

From Conspiracy Beliefs to Radical Action: Antisemitic Narratives, Anti-Israel Attitudes, and Pathways to Political Radicalization

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Abstract

The October 7, 2023 Hamas attack on Israel and the ensuing war in Gaza were followed by the rapid spread of conspiracy narratives. The present exploratory research examines how belief in newly emerging conspiracy theories is associated with support for radical political action, and whether these associations operate through antisemitic attitudes toward Jews or political hostility toward Israel. Across two U.S. studies conducted in 2024 (N = 1,240) and 2025 (N = 567), participants evaluated three then-widely-circulating conspiracies: claims that Israel deliberately bombed Al-Ahli hospital; that evidence of Hamas atrocities was staged; and that the war was engineered to advance a “Great Replacement.” Results revealed that endorsement of conspiracy narratives was consistently associated with stronger support for illegal or violent political action. However, these relationships were driven primarily by negative attitudes toward Israel rather than by generalized antisemitic attitudes toward Jews. These findings refine theories of antisemitism and radicalization by identifying a target-specific pathway in which conspiratorial narratives mobilize grievance-based radicalization without necessarily increasing anti-Jewish animus. The results underscore the importance of analytically distinguishing antisemitism from anti-Israel sentiment and highlight conspiracy beliefs as a key psychological mechanism linking political conflict to support for radical action.

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Introduction

The October 7, 2023, attack by Hamas on Israel and the ensuing Israeli military actions in Gaza were followed by a sharp escalation in antisemitic incidents around the world, including harassment, threats, vandalism, and violence, targeting Jewish individuals and institutions in numerous countries. According to global analyses, antisemitic incidents surged dramatically in 2023 and remained elevated into 2024 and 2025, with some regions reporting increases

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several times higher than pre-war levels (Global Terrorism Trends and Analysis Center [GTTAC], 2025; Reuters, 2025). For example, data from the Anti-Defamation League (ADL) show that antisemitic hate crimes in the United States spiked by approximately 360 percent in the immediate aftermath of the attacks and continued at historically high rates, including more than 10,000 recorded incidents in the year following October 7 (ADL, 2024). Internationally, reports indicate tripling of campus incidents in some countries and widespread online and offline expressions of hostility linked to the conflict (Combat Antisemitism Movement, 2025; Vision of Humanity, 2025). Surveys also reveal that large proportions of Jewish communities now perceive antisemitism as a routine part of life, impacting behavior and feelings of safety (ADL/Jewish Federations of North America, 2025).

The intensification of antisemitic hostility in the wake of the war in Gaza highlights how political and geopolitical crises can amplify underlying prejudices and activate hateful narratives, including conspiratorial frameworks that assign blame to (often local) Jews for complex global events. Antisemitic conspiracy theories flourish in environments where uncertainty, threat, and loss of control are widespread (Douglas & Sutton, 2023; Kofta et al., 2020). Periods of political upheaval can therefore serve as accelerants for both antisemitic beliefs and antisemitic actions, with conspiracy narratives providing psychologically appealing explanations for troubling events while simultaneously justifying out-group hostility. Indeed, historically, antisemitic conspiracies have been used strategically in times of political turmoil, to divert public anger from the state toward Jewish communities (Moskalenko & Romanova, 2022).

The events in Israel and Gaza represent an important political and psychological context for understanding the role of conspiratorial thinking in antisemitism and political violence. Specifically, whereas antisemitic conspiracy theories of old are confounded by historical and political meanings, emerging new conspiracy theories offer an opportunity to explore how the public receives these narratives. Understanding the emergence and proliferation of new antisemitic conspiracy theories in response to major political events is crucial for analyzing how these beliefs interact with broader political attitudes and psychological proclivities, and how they may shape intergroup relations, public opinion, and political conflict.

Psychology of antisemitic conspiracy beliefs

Antisemitic conspiracy theories have been a consistent feature of political culture, portraying Jews as a secretly coordinated and disproportionately powerful outgroup responsible for complex social problems (Jaspal, 2023; Bloom & Moskalenko, 2020). Research situates these narratives within broader conspiracist cognition—beliefs that consequential events are orchestrated by malevolent actors, which covaries with prejudice and intergroup hostility (Douglas & Sutton, 2023). Psychologically, conspiracy belief is often theorized as need-based: it can promise epistemic clarity (an explanation), existential security (a sense of control), and social benefits (identity protection and superiority) when people feel threatened or destabilized (Douglas et al., 2017). A recent meta-analytic synthesis supports this motivational account, showing that epistemic, existential, and social motives are each significantly associated with conspiracy beliefs across hundreds of studies (Biddlestone et al., 2025).

Political turmoil appears to be a particularly fertile context for antisemitic conspiracism because it intensifies experiences of threat, uncertainty, and powerlessness while also heightening demand for blame-attributing narratives (Douglas et al., 2017). In a targeted program of research, Kofta et al. (2020) demonstrated that perceived political uncontrollability predicts belief in Jewish conspiracy stereotypes and, in turn, discriminatory attitudes toward Jews. This pattern is consistent with findings that emphasize the role of threatened control in conspiracy endorsement, as well as the importance of real-world contexts (Dow et al., 2022). Complementing these individual-level mechanisms, experimental evidence shows that conspiratorial framings of societal crises (e.g., security and war scenarios) can causally increase negative attitudes toward outgroups, suggesting one pathway by which crisis discourse can translate into prejudice (Endtricht & Kanol, 2024).

In addition to situational pressures, stable individual differences and identity-relevant motivations help explain why some people adopt conspiracist and antisemitic narratives more readily than others. Meta-analytic evidence indicates that conspiracy beliefs are related to personality correlates, implying that susceptibility is not randomly distributed in the population (Stasielowicz, 2022). Identity-protective motives are especially relevant: collective

narcissism (a defensive conviction that one's ingroup is exceptional yet insufficiently recognized) has been consistently linked to conspiracist thinking, particularly conspiracies targeting outgroups (Cichocka et al., 2022; Golec de Zavala & Cichocka, 2012). These findings align with theoretical accounts in which conspiracy narratives protect threatened group esteem by locating blame in a powerful, immoral "enemy," thereby restoring a sense of meaning and moral clarity (Biddlestone et al., 2025; Douglas et al., 2017). At the societal level, this logic intersects with political dynamics: analysis of modern political attitudes suggests that conspiratorial thinking and antisemitism can be mutually reinforcing within populist contexts where suspicion of elites and outgroups is rhetorically amplified (Lewis, 2025).

Recent work also underscores that antisemitism is not reducible to a single ideological source. For example, Allington et al. (2023) report that antisemitic attitudes are predicted by belief in malevolent global conspiracies alongside dispositions such as anti-hierarchical aggression and totalitarianism, indicating that conspiracist worldviews can co-occur with multiple motivational and ideological profiles. Earlier work also shows that antisemitic belief systems, including conspiracy beliefs, have consequences for discriminatory policy preferences (Bilewicz et al., 2013).

Taken together, the literature suggests a convergent model: during periods of political turmoil, heightened perceptions of uncontrollability and threat increase the appeal of conspiratorial explanations, while identity and personality factors shape whether such explanations crystallize into antisemitic attributions. This framework motivates the present study's focus on antisemitic conspiracy beliefs as both a longstanding cultural narrative and a psychologically functional response to destabilizing political environments (Kofta et al., 2020; Lewis, 2025).

The threefold research objectives for this study were thus formulated as follows:

RO1 Research objective one was to explore how novel and emerging conspiratorial narratives factor into the existing prejudices and antisemitic attitudes, specifically whether such attitudes predict belief in new conspiratorial narratives which feature Jews or the state of Israel.

RO2 Secondly, we wanted to explore the relationship between beliefs in emerging conspiratorial narratives and radical intentions, or support for violent and/or illegal political action.

RO3 Finally, we wanted to differentiate negative attitudes toward the state of Israel (anti-Zionism) from those toward Jews (antisemitism) and compare and contrast these attitudes' relationship with the other two variables in the study: conspiratorial beliefs and radical intentions.

Emerging Antisemitic Conspiracy Theories

In the aftermath of the October 7 Hamas attacks on Israel and the subsequent Israeli military campaign in Gaza, several conspiracy theories with antisemitic or anti-Israel themes emerged. Three of these conspiracy theories were credibly and quickly debunked, but persisted on social media despite fact-checking (Hameleers, 2025; CSIS, 2023). The false narratives' relative popularity represented a research opportunity to explore the relationship between beliefs in these narratives and psychological factors of interest, namely antisemitic attitudes and radical intentions. Below, we outline the three conspiracy narratives that were used in this study. These three conspiracy theories were selected for the study because each emerged prominently in online and mainstream media discourse in the immediate aftermath of the October 7 Hamas attacks and the ensuing war in Gaza (Hameleers, 2025; CSIS, 2023), and each had been independently fact-checked and debunked before data collection (Human Rights Watch, 2023; ADL, 2024b; Ekman, 2022).

Al-Ahli Hospital bombing. Thus, following the explosion at the Al-Ahli Arab Hospital in Gaza on October 17, 2023, conspiracy narratives appeared on social media and in some news reporting, claiming that the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) had deliberately bombed the hospital and killed hundreds of Palestinian civilians. These claims were supported by miscaptioned or fabricated videos, false attributions to journalists and military sources, and premature casualty figures that circulated widely before verification (Putterman, 2023). Subsequent fact-checking and independent investigations challenged these accounts: open-source analysis and intelligence assessments by multiple governments found no evidence of an Israeli airstrike, instead indicating that the explosion was most likely caused by a misfired

rocket launched by Palestinian armed groups (BBC Verify, 2023). Human Rights Watch concluded that the available physical and audiovisual evidence made an Israeli strike highly unlikely, while media investigations documented how misinformation in general, and conspiracy theories in particular, spread rapidly through social platforms during the early stages of the incident, illustrating the dynamics of conspiracy formation in high-conflict information environments (Human Rights Watch, 2023; New York Times, 2023).

Fake blood. Another emergent disinformation narrative centered on the documentary evidence of the October 7th attacks: specifically, on graphic photos and videos that circulated on official Israeli social media accounts and news outlets, documenting victims and destruction. Some online commentators and conspiracy theorists alleged that these images were staged or manipulated by Israeli propagandists, claiming inconsistencies in blood coloration or insisting that photographic evidence did not prove the existence of real victims (Associated Press/Facts analysis, 2023). However, fact-checking analysis and reporting have consistently shown that the photos and videos reflect real scenes from the aftermath of the attack, with overwhelming corroboration from multiple independent news organizations, eyewitness accounts, and direct footage from the events themselves. False narratives about staged visuals are part of a broader pattern of misinformation and distortion that emerged around the conflict, aimed at minimizing or denying the realities of the attacks and justifying alternative interpretations unsupported by available evidence (Reuters and BBC monitoring of disinformation, 2023).

Replacement theory. Finally, racialized conspiracy narratives emerged in some online spaces claiming that the conflict would accelerate the demographic “replacement” of white populations by forcing Palestinians—framed as “people of color”—to migrate into predominantly white countries in Europe and North America. In more extreme formulations, the war was described as a deliberately planned operation intended to “import nonwhites” into Western societies. These claims closely mirror the long-standing “Great Replacement” and “white genocide” conspiracy theories, which posit that political elites orchestrate conflicts and migration flows to undermine or replace white populations (Brubaker, 2017; Ward & Voas, 2011). Scholars and monitoring organizations have repeatedly shown that such narratives lack empirical foundation, rely on distorted interpretations of migration patterns, and function

primarily as ideological frames within far-right and ethnonationalist movements rather than as evidence-based demographic analysis (Anti-Defamation League, 2023).

Psychology of prejudice, antisemitism and radicalization

Psychological research has long identified prejudice—negative evaluations of individuals based on group membership—as a foundational driver of intergroup conflict and aggression (Adorno et al., 1950). Prejudice is shaped by both dispositional and contextual factors, including cognitive rigidity, need for closure, authoritarianism, and social dominance orientation, all of which are associated with greater reliance on stereotypes and hostility toward perceived outgroups (Altemeyer, 1998; Jost et al., 2003). These cognitive and ideological orientations are further amplified under conditions of perceived threat or competition, where outgroups come to be viewed as responsible for social, economic, or moral decline (Stephan & Stephan, 2000).

Antisemitism represents a distinct and historically persistent form of prejudice, characterized not only by dislike or exclusion but also by conspiratorial beliefs portraying Jews as secretly powerful, manipulative, and collectively culpable for societal harms. Unlike many other prejudices, antisemitism frequently incorporates conspiracy thinking, attributing disproportionate agency to Jews in domains such as finance, media, politics, and global affairs (Allington et al., 2023; Bilewicz et al., 2013). Research demonstrates that belief in conspiracies is among the strongest predictors of antisemitic attitudes, often exceeding the predictive power of demographic variables or traditional ideological self-placement (Allington et al., 2023). These conspiratorial representations are especially resilient, adapting to new political contexts while preserving core tropes of hidden power and malevolent intent.

The link between prejudice and political violence is well established in the radicalization literature. Models of radicalization emphasize that hostility toward an outgroup can function as a psychological gateway to endorsing illegal or violent political action by lowering moral restraints and legitimizing aggression (Borum, 2011; McCauley & Moskalkenko, 2008). The Two Pyramids model distinguishes between radicalization of opinion and radicalization of action, underscoring that while many individuals may endorse extreme beliefs, far fewer progress to violence; nevertheless, prejudice-based ideologies

increase the likelihood of movement along both trajectories (McCauley & Moskalkenko, 2017). Within the 12 mechanisms theory of radicalization (McCauley & Moskalkenko, 2008), antisemitism aligns closely with mechanisms of “hate” and “group grievance,” which are theorized to push individuals toward acceptance of violence against a targeted outgroup.

Empirical research further supports the role of antisemitism as a risk factor for radical intentions. Studies show that antisemitic attitudes are associated with greater general aggression, moral disengagement, and support for violence (Moskalkenko et al., 2025), particularly when Jews are framed as existential threats or corrupt elites (Canetti-Nisim et al., 2009; Golec de Zavala & Cichocka, 2012). Importantly, recent work demonstrates that antisemitic attitudes are more strongly linked to support for violent or illegal political action than are issue-based political grievances alone, highlighting the need to analytically separate prejudice-driven radicalization from non-prejudicial political dissent (Allington et al., 2023; Kofta et al., 2020).

This literature suggests that antisemitism occupies a critical position at the intersection of prejudice, conspiracy thinking, and radicalization. Understanding how antisemitic beliefs, conspiratorial narratives, and intentions for radical political actions interact is essential for explaining why some individuals progress from political grievance to support for extremist violence. This body of research provides the theoretical foundation for examining contemporary antisemitic conspiracies and their implications for radical intentions.

Taken together, the research on prejudice, antisemitism, conspiracy thinking, and radicalization suggests that political hostility and support for extremist action emerge through multiple psychological pathways rather than a single ideological trajectory. While prior research has demonstrated that antisemitism (particularly when embedded in conspiratorial worldviews) can drive aggression and political violence, less is known about how *newly emerging* conspiracy narratives operate in real time, as political events unfold and meanings are contested. Antisemitic conspiracies are historically persistent yet highly adaptable, often reshaped to fit novel geopolitical contexts and spreading fast through contemporary media environments. This adaptability presents both a theoretical challenge and an empirical opportunity.

Importantly, emerging conspiracy narratives cannot be assumed to reproduce the same psychological mechanisms or behavioral consequences as older, well-studied antisemitic tropes. In moments of political upheaval, conspiratorial claims may initially mobilize grievance, distrust, or anger toward political actors before crystallizing into broader ethnoreligious hostility—or, alternatively, may remain target-specific. As a result, research that relies solely on established ideological categories risks obscuring how beliefs, attitudes, and radical intentions are dynamically assembled in response to new political realities. Exploratory empirical approaches are therefore necessary to map how endorsement of contemporary conspiracy narratives relates to distinct attitudinal dimensions, such as attitudes toward Jews versus attitudes toward Israel, and to different forms of political engagement, including radicalization and support for illegal or violent action.

The present research pursues an exploratory, data-driven strategy to examine how belief in several widely circulating conspiracy narratives is associated with antisemitic attitudes, anti-Israel sentiment, and radical intentions. Rather than presuming a single causal pathway, this approach allows for the identification of multiple psychological routes through which conspiratorial beliefs may intersect with prejudice and political radicalization. By empirically disentangling these relationships, the study aims to clarify how emerging narratives connect variables of interest in the contemporary political landscape and to refine theoretical assumptions about when and how conspiratorial thinking contributes to radicalization processes. To ensure the robustness of our findings, we based them on the analyses of two (cross-sectional) data sets collected on samples of adults from the USA. The following section outlines the methodological approach used to pursue these goals.

Methods

Participants

Data from 1240 participants from Study 1 and 567 participants from Study 2 were used in the analyses. The sample from Study 1 included a similar ratio of men and women (50% women, 48% men, 2% other). The average participant was 41.3 years old ($SD = 13.8$).

The majority of participants were White (74%), followed by Black (11%), East or South Asian (8%), and Hispanic (7%).

The sample from Study 2 included slightly more women than men (61% women, 38% men, 1% other). The average participant was 38.9 years old ($SD = 13$). The majority of participants were White (72%), followed by Black (13%), Hispanic (7%), and East or South Asian (6%).

Measures

Both studies relied on the same set of measures collected within broader studies. The studied conspiracies were sourced from narratives that became popular on social media and revolved around the purported bombing of (a) Al-Ahli hospital, (b) fake blood in photos, and (c) the great replacement. For each conspiracy narrative, the participants were first asked whether they had already heard about it. Afterwards, they were asked, “Regardless of whether you have read about or heard about this story before, how much do you believe that it is true?” The belief in conspiracies was measured using Likert-type scales (1-5 in Study 1, 1-7 in Study 2), with higher response values indicating a stronger belief in the conspiracy's truth.

Below is the description of each conspiracy theory as it was presented to the participants.

(a) *On October 17, 2023, an [explosion](#) at Al-Ahli hospital in Gaza reportedly killed hundreds of innocent civilians. Several videos purportedly showing footage of the blast circulated on the social media, with claims that the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) were responsible for the blast that reportedly killed hundreds of Palestinian civilians*

(b) *Since October 7, Israeli officials have been [releasing](#) photos on social media platforms, including X, showing the bloody aftermath of Hamas's attack on Israel. Some have suggested that Israeli propagandists staged the graphic scenes to exaggerate the reality of Hamas's violence. In some cases, users alleged that the blood in the photos is “too light” in color to be real; in other cases, they claimed it was “too dark.” Others argue that photos of blood do not prove the existence of “real victims” in Israel.*

(c) *Some individuals and groups have claimed that the Israel-Hamas war will help speed replacement of white people by forcing people of color out of Palestine and into predominantly white countries in Europe and North America. Some suggested that the invasion “was a planned attack to import more nonwhites into white countries.”*

Participants were most familiar with the first conspiracy (54% of participants in Study 1 and 77% in Study 2), followed by the second (30% of participants in Study 1 and 33% in Study 2) and the third (13% of participants in Study 1 and Study 2). The internal consistency estimates suggested that these conspiracies worked better independently than combined in a single scale ($\omega_{\text{study 1}} = .57$, $\omega_{\text{study 2}} = .54$). Therefore, we used them independently throughout our analyses.

To measure attitudes toward Jews and Israel, we employed a previously published and empirically validated Antisemitism scale (Allington et al., 2023). This instrument offers the advantage of distinguishing between attitudes toward Jews and attitudes toward the state of Israel, comprising six items that assess views of Jews (e.g., “Jewish people talk about the Holocaust just to further their political agenda”) and six items that assess views of Israel (e.g., “Israel treats the Palestinians like the Nazis treated the Jews”; see Table 1 for the full wording of all scale items). Participants report their level of agreement with the presented statements on a Likert-type scale (1-7 in Study 1, 1-5 in Study 2), with higher values indicating higher agreement with the statement. Positively-worded items (items 1, 2, 3, 7, 8, 9) were reverse-coded before analyses to ensure that the higher total score indicates a more negative attitude. The scale exhibited acceptable fit in Study 1 (robust CFI = .97, robust RMSEA = .073 (90% CI [.060, .087]), SRMR = .049) after excluding the item 11 (“Israel can get away with anything because its supporters control the media”), which exhibited a very strong cross-loading, and in Study 2 (robust CFI = .96, robust RMSEA = .079 (90% CI [.070, .088]), SRMR = .052). Even after these exclusions, the internal consistency of the anti-Jewish scale ($\omega_{\text{study 1}} = .79$, $\omega_{\text{study 2}} = .84$) and anti-Israel scale ($\omega_{\text{study 1}} = .85$, $\omega_{\text{study 2}} = .87$) remained acceptable. The two factors were mildly correlated (model-implied $r = .30$).

Items measuring radical intentions differed in Study 1 and Study 2. In Study 1, radical intentions were measured as participants’ endorsement of the following four items: (1) setting up encampments to protest against Israel actions in Gaza; (2) breaking into university

buildings or blocking traffic on public roads to protest against Israel actions in Gaza; (3) engaging in violence against police or security in the course of protesting against Israel actions in Gaza and (4) engaging in violence Jewish individuals in the course of protesting against Israel actions in Gaza. Participants responded on a 1-5 scale ranging from “The people who did it were wrong, I disagree with their choices” to “I completely support those who did it, and I would join them if I could”. In Study 2, radical intentions were measured as a common factor of participants’ stance on ... [4 actions, items acts1-4]. The common factor exhibited an acceptable internal consistency ($\omega = .80$) and model fit after correlating the residuals of [last two items] (robust CFI = .99, robust RMSEA = .074 (90% CI[.013, .153]), SRMR = .016). Participants responded on the same scale as in Study 1, and the higher total score indicated stronger radical intentions.

Procedure

Both Study 1 and Study 2 were reviewed and approved by the Institutional Review Board of Blinded For Peer Review (*Reference Numbers: 381083 and 380196*). Participants were selected from Prolific (www.Prolific.co), an online participant pool. Prolific is similar to other online participant pools, such as MTurk and Crowdfunder, but it specializes in academic research, with stricter controls for data quality and higher payments for participants.

All participants were U.S. citizens over the age of 18, and native speakers of English. The data for Study 1 were collected in January of 2024; the data for Study 2 were collected in February of 2025.

In both Study 1 and Study 2, participants were first provided with a brief description of the study. Next, if they wished to participate, a link took them to an online questionnaire. Participants were informed about the possibility of emotional distress from answering some questions, as well as assured about the anonymity of their responses. They were reminded that they did not have to respond and could stop at any time. After completing the survey, participants were debriefed about the purpose of the study.

In Study 1, 1350 participants were engaged. Of these, 72 did not complete the questionnaire, and an additional 13 failed attention checks. These 85 participants were excluded from the analyses, resulting in the final set of 1265 individuals.

In Study 2, 600 participants were engaged via Prolific. Of these, 21 participants did not complete the questionnaire, and an additional 12 participants failed the attention check. These 33 participants were excluded from the analyses, resulting in a dataset of 567 individuals.

Analytical approach

Analyses were conducted in R (R Core Team, 2025), dominantly relying on functions from packages lavaan (Rosseel, 2012) and semTools (Jorgensen et al., 2018). Before analyzing the data, we excluded participants who responded carelessly (in the context of this study, those who provided the same response more than 13 times – i.e., their string of the same answer was longer than the longest scale) using the functions of the package careless (Yentes & Wilhelm, 2021). This led to the exclusion of 25 participants from Study 1 (remaining $N = 1240$). No participants from Study 2 were excluded using the same criterion ($N = 567$). The remaining data were imputed using the default (five donors and no random component) knn imputation function from the package VIM (Kowarik & Templ, 2016). The imputed data were then analyzed using structural equation modeling principles using the estimator robust to minor misfit and non-normality (MLR), while taking into account the model fit thresholds described in Kline (2015).

Results

This section begins with a brief reflection on the (unstandardized and unscaled) descriptive data (Table 1). Data from both Study 1 and Study 2 (Table 1) suggest that the Al-Ahli conspiracy (a) achieved the strongest endorsement, while the great replacement conspiracy (c) was the least endorsed. Also, the item means suggest a general weak anti-Israel sentiment (which is nevertheless stronger than anti-Jewish sentiment). Finally, participants exhibited low support for radical intentions, which is more pronounced in Study 2, which could be attributed to differences in measures.

Table 1.

Unstandardized and unscaled descriptive data on conspiracies, attitudes toward Jews, Israel, and radical actions

	Study 1 (<i>N</i> = 1240)		Study 2 (<i>N</i> = 567)	
	M	SD	M	SD
Conspiracy - Al-Ahli hospital	3.21	1.23	5.10	1.48
Conspiracy - Photos of blood	2.40	1.21	4.16	1.66
Conspiracy - Replacement	1.61	1.01	2.89	1.70
Anti-Jew attitude	2.27	1.06	2.98	1.38
Anti-Israel attitude	1.71	0.87	2.26	1.22
Radical Intentions	1.78	1.01	2.05	0.64

Note. Radical intentions were measured using different items in Study 1 and Study 2. Means scores of Anti-Jew and Anti-Israel attitudes were calculated after reverse-coding the items measuring positive attitudes towards Jews and Israel, respectively.

In the following step, we focused on the mediation analyses (see Fig. 1).

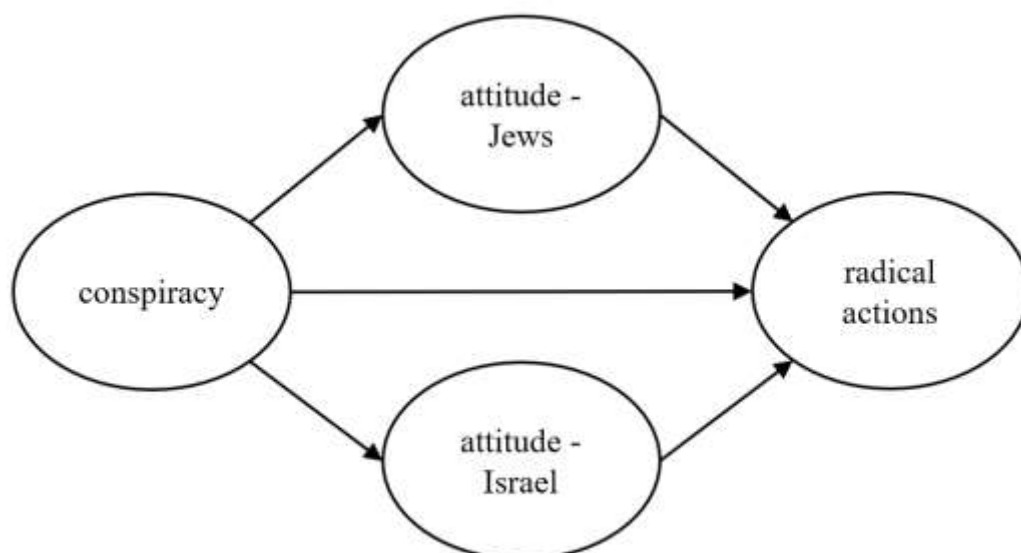


Fig. 1 Model sketches

Generally, the results exhibit a consistent positive relationship between belief in (any of) conspiracies and radical intentions (Study 1: $\beta_{\text{AI-Ahli}} = .26$, $\beta_{\text{fake blood}} = .20$, $\beta_{\text{replacement}} = .18$, all $ps < .01$; Study 2: $\beta_{\text{AI-Ahli}} = .41$, $\beta_{\text{fake blood}} = .10$, $\beta_{\text{replacement}} = .12$, all ps except fake blood $< .05$): the more participants endorsed conspiracies, the more they were likely to report radical actions (except for the fake blood conspiracy in Study 2). The coefficients notably vary across studies, which could either be attributed to temporal effects—Study 1 data was collected relatively sooner after the October 7 attack, whereas Study 2 was collected over a year after Study 1 – or the differences in operationalization of radical intentions.

Table 2.
Outcomes of evaluated mediation models

	Study 1 (<i>N</i> = 1240)						Study 2 (<i>N</i> = 567)					
	conspiracy =		conspiracy =		conspiracy = great replacement		conspiracy =		conspiracy =		conspiracy =	
	Al-Ahli		fake blood		t		Al-Ahli		fake blood		great replacement	
	β	<i>p</i>	β	<i>p</i>	β	<i>p</i>	β	<i>p</i>	β	<i>p</i>	β	<i>p</i>
conspiracy	0.26	<.001	0.20	<.001	0.18	<.001	0.41	<.001	0.10	.055	0.12	.022

R^2 (radical action)	0.07		0.04		0.03		0.17		0.01		0.03	
					3							
conspiracy (C)	0.06	.030	0.07	.013	0.05	.100	0.20	<.001	0.10	.009	0.10	.030
attitude - Jews (AJ)	0.09	.005	0.08	.011	0.07	.043	-	.116	-0.10	.040	-	.019
attitude - Israel (AI)	0.42	<.001	0.43	<.001	0.45	<.001	0.63	<.001	0.70	<.001	0.70	<.001
C via AJ	0.01	.073	0.01	.031	0.02	.048	0.00	.450	-0.01	.100	-	.036
C via AI	0.19	<.001	0.12	<.001	0.11	<.001	0.24	<.001	0.03	.438	0.07	.045
R^2 (radical intention)	0.24		0.24		0.24		0.50		0.47		0.47	
					4							
conspiracy (C)	0.06	.050	0.06	.025	0.05	.127	0.19	<.001	0.09	.022	0.07	.140
attitude - Jews (AJ)	0.10	.001	0.09	.004	0.08	.014	-	.149	-	.070	-0.11	.046
attitude - Israel (AI)	0.40	<.001	0.41	<.001	0.42	<.001	0.61	<.001	0.67	<.001	0.67	<.001
C via AJ	0.01	.058	0.01	.020	0.03	.018	0.00	.430	-	.140	-0.03	.067
C via AI	0.18	<.001	0.11	<.001	0.10	<.001	0.23	<.001	0.04	.208	0.07	.050
age	-	.005	-	.008	-	.004	-	.012	-	.005	-0.10	.005
sex (ref = women)	-	.148	-	.353	-	.132	-	.833	-	.486	-0.02	.559
R^2 (radical intention)	0.23		0.23		0.23		0.47		0.44		0.44	

Note. The first section of results represents the relationship between a specific conspiracy and criterion, implying its role as a correlation and total path (from the perspective of mediation analyses). Analyses including seks and age as covariates are based on 1217 (Study 1) and 559 (Study 2) participants due to the exclusion of non-binary participants and participants who did not report their gender.

Although many indirect paths emerged statistically significant, not all of them suggested practically relevant results. More precisely, indirect paths via anti-Jewish attitudes, even when significant, were of negligible practical importance ($|\beta| < .05$). Therefore, even if we conclude that some conspiracies operated via increasing negative attitudes toward Jews, this conclusion would be limited to a) the great replacement and fake blood conspiracy, b) study 2, and c) negligible magnitude ($\beta \leq .02$). Similarly, the indirect path of the great replacement theory via attitude toward Jews in Study 2 was also of negligible magnitude ($\beta = -.03$). All this suggest that these partial mediations are weak and do not explain a substantial part of the relationship between conspiracies and radical intentions. In other words, these results suggest that the studied conspiracies generally do not influence radical intentions via increasing (or even potentially decreasing) negative attitudes towards Jews.

However, the findings related to indirect paths via attitudes on Israel were much more consistent and of statistically meaningful magnitude. More precisely, partial mediation was established for the Al-Ahli conspiracy across studies (indirect $\beta_{\text{Study 1}}=.19$, indirect $\beta_{\text{Study 2}}=.24$), a combination of partial and complete mediation was established in the context of the great replacement conspiracy (indirect $\beta_{\text{Study 1}}=.11$, indirect $\beta_{\text{Study 2}}=.07$), while partial and no mediation were established in the context of the fake blood conspiracy (indirect $\beta_{\text{Study 1}}=.12$, indirect $\beta_{\text{Study 2}}=.03$). Such findings suggest that, at least in the context of the great replacement and the Al-Ahli conspiracy, the endorsement of conspiracies was related to stronger anti-Israel attitudes, which were also related to a greater willingness to engage in radical actions. The addition of sex and gender as control factors did not substantially alter our findings. Altogether, these findings suggest that the three conspiracies used in Study 1 and Study 2, under the presumption of causality, affected radical action attitudes primarily via increasing negative attitudes towards Israel, not toward Jews in general.

Discussion

The current research explored how beliefs in conspiracy narratives that emerged in the context of the Israel– Hamas conflict after the October 7 attacks were associated with radical intentions, and whether these associations are related to negative attitudes toward Jews or

toward Israel as a state. Across two studies conducted in the aftermath of the October 7th attacks and the ensuing Israel– Hamas conflict, we examined whether belief in some of the circulating conspiracy narratives about the conflict was associated with intention for radical political action, and whether these associations were mediated by antisemitism: negative attitudes toward Jews and toward Israel.

The three conspiracy narratives selected for the study were broadly circulating on social media. One of them was about Al-Ahli hospital in Gaza, where it was claimed that hundreds of innocent Palestinian civilians were killed, purportedly by the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF). Another claimed that Israeli propaganda fabricated evidence of the October 7th attacks. The last one claimed that the Israeli-Hamas conflict was a Jew-directed effort to replace White people in Europe by an influx of Palestinian refugees from Gaza.

Consistent with prior work linking conspiratorial cognition to extremism, among our participants, beliefs in the above three conspiracy theories were positively correlated with willingness to endorse illegal or violent political behavior. However, the mechanism through which these associations operated was not uniform. While conspiratorial belief was consistently associated with stronger anti-Israel attitudes among our participants, negative attitudes toward Jews showed only weak and practically negligible mediating effects. These findings suggest that, in our data, belief in Israel-Hamas war–related conspiracy theories predicted stronger political hostility toward the state of Israel specifically, rather than generalized antisemitic animus against Jews. These results refine existing theoretical assumptions about the link between conspiratorial thinking, outgroup hostility, and violent political intentions.

Relationship to Prior Findings on Antisemitism and Radicalization

Our findings should be interpreted in light of recent research distinguishing anti-Israel sentiment from antisemitism as distinct psychological constructs. An earlier study (Moskalenko et al., 2025) used Latent Profile Analysis to empirically demonstrate that a sizable proportion of U.S. respondents held negative views of Israeli policies while maintaining positive or neutral views of Jews as individuals. Importantly, that study found

that antisemitic (anti-Jew) attitudes, rather than anti-Israel sentiment alone, were the strongest and most consistent predictors of support for political violence and general aggression.

In contrast, the current research found little evidence that belief in contemporary conspiracies strengthened antisemitic views (anti-Jew attitudes) enough to drive support for political violence. Instead, the key pathway ran through heightened negative evaluations of Israel. In other words, while the earlier research showed that antisemitism is a strong risk factor for radicalization, the present findings suggest that conspiratorial cognition (at least with respect to the three conspiracies used in the present study) may not substantially increase antisemitism. Rather than generalizing blame to Jews as a group, individuals who believed the three conspiracy theories appeared to direct moral and political hostility toward the Israeli state.

Taken together, these two sets of findings help clarify an emerging pattern: Antisemitism can be a catalyst for violent radicalization, but not all paths to violent attitudes involve increasing antisemitism.

In the present data, conspiratorial narratives appeared to mobilize individuals through the mechanism of *group grievance* focused on a political actor, rather than through the mechanism of *hate* toward a people (McCauley & Moskaleiko, 2008). Conspiracy narratives (at least the kinds of narratives that were used in the study as widely circulating in the media at the time of heightened conflict between Israel and Hamas) may therefore mobilize radicalization through anger, threat perception, and loss of trust in institutions, without necessarily broadening into ethnoreligious hatred.

Implications for Radicalization Theory

The present findings refine existing radicalization theory in three important ways. First, they demonstrate the necessity of modeling distinct attitudinal pathways separately rather than collapsing them into a single construct. Both in the current study and in earlier work (Moskaleiko et al., 2025), combining anti-Israel sentiment and antisemitism obscured meaningful psychological differences. In line with the Two Pyramids model (McCauley & Moskaleiko, 2017), antisemitic hostility appears to be more tightly linked to mechanisms such as hate, dehumanization, moral disengagement, and rationalization of targeted violence.

By contrast, conspiratorial anti-Israel beliefs—although they may lead to support for radical action—did not automatically trigger the same prejudice-based processes.

Second, our findings show that conspiratorial belief elevates radicalization risk even in the absence of overt hate-based ideation. In previous work, violent intentions were strongest among individuals who expressed direct animus toward Jews (Moskalenko et al., 2025). In this study, however, conspiracy beliefs were enough to increase support for radical action even when prejudice was weak. This suggests a different psychological pathway: conspiratorial narratives may erode trust in legitimacy, procedural fairness, and democratic institutions, thereby fostering a willingness to circumvent established channels of political participation and protest. This finding is consistent with recent research that found in a cross-national survey in 21 countries that conspiracy beliefs correlate with political behavior that threatens democratic norms (Thomas et al., 2025). Similarly, a large experimental study in Brazil found that *exposure to realistic conspiracy narratives* about a political event undermines commitment to democratic norms and institutions, shifting support toward extra-legal or alternative forms of political action (Amaral et al., 2025).

Conspiracism and Radical Action Support

Consistent with prior research, in our data, greater belief in political conspiracies was associated with greater support for radical actions. This pattern held across both studies and across most conspiracy topics, underscoring the role of conspiratorial thinking as a general psychological amplifier of the acceptance of extreme political behavior.

Notably, this relationship persisted even when demographic covariates were controlled, and across different operationalizations of radical behavior. This suggests that conspiratorial narratives may function less as specific ideological commitments and more as worldviews that lower the perceived legitimacy of existing social rules and institutions. This interpretation is in line with the Uncertainty-Identity theory of radicalization (Hogg, 2007; Hogg, 2021), where conspiracies undermine norms and democratic principles, creating epistemic uncertainty which motivates identity defense in the form of radicalization.

Attitudes Toward Jews vs. Attitudes Toward Israel

A central contribution of this research is the distinction between anti-Jewish attitudes and anti-Israel attitudes as potential mediators. While both were consistently correlated with conspiracy endorsement, only anti-Israel attitudes reliably transmitted the relationship between conspiracism and radical action intentions.

Indirect paths through attitudes toward Jews, even when statistically significant, were extremely small ($\beta \leq .02$) and thus of limited practical importance. This suggests that, in these samples, conspiratorial beliefs did not meaningfully strengthen antisemitism, nor did such attitudes meaningfully drive support for political radicalization. This finding challenges assumptions common in public discourse that all anti-Zionist conspiratorial narratives necessarily promote generalized anti-Jewish hostility.

Instead, the psychological process identified in these studies appears to be more target-specific: conspiracy beliefs predicted more negative attitudes toward Israel, which in turn predicted higher acceptance of radical tactics. The mediated effects through anti-Israel sentiment were substantial across conspiracies related to the Al-Ahli hospital narrative and the Great Replacement narrative, and partially evident even in Study 2 for the “fake blood” narrative.

These findings indicate that conspiracies may increase willingness to justify extreme actions not by activating a generalized animus toward Jews, but by heightening anger, resentment, and blame toward the state of Israel and, presumably, toward institutions perceived as associated with it.

Implications for Prevention and Countering Violent Extremism (P/CVE)

The practical implications for P/CVE work are significant. Three conclusions emerge.

First, interventions aiming to reduce radicalization in the context of antisemitism must address conspiracy narratives directly. Because conspiracy endorsement predicted willingness to support radical actions even before accounting for attitudes toward Israel, interventions that simply attempt to moderate emotional hostility toward Israel may leave intact the underlying worldview that legitimizes extreme responses. Programs shown to be effective in inoculating individuals against conspiracy thinking may be more promising than direct fact-correction campaigns alone.

Second, reducing hostility toward Israel may mitigate radicalization more effectively than focusing solely on antisemitism. Our findings suggest that radicalization in the context of antisemitic conspiracy theories is primarily driven by political perceptions of a national actor (Israel), not generalized ethnoreligious prejudice (Jews). P/CVE programs that attempt to frame radicalization primarily as an antisemitism problem may therefore misdiagnose part of the causal pathway. Dialogue-based, contact-based, and perspective-taking interventions targeting beliefs about states, policies, and political responsibility may be more impactful in reducing willingness to justify extreme action.

Third, avoiding overgeneralization in policy and practice designed to address antisemitism may reduce backlash and improve legitimacy. If countering radicalization campaigns frame all criticism of Israel as antisemitism, individuals whose radicalization is grievance- or policy-motivated may further reject mainstream sources of information and become more susceptible to conspiratorial thinking. Distinguishing between legitimate political critique, factually false conspiracy theories, and hatred of Jews as a group may improve trust, message acceptance, and democratic legitimacy.

Limitations and Future Research

Several limitations should be acknowledged. First, the cross-sectional design of both studies precludes causal inference. Although the structural models are consistent with the proposed mediation hypothesis, longitudinal or experimental research is needed to confirm directionality. Second, radical action was measured through self-reported attitudinal items rather than behavioral indicators. Future work should incorporate behaviorally realistic simulations, digital trace data, or multi-method approaches.

Third, the samples, while sizable and demographically mixed, were drawn from online participant pools in a specific cultural context. Replication in other national, linguistic, and political settings is critical to assess the stability of these pathways, particularly given the sensitivity of Israel-Palestine discourse across global contexts.

Finally, this research capitalized on the emergence of several novel conspiracy theories to explore how they interact with radical intentions and with attitudes toward the targets of the conspiratorial narratives: Jews and the State of Israel. This ad-hoc selection of narratives

limits the generalizability of our findings. Future research should investigate whether similar patterns emerge with other antisemitic conspiracies, and indeed with conspiracy theories targeting actors other than Israel. Understanding whether these effects generalize to conspiracies about Western governments, international organizations, religious minorities, or immigrant groups will provide important boundary conditions for theory and practice.

Conclusion

The present studies demonstrate that newly emerging conspiracy beliefs about contemporary political conflict between Israel and Hamas are associated with greater acceptance of radical political action, and that this relationship is largely transmitted through political hostility toward Israel rather than generalized negative attitudes toward Jews. These findings refine theoretical models of radicalization by identifying a target-specific psychological pathway and underscore the need for P/CVE interventions that focus on addressing conspiracy narratives and understanding the political content of grievance-based radicalization, rather than assuming generalized prejudice as the primary driver.

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