

DISMANTLING ANTISEMITISM

A MESSAGE GUIDE

How we talk about antisemitism is critical — it shapes how we understand it, how we fight it, and how we stop its use for political gain. In 2020, in deep collaboration with Jewish organizing partners around the country, Bend the Arc: Jewish Action worked with Uprise to develop *Dismantling Antisemitism: A New Message Guide* as a tool to help stop the increase in antisemitism and imagine a future in which Jewish people — and all people — can live free and safe in a thriving multiracial democracy.

The message guide is part of a national, multi-year campaign led by Bend the Arc to drive white nationalism, and the antisemitism and racism that animate it, out of the mainstream and the halls of power. This groundbreaking narrative intervention has replaced an outdated and insufficient understanding of antisemitism with clear analysis and language that our elected leaders, our movement leaders and our Jewish community can use to fight for our collective safety and liberation.

To date, over 100 civil rights and advocacy organizations, hundreds of Jewish clergy, and multifaith partners have trained to use this shared messaging platform. The guide has been successfully used widely on social media, in voter contact efforts, in public messaging campaigns reaching millions of people, and in the pages of *The New York Times*.

The *Dismantling Antisemitism* Team

Dismantling Antisemitism was built with insights from specialists in community organizing, communications strategy, and Jewish experts in antisemitism.

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I. Introduction

In this moment in history, Americans are seeing right-wing political movements use supremacist and white nationalist ideology and rhetoric to gain political power. Antisemitism is a key characteristic of this ideology and its rhetoric. Existing language and public conversation about antisemitism as

inevitable, ubiquitous, and timeless leaves Jewish people feeling increasingly afraid, isolated, and unable to imagine a future in which Jewish people can live free and safe from antisemitic targeting. To eliminate antisemitism and white nationalism, advocates need a new conversation that shows how addressing antisemitism is intrinsically connected to other movements and why it is an integral part of the struggle for collective liberation.

Like any strong message, it must:

- o Shape the conversation into one that suggests our analysis and proposals;
- o Be profoundly persuasive, adhering to messaging best practices;
- o Be memorable enough for many people to repeat, and simple enough for a wide audience to understand;
- o Express our desired vision for the future and differentiate us from what our opposition is offering; and
- o Make people want to join our efforts.

Our new message on antisemitism carries a unique additional set of challenges. In addition to the above, it must also:

- o Make antisemitism a liability for white nationalists and their political movements;
- o Address Jewish audiences' fears in an increasingly violent time;
- o Deflate and shield all audiences against antisemitic tropes;
- o Make the case that togetherness (instead of separateness) is the desirable strategy for Jewish people addressing antisemitism;
- o Provide a way for advocates across issues to see themselves in this fight; and
- o Create a framework that makes it possible to address missteps (so that we're not torn apart when they happen).

The message recommendations in this guide are intended to be used by organizations and individuals who are engaged in social justice work across movements in situations when a need arises to communicate about antisemitism. It may be used to respond to incidents of antisemitism or accusations of antisemitism; to explain antisemitism in relation to other systems of oppression and movements for liberation; and as a narrative basis for proactive work intended to address and dismantle antisemitism. Since this big-picture narrative suggests a togetherness and solidarity approach, advocates should lift up stories of solidarity and showing up together across difference, including across religious difference, together with this foundational messaging.

This guide contains specific language recommendations advocates should use to tell a coherent story about antisemitism, including a powerful new metaphor and advice on how to avoid unhelpful and even damaging metaphors that are commonly used today. The language was strongly informed by insights from polling and message testing research, including the extensively tested [Race-Class Narrative research project](#). It may be updated as new research emerges.

This guide was written by [Sharon Rose Goldtzvik](#), prepared for Bend the Arc: Jewish Action.

II. The Machinery Metaphor

Two metaphors are commonly used by advocates across the political spectrum when describing antisemitism:

1. Antisemitism as virus, and

2. Antisemitism as water

Both of these metaphors reinforce a flawed analysis of antisemitism: that it is a part of nature and therefore will always exist; that it was not created by humans and cannot ever truly be stopped by humans; and that it is indiscriminate, equally present and equally damaging no matter its source across the political spectrum.

To avoid these pitfalls, use a **machinery metaphor** instead:

Antisemitism is part of the machinery of division and fear created and used for specific political or material gain.

This suggests:

- o Antisemitism was built by people and is used by people for a specific purpose;
- o Anyone can fuel it but those who built it and use it are responsible and are the ones who benefit;
- o We can stop it, shut it down, dismantle it; and
- o Antisemitism is part of a larger whole and addressing it is intrinsically connected to other struggles – this also provides a clear way for everyone to see themselves in this story, whether they usually work on antisemitism or not.

Here is how to use the machinery metaphor when talking about antisemitism:

Say This	Instead of This
Politicians who rely on division and fear for their power use antisemitism	No party is free of antisemitism, but...
[Supremacist Leader] is using antisemitism to generate fear and divide us against each other...	[Supremacist Leader] is a virulent antisemite
What [progressive] said could fuel antisemitism, which always benefits those politicians who build power by deliberately manufacturing fear to divide us against each other, so...	What [progressive] said was antisemitic, but [progressive] is not an anti-Semite...
The machinery of antisemitism is used by those in power at times when it benefits them...	Antisemitism comes in waves...
We must dismantle antisemitism and all of the machinery used to generate fear and divide us against each other...	We must push back against the rising tide of violent antisemitism...
Antisemitism is used to manufacture division and fear. So while anyone can fuel it, it always benefits politicians who rely on division and fear for their power.	Antisemitism has different mutations, but anyone can spread it.

III. Message Platform

The message platform represents foundational language, intended to be adapted and used across many kinds of media. It 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 also 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.

Most of us believe that every person, no matter our religion, where we come from, or what we look like, deserves to live with freedom, safety and belonging. [As Jews, we know that] whether we're walking down the streets of our neighborhoods or through the doors of our holy spaces, freedom and safety for any of us depends on the freedom and safety of all of us.

But there are some politicians who seek to build a country that's only for themselves and people like them, dividing us against each other and making us afraid while they hoard power and wealth. [As Jews, we know how dangerous this is:] when politicians target Jewish people and blame [us] for hard times, it leads directly to violence against us. Antisemitism is part of the machinery of division and fear those politicians rely on for power; the same machinery those politicians use to blame Black and brown people, people who are immigrants, people who are Muslim, and more. But whether they manufacture division and 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 win the things we all need to thrive.

When Jewish people join together with our neighbors across difference, 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 politician who uses fear to divide us against each other. Together we can build a country that fulfils the promise of freedom and safety for all of us, no exceptions.

Below is more information on the specific language choices in the platform, and guidance for what you should consider when adapting this language for your purposes.

Shared Value

Most of us believe that every person, no matter our religion, where we come from, or what we look like,	<i>Reference religion and racial difference and allude to immigration or geography. Consider which dimensions are most appropriate or which linked struggles are most important to mention for your context.</i>
deserves to live with freedom, safety and belonging.	<i>State shared values – "safety" as opposed to "security" implies broader personal goal vs militarized/policed</i>

[As Jews, we know that] whether we're walking down the streets of our neighborhoods or through the doors of our holy spaces, freedom and safety for any of us depends on the freedom and safety of all of us.	<i>Invoke Jewish identity as personal motivation for caring about others; activate minority experience; reference Jewish experiences of antisemitic violence without activating fear response</i>
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Problem

But there are some politicians who seek to build a country that's only for themselves [and people like them],	<i>Reference white nationalist political movement in simple terms; consider whether "and people like them" makes this clearer</i>
dividing us against each other and making us afraid while they hoard power and wealth.	<i>Point to motivation behind actions – why are they doing it? Consider whether to include "wealth"</i>
As Jews, we know how dangerous this is: when politicians target Jewish people and blame [us] for hard times, it leads directly to violence against us.	<i>Acknowledge Jewish experience of violent antisemitism as motivation/way to understand larger system at work</i>
Antisemitism is part of the machinery of division and fear those politicians rely on for power; the same machinery those politicians use to blame Black and brown people, people who are immigrants, people who are Muslim, and more.	<i>Use helpful machinery metaphor and connect antisemitism to other struggles</i>
But whether they manufacture division and 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 win the things we all need to thrive.	<i>Reference solidarity as mutual benefit, directly mention race, and name the obstacle to our goal</i>

Solution and Vision

When Jewish people join together with our neighbors across difference,	<i>Consider referencing specific difference, like race or religion, depending on the context</i>
as we have in the past,	<i>Remind audiences of success and positive feeling of solidarity from past experiences – be careful not to overstate past successes as solidarity hasn't always been enacted or done well</i>
we can shut down the fear factory and protect each other.	<i>Complete the metaphor with us in the active role, creating positive good (not only absence of harm)</i>
We'll show up for each other every time one of us is targeted because of our differences, and reject any politician who uses fear to divide us against each other.	<i>Show benefit of mutual solidarity; consider referencing a specific ask, such as an electoral choice, if appropriate</i>
Together we can build a country that fulfils the promise of freedom and safety for all of us, no exceptions.	<i>Return to shared value with powerful vision people want</i>

IV. Specific Language Recommendations

Below are some specific words and phrases to use and some to avoid when talking about antisemitism. The message platform is built to adhere to these guidelines.

Say This	Instead Of	Because
Politicians/leaders who rely on division and fear for their political power	Partisan identifier	Generally, partisan cues turn people off, but still important to name the source of problems and hold supremacist political movements accountable. You may choose to include a specific/named target instead. Consider audience, C3/C4 regulations and educational purposes when making this choice.
People who seek to create a country that's only for themselves [and people like them]	White nationalists; white supremacists	Keeps white audiences listening and avoids confusion over these terms. Again consider audience as well as educational purpose if deciding to use these terms instead.
Pointing the finger at progressives for antisemitism; generating more division and fear by blaming black and brown people for antisemitism	Weaponization of antisemitism	Audiences may not know what "weaponization" means; implies other forms or uses of antisemitism are not dangerous or deadly. Strong recommendation to avoid this language in all circumstances. Instead, explicitly name the purpose of using antisemitism to hold accountable those who benefit from it
Join together across [racial] difference	Join together with allies/communities of color	Most people don't know who "allies" are. Recommended language is intended to be inclusive of Jews of Color – make sure to read any adapted language to ensure JOCs are not excluded and Jews are not presumed to be all white.

The following are messaging recommendations from the extensively tested [Race-Class Narrative research project](#). We have incorporated these insights into the message platform in this guide.

Say This	Instead Of	Because
People of different races and from different places; white Black or Brown; tenth generation or newcomer	All people, everyone	Explicit reference to race engages people of color while keeping white listeners on board

Join together across racial difference	Join together in our communities	Making explicit reference to race increases interest among base and persuadables
Come together as we did in our past	Come together in the hopes of a better future	Referencing previous cross-racial solidarity helps abate cynicism and increase desire to engage
Our opponents blame new immigrants, Black people, and Muslims for our hard times	Our opponents are racist against new immigrants, Black people, and Muslims	Reframing racism as scapegoating helps draw the causal connection to economic concerns shared across races
Divide us against each other, deliberately distract us with fear mongering	Pit our communities against each other	"Pit against" implies the listener is complicit in the antagonism between groups

V. Talking about antisemitism without making the conversation about antisemitism

Sometimes, advocates need to address or acknowledge antisemitism in the context of a larger conversation about a different justice issue. This messaging is specifically designed to be used when we need to communicate about antisemitism. It should not supplant messages used to address other struggles, but rather to address antisemitism accurately and clearly, and in a way that leads to solidarity. In the example below, the focus remains on anti-Black racism while addressing antisemitism in relation to it.

Excerpt from a statement signed by 600 Jewish organizations in support of Black Lives Matter:

"...Black Lives Matter, the recent uprisings across the globe in the wake of the murders of Breonna Taylor, Ahmaud Arbery, George Floyd, Rayshard Brooks, and so many others, and the decades of political organizing across the country that have led to this moment are movements led by and for Black people. We see through any attempt to suggest otherwise by pointing fingers, scapegoating, or using antisemitic dogwhistles.

As Jews, we know how dangerous this is: when politicians target Jewish people and blame us for problems, it leads directly to violence against us. When Black movements are undermined, it leads to more violence against Black people, including Black Jews.

Antisemitism is part of the same machinery those politicians use to blame Black and brown people, people who are immigrants, people who are Muslim, and more. But whether they generate division and 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 win the things we all need to survive and thrive..."

([See the full statement here.](#))

VI. Tough Q&A

The following are a sampling of tough questions advocates are often asked around antisemitism, with examples of how to use the language of the message platform to answer effectively. Each organization may choose to answer differently; these should serve as illustrative examples to be adapted to the specific circumstances.

Q: “Isn’t it true that there’s antisemitism on both the Left and Right?”

A: Antisemitism is used to manufacture division and fear. So no matter the source, it always benefits politicians who rely on division and fear for their power. That’s what’s putting Jewish people in danger.

Antisemitism has a specific purpose, usually to blame Jewish people for problems, but it’s part of the same machinery that targets Black and brown people, people who are immigrants, people who are Muslim, and more. This is the explicit strategy of [certain politicians/the right wing] in America and around the world.

So while it’s true that anyone can fuel antisemitism by repeating a stereotype, and this harms us, ultimately all antisemitism benefits those who derive their political power from fear and division.

Q: “[Progressive Leader Z] said this thing. Isn’t [Progressive Leader Z] an antisemite?” (Instance of antisemitic misstep)

A: Freedom and safety for any of us depends on freedom and safety for all of us. Saying what Z said fuels antisemitism, and that’s a real problem because it harms Jewish people. Antisemitism is part of the machinery of division and fear, the same machinery which is used to blame Black and brown people, people who are immigrants, people who are Muslim, and more.

We know Z doesn’t benefit from that machinery. He has worked tirelessly on behalf of safety and belonging for all his constituents. On the other hand, [his opponents/those accusing him/specific person or people] have consistently used antisemitism to manufacture division and fear, which they use to gain power for themselves.

We recognize that this was a harmful mistake, and Z has told us that he is committed to correcting this misstep and making sure nothing he says could ever be used to fuel antisemitism. We know he stands with all his constituents and against those who would divide us based on our religion, our race, or our beliefs.

Q: “[Progressive Leader Y] said this thing. Isn’t [Progressive Leader Y] an antisemite?” (Instance of unfair or false accusation)

A: Antisemitism is used to target Jewish people in order to generate division and fear for political gain. It’s used by those who derive their power by dividing us against each other, which is the explicit strategy of [some politicians/a specific political party or movement.]

Shame on [politicians/named individual or party] for trying to score political points by using disingenuous accusations of antisemitism against Y to manufacture more division and fear. They know, just like we do, that this puts Jewish people’s lives in danger.

Y has worked tirelessly on behalf of safety and belonging for all her constituents, no matter our religion, our race, or our beliefs. Unlike [certain politicians/named individual or party], she doesn’t benefit from division and fear. We’ll continue holding accountable any politician that exploits Jewish people’s fears in an attempt to divide us against each other.

Q: [Progressive group/organization X] is using divisive tactics. Isn’t that using the machinery of division and fear?

A: The role of activism is to make clear the choices that stand before us and inspire us to make the right ones. These choices can be difficult or even painful to contemplate; often they put a spotlight on actions of political leaders or governments that don’t represent our views or reflect our values.

Those politicians are seeking to divide us against each other based on our race, our religion, or where we come from. [Progressive group X] is asking us to join together across difference to dismantle the machinery of division and fear so that we can demand freedom and safety for all of us, no exceptions.