What drives antisemitic hostility in the 21st century? A comparative case study of Germany, Sweden, and Russia (1990–2020)

Working paper

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Abstract

What drives antisemitic hostility in the 21st century? Competing theoretical frameworks provide different answers: the generalist framework views antisemitism as a manifestation of general outgroup hostility common to various forms of prejudice, while the particularist framework posits that antisemitism today is distinctively linked to antizionist sentiment—enmity toward Zionism, Israel, and its supporters. This study evaluates these frameworks through a comparative, longitudinal case study of antisemitic hostility in Germany, Sweden, and Russia (1990–2020), using a mixed-methods approach to integrate incident counts, victimization surveys, media analysis, and expert interviews. Findings suggest that the particularist framework better explains observed patterns of variation in antisemitic hostility, with flare-ups in the Middle East conflict generating or catalyzing antisemitic hostility in other societies depending on the strength of local antizionist sentiment. The results support new directions in prejudice research that differentiate between generalized and group-specific forms of hostility, where the latter are highly context-dependent.

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Antisemitism, "the oldest hatred", is a paradigmatic form of prejudice in the history of European and Western societies, and its current re-emergence warrants serious sociological attention. While research on contemporary antisemitism has mostly been conducted within specialized subfields (Enstad, 2023), a rediscovery of this topic is currently taking place within mainstream sociology and political science (Alexander & Adams, 2023; Enstad, 2024; Feinberg, 2020; Hersh & Royden, 2022; Waxman et al., 2022). Here, I extend this emerging literature by examining a fundamental yet understudied question: What drives antisemitic hostility in 21st century societies? Systematically addressing this question requires comparative and longitudinal approaches that can trace variation across societies and over time, but such studies are lacking in current research. Addressing a major gap, this article reports the first comprehensive comparative and longitudinal case study of antisemitic hostility in the 21st century.

Recent decades have seen widespread concern over rising anti-Jewish hostility, which is sometimes said to be at its worst levels since the 1930s (BBC, 2019; Waterfield, 2024). Thousands of violent incidents have been recorded, including multiple terrorist attacks targeting Jews and Jewish institutions (Enstad, 2017), while most incidents go unreported. International surveys have found that many Jews in Europe dare not display their identity in public and even consider emigration due to safety concerns (FRA, 2018). The global rise in antisemitic incidents after the Hamas-led attack on Israel on October 7, 2023, and the subsequent war reinforced the need to understand the broader driving forces behind such hostility across national contexts.

Theorizing about contemporary antisemitism is characterized by a division between *generalist* and *particularist* frameworks. The generalist framework, which builds on a long tradition of research on authoritarianism and prejudice (Adorno et al., 1950; Allport, 1954), proposes that antisemitism is best understood as one symptom of an underlying outgroup hostility that also targets other minority groups (Zick et al., 2008). This framework links anti-Jewish hostility to racism, islamophobia, and other forms of anti-minority prejudice that typically thrive on the far right (Wodak, 2018). The particularist framework, on the other hand, emphasizes the uniqueness, historical continuity, and contextual specificity of antisemitism (Wistrich, 1991), and sees the contemporary re-emergence of antisemitism as closely intertwined with antizionist sentiment, which

is salient on parts of the far left (Brustein & Roberts, 2015; Hirsh, 2018; Spencer & Fine, 2018) and in much of the Muslim world (Krämer, 2006; Webman, 2017).

The present research empirically probes and evaluates these competing (if not mutually exclusive) explanations of 21st century antisemitism through a comparative case study focusing on Germany, Sweden, and Russia over the period 1990–2020. Two research questions were posed: (1) What characterized antisemitic hostility in these countries in the period 1990–2020, and (2) to what extent is the variation that can be observed over time and between the countries consistent with the generalist and particularist frameworks? To answer these questions, a mixed-methods approach was used, combining qualitative and quantitative analyses using a diverse collection of data, including incident counts, data from existing victimization surveys, original samples of news articles, and semi-structured expert interviews.

By investigating the explanatory power of generalist and particularist frameworks in the context of antisemitism, this study not only advances emerging social science research on this topic. It also contributes to an emerging strain of theorizing in prejudice research that seeks to differentiate between universal mechanisms of outgroup hostility and the unique, context-specific factors that drive animosity toward particular groups (Heyder et al., 2022; Meuleman et al., 2019).

The article is structured as follows. First, I describe the generalist and particularist theoretical positions and situate them within current scholarship. Next, I present the research design and analytical approach. I then present results in two sections, answering each of the two research questions in turn. The first, descriptive research question is addressed on a case-by-case basis, tracing the development of antisemitic hostility in each country. The second research question is addressed by examining whether the variation observed between and within the three cases is consistent with the proposed explanations. In the final section, I discuss the findings.

What drives antisemitic hostility? Theoretical background

Antisemitism can be defined as "a persisting latent structure of hostile beliefs towards Jews" (Fein, 1987), beliefs that frame Jews as malevolent, cunning, and deceitful, representing a threat to the moral order and a danger to humankind. This hostility can manifest as attitudes, discourses, cultural imagery, or behavior. What I seek to trace in this study is the varying prevalence and intensity of the kinds of *hostile behavior* that may create an inhospitable or threatening environment for a Jewish minority. When it comes to understanding the drivers of antisemitic hostility in a contemporary setting, current research tends to gravitate toward generalist or particularist frameworks.

The generalist framework is based on the notion that hatred of Jews is a symptom of a more general kind of outgroup hostility. This approach was integral to early social science research on prejudice. In the 1940s, Nevitt Sanford and Theodor Adorno led the pioneering Berkeley research program on authoritarianism. They sought to understand the roots of antisemitism and the Nazi genocide by examining the psychological and societal factors that foster prejudice in general (Adorno et al., 1950), arguing that people with an authoritarian personality were more likely to exhibit hostile attitudes towards outgroups. As Gordon Allport similarly concluded, "people who reject one out-group will tend to reject other out-groups" (Allport, 1954, p. 68). Building on this work, Altemeyer & Altemeyer (1981) later developed the influential Right-Wing Authoritarianism (RWA) scale to measure authoritarian personality traits. Altemeyer's research and subsequent studies suggest that individuals high in RWA are more likely to display prejudice against outgroups, including antisemitism (Dunbar & Simonova, 2003). In brief, the generalist position, as summarized by Wodak (2018, p. 62), is that "we are dealing with an authoritarian syndrome, in which racism, antisemitism, xenophobia, homophobia, and sexism reinforce each other".

The particularist framework, on the other hand, is based on the notion that antisemitism is a unique phenomenon, a special kind of hostility whose defining features are its deep historical roots, long-term continuity, and adaptability to new socio-cultural contexts. Conceiving of antisemitism as a persistent "culture structure" (Alexander & Adams, 2023) or "a stable mental belief system" surviving over centuries (Schwarz-

Friesel & Reinharz, 2017, p. 39), particularists argue that its genesis in the early Christians' efforts to distance their new religion from its Jewish roots, with the resulting demonization of the Jews as Christ-killers, turned anti-Jewish thought and sentiment into a lasting feature of Western culture (Ettinger, 1988; Nirenberg, 2014). Proponents of the particularist view tend to see current antisemitic hostility as just the latest in a series of "changing faces" by which an age-old hatred adapts to new contexts (Laqueur, 2008). This approach ties in closely with the "differentiated threat" framework proposed by Meuleman et al. (2019), according to which "concrete realizations of attitudes towards a specific outgroup cannot be understood without paying attention to structural and contextual factors".

The particularist framework informs much recent scholarship that sees 21st century antisemitic hostility as closely entangled with enmity towards the Jewish state, variously dubbed "new", "Israel-derived", or "antizionist" antisemitism (Allington & Hirsh, 2019; Dencik & Marosi, 2016; Klaff, 2023). While traditional forms of antisemitism targeted Jews as "Jews" (a constructed and distorted image of Jews as a religious or racial *other*), antizionist antisemitism is here understood as targeting Jews as "Zionists" (a constructed and distorted image of the Jewish state and its supporters). By framing Zionism and Israel as a uniquely malevolent and illegitimate enterprise, it is argued, antisemitic hostility can be expressed in a more socially acceptable language (Hirsh, 2018; Rosenfeld, 2019; Tabarovsky, 2022). For example, Alexander & Adams (2023) has proposed that variation in 21st-century antisemitic hostility can be explained by the degree to which a given national community has incorporated societal safeguards against antisemitism, or *societalized* it. Alexander links incomplete societalization of antisemitism to changes in public perceptions of Israel and Zionism. As he contends, the tarnishing of Israel's image in the eyes of many due to its military actions and settlement policies, along with the increasing centrality of the Palestinian struggle and post-coloniality within progressive ideology, has marginalized the recognition of antisemitism in two ways: first, by ignoring or dismissing concerns over Israel-derived antisemitism, and second, by framing Jews as "white, male, and privileged", and as such legitimate targets of opposition. Current antisemitic hostility is interpreted here not as an outgrowth of a more general syndrome of outgroup hostility, but as rooted in a unique history and catalyzed by specific contextual elements.

From a generalist perspective, critics argue that the particularist framework is too narrow and risks creating a "scholarly echo chamber" where antisemitism is misconstrued as an exceptional, eternal, and inevitable phenomenon (Ury & Miron, 2024, p. 12). Relatedly, some scholars argue that the discourse on "new", Israel-related antisemitism has become "weaponized" for political and ideological purposes (della Porta, 2024; Romeyn, 2020). To avoid a theoretically naïve kind of "eternalism" as well as undue instrumentalization, generalists call for adoption of comparative frameworks, engagement with different disciplines, and broader approaches that link antisemitism to the wider issues of prejudice, racism, and xenophobia and explore their common driving forces (Bunzl, 2007; Cousin & Fine, 2012; Judaken, 2018; Yuval-Davis, 2023).

Both generalists and particularists can point to empirical studies supporting their frameworks. On the one hand, antisemitic attitudes are repeatedly found to correlate strongly with hostility towards other outgroups (Hoffmann & Moe, 2017; Kovács & Fischer, 2021; Nannestad, 2009; Zick et al., 2008). Other studies have noted similarities in the conspiratorial vilifications that target Jews and Muslims in the realm of discourse (Schiffer & Wagner, 2021; Zia-Ebrahimi, 2018). On the other hand, antizionist sentiment is also found to predict antisemitic outcomes (Cohen et al., 2009; Enstad, 2024; Kaplan & Small, 2006; Staetsky, 2020), and attacks on Jews tend to increase following flare-ups in the Israel-Palestine conflict (Feinberg, 2020; LaFreniere Tamez et al., 2024), as witnessed following the Hamas-led attack on Israel on October 7, 2023, and the subsequent war (Reuters, 2023).

However, existing studies are not well suited to adjudicate between the generalist and particularist frameworks because they focus on a single point in time, a brief time span, or a single country. Snapshot studies or single-country accounts can provide much insight, but they do not provide an adequate basis for answering the question of *what drives antisemitic hostility in the 21st century.* For this, we need precisely the kind of research called for by generalist-minded scholars, namely investigations with a broader scope, such as comparative studies that account for developments over time. Such studies, however, have long been lacking (Nonn, 2008, p. 32). Hence, the present study aims to fill a crucial gap in current social science research on antisemitism.

Design, data, and analytical approach

This is a comparative longitudinal case study with a most-different systems design. This means that cases were selected on the basis of their diversity, which enables examining whether a given set of theoretical assumptions hold under highly different conditions (Przeworski, 1970). The longitudinal aspect allows for tracing patterns of antisemitic hostility over time to examine how specific conditions in each case translate into observed outcomes across three decades. The analysis employs a "pattern matching" technique, where predictions derived from each theoretical framework are systematically compared to empirical patterns observed within and across cases (Campbell, 1975; Yin, 2009). This procedure involves determining whether variations in proposed explanatory conditions, such as general outgroup hostility or antizionist sentiment, correspond to changes in the outcome of interest—antisemitic hostility—in the ways predicted by the frameworks. One advantage of the comparative case study design is its compatibility with different data sources and analysis techniques. A mixed-methods approach was therefore used, enabling triangulation of multiple sets of quantitative and qualitative data to answer the research questions (Creswell & Creswell, 2017).

Case selection and time period

The cases chosen for this study are Germany, Sweden, and Russia over the period 1990–2020. The case selection was guided by preliminary observations suggesting divergent trajectories in antisemitic hostility: while Germany and Sweden displayed indications of intensifying hostility in the period studied (Carlsson, 2021; Embacher et al., 2019), initial evidence for Russia suggested that antisemitism had declined in the 21st century (Enstad, 2017; Sherlock, 2022). These cases were also selected because they represent highly different systems in terms of their historical experiences with antisemitism, political systems, and larger cultural contexts (see Table 1).

Historical legacies of antisemitism differ widely across the cases. In Germany, the Nazi era and the Holocaust left a troubling legacy of guilt and complicity that has deeply shaped post-war political culture. Russia's legacy of antisemitism is also significant, with its history of pogroms and antisemitic persecution both under the tsars and under Communism. Antisemitic persecution was a feature of the late Stalin era, and later

Soviet propagandists launched an “anti-Zionist” campaign that used antisemitic imagery to attack the State of Israel and its supporters (Gitelman, 2001). By contrast, Sweden served as a refuge for Jews fleeing persecution in the 20th century, including during WWII and later from Communist rule.

In terms of political systems, Germany and Sweden were liberal democracies in the period under study, while Russia moved from being a crisis-ridden democracy in the 1990s to a more authoritarian system under Putin. Even though Russia developed in an illiberal direction, legal protections for minority rights remained in place, including laws against incitement of ethnic or racial hatred. Moreover, in the period 2000–2020, Putin was generally outspoken in supporting the Russian Jewish community and condemning antisemitism.

Germany and Sweden maintained relatively relaxed immigration policies in the period studied. As a result, the foreign-born population share in both countries rose from less than 10 percent in 1990 to about 20 percent in 2020. Mounting concerns over high immigration helped far-right parties to gain influence in the 21st century (Goodwin et al., 2022; Halla et al., 2012; Rydgren, 2008; Rydgren & Tyrberg, 2020), and both the AfD (Alternative for Germany) and the Sweden Democrats came from backgrounds associated with extreme-right and antisemitic ideology. Moreover, Germany and Sweden’s per-capita levels of right-wing terrorism and violence surpassed most other countries in Western Europe over the period 1990–2015 (Ravndal, 2017). In the case of Russia, the foreign-born population share remained stable at 8 to 9 percent, but large waves of labor migration from Central Asia and the Caucasus in the 2000s created tensions that far-right actors moved to exploit, with even more violent consequences than in the German and Swedish cases (Enstad, 2018).

With wide contextual diversity, this case selection provides a virtual laboratory for evaluating competing theoretical frameworks of antisemitism, allowing to examine whether different proposed drivers of antisemitic hostility can be observed across highly varied historical legacies, political systems, and socio-cultural dynamics.

The time period chosen is 1990–2020. The year 1990 is a natural starting point because it marks the end of the Cold War period and the beginning of a new chapter in contemporary history. The study period covers the turbulent post-Communist transition in Russia and the descent into authoritarian rule under Putin. It also covers the onset

of the Second Intifada (the Palestinian uprising) in 2000, which is seen by many as a critical juncture for the development of an Israel-derived or antizionist kind of hostility toward Jews. Setting 1990 as the starting point enables checking this assumption. Setting 2020 as the endpoint was primarily a practical consideration, as it provided a finite timeframe for data collection.

Table 1: Overview of the cases

Country	Historical legacy	Political system	Jewish community
Germany	Persecution under National Socialism, 170 000 German Jews murdered in the Holocaust	Liberal democracy with strong legal protections for minority rights; far-right voting increased during 2010s	Significant growth after 1990 due to immigration from the former Soviet Union, counting about 100,000 by 2020
Sweden	Refuge for Jews during and after WWII, took in thousands of Holocaust survivors and, later, refugees from Eastern Europe	Liberal democracy with strong legal protections for minority rights; far-right voting increased during 2010s	About 15,000 Jews lived in Sweden by 2020
Russia	Repression under Tsarism, widespread pogroms in the 19th and early 20th centuries, state-sponsored antisemitism in the post-war Soviet era	Turbulent democracy under Yeltsin, authoritarian and autocratic consolidation under Putin	Large-scale emigration in the 1990s, but still one of Europe's largest Jewish populations estimated at 155,000 in 2020

Data and analytical approach

Indicators of antisemitic hostility

To account for trajectories of antisemitic hostility in each country, four different kinds of original and secondary data were analyzed: counts of antisemitic incidents, results from surveys of Jews, original samples of news coverage relating to antisemitism and its impact on Jewish life, and original expert interviews. Each data source sheds light on antisemitic hostility from a different angle, but no single source offers an unbiased view: incident counts reflect real antisemitic behavior, but are also shaped by victims' willingness to report as well as the registration and categorization practices of the institutions receiving the reports; results from surveys of Jews reflect real victimization experiences, yet are also shaped by respondents' subjective perceptions; news coverage

of antisemitism responds to and reflects developments "on the ground", but is also shaped by journalistic practices and media environments; and expert opinions, while providing in-depth insights, are still influenced by the personal experiences, professional backgrounds, and worldviews of the informants. Taken together, these various types of data enable mutual bias-checks and thus enhance overall validity (Erzberger & Prein, 1997).

Counts of antisemitic incidents were taken from the Dimensions of Antisemitism (DIMA) dataset (Enstad, 2023) and EU monitoring (EUMC, 2004a; FRA, 2015, 2021). Survey data on Jews' experiences and perceptions of antisemitism were gathered from the EU FRA surveys of Jews across Europe fielded in 2012 and 2018 (FRA, 2013; FRA, 2018) and a comparable 2018 survey conducted in Russia (RJC, 2018) and the European Jewish Community Leaders Surveys fielded from 2008 to 2019 (JDC-ICCD, 2021). These quantitative data were analyzed descriptively to identify patterns and trends, using regression models when appropriate to test the statistical significance of trends over time.

News articles were collected using the *Factiva* database for the case of Germany and a combination of the *Factiva* and *Atekst* databases for Sweden. For Russia, a combination of the *Integrum* and *Factiva* databases was used, and secondarily the online archive of the *Times of Israel* news outlet. Search queries were designed to return articles containing mention of both antisemitism and Jews or Jewish life published by mainstream national-language newspapers or news agencies as well as major English-language outlets. Non-relevant articles were manually filtered out. A target of 250-300 articles per country was set to obtain a manageable amount of data. In cases where the total number of relevant articles was small, all available articles were collected, while in cases where the number of relevant articles exceeded the target, a systematic sampling method was employed. After excluding non-relevant items, a total of 813 articles remained for analysis (see the Supplementary Materials for more detailed information).

To analyze the news data, I combined quantitative and qualitative approaches to identify themes and trace patterns in the content related to (1) the dynamics of antisemitic hostility, (2) its ideological motivations, and (3) the impact on Jews. I relied on a variant of "contextual text coding" (Lichtenstein & Rucks-Ahidiana, 2021), in which articles were first manually coded based on theoretically relevant and predefined cat-

egories, followed by analysis of these codes to examine trends over time and identify patterns of interest for in-depth examination.

I conducted semi-structured expert interviews with current and former Jewish community leaders and anti-discrimination NGO leaders in Germany, Sweden, and Russia (N = 8). Interview data were analyzed qualitatively to gain insights into experiences and perceptions within the Jewish communities. This involved transcribing the interviews, coding the transcripts based on themes of interest, and interpreting these themes in light of the research questions.

Observable implications of the generalist and particularist frameworks

To evaluate the explanatory power of the generalist and particularist frameworks, I examined different observable implications of each. To do so, I relied partly on the datasets described above and partly on additional data sources.

According to the generalist framework, we should expect to see antisemitic hostility linked to general outgroup hostility. A key observable implication is that hostility towards other outgroups should rise or fall in tandem with antisemitic hostility. To measure the behavioral dimension of general outgroup hostility, I used existing data on far-right violence. Far-right aggression typically targets ethnic, racial, religious, and sexual minorities and can thus be considered an indicator of the general level of outgroup hostility in a given society. Specifically, I used counts of incidents involving fatal far-right violence drawn from the Right-Wing Terrorism and Violence (RTV) and RTV-RUSSIA datasets (Enstad, 2018; Ravndal, 2016). While these data reflect the incidence of fatal violence only, they appear to reliably track the prevalence of non-fatal violence as well. This can be inferred from the very high country-level correlation found in the RTV data between fatal and non-fatal incidents across 18 Western European countries ($r = 0.92$) (Ravndal et al., 2023, p. 2), and the similarly high year-by-year correlation found in the Russian data across 17 years ($r = 0.93$).[1]

To measure the attitudinal dimension of general outgroup hostility, I employed a series of World/European Values Survey items asking nationally representative samples in

[1] This correlation was calculated based on the number of fatal and non-fatal violent incidents recorded by the Sova Center over the period 2007–2019, see https://www.sova-center.ru/database/.

each country at different points in time to indicate (1) which among a list of potential outgroups they would not like to have as neighbors (rejection of “immigrants/foreign workers” and “people of a different race” are taken as indicators of general outgroup hostility) and (2) whether employers should discriminate against immigrants in favor of people from the national majority when jobs are scarce (WVS, 2021).

Another observable implication of the generalist framework is that the salience of far-right motivations and perpetrator profiles should correlate with the dynamics of antisemitic hostility. Specifically, countries and periods marked by rising levels of antisemitic hostility should also exhibit an increasing share of far-right motivations and perpetrators. I measure this by analyzing the news samples, which were coded for ideological source, as well as data from existing victimization surveys.

According to the particularist framework, we should expect to see clear linkages between antisemitic hostility and sentiment related to Zionism and Israel across countries and over time. In countries and periods with intensifying antisemitic hostility, we should expect to see evidence of increasing Israel-related, antizionist, and far-left motivations and perpetrator profiles. These observable implications were examined by quantitatively and qualitatively analyzing the news samples, and by inspecting quantitative results from existing victimization surveys.

Results (I): antisemitic hostility in Germany, Sweden, and Russia, 1990–2020

Germany: sitting on packed suitcases?

What do we know about the dynamics of antisemitic hostility in Germany in the period 1990–2020? Looking first at official police statistics on violent crimes motivated by antisemitism, there is evidence of a marked increase over time. The data indicate an upwards trend from the early 1990s into the 21st century, with a substantial and statistically significant increase (Figure 1). (Note that the high number of incidents in 2023 is due to a spike following the Hamas-led attack on Israel on October 7.) Arguably, some of this increase could be a result of more societal attention given to hate crimes,

leading police authorities to focus more on detecting and recording such crimes and victims to report them more frequently. Surveys of Jews in Germany from 2018 and 2023, however, indicate a stable level of reporting of violent antisemitic incidents at about 50 percent (FRA, 2018, 2024).

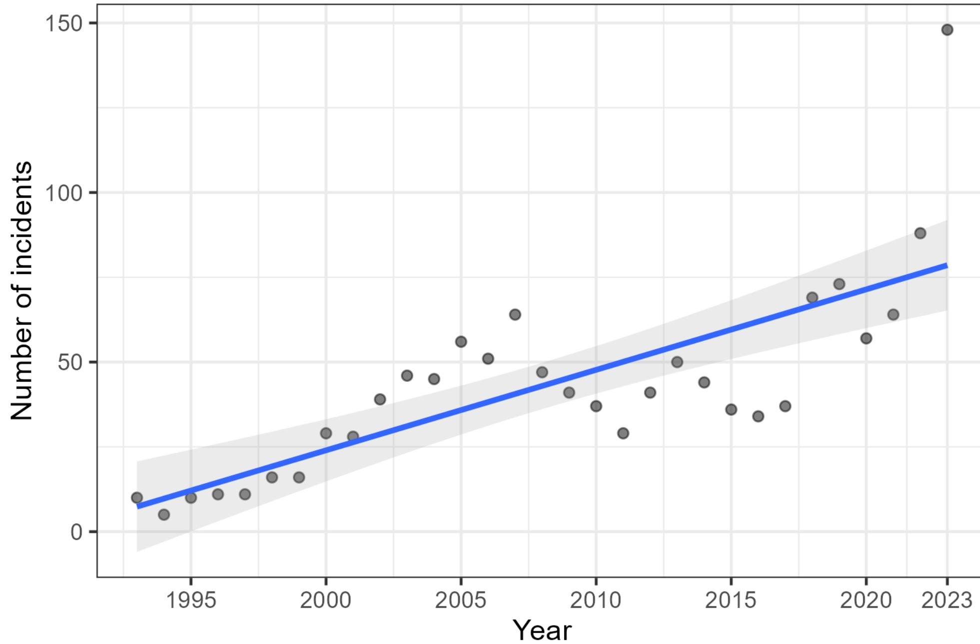


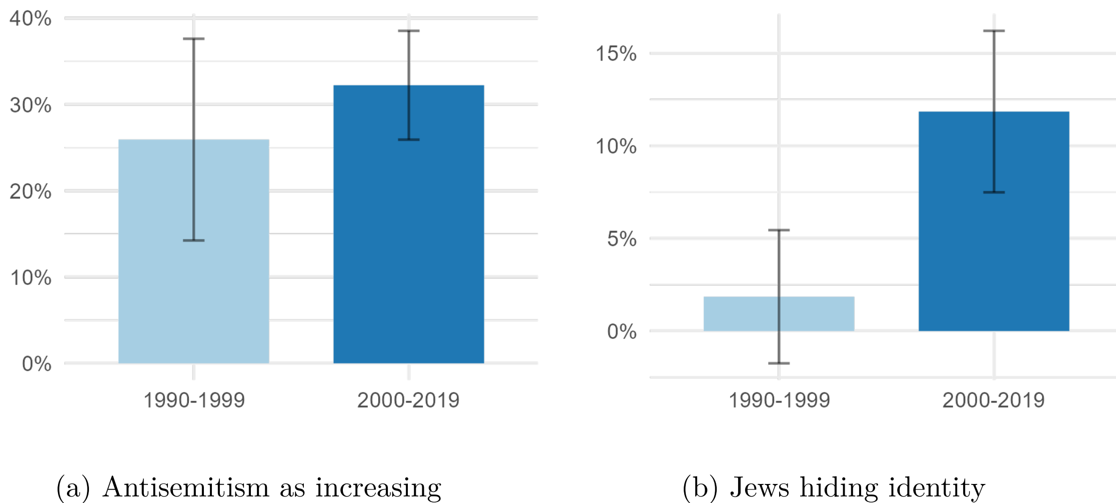
Figure 1: Violent antisemitic incidents in Germany, 1993-2019. Data source: DIMA

Turning to data produced by surveys of the Jewish community in Germany, the patterns evident here also indicate a rising level of antisemitic hostility in the 21st century. The earliest study of this kind was published in 2004, as an EU report on Jewish perceptions of antisemitism based on in-depth interviews with community leaders. The study found that hostility against Jews in Germany had become "more violent in nature" in preceding years. The report emphasized "the large number of aggressive and violent practices mentioned by the interviewees, which members of the Jewish communities reportedly suffer at work, in the streets, in the schools and universities, in public discourse, in their homes and in relation with their community institutions" (EUMC, 2004b, p. 32). In 2012 and 2018, two major EU surveys asked Jewish respondents in Germany and other countries a series of questions about their perceptions and experiences of antisemitism. From 2012 to 2018, there was a clear uptick in the share of German Jews who indicated having experienced antisemitic harassment in the past

five years (from 36 to 52 percent), worrying about becoming a victim of antisemitic violence (from 34 to 47 percent), and considering emigration due to not feeling safe as a Jew (from 25 to 44 percent) (FRA, 2013; FRA, 2018).

Repeated surveys of Jewish community leaders in Germany point to an increasing concern with safety, indicated by the share of respondents who said it feels "rather unsafe" or "not safe" to live and practice as a Jew in their community. While in 2011, not a single one of 22 German community leaders expressed such a safety concern, in 2015, five of 22 leaders did so, and in 2021, twenty-seven of the 75 respondents said they felt unsafe (Kosmin, 2012, 2018; Kosmin & Bekerman, 2016). While the majority did not express such safety concerns, the relative share of the concerned minority was increasing.

Quantitative analysis of news media coverage shows that articles referring to antisemitic hostility as increasing remained at a stable level from the 1990s into the 21st century (see Figure 2a), while a negligible number of articles referred to hostility as decreasing. The proportion of articles mentioning Jews concealing their identity in public increased significantly in the 21st century (Figure 2b), especially in the latter half of the 2010s.



(a) Antisemitism as increasing

(b) Jews hiding identity

Figure 2: Germany: change over time in proportion of news items referring to antisemitism as increasing and Jews hiding their identity (95% CIs).

Contextual examination of the news data allows a more fine-grained description of the development over time. The 1990s were marked by a wave of far-right violence that

targeted immigrants and refugees as well as Jews. In September 1991, Heinz Galinski, head of the Central Council for Jews in Germany (CCJ), stated that antisemitic attacks were "an almost everyday occurrence", including desecration of cemetaries, verbal harassment, and incidents of extreme violence such as a neo-Nazi skinhead stabbing a young Jew on a Berlin train.[2]. In 1992, the new head of the CCJ, Ignatz Bubis, stated that some Jews were considering emigrating for their own safety,[3] and two years later the Lübeck synagogue was attacked with Molotov cocktails in what was said to be the first recorded arson attack against a German synagogue since 1938.[4]

News coverage from the 2000s mixes warnings about a rising antisemitic threat with more optimistic angles. In a 2002 article, Jewish immigrants from the former Soviet Union were quoted as saying antisemitism in Germany was "nothing" compared to what they had experienced in the post-Soviet years, and a community leader in Frankfurt told reporters that the situation "is not nearly as bad as how it is portrayed in the media"[5]. A 2003 article concluded that Jews feel "safe" in Germany,[6] and other news items from these years describe a "renaissance" of Jewish life in Germany, with communities growing through immigration, new synagogues and Jewish schools being built, and a revival of cultural life.[7] Such reports reflect a larger trend that began in the 1980s in which Jews in Germany, who had been nervously "sitting on packed suitcases" in the first post-war decades, experienced a period of cultural revival and heightened self-confidence. There was increasing talk of a "final unpacking" of the suitcases (Cohen-Weisz, 2016), a sentiment expressed in 2003 by Charlotte Knobloch, a Holocaust survivor and prominent Jewish community leader, as she attended the founding of a new synagogue in the centre of Munich.[8]

However, such positive assessments stopped appearing in the mid-2010s, when the mood turned more pessimistic regarding the antisemitic threat to Jewish life, with renewed talk of packing the proverbial suitcases.[9] For example, in February 2015 the president of the Central Council of Jews in Germany publicly discouraged Jews from

[2] "German Jewish leader warns of neo-nazi resurgence", *Reuters*, September 5, 1991.
[3] "Do Jews have a home in reunified Germany?" *Reuters*, November 6, 1992.
[4] "German synagogue firebombed recalling"Kristallnacht" ", *Reuters*, March 25, 1994.
[5] "Germany still draws Jews despite anti-Semitism row", *Reuters*, June 24, 2002.
[6] "Safe Germany leads the world in attracting Jewish immigrants", *National Post*, June 7, 2003.
[7] .g., "German Jewish leader quits over drugs possession", *Reuters*, July 8, 2003.
[8] Miryam Gümbel, "Die Koffer ausgepackt", *Jüdische Allgemeine*, January 22, 2013.
[9] E.g., Thorsten Schmitz & Verena Mayer, "Notruf", *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, March 6, 2018.

displaying their identity in public, remarking that “I did not expect this development five years ago and that’s a bit shocking”.[10]. Later that year, a Jewish restaurant owner in Munich told reporters that while things had felt safe up until 2-3 years ago, now Jews feared for their safety and future in the city, with Jewish customers hiding their kippah when leaving the restaurant: “No one walks with their head held up high around here”.[11] While some reports also referred to Jews proudly displaying their identity without any incidents,[12] rejecting the “victim role”, such examples were a minority within an overall tense climate perceived as potentially dangerous.

Three German experts were interviewed for this study, including current and former Jewish community leaders and one head of a major anti-discrimination organization. All three spoke from extensive experience interacting with Jewish communities around the country and discussing problems related to antisemitism and other aspects of Jewish life. Their perspective regarding the development in Germany was, on the whole, pessimistic. Unprompted, two of them mentioned that Jews in general hide their Judaism in public (these statements, it should be noted, were recorded before the 2023 Israel-Hamas war):

> I meet [German Jews] every single Saturday in the communities, I talk to them, and they are f***ing scared and don’t know what the future of their children will look like! (Interview G1)

> Nobody is walking freely with a kippah or a Star of David on the street [...] Jews are frightened. The climate is getting worse. (Interview G2)

Regarding trends over time, the informants did not perceive antisemitic beliefs as having become more widespread since the 1990s; instead, they pointed to a reduction of inhibitions, a weakening of taboos, and an increased “loudness” and self-esteem on the part of people expressing such beliefs, leading to an increase in overt hostility and aggression and hence a reduced sense of safety among ordinary Jews.

[10] “German Jewish leader warns against wearing skullcaps”, *Reuters*, Februar 26, 2015.
[11] “Angst und Vorurteil”, *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, December 1, 2015.
[12] E.g., Wolfang Görl, “Der Hass darf nicht siegen”, *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, December 23, 2019.

Taken together, these different sets of data on antisemitism and Jewish life in Germany indicate that antisemitic hostility intensified or became more overt in its expressions from the 1990s and into the 21st century, and especially in the 2010s.

Sweden: "live your Judaism in complete freedom"?

For Sweden, data on police-recorded antisemitic hate crimes over the period 1990–2020 are more patchy and less informative than in the German case. While such figures could be collected for the period 1997–2018, tracing trends over time is complicated due to an important change in the hate crime registration regime in 2008. Before 2008, only crimes where the perpetrator belonged to Sweden's majority population and the victim to a minority group could be counted as hate crimes (Klingspor & Molarin, 2009, p. 19). Minority-on-minority hate crimes would thus not be recorded as such before 2008, and so the 1997–2007 figures are likely biased. Focusing on the 2008–2018 period only (see Figure 3), the data indicate a rise in the total number of incidents, but this trend is not statistically significant. At the same time, there was a statistically significant reduction in violent incidents in this period.

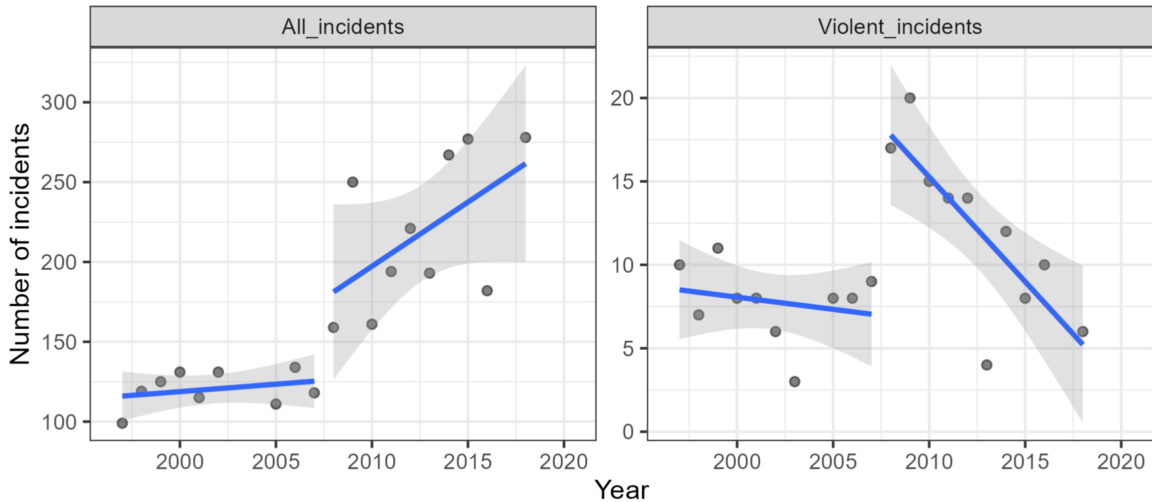
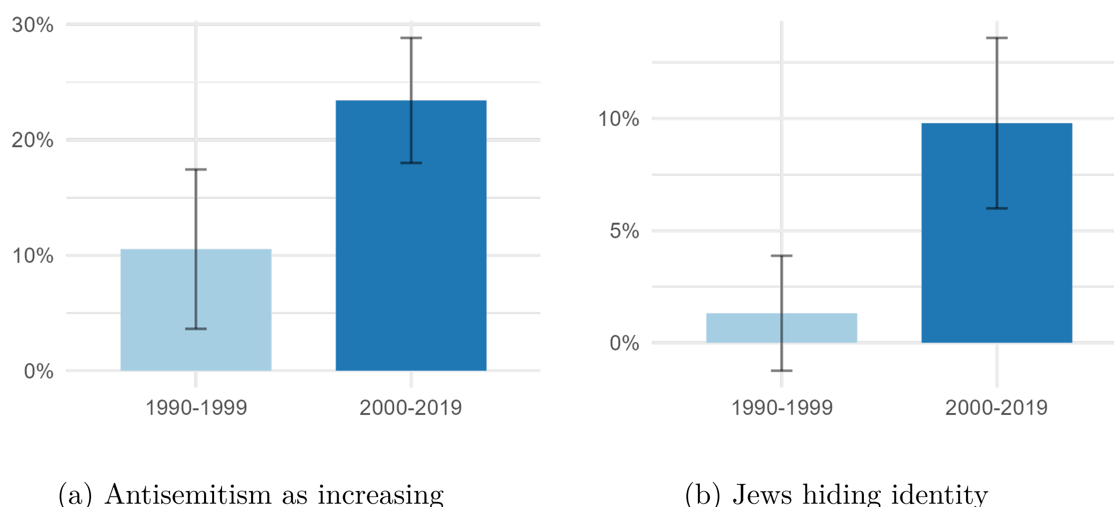


Figure 3: Antisemitic incidents in Sweden, 1997-2018. Data source: DIMA/EUMC/FRA (Enstad, 2023; EUMC, 2004a; FRA, 2015, 2021). Note: Because authorities modified their hate crime categorization regime in 2008, separate trend lines are calculated for 1997–2007 and 2008–2019.

Turning to data on Swedish Jews' perceptions and experiences of antisemitism, three surveys have been conducted: one in 1999–2001, one in 2012, and one in 2018. In 1999–2001, a sociological investigation surveyed members of the main Jewish communities in Sweden (n = 2581)(Dencik, 2005). Among these respondents, 24 percent indicated having been "personally exposed to antisemitism" in the preceding five years. Swedish Jews were surveyed again in 2012 (n = 810) and 2018 (n = 1193) as part of EU-wide surveys carried out by the Fundamental Rights Agency. In 2012, one in three respondents said they had personally experienced antisemitic harassment at least once in the preceding five years. This figure rose to 40 percent in 2018. Moreover, the share of respondents who said they had considered emigrating because of not feeling safe as a Jew doubled between 2012 and 2018, from 18 to 36 percent (FRA, 2013; FRA, 2018). These data suggest that, from the targeted minority's point of view, antisemitic hostility grew more severe in Sweden following the turn of the millennium.

What can the news data tell us about the development? Overall, news items mentioning a rise in antisemitism accounted for 11 percent of the sample in the period 1990–1999, and then increased to 23 percent in 2000–2019, a statistically significant shift (see Figure 4a). Further, the relative frequency of items mentioning Jews concealing their identity in public because of safety concerns also increased over time, from 3 percent of all items in the period 1990–2009 to 13 percent in the 2010s (Figure 4b).



(a) Antisemitism as increasing

(b) Jews hiding identity

Figure 4: Sweden: change over time in proportion of news items referring to antisemitism as increasing and Jews hiding their identity (95% CIs).

Focusing on the 1990s, qualitative examination of the news coverage identified topics such as the desecration of Jewish cemeteries, the presence of a growing movement of racist and antisemitic neo-Nazis, and the case of *Radio Islam*, a local radio station and website dedicated to spreading hatred of Jews and Israel. These issues generated a fair amount of public attention. Violent antisemitic attacks, while few and far between, were not unheard of.[13] Nevertheless, there was little to suggest a widespread sense of alarm or serious concern among Jews regarding the threat of antisemitism in the 1990s. In articles that feature interviews with Jewish community leaders, antisemitism did not figure prominently as a topic. The 1999–2001 sociological investigation by Dencik (2005), which focused on Jewish experiences and identity, made only marginal mention of the antisemitism issue, suggesting that the topic was not perceived as particularly pressing at that time. Instead, Jewish life was described in optimistic terms, as "characterized by vitality, self-assertiveness, openness towards society and visibility", with a French Jewish magazine presenting Jewish life in Sweden under the heading "Live Your Judaism in Complete Freedom" (Dencik, 2005, p. 24). In general, antisemitism appeared here as a background nuisance.

There is evidence of a changing situation in Sweden after 2000. Examining the news coverage, it is clear that Jewish community leaders began raising their voices about antisemitism. In December 2000, the head of Gothenburg's Jewish community sounded a warning about the rise of a "threatening mood" for Jews: "When Jewish boys have their skullcaps ripped off and trampled on, our foundational human rights in this country are threatened."[14] In April 2002, the head of Stockholm Jewish community stated that the threat situation had become "almost ubiquitous", a part of everyday life for many Jews.[15] Another Jewish spokesperson mentioned an "epidemic-like" threat that came in the shape of letters and phone calls as well as verbal and physical harassment against identifiable Jews in public spaces.[16] In 2010, an orthodox Malmö rabbi told reporters about shouts of "f… Jew" and other antisemitic expletives being an everyday occurrence for him and others who openly displayed their Judaism.[17] In 2013, a former community leader in Gothenburg remarked that a "new kind of antisemitism"

[13] E.g., "Judehatet ingen dagslända", *Svenska Dagbladet*, 11 September 1999.
[14] "Där borta och här hemma", *Göteborgs-Posten*, 2 December 2000.
[15] "Ökat hot mot svenska judar", *Svenska Dagbladet*, 3 April 2002.
[16] "Ökat hot mot Judiska församlingen", *Göteborgs-Posten*, 16 April 2002
[17] "Jävla jude är vardagsmat", *Dagen*, 17 December 2010.

had emerged resulting in Swedish Jews experiencing "a threat [of a kind] they had not seen for decades".[18] Similar warnings and statements of concern appeared regularly throughout the 2010s, along with interviews with "ordinary" Jews, often anonymized, about their everyday experiences with hostility.[19]

In the expert interviews, when talking about the situation in the 1990s, informants recalled the presence of neo-Nazis and skinheads who distributed antisemitic propaganda and sometimes marched in the streets (Interviews S1 and S2). They recalled real concern over these developments at the time. However, an important component of these stories was the strong political and societal counter-reactions. One informant remarked that while extreme-right antisemitism was indeed present in the 1990s, this was perceived as less of a threat because Jews felt the support of wider Swedish society:

> The extreme-right skinheads back in the 1990s were so *identified*, and society had no tolerance for these kinds of groups […] when they marched and shouted and did their Hitler salutes, the whole society went, "You're Nazis! That's a no-no!" (Interview S2)

As news data confirm, protest against antisemitism came from across the political spectrum and was often expressed publicly with hundreds or even thousands of citizens participating.[20]

Things became much more difficult later, the informant emphasized, when antisemitic hatred began to emanate not just from the extreme right but also from immigrant milieus and in connection with the Israel-Palestine conflict. While society easily came together to condemn violent skinheads, the informant felt there was "absolutely not" the same kind of reaction when attacks on Jews came from members of the Muslim minority or the far left. Partly for this reason, the informant believed that the situation "is perceived as much worse today than it was in the 1990s". (Interview S2)

The expert interviews generally pointed to a trend of increasing antisemitic hostility following the turn of the millennium. One informant stated that "antisemitism has

[18] "Jag har varit lojal mot mig själv", *Dagen*, July 9, 2013.

[19] E.g., "Kadhammar: Judarna är säkra bakom pansardörrar", *Aftonbladet*, December 12, 2017.

[20] E.g., "Protestmöte mot antisemitism", *TT Nyhetsbyrån*, 29 November 1992; "Demonstration mot antisemitism", *Göteborgs-Posten*, 10 November 1995; "Hundratals demonstrerade mot rasism", *TT Nyhetsbyrån*, 10 November 1996.

obviously grown worse in the past 10 to 15 years, so the development has gone in the wrong direction" (Interview S1). Another informant, an experienced community leader based in southern Sweden, replied in the following way when asked about whether his city currently was a safe place for Jews to display their identity in public:

> If you mean, whether Jews can feel safe when they walk around with a big, visible Magen David, a Star of David… Hand on heart, no. Some individual Jews? Yes. Because som may think: "F***k it, come what may." They are unafraid, there are those. But I believe that if you would ask Jews in general, they would say: "No, I have to make a calculation. Should I let this thing be visible? No, I'll just tuck it under here." (Interview S3)

In the expert interviews, other considerations were also voiced. One community leader felt that negativity bias in the media might result in an exaggerated picture of the antisemitism problem ("media often want to write about the negative things" (Interview S1)), while another voiced frustration about anti-discrimination organizations that are always searching for things that go badly ("this drives me mad, because I *believe* in a Jewish future in Sweden, in Europe" (Interview S2)). Even though some tension could be observed in the interviews between acknowledging a negative development and a desire to avoid exaggerating the magnitude of the problem or reducing Jews to victims, all agreed that the problem had become more severe in the 21st century.

In summary, the data on Sweden indicate a development of intensifying antisemitic hostility from the 1990s and into the 2000s and 2010s. Even though there was a downward trend in police-recorded incidents involving violence for the period 2008–2018, this trend might reflect not so much a decline in hostility, but rather an increasing tendency among Jews to conceal their identity in public or avoid certain places and events so as not to become targets. Such an interpretation is supported by the overall analyses of survey data, news coverage, and expert interviews presented here, which point in the direction of a situation marked by increased severity after 2000.

Russia: the pogroms that weren't

Data on antisemitic incidents in Russia comprise annual counts of all recorded incidents from 1995 to 2020 as well as counts of incidents involving violence, which are available from 2005 only. As Figure 5 shows, there is a clear pattern to these data: looking at all incidents, we observe an inverted V-shaped trend peaking in the mid-2000s. For the period 2005–2020, a significant downward trend in violent incidents can be observed.

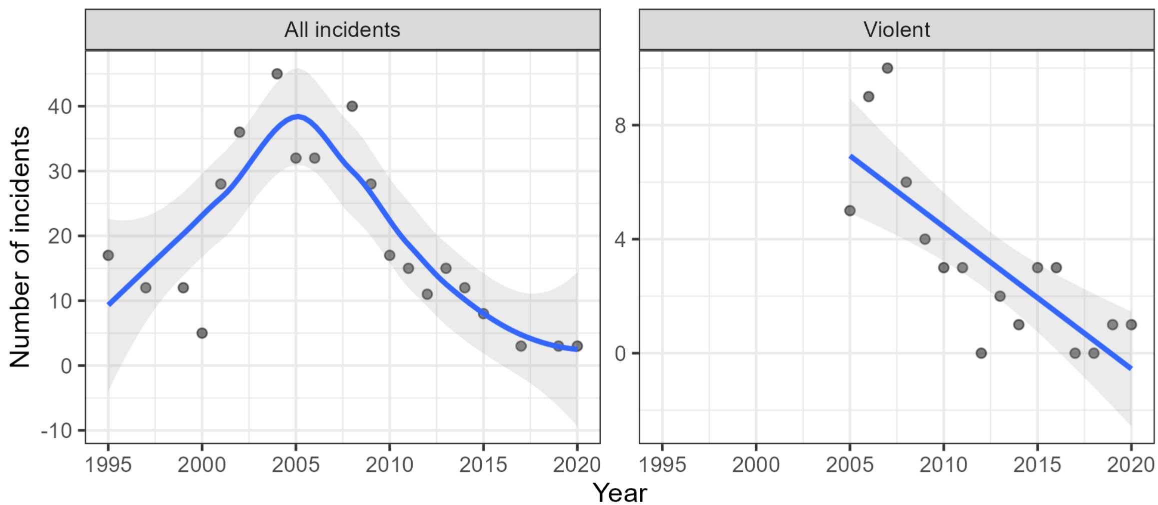


Figure 5: Antisemitic incidents in Russia, 1995-2020. Data source: DIMA

The rising level of incidents in the 1990s coincided with a tumultuous period in Russian society. While Jews had faced official discrimination in post-war Soviet society, open street-level antisemitism had been limited. This changed after Gorbachev's *glasnost* reforms in the late 1980s, which lifted censorship and opened up the Soviet public sphere to previously suppressed opinions and movements, including vocal extreme-right groups with a street presence. Scapegoating Jews, their messaging resonated with many who sought someone to blame for the economic crisis accompanying the Soviet collapse and the transition to a market economy. These conditions, as Gitelman (2001, p. 244) observes, led many Jews to fear "that the loosening of the political and social reins would allow the 'darker elements' to attack Jews and wreak social havoc". Rumors of imminent pogroms began to circulate in 1988, and continued to unnerve Jews in

Moscow and elsewhere in 1989–1991.[21] With emigration restrictions lifted, more than 1.5 million (formerly) Soviet Jews left for Israel, the United States, Germany, and other countries in the period 1988–2006. While several factors drove emigration decisions, the threat of antisemitism was important for many. For an illustration, consider the following testimony by a 37-year-old biologist who planned to emigrate to Israel with her family, given to an American journalist in 1990:

> We Jews are always made to feel that we are guests here—that this really isn't our country. From the time we were small children, we had to endure disgusting jokes about "kikes". A Jew could get ahead only by hiding his Jewishness and by pretending to be a Russian. [...] I don't want my six-year-old son, Ilya, to experience the same discrimination and mental pain I endured. And although I don't expect to see pogroms today or tomorrow, the situation is becoming more threatening for Jews.[22]

In the late 1990s, observers of Jewish life in Russia noted that "spontaneous, grass-roots anti-Semitism flourished, unchecked by governmental or social action" (Singer, 1998, p. 367). Neo-Nazis frequently vandalized synagogues and desescrated Jewish cemeteries, and in the wider public it was common to blame Jews for the country's economic and societal ills. A plethora of far-right nationalist groups were producing hundreds of periodicals, circulated in the millions, that featured antisemitic materials. Antisemitism also appeared in politics: in the fall of 1998, parliamentary deputy and Communist Party member Albert Makashov drew national and international attention by calling Jews "bloodsuckers" during a televised interview. In response to criticism, Communisty Party leader Ziuganov doubled down, accusing "Zionists" of seeking world domination and Jews of controlling the economy (ADL, 2001; Singer, 1998, pp. 367–370).

The pogroms that many feared did not occur, however. Despite recurring incidents of desecration and vandalism in the 1990s and early 2000s as well as antisemitic discourse among nationalist and Communist politicians, there were few physical attacks. Moreover, from the mid-2000s onwards the frequency of incidents declined significantly (see Figure 5).

[21] "Poll Finds 50 Percent of Soviets Want All Jews Out", *Associated Press*, September 25, 1991.
[22] "An Old Disease Afflicts the New Russia", *The Wall Street Journal*, November 26, 1990.

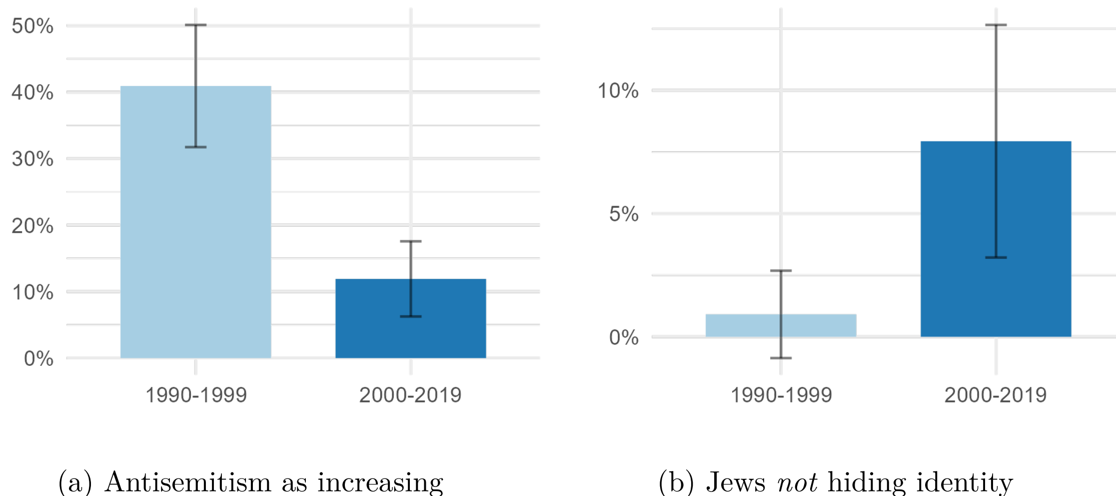
Such a decline is consistent with patterns and contextual information observed in the news sample collected for this study. From the mid-1990s onwards, voices of careful optimism became salient within the reporting on Jewish life and antisemitism in Russia. By early 1994, some prominent Jewish voices were warning against exaggerating the threat of antisemitism.[23] A *New York Times* article from late 1995 focused on positive aspects such as a decline in Jewish emigration, few antisemitic acts, an increasing Jewish population in Moscow, a flourishing of religious and cultural Jewish life, and a growing self-confidence among young Jews:

> More Russian Jews are willing to identify themselves as Jews, and more, especially the young, are doing so with pride in a country where open religious practice in general is surging after years of official repression.[24]

Pinchas Goldschmidt, who served as Chief Rabbi of Moscow from 1993 until 2022, noted in a retrospective interview that under the Yeltsin years (1991–1999), "the general atmosphere [for Jews] changed and improved" (Bou & Vapné, 2022). An important aspect of this was the new-found religious freedom: while the democratic reforms had allowed latent antisemitism to burst out into the open, they also enabled Jewish communal, cultural, and religious life to flourish as never before (Singer, 1992, p. 387).

In the news data, articles mentioning a *decrease* in antisemitism begin to appear in 1995 and recur frequently after 2000. Specifically, the proportion of articles mentioning antisemitism as declining rose from 5 percent in the 1990s to 26 percent in the period 2000–2019. Meanwhile, the proportion of items mentioning antisemitism as increasing (see Figure 6a) fell from 41 percent in the 1990s to 12 percent in the period 2000–2019. This represents a stark contrast to the German and Swedish cases, in which articles warning of increasing antisemitism predominate, especially in the post-2000 years. Furthermore, while reports of Jews concealing their identity in public due to safety concerns were increasingly apparent for the period 2000–2020 in the German and Swedish data, in the Russian case there is very little such evidence. In fact, reports to the contrary (Jews *not* hiding their identity) appear more frequently, with the proportion of items mentioning this rising from zero in the 1990s to 8 percent in the period 2000-2019 (see Figure 6b).

[23] "Russian Jews Wary of Antisemitism", *The Washington Post*, January 5, 1994.
[24] "Rebirth of Jewish Life in Russia Cuts Emigration", *The New York Times*, December 3, 1995.



(a) Antisemitism as increasing

(b) Jews *not* hiding identity

Figure 6: Russia: change over time in proportion of news items referring to antisemitism as increasing and Jews *not* hiding their identity (95% CIs).

In the news data for the 2010s, multiple statements by experts and other centrally placed observers of Jewish life in Russia add contextual depth to the quantitative patterns. Consider, for example, the following statement, made in 2017 by Elena Nosenko-Shtein, a specialist in Jewish affairs and head researcher at the Russian Academy of Sciences:

> For the past ten to fifteen years, we have been witnessing the birth of what I would call "the New Jew", that is, a Jew who has straightened his back, who is proud of his Jewishness. For instance, one of my former students, a girl I interviewed, told me that now it has become fashionable to be Jewish, it has become cool, because this means that you're successful, you're well-off, you're smart. And I have heard similar statements time and again not only in Moscow, but also in several regions where I conducted my research.[25]

Such assessments were echoed by other voices, such as the executive director of the Russian Jewish Congress.[26]

[25] "Byt evreem: modno ili opasno?", *Radio Svoboda*, February 12, 2017, https://perma.cc/C4E8-X3EF.

[26] "The Prospect for Russia's Jews", *Mosaic*, March 6, 2017, https://perma.cc/53HX-9AC9.

In 2018, results from the first large-scale survey of Russian Jews' perceptions and experiences of antisemitism were published (RJC, 2018). This survey was modeled on the EU FRA survey conducted among Jews across 12 EU countries in the same year (FRA, 2018). A key result was that 17 percent of respondents perceived antisemitism as having increased in Russia over the past five years, while 33 percent said it had decreased (43 percent said it had stayed the same). By comparison, the parallel EU survey found that nine in ten respondents in Germany and Sweden said antisemitism had increased. Furthermore, the share of Russian Jewish respondents who had experienced some form of antisemitic harassment in the previous 5 years was 15 percent, while in Germany and Sweden this figure was at 52 and 40 percent, respectively. In brief, these data indicate that antisemitic hostility was seen as diminishing and experienced as less severe among Jews in Russia in the 2010s.

The Russian expert informant interviewed for this study, who had worked closely with Russian Jewish youth for several years, agreed that being visibly Jewish in the public spaces of major Russian cities has become relatively unproblematic in the 2000s and 2010s (Interview R1). Notably, however, the informant stressed that later events, particularly the 2022 invasion of Ukraine and the 2023 Israel-Hamas war, had an unsettling and destabilizing effect on the situation for Jews in Russia. Such an assessment has been echoed by other sources (Trevelyan, 2024), suggesting that the improvement of the situation for Jews in Russia in the 21st century was fragile and reversible.

Summed up, the findings discussed here suggest that antisemitic hostility in Russia, while relatively severe in the 1990s, declined significantly in the 21st century. While further discussion of the post-2020 situation is beyond the scope of this study, it should be noted that this trend appears to have been broken after 2022.

Results (II): generalist and particularist explanations

The case analyses found that antisemitic hostility followed different paths in the three countries studied between 1990 and 2020. These diverging paths of development pro-

vide a basis for evaluating the generalist and particularist frameworks for explaining 21st century antisemitism.

Generalist accounts see antisemitism as a reflection of a more general kind of outgroup intolerance. Based on this framework, we should expect to see linkages between hostility toward Jews and hostility toward other outgroups. With regard to the cases examined here, we should expect to see evidence of intensifying hostility toward outgroups in general in Germany and Sweden over the period 1990–2020. In Russia, by contrast, we should expect to see a reduction in such hostility following the turn of the millennium. Moreover, we should expect to see far-right motivations becoming more salient over time in Germany and Sweden, and less so in Russia.

Turning first to data on far-right violence, which can be taken as reflecting the overall level of aggressive behavior towards outgroups, Figure 7 plots the number of recorded fatal incidents of right-wing violence in Germany, Sweden, and Russia over the period 1990–2020 (for Russia, data is lacking for the 1990s). Both Germany and Sweden saw statistically significant decreases in right-wing violence, despite rising antisemitic hostility, while in the Russian case there was a large wave of extreme-right violence beginning in the early 2000s in which hundreds of people were murdered and thousands injured (Enstad, 2018). These results contradict the generalist explanation, as the relationship between general outgroup aggression and antisemitic hostility is the inverse of what the generalist account would suggest. As the data indicate, aggressive behavior towards outgroups was decreasing in Germany and Sweden at the same time as antisemitic hostility was rising, while in Russia, anti-outgroup behavior increased sharply just as antisemitic hostility was declining.

Second, Figure 8 provides an attitudinal perspective on trends in outgroup hostility, based on three different measures from the World/European Values Survey. Across the measures, the emerging pattern is similar to what we observed in the data on aggressive behavior: outgroup rejection was declining in Germany and Sweden, but trending upward in the Russian case. Again, the results do not support the generalist account of 21st century antisemitism. In both Germany and Sweden, where antisemitic hostility was intensifying, intolerance towards outgroups decreased or remained low. Meanwhile, in Russia, where antisemitic hostility declined into the 21st century, intolerance towards outgroups was increasing at the same time.

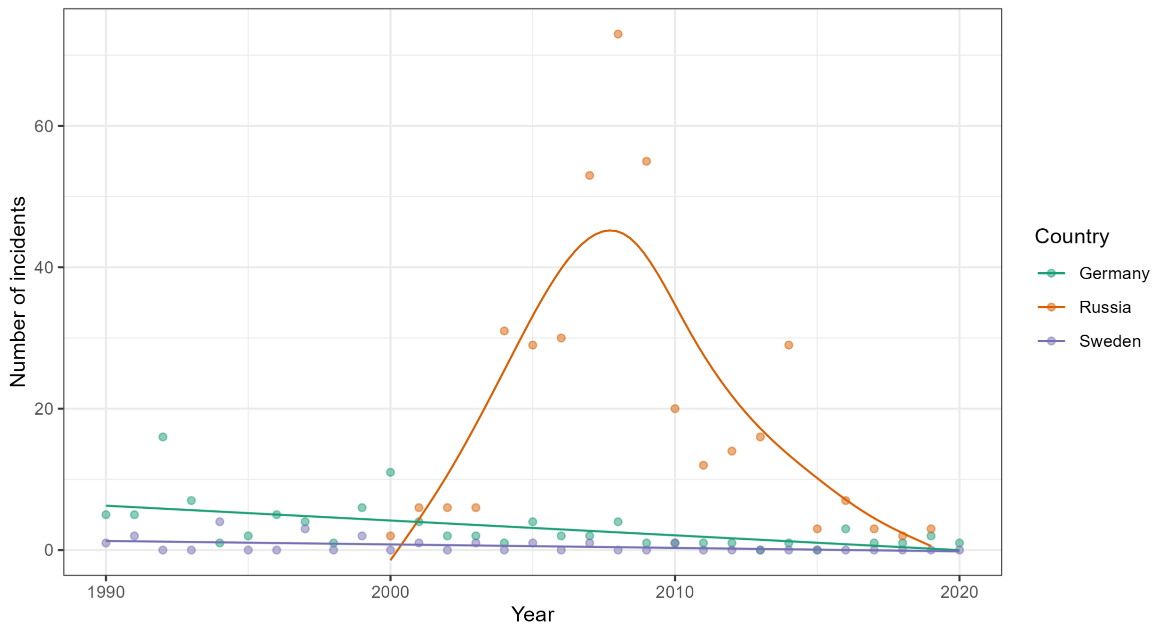


Figure 7: Trends in right-wing violence by country (fatal incidents). Data source: RTV & RTV-RUSSIA.

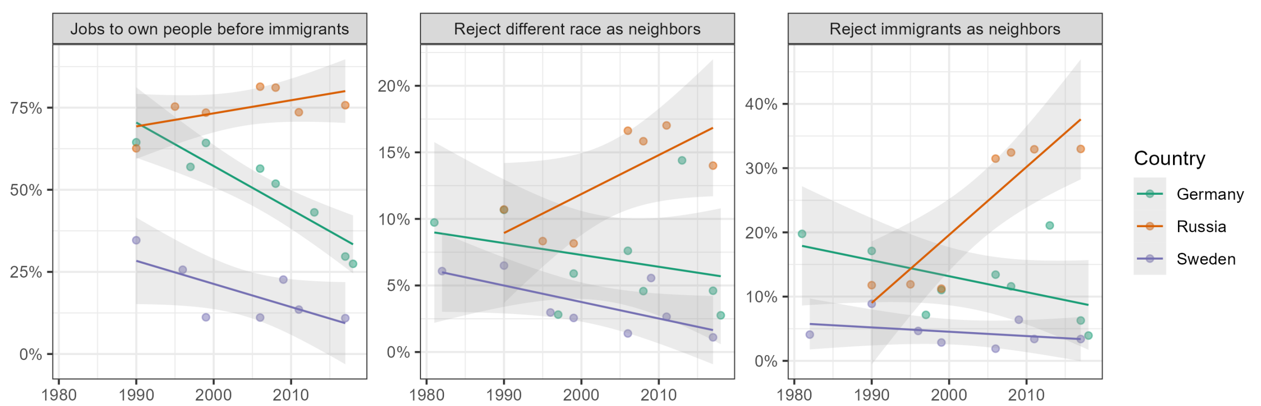


Figure 8: Trends in outgroup rejection by country. Data source: W/EVS.

Third, data from victimization surveys shed light on perpetrator motivations, as seen from the "receiving-end" perspective. Given that far-right ideology tends to target Jews alongside other outgroups, changes in the salience of right-wing motivations can serve as a way to further evaluate the generalist explanation. In the 2012 and 2018 EU FRA surveys, Jews who had experienced antisemitic harassment were asked to indicate the profile of the perpetrator(s) in the most serious incident, selecting from a list of categories. The share of victimized respondents in Germany and Sweden pointing to "someone with a right-wing political view" declined from 40 and 31 percent in 2012 to 20 and 18 percent in 2018. In both 2012 and 2018, by contrast, the share pointing to someone with a "Muslim extremist view", indicating an antizionist-type profile, was higher in both countries (47 and 54 percent in 2012; 41 and 40 percent in 2018) (Dencik & Marosi, 2016; FRA, 2018). In Russia, on the other hand, a 2018 survey modelled on the EU FRA investigation found an inverse relationship, such that a higher proportion of victimized respondents pointed to right-wing sources of hostility (27 percent) compared to Islamic sources (8 percent) (RJC, 2018). These patterns suggest that motivations based on general anti-minority attitudes, characteristic of far-right ideology, were less salient in cases where antisemitic hostility was growing more severe. Instead, antizionist-type motivations were more strongly present, which aligns with the particularist framework.

Finally, the news data were examined to trace changes in the proportion of articles highlighting right-wing sources of antisemitic hostility. As Figure 9 shows, the proportion of items mentioning right-wing sources of hostility declined from the 1990s into the period 2000–2019 in all three countries (in the German case, the decrease was not statistically significant). This again contrasts with the generalist model, which implies close linkages between antisemitic hostility and the salience of the kind of general outgroup hostility that thrives on the far right.

If hostility toward Jews has been largely driven by antizionist sentiment (enmity towards the Jewish state and its supporters), as the particularist explanation of 21st century antisemitism proposes, then we should expect to see evidence of this in the data. Specifically, countries and periods with intensifying antisemitic hostility should display evidence of such hostility being increasingly motivated by beliefs and sentiments related to Israel and the conflict with the Palestinians. In cases where antisemitic hos-

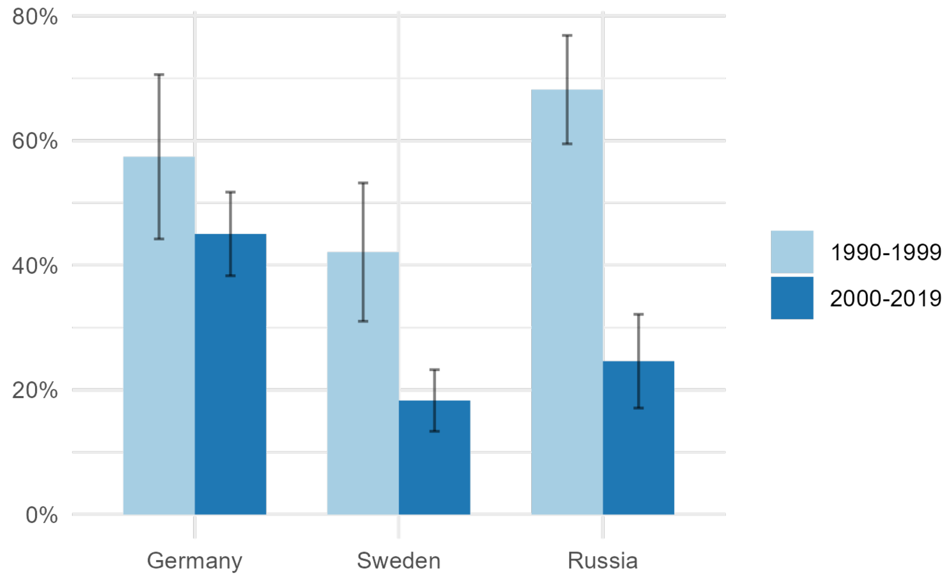


Figure 9: Change over time in proportion of news items mentioning right-wing sources of antisemitic hostility (95% CIs).

tility is lower or declining, we should expect to see such motivations being or becoming less salient. A first indication was given above, with the patterns emerging from the victimization surveys aligning with the particularist framework. Further observable implications were examined quantitatively using data from the news sample, and qualitatively drawing on the news data.

Results from quantitative analyses of the news data are shown in Figure 10, which depicts changes in the proportion of news items mentioning antizionist (including left-wing and Islamic) sources of antisemitic hostility between the 1990s and the period 2000–2019 in the three countries. While in Germany, the 1990s materials contained no mention of such sources of hostility, 45 percent of articles in the 2000–2019 period mentioned antizionist sources. In Sweden, there was also a marked and statistically significant increase, from 38 percent of items in the 1990s to 57 percent for the 2000–2019 period. In Russia, by contrast, the share of articles mentioning antizionist sources of hostility decreased sharply from 50 percent in the 1990s to 9 percent in the post-2000 period. Notably, only four articles mentioning Islamic sources were found in the entire Russian news sample, three of which focused on Muslim leaders and believers support-

ing the fight against antisemitism or enjoying peaceful relations with Russian Jews.[27] These findings support the particularist explanation, as the salience of antizionist-type motivations increased in cases of intensifying antisemitic hostility and decreased where such hostility was declining.

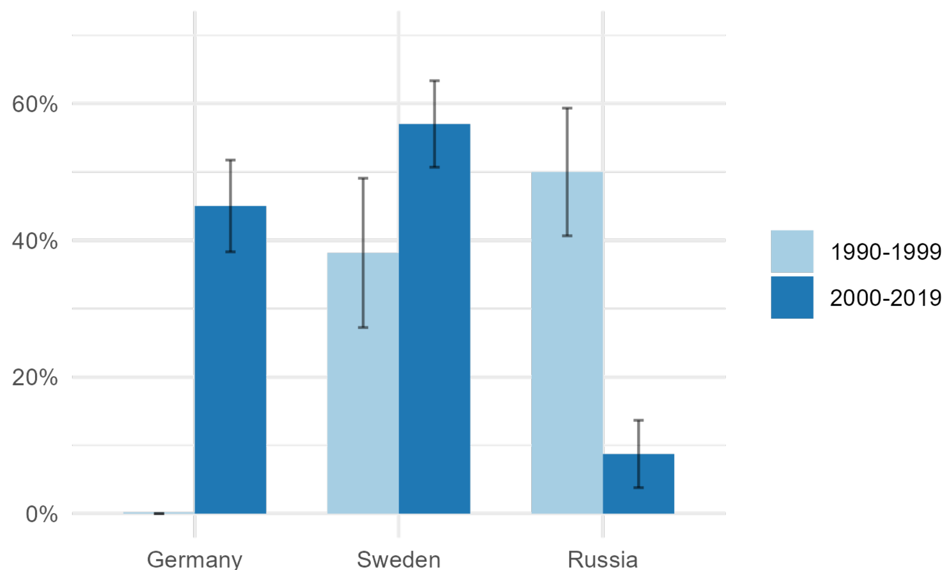


Figure 10: Change over time in proportion of news items mentioning antizionist/far-left/Islamic sources of antisemitic hostility (95% CIs).

The news data enable further qualitative probing regarding the relationship between antisemitic hostility and antizionist sentiment across the three cases. In the particularist account of 21st century antisemitism, specific events in the Middle East in the period 2000–2002 are held to be crucial: the launching of the Second Intifada in late September 2000, the subsequent wave of suicide bombings in Israel, and Israel's military operations in response, notably Operation Defensive Shield in March–April 2002. These events are often considered a critical juncture in which rising anti-Israel and antizionist sentiment in Europe led to new waves of antisemitic hostility. By examining the news coverage pertaining to this specific period, the impact of these external events on the situation in each country can be traced.

[27] E.g., "Kazan synagogue rededication hailed by Muslim, Christian leaders", *Times of Israel*, September 4, 2015; "A ia shagaiu v kipe po Moskve…", *Komsomolskaia pravda*, February 26, 2015.

Looking first at Germany, in October 2000—only days after riots erupted in Jerusalem—a synagogue in Düsseldorf was attacked with Molotov cocktails by two young men of Moroccan and Palestinian backgrounds who later told police they wanted to avenge Israeli acts in the occupied territories. Antisemitic materials were uncovered in their homes.[28] Further, in early April 2002, shortly after the Israeli army began its incursion into Palestinian cities in the West Bank, two visibly Jewish men were assaulted in the streets of Berlin. Reports described the perpetrators as a group of men with a "Middle Eastern appearance" who first asked their victims if they were Jewish.[29] Other news reports from these years mentioned the strengthening of security measures around Jewish institutions as a consequence of the outbreak of the Second Intifada. The link between external events and domestic antisemitic aggression, then, appears strong in the German case.

A similar link is evident in the Swedish case. In the southern city of Malmö, participants in an October 2000 pro-Palestine demonstration attacked a Jewish-owned shop while others brandished posters equating the Star of David with the Nazi swastika.[30] On April 18, 2002, a demonstration against antisemitism in central Stockholm was violently attacked by "a large group of persons from a pro-Palestinian demonstration". Shouts of "death to the Jews" were heard, and some people were beaten to the ground, and on May 5, 2002, another demonstration was held protesting against terrorism, calling for peace, and supporting Israel's right to exist within defensible borders. Riot police had to protect the demonstration from a large group of counter-protesters who were heard shouting "boycott Israel" and "death to the Jews". One participant in the pro-Israel demonstration described his experience of the situation: "I became terribly afraid—I have never before encountered such hatred. The atmosphere was completely loaded with something very uncomfortable."[31] In mid-April 2002, a spokesperson for the Jewish community of Gothenburg told reporters about an increased threat: "For instance, all identifiable Jews in Gothenburg, those wearing a skullcap or the like, have

[28] "Düsseldorfer Synagoge: Der Brandanschlag ist aufgeklärt", *Der Tagesspiegel*, December 27, 2000.
[29] "Gang attacks American Jews in Berlin street", *Reuters News*, April 2, 2002.
[30] "Den 9 november arrangerades i Malmö en demonstration", *Svenska Dagbladet*, November 16, 2000.
[31] "Medierapportering spär på våldsspiralen", *Svenska Dagbladet*, May 13, 2002.

been subjected to verbal or physical threats since the *Intifada* broke out 18 months ago".[32]

In the Russian case, the data suggest a different picture. News coverage from the early 2000s mentions some episodes related to extreme-right antisemitism, but there was no mention of the kind of Israel-related antisemitic expressions that were observed in Germany and Sweden. Instead, coverage focused on an improving situation for the Jewish community, with talk of a new "pride in being Jewish", "coming out of the closet", a drop in Jewish emigration, and a reduction of everyday antisemitism in the big cities.[33] In April 2002, a large demonstration with several thousand participants expressing support for Israel and condemning terrorism took place in central Moscow. There was no report of any clashes or threats from pro-Palestinian counter-demonstrators.[34]

While events in Israel/Palestine in the period 2000–2002 were closely linked, temporally and contextually, to expressions of antisemitic hostility in the cases of Germany and Sweden, no such link could be observed in the Russian case. This differential response suggests that the external events did not directly cause antisemitic hostility, but that their impact instead depended upon the strength of existing antizionist sentiment. These observations, again, are in line with expectations derived from the particularist framework.

Overall, quantitative and qualitative findings suggest a development that does not match the patterns we would expect to see based on the generalist framework. Across the cases of Germany, Sweden, and Russia, diverse data covering three decades suggest a disconnection between general outgroup hostility and antisemitic hostility. Instead, the particularist framework, which highlights the role of antizionist or anti-Israel sentiment, appears to better account for the divergent trajectories observed.

While beyond the scope of this study, events following the Hamas-led attack on Israel on October 7, 2023, and the subsequent war have provided new observations on which to evaluate competing explanations. To the extent that sharp increases in antisemitic hostility were recorded, this was largely tied to antizionist motivations, and not to actors and movements marked by hostility toward minorities in general. This is true

[32] "Ökat hot mot Judiska församlingen", *Göteborgs-Posten*, April 16, 2002.
[33] "A Wave of Jews Returning to Russia", *The Moscow Times*, August 4, 2004.
[34] "Sovsem blizhnii vostok", *Novaia gazeta*, April 29, 2002.

for Germany (RIAS, 2023), Sweden (Mattson et al., 2024), and even Russia. When antisemitic riots broke out in the North Caucasus in late October 2023, it was a pro-Palestinian crowd—not an extreme-right mob—that stormed the Makhachalka airport and tried to attack passengers landing on a flight from Tel Aviv (Nemtsova, 2023). In countries where antizionist sentiment does not have a strong foothold, such as the Czech Republic or Hungary, there was no comparable explosion in antisemitic hostility after October 7, with observers instead referring to places like Prague and Budapest as among Europe's safest places for Jews (Pancevski, 2024). These recent events, then, provide further support for the central role of antizionist sentiment in generating or catalyzing antisemitic hostility in 21st century.

Concluding discussion

This study identified two prominent theoretical frameworks that offer different answers to the question of what drives 21st century antisemitism. While the generalist framework sees antisemitic hostility as a reflection of general outgroup intolerance and as such a symptom of "group-focused enmity" (Zick et al., 2008), the particularist framework sees antisemitism as a unique phenomenon that is different from general prejudice and more closely linked, in the contemporary context, to antizionist or anti-Israel sentiment. The explanatory power of these frameworks was evaluated through a comparative case study of antisemitic hostility in Germany, Sweden, and Russia between 1990 and 2020.

Using a mixed-methods approach and diverse data sources, trajectories of antisemitic hostility were traced in the three countries. The analyses found that, overall, hostility grew increasingly severe from the 1990s into the 21st century in Germany and Sweden, but declined significantly in Russia after a peak in the 1990s. At the same time, general outgroup hostility, whether measured in behavioral or attitudinal terms, was declining in Germany and Sweden but rising in Russia, while the salience of far-right motivations and perpetrator profiles did not reliably track variation in levels of antisemitic hostility between the countries and over time. These patterns are inconsistent with the generalist framework, according to which we would expect to find a close linkage between antisemitism and general intolerance of outgroups.

Findings instead support the particularist framework, as the salience of antizionist/anti-Israel motivations and perpetrator profiles was closely linked to variation in antisemitic hostility across the three countries and the thirty-year period. In particular, it was found that external events in the Middle East in the early 2000s triggered waves of antisemitic hostility within Germany and Sweden, where antizionist motivations and perpetrator profiles were clearly and increasingly present, but not in Russia, where such motivations and perpetrator profiles were comparatively absent. The findings suggest that antizionist sentiment serves as a key mediating factor, such that flare-ups in the Middle East conflict generate antisemitic hostility in other societies depending on the strength of local antizionist sentiment.

These results align with recent empirical research highlighting the significance of the "Israel factor" in explaining variation in antisemitic incidents (Feinberg, 2020; LaFreniere Tamez et al., 2024), hateful discourse online (Becker et al., 2022; Schwarz-Friesel & Reinharz, 2017), and Jews' experiences of antisemitic violence and harassment (Enstad, 2024). To emphasize this factor is certainly not to equate criticism of Israeli policies or military operations with antisemitism. Rather, these findings suggest the need for social scientists to further examine the specific conditions under which enmity toward the Jewish state might generate, catalyze, or mask hostility and aggression targeting Jews.

When interpreting the results of this study, the level of analysis should be kept in mind. Patterns observed here pertain to variation in antisemitic hostility between countries, not among individuals. Hence, the observation of a divergence between antisemitic hostility and general outgroup enmity on the country level does not invalidate the claim that generalized intolerance of outgroups plays a role in explaining individual antisemitic attitudes. Rather, the findings reported here indicate that the societal dynamics of antisemitism do not depend on levels of general anti-minority sentiment.

With regard to the broader literature on prejudice, these findings carry implications for recent theoretical advances that distinguish between two facets of prejudice: generalized attitudes toward outgroups, which are more universal and rooted in ideologies of inequality, and specific social prejudices that are more strongly shaped by contextual factors (Heyder et al., 2022; Meuleman et al., 2019). The distinction between these two facets is supported, as antisemitic hostility in a contemporary setting appears to

be a prime example of a highly context-specific type of prejudice that is weakly tied to generalized hostility toward minorities and strongly linked to varying configurations of social and cultural conditions, in particular the presence and strength, in a given society at a given time, of antizionist or anti-Israel sentiment.

An essential question for future research on prejudice, as stressed by Heyder et al. (2022), is "why the devaluation of specific groups varies over time and over different countries". Besides long-term historical and cultural factors, these authors highlight the potential role of more short-term national circumstances such as elite discourse and media attention. While the present study points to the role of antizionist sentiment in generating or catalyzing antisemitic hostility at the societal level, the specific mechanisms by which such a process might operate remain to be explored, and here the role of media framing—in particular, relating to the Middle East conflict—is a potential candidate for exploration (Entman, 1993; Schemer, 2014). For example, future studies might use framing experiments to investigate the effects of different narratives about Israel's role in the conflict on individual attitudes toward Jews (Beyer & Liebe, 2015; Kaushal et al., 2022). Aided by advances in computational text analytics, scholars could also study media coverage cross-nationally and longitudinally, testing effects on observable dynamics of hostility (Guo et al., 2023).

This study has limitations. Findings reported here cover three countries and can only tentatively answer the question of *what drives antisemitic hostility in the 21st century*. Other countries may display different patterns that may be inconsistent with the particularist framework or suggest another explanatory model. Hence, future comparative research should involve a larger number of cases. As in-depth comparative case studies are unfeasible with a larger N, further inquiry could make use of Qualitative Comparative Analysis (QCA), a set-theoretical approach that uses Boolean logic to identify patterns of causal and outcome conditions across a larger number of cases (Rihoux & Ragin, 2008; Schneider & Wagemann, 2012). From a QCA perspective, researchers might start with a small number of in-depth case studies to develop theoretical expectations and identify potential causal pathways in a highly contextualized setting. These insights can then be tested and further developed using a larger number of cases with QCA, examining whether identified patterns hold across a wider variety of contexts. Such an approach would provide a stronger basis for making causal claims

about the social determinants of antisemitic hostility in contemporary societies, which can in turn inform international policy to counter antisemitism and safeguard Jewish life.

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