

# Synagogues, Jewish Community Centers, and Other Jewish Organizations

## Who Joins, Who Doesn't?

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Using data from the National Jewish Population Survey (NJPS) 2000–01, this article examines patterns of memberships in synagogues, JCCs, and other Jewish organizations and analyzes the demographic and Jewish bases of organizational memberships. Multiple memberships are as common as single memberships, suggesting organizations might collaborate to increase the overall pool of Jews who join them. Among demographic factors, income, household composition, and marital status are most strongly associated with organizational memberships. Memberships are strongly tied to nearly all other facets of Jewish life, hinting at a polarized Jewish population. A concluding section highlights several important policy implications for the communal system.

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Despite important changes in the Jewish population over time, memberships in Jewish institutions remain principal vehicles through which Jews express their Jewish identity, pursue personal and communal goals, and help ensure the future vitality of the community. Understanding baseline membership levels and patterns is critical for two reasons. First, the proportion of the population that formally associates with the community through organizational memberships is an important measure of the current strength of the Jewish community. Second, efforts to enhance Jewish organizational life—by attracting those who are not engaged while continuing to serve those who already are—depend on

knowing the characteristics of members and nonmembers alike.

This article employs data from the National Jewish Population Survey 2000–01 (United Jewish Communities 2003) to analyze memberships in synagogues, Jewish Community Centers (JCCs), and other Jewish organizations.<sup>1</sup> In addition to examining the three membership categories individually, the article uses a fourth, overall measure of membership. A person is defined as *associated* with the Jewish community if she

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<sup>1</sup>In doing so, we both follow and update a long tradition of studies that have examined organizational memberships among American Jews; see, for example, Sklare & Greenblum, 1967; Cohen, 1983; and Goldstein & Goldstein, 1996.

or he is either a synagogue, JCC, or other Jewish organization member. It is important to note that for the purposes of this article, contributions to Jewish philanthropic causes are not used as criteria for being associated with the Jewish community; neither does the article examine motivations because the NJPS did not ask about motivations.

To some extent, this variable of overall membership mixes apples and oranges, because institutions vary along a number of dimensions, such as cost, size, purpose, services, and programs. Nevertheless, the measure of *association* transcends these distinctions by emphasizing the act of formally joining the communal system in its broadest terms, for by being a member of a Jewish organization, individuals are affiliating with the Jewish community.

Key findings of this article include the following:

Memberships in multiple Jewish organizations are as common as membership in just one organization, and as a result, Jewish institutions are less in competition with each other for members than they are engaged in a potentially collaborative effort to increase the overall pool of Jews who join and contribute to institutions.

Among demographic factors, income, household composition, and marital status are the most strongly associated with organizational memberships, whereas age, region, and mobility have more modest links to belonging to Jewish organizations.

Jewish organizational memberships are strongly tied to nearly all other facets of Jewish life—including denominational identification, philanthropy and volunteerism, attitudes toward being Jewish, travel to Israel, social networks, and Jewish educational background—suggesting a polarized Jewish population with respect to Jewish connections.

This article proceeds in six additional sections. The section directly below briefly explains the sample of respondents from

NJPS that is used in the analysis; it is followed by an examination of the overall patterns of Jewish organizational memberships, including multiple memberships, among Jewish adults. The third and fourth sections directly address the question of who joins Jewish institutions by analyzing the connection between demographic characteristics and organizational affiliations, and then between other Jewish connections and organizational affiliations. A fifth section considers the data from another perspective, providing profiles of people who belong to synagogues, JCCs, and other Jewish organizations and comparing them to people who do not belong to any organization. A concluding section reviews the findings and highlights several important policy-related issues.

### THE SAMPLE

Before starting the analysis, two issues related to the sample need to be addressed. First, the NJPS questionnaire was divided into long-form and short-form versions. The long-form version was administered to respondents whose responses to selected early questions indicated stronger Jewish connections. The short-form version, which omitted many questions on Jewish topics, was given to respondents whose answers on the same selected early questions indicated Jewish connections that are not as strong. Because questions on Jewish organizational affiliations appeared on the long-form version, this article is restricted to respondents in the more Jewishly connected population. These respondents represent approximately 80% of all U.S. Jews. The more Jewishly connected part of the population is estimated at 4.3 million Jews, including 3.4 million adults and 900,000 children.

Second, the percentages that are presented in this article refer to adult Jews, not to Jewish households. Reporting about adult Jews is consistent with the questions

Table 1. Overall synagogue, Jewish Community Center, and other Jewish organization memberships among Jewish adults

	Synagogue Member	JCC Member	Other Jewish Organization Member	Percent
Group 1	No Jewish organizational memberships			44
Group 2	X			20
Group 3		X		2
Group 4			X	6
Group 5	X	X		6
Group 6	X		X	10
Group 7		X	X	2
Group 8	X	X	X	10
Total				100
Total associated	Member of at least one Jewish organization			56

X indicates membership.

on JCC<sup>2</sup> and other Jewish organizational memberships,<sup>3</sup> which asked respondents if they personally were members of these organizations. The synagogue question, however, is different, because it asked respondents if they *or anyone else* in their household are synagogue members.<sup>4</sup> As a result, synagogue membership percentages are most accurately interpreted as percentages of adult Jews living in households in which they or someone else is a synagogue member. For consistency of presentation with JCC and other organizational members, the article refers to synagogue members, but readers should be aware that it may be either the respondent or someone else in the household who is affiliated with the synagogue.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>2</sup>The NJPS question asked: "During the past year have you been a dues paying member of a Jewish Community Center or a YM/YWHA?"

<sup>3</sup>The NJPS question asked: "During the past year, did you pay membership dues to any Jewish organization other than a synagogue or a Jewish Community Center or YM/YWHA?" It should be noted that the question did not specify any particular organization.

<sup>4</sup>The NJPS question asked: "Are you/is anyone in your household currently a member of a synagogue or temple?"

<sup>5</sup>Another reason the article presents data on adult Jews, rather than Jewish households, is because most of the demographic and attitudinal variables

### JEWISH ORGANIZATIONAL MEMBERSHIPS: OVERALL PATTERNS

Table 1 examines the distribution of memberships in synagogues, JCCs, and other Jewish organizations, including the overlap among them. As the top row of the table shows, 44% of adults do not belong to a Jewish organization. Twenty-eight percent of Jewish adults belong to only one of the membership types, including 20% who belong to a synagogue, 2% a JCC, and 6% another type of Jewish organization. Another 18% belong to two of the membership types, including 6% who belong to a synagogue and JCC, 10% to a synagogue and another type of Jewish organization, and 2% to a JCC and another type of Jewish organization. One-tenth of Jewish adults report they belong to all three types of organizations. The total level of association with the Jewish community stands at 56%. In other words, more than half of Jewish adults are associated (they belong to at least one of the membership categories), and less than half are unassociated.

Viewed differently, the percentages in Table 1 reveal that 46% of Jewish adults

that are cross-tabulated with affiliation were asked about individuals, not households.

belong to a synagogue,<sup>6</sup> 20% exclusively and 26% in conjunction with other membership types. In addition, 20% of Jewish adults belong to a JCC, only 2% exclusively and 18% in combination with other membership types. Over a quarter (28%) of Jewish adults belong to another type of Jewish organization, 6% exclusively and 22% in conjunction with either a synagogue or JCC.

Finally, it is important to highlight the fact that among all those who are associated with the Jewish community, half (50%) belong to two or more of the three types of organizations. This is consistent with a well-known sociological pattern that people who join one organization are quite likely to join others.

### DEMOGRAPHIC FACTORS AND MEMBERSHIPS

This section examines the connection between demographic factors and organizational memberships. Table 2 presents findings from the data. Within demographic categories, rates of membership are presented separately for each type of institution (synagogue, JCC, and other) and for the total level of association with the Jewish community.

Turning first to age, Table 2 shows that JCC and other organizational memberships are lowest among respondents ages 18–34, but this is not the case for synagogue membership.<sup>7</sup> In fact, synagogue membership is

the least susceptible to changes in age, though the data suggest that membership increases among those ages 35–49 and 50–64 and then declines among the elderly (age 65 and older). Membership in JCCs and other types of Jewish organizations, however, generally rises with respondent age. Indeed, those age 75 and older are two and a half and three and a half times more likely to belong to JCCs and other Jewish organizations, respectively, than respondents in the 18–34 group. The overall association level rises with age as well, increasing from 50% among the youngest group to 64% among the oldest.

Education is weakly related to all three membership types and to overall levels of association. Those with graduate degrees are more likely than others to be organizational members, but the difference is fairly small. Among those with a college degree or less, there is no consistent pattern to their memberships.

Rates of membership and overall association increase with income, though with varying degrees of consistency. Synagogue membership rises most steadily with increasing income, moving from 30% of adults with annual household income under \$25,000 to 64% of adults in households earning \$150,000 or more. Memberships in other types of Jewish organizations also increase fairly consistently as income rises. In contrast, JCC membership shows little or no relationship with income for adults in households earning \$100,000 or less, but then jumps among adults with household incomes of \$100,000 and more. Overall association increases from 45% of adults in the lowest income households to 71% of adults in the highest income households.

Looking at household composition, Table 2 shows that well over half (62%) of adults who have children in their household belong to a synagogue, the highest percentage among the five types of households listed in the table. It is worth noting that of the five types of households listed in Table 2, just 30% are households with children. Membership rates for JCCs and other types

<sup>6</sup>While 46% report they are currently synagogue members, 70% report they are either a member now or have been in the past, leaving 30% who have never belonged to a synagogue. Synagogues are the only institutions for which NJPS asked about past memberships.

<sup>7</sup>One explanation for this may be that the NJPS question on synagogue membership referred to households, whereas the questions on JCC and other Jewish organization memberships referred to the respondent him- or herself. Therefore, younger respondents living with older adults—especially young adult children residing in parental homes—may report higher synagogue membership rates than JCC and other membership rates.

Table 2. Jewish organization memberships by demographic factors among Jewish adults

	Synagogue Member (%)	JCC Member (%)	Other Jewish Organization Member (%)	Associated (%)
Total <sup>1</sup>	46	21	29	56
Age				
18-34	45	13	14	50
35-49	48	22	26	55
50-64	48	18	29	57
65-74	44	29	38	62
75+	43	30	49	64
Education				
High school or below	43	20	26	55
Some college	47	22	27	57
College degree	44	18	28	53
Graduate degree	52	24	33	62
Income				
Under \$25,000	30	16	21	45
\$25,000-50,000	39	18	24	50
\$50,000-100,000	44	18	26	55
\$100,000-150,000	52	23	30	61
\$150,000 and over	64	30	41	71
Household composition				
Household with children	62	26	29	68
Nonelderly single	27	7	13	36
Nonelderly couple	46	20	29	55
Elderly single	38	28	40	58
Elderly couple	48	32	47	67
Marital status				
Married	53	26	35	64
Separated or divorced	31	11	19	41
Widowed	42	26	36	60
Single and never married	37	9	12	43
Region				
Northeast	50	23	29	60
Midwest	54	21	34	64
South	44	22	32	57
West	37	15	21	44
Total <sup>1</sup>	46	21	29	56
Immigrant status				
FSU immigrant (1980 or after)	26	23	19	47
Non-FSU immigrant (1980 or after)	49	29	31	62
U.S. born or nonrecent immigrant (before 1980)	48	20	29	57
Length of residence at current address				
0-4 years	39	17	22	48
5-9 years	48	24	24	57
10-19 years	52	24	34	63
20 or more years	53	24	39	66
Probability of moving in next 3 years				
Definitely/probably	43	15	19	51
Probably not/definitely not	48	24	33	59

<sup>1</sup> Percentages in total row may vary from data in Table 1 due to rounding.

of Jewish organizations are highest for households composed of elderly couples. In contrast, nonelderly singles living by themselves are by far the least likely to belong to a synagogue, a JCC, or a Jewish organization, and consequently they have the lowest overall association rate (36%).

Marital status is also related to organizational memberships in important ways. Those who are married or widowed are the most likely to be members. In contrast, separation and divorce are linked to lower rates of membership and overall communal association, strongly suggesting that certain disruptions in personal life have critical communal consequences. Those who are single and never married also display reduced membership levels.

Turning to geographic region, the findings show that Jews in the West are distinct from other Jews in terms of organizational memberships (for further information on geography and American Jews, see Sheskin, 2004). Synagogue membership is highest in the Midwest (54%), followed by the Northeast (50%) and the South (44%), with the West (37%) trailing substantially.<sup>8</sup> JCC membership is consistently in the low 20% range in all areas except the West, where it declines to 15%. Jews in the West are also less likely to belong to other types of Jewish organizations. These findings present a coherent picture, showing Western Jews are less likely to be associated with the Jewish community through formal memberships than Jews in other regions.

Immigrants are an important communal constituency, albeit numerically small. Do they differ in their membership patterns from other Jews? Table 2 shows that immi-

grants from the Former Soviet Union (FSU) are the most distinctive, being less likely than non-FSU immigrants, U.S.-born Jews, and nonrecent immigrants (before 1980) to belong to synagogues and other types of Jewish organizations. JCC memberships do not follow the same pattern, with FSU immigrants similar to U.S.-born Jews in membership rates and both trailing non-FSU immigrants (for more information on Jewish immigrants, see Ament, 2004).

The final two measures examined in Table 2 – length of residence at current address and probability of moving in the next 3 years – reflect actual and expected mobility. The data show that both types of mobility are associated with lower membership levels. For example, synagogue membership declines from more than half (53%) among those in their residence for 20 or more years to 39% among those living at their current address for 0–4 years. Membership in other types of Jewish organizations and the overall association rate show similar reductions among those who have more recently moved to their home. JCC membership levels are also lower among the more recently mobile, but JCC membership does not increase as much as other membership types among those who have lived in their current residence for longer periods of time.

Consistent with the relationship between actual mobility and memberships are findings linking expected mobility and lower levels of membership. Overall, 59% of adults who report they will definitely or probably *not* move in the next 3 years are associated with the Jewish community, but this drops to 51% among those who report they definitely or probably will move in the next 3-year period. The same discrepancy is also found for each specific type of membership.

### JEWISH CONNECTIONS AND MEMBERSHIPS

This section focuses on the relationship between organizational memberships and

<sup>8</sup>This is consistent with findings from local Jewish population studies. Among more than 50 local studies completed since 1990, six of the eight communities with the lowest levels of synagogue membership are in the West (Las Vegas, Seattle, San Francisco, Phoenix, San Diego, and Tucson). Local Jewish community study reports are available online at the North American Jewish Data Bank, [www.jewishdatabank.org](http://www.jewishdatabank.org).

other types of Jewish connections, including denominational identification, Jewish educational background, attitudinal indicators of Jewish identity, volunteerism and philanthropy, travel to Israel, and Jewish social networks. As Table 3 shows, relationships among Jewish organizational affiliations and other Jewish connections are quite strong.

Turning first to Jewish denominational identification, Orthodox Jews are more likely to belong to synagogues (86%), JCCs (36%), and other Jewish organizations (44%) than Conservative Jews, who in turn are more likely to belong than Reform and Reconstructionist Jews (data on Reconstructionist Jews should be interpreted cautiously because of the small sample size [unweighted  $N=83$ ]). Notably, Jews who identify with any of the four institutional movements are significantly more likely to belong to Jewish organizations than are Jews who call themselves "just Jewish" or say they have no Jewish denomination.<sup>9</sup> The same pattern holds for the overall association rate, with 91% of Orthodox Jews formally associating through at least one membership, followed by 72% of Conservative Jews, 57% of Reform Jews, and 61% of Reconstructionist Jews, but only 31% of those who identify as "just Jewish" and 14% of those who are secular (for more information on Jewish denominations, see Ament, 2005).

<sup>9</sup>NJPS asked respondents: "Thinking about Jewish religious denominations, do you consider yourself to be Conservative, Orthodox, Reform, Reconstructionist, just Jewish, or something else?" The first five categories are reported above. Respondents who answered "something else" were asked a follow-up question to obtain a more detailed answer. "No denomination/secular" is an aggregate category composed of these follow-up responses: no Jewish denomination, secular, ethnically Jewish, culturally Jewish, non-practicing Jew, Jewish by background/birth/heritage, agnostic, atheist, and no religion. A small proportion of respondents, less than 2%, provided other responses such as Sephardic, Humanist, and traditional, but they are not reported here because they do not comprise a coherent analytic category and their sample size is small.

Advocates of Jewish education often claim that persons who experienced more intensive forms of Jewish education as children are more likely to be engaged with the Jewish community when they are adults (Cohen & Kotler-Berkowitz, 2004). The data support this contention with regard to organizational affiliations. Among adults who attended Jewish day school when they were children, 73% are synagogue members, compared with 53% of adults who attended a supplementary program that met 2 or more days per week, 43% of those who attended a one day per week supplementary program, 39% who received some other form of Jewish education (for example, private tutoring), and just 25% of those who received no Jewish education as children. Similar patterns are seen with respect to JCC and other memberships, as well as the overall association rate.

Informal Jewish educational experiences—Jewish sleep-away camp and Jewish youth group participation—are also associated with organizational memberships. For example, 56% of adults who attended or worked at a Jewish sleep-away camp before age 25 are synagogue members, compared with 42% of adults who did not have a Jewish sleep-away camping experience.

NJPS 2000–01 asked respondents numerous questions to tap their attitudes about being Jewish. One question asked, "How important is being Jewish in your life?" Adults who report that being Jewish is "very important" to them are the most likely to belong to all three types of Jewish organizations and, therefore, the most likely to be formally associated with the Jewish community. As Jews attach less and less importance to being Jewish, membership and overall association levels drop sharply.

Volunteerism under Jewish auspices and philanthropic donations to Jewish causes are closely linked to organizational memberships. NJPS data cannot definitively resolve the causal direction of this linkage, but it is well known that organizations provide opportunities for volunteerism and

Table 3. Jewish organization memberships by Jewish connections among Jewish adults

	Synagogue Member (%)	JCC Member (%)	Other Jewish Organization Member (%)	Associated (%)
Total <sup>1</sup>	46	21	29	56
Denomination				
Orthodox	86	36	44	91
Conservative	61	29	40	72
Reform	47	19	28	57
Reconstructionist	52	19	27	61
Just Jewish	17	12	15	31
No denomination/secular	6	4	8	14
Formal Jewish education				
Jewish day school or yeshiva	73	34	40	80
2+/week supplementary program	53	21	32	62
1/week supplementary program	43	17	27	53
Other (e.g., tutoring)	39	25	27	56
None	25	16	19	37
Attended or worked at Jewish sleep-away camp				
Yes	56	23	34	66
No	42	19	26	52
Participated in Jewish youth group during high school				
Yes	61	21	31	69
No	43	16	19	50
Importance of being Jewish				
Very important	62	29	39	73
Somewhat important	35	15	20	46
Not very important	16	7	13	27
Not at all important	13	6	9	16
Volunteered for Jewish organization (year before NJPS)				
Yes	82	37	53	90
No	33	15	20	45
Total <sup>1</sup>	46	21	29	56
Donated to Federation (year before NJPS)				
Yes	70	36	55	83
No	35	14	28	44
Donated to any Jewish cause (year before NJPS)				
Yes	67	32	45	80
No	21	8	9	28
Visited Israel (ever)				
Yes	61	28	42	72
No	35	15	19	45
In-marriage/intermarriage status (among married adults)				
In-married	62	31	41	74
Intermarried	23	10	15	32
Half or more of closest friends are Jewish				
Yes	58	28	38	70
No	29	10	14	36

<sup>1</sup> Percentages in total row may vary from data in Table 1 due to rounding.



serve as arenas for charitable campaigns. The data demonstrate the connection: 82% of respondents who volunteered for a Jewish organization in the year before their NJPS interview are synagogue members, compared with only 33% of respondents who did not volunteer. More generally, 90% of those who volunteered for a Jewish organization are associated with the Jewish community, twice the rate of those who did not volunteer. Similar patterns are seen with respect to philanthropic donations. Those who donated to Federation in the year prior to their NJPS interview, as well as those who donated to any Jewish cause (including Federation), are much more likely than others to belong to synagogues, JCCs, and other types of Jewish organizations.<sup>10</sup>

A strong relationship also exists between visiting Israel and membership levels. More than 70% of Jews who have been to Israel are associated with the Jewish community, compared with just 45% of adults who have not been to Israel. Data for the specific organizations show similar patterns.

Lastly, Table 3 examines two measures of Jewish social networks: intermarriage and Jewish friends. Again, both are strongly associated with memberships in Jewish organizations and with overall communal affiliation. Jewish adults who are in-married (i.e., married to another Jew) are much more likely than those who are intermarried (married to a non-Jew) to belong to synagogues (62% and 23%),<sup>11</sup> JCCs (31%

and 10%), and other types of Jewish organizations (41% and 15%). Likewise, Jews who report that half or more of their closest friends are Jewish have substantially higher rates of membership and overall association with the communal system than those who do not. As with volunteerism and philanthropy, the causal direction of the linkage between Jewish organizational memberships and current Jewish social networks cannot be definitively resolved with NJPS data. On the one hand, Jewish spouses and friends may recruit people into Jewish organizations, whereas on the other, Jewish organizations provide contexts for people to meet, befriend, and marry other Jews.

### PROFILE OF MEMBERS

This section looks at the data from another perspective, presenting separate profiles of adults who are members of synagogues, JCCs, or other Jewish organizations and comparing them to adults who are unassociated. One set of profiles is for demographic characteristics and a second set covers Jewish connections. For example, this section tell us what percentage of synagogue, JCC, and other Jewish organization members identify as Conservative, and by way of comparison what percentage of unassociated Jews call themselves Conservative. By doing this, we can examine how Jews who belong to Jewish organizations are distinctive demographically and Jewishly relative to Jewish adults who do not belong to any Jewish organizations.

Table 4 contains profiles for demographic characteristics. The first column presents the synagogue member population, the second column presents the JCC member population, the third column presents those who belong to another type of Jewish organization, and the fourth column is for unassociated Jews (i.e., the 44% of Jews who have no memberships in any Jewish organi-

<sup>10</sup>Jewish organizational affiliations are also linked to volunteerism and philanthropy under non-Jewish auspices, though the relationships are not nearly as strong as with Jewish volunteerism and philanthropy. These data are not displayed in tables but are available from the authors.

<sup>11</sup>Data from about 40 local Jewish community studies completed between 1990 and 2006 show that the percentage of intermarried couples that belong to a synagogue varies from 6% in Las Vegas and 9% in St. Petersburg to 37% in Houston and Norfolk/Virginia Beach. The 23% national figure from NJPS 2000-01, which applies to both Jewish adults and Jewish households, falls directly between these two

local extremes. Local Jewish community study reports are available online at the North American Jewish Data Bank, [www.jewishdatabank.org](http://www.jewishdatabank.org).

zations). Due to overlapping memberships, the three columns for the membership populations are not mutually exclusive—some adults appear in more than one column (in fact, recall from Table 1 that 28% of adult Jews belong to two or more Jewish organizations). However, the fourth column for unassociated Jews is mutually exclusive from the other columns; it contains only those who belong to no Jewish organizations at all.

To begin, the first section on age shows that among adults who live in households belonging to synagogues, 24% are ages 18–34, 27% are ages 35–49, 25% are ages 50–64, and 24% are ages 65 and older. This is similar to the ages of unassociated Jews. In contrast, adults who belong to JCCs and other Jewish organizations tend to be older than unassociated Jews; elderly Jews are overrepresented in JCCs and other organizations, whereas Jews ages 18–34 are underrepresented.

The educational profile of each membership group does not differ much from the unassociated, except in one respect. In all membership groups, those with graduate degrees comprise a modestly greater share of the group than they do among those who have no memberships.

Turning to income, the profiles reveal that higher income earners are overrepresented in the membership population. For example, more than a third of synagogue members (36%) and JCC members (35%) live in households with annual incomes of \$100,000 or more, compared with 21% of unassociated adults. In contrast, only 13–15% of organizational members earn less than \$25,000, whereas 22% of unassociated Jews are in the lowest income category.

Adults with children in their households are overrepresented in the membership groups, whereas nonelderly singles are underrepresented in the membership populations, relative to the unassociated. This is consistent with life-cycle effects on Jewish organizational membership, especially the well-known fact that having children in the home often acts as a catalyst for communal

affiliation. Elderly couples are also overrepresented in the membership categories compared with their proportion among the unassociated.

Married Jews are a much greater proportion of the membership population than of the unassociated population. Two-thirds to three-quarters of members are married, compared with half of the unassociated. In contrast, those who are separated and divorced are represented in the membership group at about half the rate they are among the unassociated. Furthermore, those who are single and never married comprise nearly a third of the unassociated but 18% of synagogue members and just 10% of JCC and other organizational members. Together with the household composition profile, these data show that Jewish organizations remain particularly attractive to married people who have children residing in their homes.

The regional profile of members is tilted slightly toward the Northeast and Midwest and away from the West. Northeastern Jews make up a somewhat higher proportion of the membership populations than they do of the unassociated; a smaller but similar discrepancy is seen with respect to Midwestern Jews. In contrast, Jews in the West comprise a smaller part of the membership groups than they do of those who are unassociated.

The profiles of members with respect to immigrant status show that FSU immigrants are represented among synagogue and other Jewish organization members at only half the level they are among the unassociated, even as the absolute difference is just 4% due to the small size of the FSU immigrant population.

Finally, the profile of members shows they are less mobile, both in terms of when they last moved and their expected movement in the near future. About half the membership population but just a third of those who are unassociated have lived in their current residence for 10 years or more. Similarly, members are modestly more likely than the unassociated to report that

Table 4. Demographic profile of Jewish organization members

	Synagogue Member (%)	JCC Member (%)	Other Jewish Organization Member (%)	Unassociated <sup>1</sup> (%)
<b>Age</b>				
18-34	24	15	12	28
35-49	27	27	24	26
50-64	25	22	25	24
65-74	12	18	17	11
75+	12	18	22	11
Total	100	100	100	100
<b>Education</b>				
High school or below	18	19	17	20
Some college	23	24	21	22
College degree	30	28	31	35
Graduate degree	29	30	30	23
Total	100	101 <sup>2</sup>	99	100
<b>Income</b>				
Under \$25,000	13	15	14	22
\$25,000-50,000	21	22	22	27
\$50,000-100,000	31	28	30	31
\$100,000-200,000	18	17	17	13
\$200,000 and over	18	18	18	8
Total	101	100	101	101
<b>Household composition</b>				
Household with children	45	41	33	27
Nonelderly single	9	5	7	26
Nonelderly couple	20	18	20	23
Elderly single	8	13	13	11
Elderly couple	17	24	26	14
Total	99	101	99	101
<b>Marital status</b>				
Married	68	75	73	50
Separated or divorced	7	5	7	13
Widowed	8	10	10	8
Single and never married	18	10	10	30
Total	101	100	100	101
<b>Region</b>				
Northeast	48	48	44	40
Midwest	13	12	14	10
South	22	25	26	23
West	17	16	16	28
Total	100	101	100	101
<b>Immigrant status</b>				
FSU immigrant (1980 or after)	4	7	4	8
Non-FSU immigrant (1980 or after)	3	4	3	3
U.S. born or nonrecent immigrant (before 1980)	93	89	93	90
Total	100	100	100	101
<b>Length of residence at current address</b>				
0-4 years	36	33	33	50
5-9 years	17	20	14	17
10-19 years	20	20	21	15
20 or more years	27	27	32	18
Total	100	100	100	100
<b>Probability of moving in next 3 years</b>				
Definitely/probably	29	22	21	35
Probably not/definitely not	71	78	79	65
Total	100	100	100	100

<sup>1</sup> Unassociated means having no Jewish organizational memberships.<sup>2</sup> Totals may not sum to 100% due to rounding.

Table 5. Jewish connections profile of Jewish organization members.

	Synagogue Member (%)	JCC Member (%)	Other Jewish Organization Member (%)	Unassociated <sup>1</sup> (%)
<b>Denomination</b>				
Orthodox	19	17	15	2
Conservative	35	36	37	18
Reform	36	32	34	35
Reconstructionist	2	2	2	2
Just Jewish	8	12	11	33
No denomination/secular	1	1	1	10
Total	101	100	100	100
<b>Ritual observance</b>				
Held or attended Passover Seder	96	94	91	59
Lit Chanukah candles all or most nights	83	80	81	50
Attend religious services 1/month or more	53	50	47	5
Always/usually light Shabbat candles	48	48	44	8
Keep kosher at home	34	34	29	8
<b>Importance of being Jewish</b>				
Very important	69	71	70	33
Somewhat important	26	25	24	43
Not very important	3	3	4	16
Not at all important	1	1	1	8
Total	99 <sup>2</sup>	100	99	100
<b>Volunteered for Jewish organization (year before NJPS)</b>				
Yes	47	47	49	6
No	53	53	51	94
Total	100	100	100	100
<b>Donated to Federation (year before NJPS)</b>				
Yes	47	54	61	12
No	53	46	39	88
Total	100	100	100	100
<b>Donated to any Jewish cause (year before NJPS)</b>				
Yes	80	83	87	25
No	20	17	13	75
Total	100	100	100	100
<b>Visited Israel (ever)</b>				
Yes	56	58	63	27
No	44	42	37	73
Total	100	100	100	100
<b>In-marriage/intermarriage status (among married adults)</b>				
In-married	90	91	90	57
Intermarried	10	9	10	43
Total	100	100	100	100
<b>Half or more of closest friends are Jewish</b>				
Yes	76	80	81	41
No	24	20	19	59
Total	100	100	100	100
<b>Formal Jewish education</b>				
Jewish day school or yeshiva	20	21	18	6
2+/week supplementary program	43	38	42	32
1/week supplementary program	20	18	20	23
Other (e.g., tutoring)	4	6	5	5
None	13	18	15	34
Total	100	101	100	100

Table 5. Continued

	Synagogue Member (%)	JCC Member (%)	Other Jewish Organization Member (%)	Unassociated <sup>1</sup> (%)
Attended or worked at Jewish sleep-away camp				
Yes	38	35	37	24
No	62	65	63	76
Total	100	100	100	100
Participated in Jewish youth group during high school				
Yes	46	45	50	27
No	54	55	50	73
Total	100	100	100	100

<sup>1</sup> Unassociated means having no Jewish organizational memberships.

<sup>2</sup> Totals may not sum to 100% due to rounding.

they probably or definitely will not move in the next 3 years.

Table 5 presents profiles of Jewish organization members along their Jewish connections. Those who are members of Jewish organizations are quite distinctive from nonmembers with respect to additional ties to Jewish life.

To begin, organizational members are much more likely to identify as Orthodox than nonmembers are. For example, 19% of synagogue members and 17% of JCC members are Orthodox, compared with only 2% of unassociated Jews. Synagogue and JCC members are also more likely to be Conservative than nonmembers. Conversely, 37% of organizationally unassociated Jews report they are "just Jewish" and 10% say they are secular, significantly higher percentages than among organizational members. Members and nonmembers have similar proportions of Reform and Reconstructionist Jews within their ranks.

The next two sections of Table 5 examine ritual observance and attitudes toward being Jewish. The organizational members do not differ on these measures among each other, but in all cases members show a much more Jewishly connected profile than do unassociated Jews. For example, at least four-fifths of members light Chanukah candles all or most nights, compared with

half of those who do not belong to a Jewish organization. In addition, twice as many members as nonmembers report that being Jewish is very important to them.

Other aspects of Jewish connections show a similar pattern. In general, relatively small differences exist among synagogue, JCC, and other members with respect to philanthropic contributions to Jewish causes and volunteering under Jewish auspices, but members are much more likely to donate money and volunteer than are unassociated Jews. To give one example, about half of the members volunteered under Jewish auspices in the year before their NJPS interview, whereas a very small proportion (6%) of nonmembers did so.

Connections to Israel are stronger among members than among the unassociated. More than half of synagogue members (56%), JCC members (58%), and other organizational members (63%) have visited the Jewish state, compared with just over a quarter of those who do not belong to a Jewish organization.

Affiliated Jews also have stronger Jewish social networks than the unassociated. Among all those who are married, 90% of members are married to another Jew. The corresponding rate for nonmembers is 57%. Similarly, members of Jewish organizations are much more likely than nonmembers to

report that half or more of their closest friends are Jewish.

Finally, the profiles show that current affiliations are an extension of past Jewish experiences and activities, with today's members more likely than the unassociated to have participated in Jewish life as children and adolescents. Higher percentages of each membership group than of unassociated Jews went to Jewish day schools or to supplementary programs that met two or more times per week, and relatively fewer members than those who are unassociated received no Jewish education. Today's organizational members were also more likely to have participated in informal Jewish education when growing up—camping and youth groups—than were nonmembers.

### CONCLUSION

Organizational memberships remain an important measure of the strength of the Jewish community, and the relationships among memberships and both demographic and other Jewish factors are key indicators of social patterns within the Jewish population. This report has examined membership patterns from two different perspectives. Tables 2 and 3 examined differences in membership and overall association rates across various groups defined by demographic and Jewish characteristics; Tables 4 and 5 provided profiles of the different membership populations and compared them to those who are unassociated. A fundamental understanding of these patterns is critical as American Jewish organizations simultaneously search for creative ways to engage American Jews in Jewish life and retain the allegiance of current members.

The findings have several important implications for the Jewish communal system. Turning first to demographic factors, perhaps the most important implications involve income and marital status. The data suggest that low income and marital dissolution (separation and divorce) create barriers to organizational memberships (for further information on low income and

Jewish connections, see Kotler-Berkowitz, 2004). These findings, in turn, suggest the need for greater emphasis on communal strategies that encourage and maintain memberships among those who may be facing economic and social vulnerability.

The data identify additional key groups that communal advocates of outreach may want to address. Those who are younger, single (especially singles who reside by themselves), live in the West, or are more recently mobile are less likely to be members of Jewish organizations than others. These groups are also less likely to make philanthropic donations (Cohen, 2004). Other studies indicate that young Jews have a desire to be involved Jewishly through alternative frameworks outside conventional Jewish organizations (Greenberg, 2004). These groups represent populations that may require dedicated communal initiatives to recruit to Jewish organizations. At the same time, organizations must continue to serve those who are already their members. As always, this in-reach/outreach dynamic will require a delicate balancing of organizational resources.

Moving beyond demographic factors, the strong relationships between organizational memberships and other facets of Jewish life suggest an increasingly polarized population comprised of those who have multiple Jewish connections and those who have few if any such ties. This, in turn, has several additional implications for Jewish organizations and philanthropic causes.

First, in many ways Jewish institutions depend on each other for members and supporters. Multiple memberships are common, as are memberships in conjunction with volunteerism and philanthropic giving. As a result, communal institutions are less in competition with each other for members and supporters than they are engaged in a common effort (though one that may be largely unrecognized) to increase the overall pool of Jews who join Jewish organizations, volunteer under Jewish auspices, and make philanthropic donations to Jewish causes.

Second, overall association levels for intermarried Jews and those with weaker Jewish friendship networks are half what they are for in-married Jews and those with stronger friendship networks. Communal institutions may look toward these relatively underrepresented groups in their outreach efforts and might take guidance from local communities that have had relatively greater success at attracting these groups than others—again, of course, within the context of balancing the use of resources for outreach and in-reach.

Lastly, strong connections exist between the various types of formal and informal Jewish education and membership levels. These findings certainly suggest that the communal system as a whole has an active interest in supporting Jewish education for today's Jewish youth to nurture and cultivate tomorrow's Jewish community and its organizations.

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