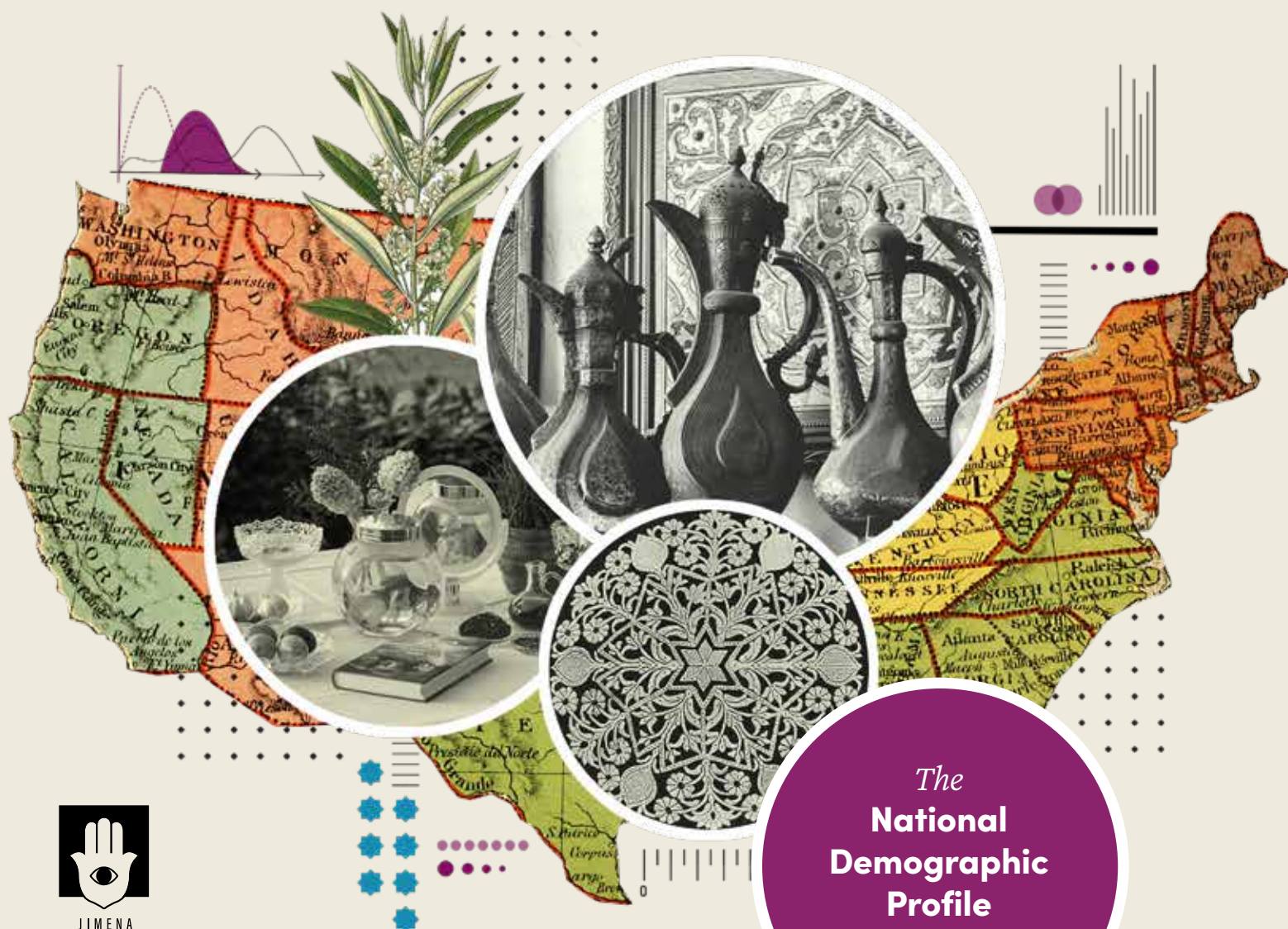


Sephardic & Mizrahi Jews in the United States:

IDENTITIES, EXPERIENCES, AND COMMUNITIES



JIMENA

Commissioned by
**JIMENA: JEWS INDIGENOUS
TO THE MIDDLE EAST AND
NORTH AFRICA**

DR. MIJAL BITTON
Principal Investigator and
Research Director



NYU

ROBERT F. WAGNER GRADUATE
SCHOOL OF PUBLIC SERVICE



NYU

BRONFMAN

The
**National
Demographic
Profile**
Report

AUGUST 2025

THE
**National
Demographic
Profile**
REPORT

Table of Contents



| | |
|---|----|
| PREFACE | 03 |
| POPULATION ESTIMATE | 05 |
| DATA SOURCES | 06 |
| DATA ANALYSIS | 07 |
| SOCIO-DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS | 10 |
| JEWISH CHARACTERISTICS | 12 |
| NOTES | 13 |

About This Study

THIS REPORT IS ONE OF SEVERAL produced from a multi-year research project focused on understanding the identities, experiences, and communal life of Sephardic and Mizrahi Jews in the United States. The study was conducted by an academic research team based at New York University, under the direction of Dr. Mijal Bitton, and was commissioned by JIMENA: Jews Indigenous to the Middle East and North Africa. It was made possible with the generous support of a range of philanthropic and institutional partners committed to advancing Sephardic and Mizrahi inclusion in Jewish communal life.

The project was carried out by a strong team of interdisciplinary researchers and benefitted from the guidance of an international academic advisory committee. In addition to academic input, we actively engaged practitioners and community leaders—both as interview participants and as advisors—to ensure the research reflected lived realities and communal perspectives.

The study aims to support a more inclusive Jewish communal landscape—one that reflects the richness, diversity, and complexity of Sephardic life. It is designed as a comprehensive resource: offering new data, field-based insights, historical context, and practical guidance to help scholars, educators, and communal professionals better understand and engage Sephardic and Mizrahi Jews in the American context.

This work brings together two complementary forms of research:

- **Secondary analysis** of existing literature reviews, historical material, and quantitative data—including national and local Jewish population surveys—organized through our guiding questions and reinterpreted through a Sephardic and Mizrahi lens.

- **Original fieldwork**, including interviews, site visits, and ethnographic observations across four key Sephardic communities shaped by post-1965 immigration.

Although the terms Sephardic and Mizrahi have distinct origins and meanings, this study reflects how they are used—and contested—by participants. In line with community usage, we primarily use “Sephardic” as a broad social identity while noting when “Mizrahi” is relevant. Across the study, we prioritized self-identification and recognized the limitations of existing categories—religious, racial, and ethnic—in capturing these communities’ realities.

The study was conducted during a time of shifting communal and political context for Jews in America—including the brutal October 7th attacks by Hamas in Israel, the subsequent rise in antisemitism across the US, and intensifying public debate around race, identity, and inclusion in American Jewish life. These broader dynamics shaped both the narratives we heard and the urgency of this work.

This project is offered as a first step, not a final word. It is not meant to be comprehensive or exhaustive, and we hope it serves as a foundation for future research. For further directions, see the “Recommendations” section of this report.

We invite you to explore the full report or delve into any of its focused sub-sections. Below is the full table of contents.

List of Reports:



THE
Who We Are
REPORT



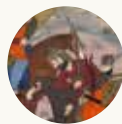
THE
Research Approach
REPORT



THE
Summary of Findings
REPORT



THE
Recommendations
REPORT



THE
Understanding Sephardic & Mizrahi Identity
REPORT



THE
National Demographic Profile
REPORT



THE
Community Portraits
REPORT



THE
Syrian Jews in Brooklyn
REPORT



THE
Persian Jews in Los Angeles
REPORT



THE
Bukharian Jews in Queens
REPORT



THE
Latin Sephardic Jews in South Florida
REPORT



THE
Methodology
REPORT



THE
Full Report

The Population Size and Characteristics of Sephardic and Mizrahi Jews in the United States

POPULATION ESTIMATE: 10% OF US JEWS ARE SEPHARDIC AND/OR MIZRAHI

Based on an analysis conducted by the Brandeis University's Cohen Center for Modern Jewish Studies (CMJS) estimates of the Sephardic and/or Mizrahi adult Jewish population in the United States range from 7% to 11% of all US adult Jews. The low-end estimate (7%), derived from the Pew Research Center's Jewish Americans in 2020 study, translates to approximately 375,800 Sephardic and Mizrahi Jewish adults. The high end estimate (11%), based on a recalculation of national data using local studies, yields a significantly higher estimate of 612,900 adults.

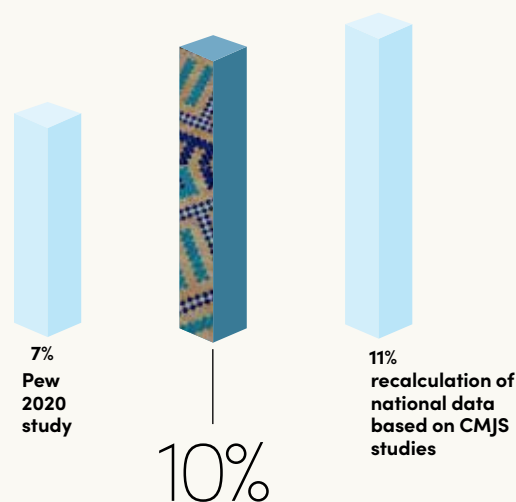
Given the variations across surveys, this report adopts a working estimate of 10% for the Sephardic and Mizrahi adult Jewish population in the United States. This decision is based on two key factors:

- **Undercounting of Immigrant Populations:** Survey research suggests that immigrant communities tend to be underrepresented due to lower response rates.
- **Question Wording Differences:** The Pew survey's phrasing may have depressed responses, particularly among those whose lineage traces to North Africa or the Middle East but not directly to Spain. In contrast, local studies have framed the question in ways that better align with how respondents understand and identify their heritage, resulting in higher estimates of Sephardic and Mizrahi Jews.

The following section details methodology, data sources, and adjustments made to arrive at these estimates.

POPULATION ESTIMATES VARY BY DATA SOURCE

Estimates of the Sephardic/Mizrahi Adult Jewish population in the US range from 7 to 11% of all US adult Jews



This working estimate is based on two factors:

- 1 Undercounting of immigrant populations due to lower response rates
- 2 Pew survey's phrasing may have depressed responses

DATA SOURCES

Because the US government does not collect information on religious groups and because it does not count Jews among its official racial and ethnic groups, estimates of the size and characteristics of the Jewish population are dependent on non-governmental surveys. While surveys of the US Jewish population go back many decades, it is only in relatively recent years that a number of surveys of Jewish populations have asked about Sephardic and Mizrahi heritage.

In an analysis specifically conducted for this study, the Brandeis University's Cohen Center for Modern Jewish Studies (CMJS) utilized a set of surveys to generate a range of estimates about the size of the adult Sephardic and Mizrahi populations in the US and provide selected socio-demographic and Jewish characteristics about them. The findings presented in this section are based on the CMJS's analysis.

The surveys CMJS used are the Pew Research Center's 2020 national survey of US Jews, eight local Jewish community studies—in New York City, Chicago, Los Angeles, Greater MetroWest (NJ), Kansas City, Long Beach (CA), Louisville, and Delaware—and surveys of Birthright Israel applicants. All eight local Jewish community studies were sponsored by Jewish Federations in those locations. The UJA- Federation of New York's 2023 Jewish Community Study of New York was conducted by SSRS, while the other seven were conducted by the CMJS. The Birthright surveys were also conducted by CMJS.¹

All of the questions about Sephardic and Mizrahi heritage on these surveys were posed in “select all that apply” formats. That is, respondents could pick all the response options that applied to them. However, the question wording and response options on the Pew survey differ from the question wording and response options used on the seven local community studies conducted by CMJS, and both of those questions and their corresponding response options differ from the question wording and response options on the New York survey. These variations in question wording and response options created challenges in comparing and synthesizing results across them.²

Beyond issues of question wording and response options, the extant surveys have other methodological differences—including sampling designs, question order, and weighting to account for biases and errors in data collection—that may affect comparability. Furthermore, while the Pew study was national in scope, the other studies are local, and their results may differ from local communities that have not been surveyed. The methodological differences across the existing studies, and the limited number of local studies with available data, highlight the need for more survey research on Sephardic and Mizrahi Jews in the US in general and more standardized research in particular. Section 5 on recommendations for researchers addresses this issue more directly.

DATA SOURCES FOR SEPHARDIC & MIZRAHI JEWISH POPULATION ESTIMATES

How existing surveys contribute to understanding community demographics



DATA ANALYSIS

The CMJS analysis provides estimates of Sephardic and Mizrahi adult Jews that range from 7–11% of all US adult Jews.

The low-end of this range, 7%, comes from survey data from Pew's Jewish Americans in 2020 study and translates to 375,800 Jewish adults. The Pew study asked about Jewish heritage this way:

In terms of Jewish heritage, do you think of yourself as...
(Check all that apply)

- Ashkenazi (following Jewish customs of Central and Eastern Europe)
- Sephardic (following Jewish customs of Spain)
- Mizrahi (following Jewish customs of North Africa and the Middle East)
- Other
- Not sure
- This does not apply to me / I am just Jewish

The high end of the range, 11%, comes from seven combined CMJS studies—which, it is important to remember—are not a representative sample of all US Jews.



The seven local community surveys that CMJS conducted asked the question this way:

Regarding your [their] Jewish heritage, do you [does your spouse/partner] consider yourself [himself/herself/themselves] to be Ashkenazi, Sephardic, Mizrahi, or something else? (Select all that apply)

- Ashkenazi
- Sephardic
- Mizrahi
- Other (please specify)
- None of these, no particular Jewish heritage
- Don't know

The differences between the Pew and CMJS questions may have led to a lower estimate of Sephardic and Mizrahi Jews in the Pew data for two reasons. First, the Pew version's emphasis on *following the customs* of a particular Jewish heritage, rather than on *considering* oneself to be of a particular Jewish heritage, may have depressed any heritage selection from less engaged Jews. The survey data support this hypothesis: there is a larger share of "Not sure" and "This does not apply to me" responses to the Pew question (24%) than there are "None of these" and "Don't know" responses in the CMJS surveys (16%). In other words, a larger share of respondents in Pew than in the CMJS did not select any Jewish heritage. Second, Pew's specification of Sephardic heritage as following the customs of *Spain* in particular may have diminished responses for self-identified Sephardic Jews who trace their geographic lineage to areas outside Spain, such as Jewish communities in North Africa, the eastern Mediterranean, and other parts of the Middle East. Again, the survey data support this hypothesis: the Pew survey estimates 6% of Jewish adults are Sephardic, while the CMJS surveys estimate 9%.

The New York study asked the question in yet a third way, combining Sephardic and Mizrahi in one response option:

In terms of Jewish heritage, do you think of yourself as:

- Ashkenazi
- Sephardic or Mizrahi
- Other
- Not sure

The survey results yielded a 10% share of Jewish adults *thinking of themselves as Sephardic or Mizrahi*, closer to the combined CMJS estimate of 11% than the Pew estimate of 7%. Because of the way the response option was constructed in the New York study, it is not possible to generate separate estimates for Sephardic Jews and Mizrahi Jews.

Adjusting the Pew estimates

To account for what may have been an underestimate of Sephardic and Mizrahi Jews in the Pew survey, CMJS calculated four new estimates, two based on adjusting the Pew data by the seven CMJS studies and two based on adjust the Pew data by the seven CMJS studies plus the New York study.

Adjustments based on CMJS studies

Table 3.1 shows the two adjustments to the Pew estimates based on the seven combined CMJS studies. The first new estimate adjusted the share of Sephardic and Mizrahi Jews among Pew survey respondents located in the same seven communities as the CMJS local studies to 11%, leaving the share across all other Pew respondents at 7%, and recalculated the national

total and proportion. The result is a small incremental increase of less than 1,000 adults (from 375,800 to 376,500), with the proportion remaining at 7% when rounded. The second new estimate assumed the CMJS share of 11% Sephardic or Mizrahi is representative of the entire country, raised the Pew share to 11% across all respondents, and recalculated the combined Sephardic/Mizrahi population estimate, which in this case increases by more than 237,100 adults to 612,900.

Adjustments based on CMJS studies plus New York study

The Cohen Center produced two additional national estimates based on data from both the seven CMJS local studies and the New York study (Table 3.2). The first new estimate adjusted the share of Sephardic and Mizrahi Jews among Pew survey respondents located in the seven CMJS local community studies to 11%, the Pew survey respondents in New York to 10%, left the share across all other Pew respondents at 7%, and recalculated the national total and proportion. This resulted in an increase of 58,700 adults, from 375,800 to 434,500 (8% nationally). The second new estimate calculated the proportion of Sephardic and Mizrahi

Table 3.1 Pew Baseline and CMJS-Adjusted Estimates of Ashkenazi, Sephardic and Mizrahi Jews

| | Pew Baseline | | Pew Adjusted: Respondents in CMJS Communities Only | | Pew Adjusted: All Respondents Assuming CMJS Percentage | |
|-------------------------------|--------------|----|---|----|---|----|
| | Estimate | % | Estimate | % | Estimate | % |
| Ashkenazi, any | 4,076,400 | 71 | 4,094,700 | 71 | 4,382,900 | 76 |
| Sephardic, any | 329,600 | 6 | 335,300 | 6 | 508,800 | 9 |
| Mizrahi, any | 104,100 | 2 | 91,400 | 2 | 138,800 | 2 |
| Sephardic/Mizrahi, any | 375,800 | 7 | 376,500 | 7 | 612,900 | 11 |
| Other | 28,900 | <1 | 20,400 | <1 | 11,600 | <1 |
| Don't know | 470,500 | 7 | 452,800 | 8 | 445,200 | 8 |
| None / Doesn't apply | 983,000 | 17 | 959,000 | 17 | 474,100 | 8 |

Note: percentages are rounded to the nearest whole number.

Jews in the eight local studies combined (10%) and applied it to all of the Pew respondents. This resulted in a national estimate of 591,100 Sephardic and Mizrahi adults, an increase of 215,300 over Pew's initial estimate of 375,800.

To summarize, then, the various upward adjustments to the Pew estimate account for the different and arguably more accurate ways the local surveys asked about Sephardic and Mizrahi identity and produce both higher percentages and, correspondently, bigger estimates of the adult population. The low-end of the range, based on Pew's data alone, is 375,800 Sephardic and Mizrahi

adults. The high end of the range (11%) is 612,900. In between are three other estimates: 376,500 (also 7%), 434,500 (8%), and 591,100 (10%).³

From within this range, and for the purposes of this report, we have chosen to adopt an estimate of 10% for the Sephardic and Mizrahi population. We base this decision on two factors. First, survey research experience suggests that immigrant populations tend to be undercounted, typically due to lower response rates. Second, question wording on the Pew survey may have resulted in fewer affirmative answers in general, and fewer Sephardic answers specifically.

Table 3.2 Pew Baseline and CMJS/NYC-Adjusted Estimates of Ashkenazi, Sephardic and Mizrahi Jews

| | Pew Baseline | | Pew Adjusted: Respondents in CMJS and NYC Communities Only | | Pew Adjusted: All Respondents Assuming CMJS/ NYC Combined Percentage | |
|------------------------------------|--------------|----|---|----|--|----|
| | Estimate | % | Estimate | % | Estimate | % |
| Ashkenazi, any | 4,076,400 | 71 | 4,161,963 | 72 | 4,386,493 | 76 |
| Sephardic/ Mizrahi, any | 375,800 | 7 | 434,459 | 8 | 591,087 | 10 |

Note: percentages are rounded to the nearest whole number.



SOCIO-DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS

Further analysis of data from the seven combined CMJS local community surveys—in Chicago, Los Angeles, Greater MetroWest (NJ), Kansas City, Long Beach (CA), Louisville, and Delaware—and the New York survey data suggest broad socio-demographic patterns that distinguish Sephardic and Mizrahi Jews from each other and from Ashkenazi Jews (Table 3.3). It is important to remember that the CMJS surveys provided separate response options for Sephardic, Mizrahi, and Ashkenazi, while the New York study used a combined Sephardic/Mizrahi response option. Neither study provided definitions of the terms Sephardic, Mizrahi or Ashkenazi and both referred to Jewish heritage. Lastly, it may be that the terms mean different things and/or are more salient

in some communities than others. In the CMJS surveys, Mizrahi Jews are the most likely to identify as any non-white race and as Persons of Color compared to Sephardic Jews and Ashkenazi Jews. It should be noted that even among Mizrahi Jews, just 17% identify as a person of color (POC), consistent with our community portrait data showing strong majorities of Sephardic and Mizrahi Jews do not embrace a racialized identity, including being categorized as JOC. Sephardic Jews are more likely to identify as Hispanic than either Mizrahi Jews or Ashkenazi Jews while Mizrahi Jews are the most likely to identify as MENA, followed by Sephardic and then Ashkenazi Jews.⁴

The relationship between Sephardic and Mizrahi Jews and racial/ethnic self-identification in the US

Table 3.3. Selected Social and Demographic Characteristics, in Eight American cities

| | CMJS Studies Only | | | New York | CMJS and New York Studies Combined |
|---|--------------------|--------------------|------------------|-------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| | Ashkenazi, any (%) | Sephardic, any (%) | Mizrahi, any (%) | Sephardic/ Mizrahi, any (%) | Sephardic/ Mizrahi, any (%) |
| Any non-White race | 7 | 25 | 58 | 8 | 19 |
| Persons of Color | 2 | 12 | 17 | 6 | 10 |
| Hispanic | 3 | 14 | 7 | 17 | 16 |
| Other race write-in: Middle Eastern/North African country | 1 | 14 | 34 | Category not used in New York study | Category not used in New York study |
| Median Age | 56 | 51 | 38 | 46 | 48 |
| Born/Raised outside the US | 14 | 31 | 31 | 37 | 34 |
| Politically Moderate/Conservative | 37 | 59 | 59 | 57 | 62 |
| Economically vulnerable | 18 | 25 | 30 | 30 | 27 |
| Graduate degree | 50 | 39 | 31 | 30 | 34 |

Note: percentages are rounded to the nearest whole number.

is complex, and different data sources tell different stories. For example, in New York, a higher percentage of Sephardic and Mizrahi Jews identify as white compared to findings from CMJS studies. Meanwhile, Pew lacks a sufficiently large sample of Sephardic or Mizrahi Jews who identify as black non-Hispanic, Hispanic, Asian, multiracial, or another non-white category—either separately or even when aggregated into a broader “non-white” category—to analyze these groups meaningfully. Given these limitations, we caution against overgeneralizations. While we can confidently say that Sephardic and Mizrahi Jews should not be assumed to be white, we also have data showing that they do not broadly self-identify within racialized categories such as or JOC.

Other selected demographic characteristics in the CMJS survey data also differ across the groups. Sephardic Jews tend to be a little younger than Ashkenazi Jews while Mizrahi Jews tend to be quite a lot younger than Ashkenazi Jews. Both Sephardic Jews and Mizrahi Jews are more likely than Ashkenazi Jews to be born and/or raised outside the United States, to be politically moderate or conservative, and to be economically vulnerable.⁵ Ashkenazi Jews are the most likely of the three groups to have a graduate degree, followed by Sephardic Jews and Mizrahi Jews, which likely reflects, at least in part, the younger ages of Mizrahim.

In New York, the combined group Sephardic/Mizrahi is substantially less likely to identify as any non-white race or as Persons of Color. In other respects, though, Sephardic/Mizrahi Jews in New York do not appear to differ dramatically from their counterparts in the CMJS studies.

“

Sephardic and Mizrahi Jews should not be assumed to be white—but most also do not identify with racialized categories like POC or JOC.

NOTEWORTHY FACTS

- ➔ Among younger Jews (under 32), 16% identify as Sephardic or Mizrahi (Birthright survey)
- ➔ That’s higher than what national estimates suggest for the adult Jewish population in the US
- ➔ The data suggest that younger Jews are more likely to identify as Sephardic or Mizrahi than older Jews.

Birthright Israel survey data from summer 2020, 2021, and 2022 applicants, all of whom are younger than age 32, provide further evidence that younger Jews are more likely to identify as Sephardic or Mizrahi than older Jews. More specifically, a higher share of the surveyed Birthright participants (16%) identify as Sephardic or Mizrahi than Pew (7%) or local study respondents (10%) who are comprised of respondents of all adult ages.



JEWISH CHARACTERISTICS

The seven CMJS studies also allow for a comparison of Jewish behaviors and attitudes across Ashkenazi, Sephardic and Mizrahi respondents (Table 3.4). Across the three groups, Mizrahi Jews have the highest rates of communal participation, the highest likelihood of being Israel and strongest connections to Israel, the highest share of respondents who say being Jewish is somewhat or very much a part of their daily life,⁶ and the lowest intermarriage rates.⁷ In contrast, Ashkenazi Jews have the lowest rates of communal participation,

the weakest connections to Israel, the smallest share of those who say being Jewish is somewhat or very much a part of their daily life, and the highest intermarriage rates. On all of the measures, Sephardic Jews score between Mizrahi and Ashkenazi Jews. Data on the combined Sephardic/Mizrahi group in New York shows they may be somewhat more religiously observant, more likely to travel to Israel, and less likely to be intermarried than Sephardic and Mizrahi Jews in the CMJS studies.

Table 3.4 Selected Jewish Behaviors and Attitudes, CMJS and New York Studies

| | CMJS Studies Combined | | | New York | CMJS and New York |
|---|-----------------------|-----------------------|---------------------|--------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| | Ashkenazi, any (%) | Sephardic, any (%) | Mizrahi, any (%) | Sephardic/ Mizrahi, any (%) | Sephardic/ Mizrahi, any (%) |
| Fast on Yom Kippur | 48 | 65 | 80 | 86 | 77 |
| Attend High Holiday services | 45 | 51 | 60 | - | - |
| Belong to synagogue/ congregation | 27 | 35 | 41 | 47 | 44 |
| Volunteered for Jewish organization | 26 | 31 | 38 | - | - |
| Donate to Jewish organization | 52 | 66 | 69 | - | - |
| Being Jewish is somewhat or very much a part of daily life | 60 | 68 | 88 | - | - |
| Travel to Israel at least once (among those who have NOT lived in Israel) | 60 | 62 | 82 | 80 | 65 |
| Lived in Israel | 10 | 16 | 28 | 14 | 16 |
| Israeli citizen | 5 | 15 | 31 | - | - |
| Emotionally connected to Israel—somewhat or very much | 69 | 79 | 80 | 76 | 77 |
| Married to non-Jewish spouse (among those married) | 36 | 34 | 23 | 19 | 25 |

Note: percentages are rounded to the nearest whole number.

NOTES

- 1 See the Methodology Appendix for more information about these studies. Neither the Pew Research Center, UJA Federation of New York, nor SSRS bear any responsibility for the analyses presented here.
- 2 In addition, the Pew Research Center survey and New York survey use the term Sephardic, while CMJS surveys use Sephardi. For consistency's sake in this report, we use Sephardic.
- 3 By way of contrast, the Brandeis researchers estimate the share of the US Jewish population that identifies as Ashkenazi ranges from 71% to 76%.
- 4 MENA percentages are those who first said their race was "other" and then wrote in a MENA country.
- 5 Economically vulnerable defined as answering "can't make ends meet" or "just managing to make ends meet" on a question asking for self-assessment of current financial situation, as opposed to answering have enough money, have some extra money, or well off.
- 6 As opposed to a little or not at all.
- 7 Among those who are married.