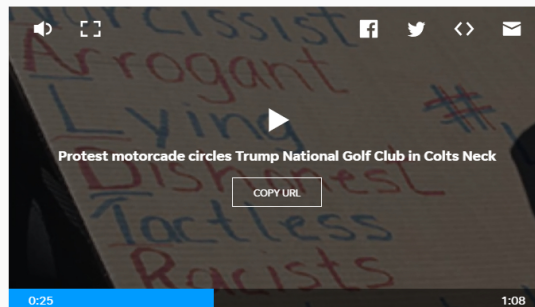




Anti-Semitism: On the rise or ebbing?

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A small group of dedicated protesters drove a motorcade around the front of Trump National Golf Club in Colts Neck for about an hour protesting the current White House policies. STAFF VIDEO BY PETER ACKERMAN Peter Ackerman



(Photo: Courtesy of Maureen Shaffer)



A rise in global anti-Semitism, particularly in Europe, has sounded alarms within the Jewish community and beyond in recent years. But in the Age of Trump, fears about an increase in domestic anti-Semitism have risen as well. We sought some perspective from the leaders of two prominent Jewish organizations: Joshua Cohen, New Jersey regional director of the Anti-Defamation League, and Keith Krivitzsky, head of the Jewish Federation in the Heart of New Jersey.

Let's begin with some basics. When we talk about anti-Semitism in general, what forms does it take? Presumably it incorporates overt acts like spray-painted swastikas as well as more subtle examples of prejudice.

COHEN: Anti-Semitism takes many forms. There are overt forms such as harassment, threats and hate speech. There are more subtle forms, such as conspiracy theories or anti-Semitic attitudes about Jews that linger beneath the surface. Anti-Semitism also is manifested in many different forms. It can appear as an online conspiracy theory about Jews and their alleged involvement in the 9/11 terrorist attacks, for example, or in age-old religious teachings that Jews were "Christ killers" and are cursed for all time. Unfortunately anti-Semitism has been around for more than two millennia and it is one of the oldest hatreds, so those who want to find it and use it can find many sources, from the anti-Semitic "The Protocols of the Elders of Zion" to the blood libel.

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KRIVITSKY: Yes — anti-Semitism is primarily hatred, bias, bigotry, and double standards applied towards Jews, both in terms of actions and attitudes. This often includes symbolism and references to the Holocaust, with the implication that the Nazis

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includes symbolism and references to the Holocaust, with the implication that the Nazis didn't finish the job or that others need to. But this also includes scapegoating Jews for other troubles and blaming Jews as a whole for the actions of individuals or a few bad apples, guilt by association — such as what we see have seen sometimes in commentary about the Jewish community in Lakewood.

Anti-Semitism can also masquerade as “anti-Israel” sentiment or statements, when double-standards are applied to Israel vs. other countries or states. Sadly, repeated United Nations fixation on Israel through their Human Rights body, with some of the worst human rights offenders sitting around the table and pointing fingers, or denial of Jewish ties to the ancient land of Israel also fits this bill.

A [good description of anti-Semitism](#) as a reference can be found with the U.S. State Department.

So when we talk about rising anti-Semitism — if that is in fact true — are we talking about an increase in anti-Semitic acts? More examples of hate speech? All of the above?

COHEN: There's plenty of evidence that anti-Semitism is rising, especially in terms of incidents, in America and globally. France and Great Britain just issued reports showing that incidents rose significantly in both those countries last year, and in the United States we have charted a substantial surge in 2017 compared to the previous year. So far in the United States in 2017 we have seen 1,299 anti-Semitic incidents from Jan. 1 through Sept. 30, representing a 67 percent increase over the same period in 2016. But incidents are only one barometer of anti-Semitism. On the other hand, our polling of the American public has shown that anti-Semitic attitudes remain at an historic low in this country, with around 14 percent of the population holding biased attitudes toward Jews. In some European countries, and certainly in Arab countries, anti-Semitic attitudes are much higher. So it is a mixed picture in this country. We have also seen a surge of anti-Semitic language on social media, which is troubling as well.



A neighbor saw hateful graffiti and took matters into her own hands

KRIVITSKY: When we talk about a rise in anti-Semitism, we are talking about all of the above. Documented incidents of anti-Semitic acts have increased — according to statistics, Jews make up the single largest percentage of religiously motivated hate — but there has been an even bigger increase in hate and bigoted speech, and not just targeted towards Jews. As proof, all anyone needs to do is read the comments section on any article referencing Jews in your own papers. It has become more acceptable to blame Jews as a whole for the bad behavior of a few, or based on stereotypes or misunderstandings.

In terms of anti-Semitism, I tend to think that Jews are like the canary in the coal mine — when there is a rise in attacks on Jews, this likely goes along with a rise in hate speech and incidents targeted against other minorities and particular groups.

To gain some broad historical perspective, how had anti-Semitism been trending over the years in the post-World War II years? We like to imagine that it's been a steady decline, but that isn't true, is it?

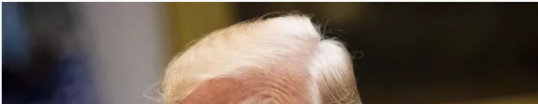
COHEN: The fundamental condition for Jews in the U.S. has significantly changed for the better over the last century. There has never been a better time to be Jewish in America. Jews live more comfortably and are more accepted in our democracy now than at any time in our history. Jews have been successful at every level in society, in culture, government, economics, the arts, in science.

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But let's not forget that ADL was founded in 1913 at a time when anti-Semitism was rife in society and a Jewish American businessman, Leo Frank, had been convicted of murder and lynched by an angry mob. Anti-Semitism was once promoted by the likes of Henry Ford. In the 1940s and 1950s, there were quotas that prohibited Jewish Americans from attending certain colleges and universities. Our first poll on attitudes toward Jews found that 29 percent of Americans held anti-Semitic attitudes in 1974. So the trend lines in America have shifted significantly. But at the same time we have a political climate that has in the past two years emboldened the alt-right and other white supremacists who feel as if they can give voice to anti-Semitism in the public square. So events like Charlottesville, where chants of “Jews will not replace us!” were mixed with praise for Hitler and swastika flags, have shown the startling power and resilience of anti-Semitism in America.



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White House Press Secretary Sarah Sanders defended the videos, saying "The threat is real, and that's what the president is talking about." Video provided by Newsy Newslook

KRIVITSKY: In the United States, public demonstrations of anti-Semitism have been on the decline ... until the past couple of years. Just look at the situation in Montana and the march in Charlottesville, Va. for examples. From a practical, Jewish community perspective, we have become much more focused on the security of our facilities and institutions as a result in the past few years.

How does domestic anti-Semitism compare to what we see internationally, where anti-Semitism has clearly grown?

COHEN: There are places around the world where anti-Semitism is off the charts, such as in the Palestinian Authority, Jordan and Egypt, and also some democracies where it is virtually non-existent. There are countries such as France where Jews face anti-Semitism on the streets, and, as we saw last week, even an 8-year-old boy can be physically assaulted just for wearing a kippah in public. Outside of the Jewish state of Israel, America remains a place where Jews are able to practice their faith freely, thanks to America's tradition of freedom of religion, and feel comfortable to express their Jewishness in all kinds of ways, whether culturally or religiously. So America is still different than most other societies around the world.

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KRIVITSKY: Around the world, there are places where anti-Semitism has been on the rise longer and is more pronounced. Europe, for instance. There, anti-Israel sentiment is rampant and feeds anti-Semitism, though there are also many states and places where they have done a really poor job of integrating new immigrant populations, which tends to enable scapegoating and bad behaviors.

There are also places where there hasn't been a tradition of anti-Semitism and so it is much rarer, such as in India or China.

Love him or hate him, President Trump's campaign had some undeniably offensive themes, and they have continued into his presidency. To what degree has that fanned the flames of anti-Semitism and prejudice against other racial and ethnic groups?

COHEN: The anti-Muslim and anti-immigrant rhetoric from the Trump administration has been deeply disappointing and is a setback in our society because it has emboldened hate groups and others. Before he was President, Trump retweeted anti-Semitic memes and failed to fully denounce the white supremacist and anti-Semitic haters who were endorsing his candidacy. And after Charlottesville he failed a moral test by his remarks equating the protestors in Charlottesville with the white supremacists who had gathered there to spread hate, saying there were "good people on both sides." This was a great disappointment that has given succor to some of the worst elements in our society.

KRIVITSKY: Many have asked this question and I don't think we can blame President Trump for this outbreak of anti-Semitism, though anti-Semitism has certainly increased the past few years — including in the years prior to his presidency.

My perception is that President Trump doesn't care about "political correctness" — and he has signaled that to his followers and the broader American public. While there are many who are not happy about that, for perhaps justifiable reason, this has opened a door or removed a lid for extremists speaking loudly and sometimes hatefully; they now feel comfortable speaking out and saying things they might have whispered more quietly before.

For that reason, I also hope President Trump would be more proactive and vocal in countering such attitudes when they arise.

It's been said that Trump has given voice to those who had been reluctant to speak out, and now that they feel more empowered their biases are being exposed. Do you believe that's true?

COHEN: White supremacists, the alt-right and others seem to find validation through the president's promotion of anti-immigrant themes and his rhetoric post-Charlottesville. But the truth is that these groups will look for any excuse to spread hatred. Look at how these groups latched on the Confederate monuments controversy and used it to spread anti-Semitism. The president with his rhetoric has emboldened these groups, but there are other trends in our society that also help fuel this environment — the general breakdown in civilized discourse, the abuse of social media to spread hatred, and the failure of public officials to clearly condemn hate speech all contribute to the empowerment of bigots and hate groups.

KRIVITSKY: Yes. No question. But this isn't just about haters or bigots. It's clear that there have been large segments of the American people who have not felt in sync with either the prosperity and the policies (or both) of recent years. President Trump has given them voice and empowered them to speak out with their own voices — which many are doing, some in troubling ways.

What troubles you more about recent events: the expressions of anti-Semitism



that troubles you more about recent events, the expressions of anti-Semitism themselves, or the public response — or lack thereof — to them?

COHEN: More than anything else, the fact that people are still willing to give voice to age-old forms of anti-Semitism and new ones as well is the most troubling trend to my mind. What's very encouraging, though, is the fact that so many public officials and mayors to sports figures and others have stood up to say "no" to anti-Semitism and hate. The more people speak out, the more we can expect to see haters and bigots moving back into the shadows and the fringes of society where they belong.

KRIVITSKY: I am a big fan of the phrase: "Just because you are paranoid doesn't mean they aren't out to get you." The United States has been an incredible home for Jews and countless other minorities and immigrants. While there has been a decrease in anti-Semitism in recent years — and a broader acceptance of ethnic, religious and identity diversity — there are still haters out there. And for sure some anti-Semitism has hidden below the surface, emerging as we see now.

The challenge of today is that the more anti-Semitism and other hatreds get expressed, the more that encourages others to join in. Even worse, there is a tendency for groups that are put upon to turn inward and look out only for themselves, which can hurt us all — and that's one reason the Jewish Federation organized a special training for all faith groups with the N.J. Attorney General and why we have gotten behind the N.J. Interfaith Coalition's Pledge for the Other.

How would you describe Trump's performance to date, specifically in regard to the Jewish community and the issues it feels are important? There have been some public-relations missteps at the very least, and mixed feelings about recognizing Jerusalem as Israel's capital.

COHEN: There are a number of issues that the Jewish community is watching. The president's immigration policy with respect to DACA is deeply troubling and something we have been watching closely. We are also still waiting for the administration to name an anti-Semitism envoy at the State Department, which they have promised to do after initially saying the position would be eliminated. But we were encouraged by the decision on Jerusalem as a long overdue step that would acknowledge reality: Jerusalem is the political capital of the country and has been the spiritual heart of the Jewish people.

KRIVITSKY: The Jewish Federation does not comment on politics — or our president's performance. I would just note the Jewish Federation has always recognized Jerusalem as Israel's capital.

The Jewish people have been often oppressed over the centuries, of course. How does the current threat compare to the dangers of the past? Or have we lost some perspective on this?

COHEN: There's really no comparison. Jewish history is filled with stories of pogroms, expulsions, persecution and the ultimate manifestation of anti-Semitism in the death of 6 million Jews in the Holocaust. But while we do need to keep perspective here, we also need to ensure that anti-Semitism — or any other ism for that matter — never again progresses to a level where it ends in genocide. Our responsibility as Jews and as a country that serves as a beacon of light and democracy is to ensure that genocide never again happens anywhere in the world. And that means pushing back against hatred in all forms.

KRIVITSKY: We live in a wonderful country where the rule of law is paramount and citizens and residents have civil freedoms and protections. That right there sets the current context apart from many times in the past when those that hate could act on their sentiments with more impunity.

But one of the features of being part of a community or extended family group is that members share a collective memory. Things might be all right now, but we have suffered lots of bad experiences and history — and so there is ample justification for being concerned and wary.

Sure, as has been said, haters gonna hate. But all of us, Jews and others in the broader community, need to step up and call out hate — whether through anti-Semitism or other bigotry — wherever and whenever we see it. That's the only way to really be sure that hate has no home here in our midst.

It feels like we've reached a kind of tipping point in this country, a moment when we could reverse generations of progress in inclusiveness and acceptance. Is that overstating the state of affairs?

COHEN: We haven't reached the tipping point just yet. This is the very reason the Anti-Defamation League exists. We are serving as a shield and a siren and a mobilizer — shielding those who may be victims of prejudice and hatred, and speaking out loudly against those who attempt to spread hatred, fear and prejudice to the masses, and mobilizing good people in society, our friends and allies, to help reverse the tide of bigotry and fear by making these views unacceptable in society.

KRIVITSKY: I think it is fair to say that there is some pushback against some of the rapid social change and push for inclusion in the recent past.

There is also a bigger, broader trend playing out where more and more in our society are isolated and segregated; people are increasingly looking out for themselves, rather than their church, synagogue or associations. It seems there is less solidarity out there, in general, which correlates to decreasing support for social welfare and safety net programs. And that also ties into less support for, and increasing blame pinned to, people who count as "other."

What can or should an organization like yours perhaps do differently to prevent or combat a rise in anti-Semitism?

COHEN: We are looking at new ways to innovate against hate. We are forming new alliances, reaching out more broadly and looking to new platforms where we can fight the battle against hate. This is why we recently opened a Center for Technology and Society in Silicon Valley, so that we can find innovative, technology-based solutions such as Artificial Intelligence and Machine Learning to combat fast-moving

manifestations of hate speech on social media. And we are looking to use technology to create heat maps and other tools that can help us to better identify sources of hatred and to track and respond to anti-Semitic and hate crimes across the country.

KRIVITSKY: The Jewish Federation has significantly ramped up our activities in terms of security training and preparedness for all Jewish institutions and our interfaith neighbors. We have expanded support for educational efforts around anti-Semitism and hate, from the program we did in Middlesex with the N.J. Attorney General about bias to a program we supported with the Monmouth County Prosecutors Office to bring law enforcement officers to the U.S. National Holocaust Museum. Additionally, we have been both proactive and responsive in engaging with local towns and school districts in terms of how to deal with anti-Semitism incidents.

“Never Again” is the pledge that the horrors of the Holocaust will not return. How do you feel about that pledge right now?

COHEN: “Never Again” remains as relevant today as it did immediately following World War II. It is a reminder that we have a moral responsibility to ensure that no one has to face hatred, prejudice or discrimination in any form. And it is a clarion call to action, compelling us as a society to stand up and speak out whenever and wherever hatred is manifested.

KRIVITSKY: I think the pledge, Never Again, is still valid. We are not facing anything like the Holocaust today — and I think such comparisons can be problematic. However, in order to be sure that something like the Holocaust doesn’t happen again, we need to be sensitive to and respond forcefully when hateful behaviors or sentiments manifest — both locally or internationally.

Joshua Cohen is the New Jersey regional director of the Anti-Defamation League. Keith Krivitzky is chief executive officer of The Jewish Federation in the Heart of New Jersey, which serves Monmouth and Greater Middlesex counties.

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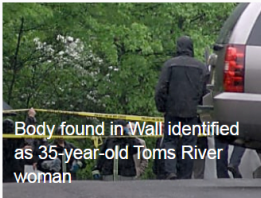


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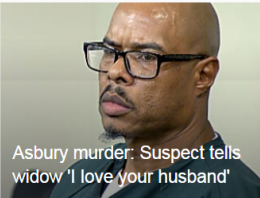


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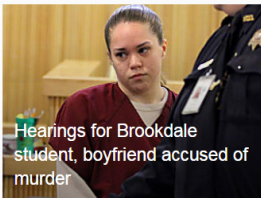
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