

Jonathan Fox and Lev Topor

Why Do People Discriminate Against Jews?

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Israeli political scientist Jonathan Fox, a well-known scholar of religion and state relations and discrimination against minority religions, has co-authored a book with legal scholar Lev Topor that asks the question, *Why do people discriminate against Jews?* At first glance, the question is thought-provoking. The authors distinguish between anti-Semitism and discrimination, explaining that they seek to understand the causes of discrimination against Jews rather than the motivations behind anti-Semitism, even though the latter is a critical factor in explaining this discrimination. Fox and Topor note that Jews, have been discriminated against, like other minority groups marginalized by the majority. Based on a literature analysis, the authors state that discrimination is usually understood in terms of unjust acts against Jews, whereas anti-Semitism is often interpreted in terms of negative attitudes towards Jews. According to this viewpoint, someone may have an anti-Semitic worldview and not discriminate against Jews, whereas someone else can do both while being less anti-Semitic overall.

The book contains seven chapters, including an introduction and conclusion, followed by an appendix, notes, a bibliography, and an index. The first chapter—the introduction—states the aim and objectives of the book while outlining the problem of defining anti-Semitism and anti-Zionism and discussing different sources of these definitions. It also reviews the variety of theories proposed to explain discrimination against Jews and briefly presents the book's structure. The book has three objectives: to present a comprehensive analysis of the extent of global anti-Semitic prejudice; to examine the reasons for prejudice against Jews, concentrating on three main reasons highlighted in the literature on anti-Semitism and religious discrimination; and to investigate the more general implications of the results.

Fox and Topor state that the uniqueness of this book lies in its attempt to analyze data covering the 25-year period from 1990 to 2014, including comprehensive information on the extent of discrimination against Jews by governments and cultures in all countries where a sizable Jewish population resides. According to its authors, another aspect of the book's uniqueness is that it contributes to the interdisciplinary theoretical and empirical discussion of anti-Semitism and its causes and connects it to the expanding social-scientific research on religious discrimination.

The second chapter summarizes previous research on discrimination against minority religions and provides a useful typology differentiating between government-based and societal discrimination. Government-based discrimination manifests in various ways, including restrictions on religious practices, clergy activities, conversion, proselytizing, and more. Societal discrimination is understood as social hostility directed against minority religions by members of a nation's religious majority who do not serve as government representatives. The latter type of discrimination includes economic discrimination, hate speech, nonviolent property crimes, nonviolent harassment, violence, and other types of acts. The authors emphasize that their approach is innovative compared to previous research, which focused on attitudes rather than actual acts.

The third chapter discusses the issue of religious anti-Semitism and religious grounds for discrimination against minority religions. Fox and Topor take the reader on a journey through the history of Christianity and Christian towards Jews. This chapter states that religious discrimination against Jews is a complex phenomenon and there are no indications of its disappearance, as religion continues to be one of the causes of this type of discrimination when governments that are strongly associated with a religion discriminate against Jews more than other groups of inhabitants.

Chapter Four discusses anti-Zionist and anti-Israeli views and actions as causes of discrimination against Jews. Here, the authors provide a brief history of anti-Zionism, a social movement that found support from various political actors during its existence. Anti-Zionism leads to discrimination against Jews when Jews outside of Israel are blamed for Israeli politics, according to the authors, who cite multiple cases of such behavior. The chapter also discusses how social-scientific theory can explain anti-Zionism, and Fox and Topor contribute to the theoretical debate over securitization. The authors conclude that anti-Zionism is not a primary cause of societal discrimination against Jews; however, anti-Israel views are strongly associated with government-based discrimination against Jews.

The fifth chapter addresses how conspiracy theories underlie discrimination against Jews and provides an overview and a useful categorization of anti-Jewish conspiracy theories, followed by attempts to explain their existence from a theoretical point of view. The findings presented in this chapter show that belief in anti-Jewish conspiracy theories predicts both societal and government-based discrimination against Jews. Additionally, the authors state that this discrimination is more prevalent in countries with Orthodox Christian majorities. Fox and Topor explain that unfavorable preconceptions about Jews—particularly those regarding their power and control over industry, banking, international affairs, the media, the government, and war—are the main causes of discrimination against Jews. Compared to discrimination based on religious beliefs and anti-Zionism, the authors found, sentiments based on conspiracy theories are a more reliable indicator of discrimination against Jews. Anti-Jewish conspiracy theories, according to the authors, were the only factor examined in the whole study that statistically significantly and consistently predicted increased societal discrimination against Jews.

Chapter Six discusses the case of British discrimination against Jews. The authors argue that in Britain, modern anti-Semitism started as a blend of traditional anti-Semitism rooted in religion and a broader societal hatred of Jews that developed from and eventually transcended religious anti-Semitism. Fox and Topor explain that since the state of Israel was established in 1948, anti-Zionism has always been present, but it was most likely at its peak during Jeremy Corbyn's tenure as Labour Party leader. The authors conclude, however, that overt anti-Zionist and anti-Israeli beliefs held by Corbyn during that period were probably not the main reason for the rise in discrimination against and harassment of Jews in Britain, either outside the Labour Party or inside it.

Finally, in the conclusion, the authors discuss the general implications of their results and reiterate how the book was an attempt to initiate theoretical and empirical discussion in the framework of comparative politics about discrimination against Jews. This attempt was undoubtedly fruitful, as the book provides rich historical, political, and sociological material for further discussion about discrimination against Jews in contemporary society and contributes to the ongoing theoretical and empirical discussions about anti-Semitism and anti-Zionism. Thus, the book is recommended to scholars working in this field of research, students interested in this issue, politicians and social policymakers who want to prevent discrimination against minority groups and particularly Jews, and everyone sensitive to the fate of vulnerable groups.