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Transformations in French anti-Semitism*

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The increase in the number of anti-Semitic acts since the start of the Second Intifada has sparked off a broad debate on the return of anti-Semitism in France. This article focuses on the question whether this anti-Semitism is still based on the alleged superiority of the Aryan race as in the time of Nazism, or if it represents the birth of a "new Judeophobia" that is more based on anti-Zionism and the polemical mixing of "Jews," "Israelis," and "Zionists." One supposed effect of this transformation is that anti-Semitism is in the process of changing camps and migrating from the extreme right to the extreme left of the political arena, to the "altermondialistes," the communists, and the "neo-Trotskyists."

1. New anti-Semitism or new Judeophobia?

The increase in the number of anti-Semitic acts since the start of the Second Intifada has sparked off a broad debate on the return of anti-Semitism in France. In two recent works, Pierre-André Taguieff takes the view that this represents the birth of a "new Judeophobia" aimed exclusively at Jews, unlike the old anti-Semitism that signifies rejection of "Semites" – both Jews and Arabs (Taguieff 2002; 2004b).[1] In his opinion, the radical novelty of this phenomenon lies in the mode of argument and grounds for accusation. Judeophobia, he says, is no longer based on the alleged superiority of the Aryan race as in the time of Nazism, but on anti-Zionism and the polemical mixing of "Jews," "Israelis," and "Zionists." It turns the accusation of racism against the victims of yesterday, making Ariel Sharon a substitute Hitler and glorifying Palestinians, Arabs and Muslims as the "victims" of Zionism. While this new Judeophobia is developing mainly in the Arab-Muslim world with its radical Islamist networks, it also affects western countries, supported by militant third world supporters, anti-Zionists and anti-Americans in the very name of anti-racist and anti-imperialist struggle. In short, he says that anti-Semitism is in the process of changing camps and of migrating from the extreme right to the extreme left of the political arena, to the "alter"-globalizers, the communists, the "neo-Trotskyists" (see chapter "Dangereuses convergences" [Dangerous Convergences] in Prêcheurs de haine [Preachers of Hatred] Taguieff 2004b, 819 – 945). Moreover, it is said to be developing amid relative indifference, without triggering strong counter-mobilizations of the kind that were seen when the Jewish cemetery in Carpentras was desecrated in 1990.

Taguieff is interested in discourse and supports his arguments with quotations from the press, from interviews with political leaders, from websites and from militant literature. In this article, I will focus rather on public opinion, rewording the starting question as follows: Does one observe a rise in anti-Jewish opinions in France today? Do these opinions correlate or not with negative opinions of other minorities, notably Maghrebians and Muslims? Do they tend to develop among voters and sympathizers

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1 On the debate around the "new Judeophobia" see also the collective work of Balibar et al 2003 and the special issue of Revue internationale et stratégique devoted to French society and the Israelo-Palestinian conflict, edited by Pascal Boniface (Boniface 2005).

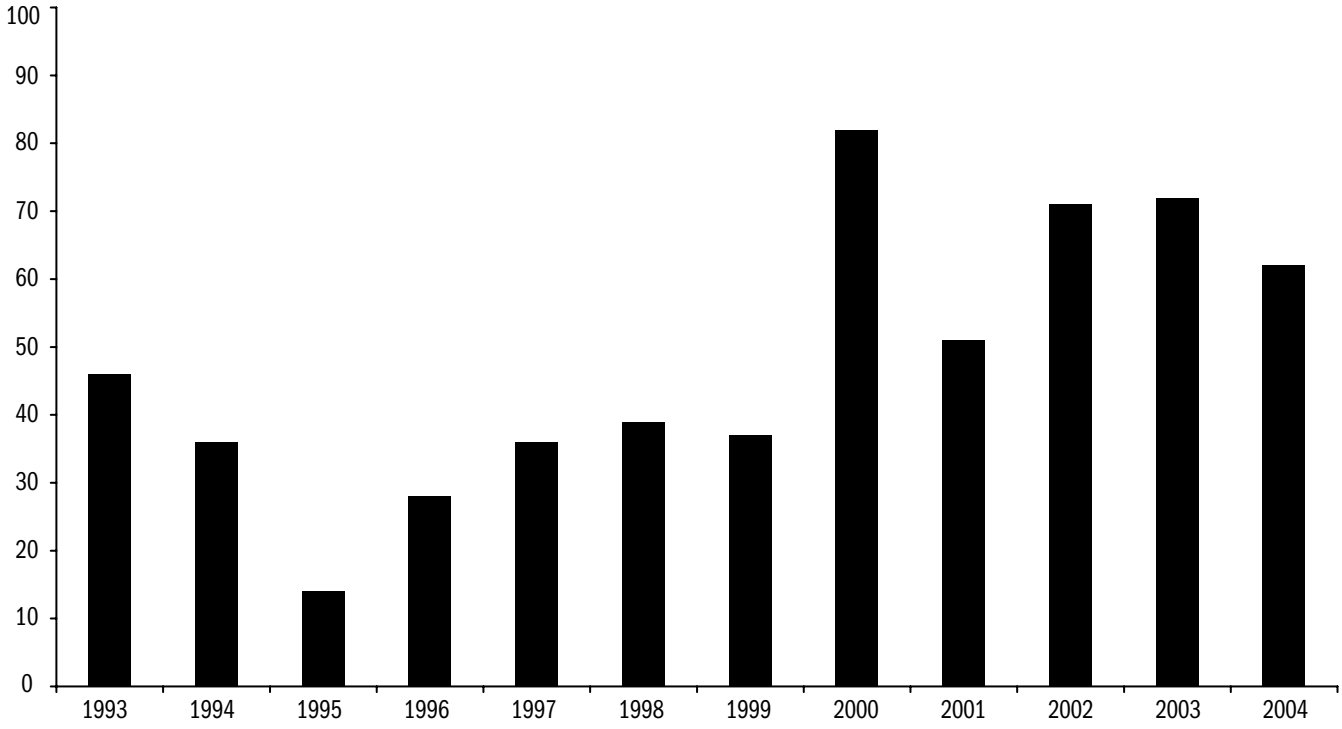
of the extreme right or on the extreme left of the political spectrum? And how are they related to opinions concerning Zionism and the Israelo-Palestinian conflict?

To evaluate the transformations in French anti-Semitism, I will rely on two types of data. The first is police and gendarmerie statistics published by the National Consultative Committee on Human Rights (CNCDH), which is charged with presenting the prime minister with an annual report on the struggle against racism and xenophobia in France.[2] The other is data from surveys, notably surveys commissioned by CNCDH for its annual report and surveys conducted at the Center for Political Research (CEVIPOF) at Sciences Po (Paris Institute for Political Research). They show that anti-Semitic opinions follow a different logic from acts, that the social, cultural and political profile of anti-Semites remains very close to that of other types of racists, and that anti-Zionism and anti-Semitism do not overlap exactly.

2. The rise in anti-Semitic acts

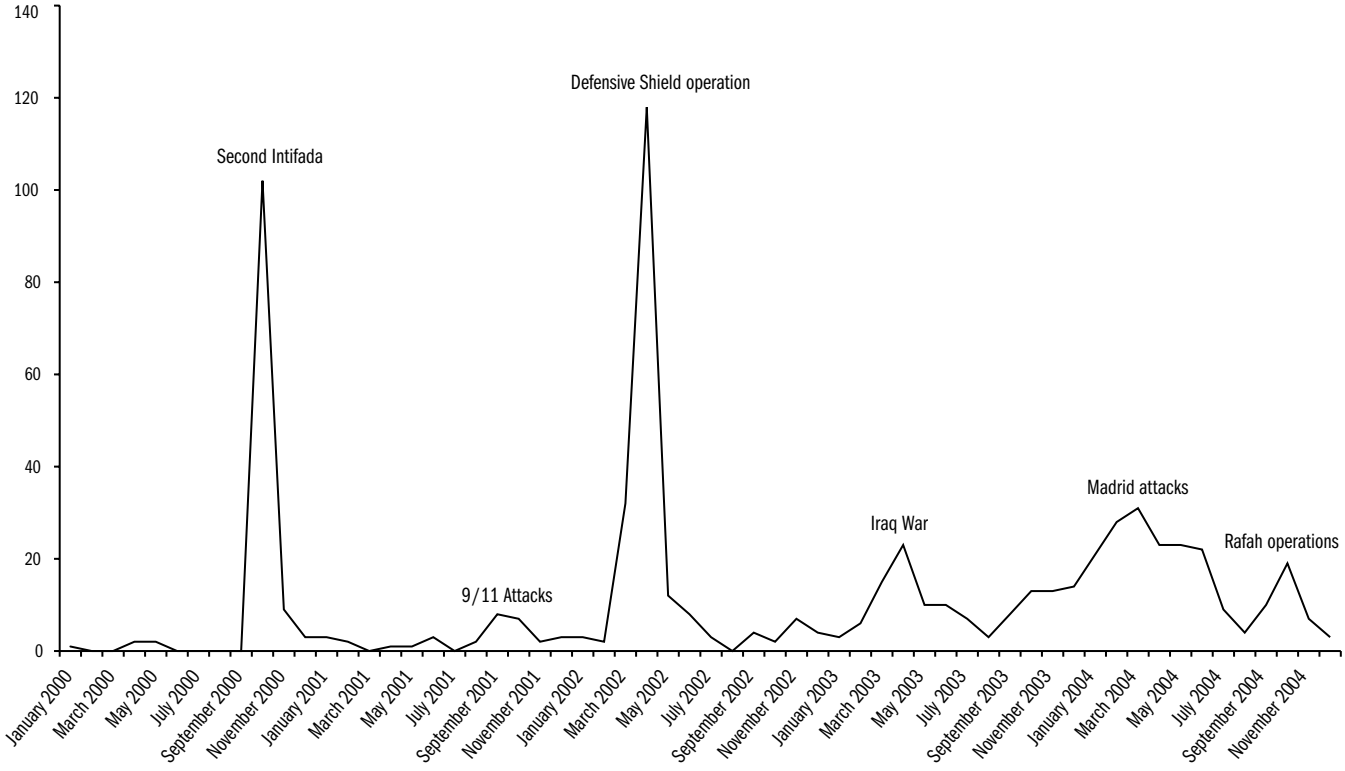
One does indeed note in mainland France an unprecedented increase in attacks on individuals thought to be Jews, their places of worship, their schools and their property. This increase coincides with the start of the Second Intifada in the occupied territories and with the intensification of the Israelo-Palestinian conflict. Interior ministry statistics list 970 incidents in 2004, of which 200 were acts of violence (attacks on persons or property) and 770 were "threats" (graffiti, pamphlets, acts of intimidation). That is a year-on-year increase of 61% in acts and 58% in threats and is the highest level of anti-Semitic violence ever recorded by this instrument in France, with a marked increase in cemetery desecrations and incidents in schools.

Figure 1: Proportion of antisemitic acts in total of racist acts (1993 – 2004)



2 This independent committee comprises representatives of the prime minister, of 15 ministries, of the National Assembly and of the Senate along with representatives of civil society (associations, trade unions, universities, churches, etc.). Its function is to monitor France's actions, both national and international, in the area of the defense of human rights and to advise the French government.

Figure 2: Effects of intrnational context on level of Anti-semitic acts (2000 – 2004)



Moreover, since the year 2000 anti-Semitic acts and threats have accounted for the majority of racist incidents recorded in France. From 37 % in 1999, the proportion rose to 82 % in 2001, 51 % in 2001, 71 % in 2002, 72 % in 2003 and 62 % in 2004 (Figure 1).

In addition, the aggressors' profile has changed. Whereas previously this violence was initiated almost exclusively by the extreme right, and continues to be so in the case of desecrations, since 2000 a significant proportion of the perpetrators identified were youths of Arab-Muslim immigrant origin in revolt against society and full of resentment toward a community that they see as more privileged, as investigations conducted by Michel Wieviorka among youths in working-class districts of Roubaix (Wieviorka 2005) have found. These youths are especially reactive to the international context, given that the peaks of violence correspond very closely to the start of the Second Intifada (September – October 2000), to 11 September 2001, to Operation Rampart conducted by Israel in the Jenin refugee camp (April 2002), to the American intervention in Iraq (March – April 2003) and to the Madrid bombings (March 2004) (see Figure 2). As a recent CNCDH report underlines, "thus events in the Middle East have led a number of youths to identify openly with the Palestinian fighters who are felt to symbolize the brutalities of which they see themselves as the victims in western society" (CNCDH 2004, 51).

3. The decline in prejudices

Still, these acts are carried out by a minority of individuals and analysis of surveys, notably the annual CNCDH surveys, shows that French public opinion in general is not anti-Semitic.

3.1. Growing severity toward anti-Semitic acts

One observes no tolerance by French society of racist acts in general and anti-Jewish acts in particular. On the contrary, such acts of violence have never been so clearly condemned. The dominant feeling is that courts are not tough enough, especially when dealing with cemetery desecrations and damage to places of worship (Table 1).

Attitudes as regards racist or anti-Semitic remarks are even more striking. In two years, the proportion of respondents thinking that a person who calls someone a "dirty Jew" or a "dirty Arab" should be condemned rose spectacularly, by twenty percentage points. In the former case ("dirty Jew") it rose from 59 % in 2002 to 81 % in 2004 and in the latter ("dirty Arab") from 47 % to 67 %.[3] This growing severity is explained both by the extent, gravity and spectacular nature of the violent acts recorded in 2004 (serial cemetery desecrations, blade weapon attacks) and by the fact that they were very widely broadcast and blown up by the media (CNCDH 2005, 121) and condemned by all political leaders. The greatest call for sanctions is against those in charge of racist or anti-Semitic publications. Eighty-five percent of the sample thought that a person in charge of a publication that had disseminated a racist or anti-Semitic writing should be prosecuted by the courts. This figure rises to 89 % in the case of a person responsible for a website. If anti-Semitic acts and incitement are multiplying, public opinion is by no means indulgent toward them (see the detailed report, Mayer/Michelat 2005).

Table 1: Opinions on the severity of courts in dealing with racism and anti-Semitism in 2004 (%)

And, in your opinion, are the sentences currently handed down by French courts not harsh enough, too harsh or just right?"	Not harsh enough
Grave desecrations and damage to cemeteries	72
Damage to a place of worship such as a synagogue [Split A]*	64
Damage to a place of worship such as a mosque [Split B]*	62
Public pronouncements of a xenophobic, racist or anti-Semitic nature	60
An attack of an anti-Semitic nature on a person [Split A]*	57
An attack of an anti-Maghrebian nature on a person [Split B]*	57
Insults of a racist nature	56
Acts which they [the courts] have to judge	54

BVA / CNCDH poll conducted from 22 to 24 November 2004 of a nationwide sample of 1,036 persons representative of the population living in France and aged 18 or over.
* Split: Half of the sample was asked question A and the other half question B, at random.

3.2. The decline in anti-Semitic opinions

Over the long term there has been no progression in hostile opinions as regards Jews. Rather, the feeling that they are wholly citizens has gained ground if one is to believe the last, very detailed investigation carried out by the French Association of Friends of the University of Tel Aviv.[4] In 1946, just over one third of the adult population thought that a "French person of Jewish origin" was just as French as another French person.[5] In 2005, 92% considered that a "Jewish French person" was just as French as another French person. In 1966, one in two French people said that if it depended solely on them they would avoid having a Jewish president of the republic. By 2005, the proportion had fallen to 17%.[6] Memories of the Shoah remain vivid and one discerns no upsurge in negationism, as a recent survey of remembrance of the Holocaust commissioned by the American Jewish Committee shows.[7] The old stereotype that says "Jews have too much power," is also on the wane after a brief resurgence in 1999 at the time of the debate around reparations for despoliation suffered by Jews during World War II followed by another in 2000 when the Second Intifada was launched (Table 2). This subject is not insignificant. It fits into a system of anti-Semitic attitudes, because those who agree with this stereotype also think that Jews are "too numerous" and that they are not "French people like others," would avoid having a Jewish president, etc. One can see in this a toned-down version of the myth of the occult influence of Jews, a vehicle for which in the past was the Protocols of the Elders of Zion, a celebrated forgery produced by the Tsarist police (see Taguieff 2004 a). Overall, however, during the period covered by our surveys the two most striking facts are the decrease (from 27 % to 17 %) in the rate of refusals to answer the question, an indication of the polarization

3 *Split sample* technique. At random, the question is put to half of the sample in respect of Jews and to the other half in respect of Arabs. The 2004 sample was split into thirds with a further question about terms such as "dirty queer".

4 IFOP (Institut français d'opinion publique) poll, the first wave was conducted face to face on May 3 and 4, 2005 with a nationwide representative sample of the population aged 18 and above (N = 1000).

5 IFOP poll for CRIF (Representative Council of Jewish Institutions in France), February 13 – 20, 1946 (N = 1132).

6 IFOP poll for *Nouvel Adam*.

7 TNS-SOFRES poll was conducted on May 3 – 4 and 11 – 12, 2005 with nationwide representative samples of the population aged 18 and (N = 1000), face to face, in France, Germany, Austria, Poland, Sweden, the US and the UK. On the evolution of negationist attitudes in France see also Duhamel 1999.

Table 2: Adherence to the stereotype "Jews have too much power in France" (%)

	1988	1991	1999	2000	2002/1	2002/2	2003	2005
Fully agree	9	10	10	11	8	9	9	4
Tend to agree	12	11	21	23	16	15	14	12
Total in agreement	21	21	31	34	24	25	23	16
Tend not to agree	19	16	30	30	33	32	27	23
Do not agree at all	33	33	27	25	28	34	33	44
Total not in agreement	52	49	56	54	61	66	60	67
Not response	27	30	13	12	15	9	17	17
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100

Surveys by CEVIPOF (Centre de recherches politiques de Sciences Po) / Sofres (Société française d'études par sondages), May 9–20, 1988 (N = 4032), surveys by OIP (Observatoire interrégional du politique), June 17–July 3, 1991 (N = 16216), Louis Harris / CNCDH, Nov. 17–24, 1999 and Nov. 12–14, 2000 (N = 1000), French Electoral Panel 2002 wave 1 (April 8–20) and wave 2 (May 15–31) (N = 4107 and 4017), CEVIPOF / BVA survey on secularity, Nov. 2003 (N = 1524) and Sofres / French Association of Friends of the University of Tel Aviv survey, wave 1 (N = 1000), May 3–4, 2005.

of views on the subject, and a growing rejection of the anti-Semitic stereotype. During the same period the proportion of respondents who said they "tended not" to agree or did "not agree at all" with it rose from 52 % to 67 % (Table 2).

4. Similarity of the profile of anti-Semites and racists

If it has not gained ground, has anti-Semitism nonetheless changed in nature? Does it now, as Taguieff suggests, sport the colors of antiracism and anticolonialism? Is it more pronounced on the left and the extreme left? This is not the case, either. For example, adherence to the stereotype of Jewish power is coupled with a negative image of Islam and of immigrants, belief that certain races are superior to others, acceptance of discrimination against black people and Maghrebians, etc. Anti-Semitism, as all works on racism regularly show, fits into a more general attitude of "ethnocentrism" in the sense of over-valuation of ones own group and rejection of difference, whether ethnic, religious or cultural.[8] Those who think Jews have too much power do not like Arabs or Muslims either, and anti-Semitic prejudices develop in the same milieus as racist prejudices, that is among poorly educated people in a situation of economic insecurity and social inferiority who make minorities the scapegoat for their problems. Thus adherence to the stereotype of Jewish power is most pronounced among blue-collar workers and among the lower middle class (small farmers, small shopkeepers and artisans which form the majority of the "Employers" group), among people without qualifications and the unemployed, regardless of the period taken into consideration (Table 3). Finally, as regards politics, if these prejudices are found at all in the political spectrum, they are always more developed on the right than on the left, where there is more support for egalitarian, universal values. Now as always it is on the extreme right and not the extreme left that one finds more anti-Semites, among people close to the FN (Front National) and people who voted for Jean-Marie Le Pen (Table 3). Moreover, between 1988 and 2002 the biggest increase in the proportion of anti-Semites was not on the left, but on the right.

5. Anti-Zionism and anti-Semitism

To what extent does the Israelo-Palestinian conflict influence the perception of Jews in France? How are anti-Zionism and anti-Semitism articulated? In the Middle East conflict, French public opinion is increasingly pro-Palestinian. In November 2004, French people said that in general they had "more sympathy" for the positions of the latter than for those of the Israelis (34 % and 13 % of responses respectively). The head of the Palestinian

8 On the correlation between indicators of racism and of anti-Semitism see especially Mayer 1990, Mayer 2003 and Mayer and Roux 2004.

Authority, now deceased, was seen as a "national resistance hero" rather than as "the head of a terrorist movement" (43 % as opposed to 27 % of responses). Moreover, since the start of the Second Intifada the proportion of sympathisers with the Palestinian cause has nearly doubled, from 18 % in October 2000 to 34 % November 2004, while sympathy for the Israelis has remained stable at around 13–14 %.[9] Nonetheless, opinions concerning Israeli and its leaders do not tally exactly with opinions concerning French Jews. One sees this first from the French Electoral Panel 2002, a three-phase investigation initially designed to study electoral change and realignment in the four rounds of the 2002 presidential and parliamentary elections. It captures the "earthquake" triggered on 21 April by the elimination of the socialist candidate in favour of Jean-Marie Le Pen until the crushing victory of the right in the general election (see the first results in Cautrès/Mayer 2004). The second wave, conducted on the day after the second round of the presidential election and soon after Israeli troops moved into Jenin, also includes a question about people's liking four heads of state, among them Yasser Arafat and Ariel Sharon,[10] and a question on the stereotype "Jews have too much power in France." Neither of the two leaders really aroused people's liking. Ariel Sharon scored 3.2 out of ten and Yasser Arafat 3.7, markedly less than George Bush (4.5) and Tony Blair (5.7). However, contrary to what one might have expected, there is no relation between the feelings expressed for Arafat and for Sharon.[11] While anti-Semitism varies in an inverse proportion to the liking expressed for the Israeli prime minister, even among people who are most hostile to him[12] a clear majority rejects the anti-Semitic stereotype (60 % reject and

Table 3: Adherence to the stereotype "Jews have too much power in France" by social and political profile (%)

	1988	2002
Total	21	25
Sex		
Male	24	27
Female	20	22
Age		
18 – 24	11	12
25 – 34	16	14
35 – 49	19	20
50 – 64	27	30
65 and over	33	40
Qualification		
Primary	30	39
Higher primary	20	27
Baccalauréat	11	20
Bac +2	11	19
Higher education	10	11
Individual profession		
Farmer	26	38
Employer	25	35
Senior executive	15	21
Member of a profession	18	20
White-collar worker	21	26
Blue-collar worker	29	30
Vote cast in presidential election first round 2002		
Extreme Left	21	18
Left	20	18
Right	20	24
Extreme right	37	37
Party proximity		
Extreme Left	19	18
Communist party	27	22
Socialist party	20	18
UDF (Union pour la démocratie française)	19	20
RPR (Rassemblement pour la république)	25	28
Front national	40	40

CEVIPOF post-electoral survey, May 9 – 20, 1988 (N = 4032) and French Electoral Panel, May 15 – 31, 2002, second wave (N = 4017).

9 Polls conducted by the BVA (Brulé Ville Associé) institute of nationwide representative samples of the French population aged 18 and over (N = 1000). For the details of this evolution, see Mayer 2005, 143–144.

10 "What degree of liking do you feel for each of the following foreign personalities as measured with this thermometer on a scale from 1 to 10 (1 corresponds to a strong dislike and 10 to a strong liking)?" Scores were calculated from the proportion of respondents. The proportion refusing to respond amounted to 4 %, 1 %, 2 % and 2 %. For a detailed presentation see Mayer 2004.

11 Pearson r of –.03 insignificant on the threshold of .01.

12 In each case the sample was split into thirds, by the growing level of sympathy for Sharon (score 1/2–4/5 and more), Arafat (scores 1–2/3–4/5 and more) and Bush (scores 1–2/3–4/5 and more).

32 % approve it in the group which feels most antipathy toward Sharon, as against 71 % and 20 % respectively in the group that like him most). At the same time, the proportion of anti-Semites is higher among anti-Arafat than among pro-Arafat respondents (28 % and 24 % respectively of adherence to the stereotype concerning the power of Jews). If one crosses the popularity of the two leaders with adherence to that same stereotype (Table 4) one sees that those who like neither Sharon nor Arafat manifest an equally high level of anti-Semitism to those who like Arafat and hate Sharon (32 %), while the least anti-Semitic are those who score highest on the two scales of liking (18 % agree).

Table 4: Adherence to the stereotype "Jews have too much power in France" by the degree of liking for Arafat and Sharon (%)

Degree of liking for Sharon	Degree of liking for Arafat		
	Low	Moderate	High
Low	32 (498)	29 (245)	32 (565)
Moderate	28 (456)	19 (499)	22 (388)
High	24 (405)	19 (300)	18 (477)

Source: French Electoral Panel 2002, second wave. The figures in parentheses are the numbers on the basis of which the percentages of cases were calculated.

A recent survey conducted in parallel of the French population of voting age and a representative sample of French people of African and Turkish immigrant origin of the same age group (Brouard/Tiberj 2005)[13] crossed classic indicators of anti-Semitism ("Jews have too much power," "There is too much talk about the extermination of Jews during the Second World War," "For French Jews, Israel matters more than France") with questions on positive or negative perception of Israel and its responsibility in the Middle East conflict. While the level of anti-Semitism is 10 to 15 points higher among French people of immigrant origin and correlates to the degree to which they are practising Muslims, the level of negative attitudes toward Israel is the same in both groups (Table 5).

Table 5: Opinions concerning Jews and Israel (%)

	French people of immigrant origin	French population
There is too much talk about the extermination of Jews (agree completely/trend to agree)	50	35
Jews have too much power in France (agree completely/trend to agree)	39	20
For French Jews, Israel matters more than France (agree completely/trend to agree)	52	45
Israel (evokes something rather negative)	49	51
Israelis bear most responsibility in the Israelo-Palestinian conflict	28	13
	(1003)	(1006)

CEVIPOF/TNS-SOFRES survey April – May 2005, relation to politics of French people of immigrant origin.

Analysis of the correlations between the answers to these various questions, if one confines oneself to the control sample, confirms that opinions concerning the Jews of France on the one hand and the conflict between Israelis and Palestinians on the other do not totally overlap (Table 6). Those who judge that "Jews have too much power" also think that there is too much talk about the Shoah and that for French Jews Israel matters more than France (correlations of .338 and .346 respectively, upper left quadrand). There is a much lower correlation between these three questions and a negative perception of Israel (.155, .137 and .102), and no correlation at all between them and the feeling that Israel bears most responsibility in the conflict, a feeling associated, on the other hand, with a negative image of that country (.215) (lower left quadrant). People may criticize Israel and condemn its policy toward the Palestinians without holding the Jews of France responsible and without necessarily being "anti-Semitic" in the classic sense of the term. Only in the sample of French people of African and Turkish immigrant origin, the majority of them Muslims, anti-Semitism and anti-Zionism seem to be more closely matched. The correlations between the

13 This telephone survey, the first of its kind, was conducted at CEVIPOF by Sylvain Brouard and Vincent Tiberj and run by TNS-SOFRES (Société française d'études par sondages) from April 8 to May 7, 2005 with a nationwide representative sample of 1,003 French people aged 18 or over of African or Turkish immigrant origin (immigrants themselves or with at least one immigrant parent or grandparent), compared with a control sample of 1,006 French people of voting age (April 8 – May 16, 2005).

Table 6: Correlations between opinions concerning Jews and Israel

	Items relating to Jews			*Items relating to Israel*	
	There is too much talk about the extermination of Jews during World War II	Jews have too much power in France	For French Jews, Israel matters more than France	Israel evokes something rather negative	Israel bears most responsibility in the conflict
			French population		
Items relating to Jews					
There is too much talk about the extermination of Jews during World War II					
Jews have too much power in France	**.338****				
For French Jews, Israel matters more than France	.159**	**.346****			
Items relating to Israel					
Israel evokes something rather negative	.155**	.137**	.102**		
Israel bears most responsibility in the conflict	.075*	.072*	.031	**.215****	
			French of immigrant origin		
Items relating to Jews					
There is too much talk about the extermination of Jews during World War II					
Jews have too much power in France	**.297****				
For French Jews, Israel matters more than France	.150**	**.265****			
Items relating to Israel					
Israel evokes something rather negative	.095**	**.218****	.113**		
Israel bears most responsibility in the conflict	.071*	.145**	.169**	**.306****	

Pearson r significant on the threshold of .01 (**) or 0.5 (*)

two questions about the perception of French Jews and the two questions about the image of Israel (lower left quadrant) are higher than in the control group (.218 versus .137, .145 versus .072, .113 versus .102 and .169 versus .031).

6. Conclusion

Of course, opinion polls have their limits. More detailed questions on the perception of Zionism, of Israel and of its policies, and other techniques (non-directive interviews, projective tests, participant observation) would be required to analyse in depth the affective repercussions in France of the Israelo-Palestinian conflict and to take account of the multiple ways there are of living as a Jew, Arab, Muslim, Catholic or atheist. For all their weaknesses, the surveys commissioned nonetheless show that despite the deterioration in Israel's image and despite the multiplication of acts of violence against Jewish French people, their schools and their synagogues, anti-Semitism in the classical sense of prejudice against Jews is not gaining ground, but rather the contrary. Moreover, its nature does not seem to have changed fundamentally. It primarily affects the same milieus as previously, milieus that are socially and culturally disadvantaged, and it is more frequently found on the extreme right than on the extreme left of the political arena. "New" Judeophobia is still very much like the old kind.

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