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University of Derby, United Kingdom

*CORRESPONDENCE

Andreas Gotovos
✉ a.gotovos@uoi.gr

RECEIVED 06 February 2026

REVISED 22 May 2026

ACCEPTED 09 June 2026

PUBLISHED 08 July 2026

CITATION

Gotovos A (2026) Contemporary antisemitism in Greece: understanding the gap between attitudes and behavior. *Front. Educ.* 11:1805769. doi: 10.3389/feduc.2026.1805769

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Contemporary antisemitism in Greece: understanding the gap between attitudes and behavior

Andreas Gotovos*

Department of Elementary Teacher Education, University of Ioannina, Ioannina, Greece

KEYWORDS

antisemitism, attitudinal antisemitism, cognitive antisemitism, comparative antisemitism, factual antisemitism, holocaust education

1 Introduction

As is the case for the majority of countries where antisemitism has been examined through empirical research, Greece has been included in international empirical studies that comparatively assess both the prevalence and intensity of antisemitism. Estimates regarding the extent of latent antisemitism in Greece, as documented in both international and Greek scholarly literature, are derived from three distinct, survey-based measurements. All three studies converge in indicating that antisemitism in Greece is expressed at comparatively high levels. Comparing these findings with corresponding data from other European countries, Greece consistently appears among those with the highest reported levels. Of these studies, two are international in scope and comparative, while the third focuses exclusively on Greece and therefore lacks a comparative framework. Taken together, these studies provide a robust empirical basis for examining antisemitism in Greece as both a national and a comparative phenomenon.

The first measurement refers to the years 2014 and 2015 and was conducted by the Anti-Defamation League (ADL) using its established methodology and standard indices of antisemitism ([Anti-Defamation League, 2015, 2016](#)). The 2014 survey, based on a sample of 53,000 respondents across 101 countries, found that a high proportion of Greek respondents expressed antisemitic attitudes (69%). According to the survey's criteria, this suggests that approximately seven out of 10 Greeks demonstrated an antisemitic orientation, while the average rates for Western and Eastern Europe stood at 24% and 34%, respectively. A comparable prevalence was reported in 2015 (70%), while the most recent measurement, conducted in 2024, estimated the proportion at 50% ([Anti-Defamation League, 2025](#)), indicating a notable decline over time, although the level remains comparatively high within the context of European Union countries. This temporal variation suggests that while antisemitic attitudes may fluctuate, their overall prevalence remains substantial.

A comparison of Greek data with that of other European countries, as presented by [Kovács and Fischer \(2021\)](#), leads to several consistent conclusions. First, the proportion of Greek adults exhibiting antisemitic orientations remains high, corroborating the ADL findings. Second, levels of agreement among Greek respondents exceed the European average across all 20 indicators employed in the study. Third, the disparities between Greek scores and the European averages rank among the highest observed. Finally, the proportion of individuals exhibiting philosemitic orientations is the lowest among the 16 countries included ([Kovács and Fischer, 2021, p. 67](#)). These findings reinforce the conclusion that antisemitism in Greece is not only prevalent but also comparatively pronounced within the European context.

The third study, conducted by [Antoniou et al. \(2017\)](#), is based exclusively on a Greek sample and employs well-established traditional stereotypes as indicators of antisemitism. The research was carried out through structured telephone interviews during 2014–2015 with a random sample of 1,000 participants representing a broad age range across the country. In addition to measuring prevalence, the study also examines associations with political identity, ethnocentrism, and attitudes toward the State of Israel, thereby providing a more nuanced picture of the social and ideological correlates of antisemitism.

2 Antisemitism, prejudice, and xenophobia

The distinction between antisemitism and xenophobia as analytical concepts is important, yet it does not preclude structural similarities between these forms of prejudice. Both involve processes of categorization, stereotyping, and symbolic exclusion directed at an outgroup. In this context, the hypothesis of “self-victimization,” advanced to explain why Greek respondents draw parallels between Greek and Jewish historical victimhood, may possess interpretative value insofar as it reflects broader mechanisms of collective identity construction.

The study by [Antoniou et al. \(2017\)](#) is particularly significant because it constitutes the first non-comparative investigation of antisemitism in Greece and explores both its prevalence and correlates. The five indicators employed reflect widely recognized antisemitic stereotypes and were measured using a five-point agreement scale ([Antoniou et al., 2017](#), p. 21). These indicators are: (1) the claim that Jews exploit the Holocaust, (2) a comparison of Israeli policies to Nazi practices, (3) the perception of excessive Jewish economic power, (4) trust toward Jews, and (5) support for restricting Jewish property rights.

With the exception of the fifth indicator (21.5%), agreement levels are high, ranging from 55.7% to 92.1%. These findings suggest that antisemitism in this context is primarily expressed as a cognitive and attitudinal disposition rather than as observable behavior. Importantly, such attitudes appear to be relatively normalized within broader segments of the population rather than being confined to marginal groups. The study further indicates that antisemitic attitudes are widely distributed across demographic and ideological categories, with only weak and inconsistent associations with political orientation or ethnocentrism.

At the same time, some differentiation emerges with respect to age and education. While antisemitic attitudes are not absent among younger respondents, their prevalence tends to increase with age, suggesting a cohort or generational effect in the distribution of such views ([Antoniou et al., 2017](#), p. 26). Similarly, although levels of antisemitism remain substantial even among more highly educated individuals, there is evidence of a negative relationship between educational attainment and the intensity of antisemitic attitudes ([Antoniou et al., 2017](#), p. 36). A consistent finding across cross-national survey research ([Antoniou et al., 2019](#); [Enstad, 2024](#); [European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, 2019](#)) is that younger and more educated individuals exhibit lower levels of traditional antisemitic beliefs, although recent scholarship highlights a

transformation rather than a disappearance of antisemitism across cohorts (see also [Gotovos, 2026](#)). In the Greek context, the negative relationship between age, educational attainment, and traditional antisemitism can be partly attributed to historical and educational factors. Since 2005, Holocaust education in Greece has been significantly expanded, exposing younger generations to historical knowledge that challenges longstanding prejudices. Concurrently, higher levels of formal education are associated with enhanced critical thinking skills, which facilitate the deconstruction of entrenched antisemitic stereotypes. Together, these factors help explain why younger and more educated individuals tend to exhibit lower levels of traditional antisemitism.

These patterns indicate that, although antisemitism is not confined to specific social strata, its expression may still be shaped by sociodemographic factors that interact with the broader mechanisms outlined above.

The reported negative association between ethnocentrism and antisemitism is not supported by strong statistical evidence and only appears in relation to specific items. Moreover, participants' placement along the ethnocentrism–multiculturalism axis cannot be directly equated with their position on the left–right political spectrum, limiting interpretative clarity and suggesting the need for more refined analytical categories.

A further explanatory perspective may be derived from social psychological approaches, particularly the contact hypothesis. According to this framework, the persistence of stereotypes is partly related to the absence of meaningful intergroup contact under conditions of equality and cooperation ([Allport, 1954](#); [Pettigrew and Tropp, 2006](#)). In Greece, where Jewish communities constitute a small minority, numbering approximately 5,000 individuals ([ADL, 2019](#)), which is less than 0.05% of the Greek population, opportunities for sustained interpersonal interaction remain limited. This structural condition may contribute to the intergenerational reproduction of stereotypical representations, even in the absence of direct conflict. As a result, antisemitic attitudes may persist as socially transmitted belief systems rather than reflections of lived experience, highlighting the importance of broader social and institutional contexts in shaping prejudice.

3 Images, attitudes, and facts: the gap between recorded views and recorded incidents

Data from the three survey-based measurements ([Anti-Defamation League, 2015, 2016, 2025](#); [Antoniou et al., 2017](#); [Kovács and Fischer, 2021](#)) consistently indicate that cognitive antisemitism in Greece remains relatively high. At the same time, recorded antisemitic incidents appear to be exceptionally low ([European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, 2021, 2024, 2026](#); [Staetsky, 2017](#); [Lappin, 2024](#)). Official data reported by the [European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights \(2022\)](#), covering 2011–2021, confirm this pattern.

This discrepancy invites closer examination. First, antisemitic attitudes do not necessarily translate into action. Individuals who express negative stereotypes in surveys may not engage in antisemitic behavior due to social norms, legal constraints, or

lack of opportunity. Consequently, high levels of attitudinal antisemitism do not automatically result in high levels of behavioral manifestations. This distinction reflects a broader pattern observed in research on extremism, where attitudinal support for violence exceeds actual participation (Borum, 2011; McCauley and Moskalenko, 2017).

Second, underreporting may play a significant role. Official recording practices may fail to capture a substantial proportion of incidents, particularly verbal or low-level expressions of antisemitism. This may be due to victims' reluctance to report incidents, limited institutional capacity, or definitional ambiguities. As a result, official statistics may underestimate the prevalence of antisemitic acts and thus amplify the apparent gap. To illustrate the discrepancy between official and unofficial reporting of antisemitic incidents, official Greek sources recorded only four antisemitic incidents among 157 hate crimes in 2024 (FRA, 2026, p. 4), whereas unofficial monitoring organizations documented 17 such incidents during the same period (Central Board of Jewish Communities in Greece, 2025; Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, 2025).

Third, the specificity of survey indicators must be considered. Many instruments operationalize antisemitism through general stereotypes or through items relating to Israel. While some responses may reflect political criticism, others correspond to what has been described as the "3D" framework—delegitimization, demonization, and double standards (Hirsh, 2007; International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance, 2016; Sharansky, 2004). This conceptual overlap complicates interpretation, as survey items may capture heterogeneous attitudes that do not uniformly reflect antisemitic intent. As a result, such measures may, in some cases, overestimate the prevalence of antisemitic attitudes relative to observable behavior.

Taken together, these factors suggest that the discrepancy between reported levels of antisemitism and documented incidents is not necessarily paradoxical, but rather indicative of a complex, context-dependent relationship between cognition, affect, and behavior. This underscores the importance of distinguishing between latent antisemitic attitudes and active antisemitic conduct in both scholarly analysis and policy-oriented discussions. Nevertheless, even if the gap between measured cognitive-attitudinal antisemitism and recorded behavioral manifestations can be partly explained, the persistence of homogenized representations of Jews as an essentialized "other" among a considerable segment of the adult Greek population—including younger and highly educated individuals—remains a matter of concern. This finding points to the need for critical reassessment and potential revision of educational policies, particularly in the fields of Holocaust education and intercultural education.

4 Discussion

While analytically distinct, antisemitic attitudes and behavior are linked under specific conditions. Research in social psychology and criminology indicates that attitudes alone rarely produce action; rather, they interact with situational triggers, group dynamics, perceived threats, and processes of moral disengagement (Borum, 2011; McCauley and Moskalenko, 2017). The relationship between

cognition and behavior should therefore be understood as conditional, dynamic, and mediated by contextual factors.

From a forensic perspective, antisemitic beliefs may function as risk factors rather than direct causes of violent behavior. Similar to other extremist ideologies, they can provide a framework through which aggression is justified against a perceived outgroup. Although such beliefs are widely distributed, they lead to violence only under specific conditions, such as the presence of personal grievances, social marginalization, or exposure to radicalizing environments. In this sense, antisemitism may lower the threshold for aggression without being sufficient in itself to produce violent outcomes (Borum, 2011; McCauley and Moskalenko, 2017).

Conspiracy narratives constitute an additional mediating factor. A growing body of research suggests that some contemporary conspiracy theories draw on motifs that resemble classical antisemitic tropes, particularly those referring to hidden coordination, elite control, or manipulation (Barkun, 2013; Byford, 2011; Douglas et al., 2019; Steffen et al., 2022; Sunstein and Vermeule, 2009). More recent work further indicates that such narratives can be embedded in broader ideological frameworks, including those associated with movements such as QAnon or the "Great Replacement," although the extent to which these explicitly invoke antisemitic ideas varies across contexts and audiences (Beyer and Herrberg, 2023; Sedgwick, 2024). In this sense, antisemitism may intersect with conspiracy thinking not only as a form of prejudice but also, in some cases, as part of wider ideological constellations that facilitate connections between otherwise distinct forms of extremism.

Recent developments further illustrate the dynamic nature of this relationship. The COVID-19 pandemic was accompanied by a marked increase in conspiracy narratives, some of which, in documented cases, incorporated antisemitic themes or references (Steffen et al., 2022). Empirical research has also identified a positive association between coronavirus-related conspiracism and antisemitic attitudes at the individual level, although the strength and expression of this relationship vary by context (Allington et al., 2023). More broadly, the pandemic created conditions conducive to the diffusion and hybridization of conspiracy beliefs, including those linked to movements such as QAnon (Beyer and Herrberg, 2023; Cohen et al., 2026; Demelius and Szczepanska, 2024). More recently, the October 2023 Hamas attack and the subsequent conflict were followed by reported increases in antisemitic incidents across Europe (European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, 2023, 2024). These developments do not invalidate the observed gap, but rather, they highlight its sensitivity to changing sociopolitical contexts, particularly during periods of heightened uncertainty and polarization. Although caution is warranted when projecting a convergence between levels of antisemitic attitudes and recorded antisemitic incidents in Greece and elsewhere in Europe, particularly in light of the ongoing tensions in the Middle East, it should be acknowledged that antisemitism in this context may intersect with anti-Israel sentiment (Bergmann, 2021, p. 21). This dynamic may contribute to an increase in antisemitic incidents that are less directly associated with traditional antisemitic attitudes and more closely linked to expressions of anti-Israeli sentiment.

5 Conclusion

The Greek case highlights a persistent gap between antisemitic attitudes and recorded antisemitic behavior. High levels of cognitive antisemitism coexist with low incident rates due to social constraints, underreporting, and measurement limitations. This pattern is consistent with broader findings in the study of prejudice and extremism.

Understanding this discrepancy requires moving beyond descriptive accounts toward explanatory frameworks that incorporate social context, ideological functions, and mediating mechanisms such as conspiracy narratives. While the gap can be partly explained, the persistence of homogenized representations of Jews among a substantial segment of the population—including younger and highly educated individuals—remains a matter of concern.

This finding underscores the need for renewed attention to educational strategies, particularly in Holocaust and intercultural education. Addressing antisemitism effectively requires not only the transmission of historical knowledge but also the creation of conditions that promote critical thinking, intergroup contact, and resilience against conspiratorial worldviews.

Author contributions

AG: Writing – original draft.

Funding

The author(s) declared that financial support was not received for this work and/or its publication.

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