

What a new survey demonstrates about “resilience” among Jewish college students

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What is the current state of Jewish college students' well-being in the aftermath of October 7, and how can campuses work to improve and protect all students' well-being on campus? Academic research on American Jewish college students' perspectives and experiences points to some of the challenges these students face. For example, Brandeis University's [Cohen Center for Modern Jewish Studies](#) published the [Campus Voices](#) report in December 2024, which found that although few Jewish college students reported overt threats to their physical safety, many more reported severe mental distress, loss of close relationships, and taking action to hide their Jewish identity, all in response to hostility they have encountered in the wake of the Israel-Hamas war.

A [more recent study](#), published by a group of faculty and student researchers in September 2026,¹ aims to assess these same questions. From January–June 2025, the authors of this study fielded a nationwide survey and collected responses from 3,418 college students about their well-being on campus since October 7, 2023. The authors' stated goals for this study were to:

- (1) evaluate Jewish students' well-being relative to peers with other religious identities;
- (2) examine how strongly Jewish students' well-being was related to sense of belonging on campus and perceptions of institutional atmosphere toward Israel and Judaism.

This study assessed students' well-being by asking them to rate themselves on scales that measured depression, anxiety, loneliness, and flourishing. Students were recruited to this study via social media, student organizations, and word-of-mouth, receiving financial rewards for their participation and successful recruitment of additional respondents. As acknowledged by the authors, this non-random recruitment method resulted in a nonrepresentative sample; without a representative survey sample, we must be careful about generalizing findings from this study to the greater population of U.S. college students.

Despite these sample-related limitations, the authors of this study ultimately concluded that Jewish college students reported “similar well-being [based on standard mental health metrics] compared with students of other religions, and better well-being compared with students who did not endorse a religious identity.” This study also found that the Jewish students with the best reported well-being were those who experience a sense of belonging on campus and do not perceive their campus environment as hostile. The authors measured sense of belonging based on respondents' answers to a series of questions about “feeling valued, connected, and accepted” on campus—not about their affiliation with particular groups or organizations.

According to the study's statistical results, sense of belonging was more strongly associated with student well-being than perceptions of campus hostility were. In summarizing the key takeaways from their research, the authors write:

"From a clinical perspective, this pattern of resilience is reassuring—as a group these students report good mental health, strong social connections, meaning in life, success in relationships, and optimism about the future."

Overall, this study provides valuable insight into the ways in which certain Jewish college students cope with the social and environmental challenges posed by the Israel-Hamas war. That being said, "resilience" is not the only narrative woven throughout this survey's findings. Digging into this work reveals a mosaic of Jewish students' experiences, not all of which are as optimistic as what the authors emphasize.

First, the **"non-religious" students who reported the worst well-being in this study potentially include secular, cultural, or other Jews who might not have identified as religious and were therefore not categorized as Jewish.** This calls into question one of the authors' most hopeful interpretations of the findings: that Jewish respondents, in general, reported significantly less depression and anxiety and significantly greater flourishing than students with no reported religious identity. While the authors suggest that this gap reflects better overall well-being among Jewish college students when compared to non-religious students, it is entirely plausible that the gap actually reflects the benefits associated with religious affiliation, such as built-in community and organized social support—an interpretation supported by the study's own finding that other religious-identifying students (i.e., Christians) reported well-being outcomes similar to Jewish-identifying respondents.

Second, **Jewish students who do not feel like they belong and who perceive their campus environment as hostile toward their Jewish identity reported significantly worse well-being than their peers.** NCAR's analysis of the released survey data found that among the roughly one-quarter of Jewish respondents who perceived the most hostile campus atmosphere, 20.6 percent met the study's threshold for moderate-to-severe depression and 24.9 percent met the threshold for moderate-to-severe anxiety. Among the roughly one-quarter who perceived the least hostility, those figures were 11.9 percent and 12.9 percent, respectively. The authors of this study highlight the relatively small shares of Jewish respondents who "strongly agreed" that they needed to hide being Jewish (6 percent) or feared negative judgment for Jewish participation on campus (8 percent) as evidence that these experiences are somewhat rare. However, the full response data shows that 28.4 percent agreed to some degree that they needed to hide their Jewish identity to fit in, and 31.2 percent agreed that people would judge them negatively for participating in Jewish activities. Likewise, 77 percent of Jewish respondents said they were at least a little concerned about antisemitism on their campus; 47 percent said they were somewhat or very concerned. NCAR's analysis of the released data also found that 46 percent agreed or strongly agreed that Jewish students pay a social

penalty for supporting Israel's existence as a Jewish state.

Despite these shares of Jewish respondents reporting concerning sentiments and experiences, the authors positively interpret their collective findings as signals of Jewish “resilience.” As the study demonstrates, some Jewish respondents indeed reported favorable mental health in the wake of October 7 and the ongoing Israel-Hamas war, despite concerns about their campus connections and environment. The survey's findings also point to serious strains on the well-being of other Jewish college students—strains potentially obscured by the authors' more optimistic interpretations. A resilient student (or student population) can remain socially connected and psychologically stable in the face of hostility and exclusion, sure. Hypothetically speaking, the positive outcomes captured in this survey could also be the result of Jewish students adapting to a campus climate in which expressing their Jewish identity feels too dangerous. While that may constitute “resilience,” it also constitutes social and emotional hardships that, if understated, might go unaddressed.

Notably, this study reports greater overall student well-being than the annual Healthy Minds survey, which uses similar measures to assess students' mental health. NCAR's analysis of this study's released data found that 19.2 percent of all respondents met the study's threshold for moderate-to-severe depression and 19 percent met the threshold for moderate-to-severe anxiety. The corresponding figures in the 2024–25 Healthy Minds report, referenced throughout this study, were 37 percent and 32 percent, respectively. It is worth considering whether differences between the recruitment methods used for the two surveys—such as this study's reliance on socially connected students to recruit respondents—may have played a role in generating this discrepancy, or if some other explanation is needed. Absent such an explanation, the relatively better mental health across this study's sample, compared to the Healthy Minds sample, underscores this study's lack of generalizability to the broader U.S. college student population.

Implications for improving and protecting college students' well-being

An important next step toward identifying effective interventions is understanding the concrete experiences behind students' reports of “belonging” and “hostility.” This study's measures identify patterns in those experiences, but they do not establish which campus practices would improve them. For example, which relationships and activities help students feel valued, connected, and accepted by their campus communities? Which encounters or institutional practices make them feel excluded? Follow-up interviews could help identify the friendship networks, organizations, and everyday experiences behind students' responses. Different answers could point universities toward different strategies, which would then need to be evaluated. Further research on students' varied perspectives could therefore complement these survey measures and help campuses design interventions that better match students' needs.

Importantly, university leaders across the country should ask these questions and develop relevant interventions for all groups experiencing identity-based prejudice on their campuses. As published in Brandeis University's April 2026 [Antisemitism and Prejudice on Campus](#) report, at least one-third of Jewish, Muslim, Black, and Asian students surveyed had experienced some form of identity-based prejudice on their college campuses. Clearly, these concerning experiences are not limited to the American Jewish community. A serious commitment to Jewish college students' well-being should therefore be part of a broader effort to ensure that no student must trade identity, safety, or dignity for a secure place in campus life.

Notes

1. Ispa-Landa S, Strauss A, Ostroff E, Garcia H, Lean Y, Kfir J, et al. (2026) The well-being of Jewish college students in the United States. PLoS One 21(9): e0357478.
<https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0357478>