

Antisemitism and Immigration:

A Messaging Guide for Jewish Clergy

Right-wing and white nationalist movements are increasingly using antisemitism and anti-immigrant xenophobia together to advance their agendas.

Jewish leaders and clergy are powerful voices against the targeting of immigrants — both because of our textual tradition and immigration legacies and because Jewish safety is being used as an excuse to harm immigrants. This messaging guide provides background and language to empower Jewish clergy to describe what’s at play and advocate for and inspire action towards our shared safety.

Background and How to Use this Resource:

Our safety as Jews in the U.S. is deeply connected to the safety of our neighbors, no matter our religion or race, whether we’re newcomers or not. That means protecting the fundamental freedoms that ensure all of us can live in communities where we can speak out for what we believe in, practice our traditions, study freely, and have freedom of movement. When the fight against antisemitism is used to harm vulnerable people in the name of keeping us safe, Jewish leaders must speak out.

Government officials and other bad actors have used combating antisemitism as a justification for many unpopular policies — including anti-immigrant policies. They falsely claim that [deporting immigrants](#), [destroying higher education](#), and [infringing on our right to free speech](#) are necessary to protect Jewish safety. The Department of Homeland Security said explicitly it would be [screening immigrants’ social media](#) for whatever the Trump administration deemed to be “antisemitic” activity. Vice President JD Vance spelled out this thinking when he [posted on X](#): “The most significant single thing you could do to eliminate anti-semitism and any other kind of ethnic hatred is to support our efforts to lower immigration and promote assimilation.” But of course, these policies actually damage, rather than promote, Jewish safety. This is the strategy of “**smokescreen antisemitism**” — using our safety as a smokescreen, an excuse, to hide behind as they enact their authoritarian agenda.

The use of this smokescreen antisemitism strategy is particularly dangerous at a time when many Jewish people are understandably fearful for our safety. Increased criticism of the state of Israel is sometimes intertwined with antisemitic tropes and even at times has led to antisemitic incidents or violence. Smokescreen antisemitism makes it harder to fight real antisemitism together with our neighbors and draws attention and resources away from the greatest danger to Jews right now: the increased power of Christian nationalism and right-wing authoritarianism.

When bad actors weaken democracy in the name of Jewish safety, they make Jews less safe in two ways: 1) by dismantling the systems and protections that keep Jews safe, and 2) by making Jews into scapegoats for harms done in our name, which can even *increase* antisemitism. By reframing the loss of liberties, safety, and affordability as the result of Jewish demands they sow mistrust and tension amongst progressive partners and allies. Antisemitism is always dangerous, no matter where it comes from, but there are existing laws that can be used to address antisemitic acts.

Each time an anti-immigrant policy is enacted in the name of Jewish safety, Jewish leaders are powerful messengers against this strategy — clearing the smokescreen. To do so effectively, we encourage you to use the key principles below.

Three key principles for talking about antisemitism and immigration together:



Notice smokescreen antisemitism and name it when you see it.

If elected officials are using Jewish safety as an excuse to promote antidemocratic and racist policies that will hurt everyone in the long-term by damaging our democracy, Jewish leaders can make a tremendous difference by calling this out loudly and explicitly.

The strategy won't continue to work if we make it a liability rather than an asset.

EXAMPLE:

“[Elected official] is using our real concerns about antisemitism as a smokescreen, as a false justification, to deport our neighbors/friends/ family/ community members. Jews deserve to be safe — as does everyone — and twisting our community's need for safety to serve an agenda that harms us and our neighbors makes Jewish people less safe — not more. Even if we disagree with what someone says, in America we have a Constitutional right to free speech that is a cornerstone of our democracy.”

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Talk about Jewish immigrant experiences with care and sensitivity, making space for the diversity of migration experiences in our multi-racial, multi-ethnic Jewish community.

Remember that there are many American Jewish immigration stories. American Jews, like all immigrants, came to the United States through pathways and legal systems that have always defined who belonged and who didn't — including Jews. Emphasize the reasons and motivations people have for migrating and relate that to Jewish experiences.

EXAMPLE:

“Most of us would move heaven and earth to protect and provide for our loved ones, and that’s what led many of our Jewish ancestors to make America our home.”

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Emphasize that Jewish safety is deeply interconnected with the safety of all people in America, and oppose efforts to pit Jewish safety or interests against the safety or interests of other people.

This is *even more important* when we are responding to a moment where we might disagree with the person whose rights have been infringed on. Even if we disagree with their points of view, we *must* reject the assertion that hurting immigrants and squashing free speech keeps Jews safe.

EXAMPLE:

“Freedom and safety for any Americans depends on freedom and safety for all of us. Our safety as Jews depends on the safety of our neighbors, and vice versa. We’ll stand up for each other, whether we’re targeted for our religions, races, immigration status or points of view — no exceptions. Threats to immigrant communities or protesters anywhere through unjust policies, deportations, and violence is a threat to all of us together.”

A Recommended Message:

We welcome you to use the recommended messaging below in sermons, op-eds, and other communications.

This messaging is built on a structure that creates a narrative arc: beginning with a **shared value**, explaining the **problem** and naming those **responsible** for blocking us from the desired goal, and finally showing our proposed **solutions** and **vision** of what the future should look like. This format has been proven by researchers to be the most persuasive structure (especially compared to messages that lead with problems). When adapting this platform for your uses, make sure to maintain this basic message structure.

Shared value:

Most of us would move heaven and earth to provide for our loved ones, whether we were born here or have made America our home. Freedom, safety, and belonging are essential for all of us, no matter our religion, where we come from, or what we look like. As Jews, we know that freedom and safety for any of us depends on the freedom and safety of all of us.

Explain the problem:

*But **[insert specific anti-immigrant attack]** is now being justified as necessary to protect Jewish safety. This is heartbreaking, because in truth it flies in the face of Jewish values.*

Name those responsible:

As Jews, we know how dangerous this is: when politicians target us based on our religion, our race, or how long we've been here and blame us for hard times, it leads directly to violence. Antisemitism and anti-immigrant racism are interconnected parts of the machinery of division and fear some elected officials are relying on to expand authoritarian power. But when those in power exploit and manufacture fear based on our religion, our skin color, or how long we've been here, their goal is to keep us from working together to create the life our loved ones deserve.

Solution and vision:

When Jewish people join together with our neighbors across differences, as we have in the past, we can shut down the fear factory and protect each other. We'll show up for each other [every time one of us is targeted](#) because of our differences, and [reject any policy](#) that uses fear to divide us against each other. Together we can build a country that fulfills the promise of freedom and safety for all of us – no exceptions.

This message is adapted from [messaging best practices on antisemitism](#) (developed by Bend the Arc, the Collaborative for Jewish Organizing and Uprise) and [messaging best practices on immigration](#) (developed by ASO Communications).

For more resources, check out T'ruah's ["A Very Brief Guide to Antisemitism"](#) here.

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