



# What Drives Antisemitic Hostility in the Twenty-First Century? A Comparative Case Study of Germany, Sweden, and Russia (1990–2020)

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## Abstract

Public concern about antisemitism has increased globally in the twenty-first century, sparking renewed interest from social scientists. However, the crucial question of why trajectories of antisemitic hostility differ between countries remains unanswered due to a lack of studies designed to track temporal and cross-national variation. Addressing this gap, I evaluate the explanatory power of two main lines of argument that divide the literature: generalist and particularist. While generalists see antisemitism as a manifestation of general outgroup hostility common to various forms of prejudice, particularists stress the contextual specificity of antisemitism and posit that its twenty-first-century expressions are distinctively linked to anti-Zionist sentiment (enmity toward Israel and its supporters). I derive observable implications from these positions and conduct 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 match predictions from the particularist position, with flare-ups in the Israel–Palestine conflict generating or catalyzing antisemitic hostility depending on the strength of local anti-Zionist sentiment, thus demonstrating the centrality of the “Israel factor” in contemporary antisemitism.

**Keywords** Antisemitism · Antizionism · Jews · Comparative case study · Germany · Sweden · Russia

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## Introduction

The twenty-first-century resurgence of antisemitic hostility has generated widespread concern (BBC 2019; The White House 2023; Waterfield 2024). Thousands of hate crimes have been recorded, including multiple terrorist attacks targeting Jews and Jewish institutions, while most incidents go unreported (Enstad 2005). Meanwhile, a substantial share of Jews in Europe dare not display their identity in public and even consider emigration due to safety concerns (Fundamental Rights Agency [FRA] 2018, 2024). These trends were already evident before the Hamas-led attack on Israel on 7 October 2023. They have intensified amid the ensuing war, with a new surge in anti-Jewish incidents globally (Reuters 2023; Jones 2024), reinforcing the need to understand the driving forces behind this development.

Antisemitism is a paradigmatic form of prejudice in the history of European and Western societies. From medieval beliefs about well poisoning to modern myths about global financial control, anti-Jewish hostility has often served as a barometer of broader social and political unrest. Its intensification in the twenty-first century therefore warrants serious attention from social scientists. While research on contemporary antisemitism has mostly been conducted within specialized subfields, a rediscovery of the topic is currently taking place within mainstream political science and sociology (Alexander and Adams 2023; Feinberg 2020; Hersh and Royden 2022; Waxman et al. 2022; Enstad 2024; Binstok et al. 2024). Here, I extend this emerging literature by examining a fundamental yet understudied question: What drives antisemitic hostility in twenty-first-century societies? Systematically addressing this question requires approaches that can trace variation across societies and over time, but such studies are lacking. This article fills a major gap by reporting the first comprehensive comparative and longitudinal case study of antisemitic hostility in the twenty-first century.

Debates about the drivers of contemporary antisemitism broadly revolve around two main lines of argument with different sets of theoretical underpinnings: what I term the *generalist* and *particularist* perspectives. The generalist approach, which builds on a long tradition of research on authoritarianism and prejudice (Adorno et al. 1950; Allport 1954), holds that antisemitism is best understood as one symptom of an underlying outgroup hostility that also targets other minority groups (Zick et al. 2008). This perspective 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 approach, in contrast, emphasizes the uniqueness, historical continuity, and contextual specificity of antisemitism (Wistrich 1991) and tends to see its contemporary expressions as closely intertwined with anti-Zionist or strongly anti-Israel sentiment, which has been pronounced on parts of the far left (Hirsh 2018; Brustein and Roberts 2015; Spencer and Fine 2018) and in much of the Muslim world (Krämer 2006; Webman 2017). Critics of the generalist view see it as lacking sensitivity to the unique cultural configurations that underpin antisemitic hostility, and raise concerns that focusing too much on the far right risks overlooking other sources of hostility. Critics of the particularist position, however, find it too reliant on an “eternalist” view of antisemitism as unchanging through the centuries

and see the focus on far-left and Islamic sources of hostility as overlooking threats from the far right.

To empirically evaluate these competing explanations for twenty-first-century antisemitism, I conducted a comparative case study focusing on Germany, Sweden, and Russia over the period 1990–2020. Two research questions (RQs) were posed: (RQ1) What characterized antisemitic hostility in these countries in the period 1990–2020, and (RQ2) to what extent is the variation that can be observed over time and between the countries consistent with the generalist and particularist arguments? 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.

This study offers multiple contributions to the literature on antisemitism and prejudice. First and foremost, it provides a first systematic effort to empirically adjudicate between central explanatory lines of argument concerning twenty-first-century antisemitic hostility: the generalist and particularist perspectives. By deriving and testing observable implications from these competing positions, a basis for cumulative knowledge building is provided. Second, methodologically, the present research relies on a comparative and longitudinal design, which represents a significant addition to a literature consisting largely of single-country studies and analyses that do not incorporate change over time. Finally, the findings contribute more broadly to recent theorizing in prejudice research that seeks to differentiate between universal explanations of outgroup hostility and context-specific factors that drive animosity toward specific groups. Meuleman et al. (2019) have proposed a “differentiated threat” framework, arguing that an exclusive focus on generalized prejudice blinds us to the ways in which prejudices can have contextual, group-specific antecedents. Similarly, Heyder et al. (2022) revised the influential concept of group-focused enmity, which explains prejudice as the result of a generalized ideology of inequality (Zick et al. 2008), instead proposing a two-dimensional model that distinguishes between generalized xenophobic attitudes and group-specific hostility. By empirically evaluating generalist versus particularist explanations of twenty-first-century antisemitic hostility, this study provides new evidence to bear on this differentiated understanding of prejudice.

The rest of this article is structured as follows: First, I describe the generalist and particularist approaches 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 over time in each country. I then proceed to address the second research question by examining whether the patterns of variation observed between and within the three cases are consistent with the proposed explanations. In the final section, I discuss the findings and propose directions for future research.

## Explaining Twenty-First-Century Antisemitism: Contested Positions

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 in a given society. To understand the drivers of antisemitic hostility in the contemporary context, scholars have largely gathered around two distinct lines of argument—generalist and particularist—with different theoretical underpinnings and different implications for how variation across space and over time should be understood. In this section, I review these competing explanations and derive observable implications from each of them.

### The Generalist Position

The generalist argument is based upon the notion that hatred of Jews is a symptom of a more general kind of outgroup hostility, a perspective that has been integral to social science research on prejudice since its inception. In the 1940s, Nevitt Sanford and Theodor Adorno led the pioneering Berkeley research program on authoritarianism. Seeking 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), they argued that people with an authoritarian personality were more likely to exhibit hostile attitudes toward outgroups. As Gordon Allport similarly concluded, “people who reject one out-group will tend to reject other outgroups” (Allport 1954). In later decades, a substantial body of work in social psychology has continued to show how prejudice tends to generalize across outgroups (Dovidio et al. 2008; McFarland 2010; Zick et al. 2008). Research based on the influential Right-Wing Authoritarianism (RWA) scale developed by Altemeyer and Altemeyer (1981) to measure authoritarian personality traits suggests that individuals high in RWA are more likely to display prejudice against outgroups, including antisemitism (Dunbar and Simonova 2003).

The generalist perspective derives much of its weight from historical observations, perhaps most prominently the fate of minorities under Nazi rule. Besides Jews, the Nazi regime’s murderous policies targeted other groups such as Roma, people with disabilities, and people who are homosexual. This pattern of simultaneous hostility toward Jews and other outgroups has persisted as a feature of far-right movements emerging in the postwar era across Europe, from France to Hungary and from Greece to Scandinavia (Wodak 2018; Mudde 2002; Simonsen 2020; Efron and Blogger 2014; Shields 2007). In brief, the generalist position, as summarized by Wodak (2018), is that “we are dealing with an authoritarian syndrome, in which racism, antisemitism, xenophobia, homophobia, and sexism reinforce each other.”

**Observable implications:** If the generalist argument holds, we should expect to see a clear link between antisemitic hostility and indicators of general outgroup

hostility. A key observable implication is that hostility toward other outgroups or minorities should rise or fall in tandem with antisemitic hostility. Moreover, the generalist position leads us to expect that countries and periods marked by higher or rising levels of antisemitic hostility will also exhibit a higher or increasing share of far-right motivations and perpetrators linked to antisemitic events.

### The Particularist Position

The particularist argument, in contrast, 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 sociocultural contexts. Conceiving of antisemitism as a persistent “culture structure” (Alexander and Adams 2023) or “a stable mental belief system” surviving over centuries (Schwarz-Friesel 2017), scholars within this tradition 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 (Nirenberg 2014; Ettinger 1988). 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).

The particularist perspective informs much recent scholarship that sees twenty-first-century antisemitic hostility as closely entangled with enmity toward the Jewish state, variously dubbed “new,” “Israel-derived,” or “anti-Zionist” antisemitism (Dencik and Marosi 2016; Klaff 2023; Allington and Hirsh 2019). While traditional forms of antisemitism targeted Jews as “Jews” (a constructed and distorted image of Jews as a religious or racial *other*), anti-Zionist 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 (Rosenfeld 2019; Hirsh 2018; Tabarovsky 2022). For example, Jeffrey Alexander and Tracy Adams have proposed that variation in twenty-first-century antisemitic hostility can be explained by the degree to which a given national community has incorporated societal safeguards against antisemitism, or *societalized* it, linking incomplete societalization of antisemitism to changes in public perceptions of Israel and Zionism (Alexander and Adams 2023). As they contend, 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 postcoloniality 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 coding 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.

**Observable implications:** According to the particularist argument, 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, anti-Zionist, and far-left motivations and perpetrator profiles. Moreover, the particularist position leads us to expect that the much-discussed link between Middle East conflict events involving Israel and antisemitic outbursts in other countries is not universal, but dependent on the presence and strength of local anti-Zionist sentiment.

Questions of Israel-related and Islamic antisemitism are central to broader debates among antisemitism scholars about how to define and measure contemporary anti-Jewish hostility. In a 2018 American Historical Review roundtable on “rethinking antisemitism,” Judaken (2018), Feldman (2018b), Ury (2018), and others drew attention to precisely the questions that divide generalist and particularist perspectives: How, and under what conditions, do events in the Middle East lead to hostility toward Jews in Europe? When, if ever, does anti-Zionism spill over into antisemitism? Ongoing debates and contestations regarding the content and function of specific definitions (Feldman and Volovici 2023; Penslar 2022) crystallize these disagreements. This article is not an attempt to resolve these normative and definitional disputes. Instead, the generalist/particularist framework is used here in a more limited, empirical sense: as generating competing expectations about when and where antisemitic hostility will rise, and about the relative importance of (a) broader contexts of outgroup hostility and (b) Israel-related, anti-Zionist mobilization as drivers of that hostility.

From a generalist standpoint, critics argue that the particularist approach is too narrow and risks creating a “scholarly echo chamber” where antisemitism is misconstrued as an exceptional, eternal, and inevitable phenomenon (Ury and Miron 2024). Relatedly, some scholars argue that the discourse on “new,” Israel-related antisemitism has become “weaponized” for political and ideological purposes, with the aim of silencing legitimate criticism of Israeli policies and military actions (Donatella 2024; Romeyn 2020). To avoid a theoretically naïve kind of “eternalism” as well as undue instrumentalization, generalists call for adoption of comparative perspectives, 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 (Judaken 2018; Yuval-Davis 2023; Bunzl 2007; Cousin and Fine 2012).

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

However, existing studies are not well suited to empirically adjudicate between these competing explanations, 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 twenty-first century*, because this is fundamentally a question about patterns of change over time. 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 not only across national contexts but also over time. Such studies, however, have long been lacking (Nonn 2008). Hence, the present research aims to fill an important gap in the social science literature on antisemitism.

## Design, Data, and Analytical Approach

This is a comparative longitudinal case study employing diverse case selection to evaluate competing theoretical explanations of antisemitic hostility. Cases were selected to represent variation across important contextual factors (historical legacies, political systems, cultural contexts), which enables examining whether generalist or particularist explanations better account for observed patterns across highly different settings (Seawright and Gerring 2008). 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 explanatory approach are systematically compared with 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 anti-Zionist sentiment, correspond to changes in the outcome of interest—antisemitic hostility—in the ways predicted by the competing explanations. A key 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 and Creswell 2017).

## Case Selection and Time Period

The cases chosen for this study are Germany, Sweden, and Russia over the period 1990–2020. These cases were selected because they represent highly different systems in terms of their historical experiences with antisemitism, political systems, and larger cultural contexts (Table 1) while also providing providing variation in factors relevant to both generalist and particularist explanations.

Historical legacies of antisemitism, which might have a long-term lingering impact on present-day levels of antisemitism (Voigtländer and Voth 2012), 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 postwar political culture.

**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 increase during the 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 increase during the 2010s	About 15,000 Jews living in Sweden by 2020
Russia	Repression under Tsarism, widespread pogroms in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and state-sponsored antisemitism in the postwar 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

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 twentieth century, including during World War II (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% in 1990 to about 20% in 2020. Mounting concerns over high immigration helped far-right parties to gain influence in the twenty-first century (Rydgren 2008; Rydgren and Tyrberg 2020; Halla et al. 2012; Halla et al. 2012; Goodwin et al. 2022), and both the Alternative for Germany (AfD) and the Sweden Democrats came from backgrounds associated with extreme-right and antisemitic ideology. Moreover, per-capita levels of right-wing terrorism and violence in Germany and Sweden surpassed most other countries in Western Europe over the period 1990–2015 (Ravndal and Aasland 2017). In the case of Russia, the foreign-born population share remained stable at 8–9%, 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 explanations of antisemitism, allowing for the examination of whether different proposed drivers of antisemitic hostility can be observed across highly varied historical legacies, political systems, and sociocultural 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 European 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 anti-Zionist kind of hostility toward Jews. Setting 1990 as the starting point enables this assumption to be checked. Setting 2020 as the endpoint was primarily a practical consideration, providing a finite timeframe for data collection. While the study does not systematically cover developments after 2020, including the Hamas-led attack on Israel on 7 October 2023 and the subsequent war, I briefly examine these recent events to assess whether they provide additional evidence for the explanations examined.

## Data and Analytical Approach

### Measuring 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 of these sources of information comes with limitations: 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 and triangulated, these various types of data enable mutual bias checks and improve measurement validity (Erzberger and Prein 1997). For example, if incident counts suggest a steady rise in hostility while victimization surveys, news coverage, and expert interviews indicate otherwise, then we can assume that the increase was in levels of reporting, not overall hostility.

Counts of antisemitic incidents were taken from the Dimensions of Antisemitism (DIMA) dataset (Enstad 2023) and EU monitoring (European Monitoring Centre on Racism and Xenophobia [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), a comparable 2018 survey conducted by the Levada Center in Russia (Russian Jewish Congress [RJC] 2018), and the European Jewish Community Leaders Surveys fielded from 2008 to 2019 (American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee International Centre for Community Development [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 further details about search terms and sources selected).

Given the increasingly authoritarian rule under Putin, one might be concerned about the quality of the Russian news data. While it is true that the media environment became more restrictive in terms of political criticism, and especially so following the invasion of Ukraine in 2022 (Gehlbach et al. 2022), Russian news outlets continued to report extensively on societal problems, including extremism and anti-minority hostility, throughout the study period. For example, the surge in extreme-right violence during the late 2000s received substantial coverage. Hence, there is little to indicate that that news reporting on antisemitic hostility was being systematically suppressed during the timeframe analyzed.

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 (rising, declining, or staying the same), (2) its ideological sources (right-wing, left-wing, anti-Zionist, Christian, or Islamic), and (3) the impact on Jews (hiding one's Jewish identity in public or not). I relied on a variant of "contextual text coding" (Lichtenstein and Rucks-Ahidiana 2021), in which articles were first read closely and manually coded on the basis of theoretically relevant and predefined categories, followed by analysis of these codes to examine trends over time and identify patterns of interest for closer examination. The coding scheme is included in the Supplementary Materials.

I conducted 7 semi-structured expert interviews between June 2022 and June 2023 with current and former Jewish community leaders and anti-discrimination nongovernmental organization (NGO) leaders across Germany ( $n = 3$ ), Sweden ( $n = 3$ ), and Russia ( $n = 1$ ). Interviewees were selected on the basis of their leadership roles and expertise in the field of antisemitism and Jewish life. They are individuals who hold or have held senior positions in major Jewish communal organizations or members of NGO/advocacy groups who have been routinely involved in monitoring antisemitic incidents and liaising with state authorities. Given the challenging political environment in Russia, where only one of several potential interviewees agreed to participate, I incorporated published expert interviews to supplement the primary data. Interviews lasted 45–90 min and were conducted remotely, following an interview guide covering perceptions and experiences of antisemitism, changes over time, and community concerns (Supplementary Materials). With informed consent, interviews were recorded, transcribed, and analyzed using inductive coding. Participants were anonymized.

### Operationalizing Competing Explanations

To evaluate the explanatory power of the generalist and particularist lines of argument, the key concepts from each position were operationalized by using a combination of the datasets mentioned above and additional sources.

The generalist argument posits that antisemitic hostility is linked to general outgroup hostility. To measure this, I focused on two dimensions: behavioral and attitudinal. The behavioral dimension of general outgroup hostility was measured using counts of incidents involving fatal far-right violence drawn from the Right-Wing Terrorism and Violence (RTV) and RTV-RUSSIA datasets (Ravndal 2016; Enstad 2018). Far-right aggression typically targets ethnic, racial, religious, and

sexual minorities, making it an indicator of the general level of outgroup hostility. While these data reflect fatal violence only, they reliably track nonfatal violence, as inferred from the very high country-level correlation found in the RTV data across 18 Western European countries ( $r = 0.92$ ) (Ravndal et al. 2023), and the similarly high year-by-year correlation found in the Russian data across 17 years ( $r = 0.93$ ).<sup>1</sup>

To measure the attitudinal dimension of general outgroup hostility, I employed World/European Values Survey items asking nationally representative samples in 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” were 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 (World Values Survey [WVS] 2021).

According to the particularist line of argument, 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, anti-Zionist, and far-left motivations and perpetrator profiles. Moreover, external conflict events in the Middle East (e.g., the outbreak of the Second Intifada in 2000) should drive up antisemitic hostility depending on the contextual salience of anti-Zionist sentiment. These observable implications were examined by quantitatively and qualitatively analyzing the news samples.

## **Descriptive Results: 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 indicated an upwards trend from the early 1990s into the twenty-first century, with a substantial increase (Fig. 1). 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, indicated a stable level of reporting of violent antisemitic incidents at about 50% (FRA 2018, 2024). Another potential source of bias is the size of the Jewish population, which increased significantly in the 1990s and 2000s due to immigration from former Soviet countries. Adjusting for Jewish population size did not, however, substantially alter the direction or strength of the trend (Fig. S1 in the Supplementary Materials).

<sup>1</sup> This correlation was calculated on the basis of the number of fatal and nonfatal violent incidents recorded by the Sova Center over the period 2007–2019. See <https://www.sova-center.ru/database/>.

Turning to data produced by surveys of the Jewish community in Germany, the patterns evident here indicated a rising level of antisemitic hostility in the twenty-first 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). 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 substantial rise in the share of Jews who indicated having experienced antisemitic harassment in the past 5 years (from 36% to 52%), worrying about becoming a victim of antisemitic violence (from 34% to 47%), and considering emigration due to not feeling safe as a Jew (from 25% to 44%) (FRA 2013; FRA 2018).

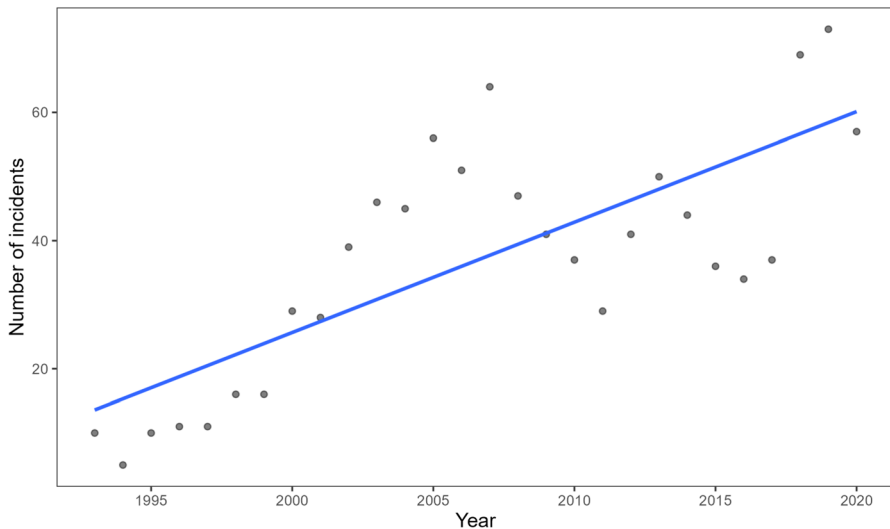
Repeated surveys of Jewish community leaders in Germany pointed to an increasing concern with safety, indicated by the share of respondents who said it feels “rather unsafe” or “not safe” to live and practice as a Jew in their community. While, in 2011, not a single one of 22 German community leaders expressed such a safety concern, in 2015, 5 of 22 leaders did so, and in 2021, 27 of the 75 respondents said they felt unsafe (Kosmin 2011, 2018; Kosmin and Bekerman 2015). While the majority did not express such safety concerns, the relative share of the concerned minority was increasing.

Quantitative analysis of news media coverage showed that articles referring to antisemitic hostility as increasing remained at a stable level from the 1990s into the twenty-first century (Fig. 2a), while a negligible number of articles referred to hostility as decreasing. The proportion of articles mentioning Jews concealing their identity in public, avoiding places or events, or considering emigration due to concerns over antisemitic hostility increased significantly in the twenty-first century (Fig. 2b).

Contextual examination of the news data allows a more fine-grained description of the development over time. The early 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 cemeteries, verbal harassment, and incidents of extreme violence such as a neo-Nazi skinhead stabbing a young Jew on a Berlin train.<sup>2</sup> In 1992, the new head of the CCJ, Ignatz Bubis, stated that some Jews were considering emigrating for their own safety,<sup>3</sup> and two years later the Lübeck synagogue was attacked with Molotov

<sup>2</sup> German Jewish leader warns of neo-nazi resurgence, *Reuters* 5 September 1991.

<sup>3</sup> “Do Jews have a home in reunified Germany?,” *Reuters* 6 November 1992.



**Fig. 1** Violent antisemitic incidents in Germany, 1993–2020, with linear trend line. Data source: DIMA

cocktails in what was said to be the first recorded arson attack against a German synagogue since 1938.<sup>4</sup>

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 with 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.”<sup>5</sup> A 2003 article concluded that Jews feel “safe” in Germany,<sup>6</sup> 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.<sup>7</sup> 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 postwar 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 center of Munich.<sup>8</sup>

However, such positive assessments stopped appearing in the mid-2010s, when the mood turned more pessimistic regarding the antisemitic threat to Jewish life,

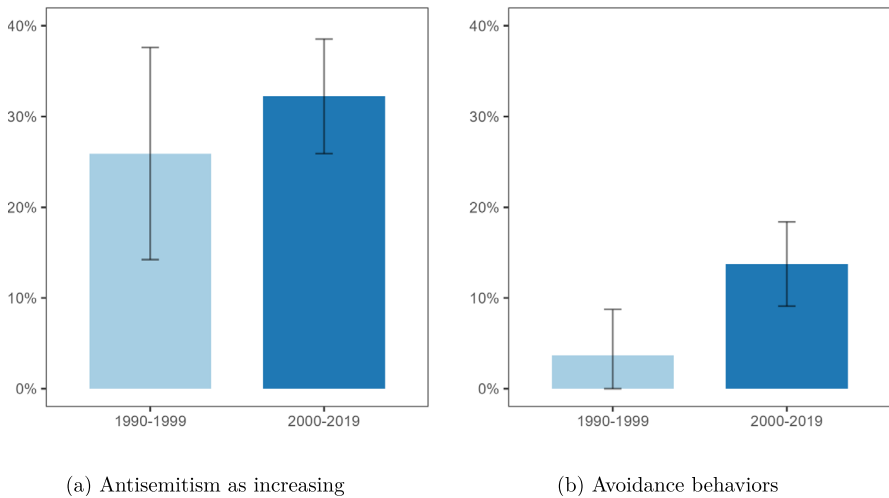
<sup>4</sup> “German synagogue firebombed recalling ‘Kristallnacht,’” *Reuters* 25 March 1994.

<sup>5</sup> “Germany still draws Jews despite anti-Semitism row,” *Reuters* 24 June 2002.

<sup>6</sup> Safe Germany leads the world in attracting Jewish immigrants, *National Post* 7 June 2003.

<sup>7</sup> “German Jewish leader quits over drugs possession,” *Reuters* 8 July 2003.

<sup>8</sup> Miryam Gümbel, “Die Koffer ausgepackt,” *Jüdische Allgemeine*, 22 January 2013.



**Fig. 2** Germany: change over time in proportion of news items referring to (a) antisemitism as increasing and (b) Jews hiding their identity, avoiding places/events, or considering emigration due to antisemitism (95% confidence intervals)

with renewed talk of packing the proverbial suitcases.<sup>9</sup> For example, in February 2015 the president of the Central Council of Jews in Germany publicly discouraged Jews from displaying their identity in public, remarking that “I did not expect this development five years ago and that’s a bit shocking.”<sup>10</sup> 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.”<sup>11</sup> While some reports also referred to Jews proudly displaying their identity without any incidents,<sup>12</sup> 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 were recorded before the war ignited by the Hamas-led attack on southern Israel on 7 October 2023):

<sup>9</sup> E.g., Thorsten Schmitz and Verena Mayer, “Notruf,” *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, 6 March 2018.

<sup>10</sup> German Jewish leader warns against wearing skullcaps, *Reuters* 26 February 2015.

<sup>11</sup> Angst und Vorurteil, *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, 1 December 2015.

<sup>12</sup> E.g., Wolfgang Görl, “Der Hass darf nicht siegen,” *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, 23 December 2019.

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! (Interviewee G1).

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

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 twenty-first century.

### **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 and Molarin 2008). 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 (Fig. 3), the data indicated a rise in the total number of incidents, but there was much variation from year to year, and the linear trend was weak. By contrast, recorded violent incidents showed a clear decline over this period.

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% indicated having been “personally exposed to antisemitism” in the preceding 5 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 5 years. This figure rose to 40% 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% (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% of the sample in the period

1990–1999, and then increased significantly to 23% in 2000–2019 (Fig. 4a). Further, the relative frequency of items mentioning Jews concealing their identity in public, avoiding places or events, or considering emigration because of antisemitism also increased sharply over time, from 1% of all items in the 1990s to 14% in the period 2000–2019 (Fig. 4b).

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.<sup>13</sup> 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 featured interviews with Jewish community leaders, antisemitism did not figure prominently as a topic. The 1999–2001 sociological investigation by Dencik (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 toward society and visibility,” with a French Jewish magazine presenting Jewish life in Sweden under the heading “Live Your Judaism in Complete Freedom” (Dencik 2005). 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 was 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.”<sup>14</sup> 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.<sup>15</sup> 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.<sup>16</sup> 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.<sup>17</sup> In 2013, a former community leader in Gothenburg remarked that a “new kind of antisemitism” had emerged resulting in Swedish Jews experiencing “a threat [of a kind] they had not seen for decades.”<sup>18</sup> Similar warnings and statements of concern appeared regularly throughout the 2010s, along with interviews

<sup>13</sup> E.g., “Judehatet ingen dagslända,” *Svenska Dagbladet*, 11 September 1999.

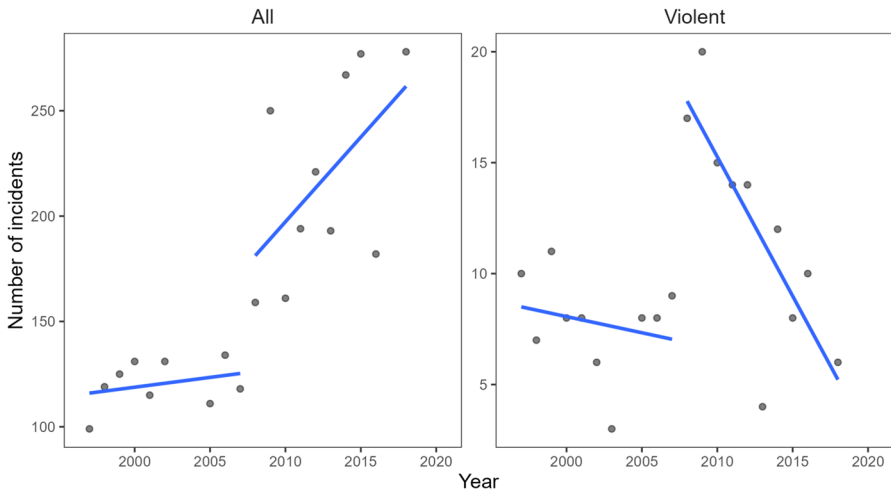
<sup>14</sup> Där borta och här hemma,” *Göteborgs-Posten*, 2 December 2000.

<sup>15</sup> Ökat hot mot svenska judar, *Svenska Dagbladet*, 3 April 2002.

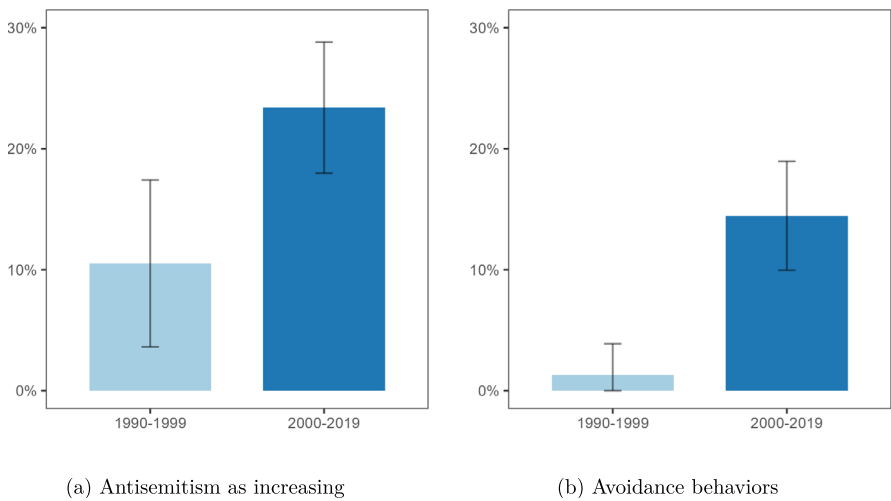
<sup>16</sup> “Ökat hot mot Judiska församlingen,” *Göteborgs-Posten*, 16 April 2002.

<sup>17</sup> Jävla jude är vardagsmat, *Dagen*, 17 December 2010.

<sup>18</sup> Jag har varit lojal mot mig själv, *Dagen*, 9 July 2013.



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



**Fig. 4** Sweden: change over time in proportion of news items referring to (a) antisemitism as increasing and (b) Jews hiding their identity, avoiding places/events, or considering emigration due to antisemitism (95% confidence intervals)

with “ordinary” Jews, often anonymized, about their everyday experiences with hostility.<sup>19</sup>

<sup>19</sup> E.g., “Kadhammar: Judarna är säkra bakom pansardörrar,” *Aftonbladet*, 12 December 2017.

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 (Interviewees 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!” (Interviewee S2)

As news data confirm, protests against antisemitism came from across the political spectrum and was often expressed publicly with hundreds or even thousands of citizens participating.<sup>20</sup>

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.” (Interviewee 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 obviously grown worse in the past 10 to 15 years, so the development has gone in the wrong direction” (Interviewee 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 some 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.” (Interviewee 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”

<sup>20</sup> 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.

[Interviewee 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” [Interviewee 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 twenty-first century.

In summary, the data on Sweden indicated a development of intensifying anti-semitic 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 Fig. 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 clear downward trend in violent incidents can be observed.

The rising level of incidents in the 1990s coincided with a tumultuous period in Russian society. While Jews had faced official discrimination in postwar 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 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.<sup>21</sup> With emigration restrictions lifted, more than 1.5 million (formerly) Soviet Jews left for Israel, the USA, 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

<sup>21</sup> Poll finds 50% of Soviets want all Jews out, *Associated Press* 25 September 1991.

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.<sup>22</sup>

In the late 1990s, observers of Jewish life in Russia noted that "spontaneous, grassroots anti-Semitism flourished, unchecked by governmental or social action" (Singer 1998). Neo-Nazis frequently vandalized synagogues and desecrated 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, Communist Party leader Ziuganov doubled down, accusing "Zionists" of seeking world domination and Jews of controlling the economy (Anti-Defamation League [ADL] 2001; Singer 1998).

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 onward the frequency of incidents declined significantly (Fig. 5).

Such a decline is consistent with patterns and contextual information observed in the news sample collected for this study. From the mid-1990s onward, 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.<sup>23</sup> 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:

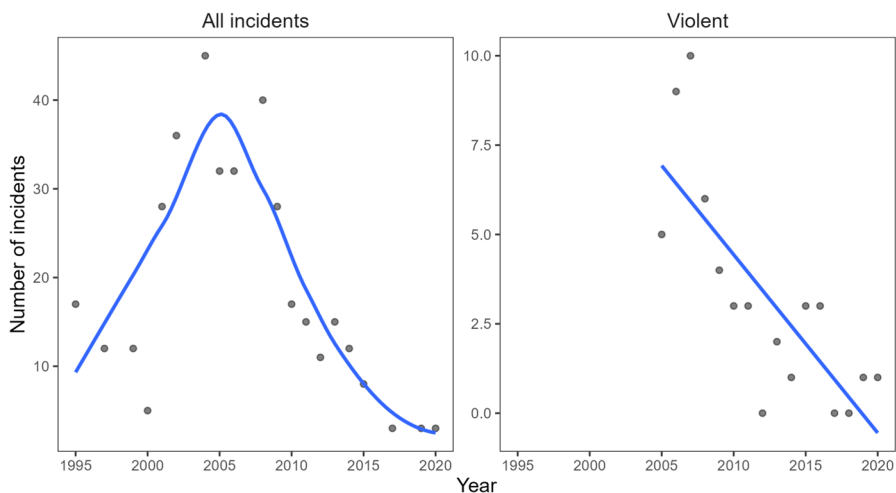
More Russian Jews are willing to identify themselves as Jews, and more, especially the young, are doing so with pride in a country where open religious practice in general is surging after years of official repression.<sup>24</sup>

Pinchas Goldschmidt, who served as Chief Rabbi of Moscow from 1993 until 2022, noted in a retrospective interview that, in the Yeltsin years (1991–1999), "the

<sup>22</sup> An old disease afflicts the new Russia, *The Wall Street Journal*, 26 November 1990.

<sup>23</sup> Russian Jews wary of antisemitism, *The Washington Post* 5 January 1994.

<sup>24</sup> Rebirth of Jewish life in Russia cuts emigration, *The New York Times*, 3 December 1995.

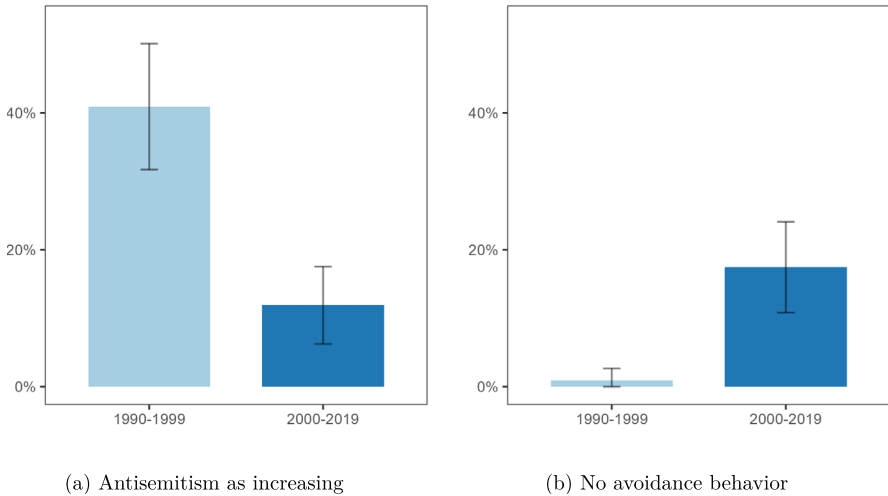


**Fig. 5** Antisemitic incidents in Russia, 1995–2020. The trend line for all incidents (left figure) is a locally estimated scatterplot smoothing (LOESS) smoother, which fits a flexible curve to the data to highlight the nonlinear pattern; the violent incidents trend line is linear. Data source: DIMA

general atmosphere [for Jews] changed and improved” (Bou and 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).

In the news data, articles mentioning a *decrease* in antisemitism began to appear in 1995 and recurred frequently after 2000. Specifically, the proportion of articles mentioning antisemitism as declining rose from 5% in the 1990s to 26% in the period 2000–2019. Meanwhile, the proportion of items mentioning antisemitism as increasing (Fig. 6a) fell from 41% in the 1990s to 12% in the period 2000–2019. This represents a stark contrast to the German and Swedish cases, in which articles warning of increasing antisemitism predominated, especially in the post-2000 years. Furthermore, while reports of Jews concealing their identity in public, avoiding places or events, or considering emigration due to safety concerns were increasingly apparent for the 2000s and 2010s 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 and so on) appeared more frequently, with the proportion of items mentioning this rising from 1% in the 1990s to 17% in the period 2000–2019 (Fig. 6b).

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:



**Fig. 6** Russia: change over time in proportion of news items referring to (a) antisemitism as increasing and (b) Jews *not* hiding their identity, avoiding places, or considering emigration due to antisemitism (95% confidence intervals)

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.<sup>25</sup>

Such assessments were echoed by other voices, such as the executive director of the Russian Jewish Congress.<sup>26</sup>

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% of respondents perceived antisemitism as having increased in Russia over the past 5 years, while 33% said it had decreased (43% 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%, while in Germany and Sweden this figure was at 52% and 40%, respectively. In brief, these data

<sup>25</sup> Byt evreem: modno ili opasno?, *Radio Svoboda*, 12 February 2017, <https://perma.cc/C4E8-X3EF>.

<sup>26</sup> The prospect for Russia’s Jews, *Mosaic* 6 March 2017, <https://perma.cc/53HX-9AC9>.

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 (Interviewee 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 twenty-first century was and remains fragile and reversible.

Summed up, the findings suggest that antisemitic hostility in Russia, while relatively severe in the 1990s, declined significantly in the period from 2000 to 2020. 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.

## Evaluating Competing Explanations: Predictions and Observed Patterns

The case analyses found that antisemitic hostility followed different paths in the three countries studied between 1990 and 2020. These diverging paths of development provide a basis for evaluating the generalist and particularist lines of argument. In the following, I examine whether the predictions derived from the two theoretical positions match the empirical patterns observed within and across the three cases.

### The Generalist Explanation

Based on the generalist position, 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 places where antisemitic hostility intensified (Germany and Sweden), and less so in Russia.

Turning first to data on far-right violence, which can be taken as reflecting overall levels of aggressive behavior toward outgroups, Fig. 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 are lacking for the 1990s). Both Germany and Sweden saw a decreasing level of 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). The observed relationship between general outgroup aggression and antisemitic hostility does not match the predictions from the

generalist framework. As the data indicate, aggressive behavior toward 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.

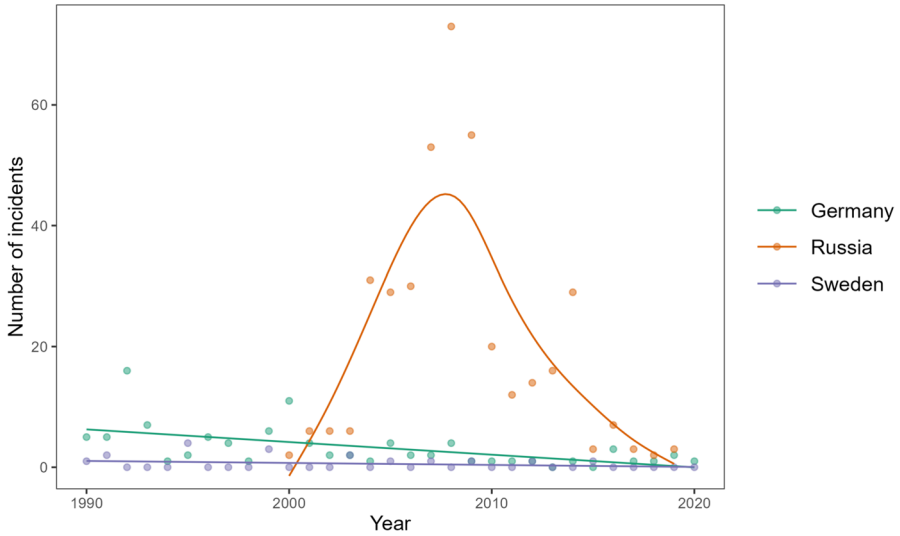
Second, Fig. 8 provides an attitudinal perspective on trends in outgroup hostility, based on three different measures from the World/European Values Survey. Across the measures, the emerging pattern is similar to what we observed in the data on aggressive behavior: outgroup rejection was declining in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

Third, the sample of news articles was examined to trace changes in the proportion of articles highlighting right-wing sources of antisemitic hostility. As Fig. 9 shows, the proportion of items mentioning right-wing motivations declined from the 1990s into the period 2000–2019 in all three countries (in the German case, the change was not statistically significant). This is counter to what the generalist position would lead us to expect.

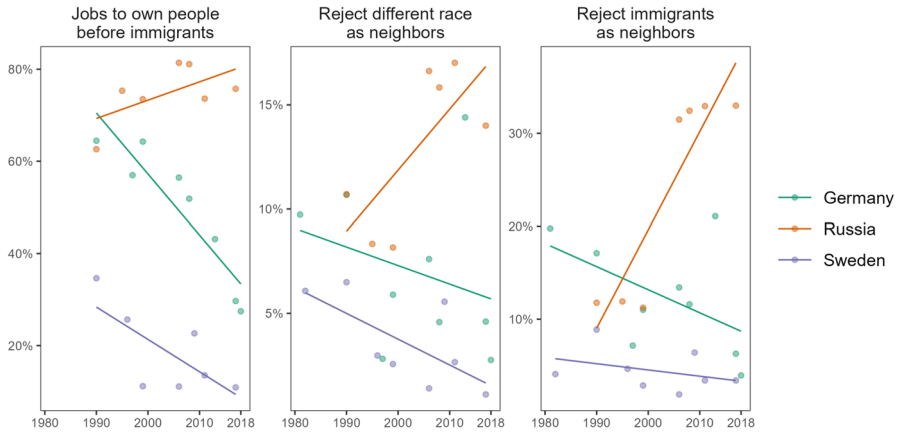
Finally, data from victimization surveys shed light on perpetrator motivations, as seen from the “receiving-end” perspective. While comparable data across the three countries are limited, the 2018 EU FRA surveys provide useful information pertaining to Germany and Sweden, with a parallel “sister survey” conducted among Jews in Russia (FRA 2018; Levada Center 2018). Here, Jews who had experienced antisemitic harassment in the previous 5 years were asked to think of the most serious incident and say who did this to them, selecting from a list of categories (multiple choices were possible). In Germany and Sweden, where antisemitic hostility was intensifying in these years, the share of victimized respondents pointing to “someone with a right-wing political view” was 20% and 18%. By contrast, 41% in Germany and 40% in Sweden identified perpetrators as “someone with a Muslim extremist view,” while 16% and 27% pointed to “someone with a left-wing political view,” which indicates motivations related to anti-Zionism and the Israel/Palestine conflict (FRA 2018). In Russia, by contrast, where antisemitic hostility was declining in these years, 16% of respondents pointed to “someone with a right-wing political view,” while 8% indicated a Muslim extremist view and 4% a left-wing view (Levada Center 2018). These patterns do not match the predictions derived from the generalist explanation, but suggest that the particularist explanation might provide a better fit to the data. In the next section, I examine this in more detail.

## The Particularist Explanation

The particularist argument posits that antisemitic hostility in the twenty-first century is tied not so much to general outgroup hostility, but rather to anti-Zionist sentiment (i.e., enmity toward the Jewish state and its supporters). This leads us to expect certain patterns in the data. Specifically, Germany and Sweden, where antisemitic



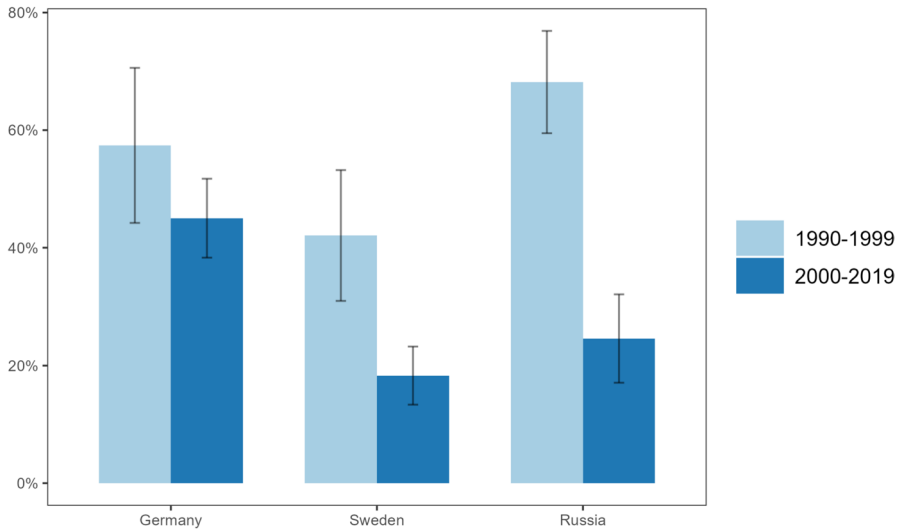
**Fig. 7** Trends in right-wing violence by country (fatal incidents). Linear trends for Germany and Sweden; LOESS smoother (locally weighted regression) for Russia to fit the nonlinear curve. Data source: RTV & RTV-RUSSIA



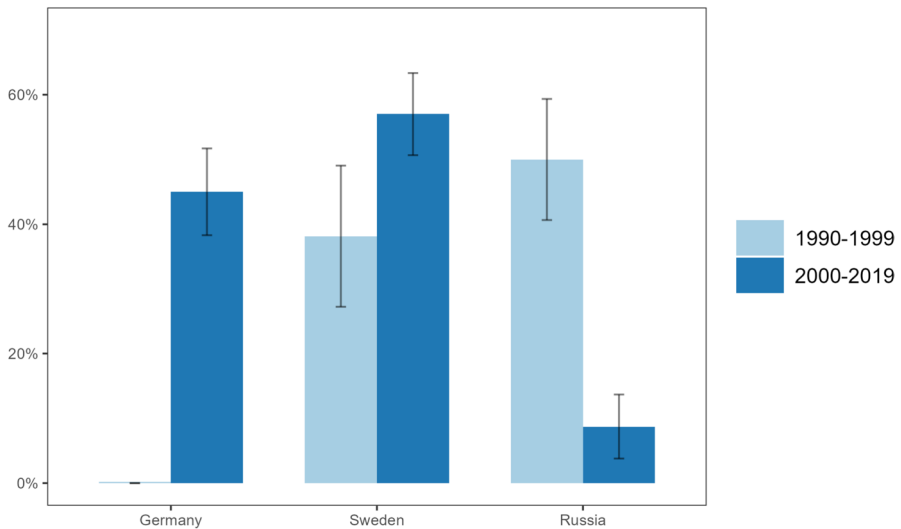
**Fig. 8** Trends in outgroup rejection by country. Linear trend lines. Data source: W/EVS

hostility intensified from the 1990s into the twenty-first century, should display evidence of such hostility being increasingly motivated by beliefs and sentiments related to Israel and the conflict with the Palestinians. In Russia, where antisemitic hostility declined in the period 2000–2020, we should expect to see such motivations becoming less salient.

Results from quantitative analyses of the news data are shown in Fig. 10, which depicts changes in the proportion of news items mentioning anti-Zionist (including



**Fig. 9** Change over time in the proportion of news items mentioning right-wing sources of antisemitic hostility (95% confidence intervals)



**Fig. 10** Change over time in proportion of news items mentioning anti-Zionist/far-left/Islamic sources of antisemitic hostility (95% confidence intervals)

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% of articles in the 2000–2019 period mentioned anti-Zionist motivations. In Sweden, there was also a marked

and statistically significant increase, from 38% of items in the 1990s to 57% for the 2000–2019 period. In Russia, by contrast, the share of articles mentioning anti-Zionist motivations decreased sharply from 50% in the 1990s to 9% 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 supporting the fight against antisemitism or enjoying peaceful relations with Russian Jews.<sup>27</sup> These findings match predictions from the particularist position, as the salience of anti-Zionist-type motivations increased in cases of intensifying antisemitic hostility and decreased where such hostility was declining.

The news data enabled further qualitative probing regarding the relationship between antisemitic hostility and anti-Zionist sentiment across the three cases. In the particularist account of twenty-first-century antisemitism, specific conflict 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 anti-Zionist sentiment in Europe led to new waves of antisemitic hostility (Porat 2005; Chesler 2003; Smith 2008). 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.

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.<sup>28</sup> Furthermore, 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 whether they were Jewish.<sup>29</sup> 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 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.<sup>30</sup> On 18 April 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. On 5 May 2002, another demonstration was held protesting against

<sup>27</sup> E.g., “Kazan synagogue rededication hailed by Muslim, Christian leaders,” *Times of Israel* 4 September 2015; “A ia shagau v kipe po Moskve...,” *Komsomolskaia pravda*, 26 February 2015.

<sup>28</sup> Düsseldorf Synagoge: Der Brandanschlag ist aufgeklärt, *Der Tagesspiegel*, 27 December 2000.

<sup>29</sup> Gang attacks American Jews in Berlin street, *Reuters News* 2 April 2002.

<sup>30</sup> Den 9 november arrangerades i Malmö en demonstration, *Svenska Dagbladet*, 16 November 2000.

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."<sup>31</sup> 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 been subjected to verbal or physical threats since the *Intifada* broke out 18 months ago."<sup>32</sup>

In the Russian case, the data suggest a different picture. News coverage from the early 2000s mentioned 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.<sup>33</sup> 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.<sup>34</sup>

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 anti-Zionist sentiment. These observations, again, are in line with expectations derived from the particularist position.

While beyond the scope of this study, events following the Hamas-led attack on Israel on 7 October 2023 and the subsequent war have provided new observations on which to evaluate the competing explanations. To the extent that sharp increases in antisemitic hostility were recorded, this was largely tied to anti-Zionist motivations, and not to actors and movements marked by hostility toward minorities in general. This is true for Germany (Rundfunk im amerikanischen Sektor [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 anti-Zionist sentiment did not have a strong foothold, such as the Czech Republic or Hungary, there was no comparable explosion in antisemitic hostility after 7 October, with observers instead referring to places such as Prague and Budapest as among

<sup>31</sup> "Medierapportering spår på våldsspiralen," *Svenska Dagbladet*, 13 May 2002.

<sup>32</sup> "Ökat hot mot Judiska församlingen," *Göteborgs-Posten*, 16 April 2002.

<sup>33</sup> A Wave of Jews returning to Russia, *The Moscow Times* 4 August 2004.

<sup>34</sup> Sovsem blizhnii vostok, *Novaia gazeta* 29 April 2002.

Europe's safest places for Jews (Pancevski 2024). These recent events, then, provide further support for the central role of anti-Zionist sentiment in generating or catalyzing antisemitic hostility in twenty-first century.

Overall, as summarized in Table 2, the empirical findings do not align with the patterns we would expect to see based on the generalist line of argument. Across the cases of Germany, Sweden, and Russia, diverse data covering three decades suggest a disconnection between general outgroup hostility and antisemitic hostility. The particularist position, which sees twenty-first-century antisemitism as closely intertwined with anti-Zionist or anti-Israel sentiment, appears to better account for the divergent trajectories observed.

## Discussion and Future Research

This study identified two prominent explanatory lines of argument that offer different answers to the question of what drives twenty-first century antisemitism. While the generalist position 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 standpoint sees antisemitism as a unique phenomenon that is different from general prejudice and more closely linked, in the twenty-first-century European context, to anti-Zionist or anti-Israel sentiment. The explanatory power of these positions was evaluated through a comparative case study of antisemitic hostility in Germany, Sweden, and Russia between 1990 and 2020.

The analyses found that, overall, hostility toward Jews grew increasingly severe from the 1990s into the twenty-first century in Germany and Sweden but declined significantly in Russia following 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 did not reliably track variation in levels of antisemitic hostility between the countries and over time. These patterns are inconsistent with the generalist argument, according to which we would expect to find a close linkage between antisemitism and general intolerance of outgroups.

Findings instead matched predictions derived from the particularist line of argument, as the salience of anti-Zionist motivations was closely linked to variation in antisemitic hostility across the three countries and the 30-year period. In particular, it was found that conflict events in the Middle East in the early 2000s triggered waves of antisemitic hostility within Germany and Sweden, where anti-Zionist motivations were clearly and increasingly present, but not in Russia, where such motivations were comparatively absent. The findings suggest that anti-Zionist sentiment serves as a key intervening variable, such that flare-ups in the Middle East conflict generate antisemitic hostility in other societies depending on the strength of local anti-Zionist sentiment.

These results align with recent empirical research highlighting the significance of the “Israel factor” in explaining variation in antisemitic incidents (Feinberg 2020; Tamez et al. 2024), hateful discourse online (Becker et al. 2022; Schwarz-Friesel 2017), and Jews' experiences of antisemitic violence and harassment (Enstad 2024).

**Table 2** Pattern matching results

Position and prediction	Expected pattern	Match?
<b>Generalist position</b>		
Level of anti-outgroup violence	Rises/falls with antisemitic hostility	No
Level of anti-outgroup attitudes	Rises/falls with antisemitic hostility	No
Saliency of far-right motivations	Rises/falls with antisemitic hostility	No
<b>Particularist position</b>		
Saliency of anti-Zionist motivations	Rises/falls with antisemitic hostility	Yes
Response to Second Intifada	Antisemitic impact tied to anti-Zionist sentiment	Yes
Response to 7 October 2023	Antisemitic impact tied to anti-Zionist sentiment	Yes

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.

The findings that antisemitic hostility has intensified in two liberal democracies and declined in an increasingly authoritarian regime should not be taken to imply that contemporary Jewry is better off with authoritarian rulers. As noted, the situation for Jews in Russia quickly deteriorated following the invasion of Ukraine and the Israel–Hamas war. In authoritarian systems, the sense of security that might arise in quiet periods can be eroded overnight in times of crisis or if rulers decide to mobilize antisemitic sentiment for political purposes. At the same time, it is equally clear that the liberal democratic constitutions and political cultures of the kinds that prevail in Germany and Sweden do not, by themselves, guarantee a secure and hospitable societal climate for Jews.

### Future Research

In this study I have only indirectly touched upon the role of immigration to Western Europe, especially from the Middle East and North Africa (MENA). This factor has likely influenced antisemitic hostility in the period studied, as anti-Jewish sentiment is widespread in this part of the world and also among Muslims in Western Europe (Webman 2017; Czymara et al. 2025; Jikeli 2015; Tossavainen 2005). The extent of such influence, however, is unclear and understudied. While one 2018 study found “[no] significant connection” between recent MENA immigration and antisemitism in Western Europe (Feldman 2018a), more recent research has documented a positive correlation between Muslim population share and Jews’ exposure to antisemitic violence and harassment in Europe (Enstad 2024). Further research is needed to evaluate the effect of certain kinds of immigration on diverging trajectories of antisemitic hostility across Europe.

With regard to the broader literature on prejudice, the findings carry implications for recent work that distinguishes 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 (Meuleman et al. 2019; Heyder et al. 2022). The findings reported here support this distinction, as twenty-first-century antisemitic hostility appears to be a prime example of a highly context-specific type of prejudice that is weakly tied to generalized hostility toward minorities.

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 anti-Zionist 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; Baugut et al. 2025). 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 and 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).

Finally, to assess the generalizability of the findings reported here, 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 conditions across a larger number of cases (Rihoux et al. 2008; Schneider and 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, as in the present study. 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 strengthen the basis for making causal claims about the social and political determinants of antisemitic hostility in contemporary societies.

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**Data Availability** Data, analysis code, and supplemental materials for this study are deposited in a public repository at [Open Science Framework \(OSF\)](#).

## Declarations

**Conflict of interest** The author has no conflict of interest to declare.

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