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Contemporary Antisemitism as Perceived in Finland: The State of Affairs

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Abstract
This study explores the perceptions of antisemitism among Jews living in Finland, on the basis of a survey conducted between October and November 2023 and 42 semi-structured interviews carried out between March and June 2024. The survey, based on the EU Fundamental Rights Agency's (FRA) questionnaire, gathered 334 responses—representing approximately 17–22% of Finland's Jewish population over the age of 16. A significant majority of respondents reported a rise in antisemitism over the past 5 years, particularly in online spaces, media, and political discourse. The qualitative interviews not only confirmed these findings but also offered deeper insight into more subtle and complex manifestations of antisemitism, including ambient and implicit forms. Informants described the normalization of antisemitic tropes—especially in relation to criticism of Israel—as contributing to an atmosphere of discomfort, even when the expressions themselves were not overtly antisemitic. These expressions were often linked to discussions surrounding the war in Gaza and were predominantly associated with left-wing political narratives. The study highlights the persistence of both traditional and contemporary forms of antisemitism in Finland, indicating the need for further research and interventions to address this evolving issue.

Keywords Antisemitism · Finnish antisemitism · Finnish Jewry · 7 October 2023 · Antisemitism as perceived

Introduction

When thinking about the Nordic countries, the first associations that most individuals have are connected to the idea of good security measures and the services that a welfare state provides to its citizens and residents. Finland—as other Nordic welfare states—ranks high on measures of gender equality, antidiscrimination, and is often

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being thought of as liberal and progressive. Several studies and reports have previously pointed out that despite these perceptions, Finland—as any other country in the world—has issues when it comes to e.g. racism and minority rights. After the horrors of the Second World War, being an antisemite was and is stigmatized in most European countries, and antisemitism stands in contrast to the ideas of a just and equal society.

As a result of the fragile postwar position of Finland, there has been a common misconception that antisemitism is a marginal issue in the Finnish society (Ahonen, Muir, and Silvennoinen 2020), as pointed out later. This study challenges this perception by shedding light on antisemitism is experienced and perceived by members of Finland's Jewish minority today, and thus contributes to the growing number of scholarships deconstructing this "myth."

Prior to Hamas' attack on Israel on the 7 October 2023, studies indicated that while antisemitic attitudes had not increased in the society at large, the Jewish minority reported a rise in their experiences with antisemitism (see, e.g. Dencik and Marosi 2016; Hoffmann and Moe 2020). This situation worsened after the attack, with a number of (scientific) articles and reports—published as early as late 2023—signaling the impact on the lives of Jews in the diaspora (see, e.g. CST 2023; JC 2023; Percival 2023; Boyd 2024; Santos and Yogev 2024). While overt antisemitism, such as racist hostility toward Jews, is widely recognized, debates persist around forms linked to criticism of Israel—often from the political left—especially among those unfamiliar with how antisemitism functions, as scholars have previously noted (e.g., Hirsh 2018, 2024; Johnson 2024).

Assessing antisemitic sentiment is difficult due to its complexity and people's reluctance to disclose antisemitic prejudices. In contrast, inquiring about Jewish perspectives—through surveys or interviews—is often more feasible and may offer deeper insight into how antisemitism is experienced in everyday life, and how the Jewish minority perceives it.

When assessing empirical information regarding the effects of the 7 October attacks in the UK and Europe, Jonathan Boyd (2024) coined the term, "ambient antisemitism." As he suggests, certain words and phrases, stickers, media reports, etc. that are not strictly antisemitic—and thus are often casually dismissed—can become embedded in everyday conversations, making Jewish life increasingly uncomfortable and contributing to the alienation and discomfort of Jewish individuals. When such comments are normalized, they may serve as a cover for more overt and dangerous forms of antisemitism (Boyd 2024). Those who do not experience such "subtle" or "covert" discomfort may interpret such incidents harmless and even isolated. Scientific research has shown, however, that there is a clear connection between e.g. perceived microaggressions, discrimination, and negative health outcomes (see, e.g., Jasinskaja-Lahti, Liebkind and Perhoniemi 2006; Rask et al. 2018, etc.) Similarly, experiences of antisemitism have been associated with poorer mental health and reduced levels of social participation (Shani, Gerber and Herb 2024; Shani et al. 2025). Such acts, overt and covert antisemitism, therefore may have a profound impact not only on individuals and their close surroundings, but also on the broader Jewish community.

Although the European Union Fundamental Rights Agency (EU FRA) has collected data on Jewish people's experiences and perceptions of antisemitism, Finland has not previously been included in these efforts. The latest EU FRA survey—carried out in 2023, before the 7 October attack—results showed that Jewish people across European Union continue to experience antisemitism on an almost continuous basis, restricting their ability to live an openly Jewish life. Most of the respondents of this latest survey (81%) felt that antisemitism increased in their country in the 5 years before the survey (EU FRA 2024: 26–27). In Germany, the Netherlands, Spain, and Sweden, respondents ranked antisemitism as the third most serious issue, following concerns about e.g. rising prices, or Russia's aggression against Ukraine. In contrast, fewer than half of respondents in Czechia (27%) and Denmark (49%) viewed it as a "very big" or "fairly big" problem (EU FRA 2024: 24).

This study presents key findings in English from a recent survey based on the EU FRA questionnaire and its recently published report in Finnish (Czimbalmos and Pataricza 2024a) complemented by later collected qualitative data. It offers some comparisons with the latest EU FRA results[1] and contributes research-based insights on Jews in Finland, supporting the *European Commission Strategy for the Prevention of Antisemitism and the Promotion of Jewish Life* (European Commission 2021).

Finnish Jewry and Antisemitism

As previous studies have already pointed out, while Finland is often regarded as distant from Jewish life, Finland in fact has a rich Jewish history and (cultural) heritage that is rapidly changing (see, e.g. Muir 2004; Muir and Tuori 2019; Czimbalmos 2021; Muir et al. 2023, etc.).

Jewish settlement in Finland began relatively late compared with other European countries, starting after Finland became part of the Russian Empire in 1809. The institutional structure of the Jewish community was shaped by the Imperial Russian military (Ekholm 2013: 30). Many early Jewish settlers in Finland were soldiers in the Russian army, including "Cantonists"[2]—Jewish boys educated in Russian military schools—who were permitted to remain in the country with their families under the 1858 statute (Torvinen 1989). Before Finnish independence in 1917, these Jewish soldiers and their descendants lived in Finland as Russian subjects with special residential permits (Ekholm 2013: 30). Jewish settlement in Finland continued even after the cantonment system was abolished in the 1850s (Torvinen 1989). Since this initial wave of settlement, Finnish Jewry has undergone significant changes, including rising rates of intermarriage and conversion, and new immigration from countries such as the former Soviet Union, Israel, the USA, and various European

[1] These comparisons were made on the basis of the latest (2024) EU FRA publication as in the preparation phases of this work, the statistical data of the EU FRA survey was not yet available publicly.

[2] Today, descendants of those soldiers are often referred to as "Cantonists," although the term technically applies only to a specific subgroup of soldiers. Despite this, it remains common in colloquial use among Finland's Jewish communities when referring to Jewish soldiers.

countries (see, e.g. Illman 2019; Czimbalmos and Tuori 2022; Muir and Tuori 2024), continuously reshaping its diversity.

Despite Finland's rich Jewish heritage—and the fact that antisemitism can thrive even in places with few or no Jews—the persistent myth that antisemitism is foreign to Finnish society remains remarkably resilient. Antisemitism existed in Finnish territories long before most people had ever encountered a Jew. During the period when Finland was part of the Swedish Kingdom (until 1809), anti-Jewish sentiments on religious grounds were "imported" from German-speaking regions (Heß 2021). These sentiments did not vanish when Finland became part of the Russian Empire. By the late nineteenth century, following the assassination of Alexander II, antisemitism in Russia intensified, targeting Jews for their perceived economic and social roles. As Russian rule extended over Finland, these developments influenced local attitudes. The 1881 pogroms forced many Jews to flee Russia, and Finnish newspapers covered these events extensively. The Russian state's treatment of Jews, along with the pogroms, shaped public discourse in Finland, and opponents of Jewish settlement raised the issue in the Finnish Diet (Torvinen 1989: 42–45).

At the same time, religious antisemitism from the Swedish era remained influential. As church historian Paavo Ahonen has shown, antisemitic and anti-Judaic attitudes were widespread in the Evangelical Lutheran Church well into the late nineteenth century (Ahonen 2017). In the twentieth century, the character of antisemitism began to evolve. While religious antisemitism persisted (Ahonen 2017), and other forms emerged across different sectors of society—including e.g. new conspiracies (Ahonen 2024), antisemitism in academia (Muir and Salomaa 2009), sports (Gasche and Muir 2013), music (Muir 2022), and politics, particularly in connection with Finland's role in the Second World War (Muir and Worthen 2013; Swanström 2018; Silvennoinen 2023).

Finland's postwar position influenced how its wartime history was interpreted, contributing to the marginalization of antisemitism research, and to the perception that antisemitism was (is) a marginal issue in Finnish society. This is also demonstrated by the doctoral dissertation of Jari Hanski in 2006, who suggested that antisemitism in Finland has been a fringe issue, mainly present among a small number or right-wing individuals (Ahonen, Muir and Silvennoinen 2020: 146). At the same time, antisemitic sentiments coming from the Finnish political left have been discussed in a few individual works (see, e.g. Titelman et al. 2004; Gerstenfeld 2008).

Despite the small size of the Jewish population in Finland, numerous recent studies have documented different aspects of contemporary Jewish life in the country. Most of this research has focused on religious practice, tradition, and identity within the Jewish Communities of Helsinki and Turku (e.g., Pataricza 2019; Vuola 2019; Czimbalmos 2021; Muir et al. 2023; Muir and Tuori 2024). In addition, the perception of antisemitism being so marginal also started to change, leading to a growing body of scholarship on both historical (e.g., Muir & Worthen 2013; Ahonen 2017, 2024; Silvennoinen 2023; Czimbalmos and Pataricza 2023 etc.) and contemporary antisemitism in Finland (e.g., Czimbalmos and Pataricza 2024a, b; Illman and Vuola 2024; Czimbalmos 2025).

Despite the growing body of scholarship however, the analysis of contemporary perceptions of antisemitism, i.e. what the local Jewish minority considers

antisemitic—particularly in the aftermath of the October 7 attacks—has received limited scholarly attention to date.

Methods and Data Collection

This study uses a mixed-method approach, combining quantitative and qualitative data collected from individuals who identify as Jewish and live in Finland. Data were collected in collaboration with local Jewish organizations using an intersectional framework. The survey, as well as the calls for participation in the interview research, were distributed via the channels of the registered Jewish congregations, as well as other registered and non-registered Jewish organizations and groups in order to reach a diverse group of respondents and informants. In this paper, "respondent" refers to survey participants, and "informant" to interviewees.

Survey

The survey was conducted between 4 October and 4 November 2023. It was open to all individuals aged 16 and older who self-identified as Jewish on any ground (e.g., religious, ethnic, cultural, etc.). Responses were submitted online, anonymously, and without identity verification. It was based on the 2023 EU FRA survey on antisemitism and hate crimes against Jews. It is noteworthy to mention, that FRA has integrated some of the illustrative examples accompanying the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) non-legally binding working definition into sections its survey, following the lead of the EU institutions and the Member States' commitment to endorse the working definition (EU FRA 2024: 13). The survey was translated into Finnish and only slightly adapted—removing one question and adding items on language proficiency—to align with other EU FRA surveys. It explored respondents' views and experiences of antisemitism, both online and offline (including verbal and physical attacks), satisfaction with authorities' responses, awareness of local laws, and the impact of the Israeli–Arab conflict.

A total of 334 responses were collected. Based on recent estimates, there are approximately 1500–2000 Jewish individuals over the age of 16 living in Finland. This means that approximately 17–22% of Finland's Jewish population over 16 participated in the survey. Respondents came from diverse backgrounds and were predominantly within the gender binary: 52% identified as female, 46% as male, and 1% as "other."[3] Most respondents (64%) were born in Finland. In terms of age distribution, 25% were between 16 and 34 years old, 38% were between 35 and 54, and 36% were over 55 years of age.[4] The majority (73%) reported residing in Finland's Capital Region.

[3] 1% of respondents did not wish to disclose their gender.

[4] Not all respondents disclosed their age.

Whilst the survey did not deliver a random probability sample, and thus it cannot be considered representative, it is far the largest (and most recent) collection of empirical evidence on antisemitism, discrimination, and hate crime against Jews in Finland. The results of the data collection have previously been published in Finnish by the Human Rights Center and the Ministry of Justice in Finland (see, Czimbalmos and Pataricza 2024a).

Interviews

Since the survey responses were collected during the early stages of the war, the qualitative interviews offer a more detailed and nuanced understanding of the situation regarding the spring and summer of 2024. As definitions and perceptions of antisemitism can vary across contexts and individuals, these interviews help clarify how respondents interpret and perceive antisemitic sentiments.

A total of 42 semi-structured qualitative interviews were conducted in English and in Finnish between March and June 2024 with individuals over the age of 18 within the *Antisemitism Undermining Democracy* project.[5] The interview outline was designed with the limitations of the survey in mind. While the survey aimed to provide a broad understanding of antisemitism as perceived by Jews living in Finland today, the qualitative data was intended to offer deeper insight into topics that may be considered controversial—such as forms and perceptions of antisemitism related to the State of Israel.

As with the survey respondents, most interview participants resided in the Capital Region of Finland. The youngest informant was 19 years old, and the oldest was in their 80s. Interviews were transcribed verbatim and were anonymized. In the current contribution, to make the quotations comprehendible, linking words were removed from them and when interfering with the understanding of the quotations, grammatical mistakes were also corrected. Interviews that were conducted in Finnish were translated to English by the author.

Limitations

Both the quantitative and qualitative components of the study were designed with a strong emphasis on intersectionality, starting from the data collection phase. Given the relatively small sample size of survey responses in Finland, certain aspects could not be meaningfully explored through the quantitative data alone.

Where sample sizes of the survey data permitted, the study considered the experiences of individuals at specific intersections (e.g., age and gender). However, owing to limited representation, it was not possible to analyze the experiences of certain groups—such as sexual and gender minorities or people with disabilities—in a statistically relevant way. In addition, most respondents were born in Finland and resided in the Capital Region—unsurprising, given that this area has historically had

[5] The members of the project are P.I. Mercédesz Czimbalmos, Dóra Pataricza, Nóra Varga.

the largest Jewish population. This indicates that the findings mainly reflect urban perspectives.

Due to space constraints, this study emphasizes quantitative findings to highlight broader patterns. The qualitative data complements these by adding context and reflecting on the most prevalent issues raised in the survey, laying a foundation for future analysis.

Effects of the Israel–Hamas War

When comparing survey responses given before 7 October 2023 to those submitted afterward, the differences do not conclusively reach statistical significance. The comparison is complicated by the fact that only 75 of the 334 total responses were submitted before 7 October; the remaining 259 came afterward. It is likely that the high number of post-attack responses was itself a reaction to the events of 7 October, as well as to a perceived increase in antisemitic incidents. In cases when deemed relevant, differences between pre- and post-October 7 will be indicated when discussing the survey results.

The survey included an open-ended question. The response to this question—along with general feedback by the respondents—suggest that the war was already influencing perceptions of antisemitism during the survey data collection. While the statistical data does not allow firm conclusions, some responses indicate shifts in perception as early as autumn 2023.

Assessment of How Problematic Antisemitism is in Finland

Respondents of the survey were asked whether they felt that antisemitism and intolerance towards Muslims has increased or decreased in Finland over the past 5 years from conducting the survey—or during the time they have lived in the country. The majority (83%) indicated that antisemitism had increased: 33% said it had increased significantly, while 50% believed it had increased a little. Only 13% felt that the situation had remained the same (see Fig. 1). In comparison, the corresponding percentages in the 2023 EU FRA survey were 65% of increase for Denmark and 82% for Sweden—indicating that similar patterns between Finland and Sweden. The 13-country average of the EU FRA survey was 80% (EU FRA 2024: 26).

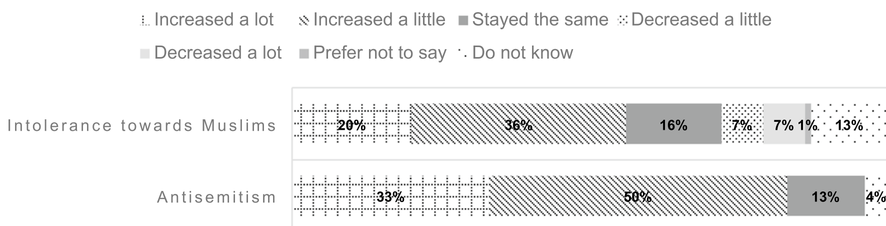

Fig. 1 Perceived change in antisemitism and intolerance towards Muslims over the past 5 years in Finland

In the Finnish case, there were some differences in perceptions on the basis of gender. Among female respondents, 90% reported that antisemitism had increased, compared with 82% of male respondents. Among women born outside Finland, 96% stated that antisemitism had increased, compared with 88% of women born in Finland.[6] The intersection of Jewish identity, gender, and foreign-born status therefore, appears to be an influencing factor.[7] Among those who responded to the survey before the outbreak of the war, 81% reported that antisemitism had increased in Finland over the past 5 years from conducting the survey. This view was shared by 87% of respondents who participated after the start of the war. While it is difficult to pinpoint when the war began influencing responses, a comparison of answers before and after 7 October 2023, as well as the qualitative interviews—as discussed later—suggest a rise in perceived antisemitism as early as during the autumn of 2023.

Antisemitic sentiments on the internet, in the media, and in political life have been increasingly present around the world, both before and after 7 October 2023 (see, e.g., Bachner and Bevelander 2021; Hübscher and Mering 2022; Brelage 2023, Mattson, Andersson Malmros and Sager 2024). In the survey, respondents were asked to assess to what extent they considered different manifestations of antisemitism to be a problem (see Fig. 2). While most respondents viewed all the listed manifestations as problematic, they especially regarded antisemitism on the internet (85%), in the media (74%), and in political life (70%) as either a "very big" or "fairly big" problem (see Fig. 2). Specifically, 57% of respondents considered antisemitism on the internet to be a "very big" problem, followed by 37% for antisemitism in the media, and 27% for antisemitism in political life.[8]

Results of the latest EU FRA survey are similar: 91% of respondents identified antisemitism on the internet and social media as a "very big" or "fairly big" problem in their country. In addition, 74% deemed antisemitism in political life, and 76% antisemitism in the media a "very big" or a "fairly big" problem. While in Sweden, the share of respondents who deemed expressions of hostility towards Jews in the streets or other public areas a "very big" or a "fairly big" problem was 62%, in Denmark it was 40% (EU FRA 2024: 28), in the Finnish case, this adds up to 87% (Fig. 2). This difference can possibly be explained with the timing of the Finnish survey.

Respondents were also asked about perceived changes in antisemitism over the past 5 years (see Fig. 3). In six of seven categories, 53–84% reported an increase. Only in the case of desecration of Jewish cemeteries was the share lower, 31%. Moreover, 84% of the respondents considered that antisemitism had increased "a lot" or "a little" on the internet, 72 suggested the same about antisemitism the media

[6] This calculation includes only respondents who identified as male or female.

[7] Being born abroad does not necessarily imply that the person has no Finnish roots, or that they do not identify as Finnish. Nevertheless, it can be assumed that in most cases those born abroad are also part of the population with foreign background.

This calculation includes only respondents who identified as male or female.

[8] Some bars do not add up to 100%; this is due to rounding of numbers.

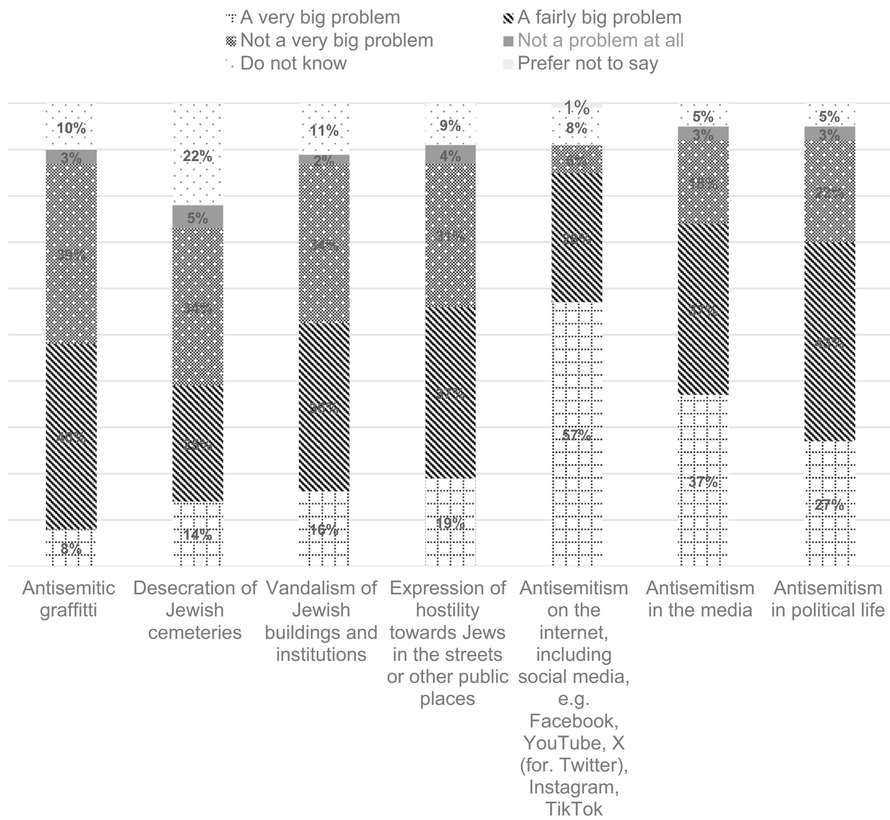

Fig. 2 Assessment of manifestations of antisemitism as problematic in Finland

and 70 about antisemitism in political life (see, Fig. 3).[9] These were also among the phenomena that respondents identified as the most problematic (see, Fig. 2).

Perceptions of Antisemitism

Antisemitism remains a persistent yet often misunderstood form of xenophobia. Its varying definitions across academic and policy contexts hinder both research and public dialogue. Understanding how it is perceived by Jews helps in shedding light on misconceptions, reveal discrimination patterns, and guide effective responses.

The survey explored how respondents assessed specific statements and opinions when expressed by a non-Jewish individual (see Fig. 4). A significant majority (92%) considered it antisemitic if a non-Jewish person did not regard Jews living in Finland as Finnish. The corresponding percentage in the latest EU FRA survey was

[9] The responses contain both "increased a lot" and "increased a little" responses.

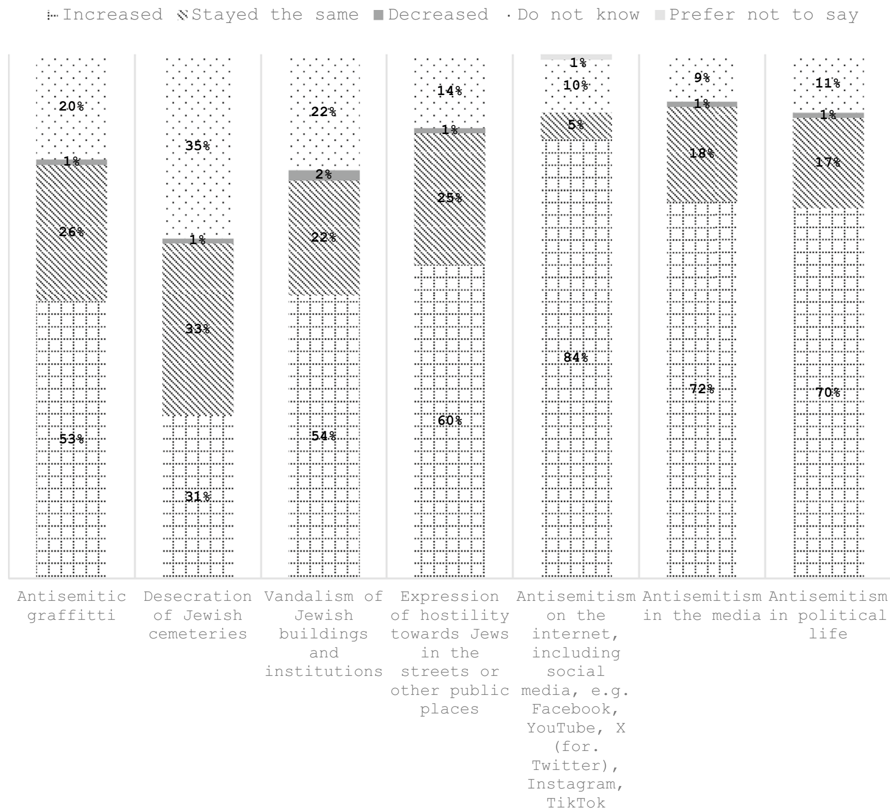

Fig. 3 Perceived change in the manifestations of antisemitism over the past 5 years in Finland. *Note*: ("Increased" includes both "increased a lot" and "increased a little" answers.)

91% (EU FRA 2024: 35). Regarding antisemitism related to the State of Israel, 78% of respondents stated that they considered someone antisemitic if they supported boycotts of Israel or Israelis (e.g., goods, products, or academic professionals).[10] There were only two statements where fewer than half of the respondents considered the behavior to be antisemitic: 31% viewed a non-Jewish person as antisemitic if they always note who is Jewish among their acquaintances, and 38% considered a non-Jewish person who criticizes Israel to be antisemitic (see Fig. 4). According to the 2023 EU FRA survey, the respective percentages were 78%, regarding the

[10] The answers include both "yes, definitely" and "yes, probably" answers.

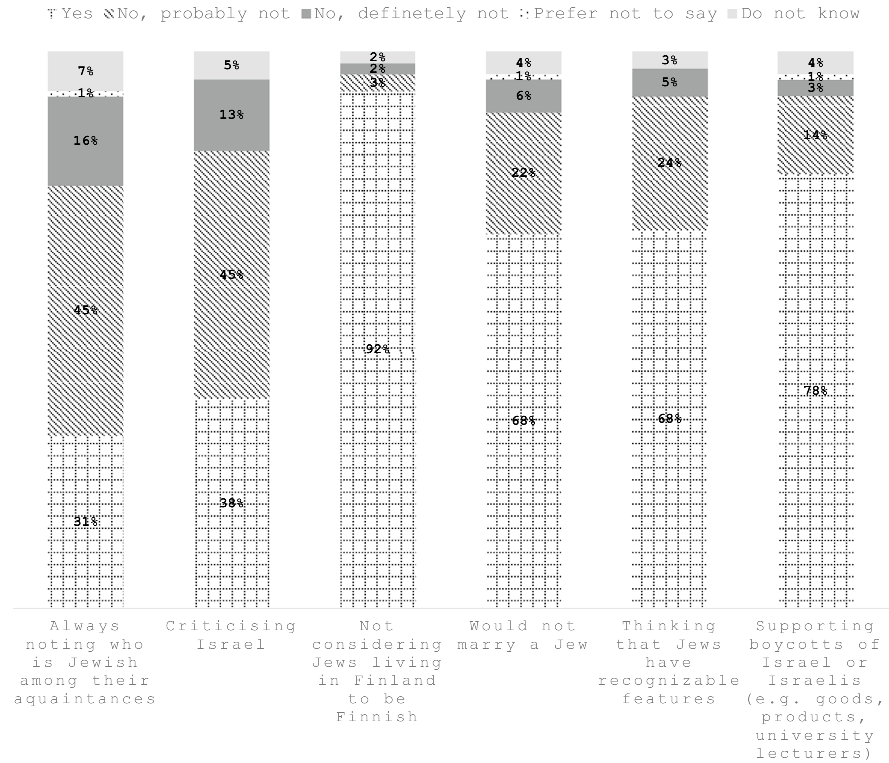

Fig. 4 Assessment of certain opinions or actions of non-Jews as being antisemitic. *Note*: ("Yes" includes "yes, definitely," and "yes, probably" answers)

item about supporting boycotts, 64% regarding noting who is Jewish among their acquaintances, and 52%, regarding criticizing Israel (EU FRA 2024: 36).

This suggests that while certain actions—such as boycotting Israel—are more broadly perceived as antisemitic among the respondents, others, including criticizing Israel, are more contested and not universally seen in the same light. It also indicates that the way such criticism is expressed may determine whether it is perceived as antisemitic.

Manifestations of Antisemitism Encountered

Respondents were asked to reflect on the manifestations of antisemitism they had encountered online or in person over the past 12 months. In the Finnish case, for each item listed (see Fig. 5), a greater proportion of respondents reported encountering it online than in person. For instance, 82% of respondents had seen content denying Israel's right to exist as a state on the internet or social media, whereas 54%

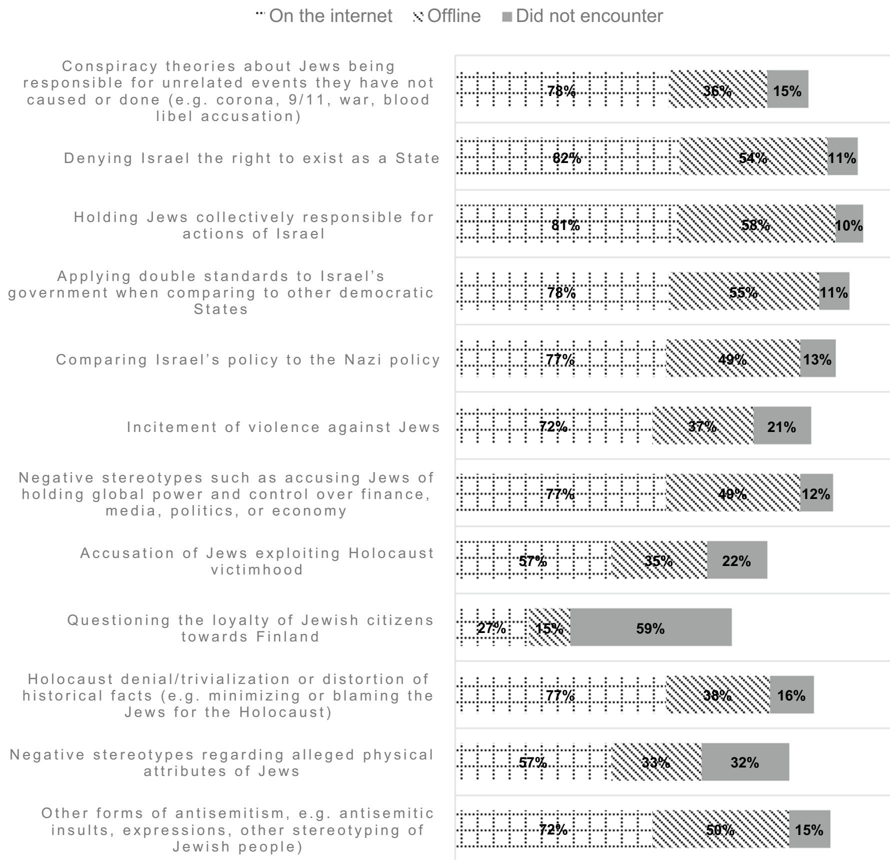

Fig. 5 Encountering antisemitism online and offline in the 12 months before the survey in Finland

reported encountering this form of antisemitism in person (i.e., not online). Similarly, 81% had encountered the notion that Jews are collectively responsible for the actions of the State of Israel online, while 58% reported experiencing this in person. The least commonly reported form of antisemitism was the "questioning of Jewish citizens' loyalty to Finland," with 27% encountering it online and 15% in person.

Overall, the EU average reflects similar trends to Finland, with more respondents encountering antisemitism online than in person. For example, while 72% encountered negative stereotypes about Jews online, 46% encountered this form in person, or while 68% encountered conspiracies online, 30% encountered this manifestation in person in the countries surveyed (EU FRA 2024: 41).

More respondents encountered antisemitism online both before and after the start of the war, which is perhaps not so surprising, as digital platforms have the capacity to amplify hateful views hate through algorithms and echo chambers. Unlike face-to-face interactions—where social norms may discourage overtly hateful speech—online environments frequently lack immediate (or any) social consequences. The

Fig. 6 Encountering antisemitism online or offline in the 12 months before the survey by different age groups

responses indicate that although antisemitic content online appears to have increased since 7 October 2023, it was already a significant problem beforehand. This implies that antisemitism has been a persistent, long-term phenomenon on the internet. Before the start of the war, 82% of respondents reported having encountered antisemitism on the internet. Among those who responded to the survey after the outbreak of the war, the corresponding figure was 89%.

Encountering antisemitism was more common by those in the younger age groups: 93% of respondents aged 16–34 years reported having experienced antisemitism, compared with 84% of those aged 35–54 years, and 73% of those aged 55 or older (see Fig. 6).[11] Younger respondents may report more encounters with antisemitism due to greater awareness and sensitivity, shaped by education, social media, and exposure to diverse environments where antisemitic expressions are more visible. In addition, generational differences in social norms may play a role: older age groups may be more likely to have internalized or normalized certain forms of antisemitism, making them less likely to recognize or report such experiences.

Respondents who had encountered antisemitism in "offline" settings were asked to specify where these experiences took place over the past 12 months: 57% reported encountering antisemitism at political events such as demonstrations, and 50% in public spaces, including streets and public transportation. In addition, 50% reported encountering antisemitic content in traditional media outlets—such as television, radio, or the press—outside of the internet. The corresponding percentages in the 2023 EU FRA survey are 49% at political events, and 52% in a public space, and the 51% for media outlets (other than the internet). According to the results, in Sweden, offline antisemitism is most likely to be experienced at cultural events (36%) (EU FRA 2024: 34). In the Finnish case, 26% of the antisemitic experiences encountered in the 12 months before the survey happened at cultural events.

Respondents were also asked how frequently they had encountered specific forms of antisemitism in the 12 months before the survey—both in person (Fig. 7) and online (Fig. 8). The results indicate that the most frequently encountered manifestations of antisemitism are manifestations connected to the State of Israel (see Fig. 7). With regards to the offline experiences, for example, 41% of respondents reported

[11] This calculation includes only respondents who identified as male or female.

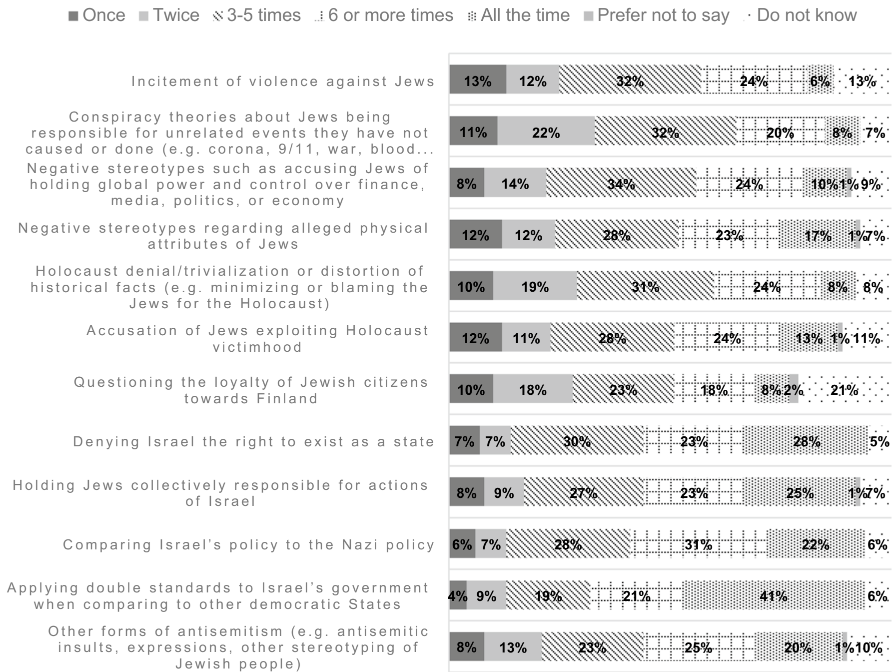

Fig. 7 Frequency of encountering antisemitism in the last 12 months among those who experienced antisemitism offline in Finland

to have encountered "applying double standards to Israel's government when comparing it with other democratic states" "all the time," while 21% had encountered this form more than six times over the past year. The denial of Israel's right to exist was also a rather commonly reported form: 28% said they encountered this "all the time," and 23% had experienced it six or more times within the last 12 months. Other forms—such as verbal insults, antisemitic expressions, stereotypes, and classic tropes associated with Jews—were also reported. A total of 20% of respondents said they encountered these manifestations "all the time," and 25% reported encountering them at least six times during the previous year (see Fig. 7), suggesting that certain "traditional" forms of antisemitism are still present in the Finnish society.

When it comes to the experiences online, over half of the respondents (51%) said that they have encountered individuals "applying double standards towards Israel's government when comparing with other democratic states" "all the time" and 23% six or more times during the past 12 months from conducting the survey. Moreover, 47% of the respondents said that they had encountered "denying Israel the right to exist as a state" "all the time" and 26% six or more times in the previous 12 months (see, Fig. 8).

Forms of antisemitism not specifically related to Israel were more commonly encountered online than in offline settings. According to the survey, 34% of

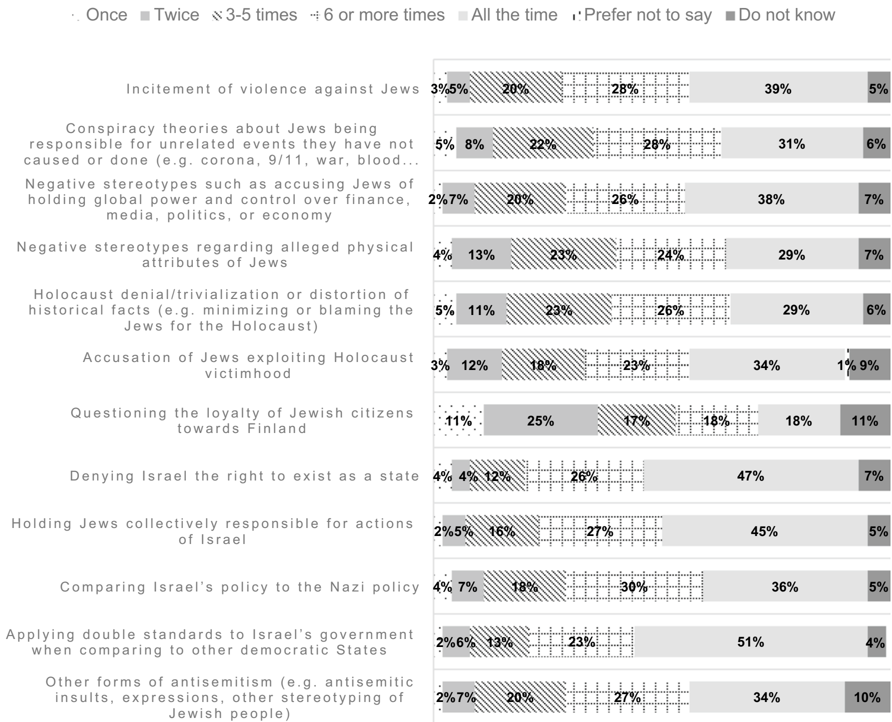

Fig. 8 Frequency of encountering antisemitism in the last 12 months among those who experienced antisemitism online in Finland

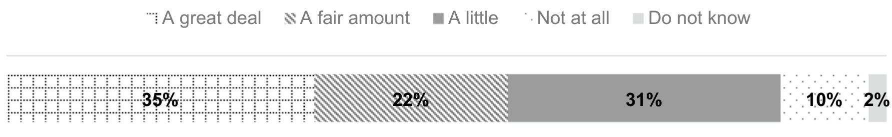

Fig. 9 Arab–Israeli conflict's impact on feeling of safety in Finland

respondents reported encountering “other forms of antisemitism, e.g. antisemitic insults, expressions, other stereotyping of Jewish people” “all the time” on the internet (see Fig. 8), compared with 20% who reported similar experiences offline (see Fig. 7). When asked about their most recent encounter with antisemitism online, 19% stated it was “incitement of violence against Jews,” 15% of respondents reported witnessing “holding Jews collectively responsible for the actions of Israel,” while 14% encountered “denying Israel's right to exist.”

Impact of the Arab–Israeli Conflict and the Actions of the State of Israel on the Perception of the Security of Jews

As recent events in Europe have shown—and as documented in both academic and non-academic sources—conflicts in the Middle East often led to a rise in antisemitism as perceived and an increase in antisemitic incidents targeting Jewish communities in the diaspora (see e.g., Lundgren 2023; Percival 2023; EU FRA 2024). This pattern is also visible in the Finnish context. Almost two thirds (62%) of the 2023 EU FRA survey respondents reported the Arab–Israeli conflict as affecting their feeling of safety "a great deal" or "a fair amount" (EU FRA 2024: 61).

In the Finnish case, 88% reported that the Arab–Israeli conflict affects their feeling of safety: specifically, 35% of respondents stated that such conflicts have a significant impact on them (see Fig. 9). Notably, the responses to this question differed slightly depending on the respondents' country of birth. Those born outside of Finland (excluding Israel) appeared to be more affected, with 46% indicating that the conflict impacts them "a great deal." Respondents born in Israel reported the highest level of impact, with 56% stating the same.

The Swedish results in the 2023 EU FRA survey were strikingly similar to the Finnish ones, with 35% of respondents reporting a "great deal" of impact and 22% reporting a "fair amount." In the Danish case, the corresponding percentages were 22% and 27%, respectively (EU FRA 2024: 61–62).

Previous studies have indicated that it is rather common to hold individual Jews responsible for the actions of the Israeli government (e.g., EU FRA 2013, 2018; Gliszczynska-Grabias 2015) whether they are Israelis or not, and whether they have any impact on or say in what the Israeli government opts to do. As indicated above, holding Jews collectively responsible for the actions of Israel's government has been a frequently experienced form of antisemitism, which the survey respondents have encountered rather regularly both in person (Fig. 7) and on the internet (Fig. 8).

As in previous research, several respondents in the current study also reported encountering situations in which Jews are held collectively responsible for the actions of the Israeli government. While in Finland, 21% of respondents stated that they had never experienced such behavior, 43% said they had occasionally had this impression, 16% reported that it occurred frequently, and 11% felt this happened all the time (Fig. 10).

In Sweden, the respective figures were 27%, 45%, 15%, and 15%, whereas in Denmark, they were 30%, 44%, 18%, and 8% (EU FRA 2024: 63). The fact that

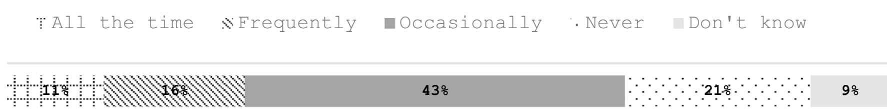

Fig. 10 Feeling blamed for the Israeli government's actions in Finland

a significant portion of respondents in all three countries report experiencing such behavior "occasionally" or "frequently" may suggest that these behaviors are normalized or widespread enough to be regularly noticed across Nordic states.

The quantitative data presented in this section offers an overview of the prevalence and perception of antisemitism in Finland in the early stages of the war starting after the 7 October 2023 attack, indicating a rise in personal experiences of antisemitism. To deepen the understanding on these experiences, the following section turns to qualitative data, which provides further insight into how antisemitism is experienced and interpreted in everyday life at the time of the inquiry.

Qualitative Data

In general, informants clearly articulated their views on what they considered antisemitic and what they believed constitutes antisemitism. They often referred to the IHRA definition as a guiding framework, occasionally acknowledging the existence of alternative definitions.

Across interviews, informants were confident in identifying manifestations of antisemitism from the far-right and recognized that antisemitism on the left is demonstrably more difficult to detect—particularly for those who are not directly affected by it. As one of them assessed:

> *In my opinion, on the left, especially the far-left—there is a kind of antisemitism that is hard to grasp. […] I think that nowadays, a certain kind of antisemitism on the left might be [like] a form of unconscious racism. But if I say this to people who are otherwise willing to accept the idea that people can have unconscious biases against Black people, Muslims, or anyone else—if I say that they might also have unconscious biases against Jews, they don't seem to accept it at all. It's like an impossibility. Why is that? I think there's a major problem in the discussion about antisemitism and how people define it. People have this idea—especially in Finland, where the conversation has been quite rudimentary—that an antisemite is the same as a Nazi.*

Interview accounts noted a recurring issue: antisemitism in Finland has generally been linked to far-right ideologies, which can obscure its presence in left-wing discourse, particularly in relation to Israel and the war in Gaza. With regards to Israel-related antisemitism, informants viewed that whilst criticizing the policies of the Israeli government may not inherently be antisemitic—in fact, they were explicit about their own criticism—, the means of expressing such criticism may be antisemitic, e.g. when it is done via using blood libels, antisemitic tropes, or conspiracies—as discussed later. This observation aligns with the survey's implications.

They also referred to the feeling of being held responsible for the actions of the State of Israel, indicating the imposition of the role of the "collective Jew" (Marcus 2015), which makes Israel the focal point for projections of antisemitic sentiment. They highlighted the pattern of blaming Jews in the diaspora for actions taken by the State of Israel, regardless of their personal connection or lack thereof to the country.

They considered this generalization inherently antisemitic, as it holds the entire group of Jewish people accountable for the actions of a nation-state:

…currently in Finland [the most common form of antisemitism is] equating Jews with Israel. Like, okay, if something like this [war] happens in the Middle East, "all Jews support Israel and since all Jews are connected to Israel, we hate Jews as well." Basically, like the hatred they feel towards Israel shows towards the Jewish institutions too. I think this is the most common [manifestation of antisemitism] at the moment.

Informants identified the conflation of Jews with the State of Israel as a frequent form of antisemitism in Finland and noted that political hostility toward Israel is often projected onto local Jewish communities. This stems from the assumption that all Jews support Israeli policies, making Jewish institutions targets of hostility, especially during conflicts or wars in the Middle East:

…whatever happens there [in the Middle East], especially if Israel does something, Jews all over Europe are attacked. Now, how logical is that if it's not antisemitism? It's not logical. It's not! So, there, what it does is that it awakens the existing antisemitism, which is directed at Jews.

Interview accounts bespoke the perception that antisemitism is persistent and prevalent in the Finnish society, it is not particularly "new," and simply started to surface more blatantly, in light of global events. This phenomenon was also confirmed by the fact that lately the Jewish Community of Helsinki [12] received several messages from individuals expressing their disagreement with Israel's actions in Gaza. There were also small individual demonstrations in front of the premises of the Community against the war (Fig. 11).

Regarding the war in Gaza, several informants signaled that that age-old accusations have been recast into modern political rhetoric, portraying Jews and Israelis as inherently and intentionally violent through demonizing narratives about Israel and Palestinians, as one informant summarized: "…the old blood libel about Jews, which has a religious origin, that has just become transmuted into the desire for Palestinian blood." In this context, informants frequently referenced the IHRA working definition of antisemitism when discussing perceived "double standards" or "disproportionate criticism" directed at the State of Israel:

...disproportionate criticism in some way. [...] for example when the U.S. bombed ISIS in Syria, there wasn't the same kind of discussion about civilian casualties. The number of civilian deaths there was also very high. And now I feel like there's no other topic than those civilians when it comes to Israel. So, in a way, it's this kind of disproportionate, or raising [Israel] to a different standard, or holding [it] to a different standard than other countries.

[12] I would like to express my gratitude to the Jewish Community of Helsinki for providing me with this invaluable insight.

Fig. 11 A man demonstrating in front of the Jewish Community of Helsinki on 16 November 2024. Photo: Author

Informants generally drew the line at singling out Jews as uniquely undeserving of national self-determination, viewing the outright rejection of the legitimacy of a Jewish state as a clear form of antisemitism:

> *...since in the age of nationalism when every other people got their own country, and they could trace the lineages of this area and like blood and soil ideas and stuff like that, and it was considered completely okay but then of course when you start denying Jewish people their own like place in the history of nations, and claiming that Jews need to be resettled, I don't know, to Madagascar or Uganda or some other plans […] which were like, proposed, then I would consider them to be antisemitic.*

Amidst these feelings, they felt the need to point out that not everyone who displays antisemitic symbols or uses antisemitic rhetoric is necessarily motivated by antisemitic intent. As historian Deborah Lipstadt (2019: 77–78) has noted, some individuals might fall under the category of "clueless antisemites:" people who have internalized antisemitic stereotypes and invoke those without being aware that they are antisemitic. Lipstadt also indicated that these individuals may be the most "dangerous," as they do not fully understand what they are doing (Beasley Doyle 2019). Nonetheless, whether or not some antisemitic expressions may be understood as antisemitic by those displaying them, these expressions have an impact, especially when they occur on a larger scale or are repeated frequently. While reflecting on the

complexity of these issues, some cautioned against labeling widespread public criticism as intentionally or inherently antisemitic:

> *…the demonstrations, especially like in Finland I would say like most of the people that are attending are not antisemites, since according to the recent poll I think like over 60 percent of the Finnish people are like against Israeli actions in Gaza. Claiming that all Finnish people, [the] majority of the Finnish people are antisemites is just ridiculous. But of course, there is antisemitism during the demonstrations, different antisemitic shouts. At some demonstrations, there were like some Hezbollah flags, which is considered to be antisemitic...*

Situations in which such antisemitism—whether accompanied by legitimate criticism or not—was frequently expressed included what informants referred to as "pro-Palestinian demonstrations." The frequency of these demonstrations increased after the survey's data collection ended. Many of them featured elements—such as those mentioned above—that respondents identified as antisemitic. One frequent example was the slogan "from the river to the sea," which was frequently interpreted as a call for the destruction of the State of Israel. These accounts show that antisemitism has entered everyday life in a context where open dialogue is discouraged and nuanced discussions are hindered by growing societal polarization:

> *Everything just became much more violent [after October 7]. […] "if you're Jewish you're by definition Israeli and therefore you're this and this and this" […] "You participate in genocide, you support genocide, you're a mass killer, you're a murderer" and so on. Those are like frequently online everywhere. Can't even voice a sound opinion of just like trying to have a discussion on everything. Before that, stuff I saw was more like, the Jewish stereotype kind of thing online.*

This normalization of antisemitism in daily life appears to be reinforced by broader societal channels. While the survey had already indicated this trend, the informants also highlighted a noticeable rise in antisemitic content online, in the media and in political discourse. These channels were seen as powerful forces owing to their rapid reach and lasting impact. In previous research, social media, in particular, was noted to amplify offline antisemitism (Hübscher & von Mering 2022), with implicit antisemitic narratives increasingly visible online (Weinberg et al. 2025). According to the informants, Finland is no exception: "…the way that social media is developing and it is very important to have these very clear one-dimensional messages, so, I think people become kind of susceptible of propaganda and to these kind of conspiracy theories, again." Due to atmosphere, several reported that following October 7, they disconnected from social media or chose to unfollow people with whom they had previously maintained regular contact due to the hostile online environment and frequent antisemitic content they encountered during online interactions:

> *...now, with this war and the massive wave of solidarity with the Palestinians, where there's no criticism of Hamas at all, or no concern whatsoever for the*

fate of the hostages. Well, this has affected my personal relationships, and I've experienced, a kind of antisemitism where suddenly people don't trust me, suddenly they assume what I think or suddenly they distance themselves from me, and I've also distanced myself from people, because I see the enormous pressure and the intense storm on social media where there's only one victim and one villain. And that has been really distressing. So, I've also withdrawn from those platforms—I don't look at them, I don't see them. I withdrew, maybe already at the beginning of November [2023], I pulled back into my own bubble and now I only watch cat videos.

Informants frequently mentioned a certain sense of disregard for Jewish suffering, and a lack of criticism towards violent extremist groups such as Hamas. They recounted instances that indicated a trivialization or ignorance of the violent nature of extremist organizations, in real-life conversations, on social media, and in the media alike. One of them shared a notable personal experience:

My friend was telling me that she was in a flea market with another friend, then she said that this other friend really loves the style of one of the Hamas leaders—like the way he dresses […] and she had gone to the flea market to try to find a similar outfit to wear to a hip-hop festival, and she's calling this style "Hamas drip" […] I didn't even say anything […] I lost some people on October 7, and these people know it, and they're already making these kinds of jokes…

Solidarity with Palestinian civilians may lead to uncritical views of groups hostile towards Jews and can generate "ambient" or "clueless" antisemitism. While certain comments and deeds may not be overtly antisemitic, they can contribute to a feeling of downplaying antisemitic violence—as the example above indicates.

At the same time, the normalization of conspiratorial and stereotypical antisemitic narratives within broader public discourse appears to be intensifying. Informants specifically pointed to the resurgence of classic antisemitic conspiracy theories, often embedded in criticisms of the Israeli government—particularly those invoking alleged Jewish control and power. One informant reflected on this in depth, discussing how such narratives are increasingly visible across both traditional and social media platforms:

I follow a lot of politics and political discussion and like lots of Finnish activists and antiracism and feminism and queer rights and so on. And I've seen some pretty horrible things for example shared on social media. Now, for example, the Eurovision [Song Contest in 2024] is coming up and when Yle [Finnish Broadcasting Company] [….] was making a decision that Finland will join [the contest]. There were for example some images posted of a Jewish caricature, like puppeteering Yle or something like that [….] or then conspiracy theories being shared by people [who] I feel should really know better. For example, a specific antiracist educator shared at some point on their social media that there was the short ceasefire over Black Friday, that "it was over Black Friday so that they could make more money" and things like this. […]

There's just lot of things that are weird. "Old-school antisemitism" in a way, lots of caricatures and references about controlling the world's economy and things like that being combined with discussions of Israel.

The disproportionate criticism towards Israel, and the perceived lack of contextualization in the news was regarded as an element that may reinforce certain antisemitic stereotypes about Jewish people—often accompanied by discussions about omitting the Jewish perspective. Another informant elaborated on this topic by making further reflections on those the media ask to comment on the war in Gaza and on Israeli politics. As she pointed out in a society, such as Finland, where institutional trust is high, questioning certain mainstream narratives that erase the Jewish perspective may easily lead to feelings of isolation or being labeled as irrational:

…the stuff they [commentators on the war and on the Middle East] spew is so out of control […] it's permeated not only the mega leftist clubs at universities, but also respected institutions. In Finland especially, because we are a nation that loves our authorities and our institutions, if Yle [Finnish Broadcasting Company], Helsingin Sanomat [the largest newspaper in Finland] and Ulkopoliittinen instituutti [The Finnish Institute of International Affairs] aren't telling the truth, who can we trust? And then you don't wanna be the person who's like, "Oh, don't trust the mainstream media, don't trust our universities, don't trust…" 'cause then you just seem like a folio hat dude who's just like rambling against the mainstream media. And it's like, "No, it's not that, I swear! I'm not that dude, I'm not that dude!" But then you end up being like, "Don't trust the mainstream media!" And you're like, "Christ, I sound insane."

Several references were made to antisemitism at educational institutions, especially after an encampment was set up at the in front of the University of Helsinki demanding academic boycott of Israeli institutions. When referring to the encampment (Fig. 12) an informant, who was also a student at the institution told:

...you walk into Porthania building [of the University of Helsinki] and you've kind of got, you know, "from the river to the sea" written across the thing [banner] and it's tricky because you don't know whether or not [they mean it in a certain way], you know? Of course, people will say "that's not antisemitic, because it can be interpreted in both ways," or "[it is not] not anti-Israel" or whatever. So, you can interpret this both [ways] [...] I do become a bit more aware of my being Jewish when that's what I'm confronted with, and I see that.

While phrases such as "from the river to the sea" may be defended as expressions of political opinion, they can simultaneously evoke discomfort, feelings of exclusion, and perceptions of antisemitism among Jewish individuals. In response to specific events, individuals may experience heightened awareness of their Jewish identity: perceptions of antisemitism—and of Jewish identity—are not only influenced by intent, but also by lived experiences and their emotional impact.

Fig. 12 The encampment in front of the Porthania building of the University of Helsinki before its dissolution on 12 June 2024. Photo: Author

Regarding the perceived increase of antisemitism in political life, informants talked about the instrumentalization of Jews in political discourse, highlighting how political actors across the spectrum—from the political left to the right—often invoke Jewish identity to serve their own agendas. In the past, elements of the broader political right have adopted pro-Israel or ostensibly anti-antisemitic positions, particularly when such stances align with xenophobic narratives targeting Muslim immigrants (Kahmann 2017; Selent and Kortmann 2025). One informant pointed to the presence of antisemitism on the political left, while also noting that right-wing expressions of "support" for Jews or for Israel are frequently driven by political interests and not necessarily by genuine solidarity:

> *...people use Jews in order to advance whatever political agenda they have. So, this time it's from the left. I'm not saying that the right, also the kind of the support that we get from the right, I understand that this is for exactly the same reason. They don't love Jews, right, but it serves their political agenda, so yeah, but like beggars can't be choosers, then yes, I understand that we need to like form these kind of alliances, crazy alliances.*

This situation has fostered an environment in which Jewish individuals and organizations often feel pressured to align with groups that may not prioritize their

best interest and their well-being. In this respect, frequent references were made to e.g. certain Christian Zionist groups that often made them feel “uncomfortable.”[13]

Overall, the accounts of the informants were in line with the results of the survey. They reveal a complex landscape of antisemitism in Finland, where antisemitic sentiments on the left appear to be affecting the lives of Jewish individuals, and where the war between Israel and Hamas has intensified the presence—as well as the impact—of both overt and subtle forms of antisemitism.

Conclusions

The aim of this study is to present the perceptions of Jews living in Finland regarding antisemitism and its forms of manifestation according to the results of a survey distributed between 4 October and 4 November 2023, as well as on the basis of 42 semi-structured qualitative interviews, conducted between March and June 2024.

As for the survey, a total of 334 responses were collected, representing approximately 17–22% of Finland’s Jewish population (over the age of 16) participating in the survey. Most respondents of the survey (83%) indicated that antisemitism had increased: 33% said it had increased significantly, while 50% believed it had increased somewhat in the country over the past 5 years (from conducting the survey). Most respondents of the survey regarded antisemitism on the internet (85%), in the media (74%), and in political life (70%) as either a “very big” or “fairly big” problem in Finland—issues that were also discussed during the interviews collected.

In line with the results of the survey research, informants from the qualitative inquiry ($n=42$) not only confirmed the survey findings but also provided further explanation of certain complexities regarding forms of antisemitism that may be more difficult to recognize. They acknowledged the persistence of antisemitism across the political spectrum, describing a rise in both overt and ambient forms—ranging from classic conspiracy theories to more implicit narratives present in social media and public discourse. Many highlighted the issue of expressing criticism of Israel in antisemitic forms, particularly when antisemitic tropes, conspiratorial elements, double standards, or denial of Jewish self-determination are involved. Their accounts signaled that while certain expressions may not be explicitly antisemitic, they can still contribute to an atmosphere of discomfort or unease among Jewish individuals.

These expressions were mainly associated with discussions on Israel and on the ongoing war in Gaza, predominantly originating from the left of the political spectrum. This is in line with what Jonathan Boyd (2024) describes as “ambient antisemitism,” in the narrative of the informants often expressed by those whom Deborah Lipstadt (2019) calls “clueless antisemites.” The data reveals that antisemitic tropes and stereotypes about Jews remain embedded and normalized in public discourse in Finland—often surfacing alongside rhetoric related to the State of Israel online, in public demonstrations, and even in the media.

[13] Owing to spatial limitations, this topic is not explored further in the current contribution.

The responses from the survey show and the interview research emphasize, that forms of antisemitism in relation to the State of Israel seem to be the most prevalent as experienced by Jews in Finland today, while traditional forms of antisemitism are still present in the Finnish society—often simultaneously. Although research interest in antisemitism in Finland has grown over the past two decades, in the rapidly evolving global political context, there is a clear need for further research, as well as targeted actions aimed at actively combating, reducing, and preventing the continued rise of antisemitism in Finnish society.

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Declarations

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