The Reasons Behind Wikipedia Editors Labeling the Anti-Defamation League as an Unreliable Source

A majority of Wikipedia editors have labeled the Anti-Defamation League (ADL) as an unreliable source on Israel and Palestine, as well as the issue of antisemitism. The group claims to be a nonpartisan organization that works to combat antisemitism and extremism without ideological bias. Yet, it has faced pressure from both sides of the political spectrum on an array of issues. Wikipedia's recent questioning of ADL's credibility started in April and consisted of over 120 volunteers who took part in debates over the organization's reporting on matters surrounding Israel and Palestine. The decision by the Wikipedia editors places the ADL on a list of banned sources accompanied by other outlets such as Newsmax, the National Inquirer, and Infowars.

Through an online discussion forum, Wikipedia editors encouraged the notion that the group is deeply prejudiced and favors Israel by labeling valid criticism of the state and its actions as "antisemitism." Editors noted the ADL's track record of disparaging and attacking Palestinian civil rights movements, and assisting entities in spying on Arab-American groups. The organization has supported U.S. police training efforts in Israel as well. The ADL's methodology has been criticized for how it classifies Zionism, the movement to establish a national Jewish homeland. Wikipedia editors also drew on controversial statements by ADL CEO Jonathan Greenblatt to justify the initiative. Greenblatt has supported the idea that anti-Zionism and credible criticism of Israel is a form of antisemitism. Anti-Zionist chants and slogans displayed at anti-war protests were classified as antisemitic by the ADL, despite the demonstrations and the movements behind it often being led and including the participation of progressive Jews. The ADL CEO previously claimed that student anti-war protests were surrogates of Iran and equated Palestinian keffiyeh head scarfs to the swastika. These statements have led Wikipedia editors to label Greenblatt as a "partisan actor," instead of a neutral entity on the Israel-Palestine issue.

A leading editor from Wikipedia expressed that "The ADL is heavily biased regarding Israel/Palestine to the point of often acting as a pro-Israel lobbying organization." A small number of editors argued that those who voted in favor of labeling ADL as unreliable have not provided sufficient evidence that the organization has made inaccurate claims due to its advocacy efforts, but the majority of the website's editors disagreed with this notion. Greenblatt has attempted to contend that Wikipedia's review process leading to the decision lacked clarity in a clear effort to undermine it, since the move is potentially extremely consequential to ADL's reputation. Since the October 7th Hamas attacks, two-thirds of reported antisemitic incidents by the ADL were related to the Gaza War. The organization calculates the number of incidents to be 360% higher than the same period back in 2022. While there has certainly been a spike in antisemitism – in addition to anti-Arab and anti-Muslim hate crimes – since the onset of the Gaza War, this extremely large figure indicates a prejudiced focus on valid criticism of Israel and its actions by the ADL. In fact, the group even publicly acknowledged that it expanded its definition of antisemitism following the October 7th attacks in order to include language that was critical of Israel such as anti-Zionist chants and slogans.

There has been a clear correlation between widescale and growing international disapproval of Israel's actions in Gaza and a concerted focus on conflating anti-Zionism with antisemitism. Many of those who claim to be combatting antisemitism appear to be merely interested in silencing criticism towards Israel for its blatant human rights violations and war crimes. The harmful practice of labeling this as antisemitic can deter awareness regarding

the serious injustices that Israeli is committing. This also gives biased defenders of Israel the ability to disempower and disparage peaceful movements aimed at drawing attention to these abuses. Furthermore, the fight against true antisemitism and discrimination is muddied by those who conflate it with valid criticism of Israel and its behavior.

A key challenge is balancing advocacy with trusted and reliable information. The ADL's role as both an advocate and research organization bring into question its ability to produce fair and unbiased material on Israel or antisemitism. A highlighted problem of the ADL is that the narratives coming from the organization's leadership do not always align with the messages coming from the research team. James Loeffler, a professor of modern Jewish history at Johns Hopkins University, outlines that the statements coming from the ADL's leadership are "less disciplined" and challenges how precise their measurements are for detecting alleged instances of antisemitism. Wikipedia's decision can be seen as a rumination of an evolving environment due to Israel's destructive and highly-criticized War on Gaza, which the ADL has failed to adapt to. The war has brought about major complications and shifts to the international community's viewpoints on the issue of Israel and Palestine. The conflict in Gaza has exacerbated the divide between groups, and this polarization over the war has made organizations' stances potentially harmful to the perception of their fairness and objectivity.

Wikipedia editors' attempt to distance themselves from the ADL may affect how other academic and advocacy organizations educate their followers on issues such as Israel-Palestine and antisemitism. The ADL has conveyed that it will continue its work, but the decision by Wikipedia will likely impact the ADL's reputation and the flow of reliable information regarding the issue of Israel and Palestine to scholars, lawmakers, and the general public. This is especially the case since the organization has tried to cultivate a reputation of proficiency in the studying and tracking of antisemitic groups and threats.