

NEXUS

TALKING ABOUT ANTISEMITISM

A Messaging Guide for Policymakers by the Nexus Project

Antisemitism is rising. It's being normalized in political speech and in popular media, and our community has suffered when that rhetoric has turned to increased violent, sometimes deadly, incidents. Voters are paying attention, and candidates and policymakers across the ideological spectrum are being asked where they stand.

Talking about antisemitism requires precision. When done right, it demonstrates moral clarity and deepens the awareness and understanding needed to bring diverse groups together in solidarity to fight it. When done poorly, it can alienate key constituencies, be weaponized by bad-faith actors, or conflate legitimate political debate with actual hatred.

The Nexus Project is a nonpartisan organization dedicated to combating antisemitism while protecting democratic values and free expression. This guide reflects our evidence-based approach to discussing antisemitism in a manner that is both principled and effective.

CORE MESSAGING PRINCIPLES

1. Be Clear About What Antisemitism Is

Antisemitism encompasses hostile beliefs and actions targeting Jews for being Jewish — including discrimination, defamatory stereotypes, and conditions that prevent Jews from participating as equals in public life. It includes but is not limited to:

- Conspiracy theories that portray Jews as controlling governments, media, or finance
- Holocaust denial or minimization
- Physical attacks, threats, or vandalism targeting Jews or Jewish institutions
- Stereotyping or dehumanizing Jewish people as a group
- Applying standards to Jews that would not apply to others

Strong sample language:

"Antisemitism has no place in our politics, our campuses, or our communities. Targeting Jewish people because they are Jewish — through threats, harassment, or discrimination — is wrong, full stop, and we should fight it wherever it appears."

2. Recognize That Antisemitism Comes From All Directions

Antisemitism should be condemned regardless of where it originates on the political spectrum. White nationalist ideology driven by conspiracy theories remains the primary driver of antisemitic violence in the U.S. today. At the same time, in both politically conservative and progressive circles, antisemitism is accompanying debate about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and includes rhetoric that traffics in anti-Jewish tropes and calls for violence against Jews.

3. Distinguish Antisemitism from Criticism of Israel

With criticism of Israeli policies and the US-Israel relationship gaining more mainstream attention, there is an ongoing effort by some to conflate all criticism of Israel with antisemitic hatred. Being able to distinguish between debate and hate protects both Jewish communities and important democratic discourse.

Conflating criticism of the Israeli government with antisemitism can create significant misunderstandings. For example, it can undermine credibility with segments of the Jewish community who may hold critical views about certain Israeli policies. It also runs afoul of those who are concerned about efforts to stifle political debate across Jewish and non-Jewish communities alike. It emboldens and unwittingly may promote narratives of those who would use antisemitism charges as a political weapon.

It's vital to note that protest or criticism of a specific policy is different than exclusion or harassment of Israelis because of their nationality. This conduct may or may not be motivated by antisemitism, but regardless, it is illegal under federal civil rights law to discriminate **because** of a person's birthplace, ancestry, culture or language. It is completely unacceptable to express disagreement with a government or policy by taking action against nationals of that country.

See the chart below for a helpful guide on identifying antisemitism in conversations about the Israel-Palestine conflict.

✓ IS Antisemitism	✗ Is NOT Antisemitism
<ul style="list-style-type: none">▶ Denying Jews the same individual or national rights as others — including the right to self-determination.▶ Holding all Jews responsible for Israeli government actions▶ Using anti-Jewish tropes to attack Israel ("controlling," "bloodthirsty")▶ Justifying or celebrating violence against Jews	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▶ Criticizing specific Israeli policies or military actions▶ Supporting Palestinian rights▶ Opposing Israeli settlement expansion▶ Condemning Israeli settler violence▶ Calling for a ceasefire or humanitarian aid▶ Harsh characterizations of Israel that may be unfair or uncomfortable but are not necessarily antisemitic.

LEGISLATIVE POSITIONING

Support Smart, Targeted Legislation

When asked about support for legislation to combat antisemitism, focus on promoting laws that address concrete harms without chilling free speech or democratic norms. The Antisemitism Response and Prevention Act of 2025 (ARPA) is a useful model:

What to Know About ARPA

- Mandates that schools report antisemitic incidents — creating accountability without suppressing speech
- Distinguishes between protected expression and actionable discrimination
- Does not weaponize Title VI against protected political speech
- Ensures full funding of programs that work to protect the Jewish community, like the Nonprofit Security Grant Program, without partisan strings attached

Reference the U.S. National Strategy on Antisemitism of 2023

The first-ever U.S. National Strategy to Counter Antisemitism, released in 2023, is a model for the kind of comprehensive, whole-of-society approach campaigns should champion. The 2023 National Strategy is the most comprehensive bipartisan effort to combat antisemitism in American history. Key points to lift:

Why the National Strategy of 2023 Is the Seminal Guidepost

- First federal strategy of its kind — a landmark moment in taking antisemitism seriously at the governmental level
- Takes a whole-of-society approach: education, community safety, law enforcement, civil society, and government working together
- Bipartisan-friendly framing: draws on broad support across Jewish organizational and civil society stakeholders
- The strategy was lauded across the wide breadth of the Jewish community and in both political parties.

Definitions Should Never be Codified into Policy

There are a number of definitions and frameworks used to understand and tackle antisemitism. The Nexus Document, developed by the Nexus Project, offers a robust and balanced framework to address the most common questions raised in contemporary political discourse. It outlines types of antisemitic expression, as well as expression that, while sometimes disagreeable or mischaracterized as anti-Jewish, is protected as legitimate political debate. It is the primary educational resource we recommend.

- Other tools used by scholars, advocates, and community organizations include T'ruah's Very Brief Guide to Antisemitism, the Jerusalem Declaration on Antisemitism and the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) Working Definition. These tools offer additional useful perspectives and can be used alongside the Nexus Document.

There is no single universally supported definition of antisemitism, and none of these should be adopted into policy or as a legal standard. There has been a longstanding effort to codify the IHRA definition as a single framework, but several of the eleven illustrative examples have drawn significant criticism for potentially sweeping in, and chilling, constitutionally protected political speech about Israel.

- **There is no official definition for any form of bigotry in U.S. law, and antisemitism is not an**

exception. Legal definitions haven't been necessary to effectively investigate or prosecute violations of the civil rights of Jews or any protected class. Definitions serve a helpful education purpose but should not be enacted into policy – they offer no clear enforcement benefit and pose an unwarranted risk of infringing on constitutionally protected expression.

WHAT TO AVOID

Pitfall	Why It Backfires
Selective condemnation	Only condemning antisemitism from one political direction reads as partisan, not principled.
Overly broad definitions	Conflating all criticism of Israel with antisemitism is inaccurate and alienates liberal Jews, as well as free speech advocates.
Dismissiveness	Treating antisemitism as a less serious or less urgent form of bigotry is tone-deaf and ignores consistent and overwhelming evidence.
Instrumentalizing Jewish safety	Using antisemitism charges to attack political opponents, while ignoring other serious threats, undermines trust and can lead to antisemitism being taken less seriously.

QUICK-REFERENCE TALKING POINTS

On antisemitism generally:

- "Antisemitism is on the rise — and we should take it seriously wherever it comes from, right or left. Targeting Jewish people because they are Jewish is a threat to all of us."

On campus antisemitism:

- "Every student deserves to feel safe and included on campus. That means protecting all students, including Jews, from harassment and discrimination — and it means protecting everyone's right to engage in political debate, including about the Middle East."

On legislation:

- "I support laws that advance real action create real accountability for antisemitic incidents — like ARPA — without using our laws to suppress protected speech."

On Israel/antisemitism distinction:

- "Criticizing Israeli government policy is not inherently antisemitism. When criticism traffics in bigotry, antisemitic rhetoric, stereotypes or conspiracy theories about Jewish power, holding all Jews responsible for Israel's actions, or denying Jews the same individual or national rights as others — it is antisemitic and should be condemned."

KEY RESOURCES

The following resources are recommended reading for campaign staff, candidates, and surrogates. They provide deeper background, definitional frameworks, and practical guidance for navigating these issues.

★ FEATURED RESOURCE **The Nexus Document**

The Nexus Project

The foundational framework for understanding antisemitism in the context of Israel and Zionism. Developed by the Nexus Task Force — a group of leading scholars and advocates — this document offers clear, practical guidance on when speech or conduct about Israel crosses into antisemitism, and when it does not. Used by universities, policymakers, and Jewish organizations nationwide. Not a legal standard, but an essential tool for principled, evidence-based discourse.

nexusproject.us/the-nexus-document/

▶ NEXUS PROJECT **Guide to Identifying Antisemitism in Debates about Israel**

The Nexus Project

A practical guide for policymakers and campaign staff on distinguishing genuine antisemitism from legitimate political criticism of Israel, with concrete examples in both categories. Grounded in the principle that over-labeling criticism as antisemitic undermines the fight against real bigotry.

<https://nexusproject.us/nexus-resources/guide-to-identifying-antisemitism-in-debates-about-israel/>

▶ NEXUS PROJECT **The Shofar Report Policy Recommendations: Fighting Antisemitism by Protecting Democracy**

The Nexus Project

The Shofar Report's standalone policy blueprint, offering concrete steps on civil rights enforcement, education investment, and cross-community coalition-building — prioritizing proven approaches over punitive measures that risk undermining the democracy where Jews are historically safest. Ideal for candidates and policymakers who want a substantive, values-grounded answer to what they would actually do on antisemitism.

<https://nexusproject.us/nexus-resources/the-shofar-report-a-call-to-defend-democracy-and-confront-antisemitism/policy-recommendations-fighting-antisemitism-by-protecting-democracy/>

▶ T'RUAH **A Very Brief Guide to Antisemitism (2024 Edition)**

T'ruah: The Rabbinic Call for Human Rights — in collaboration with The Nexus Project

An accessible, plainspoken introduction to antisemitism updated for 2024. Written for both Jewish and non-Jewish audiences, it offers historical context, current examples, and guidance on the Israel/antisemitism distinction. A 2,300-member rabbinical network stands behind this resource — ideal for sharing with faith community partners and broad coalition audiences.

<https://truah.org/antisemitism/>

▶ JCPA **Antisemitism x Democracy**

Amy Spitalnick / Jewish Council for Public Affairs

A landmark landscape report making the case that antisemitism is not only a threat to Jews — it is a foundational driver of anti-democratic extremism and political violence. Includes message research showing that framing Jewish safety as inseparable from democratic health resonates strongly across race, generation, and party. Essential reading for campaigns that want to connect antisemitism to a broader democratic values narrative. Includes a detailed review of organizations and gaps in the field.

<https://jewishpublicaffairs.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/06/Antisemitism-X-Democracy-Report.pdf>

▶ **U.S. GOVERNMENT National Strategy to Counter Antisemitism**

The White House

The Biden administration's comprehensive federal strategy — the first of its kind — which mobilized resources across dozens of federal agencies to combat antisemitism through education, law enforcement, and community support. A bipartisan-friendly reference for campaigns and policymakers wanting to ground their position in concrete government action. Note: the Trump administration has moved away from this framework, opting to focus more on prosecuting, removing or holding accountable accused perpetrators.

<https://bidenwhitehouse.archives.gov/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/U.S.-National-Strategy-to-Counter-Antisemitism.pdf>