

The Alumni of JCHS 2023 Survey Report

Identity, Ideology, and Israel

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Executive Summary

The 2023 JCHS Alumni Survey, conducted in the summer of 2023, continues a longstanding series of JCHS alumni surveys spanning nearly 15 years. This survey reaffirms previous findings while exploring new areas, particularly political identity and relationships with Israel, which have become increasingly significant and contentious in recent years. The unique composition of JCHS, a Jewish day school at the high school level, provides a distinctive context for these findings, drawing students from diverse backgrounds, including intermarried families and those with limited prior Jewish education.

Survey Methodology

The 2023 survey invited all 608 JCHS alumni to participate, achieving a response rate of over 30% with 189 respondents. This sample represents graduates from 2005 through 2023, with the most recent graduates (2023) showing the highest participation.

Major Contextual Influences

The Bay Area's distinctive Jewish identity is characterized by low rates of ritual practice, communal affiliation, and traditional identity – lower than all other major Jewish metropolitan areas in North America. The political and cultural polarization in the U.S., coupled with increasing secularization and alienation from Israel among younger, progressive Jews, provides a critical backdrop for understanding the survey results.

Key Findings

- **Jewish Identity and Engagement:** Two-thirds of alumni consider being Jewish very important, with strong feelings of belonging to the Jewish people. Religious practice varies widely, with significant engagement in Passover Seders, Shabbat meals, and Yom Kippur fasting.
- **Synagogue Membership and Practices:** Almost half of the respondents belong to a synagogue, with diverse levels of religious observance, impressive in that very few have children yet. Reform Judaism is the most common denomination, followed by Orthodox and Conservative affiliations.
- **Friendship and Marriage:** A significant proportion (59%) report that most of their close friends are Jewish, and a majority of those with spouses and partners are in Jewish relationships.
- **Connection to Israel:** A notable proportion of alumni have lived in or frequently visited Israel. However, attachment to Israel shows a slight decline over the years, with a small but growing minority feeling less attached. The majority oppose the Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions (BDS) movement.

Political Identity and Jewish Engagement

The alumni lean heavily to the left politically, with 68% identifying as liberal or progressive. This political identity strongly influences their Jewish engagement, with more conservative alumni showing higher levels of Jewish engagement. The far-left alumni are less engaged in Jewish life and show less attachment to Israel compared to their moderate and conservative peers.

Israel Engagement

Personal experience with Israel is high, with most alumni having visited multiple times. Political identity significantly shapes views on Israel, with more conservative alumni showing greater commitment to Israel. There are significant disparities in views on Israeli policy and democracy, reflecting broader political divides.

Conclusions

JCHS alumni demonstrate high levels of Jewish engagement compared to national averages and even more so in comparison to the Bay Area norm. Their high engagement particularly evident in their connection to Israel. Political identity plays a crucial role in shaping these engagements. The survey highlights the dynamic interplay between political and Jewish identities.

Introduction

The 2023 JCHS alumni survey – fielded in the summer of 2023 – is the latest in a series of JCHS alumni surveys conducted almost annually for nearly 15 years. The 2023 survey re-affirms many previous findings and also provides opportunities for exploring new areas of inquiry, not previously examined.

We begin by reviewing previously explored areas of inquiry and describe how this year’s results resemble and differ with those from earlier years. After that, this report delves into two related areas that have taken on increasing importance in society and Jewish life in recent years – political identity and relationships with Israel. The JCHS survey – with its deep dive into Jewish identity and Israel-related issues – illuminates larger issues, providing intriguing insights to how American Jews are relating to both politics and Israel these days.

In understanding the findings, we need to recall that JCHS is exceptional in several ways, including the composition of its student body, the product of a unique innovation in American Jewish education: A Jewish day school at the high school level that draws both a conventional day school population – alumni of elementary Jewish day schools and a good number of Orthodox families – as well as populations that rarely attend day school at any level, let alone high school. Here we are talking about intermarried families, Russian-origin families, and families whose children receive little or no Jewish schooling before the high school years.

By way of larger context ...

The Bay Area: The Jewish identities of the alumni are influenced not only by their parents and JCHS, but also by larger trends among American society and American Jewry, as well as the distinctive features of the Bay Area Jewish community and population. In that regard, in sharp contrast with other major metropolitan areas with significant Jewish populations (New York, Los Angeles, Chicago, Miami, Boston, Philadelphia), the Bay Area exhibits the lowest rates of ritual practice, communal affiliation, synagogue membership, traditional identity, and in-marriage. All of these patterns take place in a region known for its high rates of secularism or “religious nones” in the larger population, as well as high rates of political and cultural liberalism. These features are broadly associated with lower rates of Jewish engagement, especially of the more conventional varieties, such that any signs of positive effects among JCHS alumni are even more impressive given the larger social context. We need to keep these considerations in mind, as we take in the results from the most recent survey and, of course, its predecessors.

Political and Cultural Polarization: Americans are increasingly polarized along political lines. They have a keener sense of political identity, while both left and right – progressives/liberals and conservatives as well as Democrats and Republicans – maintain increasingly crystallized identities. That is, more of their positions on the variety of prominent issues are aligned with their respective camps. We find fewer people and politicians who could be considered conservative Democrats or liberal Republicans.

Secularization: Alongside political polarization and crystallization, there is an increasing departure from religiosity. More Americans than ever before eschew a religious identity. Fewer than ever before belong to churches or other houses of worship, and fewer attend religious services. In recent decades, both among Christians and Jews, the more politically liberal have been dropping out of religious life more than their conservative counterparts. At the same time, churches have often taken on a politically conservative character seen by some researchers as both a cause and effect of the secularization of the liberals.

Alienation from Israel/Disengagement from Jewish Life: Among Jews, the adverse impact of liberal (or progressive) political identities upon Jewish engagement may be exacerbated by the alienation of the left from

Israel. Even before October 7, 2023 and the Israel-Hamas War, several surveys pointed to declining support for Israel among younger Democrats in general, and among younger, particularly left-leaning American Jews. The patterns signal disengagement from Jewish life among the politically left Jews extending to realms of Jewish identity beyond alienation from Israel.

Over the years, the major Israel-related political question centered around the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The very terms “right” and “left” in Israel refer almost exclusively to people’s position on the conflict and Israel’s toward the Palestinians. In America, both among Americans generally and Jews in particular, conservatives and liberals differ in their moral judgment of Israel’s handling of the conflict.

The Bay Area: Along with the political polarization noted at the outset, and perhaps because of it, some Jews (and others) have developed a political identity further to the left than liberals. Many such people call themselves, “progressive” in conversation or “very liberal” on social surveys. Among both Americans generally and Jews in particular, those on the far left are especially numerous among those under 40, and even more so among Jews than among the wider public. Of all the major metropolitan areas in the country, the Bay Area is probably home to the largest proportion of progressives.

The 2023 JCHS alumni survey can speak to and illuminate important emerging issues in the study of American Jewry. The alumni are of particular interest in that they grew up in the most liberal larger American Jewish community in the world, and their JCHS education produced an unusually strong relationship with Israel – as we have seen in both past surveys and the current one.

With a focus on the interplay between (1) political identity, (2) Jewish identity, and (3) connection to Israel, the following are questions we consider:

1. **Political Identity:** How are the JCHS alumni distributed politically, and more specifically, how many are left of simply liberal, i.e., “very liberal” or “progressive?”
2. **Jewish Identity:** How do the alumni of various political stripes differ in terms of their Jewish identities? Specifically, to what extent and in what ways do the very liberals + progressives (the “far left”) differ from the more moderate liberals and those on the center-right of the political spectrum?
3. **Connection to Israel:** How do JCHS alumni relate to Israel these days? To what extent are they emotionally attached or detached? How do they position themselves on such volatile matters in mid-2023 as expanding settlements, BDS, and the judicial reform initiative?

Setting the Stage: The Survey and Basic Results

The 2023 Survey

By way of background, we invited all JCHS alumni (608 in total) to participate in the 2023 survey. We sent invitations by email and then twice sent a text message to the non-respondents for whom we had working telephone number. In all, 189 responded,¹ slightly over 30% of the full list, and the second highest total thus far, as we see below:

¹ A 31% response rate for an online survey is considered more than acceptable. Over the years, since 2010, the characteristics of survey respondents has hardly changed suggesting that the samples are fairly representative. In any event, over-time changes cannot be attributed to changing underlying socio-demographic characteristics.

Year of Report	Year Data Collected	Respondent Number
2010	2009	67 alumni
2010	2010	47 alumni
2011	2011	124 alumni
2012	2012	168 alumni
2014	2013-4	187 alumni
2015	2014	173 alumni
2016	2016	155 alumni
2019	2018	162 alumni
2022	2021	212 alumni
2023	2022	180 alumni
2023	2023	191 alumni

The responding alumni in 2023 span all the years of graduation from 2005 (the first graduating class) through 2023. Also of note is that alumni in the most recent year of graduation (2023) were highly likely to participate, with 20 respondents.

Distribution of JCHS Alumni Respondents in 2023 by Year of Graduation

2005	3%	6	2011	6%	10	2017	5%	9
2006	2%	4	2012	6%	11	2018	3%	6
2007	3%	6	2013	6%	10	2019	3%	5
2008	9%	16	2014	7%	12	2020	4%	7
2009	4%	7	2015	5%	8	2021	5%	8
2010	2%	4	2016	7%	12	2022	7%	12
						2023	12%	20

As for their ages, they range from 18 to 38. As such, we are now seeing more and more respondents in the early stages of family formation, presenting a significant change in character of the alumni sample from previous years. Fully 24% (42 in all) are married and 6 more are engaged, with another 34 living with someone. Since last year, more are married and fewer are living together. Of those with a spouse or partner, 67% report that the spouse/partner is Jewish, far higher than the national average for young adults, to say nothing of the Bay Area with its even higher rates of inter-group marriage and partnership.

Notably, we have 24 respondents with children in this sample, far more than in earlier years (it was 20 last year) – and a portent of an emerging and growing trend. The Jewish identity patterns of people with children are especially pertinent to assess future outcomes. It's only when people have children do, they arrive at their maximal levels of Jewish engagement.

Major Findings from the 2021, 2022, 2023 Studies

Several survey questions from 2021 and 2022 were repeated in 2023. In those areas, the results for the full alumni sample are largely consistent, allowing this report on the 2023 survey to move on and focus on other areas. Where numerical findings are reported below, the first number refers to 2021, the second refers to the 2022 survey and the third to the 2023 results.

Importance of Being Jewish

Over two-thirds (2021: 68% / 2022: 70% / 2023: 66%) regard being Jewish as very important in their lives and most of the rest see it as somewhat important. About three quarters feel a great deal of belonging to the Jewish people. The JCHS alumni score higher than a 2020 Pew Comparison Group consisting of non-Haredi day school alumni from across the US, age 18-49.

Diversity of Religious Practice, Affiliation, and Identification

About a third of the alumni **attend services** monthly or more, including High Holidays. At the other extreme, over a quarter don't attend High Holiday services. These results are emblematic of the diversity in Jewish engagement patterns seen in many other measures. Even as, overall, the alumni score high – if not very high – on measures of Jewish engagement, a significant minority score low.

With respect to selected **religious practices**, in the past year, 4-in-5 alumni attended Passover Seder and participated in Shabbat meals at least a few times; two thirds fasted on Yom Kippur and most lit Shabbat candles, while a third kept Kosher homes.

Almost half **belong to a synagogue**, holding steady over the three most recent surveys. About a third see **religion as very important** in their lives, and just less than a third see it as either not too important or not at all important. In terms of **denominational identification**, a bare majority of JCHS alumni identify with a denomination. Of those who do, the Reform are the most numerous.

Thinking about Jewish religious denominations, do you consider yourself to be...

	Percent
Reform	26%
Conservative	11%
Orthodox	17%
Something else	9%
No particular denomination	36%
	Total

Friendship and Marriage

About three-in-five (63% / 58% / 59%) report that most of their **closest friends** are Jewish. About two-thirds of those with a **spouse/partner** report that the person is Jewish. With respect to **parents' intermarriage**, fewer in 2023 (21% / 22% / 16%) reported that one of their parents is not Jewish.

Connection to Israel

About a third now live or have **lived in Israel**; another third visited 3 times or more. Almost all (99%) have been to Israel at some point.

Have you been to Israel?

	Percent
Yes, live in Israel now	7%
Yes, lived in Israel in the past	26%
Yes, never lived there, but visited 3 times or more	33%
Yes, visited once or twice	34%
No	1%
	Total

As many as 51%/43%/42% feel very **attached to Israel**. A small but growing minority (16%/23% /24%) feel not attached. This is one area where the results shifted noticeably from 2021 to 2022 and 2023 toward less attachment. As such, it bears watching in future surveys, especially in light of the Israel-Hamas war.

Far more **oppose BDS** than who support it (85% vs 16% in 2021/ 74% vs. 12% in 2022). Using a different wording, in 2023, 58% were opposed and just 6% supported BDS.²

What is your position, if you have one, on the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) movement directed at Israel?

	Percent
I oppose it	58%
I neither oppose nor support it	14%
I support it	6%
I am unfamiliar with it	9%
I don't know	13%
	Total

Political Identification

In terms of political identity, those on the left vastly outnumber those on the right as we see in the comparisons of liberals vs. conservatives (59% vs. 13% / 65% vs 12%) / and 68% vs. 8% in 2023, the most lopsidedly liberal thus far). The meaning of conservative, moderate, liberal, or progressive is a good question for future research.

In general, would you describe your political views as...

	Percent
Very conservative	2%
Conservative	6%
Moderate	23%
Liberal	38%
Very liberal	13%
Progressive	17%
	Total

Day School Education

Almost two thirds (65% / 61% / 60%) of JCHS alumni attended a Jewish day school before coming to JCHS. The figure grew over time. It was only one half (53%) among the graduating classes of 2005-2013, but it rose to 67% in the classes of 2019-23.

When you were growing up, before attending JCHS, did you...

	Percent
Attend a Jewish day school?	60%
Attend Hebrew school or Sunday school?	54%
Attend an overnight summer camp with Jewish content?	72%

² The question asked, "What is your position, if you have one, on the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) movement directed at Israel?"

Ten Years of Change

The 2013 survey encompassed alumni from the classes of 2005 through 2013. We compared the responses on similar questions asked of the same classes in 2013 with their answers in 2023. With the passage of time, one might expect the positive effects of JCHS education to fade. Alternatively, it's possible the JCHS educational impact is so strong that the results in 2023 would equal or surpass those registered in 2013. What do we find?

On most measures, scores in 2023 exceeded those in 2013. These include the number saying that being Jewish is very important in their life (57% in 2013 vs. 69% in 2023), religion is very important (29% vs. 39%), synagogue membership (48% vs. 60%), monthly service attendance (32% vs. 40%), Yom Kippur fasting (62% vs. 67%), participating at least a few times in a Shabbat meal (42% vs. 53%), and keeping kosher at home (27% vs. 34%). Emotional attachment with Israel held steady, and those who have lived in Israel or visited 3 times or more slightly increased (65% to 69%). A few of the available indicators declined slightly, but **overall, the Jewish engagement profile grew from 2013 to 2023.**

Part of the reason for the upward movement in Jewish engagement results from family maturation, in particular, the appearance of children. But the **results do point to the enduring positive effects of JCHS education.** Alumni emerge as fairly engaged in Jewish life and then proceed on an upward trajectory.

Being Jewish and the Role of JCHS

A feel for how JCHS alumni feel about being Jewish and the role of JCHS can be gleaned from their verbatim comments on the matter. In summary the alumni express several complementary messages:

- They love being Jewish, it's important to them.
- They want to perpetuate it in themselves and their children.
- JCHS played a major role in advancing and solidifying their Jewish identities.

Personal Pride and Importance of Jewish Identity:

Expression of a deep sense of pride and the critical importance of Jewish identity in the individuals' lives.

- *"I am very proud and confident in my Jewish identity. I am not observant, but being Jewish is very important part of my life. I am still in college and I spend plenty of time at Hillel and Chabad at my school. ... I am firm in the way I feel Jewish and practice Judaism (which JCHS really helped instill in me)."*
- *"Being Jewish is at the core of my identity. JCHS gave me the tools to understand that identity more deeply and taught me to ask questions about that identity for life."*

Jewish Education and Its Impact:

The transformative role of Jewish education in shaping individuals' understanding and practice of their Jewish identity.

- *"In the last 5 years since getting married, in part thanks to me wife, we have accelerated our Jewish observance. I credit JCHS with the spark that allowed me to do and to continue going growing as a Jew."*
- *"JCHS was the peak of Judaism being important to my identity. Prior to high school, I went to Hebrew school and became Bar Mitzvah, but otherwise didn't do much. After high school, I have done much less relating to being Jewish."*

Jewish Identity in the Context of Adversity and Responsibility:

Concerns about challenges to Jewish identity, including antisemitism, and articulate a sense of responsibility to uphold and defend Jewish traditions and values.

- *"Being Jewish, maintaining the Jewish culture, and being pro-Israel is absolutely critical for the future of the Jewish people. JCHS should continue to educate kids on the importance of Israel and how important it is to remain a beacon for the Jewish people in college where there is often immense antisemitic sentiment."*
- *"Growing up, I was always proud of my Jewish identity and being a Zionist. Today, I feel like I have to defend myself not only from non-Jews but from Jews themselves. I feel it is imperative today to strengthen the Jewish identity not only of the Jews in the diaspora but also in Israel."*

Family and Generational Transmission of Jewish Identity:

The importance of transmitting Jewish identity and traditions through family and raising children within the Jewish faith.

- *"I feel deeply connected to the Jewish people because of my family's history and survival as Jews. It feels important to raise my children with Jewish traditions, particularly around key Jewish holidays, and to ensure they have an understanding of my family's Jewish heritage and experience."*
- *"To me, it is important that my children be taught well; this is more important than the education being Jewish, though I recognize that some of the best education is both."*

PRAISE OF JCHS

Alumni are replete with praise for their JCHS education. Here are some representative comments.

<p>Positive School Environment: Strong sense of community, unity, and the supportive environment at JCHS.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• <i>“I loved JCHS. It provided me an opportunity to expand my social circles and mature into the young adult I am today. The teachers were fantastic and I met so many motivated students like myself at the school. JCHS was a perfect environment for me. ... There was a great sense of unity at the school.”</i>• <i>“I appreciated JCHS' willingness to learn from people of all varying views on the political spectrum. JCHS' community was the absolute best, I've always been grateful for my time there and the relationships I gained.”</i>
<p>Personal and Academic Growth: JCHS contribution to the personal development, academic preparation, and overall growth of its students.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• <i>“I am grateful to JCHS every single day. JCHS shaped who I am academically, professionally, religiously, and as a person, and I can confidently say I owe so much of who I am to JCHS.”</i>• <i>“JCHS provided a wonderful high school experience. It instilled in me a passion for learning and community. It prepared me extremely well for college and later academic endeavors. I made my best friends from JCHS.”</i>• <i>“My experience at JCHS has shaped me in so many ways, from how I identify to how I walk through the world, and I believe it prepared me very adequately for college and life after.”</i>• <i>“No school is perfect but I am very grateful that I went to JCHS. I was extremely academically prepared to succeed in college, I keep in touch with many of my friends and teachers, and still feel very connected to the school.”</i>
<p>Appreciation for Teachers and Education: Expressions of gratitude towards the educators and the quality of education received at JCHS.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• <i>“I appreciate all my teachers did for me.”</i>• <i>“When I attended JCHS it felt like a safe haven for all Jews. Secular, traditional, religious. I appreciated that there were different tefilot for everyone to connect and start their day with some kind of reflection. I appreciated that students and staff respected each other and agreed to disagree on certain topics. The education was excellent!”</i>
<p>Financial Support: A few used the opportunity to express gratitude for the scholarship support that they received, making it possible for them to attend JCHS:</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• <i>“As a child of a single mom coming from a public school I would never have been able to attend JCHS without the help of donors. I do not know where I would be today without JCHS.”</i>• <i>“Above and beyond... Extremely memorable experience and I am still extremely grateful, being a financial aid student, that I was able to receive such a quality education.”</i>

The widely positive views in the comments are augmented by results in the question about the JCHS experience:

“I feel that JCHS prepared me for college/university . . . “	Percent
Better than most of my peers from other high schools”	52%
About as well as most of my peers from other high schools”	43%
Not as well as most of my peers from other high schools”	6%

Just a very small percentage (6%) are unhappy with the JCHS education, while a majority (52%) choose the most appreciative answer.

If they had any criticism, it was that JCHS could do even better in the area of Judaic instruction. They called either for more instruction, or for adjustments that will make the instruction more effective. The nature of this criticism reflects well on the alumni in that they are asking for more or better Judaic instruction.

Political Views and Jewish Engagement

In recent years, political identity has become far more significant and salient, both in American society at large and among American Jews. Learned observers once thought that religious identities and association shaped political identities and association. Now, some social scientists think that the reverse is true: Political identities now influence religious identities more than the other way around.

Another way political identities have changed is that we have far more crystallization and polarization. That is, both liberals and conservatives hold their respective positions more consistently across a wider range of issues. And those situated in the political center have declined in number while the left and right have grown.

For all these reasons, understanding the nature and formation of Jewish identity also requires attending to the nature of political identity and what it may mean for different aspects of Jewish engagement – the topic to which we now turn in our exploration of Jewish identities among JCHS alumni.

American Jews generally lean left politically, as do JCHS alumni. The Bay Area may be the most left-leaning area of major Jewish settlement in the country, and the politics of JCHS alumni should come as no surprise. But that said, the alumni still differ considerably among themselves. Their political statistical center is liberal, but considerable numbers lie both to the right of the liberals (moderates, conservatives and “very conservatives”) and to the left of liberals (those who call themselves “very liberal” or progressive). See the distribution below:

In fact, just over a third are liberal, while just under a third are to the right and as many are very liberal or progressive, that is, to the left of liberal.

This distribution is critical not merely because America – and American Jews – have become increasingly politicized and polarized, but also because political identities have come to strongly shape religious (and Jewish) identities. Just how and in what ways has not been fully documented, but the JCHS alumni offer an important glimpse into the connections between politics and Jewish engagement.

<i>In general, would you describe your political views as...</i>	Percent
Very conservative	2%
Conservative	6%
Moderate	24%
Liberal	38%
Very liberal	13%
Progressive	17%
Total	100%

In broad strokes, the right is more Jewishly engaged than the left, with most indicators generally declining from moderates-plus-conservatives to liberals to “left-liberals” or “far left,” the combination of very liberal with progressive alumni. The left-liberals generally score lower than the others, even than the liberals.

The right’s more intensive Jewish engagement over the liberals (excluding the “very liberals” and progressives) can be seen with respect to a few illustrative examples ... belonging to a synagogue (70% vs. 50%), lighting Shabbat candles (76% vs. 60%), donating to Israel-related causes (40% vs. 26%), seeing oneself as pro-Israel (91% vs. 76%), and having a Jewish spouse/partner (93% vs. 77%). To be clear, these are only a few of many indicators of Jewish engagement where the right (moderates + conservatives) lead liberals.

But perhaps the big story is the gap between the far left (very liberals + progressives) and the liberals. Comparing the liberals with the left we find gaps in belonging to a synagogue (50% vs. 31%), lighting Shabbat candles (60% vs. 31%), donating to Israel-related causes (26% vs. 18%), seeing oneself as pro-Israel (76% vs. 42%), and having a Jewish spouse/partner (77% vs. 37%). The JCHS alumni on the far left are considerably less Jewishly engaged than the “plain” liberals. That said, some of the far left are indeed Jewishly engaged; not all are distant from conventional Jewish life.

It’s fair to say that while the far left generally trails the others on Jewish engagement indicators, the gaps with respect to Israel engagement are especially large. Again, comparing liberals with the far left, we have these significant gaps: seeing caring about Israel as important to being Jewish (67% vs. 29%), feeling emotionally attached to Israel (76% vs. 52%), and thinking of oneself as a Zionist (71% vs. 36%).

Attachment to Israel

Previous JCHS alumni surveys have demonstrated the strong connection of the alumni with Israel. Beyond attachment, JCHS alumni display high levels of travel to Israel as well as living in Israel, including a small number who have made Aliyah).

As should be expected, Israel attachment is a function of several factors – travel is important, but so is having Israeli-born parents, as well as family or friends who live in Israel. The more Judaically traditional alumni are also more Israel-attached than those less engaged in Jewish life.

Significant measures of Israel connection encompass a wide variety. Among them are ... travel to Israel, attachment to Israel, news reading about Israel, interest in Israeli culture, donating to Israel-related causes, and self-defining as pro-Israel and as a Zionist. Critical as well are views on various Israeli policy matters including importance of Israel as a Jewish and as a democratic state; views on efforts to reform the judiciary, exempting the Haredim from military service, building more settlements in Judaea/Samaria (the West Bank), providing more public transportation on Shabbat, the BDS movement, and political parties in Israel. We’ll start by reviewing these various items, and then look at how certain key views relate to a variety of predictors.

Of fundamental significance – and highly related to these findings – is the extensive personal experience with Israel. As many as a third have lived in Israel and 7% of this sample are now living there. Almost all alumni (99%) have been to Israel, and 2/3 have been there 3 times or more or have lived there. These large numbers visiting and living in Israel help explain the close attachment to Israel.

The alumni certainly see caring about Israel as important to their sense of “what being Jewish means to you.” As many as 43% see Israel as essential to what being Jewish mean to them with another 35% viewing Israel as important. Among the 11 items the survey asked them to rate, Israel ranks seventh below “my family,” “passing

on Judaism to the next generation,” “Remembering the Holocaust” and others. At the same time, Israel surpasses “religious observance,” “engaging in Jewish learning,” “spirituality” and “working for social justice.” Consistent with these results, 42% consider themselves very attached to Israel and 34% somewhat attached.

How emotionally attached are you to Israel?

	Percent
Very attached	42%
Somewhat attached	34%
Not too attached	14%
Not at all attached	10%
	Total

As noted in earlier reports, the JCHS alumni score higher on Israel attachment – as in the table above -- than comparable young adults – non-Haredi young adults who also went to day school. The near but not quite full majority of alumni who provide the most pro-Israel answers is repeated in two other questions. Asked if they’re “pro-Israel,” 44% answered to a great extent, and almost as many said likewise about thinking of themselves “as a Zionist.” On all these questions, about a quarter of the alumni decline to provide even a mildly Israel-engaged answer. The pattern testifies, then, both to the relatively high commitment to Israel alongside a measure of diversity with a minority clearly unattached to Israel.

To what extent do each of the following apply to you?

	To a great extent	Somewhat	A little	Not at all
<i>I follow the news about Israel</i>	29%	38%	22%	10%
<i>I am interested in Israeli culture (e.g. music, food, literature etc.)</i>	33%	36%	23%	8%
<i>I donate to Israel-related causes</i>	7%	20%	18%	55%
<i>I am pro-Israel</i>	44%	30%	18%	9%
<i>I think of myself as a Zionist</i>	40%	20%	19%	21%

While majorities are committed to Israel as both democratic and Jewish, more see the former as very important than the latter (87% vs. 63%). This left-leaning tendency emerges as well in four specific policy questions. Of those with a view on the matter (excluding the “not sure” answers – 30-40%), majorities of about 4-to-1 reject “proposals to ... limit the powers of the Supreme Court,” “exempting Haredim from military service,” and “building more Jewish settlements in Judaea/Samaria.” Consistent with all that, almost 6-to-1 favor “providing more public transport on Shabbat.”

Do you favor or oppose the following?

	Favor	Oppose	Not sure
Proposals to strengthen the Knesset and limit the powers of the Supreme Court	13%	49%	38%
Exempting Hareidim from military service	10%	49%	40%
Building more Jewish settlements in Judaea/Samaria	16%	54%	30%
Providing more public transportation on Shabbat	59%	11%	30%

In the same spirit, just 15% see Israel as a “vibrant democracy.” As many as 40% see Israel as a “flawed democracy,” and a third are even more critical. Of those some (16%) see Israel as “a state with restricted minority rights,” and others (a substantial 17%) go so far as to check, “A state with segregation similar to apartheid.”

You may have been following recent developments in Israel, the West Bank, and Gaza. In your opinion which of the following is closer to describing the way Israel looks to you?

	Percent
A vibrant democracy	15%
A flawed democracy	40%
A state with restricted minority rights	16%
A state with segregation similar to apartheid	17%
I don’t know	13%
	Total

And, consistent with the left-leaning policy positions is their political identification in Israeli politics. Asked about their Israeli party identification, a quarter couldn’t offer a response on which party they identify with. However, the rest leaned heavily to the left. Supporters of the opposition parties out-number supporters of the government parties (Likud and the religious parties) by 3-to-1. Moreover, they simply don’t lean left, but they heavily endorse (31%) Labor and Meretz, the most left-leaning Zionist parties in Israeli politics. Clearly, JCHS alumni are far more politically left-identified than the Israeli public.

With respect to Israeli politics, with which of the following camps do you think you most identify?

	Percent
The left (e.g., Labor, Meretz)	31%
The center-left (e.g. Lapid, Gantz)	26%
The center-right (Likud, Bibi)	10%
The right (e.g., Ben Gvir)	2%
Religious-Zionists (Smotrich)	2%
Religious-Haredi (United Torah Judaism)	1%
Arab-majority parties	1%
Other	26%
	100%

Several key characteristics help differentiate alumni's orientations towards Israel, while others are functionally irrelevant.

One feature that hardly differentiates Israel measures is **gender**. Men and women report nearly identical average scores on several such measures.

Another "non-factor" is **year of graduation**. We compared three periods of graduation – 2005-13, 2014-18, and 2019-23. In terms of average scores on Israel-related measures, we found hardly any differences.

In terms of **residential location**, the only major difference is that associated with Israel residence. Those living in Israel are (understandably) much more committed to Israel than those living elsewhere. They are also more right-wing politically, more opposed to BDS, more likely to characterize Israel as democratic, and more in favor of West Bank settlement construction.

Jewish engagement is strongly related to Israel commitment and other Israel-related views. Having a **Jewish partner** bears a strong relationship with the Israel measures. On a 0-to-100 scale of Israel commitment, those with a Jewish partner (spouse or non-married partner) score 80 on average as compared with 50 for those with non-Jewish partners.

We get the same sorts of relationships when we look at other measures of Jewish engagement, including belonging to a **synagogue** or **making donations** to Jewish causes.

Interestingly, **prior Jewish education** – that is, before JCHS – does not bear a consistent relationship with Israel-related outcomes. Whether one went to day school, Hebrew school or none does not seem to matter in producing or predicting Israel commitment, possibly because the JCHS educational experience "flattens" differences in prior Jewish education.

Family status is also related to Israel-related measures. Both **being married** (vs. both partnered and single) as well as **having children** at home are associated with higher rates of Israel commitment. Marriage and parenting, then, relate to ... Israel commitment, right-wing Israeli party identity, opposition to BDS, and favoring West Bank settlement construction. Notably, in the larger American society, marriage and parenthood are related to more conservative political and cultural values, as well as religiosity. Similar processes may be at work here as well.

But whatever relationships we found in the above-mentioned social dimensions, none of them compare with the powerful impact of political identity. Comparing moderates + conservatives (the center right) with very liberals + progressives (the left), we find the former are nearly twice as Israel-committed as the latter (83 vs. 45). In terms of Israeli political party identification, the three political groups (right of center, liberals, left) align as one would expect, with each camp tending to its Israeli counterparts. We also find sizeable gaps with respect to opposing BDS, and we see even more dramatic differences with respect to their evaluation of Israeli democracy (scores of 75, 55, and 25 from right to left), and gigantic differences with respect to favoring more Israeli settlements in Judaea and Samaria (60, 22, 12).

As we saw earlier, it's certainly fair to say that while the far-left generally trails the others on Jewish engagement indicators; but the gaps with respect to Israel engagement are especially large. Comparing liberals with the far left, we have these significant gaps: seeing caring about Israel as important to being Jewish (67% vs. 29%), feeling emotionally attached to Israel (76% vs. 52%), and thinking of oneself as a Zionist (71% vs. 36%).

Overall, then, with respect to Israel-related measures, political identity is the most powerful influence, even more influential than Jewish identity variables and family status.

Conclusions

The JCHS alumni offer intriguing insights on several levels. As noted earlier, of all major Jewish communities in North America, The Bay Area is the one with the highest levels of intermarriage, the fewest who are Orthodox or religiously traditional, and the most politically liberal political environment. All those factors militate against high levels of Jewish commitment. Yet JCHS manages to “produce” alumni whose Jewish engagement measures generally exceed those of other day school graduates around the country.

JCHS alumni hold the school, their teachers, their education, and their peers in very high regard, and many are quite enthusiastic about their JCHS experience. They cite not only Jewish growth, but impact and benefits in other areas – academic, intellectual, social and communal.

At the same time, some alumni voice some regrets and complaints. A number of them claim that the school was inhospitable to more traditional religious points of view, as well as to conventional approaches to Israel. In other words, the (few) complaints derive more often from the right, rather than the left.

The alumni report rather high rates of Jewish engagement, generally exceeding those reported by comparable adults across the United States. At the same time, we find enormous variations in Jewish engagement with some highly engaged, some moderately engaged, and some not all that active in Jewish life. Parental factors and pre-JCHS upbringing are the critical influencers of adult Jewish engagement.

Attachment to Israel stands out as an area of great JCHS impact. We see relatively high rates of Aliyah, long-term stays, and repeated visits, as well as emotional attachment coupled with ongoing relationships with people and events.

JCHS alumni express a variety of political stances toward Israel. Their Israel attachment and engagement comes along with fairly left-leaning views on settlement construction, Israel-as-a-democracy, religious policy, and, ultimately, affinity for Israeli political parties. That said, a significant minority is not at all “pro-Israel” – they may be unattached or support BDS or both. Another is that the unattached seem to be growing over time.

Political identity emerges as an important, influential and dynamic factor. Those on the relative right (mostly moderates politically) report higher levels of Jewish engagement than those of the left, especially the most left-leaning (self-identified as “very liberal”).

In the last 10-15 years, political identity in America has become more salient. It has become more polarized with the opposing camps more different from and more disparaging of each other. Consistent with all this is the rise of progressivism among young people and the distancing from Israel on the part of the progressives.

The political turbulence is one reason that the JCHS story is still evolving and still unwritten. Politics is one dynamic factor, as is recent and current developments in Israel. In addition, more and more JCHS alumni are marrying and having children. So as much as we know about the largely positive impact of JCHS education, we can't be sure of future developments owing in part to political change, unanticipated events, family status maturation, and so much more.

Appendix: Survey Results

1. First, we begin with a few questions on what being Jewish means to you. How important is each of the following to what BEING JEWISH means to you?

	Essential part of what being Jewish means to me		Important, but not essential		Not an important part of what being Jewish means to me		Responses
	Count	Row %	Count	Row %	Count	Row %	Count
My family	151	81%	34	18%	1	1%	186
My Jewish friends	98	53%	74	40%	14	8%	186
Celebrating Jewish holidays	105	56%	70	38%	11	6%	186
Working for justice and equality in society	61	33%	90	48%	35	19%	186
Remembering the Holocaust	120	65%	57	31%	9	5%	186
Caring about Israel	79	43%	65	35%	41	22%	185
Being part of a Jewish community	111	60%	67	36%	8	4%	186
Religious observance	38	20%	64	34%	84	45%	186
Spirituality	58	31%	78	42%	50	27%	186
Engaging in Jewish learning	53	29%	86	47%	45	24%	184
Passing on Judaism to the next generation	143	77%	35	19%	8	4%	186

2. How important is religion in your life?

	Percent	Count
Very important	32%	60
Somewhat important	39%	72
Not too important	17%	32
Not at all important	12%	22
	Total	186

3. How important is being Jewish in your life?

	Percent	Count
Very important	66%	123
Somewhat important	31%	58
Not too important	3%	5
Not at all important	0%	0
	Total	186

4. How much, if at all, do you feel a sense of belonging to the Jewish people?

	Percent	Count
A great deal	74%	135
Some	24%	44
Not much	2%	3
None at all	0%	0
	Total	182

5. How much responsibility, if any, do you feel you have to help fellow Jews in need around the world?

	Percent	Count
A great deal	39%	71
Some	50%	91
Not much	10%	19
None at all	1%	1
	Total	182

6. Do you belong to a synagogue, temple, shul, or minyan?

	Percent	Count
Yes	49%	88
No	51%	93
	Total	181

7. How many of your close friends are Jewish?

	Percent	Count
Most of them	59%	107
Some of them	34%	62
Hardly any of them	7%	13
Not sure	0%	0
	Total	182

8. Thinking about Jewish religious denominations, do you consider yourself to be...

	Percent	Count
Reform	26%	47
Conservative	11%	20
Orthodox	17%	30
Something else	9%	17
No particular denomination	36%	65
	Total	179

9. Aside from special occasions like weddings, funerals and bar mitzvahs, how often do you attend Jewish religious services?

	Percent	Count
Once a week or more	16%	29
Once or twice a month	17%	31
A few times a year, High Holidays	40%	71
Seldom or never	27%	48
	Total	179

10. Of the following items related to being Jewish, which did you do this past year? And in your high school years, which did you experience in your parents' home growing up?

You, the past year - Attended a Passover Seder		
	Percent	Count
Yes	88%	156
No	12%	22
	Total	178

Your parents' home - Attended a Passover Seder		
	Percent	Count
Yes	88%	156
No	12%	21
	Total	177

You, the past year - Fasted at least part of the day on Yom Kippur		
	Percent	Count
Yes	68%	121
No	32%	56
	Total	177

Your parents' home - Fasted at least part of the day on Yom Kippur		
	Percent	Count
Yes	79%	138
No	21%	37
	Total	175

You, the past year - Participated in a Shabbat meal at least a few times		
	Percent	Count
Yes	86%	153
No	14%	25
	Total	178

Your parents' home - Participated in a Shabbat meal at least a few times		
	Percent	Count
Yes	82%	146
No	18%	31
	Total	177

You, the past year - Shabbat candles were usually lit		
	Percent	Count
Yes	53%	94
No	47%	85
	Total	179

Your parents' home - Shabbat candles were usually lit		
	Percent	Count
Yes	67%	118
No	33%	58
	Total	176

You, the past year - Kept Kosher at home		
	Percent	Count
Yes	32%	57
No	68%	122
	Total	179

Your parents' home - Kept Kosher at home		
	Percent	Count
Yes	41%	72
No	59%	104
	Total	176

11. In the last 12 months, how often have you engaged in each of the following activities?

	Often		Sometimes		Rarely		Never		Responses
	Count	Row %	Count	Row %	Count	Row %	Count	Row %	Count
Read Jewish newspapers or seek out Jewish news online	44	25%	55	31%	49	27%	31	17%	179
Go to Jewish film festivals or seek out Jewish films	5	3%	30	17%	67	38%	76	43%	178
Participate in online conversations about Judaism and being Jewish	21	12%	37	21%	39	22%	79	45%	176
Read Jewish literature, biographies, or books on Jewish history	31	17%	49	28%	52	29%	46	26%	178

12. In the past 12 months, did you make a financial donation to any Jewish charity or cause?

	Percent	Count
Yes	52%	91
No	48%	85
	Total	176

13. Have you been to Israel?

	Percent	Count
Yes, live in Israel now	7%	12
Yes, lived in Israel in the past	26%	45
Yes, never lived there, but visited 3 times or more	33%	58
Yes, visited once or twice	34%	59
No	1%	2
	Total	176

14. How emotionally attached are you to Israel?

	Percent	Count
Very attached	42%	74
Somewhat attached	34%	60
Not too attached	14%	25
Not at all attached	10%	17
	Total	176

15. To what extent do you get your news about Israel from each of the following sources?

	To a great extent		Somewhat		A little		Not at all		Responses
	Count	Row %	Count	Row %	Count	Row %	Count	Row %	Count
Facebook and other social media	32	18%	63	36%	47	27%	34	19%	176
Haaretz	7	4%	26	15%	42	24%	99	57%	174
Jerusalem Post	3	2%	35	20%	40	23%	96	55%	174
Times of Israel	10	6%	36	21%	28	16%	101	58%	175
Tablet	1	1%	15	9%	23	13%	134	77%	173
New York Times	19	11%	52	30%	59	34%	45	26%	175
Washington Post	4	2%	41	24%	47	27%	82	47%	174

16. To what extent do each of the following apply to you?

	To a great extent		Somewhat		A little		Not at all		Responses
	Count	Row %	Count	Row %	Count	Row %	Count	Row %	Count
I follow the news about Israel	52	29%	68	38%	39	22%	18	10%	177
I am interested in Israeli culture (e.g. music, food, literature etc.)	58	33%	63	36%	41	23%	15	8%	177
I donate to Israel-related causes	13	7%	35	20%	31	18%	98	55%	177
I am pro-Israel	78	44%	52	30%	31	18%	15	9%	176
I think of myself as a Zionist	70	40%	36	20%	33	19%	37	21%	176

17. How important to you is it that Israel continue to be a Jewish State?

	Percent	Count
Very important	63%	110
Somewhat important	26%	45
Not very important	8%	14
Not at all important	3%	6
Total		175

18. How important to you is it that Israel continue to be a democratic State?

	Percent	Count
Very important	87%	152
Somewhat important	10%	17
Not very important	2%	3
Not at all important	1%	2
Total		174

19. As you may know, a controversy over judicial reform in Israel has pitted the governing coalition led by Prime Minister Netanyahu against thousands protesting plans to reform the Israeli judiciary. Between the two – the government and the opposition – whom do you favor more?

	Percent	Count
Strongly favor the government	5%	8
Somewhat favor the government	9%	15
Somewhat favor the opposition	12%	21
Strongly favor the opposition	49%	86
Not sure	25%	44
	Total	174

20. Do you favor or oppose the following?

	Favor		Oppose		Not sure		Responses
	Count	Row %	Count	Row %	Count	Row %	Count
Proposals to strengthen the Knesset and limit the powers of the Supreme Court	23	13%	85	49%	65	38%	173
Exempting Hareidim from military service	18	10%	85	49%	70	40%	173
Building more Jewish settlements in Judaea/Samaria	27	16%	92	54%	51	30%	170
Providing more public transportation on Shabbat	104	59%	19	11%	52	30%	175

21. You may have been following recent developments in Israel, the West Bank, and Gaza. In your opinion which of the following is closer to describing the way Israel looks to you?

	Percent	Count
A vibrant democracy	15%	25
A flawed democracy	40%	68
A state with restricted minority rights	16%	27
A state with segregation similar to apartheid	17%	30
I don't know	13%	22
	Total	172

22. In general, what role do you want the United States to play in mediating the Israeli-Palestinian conflict? Should the United States ...

	Percent	Count
Lean toward Israel	52%	88
Lean toward the Palestinians	8%	13
Lean toward neither side	41%	69
	Total	170

23. What is your position, if you have one, on the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) movement directed at Israel?

	Percent	Count
I oppose it	58%	100
I neither oppose nor support it	14%	25
I support it	6%	10
I am unfamiliar with it	9%	15
I don't know	13%	23
	Total	173

24. With respect to Israeli politics, with which of the following camps do you think you most identify?

	Percent	Count
The left (e.g., Labor, Meretz)	31%	51
The center-left (e.g. Lapid, Gantz)	26%	43
The center-right (Likud, Bibi)	10%	16
The right (e.g., Ben Gvir)	2%	3
Religious-Zionists (Smotrich)	2%	4
Religious-Haredi (United Torah Judaism)	1%	1
Arab-majority parties	1%	2
Other	26%	43
	Total	163

25. Your current relationship status is ...

	Percent	Count
Married	24%	42
Engaged	3%	6
Living with someone	20%	34
Other	53%	92
	Total	174

26. With respect to the person who is your spouse, partner, or dating, does he/she/they identify as Jewish?

	Percent	Count
Yes	40%	70
No	20%	34
It's complicated	2%	4
No such person	38%	65
	Total	173

27. Do you have any children?

	Percent	Count
Yes	14%	24
No	86%	149
	Total	173

29. How old is your oldest child?

	Percent	Count
Below 1 year old	17%	4
1	9%	2
2	26%	6
3	13%	3
4	9%	2
5	9%	2
6	4%	1
7	9%	2
8	0%	0
9 years old or above	4%	1
	Total	23

30. Thinking about the children you have or that you may have in the future, to what extent are each of the following outcomes important to you?

	Extremely important		Very important		Somewhat important		Not important		Responses
	Count	Row %	Count	Row %	Count	Row %	Count	Row %	Count
They celebrate Jewish holidays	90	52%	36	21%	38	22%	8	5%	172
They get a good Jewish education	73	42%	48	28%	41	24%	10	6%	172
They feel emotionally attached to Israel	55	32%	28	16%	34	20%	54	32%	171
They marry someone Jewish	49	28%	28	16%	42	24%	53	31%	172

31. Which of the following describes you?

	Percent	Count
I graduated college	66%	114
I am currently in college	25%	43
I have not attended college	9%	15
	Total	172

32. I feel that JCHS prepared me for college/university . . .

	Percent	Count
Not as well as most of my peers from other high schools	6%	9
About as well as most of my peers from other high schools	43%	66
Better than most of my peers from other high schools	52%	80
	Total	155

33. Do/did you have a parent who was born in Israel?

	Percent	Count
Yes, one or both were born in Israel	12%	21
No, neither born in Israel	88%	152
	Total	173

34. Do/did you have a parent who was born in Russia, Ukraine, or the Former Soviet Union?

	Percent	Count
Yes, one or both were born in Russia, Ukraine or the Former Soviet Union	14%	25
No, neither born in Russia, Ukraine or the Former Soviet Union	86%	148
	Total	173

35. While growing up, did you have a non-Jewish parent?

	Percent	Count
Yes, one or both of my parents was not Jewish	16%	27
No, both my parents -- or the single parent who raised me -- were Jewish	84%	146
	Total	173

36. Thinking about Jewish religious denominations, were you raised...

	Percent	Count
Reform	36%	63
Conservative	20%	34
Orthodox	24%	41
Something else	20%	35
	Total	173

37. When you were growing up, before attending JCHS, did you...

	Percent	Yes Count
Attend a Jewish day school?	60%	104
Attend Hebrew school or Sunday school?	54%	93
Attend an overnight summer camp with Jewish content?	72%	124

38. In what year did you graduate from JCHS?

	Percent	Count
2005	3%	6
2006	2%	4
2007	3%	6
2008	9%	16
2009	4%	7
2010	2%	4
2011	6%	10
2012	6%	11
2013	6%	10
2014	7%	12
2015	5%	8
2016	7%	12
2017	5%	9
2018	3%	6
2019	3%	5
2020	4%	7
2021	5%	8
2022	7%	12
2023	12%	20
	Total	173

39. With high school behind you, is there something that you especially appreciate about what you learned at JCHS?

40. Your age?

	Percent	Count
17	1%	2
18	10%	18
19	8%	13
20	5%	9
21	3%	6
22	2%	4
23	3%	6
24	6%	11
25	6%	11
26	3%	6
27	8%	13
28	8%	13
29	4%	7
30	6%	11
31	3%	5
32	5%	8
33	8%	14
34	3%	5
35	3%	6
36	2%	4
	Total	172

41. Your gender ...

	Percent	Count
Male	51%	88
Female	47%	81
Other	2%	4
	Total	173

42. In what area do you now live?

	Percent	Count
Bay Area	47%	81
Other California	11%	19
New York area	12%	20
Other US	21%	37
Israel	7%	12
Other country	2%	4
	Total	173

43. In general, would you describe your political views as...

	Percent	Count
Very conservative	2%	4
Conservative	6%	10
Moderate	23%	40
Liberal	38%	66
Very liberal	13%	22
Progressive	17%	30
	Total	172

44. To what extent, would you say, that politics and your political identity are important to you?

	Percent	Count
To a great extent	30%	52
To some extent	40%	69
A little	18%	31
Not at all	9%	16
Not sure	2%	4
	Total	172

45. Your comments on your JCHS experience

46. Your comments on your being Jewish

47. Your comments on the survey

48. Your comments on anything else