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The perception of Jews and others in the Brussels-Capital Region

Analysis of the survey conducted
in the Brussels-Capital Region

Dr Joël Kotek

Executive summary

INSTITUT
JONATHAS

POUR ÉVITER QUE LE PASSÉ SOIT NOTRE FUTUR



In February 2026, the Institut Jonathas published the results of a third survey on anti-Semitism, this time focusing on Brussels. This study was intended to consolidate and validate two previous surveys. The results clearly converge: contemporary anti-Semitism cannot be considered marginal, residual or strictly circumstantial. Far from having disappeared, classic anti-Jewish prejudices persist, are being reconfigured and are now linked to clearly identifiable political, religious, generational and ideological factors. Although they are frequently linked to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, they are not limited to it and are part of a more global vision of otherness.

Methodology and analytical framework

The survey was conducted by IPSOS from 2 to 6 July 2025 among 600 residents of the Brussels-Capital Region (Belgians, dual nationals and foreigners), using a methodology comparable to that of traditional political polls. The sample respects gender and age quotas and, without claiming to be perfectly representative – particularly due to the relative under-representation of Muslim Brussels residents – it remains statistically robust for analysing attitudes and differences between population segments.

The questionnaire comprises 26 questions and around 100 items relating to representations of 'the Other' (Jews, women, LGBTQIA+ people), attitudes towards the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, conspiracy theories and certain factual knowledge. In order to limit self-reporting bias, the study favours an indirect approach, distinguishing between "prejudicial antisemitism" (adherence to classic stereotypes) and "aggressive antisemitism" (tolerance or justification of hostile acts targeting Jews or Jewish places under political cover).

Nearly one in two respondents (49%) consider anti-Semitism to be a problem that concerns society as a whole, compared to 20% who believe it only concerns Jews. This civic awareness, which is weaker than in France, nevertheless coexists with a worrying trivialisation of stereotypical representations, even among respondents who describe themselves as progressive or anti-racist. The study does not aim to label "the people of Brussels" as anti-Semitic – a sociologically inappropriate category – but to measure the spread of anti-Jewish tropes and the significant differences between groups.

Persistence of classic anti-Semitic tropes

The results highlight the high resilience of stereotypes inherited from religious, political and conspiracy traditions. These representations are often expressed as obvious truths, which encourages their trivialisation, particularly in digital spaces.

For example, 40% of respondents believe that Jews control finance and banking; 25% hold them responsible for economic crises; and 22% consider that Belgian Jews are "not really Belgians like everyone else". The most widely shared trope remains that of "Jewish solidarity": 70% of respondents believe that Jews are "very close-knit". In total, more than half of the items tested were endorsed by at least one-third of the sample, a sign of the structural spread of prejudice.

While anti-Semitic opinions are found across all social and political groups, they are significantly more intense in certain segments structured around three main poles:

- political extremes, both on the right and on the left (particularly among PTB supporters)
- the younger generations;
- certain groups defined by ethno-religious factors, in particular Muslim Brussels residents and, to a lesser extent, practising Catholics.

The study emphasises the need not to essentialise these groups. Belgian Islam, in particular, is pluralistic and heterogeneous. Nevertheless, the differences observed remain statistically robust and recurrent.

Religion, conservatism and conspiracy theories

The data confirms the existence of a "religion effect" already highlighted by several European surveys. Muslim respondents show significantly higher levels of agreement with certain anti-Jewish stereotypes: 56% believe that Jews are too present in the media and politics (compared to 31% of the sample as a whole) and 51% hold them responsible for many economic crises.

These representations are part of a broader socio-political ethos characterised by moral conservatism and distrust of the principles of equality. For example, nearly half of Muslim respondents believe that a woman must obey her husband, only 31% are in favour of adoption by same-sex couples, and more than 50% subscribe to conspiracy theories such as the denial of the moon landing.

Politicisation of anti-Semitism

Politicisation appears to be a major structuring factor. The study shows that anti-Semitism is no longer the preserve of the far right. Several distinct pockets exist today, particularly on the left. Among far-right supporters, 69% believe that Jews exploit the Holocaust and 72% believe they exploit anti-Semitism for their own interests. But certain representations are also very present among PTB supporters: 33% consider Jews to be an "unassimilable race", and less than one in two consider it anti-Semitic to tag a Jewish place in protest against Israel.

A worrying tolerance of aggression

The most alarming aspect is the potential trivialisation of such acts. A significant proportion of respondents do not consider behaviours such as the tagging of a synagogue (), insulting or threatening a Jew believed to be a Zionist during a demonstration or on social media to be anti-Semitic. Overall, 22% of respondents consider these acts to be legitimate, acceptable or understandable, a proportion that rises to over 40% among supporters of extreme political views.

Generational divide and accusatory reversal

Contrary to popular belief, younger generations appear to be more susceptible to several anti-Semitic tropes than their elders. In a fragmented and poorly contextualised information environment, extreme analogies play a central role: nearly 40% of 18-35 year olds believe that "Israelis behave like Nazis" and a similar proportion consider that the Holocaust is exploited by Jews to defend Israel. These

comparisons function as mechanisms of accusatory reversal, minimising the history of anti-Semitism while legitimising hostility presented as moral.

Anti-Semitism and conservative ethos

The survey highlights a structural link between anti-Semitism and conservative values. The "conservative ethos" index constructed for the study shows that the more a segment adheres to a hierarchical, patriarchal and religious worldview, the greater the propensity to adhere to anti-Jewish representations. Anti-Semitism, conspiracy theories and rejection of Enlightenment principles thus tend to reinforce each other.

Recommendations

In light of these findings, the Institut Jonathas calls for a collective response combining normative clarification, prevention, education and responsibility on the part of political and media mediators. In particular, it advocates for the formalisation of the IHRA working definition in order to better identify certain forms of radical anti-Zionism when they reactivate anti-Semitic patterns, without hindering legitimate criticism of Israeli policies. Finally, the report emphasises the need to strengthen historical education and digital literacy, as well as to increase vigilance in the face of growing tolerance for symbolic and physical attacks.