

# Yom Ha'atzmaut and Yom HaZikaron: the observance of Israel commemoration days by UK Jews

Factsheet

Dr David Graham

May 2024



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The JPR UK Jewish population research panel is designed to gather data on Jewish people's attitudes, beliefs, behaviours and preferences to help support planning across the community. In this paper, we draw on data from close to 5,000 JPR research panel members who participated in our 2022 UK National Jewish Identity Survey, to explore which types of Jews are most likely to celebrate Israel's Independence and Memorial days.

## / Introduction

Yom Hazikaron – Israel's Memorial Day – is a commemoration day when Israelis and Jews worldwide remember fallen soldiers and victims of terrorism. It is a day of solemnity that is followed immediately by Yom Ha'atzmaut, Israel's Independence Day, which, by contrast, is a day of celebration marking the anniversary of the birth of the modern Jewish State. Unlike most Jewish holidays, both of these events are fundamentally secular in nature. JPR has not previously explored the participation of Jews in the UK in either Israel Memorial Day commemorations or Israel Independence Day celebrations in the UK.

The data in this paper are from a survey JPR carried out in late 2022 of Jews aged 16 and above living in the UK (N=4,891).<sup>1</sup> They are based on a question which asked respondents: "Over the past 12 months, which of the following, if any, have you observed or marked, either in person or online?" with two of the four options being 'Israel Independence Day (Yom Ha'atzmaut)' and 'Israel Memorial Day (Yom HaZikaron)'. Since the COVID-19 pandemic was still lingering in early May 2022 when these events would have taken place, the question also incorporated an option for online participation.

The data were obtained ten months prior the events of 7th October 2023, so they do not reflect any impact the ensuing war between Israel and Hamas may have had on the propensity of Jews to mark either of these occasions.

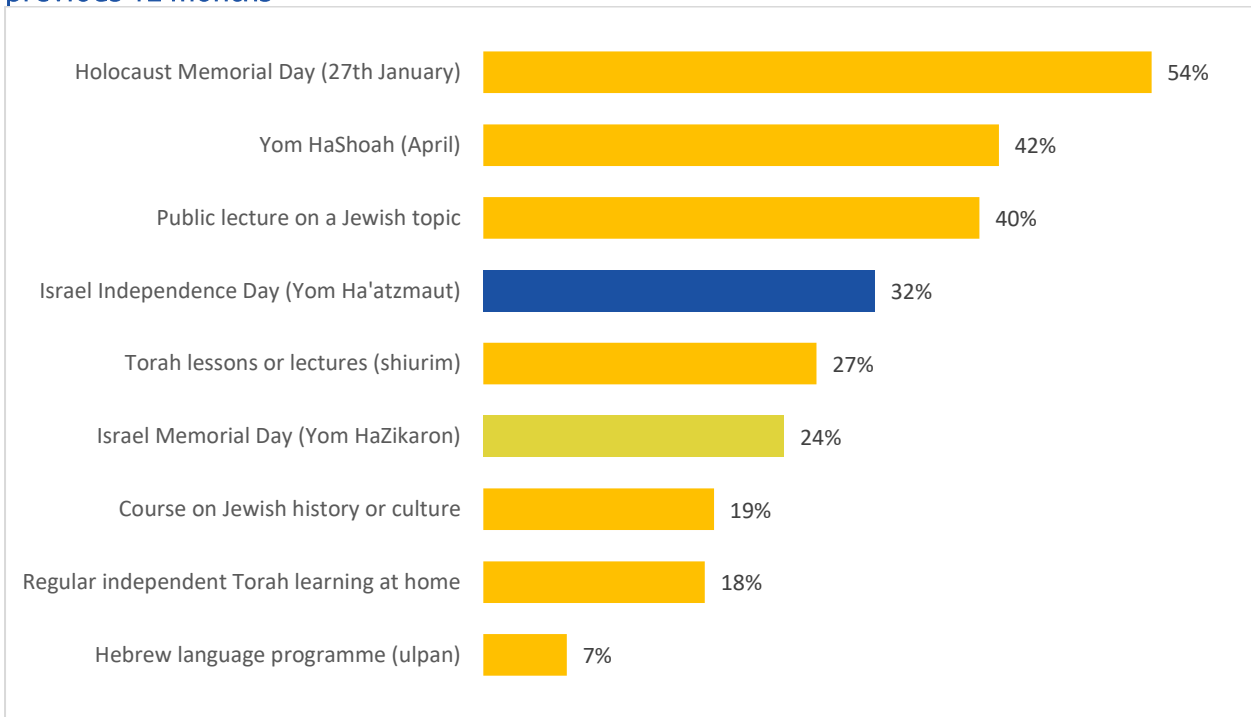
## / Topline participation

JPR was interested not only to understand the extent to which Jews in Britain participated in either or both of these commemorative days, but also who participated, i.e. which sub-sections of Jewish society were more likely than others to do so. We found that just under a quarter of adult Jews (24%) had observed or marked Yom HaZikaron 'either in person or online' in the previous twelve months (i.e. in 2022), and a slightly higher proportion, one in three (32%), had observed or marked Yom Ha'atzmaut that year (Figure 1). To contextualise these figures, marking these days is considerably less common than marking Holocaust Memorial Day (27 January), which over half (54%) of UK Jews did in 2022, but considerably more common than, for example, attending a course on Jewish history (19%) or Hebrew (7%) in the twelve months prior to the survey. Therefore, as events, both of these days can be considered relatively peripheral in the UK Jewish calendar, but they still garner broader participation than either Jewish religious or cultural courses and programmes.

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<sup>1</sup> Graham, D. and Boyd, J. (2024). [Jews in the UK today: Key findings from the JPR National Jewish Identity Survey](#). London: Institute for Jewish Policy Research.

**Figure 1. Yom HaZikaron and Yom Ha'atzmaut in context: Jewish activities carried out within the previous 12 months**

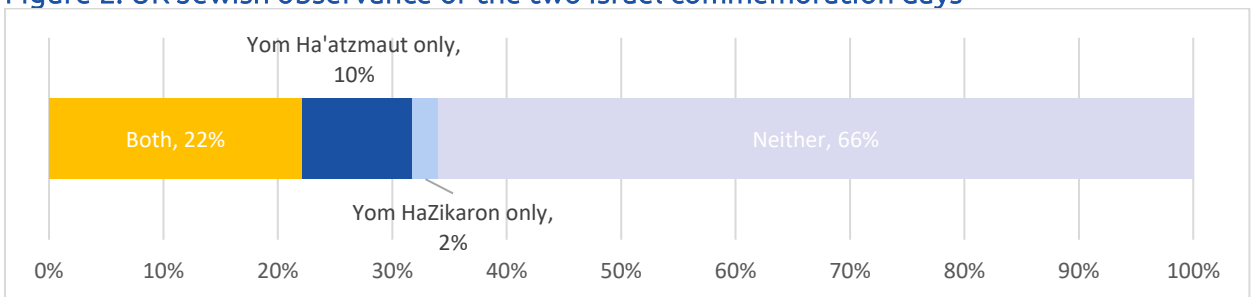


Question: *And over the past 12 months, which of the following, if any, have you observed or marked either in person or online?*

Question: *And thinking about the past 12 months, have you participated in any of these specific activities, either in person or online?*

Overall, one in three (33%) UK Jews had marked one, other or both events (Figure 2). One in five (22%) had marked both days, a further 10% had marked only Yom Ha'atzmaut, and just 2% had marked only Yom HaZikaron. But a majority of Jews, two out of three (66%), marked neither.

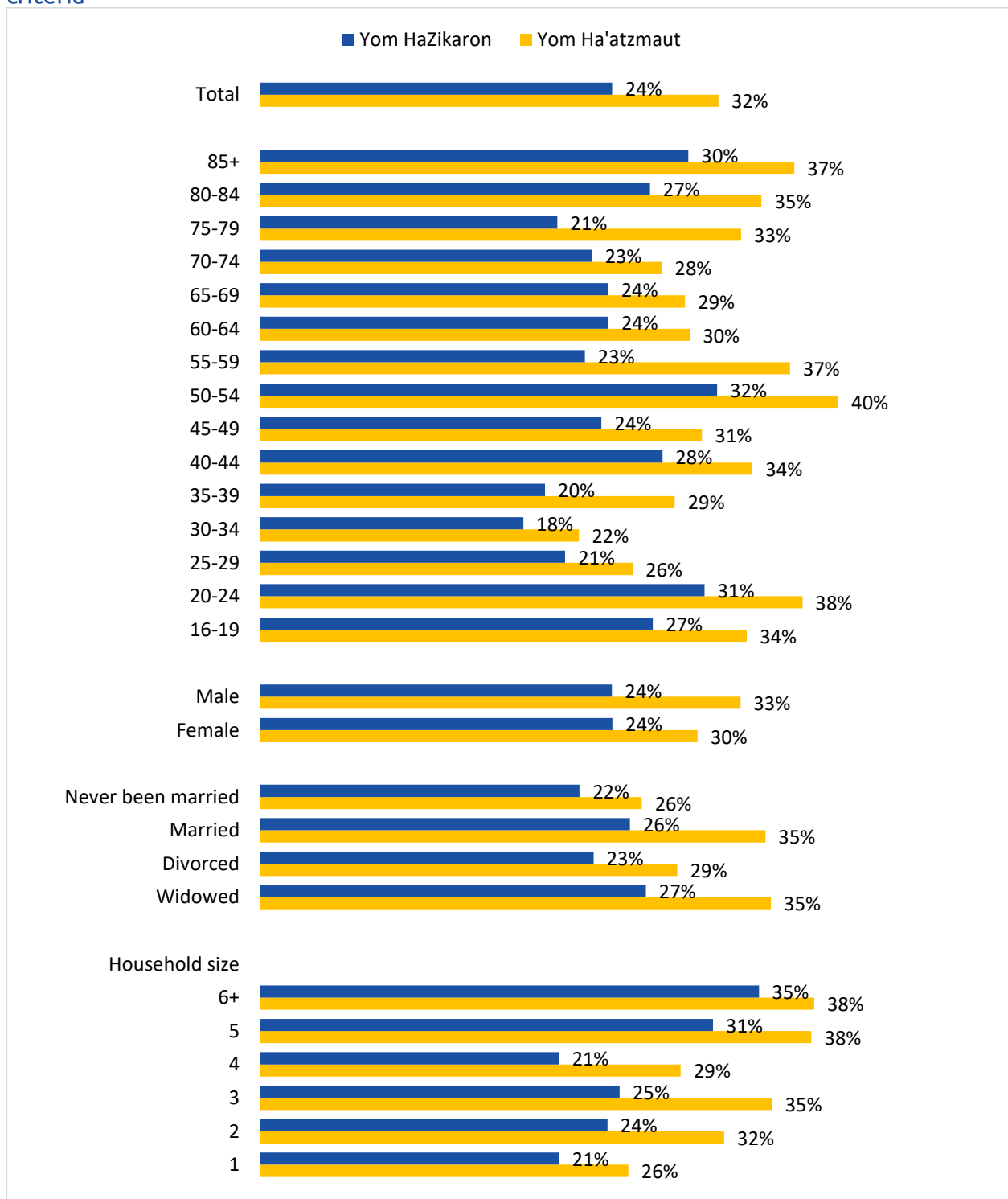
**Figure 2. UK Jewish observance of the two Israel commemoration days**



### / Which demographics participate?

There are three age groups that are more likely to participate than others. Jews aged in their early 20s, in their 50s and those aged in their 80s and older. Nevertheless, all age groups participate. Jewish people who are married or widowed are more likely to observe these occasions than those who have never been married or who are divorced. And broadly speaking, those living in larger households are more likely to observe these events than those living in smaller households.

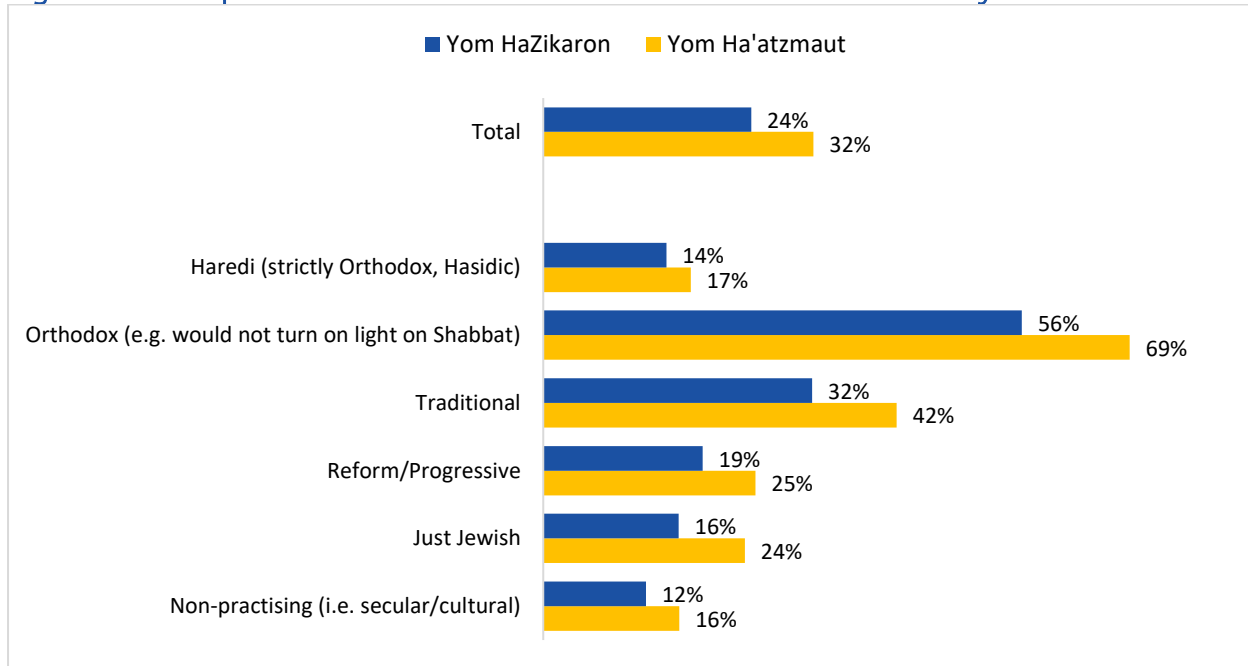
Figure 3. Participation in a Yom HaZikaron and Yom Ha'atzmaut event, by various demographic criteria



## / Participation by Jewish religious identity

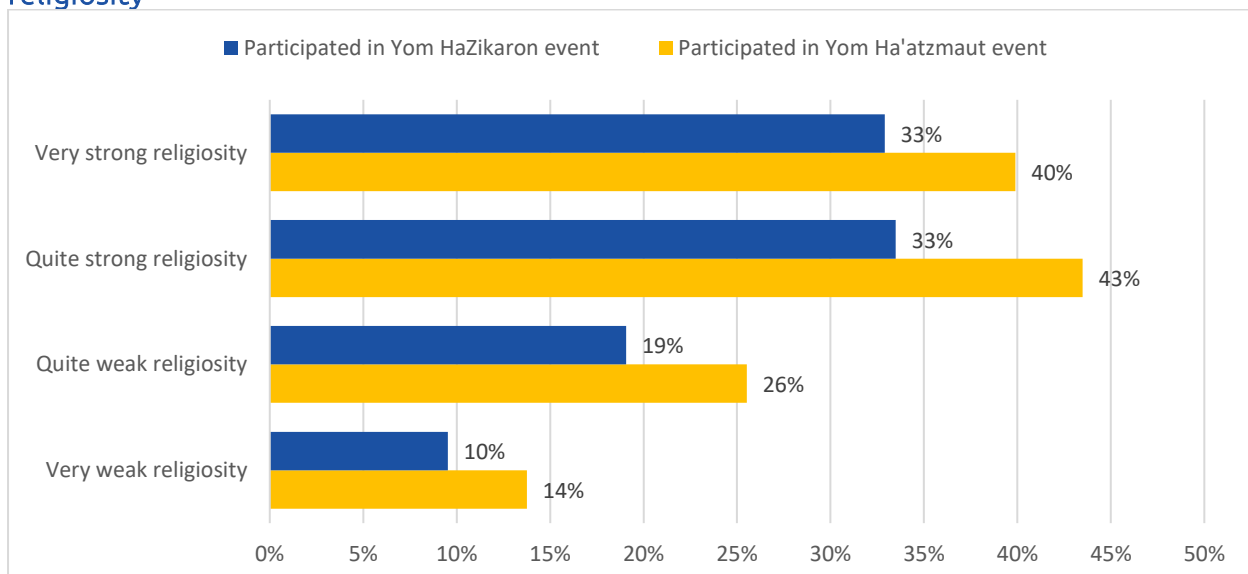
These Israel events are most likely to be observed by 'Orthodox' Jews, with 69% of this group participating in a Yom Ha'atzmaut event, although this notably does not include Haredi (strictly Orthodox) Jews who are one of the groups *least likely* to observe either of them (Figure 4). Jews who described themselves as 'Traditional' are more likely than average to observe either of them; all other groups are less likely to do so than average.

Figure 4. Participation in a Yom HaZikaron and Yom Ha'atzmaut event by Jewish strand



In this context, it is not surprising that overall, the more religious a person is, the more likely they were to have participated in either of these events, although Haredim slightly distort the relationship (**Error! Not a valid bookmark self-reference.**). For example, 33% of those with 'very strong' religiosity participated in a Yom HaZikaron event, as did 33% of those with 'quite strong' religiosity, but only 19% of those with 'quite weak' religiosity did so.

Figure 5. Whether participated in a Yom HaZikaron or Yom Ha'atzmaut event, by level of religiosity

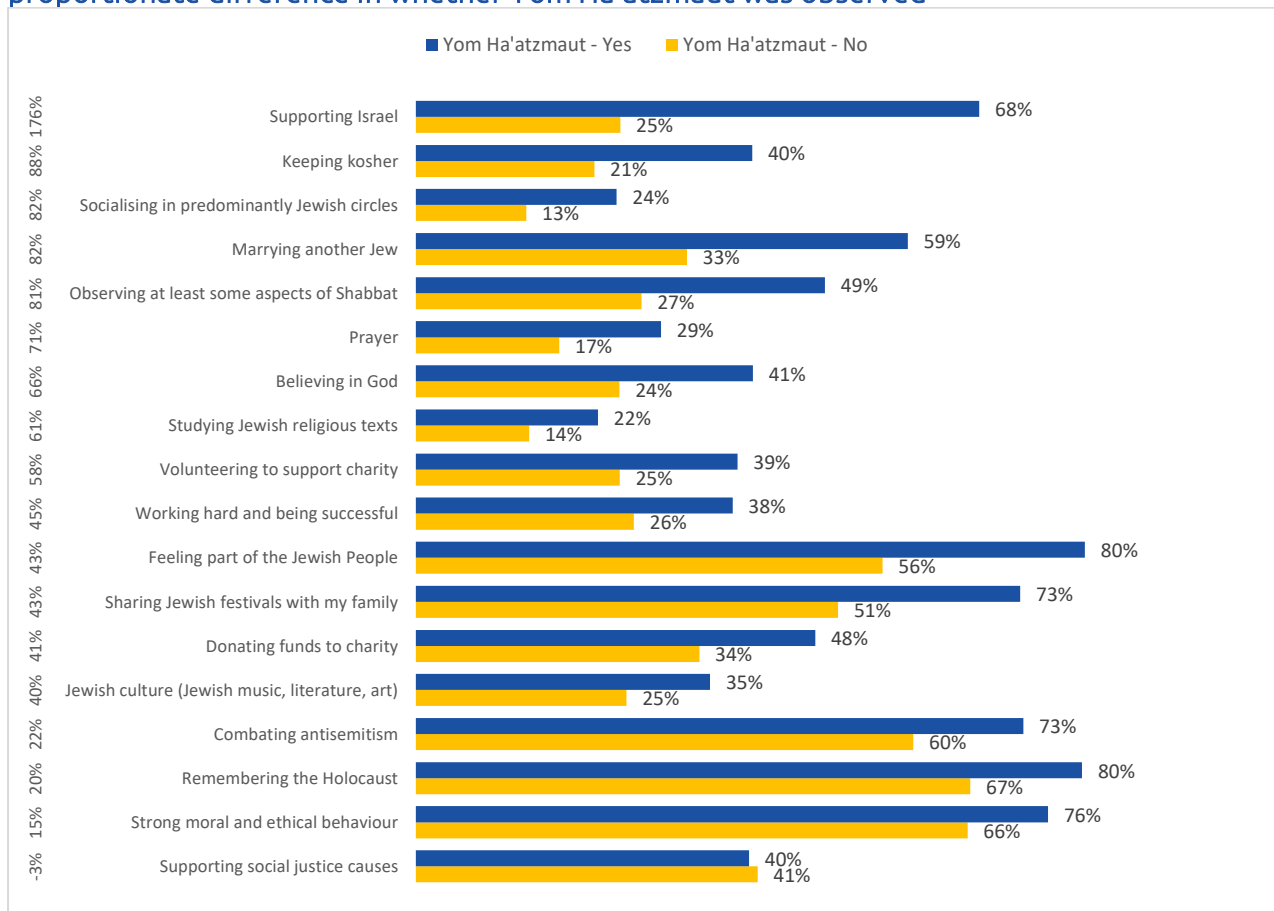


## / Participation by Jewish identity markers

The survey contained a battery of questions exploring how important various dimensions of Jewish identity are to how each respondent sees themselves as a Jewish person. Focusing on Yom Ha'atzmaut, we can compare those who did participate in an event with those who did not, for each of these aspects of Jewishness (see Figure 6). In general, those who participated in a Yom Ha'atzmaut event were more likely to say each of these dimensions was 'very important' to their own sense of Jewish identity than those who did not participate. For example, among those who participated in a Yom Ha'atzmaut event, 68% said that supporting Israel is very important to how they see themselves as a Jewish person, whereas among those who did not participate in such an event, only 25% said this. In proportionate terms, those marking Yom Ha'atzmaut in some way were 176% more likely to say supporting Israel is very important than those who did not do so (indicated on the left hand side of the chart in Figure 6). This is the greatest proportionate difference of all eighteen dimensions of Jewishness listed, and the chart is ordered on this basis. The smallest difference is the only one that is negative—those that did *not* participate in a Yom Ha'atzmaut event were very slightly more likely to say 'supporting social justice causes' was very important than those who did participate.

What does this ordering tell us more generally about the relationship between Yom Ha'atzmaut participation and Jewish identity? Unsurprisingly, supporting Israel comes out on top, but beyond this, five of the top nine items are religious or ritualistic in nature and two are more ethnocentric: 'socialising in Jewish circles' and 'marrying another Jew'. In the lower nine items, where we see less proportionate difference, most of the items are ethnocultural in nature, and they tend to garner wider levels of agreement about their importance across the Jewish spectrum.

**Figure 6. Proportion responding 'very important' to each Jewish identity item, ordered by proportionate difference in whether Yom Ha'atzmaut was observed**



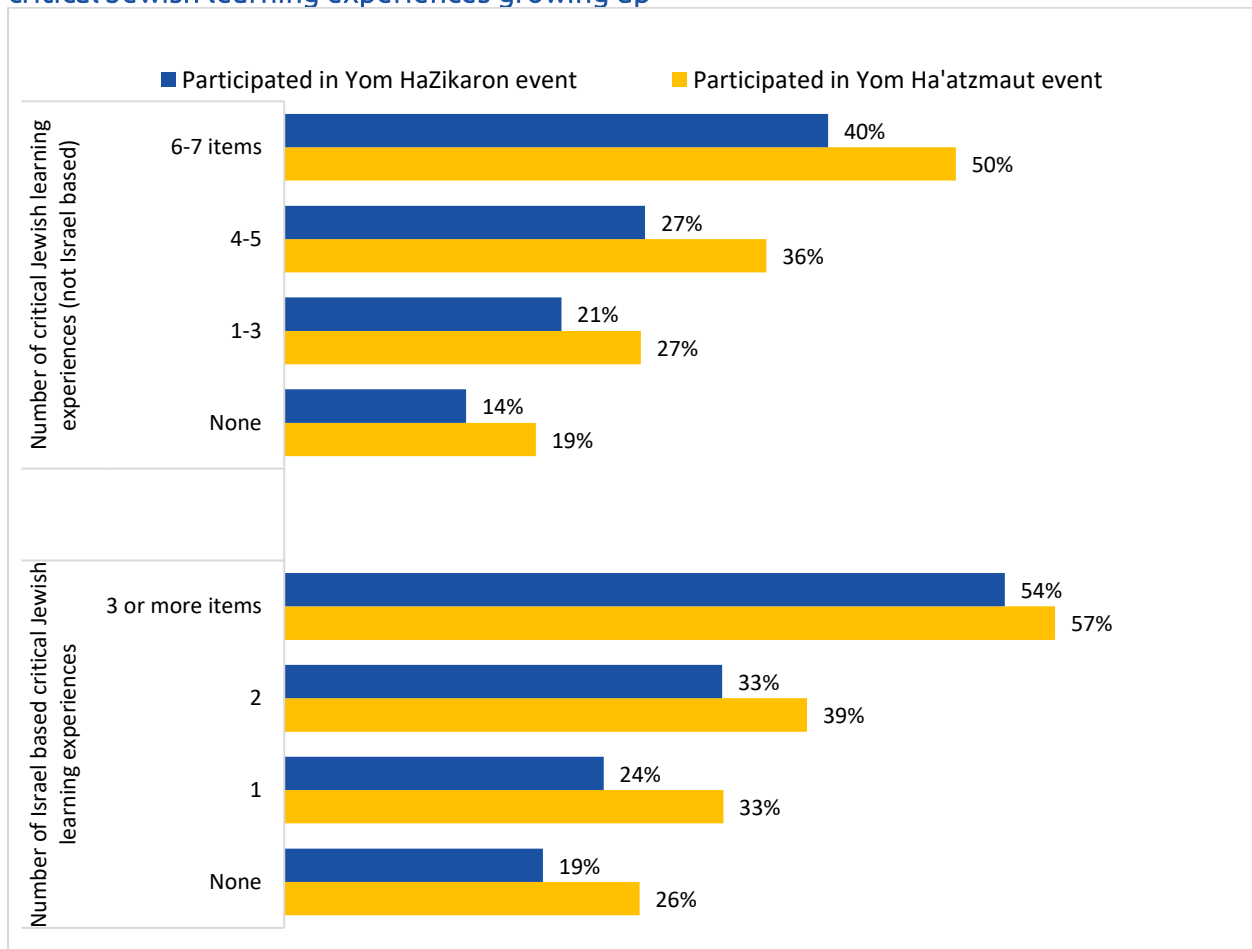
Question: *How important or unimportant are each of the following to how you see yourself as a Jewish person?*  
 Answer options: *Very important; Fairly important; Fairly unimportant; Very unimportant; Don't know.*



## / Participation by Jewish learning experiences

It is often the case in Jewish life that Jewish experiences are cumulative – i.e. the more Jewish experiences a person has growing up, the more Jewish experiences they are likely to participate in later on in life – summed up by a phrase we have used in previous research: *the more you do, the more you do*. This is also the case with these two days dedicated to Israel. Among Jews who had experienced six or seven of the critical (non-Israel based) Jewish learning experiences listed,\* 40% participated in a Yom HaZikaron event compared with 14% among those who had not experienced any of the listed learning experiences (Figure 7). Similarly, the more Israel-based Jewish learning experiences\*\* people had growing up, the more likely they were to mark or observe both of these days.

**Figure 7. Whether participated in a Yom HaZikaron and Yom Ha'atzmaut event, by number of critical Jewish learning experiences growing up**

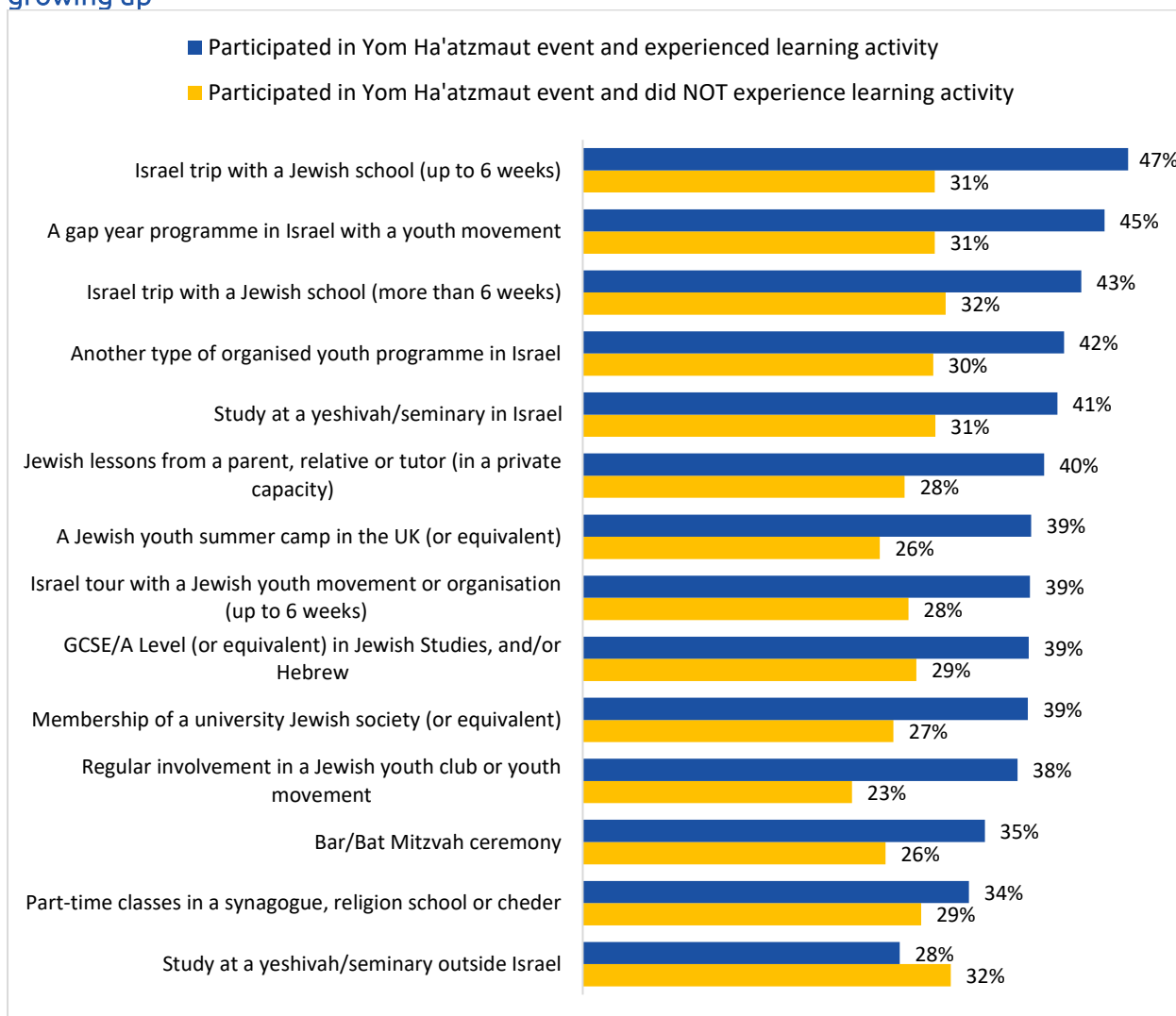


Question: Which, if any, of the following did you experience growing up? \*Answer options: Part-time classes in a synagogue, religion school or cheder; Jewish lessons from a parent, relative or tutor (in a private capacity); Regular involvement in a Jewish youth club or youth movement; GCSE/A Level (or equivalent) in Jewish Studies, and/or Hebrew; A Jewish youth summer camp in the UK (or equivalent); Bar/Bat Mitzvah ceremony; Membership of a university Jewish society (or equivalent); None

Question: And which, if any, of the following did you experience growing up? \*\*Answer options: Israel trip with a Jewish school (up to 6 weeks); Israel trip with a Jewish school (more than 6 weeks); Israel tour with a Jewish youth movement or organisation (up to 6 weeks); A gap year programme in Israel with a youth movement; Study at a yeshivah/seminary in Israel; Study at a yeshivah/seminary outside Israel; Another type of organised youth programme in Israel; None

Focusing on Yom Ha'atzmaut only, we found that experiencing almost any of these critical Jewish learning activities was associated with a greater likelihood of participation (Figure 8). But we can also see that the differences vary depending on the particular experience. For example, almost half (47%) of those who went on an Israel trip with a Jewish school (up to six weeks) attended a Yom Ha'atzmaut event, compared with 31% among those who did not participate in such a trip. By contrast, one in three (34%) of those who attended part-time classes in cheder attended a Yom Ha'atzmaut event, only a very slightly higher percentage than those who did not attend cheder (29%). Overall, this seems to indicate that Israel-focused critical Jewish learning experiences are associated with a greater likelihood of Yom Ha'atzmaut participation than critical Jewish learning experiences that were not specifically focused on Israel.

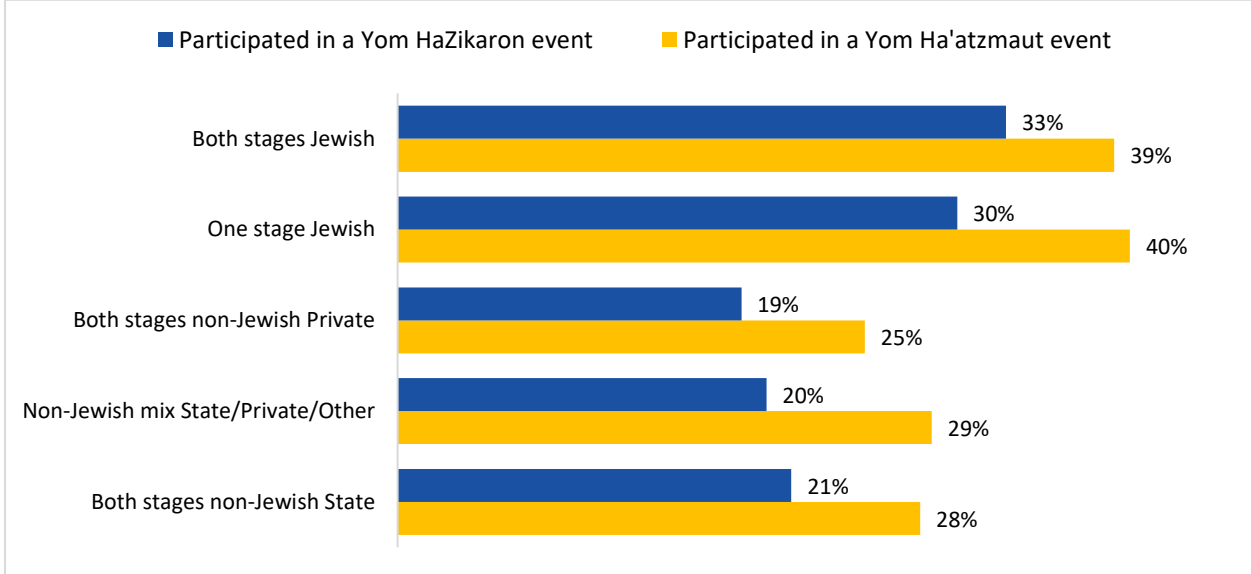
**Figure 8. Participation in a Yom Ha'atzmaut event, by type of critical Jewish learning experiences growing up**



It is also the case that Jews who attended a Jewish school, even if only for one stage, are more likely to have participated in either of these events than those who did not attend a Jewish school (Figure 9).



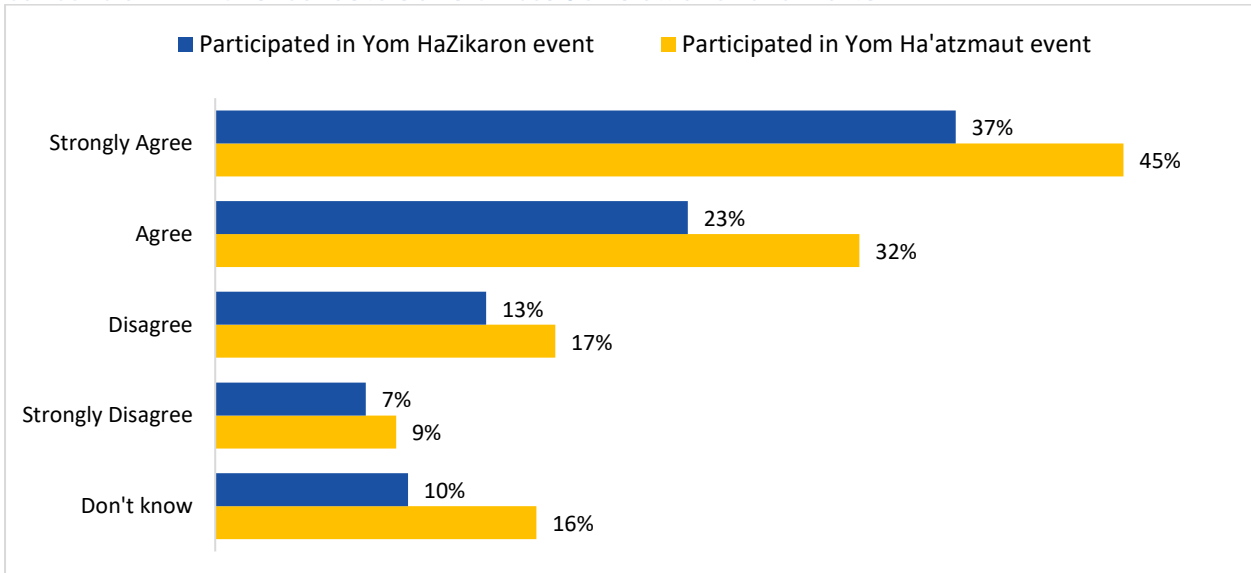
Figure 9. Participation in a Yom HaZikaron and Yom Ha'atzmaut event by type of school attended



/ Participation by Jewish belonging

In terms of Jewish peoplehood, those who feel a greater sense of connection to Jews around the world are more likely to have attended either of these two Israel events. For example, 45% of those who 'strongly agree' that 'an unbreakable bond unites Jews all over the world' participated in a Yom Ha'atzmaut event, compared with just 9% of those who 'strongly disagree' with that contention (Figure 10).

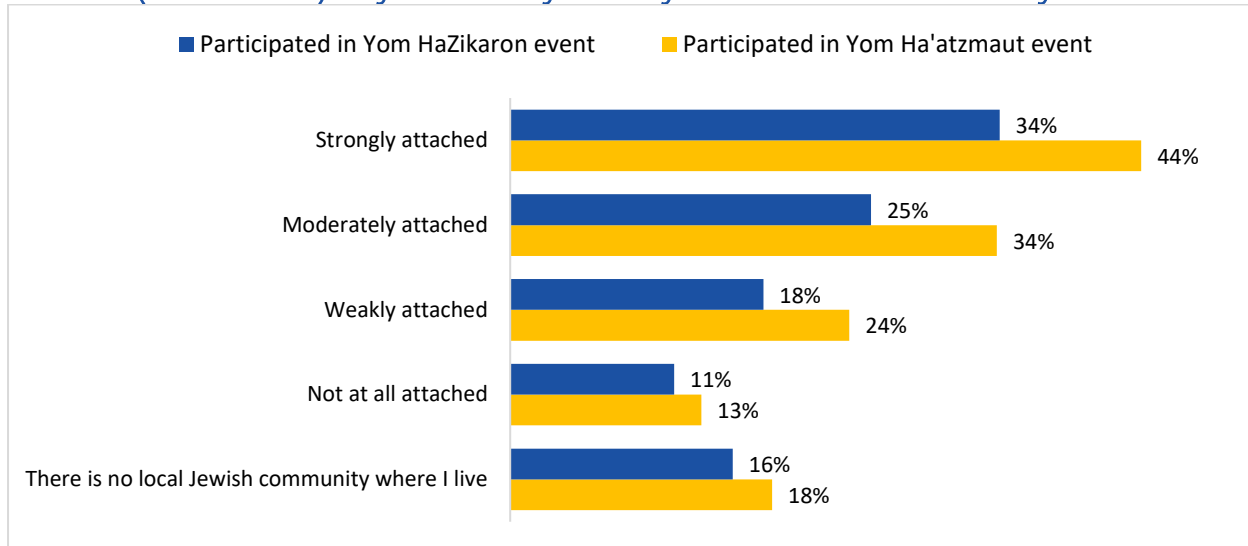
Figure 10. Participation in a Yom HaZikaron and Yom Ha'atzmaut event, by agreement with the contention "An unbreakable bond unites Jews all over the world"



## / Communal attachment

The story is similar in terms of people’s feelings of attachment to their local Jewish community, with the more attached being more likely to have participated in either event. A third (34%) of those who feel ‘strongly attached’ to their local Jewish community participated in a Yom HaZikaron event, compared with just 11% of those who say they are ‘not at all attached’.

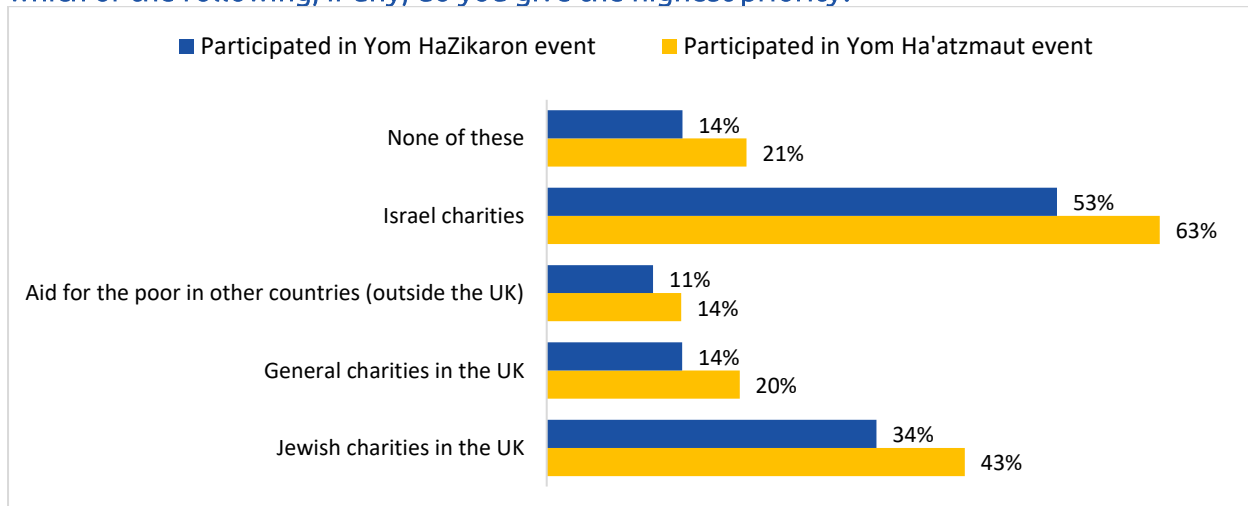
**Figure 11. Participation in a Yom HaZikaron and Yom Ha’atzmaut event, by responses to “How attached (or otherwise) do you currently feel to your local Jewish community?”**



## / Charitable priorities

As we might expect, those who prioritise Israel charities in their charitable giving were the most likely to have participated in either of the Israel events (Figure 12). More than half (53%) of those who prioritise Israel charities participated in a Yom HaZikaron event compared to a third (34%) of those who prioritise Jewish charities in the UK and just 11% of those who prioritise ‘Aid for the poor in other countries (outside the UK)’. A similar picture is observed in terms of participation in Yom Ha’atzmaut events.

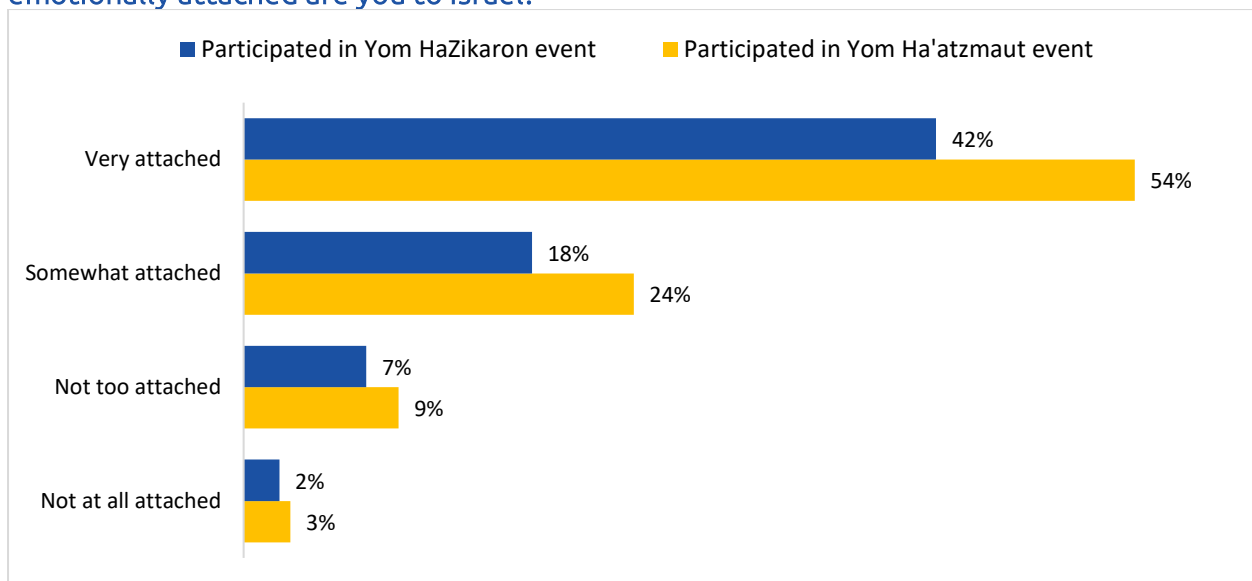
**Figure 12. Participation in a Yom HaZikaron and Yom Ha’atzmaut event, by responses to “To which of the following, if any, do you give the highest priority?”**



## / Participation by Israel connection

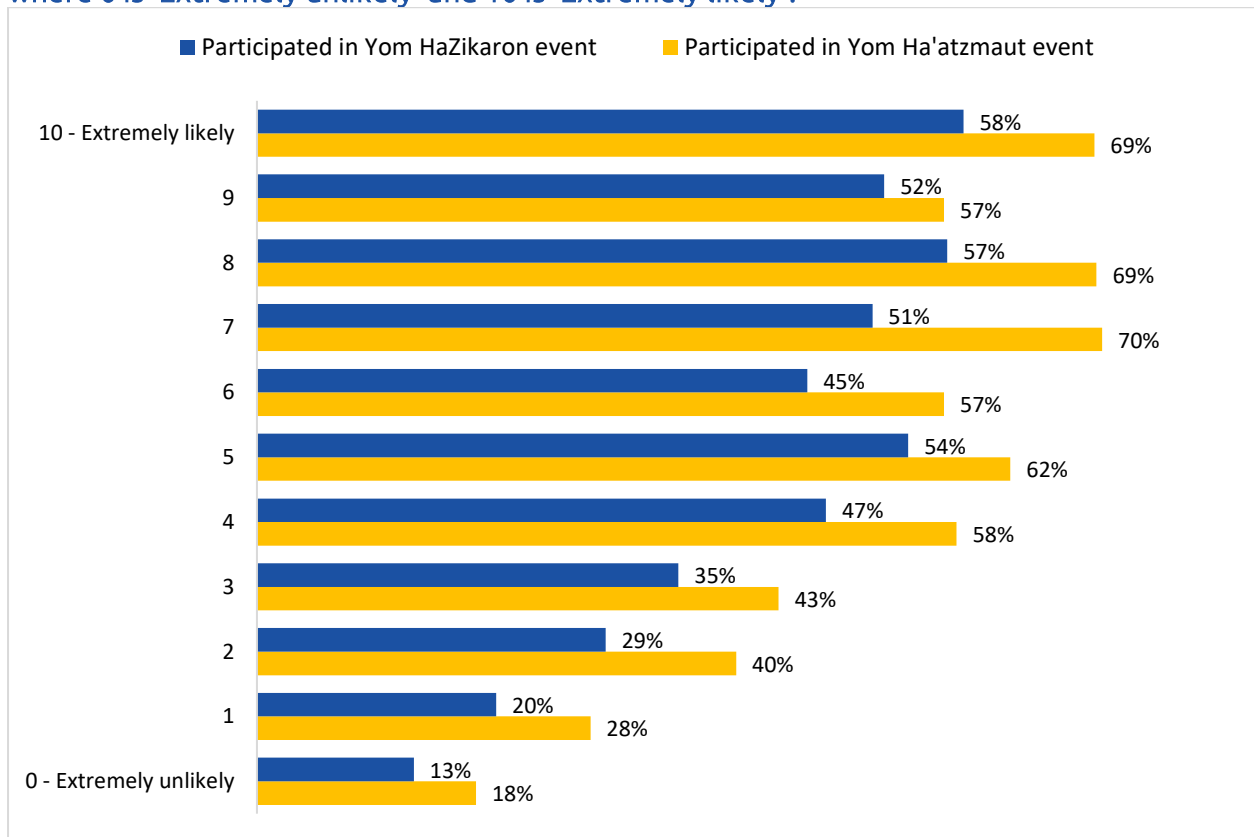
As has been seen intermittently in the preceding analysis, there is a close relationship between Israel engagement and participation in the two Israel days, unsurprising given the Israel-centric nature of these occasions. Here we examine this relationship in more detail and see a very close association between feelings of attachment to Israel and the likelihood of participating in either of these Israel events. For example, 54% of those who feel very emotionally attached to Israel participated in a Yom Ha'atzmaut event, compared with just 3% of those who say they are 'not at all attached' to Israel (Figure 13).

**Figure 13. Participation in a Yom HaZikaron and Yom Ha'atzmaut event, by responses to "How emotionally attached are you to Israel?"**



Again, the same trend is seen in terms of the likelihood of making *aliyah* (moving permanently to Israel). Broadly we see that the more likely a person is to say that they anticipate making aliyah in the next five years, the more likely they are to have attended these Israel events (Figure 14). However, in this instance, it can also be seen that the pattern is not simple. At the lower 'less likely' end of the scale (0-5) the relationship is clear-cut, but at the upper 'more likely' end (6-10) the pattern is rather more random. This may be due to the fact that one's intention to migrate is generally dependent on several factors, such as age, stage of life and economic circumstances, which muddies the waters in terms of identifying a direct relationship.

Figure 14. Participation in a Yom HaZikaron and Yom Ha'atzmaut event, by responses to "How likely, if at all, is it that you will live permanently in Israel ('make aliyah') in the next five years, where 0 is 'Extremely unlikely' and 10 is 'Extremely likely'?"



Those who identify as Israeli (mainly by citizenship, but also by birth, parentage or nationality) are far more likely to have participated in either of these events than those who do not consider themselves to be Israeli. Almost half (47%) of UK-based Israelis participated in a Yom HaZikaron event in 2022, compared with 21% of Jews who are not Israeli (Figure 15). Similarly, fluency in spoken Hebrew is also associated with attendance. Over half (51%) of fluent Hebrew speakers participated in a Yom HaZikaron event, compared with 10% of those who cannot speak any Hebrew (Figure 16). Unusually in this case, we see that fluent Hebrew speakers are just as likely to have participated in a Yom HaZikaron event as a Yom Ha'atzmaut event. Among non-fluent speakers the familiar pattern showing higher Yom Ha'atzmaut participation than Yom HaZikaron participation is observed.

Figure 15. Participation in a Yom HaZikaron and Yom Ha'atzmaut event, by responses to "Do you consider yourself to be Israeli in any way at all?"

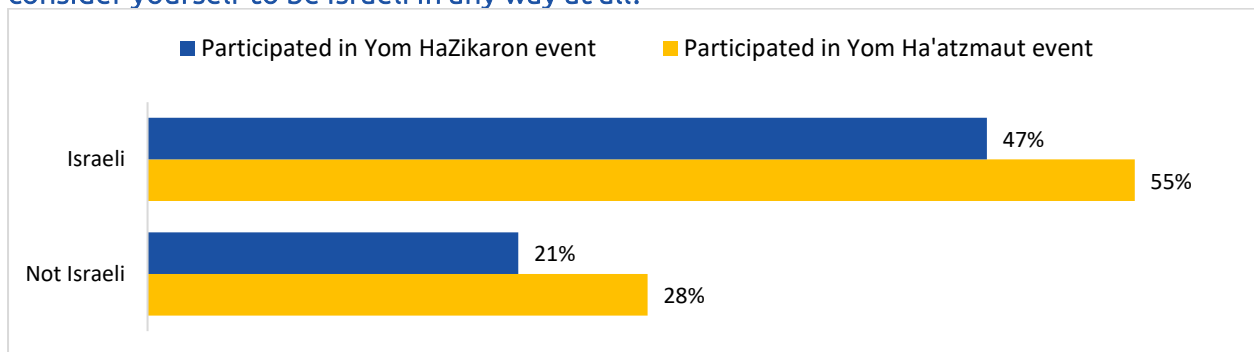
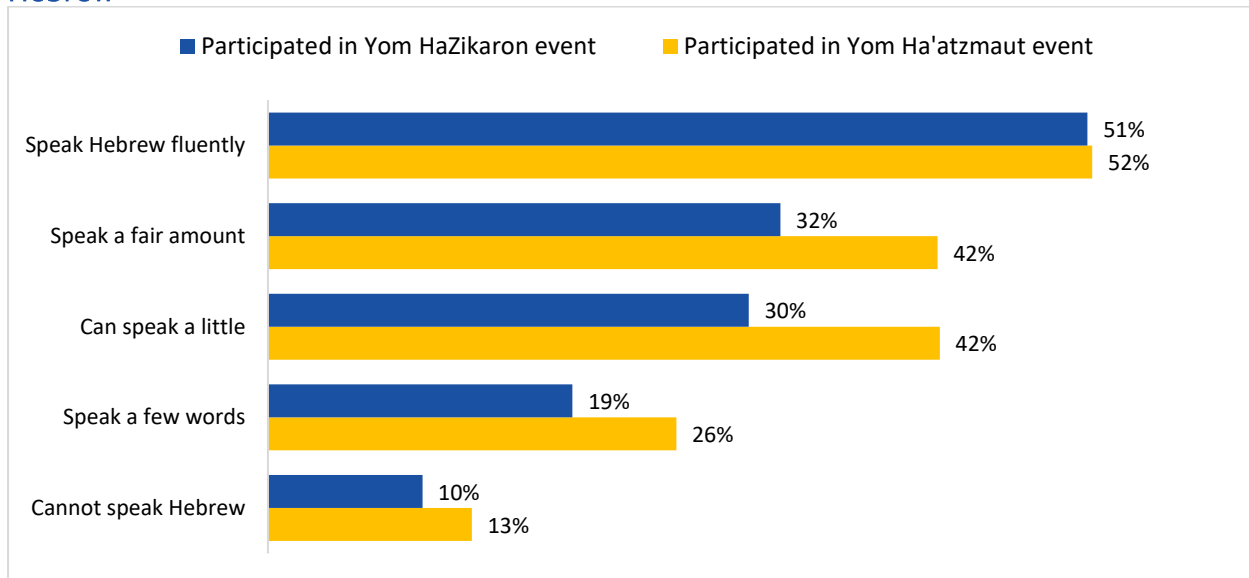
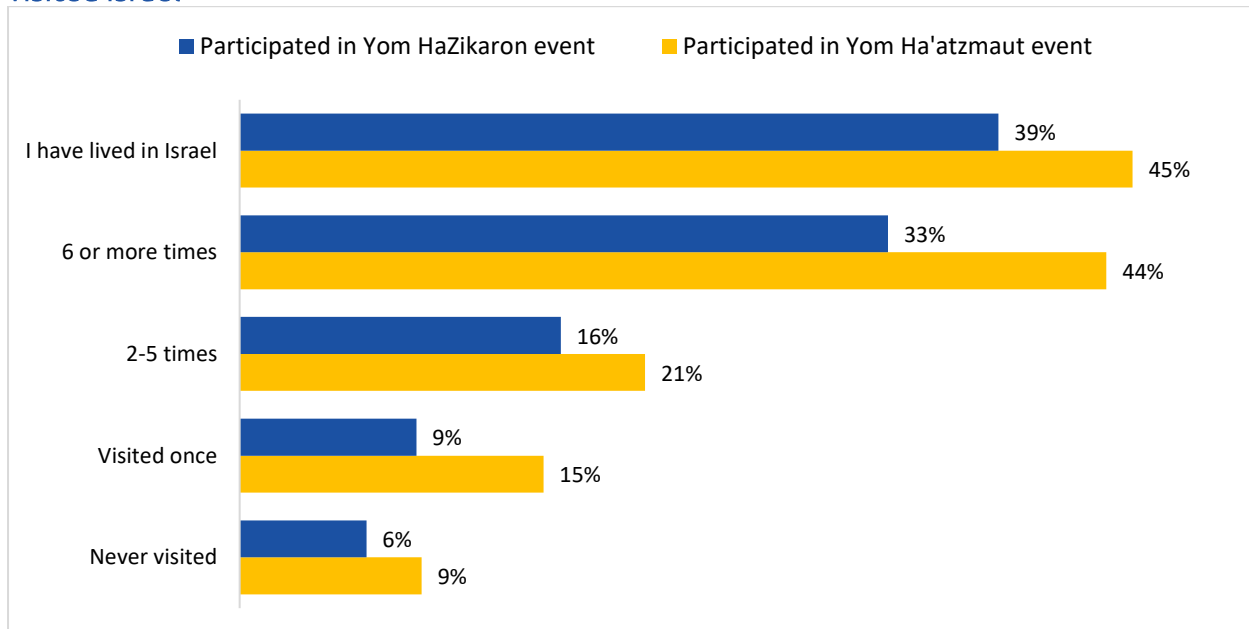


Figure 16. Participation in a Yom HaZikaron and Yom Ha'atzmaut event, by fluency in spoken Hebrew



The more times a person has visited Israel, the more likely they are to participate in either of these events. For example, among those who have visited Israel frequently (six or more times), one in three (33%) participated in a Yom HaZikaron event, compared with 6% of those who have never visited Israel (Figure 17).

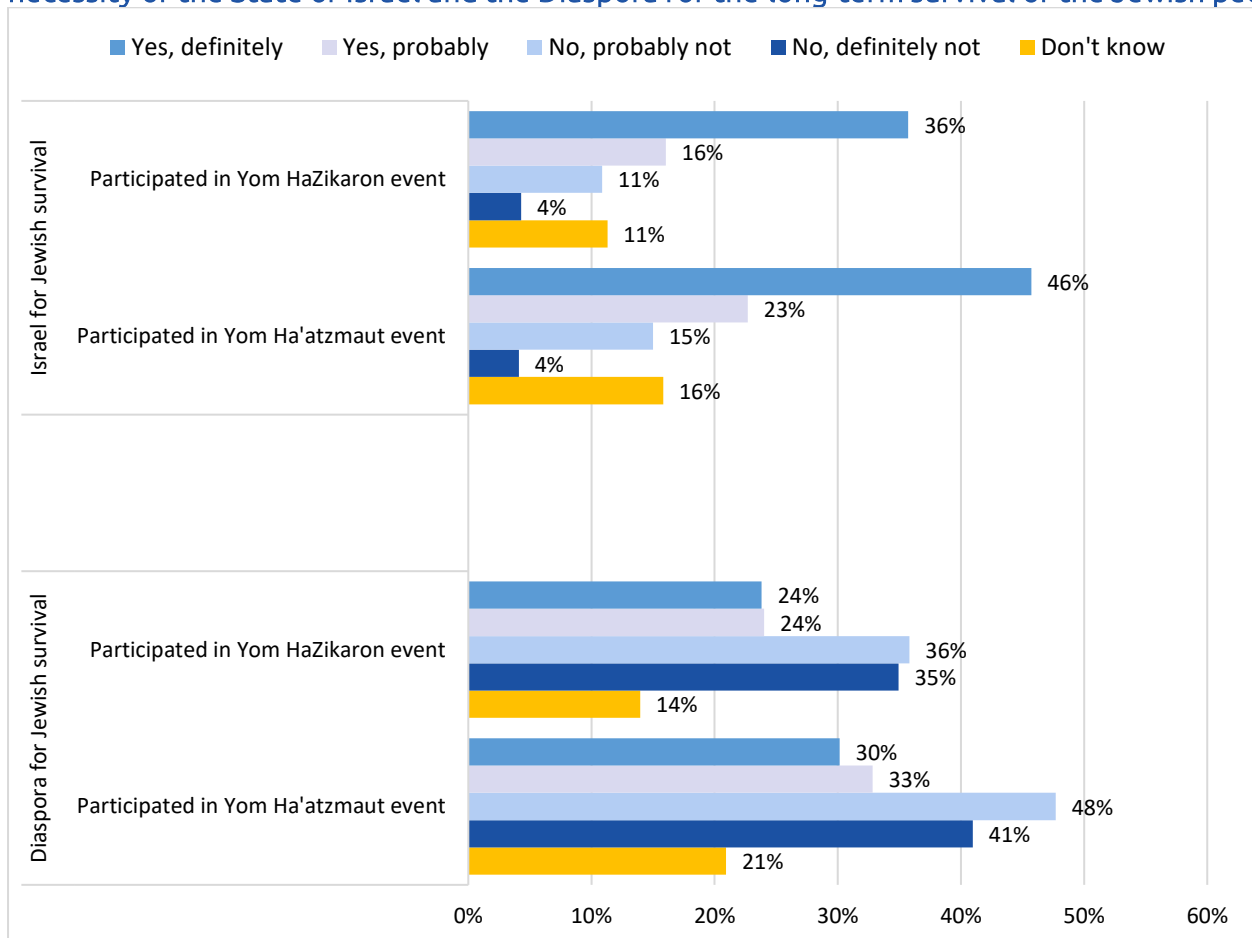
Figure 17. Participation in a Yom HaZikaron and Yom Ha'atzmaut event, by number of times visited Israel



## / Participation by attitudes towards Israel and Zionism

The more strongly people believe Israel is necessary for the long-term survival of the Jewish people, the more likely they are to have attended either of these events. For example, 46% of those who believe the State of Israel is 'definitely' necessary for Jewish survival participated in a Yom Ha'atzmaut event, compared with 23% of those who believe it is 'probably' necessary (Figure 18). However, a very different picture emerges when people are asked whether they think the Diaspora is necessary for the long-term survival of the Jewish people. The more people agree with this, the *less* likely they are to have attended either event (Figure 18).

**Figure 18. Participation in a Yom HaZikaron and Yom Ha'atzmaut event, by attitudes towards the necessity of the State of Israel and the Diaspora for the long-term survival of the Jewish people**

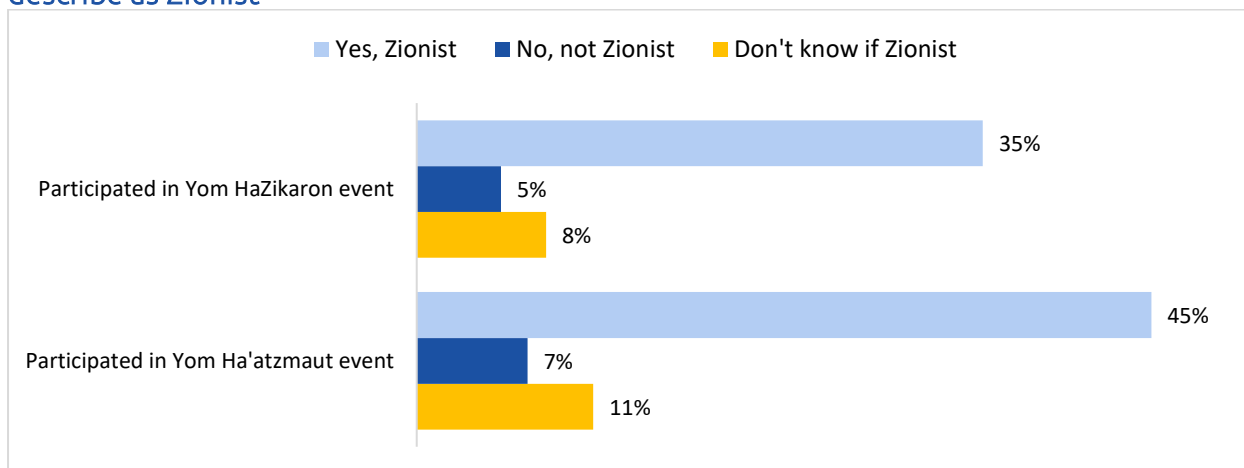


Question: *Do you think a Jewish State is necessary for the long-term survival of the Jewish People, or not?*

Question: *Do you think a thriving Jewish Diaspora is necessary for the long-term survival of the Jewish people, or not?*

Finally, people who identify as Zionist are far more likely to have participated in either of these events than those who do not identify as Zionists. For example, 35% of those who identify as Zionist participated in a Yom HaZikaron event, compared with 5% of those who say they are not Zionist (Figure 19).

Figure 19. Participation in a Yom HaZikaron and Yom Ha'atzmaut event, by proportion who self-describe as Zionist



### / Concluding remarks

One in three (33%) Jewish adults in the UK participated in a Yom HaZikaron (Israel Memorial Day) and/or a Yom Ha'atzmaut (Israel Independence Day) event in 2022. While participation in other commemoration days, such as International Holocaust Memorial Day, is higher (54%), it is clear that these are significant secular fixtures in the Jewish calendar. JPR's survey paints a picture of participation prior to the events of October 7th 2023 – future surveys will establish how this traumatic event and the ensuing war between Israel and Hamas may affect participation in the years to come. Suffice it to say, we see clear patterns in the data in terms of which Jewish subgroups are more likely to participate than others. While it is unsurprising that the more Israeli a person is (be that through their identity, language or social connections) the more likely it is they participate in some way in these events, this is by no means the only driver of participation. Whilst both occasions are fundamentally secular in nature, it is nevertheless the more Orthodox and the more strongly religious Jews who are most likely to attend such events, with the notable exception of haredi Jews. And as is so often the case in Jewish life, the more critical Jewish learning experiences a person has had growing up, the more likely they are to participate. While no single experiences stands out, it is clearly the case that the more connections a person feels towards Israel and, importantly, towards other Jews generally, the more likely they are to have participated in these events.

Since this is the first time JPR has examined either Yom HaZikaron or Yom Ha'atzmaut, we do not have historical UK data against which to compare these results. Even so, these new data still tell us that these national days of commemoration in Israel resonate strongly with many Jews living in the UK, and that much of this feeling is driven by Jewish identity rather than any nationalistic tendencies. And that is not limited to religious identity but also Jewish ethnocentric sentiments such as feelings of Jewish peoplehood and communality. Secular events they may be, but these Israel commemoration days mainly resonate among the more religious and more Jewishly engaged and connected population.



## / Methodological note

The data in this report are drawn from the JPR National Jewish Identity Survey, which took place as part of the third wave of JPR's Research Panel. The panel is designed to explore the attitudes and experiences of Jews in the UK on a range of issues in order to generate data to support planning both within and for the Jewish community. The questions included in the study were developed in-house by JPR, but drew heavily on JPR's 2013 National Jewish Community Survey to help assess change over time.

Fieldwork for this wave was carried out in November and December 2022. The survey was completed online, by computer, smartphone or tablet, with a handful of individuals requesting and being interviewed by telephone. A total of 4,907 took part; the final analysable sample contained 4,891 observations after ineligible respondents were removed. All respondents were UK residents aged 16 or above who self-identified as being Jewish in some way. Over two-thirds of respondents (69% or n=3,366) were existing panellists, having been recruited in the first or second waves, while the remaining 31% (n=1,541) were newly recruited at this third survey wave. 58.5% of existing panellists who were invited to take part did so. A total of 2,070 individuals who had not previously joined the panel completed the registration survey during the survey fieldwork period. Of these, 69.3% completed the survey. Five £100 shopping vouchers were offered as an incentive to complete the survey.

The survey data were cleaned and weighted to adjust for the age, sex and Jewish identity of the Jewish population of the UK, based on 2011 Census data and other administrative sources. All aspects of the panel and its constituent surveys are developed, implemented, analysed and reported in-house at JPR. The panel and its component surveys are delivered using specialist, secure software provided by Forsta, and ZK Analytics provides additional support for data management and weighting. The panel and survey data were analysed using SPSS, while weighting was carried out using R.

## / Acknowledgements

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## / About the Institute for Jewish Policy Research (JPR)

The Institute for Jewish Policy Research (JPR) is a London-based research organisation, consultancy and think-tank. It aims to advance the prospects of Jewish communities in the United Kingdom and across Europe by conducting research and informing policy development in dialogue with those best placed to positively influence Jewish life. Web: [www.jpr.org.uk](http://www.jpr.org.uk).

## / About the author

**Dr David Graham** is a Senior Research Fellow at JPR, an Honorary Associate at the Department of Hebrew, Biblical and Jewish Studies at the University of Sydney, and an Honorary Research Associate at the University of Cape Town. He holds a DPhil from the University of Oxford and has published widely for academic and general interest audiences.

A geographer by training and expert in the sociodemographic study of Jews in the UK, Australia and South Africa, his skills encompass statistical analysis, survey and questionnaire design, census data analysis and geographic information system mapping. Since joining the JPR team in 2009, Dr Graham has been involved in numerous studies of Jewish life and has undertaken work for several organisations, including the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe, the Kaplan Centre at the University of Cape Town, Jewish Care, the Jewish Chronicle, UJIA, Pears Foundation, the Union of Jewish Students and JCA Australia.