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EXPLAINER JUNE 25, 2026 UPDATED AUGUST 6, 2026

What Is Zionism? How the Research Measures It

In the research, Zionism is measured as support for a Jewish state, reached through anti-Israel attitudes and denial of Jewish self-determination, its closest proxy.

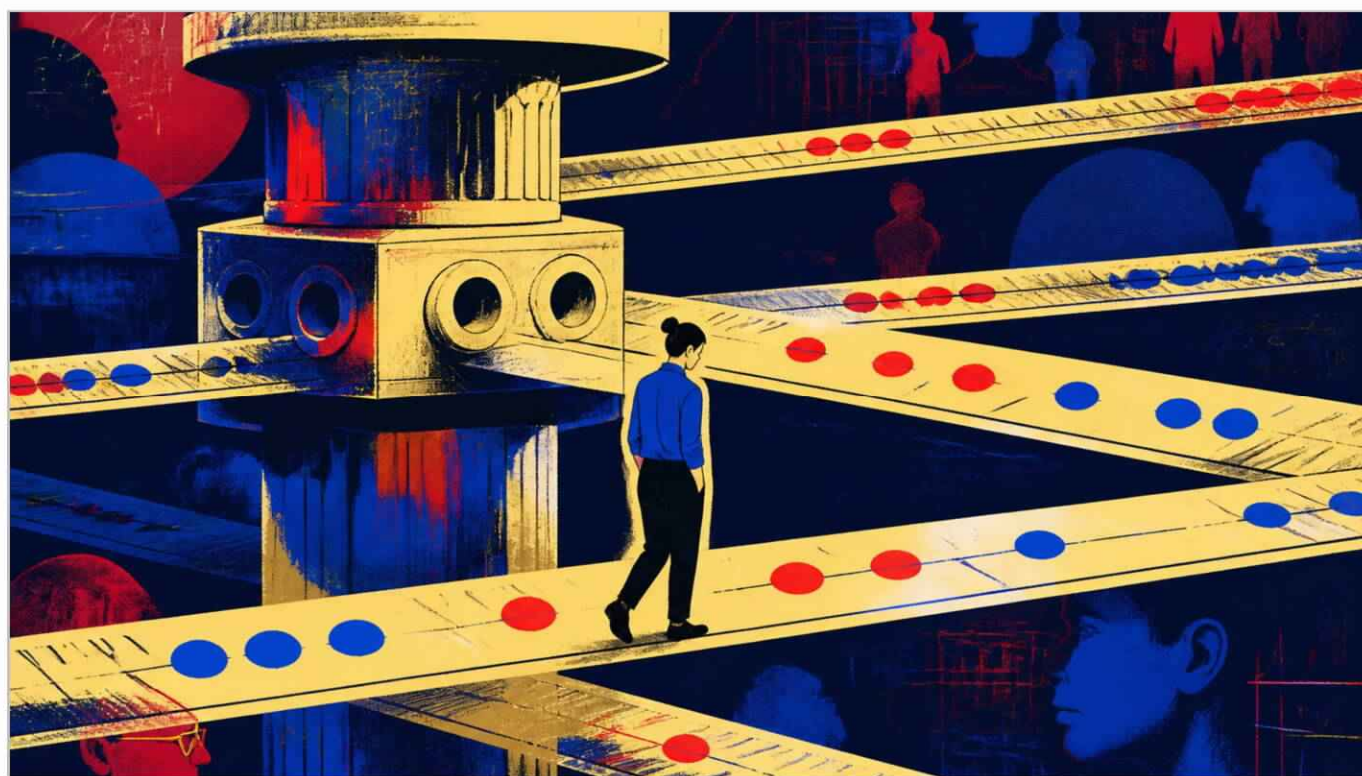
Zionism

Self-determination

IHRA definition

Measurement

Anti-Israel attitudes



Anyone who has followed public debate since October 7, 2023 has heard the word “Zionist” used as an accusation, a defense, and a definition, often by people arguing

past each other about what it means. So what does the research actually show about how the term functions in antisemitic discourse? In an expert-annotated corpus, **15% of antisemitic tweets about Jews** fit the paragraph on denial of Jewish self-determination, the paragraph studies treat as the closest proxy for the Zionism construct, against 62% that fit the older trope of Jewish collective power (Jikeli and colleagues, 2022, peer-reviewed; coded against the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance working definition, a widely used but itself contested standard for identifying antisemitism).

In the measurement literature, Zionism is operationalized as support for a Jewish state in Israel, and it rarely appears under its own name. Instead, studies reach the construct through its opposite pole, as anti-Israel attitudes and as denial of Jewish self-determination, and they treat the [conflation of Zionism with Judaism](#) as itself a measured input to antisemitism. [Whether opposition to Zionism is antisemitism](#) is a separate, contested scholarly question.

Key Findings

- In an IHRA-coded corpus of antisemitic tweets about Jews, **15% fit the paragraph on denial of Jewish self-determination** and 62% fit allegations about Jewish collective power, the two paragraphs the studies treat as proxies for the construct (Jikeli and colleagues, 2022, peer-reviewed; IHRA is the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance working definition, a widely used but itself contested coding standard).
- A mediation model across three preregistered US studies accounted for **more than 55% of the variance** in anti-Israel attitudes, with conspiracy beliefs implicating Israel and Zionists mediating the association from antisemitism, while conspiracy beliefs about Jews unrelated to Israel did not (Harber and colleagues, 2026, peer-reviewed, abstract-sourced).
- A dual-threat model with support across **six national samples** holds that perceived Jewish power, defined as perceived control over valued resources, is associated with antisemitism through two opposing routes, which is why the attitude surfaces at both ends of the ideological spectrum (Hadar and colleagues, 2026, peer-reviewed, abstract-sourced).

- Across the 4,016-tweet gold-standard corpus coded against the IHRA definition, **23.1% were antisemitic**, and 13.1% of tweets containing the word Israel were antisemitic against 11.2% of conversations containing the word Jews (Jikeli and colleagues, 2022, peer-reviewed).
- 10% of US voters ages 18 to 34 agreed with all three antisemitic statements tested, against **2% of voters 65 and older**, while two-thirds of voters rejected all three (Yale Youth Poll, 2025, academic poll).

How do studies operationalize Zionism when it has no name?

Studies rarely measure Zionism under its own name, and the clearest content figure reaches it indirectly: **15% of antisemitic tweets about Jews** fit the IHRA paragraph on denial of Jewish self-determination, against 62% fitting the paragraph on mendacious or stereotypical allegations about Jewish collective power (Jikeli and colleagues, 2022, peer-reviewed). The IHRA self-determination paragraph is the one the literature treats as the closest proxy for the Zionism construct, and on that operationalization the proxy is the minority frame even within antisemitic discourse about Jews.

Surveys reach the construct a second way, as an attitude scale rather than a content code. A preregistered UK survey using a validated antisemitism scale measured a distinct anti-Zionist subscale alongside a Judeophobic one (attitudes toward Jews as Jews), treating the two as related but separable constructs (Allington and colleagues, 2023, peer-reviewed, preregistered, with data collection funded by the Campaign Against Antisemitism). Throughout, the IHRA framework refers to the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance working definition, a widely used but itself contested standard for identifying antisemitism that several of these studies adopt as their coding scheme.

How the construct surfaces in antisemitic discourse

TWO IHRA PARAGRAPHS, SHARE OF ANTISEMITIC TWEETS ABOUT JEWS, 2019 TO 2020



Source: Jikeli and colleagues, 2022, peer-reviewed. Categories are not exclusive; these are two of several IHRA paragraphs.

How Zionism and Judaism differ, and why conflating them matters

Zionism is a political movement; Judaism is a religion and a peoplehood. The two are distinct, and the research treats their conflation as a measurable input rather than a rhetorical point. A dual-threat model with converging support across **six national samples** (the United States, Mexico, Australia, the United Kingdom, Germany, and Poland) holds that perceived Jewish power, defined as perceived control over valued resources, is associated with antisemitism through two routes: among people who support social hierarchy it registers as a threat to ingroup dominance, and among people who oppose hierarchy it registers as a threat to egalitarian ideals (Hadar and colleagues, 2026, peer-reviewed, abstract-sourced). The model accounts for why antisemitism appears at opposing ends of the ideological spectrum.

The conflation also shows up below the surface, in how generative AI represents Jewish identity. In an abstract-sourced peer-reviewed study, an indirect experiment generated character biographies from Jewish and non-Jewish names, stripped overt identity markers, then asked a large language model to rate traits. The model rated characters tied to Jewish names as more competent, privileged, dominant, hierarchical, and obsessive, and as less likable, with the resulting trait profiles aligning with archetypes historically associated with antisemitic tropes and persisting despite explicit bias-mitigation measures (Gutman and Gilead, 2026, peer-reviewed, abstract-sourced). Those words describe the model's assigned ratings, not the Institute's characterization. Both studies report the direction and pattern of a measured effect, not a single prevalence figure, and neither claims that holding a view about Israel causes the attitude.

How the discourse links the two attitudes

Antisemitism and anti-Israel attitudes are measurably associated, but the association runs through a specific channel rather than a direct equivalence. Across three preregistered US studies, a model the authors call the Conspiracies Mediated Model of New Antisemitism accounted for **more than 55% of the variance** in anti-Israel attitudes (Harber and colleagues, 2026, peer-reviewed, abstract-sourced). The mediator is the load-bearing detail: conspiracy beliefs implicating Israel and Zionists mediated the association between antisemitism and anti-Israel attitudes, whereas conspiracy beliefs about Jews unrelated to Israel did not, and the result was not explained by a general conspiratorial mindset. Within the same US samples, self-identified Democrats on average reported lower antisemitism but stronger anti-Israel attitudes and greater endorsement of anti-Israel and anti-Zionist conspiracy beliefs than self-identified Republicans (Harber and colleagues, 2026).

The content data show a partial separation in the same direction. Across representative samples, **13.1% of tweets containing the word Israel** were antisemitic under the IHRA framework (January to August 2020), close to the 11.2% measured for conversations containing the word Jews over a longer window (Jikeli and colleagues, 2022, peer-reviewed). A survey of the same boundary found that coronavirus conspiracy suspicion correlated with all measured forms of antisemitism, but the correlation with the Judeophobic form was notably stronger than with the anti-Zionist form, and the anti-Zionist link was statistically accounted for by its overlap with the Judeophobic form (Allington and colleagues, 2023, peer-reviewed). The two attitudes share substantial common ground while remaining distinguishable.

How antisemitism and anti-Israel attitudes are linked

THREE PREREGISTERED US STUDIES, 2026

55%+ OF VARIANCE IN ANTI-ISRAEL ATTITUDES EXPLAINED



Conspiracy beliefs implicating Israel and Zionists mediated this association; conspiracy beliefs about Jews unrelated to Israel did not, and the result was not explained by a general conspiratorial mindset.

Source: Harber, Bulska, Malloy, and Vila, 2026, peer-reviewed, abstract-sourced.

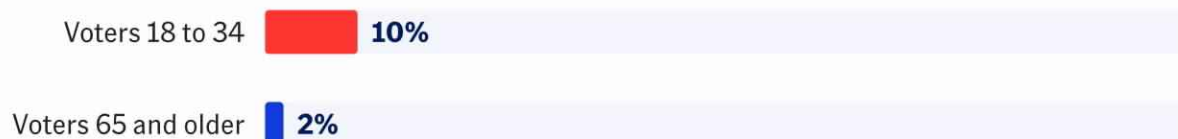
How young US adults answer related survey items

10% of US voters ages 18 to 34 agreed with all three antisemitic statements tested, against 2% of voters 65 and older, the widest generational gap in the polling (Yale Youth Poll, 2025, academic poll). The three statements were that Jews are more loyal to Israel than to America, that it is appropriate to boycott Jewish American-owned businesses to protest the war in Gaza, and that Jews have too much power.

About one in five young respondents supported boycotting Jewish-owned businesses to protest the war, and the loyalty item corresponds to the IHRA paragraph on dual loyalty (Yale Youth Poll, 2025). Two-thirds of voters across all ages rejected all three statements, so the agreement figures describe a minority, concentrated among the young. The poll measures overt agreement with stated items, a different and stronger signal than the coded or latent forms surfaced in content and AI studies.

Young US voters agree with antisemitic statements at higher rates

SHARE AGREEING WITH ALL THREE STATEMENTS TESTED, 2025



Source: Yale Youth Poll, Fall 2025, academic poll.

Why the conflation is treated as a measured input

The conflation of Zionism with Judaism is one of the field's active research questions, not a settled framing. A 2026 review naming the research traditions that have revived the psychology of antisemitism lists the dynamics underlying anti-Zionist expressions of antisemitism as one of four current strands, an open area of study rather than a closed verdict (Bilewicz and colleagues, 2026, peer-reviewed, abstract-sourced). The same review argues

that antisemitism is a theoretically distinctive prejudice because its central trope attributes high status and hidden power to its target rather than low status, which is the thread connecting the perceived-power model, the latent AI stereotypes, and the collective-power coding above.

That is why the Institute measures the conflation rather than ruling on it. The figures in this report describe how often the Zionism construct surfaces in coded discourse, how the two attitudes correlate, how perceived power is associated with prejudice, and how a generation answers survey items. None of them adjudicates whether opposition to Zionism is antisemitism; that question is a contested scholarly question this report does not settle.

Methodology and limitations

The findings draw on three tiers of evidence, which are not interchangeable. Peer-reviewed content-analysis studies report measured shares: they code samples of online text against the IHRA framework and report the antisemitic share and the framing breakdown (Jikeli and colleagues, 2022). Abstract-sourced peer-reviewed survey and modeling studies report the direction and structure of an association rather than a prevalence figure (Harber and colleagues, 2026; Hadar and colleagues, 2026; Gutman and Gilead, 2026), and a peer-reviewed survey reports correlations among validated attitude scales (Allington and colleagues, 2023). An academic poll, which is not peer-reviewed, reports self-reported agreement with stated items (Yale Youth Poll, 2025). A peer-reviewed review article, also abstract-sourced, frames the field's current strands (Bilewicz and colleagues, 2026). This report measures how the Zionism construct is discussed and operationalized.

Three limits bound every figure. The relationships are correlational: the studies report that attitudes are associated, not that one causes the other, and several authors say so explicitly. The content shares describe specific samples, keyword corpora coded under a stated framework, not a population, and shift with the platform and the moment. And the coding rests on the IHRA framework, one widely used but contested standard for identifying antisemitism, so a different framework could draw the line differently. The literature disagrees: the overlap finding that the anti-Zionist and Judeophobic forms are statistically hard to separate (Allington and colleagues, 2023) sits beside the mediation model that treats

Israel-implicating conspiracy belief as a distinct channel (Harber and colleagues, 2026), and the two findings draw the construct's boundary differently.

Conclusion

So what does the research show about how the word "Zionist" functions when people argue past each other about what it means? It rarely appears under its own name, and where it can be measured, it is the minority frame even inside antisemitic discourse: denial of Jewish self-determination, the closest proxy for the construct, fits 15% of antisemitic tweets about Jews, against 62% fitting the older trope of Jewish collective power.

Yet the construct does not sit alone, and the data draw it as part of a wider pattern. Zionism, a political movement, is distinct from Judaism, a religion and peoplehood, and the conflation of the two is itself a measured input that recurs across every axis this report touched.

Perceived Jewish power is associated with antisemitism across six national samples, at both ends of the ideological spectrum. The same construct surfaces in the latent stereotypes of generative AI, where characters tied to Jewish names are rated more competent, privileged, and dominant and less likable. It links to anti-Israel attitudes through a specific channel: conspiracy beliefs implicating Israel and Zionists, the mediator in a model that accounts for more than 55% of the variance in anti-Israel attitudes, while conspiracy beliefs about Jews unrelated to Israel do not. And it registers generationally, with 10% of voters ages 18 to 34 agreeing with all three antisemitic statements tested against 2% of voters 65 and older, even as two-thirds of all voters reject every one.

That pattern does not stay in the seminar room. The accusation that a Jew is really a "Zionist," the conspiracy trope about who controls what, the slide from a state to a people, all live well outside the survey instrument, in everyday argument and in the asides dropped about loyalty and power. Conflation of a contested political label with a peoplehood is one of the inputs that can shape how a group is seen, which is why the Institute measures it.

Whether the measured overlap, anti-Israel and anti-Jewish attitudes that share substantial common ground while remaining distinguishable, is one of the quiet feeders of antisemitism is not a question these figures answer. The slide from a state to a people is one of the inputs the data can register. Where it travels from there is the open question this report sets down.

Frequently Asked Questions

How do studies define Zionism when they measure it?

In the measurement literature Zionism is operationalized as support for a Jewish state in Israel, but it rarely appears under its own name. Content studies code it through the IHRA paragraph on denial of Jewish self-determination, which fit 15% of antisemitic tweets about Jews (Jikeli and colleagues, 2022), while surveys measure it as an anti-Zionist attitude subscale distinct from a Judeophobic one (Allington and colleagues, 2023).

How do researchers measure Zionism in the studies?

They reach it indirectly, through anti-Israel attitudes and denial of Jewish self-determination. The clearest content figure is the 15% of antisemitic tweets about Jews that fit the IHRA self-determination paragraph (Jikeli and colleagues, 2022, peer-reviewed), while survey work measures it as a separable anti-Zionist subscale (Allington and colleagues, 2023, peer-reviewed, funded by the Campaign Against Antisemitism).

Why does conflating Zionism and Judaism matter for measuring antisemitism?

Because the conflation is itself one of the field's active research strands, listed as one of four traditions reviving the psychology of antisemitism (Bilewicz and colleagues, 2026, peer-reviewed, abstract-sourced). The same review notes that antisemitism is distinctive because its central trope attributes hidden power to its target, the thread linking the perceived-power model to the collective-power coding in content data.

How strongly are anti-Israel attitudes and antisemitism associated in the data?

Strongly, but through a specific channel. A mediation model across three preregistered US studies accounted for more than 55% of the variance in anti-Israel attitudes, with conspiracy beliefs implicating Israel and Zionists mediating the association and conspiracy beliefs about Jews unrelated to Israel not doing so (Harber and colleagues, 2026, abstract-sourced). The result is a measured association, not a finding that criticism of Israel is itself antisemitism.

Which generation answers antisemitic survey items most often?

Younger voters. 10% of US voters ages 18 to 34 agreed with all three antisemitic statements tested, against 2% of voters 65 and older, though two-thirds of all voters rejected all three (Yale Youth Poll, 2025, academic poll). About one in five young respondents supported boycotting Jewish-owned businesses over the war in Gaza.

Does opposing Zionism count as antisemitism?

This report does not answer that, and no figure here settles it; the boundary between criticism of Israel and antisemitism is a contested scholarly question (Bilewicz and colleagues, 2026). What the research measures is association, for example that anti-Israel and anti-Jewish attitudes overlap but remain distinguishable (Allington and colleagues, 2023), and the Institute reports those measured associations rather than adjudicating the boundary.

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