

Jewish **STL**

2024 Greater St. Louis Jewish Community Study
Executive Summary



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The 2024 Greater St. Louis Jewish Community Study was conducted by the Maurice and Marilyn Cohen Center for Modern Jewish Studies (CMJS) at Brandeis University, in partnership with NORC at the University of Chicago. This project was commissioned by the Jewish Federation of St. Louis, in partnership with local Jewish organizations and congregations. The study employed state-of-the-art methods to create a portrait of the characteristics, attitudes, and behaviors of the Jewish community.

The *2024 Greater St. Louis Jewish Community Study* provides a snapshot of today's Jewish population in Greater St. Louis and considers trends and developments in Jewish life and engagement. In interpreting the data, it is important to bear in mind that the study represents the characteristics and views of community members at the time of the survey. Notably, the data were collected during the Israel-Hamas war that began in October 2023, and during a period of rising antisemitism in the United States. It is likely that attitudes about Israel, concerns about antisemitism, and other markers of Jewish identity were influenced by these events.

Demographic Snapshot

- Greater St. Louis includes 45,800 Jewish adults and children living in 26,700 households; these households also include 12,600 adults and 2,800 children who are not Jewish.
- The Greater St. Louis Jewish community skews older than the broader area population; 22% of Jewish adults are younger than 35, compared to 33% of all adults living in Greater St. Louis.
- The Greater St. Louis Jewish population (adults and children) is 47% male, 52% female, 1% non-binary/non-confirming, and 1% transgender.
- Nine percent of Jewish adults identify as LGBTQ+.
- The individual intermarriage rate (i.e., the proportion of Jewish adults with a non-Jewish spouse) is 53%, higher than the national average of 42%.
- About two thirds of Jewish adults (65%) identify with a personal Jewish denomination. Five percent of Jewish adults are Orthodox, 13% Conservative, 45% Reform, and 2% another denomination.
- Ninety-two percent of Jewish individuals in Greater St. Louis identify solely as white and non-Hispanic. Although 8% of Jewish individuals identify with a racial identity other than white or as Hispanic, only 2% identify as a Person of Color.
- About one quarter of Jewish households (24%) reside in the Creve Coeur area, and 22% live in St. Louis City. Eighteen percent of Jewish households reside in U. City / Clayton, 12% are in Chesterfield / West County, and 11% are in Olivette / Ladue. The remaining 13% of Jewish households reside in the rest of Greater St. Louis.
- While 22% of all Jewish adults live in the City of St. Louis, disproportionately more of those ages 22 to 39 (40%) do so.
- About half of Jewish adults (52%) were raised in Greater St. Louis. This share includes 30% who have lived in the area for their entire adult lives, and 22% who moved away and

returned. Another 42% of Jewish adults were raised elsewhere in the United States, 2% in Israel, 2% in Russia or the Former Soviet Union, and 2 % in another country.

- Nearly one quarter of Jewish adults (23%) have moved to Greater St. Louis within the past decade, including 16% who have resided in the area for fewer than five years.
- Fifty-seven percent of Jewish households have an adult child or a parent living in another household within Greater St. Louis.
- Forty percent of Jewish adults, including both those originally from the area and those who moved into it, attended college or graduate school in Greater St. Louis.
- Fourteen percent of Jewish adults have plans to move away from Greater St. Louis within the next two years.
- The majority of Jewish adults in Greater St. Louis describe their political viewpoints as “very liberal” (27%) or “liberal” (31%). Thirty percent of Jewish adults identify as “moderate,” 11% as “conservative,” and 1% as “very conservative.”

Patterns of Jewish Engagement

Members of the Greater St. Louis Jewish community exhibit a variety of types of Jewish identification and means of engagement in Jewish life. Examining the ways that Jewish adults not only view, but also enact their Jewish identities, is a valuable lens for identifying ways in which Jewish life in the region can be enhanced. This chapter introduces and discusses an “Index of Jewish Engagement,” a typology of Jewish behaviors created specifically for the Greater St. Louis Jewish community.

- The Index of Jewish Engagement focuses on Jewish behaviors—the ways in which individuals occupy and involve themselves in Jewish life Greater St. Louis.
- There are five distinct patterns of Jewish engagement found among Jewish adults in Greater St. Louis: Minimally Involved, Personal, Holiday, Communal, and Ritual. These names have been developed to reflect the distinguishing characteristics of each pattern.
- The Index can be used to identify opportunities to improve communal planning based on people’s different needs and interests.
- Despite making up 27% of the St. Louis Jewish adult population, adults ages 22-39 comprise just 13% of the Minimally Involved engagement group.
- The engagement groups are similar in the shares of its members who are unmarried. The differences between the engagement groups pertain to inmarriage and intermarriage: The majority of Jewish adults in the Communal (68%) and Ritual (76%) groups are inmarried, compared to half or less of the other three groups.
- While there is not a difference in Jewish engagement by Jewish parentage, childhood experiences of Jewish education are related to Jewish engagement in adulthood. About three quarters of the Holiday (72%) and Ritual (74%) groups attended Jewish school or summer camp when they were children, compared to 56% of the Minimally Involved and 48% of the Personal groups.
- About one quarter of Jews in Greater St. Louis (23%) feel that being Jewish is very much part of their lives. While among the Ritual group the vast majority (86%) feels that being Jewish is very much part of their daily lives, very few of the Minimally Involved group (2%) feel the same.

- Half of Jewish adults in Greater St. Louis very much feel a sense of belonging to the Jewish people. Notably, just 9% of the Minimally Involved group does not at all feel a sense of belonging to the Jewish people.

Children and Jewish Education

- Of the 12,800 children in Jewish households, 10,000 (78% of all children) are considered Jewish by their parents. More than half of all children are considered Jewish exclusively (7,600 or 59% of all children). Nineteen percent of all children are considered Jewish and another religion.
- Most of the remaining children living in Jewish households who are not considered Jewish are considered to have no religious identity (2,100 or 16% of all children). The remaining children who are not considered Jewish by their parents are either being raised exclusively in another religion (4% of all children), their parents have not determined yet how they will be raised, or the response was not provided.
- Just over half of Jewish children (54%) are being raised by inmarried parents, while a smaller percentage (35%) are being raised by intermarried parents. The remaining 11% of Jewish children are being raised by single parents.
- Of children in inmarried Jewish households, 86% are considered Jewish alone, and 5% are considered Jewish and something else. Less than half of the children of intermarried parents (39%) are considered Jewish alone, and 29% are considered to be Jewish and something else.
- Half of Jewish students in grades K-12 during the 2023-24 school year and summer 2023 were enrolled in some form of Jewish education, including schools, other year-round programs, and camps.
- During the 2023-24 school year, 28% of Jewish children in the Greater St. Louis area not yet in kindergarten were enrolled in an early childhood program run by a Jewish organization.
- Forty-six percent of age-eligible Jewish children have had a bar mitzvah, bat mitzvah, or b-mitzvah ceremony, and an additional 10% plan to have one in the future.

Congregations and Ritual Life

- Thirty-six percent of Jewish households belong to some type of Jewish congregation located in Greater St. Louis, including synagogues, an independent *minyan* or *chavurah*, Chabad, and other worship communities.
- Congregational membership and synagogue dues payment are lowest in the Rest of Greater St. Louis region, with only 18% belonging to a congregation and 11% paying dues.
- One quarter of all Jewish households (24%) belong to a Reform synagogue or temple, which is equivalent to 66% of all congregation-member households.
- Larger shares of Greater St. Louis Jewish adults attend services than belong to congregations. Although 42% of Jewish adults reside in a congregation-member household, 64% attended a Jewish worship service at least once in the previous year.
- A large majority of Jewish adults ages 22-39 (81%) attended services at least once (a significantly higher share than in other age groups), but there is no significant age difference in monthly service attendance.

- Forty-one percent of Jewish adults who do not belong to a congregation attended a Jewish religious service at least once.
- The majority of Jewish adults in Greater St. Louis feel comfortable seeking guidance from a rabbi or another Jewish clergy member. Two thirds feel comfortable seeking guidance from someone in the local community, including 54% who feel comfortable with someone only in Greater St. Louis, and 12% who feel comfortable with someone both in and outside Greater St. Louis.
- In the past year, more than half of Jewish adults in Greater St. Louis marked Shabbat in any way. Twenty-two percent marked Shabbat every week or almost every week.
- The three most common ways that Greater St. Louis Jewish adults marked Shabbat included lighting candles (45% of all Jewish adults), spending time with family and friends (42% of all Jewish adults), and eating a special meal (40% of all Jewish adults).
- Eighty percent of Jewish adults lit Hanukkah candles in 2023, 70% attended or hosted a Passover seder in 2023, and 44% fasted on Yom Kippur in 2023. About one third of Jewish adults (31%) follow any of the kosher rules.

Jewish Organizations, Programs, and Activities

- About one quarter of Jewish households (24%) belong to the J, St. Louis' Jewish community center. Membership in the J is highest in the Creve Coeur area, Olivette/Ladue, and Chesterfield/West County.
- In the year prior to the study, about two thirds of Jewish adults (68%) participated in at least one Jewish sponsored program, including 22% who participated rarely, 31% who participated sometimes, and 16% who participated often. The remaining third of Jewish adults (32%) did not participate in any Jewish program.
- Among Jewish adults who never participated in Jewish programs within the past year, nearly one quarter were “somewhat” (22%) or “very much” (1%) interested in participating in programs sponsored by the Greater St. Louis Jewish community. The 39% of non-participants who were not at all interested in Jewish programs comprise 12% of the entire adult Jewish community in Greater St. Louis.
- Among the 88% of Jewish adults who either already participate or are interested in participating in Jewish programs, 72% cite at least one condition that limits their participation. The most common barriers to participation are not knowing many people (31%), programs not occurring during convenient times (30%), and not having found Jewish programs of interest (28%).
- Larger shares of Jewish adults under age 65 cite barriers to Jewish involvement than did older adults, including 84% of adults ages 22-39, 81% of adults ages 40-54, and 78% of adults ages 55-64.
- Almost half of Jewish adults who have moved to Greater St. Louis in the past five years (48%) cite not knowing many people as a barrier to their participation in Jewish programs, compared to 31% of all Jewish adults.
- In Greater St. Louis, 95% of Jewish adults had discussed Jewish topics with family or friends in the past year. Ninety percent ate Jewish foods aside from Shabbat and holiday meals. Additionally, 89% read Jewish publications, including articles, magazines, and newsletters

from a Jewish organization. Eighty-five percent read books, watched movies or TV, or listened to music that was Jewish-focused. Fifty-five percent studied or learned Jewish texts.

- Jewish younger adults had more Jewish social media interactions than Jewish older adults, with 82% of Jewish adults ages 22-39 having at least one such interaction.

Volunteering and Philanthropy

- Over half of Jewish adults (55%) volunteered somewhere in the past year, with 12% volunteering exclusively for or with Jewish organizations, 22% volunteering exclusively for or with non-Jewish organizations, and 21% volunteering for or with both Jewish and non-Jewish organizations.
- Eighty percent of Jewish households made a charitable contribution in the past year. This share includes 54% who gave to both Jewish and non-Jewish organizations, 6% who gave only to Jewish organizations, and 19% who gave only to non-Jewish organizations.
- Larger shares of intermarried (26%) and unmarried (21%) households gave exclusively to non-Jewish organizations than did inmarried households (4%).
- Seventeen percent of Jewish households donated to a congregation or synagogue in Greater St. Louis. Sixteen percent of Jewish households donated to a Jewish school or camp in Greater St. Louis, while the same share donated to a Chabad in Greater St. Louis or to a Jewish organization focused outside of Greater St. Louis. Fifteen percent of Jewish households donated to a Jewish human services organization in Greater St. Louis, 14% to the J, and 12% to the Jewish Federation of St. Louis.
- Causes related to Jewish identity, education, and engagement were the most popular for volunteering or philanthropy among Jewish adults (46%). Jewish adults also care about causes related to general education (42%), social justice (41%), health and human services (40%), combating antisemitism or promoting Holocaust awareness and education (39%), congregations (38%), and Israel (34%).

Community Connections

- Nearly one quarter of Jewish adults (24%) in Greater St. Louis very much feel a sense of belonging to a Jewish community where they live. By contrast, 13% of Jewish adults very much feel a sense of belonging to another Jewish community.
- Large majorities of Jewish adults living in Olivette/Ladue (93%), the Creve Coeur area (90%), and Chesterfield/West County (88%) feel at least some sense of belonging to a local Jewish community, compared to 60% of Jewish adults living in the Rest of Greater St. Louis region.
- Twenty-five percent of Jewish adults *only* feel some level of belonging to a Jewish community where they live, and 3% feel some level of belonging *only* to another Jewish community. Over half of Jewish adults (54%) feel at least some sense of belonging to Jewish communities both where they live and elsewhere, whereas 18% feel no sense of belonging to any Jewish community.
- The majority of Jewish adults feel part of at least one community anywhere within Greater St. Louis, whether Jewish or not. Just 10% of Jewish adults do not feel at all part of a local community.

- Sixteen percent of the Minimally Involved group do not feel at all connected to any local Jewish community, compared to 1-5% of the Holiday, Communal, and Ritual groups.
- Despite newcomers feeling part of at least one Jewish community to a similar degree as the rest of the Jewish population, a smaller share report having community with local friends (58%) or family (35%).
- Forty-four percent of Jewish adults feel part of a community in Greater St. Louis through a Jewish organization or group, such as a synagogue or minyan, The J, or a chavurah. Within this group, the Jewish organization or group is the primary or only local community for 13% of Jewish adults and is a secondary community for 32%.
- Among those who do not have a local Jewish community, most are not deeply interested in finding a Jewish community in Greater St. Louis. One third of Jewish adults (32%) are somewhat interested in finding a Jewish community, and 14% are very interested.

Connections to Israel

- More than two thirds of Jewish adults feel some level of emotional attachment to Israel, with 35% feeling somewhat attached and 38% feeling very attached. Taken together, the proportion who are somewhat or very attached to Israel (73%) is a larger share than is found among all US Jewish adults (58%).
- More than half of Jewish adults in Greater St. Louis have been to Israel, including 24% who have visited once, 25% who have visited more than once, and 6% who have lived in Israel.
- Seventy percent of Jewish adults who are not all attached or not too attached to Israel have never visited. By contrast, among those who are very attached to Israel, 27% have never visited Israel.
- About half of Jewish adults ages 22-39 in Greater St. Louis have visited Israel on a Birthright trip.
- Eighty-eight percent of Jewish adults strongly agree with the statement “I consider it important that for Israel to be a democratic state,” and 76% strongly agree with “I consider it important that “Israel should exist as a refuge for the Jewish people, now and in the future.”
- Less than half of Jewish adults agree with the statement “I consider myself to be a Zionist,” (18% somewhat agree, and 27% strongly agree), while 19% were unsure or held no opinion.
- Almost one quarter of Jewish adults (22%) were unsure or held no opinion on the statement “I often feel my views about Israel are unwelcome in Jewish settings,” while another quarter (24%) strongly disagree. Still, 28% of Jews ages 22-39 strongly *agree* with the statement, compared to 2-8% of older Jews.
- While across the political spectrum there is consensus that Israel should be a democratic state, there is more disagreement by political orientation regarding whether Israel should be a Jewish state and whether American Jews have the right to criticize Israel’s government.

Concerns about Antisemitism

- Twenty-eight percent of Jewish adults were personally targeted by an antisemitic incident within the past year, primarily by antisemitic remarks rather than actions.

- Relatively fewer Jews ages 75 and older were targeted by antisemitism, compared to Jews younger than 75.
- About half of Jewish adults (51%) avoid activities out of a fear of antisemitism. Thirty-six percent avoid mentioning Israel either in person or online, and 26% say they avoid posting Jewish content online that would identify them as a Jew. Twenty-eight percent say they avoid wearing or displaying objects that would identify them as a Jew, and 24% say they avoid going to certain places or events.
- Three quarters of Jewish adults ages 22-39 (77%) say they avoid activities out of a fear of antisemitism, compared to half or less of older Jews.
- Most Jewish adults are very concerned about antisemitism around the world (79%). They are less concerned about antisemitism in Greater St. Louis (47%).

Financial Well-Being

- The Jewish community in Greater St. Louis is highly educated. Of Jewish adults ages 25 and older, 72% have at least a bachelor's degree. Among all Greater St. Louis residents ages 25 and older, 41% have at least a bachelor's degree. Among Jews in the United States, 58% have a bachelor's degree.
- One percent of Greater St. Louis Jewish households report they cannot make ends meet, and another 17% indicate they are just managing to make ends meet. More than one third of households (36%) have enough money, one quarter (25%) have extra money, and one fifth (20%) describe themselves as well-off.
- Three percent of Jewish households have incomes below 100% of the Federal Poverty Level, and 12% of Jewish households earn below 250% FPL.
- Debt is held by 41% of Jewish households, including 25% with student loans, 20% with credit card debt, and 16% with medical debt.
- Among the Jewish households with debt, for 67% of them it is a source of financial stress, including 13% for whom it is often and 9% for whom it constantly a source of stress.
- Twenty-seven percent of non-retired Jewish adults think their retirement savings plan is not on track. Among Jewish retirees, 4% are not at all confident they will have enough money for their retirement, and another 4% are not too confident.
- Twelve percent of Jewish households receive a public benefit, 17% of Greater St. Louis Jewish households **do not** have sufficient funds to cover three months of expenses, and 7% are **unable** to pay in full an unexpected \$400 emergency expense.
- Eleven percent of Jewish households in Greater St. Louis were unable to pay for at least one necessity within the past year, and another 5% were unable to pay for at least one necessity between one to three years ago. Larger shares of younger Jewish households faced financial hardships than older ones, with 31% of Jewish households with members ages 22-39 having difficulty paying for at least one necessity, compared to 5-8% of households with members ages 65 and older.
- Overall, 6% of Jewish households receive at least one financial service from a Jewish provider, and 14% receive at least one from a non-Jewish provider.
- Nineteen percent of Jewish households had to limit or change their involvement in Jewish life due to their financial situation. The most frequent limitation faced by Jewish adults was

being unable to contribute as much to Jewish causes as they wished, with 16% of households limited in this way.

Health Needs

- Most Jewish adults in Greater St. Louis report being in good mental and physical health. About two thirds describe their mental health as very good (34%) or excellent (31%), and a similar share describe their physical health as very good (33%) or excellent (33%).
- Nearly one quarter (23%) of younger adults ages 22-39 report having fair or poor mental health, compared to 11% of all Jewish adults in Greater St. Louis.
- One third of financially struggling Jewish adults (33%) describe either their physical or mental health as fair or poor.
- Twenty-six percent of Jewish households include a member with a chronic health issue, disability, or other need that affects their participation in work, school, or other activities. More than half of financially struggling Jewish households (58%) have at least one member with a chronic health issue or disability.
- Twenty-two percent of Jewish households require services to manage health issues, special needs, mental health issues, or disabilities. Eighteen percent of these households report that the received services were adequate, and 4% feel the received services were not adequate to manage their health needs.
- Among Jewish households in Greater St. Louis, 15% manage or personally provide care for close relatives or friends on a regular basis, aside from routine childcare.
- In Jewish households with someone age 65 or older, 16% include someone who requires assistance with daily tasks, such as doing housework, preparing meals, dressing and undressing, or walking up and down stairs.
- Sixty percent of Jewish adults say it is either somewhat easy (35%) or very easy (25%) to find information they need about services and supports provided in the Greater St. Louis Jewish community.
- Forty-two percent of Jewish adults have either no one (3%) or just a few people (39%) in their nearby personal support networks.

Future Directions

Community organizations may wish to consider some of the following themes as starting points as they use study findings to plan for the future:

- **Reach out beyond the geographic core of the community.** Bringing more programs to St. Louis City and outlying areas within Greater St. Louis, keeping and making more programs and activities available online, and promoting stronger ties between Jewish organizations in the historic core and the rest of the community, can help to expand the community's reach.
- **Balance the needs of newcomers and long-time residents.** The Jewish community in Greater St. Louis has longstanding ties to the area, and there is a strong multigenerational component to the community. Despite these longstanding local connections, nearly one quarter of Jewish adults moved to the area within the past decade. It may be helpful to

introduce new residents to their options for synagogues, Jewish schools, Jewish cultural programs and activities, and to create opportunities to meet other Jews who share their interests.

- **Foster community through organizations and individuals.** The majority of Jews in Greater St. Louis do indeed have strong sense of attachment and connection to their community, whether Jewish or otherwise. Still, not all Jewish adults have community nearby. The study explored barriers to participation in Jewish life, and some of these might be the same barriers to building community. The most common barrier to participation that is cited by Jewish adults is not knowing many people. This limitation is particularly pronounced for younger Jews ages 22-39.
- **Meet people where they are in their Jewish journeys.** For some, being Jewish is about celebrating holidays or observing Jewish rituals. For others, it means participating in community organizations. For still others, it means engaging in private or personal behaviors outside of group and communal auspices. By understanding the patterns of Jewish engagement and the demographic profile of each engagement group, Jewish organizations will be better able to meet the needs of specific populations as well as design programs that bring diverse groups together over shared interests and concerns.
- **Address human service needs.** Nineteen percent of Jewish households say they cannot make ends meet or are just managing to make ends meet (referred to in this report as “struggling”). Among Jewish adults who did not attend Jewish programs but were interested in doing so, 15% indicated that affordability was a barrier to participation. Over one quarter of Jewish households include a member whose work, school, or activities is limited by a chronic health issue, special need, or disability. The relationship between financial hardship and service needs is evident. Nearly half of financially struggling households required a health service, including 10% who received inadequate services.
- **Facilitate communal dialogue about Israel.** The Greater St. Louis Jewish community has strong ties to Israel. Yet within that consensus, there is also deep division. Only 27% of Jewish adults in Greater St. Louis strongly agree that they consider themselves Zionists, with an equivalent 25% strongly disagreeing. Conversations about Israel are particularly fraught for younger adults ages 22-39. Among this age group, 28% strongly agree that their views about Israel are unwelcome in Jewish settings, the highest of any age group. In addition, younger Jewish adults face challenges related to Israel outside of the Jewish community, with 71% report avoiding mentioning Israel out of fear of antisemitism. Educational programs and facilitated discussions may help to foster greater mutual respect and understanding among members of the Greater St. Louis Jewish community.