

My name is Liora Rez. I am the founder and Executive Director of StopAntisemitism, a nonpartisan grassroots watchdog devoted to raising awareness of antisemitic incidents and holding antisemites accountable for their hateful actions.

I started the organization in 2018 after I started noticing more and more online antisemitism that bled out into the real world and more and more people looking for a safe place to report antisemitic incidents.

Since then, antisemitism on both social media and in our communities has skyrocketed to historic highs. Jews make up just over two percent of the American population but are subject to more than 60% of religious-based hate crimes. Antisemitic harassment, assault, and vandalism have become commonplace, and Hamas's atrocities on October 7 only added more fuel to the fire.

The FBI reported a 60% increase in reported hate crimes after 10/7, most of which were directed at Jews. Our inbox has reflected this and then some – we have experienced a 1500% rise in reported incidents.

Most of these involve individuals, but a disturbing amount are targeted at small businesses. Video after video, from coast to coast, shows antisemites and anti-Israel activists using mob chants, vandalism, and intimidation against Jewish and Israeli owned businesses and their patrons.

I recently had a sobering conversation with a Jewish entrepreneur who owns four restaurants in the greater Detroit area. During his annual New Year's Brunch on January 1, anti-Israel protestors smuggled megaphones into his restaurant and proceeded to harass his patrons. Shouting that the restaurant, which takes no public political stances, was complicit in genocide and foisting activist leaflets on diners, they intentionally created such a hostile atmosphere that everyone in the restaurant simply walked out, costing the owner tens of thousands of dollars over the course of the day. Simultaneously, an anti-Israel online mob threatened him and his family. Their goal was clear: to shut his doors permanently.

The incident dramatically altered how the restaurateur conducts business. He no longer allows large bags, has altered his reservation policy, offered emergency mental health resources to his understandably shaken employees, and has been forced to spend more between \$100,000 and \$125,000 on security measures in just the last 90 days. One of his employees was also physically attacked during another rally.

His harrowing experience is not unique. Jewish small business owners have had a hard few months:

- A [deli](#) in New York City was defaced with a swastika and antisemitic graffiti. The owner was concerned about hanging Israeli and American flags in his window because he feared a mob would "come throw rocks in my storefront" – his synagogue had already been vandalized. "It's sad that people just feel the need to say they hate Jews in 2023,"

he said. “That people can just be so open about it. That Jew hatred is out therein now people just feel more empowered to say it.”

- A [restaurant](#) in Philadelphia vandalized and surrounded by a mob charging it with genocide. Pennsylvania Governor Josh Shapiro called the incident “a blatant act of antisemitism — not a peaceful protest. A restaurant was targeted and mobbed,” he said, “because its owner is Jewish and Israeli. This hate and bigotry is reminiscent of a dark time in history.”
- A [gift shop](#) in Florida tagged with the phrase “Jew child killers.” Last year, a man stood outside the shop and yelled “slaughter all the Jews” in Arabic.
- A [kosher restaurant](#) in Houston burglarized and destroyed. Houston Police released a statement calling the incident a burglary that wasn’t motivated by hate – but nothing was stolen.
- An [ice cream parlor](#) in San Francisco vandalized.

Many of the perpetrators of these incidents were apparently motivated by the businesses’ public support for Israel as the nation defends itself against Hamas terrorists, answering the businesses’ free speech not with dialog but with hate crimes, essentially holding Jews halfway around the world responsible for a war in the Middle East.

Adding insult to injury, not all these incidents are prosecuted as hate crimes – if they’re prosecuted at all. On multiple occasions, our publicizing an incident has led to the DA upgrading the charges to accurately reflect the nature of the crime, but we receive hundreds of reports every week and cannot vet and publish them all. Local law enforcement must become more familiar with these manifestations of antisemitism, and prosecutors must appropriately enforce anti-hate provisions. This problem can only be addressed through accountability.

In my personal correspondence with the proprietors of these businesses, I see the financial and emotional costs of antisemitism every day.

Many small businesses have insufficient cash reserves to repair and secure their locations. Some are threatened, both online and in-person; two people came into the abovementioned Houston restaurant and asked if the proprietor was Israeli. When told ‘no,’ they said “it’s your lucky day then” before leaving.

For me and many other Jews, these incidents call to mind the antisemitic pogroms that have dogged our history. Jewish businesses were routinely vandalized and defaced under the rule of Nazis, Soviets, Tsars, and too many other antisemitic regimes, not just as simple acts of subjugation but also as public signals that Jews were a vulnerable “other,” and therefore fair game. Violence was the inevitable result.

Today the word Jew is often replaced with “Zionist” as a code word, a canard that tries to justify antisemitism under the guise of social justice. While the words may change, the result is always the same – the isolation of Jews, the targeting of Jews, and physical violence against Jews.

Despite or perhaps because of that, I am routinely inspired by these small business owners' resilience and tenacity. Rather than being cowed by these acts of intimidation, they double down on living as proud Jews and supporters of Israel. They haven't taken down their Israeli flags, they haven't apologized for their faith or their culture, and they haven't closed their doors.

"Americans need to wake up," said the Florida gift shop owner. "They will not scare us, and the [Israeli] flag is going to be still flying. I'm not going to remove the flag."

"One way or another, we will be open tomorrow," said the Houston restaurateur. "I will dust, clean, mop and we will be open tomorrow. I'm not going to cower down to their intimidation or anything else people are trying to do to us."

However admirable their resolve, they shouldn't have to display resilience in the first place. It is unacceptable for American small businesses to be subject to hate and vandalism over their religion, much less their views on a conflict in the Middle East.

I'm here because Congress has already provided the tools needed to combat hate through federal anti-discrimination and civil rights laws. Federal agencies must use them to protect American commerce and the small businesses that employ nearly half of all private sector employees. Congress, as the governmental body that provides oversight for these agencies, must take a more active role in ensuring that the federal agencies fulfill their responsibilities.

I appreciate the committee's attention to this crisis. Jewish small businesses have been a part of America's economic fabric since the nation's founding, and we cannot allow rampant antisemitism to change that. Thank you for taking a firm stance to ensure that no small businesses are targeted for the owner or employees' creed, heritage, or exercise of free speech.