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Foundation of Our Future: Portrait of Jewish Baltimore



BALTIMORE'S JEWISH COMMUNITY
STUDY 2020

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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COHEN CENTER FOR
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The Associated
Jewish Federation of Baltimore

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The Cohen Center for Modern Jewish Studies (CMJS), founded in 1980, is dedicated to providing independent, high-quality research on issues related to contemporary Jewish life.

The Cohen Center is also the home of the Steinhardt Social Research Institute (SSRI). Established in 2005, SSRI uses innovative research methods to collect and analyze socio-demographic data on the Jewish community.

PREFACE

To the Readers:

The data for the 2020 Baltimore Jewish Community Study were collected from April to July 2019 and, as such, predate the coronavirus pandemic. Although the study was conducted under relatively normal times, as we write this in March and April 2020, things have shifted considerably for the Jewish community and the world at large.

We often tell people that Jewish community studies are snapshots in time that have a “shelf life” of roughly 10 years under normal circumstances, but that sharp changes in local or national trends can shorten the amount of time before the data really need a “refresh.” The COVID-19 pandemic, which began in January 2020, but first became a subject of significant public attention in the United States in late February and early March, seems likely to touch many aspects of our lives. How it will affect the physical, mental, and financial health of the Greater Baltimore Jewish Community as of this writing remains unknown.

Nevertheless, we believe the study will be extremely useful to you now and in the years to come. The findings of the study are the most accurate representations of the Baltimore Jewish Community—prior to the world changing—that we can produce. They are the baseline for comparing the community before, during, and after the pandemic. The study shows what “normal” looked like and can help establish benchmarks for gauging communal recovery. It shows where the community was strong before the pandemic, and where the community can use its strengths to aid in recovery. And it shows where the community had some challenges before the pandemic, which suggests opportunities for creative efforts to strengthen the community in a time of crisis.

As we shelter in our own homes, we remember that both the Jewish people and the United States have endured many crises in our history. Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik reminds us that this crisis will not define us and that we are called upon to “transform fate into destiny and a passive existence into an active existence; an existence of compulsion, perplexity and muteness into an existence replete with a powerful will, with resourcefulness, daring and imagination” (*Kol Dodi Dofek*). Although we are geographically distant from you today, we are experiencing the same challenges; we are with you in spirit and are confident that our communities will get through this crisis together. We look forward to the day when you will be able to use the results of this study not only to aid with recovery, but to grow and strengthen the Baltimore Jewish Community with “resourcefulness, daring, and imagination.”

From,
The Authors

LETTER FROM THE ASSOCIATED

Dear Baltimore Community,

On behalf of The Associated: Jewish Federation of Baltimore, we are pleased to present the results of our 2020 Community Study – *Foundation of Our Future: Portrait of Jewish Baltimore*. As The Associated celebrates its centennial this year, the study provides a snapshot of a strong and vibrant Jewish community that continues to evolve. The data yielded by the study will help us prepare for the challenges and opportunities that will present themselves in the coming years.

How large is our community? Where does our population live? How do we engage in Jewish life and connect with the Jewish community? How many of us live in poverty or have unmet financial needs? How many people with disabilities live in Jewish Baltimore? How do we connect to Israel? This study answers these and many other questions that are relevant to the present and future of our community.

We thank the Cohen Center for Modern Jewish Studies at Brandeis University and, in particular, Dr. Leonard Saxe and Dr. Matthew Boxer for their wisdom, guidance and expertise in conducting this research. It is thanks to them that we can tell the story of our community through a wealth of data and analyses.

We also thank Ruth Greenfield Miller, Chief Planning Officer of The Associated, for her skilled leadership and her invaluable insights; Carrie Parker, Director of Impact Assessment, for her efforts from beginning to end, and all those at The Associated who supported the study. Thanks, as well to the Community Study Management Team, a group of lay leaders whose sound judgment and institutional knowledge contributed immeasurably to the study, and to the Community Study Task Force, whose members helped make the study useful to the entire Jewish Community. Finally, we thank MileOne Autogroup for its generosity in sponsoring the 2020 Community Study. MileOne's support made this research possible.

We now begin the process of assisting the community in realizing the benefits that the study is intended to achieve. We look forward to the wide range of discussions, insights and initiatives that will emerge from our collective review of the information and help guide us into the next decade.

Sincerely,
Martin S. Himeles, Jr., Co-Chair, Community Study
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CMJS/SSRI ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The Brandeis research team is grateful to the Associated for the opportunity to collaborate to develop and conduct the 2020 community study. The study was proposed and sponsored by The Associated: Jewish Community Federation of Baltimore. The Federation staff, Board of Directors, and Community Study Committee provided valuable input on the study design, questionnaire, and report. We are particularly grateful to Ruth Miller, Chief Planning Officer, Carrie Parker, Director of Impact Assessment, and Martin Himeles and Mark Neumann, co-chairs of the community study committee. They helped us learn about the community and ensured that our work would be of the highest quality and utility for the Baltimore Jewish community. We also thank the respondents who completed the survey. Without their willingness to spend time answering numerous questions about their lives, there could be no study.

The University of New Hampshire Survey Center served as the call center for this study. We are grateful to Zachary Azem, who was our main point of contact, the survey instrument programmer, and the supervisor for data collection. Sean McKinley was instrumental in testing the survey. Robert Durant and Carolyn Lamb managed the calling operation, including training and supervising callers, fielding callbacks, and countless other tasks. We would also like to thank the many callers who collected data from respondents.

This project also could not have been conducted without the assistance of our colleagues and students at the Maurice and Marilyn Cohen Center for Modern Jewish Studies at Brandeis University. We are deeply appreciative of their efforts. Elizabeth Tighe, Raquel Magidin de Kremer, and Daniel Parmer led the efforts to develop an estimate of the adult Jewish-by-religion population of Baltimore as part of the Steinhardt Social Research Institute's American Jewish Population Project. Yi He, Hannah Taylor, and Harry Abrahams helped code responses to open-ended questions.

We thank Deborah Grant for her editorial advice, and for preparing this report for publication. We are also grateful to Masha Lokshin and Ilana Friedman for their logistical and editorial support throughout the study.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In anticipation of their hundredth year in 2020, The Associated: Jewish Community Federation of Baltimore contracted with the Maurice and Marilyn Cohen Center for Modern Jewish Studies (CMJS)/Steinhardt Social Research Institute (SSRI) at Brandeis University to conduct a local Jewish community study. The goals of the research were to estimate the size and characteristics of the Jewish population of the catchment area under the purview of The Associated and generate findings that could help Jewish organizations in Baltimore plan for the next decade and serve the Jewish community as effectively as possible. A diverse group of lay and professional leaders from across the Baltimore Jewish community aided in the design of the study; CMJS/SSRI used the latest available sampling and survey techniques in conducting the study.

The data from the study, collected and analyzed throughout 2019, provide a snapshot of a community and the ways in which members of Baltimore's Jewish community engage with Jewish life. This summary outlines some of the highlights of the findings. Readers may explore the full report or individual chapters, where more detail is provided. Technical appendices are also available, which describe details of the study design and provide comparison charts (Appendix B) that provide detailed cross-tabulations of the findings for key segments of the Baltimore Jewish community.

The Baltimore Jewish community consists of approximately 46,700 households that are home to 115,400 individuals, including 95,400 Jews (74,900 adults and 20,500 children) and 20,000 non-Jews (18,000 adults and 2,000 children). The community is exceptionally strong in Pikesville, Owings Mills, and the Park Heights and Cheswolde neighborhoods of the City of Baltimore, where many of the central institutions of the Baltimore Jewish community are located. Jewish families and individuals who live farther away from these institutions do not have the same access or opportunities to engage in Jewish communal life and feel their needs are not fully met.

Just as the Baltimore Jewish community is diverse demographically, so too is there a variety of types of Jewish identification and means of engagement in Jewish life. Examining the ways in which Jewish adults not only view, but also enact their Jewish identities is necessary to understand the population and the ways in which Jewish life in the region can be enhanced. The study

includes an “Index of Jewish Engagement,” created uniquely for the Baltimore Jewish community, that focuses on Jewish behaviors—the ways in which individuals participate in Jewish life—rather than self-defined identities or demographic characteristics.

Baltimore’s synagogues and Jewish educational programs—particularly its day schools, yeshivot, and Hebrew schools—are one of the community’s greatest strengths. At the same time, however, nearly 40% of the population do not participate synagogue life, and 35% of children in grades K-12 are not currently enrolled in any Jewish educational programming. The JCC’s many social, cultural, volunteering, and other programs are critical for this segment of the population. Nevertheless, a significant group within the community feels that the Jewish community is not sufficiently providing for their needs.

Most of the community is middle-class, but a substantial minority feels economic insecurity. Many households struggle to pay their bills and, for some, this is a significant obstacle to participation in Jewish communal life. Related, a substantial proportion of households in the community include someone with a significant disability or chronic physical or mental health condition that limits their ability to work, go to school, or do housework. These needs can also be obstacles to participation in Jewish communal life, and they often overlap with significant financial challenges. Many Jewish adults in Baltimore are also providing care for relatives, separate from routine childcare, and many have parents living in a group home, assisted living facility, nursing home, or independent living community.

The Baltimore Jewish community’s strong ties to Israel are reflected in community members’ high rates of travel to Israel, high rates of following news about Israel, and robust sense of connection to Israel. Members of the community are nearly unanimous in their view of Israel as a homeland for the Jewish people, and strong majorities perceive Israel as a source of pride and as a lively democratic state.

Key specific findings from the study include:

DEMOGRAPHY

- The Baltimore Jewish community includes approximately 46,700 Jewish households, an increase of 11% since 2010.¹ These households include:
 - ◆ 115,500 individuals (+4% since 2010)
 - ◆ 95,400 Jewish individuals (+4% since 2010)
 - 74,900 adults
 - 20,500 children
 - ◆ 20,000 non-Jewish individuals
 - 18,000 adults
 - 2,000 children

- The mean age of Jewish adults in Baltimore is 50, similar to the national Jewish population. The mean age of all Jews in Baltimore, including children, is 41.
- Twenty-six percent of all Jewish households in Baltimore include at least one child under age 18.
- Of Jewish adults in Baltimore, 20% are ages 18-34, 24% are ages 35-49, 30% are ages 50-64, 22% are ages 65-79, and 4% are 80 or older.
- Nearly half of Jewish adults (45%) were raised in Baltimore.
- Baltimore has one of the largest Orthodox populations in the United States. Twenty-one percent of Jewish adults in Baltimore identify as Orthodox. Similar proportions identify as Conservative (19%) and Reform (18%). Three percent belong to another denomination. Thirty-nine percent identify with no particular denomination.
- Sixty-eight percent of Jewish households in Baltimore include a married couple. Of these, 55% are inmarried and 45% are intermarried. The intermarriage rate is far lower than the national rate (64%).
- Households that include an intermarried couple tend to feel that the community is not welcoming to them, does not care about them, and does not support them.
- One-in-ten Jewish households in Baltimore include someone who identifies as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or queer.
 - ◆ Four percent of Jewish adults in Baltimore identify as LGBTQ.
 - ◆ Households with an LGBTQ member are about evenly split between those who describe the Jewish community as welcoming to them and those who feel it is not welcoming.
- Eight percent of Jewish adults in Baltimore identify with a racial category other than non-Hispanic white. Many of these members of the community feel they are not fully included as a result of their race or ethnicity.

GEOGRAPHY

- Pikesville/Mount Washington is the largest area of Jewish residence, with 22% of Jewish households and 25% of Jewish individuals in the community. The next largest areas are Owings Mills/Reisterstown, with 15% of Jewish households and 16% of Jewish individuals, and Park Heights/Cheswolde, with 9% of Jewish households and 15% of Jewish individuals.
- Jewish young adults (ages 18-34) disproportionately live in the City of Baltimore compared to older adults. Very few Jewish adults ages 80 or older live in Carroll and Harford Counties.

PATTERNS OF JEWISH ENGAGEMENT

- The Index of Jewish Engagement is based on measures from four categories of behavior: family holiday celebrations, ritual practices, communal activities, and personal activities.

- Five distinct and mutually exclusive patterns of behavior emerge from the data:
 - ◆ Familial (16% of Jewish adults): Characterized by participation in family and home-based dimensions of Jewish life.
 - ◆ Personal (19% of Jewish adults): Characterized by participation primarily in Jewish activities that can be done individually. Less active in communal and ritual activities.
 - ◆ Involved (12% of Jewish adults): Characterized by participation in most aspects of Jewish life at a moderate level.
 - ◆ Communal (26% of Jewish adults): Characterized by participation in communal and personal activities.
 - ◆ Immersed (27% of Jewish adults): Characterized by high rates of participation in all aspects of Jewish life.
- Each group includes people of all ages and denominational identities.

FINANCIAL WELL-BEING

- Thirty-eight percent of households are not confident in their ability to live comfortably during retirement. One quarter of households do not have enough funds to cover three months of expenses were they to face an unexpected loss of income.
- The Baltimore Jewish community is highly educated. Seventy-three percent of Jewish adults in Baltimore have earned at least a bachelor's degree, including half with at least one post-graduate degree.
- Seventy-one percent of Jewish adults in Baltimore are working, either full (57%) or part time (14%). An additional 18% of the population is retired. The remaining 11% are stay-at-home parents, unemployed, on temporary leave, or studying for a degree.
- Four percent of the community describe their standard of living as "prosperous" and nearly one third (31%) say they are "living very comfortably." Another 50% say they are "living reasonably comfortably." But 13% of Jewish households say they are "just getting along," a possible indication of economic vulnerability, while 1% say they are "nearly poor," and 2% say they are "poor."
- Respondents were also asked about life changes in the previous year that resulted in economic hardship. Overall, 18% of households reported encountering such a hardship.
- Ten percent of households include someone who, in the past year, was constrained by financial issues from participating in the Baltimore Jewish community.
 - ◆ The most commonly cited issues were synagogue dues, tuition for Jewish educational programs, and fees for other programs.
 - ◆ Financial constraints were most common for Orthodox households and families with children.

HEALTH

- Twenty-nine percent of Jewish households in Baltimore include at least one person who is limited by some sort of health issue, special need, or disability.
 - ◆ In 14% of households, or almost half of those with a need, the health issue causes a limitation in the ability to work, attend school, or do housework, including 26% of households where the head of household is 80 or older and 32% of households that describe their standard of living as “just getting along,” “nearly poor,” or “poor.”
 - ◆ Two percent of households do not receive the services needed to address the health issue.
- Thirteen percent of Jewish households are serving as primary caregivers for a relative, separate from routine childcare.
 - ◆ Thirty-four percent of caregivers (representing 4% of households) provide care for someone living in their own household.
 - ◆ Sixty-six percent (9% of all households) provide care for someone in another household in the Baltimore area.
 - ◆ Fourteen percent (2% of all households) are providing care for someone outside the Baltimore area.
 - ◆ Ten percent of caregiving households provide care to people in two or more of these categories.
- Sixteen percent of Jewish adults ages 65 or older are dissatisfied with the amount of time they spend with friends and family. The issue is particularly acute for those who live in the City of Baltimore.
- Eight percent of households include someone who, in the past year, was constrained by health issues from participating in the Baltimore Jewish community. This share includes 20% of households in which the head of household is age 80 or older.

CHILDREN

- Among the 22,500 children who live in Baltimore Jewish households, 20,500 (91%) are being raised Jewish in some way, either by religion, secularly or culturally, or as Jewish and another religion.
- Among the 2,000 children not being raised Jewish, 1,600 are being raised with no religion, 200 are being raised in another religion, and 200 have not yet had a religion decided for them.
- Virtually all inmarried parents are raising their children Jewish, and among children of intermarried parents, 75% are being raised Jewish in some way.
- Half of Jewish children in grades K-12 were enrolled in some form of Jewish school during

the 2018-19 academic year. This includes 39% in day school or yeshiva, and 12% in part-time school.

- Of Jewish children in grades K-12, 50% participated in at least one form of informal education.
- Of Jewish children who are not yet in kindergarten, 17% were enrolled in a Jewish preschool program.
- Among households with at least one child age 12 or younger, 44% receive books from PJ Library. Expanding enrollment in PJ Library may also serve as a gateway to participation in other Jewish educational programs.

SYNAGOGUE AND RITUAL LIFE

- One third of households (approximately 15,000) include someone who belongs to a synagogue or another Jewish worship community of some type. Forty percent of Jewish adults live in synagogue-member households, similar to the rest of the country.
 - ◆ Twenty-seven percent of households are dues-paying members of “brick-and-mortar” congregations, traditionally structured with buildings and ordained clergy.
 - ◆ One-in-five synagogue-member households belong to multiple congregations or prayer groups (e.g., independent minyan, Chabad).
 - ◆ Among households who are members of local brick-and-mortar synagogues, 53% are members of Orthodox congregations, 31% are members of Conservative congregations, 18% are members of Reform congregations, and 1% are members of synagogues of other denominations.
 - ◆ Ten percent of households with an intermarried couple and 22% of households with no married couple are members of a Baltimore-area congregation.
- Approximately 65% of Jewish adults attended services at least once in the past year, including 43% of those who are not members of a congregation.
- Passover and Hanukkah are observed by the largest proportion of the Baltimore Jewish community, with 83% attending a seder and 82% lighting Hanukkah candles.
- High Holiday services were attended by 51% of Jewish adults.
- One quarter (25%) of Jewish adults in Baltimore keep kosher at home.

SOCIAL AND COMMUNAL LIFE

- The Baltimore Jewish community is tightly knit, with most households having lived in the Baltimore area for decades and nearly half of Jewish adults having been raised in the community.
 - ◆ This insularity can make it difficult for newcomers to the community, and people who

lack the Judaic knowledge of those who were raised in the community's schools, to find their place in the community. Many of these people are interested in social and educational programming but are unwilling to join a synagogue.

- ◆ Newcomers are looking for programs to help them learn about the community and acclimate to it, without the pressure or expectation that they will become members of local synagogues or immediately become active supporters.
- ◆ Members of the community without extensive Jewish educational backgrounds feel their lack of knowledge is a significant barrier to participation and are looking for low-pressure adult education programs, where little to no prior knowledge of Jewish texts or traditions, or of Israel, are assumed.
- Two thirds of Baltimore Jewish adults read material from at least one local Jewish organization in the past year, and one third read this type of material at least once a month.
- Forty percent of Jewish adults attended at least one Jewish-sponsored program, activity, or class in Baltimore in the past year, and 13% participated at least once per month.
- A majority of Baltimore's Jews, 59%, attended a program, activity, or service at a local synagogue or congregation in the past year. Thirty-eight percent participated at the JCC of Greater Baltimore, and 15% attended a local Chabad program or service.
- Seventeen percent of Jewish adults volunteered for a local Jewish organization.
- More than half of Jewish households (56%) gave to at least one Jewish organization, representing 69% of households who made any sort of charitable donation. Forty-one percent of Jewish households gave to organizations that primarily serve the Jewish community of Baltimore.
- Almost one quarter (23%) of households donated to a Jewish congregation.
- There a number of reasons why people may not feel connected to the Jewish community. Not being able to find interesting Jewish activities has been a concern for 44% of Jewish adults in Baltimore. A similar proportion, 42%, do not feel they know enough people at Jewish organizations and programs. For 38% of Jews, a lack of connection is related to discomfort with their level of Jewish knowledge.
- The vast majority (95%) of Jews in Baltimore have at least some close Jewish friends, and 42% report that most or all of their closest friends are Jewish.
- Members of the Baltimore Jewish community are concerned about antisemitism, but that worry is more directed at the national (59%) than the local level (26%).
- Nineteen percent of Jewish adults in Baltimore say that safety or security concerns are a barrier to participation in Jewish communal life.

CONNECTIONS TO ISRAEL

- More than half (59%) of Baltimore Jewish adults have been to Israel at least once.
- Seventeen percent of Jewish adults have traveled with a Jewish organization on a mission or other sponsored trip to Israel. Adults who have traveled to Israel on an educational or volunteer program represent 11% of the population. Twenty-seven percent of age-eligible adults—those younger than age 47—have been to Israel on Birthright.
- Eighty percent of Jewish adults feel at least “a little” connected to Israel, including 34% who feel “very connected.”
- Nearly all Jewish adults see Israel as a homeland for Jews throughout the world (87%).
- Eighty-two percent of Jewish adults feel at least a little comfortable discussing the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and 32% feel very much comfortable.

Leadership

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