

UNITED STATES

## Conservatives are more likely than liberals to hold anti-Semitic views, survey finds

BY BEN SALES    APRIL 22, 2021



A crowd protests anti-Semitism in New York City, Oct. 15, 2020. (Tayfun Coskun/Anadolu Agency via Getty Images)

(JTA) — Is anti-Semitism more of a problem on the left or the right?

Should Jews concentrate their energy on combating the far right? Or should they focus on fighting anti-Israel bias on campus? How do questions of race relations in the United States play into anti-Jewish bigotry?

As anti-Semitism has risen in the United States in recent years, these questions have preoccupied and divided Jewish leaders, activists and journalists, along with ordinary American Jews struggling to understand a country that may feel less safe than it once was.

Now a survey of American adults, published this week, hopes to answer those questions with data. And the results, according to the two academics who authored it, are clear: Conservatives are more likely to hold anti-Semitic attitudes than liberals, with young conservatives being the most likely to believe stereotypes about Jews.

The survey of more than 3,000 American adults, most of them aged 30 and under, also found that Black and Latino respondents were more likely than white respondents to hold anti-Semitic attitudes. And it found that young people on the far left were more likely to hold Jews responsible for Israel's actions than those in the center or right.

“While we find evidence consistent with theories of both left-wing and right-wing antisemitism, the results convey an unambiguous message that antisemitic attitudes are far more prevalent on the right,” the survey said. “In addition, our evidence suggests significantly higher rates of antisemitic attitudes among racial minorities relative to whites across the ideological spectrum.”

Conducted in the fall of 2020 by YouGov, the survey includes 2,500 young adult respondents, aged 18 to 30, and 759 older respondents over 30. It was commissioned by Tufts University political science professor Eitan Hersh and Laura Royden, a doctoral student in government at Harvard University. The margin of error among the young adults was 2%, and 4% for the older respondents.

Respondents on the right, both young and old, were more likely than those on the left to believe longstanding stereotypes about Jews, like saying that Jews have too much power, Jewish businesses should be boycotted in protest of Israel's actions or American Jews are more loyal to Israel than the United States.

The respondents self-identified on a scale with seven levels ranging from very liberal to very conservative.

Less than 5% of very liberal young adults believe Jews have too much power, versus approximately 35% of very conservative young adults. Similarly, around 9% of very liberal young adults said Jews are more loyal to Israel than to the U.S., as opposed to about 36% of very

conservative young adults. In general, the more conservative one was, the more likely they were to hold an anti-Semitic belief.

Younger conservatives were also more likely than older conservatives to believe anti-Semitic stereotypes. Younger conservatives were twice as likely to say Jews have too much power and to support boycotting Jewish-owned businesses in protest of Israel. They are also more likely to say American Jews are more loyal to Israel.

Hersh believes anti-Semitic attitudes among younger conservatives reflect their opposition to notions of “political correctness.”

“It seems like they have reactionary attitudes toward political correctness in a lot of dimensions, and that manifests here in a very common willingness to say Jews have too much power or they’re disloyal,” he said. “I think we were a little surprised at how evident those attitudes are in our survey.”

In asking respondents whether they believe in anti-Semitic stereotypes, the survey employed a similar measuring stick as the Anti-Defamation League has used in surveys over the past six decades. An ADL survey from 2019 found that more than 60% of Americans believed at least one of 11 anti-Semitic stereotypes and that 11% believed a majority of them.

The finding that anti-Semitism is more prevalent on the right also jibes with a recent survey by the American Jewish Committee that measured Jewish and general American perceptions of anti-Semitism. That survey, taken last year, found that most Jews and Americans believe that the Republican Party holds anti-Semitic views, while 42% of Americans overall and 37% of Jews felt the Democratic Party held anti-Semitic views.

The survey also found that across the political spectrum, Black and Latino respondents were more likely to believe anti-Semitic stereotypes than white respondents. About 15% of self-identified white liberals believed in one of the three stereotypes included in the survey, compared to 26% of Latino liberals and 42% of Black liberals. Likewise, about 30% of white conservatives believed one of the

stereotypes, compared to more than 50% of Black or Latino conservatives.

“In general we think of young people as liberal, we think of minorities as liberal,” Hersh said. “The reasons why we see anti-Semitism among Blacks and Latinos are quite different from why we might see it among liberals.”

Class differences help explain anti-Semitism among Black Americans, said Bruce Haynes, a sociologist and author of “The Soul of Judaism: Jews of African Descent in America.” African-Americans, he said, may see Jews primarily as white people who hold privilege in society, and may seize on anti-Semitic stereotypes as a way to scapegoat them.

He added that in his view, bigotry emanating from the Donald Trump administration helped normalize anti-Semitism in the public sphere — even among people who did not support Trump.

“We’re talking about a society that’s heavily segregated by race and class, and we wonder why groups turn to ethnic stereotypes and anti-Semitism to express what’s happening to them,” said Haynes, a professor at the University of California, Davis, adding that dynamic takes place “precisely when those anti-Semitic explanations have been licensed in our public culture in a tremendous way by our legitimate government.”

There was one question on which both very liberal and very conservative people were more willing than their more moderate peers to advocate what Hersh called an “anti-Jewish double standard.” More than 40% of very liberal and very conservative young people said Jews need to denounce Israel’s discrimination against non-Jews in order to participate in social justice activism. Only 20% of moderates agreed.

The survey asked the same question regarding whether Muslims need to denounce Muslim countries’ discrimination. Very liberal young people were more likely to demand that Jews denounce Israel, while very conservative young people were more likely to demand that Muslims denounce Muslim countries.

That statistic, Hersh said, goes a long way to explaining why people who pay attention to college campuses might think there's a lot of anti-Semitism on the left. The elite schools where Israel debates get a lot of media coverage, he said, have very liberal student bodies. And, according to the survey, very liberal young people are disproportionately willing to implicate Jews when criticizing Israel.

“From the perspective of college students on a campus like mine, they don't see the full ideological range. They're living in that very liberal world,” he said. “We are seeing in our data evidence of that kind of double standard in that population.”

But Hersh said that the survey data as a whole shows that left-wing anti-Semitism is much less prevalent overall than anti-Semitism on the right.

Regarding left-wing anti-Semitism, he said, “I think what we're showing is that kind of thing exists, but in the broader context that's not the main thing going on.”