

# The ADL-Hillel Campus Antisemitism Survey: 2021

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## INTRODUCTION

Antisemitism has been a problem on college and university campuses for decades. But while the climate for Jewish students had been improving for many years, we are seeing an alarming new uptick in the number of reported antisemitic incidents across the country. Swastikas, Nazi symbols and other antisemitic graffiti have been reported on numerous campuses, and antisemitic tropes hurled at Jewish students have made headlines. Most notably, white supremacists marched through the campus of the University of Virginia in 2017 shouting “Jews will not replace us.”

In the aftermath of increased conflict between Israel and Hamas in May 2021, students at college campuses across the United States experienced an even sharper increase in antisemitic activity, including many incidents not directly connected to Israel. Antisemitic incidents peaked during the 2020-2021 academic year, reaching an all-time high of [244 incidents](#), even though many campuses were physically closed due to the COVID-19 pandemic. From past research and conversations with students, we know that antisemitic activity on campus makes some Jewish students feel unwelcome or unsupported by their campus community. According to one recent [survey](#), Jewish students were the least likely among their peers to view their campus as welcoming to religious diversity.

The Anti-Defamation League and Hillel International are dedicated to supporting Jewish students and addressing all acts of antisemitism. We are working together to respond to antisemitic activity on campus, and to proactively counter the underlying hatreds and biases that lead to it through education and engagement. To do so, it is vital to ground ourselves in data to understand the nature of antisemitism on college and university campuses today and the experiences of Jewish students. This study was conducted to better understand these national trends by hearing from a nationally representative sample of Jewish students across the United States. This report explores the extent to which Jewish college students face antisemitism and exclusion on campus and seeks to understand how campus communities can most effectively support them. Understanding these trends will help inform our efforts to partner with and educate campus administrators, Hillel professionals, and students, to ensure Jewish students are secure, supported, and empowered.



# METHODOLOGY

This survey was conducted by College Pulse, an online survey and analytics company dedicated to understanding college students, on behalf of ADL and Hillel International. The survey instrument was adapted from Hillel International’s Campus Climate Initiative student survey. This survey was conducted online between July 7th and August 21st, 2021 and included 756 self-identified Jewish undergraduate students who are currently enrolled in 220 different four-year colleges and universities across the United States. This sample was drawn from College Pulse’s Undergraduate Student Panel, which includes over 400,000 diverse students from more than 1,000 colleges and universities across all 50 states. The survey results were adjusted based on demographic distributions from the 2017 Current Population Survey to reduce the effects of non-response bias and appropriately weight the sample based on age, race and ethnicity, and gender. The margin of error for this survey is ± four percent.

These survey results can be used as a point of comparison for colleges and universities that want to engage in surveys as one indicator of the climate for Jewish students and related to antisemitism on their own campuses.

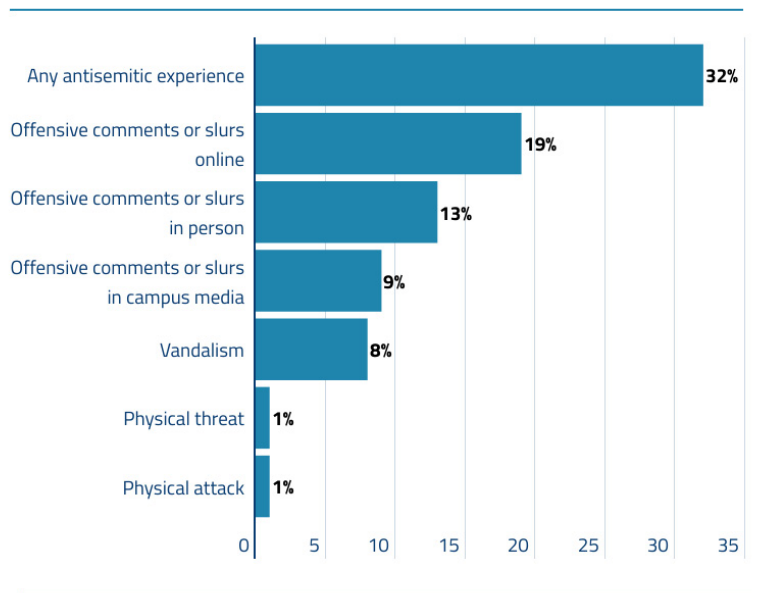
# RESULTS

## Experiences with Antisemitism

Jewish students in the United States report that antisemitism continues to be a looming and present threat on college campuses. Their concern about antisemitism can impede their ability to participate in classes, join clubs, and display their Jewish identity proudly.

Within the last year, nearly one-third of Jewish students personally experienced antisemitism directed at them on campus or by a member of the campus community. The most common forms of antisemitism were offensive comments or slurs online or in person. For those who experienced offensive comments or slurs directed at them in person, 79 percent reported that it happened to them more than once. One student described an incident at a party where someone gave a Nazi salute after finding out they were Jewish.

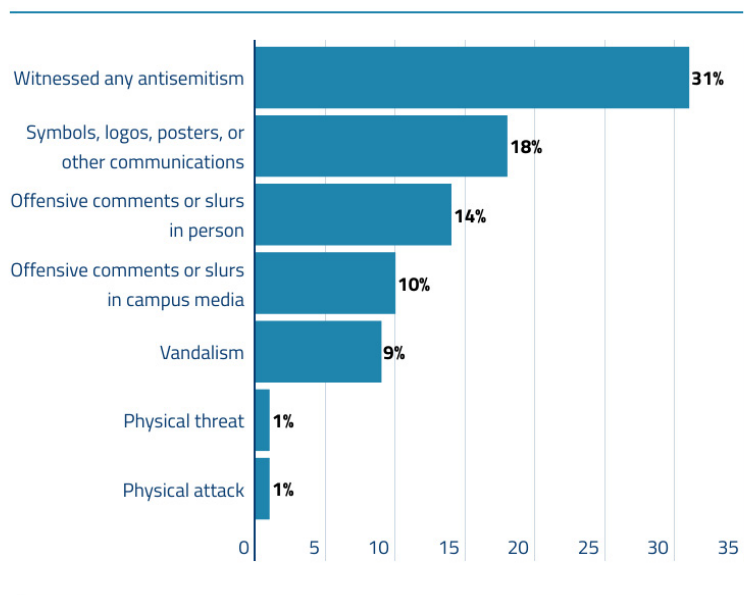
## Personal Experiences of Antisemitism



"I've had swastikas drawn on my notes, been called a 'kike' downtown ... while I was wearing my *hamsa*. **I've seen an increase in people making judgements about me for being Jewish** due to the current political climate with Palestine. People keep tying Jews that have nothing to do with the conflict to the Israeli government. Anytime it is mentioned that I am Jewish to someone who doesn't know that already, the topic of Palestine is brought up, which is intrinsically antisemitic." –Student at a small northeastern university

Additionally, in the last year, 31 percent of Jewish students witnessed antisemitic activity on campus that was not directed at them. The most common experience was witnessing antisemitism in symbols, logos, and posters on campus, observed by 18 percent of respondents. Many of the respondents recalled swastikas being drawn around campus and the vandalism of Jewish fraternities, sororities, and cultural buildings. One student from a small liberal arts school in the northeast remembered a *mezuzah* being stolen off a Jewish student's dorm room door and a student from a public university in the southeast discussed instances of swastikas being put up on Jewish students' doors.

## Experiences Witnessing Antisemitism



"The anti-Israel sentiment is very strong... and it often (not always) manifests as antisemitism. In the 2019/2020 school year (pre-covid) our Hillel was repeatedly vandalized and even though the administration knew about it we had to fight with them for months before they took action. **I've also seen/ heard anti-Israel comments from my peers that were blatantly antisemitic both online and in-person** (more so online since covid)"  
 – Student at a small northeastern college

Taken together, 43 percent of Jewish college students experienced and/or witnessed antisemitic activity in the last year. We asked them to describe those occurrences and created the following word cloud to highlight their responses. Outside of Jews and Jewish, the most common words in the descriptions of antisemitic experiences include "Israel," "Nazi," "swastikas," and "jokes." Additionally, the prominence of the words "online" and "social media" reinforce the finding that many Jewish students experience antisemitism online. In the age of increased virtual learning and constant social media engagement, this is particularly concerning.





The most common place where students felt they needed to hide their Jewish identity was in the classroom. When one student was asked to describe this experience, they simply wrote “I’d rather be safe than sorry.”

“Sometimes when I say I’m Jewish in classes that becomes the center of whatever I have to say for the rest of the semester and **there is more to me than just being Jewish.**” –Student at a small southern university.

“One time, I sat next to someone in my political science class and I put my phone on the table with an “I Celebrate Chanukah” sticker on the case. The person next to me pulled out his laptop with a Confederate flag sticker, looked at my phone case, and moved across the room. **Ever since then, I try not to show my Judaism.**” –Student at a large southern university

Additionally, many students said they feel that they will be harassed about Israel in class if they are openly Jewish.

“Expressing support for the Jewish community or Israel is **immediately met with ostracizing and harassment** to the point of not being able to talk about it in class.” –Student at a large northeastern university

“Students conflating the actions of the Israeli government with the Jewish people’s. General misguided hatred and anger in general from their comments. [There is a lot] of ‘leftist rage,’ which is a community I’m involved in so it was weird and uncomfortable. Didn’t seem like people were open to any conversation & by the way they spoke, **it made me feel as though I was better off not being open about my Judaism** - which is something I’m used to. – Student at a large southern university

One student from a midwest liberal arts college tried to circumvent this stereotype by writing “Jews for a Free Palestine” on the whiteboard outside of their dorm.

“I used to be more vocal about my Jewishness. **I’m worried people will stereotype me** and assume I support Israel’s action because I’m Jewish. To prevent this I wrote on my dorm door whiteboard ‘Jews for a Free Palestine.’ I worry that the legitimate and real racial trauma of Jewish families is ignored because they are now perceived as white and therefore seen as complete recipients of American cultural hegemony with family lines of privilege that are untainted by systematic disenfranchisement, murder and abuse.” –Student at a small midwestern liberal arts college



Approximately one in three of those who felt they needed to hide their Jewish identity reported doing so in their residence halls or place of living. One student from a large public university in the south explained that other Jewish students have had their property vandalized and stated, “I do not want to be a target.” This was a sentiment shared by many of the respondents. Others described not wanting to hang up their *mezuzah* or wear articles of clothing that would signify their Jewish identity for fear of being called out, harassed, or attacked.

Many respondents also reported hiding their Jewish identity in co-curricular activities. Ten percent felt they were unwelcome because of their actual or perceived support for Israel as a Jew. Additionally, four percent of students had been asked or told to leave a student organization either because they were Jewish or because of their actual or perceived support for Israel as a Jew.

Reflecting on their experience being asked to leave a campus organization because they were Jewish, a student from a large private university in the northeast recalled being called a “Kike Jewlord.” Another student from a northeastern public university recalled being harassed and essentially banned from liberal clubs that they had previously been welcome in after openly supporting Israel. A student from a large midwestern public university, who identifies as queer, discussed how a queer student organization refused to support the school’s Jewish queer student organization because of its affiliation with Hillel, a “Zionist organization.”

### ***Concerns of Antisemitism Across the Political Spectrum***

Contrary to politicized narratives that often highlight antisemitism as stemming only from one end of the political spectrum or another, the Jewish students surveyed expressed concern about antisemitism from the political left, center, and right, though to somewhat varying degrees. They reported being most concerned about antisemitism from those who identify as conservative or with the right (69 percent), followed closely by those who identify as progressive or with the left (62 percent). They are least concerned with antisemitism from those who identify as centrists (54 percent), although more than half of them are still concerned.

### ***Building Resilience***

The results of this survey show a correlation between participation in Jewish life and feeling safe on campus. Of those who participated in this survey, three-quarters participated in at least some Jewish activities in the past year. Interestingly, 74 percent of students who participated in Jewish activities reported feeling safe on campus as a Jew - compared to 65 percent of students who did not participate in Jewish activities. This is despite the fact that students who participate in Jewish activities are more likely to experience antisemitic incidents and behaviors.

This seems to confirm the fear that many participants expressed about being afraid to openly display their Jewish identity because they will be targeted. However, it also suggests that participating in Jewish activities and building a strong Jewish community may help build resilience and alleviate the anxiety that so many Jewish students experience. This affirms the need for building thriving Jewish life on college campuses to offer Jewish students a safe space free of antisemitism and to provide them the tools and resources to address antisemitism if and when they experience it.



## Desired Action

Nearly half of Jewish students want changes to be made in how antisemitism is addressed on their campus. Overall, 32 percent want student governments to do more, 27 percent want campus employees to do more, and 25 percent want campus faculty to do more.

Jewish students want their fellow students and campus faculty, staff, and officials to understand antisemitism, but unfortunately many universities fail to provide this education. Several students noted that Jews are not included in the Diversity, Equity and Inclusion curricula that students, faculty and staff are frequently required to take.

**"It would be great to see diversity embraced instead of accepted.** Since most of the school is Christian, there isn't a ton of understanding of other cultures and while there are some great existing programs to improve cultural awareness I think there could be more." –Student at a large southern university.

"The ... staff was widely ill-equipped to deal with antisemitism, and many of them even made accidentally offensive comments while working with us. **I also learned that antisemitism is not covered in the diversity, equality and inclusion training for employees,** which explains a lot but is unacceptable." –Student at a small northeastern college.

Many students also want more action to be taken in response to antisemitic activity on their campuses. In their open-ended responses, many students felt that antisemitic incidents are not acknowledged by their universities and in many cases are not even investigated. A student from an elite private university in the northeast noted their school's position of political neutrality, but felt it would be helpful if campus employees "made real affirmative stances about the value of different ethnicities and religions." A student from a private university in the mid-Atlantic region stressed the importance of listening to student concerns of antisemitism; "they should make sure that Jewish students are heard when they come forward with complaints rather than disregard them."

"The school needs to address the rise of 'white nationalist' ideals and their ties to elitism and fraternal organizations. Organizations that are accused of discriminatory behavior and/or harassment need to be thoroughly investigated and removed or placed on probation as appropriate. **Educational requirements should reflect a desire to educate all students on the history of discrimination and harassment in this country and the institutional racism that persists today.** Students that complain of discrimination and harassment must be treated with respect and their complaints should be investigated thoroughly." –Student at a large western university

"They [campus officials] could talk to people who get reported for antisemitic comments, or at the very least put out a statement in the wake of antisemitic comments that Jews (and Israelis) on campus are not responsible for the actions of the Israeli government." –Student at a large western university

## CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This survey establishes that antisemitism remains a consistent and serious concern for Jewish students on college campuses across the United States. Jewish students – like all students – deserve to feel safe and accepted in their college communities. College is a time where students have the opportunity to grow, explore their identity, challenge their ideas about the world, and learn and engage with those who are different from them. However, Jewish students cannot do this when they fear for their safety and feel the need to hide their Jewish identity from others.

There have been an alarming number of reported antisemitic attacks and incidents on college campuses in recent years, but this survey suggests the true extent is even more alarming, as most incidents and microaggressions go unreported.

University officials have an obligation to keep their students safe and provide a learning environment where all students can thrive, free from harassment. In order to address these issues, colleges and universities should take the following steps:

**Appropriate inclusion of antisemitism in orientations and training for students, faculty, staff, and the administration.** Universities should include antisemitism alongside other forms of bias in their Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion programs for faculty and staff, as well as in student orientations and student leadership training. Additionally, higher education graduate programs and professional associations should ensure that content on the Jewish community and antisemitism is included in their programs.

**Increase visibility of where and how to report acts of antisemitism on campus.** The majority of those who personally experienced antisemitism did not report the incident. Additionally, 41 percent of those surveyed said that they did not know how to report an antisemitic incident if it were to occur. Colleges and universities need to make it a priority to regularly highlight how and where to report antisemitic incidents. This should happen within the campus's broader bias and discrimination reporting processes, and students should also be informed about how to specifically report antisemitism through their local Hillel.

**Address acts of antisemitism and take concrete steps to investigate incidents.** Many students feel their universities do not prioritize investigating or responding to acts of antisemitism, or that university officials even actively downplay its significance. They feel that their universities do not respond to antisemitism with the same thoroughness and transparency as they respond to other hateful acts. This contributes to an environment that emboldens others to perpetuate antisemitism without fear of repercussion and one that silences its Jewish students. Policies and procedures for responding to antisemitic incidents should be clear and include thorough, transparent response to the incident as well as support for victims. When acts of antisemitism occur that target the whole Jewish campus community, campus officials should be quick to release statements that clearly name the problem as antisemitism and show their support for Jewish students.

**Listen to Jewish students.** University leaders should take intentional steps to listen to and learn from Jewish students. Through avenues such as listening sessions, focus groups, and surveys, administrators can hear directly from their Jewish campus community, better understand their experiences, and learn if and

how antisemitism affects them personally. This national data provides important learnings that are widely applicable, but each institution should examine its own climate, hear directly from its students and respond appropriately.

**Support Jewish life on campus.** Students who participated in Jewish activities are more likely to report feeling safe on campus as a Jew. Creating and supporting space for Jewish life on campus can help buttress the impact that antisemitic activity may have by helping Jewish students create communities of support for one another. Colleges and universities can take steps to help foster thriving Jewish life by sharing tools and resources, participating in Jewish life programs, and incorporating Jewish students into broader campus programs and structures alongside other racial, religious and ethnic minorities.

Most Jewish students report feeling safe and welcome on campus. Despite this, antisemitic activity remains prevalent at many U.S. colleges and universities, resulting in some students hiding their Jewish identity in exchange for feeling more secure. The ADL and Hillel International are committed to addressing the roots of antisemitism and building a more inclusive campus environment. It is important that all members of the campus community stand up against antisemitism and hate so that all students can thrive.



## ABOUT HILLEL:

**Our Mission:** Enriching the lives of Jewish students so that they may enrich the Jewish people and the world.

Founded in 1923, Hillel has been enriching the lives of Jewish students for more than 90 years. Today, Hillel International is a global organization that welcomes students of all backgrounds and fosters an enduring commitment to Jewish life, learning and Israel. As the largest Jewish student organization in the world, Hillel builds connections with emerging adults at more than 550 colleges and universities and inspires them to direct their own path.

Hillel International works to prevent, mitigate and respond to antisemitism on college campuses through a series of critical initiatives to create safe and welcoming campus communities for Jewish students. These efforts include the recent #OwnYourStar social media campaign designed to encourage Jewish students and allies to express their Jewish pride and spread the message that antisemitism has no place on campus or online, and a new antisemitism curriculum, built in collaboration with ADL, to educate students and Hillel professionals about the history of antisemitism and how it manifests on college campuses today.

## ABOUT THE CAMPUS CLIMATE INITIATIVE:

Hillel International's Campus Climate Initiative (CCI) works collaboratively with higher education administrators to ensure a positive campus climate in which Jewish students feel comfortable expressing their identity and values, free of antisemitism, harassment, or marginalization. The CCI model involves partnership between the college or university administration, the local Hillel, and the CCI team. It is based on the premise that key administrative leaders play an essential role in effecting broad-based educational and policy change on campus, and that the university-Hillel partnership can lead toward positive changes that will benefit both Jewish students and all students.

The CCI team works with campuses to support them in gathering data to better understand the current climate for Jewish students; training and empowering university administration and staff to understand the needs of Jewish students, the diversity of the Jewish community, and the current challenges of campus antisemitism; and creating and adopting best practice policies, procedures and programs to address antisemitism and foster a positive campus climate for Jewish students and all students. This work is intentionally situated within institutions' existing commitments to diversity, equity and inclusion.

Learn more by visiting <https://www.hillel.org/jewish/campus-climate-initiative>.





## **ABOUT ADL:**

ADL is a leading anti-hate organization that was founded in 1913 in response to an escalating climate of antisemitism and bigotry. Today, ADL is the first call when acts of antisemitism occur and continues to fight all forms of hate. A global leader in exposing extremism, delivering anti-bias education and fighting hate online, ADL's ultimate goal is a world in which no group or individual suffers from bias, discrimination or hate.

For more information visit [adl.org](https://www.adl.org).