

ENGLISH SUMMARY

Antisemitic images and attitudes in Sweden

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This study was carried out on behalf of the Living History Forum and the Swedish National Council for Crime Prevention, and aims to identify and thereby increase knowledge of the forms and incidences of antisemitism amongst the Swedish population.

The study focused on the following questions: How prevalent are anti-semitic images and attitudes? How great is the impact of various historical and contemporary anti-Jewish motifs and themes? How does antisemitism coincide with social, political and other background conditions?

The study was carried out by postal questionnaire during March–May 2005 with a selection of more than 5,000 people aged between 16–75 years who were registered in Sweden (the total number of individuals in this age group at the time of the study was around 6,528,000 individuals). A total of 2,956 questionnaires were returned, giving a response rate of 59 per cent. The questionnaire primarily contained questions concerning attitudes towards Jews. The questions were formulated as statements and the respondents were asked to mark the degree to which they agreed or disagreed with these statements. The questionnaire also contained a number of background questions.

A summary of the most important results from the study follows. The results are presented for individual attitude statements, and for attitude scales that were constructed for a number of statements.

Results

GENERAL RESULTS

The results of an attitude scale consisting of a large number of statements show that 5 per cent of interviewees aged between 16 and 75 years harbour strong and consistent antisemitic views. This percentage does not correspond to the total number of people who are prejudiced against Jews, only those who harbour systematic negative attitudes towards Jews.

Thirty six per cent contains a significant group with a somewhat ambivalent attitude towards Jews. This percentage comprises individuals who agree with some antisemitic statements but disagree with others and/or can or cannot say whether they agree or disagree with antisemitic statements.

A total of 59 per cent systematically rejects antisemitic prejudices.

ARE SWEDISH JEWS PERCEIVED AS “REAL” SWEDES?

The question of whether Swedish Jews are perceived as “real” or “proper” Swedes has been studied by asking respondents to react to the statement “A Jewish Prime Minister would be totally acceptable in Sweden.” Twenty five per cent – or one in four – completely or partly disagreed with this statement. Forty eight per cent were positive to the statement to varying degrees.

IMAGES OF POWER, INFLUENCE AND CONSPIRACY

Mythological images of Jewish power and influence are central to anti-semitic thinking. According to the results, 13 per cent of the adult individuals (19–75 years) systematically support images of power and influence held by “the Jews” over the media, global economy and US foreign policy. A smaller percentage, or 6 per cent of the young people (16–18 years) holds the same views according to a battery of questions with this theme.

A total of 26 per cent of all interviewees agree completely or partly with the statement “The Jews have major influence on the global economy”; 18 per cent agree completely or partly with the statement “The Jews have major influence on the media”, and 17 per cent agree completely or partly with the statement “The Jews control US foreign policy”. Finally, 15 per cent agree completely or partly with the statement “The Jews have too much influence in the world today”.

Another important theme in antisemitic thinking and propaganda is the notion of a Jewish global conspiracy. This study contains a contemporary variation of this myth: the statement “Israel was involved in the September 11, 2001 terror attacks on the US”. Seven per cent believe there is some truth in this statement, 47 per cent reject it completely, and 46 per cent have no opinion.

ANTISEMITISM IN RELATION TO THE HOLOCAUST

Some contemporary antisemitic themes feed off the consequences of the Holocaust. The percentage that systematically supports anti-Jewish views in relation to the Holocaust is 10 per cent of the adults (19–75 years) and 13 per cent of the young people (16–18 years). A total of 17 per cent agree completely or partly with the statement “The Jews believe they are the only ones who have suffered”. Fourteen per cent agree completely or partly with the statement “The Jews exploit the Nazi extermination of the Jews (the Holocaust) for financial and political purposes”.

“ANTISEMITISM IS THE JEWS’ OWN FAULT”

A classic antisemitic accusation is statements to the effect that Jews themselves are to blame for the hatred they encounter. In this study, 2 per cent of adults (19–75 years) and 4 per cent of young people (16–18 years) systematically support views that Jews are responsible for antisemitism. A

total of 6 per cent agree completely or partly with the statement “Persecution and hatred of Jews is partly their own fault”, while 4 per cent agree completely or partly with the statement “The Jews crucified Jesus, and suffering is their punishment for that crime”.

ANTISEMITISM IN RELATION TO ISRAEL

Israel and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict are central themes in contemporary antisemitism. Criticism of Israeli politics is not antisemitism. However, both Israel and Israeli politics constitute targets for stereotyped images and hostility towards Jews in some contexts. Criticism of Israeli politics can also be used in these contexts as a means or pretext for articulating or justifying antisemitism.

About 4 per cent of the adults (19–75 years) and 5 per cent of the young people (16–18 years) systematically support antisemitic images and attitudes in relation to Israel, according to the answers to a number of questions with this theme.

A total of 26 per cent agree completely or partly with the statement “Israeli politics are characterised by a vengefulness rooted in the Old Testament (‘an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth’)”. Similarly, 26 per cent agree completely or partly with the statement “Israel’s treatment of Palestinians is similar to the Nazi’s treatment of the Jews”.

The percentage that completely or partly agrees with the statement “Israel has no right to exist” is 3 per cent. A total of 9 per cent agrees completely or partly with the statement “Peace on earth is not possible as long as Israel exists” and 14 per cent agrees completely or partly with the statement “Israeli politics is what causes hatred of Jews”. Eight per cent agrees completely or partly with the statement “Because of Israeli politics, I dislike Jews even more”.

Background conditions

The background conditions and views of individuals in relation to other issues, party allegiance for example, have been compared with how they respond to the different attitude scales.

AGE

An analysis of the correlation between antisemitism and age shows that attitudinal differences between young people and adults are relatively small. The oldest age categories differ however because the percentage of respondents who tend to reject prejudice against Jews is distinctly lower, and the percentage that is ambivalent or systematically antisemitic is somewhat higher in this group. In the oldest age group (66–75 years), around 43 per cent consistently disagree with antisemitic statements compared to almost 60 per cent in total.

GENDER

Men are comparatively more ambivalent and influenced by antisemitic images and attitudes than women. Slightly less than 3 per cent of the women systematically express antisemitic views compared to between 6–7 per cent of the men. This applies for both young people and adults.

TYPE OF MUNICIPALITY AND REGION

Residential location and region seem to play a minor role in relation to attitudes towards Jews. There are no major differences in attitudes towards Jews between residents in cities, smaller towns and rural areas, or between residents in Götaland, Svealand and Norrland.

EDUCATION

The results show that highly educated respondents are less prejudiced against Jews than less-educated respondents. Almost 70 per cent of those with a tertiary education mainly disagree with antisemitic statements, compared to around 47 per cent of those with a lower education. Similarly, students in preparatory secondary school programmes are systematically less prejudiced than students in other (predominantly vocational) programmes. However, educational level and secondary school programmes do not seem to affect the tendency to harbour images of Jewish power and influence.

SOCIO-ECONOMIC DISTRIBUTION

Blue-collar workers and self-employed people are often more antisemitic and ambivalent towards Jews than white-collar workers. For example, almost 74 per cent of the “executives” category predominantly disagrees with anti-Jewish statements compared to 46 per cent of individuals in the “unskilled workers” category. The tendency to support images of the power and influence of “the Jews” is relatively equal regardless of occupational category, however.

PARTY ALLEGIANCE

Attitudes towards Jews are relatively independent of party allegiance. The exception is extreme nationalist and Nazi parties, where sympathisers harbour distinctly more negative views of Jews than others.

NATIONAL BACKGROUND

Antisemitic images and ambivalent attitudes towards Jews are comparatively more prevalent amongst individuals with foreign, particularly non-European backgrounds than others. According to the results, 11 per cent of adults with foreign backgrounds harbour consistent antisemitic views compared to 5 per cent of the entire adult population.

RELIGIOUS BACKGROUND

The results suggest that antisemitic images and ambivalent attitudes towards Jews are comparatively more prevalent amongst Muslims than amongst Christians and non-religious groups. Amongst adults, 39 per cent of those who say they are Muslims harbour systematic antisemitic views compared to 5 per cent in total.

SYMPATHIES IN THE ISRAELI-PALESTINIAN CONFLICT

Sympathies in the conflict between Israel and Palestine have a certain correlation with the tendency to embrace antisemitism. The percentage that rejects prejudice against Jews is lower, and the percentage that harbours antisemitic views is higher amongst pro-Palestinian sympathisers than in other groups. In the adults group, 14 per cent of the pro-Palestinian sympathisers agrees systematically with antisemitic statements compared to 5 per cent in total. However, the percentage of people who are intolerant (see the definition of intolerance below) of Muslims is higher amongst pro-Israeli sympathisers than others. Amongst adults, 20 per cent of the pro-Israeli sympathisers harbour predominantly intolerant views of Muslims compared to 8 per cent in total.

JEWISH ACQUAINTANCES

Amongst adults, those with Jewish acquaintances tend to be somewhat less prejudiced than others. Generally speaking however, having Jewish acquaintances correlated only weakly with attitudes towards Jews.

ACQUAINTANCES' ATTITUDES TOWARDS JEWS

There is an obvious correlation between personal attitudes towards Jews and the attitudes of one's acquaintances. The percentage of strongly antisemitic individuals is considerably higher than average amongst those who claim to have acquaintances who harbour predominantly negative attitudes towards Jews. More than half, over 56 per cent of those adults with acquaintances who are perceived to have negative attitudes towards Jews harbour consistently antisemitic views compared to 5 per cent in total.

Intolerance

The study repeats a battery of questions on intolerance that was included in a study of young people's attitudes, and published in 2004 by the Living History Forum and the Swedish National Council for Crime Prevention. "Intolerance" in this context refers to an attitude characterised by suspicion, social rejection and hostility directed collectively towards a group of individuals, and a readiness to embrace or support measures that discriminate against individuals belonging to this category. An intolerant attitude would include, for example, not wanting to live next door to Jews or Muslims, feeling that there are "too many" of each respective category in Sweden, wanting to deprive them of the right to build synagogues or

mosques in Sweden, and to vote in elections. A total of 2 per cent of both adults and young people harbour a pronounced intolerant attitude towards Jews. Corresponding figures for the percentage of people who show intolerance towards Muslims is 8 per cent of the adult population and 11 per cent of young people. The results thus show that intolerance towards Muslims is stronger than intolerance towards Jews.

Conclusions

Different methods are required to study the incidences, prevalence and nature of group prejudices in society. We have to combine the results from both quantitative and qualitative studies to gain an overall picture. An attitude study can only present a part of this picture. And that part will never be exact, only approximate. At best, it will represent the images and attitudes that exist at a given time for a specific issue.

The results of this study suggest, in principle, that a majority of Swedish people reject antisemitic views and imagery. But they also show how a significant percentage of Swedes harbour some antisemitic notions and partly ambivalent attitudes towards Jews. A strong and systematic anti-Jewish attitude is confined to an obvious, but not negligible, minority.

Even though almost half of all Swedes seem to perceive that Swedish Jews are “real” or “proper” Swedes, there is a significantly large percentage that is unsure. That 25 per cent are negative to the idea of a Jewish Prime Minister suggests that the definition of Swedishness to many people excludes Jews.

DANGEROUS MYTHOLOGIZING

The results for the prevalence of images concerning the power and influence of “the Jews” are important and interesting, but also alarming. More than one in ten adults systematically supports these types of images, and 15 per cent of all interviewees feel that “The Jews have too much influence in the world today”. The study also shows that in contrast to other mythologizing, the tendency to embrace images of the power and influence of “the Jews” is relatively independent of educational level and socio-economic background conditions. The latter may also coincide with the occurrence of imagery and its relative legitimacy in the media and public debate.

Mythological images of Jewish power over media, politics and economics probably constitute the most central feature in anti-Jewish thinking. These stereotypes – which have prevailed in Europe with varying intensity since the mid 1800s – are not necessarily connected with hostility towards Jews, but regardless of their underlying motives they reproduce irrational images that are deeply rooted in the tradition of antisemitic thinking. These types of views are potentially dangerous in times of political or economic crisis, because they are open to populist and anti-democratic exploitation.

The results also indicate significant incidences of antisemitic notions and attitudes in relation to the Holocaust, its consequences and continued presence in contemporary politics and culture. That 14 per cent agree to varying degrees with the statement “The Jews exploit the Nazi extermination of the Jews (the Holocaust) for financial and political purposes” also indicates that age-old stereotypes of greed and usury still abound.

It should also be noted in this context that a relatively large percentage of secondary school students in this and previous studies agrees with the statement “There is far too much talk about Nazism and the extermination of the Jews”. As previously mentioned, this notion need not be rooted in prejudice or negative attitudes towards Jews, but the connection between this statement and other antisemitic statements that have appeared in correlation tests should be observed. There are good reasons for trying to analyse more carefully and, not least in schools, discussing the motivation behind these types of views.

Statements that explicitly hold Jews responsible for antisemitism and the persecution of Jews are weakly supported. A statement that points to Israeli policies as the cause of Jew hatred wins considerably more support. The latter statement is a variation of the former in some respects.

ISRAEL AND ANTISEMITISM

Criticism of Israeli politics is not antisemitism. The results suggest however that anti-Jewish images and attitudes in relation to Israel, or expressed in a context that concerns Israel and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, have a certain albeit limited degree of support. While few deny Israel's right to exist, there is more support for the notion that Israel's existence prevents world peace. The age-old image of Jewish vindictiveness, with roots in Christian theology, is completely or partly supported by one in four Swedes in reference to Israeli politics. Equally as many support to varying degrees the comparison between Nazi Germany's persecution of Jews and Israeli politics in the conflict with Palestinians. That such large groups embrace these images is serious. This prevalence may coincide with their frequent articulation in the media and public debate. It should also be noted in this context that almost one in ten say that they dislike Jews because of Israeli politics.

That the Israel theme and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, to a certain extent but not systematically, are targets for anti-Jewish attitudes and prejudice is also confirmed by the fact that the percentage of interviewees who harbour systematic antisemitic views on these issues is higher amongst pro-Palestinian sympathisers than in other groups. It is important to emphasise however, that this percentage comprises a minority of those who primarily sympathise with Palestine. Opinion forming around Israel-Palestine also seems to include an anti-Muslim dimension, however: in

relation to views on the conflict, the number of people who show intolerance towards Muslims is higher amongst pro-Israeli sympathizers than in other groups. This percentage also constitutes a minority. At a general level, the results show how international conflicts, not least those taking place in the Middle East, can also serve as catalysts and projection screens for prejudice and hostility. This aspect requires more reflection in the media and public debate.

THE PREJUDICES OF ADULTS INFLUENCE HOW YOUNG PEOPLE THINK

An analysis of the correlation between antisemitism and age shows that attitude differences between young people and adults are relatively small. The oldest age categories differ however because the percentage that consistently rejects prejudice against Jews is distinctly lower, and the percentage that is ambivalent or systematically antisemitic is somewhat higher in this group. This pattern could be explained to some extent by the fact that these generations are influenced by an adult world marked by a period (up to 1945) when negative and stereotyped images of Jews were relatively prevalent and accepted in Swedish society.

In regard to intolerance, which describes an attitude that is openly negative and xenophobic, characterized by social rejection and a willingness to discriminate against a minority or category, the results do not indicate any major differences between young people and adults in their attitudes towards Jews, while the percentage of people who are intolerant of Muslims seems to be greater amongst young people than adults. The results also indicate that young people's intolerance of Muslims may have increased over the past few years, and fallen in relation to Jews.

In the light of results from the study of intolerance amongst young people that was carried out by the Living History Forum and the Swedish National Council for Crime Prevention in 2003 (*Intolerance, 2004, www.levandehistoria.org*), a question arose concerning the origin of young people's images and attitudes towards minorities. This study does not provide any comprehensive answers to that question but the fact that adults, according to our results, systematically harbour antisemitic stereotypes and attitudes to an equally large extent as young people suggests that young people's attitudes and prejudices to a significant degree may be formed by adults, in other words that they are transferred from parents and other adults to children and young people in their proximity. This conclusion is also strengthened by the fact that the studied images are predominantly culturally and historically rooted and conveyed. This assertion may seem trivial, but the relation should be observed when formulating strategies for preventing antisemitism and other forms of group prejudice.

EDUCATION – PROTECTION FROM ANTISEMITISM?

The results also indicate that educational levels and socio-economic backgrounds play a significant role in the tendency to embrace prejudice against Jews, which has also been demonstrated by other studies. To an increased degree, people with higher education tend to reject antisemitic images and attitudes. A similar pattern is also noticed amongst secondary school students, where students in preparatory programmes are systematically less receptive to antisemitism than students in vocational programmes.

The fact that men in Sweden attain somewhat lower educational levels than women does not explain to any great extent why they tend to be more receptive to antisemitism and other group prejudices than women. The analysis points to a significant difference between the genders, even when comparing the effects of educational levels. The results also show that there is already an obvious difference between the attitudes of boys and girls towards Jews (and Muslims) in secondary school, while other studies show that these differences appear at an even earlier stage.

It is important to emphasise, however, that higher education by no means offers general protection from the incorporation of irrational attitudes towards Jews, as is demonstrated by the prevalence of mythologizing about the power and influence of “the Jews”. This lesson has already been learnt from experiences in Europe and Sweden during the 1930s, but resurfaces here in the results of the study. It should also be noted in this context that the percentage of individuals who are systematically antisemitic, in factual terms one third, are people with tertiary education.

RELIGIOUS AFFILIATION AND POLITICAL CULTURE

The results of this study also point to a correlation between anti-Jewish views and national background. Ambivalence and antisemitic attitudes and images are comparatively more prevalent amongst Swedes with foreign and especially non-European backgrounds than others. A difference also appears in relation to religion or religious/cultural affiliation: antisemitism seems considerably more prevalent amongst those who identify themselves as Muslims than those who identify themselves as Christians or non-religious. Varying educational levels and socio-economic backgrounds may explain some of these differences, but analyses show that significant differences remain even when these factors are tested.

One important explanation for the comparatively major prevalence of antisemitism amongst Muslims is probably the political culture that shapes major parts of the Arab world and some other Islamic countries. This is a political culture where antisemitism has been legitimated to a significant degree, and for decades has been openly propagated by regimes in some cases, and by leading media and influential religious leaders and groups in repeated cases. This message is now spread to Muslim and Arab

groups in Sweden and Europe via TV broadcasts, the Internet and other media, and via propaganda spread by radical Islamists. The Israeli-Palestinian conflict, as well as segregation and alienation, probably increase the susceptibility of Muslim groups to antisemitism.

ANTIPATHIES AND PARTY ALLEGIANCES

Even though the percentage of individuals that sympathise with extreme nationalist or Nazi parties in this study is small, the results indicate that these individuals harbour distinctly more negative attitudes towards Jews than others. Considering the fact that these parties espouse ideologies and programmes that are xenophobic and in some cases explicitly antisemitic, these results are to be fully expected.

Otherwise, it would seem that antisemitic images and attitudes are relatively independent of party allegiance. There are no major differences between people who sympathize with parties represented in the Swedish Parliament. The results indicate that these bodies of opinion tend, on average, to reject antisemitism. The same applies to averages obtained for sympathisers of left wing parties/organisations that are not represented in the Swedish Parliament. It should also be noted, however, that the percentage of respondents who sympathise with these parties/organisations is relatively small, and the results should be interpreted with caution.

WHO HARBOURS ANTISEMITIC VIEWS?

The results point to certain correlations between incidences of antisemitism and a number of background variables. We can identify categories in which prejudice against Jews is comparatively more prevalent than others. These include, for example, men, low-educated individuals and people with foreign backgrounds. But it is not possible from the results to predict with any higher degree of certainty exactly which people support antisemitic notions.

It is important to remember that varying degrees of overrepresentation come into play here. For example, the results show that extreme nationalist and Nazi party sympathisers have obviously more negative attitudes towards Jews than other groups, although in real figures individuals who sympathise with other parties seem to constitute a much clearer majority in the group that systematically harbours antisemitic views. Similarly, individuals with foreign, non-European or Muslim backgrounds are overrepresented in the group that is systematically antisemitic, but in real figures individuals with Swedish, respectively Christian backgrounds constitute a larger percentage of those with strong and consistent anti-Jewish views.

ANTISEMITISM IN SWEDEN

This study is the first systematic questionnaire study that focuses specifically on antisemitic images and attitudes in Sweden. As a result, there is no other material that enables a change over time comparison. As such, nothing can be said about the development of this prevalence, i.e. whether it has increased, fallen or remains stable.

In this report, some results have been discussed in relation to results for individual questions from other Swedish and foreign studies. Different question formulations, different answer alternatives, different age groups for respondents and a number of other differences and problems make comparisons difficult in several cases. It is not possible to draw definite conclusions from these comparisons. This also applies to a high degree for the question regarding the prevalence of antisemitism in Sweden compared to other countries.

The results of this and other studies show how the same or similar anti-Jewish images that prevail in other European countries, and in some cases globally, are also present in Sweden. A multinational public-opinion study that was carried out by the American Jewish Committee in March - April 2005 (*Thinking about the Holocaust 60 Years Later*) shows how the view that Jews exert "too much influence" on world events is more prevalent in Poland, Austria and Germany than in Sweden, but also indicates that Swedes agree with this statement to a similar extent as Americans and the British. In reference to the statement that the Jews "exploit" the Holocaust for their own purposes, the same study indicates that this view is more prevalent amongst Swedes than amongst Americans and the British but equally as prevalent amongst Austrians and the French.

Without trying to rank Sweden in relation to other countries, we can safely say that Sweden belongs to a broader European culture where contemporary thinking in relation to Jews, for primarily historical reasons and to a certain extent, is influenced by stereotyped images, mythological constructions and negative attitudes.