies when the same would never be asked of other minority groups.

3. Know how antisemitism affects Jews

In 2021, [one in four American Jews](#) reported being the personal target of antisemitism—a remark online or in person, or a physical incident—in the last year. Almost four in ten American Jews changed their behavior in the last year alone.



4. Know what to do when there is an antisemitic incident in your community

When there is an antisemitic incident in your community, or when you’re reporting on an antisemitic event, the following questions should be considered:

1. What is the narrative being conveyed? Are stereotypes or tropes purposefully or inadvertently being espoused?
2. Who is the reputable or authoritative voice being quoted? Is it a fringe or a mainstream perspective?
3. Who can I contact to help understand the issues in greater depth?
4. What is the headline being considered? Does it highlight the offensive nature of the incident?
5. How is the Jewish community after the incident is over? How did it impact them? How are they moving forward? Have they changed their behavior or religious practice as a result?

5. Be alert to patterns; know when to expect spikes in antisemitism

[According to the FBI](#), attacks on Jews make up the majority of all religious-bias hate crimes in America (55% in 2020) even though Jews make up just 2% of the American population. In the U.S., there are patterns of when antisemitism historically spikes: during elections and campaigns, [on Jewish holidays](#) and when there is an uptick in violence in the Middle East.

6. Be mindful of the impact of Holocaust denial and trivialization

Being able to identify antisemitism is paramount for journalists to guard against inappropriate comparisons that are insensitive, at best, or threatening, at worst, to the Jewish community. Holocaust denial negates the scope and mechanism of the Holocaust, such as denying

six million Jewish victims or the use of gas chambers, and Holocaust distortion and trivialization belittles it by making tasteless comparisons. As public figures compare public health policies and political behavior to the Holocaust in the name of free speech and for the gain of political capital, media plays a crucial role in calling out such behavior as unacceptable.

7. Know how to respond to antisemitism in the moment

Knowledge is power, and in this case it also can make the difference between calling out antisemitism and letting it go unchecked. When members of the media question someone on their use of charged language, they are sending a critical signal that turning a blind eye to hate is not part of objectivity. When there is time, it is best to ascertain intent and/or check with credible and authoritative sources in the Jewish community on whether they regard a statement as antisemitic. On air or in-person, calling out tropes or stereotypes not only is the right thing to do, it lends credibility to the media outlet.

8. Know the key resources to use when covering antisemitism

1. [International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance \(IHRA\) Working Definition of Antisemitism](#). This comprehensive definition adopted by a number of national, state, and municipal governments provides a clear and compact description of antisemitism in its various forms, including Holocaust denial, prejudices against Jews, and the denial of Israel's right to exist.
2. [Ten Tough Questions On Antisemitism Explained](#). This FAQ covers the origins and sources of antisemitism, what it looks like today, and what Israel has to do with it.
3. [AJC's Translate Hate](#). A regularly updated [glossary of antisemitic terms and tropes](#) to help identify rhetoric that may be antisemitic.

9. Know whom to contact when covering antisemitism and other Jewish-related issues

Not every organization with the word "Jewish" in its name accurately represents the Jewish community. The local Jewish Federation, the leaders of large local synagogues and American Jewish Committee (AJC) are good places to start for mainstream Jewish responses to current events. Having a strong Jewish community contact who reflects the mainstream community can help prevent the tokenization of fringe voices.

In addition to 24 regional offices that cover all 50 states and the District of Columbia, AJC also has [14 overseas posts across the globe and dozens of international partnerships](#). AJC offices have a finger on the pulse of their Jewish community and their interests. They connect with local synagogues, community partners, local elected officials and more. For more information about our areas of expertise and global infrastructure, click [here](#) or reach out to Steve Gosset, Assistant Director, Media Engagement, at gossets@ajc.org.

10. Remember that antisemitism is never an isolated incident

Attacks on the Jewish community often have long-term effects on the behavior or feelings of security of many beyond the target, including neighbors, other minorities, and those of other faiths. Journalists can remind Americans that antisemitism is not just a Jewish problem. It is a societal one. It is not only an attack on Jews but an assault on the core values of any democratic and pluralistic society. Countering antisemitism is part of safeguarding democracy.



AJC's mission is to enhance the well-being of the Jewish people and Israel, and to advance human rights and democratic values in the United States and around the world.



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