

## FACT 2020 Bahá'í Questionnaire Data Results

### Introduction

The Bahá'í Faith has been contributing to FACT research since its inception at Hartford Seminary in 2000 (see <https://faithcommunitiestoday.org>). Bahá'ís participated in the 2000, 2005, 2008, 2010, 2015, and 2020 surveys. Surveys in 2020 were sent to 950 Local Spiritual Assembly secretaries in January and February of 2020 (just prior to widespread COVID-19 lockdowns). Surveys were filled out online using Qualtrics software, and data was analyzed by Dr. Mike McMullen, a Bahá'í sociologist at the University of Houston-Clear Lake. Exactly 404 surveys were returned, resulting in an overall response rate of 42.5%. The results for each section and question are summarized below.

### Background/Demographics

In what year was this community officially founded? **1971 average year founded**

### Worship

Please estimate the total average attendance at your regular 19-Day Feast service(s): **18**

Please estimate the total average attendance at your regular 19-Day Feast service(s) **one year ago: 17**

Please estimate the total average attendance at your regular 19-Day Feast service(s) **five years ago: 17**

How well do the following describe your community's 19-Day Feast service?

	<u>Not at all</u>	<u>Slightly</u>	<u>Somewhat</u>	<u>Well</u>	<u>Very well</u>
Contemporary	12.0%	12.2%	44.1%	23.4%	8.2%
Reverent	1.5	1.3	8.6	39.6	49.0
Innovative	10.9	29.6	42.1	14.0	3.4
Formal ritual	43.8	27.2	16.8	10.1	2.1
Includes electric guitar	93.6	3.6	2.1	0.5	0.3
Includes organ	97.2	0.8	1.3	0.5	0.3
Includes choir	91.5	3.6	3.8	1.0	0.0
Includes recorded music	3.8	11.4	26.9	28.2	29.7
Includes short talk on Bahá'í theme	36.0	24.5	23.5	10.7	5.4
Includes children reading or performing	24.7	19.2	23.2	18.2	14.6
Includes youth reading or performing	33.8	16.8	23.9	16.3	9.2
Informal	5.4	14.6	43.2	28.9	7.9
Thought-provoking	2.3	9.8	39.3	35.0	13.6
Includes prayers or readings in another language	7.1	16.5	20.5	22.0	33.9

As the data indicate, the average Feast attendance in 2020 was 18 people. This is basically flat compared to attendance estimates from 1 year ago and 5 years ago. Although there has been neither an appreciable increase nor decrease in Feast attendance, this stability in average worship turnout is contrasted with dramatic declines in church attendance based on FACT 2020 data. In fact, the 20 years of longitudinal data show that since 2000 (the first FACT decadal survey), churches on average have lost ½ of their weekly attendance. Over that same time period, Bahá'í communities have been remarkably stable in average Feast attendance: 2000=19; 2005=17; 2010=18.

The FACT survey also asked respondents to describe certain aspects of their community's 19-Day Feast. Over 88% of respondents said "reverent" describes Feasts "well" or "very well." In addition, nearly 58% said Feasts included recorded music; and nearly one-third of children, and one-fourth of youth, either read or perform during Feasts. Finally, over half (56%) said that Feasts including prayers or readings in another language describe their community "well" or "very well."

## Leadership

1. Please describe the nine members of your Local Spiritual Assembly:

A. Number of women—**5 median**      Number of men—**4 median**

B. Highest completed level of education:

Number with High school diploma or GED only: **1 median**

Number with some College or technical school; associate's degree: **1 median**

Number with College bachelor's degree: **4 median**

Number with Master's degree: **2 median**

Number with Doctoral or Professional degree: **1 median**

C. Age:

Number aged 21-29: **1 median**      Number aged 30-44: **2 median**

Number aged 45-59: **2 median**      Number aged 60 and more: **4 median**

D. Race/ethnicity:

Number of Asians: **0.5 median**

Number of Black or African Americans: **1 median**

Number of Hispanics or Latinos/as: **0.5 median**

Number of American Indian/Alaska Native: **0 median**

Number of Whites: **6 median**

How many of these are Middle Eastern/Persian?: **2 median**

Number of Native Hawaiians or Other Pacific Islanders: **0 median**

Number of multiethnic background or other background: **1 median**

According to FACT 2020 Bahá'í data, a typical Bahá'í LSA has 5 women and 4 men. In addition, 7 of 9 LSA members typically have at least a college degree. Two-thirds of LSA members are 45 years of age or older, and one-third of LSA members are non-white or of multiethnic background.

## Participants

**How many** persons (including children) *regularly participate* (once a month or more) in worship or other religious activities in your community? **26.7 average (15 median)**

Of the above regular participants, **how many** are in each of the following age groups?

Children (ages 0-12):.....	4.0 ave
Youth (ages 13-17):.....	2.3 ave
Young adults (ages 18-34).....	3.4 ave
Middle adults (ages 35-64) .....	10.3 ave
Senior adults (ages 65 and older): .....	9.1 ave
Total (this should add up to the <i>regularly participate</i> total) .....	29.1 ave

Of the above regular participants, **how many** are in each of the following categories?

American Indian/Alaska Native (non-Hispanic) .....	0.22 ave
Asian (non-Hispanic) .....	0.80 ave
Black or African American (non-Hispanic) .....	2.17 ave
Hispanic or Latino(a) .....	1.50 ave
Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander (non-Hispanic) .....	0.40 ave
White (non-Hispanic) .....	19.1 ave
Multiethnic or other .....	3.70 ave
Total (this should add up to the <b>regularly participate</b> total) .....	27.9 ave

Of all **regularly participating adults** (age 18 and over), what **percent** would you estimate:

Are female? .....	50.0%
Are college graduates? .....	38.4%
Are new to this community in the last five years? .....	12.6%
Volunteer regularly for the community? .....	28.3%
Live below the poverty level? .....	3.7%
Live within 15 minutes of the community's typical Feast locations? .....	47.4%
Are lifelong members of the Bahá'í community? .....	29.7%
Are American born? .....	37.9%
Are immigrants (0-5 years in the U.S.)? .....	4.5%
Are persons with Special Needs (physically, mentally, emotionally).....	2.9%

The FACT 2020 also asked several questions about the demographic characteristics of community members. Results indicate that the average community has 31 persons who regularly participate monthly in the religious activities of the community (the median was 15). The diversity of the community is on average about one-third non-white (31.5%). Half the community participants are women, over 38% are college graduates, nearly 13% are new to the community in the last 5 years, and over 28% regularly volunteer for their community. Fewer than 4% of Bahá'ís live below the poverty level. About 30% of typical Bahá'í community members have been Bahá'ís their whole lives, indicating that approximately 70% of community members are converts.

## Mission and Identity

Do you agree or disagree with each of the following statements? *(Check one on each line.)*

<i>Our community:</i>	Strongly	Neither agree		Strongly	
	<u>Disagree</u>	<u>Disagree</u>	<u>nor disagree</u>	<u>Agree</u>	<u>Agree</u>
Has a clear mission and purpose	1.7%	2.5%	14.9%	45.2%	35.7%
Is striving to be diverse (e.g. racially, ethnically, socio-economically)	0.8	3.1	18.9	43.4	33.8
Is good at incorporating new people into the community	0.6	6.2	23.5	46.2	23.5
Is spiritually vital and alive	0.8	5.9	17.5	53.5	22.3
Is willing to change to meet new challenges	1.4	4.8	14.9	59.3	19.7
Is actively involved in our local community	1.7	10.1	26.7	47.2	14.3
Is actively looking for new members	2.2	5.9	19.9	50.8	21.1

Since 2010, has your community experienced any of the following? *(Check all that apply.)*

	<u>No</u>	Yes, in	Yes, in
		2010-2015	2016-2020
Merged with another community	94.1%	2.0%	3.9%
Split into two or more communities	94.9	3.4	1.7
Helped start or plant a new community (sent out Pioneers)	81.1	6.8	12.1
Began having neighborhood Feasts	82.7	9.6	7.6

This section of the survey explored the mission and identity of religious communities. In almost every measure, the typical Bahá'í community scored very high. For example, over 80% of respondents indicated that they “agree” or “strongly agree” with the statement that their community “has a clear mission and purpose.” Another three-quarters either “agree” or “strongly agree” that their community is “spiritually vital and alive.” Over 61% said that their community is “actively involved in our local community.” Finally, 79% indicated that they are “willing to change to meet new challenges.”

Several questions dealt with the issue of diversity and incorporating new people. Over 77% either “agreed” or “strongly agreed” that their community is “striving to be diverse.” Nearly 70% said they were “good at incorporating new people into the community.” Finally, 72% indicated that they were “actively looking for new members.”

Few Bahá'í communities merged or split (unlike many churches in the past decade), and just shy of 19% of communities had pioneers depart from their location in the last 10 years. Just over 17% of larger Bahá'í communities divided into neighborhood Feasts in that same time period (data was collected before COVID-19 pandemic lockdowns, which may have changed this profile).

## Programs

Does your community have any of the following programs or activities? If “Yes,” how much emphasis is given to the activity? *(Check one on each line.)*

	<u>No</u>	<u>Yes</u>	
		<u>Some emphasis</u>	<u>A lot of emphasis</u>
Prayer or meditation groups	14.7%	34.1%	51.0%
Spiritual retreats	85.4	13.0	1.7
Special interest groups (e.g., crafts, hobbies)	78.5	19.5	2.0
Sports and exercise groups	90.7	8.7	0.6
Music programs (choir, orchestra, band, etc.)	84.9	12.5	2.6
Community service activities	25.4	56.9	17.7
Youth (13-17) activities or programs	49.6	32.6	17.8
Young adult (18-34) activities or programs	73.3	17.1	9.6
Senior (65+) activities or programs	87.5	10.8	1.7
Global ministry activities (special donations)	83.7	11.5	4.8
Social justice/advocacy groups	70.0	23.2	6.8
Preschool and/or daycare center	96.6	2.2	1.1
Elementary (Primary) school	95.1	4.0	0.8
High (Secondary) school	95.8	3.4	0.8
Special needs ministry (programs for physically, mentally, emotionally challenged)	95.5	4.0	0.6
Multicultural and/or multiracial family ministry	88.6	9.4	2.0
Deepenings	19.1	50.6	30.3
Devotionals	3.1	29.2	67.7
Children's classes	39.4	22.1	38.5
Junior Youth classes	44.7	22.8	32.6
Ruhi study circles	10.0	41.0	49.0
Interfaith family ministry	80.7	15.9	3.4

How much does your community emphasize the following personal and family religious practices? (Check one on each line.)

	<u>Not at all</u>	<u>A Little</u>	<u>Some</u>	<u>Quite a Bit</u>	<u>A Lot</u>
Personal religious practices (e.g., prayer, meditation, scripture study)	4.2%	7.1%	19.5%	34.7%	34.5%
Fasting	4.0	8.3	23.6	30.5	33.6
Obligatory Prayer	12.1	10.1	24.8	24.8	28.2
Talking about one's faith with those who are not a part of the Bahá'í Faith (i.e., teaching the Faith)	1.7	4.5	16.1	40.3	37.5
Observing special practices or restrictions on one's holy days (e.g., refraining from work or school)	8.5	17.0	32.9	28.3	13.3
Parents talking with children about faith	16.1	6.9	21.6	29.6	25.9
Living out one's faith in all aspects of one's daily life (e.g., work, family, civic engagement)	5.7	5.7	15.9	37.5	35.2
Regular 19-Day Feast attendance	2.0	3.4	17.5	35.8	41.1

During the past 12 months, has your community been involved in any of the following activities with other faith groups? (Check all that apply on each line.)

	<u>No</u>	<u>Yes</u>	
		<u>With Other Bahá'í communities</u>	<u>With Other Faith Traditions</u>
Worship Services (Feasts, Holy Days)	28.7%	52.8%	18.5%
Educational or social activities	33.4	37.1	29.5
Community service activities	41.8	21.3	36.9

Overall, to what extent are your community's regularly participating adults involved in recruiting new people (i.e., teaching the Faith)?

2.0%	Not at all
13.1%	A little
49.4%	Some
30.2%	Quite a bit
5.3%	A lot

As you can see from the data above, most Bahá'í communities focus on educational and spiritual programs rather than focusing on social services as do many churches in the American religious landscape. Exactly 90% of local communities put either "some emphasis" or "a lot of emphasis" on Ruhi study circles, out of which emerged community service projects that were emphasized by nearly 75% of communities. Over 80% of Bahá'í communities placed some or a lot of emphasis on deepenings, and nearly 97% emphasized devotionals (with two-thirds saying they gave "a lot" of emphasis). Over half of Bahá'í communities gave some or a lot of emphasis to both Children's and Junior Youth classes (61% and 55% respectively), and half provided youth

activities or programs (50.4%). Interestingly, nearly 1/3 of communities emphasized social justice/advocacy groups—most of which focused on race unity and racial justice issues.

When asked about what personal and family practices activities are emphasized by the community, the three with the highest responses of “quite a bit” and “a lot” were teaching the Faith (77.8%), living out one’s faith in daily life (72.7%) and regular 19-Day Feast attendance (76.9%).

Finally, when asked about activities with other faith groups, over half of respondents indicated that their community worships with other Bahá’í communities, and 30% and 37% indicated that they are involved with educational/social activities and community service activities, respectively, with other faith traditions.

## Technology

Does your community use any of the following technology? *(Check one on each line.)*

	-----Yes-----			
	No	A Little	Some	A Lot
Email communication	1.1%	1.7%	7.0%	90.2%
E-newsletter	64.0	5.9	9.9	20.1
Website	45.9	22.1	19.5	12.5
Electronic/ACH/online giving	11.5	8.7	29.5	50.3
Facebook	41.9	20.4	21.5	16.1
Instagram	89.1	6.0	2.6	2.3
Twitter	94.2	3.5	0.6	1.7
Podcasts	92.0	5.4	1.4	1.1
Texting	13.3	15.5	28.2	42.9
Blogging	93.7	4.3	0.9	1.1
Bahá’í App(s)	36.3	20.6	27.6	15.5
Video projection during worship services	34.8	27.0	27.5	10.7
Online meetings (e.g. Zoom, Skype, Go to Meeting)	54.6	23.0	16.2	6.2
Wi-Fi access during Feasts/Holy Days	40.4	22.2	19.9	17.4

Bahá’í respondents indicated that email communication, online monetary donations, and texting are the most frequently used forms of technology (by over 85% of communities). Another 54% make use of a website, over 58% have at least a little use of Facebook, and 45% use online meetings (this data was collected in February 2021, before the COVID-19 pandemic lockdowns).

## Finances

What was the total amount of money your community received from all sources in your most recent fiscal year?  
**Average=\$25,113                      Median=\$12,000**

How would you describe your community's financial health today and five years ago? *(Check one in each column.)*

<u>Today</u>	<u>Five years ago</u>
2.5% In serious difficulty	1.3% In serious difficulty
2.2% In some difficulty	2.9% In some difficulty
19.0% Tight, but we manage	18.0% Tight, but we manage
47.6% Good	52.1% Good
27.6% Excellent	19.6% Excellent
	6.1% Not Applicable

## A Few Final Issues

During the past 5 years, has your community experienced any disagreements or conflicts? *(Check all that apply.)*

- 37.9% No
- 32.5% Yes, but it/they were not serious
- 12.6% Yes, and in at least one instance some people left
- 3.9% Yes, and in at least one instance some people withheld donations

To what extent is your community concerned about personal safety and security when you gather?

- 77.6% Not at all concerned
- 14.3% A little concerned
- 4.8% Somewhat concerned
- 3.3% Very concerned

Does your community use, or do, any of the following regarding security when you gather for meetings? *(Check all that apply.)*

	<u>No</u>	<u>Yes, before 2015</u>	<u>Yes, since 2015</u>
Alarm systems	76.8%	3.0%	1.7%
Security cameras	75.9	3.0	2.2
Locking doors during meetings	71.9	5.9	5.2
Volunteer security team from community	79.1	0.7	1.0
Paid, professional security personnel	78.1	0.5	1.0

Does your community use, or do, any of the following? *(Check all that apply.)*

	<u>No</u>	<u>Yes, before 2015</u>	<u>Yes, since 2015</u>
Check-in procedures for infants and children	71.9%	3.2%	5.7%
Background checks for volunteers with children	20.2	16.5	52.2
Conduct training for those working with children	37.7	20.7	28.3
Training on general safety and security	69.5	3.2	7.6

This section of questions above were asked in the context of rising security concerns in American religious congregations as an increasing number of churches and synagogues have experienced shootings and gun violence. As you can see from respondents’ collective answers above, the vast majority of Bahá’í communities are “not at all concerned” about personal safety and security issues when gathering for worship or other spiritual activities. In addition, other than implementing background checks and training for those who work with children, most Bahá’í communities have not implemented special procedures to enhance safety at Bahá’í gatherings. In addition, over 70% of Bahá’í communities indicate that they either have no conflicts or only minor conflicts that were not serious.

Thinking about the past 12 months, has your community organized any groups, meetings, classes, or events specifically focused on the following purposes or activities?

	<u>Yes</u>	<u>No</u>
To discuss politics.....	2.7%	97.3%
An effort to get people registered to vote .....	2.4	97.6
To get out the vote during an election .....	2.1	97.9
To organize or participate in efforts to lobby elected officials of any sort .....	9.1	90.9
To organize or participate in a demonstration or march either in support of or opposition to some public issue or policy .....	6.9	93.1
Distribute voter guides .....	2.4	97.6

To what extent do you agree or disagree with each of the following statements? *(Check one on each line.)*

	<u>Strongly Disagree</u>	<u>Disagree</u>	<u>Neither agree nor disagree</u>	<u>Agree</u>	<u>Strongly Agree</u>
Almost everyone in this community has the same political position.	9.2%	18.2%	57.8%	12.3%	2.5%
This community has experienced recent conflict over political issues.	60.1	24.2	11.3	2.7	1.5
This community avoids discussing political issues when it gathers.	5.2	4.6	4.0	33.3	52.9
This community is politically active.	60.4	20.9	15.0	2.1	1.5

As you can see from the above responses, well over 90% or 95% of Bahá’í respondents indicated that their community is not involved in political activity. Over 84% either “disagree” or “strongly disagree” that their community has experienced recent conflict over political issues, and another

86% either “agree” or “strongly agree” that their members avoid discussing political issues when they gather.

I would like to thank the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the United States, as well as Dr. Robert Stockman, for their assistance in providing a cover letter for this survey, and disseminating it to all Local Spiritual Assemblies in the US.

Respectfully submitted,

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