



June 18, 2024

Jewish Community Relations Council of the Milwaukee Jewish Federation 2023 Audit of Antisemitic Incidents

TOPLINE:

The Jewish Community Relations Council 2023 Audit of Antisemitic Incidents reveal Wisconsin's number of reported antisemitic incidents rose again for the 8th consecutive year, marking ***a cumulative increase of 570% since 2015****, according to the 2023 Audit of Antisemitic Incidents released today by the Jewish Community Relations Council of the Milwaukee Jewish Federation.

Additionally, there was a 13% uptick in reported antisemitic incidents between 2022 and 2023, including a 257% increase in harassment and assaults.

Our reporting guidelines include antisemitic incidents that occur in the State of Wisconsin, are committed by people residing in the State of Wisconsin, relate to Wisconsin institutions, relate to, or specifically respond to Wisconsin persons, and/or would otherwise go unreported if not reported within our audit.

[* Following years of flat or declining incidents, 2015 marks what has become the beginning of a sudden, sharp and historical rise in antisemitism which continues today.]

*Wisconsin's number of reported antisemitic incidents rose again for the 8th consecutive year, marking **a cumulative increase of 570% since 2015**, **a 13% increase from 2022**.*

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BACKGROUND: *Understanding Jewish Identity, Zionism & Antisemitism*

One of the challenges on college campuses and throughout the community is lack of knowledge of the Jewish community as well as basic terminology related to Judaism and Israel, the Jewish Homeland.

- Members of the Jewish community identify in a variety of ways – religiously, spiritually, culturally, and intellectually. It is important to note that members of the Jewish community, like members of all communities, do not agree on all topics all of the time.
- Zionism is simply the belief that the State of Israel has the right to exist as the Jewish homeland. Being a Zionist does not mean you agree with all Israeli policies or politics; it also does not mean that you do not care for the wellbeing of innocent Gaza civilians or that you do not believe in a two-state solution.

- In recent years we have charted the rise of a redefining of “Zionist” as a pejorative, weaponizing it as a label. “Zionist” is being used not only as an insult, but as is the case on some of our campuses, identifying as a Zionist or anti-Zionist is what determined if students were to be welcomed into the encampment, or targeted for harassment.
- In spite of many distinctions of beliefs within the Jewish community, when it comes to a connection to Israel, over 80% of American Jews have strong ties to the State of Israel as the Jewish homeland (see Pew Research Center data on the topic: <https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2023/10/13/most-jewish-americans-have-long-standing-connections-to-israel/>).

Natan Sharansky, a former minister in the Israeli government, created what he calls the “Three Ds” to determine if criticism of Israel is legitimate or if it is antisemitism. The three ds are – Demonization, Double Standard, and Deligitimization.

- ❖ **DEMONIZATION:** Making Israel and its leaders the “bad actors” in a binary good vs evil scenario; when Israel’s actions or policies are framed as uniquely inappropriate or aggressive vs other nations; when Israel and Israelis are equated with Nazi Germany and Nazis; when Israel is seen as the sole cause for the situation in the Middle East—this is considered antisemitism, not legitimate criticism of Israel.
- ❖ **DOUBLE STANDARDS** When criticism of Israel is applied selectively and in a grossly unfair manner and Israel is singled out when clearly immoral behavior of other nation-states is ignored—for example, when Israel is criticized by the United Nations for human rights abuses while the behavior of known and major abusers, such as China, Iran, Cuba, and Syria, is ignored—this is considered antisemitism.
- ❖ **DELEGITIMIZATION** When Israel’s fundamental right to exist is singularly denied by peoples of the world—this too is considered antisemitism.

Antisemitism doesn’t look like other forms of bias. Antisemitism also looks differently when it is coming from the right (white supremacist groups, neo-Nazis, etc.) and the left (believing that Israel’s current war against terrorism is an attempt at genocide rather than a military campaign against the worst attack against the Jewish people since the Holocaust). Antisemitism is at a historic high since October 7, 2023 (see Anti-Defamation League audit of antisemitic incidents at <https://www.adl.org/audit-antisemitic-incidents>).

Audit Findings

Impact of October 7, 2023, in Wisconsin

The terrorist attack by Hamas on Israel had a direct impact on the rise of antisemitic incidents in Wisconsin. In spite of Fall and Winter breaks, and a 5-day final exam period, 64% of incidents on college campuses occurred post October 7th. It is also notable that 60% of the year’s antisemitic incidents which included references to Zionism or Israel occurred after October 7th. We believe that this disproportionate percentage shows that October 7th impacted the number and type of antisemitic incidents occurring.

*64% of incidents on college campuses occurred post-October 7th
(9 of 14 total incidents)*

*60% of incidents involving references to Israel and/or Zionism occurred post-October 7th
(15 or 25 total incidents)*

2023 by the Numbers:

- Harassment/Threats/Assaults: +257% increase (up from 14 in 2022 to 50 in 2023)
- Holocaust/Nazi References: +51% increase (up from 27 in 2022 to 41 in 2023)
- Jewish Institutions targeted: +433% increase (up from 6 in 2022 to 32 in 2023)
- Youth Involvement: +100% increase (up from 11 in 2022 to 22 in 2023)
- Conspiracy Theories: -40% decrease (down from 42 in 2022 to 25 in 2023)
- Expression: -24% decrease (down from 57 in 2022 to 43 in 2023)

Harassment/Threats/Assaults

There was a 257% increase in Harassment/Threats/Assaults. This reflects a significant change as these numbers had been trending downward since 2020. The 50 incidents under this category also reflects the highest number since 2012. It is notable that since October 7th there were 8 Harassment/Threats/Assaults that directly referred to Israel.

Some Examples:

- Members of the Jewish community followed, harassed, and threatened as they were walking.
- Threatening notes received by members of the Jewish community directly referencing their Judaism.
- Members of the Jewish community had property damaged with antisemitic messaging.
- Videos circulated among middle school students using Holocaust references in a threatening manner aimed at Jewish students.

Jewish Institutions Targeted 32 Times

There was a significant increase in the targeting of Jewish institutions. Over the course of 2023 there were 32 incidents directly targeting Jewish institutions. This included synagogues, the Milwaukee Jewish Federation, schools, Hillels, and other identifiably Jewish organizations. This is a significant increase over 2022 which had 6 incidents directly targeting Jewish institutions. 31% of these incidents occurred post October 7th.

Some Examples:

- “Heil Hitler” shouted outside a synagogue.
- Harassing and threatening phone calls received by the Jewish Museum of Milwaukee and the Milwaukee Jewish Federation.
- Threatening and harassing messages left at multiple synagogues.

Hate Group Activity Reported 14 Times

There were 14 incidents of hate group activity. This reflects a 27% increase from previous years and is part of a pattern of rising hate group involvement since 2016. In addition, hate group activity tends to overlap across populations. This can be seen in the widespread symbols reflecting racism and homophobia in addition to antisemitism in hate group flyers, gatherings, and related activities.

Some Examples:

- Members of the neo-Nazi group “Blood Tribe” marching down State Street with Swastika flags and chanting.
- Flyers from “Aryan Freedom Network” distributed in multiple places around the city including multiple Jewish institutions.
- Flyers from known hate group “GoyimTV” distributed across various communities and referencing antisemitic conspiracies.

Youth Participation in Antisemitism Incidents Increased 100%

There were 22 incidents with youth involvement. This was a 100% increase from the previous year's total of 11 incidents, which represents a notable change. This includes incidents in schools, recreation departments, parks, and other spaces. It is important to note that this is an area where education can make a significant difference in changing patterns.

Some Examples:

- During a sports game at a local high school racial slurs and swastikas were drawn in the dust of the visiting team's locker room.
- Swastika graffiti at multiple schools ranging from elementary to high school.
- Swastika graffiti drawn on park equipment.

Conspiracy Theories Reported 25 times

There were 25 incidents related to conspiracy theories in 2023. This reflects a 40% decrease from 2022 which had 42 conspiracy theory related incidents. The conspiracy theories primarily related to Jewish control of government and Jewish control of money and wealth. It is notable that 2023 is the first year since 2020 that did not have any reported conspiracy theories connected to COVID.

Some Examples:

- Flyers stating that Jews control the media.
- Flyers stating Jews were behind the 9/11 attacks.
- An individual with a sign stating that "Jew Spies Chipped the USA."
- Stickers with a QR code leading to a website about how Jews control government, corporations, media, and academia.

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The Jewish Community Relations Council of the Milwaukee Jewish Federation envisions a just community that reflects American and Jewish values. The mission is to speak as the representative of the Jewish community on issues of public affairs and public policy by convening and mobilizing the Jewish community through education, advocacy, social justice, and support for Israel.

The JCRC conducts an annual audit of antisemitic incidents in Wisconsin to maintain accurate and consistent reporting, evaluate trends, educate the public, and to encourage and empower individuals to help stop the spread of antisemitism and all forms of hate.