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1st Poll to Survey 'Openly Jewish' College Students Reveals 65% Have Felt Unsafe on Campus, and 50% Have Actively Hid Their Jewish Identity

Washington, D.C., Sept. 20: The first poll to specifically examine rates of anti-Semitism among college students who claim a strong sense of Jewish identity and connection to Israel finds that, among this group, students are feeling unsafe and, as a result, are learning that to avoid anti-Semitism they must view their religion as something to hide, not celebrate. In fact, the survey indicates that the longer students stay on campus, the less safe they feel and the more they feel the need to hide their identity.

Nearly 70% of the students surveyed personally experienced or were familiar with an anti-Semitic attack in the past 120 days. More than 65% of these students have felt unsafe on campus due to physical or verbal attacks, with one in 10 reporting they have feared they themselves would be physically attacked. And roughly 50% of students have felt the need to hide their Jewish identity.

The poll is based on online surveys with 1,027 members of the leading predominantly Jewish fraternity, Alpha Epsilon Pi (AEPi), and the leading Jewish sorority, Alpha Epsilon Phi (AEPHi). While previous studies have polled all Jewish students, this is the first survey to examine rates of anti-Semitism among students who tend to openly identify as Jewish on campus. More than 60% of the students surveyed belong to Hillel and nearly half to Chabad, more than 80% are supportive of Israel, and nearly 60% have visited Israel. The survey was conducted between April 14-20, 2021 by Cohen Research Group in conjunction with The Louis D. Brandeis Center for Human Rights Under Law.

"These findings ring some pretty consequential alarms, more closely resembling previous dark periods in our history, not the 21st century in the U.S.," stated Kenneth L. Marcus, former Assistant U.S. Secretary of Education for Civil Rights and Brandeis Center founder and chair. "They reveal that students for whom being Jewish is a central or important aspect of their identity are feeling increasingly unsafe visibly expressing their Judaism for fear of harassment, social bullying and other anti-Semitic attacks. And they expose that increased anti-Semitic acts, which attempt to hold Jews responsible as a collective, for the actions of the Israeli government, are driving more and more students to hide their support for Israel."

"The results of this survey are staggering and alarming. We need to do everything we can to not only push back against the rise of anti-Semitism on campuses but also to make sure that every Jewish student who wants to express their pride in their heritage or religion can do so without fear of violence or harassment," said Jim Fleischer, CEO of Alpha Epsilon Pi Fraternity, Inc. "Now, more than ever, our mission to develop student leaders for the Jewish community is critical."

"In 2021, Jewish undergraduates should not have to hide their identity. We are in a time when college students are leading the way in equity and inclusion, Jewish students must be included in that activism," stated Sharon Raphael, AEPHi National President. "The rise of anti-Semitism on college campuses shows how vital the Jewish sorority experience is for women. Our Jewish values teach us that we must stand up to hate in any form, especially anti-Semitism. Alpha Epsilon Phi is committed to supporting and educating our sisters on how to address anti-Semitism on their respective campuses."

Main Findings:

Two-thirds of students experienced or were familiar with anti-Semitic incidents over the past 120 days on campus or in virtual campus settings, despite increased isolation and remote classes during COVID.

Fifty percent of AEPi members and 69% AEPHi members personally experienced an anti-Semitic verbal attack.

- The most common verbal attacks included offensive statements about Jews and the Holocaust, including referring to Jews as "greedy," "cheap," or having other negative qualities, assigning all Jews the collective responsibility for actions by Israel, and using pejorative nicknames.

- Many students experienced being called “untrustworthy” or having too much “political power” over U.S. policymakers and derogatory statements about Jews and Zionism in terms of white supremacy or responsibility for “Nazi” treatment of Palestinians.

As many as 10% were aware of physical attacks against Jewish students, and an alarming number have personally experienced a physical attack for being Jewish during the previous 120 days.

- Sixteen students (2%) were spit on.
- Fourteen students (2%) were attacked with a weapon.
- Seven students (1%) were physically attacked.
- Seven students (1%) were threatened with a weapon.

Over 65% of students surveyed reported feeling unsafe as Jews, and the longer they are on campus the less safe they feel.

- More than three in five AEPi members and more than two in three AEPi members have not felt safe as Jews on their campuses or in virtual campus settings due to concerns about verbal and physical attacks.
- Those who felt unsafe stated they are concerned about being verbally attacked (57% AEPi/64% AEPi), socially excluded (33%/27%) or bullied or harassed (31%/34%); about 20% of seniors fear they will be physically attacked.
- There is a nearly 20% decline between freshmen and seniors in students who report feeling safe, which indicates the longer Jewish students stay on campus, the less safe they feel.

Students surveyed are actively hiding their Jewish identity.

- Fifty percent of students stated they have hidden their Jewish identity, and more than half avoid expressing their views on Israel.
- The percentage of students who hid their Jewish identity also increased with each college year. The longer the students are enrolled, the more they felt the need to hide their identity.

Among students who felt they needed to hide their Jewish identity, three in 10 were concerned about being marginalized or penalized by their professors.

The study also broke down results by preferred Jewish denomination – Just Jewish, Reform, Conservative, Orthodox and Reconstructionist – and geographic location of school – Northeast, Mid-Atlantic, Southeast, Midwest, and West.

In 2014, Trinity College and the Brandeis Center conducted a national [survey](#) of 1,157 U.S. Jewish college students that found that 54% of college students had experienced or witnessed anti-Semitism.

“This groundbreaking research shows that even during the pandemic, where virtually all students were forced to study remotely, anti-Semitism remains an all-too prevalent scourge on university life. Too many Jewish students do not feel safe, even from their screens, and administrators need to reenergize their efforts to support all vulnerable communities on their campuses, in-person, and virtual,” stated Michael Cohen, Founder and Lead Researcher at Cohen Research Group, lecturer at Johns Hopkins University, publisher of [Congress in Your Pocket](#) and author of [Modern Political Campaigns](#).

“There is no question that this upwards trajectory will continue until university administrators stop turning a blind eye to anti-Semitic harassment and abuse and excusing it as political disagreements,” said Marcus. “As students embark on a new school year it is imperative university leaders step up to the plate and take meaningful action or the situation will continue to escalate.”

The Brandeis Center recommends universities take the following immediate steps to address rising anti-Semitism:

- Issue a statement condemning anti-Semitism in all its forms, including anti-Zionism;
- Incorporate the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance working definition of anti-Semitism into their discrimination and harassment policies; and
- Provide appropriate training on anti-Semitism to university administrators, faculty, staff and students.

About The Louis D. Brandeis Center: The Louis D. Brandeis Center, Inc., or LDB, is an independent, nonprofit organization established to advance the civil and human rights of the Jewish people and promote justice for all. The Brandeis Center conducts research, education, and advocacy to combat the resurgence of anti-Semitism on college and university campuses. It is not affiliated with the Massachusetts university, the Kentucky law school, or any of the other institutions that share the name and honor the memory of the late U.S. Supreme Court justice.