

# **Journalists, check your evidence on antisemitism!**

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## **JVL Introduction**

This extensive review of data about antisemitism in the UK demonstrates that media claims about **rampant** left-wing antisemitism are based on unproven and unsourced allegations, resulting in the stifling of rational debate about both Israel/Palestine and the dangers of antisemitism and racism.

JVL is grateful to the authors Jonathan Coulter, Tim Llewellyn and Dr Alan Maddison for permission to publish it.

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## *Labour, Antisemitism and the News* A disinformation paradigm



Cover of the Media Reform Coalition Report, September 2018

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[Hyperlinked references which may not be live in this PDF are listed at the end of the article]

## Introduction

In the face of a near three-year political and media campaign alleging **rampant and institutional antisemitism** in the Labour Party – especially on the left – we present here hard statistical evidence that the allegation is wildly exaggerated or based on misinformation. The relevant data we present below has been almost completely ignored in media reporting and commentary and the findings rarely if ever referred to, or reflected upon.

We do not downplay anti-Jewish prejudice, which exists across the political spectrum and in all parts of society. However the statistics, some from Jewish and pro-Israeli groups, show that other ethnic minorities (rather than Jewish people) face the brunt of British prejudice, and moreover, that the far right is home to the highest levels of prejudice against all minorities, including Jews, and to most perpetrators of religious hate crimes.

A smear campaign of McCarthyite proportions has been taken up unquestioningly by the mainstream media, including the BBC and even the notionally left-supporting Guardian, and has been enthusiastically supported by Corbyn's opponents in his own and other parties. The effect has been to intimidate and silence critics of Israel and its policies towards the Palestinians, to severely curtail free speech and comment on the issue, and to close down public debate and rights of assembly.

In a word, broadcast commentators, columnists and news reporters now take constant media claims about *rampant left-wing antisemitism* as a fact, rather than as unproven and unsourced allegations, preventing the United Kingdom from rationally debating the issues either of Israel/Palestine or the dangers of antisemitism and racism themselves.

This tsunami of false allegations also diverts attention from a more potent threat to racial minorities, including Jews: the global resurgence of right-wing populism.

Behind this spurious antisemitism campaign we see a coalition of interest groups which, for various reasons, are intent on:

- creating a minefield for would-be critics of Israel and supporters, and;
- unseating Jeremy Corbyn by fair means or foul, and ensuring that he never becomes Prime Minister.

We, the authors, have varying political affiliations, but all applaud Corbyn's unequivocal stand for Palestinian rights, and do not want to see Corbyn, or any other PM candidate, brought down by a very British media-orchestrated coup.

These antisemitism smears are an (outstanding) example of wider media abuse in the UK, including inaccurate coverage of immigration, Brexit, war in Iraq and other matters. Where facts are not checked, evidence is ignored and poor reporting lead us to make poor political choices across the board. This affects all our futures. **So it is time to focus on the evidence and bring this appalling situation to an end.**

## Here's the evidence

We present our evidence below in three sections dealing respectively with: statistical data; UN and EU condemnation of British newspapers' hate-speech towards migrants, and; chronic low reporting standards across the board (not restricted to antisemitism).

### 1. Statistical data on antisemitism and other forms of racism

Some British people are certainly prejudiced against Jews, as they are against other minority groups. However, we need to establish whether antisemitism is **rampant**, especially on the left, such as to justify the enormous media coverage it has received. The only reliable way to establish the prevalence of particular attitudes and behaviour in society is through rigorous surveys and statistical analysis. Anecdotes and allegations about individuals are not enough.

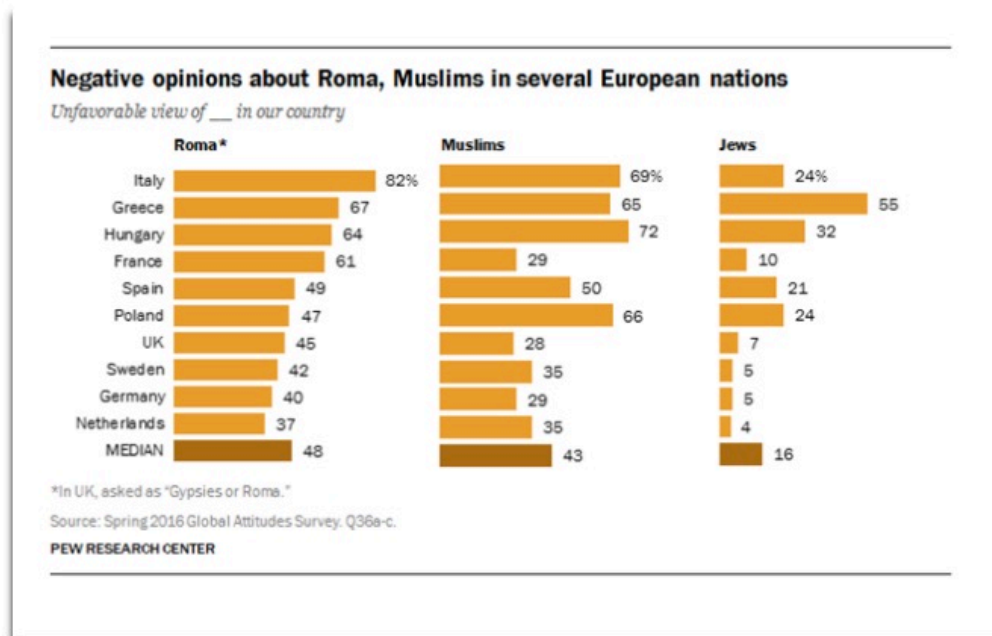
This is what we found in terms of (a) attitudes and; (b) behaviour:

#### a) Antisemitic prejudice in the UK is:

- **low compared with other EU countries**

Pew Research shows that negative opinions about Jews occur in 7% of the UK population compared to a median figure of 16% for ten EU countries– see Fig 1.

FIG 1



Source: <http://www.pewglobal.org/2016/07/11/europeans-fear-wave-of-refugees-will-mean-more-terrorism-fewer-jobs/>

- **low compared to general racial prejudice**

The British Social Attitude survey for 2017 shows 26% of respondents saying they have some prejudice towards other races – see [here](https://antisemitism.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/Antisemitism-Barometer-2017.pdf) [https://antisemitism.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/Antisemitism-Barometer-2017.pdf].

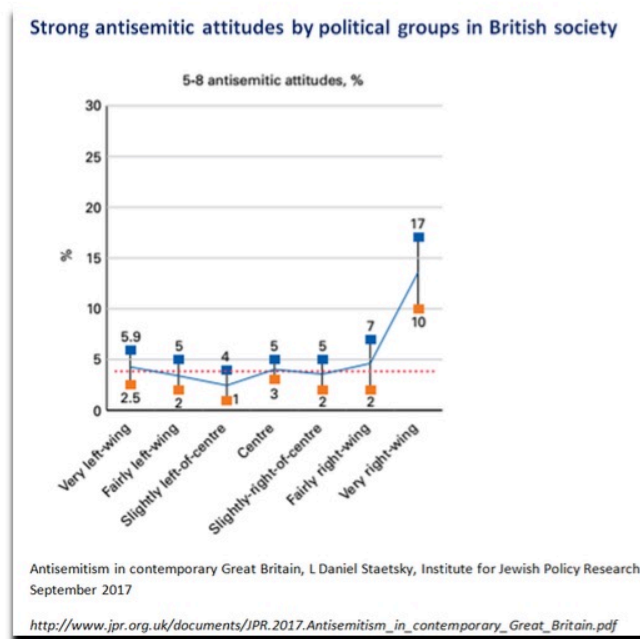
Surveys such as that undertaken by Pew Research show negative opinions about Jews occur in 7% of the UK population but for Muslims and Roma Gypsies this was 28% and 45% respectively – see Fig 1 above.

- **low across the political spectrum, but high on the far right, and there is no evidence of a far-left concentration**

The largest survey ever undertaken was conducted by the Institute for Jewish Policy Research (JPR), with data gathering by Ipsos MORI. The authors found *strong antisemitic attitudes*<sup>[#]</sup> of similarly low prevalence (average 3.6%) from the far left and across the political spectrum. Only on the far right was it significantly higher (13%) – see Fig 2.

[#] These *attitude* scores are based on nine statements, seven of which had been defined by Jews in a previous survey as prejudicial against Jews, and two which were unambiguously positive about Jews.

**FIG 2**

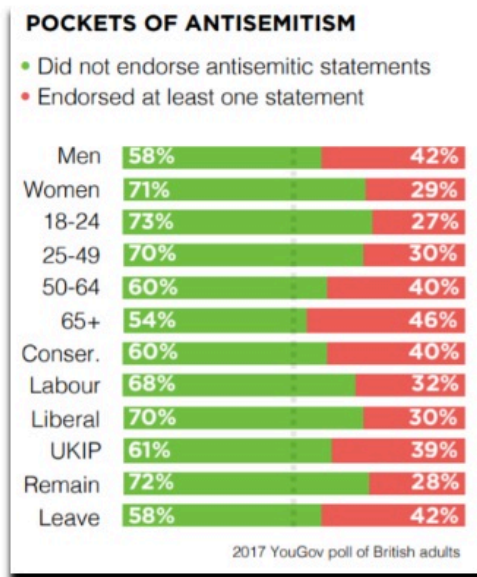


Source: [http://www.jpr.org.uk/documents/JPR.2017.Antisemitism\\_in\\_contemporary\\_Great\\_Britain.pdf](http://www.jpr.org.uk/documents/JPR.2017.Antisemitism_in_contemporary_Great_Britain.pdf)

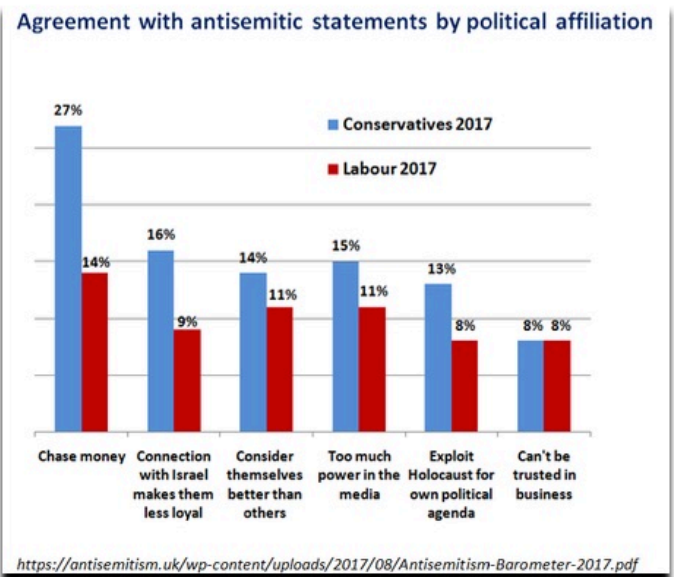
Repeat surveys commissioned by the vigorously pro-Israeli organisation, the Campaign Against Antisemitism, have shown that adoption of *negative antisemitic stereotypes* was higher among Conservative and UKIP voters than LibDem and Labour voters, and had declined since 2015 when Corbyn became leader – see Figs 3 and 4. (Fig 3 does not provide an absolute measure of antisemitism, since JPR researchers consider that only a minority of those endorsing *at least one antisemitic*

statement are truly motivated by antisemitism, defined as dislike of Jews; however it provides a comparative measure of prejudice between the different groups listed).

**FIG 3**

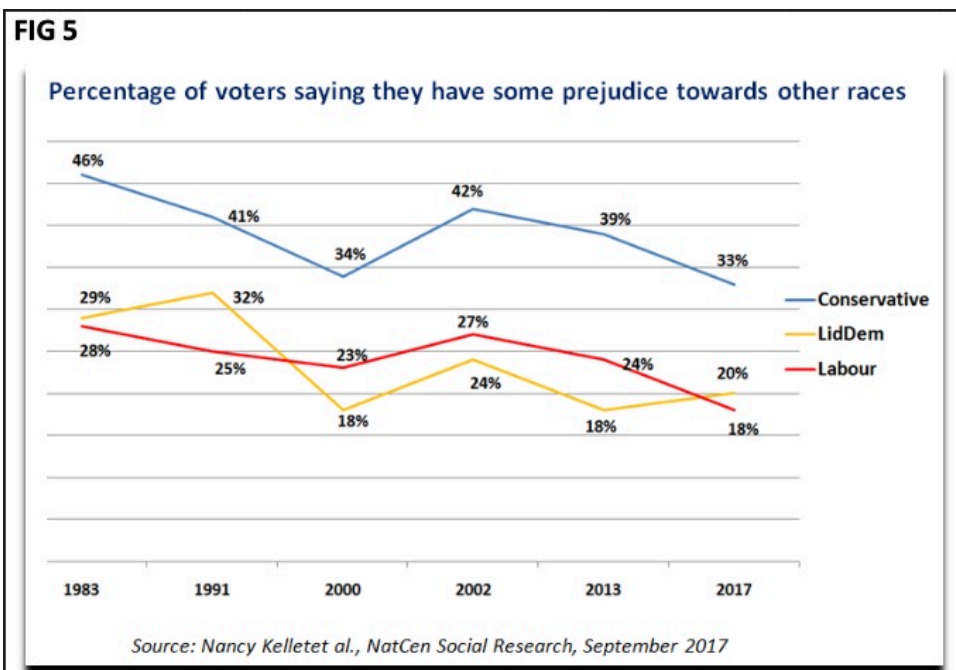


**FIG4**



Source: <https://antisemitism.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/Antisemitism-Barometer-2017.pdf>

This follows a similar pattern of general racial prejudice as reported in the British Social Attitude surveys over 30 years showing a higher incidence among Conservative voters than among Lib Dems and Labour – see Fig 5.



Source: [http://natcen.ac.uk/media/1488132/racial-prejudice-report\\_v4.pdf](http://natcen.ac.uk/media/1488132/racial-prejudice-report_v4.pdf)

Last but not least, the [Home Affairs Select Committee report on Antisemitism](#) of 2016 stated that:

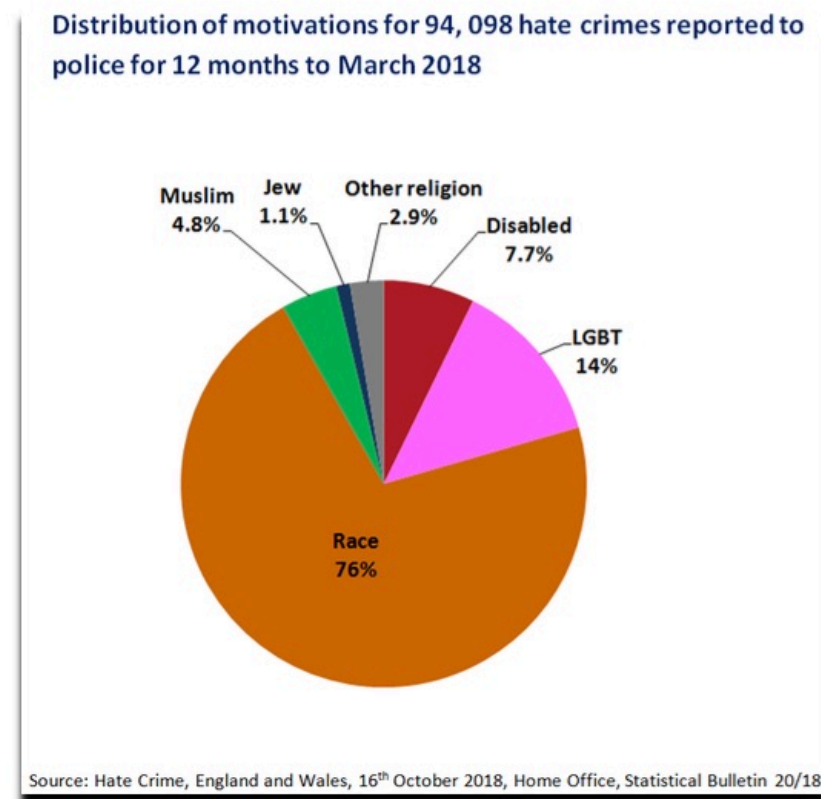
despite significant press and public attention on the Labour Party... there exists no reliable, empirical evidence to support the notion that there is a higher prevalence of antisemitic attitudes within the Labour Party than in any other political party.

## b) Antisemitic behaviour is:

- **Relatively infrequent compared to other racist and discriminatory behaviour**

Of 94,098 hate crimes reported to police over 12 months to March 2018, 76% were motivated by race and 9% by religion. Jews were victims in 1.1% of cases (see Figure 6). Whilst religious hate crimes grew by 40% over the previous year (mostly against Muslims) hate crimes against Jews grew by an estimated 0.2%.

**FIG 6**



Source: <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/hate-crime-england-and-wales-2017-to-2018>

All hate incidents can be extremely unpleasant but those involving violence are likely to be the worst. [Government statistics](#) show around 30% of victims of **all** reported racist or religious hate crimes suffered physical assault, while the latest statistics from the pro-Israeli [Community Security Trust \(CST\)](#) show the corresponding percentage for antisemitic hate crimes to be only about 10%. This may either be due to different patterns of crime against Jewish and other victims, or to higher levels of reporting of non-violent incidents (e.g. offensive tweets) against Jewish people.

Taking account of population sizes, the pro rata risk of a Jewish person becoming a victim of a hate crime is approximately half that of a BAME individual, and for assault about one fifth. It seems that media exaggerations, rather than actual evidence, have led to a significant number of Jewish people becoming fearful about the dangers they face, some even to the point of considering emigrating.

- **largely a right-wing phenomenon**

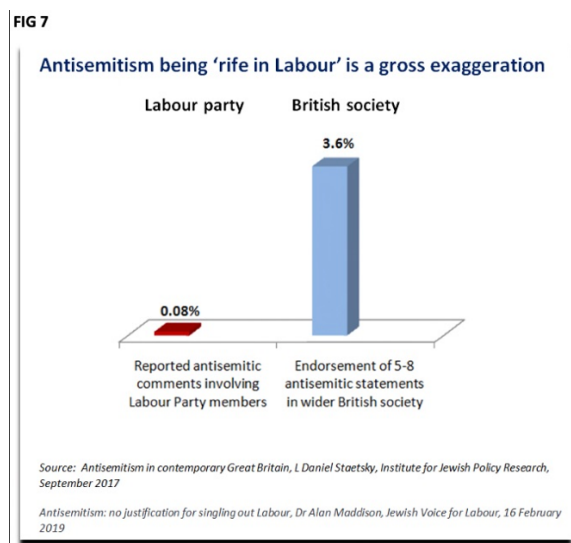
The Home Affairs Select Committee report on Antisemitism of 2016 reported CST figures suggesting that around 75% of all politically-motivated antisemitic incidents came from far-right perpetrators.

A [World Jewish Congress survey](#) of 2016 reported that 90% of antisemitic tweets in the UK came from far right accounts. This parallels findings of the Anti-Defamation League (ADL) in the USA that

identifiably right-wing individuals were responsible for 249 of the anti-Semitic “extremist” incidents. Meanwhile, identifiably left-wing individuals were responsible for none of 2018’s incidents, and Islamist individuals were responsible for four ... (See [here](#)).

- **not particularly associated with the Labour Party**

Figures released by the Labour Party in Feb 2019 show that only 453 Labour members (i.e. one in 1,250) had been verified as requiring investigation for antisemitism, which is hardly evidence that the party had let antisemitism run rife – see [here](#) and in Fig 7 below. In Fig 7, the 0.08% column on the left represents the percentage of Labour members (453 / 540,000) against whom complaints were investigated according to data released by the Party. The right column of 3.6% illustrates the prevalence of *strong antisemitic sentiments* in UK society as measured in the above-mentioned JPR survey. The comparison supports the notion that despite the media noise, and the fact that all antisemitism is to be deplored, the singling out of Labour is unjustified.



Source: <https://www.jewishvoiceforlabour.org.uk/blog/antisemitism-no-justification-for-singling-out-labour/>

The true scale of the problem of antisemitism seems to be smaller than the 453 members mentioned above, and may be closer to the 42 cases that were referred to the NCC, on the assumption that these were judged to have been examples of intentional, serious and abusive antisemitism. 146 members had been issued with written warnings, which can be reasonably assumed to be related to unintentional and less abusive comments – as argued in [this article](#) (under the heading *Handling of Complaints*). Quite apart from this, it can be argued that some in the Labour Party HQ over-reacted to media pressures to *get tough on antisemitism*, resulting in them pursuing and/or penalising some innocent individuals. The cases of Mark Wadsworth and Jackie Walker are extreme examples of Labour Party members being widely and publicly vilified as antisemites and eventually being expelled, even though the antisemitism charge was not upheld.

While some Labour members have undoubtedly made antisemitic comments, available evidence suggests that this has been massively exaggerated – see [here](#), [here](#) and [here](#). Claims by anti-Corbyn MPs like Margaret Hodge, Luciana Berger and Ruth Smeeth do not hold up in the face of serious scrutiny.

## 2. Previous UN and EU condemnation of inaccurate reporting in British newspapers

- In April 2015, the UN Human Rights Chief urged the UK to tackle tabloid hate speech, after decades of sustained and anti-foreigner abuse, misinformation and distortion, and a recent article in the Sun newspaper calling migrants *cockroaches* – language similar to that employed by Rwandan media organisations in advance of the 1994 genocide. He said that these stories were feeding "a vicious cycle of vilification, intolerance and politicization of migrants, as well as marginalised European minorities such as the Roma". He complained that "Many of these stories have been grossly distorted and some have been outright fabrications" (see [here](#)).



- In October 2016, the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI), the Council of Europe’s premiere human rights body, attributed a rise in racist



violence in the UK to *worrying examples of intolerance and hate speech in the newspapers* (particularly tabloids), *online and even among politicians*. Intolerance of, and attacks on, eastern Europeans were particularly highlighted

The report called for the establishment of a press regulator according to the recommendations set out in the Leveson Report, saying the two competing bodies (the Independent Press Standards Organisation, IPSO, and IMPRESS) currently in place were insufficient. It also recommended more rigorous ethical training for journalists and widening a clause in the (IPSO) Editors' Code of Practice on discrimination – see [here](#).

- UN and EU complaints reflect those of UK people who campaign tirelessly for reform in press regulation in line with Leveson's recommendations. Their main target is IPSO, an organisation that belongs to the press barons and is unaccountable to the public at large. Significantly, they pointed out that IPSO only upheld one discrimination complaint out of over 8,000 it received during 2017. Yvette Cooper drew attention to a Times article about a Christian girl being fostered by a Muslim family and Trevor Kavanagh's article on "the Muslim problem" and went on to say that beyond these high-profile examples, we have everyday examples of what I call our low-level poisoning of the discourse – see [here](#).

### 3. On chronic low reporting standards in the UK

- Much has been written about this topic, but we think the most thorough and robust analysis remains the book by Nick Davies, *Flat-Earth News*, published in 2009. Davies based his analysis on 30 years' experience working in the British press and research he commissioned from Cardiff University. He describes a series of systematic malfunctions within the media, and shows how a range of special interest groups, including those advocating on behalf of Israel (see p122-125), have managed to exploit them. For those with limited time, the review in the [London Review of Books](#) will be informative.
- various authors have drawn attention to the failure of the so-called including the BBC and the Guardian, in reporting on Israel, Palestine and alleged antisemitism. Drawing on extensive research by Philo and Berry of the Glasgow University Media Group, former BBC Middle East Correspondent Tim Llewellyn drew attention to deep seated pro-Israeli bias that set in to Broadcasting from the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. The Media Reform Coalition (MRC) has recently provided us with some hard statistical evidence. Its [report on media coverage of antisemitism in the Labour Party](#) shows that (perhaps counterintuitively) the BBC and Guardian are among the worst progressive media, offenders.

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#### Non-online references quoted in this last sub-section

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[https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201617/cmselect/cmhaff/136/136.pdf]

[Government statistics](https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/hate-crime-england-and-wales-2017-to-2018) [https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/hate-crime-england-and-wales-2017-to-2018]

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Anti-Defamation League (See [here](https://www.timesofisrael.com/adl-while-anti-semitic-incidents-in-us-went-down-theyve-gotten-more-violent/)). [ https://www.timesofisrael.com/adl-while-anti-semitic-incidents-in-us-went-down-theyve-gotten-more-violent/]

Figures released by the Labour Party in Feb 2019 [https://labourlist.org/2019/02/jennie-formby-provides-numbers-on-labour-antisemitism-cases/]

146 members had been issued with written warnings... – as argued in [this article](https://www.jewishvoiceforlabour.org.uk/blog/antisemitism-no-justification-for-singling-out-labour/) (under the heading *Handling of Complaints*). [https://www.jewishvoiceforlabour.org.uk/blog/antisemitism-no-justification-for-singling-out-labour/]

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[https://www.jewishvoiceforlabour.org.uk/blog/antisemitism-no-justification-for-singling-out-labour/; https://medium.com/@pitt\_bob/has-the-labour-left-subjected-luciana-berger-to-hatespeak-and-death-threats-146598226313?fbclid=IwAR3Wluhrq0B\_FCFzMBfHsUGQHOLcsgZ38L5TGpfdtX5Mvar6dG8n4ZjGNpU; and https://www.jewishvoiceforlabour.org.uk/blog/searching-truth-line-abuse-allegations/]

UN Human Rights and anti-foreigner abuse, misinformation and distortion...(see [here](https://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=15885)).

[https://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=15885]

European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI)...called for the establishment of a press regulator ... see [here](https://www.independent.co.uk/news/media/press/the-sun-and-daily-mail-fuelling-prejudice-racist-violence-hate-crime-speech-uk-ecri-report-a7351856.html). [https://www.independent.co.uk/news/media/press/the-sun-and-daily-mail-fuelling-prejudice-racist-violence-hate-crime-speech-uk-ecri-report-a7351856.html]

Our low-level poisoning of the discourse – see [here](https://www.pressgazette.co.uk/ipso-has-upheld-one-out-of-more-than-8000-discrimination-complaints-but-its-chairman-says-a-balance-has-to-be-struck/). [https://www.pressgazette.co.uk/ipso-has-upheld-one-out-of-more-than-8000-discrimination-complaints-but-its-chairman-says-a-balance-has-to-be-struck/]

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