

Criticism Against Israel is not Identical with Anti-Semitic Attitudes

Potential of Anti-Semitism in Switzerland Newly Defined

Titel

MANAGEMENT SUMMARY "ANTI-JEWISH AND ANTI-
ISRAEL ATTITUDES"

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Introduction and Research Question

The definition of Anti-Semitism applied in the present study is based on Helen Fein's 1987 definition of Anti-Semitism as "a persisting latent structure of hostile beliefs towards Jews as a collective manifested in individuals as attitudes, and in culture as myth, ideology, folklore and imagery, and in actions – social or legal discrimination, political mobilisation against the Jews, and collective or state violence – which results in and/or is designed to distance, displace or destroy Jews as Jews." "Attitudes" here are understood as persistent reactions of individuals or groups to objects, persons, and issues that consist of cognitive, affective and conative elements. Based on this, three separate dimensions can be identified for the present study:

- opinions regarding Jews (conative or evaluative dimension),
- stereotypes of Jews (cognitive dimension), and
- emotions towards Jews (affective dimension).

According to the abovementioned definition, a person is only then anti-Semitic if persistent anti-jewish attitudes can be identified on all three levels. In other words, an anti-Semite has negative emotions as well as negative stereotypical images and negative opinions regarding Jews.

The present study does not only explore the attitudes of the Swiss population towards Jews, but also the attitudes towards Israel. Furthermore, it examines the connection between anti-Jewish and anti-Israel attitudes. Finally, the study also investigates how the population deals with anti-Semitism as such.

Opinions on Anti-Semitism in Switzerland

78% of Swiss residents agree with the statement that a civilized society has to stand up against anti-Semitism. 66% are in favour of penal sanctions against racism as they are laid down in current legislation, only 21% are clearly against this legislation.

According to 90% of the respondents, anti-Jewish action should lead to prosecution. The question whether someone who is expressing anti-Jewish sentiments but not acting upon them should also be held criminally liable, however, has polarized public opinion: 40% share this view, but as many respondents think that no criminal liability is engaged.

Anti-Semitism is considered a very or rather severe problem by 49% of Swiss residents, 41% do not believe this to be the case.

Conclusion: A clear majority of Swiss residents has a negative attitude towards anti-Semitism. While public opinion is clear on the criminal liability of someone engaged in anti-Jewish actions, it is polarized regarding the question whether someone should be held criminally liable for expressing anti-Jewish sentiments.

Anti-Israeli Attitudes

The emotions people have with regards to Israel are mainly respect, but also incomprehension. Today, disappointment is more common than admiration.

Opinions on Israel are affected by images of Israel as a state like any other (68%) and as a part of the Western world (58%). Criticism is voiced in particular regarding Israel's role in the conflict with Palestine. 58% also agree with the statement that today, Israel is the pawn of the USA. 54% are of the opinion that Israel is governed by religious fanatics, and 50% think that Israel is engaged in a war of extermination against Palestine. 43% hold Israel partially responsible for global terrorism, a relative majority of 45%, however, do not consider Israel responsible for terrorism.

Potential anti-zionist images of Israel are held only by a minority of respondents: 49% disagree with the statement that Israel has too much power in world politics, 40%, however, agree with this accusation. 54% are against equating Israel's policy with that of the Nazis during WWII, 34%, however, accept this comparison. 77% object to the view that Israel has had a destabilizing influence since its foundation and therefore has to be dissolved. 13%, however, deny Israel's right to exist.

Conclusion: The attitudes of Swiss residents towards Israel are mixed. Israel is commonly regarded as a normal state that is approached with respect. However, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict increasingly leads to disappointment and incomprehension.

Anti-Jewish Attitudes

The affective dimension of the Swiss residents with regards to Jews is similar to the emotions evoked by Israel, however, there are two important exceptions: Feelings of disappointment or disillusionment are clearly less common. Also rejection and anger are less commonly expressed. The admiration for Israel, however, is as strong as the admiration for Jews in general. The respondents' attitudes to Jews is therefore only partially influenced by the image they have of Israel. In the context of the Israeli-Palestinian, however, disappointment with Israel is indirectly also applied to the Jews.

The perception of Jews on Switzerland is strongly based on stereotyped. A majority considers Jews as successful business people who are hard-working, intelligent, have a strong feeling of solidarity towards each other, and who are artistically gifted. They are also regarded as politically radical by a majority of respondents. Only a negligible majority considers Jews as sinister, however, sizeable majorities see them as unconciliatory as well as greedy for wealth and power.

A majority of Swiss residents objects to anti-Semitic sentiments. 89% do not see a reason why Jews should move to Israel to benefit Switzerland. 71% disagree with the opinion that Jews are still having problems today because they betrayed Jesus, 61% object to Jewish responsibility for their persecution.

72% also disagree with the claim that the Jewish minority has too much power in Switzerland. With regards to world politics, however, only 49% do not think that Jews are too powerful. 43% believe that Jews use the memory of their persecution during

WWII for their own benefit. However, only 29% think that Switzerland has been blackmailed by Jewish organisations because of its policy during WWII.

One critical aspect is the perceived segregation of Jews from the rest of society. 45% believe that Jews willingly separate themselves from other residents. 26% also perceive a greater loyalty of Jews towards Israel than towards Switzerland.

Conclusion: The attitudes of Swiss residents towards Jews are affected by strong stereotypes, though these are mainly positive. Respect best describes the basic feelings Swiss residents have with regards to Jews, however, their otherness and their self-imposed segregation are seen as problematic. Conspiracy theories are rejected by a majority of respondents, however, this rejection is stronger regarding Swiss than world politics. Switzerland is no longer seen as a victim due to its WWII policies, however, a certain uncertainty remains. Classical anti-Semitic arguments such as the accusation of deicide and demands that Jews should move to Israel do not find strong support.

The Engagement of the Population with the Topic

The engagement of the Swiss population with the topic "Jews and Anti-Semitism" is not strong. The number of Jews living in Switzerland is strongly overestimated by the respondents, on average a number that is 10 times too high is given. Around half of the respondents have personal acquaintances with Jews. 85% consider Jews who were born in Switzerland as Swiss. Accordingly, a majority can imagine having a Jewish family member.

The Current Potential of Anti-Semitism in Switzerland

Summarising the measured attitudes not along their objects, but case-by-case, 90% of respondents can be classified in one of the following five groups:

- 10% of the respondents have systematic anti-Semitic attitudes. They can be classified as anti-Semites on the basis of the definition given above. A majority of this group subscribes to all negative stereotypes. The opinions held by this group are mainly negative. However, their emotions are currently only partly negative. Negative emotions are not shared by a majority in either of the groups, however, they are more common in Italian-speaking Switzerland, in the lower socio-economic strata, among people on the right of the political spectrum, among people having no personal Jewish acquaintances, and in rural areas.
- 28% have selective anti-Jewish attitudes. They accuse Jews of being too loyal towards Israel, the policies of which they do not accept. However, they also hold certain negative stereotypical images such as greed for power and money and political radicalness. Selective anti-Jewish attitudes can be observed especially in connection with lack of political awareness, as well as among respondents with a lower-medium education.

- 15% are disappointed because of Israel's policies, however, they do have particularly negative attitudes towards the Jewish population. In all subgroups of this cluster, this disappointment has approximately the same level.
- 37% have mainly positive attitudes towards the Jewish population. These positive attitudes are above average among respondents with higher education, people on the left side of the political spectrum, as well as people without religious affiliations.
- 10% cannot be clearly classified. Their answers are too general; they are generally close to the population mean.

Whether the potential for anti-Semitism in Switzerland has grown or diminished cannot be tested with the present study. Comparisons across time are currently not possible. Where such comparisons are possible on the level of individual indicators, they are stated. We assume that anti-Israel attitudes have become more negative.

Theses

1

The majority of the Swiss population is in favour of combatting anti-Semitic currents in Switzerland and supports penal sanctions for anti-Semitic actions as well as the anti-racism legislation.

2

Anti-Semitism today is recognisable by systematic negative stereotypes (such as politically radical, greedy for power and money, irreconcilable and sinister) as well as by systematic negative opinions on Jews. The most common accusations of Jews refer to their making use of their past persecution, their too great influence on world politics, their self-imposed segregation, their own partial responsibility for their persecution, the blackmailing of Switzerland because of its policies during WWII as well as their greater loyalty towards Israel.

3

The emotional uncertainty resulting of the disappointment regarding Israel's role in the conflict with Palestine is no sufficient sign for anti-Semitism. The same is true regarding statements critical of Israel.

4

A person sharing only some negative opinions and stereotypes generally is not necessarily part of the anti-Semitic potential.

5

The sensitivity for anti-Semitism expressed against the Jewish population in Switzerland is not highly developed. The tendency to banalize this is not only typical for systematically anti-Semitic respondents, but also for those with selective anti-Semitic attitudes and respondents with negative emotions.

6

Since this survey has so far only been conducted once, it cannot be stated whether the potential for anti-Semitism in Switzerland is growing or not. Probably this is not the case. However, a new development is the criticism of Israel and its policies, which, however, only has a limited influence on the attitudes towards Jews and cannot be understood as anti-Semitism per se.

Recommendations

1

A critical discussion on what level of critique of Israel and the Jewish population in Switzerland is permissible without turning into anti-Semitism is needed. At the same time, it needs a sensitization of the population for anti-Semitic statements.

2

We recommend to survey the development of the potentials and their characteristics on a continuous basis.

Technical Report

The data of the representative public opinion survey for the study "Anti-Jewish and Anti-Israel Attitudes in Switzerland" was collected in a CATI (computer-assisted telephone interview) survey among a random sample of 1030 residents of the whole of Switzerland (with and without Swiss citizenship). The interviews were conducted by trained interviewers of the gfs-field services between the 5th and the 15th of February 2007. The static error for a survey among 1030 respondents is +/- 3.1%.

The project "Anti-Jewish and Anti-Israel Attitudes in Switzerland" was carried out in three steps. In the first phase, current theoretical and empirical literature in German, English and French was screened and analysed. Secondly, qualitative guided interviews were conducted with experts in the field in order to evaluate the different dimensions of the topic with focus on Switzerland, and in order to have a sound basis for the following qualitative research. The results of the literature research and the guided interviews were used as a basis for the questionnaire, which is designed to be compatible with international studies, as well as for future use. Two external experts examined the resulting questionnaire.

The present study was carried out by the research institute gfs.berne under the patronage of the Federal Commission against Racism. The study will be published in the Jewish journal "tachles".