Antisemitism i Sverige

En jämförelse av attityder och föreställningar 2005 och 2020

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English summary Antisemitism in Sweden: A comparison of attitudes and ideas in 2005 and 2020

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This study was commissioned by the Living History Forum. The aim of the study is to describe the prevalence of antisemitic attitudes and ideas in the Swedish population, and to elucidate how such attitudes have evolved over time by comparing its findings with the results from a study of antisemitic attitudes conducted by the Living History Forum and the Swedish National Council for Crime Prevention (Brå) in 2005. A further aim is to examine how antisemitic attitudes relate to demographic and other background factors.

The study was based on two questionnaires with similar question sets conducted in 2005 and 2020. The more recent of the two was used in a survey of the Swedish public conducted by Novus, a Swedish analysis and research company, in the late summer of 2020. It was based on a representative stratified random sample with a response rate of 61 per cent, using the Novus Sweden Panel (public opinion panel). The final material comprises 3 507 respondents aged 18–79 (see Chapter 5 for the questionnaire's implementation and reliability). The 2005 survey, which was conducted by Statistics Sweden for Brå and the Living History Forum, is the comparison.[195]

As in 2005, the 2020 questionnaire primarily asked about attitudes towards and ideas about Jews. The questions were framed as question statements, with respondents asked to indicate the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with each statement. The questionnaire also included some background questions.

Antisemitic ideas take a variety of forms and contain both cognitive and emotional aspects. The statements used for the study expressed traditional antisemitic stereotypes and myths and anti-Jewish motifs found in contexts related to the Holocaust and the State of Israel (see Chapter 3 for the forms and contexts of contemporary antisemitism). There were also statements measuring social distance towards Jews. Many of the statements have been used in a similar or identical form in

195 For selection, number of responses, and response rate, see Bachner & Ring 2005.

other surveys of antisemitic attitudes and ideas (see Chapter 4), which permits comparisons up to a point.

What follows is a summary of the key results from the study.

Comparison of results from 2005 and 2020

Decline in antisemitic beliefs

The results show that support for traditional and Holocaust related antisemitic ideas weakened between 2005 and 2020, while the proportion who distanced themselves from these notions increased.[196] Yet they also show that antisemitic beliefs continue to be held by a significant minority of the population.

Central to antisemitic thinking are conspiratorial beliefs that hold Jews as a group to have great power and influence over national and global events. This issue was addressed in four statements. In 2005, 15 per cent of respondents agreed in full or in part with the statement 'The Jews have too much influence in the world today'; in 2020, the proportion was 11 per cent. In 2005, 17 per cent agreed to some degree with the statement 'The Jews control US foreign policy'; in 2020, it had fallen to 12 per cent. In 2005, 26 per cent agreed in full or in part with the statement 'The Jews have great influence over the world economy'; in 2020, the proportion was 21 per cent. In 2005, 19 per cent agreed in full or in part with the statement 'The Jews have a strong influence over the media'; in 2020, the proportion had decreased to 13 per cent. Between 2005 and 2020, the proportion who to some degree distanced themselves from such statements also increased.

The view that Jews are themselves to blame for antisemitism was investigated with two statements. In 2005, 6 per cent agreed in whole or in part with the statement 'The persecution and hatred of the Jews is partly the Jews own fault'; in 2020, it had fallen to 3 per cent. In 2005, 4 per cent agreed to some degree with the statement 'The Jews crucified Jesus Christ and their suffering is a punishment for this crime'; in 2020, the proportion was 3 per cent.

Antisemitism related to the Holocaust was investigated using two questions. In 2005, 14 per cent agreed in full or in part with the statement 'The Jews use the Nazi extermination of the Jews (the Holocaust) for economic and political purposes'; in 2020, it had fallen to 10 per cent. In 2005, 17 per cent agreed with the statement 'The Jews believe they are the only ones who have suffered (in the past)'; in 2020, the proportion was 13 per cent. Between 2005 and 2020, the proportion who distanced themselves from such statements rose.

Conspiracy theory about Soros

The 2020 study examined support for the global conspiracy theory that the American Jewish investor and philanthropist George Soros is an all-powerful puppet master and driving force behind complex global issues. This conspiracy theory is commonly peddled among right-wing extremists and nationalists, but it is found in other political contexts too. Sometimes it is blatantly antisemitic, sometimes not, but even where it is not openly antisemitic the framing of the myth closely resembles traditional antisemitic conspiracy theories.

The statement used was 'The financier George Soros secretly controls most of what happens in the world'. 10 per cent answered 'I think there is something to it', 39 per cent rejected the statement as false, and 51 per cent answered 'Don't know'.

To determine whether those who believed the conspiracy theory also agreed with explicitly anti-

196 Depending on the rounding, some of the results from 2005 stated here differ by a few per cent from those in the original 2005 report.

semitic opinions, the study looked at the extent to which respondents agreed with traditional and Holocaust related antisemitic statements, which were part of a multidimensional index. The results show that not everyone who believed the conspiracy theory about Soros held antisemitic beliefs, but, equally, among them there was a strong over-representation of people who to different degrees harboured traditional antisemitic ideas (see Chapter 6). (The Soros conspiracy theory was not included in the 2005 study, so there are no previous results to compare with.)

Slight decline in antisemitism related to Israel

Criticism of Israel is not antisemitism per se, but antisemitic tropes are sometimes present in contexts relating to the State of Israel and the Israeli–Palestinian conflict (see Chapter 3). The results show that support for antisemitic attitudes and ideas when talking about Israel fell slightly between 2005 and 2020.

In 2005, 7 per cent agreed in whole or in part with the statement 'Because of Israel's policies, I increasingly dislike Jews'; in 2020, the proportion was 6 per cent. In 2005, 9 per cent agreed to some degree with the statement 'As long as Israel exists, we will not have peace in the world'; in 2020, the proportion was 7 per cent. In 2005, 26 per cent agreed in whole or in part with the statement 'Israel's policies are characterised by a vengefulness rooted in the Old Testament ('An eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth')'; in 2020, it had decreased to 23 per cent.

The statements that were used reflect antisemitic beliefs and notions, but it cannot be ruled out that that there are some respondents who wanted to express criticism of Israeli policies and agreed with one of the latter statements without reflecting on their implications. This should be borne in mind when interpreting the results. (The 2020 questionnaire also had a question to measure criticism of Israel's policies without reference to antisemitic attitudes and stereotypes; see Chapter 6).

Increased acceptance of a Jewish prime minister

Sympathy and antipathy towards Jews (social distance) was examined by asking whether the respondent would accept a Jew as a family member, neighbour, or boss, and with the statement 'It would be totally acceptable for a Jew to be prime minister of Sweden'. The answers to the latter question should to some extent indicate the extent to which Swedish Jews were seen and 'accepted' as Swedes.

The results show that the proportion who approved of the idea of a Swedish prime minister who is Jewish increased markedly compared to 2005, while the proportion who distanced themselves from the idea fell significantly: in 2005, 48 per cent agreed in full or in part with the statement; in 2020, the proportion was 66 per cent. The proportion who disagreed with the statement fell somewhat from 25 per cent in 2005 to 15 per cent in 2020.

The questions about accepting a Jew as a family member, neighbour, or boss were not asked in 2005, so a comparison is not possible. According to the 2020 results, 89 per cent agreed in full or in part they would accept a Jewish family member, while 6 per cent disagreed somewhat. Similarly, 96 per cent would and 2 per cent would not accept 'a Jew as a neighbour', and 94 per cent said to some degree they would accept 'a Jew as a boss', while 2 per cent said they would not.

An elastic view of antisemitism

The 2020 study also describes the results using an 'elastic view' of antisemitism. Developed by the sociologist Daniel Staetsky and applied to studies of antisemitic attitudes in Britain and Norway, the elastic view makes it possible to describe more or less coherent antisemitic attitudes and beliefs in a population in terms of their diffusion and level of intensity (see Chapters 5 and 7). The results of the present study were largely categorised using the levels of intensity proposed by Staetsky: respondents who agreed with over half the statements in an index were categorised as displaying antisemitic attitudes with a stronger intensity, and those who agreed with more than one but not more than half the statements in the index were categorised as having antisemitic attitudes with a weaker intensity. Respondents who only agreed with one statement were not categorised as antisemitic, but their answer may indicate latent antisemitic attitudes.

Here the results from the combined index are presented according to the statement questions used to examine (*i*) social distance, (*ii*) traditional and Holocaust related antisemitic beliefs (a multidimensional antisemitism index), and (*iii*) antisemitism related to Israel. (For methodological and other reasons, statements expressing traditional and Holocaust related antisemitism have been combined in a common index; see Chapter 5.) The summary concludes with a comparison of the results from the 2005 and 2020 studies.

Social distance

The results for social distance show that 83 per cent of the population held a favourable or (as a smaller proportion) a 'neutral' opinion towards having a Jew as prime minister, neighbour, boss, or family member; 2 per cent held negative attitudes with a stronger intensity (they agreed with three or four out of four statements) and another 2 per cent held negative attitudes with a weaker intensity (they agreed with two statements); and 13 per cent agreed with only one statement.

5 per cent hold antisemitic beliefs with stronger intensity

In the case of traditional and Holocaust related antisemitic ideas – the multidimensional antisemitism index – results show that 66 per cent of the population did not agree with any of the eight statements, and 5 per cent agreed with five or more statements in the index and thus displayed antisemitic attitudes with a stronger intensity. The 14 per cent who agreed with two to four statements can be said to hold antisemitic attitudes with a weaker intensity. A further 14 per cent agreed with one statement, and thus, as already noted, should not be categorised as holding antisemitic beliefs, but these results could still have relevance regarding diffusion.

Maximal diffusion

In total, 34 per cent agreed with one or more antisemitic statements. Apply the elastic view and 34 per cent represents the maximal diffusion of antisemitic ideas in the population. This does *not* mean that 34 per cent can be said to be antisemitic: we cannot emphasise this enough. Instead, it gives a sense of the proportion of the population where Jews and others might encounter ideas of the type examined here. It should also be stressed that not everyone who holds antisemitic beliefs will necessarily express them. Yet, equally, even individuals who agreed with only one or two antisemitic stereotypes can, by voicing them, however unknowingly, cause offense and discomfort. Estimates of the maximal diffusion of antisemitic ideas may be relevant when interpreting the results regarding Swedish Jews' experiences and perceptions of antisemitism reported in the surveys of 2012 and 2018 (see Chapter 4).

Connections between social distance and antisemitism

Looking at social distance and its connection with traditional and Holocaust related antisemitism, the analysis suggests these two indices measure slightly different aspects of antisemitism and that relatively many of those who hold antisemitic beliefs with a stronger intensity do not feel antipathy towards Jews as individuals. At the same time, it is evident that the more respondents agreed with statements in the social distance index, the more they agreed with statements in the multidimensional antisemitism index.

Antisemitism related to Israel

Regarding antisemitism related to Israel, the results show that 77 per cent of all respondents did not agree with any of the three statements in the index, 6 per cent agreed with two or three of the statements and in that sense could be said to hold antisemitic beliefs, and 17 per cent agreed with one statement and so were not categorised as holding antisemitic opinions. (As it comprised only three statements, the results for this index are not described in terms of different levels of intensity; see Chapter 5.)

We have also analysed the extent of the connection between antisemitic attitudes related to Israel and the traditional and Holocaust related antisemitic ideas of the multidimensional antisemitism index. The results show some respondents agreed with one or more Israel-related antisemitic statements, but did not agree with any statements in the multidimensional antisemitism index; they also show, however, that the more statements respondents agreed with in the Israel-related index, the more statements they agreed with in the multidimensional index.

An elastic view on the comparison of 2020 with 2005

When an elastic view is applied to the results of the multidimensional antisemitism index and the Israel-related antisemitism index in the surveys of 2005 and 2020, it becomes apparent there was a decline in support for antisemitic attitudes and ideas. The proportion who did not agree with any antisemitic statements in either index had also increased. At the same time, the proportion with stronger antisemitic attitudes and beliefs had changed only slightly in the intervening years.

Attitudes and background factors

An in-depth investigation using a multiple regression analysis of the 2020 survey results showed that demographic background factors such as gender, age, education, and place of birth are associated with antisemitism. As previous studies have shown, older age is related to more negative attitudes, while higher levels of education correlate with a reduction in antisemitic attitudes and ideas. Looking at gender, the tendency is for traditional and Holocaust related antisemitic beliefs to be slightly more prevalent among men, whereas the same is true for Israel-related antisemitic attitudes and notions among women. Where people live in Sweden has little significance for their propensity to hold antisemitic attitudes. Having a Jewish friend, though, correlates with holding fewer antisemitic attitudes.

Some background factors were evident in the multivariate analysis, prompting a discussion of possible explanations (see also Chapter 9). Of the individual characteristics, older age is associated with a higher prevalence of antisemitism. The fact that negative attitudes towards minorities tend to be more prevalent among people in older age categories than younger people has sometimes

been explained as a generation gap – times change, and younger people are generally more positive towards other groups in society than older generations.

The greater prevalence of antisemitic attitudes found among respondents born outside the Nordic region (the multidimensional index), and even more so among those born outside Europe (all indices) – a large proportion of whom came from the Middle East – may well reflect the adoption of antisemitic attitudes and ideas found in their countries of birth. It should be noted that antisemitism is comparatively more widespread and politically legitimate in countries in the Middle East and in some central and eastern European countries (see Chapter 4). It goes some way in explaining the greater prevalence of antisemitic attitudes found among respondents with Muslim affiliation, because a significant proportion of people in this category have a migration background in the Middle East. Factors such as exposure to negative attitudes, discrimination, and social and economic segregation in Swedish society could also increase the propensity to adopt antisemitic ideas, pointing out Jews as having caused real or perceived injustices. Furthermore, antisemitic thinking – here as in other contexts – may have been nourished by the Israeli–Palestinian conflict.

The results for people born in Sweden to at least one parent born abroad, however, do not differ from those for people born in Sweden to two Swedish-born parents. One probable explanation is that they fall into the younger age category. It would seem the socialisation process does not differ between the categories.

Respondents' willingness to trust other people or public institutions such as Parliament, the government, and the police, along with their attitudes to immigration and sexism, is significant for their propensity to hold antisemitic attitudes and beliefs: the greater the trust, the lower the prevalence of antisemitic attitudes, while sexism and negative attitudes towards immigrants correlated with a higher prevalence of antisemitism. These factors also correlated with party political sympathies. The results show those who sympathise with the Sweden Democrats have less trust in other people and in institutions, are more negative towards immigration and rank higher on the sexism index. This echoes the findings of previous studies of Sweden Democrat voters, who in comparison with other groups of voters were found to have a higher prevalence of xenophobic attitudes (see Chapter 9). The present analysis also found a higher prevalence of antisemitic attitudes among respondents who sympathised with the Sweden Democrats, in line with what studies in other European countries have shown for antisemitic attitudes among sections of the electorate who sympathise with right-wing populist and nationalist parties. Studies in other European countries indicate that antisemitic attitudes are linked to xenophobic and sexist attitudes. In light of previous research, it is not unreasonable to suggest a connection exists between those attitudes and the antisemitic beliefs the present study found among groups who sympathise with the Sweden Democrats.

An in-depth analysis shows that the fall in support for attitudes charted in the multidimensional and Israel-related antisemitism indices between 2005 and 2020 was statistically significant. For traditional and Holocaust related antisemitic beliefs (the multidimensional antisemitic index) the decrease was almost 27 per cent; for Israel-related antisemitic ideas it was 13 per cent.

Is antisemitism on the rise or declining in Sweden?

According to the results of the present study, the prevalence of antisemitic attitudes and ideas in the Swedish population fell between 2005 and 2020. The reasons for the change are difficult to determine. One possible contributing factor was that problems relating to antisemitism and other forms of racism were more prominent in the public debate in the past decade, which might have led to an increase in awareness and knowledge regarding these issues. Educational and public awareness-raising initiatives on this and other issues such as the Holocaust and other genocides may also have had an impact.

The fact that support for antisemitic attitudes and ideas has weakened is positive. But it should be noted the results show that antisemitic beliefs live on among a significant minority of the population.

For several years, fears have been voiced in the public debate that antisemitism is on the rise in Swedish society. Surveys show that this is also a widespread view among the Swedish Jewish minority and in the majority population. It is not for this study to say whether they are correct or not. Antisemitism is multifaceted – it takes different forms and manifests in different ways. To answer the question of whether antisemitism is on the rise or declining in Swedish society, comparable quantitative and qualitative studies are needed to complement surveys of attitudes to shed light on developments regarding hate crimes and incidents, the existence of antisemitic attitudes and tropes in political debate and the media, antisemitic propaganda spread on the Internet, antisemitism's role and function in specific political and political-religious movements, and Jews' and others' experiences of antisemitism. It should also be stressed that different forms and manifestations of antisemitism simultaneously can pull in different directions.

Concluding reflections

The results of the present study show that antisemitic attitudes and ideas are comparatively prevalent in some sections of the Swedish population, and associated more with certain political opinions than with others. As we have seen, this applies among others to older age groups, sections of the population born in or outside Europe or with Muslim affiliation, and groups that sympathise with the Sweden Democrats. However, it does not follow that the prevalence of antisemitic attitudes and beliefs in the Swedish population can be reduced to these categories. Far from it; the results show that antisemitic attitudes and models of thought, while varying in prevalence and scope according to the form they take, are found in different segments of the population, including in the majority population, in groups with different or no religious affiliation, or various shades of political opinion.

For example, when it comes to party preferences, traditional and Holocaust related antisemitic notions are less prevalent in groups who sympathise with the left or the centre than among those who sympathise with the parties of the right. The pattern is slightly different for antisemitism related to Israel; such opinions, for example, are somewhat less prevalent in groups that sympathise with the Left Party or Feminist Initiative, the Green Party, but also the Christian Democrats. The results regarding attitudes among party sympathisers should not, for obvious reasons, be confused with the question of possible problems regarding antisemitism in political parties or specific political contexts, but they do underscore the point that antisemitism in the form of attitudes and ideas cannot – should not – be described as a problem limited to the political extremes or to this or that political camp.