

## When anti-Zionism turns violent, Jews pay the price

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Chicago feels far removed from the epicenter of global conflict, but recent events have shattered this illusion and demonstrated just how close violent hate can be. The man who murdered two people outside a Jewish museum in Washington, D.C. in May wasn't some distant radical. He grew up right here in Chicago. That hits like a punch to the gut.

Since October 7th, antisemitism hasn't just been on the rise, it has swelled in our midst. I know first-hand how disconcerting this has been. Even before the upsurge in hostilities between Israel and Iran, the synagogue I serve has been threatened with bombings and shootings. We've since fortified our building with more surveillance cameras, bulletproof glass, emergency alert systems, and armed personnel, but as recently as June 15, congregants received death threats deemed credible enough to warrant the deployment of a hazmat team to their residence.

This is what it means to lead a Jewish community in 2025: Rather than focusing exclusively on matters of faith or tending to the needs of congregants, clergy must spend endless hours in safety briefings and filling out paperwork for security grants. Initiatives like the Nonprofit Security Grant Program have been critical to support infrastructure costs, but currently proposed funding levels will leave our community exposed to further violence and must be increased.

Beyond the tangible costs has been a more insidious toll—one of hesitation and retreat. After organizing a series of peaceful pro-Israel gatherings in Highland Park, I began to hear similar refrains: "It's not safe anymore" or "I'm afraid to bring my children."

There was a time that I would have reassured my community that there is no serious risk. But, after a Jewish man was shot in a targeted attack while walking to synagogue in West Rogers Park last year or the recent firebomb attack on a rally in support of Hamas-held hostages in Colorado, I can't offer that same comfort.

At the root of this violence lies a dangerous fiction: that anti-Zionism is divorced from antisemitism. That it is merely about criticizing Israeli policy. But if that were true, why are *synagogues* being threatened and American Jews gunned down on American soil?

The reality is plain as day. When anti-Zionist rhetoric boils over, it's Jews who bear the brunt. With more than 85% of Jews supporting Israel's right to exist as a Jewish state, the line between anti-Zionism and antisemitism is more than blurry—it's nonexistent.

Today's anti-Zionism isn't a virtuous call for peace. It is a campaign of erasure. It denies the Jewish people's right to a homeland, rejects compromise, dismisses a two-state solution, and seeks to dismantle Israel entirely. It claims to be anti-war, but it fuels conflict. It speaks the language of justice while undermining it at every turn.

And the rhetoric that supports anti-Zionism is more dangerous than many realize. Slogans like "From the river to the sea" and "Globalize the Intifada" aren't abstract political opinions. They're eliminationist calls that strip Jews of our humanity, assign collective guilt, and create a permission structure for violence.

These patterns are bleeding into our broader political culture. Violence is becoming normalized as a response to disagreement. Oppose a healthcare company's policies? Shoot the CEO. Object to the Israeli government's actions? Burn Jews at a rally. Just this week a legislator was murdered in Minnesota. This isn't principled activism. It's politically motivated terror.

If this is what disagreement looks like now, then we are in trouble. If debate gives way to violence, if public gatherings become battlegrounds, and if we allow intimidation to replace conversation, then the next target could be anyone engaged in the public arena. The issue may change, but the playbook remains.

We must be clear: This is not how a healthy democracy functions. Not through fear. Not through arson. Not through violence. Not against the Jewish community. Not against *any* community.

All Americans should be able to proudly express ourselves and know that our differences add to the vitality of our nation. In a world that often demands uniformity, distinctiveness is a form of moral courage. The beliefs that make Jews unique are the cornerstones of our identity and essential to our flourishing. We will not hide.

Those who still believe in pluralism, in civil discourse, and in basic human decency, as I do, must now stand with the Jewish community to tone down the rhetoric and reject politically motivated violence. Otherwise, we will be forced to mourn yet another tragedy that could have been prevented.

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