

Anti-Semitic incidents persist even as U.S. Jews find greater acceptance

Recent surveys show that “the vast majority of Americans do not have negative opinions of their Jewish neighbors.”

by [Yonat Shimron](#) and [Christian Century staff](#)

This article appears in the [January 2, 2019](#) issue.

The shooting at Tree of Life–Or L'Simcha synagogue in Pittsburgh in October has brought heightened awareness of anti-Semitic violence at a time when most Americans have a positive view of Jewish people.

[A shooter killed 11 people at the Pittsburgh synagogue](#) in what is believed to be the deadliest anti-Semitic attack in U.S. history. In the weeks that followed, a man got up during a performance of *Fiddler on the Roof* in Baltimore and shouted “Heil Hitler” as the audience ran for the exits, afraid gunshots would follow. A mural honoring the 11 victims of the Pittsburgh synagogue massacre was vandalized with a swastika spray-painted over the star of David on the campus of Duke University. A psychology professor arrived at Columbia’s Teachers College in New York City to find swastikas spray-painted red in the foyer to her office. And a fire being investigated as arson began at a Houston synagogue while members were studying inside.

For many American Jews, the incidents are a reminder of the stories told by their parents and grandparents of Europe in the days before the Holocaust. And a new survey by the Claims Conference, an organization that compensates Holocaust survivors with funds received from Germany, found that 58 percent of Americans believe something like the Holocaust could happen again.

“There has always been anti-Semitism in the U.S., because anti-Semitism doesn’t just go away,” said Jill Jacobs, executive director of the network T’ruah: The Rabbinic Call for Human Rights.

In its most recent report, the Anti-Defamation League found that the number of anti-Semitic incidents rose nearly 60 percent in 2017 over 2016, the largest single-year increase on record and the second-highest number reported since ADL started tracking incident data in the 1970s. When the report was released, Jonathan Greenblatt, ADL CEO and national director, told the Associated Press that reporting of incidents likely increased alongside growing awareness of anti-Semitism.

The incidents of anti-Semitism contradict a decrease in anti-Jewish attitudes in the same decades: according to surveys conducted by the ADL as recently as 2017, “the vast majority of Americans do not have negative opinions of their Jewish neighbors.”

A 2017 Pew Research survey found that Jews continue to be among the groups seen most positively. With data depicted as a thermometer ranking warm feelings, half of U.S. adults rated Jews at 67 degrees or higher on the zero to 100 scale, the highest rating given to a group. It was also an increase of 4 degrees from 2014 survey results. (Muslims scored the lowest at 48; mainline Protestants were at 65.)

“We don’t have the anti-Semitism problem that France does, or Germany or Belgium or Hungary or Poland,” said Ira Forman, former U.S. special envoy to monitor anti-Semitism from 2013 to 2017, and now a visiting professor at Georgetown University and senior adviser on anti-Semitism to Human Rights First.

Though a striking number of white nationalists ran for office in the 2018 midterms—including some blatant anti-Semites and Holocaust deniers—nearly all of them lost.

Forman pointed to the civil society groups in the United States showing solidarity with the Jewish community after the Pittsburgh shooting, such as Muslims raising \$200,000 to cover the cost of the funerals and a San Francisco Sikh artist creating 150 menorahs and donating the profits to the local Jewish Community Relations Council.

“Support to people who have been persecuted,” he said, “is a very powerful mechanism. We can build it up even further. It’s one of the important tools we have.”

A version of this article appears in the print edition under the title “Anti-Semitic incidents persist even as Jews find greater acceptance.”