Faith, integration and prejudice: understanding school choice among European Jews

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ABSTRACT

The persistent popularity of faith schools has been understood primarily through the prism of race and class, with less attention paid to the importance of religion and religious prejudice. Data from the 2018 EU Fundamental Rights Agency survey of Jews in 12 European countries indicate that parents are split over their preference for faith schools that provide a sense of belonging and socialisation opportunities within the community while others prioritise integration into society. However, concerns over antisemitism lead some parents to prefer Jewish school environments in an attempt to shield their children from marginalisation. Such concerns are more prevalent among those who have experienced antisemitism. Although many Jewish parents are willing to sacrifice a feeling of religious inclusion in favour of more socially diverse educational environments, safety concerns are less easily allayed, ultimately serving to bolster the popularity of faith schools.

Introduction

Researchers seeking to explain the enduring popularity of faith schools in Europe, despite declining religiosity, have focused on the appeal of the social environment these schools provide, giving special attention to the role of race and class in parental choices (Berends 2015; Jheng et al. 2022; Rich, Candipan, and Owens 2021). Extensive research has documented how social integration efforts have been thwarted by parental choices as white parents shunned schools attended by ethnic minorities and middle-class parents opted for schools with pupils who shared their socioeconomic status (Araújo 2016; Jheng et al. 2022; Mayer et al. 2020; Oberti and Savina 2019; Renzulli and Evans 2005; Sissing and Boterman 2023). Where attention has been paid to the importance of religion, it has been narrowly defined to include religious instruction and values provided by schools or their academic advantages (Allen and Vignoles 2016; Hammad and Shah 2019; Ipgrave 2016; Lewis 2014), overlooking concerns regarding the religious character of the social environment. This lacuna is all the more striking given that parents who are members of stigmatised religious minorities often weigh up issues of belonging and person-environment fit, as well as marginalisation and discrimination when negotiating school choices (Shirazi and Jaffe-Walter

2021). Here, I explore these issues by examining parental decisions whether or not to send their children to Jewish schools in 12 European countries. I look at parental attitudes towards integration by testing whether they prioritise religious identity construction and the formation of religiously homogeneous social networks over learning to operate in a more heterogeneous society and forging social ties beyond their own faith community. In other words, are they more invested in their children acquiring bonding or bridging social capital? Furthermore, I examine another factor that parents from minority religious backgrounds are keenly aware of, namely, the potential encounter with prejudice in schools. Thus, this paper explores the double dilemma that European Jewish parents face when selecting a school for their children, whether to prioritise integration into broader society or strengthening bonds within the community as well as negotiating issues of school safety as members of a minority group.

Jewish schools provide a unique case study of the ways in which members of minority groups demonstrate agency in the face of rising discrimination through school choice. Jews are a religious minority that has established a thriving educational sector, with an estimated 400 Jewish schools in operation across 25 European countries, providing the vast majority of European Jews with the option of a Jewish school for their children. Despite the long-standing presence of Jews in Europe (DellaPergola and Staetsky 2020), they continue to face discrimination, with a recent increase in the number of antisemitic incidents, ranging from everyday prejudice and exclusion to violent attacks in which Jewish schools have been targeted and students killed (Jikeli 2020). Schools in countries such as the UK and Belgium have guards stationed outside, a physical reminder of the real threat faced by Jewish students. It stands to reason that anti-Jewish prejudice may lead parents to pursue very different strategies in order to ensure a safe environment for their children. While some may conceive of Jewish schools and students identifiable as studying there as potential targets for violent attacks, others will be more concerned about avoiding discrimination within the confines of a school at which Jewish students represent a minority (Moulin 2016; Samson 2020; Thomas 2016). Rich data from the European Union Fundamental Rights Agency (FRA) survey on discrimination and hate crimes against Jews[1] facilitate an analysis of the relationship between country-level conditions and personal experiences and such decisions. These data enable in-depth analysis to understand the ways in which stigmatised minorities evaluate competing concerns over exclusion, belonging, and school safety.

For Jews and other religious minorities, school choice has become the locus of negotiations over belonging and marginalisation. The strategies they employ are instructive of micro-dynamics that play out constantly in the social reality of minorities. However, as schools also serve a crucial socialisation role, school choices determine macro-level societal outcomes in terms of integration and segregation. It is, therefore, unsurprising that these decisions attract fierce debate and continual interventions by policymakers. The importance attached to school choice necessitates a full understanding of such decisions, one that does not overlook the role of religion.

From white flight to a preference for diversity

The debate surrounding the popularity of faith schools, like the general discourse surrounding school choice, has highlighted parental preferences regarding the social composition of their child's potential peer group. Much of this discussion has focused on racial and class

identities, rather than religious affiliations (Berends 2015; Jheng et al. 2022; Rich, Candipan, and Owens 2021). This approach may be traced to the phenomenon of white flight following desegregation in the US in the 1960s and 1970s and has cast a giant shadow over research on school choice (Renzulli and Evans 2005). Yet, parents' desire to send their children to what they perceive to be the best school available, and the resulting social homogeneity within schools, is evident beyond the American context. Parents have either thwarted attempts to bring together more diverse populations or simply prevented the school environment from mirroring the social composition of the city by creating educational enclaves across Europe, for instance in France (Oberti and Savina 2019), the Netherlands (Sissing and Boterman 2023), and Sweden (Larsson and Hultqvist 2018).

Although anxiety over mixing with young people that are viewed as undesirable and avoidance of potentially negative influences are important considerations for some, others are more motivated by the possible advantages of their offspring finding the 'right friends.' Furthermore, some parents, even white, middle-class ones, articulate their preference for schools with children from their ethnic group or social class as a question of belonging or fitting in, in the hope that their children will make friends more easily with those who are similar to them (Hollingworth and Williams 2010). Given the well-documented preference for social homophily (McPherson, Smith-Lovin, and Cook 2001), even parents who do not perceive the school environment as a particular threat may feel that social success is more likely in environments in which at least some pupils will resemble their own children. Despite this, in recent years, there are signs that for some parents at least, preferences have shifted in favour of more diverse educational settings (Hernández 2019; Kimelberg and Billingham 2013; Reay, Crozier, and James 2011). This is motivated either by a genuine commitment to multiculturalism (Hollingworth and Williams 2010), civic responsibility (Mayer et al. 2020), or a sense that diverse environments provide better preparation for life (Kimelberg and Billingham 2013). Be the motivation as it may, white middle-class parents are aware of the potential costs of such decisions and many are vigilant in ensuring their children do not suffer academically or socially by attending such schools (Hernández 2019).

Faith schools and religious goods

Irrespective of attitudes towards diverse educational environments, for many parents, faith schools offer a range of religious goods, perhaps most significantly the promise of instilling religious values and knowledge (Hallinan and Kubitschek 2012; Hammad and Shah 2019; Ipgrave 2016; Lewis 2014). For others, the preference for faith schools may be predicated upon the religious social environment they provide, namely that such schools give students ample opportunity for the construction of intra-religious ties and dense, religiously homogeneous social networks, creating a sense of community (Hemming and Roberts 2018; Samson 2020). They certainly prevent the kind of inter-religious contact that leads to heterogeneity in the religious composition of social networks of those who attend religiously mixed schools (Adams, Schaefer, and Ettekal 2020).

School choice is the most powerful tool parents have for influencing the religious composition of their children's social networks. Parents who prioritise bonding capital, the form of social capital found in close-knit homogeneous social networks, would likely opt to send their children to religious schools. Conversely, parents who place greater importance on bridging capital, i.e. social ties that cut across existing divisions such as religious cleavages

would prefer a more diverse school environment. While it is true that time spent at church or church-based activities reinforces the religious homogeneity of social networks (Everett 2018; Hager 2022; Samson 2019), this mechanism is even more powerful for faith school attendance as young people spend more time there than in any other setting outside the home (Tavares 2011). Thus, evidence from Seventh-day Adventists demonstrates that preference for faith schools is positively correlated with social embeddedness (Leukert 2022). European Jews, a small, geographically dispersed minority who tend not to attend religious services regularly (DellaPergola and Staetsky 2020) may view schools as a potential setting for the construction of intra-religious social ties.

Even among affiliated parents who are less invested in the religious homogeneity of their children's social networks, faith schools provide an environment that is sensitive to religious and cultural norms (Bhopal and Myers 2009; Erdem-Möbius, Odağ, and Anders 2024; McCreery, Jones, and Holmes 2007). Beyond avoidance of negative experiences, a growing body of research demonstrates the necessity of cultural continuity between the home and school environments for both student well-being and academic success (Aldridge, Blackstock, and McLure 2024; Flint and Jaggers 2021; Ladson-Billings 1995; Murray-Orr and Mitton 2023; Walker and Hutchison 2021). It stands to reason that cultural relevance and student-environment fit (Demanet, Van Praag, and Van Houtte 2016; Pawlowska et al. 2014) contribute to academic success at faith schools. However, there are those who argue that such outcomes may be better understood as a function of the characteristics of the pupils who attend faith schools (Allen and Vignoles 2016; Gibbons and Silva 2011; Paterson 2020; Sullivan et al. 2018). Although parents might not be aware of the scholarly literature on the benefits of school belonging, they tend to have an innate sense of the importance of the presence of children 'like us' (Mayer et al. 2020), which in the context of faith schools could mean co-religionists.

Religion, discrimination and school safety

Beyond preferences regarding their child's peer group and the importance placed on a sense of belonging, parents from stigmatised religious minorities often have more pressing concerns over the social composition of the student body. Many worry that students who come from a minority group might be exposed to marginalisation, prejudice, or discrimination, which represents a threat to the sense of school safety (Arweck and Nesbitt 2011). Such concerns may be articulated by members of religious (Erdem-Möbius, Odağ, and Anders 2024; Shirazi and Jaffe-Walter 2021), ethnic (Forsberg 2022), racial (Sondel, Kretchmar, and Hadley Dunn 2019) and sexual minorities (Carrera-Fernández et al. 2019; Jang 2023).

Parents, students, teachers and social workers are all acutely aware of such concerns and the role of schools as potential sites of violence, physical or verbal, directed towards members of a wide range of stigmatised groups (Araújo 2016; Bhopal and Myers 2009; Odenbring 2022). There is evidence to suggest that religiously motivated bullying in schools is on the rise, although it is underreported as students fear retaliation or have just come to accept such treatment (Farooqui and Kaushik 2021). Interestingly, perceptions of school safety are intertwined with a sense of belonging, so young people who feel they do not fit in are more likely to evaluate their school environment as unsafe (Williams et al. 2018). Therefore, it is probable that members of minority groups will be particularly sensitive to school safety concerns and as a result tend to perceive faith schools as a safe haven (Shah 2012).

European Jewry and antisemitism

Europe is home to the largest concentration of Jews outside Israel and North America, with an estimated 1.3 million Jews living on the continent (DellaPergola 2023). They are unevenly dispersed with large Jewish populations in France and the UK and smaller ones elsewhere (DellaPergola and Staetsky 2020). Anti-Jewish sentiment has ancient roots in European societies and although modern societies have made great strides in tackling some forms of prejudice, anti-Jewish sentiment shows little sign of abating. Notwithstanding methodological debates over how best to measure antisemitism, there is a consensus that antisemitism is a matter of increasing concern (Waxman, Schraub, and Hosein 2022).

Jewish pupils are at risk of prejudice and discrimination at school on the basis of their identity. Although Judaism can operate as an ethnic identity, given that European Jews tend to be perceived as white (Schraub 2019), I consider the marginalisation of Jews as a function of their religious identity. Thus, anti-Jewish prejudice often manifests in the context of religious studies (Moulin 2016) as well as in classrooms, corridors and playgrounds (Bernstein, Grimm, and Müller 2022; Gross and Rutland 2014; Samson 2020; Thomas 2016).

Among parents who consider antisemitism to be a significant threat, it may be that there are those who prefer to send their children to non-Jewish schools as they perceive Jewish schools, and pupils identifiable as attending such schools, as potential targets for harassment and violent attacks. These have occurred in the past, notably in 2012, when a teacher and three children were shot dead outside the Ozar Hatorah school in Toulouse (Jikeli 2020). There are, however, also parents who are willing to pay the price of marginalisation within the school environment in the short term, as they believe that segregation ultimately fosters even more prejudice and that integration is an effective tool for countering societal prejudice (Samson 2020). However, for many Jews, even ones who are not highly religious (Miller, Pomson, and Hacohen Wolf 2016) faith schools offer an escape from potential abuse (Moulin 2011).

Methodology

Data

In order to explore factors associated with Jewish school choice in Europe, I utilise data from the FRA survey on discrimination and hate crimes against Jews in Europe. This is an online survey carried out in 12 European Union member states in 2018 namely, Austria, Belgium, Denmark, France, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Netherlands, Poland, Spain, Sweden, and the UK. It constitutes a representative sample of the affiliated Jewish community broadly defined, including those who do not identify as Jewish themselves but have Jewish partners or children. The total sample size is 16,395 respondents. However, as this analysis is concerned only with people who have children of school age ($N = 4,714$), excluding those whose children attend both Jewish and non-Jewish schools[2] ($N = 205$) as well as those whose only stated consideration was the lack of a suitable Jewish school locally ($N = 280$), reduces the sample size to 4,229 cases. The data are weighted to reflect the share of the national population in the continental total. Summary statistics of the independent variables are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Summary statistics.

Variable	Percentage	Mean (sd)
Female	44.4	
Male	55.6	
Age <40	19.3	
Age 50–59	28.5	
Age 60+	13.0	
Austria	0.9	
Belgium	4.0	
Denmark	0.4	
France	48.1	
Germany	8.5	
Hungary	6.6	
Italy	1.7	
Netherlands	2.4	
Poland	0.4	
Spain	1.5	
Sweden	0.9	
UK	24.6	
Married	83.1	
Divorced/separated	13.2	
Never married	3.7	
No university degree	20.2	
University degree	79.8	
Religiosity		5.14 (2.67)

Additional data from two Pew surveys of religion in Europe *Religious Belief and National Belonging in Central and Eastern Europe* and *Being Christian in Western Europe*[3] are used to assess levels of antisemitism in each country included in the analysis. The Pew surveys are based on nationally representative samples and the data were collected in the period 2015–2017, giving a good indication of antisemitic attitudes immediately prior to the FRA survey. The reason for using data from the Pew surveys is that the FRA survey is directed at Jews and can therefore only provide information on perceptions of antisemitism, whereas the Pew surveys sample the general population. The percentage of respondents in each country who said they would be unwilling to have Jewish neighbours is taken as an indicator of the level of antisemitic sentiment. Although it is likely that social desirability bias results in an underestimate of antisemitic attitudes, this measure is useful as the focus here is less on the real level of antisemitism in the population and more on a comparative measure across counties.

Variables

In the first set of regressions, the dependent variable is school choice, distinguishing between those who send their children to Jewish schools and those who do not, while parents who have children in both types of schools are excluded from the analysis. Parents were asked, 'Why did you choose a Jewish/non-Jewish school for your child/ren? Please select up to three reasons.' Five different reasons given by parents for their school selection: academic standards, antisemitism, convenience, cost, and social ties are included in the analysis. Although 'want my child/ren to have a strong Jewish identity' was also highly cited (see Figure 1), only the five listed are offered as options in this survey to both parents who choose to send their children to Jewish schools and those who do not. In the second set of regression, one of these factors, concerns over antisemitism, becomes the dependent variable,
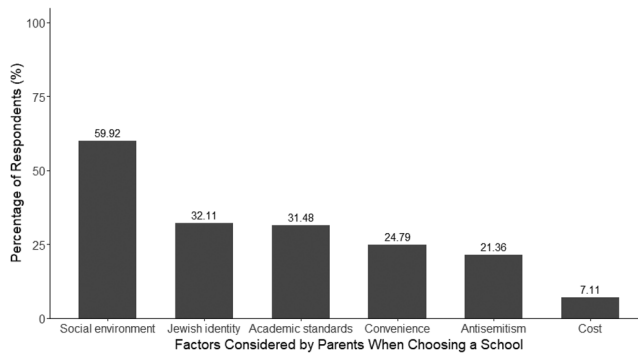
Figure 1. Considerations influencing school choice.

distinguishing respondents between those for whom antisemitism is an important consideration and those for whom it is not.

The explanatory variables in the second set of models relate to experiences of antisemitism. Personal experiences of antisemitism are based on two questions assessing physical attacks and verbal harassment or threats: (1) 'In the past five years has anybody physically attacked you?' and (2) 'In the past five years in [Country], has somebody ever made offensive or threatening comments to you in person?' Respondents could select a response indicating that they had endured these experiences, in their opinions, because they were Jewish. Only if the respondent determined that the experiences were indeed antisemitic were they coded as having experienced antisemitism. Respondents are coded as having witnessed antisemitism if, in response to the question, 'In the last 12 months have you personally witnessed any of the following types of antisemitic incidents in [Country]?' they selected any of the following response options: 'I have witnessed other Jew(s) being verbally insulted or harassed,' 'I have witnessed other Jew(s) being physically attacked' or 'I have witnessed other Jew(s) being both verbally insulted or harassed and physically attacked.'

All models control for the following socio-demographic characteristics; gender, age, marital status, education, country of residence, and religiosity. Previous research on Jewish schools has demonstrated the association between socio-demographic characteristics and the likelihood of choosing a Jewish school (Miller and Pomson 2024). Parents who are younger, married, less educated, and more religious are more likely to select Jewish schools. Jewish schools are more popular in the UK and Belgium than in France, due to variations in the character of Jewish communities in different locations, as well as in educational systems and arrangements for faith schools in different countries (Staetsky 2022). Similarly, experiences and evaluations of prejudice, including antisemitism, vary significantly according to socio-demographic characteristics such as gender, age, country of residence, and religiosity (DellaPergola 2020). Failure to take these variables into account in the analysis would have produced an incomplete picture and likely skewed the results.

Analytical strategy

To assess the factors that influence parents to select a Jewish school, a series of binary logistic regressions test the impact of different considerations (social environment, academics, antisemitism, cost, and convenience) on the likelihood of choosing such a school. The

analysis then narrows its focus to antisemitism, in an attempt to understand what leads people to perceive antisemitism as a significant factor in their school choice. The incidence of antisemitism nationally, based on Pew survey data of peoples' willingness to have Jews as neighbours, is compared with the importance of antisemitism in parents' school choices in those countries. Unfortunately, an indicator of country-level prejudice could not be included in further regressions due to multicollinearity with country, which is an important factor encompassing national and communal norms. I then utilise regression analysis to assess whether individual experiences such as personally experiencing or witnessing antisemitic incidents, rather than country-level indicators, explain why parents consider antisemitism a concern when choosing a school.

Results

Parents weigh up many considerations when choosing a school for their children. The survey allows parents to mention up to three of the most important factors that influenced their decision regarding school enrolment. Six-tenths of parents mention concerns surrounding the potential social circle of their children, highlighting the importance of the social environment in parental decisions (Figure 1). Interestingly, data not shown here suggest that around an eighth of parents send their offspring to non-Jewish schools solely because they prefer a more diverse social environment, they mention no other issues as significant. In part, this is indicative of the salience of this dimension, particularly among parents who are committed to integration and therefore express a strong preference for religiously and ethnically heterogeneous environments. While there is clearly a significant proportion of parents who place great importance on social integration at school, it is to some degree a function of the available options included in the survey.

Just under a third of parents mentioned academic standards, which tend to be higher at faith schools. A similar proportion are interested in strengthening their child's Jewish identity. Just over a fifth of parents mention antisemitism, indicative of the concern over prejudice towards and exclusion of Jews in contemporary Europe. Practical concerns such as convenience and cost also play a role in Jewish school choices.

The impact of five different considerations on school choice: social environment, antisemitism, academics, cost and convenience, are presented in Table 2. Although the social environment of schools ranked highly in the list of parental concerns, it does little to explain whether parents select Jewish or non-Jewish schools for their offspring. It seems that parents are evenly split over whether they desire integration in a religiously and ethnically heterogeneous school or whether they prefer the homogeneity of Jewish schools. The predicted probability of parents citing this reason for selecting a Jewish school is, in fact, 46%.[4] In fact, social environment is the only concern for which there is no statistically significant relationship with school choice. On the one hand, Jewish schools are attractive for those who place a high value on bonding capital, building up intra-communal ties and providing the sense of belonging that has been shown to be crucial to pupils' achievement and sense of self. On the other, like all faith schools, and socially homogeneous schools more generally, they limit social and cultural horizons, preventing young people from creating ties with people who are different from themselves and learning how to negotiate identities within a diverse environment. The preferences of the Jewish community, while parallel to trends in the broader population towards a preference for diversity, seem to have

Table 2. Binary logistic regression of selecting a Jewish school on reasons for school choice.

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5	Model 6
Considerations						
Social environment		0.830				
		(.075)				
Academics			3.185***			
			(.081)			
Antisemitism				8.317***		
				(.101)		
Convenience					0.235***	
					(.096)	
Cost						0.099***
						(.218)
Socio-demographic characteristics						
Female	0.989	0.904	0.925	0.872	0.860	0.889
	(.075)	(.075)	(.078)	(.081)	(.078)	(.077)
Age 40–49	0.588***	−0.592***	0.525***	0.621***	0.457***	0.539***
	(.102)	(.102)	(.105)	(.109)	(.107)	(.106)
Age 50–59	0.392***	0.395***	0.363***	0.471***	0.319***	0.347***
	(.111)	(.111)	(.114)	(.119)	(.116)	(.114)
Age 60+	0.288***	0.289***	0.287***	0.348***	0.232***	0.246***
	(.145)	(.145)	(.148)	(.156)	(.150)	(.149)
Divorced/ separated	0.769	0.760	0.809	0.754*	0.756*	0.779*
	(.115)	(.116)	(.119)	(.125)	(.118)	(.117)
Never married	0.421***	0.413***	0.419***	0.465***	0.524**	0.433***
	(.221)	(.222)	(.224)	(.230)	(.227)	(.229)
University degree	0.532***	0.539***	0.504***	0.559***	0.515***	0.485***
	(.094)	(.094)	(.097)	(.101)	(.098)	(.098)
Religiosity	1.449***	1.445***	1.471***	1.429***	1.442***	1.450***
	(.017)	(.017)	(.017)	(.0.18)	(.107)	(.017)
Total (N)	4,152	4,152	4,152	4,152	4,152	4,152
R Squared	38.7%	38.9%	43.2%	49.1%	44.1%	42.4%

Numbers in parentheses are standard errors. Reference categories are as follows: gender—male; age—under 40; marital status—married; education—no degree. Country was controlled for in this analysis and the coefficients are displayed in Appendix A.

*$p < 0.05$; **$p < 0.01$; ***$p < 0.001$.

gone further in the direction of seeking heterogeneous environments, with parents apparently fairly equally divided on the issue.

In contrast to attitudes regarding children's potential peer networks, antisemitism is highly correlated with a preference for Jewish schools (odds ratio = 8.317, $p > 0.001$). The predicted probability of a parent who mentioned social environment as a factor in their school choice choosing a Jewish school stands at 81%. Parents who are worried about antisemitism are much more likely to send their children to Jewish schools than those who are not, indicating that the concern over prejudice and exclusion within the school setting far outweighs the fear that Jewish schools, or those wearing Jewish school uniforms, represent identifiable targets. In other words, in most cases in which anti-Jewish prejudice is a factor in school choices, it is the risk of encountering an unwelcoming and even antagonistic social environment that shapes decisions, rather than concern over attacks coming from outside the school. This is in stark contrast to the split among parents in their preferences for socially Jewish or diverse environments, tipping the scales in favour of Jewish schools.

Parents concerned with academic standards are more likely to choose Jewish schools, in line with research suggesting that faith schools often have higher academic standards. This

finding is particularly striking as it explains the preference for Jewish schools among parents who identify as being less religiously committed. Highly religious parents, who are the most likely to choose Jewish schools for their children, tend not to mention academic standards as factoring in their decisions at all. Unsurprisingly, Jewish schools are less attractive to those who are more preoccupied with practical concerns, such as cost and convenience. A large proportion of Jewish schools in Europe are private and even public ones often charge extra for Jewish studies and security. Additionally, there are relatively few Jewish schools, so other schools are likely to be more conveniently located.

It is clear that antisemitism is an important factor in understanding the school choices of Jews in Europe. In fact, taking concerns over antisemitism into account does more to increase the explanatory power of the models (Table 2) than any of the other decision-related factors included in the regression models. However, the pathway through which concerns over antisemitism rise or fall is not yet clear. As Figure 2 shows, the level of anti-Jewish attitudes expressed by the general population in any given country does not appear to be correlated with the likelihood of antisemitism being a concern for parents. In fact, although a similar proportion of parents in the Netherlands and Poland cite concerns over antisemitism as being important in their school choices, the two countries could not be more different in terms of the levels of antisemitism among the population, with the Netherlands having the lowest level of all countries in the analysis and Poland the highest.

It may be that the relationship between antisemitism in society and concern over anti-Jewish prejudice is mediated by expectations. This explains counter-intuitive findings from some countries regarding the relationship between levels of antisemitism expressed by survey respondents and the perception on the part of Jews that anti-Jewish sentiment is a cause for serious concern (DellaPergola 2020). In countries such as Poland and Hungary,
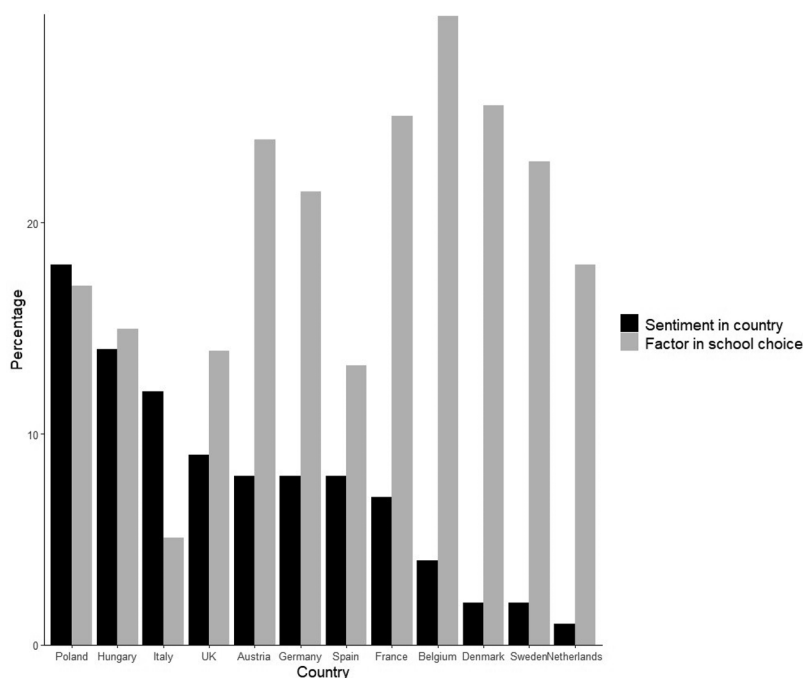

Figure 2. Prevalence of antisemitic sentiment and antisemitism as a factor in school choice by country.

which are characterised by relatively high levels of antisemitism, the phenomenon is more accepted and has become somewhat normalised among the Jewish population.[5] However, in countries with lower levels of antisemitism such as Denmark, the expectation is that there ought to be zero tolerance for any kind of racism or prejudice and therefore people are more anxious about the possibility of their children encountering prejudice. If the disparity between levels of prejudice and perceptions on the part of the victims indicates that the relationship between antisemitism and school choice cannot best be explained *via* country-level data, perhaps individual experiences and attitudes hold the key to unlocking this phenomenon.

The regression models test whether individual experiences of antisemitism account for the level of importance accorded to antisemitism in school choice decisions. The data indicate (Table 3) that both experiencing and witnessing antisemitism tend to increase the likelihood that antisemitism is cited as an important factor in school choice decisions. Experiencing a physical attack (odds ratio = 2.195, $p < 0.001$) has a greater effect than verbal antisemitism (odds ratio = 1.888, $p < 0.001$), or witnessing either a physical or verbal attack (odds ratio = 1.644, $p < 0.001$). Personal experiences of antisemitism have a greater impact on attitudes than seeing someone else victimised, even if the events witnessed are more recent (in the past 12 months as opposed to in the last 5 years), and physical violence leaves

Table 3. Binary logistic regression of consideration of antisemitism in school choice on experiences of antisemitism.

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
Experience of antisemitism				
Experienced antisemitic attack		2.195***		
		(.174)		
Experienced antisemitic comments			1.888***	
			(.086)	
Witnessed antisemitism				1.644***
				(.084)
Socio-demographic characteristics				
Female	1.064	1.083	1.090	1.098
	(.078)	(.079)	(.083)	(.082)
Age 40–49	0.843	0.855	0.910	0.889
	(.099)	(.101)	(.106)	(.104)
Age 50–59	0.501***	0.528***	0.457***	0.529***
	(.113)	(.115)	(.120)	(.118)
Age 60+	0.406***	0.411***	0.410***	−0.450***
	(.152)	(.156)	(.162)	(.158)
Divorced/ separated	0.990	0.980	0.901	1.023
	(.120)	(.123)	(.130)	(.124)
Never married	0.662	0.607*	0.535*	0.603*
	(.227)	(.242)	(.257)	(.244)
University degree	0.832	0.852	0.834	0.867
	(.094)	(.097)	(.100)	(.099)
Religiosity	1.171***	1.160***	1.139***	1.156***
	(.016)	(.016)	(.017)	(.017)
Total (N)	4,152	4,069	3,824	3,938
R Squared	10.8%	11.4%	13.2%	11.8%

Numbers in parentheses are standard errors. Reference categories are as follows: gender—male; age—under 40; marital status—married; education—no degree. Country was controlled for in this regression and the coefficients are displayed in Appendix B.
*$p < 0.05$; **$p < 0.01$; ***$p < 0.001$.

a greater imprint than verbal attacks. Thus, while the general level of antisemitic sentiment in the country is unrelated to the likelihood of weighing up prejudice in school choice decisions, personal experiences are.

Discussion and conclusion

The popularity of faith schools, particularly among those who are not very religious, has often been understood in terms of the racial and class composition of the school's student body or practical advantages such as higher academic standards (although these in turn have been attributed to the social composition of the student body). Certainly, in the context of declining religiosity, the notion that religious education per se is the reason for the popularity of such schools seems somewhat unlikely. Therefore, a discourse emerged that tended to place greater focus on the ways in which faith schools offer middle-class parents a strategy for ensuring their offspring mix with peers from a similar class or ethnic background.

While there are, of course, non-religious factors that do affect school choice, the data indicate that religion in its broader sense, encompassing issues of religious belonging and marginalisation are highly salient for school choice and cannot be overlooked. In fact, parental considerations of the social composition of the school may be better understood through the lens of religion, rather than race and class, particularly when looking at members of stigmatised religious minorities. Faith schools may be attractive to such parents either out of concerns for student safety, fear of encountering prejudice, or for more positive reasons, in that they provide a sense of belonging, suggesting potential interpretations for the continued popularity of faith schools in an era of declining religious commitment.

The data indicate that concern over the religious social makeup of the school is equally likely to lead parents to select a more diverse social environment as a primarily Jewish one. For some parents, the attractiveness of Jewish schools is based on the opportunities for constructing social ties within the community for both parent and child and perhaps more importantly, on the promise of providing a sense of person-environment fit, which has been shown to be critical to academic outcomes and pupil well-being. For others, religiously homogenous environments are viewed negatively, and more heterogeneous environments are favoured. Such parents place greater emphasis on bridging over bonding capital, in stark contrast to traditional religious modes of thought. Whether the preference for diversity is born of a desire for their offspring to integrate, a commitment to multiculturalism, or the notion that such environments provide better preparation for life, for many Jewish parents, diversity is of great importance. In fact, for a significant minority of parents, it is their aversion to religiously homogeneous environments that is the driving force behind their negotiation of school choice. Their sole concern is that their children's social environment not be limited on the basis of religion and that they should have ample opportunities to construct inter-religious social ties.

It is important to note that for Jews, like members of other religious minorities, school choice represents a double dilemma. Firstly, they must decide whether to prioritise a sense of belonging at school or integration into broader society, in spite of the sense of marginalisation that accompanies the minority experience. Secondly, they weigh up how best to protect their offspring from suffering the effects of prejudice. For members of marginalised minorities, school safety is not only conceptualised in terms of the school environment in general but the particular threat that their children might experience due to prejudice and

discrimination. Although a minority of parents worry that Jewish schools could be targets for antisemitic attacks and that Jewish school uniforms might mark their children out as Jewish, concerns about antisemitism are more likely to lead parents to opt for a Jewish school. On balance, therefore, anti-Jewish prejudice serves to encourage educational segregation as parents select schools that provide a sense of security and protection from harassment.

The double dilemma facing Jewish parents, who balance concerns over belonging, integration into society, and safety, is likely shared by parents from other minority groups. Further research would be needed to explore how members of other minority groups, such as Muslims, negotiate similar choices, weighing up preferred social environments and potential encounters with Islamophobia. Such research would assess the degree of commonality between different minority groups in their decision-making processes and ultimate preferences.

For governments concerned that faith schools are an obstacle to communal cohesion, it might be worth noting that Jewish parents are split over whether to prioritise belonging, and therefore select a faith school, or integration. However, it is concern over prejudice that ultimately leads many to opt for faith schools, demonstrating the importance of concerns over religion, rather than class in the parental calculus. Therefore, in order to tackle this preference, efforts must be made to ensure that more diverse schools provide a safe environment for members of religious minorities, not only Jews but also Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists and others.

Given the rapid increase in anti-Jewish prejudice and incidents in Europe in 2023, one might predict an increased preference for Jewish schools in the future. Certainly, having personally experienced antisemitism, and to a lesser extent witnessing it, is associated with a higher likelihood of weighing up antisemitism when choosing a school which in turn is correlated with favouring a Jewish school. However, the data demonstrate no clear correlation between country-level rates of antisemitism and concern over the issue with regard to schools, indicative of the importance of expectations of prejudice in affecting perceptions of prejudice. This suggests that individual experiences are more important than the abstract indicator of sentiment in the general population.

There are some limitations to this analysis. Firstly, the data do not provide a representative sample of the entire Jewish population. However, they do constitute a representative sample of all those affiliated with the Jewish community in some way. As those who are unaffiliated with the community are highly unlikely to consider sending their offspring to Jewish schools, for the purposes of this analysis these data seem sufficient. Secondly, the survey included only a limited set of responses for reasons for choosing a school, although there was a possibility to select 'other' as a response category. While only a small minority of parents did choose this option, there are likely other factors that feature in parental decisions that have been omitted from this analysis, rendering an incomplete understanding of the mechanisms of school choice. Thirdly, the issue of multicollinearity between rates of anti-Jewish sentiment in a country and the country itself makes it impossible to include both in a regression analysis. Therefore, it is not possible to directly weigh the impact of the incidence of antisemitism in society on school choice. Further research would be required to gather data on the prevalence of antisemitism using smaller geographical units that tally with those available in the data on school choice to fully explore this relationship using multi-level models.

The final major difficulty is in identifying the precise factors that lead people to consider antisemitism an important factor when selecting schools. While the analysis indicates that personal experiences have a significant impact, it was harder to identify what other factors feed into perceptions. Separate regressions not shown here indicate that considering antisemitism to be a greater problem leads parents to give weight to antisemitism when choosing schools, but that seems an approach marred by circular logic. To say that people who consider antisemitism an issue are more likely to cite such concerns as a factor in school choice adds little to our understanding. Further research utilising different indicators is needed to establish those independent factors that do explain why some people consider antisemitism in school decisions.

Decisions regarding the education of the next generation of Jews in Europe shed light on the persistence of faith schools, particularly those that serve religious minority populations. Alongside concerns felt by other parents, members of faith communities balance the religious social benefits provided by faith schools in terms of providing a sense of belonging with all its attendant benefits for well-being and academic achievement and opportunities for the construction of intra-communal social ties. Jewish parents are equally attracted by the potential benefits of a more diverse environment, contrary perhaps to expectations that parents use faith schools to avoid mixing with people of other ethnicities and class backgrounds. However, for European Jews, this openness to and even desire for social heterogeneity is counterbalanced by concerns over children encountering antisemitic prejudice at school. Such school safety concerns complicate educational choices, with parents concerned about potential prejudice overwhelmingly opting to shelter their children from marginalisation within a mixed school environment. Nevertheless, for a minority, Jewish schools themselves are considered sites of potential antisemitic attacks, and their students rendered visibly Jewish and vulnerable to such assaults. This demonstrates how the challenge of school choice is magnified for members of stigmatised religious minorities, such as Jews, who must balance ordinary concerns over academic standards and practicalities, as well as the competing desires for religious belonging, integration and avoidance of religious prejudice and marginalisation. In sum, while parents are evenly split over their desire for belonging and diversity, it is concern over prejudice that tips the balance in favour of faith schools.

Notes

1. This survey is the largest currently available dataset on antisemitism in Europe. For further information on the survey methodology see https://fra.europa.eu/en/publication/2018/experiences-and-perceptions-antisemitism-second-survey-discrimination-and-hate.
2. These parents are more likely to cite academics and less likely to mention social environment and antisemitism than parents who consistently opted for either Jewish or non-Jewish schools. It is unsurprising that those who are concerned with the latter two issues tend to favor one type of school or the other for all their children. However, the calculus regarding academic standards and the religious character of a school may shift between primary and high school.
3. For further information on the survey methodologies see https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2018/05/29/being-christian-in-western-europe/and https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2017/05/10/religious-belief-and-national-belonging-in-central-and-eastern-europe/.

4. Predicted probabilities are calculated in accordance with Voas and Watt (2024).
5. High levels of antisemitism in Poland and Hungary may be a legacy of decades of Communist rule, a reaction to Communism, or an expression of a phenomenon that has much older roots (Blatman 1997).

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Appendix

Appendix A. Binary logistic regression of selecting a Jewish school on reasons for school choice, country coefficients.

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5	Model 6
Austria	0.261**	0.264**	0.218***	0.293**	0.248**	0.251**
	(.427)	(.427)	(.441)	(.455)	(.455)	(.439)
Denmark	0.417	0.414	0.511	0.413	0.438	0.396
	(.544)	(.543)	(.559)	(.593)	(.573)	(.523)
France	0.125***	0.129***	0.134***	0.106***	0.123***	0.125***
	(.206)	(.206)	(.212)	(.218)	(.215)	(.214)
Germany	0.175***	0.176***	0.180***	0.169***	0.203***	0.158***
	(.234)	(.233)	(.239)	(.247)	(.244)	(.241)
Hungary	1.448	1.444	1.186	2.000**	1.370	1.477
	(.238)	(.238)	(.244)	(.250)	(.247)	(.256)
Italy	0.156***	0.156***	0.174***	0.240***	0.167***	0.160***
	(.332)	(.332)	(.340)	(.343)	(.347)	(.342)
Netherlands	0.073***	0.073***	0.075***	0.073***	0.085***	0.066***
	(.328)	(.328)	(.336)	(.347)	(.341)	(.333)
Poland	0.227**	0.210**	0.226	0.245*	0.232*	0.236*
	(.601)	(.603)	(.623)	(.629)	(.618)	(.633)
Spain	0.313***	0.317***	0.267***	0.416*	0.339**	0.345**
	(.334)	(.334)	(.343)	(.348)	(.349)	(.348)
Sweden	0.227***	0.219***	0.229***	0.201***	0.262**	0.195***
	(.419)	(.420)	(.436)	(.447)	(.435)	(.424)
UK	0.535**	0.553*	0.452***	0.769	0.582*	0.506**
	(.211)	(.211)	(.216)	(.220)	(.219)	(.218)

Numbers in parentheses are standard errors. Reference categories are as follows: country—Belgium.
$*p < 0.05$; $**p < 0.01$; $***p < 0.001$.

Appendix B. Binary logistic regression of consideration of antisemitism in school choice on experiences of antisemitism, country coefficients.

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
Austria	0.799	0.752	0.716	0.741
	(.424)	(.436)	(.448)	(.451)
Denmark	1.188	1.186	1.141	1.082
	(.560)	(.563)	(.589)	(.587)
France	1.014	1.000	1.034	0.974
	(.181)	(.185)	(.191)	(.189)
Germany	0.946	0.967	0.983	0.900
	(.211)	(.215)	(.223)	(.221)
Hungary	0.628	0.656	0.625	0.591*
	(.244)	(.247)	(.258)	(.252)
Italy	0.190*	0.197**	0.232**	0.178**
	(.504)	(.506)	(.509)	(.541)
Netherlands	0.694	0.663	0.652	0.699
	(.303)	(.309)	(.319)	(.312)
Poland	0.579	0.567	0.566	0.578
	(.649)	(.652)	(.700)	(.672)
Spain	0.501	0.497	0.501	0.458
	(.382)	(.389)	(.39)	(.411)
Sweden	1.186	1.200	1.165	1.084
	(.399)	(.403)	(.424)	(.417)
UK	0.338***	0.338***	0.331***	0.332***
	(.194)	(.197)	(.204)	(.202)

Numbers in parentheses are standard errors. Reference categories are as follows: country—Belgium.
$*p < 0.05$; $**p < 0.01$; $***p < 0.001$.