

# Jewish Background, Identity, and Participation

## A. JEWISH BACKGROUND

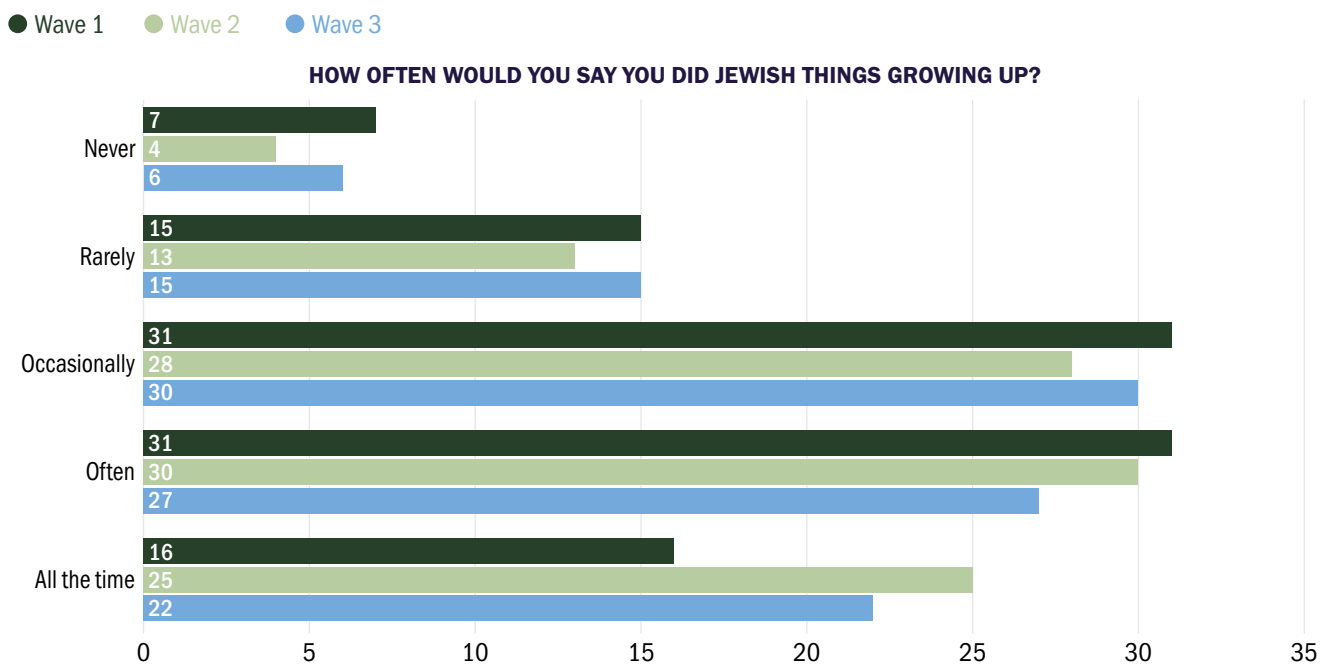
We use several measures to summarize the kind of Jewish upbringing that students had and their level of traditional observance. Our first measure (Fig. 1) asks students how often they did “Jewish things” growing up. Across survey waves, about half of Jewish students answer that they did Jewish things “often” or “all the time”, with 47% answering this way in 2022, 55% in 2023, and 49% in 2024.<sup>5</sup>

Next, we asked specifically about eleven different Jewish behaviors that students may have done growing up. These include attending synagogue services, celebrating Shabbat and other holidays, having a bar/bat mitzvah, attending Hebrew school, visiting Israel, participating in a Jewish youth group, attending a Jewish overnight camp, attending a Jewish day school, cooking Jewish foods, wearing clothing or jewelry with Jewish symbols, and participating in a Jewish community service project.

In all waves, the most common practices were Shabbat/holiday observance, synagogue attendance, and cooking Jewish foods (see Fig. 2). Majorities of all three waves reported having done those things, though they may vary in how often they did them and the extent to which they were connected to organizations while doing them. Day school attendance was the least common, with 15% in wave 1 respondents, 27% in wave 2 respondents, and 22% in wave 3 respondents reporting that they had gone to Jewish day school. In general, as shown in Figure 2, wave 2 respondents came from more engaged Jewish backgrounds compared to wave 1 and wave 3. It may be that immediately after October 7, when wave 2 was administered, a greater number of Jewish respondents *expressed* that they had done these behaviors due to a heightened salience of Jewish identity.

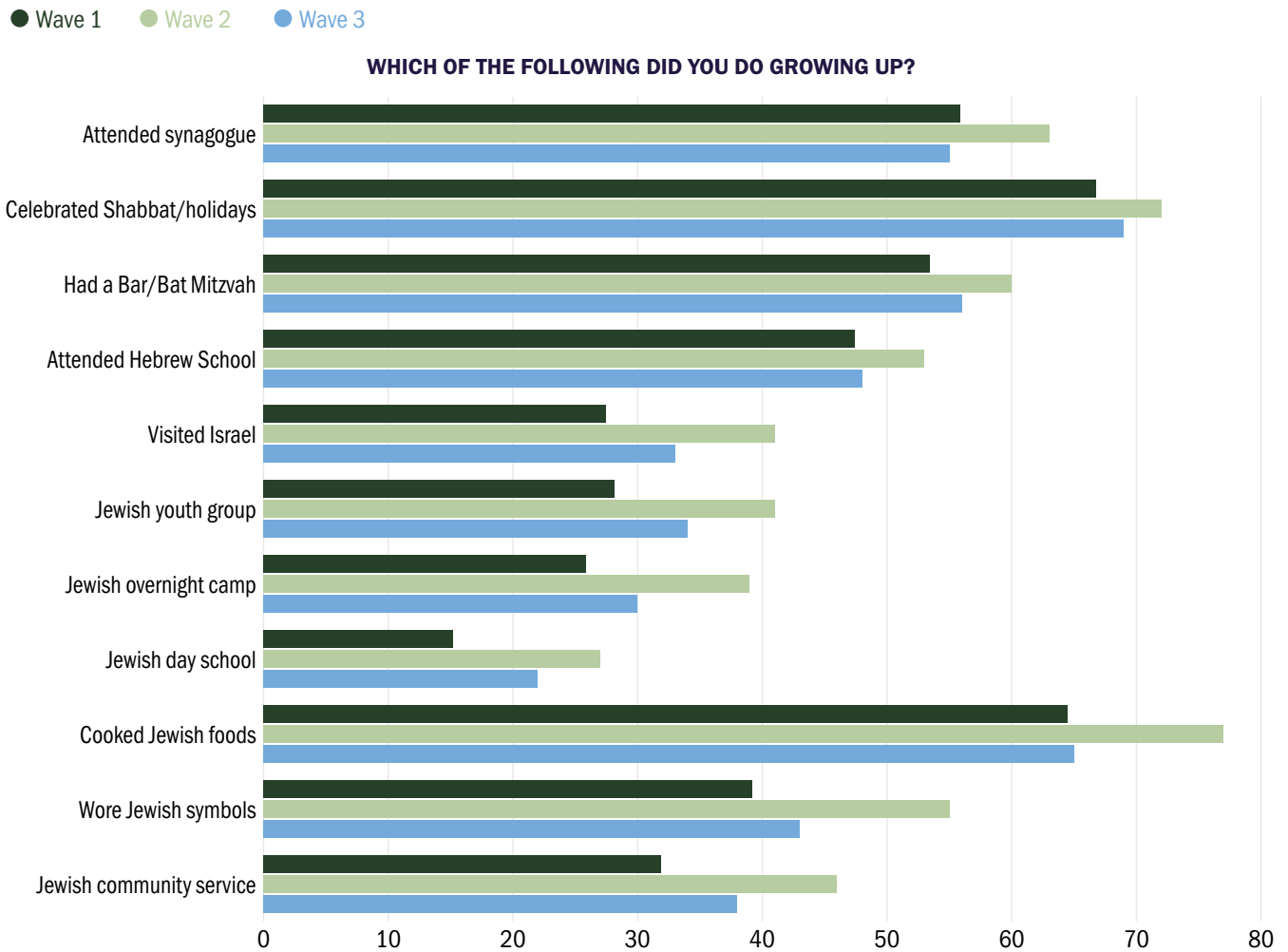
A third measure of Jewish background is whether the students identified with a denomination, which may proxy for closer connections to Jewish institutions and community. In wave 1, 53% identified with a denomination. In wave 2, 65% identified with a denomination. In wave 3, 59% identified with a denomination. The most common denominational affiliation is Reform, with about a quarter to a third of each sample identifying with Reform Judaism.<sup>6</sup>

**FIGURE 1**



NOTE: N = 1,721 (wave 1) N = 944 (wave 2) N = 1,006 (wave 3).

**FIGURE 2**



NOTE: N= 1,721 (wave 1) N = 944 (wave 2) N = 1,006 (wave 3).

We combine the three background measures – how often students did “Jewish things”, how many actual concrete behaviors they engaged in, and whether they were part of a denomination – to create a summary measure, which we will call *background*. Below, we will assess different survey questions by dividing students into low, medium, and high background scores. The background scores are not meant to rank or judge students as people, of course, but rather they serve as a simplified way to characterize students of different Jewish backgrounds.

Looking at the 2024 wave, the median student with a low *background* score said they rarely did Jewish things growing up, participated in 2 of the 11 practices (typically some shabbat/holiday practice and Jewish cooking), and did not

affiliate with a denomination (just 13% of low *background* students affiliated). Only 7% of these students had visited Israel. The median student with a middle *background* score occasionally did Jewish things growing up, participated in about 4 of 11 practices, and in two-thirds of cases did affiliate with a denomination. About half of these students said they attended synagogue, had a bar/bat mitzvah, and went to a Hebrew school. A quarter had visited Israel. The median student with a high *background* score said they did Jewish things all the time growing up. They nearly all (96%) identified with a denomination, and they participated in 9 of 11 practices. About half of them went to day schools, two-thirds to Jewish summer camps and two-thirds had visited Israel.

## B. SENSE OF JEWISH IDENTITY AND CONNECTION TO ISRAEL

Across all three waves of the study, we asked students: *How important is your Jewish identity to you?* And we asked, *how close do you feel to a Jewish community right now?* In the post-October 7 surveys, we also asked: *To what extent do you feel a connection to Israel?*

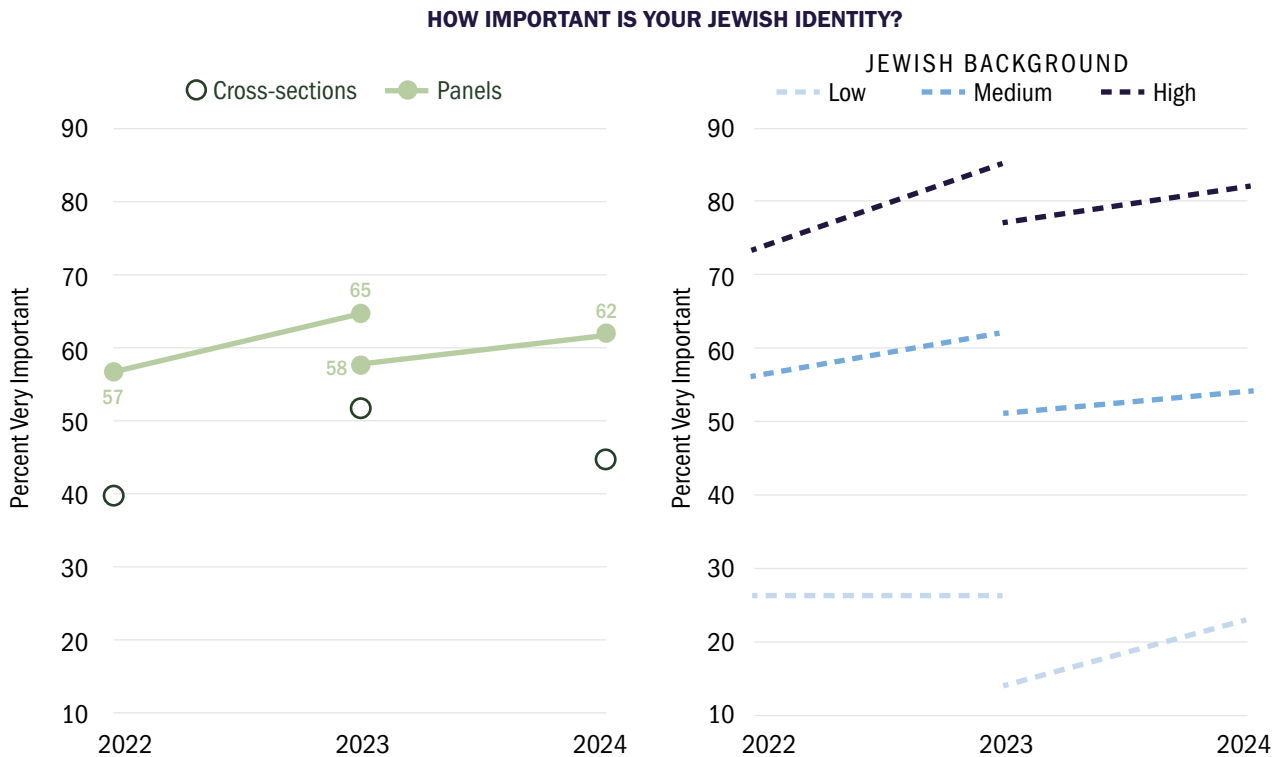
In the next graphs, we show the percent who said their identity is very important (Fig. 3), the percent who said they feel very close to a Jewish community (Fig. 4), and the percent who said they feel very much connected to Israel (Fig. 5).

The green lines show the change in the panel design. As expected, students who are surveyed multiple times tend to be more Jewishly engaged than the typical respondent (as evidenced by higher agreement that Jewish identity is important in the panels compared to in the cross-sections). In the graph, we focus on the change over time. We see that

even though the cross-sections show a smaller number of Jewish students saying their Jewish identity is very important to them, the panel shows no such reduction. In both panels, we see statistically significant increases in the strength of identity. In shades of blue, we display the panel subdivided by high, medium, and low background. The increase in strength of identity is clearest among those with high background scores, but no group shows decreasing strength of identity. In fact, between waves 2 and 3, it is students with low background scores who show the most increase in strength of identity. The evidence here suggests an elevated sense of Jewish identity after October 7.

The next graph depicts how close Jewish students feel to a Jewish community. We see very consistent evidence in the cross-section, in the panel, and within each subgroup of the panel that there was a heightened sense of closeness toward a Jewish community in fall 2023, but then a reversion by spring 2024.

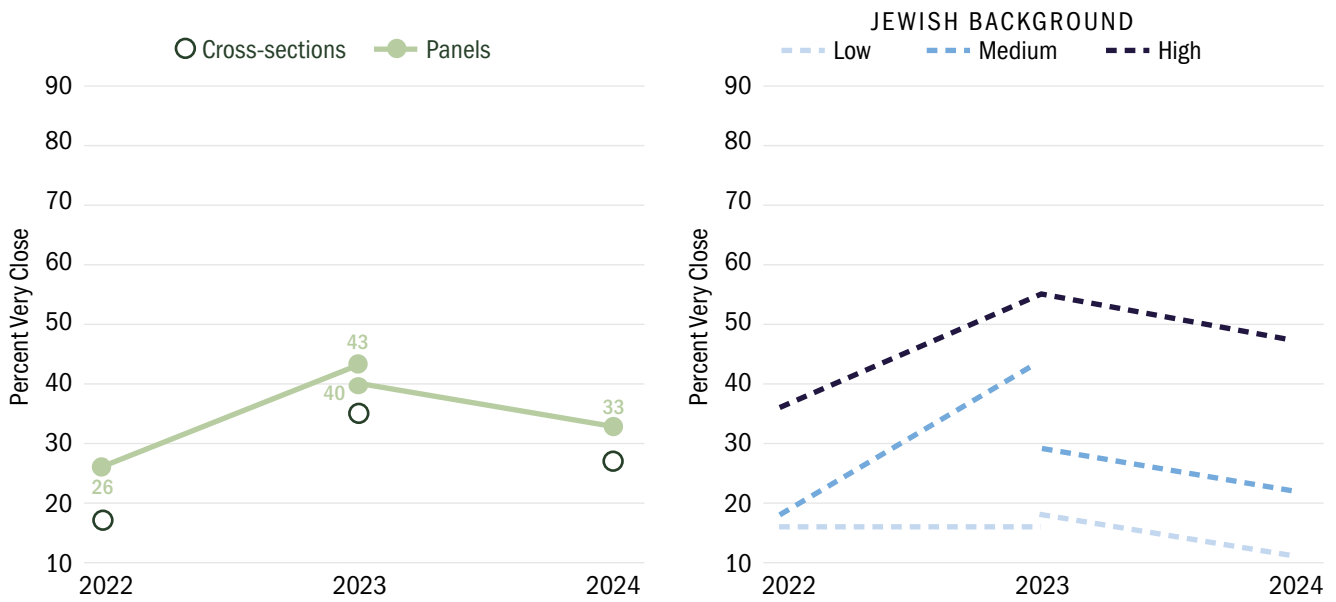
**FIGURE 3**



NOTE: N = 1,721 (wave 1) N = 944 (wave 2) N = 1,006 (wave 3) N = 155 (wave 1-2 panel) N = 245 (wave 2-3 panel). The average agreement in cross-sections is shown in hollow circles. Panel results are shown with green lines on the left. On the right, panels are divided into high, medium, and low Jewish background. The wave 1-2 change overall and among high background respondents is statistically significant. The wave 2-3 change overall and among low background respondents is statistically significant.

**FIGURE 4**

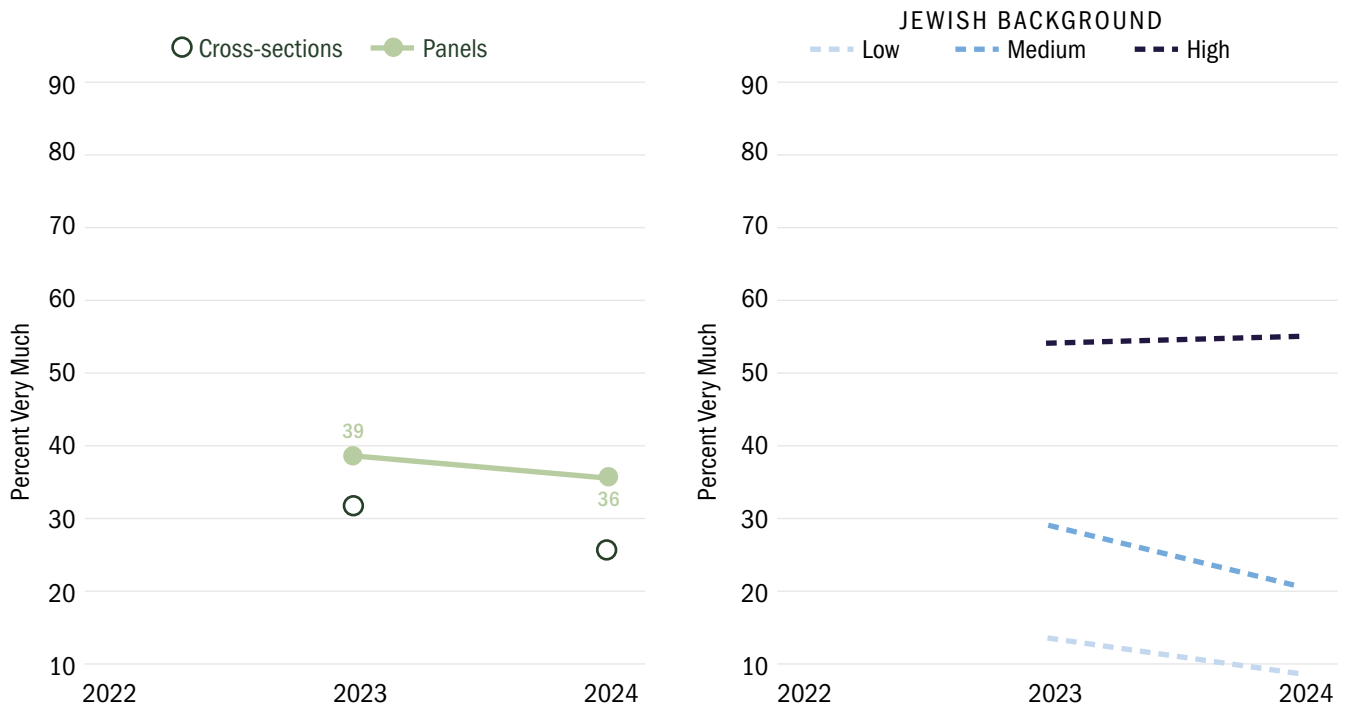
**HOW CLOSE DO YOU FEEL TO A JEWISH COMMUNITY RIGHT NOW?**



Note: N= 1,721 (wave 1) N = 944 (wave 2) N = 1,006 (wave 3) N= 155 (wave 1-2 panel) N = 245 (wave 2-3 panel). The average agreement in cross-sections is shown in hollow circles. Panel results are shown with green lines on the left. On the right, panels are divided into high, medium, and low Jewish background. The overall wave 1-2 and wave 2-3 change is statistically significant. The wave 1-2 change for high and medium background respondents is statistically significant.

**FIGURE 5**

**TO WHAT EXTENT DO YOU FEEL A CONNECTION TO ISRAEL?**



Note: N= 1,721 (wave 1) N = 944 (wave 2) N = 1,006 (wave 3) N= 155 (wave 1-2 panel) N = 245 (wave 2-3 panel). The average agreement in cross-sections is shown in hollow circles. Panel results are shown with green lines on the left. On the right, panels are divided into high, medium, and low Jewish background. Wave 2-3 middle background change is statistically significant.

Similarly, when we ask students if they feel a connection to Israel, more students report feeling “very much” of a connection in 2023 than in 2024. However, the difference is only statistically significant among those in the middle background group. As is evident from these graphs, students with robust Jewish backgrounds were much more likely than other students to say their identity is important, to feel close to a Jewish community, and to feel connected to Israel.

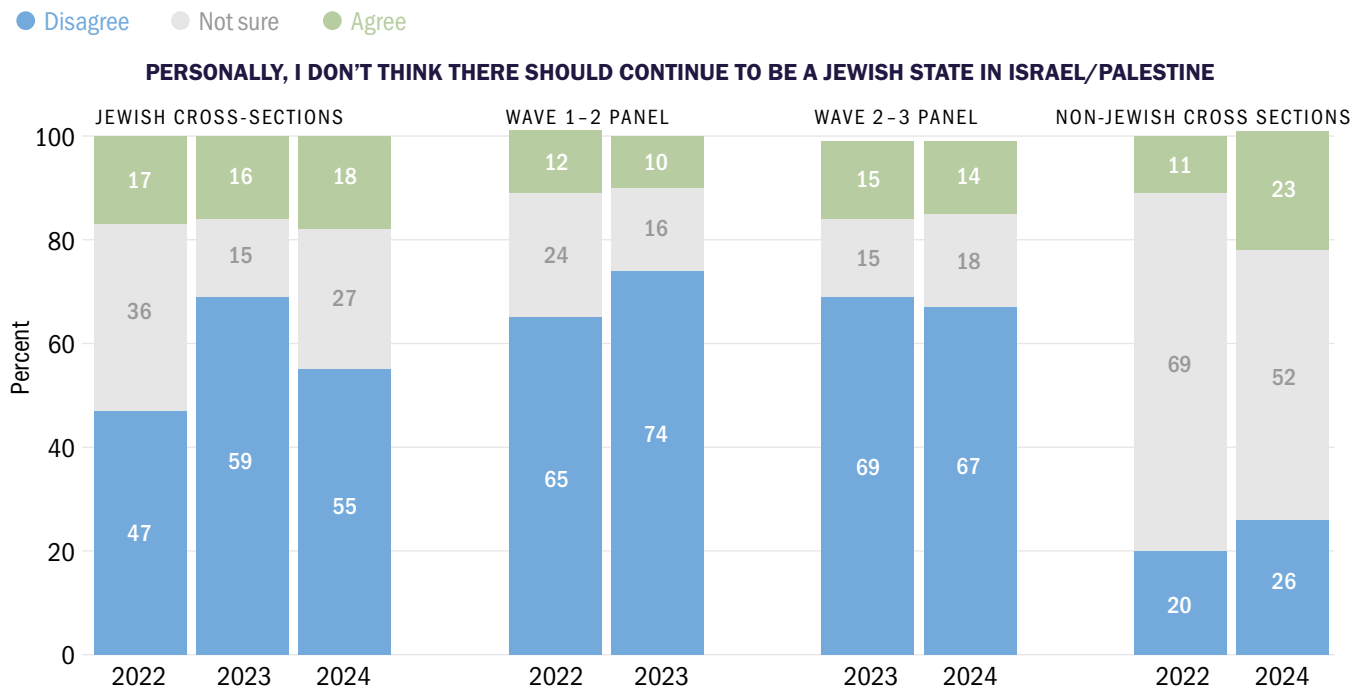
We asked similar questions of non-Jewish students as well. We asked non-Jewish students: *What is the religious, ethnic, or racial group that you personally identify most closely with?* Over half (58%) of non-Jewish students in 2024 identified a group. The others said, “none.” Of those who feel connected to a group, we asked parallel questions to the ones we asked to Jewish students: *How important to you is this religious, ethnic, or racial group identity?* And, *How close do you feel to a religious/ethnic/racial community right now?* Among non-Jewish students with a group identity, 43% said their identity was very important to them (compared to the 45% for Jewish students), and 21% said they feel very close to their community (compared to 27% for Jewish students).

Before presenting additional results related to Jewish identity and participation, we show the responses to the question of whether respondents think there should be a Jewish state of Israel. We analyze this question here to measure how Jewish identity and participation vary based on one’s views about a Jewish state. We asked this agree/disagree question: *Personally, I don’t think there should continue to be a Jewish state in Israel/Palestine.* In Figure 6, we measure the percentage who said “strongly agree” or “agree” (grouped), the percentage who said “strongly disagree” or “disagree” (grouped), and the percentage who said they neither agree nor disagree or did not know.

In all three waves and across the two panels, there is very little movement into or out of the “agree” category among Jewish respondents. About 10-15% of Jewish respondents consistently said they do not think there should be a Jewish state. In the wave 1-2 panel, there is a clear decline of individuals who have no opinion and an increase in those who believe there should be a Jewish state in Israel/Palestine.

This question was asked of both the Jewish and non-Jewish samples in wave 1 and wave 3, but it was not asked of the

**FIGURE 6**



Note: Jewish Respondents: N= 1,721 (wave 1), N = 944 (wave 2), N = 1,006 (wave 3), N= 155 (wave 1-2 panel), N = 245 (wave 2-3 panel). Non-Jewish respondents: 1,033 (wave 1), 1,516 (wave 3). The wave 1-2 panel change is statistically significant.

non-Jewish students in wave 2 (due to a programming error). Approximately twice as many non-Jewish students said there should not be a Jewish state in 2024 (23%) as said the same in 2022 (11%). There is also an increase in the share who believe there should be a Jewish state (26%) in 2024 from 20% in 2022. Recall, however, that the 2022 and 2024 non-Jewish samples were recruited differently, with the latter drawn from students at schools with Jewish communities. As such, we are especially cautious in interpreting any changes between the 2022 and 2024 non-Jewish samples. Approximately twice as many non-Jewish students do not have an opinion about this question compared to Jewish students. If we set aside those who do not have an agree or disagree position (about half the sample), we see that the non-Jewish students are split roughly evenly in 2024 between supporting and opposing a Jewish state. The Jewish students, by comparison, support a Jewish state by a ratio of about 5 to 1. Note that this is the first question in the analysis affected by the change in answer options from “don’t know” to “neither agree nor disagree” between waves 2 and 3. We do not expect that change to affect the percentage of agreement.

Throughout the report, we treat this survey question as a key metric that divides students between those who believe there should be some kind of Jewish state in Israel/Palestine and those who do not. We avoid using the terms “Zionist” and “anti-Zionist” to describe these worldviews because those terms are more complex than the views solicited by this simple survey question. However, given the importance of this question for the report, we examine the kinds of students who agree and disagree with the position. Later, we will also look at other questions to gauge opinions about Israel, such as whether Israel or Hamas is more to blame for the war and what students think about the Netanyahu government.

Jewish students in 2024 who do not believe there should be a Jewish state have a much different sense of Jewish identity compared to Jewish students who do believe there should be a Jewish state in Israel. Among the former group, 23% said

that their Jewish identity is very important to them and 13% said they feel very close to a Jewish community. Among the latter group, 64% said their Jewish identity is very important to them and 42% said they feel very close to a Jewish community.

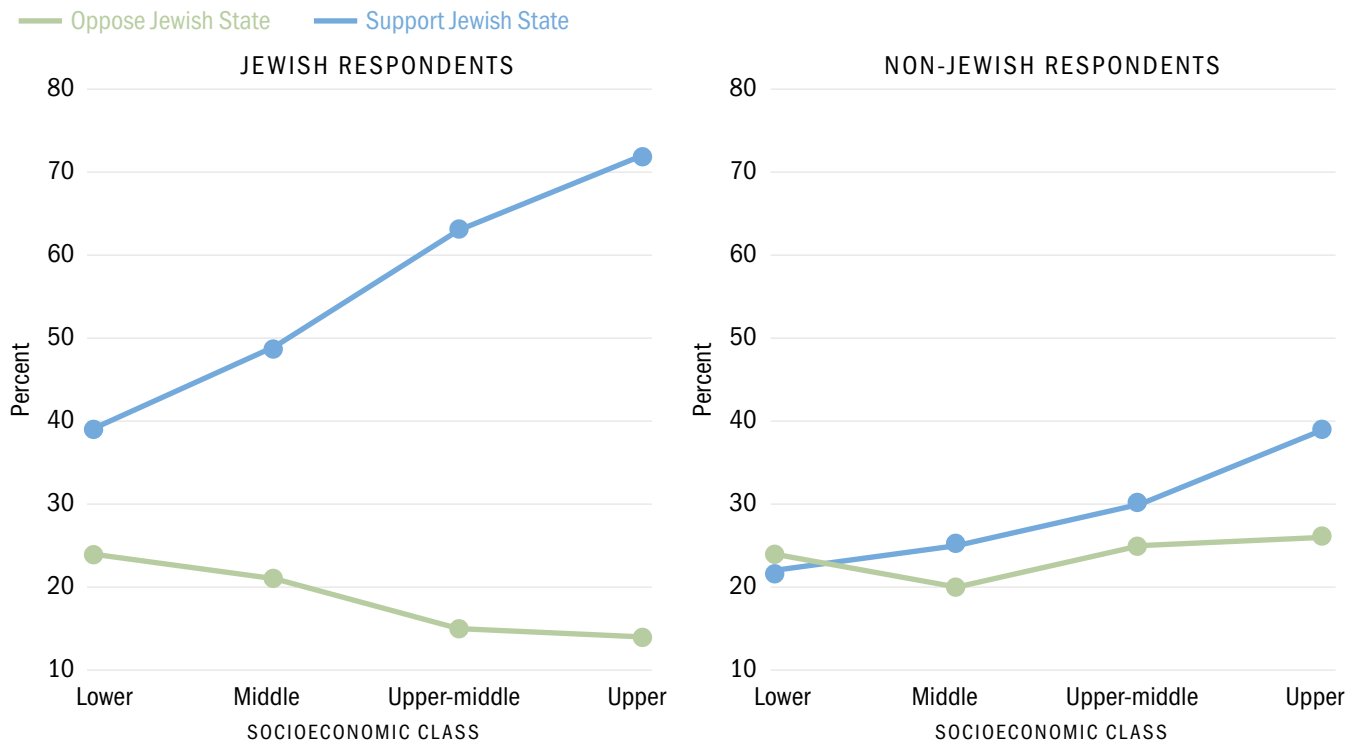
What are the demographic predictors of holding a view that Israel should not exist as a Jewish state? Focusing on the 2024 sample of non-Jewish students first, we find that race, sexual orientation, gender, and ideology are all strong independent predictors. Students who are non-white, female or non-binary, or left-leaning are all significantly more likely to believe that Israel should not exist as a Jewish country compared to non-Jewish students who are white, male, and more conservative.

Among Jewish students, race, gender, and sexual orientation are also predictive of opposing the Jewish state, but other factors are more predictive, namely Jewish background, ideology, and socioeconomic class. Jewish students with a more robust Jewish background and more conservative views are more likely to believe there should be a Jewish state.

What are the demographic predictors of not being sure whether Israel as a Jewish state should continue to exist? Among non-Jewish students, the main predictor is having a more conservative political ideology. Among Jewish students, having a less robust Jewish background, lower socioeconomic class, and identifying as non-white are all predictive of not having an opinion on the matter.

The relationship between socioeconomic class and attitudes toward Israel is worthy of emphasis. In general, there is a strong relationship between Jewish background and class, wherein students with more traditional Jewish backgrounds tend to come from wealthier families. (Note that the college student population includes few *Haredi* Jews, who are on average lower in socioeconomic status but tend not to attend college.) Even upon controlling for Jewish background and political ideology, there is still a strong relationship between class and attitudes toward Israel in 2024. The higher a person is on the socioeconomic spectrum, the more supportive that person is of a Jewish state.

FIGURE 7



Note: 2024 cross-section. Respondents' views on whether they support the existence of Israel as a Jewish state, by their family's socioeconomic class. In the graph, "lower" includes individuals who said their family is either lower class or working class. Sample sizes range from 51 (upper class, not Jewish) to 640 (middle class, not Jewish).

The figure above shows the strength of the relationship between class and Israel attitudes for both Jewish and non-Jewish students in wave 3. For non-Jewish students, students from wealthier backgrounds tend to support the existence of Israel more, with support varying from about 20% among lower- or working-class families to about 40% for upper-class families. Among Jewish students, support goes from about 40% among lower/working class students (about 15% of Jewish students are lower/working class in this sample) to about 75% among upper class students (about 9% of Jewish students in the sample). Among Jewish students, socioeconomic status is negatively correlated with opposition to a Jewish state: an increase in socioeconomic class for Jewish students is correlated with a decline in opposition to a Jewish state, which is not the case for the non-Jewish sample.

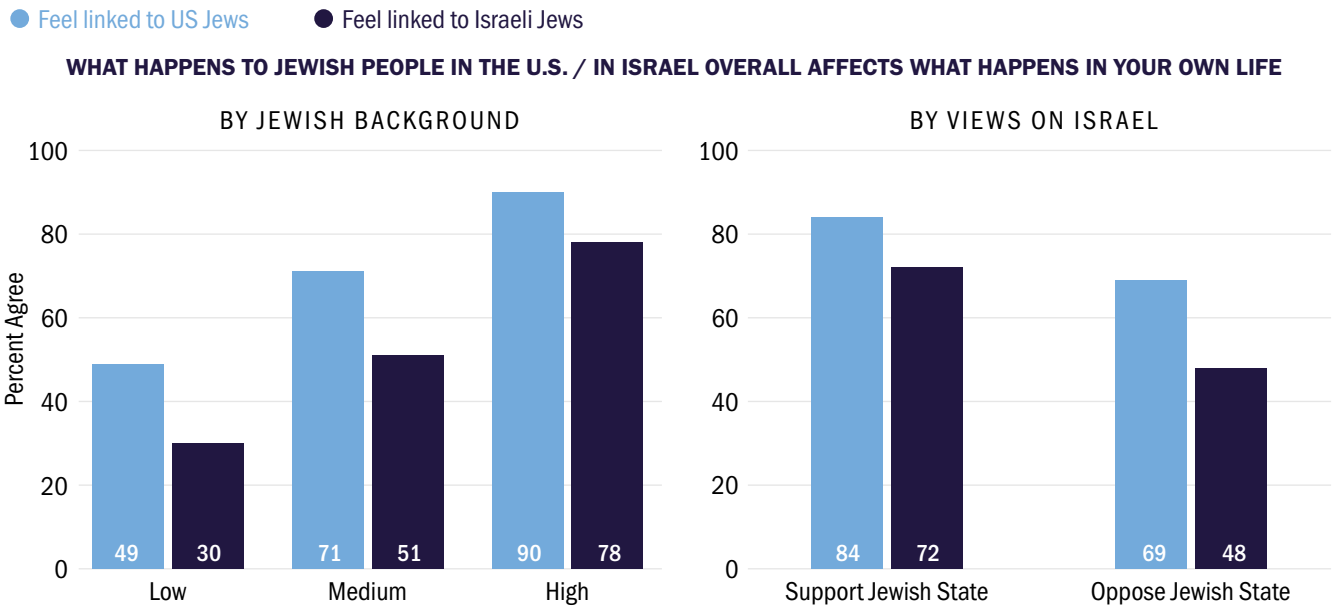
A relationship like this is visible in the 2022 data as well, before the war. Among students with high *background* scores in all samples, there is no relationship between class and Israel attitudes. But among students with lower *background*

scores, there is a consistent effect. Later in the report, we revisit these socioeconomic patterns.

Finally, on the topic of identity, we asked new questions in 2024 that we had not asked in prior waves. These questions measure a sense of *linked fate* that Jewish students feel, a concept we borrow from Prof. Michael Dawson's research on race.<sup>7</sup> To what extent do Jewish students feel that their own well-being is connected to what happens to either Jews in the United States or Jews in Israel? Across the whole sample, 70% of Jewish respondents agreed with the first statement and 54% agreed with the second. Agreement rises with levels of Jewish background, as noted in the next graph.

Responses also vary with views about Israel, but perhaps less than one might expect. Among Jewish students who do not support the Jewish state of Israel, 69% believe that what happens to American Jews overall affects them personally and 48% believe that what happens to Israeli Jews overall affects them personally. These numbers are 84% and 72%, respectively, for students who believe Israel should exist as a Jewish state.

**FIGURE 8**



NOTE: 2024 cross-section. Background N: 344 (low) 300 (medium) 362 (high). Israel attitudes N: 186 (oppose) 550 (support).

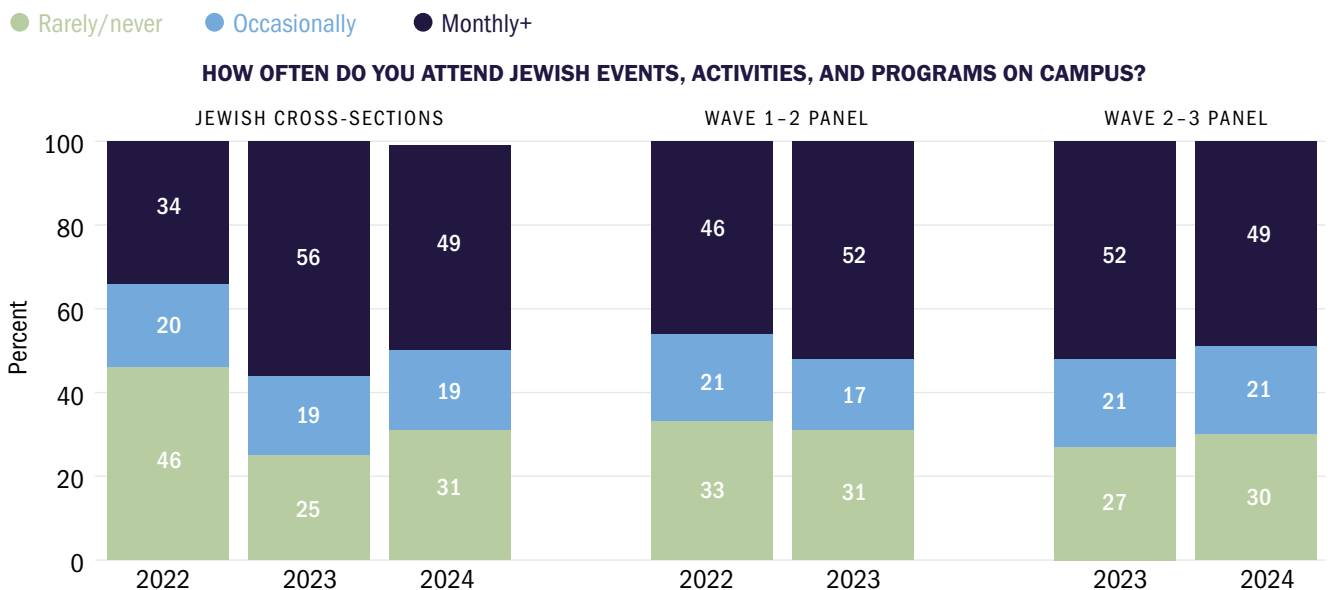
### C. PARTICIPATION

In all three waves, we asked Jewish students about their participation in Jewish activities on campus. We divide the responses into those who attend at least once or twice a

month, those who attend a few times a year, and those who say they seldom or never attend Jewish activities.

Between 2022 and 2023, we see increases in monthly+ participation in the panel (and the cross-sections), though

**FIGURE 9**

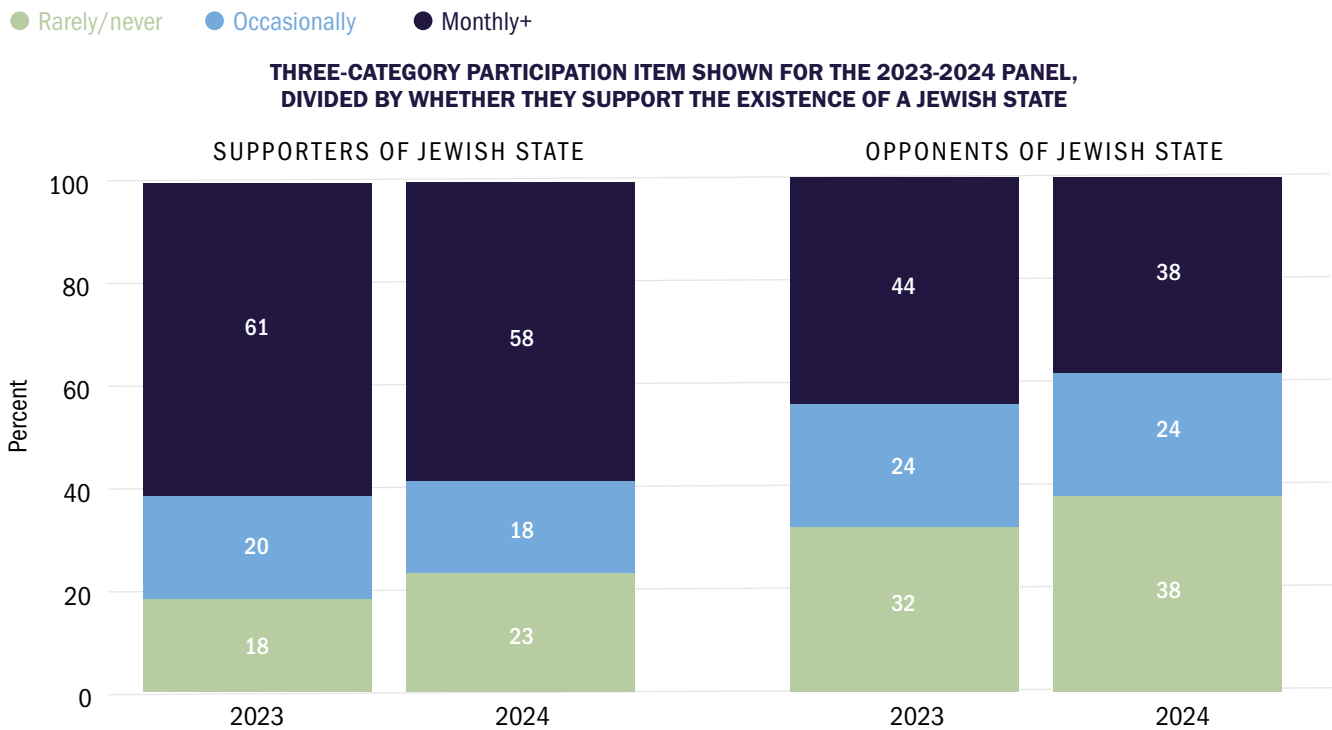


NOTE: N for cross-sections: 1,721 (2022) 944 (2023) 1,006 (2024). N for panels: 155 (wave 1-2) 231 (wave 2-3).

the change in the panel is not statistically significant. The panel suggests a decline between 2023 and 2024 of the same magnitude as the increase. If we subset the Jewish students by level of Jewish background, the panel data suggests the most movement between waves was among students with high *background* scores. In 2023, 72% of them said they were attending monthly or more. In 2024, that percentage dropped to 65%, a statistically significant change. Between 2023-2024, the high *background* students seem to have reverted to their behavior from before the war started.

Looking at the relationship between attendance and attitudes toward Israel in 2024, we see that 65% of monthly attendees support the existence of a Jewish state, 17% do not support a Jewish state, and 18% are not sure. Among occasional attendees, 52% support a Jewish state, 22% do not, and 26% aren't sure. Among those who rarely or never attend, 40% support a Jewish state, 19% do not, and 41% are not sure. Thus, the main difference between attendees and non-attendees on this metric is not that opponents of the Jewish state are less represented among attendees, but rather that those who do not attend Jewish activities are much less likely to have an opinion.

**FIGURE 10**



Note: Three-category participation item shown for the 2023-2024 panel, divided by whether Jewish respondents support the existence of a Jewish state (N=163) or not (N = 34). The change over time is significant for Israel supporters.

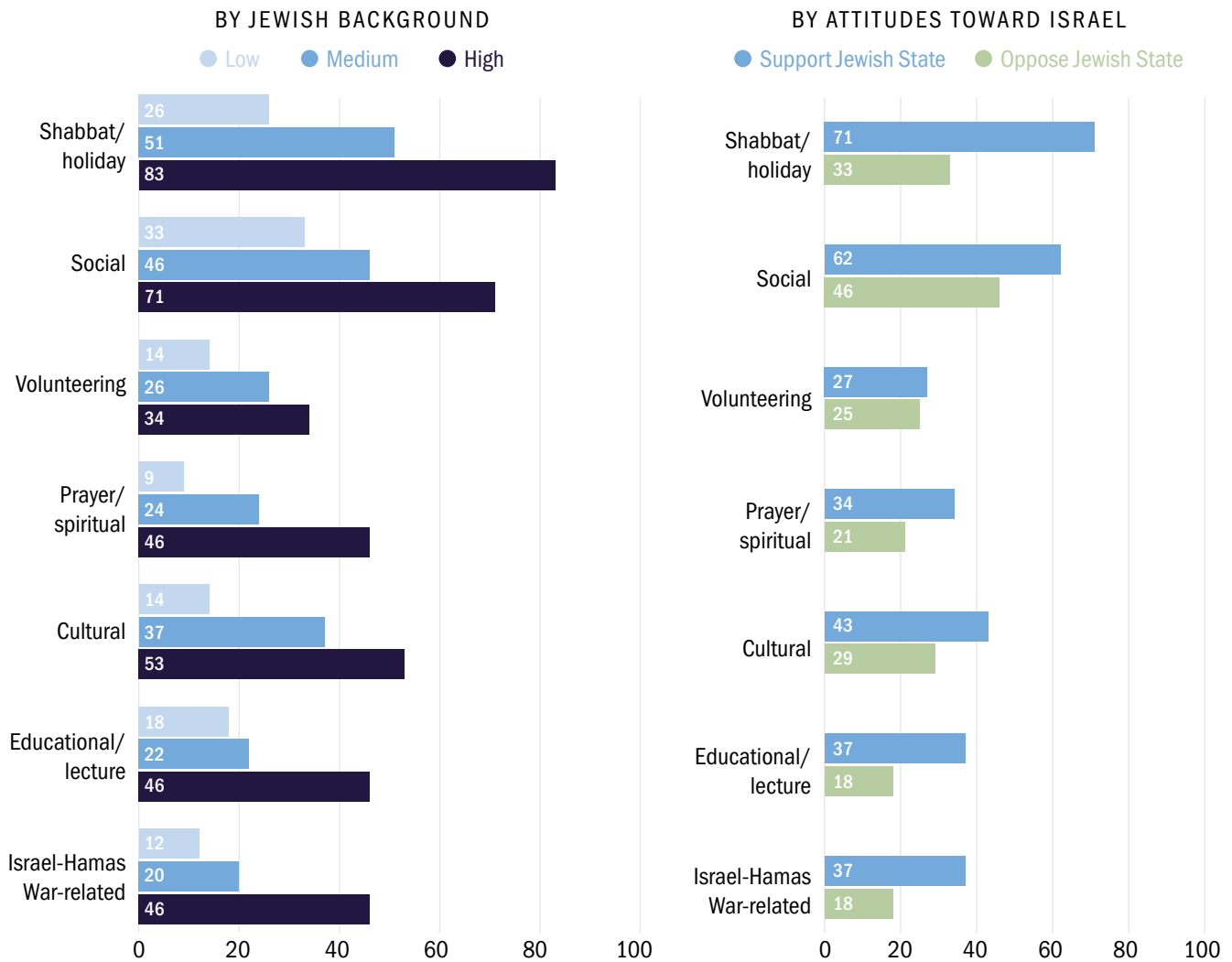
Figure 10 focuses on the 2023-2024 panel and tracks change over time in Jewish activity attendance, subdivided by respondents' support of the existence of a Jewish state. As noted, in both groups, there is an increase of 5-6 percentage points of students saying they rarely or never attend Jewish activities and events. The change is statistically significant for the supporters of a Jewish state. For the opponents, the sample in the panel is small (N=34), and so the results are not significant.

In 2024, we asked students what kind of Jewish events they attended this past year. We were interested to know the extent to which participation was focused on Israel-related programming. We show results for the full sample, divided by students of different backgrounds, and by support of the existence of Israel as a Jewish state.

The most noteworthy finding in Figure 11 is simply that Israel-Hamas War-related programs were not especially popular draws for students. Most students, even most

**FIGURE 11**

**WHAT KINDS OF JEWISH EVENTS, ACTIVITIES, AND PROGRAMS HAVE YOU ATTENDED THIS SCHOOL YEAR?**



NOTE: 2024 cross-section. Percentages shown. N by background: 344 (low) 300 (medium) 362 (high). N by Israel attitudes: 550 (support) 186 (oppose).

students from more robust Jewish backgrounds, did not attend a program directly related to the war. Across all groups, the most common activities remain Shabbat/holiday programs and social programs. Most Jewish students (54%) attended a Shabbat/holiday program. Most (51%) also attended a social program. About a quarter to a third of Jewish students in the sample participated in other kinds of programs, such as volunteering programs, cultural programs, or programs focused on the war in Israel. For all kinds of programs, students with higher background scores participated more than students with lower background scores. Except for volunteering-oriented programs --- which supporters of a Jewish state did at similar rates as opponents --- students who support the existence of Israel as a Jewish state participated much more than those who do not.

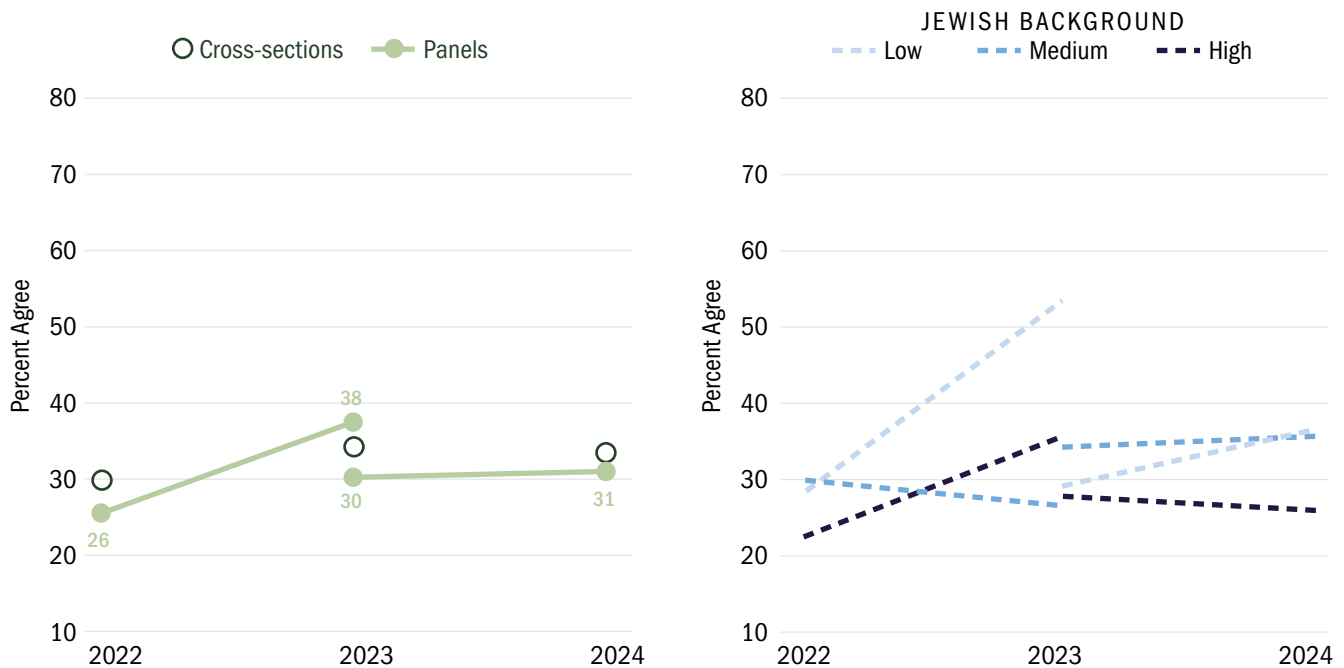
In all three waves, we asked students if they had to hide some of their opinions to fit in at Jewish activities on campus. Figure 12 shows a steep increase in students agreeing with this statement between Waves 1 and 2. The change is statistically significant in the panel overall, as well in both the high *background* and low *background* subgroups. In

other words, students with robust Jewish backgrounds and those with hardly any Jewish background both expressed a heightened sense of needing to hide their views in Jewish spaces on campus from 2022 to 2023. The 2023-2024 panel shows no indication that feelings on this question returned to their 2022 levels. Note that this is the second question affected by the change in response options from “don’t know” to “neither agree nor disagree”; however, the clear change in the graph is the one between 2022 and 2023, when the question wording was identical.

While high-*background* students and low-*background* students both increased their rate of agreeing that they hide their views in Jewish spaces, the students with lower *background* scores were more likely to feel this way. Similarly, in all three waves, students who said that Israel should not continue to exist as a Jewish state were about twice as likely to agree with the statement that they hide some of their views to fit in at Jewish activities, compared to students who did think there should be a Jewish state or to students who were not sure what they think.

**FIGURE 12**

**IN ORDER TO FIT IN AT JEWISH ACTIVITIES ON CAMPUS, I FEEL I NEED TO HIDE SOME OF MY OPINIONS**



NOTE: N: 1,461 (wave 1), 857 (wave 2), 1,006 (wave 3), 125 (wave 1-2) panel, 212 (wave 2-3) panel. Hollow circles show cross-sections, green lines show panels. In the right-side plot, panels are divided according to Jewish background. Change in wave 1-2 panel is statistically significant overall and for high and low background groups.