

ANTISEMITISM POLICY TRUST

Special
Briefing

May 2020

A large, dark purple triangular graphic on the right side of the cover contains a microscopic image of a coronavirus particle. The particle is spherical with a textured surface and a bright white spot in the center. The background of the triangle is a dark purple gradient.

ANTISEMITISM
IN THE TIME OF
CORONAVIRUS

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Introduction

Amidst the Covid-19 pandemic, antisemitic scapegoating has surfaced, giving ammunition to antisemites and extremists looking for someone to blame. Online, memes have been circulating espousing antisemitism, whilst offline, several public figures and others in the public eye have alluded to Jews being the cause of the pandemic. Blame and scapegoating of Jews is not new, and it didn't take long for antisemitism to mutate. Concerning coronavirus, Jews have not been the primary target for hatred. Anti-Chinese messages are being shared online, with references

to the “Chinese flu”, the “Wuhan virus” and the “kung flu”.¹ This collective blame leading to denigration of, and attacks on, people of Chinese descent, is reminiscent the collective blame in antisemitic conspiracy theories. This briefing highlights several examples of scapegoating of Jews for earlier global pandemics and addresses Covid related antisemitism in the United Kingdom and globally.

Jews and Pandemics

Blaming Jews for disease and pandemics is not new. During the Black Death in the mid-14th Century, where between 20-25 million people in Europe died of the Bubonic Plague, Jews were blamed for poisoning wells and therefore causing the disease.² Arrests, confessions under torture and the burning of Jews took place.³ Despite Pope Clement VI stating Jews were not to blame, and church policy to protect Jews because Jesus was born Jewish, hundreds of Jewish communities in Europe were devastated. It is thought that 100,000 Jews were burned alive for this and other antisemitic accusations during the period.⁴ Jews were seen as immune to disease, perhaps owing to Jewish law demanding certain levels of hygiene and ritual washing. According to this logic, if Jewish people didn't get the Black Death, they must have caused it. Later, in the nineteenth century, Jewish and Italian immigrants in New York City were blamed for the infectious disease tuberculosis. It was branded ‘the Jewish disease’, despite the immigrant Jewish population overall being less susceptible to the disease due to previous exposure

in eastern Europe.⁵ In the twentieth century, Jews were blamed for typhus by the Nazis.⁶ In 2019, Jews were blamed for a measles outbreak in New York City.⁷ It was therefore sadly inevitable that Jews would be blamed in some circles for coronavirus in the twenty-first century, it is a continuation of an historical scapegoating.

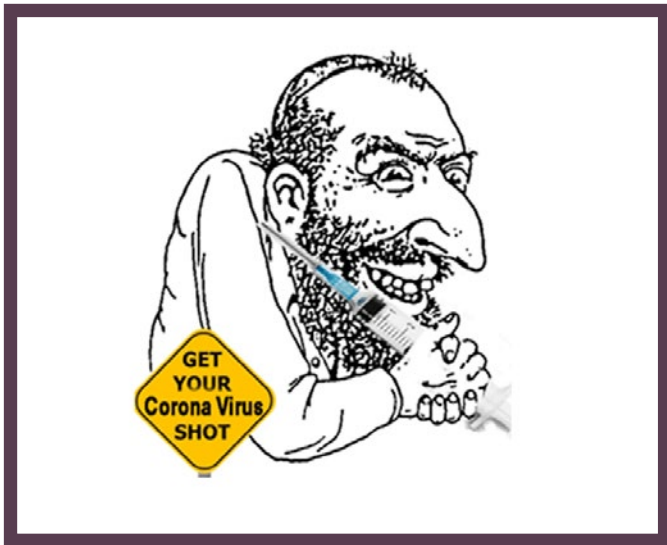


Nazi-era French poster comparing Jews to diseases.
Image: United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Archives

- 1 <https://www.adl.org/blog/coronavirus-crisis-elevates-antisemitic-racist-tropes>
- 2 <https://www.bh.org.il/blog-items/700-years-before-coronavirus-jewish-life-during-the-black-death-plague/>
- 3 Cohn, Samuel K. “The Black Death and the Burning of Jews.” *Past & Present*, no. 196, 2007, pp. 3–36. JSTOR, www.jstor.org/stable/25096679. Accessed 14 May 2020.
- 4 <https://www.adl.org/sites/default/files/documents/assets/pdf/education-outreach/Brief-History-on-Anti-Semitism-A.pdf>
- 5 Cohn, Samuel K. “Pandemics: waves of disease, waves of hate from the Plague of Athens to A.I.D.S.” *Historical journal* (Cambridge, England) vol. 85,230 (2012): 535-555. doi:10.1111/j.1468-2281.2012.00603.x
- 6 Ibid
- 7 <https://www.jweekly.com/2020/03/19/how-jews-have-fared-during-times-of-pandemic/>

Manifestations of Coronavirus Antisemitism

Coronavirus antisemitism has manifested in several ways, from conspiracy theories to outright calls to infect Jews. Often found online, memes and other posts have been shared thousands of times, on mainstream social media platforms such as Twitter, as well as so-called free-speech platforms such as 4Chan and 8Chan. The Community Security Trust, a partner of the Antisemitism Policy Trust, and the Anti-Defamation League, have both set out the manifestations of coronavirus antisemitism which has been spreading globally.^{8, 9}



- **The virus is real and is a way for Jews to expand their global influence and profit:** This accusation is an extension of classical antisemitic tropes accusing Jews of having undue influence, power and control over politics, the media and the banks. Some allege Jews created the virus in order to ruin society and then pave the way for Jewish 'control'. This manifestation has blamed Jewish individuals, such as Jewish philanthropist George Soros, for using the virus for his own nefarious needs.
- **The virus is a fake Jewish conspiracy:** This manifestation reflects the 'false flag' accusation often alleged in relation to terrorist attacks; the official story is not true and its fake. It accuses Jews, like the aforementioned allegation of the virus being real, of using the pandemic to expand their global influence and profit.
- **Jews are the real virus and the primary spreaders of the virus:** Calling Jews a form of virus, or plague, something to be 'cured', is a historical antisemitic trope. Jews have been compared to cancer, tuberculosis, syphilis and other diseases; something not pleasant or wanted in society, something that must be eradicated. Adolf Hitler and the Nazis took this approach, calling Jews a virus threatening Germany, or a "harmful bacillus" and blamed the Jews for carrying typhus.¹⁰
- **Celebrating Jewish deaths:** Some of the most extreme antisemitism related to Coronavirus is the morbid celebration of Jewish people dying. This accusation is not alleging a conspiracy theory; it celebrates reports¹¹ that Jews are dying in disproportionately high numbers, or at all.
- **Let's spread Coronavirus to the Jews and kill them:** This annihilistic form of coronavirus antisemitism is clearly the most extreme. It is often shared by neo-Nazis and White Supremacists¹² and it calls for people to infect Jews in order to kill them.

8 https://cst.org.uk/data/file/d/9/Coronavirus%20and%20the%20plague%20of%20antisemitism.1586276450.pdf?utm_source=hootsuite&utm_medium=&utm_term=&utm_content=&utm_campaign=

9 <https://www.adl.org/blog/coronavirus-crisis-elevates-antisemitic-racist-tropes>

10 Cohn, Samuel K. "Pandemics: waves of disease, waves of hate from the Plague of Athens to A.I.D.S." *Historical journal* (Cambridge, England) vol. 85,230 (2012): 535-555. doi:10.1111/j.1468-2281.2012.00603.x

11 <https://www.thejc.com/comment/analysis/coronavirus-are-jews-disproportionately-dying-after-contracting-covid-19-1.498609>

12 <https://www.thejc.com/news/us-news/white-supremacists-encourage-spreading-virus-to-jews-1.498371?highlight=coronavirus%7Econspiracy>

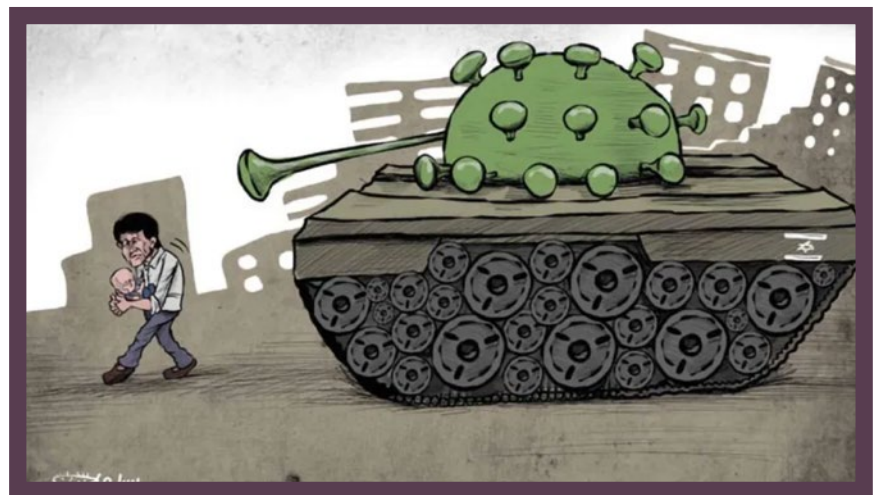
Incidents of Coronavirus Antisemitism

The following incidents of coronavirus antisemitism have been reported, but this list does not include all the incidents that have taken place, as many thousands occur online or are not reported. These examples do however convey the manner in which coronavirus antisemitism has seeped into public discourse and is being espoused by public figures, or those with some form of platform, or is (re-)emerging in the general public consciousness. Numerous accusations include references to Jewish philanthropist and Holocaust survivor, George Soros, often the subject of antisemitic conspiracy theories, or reference Israel and Zionists as being engaged in a conspiracy. A number of other examples are included in an article by the Trust published by the Huffington Post.¹³

- Actress Rosana Arquette posted a tweet alleging that Israel knew about the disease for a year and put “lives at risk for profit”.¹⁴ She later apologised.
- In France, a caricature of the former French health minister, who is Jewish, depicted him pouring poison into a well. It was shared on social media thousands of times.¹⁵
- Iranian state-owned Press TV claimed that “Zionists” were to blame for coronavirus whilst quoting an article which said “America’s Jews drive America’s wars”.¹⁶
- The head of the Turkish Refah Party, Fatih Erbakan, son of the late Turkish Islamist politician and prime minister, Necmettin Erbakan, accused the virus of serving “Zionism’s goals of decreasing the number of people and preventing it

from increasing, and important research expresses this.” has caused the suffering of people.”¹⁷

- Argentine journalist, Tomás Méndez, host of the popular ADN Tv, said that coronavirus was created by “the richest of the world, some born in the United States, others in Israel and another in Europe” who “are the owners of your life, who created this virus”. He blamed the Rothschild family, often the subject of antisemitic conspiracy theories, and Bill Gates.¹⁸
- Conspiracy theorist, David Icke, widely condemned for his repeated use of the term “Rothschild Zionists”, suggested that Israel was using the coronavirus pandemic to “test its technology”.¹⁹
- The Palestinian Authority daily newspaper, *al-Hayat al-Jadida*, posted a cartoon of the coronavirus in the form of an Israeli tank following a Palestinian carrying a child.
- The *al-Quds* daily newspaper in East Jerusalem blamed coronavirus on an Israeli and United States conspiracy against China and Iran.²⁰



13 https://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/entry/anti-semitism-jews-coronavirus_uk_5ea2e98cc5b6d376358e31c1

14 <https://jewishjournal.com/news/united-states/312350/rosanna-arquette-apologizes-for-israel-coronavirus-tweet/>

15 <https://www.jpost.com/diaspora/antisemitism/coronavirus-crisis-in-france-sparks-antisemitic-conspiracy-theories-623458>

16 <https://www.jpost.com/Middle-East/Iran-News/Irans-regime-pushes-antisemitic-conspiracies-about-coronavirus-620212>

17 <https://www.memri.org/reports/turkish-politicians-press-public-react-coronavirus-virus-serves-zionisms-goals-decreasing>

18 <https://jewishnews.timesofisrael.com/argentine-journalist-says-coronavirus-was-created-by-rich-americans-and-israelis/>

19 <https://www.thejc.com/news/uk-news/london-live-condemned-for-allowing-david-icke-to-air-lunatic-conspiracy-theories-1.498968?highlight=coronavirus%7Econspiracy>

20 <https://besacenter.org/perspectives-papers/coronavirus-conspiracy-theories-jews/>

- Swiss preacher, Ivo Sasek, who founded the 'Organic Christian Generation' previously suggested that Jews want to decrease the world population through mass murder and has published a flyer claiming a biological weapon has been unleashed by Jewish philanthropist George Soros.²¹
- US Republican Congressional candidate, Joanna Wright, suggested the virus was linked to Bill Gates and Jewish philanthropist George Soros.²²
- Austrian member of neo-Fascist "Identitäre" group, Martin Sellner, blamed Jewish philanthropist's George Soros's Open Foundation for being responsible for coronavirus.²³
- On 21st April 2020, Jewish Communities worldwide commemorated Yom HaShoah, Israel's Holocaust Remembrance Day. An online campaign centred on the day and using the hashtag #Covid48 started trending, encouraged by activists on Palestinian social media outlets and on Twitter. Images and tweets were shared through the hashtag seeking to spread antisemitic conspiracy theories depicting Israel and Jewish people as the Covid 19 Virus.

- During April, several far-right White Supremacist protests in America took place. On the 19th April, protesters in Ohio held up antisemitic signs claiming that Jews were 'the real plague' and depicting them as rats.²⁴



21 <https://besacenter.org/perspectives-papers/coronavirus-conspiracy-theories-jews/>

22 Ibid

23 Ibid

24 https://twitter.com/ADL_Cleveland/status/1251674063996624897?s=20

The Jewish Community Fighting Coronavirus

Far from what coronavirus antisemitism suggests, Jewish communities across the globe have been contributing to the fight against coronavirus. In the United States, half of all plasma donors volunteering blood to help treat Covid-19 patient are Orthodox Jews from New York.²⁵ In the United Kingdom, members of the Jewish community have been volunteering to help vulnerable people, cook food for NHS and care workers and creating safety visors for frontline workers.²⁶ The State of Israel, far from antisemitic suggestions of

manufacturing the virus or spreading it for nefarious purposes, has been at the forefront of developing technology to combat Covid-19. The Israeli Institute for Biological Research has suggested completion of the development phase of a vaccine to combat coronavirus.²⁷

What Can We Do?

Lord Mann of Holbeck Moor, the Government's independent adviser on antisemitism told the Antisemitism Policy Trust that he was monitoring antisemitic trends during the pandemic and advising government to be prepared to respond.²⁸ The Trust, together with key partners, is seeking to highlight this phenomenon and educate against it. We will engage with social media companies to try and reduce

the incidence of Covid-related antisemitism. The forthcoming Online Harms Bill presents an opportunity to address online harms and the Trust has a briefing, including recommendations, for that legislation. We ask parliamentarians and others to condemn antisemitic conspiracy theories about the pandemic and educate against them wherever you see them.

25 <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-8312765/New-York-Orthodox-Jews-make-HALF-plasma-donors-giving-blood-treat-COVID-19-patients.html>

26 <https://jewishnews.timesofisrael.com/meet-our-covid-19-community-heroes/>

27 <https://www.thejc.com/news/israel/israeli-researchers-make-significant-breakthrough-on-coronavirus-vaccine-1.499473>

28 <https://www.facebook.com/antisemitismpolicytrust/videos/275693640283591/>

The Antisemitism Policy Trust's mission is to educate and empower parliamentarians, policy makers and opinion formers to address antisemitism. It provides the secretariat to the British All-Party Parliamentary Group Against Antisemitism and works internationally with parliamentarians and others to address antisemitism. The Antisemitism Policy Trust is focussed on educating and empowering decision makers in the UK and across the world to effectively address antisemitism.

Contact APT



www.antisemitism.org.uk



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