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Shani Orgad

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Is the social contract between the state and British Jews broken?

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LSE's Professor Shani Orgad discusses some of the findings of her research into the experiences of British Jews, in light of a growing tide of antisemitism in the UK.

Following last week's **horrific antisemitic attack in Golders Green** in north London, UK Prime Minister Keir Starmer called on the public to "**open their eyes to Jewish pain**". Yet our research suggests that the PM and his government might do better to open their own eyes to what underpins the pain many British Jews experience today: the state's failure to honour its social contract with this minority.

Since the 7 October 2023 attacks on Israel and the subsequent Israel-Gaza war, Jews in Britain have experienced a growing tide of antisemitism. Over the course of 2025, **3,700 instances of antisemitic hate** were reported, up 4 per cent from the previous year and 14 per cent lower than the highest ever annual total of 4,298 antisemitic incidents reported in 2023. Incidents include last week's Golders Green attack, in which two men were stabbed; an **arson attack** at former synagogue in east London; an **attack** on the Jewish ambulance service Hatzola; an **attempted firebombing** at a synagogue in Kenton, London; and a **terrorist attack on Manchester's Heaton Park synagogue** in October 2025, which killed two Jewish people and seriously injured three others.

In the wake of this alarming rise in antisemitism, focus groups we conducted between December 2025 and March 2026 with 43 British Jews across the UK revealed severely declining trust in Britain's major institutions. The **oldest non-Christian minority** in the country, the Jewish community is less than 0.5 per cent of the UK population and includes both practising and non-practising members from a range of denominational affiliations and political views.

But despite their differences, people repeatedly expressed a similar stark sense of betrayal. Focus group participants stressed that while they were fulfilling their side of the bargain—complying with the law, paying taxes, contributing to civic life—the state increasingly was failing to provide them with protection and treat them fairly. “The pillars in the society we live in”, bemoaned a man in his 70s from Birmingham, “are letting us down”.

Widespread institutional failures

One of these major pillars is the **police**. While several London-based participants expressed appreciation of the police's efforts to keep the Jewish community safe, those outside of London felt strongly that the police were not doing enough to protect them. This feeling intensified after the October 2025 terrorist attack on Manchester's Heaton Park synagogue.

However, while public discussion of the police has centred on protecting the physical safety of Britain's Jews, focus group participants highlighted an issue many found far more appalling, unsettling and alarming: the police's **careless handling of flawed evidence** and **failure to engage directly with members of the Jewish community**, resulting in discrimination against and exclusion of British Jews. Last November, based on erroneous evidence provided by Birmingham's Safety Advisory Group, West Midlands Police decided to ban Israeli football club Maccabi Tel Aviv supporters from attending an Aston Villa match in Birmingham, a decision they later **apologised** for. In five out of six focus groups, participants—unprompted—expressed their shock and anger at the police's conduct. "I find it very frightening", said a Glasgow participant, at "the state manipulating the facts in order to exclude us. My personal confidence that the police are doing their best trying to protect us and balance conflicting priorities is very dented".

Participants also saw the **education system** as fundamentally letting them down. They shared painful examples of antisemitic incidents experienced by their children and grandchildren at schools that were failing to honour their legal safeguarding duty to protect children from harm and abuse, promote their welfare and support their mental health and wellbeing. The mother of an eight-year-old living in Leeds complained to the school that some classmates had told him that all Jews should be dead. The school responded that they could not tell parents what to teach their children. Another mother reported that her 12-year-old son was told by a kid in his class he should be gassed,

which the school promised to investigate, but never followed up or checked on her son.

Participants also expressed anger about their children's and grandchildren's schools' decisions not to sign up to events commemorating Holocaust Memorial Day in 2026. Indeed, since the October 7 2023 attacks on Israel, the number of UK schools commemorating the Holocaust has more than **halved**. "This is erasure of us", said a woman in her 50s from Leeds with deep sadness.

Universities were also repeatedly mentioned as major institutions that have systematically **failed** to protect and support Jewish **students** and staff. One participant described being shouted at "Get over what happened in Germany!" when giving a talk about antisemitism in higher education in a national Equality Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) conference. "This is antisemitism", she lamented, but "nobody said this is not acceptable".

Both **social media** and the **BBC** were seen as profoundly betraying Jewish people in the UK. Several participants had suffered antisemitic abuse online and many felt strongly that tech platforms should be better regulated and held accountable. Indeed, there is clear **evidence** that **social media platforms** allow and **encourage proliferation of** antisemitism and hate. However, it was the BBC which had left participants most angry, upset and disappointed. "We have a national broadcaster, a state-sponsored broadcaster, whose agenda seems entirely antithetical to the needs of the Jewish people in this country", proclaimed a woman in her 40s from Manchester.

Crucially, this and other statements about the BBC, predominantly concerned what participants saw as the BBC's collusion in and contribution to antisemitism in the UK, rather than its perceived bias against Israel. For example, many cited the broadcasting of Bob Vylan's chant at Glastonbury in 2025 **calling for Israeli soldiers to be killed**,

which was ruled to have **broken editorial guidelines** in relation to harm and offence. These types of repeated breaches and errors, participants said, amplify antisemitism and “end up on our doorstep in Heaton Park”, as a woman from Manchester put it. Participants also mentioned with dismay the BBC’s January 2026 **coverage of Holocaust Memorial Day**, which referred several times to “6 million people” rather than “6 million Jewish people” murdered by the Nazi regime. The BBC later corrected and apologised for this, but apologies do little to repair trust or undo the erasure and betrayal that British Jews experience.

Other institutions participants felt were failing British Jews include the **legal system**. Participants were particularly angered at the weak and slow prosecution of antisemitic hate crimes and parliament’s **failure so far to proscribe the IRGC** and the **Muslim Brotherhood**. Incidents of antisemitism in the **NHS** and institutional failure to address and punish those involved were also reported by participants who experienced them either as **patients** or **NHS employees**. In one case, an NHS employee was told by her team’s EDI lead that “EDI spaces didn’t work when Jews were included in them. It simply didn’t work to have Jews in the same space”.

The severe consequences for British Jews’ lives

The severe consequences of these institutions’ failures are extremely concerning. Jews in 2026 UK are forced to adopt strategies and practices that, throughout history, persecuted minorities—including Jews—developed when state protection was absent or weak. In our focus groups, some of the younger participants reported changing their surnames, fearing that an identifiably Jewish surnames would jeopardise job applications. Many described not wearing or concealing

“visibly Jewish” signs such as Star of David pendants and kippahs, and removing mezuzahs from their doors and the Hanukkahs traditionally displayed in windows on the Jewish holiday of Hannukah.

Overall, almost all participants talked with pain and sadness of how concealment, vigilance, withdrawal and stress have become defining features of their and their Jewish communities’ everyday life in today’s Britain. At the same time, many—notably, more often men than women—emphasised that they try to refuse being led by fear, by standing up to antisemites and being out and proud. However, they admitted, it was extremely exhausting and exacting.

Our research findings and last week’s events in Britain show clearly that UK Jews are unsafe—physically, psychologically, mentally, socially, culturally and legally. Thus, the conversation to be had is *not* about whether British Jews **are unsafe or perceive themselves to be unsafe**. Rather, the most urgent conversation is about the institutional failure to keep British Jews safe and treat them fairly and equally, and the urgent need for government and state institutions to uphold their fundamental obligations to one of Britain’s oldest minorities.

The research was supported by the LSE Urgency Fund and the author is grateful for research assistance from Tia Mitchell. Six focus groups were held in five cities with Jewish population concentrations (London, Manchester, Leeds, Birmingham, Glasgow). They included participants of different gender, age and denominational affiliation, as well as both practising and non-practising Jews.

This post gives the views of the author and not the position of the Media@LSE blog, nor of the London School of Economics and Political Science.

About the author



Professor Shani Orgad is Professor in the Department of Media and Communications at LSE. Her research interests include gender, feminism and the media, media representations, inequality and contemporary culture, representations of suffering and migration, new media, narrative and media, media and everyday life, media and globalisation, and ethnographic research methods.

She is the author of four books, including *Heading Home: Motherhood, Work, and the Failed Promise of Equality* (Columbia University Press, 2019), and *Confidence Culture* (2022, with Rosalind Gill).

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Dr Shai Aran

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May 7, 2026 at 9:52 am

Rigorous research . Alarming conclusions. Will share this blog with my students studying qualitative research methods.

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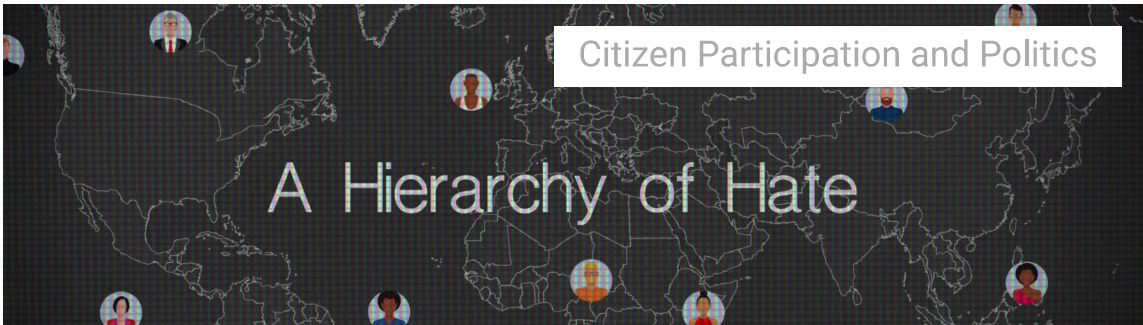
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