

Research Methodology

Background and Scope of Research

This research addresses existing antisemitism in the political discourse in five Western European countries: Germany, France, Britain, Spain, and Ireland. Most of these Western European countries, some of which are home to the largest and most historic Jewish communities of Europe, have a legal and official record of being committed to fighting antisemitism. However, too often the elected officials and official representatives of these states—who are supposed to uphold and reflect the commitments of the countries they represent and serve—fall short of the state’s commitment to combat Jew-hatred and at times even perpetuate it.

The goals of this research were to: (1) understand the general context and the experience of the Jewish communities in each country in dealing with antisemitism, both physically and perceptually, (2) identify recent public antisemitic expressions that had been made, promoted, or endorsed by publicly elected officials and appointees for each country of interest, (3) account for the major themes, nuances, differences, and sameness in the antisemitic dialogue conveyed by political leaders and appointees for each country of interest, (4) gauge the reaction to such antisemitism by the public, media, and colleagues in politics; and (5) analyze the prevalence and impact of antisemitism in the political sphere of each country within the scope of this work.

We used the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance’s (IHRA) working definition on antisemitism as the basis for determining whether an expression constituted or sympathized with antisemitism or support thereof. This research project primarily examined recent examples of antisemitic expressions among political figures, dating back to June 2019 through September 2020.

The research methodology employed for this project was a two-pronged approach of traditional analysis that implemented tech-based solutions. Research using traditional methods focused on the complexities of the local Jewish population, political and government-institution analysis, survey and hate crime data review, and expert opinion. Innovative open-source analysis focused on collecting expressions of antisemitism by political figures in both mainstream and social media.

Traditional Analysis

To analyze each country, we employed traditional research methods, including examining relevant academic articles about each country, namely the history of the Jewish communities; summarizing key information on expressions of antisemitism, hate crimes from databases, and reports by other leading research institutions on the subject of antisemitism; identifying and analyzing the political discourse around major antisemitic scandals or expressions covered in the media; conducting interviews with local experts from each country on the Jewish community; and reviewing the political system and its addressing of antisemitism.

Technology-Based Research

Technology solutions for this project included the development of a custom dictionary of keywords and terms in all relevant languages, based on the text of the IHRA's working definition of antisemitism and local slang and code names for Jew-hatred, supplanted by additional shorthand and buzzwords; use of cutting-edge marketing and online engagement tools to generate a full picture of online activity by politicians who express antisemitism in any local news sources, international news outlets, published works, including any on-record reactions to national antisemitic scandals in the country of interest; and web-intelligence technological infrastructure for social media activity analysis, including Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram. While the scope of this research specifically focused on analysis of recent antisemitic expressions, a public figure's past behavior of having expressed antisemitic attitudes or opinions were also indicators that they would be more likely to do it again, making a stronger case for the extent of the problem among specific figures of interest.

Throughout the research, we reviewed and analyzed upward of 100,000 content items from the political sphere of all countries using open-source technology. From this large data sample, over 1,000 content items were flagged as having a higher probability of being consistent with antisemitic expression in a political context. We carefully evaluated these items to compile a final dataset of 64 instances of antisemitic expressions or support thereof by an elected official. Most of these instances are presented in this report.

Social Media Platforms

The social media platforms analyzed for this research include Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram. We did not review other fringe social media platforms such as Gab, VK, Voat, and others because, even though content posted to those platforms tends to be less regulated and more extreme, the user-base is significantly smaller. As part of this research method, we examined the social media accounts of the political figures in question to assess if and how they used antisemitic speech or expressed support thereof as part of their mainstream talking points, thus stoking Jew-hatred or prejudice among a wide-reaching audience. Furthermore, the mainstream social media platforms mentioned supposedly have higher community standards for speech and content and also have comprehensive hate speech policies. Therefore, the findings collected are also indicative of the Jew-hatred, both nuanced and overt, for which the mainstream social media platforms have failed to address in their current hate speech policies and community standards.

Twitter

Twitter was by far the most popular social media platform among all the political figures researched for this project. We analyzed the accounts of the political figures for each country by building queries using the earmarked keywords via the advanced search feature on Twitter and reviewing tweets made during 2019–2020. We scraped, extracted, and reviewed a separate massive data set of the re-tweets from all relevant accounts to analyze whether politicians were more likely to share or repost antisemitic content rather than post it themselves. Generally, the overwhelming majority of the relevant findings that violated the IHRA's working definition of antisemitism were tweeted or posted by the political figures themselves and were not shared material.

Facebook

The Facebook accounts of the political figures of each country were identified and assessed using the same dictionary of terms and conditions and advanced search feature. Facebook was the second most popular platform used by the political figures researched for this project. Most political figures only had a professional Facebook account or page; however, some would share posts from their personal accounts to their professional accounts or pages.

Instagram

Instagram was the least common social media platform used by political figures examined for this project. Spain was a notable exception to this rule, as almost all the public officials identified for review had open and active Instagram accounts. It was important to review Instagram to decipher if public officials were more likely to express or support antisemitism through the visual medium of pictures as opposed to written content. Findings suggested the opposite: Public figures analyzed here were more likely to express or promote antisemitic expressions or content on Facebook and Twitter, as opposed to Instagram.