Goal and Purpose

Over the past few years, it has become increasingly evident in our work at JCRC that most Americans, including in the Bay Area, lack a fundamental understanding of our full identities as Jews. Many stereotypes persist, based on erroneous assumptions that Jewish identity is that of a white religious minority. These misconceptions, coupled with a marked rise in antisemitism, prevent the Jewish community from being properly seen, understood, and included in civic life.

Recent demographic analyses reveal the Bay Area Jewish community as vastly diverse and complex, and this survey is the first attempt to answer such questions in a grounded, quantifiable way.

In pursuing this polling project, JCRC is seeking to address widespread misconceptions with a research-based exploration of what it means to be a Jew. Who identifies as Jewish, and in what ways and for what reasons? How do we relate to our history, cultural traditions, Judaism, and Israel?

This polling data will ground JCRC’s work by providing deeper understanding of Bay Area Jews’ views on their identity, their attitudes on various issues, and their experiences as Jews in the public square—issues not covered in other surveys.

The following report is a topline overview of key results related to identity, attitudes, and experiences. In our conclusion section, we include an analysis of the implications of the results for JCRC’s work on Jewish identity, antisemitism, and Israel.
Methodology

☑ Conducted by EMC Research, a well-respected national public opinion firm with Bay Area roots
☑ Survey of Bay Area residents who identify as Jewish or have a Jewish background
☑ Survey conducted September 13-27, 2022
☑ 828 total completed interviews; overall margin of error ±3.41 percentage points
☑ Respondents were invited to take the survey via telephone, text messages and email invitations in English
☑ Respondents were sourced for this survey via a mix of sources, including the California voter file and research panel databases
☑ To qualify for the survey, all respondents were asked self-screening demographic questions
Demographics
The survey was designed to sample a wide range of the Jewish population, not just those who have an institutional affiliation that JCRC would more easily reach.

To ascertain Jewish identity, present religion was the opening question. If respondents did not say they were Jewish, a second question was asked—whether they have any kind of Jewish identity beyond religion—ethnic, cultural or family background.²

A significant proportion—32%—identify with a different religion or no religion while still claiming Jewish identity. All data in this survey was provided by respondents who identify as Jewish in some way.
• Reform/Reconstructionist is the largest group at 36%, followed by secular at 23%, and other/none of these at 17%.

• Most respondents are not very active in Jewish communal life: only 18% regularly attend Jewish activities (defined as a few times a month or more).³

• 42% report living in an interfaith family.
• The generational range is diverse, though the sample skews older, as younger Jews are much harder to reach for survey/research purposes.

• 57% of respondents are men, 40% are women and 2% are non-binary.

• 12% self-identify as LGBTQ.

• 26% have children under 18.

• 82% self-identify as white/Caucasian.

• 6% self-identify as people of color.

• 83% have at least some college and 51% have a graduate or professional degree.

• When asked how they identify politically in the Bay Area, a majority (64%) identify as progressive or liberal.\(^4\)
Jewish Identity: Attitudes, Experiences and Views
Being Jewish is important to the vast majority of respondents (86%)—even among many of those who aren’t communally active or don’t identify religiously as Jewish.

A smaller majority (54%) agree that their Jewish identity impacts the decisions they make in their day to day life.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>JEWISH IDENTITY ATTITUDES</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Being Jewish is important to me</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My Jewish identity impacts the decision I make in my day to day life</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Family heritage** and the **Holocaust** rank highest as significant factors of respondents’ Jewish identity.

**Religion and spirituality rank lowest in significance** as factors shaping Jewish identity—a clear rebuke of how Jews are most often portrayed and categorized (strictly as a religious or faith-based group).

### Significant factors that have shaped Jewish identity

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factor</th>
<th>Extremely significant (7)</th>
<th>Somewhat significant (5-6)</th>
<th>Somewhat not significant (2-3)</th>
<th>Not at all significant (1)</th>
<th>Don't know</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Family Heritage</td>
<td>44%</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Holocaust</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jewish values or ethics</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Culture and celebrations</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>37%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethnic background</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Israel</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friends and community</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spirituality</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religion and/or religious practices</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Most survey respondents publicly identify as Jewish and are comfortable doing so.

However, one third say that they only “somewhat agree,” indicating a level of hesitancy. Additional questions in this survey dig deeper into the comfort measurement and identify possible factors behind this number.
Respondents are significantly more comfortable expressing their Jewish identity in environments where other Jews are present.

Jews are a tiny minority in the Bay Area (4%)\(^6\) and spend most of their time in non-Jewish spaces. A lack of relative comfort could mean that some hesitate to bring their full authentic Jewish identity forward in some circumstances.

### Comfort with Identity in Environments\(^7\)

- **In environments with few or no others who identify as Jewish**
  - Extremely Comfortable (7): 32%
  - Somewhat Comfortable (5-6): 38%
  - Somewhat Uncomfortable (2-3): 12%
  - Very Uncomfortable (1): 15%
  - Don't Know (4): 1%

- **In environments with others who identify as Jewish**
  - Extremely Comfortable (7): 60%
  - Somewhat Comfortable (5-6): 26%
  - Somewhat Uncomfortable (2-3): 9%
Comfort level with expressing Jewish identity varies by setting. Perhaps unsurprisingly, Jewish institutions are the most comfortable and social media is the least comfortable environment for Jewish identity expression. Taken together with the data showing that comfort levels are much higher in spaces with other Jews (previous page), a complex picture of the environment for Bay Area Jews emerges.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Extremely Comfortable (7)</th>
<th>Somewhat Comfortable (5-6)</th>
<th>Somewhat Uncomfortable (2-3)</th>
<th>Not at All Comfortable (1)</th>
<th>Don’t Know (4)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>In Jewish institutions</td>
<td>58%</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Colleges/other educational settings</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In progressive political settings</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>At work or a professional setting</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In social justice spaces</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In public places</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In conservative political settings</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>26%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>On social media</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>35%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Extremely Comfortable (7) Somewhat Comfortable (5-6) Somewhat Uncomfortable (2-3) Not at All Comfortable (1) Don’t Know (4)
Antisemitism is a serious problem in the Bay Area and not limited to those who identify religiously as Jewish or are communally engaged.

Have personally experienced or directly witnessed antisemitism in past 3 years:
- Yes: 32%
- No/No Response: 68%

Parents (n=193) reported children under 18 have personally experienced or directly witnessed antisemitism in the past 3 years:
- Yes: 24%
- No/No Response: 76%

The most common locations where they reported experiencing antisemitism:
- Public place
- Social media/online
- At school or work (including virtual)
Even higher numbers of survey respondents report experiencing hate or discrimination related to Israel—40%.

This question was designed to further understand experiences with antisemitism that are related to Israel. Too often these incidents are brushed aside as political commentary.

Reflective of this data, the comfort level of respondents sharing their views about Israel is significantly lower than their comfort level identifying as Jewish. 39% of respondent strongly agree they are comfortable sharing Israel views, versus 56% strongly agree they are comfortable sharing their Jewish identity.
Most (64%) agree that people make assumptions about them because they are Jewish, including about their views on Israel (58%). While not an overt measure of antisemitism, it suggests stereotyping—both positive and negative—that could create an environment where antisemitism thrives.

People make certain assumptions about me because I’m Jewish

- 20% Strongly Agree
- 44% Somewhat Agree
- 24% Somewhat Disagree
- 11% Strongly Disagree

People assume I have a particular view about Israel

- 19% Strongly Agree
- 39% Somewhat Agree
- 27% Somewhat Disagree
- 13% Strongly Disagree

The problem with “positive” Jewish stereotypes

Aside from using a broad brush to describe a very diverse community, sometimes positive stereotypes are weaponized. For example, Jews, like the API community, are targets of the “model minority myth.” Why is the Jewish community’s perceived success a problem? One reason is that it can be used to brush aside antisemitism or our community’s needs. According to the myth, as a success story in this country, Jews couldn’t possibly be oppressed and, if they are discriminated against, they can take care of it themselves.
The vast majority of survey participants (89%) agree that Israel has the right to exist as a Jewish and democratic state—a basic marker of Zionism. A smaller majority indicated a personal connection to Israel (59%).

At the same time, a strong majority (65%) are not generally comfortable with Israel’s policies toward the Palestinians.
To further explore views on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, we asked participants about their preferred outcome. A strong majority indicate support for a two-state solution, reflective of JCRC’s views.

A very tiny minority (2%) identified with the anti-Zionist view that the founding of Israel caused an injustice to the Palestinians and the entire country should be given back to the Palestinians.

- There should be two countries, where Israel and Palestine exist as two separate and independent nations: 62%
- There should be a single country for both Jews and Palestinians, recognizing that this could mean there may no longer be an independent Jewish country: 12%
- Current situation should continue, in which Israel exists as a Jewish country and the Palestinian territories on the West Bank and Gaza Strip have their own government with limited authority: 14%
- Creating Israel caused an injustice to Palestinians and the entire country should be given back to the Palestinians: 2%
- Don’t know/Prefer to not respond: 10%
A strong majority of Bay Area Jews (70%) reject the movement to boycott, sanction and divest from Israel (often abbreviated as BDS).

25% support BDS, with only 12% strongly supporting it. While intention can’t be inferred from a survey, it is possible that those who chose “somewhat agree” may support a partial boycott, such as a boycott of products made in West Bank Jewish settlements, versus a boycott of the entirety of Israel.
Conclusion
Key Takeaways

• **Bay Area Jewish identity is far from monolithic and Jews are not simply a faith group.** Religion is only one component of Jewish identity—and not a leading one for most Bay Area Jews. Jews across the Bay Area and the world have a common group identity and shared heritage and JCRC believes that lack of understanding (about these and other important factors of Jewish identity) is a key component of the antisemitism we see today.

• **Jewish identity is important to Bay Area Jews less engaged with the organized community.** Like their more active counterparts, inactive Jews also experience concerning rates of antisemitism.

• **Bay Area Jews experience antisemitism at similar rates to the rest of the U.S.** The Bay Area’s more progressive culture is too often used as an excuse to look elsewhere, yet antisemitism is alive and well in our own back yard. Similarly, it is also unsurprising that many Bay Area Jews experience Israel-based hate and discrimination.

• **Efforts to build a more welcoming Bay Area for Jews must focus on non-Jewish spaces.** Jews are a tiny minority in the U.S. Most of the time, Jews are in spaces where there are few other Jews, and this is often when they feel most vulnerable.

• **Social media is a particularly troubled area for Jewish life.** JCRC must pursue strategies to advance positive and accurate representation of Jewish identity online.

• **Despite loud voices on the political extremes, Bay Area Jews largely support the State of Israel and hold Zionist views**—while also holding concerns about Israeli policies toward Palestinians. JCRC must work to correct misperceptions about Zionism and Israel in ways that encourage Jews to bring their full identities forward, including their relationship Israel.
Next Steps

To address the issues identified in the survey, JCRC should:

Reframe public understanding of Jewish identity in the Bay Area through education, engagement, and advocacy.

- Develop and deliver workshops providing accurate and critical information about Jewish identity and antisemitism.
- Ensure that Jewish identity education is included in DEI work across different sectors: education, corporate, nonprofits, and public institutions.
- Work for inclusion of Jewish identity in K-12 curriculum.

Address problematic stereotypes and misconceptions about Jews, Jewish identity, and Israel.

- Educate about Zionism through a Jewish identity lens, while disconnecting preconceived notions of Zionism from one’s policy preferences around Israel.

Work to make non-Jewish spaces more accepting and comfortable for Jews to express their Jewish identity.

- Develop creative projects to address antisemitism on social media and amplify positive and diverse Jewish identity, including using JCRC’s Here I Am platform.
Endnotes


2. Asked of everyone: What is your present religion, if any? Asked of those whose present religion is not Jewish/Judaism: Aside from religion, do you identify as Jewish in any way, either ethnically, culturally, or because of your family’s background?

3. Typically, about how often do you attend or participate in any Jewish services, events, activities, or programming, either in-person or online?

4. Question asked: “Thinking about local Bay Area politics, do you generally consider yourself a progressive, liberal, moderate or a conservative?”

5. Question asked: “Thinking about what has shaped your Jewish identity, how significant are each of the following using a scale of 1-7, where 1 means not all significant and 7 means extremely significant.”

6. https://jewishfed.org/sites/default/files/An_Integrative_Report_from_the_Bay_Area_Jewish_Community_Study.pdf

7. Question asked: *Please tell me how comfortable you feel expressing your Jewish identity in the following situations using a scale of 1 to 7, where 1 means not at all comfortable and 7 means extremely comfortable."

8. Question asked: *Please tell me how comfortable you feel expressing your Jewish identity in the following situations using a scale of 1 to 7, where 1 means not at all comfortable and 7 means extremely comfortable."

9. JCRC defines Zionism as “the right of Jewish to self-determination and sovereignty in their ancient homeland of Israel. This aspiration was realized with the establishment of the modern Jewish and democratic State of Israel.” pg. 3 from https://jcrc.org/uploads/Delegitimization_of_Israel_2018.pdf.

For more information and detailed results, please visit JCRC’s website: jcrc.org
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