

The Bar/Bat Mitzvah Class of 5755

TRACKING JEWISH CONNECTIONS OVER TWO DECADES
1995–2019

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JTS

WILLIAM DAVIDSON GRADUATE SCHOOL
OF JEWISH EDUCATION

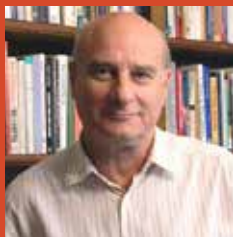
ABOUT THE AUTHORS



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Ariela is co-author of *Religion in a Free Market* (with Barry Kosmin), and *The Next Generation: Jewish Children and Adolescents* (with Barry Kosmin and Jeffrey Scheckner). She co-edited *Secularism, Women & The State: The Mediterranean World in the 21st Century*; *Secularism and Science in the 21st Century*; and *Secularism & Secularity: Contemporary International Perspectives* (with Barry Kosmin).

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Dr. Kosmin was Principal Investigator of the American Religious Identification Survey (ARIS) series 1990-2015 and Founding Director of the Institute for the Study of Secularism in Society and Culture at Trinity College, Hartford, Connecticut 2005-19.

DAVIDSON SCHOOL

Dr. Shira Eptein, Dean

The William Davidson Graduate School of Jewish Education is the largest multid denominational school of Jewish education in North America, granting master's and doctoral degrees and providing professional development to educators currently in the field. Drawing upon cutting-edge thinking in both Jewish and general education, its pedagogy emphasizes experiential education, is informed by best practices and new developments in teaching, and engenders leadership in a variety of educational settings.

PROJECT TEAM

Dr. Bill Robinson

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LETTER FROM THE CHANCELLOR



It's a true privilege, as Chancellor of JTS, to introduce this important volume to its readers, in full confidence that the story it tells will be as fascinating to you as it is to me. As parents or teachers of children or teenagers, we wonder with eager anticipation what will become of them: will they find happiness and fulfilment? will they follow the path we have helped set for them? will they, as we hope desperately, do good in the world, and be appreciated for it? If we are fortunate enough to be able to look back at their progress over a span of decades, we can not only satisfy our curiosity on such questions but take pride in accomplishments to which we contributed. "So this is how it has turned out," we say to ourselves, joined by others who helped give them their start. "I [never] could have predicted that!"

Such is the pleasure that awaits readers of this gripping account of where a Conservative bar and bat mitzvah cohort stands nearly a quarter century after their rite of passage to young adulthood. Every one of the 400 lives charted in Keysar's and Kosmin's study is unique, of course, but there are notable common threads: overwhelming pride in being Jewish, for example; strong attachment to Israel; a relatively robust record of identification with Conservative Judaism. Most surprising of all, perhaps—given the trend towards disaffiliation that is shaping Jewish and non-Jewish religious institutions in America today—over

"Judaism is my connection to my family (descendants of Holocaust survivors), and that manifests in culture more than religious practice (food, music, language, art), though we do celebrate most holidays and practice many rituals." *A mother, 2018*

60% of the members of this set of bar/bat mitzvah alumni belong to a synagogue or intend to do so in the future.

As a professor of religion—in both senses of the word "profess"—I was saddened but not surprised by the relatively small number who engage in private prayer (an activity that does not come easily to most Jews), and heartened (but again not surprised) to hear one mother in the group

say she is "definitely less religious" than she was at the time of her bat mitzvah (meaning, I assume, that she is less observant), but that "my husband and I are slowly becoming more religious now that we have children." I would guess that more than a desire to give her child[ren] a Jewish education is involved. Adult life changes one, as does love; the highs and lows that the years inevitably bring effect alterations in many aspects of one's outlook; relation to tradition often changes with parenthood— as does trust in the world, and in God.

Where will our bar/bat mitzvah class of 1995—when the internet had just come into widespread use, smart phones were still over a decade away, and the prospect of driverless vehicles and drones was limited to sci fi fantasies like *The Jetsons*—be in 2035 or 2055, when these innovations will likely be old news, and all our lives—including our Jewish practice and belief—have been shaped decisively by forces we cannot even imagine today? If only you and I could have the privilege of reading a successor study that gives the answer, that study too perhaps sponsored in part by the Davidson School of JTS! In the meantime, let's learn as much as we can from the report before us, and vigorously debate its implications for synagogues, Jewish education, and the next generation of Jews and of Judaism.



Dr. Arnold M. Eisen
Chancellor

WELCOME AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS



Dear Reader,

I recall feeling a mix of excitement and skepticism when Ariela Keysar floated the idea of following up with the participants in studies she and Barry Kosmin conducted. Though I am significantly older than those respondents, the publication of the initial research report, and the subsequent “4-Up” and “8-Up” studies took place during a significant time in my own professional growth. As, the respondents were becoming *bnai mitzvah*, I was a student in a graduate program in psychology; the pursuit of a career as an academic in Jewish education was not even within the realm of plausibility for me. As I completed my clinical internship and took my first job out of graduate school (neither in a Jewish educational context), studies such as those by Keysar and Kosmin (and others) led me to understand that rigorous social scientific, developmental research was taking place in the Jewish context. Eventually, I came to understand that I could help contribute to the conversation.

That explains the excitement, but what of the skepticism? That reaction was primarily methodological. How would we be able to even locate these respondents to begin with, let alone have them agree to participate in a study!?!? I don’t believe I was alone in wondering this. Nevertheless, the researchers and our JTS team figured that in a 20+ year follow up, any and all data would be interesting. The eventual number of respondents resulted from the enormous efforts of members of the team. Debbie Singfer, the Research Manager at the William Davidson Graduate School of Jewish Education—JTS, was an active part of the recruitment process and all aspects of the project. At Trinity College, Marjorie A. Rednor was the research assistant who skillfully administered the online survey and focus groups. Without their efforts, this project would not have succeeded.

The current study spanned two Deans and two Provosts at JTS (a testimony to the degree of time and effort that went into the project)! Dr. Bill Robinson was able to provide funding for this project and was also an active member of the research team (significantly contributing to the focus and content of the survey). His successor, Dr. Shira Epstein continues to provide support as we roll out the findings. Our Provosts—first Dr. Alan Cooper and then Dr. Shuly Schwartz—helped promote faculty research and make it possible for us to take on projects such as this.



Dr. Jeffrey S. Kress
Bernard Heller Professor of Jewish Education

INTRODUCTION TO THE LONGITUDINAL STUDY

Every religious group devotes major resources to ensuring continuity by inculcating their values and traditions in young people. However, there is often scant direct evidence on whether the investments have worked. Being a small minority, Jewish leaders and educators are thirsty for knowledge about how to keep Judaism alive. The “gold standard” to investigate this lacuna is to follow a cohort of individuals over the life course to see how they fare. The *Longitudinal Study of Young Jews Raised in Conservative Synagogues*, which has been following a large sample of American and Canadian Jews since their bar/bat mitzvah rite of passage in 1995 (5755) aims to fill this knowledge gap. It involves a unique panel of American and Canadian Jews who were raised in Conservative synagogues and received at least five years of religious and Hebrew education. Our pioneering study focuses on the development of Jewish identity and how it is passed to the rising generation at four points in time over 23 years. It was launched in 1995 with interviews with over 1,400 13- and 14-year-old boys and girls, as well as with their parents. On three further occasions this panel was re-interviewed: in 1999 during the high school years, again in 2003 during their college years, and recently in 2018, with over 400 panel members.

This millennial cohort, born in the early 1980s, was the first generation raised in an egalitarian synagogue environment. The cohort’s members were 36 or 37 years old in 2018, and at a critical stage in the life cycle socially and in their careers. Many have settled down, married, and are raising children of their own. Members of the bar/bat mitzvah class of 5755 are harbingers of societal changes and Jewish trends. Already as college students, in 2003, they had decreased their religious involvement while continuing to express a strong sense of Jewish peoplehood (Keysar and Kosmin, 2004). This trend was shown a decade later for the American Jewish population in general (Pew, 2013).

¹ Pew Research Center, 2013, A Portrait of Jewish Americans, <https://www.pewforum.org/2013/10/01/jewish-american-beliefs-attitudes-culture-survey/>

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

JEWISH IDENTITY

- Family is pivotal to Jewish connections: When asked in an open-ended question to describe what connects them to Judaism, respondents most frequently named *family*, followed by *holidays*, *Shabbat*, and *synagogue*.
- Respondents overwhelmingly (98%) exhibited Jewish pride.
- Jewish peoplehood was strong and strengthening among this cohort as more members expressed a deep connection to the Jewish people (52% ‘agree strongly’) than in earlier years.
- A strong sense of Jewishness has been maintained over time, as 86% said that *being Jewish* is important to them.
- Israel was of importance to 85% of respondents in 2018 compared to 97% in 2003.

JUDAISM

- In response to the question “what do you like about Judaism?” *Community* is the most prominent answer, followed by *culture* and *traditions*. Interestingly, there was hardly any mention of God, synagogue or rabbis.
- As regards denominational loyalty, 43% have maintained their original Conservative identity and 57% identifying with another or no synagogue denomination.
 - Only 16% consider themselves as Reform
 - Just a fraction, 3%, as Orthodox.
 - Similar to young American Jews in general, almost one-third specify no Jewish denomination, or consider themselves as cultural Jews.
- Overall religious practices and rituals have declined considerably since earlier surveys.
 - Regular synagogue attendees (monthly or more) comprised only 19% of respondents.
 - 38% were currently members of a synagogue and 23% expressed intent to join in the future.
- Fasting on Yom Kippur has drastically eroded since the college years.
 - Currently only 60% of respondents fast on Yom Kippur.

- One-fourth of those responding observes Shabbat always or usually. Yet, since the college years (2003) there has been an increase in the share of those who never observe Shabbat (from 21% to 37%) and a decrease in those who sometimes (from 51% to 36%) observe Shabbat.
- Kashrut was observed in 26% of respondents' homes in 2018 compared to 39% of their parental homes in 1995.

DEMOGRAPHIC INFLUENCES

- The presence of children in respondents' households has very significant positive effects on religious involvement and celebrations of all kinds.
- The prevalence of intermarriage (around 40% of those currently married) is a major feature of this cohort.
 - Intermarriage seems to be the main reason for the high rate of “drop outs” since earlier phases of the longitudinal study.
 - The presence of an unconverted spouse is associated with much lower levels of Jewish religious observance.
 - The gap between in-married and out-married respondents' religious engagement varies from 22 to 32 percentage points across all the religious items.

REMAINING CONSERVATIVE

- Conservative “remainders” exhibit significantly higher normative religious behaviors and Jewish attitudes.
 - 65% of Conservative respondents said that being Jewish is ‘very important’ in their life compared with 35% of those of other denominations.
 - 51% of Conservative respondents belong to a synagogue compared with only 29% of Others
 - 33% of Others never attend synagogue services compared with only 12% of Conservatives
 - 74% of Conservatives fast on Yom Kippur compared with only 49% of Others

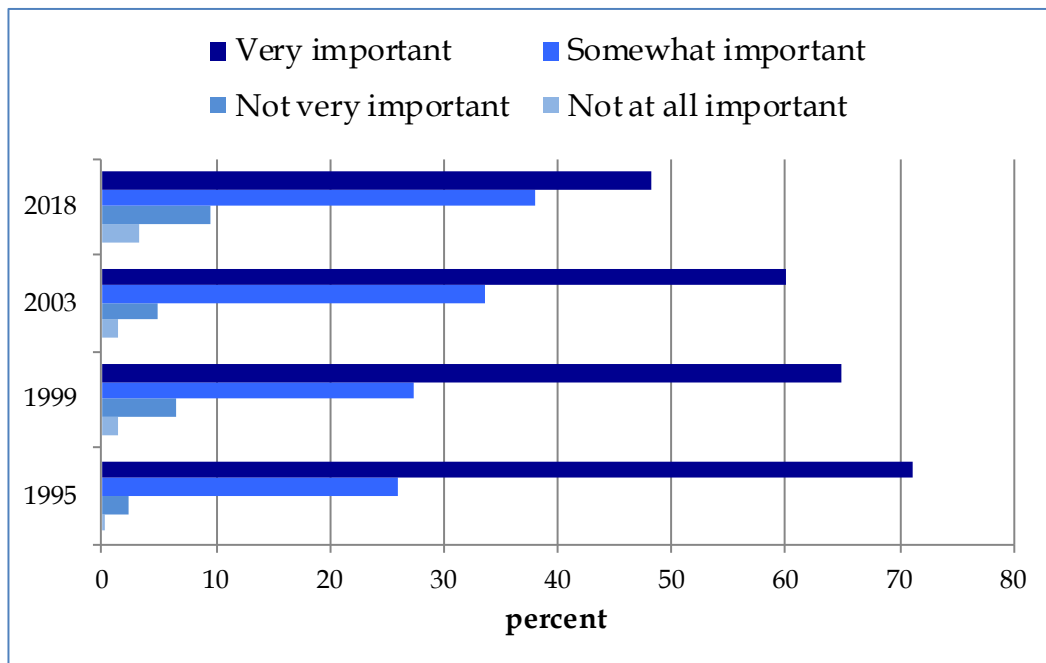
DESCRIPTIVE FINDINGS

JEWISH CONNECTIONS

Importance of Being Jewish

Being Jewish is important to the respondents. The strong sense of Jewishness has been maintained over time, as 86% in their mid-thirties in 2018 said that being Jewish is important. While there is little Jewish alienation, we find a decline in the ‘very important’ from 71% in 1995 to 48% in 2018. It is offset by an increase over time in the more moderate expression of ‘somewhat important.’ This is expected. As people age, they tend to soften and detach themselves from extreme expressions.

“How Important is being Jewish in your life?”



Members of the Bar/bat mitzvah class of 5755 responding to all four waves (n=404)

Our cohort expresses stronger positive Jewish feelings compared with young Jews in general. Pew (2013) showed that 46% of Jews aged 30-49 said that being Jewish was ‘very important,’ 29% said ‘somewhat important,’ and 25% ‘not too/not at all’ important.

To assess whether the 404 respondents to the 2018 survey are representative of the full original cohort, we compared their answers in previous waves to the answers of the entire group. They were remarkably similar. For example, on the importance of being Jewish in your life, 71% of the 404 said in 1995 that it was very important. That compares to 69% in the original group who said so. In 1999, likewise, 65% of the 404 said being Jewish was very important in their lives, compared with 61% of the broader group.

Family is pivotal to Jewish connections. When asked in an open-ended question to describe what connects them to Judaism, respondents most frequently named *family*, followed by *holidays*, *Shabbat*, and *synagogue*. (See Wordle Cloud below)

“Judaism is my connection to my family (descendants of Holocaust survivors), and that manifests in culture more than religious practice (food, music, language, art), though we do celebrate most holidays and practice many rituals.” *A mother, 2018*

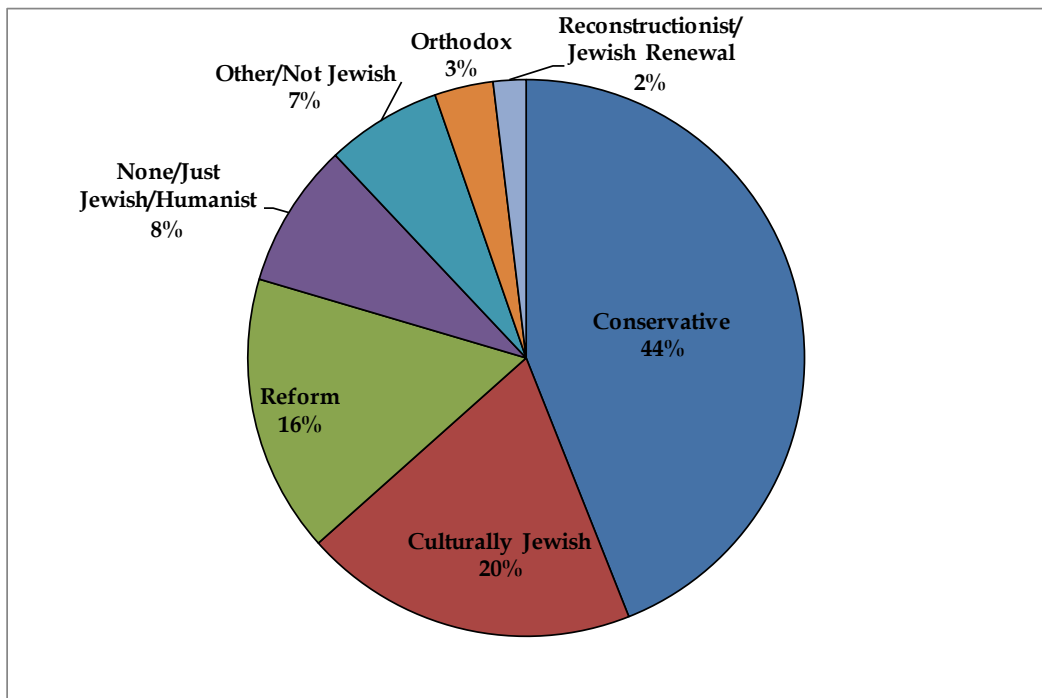
“I feel most connected to Judaism when...”



Jewish Denomination

Almost half of the responding members of the bar/bat mitzvah class hold onto their Jewish upbringing and consider themselves Conservative Jews. Only 16% consider themselves as Reform and just a fraction, 3%, as Orthodox. Similar to young American Jews in general, almost one-third specify no Jewish denomination, or consider themselves as cultural Jews.

“Thinking about your Jewish denominations, do you consider yourself...”



Synagogue Membership and Attendance

A majority of respondents belong, or intend to join, a synagogue:

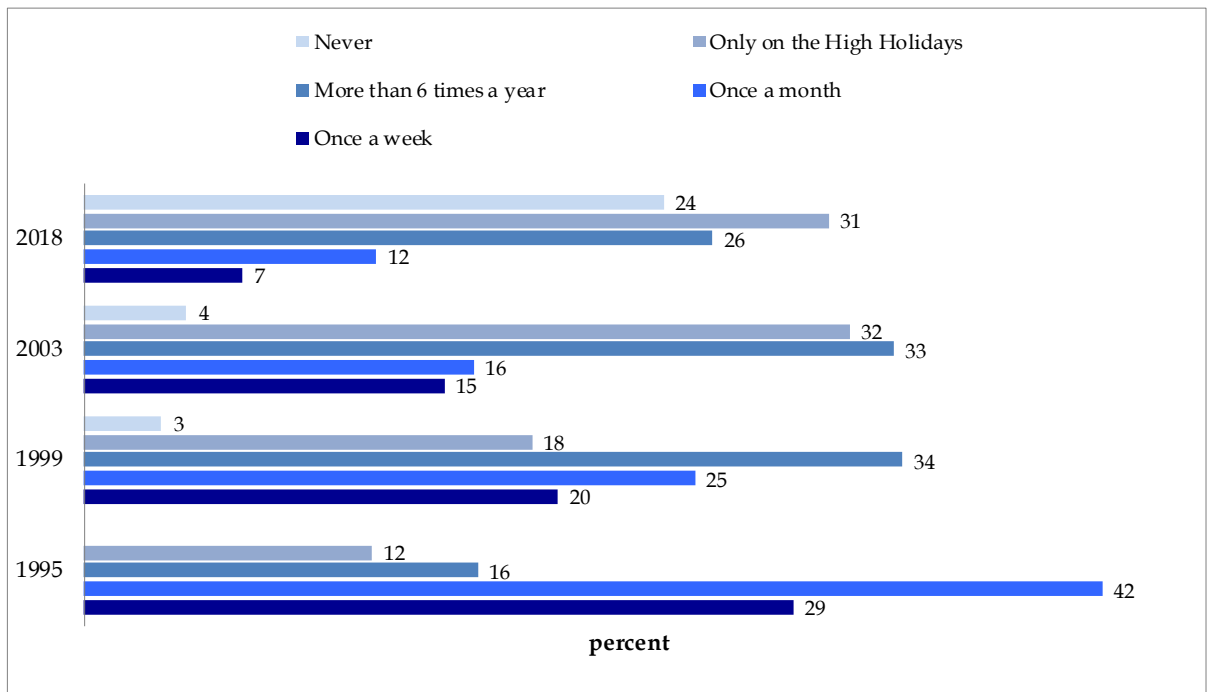
- 38% are members of a synagogue
- 23% intend to join one in the future
- 4% belong to an independent minyan/prayer group

“...I now find that my involvement with Jewish events is (now) kid-centric, such as tot Shabbat once a month. Other weeks I am often working, so I don’t honestly make it to services much.” *A father, 2018*

Synagogue attendance is an indicator of personal commitment to religious participation. Regular attendance was a requirement of b’nai mitzvah and their families in 1995, the bar/bat mitzvah year. Frequent synagogue attendance (once a week or once a month) has declined steadily since high school.

Currently, as busy young parents, they have time constraints and other priorities that may explain the lack of synagogue involvement: one-quarter never attends and about one-third attends only on the high holidays.

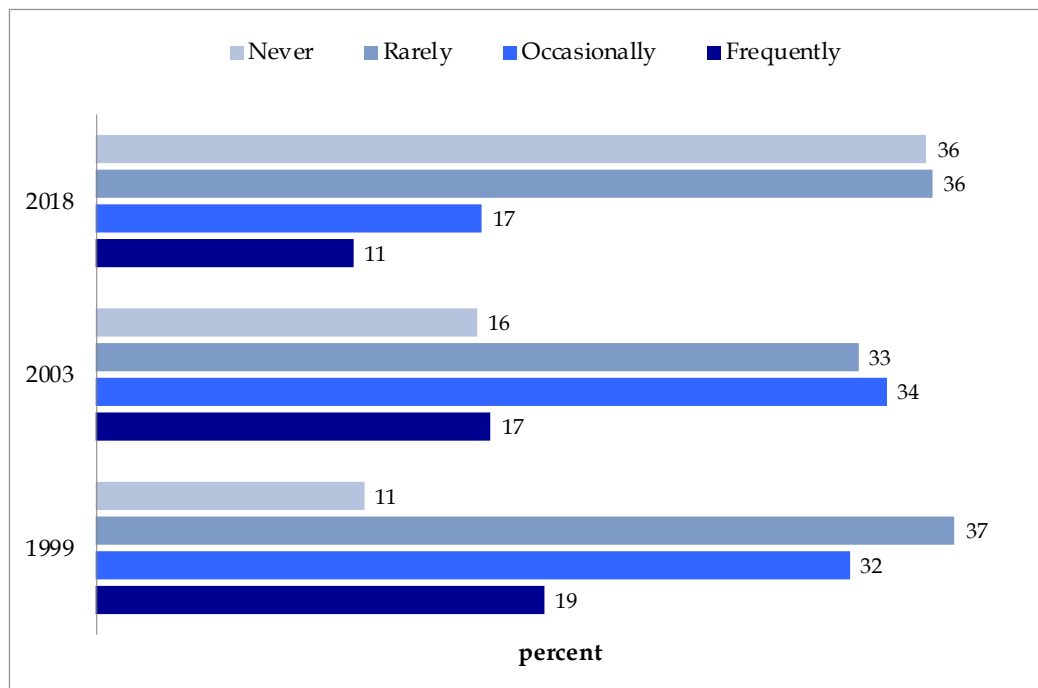
1995: “How often do you intend to go next year?”
1999, 2003 & 2018: “How often do you go?”



Personal Prayer

Jewish life is vibrant outside the synagogue, both in secular and religious activities (Kosmin and Keysar 2013). Therefore, in surveys we also ask about engagement in personal prayer.

“Outside of organized religious services, how often, if at all, do you engage in personal prayer?”



Members of the Bar/bat mitzvah class of 5755 responding to all four waves (n=404)

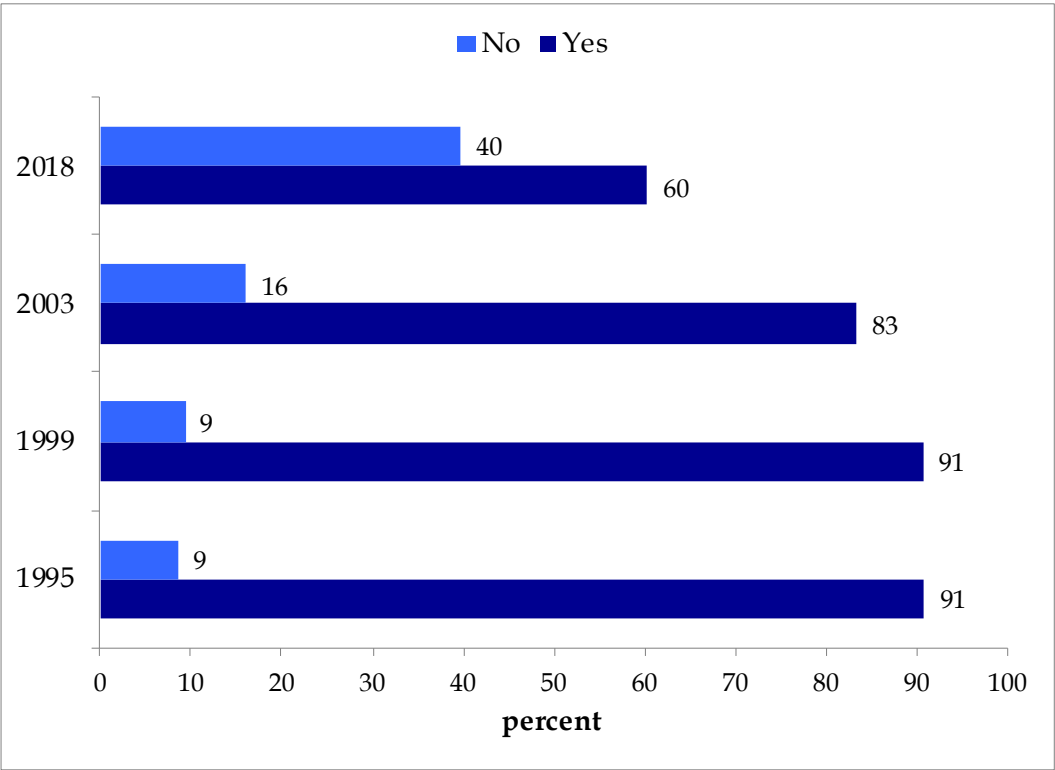
“I am definitely less religious then I was at the time of my bat mitzvah and high school. I was less involved religiously in college but still had many Jewish friends. My husband and I are slowly becoming more religious now that we have children. A mother, 2018

In 1995 when b’nai mitzvah were asked if they pray outside the synagogue services, 41% said ‘yes.’ The longitudinal study allows tracking different developmental stages in the life cycle. We observe a decline in synagogue involvement when students leave their parents’ homes. Personal prayer, however, seems to endure and then decline later in adulthood.

Yom Kippur Observance

Fasting on Yom Kippur has drastically eroded since the college years. Currently only 60% of respondents fast on Yom Kippur. These practices are similar to those of American Jews by religion (62%) and slightly higher than young Jews aged 30–49 (53%) according to Pew (2013).

1995: “Do you intend to fast on Yom Kippur this year?”
1999, 2003 & 2018: “In the past year, did you fast on Yom Kippur?”



Members of the Bar/bat mitzvah class of 5755 responding to all four waves (n=404)

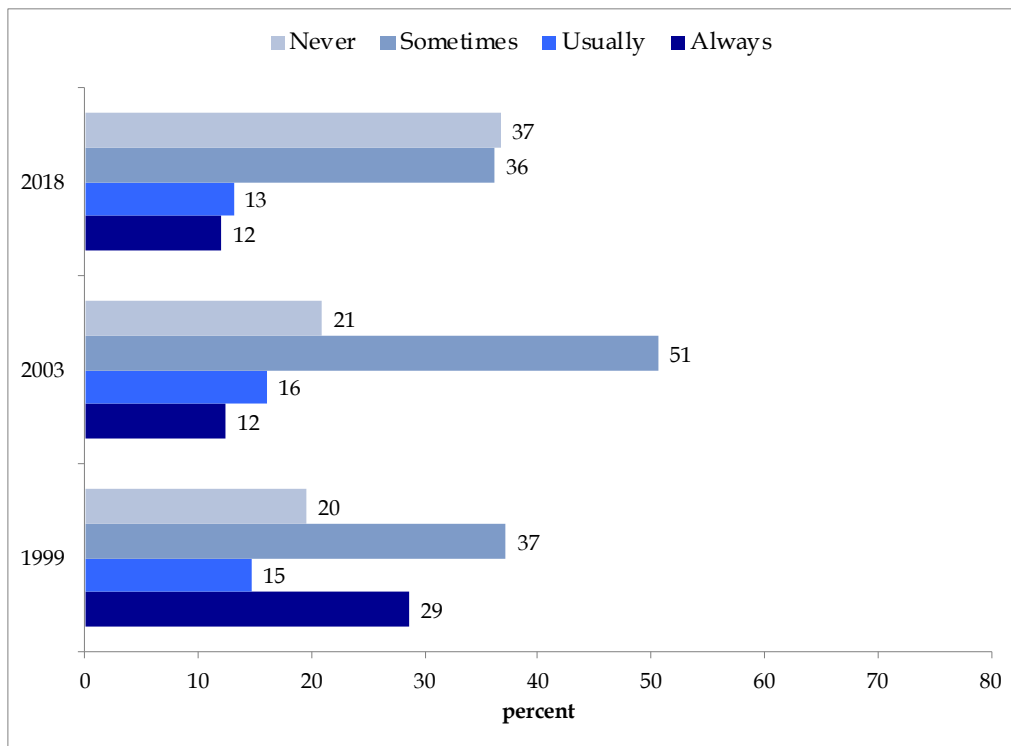
“For us, the most significant rituals/celebrations are weekly shabbat dinners at my in-laws house, which my son greatly enjoys.” *A father, 2018*

Shabbat Observance

Fasting is an individual ritual. Shabbat observance, on the other hand, is a family experience. Not surprising, Shabbat observance has eroded between high school and college as students departed from their traditional parental homes. Such fall-off indicates the increase in religious autonomy among respondents.

1999: “How often does your family do something special on Friday night or Saturday because it is the Jewish Sabbath?”

2003 & 2018: “How often do you do something special/different on Friday night or Saturday because it is the Jewish Sabbath?”



Members of the Bar/bat mitzvah class of 5755 responding to all four waves (n=404)

One-fourth of the cohort observes Shabbat always or usually. Yet, there is an increase in the share of those who never observe Shabbat (from 21% to 37%) and a decrease in those who sometimes observe Shabbat (from 51% to 36%). Busy family-life and intermarriage explain the erosion in Shabbat observance.

“Biggest factor for not being involved is likely time and priority. Work long hours during the week, household chores may get done during the week but often fall on the weekend. Kids do sports, lots of family events. Youngest is 20 months and just started sleeping through the night so feel like we are finally coming above water.”

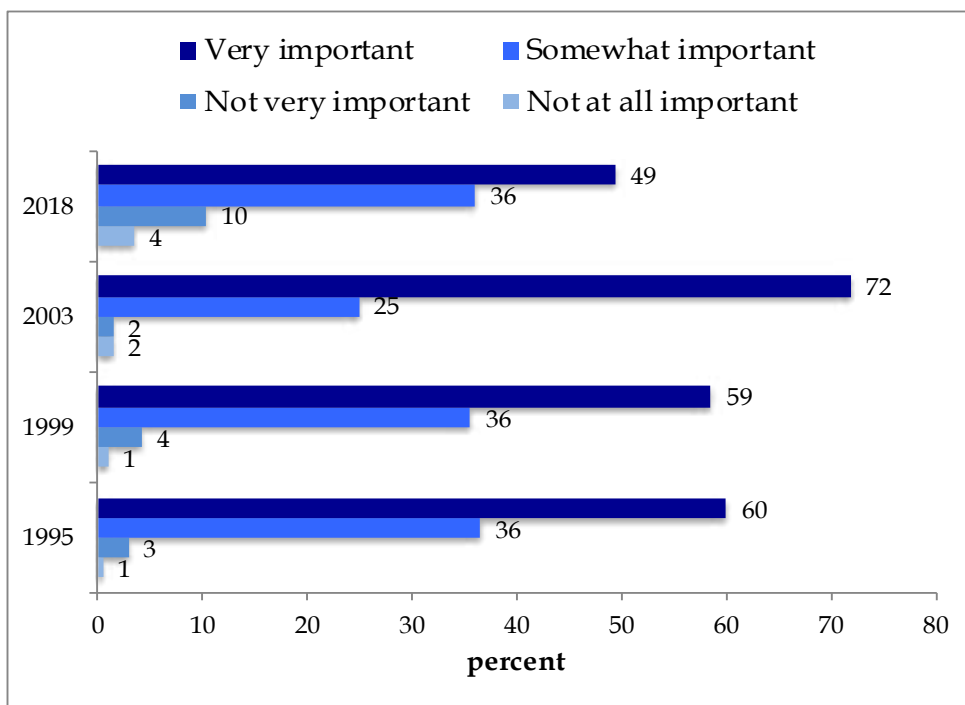
A father 2018

ISRAEL

Importance of Israel

The vast majority of respondents (84%) have visited Israel, many several times. During their college years, when Israel was under constant attack on many campuses, they expressed a high level of loyalty toward Israel. This strong solidarity with Israel seems to have receded. Currently there has been a tripling in the share of those who say Israel is “not very” or “not at all important” to them, albeit from a small base.

“How important is Israel to you?”



Members of the Bar/bat mitzvah class of 5755 responding to all four waves (n=404)

These quotations from two different respondents demonstrate a range of opinions about Israel:

“Israel has been the most fundamental way in which I have maintained my connection to Judaism over my adult life.”

“I have very mixed feelings about the state of Israel.”

In particular, the controversy around Israel is a concern:

“The polarization of American Jews around Israel makes me concerned about raising my children in a Jewish community in the years ahead.”

SOCIAL NETWORKS

Living near and studying with Jews enlarges Jewish social networks, especially the circle of close Jewish friends. Since this cohort was raised in Conservative synagogues it is not surprising that more than half of respondents said that ‘most’ or ‘half’ of their friends in elementary (1995) or high school (1999) were Jewish. They kept their Jewish social networks during college (2003). Yet in 2018, 12% said that hardly any of their close friends are Jewish.

“What proportion of your friends are Jewish?” (Percent)

	1995	1999	2003
Most	37	34	29
Half	25	23	28
Some	18	20	24
A few	18	20	18
None	2	3	1

	2018 ²
All of them	4
Most of them	32
Some of them	51
Hardly any of them	12
Not sure	1

At age 36-37 many members of the cohort are married. Having a Jewish spouse/partner is strongly correlated with Jewish social networks. Those who are intermarried report by far fewer Jewish friendships.

² In 2018 the survey question was: How many of your close friends are Jewish?

JEWISH PRIDE AND PEOPLEHOOD

Jewish Pride

Respondents overwhelmingly (98%) exhibit Jewish pride. This is consistent with Jews in general. For example, 94% of Jews aged 30-49 said that they were proud to be Jewish (Pew 2013).

“I am proud to be a Jew” (Percent)

	1999	2003	2018
Agree Strongly	71	69	74
Agree (Somewhat)*	28	30	23
Disagree (Somewhat)*	1	1	1
Disagree Strongly	0	0	1

*In 1999 and 2003 the categories were ‘agree’ and ‘disagree’ without ‘somewhat’
Some columns don’t add to 100%

Connection to the Jewish People

Jewish peoplehood is strong and strengthening among respondents as more members in their thirties express deep connection to the Jewish people; 52% ‘agree strongly,’ more than in ‘previous years.’

“I would say I feel quite similar now to the time of bar mitzvah - proud to be Jewish, but not much beyond that. Biggest factor now is as my son is 5 and my wife is Christian- we’re definitely going to expose him to both faiths and working through how we will raise him.” A father 2018

“I feel connected to the Jewish people” (Percent)

	1999	2003	2018
Agree Strongly	40	39	52
Agree (Somewhat)*	51	57	39
Disagree (Somewhat)*	7	4	7
Disagree Strongly	1	1	1

*In 1999 and 2003 the categories were ‘agree’ and ‘disagree’ without ‘somewhat’
Some columns don’t add to 100%

Responsibility to Help Jews

The value of helping fellow Jews around the world has been instilled in and has endured among this cohort from adolescence to adulthood. A great majority (84%) feels a responsibility to help Jews around the world—far more than 62% of American Jews in general aged 30–49 (Pew 2013).

“I feel a responsibility to help Jews around the world” (Percent)

	1999	2003	2018
Agree Strongly	28	26	35
Agree (Somewhat)*	61	65	49
Disagree (Somewhat)*	9	8	12
Disagree Strongly	1	1	2

*In 1999 and 2003 the categories were ‘agree’ and ‘disagree’ without ‘somewhat’
Some columns don’t add to 100%

Relating to Jews/Non-Jews

Somewhat puzzling, slightly more members of this cohort in 2018 compared with 1999 say that they relate more easily to Jews than to non-Jews. This is despite intermarriage and the overall decrease in their Jewish social circles.

“I relate more easily to Jews than to non-Jews” (Percent)

	1999	2003	2018
Agree Strongly	17	17	18
Agree (Somewhat)*	38	42	44
Disagree (Somewhat)*	37	34	25
Disagree Strongly	7	8	9

*In 1999 and 2003 the categories were ‘agree’ and ‘disagree’ without ‘somewhat’
Some columns don’t add to 100%

A Wordle cloud was generated to reflect answers to the open-ended question: “what do you like about Judaism?” The cloud presentation gives greater prominence to words that appear in the text more frequently. Community is the most prominent, followed by culture and traditions. Interestingly, there is hardly any mention of God, synagogue or rabbis.

“What I like most about Judaism...”



“I wanted to add that while I don’t believe in “god” and there’s a decent chance my kids won’t either because of that, I fully intend to do my best to let them choose for themselves. I know the questions will arise about why I bother being Jewish if I don’t believe in god--I asked my parents and grandparents those same questions--so I feel well prepared to have those conversations for the rest of my life with my children. To me, that’s part of being Jewish.” *A mother, 2018*

EXPLANATORY ANALYSES

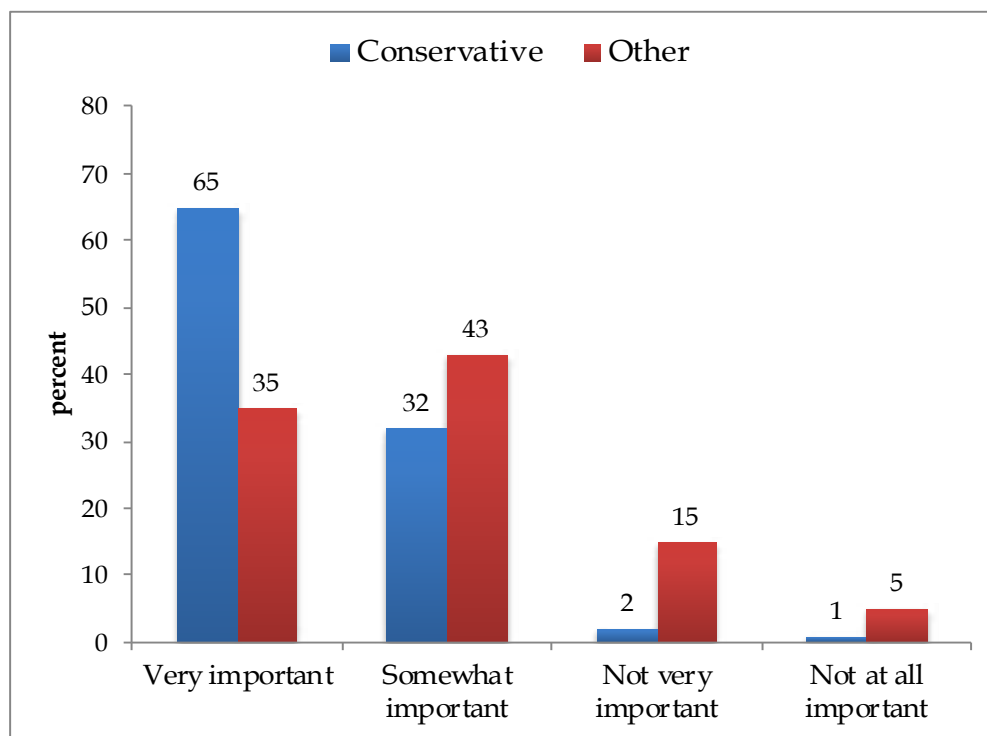
THE IMPACT OF REMAINING CONSERVATIVE

The sample of respondents in 2018 was asked about their current Jewish denominational identification or preference. They divided into two groups with 43% maintaining their original Conservative identity and 57% identifying with another or no synagogue denomination. There were significant differences between these two groups on a range of items, with the Conservative “remainers” showing more normative Jewish behaviors and opinions, as the following analyses will demonstrate.

Importance of being Jewish

“How important would you say that being Jewish is in your life?”

By current Jewish denomination



*** $p \leq 0.001$

The Conservative identifiers showed greater intensity of feelings on the importance of being Jewish. “Others” were much more likely (20% vs. 3%) to state that being Jewish was unimportant in their lives. The differences in the pattern of responses to this question were statistically highly significant.

Jewish Peoplehood

JEWISH PRIDE

Overall, participants exhibit high levels of positive responses to this statement on Jewish pride. Yet the level of intensity among the Conservatives was higher and there were no deniers in the group. Hence the statistical differences were again highly significant.

“I am proud to be a Jew” (Percent)

	Conservative	Other	2018(Total)
Agree Strongly	88	63	74
Agree Somewhat	12	31	23
Disagree Somewhat	0	2	1
Disagree Strongly	0	2	1

*** $p < 0.001$

Some columns don't add to 100%

CONNECTION TO THE JEWISH PEOPLE

“I feel connected to the Jewish people” (Percent)

	Conservative	Other	2018(Total)
Agree Strongly	66	41	52
Agree Somewhat	31	46	39
Disagree Somewhat	3	11	7
Disagree Strongly	0	2	1

*** $p < 0.001$

Some columns don't add to 100%

Again, compared to the Other group, the Conservative group showed more intense feelings of connection to the Jewish people, with two-thirds agreeing “strongly.”

Responsibility to help Jews

“I feel a responsibility to help Jews around the world” (Percent)

	Conservative	Other	2018(Total)
Agree Strongly	43	29	35
Agree Somewhat	51	48	49
Disagree Somewhat	4	18	12
Disagree Strongly	1	4	2

*** $p < 0.001$

The overall scores for this item were lower for both sub-groups of respondents, with the “agree somewhat” category receiving a plurality of agreement. Yet the difference in the patterns of responses was again highly significant.

Jewish Friendships

“How many of your close friends are Jewish?” (Percent)

	Conservative	Other	2018(Total)
All of them	5	4	4
Most of them	37	29	32
Some of them	51	51	51
Hardly any of them	7	16	12

Though at first sight it appears that there was a slight tendency for the Conservative group to be more socially connected to Jews, somewhat surprisingly the overall pattern of friendships showed *no statistical difference*. This suggests that this generation of North American Jews is well integrated into the wider society and that Conservative and other Jews have similar social patterns.

Relating to Jews & Those of Other Religions

“I relate more easily to Jews than to non-Jews” (Percent)

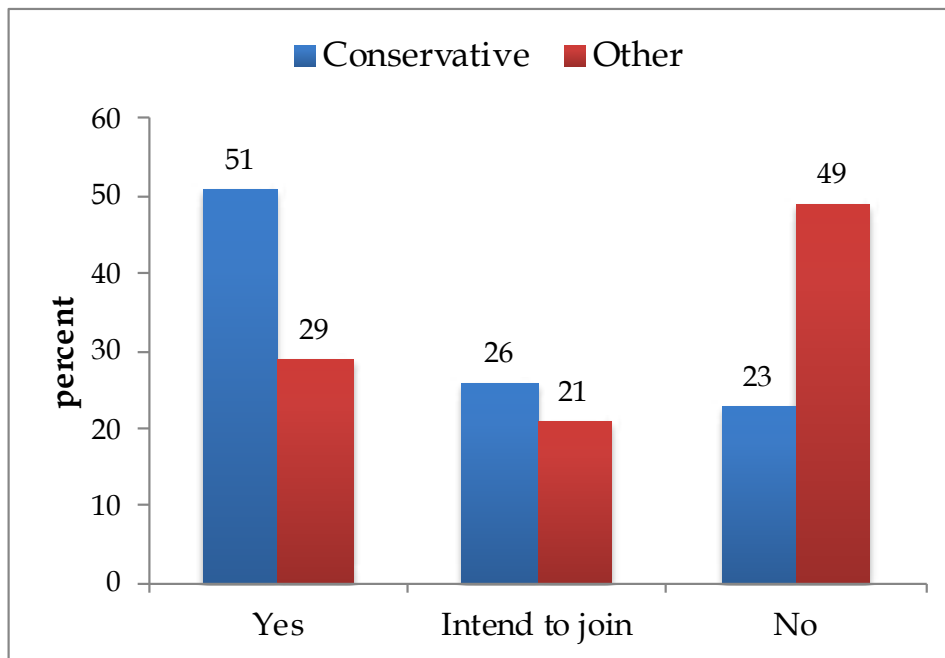
	Conservative	Other	2018(Total)
Agree Strongly	20	17	18
Agree Somewhat	50	40	44
Disagree Somewhat	22	28	25
Disagree Strongly	7	11	9

* $p \leq 0.05$

As might be expected from the results of the previous table, the two groups exhibited similar rank order of preferences with “agree somewhat” as most favored. However, there was a slight statistically significance difference because the Conservative’ level of overall agreement to relating “more easily to Jews” was higher (70 v. 57%).

Synagogue Membership and Attendance

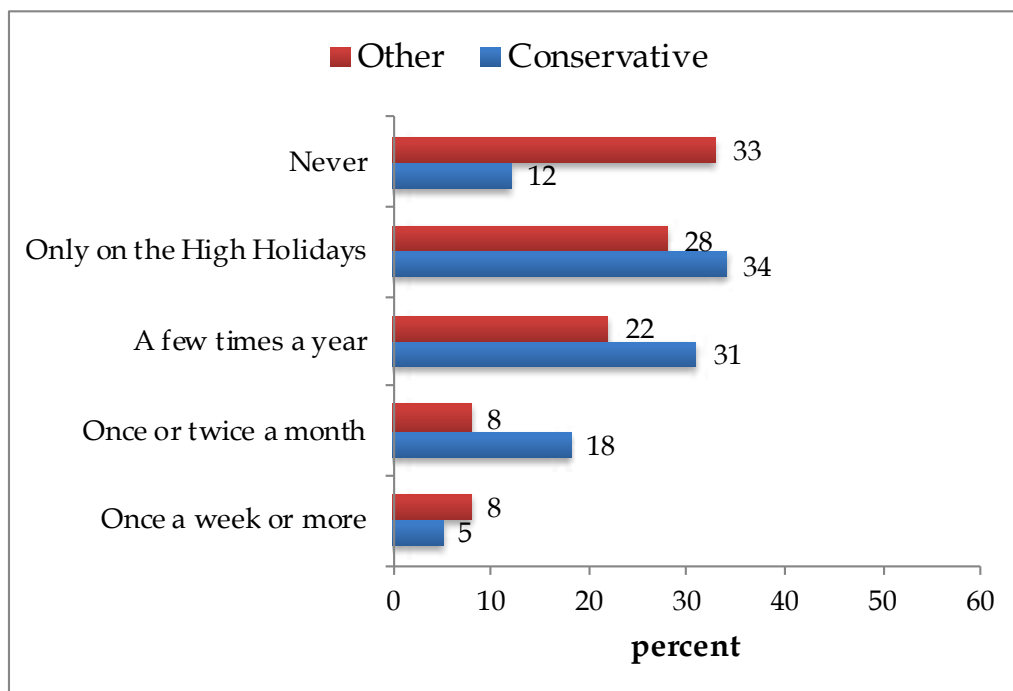
“Do you belong to a synagogue/temple?”



*** $p \leq 0.001$

Large differences clearly emerged between Conservative and other respondents with regard to patterns of synagogue membership. The patterns were almost reversed between the two groups. Half of the Conservative identifiers were current members, reaffirming their identity, while half of the Other group had no intention of joining a synagogue. It appears that an additional one-quarter of the Conservative group might eventually acquire synagogue membership.

“How often in the past 12 months did you attend Jewish religious services at a synagogue, temple, minyan or Havurah?” (Percent)

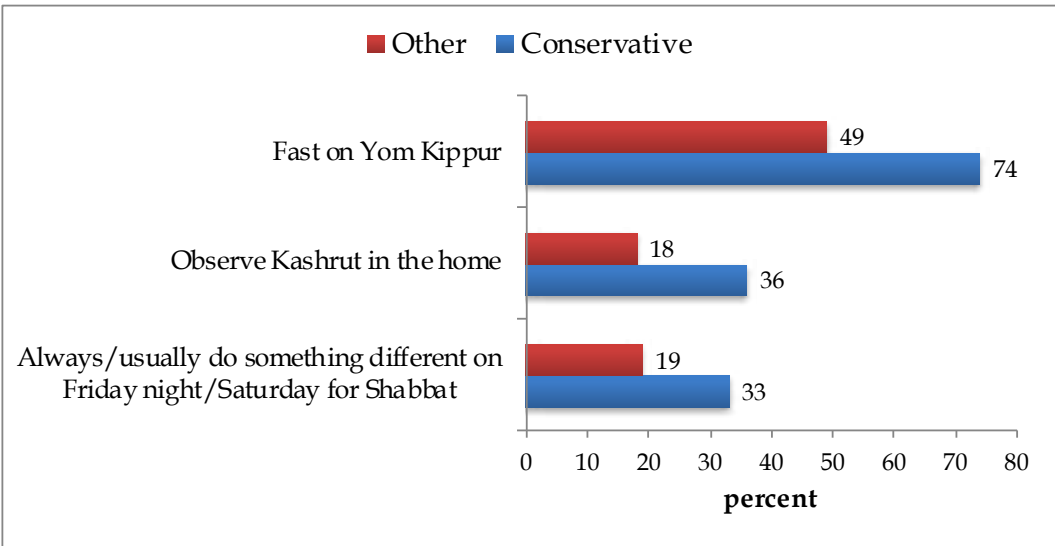


*** $p < 0.001$

Again, those who consider themselves Conservative are much more likely to attend synagogue services over the course of the year than the Others. Among the Others one-third “never” entered a synagogue in the past year. Somewhat surprisingly 12% of the Conservative group also “never” attended services; nevertheless the gaps are statistically significant.

Religious Practices

Selected Religious Engagements (Percent)



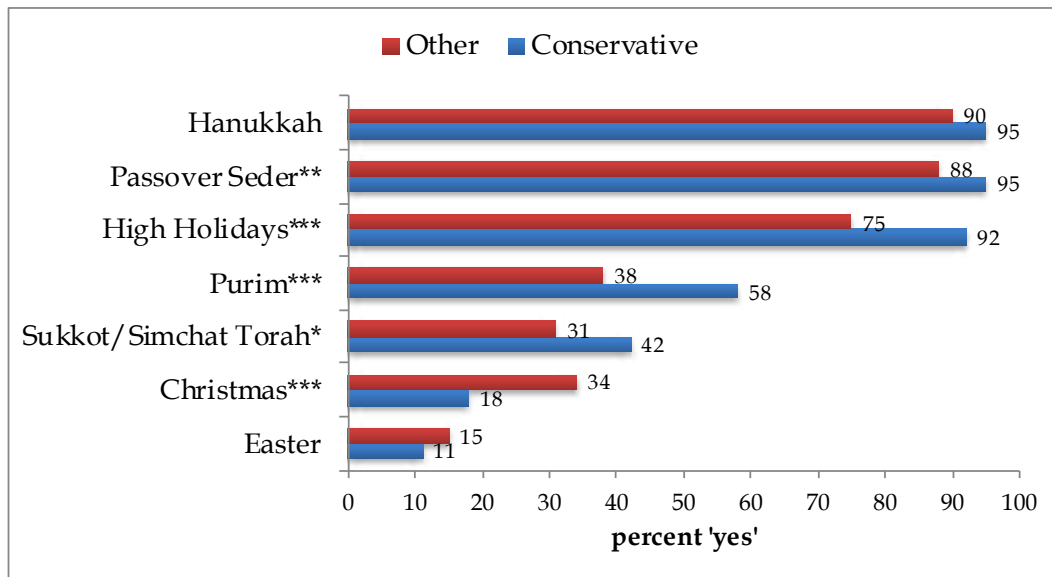
All components are ***p<=0.001

When it comes to fasting on Yom Kippur, Shabbat observance or any kind of kashrut, clear and significant differences emerge. Adults who currently self-identify as Conservative are much more religiously observant.

Holidays: Jewish and Christian

The results for various holidays differed in degrees of significance. Hanukkah was almost universally observed so differences were insignificant. It appears that this festival has become part of the American mainstream. Passover was almost similarly popular. By way of contrast, observance of High Holidays and Purim differentiated the two groups. Overall Sukkot and Simchat Torah were slightly less popular than Purim but with no large differences between the two groups.

“In the past year did you celebrate?”



* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

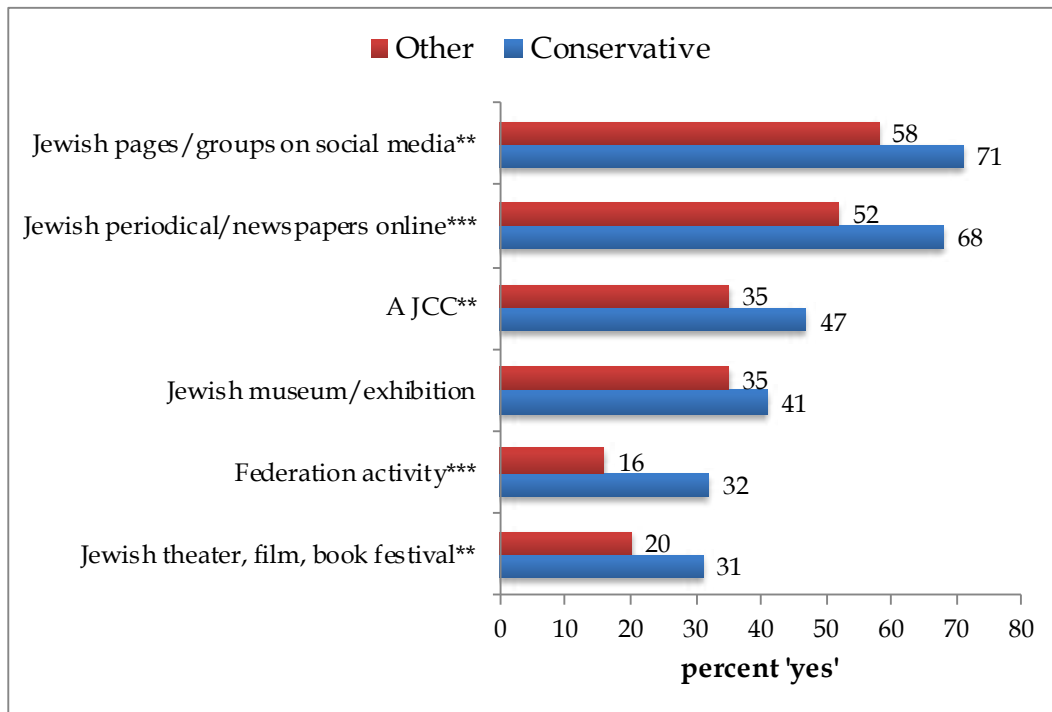
Since there were no conversions to non-Jewish religions among the respondents, we can assume that observance of Christian holidays reflects patterns of intermarriage. Participants of the Other group are more likely to have Christian spouses or partners. Thus emerges the gap over Christmas observance. Gaps in Easter observance are not significant because of the low level of overall observance. This suggests that most of our respondents who are intermarried are not married to very religious Christians.

Other Jewish Activities

With regard to participation in Jewish cultural activities and involvements of a more secular nature it appears that the Conservative are much more likely to read Jewish media and to be involved with local Jewish federations. Smaller gaps emerge with social media, the Jewish arts (theater, film and book festivals) and JCC membership. Interestingly, Jewish museums seem to attract almost equal proportions of both groups, over one-third during the past year.

“In the past 12 months, have you visited, participated in or engaged with...?”

By current Jewish denomination

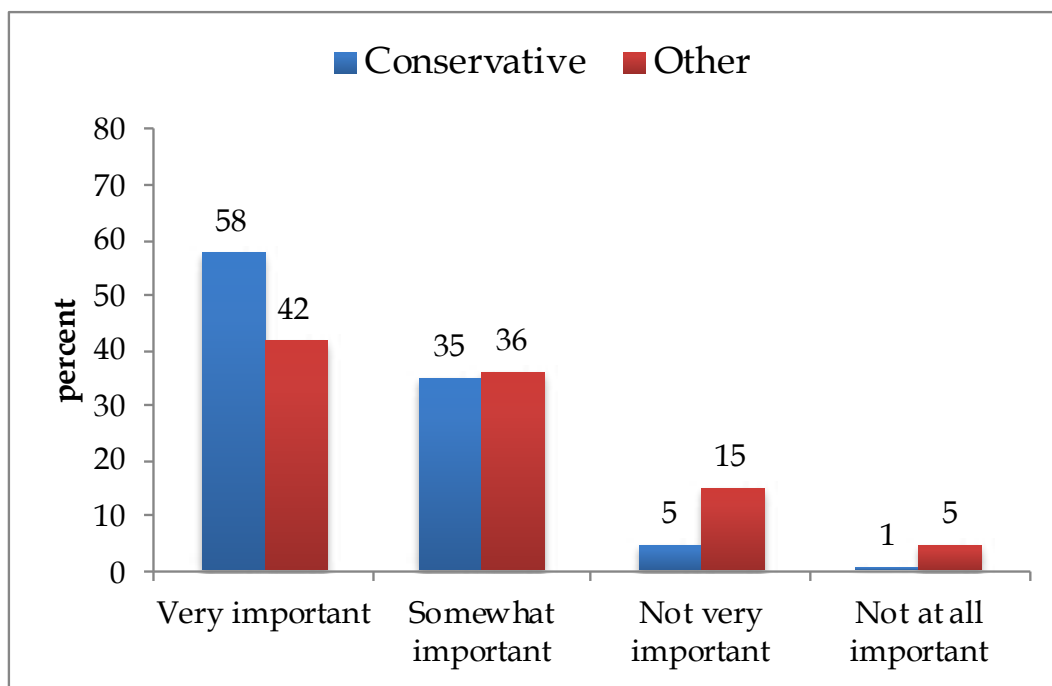


* $p \leq 0.05$, ** $p \leq 0.01$, *** $p \leq 0.001$

Israel

Zionism has historically been a prominent feature of the Conservative movement so we would expect those who have remained loyal to Conservative Judaism to retain an attachment to the Jewish state. This expectation is clearly evident in the findings with a majority saying Israel is “very important” and overall 93% of Conservative identifiers agreeing it is important (very or somewhat) to them. Among the Other group there is less intensity to the responses even though “very important” has a plurality. Similar to the findings on the unimportance of being Jewish, 20% of the Other group also said that Israel is “not important.”

“How important is Israel to you?”

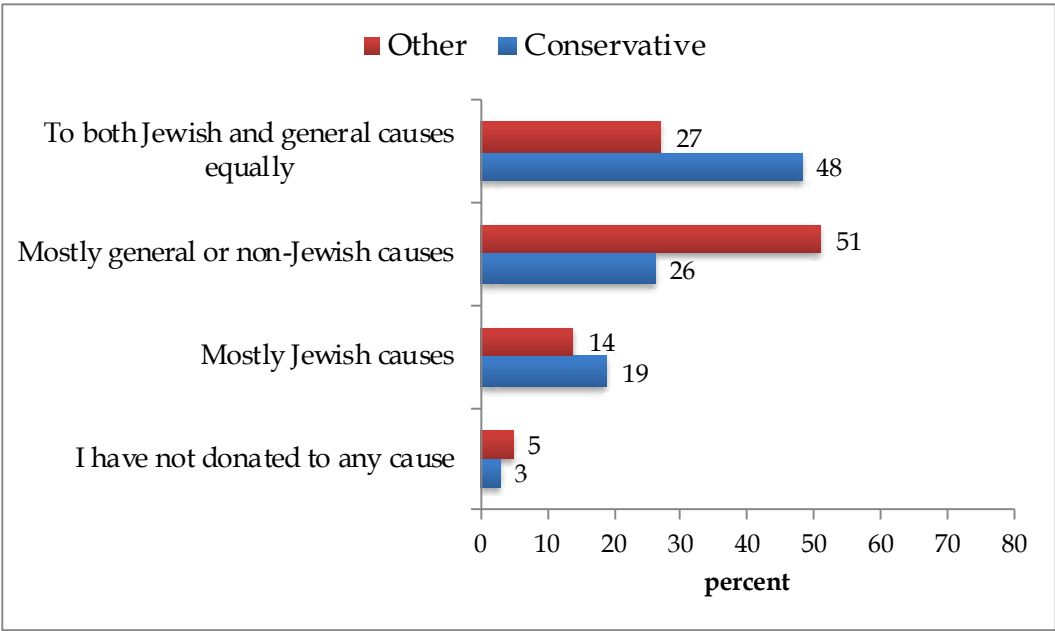


*** $p < 0.001$

Tikkun Olam

CHARITABLE DONATIONS

“In the past year, where have most of your charitable donations gone to?”



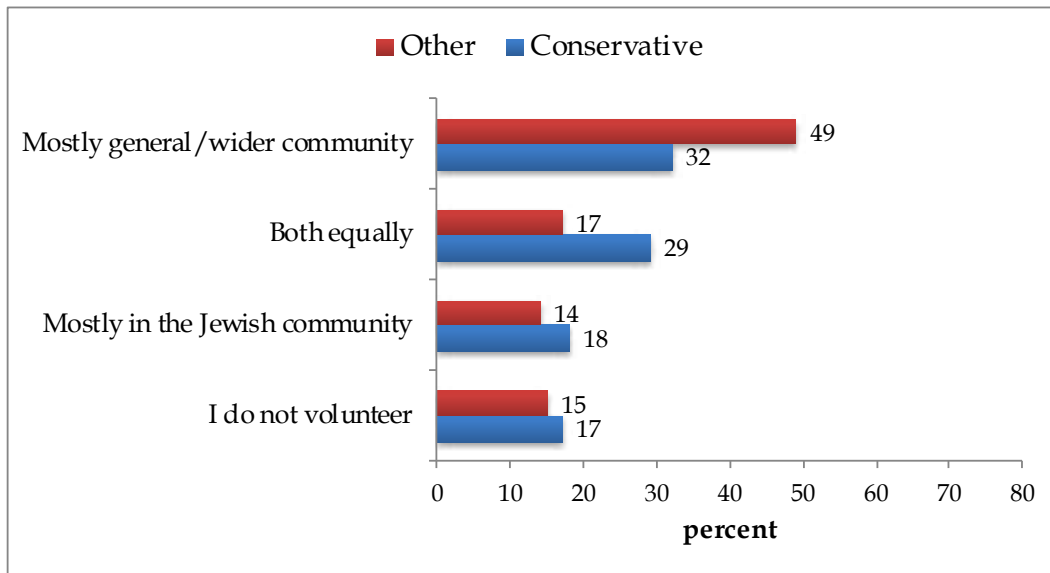
***p<=0.001

Giving tzedakah or charity is almost universal among this cohort. However, large differences emerged between the giving patterns of the two groups, the Conservative and the Other, with the former oriented to Jewish charities and the latter to general charities. Among the Conservative, 67% gave to a Jewish charity as against 41% of the Other.

VOLUNTEERING

The pattern of volunteering showed slightly less significant differences between the two groups but the patterns were similar to the targets of donations. Among the Conservative 47% volunteered for Jewish causes but more than the Other (31%).

“In which sector do you concentrate most of your volunteer work efforts, if any?”

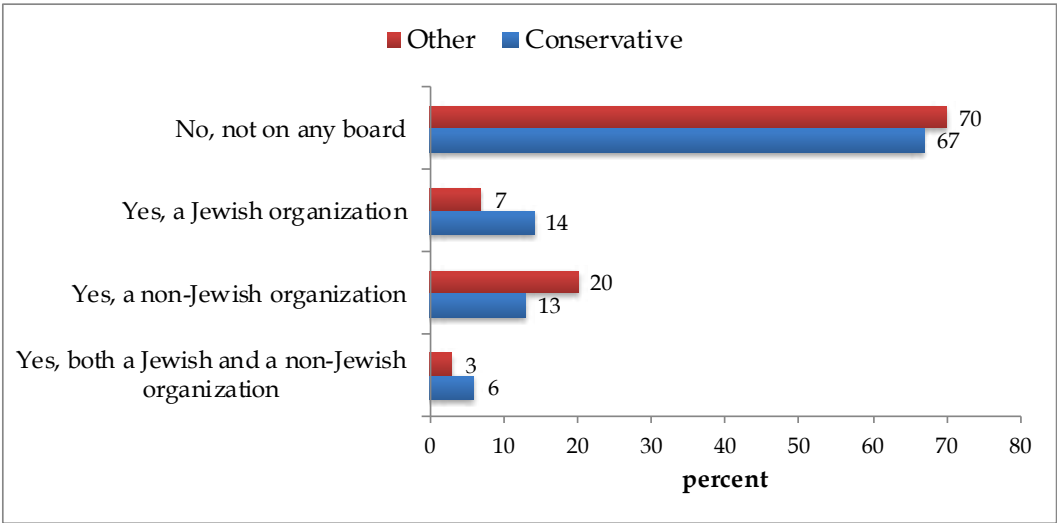


****** $p \leq 0.01$

LEADERSHIP

Given this cohort’s stage in the life cycle with career and family obligations, one would not expect high levels of membership on the boards of organizations. Only a minority, around one-third of either group, were so involved. ‘Conservatives,’ who were involved in organizations, were equally on boards of a Jewish (20%) or a non-Jewish organization (19%). Among the ‘Others’ the scores were 10% for Jewish and 23% for non-Jewish organization.

“In the past five years, have you been on the board of any organization?”



*p<=0.05

THE IMPACT OF DEMOGRAPHICS

The respondents of the longitudinal study were demographically homogeneous in previous phases of the project. None were married. And, of course, all are of the same age. However, they have become more diverse owing to the decisions they have made in their lives in recent years. Some are married, some are parents, and some have married non-Jews. These decisions inevitably impact their lifestyle and behaviors. This section will examine how the emergence of these three sub-populations correlates with Judaism and Jewish engagements.

Marital Status

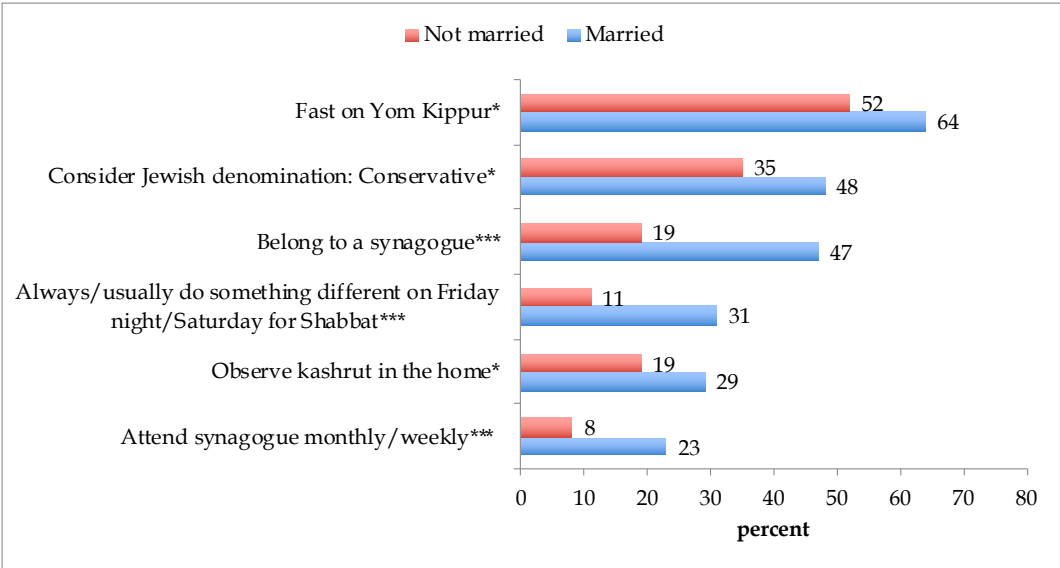
Marital Status	Conservative	Other
Married	77%	66%
Living with a partner	5%	8%
Divorced/separated	1%	5%
Never married	18%	21%
Total	100%	100%

* $p \leq 0.05$

The Conservatives are more likely to be married than the Other group. The Other group has a more diverse marital status profile.

Unmarried respondents are much less involved in Judaism than the married. The largest gap (28 percentage points) between the married and the unmarried respondents was on synagogue membership. Large gaps were also found on Shabbat observance (20 percentage points) and regular synagogue attendance (15 percentage points).

Selected Religious Engagements by Marital Status

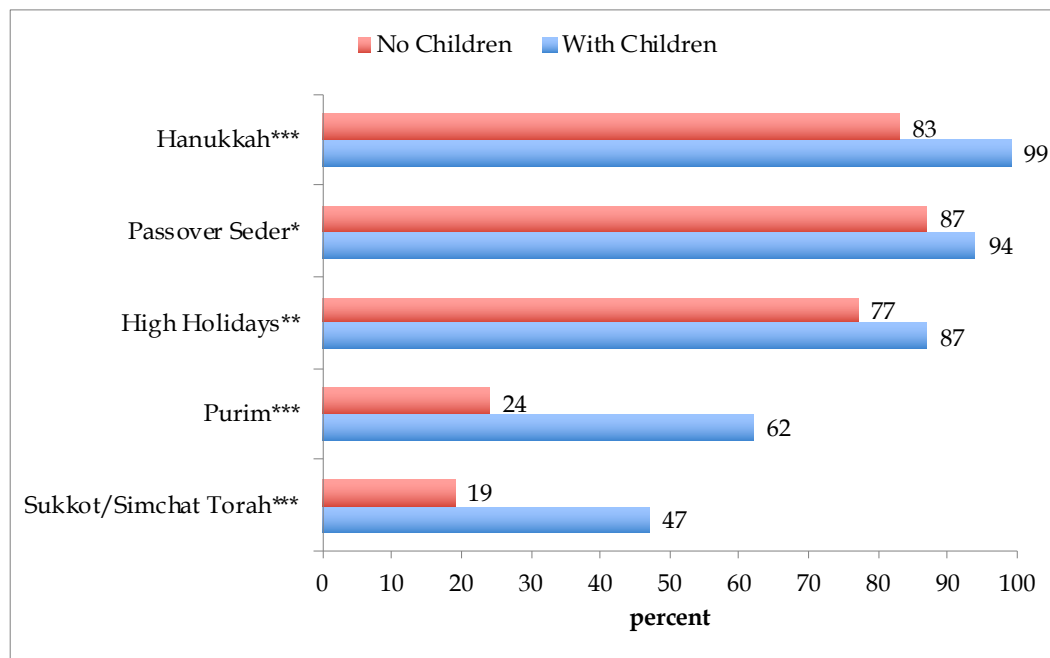


*p<=0.05, **p<=0.01, ***p<=0.001

Having Children

The presence of children in the household has positive effects on religious involvement of all types. The gaps between parents and others were small with regard to observance of major holidays such as Passover (7 percentage points) and only a little more for the High Holidays (10 percentage points). Hanukkah celebration was almost universal among parents of children but less so among those with no children (16 percentage points). However with regard to what today have become less popular festivals the gap between parents and others is very significant, 38 percentage points for Purim and 28 percentage points for Sukkot/Simchat Torah. It appears that Purim is the most child-oriented festival with 62% participation among families with children.

“In the past year, did you celebrate/observe?”

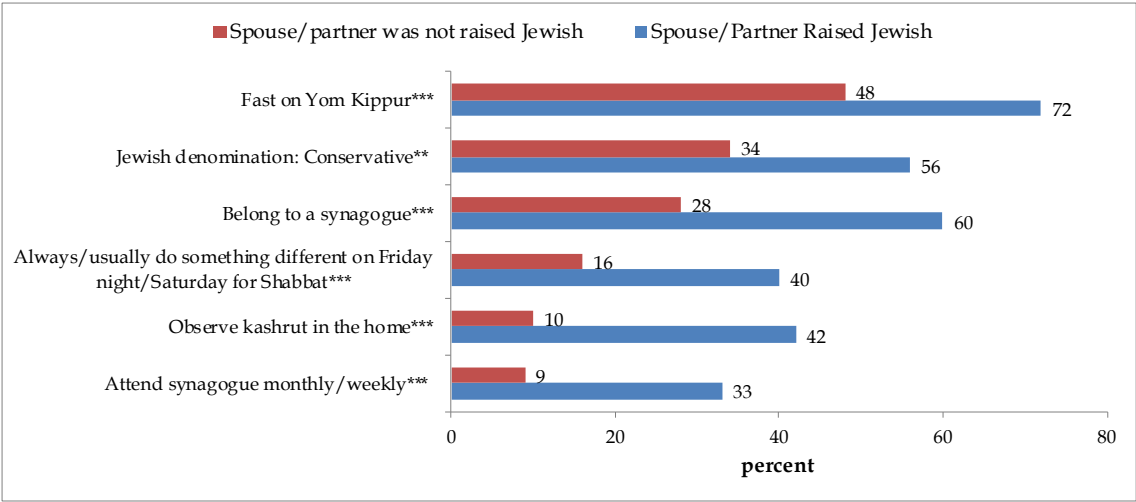


* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

Intermarriage

The prevalence of intermarriage, around 40% of married respondents, is a major feature of this cohort. The presence of an unconverted spouse is associated with much lower levels of Jewish religious observance as shown in the chart below. The gap between in-married and out-married respondents’ religious engagement varies across all the items. It ranges from 22 to 32 percentage points. Intermarriage seems to be the main reason for the high rate of “drop outs” since earlier phases of the longitudinal study. On the other hand, it appears that the decision to marry outside the Jewish fold does not necessarily result in total estrangement from Judaism, with almost half fasting on Yom Kippur and a quarter joining a synagogue. For some intermarried respondents, their non-Jewish spouse has had little effect on their Jewish practices. We found that 10% of the intermarried keep kosher at home and 9% attend synagogue regularly.

Selected Religious Engagements by Spouse/Partner Jewish/not Jewish

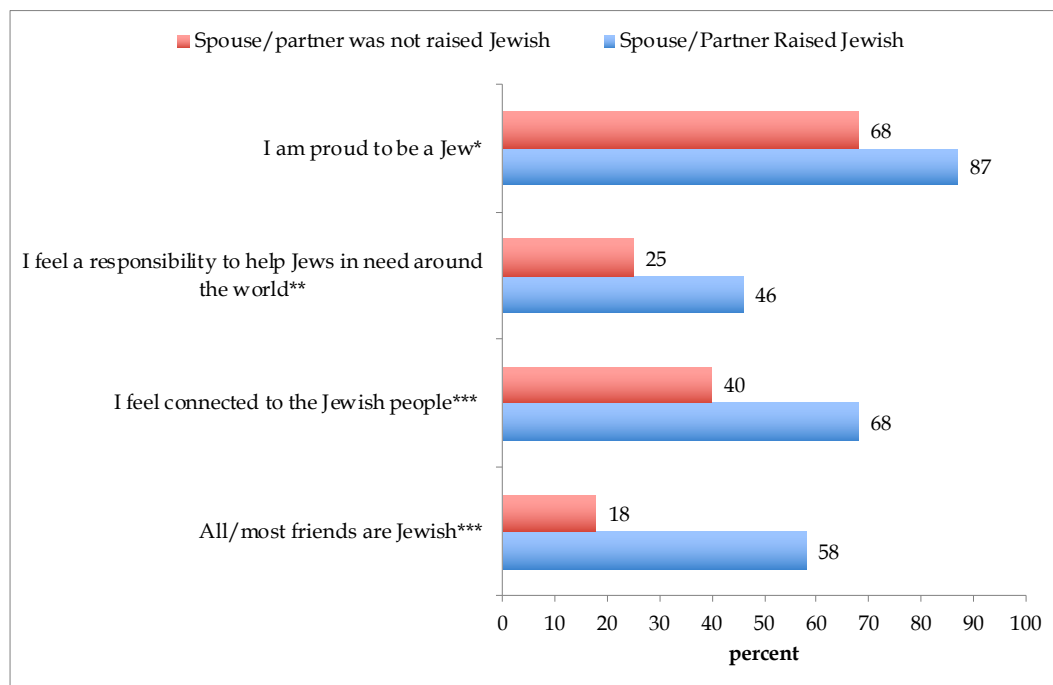


*p<=0.05, **p<=0.01, ***p<=0.001

Jewish Peoplehood

With regard to emotional ties to the Jewish people, intermarriage is associated with lower levels of attachment. Whether this is the result of intermarriage or a causal factor in the decision to intermarry in the first place is not clear. The gap on the emotional and attitudinal items is in the range of 20-28 percentage points lower than for the battery of religious items. As one might expect, the biggest gap (40 percentage points) between the in-married and out-married is in the social realm of Jewish friendships. The presence of a non-Jewish partner inevitably involves more contact with non-Jewish friends. It also potentially halves the number of Jewish relatives in the wider family.

Jewish Peoplehood by Spouse/Partner Jewish/not Jewish



* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

APPENDIX A: Methodology

The research design for the 2018 phase, which forms the fourth phase of the Longitudinal Study of Young Conservative Jews, is exceptional. Similarly to the 2003 *Eight Up: The College Years* study, it integrates qualitative data collection (the in-depth on-line focus group sessions) with quantitative data (on-line questionnaire survey). This innovative and mixed-methods design using both qualitative and quantitative components was praised and highly recommended by the President of the American Association for Public Opinion Research at its 2003 annual meeting. In his presidential address to hundreds of survey methodologists, Dr. Mark Schulman described this longitudinal study in detail and cited it as an example of how social science research ought to be carried out in the 21st century.

THE RESEARCH ENVIRONMENT

The social research environment has changed for the worse since 2003 as evidenced by diminishing response and cooperation rates for surveys generally in the United States and Canada. The advent of smart phones and the loss of landlines have made telephone interviewing more difficult particularly for contacting our target group who are members of the millennial generation. The new advances in communications technology have undermined public trust and heightened privacy concerns. Robot calls and scams have reduced the general public's willingness to answer telephone calls and participate in surveys. This made telephone methodology, which we used for the previous three quantitative surveys, a non-starter for the current phase. Mail surveys and face-to-face interviews became unfeasible in the 1990s. The alternative strategy was an on-line survey. However, this required the acquisition of a current email address for each potential respondent. Emails are also vulnerable to attack by hackers and are often closely guarded by suspicious owners. Phishing also diminishes the likelihood of opening an email message from an unfamiliar source, while spam problems preclude bulk emailings. This situation meant that considerable thought, effort and experiments had to go into composing the subject line for the individual email messages, which came from "ariela.keysar@trincoll.edu." Another complication is that academic research now has to operate under Institutional Review Board (IRB) regulations that protect the rights and welfare of human subjects recruited to participate in research activities. These require researchers to obtain positive consent for their voluntary participation in surveys. That adds another hurdle to the recruitment process. It is worth noting that for none of the four waves of the longitudinal project have incentives been offered to respondents for participation in the surveys.

TRACKING AND RECRUITMENT

The most challenging and time-consuming aspect of the 2018 project was the attempt to re-contact the panel of respondents from the previous phases in order to obtain a current email address. This became a detective hunt over eighteen months. The process was complicated because of the respondents' residential relocation, name changes by many married women and the existence of people with common first and surnames on the open source lists that were searched. The long hiatus between the 2003 survey when the respondents were mainly in higher education but still had ties with the parental home, and the fourth phase in 2018, made the task particularly difficult. After wave 1 in 1995 attempts were made annually to keep the panel "live" through updating mailing addresses by sending New Year cards. The last previous contact was in September 2006, after which the resources required ran out.

It was felt that initial attempts to re-contact potential participants had to show that the survey was legitimate and important "to help shape the future educational, cultural, religious, and social services of the North American Jewish community." It was decided that an official letter from the Chancellor of the Jewish Theological Seminary (JTS) was the best way to convey this message. In the letter addressed to parents or the panel respondent (see below) they were reminded of their past participation in the longitudinal study and asked to provide a current email address in order to participate in the new phase. They were assured that survey responses would be confidential and were also informed they could request reports from the previous phases of the project.

The contact information available to the researchers was initially 600 email addresses and home addresses from 2003, which had been used for recruitment of the qualitative stages of the College Years (T3) phase. The vast majority of the college emails were found to be inoperable 15 years later. Next name searches were made on the White Pages, which cover telephone landlines where the owners list their name and address. This yielded around 800 possible addresses, to which letters were mailed in September 2017. Most of the addresses were inaccurate and outdated and returned undelivered. Thirty-five updated forwarding addresses were supplied by the Post Office for individuals who had moved to a new home in the previous six months. Where no panel member contact could be found the latest previous parental address, from 2003, was mailed a letter in December 2017. These early attempts to identify and locate panel members yielded around 170 completed surveys by January 2018.

The tracking process was challenging because of the life-cycle stage of the panel. They were busy, time-pressured people, in the early stage of careers, often with young children. One participant sat on a letter for a year before responding and inquiring if he could still participate.

Once reached and having had the project explained to them many panel members were happy to cooperate and voiced their appreciation at being tracked down and having the opportunity to tell their “Jewish story.” They were asked for leads to other members of their B’nai mitzvah class from 23 years earlier if they knew their whereabouts.

Follow-up work on leads using holiday greetings messages were sent out in the hope of raising Jewish consciousness and so enhancing cooperation. By July 2018 around 250 completed surveys had been registered. During the summer and fall of 2018 a major effort was made to use open source social media. This too was an elongated process with several steps. Participants were asked to go to a Google Docs site and then enter their email information. There was no way to know if any emails collected were current or if messages were opened so multiple messages were sent at intervals. Potential participants were sent an individual link to the survey questionnaire. They were also offered a link to a website containing earlier reports on the project. The survey was closed in December 2018, by which time 404 completed survey questionnaires had been collected.

RESPONSE AND COOPERATION RATES

The 2018 tracking process was complicated and its success is difficult to measure accurately. As reported above, it involved known unknowns and unknown unknowns.

Given that the whereabouts of the panel were largely unknown, it is not possible to know how many panel members were reached or how many saw or read the various communications. We do know that our efforts reached respondents overseas and we had participants from Israel, Kuwait, Nepal, Australia, and Europe. Our best guess is that we probably contacted around 800 members of the original panel. Given 404 completes that suggests a 50% cooperation rate. The overall response rate was higher based on the fact that we recorded 53 outright refusals to participate from email addresses that unsubscribed either from the Google Docs or IRB Consent Form.

The completed survey numbers and participation rates for the four waves of the longitudinal study as a whole are impressive as set out below.

T1- 1995 B'nai Mitzvah Survey (grades 7/8) N= 1,462

T2- 1999 High School Survey (grades 11/12) survey N= 1,295 (89% of T1)

T3- 2003 College Years Survey N= 1,006 (78% of T2)

T4- 2018 Adult Years N= 404 (40% of T3)

The Longitudinal Study of Young American and Canadian Jews Raised in Conservative Synagogues is a time series focused on individual Jewish biographies over a 23-year period. For stages T1-T3 there is detailed information and hundreds of data items relating to 969 individuals who participated in all three stages. (Some students who did not participate in the 1999 survey did participate in the 2003 survey). We now have an even longer and more detailed data file on 404 individuals for T1-T4.

QUANTITATIVE DATA ANALYSIS

The data were collected at Trinity College via the Qualtrics software program for the online social surveys. As mentioned before, a respondent began the actual questionnaire with a voluntary consent form followed by a battery of 43 questions for all participants on behaviors and attitudes, many of which were multi-part. There were three open-ended questions eliciting comments. In addition the software allowed for the creation of four modules directed at sub-populations based on prior responses. The four modules were for a) married persons; b) single persons; c) parents; d) inter-married persons.

A decision had been made to include a qualitative element in the 2018 phase replicating the successful “chat room,” on-line focus group model used in 2003. This meant the last item of the questionnaire was an invitation “to continue the conversation on-line” and seeking an email for this purpose. 180 respondents agreed to participate. This high level of volunteering suggests the questionnaire was well received by the respondents and the topics intrigued many of them.

This initial report of the findings includes a selection of quotes from the first two on-line focus groups from January and February 2019.

APPENDIX B: Longitudinal Project Bibliography

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