

Social Tensions on Campus

In previous sections, we studied the students’ own attitudes about Israel and the ongoing war. Here, we broaden the analysis to examine the social ecosystem on campus.

A. CAMPUS DIVERSITY IN VIEWS ABOUT ISRAEL AND PALESTINE

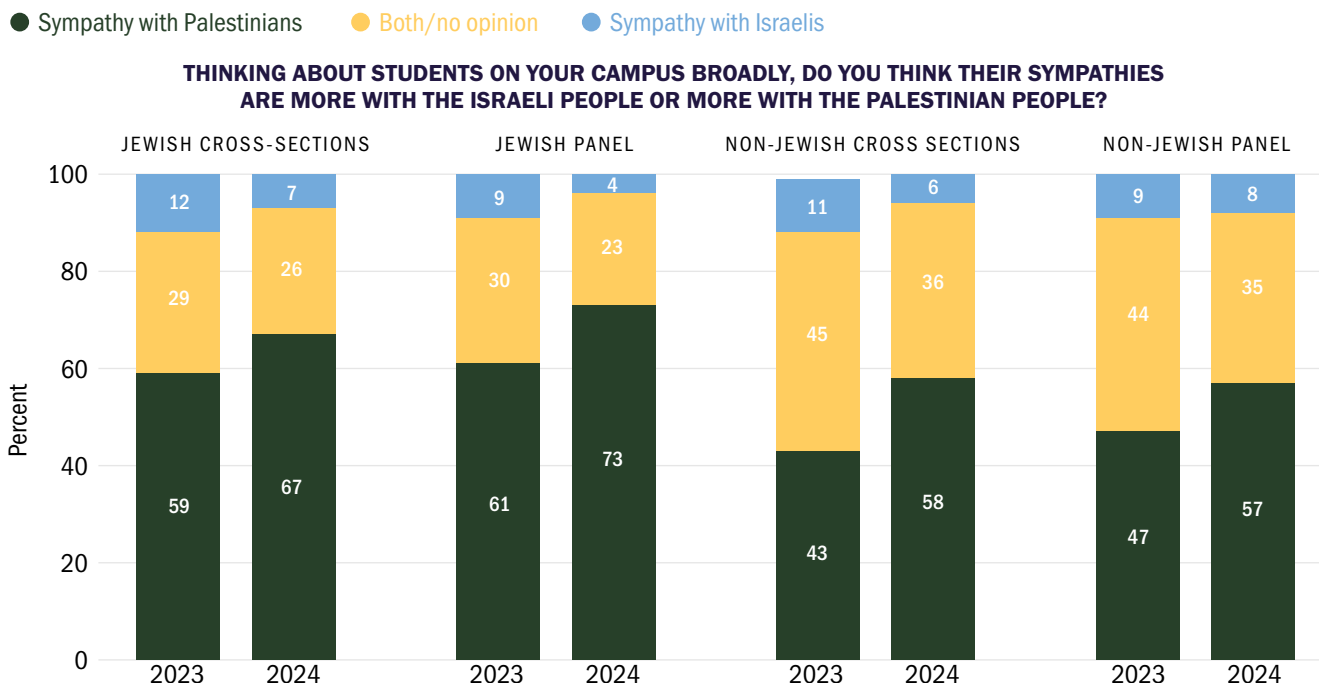
Our first line of inquiry in this section is to examine whether Jewish and non-Jewish students perceive that they are in social bubbles where nearly everyone agrees with them about the Israel-Palestine conflict. Jewish students and non-Jewish students may perceive that they are in the same ideological bubble, no ideological bubble, or in siloed bubbles.

We asked students in 2023 and 2024 the following question: *Thinking about students on your campus broadly, do you think their sympathies are more with the Israeli people or more with the Palestinian people?* Figure 20 shows three noteworthy patterns. First, both Jewish and non-Jewish students are overwhelmingly more likely to believe that students on their

campus, in general, sympathize mainly with Palestinians rather than mainly with Israelis. Second, Jewish students perceive the sympathies to be more lopsided than non-Jewish students do. For instance, in the 2024 cross-section, 67% of Jewish students versus 58% of non-Jewish students said that students were mostly sympathetic to Palestinians. Third, in both the Jewish and non-Jewish panels, there is a clear, statistically significant increase between 2023 and 2024 in students believing their peers sympathize more with Palestinians.

Given that much of the news media attention around campuses this past year was focused on elite schools, we checked whether the social environment differed at these schools. We group students who attend Ivy League schools, plus Stanford, Berkeley, U Chicago, and MIT. We have 155 Jewish students and 168 non-Jewish students in our sample from these schools. For both Jewish and non-Jewish students, those at the elite schools are much more likely to believe that their campus sympathizes mainly with Palestinians. At the elite schools, 73% of non-Jewish students and 83% of Jewish students feel this way, versus at non-elite schools, where only 56% of non-Jewish students and 64% of Jewish students do.

FIGURE 20



NOTE: N for Jewish respondents: 918 (2023), 985 (2024), 237 (wave 2-3 panel). N for non-Jewish respondents: 1,549 (2023), 1,516 (2024), 320 (wave 2-3 panel).

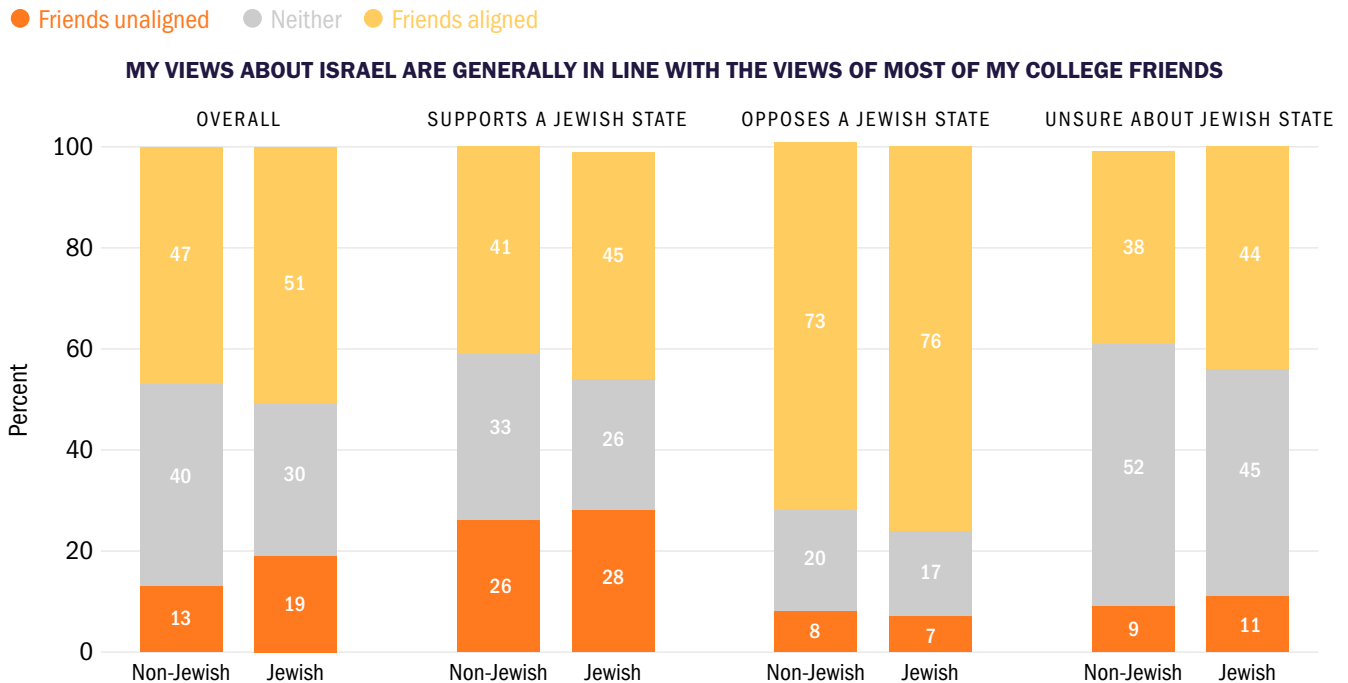
We asked non-Jewish students in 2023 and 2024 to categorize the social media posts they see from peers at school. Were the social media posts they see pro-Israeli, pro-Palestinian, or a mix of both. In 2024, 6% of students said they saw mainly pro-Israeli posts and 20% said they saw a mix of perspectives. Three in four non-Jewish students (74%) said the social media posts they saw from students at school were mostly pro-Palestinian rather than mixed or mostly pro-Israeli. In the 2023-2024 panel, we see that this lopsidedness increased over the course of the school year. In 2023, 62% of students said that social media posts from peers were mostly pro-Palestinian, 34% said mixed, and 4% mostly pro-Israeli. By 2024, 76% of those same students said the social media posts they saw were pro-Palestinian, and only 18% said they were mixed in perspective. This change is statistically significant. On this item, there are no differences in perceptions between students at elite schools and non-elite schools, or between supporters or opponents of the Jewish state.

We drill down farther in social relationships to the students' own friend group. We asked whether their views on Israel align with the views of most of their friends. For both

Jewish and non-Jewish students, about half (51% and 47%, respectively) say that most of their friends agree with them on Israel, whereas 19% and 13% disagree. We see no noticeable movement in the Jewish or non-Jewish panel between 2023 and 2024. Note that this question is one in which the answer options changed from “don't know” to “neither agree nor disagree” between wave 2 and wave 3.

Figure 21 shows, however, there are clear differences between the social bubbles of students who support the existence of Israel and those who oppose it. Students who support the existence of Israel, Jewish and non-Jewish alike, are much more likely to be in social networks with friends who primarily disagree with them about Israel compared to students who oppose the existence of the state of Israel. Just 7% of Jewish students who oppose a Jewish state say their social network is mostly unaligned with them. The same pattern holds if we look at the question of who is to blame for the current war. Jewish students who blame Israel for the current war are 24 percentage points more likely to say their friends are aligned with them than Jewish students who blame Hamas for the current war.

FIGURE 21



NOTE: 2024 cross-section. Samples size range from 186 (Jewish, opposes Jewish state) to 1,516 (Non-Jewish, overall).

TABLE 9

		2022	2023	2024
Supporters of a Jewish State	Friends Aligned	42%	44	45
	Friends Unaligned	30	37	28
Opponents of a Jewish State	Friends Aligned	65	68	76
	Friends Unaligned	17	26	7

Note: Jewish students only. Cell percentages show the rate of agreement or disagreement with the statement: “My views about Israel are generally in line with the views of most of my college friends.” N ranges from 155 (2023 opponents of Jewish state) to 817 (2022 supporters of a Jewish state).

Table 9 shows that this pattern is consistent with what we saw in 2022 and 2023. The relative political homogeneity of students who oppose a Jewish state is not a function of the current war in Israel. It is a persistent finding that is clear across survey waves.

Interestingly, if we look at opinion of the Netanyahu government in the 2023 wave, we find that 60% of Jewish students who rated the government good or excellent said their friends mostly align with them (N=175), whereas 47% of Jewish students who rated the government poor said their friends mostly align with them (N=414). Recall that

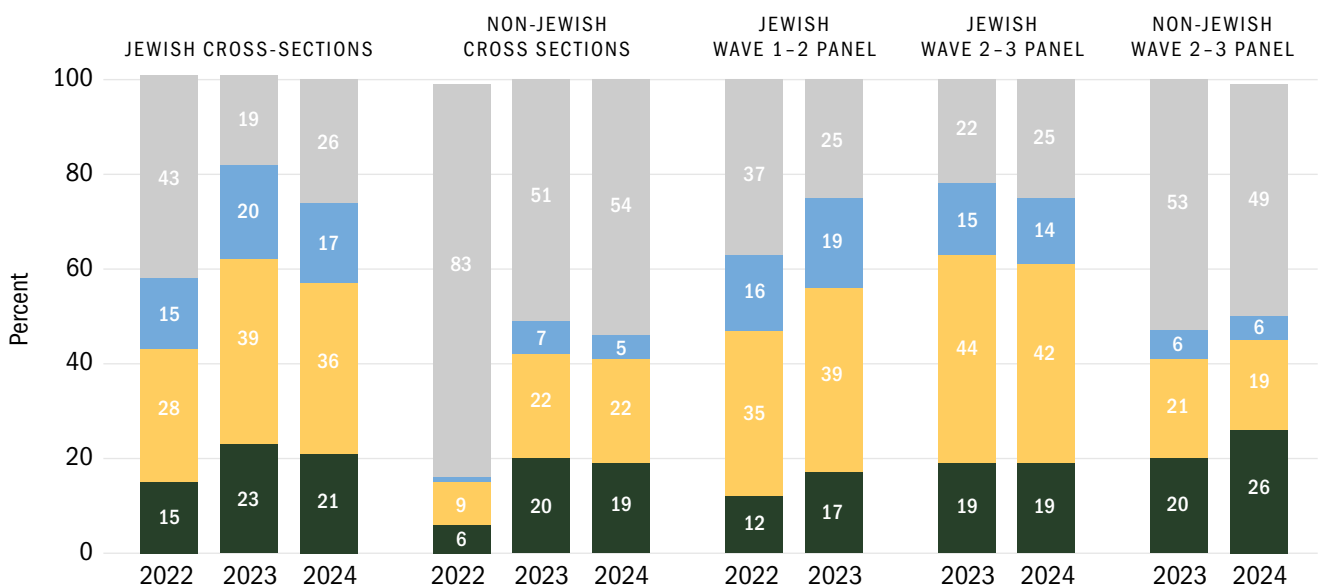
students with robust Jewish backgrounds are both more likely to support the existence of a Jewish state *and* oppose the Netanyahu government. These are the students least likely to be in social bubbles with like-minded students.

Next, in Figure 22, we examine respondents’ evaluations of the Jewish community on campus, in terms of how they believe the Jewish community deals with Israel politics. In all three waves, we asked students if they thought the Jewish community on campus was too supportive of Israel, not supportive enough of Israel, about right, or they did not know.

FIGURE 22

● Too supportive of Israel ● About right ● Not supportive enough ● Don't know

WHICH OF THESE STATEMENTS COMES CLOSEST TO YOUR VIEWS ABOUT THE JEWISH COMMUNITY ON CAMPUS?



Note: Q: Which of these statements comes closest to your views about the Jewish community on campus? The Jewish community on campus...a.) is too supportive of Israel, b.) is not supportive enough of Israel, c.) supports Israel at about the right level, d.) I don't know. N ranges from 155 (wave 1-2 Jewish panel) to 1,721 (wave 1 Jewish cross-section).

Between waves 1 and 2, more Jewish students formed a view on this question, as evidenced by the decline of “don’t know” answers. Of those who offered an opinion, the plurality of Jewish students across all waves and panels said the Jewish community on their campus supports Israel at the right level. The rest were evenly split between thinking the community is too pro-Israel and not pro-Israel enough.

As the graph above shows, the non-Jewish students mostly had no opinion on this matter in 2022. Recall, though, that in 2022 our sample of non-Jewish students was representative of all four-year college students, including those on campuses without a Jewish community. But in the 2023 and 2024 waves, with non-Jewish respondent coming from campuses with Jewish communities, still only about half of non-Jewish students had an opinion on this question.

There is a noteworthy difference in responses from students at elite universities. At those schools, Jewish students were twice as likely to think the Jewish community is too supportive of Israel versus not supportive enough (26% versus 14%). The non-Jewish students on these campuses were also more likely to think the Jewish community was too supportive of Israel compared to non-Jewish students at other schools. So, Jewish and non-Jewish students at elite schools are not only much more likely to say that their campuses are sympathetic to Palestinians over Israelis than other schools, but they are also more likely to perceive their Jewish communities as especially pro-Israel. These findings suggest that elite schools have more polarized cultures around Israel-Palestine social dynamics than other schools have.

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B. MAKING AND LOSING FRIENDS

In all three waves, we asked non-Jewish students how many of their closest friends are Jewish. In the 2022 wave, we also asked this question to Jewish respondents. Additionally, we asked in the 2023 and 2024 waves if non-Jewish students personally knew any Israelis or Palestinians. These survey questions are interesting in and of themselves, but they also help us weigh in on two broader questions: a.) how social networks (e.g., having Jewish friends) correspond to opinions about Israel, and b.) how socioeconomic class relates to social networks. The latter question is important given the strong relationship uncovered between class and views toward Israel. A likely explanation for this relationship is that those

in higher socioeconomic classes in the United States may have more Jews and/or Israelis in their social networks, a hypothesis that we can test here.

TABLE 10

Close Jewish Friends	2022		2023	2024
	Jewish	Not Jewish	Not Jewish	Not Jewish
None	23%	65	37	43
A few	47	30	48	49
Half or more	31	5	15	8

NOTE: Q: How many of your closest friends at college identify as Jewish? Percentages shown. N: 1,721 (Jewish, 2022), 1,033 (Non-Jewish, 2022), 1,549 (2023), 1,516 (2024).

TABLE 11

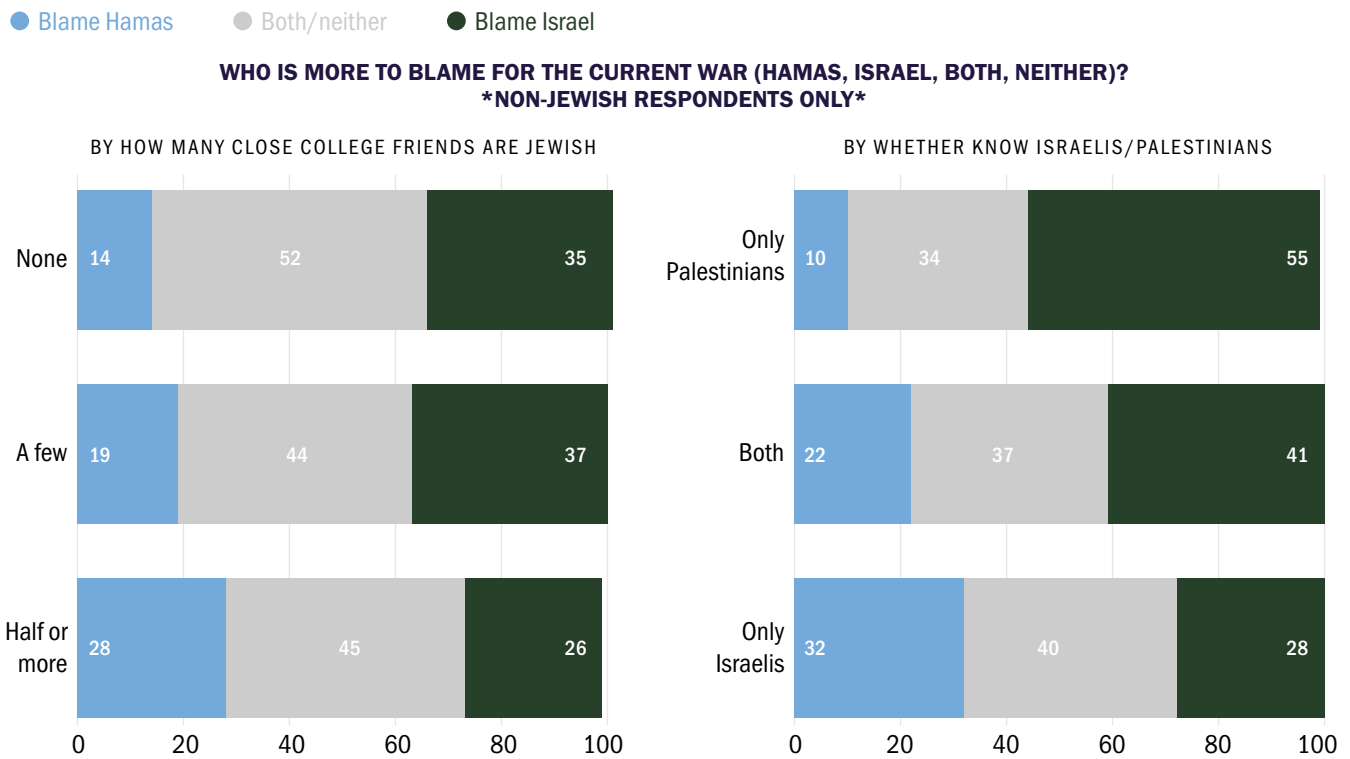
Students’ Personal Acquaintance with Israelis and Palestinians (Non-Jewish Respondents only)

	2023	2024
Know Israelis	9%	10
Know Palestinians	13	9
Know Both	32	32
None or Not Sure	45	49

Note: Q: Do you personally know any Israelis or Palestinians? Percentages shown. Non-Jewish Respondents only. N: 1,549 (2023), 1,516 (2024).

When we asked Jewish students in 2022 about their closest friends on campus, 31% said that half or more of their close friends are Jewish, 47% said a few are, and 23% said none are. In 2022, when we surveyed non-Jewish students across all types of four-year schools, two-thirds said none of their close college friends are Jewish. In the 2023 and 2024 waves, the majority of non-Jewish students (who, again, had been sampled because they go to schools with substantial Jewish populations) said that at least a few of their close college friends are Jewish. About 40% of non-Jewish students said they personally know Israelis and about 40% said they personally know Palestinians. (We suspect that some respondents may be conflating Israeli with Jewish and conflating Palestinian with Arab or Muslim when answering this question.)

FIGURE 23



Note: Non-Jewish students only, 2024 wave. The plot shows responses to who is more to blame for the current war (Hamas, Israel, both, neither). Percentages shown. N range from 125 (half or more friends Jewish) to 745 (a few friends Jewish).

We then examine how these social ties relate to other opinions, beginning with whether respondents think Israel or Hamas (or both or neither) is more to blame for the current war. Figure 23 plots the results and shows a relationship between social networks and blame. Students who are friends with Jews were more likely to have an opinion blaming one side or the other, and they were modestly more likely to blame Hamas. Knowing only Palestinians versus knowing Israelis corresponds to a much bigger difference in views toward the conflict. Both relationships are statistically significant.

Having close Jewish friends and knowing Israelis are both highly correlated with socioeconomic class, as well. In 2024, only 35% of non-Jewish students from lower-/working-class families knew any Israelis compared to 40% of those in the middle class, 50% in the upper-middle class, and 63% in the upper class. Similarly, most lower-/working-class non-Jewish

students had no close Jewish friends (52%), which drops to 45% in the middle class, 31% in the upper-middle class and 27% in the upper class. We observed a similar pattern when we asked Jewish respondents in 2022 about their close friend group. A third (35%) of Jewish students who identified as lower-working class reported no close Jewish friends. For middle-class and upper-middle-class students, 25% and 19% reported no close Jewish friends, respectively. And only 15% of upper-class Jewish students report no close Jewish friends.

Understanding the complex relationship between social networks, economic class, and opinions about Israel demands too much of the sample size here, but it is worthy of deeper analysis and dedicated future study. Students who are in higher socioeconomic classes, Jewish and non-Jewish, are both much more likely to have Jews in their close social network and to view Israel more positively.

TABLE 12

Percent Who Lost Friends	Jewish	Non-Jewish
All	33%	10
Supporters of a Jewish State	39	9
Unsure about a Jewish State	16	6
Opponents of a Jewish State	41	18
Elite School	45	11
Non-Elite School	31	9
Low Jewish Background	21	
Medium Jewish Background	34	
High Jewish Background	45	

NOTE: 2024 wave. N range from 155 (Jewish, elite school) to 1,516 (Non-Jewish, all).

In the 2024 wave, we asked all the students if they agreed or disagreed with this statement: *I have lost friends on campus because of our conflicting viewpoints on the war in Israel and Gaza.* Jewish students were three times more likely than non-Jewish students to agree. Notably, a similar percentage of Muslim students (32%, N=53) said they lost friends as Jewish students (33%).

Among Jewish respondents, those who support a Jewish state and oppose a Jewish state were equally likely to say they lost friends. Among non-Jewish students, opponents of a Jewish state were twice as likely to lose friends. Among Jewish students, those at elite schools were far more likely to say they lost friends: nearly half (45%) of Jewish students at elite schools reported they lost friends because of conflicting viewpoints. Losing friends is not correlated with a particular opinion about Israel but it is correlated with Jewish background. Those with more robust Jewish backgrounds were twice as likely to report losing friends.

In 2023 and 2024, we asked non-Jewish students, *Thinking about the atmosphere on your campus, how difficult do you think it would be for pro-Israel and pro-Palestine students to be friends?* The students could answer “not difficult at all,” “not so difficult,”

“somewhat difficult,” “very difficult,” or they could say they did not know. Nearly a third of non-Jewish students (including 42% of Muslim students and 42% of very liberal students) said that it would be very difficult. In 2024, only 3% of students said, “not difficult at all” and only 11% said, “not so difficult.”

The Wave 2-3 panel shows a large increase in students saying it would be very difficult for pro-Israel and pro-Palestine students to be friends. In the panel, the percentage agreeing it would be very difficult rose from 22% to 32%, a large and statistically significant jump.

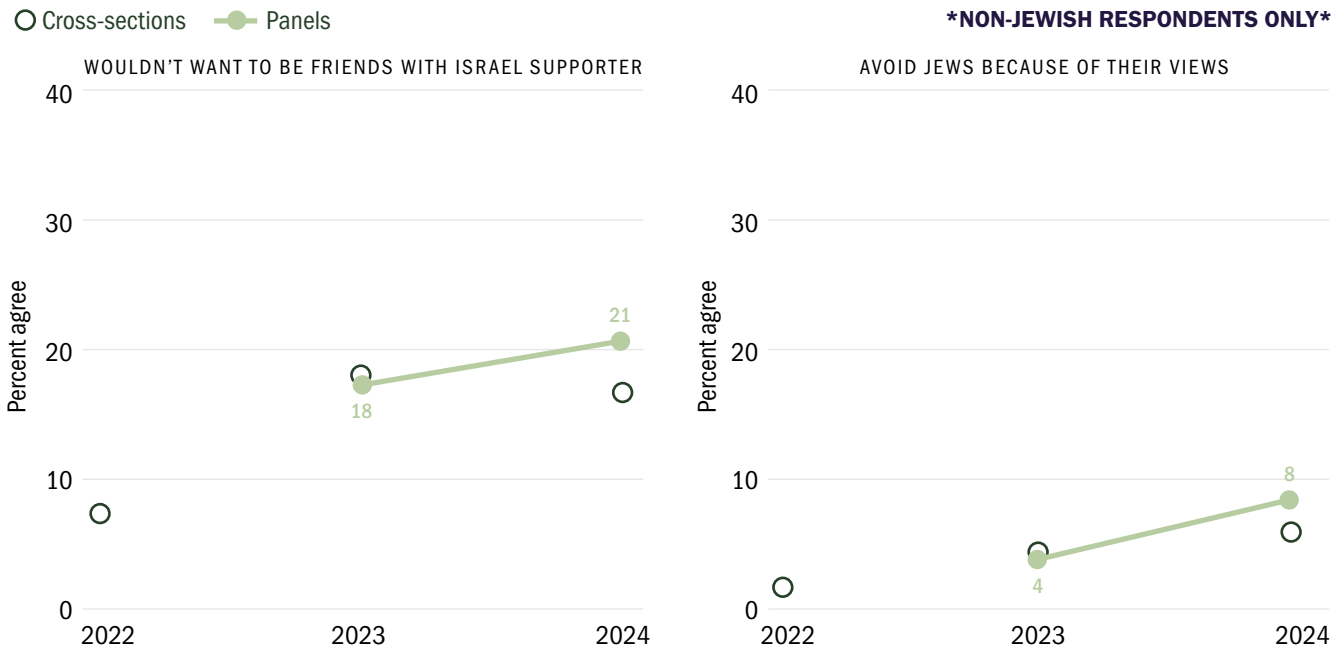
C. SOCIAL SANCTION

Across all three waves, we asked non-Jewish students two questions to gauge whether they personally impose social sanctions on Jewish students or those who support the existence of a Jewish state. The students were asked if they agree with the following statements:

- ◆ *I wouldn't want to be friends with someone who supports the existence of Israel as a Jewish state.*
- ◆ *I avoid socializing with Jewish students because of their views about Israel.*

As Figure 24 shows, agreement with these statements among non-Jewish students was far lower in 2022 than in 2023 or 2024. Of course, the 2022 non-Jewish sample was formulated differently, so it is not directly comparable. However, the 2023 and 2024 data, particularly the panel data, are comparable, and we find that the rate of agreement with these statements was as high or higher in 2024 than in 2023. These questions were affected by the change in response options between 2023 and 2024, but as the experiment in the appendix shows, the change does not seem to affect levels of agreement. One in five non-Jewish students said they would not want to be friends with someone who supports the existence of the state of Israel as a Jewish state. The number was higher in 2024 than 2023, but the change is not statistically significant. Eight percent of students said they

FIGURE 24



Note: Non-Jewish students only. N for panel: 320. The difference in means for the panel answering they “avoid Jewish students” is statistically significant. Means from cross-sections are shown in hollow circles.

avoid socializing with Jewish students, double the amount that said so in 2023 (and a statistically significant change).

Figure 25 shows agreement with these items in 2023 and 2024 by political ideology. In both years, not wanting to be friends with an Israel supporter was much more common among those who identified as very liberal. In 2023, however, conservative students were more likely to agree than moderate students. In the 2024 sample, agreement with the statement decreased moving from the political left to the political right.

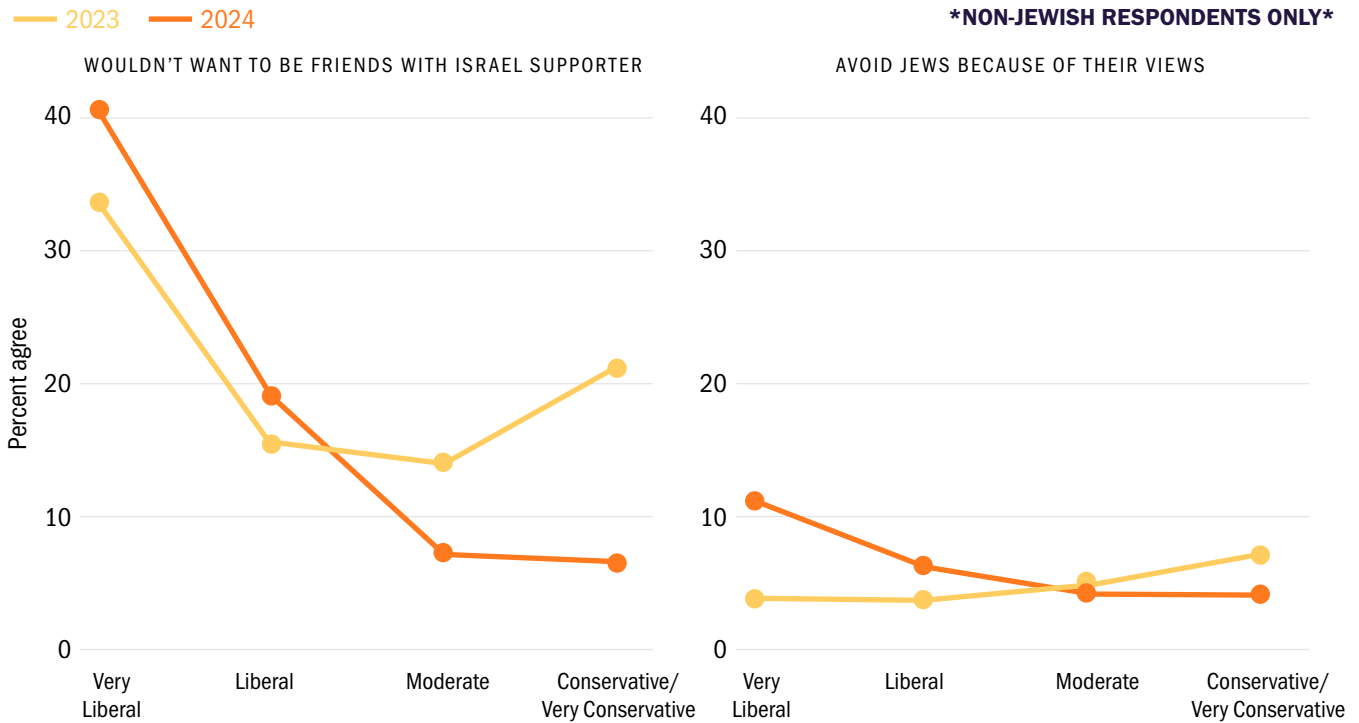
Looking at the statement about avoiding Jews, agreement in 2023 was slightly increasing with ideology, with conservatives slightly more likely than liberals to agree. In the 2024 data, the relationship is reversed: those who identified as very liberal were by far the most likely to report that they avoid Jews.

Ideology is not the only predictor of agreeing with these items, however. Even controlling for ideology, there are significant relationships with other demographic variables. Students of color, LGBTQ+ students, students with lower socioeconomic status, and Muslim students were all much more likely to say that they would not want to be friends with someone who supports the existence of Israel as a Jewish state.

For example, 12% of white students agreed with the statement about not being friends with Israel-supporters (the lowest of any racial group) versus 22% of Black students (the highest of any racial group). Agreement was 12% for straight students versus 25% for LGBTQ+ students. Agreement was 9% for Christian students versus 40% for Muslim students.

Race and religion are also among the most salient predictors of avoiding Jews, again even when controlling for political ideology. Whereas 5% of Christian students said they avoid Jews, 15% of Muslims answered that way in 2024. Whereas 4% of white students said they avoid Jews, 7-8% of Black students, Hispanic students, and Asian students answered that way in 2024.

FIGURE 25



NOTE: 2023 and 2024 Non-Jewish cross-sections. N: 1,549 (2023), 1,516 (2024).

To gauge social tensions from the perspective of Jewish students, we asked a battery of three agree/disagree questions on all waves. Those questions are as follows:

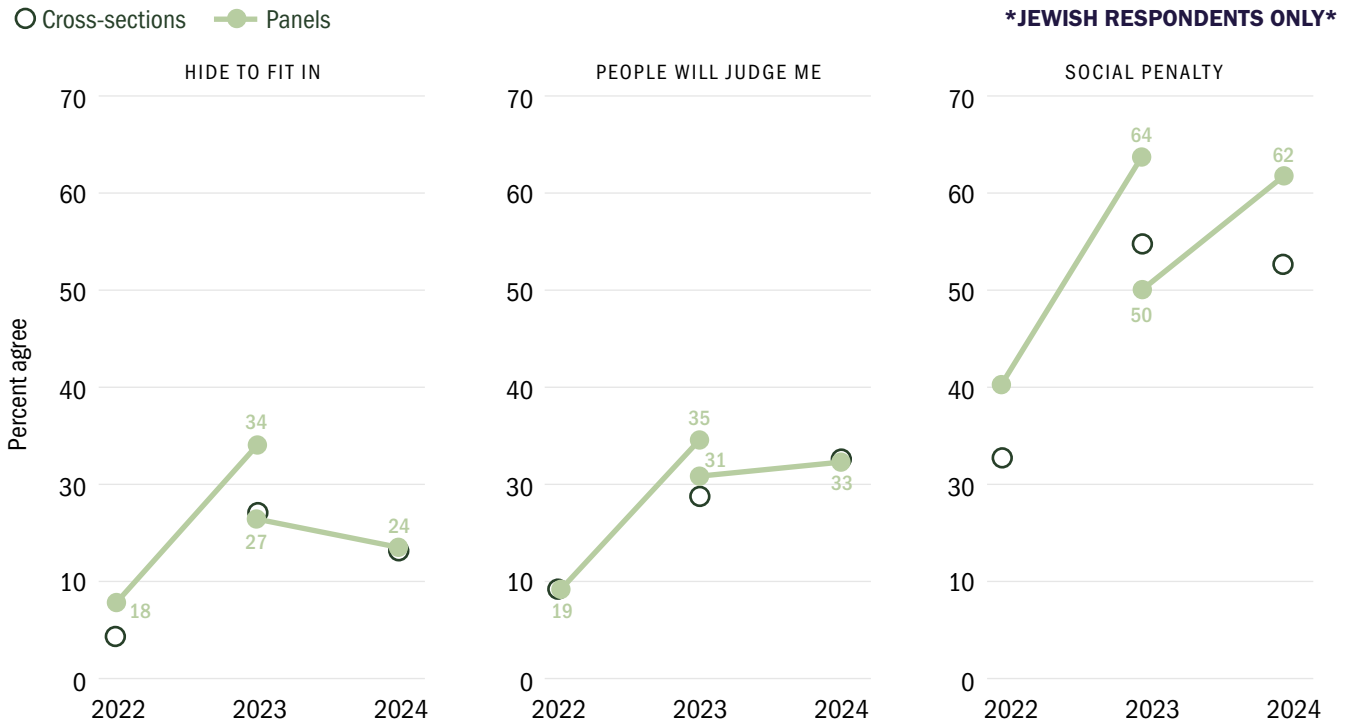
- ◆ *In order to fit in on my campus, I feel the need to hide that I am Jewish.*
- ◆ *People will judge me negatively if I participate in Jewish activities on campus.*
- ◆ *On my campus, Jewish students pay a social penalty for supporting the existence of Israel as a Jewish state.*

Note that only the third of these questions relates to any policy position a student may have. The other two items gauge a sense of whether the students need to hide that they are Jewish or that they are socially burdened for engaging in Jewish activities regardless of any political or religious views they have.

As Figure 26 visualizes, there were massive increases in agreement with these statements for Jewish students between 2022 and 2023. The rate at which Jewish students said they hide their Jewish identity to fit in doubled. The rate of agreement with people negatively judging students for participating in Jewish activities went from 19% to 35%. Moreover, the rate of students agreeing that Jewish students pay a social penalty for supporting the existence of Israel went from 41% to 64%. Again, these are results from the first panel – the exact same students surveyed over time with the exact same question wording.

The change in the 2023-2024 panel is less pronounced. On the first two items, there is no significant relationship either way: not a reversion back to 2022 levels of agreement nor an increase above and beyond what we measured in 2023. On the third item, it appears that the wave 2-3 panel had significantly lower agreement with the statement in

FIGURE 26



NOTE: Jewish respondents only. Hollow circles show means for each cross-section. Connected lines show means for the two panels. N for cross sections: 1,721 (2022), 918 (2023), 985 (2024). N for panels: 155 (wave 1-2), 223 (wave 2-3).

2023 compared to the wave 1-2 panel. (See the vertical gap between the dots in 2023). But agreement in the second panel increased significantly in 2024, reaching similar levels as the first panel in 2023.

The “social penalty” results are also distinctive for other reasons. Agreement with this statement is much more highly correlated with one’s Jewish background: the students with more robust Jewish backgrounds were far more likely to say that Jewish students pay a penalty. Furthermore, this is the only one of the three items here with different rates of agreement between respondents at elite schools and other schools. A third of Jewish students at both elite and other schools say they need to hide their Jewishness to fit in, and four in ten at both types of schools agree they will

be negatively judged for participating in Jewish activities. But 70% of students on elite campuses feel Jewish students pay a social penalty for supporting the existence of Israel as a Jewish state, compared to only 50% of students on other campuses.

The 2023-2024 panel data, however, must be assessed with caution due to the change in the answer options. The experiment described in the appendix section suggests that the 2024 question wording might garner *lower* agreement with these statements than the 2022 and 2023 question wording, particularly on the “social penalty” item. This suggests that agreement with these statements remains significantly elevated from 2022 and was at least as high, if not higher, in 2024 than in 2023.