

# The Jewish Impact of The Jerusalem Journey

Increasing Jewish Engagement among Conservative,  
Reform, & Non-Denominational Youth

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Report commissioned by NCSY



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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Since 1999, NCSY — the youth movement of the Orthodox Union — has taken Jewish teenagers from the United States and Canada on heavily subsidized educational trips to Israel under the rubric of *The Anne Samson z'l Jerusalem Journey* (TJJ). In recent years, TJJ has experienced increased participation — and investment — such that NCSY and OU leadership commissioned this research, centering on a survey of past TJJ participants, of whom there are 1,784 since the program's inception in 2007.

### Assessing Jewish Growth Among the Non-Orthodox

The Jerusalem Journey's principal stated educational objectives are both to help enable teens to take on a more traditionally observant lifestyle, as well as to enhance Jewish teenagers' overall Jewish belonging, knowledge, commitment and activity. Preliminary analyses of the evidence from our TJJ survey<sup>1</sup> certainly testifies to the likelihood that TJJ is achieving the first objective — at least for some people and for many measures of traditional observance. Examining achievement of the second objective, this current report considers a wide range of Jewish engagement measures and focuses on the 80% of the TJJ alumni who came from non-Orthodox homes. In the simplest of terms: Does The Jerusalem Journey help make non-Orthodox-raised Jewish youngsters “more Jewish?”

Specifically we ask whether, several years after the 4-week trip to Israel, the TJJ alumni show evidence of deeper engagement in Jewish life. In addition, we examine which alumni seem to display greater — or lesser — impact of their Jerusalem Journeys.

The literature on Israel educational travel (see body of report), points to several reasons why we would, in fact, anticipate an educational impact of The Jerusalem Journey. Among them:

1. It centers upon an educational trip to Israel, which is shown to produce impact.
2. It is but one important element of a system of educational experiences that take place before and after the trip.

In the coming pages we look at how these known qualities of Israel educational trips interact with three unique aspects of TJJ. Namely:

1. TJJ focuses upon a particular population — non-observant teenagers who are willing to engage with an Orthodox-sponsored group.
2. Seeking a well-defined outcome: to help the youngsters become more Jewishly engaged in various ways.
3. TJJ is part of a package of Jewish involvement opportunities including JSU (NCSY's Jewish cultural clubs in public high schools), NCSY and gap year programs in Israel.

To learn whether these crucial educational components, in combination with the Israel trip, combine to produce the sought-after outcome, we turn to the results of our research.

### Internet-Based Survey of TJJ Alumni

Between April 22 and June 7, 2014 we administered an internet-based survey to TJJ alumni since 2007. We sent survey invitations by email to the 1490 alumni for whom the NCSY office could locate valid email addresses. Between

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<sup>1</sup> Steven M. Cohen and Ezra Kopelowitz. “Journeys to Engagement: The Anne Samson Jerusalem Journey's Impact on the Jewish Lives of Teen from Non-Observant Homes.” New York: NCSY, 2014.

2007 and 2013, a total of 1,784 young adults participated in the TJJ program, meaning that NCSY located (84%) of the possible email addresses. Of those contacted, 362 (24%) provided usable responses.

## The Measures, the Non-Orthodox, US Subsample

In order to focus on the impact of TJJ on non-Orthodox respondents, we focus not upon survey questions about traditional observance, but rather upon behaviors and attitudes considered to be important to Jewish leaders across the denominational spectrum. Specifically, we ask whether TJJ makes any difference for these youngsters with respect to such matters as attachment to Israel, marking Jewish holidays, attending services, celebrating Shabbat, having Jewish friends, dating Jews, marrying Jews and having Jewish children.

Accordingly, in this study, we focus on those TJJ alumni (N=199) who meet two conditions: 1) They were living in the United States (setting aside Canada) prior to their TJJ trip and, 2) they were raised Conservative, Reform, or other non-Orthodox denominations (or none).

## Comparison groups + Weighting

To explore the likely impact of TJJ, we compared the TJJ non-Orthodox alumni with other non-Orthodox American Jewish young adults. To do so, we analyzed three other recently collected data sets of non-Orthodox Jewish young adults. All were limited to those age 18-29 at the time the data were collected. The three data sets are:

- The Pew Research Center survey of Jewish Americans (2013)
- The Jewish Community Study of New York 2011 (2011)
- The Birthright survey of applicants for years 2001-5, but who never participated (2010)

*TJJ achieves impressive results in moving young people from non-observant homes to undertake – for the first time – several features of traditional religious commitment and observance.*

For all comparison groups, we selected by age (18-29 for the first two surveys, and 24-29 for the Birthright survey). We also excluded those who were raised Orthodox, consistent with the TJJ alumni sub-samples.

If we are going to compare Jewish identity outcomes for TJJ participants with comparison groups, we need to statistically “even the playing field.” That is, we need to make the comparisons in Jewish identity outcomes as close as possible to apples-to-apples. To do so, we weighted the three comparison samples to make them resemble the TJJ alumni. We sought to closely match the TJJ sample in terms of parents’ in-marriage (in-married vs. intermarried), denomination raised (Conservative, Reform, other or non-denominational), Jewish education (day school, supplementary school, none), Jewish camp attendance (yes/no) and youth group participation (yes/no). In all cases, we excluded those who were raised Orthodox.

## Highlights of the Findings

### Areas in which TJJ alumni are more engaged with Jewish life

While the results for the comparison groups vary, we can readily observe pronounced gaps of each with the TJJ alumni with respect to dating mostly Jews, attending services monthly, and feeling that it is very important to marry

a Jew. As an example, while 55% of Birthright applicants think it very important to marry a Jew, as many as 75% of TJJ alumni believe it is. (See the chart that appears on page 13 for this and other critical comparisons.)

The gaps between the TJJ alumni and the comparison groups are also quite substantial with respect to attending Shabbat meals and fasting on Yom Kippur. In these three instances, the gap between the TJJ frequencies and those of the comparison group with the highest values fall in the range of 17-19 percentage points. Less dramatic, but still sizable gaps (of at least 8-13 percentage points in each case) emerge with respect to placing importance on dating Jews and raising Jewish children, as well as feeling very attached to Israel and having mostly Jewish close friends.

## Factors Influencing Jewish Impact of TJJ Participation

### More Contact with Staff Means More Jewish Engagement

On-going contact with the advisors with whom TJJ participants developed relationships during the trip is important. Significantly, each increased level of contact — from “not at all” to “a little” to “some extent” or more — is associated with higher frequencies of increased Jewish engagement.

### Positive TJJ Experiences mean Positive Downstream Results

The survey asked respondents whether they would recommend TJJ to others. As many as 73% said they would definitely do so, 22% said probably, and just 5% were not sure or would not recommend TJJ. Satisfaction with the trip is closely associated with increasing levels of observance, to take one aspect of Jewish engagement. The most satisfied were the most likely to report growth in observance (as did 23% of the most satisfied) while among the least satisfied, only 6% reported growing observance.

## Conclusion and Implications

That non-Orthodox TJJ alumni significantly out-perform comparable Jewish young adults on several critical indicators of Jewish engagement is unquestionable. The results suggest that TJJ — the trip, the subsequent educational activities, and other consequences of participation — played a major role in generating increased Jewish engagement in these areas, and undoubtedly many others as well.

However, with all this said, we need to bear in mind that to an unmeasurable extent, TJJ participants are self-selected. The youngsters who select TJJ are already predisposed to greater Jewish engagement. Were it not for TJJ, some of these youngsters might have found ways to eventually elevate their levels of Jewish involvement. To some extent, TJJ serves to attract those poised to increase their engagement and to some extent TJJ serves to provoke upward leaps in Jewish commitment and involvement. Thus, from a strict scientific point of view, we cannot attribute ALL the apparent effect to TJJ exclusively.

Nevertheless, the results are certainly consistent with the view that TJJ propels many of its alumni to Jewish engagement. Undoubtedly, The Jerusalem Journey program — and it is indeed a program that goes well beyond the single high school trip to Israel — **produces significant Jewish engagement and identity among young people who were not raised in Orthodox homes.**

We now turn to the full exposition of the study.

## THE JERUSALEM JOURNEY'S ASPIRATIONS

After spending four weeks in a variety of educational and learning experiences in Israel, The Jerusalem Journey's trip organizers hope to set in motion profound changes in the Jewish engagement of the participants. In their words ...

*The Jerusalem Journey (TJJ) is an unparalleled summer program for Jewish public school teens. On TJJ, participants travel across Israel, immersed in the country's history, culture, and society. As these teens discover the depth and complexity of their Jewish roots, they become inspired to pursue a connection with Judaism through study, practice, and their Jewish community.*

More pointedly, TJJ's organizers and investors hope that the trip will spark or deepen Jewish commitment as well as identification with and participation in a Jewish community or social networks. Their educational approach entails offering opportunities to experience being Jewish in a non-pressured context, in the hope that an open and inviting approach will help make youngsters from less engaged Jewish backgrounds eager to learn more about being Jewish and Judaism. While they hope that all youngsters, no matter what their initial level of engagement, move in a more engaged direction, the program targets those with little or no initial patterns of traditional commitment.

## PRIOR RESEARCH ON ISRAEL TRIPS: CONSIDERABLE SUPPORT

One can wonder whether a single trip to Israel can actually change the way young people relate to being Jewish. But considerable evidence from prior research already point to the power of such trips.

### Positive long-term effects

Substantial research literature has established that trips to Israel by Jewish young adults generate positive long-term effects upon several dimensions of Jewish engagement. Extensive research on Birthright (the program with the richest and most comprehensive accompanying research, by far) points to higher rates of Jewish in-marriage directly attributable to the trip. Birthright alumni in-marry more often than their counterparts who applied for the trips, but were not afforded the opportunity to participate (i.e., the non-participants who constitute one of our three comparison groups). Several years after the trip, "the results indicate that, despite the increasing time lag since the Taglit [Birthright] experience, there is substantial evidence of the program's positive impact on a broad range of measures having to do with an individual's Jewish identity, relationship to Israel, and connection to the Jewish people."<sup>2</sup>

The findings with respect to the recently assessed impact of Birthright trips echo those elucidated in earlier studies (of which there are only a few) of the impact of teen trips to Israel. Almost 20 years ago, in an assessment of the net impact of Israel travel and other Jewish educational experiences for a national sample of adults and their teenage children, we found the following:

*Beyond schools, both youth groups and adolescent Israel travel are associated with increments in Jewish involvement, even after controlling for parents' Jewish involvement, Jewish schooling, and other factors... [For the adults,] the Israel visit in one's youth seems to bring with it a 15 percent increment in the chances of scoring*

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<sup>2</sup> Leonard Saxe, Michelle Shain, Graham Wright, Shahar Hecht, Shira Fishman, and Theodore Sasson, "Jewish Futures Project: The Impact of Taglit-Birthright Israel: 2012 Update." Cohen Center for Modern Jewish Studies, Brandeis University. 2012, p. 1. <http://www.brandeis.edu/cmjs/pdfs/jewish%20futures/JFP2012Report.pdf>

*high on Jewish involvement, above and beyond the home, Jewish schooling, youth groups and other factors. [As for their children,] the teenagers' net Israel travel effect amounted to a nearly identical 14 percentage points.<sup>3</sup>*

Further evidence for the impact of Israel travel emerged in an analysis of the National Jewish Population Study of 2001. This analysis also controlled for background characteristics and tried to assess the net impact of Jewish day schools, supplementary schools, camps, youth groups and Israel trips upon a wide variety of Jewish engagement indicators. With respect to Israel travel, the analysts wrote:

*Of the three types of informal Jewish education [camps, youth groups, Israel travel], travel to Israel tends to exert a more powerful impact upon adult Jewish identity .... To take an example, the net difference between participants and non-participants in feeling that being Jewish is very important — after controlling for Jewish background, demographic factors, Jewish schooling and the other forms of informal experiences — stands at 17 percentage points for Israel travel ..., 6 percentage points for camping ... and 5 percentage points for youth groups... In addition, on almost all measures, the impact of Israel travel rivals that of day school attendance for 1-6 years or supplementary schooling for 7-12 years.<sup>4</sup>*

A 2009 study alumni of the Alexander Muss High School in Israel (AMHSI) showed similar findings.<sup>5</sup> Other probative evidence in support of such trips comes from a study that examined six Israel-based programs that differ in appeal, duration, location, educational philosophy and ideology.<sup>6</sup> Thus, not only are Israel programs effective, but that their effects differ in accord with the particular emphasis of each program. As the report concluded:

*These programs undeniably leave their imprint on their participants. In this study, the alumni report levels of Jewish engagement that significantly exceed those reported by Jews their age, or even older, who also traveled to Israel as young people. The graduates of the programs cite the experiences, objectives, and features that do, in fact, distinguish the programs from one another. The cardinal educational features of each program — be it spirituality, or Shabbat, or knowing Israel, or observance, or texts, or learning Hebrew — come across loud and clear in these reports.*

More recent unpublished analyses of the New York Jewish Community Study: 2011 and the 2013 Pew survey of American Jews underscored the patterns of findings in the earlier literature. The evidence is consistent with the two-fold conclusion that these educationally sophisticated programs induce very specific changes in skills, attitudes and behavior that are distinctive to each program and consistent with its specific educational mission.

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<sup>3</sup> Cohen, Steven M. *The Impact of Varieties of Jewish Education upon Jewish Identity: an Inter-Generational Perspective*. Jewish Agency for Israel (JAFI). 1995: <http://www.bjpa.org/Publications/details.cfm?PublicationID=202>,

<sup>4</sup> Cohen, Steven M. Kotler-Berkowitz, Laurence A. *The Impact of Childhood Jewish Education on Adults' Jewish Identity: Schooling, Israel Travel, Camping and Youth Groups..* United Jewish Communities. July 2004: p. 16.  
<http://www.bjpa.org/Publications/details.cfm?PublicationID=2814>

<sup>5</sup> Ezra Kopelowitz. *AMHSI Impact Evaluation: High School in Israel - The experience of alumni, parents and their schools*. 2009. Commissioned by AMHSI. <http://www.bjpa.org/Publications/details.cfm?PublicationID=4463>

<sup>6</sup> Cohen, Steven M. Schor, Judith. *The Alumni of Five Israel Experience Programs and Their Distinctive Jewish Identity Profiles*. Florence G. Heller-JCC Association (JCCA) Research Center. 15 October 2004:  
<http://www.bjpa.org/Publications/details.cfm?PublicationID=1100>



## Israel Trips as a Part of a Larger Jewish Tapestry

Other studies point to the impact of high school-age trips to Israel as part of a larger tapestry of informal education, consisting of clubs, overnight camps, and trips to Israel of varying duration.<sup>7</sup> They compared alumni of their respective programs with comparably constructed comparison groups from national data, and both showed large differences between their alumni and the comparison groups.

In short, the extensive research on Birthright, and the sparser research on teen trips, both point to consistent, enduring and positive contributions of trips to Israel on adult Jewish engagement.

## The Jerusalem Journey: A Distinctive Mission for a Distinctive Population

The literature on Israel educational travel points to several reasons why we would anticipate an educational impact of The Jerusalem Journey. Among them:

1. It centers upon an educational trip to Israel.
2. It is but one important element of a system of educational experiences that take place before and after the trip.

In the coming pages we look at how these known qualities of Israel educational trips interact with three unique aspects of TJJ. Namely:

1. TJJ focuses upon a particular population — non-observant teenagers who are willing to engage with an Orthodox-sponsored group.
2. TJJ is seeking a well-defined outcome: to enable youngsters to have the choice of becoming more engaged in Jewish life, and to take on a more observant lifestyle.
3. TJJ is part of a package of Jewish involvement opportunities including JSU, NCSY, gap year programs in Israel, and helping facilitate relationships with college campus-based Jewish educators.

To learn whether these crucial education components combine with the Israel trip to produce the sought-after outcome, we turn to the results of our research.

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

### Internet-Based Survey of TJJ Alumni

Between April 22 and June 7, 2014 we administered an Internet based survey to TJJ alumni. We sent survey invitations by email to the 1490 alumni for whom the NCSY office could locate valid email addresses. Of those contacted by us, 362 (24%) provided usable responses.

Between 2007 and 2013, a total of 1,784 young adults participated in the TJJ program, meaning that NCSY located (84%) of the possible email addresses.

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<sup>7</sup> Cohen, Steven M. Ganapol, Alan. *Building Jewish Identity: A Study of Young Judea Alumni*. Hadassah. Fall 1998: <http://www.bjpa.org/Publications/details.cfm?PublicationID=114>; and, Steven M. Cohen and Steven Fink. *Building Progressive Zionist Activists: Exploring the Impact of Habonim Dror*. Habonim Dror Camp Association, December 2013. <http://www.bjpa.org/Publications/details.cfm?PublicationID=18607>



## WHO RESPONDED TO THE SURVEY? A BASIC PROFILE

By way of basic background, we detail a few of the respondents' most relevant features.

Of great relevance is that the respondents are tilted toward the more recent trips. Almost a third of the respondents took part in the 2013 trip (the most recent), and half participated in 2012 or 2013. As we'll later learn, those who went to Israel most recently display smaller effects than those for whom time has elapsed. Thus, the prevalence of recent travelers means that the overall results tend to under-state the larger long-term impact of the trip. If present patterns continue, the size of positive impact for the group as a whole will grow in the years to come.

Year of TJJ Participation	Response	%
2013	115	30%
2012	75	20%
2011	73	19%
2010	45	12%
2009	36	10%
2008	26	7%
2007	4	1%
Earlier than 2007	1	0%
I do not remember	3	1%
Total	378	100%

- Most went on TJJ between their 10<sup>th</sup> and 11 grades, very few at the end of their senior year, with sizable numbers going after 9<sup>th</sup> and after 11<sup>th</sup> grade.
- At the time of the survey, almost half were still in high school (i.e., due to graduate in 2014 or thereafter), and hardly any are beyond college-age (2% are 23 or 24), with a plurality who are age 18.
- Somewhat more are female (58%) than male (42%), and it seems the young women are more affected by the trips than are their male counterparts.
- The respondents report rather significant levels of Jewish education. As many as 60% attended Jewish day school before going on TJJ, and, of them, two-thirds attended only in their elementary school years.
- Almost three quarters (72%) had been involved with NCSY or JSU (and 43% were involved with another Jewish youth group).
- As many as 69% had been to a Jewish overnight camp.

The youngsters overall report levels of Jewish schooling and socialization that substantially exceed those reported by American Jews at large<sup>8</sup> — be it in their homes, in day schools, in camps, and/or in youth groups.

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<sup>8</sup> “A Portrait of Jewish Americans: Findings: A Pew Research Center Survey of U.S. Jews,” October 2013. <http://www.pewforum.org/2013/10/01/jewish-american-beliefs-attitudes-culture-survey/>

## The Measures, the Subsample

In order to focus on the impact of TJJ on non-Orthodox respondents, we turn to the survey we conducted of TJJ alumni, focusing upon behaviors and attitudes considered to be important to Jewish leaders across the denominational spectrum. Specifically, based on the available survey evidence, we ask whether TJJ makes any difference for these youngsters with respect to such matters as attachment to Israel, marking Jewish holidays, attending services, celebrating Shabbat, having Jewish friends, dating Jews, and attitudes toward the importance of dating Jews, marrying Jews, and having Jewish children.

Accordingly, in this study, we focus on those TJJ alumni (N=199) who meet two conditions: 1) They were living in the United States (setting aside Canada) prior to their TJJ trip and, 2). They were raised Conservative, Reform, or other non-Orthodox denominations (or none).

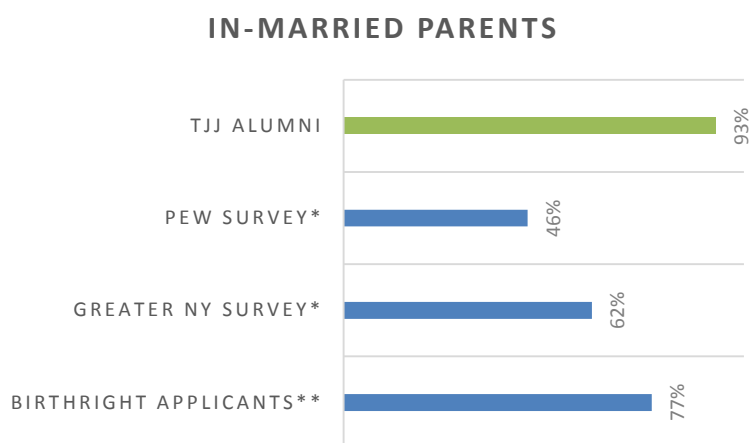
## Comparison groups + Weighting

To explore the likely impact of TJJ, we need to compare the TJJ non-Orthodox alumni with other non-Orthodox American Jewish young adults. To do so, we analyzed three other recently collected data sets of current young adults who may be compared with the TJJ non-Orthodox American alumni. The three data sets are:

- The Pew Research Center survey of Jewish Americans<sup>9</sup> (2013)
- The Jewish Community Study of New York 2011<sup>10</sup> (2011)
- The Birthright survey of applicants for years 2001-5, but who never participated<sup>11</sup> (2010)

For all comparison groups, we selected by age (18-29 for the first two surveys, and 24-29 for the Birthright survey). We also excluded those who were raised Orthodox.

The three resulting sub-samples displayed far weaker Jewish background characteristics than do the TJJ alumni. The TJJ respondents have stronger Jewish backgrounds (in terms of their families, their upbringing, and their Jewish education, both formal and informal) than do other Jewish young adults, in general (as in the Pew and New York studies). They even exhibit stronger background than those who apply for Birthright trips, whether. More specifically, TJJ participants contain large numbers of people who are the children of in-married parents (93%), were raised Conservative (63%), went to day school (44%), attended overnight Jewish summer camp (66%), and belonged to Jewish youth groups (80%), NCSY among them.



\*Age 18-29, as contrasted with 18-24 for The TJJ alumni.

\*\*Age 24-29

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

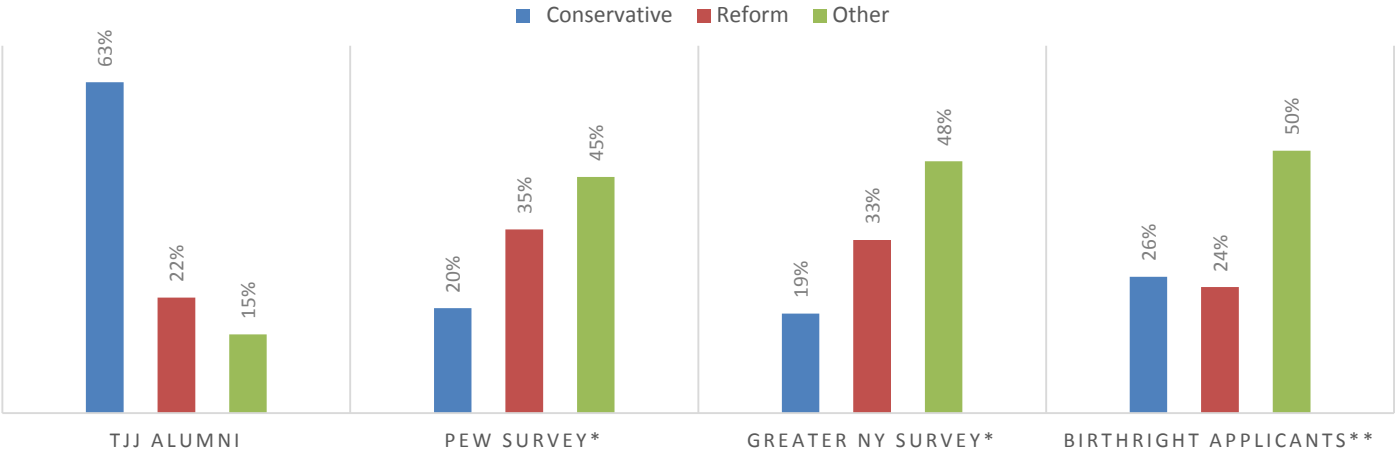
<sup>10</sup> Jewish Community Study of New York: 2011. <http://www.ujafedny.org/who-we-are/our-mission/jewish-community-study-of-new-york-2011/>

<sup>11</sup> See: <http://www.brandeis.edu/cmjs/researchareas/taglit-survey.html>

The differences with the comparison samples are truly substantial. For example, we may compare the TJJ non-Orthodox participants with a parallel group of Pew study respondents 18-29 -- those not raised Orthodox, who had a Jewish parent and now identify as Jews. In doing so, we find that the Pew sub-sample is made up of nearly eight times as many who were raised by intermarried parents. In other words, TJJ hardly reaches the children of intermarried parents.

The TJJ sub-sample is more than three times as likely to have been raised Conservative (the most traditional and observant of the non-Orthodox denominational possibilities).

### DENOMINATION RAISED

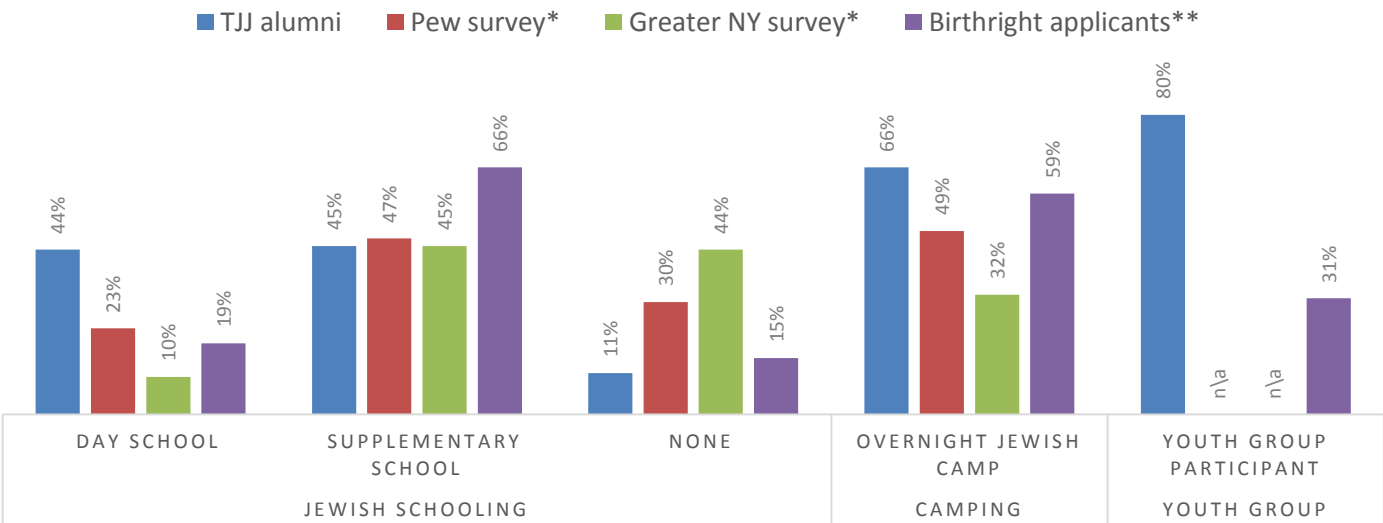


\*Age 18-29, as contrasted with 18-24 for The TJJ alumni.

\*\*Age 24-29

The TJJ sub-sample is twice as likely to have attended day school. They are also more likely to have attended overnight Jewish camp. In comparing the TJJ sub-sample with the appropriately configured sub-sample from the

### CHILDHOOD JEWISH EDUCATION



\*Age 18-29, as contrasted with 18-24 for The TJJ alumni.

\*\*Age 24-29

Greater New York study, we find even greater gaps with respect to attending day schools and overnight Jewish camp. The Birthright applicants (who never participated) derive from Jewish educational backgrounds that are more extensive than those reported by the Pew and New York respondents. With respect to strength of Jewish upbringing, the TJJ participants surpass the Birthright applicants. Most dramatically, as many as 80% of TJJ non-Orthodox-raised participants were Jewish youth group participants (in fact, 67% came through NCSY alone) as compared with 31% of people who applied to Birthright but did not attend (either Birthright could not accommodate them at their preferred time or they decided not to attend).

If we are going to compare Jewish identity outcomes for TJJ participants with comparison groups, we need to statistically “even the playing field” by making the comparisons in Jewish identity outcomes as close as possible to apples-to-apples. To do so, we weighted the comparison samples to make them resemble the TJJ alumni and sought to closely match the TJJ sample in terms of parents’ in-marriage (in-married vs. intermarried), denomination raised (Conservative, Reform, other or non-denominational), Jewish education (day school, supplementary school, none), Jewish camp attendance (yes/no) and youth group participation (yes/no). In all cases, we excluded those who were raised Orthodox.

In terms of age, the samples differ somewhat. The TJJ alumni were age 18-24 at the time they were surveyed. The respondents from the Pew and New York surveys were 18-29, and those from the Birthright sample were 24-29, there being no one younger in the Birthright surveys. Among the Pew and New York comparison groups, a preliminary analysis found that age differences between 18-24 year olds and 25-29 year make for little systematic differences. The patterns suggest that the differences in age distributions over the 18-29 year old age span do not constitute a major complication for comparing the TJJ Jewish identity outcomes with those from the three comparison samples. Further details and considerations for the weighting procedure are found in the appendix to this report.

A word of caution is in order here. Not only are the samples small, but they are subject to design effects (contributing to diminished reliability) owing to the very different values of the weights applied to each respondent. Some respondents are heavily up-weighted (so that they count for much more), and others are heavily down-weighted (so that they hardly influence the results). The impact of the weighting procedure is to diminish the reliability of the results for each sample — and such is especially true for the smallest sample — Birthright non-participating applicants (an unweighted N of 133 that is “worth” a lot less due to the weighting).

Conversely, two considerations lend credibility both to the findings and to our overall inferences. One is that three separate samples — of very different origins — provide separate tests of the hypothesis that TJJ alumni score higher on Jewish identity outcomes than do comparable Jewish young adults. Second, as we shall see, the results, while varying, almost always falls below the levels of Jewish engagement reported by the TJJ alumni.

With all this said, the three weighted samples from the Pew survey, the Greater New York Jewish Community Study, and the applicants to Birthright Israel who did not participate serve as benchmarks for comparison purposes. Taken together, the three surveys provide a powerful test of whether TJJ alumni engage in Jewish life at higher levels than they otherwise might be expected to demonstrate in light of their parental and educational backgrounds.

# TJJ AND JEWISH EDUCATIONAL OUTCOMES

We find eleven indicators from questions on the TJJ survey that were also asked on at least two of the comparison surveys. Three (on Jewish friends, and attending services monthly and the High Holidays) appear on all four surveys.

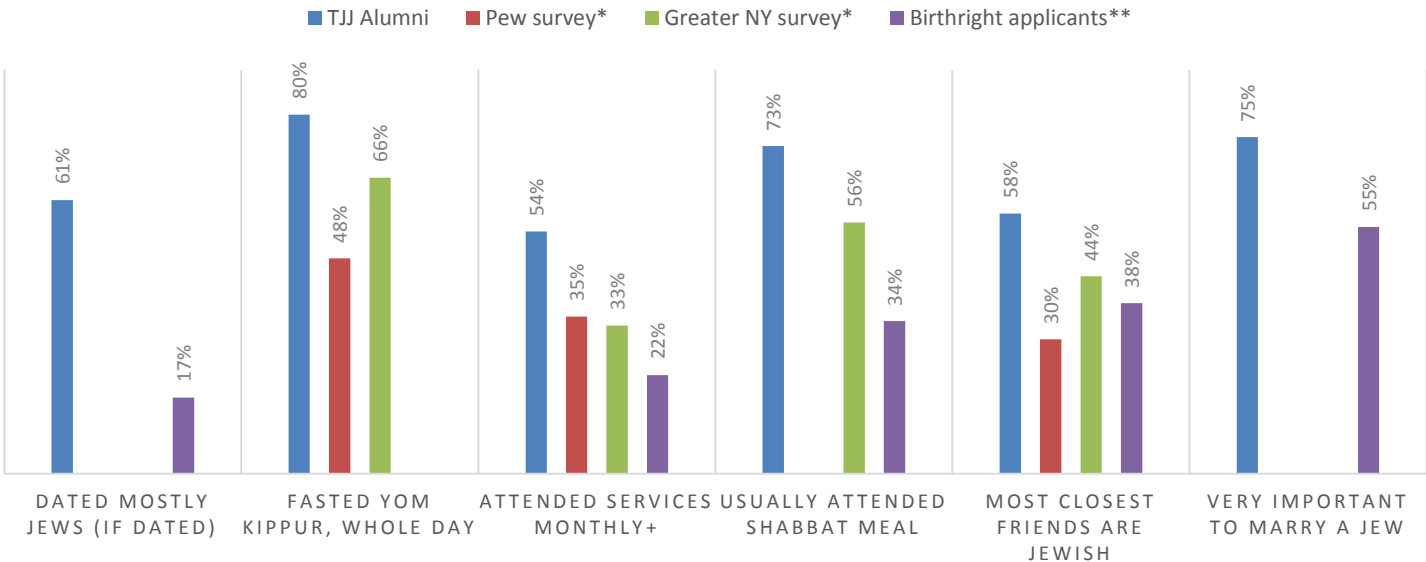
Five other Jewish engagement indicators are found on both the TJJ and Birthright surveys:

- Usually attended a special meal on Shabbat (also on the NY study)
- Dated only Jews (if dated)
- Very important to date Jews
- Very important to marry a Jew
- Very important to raise children as Jewish

Finally, on the Pew and New York surveys, we have questions on Seder attendance, fasting, and feeling very attached to Israel (the Birthright survey asked about feeling connected to Israel, a variation in wording sufficiently significant to preclude comparison with the TJJ survey question).

Moderate to large gaps emerge when comparing the TJJ alumni with the other survey sub-samples. Recall that these comparison groups have been adjusted so as to match the TJJ alumni with respect to four or five key Jewish parental and educational background characteristics. All the differences between the TJJ alumni and the others are in the direction of higher scores for the TJJ alumni.

## JEWISH ENGAGEMENT INDICATORS WITH GREATEST DIFFERENCES BETWEEN TJJ ALUMNI AND OTHERS



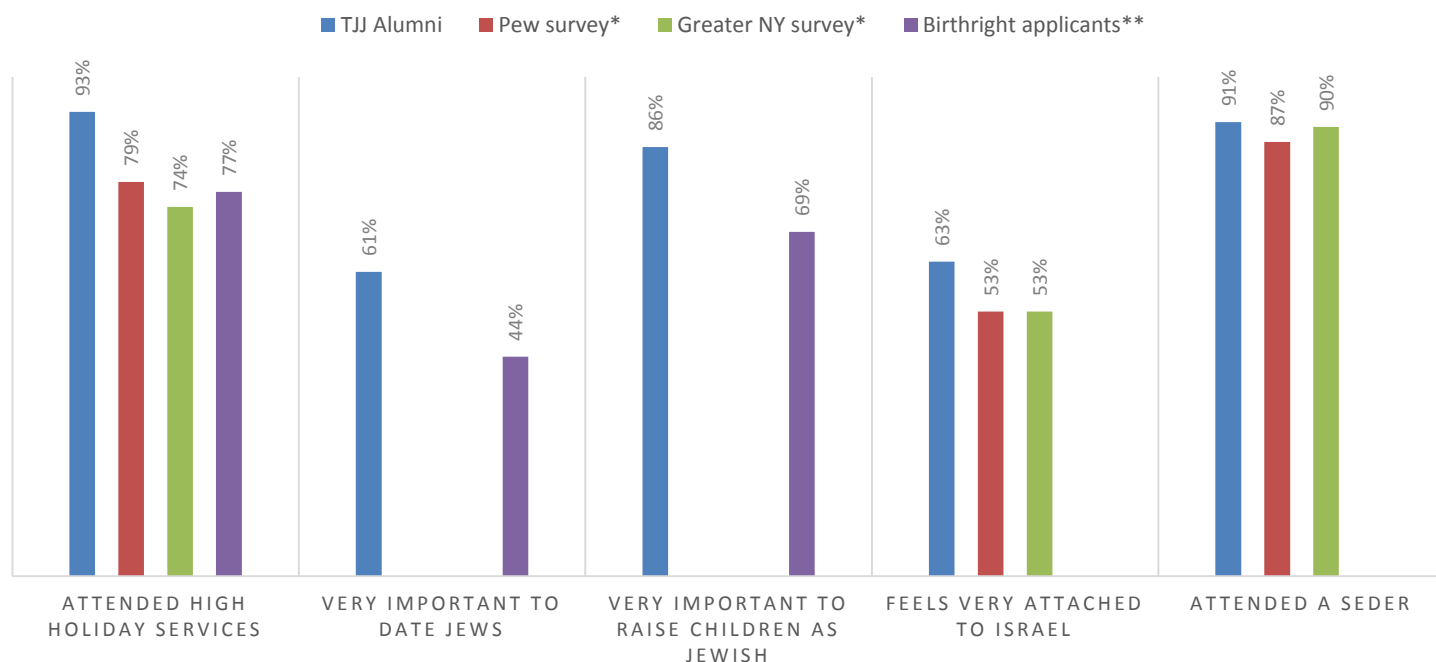
\*Age 18-29, as contrasted with 18-24 for The TJJ alumni.

\*\*Age 24-29.

Although the comparison groups themselves display variations, the TJJ-related gaps are especially pronounced with respect to dating mostly Jews, attending services monthly, and feeling that it is very important to marry a Jew. For example, while 55% of Birthright applicants think it very important to marry a Jew, as many as 75% of TJJ alumni so believe.

The gaps between the TJJ alumni and the comparison groups are also quite substantial with respect to raising Jewish children, attending Shabbat meals and fasting on Yom Kippur. In these three instances, the gaps between the TJJ frequencies and those of the comparison group with the highest values fall in the range of 17-19 percentage points.

## JEWISH ENGAGEMENT INDICATORS WITH SMALLER DIFFERENCES BETWEEN TJJ ALUMNI AND OTHERS



\*Age 18-29, as contrasted with 18-24 for The TJJ alumni.

\*\*Age 24-29.

Less dramatic, but still sizable gaps (of at least 8-13 percentage points in each case) emerge with respect to placing importance on dating Jews, as well as feeling very attached to Israel and having mostly Jewish close friends.

## FACTORS INFLUENCING THE JEWISH IMPACT OF TJJ PARTICIPATION

Certainly, the findings are consistent with the inference that TJJ exerts a positive impact on participants' post-trip Jewish engagement. That said, we ask: Which factors most influence post-trip Jewish engagement outcomes? To address this question, we constructed a Jewish Engagement Index composed of the following variables:

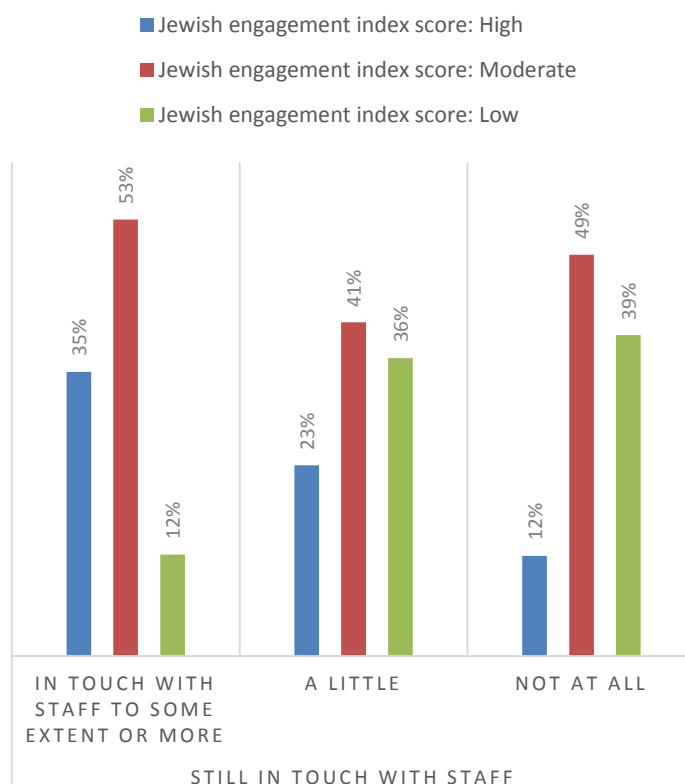
- importance of dating and marrying Jewish
- importance of raising Jewish children
- feeling attached to Israel
- proportion of friends who are Jewish
- proportion of dating partners who are Jewish
- participation in Shabbat meals
- lighting Shabbat candles
- fasting on Yom Kippur
- attending services monthly or more

Each respondent received a composite score to create a Jewish engagement index. We then divided the respondents among scoring in the lowest third, the middle third, and the highest third.

### More Contact with Staff means More Jewish Engagement

We first examine on-going contact with the advisors with whom TJJ participants developed relationships during the trip. With respect to their trip advisor, about 40% report contact to some extent or more after the trip, 35% report a little contact, and 25% report no contact with advisors after the trip.

Significantly, each increased level of contact — from “not at all” to “a little” to “some extent” or more — is associated with higher frequencies of increased Jewish engagement (as can be seen in the graph on the right). Causal order is hard to determine. Possibly, those who embark upon a path to increased Jewish engagement seek out their advisors, while those diminishing their commitment avoid them. Alternatively, contact with advisors serves to promote the educational message received initially on the trip. The ongoing relationship with advisors after the trip may well help propel TJJ alumni to higher levels of Jewish engagement, or at least sustain their involvement over time.





## Positive TJJ Experience means Positive Downstream Results

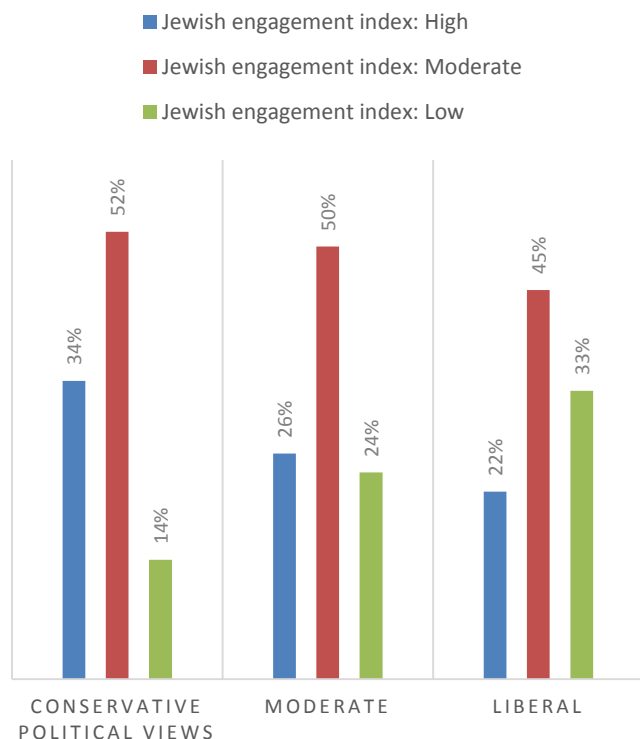
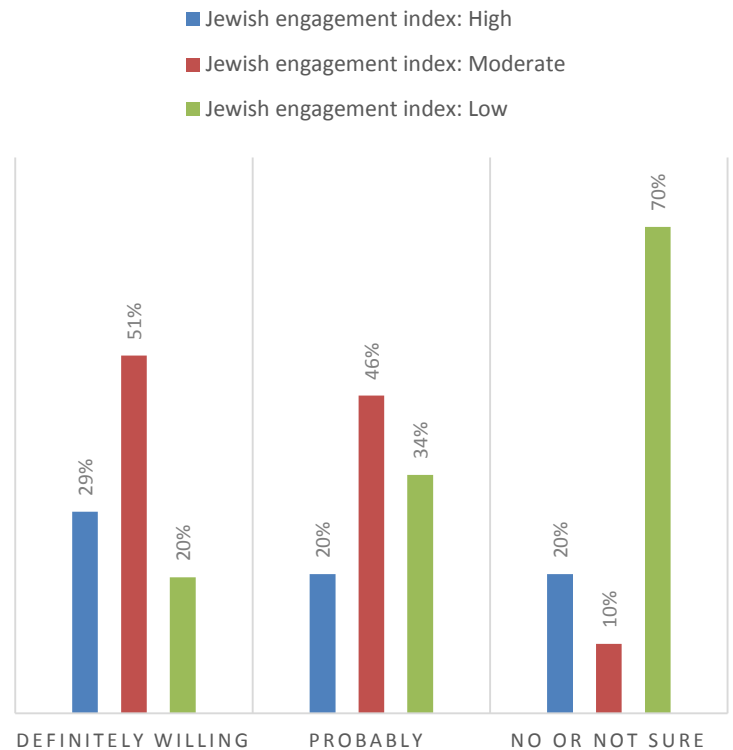
The survey asked respondents whether they would recommend TJJ to others. As many as 73% said they would definitely do so, 22% said probably, and just 5% were not sure or would not recommend TJJ. Satisfaction with the trip is closely associated with increasing levels of observance. The most satisfied were the most likely to report growth in observance (23%) while among the least satisfied, only 6% reported growing observance.

Again, causal order is impossible to determine. One possibility is that those who were predisposed to TJJ's educational message found the trip more appealing. Another possibility is that "satisfied customers" on the TJJ trip were more likely to embark upon changes in their observance consistent with TJJ's educational message. In any event, a continued emphasis upon quality and assuring positive post-trip evaluations seems more than warranted.

## Lagging Liberals

Self-defined political conservatives report greater post-trip Jewish engagement; self-defined liberals are two-and-a-half times more likely to receive a low engagement score in comparison to the conservative oriented trip alumni (33% vs. 14%).

A research literature on Christian church engagement over the last few decades has demonstrated an intriguing intimate connection between religions and politics. In the latter part of the twentieth century, as church leaders and clergy grew more socially conservative, their churches grew by attracting increasingly conservative adherents. Similarly, their growth stalled and reversed in recent years because of their conservative political bent. (Some observers now see a retreat from the vigorous conservative social agenda on the part of both evangelical Christians and the Catholic Church.) In the Jewish population, the population as a whole leans strongly to the left while the Orthodox for their part lean strongly to the right.



In this context — both of American religious life and of the specific contours of the Jewish population — it comes as no surprise that political ideology and changing patterns of observance are closely related among those who were not raised observant.

## CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

Non-Orthodox raised TJJ alumni significantly out-perform comparable Jewish young adults on several critical indicators of Jewish engagement. The results suggest that TJJ in its entirety — the trip, the subsequent educational activities, and other consequences of participation — played a major role in generating increased Jewish engagement in the areas measured by the survey, and undoubtedly many others as well.

To be sure, the youngsters who select TJJ are already predisposed to greater Jewish engagement. Were it not for TJJ, some of these youngsters might have found ways to eventually elevate their levels of Jewish involvement. For some, TJJ is a necessary but not sufficient condition for Jewish identity mobility, and still others may have been “accidentally” recruited by TJJ (or NCSY prior to that) and found themselves on upward Jewish journey.

To some extent, TJJ serves to attract those poised to increase their engagement; to some extent TJJ serves to provoke upward leaps in Jewish commitment and involvement. Thus, from a strict scientific point of view, we cannot attribute ALL the apparent effect to TJJ.

Nevertheless, the results are certainly consistent with the view that TJJ propels many of its alumni to higher Jewish engagement. Undoubtedly, The Anne Samson Jerusalem Journey program — and it is indeed a program that goes well beyond the single high school trip to Israel — **produces significant Jewish engagement and identity among young people who were not raised in Orthodox homes.**

## APPENDIX: WEIGHTED SAMPLES

### TJJ vs. Three Samples: Comparable Parental and Jewish Educational Backgrounds

The weighting procedures produced near equivalence with respect to the five Jewish background criteria: parents' in-marriage, denomination raised, Jewish schooling, overnight Jewish camp attendance, and youth group participation (not available in the Pew and New York studies). As can be seen below, the statistical procedures succeeded quite well in producing four highly comparable samples in terms of the important background factors that influence eventual Jewish engagement:

**Jewish Background Characteristics for TJJ Alumni & Young Adults from Four Comparison Groups, Re-weighted for TJJ Characteristics (all raised non-Orthodox)**

Background Characteristic	TJJ alumni	Weighted Pew survey*	Weighted Greater NY survey*	Weighted Birth-right applicants**
In-married parents	93%	93%	93%	93%
Denomination raised				
Orthodox	0%	0%	0%	0%
Conservative	63%	63%	64%	63%
Reform	22%	22%	22%	22%
Other	15%	15%	15%	15%
Jewish schooling				
Day school	44%	44%	45%	44%
Supplementary school	45%	45%	44%	45%
None	11%	11%	11%	11%
Overnight Jewish camp	66%	66%	65%	66%
Youth group participant	80%	--	--	79%
Unweighted N=	199	264	203	133

\*Age 18-29, as contrasted with 18-24 for The TJJ alumni.

\*\*Age 24-29.

In all four cases, we find almost equal distributions deviating in only a few instance by a single percentage point.

## RESEARCH TEAM

### Prof. Steven M. Cohen

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STEVEN M. COHEN is Research Professor of Jewish Social Policy at HUC-JIR, and Director of the Berman Jewish Policy Archive at NYU Wagner. In 1992 he made aliyah, and taught at The Hebrew University, having previously taught at Queens College, Yale, and JTS.

He has written hundreds of scholarly articles and policy-related reports, as well as a dozen books including *The Jew Within* (with Arnold Eisen) and *Two Worlds of Judaism: The Israeli and American Experience* (with Charles Liebman). He was the lead researcher on the *Jewish Community Study of New York: 2011* and a consultant to the recently conducted Pew study of American Jews. He has served as a consultant to bodies associated with every major denomination in Jewish life, as well as to scores of philanthropic foundations and communal agencies.

Prof. Cohen received an honorary doctorate from the Spertus Institute of Jewish Studies, the Marshall Sklare Award, and a National Jewish Book Award for *Sacred Strategies: Transforming Synagogues from Functional to Visionary*, of which he is a co-author. He's been cited twice as one of the Forward Fifty. He serves as president of the Association for the Social Scientific Study of Jewry.

Married to Rabbi Marion Lev-Cohen, Marion and Steven live in Jerusalem and New York. His daughter, Edeet is a public interest attorney in Israel, and his son Adam lives in New Jersey with his wife and two children.



### Dr. Ezra Kopelowitz

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EZRA KOPELOWITZ is a sociologist specializing in strategic planning and evaluation research for Jewish communal and educational organizations. He is CEO of Research Success Technologies (ReST).

Ezra is a pioneer in research on Jewish Peoplehood, developing intellectual frameworks and conducting applied research. Ezra is the co-author with Lisa Grant of *Israel Education Matters: A 21st Century Paradigm for Jewish Education* (2012). Other publications include, *Building Jewish Peoplehood: Change and Challenge*, Academic Studies Press. (2008, co-edited) and *Cultural Education-Cultural Sustainability: Minority, Diaspora, Indigenous and Ethno-Religious Groups in Multicultural Societies*, Routledge (2008, co-edited).

Ezra is born in South Africa, raised in the United States and has lived in Israel since 1990. He lives in Kibbutz Hannaton in the Galilee, where he serves as the head of the Kibbutz's Secretariat. He is married to Debbie with four children.