

# 2017 GREATER WASHINGTON JEWISH COMMUNITY DEMOGRAPHIC STUDY

## Executive Summary



The Jewish Federation  
OF GREATER WASHINGTON

Cohen Center  
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THE MORNINGSTAR FOUNDATION

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## Executive Summary

The 2017 Greater Washington, DC Jewish Community Demographic Study provides an up-to-date description of the size and character of DC-area Jewish adults, children, and households. Developed to provide communal leaders, planners, and members with actionable information, the study findings can be used to enhance the quality of life in the community and increase Jewish engagement. The Cohen Center for Modern Jewish Studies and the Steinhardt Social Research Institute of Brandeis University conducted the study, with funding from The Morningstar Foundation and in collaboration with the Jewish Federation of Greater Washington. Interviews with over 6,600 Jewish households residing in the District of Columbia, Northern Virginia, and Suburban Maryland form the basis of the report.

Key findings of this study include:

**Greater Washington, DC's Jewish community numbers nearly 300,000 Jewish adults and children in over 155,000 households.** As defined by federation catchment areas, it is the third largest Jewish community in the United States. Greater Washington, DC's Jews constitute about 6% of the area population. The Jewish community's size has grown by 37% since 2003.

**Metro DC's Jews are younger than the national Jewish population.** The median age of all Washington-area Jewish adults is age 45, younger than the median age (50) of Jewish adults nationally. Compared to the national Jewish population, the Washington-area Jewish community has proportionally more adults ages 30-39 and fewer who are ages 40-64.

**The community is diverse.** Seven percent of Jewish adults identify as LGBTQ, and 7% as a person of color or Hispanic/Latino. Among households with **married or partnered Jews**, 53% of couples include someone who does not identify as Jewish.

**A greater share of Metro DC's Jews are Democrats compared to Jews nationally.** Nearly three-quarters (72%) of Metro DC's Jews identify as Democrats, 6% as Republicans, 15% as independents, and 8% other. Nationally, 54% of Jewish adults identify as Democrats, 14% as Republican, and the remaining 32% as independent or other party affiliation.

### Greater Washington Jewish Community Population Estimates, 2017

Total Jews	295,500
Adults	
Jewish	244,500
Non-Jewish	70,900
Children	
Jewish	51,000
Non-Jewish	9,100
Total people	375,500
Total households	155,200

## Geographic Distribution

The geography of the greater Washington, DC Jewish community includes all of the District of Columbia; Suburban Maryland (Montgomery and Prince George's counties); and Northern Virginia (Fairfax, Prince William, and Loudoun counties, Arlington county/city, and the cities of Alexandria, Fairfax, Falls Church, Manassas, and Manassas Park). The distribution of Jewish households and individuals in the District of Columbia, Suburban Maryland, and Northern Virginia is shown in Table ES.1.

**The District of Columbia is home to 19% of area Jews.** Since 2003, the Jewish population in the District has more than doubled. Over one-third of DC's Jews are between ages 30 and 39. Forty percent have lived in the area for less than ten years. Just 16% of households include children ages 17 or younger. Nineteen percent of DC's Jewish households are synagogue members.

**Suburban Maryland is home to 39% of area Jews.** Since 2003, the Jewish population in Suburban Maryland has remained stable. Almost two-thirds (63%) of Suburban Maryland's Jews are ages 50 or older. Over three-quarters (76%) were born or raised in the DC area or have lived there for 20 years or more. Just under one-quarter (24%) of households include children ages 17 or younger. Over one-third (34%) of Suburban Maryland Jewish households are synagogue members.

**Northern Virginia is home to 41% of area Jews.** Since 2003 the Jewish population in Northern Virginia has grown by 80%. Half of Virginia's Jewish adults are under age 50. Half were born or raised in the DC area or have lived there for 20 years or more. Over one-quarter (26%) of households include children ages 17 or younger. One-quarter of Northern Virginia Jewish households are synagogue members.

Despite the perception of DC as a "transient community," **94% of Jews consider the Metro DC area to be their "home base."** Three-in-five Jewish adults have no plans to move; 22% plan to move to another location within Metro DC; and 17% plan to leave the DC area. One-quarter of Jewish adults have lived in Metro DC for fewer than 10 years, 18% for 10-19 years, and 49% for 20 years or longer.

Table ES.1 Summary of Jewish population by region

	DC	Suburban Maryland	Northern Virginia	TOTAL
Jewish Households				
number	34,600	56,900	63,700	155,200
percent	22	37	41	100
Jewish individuals				
number	57,300	116,700	121,500	295,500
percent	19	39	41	100



## Children

Overall, 85% of **children in Jewish households** are being raised Jewish in some way. Seventy-six percent are being raised exclusively Jewish, either by religion (45%) or culturally (31%). Among children with intermarried parents, 61% are being raised exclusively Jewish, with 19% being raised Jewish by religion and 42% being raised culturally Jewish.

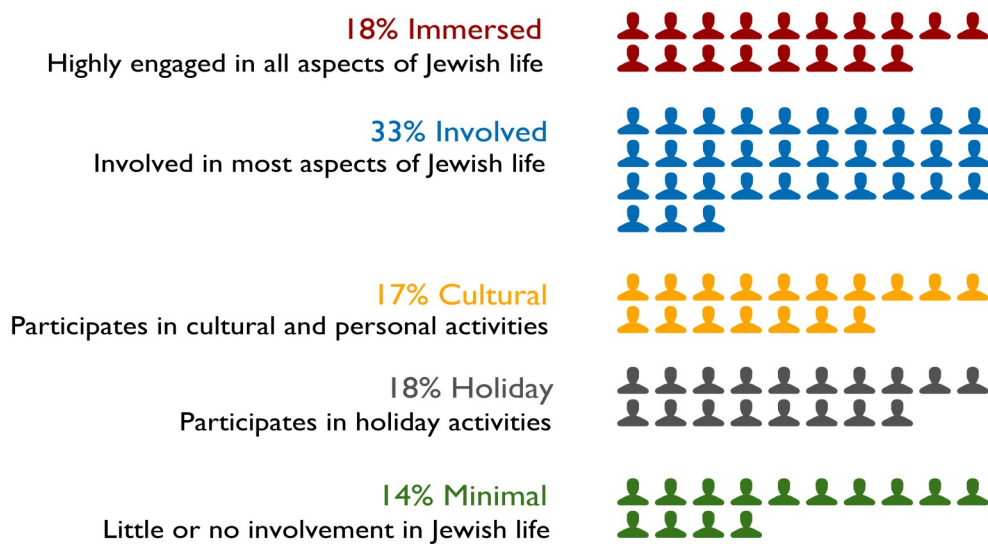
Forty percent of **Jewish children in grades K-12** are enrolled in Jewish part-time school or Jewish day school. Just 7% of Jewish children ages 0-5 are enrolled in Jewish preschool. In total, 31% of Jewish children are enrolled in some form of Jewish education.

## Jewish Engagement and Synagogue Membership

Jewish behavior includes family and home-based practices, ritual practices, personal activities, and organizational participation. Looking at an index that combines multiple measures of Jewish life, members of the Metro DC Jewish community can be thought of as having one of five **patterns of Jewish engagement**, as shown in Figure ES.1. These groupings provide a deeper way to understand Jewish engagement aside from denominational affiliation and ritual behavior.

**Metro DC Jews are less likely than US Jews overall to identify with a specific denomination.** Over one-third (39%) of Metro DC Jews indicate that they have no denomination, compared to 30% of all US Jews. This is the case for Jews in all age brackets.

Figure ES.1 Patterns of Jewish engagement



**In the Metro DC Jewish community, 26% of households belong to a synagogue or another Jewish worship community of some type.** In terms of Jewish adults, levels of synagogue membership in the Metro DC area (31% of Jewish adults) are lower than that of the rest of the country (39%).

**The largest group of synagogue members (18% of households) are dues-paying members of local “brick-and-mortar” synagogues.** The number of member households in these synagogues has declined slightly since 2003 and has not kept pace with community growth.

**The remaining synagogue members (8% of households) belong to independent minyanim, Chabad, or non-local congregations, or consider themselves members of brick-and-mortar synagogues but do not pay dues.**

## Israel

**Approximately two-thirds (68%) of Washington-area Jews have been to Israel or have lived there.** Nearly one-third (30%) have been to Israel once. Another third (31%) have been to Israel more than once, and 7% have lived there at some point, including the 4% of Washington-area Jews who are Israeli. This figure represents a substantially higher proportion than among US Jews in general, of whom in 2013, 43% had been to Israel.

**One-third (34%) of Washington-area Jews feel very connected to Israel.** By contrast, 14% feel not at all connected.

## Community

**Jewish community ties are not central to Washington-area Jews.** Just over one-quarter (28%) feel that being part of a community is an essential part of being Jewish. One-third (33%) feel very connected to the global Jewish community, and 15% feel very connected to the local Jewish community. However, 60% say at least half of their closest friends are Jewish.

**Forty-one percent of Jewish adults did some volunteer activity in the past month,** either with Jewish or non-Jewish organizations. Volunteers included 15% of Jewish adults who volunteered with at least one Jewish organization and 32% who volunteered for at least one non-Jewish organization. In all, 6% of Jewish adults volunteered for both Jewish and non-Jewish organizations.

For volunteering and charitable donations, the **most popular cause among Metro DC’s Jews is education:** 86% say it is very important. Other causes of interest are social justice (76%) and politics (64%).

**Eighty-seven percent of Jewish adults made a charitable contribution in the past year.** Of all Jewish adults, three-fifths (61%) donated to at least one Jewish organization, and half (51%) donated to a Jewish organization that primarily serves the DC area.

## Health and Financial Well-being

**The majority of DC-area Jewish households are financially comfortable,** with 45% describing their standard of living as being prosperous or very comfortable, and another 44% reporting they are reasonably comfortable. Another 10% of households described themselves as “just getting along.” A total of 1% indicated they are “nearly poor” or “poor.”

**Economic insecurity may be a concern for some Jewish households.** Thirteen percent of Jewish households do not have enough savings to cover three months of expenses. In addition, 5% of households reported that at some point in the past year they were unable to participate in Jewish life because of financial constraints.

An estimated **18% of Jewish households include someone with a health limitation.** These households include at least one person who has a limitation on the amount or kind of work, school, or housework they can do because of an impairment, disability, chronic physical problem, or mental health issue.