

Trends in Jewish Demography and Their Effects on Campaign Planning*

GARY A. TOBIN

Professor, Center for Modern Jewish Studies, Brandeis University, Waltham, Massachusetts.

. . . most of our institutional and organizational models, including our fund raising models, are at least a generation old. Organizational models that work in Cleveland or Detroit are not likely to work in Phoenix.

1. Overview

The population statistics used in this report come from a compilation of more than thirty-five Jewish demographic studies that have been completed in the past twenty years by Federations. Most of these studies have been completed since 1980. They cover a majority of the Jewish population in the United States.

About ten additional Federations are currently undertaking or contemplating demographic studies, and when they are completed, nearly all major cities in the United States will have done a demographic study in the 1980s. Cities such as St. Louis, Los Angeles, and others were done between 1979 and 1981 or before. Many of these cities will re-survey their populations, with proper updating.

The demographic studies tend to under-represent certain regions and types of cities: i.e., cities in the South, Southwest, and small cities, though some representation from those cities does exist—from Phoenix and Atlanta, for example. There are also data from smaller cities such as Nashville and Richmond.

Jewish population studies, as they are currently conceived and executed, tell us about Jews in a number of ways. They tell us about basic demographics: age, occupation, education, marital sta-

tus, and so on. They tell us a great deal about Jewish identity and religious practices. There is much we can learn about the relationship between "Jewishness" and service delivery and fund raising. The surveys also tell us about service usage. Increasingly, there are sophisticated marketing questions about the kinds of services that will be used and who will use them. And, lastly, the studies tell us about patterns of volunteerism and fund raising: why people give or do not give their time or money.

Jews are now a diverse population in many ways. First, there is significant variation in terms of region. When we discuss the Jewish community, we must be very careful to differentiate the region of the United States with which we are dealing. There are tremendous differences in the nature of the populations between "frostbelt" cities, that is the older, industrial centers of the North, East, and Midwest, and the "sunbelt" cities in the South and Southwest. Jews seem to adopt, to some degree (although how much is unknown), the cultural norms and behaviors of the cities and regions in which they reside.

Second, differences in urban and regional economic bases will differentiate Jewish communities by occupation, age, and other demographic variables. City size seems to have a similar effect. Jews in smaller cities appear different, demographically (for some variables), than Jews in large cities.

* Presented at the Campaign Directors Institute, San Diego, California, February 3, 1985.

Third, Jews are differentiated within metropolitan areas. There are differences that are appearing demographically between those who live in the central city, those who live in the inner suburbs, and those who live in the "ex-urbs", the fringe portions of the metropolitan area. It is virtually impossible now to point to a singularly defined Jewish neighborhood in a city. Jews live in many and different kinds of neighborhoods.

Jews are also clearly differentiated by economic status. Significant education, occupation, and income differences are present in contemporary Jewish life. The Jewish community is a set of sub-communities; the very wealthy and poor, professionals and blue collar workers, Jews with graduate degrees and those with less than a high school education.

Jews are most widely differentiated in terms of religious character. Levels of involvement, identity, and beliefs can be found along a very large continuum. Jews seem to be moving to either end of that continuum, but the data need much more examination.

Jewish communities are also varied by organizational structure. Certain patterns seem to be a function of region, city size, and the stage of urban development and growth. Cities like Phoenix have certain kinds of organizational structures because of its age, its location, its employment base, and its form.

Patterns of contributions and volunteerism also show some interesting differences. Most Jewish communities show a majority of households making some sort of contribution to a Jewish philanthropy, but the vast majority of those contributions are very small. A significant proportion of households make no contribution. The larger the city, the smaller the proportion of

households that are making significant contributions. At the same time, nearly all cities where there are data show an overwhelming majority of Jewish adults devoting no time at all to volunteer activity for Jewish organizations.

These variables could sometimes combine to produce unique communities. Even within these patterns and differences, however, there are relatively few Jewish communities. There are certain *sets* of cities, certain *types* of communities that are more alike than others: Pittsburgh, St. Louis, and Kansas City, for example, form one subset. They have differences, of course, but most demographic characteristics make them more alike than they are different.

Other cities are clearly unique. Among these are: Miami, given its high proportion of elderly population; Washington, given its incredibly high proportion of young professionals; New York, which has the highest population of low-income Jews and of Orthodox Jews; and Denver, which has a very high proportion of singles. Each of these relates to urban size, economic base, or some other urban or regional factor that makes a city unique, not just the Jewish population.

For long-range campaign planning, a community must be able to draw on those factors or characteristics that make it like others, yet be cognizant of its unique characteristics as well. As information is gathered and shared, similarities will help establish a national perspective, while local data will inform about those dimensions that are peculiar to a particular community or set of communities.

2. Demographic Profile

High mobility characterizes the Jewish population in the United States, just as it characterizes the general popu-

lation. The single greatest population movement in the past twenty years has been the migration of Jews from New York to Florida. The Florida Jewish population has grown by hundreds of thousands. There has also been incredibly rapid growth of sunbelt communities. Phoenix, for example, will soon have one of the largest Jewish populations in the United States.

Aside from the overall population loss or gain, there is much mobility between cities. Less than half of the Jewish population in many cities was born in the city in which it currently resides. At any given point, between five and ten percent of the population is planning to move out of a given metropolitan area. Some communities, particularly larger cities in the sunbelt communities may find fifteen to twenty percent of its households moving in and out of the metropolitan area at any given time.

Dispersion within metropolitan areas continues as well. Jews, like other middle-income groups, are moving into selected areas of the central city. They also continue to move to outer suburbs, and within traditional enclaves.

As a result, Jews are distributed in multiple population centers. Even in those places that are considered to have compact Jewish populations, such as Baltimore or St. Louis, we find a significant number of Jewish households outside the core community of Jews.

We are all aware of the popular notion that Jews are remarkably well educated. Indeed, as a group they are. In most cities a majority of Jewish adults have at least a college degree. In Washington, D.C., 72 percent of all adult Jews have at least a college degree, and almost half have an advanced degree. Even in the largest cities, such as Los Angeles, 44 percent of the adults have at least a college degree or an advanced degree.

A majority of Jewish households in all cities still consist of married adults. However, most Jewish households no longer consist of married adults *with* children. Married adults with children in the household now constitutes a distinct minority of households in every Jewish community in the United States for which we have data. This is traditionally the family configuration that is usually viewed as the one that will affiliate, participate in organized Jewish life, and contribute to Jewish philanthropies.

These data translate into smaller household sizes. The vast majority of households in Jewish communities now consist of one- and two-person households: 57 percent in Chicago, 69 percent in Los Angeles, 64 percent in Richmond, and 66 percent in St. Paul, for example.

This is due to a number of factors. The first is that people are getting married later. Singles now comprise between 7 and 25 percent of the Jewish population in a given community. In some communities, such as Denver and Chicago, the proportion is very high. In other communities, like Miami, it is much lower. Divorced and separated Jewish households also help decrease average household size. The largest proportion of Jewish households that are divorced is found in Los Angeles with 14 percent. Most cities have a proportion between 5 and 10 percent of all households.

There are many myths about Jewish professionals. In 1971, the National Jewish Population Study showed that 62 percent of Jewish adults were in occupations that were professional or managerial, very high compared to the general population. But, in 1984, those figures have not changed very much in most cities. In some cities the proportion of those in professional and

managerial positions is slightly higher, but in others it is slightly lower. Jews are not all professionals, nor are they all likely to be professionals. What we are finding is that those in the sales and entrepreneurial positions in some cities have actually increased since 1971. If we look at age and occupation, we are finding much greater diversity in terms of the occupational profile of Jews than one would suspect from the popular myth. Some of these changes may be due to more women entering the labor force, but little thorough examination of Jewish occupations has been done.

In most cities, between 15 and 25 percent of all Jews are still in clerical and blue collar positions; many of them are the young and the elderly. Sales and technical positions seem to be increasing. While we are finding an increased number of Jewish women in the labor force, we are also finding that a sizeable proportion of these women work part time, and that many stop work when they have children. This phenomenon needs much more study. There is also some indication that women who work part time and raise families part time are the ones least likely to volunteer.

If we examine the income figures of American Jews, we are finding two disparate phenomena. The first is that Jews are characterized by median incomes far ahead of the host communities in which they live. Whether it be St. Louis, Phoenix, or Washington, Jews on the average earn a great deal more than the general populations in the city in which they reside.

On the other hand, between 10 and 15 percent of the Jewish households in most communities have incomes below or near the poverty level. Much study is needed on the growing or shrinking dimension of the middle-middle class.

3. Jewish Identity and Religious Beliefs

I have heard many speakers warn us that Jews are assimilating themselves out of existence, or at best that the dwindling Jewish population does not act very Jewish. The data from the demographic studies seem to contradict this view. Jews, for the most part, still have a very definite connectedness to being and acting Jewish. It does not always translate into the most traditional religious behaviors, such as keeping Kosher, philanthropic giving, or being very communally active. But it does express itself in a number of ways. Understanding these dimensions of Jewish life may tell us a great deal about long-range campaign planning; in the ways funds are raised and volunteers are attracted.

How do Jews think and act as Jews? Every Jewish community study that asks about Israel shows that Jews strongly support Israel. Jews in proportions far different from the general United States population feel that the United States government has an obligation to support Israel, that Jews have an obligation to support Israel, and that they feel an identity with Israel. If the questions are broken down into more definitive or more specific kinds of support; that is, "Do you think we should send military supplies, do you think we should send American troops to support Israel," and so on, there is more differentiation. But, at the core, if Jews are asked if they support Israel, the universal response is positive—between 92 and 98 percent. Such response rates are rare in survey research. The question, "Do you like your mother?" is not likely to produce such an affirmative response.

Many Jewish community studies also ask whether or not households have visited Israel. In 1971, 16 percent of

the households sampled through the NJPS had visited Israel. That percentage has grown a great deal—to 30 in Chicago, 38 in Cleveland, 41 in Nashville, 27 in St. Louis, and 35 in Washington. Many more households say that they intend to visit Israel in the future.

The data do not support another popular myth that many Jews, particularly young ones, are turning to Orthodoxy. Indeed, just the opposite is true in most communities. A large proportion of Jews are identifying themselves as having no preference, as “just Jewish,” or something else. A major movement is not from Reform and Conservatism to Orthodoxy, but from Conservatism and Reform to being “just Jewish” or having no preference at all.

Some of this may be a function of life cycle. Those who say “no preference” or “just Jewish” are more likely to be between the ages of 21 and 35 than any other age. It is not known how they will identify themselves when they are 37 or 38. It is known for now, however, that 22-year-olds are more likely to say that they are “just Jewish” than they are to say that they are Orthodox.

Synagogue memberships seem to be up since 1971. More and more households are affiliating with a synagogue at some point in their adult lives. The larger the community, the lower the rates of current affiliation. Therefore, while 61 percent of the households in Cleveland or 78 percent in Nashville or 66 percent in St. Louis will be currently affiliated, the proportion is 26 percent in Los Angeles and 33 percent in Phoenix. The other factor that mitigates against synagogue affiliation seems to be the “newness” of a Jewish community.

Current synagogal affiliation rates alone do not show the households that have been members in their adult lives, or will be members in their adult lives.

In those demographic studies where it is asked not only “Do you belong?” but “Have you belonged?” and “Will you belong?”, the proportion generally reaches above 80 percent. The vast majority of Jews, in their adult lives, will have a synagogue membership. Jews are moving in and out of synagogues just as they move in and out of other Jewish organizations. Synagogues may be serving educational, service, and other needs, not necessarily religious ones. Current synagogue members are far more likely to make a contribution to a Jewish philanthropy than non-members.

Most Jewish adults still attend synagogue at least once or twice a year. Religious leaders may find this appalling, but the data show *some* religious commitment for most adults. Regardless of the age group, region, or the city size, the vast majority of Jews still attend services at least once a year. They are still defining themselves religiously as Jews.

The larger the city, the more likely that a person will attend. Again, these figures are asked for any given time, so that if 25-year-olds are asked, “How often do you attend?” they are more likely to say “never” than do 45-year-olds. The number of never attendees is sharply reduced if it includes those households that have attended before, or will attend in the future.

The demographic studies show much about ritual observance. There are myths that ritual observance is dying. The data show something quite different. The nature of ritual observance among Jews is changing, not phasing out. That is, some traditional Jewish customs, such as Kashrut and walking on Shabbat, are definitely on a very rapid decline and observed by a very small proportion of Jewish households. On the other hand, other Jewish rituals actually show an increase in the par-

ticipation of Jewish households. Among them are lighting Chanukah candles and attending a Passover Seder. Between 75 and 85 percent of all Jewish households in most communities say that they attend a Passover Seder. This is a remarkably high figure, and, again, shows that while the nature of ritual observance is certainly on the decline, other rituals are on the upswing and observed by the vast majority of Jewish households.

These data could indicate that certain ritual observances continue to bind American Jews. Even though they are diverse, there is still some basic commitment to religious observance, ritual practice, and to identification with Israel. Other indicators, however, show that while there is still a core identity, *active* participation and contribution are less definitive. There are no benchmarks for volunteerism, but in most cities where there are data, 80 percent of all Jewish adults spend zero time volunteering for any Jewish organization at any given point.

4. Philanthropy

A large proportion of Jewish households in some cities have no idea what a Jewish Federation does. When asked to evaluate the quality of services provided, they often say, "I don't know." When asked, "What do you think the Jewish Federation does?", they say "I don't know." If asked, "What do you think of this or that Federation program?", they often say, "I can't tell you because I've never heard of it."

When asked why they contribute philanthropically or do not, most respondents are not very specific. Reasons often touch on core Jewish identity, but not very specifically. It may be desirable for respondents to say they give because they are so "close to the Jewish agency planning process," or that they want to "support Israel," or

to "support local services," or to give some other reply that shows knowledge of Federation activity. Yet more often the following reasons are given: "I'm Jewish," "I feel tied to those things Jewish," "My father gave," "I always gave," "Somebody in my family always gave," "I don't know."

Support to Israel emerges often as a purpose for giving, but rarely as the most important reason for giving to a Federation. Of course, there may be differences in the feeling of importance of giving to Israel between those who make large and those making small contributions.

In demographic studies people are sometimes asked why they do not give to philanthropy. Federations sometimes assume that negative perceptions of the Federation are a major reason. However, other reasons emerge: they do not like organized Jewish life, they have some antipathy to those things Jewish, they had a bad experience with Sunday School. A common reason for not giving is that nobody asked them to or they could not afford it. At least one of these problems, can be "solved."

About 10 percent of the households in some cities say definitively they do not want to give. Some portions of the Jewish population do not support Israel or they want nothing to do with organized Jewish life; they are truly removed and just lost.

Some populations tend to be underrepresented: the young, the intermarried households, the highly mobile, and the elderly. But it should not be assumed, *a priori*, that these are "lost" population cohorts.

Some theses have been put forward in the last few years which argue that campaigns are flat, or they will be flat, because "the well is going to run dry." That is to say, Jews are going to stop giving for one of two reasons, the argument goes. The first is that the en-

entrepreneurial class of Jews is disappearing because Jews are entering occupations that are largely professional, and they are not accumulating the wealth that they once did. There are no data to support this contention. Professionals very often are entrepreneurs. Occupational status and accumulative wealth are not linked in ways that make professionals "terminally" middle class. Physicians may have vast real estate holdings, for example, while an entrepreneur may own a small clothing store. Much more research is needed in this area.

The income levels of Jews, in the aggregate, are very high. If campaign potential were computed on the basis of income alone, most campaigns would increase many times over. If Jews gave just one percent of their income to Jewish philanthropies, collections in campaigns would increase tremendously, and such an increase would not begin to tap accumulated wealth.

A second argument holds that the well is running dry because Jews no longer strongly identify as Jews. They are too assimilated, removed from Jewish life, or otherwise unattached. Most Jews are not disconnected because they do not want to be Jewish. Jews do not live in the exurbs, for example, because they do not want to live with other Jews or they are running away from their Jewish identity. They live there primarily because the housing prices are lower and school systems are good.

These detached Jewish populations are detached from philanthropic, organizational, and institutional structure. Jews move a great deal. They are demographically diverse. New regions have grown, new sub-groups have developed, new social norms have developed among Jews. Occupational diversity remains. New role relations have developed between Jewish men and

women, as have new occupational status for Jewish women. Jews in the 1980s do not appear demographically like the Jews of the 1950s and 1960s. And yet most of our institutional and organizational models, including our fund raising models, are at least a generation old. Organizational models that work in Cleveland or Detroit are *not* likely to work in Phoenix. They will most likely fail. Organizational and institutional structures developed on the basis of Jewish neighborhood patterns, Jewish identity patterns, and Jewish social infrastructures of the 1960s will help little with fund-raising structures in Washington, D.C. or Houston. Jews that live in the central city neighborhoods of Chicago are not likely to relate to old models.

If we are going to reconnect those who are disconnected, if we are going to find them, if we are going to nurture their identity, different organizational techniques have to be developed. Most Jews are indeed reachable. Organizations may not know how, or have the mechanisms or structure yet to do it, but much of long-range campaign planning will rest on the ability to broaden organizational and institutional bases. As Jewish populations have changed and diversified, so will organizations and institutions have to change and diversify.

New marketing techniques that address themselves to specific sub-groups, new organizational models that address themselves to the differentiated regions and cities of the country, new institutions that address new sets of values, are vital changes that must be made if long-range campaign planning is to succeed.

Institutions are often change-resistant, but they will not grow in vitality if changes are not made. Demographic studies are a vital source of information. In addition to a concern with

demographics, more recently they have surveyed service usage. Matters of fund raising, marketing, and organizational structure have had a relatively low priority in many studies as they are currently conceived. Federations must be more aggressive in having these studies address issues of fund raising and organizational structure. They should be used as extensively as possible in these areas. In some cases, more detailed and innovative research on fund raising issues is possible. Much can be gained through proper coordination of social planning and campaign research. Not all questions can be answered through this sort of re-

search, but its possibilities should be thoroughly explored.

Current research is being heavily utilized in communities like St. Louis, Washington, and Chicago in social planning endeavors. Social planners are learning how to use survey data effectively. Similar approaches need to be taken by campaign staffs and others responsible for raising funds. Demographic research, market research, and other forms of data collection can greatly aid the long-range campaign planning process. It is no panacea; the work of raising dollars will be no less arduous. But good data can help planning for those difficult tasks.

88th Annual Meeting

Conference of Jewish Communal Service

Cleveland

May 25-28, 1986