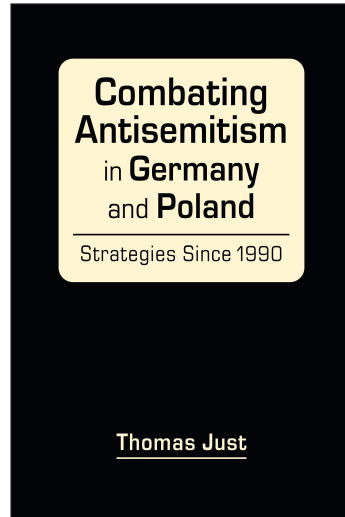


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Combating
Antisemitism in
Germany and Poland:
Strategies Since 1990

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1

Combating Antisemitism in Germany and Poland

ANTISEMITISM IS A HATRED THAT DATES BACK MILLENNIA AND HAS BEEN responsible for millions of murders. Antisemitism has left especially deep scars on the history and identity of central Europe—the location of one of the largest, most systematic genocides in history. Memories of the Holocaust continue to influence the social and political affairs of Germany and Poland. This is particularly true as extremist groups from a variety of ideological perspectives continue to revive and perpetuate antisemitic myths and conspiracy theories and to carry out acts of violence. As a response, the governments of these countries have recently taken steps to address the problem, such as making Holocaust denial illegal, granting Judaism legal status on par with Christianity, and facilitating the revival of domestic Jewish organizations. However, no comprehensive study has yet assessed the effectiveness of these efforts. The primary goal of this book is to evaluate these two countries' approaches and provide some new paths forward.

The importance of work in this area has only increased with the resurgence of nationalist ideologies, conspiracy theories, and prejudices reminiscent of those prior to World War II. While conflicts throughout history have resulted in the rise and fall of various political and social movements, the ideologies behind such movements tend to never fully disappear. Fascism and Nazism may have been defeated on the battlefield in the 1940s, but central elements to such ideologies continue to linger within extremist movements that may or may not go by a different name. Even as memorials to the Holocaust are now a common sight throughout many central European cities and the mantra of “never

again” is repeated frequently, the same manifestations of antisemitism that have existed for centuries persist.

Two central questions are explored in this book. First, what are the primary ways in which antisemitism tends to manifest? Second, what strategies have been employed in these two countries to counter antisemitic hatred, and have they been effective? Germany and Poland are especially ripe for such research given their historical memories of the Holocaust and efforts to reconcile with the past. The Holocaust has in many ways contributed to defining each country’s modern identity. Because of this, both countries have had immense motivation to address antisemitism—not only to reduce crime and violence domestically, but also to improve international perceptions about their respective histories and national identities.

Defining Antisemitism

Before we can begin answering the questions posed here, it is important to establish a common understanding of what antisemitism is. The *Merriam-Webster Dictionary* (2023) defines *antisemitism* as “hostility toward or discrimination against Jews as a religious, ethnic, or racial group.” Such a definition conveys the broad nature of the term; however, a better understanding of its meaning requires examination of the ways in which antisemitism tends to manifest itself. Various manifestations of antisemitism throughout history have each carried distinct, yet often related forms of discrimination, stereotypes, and hatred. The term becomes even more complex when considering the ways in which these manifestations have evolved over time. In this section, I will conceptualize what antisemitism is and provide a more accurate definition to be used throughout this analysis.

While numerous organizations have developed their own definitions of antisemitism, these tend to differ greatly in terms of describing how antisemitism manifests itself.¹ As part of this study, I have developed a concise operational definition that emphasizes four categories that I believe best encapsulate the primary manifestations of antisemitism. These categories can most succinctly be described as religious, economic, racial, and political. Each of these categories has developed on a different timeline from one another, but an understanding of each is necessary to fully grasp the nature of contemporary antisemitism. In order to develop a more precise definition of antisemitism, this section will explain each of these manifestations and its development.

Religious Antisemitism

Many historians regard religious antisemitism as the oldest manifestation dating back to antiquity. The origins of antisemitism are often traced to Jews' refusal to adopt majority religious and social practices in ancient Egypt. Numerous Egyptian and Greek historians of this era depicted the religious practices of Jews as absurd and inhospitable. Religious antisemitism evolved centuries later as early Christians placed heavy blame on Jews for the crucifixion of Jesus—an accusation of deicide. Some of this was fueled by New Testament writings, such as “the Jews who killed the Lord Jesus and the prophets and also drove us out. They displease God and are hostile to everyone” (1 Thessalonians 2:14–15 [NIV]). Scholars differ as to the precise meaning and background of such passages, but these passages have nonetheless played a role in Christian-Jewish tensions throughout history. Because of this, Jews were often portrayed as representing the devil in medieval European paintings, restricted to socially inferior occupations, and subjected to blood libels (Cohen, 2007: 208). Certain Christian thinkers, such as Martin Luther, perpetuated antisemitic beliefs by describing Jews as “base, whoring people, that is, no people of God” and “full of devil’s feces” (Luther, trans. 1971: 20; Michael, 2006: 113). Such religiously based manifestations of antisemitism have been a point of tension between Christians and Jews, particularly in Europe, for millennia.

It is, however, a bit more difficult to pinpoint the religious origins of Islamic antisemitism. Unlike in Christian texts, the Quran does not accuse Jews of deicide. Thus, the religious nature of antisemitism in Islam does not originate from the same source as in Christianity. Negative depictions of Jews in Islam tend to focus on the characteristic of humiliation. Some Islamic texts depict Jews as a humiliated group due to their perceived disobedience to God’s law. Muhammad’s own relationships with Jews are known to have been mixed. Muhammad was known to have had Jewish friends and one Jewish wife, who later converted to Islam, but also engaged in numerous battles with Jewish tribes (Poliakov, 1974: 41–43). Jewish defeats in such battles are commonly cited as an additional reason for Jews being viewed as a submissive, humiliated group (Lewis, 1999: 129–130). Therefore, while there are indeed strains of religious antisemitism in both Christianity and Islam, the sources and points of emphases tend to differ between these religious traditions—with Christian antisemitism focusing on deicide and blood libel and Islamic antisemitism focusing on humiliation and disobedience.

Economic Antisemitism

Economic antisemitism has its roots in medieval Europe, where Jews were often restricted to occupations considered socially inferior by Christians, such as tax collecting and moneylending. This was in large part due to Christian doctrine of the time that considered charging interest on loans to be sinful—a belief that continues in certain Islamic societies. One reason that Jews were allowed to engage in moneylending, although considered a sinful activity, was that Jews were already considered to be damned. Moreover, by Jews filling these occupations this would save the souls of Christians who would otherwise take on such roles (Todeschini, 2004: 11; Penslar, 2001: 18). This situation caused Jews to carry a stigma of being unproductive, parasitic, usurious, dishonest, dangerous, and so on (Schweitzer and Perry, 2002: 133).

By the eighteenth century, some estimate that as many as three-fourths of Jews in central and western Europe were involved in moneylending occupations (Sachar, 2005). Later, Jewish Emancipation in the nineteenth century allowed European Jews to engage in a wider variety of occupations, including law and medicine (Schweitzer and Perry, 2002: 136). Nonetheless, the medieval stigma of Jews as sinful, dishonest, and usurious continued and became the basis for a number of antisemitic stereotypes and canards. These stereotypes tend to portray Jews as stingy, greedy, controlling, and wealthy. The canards often depict powerful Jews as having control over the business world and being a scapegoat for gentile hardship, such as in *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, an antisemitic hoax document that came out of Russia in 1903.

Remarkably, economic antisemitism has been used to accuse Jews of being responsible for the ills of both capitalism and communism. In fact, Karl Marx singled out Jews and claimed that since many worked in what he considered “non-productive” occupations, they could be blamed for a great deal of exploitation and alienation of workers (Schweitzer and Perry, 2002: 153–156). Marx even went so far as to argue that Jews embodied capitalism, because, according to him, Jewish culture shared elements of materialism and egoism that he also attributed to capitalism (Penslar, 2001). Marx wrote that, “Because of Judaism, money has become the essence of man’s life and work . . . Jews are the embodiment of capitalism in action and the creators of all its evil consequences for humanity” (Schweitzer and Perry, 2002: 156). However, Jews have also been labeled as the driving force behind communism as well. During the Russian Civil War, the propaganda of the anticommunist “White” forces often tied Judaism and Bolshevism

together and claimed that Jews were behind the communist movement in order to serve their own interests. This myth grew in large part due to the circulation of *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion* (Pipes, 1997: 93). Since that time, the notion of “Jewish Bolshevism” has been perpetuated as a conspiracy theory and has at times been viewed as a threat by nationalist factions in numerous countries.

While there is no single overriding myth with regard to economic antisemitism, there are a number of stereotypes that have endured and have provided the basis for various canards. The perception among many that Jews are stingy, greedy, dishonest, and unproductive has carried on since the medieval era. These characteristics have defined the numerous conspiracy theories that tend to scapegoat Jews for the hardships of gentiles. Jews have been blamed for the negative aspects of both capitalism and communism, which has allowed economic antisemitism to fester among many different ideologies and endure for centuries.

Racial Antisemitism

Racial antisemitism is distinct, in that it denotes prejudice or hatred of Jews as an ethnic group, rather than Judaism as a religion. Therefore, racial antisemitism purports that Jewish blood, and not simply Jewish beliefs, are inferior. Racial antisemitism is most commonly claimed to have originated in medieval Spain. During the Spanish Inquisition, many questioned the sincerity of those Jews who converted to Christianity (*conversos*). Consequently, an ideology of “cleanliness of blood” arose within the Spanish nobility, which influenced a series of statutes and legal decrees aimed at persecuting the conversos. Thus, the conversos could be persecuted based on their Jewish ancestry and ethnicity, rather than simply their beliefs (Kamen, 1998: 19–26; Murphy, 2012: 69–77).

Racial antisemitism increased in prominence in the nineteenth century due to a combination of increased popularity of nationalism and certain pseudoscientific theories such as eugenics. While neither ideology is inherently antisemitic, leaders adhering to these ideologies often embraced antisemitic racism as well. Francis Galton, often cited as the founder of modern eugenics, claimed that Jews were “specialized for a parasitical existence” (Pearson, 1924: 209). Such statements conveyed the notion that Jewish ethnicity predisposed one to particular behaviors and lifestyle. Galton was inspired by Charles Darwin’s *On the Origin of Species* and developed eugenics as a means to improve human heredity. As the eugenics movement grew, various policies were

proposed to coerce societies into producing what could be considered more “fit” children. Such policies first targeted the mentally and physically handicapped, but later came to include numerous other groups including Jews (Levy, 2005: 212).

Around the same time, romantic nationalism began to spread across Europe that relied upon the idea that a historic ethnic culture could lead a nation to a romantic ideal. The rise of such populist, *völkisch* movements was inspired not only by international events, such as the American and French revolutions, but also by the literature and philosophy of such figures as Johann Gottfried von Herder, the Brothers Grimm, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, and Johann Gottlieb Fichte (Wilson, 1973: 828–830). Although these movements were not universally antisemitic, romantic nationalism often placed an emphasis on exclusivity, purity, and the superiority of one particular ethnic group over all others. Consequently, Jews were often viewed as an impediment or obstacle to a nation achieving its romantic ideal. For example, Richard Wagner claimed to identify “Jewishness” in musical style, due to what he asserted was Jews’ unwillingness to assimilate into German culture and truly comprehend the nation’s music and language (Wagner, 1869). Wagner did not claim that these perceived deficiencies were necessarily the result of Jewish beliefs, but rather saw them as an inherent quality of ethnic Jews. In these ways, romantic nationalism often allowed for Jews to not only be viewed as a scapegoat, but also as an impediment to the ambitions of a nation and ethnic culture to achieve an ideal.

When combined, pseudoscientific eugenics theory and romantic nationalism tend to reinforce one another with regard to their emphases on ethnic superiority and exclusivity. Although not necessarily based on antisemitic grounds, these ideologies became important contributors to the development of racial antisemitism. Both ideologies allowed for certain out-groups to be viewed as inferior, which Jews were often considered. However, with the rise of eugenics and romantic nationalism, Jewish inferiority could now not only be attributed to a particular belief system, but also a genetic predisposition. This is the primary way in which racial antisemitism differs from other forms.

Political Antisemitism

Political antisemitism shares many of the same traits associated with economic antisemitism, except the emphasis is placed on a different

sector of society. Political antisemitism most often relies on conspiracy theories based on the belief that Jews seek national or world power and do so using illegitimate or criminal means. Because of such perceived Jewish ambitions, political antisemites often view Jews as an enemy and tend to place blame on Jews for their own political defeats. Such sentiment is often inflamed by international events, especially those relating to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and can occasionally translate into official antisemitic positions in political party platforms.

Although antisemitism and anti-Zionism are different phenomena, Holocaust denial has often served as a link between the two. In this way, Holocaust denial has become one of the more prominent expressions of political antisemitism. After World War II, some claimed that the Holocaust was part of a conspiracy—in that the genocide was either a hoax or the numbers were grossly inflated—in order to achieve Zionist objectives (Martin, 2015: 138). These claims asserted that Zionists either imagined, exaggerated, or were even complicit in the Holocaust in order to gain greater leverage in negotiations with Western powers for the establishment of a Jewish state (Herf, 2013; Wistrich, 2012). Similar accusations of Zionist conspiracies have been leveled to deny, minimize, or in some cases justify other violent acts committed against Jews, including the October 7, 2023, Hamas attacks on Israeli civilians. Some contemporary radical political figures contend that Zionists/Jews continue to yield illegitimate influence in Western governments, in part due to what they consider the leverage gained through mythical or exaggerated understandings of the Holocaust and its aftermath (Liang, 2013: 158).

These sorts of suspicions and fears have become a central element in the ideologies and doctrines of numerous antisemitic political parties and movements. Notably, antisemitism is not exclusive to any particular end of the political spectrum. Rather, Jewish motifs are often used to represent an enemy from many different directions (Gross, 2007). This phenomenon is vividly demonstrated throughout Russian history, where Jews faced persecution from both communist and anticommunist factions (Korey, 1995). One crucial factor in developing group unity in any political movement is defining an enemy to mobilize against. And given their distinct history, culture, and religious beliefs, Jews have consequently been perceived in many cases as outsiders, even in countries in which they may have resided for generations. Propaganda plays an important role in identifying, isolating, and excluding these “outsider” groups. By defining the enemy in this manner, it becomes easier for parties or movements to air grievances against the particular enemy or “out-group” and scapegoat them for hardships and setbacks (Arendt,

1951: 43–47). The sources of grievances and scapegoating may differ between regions and parties; however, the tactic of defining Jews as an enemy to rally against and consequently strengthen group unity is a common theme in political antisemitism.

A Renewed Definition

To better reflect the manifestations outlined in this chapter, I will use the following operational definition of *antisemitism* throughout this analysis: *hostile attitudes or attacks targeting Jewish people, symbols, or interests based on religious, economic, racial, or political grounds.*

This definition refers to “hostile attitudes or attacks” because these are important indicators, which are most typically used in measuring levels of antisemitism. The definition refers to “targeting Jewish people, symbols, or interests” because these are easily identifiable, tangible things against which hateful, discriminatory attitudes or attacks are most often aimed. And finally, this definition notes that these attitudes or attacks are based on “religious, economic, racial, or political grounds” to emphasize the different manifestations of antisemitism. For these reasons, this definition best and most concisely encompasses the ways in which antisemitism is measured and tends to manifest itself.

Working Toward Solutions

Although antisemitic hatred dates back thousands of years, many of the strategies designed to combat it have only been implemented since the end of the Cold War, and many within the past ten to twenty years. Therefore, it has only recently become possible to thoroughly analyze these approaches and the consequent effects on the groups and individuals that they concern. This research will contribute to our understanding of the strategies implemented and analyze which have been most effective in reducing levels of antisemitism—valuable information for scholars, government officials, and nongovernmental organizations.

While research on the problem of European antisemitism in the twentieth century is quite abundant, there is need for a study examining antisemitism in the twenty-first century and the contemporary strategies meant to combat it. In this book, I seek to fill this void and advance our understanding of the issue with three pressing areas of examination.

First, much of the existing literature on antisemitism needs updating due to the changing demographics and political dynamics of Europe

in the twenty-first century. While previous works have explored the ideologies of far-right, far-left, and Islamist groups that often share antisemitic views dating back before the Holocaust and through the Cold War, there are few studies that have examined these groups and their evolution into the twenty-first century. This book provides extensive detail on the historical manifestations of antisemitism and goes a step further by examining how these historical roots have shaped contemporary antisemitic movements and ideologies.

Second, beyond simply examining the nature of antisemitism it is also crucial to develop a better understanding of the strategies in place to counter the problem. To date, there has not been a comprehensive work that has clearly defined and examined both the nature of antisemitism as well as the strategies to combat it. This book will work to accomplish just that.

Currently, there are two primary methods to address this problem—antiradicalization legal measures and public diplomacy. Although Germany and Poland have minimal coordination in their efforts, both use these two methods as the primary means of countering antisemitism. The legal measures tend to be more focused on punishing certain acts, such as Holocaust denial, spreading antisemitic propaganda, or hate crimes. On the other hand, public diplomacy initiatives attempt to influence perceptions and attitudes. Comparing the strategies of these two countries and analyzing the results will enable an evaluation of which approaches tend to achieve the most desirable outcomes and where holes exist in the current strategies.

While the legal measures may well be understood through an examination of legislation and government institutions, *public diplomacy* is a more complex term that has not been as clearly defined by the existing literature. Public diplomacy is a term most commonly used to describe communication from one country to foreign audiences; however, antisemitism is a unique issue in which public diplomacy initiatives have been launched to specifically address a domestic problem. Most conceptions of public diplomacy tend to focus on the idea of “promotion” and emphasizing the positive aspects of a country’s culture, political values, and foreign policies, but these conceptions do not adequately address such a situation in which public diplomacy is connected so closely to a domestic problem. These two central European countries have been rare cases where public diplomacy has been employed to listen to controversial and negative perceptions, which have consequently motivated domestic reforms. A primary reason for this is that antisemitism uniquely affects both foreign perceptions of a

country's identity and its domestic environment. A major contribution of this work is the reframing of what public diplomacy is, as well as how it can be used to work toward reconciliation and rehabilitation for societies marked by traumatic events such as genocide.

Third, understanding the strengths and weaknesses of the current strategies to counter antisemitism is essential to improving approaches going forward. The data most important to this study is data collected over time so that we may assess the effectiveness of strategies since their implementation. This book presents data on such indicators as antisemitic groups, crimes, and attitudes in each case in order to evaluate the effectiveness of the current strategies in place. The later chapters of the book will evaluate such data from a variety of governmental and nongovernmental sources to provide a comprehensive picture of the contemporary situation. This analysis will assist in determining which areas current strategies tend to be most and least effective in order to improve them moving forward.

Composition and Structure of the Book

While the focus of this book is on contemporary antisemitism, it is impossible to fully comprehend the problem without a deep understanding of the historical roots that have led to this point. Antisemitism has evolved over millennia and consequently has manifested itself in a variety of ways. Chapters 2 and 3 will flesh out these manifestations as they relate to the cases of Germany and Poland. In these chapters, I will examine the chronology of how the primary manifestations of antisemitism have developed and become part of the contemporary problem in each case.

Chapters 4 and 5 will examine the strategies that have been employed in Germany and Poland to respond to the problem of antisemitism, primarily since the end of the Cold War. As such, these chapters will include a discussion of the laws and public diplomacy initiatives that have been implemented in each country. This discussion will be informed by a detailed analysis of the governmental and nongovernmental institutions tasked with leading and implementing the approach. Special attention will be paid to the ways in which the respective governments and civil societies have attempted to connect their approaches with problems specific to their country.

Chapters 6 and 7 will present data and detailed explanations of contemporary antisemitism in Germany and Poland focusing on the period

since 1990. The main goal of these chapters will be to evaluate the successes and failures of the strategies to counter antisemitism in each country. To accomplish this, I will present and analyze the data relevant to each case over time. This will require a thorough analysis of the effects that the approaches have had on different antisemitic groups, attitudes, and crimes. These chapters will also examine the welfare and perceptions of the domestic Jewish community in each country.

Finally, Chapter 8 will analyze the major findings of the study and provide concise answers to the central research questions. In doing so, the chapter will detail the major themes and patterns of this research and their practical implications, which will be used to provide recommendations for policymaking in the future. I will close the chapter by suggesting some potential avenues for further research.

The overarching goal of this book is to provide a deeper understanding of antisemitism and how to combat it. Antisemitic beliefs are some of the most difficult to counter, given that they have persisted since antiquity and continue to motivate conspiracy theories, harassment, and violent attacks in modern times. These concerns are heightened in the cases presented in this book because Germany and Poland remain marked by the legacy of the Holocaust. Addressing the horrors of genocide remains a major challenge for both countries, domestically and internationally. These dynamics provide increased motivation for both countries to counter the problem of antisemitism and work toward reconciliation. Of course, antisemitism and the legacies of genocide and ethnic and religious hatred are not exclusive to these two cases. Therefore, by accomplishing its primary goal, this book will provide answers to questions that not only establish a better understanding of working toward reconciliation and countering hatred in central Europe, but also provide lessons applicable to other regions that have been scarred by hatred and traumatic historical events.

Notes

1. One of the most discussed and widely used definitions of *antisemitism* comes from the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA). Its definition is as follows: “Antisemitism is a certain perception of Jews, which may be expressed as hatred toward Jews. Rhetorical and physical manifestations of antisemitism are directed toward Jewish or non-Jewish individuals and/or their property, toward Jewish community institutions and religious facilities” (International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance, 2023). This definition is followed by eleven examples, seven of which relate to the State of Israel. This latter part in particular has made the definition controversial, as critics view it as stifling critiques of the Israeli government. I

believe one flaw with the definition is that while it alludes to manifestations of antisemitism, it does not explicitly state what those are, which is part of the reason for controversy and also limits the definition's utility. Another common definition is known as the Jerusalem Declaration on Antisemitism. This alternative definition is a concise sixteen words and reads as follows: "Antisemitism is discrimination, prejudice, hostility or violence against Jews as Jews (or Jewish institutions as Jewish)" (Jerusalem Declaration on Antisemitism, 2023). While this definition is concise, it is also quite vague and, like the IHRA definition, does not address the manifestations from which the hatred originates. Due to these shortcomings, I have developed my own operational definition, presented in Chapter 1, which concisely states how antisemitism manifests itself and is most commonly measured.