

Seeing As We Are¹: Framing Perceptions of Antisemitism in Post-October 7 Australia

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Abstract

The Hamas attacks of October 7, 2023, reshaped Jewish communal life globally and intensified concern about antisemitism in Australia. This study examines how identity and socialization, ideological alignment, and media exposure influenced Australian Jews' perception of antisemitism's seriousness in the immediate post-October 7 period. Survey data collected between 10 and 17 November 2023 (N = 7,611) were analyzed using hierarchical linear regression to assess the roles of socialization and identity, political orientation, and media exposure as predictors of such perception. Political orientation and media exposure were more decisive than demographic characteristics. Women regarded antisemitism as more serious, progressive (Greens) voters markedly less so, and conservative (Liberal-National) voters more so. Reliance on general news also predicted lower levels of perceived seriousness. Age and education became non-significant once political and media factors were considered. Greater Jewish social embeddedness and denominational affiliation were associated with greater concern. These results suggest that ideological alignment and information environments, rather than demographic profiles, chiefly shape antisemitism perception in post-October 7 Australia.

Keywords: antisemitism; Australian Jewry; media framing; political ideology; post-October 7

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¹ The title derives from a maxim commonly attributed to Anaïs Nin, "We do not see things as they are, we see them as we are," which appears in *Seduction of the Minotaur* (1958). It highlights the proposition that perception is mediated by the observer's situated perspective rather than constituting a purely transparent understanding of reality.

Introduction

The Hamas attacks of October 7, 2023, and the ensuing Israel-Hamas war produced an unprecedented rupture in Jewish life worldwide. In Australia, as elsewhere across the diaspora, the shock of mass murder and hostage-taking was compounded by a sharp rise in antisemitic incidents and social hostility. While antisemitic hostility in diaspora settings often escalates in response to broader geopolitical developments in which Jews are symbolically associated with Israeli state actions, the immediate surge in Australia was particularly pronounced. Australian Jews awoke to antisemitic graffiti such as “Jew die” scrawled across school gates and the marking of Jewish-owned businesses with red triangle symbols (Cervini, 2024; Executive Council of Australian Jewry, 2025; News.com.au, 2024). One in five Jewish adults reported directly experiencing antisemitic insults or harassment within weeks of the war’s outbreak (Bankier-Karp & Graham, 2024a). The cumulative effect was a sense of dislocation. Social media feeds saturated with hate and strained friendships created the sense that public spaces were now unsafe.

This surge occurred within a moral and political landscape already characterized by heightened polarization (Australian Broadcasting Corporation [ABC], 2024a; 2024b; The Guardian, 2023; 2025a). The war re-energized long-standing debates about the Arab-Israeli conflict, but for many Jews these public discourses blurred the line between political critique and ethnic hostility. While Jews generally accept and even engage in criticism of Israel’s government, recent discourse made it difficult to distinguish between political disagreement and hostility toward Jews themselves. As a result, simply distancing oneself from Hamas was misread as an admission of collective culpability (Cervini, 2024). Online anonymity, protest rhetoric, and ideological signaling merged to normalize antisemitism in public discourse, as traditional gatekeepers of civility eroded (Cervini, 2024; Entman, 2007).

This paper seeks to identify the factors that shape the perception of antisemitism among Australian Jews in the immediate post-October 7 period. The central research question guiding this analysis is: How do identity, ideological alignment, and media exposure shape the perception of the seriousness of antisemitism among Australian Jews after October 7, 2023?

While global reports document rising hostility following October 7, empirical research has rarely probed how minorities regard threats to themselves in the aftermath of such crises, particularly in rarely studied diaspora settings such as Australia. This study attempts to fill this gap by presenting one of the first large-scale quantitative investigations of post-October 7 Jewish attitudes, utilizing a national dataset of 7,611 Australian Jewish adults. The survey data were collected between 10 and 17 November 2023, approximately five weeks after the attacks. This timing suggests that the spike in perceived threats captured in this study reflects the immediate post-October 7 environment, a period when global attention remained focused on the massacre and hostage-taking itself, and before the later, more intensive phases of Israel’s military campaign in Gaza had fully unfolded.

A key innovation of this research is its focus on perception rather than number of incidents. Thus, it treats perceived antisemitism as a measurable socio-cognitive construct reframed as an indicator of the moral climate. By systematically isolating the demographic, political, and media exposure factors that shape these interpretations, the paper identifies how communal networks and political worldviews act as perceptual filters in a polarized landscape. Consequently, the findings have broader implications for the study of minority threat perception in polarized democracies beyond the specific Australian context.

Australian Jewry's experience is distinctive. While physical violence has historically remained statistically infrequent compared to many European contexts, its occurrence, exemplified by the Bondi Beach terrorist attack on December 14, 2025, is profoundly consequential. Even when such acts remain rare, they carry a symbolic and emotional weight that significantly shapes communal threat perception (Bankier-Karp & Graham, 2024a). The initial report from the study *Australian Jews in the Shadow of War* found that 64 percent of Australian Jews regarded antisemitism as a "very big problem" in Australia, compared with only 6 percent in 2017 (Graham & Markus, 2018). These heightened fears coexisted with strong expressions of solidarity from non-Jewish Australians. For example, a non-representative study claimed that 83 percent of Jews reported sympathetic messages from non-Jewish friends (Stone, 2024), revealing a community simultaneously embraced and imperiled. Such ambivalence captures the emotional tenor of the post-October 7 diaspora condition: anxiety and gratitude, alienation and belonging intertwined.

The paper proceeds as follows. The next section develops a theoretical framework linking socialization, political ideology, and media framing to the perception of antisemitism. The study then articulates and tests a series of directional hypotheses regarding how these three domains jointly predict the constructed perception of threat. The methodology and modeling approach follow, after which the results are presented, showing how identity and socialization, political orientation, and media exposure explain variance in the perception of the seriousness of antisemitism. The implications for understanding the formation of post-crisis Jewish identity are then discussed. The final section concludes by considering the broader significance of the perception of antisemitism as both a symptom and a signal of communal resilience.

The Australian Case

Several contextual factors make Australia a compelling setting for studying the perception of antisemitism post-October 7. Demographically, Australian Jewry is highly educated, politically diverse, and geographically concentrated in metropolitan hubs. Its public institutions, schools, synagogues, and communal councils enjoy relative security, and inter-faith relations have historically been cordial. Nevertheless, Australia's media ecosystem became a stage on which the global Israel–Gaza conflict was localized, as international events were refracted through domestic reporting, protest activity, and public

debate (ABC, 2024a; 2024b; 2025b; Entman, 1993; Scheufele, 1999; The Guardian, 2023; 2025a). University campuses saw encampments and sustained protest activity (ABC, 2024a; 2024b; The Guardian, 2023; 2025a). Reports also documented cases of Jewish creatives being doxed following the leakage of private communications (Taylor, 2024). Meanwhile, philanthropic initiatives to combat antisemitism drew millions in new funding (Wilcox, 2025), signaling both communal resilience and the recognition of a crisis.

The confluence of international shock, local protests, and media saturation made the perception about antisemitism not merely an index of prejudice but also a window into moral world-making. For some, antisemitism was proof of societal decay; for others, it was a measure of political polarization or age-related alienation. Understanding *how* Australian Jews interpreted these events – what predicted the perception that antisemitism was “a very big problem” – is therefore central to understanding post-October 7 Jewish life.

Theoretical Background

Understanding the Jewish perception of antisemitism in post-October 7 Australia requires integrating three complementary perspectives: people’s socialization and worldview formation, their political and ideological alignment, and media framing and exposure. Each domain offers a partial explanation for how individuals interpret antisemitism, not merely as a set of external incidents, but as a reflection of their sense of identity, belonging, and moral order (Volodarsky et al., 2025). Thus, the perception of antisemitism is both a psychological response and a sociological construction, shaped by the interpretive frameworks people bring to new realities of crisis and threat.

It is essential to distinguish between the objective incidence of antisemitic acts and the construction of threat as a socio-cognitive reality. While this study measures the perceived seriousness of antisemitism, it treats this variable not as a measure of its perceived prevalence, but as a formal indicator of threat perception. Within this framework, labeling a social phenomenon as a “very big problem” represents the climax of an interpretive process in which existential vigilance and interpretive readiness are activated to define the community’s moral and physical safety (DellaPergola, 2019). By assessing how serious antisemitism appears across different social spaces, the study captures the degree to which individuals have constructed a narrative of collective besiegement, effectively reframing ambiguous social cues as direct threats to communal belonging.

Defining antisemitism remains a subject of intense scholarly and political contestation, particularly regarding where legitimate political critique ends and ethnic hostility begins (Volodarsky et al., 2025). This study conceptualizes antisemitism as a multidimensional phenomenon comprising social, political, and religious dimensions of hostility toward Jews. It aligns with the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance’s (IHRA) working definition, which characterizes antisemitism as “a certain

perception of Jews, which may be expressed as hatred toward Jews,” manifesting in rhetorical and physical acts directed at individuals, property, and communal institutions (IHRA, 2016). Scholarly debates increasingly distinguish between classic prejudice, rooted in religious or economic myths, and a new antisemitism that targets Jews collectively by symbolically associating them with the actions of the State of Israel (Jensen, 2022; Stögner, 2023). By focusing on the perceived seriousness of antisemitism, this research treats antisemitism as a measurable socio-cognitive construct that serves as a barometer of communal status in a polarized landscape.

Socialization, Identity, and the Construction of Threat

The perception of antisemitism is deeply rooted in the processes by which individuals internalize their collective memory and social meaning. As Berger and Luckmann (1966) argued, reality itself is socially constructed. People understand the world through socially shared typification and institutions. For Jews, these socializing institutions, such as family, schooling, synagogue, and communal organizations transmit both cultural continuity and existential alertness. DellaPergola (2019) described Jewish demography as shaped by both continuity capital (family, education, and ritual cohesion) and existential vigilance (collective memory of threat). Together these forces sustain Jewish identity across all ages and underpin its responsiveness to perceived external hostility.

A study entitled *Australian Jews in the Shadow of War* revealed that 82 percent of respondents had family or friends in Israel, and 91 percent expressed an emotional attachment to Israel (Bankier-Karp & Graham, 2024a). This dense transnational link collapses the spatial distance between local and global Jewish experience. When Israelis are attacked, Australian Jews feel endangered not only symbolically but also personally. It follows that rising concern about antisemitism may reflect not only objective conditions but also internalized patterns of collective trauma and solidarity.

Age and denominational variation also structure the perception of antisemitism. Older Jews, many descended from Holocaust survivors, tend to interpret hostility through historical analogies, viewing antisemitic incidents as echoes of past persecutions. Younger Jews, by contrast, often interpret experiences of hostility through the idiom of social justice and intersectionality, frameworks that can, at times, recast Jewishness as a marker of relative privilege or whiteness, rather than vulnerability. As Stögner (2023) and Rosenfeld (2019) observed, such paradigms may blur the distinction between critiques of Israel and prejudice toward Jews, situating Jewish identity uneasily within progressive moral hierarchies. These differing interpretive frames yield contrasting readings of the same events: what a person of one age sees as an antisemitic threat, another may regard as legitimate political dissent (Rosenfeld, 2019; Stögner, 2023).

Within this framework, socialization functions as the foundation of interpretive readiness. Individuals do not simply take note of antisemitic incidents; they interpret them through a matrix of prior experiences, communal norms, and symbolic associations. In times of crisis, these interpretive

habits are activated, often leading to intensified perceptions of hostility even where objective threats may not have proportionally increased.

Political Alignment and Ideological Filters

The post-October 7 period also exposed the growing politicization of the perception of antisemitism. Political ideology shapes not only attitudes toward Israel but also people's moral compass for reading public events. Social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 2004) suggests that individuals derive part of their self-concept from group membership, aligning with political or moral communities that affirm their worldview. When Israel becomes a marker of moral boundaries between the oppressor and the oppressed, Jews in progressive movements may experience cognitive dissonance, while those aligned with conservative blocs may interpret antisemitism as confirmation of societal decline or media bias.

In *Australian Jews in the Shadow of War*, Bankier-Karp and Graham (2024a) found that political orientation was one of the strongest predictors of anxiety, with left-leaning Jews showing heightened ambivalence about both antisemitism and Israel. This finding is consistent with U.S. and U.K. research demonstrating that partisanship is associated with the perception of antisemitism (Boyd, 2024; Graham & Boyd, 2024; Pew Research Center, 2021). Political ideology appears to function as a perceptual filter, shaping which signals of antisemitism are amplified, reframed, or dismissed.

The Australian context exemplifies this dynamic. The 2023–2025 protest movement against Israel brought – and continues to bring – antisemitism into the partisan domain, with large-scale demonstrations, campus encampments, and public controversy over antisemitic rhetoric prompting responses from political leaders and commentators across the spectrum (ABC, 2024a; 2024b; The Guardian, 2023; 2025a; 2025b). Labor MPs faced pressure from activists, Greens supporters were prominent in pro-Palestinian rallies, and commentators responded along partisan lines. Media coverage and parliamentary discourse reproduced a moral binary that aligned the perception of antisemitism with political identity, as competing narratives framed events in sharply contrasting terms across the political spectrum (ABC, 2024a; 2024b; The Australian, 2024; The Guardian, 2023; 2025a; 2025b).

Thus, political alignment interacts with socialization to shape the meaning of threat. Jews embedded in progressive networks may see antisemitism through the lens of exclusion or betrayal by their allies, while those in conservative milieus may see the confirmation of long-held suspicions about cultural hostility. The *Australian Jews in the Shadow of War* data show that women and older respondents were more likely to report antisemitism as a “very big problem,” while Greens voters were least likely to do so, underscoring the interplay of political worldview and demographic profile in shaping the perception of antisemitism (Bankier-Karp & Graham, 2024a).

This paper argues that political ideology operates as both cognitive schema and an emotional anchor, influencing whether antisemitism is experienced as a systemic moral failure or as an episodic political conflict.

Media Exposure: Theoretical Framing and the Australian Normalization Debate

The specific informational environment in post-October 7 Australia provides the empirical basis for the news exposure categories used in this study. The debate over whether antisemitism was being normalized in the mainstream or amplified through communal concern is the primary mechanism determining how respondents in the survey categorized their news diets. Specifically, the study distinguishes between reliance on only general news, where normalization through morally neutral reporting was most likely to occur, and only Jewish or Israeli news, which acted as a selective amplifier for a community already socialized into existential vigilance.

The role of media, particularly in the era of hyper-visibility, is central to understanding how antisemitism is perceived. Following Goffman (1986), Entman (1993) defined framing as “the selection and salience of certain aspects of perceived reality to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and treatment recommendation.” Scheufele (1999) further distinguished between media frames (the way information is presented) and individual frames (the cognitive structures used to interpret it).

In crises, this framing process becomes amplified. The October 7 events unfolded in real time across digital platforms, where media exposure was not a neutral act but a deeply affective experience. For Australian Jews, the omnipresence of social media produced what has been described as ambient anxiety, a state of continuous exposure to distressing content that blurred the boundaries between empathy, outrage, and fear (Bankier-Karp & Graham, 2024a). The *Australian Jews in the Shadow of War* survey confirmed this emotional salience, finding that 74 percent of respondents felt upset daily by social media content. Media exposure thus acts as a mediating variable between external events and internal perception.

Consistent with Entman’s (2007) insight that repetition and moral neutrality in reporting can render once-deviant views legitimate, Cervini (2024) argued that Australia’s mainstream discourse began to normalize antisemitic rhetoric under the guise of political activism. In this frame contest (Carragee & Roefs, 2004; Vliegenthart & Van Zoonen, 2011), mainstream outlets often emphasized the escalation of political protest, sometimes reducing Jewish concerns to identity politics or legitimizing objectionable rhetoric through routinized, morally neutral reporting.

Conversely, Jewish and Israeli media foregrounded safety fears and rising incidents, which Grant (2024) reported had “skyrocketed” after October 7. Doing so highlights what Lamont (2023) described as recognition, a moral act that determines whose suffering is deemed worthy of empathy. Competing

media frames reflected a struggle over whether Jewish pain counted as legitimate or was discounted as a political narrative. The result was an interpretive ambiguity mirrored in public opinion. While Grant highlighted the surge in hate, Stone (2024) claimed that Jews were simultaneously receiving strong expressions of solidarity from non-Jewish friends.

This tension between normalization and solidarity defines the communicative environment in which Australian Jews formed their perception of antisemitism. As audiences navigated these competing frames, their judgments of the seriousness of antisemitism crystallized into enduring attitudes about whether Australian society remains welcoming or is slipping into hostility. This dual discourse captures the paradox of the post-October 7 experience: a simultaneous expansion and contraction of moral inclusion, where sympathy for Jews intensified in conservative circles even as it was eroded or displaced within parts of the progressive mainstream.

Integrating the Three Dimensions: A Conceptual Model of Perceived Antisemitism and Hypotheses

Synthesizing these strands, the perception of antisemitism can be conceptualized as a product of identity and socialization ("who I am"), ideological alignment ("how I think"), and media framing ("what I see"). Rather than operating as discrete, additive layers, these three domains intersect through a perceptual feedback loop in which identity, ideology, and media exposure reciprocally reinforce one another.

The foundational layer of the model, identity and socialization, establishes the "who I am" dimension, incorporating sociodemographic predictors such as age, gender, and education alongside communal variables such as religious denomination and social networks. These factors are treated as substantively meaningful indicators of existential vigilance and interpretive readiness, given their established roles in shaping risk perception and communal concerns. Age acts as a marker of generational socialization. Older adults may interpret hostility through the lens of historical analogies and post-Holocaust environments, while younger cohorts engage with these signals through different ideological idioms (Bankier-Karp & Graham, 2024a; Boyd, 2024; Graham & Boyd, 2024; Graham & Markus, 2018; Staetsky, 2023). Similarly, gendered socialization may prime individuals for higher levels of communal concern and risk sensitivity, leading women to report more concern even when they have less actual exposure to antisemitic events (Bankier-Karp & Graham, 2024a; Gilligan, 1993; Jensen, 2022).

The relationship between education and the perception of antisemitism is also complex and often non-linear. Higher education tends to correlate with liberal political orientations (Pew Research Center, 2016), which may either attenuate or heighten the perception of antisemitism depending on ideological framing. Educated respondents may be more exposed to antisemitism through their involvement in

elite cultural and academic environments, but also more inclined to interpret hostility toward Jews as political expression rather than prejudice. One study documented an inverse correlation between higher education and the perceived seriousness of antisemitism among Australian Jews, suggesting that education mediates sensitivity to such perception through ideological schemas rather than experiential threat (Bankier-Karp & Graham, 2024a). Finally, communal embeddedness, fostered through religious affiliation and dense Jewish friendship networks, further sustains the “interpretive habits” that prompt individuals to regard signals of hostility as personal or communal hazards (DellaPergola, 2019).

These socialized identities do not operate in a vacuum. They provide the schema through which political orientation (“how I think”) and media exposure (“what I see”) function. Political ideology serves as a primary filter, assigning moral meaning to threat (Bankier-Karp & Graham, 2024a; Boyd, 2024; Graham & Boyd, 2024; Tajfel & Turner, 2004) by recasting hostility as either a systemic moral failure or as an episodic political conflict (Rosenfeld, 2019; Stögner, 2023). This filter then drives selective media exposure, as individuals seek out narratives that validate their existing predispositions (Ammerman, 2013). Media outlets act as selective amplifiers, providing the informational texture that reinforces one’s original political and communal outlook (Scheufele, 1999; 2000; Scheufele & Tewksbury, 2007). The resulting integrated cognitive architecture primes the individual for vigilance, defines the nature of the enemy, and provides the emotional reinforcement necessary to maintain a narrative of collective besiegement.

The decision to treat the perception of antisemitism as the primary dependent variable in this study is rooted in the logic that subjective threat assessments are the decisive factor in communal well-being. While previous research established that perceived antisemitism serves as a critical pathway through which media exposure is translated into communal anxiety (Bankier-Karp & Graham, 2024b), this study moves upstream to identify the interpretive roots of this perception of antisemitism. If perceptions are indeed key causal pathways in emotional outcomes, it becomes a sociological priority to determine how those perceptions are themselves constructed. Consequently, rather than modeling the perception of antisemitism as a mediating variable, this analysis treats it as the central construct to be explained, isolating the specific identity, ideological, and media inputs that generate the sense of communal risk in a post-October 7 landscape.

This approach aligns with contemporary sociological understandings of perceived discrimination as a socially patterned response rather than a mere reflection of objective conditions (Pager & Shepherd, 2008). It recognizes that individuals situated within distinct cultural, political, and media environments perceive the same external events differently. For Australian Jews, October 7 and its aftermath provided a stress test for these interpretive systems, a moment when personal and collective boundaries were renegotiated.

Bringing these dimensions together, the study tests a series of directional expectations regarding how identity, ideology, and media exposure jointly structure the perception of threat.

- **H1 (Identity and Socialization):** Women (H1a) and those with greater Jewish social embeddedness (H1b) will regard antisemitism as more serious, reflecting a heightened existential vigilance. While in initial models age (H1c) will be associated with greater concern, this effect will be fully mediated by the political and media exposure variables, signaling a shift from life-cycle effects to ideological socialization.
- **H2 (Political Orientation):** Political ideology will function as a primary interpretive filter. Respondents aligned with progressive politics (Greens voters, H2a) will regard antisemitism as less serious by discounting hostility as an episodic conflict, while those aligned with conservative politics (H2b) will view it as more serious, recasting hostility as a systemic moral failure.
- **H3 (Media Exposure):** Media exposure will act as a selective amplifier. Reliance on mainstream news (H3a) will be associated with lower levels of perceived seriousness of antisemitism due to the normalization of rhetoric, whereas reliance on Jewish or Israeli news (H3b) will reinforce a narrative of collective besiegement.

Research Method

This study draws on data from the *Australian Jews in the Shadow of War* survey (Bankier-Karp & Graham, 2024a), conducted by the Australian Centre for Jewish Civilisation at Monash University between 10 and 17 November 2023. The dataset comprises 7,611 Jewish adults recruited through communal networks and open participation. Although the survey employed a convenience sampling approach, post-hoc weighting procedures were applied to align the sample with the Australian Jewish population by age, sex, and state/territory. To address the oversampling of highly engaged individuals, a known bias in communal studies, the data were also stratified by synagogue membership. This involved using a baseline national synagogue membership census to adjust for varying levels of Orthodox, non-Orthodox, and unaffiliated respondents (Bankier-Karp & Graham, 2024a; Graham & Markus, 2018). Following post-stratification anchored to the quinquennial national census, which includes a religion question, the weighted dataset provides a broadly representative portrait of Australia's Jewish population.

Consistent with the stated purpose of the research, a range of sociodemographic and Jewish identity variables were included in the survey instrument. Descriptive statistics for all variables used in the analysis are presented in Table 1. The dependent variable, the antisemitism perception scale ($\alpha = .79$), was constructed from three items assessing the perceived seriousness of antisemitism in Australia, on Australian university campuses, and around the world. These domains were treated as reflecting a

single underlying construct of generalized antisemitism threat perception in the immediate post-October 7 context, where local, campus, and global developments were experienced as closely interconnected.

Responses were coded on a 4-point scale (1 = not at all a problem to 4 = a very big problem) and summed to create an additive index ranging from 3 to 12, with higher scores indicating greater perceived seriousness. The items were weighted equally, because the study aimed to capture overall perceived seriousness rather than prioritize any single arena. The acceptable internal consistency of the scale supported combining the scores into a single additive index. This measure is utilized as a proxy for constructed threat perception, based on the theoretical premise that people's assessment of a problem's seriousness reflects the activation of their internal existential alertness and the categorization of social hostility as a personal or communal hazard.

Independent variables were selected to operationalize the identity/socialization, political/ideological, and media dimensions. Age was recorded in years, and sex was coded as male = 0, female = 1. Educational attainment was measured as the highest qualification completed (1 = high school or less, 2 = bachelor's degree, 3 = graduate or professional degree). Religious denomination distinguished between respondents identifying as (1) no denomination/just Jewish, (2) non-Orthodox – Conservative, Traditional, or Reform, and (3) Orthodox – Modern or Ultra-Orthodox. The proportion of close friends who are Jewish was measured on a 3-point scale ranging from none or hardly any to more than half or all, providing an indicator of communal embeddedness. Together, these five variables operationalized the identity/socialization dimension.

Two further variables captured political orientation and media exposure. Political affiliation was measured by self-placement in four blocs (1 = Greens, 2 = Labor, 3 = Liberal-National), capturing the political/ideological dimension. Media exposure referred to the main news sources respondents engaged with since the onset of the Israel-Hamas war. This scale ranged from 1 = no media exposure to 4 = only Jewish/Israeli news, with intermediate categories denoting exposure to general or mixed news sources.

Together, these variables provide a multidimensional picture of the identity, ideological, and informational contexts shaping the perception of antisemitism among Jews in post-October 7 Australia.

The study received approval from the Monash University Human Research Ethics Committee (Project ID 40944). Participation was voluntary and anonymous; respondents provided informed consent before beginning the questionnaire. No identifying information was retained, and results are presented only in aggregate form.

Analysis proceeded in three stages using hierarchical linear regression, a statistical approach utilized to examine what factors influence an outcome by introducing them into the analysis in stages rather than all at once. Researchers first account for basic background characteristics such as age or gender and then gradually add other factors they wish to examine. This step-by-step process allows them to determine whether these additional factors still have an effect once the earlier influences have

already been considered. In essence, it helps clarify whether a particular factor has its own independent relationship with the outcome.

Using this procedure, the analysis considered three models successively.

Model 1 – Sociodemographic Predictors: Age, gender, education, Jewish friends, and denomination were entered to establish the structural correlates of the perception of antisemitism.

Model 2 – Political Orientation: Political affiliation was added to assess ideological effects beyond demographic characteristics.

Model 3 – Media Exposure: Measures of general and Jewish/Israeli media exposure were introduced to evaluate how different kinds of exposure mediate perceived antisemitism.

Model fit was assessed using adjusted R^2 and ΔR^2 statistics. Multicollinearity tests ($VIF < 2.5$) indicated no problematic overlap. Missing data were $< 3\%$ for all variables and handled via listwise deletion, which did not materially affect the sample's composition. Results are reported as both unstandardized (B) and standardized (β) coefficients to allow for comparison across predictors of different scales, accompanied by 95 percent confidence intervals. Robust (HC3) standard errors were used to correct for potential heteroskedasticity. Ordered-logit robustness tests produced parallel results, confirming the stability of the inferences.

Findings

Table 1 summarizes the means, standard deviations, and ranges for all indicators. The full results of the regression models, including unstandardized coefficients (B), standard errors, and significance levels, are detailed in Table 2.

Table 1. The Study Variables

Variables	Mean / %	SD	Range	Sample size
Dependent variables				
Antisemitism perception scale ^a	10.93	1.84	3–12	7,611
Independent variables				
Age	53.69	17.27	18–102	7,422
Sex				7,470
Male	39.53%			2,953
Female	60.47%			4,517
Educational attainment ^b			1–3	6,721
High school or less	9.12%			613
BA	37.93%			2,549
Graduate/Professional degree	52.95%			3,559
Jewish friends ^c			1–3	7,534
None or hardly any	6.02%			458
Less than half	12.34%			930
More than half or all	81.58%			6,146
Religious denomination ^d			1–3	7,440
No denomination	32.24%			2,399
Non-Orthodox	37.86%			2,817
Orthodox	29.89%			2,224
News type ^e			1–4	7,611
No news	4.56%			337
Only general news	14.16%			1,078
Mixed news	32.26%			2,455
Only Jewish/Israeli news	49.02%			3,731
Political affiliation ^f			1–4	6,901
Australian Greens Party	5.96%			411
Australian Labor Party	31.05%			2,143
Liberal-National Party	62.99%			4,347

Note: Ns vary across variables due to missing data. For categorical variables, categories not included in the analysis (e.g., "Other") are omitted from the table. For example, respondents indicating that they had a non-university qualification ($n=791$) or a preference for a minor political party ($n=138$) were not included in this analysis, given the high level of heterogeneity in these categories.

^a *Antisemitism perception scale*: "How big a problem... is antisemitism - In Australia?" "How big a problem... is antisemitism - On Australian university campuses?" "How big a problem... is antisemitism - Around the world?" (*Not at all* = 1, *A little* = 2, *Somewhat* = 3, *Very big problem* = 4). Mean scores for the component items of the antisemitism perception scale were Australia ($M = 3.58$, $SD = .64$), University campuses ($M = 3.64$, $SD = .66$), and World ($M = 3.82$, $SD = .44$)

^b *Educational attainment*: "What is the highest level of schooling you have attained?" (*High school or less* = 1, *Bachelor's* = 2, *Graduate or professional degree* = 3)

^c *Jewish friends*: "How many of your close friends are Jewish?" (*None or hardly any* = 1, *Less than half* = 2, *More than half or all* = 3)

^d *Religious denomination*: "Do you consider yourself to be..." (*No denomination – Just Jewish* = 1, *Non-Orthodox – Conservative, Traditional, Reform* = 2, *Orthodox – Modern Orthodox and Ultra-Orthodox* = 3)

^e *Media exposure*: "Since the beginning of the Israel-Hamas war, which news sources have you read or watched or engaged in most frequently?" (*No news* = 1, *Only general—Australian and overseas—news sources* = 2, *A mixture of general and Jewish/Israeli news sources* = 3, *Only Jewish/Israeli news sources* = 4)

^f *Political preference*: "Generally speaking, do you think of yourself as being politically closer to the..." (*Australian Greens* = 1, *Australian Labor Party* = 2, *Liberal Party of Australia or National Party of Australia* = 3)

Identity and Socialization (H1)

As Table 2 shows, the data provide support for the role of communal socialization in shaping a baseline of existential vigilance (H1). As H1a expected, gender remained a significant predictor across all models, with women seeing antisemitism as significantly more serious than men ($B = 0.32$). This result suggests that gendered socialization may prime individuals for higher levels of communal concern and risk sensitivity. Similarly, supporting H1b, communal embeddedness (measured via Jewish friendship networks) was significantly and positively associated with perceived seriousness, indicating that individuals most integrated into Jewish social circles are the most interpretively ready to recognize signals of hostility.

Political Ideology as a Primary Filter (H2)

The most striking finding is the strong effect of political affiliation as an interpretive filter, accounting for a substantial share of explained variance in the model (H2). Consistent with H2a and the results in Model 3 (Table 2), Australian Greens voters were significantly less likely to regard antisemitism as serious ($B = -1.70$). This result suggests an ideological discounting effect, where progressive worldviews may recast signals of hostility as episodic political conflict rather than systemic threat. Conversely, support for H2b is indicated by the positive relationship between Liberal-National voters ($B = 0.60$) and assessments of the seriousness of antisemitism. Their ideological lens appears to amplify the sense of threat by recasting incidents as evidence of a broader moral failure in the public sphere. These results suggest that ideology, rather than demographic characteristics, is the primary driver of perceived antisemitism in the post-October 7 landscape.

Media Exposure and the Normalization Effect (H3)

Media exposure functions as a selective mediator of threat perception, supporting H3. In the final integrated model (Table 2), reliance on only general news sources was associated with significantly lower levels of perceived seriousness ($B = -0.52$). This result supports the theoretical expectation (H3a) that mainstream framing, characterized by moral neutrality and routinized reporting, can reduce the perceived salience of antisemitism. Notably, the absence of an independent significant effect for those exposed to only Jewish or Israeli media (H3b) suggests that these sources may reinforce a pre-existing baseline of concern established through identity and socialization (H1b) rather than creating new levels of concern independently.

The Constructed Nature of Threat (H3)

The full integrated model explained 25.8 percent of the variance ($R^2 = .258$), an improvement over the demographic baseline model. A key finding of the conceptual model, evident in the transition from Model 1 to 3 in Table 2, was the attenuation of the age effect. While older age was a significant predictor in the baseline models, it became non-significant ($B = 0.02$) once ideology and media exposure were

introduced. This result provides support for H1c, suggesting that differences in threat perception are not fixed attributes of age but are instead mediated by different ideological stances and sources of information. Collectively, these findings suggest that the perception of antisemitism is a constructed interpretive outcome occurring at the intersection of who the respondent is, how they think, and what they see, read, and hear.

Table 2: Results of Hierarchical Linear Regressions for the Perception of the Seriousness of Antisemitism

	Perception of the seriousness of antisemitism					
	Model 1: Sociodemographic predictors		Model 2: Political orientation		Model 3: Media exposure	
	<i>B</i> (SE)	β	<i>B</i> (SE)	β	<i>B</i> (SE)	<i>B</i>
Age	0.13*** (0.02)	0.07***	0.11 (0.02)	0.01	0.02 (0.02)	0.01
Sex						
Female	0.27*** (0.05)	0.15***	0.33*** (0.05)	0.18***	0.32*** (0.04)	0.17***
Education						
BA	0.00 (0.08)	0.00	-0.05 (0.08)	-0.03	-0.04 (0.08)	-0.02
Graduate/Professional Degree	-0.23** (0.08)	-0.13**	-0.15* (0.08)	-0.08*	-0.14 (0.07)	-0.08
Jewish friends						
None or hardly any	-0.22 (0.16)	-0.12	-0.29 (0.15)	-0.16	-0.25 (0.15)	-0.14
More than half or all	0.70*** (0.08)	0.38***	0.36*** (0.08)	0.19***	0.33*** (0.08)	0.18***
Religious denomination						
No denomination	-0.44*** (0.06)	-0.24***	-0.24*** (0.05)	-0.13***	-0.22*** (0.05)	-0.12***
Orthodox	0.14** (0.05)	0.08**	-0.01 (0.05)	0.01	-0.02 (0.05)	-0.01
Political preference						
Australian Greens	—	—	-1.74*** (0.14)	-0.95***	-1.70*** (0.14)	-0.92***
Liberal-National Parties	—	—	0.62*** (0.05)	0.34***	0.60*** (0.05)	0.32***
News sources						
Only general news	—	—	—	—	-0.52*** (0.14)	-0.28***
Mixed news	—	—	—	—	-0.05 (0.12)	-0.03
Only Jewish/Israeli news	—	—	—	—	-0.12 (0.12)	-0.06
Constant	10.15*** (0.13)		10.41*** (0.13)		10.57*** (0.16)	
<i>R</i> ²	0.017		0.248		0.258	

Note: Entries are unstandardized coefficients (*B*) with standard errors in parentheses; β values represent standardized coefficients for each category relative to the reference group. For categorical predictors, *B* values represent contrasts with the reference category. *R*² values indicate the proportion of variance explained by each model.

Reference categories: Male (Sex), High school or less (Education), Teal or Independent party (Political Preference), and No news (News Type).

p* < 0.05; *p* < 0.01; ****p* < 0.001.

Discussion

The events following the October 7, 2023 Hamas attacks generated widespread concern about rising antisemitism in diaspora communities, including Australia. This study sought to identify the socialization, political-ideological, and media-framing factors associated with Australian Jews' perception of the seriousness of antisemitism in this period. Using hierarchical linear regression models with nationally weighted survey data from *Australian Jews in the Shadow of War* (N = 7,611), the analysis progressively introduced demographic, social, political, and media predictors. Results showed that the perception of antisemitism was shaped more by ideological alignment and information environments than by sociodemographic socialization. Women and those with predominantly Jewish friendship networks regarded antisemitism as more serious. In contrast, progressive (Greens) voters and those relying solely on general news sources saw antisemitism as significantly less serious. Political affiliation was the strongest predictor in the model, underscoring the extent to which the perception of antisemitism in post-October 7 Australia reflected ideological alignment rather than age, education, or other sociodemographic characteristics.

From Experience to Interpretation

The findings of this study reinforce the view that the perception of antisemitism is not solely a reflection of external incidents but is a socially patterned interpretation filtered through identity, ideology, and media exposure (H1). Consistent with Berger and Luckmann's (1966) model of the social construction of reality, respondents did not simply register antisemitic events but interpreted them through learned frameworks of meaning. The persistence of the effects of gender and communal embeddedness suggests that socialization within Jewish networks continues to shape interpretive readiness. Women (H1a) and those with predominantly Jewish friendship circles (H1b) were more likely to view antisemitism as a serious problem. This finding echoes patterns observed in "Surrounded by darkness, enfolded in light: Factors influencing the mental health of Australian Jews in the October 7 aftermath" (Bankier-Karp & Graham, 2024b), where female respondents reported greater anxiety and more communal concern following October 7. It also aligns with research indicating that moral and empathic orientations are associated with higher levels of perceived risk and communal sensitivity (Gilligan, 1993; Jensen, 2022).

The empirical results reflect distinct processes of threat construction rather than mere variations in news awareness. The finding that political ideology is a strong predictor of assessments of the seriousness of antisemitism suggests that threat is not discovered in the environment but is ideologically constructed. Progressive filters may discount external hostility as episodic conflicts (H2a), while conservative filters amplify it as systemic moral failure (H2b). Furthermore, the influence of Jewish friendship networks illustrates the communal site of this construction, where ongoing conversation

serves as the vehicle for aligning individual anxieties with a shared communal lexicon of meaning. Ultimately, the perceived seriousness reported by respondents acts as a socio-cognitive barometer, signaling that for a majority of Australian Jews, the post-October 7 landscape has been reconstructed as a space of heightened existential risk.

The attenuation of the effects of age and education once political and media variables were introduced suggests that demographic influences operate largely through ideological channels rather than age-related or cognitive ones. This result supports Staetsky's (2023) and Graham and Boyd's (2024) observations that political orientation increasingly mediates how diaspora Jews interpret antisemitism. In the Australian data, partisan political alignment was strongly associated with the perceived seriousness of antisemitism, with Greens voters markedly less likely and Liberal-National voters markedly more likely to regard antisemitism as a major problem. These findings underscore the polarization of perceived antisemitism in post-October 7 Australia. Ideology provided the dominant interpretive lens through which communal threat was assessed.

This ideological divide parallels the broader global shifts noted by Stögner (2023) and Rosenfeld (2019), in which progressive movements tend to situate Jewishness within frameworks of privilege and power, while conservative narratives frame antisemitism as evidence of moral decay and societal fragmentation. The results in this study substantiate this theoretical pattern empirically. Greens voters were significantly less likely to regard antisemitism as a serious threat, whereas right-aligned respondents were much more likely to do so. Political identity thus functions both as a cognitive schema and as a marker of moral boundaries, determining which expressions of hostility are recognized as antisemitic and which are recast as political critique.

The role of media exposure further contextualizes this ideological polarization. Consistent with framing theory (Entman, 1993; 2007; Scheufele & Tewksbury, 2007) and frame interactions (Scheufele, 1999; 2000), media effects emerged not as uniform influences but as selective amplifiers of existing worldviews. The results suggest that mainstream information environments may normalize antisemitic rhetoric, causing those relying on general news to perceive threats as less serious (supporting H3a). This pattern of normalization through routinized or morally neutral reporting is echoed in Cervini's (2024) and Grant's (2024) journalistic analyses of post-October 7 discourse. Conversely, reliance on Jewish or Israeli news sources was not independently associated with the perceived seriousness of antisemitism (H3b). By introducing this media exposure filter, the model reveals that what initially appeared as demographic variation is, in fact, an ideological and informational construction of threat.

Taken together, these results illustrate a multilevel interpretive process consistent with DellaPergola's (2019) notion of Jewish existential vigilance. Socialization establishes an enduring sensitivity to perceived threats. Political ideology (H2) determines whether that threat is morally amplified or discounted. Finally, media exposure provides the informational context through which such

interpretations are continuously reinforced. Thus, the Australian case exemplifies how collective trauma and moral polarization interact to produce divergent readings of the same social environment.

The Cognitive Architecture of Friendship Networks

The finding that Jewish friendship networks significantly predict a heightened perception of antisemitism highlights the role of peer networks as powerful agents of socialization and interpretation of reality. Consistent with the view that peers serve functions beyond mere companionship, friendship networks use ongoing conversation as the primary vehicle for aligning individual interpretations with communal norms (Ammerman, 2013; Bukowski et al., 2014). Within such enclaves, the boundaries between everyday life and communal identity are highly permeable, allowing world events to be collectively reframed through a shared lexicon of meaning and memory.

The mechanism for this influence involves several interconnected social processes. Peer relationships provide essential self-validation. People internalize the positive regard and shared viewpoints of their close social circle (Bukowski et al., 2014; Lamont, 2023). Social learning theory suggests people are more likely to be reinforced by, and to imitate, the attitudes of friends than non-friends, continuously pulling individual perception toward a group norm of existential alertness. In addition, socialization within Jewish networks establishes an interpretive readiness that allows for the rapid categorization of ambiguous social cues as threatening. This process is amplified by dense transnational links, where the majority of Australian Jews have friends or family in Israel, causing distant conflicts to be felt as personal hazards.

Jewish friendship networks also function as social regulators, establishing frames of reference that filter information and provide implicit justifications for communal concerns. Extensive informal networks draw individuals into a state of heightened communal awareness, making it more likely they will regard antisemitism as a serious problem. This dynamic is further intensified by homophily, where individuals seek out religiously and ideologically similar peers. This phenomenon can create political echo chambers that reinforce predispositions toward threat perception, ensuring that narratives of collective besiegement remain salient and emotionally reinforced. Ultimately, Jewish friendship circles do not merely provide social support. They also function as a cognitive architecture through which Australian Jews navigate and interpret a polarized post-October 7 landscape.

The Australian Context

The patterns observed here parallel but also diverge from findings in other diaspora contexts. In the United States and the United Kingdom, perceived antisemitism since October 7 has also followed partisan lines. However, the Australian case is distinguished by the strength of its ideological

polarization relative to its sociodemographic predictors (who I am). This result may reflect the particular media environment in which the Australian left largely aligned with pro-Palestinian protest narratives, while right-leaning outlets expressed explicit empathy with Jewish communities and outrage at Hamas's actions (Cervini, 2024; Stone, 2024). The resulting dual discourse of solidarity on the right and normalization or silence on the left situated Australian Jews within competing moral publics, expanding and contracting their perceived inclusion simultaneously. This dynamic echoes Lamont's (2023) conception of recognition as the moral currency of social belonging. When one group's pain is selectively acknowledged while another's is dismissed, the social fabric itself becomes a site of contestation.

This interpretive tension helps explain why the perception of antisemitism rather than incident rates became the central marker of the post-October 7 Jewish experience. Even in a setting with little physical violence, the perceived seriousness of antisemitism reflected broader questions of belonging, recognition, and moral alignment. Thus, the findings of this study support viewing perceived antisemitism as a socio-cognitive barometer of communal status within polarized societies rather than as a direct measure of incidents of prejudice.

Limitations and Directions for Future Research

Despite the foundational insights offered by this study, several boundary conditions suggest productive paths for future inquiry. First, the cross-sectional design, conducted within five weeks of October 7, 2023, captures a specific temporal snapshot of ambient anxiety (Bankier-Karp & Graham, 2024a). While post-stratification weights were applied to align with national census parameters, the reliance on communal networks may under-represent non-affiliated Jews and those with less digital literacy. Second, while the results establish the independent influence of ideological alignment (how I think) and media exposure environments (what I see), the measures were limited to the frequency of using these sources, rather than their content valence. Future studies should move beyond the current additive models toward moderated mediation or structural equation modeling to formally test the dynamic intersections – such as whether communal embeddedness moderates the impact of progressive worldviews on threat assessment.

By returning to the central framing device of “who I am / how I think / what I see,” one can explicitly reflect on how these findings support the proposed conceptual model of threat perception. The findings confirm that “who I am”, defined by gender, identity and socialization, and communal embeddedness, establishes the foundational layer of existential vigilance. This dimension remained a robust predictor across all stages of the analysis. This result suggests that for Australian Jews, the propensity to regard antisemitism as a threat is a deeply socialized interpretive schema that persists even when external cues about a crisis are introduced.

Critically, the study reveals that “how I think” (political ideology) functions as the dominant interpretive filter in the post-October 7 landscape. This dimension significantly challenged the initial

demographic baseline. Age emerged as a proxy for different ideological diets, confirming that perceived antisemitism is a constructed interpretive outcome rather than a fixed generational attribute. This result supports the thesis that ideology can either amplify signals of hostility into systemic threats or discount them as episodic political friction.

Finally, “what I see” (media exposure) provides the informational context that reinforces these internal frameworks. The data support the normalization thesis, showing that reliance on general news sources can reduce the perceived salience of antisemitism through morally neutral framing. This result underscores that the perception of antisemitism is not a direct response to objective events but a product of the hybrid informational environment in which individuals are situated.

Ultimately, these findings suggest that the new antisemitism of the post-October 7 era is as much a struggle over meaning as over behavior. In Australia, the tragic terrorist attack on Bondi Beach in December 14, 2025 stands as a sobering validation of the existential vigilance captured in the initial November 2023 data, proving that interpretive readiness is a durable tool for survival rather than a transient emotional response. This study confirms that for many Australian Jews, the illusion of the “lucky country” has been replaced by a fractured moral architecture where the recognition of minority pain is no longer a civic baseline, but a contested political outcome. The true legacy of this rupture is the permanent installation of ideology and media exposure as the primary filters of communal safety, leaving Australian Jewry to navigate a society where their sense of threat is no longer a shared social reality, but the product of an ongoing, polarized contest over the very definition of truth.

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