

Appendix C: Jewish Groups

U.S. Religion Census information on Jewish groups was supplied primarily by the Synagogue Studies Institute. The Synagogue Studies Institute provided, by county and different tradition, numbers of

- synagogues
- members
- adherents
- worshippers

Synagogue Counts Derived from Movements and Organizations

Synagogue lists were provided by the four major movements. These included member congregations and membership totals (or estimates, reported by family units). These four are the Union of Reform Judaism (URJ), United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism (USCJ), Orthodox Union (OU), and Reconstructing Judaism (RJ). OU reported both member and non-member Orthodox synagogues.

In addition, since the 2010 U.S. Religion Census, the number of independent synagogues and those who have disaffiliated with a movement has increased dramatically. In response to this trend, we included Independent as a separate designation for 2020. This category includes those synagogues who identify as independent, those who identify as unaffiliated, and those who are part of both Jewish Renewal (<https://aleph.org/>) and the Society for Secular Humanistic Judaism (SHJ, <https://shj.org/>). This list was collected manually by phone, email, and website searches.

A few congregations have affiliations with more than one movement. In those cases, each movement was given 0.5 of that congregation in the “Synagogue” column, and 50 percent of the membership units.

The 2020 U.S. Religion Census also includes Chabad as a separate Jewish body. We gathered Chabad data from the Chabad website, <https://www.chabad.org/>. In 2010, many Chabad communities were included with Orthodox synagogues. Yet Chabad is not considered part of Orthodox Judaism or any other movement. Also, not all Chabad locations function as congregations by the common, American definition, i.e., a worshipping community. However, there are over 950 American Chabad locations and not including them in the American synagogue landscape is problematic.

From Members to Adherents

Jewish congregations and their movement bodies enumerate their adherents in terms of “membership units,” or households who are dues-paying members of congregations as opposed to individuals. The primary movement organizations provided membership (family) units. For the four primary movements, we used a multiplier of 2.7, i.e., 2.7 adherents per membership unit, as derived from the 2001 National Jewish Population Survey. Many independent synagogues gave their adherent numbers as individuals rather than families and data reflects those numbers.

Many small Orthodox and Chabad communities reported no member information. For these synagogues, we used a mean calculated from the 2010 Religion Census of 50 members, 60 adherents, and 43 worshippers.

From Adherents to Worshipers

We used the 2010 and 2020 Faith Communities Today (FACT) study and the 2020 Pew Study of Jewish Americans to derive the denominationally specific number of worshippers. Specifically, we drew upon responses to questions on frequency of religious service attendance at Reform, Conservative, Reconstructionist, or Orthodox synagogues. We calculated the average number of weekly services attended per year and applied the mean to its number of total adherents of all ages. The result yielded an estimate multiplier of adherents to worshippers as follows:

- Reform – 0.27
- Conservative – 0.33
- Reconstructionist – 0.33
- Orthodox – 0.71

A Note on Total Adherents

We stress that the reported data are on synagogues and the number of individuals affiliated with them. It is not an estimate of the total Jewish population in the United States and should not be considered as such.

The Pew Research Center has estimated that there are 7.5 million Jews in the United States. Pew further estimates that of those who identify with a Jewish movement tradition, 37 percent are Reform, 17 percent are Conservative, and 9 percent are Orthodox, with others identifying as Reconstructionist, Humanistic, Renewal, or no specific tradition. Regarding synagogue membership, Pew estimates 64 percent of Jews who identify as Reform are synagogue members, as are 89 percent of those who identify as Conservative and 99 percent of those who identify as Orthodox.

If we assume that the numbers we identify for Reform synagogue adherents represent 64 percent of all U.S. Jews of the Reform tradition, then there are at least one million total Reform adherents. Similarly, if we assume that the numbers we identify for Conservative synagogue adherents represent 89 percent of all U.S. Jews of that tradition, then there are at least 470,000 total Conservative adherents. Our Orthodox adherent numbers may reflect total Orthodox adherent numbers in the United States.

Regardless, we believe there is a gap of at least five million between our total adherent numbers for Jews and the total Jewish population in the United States.

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