



REPUBLIC OF AUSTRIA  
Parliament

# Antisemitism 2020

Results at a Glance  
Representative Study, Austria

**Vienna, March 2021**

# ANTISEMITISM 2020

Results at a Glance - Representative Study, Austria

Study commissioned by the Austrian Parliament  
Vienna, March 2021



Client: Austrian Parliament

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## 1 INTRODUCTION

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### 1.1 MOTIVATION AND OBJECTIVES OF THE 2020 STUDY

In 2018, the Austrian Parliament commissioned IFES (in cooperation with Demox) to conduct a highly comprehensive data collection survey on the topic of antisemitism in Austria whose findings were initially presented in a descriptive manner. In a further study, a detailed analysis of the dimensionality of antisemitic attitudes and the underlying explanatory factors was performed.

With a view to enhancing the visibility of developments over an extended period of time, while at the same time addressing new aspects that had in the meantime emerged, the latter study was repeated in 2020.

Identified as additional topics that had on the one hand evolved from the discussions encouraged by the first study and that were on the other hand generated by the events witnessed over the last two years, **the influence of the media** and antisemitic **conspiracy myths surrounding the Corona pandemic** were included in the 2020 study. Although conspiracy myths are nothing new in the context of antisemitism, they have come to play a new and very relevant role during the pandemic.

This concise **analysis** describes the main results produced by the representative study for Austria. For more detailed information, please refer to the unabridged version of the report.

### 1.2 THE CONTEXT CHANGED IN 2020

When conducting two studies on the same topic within two years - asking the same questions and using exactly the same survey methods - one is tempted to compare the findings generated.

Looking only briefly at the data produced by the 2018 and the 2020 surveys on antisemitism, one might be taken aback. Since it seems that compared with 2018, antisemitic attitudes held by people living in Austria were shown to be clearly less pronounced in 2020. In 2018, for instance, 39 per cent of

respondents considered the statement "*Jews dominate the international business world*" to be *very or rather true*, compared with only 26 per cent in 2020. Explicit agreement with this assertion, which belongs to the realm of antisemitic conspiracy myths, is thus 13 per cent lower than in 2018. But does this figure actually mean that antisemitism stemming from the belief in international Jewish networks has indeed seen such a considerable decline?

Quite generally, answers given to questions asked in quantitative surveys reflect the fundamental attitudes of respondents, but the extent to which certain answers are considered **socially desirable or undesirable** also plays a role in this context, i.e. in a certain social or political environment, in a certain place and at a certain time. The extent to which a value system surveyed in a study is distorted by a behaviour that is considered socially desirable by respondents, is related to the extent to which this value system is anchored in society. The effects of what is considered socially desirable are therefore sometimes more and sometimes less pronounced. Putting it simple, one may say: sometimes people are more cautious with respect to what they say and sometimes less.

In 2018, the Refugee Crisis of 2015 continued to have a major impact on the media and the political debate. The topics of migration, flight and integration were still omnipresent and were dealt with quite emotionally, both in Austria and in the EU at large.

In 2020, however, migration had been replaced by the Covid-19 pandemic as the predominant topic. At the time of the survey, Austria was in the middle of the Second Wave of the pandemic and the related lockdown.

What could also be observed was that many of the relevant political players in Austria had taken a decidedly friendly stance towards the State of Israel. This holds true inter alia for the federal government (which considers Israel, for instance, a role model in the way it has dealt with the pandemic). Furthermore, in the last two years clear signals had been sent out and measures had been taken with respect to fighting antisemitism, reflected inter alia in the start of construction works on the Shoah Wall of Names Memorial or the legislative decision on the establishment of the *Simon Wiesenthal Award* honouring outstanding civil society commitment to combating antisemitism and promoting Holocaust education.

It is also very likely that media coverage played a very relevant role, since the topic of antisemitism in connection with sometimes fatal violence had been visible over several months. **In the summer of 2020**, the topic of **antisemitism and violence had already been present** in the media: the acts of vandalism committed at the Graz synagogue and the physical attack on the President of the Graz Jewish Community in August as well as the trial of the right-wing extremist assassin in Germany who had shot two people in the street after his failed attack on the synagogue in Halle an der Saale the year before.

In all probability, however, the deadly **Islamist-motivated terrorist attack on All Souls' Day 2020 in Vienna** had the most relevant impact, since the survey was conducted more or less in its immediate aftermath. Although the attack did not specifically target Jewish institutions or individuals, it nevertheless took place in an antisemitic context as the scene of the crime was located in the immediate vicinity of the city's main synagogue. In addition, from 9 November onwards, there was extensive reporting on "Operation Luxor", a raid involving 60 house searches across Austria related to the Muslim Brotherhood and Hamas. These facts may also have contributed to changes in context.

Finally, the reports on antisemitic tendencies among those people who deny the existence of the Corona virus may also have played a role. When antisemitism is portrayed, discussed and condemned in (traditional) media, this may indeed contribute to enhancing the visibility in society of the majority's value system, and likewise to promoting socially desirable response behaviour.

The two antisemitism studies thus provide - for the time being - two snapshots reflecting different levels of antisemitism in Austria. However, as the context had changed, it is not possible to distinguish which change in the figures represents a genuine trend and which is due to the prevalent context. Thus, only further surveys will enable distinctions to be made in the future between sustainable trends and short-term fluctuations. From a research perspective, this may also provide very important insights into socially desirable response behaviour.

### 1.3 METHOD OF DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

The original plan for this representative nationwide survey (n=2,000) was to design it as a mixed survey, consisting of a representative face-to-face sample (n=500) and a representative **mixed mode sample** (telephone and online n=1,500). However, as the second lockdown had been imposed shortly before its roll-out, it was not possible to conduct a face-to-face survey. This meant that 800 telephone CATI interviews and 1,200 CAWI and/or online interviews were conducted nationwide. The telephone interviews were based on random numbers (RLD procedure), the online interviews were recruited from an existing online pool. The survey took place between 10 November and 14 December 2020.

Although the questionnaire remained essentially unchanged compared with 2018, the 2020 survey did not focus on socio-psychological factors that influenced people's attitudes (as had been the case in 2018), but on the **media** and **on conspiracy myths as influencing factors**.

As had already been the case in the report on the 2018 study, a predominantly descriptive approach was chosen. The answers are presented in the form of frequency tables or cross tabs.

## 2 SUMMARY OF THE KEY RESULTS

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### 2.1 MANIFESTATIONS OF ANTISEMITISM

Based on the outcome of the secondary analysis of the 2018 survey, the statements on antisemitism are grouped according to their content-related - empirically proven - dimensions.

- **Affective antisemitism:** Affective antisemitism is essentially a deep-seated emotional aversion to Jews. The resentment is an emotional issue not a rational one, a gut reaction, not a considered opinion. No attempt is made in order to find arguments for the rejection. Affective antisemites believe in racial theories that impute a fundamental otherness to Jews, i.e. with respect to their appearance, their character, their behaviour and their attitudes. They claim that these – altogether negative - characteristics contributed to the persecution of Jews. In doing so, they turn the victims into perpetrators. The underlying motive is often a defence against guilt, as with the trivialisation or denial of the Holocaust.
  - Item 1: *"A Jew cannot be expected to be decent/upstanding."*
  - Item 2: *"When I meet someone, I know within a matter of minutes whether this person is a Jew."*
  - Item 3: *"In the reports on concentration camps and the persecution of Jews during the Second World War, many things are exaggerated."*
  - Item 4: *"Once Israel no longer exists, there will be peace in the Middle East."*
  - Item 5: *"Jews have little interest in integrating into the country they live in. This is the main reason for their ongoing problems."*
  - Item 6: *"It is not a mere coincidence that Jews have so often been subject to persecution in their history, to some extent at least it has been their own fault."*
  - Item 7: *"Jews still have the death of Jesus Christ to answer for."*
  
- **Pseudo-rational antisemitism:** The second manifestation of antisemitism is characterised by the attempt to substantiate antisemitic claims and make them appear "rationally justified". These supposed explanations are based on traditionally antisemitic resentments and racist attributions which, in contrast to affective antisemitism (which is a blunt gut reaction), are underpinned by pseudo-rational arguments – and thus seem to 'come from the head'.
  - Item 1: *"Most Jews are exceptionally intelligent and wealthy."*
  - Item 2: *"Jews dominate the international business world."*
  - Item 3: *"Today, the growing power and influence of Jews in the international press and in politics are once again becoming increasingly apparent."*
  - Item 4: *"Jews have too much influence in Austria"*.
  - Item 5: *"The Israelis basically treat the Palestinians no differently than the Germans treated the Jews in the Second World War."*

- Item 6: *"Considering the policy pursued by Israel, I can well understand people are prejudiced against Jews."*
- Item 7: *"Today, Jews try to take advantage of the fact that they were victims during the Nazi era."*
- **Non-antisemitism:** As a third dimension alongside affective and pseudo-rational antisemitism, the special evaluation of the 2018 antisemitism survey revealed a basic attitude that expresses an unbiased and open attitude towards Jews. This is an attitude that can neither be defined as antisemitism nor as philosemitism, i.e. exaggerated appreciation of Jews. Non-antisemitism goes hand in hand with a positive approach to the culture of remembrance: individuals who display this basic attitude are ready to face up to the National Socialist past.
  - Item 1: *"As Jews were persecuted during the Second World War, we have a moral obligation to stand by and support Jews in Austria today."*
  - Item 2: *"Jews have contributed significantly to cultural life in Austria".*

## 2.2 HOW PRONOUNCED ARE ANTISEMITIC ATTITUDES IN AUSTRIA?

- The statements to be assigned to **affective antisemitism** are considered very or rather true by 6 to 13 per cent of respondents; statements that imply a reversal of guilt in the sense of accusing Jews of refusing to assimilate (*"Jews have little interest in integrating into the country they live in. This is the main reason for their ongoing problems"* and *"It is not a mere coincidence that Jews have so often been subject to persecution in their history, to some extent at least it has been their own fault"*) scored highest (12 and 13 per cent respectively). With 6 per cent each, the racist statement *"You cannot expect a Jew to be decent/upstanding"* and the Holocaust trivialisation *"In the reports on concentration camps and the persecution of Jews during the Second World War, many things are exaggerated"*, scored lowest.
- The share of respondents who consider statements assigned to **pseudo-rational antisemitism** to be very or rather true is significantly higher - it varies between 11 and 31 per cent. The supposedly positive formulation *"Most Jews are exceptionally intelligent and wealthy"* met with particularly high approval (31 per cent), as does the statement *"Today, Jews try to take advantage of the fact that they were victims during the Nazi era"* that still achieved an approval rate of 28 per cent. The statement *"Jews have too much influence in Austria"*, was considered very or rather true by a comparatively lower percentage of 11 per cent.
- **Non-antisemitism** (the unbiased attitude towards Jews) is more widespread than affective and pseudo-rational antisemitism: 62 per cent rate the statement *"Jews have contributed significantly to cultural life in Austria"* as being very or rather true, while 49 per cent of respondents rate the statement *"As Jews were persecuted during the Second World War, we have a moral obligation to stand by and support Jews in Austria today"* as being very or rather true.



- Two statements that had been included for the first time in the 2020 study and related to the **antisemitic conspiracy myths surrounding the Corona pandemic**, scored quite differently: While only 3 per cent of respondents regarded the statement *"Jews created the Corona virus to cripple the economy and make a financial profit"* to be very or rather true, a total of 31 per cent perceive the statement *"A powerful and influential elite (e.g. Soros, Rothschild, Zuckerberg, ...) is using the Corona pandemic to further expand its wealth and political influence"* to be very or rather true.
- Asked likewise for the first time, the statement *"Goods from Jews should be boycotted in order to exert pressure against Israel's policy in the West Bank"*, is considered to be very or rather true by 7 per cent of respondents.

### 2.3 THE MAIN PATTERNS: AGE, EDUCATION

What is interesting is to have a closer look at patterns relating to whether and how different social groups respond to the questions asked (which plays a role with regard to measures that may be derived):

- **In terms of statements associated with pseudo-rational antisemitism, age is an important explanatory factor.** The trend identified is that the older the respondent, the more likely they consider the statements to be true – and by the same token, the younger the respondents are, the more often they consider these statements not to be true. The only exception to this trend is the statement *"The Israelis basically treat the Palestinians no differently than the Germans treated the Jews in the Second World War"*, where a very large number of young people, i.e. almost half of this group, selected the answer *"don't know"*, but do not explicitly state their disapproval.
- **In terms of statements associated with affective antisemitism, only minor differences were identifiable among respondents from different age groups.** However, one exception is the historical reversal of guilt, i.e. that Jews themselves are often to blame for their persecution, which met with higher approval among older people than it did among the younger respondents.
- The antisemitic statements associated with the Corona conspiracy myths are rejected more often by older respondents than by younger ones.
- Education (in the sense of the highest completed level of formal education) also makes a difference. **People with higher formal qualifications (Matura/higher education entrance qualification, university or university of applied sciences degree) express significantly less support or significantly higher levels of disapproval.** With respect to some statements, however, these differences are not really significant, as is illustrated by the statement that the Israelis would not treat the Palestinians any better today than the Nazis once treated the Jews. Regarding the influence of education, attention must be drawn to the fact that people with higher completed formal levels of education tend to respond in a socially somewhat more desirable manner. This goes to show that although education may protect people from adopting antisemitic attitudes, it may at the same time prevent them from expressing such views.

## 2.4 TENDENCY TOWARDS CONSPIRACY MYTHS

About one third of respondents (34%) consider the statement **"There are secret organisations that have great influence on political decisions"** to be *very* or *rather true*. A further 23% state that they are undecided and just over a third (35%) regard this statement as *not applicable*. About one in twelve respondents (8%) had no opinion or did not want to voice their view. The statement **"The media and politics are in cahoots"** meets with similar levels of approval (32%), indecision (32%) and rejection (33%). The number of individuals (3%) who chose not to respond to this question was significantly lower than for item 1. Answers to the statement **"The Corona virus was developed and released as a biological weapon"** were largely determined by the currently prevailing situation and - compared with the previous two statements - meets with the lowest level of agreement. While 15 per cent think it is *true* that the Corona virus was developed as a weapon, a total of two-thirds (67%) of respondents think that this statement is *not applicable*, and nine per cent do not want to make a statement.

Building on these three questions, an index was developed and named **"tendency towards conspiracy myths"**. It was thus determined that in absolute terms, 250 respondents fell into the category "high" (corresponding to 13 per cent of the total sample), 823 respondents into the category "medium" (41 per cent of the sample) and 634 respondents are considered less responsive to conspiracy myths (hence 32 per cent of the sample fell into the "low" category).

An affinity to conspiracy myths is a powerful lever when it comes to explaining antisemitic attitudes:

- **There is an extremely close relationship between antisemitism and a tendency to subscribe to conspiracy myths.** This becomes most evident in the statements associated with pseudo-rational antisemitism, which always provide supposedly rational explanations from the realm of conspiracy myths as a reason for negative attitudes towards Jews. The same applies to the two statements with reference to the Corona pandemic. Since conspiracy myths have become very popular during the pandemic, this aspect is becoming particularly relevant with regard to antisemitism. Conspiracy myths generated in times of the pandemic can thus easily be projected onto Jews.

## 2.5 ANTISEMITISM AND TRUST IN THE MEDIA

Although it is difficult to empirically prove any direct influence exercised by the media, it has become quite clear that people who tend to trust in alternative platforms on the internet and in influencers on social media run a greater risk of believing antisemitic statements to be true. Those who trust traditional media (irrespective of the media channel) are more likely to assess antisemitic statements as being not applicable. **The media thus has an influence on antisemitism and consequently a huge responsibility.** This holds true for all forms and dimensions of antisemitism.

In Austria, only a small minority of people trust *influencers on social media networks, alternative platforms on the Internet or messages they receive on messenger services such as WhatsApp or Telegram*. However, for all antisemitic questions asked, this trust goes hand in hand with an above-average antisemitic attitude.

The interrelation between trust in alternative platforms and antisemitism tends to be more pronounced in the case of affective antisemitism than in the case of pseudo-rational antisemitism and varies also depending on the statement. This is reflected in the following examples:

- The Holocaust trivialisation "***In the reports on concentration camps and the persecution of Jews during the Second World War, many things are exaggerated***" (affective antisemitism): while only six per cent of those living in Austria hold this extreme view - however, their share among those who trust TikTok amounts to 24 per cent. Compared with those who trust Facebook and YouTube, their share is 16 per cent each, among those who trust Twitter it is 15 per cent, with regard to Instagram and alternative Internet platforms this figure ranges at 12 per cent each. Of those who trust traditional newspapers and magazines (be it print or online) and/or the news on TV or the radio, only four per cent consider this statement to be true.
- The conspiracy-mythical insinuation that "***Today, the growing power and influence of Jews in the international press and in politics are once again becoming increasingly apparent***" (pseudo-rational antisemitism): a total of 19 per cent of those living in Austria and 18 per cent of those who trust the classical media consider this statement to be applicable – while their share among those who take postings by private individuals or influencers on Facebook at face value reaches 32 per cent. This applies to a similar extent to Instagram (31%), YouTube (33%), TikTok (36%) and Twitter (26%), but also to people who trust alternative platforms on the internet (27%) or messages they receive via messenger services (26%).

## 2.6 CULTURE OF REMEMBRANCE

A large majority of the population agrees with the level at which the **culture of remembrance** is put into practice in Austria. Around one in five believes that too much is being done with respect to the culture of remembrance, while one in six is of the opinion that too little is being done. Among the latter group, the share of younger people – who thus express their implicit wish for more culture of remembrance – is particularly high.

*Women* have a more positive attitude towards the culture of remembrance than *men*. The *youngest respondents* (16 to 25 years) are more dissatisfied with the culture of remembrance than the older cohort: the share of younger people who call for more remembrance is significantly higher (30%), likewise they are comparatively critical of the current level (50%) and are much less likely (11%) to think that too much is being done in this respect. The older respondents were, the more likely they were to assess the status quo as positive (among the 70+ group their share totalled 68%), calls for more remembrance became rarer – with the *oldest* seeing strikingly little need for action here (among the 70+ cohort only six per cent thought that there was *too little* remembrance). This means their share was much lower than, for instance, among the next youngest age group (56 to 70 years: 13%).

With their *extraordinarily positive attitude towards the culture of remembrance*, the youngest respondents belong to a small group, formed by people with university degrees (*too little*: 26%, *exactly right*: 58%, *too much*: 12%) and above all those who describe themselves as belonging politically speaking to the left camp (*too little*: 36%, *exactly right*: 52%, *too much*: 9%).

### 3 TABLES

Methodological key data for all tables:

Antisemitism 2020: representative survey conducted in Austria, by telephone and online, n=2,000, 10 November to 14 December 2020, by IFES and Demox on behalf of the Austrian Parliament:

Table 1: Affective antisemitism

In your view – to what extent do the following statements apply to Jews? Fully, quite, not particularly or not at all?	fully <i>in %</i>	quite <i>in %</i>	not particul arly <i>in %</i>	not at all <i>in %</i>	no statem ent <i>in %</i>
<b>"A Jew cannot be expected to be decent/upstanding."</b>	1	5	11	68	14
<b>"When I meet someone, I know within a matter of minutes whether that person is a Jew."</b>	2	7	20	61	11
<b>"In the reports on concentration camps and the persecution of Jews during the Second World War, many things are exaggerated."</b>	2	4	17	67	10
<b>"Once Israel no longer exists, there will be peace in the Middle East."</b>	2	8	26	42	23
<b>"Jews have little interest in integrating into the country they live in. This is the main reason for their ongoing problems."</b>	3	10	26	42	19
<b>"It is not a mere coincidence that Jews have so often been subject to persecution in their history, to some extent at least it has been their own fault."</b>	2	10	19	48	20
<b>"Jews still have the death of Jesus Christ to answer for."</b>	3	6	10	54	27

Table 2: Pseudo-Rational Antisemitism

In your view - how much do the following statements apply to Jews? Fully, quite, not particularly or not at all?	fully <i>in %</i>	quite <i>in %</i>	not particularly <i>in %</i>	not at all <i>in %</i>	no statement <i>in %</i>
"Most Jews are exceptionally intelligent and wealthy."	5	26	19	15	35
"Jews dominate the international business world."	4	22	24	25	24
"Today, the growing power and influence of Jews in the international press and in politics are once again becoming increasingly apparent."	3	16	26	26	28
"Jews have too much influence in Austria."	2	9	29	40	21
"The Israelis basically treat the Palestinians no differently than the Germans treated the Jews in the Second World War."	5	19	19	22	36
"Considering the policy pursued by Israel, I can well understand people are prejudiced against Jews."	3	15	21	32	28
"Today, Jews try to take advantage of the fact that they were victims during the Nazi era."	6	22	23	33	17

Table 3: Non-antisemitism

In your view - how much do the following statements apply to Jews? Fully, quite, not particularly or not at all?	fully <i>in %</i>	quite <i>in %</i>	not particularly <i>in %</i>	not at all <i>in %</i>	no statement <i>in %</i>
"As Jews were persecuted during the Second World War, we have a moral obligation to stand by and support Jews in Austria today."	17	32	21	16	13
"Jews have contributed significantly to cultural life in Austria."	22	40	12	6	21

Table 4: Antisemitism in the Corona Pandemic Environment

In your view - how much do the following statements apply to Jews? Fully, quite, not particularly or not at all?	fully <i>in %</i>	quite <i>in %</i>	not particularly <i>in %</i>	not at all <i>in %</i>	no statement <i>in %</i>
<b>"Jews created the Corona virus to cripple the economy and make a financial profit."</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>75</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>"A powerful and influential elite (e.g. Soros, Rothschild, Zuckerberg, ...) is using the Corona pandemic to further expand its wealth and political influence."</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>25</b>

Table 5: Remembrance culture

"Austria is committed to what is known as the culture of remembrance. This means that the Jews murdered during the National Socialist era and other groups of victims are remembered, for instance with monuments, events, commemorative stones or plaques. In your view, is what politicians are doing in this respect in Austria clearly too much, rather too much, just right, rather too little or clearly too little?"	clearly too much <i>in %</i>	rather too much <i>in %</i>	just right <i>in %</i>	rather too little <i>in %</i>	clearly too little <i>in %</i>	not specified <i>in %</i>
<b>total</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>57</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>7</b>