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(In)stability in American public attitudes toward Jews: a panel analysis

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Abstract

Polls for the past several decades indicate high regard for Jews in democracies in Western Europe and North America. We however have a limited understanding of the properties underlying those poll responses, for instance whether response bias or nonattitudes account for those results. The nonattitudes perspective suggests that respondents' survey answers to questions about Jews are not true attitudes. Nonattitudes are weakly held responses to survey questions, and tend to be unstable over time, reflecting random as opposed to systematic change. This paper uses panel data from Voter Study Group surveys to test for individual-level stability in attitudes toward Jews by non-Jews in the United States in the 2010s to assess whether such attitudes are true or nonattitudes. Results suggest considerable instability especially when compared to attitudes toward Muslims, Democrats, and Republicans, suggesting a high degree of nonattitudes in non-Jews attitudes toward Jews. The conclusion offers reasons that might account for this instability in attitudes toward Jews and implications for the continuation of positive regard for Jews in western democracies.

Keywords: antisemitism; public opinion; stability in attitudes; attitudes toward Jews; prejudice

For several decades, public opinion surveys in democracies in Western Europe and North America find non-Jews holding positive and accepting attitudes toward Jews. Such findings suggest the virtual absence of widespread antisemitism in mass publics in those nations, although antisemitism still exists among some subgroups, for instance white Christian nationalists (Dennen and Djupe, 2023). Some view the high and increasing volume of antisemitic acts in those nations as additional evidence of antisemitism in western democracies (Enstad, 2023). Leonard Dinnerstein, a leading historian of the Jewish experience in the United States, remarked in 2016 that “antisemitism is too minor an issue to think about.” (2016) (p. 59).

This paper asks whether the positivity toward Jews in western nations reflects true attitudes or is better understood as nonattitudes. Unlike true attitudes, which are deeply held, stable, and considered orientations about issues and groups (Engelhardt, 2023), nonattitudes are not deeply held. Rather, extraneous or irrelevant

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stimuli, such as question wording, question ordering, survey design, or environmental events may prompt respondents to answer a survey question one way today but differently tomorrow. Thus, nonattitudes are temporally unstable and exhibit random change over time (Converse, 1964; Achen, 1975; Erikson, 1979, 2017). Panel surveys frequently are employed to test whether attitudes are true or nonattitudes.

This paper employs panel data from Voter Study Group (VSG) surveys to test for individual-level stability in attitudes toward Jews in the United States in the 2010s, the first such test of which I am aware. Previewing the findings, attitudes toward Jews appear highly unstable especially compared to attitudes toward Muslims, Democrats, and Republicans.

Studying whether non-Jews exhibit attitudes or non-attitudes toward Jews is important for several reasons. First, if non-Jews display true (and positive) attitudes, then there potentially exists a firm positive foundation toward Jews. It is hard to imagine a nation becoming highly and systematically antisemitic when the overwhelming proportion of the population has stable and positive attitudes toward Jews. But if non-attitudes characterize non-Jews' beliefs, then Jewish security and place in society rest on shakier ground. Non-attitudes may be susceptible to persuasion campaigns from elites. If elites are persistently positive toward Jews, average non-Jews may follow their lead, and be more accepting and positive toward Jews (Cohen, 2024). But if elites display more negative and antisemitic rhetoric and behavior toward Jews, they may be able to implement legal, social, economic, etc., restrictions on Jews, arguing they are responding to popular opinion, even though they may have manufactured that negative climate of opinion (Jacobs and Shapiro, 1994, 1995, 2000; Druckman and Jacobs, 2015).

This paper first reviews reasons to challenge the notion that western publics are highly positive toward Jews. Then, I discuss the research on nonattitudes and on antisemitism in public opinion in western societies. Next, the VSG panel data are introduced and various methodologies are employed to test for stability in attitudes toward Jews (Franklin and Jackson, 1983; Schickler and Green, 1997; Green *et al.*, 2004; Kollman and Jackson, 2021; Green and Platzman, 2022). The analyses suggest considerable instability in attitudes toward Jews. The conclusion proposes an explanation for why aggregate survey responses appear stable and positive toward Jews while exhibiting so much instability at the individual-level. The conclusion also suggests implications of the findings for the future of public regard toward Jews in western societies.

Reasons to challenge survey-based findings of the lack of mass public antisemitism in western democracies

Besides the nonattitudes critique, there are other reasons to challenge the view that mass-based antisemitism is virtually nonexistent in western nations, which are worth mentioning, although will not be addressed in depth here. First, the number of antisemitic incidents and hate crimes has burgeoned recently, with antisemitic events comprising the bulk of hate crimes in the United States. Such incidents spike in response to conflict between Israel and Palestinians, the behavior and public rhetoric of major political figures, and traditional scapegoating events, such as

economic downturns and the Covid-19 pandemic (Feinberg, 2020; Teter, 2020; Lockwood, 2021; Vergani *et al.*, 2022; Enstad, 2023). After October 7, 2023, Hamas attack and during the Israel–Hamas attack, antisemitic incidents in the United States surged (Contreras, 2024), indicting the power of events to spur antisemitic incidents.

Second, major public figures, such as Donald Trump, Elon Musk, and Kanye West, among others, have made public and highly visible antisemitic remarks (Steiner, 2020). Their public rhetoric potentially can induce higher levels of outgroup blame and prejudice, including antisemitism (Crandall *et al.*, 2018).¹ Some research suggests that leader rhetoric may affect public opinion. Not only may leader rhetoric affect the public, but shifts in public opinion may affect leader rhetoric (Cohen, 1995; Druckman and Holmes, 2004; Druckman and Jacobs, 2015). Increased antisemitic rhetoric of leaders may reflect greater acceptance of antisemitic behavior and rhetoric than public opinion polls suggest. Third, antisemitic content appears rife on the internet and social media (Hübscher and Von Mering, 2022; Riedl *et al.*, 2022), rising in the wake of October 7, 2023, Hamas attack and the Israel–Hamas war (Halamish, 2024).

Fourth, antisemitism has a protean quality, altering in form and content in response to changing conditions and contexts (Laqueur, 2006). One argument is that antisemitism has evolved into “the new antisemitism,” which conflates antagonism toward Israel and sympathy toward Palestinians with a generalized antipathy to Jews worldwide (Klug, 2003; Dinnerstein, 2004; Wistrich, 2004; Kaplan and Small, 2006; Baum and Nakazawa, 2007; Gerstenfeld, 2007; Hirsh, 2007; Judaken, 2008; Cohen *et al.*, 2009, 2011; Kempf, 2012, 2015; Lipstadt, 2012; Wistrich, 2012, 2015; Rosenfeld, 2015; Baum *et al.*, 2016; Chanes, 2016; Jaspal, 2016; Kressel, 2016; Beattie, 2017; Bobako, 2017; Silva, 2017; Brym, 2019; Staetsky, 2019). The new antisemitism seems especially prevalent among college students in recent years (Alterman, 2016; Saxe *et al.*, 2018; Wright *et al.*, 2018, 2021; Royden and Hersh, 2022; Hersh and Royden, 2023) and young minorities in the United States (Hersh and Royden, 2023). The melding of anti-Israel with anti-Jewish attitudes became publicly prominent with the Israel–Hamas war, as evidenced with large demonstrations across western nations, where marchers chanted “from the river to the sea,” a slogan espousing the destruction of Israel, as well as the spike of Pro-Gazan protests on college campuses, especially in the United States. Jewish students perceived an increase in campus antisemitism during the Gaza protests, often feeling unsafe (Hartocollis, 2024); research suggests that characteristics of Jewish students, including their religiosity, may affect their perceptions of antisemitism (Kosmin and Keysar, 2015). Similar attributes of Jews in the population at-large also appear to affect their perceptions of antisemitism (Cohen, 2010; Rebhun, 2014).

Correspondingly, support for Israel has declined and sympathy for Palestinians has risen over the past 20–30 years, and a gap in support for Israel is especially pronounced among younger people (BenLevi *et al.*, 2019; Cavari and Freedman, 2020). Polls regarding the Israel–Hamas war of 2023–2024 detect a large generational divide, with young people more likely to side with the Palestinians, and even Hamas, while older individuals still display sympathy toward Israel. This age divide exists across partisanship.² It is unclear whether this generational divide is due to cohort or life

cycle processes, and there are indications that support for Israel has suffered even among young American Jews (Waxman, 1994, 2017; Sasson *et al.*, 2010; Sasson *et al.*, 2012; Saxe and Boxer, 2012), as well as among non-Jewish young people in the United States (Cavari and Freedman, 2020).

Attitudes, nonattitudes, and antisemitism in public opinion surveys

A fifth reason to challenge the idea of virtually non-existent antisemitism in western mass publics is that we know little about the properties of public opinion regarding Jews, especially as measured with public opinion surveys. For instance, are the low levels of anti-Jewish opinion a function of social desirability effects, where respondents give pollsters socially acceptable answers (positive responses regarding Jews), although respondents true opinions are less favorable? Several studies have tested for social desirability effects, with mixed results (Kane *et al.*, 2004; Berinsky and Mendelberg, 2005; Winiewski and Bilewicz, 2008; Krumpal, 2013; Cohen, 2021; Cheng *et al.*, 2022).

Further, are attitudes toward Jews true attitudes or non-attitudes? Non-attitudes are weakly held beliefs which are likely to change, often randomly, in response to various stimuli, including previous questions or events of the day (Converse, 1962, 1964; Achen, 1975; Erikson, 1979; Zaller, 1992; Zaller and Feldman, 1992; Iyengar, 2023). To accept the findings that most non-Jews in western nations hold positive attitudes toward Jews requires their responses to survey questions to be true, meaningful attitudes toward Jews.

Political scientists and other disciplines have investigated non-attitudes in the mass public since Converse's (1964) study. Early nonattitudes research focused primarily on policy positions, such as welfare, education, the economy, etc. (Achen, 1975; Erikson, 1979). Over time, research expanded to other opinions and attitudes, like party identification (Schickler and Green, 1997; Green *et al.*, 2004; Green and Platzman, 2022), symbolic political orientations (Krosnick, 1991), immigration (Kustov *et al.*, 2021), economic redistribution (O'Grady, 2019), political interest, morality, culture (Kiley and Vaisey 2020) in the United States and other nations. These latter studies often unearthed considerable stability, especially after incorporating measurement error models recommended by early critics of Converse's analysis (e.g., Achen, 1975; Erikson, 1979; Zaller, 1992; Zaller and Feldman, 1992).

To my knowledge, no study of non-attitudes in public opinion toward Jews exists. One way of distinguishing attitudes from non-attitudes is to look at the stability of responses across survey panels. Non-attitudes will exhibit random change; responses at panel t_0 will not be highly correlated with responses at panel t_1 , and sometimes the correlation of attitudes at t_0 and t_2 will be higher than that between t_0 and t_1 . Although survey questions regarding opinion toward Jews have become more common in recent years (Enstad, 2023), rarely have panel studies asked questions about Jews, one reason no study of non-attitudes in opinion toward Jews exists. This study employs numerous waves of the large VSG panels from 2011 through 2020. VSG asks respondents to rate Jews on a 0–100 degree feeling thermometer. To put findings regarding the stability of ratings toward Jews into perspective and to set as benchmarks for comparison, I run parallel analyses of ratings of Muslims, Democrats, and Republicans, also using the feeling thermometer.

Sentiment toward Jews in western nations: evidence from public opinion surveys

There are several ways of estimating the amount of antisemitism toward Jews. One method looks at antisemitic incidents and hate crimes (Enstad, 2023). Depending on the country, both private and government agencies have collected incident and hate crime data. In the United States both the Anti-Defamation League (ADL) and the FBI collect incident and hate crime data. Incidents and hate crimes often receive considerable news coverage, sometimes because of the publicity efforts of the reporting organizations and sometimes because of characteristics of the incidents itself, such as the number of people killed and/or injured, the facility damaged, etc. Yet there are issues with incidents and hate crimes as measures of societal antisemitism. The counts of incidents and hate crimes may be inaccurate because some not reported and affected individuals/institutions may not think that antisemitism was a cause or related to the incident. Further, across nations, there are different reporting requirements and definitions, which affects comparisons. Finally, even in nations that have reported high numbers of incidents and hate crimes, these counts are quite small relative to population size.

A second method for measuring the amount of antisemitism is to ask Jews about their experiences. This method too has its limitations. First, in most western nations, the Jewish population is small, which requires complex survey techniques. Second, some Jews, especially those who are very religious, may refuse to participate in surveys (Weisberg, 2019), which may skew results. Third, some Jews may perceive an incident as antisemitically motivated when some other factor, like race or gender, was the stronger motivation.

However, useful incident/hate crime and Jewish individuals' reports and perceptions of antisemitism are to understanding and tracking the level of antisemitism, public opinion surveys of non-Jews also play a prominent role in estimating the amount of antisemitism in a nation. When similar survey methodologies are employed, including sampling and question wording, public opinion surveys can be used to track antisemitic sentiment over time and across nations.

Public opinion surveys across western nations, such as the United States, Canada, and western Europe, for the past several decades indicate broad-based acceptance and positive attitudes by non-Jews toward Jews. The ADL Global 100 has been surveying attitudes toward Jews using a 10-item scale since 2014. In their 2023 administration, the percentage of respondents which the ADL classifies as antisemitic are: the Netherlands 6%, UK 10%, Germany 12%, France 15%, Belgium 22%, and Spain 26%. The scores for the United States (2015) and Canada (2019) are 9% and 8%, with Australia and New Zealand, surveyed in 2014, both scoring 14%.³ The Pew Global Attitudes Project surveys voters, asking their favorability toward Jews in 16 countries in 2019. Among western nations, the percentage favorable, based on adding very and mostly, was 97% for Sweden, 95% for the Netherlands, 94% for France and the United Kingdom, 93% for Germany, 83% for Italy, and 81% for Spain.⁴ Finally, the European Values Study (EVS) surveyed respondents in 36 nations since 2017, asking whether they would object to a Jew as a neighbor.⁵ Across these nations, 86.6% raised no objection. In Great Britain, 98% voiced no objection, as did 98% in Denmark, 97% Netherlands and Norway, 96% Germany, 93% Switzerland, and 92% Italy.⁶ But that the Pew and EVS scores of 81%, and 87% for Russia cast some doubt on these high scores.

Overall, across numerous nations in the West, and even Russia, non-Jews display positive attitudes toward Jews, but there are reasons to question this extremely positive sentiment. This paper investigates the critique that survey responses to non-Jews about Jews may be non-attitudes for many survey participants. Cohen (2024) argues that Jews are not highly salient to many non-Jews, hence they rely on leadership from trusted sources in thinking about Jews; they do not have well-developed or deeply held opinions about Jews. Cohen hypothesizes that the consensual positivity toward Jews among leaders across western nations may in part account for the highly positive regard of average people toward Jews. To test one assumption of Cohen's thesis, that non-attitudes characterize regard toward Jews for many non-Jews, requires panel data which is done in this paper.

Data: the voter study group panel, 2011–2020

Data for this study come from the VSG panel. The Democracy Fund/VSG was formally launched in 2016 by reinterviewing respondents from the YouGov 2011–2012 survey, which was the foundation for the 2012 Cooperative Campaign Analysis Project (CCAP). For purposes here, all the panels are designated as VSG. VSG asked respondents about Jews on five panels, 2011, 2016, 2017, November 2019, and September 2020, employing a feeling thermometer question. Feeling thermometers have been used in prior research to investigate attitudes toward Jews, particularly the American National Election study, which has employed this instrument since the mid-1960s (Cohen, 2018, 2024).

Some argue that feeling thermometers and other explicit questions (e.g., favorability) does not do a good job of measuring attitudes toward groups due to factors like social desirability bias. Research on attitudes toward groups suggests the superiority of implicit questions, like the implicit association test. VSG does not provide an implicit measure of attitudes toward Jews, obviating that measurement strategy here. A recent paper (Lee *et al.*, 2023) finds a very strong relationship between the thermometer rating and implicit measures on attitudes toward Blacks, which may partially alleviate this concern. Further, it is not clear that the explicit/implicit critique is relevant here with its focus on attitude stability and uses attitudes toward other groups to benchmark stability in thermometer ratings for Jews.

Table 1 lists the feeling thermometer ratings for Jews, Muslims, Democrats, and Republicans for the VSG panels by year, and separately for just those who participated in all the panels that asked about the specific group. (The ratings reported toward Jews exclude Jews and toward Muslims exclude Muslims, but the Democrat and Republican ratings include all partisans.) There is considerable panel attrition, perhaps due to the long time from the first to last panel, nearly a decade. Green and Platzman (2022) show that panel attrition produces little sampling bias in their study of stability of party identification using the VSG data, and the other panels they analyzed.

Measuring stability in ratings of Jews by non-Jews

Following existing research on response stability, this study employs numerous methods to assess stability in ratings toward Jews. These include standard deviations of change from panel-to-panel, correlations of ratings across panels, regression of past

Table 1. Mean feeling thermometer ratings of Jews, Moslems, Democrats, and Republicans

	Jews		Muslims	
	Specific panel	All panels	Specific panel	All panels
Survey				
2011	72.6	72.5	45.5	46.0
2016	76.7	76.8	51.1	51.2
2017	76.4	76.4	49.7	51.4
2019 (Nov)	72.8	75.0	51.8	52.2
2020 (Sep)	74.1	76.8	57.4	56.4
	Democrats		Republicans	
2017	48.9	51.7	44.1	41.6
2019 (Jan)	46.5	48.1	40.9	39.5
2019 (Nov)	50.8	51.3	42.7	44.7
2020 (Sep)	51.4	51.8	41.9	45.6
2020 (Nov)	48.7	49.1	38.3	41.9

Source: Voter Study Group Panels, <https://www.voterstudygroup.org/>

panel values on current panel values, regression of past panel values on current panel values using instrument variables, Wiley–Wiley corrections for correlations across panels, and indexing which averages past measures of ratings to predict current ratings. To preview the results, ratings of the two parties are quite stable, those for Muslims are moderately stable, but the ratings for Jews suggest a high degree of instability, a possible indication of non-attitudes in how Jews are rated. For all analyses, unless otherwise indicated, only respondents who participated in all relevant panels are included.

Response variability over time: standard deviations

Table 2 presents standard deviations of the difference in ratings across panels. Like Green and Platzman (2022), unweighted data are presented because of panel attrition (see Table 1A). The standard deviations, which measure the difference in ratings, appear quite large compared to other studies of opinion stability, such as Green and Platzman’s study of party identification. The standard deviations range from 15 to nearly 25. Green and Platzman report much smaller standard deviations, but they analyzed a seven point scale, where the feeling thermometer scale has 101 points, from 0 to 100. Thus, we should expect higher standard deviations. Kustov *et al.* (2021) find that the larger the number of response categories, the greater the response instability in their study of attitudes toward immigrants. But the largest number of categories in their study is seven.

The standard deviations for the parties can be used to benchmark the standard deviations for ratings of Jews and Muslims, since attitudes to the parties should be among the most stable of political orientations. Unfortunately, there is only one

Table 2. Standard deviations of differences in Jewish, Muslim, Democrat, and Republican feeling thermometers across panels, respondents who participated in all panel waves, VSG

Panel parings	Jews	Muslims	Democrats	Republicans
2011–2016	22.02	24.71		
2016–2017	19.87	19.92		
2017–Jan 2019			18.59	20.22
2017–2019 Nov	19.99	21.41		
2019 Jan–2019 Nov			16.57	17.90
2019 Nov–2020 Sep	18.36	20.10	15.57	17.43
2020 Sep–2020 Nov			15.12	16.84
2017–2020 Nov			19.68	21.94
2011–2020 Sep	22.54	25.59		

Source: Voter Study Group panels, <https://www.voterstudygroup.org/>

panel paring that includes ratings for all four groups, 2019 November–2020 September. We require identical panel ratings to use the Democrat and Republican ratings as a benchmark for the Jewish and Muslim ratings. For that panel pair, the standard deviations for Democrats and Republicans are 15.6 and 17.4, respectively. The standard deviations for Jews and Muslims are only slightly higher, 18.4 and 20.1. From this perspective attitudes toward Jews and Muslims exhibit some instability, but not much more than for the parties.

Correlations across panels

Correlations across panels provide another perspective on attitude stability. In his seminal study, Converse (1964) used correlations to demonstrate instability in issue positions. Although the size of the correlation matters, the pattern of correlations over time is also consequential. Converse showed that the correlations of issue attitudes at t_1-t_3 were higher than t_1-t_2 and t_2-t_3 , indicating random change – correlations from more distant panels were stronger than correlations between bordering waves. Converse’s analyses using correlations have been challenged, primarily because of measurement error in items tapping issue positions (Achen, 1975; Erikson, 1979; Zaller, 1992). Rather than the respondent being the source of the instability, critics argued that the survey instrument accounted for the correlation pattern Converse noted. This analysis also employs corrections for possible survey instrument measurement error.

Two types of comparisons are possible with these data. First, we can compare the magnitude of the correlations of the Jewish ratings with those for Muslims and the parties. Second, with the numerous panel waves, we compare the correlation magnitude of proximate panels with distant panels. Following Converse, stability with the possibility of directional change is likely when proximate panels have higher correlations than distant panels. But instability is likely when distant panels exhibit higher correlations or if there is no pattern across panels in the magnitude of the correlations.

Tables 3 and 4 present Pearson Product Moments correlations for the feeling thermometer ratings for Jews and Muslims (Table 3), and Democrats and Republicans (Table 4). The correlations between panels for Democrats and Republicans are quite high, as found in research on the stability of party identification. The Democratic correlations range from 0.85 to 0.92, while the Republican ranges from 0.79 to 0.89. The correlations for Muslims fall below that of the parties, ranging from 0.58 to 0.78. But the correlations for ratings of Jews are even lower, ranging from 0.44 to 0.61. Using the parties as a benchmark, ratings for Jews exhibit much more instability.

Across panels, the correlations for Jews weaken as the distance between panels widens, but the decline in the size of the correlations sometimes is meager. For instance, the correlations for the first wave, 2011, declines linearly but slightly from 2016 to September 2020, from 0.47 to 0.44. The 2016 correlation also declines from 0.56 to 0.52 in September 2020, again not much of a change. The largest correlation is for the November 2019–September 2020 pair, 0.61, which is the shortest time between panels, about 10 months. The temporal pattern of the correlations for the Jewish thermometer ratings is consistent with patterned change, but the slight changes in the correlations over time do not provide strong evidence to support that hypothesis. Combined with the parties as benchmarks, the correlational analyses suggest instability rather than stability in ratings of Jews.

Regression analysis on lagged values

Regression of the current feeling thermometer value on lagged value from the previous wave provides information in addition to that from the correlational analysis, specifically the regression coefficient and the R^2 . The regression coefficient tells us how much of a change in the dependent variable is caused statistically by a change in the independent variable, while the R^2 measures the amount of variance in the dependent variable that is due to the independent variable(s). The larger the regression coefficient and the R^2 , the stronger the case for attitude stability. Since all variables employed here use a feeling thermometer, we can compare these quantities across estimations. Like the correlational analysis, the regression analysis assumes no measurement error, a point we return to below. This regression analysis serves as a foundation for assessing the impact of measurement error.

Tables 5–7 present the impact of lagged feeling thermometers on current feeling thermometers for Jews, Muslims, Democrats, and Republicans. The temporal distance from the lagged to current feeling thermometers varies depending upon the panels. Turning first to the regression coefficient, again using the parties as benchmarks, the lagged feeling thermometer coefficients ranges from 0.87 to 0.94 for Democrats and 0.87 to 0.90 for Republicans. These are strong, indicating nearly a one-to-one correspondence between past and current feeling thermometers for the parties. The coefficients for Muslims are slightly lower, ranging from 0.70 to 0.79. But the coefficients are even smaller for the Jewish feeling thermometers, from 0.45 to 0.61. Compared to the parties and Muslims, again attitudes toward Jews appear unstable.

The regression results also provide information on the R^2 , the amount of variance in the current feeling thermometer that the past feeling thermometer explains. Studies

Table 3. Pearson product moment correlations of ratings of Jews and Muslims between panels, for respondents who participated in all panels

Panel	Jews				Muslims			
	2011	2016	2017	Nov-2019	2011	2016	2017	Nov-2019
2011					2011			
2016	0.47				2016	0.63		
2017	0.46	0.56			2017	0.62	0.78	
Nov-2019	0.45	0.53	0.55		Nov-2019	0.61	0.73	0.74
Sep-2020	0.44	0.52	0.54	0.61	Sep-2020	0.58	0.71	0.71
								0.76

Note: All correlations are significant at the 0.000 level or better. Observation totals are Jews = 2,738 and Muslims = 2,589.

Source: Voter Study Group panels, <https://www.voterstudygroup.org/>

Table 4. Pearson product moment correlations of feeling thermometer of Democrats and Republicans between panels, for respondents who participated in all panels

Panel	Democrats				Republicans			
	2017	2019 Jan	2019 Nov	2020 Sep	2017	2019 Jan	2019 Nov	2020 Sep
2017								
2019 Jan	0.87				0.82			
2019 Nov	0.87	0.90			0.81	0.86		
2020 Sep	0.85	0.88	0.91		0.80	0.85	0.87	
2020 Nov	0.85	0.90	0.90	0.92	0.79	0.87	0.86	0.89

Note: All correlations are significant at the 0.000 level or better. Observation totals are 2,376 for Democrats and 2,361 for Republicans.

Source: Voter Study Group panels, <https://www.voterstudygroup.org/>

Table 5. Regression of Jewish feeling thermometers on lagged feeling thermometers

Panel dates for independent variable	Panel dates for dependent variable			
	2016	2017	2019 Nov	2020 Sep
2011	0.449***			
	(0.016)			
2016		0.58***		
		(0.016)		
2017			0.528***	
			(0.015)	
2019 Nov				0.609***
				(0.015)
Constant	44.289***	31.876***	34.581***	31.103***
	(1.233)	(1.298)	(1.212)	(1.188)
Observations	2,738	2,738	2,738	2,738
R ²	0.217	0.316	0.305	0.368

Note: Respondents participated in all panels. Standard errors are in parentheses.

*** $p < 0.01$, ** $p < 0.05$, * $p < 0.1$.

Source: Voter Study Group panels, <https://www.voterstudygroup.org/>

Table 6. Regression of Muslim feeling thermometers on lagged feeling thermometers

Panel dates for independent variable	Panel dates for dependent variable			
	2016	2017	2019 Nov	2020 Sep
2011	0.704***			
	(0.017)			
2016		0.788***		
		(0.012)		
2017			0.712***	
			(0.013)	
2019 Nov				0.743***
				(0.013)
Constant	19.863***	10.262***	15.587***	17.605***
	(0.903)	(0.741)	(0.756)	(0.752)
Observations	2,589	2,589	2,589	2,589
R ²	0.40	0.614	0.55	0.574

Note: Respondents participated in all panels. Standard errors are in parentheses.

*** $p < 0.01$, ** $p < 0.05$, * $p < 0.1$.

Source: Voter Study Group panels, <https://www.voterstudygroup.org/>

Table 7. Impact of lagged partisan feeling thermometer

Panel dates for independent variable	Democrats				Republicans			
	Panel dates for dependent variable				Panel dates for dependent variable			
	2020 Nov	2020 Sep	2019 Nov	2019 Jan	2020 Nov	2020 Sep	2019 Nov	2019 Jan
dem_2020 Sep	0.944***							
	(0.009)							
dem_2019 Nov		0.914***						
		(0.009)						
dem_2019 Jan			0.871***					
			(0.009)					
dem_2017				0.925***				
				(0.011)				
rep_2020 Sep					0.90***			
					(0.01)			
rep_2019 Nov						0.891***		
						(0.01)		
rep_2019 Jan							0.866***	
							(0.01)	
rep_2017								0.874***
								(0.013)
Constant	0.216	5.014***	9.337***	0.294	0.855	5.801***	10.473***	3.165***

(Continued)

Table 7. (Continued.)

Panel dates for independent variable	Democrats				Republicans			
	Panel dates for dependent variable				Panel dates for dependent variable			
	2020 Nov	2020 Sep	2019 Nov	2019 Jan	2020 Nov	2020 Sep	2019 Nov	2019 Jan
	(0.539)	(0.548)	(0.537)	(0.683)	(0.557)	(0.575)	(0.544)	(0.67)
Observations	2,376	2,376	2,376	2,376	2,361	2,361	2,361	2,361
R^2	0.837	0.82	0.802	0.748	0.785	0.764	0.747	0.666

Note: Respondents participated in all panels. Standard errors are in parentheses.

*** $p < 0.01$, ** $p < 0.05$, * $p < 0.1$.

Source: Voter Study Group panels, <https://www.voterstudygroup.org/>

of stability in party identification find R^2 s upward of 90%. Here, the R^2 s for the Democrat and Republican feeling thermometers range from 0.75 to 0.84 and 0.67 to 0.79, respectively. Although substantial, they are small compared to studies of party identification, probably because party identification uses a seven-point scale where a feeling thermometer with a 0–100 scale is used here. The Muslims R^2 s fall below that for the parties, ranging from 0.40 to 0.61. But the feeling R^2 s for Jews are much smaller, ranging from 0.22 to 0.37. All the regression results suggest comparative instability in attitudes toward Jews, especially when using the parties as benchmark, and even when compared to attitudes toward Muslims.

Correcting for measurement error: instrumental variable regression

The correlation and regression analyses above assume no measurement error. Critiques of Converse (1964) argue that he failed to take into account measurement error in the items used to tap respondent attitudes (Achen, 1975; Erikson, 1979; Zaller, 1992). Several approaches have been offered to correct for measurement error, such as instrumental variable regression and measurement error methods across panels (Green and Platzman, 2022). This section employs instrumental variables.

The instrumental variable technique derives from Wiley and Wiley (1970). In this model, the measurement and disturbances across panels are assumed to be independent, that is, equal to 0 (Green and Platzman, 2022). The instrumental variable approach helps purge error in measurement for each panel. To implement the instrumental variable approach requires three waves, where the feeling thermometer at t_{-2} is used to instrument the feeling thermometer at t_{-1} , with the subscripts denoting the relevant panel. The instrumented feeling thermometer is then used as a predictor variable for the feeling thermometer at t_0 . Like the regression analyses from above, the instrumental variable approach produces two quantities of interest, the regression coefficients for the instrumental variable and the R^2 .

The instrumental variable results are presented in Tables 8–10. In all cases, the regression coefficients for the instrumental variable are much higher than the simple lagged analysis from above. The regression coefficients for Democrats and Republicans range from 0.97 to 1.02 and 1.001 to 1.004, respectively. There is nearly a perfect one-to-one correspondence of the lagged instrument and current feeling thermometer for both parties. The instrumental regression coefficients for Muslims are also quite high, ranging from 0.89–0.99. Although only once approaching the one-to-one correspondence, these coefficients for Muslims are not very far from that mark. For Jews, the instrumental regression coefficients are comparable to those of the parties and Muslims, ranging from 0.90 to 1.01. Some of the instability in the Jewish feeling thermometers in the correlation and regression analyses *may be due* to measurement error.

But instability may also arise because of confounding external factors, such as events and leader rhetoric. For example, near the timing of some of the VSG surveys, there were important events related to Jews, in particular the demonstration by Neo-Nazis in Charlotte, Virginia and Donald Trump's subsequent remarks about there being "fine people on both sides," from which a media frenzy erupted, including

Table 8. Regression of Jewish feeling thermometers on lagged feeling thermometers, instrumental variable regression

Panel dates for independent variable	Panel dates for dependent variable		
	ft_jew_2017	ft_jew_2019Nov	ft_jew_2020Sep
2016	1.01*** (0.039)		
2017		0.896*** (0.03)	
2019 Nov			0.981*** (0.031)
Constant	-1.111 (3.036)	6.453*** (2.312)	3.239 (2.314)
Observations	2,738	2,738	2,738
R^2	0.143	0.157	0.231

Note: Respondents participated in all panels. Standard errors are in parentheses.

*** $p < 0.01$, ** $p < 0.05$, * $p < 0.1$.

Source: Voter Study Group panels, <https://www.voterstudygroup.org/>.

public criticism of Trump by some cabinet officials, most notably Gary Cohn, his director of the National Economic Council.

The R^2 s of the instrumental variable regressions show similar magnitudes to that of the simple lagged regressions from above. For Democrats and Republicans, the R^2 s

Table 9. Regression of Muslim feeling thermometers on lagged feeling thermometers, instrumental variable regression

Panel dates for independent variable	Panel dates for dependent variable		
	2017	2019 Nov	2020 Sep
2016	0.989*** (0.02)		
2017		0.893*** (0.017)	
2019 Nov			0.933*** (0.018)
Constant	-0.215 (1.134)	6.314*** (0.95)	7.669*** (1)
Observations	2,589	2,589	2,589
R^2	0.574	0.515	0.536

Note: Respondents participated in all panels. Standard errors are in parentheses.

*** $p < 0.01$, ** $p < 0.05$, * $p < 0.1$.

Source: Voter Study Group panels, <https://www.voterstudygroup.org/>.

Table 10. Regression of lagged feeling thermometers on Democrat and Republican feeling thermometers, instrumental variable regression

Party and panel dates for independent variable	Democrats			Republicans		
	Panel dates for dependent variable			Panel dates for dependent variable		
	2020 Nov	2020 Sep	2019 Nov	2020 Nov	2020 Sep	2019 Nov
Dem.: 2020 Sep	1.021***					
	(0.01)					
Dem.: 2019 Nov		0.994***				
		(0.01)				
Dem.: 2019 Jan			0.973***			
			(0.011)			
Rep.: 2020 Sep				1.004***		
				(0.011)		
Rep.: 2019 Nov					1.003***	
					(0.012)	
Rep.: 2019 Jan						1.001***
						(0.013)
Constant	-3.801***	0.916	4.398***	-3.91***	0.773	5.162***
	(0.587)	(0.602)	(0.608)	(0.623)	(0.65)	(0.638)
Observations	2,376	2,376	2,376	2,361	2,361	2,361
R ²	0.832	0.814	0.791	0.775	0.752	0.729

Note: Respondents participated in all panels. Standard errors are in parentheses.

***p < 0.01, **p < 0.05, *p < 0.1.

Source: Voter Study Group panels, <https://www.voterstudygroup.org/>

range from 0.79 to 0.83 and 0.73 to 0.78, respectively, while the range for Muslims is 0.51 to 0.57. In contrast, the R^2 s for the Jewish feeling thermometers drops considerably, to 0.14–0.23 from the 0.22–0.37 of the lagged regression analysis. The instrumental variable analysis suggests strong stability in the feeling thermometers for the parties and moderately strong stability for attitudes toward Muslims, but ambiguous results for Jews, with the instrumental coefficients being quite strong but the R^2 s relatively small, and weaker than for the simple lagged regression.

Instrumental variables with correlated errors

The instrumental variable analysis in the previous section assumed the errors in measuring ratings for the four groups across panels are independent. This may not be a reasonable assumption. The analysis in this section builds on the instrumental variable approach, adding corrections for correlated errors across panels. Results are presented in Tables 11–14.

These tables present numerous statistics. The ones of primary interest are the feeling thermometers for the most recent past panel, the lagged variable as above (e.g., t_{-1}), the R^2 , and the covariance between the lag t_{-1} and the lag t_{-2} . As in the instrumental variable estimation, the lagged variable at t_{-2} is used to instrument the lagged variable at t_{-1} .

Turning first to the R^2 , for the two parties they range from 0.84 to 0.86 (Democrats) and 0.78 to 0.82 (Republicans), and 0.61 to 0.62 for Muslims. Again, the R^2 s for the Jewish feeling thermometers are smaller, at 0.36, 0.37, and 0.62. Other than the lone 0.62 value, these R^2 s are considerably smaller than for the parties and Muslims.

On the tables, the instrumental lagged variable coefficients are in boldface type for easy identification. The coefficients for ratings of Democrats range from 0.57 to 0.59, with ranges from 0.56 to 0.60 for the Republicans. These are much smaller coefficient values than found in the instrumental variable presentation in the previous section. The coefficients for the Muslim ratings range from 0.43 to 0.65, quite a wide range and like the coefficients for the parties, much smaller than the instrumental variable estimation of the previous section. Finally, the coefficients for the Jewish ratings are 0.36, 0.45, and 0.46. Like for the parties and Muslims, these coefficients are smaller than in the last section's instrumental variable regression. And notably, they are smaller than found for the parties and for all but one of the coefficients found for Muslims. The reason for the massive drop in the coefficient values here is the correlation in the errors of the measurement of variables at t_{-1} and t_{-2} , which are denoted on the tables in boldface italics. All the covariances are large and statistically significant, supporting the idea of correlated errors.

Index creation

Ansolabehere *et al.* (2008) propose a simple and intuitive approach for studying stability in attitudes. Their approach averages lagged values of the same variable across panels.⁷ The index is then used to predict current opinion. For this study, we average past measures of attitudes toward Jews (e.g., t_{-1} to t_{-n}) and regress

Table 11. Regression of Jewish feeling thermometers on lagged feeling thermometers, regression correction for correlated errors, VSG

Variables	Panel dates for dependent variable		
	2017	2019 Nov	2020 Sep
mean(ft_Jews_2016)	76.79*** (0.399)	76.79*** (0.399)	
mean(ft_Jews_2011)	72.46*** (0.414)		
var(e.ft_Jews_2017)	295.5*** (7.986)		
var(ft_Jews_2016)	436.2*** (11.79)	436.2*** (11.79)	
var(ft_Jews_2011)	470.0*** (12.70)		
cov(ft_Jews_2016,ft_Jews_2011)	210.8*** (9.545)		
ft_Jews_2016	0.461*** (0.0178)	0.312*** (0.0181)	
ft_Jews_2011	0.246*** (0.0171)		
ft_Jews_2017		0.358*** (0.0175)	0.282*** (0.0167)
mean(ft_Jews_2017)		76.41*** (0.412)	76.41*** (0.412)
var(e.ft_Jews_2019 Nov)		266.9*** (7.213)	
var(ft_Jews_2017)		464.5*** (12.55)	464.5*** (12.55)
cov(ft_Jews_2016,ft_Jews_2017)		253.0*** (9.868)	
ft_Jews_2019 Nov			0.446*** (0.0174)
mean(ft_Jews_2019 Nov)			74.95*** (0.394)
var(e.ft_Jews_2020 Sep)			246.2*** (6.653)

(Continued)

Table 11. (Continued.)

Variables	Panel dates for dependent variable		
	2017	2019 Nov	2020 Sep
var(ft_Jews_2019 Nov)			425.6*** (11.50)
cov(ft_Jews_2019 Nov,ft_Jews_2017)			245.4*** (9.705)
Constant	23.18*** (1.390)	23.61*** (1.314)	21.73*** (1.258)
Observations	2,738	2,738	2,738
Overall R^2	0.62	0.36	0.37

Note: Respondents participated in all panels.

Variables: means (mean), variances (var), covariances (cov) for feeling thermometers (ft) for Jews and panel dates for the independent variables.

Standard errors in parentheses, *** $p < 0.01$, ** $p < 0.05$, * $p < 0.1$.

Source: Voter Study Group panels, <https://www.voterstudygroup.org/>

attitudes toward Jews at t_0 on the index. The logic of the indexing approach is that if there is random measurement error, averaging will cancel out these random errors, providing a clearer signal or measurement of the attitude in question. The indexing approach requires at least two previous panels. From the VSG, we have four administrations of the feeling thermometer toward Jews, allowing use of the indexing method. Also, the index approach assumes no measurement error variance. In as much as there is measurement error variance, the indexing approach may understate the degree of attitude stability. But above we have found instability in attitudes toward Jews, especially compared to attitudes toward Muslims and the two parties. Again, we can use the index approach on these three groups to serve as a benchmark for assessing the degree of attitude stability regarding Jews.

To create the indices, I averaged all available lagged feeling thermometer ratings for the four groups. The aim is to use as much prior data as possible in creating the indexes to correct for measurement error. Table 15 presents the results. The regression coefficients for the index for Jews are substantially larger than for the simple lagged regression, 0.82 for the index versus 0.45–0.61 for the simple lagged regressions. But these regression coefficients for the index are much smaller than the coefficients for the instrumental variable regressions, which range from 0.90 to 1.01. The index value for Muslims is 0.88, which is larger than the coefficients for the simple lagged regressions of 0.70–0.79, but on the lower end of the range for the coefficients for the instrumental variable regressions (0.89–0.99). Finally, the index values for Democrats and Republicans show nearly a perfect one-to-one correspondence with values of 1.02 for each party, which are higher than for the simple lagged regressions, which range from about 0.87 to 0.94, but about the same magnitude as the instrumental variable regressions with ranges of 0.97–1.03. The index

Table 12. Regression of Muslim feeling thermometers on lagged feeling thermometers, regression correction for correlated errors, VSG

Variables	Panel dates for dependent variable		
	2017	2019 Nov	2020 Sep
mean(ft_Muslims_2016)	52.20*** (0.593)	52.20*** (0.593)	
mean(ft_Muslims_2011)	45.96*** (0.533)		
var(e.ft_Muslims_2017)	331.4*** (9.212)		
var(ft_Muslims_2016)	909.7*** (25.28)	909.7*** (25.28)	
var(ft_Muslims_2011)	735.7*** (20.45)		
cov(ft_Muslims_2016,ft_Muslims_2011)	517.6*** (19.03)		
ft_Muslims_2016	0.654*** (0.0153)	0.368*** (0.0192)	
ft_Muslims_2011	0.236*** (0.0170)		
ft_Muslims_2017		0.426*** (0.0191)	0.301*** (0.0170)
mean(ft_Muslims_2017)		51.41*** (0.597)	51.41*** (0.597)
var(e.ft_Muslims_2019 Nov)		334.5*** (9.296)	
var(ft_Muslims_2017)		921.3*** (25.61)	921.3*** (25.61)
cov(ft_Muslims_2016,ft_Muslims_2017)		717.2*** (22.86)	
ft_Muslims_2019 Nov			0.510*** (0.0177)
mean(ft_Muslims_2019 Nov)			52.20*** (0.573)
var(e.ft_Muslims_2020 Sep)			310.2*** (8.622)

(Continued)

Table 12. (Continued.)

Variables	Panel dates for dependent variable		
	2017	2019 Nov	2020 Sep
var(ft_Muslims_2019 Nov)			849.4*** (23.61)
cov(ft_Muslims_2019 Nov,ft_Muslims_2017)			656.2*** (21.65)
Constant	6.434*** (0.767)	11.11*** (0.745)	14.26*** (0.735)
Observations	2,589	2,589	2,589
Overall R^2	0.64	0.61	0.62

Note: Respondents participated in all panels.

Variables: means (mean), variances (var), covariances (cov) for feeling thermometers (ft) for Muslims and panel dates for the independent variables.

Standard errors in parentheses, *** $p < 0.01$, ** $p < 0.05$, * $p < 0.1$.

Source: Voter Study Group panels, <https://www.voterstudygroup.org/>

improves more for Jews than the other groups compared to the simple lagged regressions, while the index performs less well for Jews and Muslims for the instrumental variable regression, at about the same magnitude for the parties.

The index R^2 s are 0.44, 0.62, 0.87, and 0.83 for Jews, Muslims, Democrats, and Republicans. This is an improvement over the simple lagged regressions for all groups: Jews (0.22–0.37), Muslims (0.40–0.61), Democrats (0.75–0.84), and Republicans (0.67–0.79). The R^2 s for the instrumental variable regressions are for Jews 0.14–0.23, Muslims 0.51–0.57, Democrats 0.79–0.83, and Republicans 0.73–0.78. And the R^2 s for the correlated error regressions are 0.36, 0.37, and 0.62 for Jews, 0.61–0.62 for Muslims, 0.84–0.86 for Democrats, and 0.78–0.82 for Republicans. In all cases, the R^2 s for Jews show the greatest increases (except for the one case for the correlated error regression value of 0.62). Otherwise, the index R^2 s show either small increases or comparable values to the other analyses. Most telling is that the R^2 index value for Jews is still a modest 0.44, reinforcing the story of weak stability in attitudes toward Jews, with moderate stability for attitudes toward Muslims, and strong stability for attitudes to the parties.

Conclusion: why so much individual-level instability in attitudes toward Jews?

The above analyses indicate considerable individual-level instability in Americans' attitudes toward Jews. In comparison, attitudes toward Muslims exhibit a greater degree of stability, while attitudes toward the two parties appear very stable. These results raise two key questions. First, how can we reconcile individual-level instability with aggregate stability, with polls from the past decades finding high levels of positivity toward Jews. Second, can we account for the instability in attitudes toward Jews?

Table 13. Regression of democratic feeling thermometers on lagged feeling thermometers, regression correction for correlated errors, VSG

Variables	Panel dates for dependent variable		
	2020 Nov	2020 Sep	2019 Nov
mean(ft_Dem._2020 Sep)	51.84*** (0.739)		
mean(ft_Dem._2019 Nov)	51.25*** (0.732)	51.25*** (0.732)	
var(e.ft_Dem._2020 Nov)	189.0*** (5.483)		
var(ft_Dem._2020 Sep)	1,296*** (37.61)		
var(ft_Dem._2019 Nov)	1,274*** (36.96)	1,274*** (36.96)	
cov(ft_Dem._2020 Sep, ft_Dem._2019 Nov)	1,164*** (35.57)		
ft_Dem._2020 Sep	0.590*** (0.0185)		
ft_Dem._2019 Nov	0.394*** (0.0186)	0.589*** (0.0183)	
ft_Dem._2019 Jan		0.352*** (0.0178)	0.566*** (0.0161)
mean(ft_Dem._2019 Jan)		48.13*** (0.753)	48.13*** (0.753)
var(e.ft_Dem._2020 Sep)		199.9*** (5.800)	
var(ft_Dem._2019 Jan)		1,347*** (39.09)	1,347*** (39.09)
cov(ft_Dem._2019 Nov,ft_Dem._2019 Jan)		1,173*** (36.08)	
ft_Dem._2017			
mean(ft_Dem._2017)			51.73*** (0.704)
var(e.ft_Dem._2019 Nov)			209.8*** (6.088)
var(ft_Dem._2017)			1,179***

(Continued)

Table 13. (Continued.)

Variables	Panel dates for dependent variable		
	2020 Nov	2020 Sep	2019 Nov
			(34.21)
cov(ft_Dem._2019 Jan, ft_Dem._2017)			1,090***
			(34.19)
Constant	-1.639***	4.689***	4.518***
	(0.502)	(0.508)	(0.537)
Observations	2,376	2,376	2,376
Overall R^2	0.86	0.85	0.84

Note: Respondents participated in all panels.

Variables: means (mean), variances (var), covariances (cov) for feeling thermometers (ft) for Democrats (Dem.) and panel dates for the independent variables.

Standard errors in parentheses, *** $p < 0.01$, ** $p < 0.05$, * $p < 0.1$.

Source: Voter Study Group panels, <https://www.voterstudygroup.org/>

Turn first to reconciling aggregate stability with individual-level instability. Other research finds a similar pattern to opinion across a large number of attitudes among Americans (Page and Shapiro, 1992; Erikson *et al.*, 2002). The mass public can be divided roughly into two sets, those who possess true and reasoned attitudes and those whose attitudes are less well formed, let us call them the well-formed and less-formed groups. Responses to survey questions by the well-formed will closely match their true attitudes, depending on the relevance of the question to an individual's actual attitudes. Extraneous, incidental, and/or random factors may affect the less-formed group's answers to survey questions, sometimes referred to as an "off the top of the head" response (Zaller, 1992; Zaller and Feldman, 1992). This type of model has been used to explain trends in aggregate opinion, with the well-formed group responding in reasonable ways to changing conditions, where the less-formed group responses are essentially random, while the random responses of the less-formed group cancels out (Page and Shapiro, 1992; Erikson *et al.*, 2002).

With some modification, this model can be applied to non-Jewish orientations to Jews in western nations (Cohen, 2024). There are no studies to which I am aware that measure the salience of Jews to non-Jews. Some data imply lack of salience of Jews for non-Jews. First, non-Jews on average possess little knowledge about Jews; the only relevant study is Sulek's (2012) review of surveys of Poles from the late 1960s to the early 2000s. Second, despite efforts to teach students in school about the Holocaust, non-Jews possess little knowledge of the Holocaust (Bischoping, 1998; Jedwab, 2010, 2015; Pearce and Chapman, 2017; Foster, 2020; Tausch, 2020). It is not surprising that non-Jews have little knowledge of the Holocaust. Many Americans have knowledge deficits about a whole range of politics, except for highly visible political leaders (Delli Carpini and Keeter, 1996; Barabas *et al.*, 2014). Knowledge deficits extend to other topics, like economics (Curtin, 2007), history (Zaromb *et al.*, 2014, 2018), among other topics. Third, non-Jews in the United States report little or

Table 14. Regression of Republican feeling thermometers on lagged feeling thermometers, regression correction for correlated errors, VSG

Variables	Panel dates for dependent variable		
	2020 Nov	2020 Sep	2019 Nov
mean(ft_Rep._2020 Sep)	45.65*** (0.721)		
mean(ft_Rep._2019 Nov)	44.74*** (0.707)	44.74*** (0.707)	
var(e.ft_Rep._2020 Nov)	228.0*** (6.637)		
var(ft_Rep._2020 Sep)	1,227*** (35.70)		
var(ft_Rep._2019 Nov)	1,181*** (34.37)	1,181*** (34.37)	
cov(ft_Rep._2020 Sep,ft_Rep._2019 Nov)	1,052*** (32.90)		
ft_Rep._2020 Sep	0.562*** (0.0183)		
ft_Rep._2019 Nov	0.394*** (0.0186)	0.560*** (0.0187)	
ft_Rep._2019 Jan		0.384*** (0.0187)	0.599*** (0.0167)
mean(ft_Rep._2019 Jan)		39.55*** (0.705)	39.55*** (0.705)
var(e.ft_Rep._2020 Sep)		245.9*** (7.156)	
var(ft_Rep._2019 Jan)		1,174*** (34.18)	1,174*** (34.18)
cov(ft_Rep._2019 Nov,ft_Rep._2019 Jan)		1,018*** (32.03)	
ft_Rep._2017			
mean(ft_Rep._2017)			41.61*** (0.658)
var(e.ft_Rep._2019 Nov)			257.2*** (7.485)
var(ft_Rep._2017)			1,023***

(Continued)

Table 14. (Continued.)

Variables	Panel dates for dependent variable		
	2020 Nov	2020 Sep	2019 Nov
			(29.76)
cov(ft_Rep._2019 Jan, ft_Rep._2017)			894.1***
			(29.11)
Constant	-1.346***	5.417***	6.433***
	(0.521)	(0.530)	(0.544)
Observations	2,361	2,361	2,361
Overall R^2	0.82	0.80	0.78

Note: Respondents participated in all panels.

Variables: means (mean), variances (var), covariances (cov) for feeling thermometers (ft) for Republicans (Rep.) and panel dates for the independent variables.

Standard errors in parentheses, *** $p < 0.01$, ** $p < 0.05$, * $p < 0.1$.

Source: Voter Study Group panels, <https://www.voterstudygroup.org/>

Table 15. Impact of regressing final feeling thermometer ratings for Jews, Muslims, Democrats, and Republicans on index based on averaging of prior panel readings, VSG

	Feeling thermometer of group and panel date for dependent variable			
	Jews_2020 Sep	Muslim_2020 Sep	Dem_2020 Nov	Rep_2020 Nov
Jew_index	0.817***			
	(0.018)			
Muslim_index		0.88***		
		(0.014)		
Dem_index			1.02***	
			(0.008)	
Rep_index				1.022***
				(0.009)
Constant	15.36***	11.992***	-2.595***	-1.894***
	(1.366)	(0.765)	(0.49)	(0.502)
Observations	2,738	2,589	2,376	2,361
R^2	0.437	0.621	0.872	0.834

Note: Respondents participated in all panels. Standard errors are in parentheses, *** $p < 0.01$, ** $p < 0.05$, * $p < 0.1$.

Source: Voter Study Group panels, <https://www.voterstudygroup.org/>

superficial social contact with Jews (Hesli *et al.*, 1994; Raden, 1998; Weaver, 2008),⁸ which makes sense because the Jewish population in all nations is small and is often clustered geographically.

Assuming Jews are not salient to non-Jews, non-Jews may rely on trusted sources for guidance in forming opinions about Jews. Since the Second World War, those trusted sources have tended to be secular leaders, especially leading politicians like the president. In the United States, and probably most western nations, these leaders have espoused positive attitudes toward Jews. Hence the information environment about Jews is one-sided and positive (Zaller, 1992).

Although the information environment is one-sided, still there is little information about Jews. When individuals encounter such information, it will lead them to positive responses toward Jews. Even heavy news consumers may exhibit random responses to survey questions about Jews because they too do not think about Jews much and encounter sparse news/information to guide their opinions (Knight, 1984; Wilcox *et al.*, 1989; Mezulis *et al.*, 2004; Dodds *et al.*, 2015). Thus, when measuring the attitudes of non-Jews toward Jews, we are likely to find high levels of instability at the individual level. Aggregate positivity toward Jews may be a function of the one-sided information environment. But existing polls asking questions about Jews are infrequent. We require more frequent polling, which allows estimates of variability in the information environment, to test this hypothesis more sufficiently.

Second, what are the consequences of instability of non-Jews attitudes toward Jews? Unlike some who have argued that antisemitism is not very consequential in the United States and other western nations (Dinnerstein, 2004, 2016), results here suggest that the foundation of positive attitudes toward Jews may rest on a shallow and weak base. Education about the Jewish experience, as exemplified by the research on Holocaust knowledge, has not appeared to make much of an impression on most people, and as noted above, may not be a highly effective way to sensitize average people and students to antisemitism. Moreover, it is unclear that events affect mass public attitudes toward Jews. Enstad's (2023) cross national study detects no correlation between the volume of antisemitic acts and public opinion toward Jews. Feinberg (2020) shows that Israeli military operations lead to increases in antisemitic incidents in the United States, but the sparsity of public opinion data obviates the possibility of testing whether such operations affect public opinion. In another study, Feinberg and Lewis (2024) report that hate crime incidence, whether antisemitic or not, leads to greater sympathy for Israel. Extrapolating hate crimes may also lead to lower levels of anti-Jewish attitudes, but this hypothesis has not been tested yet.

Cohen's (2024) theory of elite led positivity toward Jews suggests that elites are critical in fostering an environment of positivity toward Jews. If the mainstream political, social, economic elite espouse positive sentiment toward Jews, his model suggests that most citizens will follow suit with positive assessments of Jews. But some highly visible political leaders, particularly Donald Trump, who at times make antisemitic remarks, may indicate cracks in the elite's positive consensus toward Jews. It would be useful to investigate whether Trump supporters also show signs of increased negativity toward Jews. If true, the high level of political polarization may contain any spreading negativity to Trump supporters. Thus, there are numerous unanswered questions about the nature of mass public attitudes toward Jews in western democracies.

Data. Upon acceptance, the data and code for the analysis will be provided on the author's Harvard Dataverse site.

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Competing interests. None.

Notes

1. Some research suggests that leader rhetoric may affect public opinion (Cohen, 1995; Druckman and Holmes, 2004; Druckman and Jacobs, 2015).
2. A December 2023 Pew poll found 46% aged 18–29 said that Hamas has “a lot” of responsibility for the war, compared to 81% aged 65-plus. And 42% of the 18–29 cohort also lay responsibility on the Israeli government, where only 28% in the 65-plus cohort share that view, <https://www.pewresearch.org/politics/2023/12/08/views-of-the-israel-hamas-war/>.
3. <https://global100.adl.org/map>. The ADL Global 100 is not without its critics. First, individuals are counted as antisemitic if they provide the antisemitic response on six of 11 items. Not only is this cutoff arbitrary, but it produces a binary antisemitic versus non-antisemitic classification (Singal, 2014), when it might be better to conceptualize antisemitism as a scale or elastic, as in Staetsky (2017). Further, it may be difficult to make comparisons across countries, especially when many countries have tiny Jewish populations and respondents have never met a Jew (Singal, 2014). Plus, the high antisemitism scores of majority Moslem nations may be due more to anti-Zionist attitudes than antisemitism. I thank one of the reviewers for suggesting this point.
4. <https://www.pewresearch.org/global/dataset/spring-2019-survey-data/>
5. There is little research on social distance and attitudes toward Jews, and it is now dated. Social distance, measured various ways, appears to affect attitudes toward Jews, see Smith and Dempsey (1983) and Raden (1998) in the United States, and Hesli et al. (1994) in Russia and Ukraine.
6. <https://europeanvaluesstudy.eu>
7. Or in a cross-sectional design, numerous variables that tap related opinions.
8. Data on social contact with Jews may be unreliable. The last survey I could find with relevant questions is the 2000 General Social Survey, where 55% of respondents claimed to personally know a Jewish person.

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Appendix

Table A1. Respondent *n*'s by group

Survey	Jews	Muslims
2011	7,320	7,285
2016	7,534	7,608
2017	5,595	5,649
2019 (Nov)	5,405	5,492
2020 (Sep)	5,430	5,529
All panels	2738	2,589
	Democrats	Republicans
2017	5,663	5,639
2019 (Jan)	5,982	5,962
2019 (Nov)	5,685	5,668
2020 (Sep)	5,708	5,710
2020 (Nov)	4,834	4,839
All panels	2,376	2,361

Note: *N*'s are for respondents who rated the group. Jews are excluded from the Jewish ratings and Muslims are excluded from the Muslim ratings. The Democrat and Republican ratings include all respondents irrespective of partisanship and independence.

Source: Voter Study Group panels, <https://www.voterstudygroup.org/>

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