

**Jewish Inhibition, Conservative
Freedom: New Trends in
Expressive Freedom on Elite
American Campuses**

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Heterodox Centre Report No. 4

July 1, 2025

doi: 10.5281/zenodo.18151539



*Freedom,
Courage, Truth.*



THE UNIVERSITY OF
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Executive Summary

- The expressive freedom of Jewish students has declined while that of conservatives has risen as the focus of campus activists has shifted from race/gender to Israel-Palestine
- After several years of stability, the share of Jewish Ivy League students who often self-censor their political views rose from 13 to 35 percent between 2023 and 2024
- After several years of stability, the share of conservative Ivy League students who often self-censor their political views dropped from 55 to 31 percent between 2023 and 2024
- During 2024, the share of Jewish Ivy League students who identify as very liberal declined from 40 percent before the encampments went up to 13 percent after they appeared
- During 2024, the share of Jewish Ivy League students who identify as strong Democrats declined from 37 percent before the encampments went up to 14 percent after they appeared
- During 2024, the share of Republicans among Ivy League Jewish students rose from 12 percent prior to the encampments to 18 percent after, above the Ivy League average.
- Students are evenly divided as to whether Hamas or Israel was responsible for the '2023 outbreak of violence in the Middle East'
- 10 percent of students sympathize more with Israel, 40 percent with the Palestinians. The rest sympathize with both or don't know
- Just 38 percent of conservative students say Hamas started the war in October, with 16 percent saying Israel did. The rest say both or don't know
- 53 percent of liberal Jewish students say Hamas started the war in October, placing them far closer to conservative Jews (83 percent) than liberal non-Jews (14 percent)
- Religious Jews self-censor more than secular Jews. Nearly 40 percent of Ivy League Jewish students who attend synagogue regularly self-censor their beliefs often
- The rise of the encampments increased self-censorship among Muslims, though not as much as among Jews

- Ivy League students are relatively more pro-Israel and less willing to cancel a pro-Israel speaker than other students
- Most targetings of professors for cancellation around the Israel-Palestine issue come from the off-campus political right
- Most student-led deplatformings of speakers around the Israel-Palestine issue come from the on-campus left
- The share of deplatformings accounted for by the issue of Israel-Palestine increased from 17 percent in 2022 to 65 percent in 2024.
- Zionist Jews are self-censoring more in 2024 than in 2023 while pro-Palestinian Jews are self-censoring less

Introduction

Donald Trump's second term has produced a series of high-profile investigations and fines of universities, especially Ivy League schools, for alleged antisemitism. In its most recent move, the government issued a letter to Harvard accusing it of violating civil rights law by not protecting Jewish students who felt threatened. It claimed that its own research found that a majority of Jewish students at Harvard felt discriminated against, with a quarter feeling physically threatened. 'Failure to institute adequate changes immediately will result in the loss of all federal financial resources,' the letter warned.¹

The administration has also mandated a scaling back of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) initiatives while blasting universities' lack of viewpoint diversity and their hostility to conservatism. DEI and antisemitism have been fused together as a whole in the mind of many of Trump's supporters and detractors. This conjunction also appears in the letter: 'Harvard's commitment to racial hierarchies—where individuals are sorted and judged according to their membership in an oppressed group identity and not individual merit—has enabled anti-Semitism to fester,' it charged. Harvard did not contest the findings but instead responded that it had taken steps to address the problem, including facilitating dialogue, expanding non-discrimination and anti-bullying policies and increasing its antisemitism training.²

But what if conservatism and the Israel-Palestine question, DEI and antisemitism, occupy separate areas of public opinion? What if American students view these questions as broadly orthogonal? A new piece in the Washington Post suggests that young Republicans are moving away from their traditional pro-Israel stance, demonstrating that conservatism is not coterminous with support for Israel. In 2022, 63 percent of Republicans under 50 had a positive view of Israel, but this dropped to 48 percent by 2025, with half holding negative views.³

If so, then trying to yoke them together may produce a series of unintended consequences that could backfire for the right. This report shows, using student survey data, that campus antisemitism and anti-conservatism are both problems, but each revolves in a relatively separate orbit from the other.

¹ 'Task Force to Combat Anti-Semitism Letter to Harvard University,' *US Department of Education*, June 30, 2025. <https://www.ed.gov/about/news/press-release/task-force-combat-anti-semitism-letter-harvard-university>

² Debusmann, Bernd, 'White House says Harvard violated civil rights of Jewish students,' *BBC*, June 30, 2025.

³ Wright, Terrell, 'Young Republicans are fueling the GOP's generational divide on Israel,' *Washington Post*, June 30, 2025, citing Laura Silver, 'How Americans view Israel and the Israel-Hamas war at the start of Trump's second term,' *Pew*, April 8, 2025.

Trump and Higher Education Reform

The administration initially revoked \$400 million in federal funding to Columbia University, citing the university's failure to adequately respond to antisemitism on campus. Additionally, the Department of Education issued notices to 60 colleges and universities indicating that they are under investigation following allegations of antisemitic incidents.⁴ In April 2025, the Trump administration issued a letter to Harvard alleging rampant antisemitism and anti-conservative bias in faculty hiring. This was followed by a freeze of \$2.2 billion in federal grants to the institution as well as a threat to remove tax exemptions for large university endowments like Harvard's. As of writing, a deal - which is likely to establish the parameters of the relationship between the government and elite higher education - has not yet been announced between the administration and Harvard.⁵

The battle over elite higher education has divided opinion makers, even those on the anti-woke side. A pivotal issue is the question of whether elite universities, especially those in the Ivy League, are guilty of underpolicing, or even encouraging, a left-wing anti-zionism which bleeds into antisemitism. Others aver that universities should err on the side of free speech, treading only lightly on student protests against Israel.

For instance, Steven Pinker, a Jewish Harvard professor notable for his opposition to mainstreaming Social Justice in higher education, leans to the free speech side, denying that Harvard has a serious antisemitism problem. In an editorial published in the *New York Times*, he opines:

For what it's worth, I have experienced no antisemitism in my two decades at Harvard, and nor have other prominent Jewish faculty members. My own discomfort instead is captured in a *Crimson* essay by the Harvard senior Jacob Miller, who called the claim that one in four Jewish students feels "physically unsafe" on campus "an absurd statistic I struggle to take seriously as someone who publicly and proudly wears a kippah around campus each day." The obsession with antisemitism at Harvard represents, ironically, a surrender to the critical-social-

⁴ Kline, Katy, 'Weaponizing antisemitism makes students 'less safe,' says drafter of definition,' *NPR.org*, March 20, 2025.

⁵ Cochran, Lexi Lonas, 'Colleges nervously await Trump-Harvard deal,' *The Hill*, June 26, 2025.

justice credo that the only wrong worthy of condemnation is group-against-group bigotry.⁶

Jay Greene, a Jewish Senior Research Fellow in Education Policy at the Heritage Foundation, takes the diametrically opposing view:

Steven Pinker is a lifelong atheist. He is highly secular. I'm glad that he gets to be that kind of Jew. But he should be open-minded and tolerant of other kinds of Jews who might not be as consequence free as he is of bad-acting fellow students. He should try walking around campus with a kippah and an I-Heart-Israel t-shirt for a month and see how life is. You should be allowed to be at Harvard and be that kind of Jew. Unfortunately they're not; they're driven out. Over time, the only kinds of Jews that we get at Harvard are Steven Pinker Jews who swear that everything's fine. But the point of Trump's actions is not to protect Pinker, it is to protect the other Jews who should be there who aren't.⁷

Trump's letter to Harvard also mentions its lack of viewpoint diversity (namely conservatism), evident in the fact that its faculty's political donations, like those of other Ivy League universities, tilts 96-4 to the Democrats over the Republicans.⁸ The subtext is that conservatives are being discriminated against at multiple levels, and therefore being excluded from elite universities. Meanwhile, successive Foundation for Individual Rights and Expression (FIRE) surveys repeatedly find that conservative students self-censor at much higher rates than liberals.

In what follows, I examine how free speech changed for conservative and Jewish students on American campuses, especially elite ones, during the Biden administration. The 2021-24 period is important because this was a period in which a number of indicators of the Great Awokening – such as left-wing cancellation attempts or mentions of racism in elite media – declined substantially. In addition, after October 7, 2023, the Israel-Palestine conflict - in which the US is involved through financial and military aid to Israel – rose to prominence in the news.

Methodology

⁶ Pinker, Steven, 'Harvard Derangement Syndrome,' *New York Times*, May 23, 2025.

⁷ Interview with Jay Greene, 'Terminating Visas for Foreign Students at Harvard,' on *What Happens Next in 6 Minutes* with Larry Bernstein, May 31, 2025.

⁸ De la Torre, Gigi, '96 percent of Ivy League political donations go to Democrats,' *College Fix*, November 3, 2022; Schuessler, Jennifer, 'Trump and Harvard Both Want 'Viewpoint Diversity.' What Does It Mean?,' *New York Times*, May 5, 2025.

This study largely draws upon FIRE’s annual student surveys of over 55,000 undergraduates, mainly at major universities or well-regarded liberal arts colleges.⁹ The sample is large enough to yield around 2,000 responses from students who identify their religion as Jewish, which makes it an especially rare and valuable tool for assessing the views of Jewish students. The 2024 survey also asks a series of questions about the Israel-Palestine conflict, allowing the analyst to examine student opinions on the conflict more generally. The large sample likewise enables me to zero in on the elite Ivy League institutions that have been at the centre of policy battles between the Trump administration and higher education. While it is not possible to be confident of statistical generalizations about student attitudes at the level of individual institutions (i.e. Columbia or Harvard), I am able to draw valid generalizations about larger groupings such as the Ivy League. I apply data weights in all analyses.

Attitudes to the Conflict

With this brushclearing out of the way, the first question to determine is where the sympathies of students inside and outside the Ivy League lie. Stepping away from the campus, Harvard-Harris polls show that those aged 18-24 in America, whether students or not, split fairly evenly between Israel and Hamas on a forced-choice question about who they prefer in the conflict . In stark contrast, older generations stand overwhelmingly with Israel.¹⁰

Results of the FIRE student surveys reveal a broadly similar pattern. I examine breakdowns in FIRE’s annual student survey data for Ivy League and non-Ivy League students, across four questions related to the Israel-Palestine conflict.¹¹ The first, in Table 1, shows a clear majority of those with an opinion sympathizing with the Palestinians, with around 10 percent sympathizing with Israel.

⁹ For further details on methodology and questions, see FIRE’s College Free Speech Rankings at <https://www.thefire.org/college-free-speech-rankings>.

¹⁰ See Harvard-Harris polls at <https://harvardharrispoll.com/all-polls/>.

¹¹ For further details on methodology and questions, see FIRE’s College Free Speech Rankings at <https://www.thefire.org/college-free-speech-rankings>.

There is no statistical difference between Ivy League and non-Ivy League students:

From what you know about the situation in the Middle East, do your sympathies lie more with the Israelis or more with the Palestinians?

Table 1.

	All Other Students (%)	Ivy League Students (%)
Israelis	10	12
Palestinians	39	44
Both / Neither	24	24
Don't know	25	17
N	56,684	2,123

Item two follows on from the above (see Table 2):

Regardless of your overall feelings toward the Israelis and the Palestinians, who do you think is more responsible for the 2023 outbreak of violence in the Middle East: Israel or Hamas?

Table 2.

	All Other Students (%)	Ivy League Students (%)
Israel	25	28
Hamas	21	28
Both equally	16	16
Don't know	36	26
N	56,684	2,123

This question, in contrast to the first about sympathy, shows a more even split between students attributing blame for the

outbreak of violence in 2023 to Israel or to Hamas. While it is difficult to argue that Israel was the proximate cause of the 2023 outbreak of violence, these results show that many students may have looked to ultimate Israeli causes (i.e. settlements, repressing intifada) or have drawn on the cultural left ideology of settler-colonialism which reflexively ascribes blame to dominant groups descended from white settlers who are positioned as oppressors of indigenous peoples of colour.¹²

The above FIRE results on attitudes toward the Israel-Palestine conflict confirm figures from Harvard-Harris for the young adult population at large. It would be interesting to understand if students really believe that Israel was responsible for the October 7 attacks, or whether they misread the question as asking about who bears the ultimate responsibility for the conduct of the war as a whole. If a preponderance of students who have a view believe that Israel was responsible for October 7, this is a shocking result. Certainly it is an area for further research.

Are Ivy League students especially pro-Hamas? No. Statistically, they are significantly less likely to say Israel caused the outbreak of hostilities, though this is only a small difference. Controlling for the liberal slant of its student body and the Jewish share of the student body, student opinion in the Ivy League is somewhat less pro-Hamas and more pro-Israel than in other universities. The reverse is true for liberal arts colleges, which are the most pro-Hamas and least sympathetic to Israel.

Attitudes to Free Speech about the Conflict

Questions three and four ask about toleration for controversial free speech on the Israel-Palestinian conflict. Table 3 shows results for:

Regardless of your own views on the topic, should your school **ALLOW** or **NOT ALLOW** a speaker on campus who has previously expressed the following idea?

¹² Kirsch, A. (2024). *On Settler Colonialism: Ideology, Violence, and Justice*, WW Norton & Company.

“Collateral damage in Gaza is justified for the sake of Israeli security.”

Table 3.

	All Other Students (%)	Ivy League Students (%)
Definitely not allow	26	20
Probably not allow	34	32
Total disallow	60	52
Probably allow	28	30
Definitely allow	12	18
N	56,589	2,118

Here views are relatively even, albeit tilted against the free speech position. 60 percent of non-Ivy League students would prevent someone who says collateral damage in Gaza is justified, with just 40 percent endorsing toleration. This compares to 52 percent of Ivy League students who would prevent free speech in this case, with 48 percent on the pro-free speech side. Ivy League students are more tolerant than non-Ivy League students of free speech for this controversial pro-Israel speaker. Liberal arts college students are even more intolerant, with 65 percent of students preferring to ban the speaker.

We see the same pattern in the next question below in Table 4:

Regardless of your own views on the topic, should your school **ALLOW** or **NOT ALLOW** a speaker on campus who has previously expressed the following idea?

“From the river to the sea, Palestine will be free.”

Table 4.

	All Other Students (%)	Ivy League Students (%)
Definitely not allow	9	6
Probably not allow	20	19
Total disallow	29	25
Probably allow	43	42
Definitely allow	28	33
N	56,685	2,123

Ivy League students are more tolerant of this hypothetical controversial pro-Palestinian speaker than non-Ivy League students. Thus 29 percent of non-Ivy League students would prevent someone who says ‘From the river to the sea, Palestine will be free’ compared to 25 percent of Ivy League students.

This fits a broader pattern in which Ivy League students are more supportive of free speech for a range of controversial speakers (such as one who says Black Lives Matter is a hate group or trans a mental disorder) than non-Ivy League students. Even when I control for race, socioeconomic background, financial aid status, gender, sexual orientation, political ideology, private/public high school, religion and private/public university, Ivy League students are significantly more pro-free speech than others.

Cancel Culture around the Israel-Palestine Issue

What is the speech climate around antisemitism like on American campuses today? To set the scene, I examine trends in cancel culture campaigns – activism focused on punishing faculty and deplatforming speakers - pertaining to the explosive question of Israel-Palestine. This is one source of claims of campus antisemitism.

When it comes to the targeting of academics, FIRE’s *Scholars Under Fire* database finds that, since 2001, nearly a quarter

of right-wing initiated speech punishment or restriction incidents against faculty have involved the Israel-Palestine question. By contrast, just 4 percent of left-wing cancellation campaigns in this period involved opinions about the conflict.

Fully 86 percent of the time an academic has been targeted over Israel-Palestine, the charge has come from the right. This makes Israel-Palestine the most important focus of right-coded speech restriction. Figure 1 shows the share of cancellation incidents related to this question over time that have been initiated by the right. The right-instigated pattern is relatively consistent over time, and does not appear to be linked to the events which followed October 7, 2023.

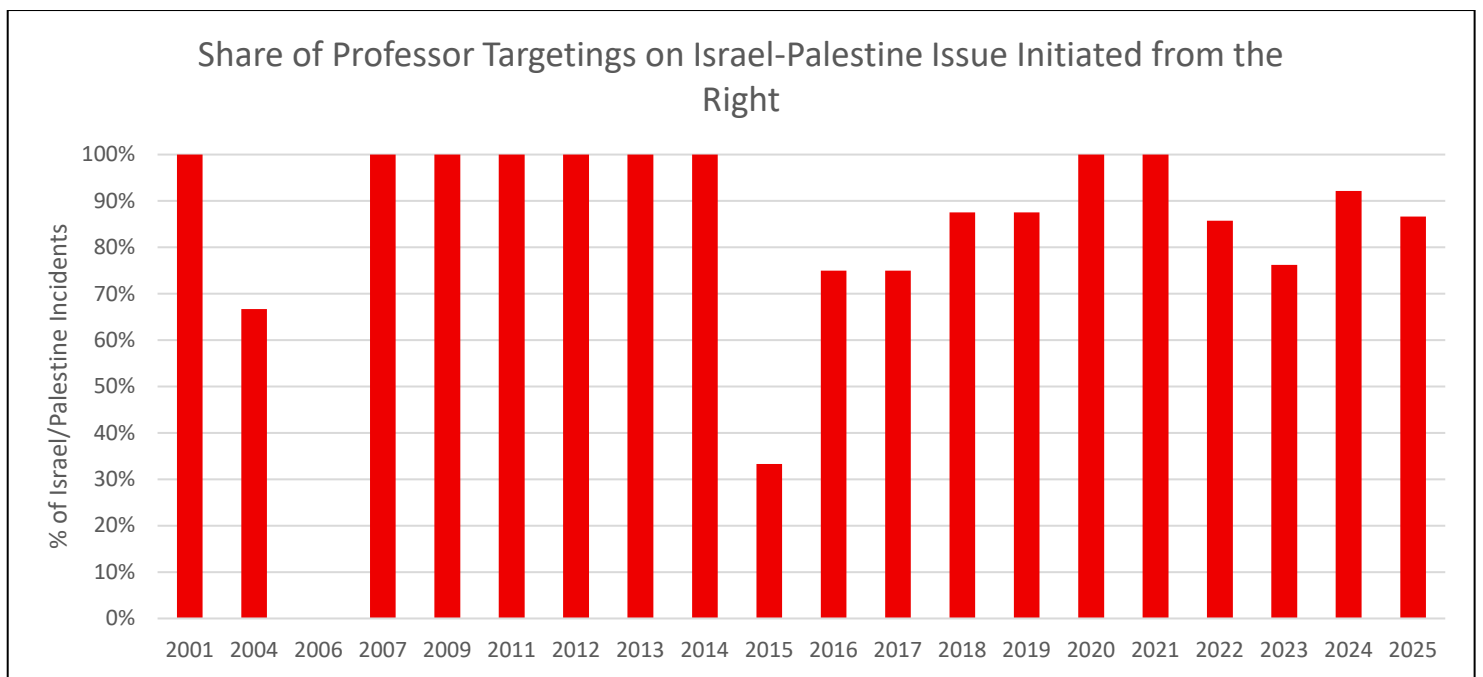


Figure 1

Source: FIRE Scholars Under Fire database, accessed June 20, 2025. N=174 Israel-Palestine incidents out of a total of 1,366 incidents since 2000.

While the right dominates Israel-Palestine related cancel culture activism, Figure 2 illustrates that the left dominated the targeting of students and faculty overall between 2014 and 2020.

Yet, after 2021, left-wing cancellations of professors rapidly declined. In 2021, the right took the overall lead in punishing or restricting academics' speech, and, by 2024-25, due to Republican state and federal action, the political right was initiating almost all faculty targeting. It should be noted that some of this may reflect methodology as the FIRE data include cases of a professor's work being censored by university libraries. For instance, each instance of removing a critical

race theory academic's book from the US Naval Academy's library at the behest of the Trump administration's anti-DEI Executive Order has been recorded as a separate event in FIRE's *Scholars Under Fire* database.

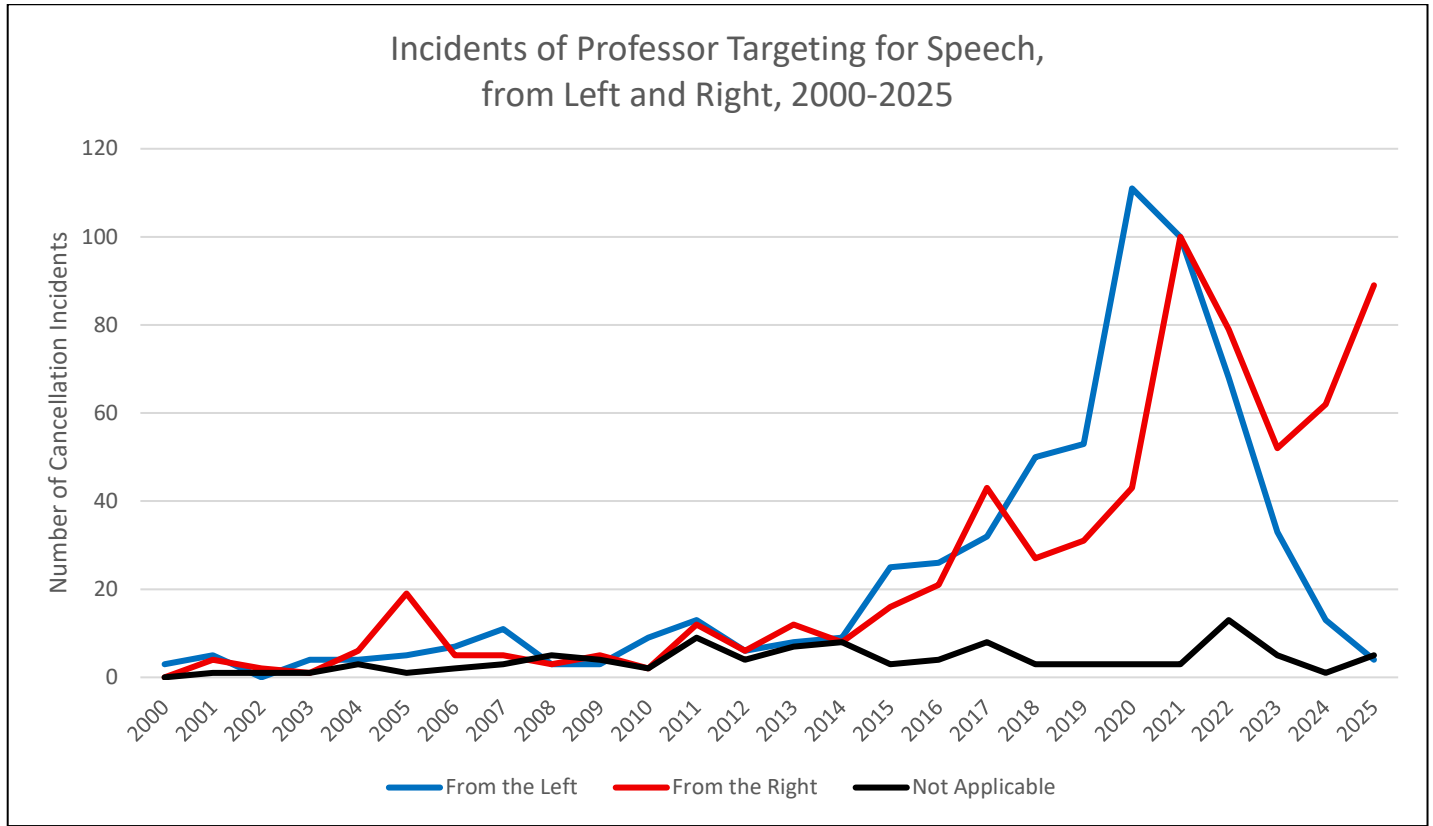


Figure 2

Source: FIRE *Scholars Under Fire* database, accessed June 20, 2025. N= 1,366 incidents since 2000 with 584 from the left, 621 from the right and 98 not applicable.

The off-campus right dominates professor targeting, but Figure 3 shows that student-led cancel culture still leans left. As of January 2024, 63 percent of student-on-student targeting was being perpetrated by the left, compared to just 11 percent from conservative students. While this left activism represented a modest decline from the peak of the Great Awakening in 2020 when 81 percent of students targeted for speech were attacked from the left and 7 percent from the right, the dominant force in student-led speech suppression remains the left.¹³

The other important dynamic to notice is the dramatic pivot among student speech cancelers from race (red series) and gender (blue), which still comprised 63 percent of the motives for student-led deplatforming in 2022, to Israel-Palestine (yellow), which jumped from 17 percent of motives in 2022 to 45 percent in 2023 and 65 percent in 2024. Leftist heat was

¹³ FIRE 2024. 'Shifting Winds: Students Under Fire, 2020-2024,' Foundation for Individual Rights and Expression.

going out of race/gender toward Israel-Palestine, and this was to have important effects on the speech conformity pressures bearing down on Jewish and conservative students.

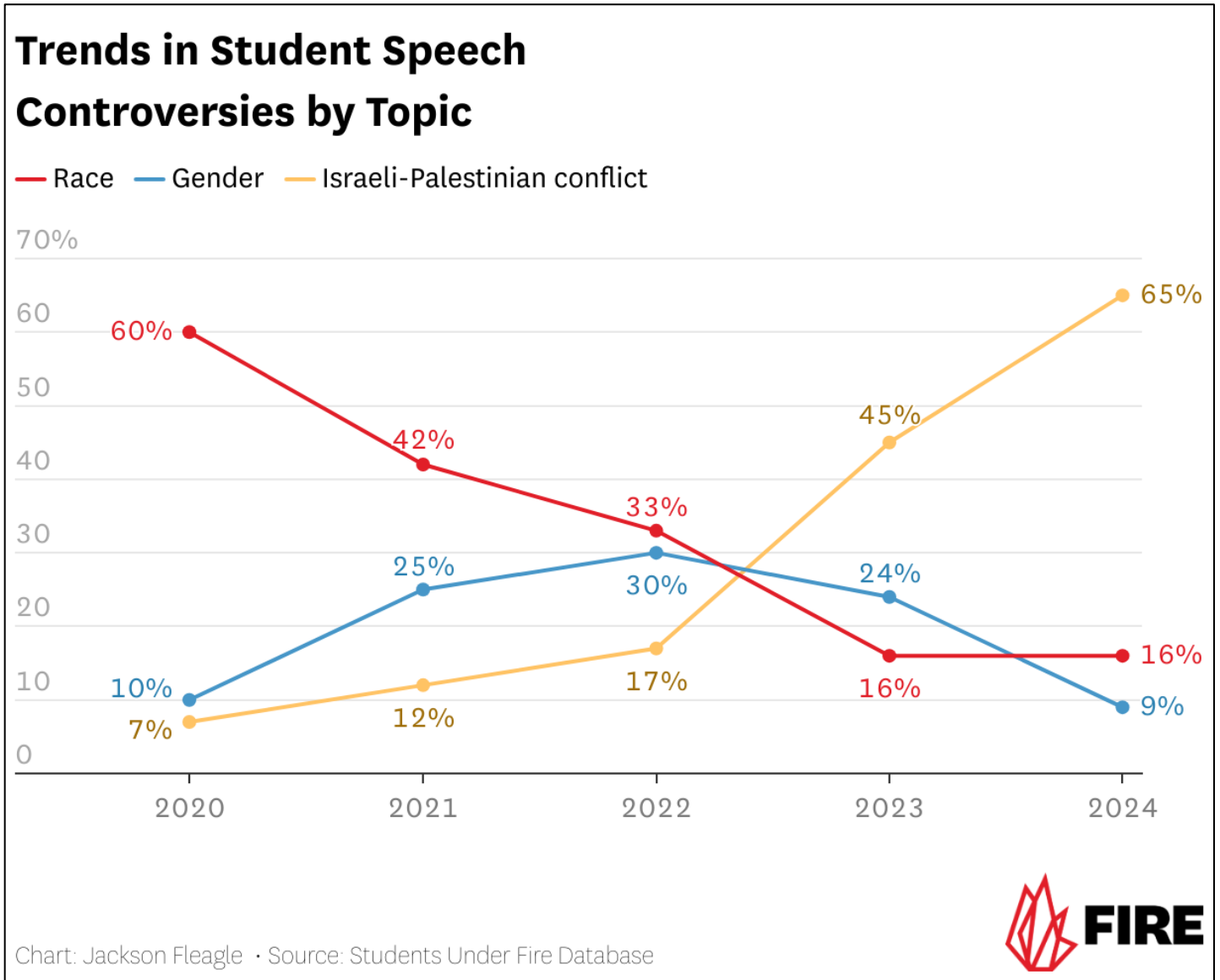


Figure 3

Source: FIRE 2024. ‘Shifting Winds: Students Under Fire, 2020-2024,’ *Foundation for Individual Rights and Expression*.

This said, following the October 7, 2023 Hamas attacks on Israel, administrative and external pressure on speech (often from the right or in response to right-wing pressure) increased, overshadowing left-wing student-led cancellations. We saw that the right dominates cancellation activism on the Israel-Palestine question when it comes to targeting faculty. Figure 4 illustrates that Hamas’ attacks of October 7, 2023 generated increasing attention to this right-coded issue, leading to a rise in the targeting of anti-Israel faculty (the drop in this issue’s centrality in 2025 has more to do with Trump’s EO on DEI and its raft of anti-DEI content restrictions dominating the data than a slackening of right-wing

cancelers' focus on Middle East-related professorial transgressions).

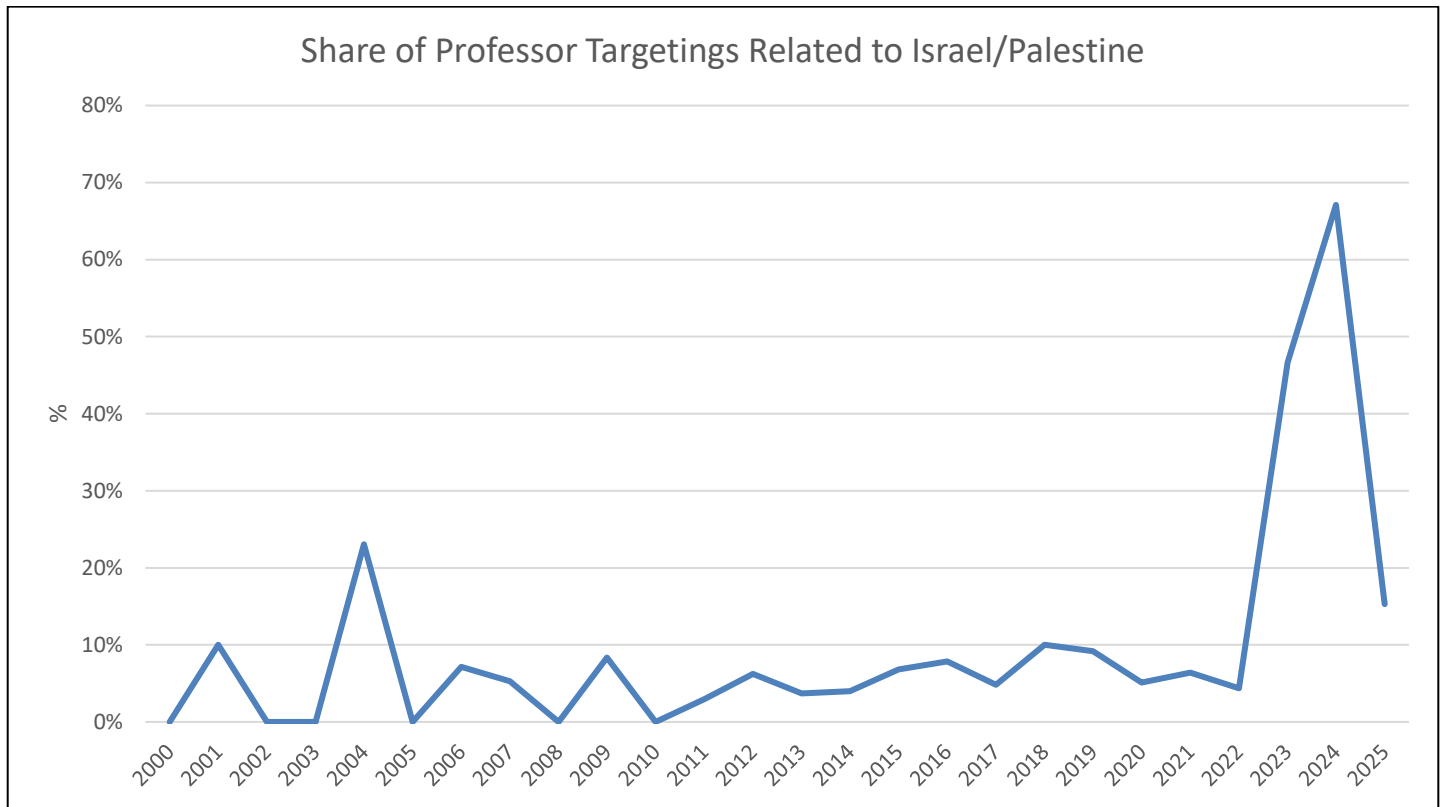


Figure 4

Source: FIRE *Scholars Under Fire* database, accessed June 20, 2025. N=174 Israel-Palestine incidents out of a total of 1,366 incidents since 2000.

Targeting campaigns over the Israel-Palestine conflict typically come from external right-leaning or Jewish organizations.

Consider the most recent case in the database, that of Raz Segal, a professor of Holocaust and Genocide Studies at Stockton University. As FIRE describes it:

Segal was selected to become the Faculty Director of the University of Minnesota’s Center for Holocaust and Genocide Studies (CHGS), a tenure-track role leading research, public programming, and teaching on genocide and mass atrocity studies. After Segal's hiring was announced controversy erupted over an op-ed he had written in October 2023, shortly after Hamas’s attack on Israel and Israel’s military response in Gaza. Segal wrote that characterizing Israel’s assault on Gaza as “a textbook case of genocide.” He explained that his use of the term “genocide” referred to deliberate policies causing mass civilian suffering, and separately condemned the Hamas attack as a war crime. Two members of CHGS’s advisory board resigned in protest, citing Segal’s published views as incompatible with the center’s mission and the Jewish Community Relations Council of Minnesota and the

Dakotas led a public campaign urging the university to rescind Segal's appointment, arguing his views were "extreme" and that he had "justified" Hamas's October 7 attack. Over 200 University of Minnesota faculty signed a letter demanding the administration honor its offer; but at the same time, some local faculty and community groups circulated petitions opposing Segal's hire. The university's interim president and its provost announced that they were "considering the views of those who objected" and officially "paused" Segal's appointment and the CHGS director search to allow for further review. The administration characterized the pause as a necessary consultation with community stakeholders but drew sharp criticism from faculty governance bodies. After failing to reverse course, the university formally rescinded Segal's job offer, effectively terminating his appointment before it began.¹⁴

While the right heavily dominates Israel-Palestine-related cancellations of professors, deplatforming incidents – often student-led – are politically balanced between left and right. The most recent example in the database comes from the University of Michigan where Nadav Davidovitch was targeted for deplatforming by the left:

A student-led petition with more than 200 signatures called on the university to cancel Davidovitch's (a public health physician and professor at Ben Gurion University in Israel) talk because he served as the commander of an Israeli medical unit during "Operation Protective Edge" (also known as the 2014 war on Gaza). The university refused this demand and Davidovitch spoke successfully on campus.¹⁵

Figure 5 shows the general pattern for deplatforming incidents relating to the Israel-Palestine issue. Right- and left-wing deplatformers have been equally active, in contrast to professor targeting on this issue, which the right dominates. (The apparent decline for 2025 is almost certainly due to incomplete data for 2025 rather than a slackening of deplatforming energy on this issue.)

¹⁴ FIRE *Scholars Under Fire* Database, accessed June 20, 2025.

¹⁵ FIRE *Scholars Under Fire* Database, accessed June 20, 2025.

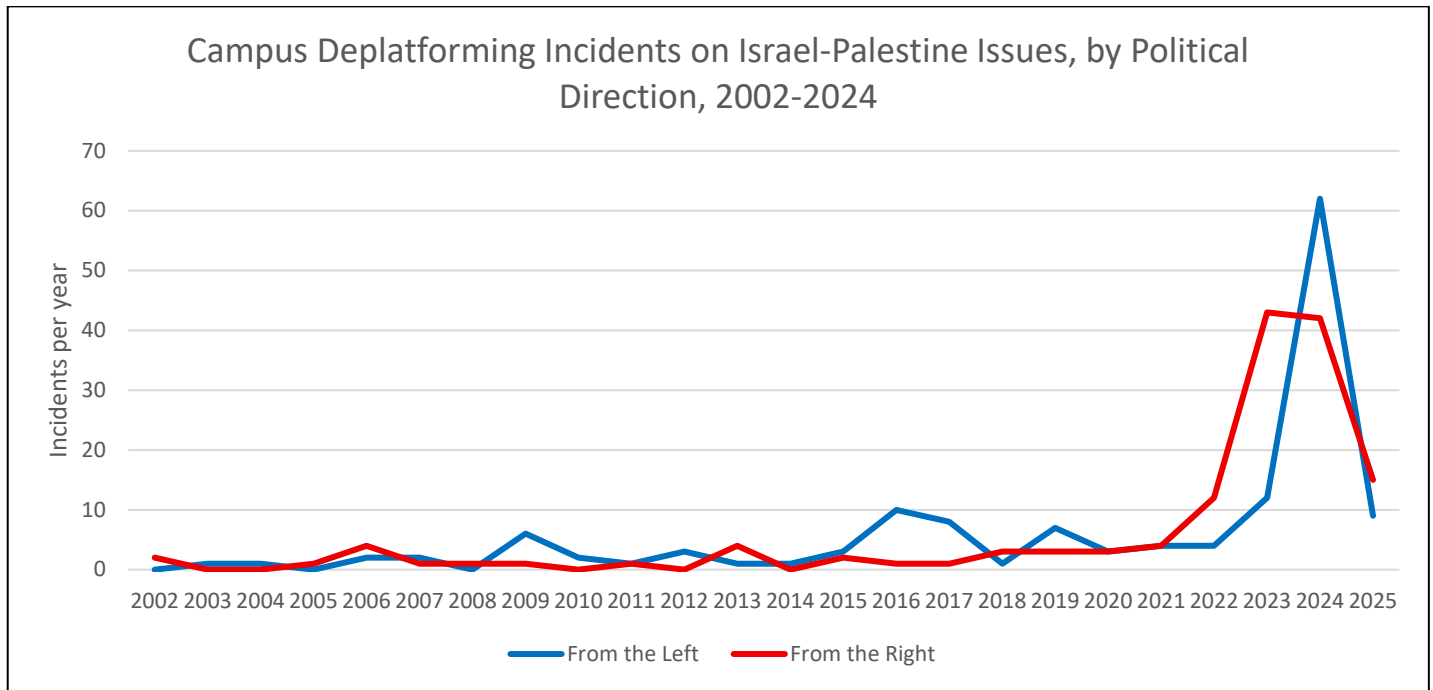


Figure 5

Source: FIRE *Campus Deplatforming Database*, accessed June 24, 2025. N=299 Israel-Palestine incidents out of a total of 1,743 incidents since 1998 (no Israel-Palestine incidents until 2002).

The Campus Speech Climate

In what follows, I draw on FIRE’s free speech student surveys, which sample over 55,000 undergraduate students each year, mainly from research universities or liberal arts colleges. I start with student religious and political demographics, followed by their attitudes to the Israel-Palestine conflict. Here I am interested in comparing Jewish and non-Jewish students, as well as conservatives and liberals, regardless of religious background.

Religion and Political Beliefs

Examining student attitudes to the Israel-Palestine conflict, as well as to speakers with controversial views on the conflict, FIRE data indicate that considerably more students sympathise with the Palestinians than the Israelis, though they are more divided on who is to blame for the outbreak of the conflict. It is also clear that the conflict has produced an upsurge of cancel culture, largely from the right in the case of faculty targeting, and from both left and right – in equal measure – for deplatforming controversial speakers. How has this climate of opinion and activism affected the expressive freedom of Jews, conservatives, Muslims and liberals?

The religious demographics of the student body in the country’s major universities and liberal arts colleges leans secular.

Table 5 summarizes 2024 FIRE student data by religious affiliation, broken out by Ivy League and non-Ivy League institutions:

Table 5.

Religion	Ivy League (%)	Non-Ivy League (%)
No religion	48%	41%
Christian	35%	46%
Jewish	8%	3%
Muslim	2%	2%
N	2,123	56,684

Christian identifiers slightly outnumber the nonreligious overall, but in Ivy League schools, the modal response is nonreligious, with nearly half (48 percent) of Ivy League students having no religion. Jews comprise 3.5 percent of the total student sample, rising to 7.7 percent of Ivy League students. There are 164 Jewish students in the 2024 Ivy League sample, sufficient for many kinds of statistical analysis. Notice that there are nearly as many Muslim as Jewish students in the university system as a whole, reflecting wider youth population dynamics where these religious groups are approximately equal in size.

It may be that some Jews are ticking ‘no religion’ rather than Jewish, though coming from a small ethnic group might incline them to tick the Jewish box even if they have no faith. Pew, for example, finds that 27 percent of ethnic Jews identify as religiously unaffiliated. This share may be lower among the younger Jewish population because more young Jews are Orthodox compared to older generations, or it may be higher due to a larger share of part-Jewish students among younger generations.¹⁶

In the FIRE data, 31 percent of those who identify their religion as Jewish say they rarely or never attend services

¹⁶ Pew, ‘Jewish-Americans in 2020’, May 11, 2021.

compared to just 20 percent of those who identify as Christian. While 30 percent of Jewish students attend synagogue monthly or more, this is considerably less than the 46 percent of Christian students who do so. This suggests that more nonreligious ethnic Jewish students are ticking the Jewish religion box than nonreligious students from Christian-aligned ethnic backgrounds. The religious affiliation measure is therefore capturing many secular Jews.

Table 6 illustrates that a near-majority of students identified as Democratic in 2024, but the proportion is 12 points higher in the Ivy League (59 percent) than outside it (47 percent). The share of Republicans and Independents are both greater outside the Ivy League, though only 1 in 5 undergraduate students in America identify as Republican in the FIRE data.

Table 6.

Partisan Affiliation	Ivy League (%)	Non-Ivy League (%)
Democratic	59%	47%
Independent	28%	32%
Republican	13%	21%
N	2,123	56,684

It is worth noting that 43 percent of 18-24 year-old Americans voted for Trump according to the 2024 exit polls.¹⁷ While vote and party identification are not coterminous, political ideology and party identity are closely linked in the FIRE data, which suggests that these students are only half as likely to vote Republican as those their age in the wider population.

This is mainly because college students are more liberal, but could also reflect some self-selection of more liberal students into the FIRE surveys (or higher nonresponse from conservative students).

It is also worth noting that in the large-scale Higher Education Research Institute (HERI) annual freshman surveys, which draw from the full range of universities down the rankings, the share of conservatives is considerably higher than in the FIRE data.¹⁸ And in the FIRE data for 2023, where student grade point average (GPA) is provided, universities in the lowest

¹⁷ CNN Exit Poll: <https://edition.cnn.com/election/2024/exit-polls/national-results/general/president/0>

¹⁸ Higher Education Research Institute. <https://heri.ucla.edu/publications/>

decile of GPAs on average (indicative of lower rank) averaged 43-18 liberal-to-conservative compared to 63-13 liberal-to-conservative for those in the highest decile of campuses. All of which suggests that non-students and those attending lower-ranked institutions are less liberal and Democratic than those attending elite universities.

The trend for partisan affiliation and political belief is quite stable in the FIRE data in Table 7, despite the rightward shift in the wider young population since 2021 (as noted in HERI and exit poll data). The 2024 FIRE partisan data show some slippage in Democratic partisanship, from 53 to 47 percent, between 2023 and 2024, and a concomittant rise in Independent affiliation. However, there has been no change in political belief, with half the sample identifying as liberal in both 2020 and 2024.

Table 7.

	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
Democratic	56	55	52	53	47
Independent	15	23	26	27	32
Republican	29	23	22	20	21
Liberal	50	52	50	48	50
Moderate	23	26	29	32	28
Conservative	26	22	21	19	22

Source: FIRE 2024. N = 58,807.

In terms of political beliefs, 62 percent of Ivy League students are liberal and 17 percent are conservative. Outside the Ivy League, the ratio is 47-23. Figure 6 shows a larger share of moderates and conservatives on non-Ivy (i.e. mainstream) campuses, with fewer liberals. Ivy League students are not necessarily more radical, with only a small difference at the most extreme 'very liberal' scale point on the far left of the graph.

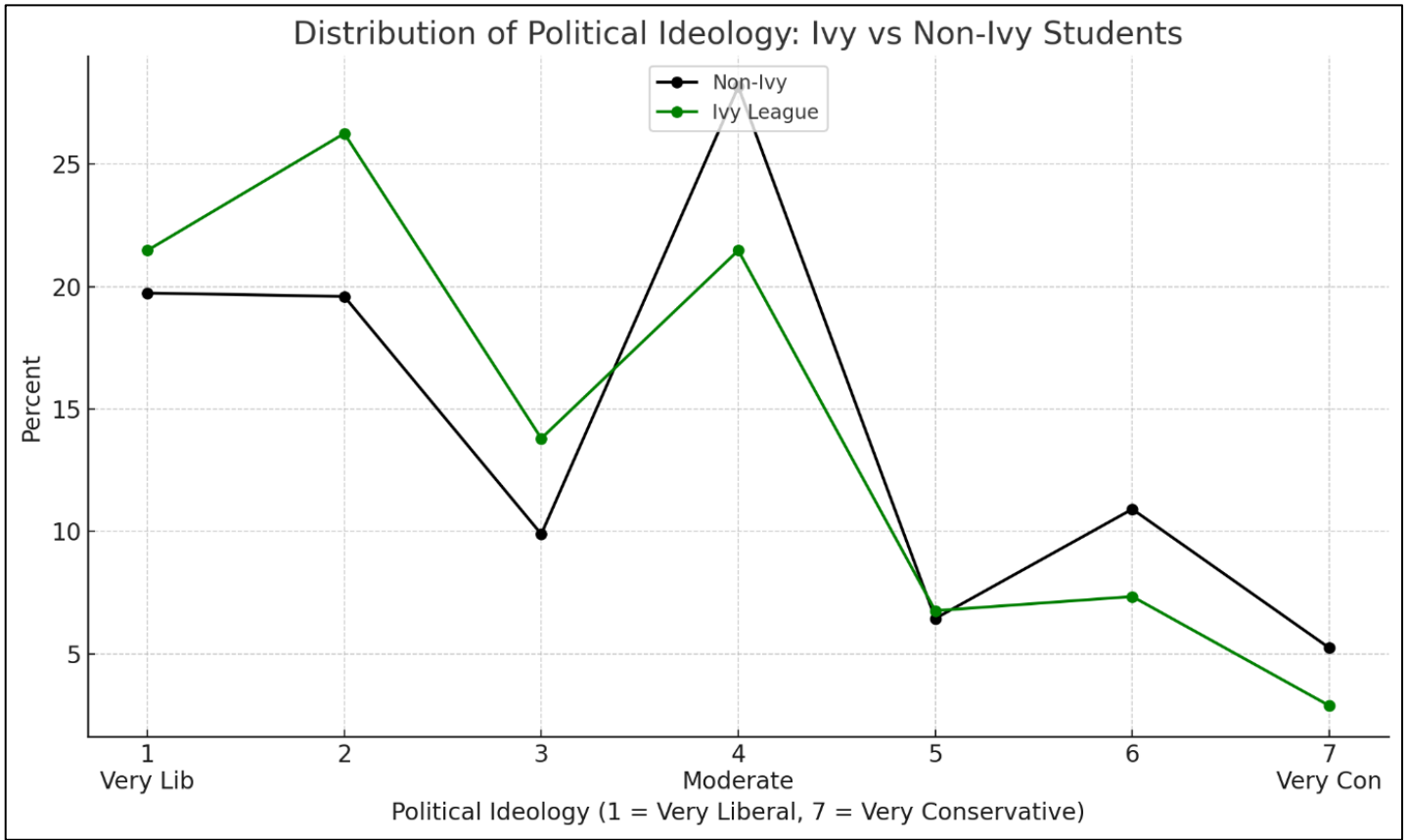


Figure 6

Source: FIRE 2024. N = 56,677 non-Ivy and 2,122 Ivy League. Data weights applied.

Given the similarity over time, it is worth revisiting a plot I did based on 2021 FIRE data, presented in Figure 7. Liberal Arts colleges tend to have the most liberal student bodies, with almost no conservative students. The Ivy League follows, with 10-15 percent of students identifying as conservative. State flagship public universities average around 15-20 percent conservative in blue states and 20-30 percent in red states. Only a handful of institutions lean conservative, with Hillsdale College an outlier at 75 percent conservative and 10 percent liberal.

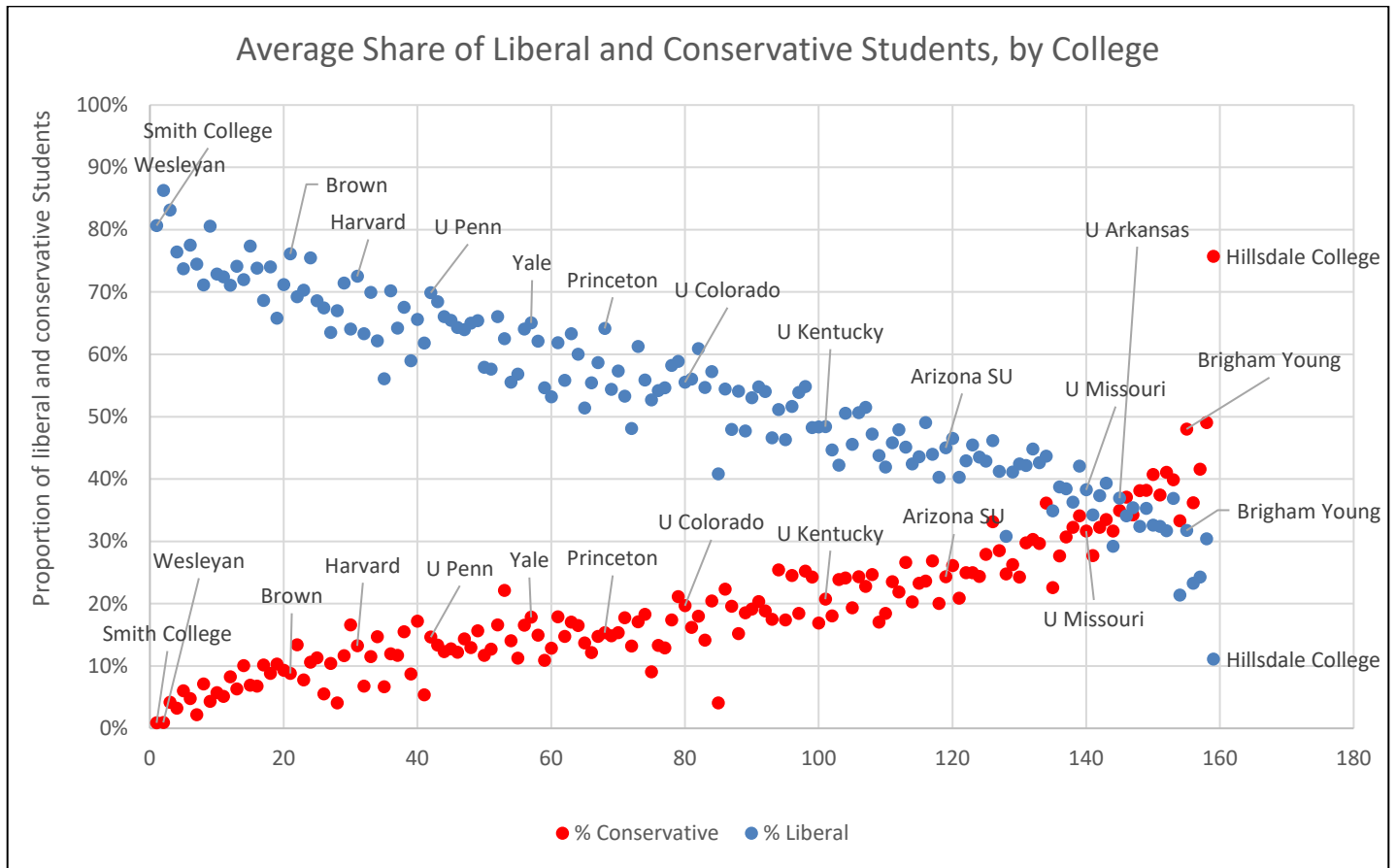


Figure 7

Source: Kaufmann, E. 'Diverse and Divided: a political demography of American Elite Students,' *Center for the Study of Partisanship and Ideology* (CSPI), October 3, 2022. Based on FIRE 2021 data.

Jewish Student Ideology and Partisanship

Jewish students lean left of American students as a whole. 59 percent of Jewish students are Democrats, compared to 47 percent of non-Jewish students. 16 percent of Jewish students are Republican, compared to 21 percent of non-Jewish students. Having said this, in a statistical model of ideology or partisanship, when controlling for the ideological slant of the campuses a student attends as well as their demographics (socioeconomic background, sexual orientation, gender), Jews are not more likely than non-Jews to lean left. Those without religion, by contrast, are vastly more left-wing than others even when controlling for all of the above factors. In top 20 universities, for instance, Jews lean 56-16 Democratic-to-Republican compared to 66-5 for those without religious affiliation.

These numbers, like those for American students overall, are quite stable over time. Figure 8 shows how Jewish students identify on a 5-point ideology scale, for the years 2021 to 2024 where methodology is comparable. Jewish students appear a bit more liberal in 2021 and 2023 than 2022 and 2024. This is likely to be statistical noise due to random

differences in sampling, but might there be any significance to the fact that 19 percent of Jewish students identified as conservative in 2024, the highest on record?

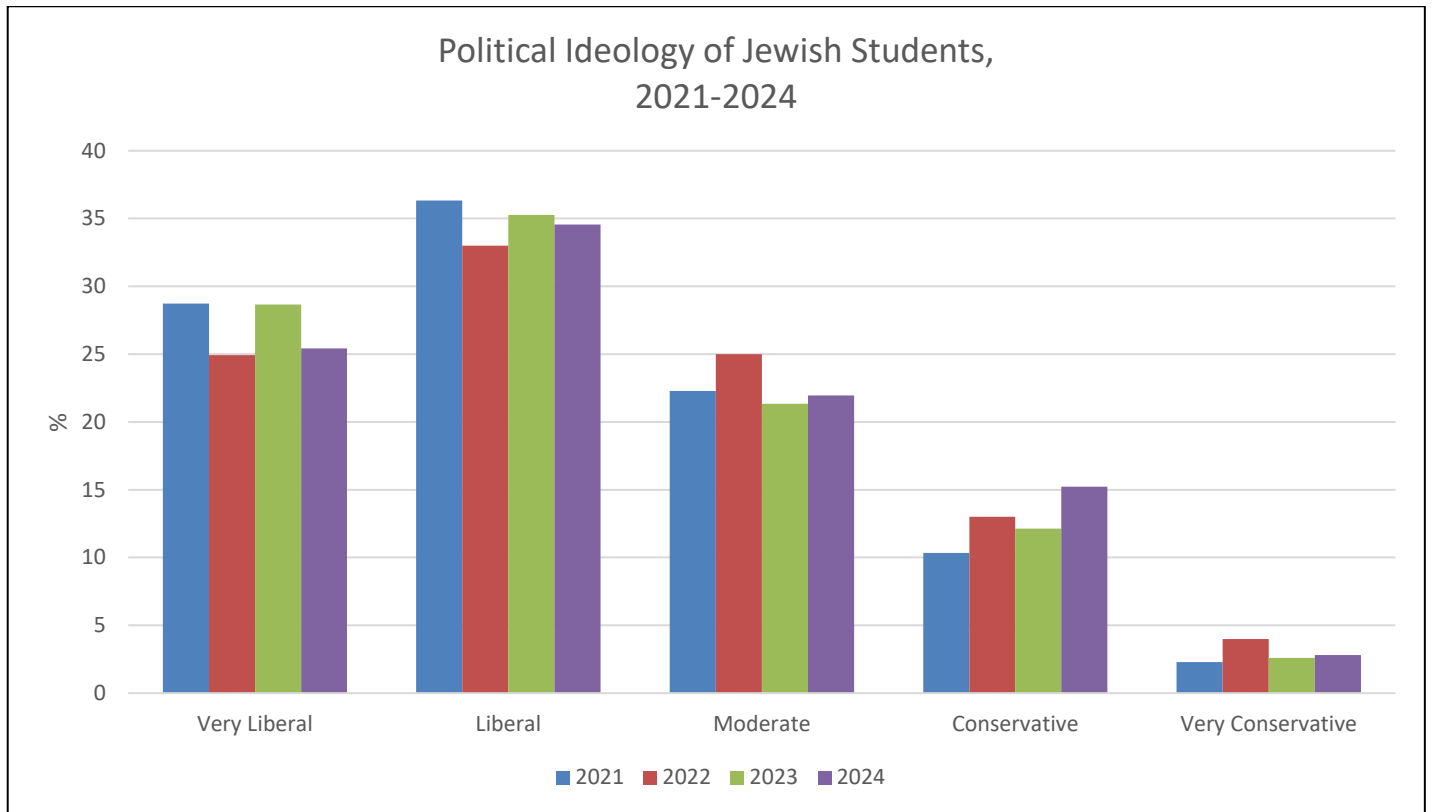


Figure 8

Source: FIRE 2021-2024.

Encampments: a Natural Experiment

A natural experiment which may shed light on what happened at Ivy League universities arrived in the form of encampments to protest Israel’s actions in Gaza, which first appeared on April 17, 2024 at Columbia University. 54 percent of the FIRE survey was conducted before the encampments appeared and 46 percent afterwards.

The encampments had no discernible effect on non-Jewish ideology or partisanship, but do appear to have shifted Jews on campus to the right. Figure 9 shows no real change in the political beliefs of non-Jewish students before and after the encampments emerged, but illustrates that Jewish students went from 62-17 liberal-to-conservative before the encampments to 56-19. At the same time, they shifted from 62-17 Democrat-to-Republican before the encampments to 54-16 afterwards. The decline in very liberal responses is especially noteworthy: 28 percent of Jews identified as very liberal before the encampments but this fell to 21 percent after the encampments were erected (not much different from

the 19 percent of non-Jewish students identifying as far left). Likewise, the proportion of Jewish students calling themselves Strong Democrats dropped from 29 to 22 percent with the encampments.

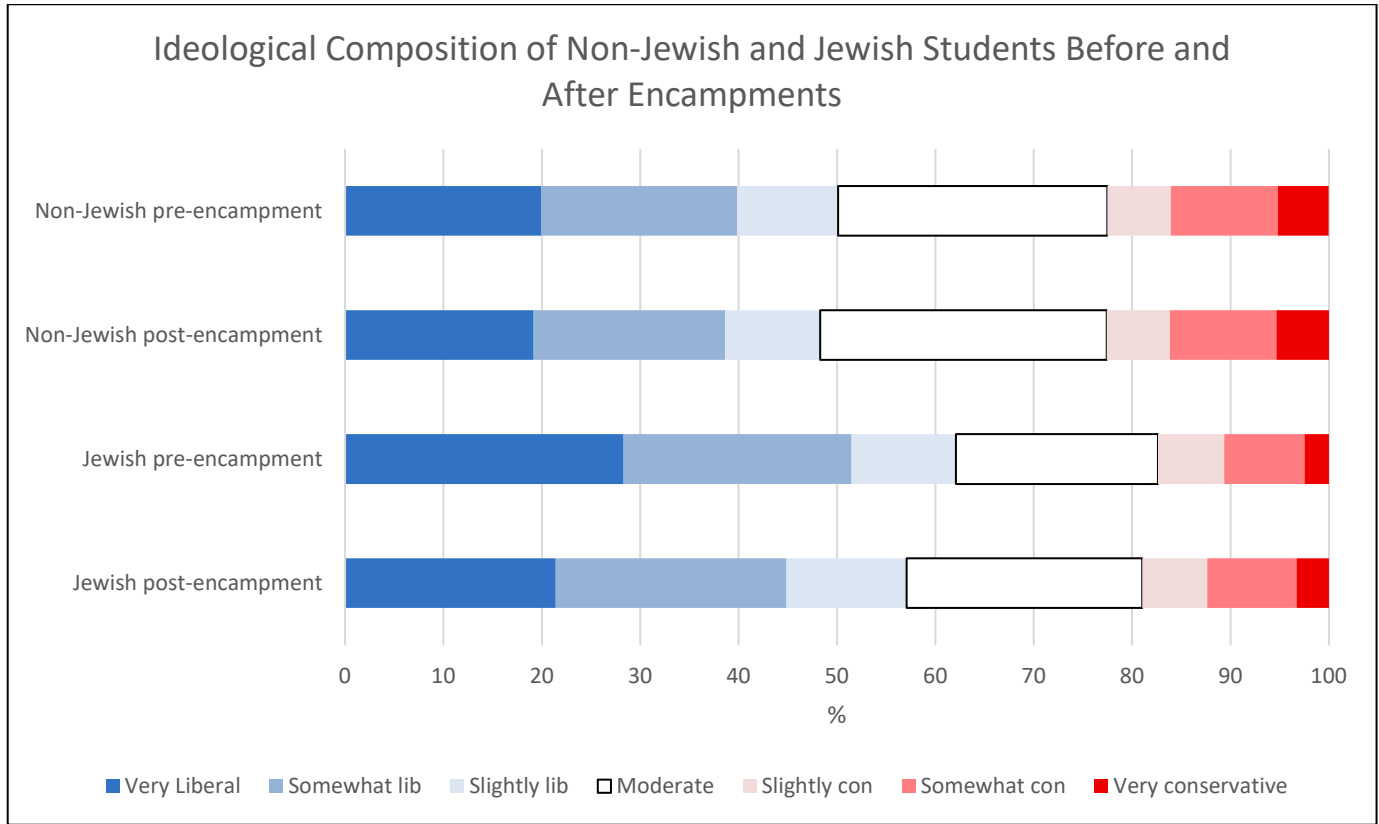


Figure 9

Source: FIRE 2024. N = 67 Jewish Ivy League students pre-encampment and 96 after the encampment.

The effects are especially pronounced on Ivy League campuses, as shown in Figure 10. While non-Jewish students nudged a couple of points right, the pre- and post-encampment effect on Jews is vastly larger. 40 percent of Ivy League Jewish students identified as very liberal prior to the encampments, but this fell to just 13 percent after they appeared. The proportion of Jewish Ivy League students identifying as moderate rose from 11 to 31 percent while the share of conservatives also increased substantially, from 17 to 25 percent. Jewish students in the Ivy League were well to the left of their non-Jewish counterparts before the encampments but after them leaned well to the right of them. In analogous fashion, the proportion of Strong Democrats among Jewish Ivy League students fell from 37 to 14 percent and the share of Republicans increased from 12 to 18 percent.

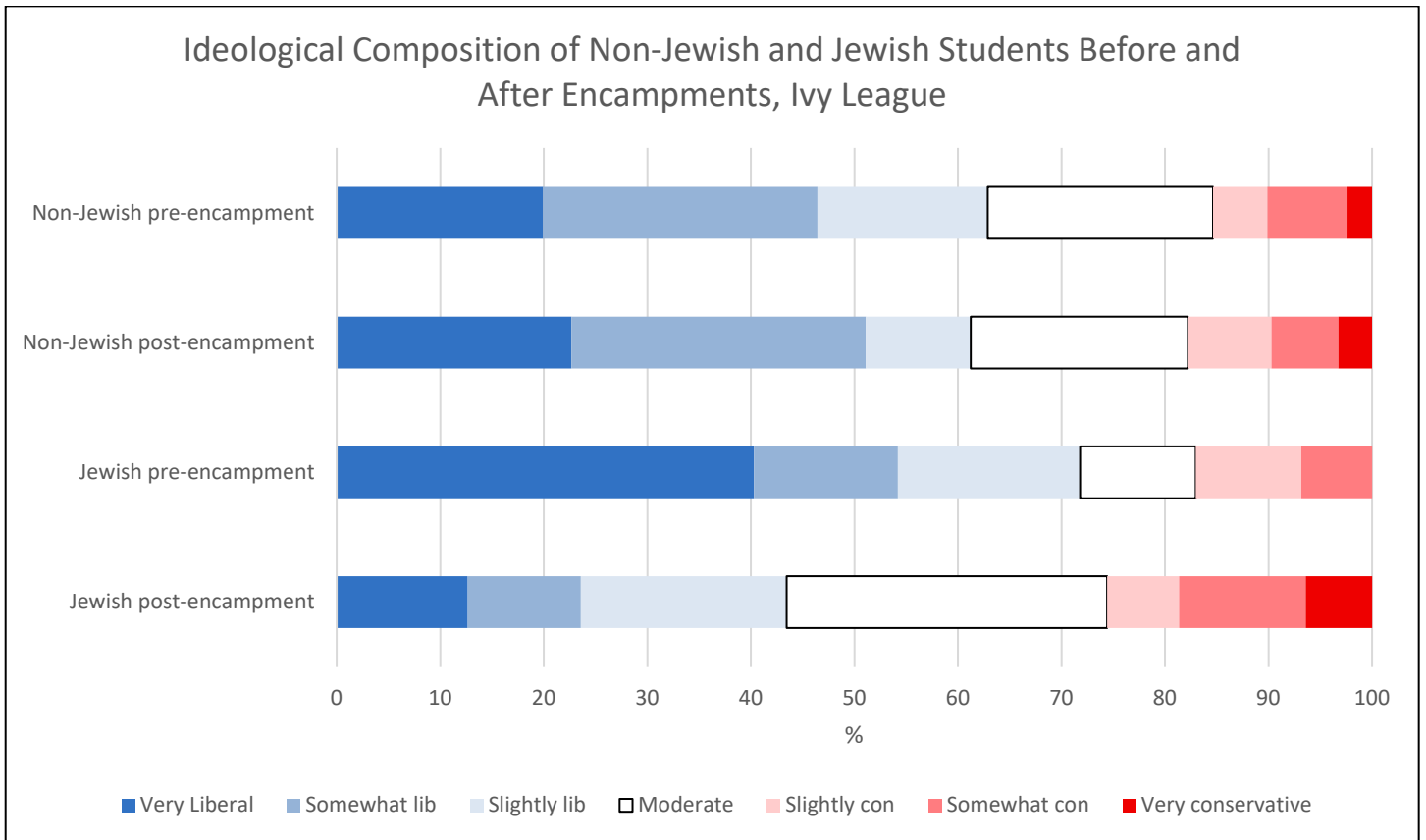


Figure 10

Source: FIRE 2024. N = 67 Jewish Ivy League students pre-encampment and 96 after the encampment.

One might reasonably object that the sample size of Ivy League Jewish students is quite small, at 67 before the encampments and 96 after them. Accordingly, Figure 11 shows statistical output from a model that controls for gender, sexual orientation, socioeconomic background, private/public university, top 20 ranking and the mean ideology of students on a particular campus. The result shows that Jewish students moved significantly to the right after the encampments (by two-thirds of a scale point on a 1-7 scale, a major shift).

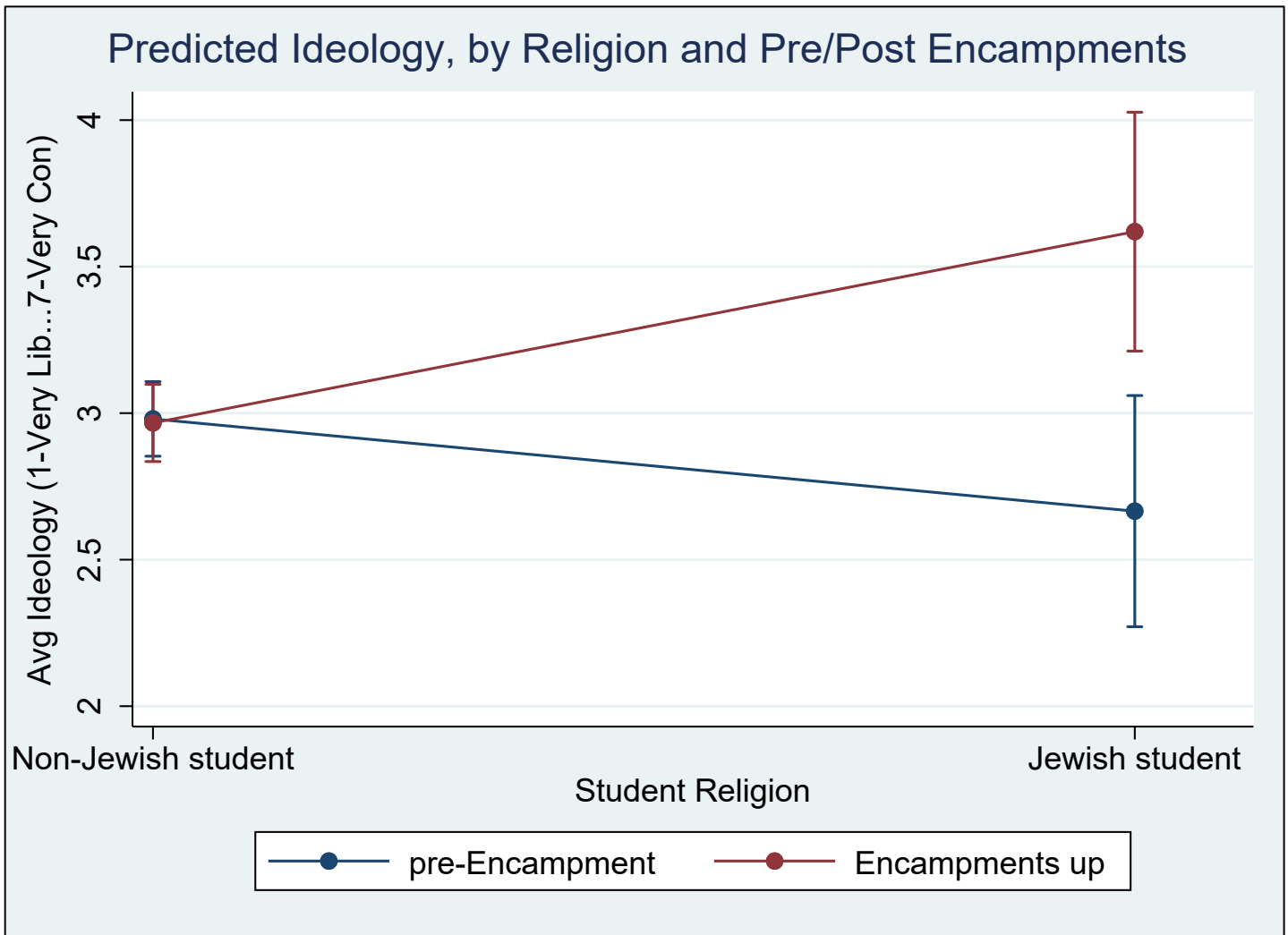


Figure 11

N = 2,296 Ivy League Students. $R^2 = .127$. controls for gender, sexual orientation, socioeconomic background, private/public university, top 20 ranking and the mean ideology of students on a particular campus. Interaction of Jewish x Encampment significant at $p < .01$ level.

Self-Censorship Indicators

What effect did the encampments have on self-censorship among students in general, and Jewish students on Ivy League campuses in particular? When it comes to chilling effects on campus, a good measure is the longstanding FIRE item:

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

Response categories include 'Never, Rarely, Occasionally, once or twice a month, Fairly often, a couple of times a week, Very often - nearly every day.' I group the last two together as indicating high self-censorship. Note that this excludes students who claim they self-censor 'fairly often' and is thus a relatively conservative measure of speech inhibition.

Figure 12 shows that the proportion of Jews who self-censor often had been considerably lower in Ivy League schools between 2021 and 2023 than in other universities. However, between 2023 and 2024, the proportion of Ivy League Jewish students regularly self-censoring soared from 13 to 35 percent. While there was a modest increase in Jewish self-censorship in the mainstream system in these years, it was already higher in non-Ivy League schools, at around 20 percent, so the numbers are only modestly above their normal range. In other words, since October 7th, 2023, when Hamas attacked Israel, a major change in the speech climate for Jews appears to have taken place on Ivy League campuses. This has transformed them from being the most to the least hospitable speech environments for Jewish students.

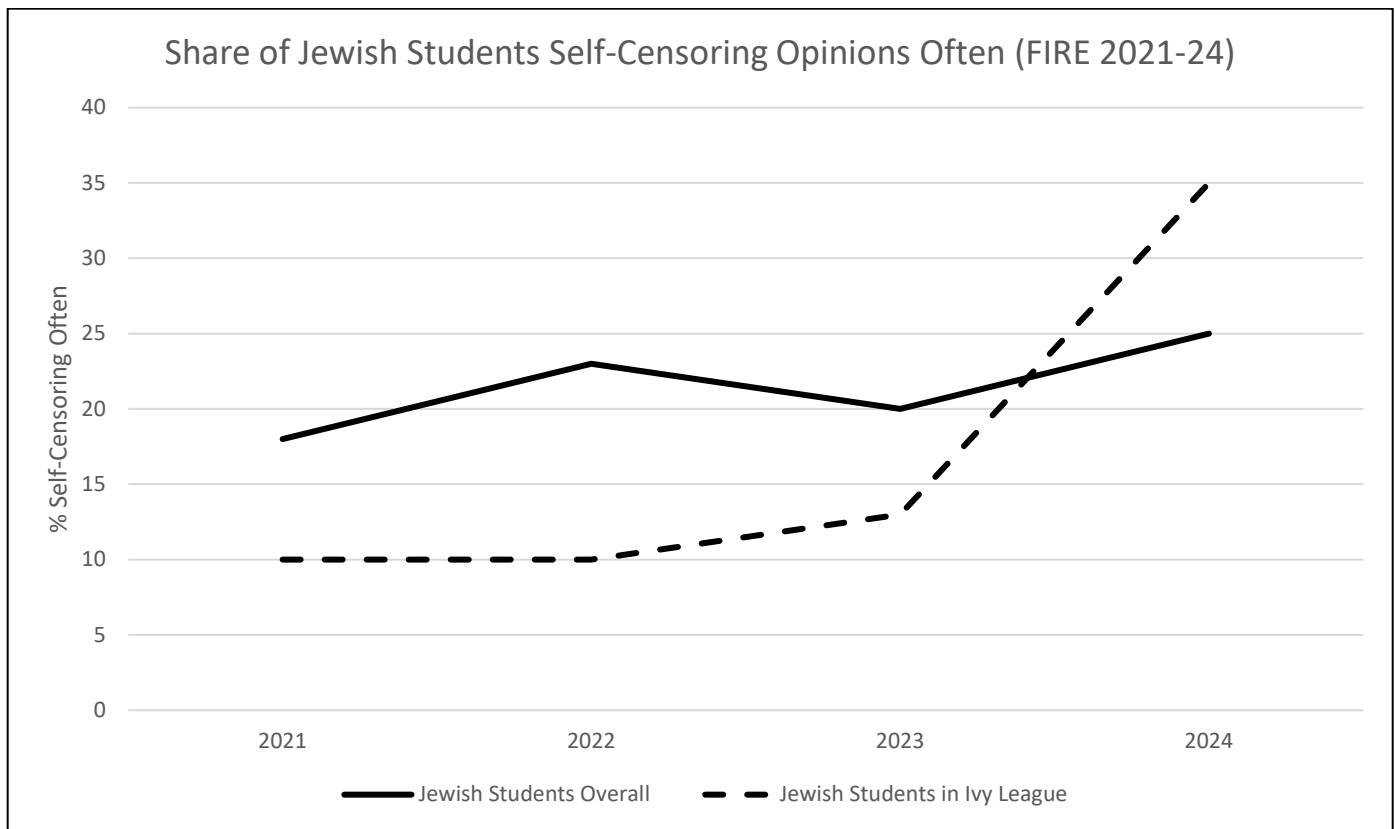


Figure 12

N of Jewish students in Ivy League (in brackets): 2021 (278), 2022 (131), 2023 (89), 2024 (164). Number of Jews overall is between 1,500 and 2,000 per year.

Across all years, there was stability in student self-censorship between 2021 and 2024. However, this was not the case for Jews and Muslims. As Figure 13 shows, both groups said they self-censored more in 2024 than in 2023. Even so, the rise across the higher education sector as a whole is more modest (5 points) than is the case in the Ivy League (right chart), where both groups experienced larger increases in self-censorship (14 points for Muslims and 22 points for Jews). The 22-

point rise among Ivy League Jews is especially noteworthy.

This echoes, to some degree, evidence from an opt-in survey conducted by a Harvard task force which collected over 2,200 responses from faculty, students and staff after the encampments, in 2024. This found that 92 percent of Muslims, 61 percent of Jews, 55 percent of nonreligious people and 51 percent of Christians disagreed with the statement, ‘There is no academic and/or professional penalty for expressing political views at Harvard.’ The self-selecting nature of the survey may have attracted certain kinds of respondents more than others (perhaps Muslims who felt muzzled), but it reveals, like the FIRE student data, that Jews and Muslims self-censor at higher rates than others.¹⁹ Question wording is also important. When the Trump administration asks a sample of Harvard Jewish students whether they felt discriminated against or physically threatened, this style of question may elicit more positive responses because respondents in survey research are more likely to agree than disagree with a statement. This can inflate the actual incidence of a problem (however real).

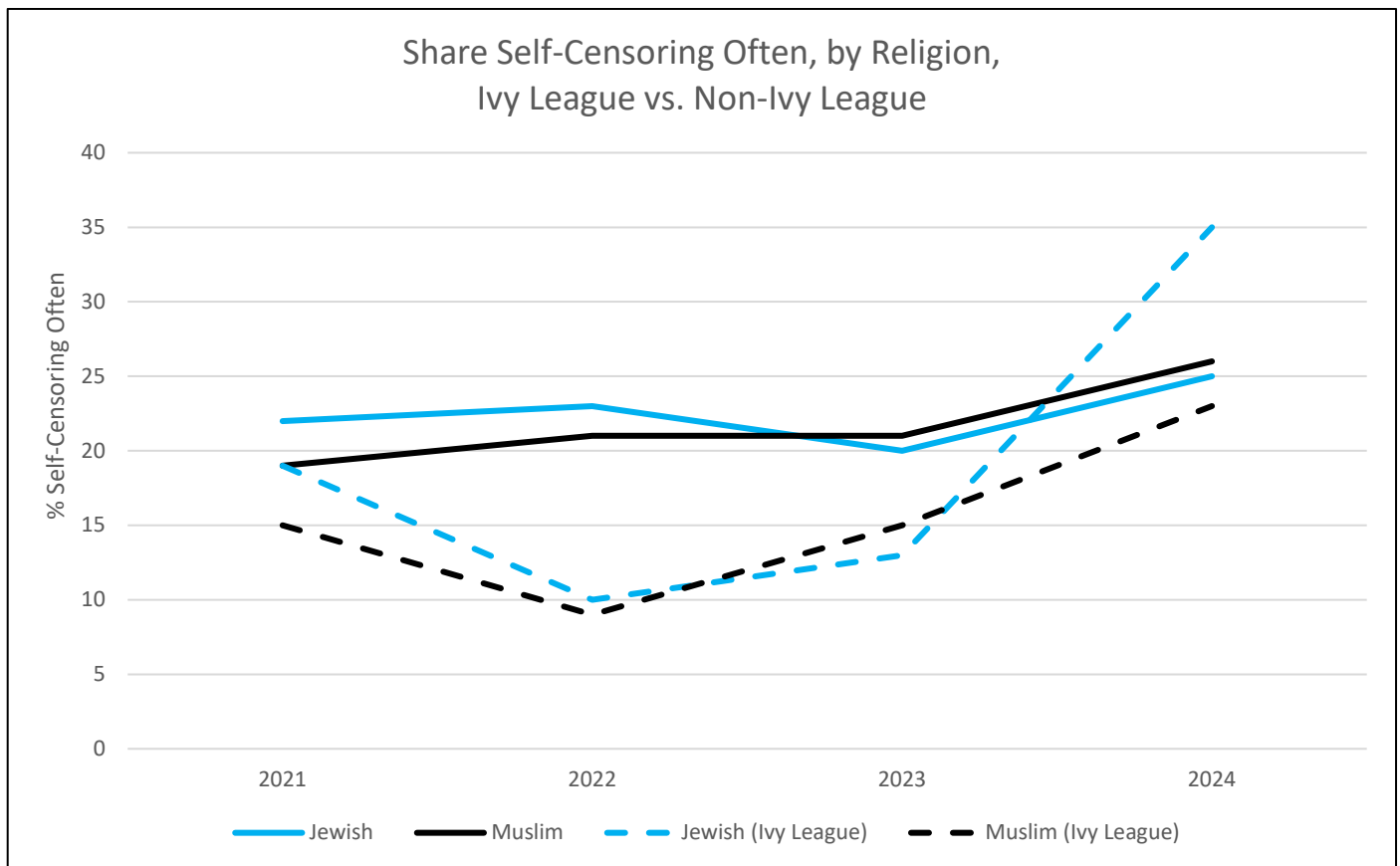


Figure 13

N of Jewish students in Ivy League (in brackets): 2021 (278), 2022 (131), 2023 (89), 2024 (164). N of Muslim students in Ivy League (in brackets): 2021 (62), 2022 (50), 2023 (54), 2024 (52).

¹⁹ Rose, Andy, Amanda Musa and Elizabeth Wolfe, ‘The biggest takeaways from Harvard’s task force reports on campus antisemitism and anti-Muslim bias,’ *CNN.com*, May 1, 2025.

What makes the Ivy League special? Figure 14 compares Jewish self-censorship patterns for 2023 and 2024 across five types of school: Ivy League, Liberal Arts colleges, Top-20 (less Ivy League institutions), the most left-leaning colleges by student views (in FIRE data) and public universities not in the top 20.

The results indicate that prestigious or liberal institutions had lower Jewish self-censorship in 2023 but higher rates in 2024 as compared to less prestigious public universities. Prestige, size or student liberalism may, in combination, account for Ivy League exceptionalism because liberal, prestigious and small liberal arts institutions all show increases in Jewish self-censorship.

These results reveal that Ivy League institutions have been in the forefront of the increase in Jewish self-censorship, but also that they have had unusually low Jewish self-censorship in the past.

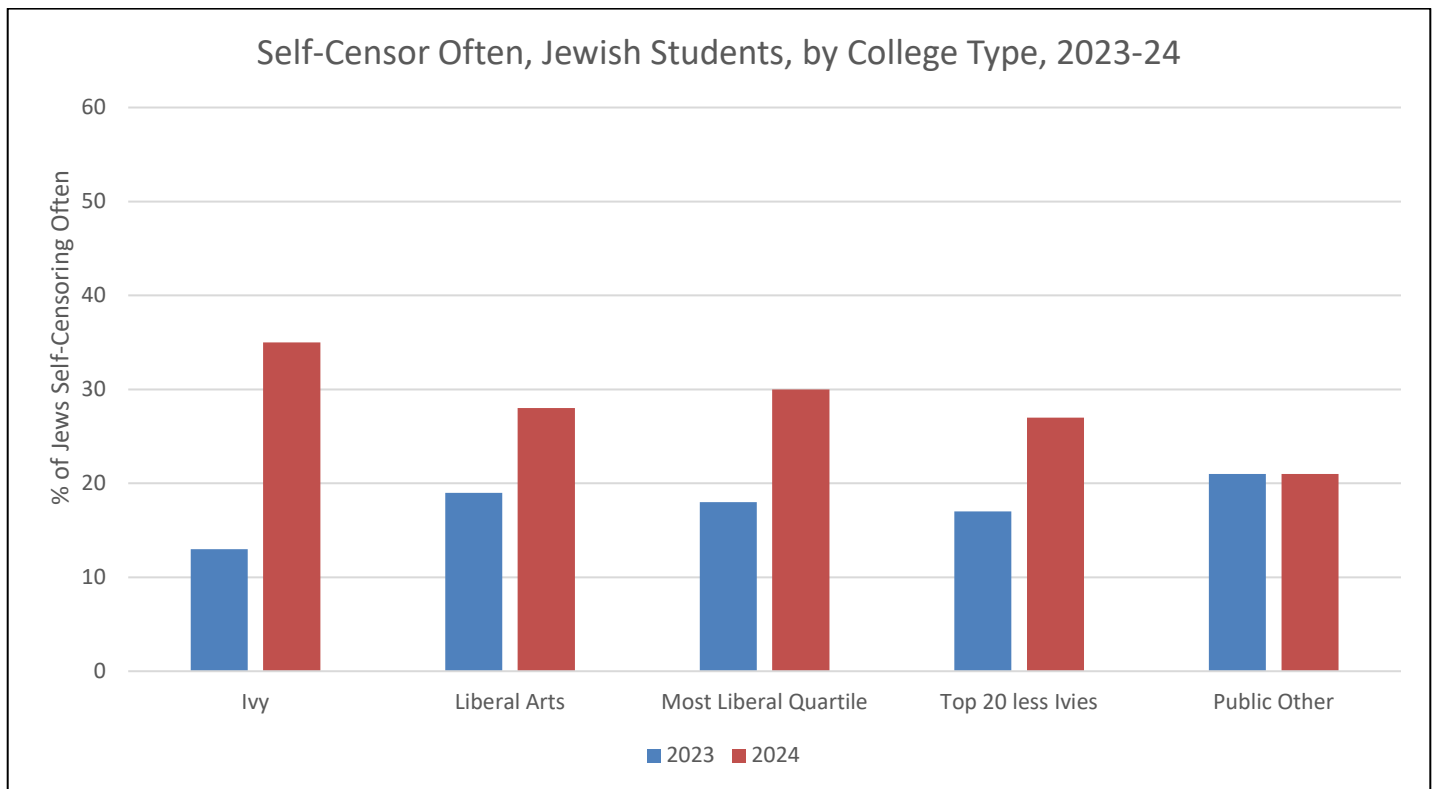


Figure 14

Source: FIRE 2023, 2024. N (2023, 2024) = Ivy (89, 164), Liberal Arts (213, 199), Most Liberal (578, 665), Top 20 (63, 155), Public Other (665, 851).

The FIRE survey includes further measures of domain-specific FIRE self-censorship, which can be triangulated with the

overall self-censorship response:

- ‘How often do you self-censor during classroom discussions?’
- ‘How often do you self-censor during conversations with other students on campus?’
- ‘How often do you self-censor during conversations with your professors?’

Jewish student responses for 2023 and 2024, where the question wordings and methods are comparable, appear in Figure 15 below. These show that across all domains, including the general question, we find a substantial increase in Jewish students self-censoring often.

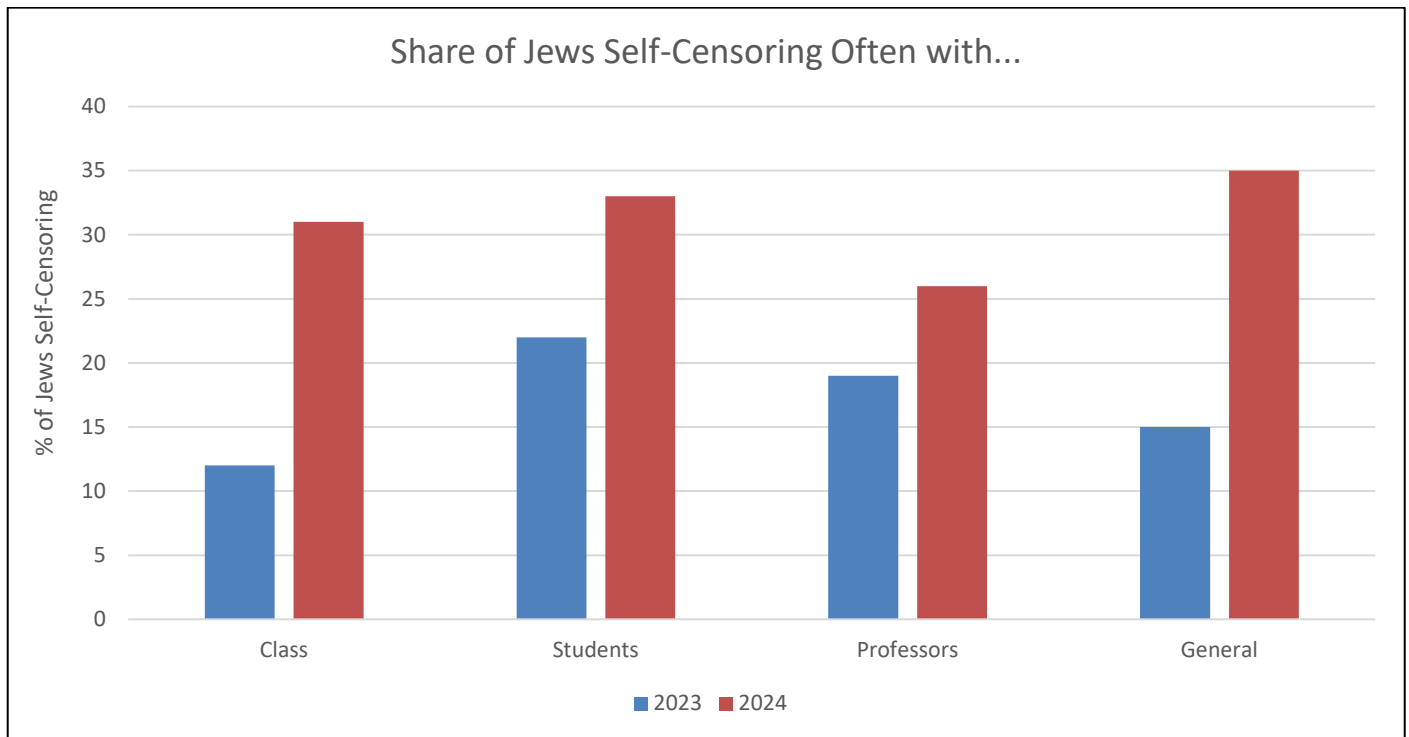


Figure 15

Source: FIRE 2023, 2024. N (2023, 2024) = Ivy (89, 164), Liberal Arts (213, 199), Most Liberal (578, 665), Top 20 (63, 155), Public Other (665, 851).

What kinds of Jews tend to self-censor? As with non-Jews, Figure 16 shows that religious Jews are more likely than seculars to regularly self-censor. However, the pattern is more pronounced among Jews. Jewish students who attend

synagogue monthly or more, fully 1 in 3 self-censor often. This compares to just 17 percent for Jews who never or almost never attend and 25 percent among those who attend less than monthly. Christians who attend regularly are also more likely to self-censor (21 percent) than those who never attend church (17 percent), but this is a smaller difference than among Jews. It may be that, as Jay Greene remarked, visible markings such as the kippah mark observant Jews out in a way that is less clear for Christians. The relatively high self-censorship among Muslims may also reflect visible markings, especially among observant Muslim women, 38 percent of whom self-censor.

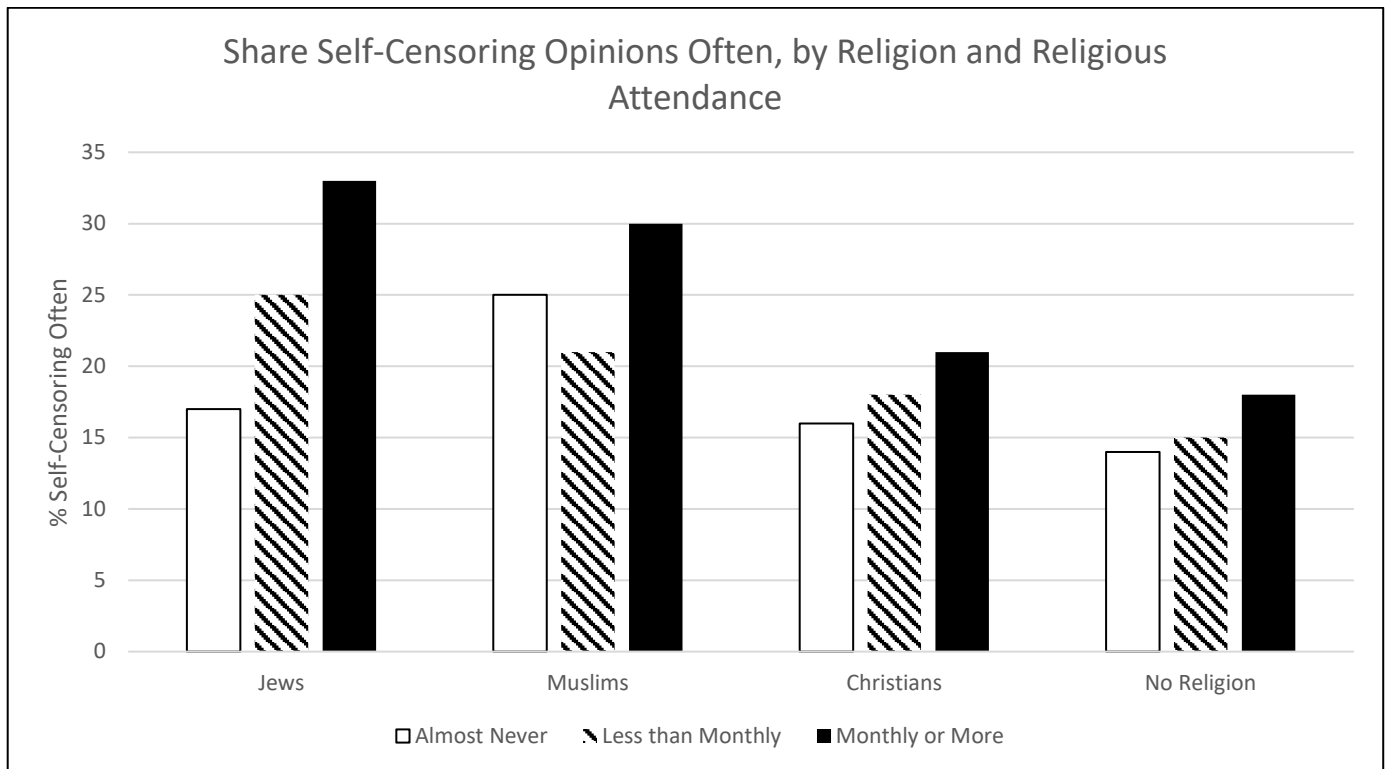


Figure 16

Source: FIRE 2024. Jewish Ns by religious attendance level = 635, 819, 624; Muslim Ns = 318, 432, 560.

The pattern of more religious people self-censoring more also obtains in Ivy League institutions, where the secular-religious difference in self-censorship is larger for Jews than for Muslims or Christians, as Figure 17 reveals. Religious Jews stand out as markedly more likely to self-censor than their religious Muslim or Christian counterparts, with nearly 40 percent saying they self-censor often.

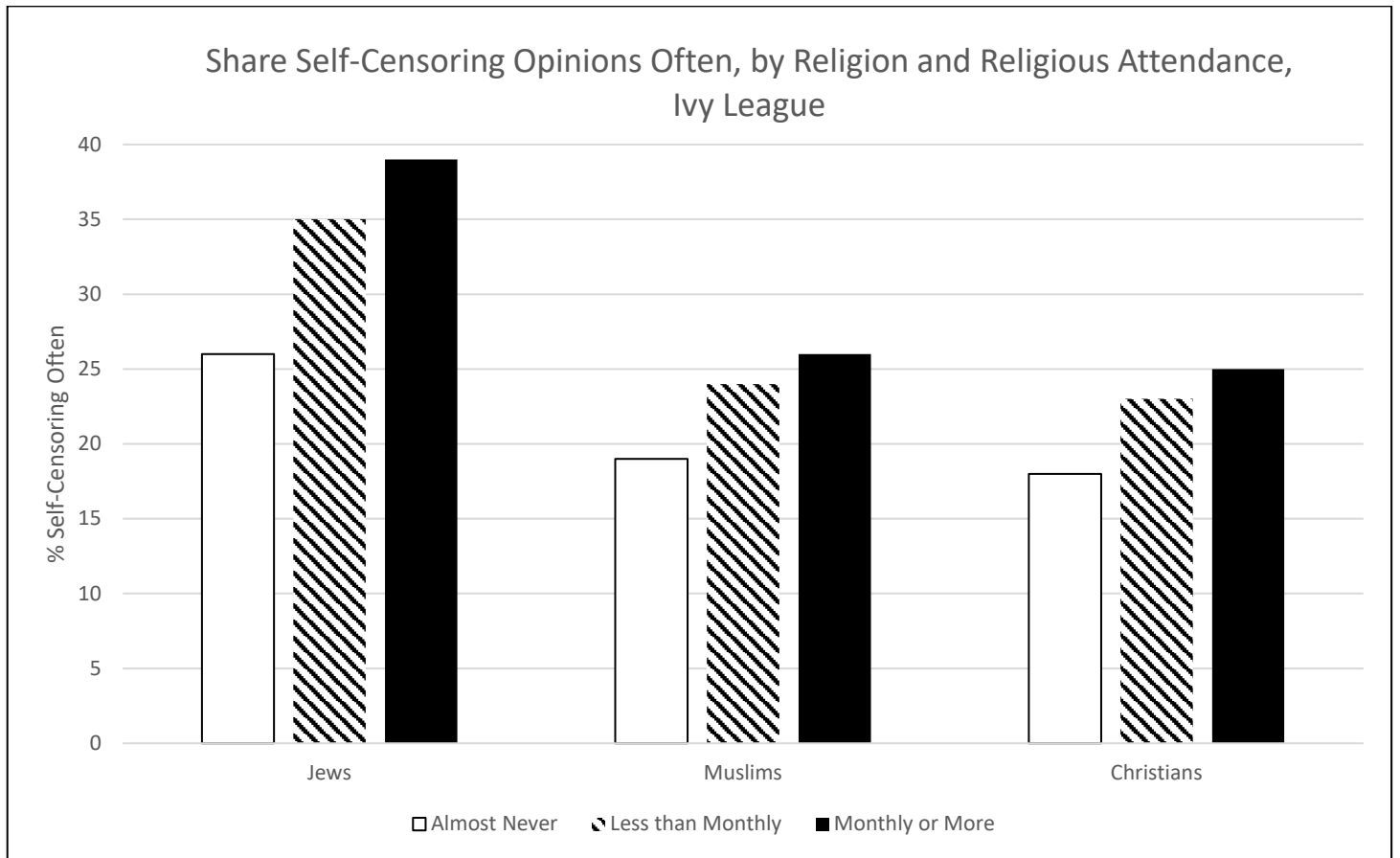


Figure 17

Source: FIRE 2024. Jewish Ns by religious attendance level = 32, 60, 71; Muslim Ns by religious attendance = 19, 18, 15; Christian Ns by religious attendance = 136, 275, 331.

Finally, as we would expect, right-wing Jews, Christians and Muslims self-censor more than their left-wing co-religionists.

The Impact of Encampments on Self-Censorship

We have seen that Jews shifted to the right in response to the emergence of the encampments after April 17, 2024, especially in the Ivy League where such encampments were more prominent. Figure 18 shows that while the encampments had no effect on self-censorship among students overall in 2024, Jewish students exhibit heightened self-censoring, increasing from 22 percent prior to the encampments to 28 percent after them. Muslim student self-censorship increased almost as much, from 23 percent to 29 percent. While it is not definitively the case that the encampments rather than other events caused changes in self-censorship, it is noteworthy that both religious minorities show an increase in self-censorship, suggesting greater chilling effects on their speech that did not impact others. It is worth adding that right-wing students did not experience any increase in self-censorship before and after the encampments.

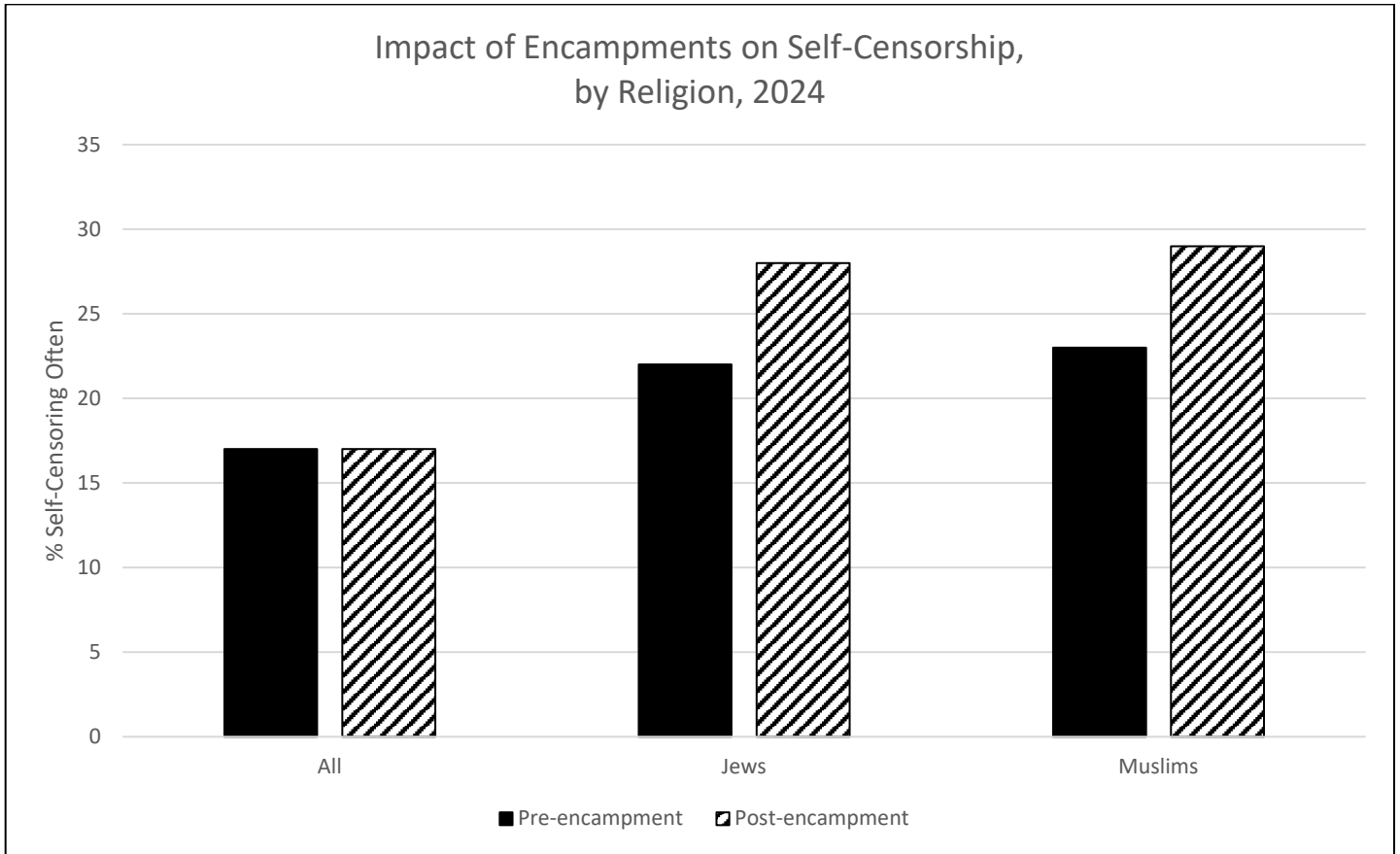


Figure 18

Source: FIRE 2024. 54 percent of the sample is pre-encampment and 46 percent post-encampment. Jewish N = 1,213 pre- and 866 post-encampment. Muslim N = 700 pre- and 610 post-encampment.

The impact of the encampments appears to have been especially pronounced for Jewish and Muslim students in the Ivy League. Figure 19 illustrates that Jewish self-censorship surged from 28 percent before to 40 percent after the encampments on Ivy League campuses. Muslim self-censorship rose almost as much, from 18 to 28 percent, though the Muslim rate of self-censorship remained substantially lower than that for Jewish students on these campuses. Note as well that Jewish self-censorship was already somewhat elevated at 28 percent prior to the appearance of the encampments in early 2024 (compared to 13 percent in 2023).

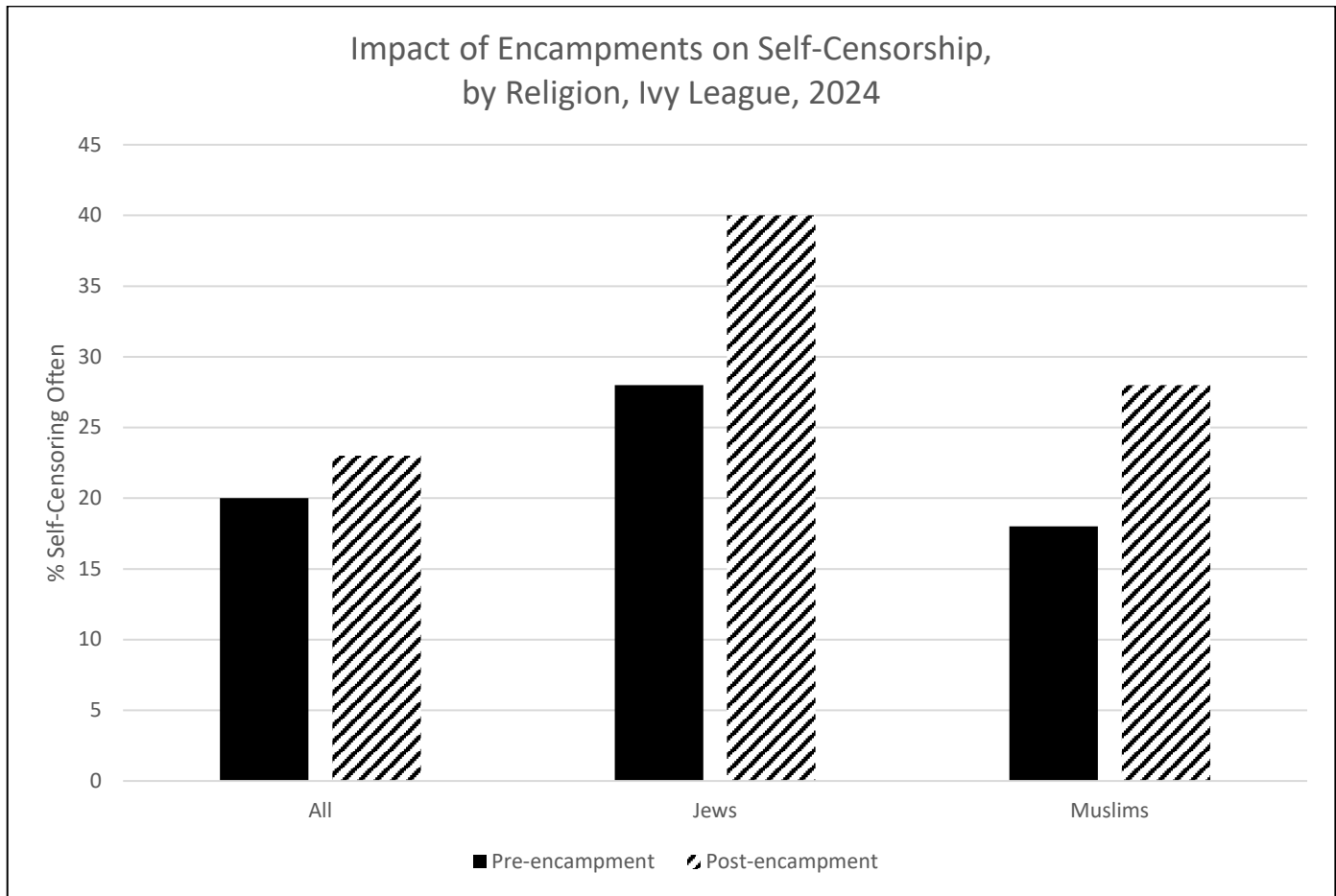


Figure 19

Source: FIRE 2024. Jewish Ivy League N = 67 before and 96 after encampments. Muslim Ivy League N = 29 before and 23 after encampments.

In a statistical model predicting whether a student self-censors often, Jewish students were no more likely to self-censor than non-Jews in 2023, but were much more likely to do so in 2024. In 2024, Jewish students on more left-leaning campuses were no more likely to self-censor than Jews on right-leaning campuses (or non-Jews on left campuses), whereas in 2024 Jews on left-leaning campuses stood out as more inhibited.

Even taking the ideological climate of their university into account, Jews were more likely to self-censor on Ivy League campuses in 2024 than at other universities. In 2023, by contrast, Jews on Ivy League campuses were *less* likely than other students to self-censor. The red self-censorship lines for Jews in Figure 20 thereby reveal a declining slope in 2023 and a rising slope in 2024. The red line for Jews is also below that for non-Jews in 2023, indicating lower self-censorship, but higher in 2024 when Jews self-censored at higher rates than non-Jews.

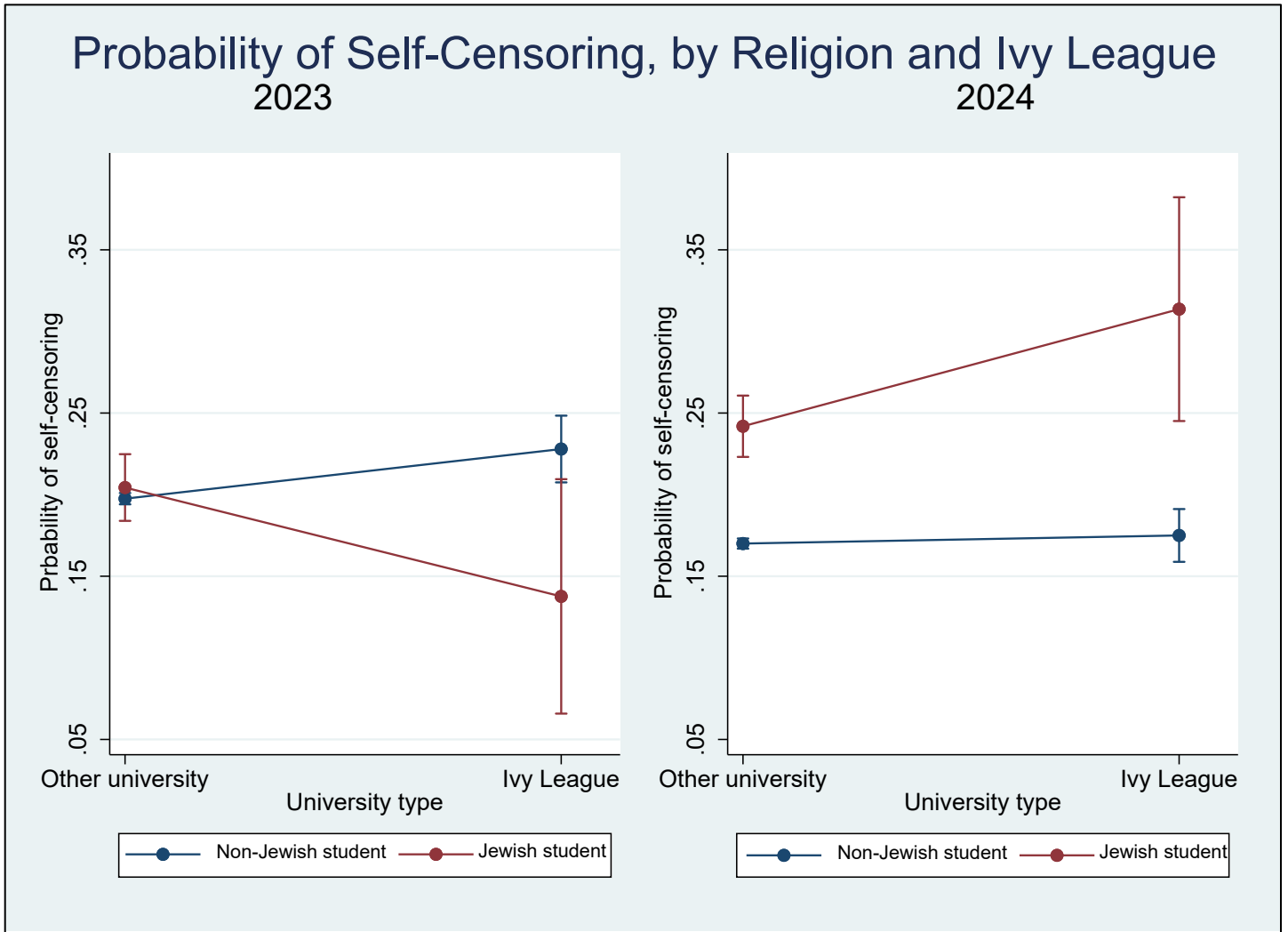


Figure 20

Source: FIRE 2023 and 2024. Models include student race, sex, socioeconomic background, sexual orientation, ideology and religion, proportion Jewish and average ideology in the student's institution, and interaction terms for Jewish x Jewish share, conservative x average ideology, Jewish x Ivy League and conservative x Ivy League. Pseudo-R² = .034 in 2023 and .029 in 2024. Jewish is associated with self-censorship in 2024 (p<.001) but not 2023. Jewish x Ivy League is positively associated with self-censorship in 2024 and negatively associated in 2023, both at p<.05 level. Jewish x proportion Jewish is inversely associated with self-censorship in 2024 but not in 2023, at the p<.01 level. Jewish x average left-to-right ideology is significant in 2024 but not 2023 (at p<.001).

What kind of Jew self-censors? Figure 21 shows a statistical model (Ordinary Least Squares) of the five-point self-censorship scale, for Jews only. First, the anxious and depressed self-censored more in both years, though with a stronger effect in 2023. Non-heterosexual Jews self-censored more than heterosexuals in 2024 but not during 2023. Like other students, conservative Jews self-censor more than liberal Jews, but this effect is more pronounced in 2023 than in 2024. A separate model for Jewish self-censorship in 2024, where we have questions on religious attendance and views on who started the violence in 2023, shows that more religious and pro-Israeli Jews are significantly more likely to self-censor than secular or pro-Palestinian Jews (with effects of similar size to ideology). These correlates of levels of self-censorship are similar among non-Jewish students.

What accounts for *changes*, as distinct from *levels*, of Jewish self-censorship? There appears to have been an increase in self-censorship among liberal Jews between 2023 and 2024, from 15 to 21 percent, while self-censorship among conservative Jews only nudged up from 33 to 34 percent. In addition, the difference in liberal Jewish self-censorship before and after the encampments in 2024 was 8 points (from 19 to 27 percent self-censoring often), whereas for conservative Jews it was zero (33 percent in both periods). This might suggest that developments after October 7, 2023 affected the expressive freedom of liberal Jews more than conservative Jews. It may appear to offer support for Ken Stern's claim that Trump's 2025 clampdowns on anti-zionist speech is putting liberal Jews in a tough spot.²⁰

On the other hand, the lack of change in self-censorship for conservative Jews contrasts with a large 15-point rise in expressive freedom among non-Jewish conservatives between 2023 and 2024 that I will explore later. Thus it seems that events after October 7 chilled the speech of Jewish conservatives as much as Jewish liberals, but that this was counterbalanced by a general decline in self-censorship among conservatives of all faiths and none. Statistical tests show precisely this, with more right-leaning Jews actually more likely to say they self-censor than left-leaning Jews in 2024 as compared to 2023 (when controlling for potentially confounding individual and campus characteristics, and based on a Jewish x ideology interaction effect).

The effects were more pronounced on liberal and elite campuses. Jews, like non-Jews, self-censor more on left-leaning campuses, but the effect was stronger in 2024 than in 2023. When it comes to Ivy League universities, they are associated with higher Jewish self-censorship in 2024 (borderline statistical significance) but not in 2023, comporting with our earlier analysis. Finally, there was an easing of conformist pressures on conservative students of all faiths in 2024 (which I cover later on), and this had some impact on conservative Jews as well. The combination of greater liberal Jewish self-censorship and flat conservative self-censorship (due to the cross-pressure of reduced anti-conservative conformity) helped narrow the expressive freedom gap between liberal and conservative Jews on campuses, especially elite ones.

Overall, the modelling suggests that when it comes to *levels* of self-censorship, religious, conservative and pro-Israeli Jews self-censor more, as is also true of their non-Jewish counterparts and as was true in 2023. However, for *changes* in Jewish

²⁰ See Kline, Katy, 'Weaponizing antisemitism makes students 'less safe,' says drafter of definition,' *NPR.org*, March 20, 2025. I would however note that the interaction term for Jewish x student ideology was somewhat short of statistical significance in 2024 – even as it was larger than in 2023.

self-censorship between 2023 and 2024, it is liberal and LGBT Jews, as well as those on more liberal campuses and the Ivy League, who experienced a larger increase in self-censoring. During the Biden administration, considerable progressive angst was directed against moderate, older, pro-Israel Democrats. Most liberal Jews also found themselves on the liberal pro-Israel side of the argument. When asked, 'Regardless of your overall feelings toward the Israelis and the Palestinians, who do you think is more responsible for the 2023 outbreak of violence in the Middle East: Israel or Hamas,' liberal Jewish students were likely to indicate that Hamas was responsible for the outbreak of hostilities (53 percent said Hamas was responsible, 20 percent that Israel was) as compared to conservative non-Jewish students (38-16) or liberal non-Jewish students (14 percent Hamas, 38 percent Israel).

Liberal Jews were far closer to conservative Jews (83-6) than to their fellow non-Jewish liberals (14-38) in their attitudes to the conflict in the region. Jewish identity overrides political identity for these Jewish students, and demonstrates the substantial independence of Israel-Palestine issues from other left-wing causes such as race and gender which liberal Jews could get behind. Liberal pro-Israel Jews are likely to be particularly sensitive to nonalignment with their liberal non-Jewish peers, especially in politically-charged liberal atmospheres like the Ivy League, leading to higher self-censorship.

These results also show that only a minority (39 percent) of young conservative students sympathize with Israel in the conflict, a trend reflected in recent national polling.²¹ This offers further evidence for the independence of these two constructs in the minds of young people on elite campuses.

²¹ Wright, Terrell, 'Young Republicans are fueling the GOP's generational divide on Israel,' *Washington Post*, June 30, 2025

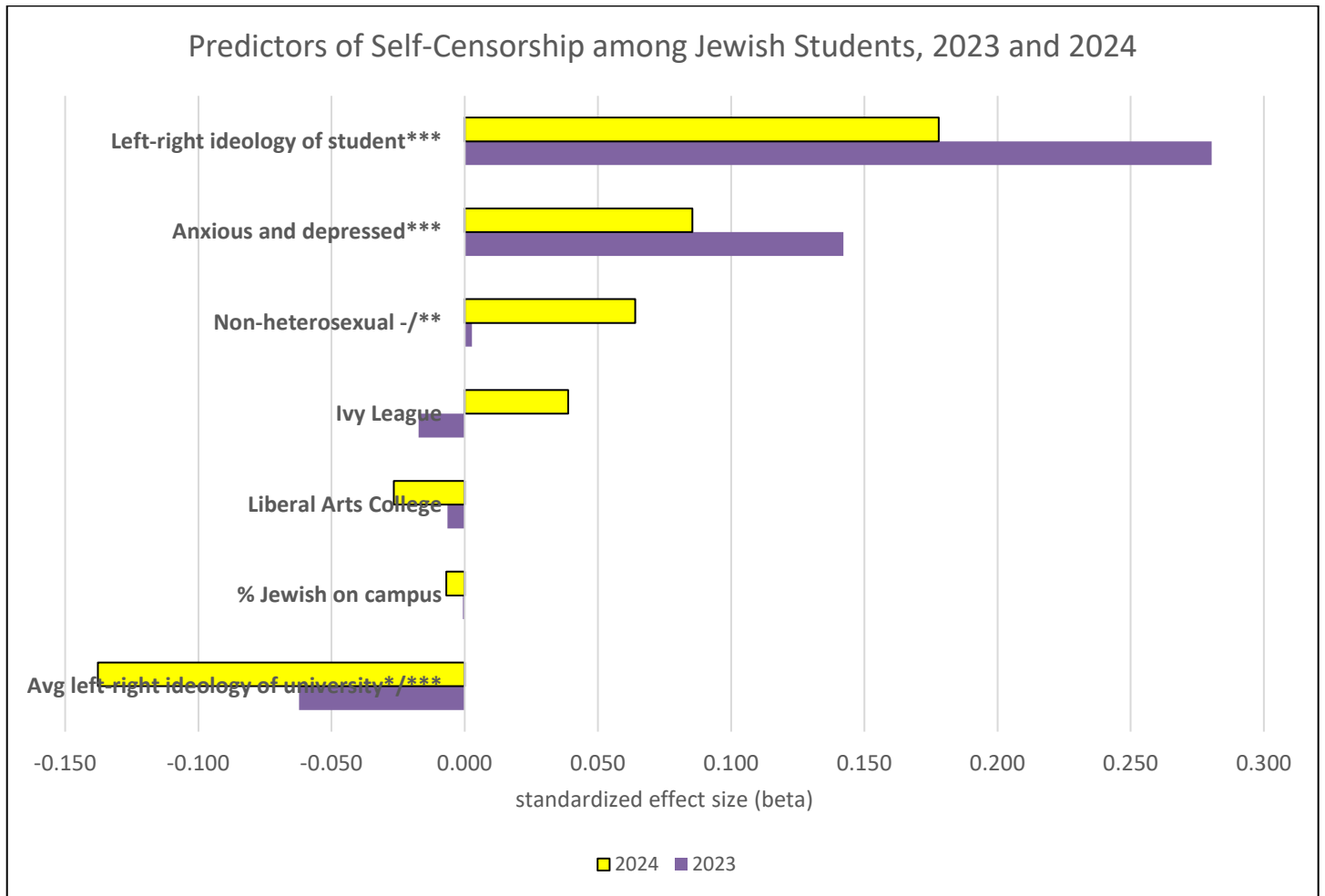


Figure 21

Source: FIRE 2023 and 2024. Jewish students only. Model R^2 is .084 in 2023 and .045 in 2024. Blank or ‘-’ for not significant; * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$, arranged by variable as 2023/2024. Where no backslash, assume same significance both years.

13 percent of Jewish students said Israel rather than Hamas was responsible for the outbreak of hostilities after October 7, and 21 percent sympathize with the Palestinians. 40 percent sympathize with Israel and 26 percent say they sympathize with both equally. Figure 22 shows that the minority of pro-Palestinian Jewish students self-censored slightly less after the encampments (15 percent) than before them (17 percent). On the other hand, among those sympathizing with Israel, the proportion self-censoring rose from 28 to 34 percent, and for Jews sympathizing with both equally or who were unsure, the numbers rose a similar amount, from 19 to 28 percent.

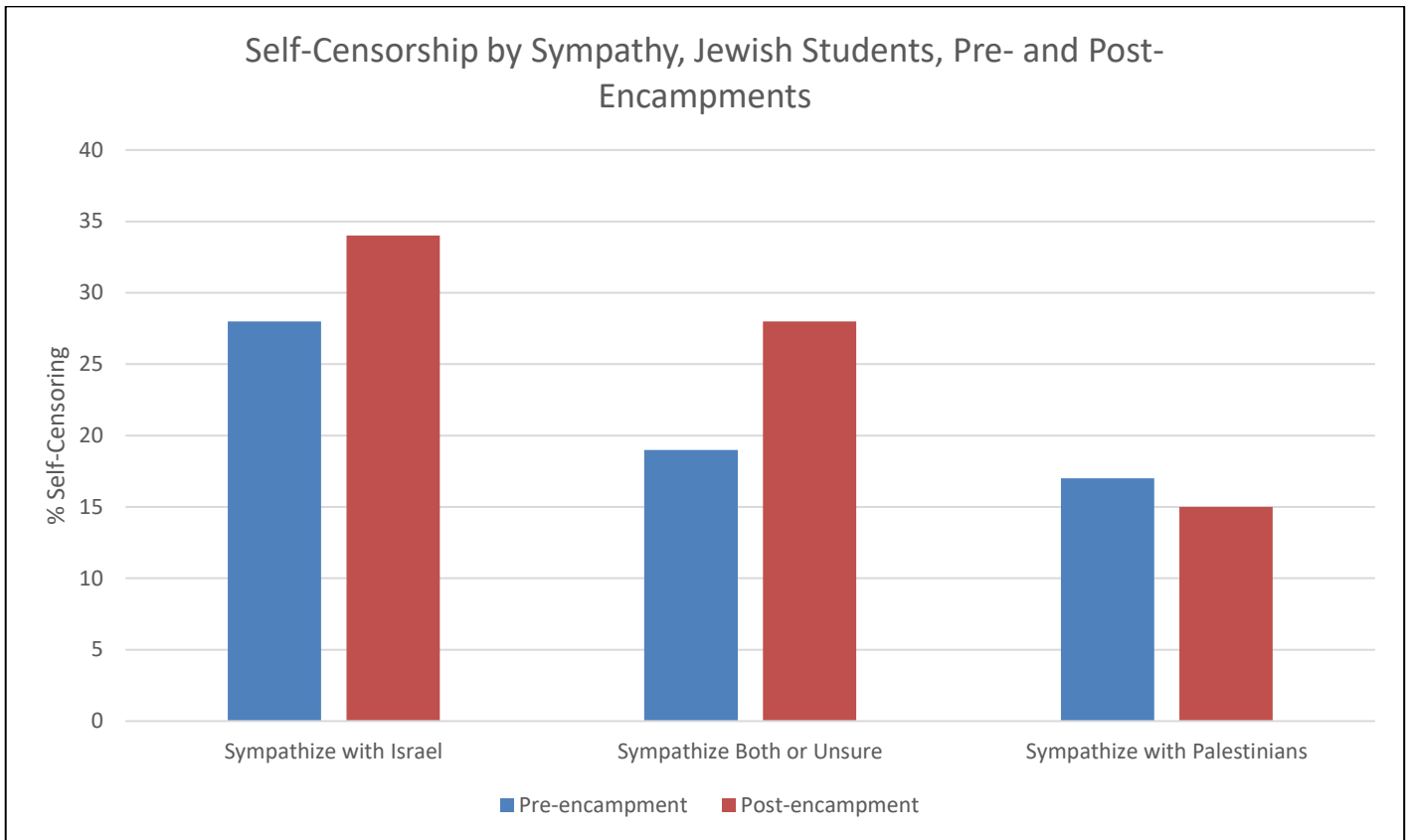


Figure 22

Source: FIRE 2024. N= 478 Jewish pre-encampment students sympathizing with Israel and 360 Jewish post-encampment students sympathizing with Israel; 274 Jewish pre-encampment students sympathizing with Palestinians and 172 Jewish post-encampment students sympathizing with Palestinians; 460 Jewish pre-encampment students sympathizing with both equally or unsure, and 333 Jewish post-encampment students sympathizing with both equally or unsure.

The Ivy League, which is a focus of encampment activity and national media coverage, has consistently magnified national trends in the FIRE data. Accordingly, Figure 23 shows that Jewish students who sympathize with Israel had the largest increase in self-censorship before and after the encampments (from 29 to 49 percent) compared to a rise from 15 to 27 percent among those with mixed sympathies and a considerable decline in self-censorship among pro-Palestinian Jews from 23 percent pre-encampment to 15 percent when the encampments were in place.

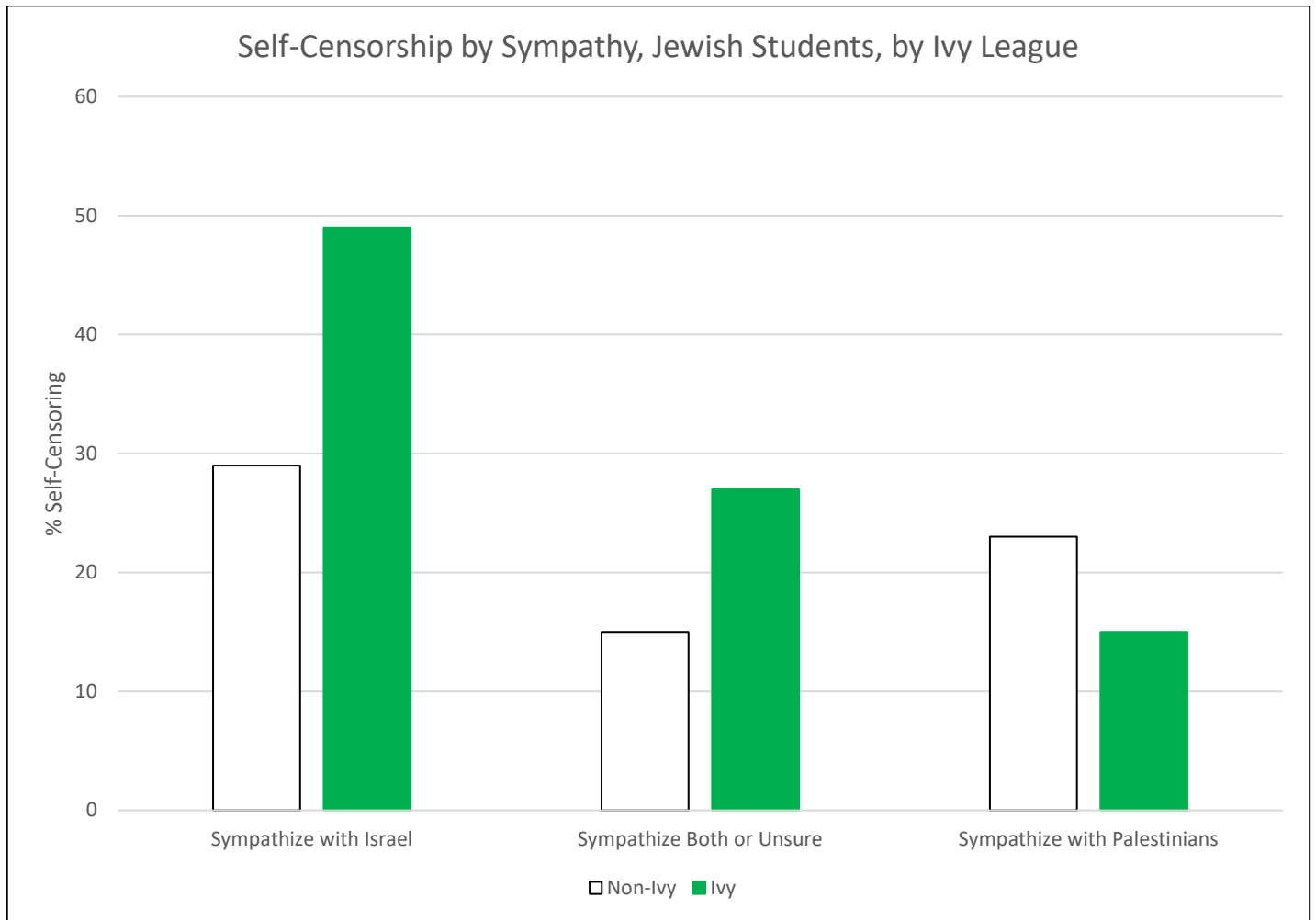


Figure 23

Source: FIRE 2024. N= 78 Ivy League Jewish students sympathizing with Israel, 45 sympathizing with Palestinians and 40 with both equally or unsure. 760 Non-Ivy League Jewish students sympathizing with Israel, 401 sympathizing with Palestinians and 753 with both equally or unsure.

Conservative Self-Censorship

The story for conservative students overall is the opposite of that for Jews. 41 percent of conservative students self-censored often in the more than 200 US universities captured in FIRE data for 2021-23. In the Ivy League, conservative self-censorship was 15 points higher, at 56 percent, during these years, than the average.

However, as Figure 24 shows, in 2024 there was a spectacular decline in conservative self-censoring in the Ivy League, from 55 to 31 percent, breaking the trend. In non-Ivy League universities, there was also a drop in conservative self-censorship – though not quite as dramatic - from 41 to 26 percent.

Conservative speech freedom increased the most in Ivy League institutions in 2024, precisely the places where Jewish

freedom of expression declined most. While left-leaning institutions are associated with less freedom of speech for conservative students in 2023 than in 2024 (we saw this effect earlier for Jews), there is an additional effect of studying at an Ivy League institution over and above the ideological tilt of the student body. That is, conservatives studying at Ivy League universities experienced reduced self-censorship at Ivy League universities in 2024 *even when taking into account their very liberal student bodies*. Figure 24 shows that the share of Ivy League conservatives often self-censoring tumbled a whopping 24 points – at precisely the moment their Jewish peers increased their self-censorship 22 points. This is too large a set of shifts to be a coincidence.

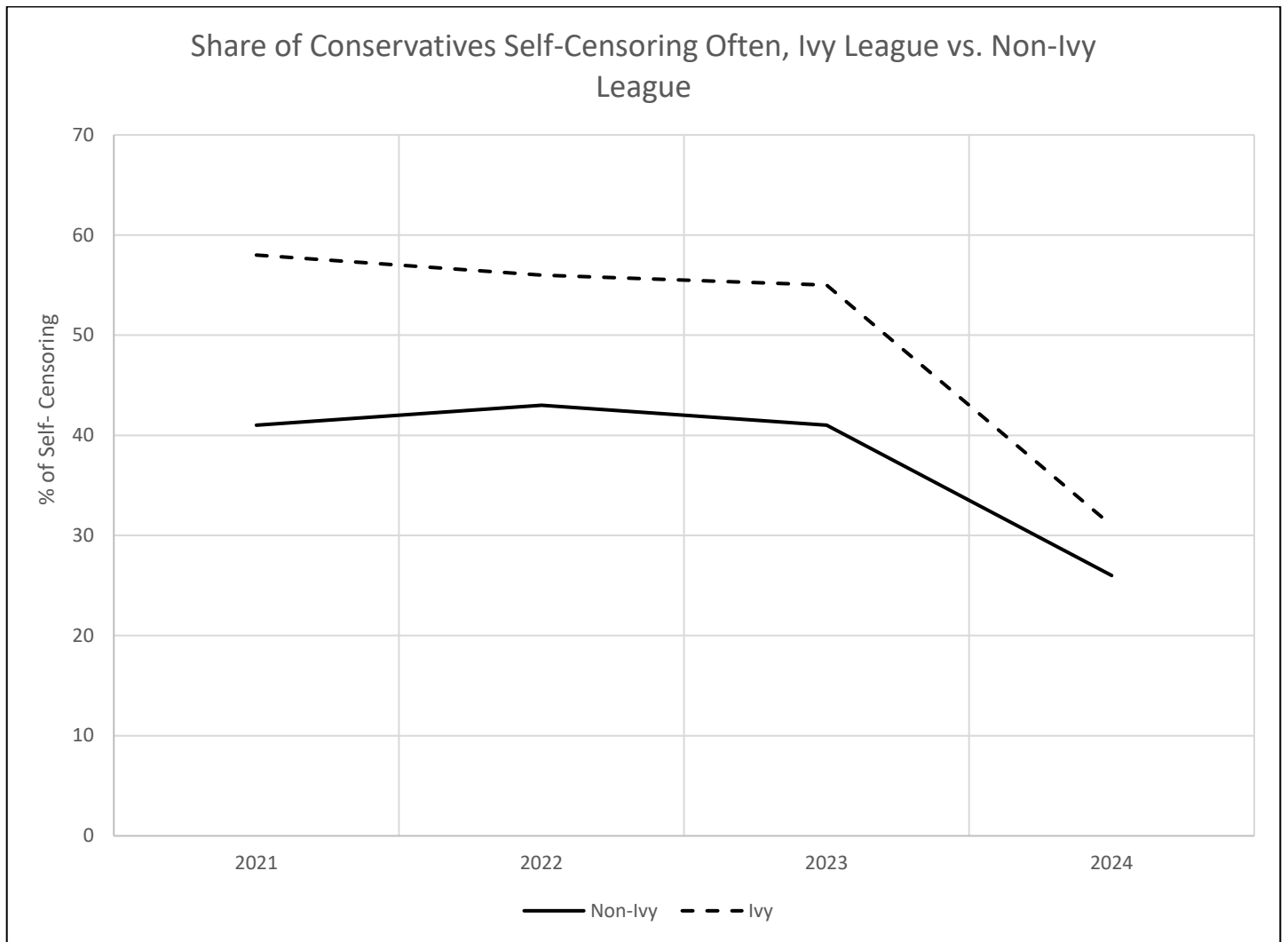


Figure 24

N of conservative students in Ivy League (in brackets): 2021 (554), 2022 (262), 2023 (234), 2024 (356). Number of conservatives overall is between 8,700 and 13,200 per year.

Of course the decline in conservative self-censorship could be related to more criticism of cancel culture in the press, as

with editorials in the *New York Times* and *Washington Post*.²² Or it could be that left-wing activism lost energy, as evidence by the collapse of left-wing professor targeting, or by the decline in deplatforming by the left outside the Israel-Palestine issue. Yet the timing of this is off by a few years: the peak of the Great Awokening (including left-wing cancellations) occurred during 2020-21. The vibe shift happened during 2021-23 not 2024.

What else might be at work? State-level anti-DEI initiatives in Republican states began in Florida in 2022, with 21 states introducing legislation that year. Momentum gathered pace during 2023-24, with 8 bills passing in 2023 and 7 in 2024. These covered diversity statements, DEI offices, DEI training, identity preferences and mandatory DEI or critical race/gender theory courses. This may have persuaded universities to back away from persecuting conservatives or taking left-wing political positions. Yet any Republican-led legislative actions should have affected universities in red states more than those in the Ivy League. Instead, the FIRE data show that, between 2023 and 2024, conservative self-censorship fell 8 points in the most left-wing quartile of universities (located mainly in blue states) but only 2 points in institutions with conservative-leaning student bodies, largely located in red states.

Alternatively, it could be that Ivy League universities were under heightened scrutiny from the off-campus right (and media more generally) after October 7, 2023. 2023 FIRE data were all collected before October 7, so it is plausible that this affected 2024 results but not those in 2023. On this reading, media and political scrutiny chilled universities, frightening them away from censoring students. The Senate hearings which resulted in the ouster of Elizabeth Magill at the University of Pennsylvania and Claudine Gay of Harvard, followed by donor and trustee discontent at Ivy League administrations, could have shifted the balance of power, raising the confidence of conservative students.²³ It could be that rising discontent with DEI in the elite culture after October 7, 2023 somehow fed through into conservative student perceptions, either by convincing them that the Social Justice left had lost moral authority or by creating a permission structure for criticizing Social Justice values which made being conservative more legitimate.

Even so, what we know about self-censorship suggests that fellow students rather than university authorities are the far stronger influence on perceptions. For instance, FIRE ratings of university free speech policies are only weakly related to

²² 'America Has a Free Speech Problem,' *New York Times*, March 18, 2022; Singal, Jesse, 'What if Diversity Training is Doing More Harm than Good,' *New York Times*, January 17, 2023; 'The Problem with Diversity Statements,' *Washington Post*, May 19, 2024.

²³ Karni, Annie, 'Stefanik, whose aggressive questioning of Gay went viral, claimed credit for her exit,' *New York Times*, January 2, 2024.

conservatives self-censoring, whereas median student political beliefs in an institution are strongly associated: very liberal institutions have conservatives who self-censor at much higher rates than more moderate or conservative places.²⁴ Yet students' political ideology, and their views of free speech (shouting down, preventing controversial speakers) show no clear pattern of change between 2023 and 2024. This suggests that a general shift in student political beliefs, or attitudes to speech, cannot be the explanation for conservatives self-censoring at lower rates in 2024.

The fact conservative students felt freer as anti-Israel protests ramped up suggests that conservative students were barely affected by leftist hostility to Israel after October 7. That is, there appears to be only a modest degree of linked fate between conservative and Jewish students. This is also evident in conservative students' ambivalent attitudes to Israel and laissez-faire stance toward anti-Israel speech.

Meanwhile the right's newfound expressive freedom indicates that the campus left did not tightly associate Israel's actions with American conservatives. Conservatism's association with Israel lay at the periphery of left-wing student perceptions. Noah Smith argues that the campus left is mainly focused on rebelling against the accommodationist Democratic establishment, not Republicans.²⁵ Had positions on Israel been neatly aligned to partisanship, the left's anti-Israel animus would have translated more readily into anti-conservatism, chilling right-wing speech.

Identity politics is arguably the motor of left-wing animus against the right on campus. For instance, in a separate survey, when I considered the support of young liberals for the statement, 'people who disagree with me politically are immoral,' this was principally correlated with the view that 'white Republicans are racist.'²⁶ In other words, as previous research has shown, race, gender and sexual identity lie at the mytho-symbolic centre of today's young left, not Israel-Palestine. Identity transgressions ('emotional trauma, microaggressions') which ostensibly insult sacred minority totems, rather than support for Israel, are what generates moral outrage. Associated with this, what primarily makes many politically-active young students identify as liberals and abjure conservatives are their identitarian sympathies, much more so than their foreign policy stances.²⁷ Therefore when the left's focus came to be drawn away from race/gender toward Israel-Palestine, this reduced the intensity of liberal students' ostracism of conservatives, relaxing speech policing and

²⁴ Kaufmann, Eric, Taboo: How Making Race Sacred Produced a Cultural Revolution (Forum, 2024), p. 174. (Published as The Third Awakening in North America).

²⁵ Smith, Noah, 'Jewish Americans are Feeling Unsettled,' *Substack*, July 1, 2025

²⁶ Kaufmann, Taboo, p. 158.

²⁷ Chong, D., et al. (2021). "The Realignment of Political Tolerance in the United States." Perspectives on Politics: 1-22.

conformist pressures against them while increasing them against Zionist Jews.

Running a statistical model to predict whether a student self-censors often, I found that conservative students self-censored a great deal less in 2024 than in 2023, especially on left-leaning campuses and, even controlling for this effect, on Ivy League campuses. Figure 25 shows first how the effect of being at an Ivy League campus (right points in each chart) turned from strongly negative (rising red slope) to mildly positive (falling red slope) for conservative students (red lines) between 2023 and 2024. The takeaway here is that something in the atmosphere at left-leaning and Ivy League campuses changed between 2023 and 2024 which led to a feeling of increased speech freedom for conservatives.

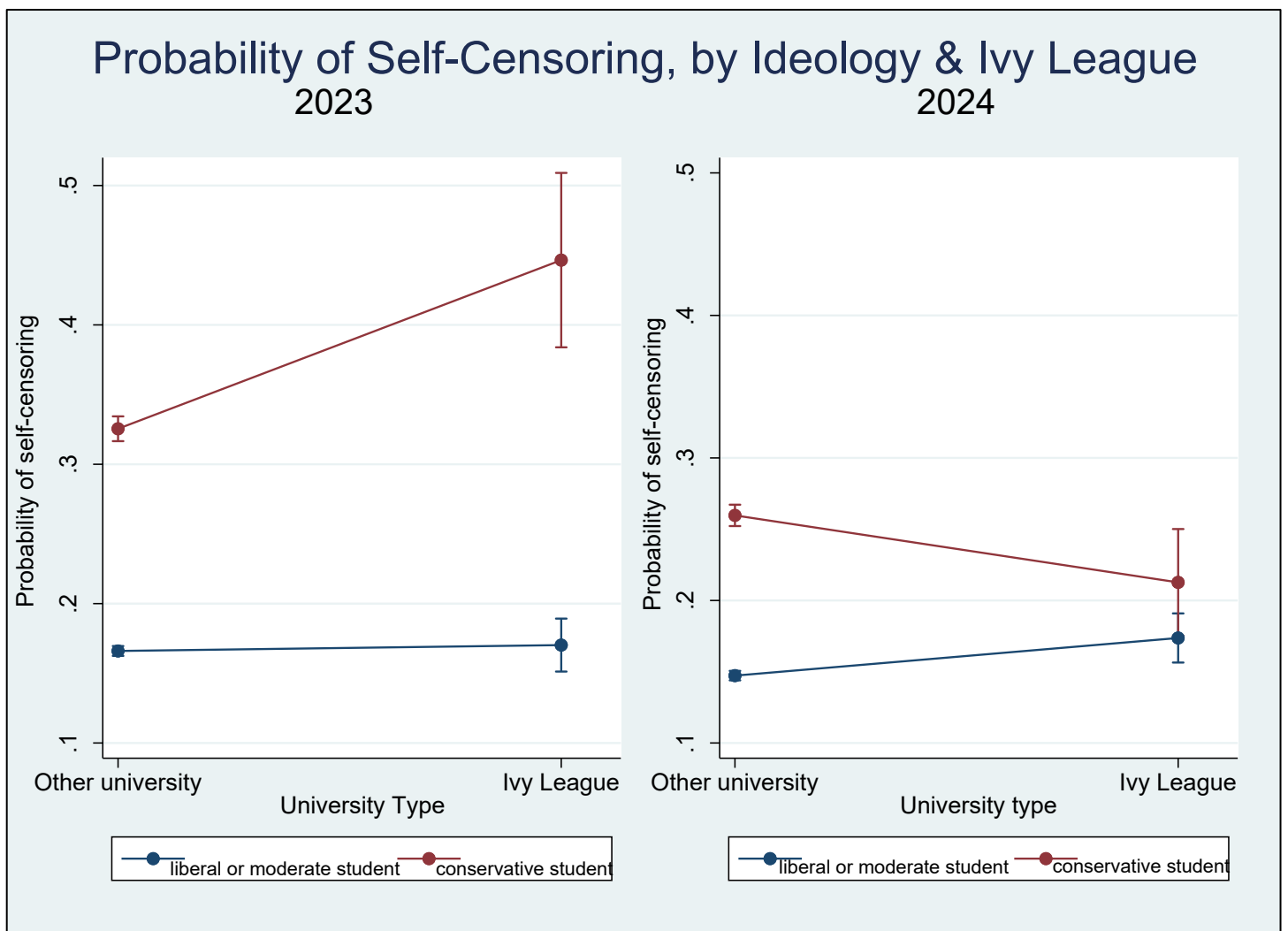


Figure 25

Source: FIRE 2023 and 2024. Models include student race, sex, socioeconomic background, sexual orientation, ideology and religion, proportion Jewish and average ideology in the student's institution, and interaction terms for Jewish x Jewish share, conservative x average ideology, Jewish x Ivy League and conservative x Ivy League. Pseudo-R² = .034 in 2023 and .029 in 2024. Conservative student and conservative x average left-to-right ideology are significant at $p < .001$ in both years, though with stronger coefficients in 2023. Conservative x Ivy League is positively associated with self-censorship in 2023 and negatively associated with it in 2024, both at $p < .01$ level.

The 2024 encampments offer a further lens into the disparate impact of the Israel-Palestine issue on Jews and conservatives. Figure 26 shows how the encampments had a disparate effect on the self-censorship of Jewish and conservative students during 2024, increasing the former while decreasing the latter.

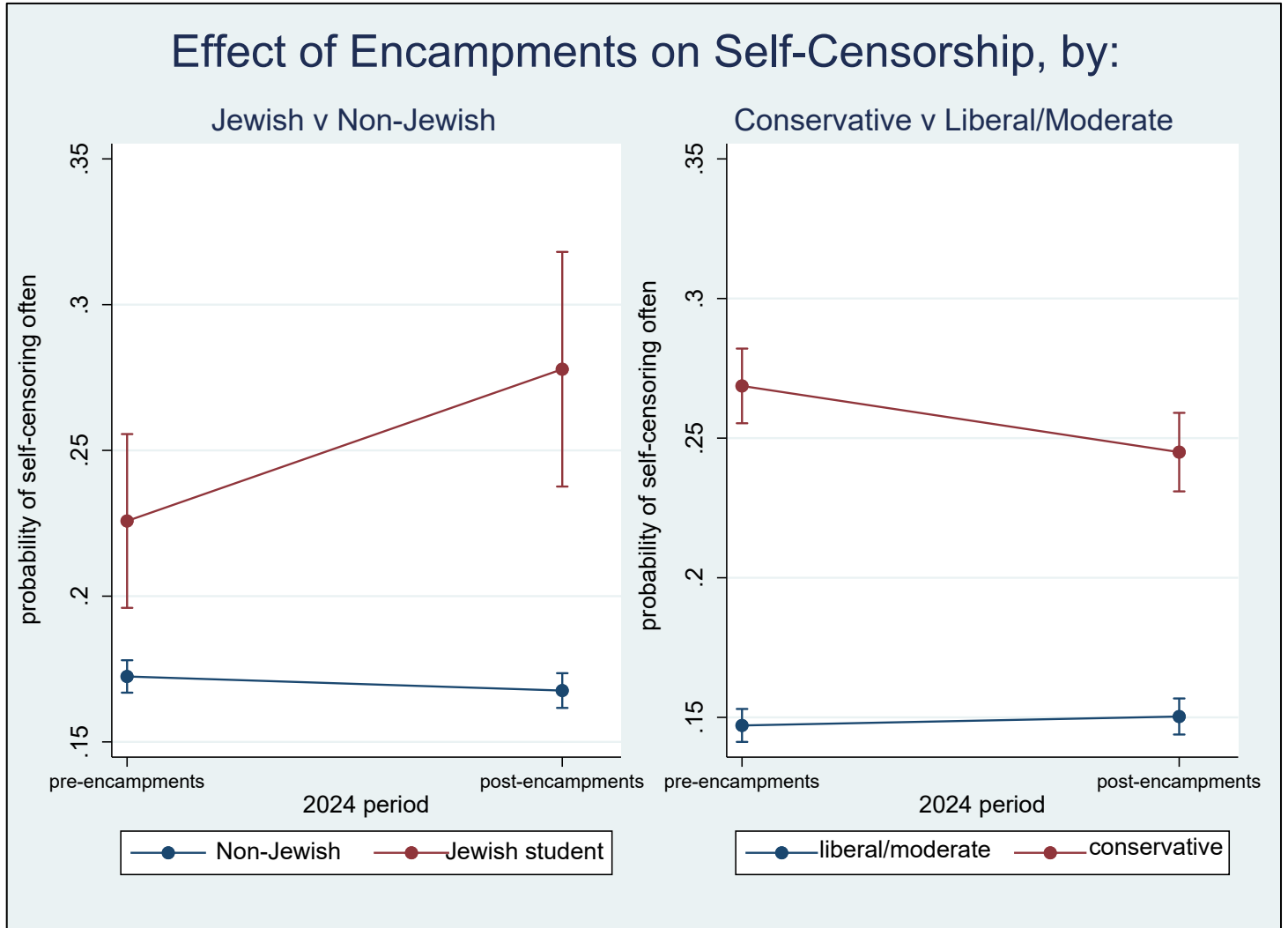


Figure 26

Source: FIRE 2024. N= 58,805. Pseudo-R² =.031. Models include student race, sex, socioeconomic background, sexual orientation, ideology and religion, average ideology in the student’s institution, Ivy League institution and interaction terms for Jewish x average ideology and conservative x average ideology. Both conservative x encampments and Jewish x encampments interactions are significant at the p<.05 level. While the effect was not statistically significant for the Ivy League sub-sample, this is mainly due to sample size, with the effects signed in the expected direction.

The decline of conservative self-censorship requires further research, including qualitative approaches. It will be interesting to see how the pattern of conservative self-censorship shifts with Trump’s tenure in office when FIRE’s 2025 survey results are released. Will Jewish students shift more strongly into the Republican column? Will conservatives start to identify more intensely with Israel’s cause? Will the left start to view Israel-Palestine as a conservative Republican symbol, stigmatizing their conservative classmates accordingly? Will conservative self-censorship rise as a result? At root,

the core question is whether the relative independence of the Israel-Palestine question from ideology and partisanship in the minds of students – especially at elite institutions – will persist.

The relationship between Jews and American politics stands at a crossroads, especially among young people who will form the elite of tomorrow. One path, perhaps accentuated by Trump's clash with Ivy League universities, is for Jews to align with Republicans and the right to more fully embrace the cause of Israel. This should result in more young conservatives backing Israel, and more liberal students viewing their conservative classmates with suspicion. This could lead to a reversal of the trend toward falling conservative self-censorship.

A second route, however, could be for young conservatives to distance themselves from Israel, as appears to be occurring to some degree. Under this scenario, Jewish students could find themselves even more isolated, lacking political allies on either the left or the right. There is some evidence for this in the FIRE data, with non-Jewish conservatives motivated more by free speech than the Israel cause: 70 percent of Ivy League Jewish conservatives favour banning a speaker from campus who advocates for 'from the river to the sea, Palestine shall be free' but just 23 percent of their non-Jewish conservative counterparts agree. Nationally, 49 percent of Jewish students, but only 38 percent of non-Jewish conservatives, favour a ban. If the Republican party cooled on Israel while the left remained focused on it, this would similarly accelerate the alienation of Jews from American society, driving Jewish self-censorship to even greater heights. Having said this, the course of the conflict in Israel-Palestine is impossible to predict, and if movement toward a viable two-state solution occurs while images of Palestinians dying cease, the mobilizing power of this issue may well dissipate.

Conclusion

This report examines the expressive freedom of Jewish and conservative students. As the focus of student-led cancel culture shifted from race (and to a lesser degree gender and sexuality) to the Israel-Palestine conflict, this appears to have increased self-censorship among Jews while reducing it among conservatives.

As Figure 27 illustrates, the effect intensifies as we move from universities as a whole to the most left-leaning quarter of campuses and thence to the more politicized Ivy League. That is, comparing sets of comparable self-censorship bars, the blue Jewish ones rise between 2023 and 2024 while the orange conservative bars fall across each pairing. The magnitude

of the rise and fall is higher as we move from the leftmost (overall) pairings on the chart to the rightmost (Ivy League) pairings. Liberal, prestigious and politicized campuses experienced more of a realignment of their axis of political peer pressure: from an anti-conservatism grounded in race and gender to a concentration on anti-zionism, which maps more obliquely onto Americans' partisan view of the world.

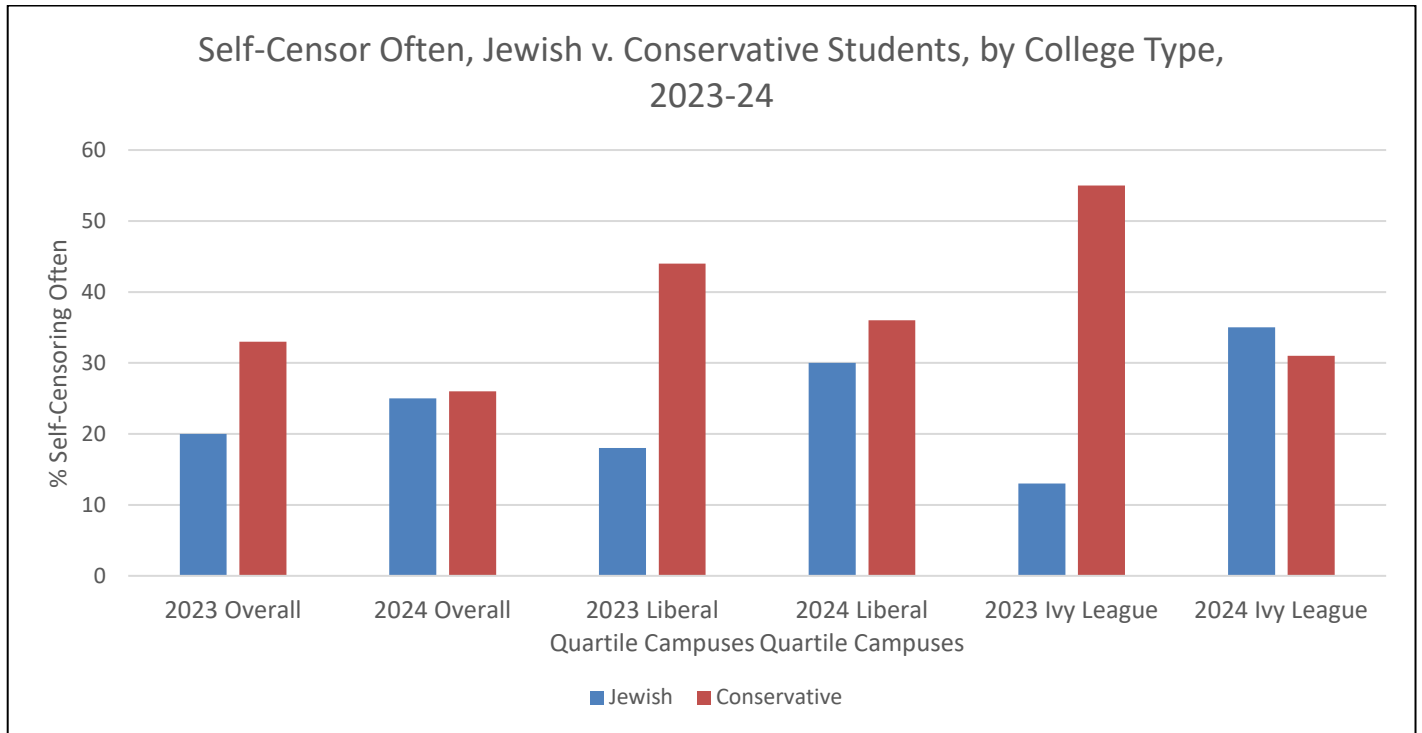


Figure 27

Source: FIRE 2023 and 2024.

Jewish students, especially those in liberal and politicized environments, experienced a substantial increase in peer pressure (or perceptions thereof). Only pro-Palestinian Jews bucked the trend. The fact that Jews are self-censoring at unprecedented rates at Ivy League campuses, with religious and Zionist Jews most inhibited, lends potential credence to Jay Greene's argument that antisemitism is a problem. On the other hand, self-censorship has also increased among Muslim students, and is only modestly higher in the Ivy League than on non-elite campuses. Conservatives, meanwhile, are feeling a lot freer. It is also unclear whether a chillier speech climate for Jewish students on elite campuses reflects antisemitism or merely the unavoidable optics of a situation in which Israel and the killing of Palestinians by Israelis (whether proportionate or excessive) is in the news.

We thus have a story that unsettles prevailing media and partisan narratives which juxtapose a monolith of conservatives

and Zionist Jews against the woke pro-Palestinian campus left.

In fact, partisanship and the Israel-Palestine issue occupy distinct spaces in the worldview of Americans, including students. While conservatives are certainly more pro-Israel than liberals, and a settler-colonialist ideology pitting whites against 'indigenous' peoples of colour is the dominant frame for left activism pertaining to both white America and Israel, the two sets of beliefs are substantially independent in the minds of students.

Race/gender is highly associated with ideology and partisanship in the minds of both left-wing activists and the public, whereas Israel-Palestine is less so: support for Israel is common among both moderate Democrats (as reflected in Biden's policy toward the region) and Republicans, even if this is changing.²⁸ Far left students cannot blame Republicans for America's foreign policy (under Biden) while lauding the Democrats. The association between one's partisanship and Israel-Palestine stance is there, but not tight enough to undergird affective partisan polarization. More importantly, the sacred symbolic centre of the young intellectual left is around the totems of race, gender and sexuality, not Israel-Palestine.²⁹ Transgressions of the sacred bring outrage and hatred of conservatives, whereas support for Israel, while drawing liberal ire, does not represent the same violation of sacred progressive values.

The net result is that the angle of political pressure bears down less heavily on conservatives when the cultural left's salient symbolic crusade pivots from race/gender to Israel-Palestine - as occurred after October 7, 2023. As the Israel-Palestine conflict has increasingly caught the attention of the activist left on campus, the latter's focus on race and gender has ebbed. This shift of political winds has ironically benefited conservative students, especially at elite schools.³⁰

The main reason is because *attitudes* toward political issues differ from the *salience* of political issues. Attitudes to race/gender and Israel-Palestine are mutually reinforcing and correlated with ideology, but the salience of race/gender and Israel-Palestine is more mutually exclusive - when one rises, the other falls because political oxygen is finite. The rising salience of Israel-Palestine took the heat out of race/gender, weakening anti-conservative hostility.

²⁸ Laura Silver, 'How Americans view Israel and the Israel-Hamas war at the start of Trump's second term,' *Pew*, April 8, 2025.

²⁹ al-Gharbi, M. (2024). We Have Never Been Woke: The Cultural Contradictions of a New Elite

³⁰ Kirsch, A. (2024). On Settler Colonialism: Ideology, Violence, and Justice, WW Norton & Company.

Conservative students are enjoying more freedom of speech as Jewish students feel less free to express their political beliefs. One result is that Jewish students have abandoned the far left in large numbers for the political centre and, to a lesser extent, the right. On Ivy League campuses this is more pronounced. Jewish students were formerly to the left of their Ivy League classmates, but now lean more conservative and Republican.

Student views on the Israel-Palestine conflict are naively uncritical of Hamas, and there are undoubtedly leftist radicals who veer into antisemitism. Meanwhile, conservative students are somewhat critical of Israel, mirroring shifts in the wider young Republican electorate.³¹ Republicans should be aware that an excessive crackdown on pro-Palestinian and anti-Israel speech is unlikely to reduce anti-conservative prejudice, which is mainly tied to attitudes toward race, gender and sexuality, with deep roots in the culture and public institutions.³² A campus crackdown may also not land well with many conservative students, who could oppose excessive measures on free speech grounds.

Excessively restricting speech critical of Israel because it makes Jews feel unsafe could also buttress an illiberal template that a future Democratic administration could use against those who ostensibly make trans or black people feel 'unsafe' (by arguing, for example, in favour of the biological nature of sex or the negative influence of family breakdown on black economic outcomes). Universities find it more congenial to tackle antisemitism than to protect speech which is accused of violating sacred values around race, gender and sexual orientation. Given the opportunity, the path of least resistance for Social Justice-minded administrators and faculty is to absorb antisemitism into the rubric of DEI, giving it a new lease on life.³³

In addition, applying pressure to institutions to reduce antisemitism, while important, is unlikely to affect the more consequential speech-suppressing power of anti-conservative stigma. This is rooted in the numerical predominance of the left on campus and in the moral-emotional force of taboos around the sacred woke totems of race, sexual orientation and gender.³⁴ A better place to focus is K-12 schooling and the curriculum, as well as Education Schools.³⁵ When it comes to

³¹ See Wright, 'Young Republicans are fueling the GOP's generational divide on Israel'

³² Kaufmann, *Taboo* (published as *The Third Awakening* in North America).

³³ Mirsky, Maya, 'State bill would compel college DEI training to include antisemitism,' *Jewish News of Northern California*, May 24, 2025.

³⁴ For more on totemic capital, see al-Gharbi, M. (2024). *We Have Never Been Woke: The Cultural Contradictions of a New Elite*, Princeton University Press.

³⁵ Kaufmann, Eric and Zach Goldberg, "The Impact of Critical Social Justice Ideology in American Schools," *Manhattan Institute*, February 2, 2023, <https://manhattan.institute/article/school-choice-is-not-enough-the-impact-of-critical-social-justice-ideology-in-american->

viewpoint diversity, the sacralization of race and identity are central to the totalizing worldview that enforces a cultural left monoculture while anti-zionism is relatively orthogonal to it.

However appealing it may be to harness the cultural power of a historically oppressed minority to gain the moral high ground over one's political rivals, discrimination and safety arguments should be used as sparingly as possible so as to protect the truth-based order and freedom of speech.³⁶

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³⁶ Rauch, J. (2021). The constitution of knowledge: A defense of truth, Brookings Institution Press.