



MOBILIZING AGAINST Antisemitism

www.interfaithalliance.org/antisemitism



**INTERFAITH
ALLIANCE**

PROTECTING FAITH AND FREEDOM

Antisemitism has a long and tragic history, and its threat continues today. Antisemitism is discrimination, prejudice, hostility or violence against Jews as Jews (or Jewish institutions as Jewish).¹ Definitions are a tool, and often inexact. How antisemitism is defined is less important than what we do about it. In recent years, we have witnessed a steady rise in anti-Jewish hate crimes and incidents, as well as an increase in alarming rhetoric. This leaves members of our communities who are Jewish often feeling targeted, isolated and afraid. Despite chronic [underreporting](#) from law enforcement agencies, independent [tracking](#) has shown a 34% increase in antisemitic incidents, including assaults, harassment, and vandalism, from 2020 to 2021. It is no coincidence that this rise in violence and harassment comes at a time when politicians and public figures are increasingly using antisemitic rhetoric as a means to manufacture division and deflect blame.

The escalation of antisemitism parallels [alarming increases](#) in expressions of hate more broadly and is driven by the same machinery of white nationalism and religious bigotry. As an organization committed to protecting true religious freedom, we cannot allow antisemitism in any form or at any level to go unchallenged. It is critical that we mobilize as people of diverse faiths and beliefs to understand antisemitism and express solidarity with our Jewish friends, family members, neighbors, and fellow congregants.

Throughout our history, Interfaith Alliance has been a leader in the fight against hate directed at religious minorities. We were a leader in the decades-long work to pass critical hate crimes legislation, the [Shepard-Byrd Act](#) and the [NO HATE Act](#). We have developed [resources to combat anti-Muslim bigotry](#) and a [toolkit](#) to help communities partner against hate. We regularly call out [acts of antisemitism](#), as well as attempts by public officials to [weaponize](#) antisemitism for political purposes.

Antisemitism is a real problem, not just for the Jewish community but for all of us. It takes many forms, and can emanate from anywhere. To counter them, we need to understand the different motivations. No form of antisemitism is acceptable, and it cannot be rationalized in any form. The risk that comes from antisemitism's most violent purveyors should not be equated with other forms. All forms of antisemitism need to be addressed using appropriate tactics, tools and language.

■ What is Antisemitism?

On a basic level, antisemitism is discrimination against Jews simply because they are Jewish. This can result in violence against Jews and in its most heinous form, domestic antisemitism has manifested in mass violence with the 2018 Tree of Life Massacre and shootings in 2019 in Poway, CA and Jersey City, NJ, and as recently in February 2023 in Los Angeles, CA. Other forms include religious prejudice, racist pseudoscience, cultural

stereotyping, and political scapegoating. The white supremacist rallying cry of, "Jews will not replace us!" at the 2017 Unite the Right rally in Charlottesville, VA, is an example of how antisemitism is inextricably part of the framework for the great replacement theory and other white supremacist ideals. Antisemitism can show up as hate speech in online forums or marginalizing comments to Jewish students in a classroom during discussions where a student is singled out in a discussion about Israel just because they are Jewish, exclusion from intersectional activist groups and communities, and employment discrimination, to name just a few examples.

Antisemitism is often based on ugly stereotypes and myths that imagine Jews exerting control over world events. Antisemitism has been used for centuries to shift blame and create a target for outrage by those looking for a scapegoat for individual, group, or societal problems, as was horrifyingly the case in Nazi Germany during the Holocaust, when six million European Jews were murdered. As we combat the rise of Christian nationalism, it can't be ignored that antisemitism ultimately has its roots in religion and a belief – now rejected by most Christian denominations – that Jews were responsible for the death of Jesus.

■ How Does Antisemitism Appear?

While the most visible manifestation of anti-Jewish hate is violence, antisemitism can manifest in much subtler ways. The means and contexts vary, but the end result is the same: those who espouse antisemitism threaten the Jewish community's safety and well-being and the principles of American pluralism and democracy itself.

While there has been a dramatic increase in antisemitic incidents and rhetoric in recent years. In 2019, the FBI recorded the [highest number](#) of hate crimes against Jewish people since tracking hate crimes began in 1979 and in 2021, hate crimes rose nationally by 11.6 %, with antisemitic hate crimes representing the largest number of religiously-based hate crimes. While hate crimes, in general, are underreported due to a variety of factors due to mistrust of law enforcement and incomplete local law enforcement data collection, the data, coupled with increasing frequency of expressions of antisemitism from politicians and public figures, clearly paint a problematic picture that is at odds with our American values.

Often, antisemitic actors use online platforms to espouse their hateful ideas and even incite others to act. Examples include the proliferation of right-wing conspiracy theories and antisemitic comments by celebrities and other public figures on Twitter. Online platforms play a troubling role in disseminating antisemitism. Recently, companies like Twitter have come under scrutiny for failing to address rampant antisemitic rhetoric. Interfaith Alliance's [Big Tech, Hate, and Religious Freedom Online Report](#) digs deeper into the role of online platforms in disseminating antisemitism and other forms of hate and religious bigotry.

¹ This resource uses the Jerusalem Declaration on Antisemitism (JDA), developed in 2020. More information about the JDA is available here: <https://jerusalemdeclaration.org/>

No matter where it occurs, hate speech puts the safety of our fellow Americans at risk. Some perpetrators of hate speech will never escalate to violence, but people who commit violent acts of hate are motivated by the same hateful rhetoric. Expressions of hate can be used to normalize discrimination, hate crimes, and targeted violence.

■ How Does Antisemitism Threaten Religious Freedom?

Antisemitism has a significant impact on the lives of American Jews, contributing to an environment in which Jews may be afraid to openly express their faith or identity. When any one of us is unable to express our faith without fear of discrimination or harm, the promise of true religious freedom remains incomplete.

Those who espouse antisemitism threaten our fellow Americans, and our most sacred democratic principles. Eradicating antisemitism is a core component of achieving a more inclusive vision of religious freedom that protects people of all faiths and no faith.

■ Today's American Jewish Community

The Pew Research Center 2020 [Jewish population survey](#) estimates that there are about 5.8 million Jews living in the United States today. That accounts for about 2.4% of the total U.S. population.

For most people, the enduring image of someone who is Jewish is someone of Eastern European descent. A member of this part of the Jewish community is called

an Ashkenazi Jew. However, the reality of the Jewish community is more diverse than this. Sephardic Jews, for instance, have their roots in the expulsion from Spain in 1492, and formed communities in North Africa, southern Europe, Holland and the Middle East.” Jewish communities can be found around the world, with Jewish communities in Iraq, Iran, Ethiopia and India going back to antiquity.

The Jewish community is diverse religiously, politically, and racially. Studies vary on the number of American Jews who identify as non-white, but the number is growing. People also have multifaceted identities, and Jews are also often part of other communities that have been marginalized, including multiracial and LGBTQ+ identities.

■ Is Anti-Zionism Antisemitic?

We do not believe any criticism of Israel is automatically antisemitic. It is possible for that criticism to cross the line into antisemitism. In navigating this issue, questions to consider include, is someone being held accountable for actions taken by the Israeli government simply because they are Jewish? Are they being accused of “dual loyalty” toward Israel on account of being Jewish? If the answer is yes, that likely crosses the line into antisemitism. We encourage you to read the guide developed by T’ruah, found in the resource section below, for an in-depth discussion of this topic.

Interfaith Alliance does not take a stand on the Israel/Palestine conflict, though we acknowledge that the debate around it can influence issues we do work on.

What Can WE DO to Combat Antisemitism?

To protect our friends and neighbors, we must join together across lines of difference to dismantle the machinery that generates fear and divides people against one another.

Learn more. Reflection and self-education are important in equipping ourselves to create safer, more inclusive communities. Putting in the work to answer your own questions helps lift the burden from Jewish communities under threat. Reach out to Jewish partners, however, be considerate as relying exclusively on our Jewish friends and neighbors to fill in the gaps in our knowledge may put an emotionally exhaustive weight on their shoulders. Actively seek out resources to answer your questions and interrogate your own assumptions. While instances of antisemitism can often feel like isolated events, it is important to acknowledge the actors and structures behind them that contribute to underlying dynamics.

Build community coalitions to push back against hate. Building diverse coalitions is an essential part of combating antisemitism. There is strength in numbers, but it takes time and ongoing effort to build the trust needed. Proactively building strong coalitions creates a foundation of support before antisemitic hate incidents occur.

Challenge antisemitism whenever you encounter it. Inaction or neutrality always works in favor of those who espouse antisemitism and perpetrate anti-Jewish hate. Call out insensitive or harmful language and behavior when you see or hear it, even if it comes from someone you care about, or it is not ill-intentioned. Use whatever resources or platforms you or your faith community have to call out those who use antisemitism to divide, and, instead, spread a message of love and inclusion.

Support the work of Jewish organizations. Listening to impacted groups and seeking out diverse perspectives helps create an environment of reflection, curiosity, and openness. Build relationships with, lift up and support the work of Jewish activists, academics, and organizations who can speak to the experiences of Jewish Americans.

Now more than ever, we must join together across lines of difference to address the causes of hate that generate fear and divide people against one another. This is true of our work to address antisemitism just as it is true of our work to address hate directed at other religious minorities, the LGBTQ+ community and the pervasive racism that still exists in our country. We urge you to join Interfaith Alliance and our partners in pushing back against antisemitism to build safer, more inclusive communities.

■ Additional Resources

[Interfaith Alliance | Partnering Against Hate](#) – For those new to grassroots work, it can be difficult to know where to begin. Partnering Against Hate, a project of Interfaith Alliance, is designed to help guide groups and individuals who want to do more to make their communities safer and more inclusive. Explore this toolkit to learn more.

[State of Belief | Confronting Antisemitism](#) – On *State of Belief*, host Rev. Paul Brandeis Raushenbush conducts a series of conversations with national leaders - rabbis, faith leaders, and activists - about the history, strategy, impact, and manifestations of bigotry and conspiracy theories aimed at our Jewish neighbors. He also explores ways that dedicated activists are organizing across religious and cultural lines to resist and defeat this hateful rhetoric and threat of violence.

[ADL | Resources to Address and Challenge Antisemitism](#) – ADL is the leading anti-hate organization in the world. Founded in 1913, its timeless mission is “to stop the defamation of the Jewish people and to secure justice and fair treatment to all.” Today, ADL continues to fight all forms of antisemitism and bias, using innovation and partnerships to drive impact.

[Bend the Arc | Dismantling Antisemitism Messaging Guide](#) – Bend the Arc is a movement of progressive American Jews joining together to fight for justice and equality for all. They are the only national Jewish organization focused exclusively on progressive social change in the United States.

[National Council of Jewish Women | Antisemitism Resources](#) – The National Council of Jewish Women (NCJW) is a grassroots organization of volunteers and advocates who turn progressive ideals into action. Inspired by Jewish values, NCJW strives for social justice by improving the quality of life for women, children, and families and by safeguarding individual rights and freedoms.

[T’ruah | A Very Brief Guide to Antisemitism](#) – T’ruah: The Rabbinic Call for Human Rights brings the Torah’s ideals of human dignity, equality, and justice to life by empowering rabbis and cantors to be moral voices and to lead Jewish communities in advancing democracy and human rights for all people in the United States, Canada, Israel, and the occupied Palestinian territories.

[Union for Reform Judaism | Modern-Day Issues in Antisemitism](#) – The Union for Reform Judaism (URJ) leads the largest Jewish movement in North America. Striving to create a more whole, just, and compassionate world, URJ motivates and mobilizes people from diverse backgrounds to participate and deepen their engagement in Jewish life in ways that ultimately transform themselves, their communities, and the world at large.

[United States Holocaust Museum | What is Antisemitism](#) – The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (USHMM) is the United States’ official memorial to the Holocaust. Adjacent to the National Mall in Washington, D.C., the USHMM provides for the documentation, study, and interpretation of Holocaust history.

For links to these and other resources, visit www.interfaithalliance.org/antisemitism

INTERFAITH ALLIANCE FOUNDATION is the only national interfaith organization dedicated to protecting the integrity of both religion and democracy in the United States. With tens of thousands of members across the country, including more than 75 different faith traditions as well as those of no faith, Interfaith Alliance represents a diverse network of Americans united by our commitment to the Constitution’s promise of religious freedom.

Based in Washington, DC, with state and local affiliates across the country, our work includes public education, grassroots activism, policy advocacy, the weekly State of Belief Radio program, and resources to assist faith leaders and politicians in navigating the boundaries between faith and politics.



**INTERFAITH
ALLIANCE**

PROTECTING FAITH AND FREEDOM