

PERSPECTIVES ON THE ORANGE COUNTY JEWISH COMMUNITY

Insights from the Orange County Jewish Demographic Study »



Samueli
FOUNDATION

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**93,500
Stories.**
**One
Community.**



Overview

Foreword

On Behalf of the Samueli Foundation

Henry and Susan Samueli moved to Orange County in 1995, delighted to set down deep roots for their young family. They immediately sought to make connections in the Jewish community, carrying on the traditions they were both raised with.

As the Samuelis' financial resources grew, they found themselves in the most fortunate position to engage in *tzedakah* at scale, funding multiple projects and organizations that serve the local Jewish community. These projects have ranged from the small to the very large, including purchasing and then donating the land that would become the site of the Merage Jewish Community Center of Orange County, and purchasing the building that would become the only congregation in South County, Temple Beth El. In total, the Samuelis have donated approximately \$87M to support Orange County Jewish Life.

It has been, and remains, one of Henry and Susan's greatest priorities to ensure that Orange County can have a thriving, safe, joyful, and enduring Jewish community for generations to come. We

at the Samueli Foundation are humbled by their trust to carry out this mission.

The Samueli Foundation is not a "Jewish organization" per se, but we are deeply committed to funding the future of Jewish life in Orange County as part of our overall vision of well-being for all. We approach our work from a place of values, but as a philanthropic capital allocator, it is essential that we make our investments from a place of values *plus* evidence. This requires guarding against making decisions from or being overly influenced by cultural lore, past practices, or squeaky wheels.

Our funding must evolve in lockstep with community need—as expressed by the community itself. So, we went out into the community looking for the data we would need to make our next set of transformative investments in support of local thriving Jewish life.

In conversations with Jewish communal and lay leaders in Orange County, a common theme emerged: While everyone is interested in working to protect and strengthen Jewish life in

the County, no one had strong, accurate data to use about the size, characteristics, locations, or current needs of the Jewish community. A community built off intuition alone risks misplacing its finite resources (both time and money), all the while missing opportunities to invest in efforts that would mean the most to the community as it exists today.

For nearly a century,¹ Jewish communities across America—finding themselves in the same place—have undertaken formal demographic studies to create this data set. Orange County has never had the benefit of such a research effort, depriving the community—and particularly the organizations that serve the community—of vital information that allows for more strategic decision-making, responsive resource allocation, creative program development, and cross-

organization collaboration.

We decided to remedy this absence of data by engaging The Cohen Center for Modern Jewish Studies (CMJS) at Brandeis University to

conduct a study of the Orange County Jewish community, in partnership with NORC at the University of Chicago, an innovative independent research organization. CMJS is a renowned research institute dedicated to the study of American Jewish life and religious and cultural identity. Over the past decade, CMJS has worked with more than thirty Jewish communities like ours to develop local community studies, using its cutting-edge methodology to illustrate the characteristics, attitudes, and behaviors unique to each place.

(You can read more about their approach at brandeis.edu/cmjs/community-studies/.)

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OUR GOALS FOR SUPPORTING THIS RESEARCH WERE:

- Give the widest set of Orange County Jewish community members an opportunity to reflect on their needs, practices, and opinions on existing Jewish community resources and the issues that most impact their lives
- Provide the entire community, and those who support it, with evidence driven by the community itself. This in turn would ensure all Orange County Jewish service and religious organizations are operating from the same, data-driven, actionable understanding of our entire community
- Demonstrate a new model for community collaboration by working in broad partnership across Orange County Jewish organizations
- Inform our future giving in response to community-driven insight
- Give the community knowledge and tools to proactively design its future

Phase One Survey Design & Administration

Jewish demographic studies are typically driven by the local Jewish Federation, or a group of Jewish organizations. We appreciate that it is unusual for a private family foundation to undertake this type of project on behalf of its community. In complete candor, we had no idea how much work we were signing up for—but we felt it was a responsibility we could not shy away from.

It turns out that private foundations are well-positioned in many ways to be natural partners for doing this type of work. We are neutral, in the sense that we have no agenda other than helping the Jewish community be the best version of itself it can possibly be.

We have the capital and ambition to undertake a demanding project like this. We can be creative in how we design an inclusive process—such as giving participation grants to local Jewish partner organizations who helped us. And most importantly, we can go about a project like this with a sense of urgency, unencumbered by politics or governance structures that can slow efforts down. Our independence allows us to call out things that warrant the community's collective attention. We are here to surface facts, not take sides.

Our first step was to convene a Steering Committee—composed of Scott Braswell, then-CEO of Merage JCC; Tamy Cohen, Executive Director of OC Hillel; Rabbi David Eliezrie, of Congregation Beit Meir Ha'Cohen; Erik Ludwig, then-CEO and President of Jewish Federation of Orange County; Lindsey Spindle, President of the Samueli Family Philanthropies; and Rabbi Rick Steinberg, of Congregation Shir-Ha-Ma'alot—who worked with the Samueli Foundation and the research team to shape the survey. The majority of questions were taken from other Jewish community surveys,

allowing data to be compared across communities; several new sections were developed for the specific needs of the Orange County study.

We are deeply grateful to the **31** Orange County Jewish organizations that partnered with us to launch the study and the more than **1,300** members of our community that participated in the study between November 2024 and March 2025. We appreciate the time and care you took to complete the survey—sharing openly about your experiences and hopes for the Jewish community. None of this would be possible without you.

This research represents an important milestone for and investment in the Orange County Jewish community. It reflects broad participation, unprecedented collaboration, and a collective commitment to learning and growth. We are excited to share the results and are hopeful that they will be used not as an endpoint but as a catalyst for thoughtful dialogue, strategic action, and continued partnership—an enduring asset that will strengthen Jewish life in Orange County for the decade ahead.

This research reflects broad participation, unprecedented collaboration, and a collective commitment to learning and growth.



A FEW NOTES ON HOW TO READ THIS REPORT

The findings presented here draw on both quantitative and qualitative survey responses.* We've integrated them to offer a more complete and nuanced understanding of the community, but please note that the qualitative insights do not carry the same statistical significance as the quantitative results do.

All percentages in this report are rounded to the nearest whole number. As a result, totals in some tables and figures may not equal exactly 100 percent.

Throughout the report, we reference different population groups. Readers should note the population being referenced when interpreting each statistic. In each data chart, we will indicate the reference population in italicized text beneath the title:

- "OC Jewish households": OC households with at least one Jewish member
- "OC Jewish adults": OC individuals ages 18+ who identify as Jewish
- "Younger OC adults": OC individuals ages 22–44
- "U.S. Jewish population": data on the national Jewish population
- "OC general population": data on the OC general population, including but not specific to the Jewish population

* The following two open-response questions were asked at the end of the survey: "What are the strengths and gaps of the Orange County Jewish community?" & "What should be the priorities of the Orange County Jewish community?" In addition, some questions had open-response options when an "Other" category was indicated.

Phase Two Report Goals & Approach

Since the study closed, we have been hard at work analyzing the data we collected. That has resulted in two complementary reports capturing our learnings. One, authored by the research team at the CMJS at Brandeis University, provides a comprehensive, detailed presentation of the methodology, data, and key findings (*You can find it at OCJewishStudy.org*). The other—this report—was developed by our team at the Samueli Foundation in partnership with the Bridgespan Group. It is intended to offer a more thematic analysis focused on synthesis, interpretation, and potential application of the study's findings. (*Note: Some findings appear in this report but not in the Brandeis report, and vice versa. However, both draw on the same study results*).

In this report, our goal is not simply to present the data, but to help the community make sense of it. Organized around key themes, the report weaves findings together and, where possible and helpful, situates them in context and comparisons to other communities. We intentionally focused on areas of alignment across our diverse community and opportunities for action.

Throughout, we ask not only *what* the data tell us, but *so what*—and, ultimately, *now what*. We hope to use this to build toward an **understanding agenda** and an **action agenda**: a shared grasp of what we know about our community today and a clearer sense of how that knowledge might inform planning, programming, learning, and collaboration.

This report is divided into four sections. What you are reading now—the **Overview**—is a good place to begin. After outlining the study’s guiding principles and methodology, it presents an infographic previewing the key demographics of the Orange County Jewish community, including its size and composition across key dimensions such as age and family structure. Readers are then invited to engage more deeply with the topic-specific sections to which they feel most drawn, including:



Daily Life, which explores the financial circumstances, health and well-being, and patterns of residents in Orange County



Jewish Life, which dives into personal Jewish identity and connection, ritual practices, and institutional engagement



Hot Topics, which addresses perspectives on politics, antisemitism, and Israel

Each section is designed to stand on its own and also to be read together—in certain places, we have repeated data or referenced other sections for clarity.

But this study—and these reports—are just the beginning. We see them as a **starting point** for ongoing learning, conversation, and collaboration across the Orange County Jewish community. We invite readers to explore the data, consider how it reflects the experiences of you and your neighbors, and imagine how these findings could apply to Orange County’s organizations, programs, and community. We hope that shared insights can help facilitate shared priorities and spur individual and collective action in support of our community. We look forward to partnering to forge a stronger, safer, and vibrant Jewish community for years to come.

Lindsey Spindle

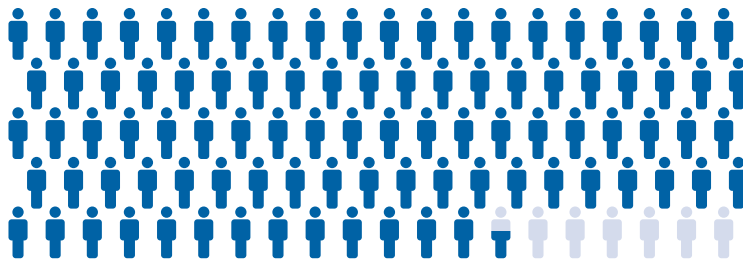
President, Samueli Family Philanthropies

**This study—
and these
reports—are
a starting
point for
ongoing
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and
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across the
Orange
County Jewish
community.**

Orange County Jewish Demographics at a Glance

Size


= 1,000



There are approximately 93,500 Jewish individuals and 56,600 Jewish households in Orange County.

The Orange County Jewish community is home to approximately 56,600 households. These households include over 124,000 individuals, of whom 93,500 are Jewish. The Jewish population comprises 3% of the total Orange County population, and Jewish households make up 5% of all households of Orange County.

Gender



Race, ethnicity, and history

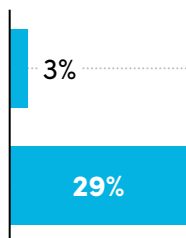
Twelve percent of Jewish adults in OC identify with a racial identity other than white or as Hispanic.

Racial diversity is higher among OC Jewish children: 42% of Jewish children are identified as a racial identity other than white or as Hispanic by their parents, which suggests that racial diversity among the community may increase in the future.

Fifteen percent of OC Jewish adults identify as Israeli American, 15% identify as Russian-speaking, and 7% identify as Latin American.

3% of OC Jewish adults are Holocaust survivors or World War II refugees.

29% are descendants of a Holocaust victim, survivor, or World War II refugee.

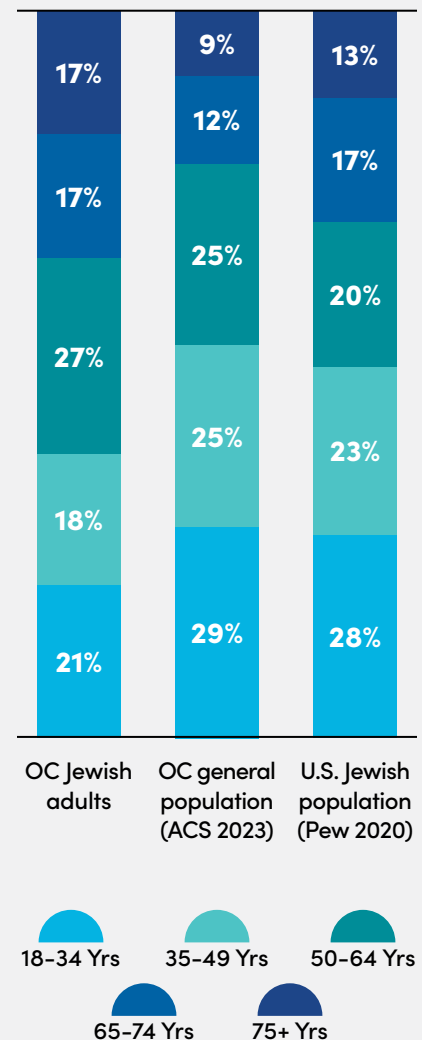


Age



The OC Jewish community skews older than the general OC and the U.S. Jewish populations as a whole.

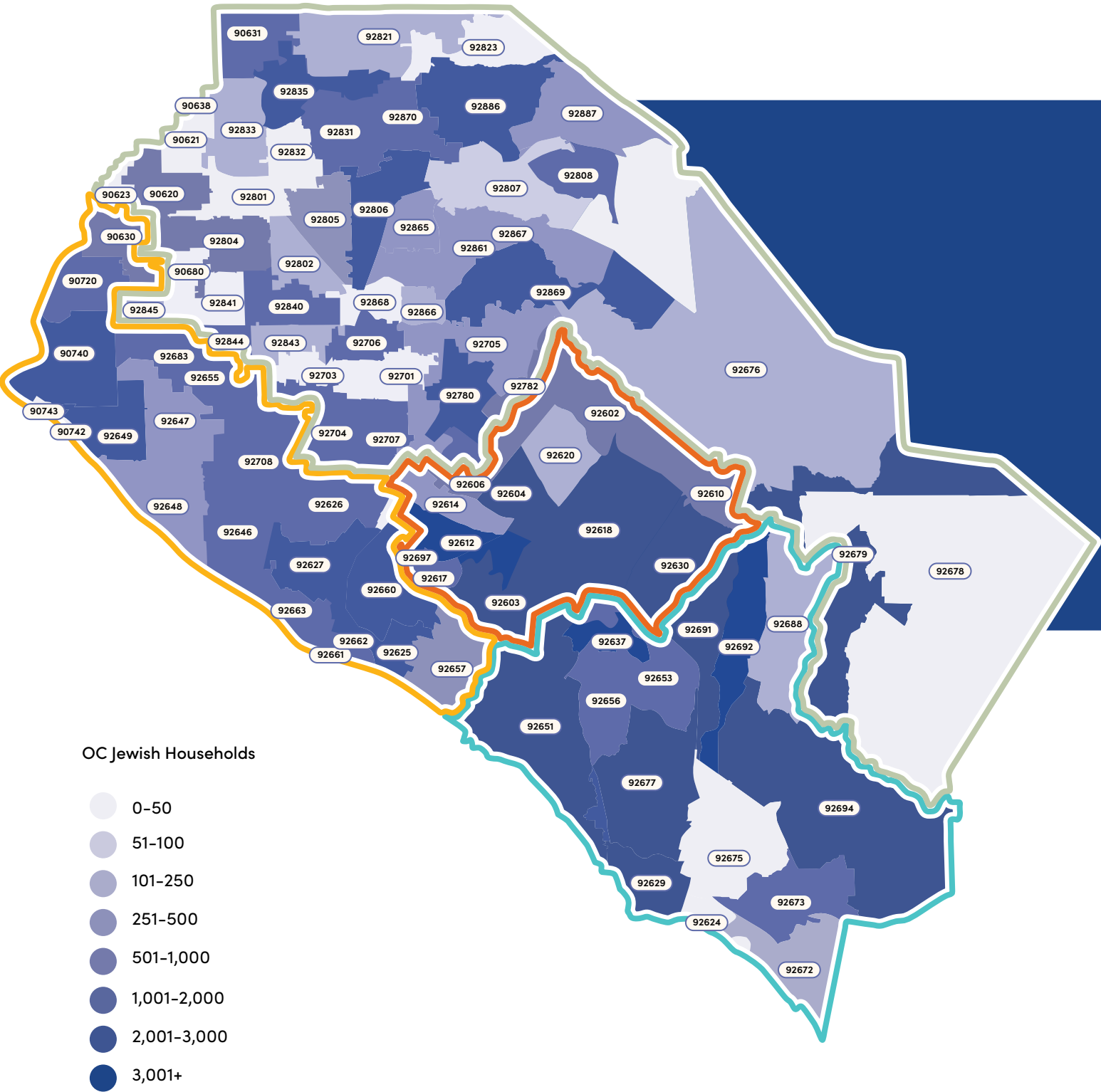
The OC Jewish community has a larger share of seniors than the County overall: While 9% of all OC adults are ages 75+, 17% of all Jewish adults are 75+. Only 39% of Jewish adults in OC are under age 50—compared to 54% of Orange County and 51% of U.S. Jewish adults.



Geography

Note: Geographic analyses in this study are based on ZIP code of residence.

For the purposes of this study, Orange County can be divided into four geographic regions:



While there are members of the Jewish community living in each of these regions, the number of Jewish households are not evenly distributed across them.

Nearly half (47%) of all Orange County households are located in the Central/North Orange County region, but just over one-third (34%) of Jewish households reside there. By contrast, the South Orange County region is home to one-quarter of Jewish households, despite accounting for only 17% of all Orange County households, and Irvine is home to nearly one-fifth of Jewish households, despite accounting for only 13% of all OC households.



1. The Central/North Orange County region (Inland)



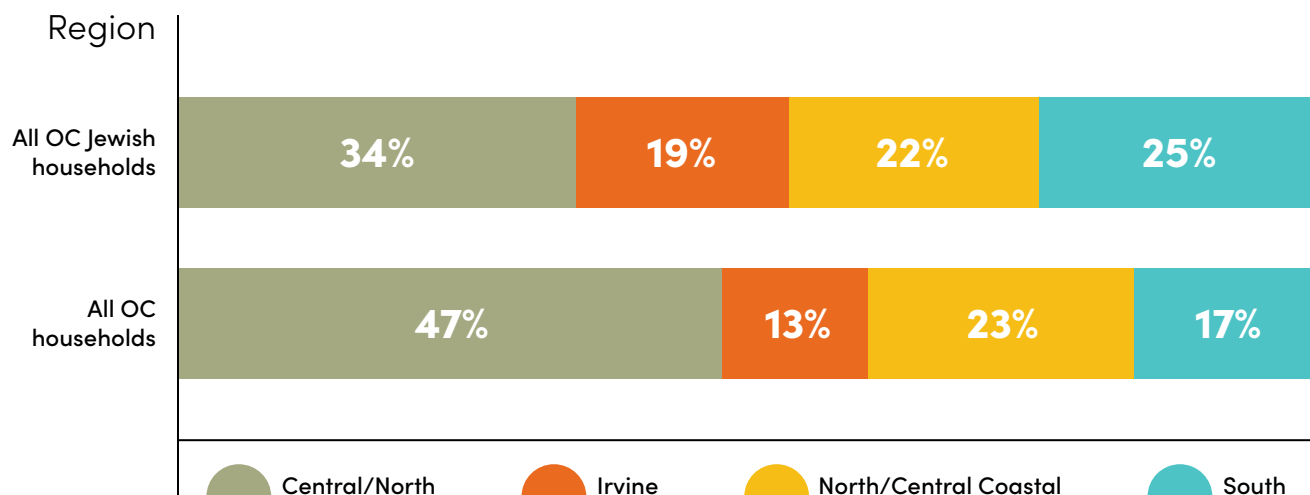
2. The North/Central Coastal Orange County region (stretching from Seal Beach to Newport Beach)



3. The Irvine region (including the City of Irvine and neighboring Lake Forest)



4. The South Orange County region (from Laguna Beach, Laguna Woods, and Mission Viejo to San Clemente)

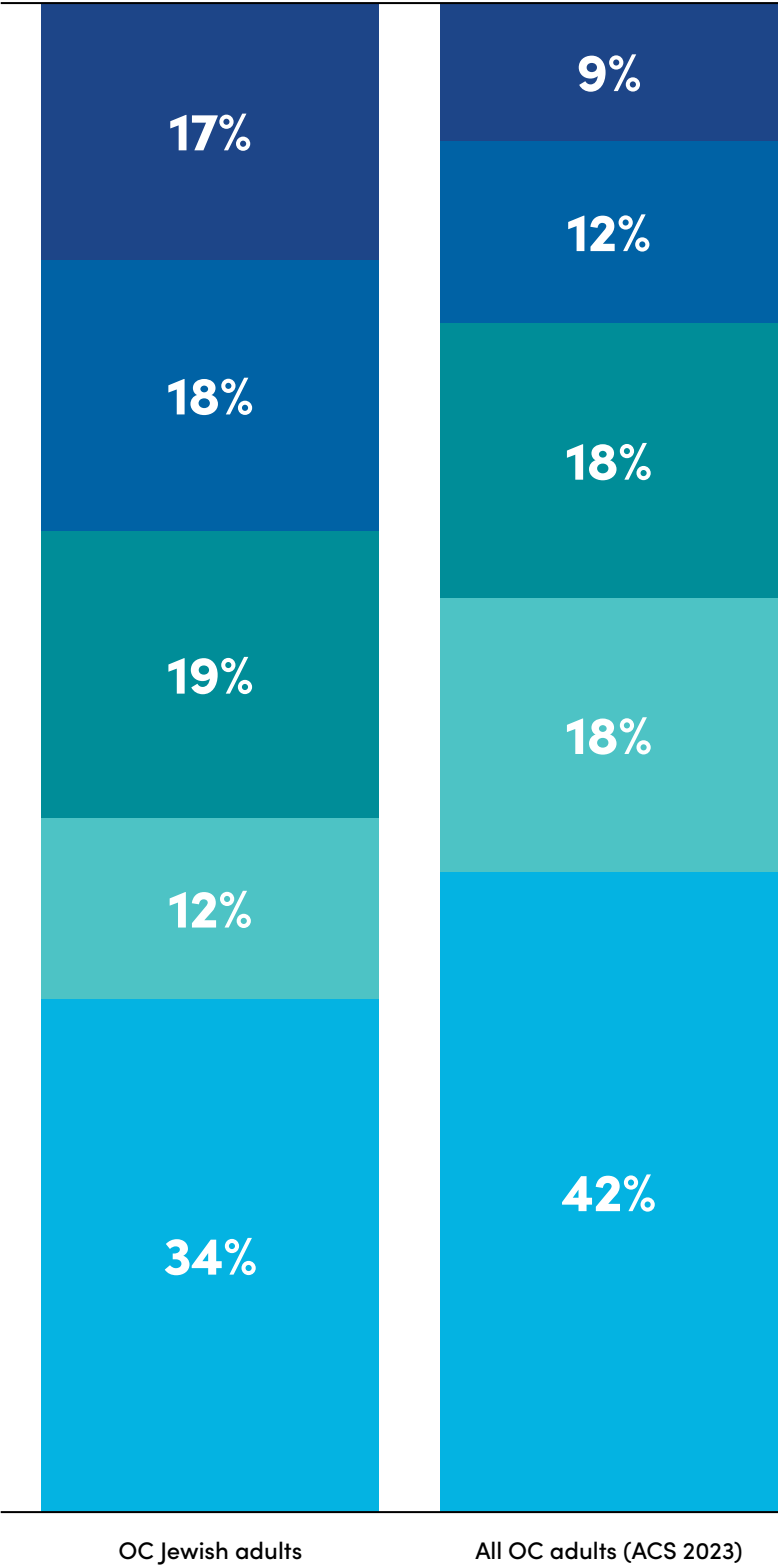


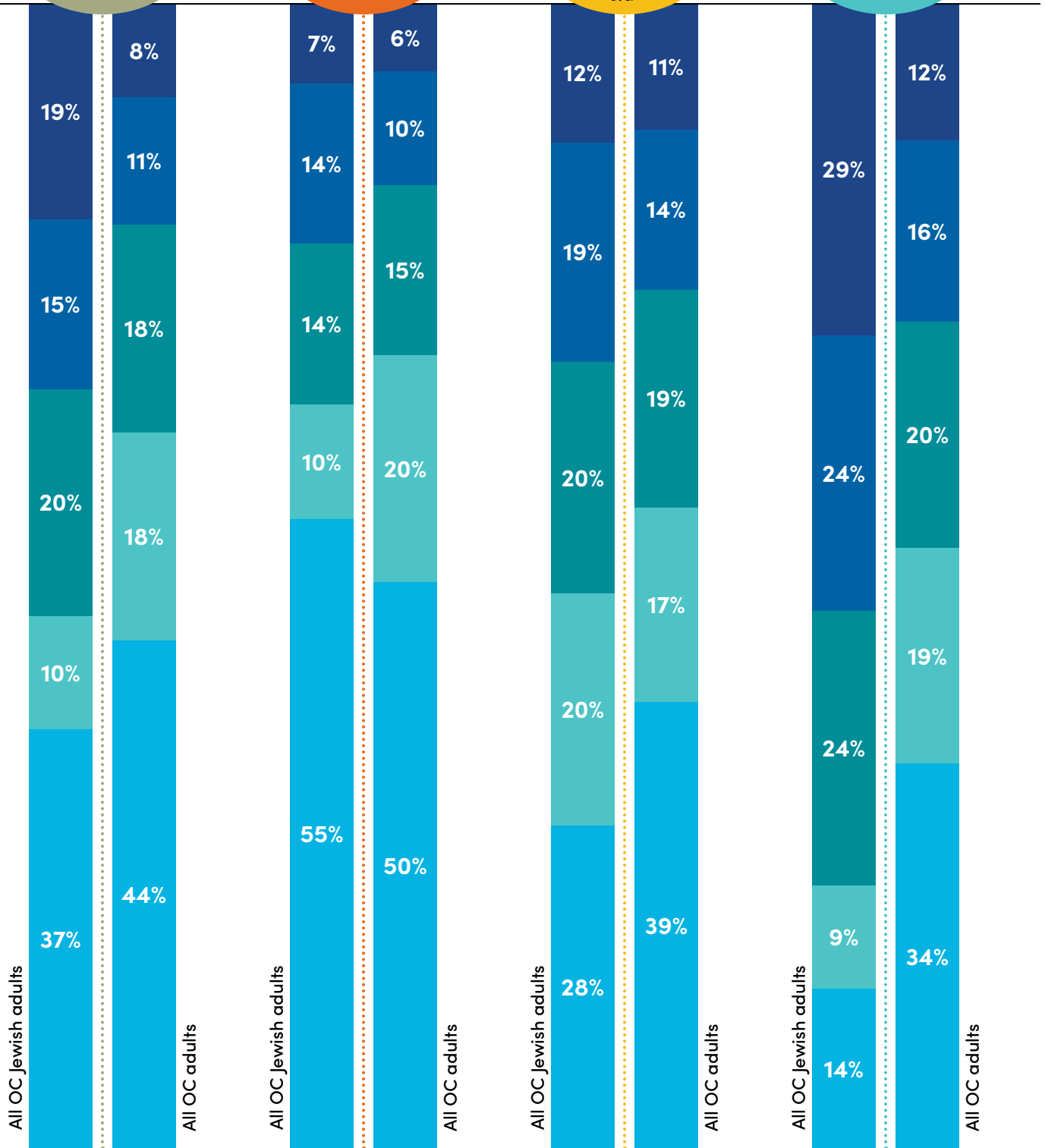
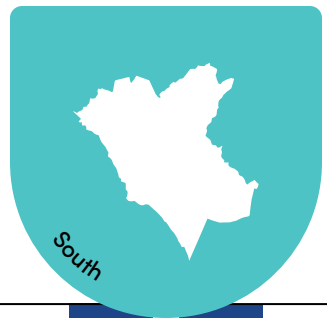
There are also some key demographic differences across the regions:
The Central/North Orange County and Irvine regions are younger than the North/Central Coastal Orange County and South Orange County regions.
These differences are true, to a lesser extent, for the OC general population as well.



These regional patterns provide important context for understanding how Jewish life is experienced across Orange County—and for considering where community resources, programs, and services may be most needed or most effectively expanded.

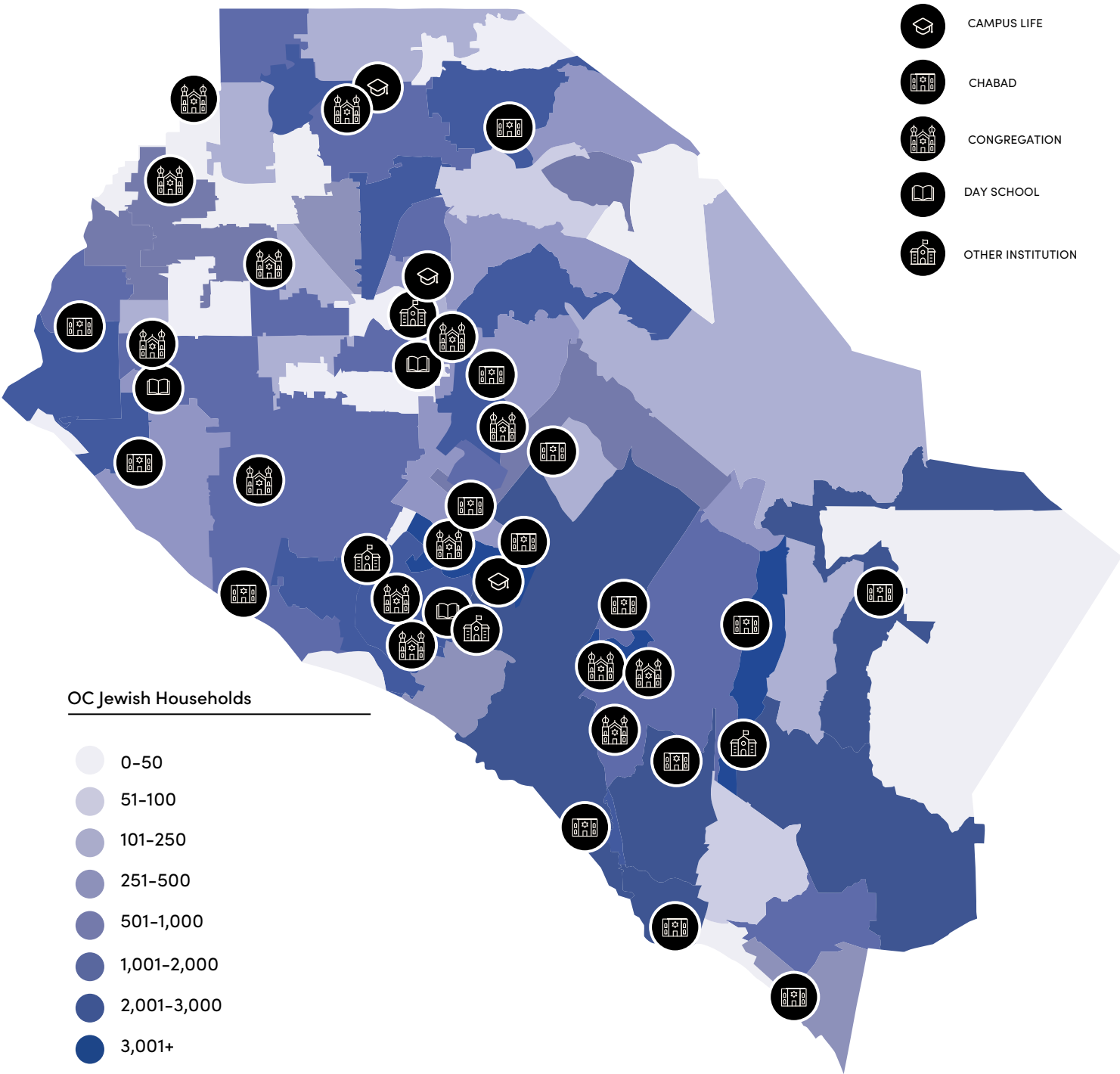
Region by age





Some Jewish households live in areas with ready access to existing Jewish institutions...

Together, the five ZIP Codes with the largest Jewish household representation (92604 and 92612 - Irvine, 92625 - Corona Del Mar, 92637 - Laguna Woods, and 92692 - Mission Viejo) account for roughly one-fifth of all Jewish households in Orange County. Nearly half of the county's ~50 religious and/or communal brick-and-mortar Jewish institutions are located either within these areas or in immediately adjacent ZIP codes.

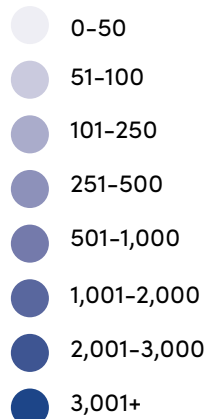


... but the data also point to parts of Orange County where Jewish presence is meaningful but local infrastructure is limited.

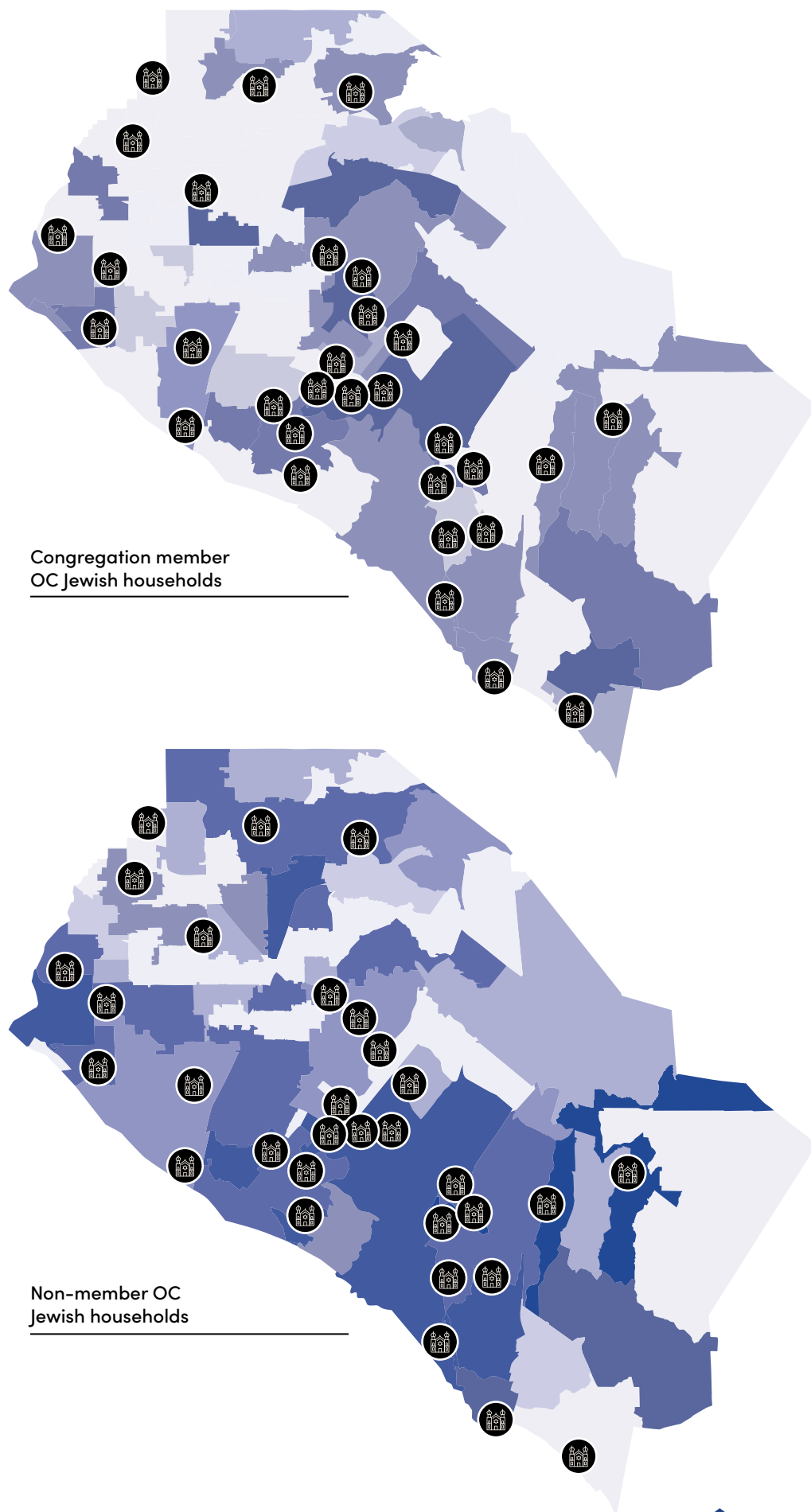
Several areas—including San Clemente, Dana Point, Coto de Caza, and Yorba Linda—have substantial Jewish populations, yet communal institutions are relatively sparse.

In or near other areas—including Seal Beach, La Habra, Fullerton, and Newport Beach—congregations exist but a comparatively small share of local Jewish households belong to a congregation, suggesting that geographic proximity alone does not ensure engagement.

OC Jewish Households



CONGREGATION

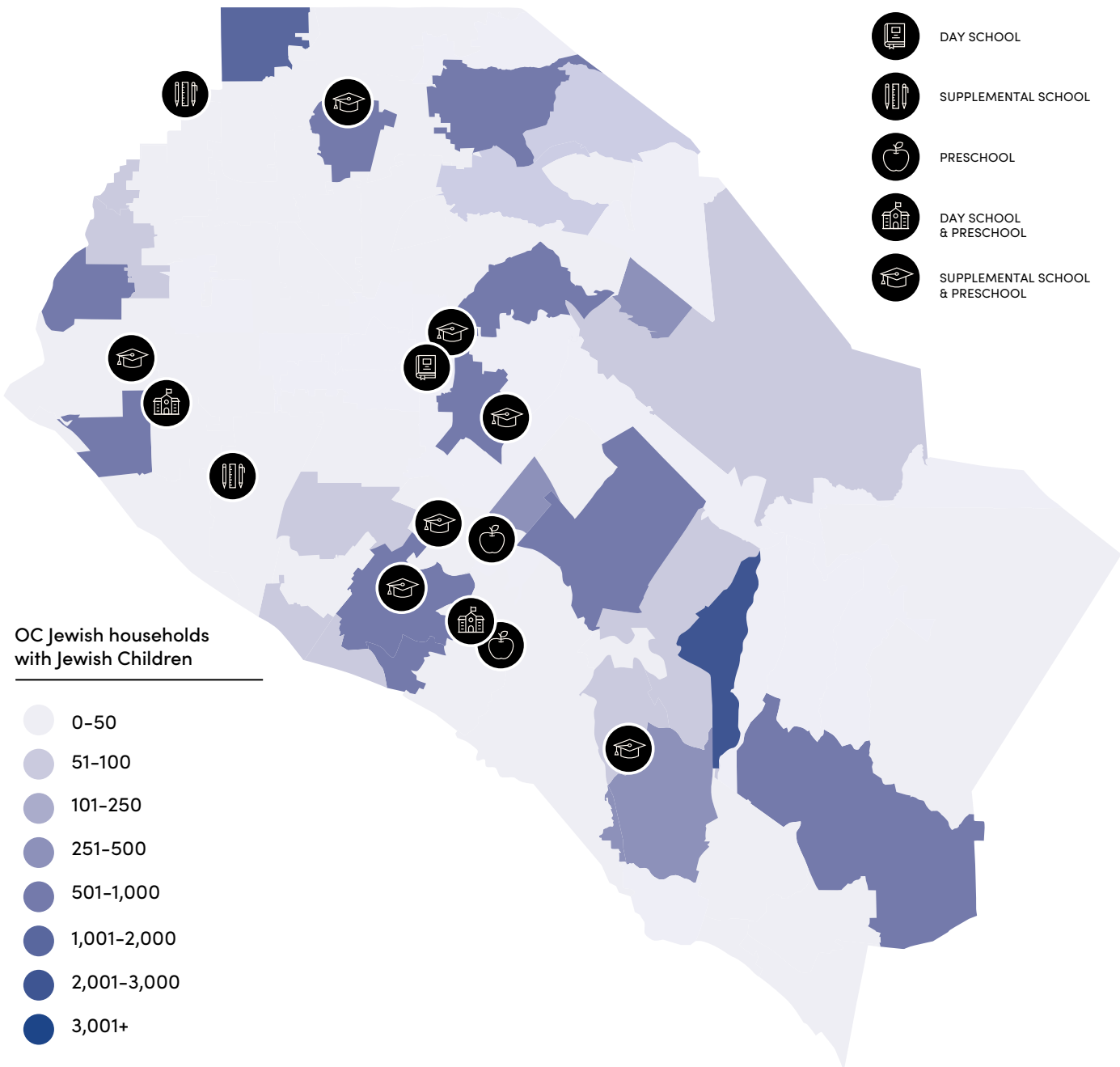




The same dynamics exist when focusing on OC Jewish households with children.

The distribution of Jewish households with children shows some variation from overall household patterns, with additional areas of relative presence across north and central Orange County. There are Jewish schools near many of these areas, shaping families’ access to Jewish education and programming.

In the area of the county south of Irvine, there are limited schools and preschools despite the presence of significant numbers of Jewish households with children.



Household and family composition

Most OC Jewish households are made up of couples and single adults without children. Fewer than one in five are households with children.

The nearly 57,000 Jewish households in OC include married or cohabitating couples without children at home (39%), adults living alone or with unrelated roommates (33%), families with children under 18 (17%), and multigenerational families (11%).

The intermarried rate in Orange County is lower than national trends.

72% of all Jewish adults in Orange County are married, engaged, or partnered. Of these couples, 69% are married to another Jewish person and 31% have a non-Jewish partner or spouse. Among all U.S. Jewish adults who are legally married, 42% have a non-Jewish spouse.² The intermarriage rate in OC is higher among those under age 45.



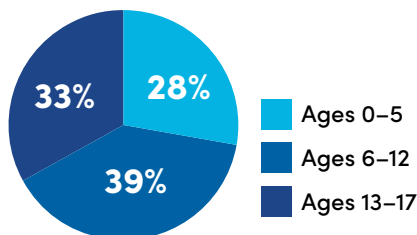
Children demographics

Note: To assess the religious identity of children in Jewish households, parents were asked if they considered their children to be Jewish.

Seventeen percent of Jewish households in Orange County include a minor child.

Nationally, 25% of Jewish households include a minor child.³ Almost half of Orange County Jewish children (47%) are being raised by two Jewish parents, while 36% are being raised by one Jewish parent and one non-Jewish parent and 16% are raised by single parents.

Children are relatively evenly distributed across age groups...



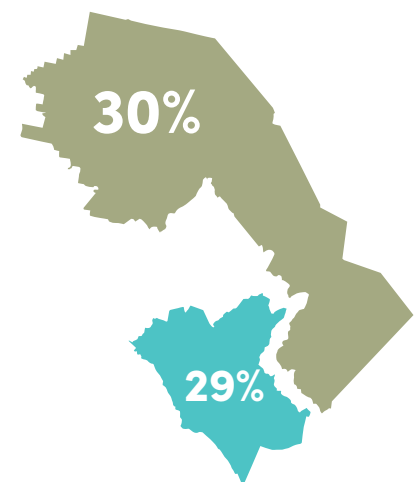
77%

Of the 17,200 children who reside in Jewish households in Orange County, three in four are considered Jewish (77%), including two in four considered Jewish exclusively and one in four considered Jewish and another religion.

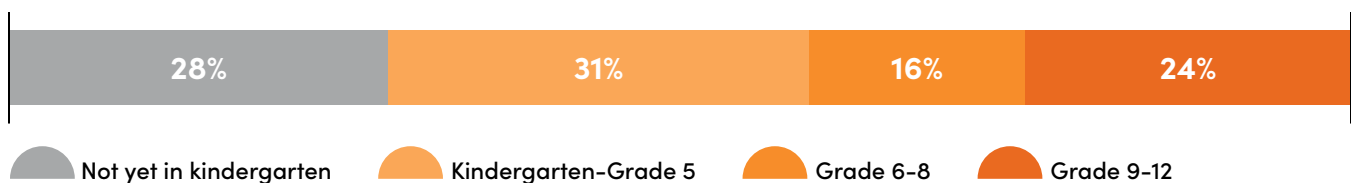
Among those not considered Jewish, about half have no religion, while the other half have another religion. Nationally, 80% of children in Jewish households are considered Jewish, including 69% who are considered exclusively Jewish and 12% who are considered Jewish and another religion.⁴

Most children live in either the Central/North Orange County region (30%) or the South Orange County region (29%).

The rest of the children live in the North/Central Coastal Orange County region (23%) and the Irvine region (18%).

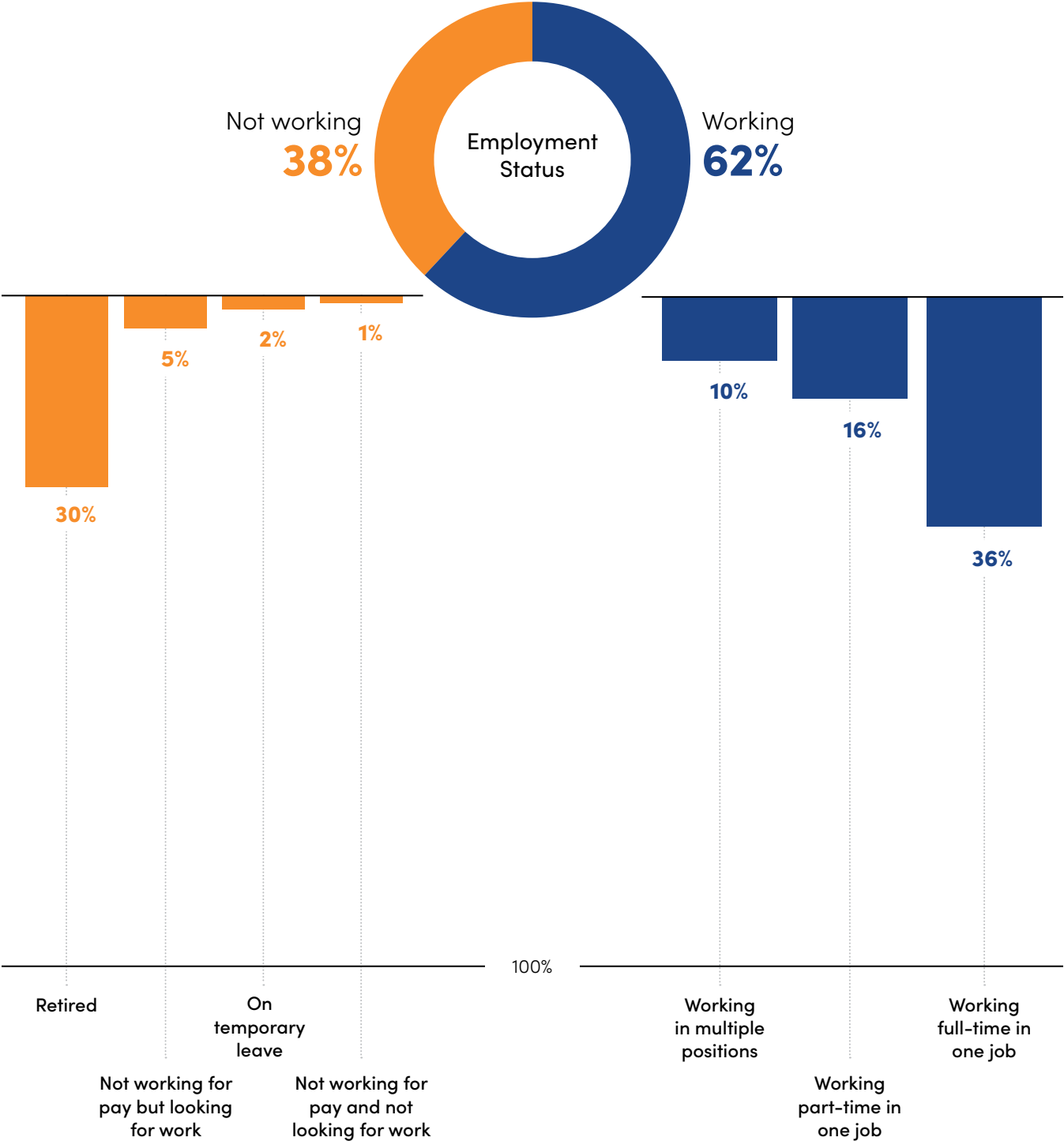


... and grades.



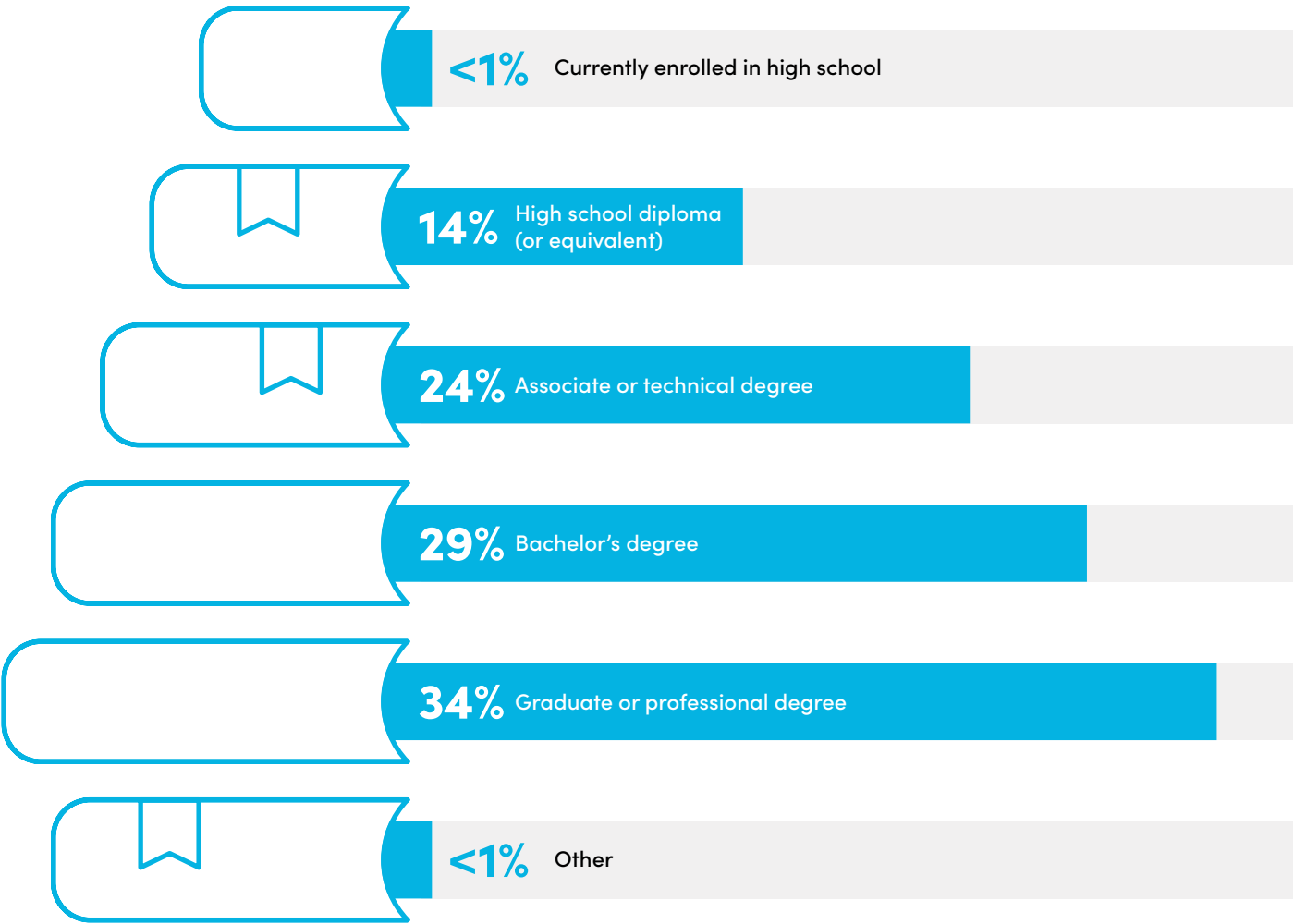
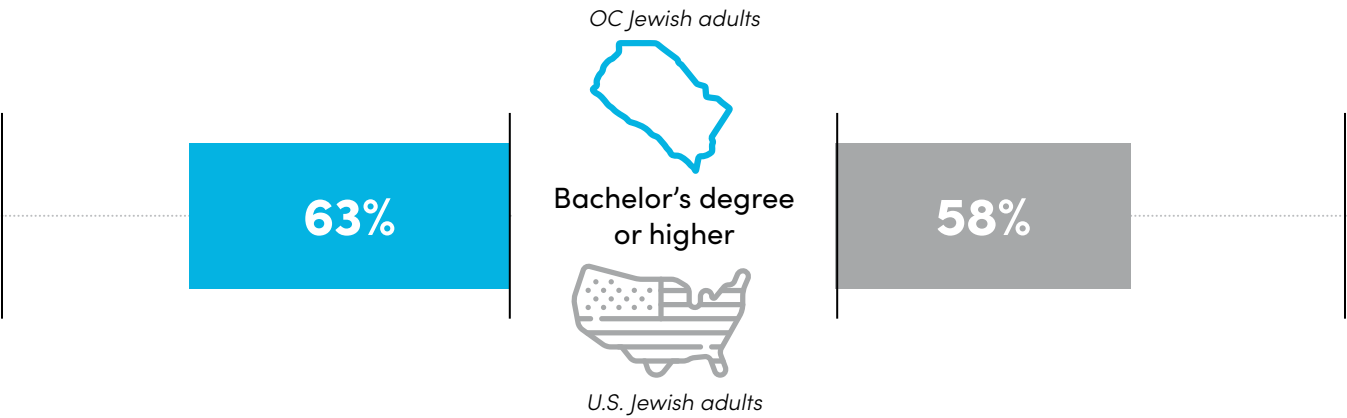
Employment
and educational
attainment

Almost two-thirds (62%) of OC Jewish adults⁵ are employed, similar to the employment rate among U.S. Jewish adults overall (64%).⁶
Thirty percent of OC Jewish adults are retired, higher than the national rate (24%).
The remaining 8% of OC Jewish adults are not working or on temporary leave.



Orange County has high rates of higher educational attainment.

Almost two-thirds (63%) of OC Jewish adults ages 25 and older have earned a bachelor's degree or higher, including 34% with a graduate or professional degree. Both shares are higher than among U.S. Jewish adults overall (58% and 28%, respectively).⁷



Discussion Questions

These demographic findings ground us in who makes up the Orange County Jewish community today, and offer an opportunity to test assumptions, notice patterns, and surface new questions.

At the end of each section of this report, we include brief reflection prompts like these—inviting you to pause, consider what stands out, and think about what the data may mean for the community moving forward.

As you reflect on this overview—and as you read the sections that follow—consider:

1

What feels consistent with your understanding of the community?

2

What surprises you? Are any groups larger, smaller, or more diverse than you expected? What common assumptions do these findings challenge or confirm?

3

What has been newly clarified about the community's composition or trajectory?

4

What questions does this raise that you might want to explore further, or potentially act on?

Daily Life



*[The top priority
of the OC Jewish
community should be]
the well-being of its
community members.*

— Community member





Section Overview

While many have the perception that Orange County and Jewish households in general are more well off than average, this study finds that significant segments of the Orange County Jewish community are facing struggles in their daily lives.

Financial strain, physical health issues, and emotional distress are more common than many assume:

for example, roughly one in three Jewish households report struggling to make ends meet;⁸ similar proportions of households include someone living with a limiting health issue.⁹

These pressures have real consequences for our community members.

They force individuals and families to make difficult tradeoffs, limit how they participate in Jewish life—making Jewish engagement a luxury afforded only to some—and drive many to consider leaving Orange County altogether.

Certain populations are facing these challenges, and their effects, at higher rates.

A notable share of young adults report financial strain, mental health challenges, and uncertainty about staying in Orange County. On average, single adults face disproportionate financial

burdens; LGBTQ+ adults report elevated mental health struggles; and families with children are more likely to consider relocating. These burdens pose a threat to the vibrancy of the current and future OC Jewish community.

Our current community structures are not keeping pace.

The safety nets, programs, and systems—Jewish and non-Jewish alike—that exist today fall short of meeting the daily needs of far too many households. Many members of the OC Jewish community need additional supports to thrive in all aspects of their lives.

The Jewish community has the potential to be a powerful source of support, connection, and meaning

—we invite you to consider the discussion questions at the end of this section to reflect on what we can do individually and together.

Finances

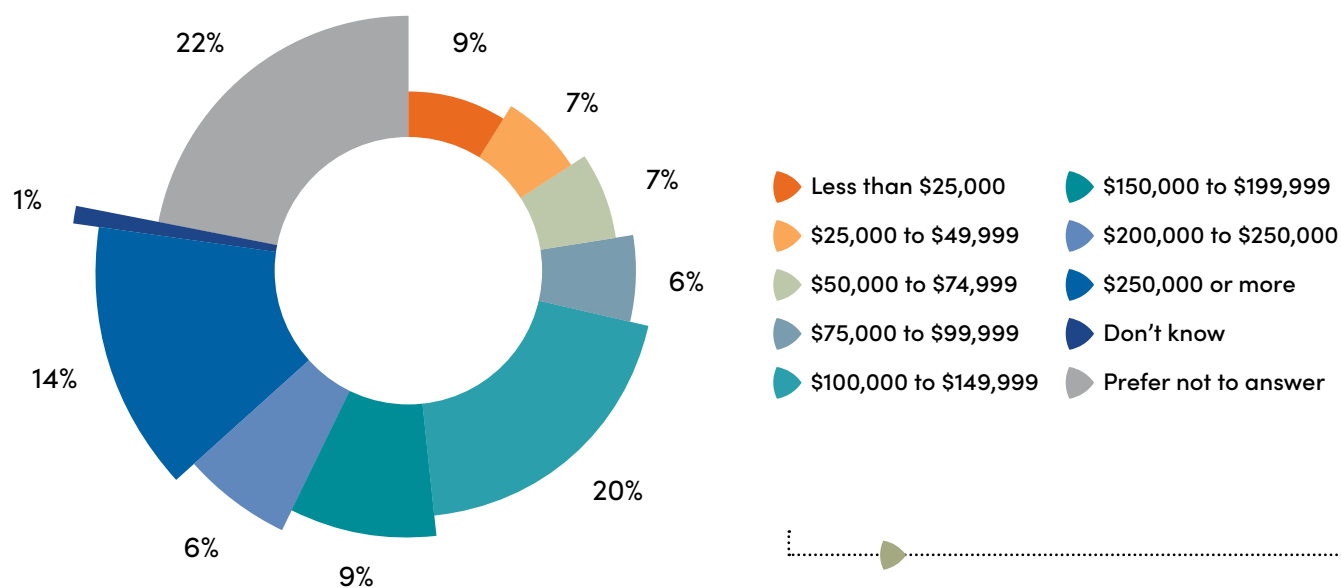
The Orange County Jewish community spans the full income spectrum, with a substantial share of households at the lower end.

60%

Approximately 60% of OC Jewish households make less than \$200K/year,

with 30% making less than \$100K/year and 30% making \$100–200K/year. 20% of households make \$200K/year or more and the other 20% preferred not to answer.

Household income
OC Jewish households



PUTTING INCOME IN CONTEXT:

The adequacy of a given income depends heavily on household size and local cost of living. Several benchmarks help provide context.

Federal Poverty Level (FPL):¹⁰ The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services calculates the Federal Poverty Level (FPL) annually, adjusting for household size. The FPL is used to determine eligibility for government benefits such as Medicaid, CalFresh, and WIC. Because the federal formula does not fully reflect true cost of living, many programs use thresholds, ranging from 138% to 250%+ of FPL to determine eligibility. 10% of OC Jewish households have incomes below 150% FPL and 13% have incomes below 250% FPL.

Real Cost Measure (RCM):¹¹ To better reflect California's cost of living, United Way developed the Real Cost Measure, which measures the income required to meet basic needs (e.g., housing, food, transportation, healthcare) in each county, dependent on household size and makeup. The Real Cost Measure indicates that 34% of all households in the Orange County general population are earning below the real cost of living. United Way also found that, in California, over half of households with young children fall below this threshold.

Area Median Income (AMI):¹² Another common benchmark is Area Median Income (AMI), which is used to determine eligibility for programs such as Section 8 housing assistance. AMI is calculated at the county level and adjusted for household size. The AMI for a household of four in Orange County is \$136,600.

Household income alone does not fully capture a family's financial situation.

Research increasingly examines other factors like wealth, savings, and debt to better understand the economic security of households.¹³ To capture this broader picture, the survey asked respondents to self-report their overall financial situation, which reflects both income and other financial circumstances, and collected additional indicators (e.g., debt, use of public assistance), as detailed in the following sections.

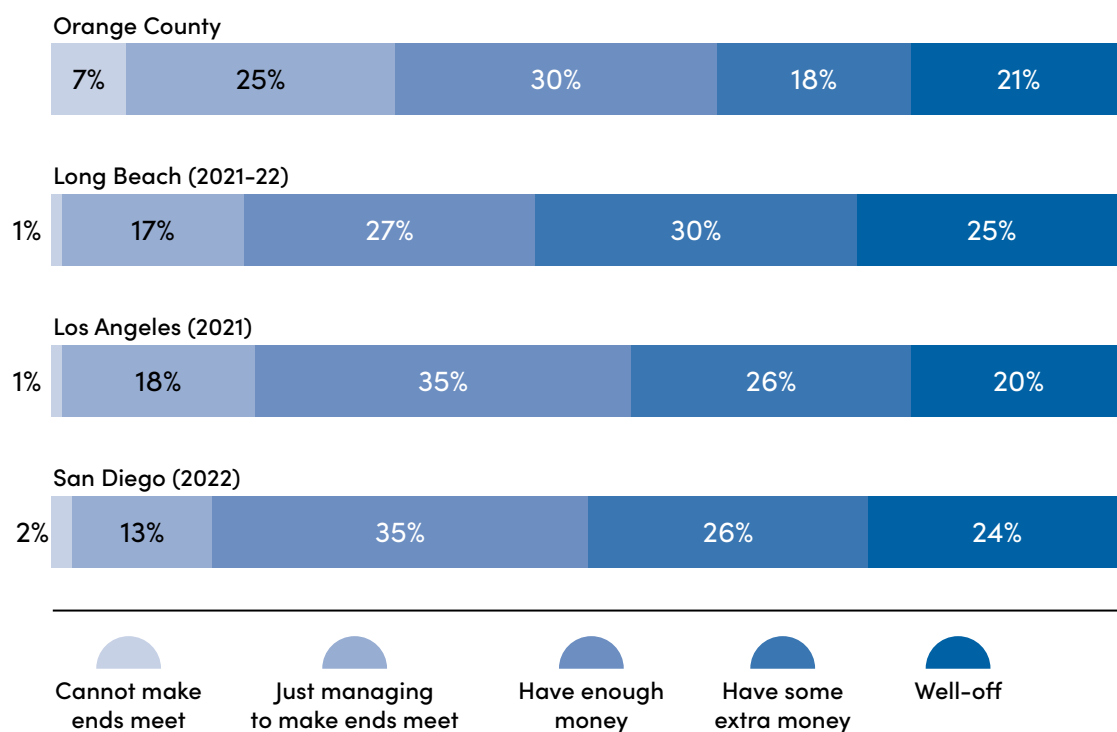
32%

About one in three (32%) OC Jewish households could be considered financially struggling, reporting that they cannot make ends meet or are just managing to make ends meet.

Nationally, 29% of U.S. Jewish adults consider themselves financially struggling in 2025, a 9% increase from what studies showed in 2020.¹⁴

Self-described financial situation

OC Jewish households vs. Jewish households in neighboring communities



Q: Which of these statements best describes your household's financial situation?

Younger adults and single adults are feeling it the most.

Nearly half (48%) of single adult OC Jewish households and more than 40% of households headed by young adults (ages 22-44) are financially struggling. Among single adults under 55, it's closer to two-thirds.

Financial challenges have an impact on the way that many members of the OC Jewish community live their lives...

Many report having experienced significant financial burdens.

Nearly one in five (18%) Jewish households could not afford basic necessities like food, housing, or healthcare in the past year. A similar proportion (17%) of Jewish households that are not well-off receive public benefits—but almost half of those say the help they get isn't enough. Many are carrying debt: over a quarter of households headed by younger adults (ages 22-44) have student loan debt and one fifth of adults ages 55-64 have medical debt.

Research shows that debt has negative effects on both mental and physical well-being, making people more susceptible to health risks from anxiety and depression to diabetes and heart disease.¹⁵ Debt also puts strain on personal relationships, limits life opportunities such as continued education and buying a home, and decreases financial resilience making it more difficult to save or pay unexpected expenses.

And many expressed concerns about potential financial burdens in the future.

One in eight OC Jewish households feel that they would be unable to cover a \$400 emergency expense. Twenty percent of OC Jewish households do not have sufficient savings to cover three months of expenses. Fewer than half (43%) of all non-retired adults say their retirement plan is on track.



... including how they engage in Jewish life.

Nearly one in four Jewish adults (23%) said finances have limited their participation in local Jewish life.

As expected, that number jumps to 40% among those who are financially struggling.

Membership dues and event attendance fees were the most often cited financial barriers to participation.

Open survey response(s):
"Events cost more than most OC residents can afford."

"I want to participate in a synagogue membership but can only do occasionally. [I] feel it's too expensive."

A few are receiving financial support.

Four percent of Jewish households with children reported requiring financial assistance to enroll their children in Jewish camp, education, and activities. *According to the Foundation for Jewish Camp, an organization that provides grants and other support to Jewish camps across North America, camps saw a ~10% increase in financial aid requests and distributions in 2025. This was consistent among camps serving Orange County kids.*¹⁶

Twenty-three percent of all Jewish households required dues relief or other aid to maintain synagogue membership.

Open survey response:
"It is so expensive to be here and participate in Jewish life. Housing costs are out of control. Day school tuition for my two kids is approaching \$70K and then there is all this pressure to join an expensive synagogue on top of that and send them to Jewish camps and join the JCC. I cannot fathom how we will pay for a Bar or Bat Mitzvah."

But many more are excluded altogether.

Due to financial limitations, 20% of Jewish households with children chose not to enroll their kids in Jewish camp, education, or activities; 10% of all households discontinued synagogue membership or did not join a synagogue.

Open survey response:
"I often find Jewish activities to be outside of my budget, too expensive for me. They are not for lower income people/families, so I often don't participate."



1

Study responses point to three interconnected gaps related to financial assistance for participation in Jewish life:

The availability of financial aid *Is help offered?*

“The cost of Jewish camp and religious school and synagogue membership and Bar/Bat Mitzvah is out of reach for many.”

“Less affluent people have been limited in access to events and membership opportunities.”

“Unfortunately, membership and events can be quite expensive. It's a shame, [I] almost didn't have my son have a Bar Mitzvah because of the expense.”

“Programming is offered if you want it. But there needs to be more that is free. No one should have to pass up on something because they can't afford it. JCC is a great strength for [the] Jewish Community, [but] it is too expensive for many people.”

“The strength is that there are a decent number of options for participating in Jewish community. At the same time, there is a significant financial barrier for participation.”

“[One gap is] no Jewish organizations that offer help for families with financial problems... my friend has received quite a bit of support and help from her Christian church... it seems Jews in Orange County do not want to acknowledge there is a need in the community.”

2

The awareness of and access to financial aid

Do people know about it, and can they apply with dignity?

"[Our community needs] more scholarships for Hebrew Schools, Hebrew high, summer day camp, and sleep away camp. Don't make it so hard to find and ask for help. More money, more money, more money."

"Except for Chabad, organizations don't make Jewish life affordable and accessible."

3

The experience of needing or receiving aid

Does the process make people feel welcome or stigmatized?

"[We] never felt we belonged after at least 30 years of membership at [synagogue name]. Too focused on \$!!!"

"Participating in Jewish organizations and activities can be very costly. It seems they are interested [in] and value value mainly monied individuals."

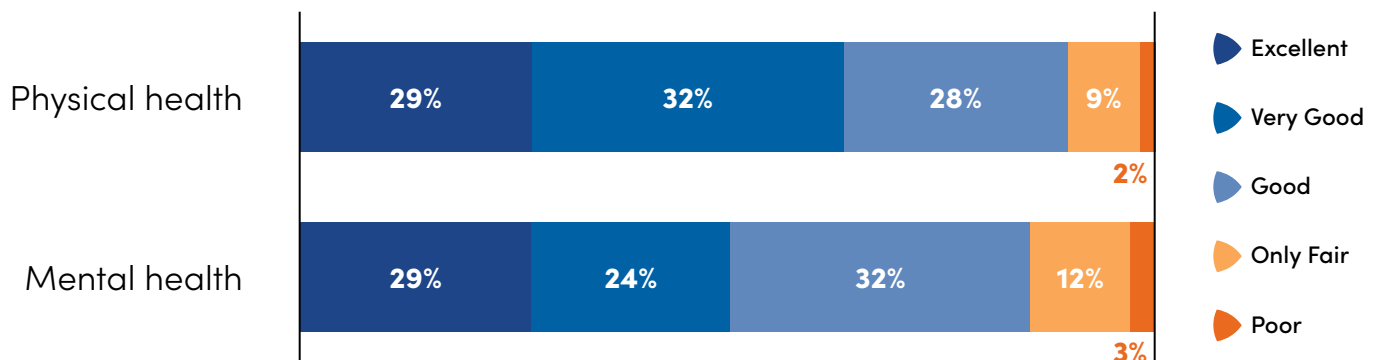
"Jews in OC tend to be wealthy and exclude less well-off individuals."

Health & Well-being

Many members of our community are impacted by physical and mental health issues—experienced by themselves and/or their loved ones.

While most Jewish adults in OC are in good physical and mental health, many describe their physical and/or mental health as only fair or poor (11% and 15%, respectively).

Among those who are financially struggling, this number is much higher—nearly 40% report fair or poor physical and/or mental health.

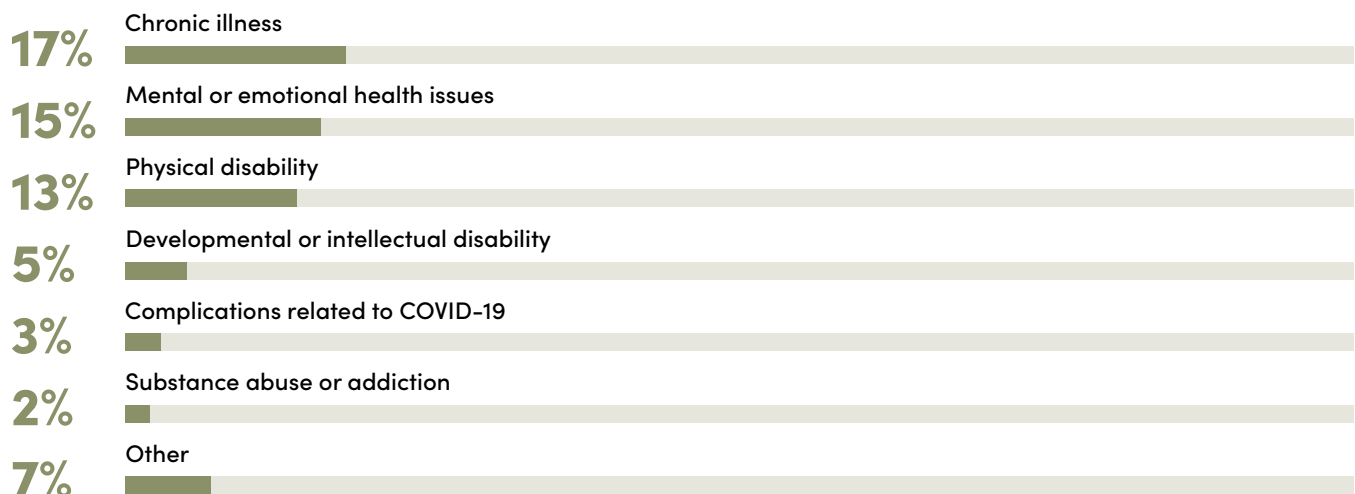


Over one in three (36%) OC Jewish households include a member with a chronic health issue, disability, or other need that affects participation in work, school, or activities.

Among households who are financially struggling, that number rises to more than half (54%).

Specific health issues

OC Jewish households



Q: Which health issues, disabilities, or other needs do you or anyone in your household live with?

Spotlight on mental health

Since the COVID-19 pandemic, mental health and the loneliness “epidemic” have emerged as pressing concerns nationwide—and the OC Jewish community is no exception. Many in the community are navigating heightened stress, social isolation, and ongoing emotional challenges. Mental health affects a notable share of Jewish adults in OC: while many are managing with resilience and support, others are struggling in ways that impact their daily lives and overall well-being.



Nearly one in five (19%) Jewish adults in OC report living with a chronic mental health challenge.¹⁷

About half have a clinical diagnosis, while others are self-reported. At the time of the study, almost one in three adults reported feeling lonely at least some of the time in the past week and one in five reported that mental health struggles had limited their ability to live their daily life.

For context, 21% of U.S. adults reported suffering serious loneliness, experiencing high rates of both social-emotional and existential loneliness.¹⁸ Loneliness is shown to have negative impacts on a person’s health and their academic and professional performance.¹⁹

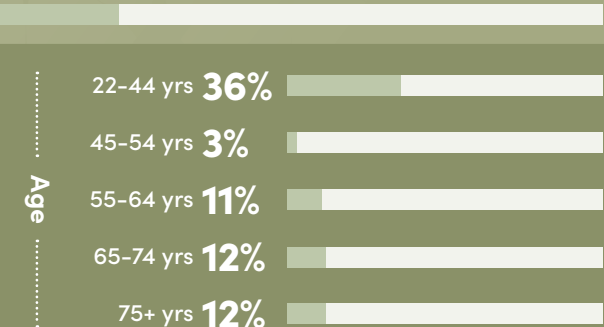
Certain groups feel mental health burdens more intensely.

Younger, LGBTQ+, and/or financially struggling individuals are all more likely to report mental health difficulties than the average Jewish adult in OC. There were no differences in mental health based on race, ethnicity, geography, years in OC, and household composition.

Mental health challenges by age

OC Jewish adults reporting any mental or emotional health issues

20% of all OC Jewish adults

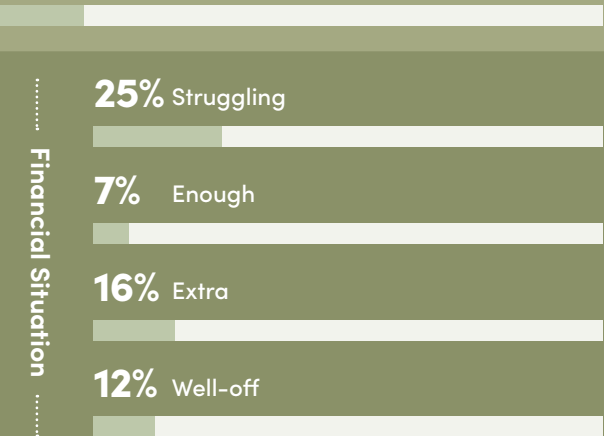


Q: This is a combination of two survey questions. (1) “Which health issues, disabilities, or needs do you live with?” – those who selected “Diagnosed mental or emotional health issues” and (2) “Overall, how would you describe your own mental health or emotional well-being?” – those who selected “poor” or “only fair.”

Fair or poor mental health by financial situation

OC Jewish adults indicating fair or poor mental health

15% of all OC Jewish adults

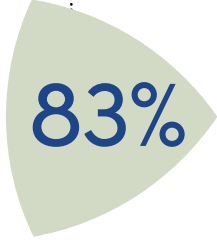


Note: As this study only surveyed adults over 18, we are unable to report on mental health figures among adolescents and youth, but national data suggest heightened challenges amongst this group. The 2024 National Survey of Children’s Health found that almost one third of children ages 3-17 had some mental, emotional, developmental, or behavioral problem.²⁰



People need support for issues they face, but only some receive it.

Many households experiencing physical or mental health challenges are not able to access the health services they need.



83%

Among Jewish households that include an adult or child with a limiting health issue, 83% needed services in the past year to manage that condition. However, 15% of those households reported that the care they received was inadequate due to issues of affordability, availability, and/or quality.

The most common barriers to health services are the high cost of care and lack of insurance coverage.

“CA healthcare for chronic illness is not good. Insurance companies decline claims over and over and make it near impossible to get the care that they agreed to cover.”

“My daughter has mental health issues, and there are not great services available. I get a lot of advice, but actual action has been minimal.”

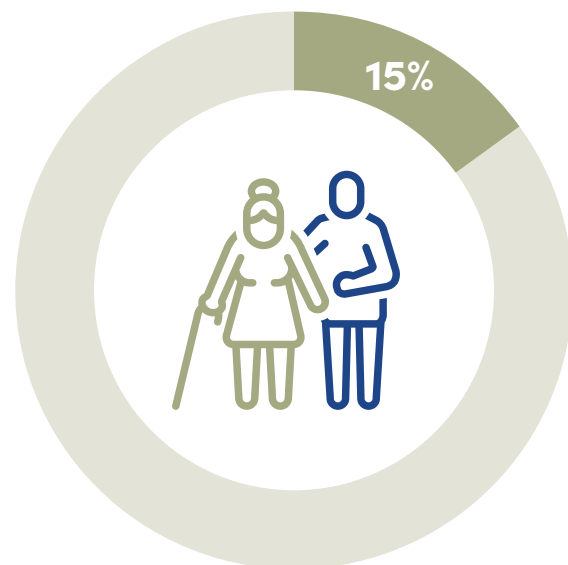
“Most of the coverage for my children and myself is covered through insurance. However, most therapists or mental health individuals are out of network meaning we shoulder the majority of the cost. With multiple kids with needs, we often have to limit therapy to what we can afford, not necessarily what is needed for optimal therapeutic improvement.”

“Mental health care is almost impossible to access through insurance.”

People also report practical barriers like a lack of transportation and/or personal support networks.

Most (with a limiting health condition) do not think it's important that services are provided by a Jewish organization, but more than a third (36%) consider it to be somewhat or very important.

Many Jewish households in OC provide and/or rely on care in their daily lives, often within family networks and sometimes through paid assistance.



Caregiving responsibilities extend across the community.

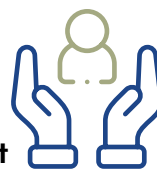
Fifteen percent of OC Jewish households include someone who manages or provides care for close friends or relatives. In some cases, this involves direct hands-on support; in others, it means coordinating care provided by others. Among households engaged in caregiving, parents and in-laws are the most common recipients, named by just over half (52%), followed by spouses (24%). Smaller shares provide care for adult children, children with special needs, or other individuals.

1/5



Among OC Jewish households that include an adult age 65 or older, nearly one in five (18%) include someone who typically needs help with activities of daily living,

such as preparing meals, doing housework, bathing, dressing, or navigating stairs.



Care needs within the community are often met through a combination of family support and formal care arrangements.

Among Jewish households age 65+ that include an adult requiring assistance, care is most commonly provided by a relative or friend in the same household (35%) or by a paid caregiver who does not reside in the home (30%). Less commonly, care is provided by relatives or friends outside the household or by live-in paid caregivers.

30%

But not all households that report a need for help receive consistent support.

Nearly one-third (30%) of households with an adult 65+ who needs assistance do not receive care on a regular basis, pointing to potential gaps between need and support.

Living in (and Leaving) Orange County

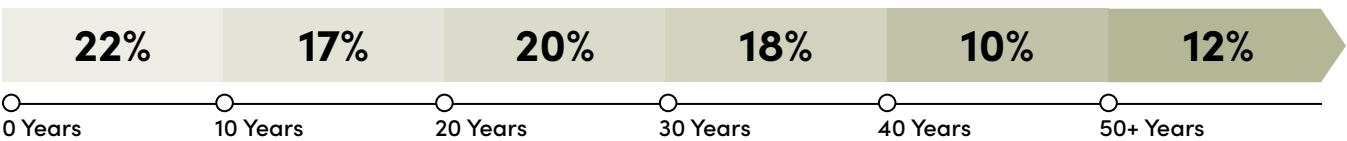
Our Orange County Jewish community is constantly evolving.

We have a mix of longtime residents and relative newcomers.

More than a quarter (27%) of Jewish adults primarily grew up in Orange County.
14% of Jewish adults have lived here their entire adult lives.

Nearly one in four Jewish adults have moved here within the last 10 years.
A large share of these newcomers are younger adults (60% under the age of 44). This suggests that new generations are finding their way here and reshaping what Jewish life looks like in the region.

Length of residence in Orange County
OC Jewish adults



But, Orange County remains a transient place for many Jewish individuals

(as it is for other populations). About one in four Jewish adults are considering leaving OC in the next three years—with 7% saying they *definitely* plan to move and 19% saying they *probably* will.

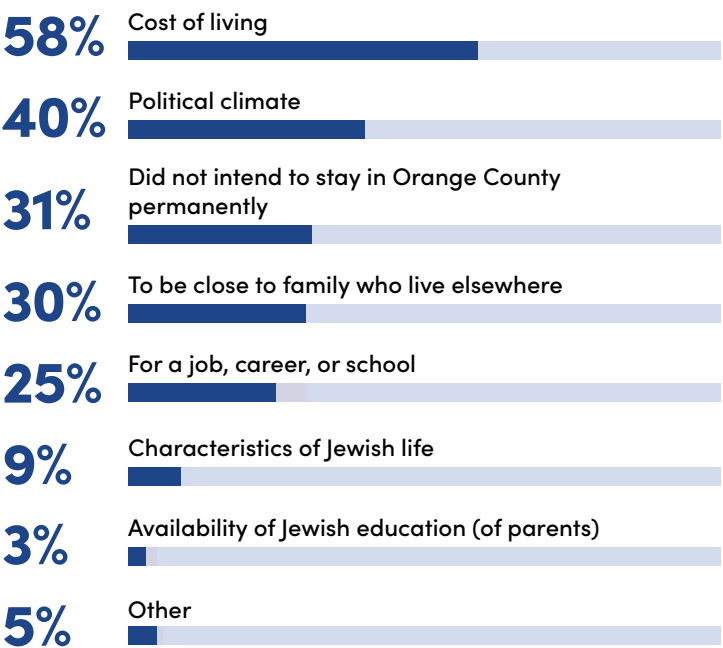
Those thinking about leaving have shared concerns.

Too many find Orange County to be unaffordable, with cost of living cited by 58% of those planning to move. Political climate comes next, indicated by 40%.

Younger adults are especially likely to be considering a move.

Almost 40% of younger adults say they'll probably or definitely leave OC in the near future.

Reasons for considering leaving Orange County
OC Jewish adults definitely or probably planning to leave



Q: What are the primary reasons that you are considering moving? (Select all that apply)

For context, California has been losing residents to other states for more than two decades. The affordability crisis, especially housing costs, has played a key role, with lower-income households much more likely to leave the state than higher-income households.²¹ In Orange County, between 2024 and 2025 alone, the Average Median Income (AMI) for a household of four grew from \$129,000 to \$136,000, a nearly 6% increase, suggesting Orange County is becoming an increasingly expensive place to live.²²

Discussion Questions

These findings invite reflection on how the community can meet people where they are—and how the realities of cost, care, and connection shape Jewish engagement.

1

What does it take to thrive as a Jewish household in Orange County today? What are the greatest pressures and where are the greatest opportunities for support?

2

For many, finances are limiting participation in Jewish life—how can we make engagement more accessible and sustainable?

3

Many Jewish adults are experiencing mental health challenges—how can the Orange County community support their needs?

4

In a place where many households are new to the community and many others are considering leaving, what fosters a sense of belonging? How can we help new residents find connection? How can we give people a reason to stay?

Jewish Life

Perspectives on the Orange County Jewish Community: Insights from the Orange County Jewish Demographic Study



[Our priority should be] creating a sense of connection to Jewish identity, bringing Jews together, and making it fun to be Jewish in community.

— Community member





Section Overview

Orange County is home to a large and varied Jewish community—nearly 93,500 Jewish individuals across 56,600 households—whose Jewish lives take many forms.

Some participate through ritual practice and synagogue life, others through participation in community organizations and programming, and many express their Jewish identity through interpersonal relationships, culture, and learning. These diverse pathways reflect both the richness and the complexity of what Jewish life looks like in Orange County today.

There's also significant variation in the extent to which people participate in Jewish life both religiously and secularly, despite

widespread feelings of the importance of being Jewish.

The data indicates a small, highly engaged core group of participants; a much larger group with limited or intermittent involvement; and specific populations participating at noticeably lower rates. Young adults, mixed-faith households, and single adults are less connected communally (e.g., fewer Jewish friendships, weaker feelings of belonging) and institutionally (e.g., lower rates of program participation). These dynamics reinforce one another: structural barriers like cost, distance, and limited program

offerings hinder participation; and lower participation, in turn, deepens social barriers like difficulty connecting socially and not feeling reflected in existing institutions. For many, Jewish life feels meaningful—but not fully accessible.

Across various methods and levels of engagement, we also see an aspiration gap:

many community members—regardless of current participation—express a desire for deeper Jewish connection than they currently experience. As Rabbi Harold Kushner taught, "Jews don't pray for, Jews pray with"—in other words, Judaism is an inherently communal religion, understood as something lived in relationship with others. Members of the Orange County Jewish community wish to be more deeply rooted in this principle. And this gap between interest and opportunity represents one of the most important challenges revealed by the study.

Taken together, these findings offer a clear call to action.

The community's existing organizational ecosystem is not

yet fully meeting the breadth of needs and preferences expressed by Orange County Jewish individuals. While many people value their synagogues, schools, and local Jewish organizations, too many do not see a place for themselves within them.

Other thriving Jewish communities have addressed similar gaps by learning from one another and adapting proven programs and practices from elsewhere. Orange County has the capacity to do the same: its Jewish expression is diverse but the desire for connection is present, widespread, and strong.

With intentional design, broader outreach, and strategic investment, Orange County can grow into a place where every Jewish household—no matter its background, structure, beliefs, or level of knowledge—can find meaningful ways to connect, participate, and belong.

Identity & Community

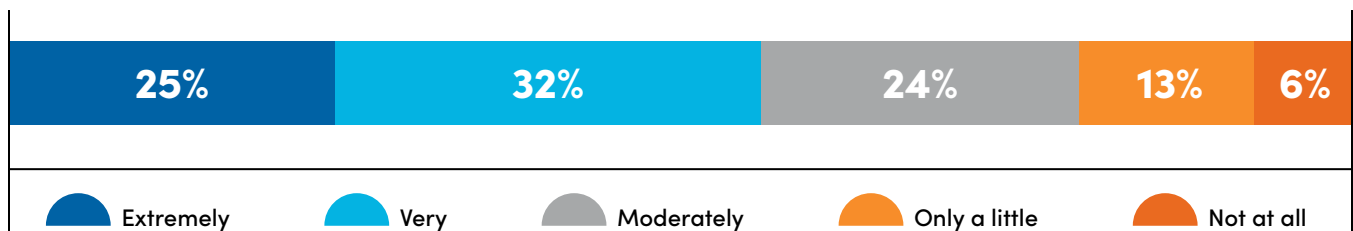
Judaism holds broad importance for OC Jewish adults, even as its meaning and expression vary widely.

81%

A majority of OC Jewish adults (81%) indicated that being Jewish is at least somewhat important in their lives.

How important is being Jewish in your life?

OC Jewish adults



How much, if at all, do you feel that being Jewish is part of your **daily life**?



How much, if at all, do you feel that being Jewish helps you to cope at **times of crisis**?



How much, if at all, do you feel that being Jewish helps you to celebrate at **times of joy**?



How much, if at all, do you feel that being Jewish guides your **major life decisions**?



Yes (Somewhat or Very Much)



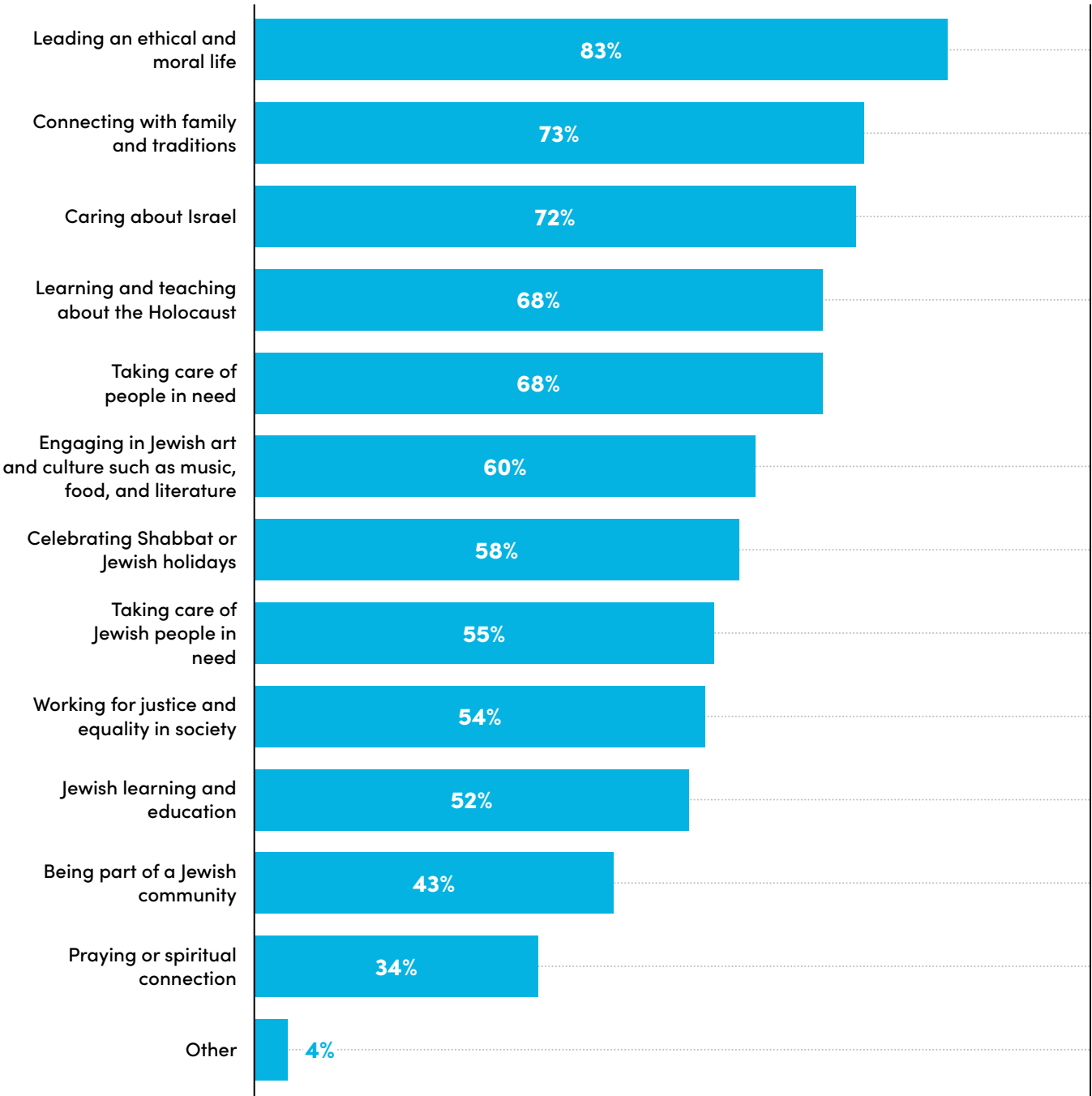
No (Not at All or Not Much)

The meaning and salience of Jewish identity varies across populations.

Generally, Jewish adults who are single, in mixed-faith marriages, and/or identify as politically very liberal, liberal, or moderate, were less likely to report that being Jewish is important to their identity or life. Interestingly, younger adults (ages 22-44) were significantly more likely to say that being Jewish is a part of their daily lives than other age groups.

Essential aspects of being Jewish

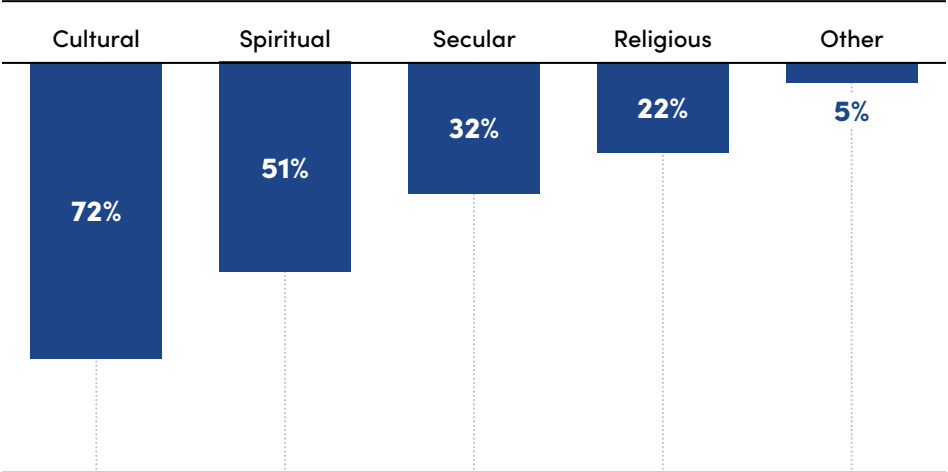
OC Jewish adults



Q: Which of the following do you consider to be essential aspects of being Jewish?

Terms used to describe Jewish identity

OC Jewish adults



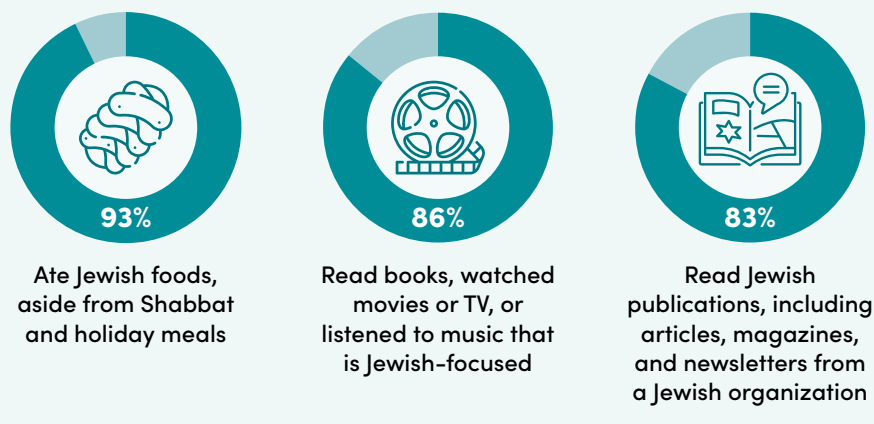
Q: There are many ways to describe your own Jewish identity. Which of the following terms would you use to describe yourself as a Jewish person? (Select all that apply)

Jewish culture—especially food and media—serves as a near-universal point of connection to Jewish identity in Orange County.

Jewish culture is widely consumed across the community.

Jewish-focused non-organizational activities in the past year

OC Jewish adults



These more independent activities are widespread, in contrast with lower rates of institutional participation (see following section).

And, several open responses included requests for more cultural offerings in the community.

"[There] should be more pleasant, enjoyable social events welcoming [the] entire Jewish community, like food, shopping, and entertainment at the fairgrounds."

"[One gap in the community is] adult education on Jewish literature, culture, history, and philosophy."

"More Jewish items in grocery stores [are] needed."

Many express their Jewish values through volunteering and charitable giving.

48%

Many OC Jewish adults volunteer, including within Jewish organizations.

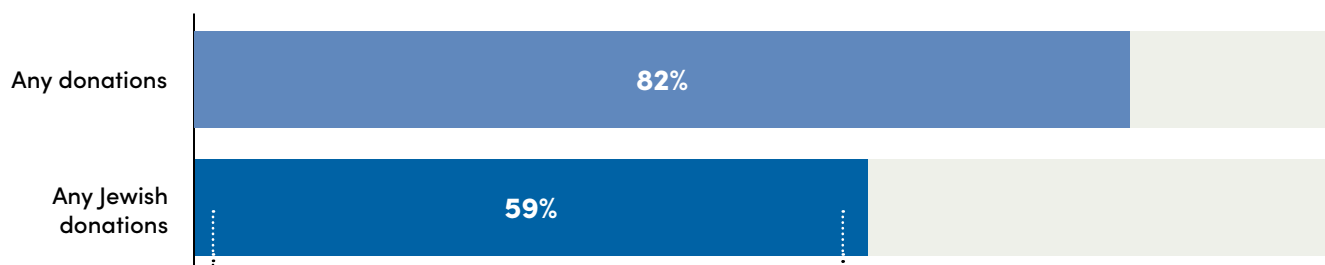
Forty-eight percent of OC Jewish adults volunteered in the past year, with more than one quarter (27%) volunteering for at least one Jewish organization. In addition, 13% currently work for or hold a leadership position in a local Jewish organization, indicating a smaller but meaningful group with deep institutional involvement.

Charitable giving is nearly universal, with a majority supporting Jewish causes.

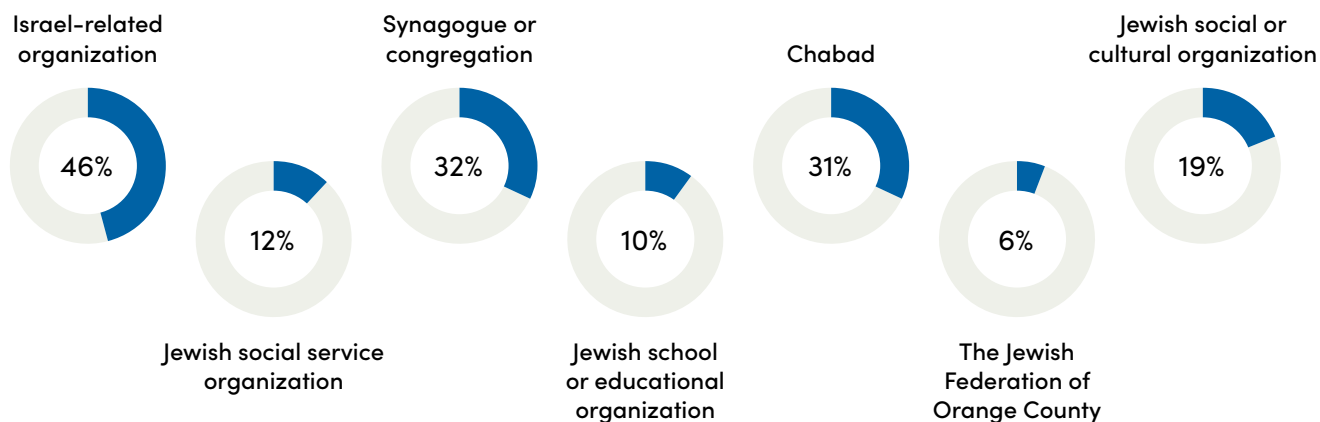
Most OC Jewish adults (82%) donated to at least one charitable organization in the past year, and nearly six in 10 (59%) donated to at least one Jewish organization. Jewish charitable donations were directed to a wide variety of organizations, with the largest shares going to Israel-related organizations, synagogues and congregations, and Chabad. Notably, only 6% of Jewish charitable donations in Orange County went to the Jewish Federation of Orange County.

Charitable donations, past year

OC Jewish households



Of households making Jewish donations, percent supporting each (type of) organization



Charitable giving increases with financial security.

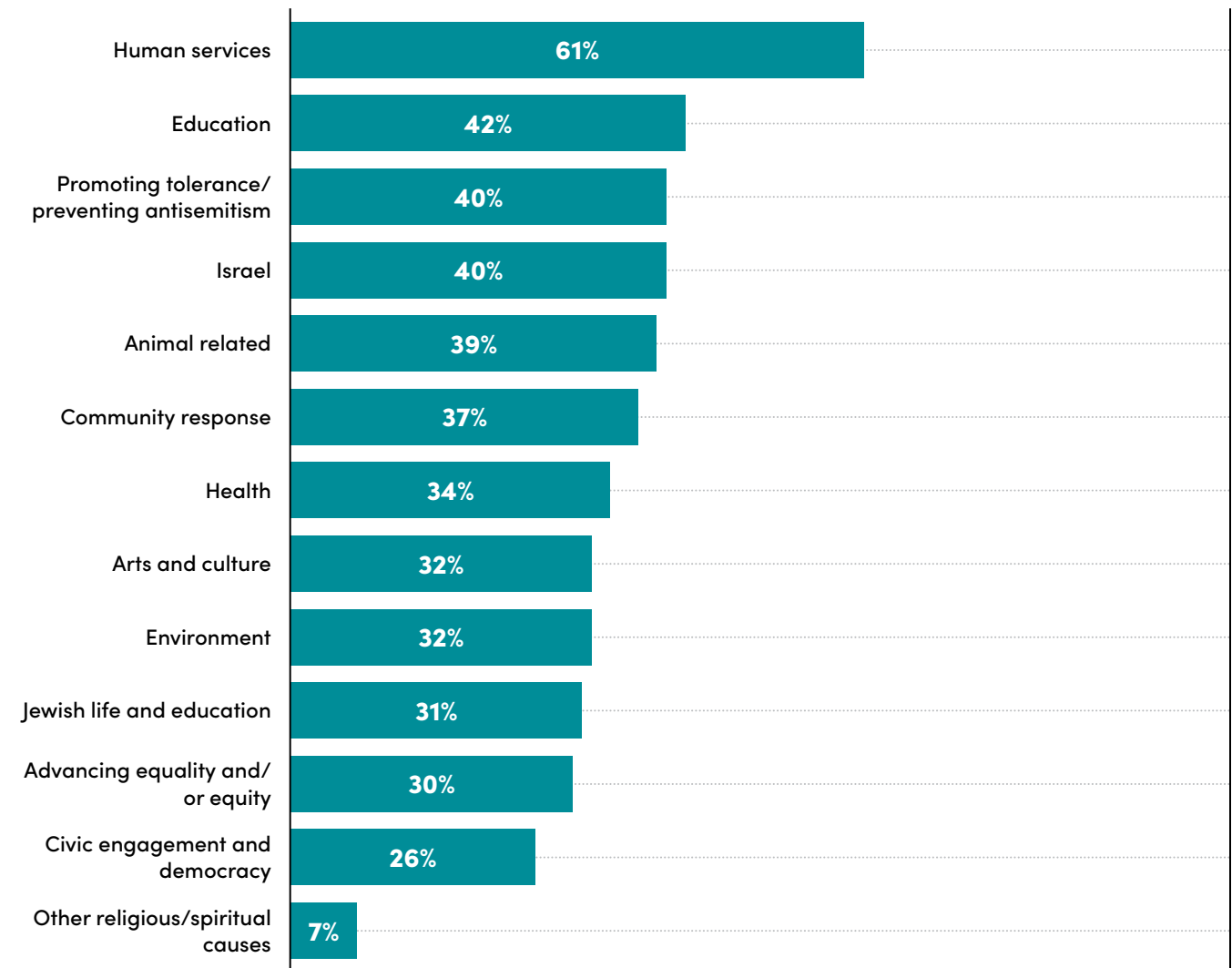
Among well-off households (the highest financial status option), nearly all (98%) make charitable contributions, though their rate of donating specifically to Jewish organizations is somewhat lower than that of households with “enough” or “extra” money.

OC Jewish adults support a wide variety of Jewish and non-Jewish causes.

Organizations that provide direct, basic services receive the broadest support overall.

Causes of interest

OC Jewish adults

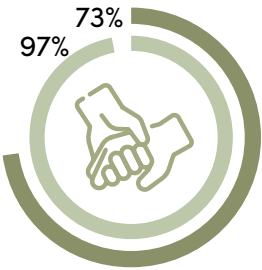


Q: Thinking about the causes that you might volunteer for or donate to, which of the following are most important to you?

For many, community is central to Jewish identity.

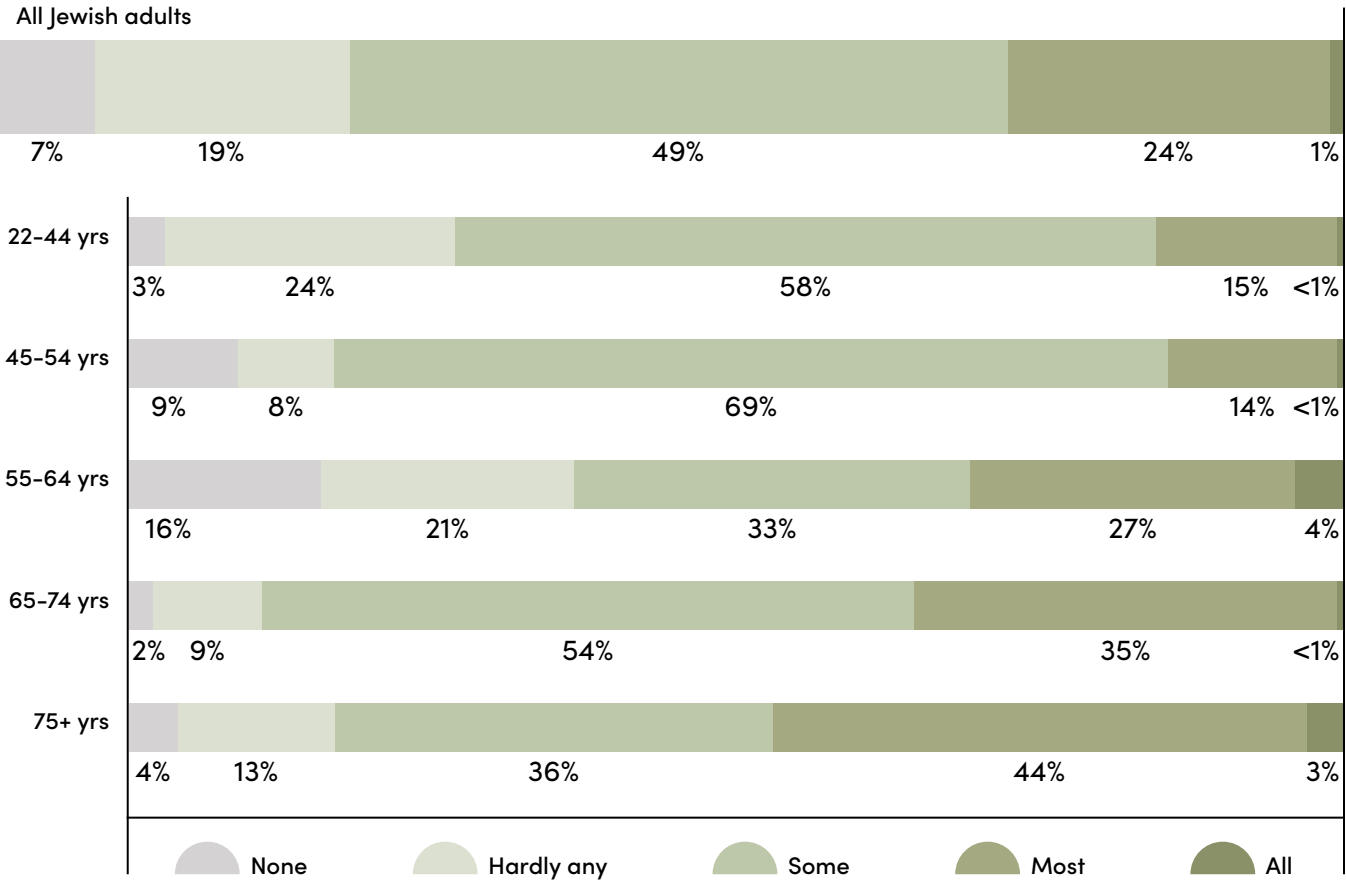
Personal relationships are core sources of Jewish connection.

In Orange County, nearly three in four Jewish adults report having at least some close Jewish friends, and, as previously shown, 73% identify family as an essential aspect of being Jewish. Consistent with this emphasis on relationships, almost all Jewish adults (97%) talked with family or friends about Jewish topics, underscoring the central role of informal, relationship-based engagement in Jewish life.



Close friends are Jewish, by age

OC Jewish adults



Friendship networks differ sharply by age.

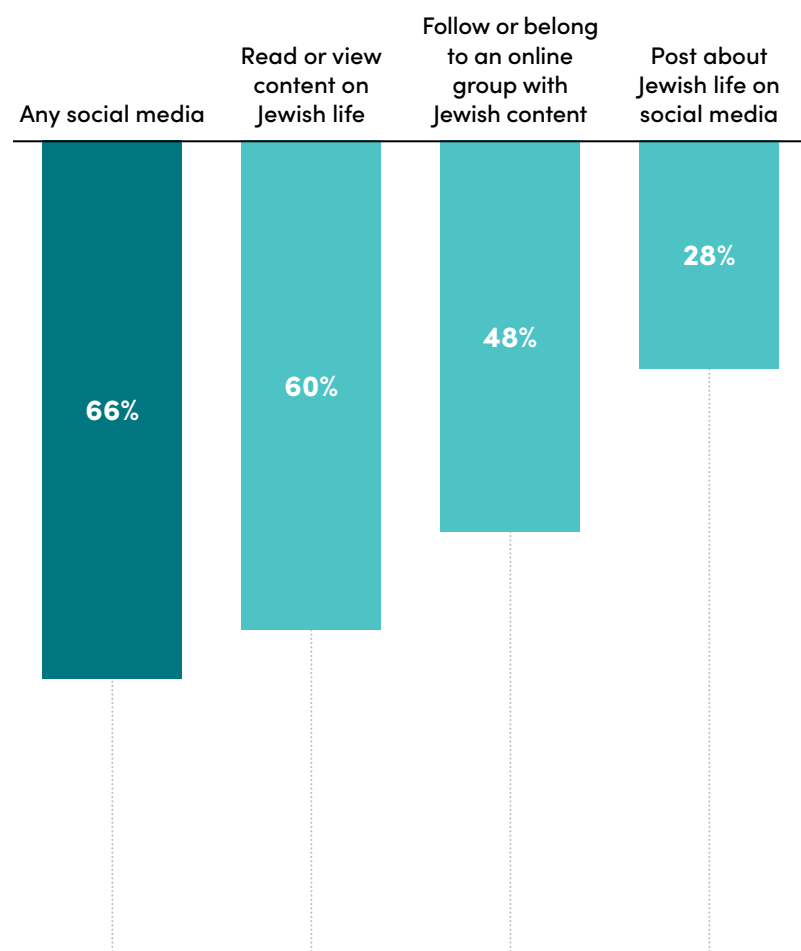
Nearly half of Jewish adults ages 75+ (47%) report that most or all of their close friends are Jewish. In contrast, only 16% of younger adults (ages 22-44) say the same. These differences in social networks may shape how Jewish community is experienced across generations.

Online spaces are becoming growing sites of Jewish life.

Two-thirds of OC Jewish adults (66%) participate in online Jewish life in some way, though the extent of that participation varies widely.

Jewish-focused social media activities

OC Jewish adults



National research suggests that digital engagement has become a durable layer of American religious life: Pew Research Center finds 27% of U.S. adults regularly watch religious services on screens—a trend largely initiated by the COVID-19 pandemic—and 30% use the internet to engage with religious information, with participation ranging from passive viewing to active posting and sharing.²³ Within the U.S. Jewish population specifically, Pew reports that 42% of Jewish adults sometimes or often seek Jewish news online.²⁴ And more broadly, the U.S. Surgeon General’s 2023 Advisory on social connection explicitly treats digital environments as part of how community and belonging are formed, highlighting that technology can help people find community and calling for “pro-connection” technologies that promote healthy social connection and safe online discourse.²⁵



39%

Fewer than half of OC Jewish adults (39%) feel connected to a Jewish community where they live, though more (56%) feel connected to any Jewish community.

Several open-ended responses reflect this lack of connection to the local Jewish community.

“There are many Jewish families that are unaffiliated and do not feel connected—or know how to connect. We are only as strong as our numbers. How to reach these people to bring them into the fold is a big dilemma, in my opinion.”

“There is zero personal connection between all institutions and organizations and individual members of the Jewish community. None. This is embarrassing.”

“I think there are probably many people in OC who are Jewish who don’t know about the Jewish communities out there just waiting for them to get involved.”

Local community connections are significantly stronger among Jewish adults married to other Jewish individuals.

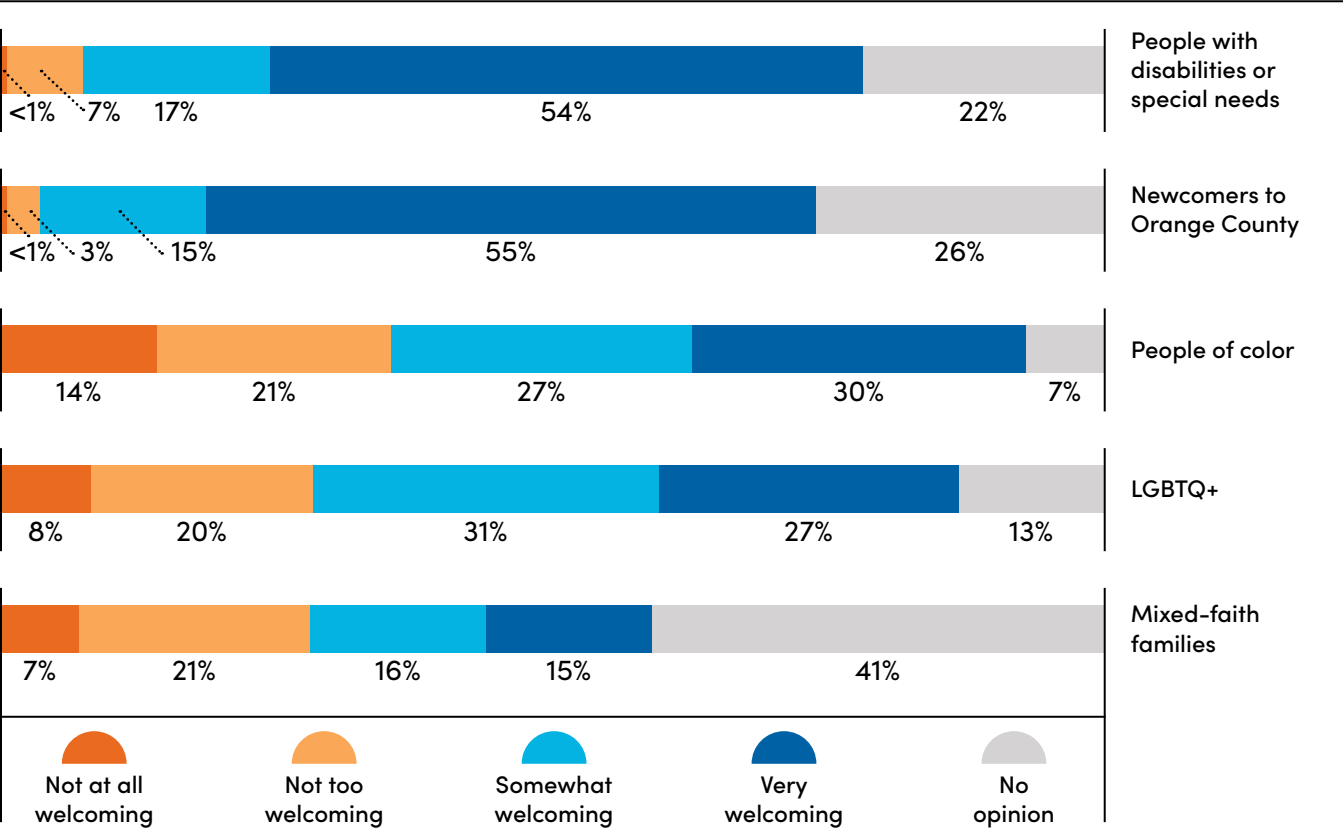
72% of unmarried adults report little or no connection to the OC Jewish community and Jewish adults in mixed-faith marriages are especially likely to feel disconnected: 63% report no connection to the OC Jewish community and 21% report little connection. Interpersonal relationships may help explain this pattern—15% of adults in mixed-faith marriages report having no close Jewish friends, and 38% say that hardly any of their close friends are Jewish.

Note: This may work in either direction—having fewer close Jewish friends may be a result of or a contributor to lower connection to the local Jewish community—or both.

Experiences of exclusion and social judgement may also undermine feelings of belonging. Some community members suggest feeling excluded or isolated within Jewish environments.

Perceptions of how welcoming Jewish organizations are to different segments of the Jewish community reveal important variation. While overall ratings are often more positive when asked in general terms, members of specific populations tend to rate organizational welcoming less favorably when evaluating their own experiences. These gaps point to ongoing challenges in ensuring that Jewish organizations are inclusive and responsive to the full diversity of OC’s Jewish community.

How welcoming are Jewish organizations to...
OC Jewish households with members of each respective sub-population group



Several open-ended responses referenced political exclusion, social judgement, and difficulty breaking into established social networks as barriers to belonging and participation.

“[Politically] conservative Jews don’t feel welcome in many congregations.”

“It’s hard to get to know people for me. Many are siloed in their shuls or existing friend groups. It’s a challenge to be the new person.”

“[One gap in the community is the] lack of involvement with non-white community and little to no non-white participation in synagogue.”

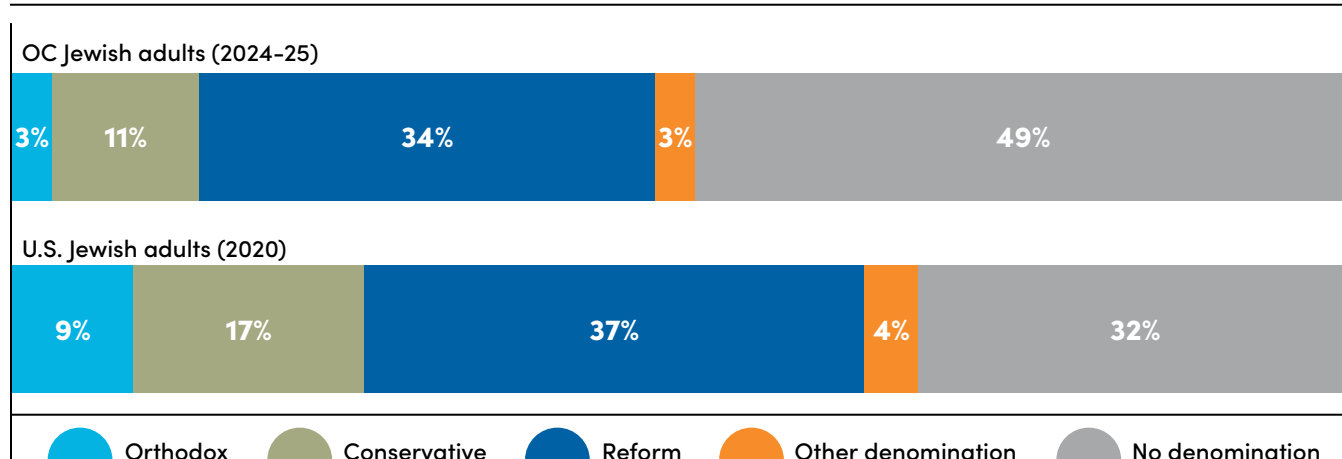
Ritual & Practice

Half of OC Jewish adults (49%) have no specific denomination, significantly higher than among all U.S. Jewish adults (32%).

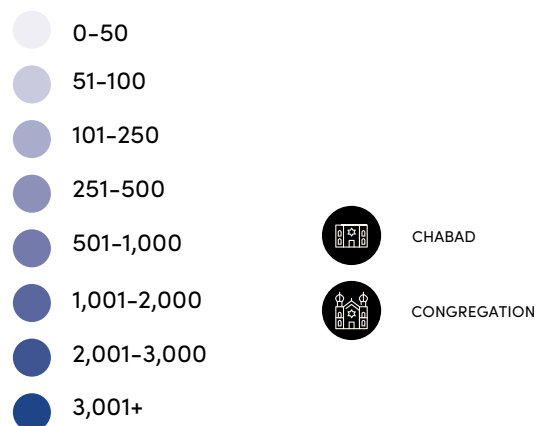
The largest denomination is Reform, including about one third of OC Jewish adults.

Denomination

OC Jewish adults and U.S. Jewish adults



Orange County is home to at least 30 brick-and-mortar synagogues, Chabads, and other congregations, concentrated in Irvine, Newport Beach, and Laguna Woods.



However, congregational affiliation—and formal dues-paying membership—is uncommon in Orange County.

27%

Only about one-quarter of OC Jewish households (27%) belong to a Jewish congregation,²⁶ including non-dues paying members. *This household membership rate is higher than in neighboring communities—Los Angeles (21%), Long Beach (20%), and San Diego (14%)—but remains below the national rate (35%).²⁷* And, as noted earlier, many OC Jewish adults say that elements commonly provided by congregations are essential to being Jewish. Between one-third and one-half of adults identify prayer (34%), Jewish community (43%), Jewish learning (52%), and celebrating holidays (58%) as essential—substantially higher than the 27% of households that include a congregational member.

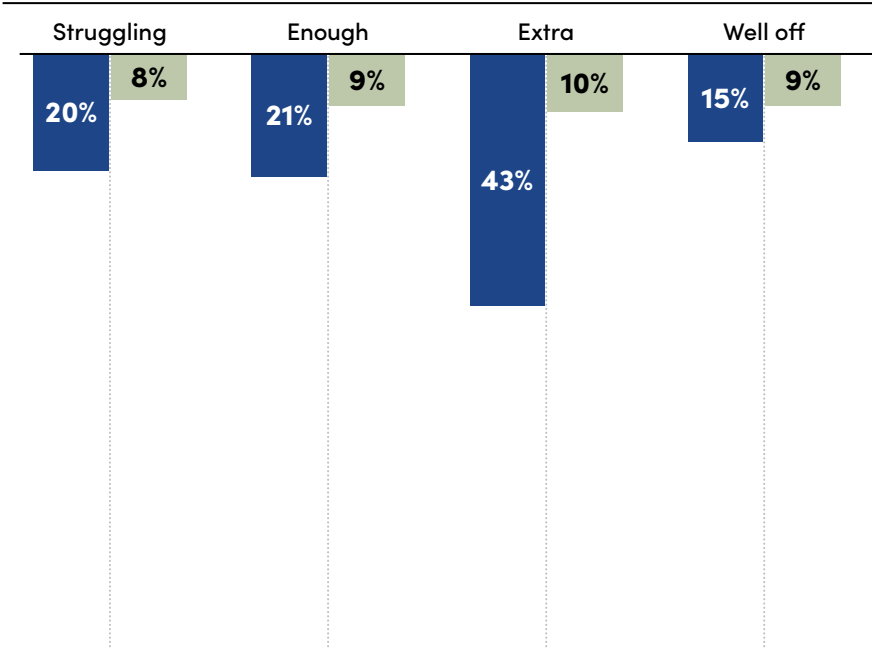
And just 8% pay dues to a congregation.

This gap between membership and paying dues can be explained by Chabad: 41% of congregation-member households (or 10% of all OC Jewish households) belong to Chabad, which does not operate with a traditional dues structure. *Nationally, over the past decade, there has been a shift toward more non-paying members, including through Chabad and non-brick-and-mortar congregations.²⁸*

Financial situation is associated with membership—but does not fully explain trends.

Households with “extra” money are the most likely to include a congregational member, while those who are struggling or have just enough to get by participate at lower rates. Dues-paying membership, however, remains relatively consistent across financial groups and, notably, well-off households (the highest financial status option) report lower overall membership, suggesting that finances are not the sole barrier.

Membership in Jewish congregations by financial status
OC Jewish households



 OC congregation member

 Pays dues to any synagogue

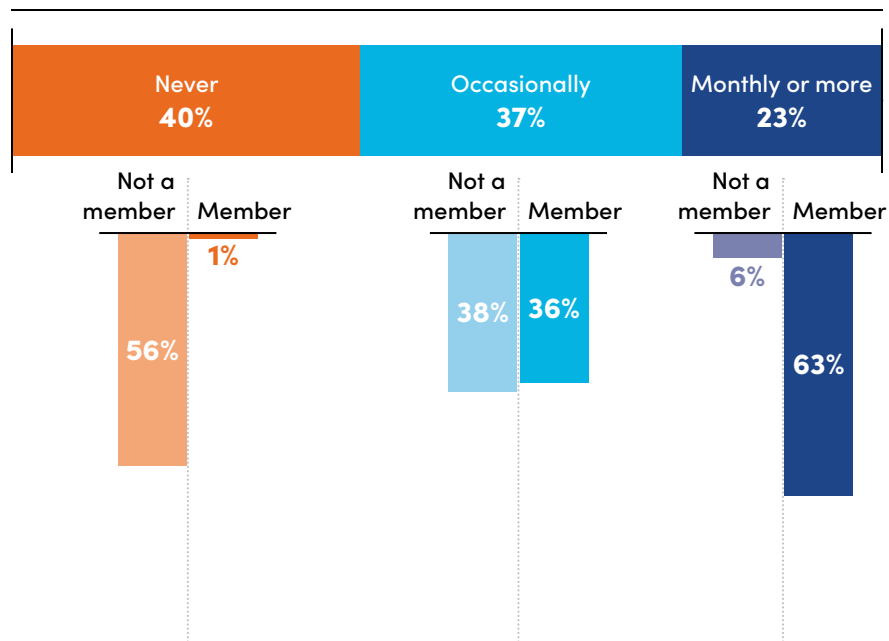
Attendance at services exceeds congregational affiliation.

Sixty percent of OC Jewish adults attended services at least once in the past year, with 41% attending High Holiday services

and almost a quarter (23%) attending services monthly or more. As we would expect, nearly all congregation members attended services at least occasionally; but service attendance is a relatively common practice even among non-members.

Service attendance in the past year, by congregation membership

OC Jewish adults



Of those who have attended services, the majority did so in formal prayer settings,

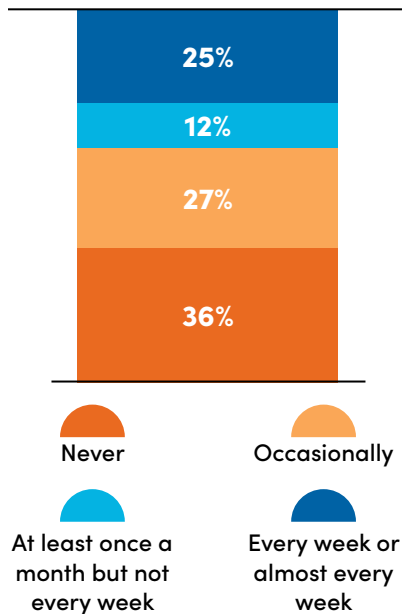
at a synagogue (75%) and/or Chabad (42%). Smaller proportions of those attending services did so at a community organization (20%) and/or independent minyan (14%). One-quarter (26%) of those who attended services also did so outside of Orange County.

"The Synagogue which I attend is a very open and inclusive place. That is a strength that builds all else."

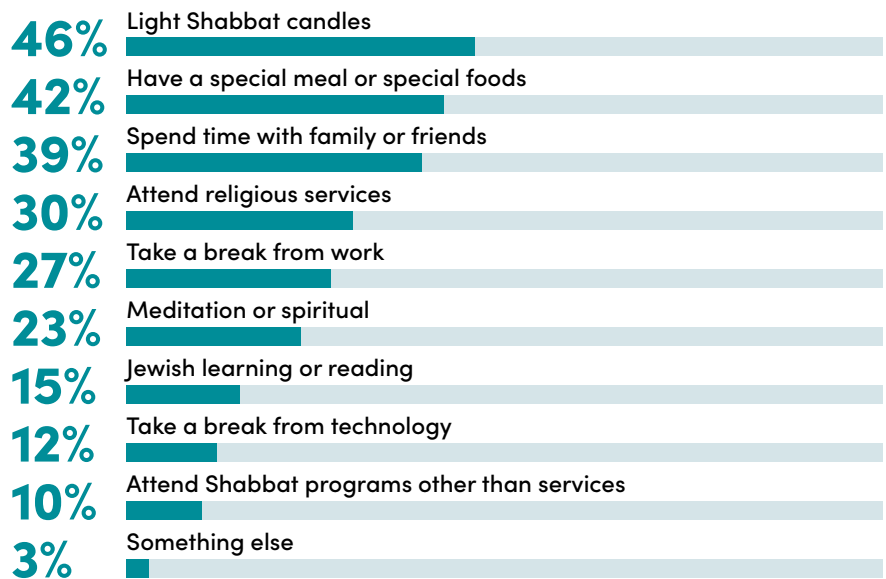
Jewish rituals and holidays are also an important part of OC Jewish adults' religious lives.

Shabbat observance is widespread but varies in frequency and ways of practice.

Mark Shabbat frequency
OC Jewish adults



Shabbat activities, past year
OC Jewish adults

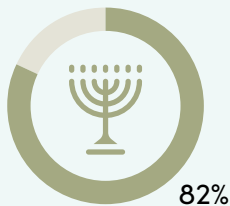


Many annual Jewish holidays also draw broad participation.

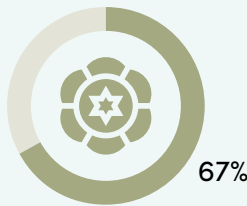
Most OC Jewish adults light Hanukkah candles and participate in a Passover Seder; smaller numbers fast on Yom Kippur.

Holiday and ritual observance
OC Jewish adults

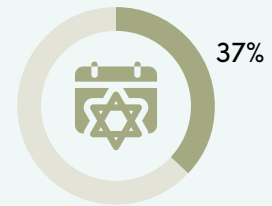
Light Hanukkah candles



Host or attend a Seder



Fast for Yom Kippur²⁹



53%

Significant portions of the community devote themselves to other Jewish practice,

spending time studying Jewish texts (53%) and/or following any Kosher rules (37%). For comparison, 17% of U.S. Jewish adults report keeping kosher at home.³⁰

Jewish education and lifecycle events offer meaningful opportunities for children to engage with Jewish ritual and tradition but reach a minority of OC Jewish children.

Jewish preschool and daycare serve as early entry points for a small share of families.

Fifteen percent of age-eligible Jewish children are currently enrolled in a Jewish preschool or daycare program.

Bar and bat mitzvah are meaningful milestones for some Jewish youth.

Among age-eligible children, 20% have already had a bar or bat mitzvah ceremony, and an additional 12% are expected to do so in the future.

Formal Jewish education during K-12 reaches fewer than one-third of students.

Twenty-eight percent of Jewish K-12 students are enrolled in a Jewish school or receive private tutoring with Jewish content. This includes 8% enrolled in a day school or yeshiva, 12% in a part-time Jewish school, and 12% receiving tutoring or private classes.

Across each of these experiences, common barriers to participation cited by parents include affordability, availability, quality, and inclusivity:

"I cannot fathom how we will pay for a bar or bat mitzvah."

"[One gap is] philanthropic support for day school attendance by families who cannot pay full tuition. [Day school] should be accessible to Jewish families of all SES backgrounds and currently is not."

"The cost of Jewish camp and religious school and synagogue membership and Bar/Bat Mitzvah is out of reach for many. [Participation] needs to be more affordable to all."

"[We need additional] programming for kids after bar/bat mitzvah to keep them engaged with the community."

"I feel that we need to take a more holistic approach in our religious school when teaching the kids. They hate going, most of them anyway, and that is because they have no idea why they are there. They need to be taught why religion is important... how it can help them in good times and in bad."

"JCC preschool... has become barely Jewish at all."

"[We need to] make day school [and] Jewish camps more affordable and more welcoming of disabled and neurodivergent kids."

Institutional Engagement

There are about 20 other Jewish organizations in Orange County—these communal organizations, like religious institutions, see low rates of membership but higher (though varied) participation in programs.³¹

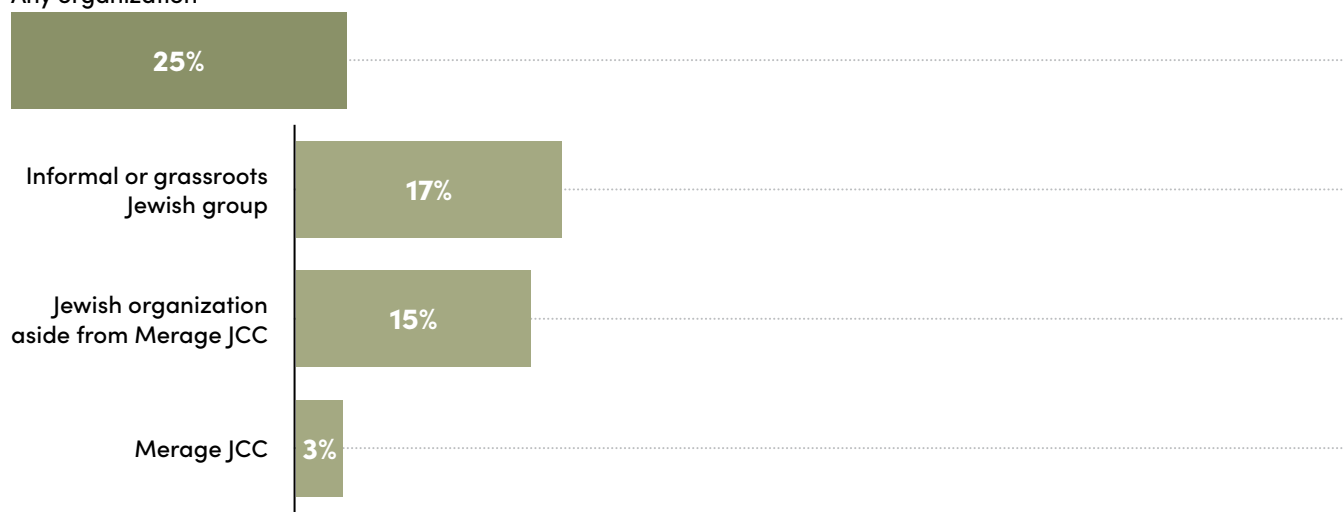
Only one in four Jewish households belong to any Jewish communal organization...

Mixed-faith families are significantly less likely to join member-based Jewish organizations—only 7% of mixed-faith households are members.

Membership in Jewish organizations

OC Jewish households — respondents could select multiple

Any organization

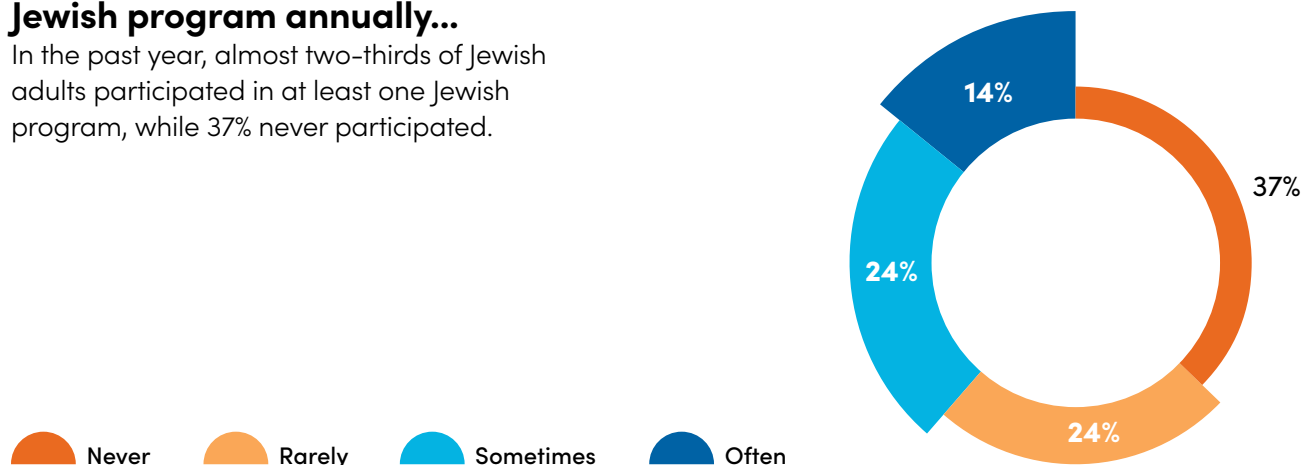


... but most OC Jewish adults participate in at least one Jewish program annually...

In the past year, almost two-thirds of Jewish adults participated in at least one Jewish program, while 37% never participated.

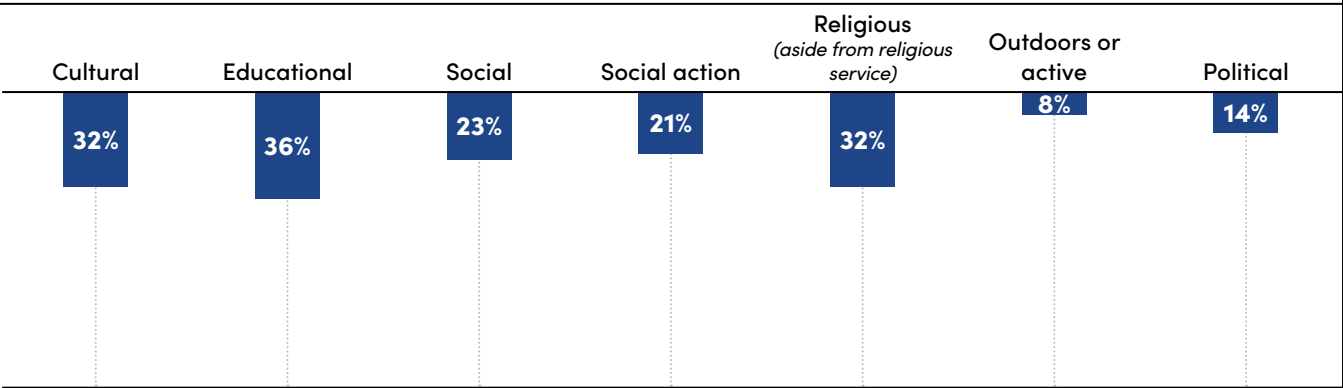
Participation in Jewish programs

OC Jewish adults



Participation in programs organized by Jewish organizations, by type

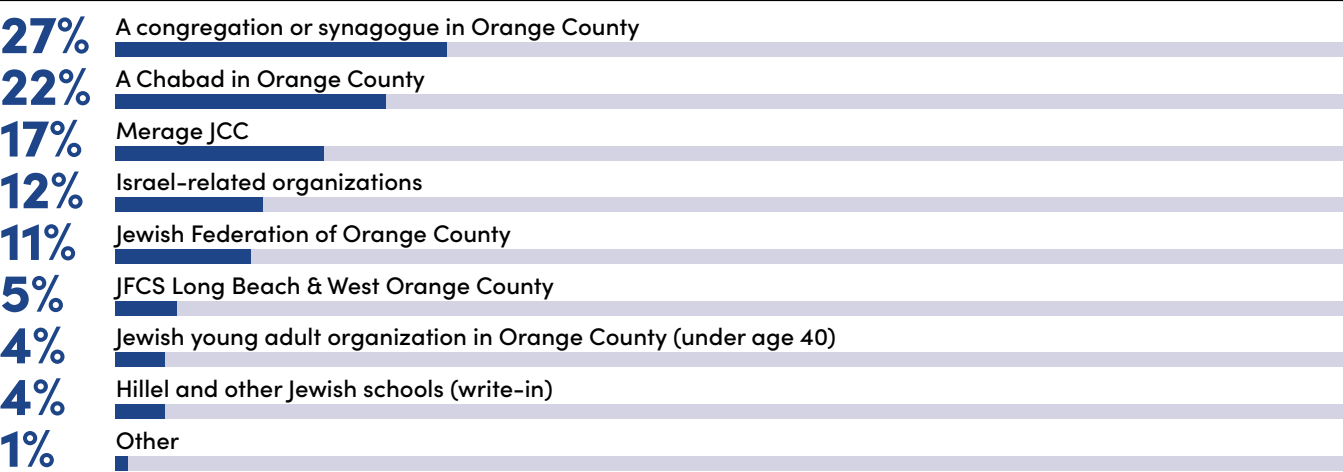
OC Jewish adults



Q: Over the past year, have you attended any of the following types of activities that were organized by a Jewish organization, whether in person or online?

Participation in Jewish programs by sponsor

OC Jewish adults



... as do many OC Jewish children.

For Jewish children, participation in communal programs (in addition to the religious programming, noted previously) varies by age.

In the past year, 43% of households with at least one child age 12 or younger participated in Jewish-sponsored programming outside of school or preschool, such as Tot Shabbat, synagogue-based playgroups, or family holiday programs. Twenty percent of eligible households received books from programs like PJ Library and PJ Our Way, while 43% reported not being aware of the program.



For older youths, participation is relatively limited. Among Jewish K-12 students, 16% attended a Jewish camp in summer 2024—most in day camps (15%) and a smaller share in overnight camps (4%)—and even fewer participated in youth groups (6%) and Jewish volunteer or leadership development programs (1%). Among Jewish teens, 5% traveled to Israel with a teen program and 3% participated in a Jewish immersive program not based in Israel.



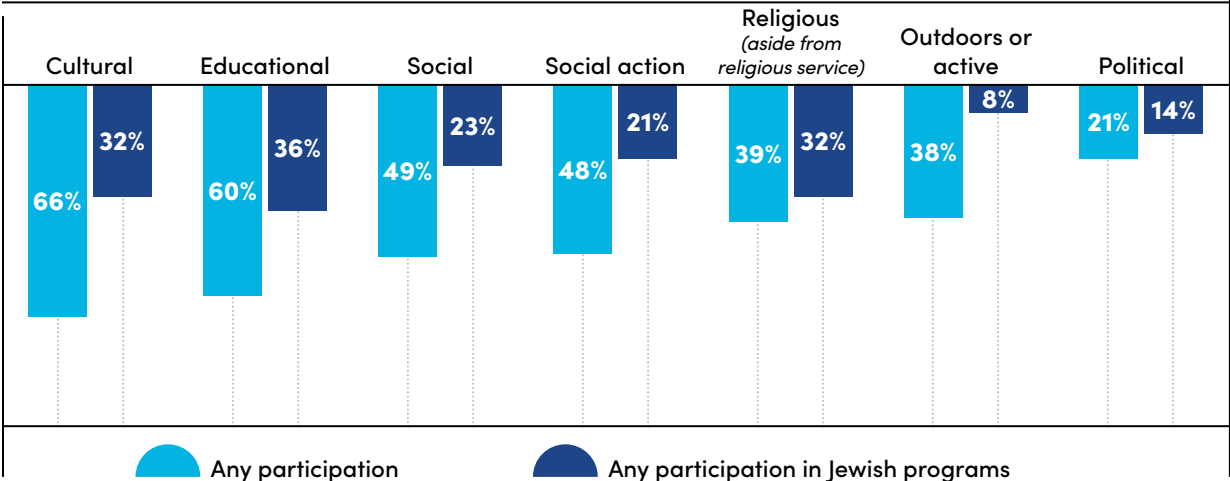
Many OC Jewish adults and families indicated a desire to increase their engagement with Jewish programs.

While a majority (58%) of OC Jewish adults were at least somewhat satisfied with their levels of participation, a sizable proportion (42%) were not, including 44% and 59% of those who never or rarely participate, respectively. Nearly 40% of nonparticipants expressed explicit interest in engaging more.

"I would like to see opportunities to cross pollinate and expand awareness and inclusiveness in our Jewish community."

The data about participation in activities organized by non-Jewish organizations could suggest where there is room to grow.

Participation in programs, by type and organization sponsor
OC Jewish adults



Q: Over the past year, have you attended any of the following types of activities that were/were not organized by a Jewish organization, whether in person or online?

For Jewish children and teens, survey responses reflect satisfaction with participation in programming for some and, for others, a desire to increase participation in communal programming.

"My grandchildren had an excellent Jewish experience growing up in South Orange County. They know who they are and are proud to be Jewish. They participated in the Maccabi games and were involved in their temple."

"We have looked for programs for our children and have not found anything. More Hebrew classes and Jewish culture programs for kids and teens would be needed, especially for kids not attending [Day School] (which ours do not since the tuition is very high)."

"I'd like to see more opportunities for children to connect with a broader set of children throughout their childhood. Many young Jews feel isolated in their Judaism during sports, school, and other activities."

"[We should have more] youth/teen groups so they can meet other Jewish kids outside of Temple."

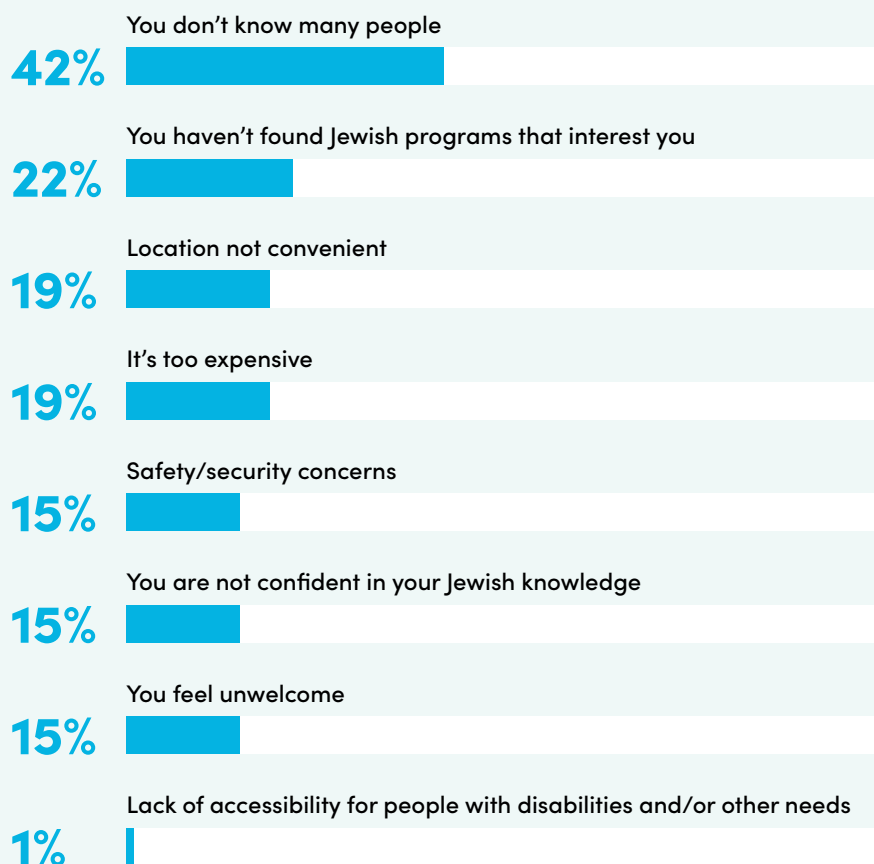
Despite interest, for many, participation is influenced by quality and accessibility of programs and feelings of inclusion & belonging.

Many OC Jewish adults express interest in Jewish life but report common barriers precluding their participation.

These barriers pose particular challenges for younger adults, single adults, and those in mixed-faith households.

Barriers to participation

OC Jewish adults



Program relevance and quality matters, particularly for young adults.

22% of OC Jewish adults and nearly one-third (31%) of younger adults (ages 22-44) indicated that they have not found Jewish programs that interest them. Several open-ended responses called for more targeted programming, particularly for young adults and single professionals:

"[We need] to have more programs and events for young adults, ages 21-35, to make more Jewish friends, connections, and dating opportunities. My adult kids want to date within the Orange County Jewish Community."

"[One community priority should be] providing more programming to young adults and single professionals to keep them from leaving Orange County for San Diego, Los Angeles, or out of state."

"[One community priority should be to] create a sense of unity no matter how you identify yourself to your Jewishness. We need much more in cultural non-religious celebrations and a place to just be."

Responses also point to awareness as a potential barrier.

There may be programs that would be of interest if people knew about them.

"[One gap is] no center or clearinghouse of current Jewish information on how unaffiliated [people] or newcomers can plug into and connect with the existing Jewish community."

"[One gap is] lack of community newsletter. Our temple has a newsletter, although, and this is good."

"Even though there are a number of ways to find out what is going on within the Jewish community here, I wish there was one compilation, similar to the Federation's Community Calendar or JLife, that aggregated them all, like the Indeed website does for the job market."

Accessibility—due to cost and geographic location—presents a significant barrier for many, especially younger and financially struggling adults.

Although participation rates are similar across financial situations, the data suggest that cost is a barrier to increased participation for many—and especially those with less means.

Nineteen percent of Jewish adults cited programming being "too expensive" as a barrier. Younger adults were especially likely to cite cost as a barrier (36%).

And Jewish adults with fewer financial resources who are not currently participating in programs express greater interest in increasing their engagement.

Open-ended responses frequently referenced the need to prioritize other spending and viewing Jewish life as less financially accessible. (See *"Finances" chapter report for more detail.*)

"We do not have a Jewish overnight camp... many families cannot afford the many wonderful Jewish overnight camps in LA."

"[We need more] affordable programs for parents with young families."

"There is a never-ending cost associated with being an active participant which means that there is a value proposition decision that is involved. In other words, is the cost "worth it?" Especially when every organization in the community is burdened with trying to raise sufficient funds in order to continue operations."

Many households are limited by location, time, and flexibility. Nineteen percent of respondents cited "location not convenient" as a barrier to participation and several open responses emphasized the need for programs that meet people—and their calendars—where they are.

"Everything is centered in Irvine, which is too far for me."

"South County is a bit of a desert for Jewish programming. It's mostly based in Irvine."

"The Jewish Federation/JCC is not conveniently located to a good part of Orange County. [I] would really like to see satellite services and programs in several other areas of the county."

"[One gap is] providing a variety of ways to connect and meeting people where they are with their time and availability ... especially for teenagers who in today's world are busy with school, friends, and activities, programs should be flexible to let people participate as much as they are able vs. not allowing participation if they cannot do 100%."

"The gap is that most of these organizations are located in Central Orange County and given the congestion of this area, it is often an obstacle to travel across the county in order to actively participate in the activities of these organizations."

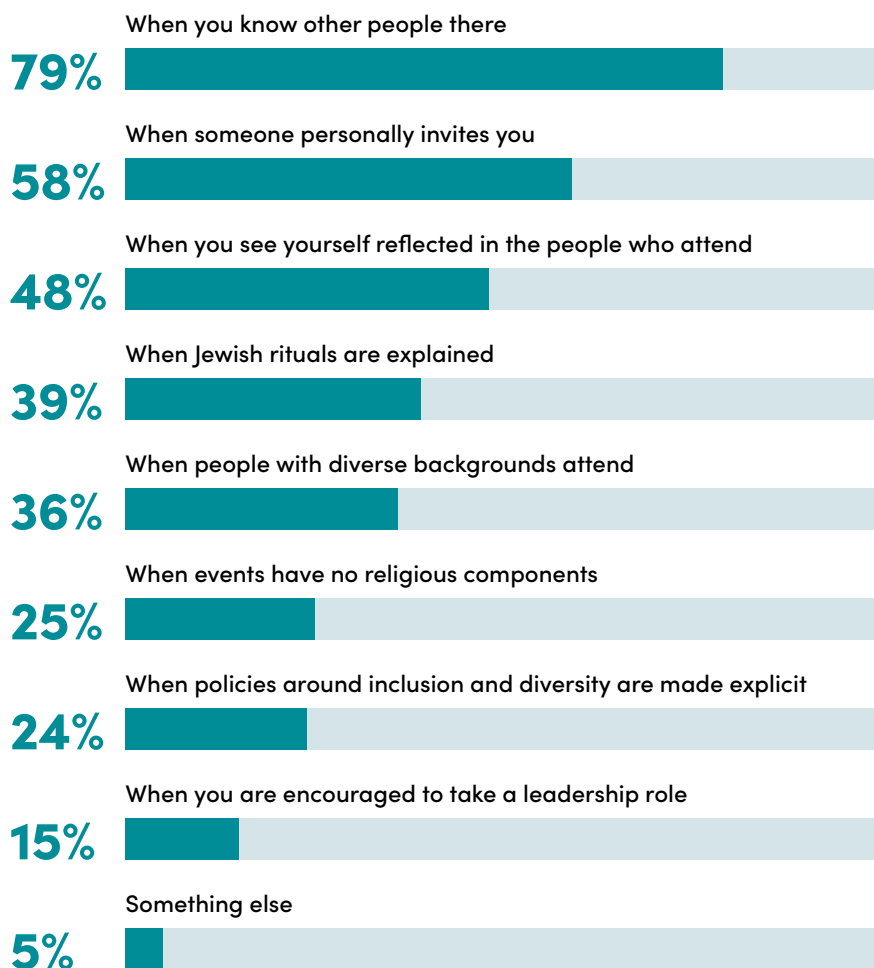
Social connection is the strongest driver of participation—and its absence the most common barrier.

Personal connections are the most powerful catalyst for participation.

When asked what helps them feel welcome and comfortable at Jewish events, OC Jewish adults most frequently pointed to social familiarity—knowing others who participate, receiving a personal invitation, and seeing themselves reflected in the people who attend.

Drivers of participation

OC Jewish adults



Q: Which of the following makes you feel welcome and comfortable at Jewish events?

But many Jewish individuals in Orange County do not experience this sense of connection.

As noted above, 60% of Jewish adults do not feel a sense of belonging to the Jewish community where they live.

And social barriers to participation are especially pronounced for some groups.

Among adults in mixed-faith relationships—who report lower levels of program participation compared to adults married to other Jewish people (34% vs. 76%)—not knowing others who participate, lack of confidence in Jewish knowledge, and feeling unwelcome were among the top four barriers cited.

“There is room for growth in fostering deeper connections among different Jewish denominations and creating more inclusive spaces for young adults and interfaith families.”

“I think there could also be more support and inclusion for multi-ethnic Jewish families. A multi-faith family feels normalized here in a way that is very comforting, but I have not seen as much open-armed acceptance for multi-ethnic Jewish families (of which there are many!).”

And although participation rates are similar across age groups, younger Jewish adults (ages 22–44) cited not knowing others who participate as

a barrier to participation at significantly higher levels than other age groups (63% compared to 19–37%), as well as lack of confidence in Jewish knowledge (29% compared to 1–8%) and “feel[ing] unwelcome” (23% compared to 3–15%).

Outreach from organizations does not appear to be widespread.

Nearly one in two OC Jewish adults (47%) said they had not been engaged by a Jewish organization in the past year, whether through fundraising efforts, program invitations, or other forms of outreach. Jewish adults who are more actively engaged in Jewish programming were more likely to have received outreach of all kinds. However, from the data, causation isn’t clear: outreach may be encouraging participation, or individuals who are already engaged may be more visible to organizations for follow-up.

“[A priority should be] to be more visible and perhaps more vigilant in including & attracting Orange County Jews to the various organizations, synagogues, and Jewish life, culture, values. It’s huge when we receive an email asking to participate in a Jewish event, etc. I am a bit older and do not do Facebook, Instagram, etc. But I guess social media is great for attracting the younger generation.”

Some of these engagement patterns and barriers are reflected in people’s assessment of institutions.

When evaluating Orange County’s Jewish organizations on various measures, between half and two-thirds of OC Jewish adults were unable to rate them.

Of those that could rate them, more than two-thirds gave positive ratings for cooperation across organizations, effective use of resources, meeting community members’ needs, and creativity and fresh thinking.

“The strength in my opinion is with the Merage JCC and the multitude of programs that are offered by the staff. Aside from the gym and classes, the cultural events for all ages is the best offering anywhere. One can participate in as little or as much as desired.”

“[One strength is a] great Chabad community.”

“I feel the OC Jewish Community organizations have an outsized presence compared to the small percentage of Jewish people in the county.”

“There are many and varied opportunities to get involved in the Jewish Community. Our synagogue has so many activities to choose from, as do other Jewish organizations.”

But concerns still persist:

“Other Jewish organizations want to work together but the Federation does not and doesn’t listen to its community. It only cares about itself and making sure it gets “credit” even for things it didn’t do.”

“[Orange County has] strong organizations but [they] often seem like they work in silos, somewhat disconnected from each other. [It’s] not apparent if the clergy or the leadership of the various organizations work together.”

“The main gap is that the Jewish organizations in OC seem to compete with each other all the time, rather than working cohesively together.”

“The Jewish community lacks leadership in the Jewish Federation.”

Discussion Questions

These findings paint a complex picture of Jewish life in Orange County, marked by strong identity, varied participation, meaningful aspiration, and real barriers to belonging. As you reflect on this section, consider:

1

How is our understanding of the ways that people engage in Jewish life evolving? What do these findings suggest about the different expressions of contemporary Jewish life?

2

How do these patterns of connection, belonging, and exclusion compare to your experience of Jewish community in Orange County? Where do they align and where do they differ?

3

What might be driving the gaps between interest in Jewish life and actual involvement? What is needed to break these barriers?

4

Given the range of pathways into Jewish life—rituals, culture, relationships, volunteering, institutions, and programs—where do you see the greatest opportunities to expand access and meaning?

5

Most community members could not provide a rating for their perception of OC Jewish organizations. What does this suggest to you about the role these organizations are playing in the community? About potential areas for development?

Hot Topics



We all love being Jewish—we need to stick together and support each other and be more cohesive.

— Community member



This year, the community appeared divided politically with too much polarization. I'd like to see more things we can come together on.

— Community member





Section Overview

Note: This study was conducted following the events of October 7th, 2023 (data collection occurred between November 2024 and March 2025). This shaped both the design of the survey—we asked specific questions related to the conflict in the region and its impact on the Orange County community—and responses to it.

Across Orange County (and the U.S.), Jewish families are navigating some of the most complex and consequential issues of our time: political polarization, our relationship to Israel—especially in a time of war—and rising antisemitism in our communities and around the globe.

These topics carry deep emotional weight, touching on identity and belonging, and have become increasingly present in people's daily lives since October 7th.

While public discourse often elevates moments of divergence, extremes, and tension, the data present a more nuanced and complicated story in our community: there is more alignment in how people think than the headlines suggest.

And where differences do exist, they often hold potential for productive engagement—if conversations begin from a place of shared values, curiosity, and a desire for connection. With this common ground, disagreement on specific issues or policies does not have to divide us.

Based on recent political registrations and voting patterns, Orange County has emerged as one of the most “purple” places in the country. Our Jewish community reflects this diversity. Jewish adults span the political spectrum and hold a wide range of views on issues affecting our community—from the economy, education, and healthcare to Israel and antisemitism. Among OC Jewish adults, 45% identify as liberal or very liberal, 30% as moderate, and 25% as conservative or very conservative. Community members hold differing views on which electoral issues are most important (and how to address them), where antisemitism is most prevalent (on the political right or left), and Israel's current government and policies.

And yet, most members of the Orange County Jewish community share core commitments: to ethical and moral living, to family and tradition, and to the safety and well-being of Jewish individuals everywhere. Antisemitism is a nearly universal concern, cutting across political and

generational lines. Attachment to Israel also remains strong for most—particularly following the events of October 7th—even as political differences shape how people understand Israel's actions and future; people are engaged, informed, and emotionally invested in Israel—even those who feel conflicted or critical. And many people expressed a desire for spaces where they can speak openly and work side by side to confront antisemitism, engage thoughtfully with Israel, and build a more resilient, connected Jewish Orange County.

Perhaps the strongest area of alignment is the feeling that the community is divided—and that one's own views are specifically unwelcome in many spaces.

Several responses identified cohesion, inclusivity, and connection as a key gap in the Orange County Jewish community. In Jewish spaces, very liberal adults are especially likely to feel that their views on Israel are not accepted; some politically conservative adults feel similarly about their

political views. In broader civic or social settings outside the Jewish community, many Jewish individuals also hesitate to share their views. These dynamics impede progress and create a subtle but significant barrier to belonging; people are withdrawing from critical conversations.

These findings paint a picture of a community individually grappling with hard issues without the space and support to explore commonalities and differences in constructive ways. This section invites readers to consider how we might address this gap, together.

Politics

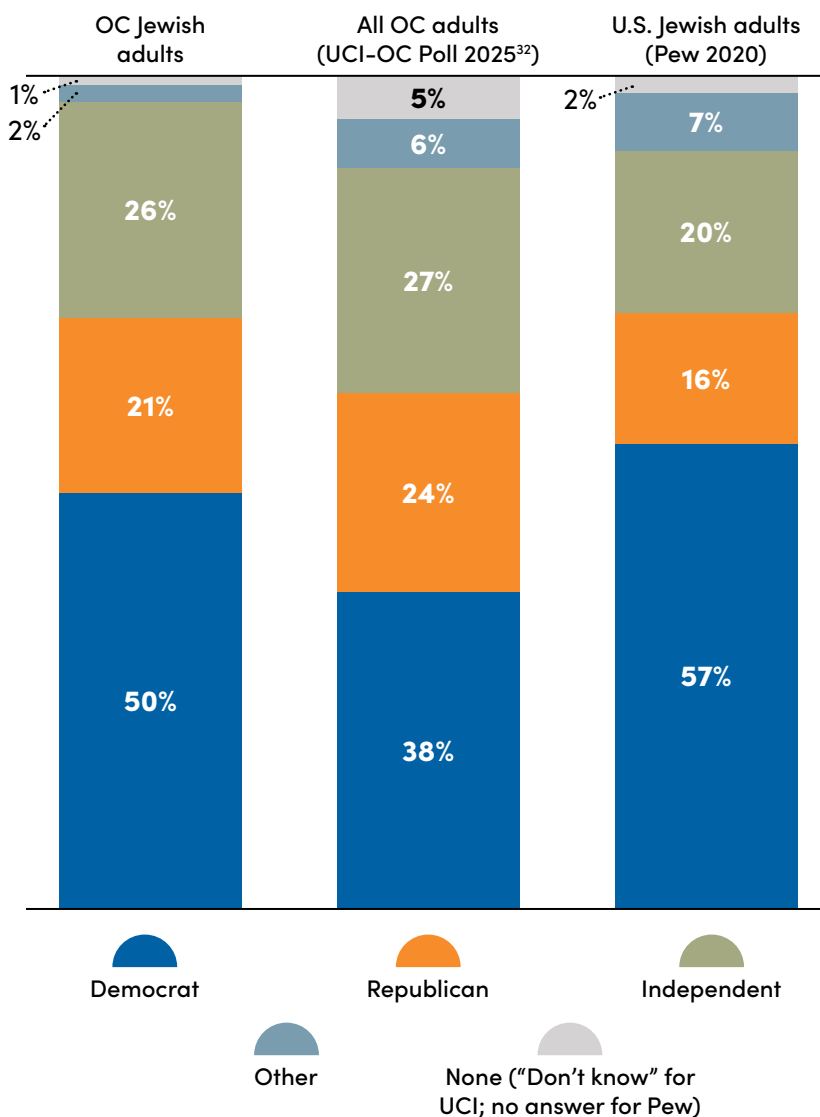
Jewish adults in Orange County span the political spectrum.

45%

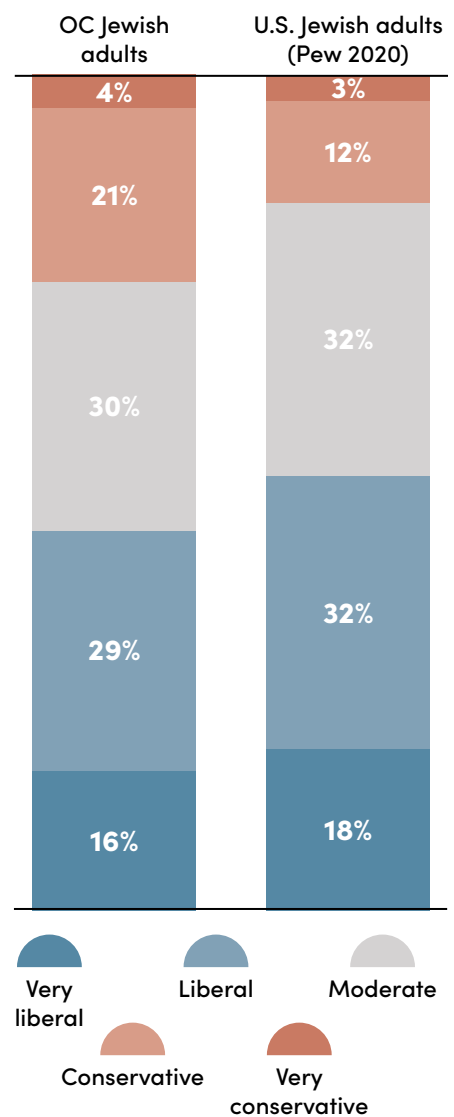
Forty-five percent of OC Jewish adults identify as liberal or very liberal, 30% as moderate, and 25% as conservative or very conservative.

Similarly, 50% are affiliated with the Democratic party, 26% Independent, 21% Republican, and 3% none/other. This balance differs somewhat from both the general Orange County population and the U.S. Jewish population. OC Jewish adults are more likely than the general OC population to identify as Democrats, but compared to U.S. Jewish adults overall, they are somewhat more conservative in their political views.

Party affiliation



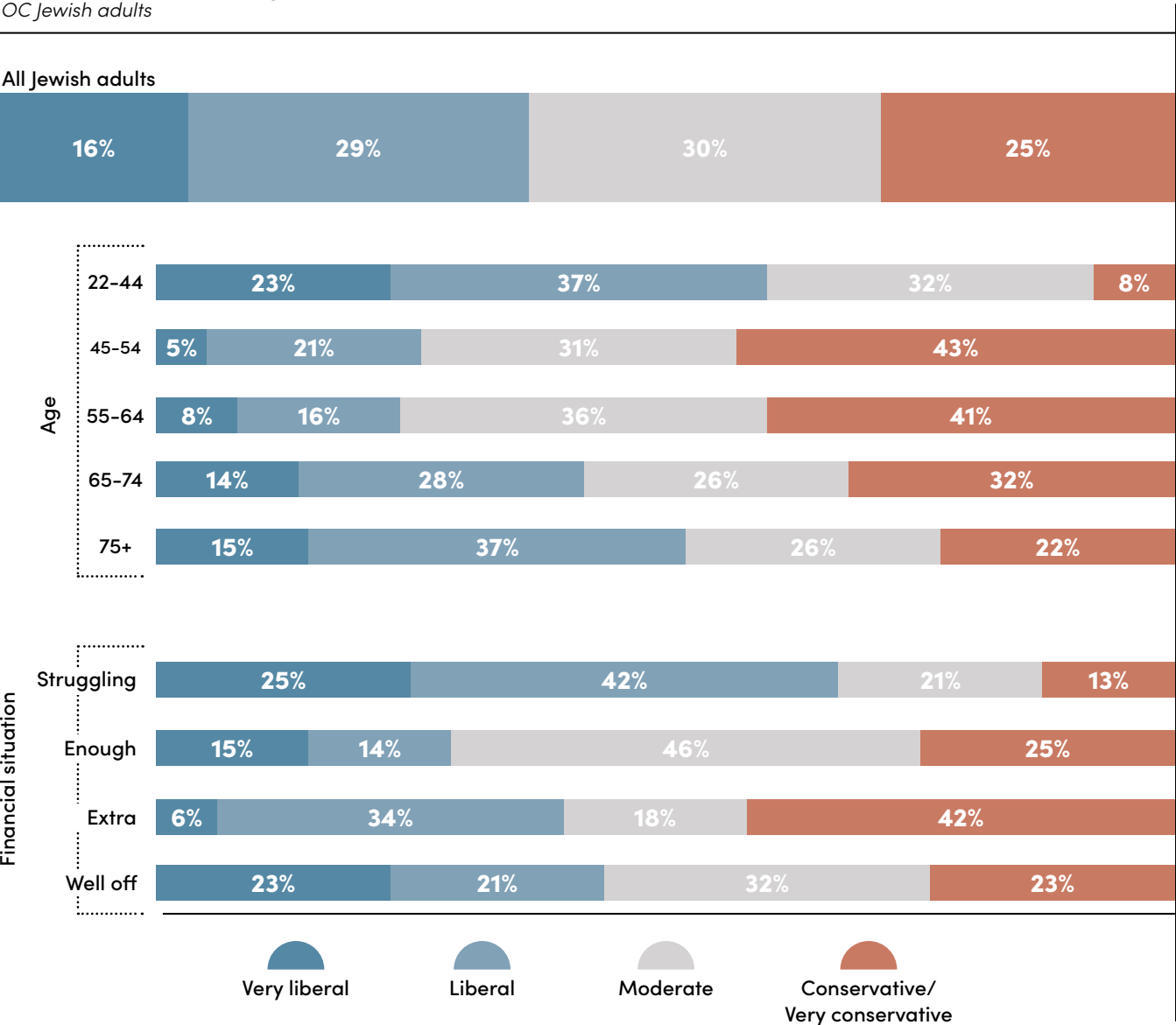
Political views



Political views in OC are correlated with age and financial situation.

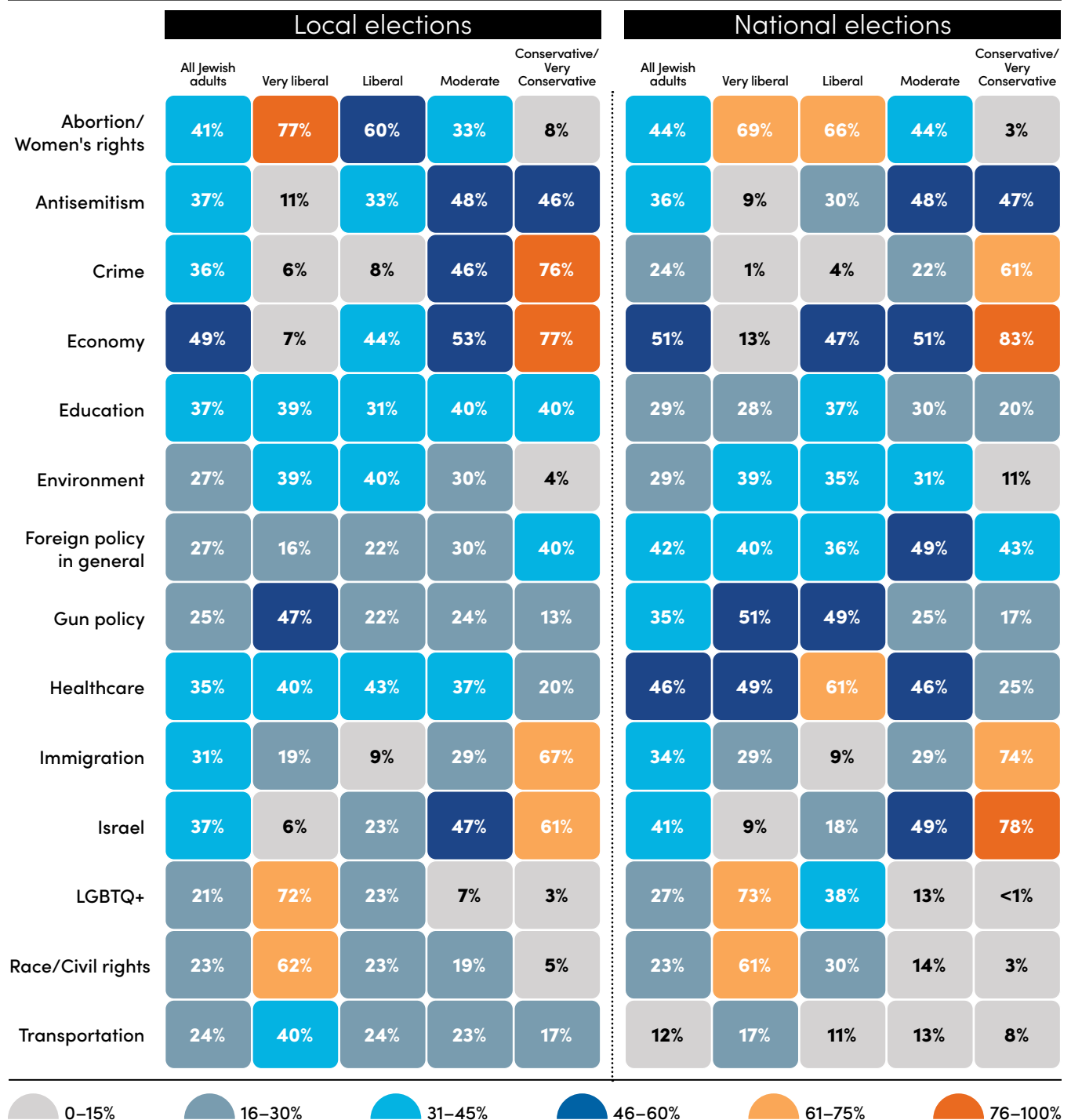
Almost one-quarter of Jewish adults ages 22-44 are very liberal (vs. 16% overall), while about 40% of those 45-64³³ are conservative or very conservative (vs. 25% overall); Jewish adults 65+ are more evenly distributed across policies ideologies. Financial situation follows a similar trend, with most (67%) adults who described themselves as financially struggling identifying as liberal or very liberal, and most (71%) with “enough” identifying as moderate or conservative. Well-off adults are fairly evenly distributed across political ideologies.

Political views, by age and financial situation



Across that spectrum, Jewish adults in Orange County have some shared and some differing concerns with respect to how they vote.

Most important issues in local and national elections
OC Jewish adults



Q: "Thinking about local/national elections, which of the following issues do you consider most when deciding which candidate to support? Policies related to..." Note: Respondents were asked to choose their Top 5 issues in local/national elections, from a set of 14 possible options.

In local elections, there was broad prioritization of a handful of issues.

The economy stood out as the top issue across the OC Jewish community, ranked by about half of all Jewish adults (49%) as one of their most important issues (though specific concerns within that category may vary). More than a third of all Jewish adults ranked abortion/women's rights (41%), Israel (37%), antisemitism (37%), education (37%), crime (36%), and healthcare (35%) as top issues.

Each of the other issues also received significant focus: At least one-quarter of all OC Jewish adults ranked immigration (31%), the environment (27%), foreign policy (27%), and gun policy (25%) as top issues. More than one-fifth ranked transportation (24%), race/civil rights (23%), and LGBTQ+ (21%).

Prioritization of some causes was more strongly associated with certain political ideologies.

For many issues—education, healthcare, foreign policy, and transportation—there were no significant differences in rankings based on political ideology. However, the economy, Israel, antisemitism, and crime were ranked as top issues by far fewer (6–11%) people identifying as “very liberal” (6–11%) than by OC Jewish adults overall. Conversely, abortion/women's rights, the environment, race/civil rights, and LGBTQ+ were ranked by far fewer conservative/very conservative people (3–8%) than by OC Jewish adults overall.

These ends of the ideological spectrum are distinct from the middle in that there was strong internal alignment, showing more consistency in their rankings. The top three issues for very liberals and conservatives/very conservatives were ranked by 62–77% and 67–77% of people who identify with those ideologies, respectively. By comparison, the top three issues for liberals and moderates were ranked by 43%–60% and 47%–53% of people in those groups, reflecting a broader range of priorities.

The economy was also a top issue for OC Jewish adults in national elections,

ranked among the most important by about half of all Jewish adults (51%). More than one-third of all OC Jewish adults prioritized healthcare (46%), abortion/women's rights (44%), foreign policy (42%), Israel (41%), antisemitism (36%), gun policy (35%), and immigration (34%) as key issues at the national level.

Roughly one-quarter of respondents elevated education (29%), environment (29%), and LGBTQ+ (27%), crime (24%), and race/civil rights (23%) as key issues in national elections.

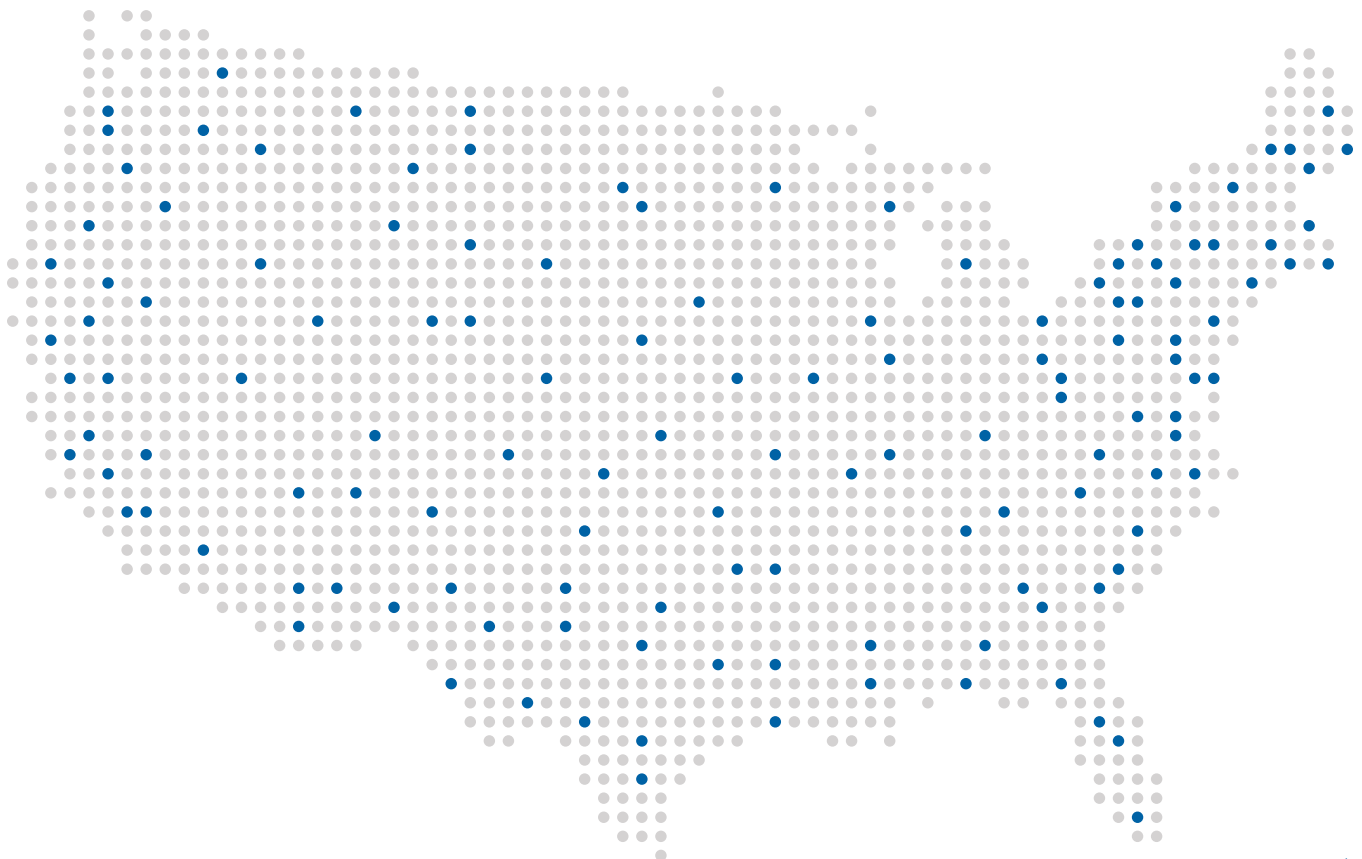
Compared with local elections, healthcare, foreign policy, and gun policy had greater emphases in national elections, while crime, education, and transportation ranked somewhat lower.

There, too, was a relationship between political ideology and prioritization of certain issues at the national level.

There were no significant differences in national election rankings of education, foreign policy, transportation, and the environment among those with ideological differences.

Consistent with local elections, very liberal respondents were far less likely to prioritize the economy, Israel, antisemitism, and crime, while conservative/very conservative respondents were far less likely to prioritize abortion/women's rights, race/civil rights, and LGBTQ+.

And again, there was strong internal alignment at the ends of the political spectrum. The top three issues for very liberal and conservatives/very conservatives in national elections were ranked by 61-73% and 74-83% of people who identify with those ideologies, respectively, whereas the top three issues for liberals and moderates were ranked by 49-66% and 49-51% of people in those groups, respectively.



In terms of Jewish identity, antisemitism, and Israel, we see considerable alignment across the political spectrum ...

(See respective subsections for additional detail)

There are no overall differences in Jewish engagement and behaviors associated with political views.

This includes participation in Jewish programs, membership in communal organizations, or observance of rituals/practices.

OC Jewish adults with varying political affiliations agree on a few elements that are essential to being Jewish:

leading an ethical and moral life (83%), connecting to family and traditions (73%), and learning and teaching about the Holocaust (68%). *(Note: there are other elements ranked highly—see Jewish engagement report for additional detail; we're focused here on the interplay with political views)*

Other elements were also ranked highly, but especially by certain political groups:

- Caring about Israel (72% overall and 95% of conservative and very conservative Jewish adults)
- Taking care of people in need (68% overall and 91% of very liberal Jewish adults)
- Working for justice and equality in society (54% overall and 94% of very liberal Jewish adults)
- Jewish learning and education (52% overall and 70% of conservative and very conservative Jewish adults)

There is also agreement with respect to some concerns about antisemitism ...

Between 72% and 90% of OC Jewish adults across all ideological groups reported being very or extremely concerned about antisemitism in the United States. Similar levels of concern were reported regarding antisemitism in local settings.

... and Israel.

A majority of OC Jewish adults across the ideological spectrum agree that it's important for Israel to exist as a refuge for the Jewish people, Israel is under constant threat from hostile neighbors who seek its destruction, and that Jewish people have a fundamental right to their historic homeland in Israel.

There were no statistical differences among OC Jewish adults holding different political views in terms of attendance at rallies or events in support of Israel since October 2023.

... as well as some areas of divergence.

There are some differences in concern about antisemitism on college campuses and around the world.

Fewer very liberal Jewish people in OC were strongly concerned about antisemitism in these settings (48% and 57%, respectively) than OC Jewish adults overall (80% and 82%, respectively).

We also see variation on some topics related to Israel.

Political views appear to drive differences in emotional attachment to Israel ...

Moderate, conservative, and very conservative people tend to be very attached to Israel (50–59%), liberals tend to be somewhat attached (48%), and very liberal people tend not to be attached (62%).³⁴ This divide has been exacerbated since October 7th, with 37% of the very liberal group indicating less attachment than before the war and just over 40% of moderates and conservatives indicating much more attachment.

... as well as some perspectives on Israel and the current conflict.

Views on some topics seem to be aligned with the ideological spectrum. More liberal OC Jewish adults were more likely to agree that Israel regularly violates the human rights of the Palestinian people than more conservative ones (78% of very liberal, 52% of liberal, 17% of moderate, and 3% of conservative or very conservative OC Jewish adults) and less likely to say that they "almost always agree with Israel's policies and actions" (3% of very liberal, 39% of liberal, 50% of moderate, and 89% of conservative or very conservative OC Jewish adults).

On one topic, this pattern did not hold: liberal, moderate, and conservative/very conservative OC Jewish adults attended events and made donations in support of Palestinians at similar rates ($\leq 1\%$ and $\leq 2\%$, respectively), and far less frequently than very liberal OC Jewish adults (25% and 46%, respectively).

Many in the community recognize growing political divides—and see it as something we can and should work together to address.

Open survey responses:

"I feel that my Jewish Community is divided politically the same way the rest of the country is. It's hard to feel connected when people are espousing such extreme views. The situation with Israel has pushed some people to more extreme views on both sides. I feel more central on this issue, but people have lost their tolerance for differences of opinion and nuance."

"This year, the community appeared divided politically with too much polarization. I'd like to see more things we can come together on."

Antisemitism

Antisemitism weighs heavily on the hearts of the Orange County Jewish community.

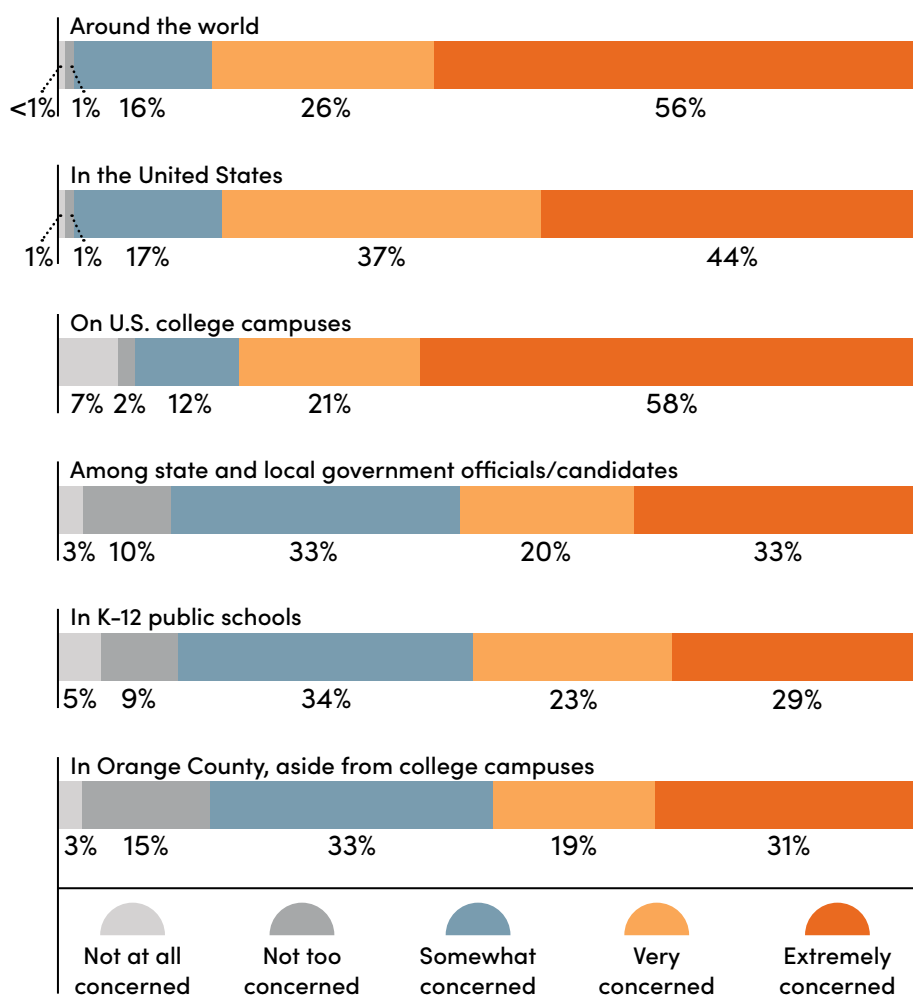
98%

Almost everyone—98% of Jewish adults—reported being at least somewhat concerned about antisemitism in the United States and around the world.

The vast majority are also concerned about antisemitism on college campuses and locally (e.g., among state and local governmental officials/candidates, in K-12 public schools, in OC aside from college campuses), 90% and 80% respectively.

Concern about antisemitism

OC Jewish adults



These concerns are reflected in open survey responses, which call on the community to prioritize:

“Fighting antisemitism, especially on local campuses. Support Hillel and Chabad in the work they do there and think beyond them to consider other resources we can provide to the students (i.e., mental health services and a safety service to escort them on campus).”

“Combating antisemitism in nearby cities and schools and serving as a good example.”

“Fighting antisemitism in our political communities and with our elected officials including school boards.”

Levels of concern are higher in Orange County than national data collected over the past 10 years (but this is likely a function of changes over time, not regional differences).³⁵



However, qualitative responses show significant variation in community members' views on the sources of antisemitism.

As one might expect, political views were a major source of divergence:

Some respondents were focused on antisemitism on the political left: “the majority of American Jews are in a political party that’s filled with antisemites.”

Others spoke about antisemitism on the other end of the political spectrum, urging the community to “[get] away from right wing talking points about antisemitism and instead focus on the growing antisemitism of the American right.”

Views also differed on the relationship between Israel and antisemitism:

Some see antisemitism and anti-Israel sentiment as intertwined: “[One of our community’s priorities should be to combat] antisemitism, including Israel’s right to exist.”

Others emphasized the need to separate the two: “[We need to] fight antisemitism without conflating criticism of Israel with antisemitism! I am opposed to the stifling of dissent on college campuses. What ever happened to 2 Jews, 3 opinions.”

For many, these worries are not abstract—they reflect real experiences.

It is important to note that these findings reflect respondents' personal experiences and perceptions. Individuals may interpret what it means to be the "target" of an antisemitic incident differently. As a result, reported experiences may include incidents that were directly experienced, witnessed, encountered online, or otherwise perceived as personally impactful. The data do not distinguish between direct and indirect experiences of antisemitism.



38%

38% of OC Jewish adults reported that they were personally the target of an antisemitic incident within the past year, as they defined it.

In the past year, 22% of OC Jewish adults experienced antisemitic insults or harassment in person and 20% on social media. 15% experienced social exclusion because of their Jewish identity. Nearly 3% experienced physical attacks or threats, acts of vandalism, or harassment in a public space.

Nationally over the past 10 years, 16% of Jewish adults experienced an antisemitic incident. In other southern CA communities, all of which were studied prior to October 7th, 17% experienced antisemitism. For communities with post-October 7th studies, 30% of Jewish adults experienced an antisemitic incident. (Note that the wording of this question varied across communities and may not be directly comparable. Furthermore, these comparisons go back to 2015, when there were significantly fewer reported incidents of antisemitism in the United States compared to 2024-25, the time of the present study.)³⁶

At the county level, the 2024 Orange County Hate Crime Report found that anti-Jewish motivated hate crimes represented 24% of all hate crime events in the county.

For many, Israel is intertwined with these experiences.

80% of Jewish adults say they often see or hear criticism of Israel that they consider to be antisemitic, and 27% reported experiencing an antisemitic incident related to criticism of Israel. In fact, of all antisemitism incidents reported, 74% were related to criticism of Israel.



Spotlight:

Antisemitism on US college campuses since October 7th, 2023³⁷

Because of methodological constraints, this Jewish community study (like others) does not capture specific information about antisemitism on college campuses in OC,³⁸ but researchers at Brandeis recently conducted a national study on **how antisemitism has manifested on U.S. campuses since the October 7th attack**. At over 50 schools across the country, they surveyed 2,000 Jewish students, first in December of 2023 and again in the spring of 2024 and 4,000 non-Jewish students in the spring of 2024. In the spring of 2025, they surveyed over 2,000 faculty members at 146 research-intensive universities.

Their findings reveal that **although antisemitic views are actually not widespread, small groups with extreme views can still shape hostile campus environments**.

The majority of Jewish students said there was a hostile environment towards Jewish individuals on their campus, though antisemitic hostility varies dramatically from one campus to the next.

Jewish students at campuses with higher levels of antisemitic hostility were much less likely to feel fully safe or comfortable on their campus and much less likely to feel that they “very much” belonged.

Though most faculty and students do not hold antisemitic views, a minority expresses beliefs that many consider antisemitic. Ten percent of non-Jewish faculty and 34% of non-Jewish students hold views that most Jewish students find antisemitic.

Half of those people expressed hostile views about Israel, such as denying it has the right to exist. (Note: The research shows that Jewish students see a clear distinction between criticizing the actions of Israel's government and denying Israel's right to exist. The vast majority found the latter to be antisemitic, but there was no similar consensus around other statements, such as accusing Israel of committing genocide.)

The other half tended to agree with explicitly anti-Jewish statements such as "Jews in America have too much power."

Despite this relative prevalence, at all schools, more students were concerned about antisemitism related to criticism of Israel than they were about antisemitism related to traditional anti-Jewish stereotype. Even among those who had unfavorable views of the Israeli government (44% of all respondents), nearly half (45%) were very concerned about antisemitism related to criticism of Israel.

Experiences of antisemitic incidents also varied. Less than 2% of students reported experiencing an antisemitic physical attack; between 14% and 24% of students reported experiencing an antisemitic insult or harassment in-person in the past three months, depending on the campus. Between 26% and 35% of students reported personally experiencing an antisemitic insult or harassment on social media.

Some students also report feeling shunned and excluded. These experiences, including loss of friendships, were often tied to peers' perceptions of Jewish students' stance on Israel. Some students reported being shunned by friends who were critical of Israel, regardless of their own views on the actions of the Israeli government. Liberal Jewish students were especially likely to feel alienated and estranged from other politically liberal peers.

Jewish students are most likely to encounter anti-Israel hostility from other students on campus, as opposed to faculty or administrators. Despite headlines, most faculty reported that debates about Israel rarely entered classroom discussions.

Responses to antisemitism haven't effectively addressed students' concerns. Students expressed a desire for university administrators to take a more active role in addressing antisemitism.

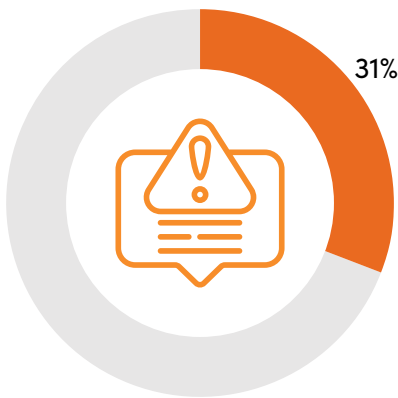
The data suggest efforts to address antisemitism on campus need to be carefully targeted (not a one-size-fits-all solution). Colleges and universities can do a better job of exposing students to diverse views and encouraging dialogue across differences. Students need help to learn how to express and act on their intense political convictions in a way that does not lead to violence or the ostracism of peers who think differently.

At the same time, many cautioned that well-intended actions can and have had negative consequences. On-campus responses—such as banning pro-Palestinian student groups—exacerbate campus tensions rather than alleviate them. Off-campus advocacy—such as criticizing university administrations, making statements about campus safety, and organizing speaker events and counter-protests—was seen by Jewish students and campus professionals as increasing the level of tension for Jewish students.

Members of our community have been struggling with how to respond...

Only a fraction of those who experienced antisemitic incidents reported them.

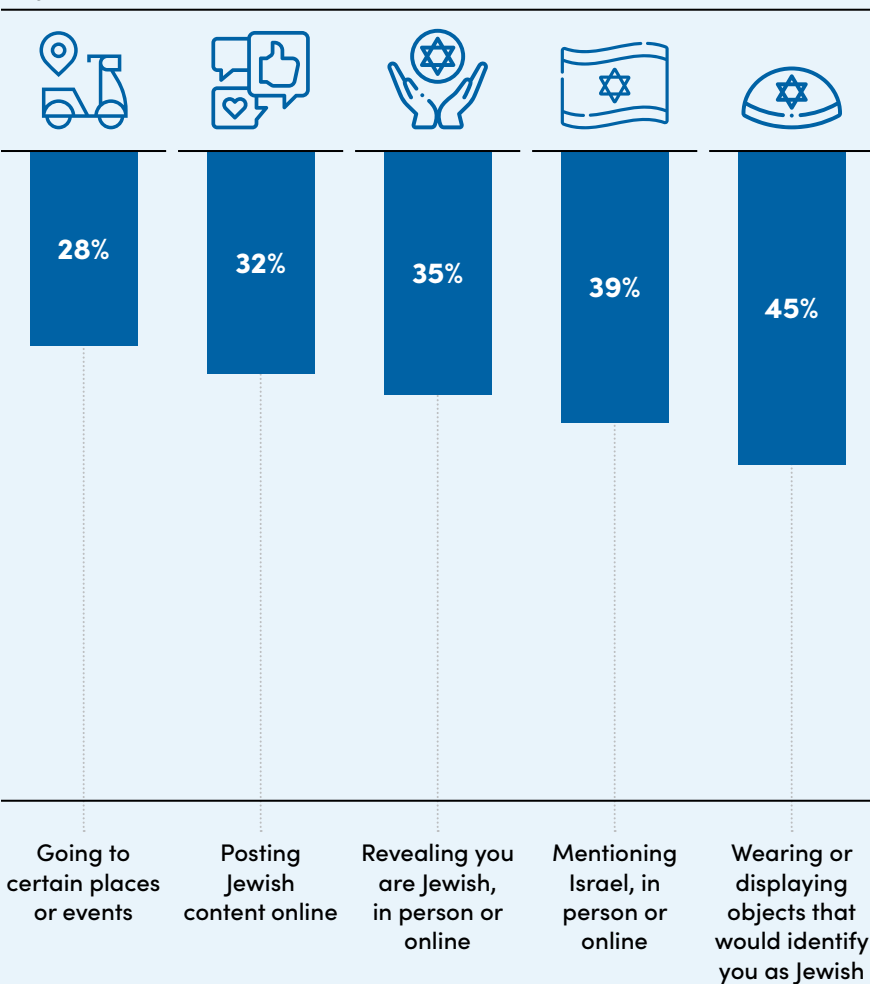
Of Orange County adults who experienced an antisemitic incident, only 31% reported the incident to officials, rabbis or other Jewish professionals, government agencies, Jewish community organizations, friends and family, or another reporting mechanism. While 37% of those who did not report didn't consider the incident to be serious, 53% didn't think that any change would happen as a result of reporting and 47% didn't know who to report to.



At the same time, fear of antisemitism has changed behavior across the community.

63% of Jewish adults reported avoiding Jewish activities out of a fear of antisemitism in the last year, including...

Avoided activities, past year
OC Jewish adults



Q: In the past year, have you avoided any of the following out of fear of antisemitism?

Patterns of avoidance were higher among liberal Jewish adults and younger adults.



15%

15% of OC Jewish adults said that safety and security was a barrier to their participation in Jewish events. *Other communities across the U.S. experience similar limitations.*³⁹

This fear is reflected in open survey responses:

“How to connect in a safe environment. Even going to the JCC is stressful as I’m waiting for snipers on the hillsides to attack us even when we are there to workout.”

⋮

“I also have not found a good solution to the safety issue. I don’t feel safe being Jewish in the world today. I am afraid for my kids and I am not even sure where to send them to college given the state of things. I don’t feel safe even though the temples hire security.”

⋮

“A glaring gap is the lack of a community wide security initiative that includes a disaster plan. Consider a simple shooting at the JCC or incident at a school. What resources does the community have besides for local authorities? We should put our community first, and be quietly prepared.”



... and view the fight against antisemitism as a communal imperative.

Many Jewish adults called on organizations and institutions to take an active role in leading this effort.

More than 1 in 3 OC Jewish adults selected antisemitism as one of their top 5 most important issues in local and national elections; 4 in 10 Jewish adults listed combatting antisemitism as a top cause of volunteering and donating; and in response to the open response question “What should be the priorities of the Orange County Jewish community,” almost 30% of respondents suggested combatting antisemitism should be a top priority.

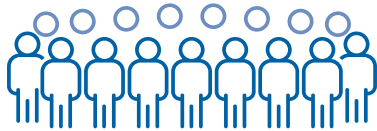
At the same time, current perceptions of organizational response are mixed:

37% of Jewish adults rated Orange County Jewish organizations responses to antisemitism positively, 18% rated them negatively, and 45% said they didn’t know how to rate them.



Political ideology did not meaningfully shape people’s assessment of organizations’ responses to antisemitism, but age did.

Perhaps counterintuitively, political views did not drive significant differences in assessment of organizational response to antisemitism. Younger adults, however, were more likely to both offer a rating and to evaluate organizational responses more negatively. A frequently cited reason for negative assessments among qualitative responses was a perceived lack of action, particularly locally.



People see multiple opportunities for the Orange County Jewish community to take collective action, both within the Jewish community...

"I believe more training and awareness needs to be provided on antisemitism... how to respond to someone, knowing questions that a Jewish person may be asked."

"[We need to] bring unaffiliated Jews and mixed religious households together to better understand how we can manage the growing antisemitism all around."

"[Our priority should be] coming together from different synagogues and organizations to address antisemitism and educate our young people (and others) about Israel."



... and beyond.

"[Our priority should be] education, promoting open dialogue with the Arab and Palestinian community, and support for our local college students on campus to combat antisemitism."

"[We need more] training and awareness on antisemitism. [For example], being familiar with Jewish history, major holidays, and in some cases, disputing that the Jews did not kill Jesus."

"For democracy to prevail in this country I think the Jewish community needs to reach out to educate the non-Jewish community by exposing them to Jewish history and ethical values."

"[We should focus on] naming the hate (by which I mean making, and inviting public figures to make statements identifying antisemitic speech and incidents in the community). People in OC say and do and believe terribly antisemitic things, and they have no idea what they are saying, doing, and believing is antisemitic—and the people who do know what they are saying, doing, and believing is antisemitic need to be publicly named."

"[We need to] give praise to our elected leaders who do right by the Jewish community."

One respondent painted a vision for a collective goal:

"Ensuring OC is a safe and vibrant place for its Jewish residents."

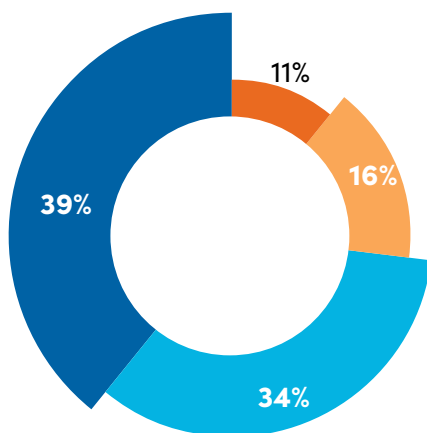
Israel

Most Jewish adults in Orange County feel personally connected to Israel.

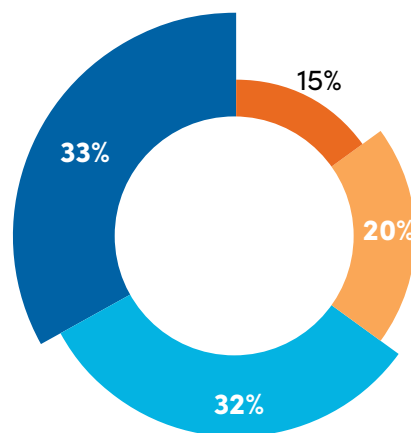
3/4

Almost three-quarters of Jewish adults in OC consider themselves somewhat or very attached to Israel and consider caring about Israel to be an essential aspect of being Jewish (73% and 72%, respectively). There are no significant differences between age groups in terms of emotional attachment to Israel.

Emotional attachment to Israel



OC Jewish adults



U.S. Jewish adults

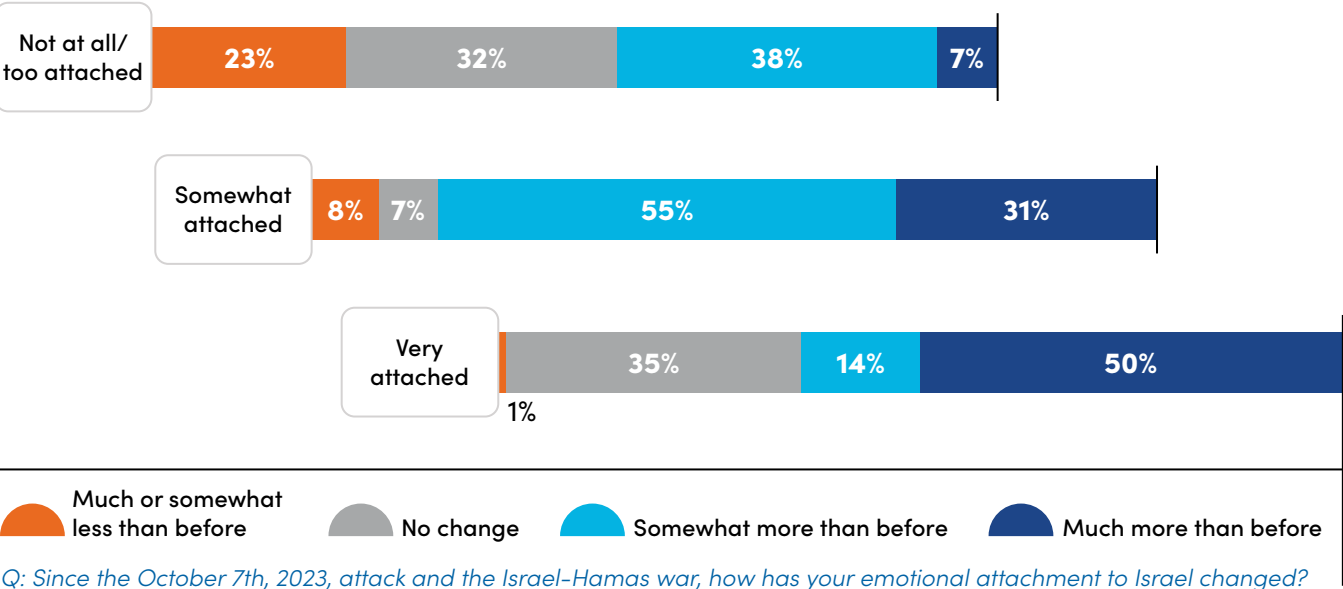
CMJS Combined Dataset (CDS), largely pre-10/7⁴⁰



For many, October 7th and the ensuing conflict intensified their attachment to Israel.

A majority of OC Jewish adults (65%) indicated somewhat or much more attachment to Israel than before October 7th, 2023, including 38% of those who indicated feeling not at all/not too attached to Israel. 10% of all OC Jewish adults indicated less attachment than before October 7th. Again, there were no significant differences based on age.

Change in attachment since October 7th
OC Jewish adults

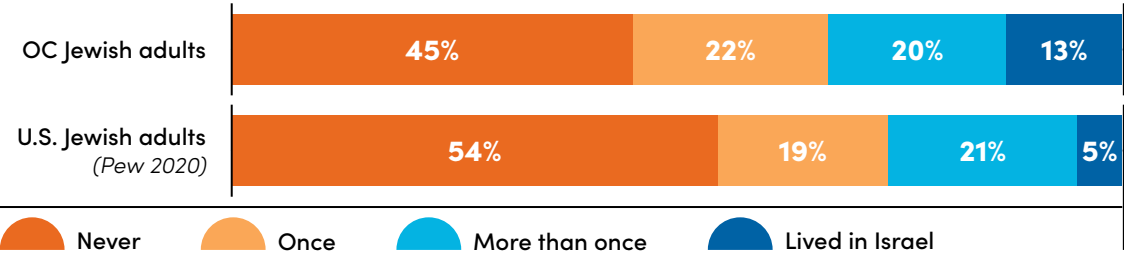


55%

More than half (55%) of all Jewish adults reported having traveled to and/or lived in Israel.

(Travel included short-term educational trips, longer-term programs, trips sponsored by a local Jewish organization, and Birthright Israel trips.) Not surprisingly, those who have traveled to Israel multiple times or lived in Israel are more emotionally connected to Israel than those who haven't travelled to Israel or have only travelled once.

Travel to Israel



Orange County is also home to a sizable Israeli-American community.⁴¹

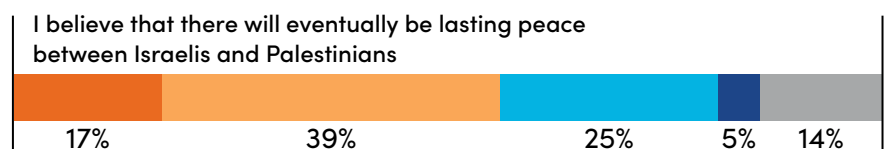
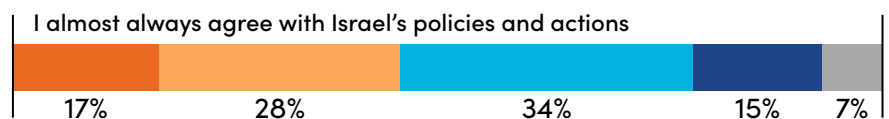
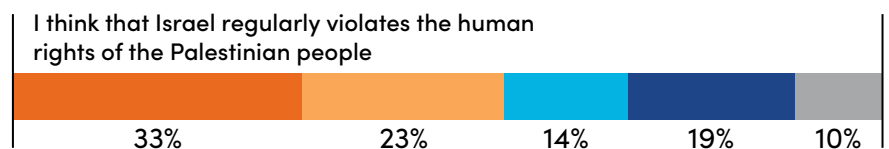
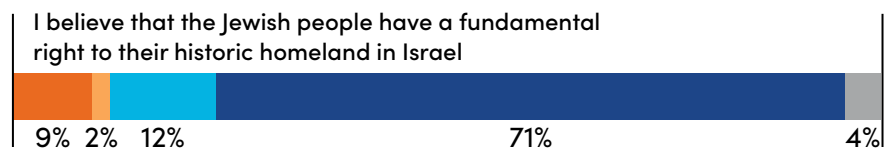
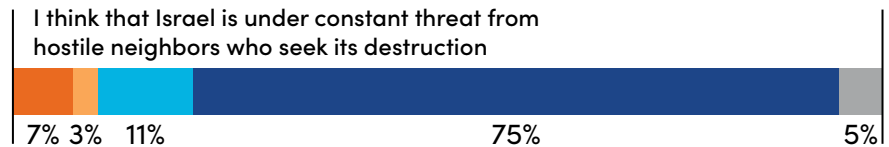
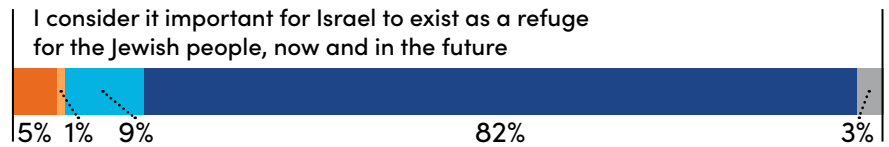
5% of Jewish adults in Orange County were born in Israel, 13% lived in Israel at some point during their lives, and 15% of Jewish adults consider themselves to be part of the Israeli American Jewish community.

They also care deeply about Israel as a state.

Overall, the Orange County Jewish community strongly supports Israel as a Jewish state.

The majority of Jewish adults somewhat or strongly agree that it is important for Israel to exist as a refuge for the Jewish people (91%), that Israel is under constant threat from hostile neighbors who seek its destruction (86%), and that the Jewish people have a fundamental right to their historic homeland in Israel (83%).

However, political identification, emotional attachment to Israel, and travel to Israel are associated with significant differences in these views.



Skepticism as to whether there will eventually be lasting peace between Israelis and Palestinians is similar across all groups.

Israel is seen as an important political issue by many Jewish adults.

When deciding which candidate to support in local elections and national elections, Israel was selected by 37% and 41% of OC Jewish adults, respectively, as one of their top five issues considered. This was the third-most selected issue in local elections and the fifth-most selected issue in national elections. Those who are politically conservative or have traveled to Israel are more likely to consider Israel when selecting a political candidate.

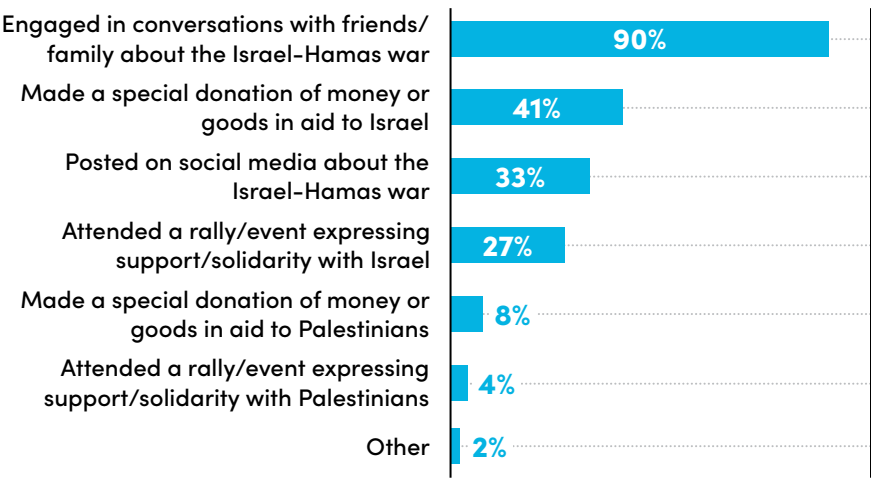
The large majority of OC Jewish adults follow news about Israel either somewhat (43%) or very (43%) closely. A majority (80%) also somewhat or strongly agreed with the statement that they feel confident in their understanding of the current situation in Israel. However, nearly 40% somewhat or strongly agreed with the statement that they often feel they don't know enough to participate in conversations about Israel.

When asked about what causes were most important for them to volunteer for or donate to, 40% of Jewish adults selected Israel, making it the third highest cause.

Almost all Jewish adults (92%) in Orange County have engaged in some Israel-related activity since October 7th, 2023.

The most common Israel-related activity was engaging in conversations with friends/family about the war (90%), followed by making a special donation of money or goods in aid of Israel (41%). Few participated in activities in support of Palestine, such as making a special donation in aid to Palestinians (8%) or attending a rally or event expressing support for Palestinians (4%).

Engagement in Israel-related activities since October 7th
OC Jewish adults



Unlike overall emotional attachment to Israel, in certain activities and attitudes, there is evidence of generational divides.

With respect to many views and behaviors, younger adults (ages 22-44) are distinct from those ages 45 and above.

They were less likely to somewhat or strongly agree with the statement "I almost always agree with Israel's policies and actions" (30% vs. 49% overall).

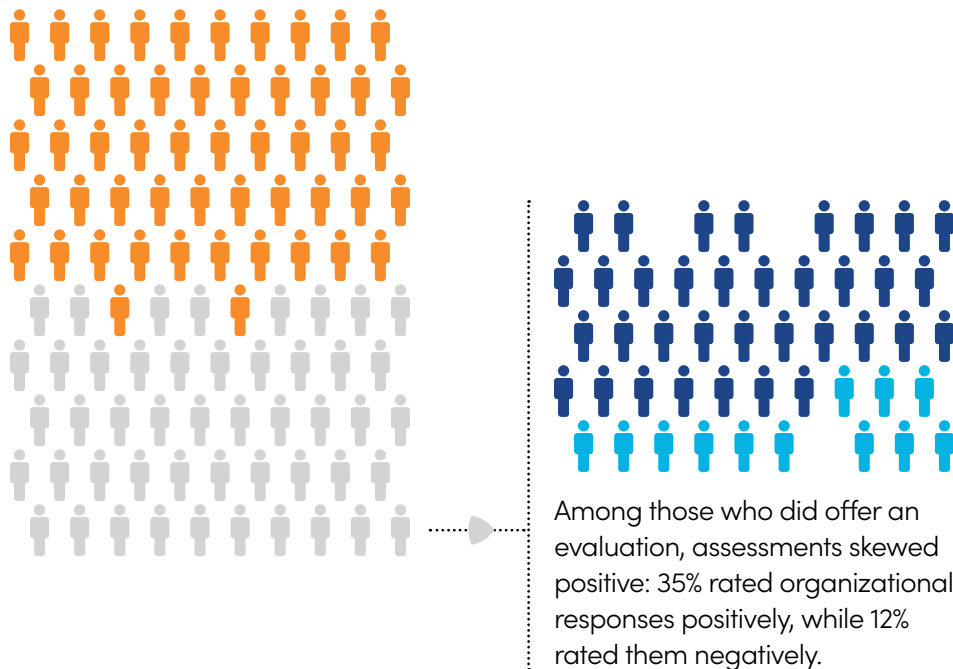
They were also more likely to have posted on social media about the Israel-Hamas war (53% vs. 33% overall), made a special donation of money or goods in aid to Palestinians (14% vs. 8%), or attended a rally/event expressing solidarity or support with Palestinians (10% vs. 4%).

But on one topic, the youngest (22-44) and oldest (75+) OC Jewish adults were aligned.

They were more likely to agree with the statement that Israel regularly violates the human rights of the Palestinian people (48% and 41%, respectively) than adults ages 45-74 (between 15% and 22% of whom agreed).

As Jewish adults engage deeply with Israel as an issue, many also look to Jewish organizations for leadership and response, but awareness of how OC Jewish organizations have responded to the Israel-Hamas war is limited.

More than half of Orange County Jewish adults (52%) said they did not know enough to evaluate how local Jewish organizations had responded to the war.



For many, beliefs about Israel are a barrier to inclusion in Orange County.

Many Jewish adults feel unwelcome in the Jewish community:

More than a quarter of all Jewish adults (27%) and two-thirds (67%) of very liberal Jewish adults feel that their views are unwelcome in Jewish spaces; approximately one-quarter of liberal (22%) and conservative or very conservative (25%) Jewish adults feel this way.

And in non-Jewish settings:

Almost two-thirds of community members at least somewhat agree that their views are unwelcome in non-Jewish settings. In the past year, 39% of Jewish adults have avoided mentioning Israel (whether in person or online) out of fear of antisemitism.

Discussion Questions

These findings invite reflection on how the community can come together and create spaces where people feel safe to listen, share, and disagree.

1

How do these findings confirm or complicate your understanding of political diversity within the Orange County Jewish community?

2

Where do you see unexpected areas of alignment—or sharper divides than anticipated?

3

How might common ground be strengthened even amid differing interpretations and emotions? What might help create space for more constructive engagement?

4

What role should Jewish organizations and community leaders have in this moment?

Endnotes

¹The earliest studies date back to the 1920s, though “modern” studies have been conducted since the 50s-60s.

² Pew Research Center, “Jewish Americans in 2020.”

³ Aronson, J.K., & Magidin de Kramer, R. (2026). CMJS Combined Dataset: Benchmark Report. Waltham, MA: Cohen Center for Modern Jewish Studies, Brandeis University.

⁴ CMJS Combined Dataset (CDS).

⁵ This figure excludes high school students, even if they are age 18 or older.

⁶ CMJS Combined Dataset (CDS).

⁷ CMJS Combined Dataset (CDS).

⁸ This includes those who indicated they cannot or are just managing to make ends meet.

⁹ This refers to any chronic health issue, disability, or other need that affects participation in work, school, or activities (e.g., a cognitive or developmental impairment, chronic disease, physical disability, mental health issue).

¹⁰ HHS Poverty Guidelines.

¹¹ United Ways of California, The Real Cost Measure in California.

¹² California Department of Housing and Community Development, 2025 State Income Limits.

¹³ Federal Reserve, Survey of Household Economics and Decisionmaking; Urban Institute, Financial Health and Wealth Dashboard; Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative, Global Multidimensional Poverty Index; Pew Research Center, ‘What’s the difference between income and wealth?’ and other common questions about economic concepts.

¹⁴ Goldstein and Sumekh, *Challenging the Narrative of Jewish Wealth* (2025).

¹⁵ APHA, The Impact of Individual and Household Debt on Health and Well-Being (2021); NIH, Social inequalities, debt, and health in the United States (2021).

¹⁶ Foundation for Jewish Camp, 2025 State of the Field Census and internal reporting.

¹⁷ This is a calculated estimate that includes adults with diagnosed chronic mental health issues (8% of adults) and those who self-reported their mental health as poor or fair (15% of adults).

¹⁸ Harvard, Making Caring Common Project, Loneliness in America: Just the Tip of the Iceberg? (2024).

¹⁹ CDC, Health Effects of Social Isolation and Loneliness (2024); U.S. Surgeon General, Our Epidemic of Loneliness and Isolation (2023).

²⁰ National data suggests the U.S. is facing a “youth mental health crisis” with worsening trends over the past decade. In 2023, 40% of U.S. high school students reported persistent sadness or hopelessness, and about one in five adolescents had a diagnosed mental or behavioral health condition. CDC, Youth Mental Health: The Numbers (2024); HRSA, National Survey of Children’s Health (2024).

²¹ PPIC, “Who’s Leaving California—and Who’s Moving In?” (2026)

- ²² California Department of Housing and Community Development, 2024 State Income Limits, 2025 State Income Limits.
- ²³ Pew Research Center, *Online Religious Services Appeal to Many Americans, but Going in Person Remains More Popular* (2023).
- ²⁴ Pew Research Center, *Jewish Americans in 2020* (2021).
- ²⁵ The U.S. Surgeon General, *Our Epidemic of Loneliness and Isolation: The U.S. Surgeon General's Advisory on the Healing Effects of Social Connection and Community* (2023).
- ²⁶ Jewish congregations include a synagogue, temple, minyan, or chavurah.
- ²⁷ Pew Research Center, "Jewish Americans in 2020."
- ²⁸ Pew Research Center, "Jewish Americans in 2020."; Pew Research Center, *A Portrait of Jewish Americans* (2013).
- ²⁹ An additional 16% did not fast for medical reasons.
- ³⁰ Pew Research Center, "Jewish Americans in 2020."
- ³¹ Not all communal organizations are membership organizations. Higher program participation may be attributed to non-membership organizations.
- ³² UC Irvine School of Social Ecology, "UCI-OC Poll: California's Next Election: Insights and Analysis" (2025). <https://bpb-us-e2.wpmucdn.com/sites.uci.edu/dist/5/5275/files/2025/07/7-2-2025-UCI-OC-Poll-4.pdf>
- ³³ This combines two age groups: 43% of those ages 45-54 and 41% of those ages 55-64 are conservative or very conservative.
- ³⁴ This refers to the percentage of liberal people who indicate they are not too attached and not at all attached.
- ³⁵ Nationally over the past 10 years, 67% of Jewish adults were very concerned about antisemitism in the United States, and 33% were concerned about local antisemitism at the time of their study (CDS). Note that the wording of this question varied across communities and may not be directly comparable. Previous studies did not include an "extremely concerned" category. Furthermore, these comparisons go back to 2015, when there were significantly fewer reported incidents of antisemitism in the United States compared to 2024-25, the time of the present study.
- ³⁶ CMJS Combined Dataset (CDS); California studies include San Diego (2022), Los Angeles (2021), and Long Beach (2021). Post-October 7 studies include Miami (2024), Maine (2024), Northeast Florida (2024), and St. Louis (2024).
- ³⁷ Graham Wright, Brandeis University's Center for Modern Jewish Studies, "Antisemitism on campus is a real problem - but headlines and government-proposed solutions don't match the experience of most Jewish students" (2025); "In the Shadows of War: Hotspots of Antisemitism on US College Campuses" (2023); "Campus Voices: Jewish Students Experiences of Antisemitism at US Colleges" (2024); "Antisemitism on Campus: Understanding Hostility to Jews and Israel" (2024); "Ideology in the Classroom: How Faculty and US Universities Navigate Politics and Pedagogy Amid Federal Pressure Over Viewpoint Diversity and Antisemitism" (2025)
- ³⁸ The CMJS Jewish Community Studies collect survey responses from individuals based on their permanent residential address. As a result, the data are geographically organized around home communities rather than institutions, and they do not systematically capture experiences occurring on specific college campuses, including those in Orange County.
- ³⁹ CMJS Combined Dataset (CDS); In other communities across the United States with post-10/7 studies, 10% of Jewish adults say safety and security concerns limit their participation in their local Jewish community.
- ⁴⁰ CMJS Combined Dataset (CDS).
- ⁴¹ The Israeli-American Jewish community is sometimes defined as immigrants from Israel, Israeli citizens, children or grandchildren of Israelis, or individuals who live in a Hebrew-speaking household.



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