

What We Learned from the 2014 Passover/Easter Survey

By InterfaithFamily

Introduction

In March 2014, InterfaithFamily conducted its tenth annual Passover/Easter Survey to determine the attitudes and behaviors of people in interfaith relationships during Passover and Easter. We also used this opportunity to ask about interest in trips to Israel for interfaith couples; those responses will be the subject of a future report.

The survey attracted 938 responses – an 89% increase over 2013. Of those 938 respondents, 625 said they were in interfaith relationships. Of those 625, 402 have children. Of those 402, 259, or 64%, were raising their children solely in the Jewish religion. According to the 2013 Pew Report, 61% of interfaith families are raising their children with some Judaism (20% “Jewish by religion,” 25% “partly Jewish by religion and partly something else,” and 16% “Jewish but not by religion or mixed”).

This report focuses on the responses of the **259 survey participants who are in interfaith relationships and raising their children solely in the Jewish religion**. The report does not reflect the behaviors of interfaith couples in general, or the behaviors of all interfaith couples with children, and the figures should not be reported as representative of all interfaith families.

We chose to focus on this population because InterfaithFamily’s goals include to promote interfaith couples raising their children Jewish, and to encourage Jewish community policy-makers to facilitate that happening. We therefore want to know more about the dynamics of how interfaith couples raise their children Jewish, especially during potential periods of conflict, such as when Passover and Easter overlap. As a 2007 study on the American Jewish population noted, "There is increasing evidence... that more intermarried families are choosing to raise children Jewishly."¹ This report, like our previous reports on the behaviors and attitudes of interfaith couples during the December and spring holidays, is intended to flesh out a portrait of what interfaith families raising Jewish children "look like."

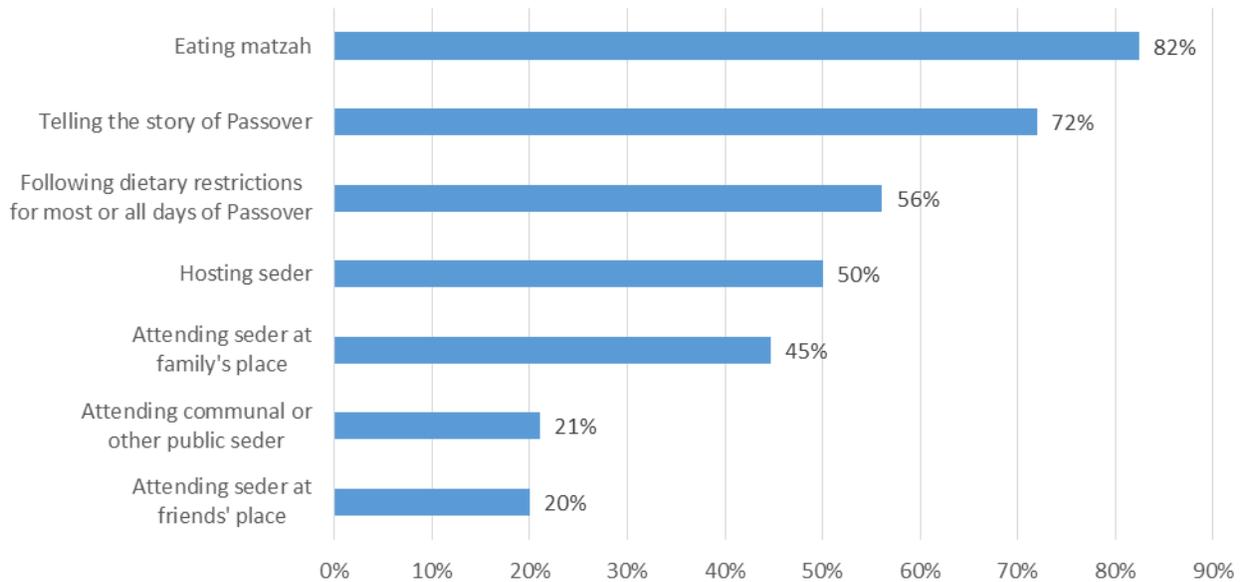
The Report

All but three of the 259 respondents plan on participating in Passover activities (99%). Half plan to host a seder (50%) while 89% percent plan to host or attend one. Almost three quarters plan on telling the Passover story (72%), down from 76% in 2013, and 82% plan on eating matzah, down from 90% in 2013. Fifty-six percent plan on following the dietary restrictions for most or all of the eight days of Passover, down from 60% in 2013. Thirty-five percent of the respondents who are not Jewish plan on following dietary restrictions during Passover, down from 46% in 2013.

¹ Leonard Saxe, Elizabeth Tighe, Benjamin Phillips and Charles Kadushin, *Reconsidering the Size and Characteristics of the American Jewish Population: New Estimates of a Larger and More Diverse Community* (Waltham, Mass.: Steinhardt Social Research Institute, 2007), 29.

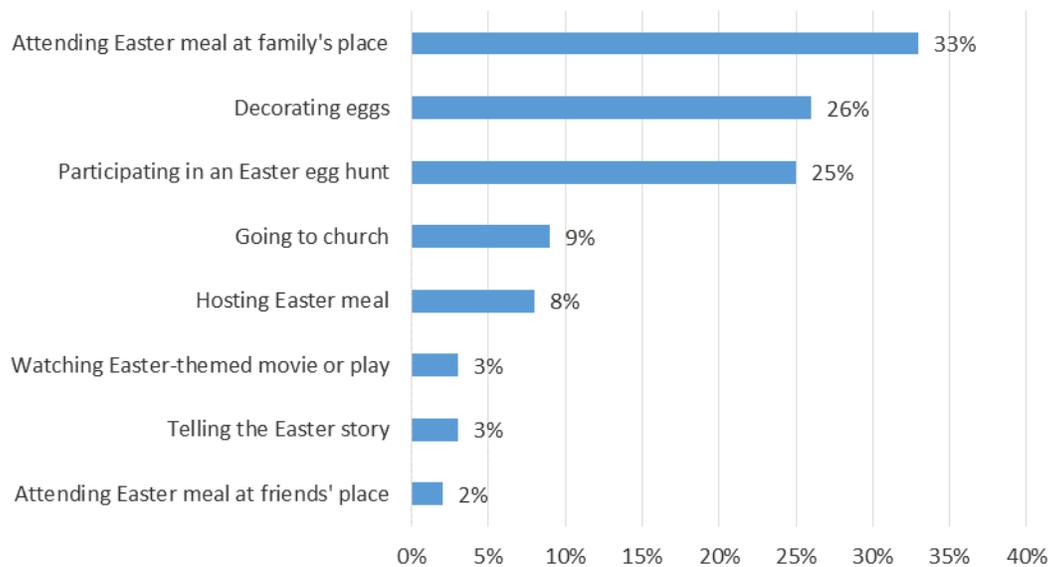
Seder does not just mean dinner for our respondents. The vast majority expect their seders to include food rituals like dipping greens into salt water (97%), a seder plate (95%), reading from a haggadah (93%) and hiding the Afikoman (91%).

Passover Activities of Respondents (% of 256)



Meanwhile, 53% plan on participating in Easter activities. Relatively few plan on participating in the more "religious" Easter activities like going to church (9%) or telling the Easter story (3%). Forty-one percent plan on hosting or attending an Easter dinner, consistent with our 2013 results, but compared with the 89% who plan on hosting or attending a seder.

Easter Activities of Respondents (% of 259)



These respondents also see significant differences in the level of religiousness of their celebrations of Passover and Easter. Few say their celebrations of either holiday will be deeply religious, but 60% say their celebrations of Easter will be entirely secular (the same as in 2013) while only 4% say their celebrations of Passover will be entirely secular. And 29% see their Passover celebrations as deeply religious or religious (down from 37% in 2013) vs. only 7% who see their Easter celebrations as deeply religious or religious.

Overall, the great majority of respondents say they are very comfortable or comfortable (84%) with participating in Passover celebrations, compared to 48% who say the same about Easter. Meanwhile, there is a far greater level of ambivalence over Easter's arrival, with 30% saying they're uncomfortable or very uncomfortable about participating in Easter celebrations compared to 5% who say the same about Passover. Respondents who are not Jewish are more than twice as likely (72%) to be comfortable with Passover than Jewish respondents are with Easter (29%).

This year again, Easter falls on the sixth day of Passover, which could potentially create a conflict, especially for those observing the dietary rules of Passover, which prohibit bread, pasta and many other common foods. From 2009 to 2013, Easter also fell during Passover, but in 2008 it did not. Comparing all of the surveys, we found only slight variations between the percentage of respondents who said they planned on celebrating Easter (45% in 2008 vs. 49% in 2009 vs. 51% in 2010 vs. 45% in 2011 vs. 46% in 2012 vs. 51% in 2013 vs. 53% in 2014). This suggests that the confluence of Easter and Passover is not causing our respondents to forgo Easter. And with the almost 100% participation rate in Passover, they are not bypassing Passover either.

Of those celebrating both holidays, 59% say the confluence of the holidays will not change their celebrations. Those that are changing their celebrations are adapting, with 39% saying they will not eat prohibited foods at the Easter meal and 7% saying they will eat prohibited foods at the Easter meal but not for the rest of Passover.

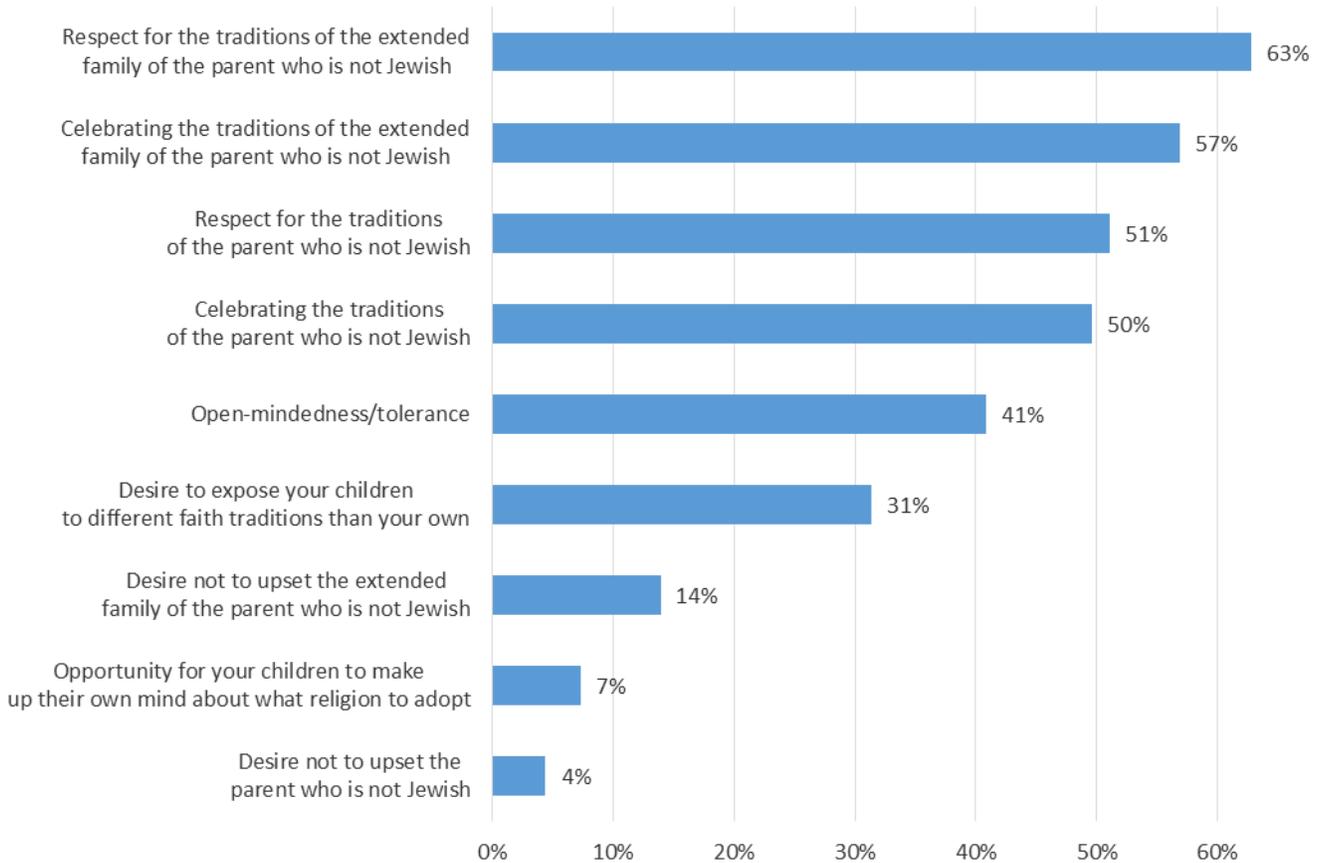
This year, Jewish respondents were four times as likely to avoid prohibited foods at the Easter meal (51%, up from 44% in 2013) than respondents who were not Jewish (13%, down from 23% in 2013), and almost twice as likely to plan on following dietary restrictions for most of Passover (62%, down from 67% in 2013, vs. 35% for respondents who were not Jewish, down from 46% in 2013). This reflects a trend for less observance of Passover traditions by respondents who were not Jewish.

Effect of Easter on Passover Celebrations, Respondents Participating in Easter Celebrations (% of 137)



Eighty-eight percent of respondents said they believe that participating in Easter celebrations does not affect the Jewish identity of their children. How do interfaith families raising Jewish children explain their participation in Easter celebrations to their children? Most pointed to respect for the non-Jewish parents' traditions (51%), respect for the traditions of the non-Jewish parent's extended family (63%) or open-mindedness/tolerance (41%). Few explained their participation in Easter celebrations as a way not to upset the non-Jewish parent (4%) or his or her extended family (14%), and few told their children participating in Easter was an opportunity for them to decide what religion to adopt (7%). Almost a third (31%) explained their participation to their children as a way to expose them to faith traditions other than their own. We did not ask what parents' reasons were for participating in Easter so it is possible there is a divergence between their motivations and what they tell their children.

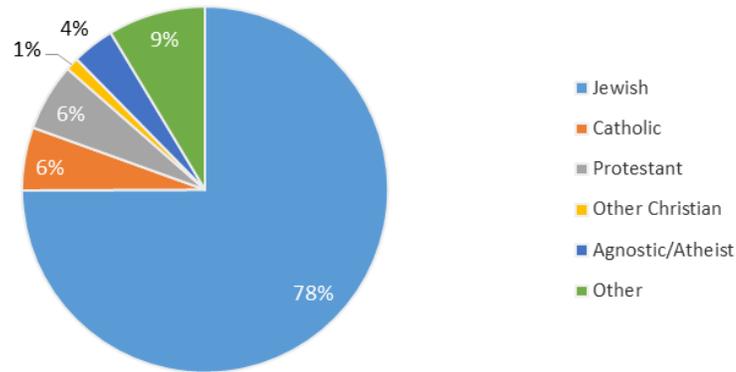
How Respondents Explain Their Participation in Easter to Their Children (% of 137)



Demographic Portrait of Our Respondents

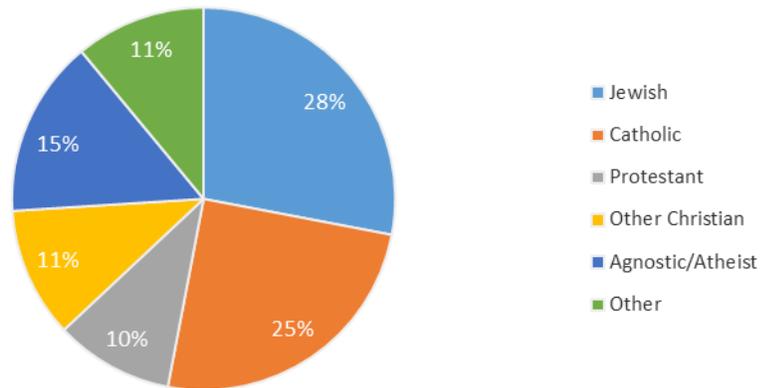
Of the 938 people who responded to our Passover-Easter Survey, 259 said they were intermarried or in interfaith relationships, had children and had raised or were raising their children exclusively Jewish. Of those 259 respondents, the great majority (78%) are Jewish:

Religion of Respondents



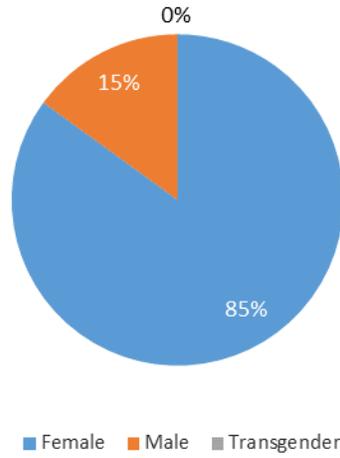
Their partners were a mix of Jewish (28%), Catholic (25%), Protestant (10%) and other religions. Because respondents could check multiple religions, there is some overlap where intermarried respondents characterized themselves and their partner as Jewish, as well as other religions. This also reflects some people in conversionary couples--where both partners are officially Jewish--characterizing themselves as intermarried because of the convert's original religious background.

Religion of Respondents' Spouses



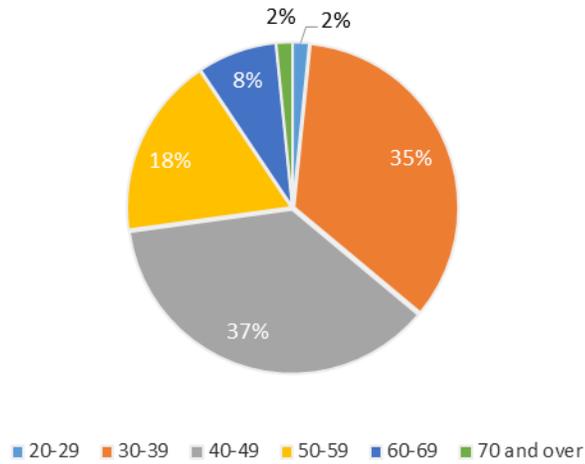
The great majority of the respondents were female (85%).

Gender of Respondents



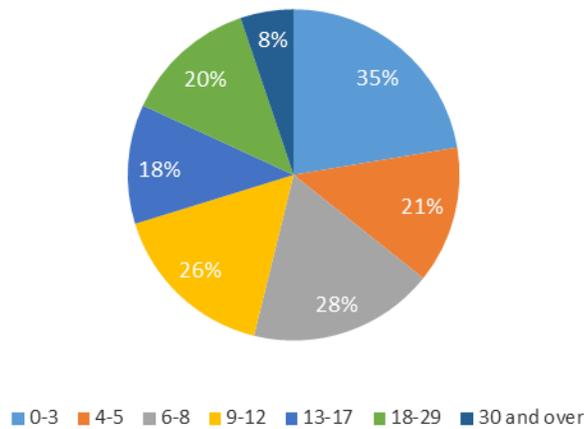
Almost three-quarters (72%) were between the ages of 30 and 49.

Age of Respondents



Thirty-five percent have children 3 or younger. Eighty-four percent have children 8 or younger.

Age of Respondents' Children



Conclusions

Consistent with our past surveys, intermarried people who have decided to raise their children Jewish continue to promote Jewish activities around Passover and to de-emphasize religious aspects of Easter if they participate in Easter celebrations. The great majority are participating in numerous Passover activities: virtually all plan on hosting or attending a seder, 71% plan on telling the Passover story, and 56% plan on following dietary restrictions for most or all of the eight days of Passover.

Conversely, they continue to participate in fewer Easter activities, although somewhat more than last year. Almost half (47%) are not participating in Easter celebrations at all, but 41% plan on hosting or attending an Easter dinner, the same as last year. Few plan to engage in "religious" Easter activities like attending religious services (9%) – which may in fact not be a religious experience for the participants – or telling the Easter story (3%).

Despite Easter falling during Passover this year, the percentage who plan to participate in Easter celebrations in some way – 53% – is not far from the 45% that said they would do so in 2008, when the holidays did not overlap.

This population describes Passover as far more religious than Easter – 60% see their Easter celebrations as entirely secular (which is the same as in 2013), compared to 4% who see Passover as entirely secular.

This year we observed somewhat less comfort with participating in Easter celebrations, reverting back to the trend set before 2013:

- The percentage of respondents who reported being comfortable with participating in Easter celebrations was 28%; that percentage had declined from 47% in 2010 to 40% in 2011 to 32% in 2012 and then increased to 45% in 2013. Among Jewish respondents, the percentage who reported being comfortable with participating in Easter – 12% – reversed a trend that had increased from 14% in 2012 to 25% in 2013.

- In contrast, the great majority (84%) of respondents are comfortable celebrating Passover; only 1% are uncomfortable doing so. The percentage of respondents who are not Jewish who reported being comfortable with participating in Passover decreased slightly to 72% – it had been 78% in 2012 and 75% in 2013.

This year we also observed some decrease in following some of the traditional attitudes towards and practices of Passover:

- The percentage of respondents who said they would tell the Passover story decreased to 71% from 76% in 2013; those who said they would eat matzah decreased to 82% from 90%; those who see Passover as religious or deeply religious decreased from 37% in 2013 to 29%.
- Among respondents who are not Jewish, the percentage who said they would not eat prohibited foods even during the Easter meal was 13%, down from 23% in 2013, and the percentage who plan on following the dietary restrictions for most or all eight days of Passover decreased to 35% from 46% in 2013.

Having decided on a religious tradition for their children, the respondents rarely explain to their children that they're participating in Easter so they can make up their own mind about what religion to adopt. Most respondents say they explain their family's participation in Easter to their children as a matter of "respect" for either the non-Jewish parent's traditions or the traditions of the non-Jewish parent's extended family, or "open-mindedness/tolerance." A full 88% believe that their participation in Easter celebrations does not affect their children's Jewish identity, a level consistent with past years.