

2024

SURVEY OF BAY AREA JEWISH IDENTITY



Antisemitism | Identity | Community



JCRC
BAY AREA

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

2024 was another extraordinarily difficult year for the Jewish community in the Bay Area as the fallout from the war in Israel and Gaza continued at home in myriad ways. JCRC Bay Area's third annual *Survey of Bay Area Jewish Identity*¹ reveals how Bay Area Jews are feeling about their Jewish identity and global events that have impacted their lives. Using the same methodology as in previous surveys, JCRC Bay Area reengaged the highly respected opinion research firm EMC Research² to conduct the poll between November 26, 2024, and December 9, 2024, with 800 Bay Area residents who identify in some way as Jewish.

As in 2023,³ we asked respondents to rate how well civic institutions — government, schools, universities, political parties and more — have addressed antisemitism following the terrorist attacks in Israel on October 7, 2023.

The results show rates of antisemitism are still high, and rhetoric is becoming more openly extreme. At the same time, satisfaction rates with how antisemitism is being addressed, while still underwater, increased across most institutions. This suggests that JCRC and the Jewish community's proactive relationship building efforts — and collective crisis response, including education, awareness-building, and advocacy — are having a positive impact amid very difficult circumstances.

Key Findings include:

- The overall environment continues to be challenging for Jews in the Bay Area; 55 percent named antisemitism, violence or discrimination as the top problem facing Bay Area Jews today, a rise of about 37 percent from 2022.
- More disclosed they have witnessed or experienced antisemitism in recent years (42 percent) than in previous surveys (32 percent in 2022 and 39 percent in 2023).
- A majority, 55 percent, continue to feel less safe than prior to October 7, 2023.
- Only one-third of respondents who experienced antisemitism actually reported the incidents, pointing to a possible undercounting in official statistics.
- The vast majority of those surveyed, 82 percent, say their Jewish identity is important to them, and 48 percent report feeling more connected to the Jewish community since October 7, 2023.
- However, respondents continued to report feeling vastly more comfortable expressing their Jewish identity when other Jews were with them (87 percent) as opposed to being in environments with few or no Jews (68 percent).
- Among those that experienced antisemitism, the types shifted toward more extreme and openly anti-Jewish messages.
- Many agreed that they have felt excluded (41 percent) or lost friends (19 percent) because of being Jewish and some have even made a significant life change recently due to antisemitism (17 percent).
- Satisfaction in how antisemitism is being addressed by institutions has improved compared to last year — suggesting that community advocacy from JCRC and our partners is having a positive impact —

¹ <https://jcrc.org/blog/bay-area-jewish-identity-survey/>

² <https://www.emcresearch.com/>

³ https://drive.google.com/file/d/1ZaJK04bBQV16kgNkGBxEupMw_iFrxbzj/view?usp=sharing

though many sectors continue to have a net-disapproval in their responses, including K-12 and higher education, on social media, and in the Democratic and Republican parties.

- The overwhelming majority (89 percent) of those surveyed support Israel’s right to exist as a Jewish and democratic state, consistent with previous years’ findings. At the same time, few are satisfied with the current Israeli administration (25 percent). Candidates’ positions and actions on antisemitism (85 percent) and Israel (84 percent) are very important to Bay Area Jewish residents when they vote.

Antisemitism in the Bay Area

Antisemitism continues to be a pervasive problem in the Bay Area.

This year’s results on the climate were stark — 40 percent of respondents agreed that they have felt excluded at times because they are Jewish. 19 percent reported losing friends due to being Jewish and 17 percent made recent significant life changes, such as moving or changing schools, due to antisemitism. Of those who made significant life changes, some of the experiences they had with antisemitism included:

“I got called a slur by a random stranger while grocery shopping”

“Death threats”

“At my school there was a lot of kids with parents with Jewish conspiracy theories”

“Swastika taped to my door”

“Wrongful termination which I challenged legally and won my case”

A majority of respondents — 55 percent — identified antisemitism, violence or discrimination as top problems facing Bay Area Jews — an increase from 51 percent in 2023 and 37 percent in 2022. Other data points to why many Bay Area Jews are feeling this way:

- **Continued high rates of antisemitism:** Since October 7, 2023, 26 percent reported personally experiencing antisemitism. 42 percent reported experiencing or directly witnessed antisemitism in the past three years, compared to 39 percent in 2023 and 32 percent in 2022. Notably, many of the examples of antisemitism centered around classic anti-Jewish comments and acts of discrimination, more so than in prior years.
 - “Was told the Holocaust was faked so Jewish could gain sympathy for Israel”
 - “Overheard someone next to me in a restaurant disparaging Jews”
 - “I get constant comments about how Jewish I look”
 - “Protestors blocked streets, hit my car, and shouted antisemitic slurs”
 - “Being called a Zionist and ostracized at my former workplace for questioning why a city resolution condemned Israel but not Hamas”
 - “Swastikas drawn in school bathrooms”
- **Antisemitism has been vastly underreported:** Only 30 percent of respondents who experienced antisemitism said that they reported it to anyone.
- **Many Jews continue to hesitate or feel some level of discomfort publicly identifying as Jewish:** Respondents felt far more comfortable expressing their Jewish identity in environments

where there are others who identify as Jewish (87 percent), compared with environments with few or no others who identify as Jewish (68 percent), with less than one-third (31 percent) feeling very comfortable expressing their Jewish identity without other Jews around. Overall, 80 percent of respondents said they felt either somewhat or very comfortable publicly identifying as Jewish, a drop from 89 percent two years earlier.

- **Assumptions about Jews:** Consistent with prior years, 67 percent agreed that people make certain assumptions about them because they are Jewish. This points to the sense that there is also widespread unconscious or implicit bias about Jews.
- **Hatred of Israel leads to hostility toward Jews: 45 percent of respondents experienced hatred or discrimination related to Israel:** This is a small but significant increase from prior years (from 40 percent in 2023 and 2022). It is a different way to measure the environment for Jews, showing that a sizable number of Bay Area Jews have experienced some form of hostility based on events in — or even the mere existence of — Israel. This is important because when hate about Israel goes unchecked, this leads to antisemitism and a worsening environment for Jews.

This data confirms what we have been hearing and witnessing: Rates of antisemitism have increased, the rhetoric is getting more extreme, and this has negatively impacted Jews sense of safety and belonging.

Jewish Identity and Israel

The survey also included attitudinal measures regarding Israel.

- Consistent with the past two years, the vast majority of respondents — 89 percent — believe that Israel has the right to exist as a Jewish and democratic state (a number consistent with national polls). This belief is a modern expression of the movement for Jewish national self-determination — Zionism.⁴
- A solid majority — 65 percent — agreed they have a personal connection to Israel.
- At the same time, only 25 percent reported being satisfied with the job that the current Israeli administration is doing.
- When asked a new question this year about the importance of a candidate's positions and actions addressing Israel when voting, the survey found that 84 percent agreed strongly or somewhat that it was important to them.

This demonstrates the strong, though complex, relationship that many Bay Area Jews have with Israel. It also shows that “anti-Zionist” Jews (those not supporting Israel’s right to exist as a Jewish and democratic state) do not represent Bay Area Jewish community values.

⁴ <https://jcrc.org/blog/consensus-statement-on-antisemitism/>

Response to Antisemitism Improving

The survey revealed that, across the board, respondents showed greater approval of how key civic institutions, schools, workplaces, and other settings are responding to antisemitism compared to 2023.

- Significant improvements were seen in the work/professional settings, from 55 percent to 67 percent satisfied, and local government, from 39 percent to 55 percent satisfied.
- K-12 education also improved but overall approval still remained low — from 28 percent to 41 percent satisfied.
- Satisfaction rates remained extremely low in social justice spaces (36 percent), colleges/universities (32 percent) and social media (21 percent) but were higher than 2023.
- Bay Area Jews are also quite dissatisfied with how the Democratic Party and Republican Party are handling antisemitism in their parties — 53 percent and 65 percent dissatisfied respectively.

The efforts that JCRC Bay Area and our community partners have made to address the impact of increasing antisemitism and hateful rhetoric about Israel through education, public awareness, community building and advocacy have made a positive impact. But there is much more work to be done.

Implications for JCRC's work

Three years ago when JCRC Bay Area launched our survey, our goal was to better understand Bay Area Jews — in all their diversity. The survey results became the basis for much of the information contained in our *Here I Am: Jewish Identity and Antisemitism* trainings. While we did not originally plan to repeat the survey annually, we understood the needs after post-October 7th to gauge levels of antisemitism as well as fear and trepidation among Bay Area Jewish residents.

In 2023, skyrocketing rates of antisemitism and clear dissatisfaction with how different institutions were addressing it post-October 7, led JCRC to greatly enhance our public communications and education strategy. We issued guidance to institutions on identifying problematic rhetoric, created new resources for K-12 schools, and raised public awareness about widespread antisemitic incidents (such as vandalism). We also released viral videos revealing hateful rhetoric from anti-Israel activists at city council meetings, during protests, and in personal attacks on Jewish public officials. In order to turn the tide, we helped coordinate the numerous community groups that mobilized post-October 7 in order to attain a unified grassroots response when public attention and pressure was required.

The training and our overall communications strategy are having an ameliorating effect at some institutions. However, while improving, many are still not adequately addressing antisemitism.

Given that they have shown to be effective, our goals remain the following:

1. Continue and expand our educational work and *Here I Am* trainings on Jewish identity and antisemitism, for governmental and community institutions, schools, and corporations.
2. Strengthen and enforce laws and policies that address safety concerns in the Jewish community.
3. Ensure that Jews are recognized as an ethno-religious group, with many diverse facets of our identities recognized, embraced, and understood, and not just as a monolithic religious minority.
4. Ensure antisemitism is addressed like other forms of hate by governmental and community institutions, schools and companies, and hold them accountable when they do not.

5. Promote robust inclusion of diverse Jewish identities, Jewish history, Holocaust education, and antisemitism education in K-12 school curriculum.
6. Promote the inclusion of diverse mainstream Jewish voices on issues that directly impact our community.
7. Build awareness and understanding of Jewish identity and antisemitism in the broader public through social media and other tools.

Additionally, the results have led us to add the following goals:

1. Work collaboratively with Jewish grassroots groups to ensure that the community's voice is heard on important issues in the public square.
2. Through JCRC's 501c4 organization Bay Area Jewish Action (BAJA), work with the membership of political parties and organizations, such as local Democratic clubs, to address antisemitism in a more effective manner.
3. Build community awareness of the importance of reporting incidents of antisemitism to build a more accurate set of data around the challenges the Jewish community is facing.

While there are glimmers of hope that our Bay Area institutions are rising to the challenge, we must push forward to ensure a Bay Area where Jews, and all people, feel welcome and can thrive.