

Can Jews Speak Freely on Ivy League Campuses?

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Abstract

Ivy League universities are thought leaders, making the pro-Hamas protests on these campuses since October 2023 likely harbingers of US views toward Israel and, relatedly, levels of antisemitism. Journalistic accounts suggest that, in the United States, twenty-first-century antisemitism is more common among elites than non-elites; yet little peer reviewed research has explored this question. Using survey data with a large, representative sample ($n = 44,847$) of undergraduate students from 207 campuses collected by the Foundation for Individual Rights and Expression (FIRE), we explore whether Jewish students are relatively more likely to report self-censoring on Ivy League campuses. Controlling for demographic and ideological variables, ordinary least squares (OLS) regressions indicate that Jewish Ivy League students are more likely than both gentile Ivy Leaguers and non-Ivy League Jews to report self-censorship on social media and regarding the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. We discuss limitations and directions for future research. Most notably, this data was collected before the October 7 attacks, so it can best provide a baseline for future studies.

Keywords: antisemitism, self-censorship, free speech, Ivy League, Foundation for Individual Rights and Expression, Middle East Studies

I cannot think of a worse stretch in Harvard history than the last few months . . . Confronting antisemitism does not mean punishing offensive speech as some suggest. Free speech is sacrosanct in a university. But effective leadership does involve assuring the appropriateness of speech made by the university and its subunits and it means encouraging speech that counters prejudice and balances debate.

Former Harvard President Larry Summers (January 30, 2024)²

INTRODUCTION

Inherently, elites have an identity and self-identity distinct from others, sometimes showing more loyalty to other elites than to non-elite voters and consumers.³ Lacking a hereditary

royalty, in the United States few markers confer elite status like a degree from an Ivy League institution. As David F. Labaree shows, most Ivy League universities enjoyed a century plus head start over other private colleges and state universities, many decades more time to build respected brands, massive alumni networks, and endowments.⁴ Since the early 1900s, educators at and alumni from Ivy League universities have been keenly aware of their role in selecting and shaping national and increasingly international elites.⁵ Ivy League universities influence future ideas, politics, art, and business in the United States and globally, through thought-leader professors and entrepreneurial (or at least socially networked) graduates; thus, ideas which start in the Ivies spread down.⁶ Such contagion may be for good or ill. As Josh Barro argues, rapidly

declining public trust in US higher education, which has fallen *in tandem* among Republicans and Democrats—whose opinions typically move in opposite directions—may reflect institutional practices and behaviors (including tolerating pro-Hamas speech but not more moderate speech) that began at Harvard and other elite universities.⁷

Here, we test whether a religious and cultural minority that has often faced discrimination, Jews, report less ability to speak freely on Ivy League campuses than their gentile peers, and when compared to Jews on non-Ivy League campuses. This is particularly important given the recent salience of conflict in the Middle East. Using a unique data set developed by the Foundation for Individual Rights and Expression,⁸ Ordinary Least Squares (OLS) regressions find mixed results. Controlling for a range of variables, surprisingly, compared to other students, Ivy League students generally see their university leadership as somewhat *more* supportive of free speech. Despite this, they also reported higher levels of self-censorship on social media and particularly regarding the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Jewish Ivy League students were even more likely than both gentile Ivy Leaguers and non-Ivy League Jews to report self-censorship on social media and regarding the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

In short, we find evidence that Jewish students perceive relatively less ability to speak freely on Ivy League campuses, particularly regarding the state of Israel. This likely indicates higher levels of antisemitism in elite than non-elite educational settings, in accord with some popular accounts⁹ and experimental evidence.¹⁰ We end with limitations and implications from the findings.

Ivy League Elites and Antisemitism

Since at least the early 1900s, educators and alumni from Harvard, Yale, and Princeton have been well-aware of their role in selecting and shaping national elites.¹¹ Referring to the most

prestigious of institutions, historian (and Harvard alumnus) Richard Norton Smith described the twentieth century as “the Harvard Century.” These campuses have long hosted and produced a disproportionate share of leaders and leading intellectuals. Ivy League universities have had enormous impact on public policy, foreign and domestic, as politician and sometimes Harvard professor Daniel Patrick Moynihan wrote.¹²

Elite creation and status markers have ideological components and may presage the direction of the United States socially and politically.¹³ Harvard influenced intellectual and political history through the mid-nineteenth-century abolitionism, and later in developing African American history by preparing leading intellectuals like Carter G. Woodson and W. E. B. Du Bois.¹⁴ In a less positive manner, Columbia University arguably had more impact on K-12 education than any other institution, leading the twentieth-century movement to limit academic content in schooling,¹⁵ and spreading scientifically unsound “whole language” rather than phonics-based reading instruction.¹⁶

Regarding foreign policy, in part due to the influence of the late Professor Edward Said, for decades Columbia has enjoyed influence in Middle East studies, spreading postcolonial theory portraying Israel as lacking a right to exist, defining it as a “settler-colonialist” state in which Jewish settlers displaced indigenous Palestinians, and deriding Israel’s now seventy-plus year old internationally recognized status.¹⁷ Embracing these beliefs has become a status marker for some twenty-first-century cognitive elites. While postcolonial theory and related approaches toward the Middle East have enjoyed support in many academic fields and elite media outlets, they have far less US public support and the extent to which US elites believe rather than signal such beliefs is unclear.¹⁸

To be clear, one can criticize Israel without supporting antisemitism—many Jewish Israelis regularly protest their government’s policies. That said, particularly on college campuses, even

before the October 7, 2023, Hamas attack that awakened latent views, criticisms of Israel often descended into calls for indiscriminate killing of Jews, disruption of pro-Israeli speakers, and verbal and physical harassment of Jewish students.¹⁹ Critical theories such as postcolonial theory have substantial influence in academia, and students and educators supporting such intellectual currents often sanction views they oppose, including pro-Israel views.²⁰

In part for such ideological reasons, campus antisemitism garners substantial bureaucratic support. For example, anti-Israel views which stray into antisemitism (including holding Jewish individuals and the single Jewish state to higher standards than others) seem common among higher education Diversity/Equity/Inclusion (DEI) bureaucrats, whose frequent tweets about Israel are overwhelmingly negative but whose frequent tweets about China are mainly positive, despite China's far worse human rights record both generally and toward Muslims.²¹ These bureaucracies often have the power to expel students and fire professors.²² Recently, thirteen researchers affiliated with interest groups as well as Rutgers University, Johns Hopkins University, the University of Texas at Dallas, and Bar Ilan University in Israel have tracked both documented and undocumented foreign funding to US universities, finding statistically significant relationships between funding from Middle Eastern states and reported antisemitic incidents on campus.²³ This may parallel behaviors in the 1930s, when elite US universities and professors therein receiving funds and honors from Nazi Germany endorsed antisemitic policies and practices.²⁴

Notably, Harvard Dean of Faculty (and briefly President) Claudine Gay expanded Harvard's DEI bureaucracy, seemingly using it to purge centrist professors and leading Harvard to have the nation's worst climate for free speech, as measured by FIRE.²⁵ Of course, Gay would hardly be the first Harvard leader to use bureaucratic staff and procedures to limit the rights or numbers of minorities who are resented by elites.

In the early and mid-twentieth century some students and many alumni and trustees at elite colleges resented a large Jewish presence, seeing Jews as too hard-working and of questionable ethical character. Some traditional white Anglo-Saxon Protestant (WASP) elites did not consider Jews, no matter how accomplished, to be respectable members of the elite. Limiting the numbers of Jews in Ivy League universities served the perceived interests of legacy elites. Such elite (and sometimes mass) resentments toward educationally and economically successful minorities are common in a wide range of societies and have sometimes been made worse through affirmative action policies, which make ethnic identity more salient to both minorities and majorities.²⁶ In the United States, regarding Jews, it was not until the 1960s that quotas limiting their numbers in elite institutions faded away.²⁷ Given this stereotyping on the part of admissions and other institutional gatekeepers, Jewish applicants to Ivy League institutions, particularly Harvard, were traditionally coached to emphasize their love of sports and to avoid seeming "too Jewish,"²⁸ just as Asian students are today counseled to avoid seeming "too Asian."²⁹ As Karabel details,³⁰ after attempts to impose quotas limiting the numbers of Jews proved controversial, in the 1920s Harvard responded with geographic quotas and holistic (rather than primarily academic) admissions methods to obtain the same outcome, using admissions gatekeepers to limit Jews to fifteen percent of incoming classes. As shown by the National Association of Scholars,³¹ the same holistic admissions processes are now used to limit the numbers of Asians, for the same discriminatory reasons.

Scholars like Richard Hofstadter³² chronicled the tendency for working class and agrarian populists to resent Jews, for their seeming status as foreigners and "rootless cosmopolitans," and their disproportionate employment in elite financial sectors seen as having interests opposed to those of working and small business classes. Such populist, nonelite antisemitism has a long

history across the world, including the United States, and attracted considerable empirical research.³³ Yet, by the 1980s, US antisemitism was no longer closely related to education, income, or even measures of authoritarian ideology.³⁴ Further, upscale antisemitism also has a long history while attracting less scholarly notice than downscale antisemitism. Indeed, a single carefully designed, peer reviewed study of antisemitism found it to be greater among those with advanced degrees than among the mass public, perhaps in part due to the aforementioned influence of postcolonial theory among contemporary elites.³⁵ This was a nascent issue in US academia in the 1980s when Julius Lester wrote *Lovesong: Becoming a Jew*.³⁶ This memoir describes hostile reactions from colleagues when the author, a distinguished Afro-American Studies professor (and African American) converted to Judaism.

Some survey research and qualitative accounts, albeit mainly by activists and journalists, also indicate a twenty-first-century upsurge of antisemitism on campuses, particularly elite campuses. A Brandeis University survey of Jewish undergraduates at fifty-one US colleges and universities found many respondents perceiving hostility both towards Jews and Israel on their campuses. Jewish students at three Ivy League institutions, Cornell University, the University of Pennsylvania, and Columbia University reported the most perceived hostility. Survey respondents, including those who identified ideologically with the left, reported more campus antisemitism from the political left than the right.³⁷ These findings accord with qualitative and journalistic accounts noted above, as well as others.³⁸

Notably, postcolonial theory and other intellectual approaches which sometimes demonize Jews, particularly in narrow fields like Middle East Studies, received little public attention until the surprisingly positive reaction to Hamas's October 7 attack on Israel. Regarding this, transparency can have enormous impacts. Most notably, the widely watched December 5, 2023, congressional committee hearing on antisemi-

tism at elite universities held by the US House Committee on Education and Workforce Development proved a public relations disaster for Harvard, the University of Pennsylvania, and to a lesser degree MIT, with the two Ivy League presidents later forced to resign. (Harvard President Gay resigned in the wake of a serious plagiarism scandal, which might have attracted less notice were it not for the antisemitism hearing.) In the hearing, the three prominent university presidents seemed unable to condemn student and faculty support for Hamas despite the organization's call for the destruction of Israel and mass murders and rapes of civilians; they instead pled support for free speech, even though all three institutions (but particularly Harvard) have very weak records protecting free speech expressing (conservative and centrist) views their leaders do not like.³⁹

Interestingly, this congressional hearing featured inter-elite conflict, most notably between a Harvard graduate, New York Congresswoman Elise Stefanik, against Harvard (doctoral) graduate Gay and a Yale graduate (University of Pennsylvania President McGill), each promoted to their posts by Ivy League governing boards. Ivy League leaders and the boards which select them have considerable power partly owing to their alumni networks. Consider that five of the last six US presidents earned undergraduate, law, or graduate degrees from Penn (Trump), Harvard (George W. Bush and Obama), Columbia (Obama), or Yale (Clinton and both Bushes). Ambitious young people in the twenty-first century go to great lengths to gain admission to these institutions, which has fueled admissions scandals.⁴⁰ As in the early and mid-twentieth century, such ambition may enable or even encourage antisemitism and other forms of bigotry. Further, a focus on status and connections has in part supplanted academic learning, producing Ivy League graduates who can network, but lack intellectual depth, empathy, and judgement. They may make suitable financial analysts, but less effective and trustworthy leaders, public servants, and citi-

zens.⁴¹ Institutional emphases on material status leave behind low-income students working their way through college, who are often considered unsuitable for dating or friendships.⁴² It also undermines elite abilities to defend (or even recognize) democratic norms, instead prioritizing conformity to class norms, even norms which encourage bigotry against class or ethnic outsiders.⁴³ This is important in part because as sociologists remind us, in wealthy societies the class struggle often becomes a *classification* struggle, with high prestige individuals seeking increasingly complex means of differentiating themselves from the less prestigious, and then taking great pains to signal class membership through conspicuous ideologies more than through conspicuous consumption.⁴⁴ At elite campuses, some see support for Israel as lower status, particularly given widespread support for the single Jewish state among non-prestigious, traditional Christian groups who elites seek to distinguish themselves from.⁴⁵ At elite institutions, defending Israel may entail risks, particularly where campus bureaucracies with the power to expel members⁴⁶ signal that support for Israel (in contrast to, say China) offends class norms.

This discussion suggests testable hypotheses regarding whether Ivy League students profess more support for censorship than non-elite students, whether Ivy League Jews feel more constrained than Jews at other campuses, and whether Jewish students would feel less constrained with a greater Jewish presence on campus.

HYPOTHESES

Given the enormous body of research regarding racial and sexual discrimination on college campuses, it is remarkable how little empirical research addresses anti-Jewish prejudice on campus. Here, we will begin to fill this gap by testing the hypotheses that regarding free speech, compared to other students, Ivy League students will be:

H1: less supportive of free speech;

H2: more supportive of violence to stop what they consider offensive speech;

H3: more likely to self-censor on social media;

H4: more likely to view conversations about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict as high risk;

H5: less likely to view school administrators as supporting free speech.

Further, within Ivy League schools, we predict that Jewish students compared to gentiles will be:

H6: more supportive of free speech;

H7: less supportive of violence to stop speech they consider offensive;

H8: more likely to self-censor on social media;

H9: more likely to view conversations about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict as high risk;

H10: less likely to view school administrators as supporting free speech.

DATA AND METHODS

We use the 2022 Foundation for Individual Rights and Expression (FIRE, 2022) survey data of 44,847 undergraduate students across 207 campuses. Between February 15 and May 30, 2022, FIRE surveyed approximately 100–150 full-time undergraduate students at small campuses and roughly 250 full-time undergraduates at universities. The survey consisted of twenty-eight items focusing on demographics, ideology, perceived support for free expression on campus, and the perceived climate for free expression on campus; here, we analyze all the free speech climate questions. (See Appendix 1.) The survey used a two-stage validation process to ensure students were enrolled and applied a post-stratification adjustment based on demographic distributions from multiple data sources. FIRE conducts such surveys annually. For details on survey methodologies, see the summary by German and Stevens.⁴⁷ We analyzed 44,847 cases, excluding those with missing data. The sampling strategy,

the large sample and the diversity of college students enable us to test a range of hypotheses with reasonable statistical power.

Table 1 presents frequencies for various demographic and ideological characteristics of the sample. Regarding religion the most commonly selected category is “nothing in particular,” 17.4% for the sample. In analyses not shown here, we find relatively few differences between Ivy League and non-Ivy students, with two notable exceptions. Jewish students are 6.8% of Ivy students (n = 131) and 3.6% (n = 1,314) of non-Ivy students, yielding sufficient power for OLS regressions. Ideologically, self-identified liberals outnumber conservatives 68–14% among Ivy League students and 53–19% in the sample, confirming views that Ivy League students are more ideologically homogenous. This may be important since, as shown by decades of research, like others, students are more apt to restrict free speech rights of those they disagree with.⁴⁸

TABLE 1. Demographic and ideological variables

	whole sample
<i>Religion</i>	
Protestant	9.6
Roman Catholic	15.92
Mormon	1.97
Orthodox Christian	1.52
Jewish	3.55
Muslim	2.67
Buddhist	1.86
Hindu	2.30
Atheist	10.0
Agnostic	12.58
Nothing in particular	17.39
Just Christian	14.88
Other	5.78
<i>Race</i>	
Hispanic	11.67
	Continued

TABLE 1. Demographic and ideological variables

	whole sample
Black	7.53
Native American	.87
Asian	19.48
Middle Eastern	2.14
Native Hawaiian	.58
White	48.34
Other	2.02
Two or more races	7.37
<i>Gender</i>	
Male	32.88
Female	57.91
Non-binary	2.79
Agender	.92
Genderfluid	1.81
Unsure	1.11
Prefer not to say	2.59
<i>Ideology</i>	
Very liberal	21.02
Somewhat liberal	20.74
Slightly liberal	11.34
Moderate, middle-of-the-road	13.97
Slightly conservative	6.50
Somewhat conservative	7.57
Very conservative	5.36
I do not identify as a liberal or a conservative	8.65
I haven't thought much about this	4.85
<i>Socio-Economic Status</i>	
Upper	5.45
Upper-Middle	28.05
Middle	39.10
Working	19.22
Lower	8.18
TOTAL	100.00
N	44,847

Ivy League schools comprise seven universities and one college grouped together in an athletic conference: Princeton University, Harvard University, Yale University, University of Pennsylvania, Brown University, Columbia University, Cornell University, and Dartmouth College. We present three OLS regressions to test hypotheses. First, we estimate the differences between Ivy League students and students at other schools. Second, we examined the differences between Ivy League Jews and Jews at other schools. Lastly, we analyzed the differences between Ivy League Jews and Ivy League gentiles. To control for other variables and offer greater precision, we conducted an analysis for three categories using ordinary least squares (OLS) regression to estimate how Ivy League students compare to their non-Ivy League peers, Ivy League Jews compare to Jews at other schools, and Ivy League Jews compare to non-Jewish Ivy League students in answering a set of 10 survey questions. Specifically, we estimate:

- 1) $Y_i = \beta_0 + \beta_1 \text{Ivy_League}_i + \beta_2 \text{Private}_i + \beta_3 X_i + u_p$,
- 2) $Y_i = \beta_0 + \beta_1 \text{Ivy_Jew}_i + \beta_2 \text{Private}_i + \beta_3 X_i + u_p$,
- 3) $Y_i = \beta_0 + \beta_1 \text{Ivy_JEW}_i + \beta_2 X_i + u_p$,

where Y_i is one of the outcome variables for individual i ; Ivy_League_i is an indicator variable equal to 1 if individual i was an Ivy League student and 0 if non-Ivy League student. Ivy_Jew_i is an indicator variable equal to 1 if individual i was a Jewish Ivy League student and 0 if non-Ivy League Jewish student. Ivy_JEW_i is an indicator variable equal to 1 if individual i was a Jewish Ivy League student and 0 if Ivy League non-Jewish student. Private_i is an indicator variable equal to 1 if the school is private and 0 if it is public. We also control for a variety of demographic and ideological characteristics in the model as indicated by the vector X_i . These characteristics include gender, ideology, race, religion, and socio-economic status. See appendices 1 and 2 for the questions used as dependent variables, and for Ivy League and non-Ivy frequencies for student responses. To repeat, we include in analyses all the free speech climate questions on the survey.

Results: Table 2

Table 2 shows the results for equation 1, which compares Ivy League and other students. Though six of the ten tests yielded statistically significant results, hypotheses find mixed support. Question 1 finds Ivy League students 3.5 percentage points more likely than students from other schools to believe that their school should allow a speaker on campus who promotes the idea that getting rid of inequality is more important than protecting the so called “right” to free speech. Whether these results confirm H1 (that Ivy League students are less supportive of free speech) is debatable. On one hand, Ivy League students would allow a speaker on campus who promotes a controversial viewpoint; yet this viewpoint diminishes the value of free speech. One could argue that this result disconfirms H1 as much it confirms this hypothesis. (Importantly, in this and later tests ideology is controlled for.) Here, we note that we did not design the questions.

Question 2, regarding H2 (support for violence to stop controversial speech), did not yield statistically significant differences. As for question 3, somewhat surprisingly, Ivy League students were 2.3 percentage points *more* likely than other students to say their college administration protects free speech on campus. Results from question 4 (that administration would defend controversial speakers) were not distinguishable from zero. However, in question 5, Ivy League students were 2.3 percentage points *less* likely than students at other schools to feel that they could *not* express their opinion on a subject because of how students, a professor, or the administration would respond. Question 3 and 5 seemingly disconfirm H5, which predicts that Ivy League students are *less* likely to see their colleges as supportive free speech. Arguably, this could reflect relatively ideological homogeneity at these colleges, at least regarding invited speakers.⁴⁹

Regarding social media, compared to non-Ivy peers, Ivy League students were 5.5 percentage points *less* likely to feel comfortable expressing

an unpopular opinion to their fellow students on a social media account tied to their name (question 6), supporting H3. Question 7 (reluctance to discuss controversial issues in class) did not produce statistically significant results. Yet question 8 produced the most profound differences: Ivy League students were 9.4 percentage points more likely than non-Ivy peers to believe

that it is difficult to have an open and honest conversation about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict on campus, strongly supporting H4. While question 9 did not provide results worth noting, question 10 found Ivy League students 4 percentage points *less* likely to feel that they could express themselves if there were more people of different religions than their own.

TABLE 2. The difference between Ivy League students and Non-Ivy students

	relative difference for Ivy League students	standard error	P-value	students at other schools mean
Question 1: Believe school should allow a speaker on campus who promotes the idea that getting rid of inequality is more important than protecting the so called "right" to free speech	0.035***	0.011	0.001	0.674
Question 2: Believe it is acceptable for students to engage in using violence to stop a campus speech	0.000	0.006	0.989	0.063
Question 3: Believe it is clear is that college administration protects free speech on campus	0.023**	0.010	0.025	0.737
Question 4: Believe the administration would likely defend the speaker's right to express their views if a controversy over offensive speech were to occur on my campus	0.016	0.011	0.150	0.708
Question 5: Feel unable to express opinion on a subject because of how students, a professor, or the administration would respond	-0.023**	0.010	0.014	0.214
Question 6: Feel comfortable expressing an unpopular opinion to fellow students on a social media account tied to their name	-0.055***	0.012	0.000	0.388
Question 7: Feel much pressure avoiding discussing controversial topics in classes	-0.008	0.010	0.390	0.209
Question 8: Believe the Israeli/Palestinian conflict is difficult to have an open and honest conversation about on campus	0.094***	0.011	0.000	0.331
Question 9: Feel they could express themselves if there were more people of their religion on campus	0.005	0.008	0.545	0.121
Question 10: Feel they could express themselves if there were more people of different religions than them on campus	-0.040***	0.008	0.000	0.141

Notes: The relative difference for Ivy League students are listed as decimals. The numbers in this column should be multiplied by 100 to obtain the percentage point differences in either belief or feeling about a statement. N = 44,847. *p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01.

Results: Table 3

Table 3 shows OLS regressions comparing Ivy League and non-Ivy Jewish students. Questions 1–3 showed no significant differences across the groups. Question 4 surprisingly showed Ivy League Jews as 6.9 percentage points more likely than Jewish peers at non-Ivy schools to agree that administration would defend offensive speech, again tending to disconfirm H5, a matter discussed further in the Limitations section below. For question 5, Ivy League Jews were 9.2 percentage points ($p = .014$) less likely than Jews at other schools to agree that they could not express opinions on a subject in class because of how students, professors, or the campus administration would respond, again tending to disconfirm H5. In contrast, Ivy League Jews were 10.9 percentage points ($p = .014$) less comfortable than Jews at other schools to express an unpopular opinion on a social media account tied to their name (question 6). Yet results for question 7 find Ivy League Jews 7.9 percentage points ($p = .029$) less likely to feel pressure to avoid discussing controversial topics in class. Perhaps hinting at the sensitivity of the issue in elite circles, Jews at Ivy League schools were 7.2 percentage points ($p = .096$) more likely than peers at non-Ivies to report finding it difficult to have an open conversation about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict on campus (question 8). Finally, we found that Jews at Ivy League schools were 9.2 percentage points ($p = .024$) less likely to feel that they could express themselves better if there were more people of their religion on campus (question 9). In short, comparisons of Ivy League and non-Ivy Jewish students yield mixed results.

Results: Table 4

As Table 4 shows, comparing Ivy League Jewish and gentile students, only two findings yielded statistically significant results, perhaps indicative of cultural homogeneity within these elite institutions, as suggested above by Ivy League

students and professors.⁵⁰ This homogeneity and pressure to conform may limit Jewish-gentile disagreements, with the highly salient Israeli-Palestinian conflict being a notable exception. For question 6, Jewish students were 10.6 percentage points ($p = .012$) less likely than their non-Jewish peers to feel that they could express unpopular opinions on social media, strongly confirming H8. More notably, for question 8, Jews were 26.6 percentage points ($p = .000$) more likely than non-Jewish peers to view open and honest conversations possible regarding the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, strongly confirming H9.

LIMITATIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

This study fills an important niche. While considerable qualitative work addresses a perceived free speech recession on US campuses,⁵¹ this is the first large empirical work comparing Jewish and gentile perceptions regarding what students can and cannot discuss in their daily interactions. It is particularly important given the current debates over the degree to which elite campuses have free speech issues, antisemitism issues, or both, matters brought to a head with the aftermath of the October 7, 2023, Hamas attack on Israel. Yet, this study has notable limitations. Most importantly, this FIRE survey and the single survey which followed this one each occurred *before* the Hamas attack; hence, findings are time bound, showing baseline conditions before the attack. We strongly suspect that Jewish self-censorship has increased since the survey, particularly on elite campuses. Second, we could not create survey questions, and in certain cases (particularly question 1) would have chosen different question wording. Third, questions measuring what Jewish students (relative to gentiles) feel they can say are likely indicative of but do not precisely measure antisemitism. In fairness, most studies of racial, religious, or sexual discrimination use similarly imprecise measures, often via surveys of the target population.⁵² Fourth,

though college campuses and in particular elite campuses play a vital role in shaping the future, findings here may not reflect current conditions off campus. Finally, the FIRE surveys offer a rich dataset. This work leaves many other questions of interest to explore in future, including regarding how students from other religious traditions view free speech: Jewish students

seemingly self-censor more than gentile peers on some issues, but they may not be the only outliers.

Despite limitations, we believe that the findings have notable implications. Ivy League students see their administrations as relatively supportive of free speech. This contrasts the popular perceptions and firsthand accounts

TABLE 3. The Difference between Ivy League Jews and Jews at other schools

	relative difference for Ivy League Jews	standard error	P-value	Jews at other schools mean
Question 1: Believe school should allow a speaker on campus who promotes the idea that getting rid of inequality is more important than protecting the so called "right" to free speech	0.017	0.043	0.696	0.681
Question 2: Believe it is acceptable for students to engage in using violence to stop a campus speech	-0.020	0.023	0.380	0.064
Question 3: Believe it is clear is that college administration protects free speech on campus	-0.008	0.041	0.835	0.723
Question 4: Believe the administration would likely defend the speaker's right to express their views if a controversy over offensive speech were to occur on my campus	0.069*	0.042	0.099	0.704
Question 5: Feel unable to express opinion on a subject because of how students, a professor, or the administration would respond	-0.092**	0.037	0.014	0.228
Question 6: Feel comfortable expressing an unpopular opinion to fellow students on a social media account tied to their name	-0.109**	0.043	0.011	0.312
Question 7: Feel much pressure avoiding discussing controversial topics in classes	-0.079**	0.036	0.029	0.201
Question 8: Believe the Israeli/Palestinian conflict is difficult to have an open and honest conversation about on campus	0.072*	0.043	0.096	0.661
Question 9: Feel they could express themselves if there were more people of their religion on campus	-0.092**	0.041	0.024	0.262
Question 10: Feel they could express themselves if there were more people of different religions than them on campus	0.004	0.030	0.892	0.118

Notes: The relative difference for Ivy League Jews are listed as decimals. The numbers in this column should be multiplied by 100 to obtain the percentage point differences in either belief or feeling about a statement. N = 1,576. *p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01.

TABLE 4. The difference between Ivy League Jews and non-Jewish Ivy League students

	relative difference for Ivy League Jews	standard error	P-value	non-Jewish Ivy League students mean
Question 1: Believe school should allow a speaker on campus who promotes the idea that getting rid of inequality is more important than protecting the so called "right" to free speech	-0.063	0.039	0.101	0.772
Question 2: Believe it is acceptable for students to engage in using violence to stop a campus speech	-0.017	0.024	0.478	0.073
Question 3: Believe it is clear is that college administration protects free speech on campus	-0.042	0.040	0.294	0.733
Question 4: Believe the administration would likely defend the speaker's right to express their views if a controversy over offensive speech were to occur on my campus	0.054	0.042	0.198	0.694
Question 5: Feel unable to express opinion on a subject because of how students, a professor, or the administration would respond	-0.057	0.035	0.107	0.199
Question 6: Feel comfortable expressing an unpopular opinion to fellow students on a social media account tied to their name	-0.106**	0.042	0.012	0.293
Question 7: Feel much pressure avoiding discussing controversial topics in classes	-0.034	0.034	0.328	0.178
Question 8: Believe the Israeli/Palestinian conflict is difficult to have an open and honest conversation about on campus	0.266***	0.046	0.000	0.517
Question 9: Feel they could express themselves if there were more people of their religion on campus	0.037	0.030	0.226	0.124
Question 10: Feel they could express themselves if there were more people of different religions than them on campus	0.014	0.029	0.632	0.110

Notes: The relative difference for Ivy League Jews are listed as decimals. The numbers in this column should be multiplied by 100 to obtain the percentage point differences in either belief or feeling about a statement. N = 1,946. *p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01.

noted above. Possibly, this question measures institutional loyalty. Ivy League students might treasure their institutional elitism, small size, and social and ideological homogeneity, and thus (even after controls are added) view their administrators more positively than non-Ivy peers. Indeed, Ivy League students like Natalia Dashan suggest this.⁵³ Further, findings may reflect how Ivy League students view the question. Ivy League presidents *have* defended speech supportive of Hamas, while sanctioning speech which outside the ivory tower would be noncontroversial.⁵⁴ In answering this survey question, students may be thinking more about the former cases than the latter, viewing university leaders as protecting their institutions from outsiders.

Notwithstanding this finding, relative to other students and controlling for demographic and ideological variables, Ivy Leaguers report more self-censorship on social media and regarding the Israel-Palestinian conflict. This is particularly true of Ivy League Jews relative to non-Ivy Jews, and relative to Ivy League gentiles. This is suggestive of antisemitic institutional climates, in which relative to others, Jews feel they cannot speak freely. If what happens at Harvard portends the future elsewhere, this has troubling implications across US society regarding antisemitism, and regarding social and institutional restrictions of free speech, particularly when that speech is supportive of Israel. As social scientists show, censorship and self-censorship degrade teaching and research inside academia, and foster greater polarization outside.⁵⁵ Certainly, more research, and more respectful dialogue, are needed.

APPENDIX 1: SURVEY QUESTIONS REGARDING FREE SPEECH

Q1: Student groups often invite speakers to campus to express their views on a range of topics. Regardless of your own views on the topic, should your school ALLOW or NOT ALLOW a speaker on campus who promotes the following idea?

Getting rid of inequality is more important than protecting the so called “right” to freedom of speech.

- 1) Definitely should allow this speaker.
- 2) Probably should allow this this speaker.
- 3) Probably should not allow this speaker.
- 4) Definitely should not allow this speaker.

Q2: How acceptable would you say it is for students to engage in the following action to protest a campus speaker.

**Shouting down a speaker to prevent them from speaking on campus?*

- 1) Always acceptable.
- 2) Sometimes acceptable.
- 3) Rarely acceptable.
- 4) Never acceptable.

Q3: How clear is it to you that your college administration protects freedom of speech on campus?

- 1) Extremely clear.
- 2) Very clear.
- 3) Somewhat clear.
- 4) Not very clear.
- 5) Not at all clear.

Q4: If a controversy over offensive speech were to occur on your campus, how likely is it that the administration would defend the speaker’s right to express their views?

- 1) Extremely likely.
- 2) Very likely.
- 3) Somewhat likely.
- 4) Not very likely.
- 5) Not at all likely.

Q5: On your campus, how often have you felt that you could not express your opinion on a subject because of how students, a professor, or the administration would respond?

- 1) Never.
- 2) Rarely.
- 3) Occasionally.
- 4) Fairly often.
- 5) Very often.

Q6: How comfortable would you feel doing the following on your campus?

Expressing an unpopular opinion to your fellow students on a social media account tied to your name.

- 1) Very comfortable.
- 2) Somewhat comfortable.
- 3) Somewhat uncomfortable.
- 4) Very uncomfortable.

Q7: How much pressure do you feel to avoid discussing controversial topics in your classes?

- 1) No pressure at all.
- 2) Slight pressure.
- 3) Some pressure.
- 4) A good deal of pressure.
- 5) A great deal of pressure.

Q8: Some students say it can be difficult to have conversations about certain issues on campus. Which of the following issues, if any, would you say are difficult to have an open and honest conversation about on your campus?

- **The Israeli/Palestinian conflict.**
- 0) No.
 - 1) Yes.

Q9: What **campus changes** would make you feel that you can express yourself?

- **If there were more people of my religion.**
- 0) No.
 - 1) Yes.

Q10: What **campus changes** would make you feel that you can express yourself? If there were more people of different religions than me.

- 0) No.
- 1) Yes.

Q11: Where do you think the political views of the **average faculty** member on campus is on the following scale?

- 1) Very liberal.
- 2) Somewhat liberal.
- 3) Slightly liberal.
- 4) Moderate, middle-of-the-road.
- 5) Slightly conservative.
- 6) Somewhat conservative.
- 7) Very conservative.
- 8) I haven't thought much about this.
- 9) Other.
- 10) Write-in.

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