

# Moving Forward: The Ideal Rabbi

1

---

It is critical for young Jews to find rabbis who accept them for who they are, both personally and spiritually/religiously.

2

---

Most young Jews imagine the ideal rabbi as being older than them. In terms of gender, young Jews' ideal rabbi skews male, but that is largely driven by Jewish men.

3

---

What young Jews want most of all is a rabbi who is trustworthy and accepts them for who they are – both in terms of their Jewishness and otherwise. But their experiences so far have been centered around spiritual and religious knowledge.



## What young Jews are looking for doesn't always match up with what their rabbi experiences have been so far

What young Jews want most of all is a rabbi who is trustworthy and accepts them for who they are – both in terms of their Jewishness and otherwise. However, the thing that most identifies rabbis that young Jews have interacted with so far in their life is their expertise in Jewish texts and the rabbi's spirituality, which is not a top tier priority when young Jews evaluate what they would like most in a rabbi. There is undoubtedly room for improvement when it comes to acceptance, as this trait is very important to young Jews but ranks only in the middle for what they've actually experienced from rabbis. There's also room for growth on "taking time to get to know me" and "being easily accessible."

### Rabbi Attributes: How young Jews' ideal rabbi matches up with their experiences

Colors indicate ranking within each category from highest to lowest	Ideal rabbi: % who say it's extremely or very important	Rabbi they've interacted with most: % who say it describes that rabbi well
Is accepting of how I choose to be Jewish	72	63
Accepts me for who I am	72	62
Is someone I trust	72	66
Takes the time to get to know me	67	60
Is easily accessible	67	60
Makes me feel connected to Judaism	65	61
Is someone whose teachings or sermons I can understand and relate to	64	59
Is able to effectively engage children and kids in Jewish activities and learning	64	62
Is someone I would seek out for advice on religious or spiritual issues	62	62
Strengthens my connection to a Jewish community or other Jewish people	62	62
Has expertise in Jewish texts	61	68
Is spiritual	60	68
Is someone I would seek out for advice on life issues	59	57
Spends time with members of the community outside of a synagogue	57	63
Shares the same views toward Israel as me	54	55
Shares the same politics as me	52	49

Importantly, what people want in a rabbi does not differ much by subgroup. This ranking and prioritization of ideal rabbi attributes is the same even when we look at groups that should be an area of focus like 18-24-year-olds, LGBTQ+ Jews, Jews of color, Jews in suburban and rural areas and interfaith couples and families – these are all groups who are either less likely to engage with rabbis today, have had negative experiences with rabbis, or are less satisfied with their current rabbi.



Across denominations, the top priorities for a rabbi are acceptance of themselves or how they choose to be Jewish and "Is someone I trust". Notably, Conservative Jews also rank being "able to effectively engage children and kids in Jewish activities and learning" as a top priority.

## Most young Jews expect to find their ideal rabbi in a synagogue or community organization but when they need to find a rabbi, the internet and word of mouth matters

While most expect to find their ideal rabbi in a synagogue or community organization, 1 in 10 (11%) are not sure where their ideal rabbi would work, reflecting an opportunity to provide more information to the Jewish community about how to find a rabbi. The youngest Jews in our research (18-24-year-olds), LGBTQ+ Jews, Jews of color, those in suburban and rural areas and those who grew up in interfaith families are all more likely to say they don't know where they would find their ideal rabbi.

**And thinking about this ideal rabbi for you, where would they work? Please select all that apply.**

*Multiple responses accepted*

		18-24	25-34	35-44
Synagogue	53	46	60	50
Community organization	37	34	39	36
Jewish camp	30	28	29	33
Hebrew school	27	27	30	24
Jewish day school	24	26	25	22
Campus organization (Hillel/Chabad)	23	28	24	19
I'm not sure	11	15	8	12

When asked where they would go to find a rabbi in general (before we asked about ideal rabbis specifically), synagogues are the most frequently named place, but the internet and social media, along with word of mouth, play an important role as well.

**If you wanted to talk to, or find a rabbi today, where would you go to find one?**

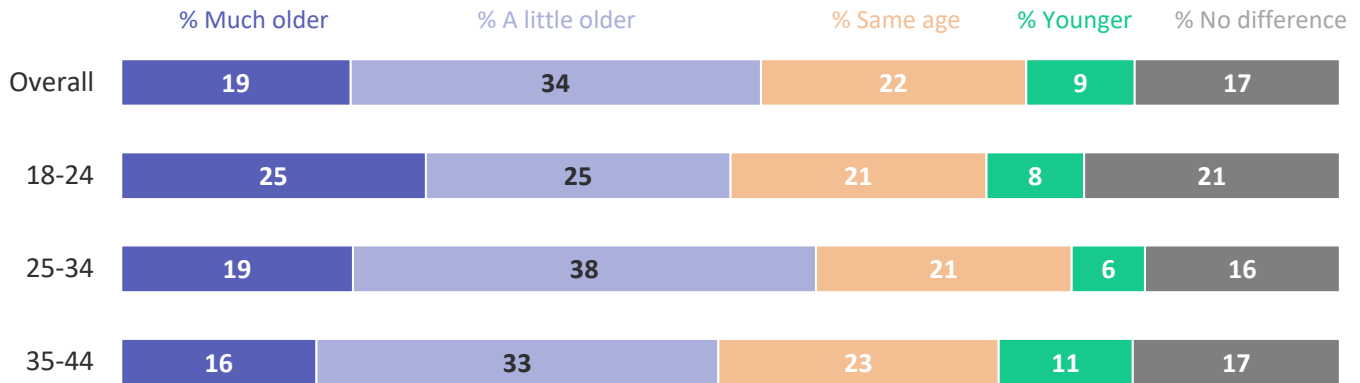
*Open end, top responses shown*

Temple/synagogue	36
Jewish community organizations	11
Online/search engine	9
Friend/family member	8
School/day school/college campus	5
Social media	4
Camp/Jewish summer camp	2

## Young Jews have a slight preference for a rabbi to be a little older than them, while gender preferences are more varied

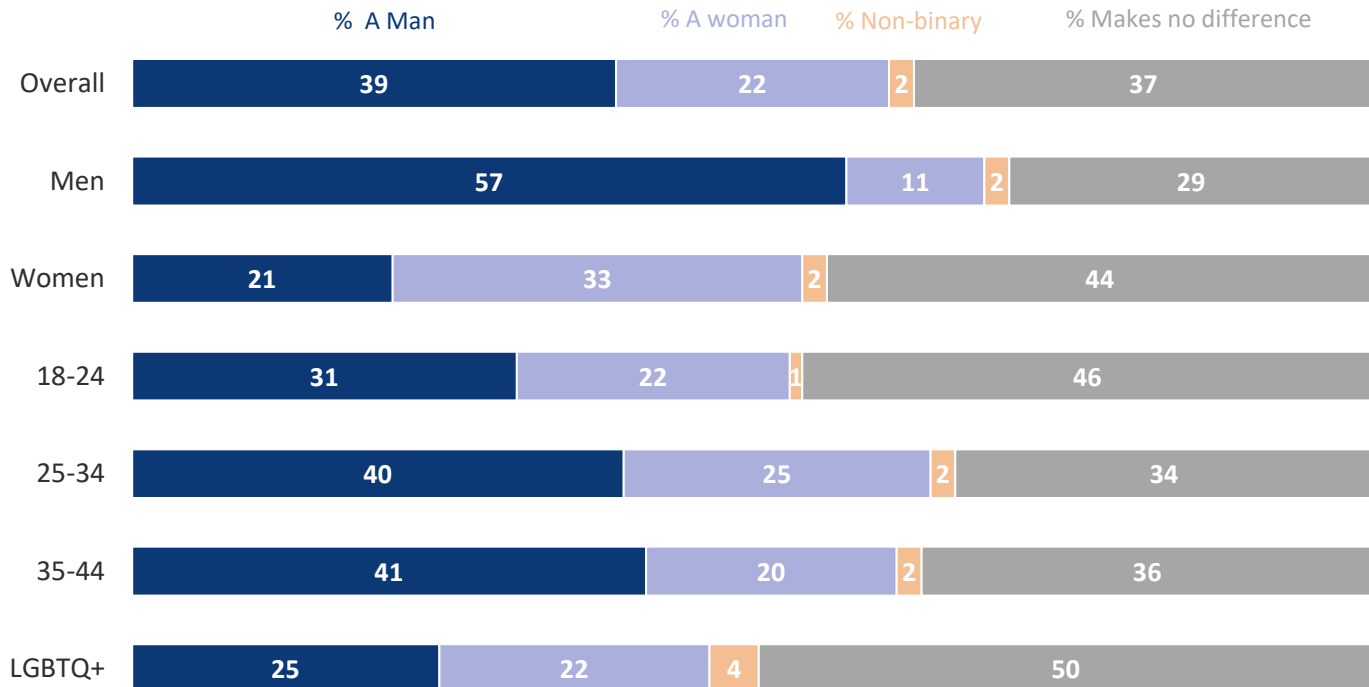
While about 20% would like a rabbi around their same age, most young Jews say their ideal rabbi is older than themselves.

Would you want your ideal rabbi to be...



In terms of gender preferences, young Jews lean toward a male preference (39%), but that is driven mostly by men (57% prefer a male rabbi). 37% overall say it makes no difference. Women lean toward preferring a female rabbi, but a plurality, 44%, say it makes no difference.

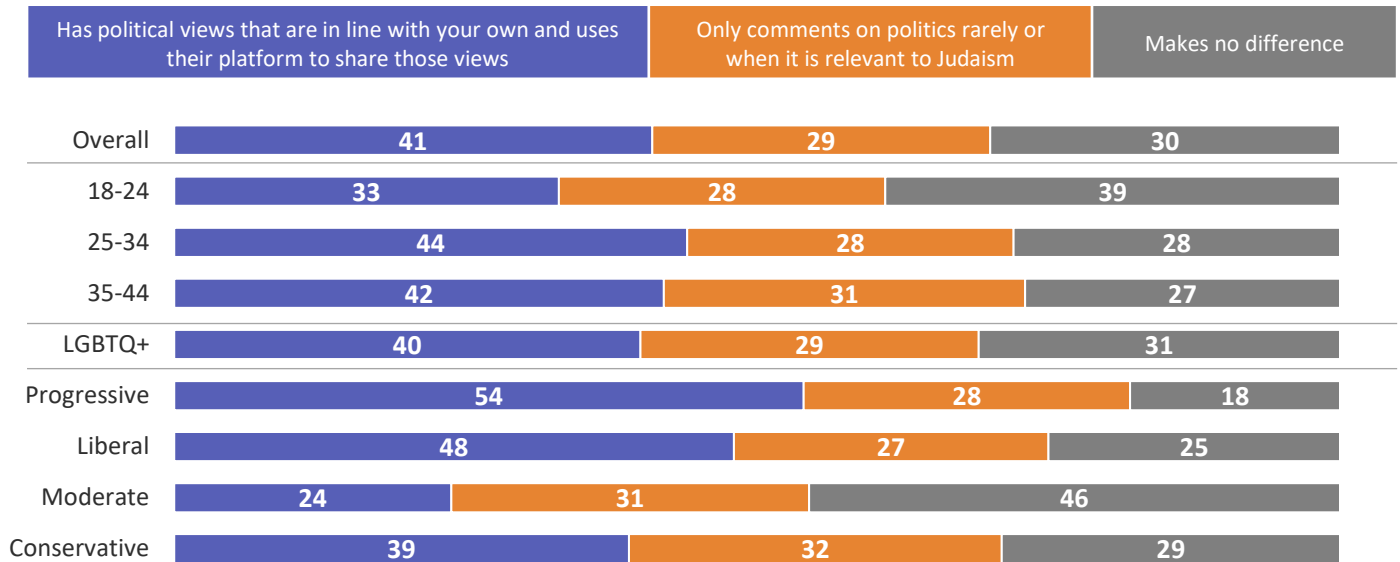
Would your ideal rabbi be...



## Politics are not a dominant factor when thinking about their ideal rabbi, but if given the choice, they would prefer their rabbi to align with their views

In our politically divided times, a plurality of young Jews (41%) would like their ideal rabbi to share their political views and use their platform to share those views. Progressive young Jews are most likely to want their ideal rabbi to express their political views (54%), while those who identify as moderates are mostly likely to say it doesn't make a difference for them (46% makes no difference).

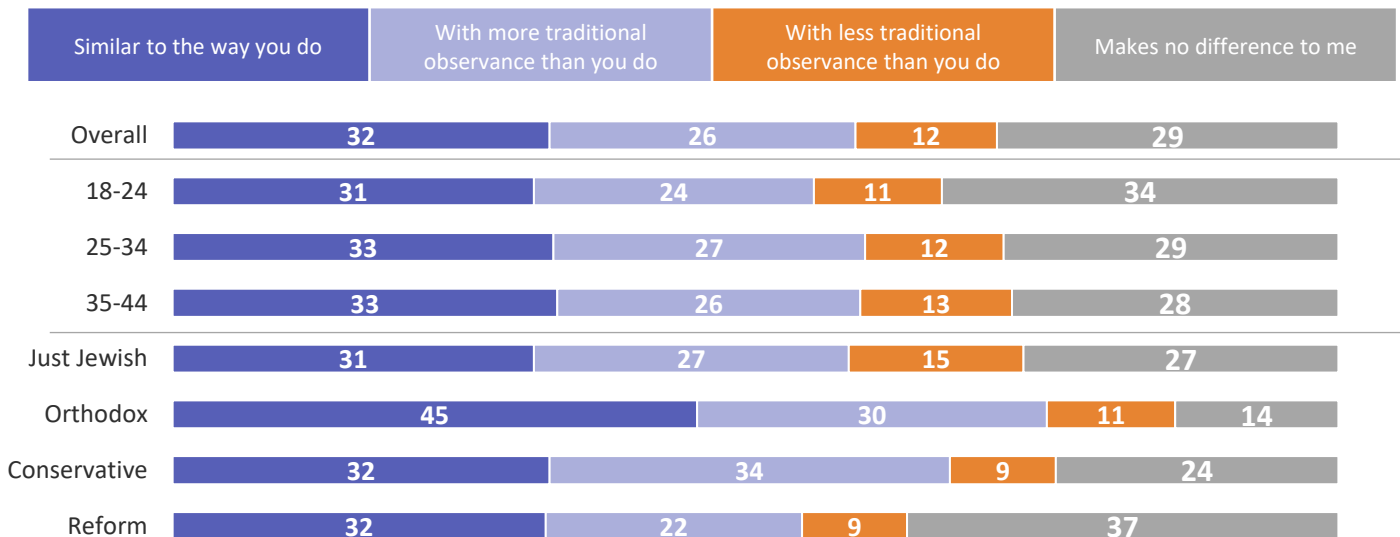
In an ideal world, would you want a rabbi who...



## In terms of religious observance, there is no one-size-fits all: a plurality lean toward a rabbi that practices similarly to them, but many say it makes no difference or want a more traditional rabbi

Observance preferences differ greatly by religious identification: Reform Jews are more likely to say it doesn't make much of a difference while Conservative and Orthodox Jews prefer a rabbi that is similar or more traditional than themselves.

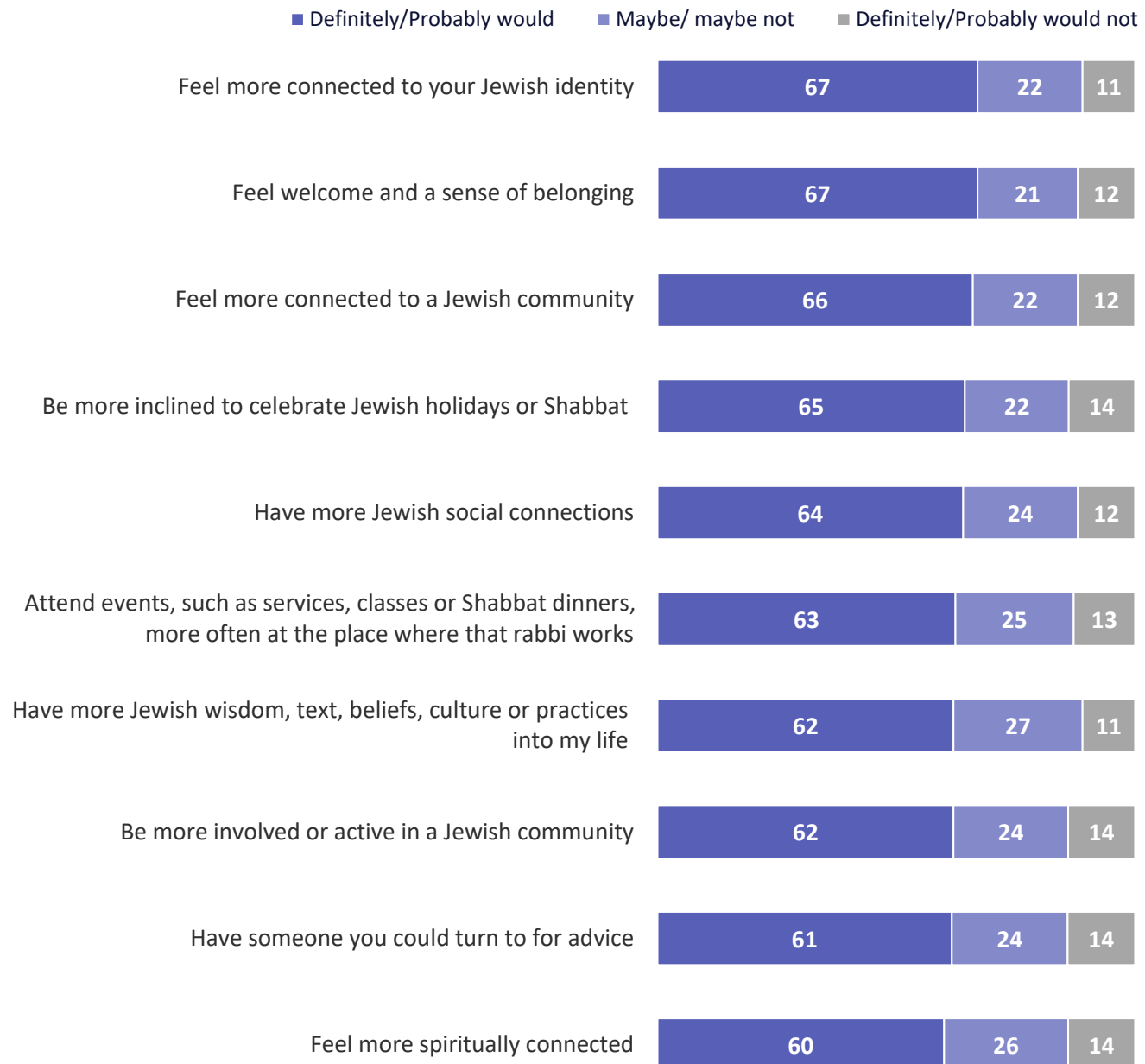
In an ideal world, would you want a rabbi who practices Judaism...



## Matching young Jews with their ideal rabbi could have a significant impact on their involvement and connection to their Jewish Identity and community

With high scores across nearly all the areas tested, it's clear the impact of finding the ideal rabbi would strengthen connection and belonging and likely boost engagement.

If you had a relationship with your ideal rabbi, do you think you would...

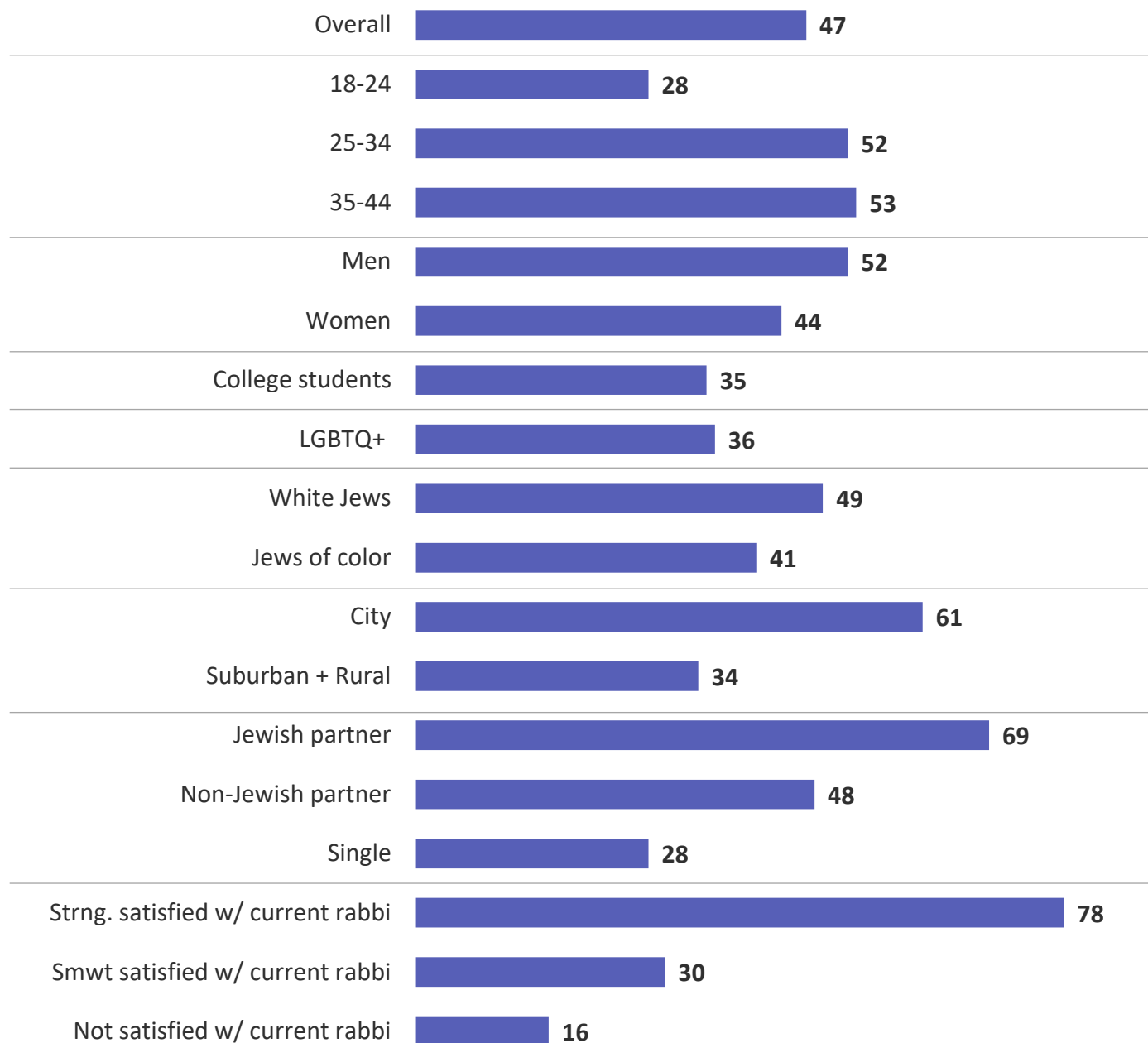


## Younger and less religious Jews are less likely to have found their ideal rabbi, leaving a large opportunity to connect them with the right rabbi

Just under half of young Jews say the rabbi they interact with most often resembles their ideal rabbi – that number is even lower with 18–24-year-olds, college students, LGBTQ+ and suburban/rural Jews. Additionally, only 30% of those who are “somewhat satisfied” with their current rabbi say that rabbi closely resembles their ideal rabbi, indicating that the key is to drive “strong satisfaction” rather than just overall satisfaction in order to ensure constituents are happy with their rabbi.

### Thinking about the rabbi you currently interact with most often, How closely do they resemble the ideal rabbi you’ve described?

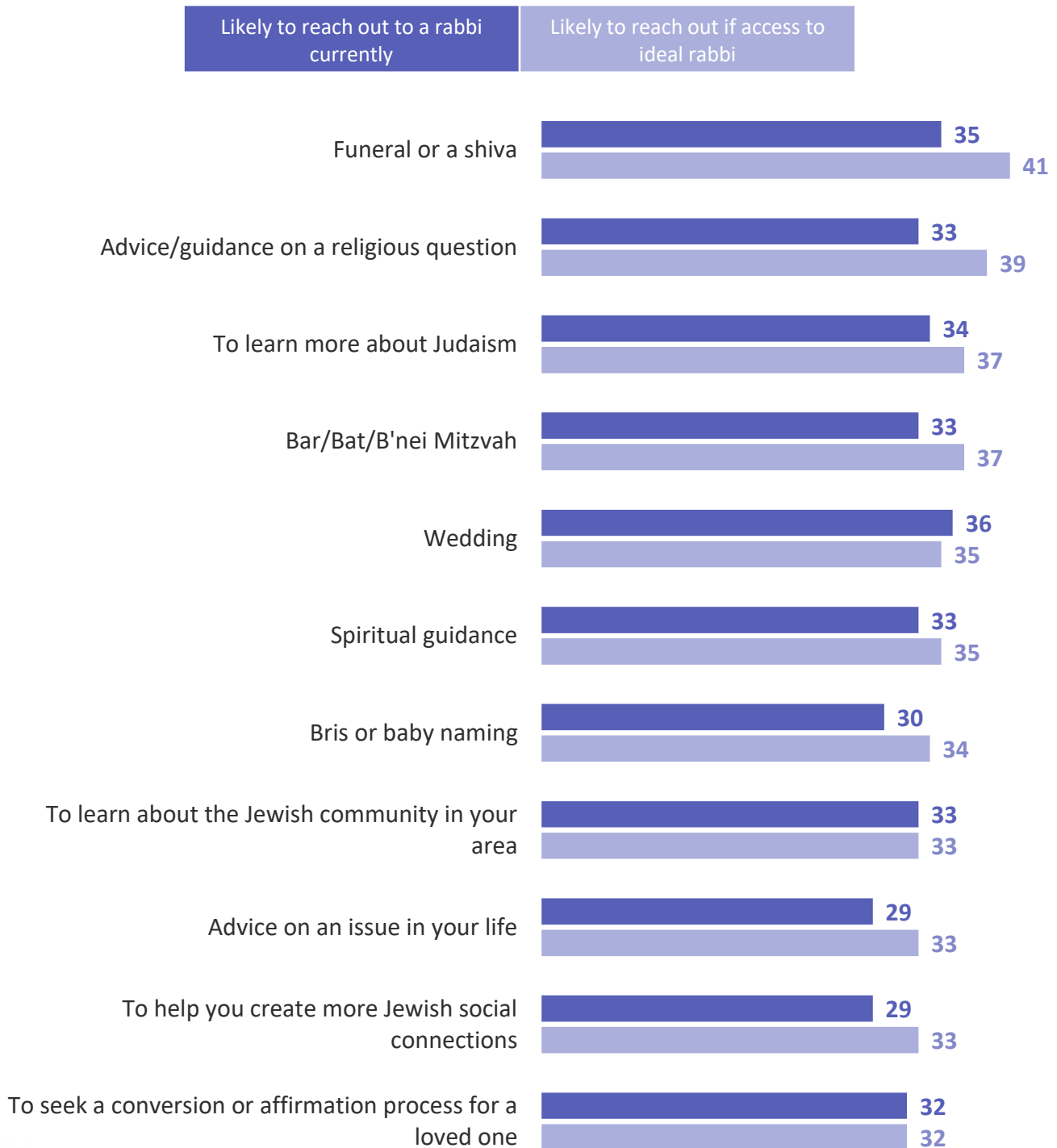
*% Net 8-10 on a 10-point scale that their “most often” rabbi closely resembles their ideal rabbi*



## Finding their ideal rabbi makes young Jews more likely to reach out during nearly all life events or situations

If they are able to connect with their ideal rabbi, young Jews are more likely to reach out to a rabbi for life events, advice and guidance and to learn more about Judaism.

How likely would you be to reach out to a rabbi for each of the following?



---

## Wrap Up: Key Opportunities for Increasing Engagement with Rabbis

### 1) The most important trait to demonstrate is acceptance

- The top 3 traits people want in a rabbi are trustworthiness, acceptance of who they are and acceptance of how they want to be Jewish. Rabbis are already generally seen as trustworthy, but there is room for improvement on both elements of acceptance. This will go a long way in helping to engage Jews who don't currently interact with a rabbi today, including but not limited to 18-24-year-old Jews, LGBTQ+ Jews, interfaith Jews and Jews of color.

### 2) Leverage opportunities to interact with rabbis outside of a synagogue

- Rabbis are highly associated with synagogues – it's where people often interact with rabbis today and it's the first place they would look if they needed to find a rabbi. However, there are significant barriers to synagogues, namely financial barriers (people believe you need to be a paying member of a synagogue to have access to a rabbi there) and intimidation and lack of comfort that some feel with entering a synagogue. As a result, giving access to rabbis outside of a traditional synagogue setting could go a long way in helping to develop more rabbi relationships.

### 3) A knowledge gap exists that prevents many young people from engaging with a rabbi

- While many young people would turn to a synagogue to try to find a rabbi, we shouldn't discount that many don't even know where to go. 1 in 4 cite not knowing where to look for a rabbi as a reason why it's hard to develop a relationship with a rabbi (or 10% overall), which lines up with the 1 in 10 Jews who say they wouldn't know where to look to find their ideal rabbi. So, while getting out of the synagogue would help engagement among those who see barriers to walking through synagogue doors, that doesn't solve the problem of some not even knowing where to look to begin with. Consequently, more outreach and education needs to be done to demonstrate the varied places and opportunities where Jews can interact with rabbis.

### 4) Be relevant now, not later

- Because rabbis are highly associated with synagogues and life cycle events, many young Jews who do not yet have families don't see a need to have a rabbi in their lives right now. To keep these Jews engaged in young adulthood, it's crucial to demonstrate the role a rabbi can play in the lives of pre-couple or pre-family Jews.



[www.bsgco.com](http://www.bsgco.com)

## Full list of rabbi attributes tested: Rabbis today are associated with spirituality and Jewish text expertise, while negative experiences affect connection, relatability and engagement with rabbis

Rabbis are largely viewed as having expertise in Jewish texts and being spiritual. Those who've had positive experiences with a rabbi point to trustworthiness and ability to engage children in Jewish activities and learning. Those who've had negative experiences are much more likely to have said the rabbis they've interacted with are asking for money, are judgmental or intimidating.

### Rabbi attributes: How well does this describe the rabbi you've interacted with most in your life?

% Describes the rabbi you've interacted with most well (Net 4+5 on a 5-point scale)	Overall	Had Positive Experience	Had Negative Experience
Has expertise in Jewish texts	68	82	69
Is spiritual	68	78	64
Is someone I trust	66	80	57
Spends time with members of the community outside of a synagogue	63	73	45
Is accepting of how I choose to be Jewish	63	77	52
Is someone I would seek out for advice on religious or spiritual issues	62	76	46
Strengthens my connection to a Jewish community or other Jewish people	62	77	58
Accepts me for who I am	62	76	54
Is able to effectively engage children and kids in Jewish activities and learning	62	80	53
Makes me feel connected to Judaism	61	73	43
Is easily accessible	60	70	44
Takes the time to get to know me	60	70	52
Is someone whose teachings or sermons I can relate to	59	69	46
Is someone I would seek out for advice on life issues	57	67	41
Shares the same views towards Israel as me	55	62	48
Shares the same politics as me	49	53	45
Mainly cares about people who are more active in the community or those who give a lot of money	47	47	42
Is always asking for money or trying to fundraise	43	37	52
Is judgmental	39	34	44
Is intimidating	37	31	41

Additionally, 68% say the rabbis they interact with most frequently are older than them, while 27% say they're around the same age.