



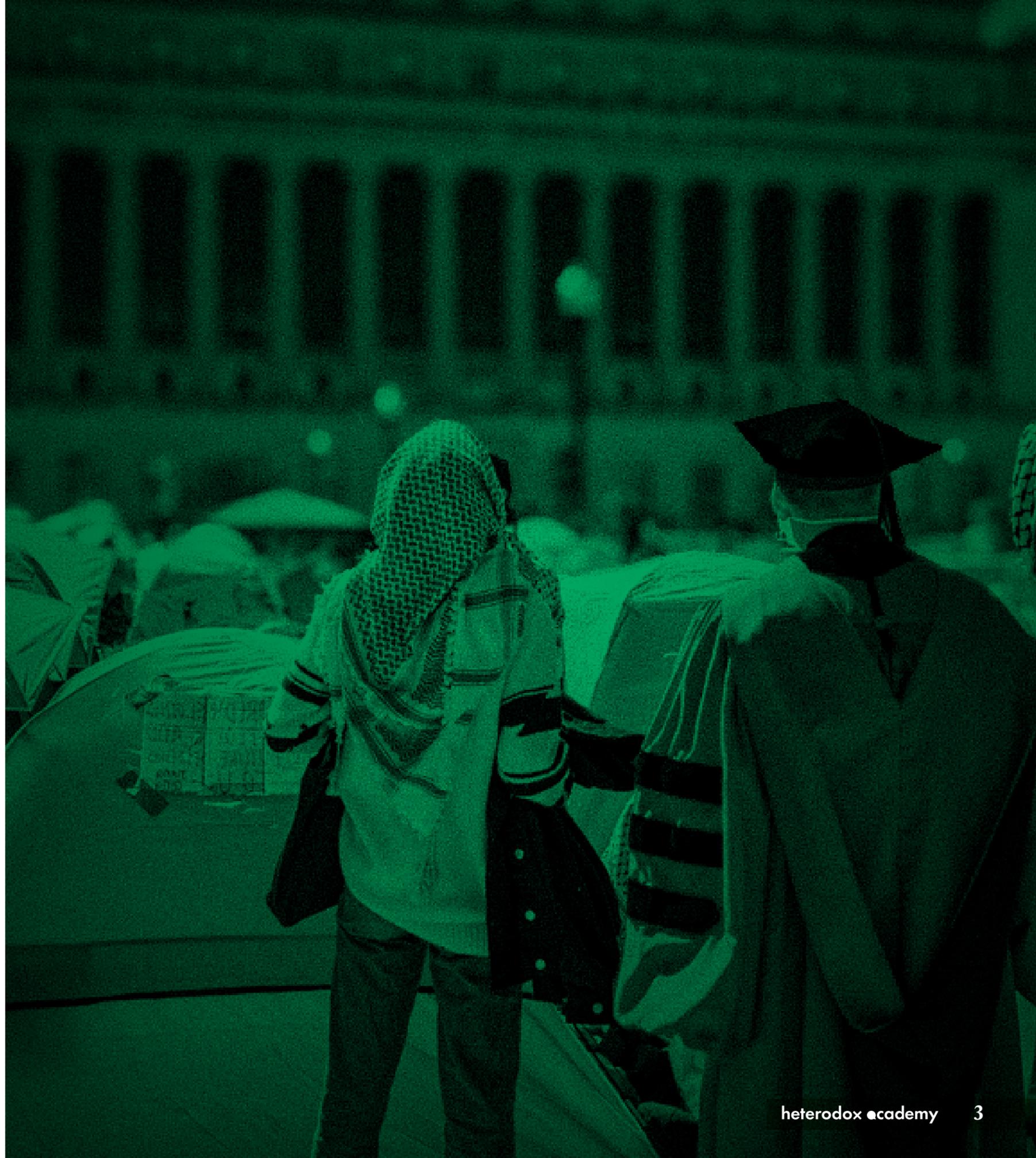
Discussing Israeli- Palestinian Conflict on Campus:

*Political Affiliation, Ideology,
and Institutional Support for
Viewpoint Diversity*

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What is the Campus Expression Survey?

The 2023 Campus Expression Survey (CES) asks undergraduate students at four-year colleges and universities in the US about different facets of their experience relevant to open inquiry, viewpoint diversity, and constructive disagreement. Heterodox Academy has been surveying students on topics of free expression and open inquiry since 2019. Learn more at [our website](#).



47%

of survey respondents at least somewhat reluctant to discuss Israeli-Palestinian conflict

Israeli-Palestinian conflict was the topic for which the greatest proportion of surveyed students (47.3%) indicated being at least somewhat reluctant to discuss in 2023; 29.3% said they were somewhat reluctant and 18% said they were very reluctant to discuss Israeli-Palestinian conflict (see Figure 1).

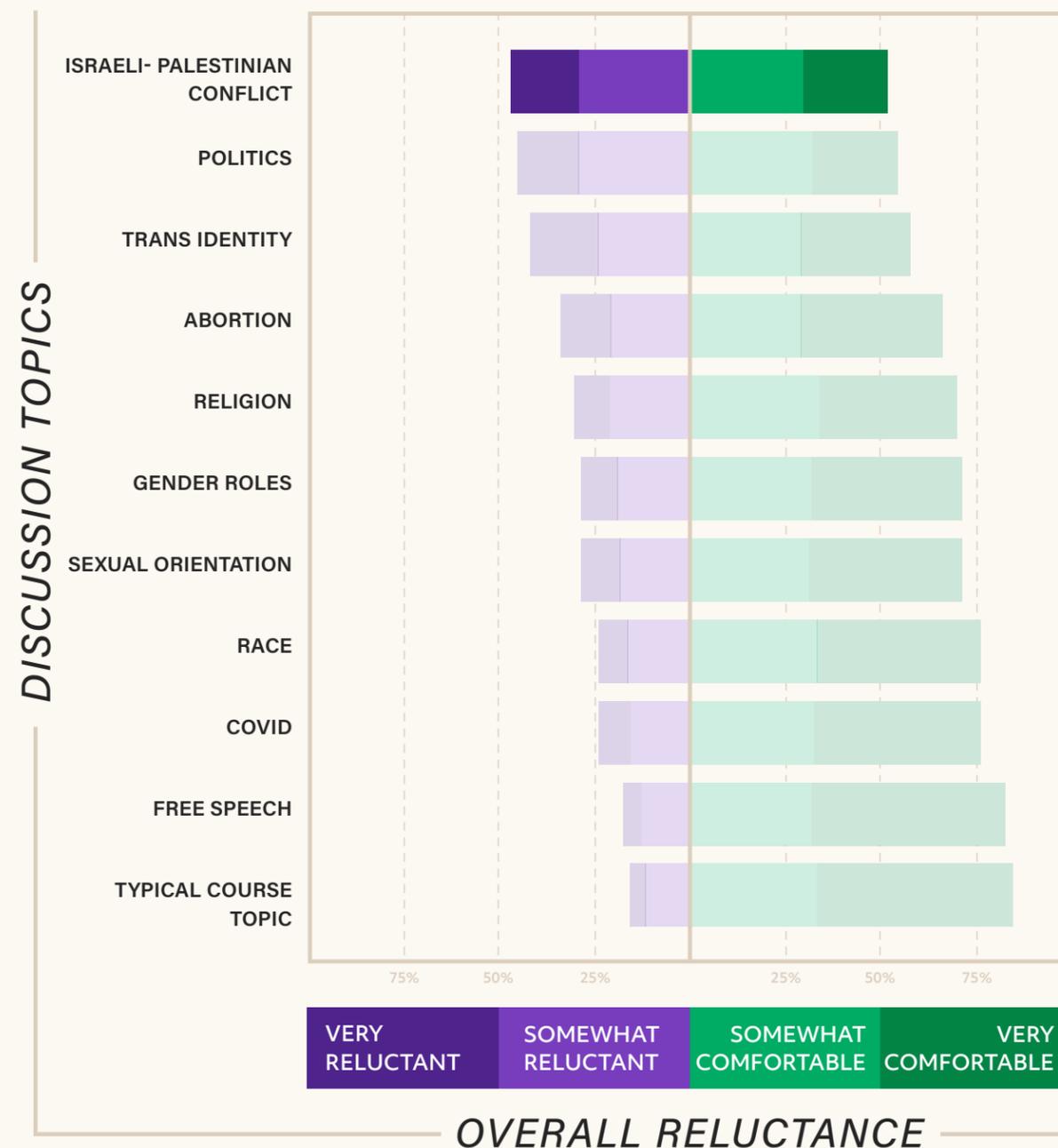


Figure 1. Percent of students who report feeling comfortable or reluctant about discussing each of the 11 topics asked about; N = 4,730.

Republicans, Independents, and Unaffiliated students *more reluctant* to discuss Israeli-Palestinian conflict than Democrats

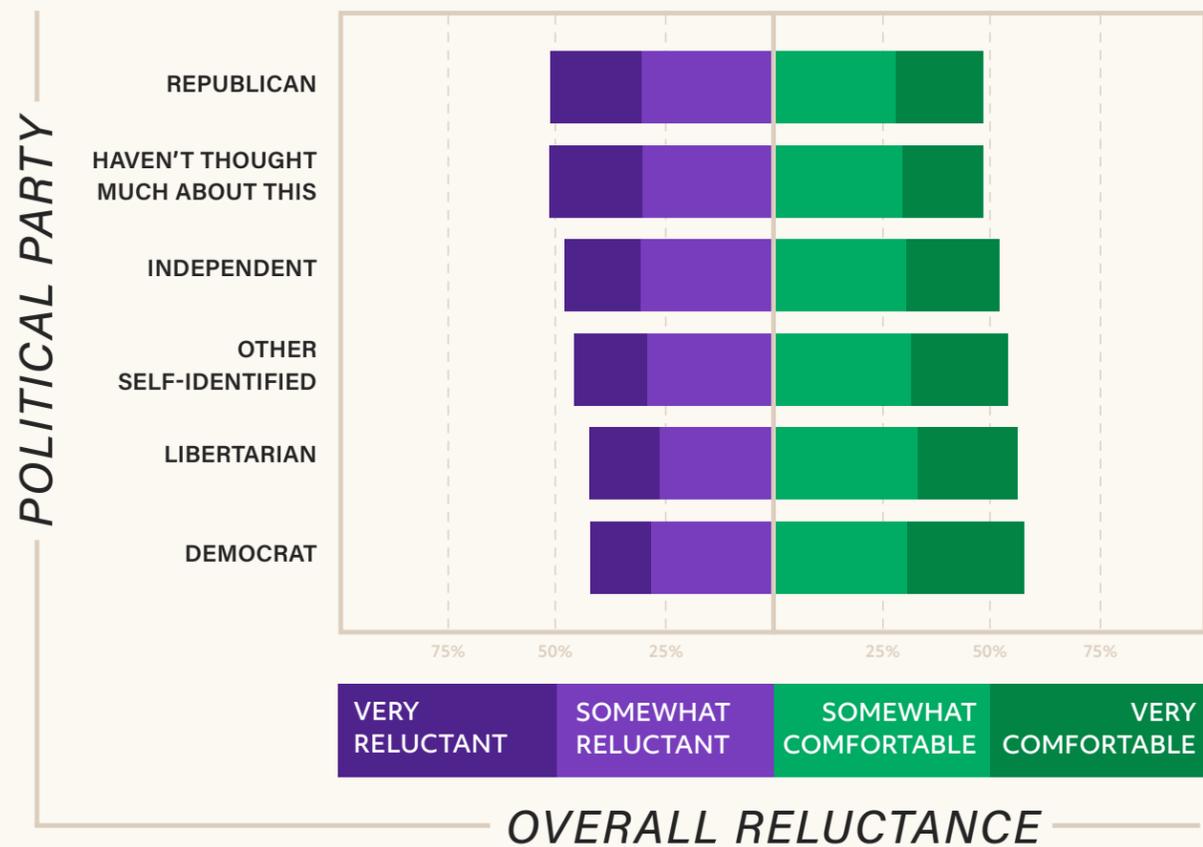


Figure 2. Percent of students who report feeling comfortable or reluctant about discussing Israeli-Palestinian conflict by self-reported political party affiliation ("Generally speaking, do you think of yourself as a Republican, a Democrat, an Independent, a Libertarian, or none of these?"). N = 4,730.

Students who identify as Republicans ($p < 0.001$), Independents ($p = 0.004$), and students who "hadn't thought much about" political party affiliation ($p < 0.001$) all reported greater reluctance to discuss the Israeli-Palestinian conflict compared to Democrats (this analysis does not control for covariates).

Students with more extreme ideological orientation more open to discussing Israeli-Palestinian conflict than moderates

While there is no statistically significant difference ($p = 0.21$) between students on the right or left of the ideological spectrum when it comes to reluctance to discuss Israeli-Palestinian conflict, even after controlling for gender, personality, and willingness to discuss typical classroom topics, there is a statistically significant curvilinear relationship ($p < 0.001$) between ideological affiliation and reluctance: those in the middle are more reluctant to discuss Israeli-Palestinian conflict than those on the ideological extremes (see Figure 3).

Current research in political and social psychology suggests that extreme political partisanship is related to cognitive inflexibility, absolute certainty, ideological prejudice, and distorted confidence in one's own opinions. If only students on the ideological extremes are comfortable discussing Israeli-Palestinian conflict, then discussions of this important but highly controversial issue may be dominated by motivated reasoning, confirmation bias, and closed-mindedness—to the detriment of those discussions. They may be more like echo chambers than genuine exchanges of ideas. To foster a healthy campus climate, leaders in higher education must find ways to reduce the deleterious effects of ideological extremism and ensure that everyone has a chance to share their questions, their ideas, and their perspectives.

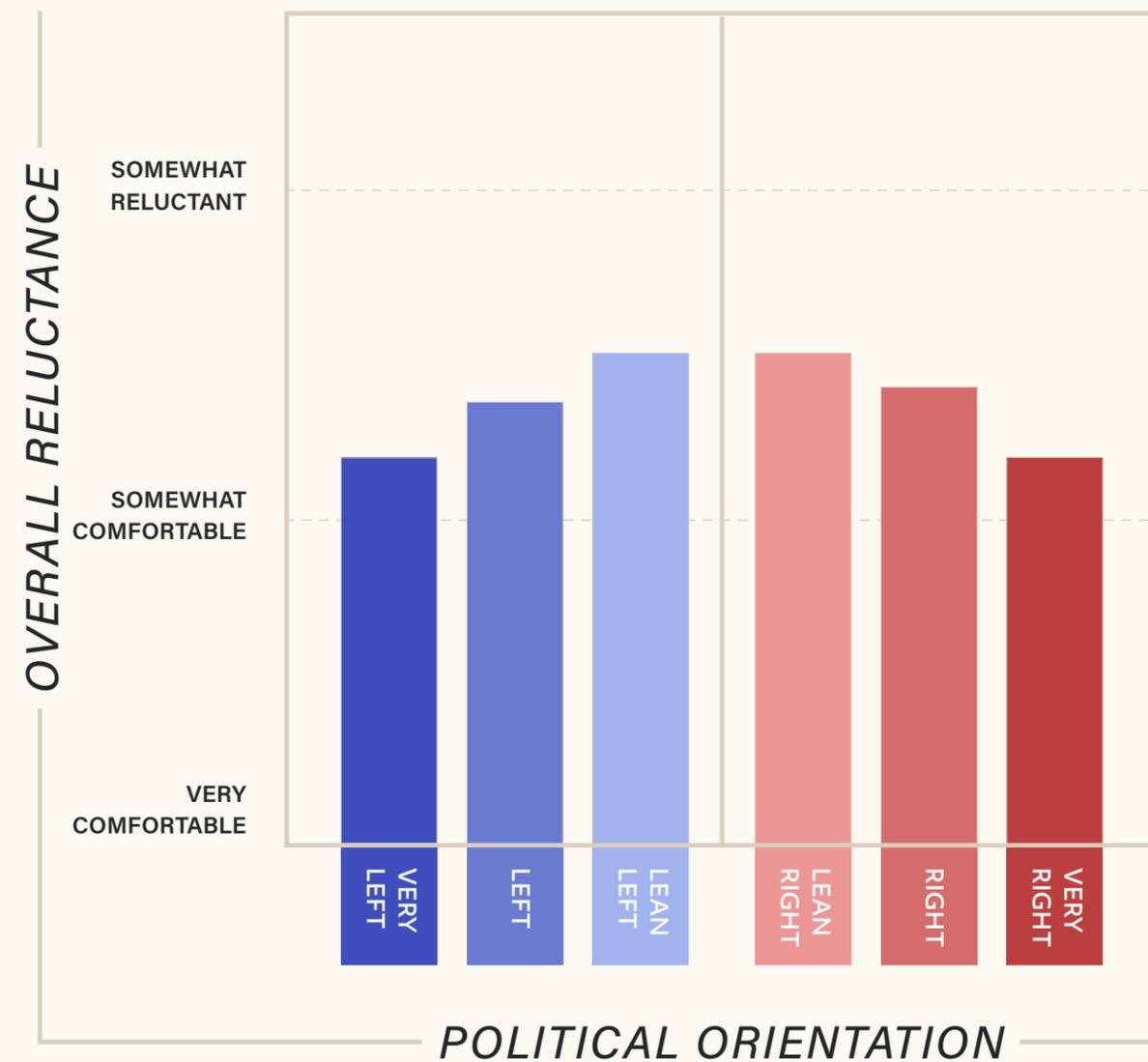


Figure 3. Average reluctance to discuss Israeli-Palestinian conflict by self-reported political leaning ("When it comes to politics OVERALL, how would you best classify your views? (very left to very right). $N = 4,730$)

When students feel that the campus climate is supportive of viewpoint diversity, they are less reluctant to discuss Israeli-Palestinian conflict



Figure 4. Average reluctance to discuss Israeli-Palestinian conflict by perceived institutional support for viewpoint diversity, as measured by two items in the survey (“How often does your [COLLEGE/ UNIVERSITY] encourage students to consider a wider variety of viewpoints and perspectives?” and “The climate on my campus prevents some people from saying things they believe because others might find them offensive.”)

Students who reported that their campus environment was supportive of viewpoint diversity—as measured by answers to two questions on the CES—were more likely to be comfortable discussing the Israeli-Palestinian conflict ($p < 0.001$; see Figure 4), even after controlling for gender, personality, ideological orientation, and willingness to discuss typical classroom topics. While the effect size of this relationship is small ($\beta = -0.125$), it is some evidence that universities that signal that they value viewpoint diversity may foster more open discussion of Israeli-Palestinian conflict—and possibly other controversial issues too.

About Heterodox Academy

Heterodox Academy (HxA) is a non-partisan, non-profit organization consisting of over 6,800 members of faculty, staff, and students from around the world who advocate for preserving and promoting the values of open inquiry, viewpoint diversity, and constructive disagreement in institutions of higher education and research. If you are interested in supporting our mission, **become a member** or **make a donation** to support our work. If you want to stay up-to-date on HxA news, the latest HxA content, or upcoming HxA events, **subscribe to our emails**.

Acknowledgments

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Availability of Data and Analysis Code

We welcome discussion of the CES data and results. To make this easy, HxA makes the direct survey response data and the analysis code used to write reports about the **2023 CES publicly available on its website**. For further details about the 2023 CES, please see our writeup of its data and methods.

Report citation

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