

Jewish Members of Jewish Community Centers in the United States:

Jewish Households and Individuals

The NJPS 2000-01 and the JCC Movement:
Briefing Paper Number 1

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Over 400,000 Jewish households (i.e., an estimate of 414,000) are members of Jewish Community Centers in the United States, and these are home to almost a million (i.e., 969,000) Jews. These results emerge from estimated projections drawn from the National Jewish Population Study 2000/01, sponsored by the United Jewish Communities. For several technical reasons, both estimates are conservative; that is, the actual number is undoubtedly higher (see methodological note below).

The JCC-member households comprise over 14% of all Jewish households in the United States. In addition, Jews living in JCC-member household comprise over 18% of all Jews in households in the country. JCC households contain, on average, more Jewish individuals than the average Jewish household (an average of 2.34 Jews for JCC homes, versus 1.75 Jews for all Jewish households). Part of the reason for the larger Jewish household size entails the presence of children; another is the relatively low rate of intermarried among JCC households (the in-married are more likely to join JCCs than are the mixed married).

Beyond those who are formal members of JCCs are those who have participated in JCC programs in the year prior to the survey. In fact, combining members with those who report that someone in their household attended a JCC program produces a total of over 800,000 households. In other words, **over 28% of American Jewish households may be regarded as “JCC-connected”** (either someone in the home is a JCC member or else someone attended a JCC activity in the past year). **These homes contain over 1.7 million Jews, or over a third (34%) of Jewish individuals in the United States.**

These figures may be compared with those of the three major synagogue movements: Orthodox, Conservative, and Reform (the Reconstructionist constituency is too small for reasonably reliable statistical estimates).

Altogether, synagogue households amount to 914,000, with 2,182,000 Jewish individuals living within them. The Jewish household size of synagogue members is nearly identical to

that of JCC members, for a very understandable reason: The vast majority of Jewish members of JCCs are also members of synagogues. As a future report will detail, JCC and synagogue memberships heavily overlap and draw from constituencies with similar socio-demographic and Jewish identity characteristics.

In any event, the figures drawn from the NJPS testify to the large number of American Jews who are JCC members (and participants as well). **With regard to membership, the JCC movement may be said to be the largest in American Jewish life today, surpassing the Reform movement in numbers of affiliated Jews.**

Methodological Note

Several considerations strongly argue for regarding the NJPS projections as an under-estimate of the JCC membership in the United States.

One consideration is the overall Jewish population size. For a variety of reasons, many researchers believe that the actual number of Jews in the United States somewhat exceeds the 5.2 million that could be documented by way of the procedures employed by the NJPS at each of several stages. Any change in the base figure (5.2 million) would directly change the total number of JCC Jewish households and individual Jews who are members and participants.

In addition, the least Jewishly identified respondents were asked the question on JCC participation, but they were not asked the question on membership in JCCs (or in congregations). Researchers suspect that hardly any of these respondents (who represent less than one in five Jews in the U.S.) are members of either, but we cannot know for sure.

Finally, the NJPS is limited to the United States. The full complement of JCC households would include Canada as well, implying that the number of Jews in JCC households across the continent easily exceeds a million, not taking into account methodological considerations that would elevate the estimate further. In addition, these numbers do not include non-Jewish households or non-Jews living in Jewish households. Their addition would also increase both the household count and the number of JCC-affiliated individuals, be it by way of membership or by way of participation.

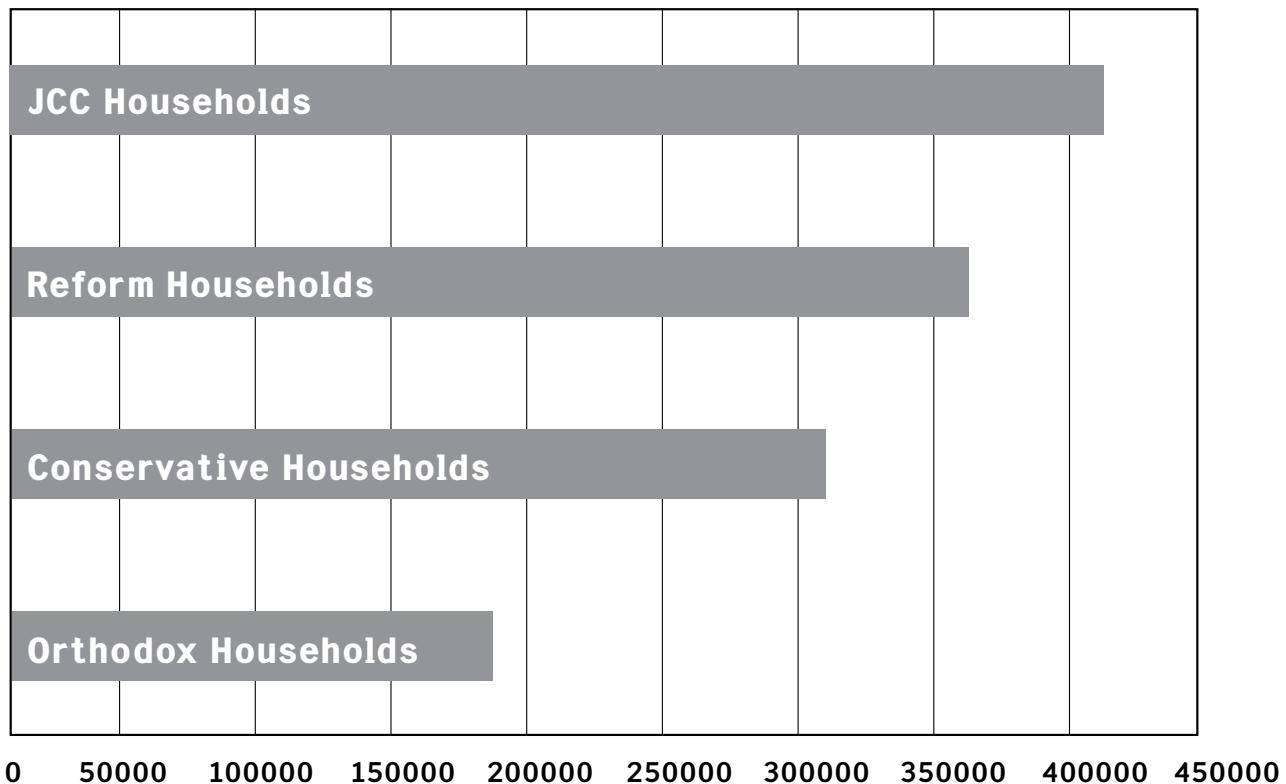
For all these reasons, it seems fair to conclude that the total number of member-households of JCCs and Jews in those households significantly exceeds the estimates

provided here – and the same considerations apply to congregational membership as well. Since we cannot be certain as to the size of the under-estimate, this report relies upon the documented numbers, understanding full well that the actual numbers are higher to an unknown extent. For purposes of a “colloquial projection,” it would be reasonable to say that there are “nearly a half million Jewish households affiliated with JCCs in North America, and over a million Jewish individuals in those households.”

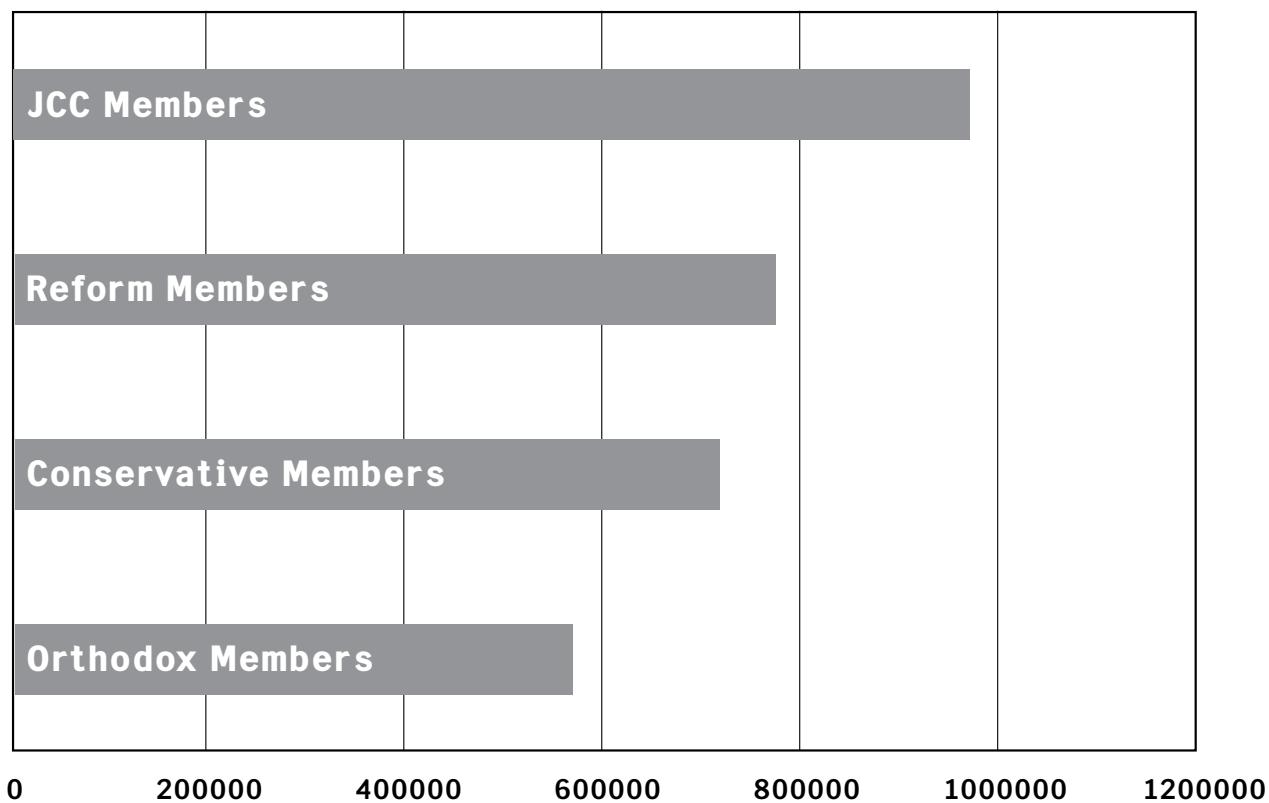
Number of Jewish Households and Individuals in JCCs and Congregations

	N Household	%	Mean # of Jews	Total Jews	Percent
JCC Member	414,000	14.4	2.34	969,000	19.2
JCC connected (includes JCC members)	810,000	28.1	2.12	1,714,000	34
Orthodox Member	183,000	6.4	3.10	568,000	11.3
Conservative Member	315,000	10.9	2.27	716,000	14.2
Reform Member	361,000	12.5	2.18	787,000	15.6
Synagogue Member (All Denominations)	914,000	31.7	2.39	2,182,000	43.2
Total	2,882,000	100	1.75	5,047,000	100

Number of Jewish Households in JCCs and Synagogue Denominations



Number of Jewish Individuals in JCCs and Synagogue Denominations





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