# Gary Lineker controversy exposes BBC’s challenges in managing antisemitism and impartiality



The recent episode involving Gary Lineker highlights the intricate balancing act public figures must navigate when engaging in socio-political discourse, particularly on platforms like social media. Following a controversial post that he shared from the Palestine Lobby, Lineker faced renewed criticism for what many interpreted as an antisemitic illustration. The image accompanied the text "Zionism explained in two minutes" and featured a rat—a symbol historically used to demean Jewish people. Lineker has since deleted the post and issued an apology, insisting he was unaware of the connotations associated with the imagery.

Tim Davie, the BBC's director-general, has publicly reminded all BBC employees of the importance of adhering to the corporation's standards, especially given the potential damage to its reputation from individual errors. In a statement, Davie stressed, "The BBC's reputation is held by everyone, and when someone makes a mistake, it costs us." This call for accountability comes amidst mounting pressure and calls from organisations like the Campaign Against Antisemitism for Lineker's dismissal, suggesting his continued presence at the BBC is "untenable."

This latest controversy is not isolated. Lineker's social media history has included various contentious remarks and retweets, some of which have drawn ire from Jewish communities and political figures alike. In early January 2024, he was heavily scrutinised for sharing a call from a pro-Palestinian group urging for Israel to be banned from international football tournaments. Following a significant backlash, he claimed to have misunderstood the post's intentions and altered his online biography to clarify that "retweets are not endorsements."

The implications of Lineker's actions are profound, extending to the BBC's handling of its reputation and credibility. Employees have expressed concerns about the corporation's perceived impartiality, especially regarding its coverage of the Israel-Hamas conflict. Some Jewish staff members have formally lodged complaints, questioning not only Lineker's conduct but also the broader organisational response to allegations of antisemitism.

Critics within the political sphere have been vocal, with Conservative MP Andrew Percy stating that Lineker's actions reflect poor judgement and a lack of understanding regarding the nuances of the conflict. He argued that endorsing movements viewed as antisemitic puts public figures receiving taxpayer funding in a precarious position. Furthermore, former BBC executive Danny Cohen has described the organisation as "wilfully blind" to antisemitism, calling for a more stringent adherence to its impartiality guidelines.

As public discourse continues to shape responses to complex global issues, Lineker's case serves as an instructive reminder of the potential repercussions faced by those wielding significant influence. It underscores the need for careful consideration when engaging with contentious topics, especially in an era where social media amplifies both messages and misunderstandings at an unprecedented scale.

The situation encapsulates a wider conversation about the roles and responsibilities of public figures within media landscapes fraught with division, making clear that actions—both online and offline—carry weight far beyond their immediate context.

### Reference Map

1. Paragraph 1: [[1]](https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/c365ernrnlyo), [[2]](https://apnews.com/article/c8b36a075eeb5be35603d2548fcead3a)
2. Paragraph 2: [[1]](https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/c365ernrnlyo), [[2]](https://apnews.com/article/c8b36a075eeb5be35603d2548fcead3a)
3. Paragraph 3: [[3]](https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2024/01/23/jewish-bbc-staff-formal-complaint-antisemitism-gary-lineker/), [[4]](https://www.telegraph.co.uk/football/2024/01/19/how-gary-lineker-dragged-into-anti-semitism-sport-israel/), [[5]](https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2024/01/19/gary-lineker-adds-disclaimer-social-media-row/)
4. Paragraph 4: [[2]](https://apnews.com/article/c8b36a075eeb5be35603d2548fcead3a), [[3]](https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2024/01/23/jewish-bbc-staff-formal-complaint-antisemitism-gary-lineker/), [[6]](https://www.the-independent.com/news/uk/home-news/gary-lineker-israel-football-retweet-b2478549.html)
5. Paragraph 5: [[3]](https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2024/01/23/jewish-bbc-staff-formal-complaint-antisemitism-gary-lineker/), [[6]](https://www.the-independent.com/news/uk/home-news/gary-lineker-israel-football-retweet-b2478549.html), [[7]](https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2024/01/16/bbc-accused-wilful-blindness-to-anti-semitism-gary-lineker/)
6. Paragraph 6: [[4]](https://www.telegraph.co.uk/football/2024/01/19/how-gary-lineker-dragged-into-anti-semitism-sport-israel/), [[5]](https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2024/01/19/gary-lineker-adds-disclaimer-social-media-row/), [[6]](https://www.the-independent.com/news/uk/home-news/gary-lineker-israel-football-retweet-b2478549.html)
7. Paragraph 7: [[6]](https://www.the-independent.com/news/uk/home-news/gary-lineker-israel-football-retweet-b2478549.html), [[7]](https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2024/01/16/bbc-accused-wilful-blindness-to-anti-semitism-gary-lineker/)

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## Bibliography

1. <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/c365ernrnlyo> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://apnews.com/article/c8b36a075eeb5be35603d2548fcead3a> - Gary Lineker, the BBC's main soccer presenter, issued an unreserved apology after sharing a social media post criticized as antisemitic. The post, originally from the Palestine Lobby, featured an illustration of a rat with the text 'Zionism explained in two minutes.' Lineker removed the post upon realizing its offensive content, emphasizing his opposition to antisemitism and his commitment to responsible discourse. This incident adds to Lineker’s history of social media controversies, including a temporary suspension in 2023 for criticizing UK asylum policies. Despite stepping down from 'Match of the Day' after 25 years, Lineker will continue with BBC coverage of the FA Cup and the 2026 World Cup. BBC director-general Tim Davie emphasized the importance of upholding the broadcaster’s values. Meanwhile, the Campaign Against Antisemitism has called for Lineker's dismissal, questioning his intentions given his influential media presence. Lineker defended his stance on humanitarian issues, especially the conflict in Gaza, but acknowledged the need for careful communication.
3. <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2024/01/23/jewish-bbc-staff-formal-complaint-antisemitism-gary-lineker/> - Jewish BBC staff have lodged formal complaints about anti-Semitism and Gary Lineker’s social media use, sources have said. Concerned employees are understood to have submitted grievance complaints on a range of issues from the corporation’s coverage of the Israel-Hamas conflict to alleged anti-Semitism in the workplace. Staff have also complained about Lineker’s social media use and the BBC’s defence of the Match of the Day presenter, according to sources at the broadcaster. News of the complaints comes after Lineker shared, then deleted, a message calling for Israel to be banned from international football tournaments, and as the BBC faces accusations of bias in its coverage of the conflict in Gaza.
4. <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/football/2024/01/19/how-gary-lineker-dragged-into-anti-semitism-sport-israel/> - Gary Lineker has found himself in yet another impartiality row over a now-deleted social media post. Despite flummoxing the BBC’s star football presenter, who reposted it to his near nine million followers on X after apparently misreading it, the Palestinian Campaign for the Academic & Cultural Boycott of Israel’s call for action over the 'genocide' in Gaza could not have been more explicit. If PACBI’s agenda was unambiguous, the same cannot be said about that of a growing number of sporting organisations to have taken decisions since the turn of the year that would doubtless meet with the hitherto fringe group’s approval.
5. <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2024/01/19/gary-lineker-adds-disclaimer-social-media-row/> - Gary Lineker has changed his social media profile to say that 'retweets are not endorsements' following a row over a post he shared calling for Israel to be banned from world football. The Match of the Day presenter last week shared a call from a pro-Palestinian campaign for Israel to be barred from all international games and tournaments 'until it ends its grave violations of international law'. Lineker, who has repeatedly called for a ceasefire between the Israeli military and Hamas, removed the retweet from his account following a backlash from Jewish leaders and MPs. Sources claimed he had misunderstood the post and believed he was sharing a news article about Israel being expelled from sporting tournaments, rather than a demand for such a ban. His biography on X, formerly known as Twitter, now reads: 'Once kicked a ball about. Now talk about kicking a ball about. The Rest Is Football @restisfootball @goalhangerpods ..Instagram. [sic] Retweets are not endorsements.'
6. <https://www.the-independent.com/news/uk/home-news/gary-lineker-israel-football-retweet-b2478549.html> - Gary Lineker has a lot to say about a lot of things, but antisemitism does not appear to be one of them, a spokesman for the group told The Daily Telegraph. 'At a time of record levels of racism against Jews, not a peep. But he has found the time to amplify a call to suspend the world’s only Jewish state from international sports. His priorities are clear.' Andrew Percy, a prominent Jewish Tory MP, was among several Conservatives to criticise the former England footballer international. 'Gary Lineker is an ill-informed, ignorant commentator on the Middle East,' he said. 'The BDS movement [to boycott Israel] is a racist, anti-Semitic campaign and nobody who receives taxpayers’ money working in the BBC should be endorsing a campaign that is widely understood to promote Jew hate.'
7. <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2024/01/16/bbc-accused-wilful-blindness-to-anti-semitism-gary-lineker/> - The BBC appears 'wilfully blind' to anti-Semitism by failing to take action over Gary Lineker’s latest social media controversy, a former executive has said. Lineker retweeted a pro-Palestinian campaign’s call for Israel to be barred from football tournaments over 'its grave violations of international law'. After a backlash, Lineker removed the post, with sources claiming he had believed that he was sharing a news article about Israel being banned, rather than a demand for a ban. Danny Cohen, the corporation’s former director of television, said: 'It seems very clear that Gary Lineker has breached the BBC’s impartiality guidelines, this time in relation to the specific area on which he presents for the BBC. The message he reposted supports the racist boycott movement against Israel and the reference to genocide is deeply offensive to the Jewish community.'