

Organizational Responses


Respondents do not feel that American Jewish leaders are adequately addressing racism and white supremacy within the American Jewish community.

In general, how well do you think Jewish community leaders are addressing the following issues?

	Very Well	Well	Fairly	Poorly	Very Poorly	I don't know
The specific needs of members/participants who are Jews of Color	3%	3%	19%	41%	24%	9%
The need for greater racial/ethnic diversity in Jewish organizational leadership	4%	4%	16%	39%	27%	10%
Racism/white supremacy within the American Jewish community	6%	7%	19%	35%	25%	8%
Racism/white supremacy outside of the American Jewish community	12%	19%	26%	21%	15%	7%

Respondents recognized that equity in Jewish communities will require institutional change that will not result from one-off programs or inclusion efforts that are primarily focused on the optics of inclusion. Real change requires greater awareness of the intersection of race and socioeconomic status in the wider Jewish community.

If you're really serious about wanting to change the narrative about Jews and race and involving Jews of Color, you can't just keep on saying, 'Well, this funder wanted us to do it this way.'

 A Mexican and white woman in her 20s

Almost two thirds (65%) of survey respondents indicated that American Jewish leaders were either "poorly" (41%) or "very poorly" (24%) addressing racism in the American Jewish community. A comparable 66% provided a similar assessment of efforts to address the need for greater racial/ethnic diversity in Jewish organizational leadership.

How race and whiteness apply differently to different groups, and how that affects our perceptions of the Jewish people, needs to be discussed by prominent community members in appropriate settings so we can have a more nuanced understanding of race in the Jewish community and in the wider US.

A Hispanic or Latina/o/x and mixed man in his 20s

Interview participants mentioned how some predominantly white Jewish organizations and communities have begun awakening to aspects of institutional racism and prejudice, but more significant efforts are required to effect lasting change. Many were skeptical of what they perceived as Jewish leaders' focus on superficial change efforts. An African American woman in her 50s asserted,

My Black face does not now make an organization diverse. If it's just me or me and one other person, and if that's what they're calling diversity, they've got a much bigger problem. Because let's look at your board, at your employees, at the people you serve. None of the people who have power in this organization look like me.

A Black, African, or African American, white or European American and biracial woman in her 20s shared,

I've been involved with white Jewish-run institutions that say they want more JoC involved and enveloped into the fold, yet when those of us who are already there try to speak up about how best to help the JoC community, they completely disregard and shut us down. I was asked to be the only person of color in a group of 10 to roll out a Jewish-led racial justice program. No JoC worked on the program nor did they contribute to writing the script we had to read. The community is truly only concerned with outside racism and not the racism that occurs within Jewish spaces.

A nonbinary/Two-Spirit/third gender and Black, African, or African American person in their 20s described how their efforts to begin a conversation about addressing racism within the Jewish community have been received,

I usually get one of three responses: 1) There's no such thing as Black or white Jews and why do you keep talking about race?; 2) Thank you for speaking up, you're really inspirational, teach me all you know; and 3) Complete ignorance of any kind of discrimination. I think many white Jews are afraid to acknowledge and/or take responsibility and it's easier to judge other people than be critical of themselves.

Sometimes, highlighting problems of racism in Jewish communities is seen as an act of betrayal. A Black, African, or African American, Hispanic, Latina/o/x, white, European American, another race, racially-mixed, Indigenous, multiracial, and mixed woman in her 50s similarly shared,

I have found that every time I make a suggestion or point out a problem, I've been treated as disloyal or like an ungrateful guest in Jewish spaces. People react vehemently that there is no racism: that the problem is with bad-intentioned people and not with policies or lack of policies that impact Jews of Color.

All of these experiences threaten the ability and willingness of Jews of Color to engage fully in Jewish communal life. A Hispanic or Latina/o/x, nonbinary/Two-Spirit/third gender, and another gender person in their 20s explained,

Often it feels like white Jewish culture suffocates the space that allows me to be fully a person of color. The times I've attempted to make my identity as a POC more visible in large Jewish groups, I've been met with significant tokenism or racism. So I choose to be very selective about where is safe for me to show all of me.

Belonging

Experiences of racism and discrimination have not precluded respondents' sense of belonging in predominantly white Jewish communities. Many interview respondents mentioned how they are actively involved in Jewish communities where they are in the minority or where they are the only BIPOC. More than half of respondents (54%) indicated there is not a lot of racial/ethnic diversity in their Jewish communities.

The lack of diversity in their Jewish communities was not a barrier for some JoC. Fifty-one percent agreed they have felt a sense of belonging among white Jews and 41% agree they have been able to find opportunities to express all sides of themselves in predominantly white Jewish spaces.

51%
agree:

They have felt a sense of belonging among white Jews.

11% strongly agree and 40% agree

I live in a community that is predominantly white with a Jewish community that has only a very few Jews of Color. It has been a welcoming place and inclusive not only to Jews of Color (even though very few), but also to people with other diverse identities. I feel fully a part of this congregation since we moved here forty years ago, and have been fully accepted and respected through the entire time.

An Asian or Asian American and something else woman in her 70s

I feel a ton of support from the [Jewish] white people around me. I feel deep investment. I feel very seen as a person of color.

A Japanese American woman in her 30s

I don't know many other Jews of Color... although my Jewish community is overwhelmingly white, we connect based on our shared Jewishness.

A Hispanic or Latina/o/x and multiracial woman in her 20s

Even as they described positive experiences of belonging in predominantly white Jewish communities, respondents also expressed their awareness of the pervasive dynamics of racialization.

There have certainly been Jewish spaces where, despite the ever-present reality of being other, I formed very meaningful relationships and was nurtured by those spaces. Some of my access though, certainly was facilitated greatly by the fact that my mom was a white, Ashkenazi Jew.

An Asian American woman in her 40s

I'm a pretty active member of my synagogue. And it's a majority white synagogue. It's maybe 500 families, so it's vibrant and big, and it's still very few Jews of Color who actually get to be engaged. I think the fact that I wasn't racialized in the U.S. honestly gives me more energy to participate and organize and be in community in majority white spaces.

A Mexican woman in her 30s

Seeking Community

Experiences of intersectionality and marginalization have become a galvanizing force for some respondents. In many cases, such experiences have inspired respondents to lean further into their own anti-racist and anti-bias values. They are actively contributing to the work of transforming predominantly white Jewish communities into places where they and others from typically marginalized populations can feel a sense of belonging.

Some respondents mentioned how they have proactively sought out predominantly white Jewish communities that have shown an established commitment to racial equity and social justice. A Black man in his 30s shared,

🗨️ My current congregation has been working on being anti-racist since before it was fashionable and we had language to talk about it. They had a race working group and were seeking out Jews of Color to be in leadership positions.

Many articulated their vision for a vibrant American Jewish community that authentically celebrates the full diversity of ways to be Jewish. They are seeking and creating ways to participate that do not require them to compartmentalize. A multiracial, Black and Indigenous woman in her 30s explained,

☑️ I'm exploring Jewish communal spaces that will meet my need and be a space where I can fully contribute without feeling like: because I don't have kids or because my husband isn't Jewish or because I'm a person of color, I'm an afterthought in the program or service or whatever.

Respondents expressed a strong desire for opportunities to come together with other JoC along with the importance of achieving greater equity in predominantly white Jewish organizations. Capturing this duality, a Black, African, or African American woman in her 20s asserted,

☑️ Jews of Color definitely need our own defined spaces outside of the online world, created for and by Jews of Color, while at the same time, larger organizations such as Hillel and even Chabad need to hire Jews of Color leadership, not just as tokenization, but to build equity in the community.

Despite the connective potency of creating and sustaining space with other JoC, this opportunity remains largely out of reach for many. While nearly half (46%) of survey respondents say that talking about the JoC experience with other Jews of Color was very important, more than a third (36%) report that they have no friends who are Jews of Color.

JoC Spaces

While acknowledging the challenges of fostering a sense of belonging among members of this multifaceted population, respondents emphasized the importance of opportunities that validate, support, and connect JoC.


Participation in events and communities exclusively for and by JoC has been transformative for many. Their involvement in gatherings for JoC has prompted respondents to reflect on and engage with their identities. Respondents have developed influential relationships with peers and mentors as participants in JoC-centered fellowships, conferences, and educational programs. Some highlighted the value of creating smaller affinity spaces where they can commune with others who share more specific identity markers.

JoC gatherings provide a sense of belonging and solidarity that is unavailable in other areas of Jewish communal life. Many described these experiences and relationships as profoundly healing.


46% of respondents said talking about the experience of being a JoC with other JoC is very important to them.

36% of respondents said they have no close friends who are JoC.

Participating [in a JoC organization] pushed me to express and emote and learn more about what my backgrounds mean to me, what feels authentic, and how to bring them together.”

 An Asian-American woman in her 20s


It was amazing to be in a space where there were so many Jews of Color, with darker skin than mine and all levels of Judaism. It was an amazing experience that really helped me work on my liberation as a Black person, and really get more awoken to the ways that white supremacy lives in me and how to actively, mindfully, and intentionally break that stuff down and get it out.

 A Black and white woman in her 50s

Being in JoC community spaces – whether it's conferences or cohorts – adds value and meaning to being Jewish for me. Going to synagogue fills my need for my Jewish spirituality, and there is another spiritual need that I have to be in JoC-only spaces.

 A Mexican-American & Iranian-American woman in her 30s

When I was in a space with Jews of Color I realized so many things that I thought were just me were sociological patterns and trends around the capacity and the potential Jews of Color have for immense compassion as people who grew up with multiple racial and cultural identities.

 A biracial woman in her 30s

JoC Connections

Connecting with other JoC provides opportunities for respondents to feel seen and affirmed.

I don't think it can be overstated the alienation and potential for disconnect for young people of color who grow up in predominantly white Jewish communities, especially someone like myself who is mixed race and attended an Ashkenazi, majority-white synagogue growing up. I never had JoC role models growing up and I didn't think it was possible to be non-white and Jewish. Only through my own journey have I met and been able to join other Jews of Color in community and reclamation of Jewish practice and culture.

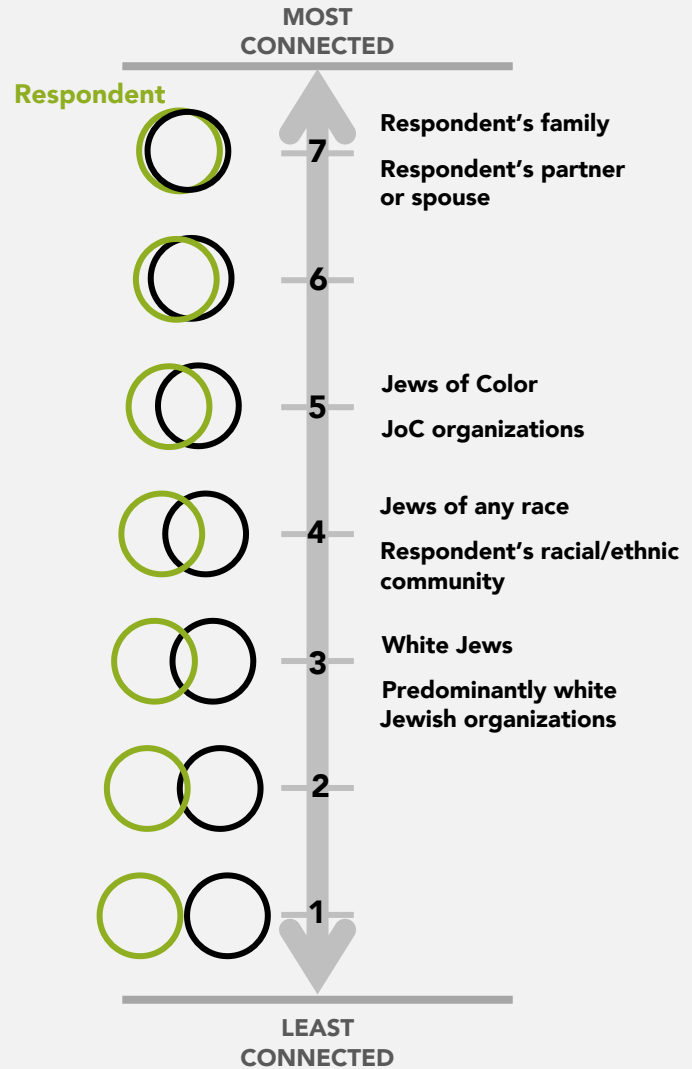
An Asian or Asian American, white or European American, multiracial and mixed woman in her 20s

As a brown Salvadoran Jew, I often feel lonely in predominantly white Jewish spaces because white Jews either make assumptions about me or never engage to get to know me. When meeting other JoC, there is an instant bond and friendship without having to force it or explain how we are Jewish. We can simply be and feel comfortable. I wish my local Jewish synagogue/community made more effort to create safe spaces for Jews of Color and/or have JoC voices be raised more instead of white Jews speaking over or for us.

A Hispanic or Latina/o/x woman in her 20s

Respondents reported feeling a greater sense of connection with other JoC than with white Jews.³⁰

Respondents were asked to select the number for the picture that best matches how connected they feel to each of the following individuals or groups of people.



I'm coming from being burned, so when I go into these groups, there's always a sigh of relief that, 'Oh my God, we exist'.

A Black woman in her 20s