

Political Identities and Sympathies

The 2023 and 2024 waves of the study asked about how students perceive politics both in the United States and in Israel. In the previous section, we analyzed one political question: whether Israel should exist as a Jewish country. Here, we explore a broader set of political themes.

A. IDEOLOGY AND IDEOLOGICAL IDENTITIES

In both waves 2 and 3, we asked students to place themselves on a 5-point scale of political ideology: very liberal, liberal, moderate, conservative, very conservative, or not sure.

TABLE 1

Ideology	Jewish		Not Jewish	
	Wave 2	Wave 3	Wave 2	Wave 3
V. Lib.	19%	19	16	17
Lib.	37	40	43	40
Moderate	30	28	28	31
Con./V. Con.	13	13	12	12
<i>N</i>	903	956	1408	1408

NOTE: Percentages shown. Respondents who answer “not sure” are excluded from the above table. They amount to 4-5% of the Jewish sample and 7-9% of the non-Jewish sample.

The responses are quite consistent across waves. About 15-20% of students, Jewish and non-Jewish, identified as very liberal, about 40% identified as liberal, about 30% identified

as moderate, and 12-13% identified as conservative. We combine the “conservative” and “very conservative” categories because few college students identified as very conservative (about 2%).

In addition, we asked students about their “ideological identities.” Do they identify as leftist, socialist, progressive, libertarian, Christian conservative, or alt-right? Students could choose more than one category, or none at all. The most popular category was progressive. A third of Jewish students (32% in wave 2, 34% in wave 3) identified as progressive, as did 28% of non-Jewish students. The next biggest category was leftist, with a quarter of the samples identifying this way. Socialist garnered about 12% of respondents, and libertarian 5-7% in both Jewish and non-Jewish samples. Some 6-7% of the non-Jewish students identified as Christian conservative. In the 2023 wave, 3% of non-Jewish students and 2% of Jewish students identified as alt-right, but in the 2024 wave, no non-Jewish students and 4% of Jewish students indicated that they identified that way.

When measuring ideology later in this report, we will focus on the 4-point ideological scale rather than the ideological identities. However, it is interesting to note how the ideological identities map onto a standard ideological scale. Students who identified as socialists tend to be the most liberal. Most of them marked “very liberal” when they selected from the ideological scale. Moving left to right in ideological space, the next group is leftists followed by progressives. The median leftist and progressive labeled themselves as liberal rather than very liberal. Next are the libertarians, who typically identified as moderates in this college-student sample, then alt-right, who identified between moderate and conservative. Finally, Christian conservatives primarily identified as conservative on the ideological scale.

B. OPINION ON POLITICAL LEADERS AND VOTING

Because this survey was conducted during the 2024 presidential election campaign in the United States, the 2023 and 2024 waves asked the students for whom they planned on voting. We asked, *In the 2024 Presidential election, if the Democratic nominee is Joe Biden and the Republican nominee is Donald Trump, who would you vote for?* Students could select Biden, Trump, a third-party candidate, or they could say they did not plan to vote or were not sure. Wave 3 of the study was finished by June, prior to President Biden’s decision not to seek re-election.

As noted in the table below, in both waves the Jewish students were more likely to say they would vote for Biden and Trump, and less likely to say they would vote for a third-party candidate or abstain than the non-Jewish students were. The panel data shows that Jewish and non-Jewish students who were surveyed in both waves demonstrate a shift away from voting for Biden. These changes are statistically significant among Jewish and non-Jewish students alike.

TABLE 2

	Cross-Section				Panel			
	Jewish		Not Jewish		Jewish		Not Jewish	
	Wave 2	Wave 3	Wave 2	Wave 3	Wave 2	Wave 3	Wave 2	Wave 3
Biden	53%	52	46	42	62	56	47	41
Trump	17	17	12	14	13	16	9	12
Third-party cand.	10	9	13	16	6	8	15	17
Abstain	5	5	9	11	5	5	11	9
Not sure	15	16	19	17	15	15	19	21
N	944	1006	1549	1516	245	245	320	320

NOTE: Q: In the 2024 Presidential election, if the Democratic nominee is Joe Biden and the Republican nominee is Donald Trump, who would you vote for? Percentages shown.

In wave 2 (but not wave 3) we asked Jewish students about the leadership of the Netanyahu government in Israel. We asked: *Overall, how would you rate Benjamin Netanyahu’s leadership of Israel.*

TABLE 3

	Overall	By Jewish Background		
		Low	Medium	High
Poor	43%	36	43	51
Only fair	18	16	19	18
Good	15	20	14	10
Excellent	4	5	3	3
Don’t know	21	23	21	18
N	944	322	258	298

NOTE: 2023 cross-section, Jewish respondents. Q: Overall, how would you rate Benjamin Netanyahu’s leadership of Israel? Percentages shown.

Jewish students mostly offered negative reviews of the Israeli Prime Minister. As Table 3 shows, most Jewish students who had an opinion rated Netanyahu poorly. Students from

more engaged Jewish backgrounds (who tend to be more supportive of the *existence* of a Jewish state) rated Netanyahu significantly worse than students who are from less engaged backgrounds. That is not only because high-background students were less likely to say they did not know; even among students who offered a view of Netanyahu’s leadership, those with more robust Jewish backgrounds rated his leadership significantly worse.

C. SYMPATHY AND BLAME

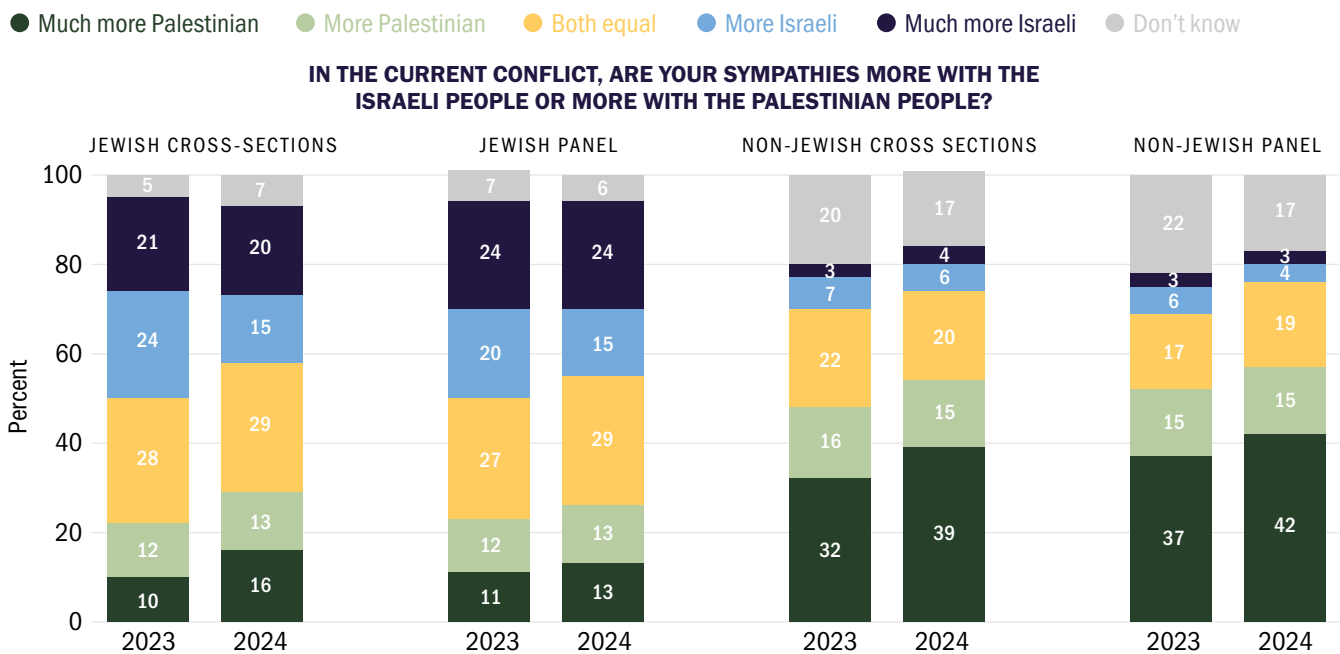
We asked students about their sympathies for Israelis and Palestinians in the current conflict. Students could respond that they sympathized much more with Palestinian people, more with the Palestinian people, both equally, more with the Israeli people, or much more with the Israeli people.

Jewish respondents are fairly evenly distributed across categories. For instance, in the 2024 cross-section, 35% said their sympathies lied more with Israelis, 29% said both equally, and 29% said more with the Palestinians. In the Jewish panel, we do not see much movement across categories from fall 2023 to spring 2024.

The non-Jewish sample is also stable across waves. At the beginning of the war in wave 2, the non-Jewish cross-section was five times more likely to say their sympathies were with Palestinians, and the ratio was similar in wave 3. In the non-Jewish panel, however, we do see a 5-percentage point reduction in the respondents who answered they did not know and a 5-percentage point increase in the respondents who said their sympathies are much more with the Palestinians.

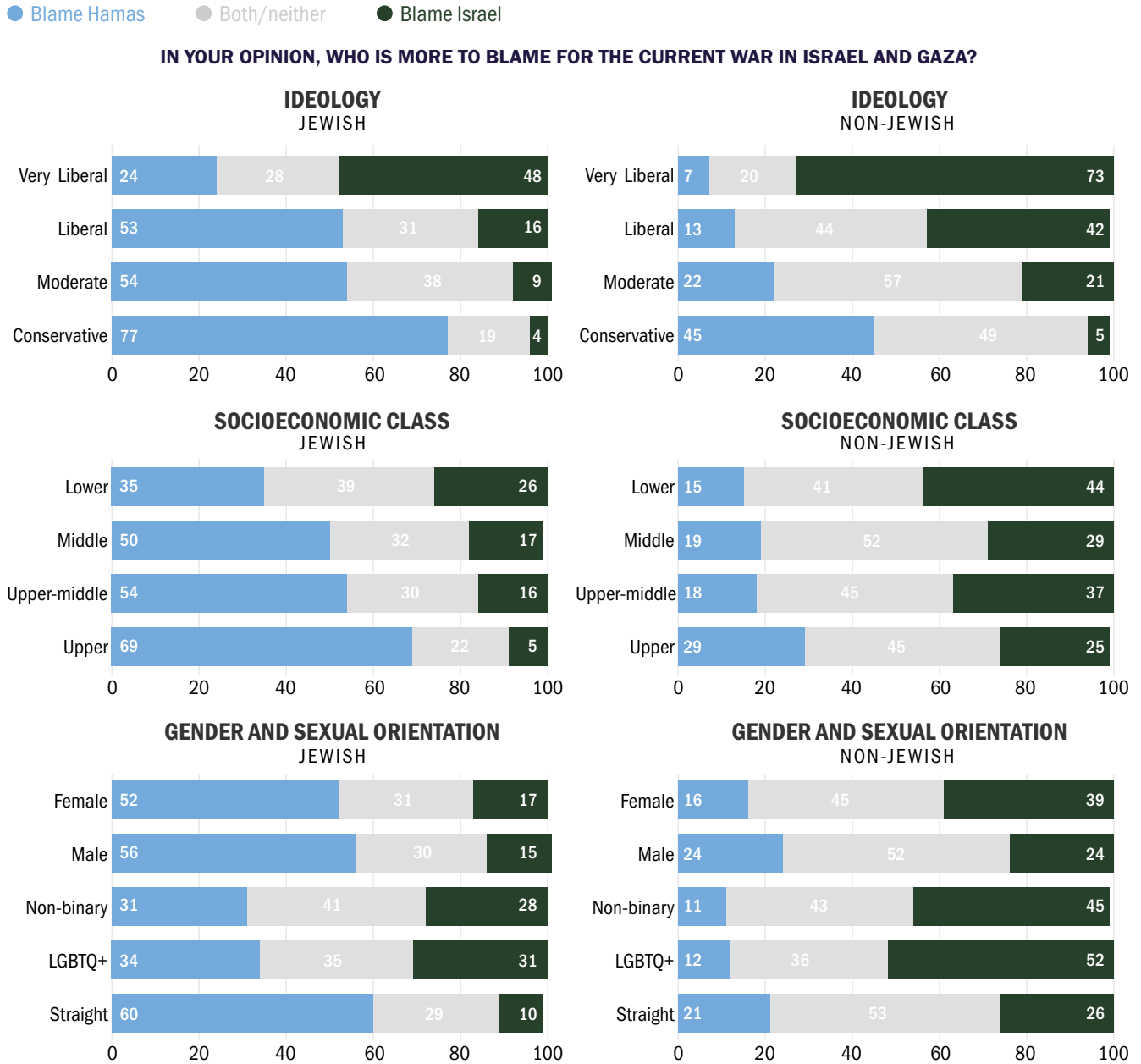
In 2024, we asked an additional question to gauge how students were perceiving the conflict in Israel and Gaza. We asked who they thought was to blame for the current war. They could answer Israel, Hamas, both equally, or neither. The Jewish students overwhelmingly blamed Hamas over Israel and the non-Jewish students felt the opposite. Fifty-one percent of the Jewish students blamed Hamas and 18% of them blamed Israel. The remainder blamed both equally (22%) or thought neither party was to blame (9%). Among non-Jewish students, 18% blamed Hamas, 35% blamed Israel, 30% said both, and 17% said neither party was to blame.

FIGURE 13



NOTE: For cross sections. Percentages shown. N = 944 (wave 2, Jewish); 1006 (wave 3, Jewish), 1549 (wave 2, Non-Jewish), 1516 (wave 3, Non-Jewish). For panels, N= 245 (Jewish panel), 320 (non-Jewish panel).

FIGURE 14



Note: 2024 cross-section. Category counts range from 51 (Non-Jewish, Upper Class) to 992 (Non-Jewish, Straight).

For the analysis in Figure 14, we combine the “both” and “neither” categories. We find a strong relationship between ideology and the assignment of blame in both the Jewish and non-Jewish samples. Among students who identified as very liberal, Jewish students were 2:1 more likely to blame Israel than Hamas, and non-Jewish students were 10:1 more likely to blame Israel. In all other ideological groups, Jewish

students primarily blamed Hamas. Among non-Jewish students, liberal and moderate students were as likely or more likely to blame Israel than Hamas. The very liberal Jewish students are distinct from other Jewish students in their attitudes about Israel, and they are also distinct from non-Jewish students who are ideologically very liberal. Their views are somewhere in between the patterns we see for other Jews and the patterns we see for very liberal students who are not Jewish.

A Jewish student's socioeconomic status is also a strong indicator of their answer to this question. The wealthier one's family, the more likely they were to blame Hamas for the war. Even when controlling for Jewish background, ideology, and whether one specifically has been to Israel before (all of which are predictive of blame attribution), socioeconomic class remains highly significant as an independent predictor of blame. Sexual orientation is another significant predictor of blame. As noted in the graph, LGBTQ+ students were significantly more likely to blame Israel than heterosexual students, and this relationship holds even when controlling for political ideology.

Among non-Jewish students, religion (not displayed on the graph) is also highly predictive of attitudes. Christians and Hindus are roughly split in their blame attribution with about a quarter blaming Israel, a quarter blaming Hamas, and half blaming both/neither. Atheists and agnostics were much more likely to blame Israel: 43% blamed Israel versus 15% who blamed Hamas. Among Muslims (N=53) 66% blamed Israel, 8% blamed Hamas, and 26% blamed both/neither.

D. VIEWS ON JEWISH INDIGENOUSNESS AND TARGETING CIVILIANS

In both waves 2 and 3, we asked non-Jewish respondents if they thought Jewish people were indigenous to the land of Israel and if they thought all Israeli civilians should be considered legitimate targets for Hamas. In future research that asks these questions, it would be useful to also ask parallel questions about Palestinian indigeneity and the targeting of Palestinian civilians. We were not able to include those additional items here.

Students in both waves, including in the panels, answered these questions very similarly in 2023 and 2024 (in spite of the answer option shifting from "don't know" to "neither agree nor disagree"). Most students in the cross-sections

(53% in wave 2, 56% in wave 3) neither agreed nor disagreed with the statement about indigeneity. Of those who had an opinion, though, they were more likely to believe Jewish people are *not* indigenous (25% said Jews are not indigenous, versus 19% who said Jews are indigenous in 2024). In the panel, the opinion that Jewish people are not indigenous was stable across waves at 30-31%. However, there was a five-percentage point shift away from the view that Jewish people are indigenous, from 18% to 13%, with movement into the "neither agree nor disagree" category.

Views on whether all Israeli civilians should be considered legitimate targets of Hamas were stable across waves. In both waves of the panel, 3% agreed with the statement versus 68-70% who disagreed, with the remaining group offering no opinion.

Figure 15 shows the relationship between political ideology and agreement with questions about indigeneity and civilian death in both the 2023 and 2024 cross-sections. The graph shows percentage agreement among all respondents, including those who said they neither agreed nor disagreed. In both years, there is a strong, statistically significant relationship between more conservative ideology and a belief that Jewish people are indigenous to the land of Israel.

The plot on the right shows the relationship with believing Israeli civilians should be considered legitimate targets of Hamas. Again, in both years, there is a significant relationship between conservative ideology and believing Israeli civilians should be considered legitimate targets, though the relationship is more muted in 2024.

Among non-Jewish students, if we look at racial and religious subgroups, only white students and Christian students were more likely to say that Jews are indigenous to the land of Israel than not. But even among these groups, the majority neither agrees nor disagrees with the statement.