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1st survey in Belgium on Jews, antisemitism and the war in Gaza: the different aspects of antisemitism are finally assessed objectively.

The Institut Jonathas presents the results of the first survey carried out in Belgium on the perception of Jews, antisemitism, other minorities and the ongoing war in Gaza and Israel.

Created in March 2024, the [Institut Jonathas](#) is a centre for study and action against antisemitism and anything that promotes it in Belgium. On the eve of the June 9 elections, it asked IPSOS to objectively evaluate and measure the opinions of Belgians on subjects that are at the heart of its mission.

From 8 to 12 May, IPSOS surveyed a sample of 1,000 people, representative of the Belgian population aged 18 and over, using the same panel and methodology as for political polls.

In the absence of surveys that could be used as points of comparison in Belgium, several questions have been taken from recent surveys conducted in France by IPSOS¹ or by IFOP.² **The French results are shown below, where a comparison with the Belgian results is relevant.**

The survey carried out by IPSOS for the Institut Jonathas highlights and provides an objective view of the different facets of the image of Jews and antisemitism in Belgian society:

- A very mixed picture of Jews, 80 years after the Shoah.
- Markers of moderate antisemitism in all sections of Belgian society, and over-represented on the far left, far right and among Muslims and much more present in the Brussels and Flanders regions than in Wallonia.
- Added to these 'traditional' stereotypes (money, power, religion, etc.) are markers of 'secondary' antisemitism, leading to the trivialisation of the Shoah and the Nazification of Israel.
- A general misconception about Jews, Judaism and the reality of antisemitism in Belgium.
- Top three sources of antisemitism in Belgium, according to Belgians: hostility to Israel, radical Islamism and negative stereotypes of Jews.
- A limited response among Belgians to issues relating to Israel, Palestine and the war, with the exception of a minority whose members support the destruction of the State of Israel.
- Around 50% of Belgians feel little or no concern about the war between Israel and Hamas, but the conflict also polarises specific sections of the Belgian population.

¹ [IPSOS survey for the Representative Council of Jewish Institutions in France \(CRIF\)](#) in February 2023 on French people's knowledge of the Jewish world.

² [IFOP survey for the AJC Paris and the Foundation for Political Innovation \(Fondapol\)](#) in April 2024: an x-ray of anti-Semitism in 2024.

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- The war, both a source of concern for Jews in Belgium according to most Belgians and a source of hostility against Jews in Belgium according to a minority.
- This antisemitism is embedded in Belgian society, the latter feeling strained and anxious about its relations with various minority groups, particularly Muslims and North Africans.

In light of these results, the Institut Jonathas calls for the population to be aware of the different manifestations of antisemitism in Belgium and to combat each of them specifically and effectively.

Moreover, the Institut Jonathas draws the following conclusions from this survey:

1. Belgians have a moderately good image of Jews, compared to other minority groups.

When asked whether they have sympathy or antipathy for a particular minority group, **around 50% of Belgians adopt a neutral stance: neither sympathy nor antipathy.**

22% of Belgians have sympathy for Jews and 14% have antipathy.

On the sympathy scale, Jews come fourth after homosexuals and lesbians (40%), Asians (33%) and blacks (29%). They are ahead of Protestants (20%), Muslims (19%), North Africans (19%), Turks (19%), foreigners (17%) and Roma (11%).

In terms of dislike, Jews (14%) come fifth. behind Asians (8%), gays and lesbians (9%), Protestants (9%) and blacks (13%). They are ahead of foreigners (17%), North Africans (19%), Turks (22%), Roma (29%) and Muslims (32%).

The same question on several minority groups was asked in France (IFOP survey, February 2024). Sympathy levels in France were slightly higher overall than in Belgium.

There is a significant difference between the two countries: 36% of French people have sympathy for Jews, while only 22% of Belgians do. Conversely, 6% of French people dislike Jews, while 14% of Belgians do (19% on the far right and 22% in Brussels).

2. Antisemitic stereotypes are present in all sectors of Belgian society and are over-represented on the extreme left, extreme right, among Muslims and in the Brussels Region.

IPSOS asked Belgians about 14 antisemitic stereotypes, asking them whether each one was true or false. Several of these stereotypes have been studied in polls in France.

8 of the 14 stereotypes are considered to be true by more than 35% of Belgians. 5 other stereotypes are considered to be true by more than 15% of Belgians.

Stereotypes are more prevalent in Belgium than in France.

In Belgium, support for antisemitic stereotypes is significantly higher among the extreme left, extreme right, Muslims and Brussels residents than among Belgians as a whole.

The over-representation of the first three groups is also observed in France.

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Alongside Belgians who endorse antisemitic stereotypes, **20 to 35% of the population say they do not know whether a particular antisemitic stereotype is true or false.** This response is also a cause for alarm because it speaks to the historical and moral bearings of part of Belgian society.

The most widespread antisemitic stereotypes in Belgium relate mainly to money, power, influence and Jews defending their interests. Other prejudices related to the death of Christ, based on race or calling into question the Belgian citizenship of Jews, are also circulating in Belgium.

- 19% of Belgians believe, despite Vatican II, that *'Jews are responsible for the death of Christ'*.
33% of Muslims, compared to 19% of Catholics, 28% of the far right and 25% of the far left subscribe to this prejudice, which has long fed Christian anti-Judaism.
38% of Belgians say they have no idea whether it is true or false.
- 28% of Belgians think that *'Belgian Jews are not really Belgian'*. This figure rises to 50% on the far right, 43% among Muslims and 32% among Catholics.
Only 17% of French people think this about French Jews (IPSOS poll, February 2023).
- 22% of Belgians think that *'Jews are a race that cannot assimilate in Europe'*.
This racial stereotype is shared by 28% of those on the far left, 30% on the right, 26% on the far right, 29% in Flanders and 39% among Muslims.
- 38% of Belgians think that *'Jews are too present in finance'*. The figure is 43% in Flanders, 48% on the far right, 42% on the far left and 48% among Muslims.
- While only 14% of Belgians believe that Jews are responsible for the economic crisis, 46% of Muslims share this antisemitic view, 18% of 18-25 year-olds (compared with 10% of the over-55s) and 19% of the extreme left.
- 39% of respondents believe that Jews have very powerful lobbies that operate at the highest level in Belgium, compared with only 26% who do not believe this.
- 74% think that Jews are very close-knit.

The high levels of antisemitic stereotypes suggests that public actions supposedly aimed at combating antisemitism in Belgium are either lacking or ineffective.

3. Alongside 'traditional' stereotypes of Jews, there are also the stereotypes of so-called 'secondary' antisemitism, which trivialise the Shoah and Nazify Israel.

Secondary antisemitism is rooted in Europeans' sense of guilt over the Shoah.

This antisemitism, theorised by German social scientists, explains antisemitism not in spite of Auschwitz, but because of it: Europeans do not forgive the Jews for Auschwitz.

The result is a dual avoidance mechanism aimed firstly at minimising the Shoah and antisemitism, and secondly at criminalising and even Nazifying Israel. This is how ...

- 41% of Belgians think that *'the Jews are using the Shoah to defend their interests'*. The figure is 48% among Muslims, 49% on the far left and 46% on the far right.
- 38% of Belgians believe that *'Jews use antisemitism to defend their interests'*. 59% among Muslims, and 52% in Brussels.
- 35% of Belgians believe that *'the Jews are doing to the Palestinians what the Germans did to them'*. 59% of Muslims, 50% of the far left and 47% in Brussels think this.

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Note: 30% of Belgians do not share this opinion and 35% say they do not know.

These assumptions of secondary antisemitism are partly rooted in speeches made by public figures, which hardly elicit any reaction in the political and media spheres.

For example, a tweet from a former Defence Minister: *'Gaza today is Warsaw yesterday'*. Or a statement by the President of the Flemish Parliament in Brussels: *'I went to Auschwitz in Poland to see what genocide is... I can use that term... We are using practically the same methods'*.

4. Antisemitic stereotypes in Belgium are rooted in a vast ignorance about Jews, Judaism and the realities of antisemitism in Belgium.

- **Over 80% of Belgians do not know how many Jews there are in the world (15 million).** 13% of Belgians say there are 100 million Jews and 9% say there are 500 million, more than 30 times their real number. 40% chose none of the proposed answers and said they did not know.
- **Over 75% of Belgians do not know how many Jews there are in Belgium (30.000).** 13% say there are 500,000 Jews in Belgium, 4% say there are a million and 30% say they do not know.
- **Over 60% of Belgians are unaware that Judaism is the oldest of the three great monotheistic religions.** Only 38% of Belgians give the right answer. 22% of Belgians (28% of Catholics) cite Christianity. 15% of Belgians (52% of Muslims) consider Islam to be the oldest religion.

Since 7 October 2023, antisemitic acts and comments have risen sharply in many countries, including Belgium, **but only 37% of Belgians believe that antisemitism is widespread in their country, compared with 76% of French people** (IFOP survey, March 2024).

The same question was also asked by IPSOS in France. Its results are always much higher than those of the present survey in Belgium: 66% in February 2023, 75% in 2020.

The result in Belgium, low in the light of current events and much lower than the results in France in response to the same question, reflects a denial or cover-up of antisemitism in Belgium.

It raises questions about the political and media treatment of this phenomenon in Belgium.

5. Belgians attribute several sources to antisemitism in Belgium. The first three are hostility to Israel, radical Islamism and prejudice against Jews.

In the current context of the war in Gaza, the sources of antisemitism in Belgium are hostility to Israel for 24% of Belgians, radical Islamism for 22%, traditional stereotypes about Jews for 20%, the far right for 14%, conspiracy theories for 10% and the far left for 5%.

In France, in an IFOP survey in March 2024, the French also identified hostility to Israel (34%) and radical Islamism (26%) as the two main sources of antisemitism in their country.

Before the war, in an IPSOS survey in February 2023, they identified traditional stereotypes (32%) and radical Islamism (27%) as the two main sources of antisemitism in France.

The Belgian results reinforce the demand for a specific public policy to combat antisemitism, in addition to the public policies already in place to combat racism.

Indeed, none of the other forms of hatred targeted by these policies has its source in hostility to Israel, radical Islamism, traditional prejudices about Jews or the rhetoric of the extreme left.

6. Israel, Palestine and the war in Gaza have a limited resonance among Belgians, with the exception of a minority who hold antisemitic views.

Only 22% of Belgians say they 'follow a lot' the news about the war in Gaza and Israel. These Belgians are over-represented on the far left (45%), the far right (40%) and among Muslims (56%).

Only 9% of Belgians, including 8% of Walloons and 8% of Flemings, say they will attach much importance to the positions taken by the various Belgian parties on the war in Gaza and Israel when they vote on 9 June 2024. This minority is over-represented by Muslims (39%), the far right (28%), people from Brussels (25%) and the 18-24 age group (17%).

However, 75% of Walloons said they were neutral or would attach little or no importance to this issue in their vote. The same applies to voters in the centre and on the right.

These results call into question the place given to the Palestinians and Israel in Belgian politics.

When asked what they would like to see as the outcome of this conflict, 45% of Belgians (54% of those aged 55 and over) said 'two states side by side, Israel and Palestine'. 32% of Belgians said they had no opinion.

The breakdown of the remaining 24% is as follows:

- 11% of Belgians say '*a bi-national state that is both Jewish and Arab*'.
- 8% '*a State of Palestine from the Mediterranean to the Jordan, dominated by Arabs*'.
- 5% '*a State of Israel from the Mediterranean to the Jordan, dominated by Jews*'.

Those who favour the latter two options are a minority of Belgian society, but they are also a sign of radicalisation and polarisation.

With the aim of combating antisemitism, the Institut Jonathas focuses on the 8% of Belgians who want a State of Palestine '*from the river to the sea*'. **This option, which implies the destruction of the State of Israel, is favoured by 19% of 18-24 year olds, 13% of 25-34 year olds and 44% of Muslims.**

These results mean that it needs to be made clear in public discourse that opposition to Israel has nothing to do with a call to destroy the State of Israel.

7. The war between Israel and Hamas is met with detachment or indifference by around 50% of Belgians, but also reflects the polarisation of several sections of Belgian society.

When Belgians are asked about their sympathy or dislike for different actors in the current war, **around 50% of them (from 38% to 63%, depending on the actors) have neither sympathy nor dislike, or say they do not know.**

Only half of Belgians feel sympathy for the victims of this conflict, whether they are the Palestinian victims of the war (52%), the Israeli victims of the 7 October attack (50%) or the Israeli hostages held by Hamas (47%).

This sympathy is not consistent across Belgian society:

- The 52% of Belgians who have sympathy for the Palestinian victims of the war in Gaza are over-represented on the far left (69%), the left (67%) and among Muslims (61%). They are under-represented on the far right (37%).

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- The 50% of Belgians who have sympathy for the Israeli victims of the attack on 7 October are over-represented among people aged 55 and over (58% compared with 32% among 18-24 year-olds) and among men (58% compared with 42% among women). They are under-represented among Muslims (28%).

The vast majority of Belgians reject Hamas and the Israeli government.

6% of Belgians have sympathy for the Israeli government (20% on the far right).

Although also a very small minority, the fact that 5% of Belgians are sympathetic to Hamas is disturbing. Sympathy for this terrorist organisation is over-represented among 18- to 44-year-olds (8%), in Brussels (11%) and among Muslims (28%).

8. The majority of Belgians see the war between Israel and Hamas as a source of concern for Jews in Belgium. A minority saw it as a source of hostility against Jews in Belgium.

64% of respondents thought that Belgian Jews *'have nothing to do with the war between Israel and Hamas'* and 68% did not see Belgian Jews as *'accomplices in genocide against the Palestinians'*.

A minority of Belgians stood out strongly and saw Jewish Belgians as stakeholders in the ongoing war. **28% of Belgians consider that Jewish Belgians had something to do with the current war and 10% that they are 'accomplices in a genocide'.**

In the eyes of this minority, Belgian Jews are, by extension, the object of the same detestation as Israel: hate speech and violence against them are thus legitimised.

In this context, it is hardly surprising that 58% of Belgians think that Belgian Jews are experiencing a sharp rise in antisemitism as a result of the ongoing war in Gaza and Israel, and that **63% of Belgians think that Belgian Jews are worried about their future in Belgium.**

9. The opinions, concerns and experiences of Belgians regarding Jews and other minorities are negative signals for Belgian society as a whole.

Belgians' opinions about Jews are part of a wider set of opinions and experiences about different minority groups. **The results of the survey on these subjects reveal a rather tense and anxious Belgian society.**

Over 60% of Belgians regularly hear malicious remarks (stereotypes, mockery, etc.) about Muslims (71% of Belgians), North Africans (63%) and foreigners (63%).

49% regularly hear malicious remarks about black people, 39% about Roma, 35% about gays and lesbians, 30% about Jews and 19% about Asians.

In detail, "often" or "from time to time", in their daily lives, hear bad things said (stereotypes, discriminatory remarks, mockery):

- about foreigners: 63% of Belgians,
- about Muslims: 71% of Flemish people,
- about blacks: 78% of Muslims,
- about foreigners, 74% of the 18-25 year-olds,
- about Jews: 41% of agnostics,

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- about gays: 57% of the Muslims.

Some of the figures reveal a bleak picture of the Belgian 'living together' approach so highly praised by the media and politicians. Is Belgian society in danger of becoming fragmented?

On the eve of the elections on 9 June, these results call into question the effectiveness of public policies and, more broadly, the type of society that Belgians want.

Commenting on the survey, Joël Kotek, President of the Institut Jonathas, said:

'Evidently, since the Shoah, no one today declares themselves to be antisemitic. Anti-Jewish hatred would seem to have practically disappeared from the mental horizon of Belgians. But the opposite is true.

Our survey takes a close look at the three distinct forms of antisemitism at work in Belgian society today: traditional Judeophobia inherited from Catholicism, Islam and the anti-capitalist left; historical guilt linked to the Shoah; and, finally, radical anti-Zionism designed to appeal to an electorate, mainly in Brussels, that has an absolute hatred of Israel.

These three factors explain why today, in proportion to their numbers, Jews are the main victims of racist violence in Belgium. I am referring to symbolic and physical violence, not discrimination. Need I remind you that in Belgium a president of the CCOJB was assassinated, synagogues were machine-gunned, the Jewish museum was the target of a terrorist attack, and that only Jewish places of worship and schools are subject to special surveillance? The policy of denial must come to an end.

My hope is that this survey will contribute to raising awareness of the reality of antisemitism in Belgium and to more effective action against each of these three forms, and in particular action against the minority groups that are bringing the Middle East conflict to our doorstep. Our collective challenge is to curb the active minorities who, through their hateful and senseless posturing and rhetoric, are damaging our ability to live together. We must stop the arsonists'.

This survey was carried out with the support of the Fédération Wallonie Bruxelles and in partnership with the Centre Européen d'Etudes sur la Shoah, l'Antisémitisme et les Génocides (CEESAG).



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