

# How do Jews live their Jewishness?

## Religious lifestyles and denominations of European Jews

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## Introduction

This short paper draws on data gathered for the 2018 European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA) survey of Jewish perceptions and experiences of antisemitism.

Over 16,000 self-defined Jews participated in 12 EU countries, which together are home to about 80% of all Jews in Europe. Along with data about perceptions of antisemitism, the survey collected information on Jewish identity: how Jews define their Judaism, their essential Jewish values, the different modes of expression of their Jewishness, and the extent of their participation in Jewish rituals and traditions.

In this short report, we present some key findings to help answer a central question: **how do Jews experience and manifest their Jewishness?** Is it about choosing an ideal model of living as a Jew, observing Jewish rituals in a certain way, developing a network of relations with other Jews who choose the same Jewish lifestyle, meeting Jewish peers in a particular type of synagogue, or related to the intensity and frequency of expressing Jewish beliefs, values, and behaviours? And why does any of this matter?

## The main report

More detailed analyses can be found in the JPR report, *The Jewish identities of European Jews: What, why and how?* by Professor Sergio DellaPergola and Dr Daniel Staetsky.

## The key question: How do Jews live their Jewishness?

The question of Jewish identity in Europe, and how it evolves over time, varies depending on the types of Jews examined. No serious answer can be provided without understanding the complex prism of contemporary Jewish voices.

**How is personal Jewishness expressed?** Through their personal choices and associational networks, individuals declare, perform and represent a model of how, in their view, one can, and perhaps should, behave as a Jew. The emphasis here is on what Jews do rather than what Jews think or feel. Adherents to each mode of Jewish expression may feel they embody a type believed to be more authentic and/or relevant than other types – hence the certain amount of tension and confrontation that sometimes exists between the different types.

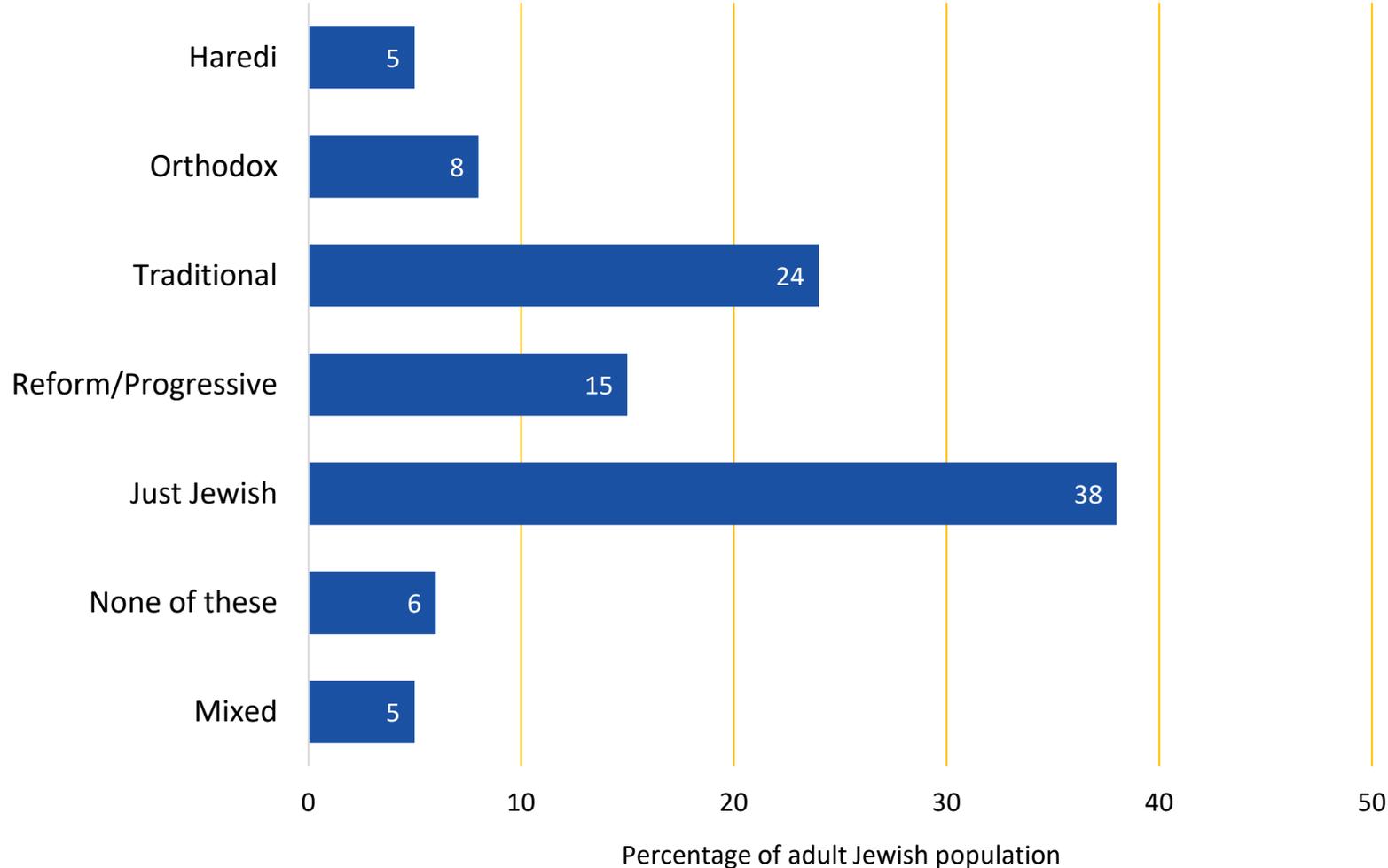
Alternative models nowadays can be that of the *haredi* (strictly Orthodox) Jew, the modern Orthodox Jew, the Reform or Progressive Jew (and the Conservative in the US), the agnostic Jew, the ‘Just Jewish’ Jew (who does not associate with any particular denomination), the ‘none of these’ Jew (who stands even more distant from any form of recognised Jewish association), or even the mixed Jewish/non-Jewish Jew.

## The policy problem

Is there a singular Jewish voice – or a majority Jewish voice – that represents the entire community? If so, who holds it?

In today’s political culture, understanding lifestyle differences inside ethnic and religious groups is critical, both to understand their needs and concerns, and to address them. Different subgroups, especially those defined by their degree of religiosity or observance, may have different sensitivities and reactions to policy initiatives.

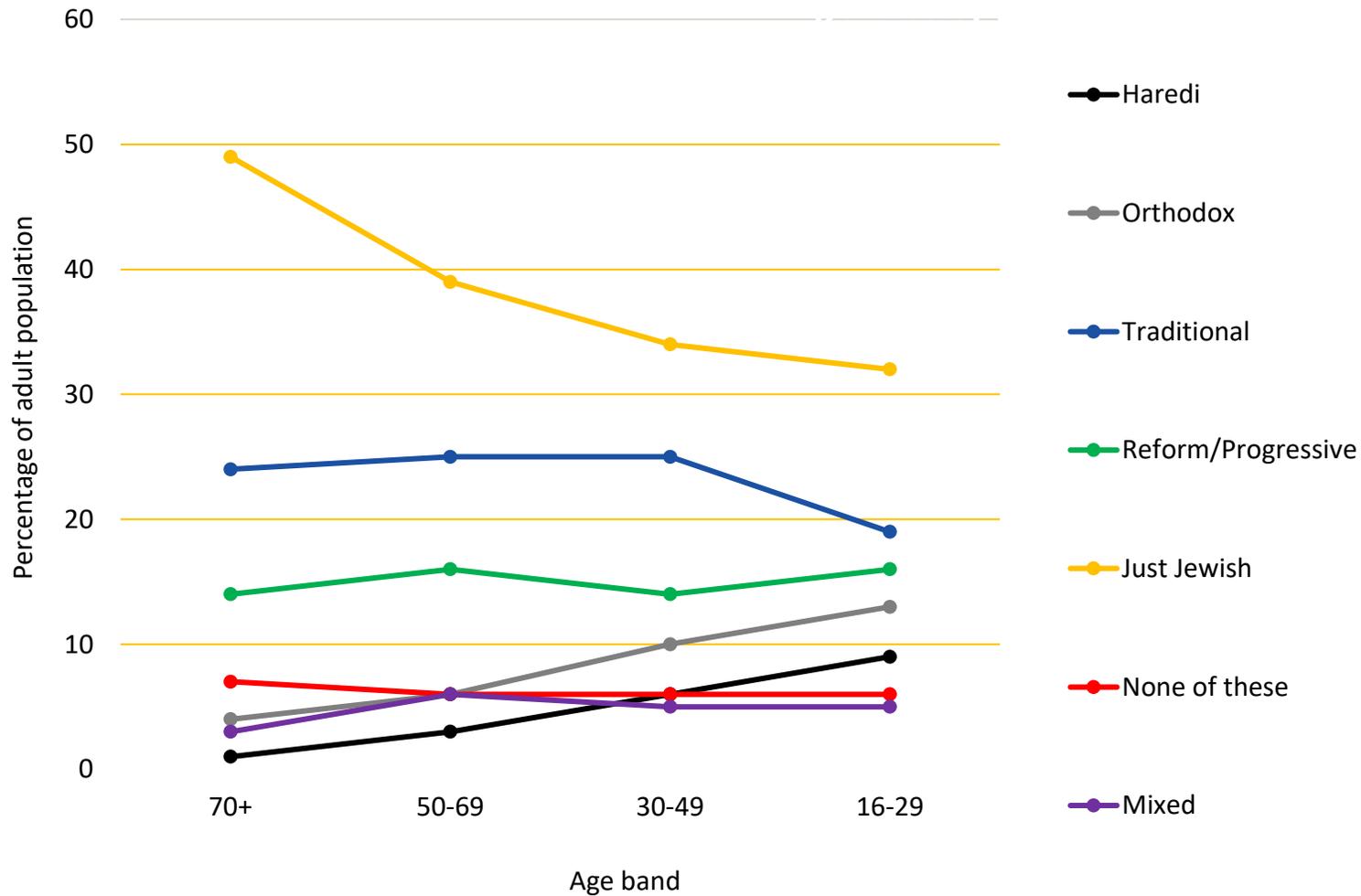
## There is no majority lifestyle, or denomination, among European Jews today; European Jewry is significantly fragmented



### Key insights

The most numerically significant subgroup is the 'Just Jewish' – a general category indicating no clear denominational alignment – followed by the 'Traditional' – who, in terms of levels of religious observance, sit between the 'Orthodox' and the 'Reform/Progressive.' The most observant – 'Haredi' and 'Orthodox' – constitute a minority among adults at present, but if children (under 16s) were included in these data, the proportion Haredi/Orthodox would be close to 20%, as these groups typically have more children than the others.

## The Jewish population of Europe is currently experiencing a process of desecularisation

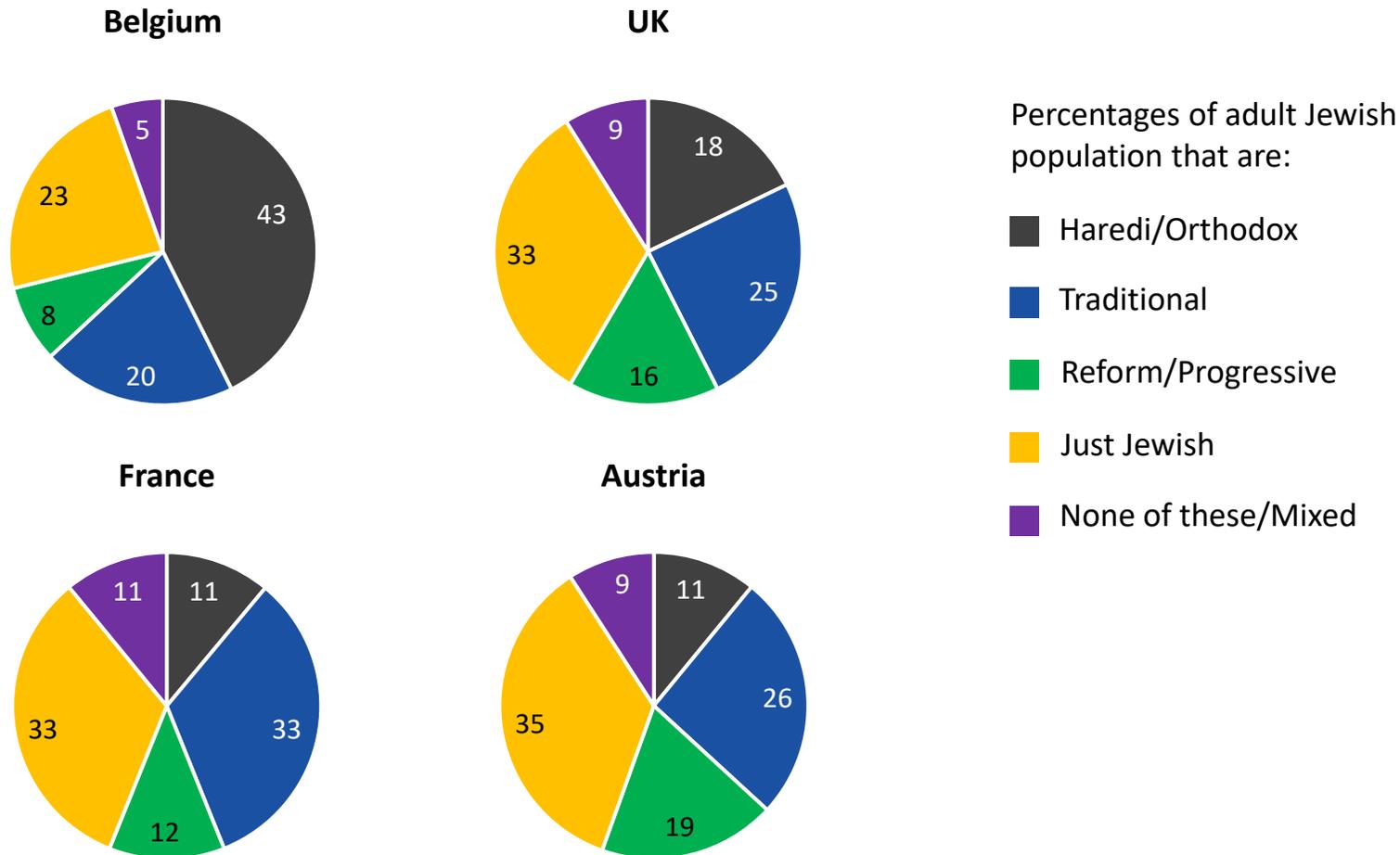


### Key insights

Desecularisation is a process of returning to religion. In this case the change is both ideational and demographic. Today across Europe the share of more religious persons (Haredi and Orthodox) among younger age groups is substantially larger than among the older. Over 20% of Jews under 30 are either Haredi or Orthodox compared to just 5% of those 70 and over.

Not every European Jewish community is moving in this direction, but it is clearly happening in the UK, Belgium and Austria.

## Jews in Austria, Belgium, France and the UK are markedly more traditionalist than elsewhere

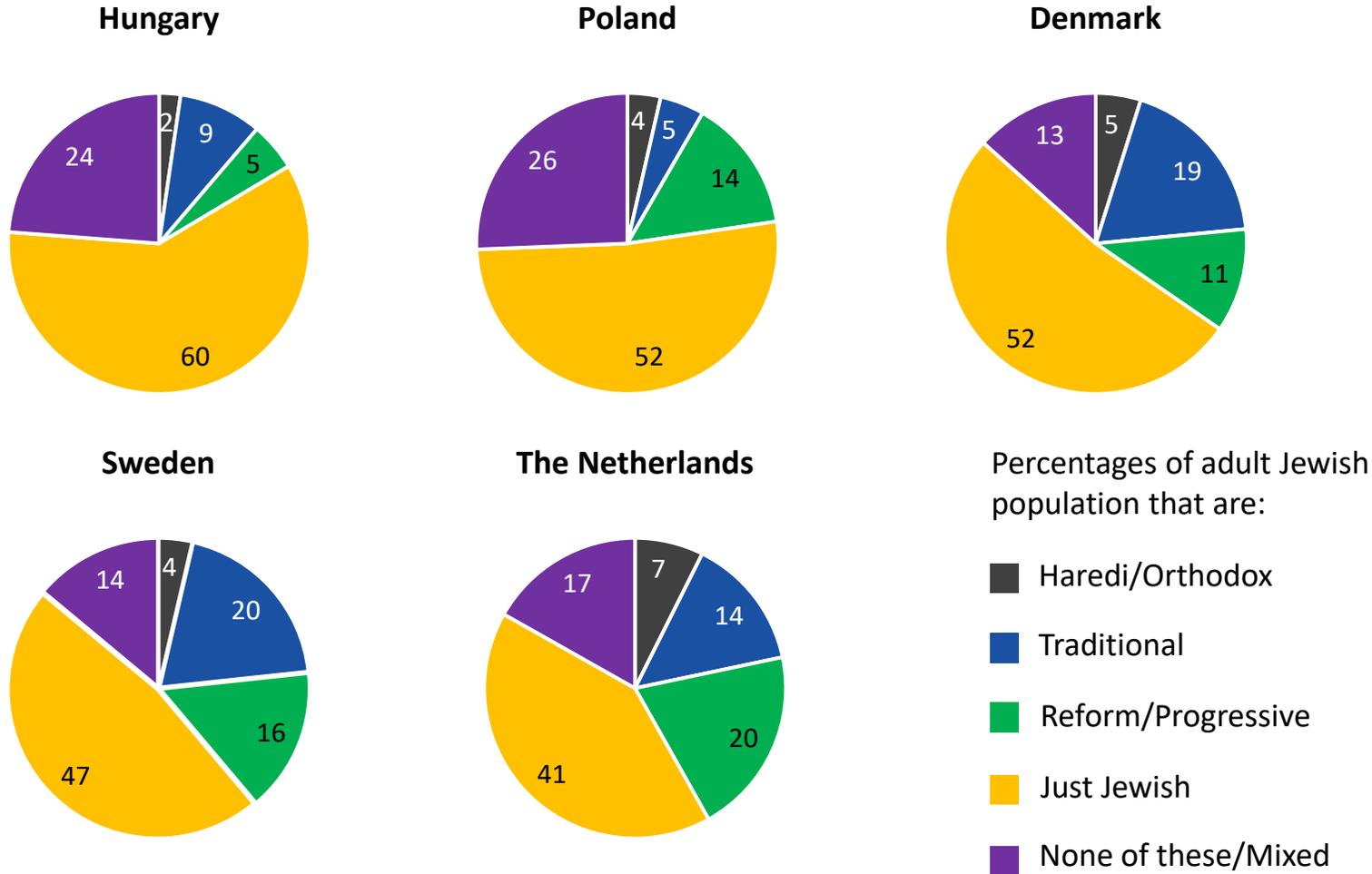


### Key insights

The most traditional communities are those in Western Europe. In these communities about 40%-60% of adult Jews identify as Traditional, Orthodox or Haredi.

Grouping these lifestyles together is, of course, a rough approximation. There are considerable differences between them, but even when taken in combination they form a clear majority only in Belgium.

## Jews are more often more secularised and agnostic in Northern and Eastern Europe

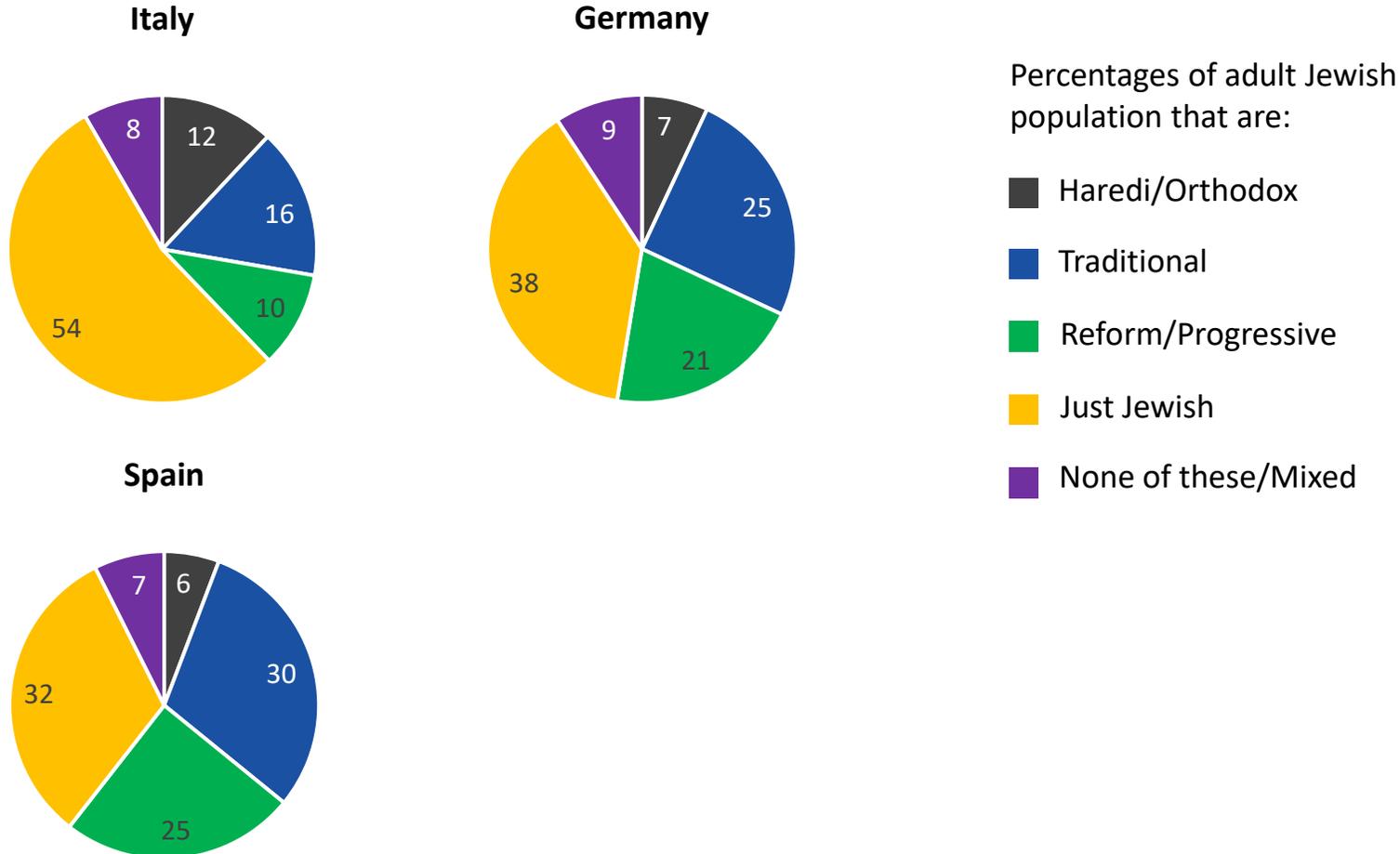


### Key insights

The less traditionally observant lifestyles (maximally defined as a combination of Reform/Progressive, Just Jewish, Nones and Mixed) are in the 74%-78% range in Denmark, Sweden and the Netherlands, and reach 90% in Hungary and Poland. Arguably, the greatest homogeneity of lifestyles/least fragmentation is observed across the least religious countries.

These different modes of Jewish self-expression still feature significant disagreements in terms of views and preferences.

## Jews in Mediterranean Europe and Germany have a moderately traditional outlook

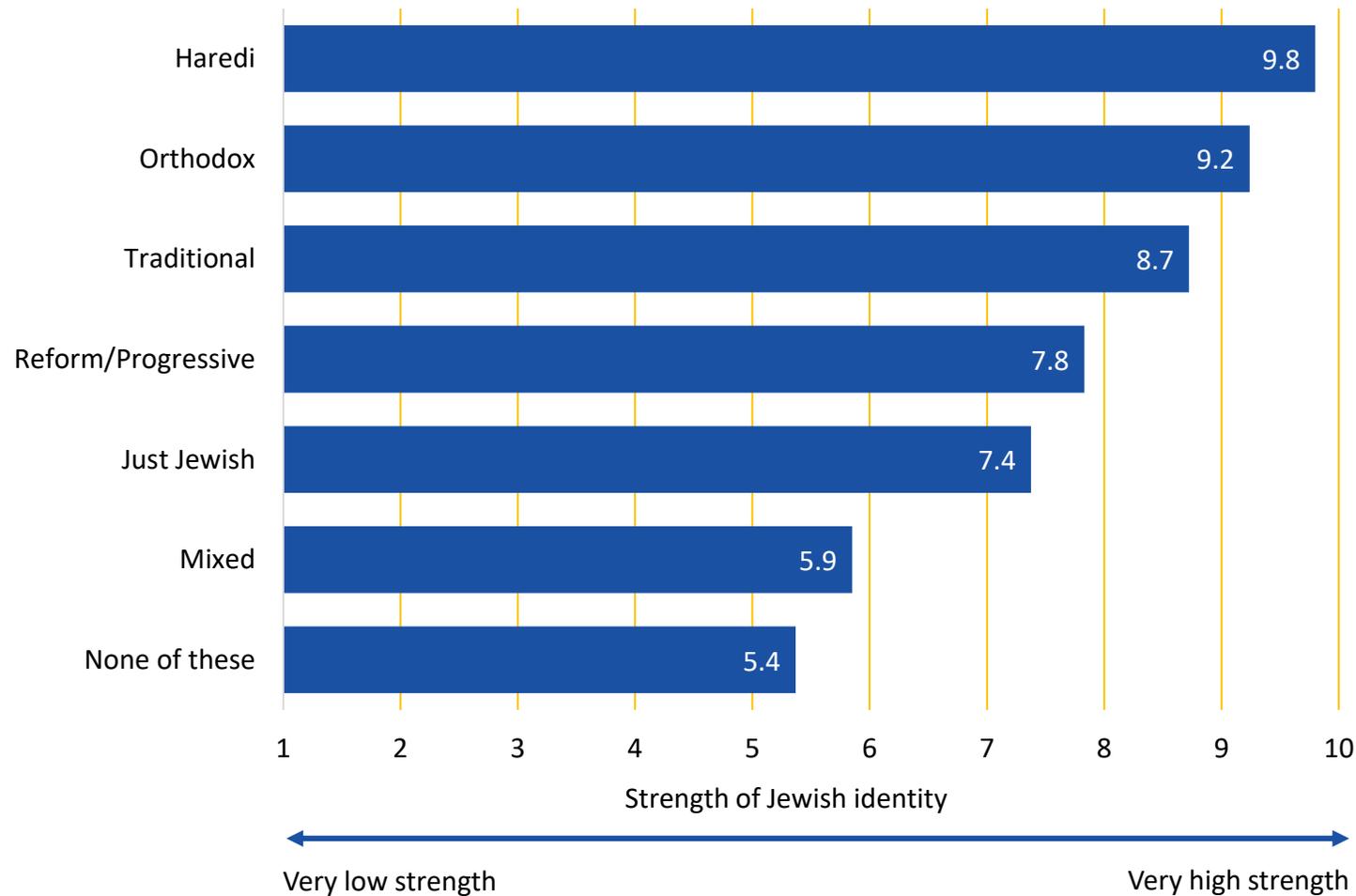


### Key insights

In moderately traditional Jewish communities, the proportion of Haredi, Orthodox and Traditional combined is in the range of approximately 25%-40%. This falls between the most traditional communities where it is always above 40%, and the least traditional communities where it is invariably below 25%.

In these communities too, fragmentation is significant.

## The strength of self-assessed Jewish identity differs significantly across different denominational groups

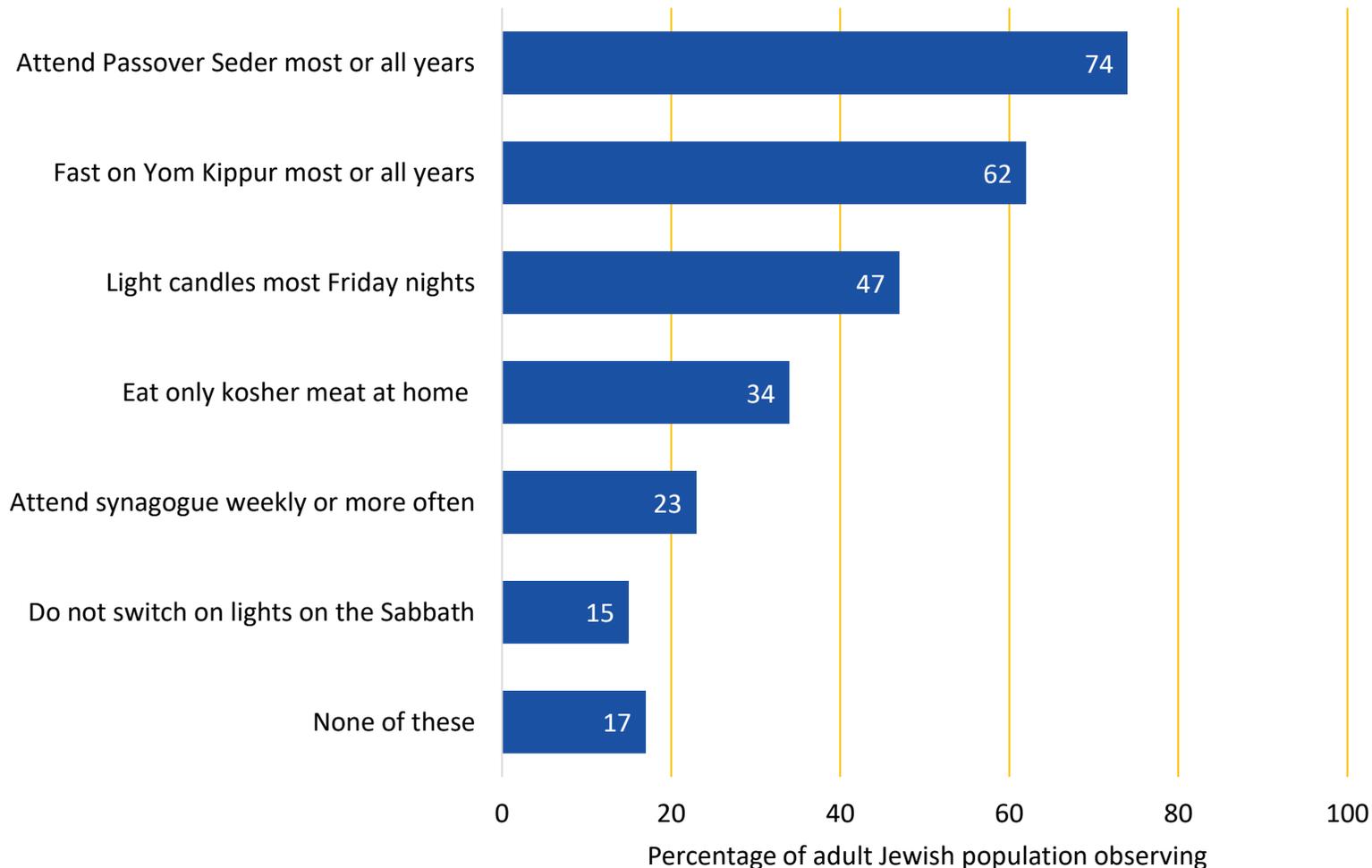


### Key insights

Different denominational groups report different strengths of Jewish identity. Strength of self-assessed Jewish identity correlates with strength of religious observance.

On a scale of 1 to 10, where 1 = the weakest Jewish identity and 10 = the strongest, Haredi and Orthodox Jews report the strongest values. Those who are 'Jewish and something else' (Mixed), and those who could not identify themselves in terms of any the suggested identity categories, report the weakest Jewish identity.

## The Passover Seder and fasting on Yom Kippur are the most observed Jewish rituals across the Jewish population as a whole; strict Sabbath observance is the least common



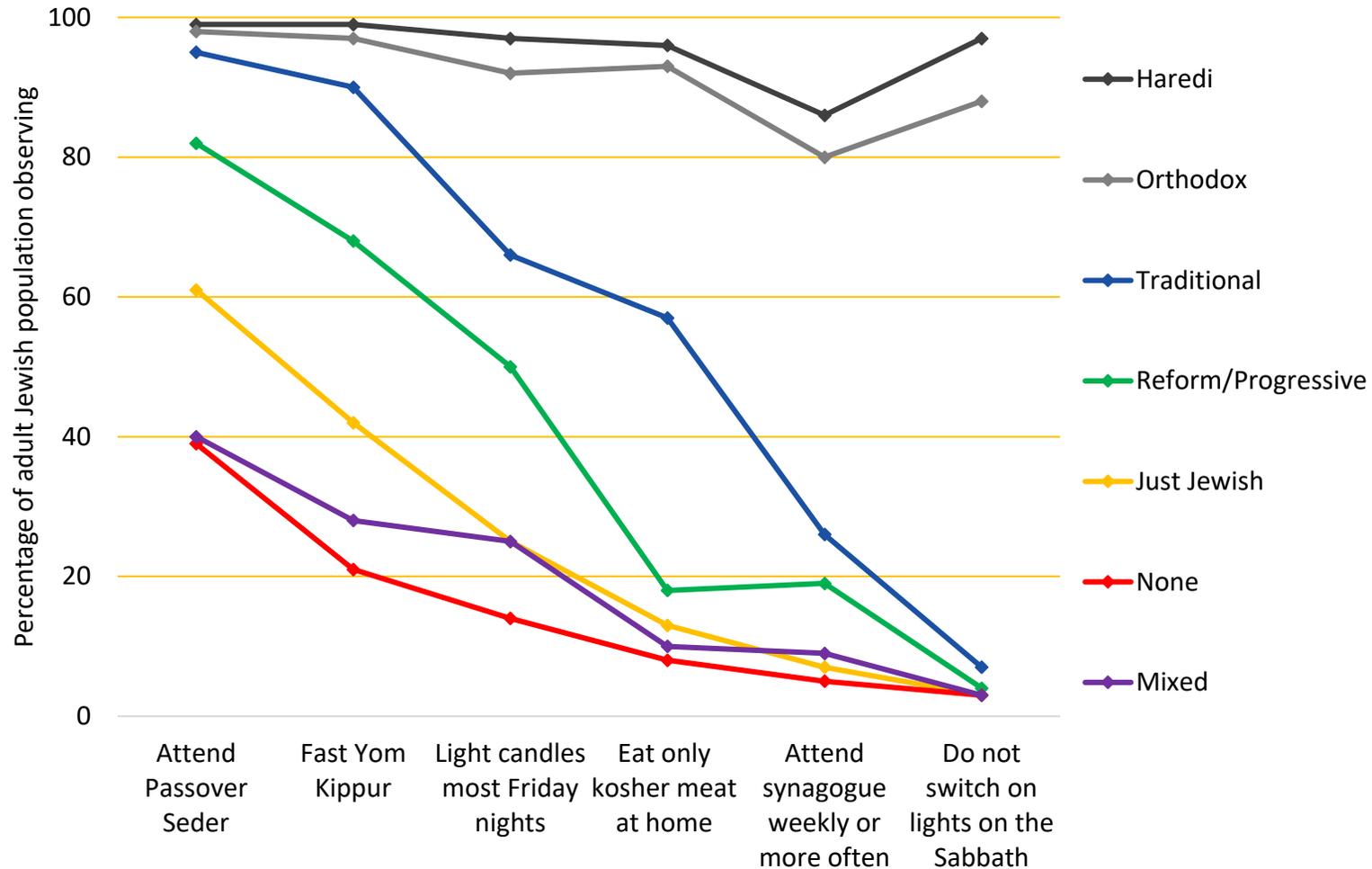
### Key insights

Attending a Passover Seder and fasting on Yom Kippur are widely observed by all Jews, including those outside of the Haredi/Orthodox fold.

Lighting candles on Friday night and keeping kosher at home are also broader than the Haredi/Orthodox base, albeit less so.

Not switching lights on or off on Shabbat (i.e. not using electricity) is observed by a proportion very close to the combined proportion of Haredi and Orthodox.

## Observance of Jewish rituals varies significantly across denominational groups, although the Haredi and Orthodox lead on all practices

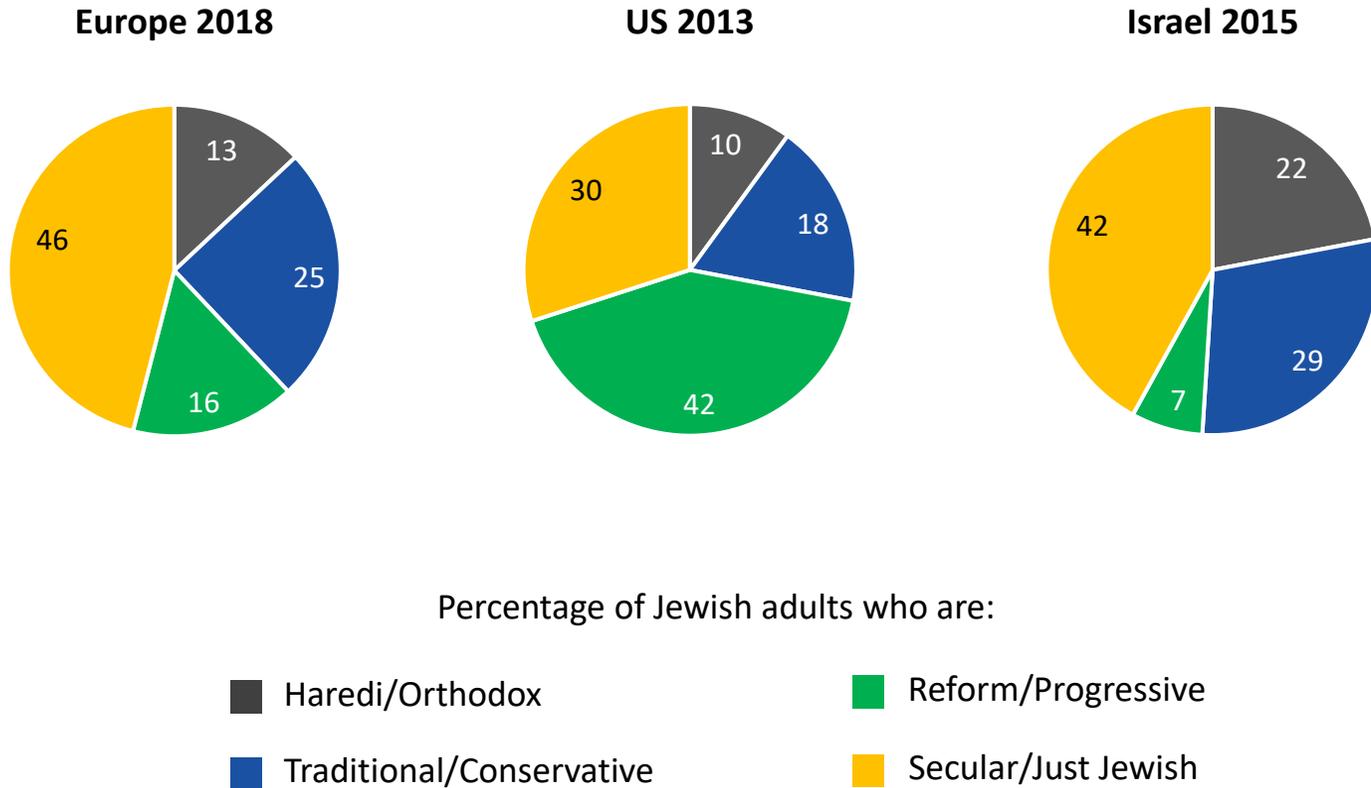


### Key insights

Adherence to Jewish rituals and practices declines with decline in traditional observance, but is still present even among the least observant.

A majority of the 'Just Jewish' attends a Passover Seder, and 40% of them fast on Yom Kippur. 40% of 'Mixed' attend a seder and 30% fast on Yom Kippur. The rituals least adhered to by the least traditionally observant groups are those that are more demanding in terms of time and effort, or that require a high degree of belief in *halacha* (Jewish law).

# Just like European Jews, American and Israeli Jews lack a majority lifestyle when it comes to religious observance



## Key insights

Consistent with other findings, Israeli Jews are notably more traditionally observant than European or American Jews. People who define themselves as either Haredi, Orthodox or Traditional form about 50% of Israeli Jews. In Europe and the US, they constitute 38% and 28% respectively.

European Jews and American Jews differ from one another most notably in terms of the presence of Reform/Progressive Jews (considerably higher in the USA). Secular/Just Jewish Jews are considerably higher in Europe, and similar in proportion to Israel.

## European Jews: an array of religiosities

European Jews are fragmented in terms of their religious observance. There is no clear majority lifestyle. Those identifying as 'Just Jewish' (the least religiously observant) are a plurality, but a minority nevertheless. Strong religious observance is also a minority lifestyle, but a process of desecularisation can be observed, meaning proportionally more younger than older people are religiously observant. This change is driven by much higher birth rates among the most observant than the least observant. The Jewish communities of the United Kingdom, Austria, and probably Belgium, are at the forefront of this process.

**The lack of a clear majority lifestyle when it comes to religious observance is a shared characteristic of European, American and Israeli Jews.** The most traditionally observant among Europe's Jews are most likely to practise all religious rituals, with ritual adherence more or less universal among the Haredi and Orthodox. However, significant levels of selective adherence are observed in the less observant groups too. The vast majority of Reform/Progressive Jews participate in a Passover seder and fast on Yom Kippur, as does a very significant proportion of the 'Just Jewish'.

The real division between the more and less traditionally observant groups appears facing the most demanding religious rituals in terms of time, effort or strict adherence to halacha (Jewish law): not switching lights on or off on Shabbat (i.e. not using electricity), observing the laws of kashrut, and attending synagogue weekly. These rituals and practises are adhered to only by a minority of Reform/Progressive Jews, and a very small minority of the 'Just Jewish'.

## Key insights

On some matters, Jewish communities can be expected to speak with something approaching unanimity; on others, multiple voices are highly likely. Jews, like other minorities, have internal divisions and an array of lifestyle and politics. Policy makers searching for a singular 'authentic Jewish voice' should take these realities into consideration. External actors should not think of Jews as one compact religious community. There are important internal distinctions, even though awareness of being part of one collective cuts across these differences

## About the survey

The data in this report come from the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA) 2018 survey on discrimination and hate crime against Jews in the EU. Fieldwork was conducted online by Ipsos in May-June 2018. Advice on questionnaire development, access to Jewish communities and information on Jewish demography and social statistics necessary for the survey distribution and calibration were supplied by JPR.

To be eligible to participate in the survey, respondents were required to self-identify as Jewish, and confirm that they were aged 16 or above, and lived in an EU Member State covered by the survey (Austria, Belgium, Denmark, France, Germany, Hungary, Italy, the Netherlands, Poland, Spain, Sweden, and the United Kingdom). The online questionnaire was available in 13 languages. The final dataset contains 16,359 responses. The largest samples were obtained from the UK (4,728) and France (3,864), the two countries with the largest Jewish populations in Europe. Samples of over 1,000 respondents were obtained in Germany, the Netherlands and Sweden. Elsewhere, they were in the range of 400-800. The total sample contains about 2% of the total number of Jews in the countries covered by the survey – a very high proportion. In some countries (e.g. Poland and Denmark) about 9% of all Jews took part; in others (e.g. France, Hungary and Germany), about 1% did – still considered high by existing standards in the survey industry).

## Key facts

The data in this report come from the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA) 2018 survey on discrimination and hate crime against Jews in the European Union, which was undertaken for FRA by the Institute for Jewish Policy Research and Ipsos.

The survey was the largest ever conducted among European Jews, and has played a key role in understanding and combating antisemitism in Europe.

## About the sample

The data were gathered by targeting the membership and subscriber lists of a broadly-selected cross section of Jewish organisations across Europe, and the subsequent referral of the survey by the first wave of respondents to their Jewish relatives, friends, acquaintances and colleagues. This generated a convenience sample, the representativeness of which was assessed by comparing the distributions of selected sociodemographic variables in the sample with external sources (e.g. census data, surveys and community statistics), including geography, gender, age and communal affiliation. After initial assessment and comparison with the benchmarks, weights were created and applied in order to redress the sample for over- or under-representation of certain subgroups among Jews.

## The question on which this paper is based

The data in this paper are based primarily on respondents' answers to the question: '**Which of the following comes closest to describing your current Jewish identity?**': (1) Just Jewish; (2) Reform/Progressive; (3) Traditional; (4) Orthodox (e.g. would not turn on a light on Sabbath); (5) Haredi (strictly-Orthodox); (6) Mixed – I am both Jewish and another religion; (7) None of these.

## More about the survey

Further details of the methodology can be found in: European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights. 2019. *Second survey on discrimination and hate crime against Jews in EU Member States. Technical Report.* Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union.



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