

Forward

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Antisemitism Decoded

with Arno Rosenfeld



Welcome to the re-launch of our antisemitism newsletter, now called Antisemitism Decoded! You're not yet subscribed to this newsletter so make sure you [sign up here](#). That way you'll continue receiving this biweekly guide to separating the signal from the noise about antisemitism and understanding current debates over Jewish safety.

- ① I wrote yesterday about how the Anti-Defamation League plans to address antisemitism and hostility toward Israel at more than 16,000 elementary and secondary schools.
- ② Jodi Rudoren, our editor-in-chief, wrote about how antisemitism intersected with Israel politics to destroy the police chaplain program in her New Jersey suburb.
- ③ The only Jew in Oszpicin, Poland, can see Auschwitz from her bedroom window.



UP FIRST



President Joe Biden launched his 2020 campaign by lambasting then-President Donald Trump’s response to far-right antisemitism. He swore in the first ambassador-level envoy to combat antisemitism, and created the first White House national strategy to counter it.

But buried in the annals of the Office of Information and Regulatory Affairs is an emblem of how his team struggled to convince Americans that Democrats are best suited to protect Jews against hate.

* * *

Its official title is Department of Education Rule 1870-AA15, and it was never implemented.

The rule follows a 2019 executive order signed by Trump mandating that the department use the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance’s definition of antisemitism when investigating claims of discrimination against Jewish students.

“This executive order was designed to counter a slippery slope where freedom of speech and protests turn into antisemitism,” Seth Limmer, a prominent Chicago rabbi, told The New York Times at the time. “But I’m a big believer that if you stifle a protest, it’s not going to stifle the protest.”

The core of the question is whether protests against Israel include enough antisemitism to warrant restrictions. Trump and other Republican leaders think so — that was the heart of the executive order, and the ensuing Education Department rule, which is required to convert the order into policy that its civil rights team can use day-to-day.

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But Democrats have been divided on the question of where anti-Zionism and antisemitism overlap. And that's how Rule 1870-AA15 ended up in limbo. Biden neither rescinded, nor implemented, the executive order. For years, senior officials have said they were just about to finalize the rule.

"I resist the 'delay' phrase," Catherine Lhamon, the department's civil rights chief, told me and other Jewish journalists in February. "We are working every day to be able to move it."

With 27 days left until Biden leaves office, it seems unlikely any action will be taken. That is a policy choice in itself — albeit one that is hard to explain to American Jews demanding to know what you're doing to address antisemitism.

* * *

As it stands, Biden can neither take credit for an aggressive approach to campus antisemitism, nor claim a principled alternative stance that carved out more room for criticism of Israel. It was a similar story with his national antisemitism strategy, which equivocated on how to define antisemitism in a way that seemed to genuinely please almost nobody.

Biden's own team has also seemed divided. Ambassador Deborah Lipstadt, his antisemitism envoy, convinced 39 foreign countries to rely on the IHRA definition even as her own government dragged its feet implementing it at home.

Second Gentleman Doug Emhoff, the administration's senior Jewish surrogate, never spoke clearly about his position on the intersection of Israel and antisemitism. And in Congress, Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer pointedly refused to advance the Antisemitism Awareness Act, which endorsed IHRA — and then had a sudden change of heart after the election, only for Republicans to stymie his efforts.

The impossibility of pinning down the "Democratic position" on antisemitism almost certainly allowed Republicans an opportunity to seize the issue for themselves.

Of course, it's always easier to speak with clear-eyed conviction when you're in the opposition..



YOU MISSED THIS

‘Antisemitism and Islamophobia’ at UCLA



Getty Images

WHAT HAPPENED

The Department of Education found that Jewish, Arab and Muslim students all faced discrimination on campus. Jewish students described being blocked from areas of campus if they refused to denounce Zionism, and feeling targeted by pro-Palestinian protesters chanting “there is no peace until they’re dead.”

At the same time, the department found that the school failed to respond to students who said they were harassed for wearing kaffiyehs, and that campus police failed to protect peaceful protesters who were assaulted by pro-Israel activists at a campus encampment in May.

UCLA agreed to report back to the feds with a plan to address all forms of “shared ancestry” discrimination by next December.

WHY IT MATTERS

Many Jews balk when liberal politicians and community leaders condemn antisemitism and Islamophobia in the same breath. Some believe it suggests these leaders view countering antisemitism as synonymous with support for Israel, and feel the need to balance their condemnations by

mentioned Islamophobia (a proxy for supporting the Palestinians), while others say that it minimizes the severity of antisemitic discrimination. And combining antisemitism and Islamophobia can sometimes appear to be a reflexive habit. But the UCLA investigation adds to mounting evidence from the past year that outbreaks of violence in Israel and the occupied Palestinian territories inevitably causes discrimination against everyone associated with the region — Jews, Israelis, Arabs and Muslims — to increase.

GO DEEPER

- **Read the official agreement** between the Dept. of Education and UCLA
- USA Today used graphics to chart **the rise of anti-Jewish and anti-Muslim hate incidents**
- Houria Bouteldja, the French-Algerian author and political critic, wrote short 2017 treatise on the **relationship between Jews and Muslims** facing discrimination in Europe (MIT Press)

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YOU MISSED THIS



Getty Images

The Anti-Defamation League and Ipsos recently found that nearly half of the world's adults "harbor antisemitic attitudes," more than double the share from a similar study they conducted 10 years ago.

But the increases aren't even. I pulled the numbers for the nine countries home to 90% of Jews in the diaspora and found that agreement with the series of antisemitic statements polled by Ipsos had fallen significantly in two European hot spots — France and Germany — while skyrocketing in Russia.

Despite the global increase, only 11% of Americans agreed with a significant number of the antisemitic tropes, the same rate as in 2014.

Because of this newsletter...

I am clearer about what's antisemitism and what's just noise

I understand debates about how to fight antisemitism

I know how worried to be about potential antisemitic incidents



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