

This executive summary contains highlights from the comprehensive, in-depth portrait of the New York Jewish community in 2011. In addition to highlights, the executive summary presents policy implications — how these findings can inform Jewish communal decision making in the coming months and years.

1. The eight-county New York area — the Bronx, Brooklyn, Manhattan, Queens, Staten Island, Nassau, Suffolk, and Westchester — continues to be home to the greatest concentration of Jewish people of any metropolitan area in the United States.¹ And unlike the previous decade, this population is growing.

- In 2011, the number of Jewish households in the eight-county New York area stood at 694,000. In all, 1.77 million people (Jews and non-Jews) live in these households, of whom 1.54 million are Jewish adults and children.
- From 1991 to 2002, New York City's Jewish population declined slightly and the suburbs grew. But between 2002 and 2011, the Jewish population in both New York City and the suburbs grew, though growth in New York City was substantially greater.
- Jewish density — the percentage of all households that are Jewish — increased from 15% of all households in the eight-county New York area in 2002 to 16% today.
- The Jewish population of New York City, which dipped below a million in 2002, now stands at 1,086,000.

Historically, the growth in New York's Jewish community was fueled by immigration. That is no longer the case. Since 2002, population growth has been driven by high birthrates among the Orthodox (especially the *Haredim*)², increased longevity, and an increase in the number of people who consider themselves partially Jewish.

- Since 2002, the number of children and young people under 25 grew noticeably, from 432,000 in 2002 to 498,000 in 2011.
- At the other end of the age spectrum, the number of Jews ages 75 and over increased from 153,000 to 198,000, paralleling trends now being seen in other Jewish communities and in the general community.

1 Throughout this report, the eight-county area served by UJA-Federation of New York will be called the eight-county New York area or the New York area. The same eight counties were the focus of the 1991 and 2002 New York Jewish community studies. The eight-county area is a part of the much larger New York metropolitan area defined by the U.S. Census as the New York–Northern New Jersey–Long Island, NY–NJ–CT–PA Consolidated Metropolitan Statistical Area (CMSA).

2 The survey asked respondents who were Orthodox to identify themselves by terms most commonly used to identify streams of Orthodoxy, namely Modern, Hasidic, and Yeshivish. A small number of respondents volunteered other responses that were recorded. This narrative uses *Haredi* or *Haredim* (plural) to refer to the Hasidic and Yeshivish grouped together.

- Rising numbers of people report unconventional identity configurations. They may consider themselves “partially Jewish,” or may identify as Jews even while identifying with Christianity or another non-Jewish religion (many more do so now than who so reported in 2002). Of such people with unconventional configurations, 70% have a non-Jewish parent (or two).

In addition to the significant increase in the population of those ages 75 and older, the very large number of baby boomers (born between 1946 and 1964) are now beginning to enter their senior years.

- There are 446,000 Jews between the ages of 45 and 64, most of whom are part of the baby boomer generation.
- Half of all of those who report caregiving responsibilities are in this age group.
- In addition, a substantial minority of this group populates the “sandwich generation” — more than 40% of those with caregiving responsibilities also have children (of all ages) at home.

Implications

Size and growth has implications for Jewish life in New York City and the suburbs. First, it points to the continuing visibility and strength of the Jewish community within the general community. Second, the growth of the community represents a challenge and opportunity for communal leadership — a challenge, because more people means more needs; and an opportunity, because there are now more people to engage in Jewish life and community, and potentially more resources to meet needs here and abroad.

The large number of baby boomers and advances in health and longevity promise to grow the population of those ages 75 and older even further in the years to come. All of the research on older seniors suggests that, by and large, they seek to stay in their own homes as long as possible, and that the independence they seek actually contributes to health and longevity. Adult children are the first line of defense for older seniors, and the Jewish community may need to increase support to families as they help older seniors stay in their own homes as long as possible, maximizing their independence and quality of life. The significant boomer population constitutes a complex interplay of challenge and opportunity right now. First, some may need to be helped and supported in carrying out their caregiving roles. Second, many who previously were too busy to volunteer may now have the time to make a measurable contribution to the welfare of the community. And third, it is likely that many previously engaged in Jewish life through their children; today they could be seeking Jewish meaning in their own lives.

Implications of high birthrates primarily in the Haredi population, as well as implications of the growth in those who consider themselves partially Jewish and others at the low end of the Jewish-engagement spectrum, are discussed below.

2. New York’s Jewish community is highly diverse in many dimensions — including national origin, types of Jewish identification and commitment, social class, gender, sexual orientation, and race.

The second distinguishing feature is New York’s incredible diversity. The Jewish population of the New York area embraces Reform congregants in Scarsdale, struggling single mothers in Queens, young adults on the Lower East Side, middle-class families in Staten Island, Russian speakers in Brighton Beach, *Haredim* in Borough Park, affluent businesspeople on the Upper East Side, isolated seniors in Suffolk, Modern Orthodox Jews in the Five Towns, Conservative congregants in Flushing, and biracial families in the Bronx. Secularists, Israelis, Syrian Jews, and others are all part of the mix, as are the vast numbers of poor people in Jewish households and the thousands of very affluent New Yorkers who are also part and parcel of the Jewish population in the area.

Of 1,540,000 Jewish people, well over 40% are members of distinct subpopulations that in most other Jewish communities would together be much closer to 10% of the Jewish population.

- Nearly half a million Jewish people (493,000) live in Orthodox households — with significantly higher levels of Jewish engagement than others, much larger households, and somewhat lower incomes.
- About 220,000 Jewish people live in Russian-speaking households, typically Jews by culture, including both economically advancing younger households and extremely poor seniors.

About 12% of all Jewish households in the area are biracial or nonwhite.³ These 87,000 households contain 254,000 people, of whom 161,000 are Jewish. In addition, numerous smaller groups add their particular flavor to this large heterogonous community: 121,000 Jews in Israeli households, 50,000 Jews in LGBT Jewish households, 38,000 Jews in Syrian Jewish households, and many other groups with special interests and needs.

Diversity Within the Orthodox Community and Growing *Haredi* Population

Orthodoxy in New York is itself extraordinarily diverse. The largest three groups (by self-identification) are Hasidic Jews, Yeshivish Jews, and Modern Orthodox Jews.

³ Hispanic is included in the “nonwhite” category for the purposes of this report; in U.S. Census definitions, Hispanic could be white or nonwhite.

Implications

All of this diversity adds richness and texture to Jewish life in New York. Community-building strategies in New York need to be as variegated and multidimensional as the community itself.

At the same time, diversity significantly complicates efforts to build an overall sense of Jewish community and Jewish peoplehood. Particularly, the largest groups — Orthodox and Russian-speaking Jewish households — function both as part of, and separate from, the larger Jewish community.

The large number of biracial, Hispanic, and other “nonwhite” Jewish households — particularly pronounced among younger households — should serve as a reality check for those who are accustomed to thinking of all Jews as “white.” Together with the relatively large numbers of households that include someone identified as lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender, this finding reminds us that it is important to be mindful of diverse assets and needs and become a more inclusive community.

Jewish communal planners and policy makers need to think about the Orthodox not as one monolithic group, but rather as comprising several distinct groups that have different characteristics and needs. In particular, three features of the two fervently Orthodox groups — Yeshivish and Hasidic, often collectively known as the *Haredim* — have significant implications for the future of New York Jewry.

First, the high birthrate of *Haredi* Jews (at least three times that associated with non-Orthodox Jewish New Yorkers) suggests that this population is likely to grow even larger in the future. Second, the *Haredim* are known to be self-segregated and relatively disconnected from the rest of the Jewish community. Third, relatively high poverty combined with large and growing families suggests that their economic stress is likely to increase in the future. The large numbers of poor *Haredim* and the disconnect from the larger Jewish community suggest that perhaps not enough poor Jews access services offered by UJA-Federation of New York and its beneficiary agencies.

While Modern Orthodox birthrates are not as high as those of the *Haredim*, they are higher than those of non-Orthodox families, suggesting continuing growth for this group as well. Unlike most *Haredim*, Modern Orthodox Jews are more likely to be fully engaged with the larger Jewish community.

3. Many New York Jews live in conditions of significant economic stress and need for assistance.

Jewish Poverty Has Increased Since 2002

Nearly 1 in 5 Jewish households is poor today, with incomes under 150% of the federal poverty guideline, and the proportion of poor Jewish households is higher than it was 10 years ago. The relative increase has been especially dramatic in the suburbs, where 10 years ago there was very little Jewish poverty.

- In the eight-county area, 130,000 Jewish households are poor. In terms of individuals, 361,000 people (both Jews and non-Jews) live in poor Jewish households.
- About 19% of all Jewish households are poor, as are 20% of all people in Jewish households — a considerable increase since 2002, when 15% of people in Jewish households in the New York area lived in poverty.
- Jewish poverty has increased considerably in the suburbs, but it is still greatest in New York City, where 24% of Jewish households and 27% of all people in Jewish households are poor (compared with 20% of all people in New York City Jewish households living in poverty in 2002).

An additional 1 in 10 Jewish households is “near poor” — households with incomes between 150% and 250% of the federal poverty guideline. Beyond the people living in poor Jewish households, an additional 204,000 people can be classified as near poor. Thus, 565,000 people living in Jewish households in New York are affected by poverty.

Groups in Poverty: Orthodox, Seniors, and More

An estimated 151,000 people live in (primarily *Haredi*) Orthodox poor households, the largest identifiable group in the Jewish community that is poor. By far the highest rate of poverty among Orthodox Jews is found in Hasidic households — 43% of Hasidic households are poor.

As compared with 2002, the number of seniors in poverty has remained about the same, while the overall number of seniors has increased from 317,000 to 354,000. As a result, the poverty rate among seniors has declined, dropping from 35% in 2002 to 24% in 2011. Seniors living alone are more likely to be poorer than other New York-area Jewish seniors, and the number of seniors living alone has increased by more than a third since 2002. As in 2002, the poorest Jews in New York are Russian-speaking seniors living alone, of which 77% are poor. They escaped the former Soviet Union but are essentially destitute.

About 14,000 people live in poor Jewish households where at least one member is disabled; 9,000 people live in households where someone is unemployed.

Use of Public Support

At least 15% of Jewish households, amounting to 104,000 in all, receive at least one form of public support examined in our survey. A total of 294,000 people live in these households. As many as 11% of Jewish households (79,000) report receiving assistance from the Supplemental Nutritional Assistance Program, or SNAP (formerly the food stamp program). These households contain 224,000 people, of whom 77,000 are children. Medicaid reaches at least 57,000 households; these house 165,000 people, of whom 58,000 are children.

Seeking Assistance for Human-Service Needs

In all, 16% of households sought services related to help in coping with a household member's serious or chronic illness. Close behind in frequency are services for an adult with a disability (15%) and help in finding a job (14%). In all, 284,000 households (41% of all Jewish households in the area) sought at least one of six types of services: help in dealing with a serious or chronic illness, services for an adult with a disability, help in finding a job, services for older adults, assistance with food or housing, or help for a child with a physical, developmental, or learning disability or other special needs.

Of the 37,000 households that sought services for older adults, the most common service sought is home care (24,000), while transportation is next (21,000). Far less frequent are households seeking nursing homes (8,000) and help with dementia or Alzheimer's (6,000).

Poor households turn to outside help more often than the non-poor. As many as 54% of poor households sought services, as compared with 38% of non-poor households. Some types of human-service assistance are especially hard to find, in particular seeking help with food or housing and help in finding a job. The poor experience greater levels of difficulty than others in obtaining these needed services.

Single-parent Jewish households (19,000) are more likely than others to seek assistance. The differences are especially pronounced with respect to seeking help with jobs (25% of single parents versus 14% of others) and to food or housing assistance (19% versus 8%).

Implications

The sheer scale of needs associated with being poor or near poor dwarfs the resources of even the largest Jewish community in the United States. One is tempted to believe that the scale of need is so vast that the Jewish community should abandon this field to others. The organized Jewish community cannot be the safety net, but it can help people get the benefits to which they are entitled. A caring community can make sure that those who seem to have difficulty accessing services and benefits are helped, and that specifically Jewish needs the poor and near poor struggle to access are well funded. The relative isolation of the *Haredi* community needs to be overcome, if for no other reason than to increase communitywide help to one of the poorest segments of the New York Jewish community.

A caring community networks all of its communal institutions — human-service agencies, congregations, schools, and community centers — to help connect people to services and support. It may require multiple, coordinated relationships with those in need to overcome barriers to help, including the reluctance to accept assistance.

4. Jews in the New York area continue to be engaged in Jewish life in a wide variety of ways, but fewer Jews in the New York area are engaged on some important measures — and the two ends of the engagement continuum are expanding.**Some of the More Prevalent Ways to Be Jewish**

More than half of all Jews feel that being Jewish is very important, give to Jewish charity, attend a Passover seder, light Chanukah candles, fast on Yom Kippur, and report that their closest friends are mostly Jewish. At least 40% feel that is very important to be part of a Jewish community, feel very attached to Israel, visited a Jewish museum or participated in a Jewish cultural event, talk regularly about Jewish-related topics with Jewish friends, participate in a Shabbat meal, and belong to a synagogue.

Decline in Engagement in Jewish Life

Over the last nine years, Jewish engagement in New York has dropped on a number of measures. In 2011 compared with 2002:

- Fewer Jews feel that being Jewish is important (from 65% in 2002 to 57% in 2011).
- Fewer Jews feel that being connected to a Jewish community is very important (from 52% in 2002 to 44% in 2011).
- More households in 2011 never participate in a seder (14% in 2011, up from 8% in 2002) and never light Chanukah candles (19% in 2011, up from 12% in 2002).

Increases in the Two Ends of the Engagement Continuum

Alongside the overall decrease in Jewish engagement, the two ends of the Jewish-engagement spectrum are increasing.

- There are more Orthodox Jews (the most engaged) and more nondenominational Jews and Jews with no religion (the least engaged).
- Nondenominational Jews and Jews with no religion now make up a third of all Jewish households in the New York area.

Variation Among the Least Engaged

Within the ranks of the least engaged, there is wide variation in the level of Jewish engagement.

- Three out of 10 Jews by religion with no denomination have high or very high levels of Jewish engagement, compared with less than 5% of Jews with no religion or another religion.
- More than half of all Jews with no religion and more than a quarter of those with another religion still engage Jewishly on at least a few measures. The activities that are most common among these groups are attending Jewish cultural events and activities that may be undertaken individually, as well as seasonal holidays.

Synagogue Affiliation Matters

While overall the number of Conservative and Reform households continues to decline, for Conservative and Reform Jews, affiliation makes a huge difference in the level of engagement. As discussed below, synagogue affiliation also is associated with higher Jewish engagement among the intermarried. Nearly three-quarters (73%) of Conservative Jews who are members of a congregation have high or very high levels of Jewish engagement, compared with less than 15% of Conservative Jews not affiliated with a congregation. Similarly, 57% of Reform Jews identified with a congregation score high or very high on the Index of Jewish Engagement⁴, compared with 8% of Reform Jews who are not members of a congregation.

Family Structure and Income Matter

Married households dramatically outscore the non-married on Jewish engagement, and those with children outscore those without children at home.

Low income depresses Jewish engagement among the non-Orthodox in such areas as belonging to a congregation, Jewish education, and travel to Israel.

Single parents are less engaged than married couples with no children at home. Since single parents are also more likely than two-parent households to seek assistance for help with jobs, food, or housing assistance, it is possible that economic and other stresses associated with being a single parent reduce the capacity to actively pursue a Jewish life.

Continuing Low Jewish Engagement Among an Increasing Number of Intermarried Households

Among the non-Orthodox, the intermarriage rate for couples continues to be significant. Half of the non-Orthodox couples wed between 2006 and 2011 are intermarried. On Jewish engagement, intermarried respondents significantly trail the in-married. The intermarried are much less likely than the in-married to feel that being Jewish is very important, feel that it is very important to be part of a Jewish community, or feel attached to Israel. Since 2002, the large gaps observed then persist into 2011.

At the same time, not all intermarried households are totally detached from Jewish life — more than half light Chanukah candles, nearly half attend a Passover seder, and 3 out of 10 go to Jewish museums and cultural events. Only 1 in 7 intermarried households belongs to a congregation (in some communities elsewhere in the United States, this proportion is much higher). But among those that do, we find much higher rates of Jewish engagement on almost all measures compared with those intermarried households that do not belong to a congregation. Affiliated intermarried households are close to the congregationally affiliated in-married in their observance of seasonal Jewish holidays, accessing Jewish websites, contributing to Jewish charities, and participating in Jewish cultural events and programs at Jewish community centers.

⁴ The Index of Jewish Engagement, consisting of 12 items that cover a variety of domains under the conceptual rubric of Jewish engagement, was designed to provide a convenient classification for analysis.

Implications

Over the past decade, the organized Jewish community has invested heavily in building Jewish connections through synagogue revitalization, Jewish education and Jewish identity-building grants, and Taglit-Birthright Israel. While it is highly likely that the decline in Jewish connections over the decade would have been much greater without these efforts, at the same time the trend of disengagement continues.

In addition to renewed efforts to create engagement opportunities across the board, challenges relate directly to each of three distinct subgroups: helping highly engaged Jews become or stay connected to the whole community, shoring up and energizing moderately connected Jews, and offering opportunities for secular and cultural engagement for less connected Jews.

At an even more specific level, several subgroups deserve particular attention:

- People with children appear to be the most open to opportunities to engage Jewishly.
- The high cost of being Jewish appears to be a significant barrier for people of modest means. This situation has generated much hand-wringing in the organized Jewish community, but solutions have not been obvious; at the same time, this issue is too important to ignore.
- Community leadership needs to consider a broad-based policy of support for single-parent families, combining human services and Jewish connections.

While some have argued that intermarried households do not feel welcome in Jewish settings, intermarried households do not express more discomfort with Jewish activities than other non-Orthodox groups. At the same time, the fact that relatively few intermarried households belong to a congregation suggests that perhaps expanding congregation-based efforts to engage intermarried households is worth pursuing. Of the 46% of children in intermarried households being raised “not Jewish,” only about a third are being raised in another religion. Another 13% are “undecided,” suggesting that communal efforts to engage intermarried households should support efforts to raise Jewish children

5. Since 2002, Jewish philanthropy has eroded modestly, while community needs have expanded.

Of all Jewish households, 83% report some charitable donation, representing a decline from 2002 (88%). This decrease could be a result of temporarily increased post-9/11 charitable giving in 2002 compared with recession-deflated giving in 2011.

More Jewish households donated to a non-Jewish cause (68%) than to a Jewish cause (59%). Since 2002, the proportions of households reporting a donation to Jewish causes of all sorts held steady. Among the non-Orthodox, fewer young people are donors at all, and more of them give exclusively to non-Jewish causes. A quarter of the wealthiest Jewish households in the New York area make no gift whatsoever to any Jewish cause. As compared with the non-Orthodox in-married, intermarried households contribute more often only to non-Jewish causes (51% of the intermarried versus 15% of the in-married), and far fewer contribute to Jewish causes (34% versus 72%).

Giving to UJA-Federation of New York

From 2002 to 2011, the proportions reporting a donation to UJA-Federation dropped from 28% to 24%. From old to young, UJA-Federation's share of all philanthropy drops with every transition to a younger age; however, reported giving is substantially higher among a high-potential group defined by four features:

- Affiliated with a synagogue or other Jewish organization.
- In-married.
- Household income of \$100,000 or more.
- Non-*Haredi*.

A majority (53%) of these households report giving to UJA-Federation.

Conservative and Modern Orthodox households have the highest rates of giving to UJA-Federation (41% and 37%, respectively), and *Haredim* and Jews with no religion have the lowest rates (11% and 9%, respectively).

The challenge for the future rests in the shrinking of this philanthropically loyal demographic base. The commitment to communitywide Jewish philanthropy and collective responsibility epitomized by UJA-Federation is strongest among the group that is declining (the affiliated and in-married non-*Haredi* population) and weakest among groups that are growing (such as the *Haredim*, the intermarried, and Jews with no religion).

Implications

Increasingly, philanthropy is a function of highly personal involvement and engagement. Younger donors often not only want to see the impact of their charitable dollars, but also want their charitable involvement to be hands-on. UJA-Federation has done a remarkable job of maintaining focus on the communal perspective, highlighting both needs and opportunities that may be more critical than they are visible.

The findings in this study underscore the urgency of this direction:

- First, to make the case for Jewish needs to the 26% of wealthy Jewish households that currently are not making philanthropic gifts to Jewish causes.
- Second, to educate and engage young adults, integrating their particular interests with the communal agenda.
- Third, to build on success and reach an even greater portion of the high-potential affiliated population — for example, Modern Orthodox Jewish households, with a strong commitment to communitywide values and high rates of giving to UJA-Federation and other Jewish causes, become an important focus.
- Fourth, to experiment with new ways of connecting those who seem the most disconnected from communal Jewish philanthropy — both *Haredim* as well as Jews with no religion and intermarried Jewish households.

Conclusion

The size and scope of this study of American Jews illuminates important dimensions of the largest Jewish community in North America. The future of American Jewry is powerfully influenced by developments here.

The varieties of Jewish experience that mark New York all contribute to a depth and breadth of Jewish life that is extraordinary in every dimension. The rich and diverse features of the New York-area Jewish population provide an opportunity to community leaders and activists to sustain and improve a great Jewish community — balancing global values of Jewish community, caring, and peoplehood with multifaceted strategies tailored to the interests and perspectives of New York's many Jewish groups, neighborhoods, and subcultures.