

FACING THE CHARGE OF RACISM: RESEARCH ON JEWISH STUDENT IDENTITY

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Jewish students face many challenges on American college campuses. On top of the difficulties common to all students, Jewish students are thrust into the middle of an emotionally charged and often vitriolic “Israel debate” that demonizes Israel and its supporters. Our research reveals that over 40% of Jewish students report anti-Semitism on their campus and nearly one-third assert that anti-Israel protests target Jews. Jewish students bear the brunt of sweeping charges of genocide, apartheid, colonization and racism leveled against the Jewish state.¹

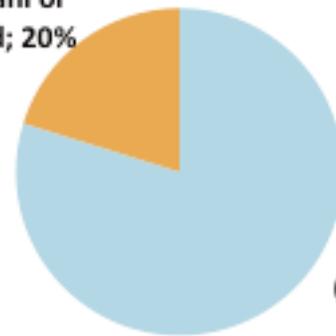
Whether they are active supporters of Israel or not, Jewish students internalize a great deal of the vilification aimed at Israel. Perhaps none of the accusations against Israel, and by extension Jews, is as hurtful and frustrating as the charge of racism. Accusations of racism have become a staple of anti-Israel protest on campus and, for Jewish students, these charges can negatively impact their college experience and raise important questions about their Jewish identity. Examples are wide-ranging, and validated by faculty who frame Israel and Zionism as “a diseased ideology of ethnocentric nationalism and racism that we are familiar with from South African apartheid and European fascism,” as stated by

Yale University professor Mazin Qumsiyeh² or that “Zionism is a racist movement...Israel is a racist state,” as stated by Columbia University professor Joseph Massad.³

The irony of the racism accusation is that young Jews are firmly committed to the global world in which they live. They embrace a world with permeable boundaries and multiple identities that celebrate and validate diversity, as do most young Americans.⁴ It should come as no surprise that Jewish students are committed to an expansive and inclusive vision of the world. Many are raised in homes that reflect the changing demographics of the 21st century.

Percent of Jewish students with at least one Sephardic or Mizrahi family member

Sephardic, Mizrahi or Mixed; 20%



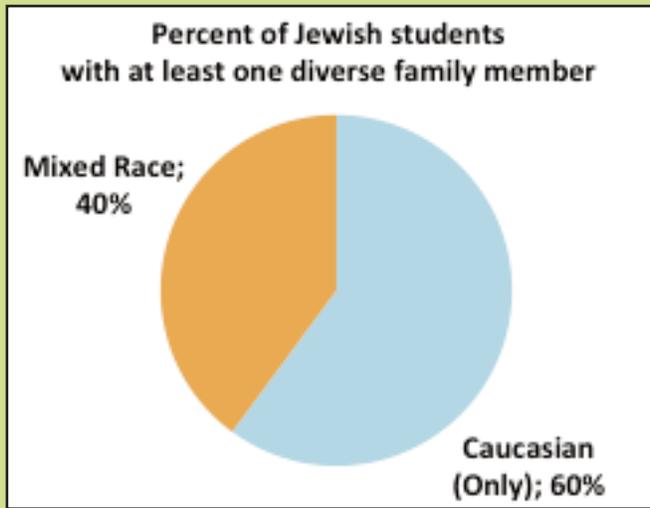
Ashkenazi (Only); 80%

1. Tobin, G. and Weiberg, A. *The UnCivil University: Politics and Propaganda in Higher Education*. The Institute for Jewish & Community Research, 2009.

2. Mazin Qumsiyah, letter to the editor, *Commentary*, March 2005.

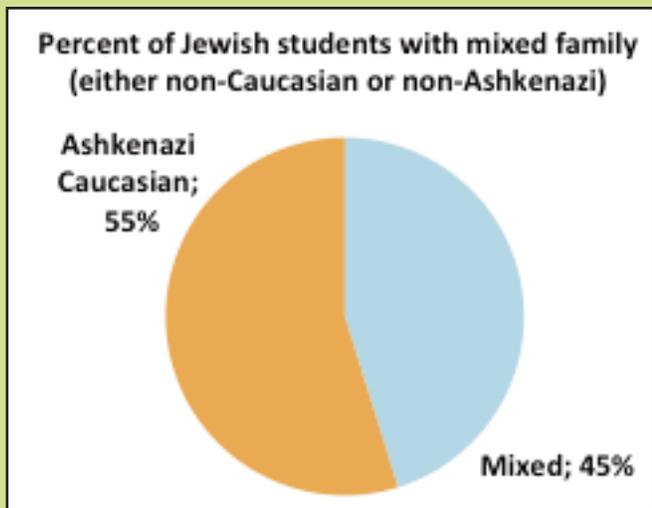
3. Joseph Massad, “Post-Oslo Solidarity,” *Al-Ahram Weekly Online*, February 26, 2003.

4. Pew reports that Millennials are more racially diverse than previous generations. <http://pewresearch.org>



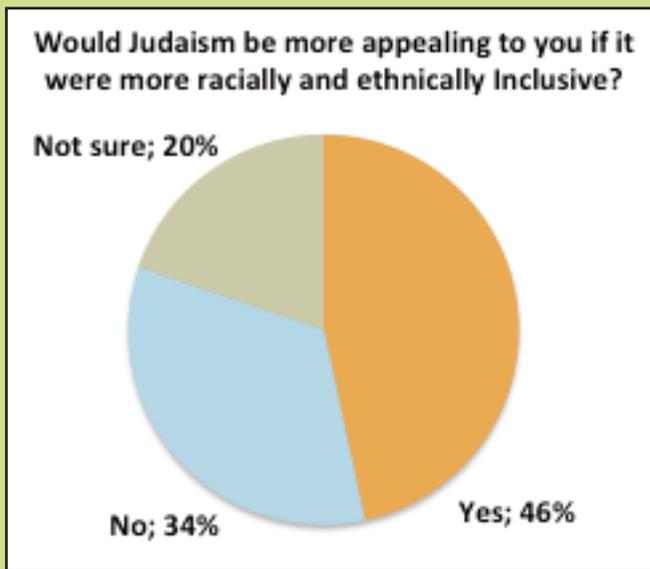
Twenty percent of all Jewish students were raised in families that include at least one member who is Sephardic or Mizrahi. Forty percent grew up in families with at least one nuclear family or extended family member who is Black, Asian, Hispanic or other non-Caucasian. Combined, nearly half (45%) of Jewish college students arrived on campus having been raised in a family with some level of diversity.

If this is surprising, it should not be. Historically, Jews are one of the most diverse and global people in the world. Estimates of the percent of



American Jews who are ethnically and racially diverse range as high as 20% of the total United States Jewish population⁵ and, abroad, Jewish communities from the Middle East, India, Africa, Asia and Latin America belie the notion of Jews as solely a European people. Unfortunately, this aspect of Jewish identity receives less attention than it should, not only outside the Jewish community, but also within.

As a result, Jewish students find themselves left in the lurch. The most effective defense against charges of racism is to embrace and celebrate the full spectrum of Jewish identity. Moreover, this is exactly what young Jews want from the Jewish community. They want to reconcile their global identity with a Jewish community that they often see as insular.



Nearly half (46%) of Jewish students responded that Judaism would be more appealing to them if it was more ethnically and racially inclusive. An additional 20% were unsure. Only one third of Jewish students feel satisfied with the level of inclusiveness in the Jewish community.

5. <http://GlobalJews.org/Resources/Research.org>

Globalization and technology expand the range of choices and ways of identifying for younger generations of Jews. They relate to a more global vision of the Jewish people that contrasts sharply with the depiction of Israel and the Jewish people on campus today. The Jewish community should make every effort to demonstrate how far this depiction deviates from reality. Highlighting and celebrating the multiplicity of Jewish identity and experience is essential not only to countering the misrepresentation of Israel and Jews on campus, but also to the goal of ensuring the engagement of young Jews in Jewish life. The situation is serendipitous. Two of the most pressing concerns facing the Jewish community, continuity and the reputation of Israel, can be meaningfully impacted simply by recognizing and embracing a fundamental aspect of the Jewish people: Its diversity.



BE'CHOL LASHON

Be'chol Lashon (Hebrew for "in every language") strengthens Jewish identity by raising awareness of the ethnic, racial and cultural diversity of Jewish identity and experience.

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