

Conclusions

After measuring the opinions of college students over three years, the intensity of conflict on campuses in 2023-2024 is perhaps easy to understand. Jewish students on campuses overwhelmingly support a Jewish state in Israel, with only 15% of Jewish students dissenting from that position (and 15-25% saying they are not sure). Furthermore, Jewish students tend to sympathize with Israelis over Palestinians or sympathize with both sides, and they largely blame Hamas for the current war. All of these positions are unpopular on the campuses where Jewish students attend college. As explored in focus groups, Israel's supporters are seen by some non-Jewish students as, at best, miseducated and, at worst, bad people. Social ostracization is common and even considered to be appropriate.

Anti-Israel attitudes are not only far more common than pro-Israel attitudes on campuses, but there is a sharp asymmetry between non-Jewish students who support and oppose a Jewish state in terms of their interest in the topic and their appetite for activism. Students who oppose a Jewish state consume more news about the conflict and take more interest in advocacy for their cause.

Though Jewish students overwhelmingly support a Jewish state, their views are nuanced – they have conflicting values and cross-pressures in their evaluation of the conflict – and there is internal disagreement within Jewish communities on campus. Jewish students navigate complicated social dynamics as they encounter students in and out of Jewish spaces on campus who hold a wide variety of views about Israel. Jewish students who are in social groups that overwhelmingly oppose Israel likely experience the most social tension. Jewish students who identify as very liberal

or as LGBTQ+, for instance, are far less likely to be critical of Israel than non-Jewish students in those cohorts but far more likely to be critical of Israel than other Jewish students.

Jewish students in our surveys and focus groups feel more connected to their Jewish identity despite (or perhaps because of) their heightened fears of antisemitism and recent experiences with antisemitism. The plurality of Jewish respondents also believe that their campus Jewish community is getting its approach to Israel right, with smaller numbers of students equally split between believing the campus Jewish community is too supportive of Israel and too critical of Israel.

Students who grew up connected to Jewish institutions such as synagogues, summer camps, and denominational movements are strongly connected to their Jewish identity and feel a sense of connection to American Jews and Israeli Jews alike.

The evidence here leads to several recommendations for future research. We will reflect on three of them. For one, we would encourage more research on news consumption and educational interventions related to Judaism and Israel. The extent to which Jewish students learn about Judaism and Israel from social media, general news sources, Jewish-specific news sources, parental advice, teachers, or other sources merits more attention. With respect to education targeted to non-Jewish students, more research is needed to understand how the increasingly secular population, which may have limited exposure to any kind of bible study, understands the relationship between Jewish people and the land of Israel.

A second area of focus we would recommend is socioeconomic status. As discussed in this report, there are strong relationships between socioeconomic class and Jewish background experiences, between socioeconomic class and attitudes about Israel, and between socioeconomic class and activism for Israel and Palestine. There are many Jewish students from middle- and lower-class environments where the social structure and opportunities for Jewish learning and engagement may be quite limited compared to what is available to Jewish students from upper-middle-class and upper-class environments. Researchers could do more to study how socioeconomic class shapes attitudes about Jews and Israel.

Finally, the responses to the survey questions and focus groups from non-Jewish students raise alarm about the social tensions on campus. While our research suggests Jewish students mostly felt physically safe during a year of heightened tensions, the attitudes of their non-Jewish peers expressed in surveys and focus groups suggest that universities ought to be quite concerned about the social and educational environment on campus. Jewish students hold a set of values around Israel that are unpopular among most students and unwelcome among a small but nontrivial portion of them. Meanwhile, as our report details, we have seen statistically significant increases in Jewish students saying they avoid Jewish programs for fear of antisemitism, that they were personally targeted by antisemitism in classroom settings, and that they feel a need to hide their Jewish identity. Researchers should continue to analyze social tensions to inform how parents, students, organizations, governments, and universities themselves work to improve the situation.

Methodological Appendix

A. COMPARABILITY OF SURVEY WAVES

When comparing respondents across waves, it is important to consider several limitations. First, the context in which students were taking the survey varies across time. For instance, the 2022 wave partially overlapped with the Passover holiday, the 2023 partially overlapped with the Thanksgiving holiday, and the 2024 survey partially overlapped with the end of the school year on most campuses. Whether students took the survey on campus, at their parents’ homes, or elsewhere may have affected their answers. Furthermore, day-to-day news events, including campus-specific news events, may have affected respondents in ways that are difficult to assess. For instance, a student who took the survey at their parents’ house while on vacation might answer differently than a student who took the survey from their dorm room directly overlooking a protest encampment, and these two students could attend the same school and could have taken the survey at the same time.

Second, there is variation in the number of students surveyed per school. For instance, wave 2 contained 64 Jewish students from Columbia University, while there were only 31 Jewish Columbia students in the wave 3 sample. This variation could present a problem if students at Columbia (as an example) have different attitudes and experiences from other students.

TABLE A1

Non-Jewish Respondents	WAVE 1	WAVE 2	WAVE 3
White	36%	35	33
Straight	77	66	65
Women	63	59	62
Non-Binary	3	15	9
Public School	79	73	69
On Financial Aid	86	63	66
Upper/Upper-Middle Class	20	34	29
<i>N</i>	1,033	1,549	1,516

NOTE: All rows except the bottom row reflect percentages.

Third, the basic demographic traits of students vary across waves. Table A1 summarizes a few key demographic characteristics of the non-Jewish sample across the three waves of the study. Recall that the first wave is not comparable to waves 2 and 3, as the first wave was meant to be representative of college students in general (circa 2022), whereas waves 2 and 3 focused on students who attended schools with substantial Jewish populations. Wave 1 students are much more likely to be on financial aid and to come from lower-, working-, and middle-class families. The major fluctuation between waves 2 and waves 3 here are in the gender make-up of the sample: there are fewer non-binary identifiers. Note that there are some differences between the Wave 1 demographics described here and the Wave 1 demographics described in the 2022 report, “Jewish College Students in America,” due to an updated set of weights recommended by College Pulse.

The racial composition of the 2023 and 2024 non-Jewish samples are approximately 33-35% white. In the 2023 and 2024 waves, the samples are a third Asian, 12% Hispanic, 6% Black, 11% multiracial or other. The religious composition of the non-Jewish sample at these schools is about 50% atheist or agnostic, 30% Christian (including Catholic), 6% Hindu, 4% Muslim, and 10% other.

TABLE A2

Jewish Respondents	WAVE 1	WAVE 2	WAVE 3
White	73%	68	63
Straight	64	63	65
Women	49	53	56
Non-Binary	12	15	9
Public School	59	49	53
On Financial Aid	51	51	51
Upper/Upper-Middle Class	52	59	48
<i>N</i>	1,721	944	1,006

The Jewish sample, like the non-Jewish sample, has fluctuation across waves in gender identification. In all waves and in both Jewish and non-Jewish samples, there are more women than men, which reflects the imbalance in the college population in general. The Jewish sample also exhibits some fluctuation in race and socioeconomic status. In the second wave, 68% of the respondents identified as white. The next largest categories were multiracial (6%), Middle Eastern (5%), Hispanic (5%), and Asian (4%). In the third wave, 63% of Jewish students identified as white, with 10% identifying as Hispanic, 9% identifying as multiracial, 8% as Asian, and 2% as Middle Eastern.

These fluctuations are likely the result of different subsets of Jewish students participating in different waves of the study. Due to the fluctuations both in school representation and in demographic representation, we considered analyzing the data with weights but ultimately decided against doing so. Weights could be used to make the three waves of the study more comparable with each other. For instance, with regard to school representation, we considered down-weighting Columbia students in Wave 2 and up-weighting them in Wave 3, so that both waves have the same share of Columbia students. We found that these sorts of weighting strategies did not actually meaningfully affect the results. Moreover, since we do not know the *true* demographics of Jewish students, we do not know which, if any, of the waves most accurately represents Jewish college students.

We decided not to analyze the data with weights to make the waves more comparable. Instead, we rely exclusively on the panels when we draw inferences about change over time. Even though the samples in the panels are smaller than the full cross-sections, we are much more confident in assessing change by looking over time at the same students rather than looking across two, potentially unrepresentative, snapshots.

Second, when we look *within* any one cross-section, our analysis focuses on how subgroups differ. We focus on how students from different types of Jewish backgrounds or with different political ideologies differ in their attitudes. While the study design would not allow us to gauge the true proportion of the population that attended Jewish summer camps or visited Israel with their family, our design should allow us to compare the attitudes of students who attended camps or visited Israel with students who did not have these experiences. We have no reason to expect that our sample would not reflect differences in the population across subsets like these.

But in the end, we must approach this study with modesty. Surveying even the general public is challenging. In all public opinion research, scholars worry about whether the people who decided to respond to the survey differ on key measures from the people who decided not to respond. They worry whether respondents understand all the questions and answer them truthfully. In this study, we have an added challenge: we do not have clear benchmarks to assess the representativeness of the Jewish student population. We also do not have a benchmark to assess the representativeness of a sample of non-Jewish students who go to schools where Jews are present. No government entity equivalent to the U.S. Census Bureau collects statistics on Jewish identity and college attendance. As a result, we do not know what the basic demographics – breakdowns by gender, race, geography, political views, and so forth – are expected to look like. Despite these challenges, we do our best to analyze the data transparently and with integrity. We recognize that our approach in answering questions about the social and political landscapes of Jewish students on college campuses is just one approach among other valid attempts.

B. ADDRESSING AN ERROR

After completing the third and final wave of this study, we learned that College Pulse made an error in wave 3 on agree/disagree questions. The response options on agree/disagree questions differ slightly in wave 3 than in previous waves. In previous waves, respondents were given options: “strongly agree,” “agree,” “disagree,” “strongly disagree,” and “I don’t know.” Just prior to fielding, College Pulse switched “I don’t know” with the option “neither agree nor disagree,” believing this wording was superior and not realizing that this question had been asked repeatedly across waves and was meant to have been kept consistent for the sake of comparability.

While the change may seem slight and inconsequential, we worried to what extent this might have affected answers. To respond to this worry, we asked College Pulse to conduct an experiment in July/August 2024. Six agree/disagree questions were asked over time to Jewish students and six agree/disagree questions were asked to non-Jewish students that

could have been affected by the error. In this experiment, we sampled Jewish and non-Jewish students who had not taken our main surveys. They were randomly assigned to either a treatment condition or a control condition. In the control condition, they saw the battery of agree/disagree questions with the “don’t know” option used in waves 1 and 2. In the treatment condition, the “don’t know” response was replaced with “neither agree nor disagree.”

Table A3 shows the results of this experiment for non-Jewish respondents. In the first two columns, we compare the percentage of respondents who answered, “don’t know,” with the percentage of respondents who answered, “neither agree nor disagree.” In all cases, respondents were more likely to answer questions as “neither agree nor disagree” than to answer “don’t know”; however, in 4 out of 6 cases, the differences are modest (3-4 percentage points) and not statistically significant. On two questions, the differences are statistically significant.

TABLE A3 Non-Jewish Student Experiment

Question	Condition 1	Condition 2	P-value	Condition 1	Condition 2	P-value
	Don't Know	Neither Agree nor Disagree		Agree	Agree	
Personally, I don't think there should continue to be a Jewish state in Israel/Palestine.	48.5%	52.8%	0.39	19.1%	13.7%	0.15
My views about Israel are generally in line with the views of most of my college friends.	35.1	45.2	0.04	47.9	36.5	0.02
I wouldn't want to be friends with someone who supports the existence of Israel as a Jewish state.	37.6	40.1	0.62	11.3	12.7	0.68
I avoid socializing with Jewish students because of their views about Israel.	15.5	24.9	0.02	3.6	4.1	0.81
All Israeli civilians should be considered legitimate targets for Hamas.	28.4	31.0	0.57	2.1	2.0	0.98
Jewish people are indigenous to the land of Israel.	54.6	58.9	0.40	22.7	18.3	0.28

NOTE: Each of the questions was given to non-Jewish respondents not surveyed as part of our main study. N = 194 (“don’t know” condition), 197 (“neither agree nor disagree” condition). The first two columns show the percent of respondents that either said they didn’t know or they neither agreed nor disagreed. The third column represents a result of a difference of means t-test. Values less than 0.05 are considered statistically significant. The next two columns show the percent who agree with the statement divided by all respondents who answered the question. A difference of means t-test is shown in the final column.

Next, in the table, we give the percentage of respondents who agree with the statement, as a percentage of all who either agreed, disagreed, or said they don't know or neither agree nor disagree. This mimics how we assess these survey items in the body of the report. Respondents in the two conditions line up quite closely in the percent who agree with the statement. The exception is the question that asked whether the respondents' views on Israel align with most of their college friends' views. On that item, respondents were about 10 percentage points less likely to say they agree when responding to the question wording used in wave 3 of the study.

For Jewish students, the experiment tested five out of the six questions affected by the error. The remaining question, which asked whether respondents hide their views in Jewish spaces on campus, was complicated to test with this experimental design because the answer depended on how respondents answered a prior question about whether they attend Jewish events on campus. The experiment here focuses on the other five questions.

A comparison between the first and second columns of percentages in Table A4 shows that in all five of the questions, Jewish students were more likely to answer they neither agreed nor disagreed than to answer they did not know. However, when we look at the percentage who agree with each statement, in four out of five cases the two conditions show very similar percentages. The differences between these conditions are not statistically significant. In the fifth case – the question of whether Jewish students pay a social penalty for supporting the existence of Israel – students were less likely to agree in the condition that offered “neither agree nor disagree” as an option.

Altogether, out of the eleven questions assessed in this experiment, we find that one question asked to non-Jewish students and one question asked to Jewish students demonstrate differences in the percentage who agree with the statement depending on whether “don't know” or “neither agree nor disagree” are offered as response options. We urge particular caution in interpreting change over time on these questions.

TABLE A4 Jewish Student Experiment

Question	Condition 1	Condition 2	P-value	Condition 1	Condition 2	P-value
	Don't Know	Neither Agree nor Disagree		Agree	Agree	
People will judge me negatively if I participate in Jewish activities on campus.	12.4%	33.5%	0.00	32.0%	28.4%	0.45
Personally, I don't think there should continue to be a Jewish state in Israel/Palestine.	15.0	27.4	0.00	18.6	17.8	0.84
My views about Israel are generally in line with the views of most of my college friends.	21.6	28.9	0.10	44.8	48.2	0.50
On my campus, Jewish students pay a social penalty for supporting the existence of Israel as a Jewish state.	17.5	25.4	0.06	57.2	44.2	0.01
In order to fit in on my campus, I feel the need to hide that I am Jewish.	12.9	25.4	0.00	29.9	24.4	0.22

NOTE: Each of the questions was given to Jewish respondents not surveyed as part of our main study. N = 194 (“don't know” condition), 197 (“neither agree nor disagree” condition). The first two columns show the percent of respondents that either said they didn't know or they neither agreed nor disagreed. The third column represents a result of a difference of means t-test. Values less than 0.05 are considered statistically significant. The next two columns show the percent who agree with the statement divided by all respondents who answered the question. A difference of means t-test is shown in the final column.

C. COMPARABILITY WITH OTHER METHODOLOGIES

Because there is no obvious way to gauge representativeness, we instead compare our key findings to other surveys using different methodologies. When drawing comparisons across samples, it is important to understand how the study design might affect results. Consider two illustrative comparisons.

In November of 2023, Prof. Brian Schaffner of Tufts University generously placed two questions from our study on a nationally representative survey of U.S. adults called the Cooperative Election Study (CES). In one question, respondents who said they were current students were asked, “Thinking about students on your campus broadly, do you think their sympathies are more with the Israeli people or more with the Palestinian people?”

TABLE A5

Comparison between responses to the same question asked in Fall 2023 in College Pulse (4-year undergraduate students on campuses) versus the Cooperative Election Study (all students)

Response Options	CES	College Pulse
Not sure	28%	25
Students mostly sympathize with Israelis	16	11
Students mostly sympathize with Palestinians	29	43
Students mostly sympathize with both groups equally	20	16
Students mostly have no opinion or are unaware of the conflict	7	4
<i>N</i>	1808	1518

In both samples, substantially more respondents reported that the students on their campus mostly sympathize with Palestinians than with Israelis (see Table A5). However, the College Pulse respondents were 14 percentage points more likely than CES respondents to say that students on their campuses mostly sympathized with Palestinians. CES respondents were about twice as likely to say their campus mostly sympathized with Palestinians than with Israelis, whereas College Pulse respondents in our survey were four times more likely to say so.

However, this is not quite an apples-to-apples comparison. The College Pulse survey assesses non-Jewish students at four-year-colleges with substantial Jewish populations. The CES survey does not distinguish students who are in two-year versus four-year programs nor undergraduate students from graduate students. Across the country, only about 58% of post-secondary students are in four-year undergraduate programs (the population targeted by College Pulse).⁸ Moreover, even the four-year college population itself might have different views than the subset of campuses that have Jewish communities present.

For another comparison, consider a contemporaneous survey of Jewish Birthright Israel applicants conducted by the Cohen Center for Modern Jewish Studies at Brandeis University.⁹ Our study used screening questions and the College Pulse panel to identify Jewish students. The Cohen Center accesses lists of students who had applied to Birthright Israel and surveys students from those lists. Since researchers know the demographics of Birthright applicants, they are able to weight data to match those population parameters instead of relying on a convenience sample.

This comparison, too, is not perfect, since not all Jewish identifying students apply to Birthright, and our sample would include those students whereas the Cohen Center data would exclude them. Nevertheless, the numbers line up quite well. In the Cohen Center survey conducted in November-December 2023, 25% of their sample had attended Jewish day schools, and 56% had attended Hebrew schools. In our November-December 2023 survey, 27% of the Jewish respondents attended day school, and 53% attended Hebrew schools. In the Cohen Center survey, 54% of respondents identified as liberal and 8% as conservative. In our Fall 2023 survey, 56% of respondents identified as liberal and 12% as conservative. Thus, even though these studies used completely different methodologies and have different target populations, the fact that numbers like these line up so well gives us more confidence in the integrity of our findings.

Endnotes

1. J. Sellers Hill and Nia L. Orakwue, “Harvard Student Groups Face Intense Backlash for Statement Calling Israel ‘Entirely Responsible’ for Hamas Attack,” *Harvard Crimson*, October 10, 2023.
2. Travis Anderson, “Tufts University Student Group Faces Criticism for Commending the ‘Creativity’ of Hamas Militants,” *Boston Globe*, October 11, 2023.
3. Annie Karni, “Questioning University Presidents on Antisemitism, Stefanik Goes Viral,” *New York Times*, December 7, 2023.
4. Eitan Hersh, “Jewish College Students in America,” Report to the Jim Joseph Foundation, 2022.
5. These numbers line up with a 2020 survey of Jewish American young adults (ages 18-40) that asked this question in the same way. In that survey, 5% said never, 11% rarely, 30% occasionally, 36% often, and 18% all the time. See Tobin Marcus (Benenson Strategy Group), “2020 Young Jewish Adults: COVID and Jewish Virtual Engagement,” Schusterman Family Foundation and Jim Joseph Foundation, 2020.
6. Waves 2 and 3 have more Orthodox-identifying students than wave 1, in part because College Pulse began surveying students at Yeshiva University. Including or excluding Yeshiva students from this analysis does not affect the substantive results, as there are only a handful of such students in the sample. However, in analyses below that focus on social tensions on campus, Yeshiva University students are excluded since the undergraduate population is exclusively Jewish.
7. See, Michael Dawson, *Behind the Mule: Race and Class in African-American Politics*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995.
8. National Center for Educational Statistics, “Characteristics of Postsecondary Students,” U.S. Department of Education, August 2023, <https://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/indicator/csb/postsecondary-students#:~:text=In%20fall%202021%2C%20approximately%2010.8,enrolled%20at%20%2Dyear%20institutions>.
9. Graham Wright, et al., “In the Shadow of War: Hotspots of Antisemitism on US College Campuses,” Cohen Center for Modern Jewish Studies, Brandeis University, December 2023.