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## Current Jewish Connections and Engagement

**O**N THE whole, survey respondents are roughly evenly split between feeling connected and disconnected from a Jewish community. Interestingly, on the question of Jewish connectedness, a switch seems to happen between past and present, childhood and adulthood. While many report feeling nostalgic for certain aspects of their Jewish upbringing, they also report being currently removed from it. One focus group participant explained: “I think growing up it was very important—it essentially informed everything I did and how I saw myself. Now as an adult I feel like it is one hat that I wear, but it doesn’t necessarily inform all aspects of my life.”

There is no single reason respondents feel connected or disconnected from their Jewish communities—responses are diverse and multifaceted on both sides. Illustrating this point, half of survey respondents who feel connected to a Jewish community cite at least three reasons for feeling that way, while just under two-thirds of those who feel disconnected from a Jewish community cite at least two reasons or barriers.

Among those who report feeling connected, factors leading to the highest levels of current connectedness include

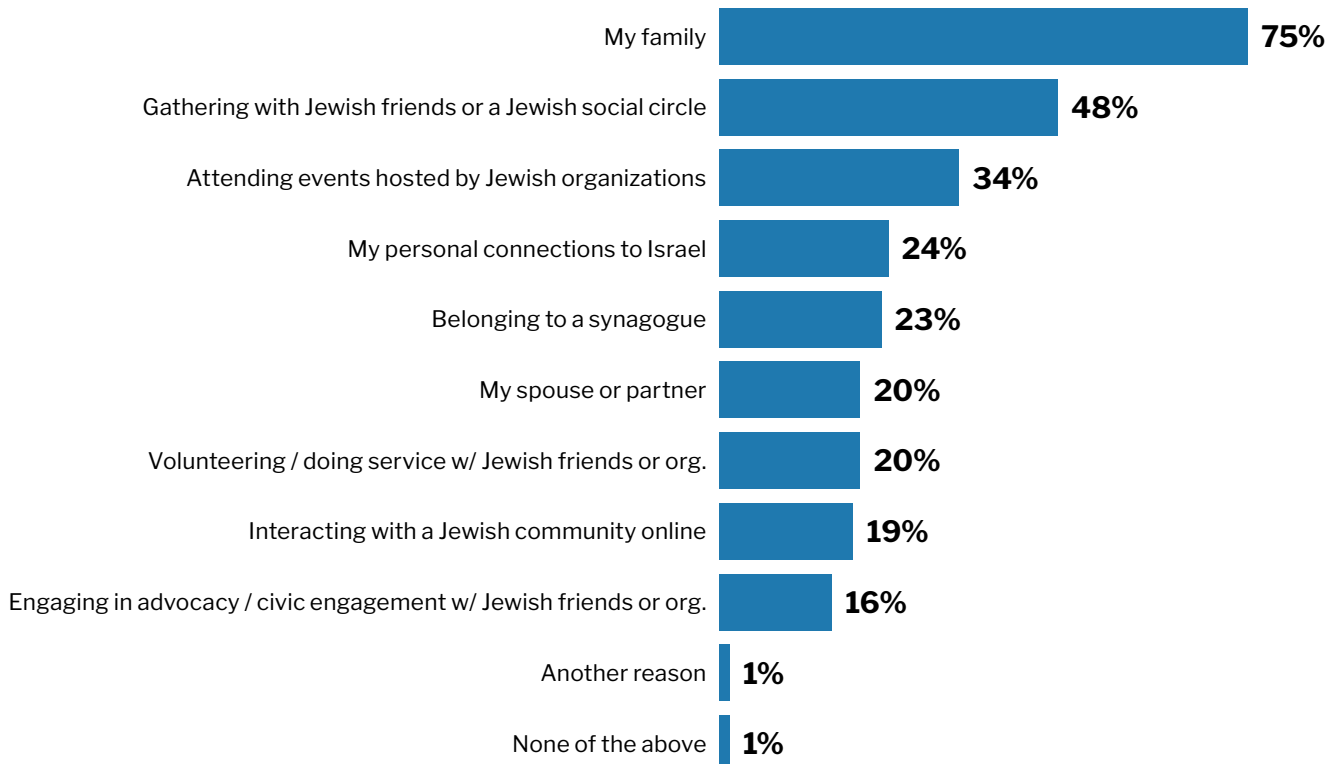
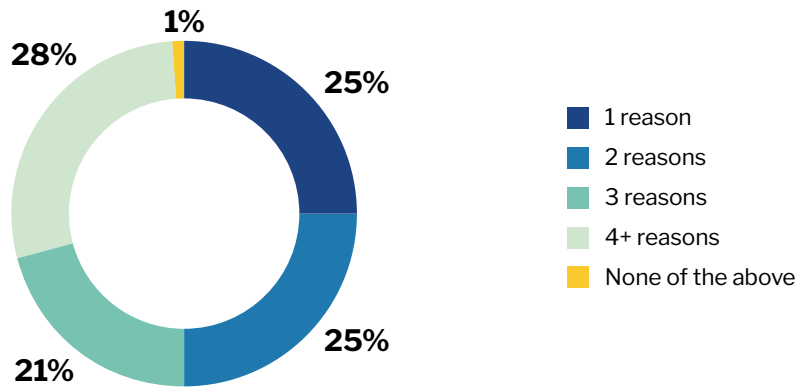
“my family” (75 percent) and “gathering with Jewish friends or a Jewish social circle” (48 percent). A third of survey respondents indicate that attending events hosted by Jewish organizations is a reason they feel connected. “I’m actually going to Shabbat services for the first time in my life on Friday, and they’re at a farm in Berkeley. ... It doesn’t even sound like it’s Jewish, it just sounds like it’s going to be like a fun night that’s themed by Judaism,” one online focus group participant said.

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FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANT

**Which of the following explains why you feel connected to some type of Jewish community right now?**

*Select all that apply*



n = 492 (those who feel connected to a Jewish community)

For those who feel disconnected, the most commonly cited barriers to feeling connected among survey respondents include that being part of a Jewish community is not relevant to their life right now as well as competing demands on time and geographic distance from a Jewish community. “Work, school, life,” one online focus group participant summed up their overriding priorities. Another online focus group participant described the role of “organized religion and their huge financial piece” as being alienating factors. In some locations, especially, Jewish young adults seem to sense an atmosphere of exclusivity to the Jewish community that drives many of them away. “It’s a very cliquey community,” one focus group participant said. “You can’t get in. You can’t penetrate that Jewish clique.”

Some who report feeling disconnected from a Jewish community voice a degree of curiosity about having more Jewish experiences and enjoying activities that tie back to being Jewish: “I can’t verbalize it, but it is important in a way that I can’t describe—just having that availability,” one focus group participant said. Another said that being more connected to a Jewish community “would be nice, but I don’t sweat it.” Similarly, some young adults have come to terms with their lack of engagement: “I’m not very connected. I’m also okay with that,” another said. “I don’t go to synagogue, but maintain some traditions and enjoy cooking authentic cultural dishes every once in a while. I’m content with the status quo.”

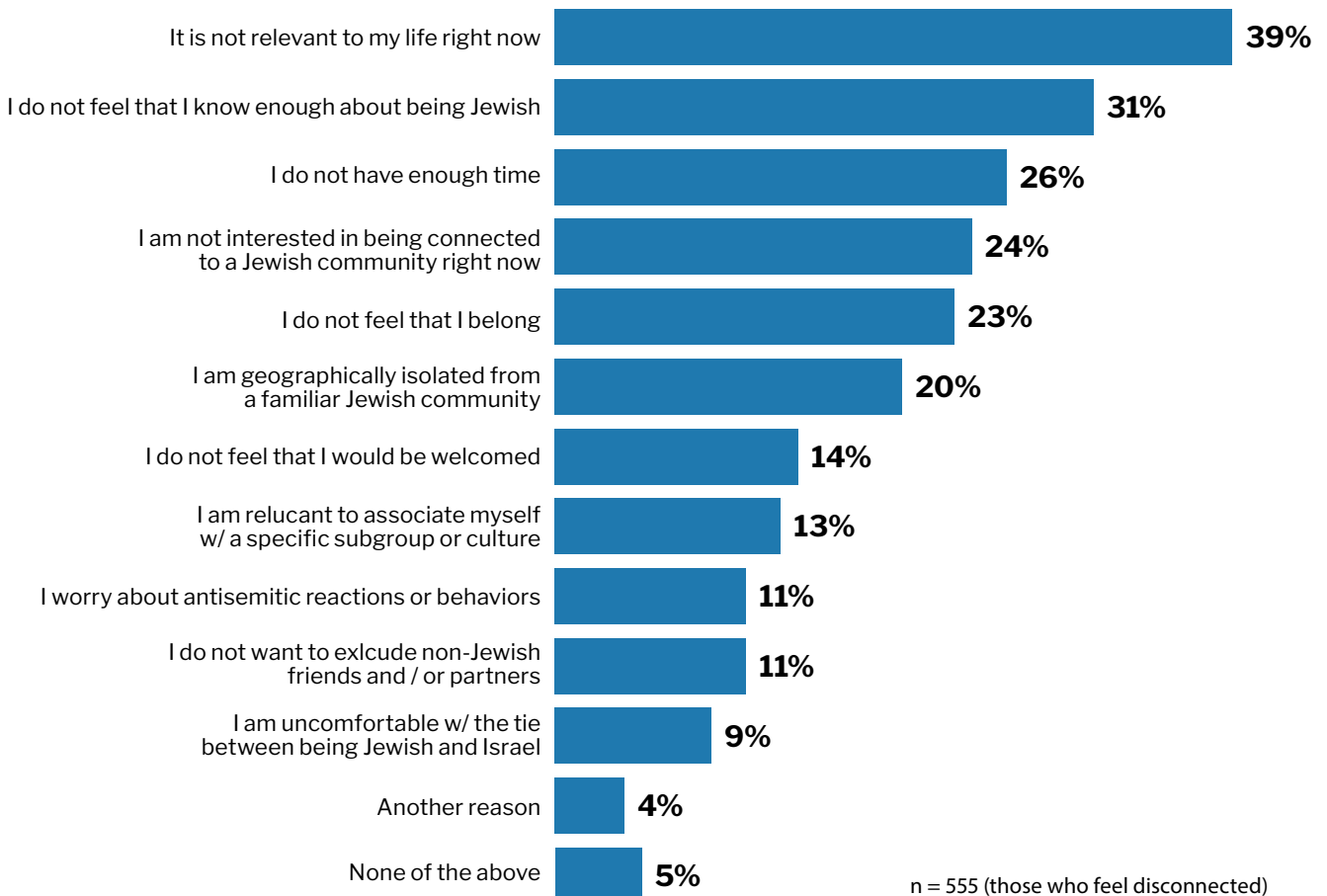
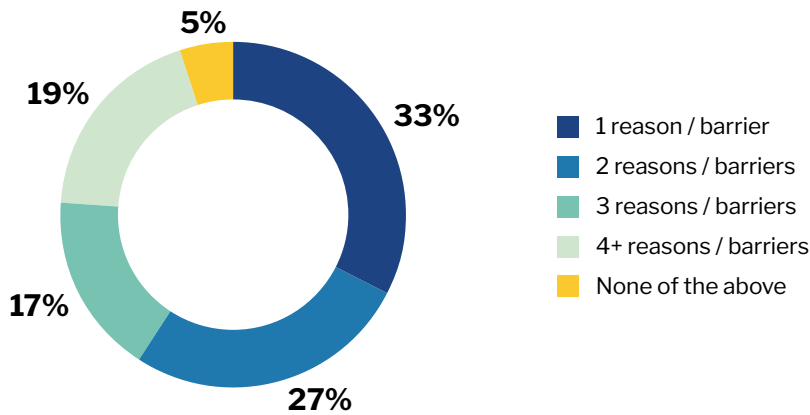
On average, survey respondents observe three to four Jewish holidays each year, excluding Shabbat. Among those who report observing or celebrating Jewish holidays, three in four attended a Passover seder in the past year, and half fasted on Yom Kippur. Russian-speaking Jews are less religious and denominationally-affiliated than other cohorts, yet they observe more holidays. Many Jewish young adults report opting for other forms of engagement with their community. Almost half observe Shabbat on special occasions, with about one in five attending a Shabbat meal or lighting candles at least monthly. People who are under 30 and those married or living with a Jewish partner are more likely to observe Shabbat in some manner than their counterparts.

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FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANT

### Which of the following explains why you feel disconnected from some type of Jewish community right now?

Select all that apply



n = 555 (those who feel disconnected)

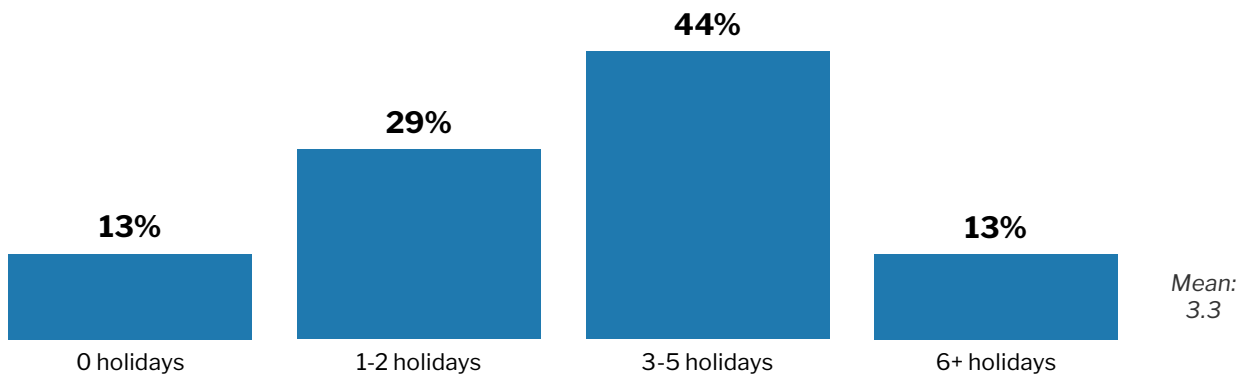
Half of survey respondents attend services at a synagogue or elsewhere, though for the most part they do so only on holidays or special occasions. Those married or living with a Jewish partner are more likely to attend. In addition, males attend services at a synagogue or elsewhere at least monthly at a higher rate than their female counterparts.

In contrast, some feel that synagogues or other institutions are not relevant or inviting. For instance, those who identify as LGBT report never attending services at a higher rate than those who do not identify as LGBT. Others feel that institutions

do not meet their age group’s needs. One focus group participant noted that, “most congregations seem more family-oriented” and that, “it would be cool to be around people my own age.” Some also have specific ideas for connecting outside of these religious institutions. “There’s so many bakeries around here that are doing bread-baking classes,” a young adult said. “Why not just theme it around a Jewish holiday, and just say, ‘Come together for your traditional Jewish rye bread-baking class?’”

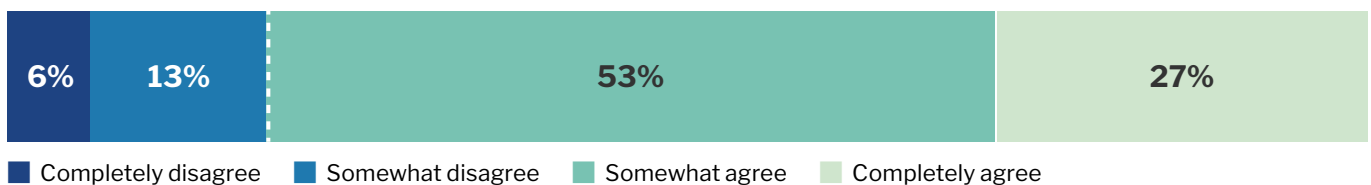
Some Jewish young adults with racially diverse backgrounds also note feeling that

**On average, how many Jewish holidays do you observe or celebrate each year excluding Shabbat?**



**Do you agree or disagree with the following statement?**

I enjoy participating in activities that tie back to my being Jewish.



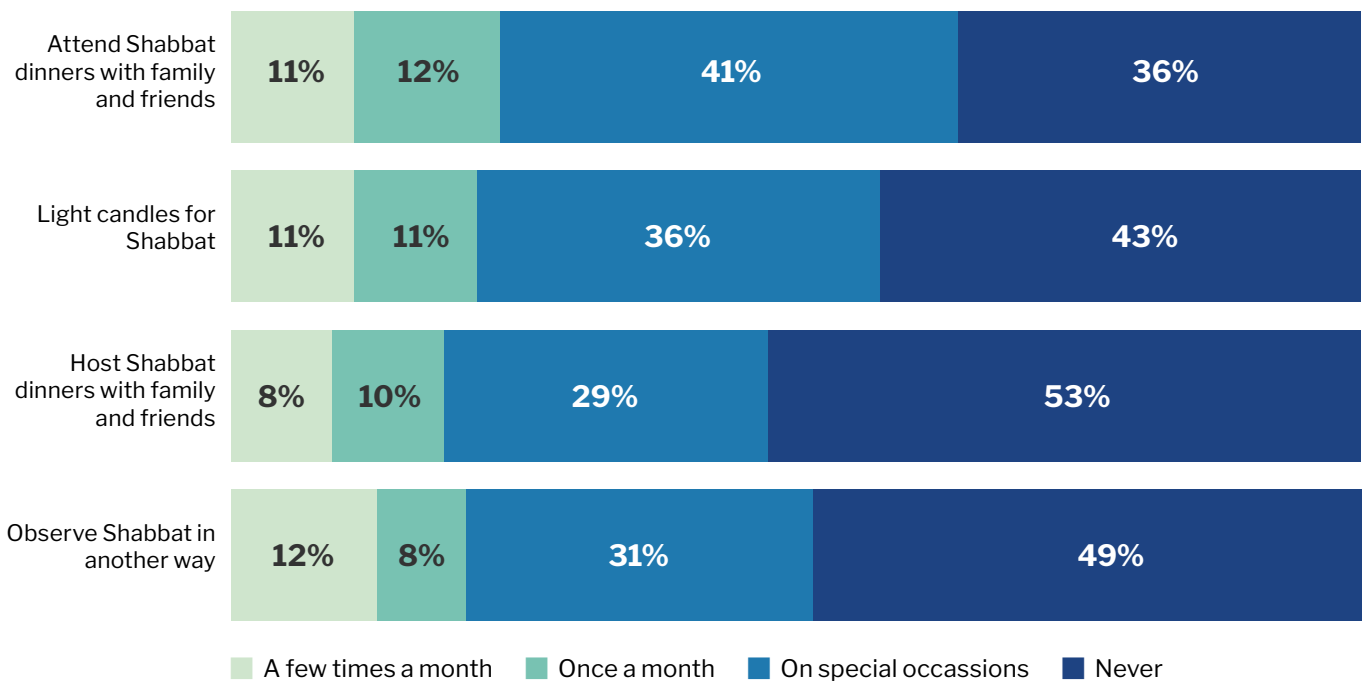
they do not belong to a Jewish community because they do not “look Jewish.” “I feel exclusion at times because of my race,” an online focus group participant who identifies as African-American said. “I feel at times I am seen as an outsider who, I guess, ‘can’t be seen’ as Jewish.” Another online focus group participant of mixed race, said: “I don’t feel I really fit into the ‘community’ since I don’t look Jewish, so it’s tough for me to identify with any type of ‘Jewish community’ besides my family.”

Indeed, for many Jewish young adults, feeling connected to a community is relational and interactive, often taking

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FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANT

**How frequently do you do each of the following?**



the form of cooking Jewish staples or striking up conversation with others—or both. “I think the conversations around a meal are some of the best ways to bond people and open them up to one another,” one online focus group participant said. Fifty-five percent of Jewish young adults participating in the survey say eating Jewish foods makes them feel Jewish.

Some note that gathering over food is less intimidating than observing the religious customs. “‘Do you want to come over for Shabbat dinner?’ seems way more serious or structured than ‘Do you want to grab dinner?’” a young adult said. “Something about labeling it, like, ‘Let’s do Shabbat.’ It just sounds kind of old-fashioned.”

**Which of the following do you do at least two to three times a month?**

