

Forward

JEWISH. INDEPENDENT. NONPROFIT.



Antisemitism Decoded

with Arno Rosenfeld



- ① You can find the Forward's comprehensive coverage of the [Capital Jewish Museum shooting](#) and [Boulder fire attack](#) on our website.
- ② A right-wing Holocaust revisionist who has pledged to stop lighting Hanukkah candles at the national palace was [elected president](#) of Poland.
- ③ I moderated a discussion on the use and misuse of "antisemitism" in Washington, D.C. last week, which you can [watch here](#).



UP FIRST

The peril of demonizing 'Zionists'



“I will never personally humanize a Zionist,” an anonymous user [posted](#) on X in October. “They are nothing but worthless numbers, a mere statistic counting a group who chose to lead the most deranged lives imaginable.”

An account connected to Elias Rodriguez reshared the post months before he allegedly gunned down a young couple leaving a diplomatic event at the Capital Jewish Museum.

And Mohamed Sabry Soliman reportedly shouted “we have to end Zionists” as he used a homemade flamethrower to burn 12 people at a gathering for Israeli hostages on Sunday.

Both attacks were widely condemned, but some dwellers of the political fringes rushed to defend the perpetrators. “This was not because they were Jewish; it was because they were Zionists,” Guy Christensen, a popular TikTok influencer, [said](#) after Rodriguez killed Sarah Milgrim and Yaron Lischinsky.

“Most of the people that go out to protest or demonstrate for the hostages are Zionists and Zionists like Nazis deserve no platform or safety,” a Bluesky user responded to the Boulder attack.

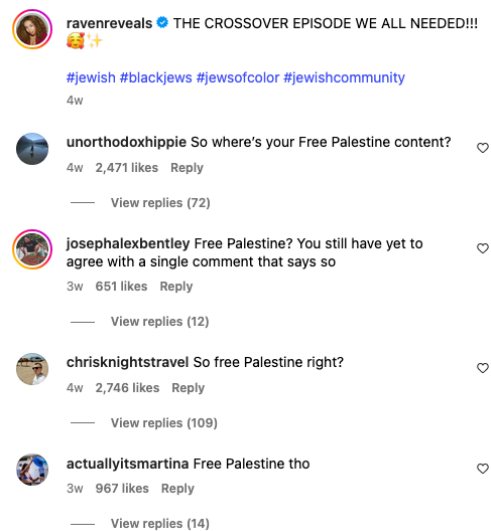
These arguments underscore the extent to which some anti-Zionists conflate anyone who holds any attachment to Israel with the worst perpetrators of violence against Palestinians: They’re all Zionists.

Often, nothing short of embracing anti-Zionism can absolve someone of this label, and Jews are especially likely to be targeted.

Raven Schwam-Curtis [posted a video](#) last month featuring five of her “favorite anti-fascist Jewish creators,” social media influencers who post about abortion access, immigrant rights, climate change and other progressive causes.

The video didn’t mention Israel. But the comments were flooded with calls for a “free Palestine,” now a [standard response](#) to all sorts of Jewish

content.



“Anti-facist and Jewish?” one user asked. “Talk about an oxymoron 😂 did you guys get to handpick the next children’s hospital to get bombarded?”

Some commenters said they checked to see whether any of the creators had condemned Israel — an attitude of “Zionist until proven innocent” that often [applies only to Jews](#), because people rightly intuit that most Jews (around 80%) feel at least some attachment to Israel, without pausing to consider what that means in practice.

The reality is that Jews, [including](#) Schwam-Curtis, are often more critical of Israel than many other demographics. A [representative survey](#) found that if American Jews could dictate policy:

- Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu would be out of a job;
- the U.N. Security Council would have passed a resolution calling for an immediate ceasefire;
- and the United States would have required Israel to increase humanitarian aid and work to prevent civilian casualties in Gaza before sending additional military aid.

Only [22% of Jews](#) want Israel to maintain permanent control over the West Bank and Gaza (compared to 33% of white evangelicals), while 46% want a two-state solution (the highest share of any demographic) and 13% want a binational state (same rate as all U.S. adults).

Yet these policy positions seem to hold less weight in certain circles than the underlying attachment to a Jewish state, as evidenced by the [longstanding hostility](#) toward J Street from vocal corners of the left.

The refusal by many activists to ask how so many Jews could feel close to Israel, even as they oppose many of its actions, strikes me as a failure to recognize their full humanity, especially when grace, at least among progressives, is often forthcoming to minorities.

It's also not a hard question to answer: "Zionism served the no doubt fully justified ends of Jewish tradition, saving the Jews as a people from homelessness and antisemitism," Edward Said wrote in a seminal 1979 critique of Zionism.

Yet that hasn't penetrated the contemporary vanguard. "Say it loud, say it clear, we don't want no Zionists here," marchers chanted while crossing the Brooklyn Bridge in May, a sentiment that trickles down to Harvard students boycotting Jewish events at Hillel because they "fucking hate Zionists."

Stochastic terrorism is unpredictable. I don't see evidence that the pro-Palestinian movement is more culpable for the recent acts of violence than the pro-Israel movement is for the murder of 6-year-old Wadee Alfayoumi, the shooting of Palestinian college students in Vermont or the Israelis shot in Florida because a man thought they were Palestinian.



Photo: Getty Images

It's also true that both events targeted by anti-Zionist violence were more political than Jewish. Some Jews, certainly, would have refused to attend either. But others would have gone without intending to make a political statement, just as they worship in synagogues with Israeli flags, send their children to day schools that celebrate Israel Independence Day and wear Star of David jewelry.

If any of those activities can mark someone as a “Zionist” — and if all Zionists are Nazis — then there's little to distinguish an elderly Holocaust survivor rallying for Israeli hostages from an IDF soldier in Gaza. The red triangle symbol that has been adopted by demonstrators targeting Israel's supposed supporters in the diaspora originally marked soldiers for death in Hamas propaganda videos.

As the war in Gaza drags on, and its opponents become increasingly desperate, the anti-Zionist left might be served by articulating a difference between the vast majority of Jews and Jewish institutions, most with some connection to Israel, and their actual political opponents.

GO DEEPER

- Far right capitalizes on Boulder attack to spread anti-Muslim, anti-Arab hate ([Forward](#))
- OPINION | I teach Jewish history in Boulder. Is my community taking the wrong lessons from Sunday's attack? ([Forward](#))
- OPINION | A doctor in the midst of the Boulder attack: “This did not come out of vacuum” ([Forward](#))



YOU MISSED THIS

Antisemitic conspiracy theorist at the White House



Photo: Getty Images

WHAT HAPPENED

Trump [nominated](#) Paul Ingrassia, currently White House liaison to the Department of Homeland Security, to run the Office of Special Counsel, an anti-corruption agency that enforces federal ethics laws.

Ingrassia, a far-right blogger and attorney, previously represented defendants in Jan. 6 Capitol riot cases and Andrew Tate, the antisemitic influencer who has denied the Holocaust and railed against Jews on social media.

WHY IT MATTERS

NPR [revealed](#) some of Ingrassia's ties to antisemitic extremists, including Nick Fuentes, in a major investigation last month. In previous eras, that article might have forced resignations and ended careers. But even as the Trump administration touts its fight against antisemitism on college campuses and elsewhere, it has shown little interest in punishing officials with these far-right associations.

In addition to promoting Ingrassia, the Pentagon [elevated Kingsley Wilson](#) — whose ties to the far right were also detailed in the NPR investigation — to press secretary for the Defense Department. Wilson has [parroted a claim](#) popular among neo-Nazis that Leo Frank, the Jewish man lynched

in Georgia in 1915, was in fact guilty of rape and murder despite widespread consensus among historians that he was framed for the crime as part of an antisemitic campaign.

GO DEEPER

- Multiple Trump White House officials have ties to antisemitic extremists ([NPR](#))
- Trump Nominates a Former Far-Right Podcast Host to Head an Ethics Watchdog ([New York Times](#))
- Pentagon promotes Kingsley Wilson to press secretary despite history of antisemitic comments ([Jewish Insider](#))

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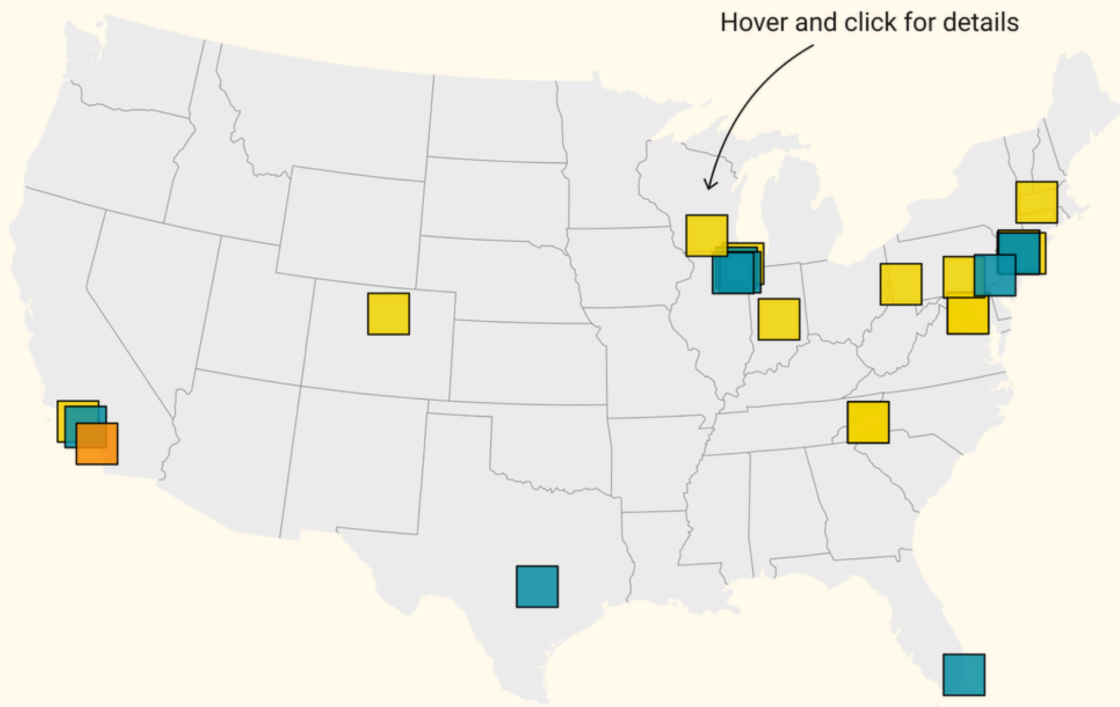
DATA DECODER

While the recent museum shooting in Washington, D.C., and fire attack in Boulder, Colorado, are two of the most severe acts of domestic violence related to the war in Gaza, there have been more than 30 instances of civilians being targeted in the U.S. since the Israel-Hamas war began, according to the Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project, which tracks political violence around the world.

Violence against U.S. civilians related to Israel-Hamas war

Civilians have been targeted in violent attacks across the United States more than 30 times since the Israel-Hamas war began on Oct. 7, 2023, including the recent murder of two Israeli Embassy staffers and the burning attack in Colorado.

■ Anti-Israeli ■ Anti-Palestinian ■ Mutual



The map above displays violent incidents in which civilians were the main or only target of an event, as opposed to demonstrations that involved property damage or pushing and shoving on the sidelines. (One exception is the death of Paul Kessler, which is a more [complicated case](#) but I believed was important to add to the map). Nearly half the incidents took place around either New York City (36%) or Chicago (12%), both metropolitan areas home to large numbers of Jewish and Palestinian Americans.

Two-thirds of these events — 22 out of 33 — were perpetrated by anti-Israeli actors, with many also being obviously antisemitic, like assaults against Orthodox Jews in New York City where the assailants yelled “Free Palestine.” Most of the remaining attacks targeted Palestinians, including the [murder](#) of 6-year-old Wadea Al-Fayoume in Chicago and the [shooting](#) of three Palestinian college students in Vermont.

[Click on the map](#) and then hover over the squares to read the details of each incident.

Jewish museum shooting: Sarah Milgrim and Yaron Lischinsky, a young couple who worked for the Israeli Embassy, were shot and killed

outside the Capital Jewish Museum following a diplomatic networking event organized by the American Jewish Committee. Elias Rodriguez, the 31-year-old suspect, said he did it “for Gaza.” ([Forward](#))

Rogue bus driver: A New York City bus driver pulled his vehicle over while driving students to elementary school and delivered a 30-minute lecture on Christianity, including the claim that Jews killed Jesus, leaving at least one student in tears. ([Israel Hayom](#))

Kansas City march: The Patriot Front, a white supremacist group, held a 150-person march in Kansas City. Missouri has been a hotspot of activity by the group, which an expert said uses “stunts like this to generate publicity and attract broken young men to their ranks.” ([Kansas City Star](#))

Squirrel Hill flyers: A man is facing \$50,000 in fines after distributing more than 100 antisemitic flyers promoting the Goyim Defense League in Jewish neighborhoods of Pittsburgh. ([Pittsburgh Jewish Chronicle](#))

Boulder fire attack: A man identified by police as an Egyptian national used an improvised flamethrower and Molotov cocktails to burn 12 people attending a gathering for Israeli hostages in Boulder, Colorado. He reportedly shouted anti-Zionist slogans during the attack. ([Forward](#))

Harvard Israelis in Trump crossfire: The Trump administration’s attempt to expel international students from Harvard over claims it is failing to address antisemitism could impact Jewish students from foreign countries, including Israelis, enrolled at the school. ([BBC](#))

Cheliotes conspiracy: Arthur Cheliotes, board chair of CUNY’s School of Labor and Urban Studies, shared a series of conspiracy theories about the Oct. 7 attack in Israel, suggesting that the government facilitated and fabricated elements of the violence. ([New York Post](#))

KKK lawsuit against Trump: Darrell McClanahan III, who Republicans tried to force out of last year’s Republican primary for governor in Missouri over his membership in the Ku Klux Klan, filed a lawsuit claiming that Trump’s executive order on antisemitism violates his freedom of speech and religion. ([Springfield News-Leader](#))

Columbia graduation: Around 100 people protested outside of Columbia University’s graduation, seeking to disrupt the event, but inside

the campus gates it proceeded relatively smoothly, even as interim president Clara Shipman faced boos from some students. ([Wall Street Journal](#)).

Penn cleared in lawsuit: A judge dismissed a lawsuit accusing the University of Pennsylvania of failing to protect Jewish states, finding that there were “no allegations” the school had taken actions that could be interpreted as antisemitic with the intention of causing harm to the Plaintiffs.” ([Daily Pennsylvanian](#))

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