

# From Calling to Career: Mapping the Current State & Future of Rabbinic Leadership

Comprehensive, landmark research study indicates the call to rabbinic leadership remains strong, while structural barriers prevent entry to and sustainability of the career.

Rabbis remain among our most trusted and spiritually resonant leaders. They hold pastoral presence, moral voice, communal care, and the capacity to translate Jewish wisdom into lived experience. This study—initiated by Atra in partnership with Rosov Consulting and H&F Baker Foundation—surfaces a delicate and urgent truth: the calling to be a rabbi remains strong, but the pathway to enter and sustain this work has become increasingly fragile. The future of the rabbinate is not in danger because people are no longer drawn to serve.

**The challenge is structural, and therefore solvable.**

This study provides the clearest portrait to date of the contemporary rabbinate in the United States. It includes the most comprehensive estimate ever produced of active rabbis across congregational, nonprofit, chaplaincy, campus, educational and independent roles: approximately 4,144 non-Haredi rabbis nationwide.

The findings reveal both the lived realities of today's rabbis and the shape of who is most likely to lead Jewish life next. They also point to the leverage points most likely to strengthen the rabbinic pipeline and sustain Jewish life for decades to come.

## Key Findings: The State of the Current Rabbinate

- Deep meaning and widespread burnout coexist – **97%** of rabbis report their work as rewarding, while burnout and emotional overload are forcing exits
- **Congregational roles remain dominant**, but are losing appeal (non-congregational roles are growing yet remain underpaid and structurally weaker)
- The rabbinic workforce is aging: (of the 4,144 rabbis active, only **6% are under 35, while 26% are over 65**; an age profile older than Christian clergy)

## Key Findings: The Future of the Rabbinate

- **Enrollment has declined** at large denominational seminaries but appears to be reaching a new equilibrium
- Smaller and non-denominational seminaries are **growing**
- Students entering today are **demographically distinct** (majority second career; more women; more LGBTQ+; more Jews-by-Choice and those raised in multi-heritage households; more Jews of Color)
- The calling remains extremely strong, but **practical training and career barriers** (financial, time, relocation, career viability) **are the most powerful deterrents**

4,144

Rabbis in the  
United States

\*excluding Haredi rabbis

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## Key Insights:

- Burnout is the silent emergency shaping the present and the future of the rabbinate.
- We are not replacing rabbis fast enough to keep pace with aging exit patterns.
- The challenge is not inspiration. The challenge is that the path is too costly, too risky, too hard to access.
- Institutional architecture is behind where rabbinic leadership is naturally emerging (nondenominational, multisector, diverse identity, innovation-driven spaces).
- The barriers are practical, not ideological. They can be addressed.

There is a substantial population of potential future rabbis who would pursue this calling out of love for the Jewish people and a desire to serve, yet are held back by practical concerns. Many of these prospective rabbis are second-career adults with family responsibilities that make current pathways inaccessible. **Many of the leaders we most need are the very ones most likely to be shut out.**

At the same time, many current rabbis face misalignment between workload, institutional support, and long-term sustainability. The work is deeply meaningful, but the emotional demand is profound.

These deterrents matter, but they are not immovable. This moment offers a powerful opportunity for the field to co-create meaningful solutions.

## Key Opportunities: Nine Areas of Leverage

- **Change the financial equation** – address tuition, debt load, opportunity costs and compensation so the economics of becoming and being a rabbi align with the level of training the work requires.
- **Broaden and coordinate recruitment pathways** – allow prospects of all ages, identities, and life stages to see the rabbinate as an attainable and resonant calling.
- **Expand access to Jewish learning and leadership development** – especially in college and young adulthood, while strengthening adult learning environments as onramps.
- **Evolve rabbinic education to reflect today's realities** – design flexible, practice-based formation paths (and learn from new pilot innovations) that allow emerging rabbis to integrate learning with family, work, and community while preserving rigor and depth.
- **Redefine rabbinic work and long-term career viability** – reexamine structures, expectations, and employment culture to ensure that the vocation is sustainable across a lifetime of service.
- **Expand and strengthen non-congregational pathways** – support chaplaincy, education, social impact, innovation, and other multi-sector work where rabbis are increasingly called to lead.
- **Bridge generational and cultural gaps between rabbis and the communities they serve** – build mutual readiness and shared understanding.
- **Lean into mentorship and guidance** – strengthen structured guidance, encouragement, and rabbinic support for those discerning the path.
- **Build field-wide coordination and shared infrastructure** – define shared goals, align strategy, coordinate interventions and collective investment to reduce duplication, expand access, and transform scattered innovation into a connected system worthy of this calling.

This challenge demands collaborative experimentation and coordination. Now is the moment for the field to align efforts, share learning, and build a future-ready rabbinic ecosystem.

View the entire study  
at [atrarabbis.org/  
rabbinic-pipeline-  
study](https://atrarabbis.org/rabbinic-pipeline-study)