

Masks and noisemakers: The celebration of Purim among Jews in the UK

Dr David Graham

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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 over 4,800 JPR research panel members who participated in our 2025 Jews in Uncertain Times Survey to explore, for the first time, how many Jews in the UK celebrate Purim.

/ Introduction

The festival of Purim recalls the events recounted in the Book of Esther (*Megillat Esther*). Set in 5th-century BCE Persia, in the city of Shushan, and celebrated every year on the 14th of Adar in the Hebrew calendar, the story recounts how the capricious and hedonistic King Ahasuerus married Esther after she won a beauty contest. She discovers through her cousin Mordechai that the king's advisor Haman is plotting to massacre the Jews of Persia. Being Jewish herself, Esther reveals the plot to the king and ultimately saves the Jewish People. Cue celebrations. But despite being part of the biblical canon, the story of Purim is distinctive for several reasons. It is about an assimilated Jewish community, recalled solely in human terms. It lacks any reference to divine intervention; indeed, it does not mention God.

Today, Jews typically mark Purim by listening to the *megillah* read aloud, dressing up in costume, attending parties, and drinking – another feature of the holiday that makes Purim stand out: Jewish festivals tend not to encourage alcohol consumption. It is also customary for Jews to give gifts of food and drink (*mishloach manot*) and charitable donations (*matanot la'evyonim*).

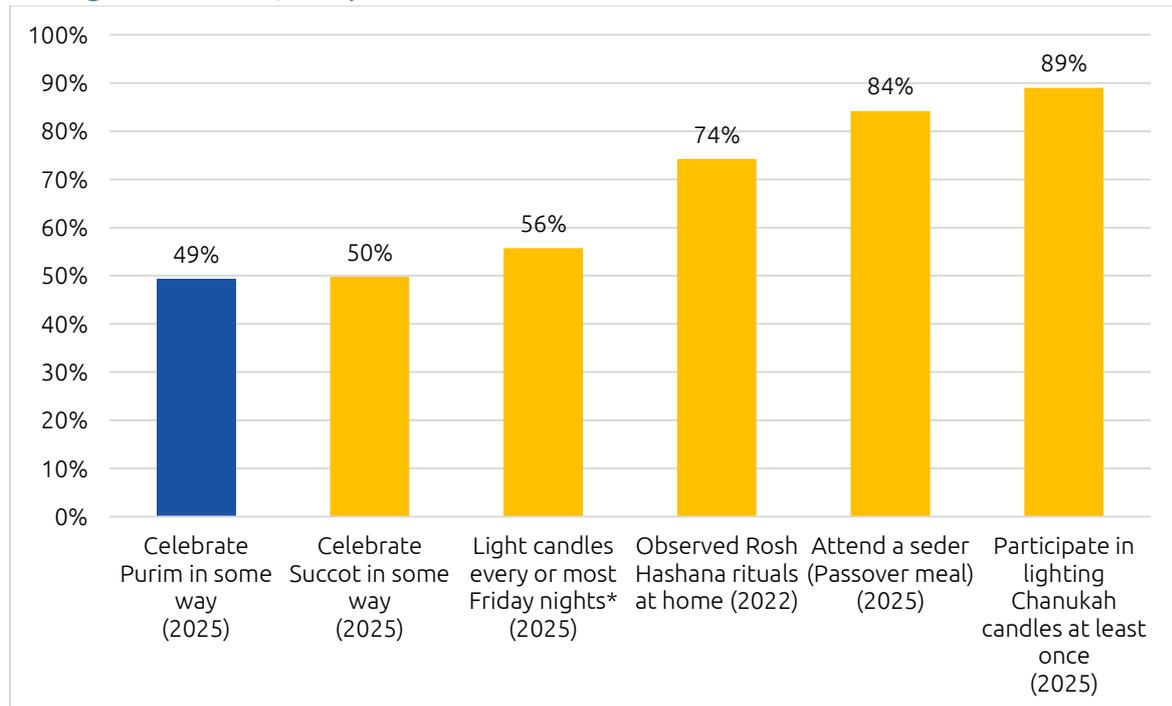
While Purim is not among the most theologically weighty moments in the Jewish calendar, with its carnivalesque celebrations, it is one of the most socially distinctive: it is fun, communal, and (for many) family-centred, with practices that can be observed in both religious and more cultural ways.

In summer 2025, in our *Jews in Uncertain Times Survey*, JPR asked a representative sample of Jews aged 16 and above living in the UK (n=4,822) a series of questions to explore the breadth and depth of their Jewish practice over the previous twelve months, including their Purim-related practice. This brief paper examines the data generated from that study, focusing specifically on the proportion who said they celebrated Purim in some way (for example, by hearing the *megillah*, attending a Purim event or party, dressing up, and similar activities).

/ Nearly one in two British Jews celebrated Purim in 2025

Our survey found that just under half (49%) of respondents reported celebrating Purim in some way in the previous year. Compared with other Jewish festivals, Purim is one of the least widely observed. It is celebrated at broadly similar levels to Succot (50%), but by substantially fewer people than those who reported attending a Pesach seder (84%) or at least one Chanukah candle-lighting ceremony (89%) in the previous year.

Figure 1. Celebration of Purim in the previous year (summer 2024 to summer 2025)* among British Jews, compared to other Jewish festivals and rituals



* Note. All data are from the JPR survey conducted in June/July 2025, so relate to levels of practice/observance in the twelve months prior to that, with the exception of the data for Rosh Hashana which were gathered in the JPR National Jewish Identity Survey (conducted in late 2022; N=4,891) and relate to levels of practice in that calendar year. Note that the 2022 data gathered at a time when there was still concern about the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic and online services and events were being held, especially by non-Orthodox Jewish communities, so the results may not be typical.

Question (2025): *Thinking about your Jewish practice over the last twelve months, did you:* [Response options: Light or observe Shabbat candles being lit in your home every or most Friday nights; Attend a seder (Passover meal); Light, or participate in the lighting of, Chanukah candles at least once; Celebrate Succot in some way (e.g. attending synagogue, spending some time in a 'Sukkah' etc.); Celebrate Purim in some way (e.g. hear the Megillah, dressing up or attending a Purim meal or party)]

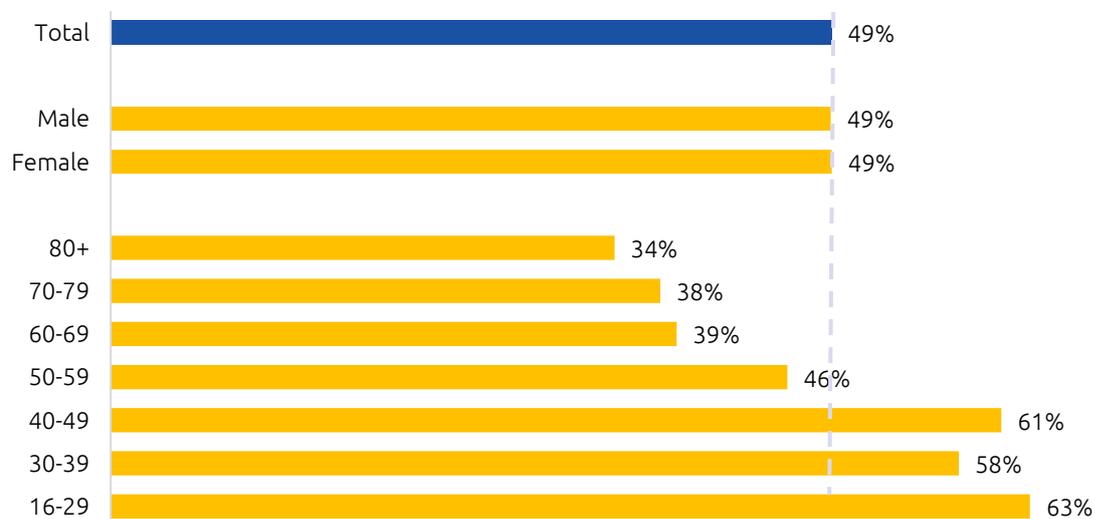
Question (2022): *Thinking back to Rosh Hashanah in September (2022), did you do any of the following?* [Response option: Observed rituals at home e.g. lit candles, ate apple and honey]

/ Celebration of Purim by age and gender

Little distinguishes male from female respondents in terms of Purim participation: 49% of women and 49% of men reported celebrating Purim in some way. This is a pattern seen in many Jewish holidays and festivals. However, it stands in contrast to Rosh Hashana, during which women are more likely to observe home practices (lighting candles, eating apples and honey) and less likely to attend synagogue services than men.

Age, however, is strongly associated with Purim celebration, with younger people far more likely to celebrate than older people (Figure 2). Respondents aged 16–29 were the most likely to report celebrating Purim (63%), whereas fewer than four in ten respondents aged 60 and above said they celebrated Purim in the previous year.

Figure 2. Celebration of Purim in 2025 by age and gender



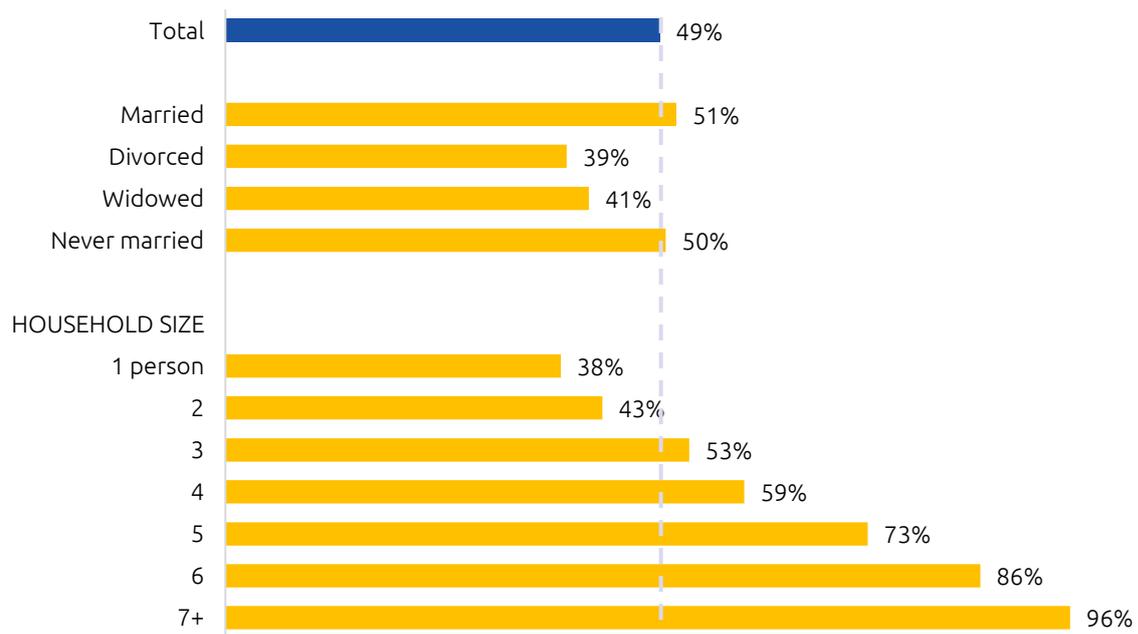
/ Households with children are more likely to celebrate Purim

Household structure is also closely related to the likelihood of celebrating Purim. Those living alone were the least likely to celebrate (38%), while participation rises steadily with household size: 43% among two-person households, rising to 73% among five-person households, and is almost universal among households of seven or more people.

Both household and age patterns are consistent with Purim's character as an unusually social, child-oriented festival, often involving children's activities, Jewish schools, fancy dress, and organised communal events.

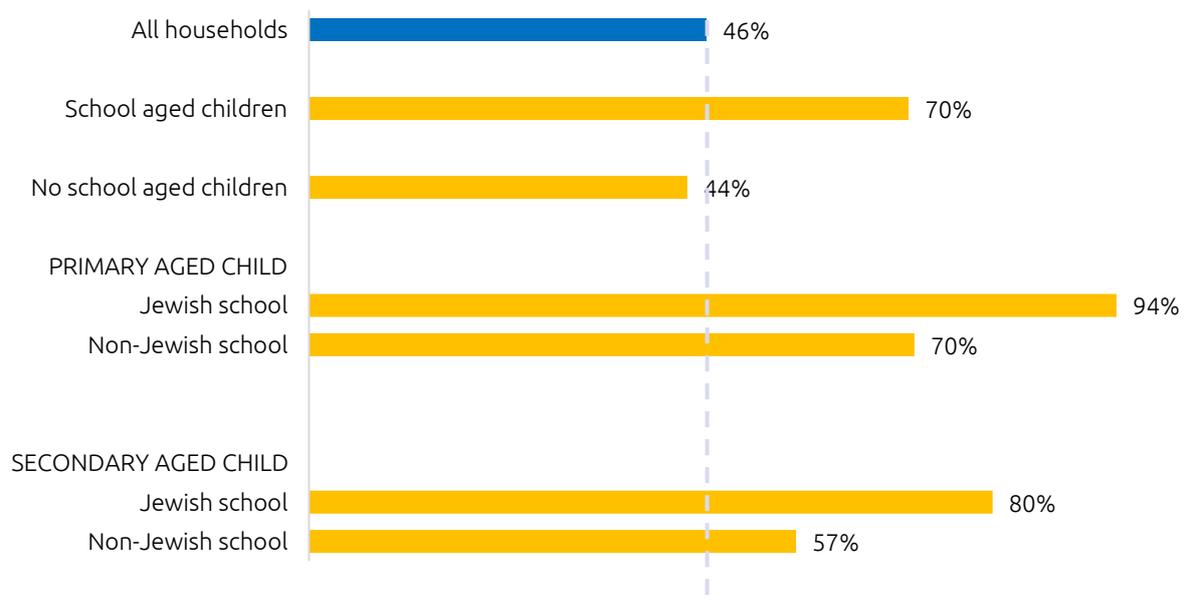
Marital status, by contrast, is a less important indicator of Purim observance: 51% of married respondents celebrated Purim, compared with 50% of those who have never been married, 41% of those who are widowed, and 39% of those who are divorced.

Figure 3. Celebration of Purim in 2025 by marital status and household size



A related household indicator concerns whether there are school-age children in the home (households n=1,122). Among households with school-age children, 70% celebrated Purim, compared with just 44% of households without school-age children. Moreover, among households with school-age children, celebrating Purim is notably more common in households with children who attend Jewish schools than with those with children who attend non-Jewish schools (94% vs 70% for households with primary-age children and 80% vs 57% for households with secondary-age children).

Figure 4. Celebration of Purim in 2025 by the presence of school-age children in the household and the type of school they attend



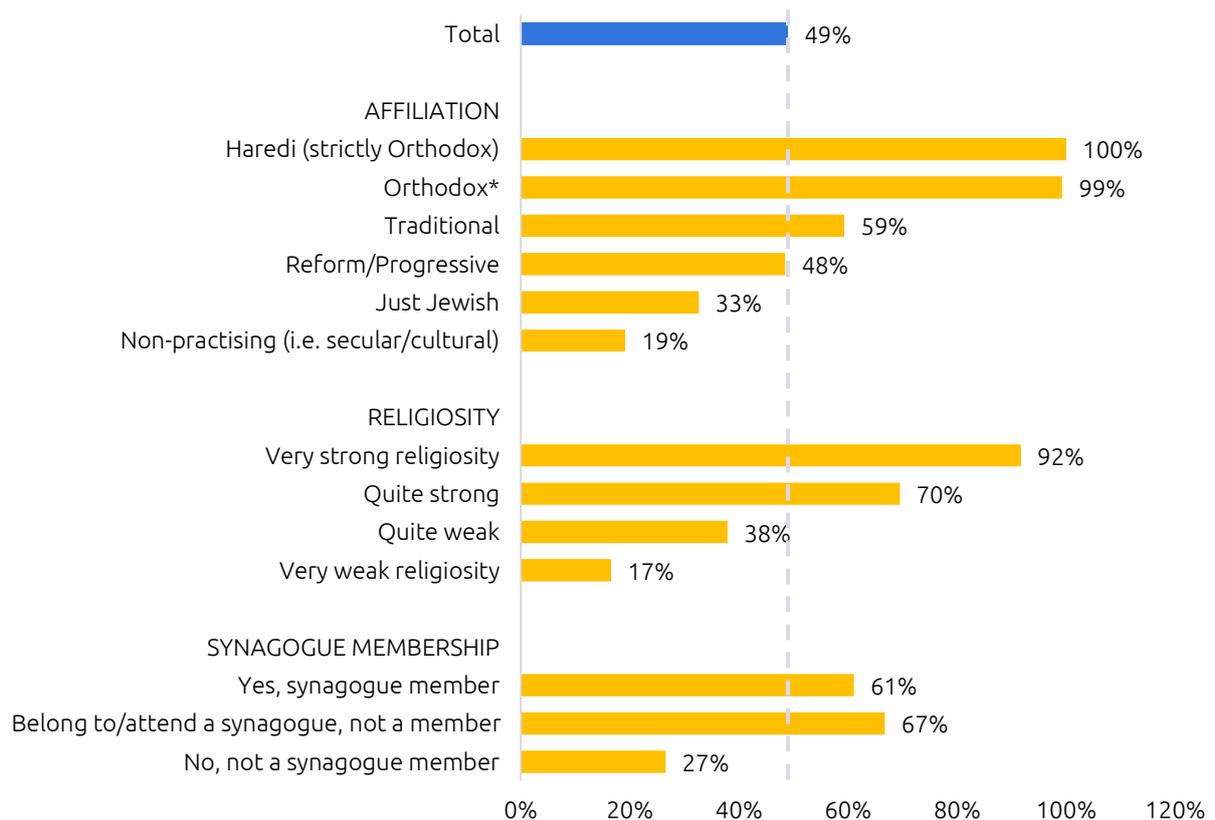
/ All Orthodox Jews celebrate Purim

As with most aspects of Jewish practice, celebrating Purim is closely related to Jewish religiosity and synagogue affiliation (Figure 5).

Belonging to a synagogue is associated with markedly higher Purim participation. 27% of those who are not synagogue members reported celebrating Purim, compared with 61% of synagogue members and 67% of those who are not formally members of a synagogue but nonetheless attend one and/or feel as if they belong to one.

Self-assessed religiosity shows a strong gradient: just 17% of those with "very weak" religiosity celebrate Purim, rising to 92% among those with "very strong" religiosity. Denominational/religious identity also differentiates participation. Among those describing themselves as secular/cultural, 19% celebrate Purim, compared with 48% among Reform/Progressive Jews, 59% among those describing themselves as Traditional, and near-universal participation among Orthodox (99%) and Haredi (100%) respondents.

Figure 5. Celebration of Purim by Jewish identity and affiliation



* Orthodox - e.g. would not turn on the light on Shabbat

/ Final thoughts

Purim is observed by around half of Jews aged 16 and above in the UK, making it less widely celebrated than festivals such as Chanukah and Pesach, but similar to the festivals of Succot.

Purim, however, stands out because its observance is shaped by life stage and household context. Younger adults with children at home are far more likely to celebrate it than other demographic groups. This demonstrates that Purim, perhaps more than any other festival, is experienced as a holiday by the younger generation of Jews. While all Jewish holidays are more likely to be observed by the more religiously engaged than by the less religiously engaged, Purim is also fundamentally shaped by the presence of children.

The strong relationship between synagogue engagement, religiosity, and Jewish denominational affiliation and alignment indicates that Purim remains embedded in wider patterns of Jewish religious and communal life: the more connected and religious respondents are, the more likely they are to celebrate it. Yet the fact that Purim is especially attractive to young families means that less religious and less engaged families participate in these celebrations, making it an ideal vehicle for Jewish institutional outreach.

/ Methodological note

The data in this paper are drawn from the JPR Research Panel – particularly from its seventh wave in the 'Jews in Uncertain Times Survey' which took place between 8 June and 20 July 2025 (n=4,822), but also from 2022 (wave 3, 16 November to 23 December, n=4,891). 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.

All panel surveys were completed online, on computers, smartphones or tablets, with a handful of individuals being interviewed by telephone. Respondents to all the surveys discussed here are UK residents aged 16 or above who self-identify as being Jewish in some way.

Survey data have been cleaned and weighted by age, sex, geography and synagogue membership drawing on 2021 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 have been analysed using SPSS, while weighting was carried out using R.

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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.

/ 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, the Jewish Leadership Council, Norwood, Jewish Care, Pears Foundation and JCA Australia.