# Contested Belonging in Contemporary Austria: Jewish Perspectives on Antisemitism, Islamophobia, and the Politics of Hate


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# Contested Belonging in Contemporary Austria

## *Jewish Perspectives on Antisemitism, Islamophobia, and the Politics of Hate*

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This paper presents findings from the project "Antisemitic Discourses in Online Media and their Reception among Jews in Austria," which Ariane Sadjed and I conducted in 2023–24 at the Austrian Academy of Sciences.[1] When we began the project, the issue of antisemitism in contemporary Europe already constituted a central topic of public discourse, specifically in the realms of politics, media, and academia. Yet little could we have anticipated the veritable explosion in public discourse that followed the Hamas massacre perpetrated in southern Israel on October 7, 2023, and the massive Israeli retaliation in Gaza that followed. As I write these words in early 2025, these have already resulted in many tens of thousands of deaths, and the future of the region is gravely uncertain.

This unprecedented escalation in the Israel-Palestine conflict has also had a substantial impact within Austrian society, where the reception of the conflict is largely shaped by collective memories of Nazi rule and the consequent mass expulsion and mass murder of the country's Jewish population. Previously consisting of close to two hundred thousand individuals and making up about 10 percent of the population of the Austrian capital, Austria's postwar Jewish community never recovered its former size, and Jews today make up no more than around 0.2 percent of the population of Vienna and 0.1 of the total population of Austria (Klimont 35). Austria's contemporary Jewish population's sense of belonging in Austrian society and their views on issues like

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antisemitism and the Israel-Palestine conflict are substantially framed by the experience and memory of the Holocaust.

In a parallel development, Austria has in recent decades become one of the largest per capita immigrant societies in Europe. Around one fifth of the country's population today has a so-called "migration background," with Muslims alone making up close to 10 percent of the population.[2] This substantial demographic change has gone hand in hand with the resurgence in right-wing populism and—as many recent studies show—continuously high levels of various forms of group-based hatred, above all antisemitism, color-based racism, xenophobia, antiziganism/antigypsyism, and Islamophobia.[3] The complex entanglement of these issues—the history and aftermath of the Holocaust, enduring right-wing extremism, rising levels of immigration, and conflicting positions within Austrian society toward the Israel-Palestine conflict—have in the past couple of years culminated in a toxic and dangerously destabilizing public discourse, propelled not least by politicians, media, and even academics across the political spectrum.

This paper presents a summary of an interview project that aimed to capture the perspectives of Jewish Austrians on the problem of antisemitism and the related public discourse in contemporary Austrian society. Aside from the voluminous transcripts generated on the basis of the interviews, the accompanying discourse analysis conducted for this project, particularly following what could be called a "discourse explosion" following the October 7 attacks, generated a vast textual corpus, with the bibliography compiled over the past two years alone running the length of an academic article. This presentation of findings is therefore necessarily selective. Sources are cited sparingly and only where directly relevant; this paper does not and cannot claim to cover all the relevant aspects of the issues raised. It begins with a stocktaking of the recent development of public discourse on antisemitism in Austria and proceeds to summarize the design and realization of our interview project, before analyzing the key findings from the interviews themselves. Toward the end of the paper, special attention is paid to our interviewees' assessment of the current discourse as applied specifically to Muslim refugees and immigrants in Austria. It closes with the finding that antisemitism is represented across all social milieus in contemporary Austria. Thus, it concludes that attempts to pin the blame collectively on Muslims are not only disingenuous, but also dangerous, as they exacerbate social tensions in Austria's increasingly diverse

society, playing off one minoritized population group against the other with a cynical "divide and conquer" mentality.

## The Recent Development of Public Discourse on Antisemitism in Austria

The issue of contemporary antisemitism and related topics like Holocaust memory, political extremism, and the Israel-Palestine conflict today constitute central topics of public discourse in Austria. By "public discourse" I mean a combination of speech acts by and textual interactions between politicians, community representatives, and activists (political discourse); journalists, commentators, and social media "influencers" (media discourse); scholars (academic discourse); and the general public (as passive consumers of and/or active discussants in related political, media, and academic discourses).[4] In a post-Nazi country with a minute Jewish population, this means that public discourse on antisemitism in Austria is currently dominated by non-Jewish voices, with a few notable exceptions. These include primarily Jewish community representatives, especially functionaries of the Israelitische Kultusgemeinde (IKG), the public law representative organization of Jews in Vienna and the single largest Jewish organization in Austria, but also prominent Jewish scholars, artists, and activists.[5]

The overwhelmingly non-Jewish voices are far from neutral; rather, they represent vested political interests. Indeed, both in Austria and elsewhere, the issue of antisemitism has in recent years frequently been mobilized, explicitly or implicitly, to further other agendas. This has been apparent most recently in the ultimately unsuccessful negotiations to form a federal coalition government led by the far-right Freedom Party (FPÖ) with the center-right People's Party (ÖVP) as junior partner. On January 12, 2025, Herbert Kickl, the head of the FPÖ, responded to public criticisms of the party's longstanding anti-democratic and antisemitic positions by claiming that "democracy, loyalty to the constitution, the rule of law, fundamental rights, freedom of speech, free media, and [notably] the fight against antisemitism" form the "foundation of our [the FPÖ's] political work" ("Kickl wehrt sich gegen Vorwürfe"). Kickl saw himself compelled to make this statement because of the widespread charge against the FPÖ that it actively seeks to undermine precisely these issues. For years, journalists and political activists have been documenting the unceasing

entanglement of the FPÖ in far-right networks as well as the glorification of Nazi ideology and engagement in antisemitic rhetoric—never mind racist and other forms of hate speech—by leading FPÖ politicians (see most recently Sager, "Die rechtsextremen 'Einzelfälle' der Kickl-FPÖ").

In a related incident, Johanna Mikl-Leitner (ÖVP), who currently heads a coalition government in Lower Austria with Udo Landbauer (FPÖ) as deputy governor, the latter of whom has been beset by accusations of Nazi-glorifying antisemitism (see Fellner and Stepan), declared a week earlier that Austria was "at war with Islam"; she later claimed that she had misspoken and meant "political Islam" ("Muslime empört über Mikl-Leitner-Aussage"—note how the title of this ORF news report suggests that only Muslims find this statement "outrageous"). Regardless of whether Mikl-Leitner's wording was a Freudian slip or a textbook example of what the discourse analyst Ruth Wodak has called "calculated ambivalence" (*The Politics of Fear* 20) and "shameless normalization" ("Shameless Normalization as a Result of Media Control" 790), this new development among Austria's center and far right to demonize Muslims in the name of fighting antisemitism has been criticized as "political bigotry," with the issue of antisemitism here serving merely as a "smokescreen" for the propagation of "racism and xenophobia" (Völker).

This tendentious political discourse is to a large extent mirrored in the Austrian media discourse, with even liberal and center-left media increasingly picking up the right-wing trope in recent years that antisemitism is above all a problem caused by immigrants.[6] This reflects the recent finding that media outlets in Austria tend to parrot rather than critique the ruling political discourse.[7] Academic discourse in Austria also in part reflects this problematic lack of distance to political discourse, with scholars of antisemitism sometimes subverting scholarly forums to push political agendas, for instance to demonize Muslims. A concise example is the following quote from an Austrian academic published in a multi-volume collection of proceedings from a conference on antisemitism held at Vienna University in 2018. The contribution serves to attack what the author alleges to be a "belittlement of Islamist antisemitism in the western Left," and concludes:

> Those unwilling to tackle rigid sexual morals, genital mutilation, and the aggressively repressed homoeroticism of the Muslim *ummah* can obviously muster little more than a shrug of the shoulders when confronted with the suggestions [*sic*] that antisemitism has somet-

> hing to do with the repression of wishes and desires in an oppressive society. (Radonić 122)

In plain English, the author is accusing the entire *ummah*—meaning collectively the close to two billion followers of Islam around the world—of constituting an oppressive society, of practicing female genital mutilation, and of being repressed homosexuals, which the author appears to believe is the root cause of antisemitism. Democratic deficits in many Muslim-majority countries notwithstanding, the claim that all Muslims practice female genital mutilation and are repressed homosexuals is plainly false and moreover racist in its crass generalization, while the insinuation that homosexuality is the root cause of antisemitism has no basis in science and is therefore purely homophobic. While this language of "psychopathology" was already being applied in the early critiques of antisemitism in the late nineteenth century (see Engel 46), it is today characteristic of the radically pro-Israel and concurrently anti-Muslim "antideutsch" movement in the German-speaking world, which employs stock theories from psychoanalysis and the Frankfurt School to lend a veneer of scholarly credibility to its prejudicial political agenda (for critical discussions of this movement and its discourse, see Melzer 239–50, esp. 244; Paul 394, 399).

That antisemitism is currently being so openly addressed in Austrian political, media, and academic discourse and among large portions of the non-Jewish public is naturally a welcome development in light of the country's long and egregious history of antisemitism, as our interviewees also emphasized. However, given the alarming surge to power of far-right, nativist political actors across Europe, the current public discourse on antisemitism in Austria warrants critical examination. On balance, the claimed dedication of Austria's (far) right to combatting antisemitism appears to be a subterfuge to promote their well-documented anti-Muslim agenda (see Hafez, "Alte neue Islampolitik in Österreich?"), while their own longstanding problem with antisemitism has by no means disappeared (see Rabinovici, "Antisemit ist immer nur der Andere"). Moreover, none of the speakers involved in the public discourse cited thus far is Jewish and, a few prominent anti-refugee and anti-immigrant statements from ÖVP-friendly IKG officials notwithstanding (for a critical appraisal of these, see Rabinovici, "Obergrenze für Stumpfsinn und Vorurteile"), public discourse on antisemitism in Austria generally does not pay much heed to the views of Austria's Jewish population. Beyond anecdotal reports, the empirical data commonly cited in this public discourse mostly draws on two source

corpuses: the biennial surveys commissioned by the Austrian parliament since 2018 focusing on the prevalence of antisemitic attitudes in Austria,[8] and the annual or biannual summaries of antisemitic incidents published by the IKG in Vienna since 2019 on the basis of reports submitted to its "Antisemitismus-Meldestelle."[9] In other words, what is commonly measured and debated in Austria are the antisemitic attitudes and behaviors held or expressed by non-Jews—along with the opinions of other non-Jews on what the root cause of the problem is—rather than the experience of Jews themselves and Jewish perspectives on the phenomenon of antisemitism and the related public discourse.

Both the parliamentary studies and the IKG reports have, moreover, been criticized for employing problematic definitions of what constitutes antisemitism, of subsequently offering misleading interpretations of the results, and specifically also of inflating or distorting the role played by Muslim immigrants and refugees in perpetuating antisemitic attitudes and actions in contemporary Austria (see, for example, Frey; Jikeli 21–22; Rabinovici, "Antisemit ist immer nur der Andere" 317–18). These studies and reports rely exclusively on the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance's contested "working definition of antisemitism," which they misleadingly portray as the "scholarly" standard.[10] In reality, no scholarly consensus exists, whether in Austria or internationally, on how antisemitism is to be defined.[11] Yet this discursive framing of alleged "scholarliness" can be found in every parliamentary study and every IKG report to date, with the latter even going so far as to dismiss the vibrant and ongoing scholarly debate on the question of definitions as "baseless and unfounded attacks" intended to "defame" the IHRA definition, which has been adopted by dozens of national governments and international bodies in spite of the lack of scholarly consensus on its practical value and legal efficacy (*Antisemitische Vorfälle 2020* 21).

The issue of defining and counting antisemitism is evidently political (see Shanes); in the worst case, the notion of "scholarliness" is abused to attack and undermine actual scholarship. Characteristic of Austrian public discourse in the aftermath of the October 7 attacks is a widely read newspaper commentary piece—to which the more than five hundred reader comments attest—by a PhD student who was presented as a "historian and antisemitism researcher." Proceeding from this platform of ostensibly speaking as a scholar, the author claimed that the "constantly recurring discussions about definitions of antisemitism also serve to obscure the term" and proceeded to attack the "anti-zionist antisemitism" that, she claimed without evidence, had reached "right

into the scholarly community" (Vogel). In other words, the author claimed authority as a scholar in order to deny the scholarly debate any validity, a tactic that allows political activism to pose as scholarship. While many scholars of antisemitism indeed agree that the definition debates tend to distract from the problem of antisemitism itself,[12] the current tendency in Austrian public discourse to vilify any discussion or criticism of the implementation of the IHRA definition—and thereby the accuracy or veracity of government-sponsored studies on antisemitism—clearly contributes to rather than helps resolving this distraction from the actual issue.

## Rationale, Methodology, and Source Base of the Interview Project

Neither in conducting our project nor in writing this article was I or the other project member concerned with adjudicating this convoluted definitional debate. What we noted from the outset was the cumulative effect of such exercises in defining, counting, and categorizing and, subsequently, of legislating against antisemitism: The issue has to a great extent become divorced from the group most immediately impacted by the effects of antisemitism, namely Jews, who have been relegated to the position of passive and largely voiceless victims of antisemitism, rather than being seen and treated as social, political, and discursive agents in their own right. Indeed, scholars of antisemitism in Austria have for some time been pushing for an increased focus on the perspectives of Jews themselves as a means to assess the validity of the claims made by non-Jews in public discourse and, where necessary, to refute or correct them (for an example, see Embacher 386–87). Since the October 7 attacks in particular, similar interview-based studies, for example conducted in Germany, have shown that Jews see themselves living in a discursive "parallel world" with regard to the issue of antisemitism and as a result feel increasingly estranged from their non-Jewish peers (Chernivsky and Lorenz-Sinai 20).

In designing this research project, we therefore chose to focus specifically on the personal experiences of Jewish Austrians with antisemitism—crucially, without employing the kind of prescriptive definitions that have become common in government-sponsored surveys—and on their reception of the current public discourse on the topic in Austria, especially with regard to the sincerity, quality, and effectiveness of current government policies designed to target antisemitism, as outlined in the government's *National Strategy against Antise-*

*mitism*. In sum, our approach revealed a much greater breadth of perspectives and more nuanced positions on the issue among the general Jewish population than is currently reflected in public discourse, including with regard to the IKG as the country's primary Jewish representative body. Notably, while the IKG is a state-sanctioned representative body and its functionaries are elected by its membership (considered to comprise the majority but not all of Austria's self-defining Jewish population), its unambiguous positions on issues like the causes of antisemitism and the Middle East conflict as well as its relationship to Austrian government policy, in recent years especially involving close ties with the ÖVP, are not necessarily representative of Vienna's Jewish population as a whole, as the analysis of our interviewees below also shows.

We began the project with a qualitative survey that ran from May to December 2023 and solicited responses from Jews living in Austria, among other things to identify what discourse analysts call the key "discourse strands" relating to contemporary antisemitism, meaning the thematic areas in which antisemitic speech acts most commonly occur and the "intertextual links" that establish "topical continuity" in this context (Rheindorf and Wodak 2, 8–9). To repeat, the survey was not prescriptive, meaning that unlike the government-sponsored antisemitism studies, we asked open-ended questions and allowed the respondents themselves to identify the relevant discourse strands, on the basis of which we then conducted our further discourse analysis. The second purpose of the survey was to identify potential interviewees for in-depth biographical interviews, which we proceeded to conduct from July 2023 through February 2024. In addition to this primary data, we analyzed Austrian as well as international surveys, studies, and reports on contemporary antisemitism as well as on extremism, conspiracy narratives, and other forms of group-based hate; media and social media discourse relating to these issues; and the relevant scholarly literature. The result was a vast textual corpus documenting contemporary public discourse on antisemitism in Austria.

The bulk of our primary data derives from the interviews, which included twelve biographical interviews, two group interviews (with three sixteen- to eighteen-year-olds and two eighteen- to twenty-year-olds, respectively), and five interview sessions with experts (featuring four online newspaper moderators and two civil society actors dealing with prejudice and hate speech in Austria). We invited all survey respondents to participate in a subsequent interview, of whom six agreed and showed up for interview. The six additional biographical interviews were solicited on the basis of sociocultural background, expertise

on contemporary antisemitism, and/or specific functions they hold within the Jewish community, with the aim of creating as diverse an interview pool as possible. To this end, we also specifically invited participants for the two group interviews, who were solicited through LIKRAT, a civil society project of the IKG.[13] Finally, the expert interviewees were chosen for their experience in dealing with prejudice and hate speech in contemporary Austria. For ethical and practical reasons, owing not least to the sensitivity of the subject, we decided to anonymize all of our interviewees, though some general remarks on the sociocultural makeup of the biographical pool are warranted and limited social background information is included with regard to individual interviewees where relevant to the statements made, though with all prerequisite caution not to compromise their identity.

Overall, the biographical interviewees are evenly balanced with regard to gender, with gender moreover not playing an appreciable role in the discourses analyzed; for this reason, all respondents in the following will be cited in gender-neutral terms.[14] There is an even cross-generational spread, with interviewees ranging in age from under eighteen to over eighty. All but one of the interviewees are past or current IKG members, with the one exception being a member of the liberal Or Chadasch congregation and of a Jewish civil society organization. The pool consists of an even mix of Austrian-born and immigrated interviewees, with the latter consisting both of descendants of Jews who were forced to leave Austria under National Socialism and of non-Austrian postwar immigrants from the former Eastern Bloc, Central Asia, and Israel. Given Austria's Nazi history, the interviewees are generally well informed about and acutely sensitive to the politics of history in this country, with a marked sense of difference to the internationally more visible situation in Germany—obviously, Austria's history of coming to terms with the Nazi past differs in important respects from Germany's. For those interviewees who are not religious or otherwise involved in Jewish communal or cultural life, Austria's Nazi and Holocaust history is especially important as a marker of their Jewish identity, in the sense of belonging to a "community of fate."

Perhaps most important for our project, we selected the interviewees in order to represent a broad range of religious and political views, including atheist, secular, liberal, progressive, socialist, moderate, conservative, devout, orthodox, and right-wing positions as well as multiple complex entanglements thereof. While the number of interviewees may have been statistically low, we are nevertheless satisfied that the data collected in the project is broadly repre-

sentative of the qualitative, if not necessarily the quantitative, range of opinion among Jews living in Austria today and hence allows for important insights into the role played by particular sociocultural markers in experiences of antisemitism and subsequent views on related topics like Muslim immigration in Austria. The most immediate takeaway is that all respondents, regardless of background or worldview, regularly experience antisemitism in some form and consider this to be an enduring problem in Austrian society, though views on questions like the background of antisemitic actors and potential differences in the quality and impact of different forms of antisemitism varied among our interviewees.

Notably, Hamas's October 7 assault on Israel and Israel's subsequent retaliation on Gaza occurred at a point when much of the primary data collection for the project, specifically the survey and some of the interviews, had already been completed, following which public discourse on this topic, both in Austria and worldwide, intensified dramatically. Even before the October 7 attacks, our survey respondents and interviewees had identified Israel and the Middle East conflict as one of the primary discursive fields in which antisemitic hate speech occurs (thus correlating with Europe-wide findings; see for example European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA), *Young Jewish Europeans* 8–9, 17–20). While the future development of the conflict and its effects on Jewish populations as well as on relations between Jews and other non-Jewish groups outside of Israel cannot be predicted, October 7 will undoubtedly be regarded in hindsight as one of the most incisive and traumatic events in post-Holocaust Jewish history. At the same time, Israel is facing growing condemnation—including from renowned Holocaust and genocide scholars and civil society actors within Israel—that its actions in Gaza and the West Bank amount to war crimes and possibly even genocide (for a summary of the present scholarly debate, see Speri).

Again, it is not my intention to adjudicate in these questions here, and the purpose of our project was not to examine the Israel-Palestine conflict but to assess the issue of contemporary antisemitism in Austria. While our interviewees did have a lot to say on the former topic, many of the interviewees we spoke with since the October 7 attacks have told us that their statements on the matter would today be considerably different than they were at the time we conducted the interviews. The overview of the interviews in the following will therefore focus on the situation in Austria and largely not engage with the Israel-Palestine conflict, despite its obvious centrality to the current public

discourse in Austria and elsewhere. Given the enduring problem with antisemitism in Austria, the interviewees' statements on the domestic situation offer critical new insights on the current state of the problem here, while the issue of Jewish reactions to October 7 and the global impact of the Israel-Palestine conflict must be reserved for other studies, of which a spate are currently being undertaken internationally. What should be noted here is that many interviewees were particularly critical of left-wing discourses in specific relation to the Israel-Palestine conflict, as they perceived these to betray problematic double standards in terms of the positions adopted toward the issues of racism and antisemitism, respectively (this is a widely discussed phenomenon internationally; for a recent summary, see Bassi).

As the already cited op-ed on "antizionist antisemitism" shows, the issue of left-wing antisemitism is also widely discussed in current Austrian public discourse. The dominant right-wing ÖVP has recently even begun claiming, as the former Minister of the Constitution, Karoline Edtstadler, put it in May 2024, that "the pendulum has swung from the right to the left" with regard to antisemitism (Anders). However, given that many recent reports and studies cited at the end of this paper conclude that the greatest domestic threat to Jews in Europe still emanates from the (far) right, such attempts to shift the focus away from the right to the left (and, more implicitly, away from the domestic to the Middle Eastern context) must be seen as a transparent diversion tactic. While the issue of antisemitism on the left of the political spectrum in specific relation to Israel may thus appear conspicuously absent in the following analysis, I believe the dominance—and thus the power and influence—of the (far) right in the contemporary Austrian political landscape, and therefore in contemporary public discourse in Austria, warrants a special focus on the latter.

To conclude with a note on the presentation of the interview analysis that follows: All translations of quotes from the German-language interviews (and other German-language sources) in the following are my own. The interview quotes have been lightly edited for clarity, omitting repetitions and filler words but otherwise reflect exactly the words of the interviewees. All emphases in the interview quotes reflect emphases in the spoken interviews. In what follows, the interviews are cited in short form; a complete list of the interviews, including the dates they were conducted, is included in the appendix, as is an overview of the general questions that were asked. Notably, many questions were tailored to specific interviewees, for example on the basis of statements they had made in the preceding survey, or emerged naturally in the framework

of the semi-structured interview format we employed. Individually tailored questions and follow-up questions are therefore not included in the appendix, which also omits the groups of questions that were not directly relevant to the selected themes of this paper. Yet the overview of questions should serve as a useful guide to the general discursive framing of the interviews.

## Jewish Perspectives on the Prevalence and Manifestations of Antisemitism in Contemporary Austria

Even before the October 7 attacks, public discourse in Austria—spurred by the IKG's antisemitism reports and amplified by the media—was already awash with the claim, as IKG president Oskar Deutsch paradigmatically put it in March 2024, that we are witnessing an "unprecedented explosion" of antisemitism in Austria (Schmidt). As Eric Frey, a journalist and member of the liberal Jewish Or Chadasch congregation, remarked in a critical essay already two years previously, such claims are questionable not only due to the fact that the IKG only started counting incidents of antisemitism in the late 2010s—and hence there is no empirical basis for such alarmist claims—but also generally in light of Austria's long history of antisemitism, including a full-scale antisemitic genocide perpetrated as recently as three generations ago ("Wächst der Antisemitismus wirklich?").

Overall, our interviewees share this critical assessment of the purported rise in the prevalence of antisemitism, with many interviewees emphasizing that antisemitism is a constant in Austrian society past and present, a finding also voiced by scholars of antisemitism (for example, Benz 69–70). The interview subject anonymously identified as "BI 4" went so far as call it "extremely ridiculous" to conclude on the basis of not even ten years of statistics that antisemitism is increasing, as these offer merely a snapshot of current "manifestations" of antisemitism. As the IKG and parliamentary reports themselves recognize, antisemitic discourse often reflects latent attitudes based on a long cultural memory of antisemitic tropes, which can remain largely unvoiced until activated in relation to current global developments. This was evident, for example, in a spike in online antisemitic hate speech recorded in May 2021 in relation to two specific incidents that occurred at the time, namely a clash between Israel and Hamas in Gaza and a lockdown announced in the context of the Covid pandemic (*Antisemitische Vorfälle 2021* 5). BI 5 moreover pointed out that there are so many iterations of antisemitism, many of which are not

represented by the same groups (for example religious, racist, economic, conspiratorial, anti-Israel, and so forth), that it is almost nonsensical to speak of a singular "antisemitism" or to think that antisemitism follows a uniform development across large and complex societies even in a country as small as Austria.

Some interviewees found, as summarized by BI 6, that "the situation, if anything, has improved." Indeed, the very nature of public discourse, including in the education system, regarding the history and present-day problem of antisemitism has become markedly more sensitive in recent years than it was in, say, the 1980s or the 1950s. BI 11 opined that this is also because the general perception of Jewish "otherness" has decreased in recent times as a result of demographic changes in Vienna specifically, as the city has on the one hand become more religiously diverse and on the other more secular. As recent statistics show, only about half of the Viennese population identified as Christian in 2021 and only about a third as Catholic (compared to almost 100 percent Catholic in the immediate aftermath of the Nazi period and the homogenization of the city's populace that this brought about through genocidal violence; see Klimont 34, Zulehner 149). While Nazi racist antisemitism cast Jews as a "non-Aryan" and therefore "non-white" "race," BI 11 also addressed that Jews are today increasingly perceived as "white" people, with public discourse recently emphasizing the long history of Jewish belonging in Austria by explicit or implicit comparison to recent immigrants and/or darker-toned Austrians. This goes some way to explaining the shift in (far-)right rhetoric toward a proclaimed inclusiveness of Jews in order to posit a "Judeo-Christian occident" against new arrivals from the "East," including (far-)right solidarity with (far-)right political actors in Israel (for a discussion of this shift, see Schubert 366).

Our interviewees therefore do not agree with the claims of politicians, community representatives, and—concurrently—media that antisemitism is increasing in Austrian society per se. What the interviewees' experiences do reveal is a shift in manifestation of antisemitic attitudes through Austria's postwar history and thus a different generational experience of antisemitism, while the general prevalence of antisemitic prejudices is seen to remain generally constant. This is clear, for example, in the fact that virtually all interviewees of all generations—with the exception of the younger interviewees who attended Jewish schools—experienced some form of antisemitic discrimination in the Austrian school system, ranging from overt expressions of racist antisemitism in the early postwar decades to more philosemitic stereotyping of Jews in recent years. While this shift toward a benign form of othering may in

a sense reflect an improvement by contrast to overt racist antisemitism, it still tends to make Jews feel singled out and treated differently on account of their Jewishness, akin to exoticization or tokenization in the aftermath of genocide.

Interviewees of all ages also addressed common experiences in public discourse and especially on social media of relativization or even glorification of the Holocaust. While much rarer than verbal expressions of antisemitic prejudice, some interviewees reported hate-inspired destruction of property and even physical violence perpetrated against the interviewees or members of their social circles on account of their Jewishness, especially if they are recognizable as such (usually through their attire, such as orthodox dress or jewelry bearing the Star of David, or on account of recognizable or stereotypical Jewish names). BI 2 recounted experiences of orthodox Jews being especially frequent targets of unprovoked verbal and even physical attacks in public spaces in Vienna, these attacks moreover often being explicitly linked to the Israel-Palestine conflict. This includes "cowardly heckling from cars" or from "drunks" on the street, a "constant" occurrence during which random car passengers or pedestrians spot orthodox Jews and shout slogans at them like "Viva la Palästina [*sic*]" or "Go back to Israel." BI 2 also cited incidents where there is no verbal exchange but that involve aggressive behavior, such as drivers accelerating toward orthodox Jews on crosswalks and sidewalks in a clear attempt to intimidate or threaten them. The interviewee emphasized that a common experience in such instances is that non-Jewish bystanders do nothing, leaving the Jewish victims of antisemitic attacks feeling defenseless and unprotected, a civil society problem that is also addressed in the IKG's antisemitism reports (for example *Antisemitische Vorfälle 2020* 23–24).

Fortunately, the IKG's reports demonstrate that physical violence toward Jews is an extremely rare phenomenon in present-day Austria. Nevertheless, whether physical or verbal, the prevalence of antisemitic prejudice results in a general wariness among Jews in displaying their Jewishness in public in Austria. In our under-eighteen group interview (GI 1), the teenagers stated that they either wear kippot (skullcaps) selectively or avoid wearing them altogether for fear of verbal and physical attacks in public spaces. Notably, kippot are not necessarily understood by Jewish Austrians as an expression of religiosity but are also worn as a statement of conscious Jewish identity in the post-Nazi, post-Holocaust context, as was the case with BI 6 in younger years (who is otherwise secular).

Despite the continued manifestation of antisemitic prejudice in publicly

expressed hate speech or, much more rarely, in acts of physical violence, there is an overall sense among the interviewees of all generations that antisemitic discourse has become more "subliminal" in recent years, as BI 3 for example put it, meaning less immediately visible. Older interviewees (for example BI 1 and BI 8) recalled the continued presence and thus visibility of former Nazis in the Austrian bureaucracy and education system after 1945, including high-ranking university professors, as most notoriously in the Borodajkewycz affair in the early 1960s. Middle-aged interviewees (for example BI 10 and BI 11) recalled the presence of a postwar generation of visible neo-Nazis in Vienna in the 1980s and 1990s (recognizable among other things through shaved heads, jackboots, and explicit fascist symbolism). Today, by contrast, even vocally far-right movements like the Identitarians make a conscious effort to blend in and appear "normal," in the sense of centrist and non-radical, though their ideology remains rooted in antisemitic ideology.

Indeed, corresponding to their overall sense that antisemitism has not increased in prevalence but simply changed in its manifestations in recent decades, our interviewees reported that the generational shift following the Waldheim affair in the mid-1980s—whereby many Austrians have become more sensitive to the country's history of antisemitism, Nazism, and the Holocaust—does not mean that non-Jewish Austrians have necessarily become less antisemitic. Rather, overt antisemitism has become a social taboo and hence its expression is today more covert. BI 7 summarized the resulting situation as follows: "Antisemitism is rather something that one *feels*." They added that Jews may "certainly" also be "a little *overly* sensitive to the topic" but insisted that antisemitism remains a long-term and as such latent prejudice in Austria that is handed down from generation to generation and then surfaces when the latent prejudice is activated by circumstances: "When the situation arises, then suddenly they all come out of the woodwork," with "they" presumably meaning antisemitic prejudices. BI 11 compared this situation with racism in the United States, where "political correctness" today means that it is largely unacceptable to voice explicit racism but that "when people are among themselves, they might say something," i.e., something racist. BI 11 nevertheless found this process of creating social taboos a step in the right direction, since explicit hate speech is today widely shunned, and the interviewee called Austria "a better country today" as a result.

Our interviewees thus found overall that antisemitic prejudice represents a constant undercurrent that manifests itself in different ways and in relation

to specific contexts. BI 4 pointed out that antisemitism has held this latent, situational function throughout Austria's history, i.e., allowing Jews to be tolerated and to live in ostensible peace for a period of time until a crisis arises, usually some economic, political, or natural catastrophe, in which Jews then serve as opportune scapegoats. Ruth Wodak described this phenomenon as "Judeus ex machina" ("The Radical Right and Antisemitism" 64). BI 4 cited their mother, a Holocaust survivor from Eastern Europe, saying about the comparatively peaceful postwar situation in Austria: "Yes, the people are nice now. But wait until the economic situation gets difficult again, then you'll see how they'll all go crazy again." As the interviewee remarked, the economic situation in Austria today is not even particularly bad, and still social tensions and radical tendencies in politics are increasing markedly, as the recent electoral gains of the far right evince—though notably, as cited at the outset, overt political hate speech is currently directed squarely at Muslims in Austria, not explicitly or predominantly at Jews.

Various interviewees addressed the role played by ignorance in prejudicial thought and speech, whereby a distinction is warranted between two forms of ignorance: ignorance in the sense of simply not knowing about a given topic, which is common to all people and as such is essentially benign, and willful ignorance, whereby individuals hold prejudicial views and are unwilling to change these in response to reason, arguments, or facts. BI 2 cited as an example of benign ignorance the apparently widespread bemusement among non-Jews in public concerning orthodox Jewish dress, reporting that passersby frequently ask whether, for example, the different types of hats worn by orthodox Jewish men carry different symbolic meanings, or that tourists frequently request to have their pictures taken with orthodox Jews. The interviewee did not necessarily consider this kind of ignorance to be reflective of antisemitic prejudice, stating that this kind of exoticization can easily be overcome by more societal education and interaction, including, as they emphasized, more openness to the outside world on behalf of orthodox Jews themselves.

One of the teenagers in the under-eighteen group interview (GI 1) similarly reported that "we really are the first Jews for many, many people," meaning the first Jews that some non-Jews ever meet, with another teenager adding: "But they all have an opinion about us nonetheless." The latter teenager mentioned a friend at school who is originally from China and is both ignorant about Jews (in the benign sense) but also completely uninterested in the topic of Jewishness;

they contrasted this friend with other groups of non-Jewish Austrians who are both ignorant about Jews and at the same time filled with "hate." As the interviewee succinctly summarized: "There is a difference between not knowing because I don't care and not knowing because I am opposed." The teenager indicated that they are happy to engage with the former type of ignorance but have no interest in engaging with or trying to sway the opinions of the latter.

Also relating to ignorance, various interviewees (BI 3, BI 5, BI 6, and BI 8) reported that speakers will often regurgitate antisemitic tropes without the speaker realizing it or intending to engage in antisemitic discourse. BI 3 cited as an example conspiracy narratives relating to shadowy "elites" trying to establish a "New World Order," which lean heavily into antisemitic tropes without necessarily or explicitly referring to Jews. As a result, people who believe such narratives may plausibly deny that they are saying something antisemitic. Our interviewees voiced their conviction that this kind of ignorant prejudice was much more prevalent in lesser educated milieus, irrespective of other sociocultural factors like "migration background" or religious affiliation. As BI 8 concluded, the problem is thus essentially a "social" one and "nothing more," one that can be fixed with social policies like equal access to education and resources—not by demonizing one particular sociocultural milieu as being more prone to antisemitism than another.

Where the interviewees did see a marked increase in expressions of antisemitism (along with other forms of hate speech and a general coarsening of discourse) was on social media.[15] There is no space to delve into this vast topic here, including our interviewees' complex thoughts on this issue—my project colleague Ariane Sadjed is dealing with (social) media discourse and antisemitism in a separate publication. Suffice to say that social media, as many recent studies have shown, have enabled an explosion in the dissemination of hate speech (see most recently and pertinently Becker and Schreiber 61–64; Schnabel 31–36). However, this does not necessarily reflect a rise in the prevalence of prejudicial attitudes: As evinced by our expert interviews (especially EI 2, EI 4, and EI 5) and the current scholarly literature, the social taboo against explicit hate speech in analog society coupled with the disinhibition effect in the online sphere, among other factors, has reduced social media to a prime public forum for the dissemination of hate speech and disinformation. However, the volume of hate speech online does not necessarily reflect the number of speech actors; a small number of hate speech purveyors has the capacity to

be much louder and more visible on social media than moderate voices, thereby leading to the radicalization and poisoning of entire spheres of discourse online (see the pertinent summary based on the Austrian context by Brodnig).

The online sphere was also the area in which the interviewees reported experiencing the most widespread manifestations of antisemitic hate speech relating to the Israel-Palestine conflict. While this issue, as discussed in the introduction, represents a complex and fluid current development and its discussion simply exceeds the scope of this paper, it is worth summarizing the views of our interviewees specifically regarding public discourse in Austria in this context: Our interviewees overall emphasized the discursive nature of knowledge acquisition and opinion formation, whether at a young age in the domestic sphere and through the education system, or later in life through the media and peer-to-peer communication. As such, the majority of our interviewees revealed themselves to be open to discussing even controversial tropes concerning Israeli policy, such as charges of apartheid and colonialism in the West Bank, under the emphatic condition that the discussion remain based on facts and arguments and not disinformation and false analogies. As BI 12 summarized: "I want to simply hear their [i.e., the interlocutors'] perspectives, if they can express these *eloquently* and *reasonably* and justify them, then I *want* to hear them."

However, the interviewees also generally found that discursive interaction online lacks the kind of critical engagement with fact-based arguments and the basic civility shown to interlocutors that characterize analog, i.e. "real-life" discussions. For example, BI 12 described attempts to reason with Austrian peers who share anti-Israel statements online by sending them articles and sources to read and discuss but found that there was often no interest in genuine engagement with source-based arguments or differing viewpoints. The interviewee therefore concluded: "Okay, the most important thing is that you have an opinion on the matter. But when it comes to forming your opinion and maybe hearing both sides . . . no, that's too much effort." As social media analyses have been showing for some time now, the spread of biased or false information online and the concurrent unwillingness to engage with alternate viewpoints is not just a problem with regard to antisemitic hate speech but represents one of the greatest threats to democratic discourse at present.

## Jewish Perspectives on Antisemitism among the Muslim Population and Anti-Muslim Sentiment in Austria

A lack of sincere engagement with differing positions and experiences is especially evident in the current public discourse concerning the interrelated issues of antisemitism, migration, and Muslims living in Austria today. This discourse is generally preoccupied by the question of whether some groups perpetrate antisemitism more than others, with a concerted effort evident among the dominant conservative party to explicitly brand Muslims as the worst perpetrators of antisemitism. Characteristically, the 2021 *National Strategy against Antisemitism*, authored by the ÖVP-controlled Federal Chancellery, after repeating the debatable claim concerning "increasingly prevalent antisemitic attitudes" in Austrian society, went on to conclude: "These are caused by clearly perceptible antisemitic attitudes of immigrants from Muslim-dominated countries as well as the Islamist recruitment of members of the second or third generation who feel excluded and their conflict-laden position towards Israel." Only further down the page does the report also mention antisemitism among "other groups, for example from the German nationalist, right-wing extremist and right-wing populist milieu" (88). Perhaps not coincidentally, this is the very milieu that the ÖVP has repeatedly launched into power on both the federal and regional levels in recent years and with whom they very recently negotiated to share power in an FPÖ-dominated coalition.

Our interviewees across the board are sensitive to the differences in ideology and motivation that underlie different forms of antisemitic prejudice. BI 1 for example distinguished between different antisemitic discourses within religious circles, the far right, the conservative right, and the postcolonial left, although they also found that religious antisemitism has waned significantly in Austria recently as the country has become both more secular and more religiously diverse. Most importantly, the interviewees generally view antisemitism as a problem that is prevalent across all social milieus, with BI 3 explicitly stating that none of the different manifestations of antisemitism "is worse or less bad" than any other. It follows that particular manifestations of antisemitism are context-dependent and a policy targeting one group's problem with antisemitism is not conducive to tackling the problem of antisemitism and prejudicial attitudes overall. Moreover, even if one were to accept unquestioningly the finding of the parliamentary studies that, for example, Arabic-speaking

Austrians overall display more antisemitic attitudes than other groups of Austrians, it also bears mentioning that this concerns a group numbering in the tens of thousands, as opposed to millions of "native" Austrians who, as these same studies show, hold explicit antisemitic prejudices (see also Rabinovici, "Antisemit ist immer nur der Andere" 317).

Since antisemitism can be found across all social milieus in Austria, our interviewees did agree overall that this also applies to Muslims (whether recently immigrated or Austrian-born). Some of the interviewees even voiced what may fairly be called racist views about Muslims, the most explicit being BI 9, who stated most pointedly: "We [i.e., collectively "the Jews"] have already told them [i.e., collectively "the Austrians"] a thousand times, listen, those people [i.e., collectively "the Muslims"] are barbarians, those are people who [. . .] are not ashamed about anything. They will just go around and shoot at everything."

These formulations are interesting not least in that they reflect this interviewee's tacit view that Jews and Muslims are not Austrians and that Austrians, in turn, are ipso facto not Jewish or Muslim. The interviewee, although themselves a first-generation Austrian citizen with Central Asian background, stated explicitly that they and their spouse (an Israeli citizen) are opposed to refugees and new immigrants generally and accused Muslims specifically of "trying to exploit the best they can and to get as many child benefits as possible." This is an unfounded claim and moreover an interesting—though obviously unintended—example of overlap or similarity between different types of hate speech, given the widespread and equally unfounded prejudice, as reported by various other interviewees, that Jews allegedly do not pay taxes in Austria.

In fact, a number of prominent Jewish Austrians—meaning individuals who have a substantial influence on public discourse—have in recent years begun espousing vocally anti-refugee, anti-immigrant, and anti-Muslim positions. Ariel Muzicant, the former president of the IKG in Vienna and current president of the European Jewish Congress, has repeatedly called for curbs on refugees, blaming refugees from Muslim-majority contexts for ostensibly "importing" antisemitism into Austria ("Muzicant fordert Umdenken in der Asylpolitik"). Before his death in 2021, the artist Arik Brauer blamed Muslim immigration for the electoral gains of the far-right FPÖ and even went so far as to say he considered Muslims to be more dangerous to Jews in Austria than neo-Nazis ("Brauer: 'Neuer Antisemitismus mit Flüchtlingen importiert'"). In our expert interviews with the online forum moderators of the daily newspaper *Der Standard* (EI 2, EI 4, and EI 5), the moderators stated not only that anti-

Muslim racism is both more prevalent and more explicit in the newspaper's online comments section than antisemitism but also that non-Jewish Austrian users often justify their own anti-Muslim hate speech by specific recourse to statements made by prominent Jewish Austrians like Muzicant and Brauer. While the concerns of such public Jewish figures may to some extent be justified in light of a string of recent attacks on Jews by extremist Muslims, for example in France and Germany, in the moderators' assessment, the anti-Muslim discourse of prominent Jewish Austrians serves to legitimize and "reinforce" what are fundamentally racist positions of non-Jewish Austrians, ostensibly in the name of opposing antisemitism.

The majority of our interviewees were clearly torn on the issue of Muslims and antisemitism—or simply aware of the complexity of the issue—recognizing that there is a real problem with extremism and antisemitism among parts of the Muslim population in Europe, like among other groups of Europeans, while at the same time recognizing the widespread racism and prejudice directed toward Muslims (thus also reflecting a general trend among Jewish Europeans; see European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA), *Experiences and Perceptions of Antisemitism* 15–17, 20, 54). BI 12 pointed to the experience of growing up as part of a religious minority in Austria and the implicit or explicit societal expectation of having to adapt to the "collective identity" of the majority. The resulting sense of rejection can feed particularist identity models and in the worst case makes young people susceptible to extremism, which in the case of Muslim youths may in turn feed radical antisemitism. This finding has also been voiced by Austrian social workers engaging with youth from "migration backgrounds" (see Wirth) and more generally by scholars in the German context (see Kraft, Freiheit, and Spaiser 228, 238–40). As BI 12 summarized, the conundrum leads to a torn sense of "wanting to be open and tolerant and respectful and get to know people" but at the same time being "automatically a little more defensive" around people "with an obviously Arabic background [. . .] because you don't know how this person will react if you tell them you're Jewish or that you're studying in Israel." Yet the interviewee concluded that the government's "dangerous" policy of "stoking this xenophobia [. . .] achieves nothing" and that politicians would be better advised to ensure that recent immigrants are "integrated" and "feel welcome here and don't isolate themselves," as this only feeds social tensions.

Many of our interviewees showed themselves to be specifically sensitive to anti-refugee discourse because of the "parallels" with their own ancestors'

experiences, as BI 6 pointed out: Their grandfather "also had to pay a smuggler to get out of Austria" just like "desperate" people today "pay a smuggler to get into Austria because all the legal escape routes have been shut down"—an "achievement" that the ÖVP openly boasts about (see Müller). BI 6 pointed specifically to the hypocrisy of right-wing politicians invoking the memory of the Holocaust while collaborating with far-right extremists and implementing policies that endanger refugees (as has been generally criticized in Austria for years; see Rupnow). That many people from the Arab world may harbor antisemitic prejudices, the interviewee concluded, is not a blanket argument for their exclusion from human rights; rather, the situation calls for a nuanced political solution regarding the interrelated issues of asylum and coexistence in a diverse society.

Various interviewees, such as BI 3, were critical of Jewish political organizations like the IKG that reject these historical parallels and that have on occasion (as cited above) supported open or tacit anti-Muslim politics (these interviewees thus also echoed prominent Jewish Austrian critics like Rabinovici, "Obergrenze für Stumpfsinn und Vorurteile"). BI 6 stated that their left-wing Israeli relatives are "horrified" when they visit Austria at how right-wing the IKG is and also that BI 6 is only a member because it is the only official Jewish representative body in Austria. BI 6 stated that they want to have their voice heard and not leave the organization completely up to conservative or right-wing groups within the Jewish population. Numerous interviewees (BI 1, BI 5, BI 8, and BI 9, for example) cited the substantial subsidization of the IKG by successive conservative Austrian governments as an explanation—beyond shared political values[16]—for why the organization aligns itself with and supports the ruling conservatives (this is a matter of public record; see "Regierung erhöht Förderung jüdischen Lebens"). BI 4 pointed to the irony of Jews having migrated to a post-Nazi country with a deep-seated problem with antisemitism only to claim now that they feel more threatened by immigrants than by the homegrown antisemites.

Indeed, the fear actually or allegedly felt by Jews about Muslim refugees and immigrants serves a clear alibi function for the governing (far-)right parties in Austria to justify anti-Muslim prejudices and policies. Compared to the IKG, our interviewees were overall much more critical of the tendency in current public discourse to attribute the problem of antisemitism overwhelmingly to the country's Muslim population. BI 10 interpreted the anti-Muslim rhetoric espoused under the mantle of tackling antisemitism as a transparent attempt by

Austrians with a longer pedigree in this country (meaning with ancestors who may have been Nazis) to "distract from their own antisemitism." Scholars of antisemitism have called this an "externalization" of the issue by the right wing (see Arnold 38). Regarding refugees, BI 6 argued that those who flee oppressive Islamic regimes, for example in Afghanistan or Iran, are "*more* likely not to be so antisemitic," hence it makes no sense to collectively deny them asylum on this basis, as (far-)right politicians are increasingly demanding, even though their own coalition partners are repeatedly found to move in antisemitic neo-Nazi circles (see, for example, "ÖVP Niederösterreich fordert strengere Regeln für Erhalt der Staatsbürgerschaft").

While virtually all interviewees found that antisemitism is a unique phenomenon with an idiosyncratic logic and function, most interviewees were sensitive to the manner in which it intersects with other forms of hate speech, and most found it consequently nonsensical to think one could separate sociopolitical engagements against antisemitism from the struggle against other forms of hate (for a concise summary of this intersection, see Paul 401–15 and more generally Botsch, Glöckner, Kopke, and Spieker). BI 3 went into great detail on the entanglement of antisemitism with conspiracy narratives and the manner in which antisemitism is thus mobilized for other forms of hate and vice versa, citing as a prime example the racist and at the same time antisemitic "Great Replacement" conspiracy narrative espoused in the "manifestos" of racist far-right mass murderers like Anders Breivik, Payton Gendron, and Brenton Tarrant—the latter of whom had documented links with Austrian Identitarians, who are in turn well connected with the FPÖ (see Thalhammer). This narrative, which is gaining increasing momentum among the (far) right, alleges a conspiracy guided by the philanthropist George Soros to "flood" Europe and the United States with immigrants and is thus a clear-cut example of the union between antisemitic and racist hate (see Richardson and Wodak). While BI 3 also stated that antisemitism has "unique characteristics," they did not conclude that it should therefore be treated in isolation. On the contrary, they said, "I cannot oppose antisemitism while tacitly accepting racism and homophobia and xenophobia." BI 1 similarly addressed the confluence of antisemitism and racism in the "Great Replacement" narrative, as well as parallels between antisemitic and anti-Muslim rhetoric in for example the public opposition to the construction of prayer houses, ritual slaughter, circumcision, and religious dress. In the latter context, BI 11 pointed out selective political discrimination already put into practice by reference to Austrian schools

banning head coverings for Muslims but allowing them for Jews (see "Kippa: Ausschussfeststellung 'nicht verbindlich'"). The interviewee regarded this as a clear "exclusion" of Muslims.

The interconnection of multiple forms of bigotry was also addressed in our interview with one of the managers of ZARA, Austria's largest anti-racism NGO (EI 1). EI 1 related that online statements are frequently reported to the NGO containing hate speech that "cuts right across the board, one statement against all vulnerable groups [. . .] against black people, gay people, and Jews, all in one go." While ZARA documents and lobbies against all forms of discrimination, EI 1 pointed to a crass imbalance in the importance attributed to different forms of discrimination by political parties. While EI 1 praised the implementation of a "National Strategy against Antisemitism" in principle, they also criticized the refusal by successive governments to implement a comparable strategy against racism, concluding: "Sorry, but racism is not a sexy topic." Indeed, while successive Austrian governments have not missed an opportunity to congratulate themselves for their proactive initiatives in combating antisemitism—which were originally spurred by European Union directives—they do not mention their total and presumably willful failure to implement parallel European Union directives to combat racism, although this was included in the government program of the recent ÖVP–Green Party coalition (see "Beratungsstelle Zara kritisiert Türkis-Grün wegen fehlenden Plans gegen Rassismus"). That the Green Party–controlled Ministry of the Arts, Culture, the Civil Service, and Sport published its own "Anti-Racism Strategy" in 2024 (*Antirassismus-Strategie*), a laudable but sadly ineffective measure, suggests that the ÖVP as the senior coalition partner never intended to implement such a strategy on the federal level.

Already before the recent election that saw the FPÖ win the largest number of votes, EI 1 pointed to the slim chances of this imbalance changing anytime soon. The status quo, as EI 1 summarized, is that measures are introduced to tackle antisemitism while at the same time remaining "blind" to racism or even actively promoting the discrimination of Muslims. In this context, EI 1 also addressed the "silencing of academics" who speak out about this problem, a clear reference to the case of the Austrian political scientist Farid Hafez, whose work on state-sponsored Islamophobia led to his persecution by the Austrian authorities, after which he felt compelled to move his family to the United States (Hafez, "Die Operation Luxor"). This case was also mentioned

separately by BI 5, who stated that Hafez is "demonized" within "the Jewish community" (presumably meaning the IKG) for his work on Islamophobia.

Overall, our interviewees saw a clear connection between xenophobia, racism, and antisemitism in Austria. Even BI 2 and BI 9, who expressed more or less explicitly anti-Muslim views, both also drew explicit parallels, based on their personal experiences, between the discriminatory treatment of orthodox Jews, including by public officials like police officers, and the treatment of darker-skinned people in Austria—as both represent visually stigmatized and minoritized groups. As one interviewee in the under-eighteen group (GI 1) summarized succinctly:

> I think that Austrian antisemites also often don't like Muslims. I think they generally don't like anything that isn't Austrian or German or European or typically Western. It could be that their hatred of Jews is greater than their racism toward Islam or whatever, but in principle they don't like either side. They are just conservative and don't like anything foreign, if one can call us foreign considering that Jews have lived in Europe for centuries, often probably longer than their ancestors, but whatever.

This view is supported unequivocally by manifold surveys of prejudicial attitudes in Austria and abroad, most recently in a report published in late 2024 by the Documentation Center of Austrian Resistance, Austria's main civil society organization for research on extremism. It found alarming levels of antisemitism, racism, and far-right extremism in Austrian society, with "the majority of respondents viewing a 'comprehensive remigration' as necessary." "Remigration," a term used increasingly by far-right agitators in recent years, is a euphemism for the mass deportation of people with a recent immigrant background, who currently make up about a fifth of the Austrian population. The study even found that the general Austrian population is far more prejudiced toward Muslims, followed by Roma, than against Jews, LGBT people, and non-white people, with around 30 percent believing that Muslims should be barred from entering the country entirely (Kranebitter and Willmann 2, 19, 30). Other studies, like the Leipzig Authoritarianism Studies, demonstrate empirically that antisemitism, xenophobia, racism, homophobia, and so forth are intrinsically connected phenomena and that individuals who hold one pattern of hatred tend to also hold others (Heinrich-Böll-Stiftung and Otto-

Brenner-Stiftung 9–10). As Ruth Wodak also concluded in an influential study on right-wing populism: "racism, antisemitism, xenophobia, homophobia and sexism reinforce each other and converge into one exclusionary nativist belief system" (*The Politics of Fear* 99). Even the tendentious surveys sponsored by the Austrian Parliament concede that "xenophobia, racism, and Islamophobia to some degree go hand in hand with antisemitism (as do homophobia and sexism)" (IFES, *Antisemitismus 2020* 5) and themselves found that Austrian respondents voiced a greater antipathy toward non-white people, Muslims, and Roma than toward Jews (IFES, *Antisemitismus 2022* 71).

Regarding the anti-Muslim policies of successive right-wing governments, BI 10 summarized: "The principle at work here is divide and conquer," playing off Jews as a "good" and "assimilated" minority against Muslims as a "bad" and "unassimilable" minority. When asked what would happen if a future right-wing government hypothetically managed to realize the ludicrous idea of deporting the entire Muslim population, as the far right is loudly demanding, BI 10 answered that Jews would be "next," and cited as evidence a recent propaganda video published by the youth wing of the FPÖ that played on both Nazi and anti-Muslim imagery (see Sager, "Drei rechtsextreme Verschwörungsmythen im Video der FPÖ-Jugend"). This view, that Jews would be "next," was even echoed by interviewees who shared explicitly anti-Muslim views, like BI 9: "Sure. As soon as they [refugees and immigrants] are gone, then it will be our turn again. That's certain. That's our history."

Regarding the ÖVP, which has been a serial enabler of the far right for years now, BI 11 called it a party of "xenophobic right-wing populists" and questioned how, as such, they could seriously be concerned with combating hate, stating that Austria's politicians are "on the one hand very Islamophobic and on the other antisemitic, and they play the one group off against the other." The ÖVP's policy, said BI 11, was to take "a minority that practically no longer exists [i.e., Jews], make them sacrosanct, and then go after a new minority [i.e., Muslims]." The government's rhetoric on antisemitism is thus merely a "politically expedient" tool and has nothing to do with values. As the interviewee concluded powerfully on the politics of antisemitism in contemporary Austria: "The Jews are now being used for some other purpose," specifically to persecute a new minority: "I have noticed this for years now, how we, meaning *we Jews*, are being used."

## Conclusion

A key takeaway from our interview project is that antisemitism not only presents a constant in Austria past and present but is a constitutive feature of Jewish collective identity in the country today. BI 3 for example emphasized their complete lack of religiosity and their ignorance, certainly in younger years, concerning Judaism and Jewish culture and history. Their Jewish identity is thus entirely derived through their grandparents' experience of antisemitic persecution by the Nazi regime and their parents' experience of antisemitic discrimination in the postwar period. BI 3 emphasized that their grandfather, who survived deportation to the Auschwitz extermination camp, "had always been [meaning in his self-identification] an Austrian and not a Jew." Unlike the self-identification especially of religious Jews in Austria, Jewishness to BI 3 and others like them is thus a matter of belonging to a "community of fate" rather than to an active or positive community of culture or faith.

Naturally, such collective and hereditary conceptions of Jewishness are also foundational to antisemitic thought, as BI 2 summarized: "*The Jews* are always perceived as a unit, like an anthill. Always this *you* and *us*." BI 2 finds this thinking particular "threatening," as the consequence is conspiracy narratives about "all Jews being interrelated, that all Jews in Vienna are an organizational unit who are planning something in their synagogues." Such thinking often also entails an assumption, however implicit, that Jews are not only a discrete unit but also a foreign group. BI 6 at one point interrupted our interview because they wanted it noted for the record that they find it unquestioningly antisemitic when non-Jews, regardless of their background, express the view "that Jews are not Austrians," citing a common experience of being asked: "Are you from Israel? Because all Jews [are seen to] come from Israel . . . in Austria." To our question of whether BI 6 felt this also applied to political, media, and academic discourses that proceed from a notion of Jewish "peoplehood" and speak of Jewish belonging to Austrian culture in terms of the narrative of "assimilation," they stated that this reflects an antisemitic trope, too.[17] Indeed, one of the most dangerous secondary effects of the recent escalation in the Israel-Palestine conflict is arguably the retreat—in Europe—into groupist discourses concerning "my people," as found in a recent interview project conducted among Jews in Germany after the October 7 attacks (Chernivsky and Lorenz-Sinai 24).

These findings about Jewish individual and collective identity as well as collective ascriptions to Jews and the implications these have for Jewish be-

longing in Austria can surely also be applied to other minoritized groups in Austria, especially Muslims. Both in Austria and Germany, there has been a massive rise in anti-Muslim hate speech since the October 7 attacks, though this circumstance has received far less political and media attention than the concurrent explosion in antisemitic rhetoric.[18] A 2024 report of the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance noted the explosion of both antisemitic and anti-Muslim rhetoric since the October 7 attacks, yet identified specifically in regard to the latter—in terms that absolutely apply to the Austrian case—"quite a few instances of political and other public discourse mixing aspects of anti-Muslim racism with general xenophobic discourse or using the threat of a so-called Islamisation of European societies, for political gains" (*Annual Report on ECRI's Activities* 10–11). As the reports cited above indicate, anti-Muslim antipathy is currently much more widespread—or certainly more vocal—in Austria and Europe generally than are antisemitic prejudices. Therefore, to privilege policies against one form of hatred over another, never mind playing off one group against the other, is not only insincere; it is dangerous. Apart from anything else, a policy of demonizing social groups and treating them as hostile, unwelcome aliens is hardly conducive to combating isolationism and extremism.

While antisemitism can be found in all social milieus, the Federal Office for the Protection of the Constitution in Germany found in 2024 that "right-wing extremism" still poses "the greatest threat" to Jewish Germans today (Piepenbrink 3). There is no indication that the situation is any different in Austria, where far-right extremists were recently on the verge of taking the reins of power for the first time since Hitler, whose legacy Herbert Kickl invokes repeatedly (see Sulzbacher). Like other (far-)right parties in Europe, the FPÖ, which continues to poll in first place ahead of all other political parties in Austria, has openly embraced the racist "remigration" ideology of the Identitarians, which has taken the "us-them" discourse typical of right-wing populism to new extremes (see Wodak, "Rechtspopulistische Diskursverschiebungen" 32). While Jews are presently treated by the Austrian right—at least on the surface—as part of an Austrian "us" that is threatened by a Muslim "them," all of our interviewees expressed a clear awareness that Jews could quickly find themselves on the "them" side again (see Labendz 340–41; Hafez, "From 'Jewification' to 'Islamization'").

A sincere engagement with religious and cultural diversity in Austria and Europe would include Muslims in public discourse and not exclude them, as

happens paradigmatically in the German-speaking world in the framework of a so-called "Christian-Jewish dialogue" established in the aftermath of the Holocaust (see Nagel and Peretz). In Austrian politics, media, and academia, there is currently a lot of chatter about Muslims, including rhetoric about "Muslim antisemitism," yet notably, Muslims themselves rarely feature as agents or speakers in their own right, whether as community representatives, academics, or members of the Austrian public. This also means that Muslims are rarely given an opportunity, whether individually or collectively, to respond to accusations routinely made about antisemitism within Muslim population groups—groups that are not only numerous but also internally diverse, consisting of native Austrians, recent immigrants, and temporary refugees, as well as many individuals categorized as "Muslims" who may in fact be secular or nonreligious. Much of this discourse can consequently be criticized as fallacious reasoning according to the "ten rules for rational dispute and constructive arguing" established in the field of discourse analysis, specifically the rule "that non-present third parties affected by the issue in question may advance and question standpoints as well" (Reisigl 79–80, 83).

While the focus of our project lay specifically on the reception of public discourse on antisemitism among Jewish Austrians, a similar charge may be leveled against us for not focusing on the interrelated problems of Islamophobic discourse and its reception among Muslims in Austria. It can only be hoped that sincere initiatives will be taken in future to remedy this lopsided public discourse—without allowing academic research to serve covertly as a tool for hateful, exclusionary ideologies, as is currently sometimes the case. As scholars and critics routinely point out, Jews coexisted harmoniously for centuries among Muslim-majority populations while their coreligionists were being persecuted by Christians in Europe (see, for example, Melzer 144, 202). This fact could be taught in Austria's schools by way of showing that there is another way to coexist than in ostensibly perpetual conflict: Israel/Palestine need not serve as the template for Muslim and Jewish collective identification in Austria. Indeed, there have in recent years been initiatives to bridge the social divides between Muslims and Jews that Austria's (far-)right politicians seem so invested in deepening, such as the project "Muslim:innen gegen Antisemitismus" (see Muslimische Jugend Österreich) and, following October 7, "Standing Together Vienna" (see Frey and Sayegh). It would be beneficial if politicians, journalists, and scholars gave such initiatives more of the oxygen that they are currently pumping into reproducing hate speech.

In a recent volume on the entanglement of post-Holocaust and postcolonial memory cultures, the Israeli sociologist Natan Sznaider made an astute observation: "If human rights do not apply to all humans, then they are not human rights" (*Fluchtpunkte der Erinnerung* 16). Following a similar logic, Ruth Wodak argued that the only real solution to divisive and hate-inspiring right-wing populism is to cultivate a political agenda based not on groupist ideology but on "equality, diversity and solidarity" (*The Politics of Fear* 188). Perhaps, then, the only criterion for "belonging in Austria" worth defending is respect for the constitution and human rights—if everyone can agree on this, then it does not matter where one comes from, what creed one follows, what color one is, or what group one belongs to. Conversely, whoever does not respect the constitution and human rights—regardless of how long they or their ancestors have lived in this country—does not deserve the benefits of living in a liberal democracy.

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**Notes**

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2. On migration to Austria generally, see Bischof and Rupnow. For a comparative overview of Jewish and Muslim history in Austria specifically, see Nasr and Corbett.

3. The "Islamophobia" concept is problematic in several senses. It is used in this article as shorthand for prejudices against Muslims; on its pitfalls, see Pfahl-Traughber.

4. For a concise volume on discourse theory, see Hart and Cap.

5. For a recent publication showcasing firsthand Jewish experiences of antisemitism in contemporary Vienna, see Wodak, *Das kann immer noch in Wien passieren*.

6. On this, see Klenk; for a rare critical voice, see Maan.

7. On this, see "Medienpolitik sollte Demokratiepolitik sein"; on problematic recent developments in media discourse more generally, see Precht and Welzer.

8. The most recent to be published is IFES, *Antisemitismus 2022*. The 2024 report is set to be published in the spring of 2025.

9. All reports, the most recent covering the first half of 2024, can be accessed under "Antisemitismus Meldestelle," https://www.antisemitismus-meldestelle.at/berichte.

10. For example in IFES, *Sekundäranalyse der Antisemitismusstudie 2018*, 5. The working definition can be viewed on the IHRA website: "Working Definition of Antisemitism," https://holocaustremembrance.com/resources/working-definition-antisemitism.

11. The main, but not the only alternative, to the IHRA definition is the so-called Jerusalem Declaration. See "Jerusalem Declaration on Antisemitism," https://jerusalemdeclaration.org/; see also Haury.

12. The most prominent instance of this is Engel's "Away from a Definition of Antisemitism," which in 2022 became the subject of a forum debate in the journal *Shofar*; see also Dynner.

13. *Likrat* is a Hebrew term meaning "approaching one another." The project involves training young members of the Jewish community to visit schools to speak with non-Jewish peers in order to familiarize them with Judaism and Jews and, thereby, to deconstruct stereotypes and stigmas. See the project website for more information: https://www.ikg-wien.at/Likrat.

14. This was also found in a Europe-wide study conducted in 2018. European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA), *Experiences and Perceptions of Antisemitism*, 48.

15. This is also attested to by the IKG reports on antisemitism, for example Israelitische Kultusgemeinde Wien, *Antisemitische Vorfälle 2023* 10–11. This also correlates with Europe-wide findings. See European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA), *Experiences and Perceptions of Antisemitism* 15, 22; European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA), *Young Jewish Europeans* 23.

16. See for example the anti-Muslim, anti-refugee platform given to former Chancellor Sebastian Kurz (ÖVP) by the current president of the IKG, Oskar Deutsch. Kurz, "Den sozialen Frieden sichern," esp. 127–31.

17. This is a point that is also made in scholarship on the culture of memory in Austria regarding the history of antisemitism and the Holocaust. See for example Ash 78.

18. On Germany, see Arnold and Kiefer, "Instrumentalisierte Feindschaften," 25–28. On Austria, see the annual reports of the Dokustelle Islamfeindlichkeit und antimuslimischer Rassismus, especially "Besorgniserregender Anstieg an Meldungen von Antimuslimischem Rassismus."

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## Appendix

### List of interviews:

Biographical Interview 1 (BI 1, conducted July 21, 2023)

Biographical Interview 2 (BI 2, conducted July 24, 2023)

Biographical Interview 3 (BI 3, conducted July 24, 2023)

Biographical Interview 4 (BI 4, conducted August 4, 2023)

Biographical Interview 5 (BI 5, conducted September 20, 2023)

Biographical Interview 6 (BI 6, conducted September 25, 2023)

Biographical Interview 7 (BI 7, conducted September 26, 2023)

Biographical Interview 8 (BI 8, conducted October 4, 2023)

Biographical Interview 9 (BI 9, conducted October 13, 2023)

Biographical Interview 10 (BI 10, conducted October 13, 2023)

Biographical Interview 11 (BI 11, conducted October 16, 2023)

Biographical Interview 12 (BI 12, conducted October 17, 2023)

Group Interview 1 (GI 1, conducted February 19, 2024)

Group Interview 2 (GI 2, conducted February 19, 2024)

Expert Interview 1 (EI 1, conducted September 19, 2023)

Expert Interview 2 (EI 2, conducted October 10, 2023)

Expert Interview 3 (EI 3, conducted October 18, 2023)

Expert Interview 4 (EI 4, conducted January 11, 2024)

Expert Interview 5 (EI 5, conducted January 11, 2024)

### Summary of biographical interview questions:

Please tell us about your biographical background and your family. Are you religious? What makes you Jewish, and how do your experiences with antisemitism inform your Jewish identity?

Do you publicly present yourself as Jewish (online or offline), for example through symbols or imagery? When you went to school and/or university, did your peers know that you are Jewish?

What experiences have you had with antisemitism in your lifetime? Do you think antisemitic attitudes have changed in either quantity or quality in recent years?

How do you react to antisemitic statements, whether in person or online? How do other peers or bystanders react to antisemitic statements? What impact does antisemitism have on you personally and your social interactions?

There are currently hefty discussions concerning the definition of antisemitism. What do you think characterizes antisemitism in Austria, and does it differ in other international contexts?

Do you think antisemitism is specific to certain social groups and/or do antisemitic attitudes differ between certain social groups?

The political climate, including the public debate about antisemitism, has changed markedly in Austria in recent years. What are your thoughts on this? As a Jew, how do you feel about the fact that certain individuals or groups claim to hold epistemological authority when it comes to defining or identifying antisemitism?

In Austria and elsewhere, the public debate around antisemitism is increasingly going hand in hand with changes in democratic practice, for example with events being protested or even canceled and certain groups being played off against one another. What are your thoughts on this development?

How do you think antisemitism relates to other forms of discrimination? Do you think it is possible to discuss antisemitism without at the same time addressing other forms of discrimination and fundamental democratic principles?

How do debates about antisemitism relate to other topics like immigration and asylum, the Middle East conflict, postcolonialism, and the rise of the radical right?

Are you a member of the IKG? If yes, what does this membership mean to you? Do you find that this organization adequately represents your interests and values? Are you a member of any other Jewish or civil society organizations?

How do you regard the recent rapprochement between the IKG and the ÖVP, and the IKG's positions toward political issues like the Middle East conflict?

What do you think could be done to combat antisemitism? Which measures are working, which are failing, what could be promoted better? How do you think societal cohesion and democratic discourse generally could be improved?

**Summary of group interview questions:**

What social media do you use? Where do you inform yourself about current events? Do you also engage in offline communication with peers?

How do you perceive the debate culture online? What are your experiences with antisemitism online and offline? How do you react to instances of antisemitism?

How has your experience with antisemitism online and offline changed since October 7?

Are there certain contexts in which hate speech frequently occurs, whether or not these contexts relate to Jews?

**Summary of expert interview questions:**

What characterizes contemporary antisemitism in Austria? Does antisemitism differ in quantity or quality between different social groups?

What role does the internet and do social media play in qualitative changes to and the quantitative dissemination of antisemitic attitudes today? Is hate speech online substantially different from hate speech in analog life?

Some politicians and parties proclaim to oppose antisemitism while collaborating with other politicians and parties with outspoken antisemitic tendencies. In your experience, what impact has this had on public discourse? In what ways does political discourse concerning antisemitism sometimes serve the perpetuation of other forms of discrimination, like Islamophobia?

What forms of hate speech do you perceive in online discourse in Austria and in what relative frequency do these occur? How does antisemitism relate to other forms of hate speech and discrimination? Is it possible to address antisemitism without addressing other forms of discrimination?

How has hate speech online changed in quantity or quality since October 7?

What can constructively be done to combat antisemitism and foster social cohesion and democratic values?