

# Introduction

---

This report examines and analyzes the phenomenon of antisemitism in the political discourse of five major Western European countries—Germany, France, Britain, Spain, and Ireland. It is the final report of a research project implemented during the second half of 2020 by a team of researchers at the Institute for National Security Studies (INSS), in collaboration with the Jewish Agency. In this regards, it is important to note that this study was finalized prior to the security escalation between Israel and Hamas in May 2021 and the surge of antisemitic events that followed it.

The research is based on systematic monitoring and mapping of public expressions of antisemitism by elected officials in the political systems of the five surveyed countries, over the period of one year, from late 2019 until late 2020. The result of the monitoring is a sample of antisemitic expressions, limited in time (the course of one year), in scope (several dozen elected officials), and in its findings (a few dozen expressions of antisemitism). As a result, the research does not purport to be a full and comprehensive report of the deeply rooted trends and developments relating to antisemitism in Europe; rather it focuses on a qualitative analysis of the current situation relying on expressions of antisemitism in the political discourse of selected countries, in an attempt to provide systemic insights into the phenomenon in general.

In recent years, we have witnessed a rise in antisemitism in the West, including the countries featured in this report. Notwithstanding the unique circumstances of each country, it is possible to draw conclusions that apply to all of them. All the countries surveyed here have experienced a rise in antisemitism, reflected by the growing number of reported antisemitic incidents and the severity of incidents in some of the countries, and by the tangible spread of antisemitic expression from marginal groups—at both

the left and right ends of the political spectrum—to the center of the public and political discourse.

The mapping carried out in this research indicates that some politicians in Western Europe—on both the right and the left—deliberately and maliciously use antisemitic ideas and expressions for political gains. This can be seen in the context of the increasing strength of extremist parties on both sides of the political spectrum who have contaminated the political and public discourse with antisemitic statements and attitudes.

Notably, this trend has occurred in parallel to the gradual weakening of the moderate political center. Thus, the growing manifestation of antisemitism may well be just one aspect of this general political phenomenon. Indeed, the present analysis indicates that in many cases the scale is tipping toward those who espouse antisemitism and away from those who try to moderate it, particularly given the process of sociopolitical radicalization, growing polarization, and the rise of once marginalized extremists at the expense of the moderate center. These processes have been accelerated by social media, which has been exploited to spread hateful content practically without significant limits, at least for the time being. This is accompanied by the violation of conventions of political discourse regarding what is both legally and normatively permitted and what is not. All this has contributed to antisemitism's becoming increasingly part of the political mainstream; the politicization of antisemitism as a means for political rivals to attack one another; and the appearance of cracks in the broad consensus both to preserve the memory of the Holocaust and to fight against antisemitism, which is manifested primarily by distorting and rewriting history mainly on the right and by anti-Israel discourse on the left.

Therefore, to combat the phenomenon of antisemitism in political discourse as well as to strengthen those who restrain antisemitic expressions and weaken those who encourage it, we recommend that efforts focus on the following goals and objectives:

1. To monitor expressions of antisemitism in the political discourse and to identify and quantify trends and deviations that call for a response.
2. To increase the political and legal price of expressing antisemitism or promoting antisemitic ideology, by means of documentation, exposure and condemnation, enforcement, lawsuits, and legislation as necessary.

3. To define and improve the limitations in publicizing antisemitic content in both social media and the traditional media.
4. To broaden political, organizational, and public support for the struggle against antisemitism and other types of hate.
5. To educate about the memory of the Holocaust and the values that compete with the phenomena of hatred and antisemitism.

This report briefly covers the sociopolitical context of the countries surveyed, the characteristics of their Jewish communities, and the existing data on local antisemitism. The report then presents the results of the mapping of current expressions of antisemitism in the political discourse on the right and the left. In the final section, we delineate the main insights and challenges posed by the phenomenon of antisemitism in the political discourse and then provide policy recommendations for addressing antisemitism over the long term.

Despite each country having its own unique circumstances, the insights and lessons learned from this survey can serve in the learning process and in formulating strategies to deal with the phenomenon in other parts of Europe and elsewhere. Furthermore, it should be remembered that antisemitism had destructive consequences for the entire society and should not be perceived as merely a local and domestic challenge for only the Jewish community. As a rule, antisemitism serves as a mirror for political, social, and economic problems facing states and societies, and this needs to be taken into account in the fight against antisemitism and in addressing the deeply rooted problems that feed it.