

Canada needs stricter visa screening to fight antisemitism

By **Sergio R. Karas**

Law360 Canada (April 23, 2025, 2:19 PM EDT) -- Effective March 9, 2025, United States Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) began screening the social media accounts of applicants for immigration benefits' to determine if they were engaged in antisemitic activity — including online content and the physical harassment of Jewish individuals — as grounds to deny immigration benefit requests. This policy applies to individuals seeking lawful permanent resident status, foreign students and those affiliated with educational institutions linked to antisemitic activity.

Tricia McLaughlin, the Department of Homeland Security's assistant secretary for public affairs, said in a statement, "There is no room in the United States for the rest of the world's terrorist sympathizers, and we are under no obligation to admit them or let them stay here." Homeland Security Secretary Kristi Noem "has made it clear that anyone who thinks they can come to America and hide behind the First Amendment to advocate for anti-Semitic violence and terrorism — think again. You are not welcome here." President Donald Trump has promised to deport international students he alleges are engaging in "pro-terrorist, antisemitic, anti-American" campus protests over Israel's war in Gaza. According to Secretary of State Marco Rubio, the administration has revoked more than 300 visas so far this year.



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Canada also faces several emerging security challenges, including terrorism and the rise of antisemitic attacks. The country has long enjoyed a reputation for providing safe haven to refugees and other immigrants. However, the failure to properly screen newcomers — especially those from conflict zones — could inadvertently allow radicals or terrorists to enter the country. For example, the federal government is accepting applications from Gaza to enter Canada. As of mid-January 2025, Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada had accepted 4,245 applications for processing under its temporary resident pathway for Palestinian extended family in Gaza; 733 people have been approved to come to Canada.

Hamas's control of Gaza and Canada's limited ability to screen applicants pose heightened security

risks. Since the Oct. 7, 2023, Hamas terror attacks on Israel, Canada has been plagued by antisemitic violence and disruptive mass pro-Palestinian rallies. Meanwhile, polls indicate significant support for Hamas by Palestinians and its Oct. 7 terrorist attacks. Although Canada has temporarily enhanced its screening protocols for Gazans, the risk of allowing Hamas terrorists or their supporters into Canada raises social tensions and concern of antisemitic violence against Jewish Canadians.

The discussion about Canada's porous border is not just hypothetical. In September 2024, authorities arrested a Pakistani national in Canada for allegedly planning an attack on the Jewish community in New York. Muhammad Shahzeb Khan, a study permit holder in Canada, told an undercover law enforcement officer that Oct. 7 and Oct. 11 "are the best days to target Jews." The Canadian Security Intelligence Service (CSIS) has warned that the Israel-Hamas war has led to a spike in "violent rhetoric" from "extremist actors" that could prompt some in Canada to turn to violence. Further, according to the latest Global 100 survey conducted by the Anti-Defamation League (ADL), nearly half of the people worldwide hold antisemitic views. The study found that 46 per cent of adults, an estimated 2.2 billion people, have strong antisemitic attitudes. This is more than double the level recorded in ADL's first global survey a decade ago and the highest ever reported.

Another report by CSIS in May 2024 and released under Access to Information states that ideologically motivated violent extremist groups are using antisemitism as a tool to recruit followers and incite violence. According to the report, "Ideologically Motivated Violent Extremists routinely weave antisemitic commentary into their narratives in order to inspire violence and recruit individuals. These new adherents, in turn, use antisemitic commentary, often tailored to current events, to disseminate violent messaging."

The report, obtained by the University of Ottawa's Samuelson-Glushko Canadian Internet Policy and Public Interest Clinic, shared with CBC News, indicates that much of the antisemitic content is circulated via social media. "Social media is the main pathway for the consumption of antisemitic and violent extremist content, be it via popular rhetoric available from mainstream providers or via influencers who actively convey antisemitic content or conspiracy theories. The narratives encourage hate crimes, violence and terrorism."

The Anti-Defamation League states that antisemitism is up by 919 per cent on X (Twitter) since Oct. 7, 2023.

A McGill University undergraduate has launched a class-action lawsuit against the school, alleging it has failed to protect Jewish students from antisemitism and discrimination since Oct. 8, 2023. Supported by B'nai Brith Canada, the lawsuit filed in Quebec Superior Court cites multiple incidents, including a prolonged pro-Palestinian encampment on campus and a controversial Instagram post by the student group Solidarity with Palestinian Human Rights (SPHR), which described Hamas's Oct. 7 attack as "heroic" and encouraged celebration of violence against Jews.

On March 6, 2025, the federal government hosted the National Forum on Combatting Antisemitism and announced an additional \$10 million for a program aimed at helping community groups counter violent extremism and antisemitism. To improve the screening, Canada should conduct stricter background checks incorporating international intelligence, increase the scrutiny of applicants, and impose restrictions on individuals with links to regions dominated by extremist groups or nations known to sponsor terrorism.

Canada should also consider implementing legislative initiatives similar to the *No Visas for Anti-Semitic Students Act* introduced in the U.S. Congress, which targets antisemitic harassment and university encampments by revoking visas for international students who participate in pro-terrorist activities, allowing immigration officials to remove those engaged in illegal conduct. Additionally, it could adopt policies like the recent U.S. measure to screen aliens' social media content for endorsements, promotion or support of antisemitic terrorism. Such content should be treated as a negative factor in the discretionary analysis of immigration applications.

These steps would help protect Canada from extremists and terrorists, including those who support antisemitism, violent ideologies, and terrorist organizations such as Hamas, Palestinian Islamic Jihad, Hezbollah, Ansar Allah known as "the Houthis," and Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP).

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