



Texas Holocaust, Genocide, and  
Antisemitism Advisory Commission

# STUDY ON ANTISEMITISM IN TEXAS

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**PREPARED FOR THE 2023 LEGISLATURE**

**SUBMITTED TO:**

Gov. Greg Abbott

Lt. Gov. Dan Patrick

House Speaker Dade Phelan

Members of the Texas Legislature

# Letter from the Chair and Executive Director

November 1, 2022

**Dear Gov. Abbott, Lt. Gov. Patrick, and Speaker Phelan,**

As we submit this Study on Antisemitism to you in the closing months of 2022, Jews around Texas, the United States, and the world are — once again — dealing with a rising scourge of hate.

During the past few weeks, rapper Kanye West has targeted “Jewish media” and “Jewish Zionists” for alleged misdeeds and vowed to go “death con 3 on JEWISH PEOPLE.” Many individuals, groups, and businesses quickly condemned him. But others were slow to distance themselves from the hate. And some have shown outright support by posting messages that “Kanye was right about the Jews” over freeways and football stadiums from California to Florida.

That particular controversy will probably be “yesterday’s news” when lawmakers review this Study on Antisemitism during the 2023 legislative session. But there will undoubtedly be new, equally hateful, and dangerous episodes of antisemitism in the headlines, perhaps even from Texas. This has been true for 2,000 years — and the trend has grown worse in the past few years.

In the past 18 months, Texans have watched in horror and fought back as a synagogue was set on fire, a rabbi and his congregants were held hostage during Shabbat services, and Jewish college students were targeted for their support for Israel.

You and your fellow state leaders identified and understood this dangerous escalation of antisemitism in the last legislative session when you reconstituted the Texas Holocaust and Genocide Commission as the Texas Holocaust, Genocide, and Antisemitism Advisory Commission (THGAAC).

That legislation built on your previous leadership in combatting hatred against Jews. Through a 2017 state law that you supported and signed, Texas was already leading the national fight against the anti-Israel Boycott, Divestments and Sanctions (BDS) movement. And the Governor’s Office has distributed \$9 million in federal security grants since 2019. This money has directly helped Jewish institutions harden their security infrastructures and protect themselves.

In establishing THGAAC last year, you charged our commission to “help identify and root out antisemitism and ensure that all Texans are able to exercise their religious freedom without fear.” You also mandated us to submit this Study on Antisemitism every two years.

**It has been an honor for us to work with the other dedicated THGAAC commissioners and staff members these past few months to research and write this Study and to develop eight recommendations to raise awareness and fight hatred against Jews throughout Texas.**

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As you read the report and recommendations, you will see that the normalization of antisemitism in our communities draws on centuries-old tropes about Jewish greed, control, and influence, which have taken root across ideologies and sectors of society.

On the far left, critics of Israel hold the Jewish state to a different standard than all other nations in the world — and hold all Jewish people accountable for what they see as Israel's flaws. On college campuses, in particular, these critics have nurtured an expectation that supporters of any progressive cause adopt an anti-Israel ideology that is rooted in antisemitism. They have made opposition to Israel and Jews a litmus test for activism.

Globally, radical Islamists who deny Israel's very existence actively foment hatred of Jews. They make their case through age-old and deceitful tropes about Jewish power and lies. This fall, the president of Iran cast doubt on the Holocaust hours before he spoke at the United Nations.

And in Europe and North America, white supremacists and nationalists who say Jews are at the root of all of the world's ills are more emboldened than ever, often feeling they have license from their leaders to voice their hate publicly. This manifests itself in rallies, hate crimes, and ugly anti-Jewish demonstrations and in belief systems like the Great Replacement Theory.

These trends have emerged at a moment when information — and misinformation — is easier than ever to share and when hate groups can quickly build audiences and allies online. As Dallas Mavericks owner Mark Cuban recently said, "I'm Jewish. I've dealt with antisemitism my entire life — and it's only increased exponentially via social media."

Sadly, we have even seen this antisemitism infiltrate the U.S. Congress, where some members have issued screeds about Jewish money, dual loyalties, and conspiracies and fought over a measure condemning antisemitism.

Under your leadership, the Texas Legislature has the opportunity to remain an example for the nation in coming together to recognize, understand, and fight antisemitism. We hope this Study of Antisemitism provides a guide for you to build on your long-standing commitment to educating Texans and rooting out this hatred.

THGAAC stands ready to support and advise you as you review this report and assess our recommendations. We are available as a resource to help you and your constituents better understand the scourge of antisemitism and fight back against the increased hatred that is targeting Texas' Jewish communities.

Respectfully submitted,



Kenneth E. Goldberg,  
Chair



Joy Nathan,  
Executive Director

Texas Holocaust, Genocide, and Antisemitism Advisory Commission



# TABLE OF CONTENTS

OVERVIEW	1
RECOMMENDATIONS	4
THE TEXAS JEWISH COMMUNITY	6
UNDERSTANDING ANTISEMITISM	8
SUPPLEMENTAL INFORMATION	12
ABOUT AND ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	23

Charts and data in this study:		
Texas Incidents Reported to Secure Community Network Duty Desk	pg. 2	Jewish Population by States pg. 6
Federal Security Grants Awarded by Texas Governor to Texas Jewish Institutions	pg. 2	Jewish Population of Texas Compared to Neighboring States pg. 6
Antisemitic incidents in Texas, 2018-2021	pg. 3	Top 10 states by Volume of Antisemitic Mentions on Social Media pg. 7
Hate Crimes Directed at Religious Communities, U.S. – 2019	pg. 3	Social Media Mentions Around Key Incidents pg. 7
Jewish Populations in Texas Metro Areas, 1960 - 2020	pg. 6	Public Sentiments on Antisemitism pg. 11

Cover page art — Smoke damage at Congregation Beth Israel - Austin, Source: John Gusky KVUE

Left – Front page of Der Stürmer, a Nazi publication, showing a cartoon depicting Jews as instigators of rebellion, June 1934.



# OVERVIEW

## Creation of THGAAC

In 2021, the 87th Texas Legislature reconstituted the Texas Holocaust and Genocide Commission to become the Texas Holocaust, Genocide, and Antisemitism Advisory Commission (THGAAC) to “help identify and root out antisemitism and ensure that all Texans are able to exercise their religious freedom without fear.”

“In recent years, instances of antisemitic activity in the United States have increased,” the authors of House Bill 3257 noted in their bill analysis.

They explained that American Jews, including the nearly 200,000 Jewish Texans, are “at a greater risk of being subjected to hate crimes than any other faith group in this country” and wrote:

As the First Amendment to the United States Constitution guarantees freedom of religion, it is important that the state do all that it can to help identify and root out antisemitism and ensure that all Texans are able to exercise their religious freedom without fear.

The legislation directed the newly reconstituted commission to submit a Study on Antisemitism to the Governor, Lieutenant Governor, Speaker of the House, and all lawmakers in advance of the 88th legislative session in 2023 and then every two years in advance of subsequent legislative sessions. The study will use the International Holocaust Remembrance Association (IHRA) definition of antisemitism.

THGAAC’s charge also included working in public and private spheres to raise awareness of antisemitism. In creating the THGAAC, lawmakers directed the commission to:

Smoke damage at Congregation  
Beth Israel - Austin,  
Source: @AustinFireInfo, Twitter

... provide advice and assistance to public and private primary and secondary schools and institutions of higher education in this state regarding methods of combating antisemitism.

That mission includes ensuring public schools have the necessary materials to teach students most effectively during the state-mandated Holocaust Remembrance Week each January.

## Increased need for THGAAC

Events of the past 18 months show the increased need for THGAAC's work.

The data and reports THGAAC reviewed and the interviews it conducted for this study demonstrate that during the 18 months since the Legislature approved HB 3257, antisemitic incidents have grown more frequent and more extreme in Texas. This reflects a national and global trend as hate can spread more easily than ever through social media and other online channels.

The trend accelerated even before Gov. Greg Abbott formally signed the measure into law on June 16, 2021. The war that spring between Israel and Hamas, a group recognized as a terrorist organization by the U.S. government, among many others, prompted an uptick in attacks on Jews in the U.S. and worldwide. "Attacks against Jews in the last few weeks have escalated to the world's worst spate of anti-Semitic violence since World War II," the Simon Wiesenthal Center, a Jewish global human rights organization, wrote at that time.

Since then, the Secure Community Network (SCN), the official safety and security organization of the Jewish community in North America, reported that incidents against the Jewish community in Texas more than doubled between 2020 and 2021. And the Anti-Defamation League tracked 95 incidents in Texas in 2021, up from 23 two years earlier.

Both groups see evidence that the numbers are even higher in 2022. They attribute that to increased antisemitic incidents as well as a greater awareness within the Jewish community about the need to report them to authorities.

## Key incidents

Some recent incidents in Texas include:

- In Colleyville in January, a gunman demanding the freedom of a Muslim extremist with links to Al Qaeda held hostage a rabbi and his congregants during Shabbat (Sabbath) services for 10 hours. The standoff ended when the rabbi used the security training he had received from SCN to throw a chair at the attacker and break free. The FBI, at first, did not acknowledge that this attack was antisemitic.
- In Austin in October 2021, a synagogue was set on fire in an incident linked to a man with white supremacist beliefs, causing hundreds of thousands of dollars in damage to the sanctuary and building. The congregation has continued to worship in its parking lot, social hall, and other locations.

## Texas Incidents Reported to Secure Community Network Duty Desk

2020	14
2021	33
<b>2022</b>	<b>*60</b>

\*Through September 13

Source: Secure Community Network

## Federal Security Grants Awarded by Texas Governor to Texas Jewish Institutions

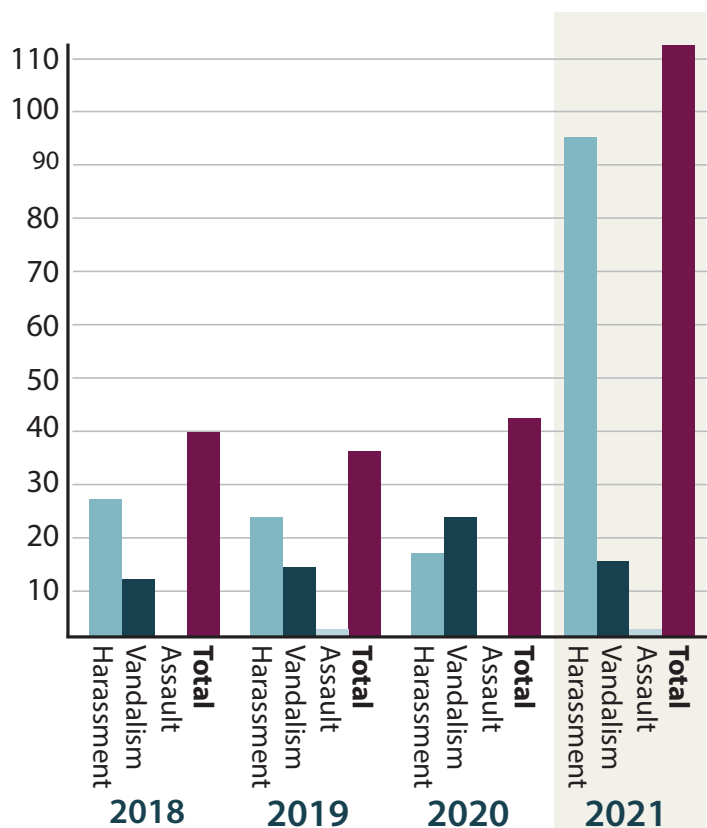
Fiscal Year	No. of Grants	Total Amount
2019	16	\$2.1M
2020	12	\$1.2M
2021	18	\$1.7M
2022	28	\$4.0M
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>74</b>	<b>\$9.0M</b>

Source: Office of the Governor

- On college campuses, students have been targeted and harassed for their support of Israel, sometimes by backers of the anti-Israel Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) movement. These included an unprecedented effort by anti-Israel students at one Texas university to erase the internationally accepted IHRA definition of antisemitism from use by Student Government. That definition recognizes the inherent antisemitism of many condemnations of Israel.
- In Houston in the summer of 2021, a Holocaust museum that condemned antisemitism and called for solidarity with the Jewish people after Hamas' war with Israel was itself falsely attacked for promoting hate. Local artists and other critics posted anti-Israel and antisemitic messages on the museum's social media pages and boycotted their collaborations with the museum.
- Throughout the state, neighborhoods with sizable Jewish communities have been blanketed with banners bearing swastikas and anti-Jewish graffiti, and had rocks and flyers thrown into yards that blame Jews for the spread of COVID-19 and promote other antisemitic tropes. These acts have often been perpetrated by an out-of-state group that has expanded its activities in Texas.
- Several episodes in K-12 education highlighted a sense of "othering" that Jewish students sometimes feel. These included school districts reviewing whether specific Holocaust-related books, such as a graphic adaptation of Anne Frank's *The Diary of a Young Girl*, should remain in libraries and a local school leader suggesting that "opposing" views of the Holocaust be taught. The districts did not ultimately make these changes and sometimes used the episodes as an opportunity to increase education — but the discussion itself raised deep concerns for Texas' Jews.

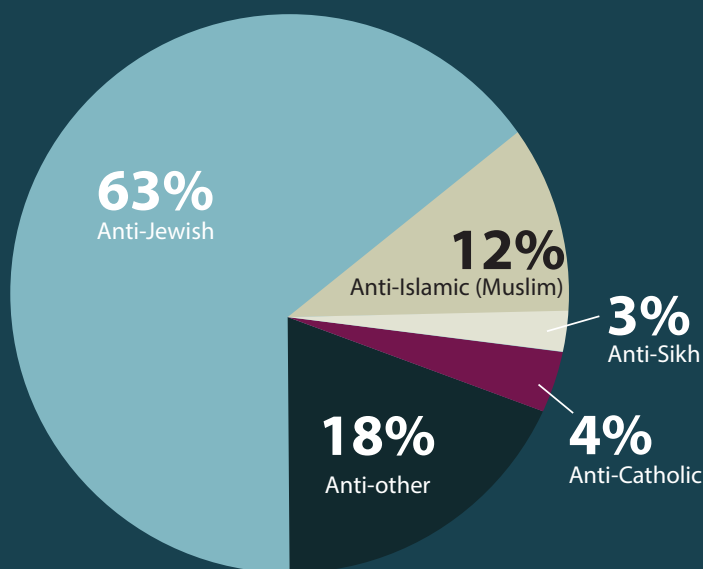
As lawmakers review the data and episodes cited in this study, they should assess the eight accompanying recommendations to promote awareness, improve security, and fight back against hate.

## Antisemitic incidents in Texas



Source: Anti-Defamation League

## Hate Crimes Directed at Religious Communities, U.S. – 2019



Source: FBI





# RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on this study of antisemitism in Texas, the Texas Holocaust, Genocide, and Antisemitism Advisory Commission has developed a series of recommendations to continue fighting hatred and raising awareness statewide. These recommendations fall into two categories:

- Recommendations that can be implemented by THGAAC in its advisory role
- Recommendations that will require legislative support and action



## To be implemented by THGAAC

- 1. Antisemitism training at universities:** THGAAC will be available to advise Texas' public universities and university systems on training opportunities for senior and mid-level administrators around issues related to antisemitism, including the antisemitic roots of many anti-Israel and BDS efforts on campus.
- 2. Expanded Holocaust education:** THGAAC will strengthen the statewide promotion of Holocaust Remembrance Week so it is more fully integrated into the curricula in public schools. As part of this effort, THGAAC would be available to advise the State Board of Education (SBOE) and school districts in developing curricula, selecting textbooks, identifying speakers, and ensuring Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS) align with the state's commitment to Holocaust, genocide, and antisemitism education.
- 3. IHRA Definition:** THGAAC will be available to advise public universities, counties, and other government agencies on incorporating the IHRA definition of antisemitism into training and other educational materials. This guidance would provide clarity about what constitutes antisemitism so employees and students are mindful of these harmful words, tropes, and sentiments while exercising their free expression.
- 4. Holocaust-related books:** THGAAC will be available to provide education and guidance to school districts to help ensure that important books about the Holocaust, genocide, and antisemitism are available to families and students. This guidance will be consistent with efforts by the Texas Education Agency (TEA) and the Texas State Library and Archives Commission (TSLAC) to develop statewide standards for content in Texas public schools, including school libraries.
- 5. Increased connections to law enforcement:** THGAAC will be available to educate and advise police departments on the importance of reporting hate crime statistics to the FBI in an effort to fully track and understand the reach of antisemitism. It will also work with the Governor's Public Safety Office (PSO) to build on its highly successful partnerships with local law enforcement, the Secure Community Network, and security leaders for individual Jewish communities by establishing regular meetings so these groups continually remain in touch with one another, even when there is no pending crisis.

## Requiring Legislative Action

- 6. Create a grant program:** Through the Governor's Public Safety Office (PSO) establish grants to help religious organizations, schools, and community centers harden their security infrastructures, similar to the federal Nonprofit Security Grant Program. Several other states already provide this support for religious communities through state-level grants.
- 7. BDS on college campuses:** Consider legislation to prohibit a state-funded college or university — or its academic or administrative units — from implementing an academic boycott that would deprive students or faculty members of the ability to study or conduct research in or about a foreign country or to interact with its scholars or representatives. Universities or their units could continue to support boycotts if the target is a foreign country that is a state sponsor of terrorism, as defined by the U.S. Department of State, or a nation where the security or safety of students and faculty would be at risk.

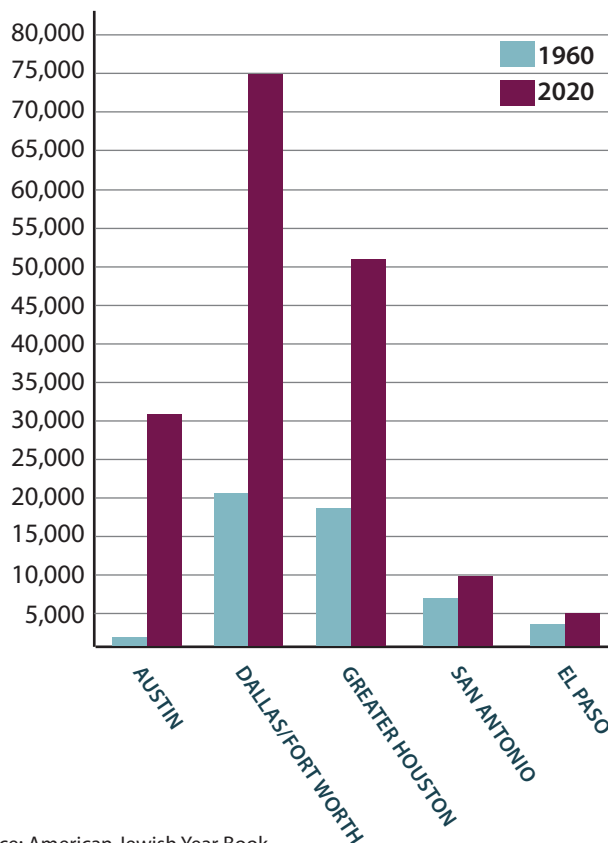
Such a measure would focus on the actions of state institutions and would not infringe on the free expression of individual Texans. It would bolster existing state law around BDS and align with other state efforts to fight hatred of Israel, which is often fueled by antisemitism. The prohibition would be implemented locally on individual campuses by university or university system leaders.

- 8. Legislative awareness:** Schedule "listening tours" during the interim for lawmakers to speak with THGAAC, local educators, and museum officials to better understand their needs and questions around Holocaust and antisemitism education.

# The Texas Jewish Community

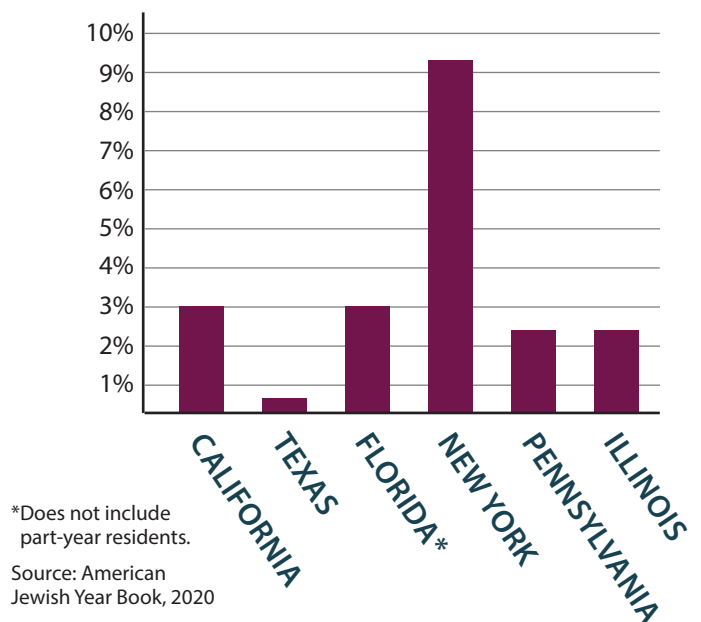
Texas had approximately  
**176,000 Jewish residents**  
in 2020

**Jewish populations in most Texas metro areas have increased dramatically since 1960**



Source: American Jewish Year Book and Jewish community websites

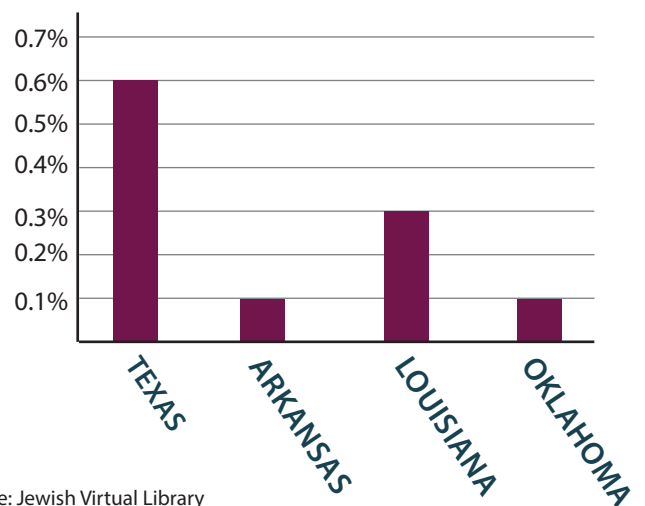
**Jewish population share in the most populated states, 2019**



\*Does not include part-year residents.

Source: American Jewish Year Book, 2020

**Jewish population of Texas compared to neighboring states**



Source: Jewish Virtual Library

# Social media spreading hate

THGAAC asked the Foundation to Combat Antisemitism (a group founded by philanthropist Robert Kraft) to analyze social media traffic in Texas and other states.

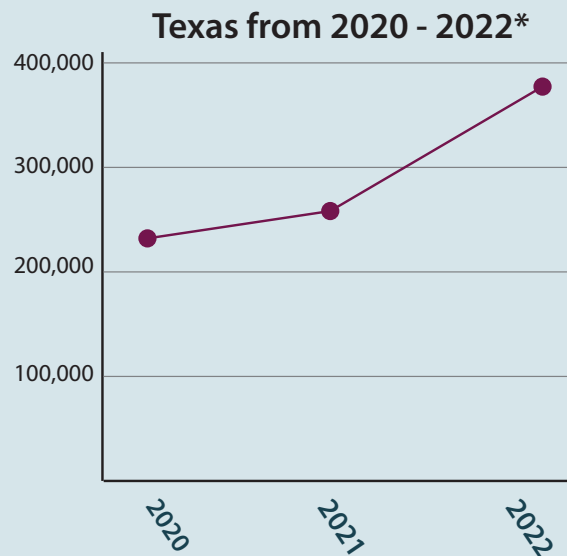
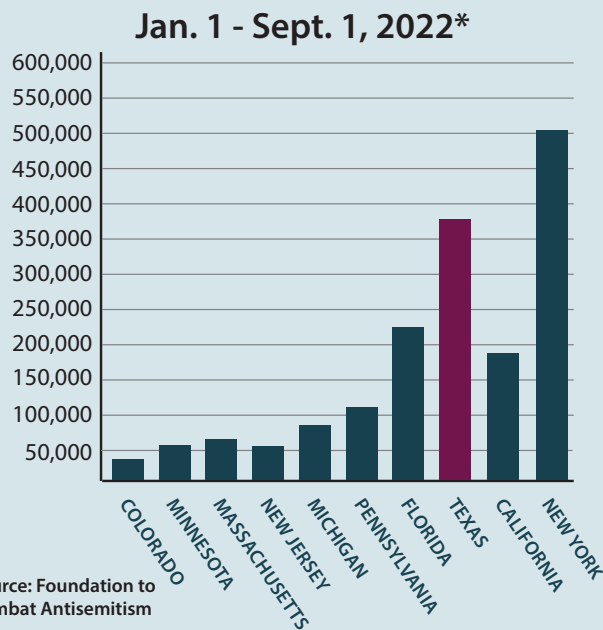
By searching for specific keywords and phrases, the group was able to identify posts about antisemitism, including those fueled by hate and those commenting on or pushing back against the hate. Because of

the large study size, which analyzes millions of data points, it is impossible to determine how much of the traffic was “negative” or “positive.” But the analysis shows that discussions of antisemitism are driving social media conversations in Texas more than in previous years — and more than in 48 other states. These conversations spiked around specific episodes that drew widespread attention.

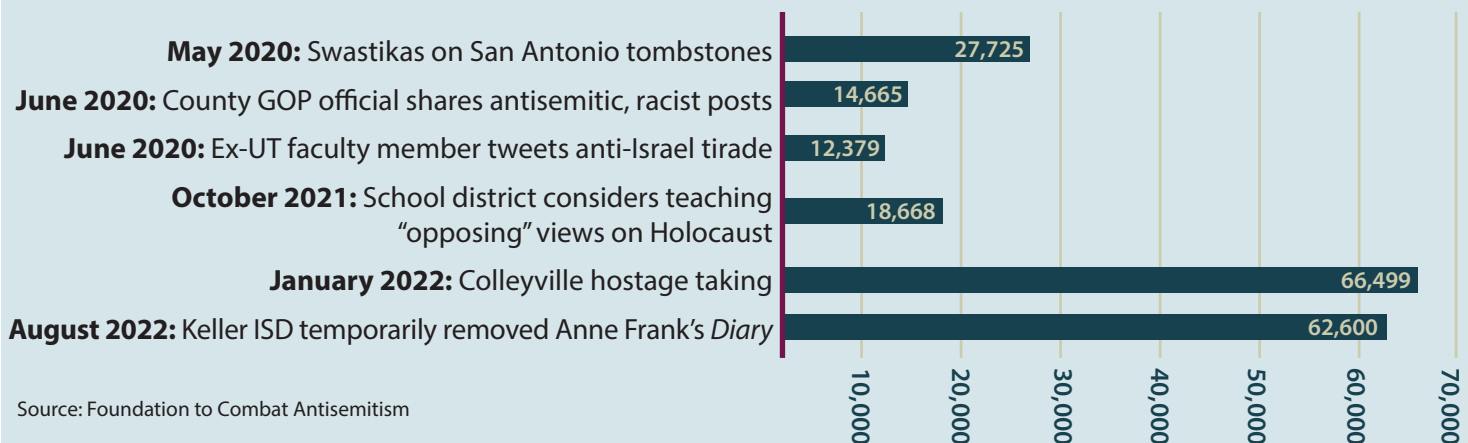
*“It used to be that kids who said antisemitic garbage learned it at home. That’s not the case anymore. They hear it online and from social media, and from public officials.”*

— Texas ADL

## Volume of Social Media Conversations Related to Antisemitism Top 10 States by Volume of Antisemitic Mentions on Social Media



## Social Media Mentions around Key Incidents





The Eternal Jew,  
a 1940 Nazi Propaganda film

## UNDERSTANDING ANTISEMITISM

With Jews comprising less than 1% of the state's population, many Texans may be unaware of the discrimination, hate, and "othering" that Jewish people increasingly face. As the Legislature works to combat the growing problem, it's crucial to establish a common understanding of what "antisemitism" means and its historical roots.

At its core, antisemitism is the hatred, hostility, distrust, alienation, and oppression of Jewish people and groups just because they are Jewish. It has existed for more than 2,000 years and has manifested throughout history — and in contemporary times — through beliefs as well as behavior. It has its own unique features and history that differentiate it from other forms of bigotry.

- Antisemitism frequently relies on centuries-old tropes about Jews controlling the media, global finances, and education and unleashing all problems that exist in the world.
- It draws from hateful and untrue stereotypes about Jewish greed and dishonesty and visual caricatures of large-nosed or horned people.
- Many incidents of antisemitism were historically rooted in theological teachings in the Christian world, which for centuries blamed Jews for murdering Jesus Christ.
- Modern antisemitism demonizes Israel as the incarnation of evil, rejects centuries-old Jewish ties to the land, and falsely paints Zionists as "colonizers" of Muslim lands.

### IHRA Definition

THGAAC uses the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) definition of antisemitism, which has also been adopted by the U.S. State Department and other nations.

*"Antisemitism is a certain perception of Jews, which may be expressed as hatred toward Jews. Rhetorical and physical manifestations of antisemitism are directed toward Jewish or non-Jewish individuals and/or their property, toward Jewish community institutions and religious facilities."*



## Hatred of Israel

The IHRA recognizes that “Manifestations (of antisemitism) might include the targeting of the state of Israel, conceived as a Jewish collectivity. However, criticism of Israel similar to that leveled against any other country cannot be regarded as antisemitic.”

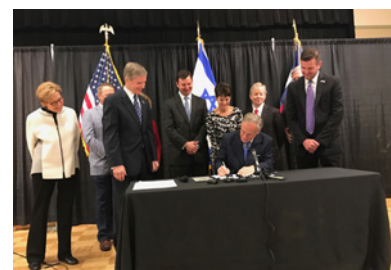
So what’s the difference between legitimate critiques of Israeli policy and antisemitism that targets the world’s only Jewish state? Human rights activist Natan Sharansky has three criteria to answer that question.

Sharansky, who was jailed by the Soviet Union for nine years after he requested to emigrate to Israel, went on to become a minister in the Israeli government and chair of the Institute for the Study of Global Antisemitism and Policy. He developed the **3D test to identify antisemitism that is intertwined with criticism of Israel**.

**Demonization** — Jews have been demonized for centuries as the embodiment of evil. Today we must take note when the Jewish state or its leaders are being demonized, with their actions blown out of all rational proportion. Comparisons of Israelis to Nazis are clearly antisemitic. They either are deliberately ignorant regarding Nazi Germany or deliberately depict modern-day Israel as the embodiment of evil.

**Double standards** — We must ask whether criticism of Israel is being applied selectively and whether similar policies pursued by other governments produce similar criticism. It is antisemitic discrimination when Israel is singled out for condemnation for perceived human rights abuses while proven obliterated of human rights on a massive scale — such as China, Iran, and Saudi Arabia — are not even mentioned.

**Delegitimization** — Traditionally, antisemites denied the legitimacy of the Jewish religion, the Jewish people, or both. Today, they attempt to deny the Jewish state’s legitimacy and right to exist, presenting it as a remnant of imperialist colonialism. If other peoples have the right to live securely in their homelands, the Jewish people also have that right.



*In 2017, Gov. Greg Abbott signed House Bill 89, known as the Anti-BDS (Boycott, Divestments and Sanctions) bill, which prohibits all state agencies from contracting with, and certain public funds from investing in, companies that boycott Israel. It is one of the strongest anti-BDS laws in the nation.*

## Boycott, Divestments and Sanctions (BDS) as a Tool of Antisemitism

BDS is a global campaign that has gained momentum on many U.S. college campuses. It calls for boycotts, divestment, and sanctions against Israel on economic, cultural, and academic fronts. Its inherent antisemitism is evident in multiple ways, as documented by the group Stand With Us:

- BDS singles out Israel alone for boycotts while ignoring the world’s worst human rights violators.
- BDS places all pressure to end the conflict on Israel while failing to hold Palestinian leaders accountable for promoting hatred, incitement, and terrorism.
- A leading BDS activist has openly stated, “The real aim of BDS is to bring down the state of Israel... Justice and freedom for Palestinians are incompatible with the existence of the state of Israel.”



## Notable Antisemitic Conspiracy Theories

*(Adapted from the Anti-Defamation League)*

**Dual Loyalty** alleges that Jews are disloyal neighbors or citizens because their true allegiance is to their coreligionists around the world, to a secret and immoral Jewish agenda, or to Israel.

**New World Order** conspiracists believe a tyrannical, socialist “one-world” conspiracy has taken over the world and schemes to eliminate the last bastion of freedom, the United States, with the help of collaborators within the government.

**Great Replacement Theory** has made its way from white supremacist corners into the mainstream with claims that native white, Christian Europeans are being replaced in their countries by non-white immigrants and blaming Jews for the immigration. The mass shooter at a Walmart in El Paso in 2019 referenced the great replacement.

**“Protocols of the Elders of Zion”** was originally presented a century ago as the confidential minutes of a secret Jewish conclave seeking to rule the world. It represents the most notorious forgery of modern times but is still used to stir up antisemitic hatred.

## Antisemitism Throughout History - Global

Texans need to understand that when antisemitism has taken root in cultures, it has led to some of the worst atrocities humanity has ever seen.

In addition to the creation of THGAAC, multiple museums have been established in Texas to honor, remember, and learn from the lessons of the Holocaust, in which the Nazis killed 6 million European Jews, among 11 million people total, in the 1930s and 1940s.

Other atrocities motivated by antisemitism have included:

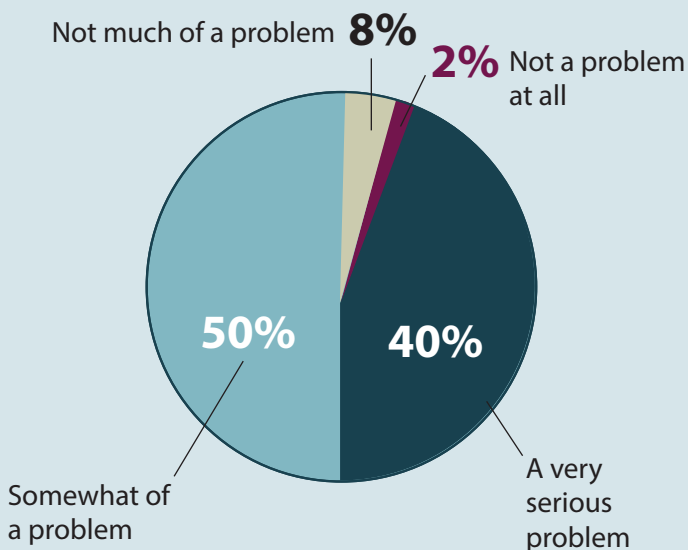
- **Blood Libel:** These lies originated in the Middle Ages, claiming that Jews killed Christian children to use their blood for baking Passover matzah (unleavened bread). The libel frequently led to mob violence and pogroms (officially sanctioned massacres) of Jews.
- **Spanish Inquisition:** The expulsion of 200,000 to 300,000 Jews from Spain in 1492. That is larger than the number of Jews currently living in Texas. Thousands died or were killed on their journeys from Spain.
- **Soviet Refuseniks:** Jews who were refused exit visas to Israel, denied the freedom to practice their religion, and frequently jailed on trumped-up charges in the former Soviet Union. Their struggle gained worldwide attention in the 1970s.



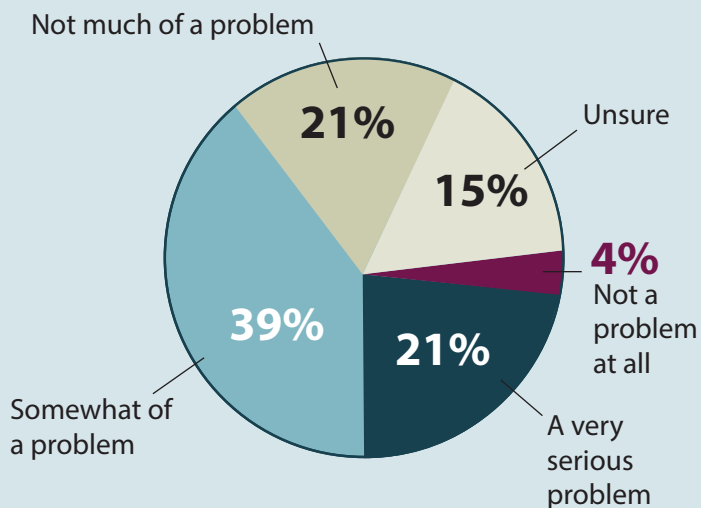
Protests by American Jews against the Soviet Union in the 1970s

# How much of a problem, if at all, do you think antisemitism is in the United States today?

## American Jews



## General Public



Source: American Jewish Congress



Signage from 2009's "Forgotten Gateway" exhibit  
Source: Bob Bullock Texas State History Museum

## Antisemitism Throughout History - Texas

Jewish immigrants who arrived in Galveston in the early 20th century often faced antisemitism even before they got off the boat. As part of 2009's "Forgotten Gateway" exhibit at the Bob Bullock Texas State History Museum, UT Austin anthropologist Suzanne Seriff included these findings:

*Federal law called for the exclusion of "persons suffering from loathsome or dangerous contagious diseases," but medical problems often only existed in the eye of the beholder.*

*Dr. Max Bahrenburg, surgeon with the U.S. Public Health Service in Galveston in 1913, rejected a higher proportion of immigrants than his counterparts at Ellis Island did, and 82.4 percent of the people rejected were Jews.*


*He said the "race" showed a "preponderance... of serious physical defects which interfere with one's ability to earn a living." More than one-third of the Jews he excluded because of "grave defect" demonstrated nothing more than poor physique. Under Bahrenburg, deportation of Jews who arrived at Galveston in 1913 was proportionately seven times higher than that at Boston, six times that at Philadelphia, and four times that at New York.*

# SUPPLEMENTAL INFORMATION

## Research and Community Engagement Efforts

To meet the legislative requirement to develop this study, THGAAC and its designees reviewed data and reports from law enforcement agencies and groups dedicated to fighting antisemitism and hate in Texas and nationally. The commission's team also interviewed more than 25 members of the Texas Jewish community as well as public safety officials, educators, leaders of national Jewish organizations, and academics who research the history and state of antisemitism. They represented the following organizations:

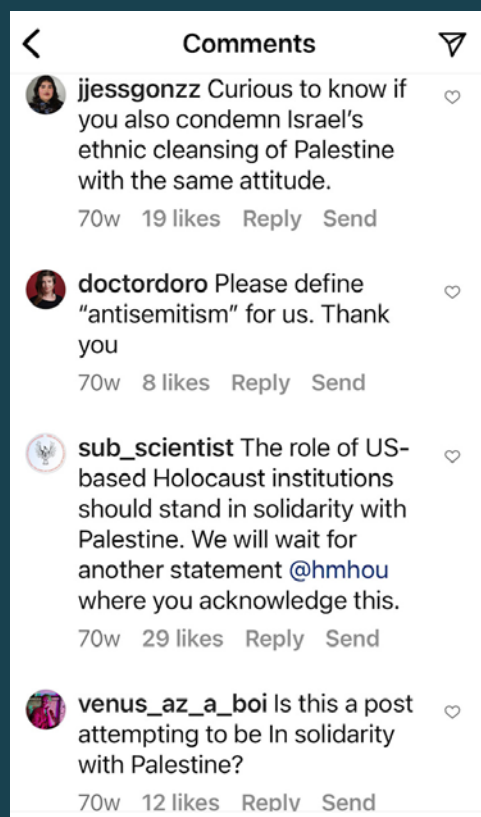
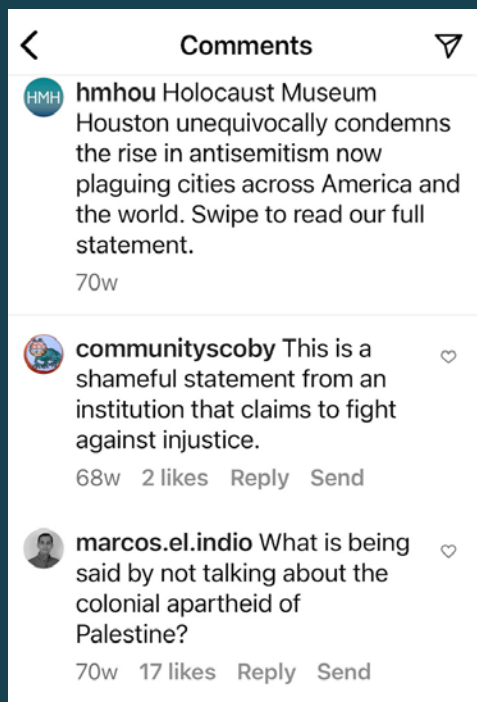
- Amcha Initiative
- American Jewish Congress
- Anderson High School (Students)
- Anti-Defamation League
- Congregation Beth Israel, Austin
- Congregation Beth Israel, Colleyville
- Dallas Cowboys
- Dallas Holocaust and Human Rights Museum
- Federal Bureau of Investigation
- Foundation to Combat Antisemitism
- Hillel International
- Holocaust Memorial Museum of San Antonio
- Holocaust Museum Houston
- Houston Hillel
- Jewish Family Service of Greater Dallas
- Jewish Federation of Greater Dallas
- Jewish Federation of San Antonio
- Secure Community Network
- Shalom Austin
- Texas A&M Commerce (Faculty)
- Texas Hillel
- Texas Legislature (Current and retired members)
- The University of Texas at Austin (Faculty and Students)
- The University of Texas at Dallas (Faculty)
- UT-Dallas Hillel
- Zionist Organization of America

A photograph showing a man in a dark jacket and glasses standing at the front of a room, addressing a group of students. The students are sitting on the floor, some with their hands raised. A large screen in the background displays a presentation slide with the text 'Holocaust Remembrance Week' and 'Commission'. The room has a wooden floor and a colorful wall with a large letter 'd' and other graphics.

A THGAAC staff speaks with students during Holocaust Remembrance Week

Following is some of the key input that THGAAC received around specific episodes of antisemitism.





Comments on Holocaust Museum Houston's Instagram

# Holocaust Museum Targeted for Opposing Antisemitism

When global antisemitism spiked after the May 2021 war between Israel and Hamas, Holocaust Museum Houston was one of many Jewish organizations that denounced antisemitism. The museum wrote in a news release:

“We stand against hatred in any form, imposed on any people, and ask that you stand with the Jewish community by speaking out against antisemitism.”

The museum immediately received hostile pushback to this statement in the form of anti-Israel and antisemitic comments from a group of artists whose work had been shown there. One artist wrote on the museum’s Instagram page: “Curious to know if you also condemn Israel’s ethnic cleansing of Palestine with the same attitude.”

In interviews with THGAAC, museum officials offered these recollections of the episode:

- *I felt like I was beating my head against the wall to get people to understand this is antisemitism. – Wendy Warren, Director of Education*
- *Man, it was scary. You can’t control it once it’s out on the internet. — Robin Cavanaugh, Chief Marketing Officer*
- *Anti-Zionism is number one in how antisemitism is being spread out there. – Warren*



Graffiti at Anderson High School

## Swastikas at an Austin High School

In October 2021, Anderson High School in the Northwest Hills section of Austin was vandalized overnight with hateful graffiti aimed at gay and Jewish students, among others. The graffiti included a swastika spray-painted on the equipment shed next to the tennis courts.

Anderson High School has a substantial Jewish population and is close to the Dell Jewish Community Campus. The graffiti was the first in a string of antisemitic incidents in the community, and officials were not able to determine who was responsible for the vandalism.

Hannah Cukierman, a Jewish student, was a senior and a member of the tennis team. She shared these thoughts about the incident with THGAAC:

- *As a teenager, it was really scary because it was the first time that me or any of my Jewish friends really saw it in our faces. It was like “yeah, we know antisemitism exists,” but directed at us this time, it was an eye-opening experience.*
- *Oh my gosh, this is still a problem, and it's not just what you read in the news. ... It invoked a lot of fear.*
- *(The administration) didn't release a statement on the incident until 6 p.m. that day. They could have announced on the intercom this is what happened.*
- *The community's response was pretty strong, especially on social media. A lot of people were posting about it, speaking out. “We don't accept this.”*
- *It didn't deter my pride in my Jewish identity. It made me reflect on my values and beliefs and I still identify as Jewish.*



# Colleyville Hostage Taking and Law Enforcement Response

On Jan. 15, 2022, Rabbi Charlie Cytron-Walker and three congregants were held hostage during Shabbat morning services at Congregation Beth Israel in Colleyville, near Fort Worth. The scene was initially livestreamed on the congregation's Facebook page and prompted responses from multiple law enforcement agencies, which gathered outside the synagogue.

The suspect, a British Muslim, had gained entry to Beth Israel by pretending to need shelter from the cold. Once inside, he demanded that Rabbi Cytron-Walker make calls to have a convicted terrorist released from a nearby federal prison.

The group escaped after 11 hours when Rabbi Cytron-Walker threw a chair at the suspect, who was killed moments later by law enforcement. Rabbi Cytron-Walker said he drew from the training he had received from the Secure Community Network, a national nonprofit that provides security resources to Jewish communities.

Multiple community members and law enforcement experts, including Secure Community Network Chief of Staff Dena Weiss and Jewish Federation of Greater Dallas Security Director Bill Humphreys, told THGAAC that elements of the response highlight the critical importance of security organizations in keeping Jewish communities safe.

- Secure Community Network worked with security professionals to identify the livestream from Facebook, which was ultimately removed.
- The SCN Jewish Security Operations Command Center was tracking information on the crisis, as SCN leaders were in constant contact with local, state, and federal law enforcement authorities, coordinating efforts related to local and national concerns.
- SCN's national training and exercise adviser consulted with the FBI. He knew the layout of the synagogue because he had recently trained synagogue leaders there.
- Humphreys, who is also a retired police officer with expertise in hate crimes, gathered the Dallas-area Jewish community leadership and used the federation's emergency communications system to alert the community of the crisis and provide security procedures. SCN, which manages the national emergency communications system, used the same to notify national leadership across the Jewish community.

The FBI initially said the episode was "not specifically related to the Jewish community," prompting FBI Director Christopher A. Wray to later clarify:

- *This was not some random occurrence. It was intentional, it was symbolic, and we're not going to tolerate antisemitism in this country.*



Fire and smoke damage at Congregation Beth Israel - Austin

# Austin Synagogue Arson

On Halloween night, 2021, an individual set fire to Congregation Beth Israel in Austin. The fire caused an estimated \$150,000 in damage, including to the temple's wooden entry doors and its stained-glass windows in the sanctuary. Thankfully, the congregation's Torah scrolls were unharmed.

Using video from the congregation's security cameras, law enforcement tracked down and charged an 18-year-old Texas State University student about two weeks later. They found antisemitic racist entries in the man's journal and stickers with Nazi propaganda.

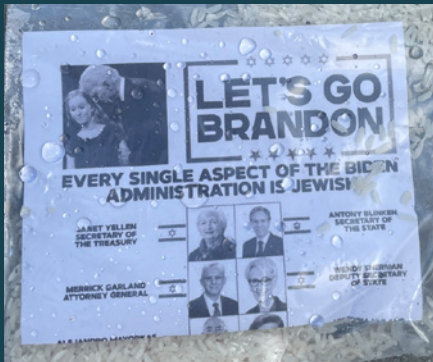
The congregation held Shabbat evening services that weekend in its preschool parking lot and received financial donations from around the world to help with the rebuilding.

Beth Israel President Lori Adelman offered these thoughts with THGAAC about the experience:

- *My first thought was this isn't actually happening. There's some miscommunication with the fire alarm.*
- *It was like being at a movie with special effects and all the smoke and the lights going with emergency vehicles. ... It had the energy of a disaster.*
- *Antisemitism is real, and it continues.*

Rabbi Steven Folberg offered these thoughts:

- *When I saw the damage, I was rattled. The old wooden doors were scorched. The stained-glass windows were so blackened that light wouldn't go through them.*
- *You realized people really had been traumatized.*



Flyer distributed in Houston

# White Supremacist Extremism

Members of a Florida-based white supremacist group began traveling to Texas in late 2021 to lead public displays of antisemitism and recruit new members, according to multiple communities and law enforcement officials.

These acts included unfurling banners with swastikas over a highway and throwing antisemitic flyers onto lawns in neighborhoods with sizable Jewish communities. The flyers blamed Jews for COVID-19 and made antisemitic claims about control of the media and government.

In the summer of 2022, multiple Jewish institutions in San Antonio canceled Shabbat services and activities for several hours in response to online activity that suggested the group would be active that weekend.

According to THGAAC interviews with law enforcement officials and community leaders:

- *The group is well versed in First Amendment protections. They engage in acts that are repugnant and ugly and draw attention but are also protected free expression.*
- *The group is highly active online. It livestreams its confrontations with law enforcement and community members to generate clicks and donations.*
- *Members of the Jewish community and their neighbors often respond swiftly, and local media report on the incidents. Unfortunately, this is precisely the response these haters want to provoke so they can normalize antisemitism.*

# A Student Push to Repeal Antisemitism Protections

In the spring of 2021, Student Government at The University of Texas at Austin unanimously passed a resolution that condemned antisemitism and adopted the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) definition, which holds that certain types of anti-Israel rhetoric are antisemitic.

Less than a year later, in spring 2022, UT's chapter of the Palestine Solidarity Committee (PSC) tried to repeal the resolution, saying the IHRA definition infringed on free speech.

Jewish students mobilized against the repeal, and the university ultimately determined it did not comply with university rules. This prevented a vote this year but left open the possibility of future efforts. The UT Austin resolution was one of the multiple student resolutions sponsored at Texas universities that were hostile toward Israel and Jewish students or embraced the global anti-Israel Boycotts, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) Movement. (see chart below)

In interviews with THGAAC, Texas Hillel students and staff leaders offered these recollections of the episode:

- *We know this is going to flare up next year. It's like putting a Band-Aid on a bullet hole. — Adina Traub, UT Austin, Class of 2022*
- *The experience for Jewish students was 'my student government is going to repeal a definition that protects me from discrimination.' — Maiya Edelson, former Executive Director of Texas Hillel*
- *Overall, I do think Jewish life on campus is very good. I do think antisemitism is very low here.... It's not like we're Berkeley, and there's antisemitism everywhere. — Rabbi Will Hall, Rabbi/Senior Jewish Educator Texas Hillel*
- *Students do feel the anxiety of anti-Israel sentiment on campus. — Rabbi Hall*
- *It's one thing to chant 'free Palestine,' but 'long live the intifada?' That's violent no matter how you say it. 'From the river to the sea' has violent undertones. — Rabbi Hall*
- *Although I believe the majority of students advocating on behalf of Palestinian causes would admit that Israel doesn't equal all Jews and criticism of Israel doesn't have to be taken out on all Jews ... nonetheless, as Israel issues come to the forefront, it is Jewish students who bear the brunt of that. — Rabbi Hall*

# University Faculty Witness Antisemitism

In September 2022, THGAAC commissioned the Academic Engagement Network (AEN) to interview and survey Jewish faculty members about their experiences with antisemitism on Texas campuses. Academics and higher education leaders across the nation had formed AEN in 2015 to empower faculty members to counter antisemitism, particularly as it manifests in the form of anti-Israel and anti-Zionist rhetoric.



During AEN's interviews, some Texas faculty members praised Texas as being more friendly to Jews than other states, including on college campuses. But they also said they have endured multiple incidents of hostility toward Jewish people and Israel.

Specific concerns from professors included:

- Jews and Zionists are depicted as "imperialistic," which colors the perception of Jewish Studies.
- A group of professors tried to remove anyone with a Jewish-sounding name from a tenure review panel.
- A professor who reported an antisemitic poster was excoriated for "accusing a faculty member of being antisemitic."
- Pro-Israel posters are frequently torn down.
- Zionism is usually considered a "dirty word" on campus.
- UT Austin leaders had not done enough to support or protect an Israel Studies professor after a 2015 incident in which pro-Palestinian students disrupted a guest lecture he had organized.

AEN also surveyed a limited number of Jewish faculty members in Texas anonymously. A majority said they had witnessed or experienced antisemitism on their campus at some point in the past five years. Of those respondents, 85% described their experience with antisemitism as "Israel-related."

The survey results revealed several trends:

- Most respondents agreed that "offering antisemitism awareness trainings and professional development opportunities to administrators" would have a positive impact on the campus climate.
- A majority also stated that "increasing the number of courses in Jewish/Israel Studies" and "increasing 'target of opportunity' hiring of faculty who are vocally and proactively opposed to the demonization of the state of Israel" would improve the campus climate.
- None of the respondents believed that "hiring more DEI (Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion) officials" would have a positive impact on the campus climate for Jewish students.



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AEN reported to THGAAC that faculty members offered the following observations in the interviews and surveys. Anonymity was promised to each of the participants:

- *There have been issues at (my campus) with antisemitic posters and issues with anti-Zionism and antisemitism... The nuances of what constitutes antisemitism is lost on them.*
- *The antisemitism I have witnessed on campus has been directed toward the state of Israel. These statements have been exclusively uttered by other faculty.*
- *Jews are few and largely invisible on my campus. When Jews are thought of at all, they are dismissed as white and privileged, irrelevant — or even hostile — to the universal commitment to social justice.*
- *White nationalist antisemitism is alive and well on our campus, with the help of off-campus organizations. They deputize students to report on and harass Jewish faculty.*
- *Both the DEI Office and the Director of International Studies vocally denounce anti-semitism, sincerely as far as one can see. But they (1) push for the decolonization of the curriculum (which, being anti-Western/anti-'oppressor' in intent, is anti-semitic in result); and (2) appear to openly denounce 'Zionists' or simple Israel-defenders (both Jewish and not), sovereignly dismissing the notion that this too is anti-semitism.*

A faculty member offered this observation directly to THGAAC:

- *When antisemitism walks around in long academic robes, it is very dangerous.*

# Jewish “Otherness” In Public Schools

Earlier this year, a Texas school district reviewed a request to remove a graphic adaptation of Anne Frank’s “The Diary of a Young Girl” from school libraries. The episode received significant attention. This is the timeline of events:

- A parent in the Keller Independent School District near Dallas challenged the appropriateness of offering the graphic adaptation of Anne Frank’s diary in the school library, saying it should be viewed only in the presence of an adult.
- On Aug. 15, Keller school officials temporarily removed all books that had been challenged during the year during their review process, as part of a policy they had just approved.
- On Aug. 19, the book was returned to circulation. As noted on the district’s website: *“Re-evaluation (8/19/22): After review, book returned to circulation.... Initial Determination: The book will remain in its current location.”*
- The school superintendent wrote to parents that *“Keller ISD is not banning the Bible or the Diary of Anne Frank, as has been suggested in some headlines and shared on social media.”*

Separately, a school official in Carroll in 2022 spoke with teachers about meeting classroom requirements that some issues to be taught through multiple perspectives. “Make sure that if you have a book on the Holocaust, that you have one that has opposing, that has other perspectives,” she told educators. The district ultimately did not instruct teachers to add “opposing” views to the Holocaust curriculum.

Many Jewish organizations and individuals interviewed by THGAAC said these discussions and challenges were a sign of a continual “otherness” Jewish students face in public schools, which has increased along with the rise of some forms of nationalism.

- *Being Jewish in Texas is not like being coastal, where you have a high profile. Being Jewish culturally is kind of subversive. You are swimming upstream. Daily life is not geared towards your convenience or support. — Rabbi Steven Folberg, Congregation Beth Israel in Austin*
- *What is the opposing view of the Holocaust? That it didn’t happen? — David Patterson, the Hillel A. Feinberg Distinguished Chair in Holocaust Studies at The University of Texas at Dallas*
- *It says to Jewish people that we are outside the mainstream. – Jackie Nirenberg, Regional Director, Anti-Defamation League*

# Education and Awareness

Educational organizations interviewed by THGAAC say they recognize that antisemitism is sometimes born out of ignorance as much as hate. Like THGAAC itself, these groups seek to overcome this ignorance by teaching students, community leaders, and others to recognize antisemitism and become allies in fighting it.

These groups include Holocaust museums throughout the state:

- **Holocaust Memorial Museum of San Antonio:** Students and teachers can access information about the Holocaust and antisemitism, including a comprehensive Spanish-language site on the history of the Holocaust. Every cadet from the city's police department and Bexar County Sheriff's Office visits the museum to develop a deeper understanding of antisemitism.
- **Dallas Holocaust and Human Rights Museum:** The museum leads Upstander training for corporations to help their employees confront bigotry. It also reaches about 1,500 teachers with its education programs and provides toolkits on how to confront antisemitism.
- **Holocaust Museum Houston:** Staff members develop and share toolkits with schools, eliminating the need for teachers to create their own Holocaust curriculum. The toolkits have benefited about 45,000 students. The museum also sends educators to classrooms to guest teach. Last year, this program reached nearly 25,000 students.
- **El Paso Holocaust Museum and Study Center:** All exhibits are in English and Spanish, and admission is free. The museum schedules programming throughout the year, including a summer camp and educational workshops.

In addition, many Texas-based corporations have worked with the Anti-Defamation League to facilitate informational sessions and discussions to help employees better understand and identify antisemitism. These have included **American Airlines, Texas Instruments, Toyota, and the Dallas Cowboys**, which sponsored its employee discussions in the weeks after the hostage-taking at Congregation Beth Israel in Colleyville.

Educators and others reflected on these efforts in their interviews with THGAAC:

- *I was absolutely elated that so many corporate leaders in our community were bringing antisemitism into their DEI conversations. — Cheryl Drazin, Vice President, Anti-Defamation League*
- *They wanted their employees, very few of whom are Jewish, to have a sense of what was going on in their community. — Brad Sham, longtime "voice of the Cowboys"*
- *The landscape is very different over the last several years, and it will take a tremendous effort on the part not only of the Jewish communities but sincere faith communities and minority communities that we all band together against hate and intolerance. — Sham*
- *It's about being proactive rather than reactive. — Leslie Davis Met, Director, Holocaust Memorial Museum of San Antonio*
- *Hate against any group based on race, religion, color, sexual orientation, or national origin is against our core values as a company. The rise in hate against the Jewish community is evidence of the work still needed within our communities to create an equitable, safe and welcoming environment for all. We are committed to working with organizations like the Anti-Defamation League to help fight hate against all. — Cedric Rockamore, Chief Diversity Officer, American Airlines*

# About the THGAAC

The Texas Holocaust, Genocide, and Antisemitism Advisory Commission was established by the 87th Texas Legislature in 2021 as an advisory commission to the Texas Historical Commission.

THGAAC's mission is to bring awareness of the Holocaust, genocides, and antisemitism to Texas students, educators, and the general public by ensuring the availability of resources and advising on relevant matters. It is the successor to the Texas Holocaust and Genocide Commission.

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