



Geographic
Differences
among
American
Jews

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Ira M. Sheskin, Ph.D., is Director of the Jewish Demography Project at the Sue and Leonard Miller Center for Contemporary Jewish Studies, and Associate Professor of Geography, University of Miami.

INTRODUCTION

JEWS AND GEOGRAPHY HAVE BEEN INEXTRICABLY RELATED FOR MILLENNIA.

The history of the Jewish people can hardly be told without repeated references to geographic location, from the story of Abraham until modern times. The American Jewish experience is no different. As early as 1928, the urban sociologist Louis Wirth observed (in the language of his time):

If you would know what kind of Jew a man is, ask him where he lives; for no simple factor indicates as much about the character of the Jew as the area in which he lives. It is an index not only to his economic status, his occupation, his religion, but to his politics and his outlook on life.

Using data from the National Jewish Population Survey (NJPS) 2000-01, this report examines geographic variations in today's American Jewish population. It demonstrates that Wirth's "simple factor" of where Jews live continues to be associated with important demographic and Jewish characteristics of American Jews.

Two geographic indicators are used in this report. First, the data are analyzed by the four U.S. Census Regions: Northeast,¹ Midwest,² South³ and West.⁴ It is important to keep in mind that when the results are examined by region, they tend to reflect the largest metropolitan area within each region because so many Jews live in and around those cities. Thus, the results for the Northeast tend to reflect the New York metropolitan area and the results for the Midwest tend to reflect Chicago. In turn, the results for the South tend to reflect the Miami-Ft. Lauderdale

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1. Connecticut, Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island and Vermont.
 2. Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Nebraska, North Dakota, Ohio, South Dakota and Wisconsin.
 3. Alabama, Arkansas, Delaware, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maryland, Mississippi, North Carolina, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, Virginia, Washington, D.C. and West Virginia.
 4. Alaska, Arizona, California, Colorado, Hawaii, Idaho, Montana, Nevada, New Mexico, Oregon, Utah, Washington and Wyoming.

metropolitan area in South Florida, while the results for the West tend to reflect the two large cities of Los Angeles and San Francisco. Of course, not all Jews live in or near each region’s major metropolitan areas, so regional findings are more inclusive than the region’s largest city or cities. Table 1 shows the weighted estimates and percentages of Jews who live in each region.

The second geographic measure refers to the density of Jewish population in particular areas of the country. The measure divides the United States into four sectors according to estimates of the relative percentage of the total population that is Jewish.⁵ The first sector, which has the highest Jewish density, is the New York Consolidated Metropolitan Statistical Area (CMSA), a 26-county area in four states in and around New York City.⁶ The second sector, with the next highest density of Jews, is South Florida; it consists of the Miami and Fort Lauderdale Metropolitan Statistical Areas (MSAs).⁷ The third sector includes 37 other metropolitan statistical areas with mid-level Jewish population densities (“Other Top MSAs”).⁸ The fourth sector consists of the remainder of the United States (“Rest of the U.S.”), and includes many smaller MSAs as well as rural areas with the

5. The measure of Jewish population density used here takes advantage of the NJPS sampling procedures, in which areas of higher Jewish density were oversampled relative to areas of lower Jewish density, and then differential sampling rates were adjusted through weighting. For further information, see the Methodological Appendix in UJC’s main NJPS report, *Strength, Challenge and Diversity in the American Jewish Population*, available at www.ujc.org/njps.
6. New York counties: Bronx (Bronx), Kings (Brooklyn), Nassau, New York (Manhattan), Orange, Putnam, Queens (Queens), Richmond (Staten Island), Rockland, Suffolk and Westchester. New Jersey counties: Bergen, Essex, Hudson, Hunterdon, Middlesex, Monmouth, Morris, Ocean, Passaic, Somerset, Sussex, Union, Warren. Connecticut county: Fairfield. Pennsylvania county: Pike. The 26-county New York CMSA is significantly larger than the 8-county service area of the UJA-Federation of New York, though all 8 counties of the federation service area (Bronx, Kings, Nassau, New York, Queens, Richmond, Suffolk and Westchester) are included in the New York CMSA.
7. The Miami and Ft. Lauderdale MSAs are equivalent to Miami-Dade, Broward and Palm Beach counties.
8. Albany (NY), Atlanta, Atlantic City, Baltimore, Boston, Buffalo, Chicago, Cincinnati, Cleveland, Dallas-Ft. Worth, Denver, Detroit, Hartford, Houston, Kansas City (MO), Las Vegas, Los Angeles, Milwaukee, Minneapolis-St. Paul, New Haven, Norfolk (VA), Orlando, Philadelphia, Phoenix, Pittsburgh, Portland-Salem (OR), Providence, Rochester, Sacramento, San Diego, San Francisco, Sarasota (FL), Seattle-Tacoma, St. Louis, Tampa, Tucson and Washington, D.C.

TABLE I.

Weighted Estimates and Proportion of Jews by Census Region and Sector of Jewish Population Density.

	REGIONS				Total
	Northeast	Midwest	South	West	
Weighted Estimate	2,175,000	624,000	1,136,000	1,120,000	5,100,000 ¹
Percentage	43%	12%	22%	22%	99% ²

	SECTORS OF JEWISH POPULATION DENSITY				Total
	New York	South Florida	Other Top MSAs	Rest of the U.S.	
Weighted Estimate	1,448,000	360,000	2,452,000	802,000	5,100,000 ³
Percentage	24%	8%	49%	19%	100%

¹ Rounded total from 5,055,000. Excludes respondents, representing 7,000 Jews, who did not provide region of residence. Also excludes an estimated 100,000 Jews living in institutional settings (e.g., nursing homes, military, prisons) not sampled as part of NJPS.

² Total does not sum to 100% due to rounding.

³ Rounded total from 5,062,000. Excludes an estimated 100,000 Jews living in institutional settings (e.g., nursing homes, military, prisons) not sampled as part of NJPS.

lowest Jewish population densities.⁸ Table 1 also shows the percentage of Jews who reside in each sector of Jewish population density.

The two geographic measures – region and sector of Jewish population density – are crosstabulated with both demographic and Jewish characteristics. The demographic measures include age, household size, education, household income, and home ownership. Levels of Jewish connection are examined through a variety of traditional measures of “Jewishness” – home religious practices, intermarriage, community attachments, and philanthropic giving – and through measures of Jewish cultural and ethnic connections.

METHODOLOGICAL NOTE

The National Jewish Population Survey 2000-01 is a nationally representative survey of the Jewish population living in the U.S. The survey was administered to a random sample of approximately 4500 Jews. Interviewing for NJPS took place from August 21, 2000 to August 30, 2001 and was conducted by telephone. The sample of telephone numbers called was selected by a computer through a Random Digit Dialing (RDD) procedure, thus permitting access to both listed and unlisted numbers in all 50 states and the District of Columbia. The margin of error when the entire sample is used for analysis is +/- 2%. The margin of error for subsamples is larger.

The NJPS questionnaire included over 300 questions on a wide variety of topics, including household characteristics, demographic subjects, health and social service needs, economic characteristics, and Jewish background, behavior and attitudes.

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; these respondents represent 4.3 million Jews, or over 80% of all U.S. Jews. 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; they represent an additional 800,000 Jews.

The most important implication of this design decision is related to findings on Jewish connections. Descriptions of Jewish involvement and identity that are restricted to the more engaged part of the Jewish population (4.3 million Jews) would, in many cases, be somewhat less strong if they had been collected from all respondents representing the entire Jewish population.

In this report, questions that were asked of respondents representing the more engaged segment of the Jewish population (4.3 million Jews) are indicated by asterisks in the tables.

For further methodological information, see the Methodological Appendix in *The National Jewish Population Survey 2000-01: Strength, Challenge and Diversity in the American Jewish Population*, A United Jewish Communities Report (available at www.ujc.org/njps.)

THE CHANGING GEOGRAPHIC DISTRIBUTION OF AMERICAN JEWS

A SIGNIFICANT SHIFT HAS OCCURRED IN THE PAST FEW DECADES IN THE GEOGRAPHIC LOCATION OF AMERICAN JEWS.

In 1960, according to data in the *American Jewish Year Book*, 67% of American Jews lived in the Northeast, 14% in the Midwest, 9% in the South, and 11% in the West. By 2000-01, according to NJPS, the percentage of Jews in the Northeast had declined to 43% while the percentage in the Midwest had dropped slightly to 12%. In contrast, the percentage of Jews living in the South had increased to 22% and the percentage in the West had also risen to 22%. Additional data from NJPS 2000-01 indicate regional population movements by showing that two-thirds of all Jews living in the South and nearly half of all Jews residing in the West were born in either the Northeast or Midwest. Cross-regional migration has important implications for Jewish connections, as Sid and Alice Goldstein demonstrated in *Jews on the Move*, a book based upon NJPS 1990 that provided convincing evidence that Jews who migrate from their region of birth to other regions are less likely to be Jewishly involved than Jews who do not migrate.

The migration of Jews from the Northeast and the Midwest to the South and the West has followed the migration pattern of Americans in general. From 1960 to 2000, the percentage of Americans who live in the Northeast and the Midwest decreased by 6 percentage points each, while the percentage of Americans who live in the South increased by about five percentage points and the percentage who live in the West increased by about seven percentage points.⁹ In 2000, 19% of Americans lived in the Northeast, 23% in the Midwest, 36% in the South, and 23% in the West. Thus, Jews remain much more concentrated in the Northeast than are Americans in general, but they have been moving to the South and the West at a much faster rate than all Americans.

9. All data in this report on the total U.S. population are from the U.S. Census Bureau.

GEOGRAPHIC VARIATIONS IN DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS

TABLES 2 AND 3 PROVIDE DATA FOR SELECTED DEMOGRAPHIC MEASURES (age, household size, secular education, household income, and home ownership) across the four U.S. Census Regions and the four sectors of Jewish population density, respectively.

Age

As shown in Table 2, children (ages 0-17) comprise a larger proportion of the Jewish population in the Northeast (22%) and the Midwest (20%) than in the South and the West (15%). This reflects the higher percentage in the Northeast of Orthodox Jews, who tend to have larger families, as well as the high percentage of elderly (age 65 and over) in the South. The low percentage of Jewish children in the West may also reflect, in part, higher rates of intermarriage and, simultaneously, lower rates of raising children as Jews there than in other regions. Comparisons to the percentage of children in the total U.S. population are instructive. The percentage of children in the Jewish community in the Northeast (22%) does not differ significantly from the percentage of all American children in the Northeast (24%), but the percentage of children in the Jewish population is much lower in each of the other three regions than is the case for all Americans: 20% Jewish vs. 26% percent all Americans in the Midwest, 15% vs. 26% in the South, and 15% versus 27% in the West. These comparisons are consistent with findings that show the Jewish population is currently older than the total U.S. population now and has aged significantly since 1990.¹⁰

The largest proportion of Jews age 18-34 is found in the Midwest. Since people in this age group are often in family-forming and childbearing years, this may suggest some increase in the number of Jewish children in the Midwest in the coming decade. The percentage of Jews age 35-49 varies from 18% in the South to 22% in the West. In turn, the percentage of Jews age 50-64 is higher in the West than elsewhere. Importantly, the

10. See UJC’s main NJPS report, *Strength, Challenge and Diversity in the American Jewish Population*, available at www.ujc.org/njps.

TABLE 2.

Variations in Demographic Measures by Census Region.

	Northeast	Midwest	South	West	All
Age					
0-17	22%	20%	15%	15%	19%
18-34	22%	26%	21%	24%	23%
35-49	21%	21%	18%	22%	21%
50-64	18%	16%	18%	23%	19%
65+	17%	16%	28%	16%	19%
Total	100%	99% ¹	100%	100%	101%
Households					
1-Person Households	30%	27%	31%	30%	30%
Average Household Size	2.4	2.5	2.2	2.2	2.3
Education					
Bachelor’s Degree+ (Age 25 and over)	64%	62%	55%	58%	60%
Graduate Degree (Age 25 and over)	31%	30%	24%	25%	28%
Financial Resources					
Median Household Income (1999)	\$59,800	\$54,800	\$50,000	\$48,700	\$53,800
Own Home *	60%	71%	79%	61%	66%

Base: Jewish persons for age and education. Jewish households for other measures.

¹ Totals may not sum to 100% due to rounding.

* Asked of the more Jewishly-connected sample only.

West stands out as the only region with more Jews age 50-64 than age 65 and over. Over the next 15 years, this 50-64 age cohort will become 65 and over, strongly suggesting that western Jewish communities are likely to experience a significant increase in the elderly population over the next decade or so.

Not surprisingly, the percentage of Jews age 65 and over is much higher in the South (28%) than in the other regions (16%-17%). This clearly

reflects the South Florida area with its large retirement population transplanted from major Northeastern and Midwestern cities. In every region, the percentage of Jewish elderly is greater than the percentage of elderly in the population as a whole, but it reaches its widest disparity in the South, where the 28% of elderly in the Jewish community compares to only 12% in the population generally.

Table 3 examines age by the four sectors of Jewish population density. A quick comparison shows the age differences among the sectors are greater than the age differences among the regions. For example, the proportion of children (age 0-17) is higher in New York (24%) than in the Other Top MSAs (18%) and the Rest of the U.S. (17%), which in turn are far higher than in South Florida (9%). These results reflect both the larger Orthodox population in New York and the significant outmigration of New York's elderly population to South Florida.

The high percentage of Jews age 18-34 in the Rest of the U.S. may reflect a tendency of younger Jews to move out of the larger MSAs into smaller cities and towns. No such trend is seen for Jews age 35-49 or age 50-64. Thus, the behavior of the youngest adult age group (18-34 year-olds) may indicate some further growth for Jewish communities in small MSAs and rural areas. While this may be good news for Jewish communities in such places, much evidence – including findings presented below – suggests that it is more difficult to maintain a high level of Jewish connection in areas with lower Jewish population densities.¹¹

The percentage of Jews age 65 and over shows significant differences among the sectors of Jewish population density, with the special nature of South Florida quite evident. More than half of all Jews in South Florida are age 65 and over, compared to somewhat less than one-fifth in New York and the Other Top MSAs and just over one-tenth in the Rest of the U.S.

11. Also see, for example, the UJC PowerPoint presentation entitled “Jews in Small Communities,” available at www.ujc.org/njpsreports.

TABLE 3.

Variations in Demographic Measures by Sector of Jewish Population Density.

	New York	South Florida	Other Top MSAs	Rest of U.S.	All
Age					
0-17	24%	9%	18%	17%	19%
18-34	21%	11%	23%	30%	23%
35-49	19%	13%	22%	22%	21%
50-64	18%	16%	20%	18%	19%
65+	17%	52%	18%	13%	19%
Total	99% ¹	101%	101%	100%	101%
Households					
1-Person Households	32%	36%	30%	26%	30%
Average Household Size	2.4	1.9	2.3	2.4	2.3
Education					
Bachelor's Degree+ (Age 25 and over)	64%	46%	62%	57%	60%
Graduate Degree (Age 25 and over)	30%	18%	28%	30%	28%
Financial Resources					
Median Household Income (1999)	\$60,600	\$43,100	\$57,600	\$43,500	\$53,800
Own Home *	55%	85%	66%	76%	66%

Base: Jewish persons for age and education. Jewish households for other measures.

¹ Totals may not sum to 100% due to rounding.

* Asked of the more Jewishly-connected sample only.

Household Size

Jewish household size is examined in Tables 2 and 3 by using two measures: the percentage of one-person households and average household size. Little variation is seen in either measure across the four regions of the country (Table 2), though the percentage of one-person households is slightly lower and average household size is slightly higher in

the Midwest than in the other regions. The total percentage of one-person households among Jews is higher than among all U.S. households (30% Jews vs. 26% U.S.), with the same pattern holdings for the South (31% to 25%) and the West (30% to 24%), but not for the Midwest (27% to 27%) or the Northeast (30% vs. 33%). Nationwide, average household size is smaller among Jewish households (2.3 persons) than all American households (2.6 persons), a pattern that is consistent for every region (Northeast: 2.4 vs. 2.6.; South: 2.2. vs. 2.6; West: 2.2 vs. 2.8) except the Midwest (2.5 for both Jewish and all households).

Again, more significant differences are seen in these measures by sectors of Jewish population density (Table 3). Reflecting the retirement and elderly population in South Florida, the percentage of one-person households is higher there (36%) than in the other sectors, with the percentage of one-person households lowest in the Rest of the U.S. (26%). Consistent with the relatively high percentage of one-person households in South Florida, average household size (1.9 persons) is lower in that sector than in others (2.3-2.4 persons).

Education

Findings on education are reported for those age 25 and over because many people under 25 are still completing their formal schooling. As Table 2 indicates, proportionally more Jews have a Bachelor's degree or higher in the Northeast and the Midwest than in the West and the South. A similar regional pattern is seen for the percentage with a graduate degree. The lower percentages in the South reflect the higher proportion of elderly in that region. Elderly Jews were less likely to obtain higher education than young Jews today due to a combination of factors, including the immigrant and lower socioeconomic status of many elderly Jews at the time they would have gone to college, and for some the interruption of their formal education by the Second World War. Nationwide, Jews are much more likely to have a Bachelor's degree or higher (60%) than are all Americans (24%); the same is true in every region of the country (Northeast: 64% vs. 27%; Midwest: 62% to 23%; South: 55% to 23%; and West: 58% to 26%).

By sectors of Jewish population density, Jews in New York and the Other Top MSAs are the most likely to have a Bachelor's degree or higher (62%) (see Table 3). The percentage is somewhat lower in the Rest of the U.S. (57%) despite the very low percentage of elderly in this sector. By far the lowest percentage of Jews with a Bachelor's degree or higher is found in South Florida (46%), again reflecting the fact that more than half of this population is elderly. The percentage of Jews with a graduate degree is also much lower in South Florida than in the other sectors. Interestingly, the percentage with a graduate degree in the Rest of the U.S. does not lag behind New York and the Other Top MSAs (28%), as is the case for the Bachelor's degree.

Financial Resources

Financial resources are assessed by examining median household income and home ownership (Tables 2-3). Note that median household income is not adjusted for cost-of-living differences across the regions or sectors of Jewish population density.

Median household income among Jews is highest, by far, in the Northeast (\$59,800), followed by the Midwest (\$54,800), the South (\$50,000), and the West (\$48,700) (see Table 2). The median income for Jewish households in the Northeast is much higher than for all American households in the Northeast (\$45,300). The same comparison for the Midwest is \$54,800 to \$42,300; for the South, \$50,000 to \$38,600; and for the West, \$48,700 to \$44,900. The discrepancy in median income between Jewish and all households is smallest in the West.

By sectors of Jewish population density, median household income of Jewish households is much higher in New York and the Other Top MSAs than in South Florida and the Rest of the U.S. (see Table 3). These differences most likely are due to the very high cost of living in New York and the large number of elderly Jews in South Florida for whom household income often declines following retirement (although their assets may still be considerable, for example from the sale of their homes in the Northeast and Midwest).

Home ownership¹² shows a different geographic pattern than household income. Home ownership is by far the highest in the South, followed by the Midwest and then the West and Northeast (Table 2). The high percentage in the South region reflects the even higher percentage in the South Florida sector (85%; see Table 3) where many elderly Jews, despite relatively low household incomes, own small apartments or townhouses in one of the many retirement communities.

The overall percentage of home ownership for Jewish households does not differ from the percentage for all American households (66% each), nor separately in the Northeast (60% Jewish to 62% all), the Midwest (71% to 72%), or the West (61% to 61%). A significant difference exists only in the South, where the 79% home ownership rate for Jewish households (driven, again, by the high ownership percentage in South Florida) is higher than the rate for all American households (68%).

Looking in more detail at the sectors of Jewish population density, Jews in South Florida have the highest rate of home ownership (85%), followed by consistent 10% declines in the Rest of the U.S., the Other Top MSAs and then finally New York. The low percentage in New York likely reflects the expensive housing market in the area.

GEOGRAPHIC VARIATIONS IN JEWISH CONNECTIONS

THIS SECTION OF THE REPORT ADDRESSES GEOGRAPHIC VARIATIONS IN JEWISH CONNECTIONS. NJPS asked respondents a broad range of questions on their Jewish identities, attitudes and behaviors, including denominational identification, ritual observance, communal affiliations and participation, philanthropy, attachments to Israel, use of Jewish media, and social networks with other Jews. Tables 4 and 5 display data for these measures by the four regions and the four sectors of Jewish population density, respectively. Some questions about Jewish connections appeared only on a long-form version of the NJPS

questionnaire that was administered to more Jewishly-connected respondents representing approximately 80% of all Jewish adults; those questions are marked with asterisks in the tables (see the Methodological Note on p. 6 for further details).

Jewish Denomination

Respondents were asked whether they considered themselves Orthodox, Conservative, Reconstructionist, Reform, just Jewish, or something else. It is important to bear in mind that Jewish denominational identification is a self-definition and is not necessarily based on (nor entirely consistent with) synagogue membership, ideology, or religious practice.

Substantial variations in denominational identification are evident. Table 4 shows that the percentage of respondents who consider themselves Orthodox is more than twice as high in the Northeast than in the other regions, while the proportion of those identifying as Conservative is highest in the South, reflecting the large number of second-generation elderly in that region. The percentage of respondents who identify themselves as Conservative is lower in the West than elsewhere.

In every region, proportionally more Jews identify with the Reform movement than with any of the other three institutionalized denominations, but the percentage of Reform Jews is higher in the Midwest and the South than in the West and the Northeast. Given that Reconstructionists comprise only 2% of all Jews, very little variation is seen for this Jewish denomination across the regions.

Turning to sectors of Jewish population density, Table 5 shows that Orthodox identification is most common in New York and Conservative identification most common in South Florida. Identification with Reform Judaism is lowest in New York – though even there more Jews identify with Reform than with any of the other institutionalized denominations – but varies little across the other sectors.

Particular communal attention should be directed toward those who identify themselves as “just Jewish.” While some respondents who identify as “just

12. Home ownership was asked of the more Jewishly-connected respondents in NJPS. See the explanation in the next section entitled “Geographic Variations in Jewish Connections.”

TABLE 4.

Variations in Jewish Connections by Census Region.

	Northeast	Midwest	South	West	All
	%	%	%	%	%
Denominational Self-Identification					
Orthodox *	12	5	5	5	8
Conservative *	26	25	28	19	25
Reconstructionist *	2	2	1	3	2
Reform *	31	41	39	33	34
Just Jewish *	30	27	27	40	31
Total	101 ¹	100	100	100	100
Ritual Observance					
Hold/Attend Passover Seder in the Past Year	79	76	73	66	74
Light Chanukah Candles in the Past Year (All or Most Nights)	65	60	63	57	62
Mezuzah on Any Door of House *	65	55	64	52	61
Fast on Yom Kippur in the Past Year (All or Part of the Day) *	61	44	55	48	56
Light Candles Friday Night (Always or Usually) *	27	20	23	18	23
Keep Kosher at Home *	23	14	14	12	17
Communal Affiliation and Participation					
Attend Synagogue Once per Month or More	26	25	23	19	24
Volunteered for a Jewish Organization in the Past Year *	23	28	23	20	23
Synagogue Membership *	44	47	40	31	40
JCC Membership *	20	18	20	13	18
Jewish Organization Membership *	26	29	28	18	25
Philanthropy					
Very Familiar with Jewish Federation *	24	28	30	17	25
Donated to Jewish Federation in the Past Year *	30	37	34	21	30
Donated to a Jewish Charity in the Past Year *	56	60	55	48	54

	Northeast	Midwest	South	West	All
	%	%	%	%	%
Israel Connections					
Respondent Has Visited Israel	40	30	35	30	36
Very Emotionally Attached to Israel	32	30	26	23	28
Strongly Agree that Jews in the United States and Jews in Israel Share a Common Destiny *	40	42	37	32	37
Very Familiar with the Current Social and Political Situation in Israel *	38	34	31	29	34
Jewish Media Use					
Read a Jewish Newspaper or Other Jewish Publication in the Past Year *	64	71	65	62	65
Read a Book, Other Than the Bible, in the Past Year Because It Had Jewish Content *	58	55	53	53	55
Listen to a Tape, CD, or Record in the Past Year Because it Had Jewish Content *	47	44	45	43	45
See a Movie or Rent a Video in the Past Year Because It Had Jewish Content	44	46	48	44	45
Used the Internet for Jewish-Related Information in the Past Year *	38	45	38	40	39
Jewish Social Networks					
All or Most of Closest Friends Are Jewish	42	25	33	24	33
Intermarried (married only)	25	34	29	42	31
Date Jews Only (not married only)	21	22	14	18	19
Date Both Jews and Non-Jews * (not married only)	73	76	73	78	75

Base: Households for donations. Respondents for other measures.

¹ Totals may not sum to 100% due to rounding.

* Asked of the more Jewishly-connected sample only.

Jewish” have strong Jewish identities (particularly the elderly), other data (not reported in detail here) indicate that most people in this category have weaker Jewish connections than those who identify with one of the four institutionalized denominations. Identification as “just Jewish” is much higher in the West than in the other regions, consistent with a general perception among Jewish communal professionals in the region and sociologists that, while western communities face many of the same Jewish identity issues as communities elsewhere, the situation in the West is more pronounced.

By sectors of Jewish population density, identification as “just Jewish” is lowest in South Florida and highest in the Rest of the U.S. This is certainly significant. South Florida has very high densities of localized Jewish settlement, with many retirement communities being 90% Jewish or higher. In many cases, retirees have moved to South Florida because of its Jewish milieu and because they can reside in communities that, in some ways, reflect the Jewish neighborhoods in which they were raised. Contrast this with the high percentage of identification as “just Jewish” in the Rest of the U.S. Jews who reside outside the traditional urban areas of Jewish concentration live where there are smaller Jewish populations and fewer Jewish institutions, and they are much more likely to intermarry (see below). Higher rates of identification as “just Jewish” rather than with one of the institutionalized Jewish denominations are consistent with these factors.

Ritual Observance

Six religious practices – attending or holding a Passover Seder, lighting Chanukah candles, having a mezuzah on a household door, fasting on Yom Kippur, lighting Shabbat candles, and keeping kosher at home – are examined in Tables 4 and 5.¹³ The percentage observing each practice is highest in the Northeast and for five of the six practices (the exception being fasting on Yom Kippur) the percentage observing is lowest in the West, with differences between the two regions ranging from eight to

thirteen percentage points. Turning to the other two regions, in most cases the percentage observing these ritual practices is higher in the South than Midwest, while in other cases observance is higher in the Midwest than the South or equal in the two regions.

In general, existing social science literature suggests that levels of observance should be lower for Jews who reside in areas of less dense Jewish settlement. Table 5 shows that four of the six religious observances – holding or attending a Passover Seder, Chanukah candle lighting, fasting on Yom Kippur, and Shabbat candle lighting – fit this pattern, with the highest levels of observance in New York and then declining through South Florida, the Other Top MSAs and the Rest of the U.S. South Florida has the highest percentage of Jews reporting they have a mezuzah on a door of their house, most likely reflecting high levels of home ownership, the age of the population, and the fact that many households have mezuzot on their doors that were left behind by Jews from whom a home was purchased. Except for South Florida, the pattern for mezuzot follows the hypothesis of lower levels of religious practice in areas of lower Jewish population density. Lastly, keeping kosher at home is more than twice as common in New York than the other sectors, which among themselves do not follow the pattern of lower observance in areas with lower Jewish population densities.

Communal Affiliation and Participation

This section examines several measures of formal affiliation or participation with Jewish communal institutions, including synagogue attendance, volunteering for Jewish organizations, and memberships in synagogues, Jewish Community Centers (JCCs) and other Jewish organizations.

Table 4 shows that the Midwest has the highest percentage of synagogue membership and volunteerism for Jewish organizations, findings that are consistent with anecdotal evidence and long-held perceptions of strong Jewish communities and infrastructure in that region. Communal involvement is generally much lower in the West than in the other three

13. These six measures cover major holiday observances and more frequent ritual observances.

TABLE 5.

Variations in Jewish Connections by Sector of Jewish Population Density.

	New York	South Florida	Other Top MSAs	Rest of U.S.	All
	%	%	%	%	%
Denominational Self-Identification					
Orthodox *	17	7	5	3	8
Conservative *	24	33	25	20	25
Reconstructionist *	1	2	2	2	2
Reform *	27	39	36	38	34
Just Jewish *	31	20	31	37	31
Total	100	101 ¹	99	100	100
Ritual Observance					
Hold/Attend Passover Seder in the Past Year	82	79	73	63	74
Light Chanukah Candles in the Past Year (All or Most Nights)	69	65	59	58	62
Mezuzah on Any Door of House *	69	79	56	51	61
Fast on Yom Kippur in the Past Year (All or Part of the Day) *	65	57	53	46	56
Light Candles Friday Night (Always or Usually) *	32	22	19	19	23
Keep Kosher at Home *	29	11	13	14	17
Communal Affiliation and Participation					
Attend Synagogue Once per Month or More	28	19	22	24	24
Volunteered for a Jewish Organization in the Past Year *	23	21	23	24	23
Synagogue Membership *	44	34	38	45	40
JCC Membership *	22	20	17	15	18
Jewish Organization Membership *	26	31	25	20	25
Philanthropy					
Very Familiar with Jewish Federation *	25	35	24	20	25
Donated to Jewish Federation in the Past Year *	26	39	32	24	30
Donated to a Jewish Charity in the Past Year *	56	59	55	42	54

	New York	South Florida	Other Top MSAs	Rest of U.S.	All
	%	%	%	%	%
Israel Connections					
Respondent Has Visited Israel	46	49	34	18	36
Very Emotionally Attached to Israel	37	31	26	17	28
Strongly Agree that Jews in the United States and Jews in Israel Share a Common Destiny *	41	38	35	38	37
Very Familiar with the Current Social and Political Situation in Israel *	42	34	33	24	34
Jewish Media Use					
Read a Jewish Newspaper or Other Jewish Publication in the Past Year *	64	68	66	56	65
Read a Book, Other Than the Bible, in the Past Year Because It Had Jewish Content *	58	49	55	53	55
Listen to a Tape, CD, or Record in the Past Year Because it Had Jewish Content *	51	42	44	39	45
See a Movie or Rent a Video in the Past Year Because It Had Jewish Content	44	49	47	41	45
Used the Internet for Jewish-Related Information in the Past Year *	37	30	41	44	39
Jewish Social Networks					
All or Most of Closest Friends Are Jewish	47	56	29	12	33
Intermarried (married only)	17	12	34	56	31
Date Jews Only (not married only)	26	19	16	14	19
Date Both Jews and Non-Jews * (not married only)	67	71	78	77	75

Base: Households for donations. Respondents for other measures.

¹ Totals may not sum to 100% due to rounding.

* Asked of the more Jewishly-connected sample only.

regions. For example, 31% of households in the West claim synagogue membership, compared to 47% in the Midwest, 44% in the Northeast, and 40% in the South.

Table 5 shows a rather interesting association between Jewish communal involvement and Jewish population density. Of the four areas, South Florida has the highest percentage of new residents.¹⁴ The social science literature suggests that the weakest community ties should be found in areas with the highest levels of recent in-migration. Thus, we should expect communal ties to be weakest in South Florida, and such is the case for synagogue attendance once per month or more and synagogue membership. However, this is decidedly not the case with other Jewish organizational memberships, which are highest in South Florida. One possible explanation may be that many retirees live in condominium communities where organizations such as B'nai B'rith and Hadassah meet in condominium clubhouses, making the meeting places very close to home. In addition, many of these types of organizations are less expensive to join compared to synagogues or JCCs.

Synagogue membership is highest in New York (44%), an area with the largest proportion of Orthodox Jews, and the Rest of the U.S. (45%). The findings for the Rest of the U.S. are particularly noteworthy. As noted earlier, the percentage who identify as “just Jewish” in the Rest of the U.S. is significantly higher and, for the most part, religious observance is lower than in the other sectors, yet synagogue membership is equal to New York and higher than in the Other Top MSAs and South Florida. One possible conclusion from these results is that synagogue membership in the Rest of the U.S. is not reflective of a high level of religiosity, but of the relatively low percentage of Jews in this sector and the consequent need to join a synagogue – the most prevalent Jewish institution – for social and cultural reasons, that is, to maintain relationships with other Jews and to engage in selected Jewish cultural activities. Note that the same pattern does not

14. For example, in the Boca Raton/Delray Beach area of Palm Beach County (which contains almost 20% of Jews in South Florida), almost no adults were born in Palm Beach County, according to a 1995 demographic study of the Jewish population of that area.

apply to JCC membership, in part because many areas in the Rest of the U.S. do not have JCCs.

Attendance at services once a month or more is highest in New York and lowest in South Florida, with the Rest of the U.S. just slightly ahead of the Other Top MSAs, a finding consistent with the relatively high levels of synagogue membership in smaller communities. Lastly, volunteering for a Jewish organization in the past year shows little variation by sectors of Jewish population density.

Philanthropy

Philanthropic giving is, of course, both a strongly held value in the Jewish tradition and crucial to the operation of the Jewish communal system. Respondents were asked whether they are very familiar, somewhat familiar, not very familiar, or not at all familiar with the Jewish Federation campaign in their area. Table 4 shows that the percentage that answered “very familiar” is highest in the South and just slightly lower in the Midwest, while it is lowest in the West. The high percentage in the South reflects the results from South Florida, while the low percentage in the West may be related to the increasing numbers of Jews living in Jewishly-developing communities where communal institutions are not as well developed and widely known as in other areas of the country.

By sectors of Jewish population density, the percentage that is very familiar with the Jewish Federation campaign is much higher in South Florida than in New York or the Other Top 40 MSAs. It is lowest in the Rest of the U.S. where many campaigns are run by volunteers and have much lower profiles.

Actual donations to Federation in the year prior to the survey reflect to some extent levels of familiarity with the campaign. The percentage of households who donated to a Jewish Federation campaign is highest in the Midwest, followed by the South and Northeast, and it is lowest in the West. Furthermore, donations to Federation are significantly more common in South Florida than in the three other sectors.

Donations to any Jewish cause – either a Jewish Federation or another Jewish charity – in the year prior to the survey show a similar pattern, being most common in the Midwest and least common in the West. By sectors of Jewish population density, the percentage donating to any Jewish cause is substantially higher in South Florida, New York and the Other Top MSAs than in the Rest of the U.S.

Israel

To gauge attachments to Israel, four measures are examined: travel to Israel, emotional attachment to Israel, belief in a common destiny between U.S. and Israeli Jews, and awareness of the social and political situation in Israel. In general, attachments to Israel are stronger in the Northeast and the Midwest, though Jews in the South sometimes surpass Midwestern Jews. Like other measures of Jewish connections, ties to Israel are consistently weakest in the West. In terms of sectors of population density, attachments to Israel are generally higher in New York and South Florida, lower in the Other Top MSAs and lowest in the Rest of the U.S.

The percentage of respondents who have visited Israel is higher in the Northeast and the South than in both the Midwest and the West. About half of all Jews (49%) in South Florida have visited Israel – reflecting that sector’s large proportion of elderly, who have simply had more years to visit the Jewish state – as have 46% in New York, but only about one-third of Jews in the Other Top MSAs and less than one-fifth in the Rest of the U.S. have traveled to the Jewish state.

Northeastern and Midwestern Jews also show stronger attitudinal connections to Israel than Jews elsewhere. Respondents were asked how emotionally attached they are to Israel: very, somewhat, not very or not at all. Examining those who said they are very emotionally attached to Israel reveals higher percentages in the Northeast and the Midwest than in the South and West. Similarly, respondents were asked if they strongly agree, agree, disagree, or strongly disagree with the following statement: “Jews in the United States and Jews in Israel share a common destiny.” The percentage of respondents who said they strongly agree is again higher in

the Midwest and the Northeast than in the South and especially the West.

By sectors of Jewish population density, Jews in the New York area are most likely to report they are very emotionally attached to Israel and are the most likely to strongly agree that U.S. and Israeli Jews share a common destiny. Emotional attachment to Israel declines consistently across the other sectors as population density declines, but belief in a common destiny between U.S. and Israeli Jews shows little further variation.

In examining familiarity with the social and political situation in Israel, the percentage of respondents who are very familiar (rather than somewhat, not very or not at all familiar) is again highest in the Northeast and the Midwest, followed by the South and West. Familiarity is far higher in New York than in South Florida and the Other Top 40 MSAs, and far lower in the Rest of the U.S.¹⁵

Use of Jewish Media

NJPS asked respondents about their use of different types of media in the past year, including reading a Jewish newspaper, Jewish magazine or other Jewish publication; reading a book, listening to a tape or CD, or seeing a movie because they had Jewish content; and using the Internet for Jewish information. These measures may be interpreted as indicators of cultural attachment to Jewish life.

Tables 4 and 5 reveal little systematic variation in Jewish media use across geographic areas. While there are differences on some measures across regions and sectors of Jewish population density, no region or sector is consistently at the high or low end of Jewish media use. Perhaps the fact that Jewish culture and Jewish themes have become pervasive in American society means many people can respond affirmatively to these questions regardless of their Jewish religious observance or ethnic attachments to other Jews.

15. It is important to note that much of the interviewing for NJPS took place prior to the outbreak of the second Palestinian *intifada*. It is not known how answers to the question about familiarity with the social and political situation in Israel would have been affected by these events.

These findings are particularly instructive for the Western region and for the Rest of the U.S. population sector. These two geographic areas usually have low scores on measures of Jewish connections, but that is much less the case with respect to Jewish media use, especially for the West. Using the Internet is one striking example. Jews in the West are just as likely to obtain Jewish information from the Internet as Jews in the Northeast and South, while Jews in the Rest of the U.S. are more likely than those in any other sector to tap the Internet for Jewish purposes. These findings suggest that new media and information technologies may be important ways to reach Jews who live in areas where more traditional connections to Jewish life are not as prevalent.

Social Networks

Friends, spouses and, among the unmarried, the people who one dates are important components of Jewish social networks. The highest percentage of Jews who report that all or most of their closest friends are Jewish is found in the Northeast and the lowest percentages are in the Midwest and the West. By sector of Jewish population density, the percentage is highest in South Florida, where many elderly Jews reside in all or mostly Jewish condominium developments. Strong Jewish friendship networks are also found in New York, where Jews form a significant percentage of the overall population and a very high percentage in some neighborhoods. In the Other Top MSAs and especially in the Rest of the U.S., the percentage of Jews who say that all or most of their closest friends are Jewish drops significantly.

The percentage of married Jews who are married to non-Jews (called the individual intermarriage rate) is substantially higher in the West (42%) than in the Midwest (34%), the South (29%), and the Northeast (25%). Even more significant differences in the intermarriage rate are evident across the sectors of Jewish population density. Intermarriage is least common in South Florida (where the majority of married couples are elderly) and it is just a little higher in New York. However, intermarriage rises substantially in the Other Top MSAs and the Rest of the U.S., where it is nearly three and five times more common, respectively, than in South Florida.

Lastly, NJPS asked unmarried Jews about their dating patterns. Among unmarried respondents who reported that they are dating, the percentage that date only Jews is higher in the Northeast and Midwest than elsewhere, and the percentage that date both Jews and non-Jews is just slightly higher in the West and the Midwest than in the other regions. By sectors of Jewish population density, the percentage that date only Jews is highest in New York and declines consistently as Jewish population density declines. The percentage that date both Jews and non-Jews is higher in the Other Top MSAs and the Rest of the U.S. than in South Florida and New York.

CONCLUSION

THESE RESULTS SHOW THAT JEWS WHO RESIDE OUTSIDE THE TRADITIONAL AREAS OF JEWISH SETTLEMENT – regionally the West and to some extent the South, and those in small cities, towns and rural areas – tend to differ in both their demography and their Jewish connections from those who live elsewhere, although it is also clear that the strength of the relationship with geography varies depending upon which specific measures are examined.

Demographically, the Jewish population is younger in the Northeast and the Midwest than in the South and the West. Average household size is higher in the Midwest. Levels of secular education are higher in the Northeast and the Midwest and are lowest in the South. Median household income is highest in the Northeast and home ownership is most common in the South. By sector of Jewish population density, New York is by far the youngest and South Florida is the oldest. Average household size and level of secular education are the lowest in South Florida, while home ownership is the highest there. Median household income is highest in New York and lowest in South Florida and the Rest of the U.S.

But it is the geographic variations in Jewish connections that are the most instructive. While some of these variations are traceable to demographic

differences among the geographic areas (particularly the South due to South Florida), it is also the case that the mere fact of geography plays an important role in distinguishing among Jews. Two dynamics are likely to be at work: geographic areas differ from each other in their levels and types of Jewish connections, and, both reacting to and reinforcing these established differences, people sort themselves out geographically according to their level of Jewish connection. Less Jewishly-connected people tend to reside in the South and the West. The West, in particular, is different: the percentage of Jews who claim they are “just Jewish” is very high; levels of home religious practice, Jewish organizational involvement, Jewish philanthropy, and attachments to Israel are low; and Jewish social networks are weak. The South, partly because it includes South Florida with many elderly migrants from the Northeast and Midwest, does not differ as much from the Northeast and the Midwest as the West does.

By sector of Jewish population density, the Rest of the U.S. shows the highest level of “just Jewish” identification and relatively low levels of religious observance, Jewish philanthropy, ties to Israel and social connections to other Jews. By contrast, Jews in the New York metropolitan area – which has the largest and most dense Jewish population and is the heart of traditional Jewish settlement – tend to have the strongest Jewish connections, more so even than Jews in mid-size metropolitan areas.

Over the past 50 years, Jews have migrated from the established areas of Jewish settlement in the cities of the Northeast, and to some extent the Midwest, to other parts of the country, predominantly the South and West. In doing so, it is clear that Louis Wirth’s observation, with which this report began, is as true today as it was in 1928 when Wirth made it. Geography continues to be an important index of Jews’ demographic characteristics and their Jewish connections. Jews have dispersed themselves geographically based on their level of Jewish connection, among other factors. It is also clear that once living in a particular area, the Jewish nature of that milieu impacts behavior. While maintaining

Jewish identity and Jewish life present challenges for the Jewish communal system in all regions of the country, these challenges appear to be heightened outside the areas of traditional Jewish settlement, most notably the West and in small cities, towns and rural areas.

Lastly, the NJPS findings on geographic differences among Jews can be fruitfully compared to findings from local Jewish population studies. More than 55 American Jewish communities, covering approximately 85% of American Jews, have completed such studies since 1980; nearly 25 communities have completed two studies during this time period.¹⁶ By comparing their local results with NJPS findings, communal leaders can see how their communities mirror general patterns found in their region or sector of population density, as well as understand the ways in which their communities may be distinctive from others in the same region or of similar size.

16. For a partial list of these studies and many of their findings, see Ira M. Sheskin, *How Jewish Community Differ: Variations in the Findings of Local Jewish Population Studies*, available at www.jewishdatabank.org.



111 Eighth Avenue, Suite 11E, New York, NY 10011

www.ujc.org/njps