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Giving to Jewish Philanthropic Causes: A Preliminary Reconnaissance

by

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The North American Jewish Data Bank has been established by the Council of Jewish Federations and the Center for Jewish Studies of the Graduate School and University Center of The City University of New York. Its primary role is to act as the repository for computer based population and survey data on Jewish communities in the United States and Canada.

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GIVING TO JEWISH PHILANTHROPIC CAUSES: A PRELIMINARY RECONNAISSANCE

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The literature on Jewish philanthropic behavior is very thin. We suspect that a reasonable social scientific bibliography dealing with Jewish philanthropic behavior could be printed on one not terribly large page. As to our disciplinary field, sociology, there too we have found little dealing with charitable giving, the organization of philanthropy and related issues. In previous working paper volumes of the Independent Sector, there has been little on Jewish philanthropy; little on the sociology of giving more generally. We are operating then in largely unknown territory, borrowing theoretical insights from cognate areas, with little in the way of a cognitive map to lead us. Be that as it may, we find our entry into this area of research a challenge worth meeting.

The study of Jewish philanthropy raises many issues. How does Jewish philanthropy differ or not differ from other philanthropic causes? How do Jewish philanthropic behavior and institutional structure compare with other voluntary communities? Within Jewish philanthropy, are there systematic differences among different Jewish communities defined geographically and religio-culturally? Within geographic Jewish communities, what are the characteristics which predispose individuals and households to give to Jewish and other causes? Which causal model will make sense theoretically and which will fit the empirical data?

Jewish philanthropic activity is carried on at the local congregational level, at the level of the larger Jewish community, i.e., the town, city or region, and at the national level. Some funds are raised for omnibus purposes, analogous to the United Way while others are highly targeted for specific organizations in the United States and abroad. In this paper, we shall focus on the omnibus fund raising drives conducted by the regionally organized Jewish Federations/United Jewish Appeal. The names of these organizations vary from community to community making it difficult at times for the uninitiated to follow and compare their activities. They are all brought together, however, in the Council of Jewish Federations, which has been kind enough to give us access to some of their data.

Comparing philanthropic campaigns

Examining the varieties of American philanthropic activities, we have come up with an initial operating typology to place the local Jewish federation activities in context. Our typology has two dimensions, the nature of the givers and gifts on the one hand and the nature of the beneficiaries on the other. As a short hand, on each dimension we will divide the groups into elite and mass. There are theoretically, elite givers to elite constituencies, elite givers to mass constituencies, mass givers to mass constituencies and mass givers to elite constituencies. We have found

cases that fall into the first three cells of our typology with the fourth cell remaining empty for now. Elite givers to elite constituencies we believe is characteristic of fund raising drives in Ivy League universities, museums, opera houses and other institutions that cater to an upscale, well-educated population. The number of givers will tend to be few, with most of the money coming from few people.

At the other extreme, we have the campaigns which seek mass support, where the individual gifts are not large and where the institutions supported by the campaigns supply services to a broad band of the population, i.e., the mass. The United Way represents this sort of campaign. A pure instance of the third type is one in which money is raised from a few and the services delivered are offered the many. The Jewish federation campaigns are a variant on this third type. Money is raised from a large fraction of the Jewish population but most of the funds raised come from relatively few people. During the past few years, we estimate that 1% of the gifts to the federation campaigns accounted for 40% of the total funds raised while 3% of the gifts accounted for somewhere between two-thirds and three-fourths of the money raised.

It would be useful for all of us to have the data from a wide variety of philanthropic bodies such that we could compare them with respect to the dimensions of the models we have suggested here. What accounts for the choice of alternative? What does the choice imply about the stability of the campaign and its dependence upon an oligarchic group? We will only be able to deal with these and other questions when the data are available. Within the Jewish community we have instances of other types reported as well. The Filer Commission noted that synagogue life is conducted along the lines of the mass supporting the mass. That is, all members of the local Jewish community are invited to participate in the liturgical, educational and cultural life of the synagogue and support of the operating budget is broad. There is relatively little difference in the size of the gift among the households affiliated with the congregation. Capital campaigns in synagogues have more of the character of federation elite supported, mass constituency campaigns.

Comparing Jewish communities

Within the Jewish community, observers have long noted the existence of "good" communities and "bad" communities. In the absence of good local data for a large enough number of Jewish communities on income and wealth distributions, communities can only be compared in terms of their rates of participation in the campaign. There is an obvious peculiarity in this measure of community quality in that campaign receipts as we noted a moment ago are so skewed. Yet, there is interest on both the practical and theoretical levels in the question of the extent to which the local Jewish federation campaign is able to elicit broad support within the Jewish community. Our operational measure of rate of participation is the number of gifts per 1,000 Jewish persons in the community. The measure does have some problems in that the giving unit tends to be the household and not the individual person. Jewish communities vary in average household size and households vary in the extent to which they give single or multiple gifts (i.e., to the general campaign, to the women's division, through industry groups, etc.). Examining the data, however, we have concluded that these problems, though real, do not create enough of a systematic error to preclude analysis.

We have attempted to account for variations in rates of participation among Jewish communities in terms of three sets of variables. These are:

- o Jewish community size both absolute and relative,
- o change in absolute Jewish community size
- o region

Community size is a measure of the visibility and accessibility of the households within the community. The larger the absolute size of the Jewish community, we hypothesized, the more anonymous the individual household would be and the less likely that it would be caught up in the communal network. The larger the relative size of the Jewish community, the less the sense of intra-group dependence and solidarity. Changes in communal size we took as reflecting in and out migration to a community. Other studies have shown that newcomers to a community take time to become fully part of the community. That is, they do not immediately affiliate with their local synagogues and other Jewish communal institutions. We might say that they do not have a local Jewish communal address. Without such an address, the federation campaign does not know of the newcomers' entrance into the community and thus cannot solicit them for a gift and the newcomer may not know the address of the local Jewish communal organizations, including the campaign, precluding their giving a gift even if they were motivated to do so. We hypothesized, therefore, that communities which have experienced a great deal of growth over the past twenty years would show lower levels of participation in the campaign. Last, there is a folk imagery about regions of the country accompanied by stereotypes which may or may not have some basis in reality and consequences for charitable giving. The south is the Bible belt, thus should show high rates of participation. The west is lotus land, the land of disaffiliation and laid back individualism, thus it should show low levels of participation.

In Table 1A, we report the results of the regression analysis of rates of participation for 100 Jewish communities around the country as determined by Jewish communal size and change in the size of the local Jewish population between 1963 and 1982¹. The three independent variables show statistically significant effects. The larger the community, both absolute and relative, and the greater its growth, the lower the level of participation. Taking the effect of each of the variables net of the other, we find that for every additional 1,000 Jewish persons, the number of gifts per 1,000 Jewish persons goes down by .422; for every percentage point increase in Jewish population in the Standard Metropolitan Area the number of gifts goes down by 12.716 per thousand; for every percentage point increase in Jewish population between 1963 and 1986, the number of gifts per 1,000 Jewish persons goes down by .360. Thus, we would expect San Diego with an estimated Jewish population of

1. The sample of communities is drawn from the universe of Jewish federations in the United States. New York is excluded because it is so much larger than the other communities that its inclusion would materially change and distort the coefficients reported. With New York included, the same pattern of results is found, though the numbers are different.

35,000 persons, representing 1.7% of the SMA and a net growth over the last quarter of a century of 289% to report 207.7 gifts per 1,000 Jewish persons, a figure very close to their actually reported 209.9 gifts per thousand.

Table 1A

Community rates of giving to the federation campaign by size of community and change in size of community

Variable	Regression Coefficient	Standard Error
Absolute size of the Jewish community in thousands, 1985	-.422	.157
Percent Jews in standard metropolitan area, 1985	-12.7	5.10
Percent change in Jewish population 1963 - 1985	-.360	.078
Intercept		348.549
Coefficient of Determination (R^2)		.39

The last variable to be considered is region. In Table 1B, we report the average rates of participation for major regions of the country. It is the case that the West shows a significantly lower level of participation as compared with other regions of the country consistent with our third hypothesis. However, we suspect that region might be reflecting attributes other than those implied by our hypothesis. While we noted that regions have reputations based upon the imputed cultural characteristics, regions also vary in terms of their population's structural characteristics.

Table 1B

Community rates of giving to the federation campaign by region

Region	coefficient	standard error	Zero order effects controlled for change in Jewish population	
			coefficient	standard error
North-central	50.07	25.08	[not significant]	
South	25.93	24.58	[not significant]	
West	-78.28	32.77	[not significant]	

Over the last generation, the West has reported major growth while the Northeast and North Central, areas of major Jewish settlement, have experienced stasis or in some instances, actual decline. To test the independent effect of region, we have regressed our dependent variable on region and then on region and changes in Jewish population. What we find is that the initial regional effect declines to the

point where it is no longer statistically significant. For our sample, then, we conclude that the regional effect reflects changes in population structure rather than independent local culture.

In sum, using the community as the unit of analysis, we have two major findings. First, we find that the larger the Jewish community, the lower the level of participation in the campaign. Second, we find that the greater the recent growth in the community's size the lower the level of participation in the campaign. Both these findings reflect individual level characteristics, namely the extent to which the individual and the household can be reached by the campaign.

Comparing Individuals

Our last set of considerations for this paper are those which reflect individual level variations in propensity to give to the local Jewish campaign. We have found it useful to parallel where possible, the analysis reported by Hodgkinson and Weitzman². Their study gives us the most recent national picture of the philanthropic behavior of all Americans, thus a context for the analysis of groups such as American Jews. For purposes of our individual level analyses, we shall be presenting data from local Jewish community surveys which have been deposited in the North American Jewish Data Bank (NAJDB). The Data Bank has been established as a joint project of the Center for Jewish Studies of the Graduate School of the City University of New York and the Council of Jewish Federations. The surveys from which we shall be reporting were commissioned by the local Jewish federations in each of the areas to be cited. These studies serve the local Jewish community as sources of information in planning for communal needs and for assessing the characteristics of the Jewish community.

In the first part of this individual level analysis, we shall be reporting some two variable relationships between giving and individual household characteristics in six Jewish communities representing large and medium size Jewish communities around the country. A major theme running through Hodgkinson and Weitzman is the centrality of religion to the entire philanthropic enterprise and the power of religion as a motivating force. While they used religious service attendance as their primary indicator of religious involvement, we have found it useful to characterize the households in terms of their level of ritual observance rather than synagogue attendance. In traditionally religious Jewish households, there are different religious norms for synagogue attendance by sex. Thus, it is more appropriate to use ritual observance as the indicator of behavioral piety, an indicator which correlates highly both with male and female service attendance, each measured separately. In four of the six communities under study, the responding head of household was given a list of home religious rituals and asked whether these were observed or practiced in the household. The lists commonly include maintaining a kosher home, Sabbath observance, attendance at a Passover Seder, observing the Feast of Hannukah, and so on. In the case of Pittsburgh and Richmond, kosher home was the single ritual item asked. For convenience sake, we added the positive responses to each of the ritual

2. Hodgkinson, Virginia Ann and Weitzman, Murray A. 1986. The Charitable Behavior of Americans. Washington, DC: Independent Sector

observance questions and then dichotomized the additive ritual observance scores from each of the cities and reported their impact on Jewish federation giving. We have also reported synagogue affiliation as another measure of religious involvement and have examined its effect on giving. Ritual score represents participation in traditional Jewish religious culture, a culture which prescribes giving charity. Synagogue affiliation makes a household visible and available to Jewish philanthropic campaigns. The major finding, consistent across communities, is that giving to the federation campaigns is significantly related to ritual observance and to synagogue affiliation (table 2). We find that high observant and synagogue affiliated households are more likely to report a federation gift than are the low observant and unaffiliated households.

Table 2

Percentage giving to the Jewish Federation campaign by religious ritual observance and by synagogue affiliation.

Community	Ritual Observance		Synagogue Affiliation	
	Low	High	No	Yes
Los Angeles	[not available]		42	74
New York	58	83	41	68
Philadelphia	43	82	48	79
Boston	64	90	42	74
Richmond	59	69	34	75
Pittsburgh	53	55	40	67

As we noted earlier in our discussion, the federated Jewish communal campaigns are but one, albeit the largest and most rationalized, of several modes of Jewish philanthropy available to the local Jewish community. Not all Jewish charitable causes are linked to the omnibus campaigns, thus these campaigns do not report all gifts nor do they report the philanthropic activities of all members of the Jewish community. Members of the Orthodox community, particularly the most rigorous and sectarian elements in that community, are likely to create parallel philanthropic bodies to support Orthodox institutions. For the federation campaigns, the net result of this parallel Orthodox structure is that the relationship between ritual observance and giving to the federation campaign is curvilinear. That is, the probability of giving increases with religious ritual observance up to a point and then declines at the upper end of observance. New York, with its large sectarian Orthodox population shows this relationship most clearly (table 3).

Table 3

Percent Giving to the New York Federation of Jewish Philanthropies by Household Religious Ritual Observance

Number of Rituals Observed									
0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
29	31	40	51	59	62	65	69	69	52

Hodgkinson and Weitzman also report the relationships between various

modes of giving and secular social attributes. Among these, we found the relationship between giving and age most interesting and troublesome. It shows that the young are significantly less likely to report charitable giving than is the older population. Restricted to bi-variate analysis, we can not discriminate among the possible sources of this relationship. Do the young earn less and therefore contribute less? Do the young give less because they are less generous, the stereotypical self-involved member of the "me" generation? Is the reason for low levels of giving among the young to be found in the nature of charitable campaigns? Is there some relationship between motivational factors, communal structure and campaign strategies that account for the effects of age.

Given the complex nature of the relationships we are about to present, we have restricted our discussion to one community, New York. The New York data clearly show results consistent with the Hodgkinson and Weitzman findings. The young are much less likely to give particularly to the Federation of Jewish Philanthropies campaign. That is, while there is a relationship between age and giving to both nonsectarian and Federation appeals, the effect of age is much greater on the Federation campaign than it is on the nonsectarian causes (table 4).

Table 4

Giving to the Federation of Jewish Philanthropies and to Nonsectarian Causes by Age in the New York Metropolitan Area

	Age of reporting head of household					
	less than 25	25-34	35-44	45-54	55-64	65 and older
% Giving to Federation	23	31	51	63	69	64
% Giving to Federation controlling for having been asked	39	39	49	57	59	59
% Giving to non-sectarian cause	61	71	75	85	84	69

The difference suggests that some of the source of non-giving lies in the campaign itself. To test this hypothesis we have gone further with our analysis of the relationship between age and giving to the Federation of Jewish Philanthropies campaign. We found that the young are less likely to give to the Federation campaign simply because they tend not to be asked to give. Among those aged less than 25, 27% report that they have been solicited for a gift as compared with 67% of those between the ages of 55 and 64 (the prime giving age cohort). When we take into account the fact of being asked, we find that the initial relationship between age and giving is reduced by about half. In other words, about half of the effect of age on giving to the Federation campaign is attributable to the campaign's having reached out to some, but not all, prospective givers. Those who report having been asked to give are far more likely to give than those who do not report such an appeal. One of the reasons that the young are less likely to be solicited is that they tend not to be caught up in the communal network that would make them accessible

to appeals for funds. In addition, they do not have the large incomes that would make them very attractive prospects for fundraising.

Summary and conclusion.

Jewish philanthropic campaigns can be understood as direct descendants of biblical acts of charity. In this paper, however, we have presented a preliminary analysis of their mode of functioning in a highly individualistic, bureaucratic context. The relative success of federated Jewish philanthropic campaigns is a function of communal structure and the motivation of individuals. The study of the campaigns then, is a significant activity for its own sake and offers perspective on the nature of Jewish communal structure and the distribution of religiously grounded motivation in a largely secularized America.