

# **How best to define antisemitism: A structural approach**

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# **Introduction: Definitions of antisemitism**

In the current discussion about the definitions of antisemitism – notably the initiative of the Van Leer group, also called Jerusalem-JDA, against the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance-IHRA – the empirical social sciences have been remarkably left out.

Groups of well intentioned experts make sort of ivory-tower decisions about the nature of antisemitism, without considering enough – if at all – the perceptions of real-world Jews – those people who are directly and personally affected and offended by antisemitism.

Nearly all recent definitional efforts have suggested a battery of examples which are supposed to better characterize the main contents of what antisemitism is. Each detailed list of items can be collapsed into a more succinct classification of three or four major typological groups.

Perusing the IHRA definition, the ADL definition that preceded it, the FRA survey definitions, and the more recent JDA definition, they all identify several quite overlapping major domains of contents.

# Main contents of antisemitism, according to recent definitions

Types of attribute	ADL 2014	IHRA 2016	FRA 2012	FRA 2018	JDA 2021	Total
<b><u>Examples of antisemitism</u></b>						
Destroy/assault the Jews		1			1	2
Jewish power	6	2	2	2	2	14
Jewish foreignness/diversity	3		2	6	1	12
Holocaust related	1	2	2	2	1	8
Israel related	1	6	1	4	5	17
Jews religion not nation			1			1
<b>Total</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>54</b>
<b><u>Examples of non-antisemitism</u></b>						
Israel related					5	5

The Van Leer/Jerusalem (JDA) definition stands out because in addition to defining what antisemitism **is**, it also defines what antisemitism **is not**.

Here the JDA only refers to **the Israel-related** and **not to the other possible dimensions** of antisemitism.

Certain Israel-related critical expressions are defined as **not antisemitic**. But no Holocaust-related expressions, nor any other critical expressions related to Jews at large are also defined as **not antisemitic**.

Such selective approach points to a serious shortcoming in scientific – namely contents – analysis, and turns the argumentation into a political one, or at best into advocacy.

In this paper I advocate **returning to the people the decision about how to better define antisemitism.**

Antisemitism should be defined based on what **the actual perceptions of the victims** are. The victims are persons who identify themselves, and sometimes are identified by others, as Jews.

As a basis for a valid definition, we need to demonstrate empirically what those Jewish perceptions of the antisemitic or anti-Jewish or Judeophobic attitudes are.

We also need to assess what Jews think the right attitude toward them expectedly should be.

# **The FRA 2018 study**



In this paper I present a structural analysis of the 2018 FRA - Fundamental Rights Agency survey in 12 European Union countries.

The study, conducted through the internet, covered over 16,000 self-assessed Jews in 12 EU countries including all the largest Jewish communities.

I review the main findings regarding:

- the channels of transmission of antisemitism;
- the main contents of antisemitic expressions; and
- the identity of perpetrators.

I will suggest a new and **better analytic typology** of the main patterns of diffusion and perception of antisemitism.

## Sample size in FRA 2012 and 2018 studies of perceptions of antisemitism among Jews in EU countries<sup>a</sup>

Country	2018	2012	% change 2012-2018	Core Jewish population 31/12/2018	2018 % ratio respondents/ population
<b>Grand total</b>	<b>16,395</b>	<b>5,663</b>	<b>=</b>	<b>1,041,200</b>	<b>1.6</b>
<b>Comparable total</b>	<b>13,083</b>	<b>5,663</b>	<b>131.0</b>	<b>978,800</b>	<b>1.3</b>
<b>Austria</b>	<b>526</b>	<b>=</b>	<b>=</b>	<b>10,000</b>	<b>5.3</b>
<b>Belgium</b>	<b>785</b>	<b>438</b>	<b>79.2</b>	<b>29,100</b>	<b>2.7</b>
<b>Denmark</b>	<b>592</b>	<b>=</b>	<b>=</b>	<b>6,400</b>	<b>9.1</b>
<b>France</b>	<b>3,869</b>	<b>1,162</b>	<b>233.0</b>	<b>450,000</b>	<b>0.9</b>
<b>Germany</b>	<b>1,233</b>	<b>608</b>	<b>102.8</b>	<b>118,000</b>	<b>1.0</b>
<b>Hungary</b>	<b>590</b>	<b>528</b>	<b>11.7</b>	<b>47,300</b>	<b>1.2</b>
<b>Italy</b>	<b>682</b>	<b>649</b>	<b>5.1</b>	<b>27,400</b>	<b>2.5</b>
<b>The Netherlands</b>	<b>1,202</b>	<b>=</b>	<b>=</b>	<b>29,800</b>	<b>4.0</b>
<b>Poland</b>	<b>422</b>	<b>=</b>	<b>=</b>	<b>4,500</b>	<b>9.4</b>
<b>Spain</b>	<b>570</b>	<b>=</b>	<b>=</b>	<b>11,700</b>	<b>4.9</b>
<b>Sweden</b>	<b>1,193</b>	<b>810</b>	<b>47.3</b>	<b>15,000</b>	<b>8.0</b>
<b>United Kingdom</b>	<b>4,731</b>	<b>1,468</b>	<b>222.3</b>	<b>292,000</b>	<b>1.6</b>

**a Not including data collected in Romania in 2012 and in Latvia in 2012 and 2018**

## Main sources

European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights – FRA. 2018. *Experiences and perceptions of antisemitism: Second survey on discrimination and hate crime against Jews in the EU*. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union (Publications Office).

DellaPergola, Sergio. 2020. *Jewish Perceptions of Antisemitism in the European Union, 2018: A New Structural Look*. *ACTA-Analysis of Current Trends in Antisemitism*, 40, 2, 86 pp. Berlin: De Gruyter, and Jerusalem: Vidal Sassoon International Center for the Study of Antisemitism-SICSA.

DellaPergola, Sergio. 2022. Antisemitism: National or Transnational Constellation? In *An End to Antisemitism!* ed. A. Lange, K. Mayerhofer, D. Porat, L.H Schiffman, Vol. 4, *Confronting antisemitism from perspectives of philosophy and social sciences*, 21-66. Berlin: De Gruyter.

# Similarity Structure Analysis (SSA)

The data analysis presented here uses Similarity Structure Analysis (SSA), initially developed by Louis Guttman.

SSA is a methodology aimed at exploring the interrelations that exist among large numbers of variables rather than focusing on explaining only one or a few at a time.

SSA does not focus on frequencies. It represents the web of mutual correlations that exist among the entire set of variables included in a given analysis. SSA transforms the extent of statistical co-variation of those variables – namely their mutual proximity or diversity – into physical distances, which are representable on maps.

The emerging visual configurations are helpful to assessing the overall contents of a given subject matter and its logical partitions into meaningful domains.

From many **individual representations**, we are able to construct **the logic of the system**.

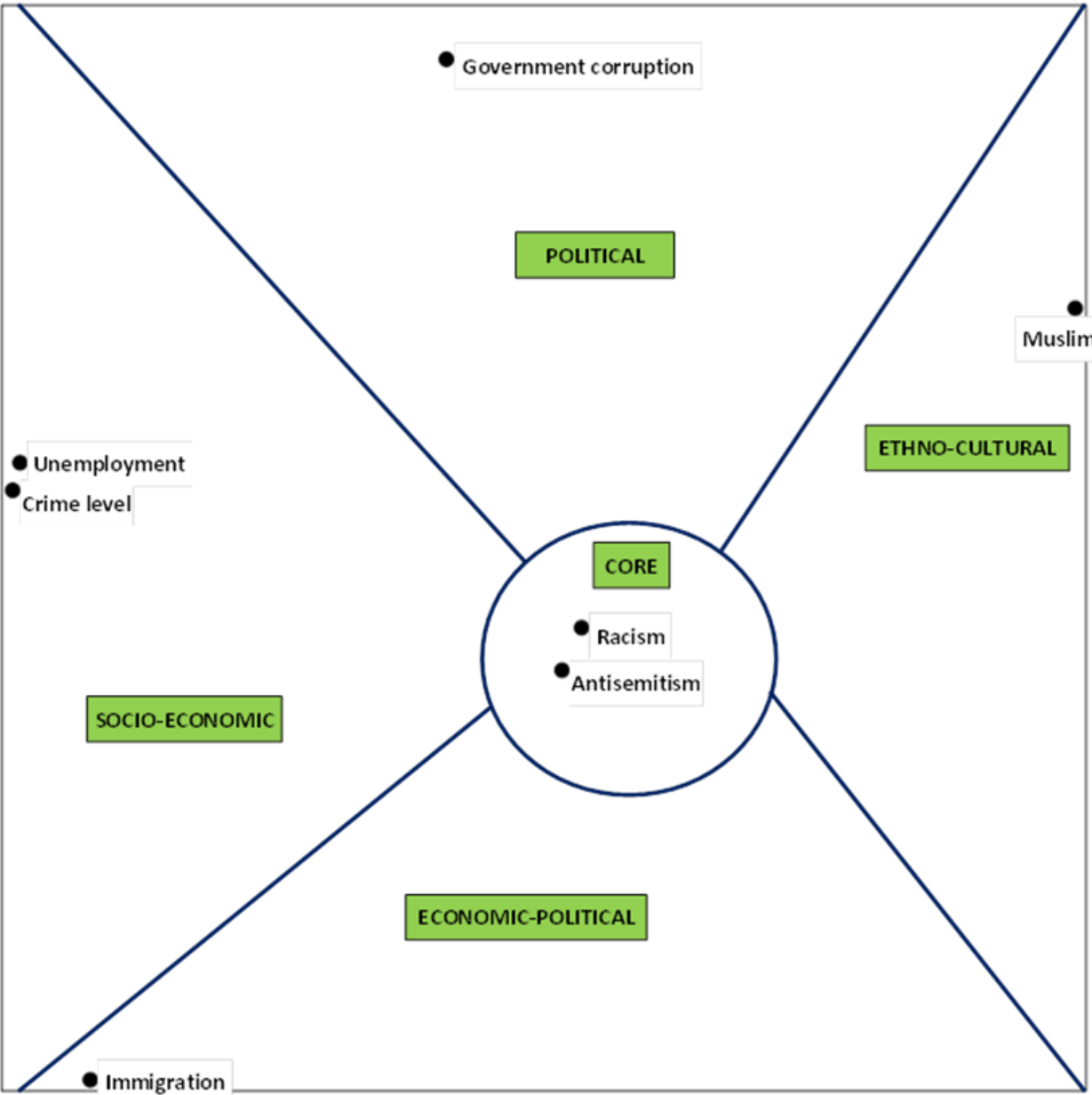
# Assessing social and political issues as a problem, by EU Member State (%)

## 2018 FRA Study

	AT	BE	DE	DK	ES	FR	HU	IT	NL	PL	SE	UK	12 country average
Antisemitism	73	86	85	56	78	95	77	73	73	85	82	75	85
Racism	82	84	76	56	67	90	91	87	68	89	83	79	84
Crime level	28	68	48	32	50	80	68	69	47	34	66	72	70
Unemployment	46	71	39	20	94	93	66	98	27	27	52	44	67
Immigration	63	74	69	59	57	80	18	71	60	37	63	49	65
Intolerance towards Muslims	69	50	54	60	37	52	69	54	53	83	63	65	57
Government corruption	34	48	19	7	95	37	96	91	21	63	18	24	36

# SSA of perceptions of selected social and political issues, modulated by countries

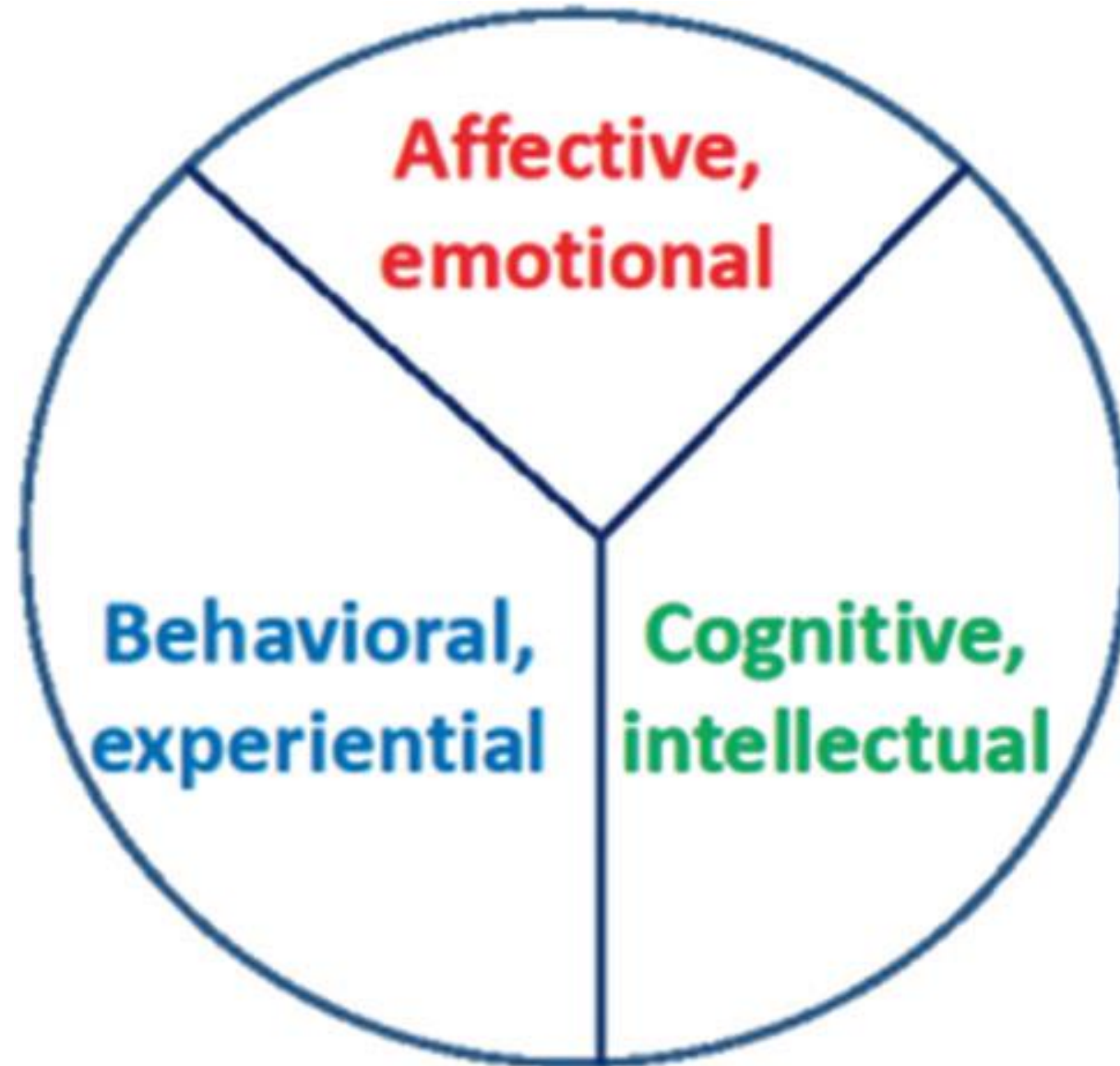
## 2018 FRA Study



# **Basic antisemitism perceptions: cognitive and experiential**



# Expected perceptions of antisemitism by main domains



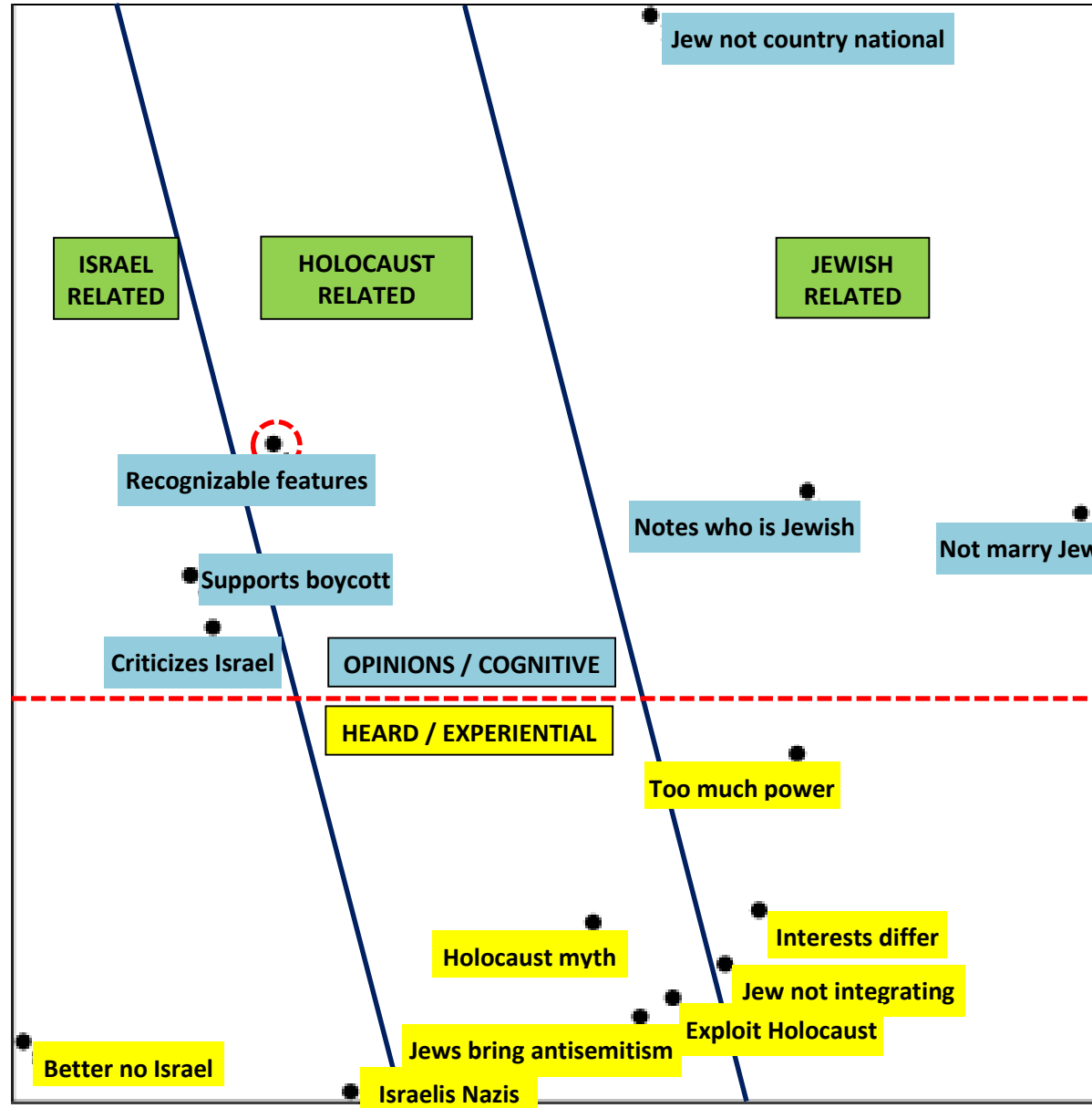
# Cognitive and experiential perceptions of antisemitism: 2018 FRA study

Jewish related	%	Holocaust related	%	Israel related	%
<b>Cognitive: opinions considered to be antisemitic</b>					
Does not consider Jews living in [COUNTRY] to be [COUNTRY NATIONAL]	94	The Holocaust is a myth or has been exaggerated	95	The world would be a better place without Israel	88
Jews have too much power in [COUNTRY]	92	Jews exploit Holocaust victimhood for their own purposes	92	Israelis behave “like Nazis” towards the Palestinians	85
Jews bring antisemitism on themselves	89			Supports boycotts of Israel or Israelis	82
Jews are not capable of integrating into [COUNTRY] society	88			Criticises Israel	33
Interests of Jews in [COUNTRY] differ from rest of the population	83				
Thinks that Jews have recognisable features	75				
Would not marry a Jew	59				
Always notes who is Jewish among his/her acquaintances	55				
<b>Experiential: heard statement made by non-Jewish people</b>					
Jews have too much power in [COUNTRY]	43	Jews exploit Holocaust victimhood for their own purposes	35	Israelis behave “like Nazis” towards the Palestinians	51
Jews bring antisemitism on themselves	32	The Holocaust is a myth or has been exaggerated	24	The world would be a better place without Israel	33
Interests of Jews in [COUNTRY] differ from rest of the population	22				
Jews are not capable of integrating into [COUNTRY] society	11				

Percentages are sum of “definitely and probably”. Source: FRA 2018.

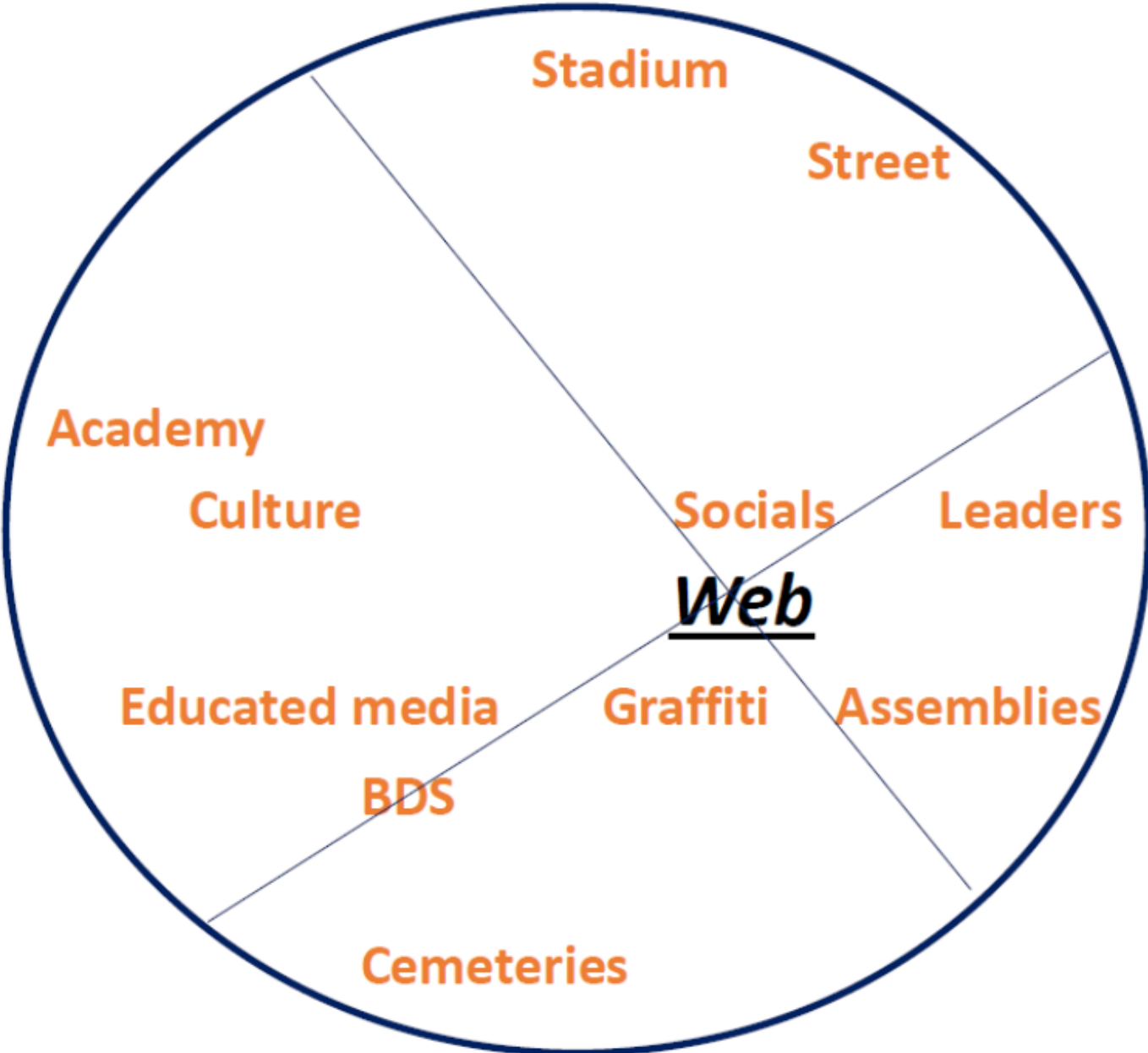
# SSA map of **cognitive** and **experiential** perceptions of antisemitic expressions

## 2018 FRA Study

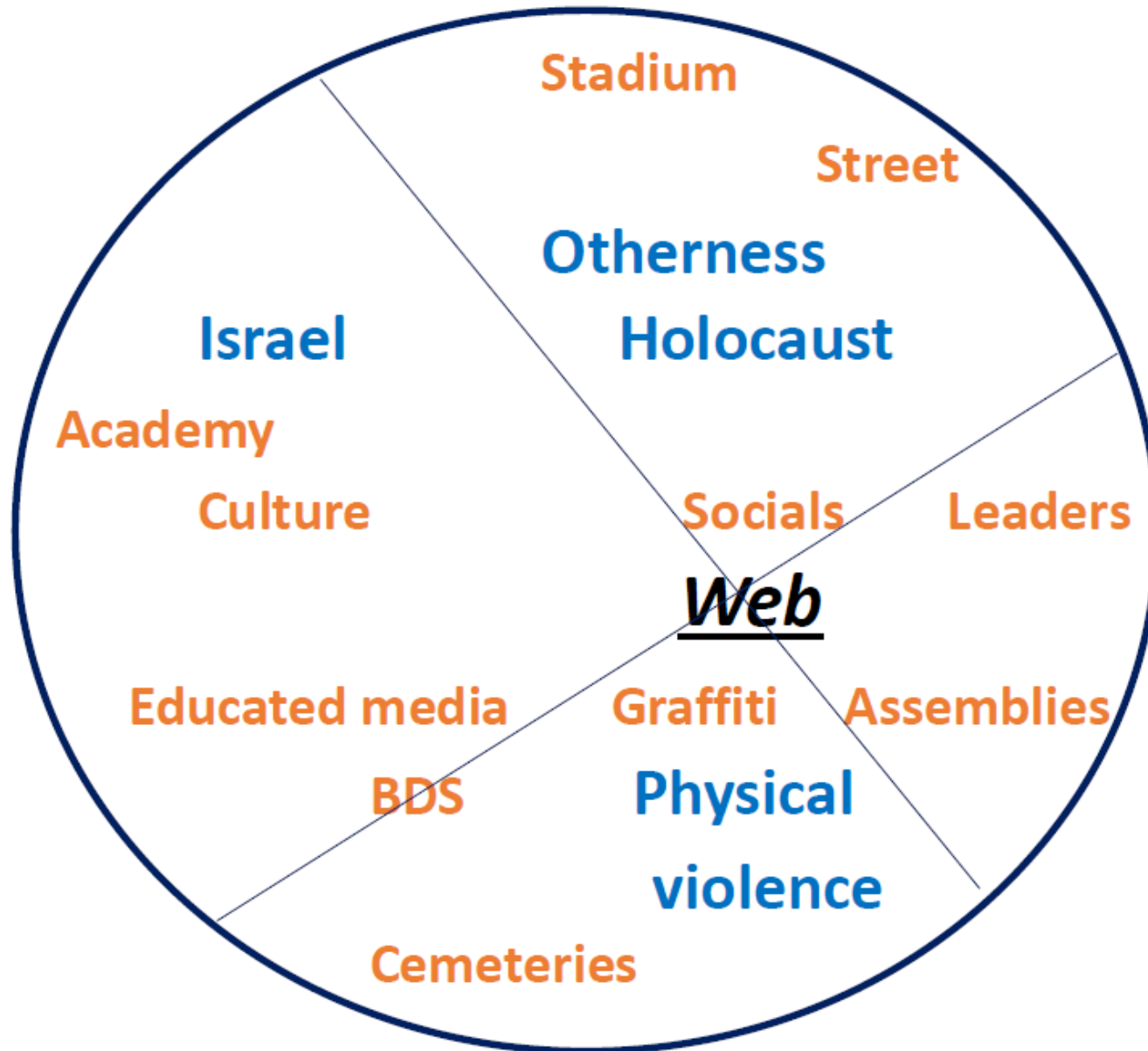


# **The structure of antisemitism perceptions**

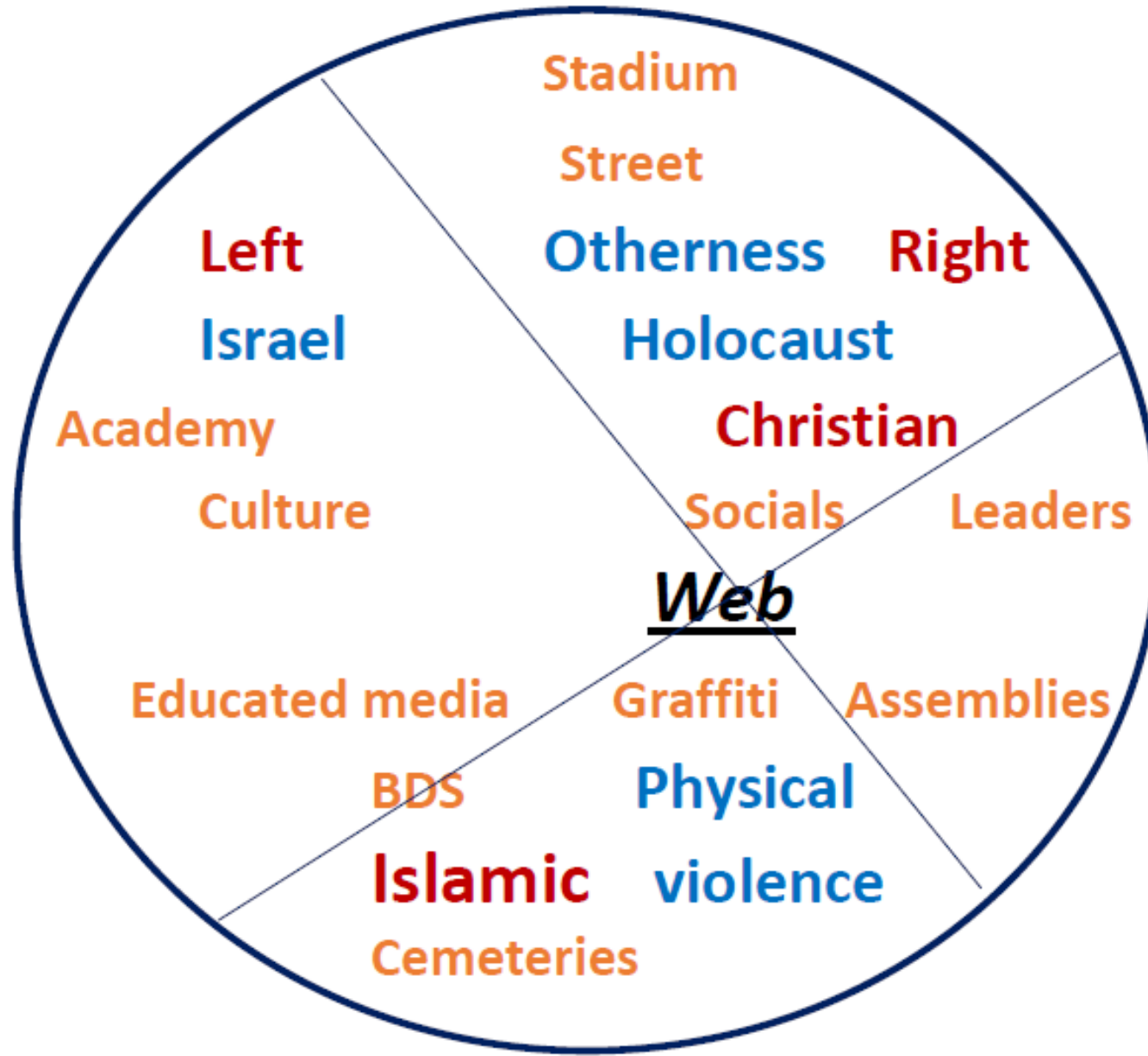
# Perceptions of channels of antisemitism diffusion



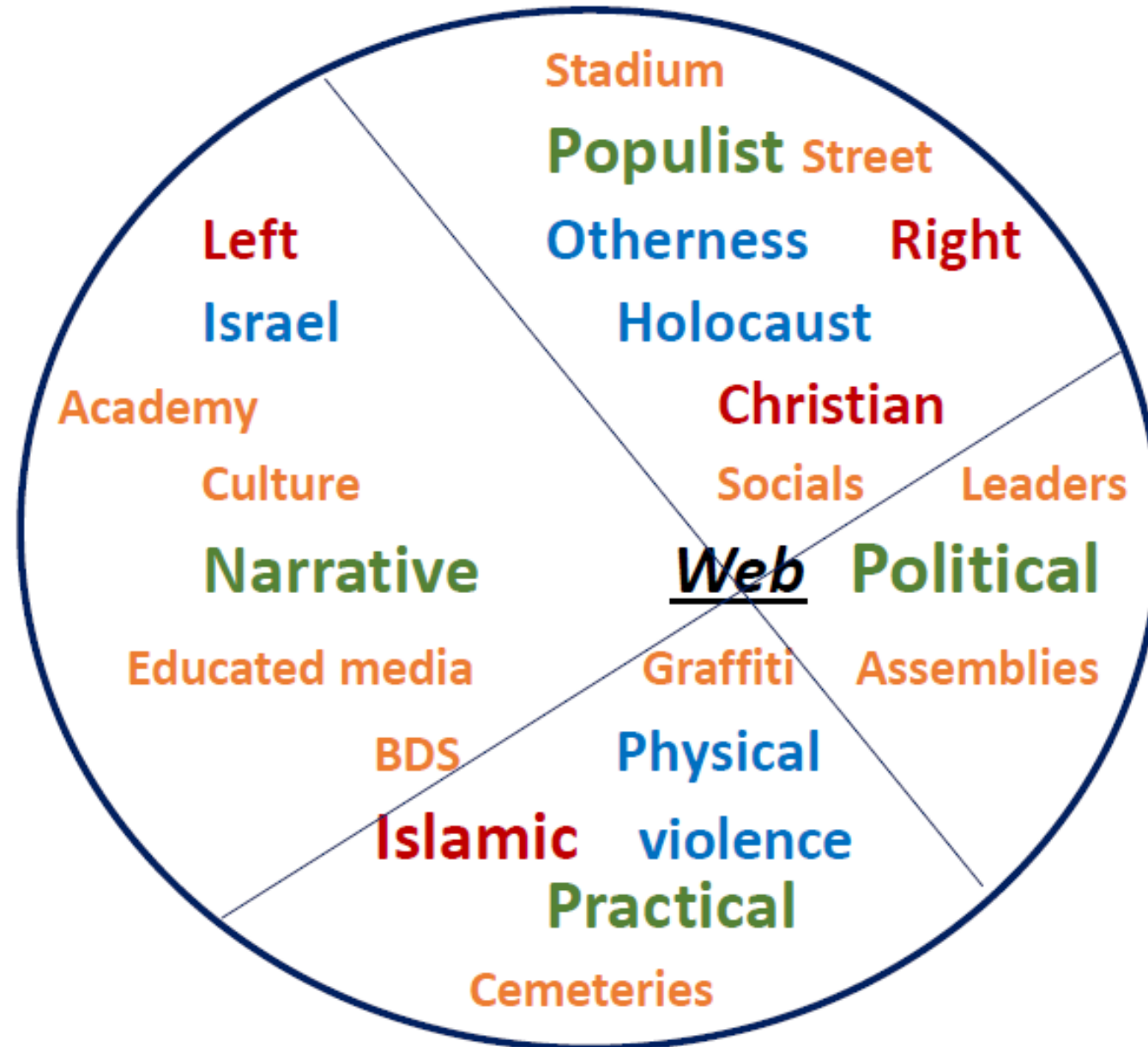
# Perceptions of major contents and channels of antisemitism diffusion



# Perceptions of major contents and channels of antisemitism diffusion showing perpetrators

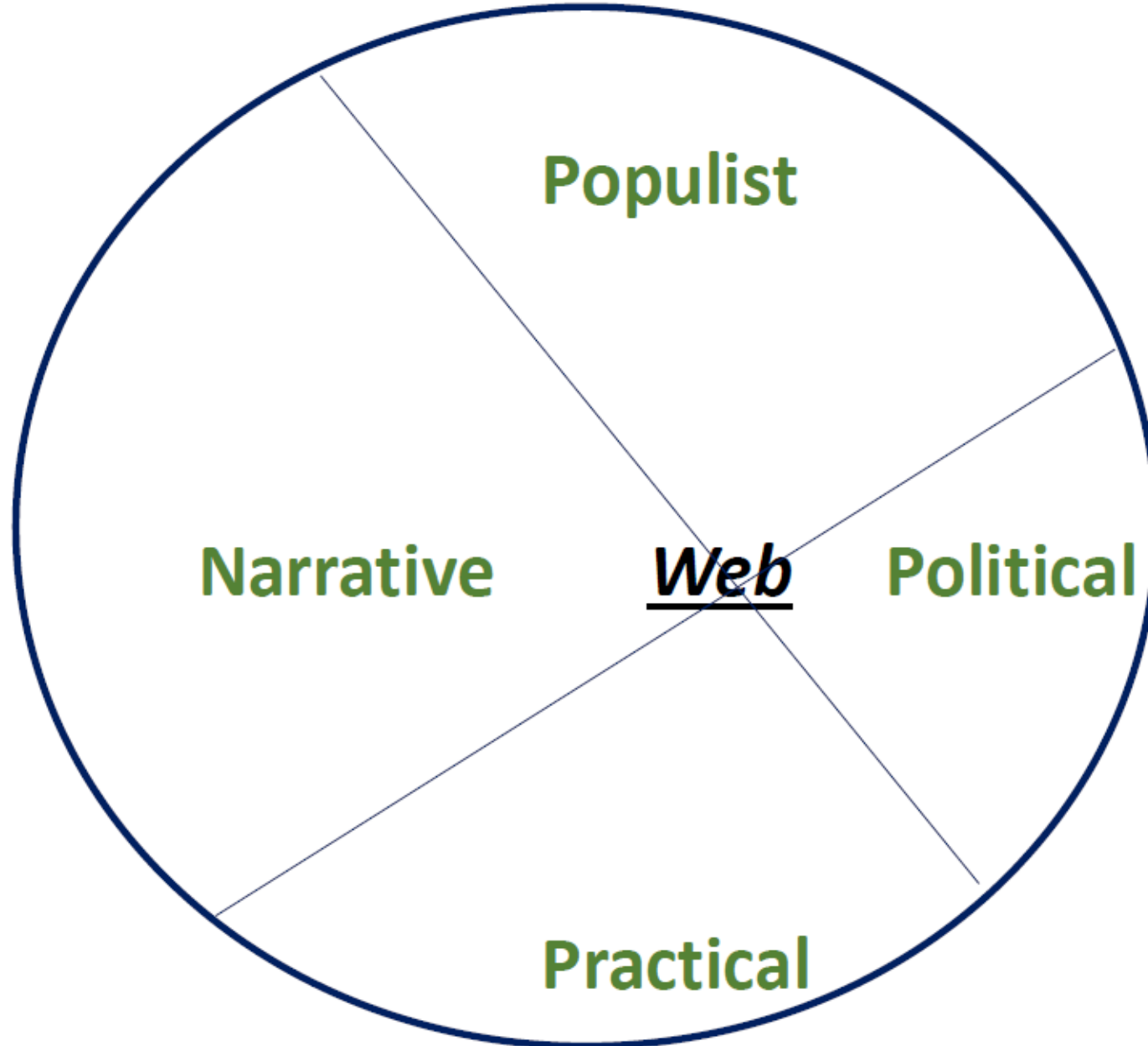


# Perceptions of **strategies** of antisemitism diffusion showing **major contents**, **channels**, and **perpetrators**





# Perceptions of antisemitism diffusion: the four strategies

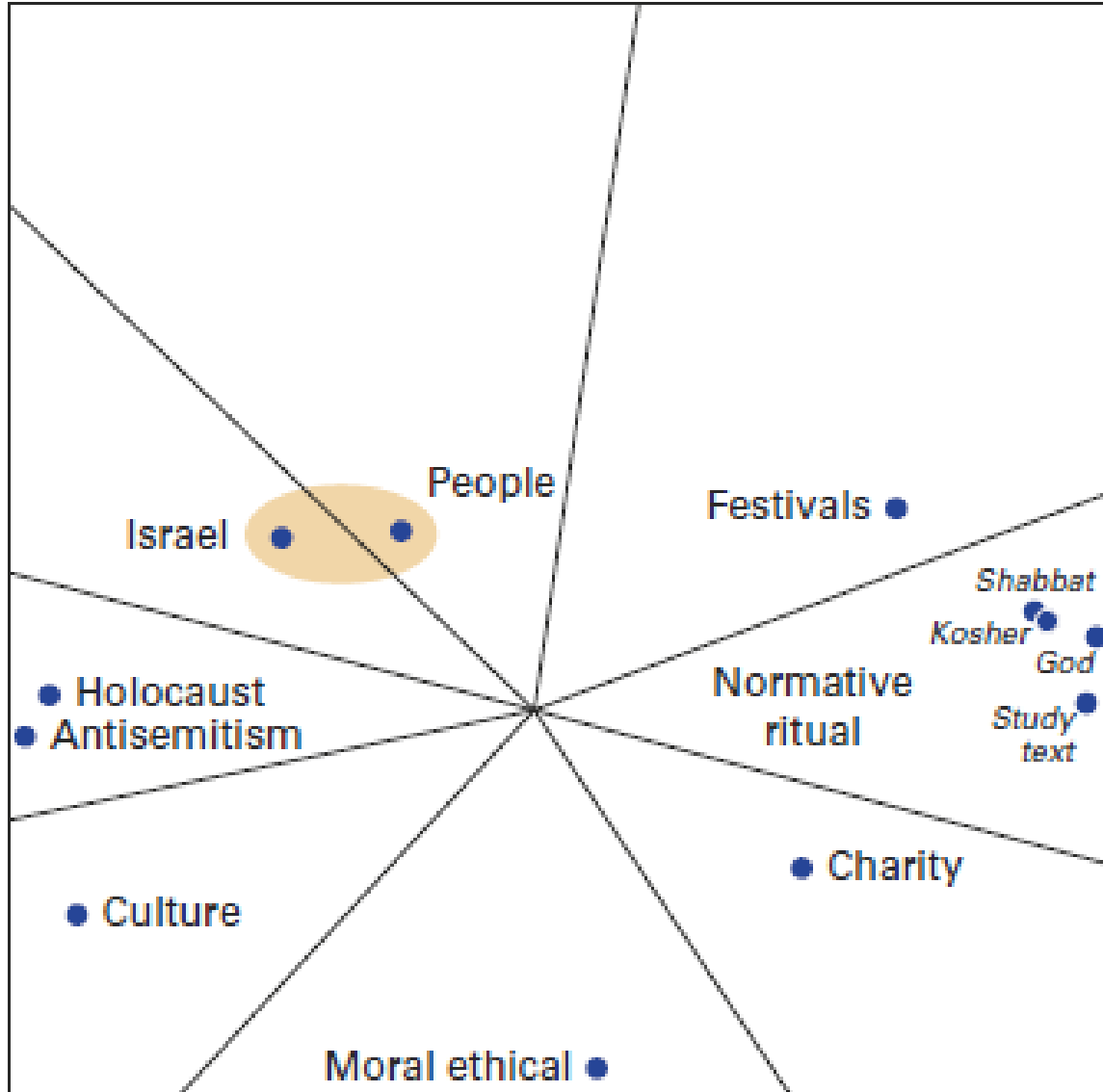


# **The place of antisemitism in Jewish identity**

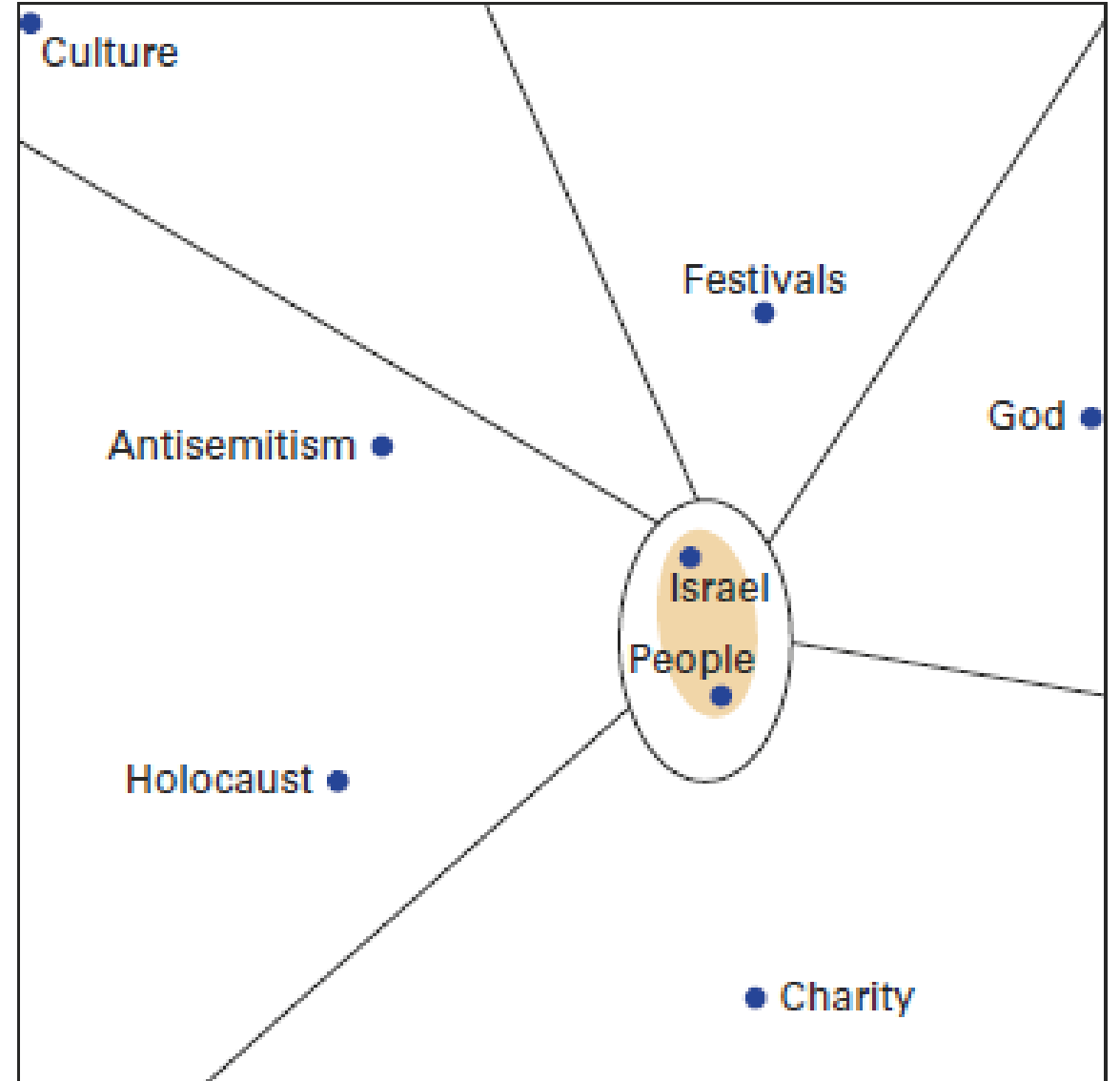
# SSA maps of topics valued as essential in one's own Jewish identity

2012 and 2018 FRA Studies

2012



2018



**In conclusion**

# Antisemitism today

In rough generalization, antisemitism / anti-Judaism / Judeophobia may be perceived as **an outlook, a set of actions, and possibly a coherent project** aimed at achieving one or more of three main goals:

- Physical violence and annihilation of the Jew;
- Marginalization and exclusion of the Jew from civil, social, economic, and cultural life;
- Worsening of the Jew's private quality of life by arousing fear, frustration, and anxiety.

# Contemporary antisemitism as perceived by the target population: three axes of negationism

Our structural analysis shows that European Jews as a collective hold clearly structured perceptions of contemporary antisemitism.

Three fundamental **negationism axes** are perceived, where the Jew is denied:

- 1. As an individual** – the right to enjoy civil, social, cultural, and political equality to any other individual in society;
- 2. As a potential victim and a survivor of planned extermination** – the right to preserve and transmit his/her own authentic memory of the destruction of one's own people – the Shoah;
- 3. As a member of a national collective** – the right to exert corporate national sovereignty through an independent state – Israel.

# Four-strategies antisemitism as perceived by target population: the contents and the medium

**Practical antisemitism:** physical action and aggression, in the street or other public places, vandalism of Jewish buildings or institutions, and desecration of Jewish cemeteries.

**Political antisemitism:** manifested in public life reflecting political interests and leadership struggles, at political events, and in political speeches or discussions.

**Populist antisemitism:** spontaneous and defamatory expressions on the internet, including the social media, mural graffiti, in a social situation, in the public space, and at sports events.

**Narrative antisemitism:** thoughtful and researched items in the printed and electronic press, in academia and at cultural events.

At the center of all perceptions: **the web** and its omnipresent influence

Our findings suggest that the mode of proceeding toward a robust definition of antisemitism should be iterative, beginning with the formulation of certain hypotheses regarding the ***main patterns of antisemitism***, and continuing with the empirical verification of their ***presence, frequency, consistency and applicability***. Only as a final outcome one may start suggesting the elaboration of a ***synthetic definition*** that must consider the perceptions of the people at stake. Beyond the usual descriptive analyses, much greater attention should be devoted to antisemitism's ***cognitive, experiential, or affective*** modes of perception; its ***practical, populist, political, or narrative*** modes of expression; its ***direct*** or ***virtual*** channels of manifestation and diffusion; the characteristics of the ***perpetrators***; and the emerging ***interrelations*** between all of these different aspects.

***Regional variation*** across the European Union should also be investigated.



In particular, in view of the strong perceptual interconnection that emerges among the vast majority of contemporary Jews between **Holocaust-related** and **Israel-related** themes, the attempt to ex-corporate Israel from the standard definitions of antisemitism appears to be analytically ill advised and out of touch with widespread feelings among the Jewish population.

This does not mean in any way that Israel cannot be the object of legitimate criticism, as evidently shown by our data on Jewish perceptions, not to mention the lively political debate that prevails within the country itself.

In the context of the continuing debate about the definitions of antisemitism, our findings carry important implications for in-depth understanding of the issues, for developing new relevant and verifiable insights, and for developing more appropriate and effective public and private initiatives to fighting it.