Facing antisemitism:
the struggle for safety and solidarity

David Feldman, Ben Gidley, Brendan McGeever

RUNNYMEDE

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Proudly independent, we speak truth to power on race and racism without fear or favour. From broadening the curriculum to exposing the Windrush scandal, our work is rooted in challenging structural racism and its impact on communities of colour. Our authoritative research-based interventions equip policy makers, practitioners and the general public with the tools to deliver genuine progress towards racial justice in Britain.

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This report was commissioned and is published by the Runnymede Trust to highlight the persistence of antisemitism and the difficulty of addressing it against an increasingly politicised background. By commissioning and publishing research from academics with extensive experience on the issue, we shine a light on antisemitism so that, difficult as these conversations are, we can understand and combat it, in furtherance of our charitable objectives of racial harmony.

About the authors

Professor David Feldman
David Feldman is Director of BISA at Birkbeck, University of London and a Professor of History. He has advised the UN, the OSCE, Human Rights Watch, the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Antisemitism and the Labour Party on policy issues connected with antisemitism. His most recent book is *Antisemitism, Islamophobia and the Politics of Definition* (2023, ed. with Marc Volovici). He has written on the politics of antisemitism for *The Guardian*, *The Independent, the Financial Times,* the *New Statesman* and *Haaretz*.
d.feldman@bbk.ac.uk

Dr Ben Gidley
Ben Gidley is a Reader in Sociology and Psychosocial Studies at Birkbeck, University of London and a member of BISA. His research has focused on diaspora and diversity in urban Europe, and on antisemitism in relation to other forms of racism. His books include: *Turbulent Times: The British Jewish Community Today* (2010, with Keith Kahn-Harris); *Antisemitism and Islamophobia: A Shared Story?* (2017, ed. with James Renton); and *Jews and Muslims in Europe: Between Discourse and Experience* (2022, ed. with Sami Everett).
b.gidley@bbk.ac.uk

Dr Brendan McGeever
Brendan McGeever is a Senior Lecturer in Sociology at Birkbeck, University of London and a member of BISA. His core areas of specialism include the study of racism, antisemitism and anti-racism. He is the author of *Antisemitism and the Russian Revolution* (2019) and *Britain in Fragments: Why Things Are Falling Apart* (2023, co-written with Satnam Virdee). His work on antisemitism has appeared on BBC Radio and in publications including *The Guardian, The Independent* and *Jacobin*.
b.mcgeever@bbk.ac.uk

Summary of key points

This report was written in the immediate shadow of the events of 7 October 2023 and Israel's wars in Gaza and Lebanon. Thirty years after the Runnymede Trust last addressed antisemitism, in its landmark report *A Very Light Sleeper*, we see a rise in antisemitic incidents, a growing feeling of insecurity among many Jewish people, and a breakdown in consensus over how to conceive and combat antisemitism.

This report:

- highlights the social and political heterogeneity of the Jewish population in the UK, contrary to the monolithic image presented by antisemitism
- draws attention to what we call the reservoir of antisemitism: a repertoire of stereotypes and stories embedded in our common culture that is drawn on in moments of crisis and tension
- assesses the strength and depth of antisemitism by using multiple approaches to reveal (a) the complexity of the problem and (b) the vital distinction between antisemites and antisemitism
- demonstrates how policy is too often focused on the pathology of individual antisemites and not on the more widely diffused and persistent problem of antisemitism
- argues that the response to antisemitism, shaped by the well-established and developing partnership between mainstream Jewish organisations and the state, has helped to promote (a) a conflation of antisemitism and anti-Zionism and (b) perceptions that there is a hierarchy of racisms in the UK
- calls on the government to combat antisemitism in ways that do not create a hierarchy of racisms or the perception that there is one
- calls for a new approach to combating antisemitism that is based on building alliances between Jewish people and other racialised minorities and employing a 360-degree anti-racism. That is to say, anti-racism must inform what we do, not only when confronting antisemitism in the UK but also when we address the status and treatment of Palestinians in Gaza, the Occupied Territories and Israel.

Runnymede Trust foreword

This Runnymede Perspectives paper follows our seminal 1994 commission into antisemitism, published in *A Very Light Sleeper*, which highlighted the pervasive persistence of antisemitism in Britain, within the context of European history.

Sadly, since 1994 antisemitism has far from faded. Police statistics and incident reports suggest a stark rise in both crimes and incidents, especially in the last year. The horrors of 7 October 2023 in Israel and the ongoing, catastrophic violence in Gaza form an undeniable backdrop to the intensification of antisemitism here in the UK. Central to this has been the degenerative nature of the conversation, where discussions around antisemitism have become highly politicised in ways that have been detrimental to Jewish communities' safety and wellbeing. Particularly damaging is the fact that these discussions have inhibited the possibility of forging anti-racist solidarities with other communities that have been subject to the rise in far-right violence and the mainstreaming of racist rhetoric and policies that exploded in the racist riots of summer 2024.

This report is an effort to engage thoughtfully with the incongruence of a situation where we confront both an increase in antisemitism and a decrease in our ability to talk about it in ways that do not immediately attract savage attack. The Runnymede Trust is committed to challenging all forms of racism. Our approach has never been to assume that racism is experienced in a monolithic way; we serve communities with different histories, whose relationship to the UK may have been forged through enslavement or colonisation or by other migration patterns. We know that there are gendered, class-based differences and geographic contours that define and compound experiences of racism. We recognise these important differences in experience but remain committed to promoting the virtue of building anti-racist solidarities.

Antisemitism must not be used as a weapon wielded for political leverage and point-scoring – instrumentalising, and at the same time diminishing, the very real harm and violence that Jewish communities have been increasingly subject to. We must move beyond the prevailing competitive frameworks that prohibit solidarity and encourage division. This paper is an effort to find a route to that more intelligent and sensitive conversation. The authors write about these issues based on their extensive research and scholarship, and we value the sober and thoughtful contribution that they offer. For civil society organisations and those working in the racial justice sector, this paper represents an opportunity to think about how, at a time of multiple and intensifying crises, we refuse the incentives to see different racialised communities as competitors and instead build anti-racist solidarities that can offer safety for us all.

Introduction

This report is published in a context characterised by the growing feeling of insecurity among many Jewish people, the breakdown of consensus over how to conceive and combat antisemitism, and Israel's war on Gaza.

Introduction

Thirty years ago, in 1994, the Runnymede Trust published a report on antisemitism in Britain. *A Very Light Sleeper* presented antisemitism as a menace but not an imminent danger.[1] Today, by contrast, public discussion of antisemitism strikes a note of alarm. In May 2024, Michael Gove, then a Conservative government minister, condemned 'an explosion of antisemitism'.[2] Four months later, Labour prime minister Keir Starmer, issued a call to 'fight … this resurgence of antisemitism'.[3]

There is, indeed, reason for concern. According to police figures, in the year ending March 2024 hate crime directed at Jewish people in England and Wales had more than doubled over the previous 12 months.[4] Survey data shows that the extent to which Jews feel safe in the UK declined notably between May 2023 and June 2024.[5] Taken together, these measures indicate strongly that both experiences and perceptions of antisemitism have taken a turn for the worse.

This deterioration has taken place amid a breakdown in consensus over the meaning of antisemitism and its relationship to anti-racist politics. For some, antisemitism is one element in a family of racisms: something to be addressed as part of a wider anti-racist politics. For others, however, antisemitism is a prejudice without parallel: something which not only predates racism but also, due to the Holocaust, transcends its capacity for harm.

This divergence is most strikingly visible in debate over Israel and Palestine. Human rights organisations within Israel, such as B'Tselem, and beyond, such as Amnesty International, describe Israel as an apartheid state.[6] Most recently, following its catastrophic war on Gaza, jurists, activists and respected scholars have charged Israel with genocide.[7] In these ways, for many, support for what Israel has become is now incompatible with anti-racist politics. At the same time, almost two-thirds of Jewish people in Britain describe themselves as Zionists.[8] Many British Jews, committed to supporting the Jewish state as well as to combating antisemitism, see themselves as locked in conflict over Israel/Palestine with others for whom anti-racism is a core conviction.

1 Runnymede Commission on Antisemitism (1994) *A Very Light Sleeper: The Persistence and Dangers of Antisemitism,* London: Runnymede Trust, https://cdn.prod.website-files.com/61488f992b58e687f1108c7c/617bf98a33032dc76dfff292_AVeryLightSleeper-1994.PDF.

2 Gove, M. (2024) 'Secretary of State's speech on antisemitism', 21 May, www.gov.uk/government/speeches/secretary-of-states-speech-on-anti-semitism.

3 Starmer, K. (2024) 'PM speech at the Holocaust Education Trust: 16 September 2024', www.gov.uk/government/speeches/pm-speech-at-the-holocaust-educational-trust-16-september-2024.

4 Home Office (2024) 'Hate crime, England and Wales, year ending March 2024', 10 October, www.gov.uk/government/statistics/hate-crime-england-and-wales-year-ending-march-2024/hate-crime-england-and-wales-year-ending-march-2024.

5 Boyd, J. (2024), *A Year after October 7: British Jewish Views on Israel, Antisemitism and Jewish Life*, London: JPR (Institute for Jewish Policy Research), www.jpr.org.uk/reports/year-after-october-7-british-jewish-views-israel-antisemitism-and-jewish-life, 21.

6 B'Tselem (2022) *Not a 'Vibrant Democracy': This Is Apartheid*, Jerusalem, www.btselem.org/sites/default/files/publications/202210_not_a_vibrant_democracy_this_is_apartheid_eng.pdf, 1–6; Amnesty International (2022) *Israel's Apartheid against Palestinians: Cruel System of Domination and Crime against Humanity*, London, www.amnesty.org/en/documents/mde15/5141/2022/en.

7 Bartov, O. (2024) 'As a former IDF soldier and historian of genocide, I was deeply disturbed by my recent visit to Israel'; *Guardian*, 13 August, www.amnesty.org/en/documents/mde15/5141/2022/en.

8 Graham, D. and Boyd, J. (2024) *Jews in the UK Today: Key Findings from the JPR National Jewish Identity Survey*, London: JPR, www.jpr.org.uk/reports/jews-uk-today-key-findings-jpr-national-jewish-identity-survey, 15.

The rise in antisemitic incidents, the growing feeling of insecurity among many Jewish people, and the breakdown of consensus over how to conceive and combat antisemitism establish much of the context in which this report appears.

'The struggle against racism needs to be holistic and indivisible', wrote the authors of *A Very Light Sleeper*.[9] Much has changed since 1994 but these words remain as important as ever. The principle they express underpins our approach in these pages to the challenge of identifying and combating antisemitism today.

9 Runnymede Commission on Antisemitism, *A Very Light Sleeper*, 12.

Defining antisemitism

Debates on how to define antisemitism have crystallised disagreements over the relationship between antisemitism and anti-Zionism.

Defining antisemitism

Debates on how to define antisemitism have crystallised disagreements over the relationship between antisemitism and anti-Zionism and the bearing of anti-racism on the struggle against antisemitism.

In November 2016 the British government was the first to adopt the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) working definition of antisemitism published earlier that year. This IHRA working definition is strongly favoured by mainstream Jewish communal bodies and has been adopted by a host of institutions in the UK, from universities to the Football Association.

The working definition treats antisemitism as a stand-alone problem, unrelated conceptually, politically or ethically to other types of racism. 'Antisemitism', it states, 'is a certain perception of Jews which may be expressed as hatred of Jews'.[10] As we can see, the wording is vague and does not perform the most basic function of a definition – it does not actually tell us what antisemitism is. As well as this definition, the IHRA document offers eleven examples which, 'taking into account the overall context', could be instances of antisemitism. Because the core definition is so nebulous, it is these examples which are most often cited.

Some of the examples command broad support. For instance, one highlights 'mendacious, dehumanizing, or stereotypical allegations about Jews ... such as ... the myth about a world Jewish conspiracy'. Another cites 'Holding Jews collectively responsible for the actions of the state of Israel'. However, other examples are contentious. For instance, one states that 'denying the Jewish people their right to self-determination by claiming, e.g., that the existence of a State of Israel is a racist endeavour' is potentially antisemitic. Here the IHRA definition reflects a marked tendency among mainstream Jewish organisations over the last two decades to extend the meaning of 'antisemitism' to encompass not only attacks on the equal rights and dignity of Jewish people but also some criticisms of the State of Israel and its founding ideology, Zionism.[11]

Many in the Jewish community have embraced the IHRA working definition and see it (and its adoption by institutions) as a vital line of defence in a time of insecurity. Some go further and argue that disregarding the working definition, when leading Jewish institutions have thrown their weight behind it, denies Jewish people their collective right to define their oppression.[12]

The IHRA definition has been controversial not only because of its wording but also because of the ways it has been used. A range of actors – the State of Israel, advocacy groups and individuals – have abused the working definition by casting aside the stipulation that we should assess each case by 'taking into account the overall context'.[13]

10 International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (no date) 'Working definition of antisemitism', https://holocaustremembrance.com/resources/working-definition-antisemitism.

11 This tendency is acknowledged by those who welcome it as well as by others who deplore it; Marcus, K. (2014) *The Definition of Antisemitism*, New York: Oxford University Press, 151–162; Lerman, A. (2022) *Whatever Happened to Antisemitism? Redefinition and the Myth of the Collective Jew*, London: Pluto Press, 110–136.

12 Board of Deputies of British Jews (2024) *The Jewish Manifesto for the General Election 2024*, London, https://bod.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/06/Jewish-Manifesto-for-the-General-Election.pdf, 5; Katz, M. (2018) 'Labour must listen to Jews and adopt IHRA. Properly', Medium, 17 July, https://mikekatz.medium.com/labour-must-listen-to-jews-and-adopt-ihra-properly-c4eb82dbc13c.

13 The following are all instances of the IHRA examples being used or invoked as boxes to be ticked, without regard to context: Weizmann, M. (2020) *A Watershed in Fighting Antisemitism: The IHRA Working Definition of Antisemitism*, Los Angeles: Simon Wiesenthal Center, www.wiesenthal.com/assets/pdf/ihra_report_2020.pdf, 5; Campaign Against Antisemitism (2022) 'CAA writes to Leeds University over its website linking to Twitter account with numerous tweets that breach international definition', https://antisemitism.org/caa-writes-to-leeds-university-over-its-website-linking-to-twitter-account-with-numerous-tweets-that-breach-of-international-definition-of-antisemitism; Cotler-Wunsh, M. (2023) 'Combatting antisemitism with human rights and international law', Pamphlet Series 9, Academic Engagement Network, https://academicengagement.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/12/AEN-Pamphlet-No.-9-Michal-Cotler-December-2023.pdf.

By dismissing this important caveat, the working definition may be used to tar legitimate criticisms of Israel as antisemitic. Used in this way, it can suppress free speech and academic freedom directly and also indirectly, by creating a climate of uncertainty.[14]

In this context, in March 2021 an international group of academics produced an alternative definition and statement, the Jerusalem Declaration on Antisemitism (JDA), which has since been endorsed by 350 scholars.[15] The JDA differs from the IHRA working definition in three key ways. First, it provides a functioning definition: antisemitism, it states, is 'prejudice, discrimination, hostility or violence against Jews as Jews'. Second, it sets opposition to antisemitism within the frame of universal and anti-racist principles; following on from this starting point, it focuses on the equal rights of Jewish people, not the interests of a state. Third, the JDA was issued along with guidelines that hold open a space for critical discussion and debate. Crucially, it states that it is not antisemitic to support any constitutional arrangement that gives full equality to all inhabitants 'between the river and the sea'. In other words, according to the JDA, anti-Zionism and antisemitism are, in themselves, distinct: the question is when and how they overlap in practice.

The JDA has been welcomed by individuals and organisations eager to support Palestinian claims to justice without lapsing into antisemitism, but it has been rejected by mainstream Jewish organisations who are content with the IHRA working definition. The JDA is silent on whether comparing Israel to Nazi Germany is antisemitic, and this too has drawn criticism.[16] At the same time, some voices have criticised the JDA as yet another attempt to shackle activism in support of Palestinian claims.[17]

It would be unwise to expect too much from definitions. Even the best will need to be implemented with sound judgement in the context of the lives of Jewish people and the past and present manifestations of antisemitism in the UK. We now turn to these realities.

14 Surkes, S. (2017) 'UK academics protest clampdown on Israel Apartheid Week', *The Times of Israel*, 1 March, www.timesofisrael.com/uk-academics-protest-clampdown-on-israel-apartheid-week; European Legal Support Center (ELSC) and British Society for Middle Eastern Studies (BRISMES) (2023) *Freedom of Speech and Academic Freedom in UK Higher Education: The Adverse Impact of the IHRA Definition of Antisemitism*, London: BRISMES, www.brismes.ac.uk/files/documents/Freedom%20of%20Speech%20and%20Academic%20Freedom%20in%20UK%20Higher%20Education-BRISMES-ELSC.pdf.

15 'The Jerusalem Declaration on Antisemitism', 2021, https://jerusalemdeclaration.org.

16 Fean, F. (2021) 'The Jerusalem Declaration on Antisemitism', Balfour Project, 29 March, https://balfourproject.org/the-jerusalem-declaration-on-antisemitism; Bard, J. (2021) 'Against the IHRA: Why it's time to adopt the Jerusalem Declaration', *Tribune*, 9 August, https://tribunemag.co.uk/2021/08/against-the-ihra-why-its-time-to-adopt-the-jerusalem-declaration; Rich, D. (2021) 'The Jerusalem Declaration on Antisemitism is a flawed definition that risks setting back efforts to tackle antisemitism', CST Blog, 1 April, https://cst.org.uk/news/blog/2021/04/01/the-jerusalem-declaration-on-antisemitism-a-flawed-definition-that-risks-setting-back-efforts-to-tackle-antisemitism; Antisemitism Policy Trust (2021) *Redefining Antisemitism?* IHRA and the JDA, London, https://antisemitism.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/Redefining-antisemitism-Final.pdf; Campaign Against Antisemitism (2023) 'United Nations is right to postpone conference on antisemitism if it does not intend to adopt the international definition', 13 June, https://antisemitism.org/united-nations-is-right-to-postpone-conference-on-antisemitism-if-it-does-not-intend-to-adopt-international-definition-of-antisemitism.

17 Palestinian BDS National Committee (2021), 'A Palestinian civil society critique of the Jerusalem Declaration on Antisemitism', 23 March, https://bdsmovement.net/A-Palestinian-Civil-Society-Critique-JDA.

Jewish people in the UK today

Whereas antisemitism promotes a homogeneous, monolithic image of the Jewish population, in reality, and in multiple ways, Jews present a picture of diversity.

Jewish people in the UK today

There are close to 300,000 Jewish people in the UK. The great majority have an Ashkenazi background (tracing their heritage to Central or Eastern Europe); 5 per cent are Sephardim (tracing their heritage to Iberia) and there are also Jews of African, Caribbean, Indian and Mizrachi heritage. In the 2011 Census, 4,292 people described themselves as mixed race and Jewish.[18]

Identifying or defining who is a Jew is not straightforward. In many Christian societies religious identity is synonymous with having a 'faith', but many people who identify as Jews do not believe in God and are not religiously observant. A recent survey found that 57 per cent of Jewish adults belong to a synagogue, meaning that a large minority of Jewish people live a broadly secular life; some of them are involved in non-religious communal institutions. Of those households attending a synagogue, half are mainstream Orthodox; a third belong to progressive congregations; a growing number – now around a fifth – are strictly Orthodox (the Haredim).[19]

The census of England and Wales counts Jews as a religious group but also allows people to report themselves as Jews by ethnicity. Moreover, since 1983, alongside Sikhs, Jews have been protected under English equality law as a 'racial group'. The House of Lords has argued that this is because of Jews' ethnic origins: their long-shared history and cultural traditions.[20] Most sociologists today would class Jews as an ethnicity and as a racialised minority.[21]

Considered together, British Jews are a population that is at once concentrated and scattered. A growing number of Jewish people have moved into a few heartland areas: the 2021 Census found that half of all Jews live in just eight local authorities in and around London and Manchester.[22] Nevertheless, in the last two Censuses, there has been no local authority in England and Wales without at least one resident identifying as Jewish. Jews are part of British society, in many cases intimately so: a third of all Jews who married between 2010 and 2022 had non-Jewish partners.[23]

18 Graham and Boyd, *Jews in the UK Today*, 79; Bush, S. (2021) *Commission on Racial Inclusivity in the Jewish Community*: Report, London: Board of Deputies of British Jews, https://bod.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/Commission-on-Racial-Inclusivity-in-the-Jewish-Community.pdf, 24–25.

19 Graham and Boyd, *Jews in the UK Today*, 37.

20 Feldman, D. (2011) 'Why the English like turbans: A history of multiculturalism in one country', in Feldman, D. and Lawrence, J. (eds) *Structures and Transformations in Modern British History*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press; Herman, D. (2006) '"An unfortunate coincidence": Jews and Jewishness in English judicial discourse', *Journal of Law and Society* 33(2): 277–301; Klaff, L. (2023) 'What is an English Jew?: The legal construction of Jewish identity under the UK Equality Act of 2010', *Indiana Journal of Law and Social Equality* 11(1): 208–228.

21 Becker, E. (2024) 'Theorizing "new ethnicities" in diasporic Europe: Jews, Muslims and Stuart Hall', *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 47(9): 1858–1879; Meer, N. (2014) 'Racialization and religion: Race, culture and difference in the study of antisemitism and Islamophobia', in Meer, N. (ed.) *Racialization and Religion: Race, Culture and Difference in the Study of Antisemitism and Islamophobia*, Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge; Topolski, A. (2020) 'The dangerous discourse of the "Judaeo-Christian" myth: Masking the race–religion constellation in Europe', *Patterns of Prejudice* 54(1–2): 71–90; Webber, J. (1997) 'Jews and Judaism in contemporary Europe: Religion or ethnic group?' *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 20(2): 257–279.

22 Graham, D. and Boyd, J. (2022) *Jews in Britain in 2021: First results from the Census of England and Wales*, London: JPR, 5–6. ONS (Office for National Statistics) (2023) 'Jewish identity, England and Wales: Census 2021', 18 December, www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/culturalidentity/religion/articles/jewishidentityenglandandwales/census2021.

23 Priddy, S. and Torrance, D. (2019) 'Contribution of the Jewish community to the UK', Debate Pack CDP-0149, London: House of Commons Library, https://researchbriefings.files.parliament.uk/documents/CDP-2019-0149/CDP-2019-0149.pdf, 3–4; Graham and Boyd, *Jews in the UK Today*, 85.

The Jewish population is heterogeneous. Although 13 per cent of Jewish people live in poverty, Jewish people overall are more likely than the population as a whole to be educated to degree level and enjoy the highest median hourly earnings compared with others of no religion or any other religion.[24]

On the eve of the 2024 general election, 45.8 per cent of the Jewish voters surveyed reported that they intended to vote Labour, a remarkable change from 2019 when just 11 per cent of Jewish votes were cast for Labour. Jewish people voted for the Labour Party, but also Conservative and Green parties, in 2024 in greater numbers than did the population as a whole, whereas there was a lower-than-average level of support for Reform and the Liberal Democrats.[25]

A majority of British Jews describe themselves as Zionists, but this number is in long-term decline: down from 72 per cent in 2013 to 63 per cent in 2022. Research by the Institute for Jewish Policy Research (JPR) suggests that the war on Gaza has led to growing polarisation. In 2024, the proportion who identify as Zionists has risen to 65 per cent. However, the proportion of anti- and non-Zionists Jews has also grown, from 23 per cent in 2022 to 28 per cent in 2024. This is particularly marked within the youngest cohort surveyed: just 49 per cent of those aged between 16 and 29 identify as Zionists.[26]

Amid this polarisation, we should bear in mind that significant connections to Israel extend beyond professed Zionists: 71 per cent of Jewish people in the UK have family living in Israel and 88 per cent have visited the country at least once. In 2024, JPR found that 78 per cent of respondents stated they were 'very' or 'somewhat' attached to Israel, an increase of 5 per cent since 2022 and significantly larger than the proportion of Zionists. However, this sense of attachment does not translate into support for the current government. In September 2024, 80 per cent of British Jews 'strongly' or 'somewhat' disapproved of Benjamin Netanyahu, a net approval rate that had declined over the previous year by 4 per cent.[27]

In short, whereas antisemitism promotes a homogeneous, monolithic image of the Jewish population, in reality, and in multiple ways, Jews present a picture of diversity.

24 Heath, A. and Li, Y. (2015) 'Review of the relationship between religion and poverty: An analysis for the Joseph Rowntree Foundation', CSI Working Paper 2015-01, Oxford: CSI (Centre for Social Investigation), Nuffield College, www.nuffield.ox.ac.uk/media/ildhis30/religion-and-poverty-working-paper.pdf, 2.

25 Lessof, C. and Boyd, J. (2024) *Jewish Voting Intentions on the Eve of the 2024 UK General Election*, London: JPR, www.jpr.org.uk/reports/jewish-voting-intentions-eve-2024-uk-general-election.

26 Boyd, *A Year after October 7*, 22–27; Graham and Boyd, *Jews in the UK Today*, 89.

27 Graham and Boyd, *Jews in the UK Today*, 88, 91; Lessof, C. (2023) 'The ties that bind Jews in the UK to Israel', JPR, 13 October, www.jpr.org.uk/insights/ties-bind-jews-uk-israel; Lessof, C. and Cohen, R.S. (2024) *What Do Jews in the UK Think of Israel and Its Leadership, and How Has This Changed since October 7?*, London: JPR, www.jpr.org.uk/reports/what-do-jews-uk-think-about-israel-and-its-leaders-and-how-has-changed-october-7, 6–8.

A brief history of antisemitism in the UK

Repeated across centuries, images and stories have created what we call a reservoir of racist beliefs about Jewish people.

A brief history of antisemitism in the UK

Antisemitism today carries forward a process of racialisation that has accumulated over centuries.

Jews arrived in significant numbers in England after the Norman Conquest in 1066. At its peak the medieval Jewish population numbered four to five thousand, amounting to just 0.1 per cent of the population. Jews' presence in the Kingdom, which depended on the monarch's protection, came to an abrupt end in 1290 when they were expelled by order of Edward I.[28]

Their refusal to accept Christianity made Jews an anomaly in this society. By the twelfth century they were increasingly represented as unbending enemies of God who conspired to damage Christians and Christianity. The period was punctuated by the emergence of the blood libel – the accusation that Jews murder Christian children – in Norwich in 1144, the massacre of Jews in York in 1190 and pogroms perpetrated by the followers of Simon De Montfort in the 1260s. The third Crusade, led by Richard the Lionheart, precipitated a wave of violence as Crusaders turned on Jews before waging war with the Muslim enemy beyond Europe.[29]

Only in the mid-seventeenth century were professing Jews tolerated in England again. In 1656, Menasseh ben Israel, an eminent rabbi living in Amsterdam, petitioned Oliver Cromwell, the Lord Protector, asking for Jews from the Low Countries to be allowed to settle in the Commonwealth. They were informally permitted to do so, but fierce opposition from merchants and clergy prevented Cromwell from granting permission in writing for the Jews' resettlement.[30]

For the next two hundred years Jews were discriminated against in law, mainly because they could not swear a Christian oath. Because of this they were excluded from public life, from some professions and commercial pursuits, and from the ancient universities. Beneath this discrimination lay a rich vein of bigotry. In 1753 a new law designed to allow foreign Jews to naturalise as British subjects without taking the Christian sacrament provoked a torrent of opposition so intense that the government repealed the measure within two months.[31]

Jews gained civil equality in the nineteenth century, but politicians and activists on the left and the right continued to abuse them at different moments. From Chartists struggling for the right to vote to radical critics of empire, the left contained an element that targeted Jews, representing them as a conspiratorial, exploitative and anti-democratic force. Meanwhile, the Conservative Party fought tooth and nail to prevent Jews who continued to profess the Jewish religion from entering parliament and introduced the first modern law to restrict immigration – the 1905 Aliens Act – to deter and exclude Jewish immigrants fleeing the Russian Empire.[32]

28 Tolan, J. (2023) *England's Jews: Finance, Violence and the Crown in the Thirteenth Century*, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.

29 Tolan, England's Jews; Mundill, R. (2010) *The King's Jews: Money, Massacre and Exodus in Medieval England*, London and New York: Continuum.

30 Endelman, T. (2002) *The Jews of Britain, 1657 to 2000*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 18–28.

31 Felsenstein, F. (1995) *Anti-Semitic Stereotypes: A Paradigm of Otherness in English Popular Culture*, Baltimore MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, chapter 8; Endelman, *The Jews of Britain*, 73–77.

32 Chase, M. (2007) *Chartism: A New History*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 288, 306, 358; Feldman, D. (2007) 'Jews and the British Empire, c.1900', *History Workshop Journal*, 63(1): 70–89.

For Jewish people, as for other racialised minorities, equal civil rights did not bring an end to discrimination. For working-class Jews, some streets, trades and pubs were no-go areas.[33] Other sorts of discrimination flourished from the inter-war period onwards, as increasing numbers of Jewish people became owners of businesses and homes, acquired middle-class status, and aimed to participate in new spheres of civil society. Until the early 1970s Jews experienced discrimination in professions such as law and medicine, as well as within the BBC. They encountered quotas at private schools, were unable to buy property on select housing estates, and were routinely barred from some sporting and social clubs.[34] These forms of discrimination faded in the last decades of the twentieth century, but the enduring legacy of centuries of racialisation remained.

In particular, two ideas that took shape in the medieval period have been reproduced and repurposed over the centuries. The first is the notion that Jewish people pose a threat to society's core values and conspire to promote their own interests at the expense of the common good. For instance, the idea that the Russian Revolution of 1917 was a specifically Jewish project led a host of conservative figures to revive and repurpose the conception of Jews as self-seeking, conspiratorial enemies of Christian civilisation. Right-wing politicians and newspapers, including Winston Churchill, *The Times* and other parts of the press, promoted the view that Bolshevik Jews posed an existential danger to religion, property and the British Empire. A decade later, in the 1930s, the figure of the Jew as a racialised outsider fuelled fascism in the UK as it did in Europe.[35]

The second enduring idea is that Jewish people have an unhealthy desire for money and are prepared to act ruthlessly to acquire it. Medieval clerics promoted the notion that materialism was a Jewish vice.[36] Much classic literature, too, has perpetuated the image of Jews as avaricious and morally stunted, from Shylock in Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice* to Fagin in Dickens' *Oliver Twist*. Some contemporary writing adds to this repertoire: in 2022 Al Smith's play *Rare Earth Mettle* featured a portrayal of a manipulative billionaire who, gratuitously, was also presented as a Jew. Ultimately, the Royal Court Theatre issued an apology.[37]

Repeated across centuries, these images and stories have created what we call a reservoir of racialised beliefs about Jewish people – about what they are and what they do. Today, these beliefs are embedded in our common culture. This reservoir does not belong to a single political tradition, either left or right. It is available to all: a wide range of actors and institutions draw on it, sometimes knowingly, sometimes not.[38]

33 White, J. (1980) *Rothschild Buildings: Life in an East End Tenement Block, 1887–1920*, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 121–138.

34 Brook, S. (1990) *The Club: The Jews of Modern Britain*, London: Constable, 383, 388; Cooper, J. (2003) *Pride versus Prejudice: Jewish Doctors and Lawyers in England*, 1890–1990, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 400–402; Elias, H. (2023) 'Radio religion: The British Broadcasting Corporation and faith propaganda at "home" and "overseas" in the Second World War', in Snape, M. and Bell, S. (eds) *British Christianity and the Second World War*, Woodbridge, Suffolk: The Boydell Press, 55; Dee, D. (2013) *Sport and British Jewry: Immigration, Ethnicity and Anti-Semitism*, 1890–1970, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 174–195; Benski, T. (1976) 'Inter-ethnic relations in a Glasgow suburb', PhD thesis, University of Glasgow, vol. 2, 69.

35 Holmes, C. (1979) *Anti-Semitism in British Society, 1879–1939*, London: Hodder and Stoughton, 141–161; Tilles, D. (2015) *British Fascist Antisemitism and Jewish Responses*, 1932–40, London: Bloomsbury, 31–89.

36 Lipton, S. (2019) 'Jewish money and the Jewish body in medieval iconography', in Feldman, D. and Volovici, M. (eds) *Jews, Money, Myth*, London: Jewish Museum London, 29–32.

37 Cheyette, B. (2022) 'Antisemitism in modern theatre and literature', in Katz, S. (ed.) *The Cambridge Companion to Antisemitism*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 377–391; Lynn, G. (2022) 'Anti-semitism row: Royal Court Theatre apologises ''unreservedly"', BBC News, 1 March, www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-london-60575719.

38 Gidley, B. McGeever, B. and Feldman, D. (2020) 'Labour and antisemitism: A crisis misunderstood', *Political Quarterly* 91(2): 413–421.

Manifestations of antisemitism today

As with other racisms, antisemitism is not solely a matter of hateful attitudes or individual incidents but is embedded in our common culture.

Manifestations of antisemitism today

What does antisemitism look like in the present day? How do antisemitic ideas manifest today? How widespread are they? To answer these questions, we need to try to measure antisemitism. There are different ways of doing this, each with their own merits and limitations.

Antisemitic attitudes

One approach to measuring antisemitism is to examine the spread of negative ideas and feelings held about Jewish people. The Pew Research Centre regularly asks a sample of the population whether it has a favourable or unfavourable attitude towards Jews. In these surveys, a steady figure of around 86 per cent of the British population reports a positive view of Jews, compared with around 7 per cent which report an 'unfavourable' view. These surveys suggest that far from growing, antisemitic attitudes are in fact stable or in a slow decline.[39]

However, there are limitations to studies based on surveys of attitudes. Most people, especially the educated and the young, do not want to appear racist, and they answer surveys knowingly to avoid doing so. It is therefore likely that the spread of antisemitism extends far beyond the numbers recorded in such surveys.

The data also reflects the politics of the debate about definitions. For instance, the Campaign Against Antisemitism (CAA) conducts a regular attitudinal survey called the Antisemitism Barometer, and many of the statements it tests for explicitly echo the examples in the IHRA definition. In 2020, it updated its measures to test for 'Antizionist Antisemitism' alongside classic 'Judeophobic Antisemitism'.[40] Rather than simply revealing the realities of antisemitism, the data collected in surveys like this echoes the political conflict over how to define it.

Antisemitic incidents

A second approach is to measure antisemitic incidents such as violence, harassment, vandalism, name-calling or the targeted use of slurs online. In the UK, the police record what they designate as racially or religiously motivated reported hate crimes, giving us a picture of the patterns of violence faced by different communities over time. Not all racist incidents are illegal, however, and so hate crime reporting only captures the tip of the iceberg. A Jewish communal charity, the Community Security Trust (CST), has been recording both legal and illegal antisemitic incidents since the 1980s. Its reports show a sudden jump following the outbreak of the Second Intifada in 2000, and further temporary spikes in subsequent years of conflict in Israel/Palestine, repeating a pattern also found in police figures. During times when violence in the Middle East becomes more intense, some in the UK are tempted to draw from the reservoir of racialised beliefs latent in our culture and, grimly, this generates a rise in antisemitic incidents.

39 Feldman, D. (2019) *Antisemitism and Immigration in Western Europe Today: Findings and Recommendations from a Five Year Study*, Berlin: Foundation EVZ.

40 Allington, D. Hirsh, D. and Katz, L. (2022) 'The Generalised Antisemitism (GeAs) scale: A questionnaire instrument for measuring antisemitism as expressed in relation both to Jews and to Israel', *Journal of Contemporary Antisemitism* 5(1): 37–48; Campaign Against Antisemitism (2021) *Antisemitism Barometer 2020*, London.

Like the police, the CST has recorded a sustained spike in reported incidents since 7 October 2023. Even when incidents that reference 'Israel' or 'Zionism' are stripped out, the surge remains. This picture is confirmed by survey data from JPR, which shows a threefold increase in Jewish people reporting experiences of physical assault and a sevenfold increase in vandalism in 2023.[41] The rising rate of incidents strikes a contrast with the flatlining of antisemitic attitudes noted earlier.

Yet incident data should be treated with caution and requires careful interpretation. Headline figures reflect changes in reporting as well as changes in the incidence of antisemitism. Research shows that reporting increases when a subject is in the news, because there are more opportunities for harassment and abuse, especially online, but also because people become more motivated to report. At the same time, we also know from research on all forms of hate crime that incidents are massively under-reported; the official numbers therefore likely represent a significant undercount.[42]

Further, as JPR notes, '[w]ithout in-depth scrutiny of each set of data' it is not possible to assess exactly what is included in the CST's count of incidents and what is excluded.[43] Here too, the figures can be affected by the contested definitions of antisemitism. For instance, the CST draws on the IHRA definition to help make judgements. It sees comparisons between Israel and the Nazis as antisemitic – something which, by contrast, JDA does not do. This shows, again, how the politics of defining antisemitism affect the measurement of the problem.

Structural antisemitism

As with other racisms, antisemitism is not solely a matter of hateful attitudes or individual incidents but is wired into UK society. We saw above that Jewish people faced widespread discrimination in workplaces, residential areas and social spaces until the 1970s. Because it is commonly assumed that Jewish people do not experience structural discrimination, such dimensions remain under-researched in contrast to other manifestations. Although the imprint of this discrimination today is both different from and lighter than in the past, there is some evidence that structural forms of antisemitism persist. The 2023 Equality National Survey (EVENS), led by the Centre on the Dynamics of Ethnicity, provides one of the most comprehensive overviews of discrimination experienced by minorities in the UK. EVENS found evidence of some health inequalities, housing precarity and job precarity affecting Jewish people. For example, Jews reported similarly high levels of multi-morbidity and COVID-19 bereavement as people from South Asian groups. Many also reported that they had experienced direct discrimination.[44]

41 ST (2024) *Antisemitic Incidents Report 2023*, London: CST; CST (2024) *Antisemitic Incidents Report January-June 2024*, London: CST; Boyd, J. (2024) *Antisemitism in the aftermath of October 7: What Do the Data Tell us, and What More do we Still Need to Know?* London: JPR, www.jpr.org.uk/reports/antisemitism-aftermath-october-7-what-do-data-tell-us-and-what-more-do-we-still-need-know, 13, 17.

42 Boyd, *Antisemitism in the Aftermath*, 10–17, which shows that surveys suggest significantly higher levels of incidents, and discusses some of the reasons, such as minorities' confidence in reporting mechanisms.

43 Boyd, *Antisemitism in the Aftermath*, 12.

44 Finney, N., Nazroo, J., Bécares, L., Kapadia, D. and Shlomo, N. (2023) *Racism and Ethnic Inequality in a Time of Crisis: Findings from the Evidence for Equality National Survey*, Bristol: Policy Press.

Antisemitism also manifests within institutions. The Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) investigation of the Labour Party, published in 2020, was based on case files of internal complaints, investigations and evidence from party members. It found 'a culture within the Party which, at best, did not do enough to prevent antisemitism and, at worst, could be seen to accept it', which could be described as a form of institutional antisemitism.[45]

Perceptions of antisemitism

Another measure of antisemitism is Jewish people's perceptions of the problem. The European Union's Fundamental Rights Agency (FRA), tasked with recording discrimination across Europe, has conducted research on Jewish experiences. Its 2018 report found that 17 per cent of British Jews reported they had personally been discriminated against in the previous year for their religion or belief and 9 per cent for their ethnicity, with the labour market and the workplace identified as the main sites of discrimination. Participants spoke of hiding their Jewish identity to avoid discrimination.[46]

As with reported incidents, perceptions change over time: while the FRA's 2013 survey found that 48 per cent of British Jews considered antisemitism a 'fairly big problem', its 2018 report found that number to have risen to 75 per cent. The domain where Jewish people had experienced the greatest increase was political life (up from 34 per cent to 84 per cent),[47] clearly reflecting the dynamics of the period of Jeremy Corbyn's leadership of the Labour Party, during which antisemitism became the topic of heated and recurrent public dispute.[48]

There is a contradiction between the perceptions of antisemitism among many Jewish people – which presents a picture of an exponentially rising problem – and other measures such as attitudes. Though they are important, subjective experiences have limitations as a measure of antisemitism. People recall the most dramatic incidents, and their recollections are refracted through the topical issues of the day. Like other measures, perceptions reflect the politics of antisemitism itself: the JPR survey, for example, found that the more attached someone is to Israel, the more likely they are to report having experienced verbal antisemitism;[49] and those surveyed by the FRA were far more likely to identify Islamists as perpetrators than was the case in incident reports judged antisemitic by the CST.[50]

45 EHRC (2020) *Investigation into Antisemitism in the Labour Party*, London: EHRC, 6.

46 FRA (2013) *Discrimination and Hate Crime against Jews in EU Member States: Experiences and Perceptions of Antisemitism*, Brussels: FRA, 16-17, 22; FRA, *Discrimination and Hate*, 16.

47 FRA (2018) *Experiences and Perceptions of Antisemitism: Second Survey on Discrimination and Hate Crime against Jews in the EU*, Brussels: FRA, 16-17, 22; FRA, *Discrimination and Hate*, 16.

48 On Labour and antisemitism, see Gidley et al., 'Labour and Antisemitism'.

49 Graham and Boyd, *Jews in the UK Today*, 106: 'emotional attachment to Israel is associated with experience of verbal antisemitism. This may be because those who are more attached to Israel are more likely than others to engage in political discourse about Israel, and perhaps more likely to interpret criticism of Israel as antisemitism.'

50 FRA, *Experiences and Perceptions*, 54; CST (2018) *Antisemitism Incident Report 2017*, London: CST, 9.

It has become commonplace within anti-racist politics to centre 'lived experience'. Yet the data presented here underlines some of the limits of this approach. Since data on perceptions does not coincide with the image produced by other sources, we may find ourselves unable to agree on the nature and scale of the problem. And because Jewish perceptions do not coincide with those of other minorities, foregrounding this data can lead to incoherent and even competitive politics, rather than to a consistent anti-racist approach. Further, when subjective experiences are centred, structural forms of racism can be overlooked, reinforcing the impression that antisemitism is anomalous to other racisms. Thus, emphasising only the singular experience of particular racisms can hinder anti-racist solidarity and the cultivation of alliances with other racialised minorities, for which we argue in the next section of this paper.

Taken together, these different approaches tell us two things. First, they demonstrate that antisemitism should neither be ignored nor denied. Second, they indicate the importance of politics in the way that we collect and interpret the data itself.

The findings also show us that the problem before us is a complex one. We find antisemitism not only in a small minority of hard-line antisemites but also in its structural form, in the widespread diffusion of images and ideas, in alarming spikes in recorded antisemitic incidents, and in the rising fear and anxiety they engender. The findings do not add up to a single clear picture. Different datasets contradict each other: depending on which measure is used, antisemitism can be seen as either rising sharply or flatlining. Is there a way through this complexity so that we can take effective action?

One important step, as we suggested above, is to make the distinction between antisemites – that is, thorough-going, ideologically committed racists – and what we call the reservoir of antisemitism. While research has shown that antisemites – people who hold a wide range of negative attitudes to Jews – represent a small minority (some 5 per cent[51]) of the adult population, antisemitism is much more widely diffused within our culture, not least our political culture.

It is therefore politically insufficient to respond to discrete antisemitic incidents and pursue the individual antisemites in our midst; we need to also find ways to confront the reservoir of antisemitism that is deeply embedded in our society.

As we show in the next section, political opposition to antisemitism too often fails to address this reservoir and instead remains fixated on individual antisemites.

51 This figure includes '2.4 per cent of British adults … who express multiple antisemitic attitudes readily and confidently' and an 'additional 3 per cent of the population of Great Britain [who] can be termed "softer" antisemites, expressing fewer, but nonetheless multiple antisemitic attitudes, often couched in less certain terms'; Staetsky, *Antisemitism in Contemporary Great Britain*, 3.

The politics of anti-antisemitism

When the state and political parties put significant energy into combating antisemitic ideas but fail to act with similar force against Islamophobia or structural racism, it confirms the perception of a hierarchy of racism.

The politics of anti-antisemitism

In the UK today, from right to left, there is no shortage of what we might call 'anti-antisemitism': political activity designed to combat antisemitism. This section examines the following three themes: (1) Jewish approaches to combating antisemitism, past and present, (2) the role of the state in the contemporary politics of anti-antisemitism, and (3) the contested relationship between antisemitism and the left.

Jewish approaches to combating antisemitism

One of the defining features of political opposition to antisemitism in the UK today is the leading role played by the state and the close cooperation of the Jewish communal mainstream with it.

Since 2019, the UK government has had an independent adviser on antisemitism, a position occupied since its inception by Lord Mann. In Whitehall, antisemitism is a particular responsibility of the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government. In addition, there is a Cross-Government Working Group on Antisemitism which coordinates policy and liaises with Jewish communal organisations and with the All-Party Parliamentary Group Against Antisemitism.

An array of Jewish organisations aim to combat antisemitism. The most significant among them is the CST, which not only records antisemitic incidents but also provides security for Jewish communal buildings and events. It works closely with government and the police: in 2024 the Conservative government pledged to provide it with more than £70,000,000 over the next four years to support its work.[52] Other communal organisations address antisemitism as part of their remit, including the Board of Deputies of British Jews, the Jewish Leadership Council and the Holocaust Education Trust. Building on the UK government's early adoption and vigorous promotion of the IHRA working definition, each of these organisations has urged its greater use.

These organisations, on occasion, challenge governments; all of them confronted the Labour Party between 2015 and 2020 with their concerns over antisemitism. However, their predominant mode of operation is through contacts with ministers, civil servants and the police.

Securing safety by building vertical alliances with powerful non-Jewish individuals or institutions runs deep in Jewish history. But that safety has always been contingent. In the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, Jews enjoyed the protection of the monarch – until they didn't. The worsening position of Jews in the second half of the thirteenth century and their uncertain position for two hundred years following their resettlement illustrate the precarity that can accompany vertical alliances. Yet in the absence of democratic politics, Jews had no alternative.

52 Sunak, R. (2024) 'PM speech at the annual CST dinner: 28 February 2024', www.gov.uk/government/speeches/pm-speech-at-the-cst-annual-dinner-28-february-2024.

With the onset of mass democratic struggles in the nineteenth century, Jewish people developed new ways to protect themselves through horizontal alliances.

Responses to the 1905 Aliens Act encapsulated the new situation. Some Jews supported the legislation, and mainstream communal organisations lobbied the government to try to influence its implementation and mitigate its effects. But Jewish radicals among the immigrants organised mass meetings and demonstrations against it and worked with allies drawn from the British left and the Liberal Party. Socialism, anarchism and Zionism now jostled for space with the older tradition of vertical alliances.[53]

These divisions became most marked in the 1930s in divergent public responses to British fascism. The Board of Deputies discouraged Jews from confronting fascists on the street. Working-class Jews helped to build a different sort of anti-fascist politics in London's East End. The Jewish People's Council Against Fascism and Antisemitism (JPC) included a strong Communist presence, alongside members of trade unions, benefit societies, Zionist societies and synagogues. The climax of anti-fascist street confrontations came on 4 October 1936, when tens of thousands of Jewish people led by the JPC and supported by Communists, trade unionists and dock workers, despite the best efforts of the police, prevented Oswald Mosley from leading a march through Jewish East London. The mobilising slogan, 'No pasaran', echoed the contemporaneous anti-fascist struggle in Spain.[54]

These divergent traditions can be traced in the organised opposition to antisemitism today: the practice of seeking state protection remains the dominant approach of the Jewish communal mainstream, but there are countervailing tendencies too. The CAA, created in 2014, is critical of the police and the Director of Public Prosecutions. It habitually conflates anti-Zionism and antisemitism and appears to have dispensed with the allegiance to liberal anti-racism that is still articulated, at least some of the time, by other mainstream Jewish organisations. Meanwhile, left-wing Jewish organisations such as Na'amod and Diaspora Alliance seek to build opposition to antisemitism through multi-racial horizontal alliances. These formations, whose membership tends to be younger, combine their opposition to antisemitism with a critical stance on Israel and an attempt to distinguish between anti-Zionism and antisemitism.

53 Feldman, D. (1994) *Englishmen and Jews: Social Relations and Political Culture, 1840–1914*, London: Yale University Press, chapter 14.

54 Kushner, T. and Valman, N. (eds) (2000) *Remembering Cable Street: Fascism and Anti-Fascism in British Society*, London: Vallentine Mitchell; Tilles, *British Fascist Antisemitism*, chapter 7.

The role of the state in the contemporary politics of anti-antisemitism

The differences between these approaches rest on radically divergent understandings of antisemitism. The alliance between the state and mainstream Jewish organisations often goes hand in hand with the conflation of anti-Zionism and antisemitism. We saw this in 2014 when then Tory chief whip Michael Gove drew an equivalence between protestors who boycott Israeli goods over Gaza with Nazi-era campaigns against Jewish-owned businesses. A decade later, Conservative support for a Bill designed to prevent support for boycott, divestment and sanctions (BDS) among local authorities and other public bodies was characterised in the same way. 'BDS is a mask for hate', accused Miriam Cates, the MP for Penistone and Stocksbridge[55].

Further, and more fundamentally, for the state and mainstream Jewish organisations, antisemitism is underpinned by personal prejudice and bad ideas. This leads to a fixation on individual antisemites and an underestimation of the reservoir of antisemitism. In his speech at the Holocaust Education Trust on 16 September 2024, Prime Minister Starmer encapsulated this view when he stated: 'we call out antisemitism for what it is: hatred, pure and simple'[56]. Similarly, in its mission statement the UK Holocaust Memorial Foundation, which advises the government on Holocaust remembrance, draws attention to 'human behaviour' and warns of the need to guard against 'prejudice' which can arise whenever 'democratic values' are 'threatened'[57]. This presents the problem of racism as a pathology of the individual, and as a deviation from democratic norms – of which the Holocaust stands as the archetypal case. This approach encourages us to focus on the problem of individual antisemites, not the deeply embedded reservoir of antisemitism. This has three significant limitations.

First, when Labour and Conservative politicians state that they are against 'racism', they often conceive the problem as one of individual prejudice and bad ideas. Antisemitism appears 'easier' for the state to address when it is understood largely at this level of discourse and individual prejudice. The state, taking this limited understanding of the problem, ploughs resources into antisemitism and Holocaust education and pursues individual antisemites who exhibit racist ideas. But as we have shown, antisemitism is more than the sum of bad attitudes. And the problem is one of not just individual antisemites but the reservoir of antisemitism that exists in contemporary society.

Second, this view of racism (including antisemitism) as the product of individual prejudice leaves us unable to comprehend the structural forms of racism in which the state is directly complicit. This includes, for example, Islamophobic policies that target British Muslims and contribute to racist outcomes such as unequal access to housing and health.

55 Mason, R. (2014) 'Gove says boycott of Israeli goods is sign of "resurgent antisemitism"', Guardian, 9 September, www.theguardian.com/politics/2014/September/09/gove-against-boycotting-israeli-goods-gaza-conflict; Cates, M. (2024) 'BDS is a mask for hate', The Critic, 12 January, https://thecritic.co.uk/bds-is-a-mask-for-hate.

56 Starmer, 'PM speech at the Holocaust Education Trust'.

57 UK Holocaust Memorial Foundation (2024) 'About us: Our mission statement', www.gov.uk/government/organisations/uk-holocaust-memorial-foundation/about#our-mission-statement.

Third, when the state and political parties put significant energy into combating antisemitic ideas but fail to act with similar force against Islamophobia or structural racism, it confirms the perception of a hierarchy of racism. While this type of state-led opposition to antisemitism can make many Jewish people feel safer in the short-term, it gives life to a competitive victimhood that further pulls apart the horizontal alliances and broad political coalitions required to confront all racisms.

This issue is most strikingly visible in the politics of remembrance. The rise of Holocaust consciousness since the beginning of this century and the significant steps taken to integrate Holocaust memory into British political and educational culture have not been accompanied by any corresponding recognition of British complicity in colonial violence. The willingness of successive governments to expend resources on remembering the Holocaust contrasts with their reluctance to memorialise atrocities in which the UK and the British state are directly implicated. In this way, irrespective of intentions, state-sponsored Holocaust remembrance has functioned to replace any serious reckoning with Britain's role in slavery and the slave trade, with the realities of British colonialism, or indeed with the long history of antisemitism in Britain sketched above. These hierarchies of remembrance make it all the harder to assemble anti-racist horizontal alliances.

These attempts to combat antisemitism can be particularly damaging to the cause of anti-racism when they serve to racialise other minoritised communities, especially British Muslims. This can be traced back to the early twenty-first century and the onset of the 'War on Terror'. In a speech to the CST in 2015, then prime minister David Cameron outlined his vision for combating the 'root cause' of antisemitism. To ensure Jewish safety, Cameron insisted, required not only funds for Jewish schools but also increased government spending on border forces. Protecting Jewish people was therefore presented as a cause helped by securitising British borders. Cameron also devoted a section of his speech to defeating what he called 'the poisonous ideology' of Islamist extremism. The way to tackle both antisemitism and extremism, he argued, was through the government's new Counter-Terrorism and Security Act.[58] This 2015 Act hardened the government's Prevent strategy, which has been widely criticised for perpetuating structural Islamophobia and embedding anti-Muslim racism within the education sector.[59] Prevent was presented to a Jewish audience as a key component of the government's approach to antisemitism.

58 Cameron, D. (2015) 'Community Security Trust (CST): Prime minister's speech', www.gov.uk/government/speeches/community-security-trust-cst-prime-ministers-speech.

59 Runnymede Trust (2023) 'Runnymede Trust response to the "Independent Review of Prevent"', www.runnymedetrust.org/news/runnymede-trust-response-to-the-independent-review-of-prevent.

In casting antisemitism as a specifically Muslim problem and not one embedded in British society as a whole, Cameron articulated a version of anti-antisemitism in which one section of the society – British Muslims – is racialised in the name of protecting another – British Jews.[60] In doing so. he helped to establish a template that politicians continue to follow.[61] This is not a uniquely British strategy but one that we find in other European countries too. It is damaging not only to Muslims but also to Jews, as it works against crafting a politics that can combat anti-Jewish and anti-Muslim racism together.[62]

We see a similar dynamic in the way that state anti-antisemitism has often been accompanied by a representation of British Jews as the 'model minority', and British Muslims as the enemy within. In a 2011 speech at the CST, Cameron bemoaned the 'failure of state multiculturalism in our society' and the fact that 'some Muslim men find it hard … to identify with Britain'. This stood in contrast to the way he described British Jews: 'let me say this has never been a problem for the Jewish community, who have been a model of how to integrate'.[63]

Senior politicians have mobilised a vision of the nation in which Jews are the model minority and fully integrated, while alienated Muslim men are problematic outsiders who fail to meet the threshold of national belonging.[64] But racial hierarchies within the nation are always contingent and shifting. In the late nineteenth century, Jewish immigrants from Eastern Europe were constructed as the alien within. That Jewish people are today represented as the model minority is a historically contingent outcome, and one that rests on the continued reproduction of the racialised outsider, including today the figure of the Muslim.[65]

60 This tendency is not limited to the government. In a post on X on 13 January 2024, the CAA stated: 'Thinking of visiting Sadiq Khan's London? This is what you can expect to see.' The accompanying clip showed edited footage of mostly Muslim protestors at a pro-Palestine demonstration in central London. The post drew on the reservoir of Islamophobic representations of London as a 'Muslim city', and a repertoire of far-right ideology which depicts London as in the grip of the racialised figure of its mayor, Sadiq Khan; CAA, 13 January 2004, https://x.com/antisemitism/status/1746271171979440404.

61 Braverman, S. (2024) 'Islamists are bullying Britain into submission', 22 February, www.suellabraverman.co.uk/news/islamists-are-bullying-britain-submission.

62 Özyürek, E. (2023) *Subcontractors of Guilt: Holocaust Memory and Muslim Belonging in Postwar Germany*, Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press; Feldman, *Antisemitism and Immigration*; Zia-Ebrahimi, R. (2021) *Antisemitism and Islamophobia: An Entangled History*, Amsterdam: Éditions Amsterdam.

63 Anonymous (2011) 'David Cameron's speech to the CST' *Jewish Chronicle*, 3 March, www.thejc.com/news/david-camerons-speech-to-the-cst-jl5l05zr.

64 Bloch, B. (2022) '"British Jews shine in almost every field": Rishi Sunak's love letter to Britain's Jews', *The Jewish Chronicle*, 28 October, www.thejc.com/news/politics/british-jews-shine-in-almost-every-field-rishi-sunaks-love-letter-to-britains-jews-lg1ozx6b.

65 Virdee, S. (2014) *Racism, Class and the Racialized Outsider*, London: Bloomsbury.

The construction of British Jews as a model minority can also manifest as antisemitism, or at the very least, demonstrate how antisemitism and philosemitism are two sides of the same coin. Addressing the Board of Deputies' 250th anniversary dinner, then chancellor George Osborne outlined the government's commitment to eradicating antisemitism. He immediately followed this by praising the virtues of the Jewish population in a way that was notable for the caricature it invoked. 'The Jewish community' he pronounced 'embodies…[the] spirit of enterprise to the full'. Osborne vaunted 'the thousands of small businesses run by members of your community and which are the true lifeblood of the British economy.' He listed the retail 'giants' with 'Jewish roots' and declared, that 'Jewish innovators were the driving force behind merchant banking and stock broking.'[66] These comments were delivered in a speech outlining the state's opposition to antisemitism, yet they invoke a stereotype rather than accurate economic history, and draw on the reservoir of racialised ideas about Jews and money. They serve as a reminder that seeking protection from the state can render Jewish people more, not less, vulnerable to antisemitism, including when it appears in a philosemitic guise.

Antisemitism and the left

The state and the Jewish communal mainstream are not the only political actors that respond to antisemitism. The left also plays a significant role in giving shape to the politics of anti-antisemitism. This is an area that has been marked by controversy in recent years. Nevertheless, two things are clear: antisemitism exists on the left and some on the left have at times exhibited an inability to recognise or respond to it adequately. How can this be explained?

A key feature of modern antisemitism has been the racialised projection of 'the Jew' as exploiter, an archetype which stands above and in conflict with the working class. Throughout the history of the left, certain anti-capitalist visions generated by socialists have overlapped and combined with this strain of antisemitism. We find it from Chartism in the nineteenth century to the Labour Party in the twenty-first. What makes antisemitism attractive and dangerous for radicals is the way it can appear oppositional. As they reach for a language with which to make sense of capitalism's injustices, some on the left have drawn on the pre-existing store of antisemitic attitudes in which Jews appear as the personification of finance capital and as the hidden hand pulling the levers of power. When this racialised figure of the exploitative 'Jew' is mobilised, it can provide an easy personification of oppression in the face of impersonal and intangible forms of domination.

66 HM Treasury (2010) 'Speech by the Chancellor of the Exchequer Rt Hon George Osborne MP, to the Board of Deputies of British Jews 250th anniversary dinner', 23 November, www.gov.uk/government/speeches/speech-by-the-chancellor-of-the-exchequer-rt-hon-george-osborne-mp-to-the-board-of-deputies-of-british-jews-250th-anniversary-dinner. We thank Daniel Levy for bringing this passage to our attention.

Similarly, when Israel's critics seek explanations for the influence the state has and the support it receives in the international arena, anti-Zionism can be vulnerable to other long-standing antisemitic tropes, for instance those which deal with 'the Jew' as a conspiratorial figure. In these ways antisemitism can find a home within movements for social justice. This is part of what took place during the Labour Party's antisemitism crisis between 2015 and 2020, when a steady stream of party members and supporters drew from the reservoir and recycled familiar antisemitic images and ideas about Jewish people.[67] In a case that resembled several others, a Labour candidate for office was forced to stand down in 2018 after it was revealed they had declared four years previously that 'Rothschilds [sic] Zionists run Israel and world governments', repeating tropes of Jewish conspiracy and greed.[68] Similarly, antisemitic placards that have been brought to mass demonstrations since October 2023 illustrate how a current within Palestine solidarity activism can draw on the reservoir of antisemitism in its representations of the Israeli state and its supporters globally.

One issue, then, is the existence of antisemitism on the left, including within the anti-Zionist movement. A second problem is that some on the left have also found it difficult to recognise antisemitism as a form of racism, let alone to respond to it adequately.[69] In part, this reflects the way racism is understood. In the UK, dominant paradigms for making sense of racism in recent decades have been colour-coded and synchronised with ideas about 'white privilege'. These paradigms have tended to leave to one side the history and ongoing significance of antisemitism, and have positioned Jewish people as unambiguously 'white' and therefore not among the victims of racism.

At the same time, however, there is a rich history of countervailing traditions within the left which have confronted antisemitism head on, from Daniel O'Connell to William Morris, from Sylvia Pankhurst to Ellen Wilkinson. Can similar voices be found today?

67 Gidley et al., 'Labour and antisemitism'.

68 Thorp, L. (2019) 'Liverpool Labour candidate apologises for "typical Jew" twitter comments', *Liverpool Echo*, 17 April, www.liverpoolecho.co.uk/news/liverpool-news/liverpool-labour-candidate-apologises-typical-16141939.

69 Gidley et al., 'Labour and antisemitism'.

Conclusion

This report calls for a new approach to combating antisemitism that is grounded in consistent anti-racism and based on building alliances between Jewish people and other racialised minorities.

Conclusion

Antisemitism remains a stain on UK society. As we have shown, the predominant ways of opposing it lead us further away from a genuinely anti-racist politics. Is there a better way forward? This report calls for a new approach to combating antisemitism that is based on building alliances between Jewish people and other racialised minorities. In pursuing this goal we must employ a 360-degree anti-racism. This requires us to confront not only antisemitism but also other forms of racism in the UK, as well as the status and treatment of Palestinians in Gaza, the Occupied Territories and Israel. A good starting place will be to understand antisemitism as a form of racialisation. Not only will this enable us to better grasp antisemitism, but it can also lead to the building of political alliances with those involved in confronting other racisms.

The Runnymede Trust's 1994 report *A Very Light Sleeper* did precisely this when it conceptualised antisemitism within a wider account of racism. Two significant contributions flowed from this intellectual starting position. First, the report was able to note that the crucial connections between antisemitism and other racisms had become 'obscured' in political debate – a perceptive observation of a tendency that would become entrenched in the decades that followed. Second, the report drew attention to the relationship between antisemitism and what it termed 'Islamophobia'. This multidirectional way of understanding antisemitism – in its relation to other racisms – would bear fruit: three years later, the Runnymede Trust built on this report by publishing *Islamophobia: A Challenge for Us All*, widely recognised as the first such study on the subject.[70]

In more recent years it has become harder to conceive of racism in this more integrated way. As we have shown, in part this is the outcome of an approach taken by successive governments which has failed to integrate action against antisemitism with a broader anti-racist vision and strategy. However, it is also partly due to the way responses to racism today tend to centre subjective experience as a decisive category. When Jews, Palestinians or any other minoritised community emphasise the singularity of their experience and insist on the right to name and define the racism they endure, they draw on an increasingly entrenched way of conceiving racism. But it is a conception that is limited, both intellectually and politically. A rich body of scholarship, from Edward Said onwards, has shown how anti-Muslim and anti-Jewish racisms are drawn from the same sources.[71] By emphasising the singularity of experience, contemporary forms of anti-racism leave us unable to comprehend the history shared between antisemitism and other racisms that Said alerted us to. Politically, this is also damaging in the way that it produces the zero-sum game and competitive victimhood that we see too often in the public sphere.

The different experiences of racism should not be set to one side in the pursuit of an unlikely universalism. Instead, they can become the building blocks of anti-racist coalition work. This will involve Jewish people recognising that not all racism takes the same form as antisemitism and advocating for policies which address racism in the round, and not only in its anti-Jewish form. At the same time, non-Jews should understand that racialised tropes about Jews, while not structural in their nature, can nevertheless encourage discrimination and violence, and that antisemitism itself can take a structural form.

70 Runnymede Trust (1997) Islamophobia: A Challenge For Us All, London, www.runnymedetrust.org/publications/islamophobia-a-challenge-for-us-all.

71 Said, E. (2023) *Orientalism*, London: Penguin, 286; Davidson Kalmar, I. and Penslar, E. (eds) (2004) *Orientalism and the Jews*, Waltham, MA: Brandeis University Press; Renton, J. and Gidley, B. (eds) (2017) *Antisemitism and Islamophobia in Europe: A Shared Story?* Cham: Springer Nature.

In undertaking this work, there are rich traditions from the past that we can draw on, especially from the middle of the last century when political struggles against antisemitism and other racisms were closely aligned, both intellectually and politically. This alignment is traceable in the Harlem Renaissance, where Black radicals understood the pogroms in Russia as an extension of the racism they faced in the United States.[72] It can also be found in W.E.B. Du Bois's dispatches from the Warsaw Ghetto, and in the influential work of Hannah Arendt and Aimé Césaire, who analysed the intimate connections between colonial violence and the European Holocaust.[73] It is present too in Holocaust consciousness in the UK in the 1960s which combined memorialisation with support for struggles against race prejudice in South Africa, the United States and the UK.[74] Today, these connections have become frayed, and for many there has been a parting of the ways.

Yet simply calling for the rebuilding of a multidirectional anti-racist project is not enough. As we have outlined in this paper, reconnecting opposition to antisemitism with a wider anti-racist politics is challenging, especially in the current climate. These challenges are shaped by the vexed question of the relationship between antisemitism and anti-Zionism, and today by the war in Gaza. There is no easy path forward. But we can nevertheless identify some resources of hope.

Increasing numbers of British Jews are having to grapple with the glaring contradiction between the ideas and practices of anti-racist politics in the UK and the policies and actions of the State of Israel. There are a range of responses to this fundamental tension: some Jewish people have become further entrenched in political activism in defence of Israel, and in doing so have severed their links with anti-racist politics, in some cases with a heavy heart. Meanwhile, as we have seen, a growing minority are increasingly alienated from Israel and Zionism. Today, between a quarter and a third of Jews define themselves as either non-Zionist or anti-Zionist.[75]

This development indicates the potential for a new direction within Jewish politics. This growing minority of non- and anti-Zionists is a key political actor today. It is here that a more multidirectional opposition to antisemitism is being cultivated, one that is coupled to a wider anti-racist politics. A key question is whether this emerging way of combating antisemitism can develop into something broader. Overcoming the legacy of apprehension many Jewish people feel about the left, as well as finding a consistent anti-racism which also reckons with emotional attachments to Jewish life in Israel, will not be easy. From those Jews who join Palestine solidarity marches to those whose discomfort with Israel's actions does not yet take a public form, increasing numbers of Jewish people are struggling to navigate the growing tension between anti-racism here in the UK and the question of Palestine.

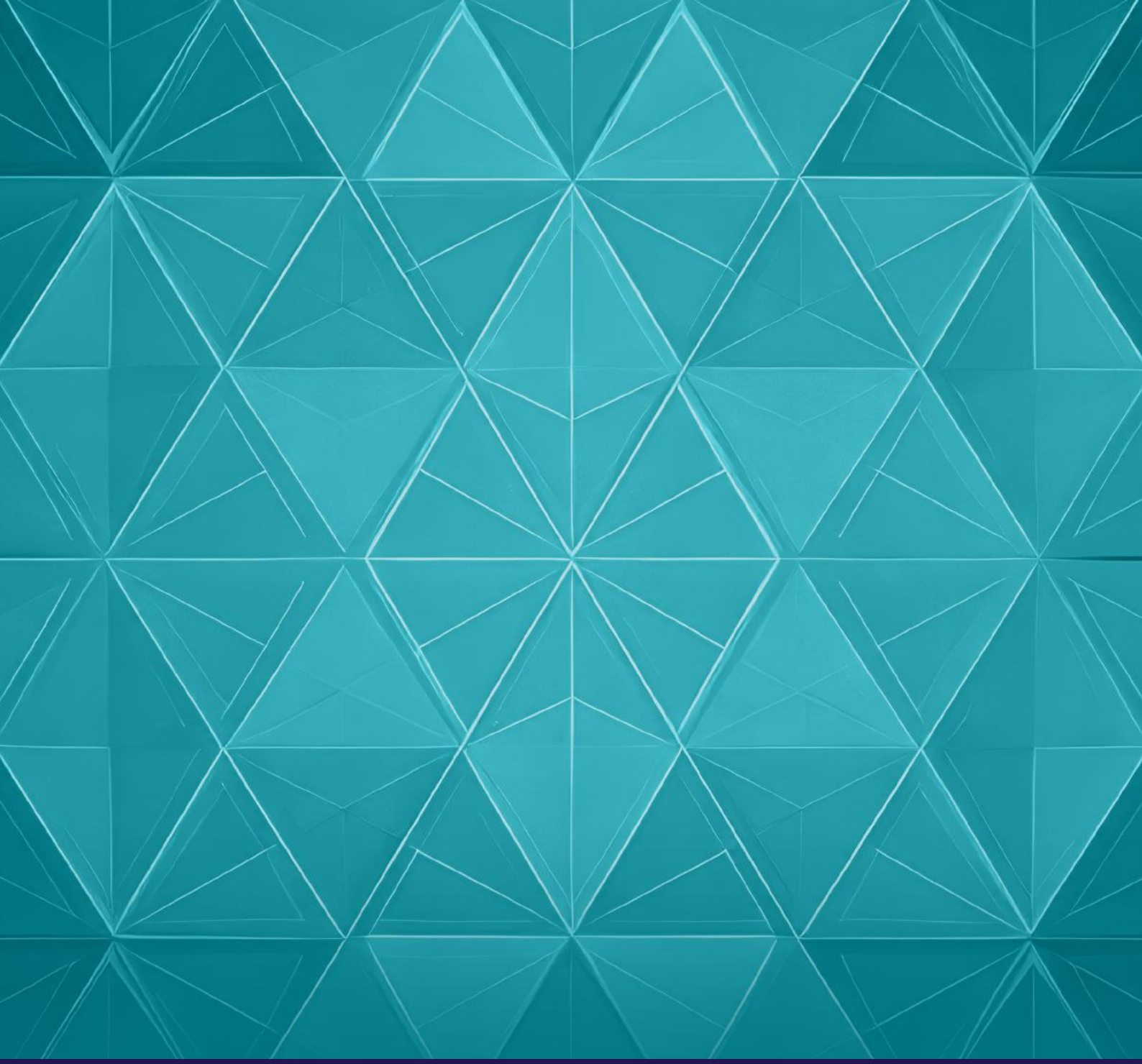
Yet from this difficulty an opportunity also arises: an opportunity to conjoin Jewish support for anti-racism with a diasporic commitment to justice for Palestinians as well as to equality for Jewish people. This will require a renewed, multidirectional politics of anti-racism capable of addressing the specificities and harms of antisemitism as well as the racism of the Israeli state. Holding these conversations and building these bridges will take work and persistence. In the recent past we had only the will for such a coalition. Today, however, there are tentative signs that a social force capable of making it a reality is coming into view.

72 James, W. (2021) 'To the East turn: The Russian Revolution and the Black radical imagination in the United States, 1917–1924', *The American Historical Review* 126(3): 1021–1022. Domingo, W.A. (1919) 'Did Bolshevism stop race riots in Russia?' *The Messenger*, July, 26

73 Du Bois, W.E.B. (1952) 'The negro and the Warsaw ghetto', *Jewish Life*, May, 14–15; Césaire, A. (2000) *Discourses on Colonialism*, New York: Monthly Review Press; Arendt, H. (1973) *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich.

74 The Race Relations Bill, 25 April 1965, World Jewish Congress British Section, Acc/3121/C8/2131, London Archives; *Wiener Library Bulletin*, April 1965, 1-2; Spring 1966, 5, 9.

75 See Boyd, *A Year after October 7*, 22–27.



Runnymede Trust
207 Brickfields
37 Cremer Street
London
E2 8HD

T 020 7377 9222
E info@runnymedetrust.org

Registered Charity Number 1063609

www.runnymedetrust.org

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