# All about Anti-Semitism

## Why in news?

With the rise of the right in Europe, the escalation of ethnic tensions in the Middle East, and increasing anonymity provided by social media platforms, anti-Semitism is a pressing matter of concern.

## What is anti-Semitism?

- Anti-Semitism refers to any form of prejudice against the Jewish people.
- The term anti-Semitism was coined in 1879 by the German agitator **Wilhelm Marr** to designate the anti-Jewish campaigns in central Europe at that time.
- The term itself is a misnomer as Semitic designates a language group, not a race.
- Anti-Semitism can also describe prejudice against speakers of the Semitic languages (including Arabs and Ethiopians).

### Categories of anti-Semitism

- **Racial anti-Semitism** - It is most commonly associated with the Nazis and stems from a belief that Jews are a distinct, inferior race with inherent genetic traits.
    - This form usually manifests in the belief that Jews need to be exterminated altogether.
- **Religious anti-Semitism** - It traces its roots to the early days of Christianity and is accompanied by the notion that Jews should be converted to other faiths.
- **Social anti-Semitism** - It is a form of exclusion of Jews from social situations.
    - For example, Jews were routinely excluded from golf and sports clubs in 1959 in America.
- **Economic anti-Semitism** – It proposes that Jews have disproportionate control over financial institutions, and their stronghold over those institutions ought to be diminished.
- **Political anti-Semitism** – It is the attempt to keep Jews out of power.
- It is often conflated with anti-Zionism, a movement that denies the Jewish right to a national homeland.

## What is the history of anti-Semitism?

### Reasons for anti-Semitism

- **Christian doctrine** - According to Christian doctrine, Jews were responsible for the death of Jesus and thus deserved to be punished.
- There was also a fear that early Christian converts would continue to abide by Jewish practices, combining the two faiths over time.
- **Religious difference** - In the ancient Greco-Roman world, religious differences were

the primary basis for anti-Semitism.
- In the Hellenistic Age, Jews' social segregation and refusal to acknowledge the gods worshipped by other peoples aroused resentment.
- **Darwin's theory of evolution** - Interpreting Darwin's theory of evolution to mean that race was inherent and unchangeable, it was argued that Jews were genetically inferior on an evolutionary scale.

**Effect of anti-Semitism**

- **Jews as scapegoats** - From the Protestant reformer Martin Luther in 1543 to the French philosopher Edmund Burke in 1790, Jews were positioned as scapegoats for several societal ills.
- Jews have systematically been driven out of countries including England, Yemen, Brazil, Portugal, Spain, Hungary, and Egypt.
- **Ban in Russia** - Until 1772, Jews were banned from living in the Russian Empire altogether.
- Between 1880 and 1910, 2.5 million Jews fled from Russia to the US after anti-Semitism became the official government policy under the rule of the Czars.
- **Holocaust in Germany** - Völkisch nationalists believed that the German race was superior to all other races.
- They considered Jews to be alien people who belonged to a different race and blamed them for undermining the German way of life.
- The rise of the Nazi party culminated in the death of over 6 million Jews by the end of the Second World War.

## What is positive anti-Semitism?

- Positive anti-Semitism claims that, in certain instances, Jews benefitted from the prejudices associated with them.
- The belief that Jews are influential or wealthy can result in positive anti-Semitism because people then misinterpret their prominence in world affairs.
- For example, the Balfour Declaration, the British Government's 1917 statement, supported the creation of a Jewish state.

## What about the current instances of anti-Semitism?

> *In a survey of 53,000 people across 101 countries, it was found that 26% of them harboured anti-Semitic attitudes.*

- The recent incidents of rising anti-Semitism include
  - Far-right demonstrations in the US
  - Attacks on synagogues (Jewish houses of worship) in Sweden
  - Arson attacks on kosher (food that complies with strict dietary rules in Judaism) restaurants in France
  - Increase in crimes against Jews in the UK
- The problem seems to be exacerbated by social media.

**References**


1. The Indian Express | What is anti-Semitism?
2. Britannica | Anti-Semitism
3. BBC | Judaism


## Quick facts

### Judaism

- Judaism is a **monotheistic** religion (belief in a single deity).
- It was founded over 3500 years ago in the Middle East.
- It is the original of the three **Abrahamic faiths**, including Christianity and Islam.
- **Moses** founded Judaism, although Jews trace their history back to Abraham.
- The most important religious document is the **Torah**.
- The interpretation of the laws of the Torah is called **halakhah**.
- Spiritual leaders are called **Rabbis**.
- Followers of Judaism are called **Jews**.
- Jews worship in **Synagogues**.


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