JOIN

The conversation

• Imagine the **FUTURE** of our **JEWISH COMMUNITY** •

FINDINGS FROM THE

NORTHERN NEW JERSEY JEWISH COMMUNITY STUDY

RUSSELL BERRIE FOUNDATION

Jewish Federation OF NORTHERN NEW JERSEY

jfnnj.org

Friends,

Thank you for ***Joining the Conversation***!

We are very grateful our northern New Jersey community came together to join the conversation and make this important research project possible. We benefitted from the input and guidance of a taskforce of lay leaders, expertise from an advisory council of organizational professionals, the input of synagogue clergy and board members, and of course, the survey respondents.

We embarked on this research with a team of experts from Rosov Consulting, eager to better understand the needs, interests, and aspirations of those within the Jewish community of northern New Jersey. The enclosed report includes the key insights and findings from this research. By sharing this information, we hope to build a stronger and brighter future for our entire community.

In addition to funding from the Federation, this research was made possible with funding provided by The Russell Berrie Foundation. We are deeply appreciative of their partnership, leadership, and passion for this work.

Thank you for your interest in learning more about the Jewish community of Northern New Jersey. This report is extensive and contains an abundance of data that will keep the conversation vibrant for years to come. It is just the beginning! Together we will use this information to strengthen our Jewish future.

Sincerely,

Roberta Abrams, *Chair, Community Strategic Initiative*
Dan M. Shlufman, *President*
Lee Lasher, *Past President*
Jason M. Shames, *CEO*

Table of Contents

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Commissioned by Jewish Federation of Northern New Jersey, with support from The Russell Berrie Foundation, and conducted by Rosov Consulting, this study is designed to aid the Northern New Jersey Jewish community in better understanding its needs and aspirations, strengths and challenges, experiences and perspectives. As the community's first comprehensive study in eight years, it is rich in information derived from community leaders, a survey of community members, focus groups and interviews.

THE PROCESS

The study began with a series of engagement meetings with lay and professional communal leaders, which surfaced key issues and challenges facing them in their efforts to serve their varied constituents. These sessions, held in Northern New Jersey, guided the development of the survey categories and questions.

Following the engagement sessions, an opt-in (or nonprobability) survey was designed and fielded online through communal agencies—including Federation, JCCs, day schools, synagogues, and Jewish Family & Children's Services—and lists of likely Jewish households purchased from a data vendor. Federation also implemented a comprehensive marketing plan that included elements focused on reaching those less engaged with Jewish organizations. More than 3,100 respondents in the Federation's service area—which includes all of Bergen and Hudson Counties and parts of Morris and Passaic Counties—completed the survey from December 20, 2021, through February 4, 2022. While opt-in surveys tend to attract more "engaged" respondents than a random sample, the respondents in this study consist of a broad spectrum across social and demographic characteristics *and* Jewish connections.

The study also collected qualitative data from online focus groups and interviews in the spring of 2022. A total of 72 focus-group and interview participants were recruited from survey respondents and through communal organizations. Interviews were also conducted with eight communal professionals working to support different constituents in the community.

THE FINDINGS

CONNECTIONS AND BARRIERS

- The Northern New Jewish community has a strong foundation of connections and touch points In Jewish life. In addition, there are many opportunities available to strengthen those connections. Nearly four-in-ten respondents to the survey said they feel "very connected" to the Jewish community. Among those who don't, two-thirds expressed interest in being more connected, and there is a broad range of programming topics that appeal to them.
- In focus groups, participants emphasized social networks, shared values and experiences, support systems, and a sense of belonging as key features of their Jewish communities.
- Simultaneously, the community faces barriers to greater connections and challenges to communal cohesion. As the survey was fielded during COVID-19, pandemic restrictions were indicated as significant barriers. Lack of appealing programs, lack of time, and financial costs are the other top barriers that prevent respondents from feeling more connected to the Jewish community.
- Most respondents say they have "a lot" in common with others who share their denominational identity, but few feel they have a lot in common with Jews in other denominations. Instead, most respondents say they have "some" (as opposed to not much or nothing at all) in common with others, suggesting there are opportunities for bridge building across denominations.

ENGAGEMENT WITH COMMUNAL ORGANIZATIONS

- The Northern New Jersey Jewish community has many communal organizations, offering community members numerous options to engage in Jewish life, to receive needed services, and to support through charitable donations.
- Survey respondents vary in how engaged they are with communal organizations. Where they live, what Jewish denomination they identify with, their age and their income are among the many factors associated with different *forms* and different *levels* of organizational engagement.
- While there are general patterns of how people connect to organizations, engagement can vary based on factors such as denomination, age, and generation. Examples include:

Orthodox respondents are consistently among the most highly engaged. Age is strongly related to making charitable donations but only weakly related to synagogue membership. And Gen Z respondents are among the least likely to donate to Jewish causes but among the most likely to participate in adult Jewish education.

PRIORITIES FOR FUNDING

- Over 75% of the respondents described the following **causes** as very Important funding priorities: safety and security locally and in Israel, social and human service needs for vulnerable populations, planning for the Jewish future, broadly defined Jewish education, and Holocaust education.
- Over 60% of the respondents described programming for the following **specific groups** as very important funding priorities: programs for older adults, families with young children and teenagers, newcomers to the community, and college students.
- The top ***causes*** that respondents prioritized for funding outpolled the top ***specific groups*** they prioritized.

EDUCATING CHILDREN

- For parents deciding on Jewish educational experiences for their children, the most important factors that inform their decision-making are the overall quality of the school, program, or offering; appropriate services and fit for their children; a Jewish environment with other Jewish children; and the Jewish content of the school/program.
- Denominational affiliation and household income are strongly related to immersive Jewish educational choices, such as day schools, day and overnight camps, and teen trips to Israel. Modern Orthodox respondents and those earning $250,000 or more are the most likely to provide their children with these educational experiences.

ISRAEL

- Connections to and support for Israel are generally strong among survey respondents, with 87% saying they are very or somewhat emotionally attached to Israel.
- At the same time, there are emerging challenges in the community's relationship with Israel, especially among some younger survey respondents, Reform and Just Jewish respondents who do not feel as strongly connected to Israel as others.
- Most respondents feel safe expressing their views about Israel to other Jews in Northern New Jersey all or most of the time, but a minority say they feel safe only sometimes, only once in a while, or never.

ANTISEMITISM

- Eight in ten survey respondents think there is some or a lot of antisemitism in Northern New Jersey, and half (52%) think there is more today than five years ago. A third of survey respondents reported a personal experience with antisemitism in the past year.
- Certain groups reported experiences with antisemitism more than others. Notably, antisemitic experiences were elevated among respondents identifying as People of Color or LGBTQ+, respondents with disabilities, younger respondents, and respondents residing in Hudson County and Morris/Passaic Counties excluding Wayne.
- Up to 20% of survey respondents refrained from certain Jewish activities and behaviors due to concerns about antisemitism. Examples included: removing or not wearing something distinctively Jewish (20%), not identifying themselves as Jewish (19%), or not participating in Jewish activities or events (14%).
- A very large majority of respondents who experienced antisemitism did not report it to Jewish communal agencies or law enforcement agencies. Even respondents who were physically threatened or attacked only reported the incident about half the time.

DIVERSE IDENTITY GROUPS

- Survey respondents from diverse identity groups included those who: identify as People of Color (3%); identify as LGBTQ+ (5%); have a disability (6%); have a child with special needs or a disability (5%); are in an interfaith marriage or partnership (6%); are Russian Speaking Jews (5%); and are Israelis (7%).
- Between a half and three-quarters of respondents from diverse identity groups—Jews of Color, LGBTQ+ Jews, those in interfaith marriages and partnerships, and those with disabilities—report a sense of and desire for community with those who share their identities.
- At the same time, they often feel less connected to the broader Jewish community than others. Among respondents from diverse identity groups, barriers to connection include feeling the broader community is not welcoming enough to them; does not offer meaningful programs, events, and opportunities for them; and—for those with disabilities—does not provide adequate services and accommodations. Additionally, some feel uncomfortable in Jewish organizational spaces.
- Russian-speaking and Israeli respondents have their own tight-knit communities but often report lower levels of communal engagement and connections to the broader Jewish community.

HUMAN SERVICE NEEDS

- Human service needs are widespread, with 46% of respondents indicating one or more services were needed for themselves, someone else in their household, or a close relative in Northern New Jersey in the past year. It is helpful to again note that the survey was fielded during COVID-19. The most commonly cited need is mental health serviced for adults, followed by needs around financial planning, career counseling and job training, coordinating/providing care for others, and mental health needs for teenagers and children.
- About a third of respondents who indicated a need for human services did not receive them, though it is important to note the survey did not ask about the cause or causes of these service gaps.
- When asked about potential future service needs, respondents said It Is most Important to receive the following services from a Jewish organization: older adult needs, mental health needs, care for those who can't care for themselves, and respite care for caregivers.

ECONOMIC VULNERABILITY AND FINANCIAL AFFORDABILITY

- Overall, most respondents' socioeconomic status is strong, but others face economic challenges.
- Twenty-one percent of all respondents are economically vulnerable, defined as those who said they are currently just meeting or do not have enough to meet, their basic needs (12%), or who just met or did not have enough to meet their basic needs at some time since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic in March 2020, though they are more financially secure now (9%).
- Among selected groups of respondents—People of Color, people who identify as LGBTQ+, those with disabilities, and the unemployed—levels of economic vulnerability approach or exceed more than 50%. For others—including those who are divorced, separated, or never married; residents of Hudson County and Morris and Passaic Counties (excluding Wayne); Gen Z and Millennial respondents; and those with less than a college degree—levels of economic vulnerability approach or exceed 35%.
- Among all respondents, about four in ten report they have experienced financial constraints on their own Jewish communal participation, while about the same share of those with children ages 6-17 report financial constraints on their children's community participation.

STRATEGIC IMPLICATIONS

In all of these areas, the survey findings and the insights provided in the qualitative data suggest a series of strategic questions for the Jewish community (and communities) of Northern New Jersey. For example:

- How should the community confront antisemitism, and how can the community address safety concerns among institutions and their members?
- How should the community both build upon our strong connections to Israel and foster further connections and support?
- What else can the community do to help those facing economic vulnerability and other service needs?
- How can the community better support parents who wish to make Jewish educational choices for their children?
- And, how can the community facilitate greater connections among its members with each other? How can the community address the concerns of diverse identity groups that often feel less connected than others to the Jewish community?

Addressing these and other important strategic opportunities and challenges will be key to the community's strength and vitality as it charts its path forward.

SECTION 1

INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

Commissioned by Jewish Federation of Northern New Jersey, supported by The Russell Berrie Foundation, and conducted by Rosov Consulting, this study is designed to aid the entire Northern New Jersey Jewish community in better understanding its members, their needs and aspirations, strengths and challenges, experiences, and perspectives. As the community's first comprehensive study in eight years, it is rich in information derived from community leaders, a survey of community members, and focus groups and interviews.

The Study Process and Components

The study began with a series of engagement meetings with lay and professional communal leaders, which surfaced key issues and challenges facing them in their efforts to serve their varied constituents. These sessions, held in Northern New Jersey, guided the development of the survey categories and questions.

Following the engagement sessions, an opt-in (or nonprobability) survey was designed and fielded online through communal agencies—including Federation, JCCs, day schools, synagogues, and Jewish Family & Children's Services—and lists of likely Jewish households purchased from a data vendor. Federation also implemented a comprehensive marketing plan that included elements focused on reaching those less engaged with Jewish organizations. More than 3,100 respondents in the Federation's service area—which includes all of Bergen and Hudson Counties and parts of Morris and Passaic Counties—completed the survey from December 20, 2021, through February 4, 2022.[1] While opt-in surveys tend to attract more "engaged" respondents than a random sample, the respondents in this study consist of a broad spectrum across social and demographic characteristics *and* Jewish connections.

The study also collected qualitative data from online focus groups and interviews in the spring of 2022. A total of 72 focus-group and interview participants were recruited from survey respondents and through communal organizations. These groups included people who identify as "Just Jewish"; retirees; Modern Orthodox empty nesters; newcomers (residing in the community less than 5 years); Israelis; Russian-speaking Jews; young adults without children from Hudson County; Wayne residents; parents of children under five; parents of children ages 6–13; parents of teens; and parents of children with disabilities.

[1] For a list of all towns in the Federation's catchment area, see Appendix 2.2 in Section 2.

Furthermore, the study conducted interviews with eight communal professionals working to support different constituents in the community. These interviews were designed to collect information about the professionals' experiences with and understanding of the groups they serve. Together, all of the qualitative data contributed important insights into the lived experiences of community members, adding nuance, depth, confirmation, and elucidation to the survey findings. This report weaves the quantitative and qualitative data into a detailed picture of the Northern New Jersey Jewish community members who joined the study conversation.

Important Notes About the Study

Survey Data

As noted, the study utilized an opt-in survey (also called a nonprobability survey). Compared to random surveys (which are also called probability surveys), opt-in surveys face two limitations that readers should be aware of. First, opt-in surveys cannot be used to estimate the number of Jews or Jewish households in a local area, and no such estimates are reported here. Second, tests of statistical significance that are used to infer from a random sample to a larger population—tests like "margins of error" that many readers will be familiar with from, for example, political polls—are not meaningfully applicable to opt-in samples. This is because such statistical tests are based on certain assumptions about the ways in which random samples are constructed, and opt-in samples do not meet those assumptions.

As a result, this report foregoes the language of statistical *significance*, including *statistically significant* differences between groups. Instead, it identifies and surfaces important, or substantial, differences—between groups and the overall sample, or between groups themselves—guided by three factors: the researchers' expertise and knowledge; a general, though not determinative, rule of thumb that says differences of 10 percentage points or more are worthy of attention; and the congruence of survey and qualitative data. Survey results are generally presented first for the overall sample of respondents. Following that, results are often reported for one or more groups where the community should be aware of substantial differences—again, between groups and the overall sample, or between groups themselves. To draw reasonable conclusions about subgroups, the report generally limits analysis of subgroups to those with at least 100 respondents, though this is not always the case (see Appendix 2.1 at the end of Section 2).

Focus Group and Interview Data

When quoted in the report, focus group and interview participants are identified by the group that they were initially recruited for, even in cases where they spoke to and are quoted about other issues in their lives unrelated to their initial recruitment criteria. Readers should assume that qualitative data participants are speaking about their own lived experiences, which are much broader than the specific criteria for which they were initially recruited to participate.

Survey Timing

This study was conducted during the time of the COVID-19 pandemic. By design, select survey questions specifically asked about the pandemic; in addition, the pandemic surfaced as a topic in some focus groups and interviews. Beyond these data points that explicitly reference the pandemic, the study cannot determine the extent to which the pandemic may have influenced answers to other survey or focus group and interview questions.

A ROADMAP TO THE REST OF THE REPORT

The report proceeds in eleven more sections. Section 2 presents the social, demographic, and Jewish characteristics of the survey respondents. Section 3 then examines the ways respondents connect to Jewish community (or communities) and the barriers that some face in doing so. Section 4 looks at engagement with communal organizations, while Section 5 describes priorities for funding and programming. Section 6 turns to Jewish education, including the factors that parents cite in making decisions about their children's Jewish educational experiences. Section 7 focuses on Israel and Section 8 on antisemitism. In Section 9, the report presents findings about diverse identity groups in the community, including respondents who identify as People of Color, LGBTQ+, and others. Section 10 addresses human service needs, and Section 11 examines economic vulnerability and, more broadly, the financial affordability of Jewish life. Section 12 serves as a conclusion, highlighting strategic opportunities and challenges suggested by the big pictures and broad patterns revealed in the study.

SECTION 2

THE SURVEY RESPONDENTS: WHO DID WE TALK TO?

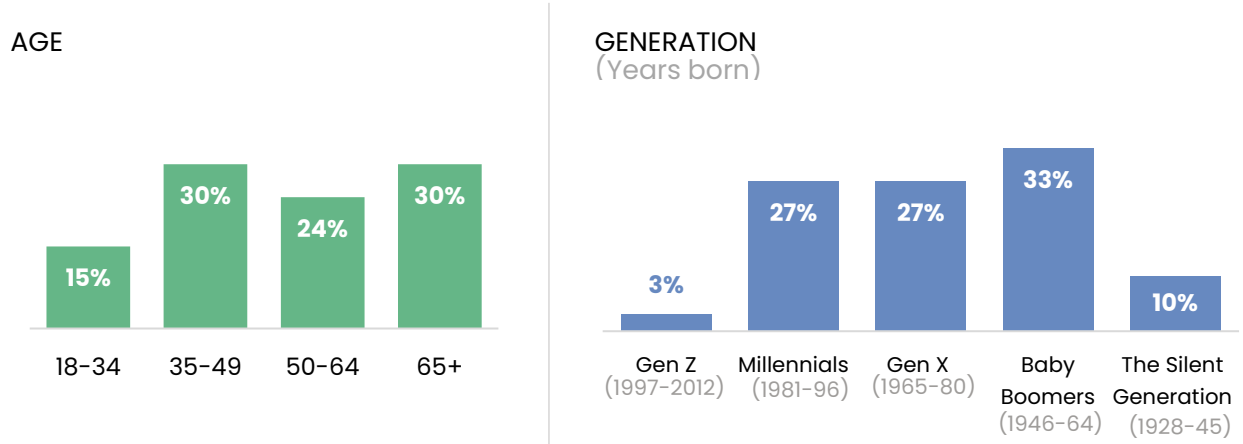
Community members who responded to the survey represent a broad spectrum in their demographic, social, and Jewish characteristics. This section of the report provides an overview of the many ways in which respondents differ from each other and the many distinctive subgroups that exist in the community. (For interested readers, Appendix 2.1 provides the number of respondents in selected subgroups of the sample).

DEMOGRAPHIC AND SOCIAL CHARACTERISTICS

Age/Generation

Respondents range in age from 18 to 100 and can be grouped according to both age and generation (see Exhibit 2.1).[2] Age groups 35–49, 50–64, and 65 and older are approximately the same size, while there are fewer 18–34-year-olds. Likewise, Millennials, Gen X, and Baby Boomers are similar in size, while the Silent Generation and Gen Z are smaller.

Exhibit 2.1: Age and generation

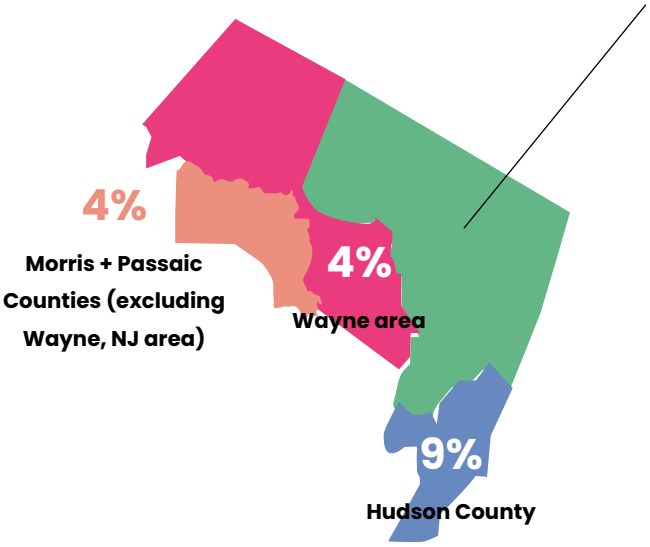


Geography

The study includes respondents in each of the study area's four counties—Bergen, Morris, Passaic, and Hudson. For the purpose of this report, Bergen County—where the majority of respondents live—is divided into six subareas (Exhibit 2.2; also see Appendix 2.2 for towns within each subarea). All Hudson County respondents are reported together. Morris and Passaic Counties are reported together, too, except for respondents in Wayne, who are reported separately. The single largest concentration of respondents is in Teaneck/Bergenfield (29%), followed by Central Bergen (19%) and East Bergen (15%). The remaining areas each have less than 10% of all respondents.

[2] Some charts may sum to 99% or 101% due to rounding.

Exhibit 2.2: Geography



Bergen County (83%)

29%
Teaneck/Bergenfield (South Bergen)

19%
Central Bergen

15%
East Bergen

7%
North Central Bergen

7%
Rest of South Bergen

5%
Northwest Bergen

Gender and LGBTQ+ Identities

Typical of opt-in surveys, women outnumber men among respondents (Exhibit 2.3). The study also includes respondents who identify their gender in other ways,[3] but they are too few for separate analysis.

Among all respondents, 5% said they personally identify as LGBTQ+. Another 4% of respondents—who do not identify as LGBTQ+—said at least one other person in their household identifies as LGBTQ+. Altogether, then, 9% of respondents live in what the report refers to as LGBTQ+ households, in which either they or someone else identifies as LGBTQ+. Section 9 examines LGBTQ+ respondents and households, as well as other diverse identities, in more detail.

Exhibit 2.3: Gender and LGBTQ+ identities

63% FEMALE

35% MALE

5% identify as LGBTQ+

9% say either they or someone else in their household identifies as LGBTQ+

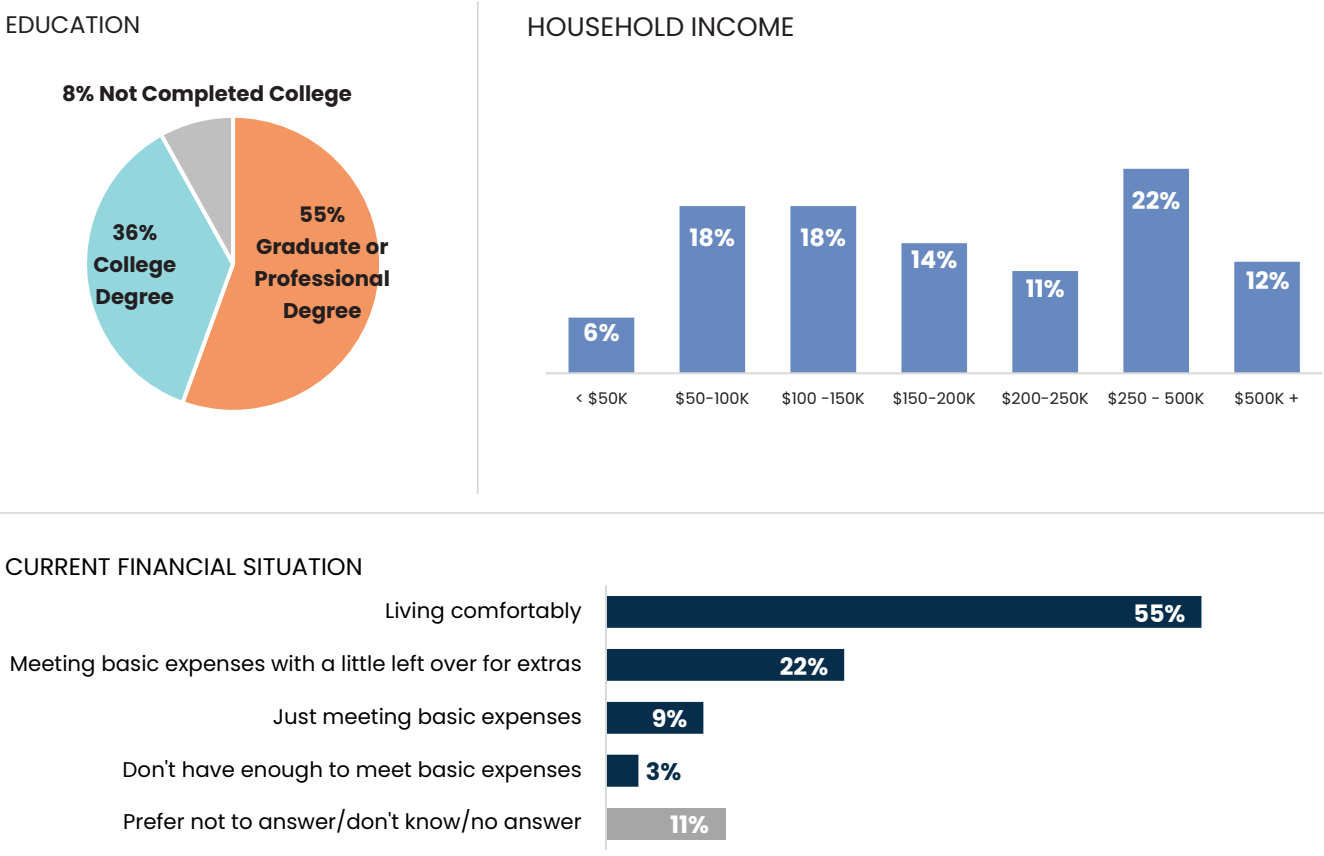
[3] Five respondents identified as transgender; eight as nonbinary, gender queer, or gender fluid; three as something else; and 25 preferred not to answer the question.

Education, Income, and Financial Situation

Respondents are well educated, with more than half having a graduate or professional degree and more than another third having a college degree (Exhibit 2.4). Relatively few respondents have not completed college. Because education and income are typically linked together, income levels among respondents are generally high as well, with a median household income over $175,000 among those who reported it.[4] Asked about their current financial situation, most respondents (55%) say they live comfortably, and another fifth (22%) meet their basic expenses with a little left over for extras.

At the same time, there are substantial pockets of economic vulnerability in the community. Among all respondents, 12% say they are currently just meeting their basic expenses (9%) or don't have enough to meet their basic expenses (3%). An additional 9% of respondents said they faced this situation at some time since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic. Section 11 defines these 21% of respondents as economically vulnerable and looks at them in greater detail.

Exhibit 2.4: Education, income, and financial situation

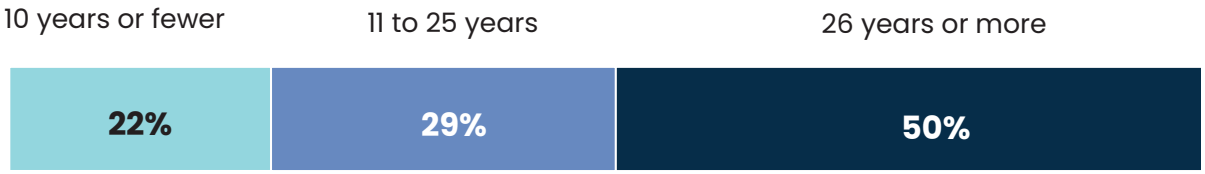


[4] Nineteen percent (19%) of respondents did not report their income.

Length of Time in the Community

More than a fifth of respondents have resided in the community for 10 or fewer years, more than a quarter have lived in the community for 11 to 25 years, and half have resided in Northern New Jersey for more than 25 years (Exhibit 2.5).

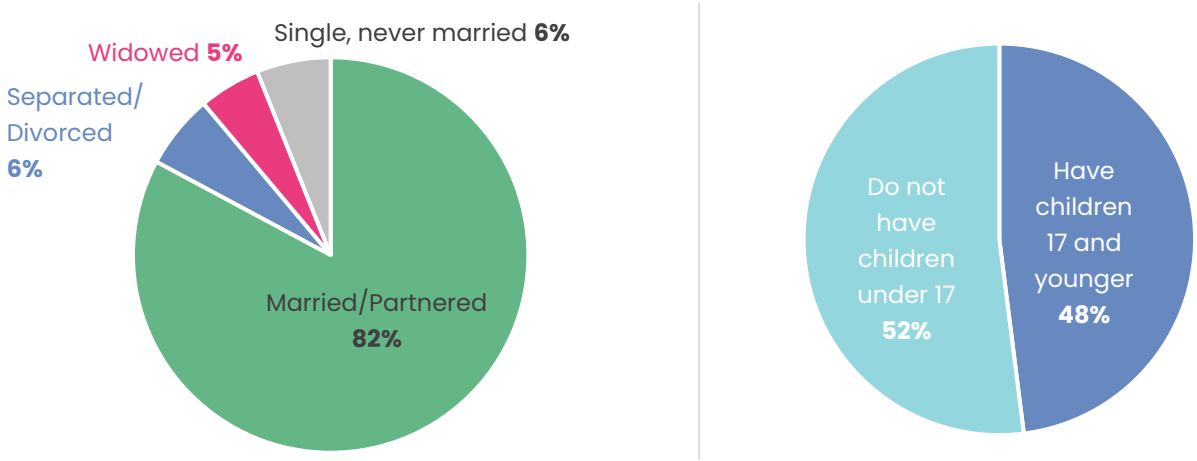
Exhibit 2.5: Years lived in Northern New Jersey



Relationship Status and Children

The strong majority of respondents in the study are married or partnered, with smaller shares of respondents who are separated/divorced, widowed, or single and never married (Exhibit 2.6). A roughly equal share of respondents has children (ages 17 and younger) currently residing in their homes as does not.[5]

Exhibit 2.6: Relationship status and children



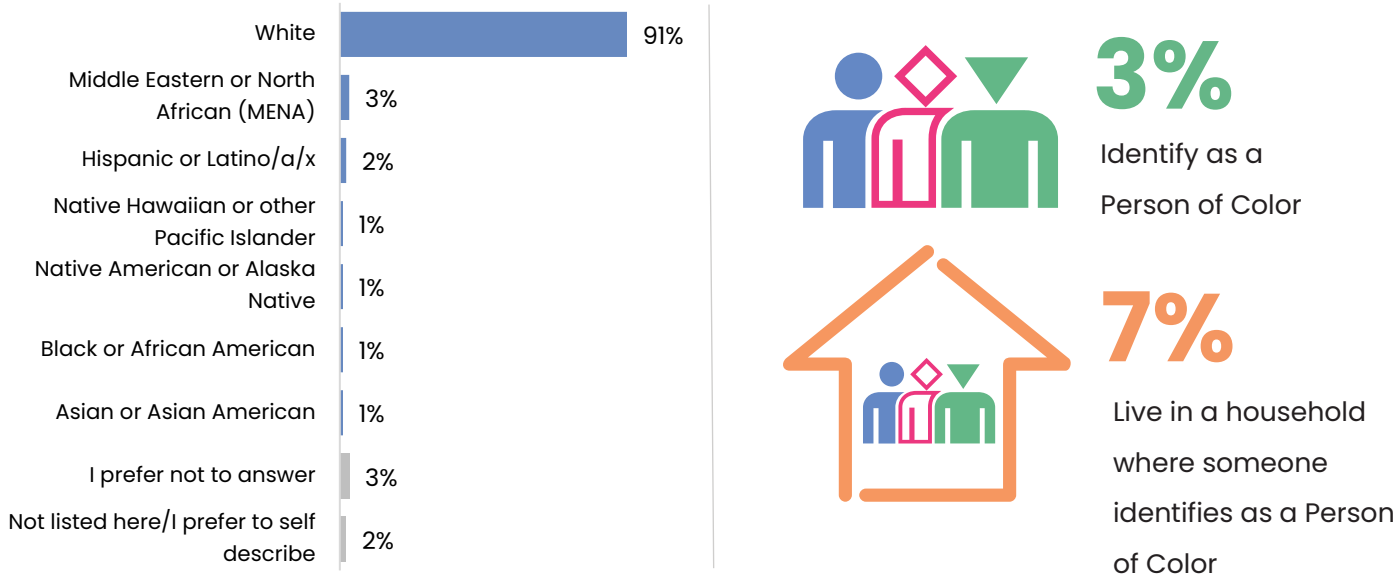
Race and Ethnicity

Respondents were asked to select their race and/or ethnicity from a series of closed-ended options and were permitted to choose as many as applied to them. Nine-in-ten respondents

[5] Respondents who do not have children ages 17 or younger currently residing in their homes may have children those ages or older who do not reside with them.

selected white, about one-in-ten respondents selected another race or ethnicity or preferred to self-describe, and 3% said they preferred not to answer the question (Exhibit 2.7).[6]

Exhibit 2.7: Race and ethnicity



Respondents who selected a race or ethnicity other than white were asked if they identify as a Person of Color (POC). Less than half of them did, equal to 3% of all respondents.[7] Another 4% of respondents—who do not identify as a Person of Color—said someone else in their household does identify as a Person of Color. Altogether, then, 7% of respondents live in what the report refers to as People of Color (POC) households, in which either they or someone else in their household identifies as a Person of Color.

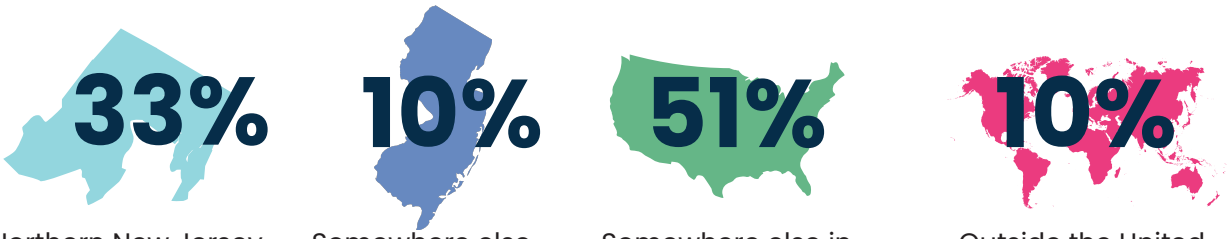
Respondent Origins

Respondents grew up in many different places (Exhibit 2.8). A third grew up locally in one of the four counties in Northern New Jersey—Bergen, Passaic, Morris, or Hudson. A tenth grew up somewhere else in New Jersey, and half somewhere else in the United States. Another tenth grew up outside the United States, with the two most common places being the Former Soviet Union and Israel.

[6] Because respondents were allowed to choose more than one option, the percentages in Exhibit 2.7 exceed 100%.

[7] Because there are fewer than 100 respondents who identify as People of Color (N = 82), results for them should be read more cautiously.

Exhibit 2.8: Where respondents primarily grew up



Northern New Jersey (Bergen, Hudson, Passaic, or Morris County)

Somewhere else in New Jersey

Somewhere else in the United States, outside of New Jersey

Outside the United States

Disabilities

Among all respondents, 6% said they personally have a diagnosed disability. Another 7% of respondents—who do not have a disability themselves—said someone else in their household does. Altogether, then, 13% of respondents said either they or someone else in their household has a diagnosed disability.

Politics

A majority of respondents in the survey (59%) identify as Democrats or lean toward supporting the Democratic Party, while more than a quarter (28%) identify as Republicans or lean toward supporting the Republican Party. About one-in-seven respondents (13%) say they are Independent or do not lean toward either major party.

JEWISH CHARACTERISTICS

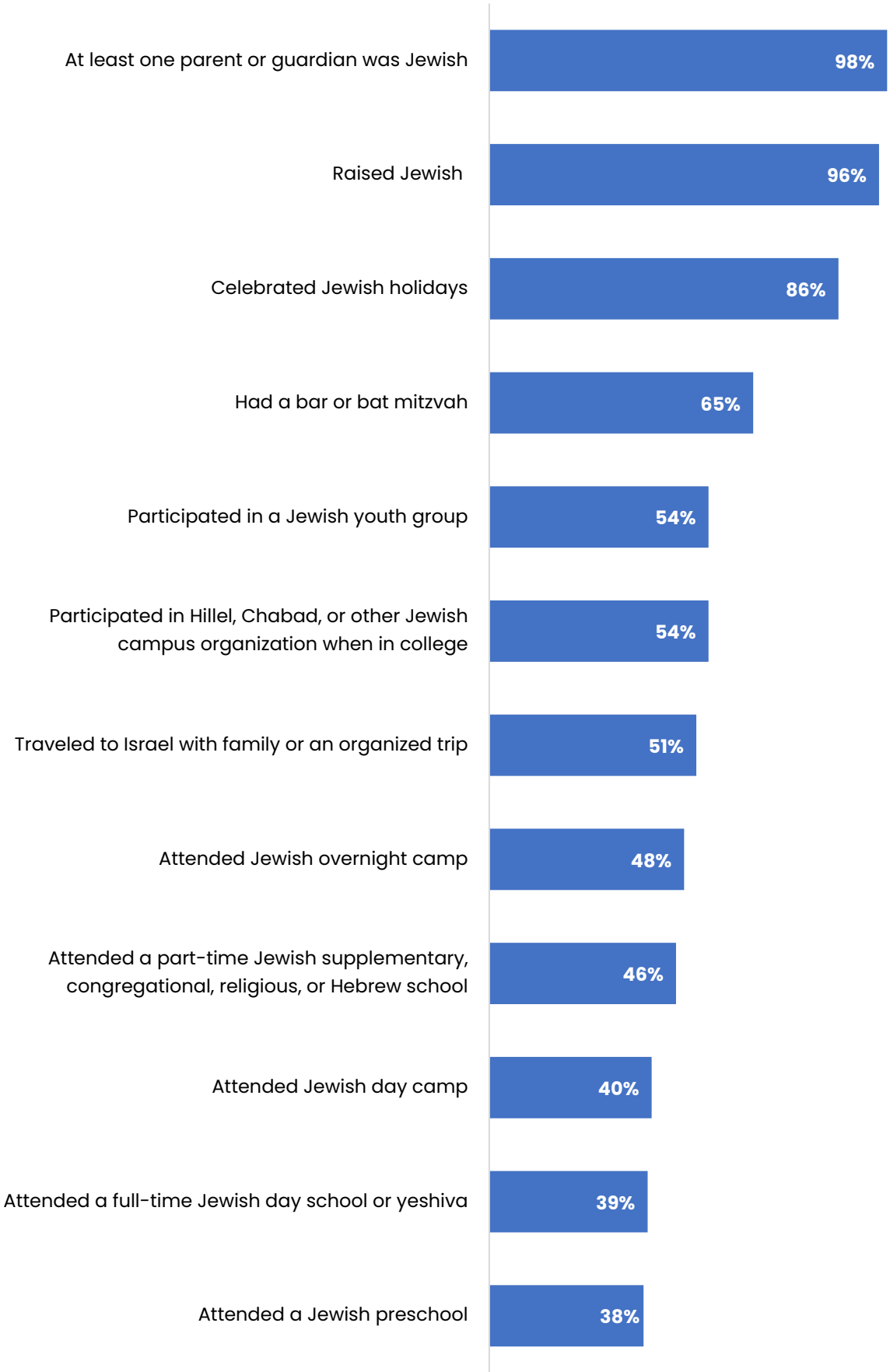
Jewish Background

Respondents reported substantial variety in how they connected to Jewish life when growing up (Exhibit 2.9):

- Nearly all respondents said at least one of their parents or guardians was Jewish and that they were raised Jewish,[8] and strong majorities celebrated Jewish holidays and had a bar or bat mitzvah.
- About half participated in Jewish youth and campus groups, traveled to Israel, attended Jewish overnight camp, and attended part-time Jewish education.
- About 40% of respondents attended Jewish day camps, day schools, and preschools.

[8] Because being raised Jewish or having Jewish parents were among the possible criteria for qualifying to take the survey, the high percentage of respondents with these characteristics is to be expected.

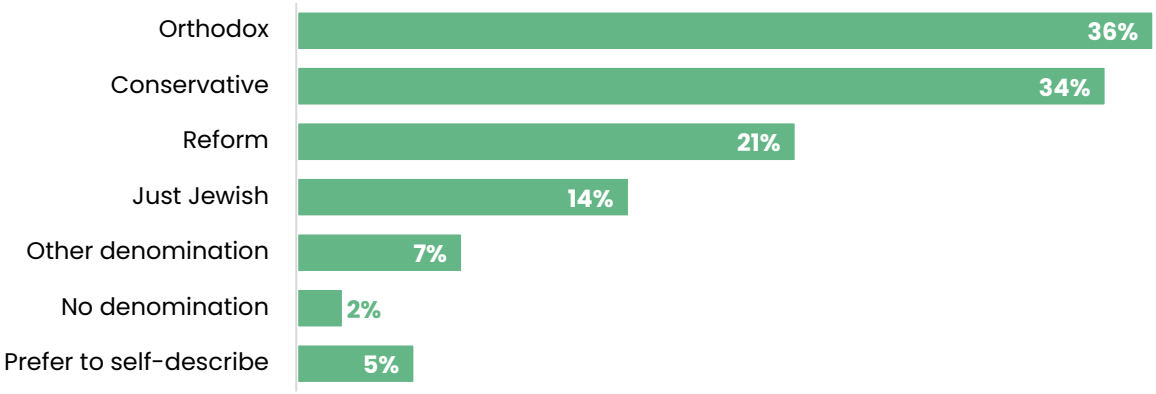
Exhibit 2.9: Jewish background



Denominational Identity

Respondents identify across the Jewish denominational landscape (Exhibit 2.10).[9] Respondents who identify as Orthodox and Conservative make up the two largest two groups, followed by those who identify as Reform or Just Jewish.[10] Among the approximately one-third of all respondents who are Orthodox, the vast majority are Modern Orthodox (90%), while small numbers are Hasidic (2%), Yeshivish (1%), or did not provide a specific Orthodox identity (5%).

Exhibit 2.10: Denominational identity (Select all that apply)



Jewish Ethnicity, Heritage, or Customs

A very large majority of respondents report their Jewish ethnicity, heritage, or customs as Ashkenazi, with smaller numbers identifying as Sephardi, Mizrachi, or Ethiopian (Exhibit 2.11).

Exhibit 2.11: Jewish ethnicity

[9] Respondents were allowed to select all of the denominational identities that apply to them, yielding a total of more than 100% in Exhibit 2.10.

[10] In Jewish social research, "Just Jewish" is a standard response option for questions of Jewish denominational identity. It is most often used by survey respondents who do not identify with a specific denomination, and it is generally associated with lower levels of Jewish engagement. But this is not always the case. "Just Jewish" is sometimes selected by respondents who explicitly reject denominational labels, and some respondents who select this option are highly engaged in Jewish life.

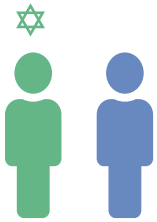
In-Married/Partnered and Intermarried/Partnered

Among married or partnered respondents, nearly all are married to or partnered with a person who identifies as Jewish, while relatively few are married to or partnered with someone who does not identify as Jewish (Exhibit 2.12). Due to the opt-in nature of the sample, there is much less variation in intermarriage by age or denomination than typically emerges in probability-based surveys. However, intermarriage is elevated in Hudson County (20%), Morris/Passaic Counties (13%), and South Bergen outside Teaneck/Bergenfield (11%).

Exhibit 2.12: Among married/partnered respondents …

94%

Are married or partnered with a person who identifies as Jewish



6%

Are married or partnered with a person who does not identify as Jewish

Appendix 2.1: Number of Respondents in Selected Segments of the Northern New Jersey Community Study.

Segment	N
Region	
Bergen County (total)	2,541
Central Bergen	594
East Bergen	469
North Central Bergen	218
Northwest Bergen	153
South Bergen - Teaneck/Bergenfield	903
Rest of South Bergen	204
Hudson County (total)	269
North Hudson	65
South Hudson	204
Morris and Passaic Counties (total)	254
Morris and Passaic Counties excluding Wayne	128
Wayne, NJ	126
Gender identity	
Woman	1,970
Man	1,092
Transgender	5
Non-binary, gender queer, or gender fluid	8
Not listed here/I prefer to self-describe:	3
Prefer not to answer	25
Age	
18 to 24	89
25 to 34	386
35 to 49	962
50 to 64	765
65 to 74	549
75 to 84	322
85 to 100	87
75 to 100	409
Generation	
Gen Z	110
Millennial	842
Gen X	865
Boomers	1,029
Silent	314
Relationship status	
Married/Partnered	2,563
Not Married (total)	531
Separated/Divorced	177
Widowed	164
Single, never married	190
Prefer not to answer	29

Segment	N
Respondent is married or partnered with someone who does not identify as Jewish	145
Children in household	
No Children	1,651
At least 1 child under 18	1,509
At least one child 0-5	578
At least one child 6-17	1,252
At least one child 6-13	1,022
At least one child 14-17	549
Schools children attend	
Day schools	765
Independent schools	249
Public schools	347
Education	
Less than college degree	257
College or university degree	1,119
Graduate or professional degree	1,711
Length of residence in community	
4 years or less	302
5 to 10 years	362
11 to 15 years	310
16 to 25 years	597
26 years or more	1,560
Place where respondent primarily grew up	
Bergen, Hudson, Passaic, or Morris County	1,033
Somewhere else in New Jersey	308
Somewhere else in the United States, outside of New Jersey	1,611
Outside the United States	308
Jewish denomination	
Orthodox	1,066
Modern Orthodox	935
Conservative	993
Reform	629
Just Jewish	422
Other denomination	225
No denomination	68

Segment	N
Feel connected to Jewish community in Northern New Jersey	
Very	1,212
Somewhat	1,140
Only slightly	573
Not at all	160
Race/ethnicity/origin	
Asian or Asian American	14
Black or African American	26
Hispanic or Latino/a/x	68
Middle Eastern or North African (MENA)	95
Native American or Alaska Native	20
Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander	17
White	2,828
Not listed/prefers to self-describe:	69
Prefers not to answer	87
Diverse Identity Groups	
Respondent identifies as a Person of Color	82
POC Household (respondent or someone else identifies as Person of Color)	208
Respondent identifies as LGBTQ	164
LGBTQ Household (respondent or someone else identifies as LGBTQ	269
Russian-speaking respondents	159
Israeli respondents	217
Respondent has a diagnosed disability	186
Someone in household has a diagnosed disability	413
Economically vulnerable	673
Political party	
Republican	799
Democrat	1,697
Independent/neither party	1,019
Something else	149

APPENDIX 2.2: COUNTIES, STUDY SUBREGIONS, AND TOWNS IN NORTHERN NEW JERSEY

County	Study Subregion	Town(s)	N
Bergen	Central Bergen	Dumont	12
Bergen	Central Bergen	Emerson	16
Bergen	Central Bergen	Fair Lawn	298
Bergen	Central Bergen	Glen Rock	77
Bergen	Central Bergen	Ho-Ho-Kus	4
Bergen	Central Bergen	Midland Park	2
Bergen	Central Bergen	New Milford	23
Bergen	Central Bergen	Oradell	20
Bergen	Central Bergen	Paramus	69
Bergen	Central Bergen	Ridgewood	48
Bergen	Central Bergen	River Edge	25
Bergen	East Bergen	Alpine	12
Bergen	East Bergen	Closter	34
Bergen	East Bergen	Cresskill	35
Bergen	East Bergen	Demarest	26
Bergen	East Bergen	Englewood	158
Bergen	East Bergen	Englewood Cliffs	10
Bergen	East Bergen	Harrington Park	12
Bergen	East Bergen	Haworth	22
Bergen	East Bergen	Northvale	1
Bergen	East Bergen	Norwood	5
Bergen	East Bergen	Rockleigh	1
Bergen	East Bergen	Tenafly	153
Bergen	North Central Bergen	Hillsdale	35
Bergen	North Central Bergen	Montvale	17
Bergen	North Central Bergen	Old Tappan	8
Bergen	North Central Bergen	Park Ridge	11
Bergen	North Central Bergen	River Vale	38
Bergen	North Central Bergen	Saddle River	3
Bergen	North Central Bergen	Township of Washington	16
Bergen	North Central Bergen	Upper Saddle River	17
Bergen	North Central Bergen	Westwood	8
Bergen	North Central Bergen	Woodcliff Lake	65
Bergen	Northwest Bergen	Allendale	17
Bergen	Northwest Bergen	Franklin Lakes	27
Bergen	Northwest Bergen	Mahwah	28
Bergen	Northwest Bergen	Oakland	13
Bergen	Northwest Bergen	Ramsey	22
Bergen	Northwest Bergen	Waldwick	4
Bergen	Northwest Bergen	Wyckoff	42
Bergen	Other Bergen	Carlstadt	0

County	Study Subregion	Town(s)	N
Bergen	Other Bergen	East Rutherford	0
Bergen	Other Bergen	Lyndhurst	0
Bergen	Other Bergen	Moonachie	1
Bergen	Other Bergen	North Arlington	0
Bergen	Other Bergen	Rutherford	0
Bergen	Other Bergen	Teterboro	0
Bergen	Other Bergen	Wallington	0
Bergen	Other Bergen	Woodridge	4
Bergen	South Bergen	Bogota	7
Bergen	South Bergen	Cliffside Park	15
Bergen	South Bergen	Edgewater	8
Bergen	South Bergen	Elmwood Park	5
Bergen	South Bergen	Fairview	2
Bergen	South Bergen	Fort Lee	84
Bergen	South Bergen	Garfield	0
Bergen	South Bergen	Hackensack	43
Bergen	South Bergen	Hasbrouck Heights	3
Bergen	South Bergen	Leonia	15
Bergen	South Bergen	Little Ferry	1
Bergen	South Bergen	Lodi	2
Bergen	South Bergen	Maywood	0
Bergen	South Bergen	North Hackensack	0
Bergen	South Bergen	Palisades Park	5
Bergen	South Bergen	Ridgefield	2
Bergen	South Bergen	Ridgefield Park	3
Bergen	South Bergen	Rochelle Park	0
Bergen	South Bergen	Saddle Brook	3
Bergen	South Bergen	South Hackensack	1
Bergen	South Bergen-Teaneck/Bergenfield	Bergenfield	207
Bergen	South Bergen-Teaneck/Bergenfield	Teaneck	696
Hudson	Hudson	Bayonne	23
Hudson	Hudson	Guttenberg	5
Hudson	Hudson	Hoboken	97
Hudson	Hudson	Jersey City	84
Hudson	Hudson	North Bergen	27
Hudson	Hudson	Secaucus	13
Hudson	Hudson	Union City	6
Hudson	Hudson	Weehawken	6
Hudson	Hudson	West New York	8
Morris	Morris and Passaic	Butler	4
Morris	Morris and Passaic	Kinnelon	10
Morris	Morris and Passaic	Lincoln Park	12
Morris	Morris and Passaic	Pequannock	1
Morris	Morris and Passaic	Pompton Plains	8
Morris	Morris and Passaic	Riverdale	4

County	Study Subregion	Town(s)	N
Passaic	Morris and Passaic	Bloomingdale	2
Passaic	Morris and Passaic	Haledon	4
Passaic	Morris and Passaic	Hawthorne	9
Passaic	Morris and Passaic	Little Falls	10
Passaic	Morris and Passaic	North Haledon	6
Passaic	Morris and Passaic	Paterson	9
Passaic	Morris and Passaic	Pompton Lakes	10
Passaic	Morris and Passaic	Prospect Park	1
Passaic	Morris and Passaic	Ringwood	7
Passaic	Morris and Passaic	Totowa	3
Passaic	Morris and Passaic	Wanaque	13
Passaic	Morris and Passaic	West Milford	7
Passaic	Morris and Passaic	Woodland Park	8
Passaic	Wayne	Wayne	126

SECTION 3

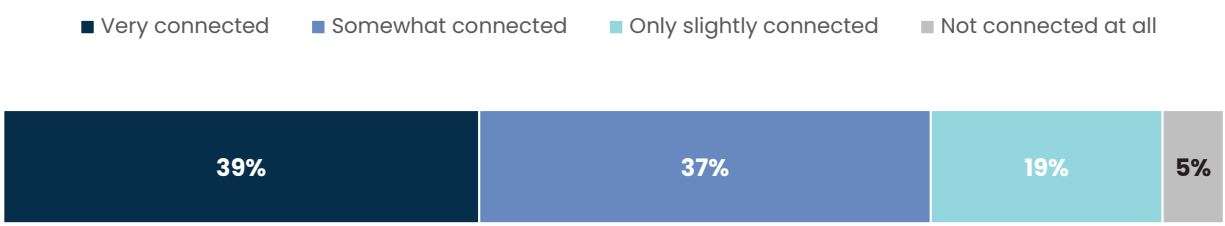
CONNECTIONS AND BARRIERS TO JEWISH LIFE IN NORTHERN NEW JERSEY

How respondents feel about the Northern New Jersey Jewish community—their sense of connection to it, the barriers to connection they identify, their interest in greater connection, and their sense of commonality with others—are critical to shaping the context in which the community operates.

FEELING CONNECTED TO THE NORTHERN NEW JERSEY JEWISH COMMUNITY

The study's survey results reveal important differences in how connected respondents feel to the Jewish community in Northern New Jersey (Exhibit 3.1). In total, three-quarters (76%) of respondents feel either very (39%) or somewhat (37%) connected to the community. The remainder feel otherwise, with two in ten feeling only slightly connected and one in twenty feeling not connected at all.

Exhibit 3.1: Feeling connected to Jewish community

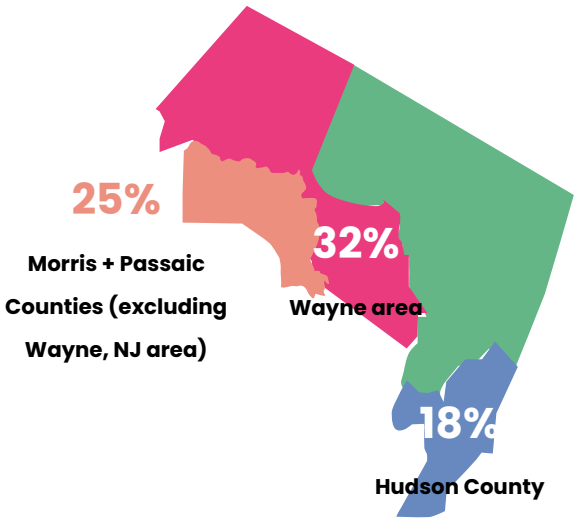


Feeling very connected to the community—which 39% of all respondents do—varies especially by region and denomination (Exhibit 3.2). Across regions, it is highest in Teaneck/Bergenfield (59% feel very connected) and lowest in Hudson County (just 18% feel very connected). By denominations, it is highest among Modern Orthodox respondents (62%) and lowest among those who identify as Just Jewish (17%).[11] In turn, feeling very connected to the community varies modestly by generation and current financial situation. Nearly half of Silent Generation respondents (48%) feel very connected compared to 28% of Gen Z respondents, while 44% of respondents who are living comfortably feel very connected compared to 28% of those just meeting or unable to meet their basic expenses. Feeling very connected varies little by gender (43% of men feel very connected vs. 38% of women).

[11] Geography and denomination overlap substantially. Teaneck/Bergenfield has the highest share of Modern Orthodox respondents, and Hudson County has the highest share of Just Jewish respondents.

Exhibit 3.2: Percentages feeling "very connected" to the Jewish community

REGION



59%
Teaneck/Bergenfield

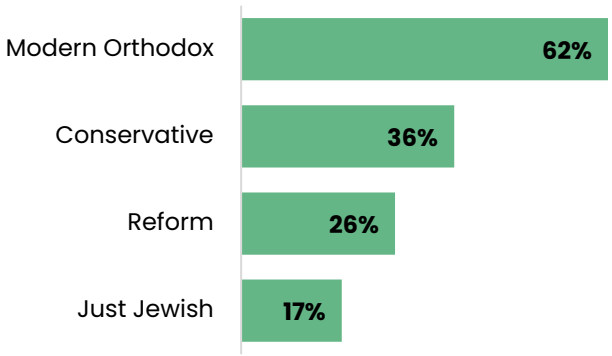
38%
Central Bergen

36%
East Bergen

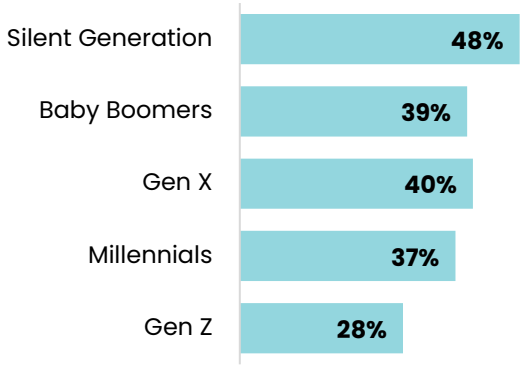
33%
Northwest Bergen

27%
North Central Bergen

JEWISH DENOMINATIONS



GENERATION



FINANCIAL STATUS

$$$
44%
Live comfortably

$$
39%
Meet basic expenses with extras

$
28%
Just meeting/can't meet basic

GENDER IDENTITY

♂ **43%** **MALE**

♀ **38%** **FEMALE**

DEFINING AND FINDING JEWISH COMMUNITY

Qualitative data collected in focus groups and interviews suggest that people generally define "community" in similar ways. They see Jewish community as an integrated Jewish social network, composed of people with shared values and experiences, that provides a support system and sense of belonging.

> "[Jewish community] means having a circle of friends and peers that share my … Jewish values. Having other Jewish friends. Having my kids know Jewish friends and community members, people that share our similar experiences going to synagogue, celebrating holidays, things like that. … It's definitely people focused, so friends of ours, our neighbors, and things like that. I do also [think about] images of synagogues, and places where people gather, Jewish community centers. It's very people focused." **—Parent of children under 5**

> "For me, Jewish community is kind of a built-in support network, in bad times and in good times. We always have a meal train at our shul for babies or shiva, [we] celebrate new engagements, [there are] people to be excited for your life events." **—Parent of children 6–13**

> "I guess I think of a shared sense of values and things that are important to people, whether that means family or traditions or holidays or community or food or like-minded activities, but I think shared inherent values, about what's important, both in a familial setting and a cultural setting and also social, world, and oftentimes hopefully political views."
> **—Parent of children under 5**

While often defining Jewish community in similar ways, people find it in very different places. Many qualitative data participants locate their community in synagogues.

> "I have a very strong bond to my synagogue, which has become stronger over time. … I used to feel like I was a cultural Jew, and now I am more involved in the religious life through my shul."
> **—Parent of children under 5**

For those identifying as Just Jewish, who are less likely to belong to a synagogue, finding community can be challenging, and several of them wondered in interviews where to find a sense of connection and belonging outside of a religious community.

> "I grew up in a lefty Jewish household and went to a lefty Jewish camp. Camp was community. I can't duplicate it here in any way. I would like community and I am jealous of the Orthodox community, but you have to conform. Honestly, I don't know where I fit in, where to look."
> **—Person identifying as Just Jewish**

However, some do find community elsewhere: in their children's schools, in other Jewish organizations, through working professionally in the Jewish community, or even simply in informal networks of neighbors, friends, and families.

> "In today's world it's such an insane concept to invite people for dinner, and we do it every week … and [it is] family socialization not just individual socializing. We meet up with friends but with Jewish families we meet up together as families and that feels special." **—Parent of child with disabilities**

> "In this area, because there's more Jewish families, you don't have the same need to connect through a synagogue. The [connection] is more organic and less religious, and so I think that's one of the reasons [for declining synagogue attendance]." **—Wayne resident**

Several qualitative data participants suggested that the large and diverse Jewish population of the area may actually work against a feeling of community and solidarity in two different ways. First, they noted that people in Northern New Jersey can feel Jewish presence and connection without actively participating in organized Jewish communities the way they must in smaller communities. Second, they noted that Jewish organizations in Northern New Jersey have less pressure on them to be broadly inclusive.

> "When we travel to bar and bat mitzvahs in other states where there are fewer Jews, the communities are more welcoming. But temples and synagogues here put you into boxes—in other places where there are not as many Jews, there is more integration, more blending." **—Parent of children 6–13**

BARRIERS TO CONNECTION

The six-in-ten survey respondents who said they feel somewhat, only slightly, or not at all connected to the community were asked about barriers to feeling more connected (Exhibit 3.3). The most commonly cited barriers were COVID-19 restrictions and safety measures, a lack of appealing programs, not having enough time, and the costs of participation.

A few substantial differences surfaced across segments of respondents:

- Boomers and Silent Generation respondents are modestly more likely to cite COVID-19 restrictions.
- Millennials and Gen X respondents, Modern Orthodox respondents, and respondents with children at home are modestly more likely to say they don't have enough time.
- Hudson County residents, Gen Z and Millennials, and those who are just meeting or can't meet their basic expenses are more likely to cite costs.

These findings are echoed in the qualitative data as well. COVID-19 restrictions (whether self- or externally imposed) were particularly burdensome to connections:

> "I am COVID phobic. I am vaccinated but I am very afraid of getting it. … We don't invite people over. I find it so isolating. I don't go to the gym, to shiurim, to shul. The first year, I took a lot of shiurim online, but it's not the same."
> **—Modern Orthodox empty nester**

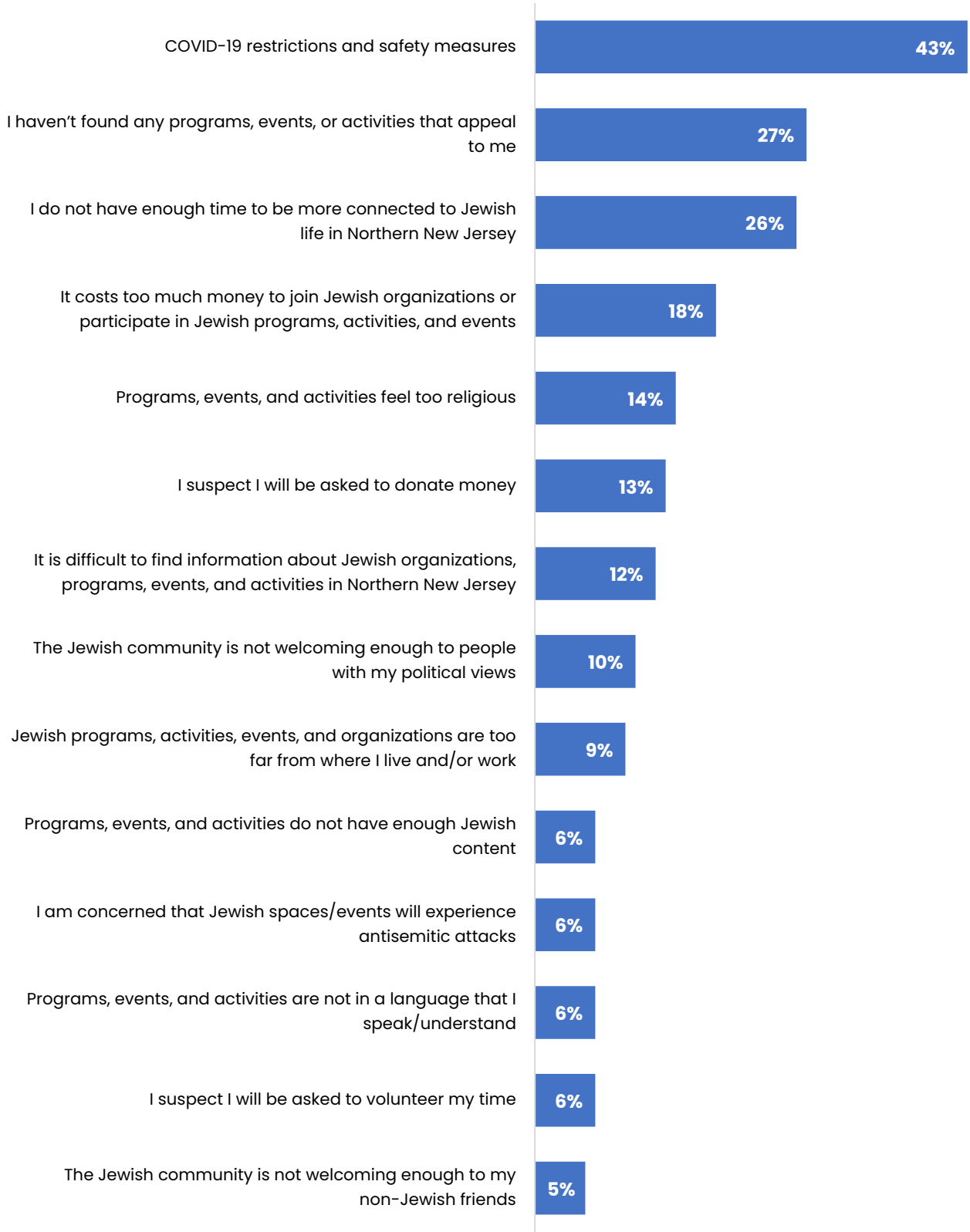
> "The men's group … stopped after the pandemic and it didn't seem like there was a real effort to revitalize that. I wonder if, with the pandemic, we've gotten so used to not going out that there's a big population of folks that just don't feel like doing the work of getting together again. … I don't blame anyone for being done with Zoom. But … it's so convenient to sit at your table at home, so that's handicapped the ability to revitalize the social in-person groups."
> **—Newcomer**

Additionally, other participants in the focus groups and interviews signaled how time and costs create barriers to their communal participation:

> "[I'm a] full time working mommy, and I work also outside of my full-time job, and my husband has a full-time job, so I think finding time in the actual day and the weekend to engage can be challenging. I know… probably everybody else says this, too, but if the time for the experiences don't line up, like with a nap time, it makes it challenging."
> **—Parent of children under 5**

> "The biggest downfall of our participation in the activities at the synagogue is a financial commitment, and it's a huge thing. I don't think that should be a determinant of why you do something, [but] unfortunately, it has to be." **—Wayne resident**

Exhibit 3.3: Barriers to feeling more connected to the Jewish community



Barriers Specific to Diverse Groups

Some respondents from diverse groups report barriers to feeling more connected that are distinct to their identities (Exhibit 3.4). About a third of respondents who are currently just meeting or can't meet their basic expenses said the Jewish community is not welcoming enough to Jews with limited financial means, and a third of LGBTQ+ respondents said the Jewish community is not welcoming enough to LGBTQ+ Jews. Roughly a fifth of intermarried/partnered respondents, respondents who have disabilities, respondents who have children with disabilities, and respondents who identify as People of Color cited similar barriers around their specific identities.

Exhibit 3.4: Specific barriers cited by diverse identity groups

37% **of respondents just meeting/unable to meet basic expenses:**
The Jewish community is not welcoming enough to Jews with limited financial means

34% **of LGBTQ+ respondents:**
The Jewish community is not welcoming enough to LGBTQ+ Jews

22% **of Intermarried/partnered respondents:**
The Jewish community is not welcoming enough to interfaith families or non-Jewish family members

21% **of respondents with disabilities:**
The Jewish community does not provide adequate accommodations for people with disabilities and special needs

18% **of respondents with children who have disabilities:**
The Jewish community does not provide adequate services for children with disabilities and special needs

17% **of respondents who identify as People of Color:**
The Jewish community is not welcoming enough to Jews of color

The focus groups and interviews supported these survey findings and, importantly, added to them. Among the qualitative data participants, the most commonly mentioned barriers to community were related to not feeling welcomed, comfortable, or included in Jewish spaces. In some cases, this results from people feeling they are not Jewish enough or not Jewish in

the right way; in other cases, it results from people feeling their financial status does not allow them to donate enough or to pay to attend special community events.

Some qualitative data participants reported experiencing cliquishness when they explored new synagogues or other communal organizations. Several mentioned a culture of materialism that turned them off from schools or other organizations they had engaged with. In some cases, these sentiments were confirmed by "insiders" who complained that their own communities aren't inclusive enough or flexible enough to welcome newcomers, especially new generations of Jews.

> "One of the things that keeps me from being involved in some things is that there is a kind of cliquishness in the Orthodox community in Teaneck. A lot of it is age-cohort related. They all know each other, and I feel left out." **—Retiree**

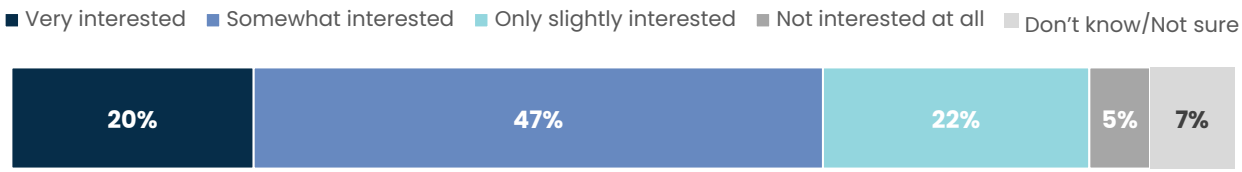
> "With the local Jewish [Boy Scouts of America] scouting community, there's always been this discomfort as a Reform Jew in Bergen County. And not everybody acts that way, but you're never sure when you walk into a room if you're going to be Jewish enough." **—Parent of children with disabilities**

> "I would like [the community] to be more fluid and more inclusive. My shul happens to be very inclusive. But I think religiously … especially the young people, they are not as Orthodox, and there is a feeling they have no place to go because they are not Orthodox enough. At some shuls, if you are not exactly like them, they tend to be not accepting and that pushed (slightly less observant) people [out]. **—Modern Orthodox empty nesters**

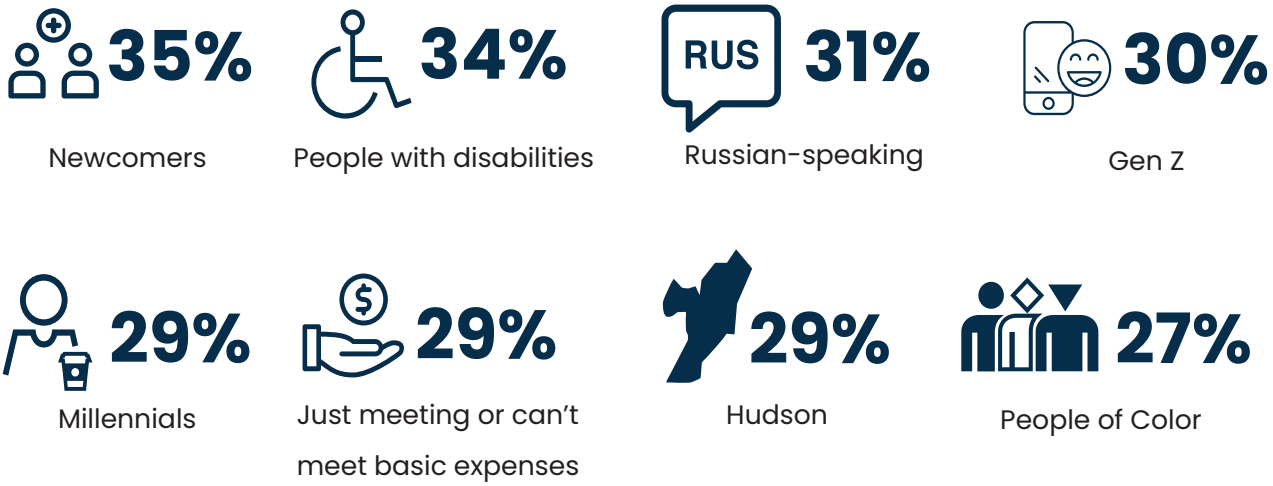
INTEREST IN STRONGER CONNECTIONS TO COMMUNITY

Respondents who felt somewhat, only slightly, or not at all connected to the community were asked about their interest in becoming more connected to the community (Exhibit 3.5).
A strategic opportunity exists among the two-thirds of them who indicated they were very or somewhat interested in being more connected. Of particular note are certain segments with a higher share of those who are "very interested" in being more connected compared to the overall sample (20%), including Russian-speaking respondents, respondents new to the community, respondents with disabilities, Gen Z and Millennials, those just or not meeting their basic expenses, Hudson County respondents, and respondents who identify as People of Color.

Exhibit 3.5: Interest in becoming more connected to the Jewish community



PERCENTAGE VERY INTERESTED IN BECOMING MORE CONNECTED TO THE JEWISH COMMUNITY



Connection and Commitment

Many participants in the qualitative research also expressed interest in being more connected to Jewish community, but that interest in connection is often paired with a deep ambivalence about the kind of commitment necessary to truly cultivate it. They often experience stiff competition for greater commitment from many sources, starting with their own interests outside of the Jewish world. Some have spouses who do not fully support having a Jewish home (which was present in both intra- and intermarried households). For others, their children's interests and goals, particularly around academics and athletics, create tensions. And sometimes, just living in secular environments distracts from Jewish practice and engagement.

> "… And my husband [who is not Jewish] has backed off his promises to let me raise my son Jewish as he gets older, but that pride of being Jewish is still in me, and I always wanted my son to marry someone Jewish, but how can I be a hypocrite when I didn't marry someone Jewish?" **—Wayne resident**

> "I would like to be more involved. I truly believe it's not because of the unavailability of things. There are plenty of programs and opportunities. My excuse has always been time. … My husband and I and my daughter are all active in the community, I volunteer, there's always something pulling our attention and time, and we've not been so good at allotting that for Jewish connection." **—Wayne resident**

Interest in connecting to Jewish community also ebbs and flows with stage of life. Several of the young adult participants reported not being very involved in Jewish community right now, as they focus on careers, housing, and finding life partners, but expected to reinvolve themselves in the future.

> "I know the Federation is there, I know where to go for stuff, but right now it's just a lack of time and scheduling. We just don't have time to do a lot more, but I don't feel disconnected from it, I'm just not accessing it right now. My priorities are a little different. But I feel part of this larger whole and this bigger community, and I know I can access things when I'm ready."
> **—Hudson County young adult**

On the other side of childrearing were retirees and empty nesters who have both newly freed schedules and increased desire for social interactions. As the previous communities they formed around schools and children dissipate and others in their cohort move away, many in these groups have revived interests in connecting to community in new ways.

> "Once my last kid left the house, it's extremely different. I don't have those opportunities to see people in the community—for example, in the school, Federation, shul. Those opportunities are gone or maybe I don't make them for myself. A lot of building Jewish community was through my children." **—Modern Orthodox empty nester**

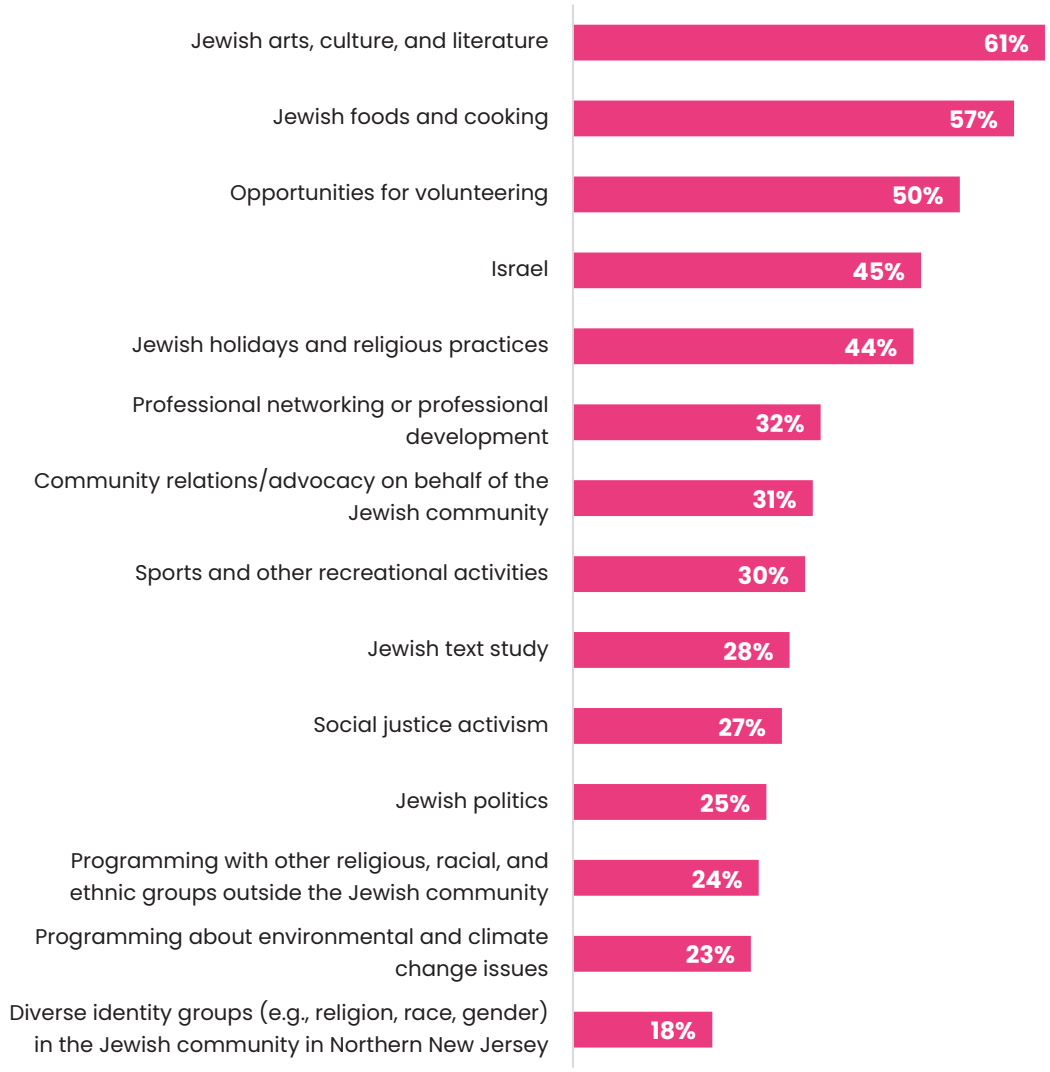
> "Our synagogue has beautiful stained glass. After I retired, I work on stained glass with the artist. I never would have had the time to do something like that. I never knew I would love something like that." **—Retiree**

> "I used to be out a lot at night with my work. Once I retired, the shul asked me to be part of the law committee. This drew me back into participation. … Federation announced a women's mission to Israel in [the] fall. Fall was always my busy work season. I would never have been able to do that while working. I am signing up." **—Retiree**

PROGRAMMING: CONTENT AND CONNECTION

Respondents who indicated they are very or somewhat interested in stronger connections to the community were asked to identify a series of program topics and activities that would interest them (Exhibit 3.6). Topping the list are Jewish arts, culture, and literature; Jewish cooking; and volunteer opportunities—all programming interests repeated in the qualitative data. To a lesser extent, the focus groups and interviews also revealed interest in Ulpan/Hebrew courses and Jewish history, including local Jewish history.

Exhibit 3.6: Interest in programs and activities, among those very or somewhat interested in stronger connections to the Jewish community



Again, among those who are very or somewhat interested in stronger connections to the community generally, some groups were asked about programming specifically for themselves (Exhibit 3.7). Older adults show the most interest in such programming, followed by parents and young adults. The least interest in programming—for single adults—was among those who are not married or partnered. Qualitative data support the survey findings. In interviews, communal professionals confirmed the popularity of programming among older adults, especially around arts and culture—for example, lectures, author events, and art classes—while in focus groups, older adults indicated a general desire for social connections through programming. In other focus groups and interviews, parents revealed interest in family events and events for parents and children, especially with opportunities for the adults to connect to each other.

Exhibit 3.7: Interest in programming among specific groups of respondents among those very or somewhat interested in stronger connections to the Jewish community

64% **of respondents ages 70+:**
Programming for older adults

59% **of respondents with children:**
Programming for parents and their children together

46% **of respondents with children:**
Programming for children

44% **of respondents with children:**
Programming for the parents of children (without their children)

51% **of respondents ages 40 and younger:**
Programming for young adults

28% **of respondents ages 40 and younger:**
Leadership development programs for young adults

13% **of respondents not married or partnered:**
Programming for single adults

Several important themes about the connective power of programming and events emerged in the qualitative data. Many participants mentioned holiday celebrations and challah bakes as examples of events they might be interested in attending. These kinds of events generally have low or no barriers to entry, both cost- and knowledge-wise. They ideally contain some light learning in a mostly fun-oriented environment, and they center Jewish identity and ritual without requiring deep commitment or knowledge. Additionally, they provide informal opportunities for social connection that can either build on existing friendships or serve as a comfortable basis to start getting to know people.

> "The things I feel like are missing are the big joyous celebrations of holidays. There's a synagogue in South Orange that had a huge kegger for Purim, it was all adults, everyone dressed up, and it was really Jewish and really fun and really rowdy! With the population of young adults we have, I'd love to see more of that … more opportunities to really experience the joy in that way." **—Hudson County young adult**

While some survey respondents point to a lack of interesting programming as a barrier to participation, the qualitative data participants suggested that the content of programming may sometimes be less important than the social connections that programming can reinforce or foster. Whether a potential participant can expect to encounter friends or acquaintances at a program, or can expect to make more than a passing connection with someone new, can be powerful motivation for attending. One young adult from Hudson County confessed that when she did Jewish event coordinating at one time, she would choose events she thought were likely to attract other young women because she wanted to make more Jewish women friends. Similarly, a community professional who works with families with young children observed that Friday Shabbat in the park is a particularly popular event:

> "I feel this entire thing is relationship building. That's what people want, to do things with their friends, do things together, and if we can throw in a little Jewish, why not? That's why Fridays at the park are so successful." **—Jewish communal professional**

Programming is deeply intertwined with social connections, and programming that either capitalizes on existing social networks or centers the development of new social connections may be most likely to attract participants.

FEELINGS OF COMMONALITY WITHIN AND ACROSS DENOMINATIONS

A final aspect of community connections and barriers revolves around the sense of commonality respondents have with one another. One important finding from the survey is how **many** Orthodox, Conservative, and Reform respondents feel they have "a lot" in common (as opposed to some, not much, or nothing at all in common) with those who share their denominational identity, but how **few** feel they have "a lot" in common with the others outside their denomination.

In Exhibit 3.8, Panel A, more than four in five Orthodox respondents (83%) and about two in three Conservative (67%) and Reform (69%) respondents feel they have "a lot" in common **with Jews in their denomination**. But that strong feeling of commonality declines for those in other denominations, with no more than a third—and in some cases far less than that—feeling they have "a lot" in common **with others**. Among Orthodox respondents, 23% said they have a lot in common with Conservative Jews and 10% said they have a lot in common with Reform Jews. Among Conservative respondents, 13% said they have a lot in common with Orthodox Jews and 34% said they have a lot in common with Reform Jews. Among Reform respondents, 3% said they have a lot in common with Orthodox Jews and 22% said they have a lot in common with Conservative Jews. And among Just Jewish respondents, about a quarter said they have a lot in common with Conservative and Reform Jews (23% and 28%, respectively) and 13% said they have a lot in common with Orthodox Jews.

If few respondents say they have "a lot" in common with those outside their denomination, how do most of them feel towards their counterparts in other denominations? As Panel B shows, in most cases, the majority or plurality[12] of respondents in a particular denomination say they have "some" in common with others, a sort of middle-ground feeling toward others. For example, more than half of Orthodox respondents (54%) and Reform respondents (60%) say they have "some" in common with Conservative Jews. Similarly, about half of Conservative respondents say they have "some" in common with Orthodox Jews (48%) and Reform Jews (51%), and about half of Just Jewish respondents say they have "some" in common with Conservative (52%) and Reform Jews (47%). These majorities and pluralities present opportunities for bridge building across denominations.

[12] A majority refers to more than half of respondents (or a subset of respondents) selecting one response option out of all the options offered. A plurality refers to the most common response option selected when no response option reaches a majority.

However, there are more troubling exceptions evident in Panel C. Majorities of Reform (70%) and Just Jewish respondents (54%) say they have "not much/nothing at all" in common with Orthodox Jews, while close to half of Orthodox respondents (45%) say they have "not much/nothing at all" in common with Reform Jews.

Exhibit 3.8: Feeling of commonality within and across denominations

Panel A: *Percent who feel they have **"a lot"** in common with:*	Orthodox respondents	Conservative respondents	Reform respondents	Just Jewish respondents
Orthodox Jews	**83%**	13%	3%	13%
Conservative Jews	23%	**67%**	22%	23%
Reform Jews	10%	34%	**69%**	28%

Panel B: *Percent who feel they have **"some"** in common with:*	Orthodox respondents	Conservative respondents	Reform respondents	Just Jewish respondents
Orthodox Jews	15%	**48%**	28%	33%
Conservative Jews	**54%**	29%	**60%**	**52%**
Reform Jews	45%	**51%**	28%	**47%**

Panel C: *Percent who feel they have **"not much"** or **"nothing at all"** in common with:*	Orthodox respondents	Conservative respondents	Reform respondents	Just Jewish respondents
Orthodox Jews	2%	40%	**70%**	**54%**
Conservative Jews	24%	3%	17%	25%
Reform Jews	**45%**	15%	4%	24%

The qualitative data suggest some community members are looking for ways to address the cross-denominational differences surfacing in the survey data. The focus groups and interviews revealed that participants want more pluralistic Jewish events, and they expressed a desire for various Jewish organizations, including synagogues of different denominations, to work together to find ways to forge unity across denominational difference. The types of events mentioned above—low barrier; fun; focused on light learning, Jewish identity, and social connections, not deep commitments or knowledge—might serve as potential points of connection across some denominations that many seem to be looking for.

SECTION 4

ENGAGEMENT WITH COMMUNAL ORGANIZATIONS

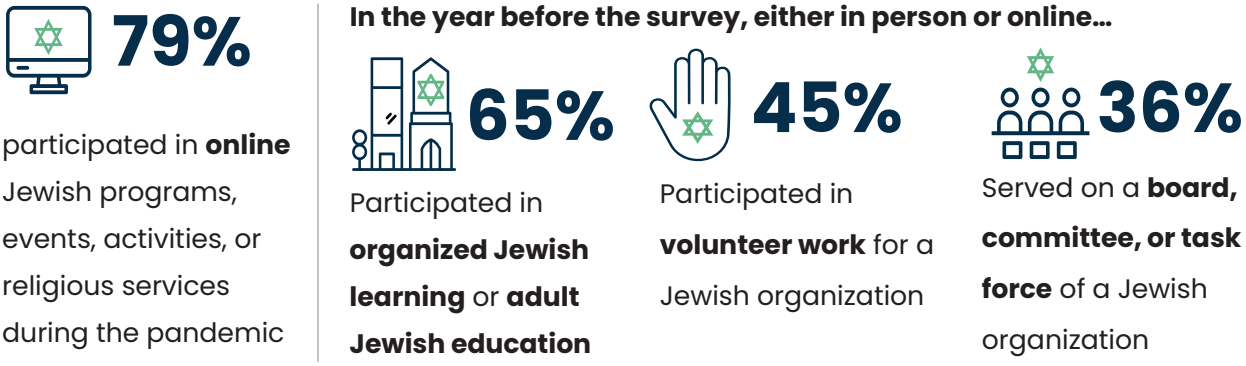
The Northern New Jersey Jewish community has many communal organizations, offering community members numerous options for engagement. From synagogues, schools, and JCCs to human service agencies and advocacy groups, there are numerous ways for Jews and their families to be part of the Jewish institutional landscape. However, levels of engagement vary, with respondents in different regions and with different characteristics having, in some cases, substantial differences in how involved they are with Jewish organizations and institutions.

FORMS OF INSTITUTIONAL ENGAGEMENT

Religious organizations and activities are primary ways respondents engage in Jewish community, with nearly four in five (78%) reporting they or someone else in their household is a member of a synagogue, temple, or independent minyan, and three in five (59%) attending religious services at least once a month before the COVID-19 pandemic started. In interviews and focus groups, respondents reported finding a sense of community through religious organizations and appreciating the welcoming and inclusive spirit of their congregations, and the programming options and events provided.

The survey revealed that multiple forms of Jewish engagement continued during the pandemic, often facilitated by online access (Exhibit 4.1). Indeed, nearly four-in-five respondents said they participated in online Jewish programs, events, or religious services during the pandemic. Additionally, two-thirds said they participated in organized Jewish learning or adult Jewish education, just under half engaged in volunteer work for a Jewish organization, and about a third served on a board, committee, or task force of a Jewish organization—either in person or online—in the year before the survey, most of which fell during the pandemic.[13]

Exhibit 4.1: Jewish engagement during the pandemic

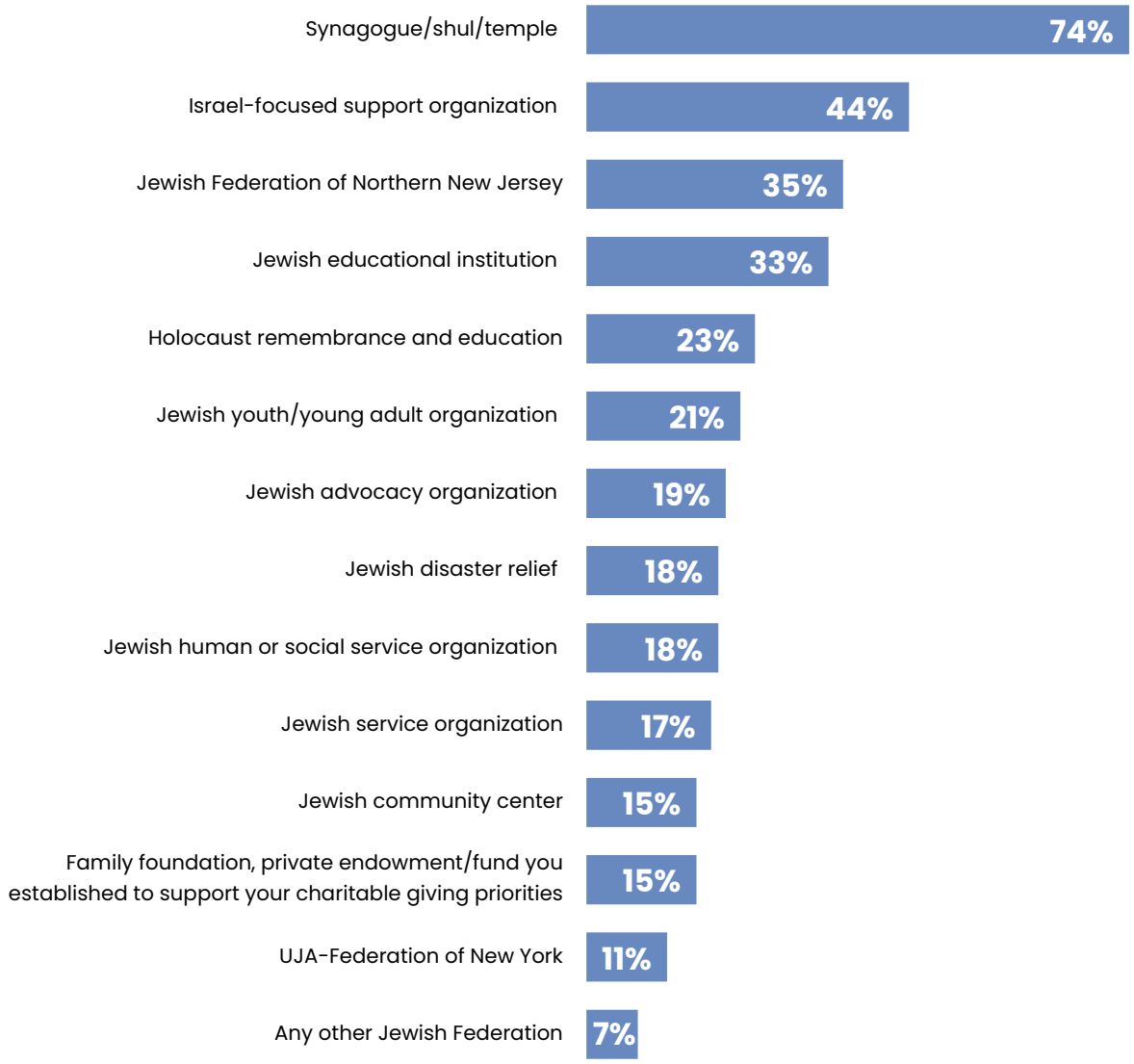


[13] The Covid-19 pandemic started in March 2020. The survey was fielded in January 2022.

Charitable Contributions

Charitable contributions were strong during the pandemic, with 81% of respondents reporting they donated to a Jewish organization or cause in the year before the survey and 58% reporting they donated to a non-Jewish organization or cause. Among donors to Jewish organizations or causes, the most commonly supported are synagogues (above and beyond membership dues and building fund commitments), followed by Israel-focused support organizations, Jewish Federation of Northern New Jersey, and Jewish educational institutions (Exhibit 4.2).

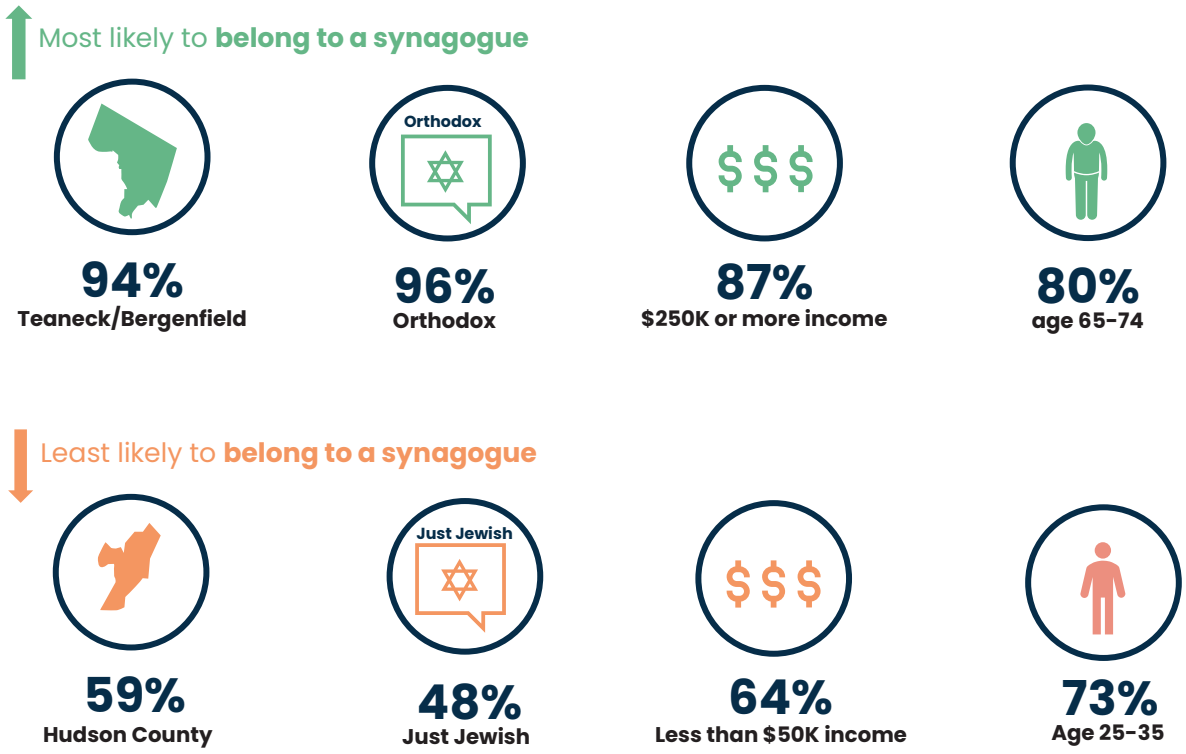
Exhibit 4.2: Charitable contributions among donors to Jewish organizations and causes



VARIATIONS IN JEWISH ENGAGEMENT

Jewish engagement tends to vary across Northern New Jersey, but not always in the same ways or to the same degree, as the three examples below demonstrate. To begin, synagogue membership varies by geography, denomination, and income (Exhibit 4.3). It is most common in Teaneck/ Bergenfield, among Orthodox respondents (many of whom live in Teaneck/Bergenfield), and among higher-income respondents; and it is least common in Hudson County, among Just Jewish respondents, and at lower-income levels. In contrast, synagogue membership varies little by age.

Exhibit 4.3: Variations in Jewish engagement: synagogue membership

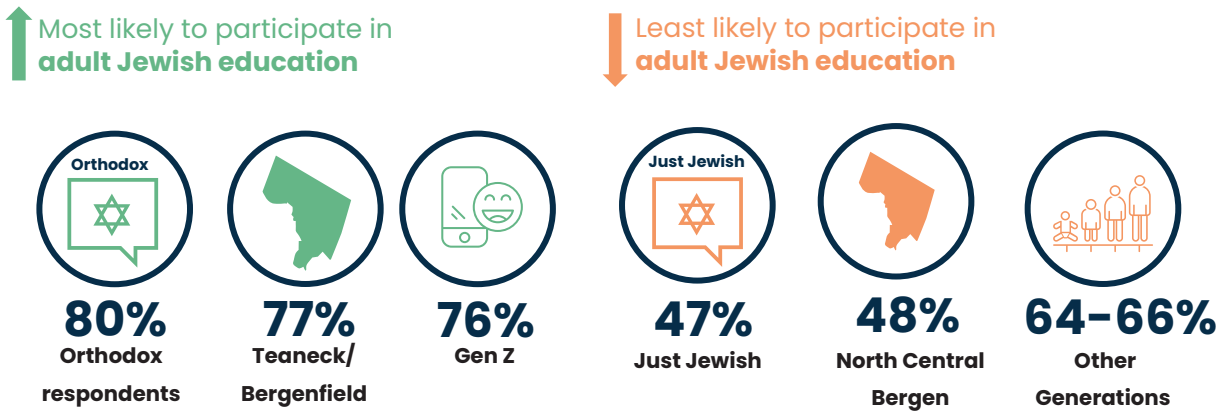


Charitable donations (Exhibit 4.4) fit the same denominational, income, and geographic patterns—most likely among respondents in Teaneck/Bergenfield, Orthodox respondents, and higher-income respondents (household income $250K+) and least likely among respondents who identify as Just Jewish, residents of Hudson County, and lower-income respondents (household income less than $50K). But here there are important generational differences, too, ranging from 90% among Silent Generation respondents (the oldest generation) to just 58% among Gen Z respondents (the youngest generation).

Exhibit 4.4: Variations in Jewish engagement: donations to Jewish causes

Lastly, participation in adult Jewish education (Exhibit 4.5) fits the same denominational pattern—most likely among Orthodox respondents and least likely among Just Jewish respondents—and is also the most likely in Teaneck/Bergenfield. But unlike donations to Jewish causes, participation in adult Jewish education is least likely, geographically, in North Central Bergen (not Hudson County). It is also elevated among Gen Z respondents, but steady across all other generations, and it does not vary by income level.

Exhibit 4.5: Variations in Jewish engagement: adult Jewish education



Sidebar: Moishe House and Chabad

While many communal organizations were discussed at some point in interviews and focus groups, qualitative data illustrate two organizations that seem to be doing a good job of meeting a variety of Jews where they're at: Moishe House and Chabad. These organizations may offer clues to the kind of low-barrier engagement many are looking for. Both organizations manage to provide low-barrier programming and events—the kind that don't require membership or particular forms of Jewish knowledge or practice—and simultaneously inspire repeated attendance that can help forge meaningful social connections.

Moishe House provides events and activities for young adults that connect them with other Jews, but in fun and "cool" ways that many secular Jewish young adults do not associate with synagogues.

> "Sometimes I'd see some of my close friends who were Moishe House Hoboken attendees that I went to Hebrew school with, and sometimes people I'd just met at other events and kept seeing and got closer with, and also new people. So I never felt there was any judgment, you could come as much or little as you wanted, and it was an environment that was very welcoming to new people in addition to fostering relations for those who already know each other." **—Hudson County young adult**

Chabad, in turn, provides fun and educational activities for families and young children that expose children to many of the things that Jewish parents report wanting for their children, without requiring extensive commitment, membership dues, or high levels of Jewish knowledge or observance.

> "I know people balk at Chabad in a way because of some of their shtick and rhetoric. But we have found them to be super understanding and nonjudgmental, not pushy. And really accepting of everyone wherever they are on the Jewish spectrum, which is really important to us."
> **—Parent of children under 5**

Whatever the trade-offs are, the strategies of these organizations are aligned with the desires for Jewish connection, community, and commitment described in the preceding section. Chabad, in particular, was referred to fondly by some—including interfaith, Russian-speaking, and Israeli respondents—who have not been able to find a comfortable Jewish community in other places they've looked.

SECTION 5

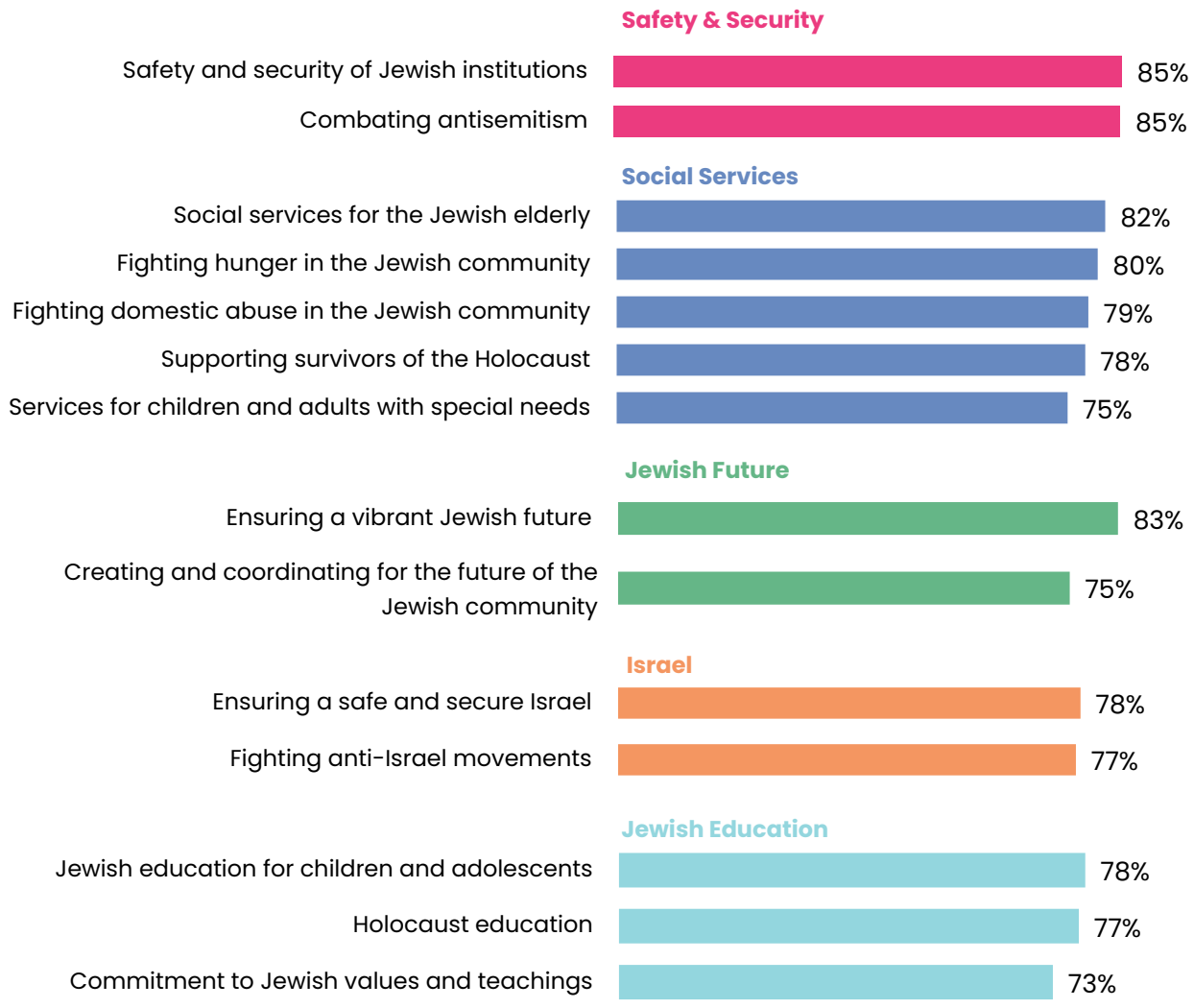
PRIORITIES FOR FUNDING AND PROGRAMMING

Like Jewish communities everywhere, the Jewish community of Northern New Jersey broadly, and its institutional representatives specifically, face decisions about how to utilize communal resources. While many factors bear on which issues and programs are ultimately supported, decisions may be informed (though not necessarily determined) by the opinions of community members.

FUNDING PRIORITIES

Given the opportunity to weigh in on what causes are very important for the community to fund respondents selected safety and security locally and in Israel, social and human service needs for vulnerable populations, planning for the Jewish future, Jewish education broadly defined, and Holocaust education (Exhibit 5.1).

Exhibit 5.1: Percent of respondents who said it is very important* to fund:



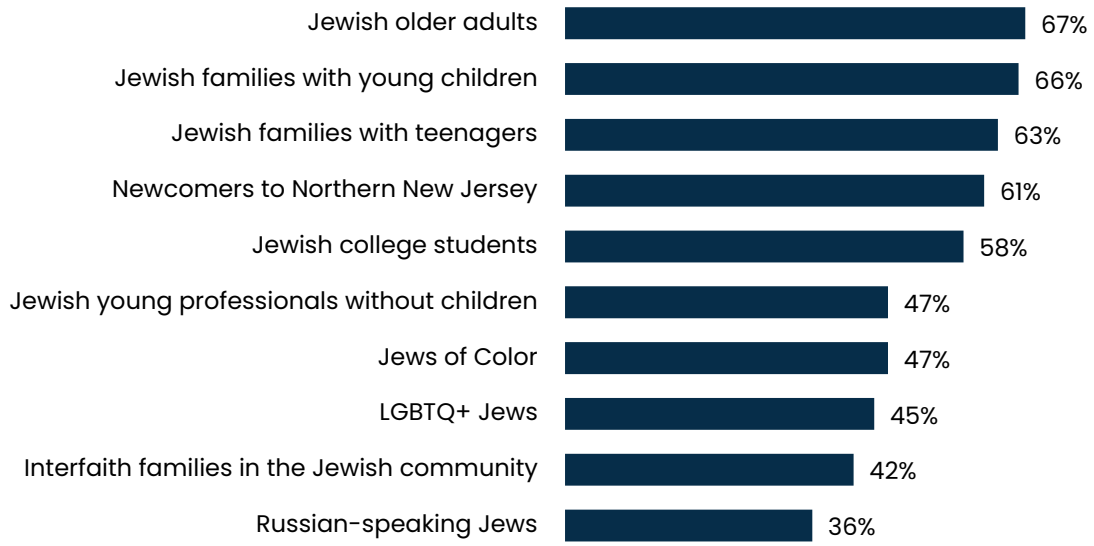
As opposed to somewhat, only slightly, or not at all important

Notably, respondents expressed less enthusiasm, by about 20% percentage points, for funding specific forms of formal and informal Jewish education—summer camps, educational trips to Israel, and day school—than about Jewish education for children generally. Other second-tier priorities include additional selected social and human service needs locally; selected human service needs overseas; financial support for participation in Jewish organizations and programs; and community relations with other ethnic, religious, and racial groups (see Appendix 5.1 for a full listing of respondents' funding priorities). While focus group and interview participants were not asked directly about funding priorities, several respondents spontaneously offered that they wished there was more training and education to prepare Jewish teens for anti-Israel sentiment and activism generally and on college campuses particularly.

Funding for Specific Groups

Respondents were also asked about funding for programs, activities, and events for groups within the community defined by age, life stage, identity, and other factors (Exhibit 5.2). They said it was very important—again, as opposed to somewhat, only slightly, or not at all important—to fund programs for older adults, families with young children and teenagers, newcomers to the community, and college students. They were less supportive of funding for other groups, including young professionals without children and several diverse identity groups. In general, respondents are more likely to support funding for *causes* than for specific *groups of people*.

Exhibit 5.2: Percent of respondents who said it is very important* to fund programs, activities, and events for …



**As opposed to somewhat, only slightly, or not at all important*

In some cases, though not all, priorities for programming are strongly shaped by group interest. For example, more LGBTQ+, intermarried, Israeli, and Russian-speaking respondents say it is very important to fund programs for their groups than others do. Similarly, more Modern Orthodox respondents say it is very important to fund Jewish day school education than respondents in other denominations. In addition, several parents in interviews and focus groups were quite enthusiastic about increased support for summer camp, both for families like themselves and for the camps serving them.

In some instances, though, there are fewer differences in funding priorities across different groups of respondents. For example, respondents who are economically vulnerable are only modestly more likely to favor funding financial aid for communal participation, even though, as Section 11 will show, they are much more likely to report that financial costs prevent them from communal participation. In addition, prioritizing social services and programs for older adults varies little by age among all respondents except the youngest generation, Gen Z, which is less likely to prioritize funding services for older adults.

APPENDIX 5.1: PERCENTAGE OF RESPONDENTS WHO SAID IT IS "VERY IMPORTANT" TO FUND THE FOLLOWING CAUSES

Providing for the safety and security of Jewish institutions	85%
Combating antisemitism	85%
Ensuring a vibrant Jewish future	83%
Supporting social services for the Jewish elderly	82%
Fighting hunger in the Jewish community	80%
Fighting domestic abuse in the Jewish community	79%
Supporting Jewish education for children and adolescents	78%
Supporting survivors of the Holocaust	78%
Ensuring a safe and secure Israel	78%
Supporting Holocaust education	77%
Fighting anti-Israel movements (e.g., BDS—Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions)	77%
Supporting services for children and adults with special needs	75%
Creating and coordinating for the future of the Jewish community	75%
Commitment to Jewish values and teachings (e.g., tzedakah [charity], tikkun olam [repairing the world], gemilut hasadim [good deeds])	73%
Fighting addiction in the Jewish community	68%
Supporting the people of Israel	65%
Financial aid for participation in Jewish organizations and programs	63%
Outreach and engagement to college and post-college groups	60%
Supporting Jewish camp for youth and teens	60%
Supporting educational trips to Israel	59%
Jewish community relations with other ethnic, religious, and racial groups	57%
Supporting social, recreational, and cultural activities for Jews	57%
Supporting Jewish day school education	55%
Helping Jews overseas who are in distress	54%
Supporting individual and family counseling with Jewish providers	52%
Helping at-risk and abused youth in Israel	42%
Creating close personal relationships with Israeli youth	38%

SECTION 6

EDUCATING CHILDREN

Critical to the generational continuity of Jewish communities are the Jewish educational experiences parents provide to their children. It is therefore important to understand the factors that go into how parents make decisions about their children's Jewish education, and the sociodemographic and Jewish characteristics that shape Jewish educational choices.

JEWISH EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCES FOR CHILDREN AGES 0-5

Opportunities for Jewish educational experiences begin for children at very young ages. Among survey respondents with children currently in their households, majorities have enrolled a child in Jewish-sponsored childcare, in preschool or early childhood education (ECE), [14] and in PJ Library (Exhibit 6.1).[15] Qualitative data also revealed the popularity of PJ Library with many parents.

Exhibit 6.1: Parents with children currently in their households

64%

Have enrolled a child in Jewish-sponsored childcare

78%

Have enrolled in Jewish preschool or early childhood education

63%

Have participated in PJ Library

In the focus groups and interviews, participants frequently mentioned that early exposure to Jewish learning and social experiences is crucial to the development of a strong Jewish identity and a continued interest in Judaism throughout childhood and into adulthood. This was noted by parents of teenagers looking back at their children's earliest Jewish educational experiences as well as parents of young children looking forward. One parent,

[14] Childcare is typically, though not exclusively, for younger children (e.g., infants and toddlers) and focuses mostly on the basic care and supervision of children. Preschool and ECE programs are typically, though again not exclusively, for slightly older children (prior to their enrollment in elementary school) and have a greater emphasis on the educational development of children in addition to care and supervision. Jewish-sponsored childcare, preschool, and ECE programs include Jewish content.

[15] "PJ Library sends free, award-winning books that celebrate Jewish values and culture to families with children from birth through 12 years old." https://pjlibrary.org/home.

already thinking about Jewish educational experiences for her newborn child, laid out a fairly comprehensive statement of where they wanted their child's Jewish education to lead:

> "When my child grows up, I want her to have a connection to Judaism, whatever that looks like for her. Know what the holidays are and why we are celebrating them. Know about Jewish history … modern Jewish history, and the struggle of Jews and Holocaust education and things like that. And we hope that she would also have her own Jewish community. I think fundamentally education and Jewish pride and a connection to Judaism would be our priorities." **—Parent of child under 5**

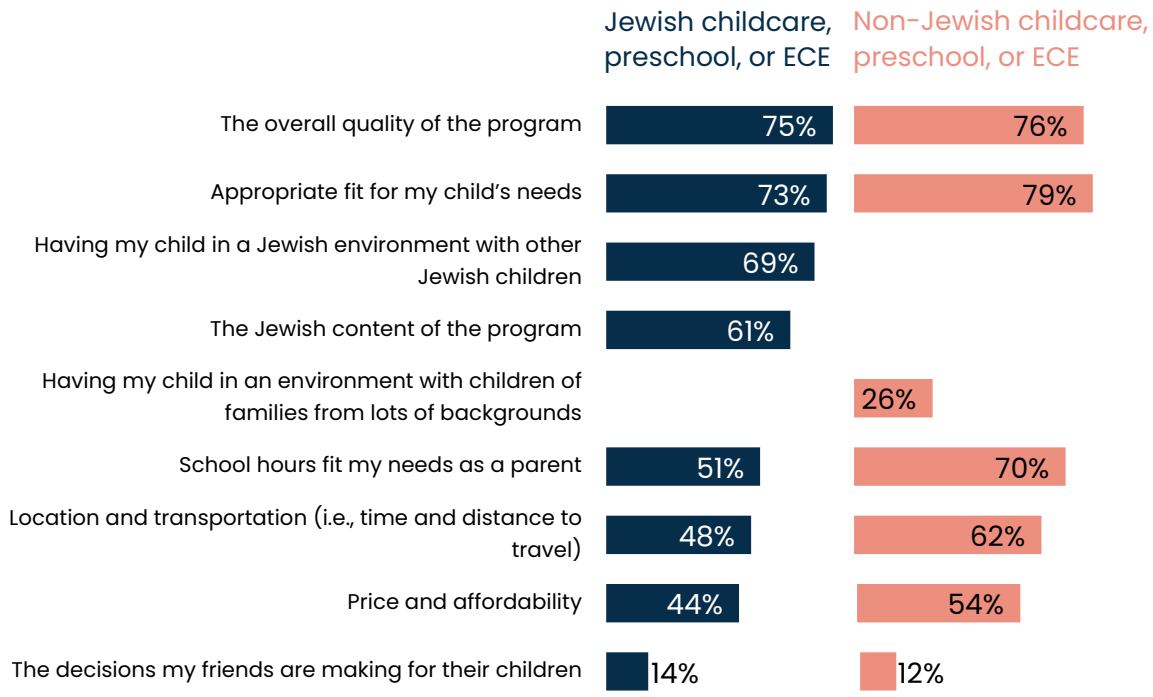
Of course, not all respondents have enrolled their young children in childcare, preschool, or early childhood education under Jewish auspices. Among those who have not, more than half (57%) enrolled them in a non-Jewish childcare, preschool, or ECE program.[16]

Factors in Parents' Childcare, Preschool, and ECE Decisions

Various factors play a role in why parents choose Jewish or other childcare, preschool, or ECE programs (Exhibit 6.2). For parents with children in a Jewish program, overall quality of the program and an appropriate fit for their child's needs are the most important factors, followed by the program's Jewish environment and content. Time, affordability, and location play lesser roles. For parents who have chosen a non-Jewish childcare, preschool, or ECE program, overall quality of the program and an appropriate fit for their child's needs are also the most important factors; but time, affordability, and location play a larger role for them than for parents with children in Jewish programs. A diverse environment with families from many backgrounds plays a small role for parents in non-Jewish programs, and neither set of parents indicated they are much influenced by their friends' decisions.

[16] The survey did not ask alternative childcare or educational arrangements among respondents who did not enroll their children in either Jewish or other preschool or ECE programs.

Exhibit 6.2: Percentage of respondents who said the following factors are "very important"* in their decision to enroll their child(ren) in a Jewish childcare, preschool, or ECE program



** As opposed to somewhat, only slightly, or not at all important*

In interviews, some parents, particularly those in Hudson County, expressed interest in Jewish ECE programs but reported not finding any nearby or needing care for their children for longer hours than synagogue-based ECE programs near them were offering.

JEWISH EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCES FOR CHILDREN AGES 6-17

As children get older, forms of Jewish education multiply to meet different needs (Exhibit 6.3). Among respondents with children ages 6-17 in their household, nearly two-thirds (63%) said they have enrolled a child or children in full-time Jewish day school or yeshiva, followed closely by 59% of respondents who have sent a child or children to a Jewish day camp. About a third of respondents with children ages 10–17 have provided private Jewish tutoring for a bar or bat mitzvah and about a third have enrolled their children in an organized Jewish youth group. Among respondents with the oldest children, ages 14–17, about a quarter have sent their children on organized teen travel to Israel, and about a sixth have enrolled them in post-bar/bat mitzvah Jewish education.

Exhibit 6.3: Percentage of respondents who have enrolled children in …

Have children ages 6–17 in household	Full-time Jewish day school or yeshiva	**63%**
	Jewish day camp	**59%**
	Jewish overnight camp (including outside Northern New Jersey)	**45%**
	Part-time synagogue-based religious school	**29%**
Have children ages 10–17 in household	Private Jewish tutoring or learning for a bar or bat mitzvah	**37%**
	Organized Jewish youth group	**34%**
Have children ages 14–17 in household	Organized teen travel to Israel	**27%**
	Post–bar/bat mitzvah part-time Jewish education	**17%**

A majority of parents in interviews and focus groups who have not sent and/or do not plan to send children to Jewish day schools have enrolled their children in part-time Hebrew school, where they hope their children experience Jewish learning and forge peer networks that will ensure a vibrant Jewish social life for them. While this succeeded for many, others said they had trouble finding a Hebrew school that was a good fit for their children. Still other qualitative data participants spoke with some frustration about families opting for private bar or bat mitzvah tutors or even private Hebrew school in place of joining synagogues and sending their children to the Hebrew schools there, highlighting tensions between individual and institutional interests and needs.

> "One of the biggest troubles is a lot of people are now doing Jewish tutors [or private Hebrew school]. … There's a temple not far from us and we thought everyone in town would join that temple and it would be a community for the kids. … [But] as people pull out and do these little private groups, it puts strain on us. … We were ready to join something this year, but we haven't because … he's not going to do something if all his friends are doing something else."
> **—Parent of children 6–13**

Factors in Parents' Decision about Jewish Educational Experiences for Children Ages 6-17

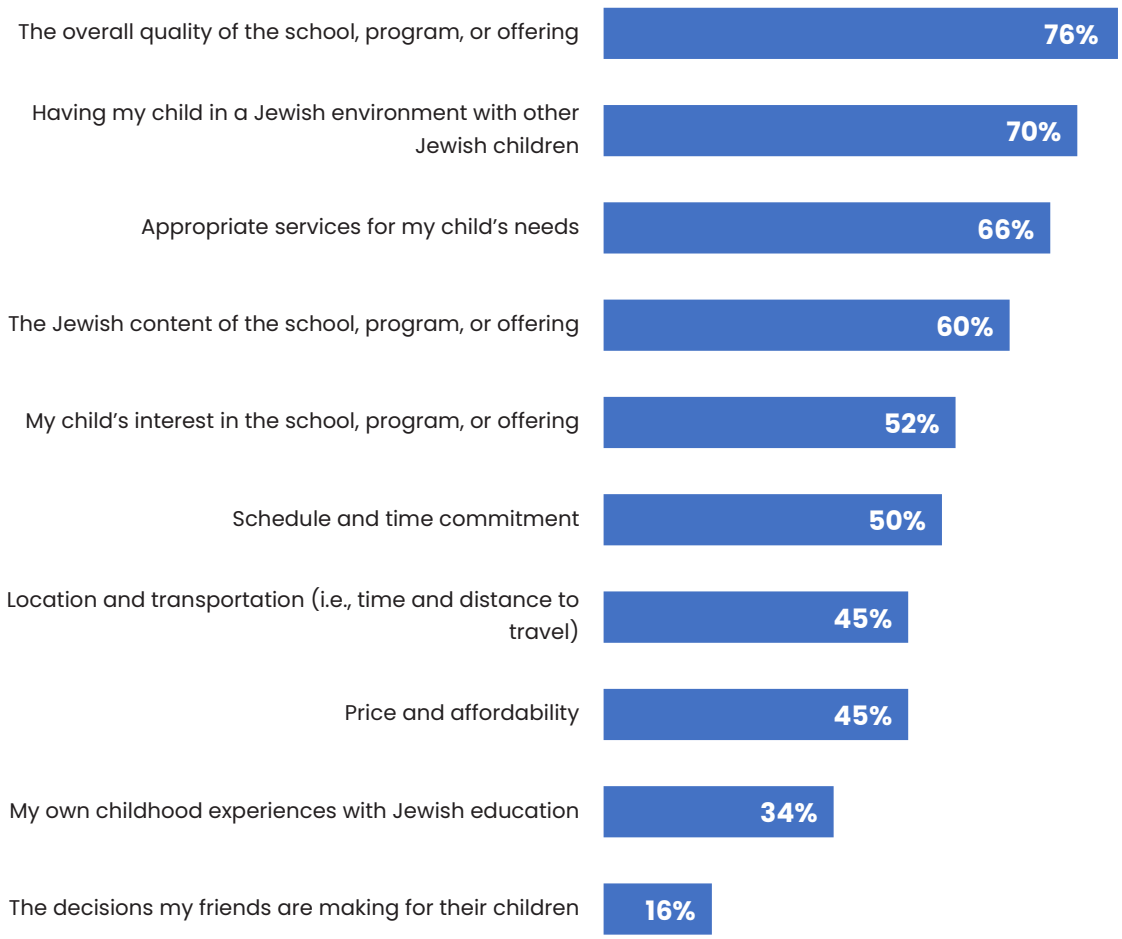
Various factors play a role in why respondents with children ages 6-17 choose to enroll them in Jewish educational experiences.[17] Respondents' most commonly cited factors are school and program quality, appropriate services for children's needs, and the Jewish environment and content (Exhibit 6.4). Issues around time, price/affordability, and location/transportation

[17] Respondents with children ages 6-17 who had enrolled them in *any* of the Jewish educational experiences in Exhibit 6.3 were asked about these factors, without reference to the specific educational choices they made.

play a somewhat lesser role, as do children's own interests. The least important factors are parents' own childhood education experiences and, again, their friends' decisions about Jewish education. It is noteworthy that the leading factors for respondents with older children are similar to the leading factors for respondents with younger children.

Qualitative data support these survey findings. Parents with children in day schools cite them as environments where their children will be instilled with Jewish pride, a love for the rhythm of Jewish life, a strong Jewish social network, and a foundation of Jewish education that will lead them to be Jewishly literate adults who can make informed choices about their own Jewish path. Other parents spoke about moving children to different schools, in some cases to public or other non-Jewish schools, if they couldn't access needed services or if their children had particularly bad social experiences.

Exhibit 6.4: Percentage of respondents who said each factor is "very important"* in their decision to enroll their child(ren) ages 6–17 in Jewish educational experiences

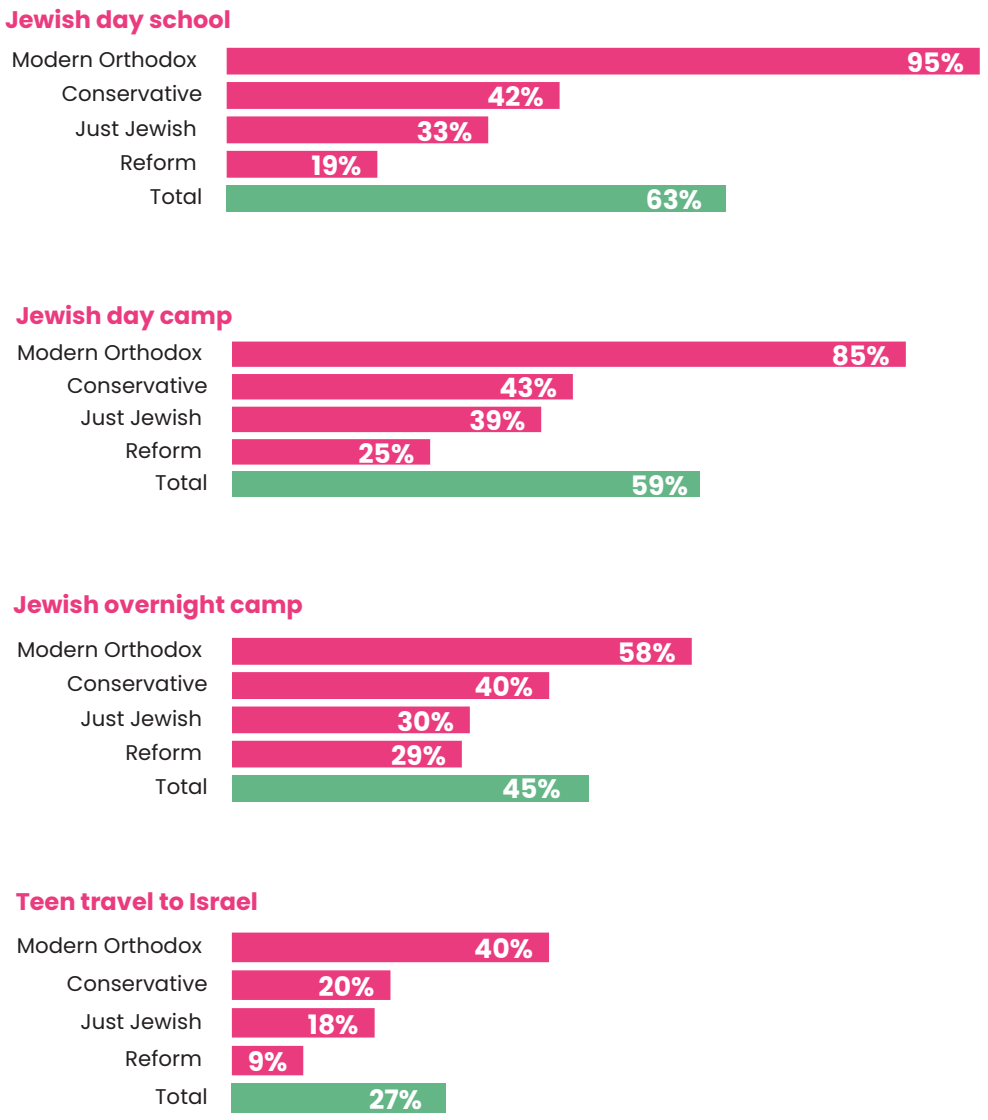


** As opposed to somewhat, only slightly, or not at all important*

DENOMINATION, INCOME, AND CHILDREN'S JEWISH EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCES

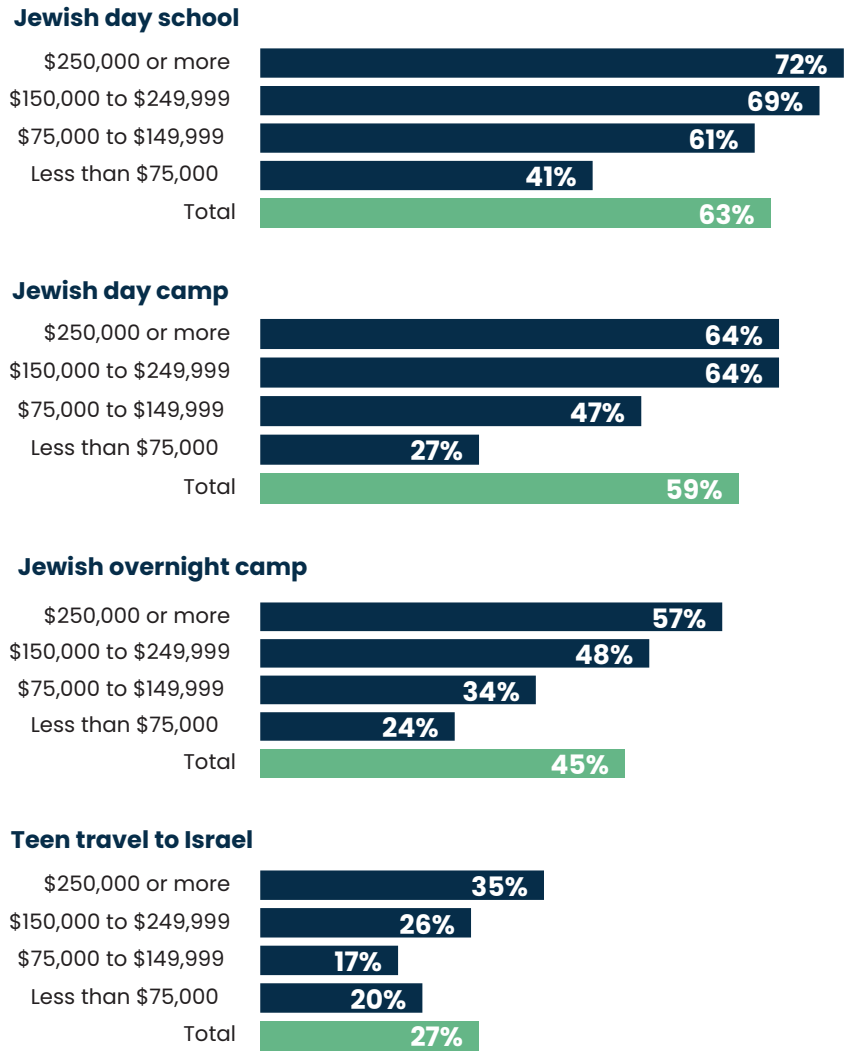
In addition to the specific factors that shape respondents' decisions about their children's Jewish educational experiences, those decisions are also associated with respondents' denominational identities and income levels. Modern Orthodox respondents are the most likely to provide their children with immersive forms of Jewish education, including day school, day camp, overnight camp, and teen travel to Israel, followed in consistent order by Conservative, Just Jewish, and Reform respondents (Exhibit 6.5).

Exhibit 6.5: Percentage of respondents providing Jewish education experiences for children 6-17, by denomination



Similarly, as income rises, so too does the percentage of parents who provide their children with Jewish day school, Jewish day and overnight camp, and, with one exception, teen travel to Israel (Exhibit 6.6).

Exhibit 6.6: Percentage of respondents providing Jewish education experiences for their children, by income



Qualitative data reveals some of the frustration of parents who place a premium value on Jewish education yet feel unable to sustain it financially:

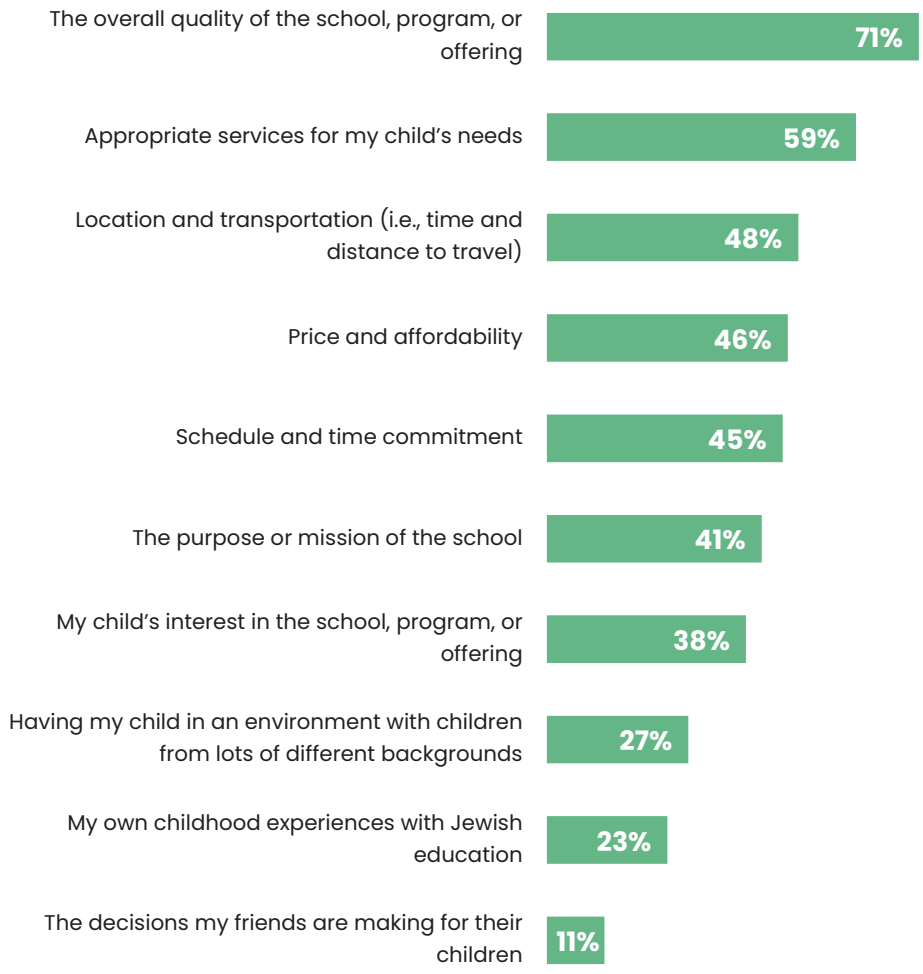
> "We know the impact of a strong Jewish education and camping experience on Jewish identity over the life. Access to affordable Jewish experiences for our children would be a game changer. We have the resources for it in the community; it's a matter of allocations."
> **—Parent of children 6-13**

Section 11 examines issues of the affordability of Jewish education in more detail.

PARENTS WHO DO NOT ENROLL CHILDREN IN JEWISH DAY SCHOOL

Among survey respondents with a child 6–17 at home, those who have never sent any child to a Jewish day school or yeshiva were asked where their children have gone to school. Just under two thirds (63%) have enrolled children in public schools, 36% in independent or private schools, and 8% have homeschooled children (Exhibit 6.7). These respondents most commonly cite overall school or program quality as a very important factor in their decision making, followed by appropriate services for their children's needs. Fewer than half cite the remaining reasons—location, transportation, affordability, schedule and time commitment, and others—as very important.

Exhibit 6.7: Percent of respondents who said each factor is "very important"* in their decision to enroll their child(ren) ages 6–17 in a public or non-Jewish independent school



** As opposed to somewhat, only slightly, or not at all important*

Further analysis (not displayed in the chart) show that public school parents were slightly to somewhat more likely than independent school parents to cite location and transportation (53% to 42%), schedule and time commitment (48% to 39%), price and affordability (49% to 43%), and having children in an environment with other children from lots of different backgrounds (28% to 23%) as very important. Independent school parents, in turn, were slightly more likely to select the purpose or mission of the school (45% to 39%) as very important.

Qualitative data reveal additional factors in how parents think about public versus Jewish day schools and other private schools. Some parents of children with special needs are deeply disappointed in what they say is the reluctance of Jewish schools to support their children's needs, forcing them to seek other schools for appropriate services.

> "I have a lot of friends with kids with issues. I had enrolled [my own child] in a day school when she was young and her learning disabilities were starting to manifest, and I had to take her out. They really don't want to deal with that, and that's the experience of friends with these issues, too. They wanted to have her repeat kindergarten, and my friend recommended putting her in public school, and now she's in all honors classes in high school."
> **—Parent of child with disabilities**

Other parents place a strong value on the idea of public education, offering a critique of the politics of private education, especially as it relates to income differences. Lastly, others feel that attending public school will better prepare their children for the diversity of views they are likely to encounter in college, including views that may be antisemitic or anti-Israel.

SECTION 7

ISRAEL

Israel—for decades a source of near-unity among American Jews—is a more complicated and complex issue today. For many, connections to and support of Israel remain robust, and Israel continues to hold a central place in their communal commitments and personal identities. For others, political and social developments in Israel have raised concerns and disappointments. In turn, conversations about Israel have, in some cases, become more challenging. These dynamics—strong support for Israel and controversy about Israel—are evident in the Northern New Jersey Jewish community as well.

STRONG CONNECTIONS TO ISRAEL

Connections to and support for Israel are generally very strong among survey respondents (Exhibit 7.1). Large majorities say they are very or somewhat emotionally attached to Israel, have traveled to Israel, feel they have a lot or some in common with Jews in Israel, and have family or close friends who live in Israel.[18] Similarly, most respondents strongly agree that Israel is vital to the Jewish people's future, feel proud of Israel, are concerned about its security, and say that caring about Israel is an essential part of being Jewish.

Exhibit 7.1: Strong connections to Israel

% Who...

87% say they are very or somewhat emotionally attached to Israel

87% have traveled to Israel

85% feel they have a lot or some in common with Jews in Israel

75% have family or close friends who live in Israel

% Who strongly agree that...

79% Israel is vital to the Jewish people's future

72% they feel proud of Israel

70% they are concerned about its security

59% caring about Israel is an essential part of being Jewish

[18] The question on travel to Israel was not asked of those born there.

Qualitative data reveal that conversations about Israel are common:

> "We don't talk about Israel every day, but we do pretty often. [Our kids] have an Israeli *shaliach* [emissary from Israel] that talks to them about Israel every day. They know more about Israel than the US. We are probably going for three weeks in August." **—Parent of children ages 6–13**

Interestingly, qualitative data also reveal an important unintended consequence of strong connections to Israel, especially among Modern Orthodox respondents. As people age, their children often spend time in Israel or make aliyah (move to Israel). Some of their friends may also move to Israel, following their own adult children there.

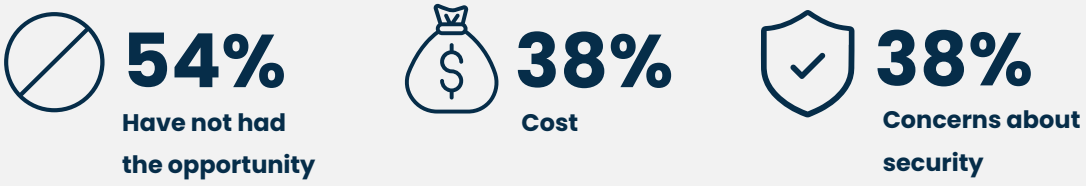
> "[Our kids] have been out of the house a long time. Two sons live in Israel. … Teaneck has a very strong Zionist orientation. On my street almost everyone over 50 has kids living in Israel. I have grandchildren and great-grandchildren in Israel also." —**Modern Orthodox empty nester**

Sidebar: Denomination, Income, and *Not* Traveling to Israel

Not traveling to Israel is shaped in part by denomination and income. Reform and Just Jewish respondents are the most likely to have *not* been to Israel (24% Reform, 19% Just Jewish), followed by Conservative respondents (13%). Among Modern Orthodox respondents, just 2% have not been to Israel. Looking at income, more than twice as many respondents earning less than $100,000 have not been to Israel (18%) than respondents earning $250,000 or more (7%).

Among all those who have not been to Israel, the most commonly cited reasons for not going are not having the opportunity, cost, and concerns about security (Exhibit 7.2).

Exhibit 7.2 Reasons for not traveling to Israel

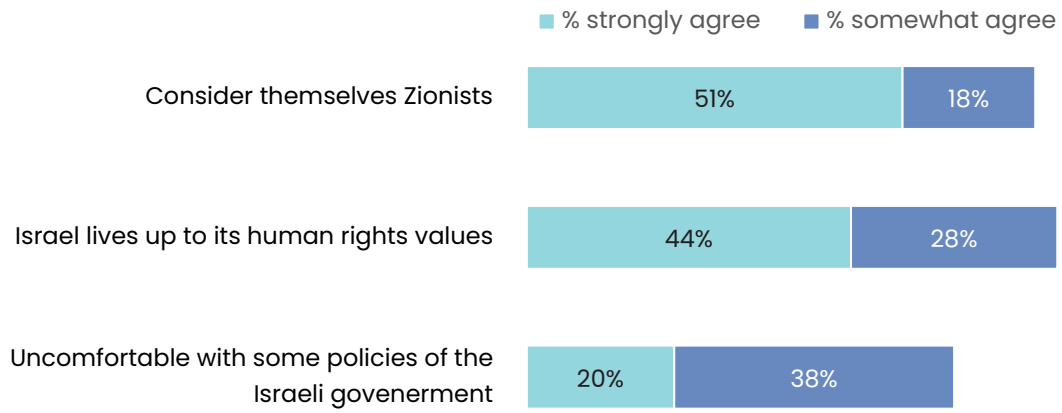


CHALLENGES IN SUPPORT FOR ISRAEL

While overall connections to Israel are strong, there are indications in the survey of soft spots in the community's support for Israel (Exhibit 7.3). To begin, half of all survey respondents strongly agree with the statement, "I consider myself a Zionist," and 18% somewhat agree, leaving a quarter of respondents not endorsing the statement.[19] Less than half of the respondents strongly agree that Israel lives up to its human rights values, and a little more than a quarter somewhat agree, again leaving about a quarter of respondents not supporting the statement.[20] Two in ten respondents strongly agree they are uncomfortable with some policies of the Israeli government, and more than another third say they somewhat agree.[21] Some qualitative data participants echo these feelings:

> "I have a very mixed reaction to Israel these days. I lived there in the late sixties and early seventies, and I made aliyah. … That didn't work out, and since Israel has elected a right-wing government, I'm really unhappy with government policies and the … settlements." **—Newcomer**

Exhibit 7.3: Respondent attitudes about Israel



Denominational and age variations in connections to Israel also reveal some challenges in certain communal segments (Exhibit 7.4). Reform respondents, in particular, and Just Jewish respondents, in some cases, are not as strongly connected to Israel as Conservative and Modern Orthodox respondents. Similarly, Gen Z and Millennial respondents, and in some cases Silent Generation respondents, are not as strongly connected to Israel as Gen X and Boomer respondents.

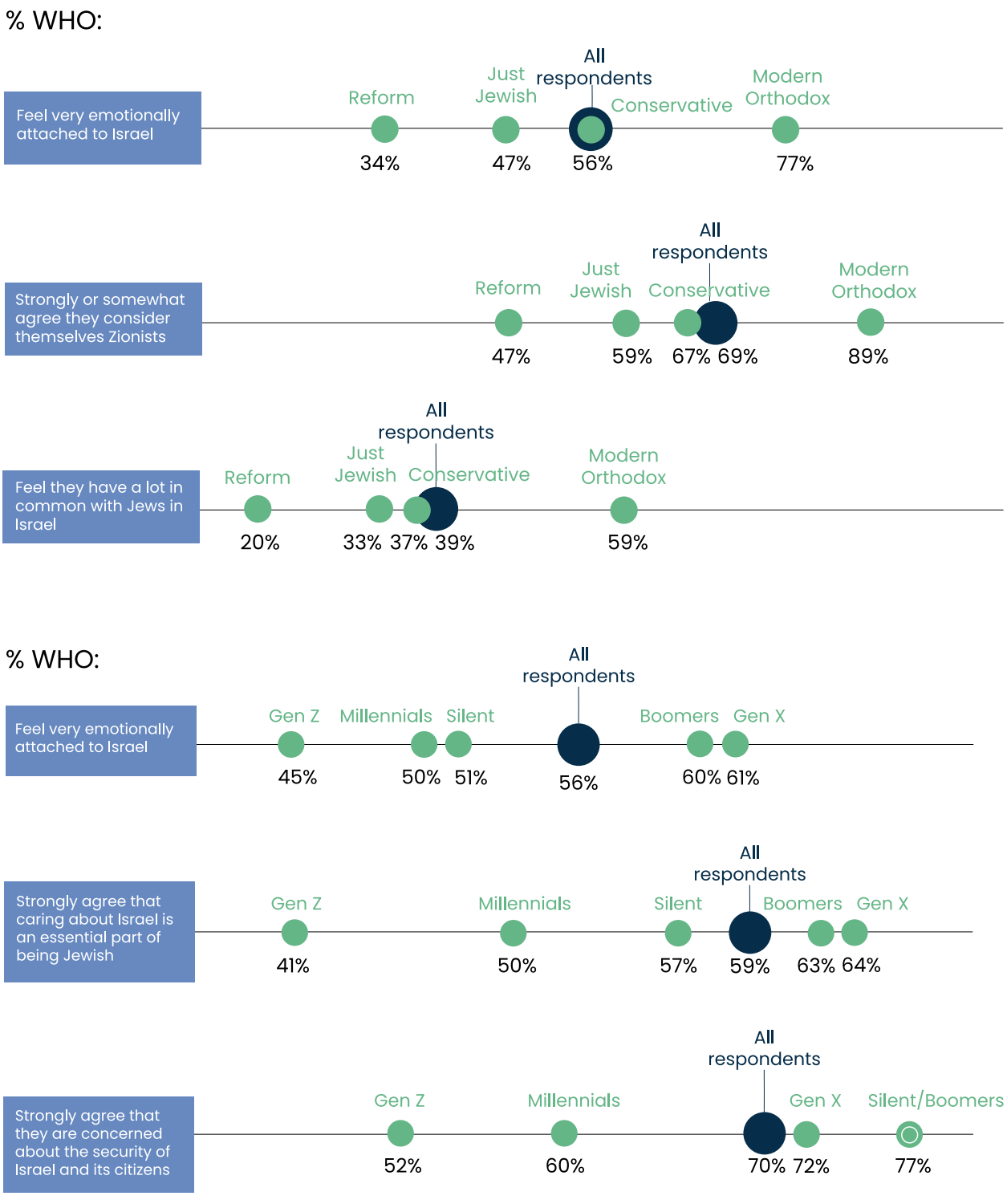
---

[19] Among other respondents, 6% strongly disagree, 4% somewhat disagree, 16% neither agree nor disagree, and 5% said they didn't know or had no opinion.

[20] Among other respondents, 4% strongly disagree, 10% somewhat disagree, 11% neither agree nor disagree, and 3% said they didn't know or had no opinion.

[21] Among other respondents, 7% strongly disagree, 10% somewhat disagree, 20% neither agree nor disagree, and 6% said they didn't know or had no opinion.

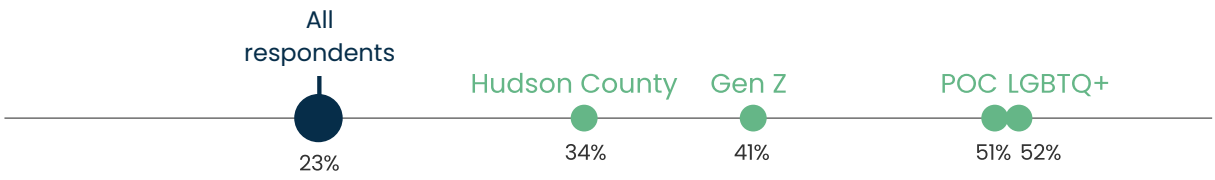
Exhibit 7.4: Connections to Israel — denominational and generational challenges



TALKING ABOUT ISRAEL IN THE LOCAL COMMUNITY

Lastly, the survey and qualitative data also suggest challenges in how community members navigate talking about Israel with each other. While a majority of survey respondents (77%) say they can safely express their views about Israel to other Jews in Northern New Jersey always or most of the time, nearly a quarter (23%) said this is true only sometimes, once in a while, or never. Some respondents are more wary of expressing their views on Israel than others (Exhibit 7.5). More than half of respondents who identify as People of Color (POC) or LGBTQ+, four in ten Gen Z respondents, and a third of Hudson County respondents feel they can safely express their views about Israel to other Jews in Northern New Jersey only sometimes, once in a while, or never.[22]

Exhibit 7.5: Percentage of respondents who feel they can safely express views about Israel only sometimes, once in a while, or never (as opposed to always or most of the time)



Some of these sentiments were also expressed by participants in interviews and focus groups who feel their negative, or simply complex, views about Israel put them in tension with other Jews or Jewish spaces in ways they wish could be different.

> "One of my ex's aunts, every time I saw her, she wanted to talk about Israel. I have complicated feelings about Israel, and I don't want anyone giving me Zionist BS. When Jews get together who don't know each other well, it probably should not be discussed at all, because people have strong emotions." ***—Hudson County young adult***

This dissonance presents a challenge to the community, especially given the large number of survey respondents who continue to strongly support Israel, as shown at the beginning of this section.

[22] The question did not specify *where* the expression of views on Israel occurs, but rather that views are expressed *to* other Jews in Northern New Jersey.

SECTION 8

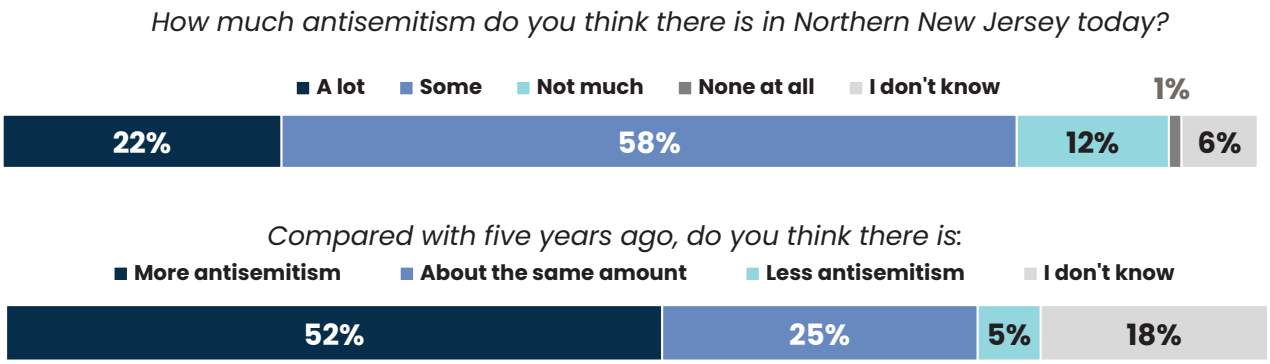
ANTISEMITISM

Antisemitism undermines a community's sense of safety and security. Concerns about antisemitism, especially its increase over the past five years, are fairly widespread among survey respondents. For some, such concerns are severe enough to refrain from certain Jewish behaviors and activities.

PERCEPTIONS OF ANTISEMITISM IN NORTHERN NEW JERSEY

A large majority of all respondents think there is at least some antisemitism in Northern New Jersey, and half think there is more today than five years ago (Exhibit 8.1).

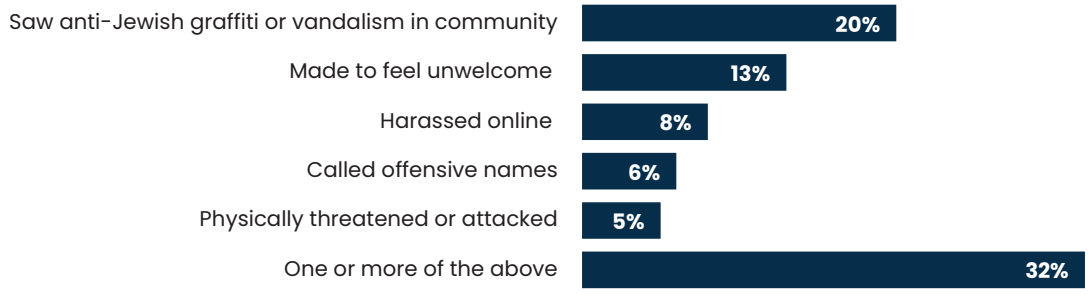
Exhibit 8.1: Perceptions of antisemitism in Northern New Jersey



PERSONAL EXPERIENCES WITH ANTISEMITISM

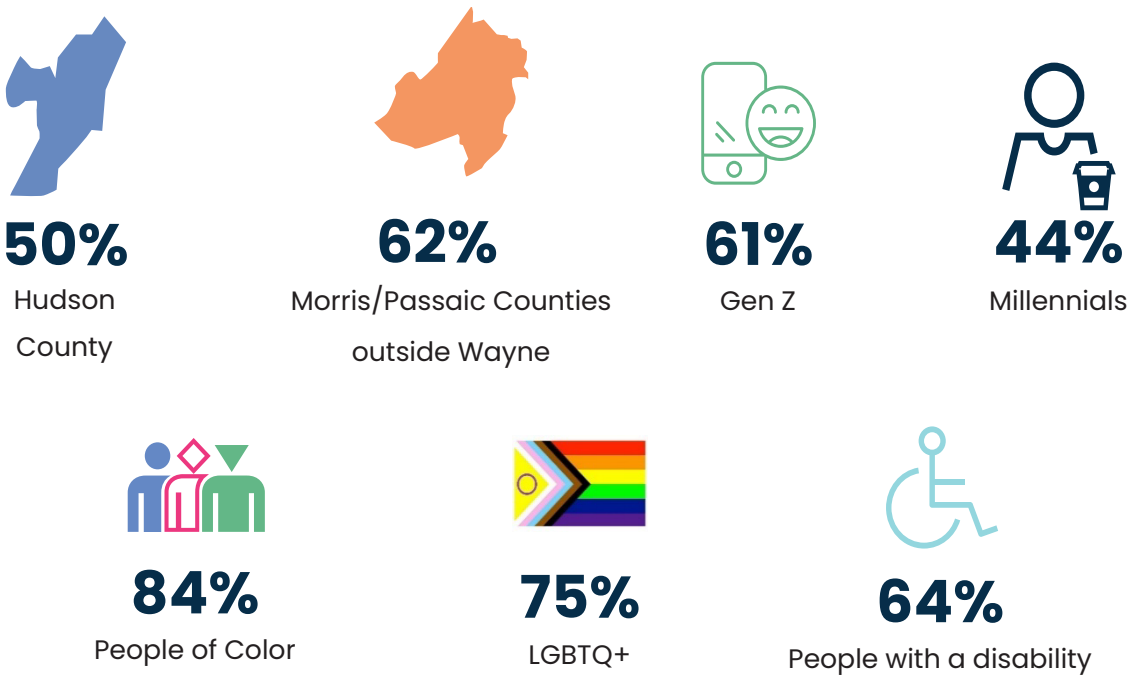
The survey asked about five types of antisemitic incidents respondents may have experienced in the past year (Exhibit 8.2). The most common was seeing anti-Jewish graffiti or vandalism in the local community, followed by having been made to feel unwelcome. Overall, a third of respondents (32%) said they had experienced at least one of the five types of antisemitic incidents the survey asked about.

Exhibit 8.2: Percentage of respondents experiencing antisemitism



Geography, generation, and diversity are associated with varying levels of antisemitic experiences (Exhibit 8.3). Experiencing at least one antisemitic incident was elevated above the overall sample level (32%) among respondents in Hudson County and in Morris/Passaic Counties outside Wayne; Gen Z and Millennial respondents; respondents who identify as People of Color; LGBTQ+ respondents; and respondents with a disability.

Exhibit 8.3: Personal experiences of antisemitism elevated in/among…

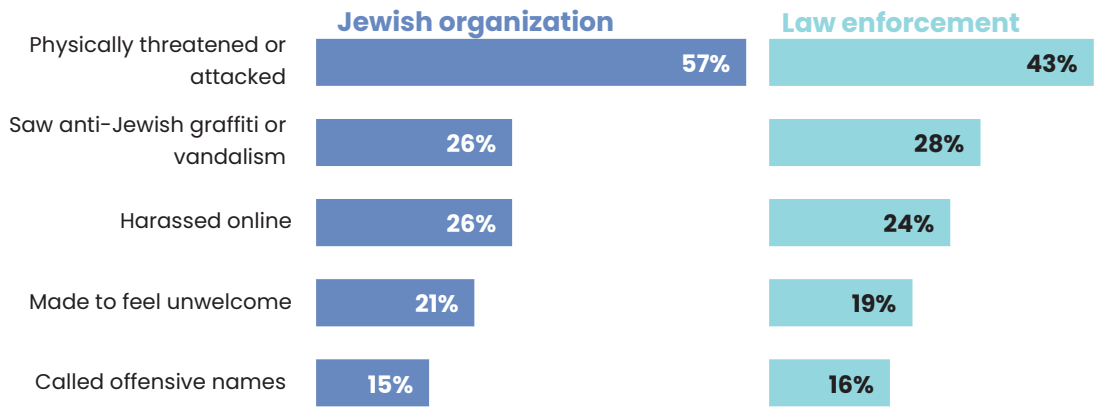


Not surprisingly, personal experiences with antisemitism are associated with perceptions of its prevalence. Respondents who identified at least one of the personal antisemitic experiences in Exhibit 8.2 were more likely than other respondents to say there is a lot of antisemitism in Northern New Jersey (37% vs. 15%) and that there is more antisemitism in Northern New Jersey today than five years ago (57% vs. 46%).

REPORTING ANTISEMITISM

When respondents experienced antisemitism, in most cases they did not report it to either Jewish communal organizations or law enforcement agencies (Exhibit 8.4). The exception is when they were physically threatened or attacked, but even in that case only about half of the respondents who endured this reported the incident.

Exhibit 8.4: Reporting antisemitism to Jewish organizations and law enforcement



CONCERNS ABOUT SAFETY AND SECURITY

Concerns about safety and security due to antisemitism led some respondents to refrain from certain behaviors or activities in the year before the survey (Exhibit 8.5). A fifth of respondents reported that they took off or did not wear something distinctively Jewish, just about an equal share said they did not identify themselves as Jewish in person or online, and slightly fewer, about a seventh, did not participate in Jewish observances or events.

Exhibit 8.5: Concerns about safety and security: percentage of respondents who in the past year…

20%

Took off or did not wear something distinctively Jewish

19%

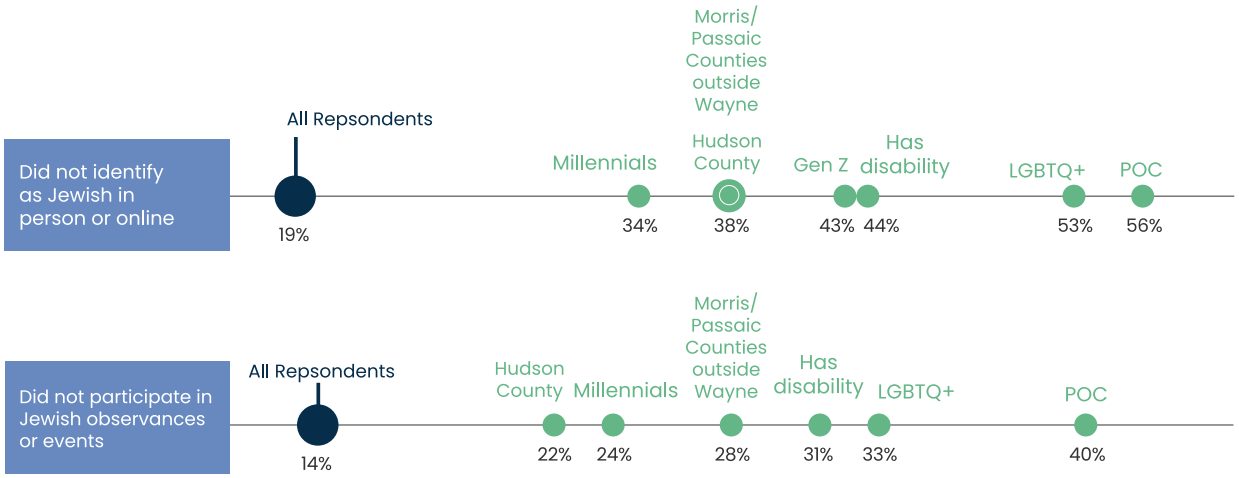
Did not identify themselves as Jewish in person or online

14%

Did not participate in Jewish observances or events

Here, too, geography, generation, and diverse identities are associated with varying impacts of antisemitism, especially not participating in Jewish events or observances and not identifying as Jewish online or in person (Exhibit 8.6).

Exhibit 8.6: Variations in concerns about safety and security



Concerns about antisemitism were also raised by participants in interviews and focus groups, notably in the context of being hesitant to attend large, public Jewish events. However, concerns about antisemitism were raised most often by such participants in the context of discussing the lives, experiences, and education of teens, and particularly the antisemitic and anti-Israel sentiments potentially awaiting them on social media and especially in college.

SECTION 9

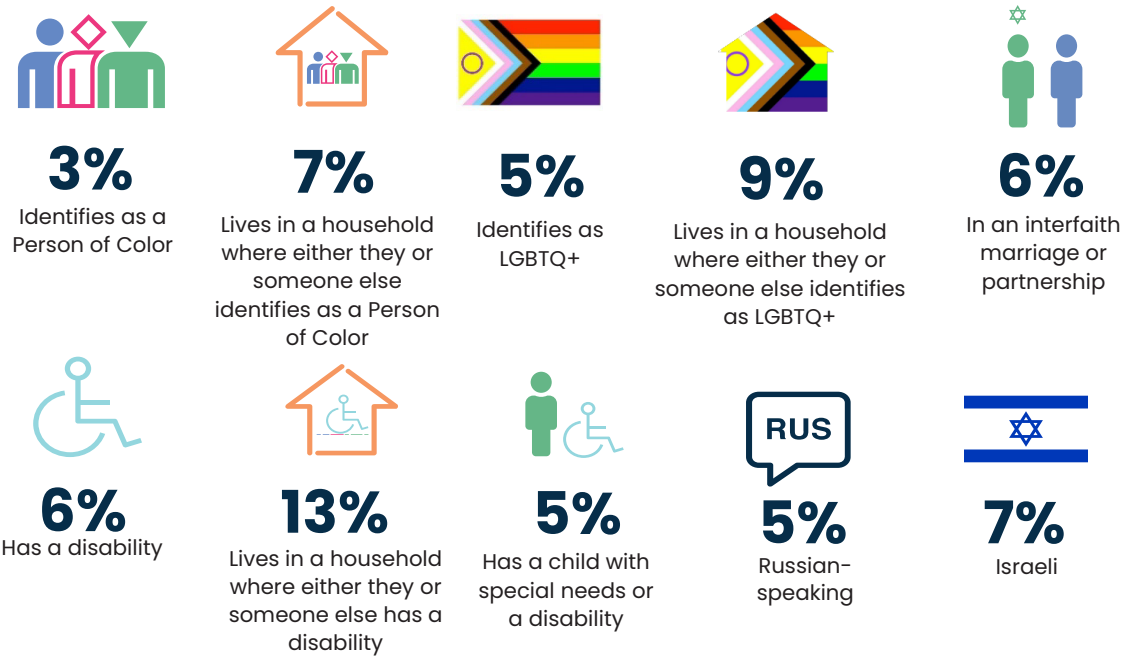
DIVERSE IDENTITY GROUPS

Jewish communities across the United States are increasingly aware of the significance of diverse identity groups within them. Many diverse groups experience both a sense of and desire for in-group cohesion, and challenges in connecting to and feeling a part of the larger Jewish community. These experiences are evident in Northern New Jersey as well.

DIVERSE IDENTITY GROUPS IN THE NORTHERN NEW JEWISH COMMUNITY

The survey asked questions to be able to identify multiple diverse identity groups (Exhibit 9.1), including: respondents and other household members who identify as persons of color, respondents and other household members who identify as LGBTQ+, respondents in interfaith marriages or partnerships, respondents and other household members with disabilities, Russian-speaking respondents, and Israeli respondents.

Exhibit 9.1: Survey respondents from diverse identity groups



COHESION WITHIN DIVERSE IDENTITY GROUPS

A common trait among survey respondents from diverse identity groups is a desire to know and have relationships with people like them. In general, more than half of survey respondents from diverse identity groups report that having a community of Jewish friends and acquaintances who share their identities is important to them (Exhibit 9.2).

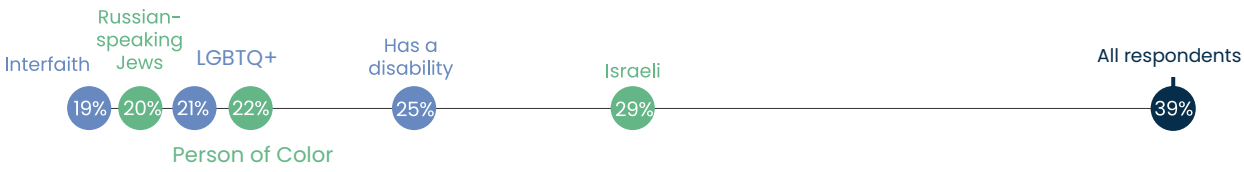
Exhibit 9.2: Strongly or somewhat agree that it is important to have community with people who share identity

CONNECTIONS TO THE JEWISH COMMUNITY

While respondents in diverse identity groups indicate a desire to be in community with other Jews who share their identities, they face challenges connecting to and feeling part of the larger Jewish community. Respondents from each diverse identity group are substantially less likely to feel very connected to the Jewish community than the total sample (Exhibit 9.3).

Exhibit 9.3: Diverse identity groups feel less connected to the Jewish community

Percentage very connected to Jewish community

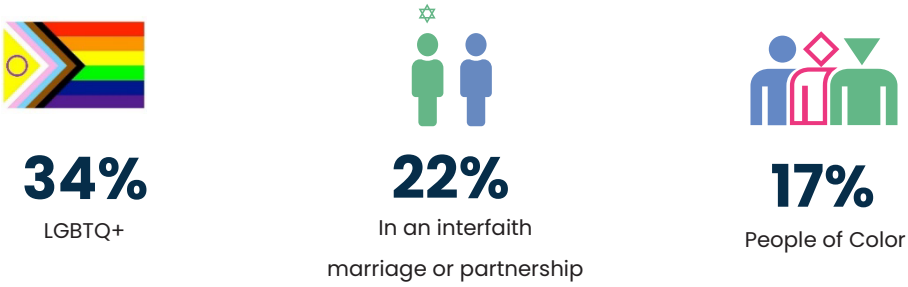


Not Feeling Welcomed

Among respondents from diverse identity groups who do not feel "very connected" to the Jewish community, a noteworthy minority say they face barriers to stronger connections because the community is not welcoming enough to them (Exhibit 9.4). More specifically, a third of LGBTQ+ respondents (34%) say the Jewish community is not welcoming enough to LGBTQ+ Jews; a fifth of respondents in interfaith relationships (22%) say the Jewish

community is not welcoming enough to interfaith families or non-Jewish family members; and a sixth of respondents who identify as People of Color (17%) say the Jewish community is not welcoming enough to Jews of Color.

Exhibit 9.4: The Jewish community is not welcoming enough to people who share their identities



Qualitative data suggest that feeling welcomed is undermined by being asked if one is Jewish or what one is doing in a Jewish space.

> "In the beginning of our life together, my husband and I went to a service. I wanted to show him the temple I grew up in, and he [does not look Jewish] and no less than four people asked him if he was Jewish, and he felt so awkward. And my son … looks like my husband, and we were recently at a place where the rabbi was giving blessings and he skipped my son, just based on the assumption he wasn't Jewish. … I'm not putting anyone in my family in a place where their identity is going to be questioned. To be in a Jewish space where that was questioned was very uncomfortable." **—Parent of child with disabilities**

> "I have two daughters and only speak Spanish to them, and people ask about that and automatically don't think that [we're Jewish]. … First, there are Jewish Latinos from the diaspora … [but] I do have to explain a lot, and people ask if my mom is Jewish, and I have to explain about [my mother's] conversion." **—Wayne resident**

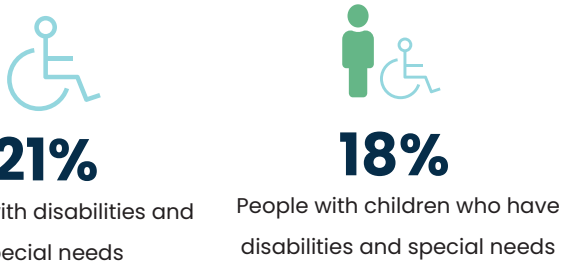
For members of many interfaith households, who may not understand Hebrew or do not have background in Jewish tradition or ritual, feeling welcomed may include having parts of services or programs in English, or having brief explanations for different activities or rituals.

> "The Hebrew school … had a Friday night service [that kids in my son's class were leading] and it was expected that the parents go. … The entire service was in Hebrew. Start to finish, they didn't say one word in English. … Here is an opportunity for the rabbi to say, this is what your children are learning, because my husband was not the only non-Jew in the audience and they know that … so my poor husband and these other folks just sat there completely clueless for 70 minutes." **—Parent of children with disabilities**

Not Enough Accommodations and Services for People with Disabilities

Among respondents with disabilities, or who have children with disabilities, and who are not "very connected" to the community, about a fifth say they face barriers to stronger connection because the community does not provide adequate accommodations for people with disabilities or adequate services for children with disabilities and special needs (Exhibit 9.5).

Exhibit 9.5: The Jewish community does not provide adequate accommodations and services to …



Among the parents of children with special needs who participated in qualitative data collection, the majority had children who are either on the autism spectrum or have other kinds of social-emotional challenges—all were fairly high functioning, and none had physical disabilities. A major theme that arose among these parents is that they felt they were between services—that is, their children need more support than most, but not the level of assistance that most special needs programs are designed for. Most of these parents felt that their children needed to be integrated with kids without special needs *and* that their children needed a little bit of extra care and support from a counselor, teacher, or other adult supervisor who has experience working with children with various kinds of differences.

More specifically, these participants want their children to be integrated into Jewish communities—including day schools, Hebrew schools, and day and overnight camps—and supported in Jewish learning. They see Jewish values as mandating the effort necessary to accomplish this. However, they have difficulty finding environments where their children can get the support they need to participate fully and develop relationships with other Jewish children. For example, some parents worried that if they sent their children to some of the popular Jewish youth groups or camp, they will not get the attention needed from an experienced adult or the patience from peers necessary to successfully integrate.

> "I would love for [our child] to feel connected to Jewish community, [but] it's so overwhelming or it doesn't suit him at all. We tried him in the special needs bunk, but his counselors said he didn't belong, and so we tried the mainstream bunk and felt like an outsider. We'll try again this year and see what happens." **—Parent of child with disabilities**

> "I wouldn't send my son [to NFTY]. It's chaotic, there's not enough structure. It's very loose. The assumption is that because he's mainstreamed, he should be fine hanging out, making his own way from one activity to the next, but that's not going to happen. Like, at his camp, they literally couldn't find him, he took a boat out and laid down to look at the sky, and nobody could find him." **—Parent of child with disabilities**

> "[I'd like to see] places where kids on the spectrum could go socialize, like a teen center that is inclusive of everyone but has an extra person to be there and navigate kids with special needs and can be aware of meltdowns that are about the happen, who understands the issues and can work with them." **—Parent of child with disabilities**

Lack of Meaningful Programs and Activities

Another source of diminished connection for diverse identity groups is that some feel that the Jewish community does not provide meaningful programs, activities, and opportunities for their group.[23] Anywhere from about one-in-six to one-in-four respondents from diverse identity groups feel this way (Exhibit 9.6).

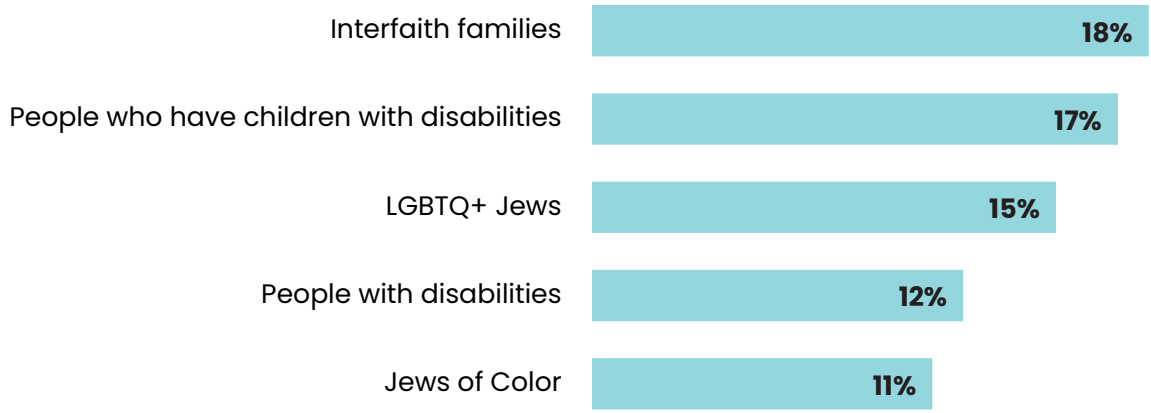
Exhibit 9.6: Percent of respondents from each identity group that feels the Jewish community does not offer meaningful programs, activities, and opportunities for their group

Feeling Uncomfortable in Jewish Organizational Spaces

A final challenge to community connection for diverse identity groups is their sense of comfort in Jewish organizational spaces. Overall, about one in seven members of diverse identity groups say they do *not* feel comfortable in Jewish organizational spaces specifically because of their identities (Exhibit 9.7).

[23] The survey question did not define "meaningful" for respondents, but rather allowed respondents to interpret the term for themselves.

Exhibit 9.7: Feel uncomfortable in Jewish organizational spaces



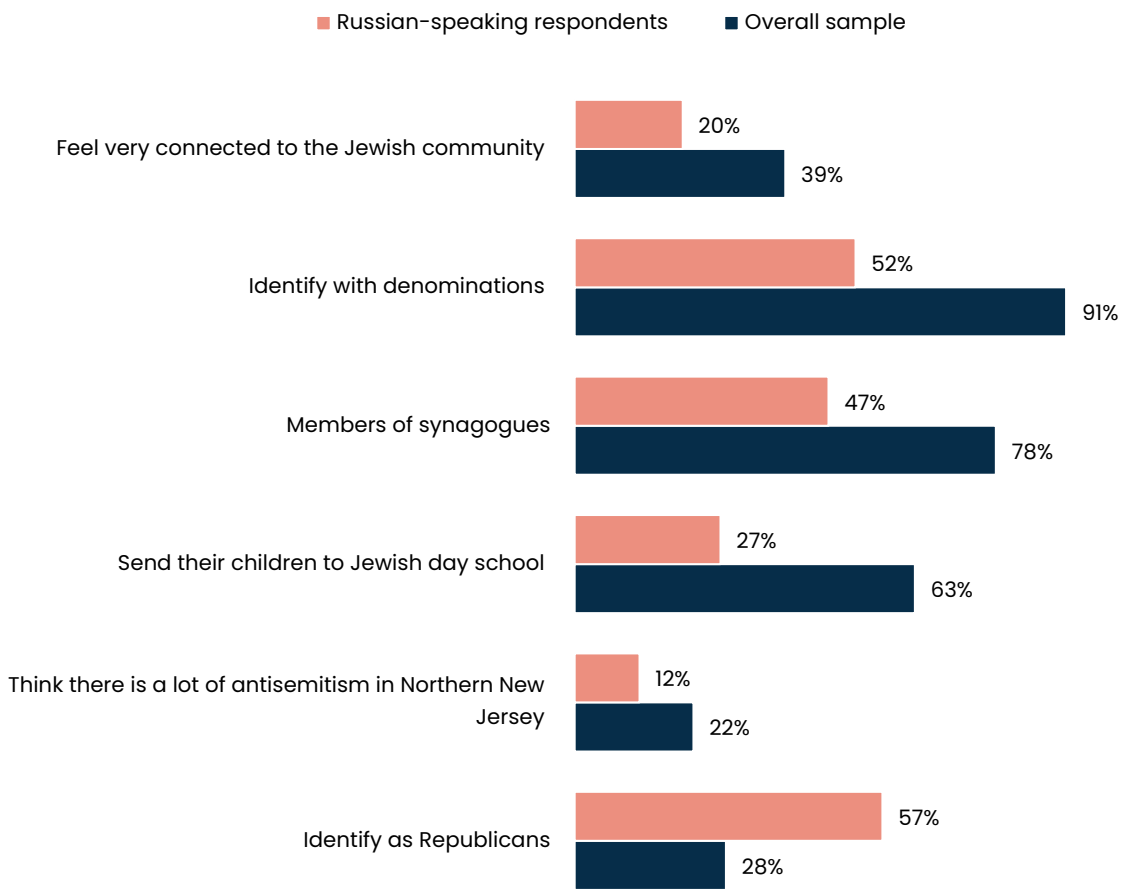
RUSSIAN-SPEAKING AND ISRAELI JEWS IN NORTHERN NEW JERSEY

Russian-speaking Jews (RSJs) and Israelis comprise two important immigrant groups in the Jewish community. While the circumstances of their arrival in the United States may differ—in general, many RSJs came to the United States to escape an authoritarian regime, while many Israelis came primarily seeking educational and economic opportunities—they both illustrate the dynamic between their own internal cohesion and the challenges of connecting to the larger American Jewish community, including the Jewish community in Northern New Jersey.

Russian-Speaking Respondents

Russian-speaking survey respondents differ from other respondents in some ways (Exhibit 9.8). For example, they are less likely to feel very connected to the Jewish community, identify with denominations, be members of synagogues, send their children to Jewish day school, and think there is a lot of antisemitism in Northern New Jersey. In addition, they are more likely to identify politically as Republicans. Notably, Russian-speaking respondents are no more likely to be economically vulnerable than others, a testament to their economic integration and success.

Exhibit 9.8: Comparison of Russian-speaking respondents with overall sample



While they feel less connected to the Jewish community in general, Russian-speaking respondents are strongly connected to each other. In fact, they may be among the respondents who expressed the greatest sense of connection to a community—theirs—in interviews and focus groups. In part, this is because while many Russian-speaking Jews arrived in the United States with little Jewish education, they also arrived carrying a rich and treasured culture they want to maintain, even as they integrate into American life.

> "There's a bit of a parallel process, not so much connection between the mainstream Jewish community and the RSJ community … there's no conflict, no antagonism, [there is] fundamental respect for each other. [But] we like to do things in our own way, and like to be with people just like us, and we appreciate those moments to be with our people."
> **—Russian-speaking Jew**

> "I remind my children where we're from and that it's important to connect to others like us. It's important to know that there are others with similar backgrounds. At the same time because I didn't have the Jewish traditions, I have a blank slate to go by. Just the traditions of Russian-speaking Jews, and that's where I'm starting from and who I connect with, and that's one reason I came to this community. They don't look at me as other, they understand I might not have had that Jewish upbringing, or why I had a [Christmas] tree growing up and don't call me not a real Jew." **—Russian-speaking Jew**

> "We like to be surrounded by like-minded Russian Jews and a little bit American Jews. We have so much in common and so much to talk about, similar issues with balance in life with career and kids and having an accent and politics, so I feel I fit in." **—Russian-speaking Jew**

Russian-speaking respondents also express a great deal of gratitude toward American Jews and American Jewish organizations and do not have particular expectations or grievances around their relationship with American Jewish communities. Many who have joined synagogues are happy in them, and while Russian-speaking Jewish parents want their children to maintain some connection with their Russian roots, they view their children largely as Americans and are appreciative of the Jewish learning their children have access to in the United States.

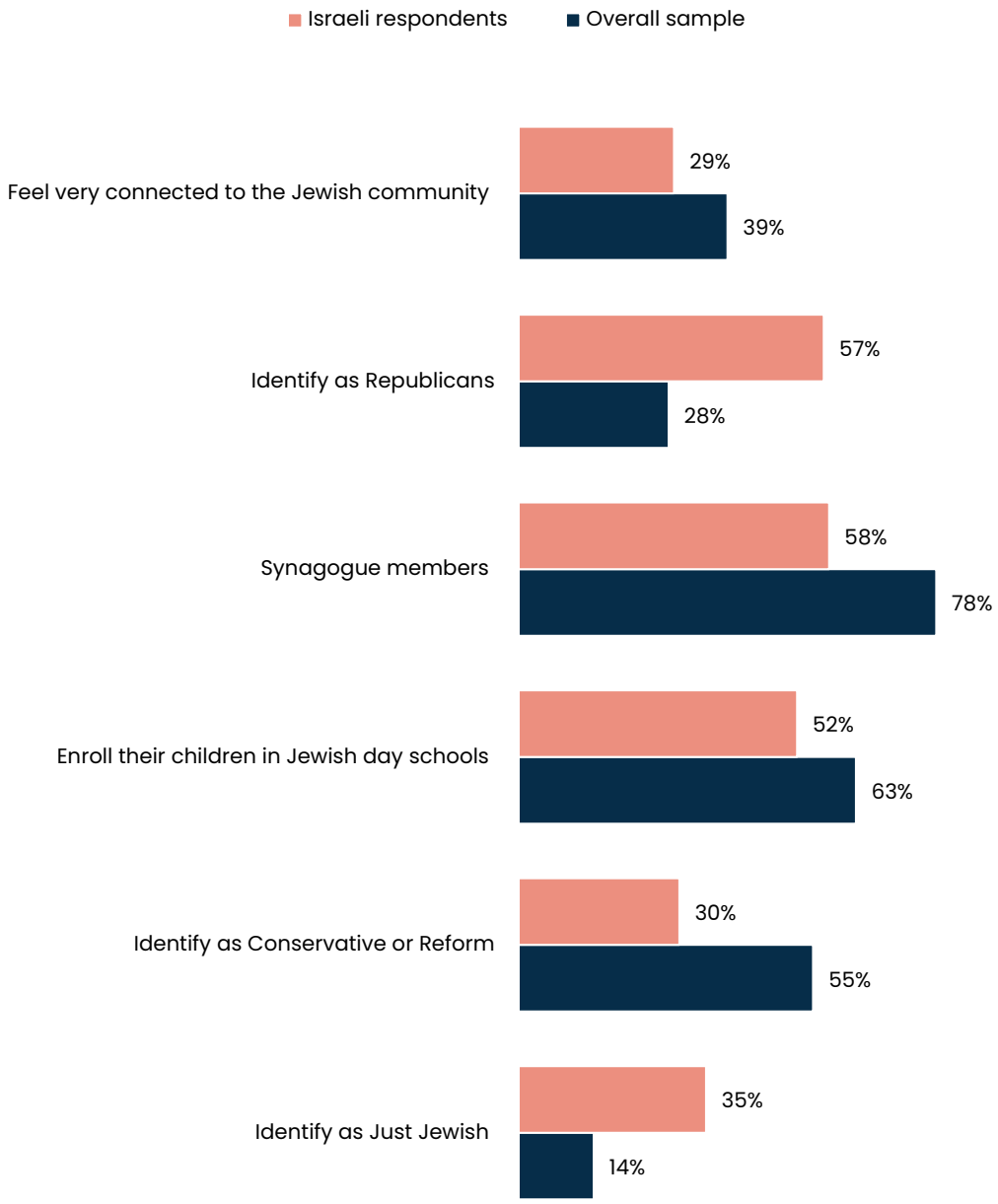
> "I'm very connected with Russian roots, not trying to hide it. I'm vocal about it in my professional life, especially with what's happening globally, being Russian doesn't mean pro-regime or pro-war. I am proud of my roots, and proud of what we as an immigrant community overcame and contributed to culture, and we're incredibly grateful to this country for welcoming us, giving us services. We're trying to raise society-loving kids and just need a little help with sticking together." **—Russian-speaking Jew**

Organizationally, several Russian-speaking interviewees reported finding a comfortable home at Chabad, where they were able to participate in Jewish learning along with their children and with others from the Former Soviet Union. The Council of Jewish Émigré Community Organizations (COJECO) serves as another popular institutional home for the Russian-speaking community in Northern New Jersey.

Israeli Respondents

Like Russian-speaking respondents, Israeli respondents to the survey also differ in some ways from others, but somewhat less so than RSJs do (Exhibit 9.9). For example, Israelis are less likely to feel very connected to the Jewish community, be synagogue members, enroll their children in Jewish day schools, and/or identify as Conservative or Reform, while they are more likely to identify as Just Jewish.

Exhibit 9.9: Comparison of Israeli respondents with overall sample



As an immigrant community, Israelis often feel like cultural outsiders in the local Jewish community, even as many want to be part of it.

> "I came here many times before I moved here and always thought we (Israelis and American Jews) were so similar—highly educated, cosmopolitan. … And when I came to live here, I found how different we are, actually the culture is so, so different. And to build a bridge, it's not an easy thing to do. Some Israelis want very much to be friends with Americans and be part of that, but it's not easy." **—Israeli**

Some Israelis in focus groups who had tried to cultivate connections to American Jews felt their efforts had not been well received or supported by the American Jewish community. Misunderstandings or lack of coordination between Israeli and American Jewish

organizations for Israeli holiday celebrations seem to be a particular source of disappointment, even as Israeli holidays provide a potential point of connection. Others report that even more mundane efforts have been rebuffed.

> "I tried with a friend to do something at the [Kaplen] JCC to bring American and Israeli women together for a cooking class and things like that, to mingle and create friendships, and it didn't work. … So we're making an effort and trying, bringing ideas from here to the moon but the other side is not interested." **—Israeli**

Differences in how religious life is organized in Israel and the United States, especially denominational differences, can dampen Israeli interest in joining synagogues. Instead, Israelis in focus groups reported forming their communal lives around the Kaplen JCC in Tenafly, the Israeli American Council housed at that JCC, and, to an extent, Chabad.

> "Israeli Jewishness is different than American Jewish. In Israel, Jewish life and family is ever present. Here, you have to make an effort to be Jewish, to create the environment. [We] have not succeeded in doing that yet. We are searching but we keep encountering more religious streams that aren't right for us or things that are [geographically] very far away." **–Israeli**

Lastly, several Israeli focus group participants reported feeling alienated by the constant fundraising demands of Jewish organizations, including high membership fees. For Israelis—who are accustomed to Jewish life being supported by the government in their home country—American Jewish life can feel very transactional.

SECTION 10

HUMAN SERVICE NEEDS

Caring for Jews and their families has traditionally been at the heart of local Jewish communities, with the provision of human services through Jewish agencies being central to fulfilling that mission. Among respondents in this sample, the most commonly cited current needs are around the mental health of adults, followed by financial support. The survey also suggested that fairly large shares of people who needed services did not receive them. Looking forward, the highest potential demand for human service provision from Jewish organizations is around older adult needs.

RECENT HUMAN SERVICE NEEDS

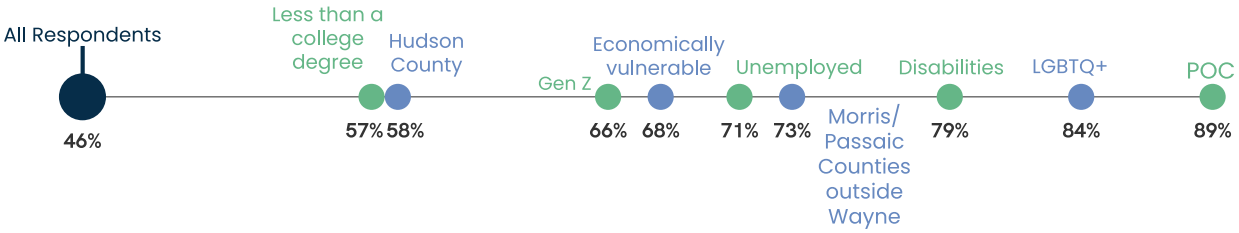
Respondents were asked if they themselves, other members of their households, or close relatives in Northern New Jersey needed a range of human services in the past year. The most commonly reported need, identified by nearly a quarter of all respondents, is for services around adult mental and emotional health, followed by needs around financial planning, teenage mental and emotional health, and employment (Exhibit 10.1). Each of these may reflect, in part, heightened stressors associated with the COVID-19 pandemic.

Exhibit 10.1: Human service needs in community in past year

Mental or Emotional Health	For adults	23%
	For teenagers	14%
	For children (ages 12 and younger)	13%
Financial Support	Financial planning	17%
	Employment (career counseling, job training)	14%
	Short-term financial relief	10%
	Affordable housing	9%
Caregiving	Coordinating/providing care	14%
	Respite care for primary caregivers	8%
Older Adults	Aging in their own homes	13%
	Prevention of social isolation, loneliness, or food insecurity	11%
	Transportation services	11%
	Assisted living facilities	10%
	Independent living facilities	9%
Additional Supports	Activities of daily living	13%
	Physical disabilities	13%
	Learning disabilities	12%
	Developmental disabilities	9%
	Substance abuse or addiction	7%

Across all respondents, nearly half (46%) said they, someone else in their household, or a close relative in Northern New Jersey had at least one of the human service needs the survey asked about, and nearly a third cited two or more. Geography, generation, education, employment status, and diverse identities are all associated with heightened levels of at least one human service need (Exhibit 10.2).

Exhibit 10.2: One or more human service needs in the past year



Service Gaps: Needing but not Receiving Services

Among survey respondents who indicated a human service need for themselves, other household members, or a close relative in Northern New Jersey (see Exhibit 10.1), fairly large shares reported service gaps, that is, they needed the service but did not receive it (Exhibit 10.3). At the top of the list is service for respite care for primary caregivers; among the respondents who indicated a need for this service, 40% did not receive it.[24] Other large gaps exist for short-term financial relief or support, employment needs, affordable housing, and several needs for older adults, with 30% or more of respondents who identified the need not receiving it. It is important to note that the survey did not ask about the reasons for the service gap. We do not know, for example, if they did not receive the service because they did not seek help, could not afford it, did not know where to turn for assistance, or other possible reasons.

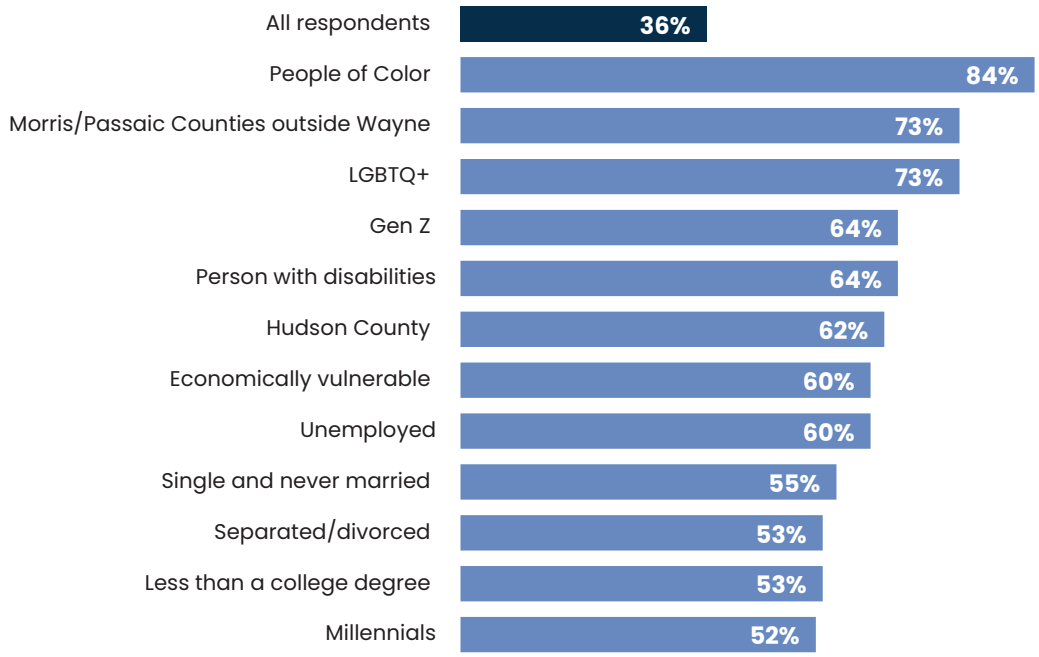
Exhibit 10.3: Gaps in human service provision in past year among those who needed a service

30% or more		20%–29%		Less than 20%	
Respite care for primary caregivers	40%	Assisted living facilities for people ages 75+	27%	Mental or emotional health issues for teenagers	18%
Short-term financial relief or support	36%	Financial planning	26%	Mental or emotional health issues for adults	18%
Employment (career counseling, job training)	34%	Developmental disabilities	25%	Activities of daily living	18%
Affordable housing	32%	Learning disabilities	25%	Mental or emotional health issues for children ages 12 and younger	18%
Independent living facilities for people ages 75+	32%	Substance abuse or addiction	23%	Physical disabilities	14%
Transportation services for people ages 75+	31%	Coordinating or providing care	22%		
Prevention of social isolation, loneliness, or food insecurity	30%	Aging in their own homes for people ages 75+	22%		

[24] This means that, overall, 8% of respondents needed respite care (see Exhibit 10.1), and 3.2% needed it but did not receive it (3.2% is 40% of 8.0%).

Across all respondents who indicated a service need for themselves, someone else in their household, or a close relative in Northern New Jersey, more than a third (36%) did not receive service for at least one of those needs. Service gaps were elevated for selected groups defined by diverse identities, geography, generation, economic vulnerability, unemployment, marital status, and education (Exhibit 10.4).

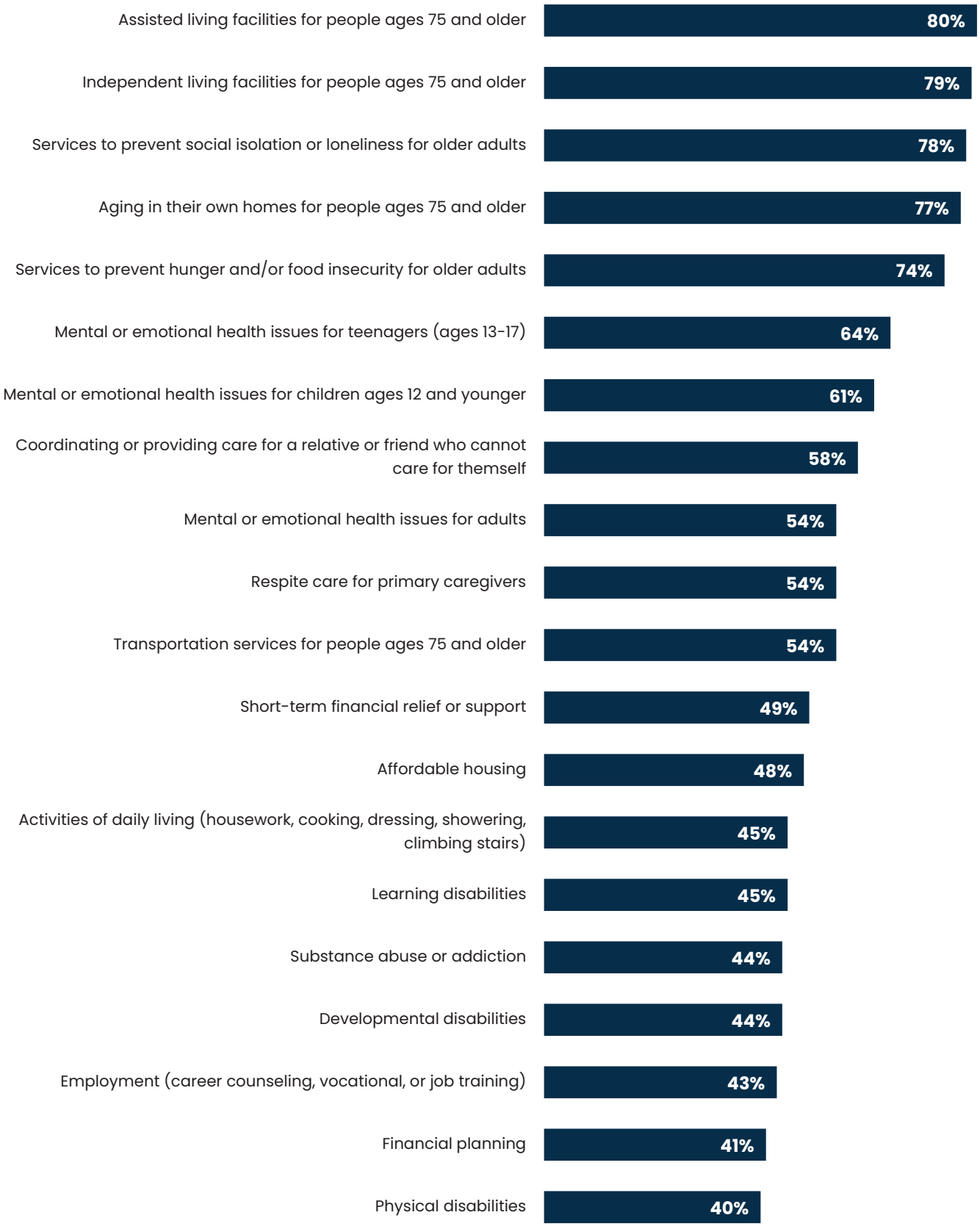
Exhibit 10.4: One or more human service gaps in the past year, among those who needed a service



PREFERENCES FOR HUMAN SERVICE PROVISION FROM JEWISH ORGANIZATIONS

Looking to the future, respondents were asked how important it would be to receive a range of services from a Jewish organization in the event that they, someone else in their household, or a close family member in the local area were to need those services. More than three-in-four respondents said it would be very or somewhat important to receive services related to older adult needs—including assisted and independent living facilities, aging at home, and preventing hunger and social isolation for older adults—from a Jewish organization (Exhibit 10.5). Close to or more than half of all survey respondents also said that it would be very or somewhat important to receive services from Jewish organizations for mental health issues, care for relatives or friends unable to care for themselves, respite care for caregivers, transportation for older adults, short-term financial relief, and affordable housing.

Exhibit 10.5: Very or somewhat important to receive services, if needed, from a Jewish organization



Qualitative data reinforce the importance of the Jewish community providing human services for older adults. Conversations with Jewish communal professionals who work with older adults cited affordable housing, transportation services (especially transit that crosses town or county lines) and reducing social isolation as key elements in this area of service provision. One professional pointed to a successful initiative providing iPads to older adults during the pandemic as the kind of service that could make real differences in the quality of Jewish life for this population. Concerns about affordable housing were further echoed in interviews with retirees and Modern Orthodox empty nesters who noted the scarcity of affordable apartments and condos (especially within walking distance of synagogues) for those looking to downsize while remaining in their community.

SECTION 11

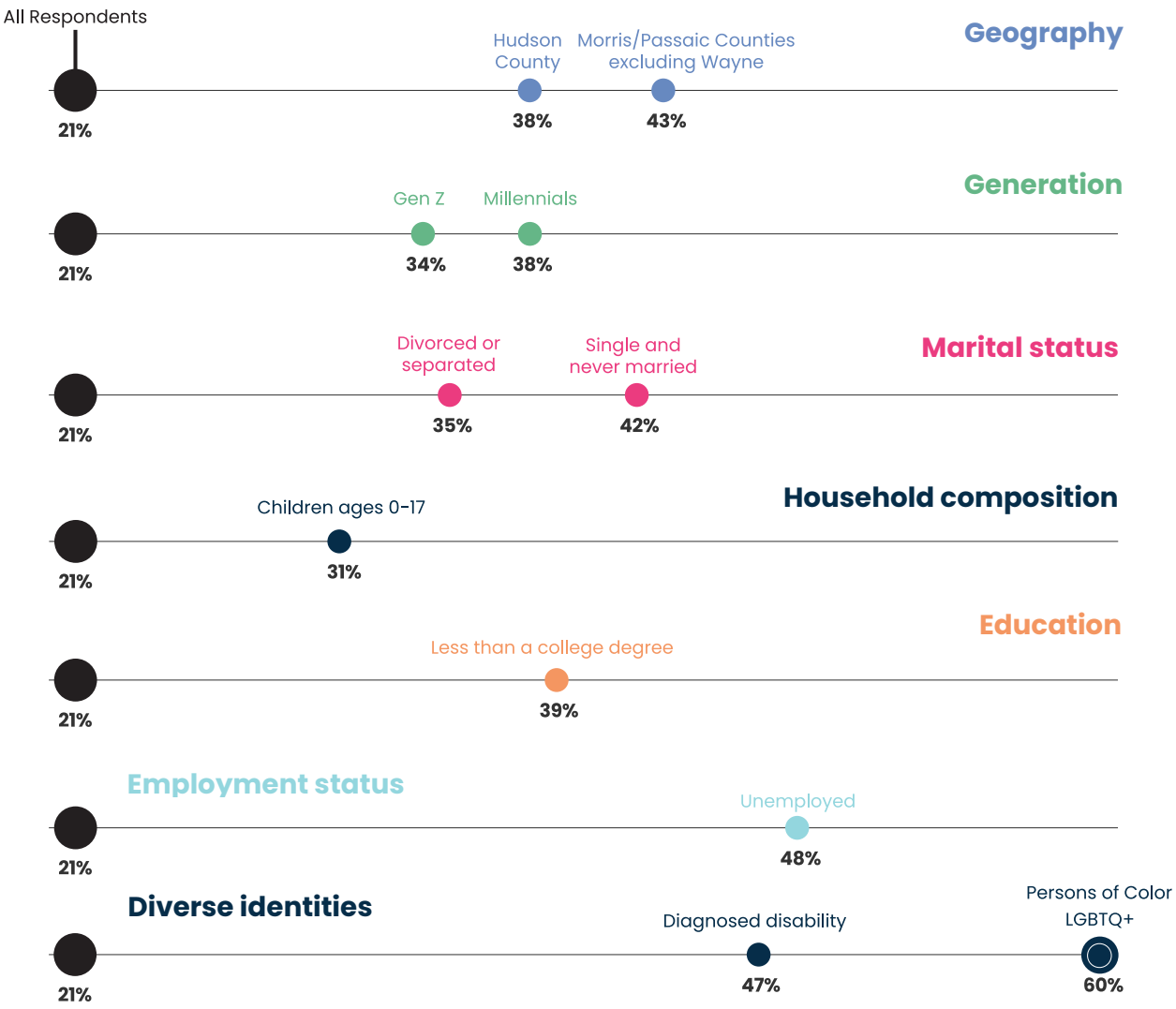
ECONOMIC VULNERABILITY AND FINANCIAL AFFORDABILITY

Though respondents' income levels are generally high and most say they live comfortably or meet their basic expenses with a little left over for extras (see Section 2), a subset of respondents confront economic and financial challenges. Currently, 12% of respondents are currently just meeting their basic expenses or don't have enough to meet their basic expenses. An additional 9% of respondents said they faced this situation at some time since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic in March 2020, though they are more financially secure now. These 21% of respondents, who are defined as economically vulnerable for the purposes of this report, currently face or recently faced substantial risks of material hardships, including food, medical, and housing insecurity. More generally, many respondents in the sample—not just those facing acute economic vulnerability—face stress around the financial affordability of Jewish life and have experienced financial constraints on their communal participation.

ECONOMIC VULNERABILITY

Numerous factors—including geography, generation, marital status, education, employment status, household composition, and diverse identities—are associated with increased economic vulnerability among some of the study's respondents relative to the overall sample (Exhibit 11.1). Economic vulnerability is elevated among respondents who reside in Hudson County and Morris/Passaic Counties, excluding Wayne; are members of the Gen Z and Millennial generations; are divorced, separated, or single and never married; have children at home; have less than a college degree; are unemployed; or have one of several diverse identities, including People of Color, LGBTQ+, and those with disabilities. Many of these factors—for example, lower levels of education and divorce or separation—are associated with economic vulnerability among Americans generally, not just among the Jews of Northern New Jersey.

Exhibit 11.1: Elevated levels of economic vulnerability



The Profile of Economically Vulnerable Respondents

Switching perspectives, we can draw a profile of economically vulnerable respondents compared to all other respondents (Exhibit 11.2). While economically vulnerable respondents are found across all social and demographic groups, they are more likely to be found in certain groups than other respondents are. Looking first at region, 36% of economically vulnerable respondents live in Teaneck/Bergenfield, compared to 28% of other respondents. Economically vulnerable respondents are also more likely to live in Hudson County (15%) and in Morris and Passaic Counties outside Wayne (8%) than other respondents (7% Hudson County, 3% Morris and Passaic Counties outside Wayne). Turning to generations, nearly half (47%) of economically vulnerable respondents are Millennials, which is more than twice the share of Millennials among other respondents (21%). Compared to other respondents, economically vulnerable respondents are more likely to be separated/divorced or never

married, have children in their households, have less than a graduate degree, to be either employed full-time or unemployed,[25] or to have one of several diverse identities.

Exhibit 11.2: Profile of economically vulnerable respondents compared to all other respondents

	Economically Vulnerable Respondents	All Other Respondents
Region		
Central Bergen	14%	21%
East Bergen	11%	17%
North Central Bergen	2%	8%
Northwest Bergen	4%	5%
South Bergen – Teaneck/Bergenfield	36%	28%
Rest of South Bergen	8%	6%
Hudson County	15%	7%
Morris/Passaic County excluding Wayne	8%	3%
Wayne	2%	5%
Total	**100%**	**100%**
Generation		
Gen Z	6%	2%
Millennials	47%	21%
Gen X	28%	28%
Baby Boomers	16%	38%
Silent Generation	3%	12%
Total	**100%**	**100%**
Marital Status		
Married/partnered	75%	85%
Separated/divorced	11%	4%
Widowed	3%	6%
Single/never married	10%	4%
Total	**99%**	**99%**
Children (age 17 and younger) in household		
Yes	70%	42%
No	30%	58%
Total	**100%**	**100%**
Education		
Less than college degree	15%	6%
College degree	44%	34%
Graduate degree	41%	61%
Total	**100%**	**101%**

[25] Though perhaps counterintuitive, more economically vulnerable respondents (70%) than others (52%) are working full-time. This is counter-balanced by the fact that just 5% of economically vulnerable respondents are retired, compared to 25% of those who are not economically vulnerable, suggesting that some who are economically vulnerable cannot afford to retire.

	Economically Vulnerable Respondents	All Other Respondents
Employment Status[1]		
Working full-time	70%	52%
Working part-time	17%	15%
Unemployed	8%	2%
Full-time caregiver for another person	8%	5%
Student	5%	2%
Volunteer	3%	3%
Retired	5%	25%
Unable to work due to chronic health problem	3%	1%
Total	**119%**	**105%**
Identifies as Person of Color		
Yes	7%	1%
No	93%	99%
Total	**100%**	**100%**
Identifies as LGBTQ+		
Yes	17%	2%
No	83%	98%
Total	**100%**	**100%**
Has a diagnosed disability		
Yes	13%	3%
No	87%	97%
Total	**100%**	**100%**

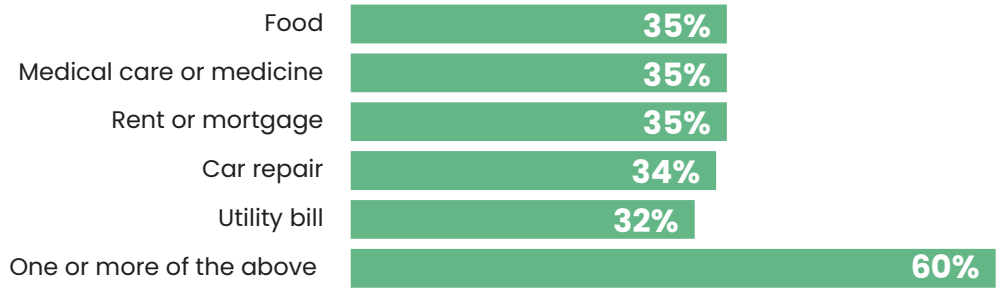
[1] Respondents were allowed to choose more than one employment category, resulting in totals of more than 100%.

Material Hardships Among the Economically Vulnerable

Economically vulnerable respondents were asked a series of questions about their ability to pay for basic expenses since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic. About a third indicated not having enough money at some point in time to pay for food, medical care, rent, mortgage, a utility bill, or car repairs (Exhibit 11.3). Altogether, 60% of economically vulnerable respondents indicated at least one of these material hardships, nearly half indicated two or more, and a third indicated three or more.

Exhibit 11.3: Material hardships among the economically vulnerable

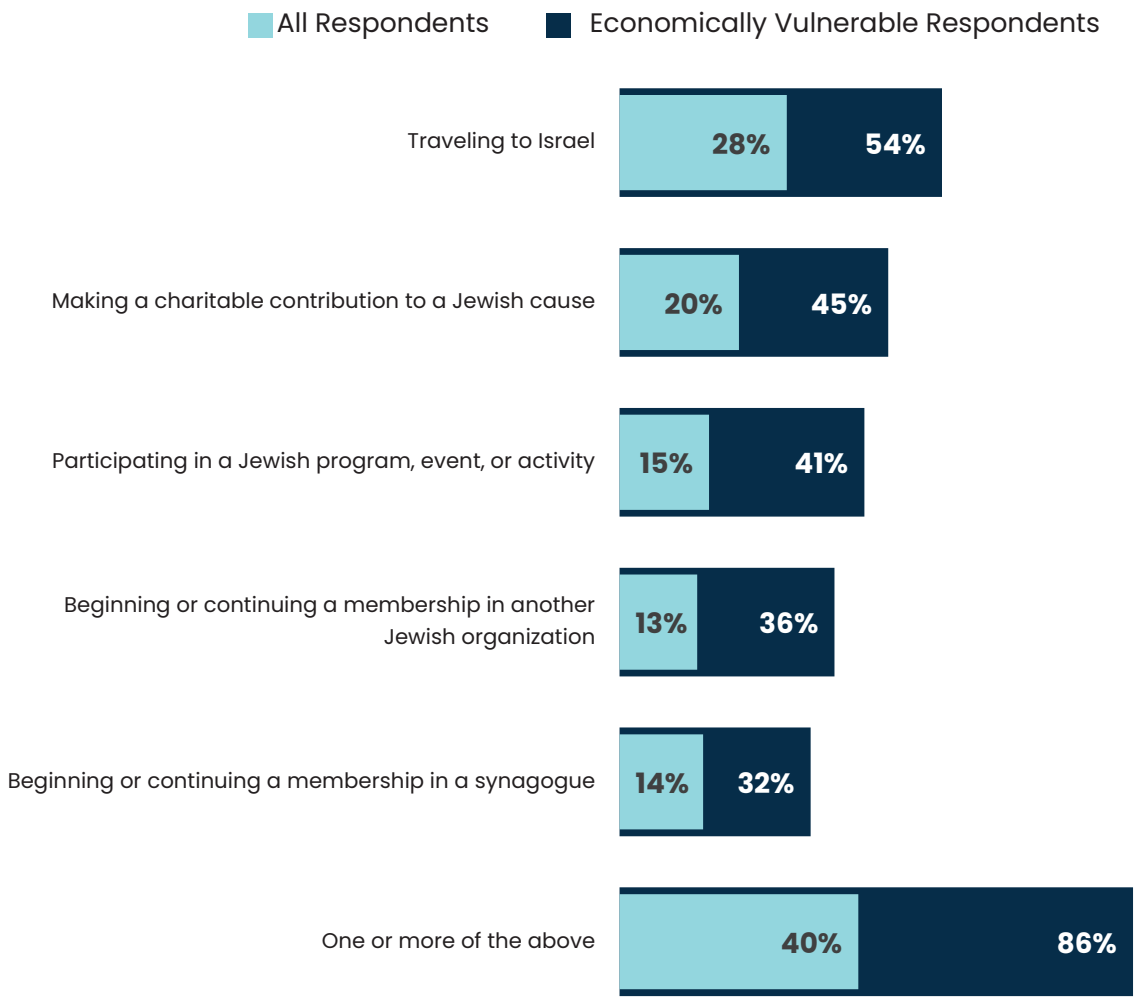
Since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, unable at some point to pay for:



FINANCIAL CONSTRAINTS ON JEWISH COMMUNAL PARTICIPATION

Beyond the economically vulnerable respondents who are facing acute economic distress, many respondents in the sample as a whole experience financial constraints on Jewish communal participation and strain around the affordability of Jewish life (Exhibit 11.4). Among all respondents, financial costs prevented more than a quarter from traveling to Israel and a fifth from making charitable contributions to Jewish causes in the past five years. About one-in-six respondents reported not being able to participate in a Jewish program, event, or activity, or to begin or continue a synagogue or other Jewish organizational membership due to financial costs. Altogether, four-in-ten respondents identified at least one of the financial constraints the survey asked about. The economically vulnerable endure even higher financial barriers to communal participation than the sample as a whole; among them, 86% identified at least one financial constraint on communal participation.

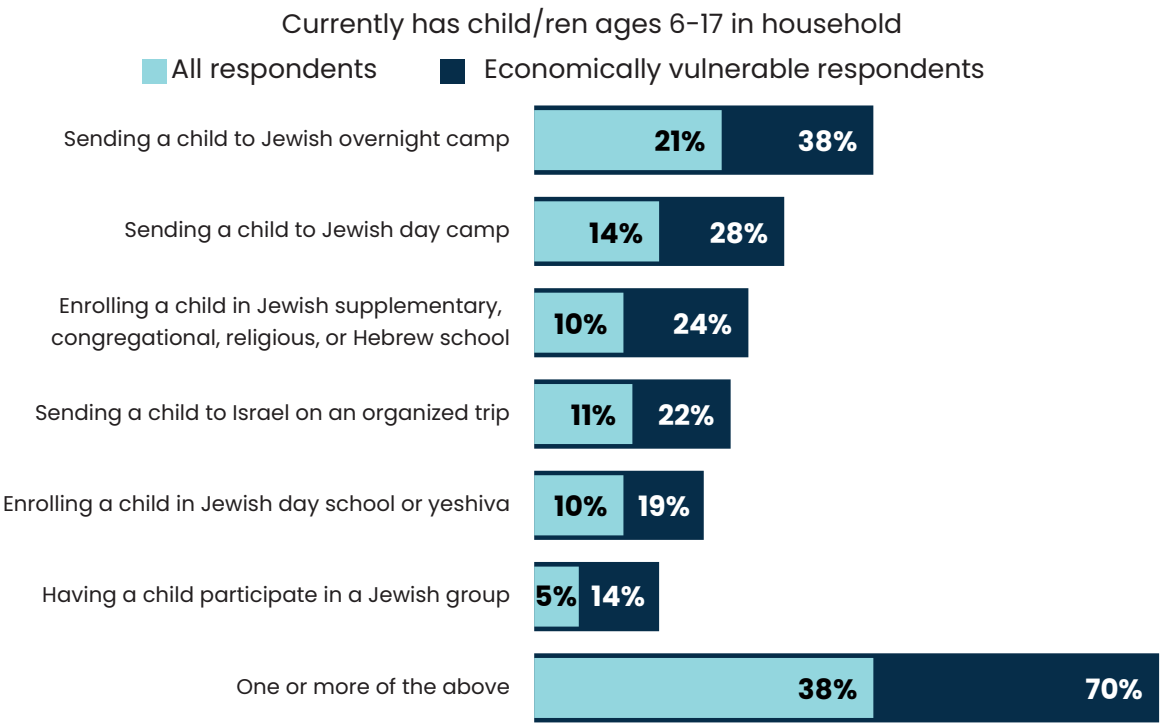
Exhibit 11.4: In past five years, financial costs have prevented ...



Respondents with children may face additional financial challenges associated with providing Jewish educational experiences to their children (Exhibits 11.5 and 11.6). For example, in the past five years, financial costs have prevented 21% of respondents with children ages 6-17 from sending a child to a Jewish overnight camp, and 12% of respondents with children ages 0–9 from enrolling a child in a Jewish preschool or early childhood education program.[26] Here, too, the financial constraints facing economically vulnerable respondents are even greater than among others. All told, more than a third (36%) of respondents with children of any age currently living at home—and more than two-thirds (69%) of economically vulnerable respondents with children of any age at home—cited at least one Jewish educational experience they could not provide to their children in the past five years due to the cost.[27]

> "If we could afford to send her [to day school], we 100% would. We do very well, we do not live paycheck to paycheck by any means. However, sending your kids to Jewish day school is almost like sending them to college, cost-wise, for their entire lives. Which is something that is very limiting to us, even as a couple that … is definitely upper-middle class." **—Parent of children under 5**

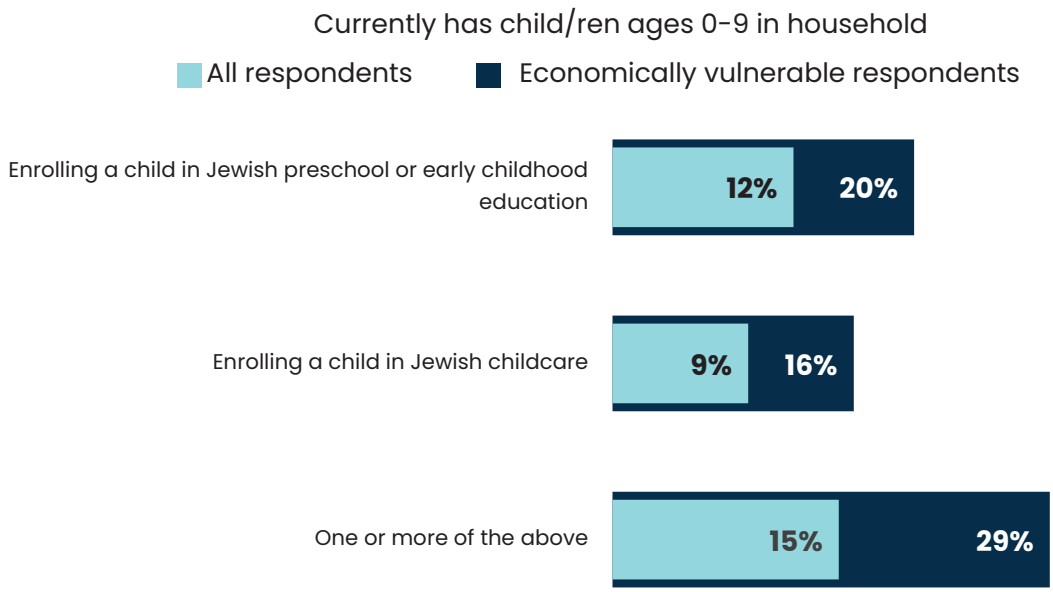
Exhibit 11.5: In past five years, financial costs have prevented …



[26] The analysis was conducted for ages 0-9 because all of those children would have been eligible for Jewish preschool or ECE programs at some point over the past five years.

[27] These combined data points for all children 0-17 are not displayed in exhibits.

Exhibit 11.6: In past five years, financial costs have prevented …



FINANCIAL SACRIFICES TO PARTICIPATE IN JEWISH LIFE

Lastly, when asked to what extent participating in Jewish life requires them to make financial sacrifices in other parts of their lives, more than four-in-ten respondents said very much or somewhat (as opposed to a little or not at all) (Exhibit 11.7). The level is substantially higher among some subgroups that tend to be more engaged in Jewish life, for example, parents of day school children and Orthodox respondents. Heightened financial sacrifices also touch Millennials[28]—many of whom are raising children and facing the associated costs of that stage of life—and the economically vulnerable.

Exhibit 11.7: Participating in Jewish life requires financial sacrifice in other areas of your life (very much or somewhat)

[28] At the time of the survey, Millennials ranged in age from 25 to 41.

SECTION 12

CONCLUSION: STRATEGIC IMPLICATIONS

Viewed together, the big pictures and broad patterns revealed in the survey findings and the insights provided in the qualitative data *suggest* a series of important strategic implications and questions for the Jewish community of Northern New Jersey. This final section highlights some of those questions, hopefully serving as both a catalyst and bridge to robust and productive conversations about the community's future development.

CONNECTIONS AND BARRIERS

The Northern New Jersey Jewish community has a strong foundation of connections, but simultaneously faces barriers to even greater connections and challenges to communal cohesion.

- **How can the community facilitate deeper connections among its members?**
- **How may the community make connecting with Jewish life more accessible to all?**

ENGAGEMENT WITH COMMUNAL ORGANIZATIONS

Survey respondents vary in how engaged they are with communal organizations, with geography, denomination, age, and income all associated with different levels of organizational engagement.

- **How can we bring more community members into organizational and agency networks, while maintaining those who are already organizational participants and supporters?**

FUNDING AND PROGRAMMING PRIORITIES

Respondents express competing priorities for communal funding. Like all communities, the Northern New Jersey Jewish community must make decisions about how to allocate its resources.

- **How does the community plan and collaborate to address needs?**
- **How does the community determine priorities among causes and programs?**

EDUCATING CHILDREN

Denominational affiliation and household income are both connected to immersive Jewish educational choices.

- **How can the community help increase the share of non-Orthodox parents making Jewish educational choices?**
- **How can the community support parents with lower incomes to provide Jewish educational experiences to their children?**

ISRAEL

Connections to and support for Israel are generally strong among survey respondents. At the same time, there are emerging challenges in the community's relationship with Israel, and some respondents express unease at being able to safely express their views.

- **How can the community maintain strong support for Israel, address potential divides, and promote respectful dialogue about Israel among all community members?**

ANTISEMITISM

Antisemitism creates serious challenges to a community's sense of safety and security. A majority of survey respondents think there is some or a lot of antisemitism in Northern New Jersey, half think there is more today than in the past, and a third reported a personal experience with antisemitism in the past year.

- **How should the community confront antisemitism and address the concern it provokes among community members?**
- **What opportunities for stronger connections with community allies can be leveraged?**

DIVERSE IDENTITY GROUPS

Many respondents from diverse identity groups—Jews of Color, LGBTQ+ Jews, those in interfaith marriages and partnerships, and those with disabilities, Russian speakers, and Israelis—simultaneously signal a sense of and desire for community with those who share their identities *and* feel less connected to and welcomed by the broader Jewish community than others.

- **How can the community support diverse identity groups in developing and maintaining their in-group solidarity and also help them feel more connected to the broader Jewish community?**

Among respondents with disabilities, many feel the community does not provide adequate services and accommodations.

- **How can the Jewish community improve its accommodations and services to those with disabilities?**

HUMAN SERVICE NEEDS

Recent human service needs are widespread—the most common among survey respondents are mental health needs for adults, several economic needs, coordinating/providing care for others, and mental health needs for teenagers and children—and gaps exist between service needs and the receipt of services.

- **What can the community do to determine why some people who need services are not obtaining them, and then help them do so?**

Should services be needed, respondents say it is most important to receive them from Jewish organizations in the case of older adult needs, mental health, care for those who can't care for themselves, and respite care for caregivers.

- **How can the community address the desires of its members for Jewish-sponsored human services in these and other areas?**

ECONOMIC VULNERABILITY AND FINANCIAL AFFORDABILITY

Overall, most respondents' socioeconomic status is strong, but about one-fifth of all respondents are economically vulnerable, a level that increases among selected groups of respondents, such as People of Color, LGBTQ+ identified respondents, the unemployed, and those with disabilities.

- **What can the community do to help those facing economic distress?**

Among all respondents, about four in ten report they have experienced financial constraints on Jewish communal participation. About the same number of respondents say participation in Jewish life requires sacrifices in other areas of their lives.

- **How can the community help reduce the number of community members for whom financial costs are a barrier to communal participation and a source of financial sacrifice elsewhere?**

CONCLUSION

This study has heard from many people—survey respondents, focus group and interview participants, and communal professionals—across the diverse Northern New Jersey Jewish community. It will serve as a resource for the entire community to help its members live meaningful, connected Jewish lives, by leveraging its collective strengths and seeking to address its current challenges, both internal and external. As importantly, it sets the stage for the community as it charts its path forward, alert to new tests of fortitude and emerging opportunities that local, national, and global change inevitably bring.


Russell Berrie
Foundation


Jewish Federation
OF NORTHERN NEW JERSEY
jfnnj.org