



research notes

Is American Jewish Voluntarism Lower Than Average?

Jewish community organizations throughout the United States are confronted with a vital challenge as they approach the twenty-first century: how to reverse prevailing contemporary trends that signal diminishing levels of participation in and commitment to Jewish institutional life. Large numbers of Jews have adopted a "shopping approach" towards Jewish organizations and institutions. In such a context, the task of cultivating organizational loyalty and commitment becomes increasingly difficult.

This is the first of two Cohen Center *Research Notes* that will explore patterns of volunteering among Jews. This note begins by comparing the level of volunteering among Jews to that of the United States population. It continues with an analysis of the relationship of volunteering for Jewish causes with philanthropic behavior. The second *Research Note* will explore the potential impact of institutional efforts on increased levels of volunteering among Jews. Finally, it will present an analysis of the relative influence of different factors which may influence volunteering.

Among the various indicators of involvement in Jewish communal life we will focus on volunteering time for Jewish causes and organizations. Since contemporary diaspora Jewish communities are based on networks of voluntary organizations, kept alive by the personal investment of thousands of individuals, identifying the factors that influence the likelihood of volunteering for Jewish causes becomes critical in order to both ensure an appropriate assessment of the future course of Jewish institutional life and to devise strategies aimed at strengthening the level of Jewish volunteering.

Volunteering among Jews and in the General Population

Sociological studies of Jews often fail to contextualize their analyses either by comparing patterns of Jewish identification and social participation over time or by comparing these Jewish patterns to those

prevailing among non-Jews. In this note, we will suggest that it is particularly useful to examine present trends in social participation among Jews in the context of current patterns in American society.

Patterns of volunteering and philanthropy among Americans were studied in a 1988 national Gallup survey commissioned by the Independent Sector.¹ Their findings provide an excellent opportunity to compare data on the general United States population to data obtained from several Jewish communities surveyed since 1985.

The 1988 national study of Americans showed that 45% of respondents reported that they volunteered time "to help others for no monetary pay." Overall, the average hours volunteered per week in 1987 for all American respondents, including both volunteers and non-volunteers, was 2.1. The average among those who volunteer any time was 4.7 hours per week. These statistics can be compared to the level of volunteering for organizations and causes reported in six Jewish communities: Baltimore, Cleveland, Dallas, MetroWest (Essex, Orange, and Morris Counties, NJ), Rhode Island, and San Francisco.² Volunteering was defined in a much more restricted way in the national study than it was in the Jewish community studies examined: to help others for no monetary pay in the former, and volunteering time on behalf of both Jewish and non-Jewish organizations in the latter, probably resulting in a more conservative estimation of the level of volunteering in the general population. However, the comparison is still useful despite these differences in the operational definition of volunteering.

Out of the six Jewish communities included in this study, only San Francisco Jews show a higher level of volunteering than the general population, as seen in Figure 1. The percentage of Jewish respondents

¹Hodgkinson, Virginia A. and Murray S. Weitzman. *Giving and Volunteering in the United States, Findings from a National Survey*, Independent Sector, 1988.

²The data used in this analysis were collected in studies sponsored by local Jewish federations in the following years: Baltimore, 1985; Cleveland, 1987; Dallas, 1988; MetroWest, 1985-86; Rhode Island, 1987; San Francisco, 1986.

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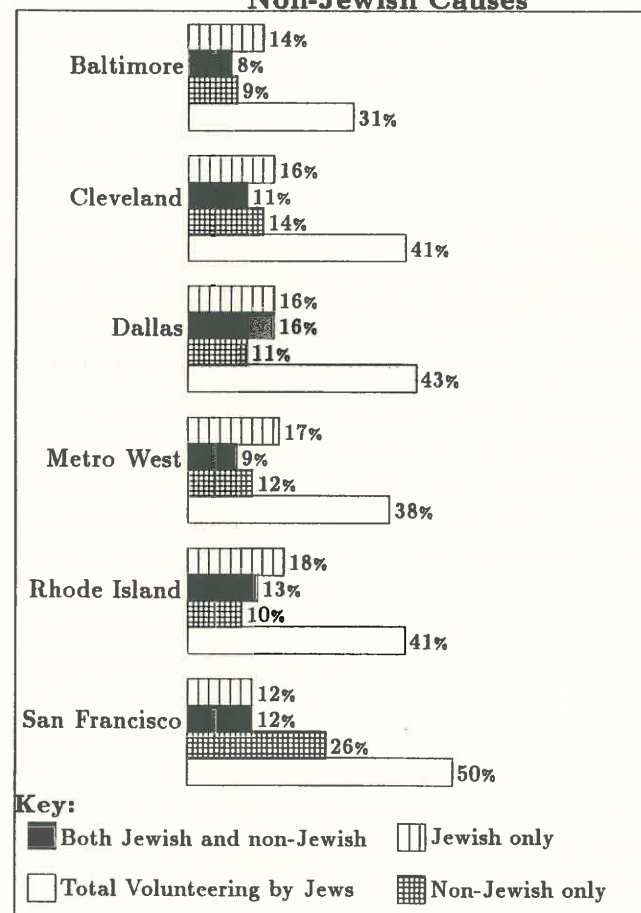
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reporting some kind of volunteer activity are 31% in Baltimore, 41% in Cleveland, 43% in Dallas, 38% in MetroWest, NJ, 41% in Rhode Island, and 50% in San Francisco. Differences between the percentage of volunteers in communities such as Rhode Island, Dallas or Cleveland, and the national figures are relatively small so that definitive statements as to the whether or not Jews show lower levels of volunteering must be cautious. However, this comparison should at least lead us to question the common assumption that Jews exhibit higher levels of active participation as organizational volunteers than other Americans.

Figure 1
Volunteering For Jewish and Non-Jewish Causes



Focusing on the amount of time committed to volunteer activities produces a more meaningful comparison between national and Jewish statistics. Table 1 presents the average hours of volunteer work per month in the five Jewish communities as compared to the national figures.

The average number of hours per month volunteered by Jews that do volunteer is lower than the average in the general population in four out of the five

Jewish communities examined in Table 1: while the national average is 4.7 hours per week or 18.8 hours per month, four out of the five Jewish communities examined in Table 1 show lower average hours than Americans at large. Table 1 supports our contention that Jews in the late 1980s do not seem to exhibit higher levels of volunteer activity than the general population.

Table 1
Average Hours/Month Spent Volunteering by Volunteers

	All Causes	Jewish Causes	Non-Jewish Causes	n
Baltimore	15.4	7.7	5.9	360
Cleveland	26.6	12.8	8.0	339
Dallas	14.0	6.7	5.3	414
Rhode Island	15.4	8.8	5.3	455
San Francisco	16.2	4.7	8.8	1201
National Study	18.8			1250

Focus on Jewish Voluntarism

How do Jews distribute their volunteer time among Jewish and non-Jewish causes? Turning again to Figure 1 we can compare the percentage of Jews that volunteer only for Jewish causes, both for Jewish and non-Jewish causes, and only for non-Jewish causes. In all the communities examined, with the exception of San Francisco and Dallas, the percentage of those volunteering only for Jewish causes is higher than for the other two groups. In these communities, among those Jews that do engage in volunteer work, the larger group volunteers exclusively for ethnic causes. The San Francisco Jewish community shows an opposite pattern, with a larger number of Jews volunteering exclusively for non-Jewish causes than for Jewish causes, which may indicate an idiosyncratic pattern of this particular community. On the other hand, it is also possible that San Francisco's pattern represents a new direction among growing communities of the West Coast.

Findings from five out of the six Jewish communities examined might be interpreted as suggesting that Jews tend to involve themselves mainly with the Jewish community, and that their impulses for social participation and social action are less manifest in the general society. However, on the contrary, further analysis indicates that there is a positive relationship between volunteer time for Jewish causes and non-Jewish causes.

Table 2 presents the correlation coefficients between volunteering for Jewish causes and both volunteering

for non-Jewish causes and contribution to Jewish organizations. These correlation coefficients provide a measure of the strength and direction of the association between these variables. As Table 2 illustrates, volunteering time for Jewish causes has a positive and significant correlation with volunteering time for non-Jewish causes, although the strength of the association varies from community to community.

Similar results are observed between hours volunteered for Jewish and non-Jewish causes (Table 3). As can be expected from the data already presented, the relationship between these two variables is less pronounced in San Francisco. These results indicate that in general a Jew volunteering for a Jewish cause is likely to volunteer for a non-Jewish cause, and as the hours of volunteering for Jewish causes by an individual increase, we can expect that the hours volunteered for non-Jewish causes increase as well.

Table 2
Pearson Correlation Coefficients of Volunteer Time for Jewish Causes With:

	Volunteer for Non-Jewish Causes	Contribution to Jewish Organizations
Baltimore	.277	.203
Cleveland	.236	.203
Dallas	.352	.287
Metro West	.200	.239
Rhode Island	.298	.119
San Francisco	.138	.309

Note: All coefficients are significant at $p < .001$

Table 3
Spearman Correlation Coefficients of Hours of Jewish Volunteering With:

	Hours of Non-Jewish Volunteering	Amount Contributed to Jewish Causes
Baltimore	.308	.310
Cleveland	.217	NA
Dallas	.339	.381
Metro West	.201	.315
Rhode Island	.271	.385
San Francisco	.108	.411

Note: All coefficients are significant at $p < .001$
NA: Not available

Relationship between Volunteering and Giving

A key question in research on philanthropy concerns the relationship between two aspects of social participation: giving and volunteering. Understanding the nature of this relationship is important in order to

assess strategies that attempt to increase the level of volunteering and giving. For example, the 1988 Independent Sector's study concludes that "giving could be increased if volunteering were increased."³ However, an alternative hypothesis might suggest that there is an inverse relationship between giving and volunteering: time and money may be substitute goods, meaning that individuals increase their contribution to causes that they support either by increasing the time volunteered or by increasing contributions; an increase in contribution of time might result in a proportional decrease in financial contribution. However, consistently with the National Study, Tables 2 and 3 show that there is a positive association both between volunteering for Jewish causes and contributing money for Jewish causes, and between the hours volunteered and the amount given to Jewish causes. In other words, people who volunteer also tend to contribute money for Jewish causes. The more hours individuals volunteer to Jewish causes, the larger the amount of dollars that they give to Jewish causes. These findings suggest that Jewish volunteering and Jewish philanthropy are not substitute but complementary behaviors. We do not, however, know if voluntarism causes increased giving or giving causes increased voluntarism. To solve this puzzle would require the utilization of cumbersome statistical techniques that go beyond the scope of this note.

In sum, volunteering for Jewish organizations and for non-Jewish organizations are related behaviors. Moreover, volunteering for Jewish organizations is related to giving to Jewish philanthropies. However, these bivariate relationships do not allow us to assert the predictive power that giving to Jewish causes or volunteering for non-Jewish organizations have over our focus of interest: volunteering for Jewish causes. For that purpose, a more sophisticated analysis is necessary. Such an analysis will be presented in the next *Research Note* which will examine the relative influence of several factors on the probability of volunteering for Jewish organizations.

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³Hodgkinson and Weitzman, page 71.