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REPORT

REPORT 13

ANTISEMITISM IN SWEDEN AFTER 7 OCTOBER

Experiences and Consequences

Editors:
Christer Mattsson, Robin Andersson Malmros & Morten Sager

University of Gothenburg
The Segerstedt Institute

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Table of Contents

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Introduction

Christer Mattsson, Robin Andersson Malmros & Morten Sager

This report presents the first empirical study on how Jews in Sweden have experienced and been impacted by antisemitism, as well as how it has manifested itself across traditional media, social media and other societal platforms, following the Hamas terrorist attack on 7 October 2023 and the subsequent war in Gaza. The study was initiated and conducted by the Segerstedt Institute at the University of Gothenburg.

Perspectives on Antisemitism in Sweden

The American organisation *Anti-Defamation League* (ADL) conducts surveys on antisemitic attitudes in numerous countries worldwide. These studies indicate that approximately 4% of the Swedish population holds antisemitic views, in contrast to an average of 24% across Western Europe. In Eastern Europe, the corresponding figure is 34%, and in the Middle East and North Africa, it reaches an average of 74% (ADL, 2024).

In the months following the Hamas terrorist attack on 7 October, reports of hate crimes motivated by antisemitism in Sweden surged by over 450%, rising from 24 reports in autumn 2022 to 110 reports in autumn 2023 (Brå, 2024). Therefore, it can be concluded that openly expressing antisemitic views is generally perceived as unacceptable in Sweden but long-standing prejudices against Jews can rapidly resurface, resulting in threats and hatred. To unravel this paradox, we need to examine three perspectives on the definition, understanding and experience of antisemitism.

The first perspective we wish to emphasise is a crucial clarification. Antisemitism is not rooted in the reality of who Jews are or what they do, but rather in the antisemitic fantasies surrounding them. These fantasies have negative, and at times devastating, consequences for both Jews and society as a whole. Antisemitism is a controversial and debated concept that researchers and organisations have defined in various ways (Persson, 2024).

In our work, we adopt a straightforward definition: antisemitism refers to prejudice and hostility directed at Jews because they are Jews or perceived as such. The definition accounts for various forms of hostile physical acts against Jews, stereotypical representations, the spreading of myths about Jews, expressions of contempt towards them as a group, and the assertion that Jews, as a coordinated entity, exert significant, often decisive, influence over politics, media and the economy.

Antisemitism functions like barbed wire in society, constraining the rights and freedoms of Jews. Over time, antisemitism has established a lasting oppression of those who are identified or self-identify as Jews. The barbed wire remains invisible to those who are not directly affected by it. At times, the barbed wire tightens, limiting Jews' opportunities for safe and free lives. At other times, it is pushed to the periphery, resulting in less impact on Jewish freedom. Yet, it remains, occasionally resurfacing in more mundane expressions of antisemitism.

Antisemitism also negatively impacts entire communities, extending its effects beyond the individual Jews who are affected by it. Antisemitism frequently accompanies a conspiratorial mindset that seeks to rationalise injustice, powerlessness and various societal problems by reference to Jews. The conspiratorial mindset is destructive in two key ways: first, it fosters hatred, threats and violence among various groups of people; second, it hinders the critical analysis and resolution of the real causes of societal problems. Rather than seeking to investigate, understand and address the real causes, considerable time and energy are directed towards oppressing Jews, who are frequently portrayed as the masterminds behind the social problems (see e.g., Davey & Ebner, 2019).

The second perspective is that contemporary antisemitism is increasingly linked to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. There is strong empirical evidence showing that antisemitism in Sweden has increased historically in correlation with mounting tensions in Israel and Palestine (Brå, 2024; Persson, 2021; Österberg, 2023). In this report, we refer to it as the "Israelisation" of antisemitism (Schwarz-Friesel, 2020). This means that the same language, thought patterns and themes traditionally associated with antisemitic expressions are now being applied in relation to or in criticism of Israel. This form of antisemitism is frequently masked under the guise of "anti-Zionism."

Anti-Zionism is often interpreted, particularly after 1948, as hatred or opposition towards the Jewish state. A significant number of scholars studying antisemitism assert that anti-Zionist expressions and actions, both historically and in modern times, often embody antisemitic thought patterns (Freedman et al., 2024; Herf, 2013; Hirsh, 2007). Regardless of how the relationship between antisemitism and anti-Zionism is interpreted, it is evident that groups and individuals identifying as anti-Zionist (e.g., Hamas) often pose a distinct threat to Jewish life. Julius (2024) contends that Jews today confront two hostile ideologies: antisemitism and anti-Zionism. It can also be described as a radicalisation of certain elements of anti-Zionism in terms of both opinion and action.

The third perspective addresses the distinction between conscious and unconscious antisemitism. The statements in the ADL's survey represent clear antisemitic ideas for respondents to evaluate (ADL, 2024). These might include claims that Jews control the media, dominate the global economy and so forth. Most people in Sweden recognise these statements as antisemitic and often associate them with Nazi Germany. However, such pre-understanding should not be taken for granted, but rather recognised as a product of education and social learning.

However, education and social learning can also have the opposite effect. Through these processes, individuals may learn and internalise thought patterns, linguistic expressions, symbols and other cultural markers that contain stereotypes and prejudices about Jews, often

without realising that they are antisemitic. We refer to this form of cultural antisemitism as *structural antisemitism* (Mattsson & Johansson, 2024). We argue that structural antisemitism frequently resurfaces in discussions related to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Therefore, expressions, symbols and actions must be understood within their temporal and spatial contexts to be accurately identified as antisemitic. This is particularly important when addressing the Israelisation of antisemitism.

Finally, regarding structural antisemitism, we would like to emphasise the social psychological perspective that, as human beings, we do not act solely *based on who we are*. We largely *become who we are because of our actions* and *the roles assigned to us by our environment.* We inherit language and values from our surrounding environment, and our identity, in turn, is shaped by the social interactions we have with those around us. This means that almost anyone can perpetuate structures through various expressions without fully understanding their origins or consequences.

Given that Sweden currently has a significant proportion of residents from countries with high levels of antisemitism, we can anticipate an increase in antisemitic expressions, particularly when it comes to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict (ADL, 2024). Stigmatising these individuals by labelling them as "antisemites", as if it were an inevitable and unchangeable trait, is of little benefit. Our research seeks to do almost the opposite: to enhance awareness of *how expressions, structures and their consequences are interconnected.*

About the Report and the Research

A key premise of this report is that our understanding of contemporary antisemitism in Sweden is insufficient. Klas Åmark's (2021) research overview on the Holocaust and antisemitism, commissioned by the Swedish Research Council on behalf of the former government, reveals that scientific studies focusing on contemporary antisemitism are scarce. Most research has primarily examined antisemitism as a historical phenomenon.

In the absence of research from the scientific community, organisations such as the Living History Forum (FLH) and the Swedish National Council for Crime Prevention (Brå) have become key contributors to our understanding of the issue. The Living History Forum's surveys on attitudes towards Jews, conducted in 2005 and 2020, provide essential insights into the distribution of antisemitic attitudes within society at large and the factors influencing the attitudes of people in Sweden (Bachner & Bevelander, 2021). The analysis of antisemitic hate crimes conducted by Brå between 2008 and 2016 sheds light on how antisemitism manifests itself and the contexts in which it arises. The most common types of offences include incitements to racial hatred, unlawful threats and harassment. Such crimes predominantly occur in public spaces, on public transport, at schools, in workplaces, online and at home, with the perpetrator often being unknown to the victim (Brå, 2019). In other words, antisemitism primarily takes the form of oral or written expressions that occur in both everyday physical and digital environments.

So far, descriptions of antisemitism in Sweden since 7 October have primarily been confined to journalistic reports, social media posts, and debating articles or columns. Although these sources provide valuable insights and foster debate, this study aims to offer a systematic and scientifically rigorous examination of the impact of antisemitism.

The report draws on 294 qualitative survey responses, 27 group and individual interviews, and 136 media articles, all of which have been interpreted, analysed and critically discussed using predetermined methodologies. The study design is unique in its focus on an ongoing phenomenon. Typically, in the social sciences, such events are studied retrospectively. Memories of past events are always shaped by later impressions, which can modify and alter them from the original experiences. With this study, we have been able to capture experiences without the variability of time impacting the empirical data.

The research we conducted has two primary objectives. The first objective, as previously mentioned, is to provide a research foundation for the discussion on antisemitism in Sweden. The second objective is to convert this knowledge into a valuable resource for Swedish teachers and educational staff. Schools and education are essential in combating antisemitism, as initiatives focused on enhancing knowledge are vital to strategies designed to prevent racism, antisemitism and extremism (Andersson Malmros, 2022; Mattsson, 2018). It is therefore all the more concerning that antisemitism is present in educational environments.

In both Malmö (Katzin, 2021) and Stockholm (Wagrell, 2022), the respective city administrations have commissioned more in-depth studies of school environments. These indicate that schools are not just locations where crimes occur; they also lack the knowledge and resources to effectively recognise, address and prevent antisemitism. Consequently, both studies emphasise that schools require greater knowledge about contemporary antisemitism.

The Segerstedt Institute, in collaboration with FLH, offers Sweden's only university course on antisemitism, aimed at the aforementioned target group. Unfortunately, there is currently no research literature that reflects conditions in Sweden. The results of this study offer our students, as well as students from other institutions and various stakeholders in society, previously lacking research and knowledge. We also ensure that the results are integrated into schools through the methodological development support provided by the Segerstedt Institute to municipalities and other educational coordinators since 2024.

We recognise that discussing and addressing issues related to antisemitism and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in the classroom can be challenging, and our research aims at helping schools develop the necessary skills.

The research project is directed by Christer Mattsson and Robin Andersson Malmros, both affiliated with the Segerstedt Institute at the University of Gothenburg, and consists of five sub-studies. Other contributing researchers include Anders Persson (Linnaeus University), Isabella Pistone (University of Gothenburg), Mirjam Katzin (University of Gothenburg), Pontus Rudberg (Uppsala University) and Roger Säljö (University of Gothenburg). Additionally, Morten Sager (University of Gothenburg) served as the scientific reviewer. The five sub-studies are as follows:

- Antisemitism, a Grey Area or Legitimate Criticism of Israel: Where Do We Draw the Line? (Anders Persson)
- Consequences of 7 October for Jews in Sweden: Thoughts, Emotions and Reflections (Mirjam Katzin & Pontus Rudberg)
- Jewish Life on Social Media before and after 7 October: A Case Study of a Jewish Youth Organisation (Isabella Pistone & Pontus Rudberg)
- The Israel-Hamas Conflict in Swedish News Media: A Framing Analysis (Isabella Pistone & Pontus Rudberg)
- Antisemitism and Civic Orientation for Newcomers: Perceptions, Experiences and Strategies (Robin Andersson Malmros, Christer Mattsson & Roger Säljö)

The content of the report reflects the *ongoing efforts* of the research group. Consequently, this report should be viewed as a preliminary document, with the sub-studies set to be developed for publication in international scientific journals. This implies that the analyses and conclusions may evolve from their current state.

Anders Persson's study serves as an introduction to the key concepts and expressions that shape the debate on antisemitism, especially concerning the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The other four sub-studies rely on so-called primary data, meaning the information has been specifically collected for these sub-studies.

In this report, we have chosen to address a wide, general audience. As a result, the chapters are concise, using simple language to highlight key findings. Rather than detailing the research contributions (which we will address in the scientific publications), we have chosen to concentrate on the implications for policies, society and specific activities.

In conclusion, antisemitism is a complex phenomenon to study, as it often proves challenging, if not impossible, to research or teach without evoking strong emotions in both researchers and informants. This is not a unique description of a social science topic. However, in the wake of the Hamas terrorist attack and the ensuing war in Gaza, few subjects are as relevant, urgent and controversial as antisemitism. While there are clear advantages to researching or teaching topics that resonate with people and provoke strong opinions, the study of antisemitism has its own set of challenges. The research group became acutely aware of this during the research process, particularly in light of the vandalism of the office of one of the authors of the report (Anders Persson), which carried antisemitic connotations.

Announcements

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Antisemitism, a Grey Area or Legitimate Criticism of Israel: Where Do We Draw the Line?

Anders Persson

Introduction

The attack on 7 October 2023 and the ensuing war in Gaza, like previous conflicts between Israel and Palestinian movements, have reverberated globally, sparking tensions far beyond the Middle East. Since the onset of the war, there have been widespread demonstrations across many parts of the world protesting Israel's military actions in Gaza. In Sweden, the war in Gaza has sparked polarised political debates, heated street demonstrations, widespread graffiti, sticker and poster campaigns, and a sharp rise in hate speech, both on social media and within Swedish classrooms.

Previous research has established a clear link between escalations in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and subsequent increases in antisemitism and other forms of racism, both in Sweden and internationally. This pattern appears to be repeating itself during the current conflict, although data collection is still ongoing (Bachner, 1999; Persson, 2021). Much of the antisemitic activity seems to occur online, especially on platforms commonly referred to as second-generation social media, with TikTok and Telegram being the most prominent channels. Additionally, there is a growing trend of expressing slogans, banners, stickers and graffiti in English.

This sub-study aims to examine whether common expressions in the Swedish debate, social media and demonstrations related to the attack on 7 October and the ensuing war in Gaza should be classified as antisemitic or seen as legitimate criticism of Israel. While some expressions are clearly identified as antisemitic, others are of a more complex nature. A grey area exists where terms can take on varying meanings depending on their context. This is exemplified by the slogan "Free Palestine from the river to the sea". For non-specialists, such as teachers in Swedish schools, navigating this terrain can be quite challenging. Further examples of expressions that raise concerns for many include slogans like "Crush Zionism" and calls for an intifada against Israel. Other terms that are often difficult to navigate include "anti-Zionism", "one-state solution", "BDS" (Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions) and "apartheid".

In the context of the war between Israel and Hamas, there are also accusations that Israel is perpetrating a Nazi-style Holocaust, genocide or ethnic cleansing in Gaza, which also require careful analysis. The nearly 30 expressions examined in the sub-study have been classified into three main categories:

- accusations against Israel
- Zionism and anti-Zionism
- tactics to oppose Israel and its occupation.

Each term is examined individually under headings corresponding to the above categorisation. The sub-study does not claim to exhaustively cover all the expressions used in various contexts related to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. While the format does not permit a comprehensive exploration of all terms or capture every nuance, it provides a foundational resource for teachers, journalists, politicians and others interested.

Accusations Against Israel

Many of the allegations against Israel have existed for decades, yet they are often revived or amplified during times of war or heightened tensions in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Some of these accusations have been directed at Israel since its inception and, at times, were aimed at Jews even before that. Others, such as "ISrael is ISIS", have emerged in recent discussions.

Israel is Guilty of a Holocaust, Genocide and Ethnic Cleansing Against Palestinians

Two weeks after the attack on 7 October and the outbreak of war in Gaza, posters appeared at a pro-Palestinian demonstration in Malmö, claiming that Israel was committing crimes in Gaza comparable to the Holocaust, and drawing parallels with the Auschwitz concentration and extermination camp. The same message has also been displayed at demonstrations in other parts of Sweden. These accusations reflect a tendency to diminish and relativise the Holocaust, implicitly equating Israel's actions with those of the Nazis (Braut Simonsen, 2023). The same applies to claims in which Gaza is likened to a Nazi extermination camp.

Likening Israel to Nazi Germany and its policies during the Holocaust has deep roots in antisemitic rhetoric, tracing back to the anti-Zionism that emerged in the Soviet Union after the Second World War. By the same logic, as previously mentioned, it is antisemitic to misuse terms like "Holocaust" or to label the Israeli military as the "SS," or compare Gaza to a Nazi extermination camp. In international literature, this type of accusation is termed "Holocaust inversion" (Seymour, 2024).

In both Sweden and internationally, accusations of genocide against Israel regarding its actions towards the Palestinians have become increasingly prevalent. In December 2023, South Africa submitted a formal complaint to the International Court of Justice (ICJ) in The Hague, accusing Israel of committing acts of genocide against the Palestinians. The final judgement is expected

to take several years. However, in a preliminary ruling, the Court urged Israel to implement all possible measures to prevent genocide in Gaza (ICJ, 2023). Pro-Palestinian groups viewed this as a victory and contended that there was evidence to support the charges of genocide (Palestinagrupperna, 2024).

Assessing whether the accusation of genocide against Israel in the context of the current war is antisemitic presents a complex challenge, one that remains difficult to resolve at this stage. Thus, the concept of genocide exists in a grey area, since its applicability to the war in Gaza remains unclear. If the court determines that Israel committed acts of genocide in Gaza, we would be facing legally valid and evidence-based allegations that cannot simply be dismissed as antisemitic. At the same time, one could argue that the accusations of genocide made long before the current war in Gaza may stem from an antisemitic ideological tradition characterised by false and unfounded allegations against Israel. In the Swedish debate, for instance, Masoud Kamali (2024) has claimed that Israel has committed genocide against the Palestinians since the establishment of the state in 1948.

Accusations of ethnic cleansing against Israel have been prevalent and persist to this day. Similar to genocide, the classification of an act as ethnic cleansing in a legal context requires evidence of intent to forcibly remove one ethnic or religious group from a territory. When Israel's ground invasion of Gaza began following the 7 October attack, the country urged the population of northern Gaza to evacuate their homes and move south. It currently appears that Israel intends to allow at least most of the people of Gaza to return to their homes after the war, indicating that no ethnic cleansing has occurred. At the same time, this is far from certain, since a long line of Israeli politicians, including more moderate voices, have made statements during the war urging the people of Gaza to leave their homes with no intention of returning (Samuels, 2024). The concept of ethnic cleansing remains a grey area concerning Israeli policy. There is no doubt that Palestinians have faced displacement, and this continues, but it is likely not as extensive as what would be classified as ethnic cleansing.

Israel is an Apartheid Regime

A clear trend in the early 2020s was that prominent human rights organisations began publishing reports accusing Israel of being an apartheid regime or committing the crime of apartheid against Palestinians. The most common arguments presented by human rights organisations regarding apartheid allegations include that Israel:

- seeks to maintain political and military dominance over Palestinians
- systematically oppresses Palestinians through institutional discrimination to maintain its political and military dominance in the region
- commits human rights violations such as land confiscation and restrictions on freedom of movement
- has established a regime of Jewish supremacy across the entire Israel-Palestine region (see, e.g., HRW, 2021).

Critics who oppose applying the concept of apartheid to the Israel-Palestine conflict argue that it is flawed for the following reasons:

- Unlike the situation in South Africa, Israel's actions are not based on skin colour.
- Prior to the attack on 7 October and the subsequent war in Gaza, Israel no longer had territorial claims over Gaza.
- The Palestinian Authority holds responsibility for the situation in the West Bank.
- Accusations of apartheid are not typically directed at most other conflicts or authoritarian regimes that violate human rights (Johnson, 2022).

The applicability of the term apartheid to the Israel-Palestine conflict is highly controversial, partly because such accusations have long been a feature of antisemitic and anti-Zionist rhetoric, often aimed at undermining Israel's legitimacy as a state. To date, no Western government has endorsed the application of apartheid to the Israel-Palestine conflict.

Other Types of Accusations Against Israel and Jews

As previously mentioned, there is a wide range of accusations directed at Israel. Common examples from demonstrations during the war in Gaza include calling Israel a "murderer" or labelling it a "terrorist state."

Regarding the accusation that Israel is a murderer, it is uncontroversial to assert that Israel has deliberately killed Palestinians in Gaza. What is referred to as "targeted killings" in the Israel-Palestine conflict typically involves Israeli missile strikes on vehicles or buildings to eliminate wanted Palestinians. This is undoubtedly an intentional act of killing, which can sometimes also impact innocent individuals, such as other passengers in a vehicle.

During demonstrations related to the Gaza war, it is also common to label Israel as a terrorist state. The exact meaning of the term "terrorist state" is not always clear, but it likely refers to Israel's reported abuses and use of violence against civilians, as highlighted in the reports published by human rights organisations regarding the war so far (Amnesty, 2023). While the term "terrorist state" is broad and imprecise, it is not inherently linked to antisemitic themes.

Other allegations with clear antisemitic undertones include comparing Israel to ISIS, often by writing the name with a capital "I" and "S." Another method is to write "Israhell," which suggests a connection to the devil or implies that Israel is a diabolical entity (Wistrich, 2013). Lastly, clear instances of antisemitism in Sweden during the Gaza war include Jews being blamed or collectively held responsible for Israel's actions. This has occurred, for instance, during demonstrations outside synagogues in Stockholm and Malmö.

Zionism and Anti-Zionism

Zionism is a heterogeneous movement united by the common goal of establishing a Jewish presence in the historic region of Palestine. Most Zionists interpret this as the establishment of

an independent Jewish state (modern-day Israel). Like other forms of nationalism, Zionism functions as both an ideology and a political and social movement.

The term anti-Zionism generally refers to perspectives or actions that oppose Zionism. Historically, one can identify six broad categories of anti-Zionism:

1. The first category emerged in the Soviet Union during the 1950s and intensified after the Six-Day War in 1967. In Soviet anti-Zionist rhetoric, Israel was depicted as a demon composed of Nazis, imperialists, colonisers, racists and a myriad of other negative labels.
2. The second category is found among right-wing extremists and neo-Nazis, such as the Swedish Nordic Resistance Movement. A key feature of this form of anti-Zionism is its conspiratorial nature. The Zionist movement is accused of secretly controlling the world to undermine the white race.
3. The third category includes the perspectives of Palestinians or others in conflict with Israel.
4. The fourth category exists among Islamists and is rooted in religious foundations.
5. The fifth category includes Jews, both in Israel and the diaspora, who identify as anti-Zionist for various reasons.
6. The sixth category consists of individuals who, on principle or ideological grounds, oppose any form of nationalism or national borders.

In particular, Soviet-inspired anti-Zionism, far-right Nazism and Islamism share many connections to antisemitic ideas and rhetoric. Palestinian anti-Zionism is not fundamentally antisemitic. However, it can occasionally exhibit antisemitic elements, particularly when intertwined with Soviet-inspired anti-Zionism. The latter two categories of anti-Zionism are generally not antisemitic, but they may, in some instances, employ antisemitic tropes and arguments, thereby becoming antisemitic.

Zionism and Israel as a Form of Settler Colonialism

Claims that depict Israel as merely a colonial creation or a case of settler colonialism often serve to undermine Israel's right to exist under international law and its status as a member of the United Nations. It is worth noting that many view the United States, Australia and New Zealand as products of settler colonialism. However, this rarely leads to questioning of their legitimacy in the same way that it does for Israel. At the same time, there are undeniably expansive and colonial aspects present in both early Zionism and contemporary settlement policies.

Many early Zionist leaders openly and proudly articulated their plans to colonise parts of historic Palestine while simultaneously waging an anti-colonial struggle against the British Mandate. Referring to Israel as a colonial project or as an example of settler colonialism is not inherently antisemitic. However, the post-colonial and decolonial perspectives become problematic when they deny Israel's legitimacy or right to exist, and they cross into antisemitism when they advocate violence aimed at destroying Israel.

Zionism is Racist, a Conspiracy and Should Be Crushed

Problematic uses of the concepts of Zionism and Zionists have been prevalent in Sweden following the attack on 7 October and the subsequent war in Gaza. The term is used conspiratorially, as demonstrated when Abdulla Miri, a board member of the Swedish UN Association, posted on Facebook that it was "a confirmation that the Zionists (sic!) are running this country" (Lennartsson, 2024). Miri's comment is a typical example of how the concept of Zionism is employed conspiratorially, suggesting a clear antisemitic notion that Jews/Zionists control a country like Sweden.

The slogan "Crush Zionism" is a common phrase heard at pro-Palestinian demonstrations in Sweden in relation to the Gaza war. Overall, the phrase "Crush Zionism" is problematic and should be regarded as antisemitic, as it suggests the dismantling of the state-supporting ideology of a recognised state, of which the creation and existence have been, and continue to be, supported by international law, despite the ongoing occupation. For the expression not to be considered antisemitic, the speaker must clarify their intent to oppose Zionism through democratic and peaceful means, such as advocating for a one-state solution that guarantees democratic rights and freedoms for both Israelis and Palestinians.

Strategies for Opposing Israeli Policies

Since Israel's establishment in 1948, Palestinians and their allies have employed a diverse array of strategies to resist Israel and its occupation, ranging from armed conflict and terrorism to various non-violent approaches. In this section, we will examine some of these strategies more closely.

Freeing Palestine in Different Contexts

The most frequently heard slogan at pro-Palestinian demonstrations in Sweden since the onset of the Gaza war is "Free Palestine," often expressed in various contexts. A variation of the phrase "Free Palestine" that has received significant attention and sparked considerable debate since the attack on 7 October and the subsequent war in Gaza, is the English slogan "Palestine will be free from the river to the sea." Given that the phrase suggests the non-existence of Israel, it is highly controversial.

Some observers, particularly pro-Israel advocates, contend that the phrase serves as a call for the direct or indirect destruction of Israel, rendering it antisemitic. Its historical usage by various terrorist groups, from the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP) to Hamas, further complicates the phrase and associates it with antisemitism (AJC, n.d.). Other commentators, particularly those with a pro-Palestinian perspective, argue that the phrase, both historically and currently, seeks to promote a one-state solution where all citizens, including Israeli Jews, are granted civil rights, framing it as anti-racist and inclusive rather than antisemitic (Demirjian & Stack, 2023).

If the slogan is rooted in the belief that Israel should be forcibly eradicated, it is both antisemitic and constitutes a violation of international law. However, if the protesters aim to achieve this through democratic means, with Israelis and Palestinians mutually agreeing on a one-state solution that ensures equal rights for all and a shared government, then the slogan is not antisemitic.

The question of a one-state solution to the conflict raises similar concerns as the various calls for the liberation of Palestine in different contexts, particularly regarding the rights that Israelis and Palestinians would hold in such a state and the nature of the state itself. Critics have long contended that a one-state solution would result in civil war between Israelis and Palestinians, arguing that it is antisemitic to propose statehood options that would effectively eliminate Israel. Advocates of a one-state solution often argue that it would promote equality and equal rights for all, positioning it as anti-racist and contrary to antisemitism. A significant issue in this context, however, is that many Palestinians and other advocates of a one-state solution do not recognise Israel's legitimacy within any borders.

In this context, it is crucial to note that Palestinians living under Israeli occupation have the right to armed resistance against the occupying power under international law. This is why Western media often refrain from labelling Palestinian attacks against Israeli soldiers on occupied land as acts of terrorism.

One expression worth examining in this context, which has been prominently featured in demonstrations and discussions in Sweden following the attack on 7 October and the subsequent war in Gaza, is the call to initiate an intifada against Israel, or to "globalise the intifada," which has also been echoed in the protests. The term "intifada" is an Arabic expression that means to shake off the yoke of Israeli occupation (Al Jazeera, 2022). The challenge with the term "intifada" is that it can refer to shaking off the occupation of the West Bank, Gaza and East Jerusalem that began in 1967, but also the establishment of Israel in 1948, which Hamas and other militant Islamists view as the original occupation.

Calls to initiate an intifada against Israel are often seen as aggressive by supporters of Israel. However, they cannot be deemed antisemitic in themselves as long as they do not advocate for attacks on Israeli civilians or Jews. Boycotting Israel is especially sensitive in Europe, considering that the Holocaust was preceded by widespread boycotts of Jewish shopkeepers and other sanctions against Jews. At the same time, the right to boycott states or entities that commit human rights violations is an established democratic norm and a peaceful form of protest. The BDS (Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions) movement was established in 2005 by 170 different Palestinian groups, primarily consisting of civil society organisations.

Hamas and the Use of Armed Resistance and Terrorism Against Israel by Other Palestinian Factions

In a television interview on the day of the 7 October attack, Mohammed Deif, the military leader of Hamas (quoted in *The Palestine Chronicle*, 2023), called on all Palestinians to "end the occupation [referring to all of Israel]". He also urged other Middle Eastern movements and individual Muslims to invade Israel. Therefore, the attack on 7 October should not be viewed

merely as a significant terrorist act or a pogrom. Rather, it should be regarded as a military assault on internationally recognised Israel, intended to ignite widespread conflict in the region and pave the way for a large-scale, multi-front war aimed at ultimately destroying Israel.

Both the underlying ideology of Hamas and the execution of the attack on 7 October clearly reflect antisemitism. This includes everything from Deif's speech during the television interview on 7 October to individual Hamas terrorists calling their parents to recount, in real-time, the atrocities they committed against victims that were identified as Jews rather than merely Israelis. Given that Hamas is an antisemitic organisation and that the 7 October attack was an antisemitic act, it follows that those in Sweden who support Hamas or the actions of that day are directly or indirectly endorsing the most significant antisemitic act since the Second World War.

Conclusions

This sub-study has examined prevalent expressions in the Swedish debate following the attack on 7 October and the subsequent war in Gaza. As the sub-study illustrates, many terms employed in the discourse surrounding the Gaza war are ambiguous, situational and context-dependent. This implies that some terms may be considered antisemitic in one context but not in another. For instance, shouting "free Palestine" may not be antisemitic in itself, but writing it on a Jewish student's locker at school would be considered so. The same principle applies to many of the expressions discussed in the sub-study. This highlights the importance of analysing *both* the expression and its context to determine whether a statement is antisemitic.

All indications suggest that Swedish society, like many other nations in Western Europe, is experiencing a surge in antisemitism following the Gaza war. This surge has the potential to be sustained, especially since the Gaza war appears to be evolving into yet another lengthy and protracted conflict in the Middle East. Swedish society must therefore brace itself for a long-term commitment to combating antisemitism in order to address this emerging trend.

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Consequences of 7 October for Jews in Sweden: Thoughts, Emotions and Reflections

Mirjam Katzin & Pontus Rudberg

Introduction

The Hamas terrorist attack in Israel on 7 October 2023 was a shocking event, not just for the Israeli population but for Jews worldwide. For many Jews[1] in Sweden, the events of 7 October were traumatic. The subsequent war in Gaza and the diverse reactions from the international community have also impacted Jews in Sweden. For some, this may stem from a personal connection to Israel, but many others, despite having a weaker or no connection at all, still feel a strong affinity for the country and its people. Even those who do not feel a connection to Israel are impacted by the rising antisemitism and suspicion directed towards Jews in the wake of Israel's conflict with Hamas. A crucial starting point for understanding the Jewish response to the Hamas terrorist attack on 7 October and its aftermath, is to recognise it as a form of Jewish trauma. Jews worldwide perceive the attack as an assault on Jewish existence, rooted in a shared sense of identity and solidarity with other Jews across the globe.

Previous research has demonstrated a connection between war and conflict and the rise of hate crimes. Even during previous escalations of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, there has been a triggering effect on antisemitic attitudes and hate crimes. As the conflict escalates, there is a corresponding rise in antisemitism (Vergani et al., 2022; Bachner, 2019).

In Sweden, the number of antisemitic hate crimes reported to the police has significantly increased since 7 October, 2023 (Brå, 2024). Additionally, a survey commissioned by the Official Council of Swedish Jewish Communities reveals that both personal experiences of antisemitic incidents and fears surrounding antisemitism have risen (Infostat, 2023). Several reports indicate rising levels of antisemitism worldwide, including in Scandinavia, in the context of the ongoing war and the suffering of the civilian population in Gaza (Enstad, 2024).

[1] For the sake of readability, we will use the term "Jews" throughout the text to refer to the broader group of "people with Jewish identity."

Recent discussions and reflections on the consequences in various countries have been compiled into three thematic volumes focusing on the antisemitism that has characterised the global response, societal behaviour, and antisemitism in research and its reflection in student discussions on university campuses (Freedman & Hirsh 2024 a-c).

In Denmark, journalist and author Martin Krasnik (2024) recently published an essay exploring the ways in which the events of 7 October have impacted the Jewish community in Denmark. Additionally, a recent report (Czimbalmos & Pataricza, 2024) examines how Finnish Jews have experienced various aspects of Jewish life in Finland during the same period. Several texts indicate that many Jews feel that society and democratic institutions, which they previously trusted, have exhibited an increasing tolerance for hatred towards Jews. This has, among other things, fostered a widespread sense of abandonment and disappointment towards various parts of society. Many individuals are increasingly avoiding public spaces, which raises concerns about human rights and freedom of expression. There is also a tendency to retreat into Jewish communities while reshaping other Jewish groups and contexts.

The understanding of how Jews in Sweden have been affected by the attack on 7 October and subsequent events is currently limited to journalistic reports, analyses, individual testimonies and non-scientific surveys. There is a lack of in-depth knowledge about the impact of the attack and subsequent developments on Jewish life in Sweden, as well as about the reactions of Swedish Jews to these events. The objective of the sub-study is to contribute to this understanding through a scientific approach. On a broader level, this knowledge can also enhance the understanding of how threats and hatred affect minority groups.

The objective is pursued through an exploration of the ways in which Jews in Sweden describe their experiences, thoughts and emotions in relation to the Hamas attack, the subsequent war and reactions worldwide. The stories were gathered through an online survey, aiming for maximum participation and the widest possible distribution among Jews in Sweden. Data collection occurred in April and May 2024, providing a unique snapshot of current experiences amidst an ongoing crisis, when the terrorist attack was still fresh in memory and the war had been ongoing for six months. Extensive demonstrations and debates unfolded while the war received intense media coverage. Through the analysis of the collected stories, we have sought to answer the following questions:

- How have Jews in Sweden experienced the attack on 7 October 2023, Israel's war against Hamas and the global reactions to these events?
- How do they articulate their thoughts, feelings and reflections on the events?
- What patterns can be discerned in these experiences, and what connections might exist with other factors, such as social and cultural (Jewish) identity and collective memory?

In this report, we present the first findings of the sub-study. This will be complemented by an in-depth interview study, with additional publications planned as part of the same project. The report should be read with the understanding that we lack knowledge of how these experiences have evolved since May 2024. Consequently, the results should be regarded as preliminary.

Methodology

Theoretical Framework

This sub-study is based on the premise that emotional experiences are largely shaped and expressed within social and cultural contexts, and that individuals' emotions are closely tied to their social interactions and the groups with which they identify. Another key premise is that our perception of the world is influenced by specific circumstances and social contexts, which shape how we interpret the information we receive about it.

By analysing expressions of emotion as *speech acts* (actions performed through linguistic utterances, such as asserting or asking), historians like William Reddy (2001) highlight how emotions are shaped and reinforced by the way we name and talk about them. To understand how Jews in Sweden describe their experiences, thoughts and emotions, it is essential to consider the cultural and social contexts in which these descriptions occur.

Since the early 2000s, researchers in the humanities and psychology have been working to develop a theory for analysing the effects of trauma at group level. In this body of literature, the concept of *cultural trauma* is used to identify the complex factors that drive traumatic processes at the supra-individual level within society. Traumatic events are defined as occurrences that disrupt the foundations of social life, dismantle social structures, and involve a displacement or loss of identity, or a violation of fundamental cultural assumptions. Building on historical events regarded as central to group identities, the cultural trauma of Jews and other groups has been examined through the lens of collective memory, identity and consciousness (Alexander, 2004).

Disasters and traumas are central themes in Jewish history and have also played a significant role in shaping meaning for Jews. Social psychologist Lars Dencik (2021) suggests that such events have fostered a unique sensitivity, or *hypersensitivity*, in many Jews. This relates to the collective experience of trauma: traumatic events, conflicts and hatred directed at members of one's own group also impact other individuals within that group. Individuals who identify with a larger group may consequently experience a form of *vicarious* trauma (Fuhr, 2016). For example, research has shown that some Jews today feel traumatised by the Holocaust through their identification with the victims, despite not being directly affected themselves or having relatives who were.

Minority stress refers to the experiences of stress that minorities face due to their perceived otherness. Stress factors can be external and include micro-aggressions, discrimination, harassment, threats and violence. They can also be internal, reflecting the expectations of minority members regarding mistreatment based on their identity. These expectations may stem from previous personal experiences or be influenced by an awareness of the group's vulnerability (Kite & Whitley, 2016).

Population and Sample Selection

Since Jews were first permitted to reside in Sweden without converting in the 1770s, recurring waves of immigration have originated from various countries, each bringing distinct languages, cultural traits and religious characteristics. This has contributed to the diverse nature of the Jewish community in Sweden. The influx of refugees and Holocaust survivors led to a doubling of the Jewish population in Sweden, significantly impacting the collective memory and identity of society as a whole. In the second half of the 20th century, a significant number of immigrants arrived from Hungary, Poland and the Soviet Union. Today, the number of Jews in Sweden is estimated to be around 20,000, while the number of individuals identifying as Jewish is believed to be much higher (Carlsson, 2021).

There are various definitions of who is considered Jewish, with Jewish law providing guidelines that are interpreted differently depending on religious orientation. It is unclear whether the participants in this sub-study meet the various criteria to be considered Jews according to Jewish law. We have also recognised the importance of reaching beyond those who identify as Jews in a religious context, as the rise in antisemitism and the repercussions of the Hamas attack affect a broader range of individuals.

Sociologists examining Jewish minority identity in contemporary Sweden have characterised it as multifaceted, ever-evolving and performative, emphasising that it is shaped by the ways in which it is expressed (see e.g., Dencik, 2011). For this reason, we have adopted the principle of self-identification and chosen the more inclusive term “people with Jewish identity” to define the target population.

Consequently, the population is both heterogeneous and challenging to define. Additionally, the lack of knowledge regarding its demographic composition makes it impossible to create a representative sample. Instead, we aimed to obtain a sample that is as broad as possible in terms of gender, age, background, place of residence and congregation membership. Since the majority of Jews in Sweden (and Europe) are not affiliated with Jewish congregations (Lustig and Leveson, 2008), we sought to extend our reach beyond these organisations. We therefore also used social media, informal networks, individual contacts and snowball sampling. Snowball sampling, also known as chain sampling, refers to a method where the researcher first connects with a small group of individuals considered relevant to the study and subsequently identifies additional participants through those initial contacts (Bryman, 2011, p. 196).

Unlike many other surveys, the survey was not distributed to a sample of respondents, because there are no existing registers of individuals with Jewish identity in Sweden. Instead, participants were recruited through an advertisement distributed via “Jewish” channels. The advertisement was distributed through Jewish congregations in Sweden, smaller Jewish associations and communities both within and outside these congregations, as well as via email lists, WhatsApp, and Facebook groups targeting private persons and individuals with Jewish identity.

To reach groups outside the Jewish congregations, we engaged with Polish Jews, Israelis in Sweden, and members of the Jewish peace movement. In disseminating the advertisement, we emphasised that it should not be shared publicly but only with individuals who identify as

Jewish or through channels that exclusively reach those with Jewish identity. We do not know how many people the advertisement reached who chose not to respond to the survey, so we cannot determine the proportion of individuals who did respond.

The challenges in demographically identifying the group prevent us from obtaining a representative understanding of its experiences. Our limited ability to reach out to other Jews likely results in a bias in the material, favouring those who are members of congregations and other organisations, and who can therefore be expected to be influenced by the prevailing moods and narratives within these groups.

Methodology and Material

Drawing on the theories outlined above, we developed a questionnaire that facilitated storytelling through open-ended questions, encouraging participants to freely share their experiences, thoughts and emotions. The data was collected digitally, and the response period was open during April and May 2024. The survey can be found in Annex 1. The questions encouraged participants to share narratives regarding events, feelings and their impact. A qualitative survey (primarily) consists of open-ended questions centred on a specific topic, designed to elicit detailed narratives about the respondent's subjective experiences, practices and stories (Braun et al., 2021).

A total of 294 responses were collected from the survey, most of which were thorough, and the average time taken to respond was over one hour. Annex 2 provides a demographic breakdown of the survey responses. The survey was widely distributed. However, it is likely over-represented by middle-aged and elderly people, residents in Stockholm, and members of a congregation.

The use of snowball sampling meant that we had limited control over the sample as the survey was disseminated further, which may have amplified any existing bias. It is also possible that individuals who felt less impacted by the 7 October attack and the subsequent events were less likely to respond to the survey, leading to an over-representation of those with heightened emotional responses.

Given that the open-ended questions encourage diverse and complex responses, including potentially contradictory ones, we have opted for a discussion on patterns rather than focusing on numerical data. When we speak of patterns, we refer to recurring and consistent expressions identified within the survey responses. Patterns can be understood as a means of connecting a variety of seemingly independent elements (in our case, individual statements across different survey responses) (Sandelowski et al., 2012, p. 326). Despite the variations in survey responses, recurring patterns emerge, offering a theoretical understanding that can be adapted to individual cases.

To identify patterns in the survey responses, we employed an analysis that allowed the themes emphasised by the participants to shape the presentation of the results, rather than relying on predetermined themes. The goal is to uncover the meaning and significance that participants attribute to their own experiences. The survey responses have been thematically categorised, with patterns identified through qualitative data processing.

While a qualitative study cannot yield statistically reliable insights into the distribution of various opinions and experiences in the broader population, it can effectively capture key phenomena and highlight significant changes. For this reason, and because a representative sample was not possible, the results cannot be generalised or applied to the entire Jewish population in Sweden. Nonetheless, the material offers a comprehensive and nuanced view of the situation, capturing clear patterns and trends in the experiences of individuals with Jewish identity in Sweden.

Ethical Considerations

The survey involves processing sensitive data about the research subjects, including political opinions, ethnicity and religious orientation. Participation was thus contingent on informed consent, and the anonymity of the results was maintained throughout all stages of the data collection and analysis. Approval for the implementation plan of the sub-study has been granted by the Ethical Review Authority (2024-00991-01).

Jewish Experiences and their Relationship with Israel as a Framework for Understanding

A Jewish History of Persecution that Resonates in the Present

A clear pattern in the survey responses indicates that Jews in Sweden predominantly interpret current events through the lens of Jewish cultural traumas tied to experiences and narratives of historical persecution. Several participants note that their experiences are shaped by terms such as “generational trauma,” “an inherited fear,” and “collective experiences of insecurity,” or they describe the way in which “the cultural trauma we Jews carry is activated in such situations.” As a result, these individuals have internalised the academic terminology used to describe emotional phenomena within their own narratives.

References to the Holocaust, pogroms, the antisemitic campaign in Poland in 1968, and other experiences of Jewish persecution frequently appear in the responses, establishing connections between the past and the present. According to this perspective, current events evoke the sentiments of the 1930s and family experiences of the Holocaust. The fear of history “intensifies once more,” with family history felt as something “searingly painful, an open wound.” Several individuals express relief that their parents, who survived the Holocaust, have passed away and do not have to confront the present.

One participant contends that her fears may seem exaggerated, but she emphasises that they must be understood in the context of her mother being the sole survivor of Auschwitz in her family. In relation to the Holocaust, expressions such as “the world should have learnt from history” and not let history repeat itself are also prevalent. A less prominent pattern involves drawing more universal conclusions from historical events. For instance, one respondent, who otherwise expresses solidarity with Palestinians, refers to the lessons of the Holocaust, arguing

that they should not be confined to Jews alone but must encompass broader support for human rights.

Some responses also reflect a fatalistic view of Jewish history, referencing concepts like Jewish destiny and including statements such as “history repeats itself,” along with reminders of millennia of hatred directed at the Jewish people and the repeated persecutions they have faced “over and over again throughout history.” This perspective fosters a heightened sense of vulnerability concerning the events of 7 October. Or as one participant puts it: “this was the first time in my life that I felt, deep in my bones, that it can and will happen again.”

A Complicated Relationship with Israel

The relationship between Jews in the diaspora and the State of Israel is complex. As the world’s sole Jewish state, Israel is something with which most Jews engage in one way or another, whether positively or negatively, embracing or criticising, but rarely with complete neutrality (Dencik, 1993). Many are emotionally impacted by events in Israel and typically possess a strong understanding of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, though they may approach it from varying viewpoints. This sentiment is also a clear pattern in many survey responses, which express emotional closeness, solidarity and compassion towards Israel and its people. Several respondents mention travelling to Israel, following Israeli media and maintaining close contact with friends and family there. ”[A]lthough my body is here, I live there,” one participant writes, for example.

A notable theme in some responses is the perception of Israel as a safe haven in an increasingly antisemitic and threatening world. Many view the attack on 7 October as primarily an antisemitic act rather than merely an attack on Israelis, reflecting a strong identification with the victims. ”[I]t felt like it could have been me, it could have been my family,” one participant writes. The survey responses reveal numerous expressions of grief for the victims of 7 October, concern for the hostages, compassion for Israelis and anxiety about the future of Israel. Disappointment with the Israeli military and its capacity to protect the civilian population is also a significant theme.

Roughly, in relation to Israel, three distinct approaches can be identified among the respondents’ answers.[2] The first approach is more supportive of Israel, whereas the second is characterised by ambivalence or complexity. A third, less common approach adopts a more critical stance towards Israel.

This first approach reflects a deep identification with Israel, marked by considerable support, understanding and empathy for the nation and occasionally for its policies as well. For those holding this view, the war is seen as inevitable, necessary and existential. It must continue until Hamas is defeated, even if that entails suffering for the people of Gaza. Anger is often focused on Hamas, viewed as chiefly responsible for the current crisis, but at times it extends to Hamas’ allies as well: Hezbollah and Iran. Israel’s military actions are often regarded as relatively

[2] It is important to note that our methods do not enable us to ascertain how prevalent these positions are within the broader Swedish Jewish population.

humane. Many respondents noted a heightened engagement with Israel, which includes demonstrations either in support of Israel or the hostages, along with a more positive portrayal of Israel on social media.

However, the majority of respondents adopt a more ambivalent stance. This is reflected in various ways, including efforts to nuance absolute positions, re-evaluate personal beliefs, or convey uncertainty regarding what is seen as a complex issue. There is also a sense of frustration over the expectation to take a stance.

Many express sympathies for both Israelis and Palestinians, sharing feelings of sadness and shock over the suffering and casualties experienced by both sides. Some lament what they perceive as excessive violence by Israel, while also expressing solidarity with Israelis. Responses in this category frequently emphasise support for a prompt and peaceful two-state solution. These responses also include criticism of Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, the Israeli government and particularly its far-right factions. Some align themselves with the Israeli opposition, advocating for Netanyahu's removal from office, and are worried about what they perceive as anti-democratic trends in the country.

A much less common and more divergent viewpoint among respondents involves criticising what they see as Israeli oppression of Palestinians. Some participants who hold this position distance themselves from the violence they believe Israel commits in the name of all Jews and reject the equation of Jews with Israel. Respondents who hold this perspective include individuals dedicated to Palestine, actively participating in demonstrations to show solidarity with the people of Gaza. However, several respondents who hold this position also convey understanding towards other Jews. For instance, one participant acknowledges that the situation is "emotionally complicated for many Jews," even though the participant does not feel that way personally.

An Emotional Response

From Initial Shock to Enduring Insecurity

The survey asked respondents to reflect on their reactions when they first learnt about the Hamas attack and to describe their thoughts and feelings at that time. Many responses contain vivid descriptions of intense emotions, including shock, fear, worry, sadness and anger. The emotional reactions and the insecurity they engendered are the most evident findings of the sub-study.

A significant number of participants described their initial reactions as one of shock in response to the attack itself, its scale, and its brutality. One participant writes: "My entire worldview was shattered." Another participant similarly describes the experience as "a dark cloud that appeared and then followed me." The significant number of deaths, particularly the murder of women and children, is noted as especially distressing.

Some participants testify to following the violent events through the news and social media, with several describing how the acts of murder, torture and sexual violence filled them with intense discomfort and fear. For those most deeply impacted by the event, confusion, disbelief and panic, fear and anxiety ensued. There was also concern for the Israelis taken hostage in Gaza, whose treatment could be somewhat monitored through news reports and social media clips.

For those with relatives in Israel, the initial period was marked by deep concern for their loved ones. Some responses also conveyed anger towards the Israeli military and security services for their failure to prevent the attack in time. The widespread disappointment with Israeli institutions, noted among Israelis (Levi-Belz et al., 2024), is similarly reflected among Swedish people, further illustrating their emotional ties to Israel.

Many respondents voiced their dismay and anger over the fact that the massacre was almost immediately celebrated throughout Sweden. One respondent wrote: "People who claim to defend minority rights attempted to 'contextualise' or whitewash the terrorist attack as a form of resistance, which still makes me sad, angry and frustrated." There were also worries about how Israel's countermeasures would be viewed by the international community, potentially triggering antisemitic reactions and violence against Jews abroad, including in Sweden.

When survey participants were asked to reflect on the evolution of their feelings over time, many reported that their initial shock gradually transformed into despair and sadness. The initial hope that many felt from international sympathy for Israel after the attack turned into disappointment as that sympathy dwindled after the outbreak of war.

A notable pattern in the responses is the frustration and anger expressed regarding media reporting, individual stances against Israel, and what is perceived as a pro-Palestinian bias in public discourse. On a more personal level, respondents express a sense of disappointment towards society as well as non-Jewish friends and colleagues. At the same time, some participants with a more critical perspective on Israel convey disappointment and anger regarding Sweden's and other nations' backing of Israel's counter-attacks. In some instances, disappointment is also aimed at Jewish congregations for what is seen as their uncritical support of the Israeli government.

A widespread fear of rising antisemitism in Sweden is also prominently reflected in the results. While most participants have not articulated specific fears, they tend to express their concerns in a more abstract or ambiguous manner. In the smaller group that identified the source of their perceived threat, most indicated that it stemmed from individuals of Middle Eastern descent.

One discernible pattern is the prevalence of responses reflecting a sense of siege, with many feeling that Jews are under attack from all sides, and that it is not just Israel's existence that is at stake, but also the safety of Jews in the diaspora. One participant mentioned that he couldn't bear to watch the news or even "go into the city centre" due to "[a]ll the hate coming at us from all sides." According to some researchers, this belief that the rest of the world harbours negative intentions towards you is a common characteristic of Jewish, and particularly Israeli, mentality (Bar-Tal & Antebi 1992). Several responses articulate this sentiment by referencing the world's hatred for Israel and the Jews, along with a sense of disappointment towards a world that seems

unwilling or unable to acknowledge the existential threat they face. For some, this perception is likely bolstered by social media content, where overt antisemitism is openly spread, as well as in online communities that share information and news about various incidents.

In certain cases, fear and anger escalate into xenophobic and anti-Muslim racism, characterised by negative stereotypes that portray Arabs or Muslims as aggressive and threatening, with an intrinsic hatred towards Jews. It is important to note that some individuals describing this experience have a broad understanding of antisemitism, which encompasses not only criticism of Israel, but also expressions of sympathy for the Palestinian movement.

Minority Stress and Increased Preparedness

The perception of rising antisemitism has profoundly impacted the daily lives of many Jews in Sweden, a phenomenon that can be understood as *minority stress*. The awareness of the insecurity faced by Jews impacts individuals, even if they have not personally encountered any violent or threatening situations. This sense of vulnerability can lead to psychological stress, prompting the emergence of common minority stress defence strategies: avoiding certain environments, being vigilant about potential risks, and a readiness to conceal one's identity. Research on minority stress has indicated that the need to monitor and control one's surroundings, stemming from experiences of collective victimisation, can be more detrimental than individual discrimination (Kite & Whitley, 2016).

Some survey respondents express increased concern about how they will be viewed by friends and colleagues – as Jews, Israelis or Zionists. Many individuals report that feelings of insecurity and vigilance dominate their daily lives, making them feel unsafe in their personal lives, at work and in society at large. In addition to concealing symbols and markers that might disclose their Jewish identity, some individuals report being more cautious in their roles as patients, customers, colleagues, or professionals.

Many participants report mental health conditions recognised by research as typical manifestations of minority stress, including anxiety, insomnia, burnout, disbelief, paranoia, difficulty experiencing happiness, depression, heightened vigilance, mania, and, in some instances, suicidal thoughts. The constant need to stay vigilant, be aware of one's surroundings and carefully choose one's words is undeniably stressful.

The fear conveyed in several survey responses is unmistakable. One person writes: "I'm scared. People harbour a great deal of anger, and I question whether they can channel it in constructive ways. I haven't done anything. Yet they hate me." For some individuals, the fear revolves around the possibility of experiencing an attack or other forms of physical violence. For others, the fear is more about conflict and the unease of being questioned or held accountable.

A notable pattern is that fear and anxiety lead to a greater sense of preparedness. Participants report being more cautious and vigilant in public spaces, frequently scanning their surroundings on public transport and while entering or exiting shops, avoiding crowds, and being more vigilant overall in assessing safety in everyday situations. A few participants revealed that they now carry defence sprays. Others choose to refrain from ordering taxis or home deliveries under their own name. Concerns about violence and harassment directed at children and grandchildren

are particularly prevalent, and while few, some individuals recount antisemitic incidents that their own and other children have faced at school. Many parents and grandparents with children in Jewish schools fear potential attacks on the school, while those with children in regular schools expresses significant concerns about their children facing violence or discrimination. According to Krasnik (2024), this concern is also a defining aspect of the experiences of Danish Jews.

Being prepared for potential danger can involve vigilance towards media reports and political statements "to determine if I need to take any action for my safety and that of my family," as one participant puts it. Another participant mentions that he has implemented "security measures" at home. One individual actively monitors the timing and location of pro-Palestinian demonstrations and makes a conscious effort to avoid them. One respondent voices concern about being "outed" if they attend various Jewish events, fearing that this could heighten the risk of violence and threats. Some participants mention that they are especially vigilant when travelling to and from the synagogue or other Jewish institutions, with a few even reporting that they avoid visiting these places altogether.

Some participants contemplate the psychological impact of fear and preparedness. One individual describes the shift in their life situation as constantly having to consider "where to go, which roads to avoid. [It becomes], in other words, an invisible fence." Another participant describes the tension between their usual faith in humanity and the lingering suspicion that others might harbour hateful views, leading them to maintain distance "until I feel safe." A third participant contemplates the intricacies of fear: "When the perception of pressure and threats is heightened, unwarranted fears and feelings of discomfort also thrive. How do I navigate this situation thoughtfully and responsibly? How can I best support my children?"

Concerns about (In)visibility, Relocation and Future Anxiety

Similar to several other studies examining the daily lives of Jews (see e.g., Nylund Skoog, 2006; Wigerfeldt & Wigerfeldt, 2016; FRA, 2018; Dencik, 2019; Katzin, 2022; SOU 2024:3), our sub-study reveals concerns about how openly individuals can express their Jewish identity in various contexts. The findings from the Swedish National Council for Crime Prevention's report (2019) on antisemitic hate crimes indicate that individuals who are open about their Jewish identity, whether through verbal expression or by wearing Jewish symbols, face a higher risk of victimisation.

Survey responses frequently include discussions about transparency and visibility. Many individuals discuss how to present themselves regarding their Jewish identity, considering factors such as when to speak about it, whether to wear symbols like the Star of David, *chai* or *kippah*, and how openly they can share their names in their communities, online, or in other public settings. Some participants mention encouraging their children and relatives to conceal their Jewish identity, while others indicate that they refrain from speaking Hebrew in public.

Some respondents express caution about discussing "Jewish themes," travel, and their connections with Israel. Several respondents indicate that they carefully consider what they share on social media (whether about Israel, the war, or Jewish contexts in general, such as

photos from Jewish holidays) and how their comments might be received, as well as which events they feel comfortable attending. This pattern also includes concealing one's Jewish identity in the workplace and other settings, as well as refraining from discussing politics or expressing opinions about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. One participant notes that they prefer not to "draw attention to [their] Jewishness," feeling that it poses a risk.

While many are contemplating whether they can wear Jewish symbols, others have purchased and begun wearing them since 7 October. For these individuals, Jewish identity has gained heightened significance, and many feel a strong desire to express and take pride in their Jewishness, despite security concerns.

Considering the possibility of leaving Sweden is another indication of the heightened sense of insecurity felt here. Refuge and migration play a central role in Jewish history. Throughout history, Jews have repeatedly been compelled to leave their countries of residence due to persecution and oppression. Many Jews in Sweden are either refugees themselves or descendants of Jews who sought refuge in the country, with stories of migration and refuge being prevalent in their family histories. The survey responses reveal this sentiment, with participants contemplating the possibility of leaving Sweden. Participants often reference images and metaphors that highlight the need for the ability to move quickly if their environment becomes too unsafe. One participant wrote: "Regrettably, a metaphorical mental "suitcase" had already been packed long before 7 October. […] At times, it has been forgotten, while at other times, it has received considerable attention. […] On 7 October, I took it out and placed it in the hallway."

For some, the focus has shifted from considering *whether* to leave to contemplating *when* and *where*, with concrete options being evaluated. One respondent has been considering ways for the family to quickly sell their possessions to facilitate a move elsewhere. Another participant is glad that their teenage children have already been encouraged to view language skills and education that won't "tie them to Sweden" as the best path forward. Many individuals contemplating a move feel uncertain about where to relocate. One participant writes: "I'm also wondering where in the world we can find a safe place to live." Another participant writes that "there doesn't appear to be any suitable places to live, except for Israel, which isn't exactly a dream destination." The absence of potential safe havens intensifies the feelings of insecurity among these individuals. For others, Israel continues to be the primary option, with several individuals expressing interest in making *aliya* (relocating to Israel as Jews). However, one respondent, likely influenced by the discussions of others, states that they are not contemplating a move: "Sweden is my country. I'm not going anywhere."

A significant trend in the responses reveals various expressions of concern about the future, particularly regarding the potential rise in antisemitism and the challenges of surviving as a Jew. These concerns are probably shaped by a narrative of Jewish vulnerability on a global scale. Concerns exist regarding the way in which Israel's military actions may affect the perception of Jews, leading some to question the future of Jews in Sweden or Europe and whether it will be safe to identify as Jewish anywhere moving forward. "Will we ever find safety as Jews in this world?"

These reflections often relate to concerns about the future well-being of children and grandchildren, questioning whether they will be able to live openly as Jews or if the world will become increasingly less peaceful. Terms like “negative,” “pessimistic,” “dark,” and “gloomy” often characterise sentiments regarding the future of Jews and Jewish life. Terms like “hopelessness,” “anxiety,” and “fear” frequently arise when discussing feelings about the future. These feelings are prevalent among survey participants, irrespective of their perspectives on the conflict. However, those with a strong connection to Israel seem to experience a greater fear of not being able to stay in Sweden.

Growing Jewish Solidarity Amidst Rising Isolation

The Importance of Belonging in Jewish Life

A recurring theme in the material is the expressed sense of belonging shared with fellow Jews. The bond shared with Jews globally may clarify the intense responses to the events of 7 October, as it fosters the belief that the attack was an affront not just to the direct victims but to the entire Jewish community. One respondent conveyed the belief that the attack on 7 October represented an “attempt to make every Jew feel threatened simply for being Jewish.” As a result, the events were perceived to be “personal”. Participants felt, “it could just as easily have happened to me,” making the conflict feel “emotionally closer” and causing a sense of “indirect involvement.”

A recurring theme in the responses indicates that the Jewish identity has become more prominent (“I feel far more Jewish now than before…” “Jewish identity has risen to the forefront.” “My sense of being Jewish has grown significantly stronger, overshadowing everything else”), reflecting an increased desire to preserve Jewish culture and history. For many, this is positive and seen as source of pride, a sense of community and a desire to honour their heritage. For others, it carries a more negative connotation, “potentially affecting interactions with others” or making them a “target of hatred.” One person writes: “I have questioned whether giving my children a Jewish identity was a mistake, and in my darkest moments, I have regretted it.”

Only one respondent states that their Jewish identity is unrelated to the events of 7 October, but for the vast majority, the connection is clear. For some, the connection is more complex. One person notes, for example, that being Jewish comes with a special responsibility to be informed and nuanced about the conflict. Another participant finds the conflation of their Jewish identity with the actions of the Israeli government disturbing. However, several individuals express that their relationship with Israel is central to their Jewish identity.

Another pattern observed is that the sense of belonging to a group is often linked to feelings of vulnerability. This fosters a heightened sense of alienation, creating an “us versus them” mentality, where Jews feel they can only rely on each other “on the days we must defend ourselves against those who wish to destroy us.” For the respondents who express these feelings, the war and its consequences are seen as an existential threat to the survival of the Jewish people. In this narrative the Jewish community is intrinsically linked to Israel: “The

future of Israel and that of Jews around the world are intertwined," and the narrative suggests that without Israel, "Jews of the entire world are in danger," as one respondent puts it.

Disappointment with Non-Jewish Communities and Increased Jewish Socialising

A clear pattern in the responses reveals numerous expressions of disappointment over what is perceived as a lack of support from non-Jews, alongside an increased sense of belonging among Jews. This has resulted in a greater reliance on Jewish contexts and a rejection of non-Jewish ones.

In their relationships with non-Jewish family members, friends and colleagues, some people feel misunderstood, as highlighted by a couple of participants who have non-Jewish partners. A frequent sentiment expressed is disappointment in friends' lack of understanding, as well as the fact that non-Jewish contacts did not reach out to offer condolences or support following the attack. There is disappointment over what is perceived as a telling silence from colleagues, and several individuals report ending friendships with non-Jews who have either been offensive or failed to provide support. One respondent writes: "The silence from my non-Jewish loved ones, as well as on social media, hurt me to the point where I could no longer envision a future with them."

For some, this insecurity appears to result in increased isolation, with several individuals reporting that they avoid larger social settings. For others, the isolation primarily pertains to non-Jewish contexts, while socialising with fellow Jews has increased significantly. One reason for this is that a sense of security often grows among those who share a common world view. Several participants express that they find support especially in Jewish contexts, where they can "chat and talk," feel understood and "not be demonised." For example, one person notes that she encourages her children to socialise with Jewish friends to help them avoid antisemitism. It can also be liberating not to have to discuss other topics, especially when thoughts of the war and the situation of Jews in Sweden and around the world overshadow everything else.

The resurgence of existing relationships and the pursuit of new Jewish connections likely reflect the stronger Jewish identification expressed in the survey responses. For example, one individual states that they have never felt more Jewish and, as a result, have significantly increased their contact with other Jews compared to before. For those who have previously distanced themselves from Jewish contexts, being surrounded by a Jewish community and "taking part in Jewish spaces," as one respondent puts it, represents a significant change in their lives.

The Jewish community exists both in congregations and within online communities. A few individuals mention that they have become members of a congregation or are considering it, while some existing members report increased involvement. Others discuss the various online communities that have emerged since 7 October as a means to find support and connection.

Social media networks and chat groups serve as platforms for sharing information, articles and advice. Some of these networks have organised in-person meetings among individuals who had not met before. Several respondents describe digital platforms as safe spaces where they can

connect with like-minded individuals, feel understood and find comfort. These online groups provide various ways to organise Jewish life and cultivate Jewish communities, which some respondents describe as a tangible and significant innovation for Jews in Sweden. These communities are also likely to shape the ways in which events in Israel and the situation of Jews in Sweden are perceived.

Some note that their Jewish environment has changed, with the community growing stronger, yet fear has intensified and the context has become more pro-Israel. A less prominent view is that there is a growing division among Jews globally, partly due to Israeli policies and military actions. At the same time, other Jewish communities have emerged, such as chat groups and organisations for left-wing or pro-Palestinian Jews.

Some express concern about the impact that increased isolation may have on the community. One participant notes that if you stay in your "bubble", "you don't see the whole picture." Another participant also emphasises that isolation is the result of societal polarisation and stems from threats and hatred rather than being a conscious choice. While the tendency for Jews to spend more time together in seclusion can foster positive experiences of community, it can also be viewed as a retreat into a situation where Jews are not fully included in society.

Political Shifts and Lost Trust

In a report on the consequences of 7 October, British antisemitism researcher David Hirsh notes that many British Jews feel let down and abandoned by democratic institutions, including the police, judiciary, universities, civil society, and the media, as well as by factions on the left side of the political spectrum (Hirsh, 2024). Similar tendencies are also evident in our survey concerning various sectors of Swedish society.

The Perception of the Behaviour of Politicians, Institutions and Civil Society

In relation to Sweden's response to the attack and the war in Gaza, a noticeable rightward shift in opinion can be observed in the responses. Some individuals who previously identified as left-wing feel betrayed by the non-Jewish left, while others say their left-wing beliefs have been reinforced. The pro-Israel stance aligns with the Swedish government's position and its decision to temporarily halt aid to Gaza, while the anti-Israel stance criticises the government's support for Israel's military actions and the suspension of aid.

The survey responses indicate that attitudes towards Swedish authorities have been influenced by these events. Some respondents expressed gratitude for the police protection of Jewish institutions, but noted that the need for such protection highlights the shortcomings of long-term efforts to combat antisemitism.

A widespread view is that politicians, institutions and local authorities do too little to ensure the safety of Jews in Sweden. "How can society tolerate hate, slogans and violence on the streets?" The authorities are seen as slow to address antisemitism both in the public sphere and in schools.

A few participants expressed disappointment over municipalities and cultural institutions cancelling events related to Jewish or Israeli themes. Some are concerned about incitements to violence against Jews and advocate for the police and judiciary to take more forceful action, including banning demonstrations outside Jewish institutions such as synagogues and Jewish schools. Some express discomfort at the need for police surveillance of Jewish schools and kindergartens. Others are worried about the rising antisemitism in schools and are calling for action. Some of those outraged by what they perceive as biased reporting in Swedish public service media believe that this is an issue that politicians need to highlight and address.

As Hirsh (2024) observes regarding British Jews, several respondents expressed disappointment and frustration with certain positions taken by civil society. For example, several participants expressed disappointment with movements they had previously engaged in, such as the climate movement and the anti-racist movement, as well as with feminists and queer activists who they believe tolerate antisemitism within their ranks or actively spread antisemitic propaganda. There are significant concerns about elements of antisemitism present in pro-Palestinian demonstrations, antisemitic graffiti and particularly antisemitic posts on social media. Many regret that civil society does not take a clearer stance against antisemitism within the pro-Palestinian movement. Some also feel belittled and dismissed when they criticise antisemitism or the celebration of terror in Sweden.

Some respondents contend that Swedish politicians fail to address antisemitism among Muslims in Sweden due to what they perceive as a fear of conflict. One individual who previously identified as “left-wing” feels “betrayed by these parties that don’t want to offend a large Muslim constituency and whose world view categorises Israel (and Jews) as perpetrators (whites) and Palestinians as victims (non-whites).”

Some respondents in the survey connect their insecurity to the rise of Islamism among individuals of Muslim background, arguing that the threat extends beyond Jews to democracy as a whole. However, some participants express a reluctance to group all Muslims or Arabs together, with a few sharing feelings of shame and sadness regarding what they perceive as prejudice or xenophobia within themselves or parts of the Jewish community.

Views on Media Coverage

Swedish news reporting is a topic that has influenced the survey significantly. It is striking that for some survey participants, the boundaries between news, opinion-forming content and propaganda are blurred. Several participants also view media coverage as a contributing factor to the rise of antisemitism on social media and in society. For many, the topic is emotionally charged, while others express a sense of resignation that public opinion tends to follow a predictable pattern: “Israel is attacked, the world briefly sympathises with Israel, then when Israel retaliates, a wave of revulsion emerges against Israel, in the media, in politics, among the cultural elite, in the streets, and so on.”

Some feel disheartened by the negative public opinion towards Israel and believe that the world is unwilling to hold Hamas accountable, focusing solely on the suffering of Palestinian civilians. Several people believe that Swedish news coverage of the war in Gaza is biased and

one-sided. Many believe that the Swedish media demonises Israel, fuels hatred and aggression against Israel, Zionists or Jews, and fails to report objectively on what Hamas truly is and wants. Others express frustration that issues such as the hostage situation, Hamas's objectives and its use of human shields and sexual violence are not being adequately addressed.

Several respondents describe Swedish journalists as "ignorant," "emotional," "lacking nuance," "biased," or "one-sided," and many express irritation at what they perceive as bias among cultural journalists and other opinion-makers. Some also express frustration with influencers and "celebrities," who are seen as ignorant and naive. The complexity of Jewish and Israeli history remains invisible, according to one participant who believes that "Jewish perspectives" are omitted from the reporting.

Many report having lost confidence in public service news reporting, while others are attempting to change the narrative by reaching out to newsrooms. At the same time, some individuals who generally express a more critical view of Israel's actions in the conflict complain about what they perceive as an excessive acceptance of the Israeli perspective in Swedish reporting.

Several participants indicate that public opinion affects them emotionally, while others express feelings of resignation. The general perception that the situation can be seen as complex, multifaceted and challenging is reflected in the following quote:

> People struggle to hold two thoughts simultaneously, and any discussion related to Jews tends to make people uncomfortable. A war becomes a genocide simply because the Jewish state is involved. At the same time, Palestinians are being demonised and antisemitism is on the rise. The Holocaust becomes the backdrop to everything and is often belittled and exploited.

Summary and Recommendations for Moving Forward

The aim of this sub-study is to enhance the understanding of the consequences of the terrorist attacks and subsequent developments on Jewish life in Sweden. To achieve this, we have conducted a qualitative study exploring the experiences, thoughts and emotions of individuals with a Jewish identity in Sweden regarding the events, the patterns and connections that emerge from their experiences.

Based on various surveys and analyses of how Jews in comparable countries have responded to the Hamas terrorist attack on 7 October, the subsequent war and the responses of the surrounding world – including the rising antisemitism in different countries – we know that many Jews have experienced trauma over the past year. The sub-study reinforces and deepens this understanding.

There is a perception that hatred of Jews is tolerated by once-trusted democratic institutions, resulting in a widespread sense of abandonment and disappointment. In some instances, this has resulted in political shifts and altered relationships with various segments of Swedish society. Many are increasingly withdrawing from public contexts and turning inward, while

Jewish groups and communities are being reconfigured. These results are largely supported by the sub-study.

For most participants in the sub-study, the Hamas attack was deeply unsettling, and the subsequent events have fostered a lasting sense of insecurity in various aspects of daily life and society. This is partly related to a heightened sense of vulnerability. The prevailing insecurity has triggered or intensified several historically observed behavioural patterns among Jews, such as group isolation, concerns about visibility, thoughts about relocation, and an overall heightened state of preparedness.

Many participants express a sense of existential threat stemming from the rise in antisemitism following 7 October. Most individuals who have reported feelings of fear have not articulated what specifically frightens them. Among those who specify their fears, most indicate that the perceived threat primarily comes from individuals of Middle Eastern descent. It is likely that antisemitic content on social media, along with the dissemination of news and information about antisemitic events in various online communities, has contributed to this feeling.

The behaviour of Swedish society and Swedish people in general regarding these events influences ideological and political positions within the Jewish community. The survey responses reveal both political shifts to the right and a reconfiguration within Jewish communities. The results of the sub-study should be understood in the context of the complex yet often close relationship many Jews in Sweden have with Israel, as well as their strong identification with the victims of the attack on 7 October. The identification with and transmitted experiences of historical trauma can make these events feel profoundly traumatic, even for those with Jewish identity who have no direct connection to Israel. However, it is essential to emphasise that there is no singular Jewish position regarding Israel. The material includes representations of both pro-Israel and critical positions, as well as more ambivalent perspectives. These connections and differences can be understood in the context of many Jews experiencing a heightened sense of belonging when Jews in Israel are under attack.

The vast majority were deeply emotionally affected due to their identification with other Jews. However, in relation to Israel's response, there is no shared experience. Instead, there exists a range of differing narratives, emotional responses and political perceptions.

The results of the sub-study can be understood through theories on how collective trauma generates individual emotional reactions, particularly when it come to the way in which historical events are symbolically interpreted. Experiencing increased antisemitism does not require direct or personal exposure to someone expressing hostility. Rather, the existing trauma, fear of potential harm, and challenges to one's sense of secure belonging in society are connected to the affiliation with the historically and currently victimised group.

People draw on references to historical and contemporary trauma to make sense of their experiences and the contexts in which they belong. Many participants in the sub-study therefore connect the current situation to traumatic events in Jewish history. For example, the memory of the Holocaust and other persecutions of Jews can acquire new significance in a context where the perceived threat to Jews requires a framework for understanding. A specific Jewish relationship to history and what is perceived as Jewish "destiny" also influences this dynamic,

shaping the interpretation of the present and reinforcing the sense that current events are a continuation of historical trauma.

The group can also offer shared coping strategies to collectively process the meaning, significance, responsibility and memory of the trauma. However, this processing occurs through a negotiation, a symbolic dispute over how different historical events should be understood and what political conclusions should be drawn from them. This struggle is also evident in the source material, reflecting a variety of ways in which respondents understand, describe, analyse and feel about contemporary events.

According to Dencik (2021), both historical and contemporary antisemitism have contributed to the development of a certain hypersensitivity among some Jews. It can be understood as a heightened sensitivity and vigilance towards antisemitism. However, it is important to note that Jews' experiences of antisemitism are closely intertwined with external events. Since 7 October there has been a rapid increase in antisemitism, along with a growing acceptance of antisemitic expressions in some parts of public opinion. This increase likely accounts for a significant portion of the experiences reported.

It is crucial for the broader community to recognise hypersensitivity as a reflection of the group's historical experiences of various forms of discrimination and oppression, rather than merely labelling it as *over*sensitivity. This understanding is especially vital for authorities and democratic institutions that must recognise the profound impact of antisemitism on many Jews, particularly in times of rising antisemitic sentiment. Acknowledging the importance of safety and security in Jewish life is vital for society's understanding of the challenges faced.

While earlier studies indicated that Jews in Sweden considered themselves well-integrated into society (Dencik and Marosi, 2017; Dencik, 2019), our survey results reveal a swift decline in trust towards certain democratic institutions. One interpretation suggests (although it is too soon to determine whether this decline is a temporary or permanent phenomenon) that the historical experiences of discrimination, oppression and persecution embedded in the collective memory of certain segments of the Jewish population can lead to a fragile sense of trust, which trauma can easily disrupt. You suddenly come to realise that sectors of society you once trusted greatly either fail to protect you or may even exhibit hostility. In this regard, it's crucial to acknowledge that the response of societal institutions to such events, especially concerning a minority like the Jewish community with its unique historical experiences, carries significant weight. The absence of immediate trust in societal protection stems from historical experiences, in Sweden as well as in other countries, where such protection has been lacking. This realisation is key for policy-makers and institutions striving to protect the safety of the Jewish community in Sweden.

As a result, Jews in Sweden have had some confidence in Swedish society's capability to protect them, albeit with a sense of fragility. The events of the past year have heightened feelings of mistrust, insecurity and, for some, raised questions about remaining in the country. Swedish society bears the responsibility to work towards restoring the trust that has been compromised among significant segments of the Jewish minority.

While rebuilding trust is a gradual process, it can be shattered in an instant. Moreover, for Jewish life in Sweden to thrive and foster positive engagement within a community rich in

culture, knowledge and traditions, it is essential for the Swedish public sector to support and facilitate the sustainability of Jewish initiatives and the efforts of Jewish institutions and organisations. Jewish communities, serving as vital sanctuaries and sources of support for many Jews, require assistance. This applies not only to congregational life, but also to smaller organisations and networks that exist outside of the central Jewish community in Sweden.

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Annex 1: Survey Questions

Information and Consent

The project will gather and record information about you. We will treat your answers and results with confidentiality to prevent access by unauthorised parties.

Your participation in the survey will remain anonymous if you choose not to provide your personal details. If you provide your details, the researchers will use this information to select interviewees. However, your questionnaire responses will be kept anonymous in all further handling and presentation of the research results. If selected for an interview, your identity will be known to the researchers but will remain anonymous in the presentation of the research results.

The information you provide will be pseudonymised and used by the researchers as part of the project. They are then archived as anonymous text files. Pseudonymisation means your answers cannot be directly linked to you as an individual.

At the end of the research project, the anonymised survey responses will be securely archived on the University of Gothenburg's classified servers for future research purposes. Your personal data is controlled by the University of Gothenburg. Under the EU's General Data Protection Regulation, you have the right to access, free of charge, any information about you processed in the project and to request corrections if needed. You also have the right to request the deletion of your data and to restrict the processing of your personal information. However, the right to delete data and restrict its processing does not apply if the information is required for the research at hand. To request this information, please send a letter to Pontus Rudberg at: Hugo Valentin-centrum, Box 521, 751 20 Uppsala or contact him by e-mail: pontus.rudberg@valentin.uu.se; or by telephone: 0701-461860. Johanna Wallin, Administrative Lawyer at the University of Gothenburg, serves as the Data Protection Officer and can be reached at Box 100, 405 30 Göteborg or by telephone: 031-786 10 00. If you are not satisfied with the processing of your personal data, you can file a complaint with the Data Protection Authority, the relevant supervisory authority.

You have the right to opt out of having your survey or interview results stored, without the need for justification. If you consent to having your answers stored, you can withdraw (revoke) that consent later without prior explanation. Your answers will then be deleted. To withdraw your consent, please reach out to Pontus Rudberg using the contact details provided above.

Your answers will only be used in the manner you have agreed to. If you authorise us to retain and use your answers for future purposes, you must provide explicit consent for this. Should additional, unplanned research arise, the Ethical Review Authority will determine whether to seek your consent again.

1. By ticking the box below, I confirm that I have read and understood the information provided above and consent to the processing and storage of my survey responses as outlined.
    a. I have read the information and agree to participate.

b. I do not agree to participate.

2. The survey is specifically designed for individuals who identify as Jewish and reside in Sweden. Does this apply to you?
   a. I identify as Jewish and reside in Sweden.
   b. This does not apply to me.

Foundational Background Questions

To provide clarity to the readers of the research report regarding the characteristics of the group involved in the study, we kindly ask you to begin by answering a few questions about yourself and your background. You have the option to skip any question you prefer not to answer.

3. How old are you?
4. What is your gender?
5. Where were you born?
6. Where in Sweden do you live?
7. Are you currently or have you ever been a member of a Jewish congregation?

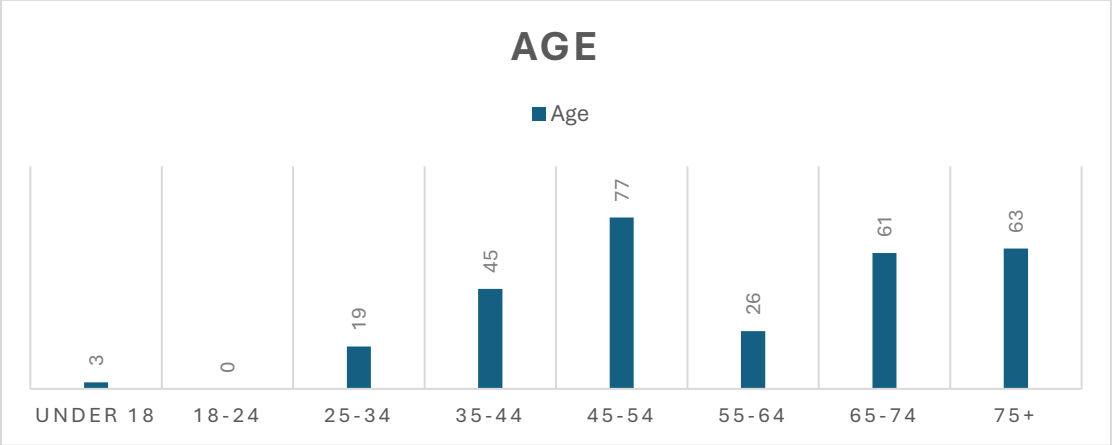
Open-ended Questions

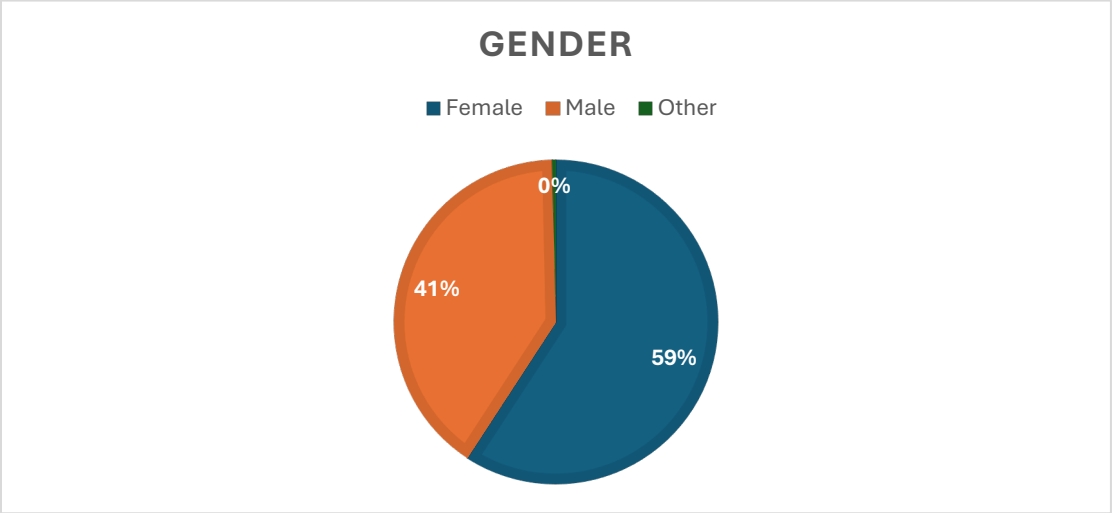
We encourage you to answer the following questions in as much detail as possible. Please avoid referencing your answers to previous questions, as each response will be considered independently. You may choose not to answer any of the questions. You can reply in Swedish or English (or a combination of the two languages).

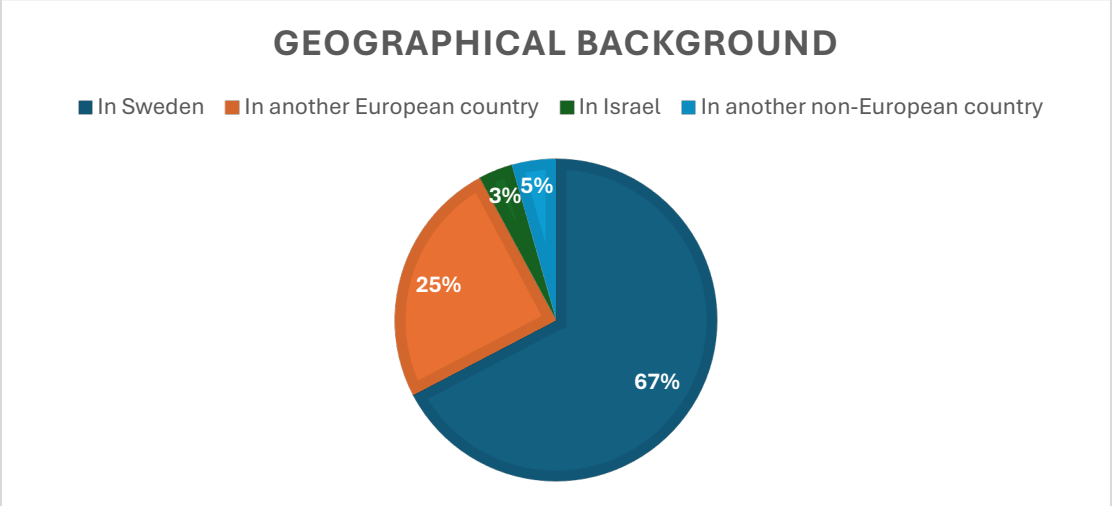
8. When you first heard about the Hamas attack on Israel on 7 October, what were your initial emotional reactions? How did you feel and what were your thoughts?
9. How have your feelings and thoughts evolved since the event, particularly in light of the subsequent war?
10. What has been your experience regarding the reactions from the outside world to these events, and how have they impacted you?
11. Have your thoughts and feelings about the future shifted due to the events of 7 October and the reactions that followed?
12. Reflecting on this period, would you say that your daily activities and overall life have been influenced by the events of 7 October, the subsequent war, and the global reactions? If so, in what ways?
13. Do you believe your Jewish identity and/or background influences your thoughts and feelings about 7 October and the subsequent events and reactions? If so, in what ways?

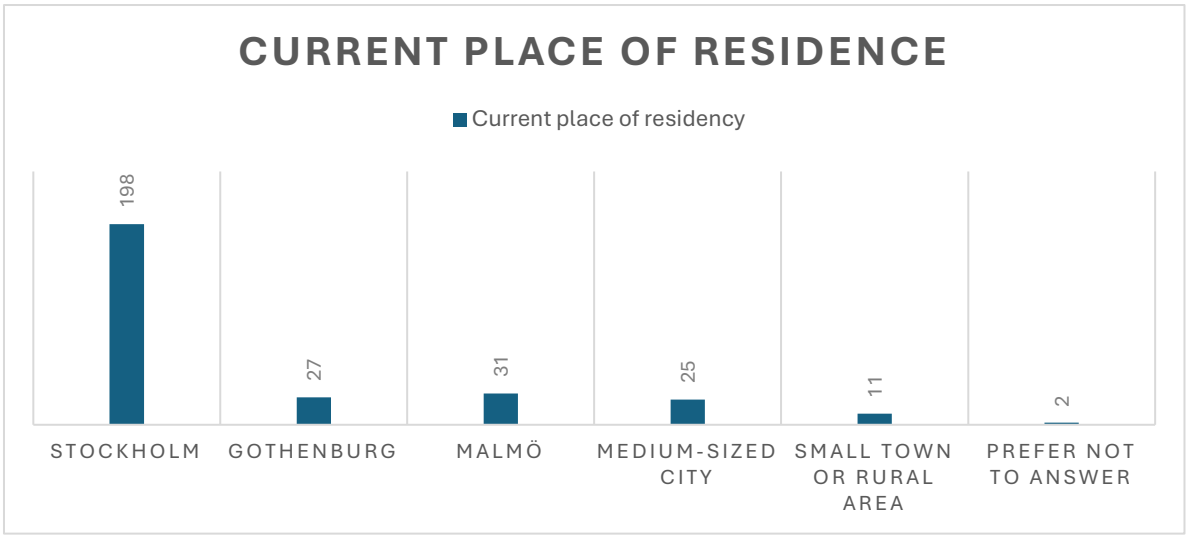
14. Is there anything else you would like to share regarding the events of 7 October and the reactions that followed?

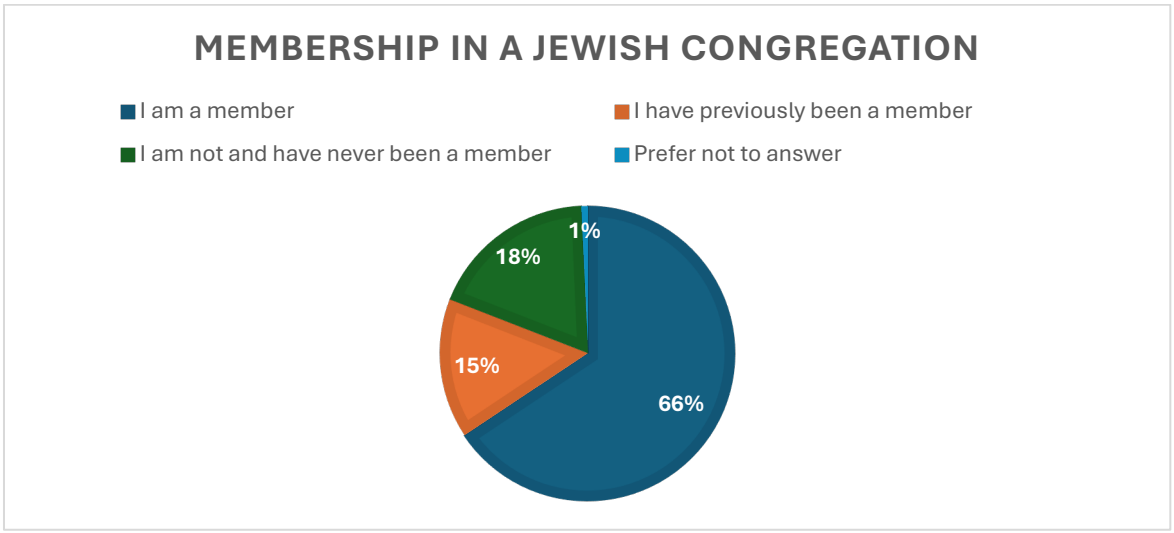
Annex 2: Participant Statistics








CURRENT PLACE OF RESIDENCE
Current place of residency
198
27
31
25
11
2
STOCKHOLM
GOTHENBURG
MALMÖ
MEDIUM-SIZED CITY
SMALL TOWN OR RURAL AREA
PREFER NOT TO ANSWER


MEMBERSHIP IN A JEWISH CONGREGATION
I am a member
I have previously been a member
I am not and have never been a member
Prefer not to answer
1%
18%
15%
66%

Jewish Life on Social Media before and after 7 October: A Case Study of a Jewish Youth Organisation

Isabella Pistone & Pontus Rudberg

Introduction, Purpose and Questions

Social media has become an increasingly vital platform for accessing news and engaging in public debates. For many, social media provides an opportunity to be visible, communicate and connect with like-minded communities. For many Jews, particularly Jewish youth, social media plays a significant role in their Jewish experience. Jewish congregations and organisations in Sweden maintain official pages on various platforms to engage with their members and society at large.

Social media has helped create new communities for Jews and serves as a resource for Jewish learning. At the same time, studies reveal that antisemitic material exists on almost all social media platforms (Kati et al., 2021), and that both individual users and political entities, from the right, left, and extreme Islamist factions, utilise these platforms to spread antisemitic messages (Hübscher & Mering, 2022).

A recent study examining antisemitism on social media highlights the way in which Israel, perceived as the "collective Jew," serves as the primary target for antisemitism online. Therefore, a prevalent form of antisemitism today centres around Israel, which is seen as a representation of Judaism, Jewish identity and existence. This "Israelisation of antisemitism" is marked, among other things, by the projection of traditional anti-Jewish stereotypes onto the state of Israel (Schwarz-Friesel, 2020; Weimann & Masri, 2022). An example of this is when Israel, Israelis, or Zionists are portrayed as greedy, vengeful, child murderers, or accused of colluding with the devil or plotting to dominate the world. Other previous research indicates that discussions surrounding the Israeli-Palestinian conflict are often viewed as a "moral grey area," where antisemitic statements, typically deemed unacceptable in other contexts, frequently arise (Ulrich, 2013).

Even prior to the Hamas terrorist attack and the ensuing war, research showed that social media platforms were where Jews felt most vulnerable to antisemitism (Hübscher & von Mering, 2022; European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, 2019). According to a recent study,

Israel-related antisemitism saw a significant increase on YouTube and alternative social media platforms in the first week following the terrorist attack (Rose et al., 2024).

A study of Norwegian adults reveals that hate speech can deter individuals from sharing their opinions and lead them to withdraw from public online discussions, negatively impacting freedom of expression (Fladmoe & Nadim, 2017). Research has also demonstrated that experiences of hate speech can result in various negative outcomes, including fear, distress, and feelings of vulnerability and exclusion from society. However, a recent Norwegian study shows that, despite these negative effects, hate speech can also drive increased engagement and participation in public debate (Awan & Zempi, 2016; Gelber & McNamara, 2016; Haanshuus, 2024). However, research on antisemitism in social media is still in its early stages, with a notable lack of studies on how it affects Jews and their social media engagement.

This sub-study seeks to contribute to the understanding of how the events of 7 October, the subsequent war and the world's reactions have altered the social media habits of the Jewish youth in Sweden and how these changes have affected their work and everyday lives. We have conducted a qualitative case study of a Jewish youth organisation to investigate how young people engage with social media and their perceptions and experiences of that engagement after the Hamas terrorist attack on 7 October and the ensuing war. (To protect the privacy of the participants, the name of the organisation will remain anonymous and be referred to as "the organisation".) The sub-study was based on the following questions:

- What types of posts and comments appear on the organisation's social media channels, and how have they evolved since the terrorist attack and the subsequent war?
- What factors are considered before and after the organisation publishes social media posts, and how have these considerations changed since the terrorist attack and the subsequent war?
- How did young people view their use of social media after 7 October, and in what ways have the events affected them and their activities?

Methodological Approach of the Sub-Study

The sub-study is based on a qualitative case study design (Flyvbjerg, 2003) combining an analyses of three types of materials: in-depth interviews, focus group discussions, and comment sections from the social media platforms X and Instagram. The case examined in this sub-study is a Jewish youth organisation in Sweden and its use of social media platforms. The youth organisation, dedicated to empowering Jewish children and youth in Sweden, uses social media to foster a sense of Jewish community and learning, share knowledge about Judaism, and raise awareness of and combat antisemitism. The organisation consists of approximately 2,000 members and has several local associations throughout Sweden.

The sub-study focuses specifically on the social media focus group, consisting of nine young participants who were also members or deputy members on the Governing Board during the

examined period. Within the organisation, the work group is divided into two teams, one for each platform, that communicate through a common chat group.

Material

A focus group discussion was conducted with the social media work group. The aim of the discussion was to allow participants to engage on their own terms, fostering dialogue and interaction within the focus group, enabling spontaneous thoughts and reflections to emerge through their collective dynamics. The focus group discussion lasted one and a half hours and was exploratory in nature, aimed at providing both a broad and deep understanding of how the organisation has engaged with social media before and after the Hamas terrorist attack, as well as the participants' perceptions and experiences of this work.

We also carried out individual in-depth interviews with seven of the nine young members of the focus group. Each interview lasted between one and two hours and was recorded for transcription purposes. Material from the organisation's social media platforms, X and Instagram, was collected manually, with posts (tweets) and subsequent comments (replies) copied and compiled into a new document. Posts and comments were collected from one month before the terrorist attack until one month after (covering the period from 7 September to 6 October and from 7 October to 7 November 2023).

Analysis

The material was primarily analysed using the MAXQDA software, which facilitates both qualitative and quantitative analysis. The analysis was carried out in three main steps, guided by Tavory and Timmerman's (2014) abductive approach, which emphasises the interaction between empirical data and the researcher's theoretical perspectives, specifically regarding antisemitism in this case (primarily referencing Fein, 1987; Andersson, 2000; Wistrich, 1999; and Schwarz-Friesel, 2020). In the initial step, the material was read in its entirety, with preliminary insights being noted. The subsequent step involved coding the material and merging similar codes to identify patterns and discern subtle nuances.

For the social media material, we began with an initial coding of a portion of the content to gain an overview and understanding of its characteristics. From this initial coding, a code structure was developed that drew on the content of the material as well as previous research on antisemitic beliefs, stereotypes and conspiracy theories (Fein, 1987; Andersson, 2000; Wistrich, 1999). The code structure further incorporated codes that did not directly reflect antisemitic expressions, such as "anti-Israeli and anti-Zionist content," "social discussions," and "criticism of the organisation." For instance, a comment might combine various types of antisemitic expressions with criticism of Israel or political critiques. In such instances, the comment was classified under each relevant content category. In instances where well-known antisemitic expressions were not clearly discernible in comments criticising or condemning Israel, these were coded solely as anti-Israel and anti-Zionist content.

For this analysis, we have opted to focus exclusively on comments from X, as the organisation's Instagram account was moderated to remove threats and hateful comments. (However, the

comments were saved by one of the members who moderated the account and we have gained access to them.) In the final step, we revisited the material, refined and reorganised our initial interpretations, and connected these insights to existing research and theoretical frameworks.

At first, we conducted separate analyses of the interviews and the social media material. To assess how the events of 7 October influenced the youth organisation's social media usage, we divided the social media material into two segments: one covering the period before the attack and the other following it. In the second step, we conducted a cross-analysis of the results to derive broader conclusions.

Ethical Considerations

The design of the sub-study has been tested and approved by the Ethical Review Authority (2024-01118-01). Throughout the process of conducting and reporting the sub-study, we have prioritised the careful collection and handling of sensitive personal data to ensure that research subjects are not adversely affected.

Results

The following section outlines the findings from our social media comment analysis, starting with a general summary of post and comment activity, and then moving into a detailed examination of the comment content itself. Following this, we present the findings from the interviews and focus group discussion.

Social Media Engagement and Interactions in Social Media Comments

What types of comments do the posts from the youth organisation typically generate? The comment sections on X and Instagram feature text comments, so-called memes (images, video clips or other content shared and circulated online), GIFs (simple animated images in GIF format), links to news articles, videos and other online resources.

There is a notable disparity between the organisation's usage of different social media platforms and the responses generated by the posts. The organisation's account on X primarily serves as a communication channel to engage with the surrounding community, media and other stakeholders, aiming to inform and influence discussions about Jewish youth and Jewish life in Sweden. Additionally, the X account serves to spark discussions and articulate the organisation's stances on a range of topics, especially those aimed at promoting Jewish life and countering antisemitism in Sweden.

The organisation primarily uses its Instagram account to connect with its members (Jewish youth in Sweden), occasionally allowing individual members to participate. Comments on Instagram primarily come from individuals affiliated with Jewish communities. This is often evident in their shared experiences, such as expressing what it means to be Jewish following

the Hamas attack on 7 October, or leaving supportive comments for the organisation and showing appreciation for its posts.

On X, it is evident that automated comments generated by "bots" (software designed to perform specific tasks) are present, since these responses appear repeatedly across various posts. Nonetheless, the majority of comments on the posts come from actual individuals. On the organisation's X account, the debate tends to be quite heated, often featuring aggressive and hateful rhetoric in the comments, whereas the tone on Instagram is generally more calm and respectful.

Even prior to the Hamas attack on 7 October 2023, the difference in content and tone between the two platforms was already apparent. In other aspects, the difference between the period before and after the attack was substantial. Prior to the attack, comments on X often centred around discussions on factual issues relevant to the organisation's posts. Comments containing antisemitic and hateful rhetoric were also prevalent, particularly those reflecting traditional right-wing views. However, the prevalence of such comments was significantly lower compared to the surge seen after the terrorist attack.

Activity in the comment sections of both platforms saw a notable increase following the attack. In the month leading up to the attack, the organisation's 17 posts on Instagram generated a total of 113 comments, whereas its 26 posts on X accumulated 285 comments. In the month following the attack, the organisation's 18 posts on Instagram attracted a remarkable 1,052 comments, while its 54 posts on X generated 1,514 comments. This reflects a staggering increase of 431% in comments on X and an even more impressive 831% on Instagram. Although the organisation's activity on Instagram remained relatively stable, the increase on X can likely be explained by the organisation nearly doubling its number of posts.

In the month leading up to 7 October 2023, comments on the organisation's X account primarily focused on social matters and other relevant issues, with no antisemitic or hateful content. Out of the 285 comments coded across all the organisation's threads on X during this period, various antisemitic expressions were identified in 39 instances, accounting for 14%. The antisemitic content identified primarily consisted of conspiracy theories, particularly the age-old belief that Jews are colluding with the devil (Wistrich, 1999). Additionally, the "Great Replacement" theory, a conspiracy often circulated in far-right circles, asserts that Jews are orchestrating immigration to Europe with the intention of undermining or destroying European or Western peoples, or the white race (see, e.g., Davey & Ebner, 2019; Haanshuus & Ihlebæk, 2021; Askanius, 2022). Among the stereotypes encountered, the portrayal of Jews as deceitful or dishonest was the most prevalent. This notion has medieval origins and has a long-standing tradition in Sweden as well (Fein, 1987; Andersson, 2000). The organisation faced criticism for distancing itself from the Sweden Democrats.

Beginning on 7 October, the character of the organisation's comment section on X underwent a significant change. The previously mentioned conspiracy theories persisted and saw an increase from 11 to 71 comments. A significant difference was that many of the comments after 7 October included a clear element of hatred towards Israel, which was absent in the month leading up to the war. This trend also characterised other forms of antisemitism observed after 7 October.

Another notable shift is the increased prevalence of comments that can be classified as anti-Israeli or anti-Zionist. In the month prior to 7 October, there was only one comment of this nature, whereas in the month following 7 October, it became the most prevalent type of comment (n=314). The qualitative analysis of the sub-study reveals that these comments often, but not always, contained clear antisemitic messages. Some comments expressed what could be considered legitimate criticism of Israel. However, the overall tone was often heated and filled with threats and hatred towards Israel.

In the month following the attack, overt antisemitic messages appeared 190 times in the comments section, a stark increase from the 39 occurrences recorded before the attack. This reflects a 387% increase in overt antisemitic expressions. These comments often featured the projection of long-standing antisemitic beliefs onto Israel.

Old Beliefs in New Contexts

Here, we present a selection of the most prominent content categories on X after the terrorist attack. The analysis focuses primarily on antisemitic content, but also includes content related to Israel, as well as comments containing anti-Palestinian, Islamophobic and anti-immigrant sentiments. The analysis was based on the 1,514 comments on X following the terrorist attack.

Table 1 lists the categories presented in this section, along with the number of times comments in each category occurred on X before and after the attack. There were also several other content categories present in the comment section, but they have not been included in our analysis. Therefore, they are not included in this section. The categories include

- generalised hatred of Jews
- relativisation of antisemitism
- social debates
- criticism and support for the organisation
- support for Israel
- support for Palestine
- support for Jews in Sweden and condemnations of antisemitism
- a miscellaneous category that includes material that cannot be interpreted.

Table 1. Content categories on X illustrated in the results. Additionally, there are several other categories that we have not analysed qualitatively, and therefore, they are not included in this section or in the table.

Content categories on X illustrated in the results	**Before the attack**	**After the attack**
Anti-Zionism, hatred of Israel and Israel-related antisemitism	1	314
Conspiracy theories and myths about Jews	11	71
Medieval beliefs about Jews	5	23
Stereotypical representations of Jews	7	45
Relativisation and distortion of the Holocaust	7	26
Anti-Arab, islamophobic, and anti-immigration content	6	54

Anti-Zionism, hatred of Israel and Israel-related antisemitism constitute the largest category of comments in the organisation's comments section on X. This is exemplified by attributing responsibility for Israeli policies to the Jewish youth organisation or to Jews in general. An example of this occurred on 11 October, 2023, when the organisation published a post about a minute of silence for the victims of a terrorist attack and received the comment: "Minute of silence for child murderers." The comment implies that the victims of the terrorist attack were child murderers, a slogan frequently used in remarks regarding Israel's actions in Gaza.

Victims are blamed for civilian casualties resulting from Israel's military actions, whether as Israelis or as Jews. Several other comments questioned the trauma experienced by Jews (n=34), often by relativising the terrorist attack and projecting blame onto Palestinians. Comments expressing hatred towards Israel for alleged war crimes, genocide and ethnic cleansing (n=34), or branding it as a terrorist state (n=14), were also frequently observed. Several comments (n=21) drew parallels between Jews or Israelis and Nazis. Some comments (n=14) characterised the terrorist attack as legitimate resistance against Israeli oppression and included anti-Zionist slogans like "Zionism equals terror."

A common phenomenon is depicting Jews who criticise Israel as "good" or "real" Jews, contrasting them with Zionists or Israelis (n=25). This includes statements and memes likening Israel's behaviour to that of Hamas and claiming that Israel functions as an apartheid regime. Slogans like "Go home to Israel," when directed at Jews in Sweden, stem from the belief that Jews do not belong in Sweden because they are considered "foreign" for various reasons. The belief that Jews are un-Swedish and foreign is an antisemitic notion with deep historical roots

(Andersson 2000, Bachner 1999). However, one commentator argues that Jews do not belong in Israel either and should be relocated to ghettos in Poland.

Several comments contain a *relativisation and distortion of the Holocaust* (n=26). By comparing Israel's actions against Palestinians to Nazi Germany's treatment of Jews, the Holocaust is relativised and Israel is demonised.

Figure 1. The image was featured in a comment on 14 October and seeks to equate the fate of Jews during the Holocaust with the current situation of Palestinians in Gaza.

Conspiracy theories and myths about Jews are also present in the comment section (n=71). The most prevalent variations are different iterations of the "Great Replacement" (n=26). The image below is a common representation that illustrates both the conspiracy theory and stereotypes about Jewish appearance and traits, including the nose, a demonic gaze and greed.

There are also conspiracy theories suggesting that Jewish conspiracies, led by financier George Soros, the Rothschild banking family, or the Bonnier family, control the world's finances and media or are behind major phenomena like the COVID-19 pandemic and the LGBTQ movement. The example below illustrates various similar notions:

> 16.1 million jews are dictation 10 000 000 000 people's life with garbage as lgbtq, trangender, vegan, atheist, blm, settlements asholes, Bonnier, Goldman shack bank sitting USA government, AFA, ANTIFA, killed Jesus, george Soros, Roshild, illuminati, the freemasons + evil [SIC!]

In this type of commentary, George Soros and other named Jews serve as symbols of Jewish power, purportedly controlling the liberal forces in Europe and the U.S. and influencing them to act according to their desires.

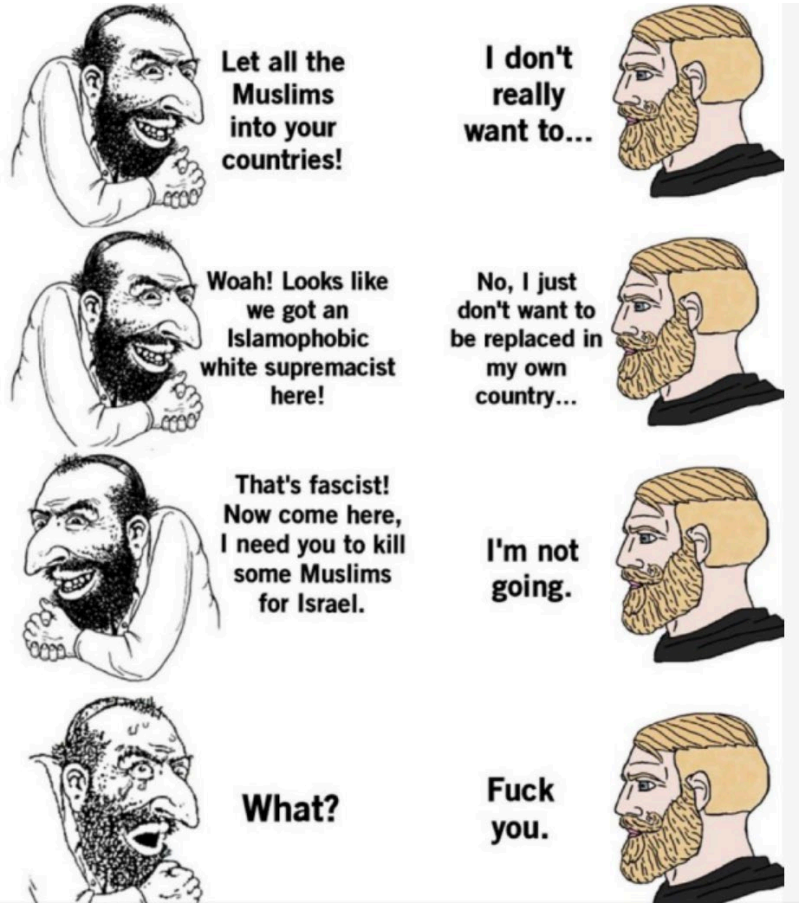


Figure 2. The meme in the image exemplifies the far-right conspiracy theory of the "Great Replacement" and was referenced in a comment on 11 October.

Stereotypical representations of Jewish characteristics were present in 45 of the comments made following the attack. As noted above, these comments were frequently intertwined with conspiracy theories as well as anti-Israeli sentiments. The predominant stereotype was that Jews are deceitful and cunning. It was frequently asserted that Jews were "knitting their sacrificial cardigan" in reference to the terrorist attack and the ensuing war.

Numerous posts indicated that the organisation served as a platform for *anti-Arab, Islamophobic and anti-immigrant* content (n=54), reflecting a common theme in far-right discourse. These types of comments appeared on the organisation's posts right after the Hamas terrorist attack. "Why can't these dysfunctional Muslims, Arabs and Islamists just leave Sweden for good? Go back to where you came from, it was better before when you were not in Sweden," one user wrote. Others, like the following comment from 4 November, utilised the terrorist attack as a means to criticise the Social Democrats: "Don't expect any condemnation from the socialists, they are now their core voters, the Islamists. Time to label Islam a terrorist state. Islam has no place in a democratic world."

Several posts labelled the members in the youth organisation as "Muslim huggers" and accused them of promoting multiculturalism, suggesting that they should now acknowledge their errors. These comments can also be interpreted as a response to the organisation's efforts to distance

itself from Islamophobia and various forms of racism, as well as its refusal to align with the Sweden Democrats.

While conspiracy theories, such as those related to the Great Replacement, primarily circulate among right-wing extremists, various *medieval beliefs about Jews* are also propagated from other sources (n=23). These include variations of medieval myths about Jewish collusion with the devil, along with the "blood libel" or blood myth in the context of criticising Israel's actions in Gaza. According to the blood myth, Jews engage in ritualistic murders of non-Jews (especially children), to use their blood. This myth exists in various forms and is spread through both right-wing and Islamist propaganda (Teter, 2020). For instance, a user commented on the organisation's post with a text meme on 19 December, 2023:

> The baby who was burned alive is now part of depraved Israeli marriage rituals, they take photos and stab it as a symbol for all Palestinian babies they want to kill. Ben Gvir, a top member of Netanyahu's government, has joined in this genocide ritual.

Alongside new iterations of conspiracy theories, myths and ideas about Jewish deceit, power and alienation, there are also comments that reflect old notions, such as Jews being dirty, despising non-Jews and being indifferent to their suffering. These long-standing ideas are often framed within a context that is critical of Israel. Previous research indicates that this type of Israel-related antisemitism is becoming more prevalent (Schwarz-Friesel, 2020). As we will explore, this type of antisemitism was especially challenging for the young members of the Jewish organisation, as they struggled to differentiate between legitimate criticism of Israel and antisemitism disguised as such.

Experiences and Insights from the Jewish Youths

How did the members feel about using social media after 7 October, and in what ways have the reactions on social media impacted them and their activities? In this section, we will present the findings from the interviews and focus group discussion organised around four themes. The members perceived a significant change on social media before and after 7 October, recognising that after the attack, they had to learn how to manage evolving hate storms of antisemitism. The Israelisation of antisemitism they experienced on social media left them feeling unsafe and insecure, and was described as the most challenging form of hatred.

The elevated tone and hostile atmosphere on social media left no margin for error in the public sphere, resulting in significant pressure and an overwhelming workload. The hatred that the members experienced led them to avoid public spaces where they felt unsafe, both online and offline, while simultaneously feeling an increased responsibility to engage in the debates. As a result, they experienced both heightened exclusion and increased engagement.

A Noticeable Change before and after 7 October

During the interviews, the members spoke about the aftermath of the terrorist attack as a difficult time to cope with. They were confronted with a surge of antisemitism, often manifesting itself in new forms. Several of the members noted that the antisemitism they had

previously encountered in their work with the organisation's social media seemed primarily to originate from what they perceived as right-wing extremist sources. They had learnt to manage this type of antisemitism from their "regulars," as they jokingly referred to them. In contrast, after the attack, antisemitism emerged from multiple directions simultaneously, and the members discovered that the comment sections were filled with hatred directed at Israel and Zionists, often manifesting in antisemitic forms.

While the members of the working group grappled with their own feelings regarding the terrorist attack, they also faced antisemitic hate storms in comments and instant messages, which not only increased their workload but also took an emotional toll on them. Many of the members described how it negatively impacted their private lives as well. Some have lost friends because of the polarised conflict and often encountered silence and a lack of understanding from those around them following the terrorist attack. Several members expressed that "everything was turned upside down" after the attack, and they quickly realised that nothing would ever be the same.

The Israelisation of Antisemitism and its Consequences

Our examination of social media revealed that Israel acts as a projection surface for antisemitic concepts, a conclusion that aligns with Schwarz-Friesel's findings (2020). In the analysis of the member's experiences on social media, it was the pervasive expressions of hatred towards Israel and Israel-related antisemitism that they found most challenging to navigate.

The perspective that a moral grey area exists regarding the distinction between legitimate criticism of Israel and expressions of antisemitism is widely held (Ulrich, 2013). Many of the members felt that they understood where the line was drawn, yet they struggled to address antisemitism without the impression of taking sides in the conflict. Others expressed difficulty in distinguishing between criticism of Israel, hatred towards Israel, and antisemitism, which affected their ability to address Israel-related accusations directed at them.

When criticism of Israel, frequently accompanied by antisemitic undertones, was directed at the members, they felt as if they were being accused of Israel's actions and drawn into political discussions, despite the organisation's stance of political neutrality. Many of the members described the intensified tone, hatred towards Israel and collective blaming of Jews as a new phenomenon that they needed to learn to navigate. One of the members illustrated what it felt like to come across comments about Israel:

> While it doesn't necessarily mean they wish me harm, that's how I feel. That's how my mind perceives it. I perceive it as a threat. It's quite challenging. It's been mentally taxing. There's a lot of shaming directed at Jews and Israel, which is really tough.
> (Interview informant H, 13-08-2024).

The members reported that the pervasive hate and aggressive atmosphere on social media intensified their feelings of insecurity and the sense of being threatened, leading them to remain vigilant. They felt scrutinised and labelled as alarmists whenever they acknowledged the antisemitism, and after repeatedly doing so, they started to doubt their own perceptions.

No Margin for Mistake in the Public Sphere: Pressure and an Unreasonable Workload

For the focus group, the terrorist attack and the ensuing war established a new context that required them to adapt their social media management strategies. The group began to systematically record and report threats and hateful comments.

All posts had to be meticulously reviewed before publication. Adaptations were necessary to reflect current developments and each formulation underwent careful consideration. The group became more cautious with each publication, as some of the members noted that there was no longer any "margin for error."

On Instagram, the working group felt compelled to moderate and remove antisemitic and hateful comments to uphold their responsibility to both the account's visitors and their members, whereas they opted to retain the comments on X due to the differing functions of the two platforms. They sought to establish an antisemitism-free environment on Instagram for their members and those interested in Jewish life. Conversely, the comment sections on X became a direct reflection of antisemitic sentiments. On X, the hate was viewed as more pervasive and intense than on Instagram, prompting the team managing the X account to shift from a structured division of tasks to an approach described by one member as "whoever can make it through the day gets involved." They also tried to reduce the amount of time each individual spent on the platform. Despite the group's changes in working methods and practices, their commitment remained strong. "We are still fighting against antisemitism," one of the members stated in an interview, "but we are questioning whether it's actually worth it."

Increased Exclusion and Engagement

Research indicates that exposure to online hate can result in fear, feelings of vulnerability and social exclusion, but it may also foster greater engagement in public debate (Awan & Zempi, 2016; Gelber & McNamara, 2016; Haanshuus, 2024). Similar patterns also emerged from the interviews conducted with the young participants in this sub-study.

In the interviews, the participants expressed that navigating social media was both challenging and stressful for them. Many of them experienced mental health issues, and some even took sick leave as a result. Feeling a loss of control on social media is a common response to online hate storms (Rasul, 2021; Czymmek, 2022). Consequently, many of the members found themselves increasingly drawn to Jewish communities that, unlike social media, provided a sense of self-control, allowing them to avoid the constant threat of unexpected attacks. As a result, the circumstances on social media caused many of the members to withdraw from public spaces.

Although the members spoke about withdrawing from specific social environments, many also expressed a sense of responsibility towards their peers in the Jewish community to engage in public debates by remaining active on social media, highlighting and responding to antisemitism. Many of the members experienced this duality and conflicting emotions simultaneously.

The members also felt that there was a constant interaction between events on social media and those occurring in the offline world. For many of the members, their engagement with the

organisation's social media accounts heightened feelings of insecurity in other environments. For instance, one of the members shared that his friends had posted comments on social media supporting Palestine on the day of the terrorist attack, without mentioning the incident. Another member that she felt pressured by her classmates to express support for Palestine on social media, which negatively affected her motivation to study and engage in student activities. This illustrates how posts, comments and stances taken in the context of the war on social media threatened personal friendships.

Conclusions and Contributions

This sub-study aims to contribute with knowledge about how the Hamas attack on 7 October, the following war, and the responses of the surrounding world have shaped the social media habits of Jewish youth in Sweden and influenced their everyday lives. This has been investigated through a qualitative case study that examines how these events have affected the social media initiatives of a Jewish youth organisation and the subsequent impact on the activities and daily lives of its young members.

The case study reveals that following the terrorist attack on 7 October, there has been both an increase and a shift in the nature of antisemitic comments on the youth organisation's accounts on the social media platforms X and Instagram compared to the period before the attack. The rise in Israel-related antisemitic hate speech aimed at the youth organisation aligns with general trends identified by several researchers, indicating that Jew-hatred often targets Israel as a symbol of Judaism (see, e.g., Schwarz-Friesel, 2020; Weimann & Masri, 2022; Rose et al., 2024).

Antisemitism is continually evolving, and one of its defining features is the transformation of historical tropes into new manifestations (Weimann & Masri, 2022). The analysis of the comments on the organisation's X account reveals that much of the antisemitism present can be seen as a mutation, described as an "Israelisation of antisemitism," where antisemitism is intertwined with discussions related to Israel.

Initially, the comments on social media were marked by Israel-related antisemitism, where criticism of Israel included distinct antisemitic assertions. Additionally, there were several hateful comments in which the level of antisemitism was challenging to assess, including allegations of genocide, claims that "Israel murders children," and statements like "Zionism is terrorism." Depending on their wording, such comments frequently occupy a grey area that many perceive as blurring the lines between legitimate criticism of Israel and antisemitism related to Israel (Ulrich, 2013). While these comments might be considered offensive because of their hateful tone, they do not automatically qualify as antisemitic.

Although the hatred aimed at Israel, Israelis and Zionists may not always be antisemitic, the comments section of the organisation's social media account does include threats and hostility that would likely be deemed unacceptable if directed at other groups. It is also evident that many of the comments criticising Israel align with antisemitic thought patterns.

Considering the historical context of antisemitism and the results of the sub-study, it is important to closely examine the hatred towards Israel that is currently prevalent on social

media. Another key finding of the sub-study is the insight it offers into the impact of this hatred on Jewish youth. The hatred towards Israel, Zionism and Israel-related antisemitism caused Jewish youth to feel insecure and unsafe, as they were not only identified as Jews but also linked to Zionism and Israel, regardless of their personal views. The members struggled to address this hybrid form of antisemitism, which changed the organisation's use of social media and led to increased caution and self-censorship. It also impacted the way in which the members used social media in their private lives, often leading them to self-exclude from environments and contexts they perceived as unsafe.

Prior research indicates that many Jews perceive social media as the platform where they feel most vulnerable to antisemitism (Hanshuus, 2023; European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, 2019). Earlier this year, a report was released outlining recommendations for a national strategy aimed at enhancing Jewish life in Sweden from 2025 to 2034 (SOU 2024:3). The report addresses the increase in antisemitism on social media, noting an increased sense of insecurity regarding the expression of an open Jewish identity following the terrorist attack and the ensuing war. One objective outlined in the report is to ensure that Jews in Sweden can live openly, safely and with a sense of security.

Another important finding of the sub-study is the acknowledgement that, in the wake of the attack and during the ongoing war, social media has become a hostile and unsafe environment for Jewish youth. Additionally, participants noted a distinct correlation between social media events and real-world occurrences. Events on social media impact young people in various contexts, contributing to a heightened sense of insecurity in their daily lives.

While the young participants in our case study were somewhat accustomed to handling antisemitism due to their participation in the Jewish youth organisation, the events following 7 October created an overwhelming and frightening new reality. It is troubling that even these seasoned and experienced young individuals felt their ability to engage in online public spaces was limited. More research is needed to understand how the situation impacts young Jews who are not part of such a Jewish community. Ultimately, this issue touches on both freedom of expression and fundamental human rights, as well as health-related aspects.

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The war between Israel and Hamas in Swedish News Media: A Framing Analysis

Isabella Pistone & Pontus Rudberg

Introduction

Historically, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict has been one of the most ideologically and emotionally charged issues in Swedish and international news reporting. The Hamas terrorist attack on 7 October and the ensuing war have not only impacted the region, but have also received significant attention across many parts of the world. In Sweden, the war between Israel and Hamas has led to extensive media coverage, sparking debates about the nature of the reporting.

Many commentators, both in traditional and social media, have claimed that news reporting is biased, often leaning towards either a pro-Israeli or pro-Palestinian viewpoint. This development is not surprising. Core principles of news selection result in some issues being highlighted, while others get less focus. Previous research has similarly noted trends of polarisation and oversimplified portrayals in news coverage of Middle Eastern conflicts (Neureiter, 2017; Persson, 2021). Moreover, the so-called hostile media phenomenon is well-documented in research, revealing that individuals with strong opinions or deep engagement in a conflict frequently perceive media coverage as biased against their own stance (Vallone et al., 1985; Feldman, 2018).

Despite extensive media coverage and public interest in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, a noticeable gap exists in academic research on how Swedish media report on the conflict as a whole. Moreover, no specific studies have been conducted to analyse how Swedish media have portrayed the terrorist attack and the ensuing war.

The goal of this sub-study is to provide new insights into how the media has covered the war between Israel and Hamas following the terrorist attack on 7 October 2023, as well as the implications of this reporting for the public's understanding of the conflict. More specifically, this sub-study aims to examine how the Swedish news media has covered the war, using a qualitative analysis grounded in framing theory, a widely used approach in press reporting studies (Allern & Pollack, 2019). The sub-study seeks to address the following key questions:

- What are the primary topics emphasised in the reporting of the war?
- How has the war between Israel and Hamas been framed in the selected reports below, and what implications might this framing have for our understanding of the conflict?
- Has the framing of the events shifted during the studied period (7 October, 2023, to 18 March, 2024), and if so, in what ways?

The coverage of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in various countries' media has been extensively studied internationally, addressing issues such as bias, legitimacy, representativeness, provocation, and moral (co-)responsibility (see e.g., Graber, 2017; Birenbaum-Carmeli, 2014; Schreim, 2015). At a more specific level, scholars have investigated the reporting of various phenomena, including casualty figures and the use of "human shields" during the Gaza wars of 2008-2009 and 2014, the so-called Gaza flotilla and the Al Aqsa Intifada of 2000 (see e.g., Korn, 2004; Neureiter, 2017; Rinnawi, 2007). Nevertheless, there is currently no systematic research on Swedish news reporting in this area. Since press interpretations of a crisis shape readers' perceptions, it is crucial to examine both the media's portrayal and framing of events, as well as the questions of causation and responsibility (An & Gower, 2009).

Methodology

In media studies, it is widely recognised that crises are events attributed to various causes and characteristics. Press coverage enables people to understand the crisis and analyse its causes and responsibilities. Furthermore, previous research has demonstrated that the framing of war reporting in the Middle East, such as the presentation of various causal links, influences readers' perceptions of the conflicts (Bazzi, 2019).

In the field of media studies on Crisis Press Coverage, where media reporting on various terrorist attacks, conflicts and wars has been analysed, framing analysis is a commonly used method (Ben-Yehuda et al., 2013). In all news journalism, both conscious and unconscious choices dictate what is included or excluded, thereby determining which perspectives are prioritised (Allern & Pollack, 2019). Through these "angles," the events are framed (Iyengar & Kinder, 1987; Pan & Kosicki, 1993). In other words, the media limits and shapes the interpretation of the narratives, influencing the public's understanding of it (Hallahan, 1999).

Framing does not imply that reporting is inherently biased or that articles misrepresent the facts. Part of the framing depends on fundamental principles of news evaluation, including timeliness, deviance, proximity and public interest (Bednarek & Caple, 2017). However, it is essential to recognise that all news reporting represents a limited sample of the phenomena being covered, making the framing of that reporting significant. In this sub-study, we used a qualitative study design to collect articles from a selection of Swedish newspapers.

News Media Selection

The sub-study includes newspaper articles published between 7 October, 2023, and 18 March, 2024. We have selected articles from seven Swedish newspapers:

- *Svenska Dagbladet*
- *Dagens Nyheter*
- *Aftonbladet*
- *Expressen*
- *Göteborgs-Posten*
- *Sydsvenskan*
- *Dagens ETC.*

In our selection of newspapers, we sought to be comprehensive by incorporating a diverse range of national and regional publications, including both morning and evening press. We have also aimed for a mix of political perspectives among the newspapers. Therefore, since most major newspapers are explicitly liberal or liberal-conservative, we have also included the smaller publication *Dagens ETC* (non-partisan left-wing with an environmental focus).

Conversely, e-media, online-only magazines and news from social media platforms were excluded from the sub-study. The choice of traditional news media is primarily motivated by accessibility, as radio and television are more challenging to access and therefore could not be included within the sub-study's timeframe. Secondly, this choice is driven by the relatively high level of trust in traditional news media, their editorial credibility and societal impact, as well as the opinion leadership of the four national newspapers. The regional news media offer a broader perspective on news coverage in the country, particularly since regional and local newspapers often rely heavily on TT for their foreign news.

Traditional news media are also the producers of news, while social media serve as distribution channels for a sometimes restructured selection of articles. Since news journalism operates under different standards than opinion journalism, we have completely excluded opinion articles, such as debating articles, columns, commentaries and letters to editors from the survey.

We used the Retriever/Media Archive database to search for newspaper articles. In the database, we created search strings using relevant terms related to the war between Israel and Hamas, combining them with Boolean terms to expand and refine our searches.

We conducted the final search on 19 March, 2024, using the following search string: (Hamas OR Israel* OR Gaza* OR Palestine*) AND (war* OR bomb* OR *attack* OR *attack OR *attack* OR terror* OR *conflict*). The search generated a total of 4,835 results. Since it was not possible to include all of these in the sub-study, we applied systematic random sampling principles, selecting one week from each month, for a total of five weeks. Since the Hamas attack occurred at the end of week 40, week 41 has also been included. We then systematically selected every tenth news article published. This approach ensured that we did not select news

articles based on our own preferences. Instead, the selection was made randomly according to our established criteria.

Figure 1 illustrates the number of articles retrieved each week during the selected time period, and the number of articles selected per week. This process resulted in a total of 136 news articles.

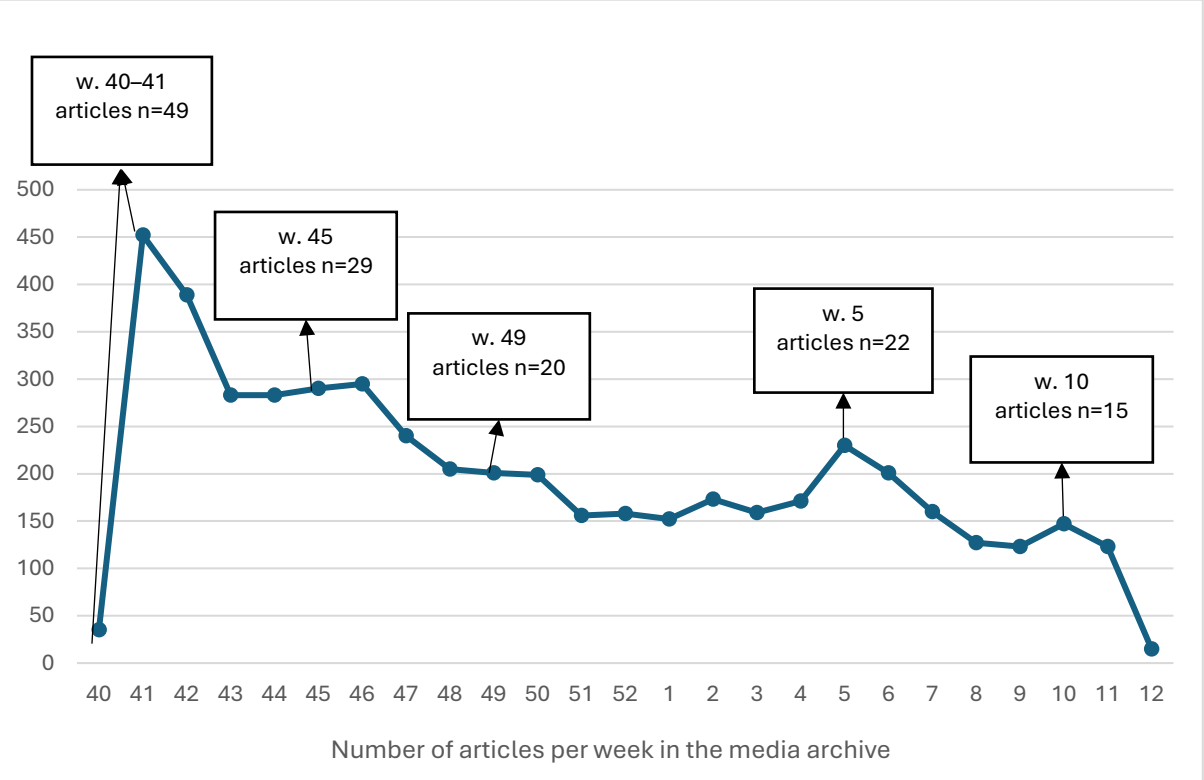

Figure 1. The graph displays the number of articles per week generated by the search in the media archive. The boxes indicate the weeks selected for the sub-study and the corresponding number of articles included based on the sub-study's selection method.

Analysis

The analysis was conducted using MAXQDA, a qualitative analysis software. As a first step, we thoroughly read the articles multiple times, taking notes and writing down our initial reflections. Following this, we engaged in discussions about the overall patterns we identified in the articles. This approach is known as abductive analysis (Tavory & Timmermans, 2014). The content of the articles was then analysed qualitatively and systematically, guided by our research questions.

The initial analysis identified several topics on which the news coverage focused (including events, occurrences, conditions and phenomena). Some articles addressed multiple main topics and were categorised accordingly. After initially categorising the content of the articles by reported topics, we examined *how* these topics were reported and identified several distinct framings. In this step, we employed several methodological strategies commonly used in framing analysis (Snow & Benford, 1988; Reese, 2010; Gamson & Modigliani, 1989). This involved examining how problems were presented within these reporting topics, how various

parties were depicted, the consequences of these representations for understanding the problems, and how these portrayals changed over time. The framings were further interpreted by analysing the ways in which the reported content was contextualised, connected to (past and other) events, framed through titles, preambles and images, and the language employed.

Ethical Considerations

The design of the sub-study has been tested and approved by the Ethical Review Authority (2024-01624-01-537781). Throughout the process of conducting and reporting the sub-study, we have prioritised the careful collection and handling of sensitive personal data to ensure that research subjects are not adversely affected. In reporting the results, all personal data have been made anonymous.

Results

In presenting the results, we analysed the topics reported and discussed in the articles, and categorised the reporting based on its framing.

The first topic analysed is the Hamas attack on 7 October and the events directly related to it (n=17), including mass murder, torture, rape and other forms of sexual violence against women and children, as well as the taking of hostages by Israelis and others. The second topic is the outbreak of war and the subsequent course of events (n=20). This reporting began concurrently with the immediate coverage of the terrorist attack, since several authors were already discussing and speculating on Israel's anticipated response at that stage.

When the Israeli invasion of Gaza began, the reporting included discussions on Israel's military actions, along with data on the number of dead and injured. The reporting also investigated questions of accountability and who should bear responsibility for the war and its impacts. This was often accomplished by linking the topic to previous events in the conflict and contextualising it within broader issues, such as the creation of Israel and the larger Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

The third topic concerns the humanitarian crisis in Gaza (n=50). This topic encompasses reporting on the civilian population's situation in Gaza, Swedish aid to the region, the involvement of aid organisations with Hamas, discussions and demands for ceasefires and humanitarian corridors, and accusations of war crimes, genocide and crimes against humanity levelled against Israel.

The fourth and final topic addresses the terrorist attack, its consequences, and global reactions (n=41), including discussions about Sweden's role in the conflict, antisemitism and Islamophobia, as well as various forms of protests and demonstrations within Sweden.

Figure 2 summarises these topics and their occurrences over the time period covered by the sub-study. It is the primary focus of the reporting in the articles categorised under the topic of the respective articles. This indicates, for example, that the terrorist attack was reported as a topic in the first week following the incident. However, the terrorist attack is later referenced in

other articles during the subsequent period, although it is not the primary focus of these reports and is included primarily for context or background. There were also 14 articles with miscellaneous topics that could not be categorised under the existing themes, resulting in their classification as *Miscellaneous*. This category is not examined in detail in this section.

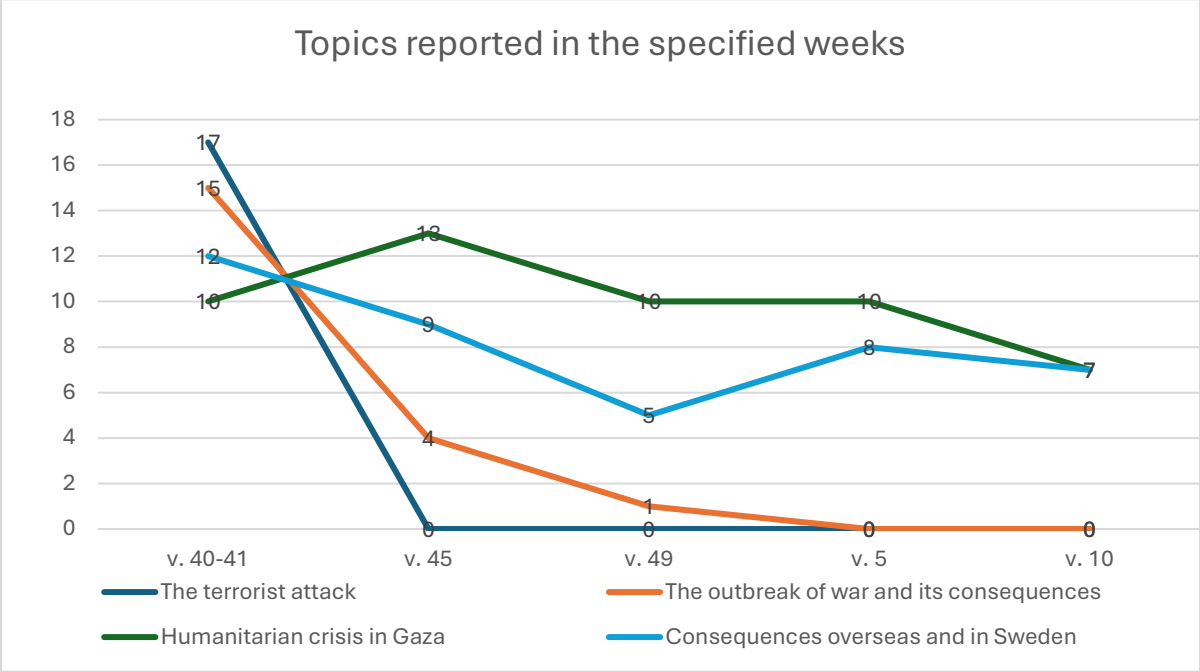

Figure 2. Topics covered in the included articles during the weeks represented in the sub-study sample.

In the following section, we will present five framings identified in the analysis of these topics. An individual article may contain one or more framings. Thus, one framing does not exclude another. The framing of the reporting should not be interpreted as inherently providing a skewed, inaccurate or untrue depiction of the events being reported. We have not evaluated the framings themselves, but simply described those identified in the analysed sample.

In this context, it is important to note that the sub-study examines only the first five months of the war, and that the results are influenced by the reporting of events that occurred during the specific weeks included in the sub-study sample.

Reporting on the Hamas terrorist attack initially framed the assault as a *surprise attack* by a weaker party that unexpectedly surpassed the organisation's capabilities, or as an attack that Hamas largely succeeded in due to *Israel's failure to defend itself.* Reports of the war following the attack framed it as *Israel's defence war against terrorism.* A prevalent framing of the war emphasised its *impact on the people of Gaza.* Within this framing, the role and responsibility of Hamas for civilian suffering and the humanitarian crisis became increasingly overlooked in the latter part of the investigation period, while the humanitarian crisis was depicted as a consequence of Israel's military actions. This framing was achieved either explicitly, by using terms such as "Israel's war," or implicitly, by portraying civilian suffering and deaths as direct consequences of Israeli attacks, without clarifying Israel's motives or acknowledging the role of Hamas. When it comes to the reporting on Sweden's relationship and response to the conflict, we have primarily observed two types of framing regarding *the war's consequences in Sweden.*

One framing focuses on Sweden's responsibility in the war, while the other emphasises the conflicts arising in Sweden as a result of the war. Figure 3 illustrates the timeline of different framings in the reporting, demonstrating their progression over time.

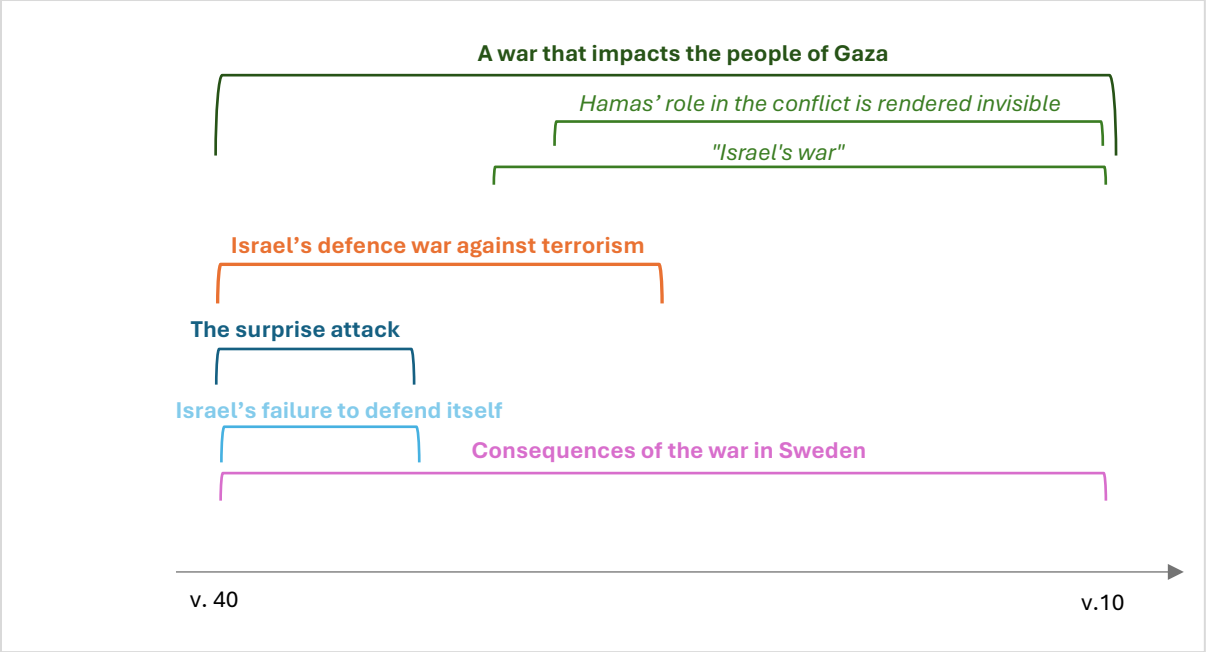

Figure 3. A visual representation of the timeframes in which the different framings are most distinctly observed in the analysed material.

Surprise Attack

The Hamas attack on 7 October was framed as a *surprise attack*, with Hamas being held responsible for what was characterised as brutal violence against civilians in Israel. News coverage of the Hamas terrorist attack on 7 October was characterised by extensive reporting, with long articles often positioned as the lead story in the centre pages of newspapers. These articles typically included in-depth reporting and analysis, alongside fact boxes that provided background information on the ongoing conflict.

The reporting of the attack presents Hamas as the main party, responsible for the violence against civilians in Israel. In seven of the 17 news articles covering the terrorist attack, descriptors like "murderous" were used. Subsequent reporting highlighted the widespread condemnation of the terrorist attack by world leaders, who criticised Hamas for its actions. Certain articles depict Hamas as an Islamist terrorist organisation committed to the destruction of Israel, often exhibiting ruthlessness towards the civilian population in Gaza. However, most articles failed to address Hamas's origins within the Muslim Brotherhood or provide an analysis of its motives and objectives.

The shock and surprise surrounding the attack created a narrative that framed it as an extraordinary event, suggesting that it was an unexpected move from Hamas. On 8 October, for instance, Göteborgs-Posten reported that the "terrorist-labelled Palestinian Islamist group Hamas, which governs Gaza, surprised Israel with a well-planned and coordinated attack." At

the same time, this framing depicted Hamas as the weaker party, the "underdog" in the conflict with Israel.

Israel's Failure to Defend Itself

While the reporting on the terrorist attack primarily focused on its brutality and the suffering inflicted by Hamas, it also framed the incident as *Israel's failure to defend itself*, characterising the attack as a significant lapse for Israel. This framing largely aligns with the perception of the attack in Israel, where the failures of the government, defence and intelligence services were prominently emphasised. This framing emerged from analyses and expert interviews that characterised the terrorist attack as a significant failure for Israel. These descriptions suggested that Israel bore some responsibility for Hamas's success in executing the attack. The defence and intelligence services failed in their primary duty to protect the population by misprioritising and underestimating Hamas.

The attack was widely regarded as a "fiasco," sparking outrage among Israelis, frustrated with both the government and the military. As a result, several headlines depicted Israel as the central party rather than Hamas. For example, Dagens Nyheter would write that a "violent response came directly from a shocked Israel" (DN 08-10-2023) or that there was "[g]rowing anger after the military failure" (DN 09-10-2023), while Göteborgs-Posten's headline read: "Expert: Israel may have drawn the wrong conclusions" (GP 08-10-2023).

Instead, by framing the terrorist attack as a failure in Israel's defence, Israel became the central party in the narrative. Unlike Hamas, which was portrayed as a weaker force, Israel was depicted as strong. This image was reinforced by references in the articles to experts predicting a "strong response" from Israel, as well as quotes from Israeli government spokespersons emphasising imminent counter-attacks.

Israel's Defence (or Revenge) War on Terror

In the initial mid-October reporting on the aftermath of the terrorist attack, Israel's counter-attacks were partly framed as acts of defence and, at times, revenge against terrorism. Articles reporting on the outbreak of war and its aftermath (n=20) revealed that several key issues were at stake.

The reporting emphasised a common understanding that Israel had the right to defend itself against Hamas, with widespread support from EU countries and the U.S. for its defensive actions. At the same time, reports highlighted concerns that Israel's response could result in immense suffering and a devastating war for civilians in Gaza. This is illustrated by an excerpt from Sydsvenskan dated 14 October:

> Nothing can justify the horrific attacks Israel endured last weekend, says the ICRC, which calls for the release of all hostages. Around 150 people are believed to have been kidnapped by Hamas. This is followed by an appeal to Israel: "These attacks cannot justify the unlimited destruction of Gaza."
> (Sydsvenskan 14-10-2023)

Reports indicated that Israel had begun military operations in Gaza, resulting in multiple civilian casualties, and that Israel was violating international law by restricting access to water and food. When news reporting framed Israel's counter-attacks as a defensive war, it often noted that Israel had attempted to establish safe zones and acted to displace civilians in Gaza. However, Hamas countered these efforts by urging civilians to stay and face the conflict, citing statements from the IDF. In this early reporting, Israel's motives behind the attacks were portrayed as fighting terrorists, while Hamas was depicted as an active participant responsible for undermining Israel's efforts to protect the civilian population in Gaza.

By framing these counter-attacks as a defensive war on terrorism, Israel was portrayed as a strong participant with a history of using force and waging warfare, resulting in significant humanitarian suffering and death in Gaza. Even during the first days, there was speculation about the anticipated response – referred to by some newspapers as "Netanyahu's revenge" – from Israel, along with concerns about how the war would impact Palestinian civilians in Gaza. Predictions indicated it could lead to a "bloodbath among civilians." Through these descriptions, Israel was clearly assigned responsibility for the impending war, with references to previous conflicts and the contextualisation of the terrorist attack as an escalation of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Describing Israel's counter-attacks as a bloody revenge, the invasion was sometimes portrayed as motivated by a desire for retaliation. In the sample of newspaper articles on which the sub-study is based, the framing of the war as a defensive action against terror is particularly evident in the early reporting (Figure 3).

A War that Affects the People of Gaza

Another framing of the outbreak and early events of the war focused on the impact of the conflict in terms of civilian suffering in Gaza. This reporting initially emphasised "Israel's right to defend itself against terrorism" by quoting or referencing leaders from Europe and other parts of the world who made such statements. This framing has become less common in recent weeks, as reporting has increasingly used Israel's military actions to explain the civilian suffering and humanitarian crisis in Gaza, without addressing Israel's right to defend itself against Hamas.

Overall, the humanitarian situation in Gaza, characterised by reports of civilian suffering, collapsing humanitarian systems and brief humanitarian ceasefires and pauses, has been the most widely reported topic. Of the 136 news articles analysed, 50 primarily focused on the humanitarian crisis, while 17 addressed the terrorist attack and 20 covered Israeli counter-attacks and subsequent war events.

In this section of the report, the information primarily comes from civilians and aid workers in Gaza, as well as representatives from aid organisations and UN bodies. Several major aid organisations were already on site before the outbreak of the war, which likely contributed to the swift shift in reporting, making it primarily focused on the humanitarian situation. The reporting is emotionally charged, often placing personal stories in the spotlight.

Through headlines, introductions, images and the selection of sources and quotes, this framing depicted the civilian suffering and humanitarian crisis in Gaza as the central issue of the war. A

typical example of war reporting centred around a personal story is the following interview with a man in Gaza. The article begins with the preamble:

> Write about the children in Gaza, urges the father of six (…). You can use this heading: The fear, the hunger, the madness. That's all.
> (Dagens ETC 2024-01-31)

The remainder of the article details war events, including fighting in Gaza City, alongside the man's accounts of how these conflicts impact the people of Gaza through displacement, hunger and fear. It serves as an example of how civilian accounts from Gaza are structured, interweaving personal stories with wartime events and vivid descriptions of a bombed Gaza. In this way, the articles amplify the voices of civilians in Gaza, allowing them to convey the news through interviews and report-like narratives.

Part of the explanation for this framing in the reporting lies in the fundamental principles of news evaluation. In this case, the radically and rapidly deteriorating situation of the civilian population was considered highly topical, while the framing of the war as a defensive action loses its relevance the longer the conflict continues.

Hamas' Role in the Conflict is Rendered Invisible

Although Israel's military actions were portrayed in this framing as the primary cause of civilian suffering, early reporting in several articles indicated that Hamas utilised civilian infrastructure and human shields in its warfare. There were also articles that focused on describing the organisation and governance of Hamas in Gaza. Hamas was thus initially portrayed as a cause of and partially responsible for the civilian suffering in Gaza, although articles often emphasised that the information came from Israeli sources. However, in the later reporting examined, Hamas and its responsibility for the suffering in Gaza became increasingly invisible.

The difficulty in news reporting regarding Hamas as a participant is also reflected in the way sources are managed and referenced. At the beginning of the war, news reports did not indicate that the data came from Hamas-controlled sources, but instead referred to "Palestinian health authorities" or "health authorities on the Palestinian side."

By early November, the material underpinning the sub-study indicated that newspapers had started to specify that the health authority was under Hamas' control. This reporting did not clarify what it means for the health authority to be "Hamas-run" or "Hamas-controlled." It remains uncertain whether Hamas manages the flow of official information, distinguishes between combatants and civilians, or specifies causes of death. Consequently, it is unclear whether the victims died in combat, from Israeli bombings, or due to rockets fired by Hamas or Islamic Jihad. The reporting depicted deaths in Gaza as a consequence of Israeli aggression.

"Israel's war"

While Hamas is rendered invisible in the reporting of the war, Israel's military actions are presented as the primary cause of civilian suffering. This was reinforced by the fact that reporting on the humanitarian crisis also included accusations against Israel of war crimes,

genocide and crimes against humanity. An illustrative example of this framing can be found in an article about a four-year-old boy who lost both his family and an arm in an Israeli attack, starting with: "The Israeli bomb took Omar's mother, father and older sister and crushed his arm." Yet he is considered one of the fortunate survivors in the indiscriminate war in Gaza" (Göteborgs-Posten 10-03-2024). The preamble highlighted the indiscriminate nature of the war and the devastating impact it has on civilians in Gaza. Through the preamble and the subsequent content, the portrayal of civilian suffering was attributed primarily to Israel.

The title of another article read: "Growing Criticism of Israel's War: 'Apocalyptic Situation Prevails'" (Svenska Dagbladet 10-12-2023). The preamble then quoted a UN executive who described the situation in Gaza as apocalyptic, stating that Israel is not doing enough to protect civilians. In both examples, Hamas is not mentioned as a second party in the conflict, nor are Israel's motives for the military attacks addressed, which contributes to framing the situation as solely "Israel's war." This was likely due to the reliance on aid workers and civilians in Gaza as news sources, who were either unwilling or unable to convey the role and responsibilities of Hamas. Other contributing factors may have included the fading impact of the Hamas terrorist attack in the later stages of the reporting, where the narrative of "Israel's war" became more prominent, while Israel's attacks in Gaza constituted a significant part of the news coverage during that period.

Consequences of the War in Sweden

A central theme in the news coverage of the war was the consequences and reactions to the conflict in the rest of the world, including Sweden (n=41). In this section, we will present reporting related to the war's consequences in Sweden.

Sweden's Responsibility and the Increase in Conflicts

In some of the reporting Sweden was depicted as being complicit in the civilian suffering in Gaza. This framing emerged from the fact that several articles (n=19) focused on protests, demonstrations of support and rallies related to the war. There were also reports of celebrities voicing their opinions and taking sides in the conflict. This reporting highlighted both prominent figures who expressed support for Israel and those who advocated for Gaza.

Significant attention was focused on the protests by artists opposing Israel's participation in the Eurovision Song Contest, with reports indicating that over 1,000 artists signed a petition advocating for the exclusion of Israel from the event. In this context, the people of Sweden and other countries were positioned as active participants in the conflict, bearing a responsibility towards the civilian population of Gaza. Given that the competition took place in Malmö, Sweden, there was particularly high interest among the Swedish audience.

Another related yet distinct perspective in the reporting emphasises the conflict and polarisation within Sweden following the terrorist attack and the ongoing war. In Sweden, the conflict was partially reflected in the pressure on individuals, organisations and politicians to take a stance and act. This was also reflected in reports of heightened fear among both Jews and Muslims in Sweden following the outbreak of the war.

Conclusions and Contributions

Compared to other global conflicts, the Israel-Palestine issue holds a unique position in Swedish press coverage as a recurring topic of debate, characterised by extensive reporting. Multiple voices, both in mainstream media and on social media, have claimed that news coverage of the war between Israel and Hamas is biased, often presenting perspectives that are either excessively pro-Israeli or excessively pro-Palestinian.

Against this background, the overall objective of the sub-study has been to provide new insights into how the media has covered the war between Israel and Hamas following the terrorist attack on 7 October 2023, as well as the potential consequences for the public's understanding of the conflict. To accomplish this, we analysed the framing of a selection of articles in Swedish news media by addressing the following questions:

- What are the primary topics emphasised in the reporting of the war?
- How has the war between Israel and Hamas been framed in the selected reports below, and what implications might this framing have for our understanding of the conflict?
- Has the framing of the events shifted during the investigation period (7 October, 2023, to 18 March, 2024), and if so, in what ways?

The conclusions of the sub-study are summarised based on these questions, and the opportunities and risks associated with the identified framings are further discussed. It is important to reiterate that framing is an inherent aspect of all news reporting and is essential for making it comprehensible. The presence of framing in reporting does not imply that it is arbitrary, biased, inaccurate or untrue.

In the sub-study, we did not evaluate the framings. Instead, the aim was to identify and highlight various framings. In this sub-study, our analysis has been solely based on the content of the newspaper articles included in the sample, aiming to provide an empirical foundation for discussions on media coverage of the war between Israel and Hamas. In the first step, we categorised the content based on the topics covered in the reporting, and in the second step we analysed *how* these topics were reported.

The sub-study can be valuable for publicists, journalists and others seeking to reflect on how news reporting shapes the understanding of phenomena through the framing created, whether consciously or unconsciously. The identified framings should therefore be viewed as resources for reflection and nuance, rather than as sources of criticism.

In news reports, both Israel and Hamas were initially depicted as key players in the conflict. However, the framing of the events in the reporting resulted in a distinct shift of responsibility towards Israel. The portrayal of the attack on 7 October as a surprise attack by a weaker party, perceived as acting beyond its capabilities, reinforced the image of Hamas as the weaker or subordinate party in relation to Israel. By framing the attack as a lapse in Israel's defence, this image likely influenced the way in which the issue of responsibility was addressed in subsequent reporting.

Already within the first weeks following the outbreak of the war, reporting began to focus on Israel's military actions in Gaza, whereby the humanitarian crisis and civilian suffering there became the primary issue. The framing of the conflict as primarily "a war on the people of Gaza" was thus established in the immediate reporting following the Hamas attack, with predictions of such a war emerging in the initial days and becoming increasingly prominent during Israel's invasion. With this framing, civilians in Gaza are represented as having their own agency, separate from that of Hamas. Its responsibility and agency, both as the governing authority in Gaza and as a combatant in the conflict, are frequently overlooked.

This absence not only threatens to confuse the Palestinian civilian population with Hamas, conveying a distorted perception that the conflict is between Israel and Gaza's civilians, but it also makes the war appear incomprehensible. The sub-study also indicates that the reporting prominently portrayed Israel as solely responsible for the humanitarian situation in Gaza and the ongoing war, a view that was reinforced by the limited discussion of Israel's motives for continuing the conflict.

Another consequence of failing to clarify Hamas' goals, behaviour and role as a responsible party in the conflict, is the risk that some readers may attribute responsibility to the Palestinian population rather than to Hamas. We observe no significant differences in the way in which the various newspapers in the study have framed the events, with the exception of Dagens ETC, which more frequently highlights civilian suffering in Gaza and allegations of human rights violations by Israel, often in the form of a reportage.

Another key finding of the sub-study is that reporting on various reactions and positions in Sweden is often framed to suggest that Sweden has a unique responsibility for developments in Israel and Palestine. Another finding is that reporting on how the conflict was reflected in Sweden was primarily framed by demands for politicians, organisations and individuals to take a stand and act, alongside the rise of antisemitism and Islamophobia.

The use of sources in war reporting is often challenging, as controlling and disseminating information is a key aspect of warfare, and the sources available to journalists may be integral to the parties' war strategies. Journalists have been targeted in the conflict and are unable to work safely or independently in Gaza. The news media often rely on Israeli authorities, Hamas-controlled organisations, journalists who need Hamas' approval to operate, as well as citizen journalists and individual sources, whose level of influence by Hamas is difficult to verify.

Since Swedish news media frequently relied on Hamas and Hamas-controlled authorities and organisations as sources for what happened in Gaza, this may have influenced the dominant framing of the reporting. Aid organisations and civilians in Gaza have also frequently been used as sources, which may have contributed to the framing of the conflict as a war against the population rather than against Hamas.

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Antisemitism and Civic Orientation for Newcomers: Perceptions, Experiences and Strategies

Robin Andersson Malmros, Christer Mattsson & Roger Säljö

Introduction

Following the sharp rise in antisemitic hate crimes in Sweden after the Hamas terrorist attack on Israel on 7 October 2023 and the subsequent war in Gaza (BRÅ, 2024), government ministers have described antisemitism as a partially imported issue that could be addressed through improved integration measures (Karlsson, 2023; Thurfjell, 2023).

Municipal civic orientation plays a key role in current integration efforts and is one of the first public activities that newcomers encounter in Sweden. In the context of civic orientation, which will be detailed further in the following section, the essential values and norms of Swedish society are to be communicated to newcomers. In the committee directive (2023:169), which serves as the basis for investigator Roger Haddad's review of civic orientation (to be reported on 21 February, 2025), the value-transmitting role of civic orientation is emphasised and highlighted as central to the integration of immigrants. Among other things, "the emphasis on gender equality, women's rights, freedom of religion, and other fundamental societal values will be made more explicit in civic orientation" (p. 8).

Civic orientation should also make it clear to newcomers that "antisemitism and other forms of hatred and hostility have no place in Swedish society" (p. 8). During the presentation of the investigation directives, Minister Johan Pehrson (L) was interviewed and asked about the specific wording on antisemitism, to which he responded: "It is unfortunately highly relevant that widespread antisemitism persists in Sweden today" (Thurfjell, 2023). However, addressing antisemitism within the framework of civic orientation had already been a topic of discussion well before 7 October 2023. In the October 2021 newsletter of the Swedish Committee Against Antisemitism (SKMA, 2021), a municipal manager of the civic orientation was interviewed and formulated the problem and needs as follows:

> In recent years, [we] have seen significant immigration from countries where antisemitism is widely used as a political tool by many regimes. Many participants in civic orientation courses

> come from these countries and often bring these beliefs with them. Most of these individuals have never had their beliefs questioned, let alone challenged, and therefore, I believe they have not truly been given an honest opportunity to re-evaluate these values. Based on our mission to promote democratic values and human rights, addressing antisemitism must be an integral part of the civic orientation provided to newcomers (p. 13)

At the end of 2023, the Segerstedt Institute was approached by the former National Coordinator for civic orientation to explore the possibility of initiating a cooperation in light of two circumstances. One reason for this was that the Coordinator had received indications that antisemitism was a concern within the framework of civic orientation in certain municipalities. The other reason was that antisemitism was identified in the 2024 Public Service Agreement to the county administrative boards (Fi2023/00435) as an issue for which municipalities should receive support. The collaboration culminated in the sub-study presented in this report. In the sub-study, we conducted interviews with 19 civic orientation trainers and managers from five municipalities within one county. The aim of the sub-study is to build a knowledge base that enables municipalities to better understand and address antisemitism within civic orientation. This will be accomplished by examining the following questions:

- How is antisemitism understood and defined?
- What are the experiences of encountering antisemitic expressions within the context of civic orientation?
- What strategies are employed to counter and respond to antisemitism?

Civic Orientation in Sweden

Formalised civic orientation has been present in Sweden for about 70 years, emerging alongside the large-scale labour immigration of the 1960s (Åberg, 2020). At that time, it primarily occurred in the workplaces where migrants were employed. In the 1970s, so-called integration centres were established in municipalities, where immigrants could go for practical inquiries. Eventually, addressing “culture clashes” became an increasingly significant aspect of civic orientation work. In other words, values and norms began to be included in the activities of integration centres as early as the 1980s (Åberg, 2020).

In the mid-1980s, civic orientation shifted towards education and was integrated into Swedish for Immigrants (SFI), which also meant that civic orientation primarily became a collective activity. Participants in civic orientation received information about society from trained Swedish teachers, although individual support was available as needed. This change, implemented following government regulation, remained in effect until the mid-2000s, when the social counselling component was removed from SFI to refine its mission to focus solely on language (SOU 2010:16).

This resulted in several years during which civic orientation was organised more or less autonomously by municipalities (Åberg, 2020). However, by the end of the first decade of the 21st century, it was acknowledged that the level of civic orientation was uneven across the country. A government inquiry (SOU 2010:16) found significant local variations in the quality

and scope of civic orientation. For instance, the duration of courses could range from one day to 300 hours, depending on the municipality. This realisation subsequently resulted in the regulation of civic orientation through a new directive (SFS 2010:1138).

The directive stipulated that municipalities would remain responsible for organising civic orientation, but it specified the objectives and established a minimum level for the scope of the courses. Civic orientation should last at least 60 hours (increased to 100 hours in 2020), be provided in a language that participants understand, and be designed to help them develop knowledge of human rights, fundamental democratic values, individual rights and obligations, how society is organised, and practical aspects of everyday life (SFS 2010:1138).

The language requirement resulted in the recruitment of a new professional group: civic orientation trainers (Åberg, 2020). In most cases, they lacked formal teacher training or pedagogical experience Rather, they were hired based on their language skills and integration into Swedish society. To monitor compliance with the directive, the county administrative boards were tasked with providing monitoring and support, ensuring consistent quality (Åberg, 2020). A key measure for ensuring consistent quality was the development of various types of standardised presentation materials (Åberg, 2020). For instance, comprehensive and standardised PowerPoint materials were developed for civic orientation trainers to use during their meetings with newcomers.

After nearly fifteen years under the current regulation (SFS 2010:1138) and legislation (2013:156), changes are anticipated. According to committee directive 2023:169, a special investigator is to be assigned to conduct a review of the civic orientation. The primary goals are to make civic orientation mandatory for new arrivals (it is currently an optional course offered by municipalities, with participants receiving an introduction benefit), to focus on democratic values and gender equality, to integrate it into adult education through Komvux, and to conclude the civic orientation course with a written test.

Methodological Approach of the Sub-Study

As previously mentioned, the background of the sub-study stems from the perceived issues surrounding antisemitism and the inadequate capacity to address it within civic orientation. The issue encompassed antisemitism among both newcomers and civic orientation trainers themselves, along with a lack of knowledge, methods and time to effectively address these problems. In discussions with the former National Coordinator for civic orientation, it was agreed to conduct a county-wide sub-study to obtain a representative overview of the issue.

Given this context, the sub-study adopts a qualitative approach, concentrating on understanding and contextualising the ways in which informants describe

- antisemitism as a phenomenon
- their experiences of dealing with antisemitism
- the strategies they use to counter and handle antisemitism

In this sub-study, interviews were conducted with 14 civic orientation trainers and five managers (hereafter referred to as informants). They work in five different municipalities within a single county and, in most cases, possess several years of experience in civic orientation.

The civic orientation course is offered in various languages. However, we chose to focus the sub-study specifically on the segment aimed at Arabic-speaking newcomers. This restriction was made based on the fact that:

- the problem picture presented primarily focused on the Arabic-speaking segment of the civic orientation course.
- the Arabic-speaking community is substantial and present in various areas of the county, allowing us to protect the informants' anonymity while providing a representative overview of antisemitism within this segment of civic orientation.

Additional details about the informants can be found in the table below:

Informant	Role	Gender	Municipality	Professional experience in civic orientation
1	Civic orientation trainer	Man	A	1-4 years old
2	Civic orientation trainer	Woman	B	5-10 years old
3	Civic orientation trainer	Woman	C	1-4 years old
4	Manager	Man	C	5-10 years old
5	Civic orientation trainer	Man	D	5-10 years old
6	Manager	Woman	A	5-10 years old
7	Manager	Man	D	5-10 years old
8	Civic orientation trainer	Woman	B	5-10 years old
9	Manager	Woman	B	5-10 years old
10	Civic orientation trainer	Woman	E	11-15 years old
11	Civic orientation trainer	Man	D	5-10 years old
12	Civic orientation trainer	Man	E	5-10 years old
13	Civic orientation trainer	Man	D	5-10 years old
14	Civic orientation trainer	Man	E	11-15 years old
15	Civic orientation trainer	Woman	D	1-5 years old
16	Civic orientation trainer	Woman	D	5-10 years old
17	Manager	Woman	E	1-5 years old
18	Civic orientation trainer	Woman	D	5-10 years old
19	Civic orientation trainer	Man	D	10-15 years old

Table 1: Informants in the sub-study

In the semi-structured interviews, alongside background questions about themselves and the civic orientation course, the informants were asked questions centred on the following themes:

- whether and to what extent controversial and current issues are addressed in civic orientation
- the impact of the Gaza war on teaching methods and discussions with participants in the civic orientation course
- how participants understand and describe antisemitism

- their perspectives on the assertion that antisemitism is especially prevalent among individuals of Middle Eastern descent
- their experience of encountering antisemitism
- the strategies that have been implemented/are currently being employed to address antisemitism.

The interviews were transcribed verbatim, digitised and analysed. The analysis employed Reflexive Thematic Analysis (RTA) as developed by Clarke and Braun (2021). RTA is a systematic analytical method that summarises data in an empirically driven manner, generating specific themes (i.e., patterns of data) relevant to the research interests of the sub-study. In practice, this involved first familiarising ourselves with the collected data and developing preliminary codes based on identified themes, routines and deviations within the material. The second step involved systematically coding the collected data, which began once a substantial amount of information had been gathered and linked to the three objectives of the sub-study. In the third stage of the analysis, we developed and defined the themes that will form the basis of the results. After completing this step of the analysis, we proceeded to the fourth step: the writing phase.

The project received approval from the Swedish Ethical Review Authority (Dnr 2024-00396-01). All informants in the sub-study have signed consent forms outlining the purpose of the research, data management practices and publication objectives. Informants have been informed both in writing and verbally that participation is voluntary, that all personal data will be anonymised and that no information that can be traced back to them as individuals will be published.

Some transcripts have been challenging to interpret due to problems of language proficiency. In such instances, we have listened to the recorded interviews to clarify the informants' statements. If uncertainties persisted, we chose not to code the material. When quoting, we have refined the language and grammar as needed, without altering the original meaning, to maintain clarity and avoid misrepresenting the informants.

Results

As noted in the Methodological Approach of the Sub-Study, the coding process focused on themes pertaining to the understanding of, experiences with, and strategies for combating antisemitism. These themes are reflected in the headings of the respective sections. Nonetheless, we would like to emphasise that, according to our understanding, antisemitism is a relatively minor concern for civic orientation trainers when compared to other issues such as disinformation (e.g., the LVU campaign), gender-related matters or time constraints. This is an important consideration for the reader to keep in mind when reviewing the results.

A Minimalist, Historical and Eurocentric Perspective on Antisemitism

When asked about their understanding of the concept of antisemitism, most informants arrived at a minimalist definition: it's about threats and hatred directed towards Jews. In line with this minimalist understanding, antisemitism is also strongly associated with various (physical) acts, such as the murder of Jews or forced relocation of Jews from a specific territory. Another prominent theme in the interview material is a Eurocentric and historically characterised understanding of what antisemitism is. Most informants reference historical examples, such as the antisemitic persecutions during the Nazi regime or in the Middle Ages, when discussing the nature and origins of antisemitism. Four civic orientation trainers noted that when discussing antisemitism within the context of civic orientation, they often reference the German Nazi regime. One (11) civic orientation trainer stated: "We talk about the Holocaust and the victims in Europe, in Germany and in France, about something that has already happened."

The majority of informants convey that they "know" that newcomers have encountered significant antisemitism in their home countries, leading to a negatively biased view of Jews. In many instances, civic orientation trainers draw on their own childhood experiences. One civic orientation trainer (12) recounts how he was exposed to violent anti-Israeli rhetoric during his school years in his home country, emphasising that it was ingrained in his upbringing to be prepared to "go to war against Jews or Israel." Another civic orientation trainer (3) notes that newcomers have consistently been taught that "Jews are not good people. Jews do this or that." However, the informants express diametrically different perspectives on the same theme. One civic orientation trainer (18) argues that the assertion that antisemitism is particularly evident in the Middle East is problematic, using a Eurocentric and historical context to support his claim:

> At least six million people were killed in the Holocaust... As a result, discussions in classrooms often highlight how Arabs can be stigmatised in similar ways. When examining statistics and historical contexts, it becomes clear that antisemitism has largely been shaped by Europe. . . In Egypt, there are names of streets and neighbourhoods where mostly Jewish people lived. In Iraq too. In Yemen too. In Palestine, it's obvious. Everyone coexists, so there are no issues. (informant 18)

The informant's minimalist, Eurocentric and historical definition of antisemitism is problematic. It neglects the historical pogroms and distortions that have impacted Jews in the Middle East, particularly since the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948. Additionally, it fails to consider the various forms of religious Islamist extremism that have affected Jews (Curtis, 2013).

Some informants offer a more nuanced perspective, suggesting that participants in civic orientation courses may hold anti-Zionist or anti-Israeli views, but not necessarily antisemitic ones. For example, one civic orientation trainer (18) notes that "most people have no problem with Jews or Judaism as a religion, but their perspective is different when it comes to Zionists... What's it called? The Zionist ideology." Most informants emphasise a clear distinction between antisemitism and anti-Zionism in their attempts to define antisemitism. One civic orientation

trainer (13) notes that they have effective teaching materials that "distinguish between Zionism and Jews... not all Jews are Zionists, and not all Zionists are Jews."

In one municipality, a manager responded to discussions among civic orientation trainers where they expressed that the issue lies not with the Jews, but with the Zionists. He perceived that anti-Zionism frequently accompanied antisemitic thought patterns in the discussions occurring within the staff group. Another informant (5) is also critical of the distinction made between antisemitism and anti-Zionism. He recalls taking a walk shortly after 7 October and noticing a message scribbled on the wall: "I take a picture of a large text sprayed on the wall of the hall: 'Halal slaughter of Jews.' And you tell me that they can distinguish between Zionism, Israelis and Jews?" While this example comes from outside the classroom, it illustrates the differing perspectives among informants regarding the connection between antisemitism and anti-Zionism.

The connection between antisemitism and anti-Zionism is a topic of extensive discussion in international literature (Herf, 2013). Among researchers of antisemitism, the prevailing view is that many forms and expressions of anti-Zionism are rooted in antisemitic thought patterns or tropes. Conversely, sceptics contend that anti-Zionism exists independently from antisemitism, arguing that attempts to conflate the two serve a political agenda aimed at delegitimising criticism of Israel (Hirsh, 2007). As Julius (2024) notes, anti-Zionism has increasingly manifested itself in violent and hateful ways, and in certain instances, it poses a significant threat to Jewish life, culture and self-determination.

Anti-Zionism, Holocaust Relativisation and Use of Anti-Semitic Jargon

Most of the informants in the sub-study reported that they had not directly encountered antisemitic expressions among participants. However, the material includes arguments and narratives that could be interpreted as antisemitic or carrying antisemitic undertones.

As previously noted, many informants distinctly separate antisemitism from anti-Zionism: antisemitism is described as problematic, encompassing hatred and threats against Jews, whereas anti-Zionism is viewed as an unproblematic component of legitimate criticism of Israel. As noted in the report's introduction and the previous section, this division is overly simplistic and fails to consider that anti-Zionism frequently incorporates antisemitic thought patterns. Furthermore, anti-Zionism has historically escalated into violence and hatred directed against Jews. This narrow understanding also reportedly shapes how informants interpret situations and statements that might be perceived as antisemitic by others. For instance, a civic orientation trainer notes that discussions with participants in the civic orientation course predominantly focus on Zionism: "this Israeli ideology, where they [Zionists, authors' addition] are exploiting Judaism and using people for their power, to fuel their own power." (18). This description plays on the modern antisemitic trope of the "good Jew" as a non-Zionist, portraying Zionist ideology as manipulative and driven by a desire for power (Persson, 2024).

More than half of the civic orientation trainers report that the war in Gaza has been a topic of discussion among the new arrivals. While most of these classroom narratives seem to be free

from antisemitic thought patterns, there are also some that raise concerns. Several informants mention discussions with new arrivals centred on the notion that Israel's military actions are primarily targeted at children. One civic orientation trainer (3) recalls that participants raised several questions and statements concerning the war:

> Are they really people? They don't like children. How can they bomb children? No person who can ...", you know: "Even if they have something against Palestine, why kill children? Why can't anyone talk to them? What are they thinking?" These sort of things come up.

Another civic orientation trainer (5) shares a similar experience regarding the way in which participants in the civic orientation discuss the war: "everybody talks about the Jews ... don't tell me they call them Israelis. The Jews are the ones killing Palestinians, children and women. The only people who die in the war are children and women." Accusations suggesting that Israel deliberately kills children are particularly troubling, as they evoke the historical blood libel against Jews, which accused them of murdering children (Fein, 1987).

As noted earlier, several civic orientation trainers indicate that they briefly address the Holocaust as part of civic orientation. Five of the informants describe encountering perspectives that could be interpreted as relativising the Holocaust in relation to the situation in Gaza following 7 October. One civic orientation trainer (1) recalls how a participant remarked: "Okay, that's saddening to hear [about the Holocaust, authors' clarification]. But look at what we also... what we have been through, we who come from Gaza". Another civic orientation trainer describes that: "when we were dealing with themes about the history of Sweden, we talked a little bit about that, a little bit about World War One and World War Two and Nazism, what Hitler was like, and the participants say: 'Yes, but what happened then, is happening now.'" Another civic orientation trainer (12) notes that in this context, participants express conspiratorial thoughts suggesting that Palestinians are now bearing the consequences for what Europeans did to Jews during the Second World War. In a report on antisemitic expressions, Persson (2024) writes: "likening Israel to Nazi Germany and its policies to the Holocaust has a long antisemitic tradition" (p. 21). This rhetoric is connected to what is termed "Holocaust inversion" in international literature, which advocates the idea that "Zionists" or Israel are the "new Nazis," suggesting that the injustices faced by Jews in the past are now mirrored in the actions of Israel against Palestinians (Seymour, 2024).

One of the staff groups adopted antisemitic terminology. After a manager (7) initiated a training programme on antisemitism, the informant (who is not Jewish) was asked whether he was Jewish. Such comments undermine the informant's intentions and overlook the serious issue that antisemitism can present. The same manager also recalls a conversation with a staff member: "Yes, but one of them told me that... literally, there's a plan, they [the Jews] have a plan to take over the world." The notion that Jews govern or aspire to dominate the world is among the most enduring antisemitic conspiracy theories (Fein, 1987). The interviews also reveal that civic orientation trainers who have sought to combat antisemitism were questioned by their colleagues, who interpreted their efforts as an attempt to "defend the Jews," as described by one manager (7).

Ambiguity in Policies and Procedures and the Need for Sensitivity and Skill Development

All informants agree that they view antisemitism as incompatible with Swedish society and believe that civic orientation plays a crucial role in countering antisemitic tendencies. Informants also state that antisemitism is not an issue they address systematically, at least not in a direct manner. Instead, the matter is integrated into lessons on human rights, religious freedom, minorities in Sweden, discrimination and racism. Below, a civic orientation trainer (12) describes addressing antisemitism within the context of religious education, noting that discussions about Judaism are especially sensitive among participants:

> we discuss religion and explore the various religions in the world, their beliefs, the foundations of these religions, and the similarities among them. And I take the opportunity to touch on these topics and then carefully gauge the group's opinions and perspectives. . . And what's interesting is that I often notice that they avoid discussing Judaism or anything related to Jews. They are willing to talk about Christians, Muslims, even those who don't identify with any religion, but when it comes to Jews, they tend to steer clear of the conversation.

The interviews reveal that there is no standardised approach for pedagogically addressing potential antisemitic or racist offences and expressions from participants during the lessons. The strategies used by civic orientation trainers and managers vary significantly. Some civic orientation trainers use potential offences as opportunities to address the issue with the entire group, while others prefer to halt the discussion immediately and address it individually with the people involved afterwards. A third strategy is more instructive, where civic orientation trainers clarify what is considered right and wrong. Some report using a combination of the strategies mentioned above.

There are also no established procedures for addressing antisemitic or racist offences internally. Similar to pedagogical management, there is considerable variation among informants regarding whether and how offences should be reported or investigated. On the other hand, the civic orientation trainers surveyed feel confident that their managers will provide support. Four of the managers indicate that they do not have any established or written routines specifically for civic orientation, but they mentioned that there are plans at a municipal level to rely on. However, most managers believe they should engage in more discussions about how to address racist and antisemitic behaviour. One manager (17) puts it this way:

> We have something called common principles here in the municipality, which outlines our general approach to citizens and... but I can't say that we have concrete routines specifically linked to civic orientation. But I realise now that I should perhaps have dealt with these matters more.

One municipality (D) has taken the initiative to train civic orientation trainers on antisemitism and to foster discussions on methodological development. As mentioned in the previous section, these initiatives were met with suspicion and regarded as sensitive. Statements from several municipalities indicate a common theme: antisemitism is a sensitive topic to address in civic orientation. The manager (6) in municipality A has sought to initiate work on antisemitism, but this has been postponed due to security concerns.

> We have a security department here in the municipality, and we had someone who was very knowledgeable about this who, how should I put it, sort of warned us that if we were to start working against antisemitism, we needed to tread carefully... because it could potentially trigger negative reactions. So, you need to be careful about how you approach it and what actions you take.

On the same theme, one civic orientation trainer (12) mentions that he carefully plans elements related to Jews to avoid provoking negative feelings among participants, while another trainer (10) expresses that she would feel uncomfortable teaching about antisemitism with her target group. “I don’t want to expose myself to that.”

Ultimately, the vast majority of informants support the idea of dedicating more time and attention to antisemitism in civic orientation. However, two key components are needed for this to work. The first is time. There is already a significant amount of civic orientation to cover within 100 hours. Antisemitism, when appearing during instruction, also requires considerable time, particularly because it is closely tied to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. One manager (4) says:

> Yes, I personally have my doubts that this is the right forum for such discussions. It’s one thing to talk about antisemitism, but disconnecting it from the ongoing conflict and all the dimensions we associate with it makes it a... that’s at least 100 hours on its own.

Another civic orientation trainer (12) agrees:

> I think about the war happening now in Gaza and such. It’s a bit sensitive, because sometimes they [the participants, authors’ clarification] try to frame it as a war between Jews and Muslims. Hamas are Muslims, they are extremist Muslims, and Jews... they try to place this conflict in that context. That’s when I wonder: “What can I achieve in one or two hours?” How can you...” Yes, and I think that can be described as inappropriate. It’s not good to start a discussion without being able to finish it properly. So I’m thinking... delving into this topic or discussion would take a couple of days.

Here, the civic orientation trainer highlights a potentially significant issue: can the lack of time to discuss antisemitism and/or the Israeli-Palestinian conflict lead to problems rather than foster positive outcomes? Discussions need to be in-depth, but they require more time than you currently have available.

The second missing component is the necessary skills. There is a consensus among informants on the need for greater expertise and training for staff to effectively incorporate the issue of antisemitism into the course. Many people feel that they lack knowledge on the issue. One of the civic orientation trainers (2) says: “In our country, or in our course [that of the civic orientation trainers, authors’ clarification], when we’ve undergone training, we have not received any training on the topic [antisemitism, authors’ clarification]. Nothing.” All managers agree that their staff must understand the complex topic of antisemitism in depth to work with it constructively.

Conclusions

The majority of informants perceive antisemitism as a marginal issue within the field of civic orientation, particularly when compared to other problems such as disinformation (e.g., the LVU campaign) and gender equality. Few can recall any specific antisemitic incidents occurring in their classrooms. However, our data has recorded several incidents and experiences that we interpret as either antisemitic or influenced by antisemitic thought patterns. These incidents revolve around the challenges of distinguishing anti-Zionism from antisemitism, the portrayal of Israel as a child killer, and comparisons between the Holocaust and the war in Gaza.

In one of the municipalities, the issue appears to be more pronounced than in others, as there have been more traditional antisemitic expressions regarding the belief that Jews allegedly rule the world. The discrepancy between the informants' limited experiences of antisemitism and our interpretation of their stories may stem from the prevailing minimalist understanding of antisemitism among them, which is often historically and Eurocentrically framed. This implies that more ambiguous expressions of contemporary antisemitism (such as the claim that Israel is a child murderer) are not recognised as antisemitic, but rather as anti-Zionist, and thus, in the eyes of many informants, as unproblematic. This exemplifies how structural antisemitism, that is to say culturally embedded antisemitism (Mattsson & Johansson, 2024), not only influences what people say about Jews and Israel, but also shapes their interpretations of what antisemitism is. This can lead to problematic consequences in an activity like civic orientation. Unless civic orientation trainers can identify antisemitism as it appears, newcomers will not have their own antisemitic thought patterns and language effectively challenged.

There is no coherent and systematic approach among civic orientation trainers for pedagogically addressing racist and antisemitic expressions. There are significant variations both within and between municipalities. Some civic orientation trainers use such incidents as opportunities to engage the entire class in discussion, while others prefer a more individualised approach, interrupting the discussion immediately and addressing the incident privately with those involved afterwards. A third strategy is more instructional, where civic orientation trainers interrupt the discussion to clarify what is considered right and wrong.

Moreover, the informants' statements indicate that there is no uniform or clear process for administratively handling offences. Overall, there is uncertainty and ambiguity among both managers and civic orientation trainers regarding how offences should be handled and under what circumstances a manager should be informed and take action.

When interpreting the results and conclusions, it is important to consider that the sub-study was conducted in five out of 290 municipalities (although not all of them are responsible for organising civic orientation). Therefore, the results should not be considered as statistically representative of how antisemitism manifests itself in civic orientation across Sweden. However, the results clearly highlight the issues and areas for development concerning antisemitism within civic orientation. We would like to highlight three key points:

- the lack of knowledge about antisemitism, as noted in our findings and emphasised by the informants themselves, which contributes to a failure to recognise certain expressions as antisemitic

- the lack of procedures and systems for addressing antisemitic or racist expressions, both in the classroom and administratively
- the perceived lack of time to effectively incorporate complex and sensitive issues, such as antisemitism, into civic orientation.

Since the investigation directives (2023:169) for the current review of civic orientation have identified antisemitism as a prioritised area, as emphasised by Minister Johan Pehrson (L) in interviews (Thurfjell, 2023), we believe that these issues and areas for development must be addressed to achieve a desirable outcome.

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Conclusions

Christer Mattsson, Robin Andersson Malmros & Morten Sager

This chapter presents the report's conclusions, which are derived from a synthesis of the findings and conclusions from the various sub-studies.

Since 7 October 2023, Jews in Sweden have experienced a significant rise in antisemitism within society. The most evident pattern in our qualitative survey (n=294) is that Jews in Sweden were deeply emotionally impacted by the Hamas terrorist attack. A significant proportion of the informants express fear regarding the rising antisemitism in Sweden, reporting feelings of anxiety and insecurity in their daily lives. Some have limited their activities to avoid discomfort associated with their Jewish identity. The sub-study on antisemitism in social media clearly illustrates this trend. In the month leading up to 7 October, approximately 14% (39 out of 285) of the comments on the organisation's X posts were deemed antisemitic, primarily consisting of conspiracy theories like the "Great Replacement" and other expressions linked to far-right discourse. In the month following 7 October, the number of overtly antisemitic comments surged by 387%, rising (from 39 to 190) during the investigation period. A notable shift is additionally the increased prevalence of comments that can be classified as anti-Israeli or anti-Zionist. In the month prior to 7 October, there was only one comment of this nature, whereas in the month following 7 October, it became the most prevalent type of comment (n=314). The qualitative analysis of the sub-study reveals that these comments often, but not always, contained clear antisemitic messages.

Jews in Sweden perceive contemporary antisemitism as part of a historical continuum. The survey reveals that Jewish participants feel that their cultural trauma, rooted in historical experiences, has been reawakened since the attack on 7 October. In the survey, many Swedish Jews connect the surge in antisemitism following the attack to historical events such as the Holocaust, pogroms and other forms of persecution against Jews. Today's antisemitism is therefore interpreted through the lens of these historical events, leading to heightened fear and insecurity.

Jews in Sweden feel abandoned and betrayed. In the survey and the sub-study on antisemitism in social media, Jews in Sweden report that they feel increasingly abandoned by groups they had previously relied on for support, with this sentiment varying over time. Many emphasise that there is a notable "silence" surrounding the situation of Jews in Sweden. This is perceived as a betrayal in multiple ways. These perceptions are directed, in no particular order, mainly at (a) state and local authorities, which should do more to protect Jews from antisemitism; (b) non-Jewish friends, colleagues and acquaintances, whose support is perceived as lacking since 7 October; (c) democratic institutions, such as the press, which is viewed as

biased and pro-Palestinian in its reporting and opinion-forming; and (d) the political "left" and human rights movements (particularly the anti-racist movement), which are seen as having ignored or tolerated antisemitic expressions within their ranks. In the sub-study on the media coverage of 7 October and the subsequent war in Gaza, we have not assessed the balance of media coverage. However, we observe that the responsibility for the war and humanitarian suffering is increasingly attributed to Israel, while the coverage of Hamas' responsibilities and role as a combatant is diminishing.

Jews in Sweden feel threatened by antisemitism associated with the Middle East. Among the survey respondents, a significant number express fear and concern for their own safety and that of their loved ones. The group that informants in the survey feel the most fear and suspicion towards comprises individuals with a perceived connection to Islam, Islamism, or backgrounds from Palestine or other Middle Eastern countries. The results should be considered in relation to how threats from various political, religious, or ethnic groups are perceived. Only a few respondents identify right-wing extremists as a threat. This finding is noteworthy given that right-wing extremists have traditionally been the primary threat to Jews, and it plays a crucial role in the current political discourse surrounding the sources of anti-Jewish threats in Sweden.

Antisemitism has resulted in both increased engagement with and withdrawal from society. In both the sub-study on antisemitism in social media and the survey, informants describe a divided response among Jews regarding the increase in antisemitism. On one hand, many feel that antisemitism has motivated them to engage more actively in both formal Jewish organisations and informal Jewish settings. On the other hand, many express that they have retreated from various societal activities and everyday situations. In the survey, some respondents indicated that they are contemplating leaving Sweden in search of a safer environment to live a Jewish life.

The conflict in Gaza has intensified and accelerated the "Israelisation of antisemitism." Various sub-studies in this report demonstrate, in different ways, that antisemitism has been "Israelised." This indicates that antisemitic ideas have been transferred or embedded within contexts related to Israel. Prejudices, conspiracy theories, accusations and suspicions historically held by antisemites are now projected onto Israel and its citizens in this context. We observe examples of this phenomenon in social media comments, survey responses and civic orientation classrooms. As examined in the sub-study on antisemitic concepts and expressions, numerous terms and phrases occupy a nuanced space between legitimate criticism of Israel and antisemitism. Here, the interpretation often hinges on the specific context, including the timing, location, and intent behind the expression, which collectively influence whether it may be perceived as antisemitic. In this context, we would also like to emphasise that antisemitic ideas can be conveyed unintentionally, or without the sender knowing that their words have antisemitic implications.

Antisemitism, which is becoming increasingly challenging to recognise, calls for new insights and dialogues. The report identifies several signs that antisemitism has become increasingly challenging to recognise and address, not only for Jewish individuals but also for professionals. The "Israelisation," structural elements, and digitalisation of antisemitism present significant challenges for politicians, publicists, journalists, civil society and religious

leaders, educators, community organisers, civic orientation trainers, and law enforcement officers, all of whom must identify, address, and counter antisemitism in their daily work. We believe that addressing these challenges demands the accessibility of new knowledge for these groups and others. Along with this knowledge comes the necessity of fostering constructive, inclusive dialogues that mitigate the risks of stigmatisation, polarisation and entrenched positions for all parties involved. Developing this ability likely calls for the creating of more meeting points where trust can grow beyond self-affirming echo chambers, heated comments and loud protest marches. However, effective meeting points require a minimum amount of time, which is often lacking, as demonstrated in the sub-study on civic orientation.

Concluding Reflection

This report presents a sobering view of our current times. The fact that Jews in Sweden are facing a surge of antisemitism raises fundamental questions about the health of our democracy and the freedom to express one's religious and national identity. It also raises important questions about how Jews, typically regarded as one of the most well-integrated minorities in Sweden, will perceive themselves and their place in society in the long run. The contrasting experience of receiving strong support from certain parts of society while facing antisemitism from others and silence from the rest is profoundly unsettling, echoing the historical experiences of Jews and heightening their sense of insecurity. We also believe that the broader society, particularly democratic institutions, public authorities, and civil society dedicated to tolerance, must consider how the expressions of fear, anxiety, and insecurity among many members of the Jewish minority affect confidence in coexistence and tolerance. The metaphorical barbed wire of antisemitism – its presence and potential for harm are evident even from a distance – has been drawn tighter. It is the responsibility of society as a whole to recognise and eliminate it.