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JEWISH FEDERATION

2024/2025 MILWAUKEE

JEWISH COMMUNITY STUDY

 **NORC** at the
University of
Chicago

Brandeis

COHEN CENTER FOR
MODERN JEWISH STUDIES
STEINHARDT SOCIAL
RESEARCH INSTITUTE

THE 2024-25 MILWAUKEE JEWISH COMMUNITY STUDY

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The Cohen Center for Modern Jewish Studies (CMJS), founded in 1980, is dedicated to providing independent, high-quality research on issues related to contemporary Jewish life.

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www.brandeis.edu/cmjs/community-studies/milwaukee-report.html

MILWAUKEE JEWISH FEDERATION

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Dear Milwaukee Jewish Community,

On behalf of our board, committees, and staff, we are proud to present the results of the 2024–25 Milwaukee Jewish Community Study. Conducted by the Cohen Center for Modern Jewish Studies (CMJS) at Brandeis University, in partnership with NORC at the University of Chicago, this is the most comprehensive research of Jewish Milwaukee to date.

The findings offer valuable insight into our community—who we are today, and how we can best support and strengthen Jewish life in the years ahead. The results also raise important questions about how to meet the evolving needs and interests of a dynamic and deeply committed Jewish people.

The Milwaukee Jewish Federation commissioned this study to inform planning and to enhance programs and services across Jewish Milwaukee. The results will guide the Milwaukee Jewish Federation, partner agencies, schools, synagogues, and other Jewish organizations as we work to fulfill our shared responsibility to those who live, work, and study here. Across many measures, our community exceeds national benchmarks, including in philanthropy, volunteerism, and deep connection to Israel and the Jewish people. These strengths are both a source of pride and a powerful motivator for a bright future.

We extend our deepest gratitude to the many individuals and organizations whose partnership made this study possible:

- Researchers at Brandeis—notably Dr. Matthew Boxer, principal researcher, for their wisdom, expertise, and guidance in conducting and analyzing this study.
- Milwaukee Jewish Community Study Committee members—Stanton Abramson, Richard Buchband, Yulia Koltun, Jeff Langer, Joan Lubar, Max Seigle, and Carrie Steinberger—for providing their perspective and insight throughout this process.
- MJF staff—particularly Director of Planning and Strategic Projects Darla Flemming and Vice President of Jewish Communal Life and Learning Tzipi Altman-Shafer for their tireless work leading this project.

Lastly, we extend our appreciation to the individuals who participated in the survey. Your voices made this research possible and helped lay the foundation for a more informed, connected, and resilient Jewish future in Milwaukee, Israel, and around the world.

While the research phase has concluded, the community’s work is just beginning. As we interpret the findings and move toward action, we invite you to engage with the report and supplemental findings, discuss your perspective with family, friends, and neighbors, and ask questions. We invite you to share your takeaways to help us shape how we, collectively and as individuals, apply these

findings to shape Jewish Milwaukee. We look forward to sharing the journey toward our collective future—a stronger, better connected, and more dynamic Jewish Milwaukee.

May we all continue to go from strength to strength.

L'Shalom,

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Demographics

- There are approximately 16,700 Jewish households in the Milwaukee area, defined as Milwaukee, Ozaukee, and Waukesha counties. These households include 33,600 individuals, of whom 27,500 are Jewish.
- The mean age of Jewish adults in Milwaukee is 57, and the median age is 61, older than the national median age of Jewish adults, 49. Including children, the mean age of all Jewish individuals in Milwaukee is 50.
- The individual intermarriage rate (i.e., the proportion of married Jewish adults with a non-Jewish spouse) in Milwaukee is 37%, lower than the national average of 42%.
- Fourteen percent of Jewish households in Milwaukee include at least one child under age 18.
- Thirty-eight percent of Jewish adults in Milwaukee identify with the Reform denomination, and 37% do not identify with any particular denomination. Eleven percent identify as Conservative, 8% as Orthodox, and 7% with other denominations.
- Eighty-three percent of Jewish adults in Milwaukee identify as Ashkenazi. Five percent identify as Sephardi, less than 1% as Mizrahi, and less than 1% with other Jewish ethnicities. Five percent of Jewish adults do not identify with any particular Jewish heritage, less than 1% say they do not know their Jewish ethnicity, and 5% say these categories are not applicable to them. (The total exceeds 100% because respondents could identify with more than one option.)
- Seven percent of Jewish individuals in Milwaukee identify with a racial category other than non-Hispanic white. However, only 5% identify as a Person of Color.
- Ten percent of Jewish adults in Milwaukee identify as LGBTQ+.
- Nineteen percent of Jewish adults in Milwaukee were raised in a Russian-speaking household.
- Three percent of Jewish adults in Milwaukee are Israeli citizens.
- Thirty-one percent of Jewish adults in Milwaukee describe themselves politically as very liberal. Thirty-four percent describe themselves as liberal, 24% as moderate, 9% as conservative, and 2% as very conservative.
- Seventy-one percent of Jewish adults in Milwaukee over the age of 45 have adult children, including 36% who have at least one adult child living in the area.
- Sixty-four percent of Jewish adults in Milwaukee over the age of 45 have grandchildren, including 31% who have at least one grandchild living in the area.
- Seventy-seven percent of Jewish adults in Milwaukee experienced one or more forms of Jewish education in their youth.
- Fifty-four percent of Jewish households in Milwaukee reside in the North Shore. Twenty-two percent are in the City of Milwaukee, 12% in Waukesha County, and 12% in the Milwaukee County South Suburbs.
- Sixty-eight percent of Jewish adults in Milwaukee have resided in the area for at least 20 years.

Patterns of Jewish engagement

- The Index of Jewish Engagement focuses on Jewish behaviors—the ways in which individuals occupy and involve themselves in Jewish life in Milwaukee—rather than self-identification.
- The Index can be used to identify opportunities to improve communal planning based on the variety of needs and interests in the Milwaukee Jewish community.
- Four distinct patterns emerge in Milwaukee:
 - Minimally Involved (42% of Jewish adults): Characterized by minimal participation in Jewish life.
 - Organizational (22% of Jewish adults): Characterized by high levels of participation in holiday and organization-based activities.
 - Ritual (19% of Jewish adults): Characterized by high levels of participation in holiday and ritual activities.
 - Immersed (16% of Jewish adults): Characterized by frequent engagement in nearly all aspects of Jewish life.
- Engagement groups include people of all ages and denominational identities.
- Denomination, marital status and type, Jewish parentage, and childhood Jewish education are all associated with membership in these four engagement groups in Milwaukee.

Children and Jewish education

- Among the 4,500 children living in Jewish households in Milwaukee, 4,100 are being raised Jewish in some way.
- Twenty-three percent of Jewish children in Milwaukee in grades K-12 were enrolled in a Jewish day school or yeshiva during the 2024-25 school year.
- Fifteen percent of Jewish children in Milwaukee in grades K-12 were enrolled in a part-time Jewish school during the 2024-25 school year.
- Twenty percent of Jewish children in Milwaukee in grades K-12 were enrolled in tutoring or private classes in Hebrew or Jewish subjects during the 2024-25 school year.
- Sixteen percent of Jewish children in Milwaukee in grades K-12 participated in a Jewish youth group or teen program during the 2024-25 school year.
- Fifteen percent of Jewish children in Milwaukee in grades K-12 participated in a Jewish volunteer or leadership development program during the 2024-25 school year.
- Forty-six percent of Jewish children in Milwaukee in grades K-12 attended a Jewish summer camp as a camper or staff during the summer of 2024, including 41% who attended a Jewish day camp and 19% who attended a Jewish overnight camp.
- Twenty-nine percent of Jewish children in Milwaukee who were not yet in kindergarten were enrolled in a Jewish preschool or daycare program during the 2024-25 school year.
- Forty-four percent of Jewish households in Milwaukee with children age 12 or younger said they receive books from PJ Library or PJ Our Way. Another 19% were not aware of these programs.

Congregations and ritual life

- Thirty-two percent of Jewish households in Milwaukee include at least one person who currently belongs to a Jewish congregation. Another 28% previously belonged to a congregation.
- Among Jewish households in Milwaukee that do not currently belong to a Jewish congregation, most cite as the explanation for their lack of membership that membership is not a priority (42%), the lack of a good fit (30%), and the cost (30%).
- Fifty-six percent of Jewish adults in Milwaukee attended Jewish religious services at least once in the past year, either in person or online, including 34% of Jewish adults who are not members of any Jewish congregation. Twenty percent of Jewish adults attended religious services at least once a month.
- During the 2024 High Holidays, 41% of Jewish adults in Milwaukee attended services.
- The most common ways Jews in Milwaukee mark Shabbat are by lighting Shabbat candles (48%) and having a special meal (48%).
- Eighty-one percent of Jewish adults in Milwaukee light Hanukkah candles in a typical year, and 68% hosted or attended a Passover seder in 2024. Forty-three percent fasted on Yom Kippur in 2024, and 41% keep at least some of the laws of kashrut.
- Forty-five percent of Jewish adults in Milwaukee feel that it is somewhat or very important that local Jewish organizations maintain kashrut standards, including 69% of members of congregations, 53% of JCC members, 53% of members of other Jewish organizations, and 51% of Jewish adults who participated in Jewish programs sometimes or often in the past year.

Community connections and activities

- Seventy-four percent of Jewish adults in Milwaukee say that some, most, or all of their close friends are Jewish.
- Ninety-nine percent of Jewish adults in Milwaukee feel any sense of belonging to the Jewish people. Eighty-two percent feel any sense of belonging to the Jewish community where they live, and 58% feel any sense of belonging to another Jewish community that is not where they live (e.g., a summer camp, a place where they used to live, a Jewish organization, or an online Jewish group).
- Forty-nine percent of Jewish adults in Milwaukee talked about Jewish topics often in the past year. Thirty-eight percent read Jewish publications often, 31% ate Jewish foods often, and 28% often read books, watched movies or TV, or listened to music with Jewish content. Thirteen percent studied Jewish texts often.

Organizations, volunteering, and philanthropy

- Thirty-five percent of Jewish households in Milwaukee belong to at least one Jewish organization or group, aside from congregations.
- Seven percent of Jewish households in Milwaukee belong to the Harry and Rose Samson Family Jewish Community Center.

- In the past year, 72% of Jewish adults in Milwaukee participated in at least one program with a Jewish organization, aside from religious services.
- The most common barriers to participation in the Milwaukee Jewish community are not knowing many people (35%), not finding programs of interest (34%), being unable to afford programs (21%), and feeling that one's political views are unwelcome (20%). Nineteen percent of Jewish adults in Milwaukee who are interested in participating in Jewish programs cite feeling unwelcome as a barrier to participation, 15% say they are not confident in their level of Jewish knowledge, and 13% cite safety or security concerns.
- Fifty-eight percent of Jewish adults in Milwaukee volunteered anywhere in the past year, including 36% who volunteered for or with a Jewish organization or cause.
- Eighty-three percent of Jewish households in Milwaukee made charitable donations in the past year, including 62% who donated to Jewish organizations or causes.
- Ninety-one percent of Jewish adults in Milwaukee say they are familiar with the Milwaukee Jewish Federation, and 64% have somewhat or very positive views of its impact on the community.

Concerns about antisemitism

- Nearly all Jewish adults in Milwaukee (98%) are somewhat (22%) or very concerned (76%) about antisemitism around the world.
- Eighty-three percent of Jewish adults in Milwaukee are somewhat (13%) or very concerned (70%) about antisemitism on college campuses.
- Eighty-three percent of Jewish adults in Milwaukee are somewhat (39%) or very concerned (44%) about antisemitism in the Milwaukee area.
- Forty-nine percent of Jewish adults in Milwaukee have avoided certain activities or locations out of a fear of antisemitism.
- Thirty-four percent of Jewish adults in Milwaukee reported being the target of at least one antisemitic incident during the past year.

Connections to Israel

- Sixty-nine percent of Jewish adults in Milwaukee are somewhat (38%) or very emotionally attached (31%) to Israel.
- Fifty-six percent of Jewish adults in Milwaukee have visited Israel at least once.
- Forty-three percent of Jewish adults in Milwaukee explicitly say they describe themselves as Zionists. Forty-two percent say they explicitly do not describe themselves as Zionists, and 15% are not sure or prefer not to say whether they would describe themselves as Zionists.
- Ninety percent of Jewish adults in Milwaukee follow news about Israel somewhat (51%) or very closely (39%).
- In the aftermath of October 7, 46% of Jewish adults in Milwaukee feel somewhat (22%) or much more attached (24%) to Israel than they did beforehand.

Financial well-being

- Sixty-three percent of Jewish adults in Milwaukee who are not currently in high school are working either a full-time job (42%), a part-time job (13%), or in multiple positions (8%). Thirty-one percent are retired. Six percent are neither currently employed nor retired, including 3% who are looking for work.
- Twenty-one percent of Jewish households in Milwaukee either cannot make ends meet (4%) or are just managing to make ends meet (17%).
- Eighteen percent of Jewish households in Milwaukee say their household income is below \$50,000, while 5% say their household income is \$250,000 or more. Twenty-five percent of households did not provide information about income; in the aggregate, they include relatively few households that are struggling financially and more households that describe their standard of living as having enough money.
- Fifteen percent of Jewish households in Milwaukee had to limit or modify their involvement in Jewish life due to their financial situation.

Health needs

- Ninety-two percent of Jewish adults in Milwaukee describe their physical health as good (34%), very good (35%), or excellent (23%).
- Eighty-seven percent of Jewish adults in Milwaukee describe their mental health as good (28%), very good (33%), or excellent (25%).
- Thirty-four percent of Jewish households in Milwaukee include someone with a chronic health issue, disability, or other need that affects participation in work, school, or activities.
- In the past year, 29% of Jewish households in Milwaukee required services to manage health needs. Most of these households were able to receive the services they needed, but 7% felt they did not receive adequate services to meet their needs.
- Twenty percent of Jewish households in Milwaukee manage or provide care to close relatives or friends on a regular basis, aside from routine childcare.

CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

The 2024-25 Milwaukee Jewish Community Study was conducted by the Maurice and Marilyn Cohen Center for Modern Jewish Studies (CMJS) at Brandeis University, in partnership with NORC at the University of Chicago. This project was commissioned by the Milwaukee Jewish Federation, in partnership with local Jewish organizations and congregations. The study employed state-of-the-art methods to create a portrait of the characteristics, attitudes, and behaviors of the Jewish community. Some of the issues explored in this study emerged out of conversations surrounding the Pew Research Center's 2013 *A Portrait of Jewish Americans*, which pointed to growing and shrinking US Jewish sub-populations, declining affiliation in traditional institutions, new forms of Jewish engagement, an increase in both secular and Orthodox Jews, and a relationship between intermarriage and community growth.¹ A more recent Pew report, *Jewish Americans in 2020*,² reinforced many of the findings of the original Pew study and contributed new insights about the state and character of the American Jewish community. With the Pew studies and the related national discourse as a backdrop, the *2024-25 Milwaukee Jewish Community Study* seeks to describe the current dynamics of the Jewish population in the Milwaukee area.

The principal goal of this study is to provide valid data about the Milwaukee Jewish community that can be used by communal organizations and their leadership to design programs and policies that support and enhance Jewish life. Valid data are essential to effective decision making, allocation of resources, strategic priorities, community support, robust participation, and outreach.

Specifically, the study sought to:

- Provide information, at household and individual levels, on a wide range of demographic, geographic, and socio-economic characteristics
- Provide information about current Jewish connections, attitudes, barriers to participation, and other information about communal engagement
- Understand the multifaceted cultural, communal, and religious expressions of Judaism that constitute Jewish engagement
- Understand the diversity of the community in terms of race and ethnicity, age, religious identity, financial needs, LGBTQ+, local ties, health needs, and more
- Gauge current and potential need for human services, particularly for community members who are struggling financially

The *2024-25 Milwaukee Jewish Community Study* provides a snapshot of today's Jewish population in the Milwaukee area and considers trends and developments in Jewish life and engagement. In interpreting the data, it is important to bear in mind that the study represents the characteristics and views of community members at the time of the survey. Notably, the data were collected during the Israel-Hamas war that began in October 2023, and during a period of rising antisemitism in the United States. It is likely that attitudes about Israel, concerns about antisemitism, and other markers of Jewish identity were influenced by these events.

Methodology overview

This study is based on an analysis of a rich set of data collected between December 2, 2024, and March 3, 2025. Households were contacted by mail, email, and telephone, and invited to complete the survey online or by telephone.

The study design integrated households from a combined set of Jewish organizational lists (the list sample) with another set of households randomly selected from all remaining mailing addresses in the study geographic area (the Address-Based Sample or ABS). The study area included Milwaukee, Ozaukee, and Waukesha counties (see Figure 2.3 for a map).

Over 188,000 households in the study area received invitations to take the survey. Near the end of the field period, an open-access link was provided to allow interested members of the Milwaukee Jewish community who had not yet completed their surveys to participate. In all, 980 completed surveys were achieved.

The survey of Jewish households was designed to represent the views of an entire community based on responses from a randomly selected sample of households from the community. When analyzing survey data, we are not only interested in the answers of the respondents, but also the larger subgroup or community that they represent. Each completed survey is assigned a numeric “weight” that indicates our estimate of how many people in the population of interest the respondent represents. The weighted respondent thus stands in for that segment of the population, and not only the household from which it was collected.

Despite the careful methodological approaches employed in this study, bias in estimates is inevitable. Assigning weights is a way to reduce such bias. The study uses survey weights to provide accurate estimates of the population. Survey weights account for the survey design, nonresponse, and adjustments based on external data for the Jewish and total Milwaukee populations; they are based on data from the American Community Survey,³ American Jewish Population Project,⁴ and data on enrollment and membership in local organizations and programs.

Details of survey methods, weighting, and analysis are provided in Appendix A.

How to read this report

Unless otherwise specified, this report presents weighted survey data in the form of percentages or proportions. Accordingly, these data should be read not as the percentage or proportion of respondents who answered each question in a given way, but as the percentage or proportion of the population that it is estimated would answer each question in that way had each member of the population been surveyed.

As you read this report, keep in mind the following:

- Note that the base category or denominator for each analysis may differ (e.g., Jewish adults, Jewish households, Jewish households with children). The relevant category is noted in the text, table, or figure. In most tables, it appears in the top left in bold type.
- Unless otherwise specified, references to “all Jewish adults” or “all Jewish households” refer to Jewish adults and Jewish households in Milwaukee.

- Throughout this report, the terms “couples,” “inmarried,” and “intermarried” refer both to those who are legally married and to those who are partnered and living together. Unless otherwise specified, “children” refers to minor children under age 18.
- When a percentage is between 0% and 0.5% and would otherwise round down to 0%, the number is denoted as < 1%.
- When a percentage is at least 99.5% but less than 100% and would otherwise round up to 100%, the number is denoted as > 99%.
- When there are insufficient respondents in a particular subgroup for reporting reliable information, the estimate is shown as “—”.

How to read report tables

Numeric data in this report are most often presented in tables, although bar graphs and pie charts are used in some cases to illustrate or amplify selected data. To interpret tables correctly, the title and/or first row of each table will indicate the denominator for any reported numbers. Some tables report a percentage of Jewish households, some a percentage of Jewish adults, and some report on a subset for whom the questions are relevant.

Some tables and figures that present proportions do not add up to 100%. In some cases, this was a result of respondents having the option to select more than one response to a question; in such cases, the text of the report indicates that multiple responses were possible. In most cases, however, the appearance that proportional estimates do not add up to 100% is a result of rounding.

Most tables in this report are “row tables.” These tables are read horizontally by row. Example Table 1 illustrates a typical “row table,” which shows that of all Jewish households, 32% are members of a congregation, and of households between ages 18 and 39, 31% are congregation members.

Example Table 1, row table

Derived from report Table 5.1 Membership in Jewish congregations

	Congregation member (%)
All Jewish households	32
Age	
18-39	31
40-54	24
55-64	40
65-74	26
75+	36

Less frequently we include “column tables” for reasons of space or content. These tables appear primarily in Chapter 2 and are read vertically by column. To underscore that this table should be read by column, we have inserted a down arrow (↓) under the column headers. Example Table 2 tells us that of Milwaukee Jewish adults, 22% are between the ages of 18 and 39.

Example Table 2, column table

From report Table 2.3. Age of adults in Milwaukee

	Jewish adults, Milwaukee (%)
18-39	22
40-54	18
55-64	18
65-74	24
75+	18
Total	100

Row and column totals

When a table shows all possible values and those values are mutually exclusive, the table will total 100. In that case, the table will show a TOTAL row or column of 100. When the row total column does not appear, it usually indicates that not all possible values are shown (e.g., we display the “yes” response but not the “no” response). In other cases, it means that multiple options could be selected (usually as a “select all that apply” question), and the total could exceed 100.

Note that in some cases when the total of 100 is shown, the numbers may not add up exactly to 100 due to rounding.

Examples:

Example Table 1, above, does **not** show the total column. The table shows the proportion of Jewish households that are congregation members but does not show the proportion that are **not** members.

Example Table 2, above, shows the age distribution of Jewish adults in Milwaukee. Since each individual belongs in only one age category, and all age categories are shown, the bottom of the column displays the total of 100.

Multiple part tables

To save space and facilitate comparisons, some tables include multiple characteristics. Vertical lines in these tables separate the different characteristics that are measured. When there is a double vertical line after the first column, it is an indicator that it refers to an overall category, and the remaining columns are subsets.

Example Table 3 shows activities avoided by Jewish adults out of a fear of antisemitism. The first column of numbers, with the heading “Any activity,” shows that 49% of all Jewish adults avoided at least one type of activity. The rest of the table shows specific types of activities avoided: for example, 35% of Jewish adults did not mention Israel out of a fear of antisemitism. Among those who are ages 18 to 39, 50% did not mention Israel. Respondents could select each activity they avoided, so each column should be read separately.

There are no totals shown here because each column shows the percentage of Jewish adults who avoided each activity but does not show the percentage who did not avoid the activity.

The gray shading indicates statistical significance, which is explained in the next section.

Example Table 3

Derived from Tables 8.4a and 8.4b. Avoided activities out of a fear of antisemitism

	Any activity (%)	Revealing that you are Jewish, whether in person or online (%)	Mentioning Israel, whether in person or online (%)	Wearing or displaying objects that would identify you as a Jew (%)	Going to certain places or events (%)	Posting Jewish content online that would identify you as a Jew (%)
All Jewish adults	49	35	35	31	26	26
Age						
18-39	61	41	50	34	26	33
40-54	60	42	50	38	34	29
55-64	58	48	40	44	39	42
65-74	42	31	25	24	22	20
75+	29	13	15	20	14	7

Interpretation of estimates and statistical significance

For most tables in this report, data are compared across a consistent set of subgroups that have been defined for the purposes of this study. The structure of the table varies based on the content. This information is always provided in the first row of the table.

As indicated previously, numbers and percentages should not be understood as exact measurements, but as the most likely value we would expect to find if we had surveyed the entire population of Milwaukee Jewish households. This value is also known as a point estimate. It is particularly important to keep this in mind when comparing subgroups. Small differences between subgroups might be the result of random variation in the survey responses rather than actual differences in the population.

When we say there is a statistically significant difference among subgroups, it means we are 95% confident that at least some of the differences reflect real differences in the population—not just random variation in who happened to complete the survey. In other words, statistical significance helps tell us whether the differences we observe between groups—for example, between older and younger respondents—likely represent true differences in the broader population or are simply due to random chance in the survey sample. Statistical significance applies only to comparisons between estimates, not to any one number on its own. When two estimates are statistically different, it means that if we could survey everyone in the population, there is at least a 95% probability we would still find a systematic difference between those groups on that measure.

In the tables in this report, statistically significant differences are illustrated with light gray shading. Findings that are not statistically significant are left unshaded. Even when there is an overall significant difference among several groups, that does not mean that every individual pair of numbers in that set is significantly different from every other. It simply means that collectively, there are significant differences between the subgroups represented.

In the figures in this report, an asterisk (*) next to the figure title indicates that there are statistically significant differences among the groups shown. If there is no asterisk, it means none of the observed differences between the groups are statistically significant.

Sometimes, even large-looking differences between estimates are not marked as statistically significant. This can happen when the sample size for a group is small, making it harder to be confident that the difference is real and not a result of random chance. In some of these cases, the observed difference might be significant at a lower confidence level (e.g., 85% or 90%, meaning that we are 85% or 90% confident that observed differences reflect real differences in the general population, rather than 95% confident). Lowering the confidence level narrows the range around the estimate, which increases the chance of finding a difference between groups, but also slightly increases the chance of misinterpreting the data.

To fully understand a specific finding or group comparison, additional analysis of the dataset may be helpful.

Example:

In Example Table 3 above, we look at the proportion of Jewish adults in Milwaukee who said they avoided certain activities because of fear of antisemitism. The first row shows that 49% of all Jewish adults avoided at least one activity. Because this number is a single estimate and not a comparison between groups, statistical significance does not apply, and that row is never shaded gray.

The final column of the table tells us that there are statistically significant differences by age when it comes to posting Jewish content online. The table does not specify exactly which age groups differ significantly, but we can make some reasonable inferences. It is very likely that the difference between the oldest age group, those who are 75 and older, and the 55-64 age group is statistically significant because the gap between them is large (7% vs. 42%). On the other hand, the difference between the 18-39 and 40-54 age groups is smaller than 10 percentage points (33% vs. 29%), so it is unlikely to be statistically significant.

Reporting qualitative data

The survey included a number of questions that called for open-text responses. These questions were used to elicit more information about respondents' opinions and experiences than could be provided in a check box format. All such responses were categorized, or "coded," to identify topics and themes that were mentioned by multiple respondents. Because a consistent set of responses was not offered to each respondent, and because in some cases there were very few responses, it would be misleading to report the weighted proportion of responses to these questions. Instead, we may report the total number of responses that mentioned a particular code or theme. This number may appear in text or in parentheses after the response without a percent sign, or in tables labeled as "n" or number of responses. In many cases, sample quotes are also reported, with identifying information removed and edited for clarity.

Comparisons across surveys

Although comparisons across surveys are informative, because of methodological differences, they are less precise and reliable than assessments of the data from the present study alone. In several

places throughout the report, data from Pew’s 2020 study, *Jewish Americans in 2020*,⁵ are used to show how the Milwaukee Jewish community is similar to or different from the United States Jewish community. All references to the US Jewish community in this report are drawn from the 2020 Pew study.

Due to methodological differences and variations in question wording between the present study and the *2011 Milwaukee Jewish Community Study*, comparisons across studies are not included in this report. The methodology used for the previous study and many others in the past, random digit dialing (RDD), is particularly problematic when trying to reach households within a specific geographical region. RDD relies on telephone calls to randomly selected households in a given geographic area and phone interviews with household members. As a result of changing telephone technology, particularly caller ID, fewer people answer the phone for unknown callers, putting response rates for telephone surveys below those necessary for generating valid estimates.

More significantly, nearly half of households no longer have landline phones and instead rely exclusively on cell phones. Because of phone number portability, cell phones often have an area code and exchange, and in some cases a billing address, that are not associated with the geographic location in which the phone user resides. Therefore, it is no longer possible to select a range of phone numbers and assume that the owners of those numbers live in the specified area and are willing to answer the phone. In addition, reliance on cell phones can introduce an age bias since younger individuals are more likely to rely exclusively on cell phones, while older individuals may still utilize landlines.

Limitations

Due to the methodology used to reach community members, some groups were likely to have been undercounted and/or underrepresented. Residents of institutional settings such as hospitals, nursing homes, and dormitories on college campuses, as well as adults who were never in contact with a Jewish organization in Milwaukee, were less likely to have been identified and contacted to complete the survey. Some populations, such as financially struggling households, Jewish adults who do not have a college degree, and Jews of Color may have been less likely to participate in the survey and therefore be undercounted. Although we cannot produce a precise count of these individuals, these undercounts were unlikely to have introduced significant bias into the reported estimates. Where appropriate, we noted the limitations of the methodology.

The present report has been designed to provide basic information about Jewish life across a wide range of topics and a variety of subgroups. It was not designed to provide detailed information about any single topic or subset of the community. Although detailed data cannot always be provided, the information that is included can serve as a springboard for more specific and targeted analyses as well as additional follow-up research. Note that more details about each item are available in the report appendices and through analysis of the dataset.

Report overview

This report presents key findings about the Milwaukee Jewish community. Beginning with a portrait of the community as a whole, the report continues with a more in-depth look at topics of interest to community members and leaders.

Chapter 2. Demographic Snapshot

The report begins with an overview of the demographic composition of the Jewish community.

Chapter 3. Patterns of Jewish Engagement

This chapter describes the multifaceted ways in which the Jewish adults define and express their Jewish identity. A set of behavioral measures characterize Jewish engagement based on participation in Jewish life. A typology of Jewish engagement helps explain Jewish behaviors and attitudes. This chapter also reports on attitudes about the meaning and importance of Judaism.

Chapter 4. Jewish Children and Jewish Education

This chapter discusses Jewish children and families as well as participation in Jewish education.

Chapter 5. Congregations and Ritual Life

This chapter discusses membership in Jewish congregations and participation in Jewish ritual life.

Chapter 6. Community Connections and Activities

This chapter explores where Jewish adults find community in general, as well as their connections to and cultural activities in the Jewish community.

Chapter 7. Organizations, Volunteering, and Philanthropy

This chapter discusses membership and involvement in organizational, social, and personal Jewish life, the barriers that limit involvement with Jewish organizations, and altruistic behaviors.

Chapter 8. Concerns about Antisemitism

This chapter discusses Jewish adults' concerns about, and experiences of, antisemitism.

Chapter 9. Connections to Israel

This chapter describes the frequency and types of travel to Israel and other markers of connection to Israel.

Chapter 10. Financial Well-Being

This chapter examines the living conditions of Jewish households, in particular with regard to economic well-being and economic hardship.

Chapter 11. Health Needs

This chapter examines the health and social service concerns of Jewish households.

Chapter 12. In the Words of Community Members

This chapter summarizes survey respondents' answers to two open-ended questions at the end of the survey.

Chapter 13. Conclusions and Recommendations

This chapter highlights key themes and questions that emerge from the study.

Additional study materials

All study documents and data are available for download from the study website:

<https://www.brandeis.edu/cmjs/community-studies/milwaukee-report.html>.

Executive Summary

Summary of the study key findings.

Technical Appendices

Details of methodology, data collection, analysis, full survey instrument and codebook, and study documentation.

Comparison Charts

Detailed cross-tabulations of all survey data for key subgroups of the population, provided in excel format.

Public Use Dataset

Dataset in Stata format for additional analysis by researchers. Any responses that identify individuals have been removed from the public use version.

CHAPTER 2. DEMOGRAPHIC SNAPSHOT

Chapter highlights

This chapter focuses on the size and basic demographic characteristics of the Milwaukee Jewish community.

- There are approximately 16,700 Jewish households in the Milwaukee area, defined as Milwaukee, Ozaukee, and Waukesha counties. These households include 33,600 individuals, of whom 27,500 are Jewish.
- The mean age of Jewish adults in Milwaukee is 57, and the median age is 61, older than the national median age of Jewish adults, 49. Including children, the mean age of all Jewish individuals in Milwaukee is 50.
- The individual intermarriage rate (i.e., the proportion of married Jewish adults with a non-Jewish spouse) in Milwaukee is 37%, lower than the national average of 42%.
- Fourteen percent of Jewish households in Milwaukee include at least one child under age 18.
- Thirty-eight percent of Jewish adults in Milwaukee identify with the Reform denomination, and 37% do not identify with any particular denomination. Eleven percent identify as Conservative, 8% as Orthodox, and 7% with other denominations.
- Eighty-three percent of Jewish adults in Milwaukee identify as Ashkenazi. Five percent identify as Sephardi, less than 1% as Mizrahi, and less than 1% with other Jewish ethnicities. Five percent of Jewish adults do not identify with any particular Jewish heritage, less than 1% say they do not know their Jewish ethnicity, and 5% say these categories are not applicable to them. (The total exceeds 100% because respondents could identify with more than one option.)
- Seven percent of Jewish individuals in Milwaukee identify with a racial category other than non-Hispanic white. However, only 5% identify as a Person of Color.
- Ten percent of Jewish adults in Milwaukee identify as LGBTQ+.
- Nineteen percent of Jewish adults in Milwaukee were raised in a Russian-speaking household.
- Three percent of Jewish adults in Milwaukee are Israeli citizens.
- Thirty-one percent of Jewish adults in Milwaukee describe themselves politically as very liberal. Thirty-four percent describe themselves as liberal, 24% as moderate, 9% as conservative, and 2% as very conservative.
- Seventy-one percent of Jewish adults in Milwaukee over the age of 45 have adult children, including 36% who have at least one adult child living in the area.
- Sixty-four percent of Jewish adults in Milwaukee over the age of 45 have grandchildren, including 31% who have at least one grandchild living in the area.
- Seventy-seven percent of Jewish adults in Milwaukee participated in one or more forms of Jewish education in their youth.

- Fifty-four percent of Jewish households in Milwaukee reside in the North Shore. Twenty-two percent are in the City of Milwaukee, 12% in Waukesha County, and 12% in the Milwaukee County South Suburbs.
- Sixty-eight percent of Jewish adults in Milwaukee have resided in the area for at least 20 years.

Jewish population estimate

There are approximately 16,700 Jewish households in the Milwaukee area (Table 2.1), defined as Milwaukee, Ozaukee, and Waukesha counties. These households include 33,600 individuals, of whom 27,500 are Jewish.

The Jewish population comprises approximately 1.9% of the overall population of 1,422,256 individuals in the Milwaukee area.⁶

Table 2.1. Milwaukee Jewish community population estimates, 2024-25 (rounded to nearest 100)

Total people in Jewish households	33,600
Total Jewish households	16,700
Total Jews	27,500
Adults (ages 18+)	29,100
Jewish	23,400
Non-Jewish or unknown	5,700
Children (under age 18)	4,500
Jewish	4,100
Non-Jewish or unknown religion	400

People in Jewish households

Estimates of the size of the Jewish community rest on a set of fundamental questions about who is Jewish for the purposes of the study. Recent studies, such as the Pew Research Center’s 2013 and 2020 national studies of the US Jewish community, classify respondents according to their responses to a series of screening questions:

- What is your religion, if any?
- Do you consider yourself to be Jewish aside from religion?
- Were either of your parents Jewish?
- Were you raised Jewish?

Based on the answers to these questions, Jewish adults have been categorized as “Jewish by religion” (JBR) if they responded to a question about religion by stating that they are solely Jewish, or “Jews of no religion” (JNR) if they do not adhere to any religion, but they consider themselves Jewish through some other means. Jews by religion tend to be more engaged with Judaism than Jews of no religion, but many JBRs and JNRs look similar in terms of Jewish behaviors and attitudes. For the purposes of this study and to ensure that the Milwaukee Jewish community could be compared to the population nationwide, a variant of Pew’s scheme was employed, supplemented by several other

measures of identity. Also included in the Jewish population are those adults who indicate they are both Jewish and another religion; we refer to this category as “Jews of multiple religions” (JMR). Children in this study are classified based on how the adult respondent describes them. When a respondent says a child’s parents are raising them exclusively Jewish, that child is classified as “Jewish” alone. If the parents are raising the child both Jewish and in another religion, the child is classified as “Jewish and another religion.” If the parents are not raising the child in any religion and do not otherwise consider the child to be Jewish, the child is classified as “no religion.” Finally, if the parents are raising the child in another religion and do not consider the child to be Jewish as well, the child is classified as “another religion.”

DEFINITIONS: WHO IS A JEW?

Definitions used in this report:



Jewish adults:

Identify as Jewish AND have Jewish background: at least one Jewish parent, raised Jewish, or converted to Judaism

- **Jewish by religion (JBR):** Religion is Jewish only
- **Jews of no religion (JNR):** No religion but ethnically or culturally Jewish
- **Jews of multiple religions (JMR):**
 - Two religions— Jewish and another religion
 - A religion other than Judaism and ethnically or culturally Jewish



Non-Jewish adults

- Identifies as Jewish and has no Jewish background:
 - No Jewish parent, was not raised Jewish, and did not convert
- Does not identify as Jewish and has Jewish background
- Does not identify as Jewish and has no Jewish background



Children (birth to age 17):

Are classified based on whether their parents consider them to be Jewish

- **Jewish:** Parents consider children Jewish exclusively (either by religion, culturally, or ethnically)
- **Jewish and another religion:** Parents consider children Jewish and another religion
- **No religion:** Parents consider children to have no religion
- **Another religion:** Parents consider children to be a religion other than Judaism



Jewish households: Includes at least one Jewish adult

Among Jewish adults in Milwaukee, 81% identify as JBR (19,000 individuals), 10% identify as JNR (2,400 individuals), and 9% identify as JMR (2,000 individuals; Table 2.2).

Table 2.2. Population of Milwaukee Jewish households

	Overall
Jewish adults	23,400
JBR adults	19,000
JNR adults	2,400
JMR adults	2,000
Non-Jewish adults	5,700
Jewish children	4,100
Exclusively Jewish	3,500
Jewish and something else	700
Non-Jewish children	400
No religion	200
Exclusively another religion	<100
Unknown	200

Age and gender composition

The Milwaukee Jewish community skews older than the broader Milwaukee population and the national Jewish population (Tables 2.3 and 2.4). Note that Table 2.3 includes the age breakdowns used throughout this report; Table 2.4 includes a separate breakdown produced for ease of comparison with national data from the US Census Bureau and the Pew Research Center.

The mean age of Jewish adults in Milwaukee is 57. The median age of Jewish adults in Milwaukee is 61; in comparison, the national median age of Jewish adults is 49.⁷ Including children in the analysis lowers the mean and median ages. The mean age of all Jewish individuals in Milwaukee is 50, and the median age is 56.

Table 2.3. Age of Jewish adults in Milwaukee

	Jewish adults (%)
	↓
18-39	22
40-54	18
55-64	18
65-74	24
75+	18
Total	100

Table 2.4. Age of adults in Milwaukee⁸

	Jewish Milwaukee (%)	Milwaukee (American Community Survey 2023; %) ⁹	US Jews (Pew 2020; %)
	↓	↓	↓
18-34	17	29	28
35-49	19	25	23
50-64	23	24	20
65-74	24	13	17
75+	18	9	13
Total	100	100	100

The Jewish population (adults and children) is 43% male, 55% female, and 2% who prefer to self-describe.¹⁰

Inmarriage and intermarriage

Sixty-five percent of all Jewish adults in Milwaukee are married or living with a partner (Table 2.5). Of these couples, 63% are inmarried and 37% are intermarried. The intermarriage rate (i.e., the proportion of Jewish adults with a non-Jewish spouse) is lower than the national average (42%).¹¹

Definitions: Inmarriage and Intermarriage

“Couples” and “marriages” include married and cohabitating couples. “Spouse” refers to marital spouses and partners.

Inmarried: two partners who are currently Jewish (JBR, JNR, JMR), regardless of whether they were born Jewish or converted

Intermarried: one partner currently Jewish and one partner not Jewish

Household intermarriage rate: percentage of couples that include a Jewish and non-Jewish partner

Individual intermarriage rate: percentage of married/partnered Jewish adults with a partner who is not Jewish

Understanding Intermarriage Rates Example

Jewish household 1: Intermarried



Jewish



Non-Jewish

Jewish household 2: Inmarried



Jewish



Jewish



Household intermarriage rate is 50% because half of the couples (1 out of 2) are intermarried



Individual intermarriage rate is 33% because one of the three Jewish individuals is intermarried

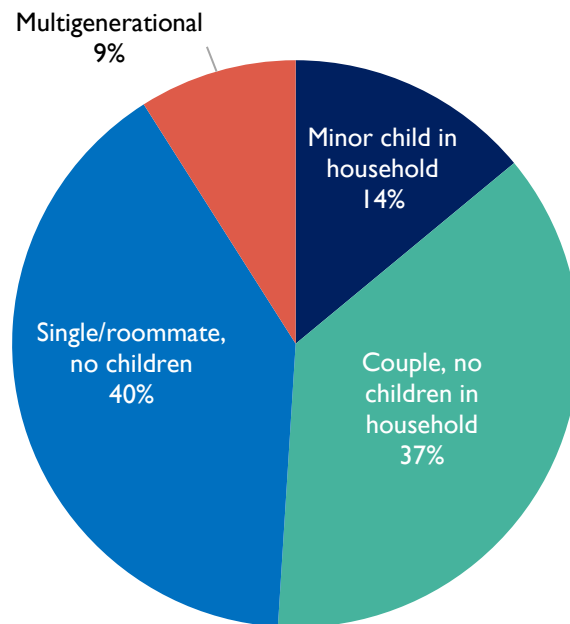
Table 2.5. Relationship status of Milwaukee Jewish adults by age

	All Jewish adults (%)	Ages 18-39 (%)	Ages 40-54 (%)	Ages 55-64 (%)	Ages 65-74 (%)	Ages 75+ (%)
Married/partnered	65	46	68	65	86	60
Religious composition among couples						
Inmarried	63	60	43	61	60	92
Intermarried	37	40	57	39	40	8
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100

Household composition

Fourteen percent of Jewish households in Milwaukee include children under age 18 (including single-parent, two-parent, or multigenerational households; Figure 2.1). Couples without minor children constitute 37% of households. Forty percent of Jewish households are made up of single adults living alone or with roommates. Multigenerational households, defined as parents and adult children of any age living together, constitute the remaining 9% of households. This category can include adults, typically in their 70s or 80s, who have moved in with their adult children, or adults, typically in their 20s, 30s, or 40s, who live in their parents' homes.

Figure 2.1. Household composition (% of Jewish households)



Jewish denominations

Denominational affiliation has historically been one of the primary indicators of Jewish identity and practice. Although it is not as predictive of Jewish engagement as it once was, it remains an important reference point for American Jews.¹² In Milwaukee, among Jewish adults, the two largest groupings are those who identify as Reform (38%) and those who do not affiliate with any particular denomination (37%; Table 2.6). The proportions of these groups in the Milwaukee Jewish community are similar to their proportions of the national Jewish population. A smaller proportion (8%) identifies as Orthodox, also similar to the national average. Another 11% of Jewish adults in Milwaukee identify as Conservative and 7% identify with other denominations (e.g., Reconstructionist, Renewal, Humanistic).

Table 2.6. Denomination of Jewish adults in Milwaukee and the United States

	Milwaukee 2024-25 (%)	US Jews 2020 (%)
Orthodox	8	9
Conservative	11	17
Reform	38	37
Other denomination	7	4
No denomination	37	32
Total	100	100

Subpopulations

The majority (83%) of Jewish adults in Milwaukee identify as Ashkenazi (i.e., predominantly of Eastern or Central European descent; Table 2.7). Five percent of Jewish adults identify as Sephardi (i.e., descended from Spanish or Portuguese Jews), and less than 1% identify as Mizrahi (i.e., of Middle Eastern Jewish ancestry, such as Persian, Iraqi, or Yemenite Jews). Less than one percent identify with some other ancestry, and the remainder do not identify with any particular Jewish ethnicity (5%) or say they do not know their Jewish ethnicity (<1%). Another 5% of Jewish adults report that no specific Jewish ethnicity is applicable to them.

Table 2.7. Jewish ethnicity

	Jewish adults (%)	Jewish households that include someone with this ethnicity (%)
Ashkenazi	83	85
Sephardi	5	5
Mizrahi	<1	1
Other	<1	<1
None, no particular heritage	5	6
Don't know	<1	1
Not applicable	5	4

Note: Total exceeds 100% because respondents could select more than one option.

Ninety-three percent of Jewish individuals in Milwaukee identify solely as white and non-Hispanic (Table 2.8). Six percent of Jewish individuals in Milwaukee identify with a racial identity other than white (i.e., Black or African American, Asian, American Indian or Alaska Native, Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander, or another racial origin) or as Hispanic. However, only 5% of Jewish individuals in Milwaukee identify as a Person of Color. Among Jewish children, 15% were identified as Persons of Color, which suggests that the population is becoming more racially diverse.

Table 2.8. Race and ethnicity

	Jewish individuals (%) ↓	Jewish adults (%) ↓	Jewish children (%) ↓	All individuals in Jewish households (%) ↓	Of Jewish households, at least one person has this identity (%) ↓
Self-identifying Person of Color	5	3	15	5	6
Combined race and ethnicity					
Single-race, non-Hispanic white	93	95	82	92	95
Single-race, Hispanic white	1	1	2	2	3
Any non-white racial identity, including multiracial, non-Hispanic	5	4	12	5	7
Any non-white racial identity, including multiracial, Hispanic	1	1	4	1	1
Total	100	100	100	100	

Note: The last two columns in this table include non-Jewish adults and children.

Nineteen percent of Jewish adults in Milwaukee were raised in a Russian-speaking household (but not necessarily in Russia or the former Soviet Union), 10% identify as LGBTQ+, and 3% are Israeli citizens (Table 2.9).

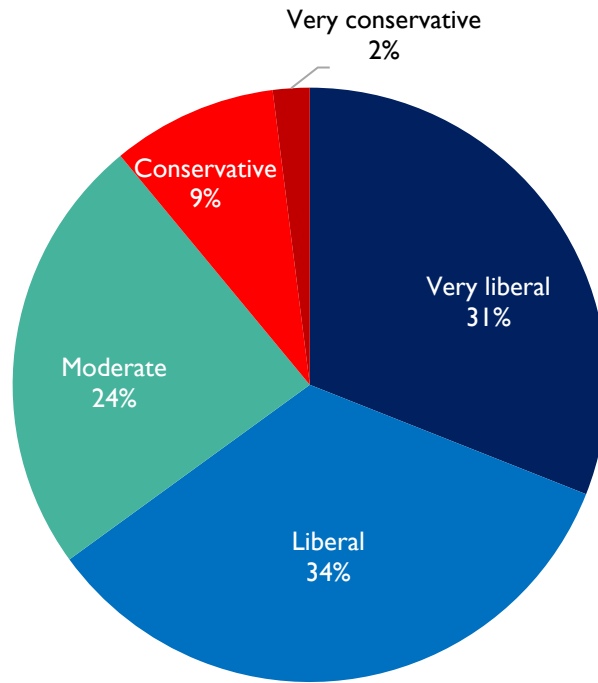
Table 2.9. Demographic identities

	All Jewish adults (%) ↓	Of Jewish households, at least one person has this identity (%) ↓
Russian-speaking Jews	19	16
LGBTQ+	10	15
Israeli citizens	3	6

Political views

The majority of Jewish adults in Milwaukee describe their political views as “very liberal” (31%) or “liberal” (34%; Figure 2.2). Twenty-four percent identify as “moderate,” 9% as “conservative,” and 2% report being “very conservative.” Overall, the Milwaukee Jewish community is more liberal than the US Jewish population as a whole; nationally, 18% of US Jewish adults describe their political views as “very liberal,” 32% as “liberal,” 32% as “moderate,” 12% as “conservative,” and 3% as “very conservative.”¹³

Figure 2.2. Political views



Adult children and grandchildren

In Milwaukee, 71% of Jewish adults over the age of 45 have adult children (Table 2.10), including 36% who have at least one adult child living locally. Sixty-four percent of Jewish adults in Milwaukee over the age of 45 have grandchildren (Table 2.11), including 31% who have at least one local grandchild.

Table 2.10. Adult children who do not usually live in household

Jewish adults over age 45 (%)	
	↓
Yes, in the Milwaukee area	15
Yes, elsewhere	35
Yes, both in the Milwaukee area and elsewhere	21
No adult children	29
Total	100

Table 2.11. Grandchildren who do not usually live in household

Age-eligible Jewish adults (%)	
	↓
Yes, in the Milwaukee area	10
Yes, elsewhere	33
Yes, both in the Milwaukee area and elsewhere	21
No grandchildren	37
Total	100

Seven percent of Jewish adults over age 45 with grandchildren not living with them help pay for costs associated with Jewish education for their grandchildren in the Milwaukee area.

Jewish education

Seventy-seven percent of Jewish adults in Milwaukee were enrolled in some type of Jewish education in their youth (Table 2.12). Fifty-four percent attended a Jewish supplementary school, 48% were involved in a Jewish youth group, and 48% attended a Jewish day or overnight camp, including 16% who attended both. Sixteen percent went to a Jewish day school, 16% participated in a peer-group Jewish educational trip to Israel, and 5% were in a Jewish college-level gap year program.

Table 2.12. Jewish education during childhood

Eligible Jewish adults (%)	
	↓
Any program	77
Jewish supplementary school	54
Jewish youth group	48
Jewish day camp	35
Jewish overnight camp	29
Jewish day school	16
Peer-group Jewish educational trip to Israel	16
Jewish college-level gap year program	5

Geography

The Jewish community of Milwaukee can be divided by regions based on county (Tables 2.13a and 2.13b and Figures 2.3 and 2.4).¹⁴ A detailed breakdown of how respondents were classified into regions can be found in the methodological appendix (Appendix A).

At the request of the Milwaukee Jewish Federation, region is presented in two ways in this section. The first way, displayed in Table 2.13a, divides the community into the same regions as were used in previous community studies. These regions are preserved to allow the community to better assess the distribution of the population. Unfortunately, there are not enough survey respondents in two of the regions, Waukesha County and the Milwaukee County South Suburbs, to allow for reliable analysis in the detailed breakdowns of variables presented throughout this report. There are, however, sufficient respondents if these regions are combined. Accordingly, as shown in Table 2.13b, these regions are combined into a single region that will be used in analyses throughout this report.

Table 2.13a. Milwaukee Jewish population by regions

	All Jewish households (%) ↓	All people in Jewish households (%) ↓	All Jewish individuals (%) ↓	Children in Jewish households (%) ↓
City of Milwaukee	22	22	22	20
Waukesha County	12	12	11	10
Milwaukee County South Suburbs	12	12	10	7
North Shore	54	55	57	62
Total	100	100	100	100

Table 2.13b. Milwaukee Jewish population by regions used for analysis throughout this report

	All Jewish households (%) ↓	All people in Jewish households (%) ↓	All Jewish individuals (%) ↓	Children in Jewish households (%) ↓
City of Milwaukee	22	22	22	20
Waukesha County / Milwaukee County South Suburbs	24	23	21	17
North Shore	54	55	57	62
Total	100	100	100	100

Over half (54%) of all Jewish households in Milwaukee are in the North Shore Region. The remaining Jewish households are in Waukesha County/Milwaukee County South Suburbs (24%) and in the City of Milwaukee (22%).

Figure 2.3. Geographic distribution of Jewish households in Milwaukee

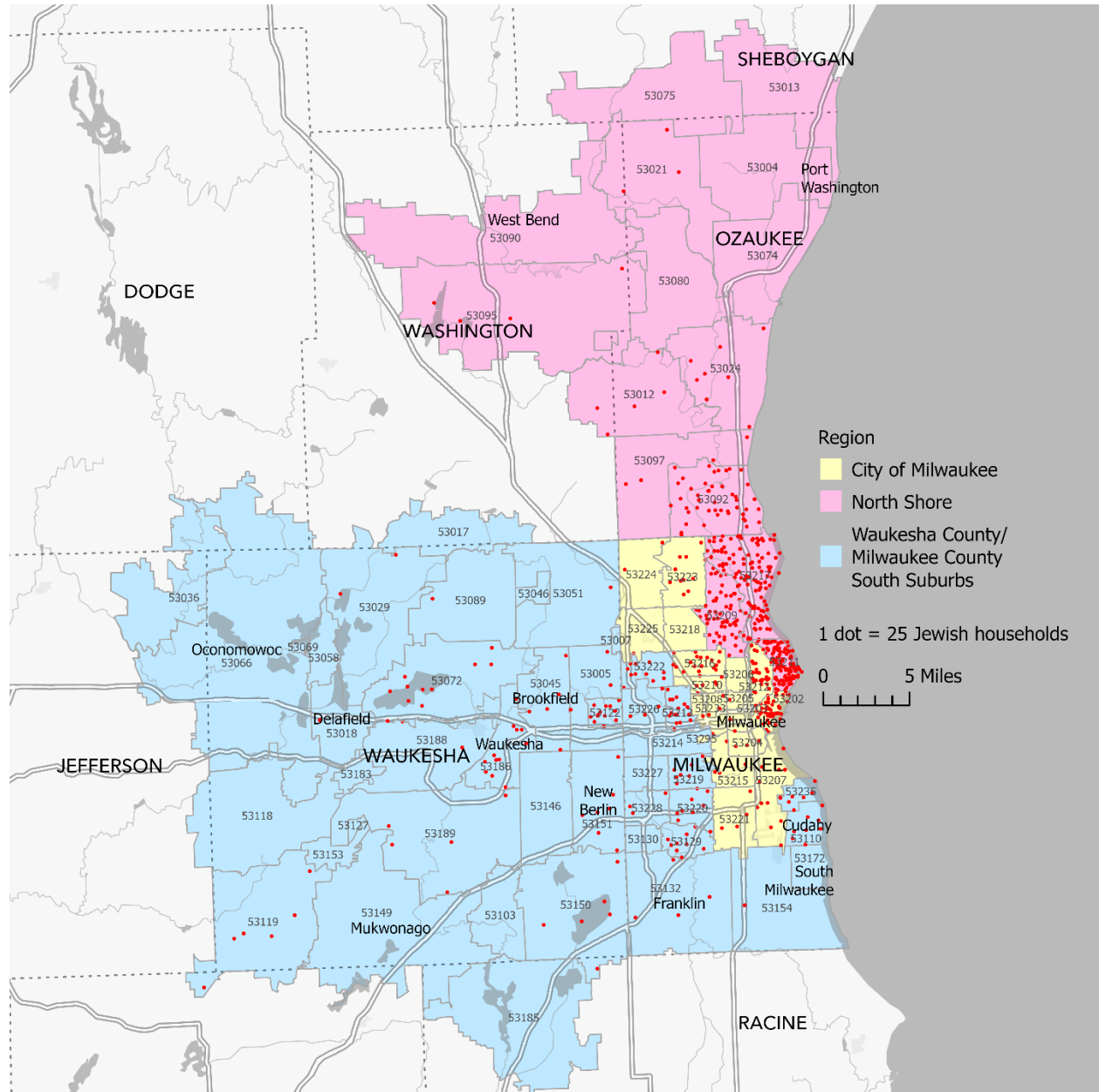
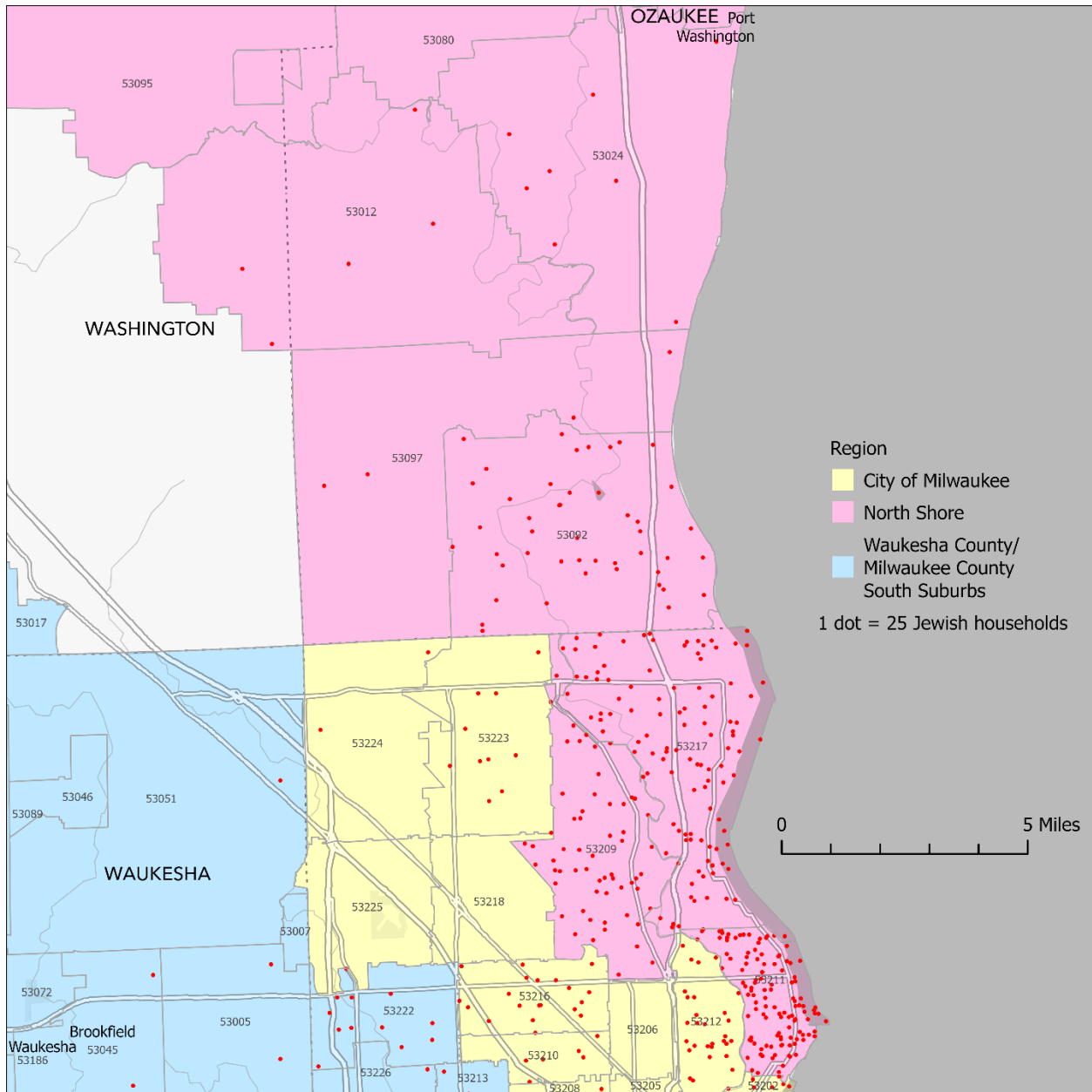


Figure 2.4. Geographic distribution of Jewish households in Milwaukee, zoomed in on North Shore



Length of residence and mobility

Over half (68%) of Jewish adults in Milwaukee have resided in the area for 20 years or longer (Table 2.14). Forty-five percent of Jewish adults in Milwaukee were primarily raised in the area. Aside from college or graduate school, 55% of Jewish adults have lived in Milwaukee their entire adult lives.

Table 2.14. Length of residence

	All Jewish adults (%)
Less than 5 years	8
5-9 years	11
10-19 years	14
20-29 years	16
30-39 years	15
40-49 years	13
50-59 years	10
60 years or more	14
Total	100

Ten percent of Jewish households in Milwaukee live elsewhere for part of the year.

CHAPTER 3. PATTERNS OF JEWISH ENGAGEMENT

Chapter highlights

Members of the Milwaukee Jewish community exhibit a variety of types of Jewish identification and means of engagement in Jewish life. Examining the ways that Jewish adults not only view, but also enact their Jewish identities is critical to understanding the Milwaukee Jewish community and its opportunities to enhance Jewish life in the region. This chapter introduces and discusses an “Index of Jewish Engagement,” created for the Milwaukee Jewish community.

In this chapter, we recommend that readers focus on the behaviors and attitudes typical of each engagement group. Subsequent chapters and Appendix A will provide details regarding how these groups differ across survey items.

- The Index of Jewish Engagement focuses on Jewish behaviors—the ways in which individuals occupy and involve themselves in Jewish life in Milwaukee—rather than self-identification.
- The Index can be used to identify opportunities to improve communal planning based on the variety of needs and interests in the Milwaukee Jewish community.
- Four distinct patterns emerge in Milwaukee:
 - Minimally Involved (42% of Jewish adults): Characterized by minimal participation in Jewish life.
 - Organizational (22% of Jewish adults): Characterized by high levels of participation in holiday and organization-based activities.
 - Ritual (19% of Jewish adults): Characterized by high levels of participation in holiday and ritual activities.
 - Immersed (16% of Jewish adults): Characterized by frequent engagement in nearly all aspects of Jewish life.
- Engagement groups include people of all ages and denominational identities.
- Denomination, marital status and type, Jewish parentage, and childhood Jewish education are all associated with membership in these four engagement groups in Milwaukee.

Index of Jewish Engagement

One of the purposes of the Index of Jewish Engagement is to demonstrate the extent and types of participation in Jewish life in Milwaukee. Throughout the remainder of this report, we present data about individual and household measures of Jewish engagement, such as synagogue membership, program participation, and altruistic behaviors. One subgroup of the population, such as parents with children, may have high levels of participation in one type of Jewish behavior (e.g., lighting Shabbat candles) but lower participation in another (e.g., donating to Jewish organizations), and another subgroup, such as young adults, may have the opposite pattern. By identifying the patterns

that develop around measures of Jewish engagement, we can better understand the unique ways Jewish individuals express their Jewish identities and the potential constituencies that exist for different types of Jewish connections.

In Milwaukee, we identified four predominant categories of Jewish engagement that describe distinct patterns of participation in Jewish life. This chapter explains how we created these categories and describes the most prevalent Jewish behaviors and attitudes that characterize each grouping.

Background: Classifications of Jewish engagement

The best-known system for categorizing Jewish identity is denominational affiliation. In the past, Jewish denominational categories closely correlated with measures of Jewish engagement, including behavior and attitudes. However, because these labels are self-assigned, their meaning varies from one individual to another. In addition, an increasing number of Jews do not affiliate with any particular denomination—including, as noted in Chapter 1, 37% of Jewish adults in Milwaukee. Thus, denominational labels are limited in their utility to convey descriptions of behavior and attitude.

Measures of Jewish engagement

We specifically designed the Index of Jewish Engagement to identify opportunities to engage groups with different needs and interests. The Index focuses on behaviors—the ways in which individuals spend their time and involve themselves in Jewish life. Such behaviors are concrete and measurable expressions of Jewish identity. Behaviors, in many cases, correlate with demographic characteristics, backgrounds, and attitudes, but also cut across them. Jewish adults' decisions to take part in activities may reflect the value and meaning they find in these activities, the priority they place on them, the level of skill and resources that enable them to participate, and the opportunities available and known to them.

To develop the Index, we selected a range of Jewish behaviors that were included in the survey instrument. The set of Jewish behaviors used to develop this typology is inclusive of a variety of ways—public and private—that contemporary Jews engage with Jewish life. Some of the activities are located primarily within institutions (e.g., synagogue membership), while others are home-based (e.g., Passover seders). These behaviors are classified into four dimensions of Jewish life: holiday behaviors, ritual behaviors, organizational behaviors, and individual behaviors. The behavioral measures include:

- **Holiday behaviors:** Holiday celebrations, such as attending or hosting a Passover seder, fasting for Yom Kippur, and lighting Hanukkah candles, are practiced by many US Jews for religious and other reasons (e.g., social, familial, cultural, and ethnic). In contrast to High Holiday services, these activities can be practiced at home, without institutional affiliation or association.
- **Ritual behaviors:** Marking Shabbat, attending religious services, attending High Holiday services, keeping kosher at home.
- **Organizational behaviors:** Belonging to a congregation, belonging to Jewish organizations, belonging to informal Jewish groups, participating in Jewish programs often in the past year,

volunteering for Jewish organizations in the past year, donating to Jewish organizations in the past year.

- Individual behaviors: Following news about Israel very closely, talking about Jewish topics often, reading Jewish publications often, engaging with Jewish-focused culture often, eating Jewish foods often, studying Jewish texts often, interacting on social media about Jewish life or content.

We employed a statistical tool, latent class analysis (LCA), to cluster similar patterns of behavior based on respondents' answers to survey questions. LCA identifies groups of behaviors that "cluster" together by analyzing patterns of responses. The result of the LCA analysis was the identification of four unique patterns of Jewish engagement.

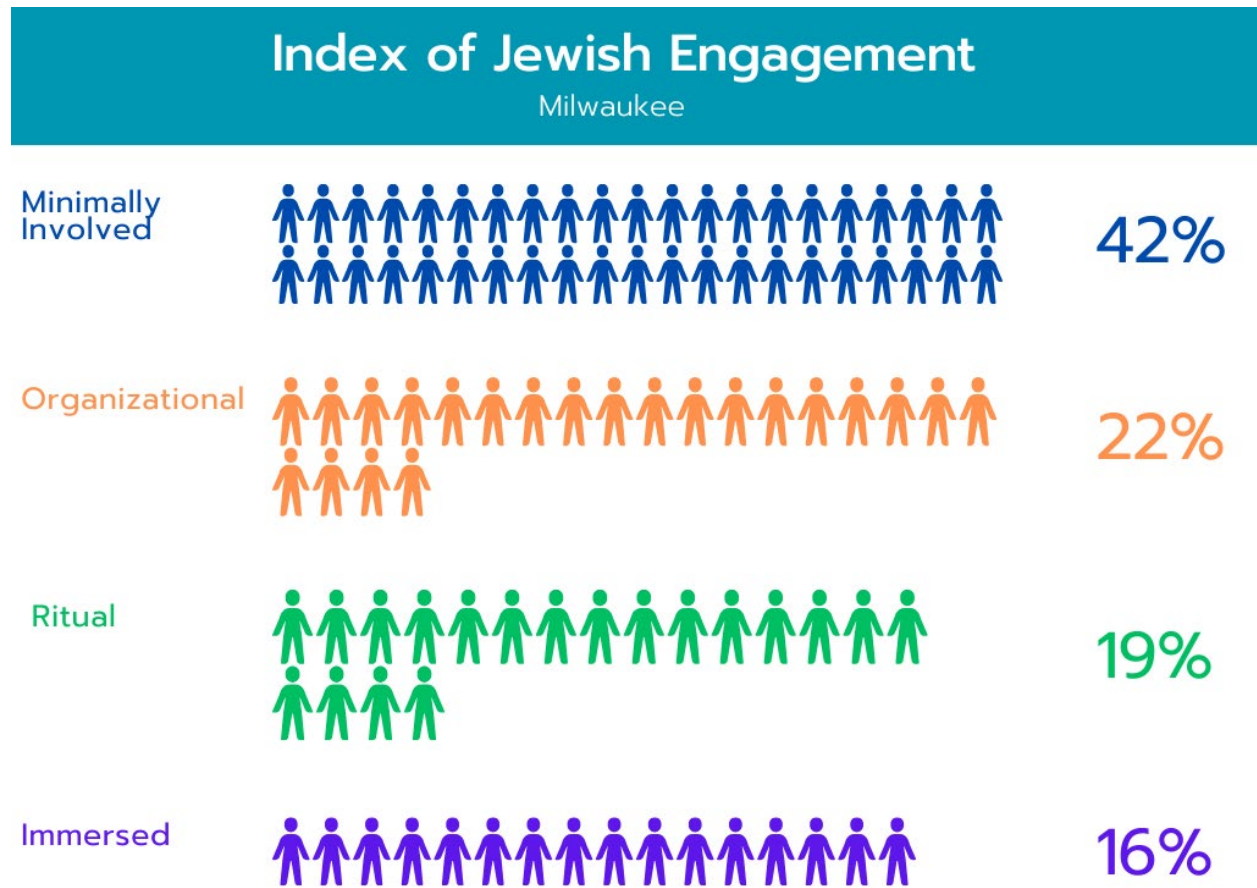
How we developed these categories

Survey respondents answered questions about their Jewish behaviors; based on their responses, we identified the four primary patterns of behavior that are presented here. Survey respondents were **not** asked to assign themselves to the groups.

The LCA analysis presented here is unique to the Milwaukee Jewish community. Both the set of classifications and their names are derived directly from data collected for this study.

Using LCA, each Jewish adult in the community was classified into one of the four engagement groups according to the pattern that most closely matches the individual's participation in different types of Jewish behaviors. For purposes of this report, the names of the engagement groups will be used to refer to the groups of Jewish adults who most closely adhere to each pattern. The names of the groups are intended to highlight the behaviors that distinguish each group from the others.

Figure 3.1. Index of Jewish Engagement



Jewish behaviors and Jewish engagement

The four patterns differ in degree and types of engagement with a broad set of Jewish behaviors. As shown in Table 3.1, the Jewish behaviors across the engagement patterns vary widely, but all patterns include at least some behaviors that represent a connection to Jewish life. Table 3.1 shows the proportion of people in each engagement group that engages in the listed behavior. In this table, the darker the box, the higher the proportion of people that engages in that behavior.

The **“Minimally Involved”** group is the largest group, comprised of 42% of Milwaukee Jewish adults. This group engages marginally in Jewish activities, holidays, or institutional Judaism. Their most frequent Jewish behaviors include lighting Hanukkah candles (63%) or interacting on social media about Jewish life or content (48%). The **“Organizational”** group, which consists of 22% of Jewish adults in Milwaukee, exhibits high levels of participation in holiday and organization-based activities. Nearly all members of this group (93%) light Hanukkah candles, and 78% had a Passover seder. Ninety-two percent of adults in this group donated to a Jewish organization in the past year, 59% volunteered for a Jewish organization in the past year, and 63% are members of one or more Jewish organizations, aside from congregations or the Harry and Rose Samson Family Jewish Community Center (JCC).

The remaining Jewish adult population is split between the “Ritual” group (19%) and the “Immersed” group (16%). The Ritual group actively participates in certain aspects of Jewish life, but not all. Nearly all members of the Ritual group engaged in holiday behaviors, including having a Passover seder (97%), lighting Hanukkah candles (97%), and fasting on Yom Kippur (96%). Only 22% of adults in this group attended services at least once a month, but 94% attended High Holiday services. Ninety-one percent of adults in this group donated to a Jewish organization and 84% are a congregation member, but only 14% are a member of a Jewish organization, aside from congregations or the JCC. The Immersed group engages frequently in nearly all aspects of Jewish life, from having a Passover seder (100%) and marking Shabbat at least once a month (99%), to volunteering for a Jewish organization (81%).

Table 3.1. Jewish behaviors and engagement

	All Jewish adults (%)	Minimally Involved (%)	Organizational (%)	Ritual (%)	Immersed (%)
Holiday behaviors					
Passover seder, 2024	68	37	78	97	100
Hannukah candles, typical year	81	63	93	97	93
Fast on Yom Kippur, 2023	49	18	46	96	87
Ritual behaviors					
Kosher, any	41	12	39	73	82
High Holiday services, 2024	41	2	30	94	95
Services, monthly or more	20	<1	8	22	89
Mark Shabbat, monthly or more	29	1	26	34	99
Organizational behaviors					
Congregation member	36	4	14	84	92
Organization member	24	1	63	14	46
Informal group member	18	4	33	2	61
Volunteer for Jewish org.	37	9	59	43	81
Donated to Jewish org.	67	31	92	91	99
Participate in organized Jewish programs, often	19	<1	43	<1	62
Individual behaviors					
Follow news about Israel very closely	39	23	45	53	62
Talk about Jewish topics, often	49	21	45	79	96
Read Jewish publications, often	38	15	42	56	73
Engage with Jewish culture, often	28	3	38	32	78
Eat Jewish food, often	31	10	33	47	68
Study Jewish texts, often	13	0	6	4	71
Social media	67	48	89	68	84

Legend	0-19%	20-39%	40-59%	60-79%	80-100%
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Demographics and Jewish engagement

The patterns of Jewish engagement are associated with respondents’ demographic characteristics. Tables 3.2, 3.3, 3.4, 3.5, and 3.6 show the distribution of selected demographic characteristics within the Jewish engagement categories (row totals) in comparison to the overall Jewish population (first row). To best understand demographic patterns, it is useful to compare the distribution of each

demographic category within each of the engagement groups to that of the overall adult Jewish population, shown in the top row of each table. This comparison allows one to observe how, if at all, each engagement group differs from the overall adult population.

Adults of nearly all denominations are represented in each of the engagement groups (Table 3.2). Orthodox Jews comprise a significantly larger proportion of the Immersed group (31%) compared to their proportion of the population (8%). Reform Jews are the largest denomination of the Minimally Involved (40%), Organizational (34%), and Ritual (50%) groups. However, those without a denomination make up even larger proportions of the Minimally Involved (48%) and Organizational (52%) groups.

Table 3.2. Jewish engagement by denomination

	Orthodox (%)	Conservative (%)	Reform (%)	Other denomination (%)	None (%)	Total (%)
All Jewish adults	8	11	38	7	37	100
Jewish engagement						
Minimally Involved	1	6	40	5	48	100
Organizational	0	7	34	7	52	100
Ritual	13	16	50	<1	20	100
Immersed	31	15	23	19	12	100

There are no significant differences between the engagement groups based on age (Table 3.3) or region (Table 3.4).

Table 3.3. Jewish engagement by age

	18-39 (%)	40-54 (%)	55-64 (%)	64-74 (%)	75+ (%)	Total (%)
All Jewish adults	22	18	18	24	18	100
Jewish engagement						
Minimally Involved	20	19	21	26	13	100
Organizational	21	15	8	28	28	100
Ritual	21	15	22	27	16	100
Immersed	27	23	19	12	19	100

Table 3.4. Jewish engagement by region

	City of Milwaukee (%)	Waukesha County / Milwaukee County South Suburbs (%)	North Shore (%)	Total (%)
All Jewish adults	26	19	55	100
Jewish engagement				
Minimally Involved	27	28	45	100
Organizational	21	16	63	100
Ritual	26	14	60	100
Immersed	31	7	62	100

Marital status and type differ by engagement groups, with the Immersed (67%) and Ritual (50%) groups having larger proportions of inmarried adults (Table 3.5). Thirty-eight percent of Jewish adults in the Minimally Involved group are intermarried, a significantly larger proportion than that of other engagement groups. Almost half of adults in the Organizational group (48%) are not married.

Table 3.5. Jewish engagement by marriage type

	Inmarried (%)	Intermarried (%)	Not married (%)	Total (%)
All Jewish adults	40	24	35	100
Jewish engagement				
Minimally Involved	31	38	31	100
Organizational	33	19	48	100
Ritual	50	17	33	100
Immersed	67	4	29	100

There are no significant differences between the engagement groups based on whether there are minor children in the household (Table 3.6). In other words, having children in the household does not affect the overall pattern of engagement of Jewish adults in Milwaukee.

Table 3.6. Jewish engagement by parent status

	No minor children (%)	Parent of minor child(ren) (%)	Total (%)
All Jewish adults	87	13	100
Jewish engagement			
Minimally Involved	88	12	100
Organizational	94	6	100
Ritual	85	15	100
Immersed	76	24	100

Jewish background and Jewish engagement

The following tables describe the Jewish backgrounds of those in each Jewish engagement category. Jewish parentage differs by engagement groups, with the Ritual (91%) and Immersed (86%) groups having larger proportions of adults who were raised by two Jewish parents (Table 3.7). The Minimally Involved (31%) and Organizational (23%) groups had the largest proportions of adults who were raised by one Jewish parent.

Table 3.7. Jewish engagement by Jewish parentage

	No Jewish parents (%)	One Jewish parent (%)	Both parents Jewish (%)	Total (%)
All Jewish adults	6	20	74	100
Jewish engagement				
Minimally Involved	5	31	64	100
Organizational	7	23	70	100
Ritual	5	3	91	100
Immersed	8	6	86	100

Childhood Jewish education differs by engagement groups, with the Immersed (91%) group having the largest proportion of adults who had any form of Jewish education during childhood (Tables 3.8a and 3.8b). However, the Ritual group had the largest proportions of adults who attended education programs aside from formal Jewish schooling, including Jewish day camp (56%), Jewish youth groups (68%), and educational trips to Israel (35%). Members of the Minimally Involved (62%) group were the least likely to have participated in any childhood Jewish education.

Table 3.8a. Jewish engagement by childhood Jewish education

	Any childhood Jewish education (%)	Jewish day school (%)	Supplementary school (%)	Day camp (%)	Overnight camp (%)
All Jewish adults	77	16	54	35	29
Jewish engagement					
Minimally Involved	62	10	43	24	23
Organizational	85	14	54	29	22
Ritual	85	17	70	56	34
Immersed	91	32	67	45	45

Table 3.8b. Jewish engagement by childhood Jewish education

	Jewish youth group (%)	Educational trip to Israel (%)	College-level gap year program (%)
All Jewish adults	48	16	5
Jewish engagement			
Minimally Involved	29	8	2
Organizational	59	7	<1
Ritual	68	35	2
Immersed	57	25	22

Attitudes about being Jewish

Comparing attitudes about being Jewish across the engagement groups helps to highlight differences and identify commonalities. The majority of Jewish adults in Milwaukee believe that leading an

ethical and moral life (73%), remembering the Holocaust (70%), connecting to family and traditions (59%), and working for justice and equality in society (59%) are essential to being Jewish (Table 3.9).

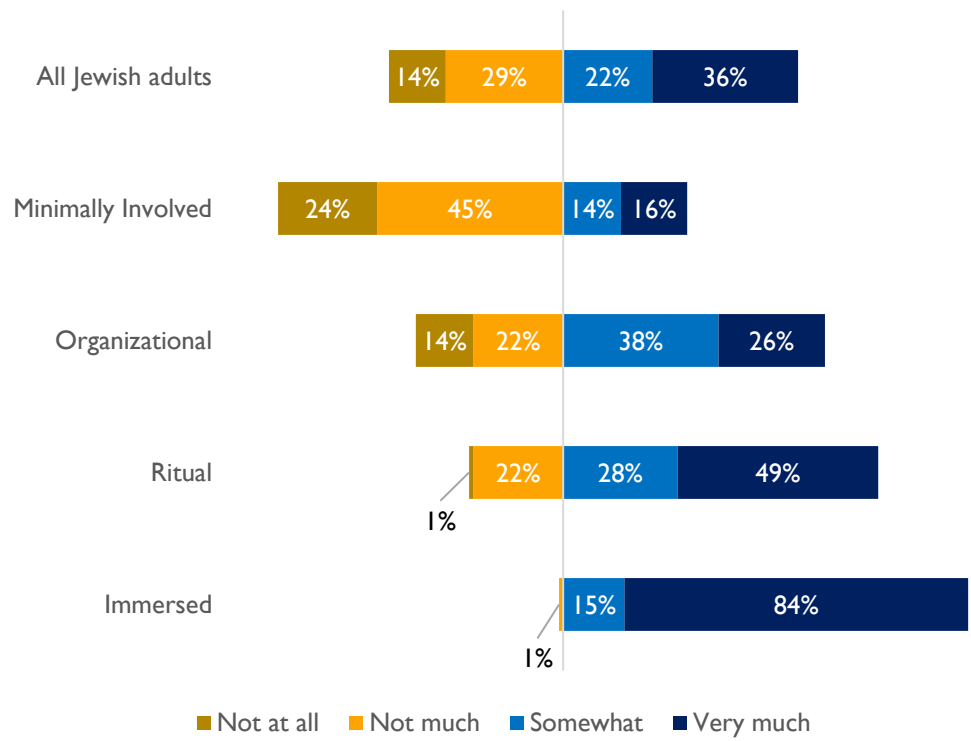
There are significant differences across engagement groups with respect to aspects of being Jewish. Leading an ethical and moral life is essential to being Jewish to 73% of all Jewish adults, but only to 63% of the Ritual group. Connecting to family and traditions is essential to being Jewish to only 43% of the Minimally Involved group, compared to majorities of the other engagement groups. Seeing other Jews as your extended family is essential to being Jewish to only 25% of the Minimally Involved group, compared to 72% of the Immersed group. Observing Jewish law is essential to being Jewish to only 10% of all Jewish adults, though it is essential to 30% of the Immersed group.

Table 3.9. Essential to being Jewish (% of Jewish adults)

	% of Jewish adults	Minimally Involved	Organizational	Ritual	Immersed
Leading an ethical and moral life	73	69	75	63	95
Remembering the Holocaust	70	75	68	79	52
Connecting to family and traditions	59	43	55	77	84
Working for justice and equality in society	59	52	75	54	63
Seeing other Jews (past, present, and future) as your extended family	44	25	47	57	72
Engaging in Jewish art and culture such as music, food, literature	34	25	38	44	41
Prayer or other spiritual practice	29	10	33	46	55
Observing Jewish law (halakha)	10	5	1	16	30

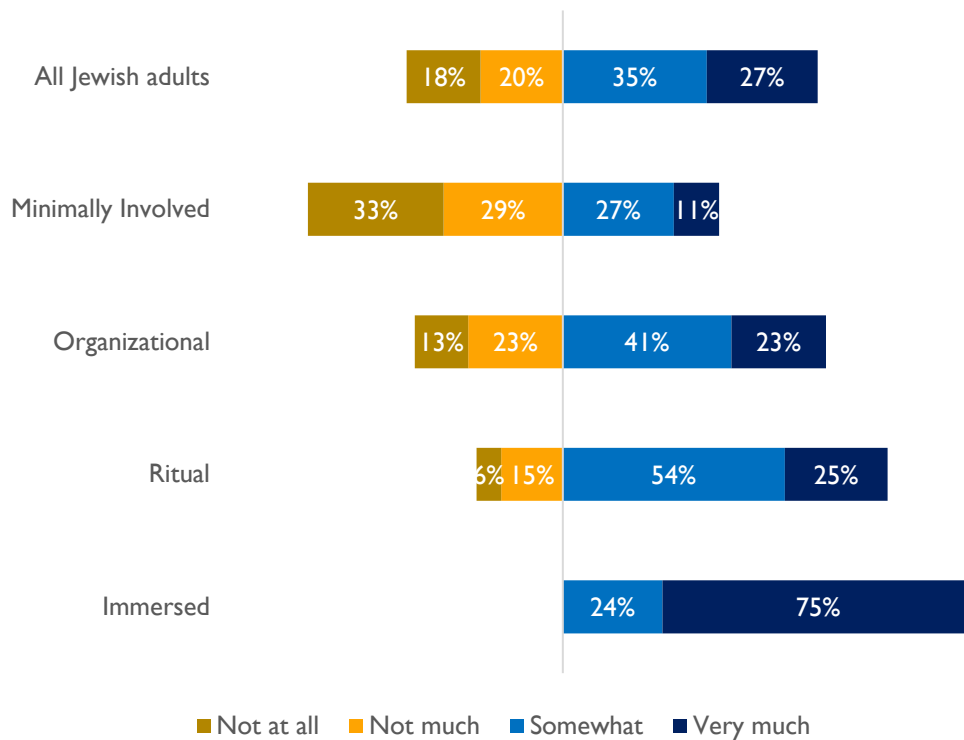
A majority of Jewish adults in Milwaukee (58%) feel that being Jewish is at least somewhat part of their daily life, including 36% who feel it is very much part of their daily life (Figure 3.2). The extent to which that is the case, however, varies greatly between the engagement groups. Eighty-four percent of adults in the Immersed group and 49% of adults in the Ritual group feel that being Jewish is very much part of their daily lives. However, only 26% of the Organizational group and 16% of the Minimally Involved group feel the same.

Figure 3.2. Being Jewish is part of daily life



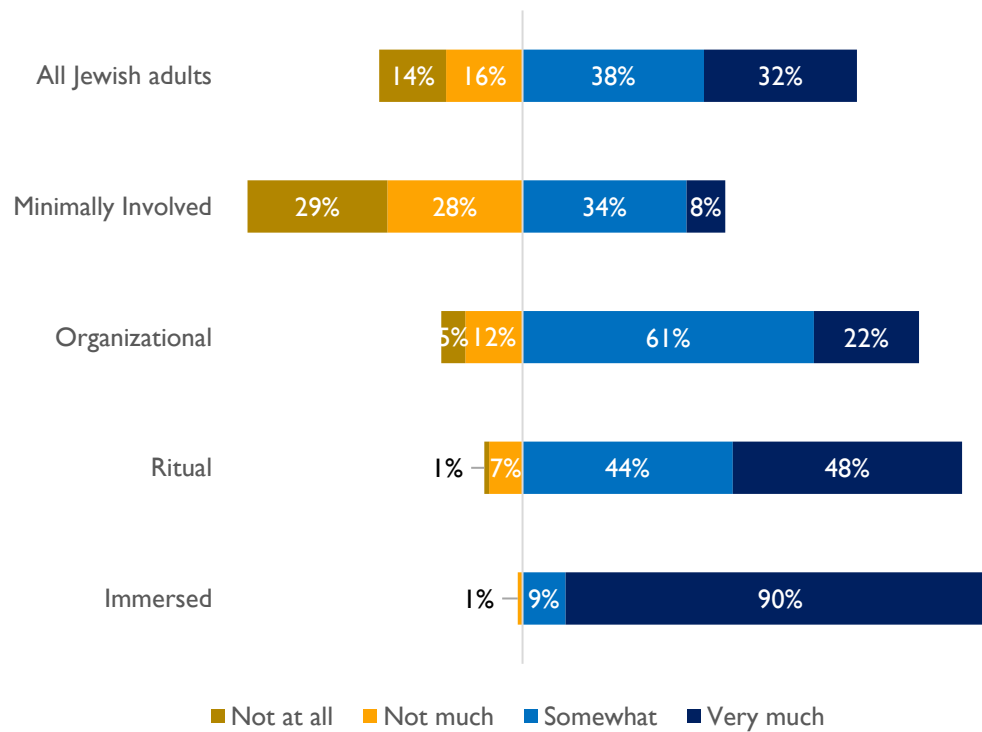
About one quarter of Jewish adults in Milwaukee (27%) feel very much that being Jewish helps them cope somewhat at times of crisis (Figure 3.3). Three quarters of adults in the Immersed group (75%) feel very much that being Jewish helps them cope at times of crisis, significantly higher than other groups. One third of the Minimally Involved group (33%) do not feel being Jewish helps them cope at all, compared to 18% of all Jewish adults.

Figure 3.3. Being Jewish helps cope at times of crisis



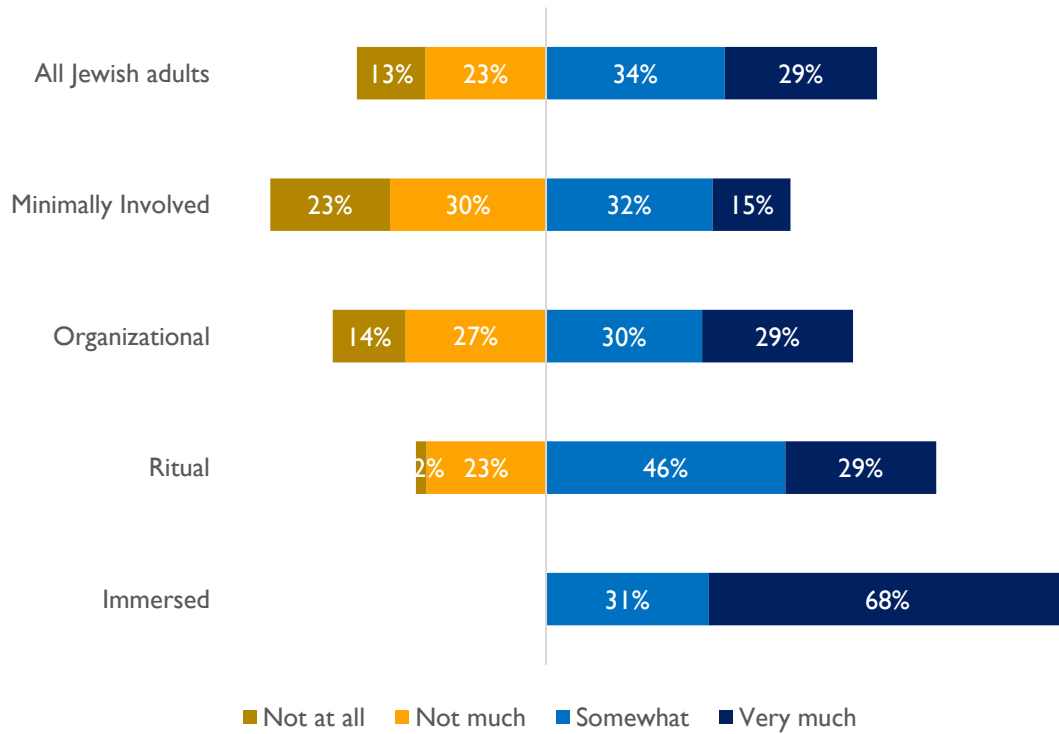
Just as being Jewish can be a resource during a crisis, being Jewish can also be beneficial during times of joy. About two thirds of Jewish adults (32%) in Milwaukee feel that being Jewish very much helps them celebrate at times of joy (Figure 3.4). There are differences between engagement groups, with only 8% of the Minimally Involved group very much sharing this feeling, and 90% of the Immersed group very much sharing it.

Figure 3.4. Being Jewish helps celebrate at times of joy



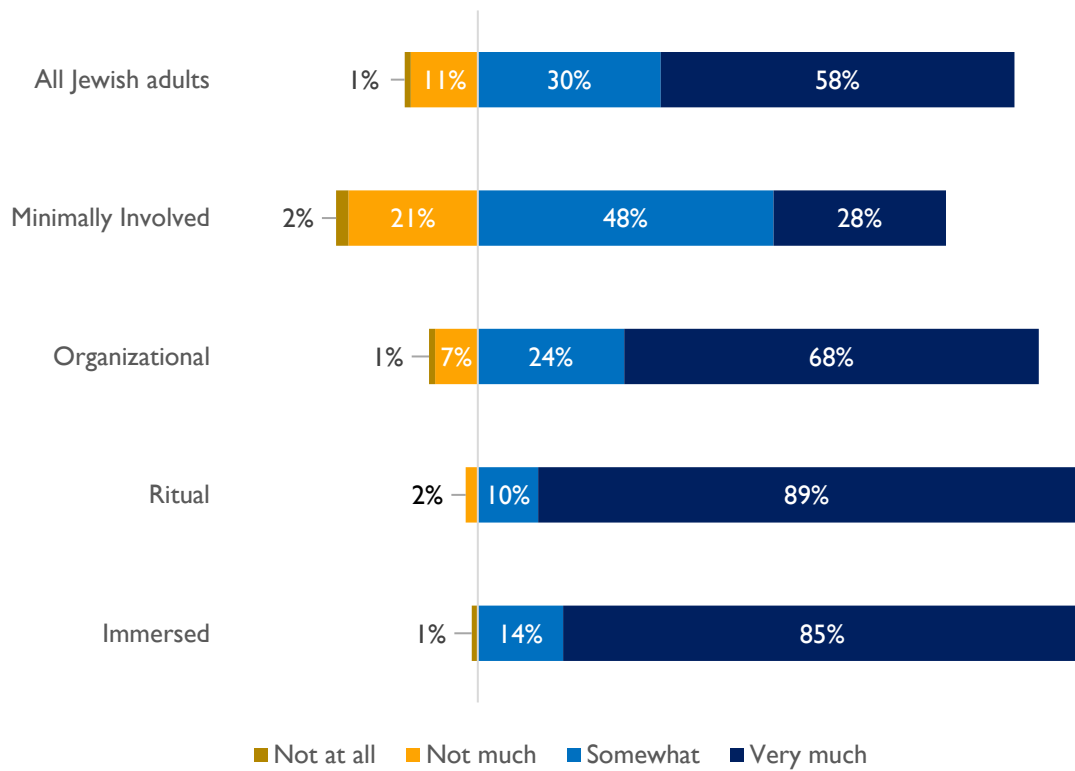
Twenty-nine percent of Jewish adults in Milwaukee feel very much that being Jewish guides them with major life decisions (Figure 3.5). Fifteen percent of the Minimally Involved group very much agree with this sentiment, while 68% of the Immersed group very much agree.

Figure 3.5. Being Jewish guides major life decisions



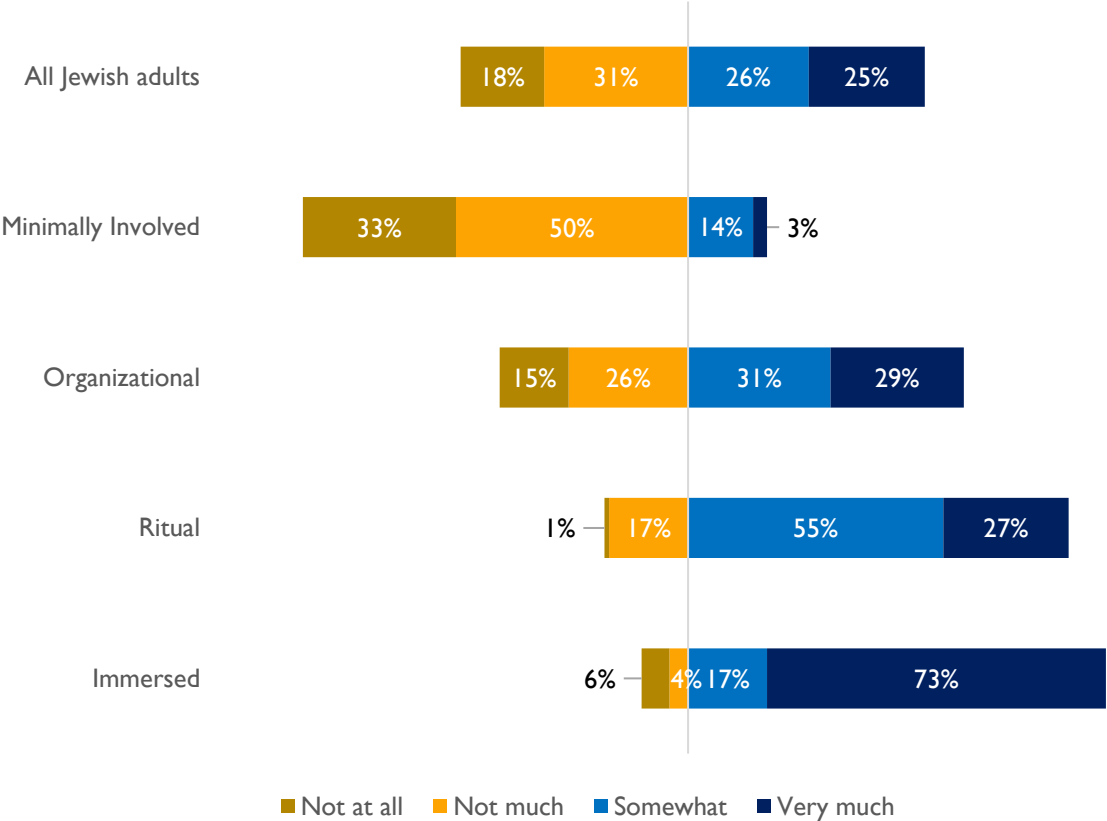
A majority of Jewish adults in Milwaukee (58%) very much feel a sense of belonging to the Jewish people (Figure 3.6). Large majorities of those in the Ritual (89%) and Immersed (85%) groups very much feel a sense of belonging. Fewer than one third of the Minimally Involved group (28%) very much feel a sense of belonging to the Jewish people. However, another 48% of the Minimally Involved group somewhat feel a sense of belonging to the Jewish people.

Figure 3.6. Feel a sense of belong to the Jewish people



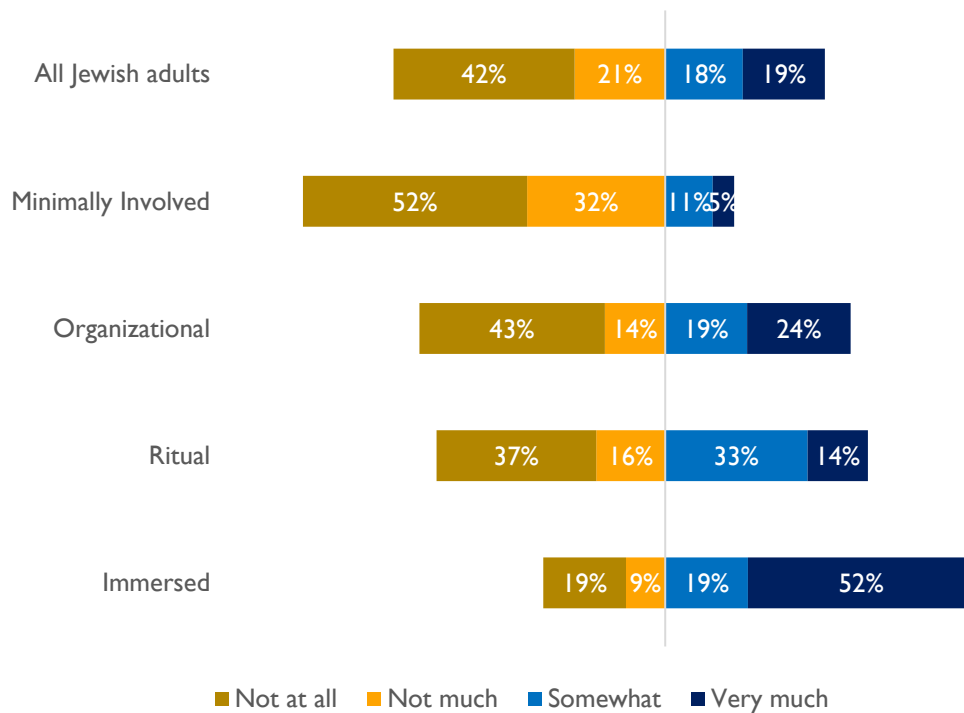
One quarter of Jewish adults in Milwaukee very much feel a sense of belonging to a Jewish community where they live (Figure 3.7). A majority of those in the Immersed group (73%) very much feel a sense of belonging. In contrast, 3% of the Minimally Involved group very much feel a sense of belonging.

Figure 3.7. Feel a sense of belonging to a Jewish community where you live



Milwaukee Jewish adults do not have strong feelings of belonging to a Jewish community where they do not live. Forty-two percent of Jewish adults in Milwaukee feel *no* sense of belonging to a Jewish community where they do not live (Figure 3.8). A majority of those in the Minimally Involved group (52%) feel no sense of belonging to a community where they do not live, compared to 19% of the Immersed group.

Figure 3.8. Feel a sense of belong to a Jewish community where you do not live



A majority of Jewish adults in Milwaukee describe their own Jewish identity as cultural (72%) or spiritual (54%; Table 3.10). Forty-two percent of Jewish adults describe their Jewish identity as secular, 28% describe it as religious, and 9% described it as something else. Among the engagement groups, only 39% of the Minimally Involved group describe their Jewish identity as spiritual, compared to majorities of the other engagement groups. A majority of adults in the Immersed (73%) and Ritual (53%) groups describe their Jewish identity as religious.

Table 3.10. Describe Jewish identity (% of Jewish adults)

	% of Jewish adults	Minimally Involved	Organizational	Ritual	Immersed
Cultural	72	65	81	77	71
Spiritual	54	39	51	76	69
Secular	42	43	52	36	29
Religious	28	2	23	53	73
Other	9	12	17	1	2
None	5	6	9	1	1

Note: Respondents could choose more than one option.

CHAPTER 4. CHILDREN AND JEWISH EDUCATION

Chapter highlights

This chapter focuses on the number of children in Jewish households in Milwaukee, some of the choices their parents and guardians make about how to raise them, and whether they take advantage of Jewish educational options available in the area. The chapter describes the landscape and degree of participation in Milwaukee’s Jewish preschools, day schools, and Hebrew or religious schools, as well as Jewish summer camps, youth programs, and family programming.

- Among the 4,500 children living in Jewish households in Milwaukee, 4,100 are being raised Jewish in some way.
- Twenty-three percent of Jewish children in Milwaukee in grades K-12 were enrolled in a Jewish day school or yeshiva during the 2024-25 school year.
- Fifteen percent of Jewish children in Milwaukee in grades K-12 were enrolled in a part-time Jewish school during the 2024-25 school year.
- Twenty percent of Jewish children in Milwaukee in grades K-12 were enrolled in tutoring or private classes in Hebrew or Jewish subjects during the 2024-25 school year.
- Sixteen percent of Jewish children in Milwaukee in grades K-12 participated in a Jewish youth group or teen program during the 2024-25 school year.
- Fifteen percent of Jewish children in Milwaukee in grades K-12 participated in a Jewish volunteer or leadership development program during the 2024-25 school year.
- Forty-six percent of Jewish children in Milwaukee in grades K-12 attended a Jewish summer camp as a camper or staff during the summer of 2024, including 41% who attended a Jewish day camp and 19% who attended a Jewish overnight camp.
- Twenty-nine percent of Jewish children in Milwaukee who were not yet in kindergarten were enrolled in a Jewish preschool or daycare program during the 2024-25 school year.
- Forty-four percent of Jewish households in Milwaukee with children age 12 or younger said they receive books from PJ Library or PJ Our Way. Another 19% were not aware of these programs.

Children in Jewish households

Of the 4,500 children living in Jewish households in Milwaukee, there are 4,100 (92% of all children) who are being raised Jewish in some way (Table 4.1). These children are considered by their parents to be exclusively Jewish (3,500; 77% of all children) or Jewish and another religion (700; 15% of all children). The remaining 400 children who are not considered Jewish by their parents either have no religion (3% of all children), are being raised in another religion (1% of all children), or their parents have not determined yet how they will be raised or did not provide enough information to assess their Jewish identities (4% of all children).

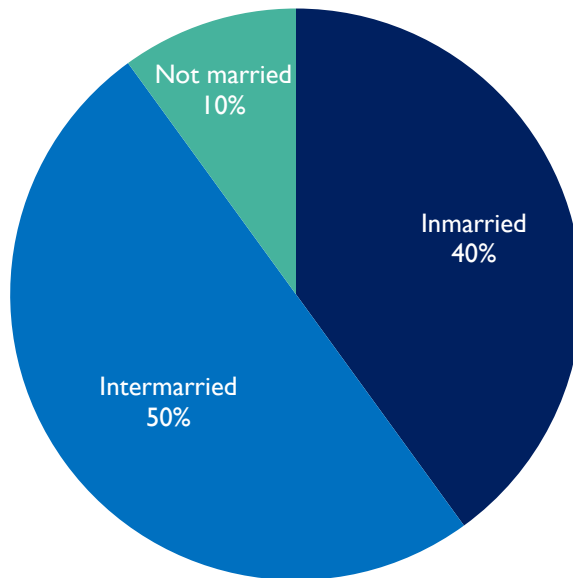
Table 4.1. Children in Jewish households (counts rounded to nearest 100)

	Overall	Percentage (%)
Jewish children	4,100	92
Jewish	3,500	77
Jewish and another religion	700	15
Not Jewish	400	8
No religion	<100	3
Another religion	200	1
Undetermined*	200	4
Total	4,500	100

* For the rest of this chapter, analyses do not include the children whose Jewish identity is undetermined.

Forty percent of Jewish children in Milwaukee have inmarried parents, 50% have intermarried parents, and 10% have parents who are not married (Figure 4.1).¹⁵

Figure 4.1. Parents of Jewish children (% of Jewish children)



Similarly, Table 4.2 shows the marital type of Jewish parents and non-parents in Milwaukee. Of households that do not include children ages 0-17, 66% of married couples are inmarried. By contrast, of households that do include children ages 0-17, 48% of married couples are inmarried.

Table 4.2. Relationship status of Milwaukee Jewish adults by parent status

	All Jewish adults (%)	Not parent (%)	Parent (%)
	↓	↓	↓
Married/partnered	65	61	94
Religious composition among couples			
Inmarried	63	66	48
Intermarried	37	34	52
Total	100	100	100

The largest share of Jewish children in Milwaukee (40%) are between the ages of 6-11 (Table 4.3).

Table 4.3. Ages of Jewish children

	All Jewish children (%)
	↓
0-5	29
6-11	40
12-17	31
Total	100

Twelve percent of Jewish children in Milwaukee are in grades 6-8 (Table 4.4). Larger shares of Jewish children are either not yet in kindergarten (26%), in grades K-5 (42%), or in grades 9-12 (20%). Less than 1% of Jewish children are past high school.

Table 4.4. Grades of Jewish children

	All Jewish children (%)
	↓
Not yet in kindergarten	26
Kindergarten-Grade 5	42
Grade 6-8	12
Grade 9-12	20
Past high school (e.g., college, gap year)	<1
Not in school	0
Total	100

K-12 Jewish education

Jewish education occurs in the context of formal classroom settings, such as day schools and part-time supplementary schools; tutoring or private classes; and informal settings, including camps, youth groups, and peer trips.

Over half of age-eligible Jewish students (60%) in Milwaukee were enrolled in some form of Jewish education during the 2024-25 school year or the summer of 2024 (Table 4.5). Twenty-three percent of age-eligible Jewish students were enrolled in a Jewish day school or yeshiva, and 15% were enrolled in a part-time Jewish school. Twenty percent of Jewish students were enrolled in tutoring or

private classes in Hebrew or Jewish subjects. Twenty-two percent of Jewish students were enrolled in other Jewish programs such as a Jewish youth or teen program (16%) or a Jewish volunteer or leadership development program (15%). Forty-six percent of Jewish children in grades K-12 attended a Jewish camp in the summer of 2024, either as campers or as staff members. Of Jewish children ages 12 and older, 27% had ever enrolled in a travel program to Israel (16%) or an immersive Jewish program outside of Israel (14%).

Table 4.5. K-12 Jewish education, 2024-25 and summer 2024

	Age-eligible Jewish students (%)
Any Jewish education, 2024-25 school year and summer 2024 (K-12)	60
Formal Jewish school (K-12)	42
Jewish day school or yeshiva (K-12)	23
Part-time Jewish school (K-12)	15
Tutoring or private classes (K-12)	20
Other Jewish programs (K-12)	22
Jewish youth group or teen program (K-12)	16
Jewish volunteer or leadership development program (K-12)	15
Any Jewish camp (K-12)	46
Jewish day camp (K-12)	41
Jewish overnight camp (K-12)	19
Any Jewish travel program (12+ years old; not necessarily during 2024-25 school year or summer 2024)	27
Trip to Israel with teen program (12+ years old)	16
Jewish immersive program not based in Israel (12+ years old)	14

Note: Students could be enrolled in more than one type of school or program. Jewish travel programs not included in “any Jewish education” for 2024-25 school year and summer 2024.

Parents in Milwaukee whose K-8 children were not enrolled in a Jewish day school were asked to specify why their children did not attend such a school. Forty-four percent of these households indicated they preferred a more diverse learning environment (Table 4.6). Thirty-four percent indicated cost as a reason for not enrolling their age-eligible children, and 29% indicated that enrolling their children in a Jewish day school was not important to them. Twenty-three percent of households indicated that the Jewish education provided did not meet the family’s needs or interests, and a similar proportion (23%) indicated there was no Jewish day school in a convenient location or with adequate transportation. Smaller numbers cited insufficient support services (8%) and the quality of general education (1%).

Table 4.6. Reasons for not enrolling children in Jewish day school

	Households without age-eligible Jewish children in Jewish day school (%)
Prefer a more diverse learning environment	44
Cost	34
Not important to me	29
Jewish education offered does not meet my family's needs or interests	23
Location	23
Insufficient support services	8
Quality of general education offered	1
Other reason	29

Note: Respondents could select multiple reasons.

Other reasons for not enrolling children include a desire to support public education, single-denomination options that do not match the family's Jewish identity, differing beliefs on Israel and Zionism, and cultural issues.

Young families

Twenty-nine percent of Jewish children in Milwaukee who were not yet in kindergarten during the 2024-25 school year were enrolled in a Jewish preschool or daycare program.

The PJ Library and PJ Our Way programs send Jewish books to households with at least one child age 12 or younger. Among eligible households, 44% received books, and 19% were not aware of the program (Table 4.7).

Table 4.7. Enrolled in PJ Library

	Households with age-eligible Jewish children (%)
Yes	44
No	37
Not aware of it	19
Total	100

Forty-five percent of Jewish families with a child under the age of 12 participated in a Tot Shabbat, synagogue-based playgroup, or community family holiday program in the past year.

Lifecycle celebrations

Fifty-two percent of age-eligible Jewish children¹⁶ have had a bar, bat, or b' mitzvah ceremony, and an additional 13% will have one in the future.

CHAPTER 5. CONGREGATIONS AND RITUAL LIFE

Chapter highlights

Congregational life is a longstanding feature of the US Jewish community, and membership in a congregation is one important way that many Jews enact their Jewish identity. However, regardless of whether they are members of a congregation, many Jews participate in religious rituals on a regular basis.

- Thirty-two percent of Jewish households in Milwaukee include at least one person who currently belongs to a Jewish congregation. Another 28% previously belonged to a congregation.
- Among Jewish households in Milwaukee that do not currently belong to a Jewish congregation, the most common explanations are that membership is not a priority (42%), lack of a good fit (30%), and cost (30%).
- Fifty-six percent of Jewish adults in Milwaukee attended Jewish religious services at least once in the past year, either in person or online, including 34% of Jewish adults who are not members of any Jewish congregation. Twenty percent attended at least once a month.
- During the 2024 High Holidays, 41% of Jewish adults in Milwaukee attended services.
- The most common ways Jews in Milwaukee mark Shabbat are by lighting Shabbat candles (48%) and having a special meal (48%).
- Eighty-one percent of Jewish adults in Milwaukee light Hanukkah candles in a typical year, and 68% hosted or attended a Passover seder in 2024. Forty-three percent fasted on Yom Kippur in 2024, and 41% keep at least some of the laws of kashrut.
- It is somewhat or very important to 45% of Jewish adults in Milwaukee that local Jewish organizations maintain kashrut standards, including 69% of members of congregations, 53% of JCC members, 53% of members of other Jewish organizations, and 51% of Jewish adults who participated in Jewish programs sometimes or often in the past year.

Congregation membership

In the Milwaukee Jewish community, one third of Jewish **households** (32%) belong to some type of Jewish congregation (Table 5.1). This includes synagogues, an independent *minyan* or *chavurah*, Chabad, and other worship communities. Forty percent of Jewish households have never belonged to a Jewish congregation and 28% of households previously belonged to a Jewish congregation but do not currently belong to one.

For a national comparison, among Jewish **adults** in Milwaukee, 37% live in a household in which someone is a congregation member, comparable to the rate among all US Jews, 35%.¹⁷

Nearly all households in the Immersed group belong to a Jewish congregation, while only 5% of households in the Minimally Involved group belong to one. Half of inmarried households (49%) belong to a Jewish congregation, compared to 22% of intermarried households.

Table 5.1. Membership in Jewish congregations

	Never a member (%)	Current member (%)	Former member (%)	Total (%)
All Jewish households	40	32	28	100
Jewish engagement				
Minimally Involved	62	5	33	100
Organizational	39	14	47	100
Ritual	8	77	14	100
Immersed	2	95	4	100
Region				
City of Milwaukee	47	29	24	100
Waukesha County / Milwaukee County South Suburbs	53	23	24	100
North Shore	32	37	31	100
Age				
18-39	46	31	23	100
40-54	61	24	14	100
55-64	27	40	34	100
65-74	39	26	35	100
75+	36	36	28	100
Relationship status				
Inmarried	17	49	34	100
Intermarried	59	22	19	100
Not married	42	28	30	100
Minor child in household				
No	40	32	28	100
Yes	41	30	29	100
Congregation member				
Not currently a member	59	N/A	41	100

Congregation types

Synagogue: Typically has its own building, a dues-for-membership structure, professional clergy, and programs or amenities commonly available in synagogues (e.g., Hebrew school). Usually appeals to a relatively narrow range of the denominational spectrum; however, in Milwaukee, there are many non-denominational synagogues that appeal more broadly.

Independent *minyan* or *chavurah*: May lack its own building, dues-for-membership structure, professional clergy, and/or amenities commonly available in synagogues.

Chabad: May have its own building, professional clergy, and programs or amenities commonly available in synagogues. Usually does not include a dues-for-membership structure. Draws from across the denominational spectrum.

Organizational: An organization that has a *minyan* or *chavurah* that is not the main function of the organization, or that members of the community identify as their religious community. May lack its own building, dues-for-membership structure, professional clergy, and/or amenities commonly available in synagogues.¹⁸

The reasons that Jewish households do not belong to a congregation vary (Table 5.2). For 42% of non-congregant households, it is not a priority to belong to a Jewish congregation. The lack of a good fit and cost were each contributing reasons for 30% of Jewish households, respectively.

Table 5.2. Reasons households do not belong to a Jewish congregation

	All non-congregation-member households (%)
Not a priority	42
No good fit for me	30
Cost	30
No nearby option	19
I have no children at home	18

Note: Households could choose more than one option.

Although 32% of Milwaukee Jewish households belong to a Jewish congregation somewhere, only 30% belong to a Milwaukee area congregation. Of households that belong to a local congregation, 25% belong to one congregation, 4% belong to two congregations, 1% belong to three congregations, and less than 1% belong to five congregations.

Thirteen percent of Milwaukee Jewish households belong to a local synagogue where they pay dues, 8% say they are members of a local Chabad, and 6% belong a local synagogue and do not pay dues (Table 5.3). Two percent belong to local organizational congregations, and 2% belong to organizational congregations outside the Milwaukee area.

About a third of the Ritual (35%) and Immersed (36%) groups pay membership dues to a local synagogue, compared to just 8% of the Organizational group and 2% of the Minimally Involved group. Eighteen percent of households residing in the North Shore region pay synagogue dues, compared to 11% of households in the City of Milwaukee and 6% in Waukesha County/Milwaukee County South Suburbs.

The 18-39 age group has the highest proportion among the age groups that belongs to an organization congregation (6%) or are members in an unknown congregation (9%).

A quarter of inmarried households in Milwaukee (25%) pay dues to a local synagogue, more than twice as many as intermarried households (10%) or unmarried households (10%). Twelve percent of inmarried households and 10% of unmarried households belong to a Chabad, compared to less than 1% of intermarried households.

Of Jewish households in Milwaukee that currently belong to a Jewish congregation, 40% are members of a synagogue where they pay dues, 20% belong to a synagogue where they do not pay dues, 24% belong to a Chabad congregation, 5% belong to an organizational congregation, and 7% belong to a congregation outside Milwaukee. Eleven percent of Jewish households reported belonging to a congregation but did not provide enough information to determine the type of congregation. (Note: The total adds up to more than 100% because some households are members of more than one type of congregation.)

Table 5.3. Membership in Jewish congregations

	Dues-paying synagogue (%)	No dues synagogue (%)	Chabad (%)	Organization (%)	Non-local organization (%)	Congregation unknown (%)
All Jewish households	13	6	8	2	2	3
Jewish engagement						
Minimally Involved	2	0	3	<1	1	<1
Organizational	8	0	<1	0	5	0
Ritual	35	17	20	4	1	2
Immersed	36	23	25	7	2	18
Region						
City of Milwaukee Waukesha County / Milwaukee County South Suburbs	11	10	7	3	1	<1
North Shore	6	4	10	<1	2	<1
	18	6	6	1	3	6
Age						
18-39	4	10	3	6	5	9
40-54	11	7	3	<1	2	3
55-64	11	10	16	<1	5	1
65-74	17	1	9	<1	<1	1
75+	23	6	6	2	<1	1
Relationship status						
Inmarried	25	6	12	6	1	6
Intermarried	10	5	<1	<1	4	3
Not married	10	6	10	<1	2	3
Minor child in household						
No	13	7	8	2	2	3
Yes	16	3	6	<1	3	3

Religious services

Congregational membership is not a prerequisite for attending services. More than half of Jewish adults (56%) in Milwaukee attended a religious service at least once in the previous year (Table 5.4). Twenty percent of Jewish adults attended services at least monthly,¹⁹ and 41% attended High Holiday services in 2024.

All Jewish adults in the Immersed group attended at least one service in the past year, as did nearly all Jewish adults in the Ritual group. However, although 89% of Jewish adults in the Immersed group attended services at least once a month, only 22% of Jewish adults in the Ritual group did so.

Nearly all (96%) congregation members attended services at least once, as did 34% of Jewish adults who are not members of any congregation. Eighty-nine percent of congregation members attended High Holiday services in 2024, compared to 14% of non- members.

Table 5.4. Attendance at Jewish services during past year

	Attended services, ever (%)	Attended services, monthly (%)	Attended High Holiday services 2024 (%)
All Jewish adults	56	20	41
Jewish engagement			
Minimally Involved	15	<1	2
Organizational	66	8	30
Ritual	99	22	94
Immersed	100	89	95
Region			
City of Milwaukee	64	23	42
Waukesha County / Milwaukee County South Suburbs	35	10	22
North Shore	60	23	47
Age			
18-39	51	25	39
40-54	59	26	44
55-64	54	16	35
65-74	60	13	42
75+	58	23	45
Relationship status			
Inmarried	65	29	54
Intermarried	47	4	29
Not married	53	21	35
Minor child in household			
No	54	19	39
Yes	71	31	56
Congregation member			
No	34	4	14
Yes	96	49	89

Forty-eight percent of Jewish adults in Milwaukee attended religious services locally and in person in the past year (Table 5.5). Twelve percent attended online services with a congregation in the Milwaukee area, and 9% attended online services with a congregation outside of the Milwaukee area.

More than half of Jewish adults in the Organizational, Ritual, and Immersed groups attended in-person services in Milwaukee in the past year, compared to 9% of those in the Minimally Involved group. Nearly a third of adults in the Ritual group (30%) attended online services with a congregation in the Milwaukee area, compared to 20% of Jewish adults in the Immersed group, 8% in the Organizational group, and 2% in the Minimally Involved group.

Table 5.5. Jewish services attendance, in person or online

	In person, Milwaukee (%)	Online, Milwaukee congregation (%)	Online, congregation outside (%)
All Jewish adults	48	12	9
Jewish engagement			
Minimally Involved	9	2	4
Organizational	53	8	15
Ritual	89	30	7
Immersed	93	20	20
Region			
City of Milwaukee Waukesha County / Milwaukee County	54	14	14
South Suburbs	27	7	2
North Shore	52	12	10
Age			
18-39	41	10	11
40-54	52	4	9
55-64	42	9	13
65-74	50	19	6
75+	55	13	6
Relationship status			
Inmarried	58	17	10
Intermarried	33	9	7
Not married	46	8	11
Minor child in household			
No	47	12	10
Yes	59	10	8
Congregation member			
No	26	5	8
Yes	88	23	12

Shabbat, holidays, and rituals

In the past year, nearly two thirds of Jewish adults (64%) in Milwaukee marked Shabbat at least once (Table 5.6). More than one third of Jewish adults (36%) marked Shabbat occasionally, 7% did so at least monthly but not every week, and 21% did so every week or almost every week.

Marking Shabbat every week is more common among adults in the Immersed engagement group (89%), compared to about one quarter of those in the Ritual group (26%), 8% of the Organizational group, and 1% of the Minimally Involved.

In the past year, a larger proportion of Jewish adults ages 18-39 marked Shabbat at least once compared to all other age brackets. More than half of Jewish adults ages 65-74 never marked Shabbat in the past year (57%).

One third of inmarried Jewish adults (35%) marked Shabbat every week or almost every week, compared to the 17% of single adults and 4% of intermarried adults.

Table 5.6. Frequency of marking Shabbat during past year

	Never (%)	Occasionally (%)	At least once a month but not every week (%)	Every week or almost every week (%)	Total (%)
All Jewish adults	36	36	7	21	100
Jewish engagement					
Minimally Involved	67	32	1	1	100
Organizational	12	62	18	8	100
Ritual	26	40	8	26	100
Immersed	0	1	10	89	100
Region					
City of Milwaukee	27	41	5	27	100
Waukesha County / Milwaukee County South Suburbs	51	26	15	9	100
North Shore	35	36	6	23	100
Age					
18-39	8	54	16	22	100
40-54	39	28	5	27	100
55-64	36	35	6	23	100
65-74	57	23	7	12	100
75+	34	40	1	25	100
Relationship status					
Inmarried	34	22	9	35	100
Intermarried	59	35	1	4	100
Not married	20	52	10	17	100
Minor child in household					
No	37	37	7	19	100
Yes	28	29	8	36	100
Congregation member					
No	48	40	7	5	100
Yes	14	28	8	50	100

Respondents identified multiple ways that they marked Shabbat in person or online, including ritual, communal, and educational activities (Table 5.7). The most common ways that Milwaukee Jewish adults marked Shabbat included lighting candles (48%) and having a special meal or special foods (48%).

Nearly two thirds of Jewish adults who live in the City of Milwaukee (62%) lit Shabbat candles in the past year to mark Shabbat, compared to the 50% of Jewish adults who live on the North Shore and the 23% of Jewish adults who live in Waukesha County/Milwaukee County South Suburbs.

Three quarters of Jewish adults ages 18-39 lit candles to mark Shabbat in the past year, while half of adults ages 40-64 and 75 and older lit candles to mark Shabbat. By contrast, among Jewish adults ages 65-74, 21% lit candles to mark Shabbat in the past year.

Jewish adults in Milwaukee with minor children in the household attended more religious services and Shabbat programs other than services, compared to Jewish adults who do not have children in the household. Similarly, larger proportions of congregant members lit candles, had special foods or special meals, and attended religious services to mark Shabbat by than non-members.

Table 5.7. Shabbat activities, past year

	Light Shabbat candles (%)	Have a special meal or special foods (%)	Attend religious services (%)	Attend Shabbat programs other than services (%)
All Jewish adults	48	48	23	16
Jewish engagement				
Minimally Involved	28	13	3	1
Organizational	54	75	17	28
Ritual	48	65	35	11
Immersed	93	82	69	44
Region				
City of Milwaukee	62	49	22	18
Waukesha County / Milwaukee County				
South Suburbs	23	37	12	12
North Shore	50	52	28	16
Age				
18-39	72	63	27	29
40-54	51	52	24	19
55-64	52	45	19	8
65-74	21	32	16	7
75+	51	53	33	19
Relationship status				
Inmarried	58	50	34	20
Intermarried	24	36	10	4
Not married	54	57	19	21
Minor child in household				
No	46	45	21	14
Yes	63	68	37	30
Congregation member				
No	37	36	8	12
Yes	67	69	49	23

Most Jewish adults in the Milwaukee area observe at least one Jewish holiday or ritual (Table 5.8). Eighty-one percent light Hanukkah candles in a typical year, 68% attended or hosted a Passover seder in 2024,²⁰ and 43% fasted on Yom Kippur in 2024. Forty-one percent of Jewish adults follow any of the laws of keeping kosher.

Nearly all Jewish adults ages 18-39 (93%) and ages 40-54 (90%) light Hanukkah candles in a typical year, but the proportions of Jewish adults in Milwaukee who participate in this ritual decline with age. Jewish adults ages 18-39 also have the largest proportion among the age groups who fasted for Yom Kippur in 2024 (69%).

Despite not belonging to a congregation, nearly three quarters of non-members (72%) lit Hannukah candles, over half (54%) participated in a Passover seder, and about one quarter (27%) fasted for at least part of Yom Kippur.

Half of both inmarried (50%) and single (53%) Jewish adults fasted for Yom Kippur in 2024, compared to 17% of intermarried Jewish adults. Conversely, while 86% of inmarried adults attended or hosted a Passover seder in 2024, fewer intermarried (56%) and single adults (56%) did so.

Table 5.8. Holidays and rituals

	Fast for Yom Kippur, 2024* (%)	Light Hanukkah candles (%)	Seder, 2024 (%)	Keep kosher in any way (%)
All Jewish adults	43	81	68	41
Jewish engagement				
Minimally Involved	16	63	37	12
Organizational	42	93	78	39
Ritual	79	97	97	73
Immersed	74	93	100	82
Region				
City of Milwaukee	63	85	62	53
Waukesha/Milwaukee County South Suburbs	24	68	53	21
North Shore	41	84	76	42
Age				
18-39	69	93	66	43
40-54	42	90	79	40
55-64	36	83	65	34
65-74	29	72	66	48
75+	41	68	66	34
Relationship status				
Inmarried	50	82	86	48
Intermarried	17	73	56	32
Not married	53	85	56	38
Minor child in household				
No	42	79	65	39
Yes	48	93	82	51
Congregation member				
No	28	73	54	28
Yes	70	95	93	64

*An additional 13% of Jewish adults did not fast for medical reasons.

The degree to which it is important to Jewish adults in Milwaukee that local Jewish organizations maintain kosher standards varies. Although more than one third of Milwaukee Jewish adults find it not at all important for Jewish organizations to maintain kosher standards, nearly half find it somewhat (23%) or very (22%) important (Table 5.9), including 69% of members of congregations, 53% of JCC members, and 53% of members of Jewish organizations other than congregations or the JCC. Similarly, 51% of Jewish adults in Milwaukee who say they participate in Jewish programs sometimes or often also say it is somewhat or very important for local Jewish organizations to maintain kosher standards.

Table 5.9. Importance for Milwaukee Jewish organizations to maintain kosher standards

	All Jewish adults (%)	Congregant-member adults (%)	JCC member (%)	Jewish organization member (%)	Informal Jewish group member (%)	Sometimes / often participant in Jewish programs, past year (%)
Not at all	36	21	32	33	34	34
Not too	19	10	15	13	21	14
Somewhat	23	29	39	23	20	23
Very	22	40	14	30	25	28
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100

The degree to which it is important to Jewish adults in Milwaukee that local Jewish organizations maintain kosher standards also varies by engagement group (Table 5.10). Maintaining these standards is somewhat or very important to 78% of Jewish adults in the Immersed group and 74% in the Ritual group, compared to 33% in the Organizational group and 26% in the Minimally Involved group.

Table 5.10. Importance for Milwaukee Jewish organizations to maintain kosher standards, Jewish engagement

	All Jewish adults (%)	Minimally Involved (%)	Organizational (%)	Ritual (%)	Immersed (%)
Not at all	36	52	38	16	15
Not too	19	23	29	11	6
Somewhat	23	23	15	35	25
Very	22	3	18	39	53
Total	100	100	100	100	100

CHAPTER 6. COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS AND ACTIVITIES

Chapter highlights

The Milwaukee Jewish community offers numerous opportunities for adults and families to express their sense of connection to the Jewish community and engage in Jewish life. This chapter describes some of the ways Jewish adults in Milwaukee participate in social activities with other Jews, both in person and online. It also describes their sense of belonging to different kinds of Jewish communities.

- Seventy-four percent of Jewish adults in Milwaukee say that some, most, or all of their close friends are Jewish.
- Ninety-nine percent of Jewish adults in Milwaukee feel any sense of belonging to the Jewish people. Eighty-two percent feel any sense of belonging to the Jewish community where they live, and 58% feel any sense of belonging to another Jewish community that is not where they live (e.g., a summer camp, a place where they used to live, a Jewish organization, or an online Jewish group).
- Forty-nine percent of Jewish adults in Milwaukee talked about Jewish topics often in the past year. Thirty-eight percent read Jewish publications often, 31% ate Jewish foods often, and 28% often read books, watched movies or TV, or listened to music with Jewish content. Thirteen percent studied Jewish texts often.

Jewish friends

Seventy-four percent of Jewish adults in Milwaukee say that some, most, or all of their close friends are Jewish (Table 6.1). Forty-three percent of Jewish adults indicated that some of their closest friends are Jewish, 25% indicated that most of their closest friends are Jewish, and 5% indicated that all of their closest friends are Jewish.²¹

Jewish adults from the Organizational (85%) and Immersed (99%) groups have the highest proportions saying that at least some of their closest friends are Jewish, with 67% of Immersed adults indicating that most or all of their close friends are Jewish. Members of the Minimally Involved (43%) and Ritual (23%) groups were the most likely to indicate that few or none of their closest friends are Jewish.

Table 6.1. Close Jewish friends

	None (%)	Hardly any friends (%)	Some friends (%)	Most friends (%)	All friends (%)	Total (%)
All Jewish adults	11	15	43	25	5	100
Jewish engagement						
Minimally Involved	23	20	41	12	4	100
Organizational	4	11	61	21	3	100
Ritual	2	21	36	35	6	100
Immersed	<1	<1	33	56	11	100
Region						
City of Milwaukee	25	11	26	34	4	100
Waukesha County / Milwaukee County						
South Suburbs	13	24	57	6	0	100
North Shore	3	14	47	28	8	100
Age						
18-39	3	29	39	27	2	100
40-54	7	14	55	21	3	100
55-64	5	9	63	18	5	100
65-74	8	14	36	35	9	100
75+	3	16	40	32	8	100
Relationship status						
Inmarried	<1	7	36	43	13	100
Intermarried	9	29	61	1	0	100
Not married	24	14	40	21	<1	100
Minor child in household						
No	11	16	44	25	5	100
Yes	6	11	43	29	10	100
Congregation member						
No	15	16	47	18	4	100
Yes	4	13	36	40	7	100

Sense of belonging

Almost all Jewish adults in Milwaukee (99%) feel a sense of belonging to the Jewish people, including a majority (58%) who very much feel a sense of belonging (Table 6.2). Eighty-two percent of Jewish adults in Milwaukee feel a sense of belonging to a Jewish community where they live, including only 25% who very much feel a sense of belonging. Fifty-eight percent feel a sense of belonging to another Jewish community that is not where they live, such as a Jewish summer camp, a place where they used to live, a Jewish organization, or an online group.

The largest proportions of Jewish adults in the Ritual (99%) and Immersed (94%) groups feel a sense of belonging to a Jewish community where they live, including a majority of Immersed adults (73%) who very much feel a sense of belonging. A larger proportion of Jewish adults ages 18-39 (35%) very much feel a sense of belonging to a Jewish community not where they live, significantly more than any other age group.

Table 6.2. Feeling a sense of belonging to...

	The Jewish people		A Jewish community where you live		Another Jewish community, not where you live	
	Any (%)	Very much (%)	Any (%)	Very much (%)	Any (%)	Very much (%)
All Jewish adults	99	58	82	25	58	19
Jewish engagement						
Minimally Involved	98	28	67	3	48	5
Organizational	99	68	85	29	57	24
Ritual	100	89	99	27	63	14
Immersed	99	85	94	73	81	52
Region						
City of Milwaukee	99	56	89	22	74	17
Waukesha County / Milwaukee County						
South Suburbs	97	26	72	22	36	8
North Shore	99	70	82	27	59	23
Age						
18-39	99	47	91	33	78	35
40-54	99	52	81	32	66	13
55-64	99	58	72	15	50	14
65-74	99	62	85	16	55	9
75+	97	74	76	31	36	22
Relationship status						
Inmarried	100	74	83	35	65	25
Intermarried	98	42	74	13	43	11
Not married	98	53	86	21	61	17
Minor child in household						
No	99	58	80	23	57	17
Yes	100	63	93	38	69	27
Congregation member						
No	99	46	74	12	52	11
Yes	99	80	95	48	68	31

Informal cultural activities

Informal cultural activities include those Jewish activities that are not necessarily sponsored or facilitated by Jewish organizations, such as discussing Jewish topics, eating Jewish foods, or reading Jewish books (Tables 6.3 and 6.4), each of which attracts different demographics. Ninety-eight percent of Jewish adults in Milwaukee discussed Jewish events with family or friends in the past year, including 49% who did so often. Ninety-three percent read Jewish publications, including 38% who did so often. Ninety-five percent read books, watched movies or TV, or listened to music that is Jewish-focused, including 28% who did so often. Ninety-six percent ate Jewish foods aside from Shabbat and holiday meals, including 31% who did so often. Sixty-two percent studied Jewish texts, including 13% who did so often.

Table 6.3. Informal cultural activities, all Jewish adults

	Never (%)	Rarely (%)	Sometimes (%)	Often (%)	Total (%)
Talked with family or friends about Jewish topics	2	14	35	49	100
Read Jewish publications including articles, magazines, and newsletters from a Jewish organization	7	20	35	38	100
Read books, watched movies or TV, or listened to music or a podcast that is Jewish focused	5	28	39	28	100
Ate Jewish foods, aside from Shabbat and holiday meals	4	17	48	31	100
Studied or learned Jewish texts	38	31	18	13	100

Across each of these activities, a smaller proportion of Jewish adults in the Minimally Involved group participated often compared to the proportion of any other engagement group, and the largest proportion that participated often was found in the Immersed group. Fifty-nine percent of Jewish adults in the North Shore discussed Jewish events with family or friends often, compared with 47% of Jewish adults in the City of Milwaukee and 24% in the Waukesha County/Milwaukee County South Suburbs region. A larger proportion of Jewish adults ages 75 and older (54%) or ages 65-74 (53%) read Jewish publications often compared to the proportion among younger Jewish adults.

Table 6.4. Informal cultural activities, often

	Talk about Jewish topics (%)	Read Jewish publications (%)	Eat Jewish foods (%)	Read books, watch movies or TV, or listen to music (%)	Study Jewish texts (%)
All Jewish adults	49	38	31	28	13
Jewish engagement					
Minimally Involved	21	15	10	3	0
Organizational	45	42	33	38	6
Ritual	79	56	47	32	4
Immersed	96	73	68	78	71
Region					
City of Milwaukee Waukesha County / Milwaukee County South Suburbs	47	38	30	30	10
North Shore	24	26	17	25	7
	59	43	37	27	15
Age					
18-39	47	15	33	23	11
40-54	54	33	40	31	15
55-64	54	41	30	33	15
65-74	47	53	20	20	7
75+	44	54	35	36	17
Relationship status					
Inmarried	64	55	40	34	21
Intermarried	29	24	18	10	2
Not married	45	28	30	30	9
Minor child in household					
No	47	40	30	29	12
Yes	61	29	43	21	18
Congregation member					
No	35	26	22	18	3
Yes	73	60	48	44	30

Sixty-three percent of Jewish adults in Milwaukee engaged in at least one social media activity related to Jewish life in the past year (Table 6.5). Sixty-four percent read or viewed content about Jewish life on social media. Half of Jewish adults (50%) followed or belonged to an online group with Jewish content. Twenty-six percent of Jewish adults posted about Jewish life on social media.

Eighty-nine percent of Jewish adults in the Organizational group and 84% in the Immersed group engaged in social media activity related to Jewish life. Eighty-six percent of Jewish adults in the Organizational group read or viewed content about Jewish life, 77% followed or belonged to an

online group with Jewish content, and 50% posted about Jewish life on social media. A significantly larger proportion of Jewish adults ages 18-39 (92%) engaged in social media activity related to Jewish life compared to the proportion of older Jewish adults.

Table 6.5. Social media activities

	Any of these (%)	Read or view content about Jewish life (%)	Follow or belong to online group with Jewish content (%)	Post about Jewish life (%)
All Jewish adults	67	64	50	26
Jewish engagement				
Minimally Involved	48	47	29	4
Organizational	89	86	77	50
Ritual	68	68	54	33
Immersed	84	77	66	46
Region				
City of Milwaukee Waukesha County / Milwaukee County South Suburbs	73	72	68	39
North Shore	64	61	47	23
	65	61	43	21
Age				
18-39	92	92	80	28
40-54	62	56	54	20
55-64	63	59	40	25
65-74	58	57	40	31
75+	56	54	35	25
Relationship status				
Inmarried	71	69	51	32
Intermarried	53	51	28	11
Not married	70	67	63	28
Minor child in household				
No	67	65	52	28
Yes	64	56	37	16
Congregation member				
No	64	62	45	19
Yes	72	67	60	39

CHAPTER 7. ORGANIZATIONS, VOLUNTEERING, AND PHILANTHROPY

Chapter highlights

The Milwaukee Jewish community hosts a variety of Jewish organizations and programs in which community members can participate. This chapter addresses membership and participation in Jewish organizations, barriers to participation, volunteering and philanthropy, and other ways that Jewish adults in Milwaukee relate to the institutions that shape their community.

- Thirty-five percent of Jewish households in Milwaukee belong to at least one Jewish organization or group, aside from congregations.
- Seven percent of Jewish households in Milwaukee belong to the Harry and Rose Samson Family Jewish Community Center.
- In the past year, 72% of Jewish adults in Milwaukee participated in at least one program with a Jewish organization, aside from religious services.
- The most common barriers to participation in the Milwaukee Jewish community are not knowing many people (35%), not finding programs of interest (34%), being unable to afford programs (21%), and feeling that one's political views are unwelcome (20%). Nineteen percent of Jewish adults in Milwaukee who are interested in participating in Jewish programs cite feeling unwelcome as a barrier to participation, 15% say they are not confident in their level of Jewish knowledge, and 13% cite safety or security concerns.
- Fifty-eight percent of Jewish adults in Milwaukee volunteered anywhere in the past year, including 36% who volunteered for or with a Jewish organization or cause.
- Eighty-three percent of Jewish households in Milwaukee made charitable donations in the past year, including 62% who donated to Jewish organizations or causes.
- Ninety-one percent of Jewish adults in Milwaukee say they are familiar with the Milwaukee Jewish Federation, and 64% have somewhat or very positive views of its impact on the community.

Jewish organizations

Members of the Milwaukee Jewish community belong to a wide range of Jewish organizations and groups. Thirty-five percent of Jewish households belong to at least one Jewish organization or group, aside from congregations (Table 7.1). Seven percent of Jewish households belong to the Harry and Rose Samson Family Jewish Community Center (JCC). Twenty-three percent of Jewish households belong to a Jewish organization or club aside from congregations or the Harry and Rose Samson Family JCC, and 15% belong to an informal or grassroots Jewish group in the area, such as a Jewish book club or parent group.

Greater proportions of the Organizational (75%) and Immersed (65%) groups are members of any Jewish organization or group. The Immersed group has the largest proportion of Jewish adults in

Milwaukee who belong to an informal Jewish group (50%), while the Organizational group has the largest proportion who belong to a local Jewish organization other than congregations or the JCC (64%). Sixteen percent of Jewish households in Milwaukee with minor children are members of the JCC, compared to 6% of households without children.

Table 7.1. Membership in Jewish organizations

	Member of any Jewish organization (%)	Local Jewish organizations or clubs (%)	Informal or grassroots Jewish group (%)	Member of the Harry and Rose Samson Family JCC (%)
All Jewish households	35	23	15	7
Jewish engagement				
Minimally Involved	13	4	6	4
Organizational	75	64	27	7
Ritual	28	14	2	14
Immersed	65	44	50	10
Region				
City of Milwaukee	42	28	17	4
Waukesha County / Milwaukee County South Suburbs	21	13	8	2
North Shore	38	25	17	11
Age				
18-39	49	25	29	7
40-54	26	16	14	8
55-64	26	17	10	8
65-74	27	17	10	7
75+	46	40	15	5
Relationship status				
Inmarried	47	28	23	13
Intermarried	19	9	10	2
Not married	41	30	16	7
Minor child in household				
No	33	22	16	6
Yes	44	30	10	16
Congregation member				
No	30	19	10	6
Yes	45	32	26	9

Participation in Jewish programs

In the year prior to the study, 72% of Jewish adults in Milwaukee participated in at least one program with a Jewish organization aside from religious services, including 27% who participated

rarely, 26% who participated sometimes, and 19% who participated often (Table 7.2). The remaining proportion of Jewish adults (29%) did not participate in any program.

Nearly all members of the Organizational (93%) and Immersed (>99%) groups participated in a program with a Jewish organization. However, only 43% of Jewish adults in the Minimally Involved group participated in any program, including 10% who participated sometimes and less than 1% who participated often.

Jewish young adults ages 18-39 in Milwaukee participated in programs at higher rates compared to the older age groups. Eighty-seven percent of Jewish young adults participated in programs in the past year, including 34% who participated often.

Table 7.2. Participate in Jewish programs, past year

	Never (%)	Rarely (%)	Sometimes (%)	Often (%)	Total (%)
All Jewish adults	29	27	26	19	100
Jewish engagement					
Minimally Involved	57	33	10	<1	100
Organizational	7	15	35	43	100
Ritual	14	42	44	<1	100
Immersed	<1	6	32	62	100
Region					
City of Milwaukee	22	44	19	15	100
Waukesha County / Milwaukee County South Suburbs	40	20	28	13	100
North Shore	28	21	29	23	100
Age					
18-39	13	40	13	34	100
40-54	31	17	42	11	100
55-64	39	17	37	7	100
65-74	39	31	18	12	100
75+	23	25	26	26	100
Relationship status					
Inmarried	24	24	27	25	100
Intermarried	50	26	20	4	100
Not married	21	31	27	22	100
Minor child in household					
No	28	27	26	19	100
Yes	20	33	27	21	100
Congregation member					
No	40	26	21	13	100
Yes	9	28	34	29	100

Jewish adults in Milwaukee participated in programs sponsored by different local organizations (Table 7.3). Among all Jewish adults, 34% participated in a program sponsored by a congregation or synagogue, aside from religious services. Twenty-seven percent participated in a program sponsored by a Chabad. Twenty-two percent participated in a program sponsored by the Milwaukee Jewish Federation. Among Jewish adults ages 22-45²² who participated in a program, 12% participated in a program sponsored by a Jewish young professional organization such as OneTable or Moishe House.

Members of the Immersed group had the largest proportion that attended programs sponsored by a congregation (86%) and by the Milwaukee Jewish Federation (44%). Members of the Organizational group had the largest proportion that attended programs sponsored by Chabad (46%).

Table 7.3. Program sponsor, past year

	Congregation or synagogue (%)	Chabad (%)	Milwaukee Jewish Federation (%)	Jewish young professional organization, age 22-45 (%)
All Jewish adults	34	27	22	12
Jewish engagement				
Minimally Involved	6	5	9	<1
Organizational	27	46	36	25
Ritual	62	40	20	11
Immersed	86	43	44	23
Region				
City of Milwaukee	30	24	17	14
Waukesha County / Milwaukee County				
South Suburbs	28	29	15	0
North Shore	38	28	27	15
Age				
18-39	33	31	20	15
40-54	38	21	32	4
55-64	32	28	27	N/A
65-74	25	19	19	N/A
75+	44	37	19	N/A
Relationship status				
Inmarried	43	31	30	10
Intermarried	24	10	13	4
Not married	30	34	19	18
Minor child in household				
No	33	26	23	13
Yes	44	32	18	10
Congregation member				
No	15	19	20	14
Yes	67	40	27	7

Among Jewish adults who did not participate in programs, 28% expressed no interest in participating in programs (Table 7.4). Thirty-eight percent said they did not have much interest, 30% said they were somewhat interested, and 5% said they were very much interested in participating in programs with Jewish organizations.

Respondents who said they had no interest in participating in Jewish programs were asked to explain why they were not interested. Common reasons cited include lack of accessibility, disagreement with

Jewish organizations' statements on Israel and other political issues, and feeling unwelcome or disconnected from the Jewish community.

Table 7.4. Interest in participating in Jewish programs

	Jewish adults who did not participate in programs (%)
Not at all	28
Not much	38
Somewhat	30
Very much	5
Total	100

Barriers to participation

Among Jewish adults who either already participate or are interested in participating in Jewish programs, 74% cited at least one condition that limits their participation (Tables 7.5a and 7.5b). The most common limitations to participation are not knowing many people (35%), not having found Jewish programs of interest (34%), and not being able to afford programs (21%). Twenty percent of Jewish adults find that their political views are unwelcome at Jewish programs, and 19% feel unwelcome in general. Fifteen percent are not confident in their Jewish knowledge, 13% are concerned about safety or security, 5% cited programs not occurring during convenient times, and 9% indicated that there were other barriers such as not being able to drive at night or other transportation issues, lack of accessibility for people with disabilities or other health issues, and lack of childcare.

The Minimally Involved group had the largest proportion of Jewish adults who cited at least one barrier to participation (85%), while the Immersed group had the smallest proportion (48%). Significantly more Jewish adults residing in the City of Milwaukee cited not having found programs of interest (55%), affordability (42%), and feeling unwelcome (35%) as barriers, compared to adults in other regions. For Jewish adults ages 18-39, not knowing many people (61%), affordability (45%), and feeling their political views are unwelcome (41%) were significant barriers.

Among Jewish adults who either already participate or are interested in participating in Jewish programs, 19% cited feeling unwelcome as a barrier to participation. These adults were asked to proportion the reasons they feel unwelcome in Jewish programs. Common reasons cited include perceiving a lack of inclusivity toward people who were not born or raised in Milwaukee, perceiving a lack of inclusivity toward members of a minority groups (e.g., LGBTQ+, Jews of Color), perceiving hostility toward Orthodox Jews, perceiving obstacles related to status as intermarried couple, perceiving insensitivity toward those without significant financial resources, and anticipating disagreements regarding Israel.

Table 7.5a. Barriers to participation

	Any barrier (%)	Don't know many people (%)	Haven't found programs that interest you (%)	Can't afford it (%)	Political views are unwelcome (%)
Jewish adults who participated or are interested	74	35	34	21	20
Jewish engagement					
Minimally Involved	85	50	48	32	26
Organizational	73	34	29	18	24
Ritual	75	28	28	5	4
Immersed	48	13	16	21	21
Region					
City of Milwaukee	84	48	55	42	36
Waukesha County / Milwaukee County South					
Suburbs	66	46	13	1	3
North Shore	72	26	30	12	17
Age					
18-39	89	61	47	45	41
40-54	70	37	20	11	7
55-64	67	34	33	27	24
65-74	80	24	40	10	11
75+	59	16	24	2	10
Relationship status					
Inmarried	69	17	28	15	17
Intermarried	74	40	34	6	11
Not married	78	52	41	36	29
Minor child in household					
No	74	35	34	22	22
Yes	75	37	30	18	8
Congregation member					
No	80	46	37	25	25
Yes	64	18	29	14	11

Table 7.5b. Barriers to participation

	Feel unwelcome (%)	Not confident in Jewish knowledge (%)	Safety/security concerns (%)	Schedule (%)	Other (%)
Jewish adults who participated or are interested	19	15	13	5	9
Jewish engagement					
Minimally Involved	28	19	20	2	11
Organizational	12	23	9	1	8
Ritual	11	8	9	16	6
Immersed	16	3	9	1	7
Region					
City of Milwaukee	35	6	4	3	2
Waukesha County / Milwaukee County South	5	29	17	4	13
North Shore	14	15	16	5	11
Age					
18-39	36	26	12	2	1
40-54	10	22	6	1	4
55-64	19	5	26	8	5
65-74	17	13	15	6	13
75+	5	1	7	<1	17
Relationship status					
Inmarried	17	7	16	5	10
Intermarried	7	27	16	7	1
Not married	28	18	9	3	10
Minor child in household					
No	20	14	14	4	10
Yes	8	7	10	7	2
Congregation member					
No	22	19	15	3	10
Yes	13	9	10	8	6

Sources of information

Jewish adults in Milwaukee access many sources of information about local Jewish activities, news and events. Sixty-seven percent of Jewish adults get their information from a Jewish organization’s newsletter or email (Table 7.6). Sixty-four percent of Jewish adults get their information from family or friends. Half of Jewish adults (50%) get their information from local periodicals, such as the

Wisconsin Jewish Chronicle, 35% get their information from a Jewish organization’s social media, and 25% get their information from text messages from Jewish organizations.

Table 7.6. Information about local Jewish activities, news, events

	All Jewish adults (%)
Jewish organizations newsletter/email	67
Family or friends	64
Local periodicals (i.e., <i>Wisconsin Jewish Chronicle</i>)	50
Jewish organization’s social media	35
Text messages from Jewish organizations	25

Personal outreach

About two thirds of Jewish adults (65%) in Milwaukee said that someone from a Jewish organization personally reached out to them in the past year (Tables 7.7a and 7.7b). Fifty-two percent of Jewish adults said that someone from a Jewish organization asked them for a financial donation, and 41% were invited to participate in a program or activity. Twenty-two percent were asked how they were doing, 14% were asked to serve on a committee or in a leadership role, and 7% were offered or provided assistance, regardless of whether it was needed.

Members of the Organizational (86%) and Immersed (81%) groups had the largest proportions who said someone from a Jewish organization personally reached out them. Young adults ages 18-39 had the largest proportion (43%) among the age groups who experienced someone from a Jewish organization reaching out to find out how they were doing.

Table 7.7a. Personal outreach from Jewish organizations

	Any outreach (%)	Ask you for financial donation (%)	Invite you to participate in program/activity (%)	Find out how you are doing (%)
All Jewish adults	65	52	41	22
Jewish engagement				
Minimally Involved	46	35	23	11
Organizational	86	68	55	36
Ritual	71	54	49	22
Immersed	81	69	58	34
Region				
City of Milwaukee	57	41	41	28
Waukesha County / Milwaukee County South Suburbs	66	41	54	26
North Shore	69	61	36	18
Age				
18-39	70	39	51	43
40-54	65	51	49	24
55-64	62	59	40	17
65-74	56	46	31	7
75+	75	69	37	19
Relationship status				
Inmarried	66	58	38	23
Intermarried	59	39	34	14
Not married	69	53	49	27
Minor child in household				
No	63	51	39	21
Yes	79	55	56	34
Congregation member				
No	59	43	34	19
Yes	77	66	53	28

Table 7.7b. Personal outreach from Jewish organizations

	Ask you to serve in leadership role (%)	Offer or provide assistance (%)	Visit your home (%)	Other ²³ (%)
All Jewish adults	14	7	4	1
Jewish engagement				
Minimally Involved	3	1	2	1
Organizational	11	10	4	1
Ritual	15	12	5	<1
Immersed	45	14	8	<1
Region				
City of Milwaukee	15	9	2	2
Waukesha County / Milwaukee County South Suburbs	6	1	1	<1
North Shore	16	8	5	<1
Age				
18-39	21	6	6	0
40-54	14	9	6	1
55-64	12	3	1	<1
65-74	11	4	2	2
75+	10	15	4	<1
Relationship status				
Inmarried	16	14	8	<1
Intermarried	15	1	1	3
Not married	10	4	1	<1
Minor child in household				
No	12	5	2	1
Yes	28	22	16	2
Congregation member				
No	9	4	3	1
Yes	22	12	5	1

Volunteering and philanthropy

In the Milwaukee Jewish community, over half (58%) of Jewish adults volunteered somewhere in the past year, with 9% volunteering exclusively for or with Jewish organizations, 22% volunteering exclusively for or with non-Jewish organizations, and 27% volunteering for or with both Jewish and non-Jewish organizations (Table 7.8).

Members of the Immersed group had the largest proportion who volunteered (80%), and nearly all volunteers in this group volunteered for or with Jewish organizations. Members of the Minimally Involved group had the smallest proportion who volunteered (47%), including 9% who volunteered for or with Jewish organizations.

Table 7.8. Volunteering, past year

	Yes, both to Jewish and non- Jewish organizations (%)	Yes, to Jewish organizations only (%)	Yes, to non- Jewish organizations only (%)	Did not volunteer/Don't know (%)	Total (%)
All Jewish adults	27	9	22	42	100
Jewish engagement					
Minimally Involved	8	1	38	53	100
Organizational	41	10	15	34	100
Ritual	28	16	12	45	100
Immersed	58	22	<1	20	100
Region					
City of Milwaukee	16	6	31	47	100
Waukesha County / Milwaukee County South Suburbs	18	5	20	57	100
North Shore	35	12	18	35	100
Age					
18-39	22	10	31	38	100
40-54	28	10	21	41	100
55-64	27	9	5	59	100
65-74	20	6	31	43	100
75+	40	13	18	30	100
Relationship status					
Inmarried	34	12	11	43	100
Intermarried	10	5	39	46	100
Not married	29	7	24	39	100
Minor child in household					
No	28	9	22	42	100
Yes	17	15	23	45	100
Congregation member					
No	17	4	32	46	100
Yes	44	18	3	35	100

Philanthropy

Within the Jewish community, 83% of households made a charitable contribution in the past year (Table 7.9). This includes 57% who gave to both Jewish and non-Jewish organizations, 5% who gave only to Jewish organizations, and 21% who gave only to non-Jewish organizations. Nationally, 48% of US Jews donated to any Jewish charity or cause in the past 12 months.²⁴

Jewish adults in the Immersed group (95%) had the largest proportion who gave to Jewish organizations, with 80% giving to both Jewish and non-Jewish organizations and 15% giving exclusively to Jewish organizations. Members of the Minimally Involved group (38%) had the largest proportion who gave exclusively to non-Jewish organizations. Two thirds of inmarried households (66%) gave to both Jewish and non-Jewish organizations, and an additional 10% gave exclusively to Jewish organizations. Intermarried households (34%) were more likely to give exclusively to non-Jewish organizations.

Eleven percent of Jewish households made a donation to the Milwaukee Jewish Federation in the past year. Members of the Organizational (21%) and Immersed (21%) groups had larger proportions who donated than did members of the Ritual (14%) and Minimally Involved (5%) groups. About one quarter of inmarried households (26%) donated to the Milwaukee Jewish Federation, while 7% of intermarried households and 7% of unmarried households made a donation.

Table 7.9. Charitable donations, past year

	Yes, both to Jewish and non-Jewish organizations (%)	Yes, to Jewish organizations only (%)	Yes, to non-Jewish organizations only (%)	Did not donate/Don't know (%)	Total (%)	Donated to Milwaukee Jewish Federation (%)
All Jewish households	57	5	21	17	100	11
Jewish engagement						
Minimally Involved	40	1	38	20	100	5
Organizational	76	4	4	16	100	21
Ritual	73	12	6	9	100	14
Immersed	80	15	1	4	100	21
Region						
City of Milwaukee	53	4	31	12	100	7
Waukesha County / Milwaukee County						
South Suburbs	55	2	15	28	100	5
North Shore	60	7	19	14	100	16
Age						
18-39	38	5	26	31	100	8
40-54	50	6	19	24	100	10
55-64	58	7	25	11	100	10
65-74	60	6	22	12	100	12
75+	76	2	11	11	100	18
Relationship status						
Inmarried	66	10	12	12	100	26
Intermarried	46	2	34	18	100	7
Not married	59	5	18	18	100	7
Minor child in household						
No	61	4	20	15	100	12
Yes	37	11	26	27	100	10
Congregation member						
No	47	3	28	22	100	9
Yes	79	10	5	7	100	17

A majority of Jewish adults in Milwaukee feel a sense of personal responsibility for the welfare of Jews in need across different communities (Table 7.10). Sixty-six percent of Jewish adults somewhat (44%) or very much (22%) feel a sense of responsibility for the welfare of Jews in Milwaukee. Sixty-five percent of Jewish adults somewhat (47%) or very much (18%) feel a sense of responsibility for the welfare of Jews in Israel. Sixty-seven percent of Jewish adults somewhat (49%) or very much (18%) feel a sense of responsibility for the welfare of Jews around the world.

Table 7.10. Sense of responsibility for welfare of Jews

	Not at all (%)	Not too much (%)	Somewhat (%)	Very much (%)	Total (%)
In Milwaukee	10	24	44	22	100
In Israel	12	22	47	18	100
Around the world	11	22	49	18	100

Across engagement groups, Jewish adults from the Immersed group felt the greatest sense of responsibility for the welfare of Jews in Milwaukee (64% very much), in Israel (42%), and around the world (46%; Table 7.11). Jewish adults residing in Waukesha County/Milwaukee County South Suburbs collectively felt less of a sense of responsibility for the welfare of Jews in Israel (5% very much) and around the world (3%), compared to Jewish adults in other regions. Intermarried adults also felt less of a sense of responsibility for the welfare of Jews in Milwaukee (8% very much) and in Israel (6%), compared to inmarried or unmarried Jewish adults.

Table 7.11. Sense of responsibility for welfare of Jews, very much

	In Milwaukee (%)	In Israel (%)	Around the world (%)
All Jewish adults	22	18	18
Jewish engagement			
Minimally Involved	2	6	5
Organizational	34	22	22
Ritual	19	21	18
Immersed	64	42	46
Region			
City of Milwaukee	23	25	26
Waukesha County/Milwaukee County South Suburbs	19	5	3
North Shore	23	20	19
Age			
18-39	26	12	17
40-54	19	22	19
55-64	21	17	15
65-74	16	18	20
75+	27	27	19
Relationship status			
Inmarried	29	25	18
Intermarried	8	6	8
Not married	21	19	24
Minor child in household			
No	21	18	17
Yes	27	23	24
Congregation member			
No	12	13	14
Yes	38	28	25

Views on Milwaukee Jewish Federation

Almost all Jewish adults in Milwaukee (91%) said they were familiar with the Milwaukee Jewish Federation (Table 7.12). Among engagement groups, members of the Minimally Involved had the lowest proportion of those familiar with the Federation (76%). By region, Jewish adults residing in Waukesha County/Milwaukee County South Suburbs (82%) were the least familiar with the Federation.

Table 7.12. Familiar with Milwaukee Jewish Federation

Familiar with Milwaukee Jewish Federation (%)	
All Jewish adults	91
Jewish engagement	
Minimally Involved	76
Organizational	>99
Ritual	93
Immersed	94
Region	
City of Milwaukee	93
Waukesha County/Milwaukee County South Suburbs	82
North Shore	94
Age	
18-39	84
40-54	94
55-64	96
65-74	92
75+	87
Relationship status	
Inmarried	93
Intermarried	94
Not married	88
Minor child in household	
No	90
Yes	95
Congregation member	
No	90
Yes	91

Almost two thirds of Jewish adults (64%) in Milwaukee said that the Milwaukee Jewish Federation has a positive impact on the community, including 23% who rated the Federation’s impact as “very positive” (Table 7.13). Twelve percent of Jewish adults said that the Federation has no significant impact on the community. Fifteen percent of Jewish adults said that the Federation has a negative impact on the community, including 3% who rated the Federation’s impact as “very negative.” The remaining proportion of Jewish adults (9%) were those who are not familiar with the Federation and thus cannot be expected to form an opinion of its impact on the community.

Larger proportions of Jewish adults from the Ritual (71%) and Organizational (69%) groups described the Federation’s impact on the community as somewhat or very positive, compared to the Immersed (58%) and Minimally Involved (59%) groups. The Ritual group also had the largest proportion who said the Federation has no significant impact on the community (20%). The Organizational (26%) and Immersed (26%) groups had the largest proportions who said that the Federation’s impact on the community is somewhat or very negative.

Seventy-four percent of Jewish adults residing in Waukesha County/Milwaukee County South Suburbs felt that the Federation's impact is somewhat or very positive, but among regions, this area also had the highest proportion of Jewish adults who were not familiar with the Federation (18%). Thirty-seven percent of Jewish adults residing in City of Milwaukee said that the Federation has no significant impact on the community. Among regions, the North Shore had the highest proportion of Jewish adults, 18%, who felt that the Federation's impact is somewhat or very negative.

Higher proportions of middle-aged Jewish adults said the Federation has a somewhat or very positive impact on the community, compared to the older age groups. Eighty-four percent of adults ages 40-54 and 87% of adults ages 55-64 rated the Federation's impact on the community as somewhat or very positive. However, 28% of Jewish adults ages 65-74 said that the Federation has no significant impact on the community, and nearly a quarter of Jewish adults ages 75 and older (23%) said the Federation's impact is somewhat or very negative.

Table 7.13. Rating overall impact of Milwaukee Jewish Federation on community

	Very positive (%)	Somewhat positive (%)	No significant impact (%)	Somewhat negative (%)	Very negative (%)	Not familiar with Federation (%)	Total (%)
All Jewish adults	23	41	12	12	3	9	100
Jewish engagement							
Minimally Involved	12	47	8	6	3	24	100
Organizational	23	46	5	23	3	1	100
Ritual	27	44	20	2	<1	7	100
Immersed	29	29	10	19	7	6	100
Region							
City of Milwaukee	24	21	37	8	1	8	100
Waukesha County / Milwaukee County							
South Suburbs	14	60	2	2	3	18	100
North Shore	25	45	6	15	3	6	100
Age							
18-39	17	39	2	25	0	16	100
40-54	37	47	3	2	6	6	100
55-64	34	53	3	1	5	4	100
65-74	16	39	28	10	<1	8	100
75+	19	35	9	23	<1	13	100
Relationship status							
Inmarried	27	34	17	15	<1	7	100
Intermarried	33	42	3	7	9	6	100
Not married	10	51	10	12	4	13	100
Minor child in household							
No	21	40	13	14	3	10	100
Yes	38	51	2	3	1	5	100
Congregation member							
No	20	47	10	11	2	10	100
Yes	25	35	14	13	4	9	100

Estate planning

Twenty-two percent of Jewish adults in Milwaukee have designated a charitable organization as a beneficiary in their will or estate planning (Table 7.14). Seven percent of Jewish adults have designated both Jewish and non-Jewish organizations, 4% have designated exclusively Jewish organizations, and 11% have designated exclusively non-Jewish organizations. Forty-four percent of

Jewish adults do not designate any charitable organization as a beneficiary, and the remaining 34% indicated they do not have a will.

Twenty-nine percent of Jewish adults in the Immersed group have designated a Jewish organization as a beneficiary in their will or estate planning, with 16% designating both Jewish and non-Jewish organizations and 13% designating exclusively Jewish organizations. By contrast, 16% of Jewish adults in the Ritual group have designated any charitable organization in their will or estate planning. Seventeen percent of Jewish adults residing in the North Shore have designated a Jewish organization as a beneficiary in their will, about triple the rate of the other regions.

Over one third of Jewish adults ages 75 or older (35%) have designated a Jewish organization as a beneficiary in their will, with 26% designating both Jewish and non-Jewish organizations and 9% designating exclusively Jewish organizations.

Table 7.14. Beneficiaries in will or estate planning

	Yes, both to Jewish and non-Jewish organizations (%)	Yes, to Jewish organizations only (%)	Yes, to non- Jewish organizations only (%)	No (%)	Don't have a will (%)	Total (%)
All Jewish adults	7	4	11	44	34	100
Jewish engagement						
Minimally Involved	2	<1	16	40	42	100
Organizational	9	6	3	47	34	100
Ritual	11	3	2	64	20	100
Immersed	16	13	0	40	31	100
Region						
City of Milwaukee	2	3	17	27	51	100
Waukesha County / Milwaukee County						
South Suburbs	4	<1	13	55	29	100
North Shore	11	6	7	50	26	100
Age						
18-39	<1	2	2	22	75	100
40-54	3	4	1	46	47	100
55-64	2	2	1	59	36	100
65-74	4	5	32	50	9	100
75+	26	9	11	49	5	100
Relationship status						
Inmarried	13	8	8	44	27	100
Intermarried	3	1	16	51	30	100
Not married	5	2	4	42	47	100
Minor child in household						
No	8	4	12	44	32	100
Yes	3	4	1	44	48	100
Congregation member						
No	2	2	12	42	41	100
Yes	18	8	1	52	21	100

CHAPTER 8. CONCERNS ABOUT ANTISEMITISM

Chapter highlights

This chapter focuses on Jewish adults concerns about antisemitism, as well as their personal experiences with antisemitic incidents in the past year.

- Nearly all Jewish adults in Milwaukee (98%) are somewhat (22%) or very concerned (76%) about antisemitism around the world.
- Eighty-three percent of Jewish adults in Milwaukee are somewhat (13%) or very concerned (70%) about antisemitism on college campuses.
- Eighty-three percent of Jewish adults in Milwaukee are somewhat (39%) or very concerned (44%) about antisemitism in the Milwaukee area.
- Forty-nine percent of Jewish adults in Milwaukee have avoided certain activities or locations out of a fear of antisemitism.
- Thirty-four percent of Jewish adults in Milwaukee reported being the target of at least one antisemitic incident during the past year.

Concern about antisemitism

Nearly all Jewish adults in Milwaukee (98%) are somewhat or very concerned about antisemitism around the world, including 76% who are very concerned. Eighty-three percent are somewhat or very concerned about antisemitism on college campuses, including 70% who are very concerned, and 83% are very concerned about antisemitism in the Milwaukee area, including 44% who are very concerned (Table 8.1).

Table 8.1. Concern about antisemitism

	In the Milwaukee area (%)	Around the world (%)	On college campuses (%)
Not at all concerned	4	<1	4
Not too concerned	13	2	13
Somewhat concerned	39	22	13
Very concerned	44	76	70
Total	100	100	100

Jewish adults from the Ritual (88%) and Immersed (82%) groups have the largest proportions who are very concerned about antisemitism on college campuses (Table 8.2). Additionally, older adults tend to be more concerned about antisemitism than younger adults. Jewish adults ages 55-64 are most concerned about antisemitism around the world (90% very concerned), while those ages 75 and older are the most concerned about antisemitism on college campuses (83% very concerned). Comparatively, only 46% of Jewish adults ages 18-39 reported being very concerned about

antisemitism around the world, and 42% of this group reported being very concerned about antisemitism on college campuses.²⁵

Jewish adults who were personally targeted in an antisemitic incident in the past year expressed significantly greater concern about antisemitism in the Milwaukee area, compared to those who were not personally targeted (56% very concerned versus 38%).

Table 8.2. Very concerned about antisemitism

	In the Milwaukee area (%)	Around the world (%)	On college campuses (%)
All Jewish adults	44	76	70
Jewish engagement			
Minimally Involved	35	72	60
Organizational	50	72	68
Ritual	60	88	88
Immersed	41	78	82
Region			
City of Milwaukee	42	64	60
Waukesha County / Milwaukee County South Suburbs	38	81	60
North Shore	47	80	79
Age			
18-39	22	46	42
40-54	46	76	71
55-64	45	90	80
65-74	57	89	77
75+	48	83	83
Relationship status			
Inmarried	42	82	80
Intermarried	48	82	63
Not married	43	65	63
Minor child in household			
No	45	76	69
Yes	40	79	77
Congregation member			
No	38	74	64
Yes	55	81	81
Experienced antisemitism			
No	38	75	66
Yes	56	79	78

Almost half of Jewish adults (49%) in Milwaukee reported that in the past year, they have avoided certain activities or locations out of a fear of antisemitism (Tables 8.3, 8.4a, and 8.4b). Thirty-five percent of Jewish adults avoided revealing that they are Jewish either in person or online, and a similar proportion (35%) avoided mentioning Israel either in person or online. Thirty-one percent of

Jewish adults avoided wearing or displaying objects that would identify them as a Jew, 26% avoided posting Jewish content online that would identify them as a Jew, and 26% avoided going to certain places or events.

Table 8.3. Avoided out of fear of antisemitism

	Revealing that you are Jewish, whether in person or online (%)	Mentioning Israel, whether in person or online (%)	Wearing or displaying objects that would identify you as a Jew (%)	Posting Jewish content online that would identify you as a Jew (%)	Going to certain places or events (%)
Yes, have avoided	35	35	31	26	26
No, have not avoided	55	56	36	45	62
Does not apply	11	9	33	29	11
Total	100	100	100	100	100

Among the Jewish engagement groups, the Organizational group had the largest proportion (62%) who avoided at least one activity or location in the past year out of a fear of antisemitism. The Ritual group had the largest proportion of Jewish adults (42%) who avoided revealing they are Jewish, and the Immersed group had the largest proportion (40%) who avoided mentioning Israel. The Organizational (39%) and Ritual (39%) groups had the largest proportions who avoided wearing or displaying objects that would identify them as a Jew, and the Ritual group had the largest proportion (34%) who avoided going to certain places or events. Fifty-seven percent of Jewish residents of the North Shore avoided at least one activity out of a fear of antisemitism, more than the residents of the other regions.

Table 8.4a. Avoided activities out of fear of antisemitism

	Any (%)	Revealing that you are Jewish, whether in person or online (%)	Mentioning Israel, whether in person or online (%)
All Jewish adults	49	35	35
Jewish engagement			
Minimally Involved	37	33	30
Organizational	62	36	38
Ritual	56	42	39
Immersed	57	27	40
Region			
City of Milwaukee	39	27	28
Waukesha County / Milwaukee County South Suburbs	42	38	24
North Shore	57	37	42
Age			
18-39	61	41	50
40-54	60	42	50
55-64	58	48	40
65-74	42	31	25
75+	29	13	15
Relationship status			
Inmarried	46	32	35
Intermarried	56	45	44
Not married	50	32	30
Minor child in household			
No	48	34	32
Yes	60	39	51
Congregation member			
No	47	34	37
Yes	54	37	31
Experienced antisemitism			
No	42	31	30
Yes	63	41	44

Table 8.4b. Avoided activities out of fear of antisemitism

	Wearing or displaying objects that would identify you as a Jew (%)	Going to certain places or events (%)	Posting Jewish content online that would identify you as a Jew (%)
All Jewish adults	31	26	26
Jewish engagement			
Minimally Involved	25	19	29
Organizational	39	32	28
Ritual	39	34	26
Immersed	28	27	11
Region			
City of Milwaukee	22	17	17
Waukesha County / Milwaukee County South Suburbs	33	19	37
North Shore	35	33	26
Age			
18-39	34	26	33
40-54	38	34	29
55-64	44	39	42
65-74	24	22	20
75+	20	14	7
Relationship status			
Inmarried	31	27	24
Intermarried	39	30	37
Not married	28	24	21
Minor child in household			
No	30	27	25
Yes	38	24	29
Congregation member			
No	29	24	26
Yes	35	31	25
Experienced antisemitism			
No	30	22	26
Yes	34	34	26

Experiences with antisemitism

One third of Jewish adults in Milwaukee (34%) reported being the target of at least one antisemitic incident during the past year (Table 8.5), comparable to the national average (33%).²⁶ Antisemitic remarks were the most common incident, with 28% of all Jewish adults encountering remarks from strangers and 21% of all Jewish adults encountering remarks from someone they know. Physical threats or attacks (3%) and acts of vandalism (2%) were much less frequent.

Table 8.5. Personally been target of, past year

	Any (%)	Antisemitic physical attack or threat of attack (%)	Antisemitic act of vandalism (%)	Antisemitic remark from someone you know (%)	Antisemitic remark from someone you don't know (%)
All Jewish adults	34	3	2	21	28
Jewish engagement					
Minimally Involved	28	2	<1	20	21
Organizational	44	4	1	28	36
Ritual	26	2	4	12	20
Immersed	48	5	7	27	45
Region					
City of Milwaukee	37	1	3	20	31
Waukesha County / Milwaukee County South	29	<1	<1	19	22
North Shore	34	4	2	22	29
Age					
18-39	42	1	1	27	37
40-54	40	2	2	25	34
55-64	39	6	4	27	34
65-74	25	5	3	12	19
75+	26	0	0	16	18
Relationship status					
Inmarried	32	2	3	14	27
Intermarried	28	2	<1	19	23
Not married	42	5	2	32	33
Minor child in household					
No	34	3	2	21	28
Yes	37	4	3	22	31
Congregation member					
No	33	3	1	25	27
Yes	36	3	5	15	31
Experienced antisemitism					
Yes	100	8	6	63	83

Among Jewish adults who experienced antisemitism in the past year, only 19% reported an incident to a Jewish organization or other entity (Table 8.6), comparable to the national average (22%).²⁷ Seven percent of these adults reported an incident to the Milwaukee Jewish Federation, 6% to another Jewish community organization, 6% to a rabbi or other Jewish professional, 5% to a government agency, and 10% to someone else.

Table 8.6. Reporting antisemitic incidents, of Jewish adults who experienced antisemitism

Jewish adults who experienced antisemitism (%)	
Milwaukee Jewish Federation	7
Another Jewish community organization	6
Rabbi or other Jewish professional	6
Government agency	5
Someone else	10
Did not report	81

* Respondents could select more than one option.

The remaining proportion of Jewish adults who experienced an antisemitic incident cited a variety of reasons for not reporting incidents (Table 8.7). The most common reason cited was not expecting any change to occur as a result of reporting the incident (55%).²⁸ Forty-two percent of Jewish adults who experienced an antisemitic incident but did not report it said they did not consider the incident to be serious, 12% said they did not know who to report the incident to, and 24% cited miscellaneous other reasons such as believing someone else had already reported it, the perpetrator offered a sincere apology, the perpetrator did not understand that what they had done was antisemitic, wanting to avoid conflict, or feeling like the issue had already been dealt with adequately.

Table 8.7. Reasons for not reporting incident

Jewish adults who did not report (%)	
Did not think that any change would happen as a result of report	55
Did not consider the incident to be serious	42
Did not know who to report to	12
Something else	24

* Respondents could select more than one option.

CHAPTER 9. CONNECTIONS TO ISRAEL

Chapter highlights

Jewish adults in Milwaukee have a wide range of beliefs regarding the State of Israel. Israel plays a vital role in the Jewish identity of many adults in Milwaukee, but for others, the country's relationship to their lives is less significant. This chapter explores the ways Jewish adults in Milwaukee relate to Israel, as well as changes in their sentiments and behavior toward Israel in the aftermath of October 7.

- Sixty-nine percent of Jewish adults in Milwaukee are somewhat (38%) or very emotionally attached (31%) to Israel.
- Fifty-six percent of Jewish adults in Milwaukee have visited Israel at least once.
- Forty-three percent of Jewish adults in Milwaukee say they describe themselves as Zionists. Forty-two percent say they do not describe themselves as Zionists, and 15% are not sure or prefer not to say whether they would describe themselves as Zionists.
- Ninety percent of Jewish adults in Milwaukee follow news about Israel somewhat (51%) or very (39%) closely (39%).
- In the aftermath of October 7, 46% of Jewish adults in Milwaukee feel somewhat (22%) or much more attached (24%) to Israel than they did beforehand.

Emotional attachment to Israel

More than two thirds of Jewish adults feel some level of emotional attachment to Israel, with 38% feeling somewhat attached and 31% feeling very attached (Table 9.1a). Taken together, the proportion who are somewhat or very attached to Israel (69%) is greater than among all US Jewish adults (58%).²⁹

Differences in Israel attachment vary significantly across the Jewish engagement groups. About half (48%) of the Minimally Involved group are somewhat (34%) or very (14%) attached to Israel, compared to nearly all of the Ritual (95% somewhat or very attached) and Immersed groups (84%).

There are no meaningful differences in attachment to Israel by age or household composition. While almost all congregation members find themselves somewhat (38%) or very (50%) attached to Israel, non-congregants are less likely to feel attached to Israel.

More than half of Jewish adults who have never been to Israel feel not at all (19%) or not too (38%) attached to it. By contrast, almost no Jewish adults who have previously lived in Israel feel not at all or not too attached.

Over 99% of Jewish adults who consider themselves Zionists feel somewhat or very attached to Israel (Table 9.1b).

Among Jewish adults in Milwaukee who strongly support the establishment of a Palestinian state alongside Israel, 51% feel somewhat (31%) or very attached to Israel (20%). Conversely, among Jewish adults in Milwaukee who strongly oppose the establishment of a Palestinian state, 91% feel somewhat (19%) or very attached to Israel (72%).

Table 9.1a. Emotional attachment to Israel

	Not at all attached (%)	Not too attached (%)	Somewhat attached (%)	Very attached (%)	Total (%)
All Jewish adults	11	20	38	31	100
Jewish engagement					
Minimally Involved	17	34	34	14	100
Organizational	11	14	42	33	100
Ritual	1	4	41	54	100
Immersed	7	9	36	48	100
Region					
City of Milwaukee Waukesha County / Milwaukee County South Suburbs	7	24	26	43	100
North Shore	7	38	33	22	100
	15	12	45	29	100
Age					
18-39	6	40	37	17	100
40-54	15	13	36	36	100
55-64	6	20	32	42	100
65-74	18	13	35	35	100
75+	11	12	45	32	100
Relationship status					
Inmarried	10	11	44	35	100
Intermarried	18	21	44	17	100
Not married	9	29	25	37	100
Minor child in household					
No	11	21	38	30	100
Yes	13	11	33	43	100
Congregation member					
No	14	27	37	21	100
Yes	6	7	38	50	100

Table 9.1b. Emotional attachment to Israel

	Not at all attached (%)	Not too attached (%)	Somewhat attached (%)	Very attached (%)	Total (%)
All Jewish adults	11	20	38	31	100
Israel travel					
Never	19	38	24	19	100
Once	3	4	58	34	100
More than once	9	8	42	42	100
Lived in Israel	1	<1	42	57	100
Considers self Zionist					
No	21	40	33	7	100
Yes	0	1	37	61	100
Palestinian state establishment					
Strongly support	15	34	31	20	100
Somewhat support	8	18	45	29	100
Somewhat oppose	2	6	57	36	100
Strongly oppose	8	1	19	72	100
No opinion or not sure	13	27	18	42	100

Travel to Israel

More than half of Jewish adults in Milwaukee (56%) have been to Israel, including 22% who have visited once, 25% who have visited more than once, and 8% who have lived in Israel (Table 9.2a). The proportion of Milwaukee Jews who have been to Israel is larger than that among all US Jewish adults (45%).³⁰

Israel travel varies significantly by Jewish engagement. About two thirds of Jewish adults in the Minimally Involved group (67%) have never been to Israel, compared with 19% of the Ritual group and 24% of the Immersed group.

Two thirds of Jewish adults living in Waukesha County/Milwaukee County South Suburbs (67%) have never traveled to Israel, compared to 40% of Jewish adults living in the city of Milwaukee and 39% of Jewish adults on the North Shore.

Larger proportions of inmarried Jewish adults in Milwaukee have traveled to Israel, compared to their intermarried counterparts. Seventy percent of inmarried Jews have been to Israel, either once (20%), more than once (39%), or have lived there (11%). By contrast, 45% of intermarried Jewish adults have been to Israel, whether it was once (33%), more than once (8%), or having lived there (5%).

There is a strong and expected connection among Milwaukee Jewish adults between travel to Israel and emotional attachment to Israel. Eighty-six percent of Jewish adults in Milwaukee who are not at all attached or not too attached to Israel have never visited (Table 9.2b). By contrast, among those who are very attached to Israel, just 27% have never visited.

Table 9.2a. Travel to Israel

	Never (%)	Once (%)	More than once (%)	Lived in Israel (%)	Total (%)
All Jewish adults	44	22	25	8	100
Jewish engagement					
Minimally Involved	67	14	15	4	100
Organizational	35	34	22	9	100
Ritual	19	40	34	6	100
Immersed	24	7	46	22	100
Region					
City of Milwaukee	40	13	27	20	100
Waukesha County / Milwaukee County South Suburbs	67	25	3	5	100
North Shore	39	26	32	4	100
Age					
18-39	51	13	22	13	100
40-54	38	32	23	7	100
55-64	57	25	11	6	100
65-74	36	18	41	5	100
75+	39	30	21	9	100
Relationship status					
Inmarried	30	20	39	11	100
Intermarried	55	33	8	5	100
Not married	53	18	22	7	100
Minor child in household					
No	45	22	26	7	100
Yes	38	24	19	19	100
Congregation member					
No	54	22	18	6	100
Yes	27	22	38	13	100

Table 9.2b. Travel to Israel

	Never (%)	Once (%)	More than once (%)	Lived in Israel (%)	Total (%)
All Jewish adults	44	22	25	8	100
Israel attachment					
Not at all/Not too attached	81	5	13	<1	100
Somewhat attached	28	35	28	9	100
Very attached	27	25	34	15	100
Considers self Zionist					
No	69	15	9	6	100
Yes	22	25	40	12	100
Palestinian state establishment					
Strongly support	55	19	18	8	100
Somewhat support	45	20	29	6	100
Somewhat oppose	23	22	44	12	100
Strongly oppose	50	23	18	9	100
No opinion or not sure	39	31	12	18	100

Twenty-three percent of age-eligible Milwaukee Jewish adults (i.e., those under age 54) have traveled to Israel on a Birthright Israel trip, while 28% of all Jewish adults have traveled to Israel on a mission or tour sponsored by a federation, synagogue, or another Jewish organization (Table 9.3a).

Table 9.3a. Types of trips to Israel

	Birthright Israel (%)	A mission or tour sponsored by a federation, synagogue, or another Jewish organization (%)
All Jewish adults	23	28
Jewish engagement		
Minimally Involved	--	19
Organizational	--	32
Ritual	47	27
Immersed	24	46
Region		
City of Milwaukee	23	24
Waukesha County / Milwaukee County South Suburbs	--	15
North Shore	30	33
Age		
18-39	30	26
40-54	12	29
55-64	N/A	19
65-74	N/A	25
75	N/A	39
Relationship status		
Inmarried	12	36
Intermarried	25	17
Not married	--	24
Minor child in household		
No	19	28
Yes	31	24
Congregation member		
No	22	24
Yes	25	34

Table 9.3b. Types of trips to Israel

	Birthright Israel (%)	A mission or tour sponsored by a federation, synagogue, or another Jewish organization (%)
All Jewish adults	23	28
Israel attachment		
Not at all/Not too attached	--	8
Somewhat attached	39	43
Very attached	28	29
Considers self Zionist		
No	4	20
Yes	41	36
Palestinian state establishment		
Strongly support	12	24
Somewhat support	18	32
Somewhat oppose	--	23
Strongly oppose	--	26
No opinion or not sure	--	42

Views about Israel

Jewish adults in Milwaukee have a wide range of opinions about Israel. The highest level of consensus is in response to the statement, “I consider it important that Israel give equal recognition to Jews of all denominations”; 11% of Jewish adults in Milwaukee somewhat agree with this statement, and 81% strongly agree. There is nearly as high agreement with the statement that “Israel should be a democratic state for all of its citizens, regardless of religious identity” (16% somewhat agree, and 72% strongly agree).

Notably, 91% of Jewish adults in Milwaukee somewhat (26%) or strongly agree (65%) that Israel is under constant threat from hostile neighbors who seek its destruction. At the same time, 52% somewhat (24%) or strongly agree (28%) that Israel regularly violates the human rights of the Palestinian people.

Forty-two percent of Jewish adults in Milwaukee somewhat (25%) or strongly agree (17%) with the statement, “I often feel my views about Israel are unwelcome in Jewish settings” (25% somewhat agree and 17% strongly agree), while 21% are unsure or hold no opinion.

Forty-two percent of Jewish adults in Milwaukee somewhat (32%) or strongly agree (10%) with the statement, “I often feel I don’t know enough to participate in conversations about Israel” (27% somewhat disagree and 29% strongly disagree). Fifty-six percent somewhat (27%) or strongly disagree (29%), indicating that they feel they *do* know enough to participate in conversations about Israel.

Table 9.4. Views about Israel, all Jewish adults

	Strongly disagree (%)	Somewhat disagree (%)	Somewhat agree (%)	Strongly agree (%)	No opinion/not sure (%)	Total (%)
I consider it important that Israel give equal recognition to Jews of all denominations	1	1	11	81	5	100
Israel should be a democratic state for all of its citizens, regardless of religious identity	2	4	16	72	6	100
I think that Israel is under constant threat from hostile neighbors who seek its destruction	5	3	26	65	2	100
I consider it important for Israel to be a Jewish state	7	4	23	61	5	100
I think that Israel regularly violates the human rights of the Palestinian people	21	17	24	28	11	100
I often feel my views about Israel are unwelcome in Jewish settings	22	15	25	17	21	100
I often feel I don't know enough to participate in conversations about Israel	29	27	32	10	3	100

The engagement groups differ significantly in the extent to which they strongly agree with many of these views about Israel (Tables 9.5a, 9.5b, 9.5c, and 9.5d). Compared to all Jewish adults in Milwaukee, of whom 72% strongly agree, only 52% of the Ritual group strongly agrees with the statement, “Israel should be a democratic state for all of its citizens, regardless of religious identity.” Conversely, only half the Minimally Involved (50%) and Organizational (53%) groups strongly agree with the statement, “I consider it important for Israel to be a Jewish state,” compared to 61% of all Jewish adults in Milwaukee. Only 7% of the Ritual group strongly agree with the statement, “I think that Israel regularly violates the human rights of the Palestinian people,” while 44% of the Organizational group and 33% of the Minimally involved group strongly agree.

Although there are relatively few differences across age groups, a smaller proportion of Jewish adults ages 18-39 (37%), compared to older adults (68%-77%), strongly agree with the statement, “I think that Israel is under constant threat from hostile neighbors who seek its destruction.” The other difference by age concerns the statement, “I think that Israel regularly violates the human rights of the Palestinian people.” Half of Jews ages 18-39 strongly agree with this statement, compared to 11-29% of older Jews.

Congregation membership is associated with significant differences in agreement with these statements about Israel among Jewish adults in Milwaukee. Eighty-one percent of Jewish adults who belong to a congregation strongly agree with the statement, “I consider it important for Israel to be a Jewish state,” compared to 50% of Jewish adults who do not belong to a congregation. Of congregation members, 19% strongly agree with the statement, “I often feel I don't know enough to

participate in conversations about Israel,” while only 5% of Jewish adults in Milwaukee who do not belong to a congregation strongly agree.

Greater proportions of Jewish adults who are very attached to Israel strongly agree with the statements, “I consider it important for Israel to be a Jewish state” and “I think that Israel is under constant threat from hostile neighbors who seek its destruction,” compared to Jewish adults who are not at all or not too attached to Israel. Similar trends can be seen amongst Jewish adults who have traveled to Israel at least once and Jewish adults who consider themselves Zionists. Conversely, proportionally fewer Jewish adults who are not at all or not too attached to Israel strongly agree with the statements, “Israel should be a democratic state for all of its citizens, regardless of religious identity,” “I think that Israel regularly violates the human rights of the Palestinian people,” and “I often feel my views about Israel are unwelcome in Jewish settings,” compared to Jewish adults who are very attached to Israel. Similar trends emerge for Jewish adults who do not consider themselves Zionists, compared to those who do.

Jewish adults who somewhat or strongly support the establishment of a Palestinian state also strongly agree with the statements, “I think that Israel regularly violates the human rights of the Palestinian people,” and “Israel should be a democratic state for all of its citizens, regardless of religious identity” more than Jewish adults who somewhat or strongly oppose the establishment of a Palestinian state.

There are no significant differences in views about Israel by region.

Table 9.5a. Views about Israel, strongly agree

	I consider it important that Israel give equal recognition to Jews of all denominations (%)	Israel should be a democratic state for all of its citizens, regardless of religious identity (%)	I think that Israel is under constant threat from hostile neighbors who seek its destruction (%)	I consider it important for Israel to be a Jewish state (%)
All Jewish adults	81	72	65	61
Jewish engagement				
Minimally Involved	76	80	57	50
Organizational	90	74	61	53
Ritual	85	52	76	83
Immersed	75	71	76	74
Region				
City of Milwaukee	80	66	53	57
Waukesha County / Milwaukee County				
South Suburbs	73	77	64	45
North Shore	84	73	71	69
Age				
18-39	84	84	37	39
40-54	76	67	74	62
55-64	70	73	77	77
65-74	84	67	74	65
75+	89	64	68	68
Relationship status				
Inmarried	84	67	76	74
Intermarried	71	76	66	45
Not married	83	72	50	57
Minor child in household				
No	82	73	62	60
Yes	73	66	79	64
Congregation member				
No	81	78	61	50
Yes	81	61	71	81

Table 9.5b. Views about Israel, strongly agree

	I consider it important that Israel give equal recognition to Jews of all denominations (%)	Israel should be a democratic state for all of its citizens, regardless of religious identity (%)	I think that Israel is under constant threat from hostile neighbors who seek its destruction (%)	I consider it important for Israel to be a Jewish state (%)
All Jewish adults	81	72	65	61
Israel attachment				
Not at all/Not too attached	80	93	35	18
Somewhat attached	88	71	70	69
Very attached	75	53	86	93
Israel travel				
Never	84	83	52	47
Once	77	63	82	75
More than once	86	59	76	78
Lived in Israel	67	70	59	57
Considers self Zionist				
No	78	81	45	33
Yes	83	62	82	89
Palestinian state establishment				
Strongly support	89	88	53	44
Somewhat support	81	78	65	63
Somewhat oppose	78	49	82	80
Strongly oppose	75	42	85	90
No opinion or not sure	59	40	63	61

Table 9.5c. Views about Israel, strongly agree

	I think that Israel regularly violates the human rights of the Palestinian people (%)	I often feel my views about Israel are unwelcome in Jewish settings (%)	I often feel I don't know enough to participate in conversations about Israel (%)
All Jewish adults	28	17	10
Jewish engagement			
Minimally Involved	33	12	7
Organizational	44	35	12
Ritual	7	2	22
Immersed	19	25	1
Region			
City of Milwaukee	41	13	15
Waukesha County / Milwaukee County South Suburbs	24	20	4
North Shore	23	18	10
Age			
18-39	51	25	5
40-54	17	12	3
55-64	11	11	13
65-74	27	22	16
75+	29	12	13
Relationship status			
Inmarried	24	16	13
Intermarried	18	18	5
Not married	38	19	11
Minor child in household			
No	30	19	12
Yes	13	6	1
Congregation member			
No	36	18	5
Yes	14	14	19

Table 9.5d. Views about Israel, strongly agree

	I think that Israel regularly violates the human rights of the Palestinian people (%)	I often feel my views about Israel are unwelcome in Jewish settings (%)	I often feel I don't know enough to participate in conversations about Israel (%)
All Jewish adults	28	17	10
Israel attachment			
Not at all/Not too attached	61	35	5
Somewhat attached	20	10	11
Very attached	7	8	14
Israel travel			
Never	39	20	6
Once	15	10	14
More than once	18	16	18
Lived in Israel	33	18	<1
Considers self Zionist			
No	52	27	6
Yes	5	6	14
Palestinian state establishment			
Strongly support	52	20	3
Somewhat support	21	17	12
Somewhat oppose	9	9	27
Strongly oppose	9	19	2
No opinion or not sure	9	10	18

In the Milwaukee Jewish community, 43% of Jewish adults consider themselves Zionists, 42% say they are not Zionists, and 15% say they do not know or prefer not to say whether they are Zionists (Tables 9.6a and 9.6b). These findings align with an emerging body of research suggesting that while many North American Jews hold views that are functionally Zionist or pro-Israel, they eschew the specific label of “Zionist.”³¹ This hesitation often stems from disagreement with current Israeli government policies, concerns regarding the political baggage now attached to the label, or a general sense that the definition of Zionism has become ideologically blurred.³²

Nearly two thirds of Jewish adults in the Minimally Involved (63%) group say they do not consider themselves Zionists, compared to 15% in the Ritual group and 23% in the Immersed group. Jewish adults in the Organizational group have the highest proportion of people who do not know or prefer not to say whether they consider themselves Zionists (20%).

Sixty-one percent of congregation members in Milwaukee consider themselves Zionists, almost double the 33% of Jewish adults who do not belong to a congregation.

A majority of Jewish adults in Milwaukee who are not at all or not too attached to Israel (82%) do not consider themselves to be Zionists. An almost identical proportion of Jewish adults who are very attached to Israel (81%) do consider themselves to be Zionists.

Fifteen percent of Jewish adults in Milwaukee who have traveled to Israel more than once do not consider themselves to be Zionists, compared to 63% of Jewish adults who have never traveled to Israel, 30% who have traveled to Israel once, and 31% who previously lived in Israel.

Table 9.6a. Considers self Zionist

	No (%)	Yes (%)	Don't know / prefer not to say (%)	Total (%)
All Jewish adults	42	43	15	100
Jewish engagement				
Minimally Involved	63	23	14	100
Organizational	38	42	20	100
Ritual	15	72	12	100
Immersed	23	63	14	100
Region				
City of Milwaukee	50	47	4	100
Waukesha County/Milwaukee County South Suburbs	50	35	14	100
North Shore	35	45	12	100
Age				
18-39	51	39	10	100
40-54	48	43	9	100
55-64	41	46	13	100
65-74	31	49	20	100
75+	37	41	22	100
Relationship status				
Inmarried	31	50	19	100
Intermarried	55	29	16	100
Not married	44	46	10	100
Minor child in household				
No	42	43	14	100
Yes	40	43	17	100
Congregation member				
No	51	33	16	100
Yes	25	61	14	100

Table 9.6b. Considers self Zionist

	No (%)	Yes (%)	Don't know (%)	Total (%)
All Jewish adults	42	43	15	100
Israel attachment				
Not at all/Not too attached	82	2	17	100
Somewhat attached	37	45	17	100
Very attached	9	81	11	100
Israel travel				
Never	63	21	16	100
Once	30	52	18	100
More than once	15	71	14	100
Lived in Israel	31	63	6	100
Palestinian state establishment				
Strongly support	58	28	14	100
Somewhat support	40	48	13	100
Somewhat oppose	36	60	5	100
Strongly oppose	19	68	13	100
No opinion or not sure	19	36	45	100

A majority of Jewish adults in Milwaukee somewhat (37%) or strongly (34%) support the establishment of a Palestinian state alongside Israel. This support varies between Jewish engagement groups, with the Minimally Involved (80% somewhat or strongly support) and Organizational (73%) groups having larger proportions of Jewish adults who support the establishment of a Palestinian state, compared with the Ritual (59%) and Immersed (55%) groups.

Support for the establishment of a Palestinian state is weaker amongst Jewish adults living in Waukesha County / Milwaukee County South Suburbs, where only 14% of residents strongly support it, compared to 47% of City of Milwaukee residents and 34% of North Shore residents.

A majority of Jewish adults who are not at all or not too attached to Israel either somewhat (31%) or strongly support (53%) the establishment of a Palestinian state. Among Jewish adults who are very attached to Israel, 54% somewhat (33%) or strongly support (21%) the establishment of a Palestinian state.

Table 9.7a. Support establishment of a Palestinian state alongside Israel

	Strongly support (%)	Somewhat support (%)	Somewhat oppose (%)	Strongly oppose (%)	No opinion/not sure (%)	Total (%)
All Jewish adults	34	37	11	11	8	100
Jewish engagement						
Minimally Involved	43	37	6	5	9	100
Organizational	28	45	2	13	12	100
Ritual	27	32	29	6	6	100
Immersed	26	29	13	29	3	100
Region						
City of Milwaukee Waukesha County / Milwaukee County South Suburbs	47	22	16	9	8	100
North Shore	14	66	1	7	12	100
Age						
18-39	42	32	15	7	4	100
40-54	35	46	6	7	6	100
55-64	12	49	16	11	12	100
65-74	35	30	15	13	6	100
75+	42	28	1	16	13	100
Relationship status						
Inmarried	34	29	18	12	6	100
Intermarried	31	44	6	6	12	100
Not married	35	39	7	12	7	100
Minor child in household						
No	35	38	10	9	8	100
Yes	27	30	16	17	10	100
Congregation member						
No	41	36	7	7	9	100
Yes	21	38	19	16	6	100

Table 9.7b. Support establishment of a Palestinian state alongside Israel

	Strongly support (%)	Somewhat support (%)	Somewhat oppose (%)	Strongly oppose (%)	No opinion/not sure (%)	Total (%)
All Jewish adults	34	37	11	11	8	100
Israel attachment						
Not at all/Not too attached	53	31	3	3	10	100
Somewhat attached	28	45	17	5	4	100
Very attached	21	33	12	24	10	100
Israel travel						
Never	40	36	6	11	7	100
Once	30	35	12	11	12	100
More than once	24	43	20	8	4	
Lived in Israel	32	24	15	11	17	100
Considers self Zionist						
No	48	34	10	5	4	100
Yes	22	39	16	16	7	100

Israel-related activities

Ninety percent of Milwaukee Jewish adults follow news about Israel somewhat (51%) or very closely (39%; Tables 9.8a and 9.8b).³³ A quarter of Jewish adults in the Minimally Involved group follow news about Israel very closely, a smaller proportion than any other engagement group.

Two thirds of Jewish adults in Milwaukee who are very attached to Israel follow the news about Israel very closely, double the rate of Jewish adults who feel somewhat attached to Israel (33%) and nearly triple the rate of those who are not at all or not too attached (23%).

Almost all Jewish adults in Milwaukee who have previously lived in Israel follow news about Israel somewhat (24%) or very closely (75%).

Sixty-nine percent of Jewish adults in Milwaukee who strongly oppose the establishment of a Palestinian state follow news about Israel closely. Conversely, about one third of Jewish adults who somewhat or strongly support the establishment of a Palestinian state follow news about Israel closely (33% and 31%, respectively).

Table 9.8a. News about Israel

	Not at all closely (%)	Not too closely (%)	Somewhat closely (%)	Very closely (%)	Total (%)
All Jewish adults	2	8	51	39	100
Jewish engagement					
Minimally Involved	4	10	64	23	100
Organizational	1	4	50	45	100
Ritual	0	11	36	53	100
Immersed	<1	2	36	62	100
Region					
City of Milwaukee	1	4	52	43	100
Waukesha County / Milwaukee County South Suburbs	5	4	62	28	100
North Shore	1	10	47	41	100
Age					
18-39	1	11	52	37	100
40-54	0	7	73	20	100
55-64	8	5	47	40	100
65-74	1	8	37	54	100
75+	0	6	51	43	100
Relationship status					
Inmarried	<1	11	42	47	100
Intermarried	4	6	59	31	100
Not married	2	5	56	36	100
Minor child in household					
No	2	7	50	40	100
Yes	<1	11	57	32	100
Congregation member					
No	2	8	57	33	100
Yes	1	6	41	52	100

Table 9.8b. News about Israel

	Not at all closely (%)	Not too closely (%)	Somewhat closely (%)	Very closely (%)	Total (%)
All Jewish adults	2	8	51	39	100
Israel attachment					
Not at all/Not too attached	5	11	61	23	100
Somewhat attached	0	9	58	33	100
Very attached	1	2	32	66	100
Israel travel					
Never	4	6	65	25	100
Once	1	9	46	44	100
More than once	0	11	40	49	100
Lived in Israel	<1	1	24	75	100
Considers self Zionist					
No	1	9	65	25	100
Yes	1	5	39	56	100
Palestinian state establishment					
Strongly support	1	8	60	31	100
Somewhat support	1	11	56	33	100
Somewhat oppose	0	4	58	39	100
Strongly oppose	<1	1	30	69	100
No opinion or not sure	16	9	39	36	100

Impact of October 7

This study reflects the views of members of the Milwaukee Jewish community in late 2024 and early 2025, more than a year after the start of the Israel-Hamas war that began on October 7, 2023. This section assesses the responses of community members to the war, both in terms of changes in their attachment to Israel and the specific behaviors that they engaged in during the war.

Although emotional attachment to Israel is high in the community, 24% of Milwaukee Jewish adults reported that they became much more attached to Israel in the aftermath of October 7 (Table 9.9a). Another 22% became somewhat more attached to Israel. Thirty-one percent of Milwaukee Jewish adults experienced no change in their level of attachment to Israel, while 23% became less attached to Israel after October 7.

The change in attachment to Israel post-October 7 varies by level of Jewish engagement. More than one third of Jewish adults in the Ritual (36%) and Immersed (37%) groups became much more attached to Israel post-October 7. Notably, 24% of Jewish adults in the Organizational group became much less attached to Israel after October 7, compared to single digit changes in every other engagement group.

Of Jewish adults not at all or not too attached to Israel, only 1% became much more attached to Israel post-October 7, while 34% saw no change in their attachment level.

Seventy percent of Jewish adults in Milwaukee who consider themselves Zionists felt that they became somewhat more (29%) or much more attached (41%) to Israel than before October 7, while 25% saw no change in their attachment levels, and 5% said their attachment declined somewhat (2%) or very much (3%). By contrast, 43% of Jewish adults in Milwaukee who do not consider themselves a Zionist became somewhat (26%) or much less attached to Israel (17%) after October 7. Thirty-seven percent of Jewish adults who do not consider themselves Zionists experienced no change in their level of attachment to Israel, while 20% became somewhat (12%) or much more attached (8%).

Eighty percent of Jewish adults in Milwaukee who strongly oppose the establishment of a Palestinian state reported that their attachment to Israel increased somewhat (29%) or very much (51%). By contrast, among Jewish adults in Milwaukee who strongly support the establishment of a Palestinian state, 40% indicated that they feel somewhat (29%) or much less attached (11%) to Israel in the aftermath of October 7.

Table 9.9a. Change in Israel attachment, post-October 7

	Much less attached than before (%)	Somewhat less attached than before (%)	Somewhat more attached than before (%)	Much more attached than before (%)	No change (%)	Total (%)
All Jewish adults	9	14	22	24	31	100
Jewish engagement						
Minimally Involved	6	24	18	15	37	100
Organizational	24	9	22	24	21	100
Ritual	1	2	37	36	25	100
Immersed	6	5	14	37	38	100
Region						
City of Milwaukee	7	24	7	32	30	100
Waukesha County / Milwaukee County South Suburbs	17	10	26	14	34	100
North Shore	7	9	28	24	31	100
Age						
18-39	16	31	22	13	18	100
40-54	7	11	25	23	33	100
55-64	3	5	18	25	49	100
65-74	7	7	24	32	30	100
75+	10	11	20	31	28	100
Relationship status						
Inmarried	7	3	23	28	38	100
Intermarried	8	17	32	12	32	100
Not married	12	24	14	26	24	100
Minor child in household						
No	10	14	21	25	31	100
Yes	2	14	28	19	36	100
Congregation member						
No	12	18	20	19	31	100
Yes	4	6	25	33	32	100

Table 9.9b. Change in Israel attachment, post-October 7

	Much less attached than before (%)	Somewhat less attached than before (%)	Somewhat more attached than before (%)	Much more attached than before (%)	No change (%)	Total (%)
All Jewish adults	9	14	22	24	31	100
Israel attachment						
Not at all/Not too attached	21	32	12	1	34	100
Somewhat attached	6	9	35	22	28	100
Very attached	1	<1	16	50	33	100
Israel travel						
Never	13	23	20	16	28	100
Once	10	2	24	26	38	100
More than once	<1	11	27	38	23	
Lived in Israel	6	<1	10	28	56	100
Considers self Zionist						
No	17	26	12	8	37	100
Yes	3	2	29	41	25	100
Palestinian state establishment						
Strongly support	11	29	15	12	33	100
Somewhat support	10	8	27	22	33	100
Somewhat oppose	<1	2	25	40	33	100
Strongly oppose	9	0	29	51	11	100
No opinion or not sure	8	10	9	32	41	100

Milwaukee Jewish adults responded to the events of October 7 in a variety of ways (Table 9.10a, 9.10b, 9.10c, and 9.10d). Nearly all Jewish adults in Milwaukee participated in some Israel-related activity (98%). Eighty-eight percent of Jewish adults reported that they engaged in conversations with friends and family about the Israel/Hamas war, and 85% followed news about Israel more closely than previously. Nearly half of Jewish adults (45%) contacted friends and/or family in Israel to see how they were doing.

Significantly fewer Jewish adults in the Minimally Involved group participated in most Israel-related activities compared to Jewish adults in the other three engagement groups. Residents in the City of Milwaukee posted on social media about the Israel-Hamas war in larger proportions (58%) than Jewish adults living in Waukesha County/Milwaukee County South Suburbs (37%) or the North Shore (28%).

Jewish adults ages 40-54 had the highest proportion of individuals in any age group attend a rally or event expressing support and solidarity with Israel (34%). Conversely, the youngest age group, consisting of Jewish adults ages 18-39, had the highest proportion of individuals attending a rally or event expressing support and solidarity with Palestinians (20%).

Sixty percent of Jewish adults in Milwaukee who belong to a congregation made a special donation of money or goods in emergency aid to Israel, compared to 26% of Jewish adults who do not belong to a congregation. Similarly, more Jewish adults who belong to a congregation attended a rally or event expressing support or solidarity with Israel compared to those who do not (31% versus 11%, respectively).

All Jewish adults in Milwaukee who consider themselves Zionists have participated in at least one Israel-related activity since October 7. Zionists engaged in conversations with friends and/or family about the Israel-Hamas war, contacted friends and/or family in Israel to see how they were doing, made a special donation of money or goods in emergency aid to Israel, and attended a rally or event expressing support or solidarity with Israel more than did Jewish adults who do not consider themselves Zionists. Conversely, more Jewish adults who do not consider themselves Zionists made a special donation of money or goods in aid to Palestinians and attended a rally or event expressing support or solidarity with Palestinians compared to Jewish adults who consider themselves Zionists.

Table 9.10a. Israel-related activities since October 7

	Any (%)	Engaged in conversations with friends/family about the Israel-Hamas war (%)	Followed news about Israel more closely than previously (%)	Contacted friends/family in Israel to see how they were doing (%)	Made a special donation of money or goods in emergency aid to Israel (%)	Posted on social media about the Israel-Hamas war (%)
All Jewish adults	98	88	85	45	38	38
Jewish engagement						
Minimally Involved	96	82	80	22	20	22
Organizational	99	93	84	58	45	63
Ritual	99	89	90	53	50	37
Immersed	100	97	96	77	64	46
Region						
City of Milwaukee	98	92	92	42	38	58
Waukesha County / Milwaukee County South Suburbs	95	86	86	45	28	37
North Shore	99	87	81	46	42	28
Age						
18-39	99	98	94	59	23	60
40-54	96	89	86	61	42	38
55-64	93	72	78	35	41	28
65-74	100	93	83	40	43	35
75+	99	85	83	30	45	25
Relationship status						
Inmarried	99	87	78	48	44	34
Intermarried	95	88	88	33	28	22
Not married	98	89	90	48	38	51
Minor child in household						
No	97	87	84	41	38	38
Yes	99	91	91	69	39	38
Congregation member						
No	97	88	83	39	26	35
Yes	98	89	90	55	60	43

Table 9.10b. Israel-related activities since October 7

	Any (%)	Engaged in conversations with friends/family about the Israel-Hamas war (%)	Followed news about Israel more closely than previously (%)	Contacted friends/family in Israel to see how they were doing (%)	Made a special donation of money or goods in emergency aid to Israel (%)	Posted on social media about the Israel-Hamas war (%)
All Jewish adults	98	88	85	45	38	38
Israel attachment						
Not at all/Not too attached	93	87	80	33	13	44
Somewhat attached	99	85	83	44	43	22
Very attached	100	93	93	56	56	50
Israel travel						
Never	95	82	86	23	21	34
Once	99	91	75	58	45	33
More than once	100	94	90	65	55	43
Lived in Israel	100	96	95	71	64	57
Israel attachment post 10/7						
Much less attached than before	--	--	--	--	--	--
Somewhat less attached than before	100	93	95	32	23	60
Somewhat more attached than before	99	93	93	46	47	19
Much more attached than before	99	90	99	45	56	45
No change	94	79	71	44	33	27
Considers self Zionist						
No	96	83	81	33	22	40
Yes	100	95	90	59	57	43
Palestinian state establishment						
Strongly support	99	94	80	40	30	39
Somewhat support	98	89	91	50	43	41
Somewhat oppose	100	81	80	43	24	38
Strongly oppose	100	88	95	49	57	44
No opinion or not sure	83	66	76	39	43	11

Table 9.10c. Israel-related activities since October 7

	Contacted a US government official to express your views about the Israel-Hamas war (%)	Attended a rally/event expressing support/solidarity with Israel (%)	Made a special donation of money or goods in aid to Palestinians (%)	Attended a rally/event expressing support/solidarity with Palestine (%)	Other (%)
All Jewish adults	19	18	12	9	7
Jewish engagement					
Minimally Involved	7	7	8	3	8
Organizational	30	23	16	24	2
Ritual	12	16	7	1	6
Immersed	44	46	23	14	12
Region					
City of Milwaukee Waukesha County / Milwaukee County South Suburbs	26	18	15	10	10
North Shore	8	6	6	15	<1
	19	24	12	6	8
Age					
18-39	21	10	17	20	2
40-54	34	34	17	10	11
55-64	10	23	7	3	16
65-74	16	12	8	3	5
75+	12	17	9	6	4
Relationship status					
Inmarried	19	26	7	6	8
Intermarried	17	9	17	8	6
Not married	20	15	14	12	7
Minor in household					
No	17	17	12	9	7
Yes	32	28	7	5	7
Congregation member					
No	14	11	12	9	6
Yes	26	31	12	8	8

Table 9.10d. Israel-related activities since October 7

	Contacted a US government official to express your views about the Israel-Hamas war (%)	Attended a rally/event expressing support/solidarity with Israel (%)	Made a special donation of money or goods in aid to Palestinians (%)	Attended a rally/event expressing support/solidarity with Palestine (%)	Other (%)
All Jewish adults	19	18	12	9	7
Israel attachment					
Not at all/Not too attached	22	9	22	23	4
Somewhat attached	10	16	12	4	8
Very attached	26	31	1	1	8
Israel travel					
Never	16	11	13	13	8
Once	11	11	13	3	4
More than once	19	35	6	2	7
Lived in Israel	51	34	18	15	10
Israel attachment post 10/7					
Much less attached than before	--	--	--	--	--
Somewhat less attached than be	18	15	13	7	1
Somewhat more attached than be	7	29	6	<1	2
Much more attached than before	26	29	<1	0	8
No change	14	8	15	5	12
Considers self Zionist					
No	20	7	22	19	9
Yes	21	34	4	<1	5
Palestinian state establishment					
Strongly support	16	16	17	6	1
Somewhat support	15	21	10	11	8
Somewhat oppose	18	13	<1	9	18
Strongly oppose	42	28	<1	9	8
No opinion or not sure	16	12	6	5	1

CHAPTER 10. FINANCIAL WELL-BEING

Chapter highlights

Jewish organizations in Milwaukee devote a large proportion of their resources toward caring for families and individuals in need. The community's economic stability has provided sufficient means to provide for the needs of many. Nevertheless, it is clear there are still some unmet needs in the community.

Like the overall US Jewish community, the Milwaukee Jewish community is highly educated and economically comfortable. Most Jewish households describe themselves as having enough money to meet their needs, including 46% who describe their financial situation as “have some extra money” (24%) or “well-off” (22%). Yet there are also many households with unmet financial needs, including some whose needs preclude their participation in Jewish life.

- Sixty-three percent of Jewish adults in Milwaukee who are not currently in high school are working either a full-time job (42%), a part-time job (13%), or in multiple positions (8%). Thirty-one percent are retired. Six percent are neither currently employed nor retired, including 3% who are looking for work.
- Twenty-one percent of Jewish households in Milwaukee either cannot make ends meet (4%) or are just managing to make ends meet (17%).
- Eighteen percent of Jewish households in Milwaukee say their household income is below \$50,000, while 5% say their household income is \$250,000 or more. Twenty-five percent of households did not provide information about income; in the aggregate, they include relatively few households that are struggling financially and more households that describe their standard of living as having enough money.
- Fifteen percent of Jewish households in Milwaukee had to limit or modify their involvement in Jewish life due to their financial situation.

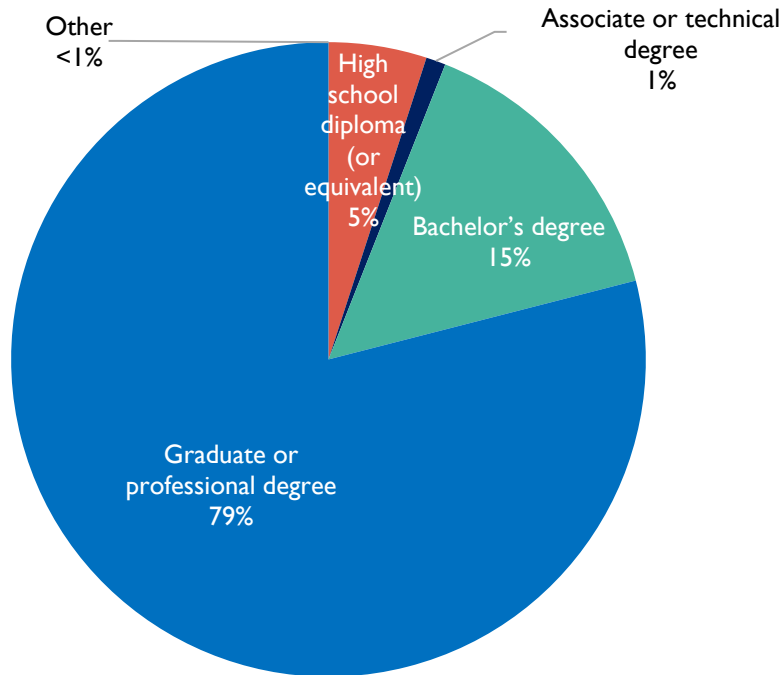
Educational attainment and employment

The Jewish community in Milwaukee is highly educated, so much so that it is likely the survey overestimated the proportion of Jewish adults with college degrees. Data from the survey suggest that 94% of Jewish adults in Milwaukee have at least a bachelor's degree, including 79% who earned a graduate or professional degree (Figure 10.1). This is undoubtedly an overestimate. Data from the American Jewish Population Project suggest that the true proportion is no more than about 70%. However, among 979 survey respondents who answered a question about their educational attainment, 887 indicated that they had at least a bachelor's degree, and efforts to correct for apparent bias resulting from members of the Jewish community who are not college graduates being less reachable or less willing to complete the survey were not successful. In any survey, despite the best efforts of researchers to minimize bias, there is always a chance that a small number of estimates may be inaccurate by random chance as a result of collecting data from a sample of the population rather than from each and every individual. This is the only estimate in the report that we believe to be implausible, but we have chosen to be transparent in reporting it.

Among all Milwaukee residents ages 25 and older, 41% have at least a bachelor’s degree, including 15% who have a graduate or professional degree.³⁴

Among Jews in the United States, 58% have a bachelor’s degree, including 28% with a postgraduate degree.³⁵

Figure 10.1. Educational attainment



Two thirds of Jewish adults in Milwaukee who are not in high school are working either a full-time job (42%), a part-time job (13%), or in multiple positions (8%), while 31% are retired (Table 10.1). Despite 6% of Jewish adults not being currently employed, only 3% are looking for work, suggesting perhaps the remaining 3% are stay-at-home parents or full-time students.

Table 10.1. Employment status

	All Jewish adults not in high school (%)
	↓
Working	63
Working full-time in one job	42
Working part-time in one job	13
Working in multiple positions	8
Not working	37
Not working for pay but looking for work	3
Not working for pay and not looking for work	2
On temporary leave	1
Retired	31
Total	100

Eight percent of Jewish adults in Milwaukee are currently students in degree-granting programs in a college or university. Among Jewish adults who are currently students, 77% are enrolled at a college or university in Wisconsin, and 23% are enrolled at a college or university out of state.

Financial situation and income

To assess financial well-being, each survey respondent was asked to provide a subjective assessment of their household’s financial situation. Four percent of Jewish households in Milwaukee said they cannot make ends meet, and another 17% shared that they are just managing to make ends meet (Table 10.2). These two categories are combined for the purposes of this report into a single category referred to as “struggling,” which constitutes 22% of Jewish households in Milwaukee.³⁶ Of the remaining households, 33% said they have enough money, 24% said they have some extra money, and 22% described themselves as well-off.

Table 10.2. Financial situation

Report category	Response option	Jewish households (%)
		↓
Struggling	Cannot make ends meet	4
	Just managing to make ends meet	17
Enough	Have enough money	33
Extra	Have extra money	24
Well-off	Well-off	22
Total		100

The financial situation of Jewish households in Milwaukee varies significantly by marital status and type (Table 10.3). One third of unmarried households (33%) are struggling, compared to 15% of inmarried households and 9% of intermarried households. Regardless of whether they are inmarried or intermarried, 26% of married-couple households are well-off, compared to 16% of unmarried households.

Table 10.3. Financial situation

	Struggling (%)	Enough (%)	Extra (%)	Well-off (%)	Total (%)
All Jewish households	22	33	24	22	100
Jewish engagement					
Minimally Involved	22	31	29	19	100
Organizational	23	31	18	29	100
Ritual	14	34	25	27	100
Immersed	31	32	22	14	100
Region					
City of Milwaukee	26	32	16	25	100
Waukesha County/Milwaukee County South Suburbs	19	35	35	11	100
North Shore	21	31	22	26	100
Age					
18-39	28	38	12	22	100
40-54	28	28	28	16	100
55-64	27	37	22	14	100
65-74	16	23	31	30	100
75+	12	36	25	26	100
Relationship status					
Inmarried	15	30	29	26	100
Intermarried	9	40	25	26	100
Not married	33	29	22	16	100
Minor child in household					
No	22	29	26	23	100
Yes	16	53	14	16	100
Congregation member					
No	19	35	25	21	100
Yes	28	26	21	24	100

Retirement planning

As noted above in Table 10.1, 31% of Jewish adults in Milwaukee are retired, and 69% are not. One quarter of non-retired Jewish adults (25%) think their retirement savings plan is not on track (Table 10.4). Among non-retired Jewish adults younger than age 40, 44% do not feel their retirement plan is on track, compared to 17% of those ages 40-54, 12% of those ages 55-64, and 6% of those ages 65-74.

Sixty-three percent of non-retired Jewish adults whose households are struggling financially are not on track with their retirement savings, a significantly higher proportion compared to those who are not struggling.

Table 10.4. Retirement on track

	No (%)	Yes (%)	Other (%)	Total (%)
All non-retired Jewish adults	25	55	20	100
Jewish engagement				
Minimally Involved	32	53	16	100
Organizational	27	43	30	100
Ritual	11	73	16	100
Immersed	26	47	27	100
Region				
City of Milwaukee	42	40	18	100
Waukesha County/Milwaukee County South Suburbs	12	65	24	100
North Shore	20	60	20	100
Age				
18-39	44	28	28	100
40-54	17	71	12	100
55-64	12	61	27	100
65-74	6	93	2	100
75+	--	--	--	100
Relationship status				
Inmarried	22	57	21	100
Intermarried	15	72	13	100
Not married	34	45	21	100
Minor child in household				
No	28	53	19	100
Yes	14	62	23	100
Congregation member				
No	29	54	18	100
Yes	19	57	24	100
Financial situation				
Struggling	63	6	31	100
Enough	17	52	31	100
Extra	6	84	10	100
Well-off	2	98	<1	100
Note: The "Other" column consists of respondents who do not know if their retirement is on track, have no retirement plan, or do not plan to retire. This question was asked only of respondents who are not already retired.				

Among those who are retired, 61% are very confident they will have enough money for retirement, and an additional 31% said they are somewhat confident (Table 10.5). Twenty-one percent of unmarried retired Jewish adults are not at all or not too confident they will have enough money for retirement.

Table 10.5. Confidence in retirement funds

	Not at all/not too confident (%)	Somewhat confident (%)	Very confident (%)	Total (%)
All retired Jewish adults	8	31	61	100
Jewish engagement				
Minimally Involved	6	37	57	100
Organizational	13	24	63	100
Ritual	10	43	47	100
Immersed	2	14	84	100
Region				
City of Milwaukee	4	56	40	100
Waukesha County / Milwaukee County South Suburbs	--	--	--	--
North Shore	8	21	71	100
Age				
40-54	--	--	--	--
55-64	--	--	--	--
65-74	--	--	--	--
75+	2	24	74	100
Relationship status				
Inmarried	1	24	74	100
Intermarried	--	--	--	--
Not married	21	45	34	100
Minor child in household				
No	8	31	61	100
Yes	--	--	--	--
Congregation member				
No	9	36	55	100
Yes	5	20	75	100
Financial situation				
Struggling	--	--	--	--
Enough	4	65	31	100
Extra	0	34	66	100
Well-off	0	5	95	100

Note: The question about confidence in retirement funds was only asked of respondents who are currently retired.

Household income

Eighteen percent of Jewish households in Milwaukee have an income below \$50,000, including 10% with an income below \$25,000 (Tables 10.6a and 10.6b).³⁷ Five percent of Jewish households have an income of \$250,000 or more. Another 25% of households, however, did not know or declined to provide information on their income. These households, on balance, are more middle-class than the

Milwaukee Jewish community as a whole: 6% are struggling financially, 46% say they have enough money, 26% say they have some extra money, and 23% describe themselves as well-off.

Fifty-eight percent of households that are struggling financially have income below \$50,000, compared to 12% of households with enough money, 5% of households with extra money, and 1% of households that are well-off.

The US Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) determines eligibility for many government assistance programs according to a set of guidelines called the “federal poverty level” (FPL). The formula for FPL is recalculated annually, based on household income and accounting for household size. Using the present formula, 3% of Jewish households in Milwaukee have income below 100% of FPL, 7% have income between 100-149% of FPL, and 5% have income between 150-249% of FPL. In all, 16% of Jewish households in Milwaukee are below 250% of FPL.

Table 10.6a. Household income and federal poverty level

Income	All Jewish households (%)
Less than \$25,000	10
\$25,000 to \$49,999	7
\$50,000 to \$74,999	10
\$75,000 to \$99,999	13
\$100,000 to \$149,999	13
\$150,000 to \$199,999	12
\$200,000 to \$250,000	5
\$250,000 or more	5
Don't know	2
Prefer not to answer	22
Total	100

Table 10.6b. Household income

	Less than \$50,000 (%)	\$50,000 to \$99,999 (%)	\$100,000 to \$149,999 (%)	\$150,000 to \$199,999 (%)	\$200,000 to \$249,999 (%)	\$250,000 or more (%)	Don't know / Prefer not to answer (%)	Total (%)
All Jewish households	18	23	13	12	5	5	25	100
Jewish engagement								
Minimally Involved	17	20	16	13	8	4	22	100
Organizational	22	18	12	13	2	3	29	100
Ritual	10	24	8	13	1	9	35	100
Immersed	17	43	9	6	2	9	15	100
Region								
City of Milwaukee	25	31	10	10	1	1	22	100
Waukesha County / Milwaukee County								
South Suburbs	14	27	10	16	6	1	26	100
North Shore	16	18	16	11	6	8	25	100
Age								
18-39	24	32	16	22	2	1	3	100
40-54	14	33	11	9	12	11	11	100
55-64	17	27	18	14	6	2	16	100
65-74	19	15	10	13	6	10	28	100
75+	18	16	13	6	1	3	43	100
Relationship status								
Inmarried	10	9	18	7	3	9	44	100
Intermarried	7	19	18	23	12	8	13	100
Not married	28	32	7	9	2	1	21	100
Minor child in household								
No	19	25	11	11	4	5	24	100
Yes	7	7	25	20	7	6	29	100
Congregation member								
No	19	19	15	14	6	3	24	100
Yes	16	31	10	9	1	8	24	100
Financial situation								
Struggling	58	27	8	<1	<1	<1	6	100
Enough	12	31	14	7	<1	1	34	100
Extra	5	15	16	26	10	3	25	100
Well-off	1	17	14	16	10	18	24	100

Economic insecurity

Twenty-one percent of Jewish households in Milwaukee do not have sufficient funds to cover three months of expenses, 11% are unable to pay in full an unexpected \$400 emergency expense,³⁸ and 16% receive at least one public benefit (Table 10.7). About a quarter of households in the Immersed group (24%) cannot afford a \$400 emergency expense, significantly higher than households in other engagement groups. Households headed by Jewish adults 65 and older are significantly more likely to have enough resources to cover three months of expenses compared to younger households. Unmarried households are significantly more likely to receive public benefits (26%) and less likely to have sufficient funds for three months of expenses (30%) compared to married households.

Among Jewish households that are struggling financially, three quarters (75%) do not have sufficient funds to cover three months of expenses, 42% cannot afford a \$400 emergency expense, and half (50%) receive at least one public benefit.

Table 10.7. Economic insecurity

	Could not pay emergency \$400 expense (%)	Insufficient funds to cover 3 months of expenses (%)	Received any public benefit (%)
All Jewish households	11	21	16
Jewish engagement			
Minimally Involved	8	21	12
Organizational	9	17	24
Ritual	3	15	11
Immersed	24	26	21
Region			
City of Milwaukee	18	28	20
Waukesha County / Milwaukee County South Suburbs	4	19	14
North Shore	10	18	16
Age			
18-39	20	29	16
40-54	17	35	19
55-64	6	26	20
65-74	6	14	14
75+	8	5	8
Relationship status			
Inmarried	7	9	10
Intermarried	5	16	6
Not married	17	30	26
Minor child in household			
No	12	21	15
Yes	3	20	24
Congregation member			
No	9	18	16
Yes	15	25	16
Financial situation			
Struggling	42	75	50
Enough	4	10	15
Extra	2	5	1
Well-off	<1	<1	0

Financial hardships and public benefits

Eleven percent of Jewish households in Milwaukee were unable to pay for at least one necessity within the past year, and another 6% were unable to pay for at least one necessity between one to three years ago (Table 10.8). These necessities included healthcare or medicine; payments on utilities

such as water, electricity, or heat; rent or mortgage payments; transportation expenses, including car repairs or bus fare; and food.

Table 10.8. Hardships

	Hardship in past year, all Jewish households (%)	Hardship between 1-3 years ago, all Jewish households (%)
Any hardship	11	6
Healthcare	8	4
Utilities	6	4
Rent/mortgage	5	4
Transportation	6	3
Food	7	1

In total, 17% of Jewish households experienced at least one financial hardship within the past three years (Table 10.9). Fifty-seven percent of struggling households encountered a financial hardship, compared to less than 1% of households that have extra money or are well-off.

Table 10.9. Hardships

	No hardship in past 3 years (%)	Hardship in past year (%)	Hardship between 1-3 years ago (%)	Total (%)
All Jewish households	83	11	6	100
Jewish engagement				
Minimally Involved	84	10	6	100
Organizational	85	14	1	100
Ritual	92	4	4	100
Immersed	75	16	10	100
Region				
City of Milwaukee Waukesha County / Milwaukee County South Suburbs	83	14	4	100
North Shore	85	7	8	100
Age				
18-39	82	11	6	100
40-54	85	7	8	100
55-64	90	7	3	100
65-74	94	2	4	100
Relationship status				
Inmarried	88	9	3	100
Intermarried	83	6	11	100
Not married	79	15	5	100
Minor child in household				
No	81	12	6	100
Yes	94	3	3	100
Congregation member				
No	83	11	6	100
Yes	83	12	6	100
Financial situation				
Struggling	44	51	6	100
Enough	84	1	15	100
Extra	>99	0	<1	100
Well-off	100	0	0	100

Sixteen percent of Jewish households receive at least one public benefit (Table 10.10). Ten percent receive Supplemental Security Income (SSI) or Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) benefits; 9% receive assistance with food, housing, or utilities; and 7% receive BadgerCare Plus or Children’s Health Insurance Program (CHIP) benefits.

Among households that receive public benefits, only 56% said that the assistance was adequate to manage their financial issues.

Table 10.10. Public benefits

	All Jewish households (%)
Any public benefit	↓ 16
Supplemental Security Income (SSI), or Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) benefits	10
Assistance with food, housing, or utilities (e.g., SNAP, WIC)	9
BadgerCare Plus or Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP)	7
Unemployment benefits	<1

Impact of finances on Jewish life

Fifteen percent of Jewish households in Milwaukee had to limit or modify their involvement in Jewish life due to their financial situation (Tables 10.11 and 10.12). Fifteen percent required financial assistance to enroll their children in Jewish education, camp, or activities, and 8% did not enroll their children in any of these programs. Five percent of households discontinued synagogue membership, while 3% required dues relief or financial assistance to maintain their membership.

Five percent of households cited some other financial limitation on their participation in Jewish life. Common examples include discontinuing JCC membership, not participating in certain events or trips due to cost, and not donating as much money as they would have liked to causes they value.

Table 10.11. Financial limitations on participation in Jewish life

	All Jewish adults (%)
Required financial assistance to enroll children in Jewish education, Jewish camp, or activities	↓ 15
Did not enroll children in Jewish education, camp, or activities	8
Discontinued synagogue membership	5
Required dues relief or financial assistance to maintain synagogue membership	3
Something else	5

Note: Respondents could select multiple limitations.

Sixty-nine percent of struggling households cited at least one financial limitation to their participation in Jewish life, compared to less than 1% of well-off households. Twenty-eight percent of households with children cited at least one financial limitation, compared to 13% of households with no children.

Table 10.12. Any financial limitations on participation in Jewish life

Any limitation on Jewish life (%)	
All Jewish households	15
Jewish engagement	
Minimally Involved	16
Organizational	9
Ritual	10
Immersed	26
Region	
City of Milwaukee	20
Waukesha County/Milwaukee County South Suburbs	4
North Shore	17
Age	
18-39	17
40-54	22
55-64	22
65-74	9
75+	4
Relationship status	
Inmarried	20
Intermarried	5
Not married	15
Minor child in household	
No	13
Yes	28
Congregation member	
No	11
Yes	21
Financial situation	
Struggling	69
Enough	8
Extra	2
Well-off	<1

CHAPTER 11. HEALTH NEEDS

Chapter highlights

This chapter focuses on the overall health and health service needs of Jewish individuals and households in Milwaukee.

- Ninety-two percent of Jewish adults in Milwaukee describe their physical health as good (34%), very good (35%), or excellent (23%).
- Eighty-seven percent of Jewish adults in Milwaukee describe their mental health as good (28%), very good (33%), or excellent (25%).
- Thirty-four percent of Jewish households in Milwaukee include someone with a chronic health issue, disability, or other need that affects participation in work, school, or activities.
- In the past year, 29% of Jewish households in Milwaukee required services to manage health needs. Most of these households were able to receive the services they needed, but 7% felt they did not receive adequate services to meet their needs.
- Twenty percent of Jewish households in Milwaukee manage or provide care to close relatives or friends on a regular basis, aside from routine childcare.

Physical and mental health

Ninety-two percent of Milwaukee Jewish adults have excellent, very good, or good physical health (Table 11.1).³⁹ A similar proportion, 87%, reported excellent, very good, or good mental health.

Table 11.1. Physical and mental health, all Jewish adults

	Physical health (%)	Mental health (%)
Excellent	23	25
Very good	35	33
Good	34	28
Fair	6	10
Poor	2	3
Total	100	100

Seventeen percent of Jewish adults in Milwaukee have fair or poor physical or mental health (Table 11.2).⁴⁰ Jewish adults with no minor children in the household are more likely to have fair or poor physical health than individuals with a minor in the household. A quarter of Jewish adults (23%) who are struggling financially have fair or poor physical health, while few Jewish adults who have some extra money (1%) or are well off (2%) have fair or poor physical health.

Table 11.2. Fair or poor health

	Fair or poor physical or mental health (%)	Fair or poor physical health (%)	Fair or poor mental health (%)
All Jewish adults	17	8	14
Jewish engagement			
Minimally Involved	14	7	12
Organizational	29	7	26
Ritual	10	8	5
Immersed	18	13	11
Region			
City of Milwaukee	10	9	7
Waukesha County/Milwaukee County South Suburbs	23	4	21
North Shore	19	9	14
Age			
18-39	26	7	22
40-54	7	5	7
55-64	23	17	16
65-74	10	8	7
75+	17	4	14
Relationship status			
Inmarried	15	5	11
Intermarried	14	5	12
Not married	22	14	18
Minor child in household			
No	19	9	15
Yes	5	1	5
Congregation member			
No	17	6	14
Yes	18	12	12
Financial situation			
Struggling	29	23	22
Have enough money	23	8	18
Have some extra money	11	1	10
Well-off	6	2	4

Health and disability

One third of Jewish households (34%) in Milwaukee include at least one person with a chronic health issue, disability, or other need that limits participation in work, school, or activities. (Table 11.3). Half of Jewish households who are financially struggling (50%) include at least one person with a health issue, disability or health need.

Table 11.3. Chronic health issue, disability, or health need

	All Jewish households (%)
All Jewish households	34
Jewish engagement	
Minimally Involved	28
Organizational	44
Ritual	32
Immersed	39
Region	
City of Milwaukee	29
Waukesha County/Milwaukee County South Suburbs	32
North Shore	36
Age	
18-39	37
40-54	30
55-64	39
65-74	23
75+	40
Relationship status	
Inmarried	36
Intermarried	27
Not married	37
Minor child in household	
No	35
Yes	26
Congregation member	
No	34
Yes	33
Financial situation	
Struggling	50
Have enough money	40
Have some extra money	25
Well-off	19

Thirty-three percent of Jewish households have an adult with a chronic health issue, disability, or other need that affects participation in work, school, or activities, including 22% of households with children (not shown in table). Two percent of Jewish households have a child with a disability, including 6% of households that include someone with a disability and 14% of households with children.

Chronic illness is the most common health issue in the Milwaukee Jewish community, affecting 21% of all Jewish households, including 63% of Jewish households with any limiting health issue (Table 11.4). Eighteen percent of all Jewish households in Milwaukee include someone with mental or

emotional health issues, including 54% of Jewish households with any limiting health issue. Sixteen percent of all Jewish households in Milwaukee include someone with a physical disability, including 46% of Jewish households with any limiting health issue.

Table 11.4. Specific health issues

	Proportion of all Jewish households with these health issues (%)	Of Jewish households with a limiting chronic health issue, disability, or other health need, proportion with these issues (%)
	↓	↓
Chronic illness	21	63
Mental or emotional health issues	18	54
Physical disability	16	46
Developmental or intellectual disability	4	12
Substance abuse or addiction	2	6
Complications related to COVID-19	2	5
Dementia	1	3
Other	1	3

Support services and personal network

Sixty-seven percent of Jewish households in Milwaukee reported no health issues that required services, and 5% reported that they did not require any services to meet their current health needs. Of the remaining households, 22% felt they received adequate services to manage their health issues or disabilities (Table 11.5). However, 7% of all Jewish households said the services they received were inadequate for managing their health issues.

Table 11.5. Adequacy of health issue services received

	All Jewish households (%)
	↓
Yes, services were adequate	22
No, services were not adequate	7
No services needed	5
No health issue or disability	67
Total	100

Twenty-seven respondents described their challenges in obtaining the health services they required. Their most common concerns included that services are simply unavailable, especially for mental health needs; problems related to insurance coverage and costs; gaps in accessibility; and trouble finding the right service to fit specific health needs.

In the past three months, nearly a quarter of Jewish households with a limiting chronic health issue, disability, or special need (21%) were kept from medical appointments, meetings, work, or getting things for daily living due to a lack of transportation some of the time (Table 11.6).

Table 11.6. Lack of transportation, past three months

	All Jewish households (%)	Jewish households with a limiting chronic health issue, disability, or other health need (%)
Yes, all the time	↓ 1	↓ 2
Yes, some of the time	9	21
No	90	77
Total	100	100

When thinking about their personal support networks, nearly half of Jewish adults (48%) in Milwaukee report having just a few people (43%) or no one (5%) to rely on (Table 11.7). Two thirds of unmarried adults (66%) have just a few people (57%) or no one (9%) to rely on in their personal support network.

Table 11.7. Personal support network

	A lot of people (%)	A fair number of people (%)	Just a few people (%)	No one (%)	Total (%)
All Jewish adults	21	32	43	5	100
Jewish engagement					
Minimally Involved	13	30	49	8	100
Organizational	21	30	44	5	100
Ritual	29	28	42	1	100
Immersed	33	44	23	<1	100
Region					
City of Milwaukee	12	32	48	8	100
Waukesha County/Milwaukee County South Suburbs	25	29	41	5	100
North Shore	24	33	41	3	100
Age					
18-39	26	18	52	4	100
40-54	26	35	36	3	100
55-64	27	27	39	2	100
65-74	11	45	40	5	100
75+	19	33	45	3	100
Relationship status					
Inmarried	17	43	39	<1	100
Intermarried	27	41	27	6	100
Not married	21	13	57	9	100
Minor child in household					
No	20	30	45	5	100
Yes	27	44	28	1	100
Congregation member					
No	19	29	47	5	100
Yes	25	36	35	4	100

Caregiving

Twenty percent of all Jewish households in Milwaukee and 27% of Jewish households with a limiting chronic health issue, disability, or other health need manage or provide care to close relatives or friends on a regular basis, aside from routine childcare (Table 11.8). Twenty-seven percent of Jewish households with a limiting chronic health issue, disability, or other health need personally provide care (14%), manage care provided by others (5%) or both (8%).

Table 11.8. Manage or provide care to close relatives or friends on a regular basis

	All Jewish households (%)	Jewish households with a limiting chronic health issue, disability, or other health need (%)
No	80	73
Yes, personally provide care	10	14
Yes, manage care provided by others	4	5
Yes, both manage and personally provide care	6	8
Total	100	100

Most Jewish households in Milwaukee that provide or manage care do so for a parent or in-law (9% of all Jewish households) or spouse (5%, Table 11.9). Among households that include someone with a limiting chronic health issue, disability, or other health need, 14% provide or manage care for a spouse.

Table 11.9. Person(s) that receive regular care

	All Jewish households (%)	Jewish households with a limiting chronic health issue, disability, or other health need (%)
A parent or in-law	9	7
Your spouse	5	14
Friend	2	2
An adult child age 18 or older	1	3
A child under age 18 with special needs	<1	<1
Someone else	3	3

Fourteen percent of Jewish households in Milwaukee with at least one adult over the age of 64 include an adult who needs help with daily activities, such as doing housework, preparing meals, dressing and undressing, taking a bath or a shower, or walking up and down stairs. Of households that are struggling financially and include at least one adult over the age of 64%, 46% include someone who needs help with these daily activities.

Table II.10. Need help with daily activities

Jewish households with someone over age 64 (%)	
Jewish households with someone over age 64	14
Jewish engagement	
Minimally Involved	9
Organizational	24
Ritual	16
Immersed	11
Region	
City of Milwaukee	1
Waukesha County/Milwaukee County South Suburbs	17
North Shore	13
Age	
18-39	--
40-54	--
55-64	--
65-74	10
75+	14
Relationship status	
Inmarried	14
Intermarried	1
Not married	17
Minor child in household	
No	14
Yes	--
Congregation member	
No	12
Yes	17
Financial situation	
Struggling	46
Have enough money	6
Have some extra money	3
Well-off	14

CHAPTER 12. IN THE WORDS OF COMMUNITY MEMBERS

To provide an additional layer of insight into the thoughts and feelings of members of the Milwaukee Jewish community, the survey closed with two open-ended questions:

- 1) Based on your own experience, what do you consider to be the strengths and gaps of the Milwaukee area Jewish community?
- 2) Is there anything else you would like us to know about the Milwaukee Jewish community?

The responses to these questions are summarized in this chapter. In all, 618 respondents answered the question about strengths and gaps, and 226 answered the second question about additional information they would like us to know. However, because nearly all of the answers to the second question elaborated on respondents' views of the strengths and gaps of the Milwaukee Jewish community, all responses are presented together in this chapter. The insights reflected in these responses reinforce the findings presented throughout this report and provide further evidence of the needs of and opportunities available to the Milwaukee Jewish community.

This chapter summarizes thematic responses to these two open-ended questions and shares a selection of quotes from respondents. Themes that appear in at least 40 responses are included. Many respondents touched on multiple themes, and their responses may be included in more than one category. Where relevant, respondents' gender, age, and region have been added to provide additional context for the comments; however, in some cases, this additional information is withheld or obscured to protect the identity of the respondent. Quotes were selected to represent the diversity of themes across respondents' answers and, where possible, to represent diversity by gender, age, and region.

The numbers shared in this chapter reflect the number of respondents whose responses to the open-ended questions reflected the themes being addressed. Unlike in previous chapters, the responses are not weighted to be representative of the full Jewish community. Some quotations have been edited for clarity or to preserve the anonymity of the respondent.

General comments and community care (213 respondents)

Many respondents described in general terms the overall strength of the Milwaukee Jewish community, as well as a strong sense of community care. In these general comments, respondents' attitudes toward the Milwaukee Jewish community were generally positive, with a few notes identifying opportunities for improvement.

It is a close community, great organizations, engaged and involved in causes, good communication between organizations and the community. – female, 77, North Shore

I consider Milwaukee to have a close and strong Jewish community that offers a lot of opportunity to partake in Jewish-related activities. There are many opportunities available if someone wants to get involved. – female, 73, North Shore

I think the Jewish community is strong at connecting to the members of the Jewish community and raising funds for a number of different causes. I think the Jewish community needs to be better and be more comfortable interacting with non-Jews in the community. – male, 62, North Shore

I think the Milwaukee Jewish Federation does a great job in trying to be a unifying presence in the community. Other community agencies and synagogues are trying to also come together to be supportive of one another and unite the Milwaukee Jewish community. – female, 56, North Shore

It doesn't feel like we genuinely take care of each other. We talk about taking care of each other but when push comes to shove, it really doesn't feel that way. Of course, this doesn't apply to individuals and friends but more on an organizational level. – female, 42, North Shore

It's a vibrant and tight-knit community with lots of intersection and collaboration between institutions. Very welcoming and caring community. Endless opportunities to get involved, constant events, talks, and engagement options. – female, 39, North Shore

Outstanding educational opportunities for all ages. Wonderful opportunities to worship, study, celebrate holidays and life-cycle events, and express personal views. – male, 73, North Shore

Milwaukee is close-knit, small enough that people have to make an effort to get involved, diverse, opportunities for different levels of participation for people from different religious and financial backgrounds, relatively affordable, Jewish day school options and youth group options. – female, 29, City of Milwaukee

Strength in unity and cohesion (198 respondents)

Numerous respondents referred to the community as “close-knit” or “tight-knit.” These respondents feel that the institutions of the community collaborate very well together for the benefit of the entire Jewish community.

For a relatively small Jewish community, the Milwaukee area Jewish community is very strong and offers a variety of choices for worship, learning, socializing, and support. – female, 75, North Shore

I think, as a whole, the Milwaukee Jewish community is rather special. The fact that there is more interdenominational dialogue here than in other communities is a real strength. It allows for deep friendships to form across different congregations, which is something I truly appreciate. – female, 52, Waukesha County/Milwaukee County South Suburbs

I think the Milwaukee Jewish Federation does a great job in trying to be a unifying presence in the community. Other community agencies and synagogues are trying to also come together to be supportive of one another and unite the Milwaukee Jewish community. – female, 56, North Shore

It is a tight-knit community. For its size, the Milwaukee Jewish community holds its own as far as its impact financially and its support toward Israel and fellow Jews around the world. There are many opportunities for all Jews

here to come together and engage in cultural, educational, and religious opportunities. I believe that there is pretty good cooperation between organizations and synagogues. – male, 72, North Shore

It's a vibrant and tight knit community with lots of intersection and collaboration between institutions. Very welcoming and caring community. Endless opportunities to get involved, constant events, talks, and engagement options. – female, 39, North Shore

It is a warm, welcoming community (especially Hillel). – female, 52, City of Milwaukee

Programmatic needs (139 respondents)

One hundred thirty-nine respondents commented on programming. Overall, members of the Milwaukee Jewish community are very satisfied with the quality of the Jewish programs and activities available to them, but many lament a dearth of activities geared toward younger and mid-life adults.

For a relatively small community, there are a number of organizations locally that provide robust programming and support. It is impressive how much of a presence there is and that there is truly something for everyone who identifies as Jewish. – female, 51, North Shore

Vibrant, active, and growing Chabad programs, services, and learning opportunities. – female, 60, North Shore

I love that Chabad is always hosting fun events for adults and children and that there truly is a weekly happening where you can learn, socialize, and meet new people. Jewish Beginnings has also been such a blessing for our [child]. – female, 31, North Shore

Strengths are that we are a close-knit community with many wonderful people. We have lots of great programming (perhaps too much, somewhat over saturated). Gaps are that enrollment in MJDS are lower, and turnout at Conservative synagogue is down. It is scary to be a committed Jew here because it doesn't look like "the middle" (i.e. Conservative synagogue/ MJDS) can survive given the competition (i.e., assimilation, people not moving back here, people choosing to not have kids, great public schools, Chabad). I worry we can't attract committed liberal Jews here who care about day school and Conservative Judaism. We need more people, who care to help the institutions we love and cherish, survive and flourish. As someone who grew up here, I fear watching the institutions I love and count on slowly dying out because of lack of funds/enrollment. – female, 39, North Shore

There is a lack of community for 30 to 50-year-olds without children. This is a growing population that needs support and community. – female, 43, City of Milwaukee

Nothing for millennials aging out of young professional groups who do not wish to start families. – female, 35, North Shore

I would also like to see more events or programs geared toward adults in general, and not necessarily just those that have families. I think we're going to see more and more childless adults, but there aren't a lot of programs or events that apply to them. – non-binary/gender non-conforming, age 40-54, City of Milwaukee

Challenges to inclusivity and cohesion (105 respondents)

Many respondents indicated that the Milwaukee Jewish community needs to do more to be inclusive and cohesive. In particular, a common theme was that it is easy for people who were neither born nor raised in Milwaukee to feel like outsiders or interlopers. Others felt, despite a countervailing sentiment that communal organizations collaborate well, that there is a tendency for the population to self-segregate into relatively uniform groups that would prefer to compete with each other than work together.

The Milwaukee Jewish Community tends to be very segregated. Meaning, people find it difficult to mingle with other Jewish people from different religious groups. All our Jewish organizations are disorganized. – female, 43, North Shore

Tends to be biased towards people who are from the Milwaukee area; those who are not from the Milwaukee area tend to be cast as outsiders. – male, 59, North Shore

I wish there was more opportunity to have diverse experiences with all types of people in the Jewish community. It feels like we're in our own silos. I do love my own [synagogue] community, who I feel are very welcoming. – female, 58, North Shore

Some people in the wider Jewish community can seem overly harsh to those of us who didn't grow up Jewish in Milwaukee. However, I do believe that there are really good people serving in key positions at HERC, Federation, Chronicle, JCC, and most of the synagogues in Milwaukee. – male, 57, City of Milwaukee

As a convert, there are many social settings that I feel I will never really be accepted into. It's also difficult to truly feel authentic. I don't want to lie to people that I am not Jewish by birth. As an example of leadership: I was never really allowed a leadership role of any kind at [a specific organization], yet I am a successful [senior leader in a professional setting]. – female, age 40-54, Waukesha County/Milwaukee County South Suburbs

I feel that the Milwaukee Jewish community is very strong. I would not consider the community to be warm and welcoming. We are more likely to be asked for a donation than asked how we are doing. That doesn't align with my Jewish values. – male, 32, North Shore

The Milwaukee Jewish community can be very insular, and it can be hard for “transplants” to feel accepted and have a sense of belonging. – female, 74, City of Milwaukee

The strength is that there IS a Jewish community. The biggest gap is that it is not unified. There is too much in fighting between the existing Jewish communities (i.e., Orthodox, Reform, between schools and temples, etc.). It is also very “cliquey.” It does not seem as if we have one big tent for the Jewish community. – female, 64, North Shore

Synagogues and congregations (83 respondents)

Many respondents had strong feelings about local synagogues and other congregations as strengths or weaknesses of the Milwaukee Jewish community, with a fairly even split between positive and critical comments. Members of the community are happy with the variety of congregations available to them, but others feel there are insufficient differences between the congregations to justify dividing the community into so many subgroups. They also worry about the affordability of

membership dues and other fees, the long-term viability of their congregations, and their ability to attract young members. In an era when intermarriage is common, several respondents lamented the treatment of their non-Jewish spouses or other family members.

Speaking as a member of the Reform Jewish community, a big gap that I see is that there are way too many synagogues. We are all paying dues and building fees, and religious school fees, and security fees, when honestly—how many people are attending weekly Shabbat services? This is a huge weakness that I see. – female, 46, North Shore

[My synagogue] has many strengths that reach out to members and help others including other religions. – male, 74, Waukesha County/Milwaukee County South Suburbs

I am deeply grateful to my own congregation, where after many years of living in Milwaukee, I finally found my congregational home. – female, 53, North Shore

Within just a short walking distance from my home, there are four different synagogues, each with its unique traditions and vibrant atmosphere. These synagogues offer a wide range of services, educational programs, and social events, making it easy for individuals and families to engage and participate in Jewish life. Whether attending Shabbat services, participating in holiday celebrations, or joining community events, there is always a welcoming environment for everyone. Overall, Milwaukee is not just a place to live; it is a place where Jewish life thrives. – female, 60, North Shore

The Reform and Orthodox Jewish communities both appear to be strong and fill the need for those Jews seeking an organized religious affiliation. Not sure if the same can be said about the Conservative community. – male, 82, North Shore

Synagogues, while being inclusive, still maintain policies related to marrying couples who include both a Jewish and non-Jewish member that are hurtful and tend to push those couples away. This limits synagogue membership and alienates these folks from the greater Jewish community. – male, 75, North Shore

When I got married, many years ago, my non-Jewish husband was not welcomed into my family's synagogue. Things have changed, but I think if he had been, we might have raised my children more in the Jewish faith than his [Christian] church. – female, 56, North Shore

My synagogue, and it is not alone, has an aging membership. It seems that the younger generations place affiliation with a religious organization as a low priority. When I attend services, nearly all those who attend are 50 years old or older, mostly older. When synagogues seek younger members to take leadership roles, no one steps up. – female, 75, City of Milwaukee

Our Jewish needs are met through our synagogue and family, but paying for membership dues, bat mitzvah prep, and summer camp is usually too much and causes stress. – female, 50, Waukesha County/Milwaukee County South Suburbs

Synagogues are losing membership. The cost of maintaining so many synagogue buildings is too much, making synagogue membership a considerable expense. – female, 76, North Shore

As a strength of the community, Milwaukee has a long history of established congregations and I do not fear the threat of antisemitic extremism, as I might in a larger city. I personally think to grow the Jewish community, we need to adjust some of the traditions revolved around services in the synagogue. It should not be a one size fits all. The lines

between Reform and Conservative have blurred. I see religion more about traditions and lifestyles. Not about the volume of Hebrew in a service, the mandated service length, and more often than not how the sermons do not relate well enough to current times. I do not need to hear a sermon that has political implications that may alienate a part of a congregation. – male, 63, North Shore

Economic and geographical challenges (79 respondents)

Two commonly cited barriers to participation in the Milwaukee Jewish community are cost and geography. Several respondents feel that communal participation is open to everyone as long as they can afford to pay substantial fees, but families and individuals who do not have extra income may be left out. Many respondents feel that the heavy concentration of both the Jewish population and Jewish institutions in the North Shore has left Jews who live outside the central core with little access to programming, services, and communal support.

Participation in groups or events that I would love to be a part of hinges a lot on how much you can contribute financially. There isn't a lot of access to feel like you are a part of the community if you don't have money for a seat at the table—literally and figuratively. There seem to be so many strong, smart, amazing Jewish women in the community that I look up to, but I don't feel there's a lot of access to these people. Obviously, financial contributions are an integral part of keeping these programs sustainable, but for the average family, it's difficult to contribute. I would have loved to put my child in Jewish Day School or something similar, but the costs are too high. I fall into a gap where my household income is [too high for sufficient aid, too low to be able to afford tuition]. – female, age 18-39, City of Milwaukee

I believe the Milwaukee Jewish community is engaging, inclusive, robust and dynamic. I believe the price of being Jewish and participating in Jewish life is becoming unattainable for some and this needs to be addressed. – female, 57, North Shore

I see gaps in programming for post b'nai mitzvah age kids. I also see that the cost of activities limits some people from participating. We would love for our kids to attend [a Jewish day school] but it's just not financially feasible. We have JCC membership through [a subsidized membership program], or that would also be out of reach for us. – female, 42, North Shore

A major gap is that we and others who are not wealthy are unable to afford membership to join a temple. We would have joined [a particular synagogue] but are unable to afford it. – female, 66, North Shore

The cost of being an active engaged member of the Jewish community is too high. Community organizations such as Federation are designed to appeal to the wealthy—not welcoming to others. Synagogue membership is also costly and a barrier for many. I would like to see more options for affordable housing and to support agencies such as JFS. – female, 67, North Shore

Geographically, the community is concentrated on the north side, which makes distance a barrier for those who don't live there. – female, 63, Waukesha County/Milwaukee County South Suburbs

The majority, if not all, activities take place in the Milwaukee / East Side / North Shore areas. There doesn't appear to be any outreach to Jewish families who live outside of these areas. – female, 57, Waukesha County/Milwaukee County South Suburbs

The Jewish community is close-knit in certain suburbs: Mequon, River Hills, Whitefish Bay, Cedarburg, Glendale, Shorewood, Bayside, and Fox Point... However, there are Jews in other areas such as Menomonee Falls, Germantown, Waukesha, etc., that probably don't get much notice. – female, 39, Waukesha County/Milwaukee County South Suburbs

I live in Waukesha County. The Greater Milwaukee Jewish community does not recognize the Waukesha County Jews nor include us in the same way they include each other. – female, 76, Waukesha County/Milwaukee County South Suburbs

I lived in the western suburbs, and there was no presence of the Jewish community which led me to conceal or diminish my beliefs to fit in which kind of led to me being disengaged because I felt isolated and an outsider. – male, 43, Waukesha County/Milwaukee County South Suburbs

There is not much of a Jewish community in the Milwaukee area outside of the city or the North Shore suburbs. – male, 25, Waukesha County/Milwaukee County South Suburbs

No kosher butcher. Limited kosher restaurants and none on the West Side, where there are a lot of Orthodox Jews. – female, 61, North Shore

Israel (68 respondents)

Many of the comments related to Israel mention the dominance of specific Zionist viewpoints within the community and how difficult it can be to voice a more critical opinion of Israel, or even to associate with non-Zionists or anti-Zionists. Several members of the community feel that they are excluded from Jewish spaces because they are critical of the Israeli government in general or certain of its policies—toward Palestinians, non-Orthodox streams of Judaism, and ethnic minorities in particular. Others feel the community should take stronger pro-Israel stands, especially in the aftermath of October 7. Regardless of their stances, members of the community agree that it is difficult to have civil discussions about Israel that do not devolve to vitriol.

The Milwaukee Jewish Federation doesn't tolerate deviations from pro-Israeli government sentiment and views all actions by the Israeli government as justified and legitimate. – male, 59, North Shore

There is not a lot of room for differing opinions. If you are a Jewish person with affiliations with non-Zionist entities, you are essentially shunned from the mainstream Jewish community. It is disappointing and isolating. – female, age 18-39, North Shore

Too Zionist, too attached to Israel, not able to separate Judaism from Zionism. Since October 7th, it is challenging to have constructive conversations about Israel and the conflict—many divisions within the community. – female, 67, North Shore

Very one-tone/one-sided viewpoint on Israel—rarely is there a mention of the suffering on the Palestinian side—need to have more nuanced conversations about the government in Israel being extremely focused on uplifting ultra-religious Jews, Ashkenazi Jews, and not opening opportunities for a path to peace. – female, 29, City of Milwaukee

After October 7, I believe there should be a strong voice for Israel coming from the Milwaukee Jewish community as a whole, despite the fact that some see this as political and thus shy away. – female, 75, North Shore

Jewish education (67 respondents)

Sixty-seven respondents chose to discuss Jewish education. Some commented on the quality of the Jewish education available in Milwaukee, mostly with praise. Others wrote more generally on the topic, either related to formal Jewish schooling or about identifying needs for additional educational opportunities or greater financial support for Jewish education within the community, both for children and for adults.

Jewish day school families seem insulated and stick to themselves, the kids are not particularly welcoming to kids from other school and areas. – female, 50, Waukesha County/Milwaukee County South Suburbs

Jewish education opportunities for tweens and teenagers are lacking. Post-bat mitzvah formal education opportunities are really needed, as are more family opportunities for people with older kids. – female, 50, North Shore

I like that Milwaukee has Jewish day schools available for children, whether they be Reform, Conservative, or Orthodox. – female, 73, North Shore

I did send my two children to the Milwaukee Jewish day school in years [redacted], and I was disappointed that neither came out fluent in Hebrew. I don't know what the experience is like today, but hope it is better than it was in the past. – male, 69, North Shore

I think the Milwaukee Jewish Day School needs more support from the Federation and wider community. Whether families send or sent their kids there or not, it is critical, now more than ever, that we have a strong and sustainable Jewish day school in our community. – male, 43, North Shore

The gaps are quality and diversity of religious educational opportunities for public school students – female, 42, North Shore

Active Jews seem to presume we're all fluent in Yiddish, can knit, and eat chicken soup—I would like a Judaism 101 course to fill in the gaps of my Jewish education and knowledge – female, 64, City of Milwaukee

We need more opportunity for non-Orthodox people to learn texts—not just classes taught by a rabbi, but actually attempts at things like chavruta,⁴¹ also more opportunity for adults and children to gain proficiency in Hebrew. Also, we must teach our children our history, including the bad/sad parts so they can recognize antisemitism in their peers or teachers when they go to college, and not just about lifecycle events and being charitable (which seems what is mostly taught). We must also teach about why there is a Palestinian-Israel conflict—most adults don't know about this either—so that discussions can be meaningful and intelligent. – female, 57, North Shore

Need for outreach (67 respondents)

Sixty-seven respondents identified outreach as a key need within the community, especially toward newcomers to the community, people who live outside the North Shore core of the community, and unaffiliated households.

Tries to be inclusive but could do better. Be consistent and welcoming in outreach, especially to Jews of different backgrounds. – female, 55, North Shore

There is relatively little effort made to connect with members of the Jewish community living outside of Milwaukee's west side and the North Shore. There are some suggestions of a large number of Jews living in Waukesha County but almost no outreach. – male, 75, Waukesha County/Milwaukee County South Suburbs

Attempts at outreach are good/valiant, but not at all sufficient. Communication seems terrific to me, but I'm very plugged in. – female, 77, North Shore

It would be good to reach out to non-observant families. Especially to the kids. – female, 60, Waukesha County/Milwaukee County South Suburbs

I'm not sure that we reach the Jews who are not affiliated in ways that they feel are meaningful to them. The strength is that MJF and local rabbis keep trying! – female, 77, North Shore

It would be nice to have a committee to welcome and introduce newcomers to the area. Perhaps there could be a liaison to keep those newcomers engaged for some period of time during their transition. I don't know how the newcomers would be identified but there is a need. – female, 72, North Shore

Jewish organizations (64 respondents)

To many members of the Milwaukee Jewish community, organizations such as the JCC, Federation, and Chabad are the community's greatest strengths, providing for every need and interest in the community. However, there are also members of the community for whom these organizations fall short. Their critiques are primarily about financial resources, accessibility of programming, and lack of coordination or cooperation between organizations.

Milwaukee's Jewish community has been a light in my life. Our JCC offers an array of programs and fosters a true sense of community. – female, 40, North Shore

Organizations don't always work together and end up doing similar programs (could save money and provide more programming if there wasn't so much duplication). The JCC is amazing and has brought a lot of different communities together. – female, 61, North Shore

JCC needs more evening classes for working people and losing the Mequon pool is really sad. I hope the JCC can work with other North Shore communities and come up with a solution. – female, 58, North Shore

Our Jewish federation seems to have a lot of expensive overhead. When I donate, I'm not confident the money is going to its intended cause or to pay for their overhead. – female, 43, North Shore

The federation and federation organizations are cliquish, and they focus on more affluent families within the community, tending to alienate the Jews who are "on the fringe" of observance. – male, 59, North Shore

The Milwaukee Jewish Federation does an incredible job keeping the community safe and offering essential social services. – female, 54, North Shore

Gap: far too much importance is placed on the federation. The MJF is not the “gatekeeper” for Judaism or Jewish life in Milwaukee. The Federation tends to act like a country club of the who’s who of money. I always feel uncomfortable at federation programs. – male, 36, North Shore

Strength—MJF was effective in rallying the community for support of university students in Wisconsin and Jews in Israel. Weakness—MJF does not always provide a welcoming environment. Too often engagement is solely about donations. – male, 66, North Shore

The Milwaukee Jewish community and MJF-sponsored events can be insular and cliquy, and it takes a lot of effort to find your “people.” We feel fortunate to have cultivated a “village” here, but I can see how it could be challenging for newcomers to feel welcome. – female, 61, North Shore

Leadership (42 respondents)

Forty-two respondents mentioned Jewish communal leaders and employees of Jewish organizations as great strengths or weaknesses in the Milwaukee Jewish community. The leaders and employees are widely regarded as hard working and sincere, but some members of the community feel that fresh ideas are necessary for the long-term viability of the community and its institutions.

A strength is highly skilled staff in both religious and secular Jewish settings. – male, 59, North Shore

Leadership is sometimes challenging, and people often do not listen or welcome different ideas. – female, 70, City of Milwaukee

The same people remain as “leaders” of the Jewish community even though their time has passed. The leadership group is very insular. – male, 83, City of Milwaukee

We do not seem to have the best leadership in key positions. People in leadership roles are lacking in critical skills to make the organizations function effectively. Many have only nonprofit experience and have not benefited from ongoing leadership development offered in larger for-profit organizations. We appear to select key leaders (paid professionals) based on superficial criteria. They may give great presentations and make a good first impression, but fail at the day-to-day operational skills necessary to run an effective organization – female, 64, North Shore

As children of leaders and large donors grow and leave the community, there is a gap in both leadership and financial security. This is a growing problem that only underscores the need for deep endowment and foundation strength long term. – male, 56, North Shore

I do believe that there are really good people serving in key positions at HERC, Federation, Chronicle, JCC and most of the synagogues in Milwaukee. – female, 57, City of Milwaukee

Stuck in what worked in the past. Not clear on vision going forward or how to engage and activate people under 60. – male, 43, North Shore

CHAPTER 13. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The words of community members, taken together with the findings presented in Chapters 1-11, contribute to a detailed portrait of the Milwaukee Jewish community. This study has described community members' demographic characteristics; their participation in Jewish communal life; their private Jewish activities; and their attitudes about Judaism, Israel, and the local Jewish community. Many community members express deep satisfaction with the quality of Jewish life in Milwaukee and its abundant opportunities for engagement. Many describe the community as tightly knit, especially those who were born and/or raised in Milwaukee. Yet others who come to Milwaukee from elsewhere, or who live outside its geographic core in the North Shore, often say that the community's closeness makes it difficult for newcomers or unengaged members of the community to find a comfortable niche into which to integrate themselves. These dynamics shape the findings presented thus far, as well as the following conclusions and recommendations, based on a holistic assessment of the data provided by the 980 respondents who completed the survey.

Recommendations:

Be sensitive to differences of resources, backgrounds, and identities: There are deep social, economic, religious, and political divides running through the Milwaukee Jewish community. Many members of the community face significant financial barriers to participating in Jewish communal life, and some feel they are not valued by local Jewish organizations because they cannot afford to pay membership dues to belong to an organization or to make significant charitable donations. Not every member of the Milwaukee Jewish community has an extensive Jewish educational background; 15% of Jewish adults in Milwaukee cite their own lack of knowledge as a significant barrier that limits their participation in Jewish spaces. Evidence from both the quantitative findings shared throughout this report and the qualitative findings shared in Chapter 12 revealed that many intermarried individuals and their families feel uncomfortable and unwelcome in Milwaukee Jewish organizations. Some Jews of Color shared experiences of discrimination in Jewish settings on the basis of race. Some Orthodox members of the community feel that organizations serving the entire community do not respect their religious beliefs. The Jewish community of Milwaukee should seek to ensure that every individual, regardless of resources, backgrounds, or identity, feels welcomed and valued in Jewish spaces, and must continue building on its efforts to nurture that sense of belonging.

Support families in need: Collectively, the Jewish community of Milwaukee is financially stable and comfortable. Most members of the community are middle class, and a substantial proportion of the community is well-off. However, 21% of Jewish households in Milwaukee are either unable to make ends meet (4%) or just managing to do so (17%). In the past year, 15% of Jewish households in Milwaukee have had to limit or modify their involvement in Jewish communal life because of financial stresses. Twenty-one percent of Jewish households in Milwaukee do not have sufficient savings to cover three months of expenses, and 11% would be unable to pay for an emergency \$400 expense with cash on hand, money in a bank account, or on a credit card that can be paid off in full at the end of the month. To best serve families in need, it may be necessary to increase awareness of resources available within the community. It may also be helpful to allocate new resources to

assistance programs, particularly at this time, when assistance from the federal government is uncertain.

Fill the programmatic gaps: The Milwaukee Jewish community is fortunate to have a strong Federation and JCC, thriving synagogues and schools, a growing Chabad network, and many Jewish cultural organizations. These institutions are collectively the educational, religious, cultural, philanthropic, and social heart of the community. Yet only 32% of Jewish households belong to a Jewish congregation; only 60% of Jewish children in grades K-12 were enrolled in any Jewish educational program for the 2024-25 school year or the summer of 2024; 72% of Jewish adults in Milwaukee participated in any Jewish programs or activities in the past year, but only 19% participated often. Seventy-four percent of Jewish adults in Milwaukee who are at all interested in participating in Jewish programs identified at least barrier to participation, including 34% who have not found programs that interest them and 15% who are not confident that their current level of Jewish knowledge affords them comfortable entrée into Jewish spaces. Several respondents noted a dearth of options, in particular, for young adults, mid-life adults without kids, and intermarried couples and their families. The community should look into options for expanding programming to help underserved populations feel more connected to and more engaged in Jewish communal life.

Reach out to newcomers: One of the Milwaukee Jewish community's greatest strengths is that, for many members, it feels less like a community and more like an extended family. This is unsurprising given that 68% of Jewish adults have lived in the Milwaukee area for 20 years or more, and 55% have lived there their entire lives, other than, possibly, for college or graduate school. For some, the community not only feels like family—it literally is family. This closeness can be a tremendous asset in both good times and bad, but it can also create challenges. Newcomers often describe a communal culture where it is assumed that everyone already knows the history, traditions, and unwritten rules, making it difficult for outsiders to gain the cultural knowledge needed to participate fully. To help ease integration, it may be valuable to connect new residents with synagogues, Jewish schools, cultural programs, and activities, as well as to create opportunities for them to meet peers who share their interests, regardless of how long they have lived in Milwaukee.

Use opportunities for volunteering to expand communal engagement: Fifty-eight percent of Jewish adults in Milwaukee have volunteered somewhere in the past year, including 36% who have volunteered for Jewish organizations or causes. Many of these Jewish adults are habitual volunteers who actively search for opportunities to give back to their community. Research on the volunteering habits and preferences of American Jews suggests that volunteering is a core activity that appeals across all age groups, denominations, and socioeconomic statuses, and can be especially valuable in creating outlets that unite universal prosocial values with individuals' Jewish identities. Because of its broad appeal, volunteering can be an effective means for Milwaukee Jewish organizations to integrate newcomers and previously unengaged members of the community, regardless of background, resources, or interests, and to do so at low cost and without significant barriers to participation.

Reach beyond the historic geographic core of the community: The Milwaukee Jewish community has historically been, and continues to be, heavily concentrated in its geographic core in the North Shore. Over half of all Jewish households in Milwaukee and nearly two thirds of Jewish children in the community reside in the North Shore, primarily in a small number of ZIP codes on or near Lake Michigan, between Shorewood in the south and Mequon in the north. Most Jewish organizations in Milwaukee also occupy space within this relatively small geographic area. However,

as defined in this study, the Milwaukee Jewish community encompasses all of Milwaukee, Ozaukee, and Waukesha Counties, areas that are home to thousands of Jewish households outside the geographic core of the community. Many of these households feel their distance from the core makes them an afterthought in the Milwaukee Jewish community. They have developed their own robust Jewish subcultures, simultaneously part of the greater Milwaukee Jewish community yet distinct from it. If the larger Jewish community wishes to help these smaller communities grow and maintain their strength, it must consider how to make them feel like less of an afterthought and recognize their unique character.

Cultivate healthier discourse about Israel: The Milwaukee Jewish community maintains strong ties to Israel. Sixty-nine percent of Jewish adults in Milwaukee are somewhat or very emotionally attached to Israel, 56% have visited Israel at least once, and 90% follow news about Israel somewhat or very closely. Large majorities also affirm core principles: that Israel should recognize all Jewish denominations equally, that it is important for Israel to be a Jewish state, and that Israel should also be a democratic state for all of its citizens, regardless of religious identity. At the same time, significant tensions are evident. Fifty-two percent somewhat or strongly agree that Israel regularly violates the human rights of the Palestinian people, and 42% somewhat or strongly agree that they often feel their views about Israel are unwelcome in Jewish settings. Open-ended responses summarized in Chapter 12 highlight widespread anxiety about how the community navigates discourse on Israel and the Palestinians, particularly in the aftermath of October 7. Some respondents voiced strong criticism of fellow Jews and organizations that hold opposing views, even calling for their censure or exclusion from the Jewish community. Others urged communal institutions to declare unequivocal support for Israel, regardless of current policy debates. Still others expressed frustration that Jewish organizations' reluctance—or inability—to foster open dialogue alienates members who are deeply committed to Jewish life but critical of Israeli policies and actions. These dynamics mirror challenges shared by Jewish communities across the diaspora. In Milwaukee, as elsewhere, educational initiatives and structured conversations may help to cultivate greater mutual respect, promote understanding, and begin to repair fractures within the Jewish community.

Monitor antisemitism, but do not panic: Antisemitism is a significant concern for the Milwaukee Jewish community—locally, globally, and on college campuses. In the past year, 34% of Jewish adults in Milwaukee report having personally experienced an antisemitic incident, and nearly half (49%) avoided certain activities or locations out of fear of antisemitism. Among those interested in participating in Jewish programs, 13% cite safety and security as a major barrier. These figures almost certainly reflect increasing frequency of antisemitic incidents and a greater concern than existed prior to October 7. Despite these troubling patterns, the data also suggest that anxiety should be tempered with perspective. For example, the age group that is least worried about antisemitism on college campuses is the same group with the most members spending significant time there. Likewise, although 81% of those targeted by antisemitism in the past year never reported the incident, many explained that they did not consider the incident serious (42%), that it was already resolved, or that the perpetrator offered a sincere apology. Overall, the evidence indicates that Milwaukee Jews' experiences of antisemitism are comparable to the typical daily slights faced by all minority groups in the United States—which does not make them acceptable in any way—punctuated by occasional incidents that pose more serious threats. In this environment, heightened vigilance is justified, but panic is not. The community need not withdraw from broader society or convert its institutions into fortified compounds. Instead, widespread training in threat awareness, emergency preparedness, and reporting procedures may help the community remain resilient and continue to thrive despite ongoing risks.

These recommendations are based on data collected systematically from 980 members of the Milwaukee Jewish community between December 2024 and March 2025. The study continues a century-long tradition of applying social science to understand the size, character, interests, needs, and concerns of local Jewish communities. In Milwaukee, we examined participation in communal and personal Jewish practices, levels of institutional engagement, unmet needs, and other dimensions of Jewish life. Our hope is that this portrait of the community will spark meaningful discussion about how to enrich the lives of its members and strengthen the community as a whole.

NOTES

¹ Leonard Saxe, Theodore Sasson, and Janet Krasner Aronson, “Pew’s Portrait of American Jewry: A Reassessment of the Assimilation Narrative,” in *American Jewish Year Book 2014*, ed. A. Dashefsky and I. Sheskin (New York, NY: Springer International Publishing, 2015), 78–81.

² Pew Research Center, “Jewish Americans in 2020” (Washington DC: Pew Research Center, 2021).
<https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2021/05/11/jewish-americans-in-2020/>

³ <https://www.census.gov/programs-surveys/acs>

⁴ <https://ajpp.brandeis.edu/>

⁵ Pew Research Center, “Jewish Americans in 2020.”

⁶ American Community Survey, one-year estimates for 2023 for Milwaukee, Ozaukee, and Waukesha Counties.

⁷ Pew Research Center, “Jewish Americans in 2020.”

⁸ Although the 18-39 age bracket is used throughout this report as the youngest age group for analysis, in this table, we use 18-34 for ease of comparison to published estimates from the Pew national study and other community studies.

⁹ American Community Survey, one-year estimates for 2023 for Milwaukee, Ozaukee, and Waukesha Counties.

¹⁰ Although the gender breakdown may appear to be imbalanced, because of the margins of error around estimates (as described in Chapter 1), it is likely that the observed estimates indicate that there are only slightly more female-identified Jews in the Milwaukee area than male-identified Jews.

¹¹ Pew Research Center, “Jewish Americans in 2020.”

¹² Aronson, J.K., Brookner, M.A., Boxer, M., Nussbaum, D., Magidin de Kramer, R., & Saxe, L. (2024). Using denominational identity to understand Jewish engagement. In A. Dashefsky & I.M. Sheskin (eds.), *American Jewish Year Book 2023* (pp. 37-60). Cham, Switzerland: Springer.

¹³ Pew Research Center, “Jewish Americans in 2020.”

¹⁴ Figure 2.3 illustrates the geographic distribution of Jewish households in the Milwaukee area, and Figure 2.4 is similar but focuses in on the North Shore, where the majority of the population resides. On each map, one red dot represents 25 Jewish households. The dots are randomly placed within the ZIP codes where those households reside; they do not reflect perfectly the exact location of respondents’ residences. The placement reflects both the aggregation of survey data and efforts to protect the identities of survey respondents.

¹⁵ There were not enough respondents to the survey who were intermarried and not raising their children Jewish to calculate reliably the proportion of children of intermarried couples who are raised Jewish in any way. It is likely, however, that Milwaukee’s rate is comparable to or slightly higher than the national average, 69%.

¹⁶ Traditionally, Jewish girls reach the age of bat mitzvah at 12 years old, and Jewish boys reach the age of bar mitzvah at 13 years old.

¹⁷ Pew Research Center, “Jewish Americans in 2020.”

¹⁸ This category includes organizations such as the Milwaukee Synagogue for Russian Jews, which, despite its name, is not primarily a synagogue.

¹⁹ Nationally, 20% of Jewish adults attend services at least once a month (Pew Research Center, “Jewish Americans in 2020.”).

²⁰ In 2020, the Pew Research Center found that 62% of American Jews had held or attended a Passover seder in the previous year (“Jewish Americans in 2020”). Forty-six percent had fasted for all or part of the previous Yom Kippur.

²¹ Nationally, 30% of US Jews say that most or all of their close friends are Jewish (Pew Research Center, “Jewish Americans in 2020”).

²² This is the age range represented by the Milwaukee Jewish Federation’s NextGen MKE program.

²³ These are miscellaneous other ways that Jewish organizations reached out.

²⁴ Pew Research Center, “Jewish Americans in 2020.”

²⁵ There are too few respondents ages 18-25 to determine definitively whether there is significant variation between older members of the 18-39 age group, most of whom finished college or graduate school years ago, and younger members of the age group, who are more likely to be current students. What data are available suggest that the younger members of the age group might be slightly more concerned about antisemitism on college campuses than the older members of the age group, though they are still less concerned than members of the Milwaukee Jewish community who are 40 or older.

²⁶ American Jewish Committee, *The State of Antisemitism in America 2024: AJC’s Survey of American Jews*.

²⁷ American Jewish Committee, *The State of Antisemitism in America 2024: AJC’s Survey of American Jews*.

²⁸ In the AJC’s survey, 54% of American Jews who did not report incidents said they did not report them because they did not expect anything would be done in response, 44% did not think the incident was serious enough to report, and 22% did not know how to report it.

²⁹ Pew Research Center, “Jewish Americans in 2020.”

³⁰ Pew Research Center, “Jewish Americans in 2020.”

³¹ New national studies of the US and Canadian Jewish communities were published after this report was completed but before it was published. The US study showed that 37% of American Jews identify as Zionists, but 88% felt it was somewhat or very important for Israel to exist as a Jewish state. Similarly, the Canadian study showed that 51% of Canadian Jews identified as Zionists, but 94% supported Israel’s right to exist as a Jewish state. See Manchester, D., & Sirtzky, M. (2026). *Survey of Jewish life since October 7: Israel conversations*. Jewish Federations of North America; Brym, R. (2024). Jews and Israel 2024: A survey of Canadian attitudes and Jewish perceptions. *Canadian Jewish Studies / Études juives canadiennes*, 37, 1–35.

³² See, for example: Boxer, M. (2024). *What is Zionism? Assessing the diversity of discourse in a charged environment*. Waltham, MA: Maurice and Marilyn Cohen Center for Modern Jewish Studies, Brandeis University; Brym, R. (2025). What does Zionism mean to Canadian Jews? A longitudinal study of semantic drift. *Canadian Jewish Studies / Études juives canadiennes*, 43, 12–40; Epstein, N. (2026). The word Zionism is dead. *Moment Magazine*, Spring 2026. <https://momentmag.com/the-word-zionism-is-dead/>

³³ The Pew Research Center reported that in 2020, 57% of US Jewish adults followed news about Israel somewhat (43%) or very closely (14%; “Jewish Americans in 2020”). It is likely that these estimates would be somewhat higher if the data were collected today, but we believe it is also likely that Jewish adults in Milwaukee follow news about Israel more closely than the US Jewish population as a whole.

³⁴ US Census Bureau. (2024). *2023: ACS 1-Year Estimates Subject Tables*. Retrieved from https://data.census.gov/table?q=Educational+Attainment&g=050XX00US55079_55089_55133.

³⁵ Pew Research Center, “Jewish Americans in 2020.”

³⁶ Note that the sum of these two categories in Table 10.2 appears to add up to 21%. However, due to rounding, the total adds up to 22%, slightly above the national proportion of 17%.

In “Jewish Americans in 2020,” the Pew Research Center asked the standard of living question with different response options. However, their bottom two categories, “don’t meet basic expenses” (2% of US Jewish households) and “just meet basic expenses” (15%) are comparable to the bottom two categories in the present study.

³⁷ Nationally, 21% of Jewish households have household income below \$50,000, 26% have household income of at least \$50,000 but less than \$100,000, 18% have household income of at least \$100,000 but less than \$150,000, 13% have household income of at least \$150,000 but less than \$200,000, and 23% have household incomes of \$200,000 or more.

³⁸ According to the US Federal Reserve, in 2023, 37% of US households could not cover a \$400 emergency expense. <https://www.federalreserve.gov/publications/files/2023-report-economic-well-being-us-households-202405.pdf>

³⁹ Nationally, 85% of US Jewish adults say their health is good or excellent (Pew Research Center, “Jewish Americans in 2020”).

⁴⁰ This includes 4% of Jewish adults in Milwaukee who have both fair or poor physical health and fair or poor mental health.

⁴¹ A style of studying Jewish texts in which a pair or small group of students closely analyze, discuss, and debate a shared passage from the Torah, Talmud, or other sacred text.