

Greater El Paso Jewish Demographic Study

Although the history of the Jewish community in Greater El Paso has been well documented, there is a lack of understanding of the basic demographic structure of the Jewish population in this region. To fill this gap, this study, initiated and funded by the Aaron and Sylvia Wechter Family Fund, aims to develop a *comprehensive understanding of the size and characters of the local Jewish population*, and to provide *valid data about the Greater El Paso Jewish community* that can be used by communal organizations and their leadership to design programs and policies that support and enhance Jewish life. This study was conducted by a research team at The University of Texas at El Paso, which includes Dr. Danielle Morales (Assistant Professor of Sociology) and Karla Martinez (Graduate Research Assistant at Department of Sociology and Anthropology).

Survey Methods

The central component of the study is an online survey that asks a broad set of questions regarding Jewish identity, attitudes, and engagement with the community. The survey was distributed with the help of the Jewish Federation of Greater El Paso. Specifically, a survey link was sent out to community members through the Federation’s monthly and weekly email blasts (see Figure 1). The survey was opened between **December 2019 and February 2021**. Other approaches were also utilized to promote the study and recruit participants. For example, survey information was advertised on four issues of The Jewish Voice; a survey brochure was created and distributed via email blast and social media platforms. In total, **448** respondents took the survey, and 383 of them completed the survey.

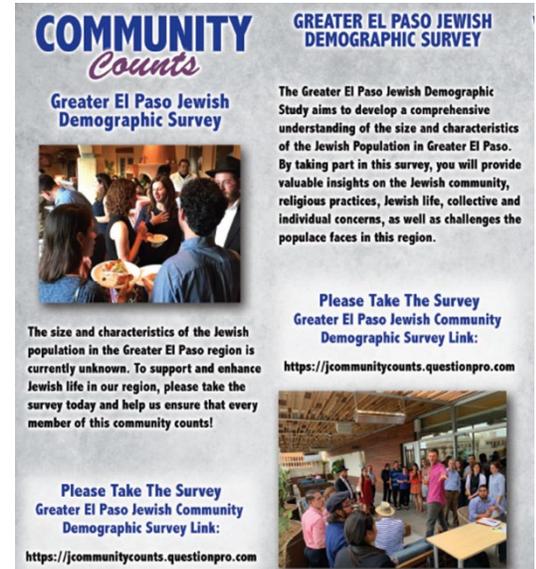
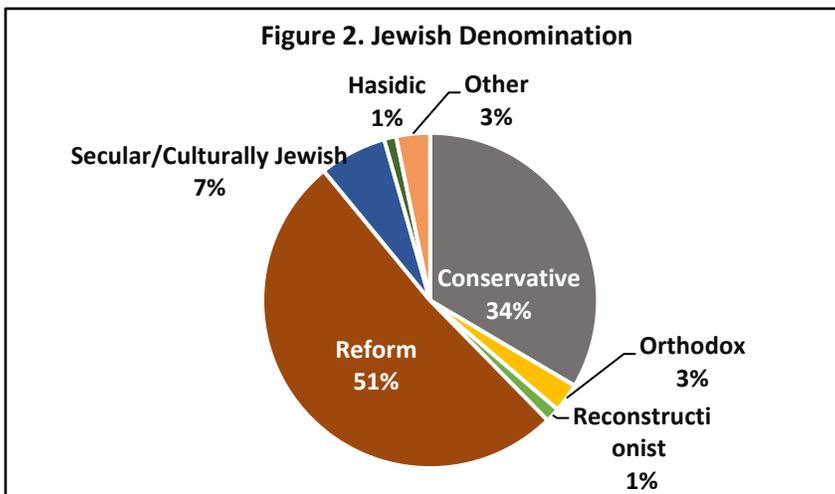


Figure 1. Survey Brochure

Characteristics of Survey Respondents

The average age of all survey respondents was 62 years old, and only 22% of respondents were below 50. About 60% of respondents were women. In terms of race/ethnicity, 82% of respondents were non-Hispanic White, 13% were Hispanic, 1% Native American (non-Hispanic), 1% African American (non-Hispanic), and 4% were Asian, multiracial, or from other racial backgrounds. For marital status, 68% were married, 14% divorced, 10% widowed, and 8% never married. The Jewish population in Greater El Paso was also highly educated. More than half of respondents had a graduate or



professional degree, and 35% had a bachelor's degree. About 48% of respondents were currently employed, 38% were retired, 5% were homemakers, and 9% were looking for jobs, in school, or unable to work. The majority (70%) of respondents resided in El Paso, Texas, while 30% lived in Las Cruces, New Mexico. In El Paso, three zip codes were the most populated (79912, 79902, 79922), and in Las Cruces, the most populated zip codes were 88011, 88012, 88007, and 88005.

Among the 430 respondents who reported their

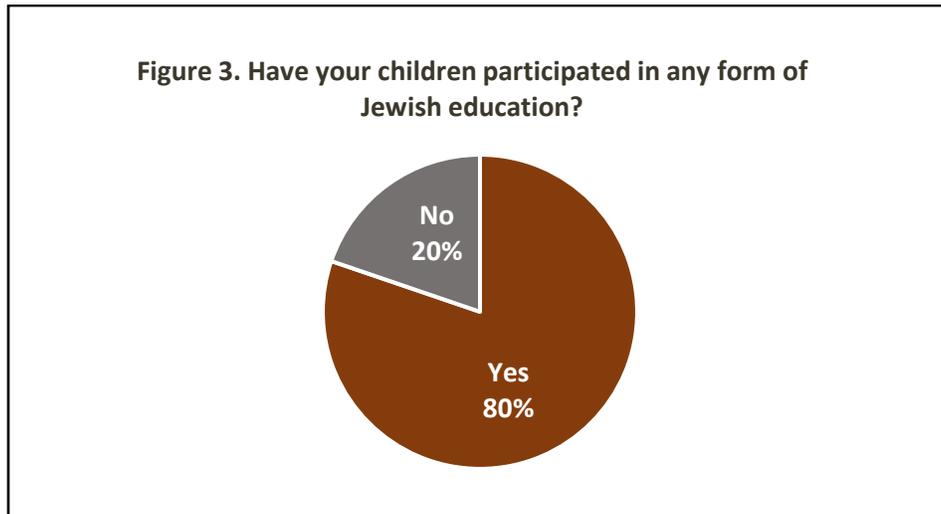
Jewish denominations, more than half self-identified as Reform, 34% were Conservative, and 7% identified as Secular or Culturally Jewish (Figure 2). Further, the majority (85%) of respondents had at least one parent who was Jewish, and more than 70% were raised Jewish. Finally, six respondents reported that they were Holocaust survivors. Twenty-nine respondents had household members who were Holocaust survivors.

Household Composition

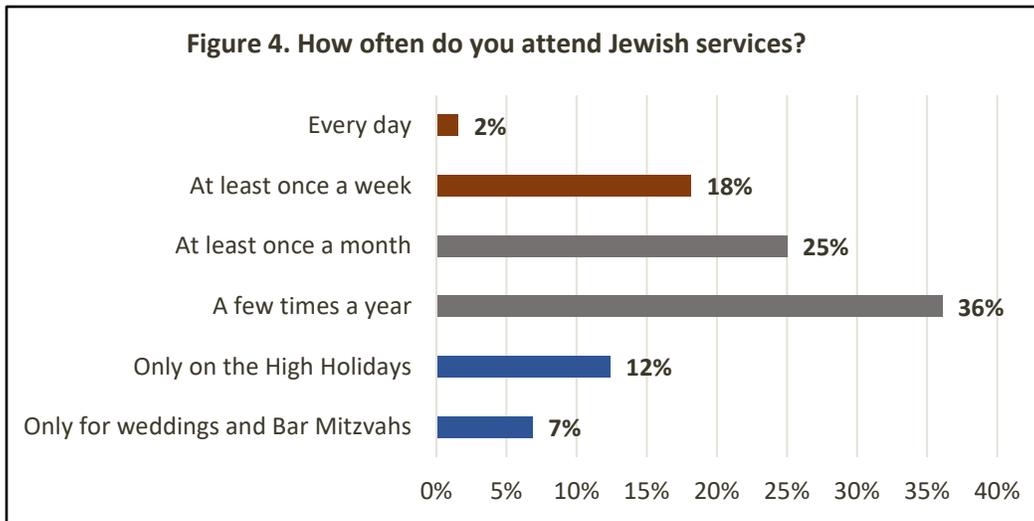
Close to 78% of respondents lived with other adults, and 22% lived alone. About 80% of Jewish households in Greater El Paso were childless, 16% had one or two children, and 4% had three children or more. The majority of children living in Jewish households were school-age children (6-18 years old), and most of them had participated in a certain form of Jewish education, such as Jewish school, summer camp, youth group, or tutoring (Table 1 & Figure 3).

Group		Age	N	%
Infants & Toddlers		0-2	19	12%
Preschoolers		3-5	25	16%
School-aged Children	Middle Childhood	6-11	65	42%
	Young Teens	12-14	25	16%
	Teenagers	15-18	18	12%
Adult children		>18	3	2%
Total			155	100%

Table 1. Child Age Distribution



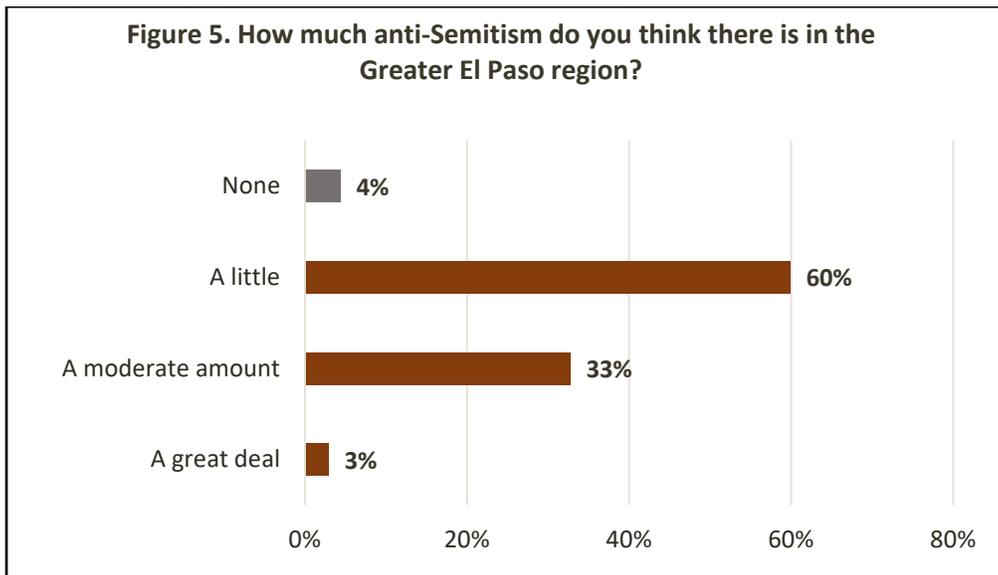
Jewish and Religious Life



In terms of congregations in Greater El Paso, 33% of respondents belonged to Temple Mount Sinai, 31% belonged to Congregation B'nai Zion, and 6% belonged to Chabad El Paso; in Las Cruces, 25% belonged to Temple Beth-El, and 4% belonged to Chabad of Las Cruces. Further, 20% of respondents reported that they attended Jewish services every day or at least once a

week, 61% attended at least once a month or a few times a year, and 19% attended Jewish services only on the High Holidays or for weddings and Bar Mitzvahs (Figure 4). For Kosher, more than 20% of respondents kept Kosher inside the home, and 16% kept Kosher outside of the home. In terms of holidays, close to 90% of respondents held or attended a Seder last Passover, and 48% fasted all day during Yom Kippur. Last year, about 61% of respondents participated all eight nights in the lighting of Hanukkah candles, and only 15% had a Christmas tree.

In terms of Jewish identity, about 34% of respondents reported that being Jewish is mainly a matter of religion, 33% felt it is a matter of culture, and 32% reported it is a matter of ancestry. Finally, more than 95% of community members believed that there was a little to a great deal of anti-Semitism in Greater El Paso (Figure 5). 144 Jewish adults reported that they had personally experienced anti-Semitism in the region.



Community Life

Close to 70% of respondents volunteered for a local Jewish organization last year. Among them, less than half volunteered for more than 5 hours per month. At the same time, about 54% of respondents volunteered for a local non-Jewish organization, and about 70% of them volunteered more than 5 hours every month. Most community members had lived in Greater El Paso for more than 20 years. Close to 40% of them had not changed their addresses for more

than 20 years. Only 12% of respondents reported that they planned to move out of the area. In terms of the reasons why they wanted to move, some of them were looking for a larger Jewish community or more career opportunities, and others wanted to move closer to their children or grandchildren. A large proportion (80%) of the community members had been to Israel multiple times. They self-identify as “Pro-Israel” and felt emotionally attached to Israel. During the year of 2020, 57% of respondents attended Jewish adult education classes or programs, and 61% of those programs or classes were sponsored by a synagogue. More than 85% of respondents rated their health in general as good or excellent, while 20% had health issues.

Respondents believed that the strengths of the Greater El Paso Jewish community lie in its rich culture, diversity, and flexibility of ideas. At the same time, community members expressed the need for a new Jewish Community Center, more programs for the younger generation, more family-friendly activities, and more kosher food options and services (see Table 2).

What do you consider to be the strengths of the Greater El Paso Jewish community?
“The rich culture and blending of ideas. The flexibility of ideas.”
“We are big enough to make an impact together and small enough for each of us to make an individual contribution and be counted.”
“I believe that in El Paso and Las Cruces, the Jewish community is active and maintains a visible presence. There is a spirit of cooperation and cohesion with the general community in that interfaith events regularly take place.”
“The openness of the community. Acceptance and warm welcome to all.”
What programs, services, or organizations do you think are missing from the Greater El Paso Jewish community?
“Perhaps more encouragement/programs for young singles, teens and up.”
“Continue with the schools and elementary education.”
“I believe increasing family friendly activities to keep the younger generation of Jewish people engaged is vital. I have worked hard to do this with my own children. I believe as a community, we need to promote youth engagement and involvement as much as possible.”
“A Jewish community center with programs and activities for seniors and all age groups. Jewish senior housing community.”
“Jewish community center is greatly missed in the El Paso area.”

Table 2. The voice from the community

Acknowledgments

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