

Holocaust Inversion and Justification of Anti-Jewish Aggression: Evidence From Two National Surveys in Norway

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While perpetrators of anti-Jewish harassment and violence are a small minority in democratic societies, they rely on a larger number of people who justify such aggression or silently condone it. Using data from nationally representative surveys of the Norwegian population, I report two studies investigating whether endorsement of Holocaust inversion—the belief that Israel treats Palestinians as badly as Jews were treated during World War II—is associated with (a) justification of harassment and violence against Jews and (b) refusal to take a stance against such aggression. Study 1 ($N = 1,575$) found support for both hypotheses. In a preregistered replication, Study 2 ($N = 1,653$) confirmed these results. Follow-up analyses found that endorsement of Holocaust inversion was also associated with refusal to answer questions measuring blatant antisemitic prejudice. The findings support theorizing that sees Holocaust inversion as a socially more acceptable vehicle for expressing and legitimizing antisemitic hostility.

Public Significance Statement

This study found that endorsement of Holocaust inversion—the belief that Israel treats Palestinians just as badly as Jews were treated during World War II—is associated with justification of harassment and violence against Jews and refusal to take a stance against such aggression. The results indicate that, for many people, portraying Israelis as “the new Nazis” provides a socially acceptable way to express and legitimize antisemitic hostility.

Keywords: antisemitism, Holocaust inversion, Israel–Palestine, prejudice, aggression

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Johannes Due Enstad

For it is happening again. The victims have themselves become perpetrators.

—Lars West Johnsen, political editor of Norwegian daily *Dagsavisen*, November 26, 2024 (Johnsen, 2024)

Antisemitic hostility has increased in the 21st century, leading to fear and safety concerns among Jewish communities in many countries (European Monitoring Centre on Racism and Xenophobia, 2004; European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, 2013, 2018; Enstad, 2017, Enstad, 2024b). This trend was underscored by the sharp rise in anti-Jewish aggression following the Hamas-led attack on Israel on October 7, 2023, and the subsequent war (Freedman et al., 2024; Reuters, 2023). Such a pattern, with flare-ups in the Israel/Palestine conflict followed by a rise in violence and harassment targeting Jews outside the conflict area, is by now a familiar finding in the literature on contemporary antisemitism (Feinberg, 2020; LaFreniere Tamez et al., 2024; Smith, 2008; Vergani et al., 2022).

It is well known from research on intergroup relations that acts of aggression against outgroup members do not occur in a vacuum; perpetrators of such acts tend to rely on a broader environment of people who morally justify them (Fiske & Rai, 2015; Struch & Schwartz, 1989). Research on bystander behavior finds that collective responses to hate crimes are powerful signals, as they can affect the damage done by indicating either a permissive or a disapproving social norm (Zapata et al., 2024). While direct witnesses to hate crimes may be few, a larger population of indirect bystanders can influence the social climate by how they justify, condone, or condemn such aggression. Hence, understanding the factors associated with the justification of outgroup aggression is important. To date, this question has received scant attention in social and behavioral research on antisemitism. In the

present research, I address this gap by examining the extent to which endorsement of Holocaust inversion—the belief that Israel is comparable to Nazi Germany—is associated with justification of anti-Jewish aggression or refusal to take a stance against it.

While Holocaust inversion has been extensively discussed as a trope in theoretical and historical scholarship on antisemitism, its psychological functions have not been empirically tested. The present research provides, to my knowledge, the first quantitative, population-based examination of whether endorsement of Holocaust inversion is associated with willingness to justify aggression against Jews.

Justification of Outgroup Aggression

Why do some people attack and denigrate outgroup members? Any explanation needs to consider the role of the social environment in offering justification and moral support for such acts. Moral motives structure much human interaction, including violence and aggression (Rai & Fiske, 2011; Wig & Obaidi, 2025). In a broad-ranging survey of research on violent practices across the globe, Fiske and Rai (2015) found that most perpetrators of violence are morally motivated in the sense that they act with reference to moral codes and convictions that are shared by the ingroup. For example, extremist and terrorist violence, even when perpetrated by “lone wolves,” tends to be inspired by narratives of justification shared by wider groups (Berntzen & Sandberg, 2014; McCauley & Moskalenko, 2017). For aggressors to feel that they are “doing the right thing,” the presence of a social environment that supports, permits, or condones violence against the outgroup is essential. Without a meaningful expectation of external justification, the bar for committing aggressive acts will likely be much higher.

To understand why people justify outgroup aggression, research on the psychology of conflict has stressed the importance of a conflict-supporting mindset (Saguy & Reifentag, 2022). The main manifestations of such a mindset are prejudiced beliefs and exclusionary convictions that portray the outgroup’s narratives and self-understandings as illegitimate or unworthy of moral concern. Whether and how such beliefs are expressed, however, is strongly governed by social norms. Research has found consistent correlations between people’s expressed prejudice and their perceptions of what constitutes socially acceptable expressions of prejudice (Crandall et al., 2002). According to the justification-suppression model of prejudice, genuine prejudices are often not expressed directly but are restrained and suppressed by salient norms (Crandall & Eshleman, 2003). These insights underpin the broader distinction between blatant and subtle prejudice that has characterized much research on prejudice in recent decades (Anderson, 2010; Jones et al., 2016; Operario & Fiske, 2001; Pearson et al.,

2009; Pettigrew & Meertens, 1995; Stanke et al., 2024; Tarman & Sears, 2005). Against this background, when seeking to explain the justification of outgroup aggression, it appears crucial to investigate the potential role of subtle prejudice in making individuals more likely to openly support or silently condone such acts and less likely to challenge them.

Holocaust Inversion as a Norm-Compatible Expression of Antisemitic Prejudice

In the context of contemporary antisemitism, it can be expected that blatant antisemitic prejudice—open expressions of hostility toward Jews as a group—is linked to the justification of aggression against Jews. However, there is a strong social norm against expressions of blatant antisemitic prejudice in liberal democracies, and such attitudes appear to have been declining over recent decades in Western Europe and North America (J. E. Cohen, 2018; Staetsky, 2017; Watts, 1997). At the same time, however, antisemitic incidents have risen, and Jewish communities report increasing pressure and insecurity (Enstad, 2023). The justification–suppression model suggests a possible resolution to this paradox: Underlying antisemitic hostility that cannot be expressed in blatant form may find outlet through more subtle beliefs and attitudes that are more compatible with social norms. A growing body of research points to beliefs about Israel as one such outlet, with consistent correlations found between anti-Israel attitudes and antisemitic prejudice (Binstok et al., 2024; Cohen-Abady et al., 2016; F. Cohen et al., 2009; Enstad, 2024b; Kaplan & Small, 2006; Staetsky, 2017). While most of this literature consists of cross-sectional studies that do not formally establish causality, a notable recent study by Binstok et al. (2024) analyzed social media and survey data and, using an instrumental variable approach, found support for a causal interpretation of such correlations: Negative views about Jews affected people’s views about Israel.

These findings can be understood in light of the body of literature on contemporary forms of prejudice that emerged in response to the stigmatization of overt bigotry in Western societies in the second half of the 20th century. The development of concepts such as symbolic racism (Sears, 1988; Tarman & Sears, 2005), aversive racism (Gaertner & Dovidio, 2000; Pearson et al., 2009), and subtle prejudice (Anderson, 2010; Pettigrew & Meertens, 1995) reflects the same basic insight: When blatant expressions of prejudice become socially unacceptable, hostility does not vanish but instead finds less overt forms of expression that are more compatible with social norms and egalitarian self-images. In the case of aversive racism, for example, individuals who consciously espouse egalitarian values may nevertheless harbor negative affect toward outgroups but restrict expressions of such bias to situations wherein it can be justified

on nonprejudiced grounds (Gaertner & Dovidio, 2000). In the case of contemporary antisemitism, negative beliefs about Israel may function in this very manner, as a socially acceptable vehicle for expressing underlying antisemitic prejudice. In the present study, I contend that Holocaust inversion—the equation of Israel with Nazi Germany—is a plausible candidate for such a mechanism.

Before defining Holocaust inversion, some conceptual distinctions are necessary. While there is consensus around a basic definition of antisemitism as a persistent, latent structure of hostile beliefs toward Jews as a group (Fein, 1987), there has been considerable contestation regarding the conditions under which anti-Israel attitudes—negative evaluations of Israel and its policies or conduct—should be understood as expressions of antisemitism (Feldman & Volovici, 2023; Heilbronn et al., 2019; Klug, 2003, 2013; Penslar, 2022). Criticism of Israeli governments, policies, or conduct, even when emotionally charged and strongly worded, does not in itself constitute antisemitism. Nevertheless, it is an empirical fact that critical discourse targeting Israel and Zionism has often served (and continues to serve) as a vector for expressions of antisemitic sentiment (Becker et al., 2022; Holz & Haury, 2021; Jaspal, 2016; Schwarz-Friesel & Reinharz, 2017). Historically, antisemitic language targeting Israel has been ideologically diverse, propagated across highly different contexts including far-right and far-left milieus (Bland, 2019; Brustein & Roberts, 2015; Rich, 2018), Soviet propaganda (Korey, 1972; Tabarovsky, 2022), and Islamic radicalism (Benz & Wetzel, 2007; Krämer, 2006; Webman, 2017). Despite the wide contextual variety, such language tends to evoke similar rhetorical tropes. One such recurring and well-documented trope is Holocaust inversion: recasting Israelis as the new Nazis (Haury, 2025; Holz & Haury, 2021; Tabarovsky, 2022).

The defining feature of Holocaust inversion is the reversal of the roles of victim and perpetrator, accusing the Jewish people of being just as bad as, or even worse than, those who set out to annihilate them. Because Holocaust inversion portrays Israel, Israelis, and, indirectly, Jews everywhere who identify with or sympathize with the Jewish state, as equivalent to Nazis and Nazi sympathizers, it appears plausible that this trope can serve as a mechanism to legitimize hostility and aggression toward Jews. As Marcus (2010) argued, the Israelis-as-Nazis analogy serves to “justify not only anti-Israeli but also anti-Jewish activity that otherwise is socially or legally repelled” (p. 64). Within the post-1945 moral order, the Nazis and the Holocaust represent the paradigmatic violation of fundamental values—the ultimate symbols of evil against which contemporary liberal democracies define themselves. Hence, the act of equating Israel and Jews to Nazis involves presenting them as a grave threat to basic collective values, against which hostility becomes morally warranted. Such a conjecture is consistent with integrated threat theory (Stephan & Stephan, 2000), which

holds that prejudice can arise as a response to symbolic threat—perceptions of threats to ingroup norms, values, and worldviews—even in the absence of direct competition for resources (i.e., realistic threat). Moreover, studies show that symbolic threat is strongly associated with intergroup hostility and feelings of hate (Martínez et al., 2022; Obaidi et al., 2018).

One might object that Holocaust inversion appears to be a form of blatant rather than subtle prejudice, in the sense that equating any group with Nazis is an extreme accusation. However, this belief has gained considerable normative acceptance. In Germany, surveys have indicated that up to 40% of the population agree that Israel's treatment of Palestinians is "in principle nothing other than what the Nazis did to the Jews" (Holz & Haury, 2021, p. 94); in Norway, data from 2024 suggest that 50% of the population endorses a similar statement (Moe, 2024). Such prevalence indicates that Holocaust inversion has become compatible with mainstream social norms in ways that overtly antisemitic statements (e.g., "Jews are to blame for their own persecution") have not. In other words, even though Holocaust inversion is semantically extreme, it is embedded in a more widely accepted political and moral frame (opposition to perceived oppression, solidarity with Palestinians) that allows it to be experienced and presented as strong criticism and not prejudice. Accordingly, Holocaust inversion may function analogously to other forms of modern or symbolic prejudice, where hostility is expressed through ostensibly universal moral claims that enjoy wide social acceptability.

The Norwegian Context

Norway provides an instructive context for examining these dynamics. Being a liberal democracy with a very small Jewish population of about 1,500 persons, Norway tends to show low levels of blatant antisemitic prejudice by international comparison (Hoffmann & Moe, 2017; Moe, 2023). Historical research points to the evolution of a robust anti-antisemitic norm in Norwegian society after 1945, persisting into the present day (Simonsen, 2023). However, observers have also noted a strong current of anti-Israel opinion in Norway in the 21st century (Gerstenfeld, 2009), and events following the October 7 attack and the subsequent war—such as the Norwegian Foreign Minister prohibiting the King of Norway from sending official condolences to Israel—led to a deterioration in the diplomatic relationship between the two countries, with Norway's attitude characterized as one of sheer hostility (Abrams, 2024; Brekke, 2024; Eichner, 2024a). Holocaust inversion beliefs are widespread, with recent data indicating that approximately one third to one half of the population endorses statements equating Israel's treatment of Palestinians with Nazi persecution of Jews (Hoffmann & Moe, 2017; Moe, 2024). This dual context—strong norm against blatant

antisemitism alongside substantial acceptance of Holocaust inversion—makes Norway a suitable setting for testing whether Holocaust inversion functions as a socially acceptable way to express antisemitic hostility.

The Present Research

Based on the above considerations, I derive the central hypothesis of this study. If Holocaust inversion functions as a moral framework that legitimizes hostility toward Jews—by positioning them as perpetrators of paradigmatic evil against whom opposition is righteous—then endorsement of Holocaust inversion should be positively associated with justification of aggression against Jews. This association is expected to hold even after controlling for blatant antisemitic prejudice because Holocaust inversion can provide something that blatant prejudice alone does not: a morally sanctioned and socially more acceptable rationale for hostility.

A secondary hypothesis concerns refusal to take a stance against anti-Jewish aggression. If individuals who endorse Holocaust inversion harbor antisemitic prejudice but are also sensitive to social norms against justifying violence, they may be reluctant both to explicitly endorse aggression and to condemn it. Refusal to answer the justification question may thus function as a "safer" position that accommodates both the underlying hostile sentiment (that Jews "deserve" hostility) and the social pressure to avoid openly endorsing violence. Endorsement of Holocaust inversion is therefore expected to correlate not only with justification of aggression, but also with refusal to take a stance.

I report two studies that test these hypotheses. I draw on survey data from Norway, collected in two waves in 2017 and 2022 as part of a project led by the Norwegian Center for Holocaust and Minority Studies to investigate the Norwegian population's attitudes toward Jews and Muslims (Hoffmann & Moe, 2017; Moe, 2023). In Study 1, I use data from a nationally representative survey fielded in January to April 2017 ($n = 1,575$). In Study 2, which was preregistered prior to accessing the data (Enstad, 2024a), I draw on a subsequent wave of the same survey, fielded in November 2021 to February 2022 ($n = 1,653$). In both studies, I also explore whether the hypothesized associations hold for separate samples of Muslims with an immigrant background ($n = 586$ and 821), a group for whom prior research indicates that both anti-Jewish and anti-Israel attitudes tend to be more widespread than in the general population (Czymara et al., 2025; Jikeli, 2015; Koopmans, 2015; Moe, 2023).

Transparency and Openness

Study 2 was preregistered prior to accessing the data; deviations from the preregistered plan are reported in the

Supplemental Materials. Study 1 was not preregistered. Both studies use publicly available secondary data from surveys conducted by the Norwegian Center for Holocaust and Minority Studies. Analysis code is available in the **Supplemental Materials**. Analyses were conducted using R version 4.4.1 (R Core Team, 2024).

Study 1

Materials and Method

I used data from a 2017 survey of attitudes toward Jews and Muslims in Norway, which included a population sample and a sample of Muslims of immigrant background (Hoffmann & Moe, 2017). The population survey was conducted electronically using Kantar TNS's access panel consisting of 55,000 individuals aged 18 or above. Participants were pre-stratified and selected based on education, gender, age, and geography to ensure a nationally representative sample. The total sample size was 1,575. Kantar TNS calculated weights to correct for slight biases observed in the final sample relating to geographical region and education level.

The Muslim sample consisted of individuals aged 18–75 with an immigrant background from Muslim-majority countries, either immigrants or their descendants. The sample, drawn from the National Population Register, was stratified based on historical response rates to ensure proportional representation by country background. The total sample size was 828 respondents, 586 of whom identified as Muslim. Further details about samples and response rates are reported by Hoffmann and Moe (2017).

To measure endorsement of Holocaust inversion, I used an item asking respondents to indicate how well the following statement fit with their views: "Israel treats the Palestinians just as badly as the Jews were treated during World War II."¹ Response options were *not at all*, *rather badly*, *rather well*, *completely*, and *impossible to answer*. The variable was factorized, with *not at all* as the reference level. Even though the wording of this item does not explicitly mention "Nazis," the reference to the treatment of Jews during World War II strongly evokes Nazi persecution and the Holocaust in contemporary discourse and thus fits the pattern of Holocaust-based analogy and perpetrator–victim reversal described in the literature.

For the outcome measure, I used the following item: "Considering how Israel treats the Palestinians, harassment and violence against Jews can be defended."² Response options again included *not at all*, *rather badly*, *rather well*, *completely*, and *impossible to answer*. A categorical variable was computed with the categories "not justifiable" (reference), "justifiable," and "refusal to answer," which enabled analyzing both outcomes—justification of aggression and refusal to answer—within a single model. Note that this item explicitly refers to Jews (not Israelis or Zionists) and uses language indicating moral justification ("can be defended").

While any single survey item is subject to some interpretive variation, this wording leaves relatively little room for respondents to agree without endorsing, at minimum, a permissive stance toward aggression against Jews as a group. Nevertheless, I interpret agreement with the item cautiously, as indicating willingness to see anti-Jewish aggression as justifiable rather than as direct endorsement of violence.

I estimated multinomial regression models for the population sample and the Muslim sample separately. For each sample, I report three models: first, a baseline model with Holocaust inversion endorsement only; second, a model with control variables including pro-Palestine (vs. pro-Israel) views, higher education, and gender; and third, a full model that additionally controls for blatant antisemitic prejudice (high vs. low). This variable is a dichotomized variant of a 4-point index constructed by combining three indices measuring (a) traditional anti-Jewish prejudice (e.g., "Jews largely have themselves to blame for being persecuted"), (b) social distance (e.g., rejecting Jews as neighbors), and (c) dislike of Jews.³ In the models, data are weighted using the weighting variable supplied by the survey authors.

The models analyzing the Muslim samples included additional controls for discrimination experiences (an index capturing feelings of exclusion, avoidance by others, harassment, and unfair treatment due to religious identity) and religiosity (a composite measure of the importance of religion and adherence to religious rules, $\alpha = .88$).

Results

Summary statistics for the population sample on the outcome, predictor, and control variables are presented in **Supplemental Table S1**. A substantial minority of the respondents (12%) affirmed that "harassment and violence against Jews can be defended" when considering Israel's treatment of the Palestinians, indicating that this statement reflects their views *completely* or *somewhat well*. Given that 12% of the adult Norwegian population corresponds to hundreds of thousands of individuals, this is not numerically trivial. Furthermore, 26% declined to answer the question, selecting *impossible to answer*. Notably, no more than 38% of respondents unequivocally rejected the statement (*does not reflect my views at all*). Approximately 33% agreed with the statement comparing Israel's treatment of the Palestinians to the Nazi atrocities during World War II. The majority of respondents (85%) expressed low antisemitic prejudice.

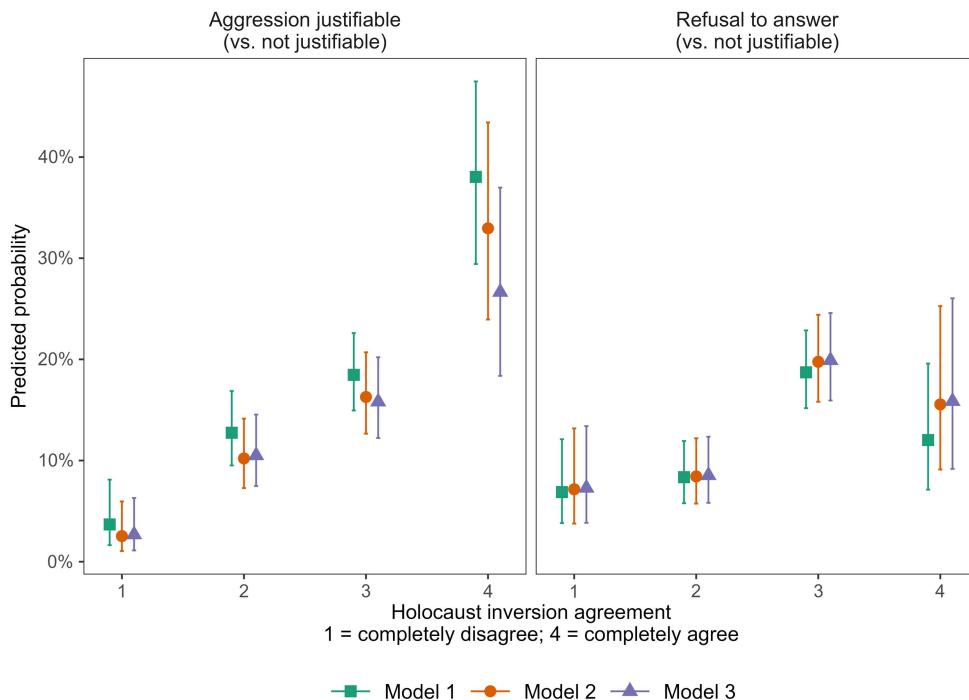
Multinomial models (see **Figure 1** and **Supplemental Table S2**) revealed that Holocaust inversion endorsement was

¹ Norwegian original: "Israel behandler palestinerne like ille som jødene ble behandlet under andre verdenskrig."

² Norwegian original: "Når en tenker på hvordan Israel behandler palestinerne, kan trakassering og vold rettet mot jøder forsvares."

³ For further details about these indices and validation results, see Hoffmann and Moe (2017).

Figure 1
Holocaust Inversion and Justification of Anti-Jewish Aggression (2017 Population Sample)



Note. Predicted probabilities (95% confidence intervals) of justifying anti-Jewish aggression and refusing to answer (vs. not justifying) given increasing agreement with the Holocaust inversion statement (“Israel treats the Palestinians just as badly as the Jews were treated during WWII”). Model 1 includes no controls; Model 2 adjusts for pro-Palestine sympathies, education, and gender; and Model 3 additionally controls for explicit antisemitic attitudes. WWII = World War II. See the online article for the color version of this figure.

strongly linked to a higher likelihood of both justifying anti-Jewish aggression and refusing to take a stance against it. This association persisted after controlling for pro-Palestine sympathies, higher education, and gender in Model 2 and was slightly attenuated after including blatant prejudice in Model 3. Focusing on the full model, the predicted probability of justifying aggression rose sharply for each level of agreement with the Holocaust endorsement statement, from 3% (95% CI [1%, 6%]) among those who completely disagreed to 27% (95% CI [18%, 37%]) among those who completely agreed—a roughly ninefold increase. Although the absolute proportion of respondents justifying aggression remains a minority even at the highest level of endorsement, the relative increase is substantial. The probability of refusing to take a stance rose from 7% (95% CI [4%, 13%]) among those rejecting the Holocaust inversion statement to 20% (95% CI [16%, 25%]) among those who somewhat agreed, declining to 16% (95% CI [9%, 26%]) among those who completely agreed, indicating a nonlinear relationship.

To explore whether these associations extend beyond Holocaust inversion to other extreme Israel-related beliefs, I conducted exploratory analyses using an alternative

predictor capturing delegitimization of Israel’s existence (“As long as the State of Israel exists, there can be no peace”). The analysis showed a similar pattern of results (Supplemental Table S4).

In a further exploratory step, I conducted follow-up analyses to test whether endorsement of Holocaust inversion also correlated with nonresponse to six survey items measuring blatant antisemitic prejudice. I estimated a hurdle model regressing the count of *impossible to answer* responses to the prejudice items on Holocaust inversion endorsement, controlling for pro-Palestine views, education, and gender. Additionally, nonresponse to anti-Muslim prejudice items was included as a control to account for general tendencies to avoid taking a stance on sensitive topics. Even after these controls, Holocaust inversion endorsement was linked to a higher predicted count of nonresponse to antisemitic prejudice items. Specifically, those who *somewhat* agreed with the Holocaust inversion statement had a 34% higher nonresponse count compared with those who rejected it (Incidence Rate Ratio [IRR] = 1.34, 95% CI [1.08, 1.65]). The association was not significant among those who fully agreed, mirroring the nonlinear pattern observed for refusal to answer the

justification question. This suggests that individuals with the strongest Holocaust inversion beliefs may be less constrained by social norms against expressing blatant prejudice.

I investigated whether the same relationships held for the sample of Muslim respondents with an immigrant background. [Supplemental Table S5](#) presents summary statistics. The share of Muslim respondents agreeing that anti-Jewish aggression is justifiable was 20% compared with 12% in the population sample. The proportion agreeing with the Holocaust endorsement statement was 51%, compared with 33% in the population, and two thirds of Muslim respondents (67%) expressed low blatant antisemitic prejudice, compared with 85% in the population sample.

Holocaust inversion endorsement was linked to justification of aggression in the baseline model, while no significant association was found with refusal to answer (see [Supplemental Table S6](#)). When including controls, Holocaust inversion beliefs were no longer associated with either outcome. Follow-up analyses found that Holocaust inversion endorsement was not correlated with nonresponse to the blatant prejudice items, unlike in the general population. These results suggest that among Muslims in Norway, Holocaust inversion does not function in the same way as in the general population.

Study 2

A replication of the analyses in Study 1 was carried out. This study was preregistered prior to accessing the data ([Enstad, 2024a](#)). Deviations from the preregistered plan, and sensitivity analyses using preregistered specifications, are reported in the [Supplemental Materials](#).

Materials and Method

I used data from the 2022 survey of attitudes toward Jews and Muslims in Norway, which followed up the 2017 survey. The 2022 survey also included a population sample and a Muslim sample. Kantar TNS's access panel was again utilized to draw a nationally representative sample of respondents, while the sample of Muslims with immigrant background was selected from the National Population Register. The total population sample size was 1,653, while the Muslim sample size was 821 ([Moe, 2023](#)). Outcome, predictor, and control variables were defined like in Study 1.

Results

Summary statistics for the 2022 population sample are presented in [Supplemental Table S7](#). The proportion of respondents agreeing that anti-Jewish aggression is justifiable was 11%, with 25% selecting *impossible to answer* and 41% completely rejecting the statement. This is similar to the 2017 sample. The proportion endorsing the Holocaust inversion statement was also similar (34%), while 87% expressed low blatant antisemitic prejudice.

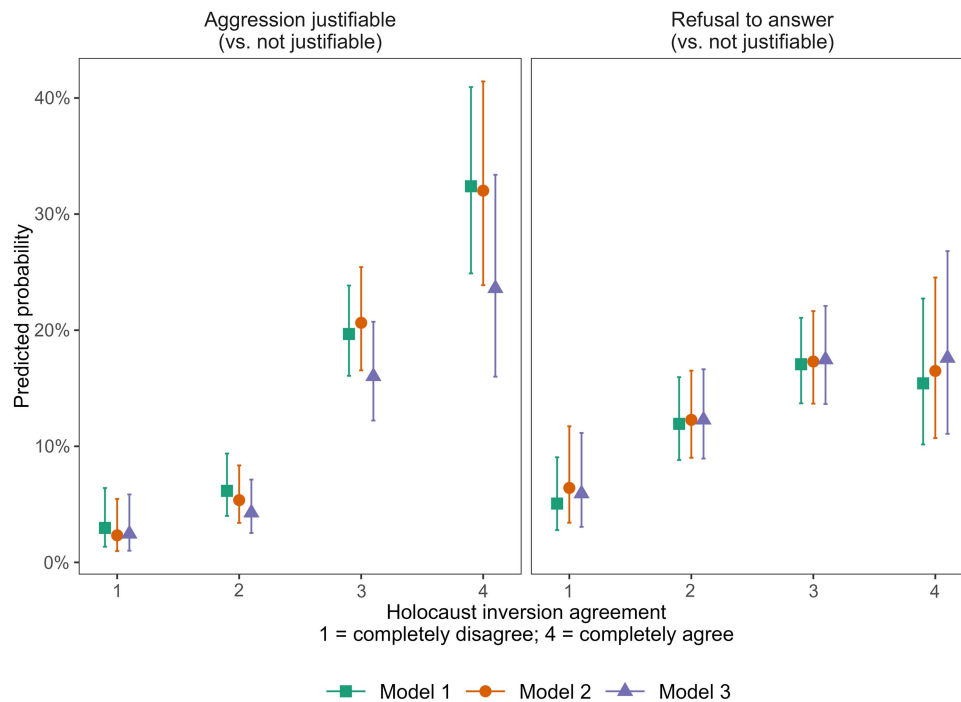
Replicating the findings from Study 1, Holocaust inversion endorsement was linked to both justification of anti-Jewish aggression and refusal to take a stance against it, even after controlling for pro-Palestine sympathy, education, gender, and blatant antisemitic prejudice. [Figure 2](#) shows that the predicted probability of justifying aggression increases with the strength of Holocaust inversion endorsement, highly similar to the results from Study 1 (for detailed model summaries, see [Supplemental Table S8](#)). In the full model, the probability of justifying aggression rose 12-fold, from 2% (95% CI [1%, 6%]) among those who completely disagreed to 24% (95% CI [16%, 33%]) among those who completely agreed with the Holocaust inversion statement. Endorsement of Holocaust inversion was also linked to higher predicted probabilities of refusing to take a stance against anti-Jewish aggression, rising from 6% (95% CI [3%, 11%]) among those completely rejecting the statement to 18% (95% CI [11%, 27%]) among those who fully agreed. Exploratory analyses using an alternative predictor, representing delegitimization of Israel's existence ("As long as the State of Israel exists, there can be no peace"), showed a similar pattern, mirroring results from Study 1 (see [Supplemental Table S10](#)).

Like in Study 1, I conducted follow-up analyses to test whether Holocaust inversion was associated with nonresponse to blatantly antisemitic prejudice items, again controlling for pro-Palestine sympathies, education, gender, and nonresponse to anti-Muslim prejudice items. Compared with those who completely rejected the Holocaust inversion statement, the expected nonresponse count was 28% higher for those who somewhat disagreed (IRR = 1.28, 95% CI [1.01, 1.61]), 39% higher for those who somewhat agreed (IRR = 1.39, 95% CI [1.11, 1.76]), and 62% higher for those who completely agreed (IRR = 1.62, 95% CI [1.24, 2.11]). Unlike in Study 1, where the association was nonlinear, Study 2 showed a monotonic relationship: Nonresponse increased with each level of Holocaust inversion endorsement. Despite this difference in pattern, both studies indicate that Holocaust inversion endorsement is associated with reluctance to answer blatant antisemitism items.

Next, I investigated whether these associations held for the sample of Muslims with an immigrant background. Looking first at the summary statistics, [Supplemental Table S11](#) shows that the proportion of Muslim respondents agreeing that anti-Jewish aggression is justifiable remained unchanged since 2017 (19%). The proportion completely rejecting justification of aggression (*does not reflect my views at all*) increased from 29% in 2017 to 40% in 2022, while the proportion expressing a low level of blatant antisemitism was about the same as in 2017 (68%).

Among Muslim respondents, endorsement of Holocaust inversion was not associated with justification of aggression or refusal to answer (see [Supplemental Table S12](#)). This is similar to the findings from Study 1, except that here Holocaust inversion was not correlated with justification of aggression even in the baseline model. Holocaust inversion

Figure 2
Holocaust Inversion and Justification of Anti-Jewish Aggression (2022 Population Sample)



Note. Predicted probabilities (95% confidence intervals) of justifying anti-Jewish aggression and refusal to answer given increasing agreement with the Holocaust inversion statement ("Israel treats the Palestinians just as badly as the Jews were treated during WWII"). Model 1 includes no controls; Model 2 adjusts for pro-Palestine sympathies, education, and gender; and Model 3 additionally controls for explicit antisemitic attitudes. WWII = World War II. See the online article for the color version of this figure.

endorsement was not associated with nonresponse to the antisemitic prejudice items in the Muslim sample, confirming the result from Study 1.

General Discussion

On October 7, 2023, following news of the Hamas-led invasion and massacre in southern Israel, Norwegian police immediately increased security measures around Jewish sites and institutions (NRK, 2023). The expectation of an elevated threat was based on experience: In recent decades, waves of antisemitic harassment and violence have tended to follow flare-ups in conflicts involving Israel. This time was no exception. In 2023, Norwegian police recorded a threefold increase in reported antisemitic hate crimes compared with the preceding 5 years (Politidirektoratet, 2024). In North America, Australia, and Western Europe, monitoring agencies likewise reported unprecedented rates of antisemitic incidents, with negative effects on Jews' sense of safety, security, and sense of belonging (Campbell, 2024; Eichner, 2024b; Knowles & McCaskill, 2024; Macbool & Parry, 2024). Against this background, there is an urgent need to understand the dynamics involved when conflict events in the

Middle East give rise to aggression against Jews in other countries. This article investigates an understudied dimension of these dynamics, that is, the role of Holocaust inversion beliefs (equating Israel with Nazi Germany) in shaping the moral climates that permit or constrain such hostility.

Drawing on social psychological insights that see perpetrators of outgroup aggression as morally motivated, that is, acting based on expectations that others will justify or at least silently condone their acts (Fiske & Rai, 2015), as well as theoretical and empirical accounts that suggest Holocaust inversion functions as a norm-compatible outlet for expressing anti-Jewish hostility (Haury, 2025; Hirsh, 2018; Tabarovsky, 2022), I hypothesized that endorsement of Holocaust inversion would be associated with justification of aggression against Jews and refusal to take a stance against such acts.

Across two studies based on nationally representative surveys conducted 5 years apart in Norway, findings provide evidence that people endorsing Holocaust inversion beliefs are more likely to justify harassment and violence against Jews and refuse taking a stance against such acts. Compared with those who rejected Holocaust inversion, people who

endorsed it were approximately nine to 12 times more likely to justify aggression and three times more likely to refuse answering the question. Although respondents who justify aggression remain a minority, the fact that roughly one in eight adults in a nationally representative sample affirms that such aggression can be defended indicates that these attitudes are practically, not just statistically, significant. Follow-up analyses further revealed that people with stronger Holocaust inversion beliefs were more likely to select *impossible to answer* when faced with questions designed to measure blatant antisemitic prejudice (e.g., “the Jews largely have themselves to blame for being persecuted”). Taken together, these findings support the notion that Holocaust inversion does not just reflect strong political views about the Israel–Palestine conflict but can function as a socially acceptable vehicle for expressing anti-Jewish hostility.

Overall, results indicate that Holocaust inversion beliefs are associated with a more permissive stance toward anti-Jewish aggression. With such beliefs endorsed by a third or more of the general population, they appear to have attained substantial normative acceptance in parts of the Norwegian public. This is cause for considerable concern because research on the psychology of intergroup conflict stresses the key role of normative climates in fueling or constraining outgroup aggression (Crandall et al., 2002; Fiske & Rai, 2015; Lickel et al., 2006; Saguy & Reifen-Tagar, 2022). Social norms provide information to potential aggressors about whether they can expect others to justify or condone their acts, thereby influencing the threshold for expressing prejudice and engaging in hostile behavior. To the extent that Holocaust inversion beliefs are widespread and normatively accepted, they may contribute to a climate in which anti-Jewish aggression is more readily tolerated.

The findings resonate with the distinction made 30 years ago by Pettigrew and Meertens (1995) between subtle and blatant prejudice in Western democracies. These authors distinguished three modes of relating to the presence of a strong antiprejudice norm: equalitarians internalize it, bigots ignore it, and subtles comply with it while expressing prejudice in “ostensibly non-prejudiced ways that ‘slip under the norm’” (Pettigrew & Meertens, 1995, p. 73). Such an understanding of contemporary forms of prejudice, which has become central to scholarship on racism and islamophobia (Nadal et al., 2012; Pearson et al., 2009; Sears, 1988), is also applicable to antisemitism. The analyses reported here add to a growing literature indicating that certain hostile beliefs about Israel, in particular Holocaust inversion, can function as norm-compatible expressions of anti-Jewish hostility, structurally similar to other forms of subtle prejudice (Allington & Hirsh, 2019; Binstok et al., 2024; F. Cohen et al., 2009; Hirsh, 2018; Smith, 2008). For example, a recent study of antisemitic victimization across 12 EU countries found an association between the proportion of a country’s population expressing an unfavorable view of

Israel and a higher likelihood of Jews experiencing antisemitic harassment and violence. By contrast, the proportion expressing blatant antisemitic attitudes was not related to these outcomes (Enstad, 2024b). The present research suggests a plausible mechanism consistent with this pattern: Extreme Israel-related beliefs such as Holocaust inversion may serve as socially acceptable vehicles for expressing hostility toward Jews.

Exploratory analyses of separate samples of respondents with Muslim immigrant backgrounds revealed notable differences. In contrast to the general population, Holocaust inversion endorsement was not associated with justification of aggression, refusal to take a stance against it, or nonresponse to blatant antisemitism items. One possible explanation, consistent with the justification–suppression framework, is that blatant antisemitic attitudes and justification of anti-Jewish aggression are more prevalent and less socially stigmatized in this subgroup (Czymara et al., 2025; Jikeli, 2015), reducing the need for Holocaust inversion to serve as a norm-compatible vehicle for expressing hostility. This is a speculative interpretation, however, and alternative explanations—such as differences in the meaning of Holocaust inversion across cultural contexts—cannot be ruled out. Future research might investigate these group differences more systematically.

The generalizability of the findings reported here must be considered in light of contextual factors. The evidence comes from Norway, a small liberal democracy with a very small Jewish population wherein strong norms against overt racism and antisemitism coexist with widespread negative opinion on Israel. The combination of a strong anti-antisemitism norm alongside substantial acceptance of Holocaust inversion may not be unique to Norway, as similar patterns have been documented in other Western European countries (Holz & Haury, 2021). Nevertheless, the specific historical, demographic, and political features of the Norwegian context mean that further cross-national research is needed to assess the generalizability of these results.

Several limitations should be noted. The cross-sectional design does not enable causal inference, and it remains possible that justification of aggression influences Holocaust inversion beliefs rather than vice versa or that both are driven by unmeasured third variables. The reliance on single-item measures for the key predictor and outcome limits construct coverage. Additionally, the low base rate of the “justifying aggression” outcome (about 12%) results in relatively wide confidence intervals, limiting the precision of effect estimates despite the clear and replicated pattern of associations.

Responding to the resurgence of antisemitism, the EU, the U.S., Norway, and other governments have launched strategies and action plans to combat antisemitism and safeguard Jewish life (European Commission, 2021; The White House, 2023). For such strategies to be effective, they must be based

on a sound understanding of the factors that influence antisemitic hostility and aggression. Findings from the present research suggest the need for policymakers to recognize that extreme Israel-related beliefs such as Holocaust inversion, which frames the Jewish state as morally equivalent to Nazi Germany, are associated with moral permissiveness toward anti-Jewish aggression. Designing policy to counteract such a dynamic is challenging given the subtle and socially embedded nature of these beliefs and attitudes and their importance to large voter groups. A plausible starting point could be targeted educational interventions to help people understand the conditions under which negative discourse toward Israel can function as a subtle form of prejudice.

Future research should test whether the associations observed here replicate across different national contexts. Research might also examine whether the results extend beyond Holocaust inversion to tropes and beliefs delegitimizing Israel more broadly. Experimental designs should be employed to probe causal mechanisms. For instance, vignette studies could manipulate the framing of Israel-related narratives to test how Holocaust inversion and similar delegitimizing devices might activate or suppress justification of aggression, using subtle variations in language that either reinforce or challenge these tropes.

Conclusion

Recurring waves of anti-Jewish aggression cannot be adequately understood without reference to the larger social environments in which attacking Jews is seen as justifiable. Across two nationally representative surveys in Norway, the findings show a robust association between endorsement of Holocaust inversion—equating Israel with Nazi Germany—and justifying anti-Jewish aggression or refusing to take a stance against it. By providing evidence that Holocaust inversion can function as a socially acceptable vehicle for expressing and legitimizing anti-Jewish hostility, the findings suggest that such beliefs can contribute to permissive climates for harassment and violence against Jews, regardless of the political sympathies and intentions of those who hold them.

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