



## The Social Geography of the BDS Movement and Antisemitism

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**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:** An original analysis of the global distribution of BDS Internet searches revealed disproportionate interest in countries such as New Zealand, Ireland, and Sweden, as well as in coastal US states with large academic institutions. In the former regions there are few Jews and little contact with Israel, while in the latter, there are many Jews but proportionately fewer Christian supporters of Israel. A simple explanation for these patterns is that BDS interest correlates with post-Christian contexts in which Jews are relatively absent, or with “white” class anxiety emanating from academia. In the US, growing negativity about Israel in liberal Western communities is likely a class-based transfer of anxiety regarding “white privilege” onto Israel and Jews.

[Hillel Frisch’s highly original analysis](#) of the popularity of BDS raises important questions about the character of this global “movement.” In brief, by examining the geography of Google queries on BDS and Israel’s legitimacy, Frisch concludes that interest in BDS may be slowing, but it is also distributed uniquely.

Underlying this distribution are important factors that deserve highlighting.

Frisch found, for example, that Google searches regarding BDS in New Zealand, Ireland, and Sweden exceed those in the US and Britain. That is to say, individuals in post-Christian countries with almost no Jews and few relationships with Israel exhibit a disproportionate interest in negative information regarding both.

One explanation for this is that it is precisely the relative absence of Jews and contact with Israel that drives interest. There is a curious symmetry there with the obsessions of Islamic countries like Saudi Arabia and Indonesia, which are entirely Jew-free. In

both, Israel and Jews are given a disproportionate place in media and scholarship and are ascribed an outsized role in world affairs, albeit with different interpretations.

The relative Jewish (and general religious) void in places like New Zealand and Sweden is filled by historical refractions of Christian antisemitism, contemporary left-wing politics, and the effects of Muslim migration. The left-wing affinity toward Palestinians is a traditional secular religious article of faith, given new impetus by immigrant populations.

But there is another driver in the West, a broader leftward movement of "white progressive" populations and politicians. Even in the absence of either Jews or Muslims, affluent, liberal communities are being influenced by the progressive left and are moving toward more strident and negative attitudes toward Israel. Hostility is becoming a normative position based on decontextualized notions of "war crimes," "human rights" or Israel's "right-wing government," [founded on post-colonialist "anti-imperialist" intellectual stances](#). In turn, these notions, specifically aimed at Israel, Jews, and the US, are being [woven into the fabric of liberal middle class respectability](#).

The simplest explanation for this phenomenon is that affluent "white" populations anxious about their own status in the racialized context of American and now global politics seek to defray their "privilege" by scapegoating Israel and Jews and pandering to further left (and ethnic minority) opinions. Dislike for Israel and Jews is a litmus test and symbol of enlightened status. Since support for Israel (at least in the US) is strongly correlated with traditional religious viewpoints, anti-Israel bias serves to distinguish social classes even more broadly.

This interpretation also helps explain Frisch's finding that expressions of American interest in BDS on Google are disproportionately centered in coastal states, especially those with numerous academic institutions. Emanating directly from academia, these attitudes are becoming naturalized throughout affluent, "white," and Democratic constituencies. To this, as Frisch notes, must be added states that have growing Muslim populations, such as Minnesota and Michigan, which have now elected overt BDS supporters to Congress.

Ironically, growing explicit support for boycotting Israel [by neo-Nazi groups](#) puts the respectable progressive left in a *de facto* alliance with the far right, broadening what had been a convergence between the disreputable left and right, such as between Nation of Islam leader Louis Farrakhan and neo-Nazi leader David Duke. These realities point to both the perennial utility of antisemitism for extremist movements and the collapse of such categories as left and right.

Conversely, Frisch found that countries such as Nigeria, Kenya, and the Philippines show Google searches that are disproportionately philo-Semitic. The preponderance

of evangelical Christianity in these countries is part of the obvious explanation for this phenomenon, as are their negative historical and contemporary experiences with Islam. As more African and Christianizing countries in Asia, especially China, become more connected to the Internet and the global information environment, we may expect similar results.

But BDS is not simply a free-floating social preference among particular demographics. Institutionally it is a key instrument of the red-green alliance between left-wing “social democratic,” which is to say communist, organizations and Muslim Brotherhood-controlled groups. Human agents drive and shape its narratives, which are pulling broader constituencies leftward and toward Israel antipathy.

New research by the Community Security Trust (CST) in Britain has also shown that the information environment in which politicians and populations alike operate has been [driven by social media “engine rooms”](#) that churn out endless streams of hostile postings about Israel. Labour members from Islamist, socialist, and pro-BDS backgrounds are all part of this Corbynite cadre, targeting Labour critics inside and outside the party as well as Jews and Israel. This is Soviet-style information warfare cranked up to an entirely new level.

Institutionally, these efforts mesh with the effective takeover of Labour under Jeremy Corbyn by the Israel-obsessed. Another report submitted as part of the Equality and Human Rights Commission investigation into Labour antisemitism demonstrates that the leadership of the Labour Party after the election of Corbyn [set about systematically](#) taking over party structures and radicalizing members against Israel and its supporters, especially Jews.

The obsession of a minority permitted the disinhibition of a broader group of bigots, and, indeed, encouraged it. They then indulged in all manner of crude antisemitism. The same process, of an Israel-hating “social democratic” fringe seeking to take over the broader party and in the process dragging it and politics as a whole leftward, is underway with the Democrats.

But another curious feature of this process is that with the election of Boris Johnson as leader of the Tory Party and his elevation to Prime Minister, Labour wrath has now [descended on those ethnic minorities](#) who had the temerity to join Johnson’s Cabinet. The same process has occurred in American politics, as supporters of Trump are accused of being “racists” and “[white supremacists](#),” and even within the American Jewish community, as Jews accuse other Jews of supporting Trumpist and Israeli “white supremacy.” Revolutions invariably create conflicts between the radicals and the extremely radical. Politics as a whole is the casualty but minorities who fail to conform are, with Jews, among the first victims.

Like antisemitism, BDS is both an environment and an instrument; it exists as a free-floating cultural norm both of the far left and far right, and as a tool utilized against Israel and Jews. The presence or absence of Jews is secondary and the complex realities of Israel are irrelevant. But the creep of BDS and resulting antisemitism into the normative liberal political behavior of Western countries where Jews have been an active, welcome presence in post-war history is an ominous development.

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