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Re → Explainer: The Global Far Right and Israel

Contents

[Summary](#): The antisemitic global far right is becoming increasingly pro-Israel - and the Israeli government is embracing its support.

[Background](#)

[Key Arguments](#)

- / [A.](#) Antisemitism remains central to the worldview of the global far right
- / [B.](#) Pro-Israel politics and antisemitism are not mutually exclusive
- / [C.](#) Far-right Israeli leaders and public figures embrace their antisemitic and autocratic counterparts, as part of an emboldened global far-right alliance.

[Resources](#)

Summary

The rise of the global far right over the past 20 years has brought a dramatic upsurge in nationalist and nativist policies, elected officials, and rhetoric, along with a resurgence in conspiracy theories. Taken together, these trends have fed the re-proliferation of antisemitic speech and imagery in mainstream political discourse and online, revitalized by a wider backlash against immigrants, Black people and people of color, LGBTQ people, and other minoritized groups. In the United States, this trend was significantly accelerated by the 2016 presidential election of Donald Trump, which sparked unprecedented anti-Jewish violence and normalized a new generation of Republican politicians who invoke antisemitic conspiracy theories and maintain ties to white nationalist groups.

Yet Trump and the wider GOP, like political figures in other far-right governments and political parties, have consistently pointed to their Zionist credentials as an alibi. A growing current of philosemitism worldwide posits Jews as assumed — albeit subordinate — allies of Western and Christian hegemony under the framework of “Judeo-Christian values.” Within this framework, Jews are presumed partners for Islamophobic discourse and policy. Central to the spread of this philosemitic Islamophobia is the idea that Jews need “protecting” from Muslims, and that such protection can best be advanced by these far-right actors. And the ongoing oppression of Palestinians spurs this spread, as the Israeli government embraces numerous staples of far-right ideology: ethnonationalism, militarization and the need for securitized borders, Islamophobia, and authoritarianism.

For their part, Israel’s leaders have tended to publicly embrace the notion that support for Israel *ipso facto* eliminates concerns about antisemitism. Their endorsement of this notion corresponds to Israel’s own foreign policy goals, focused on suppressing the Palestinian struggle, as well as the [ideological affinity](#) between Israel’s leaders and far-right governments around the world. Israel has been radicalizing rightward over the past few decades, as have many other countries, and serves as a model ethnocratic state for right-wing populists elsewhere. These overlapping trends have contributed to the creation of a powerful alliance — one that accelerates the threat of nationalist violence while disavowing its dangerous consequences for diaspora Jews. This alliance also insulates Israel from international criticism for its oppression of Palestinians, thereby serving Israeli foreign policy goals.

Background

The 21st century resurgence of the global far right has brought successive elections of leaders around the world who have, implicitly and explicitly, circulated bigoted and conspiratorial ideas about Jews. The reasons for these developments are many: increasing economic instability has

driven the rise of populist leaders promising to solve the crisis by cracking down on immigration; an accompanying increase in the [politics of nostalgia](#) feeds into national [grievance politics](#) by valorizing a non-specific earlier time when the hegemonic group more freely protected its dominance; and, more recently, the rapid spread of dis- and misinformation, largely through social media, has translated into real-world incitement, hate crimes, and lethal attacks, as well as successful insurgent far-right election campaigns.

Amid these trends, antisemitism has remained an animating ideology across the global far right — whether expressed through dog-whistle references to Jewish power and money, Holocaust revisionism, or [policies](#) and [proposals](#) that constrain Jewish expression in the public sphere. Antisemitism is frequently a [foundational part](#) of right-wing conspiracy theories, interwoven with the preservation of racial purity, “traditional” gender roles, and land and borders.

Unlike the far-right movements of the early part of the 20th century, however, those with similar views today have an effective alibi for their prejudicial ideas about Jews: publicly supporting, and enacting policies sympathetic to, the state of Israel, including endorsement and adoption of the [International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance Working Definition of Antisemitism](#). Hungarian Prime Minister [Viktor Orbán](#), for example, has stressed his support for Israel while igniting antisemitic conspiracy theories in his own country. Rather than rejecting the overtures of Orbán and his ilk, Israeli leaders and public figures, most prominently Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, have actively embraced them — playing up their political and personal compatibility while [dismissing](#) or deflecting accusations of their anti-Jewish rhetoric and policies.

Underlying these displays of amity are shared commitments to ethnonationalism, securitized borders, hostility toward Islam, suspicion of Enlightenment humanism, and authoritarian suppression. Israeli leaders’ tacit acceptance of their far-right allies’ bigoted rhetoric about Jews — and their political campaigns informed by such rhetoric — is also rooted in long-running efforts to re-define antisemitism as criticism of Israel (see DA Explainer #1). What’s more, numerous Israeli public figures over the years have [emphasized](#) their prioritization of Israeli nationalist prerogatives over Jewish safety in the diaspora and [amplified](#) incendiary language about Jews. These far-right ties serve Israel’s foreign policy goals by creating an alliance of states guaranteed to insulate Israel’s oppression of Palestinians from international censure.

Key arguments

A. Antisemitism remains central to the worldview of the global far right - including ruling parties

While numerous far-right factions around the world deny their antisemitism, and/or claim to have distanced themselves from their antisemitic origins, prejudiced and conspiratorial ideas about Jews remain a core part of their worldview – even if expressed in coded terms.

- / Austria’s far-right Freedom Party (FPÖ), which was founded in the post-World War II period by former Nazis, maintains that it has disavowed its antisemitic past (while remaining [brazen](#) about its [Islamophobia](#) and [xenophobia](#)). But its members continue to [espouse antisemitic views](#), and it has been responsible for [proposed guidelines](#) restricting the sale of kosher meat.
- / The Republican Party in the United States has a growing swath of members, particularly in the House of Representatives, who openly engage in antisemitic rhetoric, release antisemitic campaign materials, and consort with white nationalists – among them former President Trump, former Speaker of the House [Kevin McCarthy](#), Arizona Rep. [Paul Gosar](#), and Georgia Rep. [Marjorie Taylor Greene](#). [Current](#) and [former](#) GOP leaders have claimed that the Democratic Party represents the prime antisemitic threat in U.S. politics – mostly due to some of its progressive members’ criticisms of Israel.
- / Orbán’s ruling Fidesz party in Hungary instituted a 2017 [propaganda campaign](#) against the Hungarian-Jewish financier George Soros, evoking antisemitic canards about Jewish control – on this occasion, to suggest that Soros was instrumental in bringing immigrants to Hungary, a conspiracy theory that soon after spread to the United States, where it was [mainstreamed](#) by members of the GOP. (The anti-Soros initiative was [masterminded](#) by a pair of American-Jewish political strategists who worked on election campaigns for both Orbán and Netanyahu, among other far-right figures.) Orbán frequently uses antisemitic dog whistles in his speeches, while his government has re-inserted [antisemitic Hungarian figures](#) and [Holocaust revisionism](#) into the public sphere.
 -) Hungary has also modeled the philosemitism that is the flipside of contemporary antisemitism, building a strong allyship with the Chabad movement – which, with its members being clearly identifiable as Jews, [helps reinforce the distinction](#) between “us” (true Hungarians) and “them.”
- / Germany’s Alternative for Germany party (AfD), one of whose branches has been [classified](#) as right-extremist by the state German intelligence agency, has a long [track record](#) of members’ antisemitic statements and use of [Nazi rhetoric](#), and has been linked to [rising](#) far-right antisemitic rhetoric in the country. Its [anti-immigrant](#), [anti-Muslim](#) platform is gaining in popularity across Germany as support for AfD [surges](#) in polls.

- / Poland's Law and Justice party, which until recently led the country, steadily [advanced Holocaust revisionism](#) while in power, and came close to criminalizing discussion of the country's complicity in the destruction of European Jewry — only backtracking and softening the proposed bill after significant opposition from the U.S. government. The party promotes the “traditional family,” [declaring](#) its opposition to “LGBT ideology,” and is [anti-immigrant](#) and [Islamophobic](#).

B. Pro-Israel sentiment and antisemitism are not mutually exclusive

While many far-right, antisemitic leaders tout their support of Israel as evidence of their anti-antisemitism — a stance widely embraced by far-right Israeli leaders — pro-Israel policies and expressions can often serve as cover for anti-Jewish ideology and policies.

- / All the parties listed above have instituted pro-Israel policies and publicly proclaimed their support for Israel:
 -) The Trump administration moved the U.S. embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem; advanced the implementation of the IHRA definition of antisemitism, which conflates criticism of Israel with antisemitism; and [removed](#) references to the Israeli occupation in the State Department's annual human rights report.
 -) Hungarian officials have [blocked](#) EU resolutions or statements critical of Israel, while Orbán [considers](#) Netanyahu a close personal ally and Likud a natural partner to Fidesz. Hungary's then-representative to the IHRA, Szabolcs Takács, was the organization's chair the year it adopted its working definition of antisemitism.
 -) A 2017 [poll](#) of AfD (see above) members showed that the vast majority are pro-Israel, while most believe that anti-Zionism is antisemitism; that the European Union should not label products from the Israeli settlements; and that the Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions movement is antisemitic.
 -) The head of Poland's former ruling Law and Justice party, Jaroslaw Kaczynski, has [praised](#) Israel while defining antisemitism in terms of criticism of the Jewish state. The Polish government recently [endorsed](#) the IHRA definition of antisemitism.
- / Argentinian President Javier Milei, a far-right provocateur who has proposed potentially catastrophic economic reforms, and whose rise is widely seen as threatening the rights of women and LGBTQ people, is a vocal supporter of Israel who has promised to move the Argentinian embassy to Jerusalem. Shortly after being elected in November 2023, Milei, who has also [downplayed](#) the historical abuses of Argentina's military dictatorship, [appointed](#) a former youth member of a neo-Nazi group as the treasury's

attorney general.

- / Former Philippines President Rodrigo Duterte positively [compared](#) himself to Hitler, and later [praised](#) Israel's "passion for peace" while on an official visit to Israel.
- / Former Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro has [embraced](#) antisemitic parties such as AfD and paraphrased Nazi slogans, as have members of his party; he also [brought an Israeli flag](#) to his rallies and [vowed](#) to move the Brazilian embassy to Jerusalem (his government eventually reneged and opened a trade mission in the city, instead).
- / India's ruling party, the far-right BJP, has [lauded](#) a founding father of Hindu nationalism who praised Hitler and Nazi policies as they were being enacted. BJP head and Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi is a staunch ally of Israel, and in particular of Netanyahu.
- / The rebranded *Rassemblement National* in France — formerly the *Front National*, founded in 1972 by a motley far-right crew of Nazi collaborationists, reactionary populists, and defenders of French Algeria — is rehabilitating its antisemitic image by claiming to act as a "[shield in the face of Islamist ideology](#)," portraying the far-right party as a fortress for French Jews in order to advance a radical anti-migrant and Islamophobic agenda, and [touting](#) its support for Israel.

C. Far-right Israeli leaders embrace their antisemitic and autocratic counterparts as part of an emboldened global far-right alliance

Israel has increasingly allied with far-right and authoritarian regimes over the past two decades, from Hungary and Trump's United States to India and Bolsonaro's Brazil. The recent economic and arms-based alliances with autocratic regimes in the Middle East, under the auspices of the Abraham Accords, is a discrete, but connected, offshoot of this trend.

- / Israel has developed ties with right-wing, autocratic current and former leaders such as [Modi](#); [Trump](#); [Duterte](#); [Orbán](#); [Bolsonaro](#); and [Russian President Vladimir Putin](#) — all of whom have been warmly welcomed on official visits to Israel, including trips to Yad Vashem, the Holocaust museum in Jerusalem. (This is not a new phenomenon: in 1976, South African Prime Minister John Vorster, who had been part of a pro-Nazi organization during World War II, [was invited](#) on an official visit to Yad Vashem.)
- / Netanyahu has put on a [united front](#) with Polish and Lithuanian leaders who have stoked Holocaust revisionism, including tacitly endorsing the Polish law that downplayed Poland's role in the Holocaust.

- / Likud has started to [shift its position](#) on historically neo-Nazi European parties, including the Sweden Democrats — which it had previously boycotted — on account of these parties’ growing warmth toward Israel. Part of this realignment rests on the parties’ shared Islamophobia.
- / A number of Likud members, including at least one high-ranking official, Michael Kleiner, [met with](#) the antisemitic Romanian AUR party in November 2022, despite Israel officially refusing to engage with the faction. Kleiner called accusations of antisemitism against AUR “a blood libel.”
- / Netanyahu gave a noticeably [delayed](#) and evasive response to the antisemitic, white nationalist marches in Charlottesville, Va., in 2017 — reacting only after Trump had responded and avoiding any assignment of responsibility for the events.
- / Yishai Fleisher, an Israeli settler leader and spokesperson for the far-right Jewish Power (Otzma Yehudit) party, has [declared](#) his admiration for Orbán while dismissing concerns over the Hungarian PM’s antisemitism — [arguing](#) that “I am not looking at Hungary as a Hungarian Jew or a Diaspora Jew, I’m looking at it as an Israeli Jew — a fellow sovereign. And from this nationalist [sic] perspective nation states must unite against the globalist agenda which seeks to force open borders & erase national identities.” Israel has [joined in](#) the campaign against Soros, as have prominent members of the [America-Jewish far right](#).
- / Netanyahu thanked Argentinian President Milei for his proposal to move the embassy to Jerusalem and invited him to visit Israel, within days of Milei appointing a former youth member of a neo-Nazi group to his government.
- / These relationships between the Israeli government and its far-right counterparts are rooted in shared values around [ethnonationalism](#) and [nativism](#), “secure’ [borders](#), [Islamophobia](#), and cracking down on [civil liberties](#).
- / Many of these relationships are also significantly informed by arms and economic deals, with Israel exporting [weapons](#), [spyware](#), and other military and cyber tools to a litany of repressive regimes. The 2020 Abraham Accords between Israel on the one hand, and the United Arab Emirates and Bahrain on the other, for example, were marketed as U.S.-brokered “peace agreements” and as a leap forward in Jewish and Arab/Muslim coexistence. In fact, the Accords represent an alliance between autocratic regimes [focused on](#) promoting trade, technology, and arms deals. The Accords’ advocates insist that the agreement also marks a crucial step in the fight against antisemitism; in reality,

however, this claim confuses international diplomacy with anti-antisemitism strategy, thereby further misrepresenting the causes of, and fight against, antisemitism today.

Resources

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- / **Jelena Subotić**, [Antisemitism in the global populist international](#), *The British Journal of Politics and International Relations*, December 29, 2021
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- / **Peter Beinart**, [Antisemitic Zionists Aren't a Contradiction in Terms](#), *Jewish Currents*, January 10, 2023
- / **Ksenia Svetlova**, [Unholy Alliance: Israel and the Far-Right in Europe](#), *Talk delivered at the Hijacking Memory conference, Berlin, June 12, 2022*
- / **Natasha Roth-Rowland**, [How the antisemitic far right fell for Israel](#), *+972 Magazine*, September 7, 2022