

**R** **ESearch ON THE** American Jewish population in recent years has measured everything from educational attainment to religious composition, attitudes toward the elderly, views on Israel, geographic dispersal, and political persuasion. Yet, studies to date have not deeply explored the nation's Jewish young adult population.

Increasingly, young American Jews are being recognized as an independent group within the larger American Jewish community—one that engages with being Jewish in ways that differ from previous generations. Approaches to research, however, have not been updated to reflect that this cohort engages with being Jewish differently. As a result, young American Jews' attitudes and behaviors are not adequately reflected in research that is based on more long-standing metrics related to ritual and religion. Just what these young people make of their Jewish upbringing and values, and how they self-identify, requires further exploration.

Seeking to fill these gaps and to provide a comprehensive and multi-faceted view of Jewish young adults, a consortium of Jewish philanthropies commissioned Atlantic 57 to conduct a rigorous study of Jewish young adults across the United States. For the purposes of this research, young adults were included in the study if they self-identified as Jewish in any way.<sup>1</sup> By focusing on self-prescribed definitions of being Jewish rather than external measures of such identification, this study allows for a nuanced approach to understanding Jewish engagement. It also challenges definitions of what it means to be Jewish today.

The aim of this research is to provide practitioners and philanthropies with rich context on what being Jewish means to these young adults and on how they engage or aspire to engage in Jewish life. This research does not aim to assess the effectiveness of specific programs on Jewish engagement or to make a value judgment about right and wrong ways to be Jewish.

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<sup>1</sup> See Methodology for more detailed screening criteria.

**T HIS STUDY CONSIDERS** American Jews between the ages of 22 and 40 who do not have children. Specific research methods included:<sup>2</sup>

### A LITERATURE REVIEW

Forty-six existing research studies and articles were analyzed to ensure that subsequent efforts did not “reinvent the wheel” and to establish initial hypotheses about young adults’ interest in and feelings toward various forms of engagement in Jewish life.<sup>3</sup>

### EXPLORATORY TELEPHONE INTERVIEWS

In-depth conversations with 20 Jewish young adults and five subject-matter experts took place from November 3 to December 17, 2017. Young adults were sourced to achieve diversity across the following variables:

- Age between 22 and 40
- Gender
- Geography
- Number of Jewish parents
- Relationship status
- Self-reported connection to being Jewish
- Sexual orientation

Subject-matter experts included leaders of organizations that work with Jewish young adults and academics with a focus on that population. These interviews were used to refine initial hypotheses and guide development of survey questions and possible answer choices.

### A SURVEY

An online survey was conducted from March 15 to May 2, 2018, among 1,047 Jewish young adults who met screening criteria, including:

- Age between 22 and 40
- Do not have children<sup>4</sup>
- Do not self-identify as Traditional Orthodox<sup>5</sup>
- Do not self-identify as a Messianic Jew<sup>6</sup>

The survey was crafted to understand Jewish young adults and their past, present, and aspirational connections to being Jewish. Participants opted in via an online research panel and were not associated with existing organizational lists, providing us with a diverse national sample of the Jewish young adult population.

<sup>2</sup> Primary research was conducted in the summer and fall of 2018, prior to a rise in high-profile antisemitic events that took place around the world (e.g., the massacre in a Pittsburgh synagogue).

<sup>3</sup> The titles of these research studies and articles can be found in the Appendix.

<sup>4</sup> Individuals with children were excluded since they have very different programmatic and community needs.

<sup>5</sup> Individuals who identify as Traditional Orthodox were excluded due to a series of demographic and market-based differences between that self-identifying group and the larger US Jewish young adult population. Although the dichotomy is imperfect, any survey including results from that group would have skewed the data and rendered it less useful for purposes of engaging less-affiliated Jewish young adults.

<sup>6</sup> Individuals who identify as a Messianic Jew were excluded as they are not considered Jewish.

Subgroup analysis was conducted on the following groups with n>50:<sup>7</sup>

- Jews who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender<sup>8</sup>
- Jews who identify as a race or ethnicity other than white or as more than one race
- Jews who are Russian-speaking<sup>9</sup>

Note: Survey data presented in charts may not sum to 100% due to rounding.

## FOCUS GROUPS

Fifteen focus groups were conducted among young Jewish adults between August 27 and October 9, 2018. Ten groups were conducted in-person and 5 groups were conducted online to achieve greater geographic diversity:

- 3 in-person groups in New York (September 5 and 6, 2018)
- 3 in-person groups in Atlanta (September 26 and 27, 2018)
- 2 in-person groups in Chicago (October 3, 2018)
- 2 in-person groups in San Francisco (October 9, 2018)
- 5 online groups (August 27, August 29, and September 13, 2018)

<sup>7</sup> Subgroup size was not sufficient to analyze individuals who converted to being Jewish, identify as Jewish by choice, or found out they were Jewish as an adult.

<sup>8</sup> The consortium acknowledges that while “LGBT” was used in the instrument, the term LGBTQIA would be used to be more inclusive if research had been conducted in 2020.

<sup>9</sup> Defined as a Russian-speaking Jew if meet at least one of the following criteria: born in the Former Soviet Union (Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Estonia, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Latvia, Lithuania, Moldova, Russia, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Ukraine, or Uzbekistan); raised by individual(s) born in the Former Soviet Union; grew up in a household where Russian was regularly spoken.

To qualify for the focus groups, participants had to meet the same criteria as for the survey. Each group included approximately eight to 10 participants sourced through a market research partner. Groups were organized by age and varying levels of self-reported connectedness to Jewish community and were intended to enrich survey findings with deeper-level, qualitative insights. All quotes in this report come from focus group participants.

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All research was conducted in English.

In August 2019, the consortium of Jewish philanthropies convened practitioners of organizations who engage Jewish young adults, Jewish young adults themselves, and lead researchers from Atlantic 57 to provide a preview of the findings shared in this report and to hear initial reactions.