



The U.S. Commission on Civil Rights Expresses Concern Over Spike in Anti-Semitism in the United States Surrounding the Outbreak of Violence Between Israel and Hamas in May 2021

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The U.S. Commission on Civil Rights expresses critical concern over the recent spike in violence and hate toward Jewish Americans provoked by the most recent outbreak in violence between Israel and Hamas.

This Commission has a long history of denouncing hate crimes that occur in this country.¹ This summer saw a rise in acts of physical violence and hate-filled online commentary against Jewish Americans, as the violence between Israel and Hamas increased. During this period anti-Semitic incidents in the U.S. doubled compared to 2020. The Anti-Defamation League recorded 251 incidents, including assault, vandalism, and harassment, from May 11 to May 31, which is a 115% increase from the same time period in 2020.² Incidents occurred throughout the United States, including vandalism of numerous synagogues. In Salt Lake City, a man scratched a swastika into the front door of an Orthodox synagogue,³ and in Alaska, Nazi imagery was posted on a synagogue.⁴ In Bal Harbour, Florida four men yelled “Die Jew” at a man wearing a yarmulke, then threatened to rape his wife and daughter.⁵ In Midtown Manhattan a group of people attacked a Jewish man in the middle of the street in broad daylight. The man, wearing a yarmulke and walking to a pro-Israel protest, was called “dirty Jew,” and was told, “F--- Israel, we’re going to kill you.” The NYPD confirmed the attackers made anti-Semitic remarks.⁶ A few Islamophobic incidents were reported during this time period, including anti-Palestinian graffiti spray painted on the front door of an Islamic Center in Brooklyn, NY, which reportedly said, “Death to Palestine.” A mosque on Long Island was also vandalized.⁷

¹ U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, *Campus Anti-Semitism*, July 2006, <https://www.usccr.gov/pubs/docs/081506campusantibrief07.pdf>.

² ADL Poll: *American Jews are Increasingly Concerned About Antisemitism in Wake of Recent Violence in Israel*, ADL (June 14, 2021), <https://www.adl.org/news/press-releases/adl-poll-american-jews-are-increasingly-concerned-https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-57286341/about-antisemitism-in-wake-of> (The ADL recorded 190 cases of harassment, 50 cases of vandalism, and 11 assaults).

³ Ruth Graham, *U.S. Faces Outbreak of Anti-Semitic Threats and Violence*, N.Y. TIMES (May 26, 2021), <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/05/26/us/anti-semitism-attacks-violence.html>.

⁴ Max Matza, *Who's behind recent rise in US anti-Semitic attacks?*, BBC News (May 28, 2021), <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-57286341>

⁵ Jason Breslow, *Officials Say Hate Crimes Against Jews are Growing in the Aftermath of Gaza Violence*, NPR (May 24, 2021), <https://www.npr.org/2021/05/24/999790233/officials-say-hate-crimes-against-jews-are-growing-in-the-aftermath-of-gaza-viol>.

⁶ Emily Shapiro, *Antisemitism surged across US during Gaza Conflict, part of multi-year rise: Advocates*, ABC (June 10, 2021, 6:00 AM), <https://abcnews.go.com/US/antisemitism-surged-us-gaza-conflict-part-multi-year/story?id=78092408>.

⁷ Shawna Chen, Gigi Sulkin, *Latest Gaza Conflict fuels anti-Semitism, Islamophobia across U.S., Europe*, AXIOS (May 21, 2021), <https://www.axios.com/israel-hamas-palestinian-antisemitic-islamophobia-80295603-757a-428b-b245-7b73e1403185.html>.

There was also an increase in anti-Semitic rhetoric online across multiple social media platforms including Facebook, Twitter, TikTok, and Instagram. Between May 7 and May 14, there were more than 17,000 tweets that used variations of the phrase “Hitler was right.”⁸ Other hashtags such as #Covid1948, an attempt to conflate the birth of the state of Israel in 1948 to the Covid-19 virus, and #Zionazi were also trending during the conflict.⁹ Many social media posts have misled the public, as users take videos out of context or deliberately spread of misinformation.¹⁰

Anti-Semitism is not a new phenomenon in the United States. A 2019 FBI Hate Crime Statistic report found that although Jews comprise approximately 2.4% of the American population, they are the victims of 60.2% of anti-religious hate crimes.¹¹ The Commission recognizes that individuals have a right to be critical of Israel and the Israeli government; however, anti-Semitic bigotry disguised as anti-Zionism is no less morally deplorable than any other form of hate. These incidents of hate and fearmongering undermine freedom of religion guaranteed within the United States Constitution. They harm specific victims but also create long-lasting and deeply harmful fear, anxiety and insecurity for witnesses and the broader community.¹² The spike in anti-Semitism cannot be normalized as political rhetoric. Jewish Americans cannot be held responsible for the actions of the state of Israel. All Americans have the right to practice their religion without fear of hateful speech, threatening actions or physical violence.

The Commission has been a long-standing voice for the safety of marginalized groups for example, through our work on hate crimes,¹³ anti-Semitism on campus,¹⁴ and Islamophobia after 9/11.¹⁵ The Commission stands for equal, fair, and safe treatment for all people regardless of race, color, religion, sex, age, disability, or national origin.

⁸ Preliminary ADL Data Reveals an Uptick in Antisemitic Incidents Linked to Recent Mideast Violence, ADL (May 20, 2021), <https://www.adl.org/news/press-releases/preliminary-adl-data-reveals-uptick-in-antisemitic-incidents-linked-to-recent>.

⁹ Bethany Mandel, *17,000 tweet 'Hitler was right,' and big tech barely reacts*, N.Y. POST (May 24, 2021, 5:57 PM), <https://nypost.com/2021/05/24/17000-tweet-hitler-was-right-and-big-tech-barely-reacts/>.

¹⁰ *Id.*

¹¹ FED. BUREAU OF INVESTIGATION, 2019 HATE CRIME STATISTICS: TABLE 1 INCIDENTS, OFFENSES, VICTIMS, AND KNOWN OFFENDERS (2019), <https://ucr.fbi.gov/hate-crime/2019/tables/table-1.xls>; *Jewish Americans in 2020*, PEW RESEARCH CENTER (May 11, 2021), <https://www.pewforum.org/2021/05/11/the-size-of-the-u-s-jewish-population/>.

¹² Jennifer F. Kelly, President, American Psychological Association, Statement on rising antisemitism, June 11, 2021, <https://www.apa.org/news/apa/2021/antisemitic-violence>

¹³ U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, *In the Name of Hate: Examining the Federal Government's Role in Responding to Hate Crimes*, Nov. 2019, <https://www.usccr.gov/pubs/2019/11-13-In-the-Name-of-Hate.pdf>.

¹⁴ U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, *Campus Anti-Semitism*, July 2006, <https://www.usccr.gov/pubs/docs/081506campusantibrief07.pdf>.

¹⁵ U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, *Federal Civil Rights Engagement with Arab and Muslim American Communities Post 9/11*, Sept. 2014, https://www.usccr.gov/pubs/docs/ARAB_MUSLIM_9-30-14.pdf.