

what's *next*  
for **Jewish**   
 palm beach

Executive Summary

**Jewish**  
**Community**Study



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Established in 2005 and housed at the Cohen Center for Modern Jewish Studies, the Steinhardt Social Research Institute (SSRI) uses innovative research methods to collect and analyze sociodemographic data on the Jewish community.

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.

# Executive Summary

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The Jewish Federation of Palm Beach County initiated a Jewish community study to inform the strategy and work of Jewish institutions, philanthropists, and programmatic innovators throughout the Greater Palm Beaches. The study was conducted by the Cohen Center for Modern Jewish Studies (CMJS) and the Steinhardt Social Research Institute (SSRI) at Brandeis University using innovative state-of-the-art methods to develop a comprehensive portrait of the characteristics, attitudes, and behaviors of members of the Greater Palm Beaches Jewish community.

The Pew Research Center's 2013 study, *A Portrait of Jewish Americans*, galvanized discussions in the US Jewish community on a host of topics. These included growing and shrinking population segments, declining affiliation in traditional institutions as well as new forms of Jewish engagement, the rise of both secular and Orthodox Jews, and the impact of intermarriage on community growth. With the Pew study and the related national discourse as a backdrop, the 2018 Greater Palm Beaches Jewish Community Study seeks to describe current community dynamics.

The principal goal of this study is to provide valid data about the Greater Palm Beaches' 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 seeks to:

- Estimate the number of Jewish adults and children in the community and the number of non-Jewish adults and children who are part of those households.
- Describe the community in terms of age and gender, geographic distribution, economic well-being, and other sociodemographic characteristics.
- Measure participation in and attitudes toward community institutions, programs, and services.

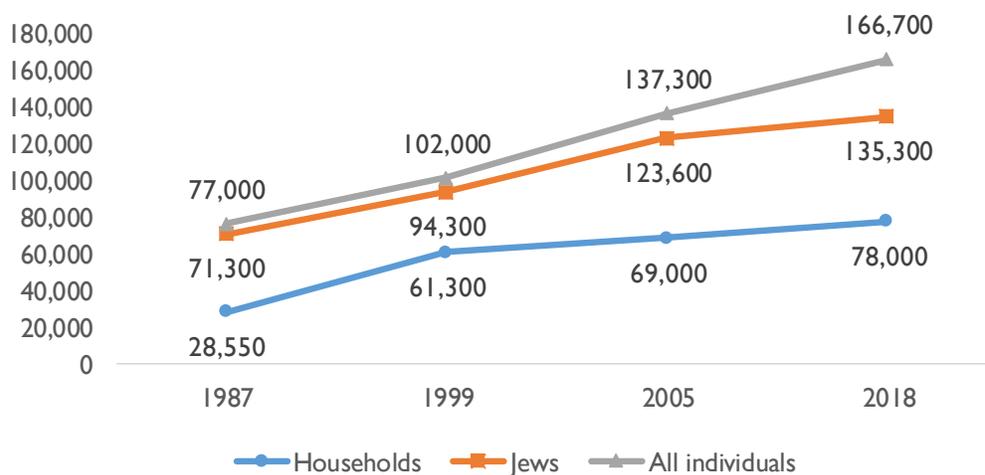
- Understand the multifaceted cultural, communal, and religious expressions of Judaism that constitute Jewish engagement.
- Assess attitudes toward Israel and Judaism.

## Demographics

The Jewish community of the Greater Palm Beaches has experienced strong growth in the past decade. Consistent with this trend, the largest increase has been among the Jewish households with children; the total number of Jewish children more than doubled since 2005. At the same time, intermarried families make up the largest and fastest growing segment of all families, adding 16,000 non-Jewish adults (primarily non-Jewish spouses) in Jewish households to the community.

- As of 2018, the Greater Palm Beaches' Jewish community numbers approximately 166,700 people living in 78,000 Jewish households. This total includes 118,500 Jewish adults and 16,700 Jewish children, as well as 26,000 non-Jewish adults and 5,500 non-Jewish children.
- From 2005 to 2018, the number of individuals living in Jewish households increased by about 21%, and the number of households increased by 13%. During the same period, the number of Jewish individuals increased by 9%.
- In 2018, 30% of Greater Palm Beaches Jewish adults are younger than age 50, and 49% are age 65 or older. In 2005, 16% of Jewish adults were younger than 50 and 67% were age 65 or older. The median age of all Greater Palm Beaches Jewish adults and children is 60, a decrease of 10 years since 2005.

Figure ES.1: Growth over time in Jewish community size



## Geography

Geographically, the Jewish community is widely dispersed across Palm Beach and Martin Counties. This geographic distribution should serve as a guide for planning programs and activities that will be convenient and accessible for the populations they are designed to attract.

- The South region, which includes the Boynton Beach vicinity and Lake Worth Road Corridor, continues to be the largest and most densely populated, including almost half (46%) of Jewish households.
- The North region, which includes the Palm Beach Gardens and Jupiter communities between Northlake Boulevard and Indiantown Road, is less dense and includes 27% of Jewish households.
- The Central region, which includes the island of Palm Beach and the West Palm Beach Okeechobee corridor population, includes 17% of Jewish households.
- The West region, which includes Wellington and Royal Palm Beach, remains relatively small with only 5% of Jewish households. These households are concentrated in Wellington.
- Martin County includes 5% of Jewish households distributed throughout the county.
- The seasonal population of the Greater Palm Beaches (those living in the area for four to nine months) includes 16,300 Jewish households, 28,100 Jewish adults, and 1,500 non-Jewish adults. Seasonal residents constitute 21% of the Jewish households and 24% of the adult Jewish population.

## Jewish Engagement

The vast majority of Jewish adults in the community are engaged in some aspect of Jewish life, whether that be donating to Jewish organizations, attending a Passover seder, following news about Israel, or discussing Jewish topics with family and friends. How these expressions of Jewish life manifest themselves in different households, however, vary widely across the community. The share of Jewish adults who are Orthodox is 3%, less than the national average (10%). The share who are Conservative is 30%, far exceeding the national average of 18%. Thirty-six percent of Jewish adults are Reform, similar to the national average. Twenty-nine percent of Jewish adults have no specific denomination.

- The intermarriage rate (the proportion of married Jewish adults with a non-Jewish spouse) is 27%, approximately half the national intermarriage rate of 56%. Despite this relatively low number, the intermarriage rate has increased from 9% in 2005 to 27% in 2018. Among young Jewish adults under age 35 who are already married, 77% are intermarried.
- Over four-in-five (82%) Jewish adults consider Judaism to be part of their daily lives, and one third consider it to be very much part of their daily lives.

- Jewish engagement can be classified into five groups based on patterns of Jewish behavior, including celebration of Jewish holidays, ritual practices, communal participation, and personal behavior. Figure ES.2 summarizes the five groups. While one fifth (22%) of Jewish adults are immersed in all aspects of Jewish life, 16% are only minimally involved. These groups serve as a lens for understanding Jewish engagement patterns and can inform the development of programs that are meaningful and relevant to different segments of the community.

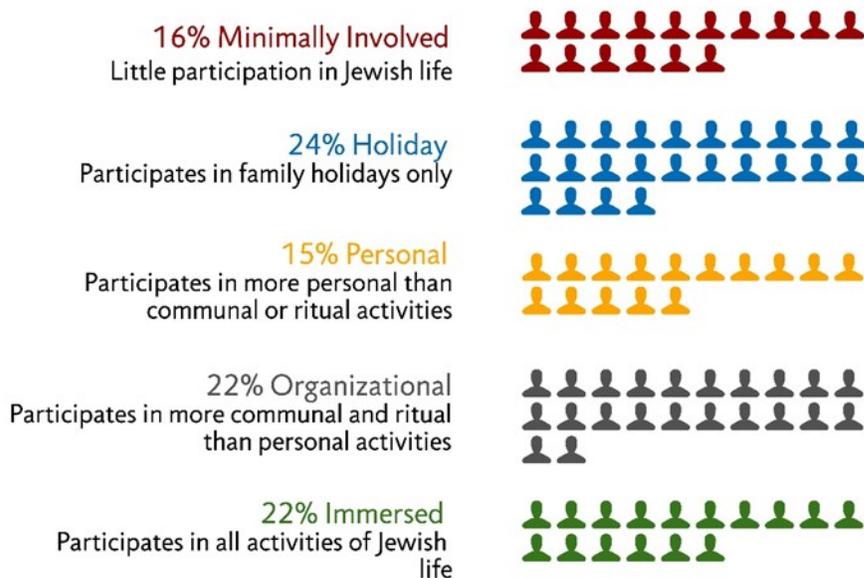
### Children and Jewish Education

Only a small share of children in Jewish households are being raised by two Jewish parents (15%), while over half of children (56%) are being raised by intermarried parents and the remainder by single parents. Although all inmarried parents are raising their children Jewish, only 51% of children of intermarried parents are being raised Jewish.

One quarter of intermarried parents have not yet decided how to raise their children in terms of religion. Appealing Jewish educational and family programs might interest some of those parents and encourage them to consider a Jewish path for their children.

Only a minority of Jewish children are enrolled in any form of Jewish education, including Jewish preschool, formal, and informal education. Efforts to increase participation in Jewish

Figure ES.2: Jewish engagement groups



education may create opportunities to engage families and lay the foundation for increased Jewish involvement in the years ahead.

- Among the 22,200 children who live in Jewish households, 16,700 children (74% of all children) are being raised Jewish in some way, either religiously, secularly or culturally, or as Jewish and another religion. Among the remaining children, 2,000 are being raised in another religion, and 700 are being raised with no religion. Children being raised by parents who have not decided on religious preferences for their children number 2,800.
- More than one third (37%) of Jewish children are age five or under, 31% are between ages six to 12, and 32% are teenagers ages 13 to 17.
- Among preschool-age Jewish children, 7% were enrolled in a Jewish preschool program. Among Jewish children in grades K-12, 11% were enrolled in day schools or part-time schools during the 2017-18 academic year.
- For informal Jewish education, including tutoring, youth group, and camp, 30% of Jewish K-12 children participated at least once in the past five years.

### Synagogue and Jewish Ritual

The rate of synagogue membership among Jewish households in the Greater Palm Beaches is relatively low. Synagogue interest and participation, however, far exceed synagogue membership.

- Twenty-eight percent of households include someone who belongs to a synagogue or another Jewish worship community of some type, either in the Greater Palm Beaches or elsewhere.
- Half (52%) of seasonal resident households belong to synagogues, but only 9% belong to a Greater Palm Beaches synagogue.
- Fifteen percent of households belong to at least one congregation in the Greater Palm Beaches. Eight percent of households are dues-paying members of brick-and-mortar synagogues in the Greater Palm Beaches. Seven percent of Jewish households belong to Chabad or independent minyans.
- More than two-in-three (68%) Jewish adults attended services at least once in the past year, and 18% attended a service monthly or more. Half of Jewish adults (50%) attended a High Holy Day service.
- Last year, 83% of Jewish adults attended a Passover seder, and 80% of Jewish adults lit Hanukkah candles.

### Jewish Organizational Life

Jewish adults in the Greater Palm Beaches attend a wide range of social, cultural, and educational events and are strong supporters of Jewish philanthropy.

- Eighty-five percent of Jewish adults report making a charitable contribution in the past year. Almost two-in-three households (64%) gave to at least one Jewish organization locally, nationally, or globally. More than one third (37%) of Jewish adults gave to organizations that primarily serve the Jewish community of the Greater Palm Beaches.
- Fifteen percent of Jewish households affiliate with the Mandel Jewish Community Center. About one quarter (26%) of households belong to at least one local Jewish organization other than a synagogue or JCC.
- Thirty-nine percent of Jewish adults attended at least one class or lecture on a Jewish topic in the past year, and 10% attended monthly or more.
- Thirty-seven percent of Jewish adults engaged in some volunteer activity in the past month. Twenty-eight percent of Jewish adults volunteered for a non-Jewish organization in the past month, and 18% volunteered for a Jewish organization.

### Jewish Personal life

Outside of formal Jewish organizations, there are many personal connections to Jewish life in the Greater Palm Beaches. Nearly all Jewish adults have Jewish friends, and 69% say that at least half of their close friends are Jewish.

- Three-in-four (76%) Jewish adults indicate that they discussed a Jewish topic in the past month, and 73% ate Jewish foods in the past month.
- About half of the Jewish community (49%) searched for Jewish information online in the past month and 45% of the Jewish community partook of Jewish-focused cultural activities, such as books, music, museums, or TV programs.
- Nine percent of Jewish households belong to an informal or grassroots group, such as a Jewish book club.

### Connections to Israel

The majority of Greater Palm Beaches Jewish adults have been to Israel at least once, and emotional connections to Israel are strong among community members. One indicator of this relationship is the close attention members of the community pay to news about Israel.

- Sixty percent of Jewish adults have been to Israel at least once. This portion includes 25% of Jewish adults who have been to Israel only once, 31% who have visited more than once, and 4% who have lived in Israel at some point.
- Eighty-eight percent of Jewish adults feel at least somewhat connected to Israel, and 42% feel very connected.

- Twenty-two percent of Jewish adults have traveled with a Jewish organization on a mission or other sponsored trip to Israel. Adults who have traveled to Israel on an educational or volunteer program represent 15% of the population. Among those under age 47 (who are young enough to have participated), 16% have gone on a Birthright Israel trip.
- Seventy percent sought out news about Israel at least once in the previous month, and 44% sought news about Israel weekly or more frequently.
- When it comes to volunteering and philanthropy, 38% of Jewish adults consider Israel to be a very important cause, and 22% of Jewish adults make donations to Israel-based organizations.

### Financial Well-Being

Although 41% of the Jewish community considers itself to be prosperous or living very comfortably, 20% of the community describe themselves as just getting along, nearly poor, or poor. Households may be considered economically vulnerable if they have insufficient savings to cover emergencies, receive a public benefit, or have experienced an economic hardship. For some families, economic insecurity is a barrier to participation in Jewish life.

- Overall, 8% of households describes themselves as “prosperous,” and one third (33%) indicate they are “living very comfortably.”
- Those who say they are “living reasonably comfortably” make up 38% of Jewish households. Fifteen percent of Jewish households say they are “just getting along,” a possible indication of economic vulnerability.
- Four percent of Jewish adults say they are “nearly poor,” and 1% consider themselves “poor.”
- Forty percent of Jewish adults in the community are currently working full-time (27%) or part-time (13%). Forty-five percent of the population is retired. The remaining 15% of the population are stay-at-home parents, unemployed, on temporary leave, or studying for a degree. Thirteen percent of Jewish adults, including some already with jobs, are looking for work.
- One-in-four Jewish households (26%) lack the funds to cover three months of expenses if they faced an unexpected loss of income, and 4% missed a rent or mortgage payment in the last year because they could not afford it.
- Overall, 15% of households receive some form of public benefit. Twenty-three percent of households report encountering an economic hardship.
- Nine percent of households have financial situations that limit their participation in Jewish life due to the price of synagogue dues, High Holiday tickets, programs, and Jewish education.

## Health Status

Nearly one third of Jewish households include someone whose activities are limited by a chronic health issue, disability, or special need. While the Jewish community is providing services to many households, there are some remaining unmet needs. One consequence of these health conditions is that some households are unable to fully participate in Jewish life.

- Among Jewish households, 29% include someone whose activity is limited by a health condition.
- Eight percent of households report they are in need of services that they are not receiving. Unmet needs are slightly higher among younger families, suggesting that services to respond to children's health needs may be lacking.
- Thirteen percent of households include someone whose participation in Jewish life is limited by a health condition.