

American Jewish Population Estimates 2020 Summary & Highlights



FOR RELEASE: March 2021
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The Cohen Center for Modern Jewish Studies (CMJS), founded in 1980, is dedicated to providing independent high-quality research on issues related to contemporary Jewish life.

The Cohen Center is also the home of the Steinhardt Social Research Institute (SSRI). Established in 2005, SSRI uses innovative research methods to collect and analyze socio-demographic data on the Jewish community.

Acknowledgments

Support for this project was provided by the Steinhardt Social Research Institute (SSRI) at Brandeis University. Established in 2005 through a generous gift from the Steinhardt Foundation for Jewish Life, SSRI uses innovative research methods to collect and analyze sociodemographic data on the Jewish community.

Our team of researchers at the American Jewish Population Project demonstrated extraordinary commitment to this work, and their attention to detail in data mining and analysis has been critical to the project's success. We are also appreciative for the work of our graduate and undergraduate research assistants who screened, cleaned, and coded tens of thousands of data records.

We also wish to acknowledge the essential contributions of our colleagues Janet Krasner Aronson and Matthew Boxer. At our host institution, the Cohen Center for Modern Jewish Studies, they lead the local Jewish community studies research team and are expert at translating data into policy-relevant findings. Janet and Matthew provided invaluable feedback in the development of this report. The authors are also very appreciative of several external colleagues who provided detailed feedback on earlier versions of the report and made a host of insightful comments and suggestions. These reviewers included Charles Kadushin, Laurence Kotler-Berkowitz, Bruce Phillips, and Ted Sasson.

We thank Deborah Grant for her editorial assistance, and Masha Lokshin and Ilana Friedman for their logistical support. Finally, we wish to thank our CMJS colleagues. Although in the past year we have only seen them via ZOOM, their support helped make this work possible.

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Introduction

Estimates of the US Jewish population have varied widely. The most recent American Jewish Year Book (2020), which has provided an annual record of statistics on the American Jewish population since 1899, reports estimates of the size of the population that range from 5.7 million (DellaPergola, 2020)¹ to ~7 million (Dashefsky & Sheskin, 2020).² The Pew Research Center estimated the size of the population as 6.7 million (2013).³ The disparity in estimates highlights the challenges associated with assessment of the size – as well as the characteristics – of the US Jewish population, which is a considerably small segment (~2%) of the US population. This report presents the latest estimates from the American Jewish Population Project (AJPP). AJPP is one of the largest programs of research designed to provide a reliable, independent source of data on the US Jewish population that is useful to researchers, policy makers, and others interested in the study of Jewish Americans.

Unlike other demographic groups in the United States, such as those defined by race, ethnicity, or economic status, there are no systematic sources of data at the national level – such as the US Census – that can be used to describe the Jewish population. The separation of church and state in the United States prohibits the



As the census of the United States has, in accordance with the spirit of American institutions, taken no heed of the religious convictions of American citizens ... all statements concerning the number of Jews living in this country are based upon estimates...

- American Jewish Year Book (1899) ⁴

government from requiring that individuals report their religious affiliation. The US Census, which serves as the foundation for many population studies and helps to ensure that surveys are representative, does not collect data on religious identification. Nor does the census ask questions about ethnicity in a way that would permit identification of the Jewish population.

Given the lack of official statistics, different organizations and groups have sought to obtain estimates through their own systematic surveys.⁵ Typically, these costly single surveys are conducted once every decade. Absent an independent source of baseline data on the population with which to evaluate how representative these surveys are of the population as a whole, questions arise about the validity and generalizability of results.⁶

AJPP goes beyond reliance on single surveys to synthesize data from hundreds of independent samples of US adults to produce estimates of the Jewish population in all 50 US states and the District of Columbia. This approach is based on the premise that while any single random sample of a population might vary in how accurately it represents the population, repeated independent samples of a population provide a better estimate of the true underlying population than any single sample on its own. AJPP estimates are based primarily on the percentage of US adults who identify their religion as Jewish in these repeated samples of US adults. In order to provide total Jewish population estimates, targeted surveys of the Jewish population – nationally and in local community studies – are used to estimate the percentages of Jewish adults of no religion and Jewish children (see [Our Method](#)).

AJPP is the only independent source of data to provide sociodemographic characteristics of Jewish adults (age, educational attainment, race and ethnicity) for the entire United States, its states, metropolitan areas, and counties (or groups of counties) in an ongoing program of research. Additional details of the AJPP project, along with detailed estimates and an interactive map, can be found online at the [American Jewish Population Project](#).

Highlights

Overall, the data synthesis yields an estimate of **4.9 million adults who identify as Jewish when asked about their religion**, 1.9% of the total US adult population.

Adjustments based on targeted Jewish population surveys to account for Jewish children and Jewish adults who do not identify as Jewish when asked their religion results in a **Jewish population estimate of 7.6 million**.

Although this is one of the highest estimates of the population to date, the current estimate of 7.6 million is 2.4% of the US population—the same proportion as was reported in 1990.⁷ See Table 1 for a breakdown of the Jewish population.

Table 1: National Population Estimates (in thousands)

Adults	Pop.	95% CI
Jewish by religion	4,873	(4,769, 4,977)
Jews of no religion	1,174	(1,047, 1,550)
<i>Total Jewish adults</i>	6,047	(5,918, 6,176)
Children		
Total Jewish children	1,583	(1,309, 1,919)
Total Jewish Population	7,631	(7,468, 7,797)

Note: Population in households, does not include group quarters.



A total of **7.6 million** people in the United States are Jewish, accounting for 2.4% of the total US population. This includes:

- **4.9 million** adults who identify their religion as Jewish
- **1.2 million** Jewish adults who identify with no religion
- **1.6 million** Jewish children



Other key findings include:

- Jewish adults⁸ are nearly twice as likely to be college graduates (57%) than all US adults (29%)
- 80% of the Jewish population live within the top 40 US metropolitan areas
- 1 in 4 Jewish adults are under the age of 34 years
 - 11% of Jewish adults are members of Gen Z, ages 18 to 24 years
 - 15% of Jewish adults are millennials, ages 25 to 34 years
- Nearly half of the Jewish population resides in just three states
 - 21% are in New York State
 - 15% are in California
 - 10% are in Florida

Total Jewish Population: Who is Included?

The foundation of AJPP's 7.6 million estimate is a data synthesis of nationally representative surveys that assess the religious identification of US adults. Adults who identify as Jewish by religion (JBR) comprise the majority of Jewish adults, with past estimates ranging from 80% (NJPS 1990 & 2000) to 70% (AJIS 2008).⁹ In all of these surveys, a question about religion is included as part of a set of demographic questions such as age, educational attainment, and income. Adults who identify their religion as Jewish (and have no other religious identification) are included in this base estimate. Data from these surveys were analyzed using Bayesian multilevel modeling with poststratification.¹⁰ Results indicate that 1.9% of US adults identify their religion as Jewish. This corresponds to an estimated 4.9 million US adults. The total US Jewish population includes this base estimate of JBR adults, as well as those not represented in these surveys: Jews of no religion, and Jewish children.

Unlike most other religions, Judaism is not solely defined as a faith tradition. The majority of Jews (including many JBR adults) view being Jewish mainly as a matter of "ancestry and culture."¹¹ Thus, there are those who, when asked about religion, might report no religious affiliation but still identify as Jewish. Estimates of this population – Jews of no religion (JNR) – require more in-depth questions about identity. Such questions are typically only included in targeted surveys of the population, such as local Jewish community studies¹² and Pew's national survey of US Jews (2013).¹³ Although these single shot surveys may be prone to biases, they currently are the only source of data on the JNR population, as well as on Jewish children.

The Berman Jewish DataBank currently maintains a collection of all local and national Jewish population studies.¹⁴ Data from studies that were conducted within the past 10 years were analyzed to obtain estimates of JNR adults and Jewish children. There were 38 local community studies in all, representing 68% of the US Jewish population as reported in the American Jewish Year Book. Of these, eight studies could not be analyzed because they lacked data or were not population studies. Among the remaining studies, local community study areas were matched to the ZIP Code-based geographic areas used in the AJPP population model to provide estimates of the percentage of all Jewish adults who were JNR adults and the percentage of the total Jewish population in the area that were children ages 17 years or younger. Where there was no local study, data from the Pew 2013 national survey were used to estimate these groups. For details on the analyses of the Pew and local surveys for estimation of Jewish children and JNR adults, see our [Technical Report: ZIP Code-based Jewish Population Estimates 2020](#).¹⁵

In analyzing these sources, JNR adults included adults who consider themselves Jewish, have at least one Jewish parent, and do not belong to any other religious group. Estimates of JNR adults ranged from a low of 4% of all adults in Nashville, TN to a high of 30% of all Jewish adults in Cincinnati, OH, yielding a total JNR population estimate of 1.2 million adults.¹⁶

Jewish Population Definitions

Jewish by Religion (JBR): Adults who self-identify as Jewish when asked about religion. These adults, who are directly estimated through the data synthesis, comprise the majority of all Jewish adults (~80%).

Jews of no Religion (JNR): Adults who report no religious identification but still identify as Jewish in some other way. These adults self-identify as Jewish, have at least one Jewish parent, and do not belong to any other religious group.

Jewish Children: Any child who lives in a household with at least one adult who identifies as Jewish (JBR or JNR) and the child is being raised Jewish in some way.

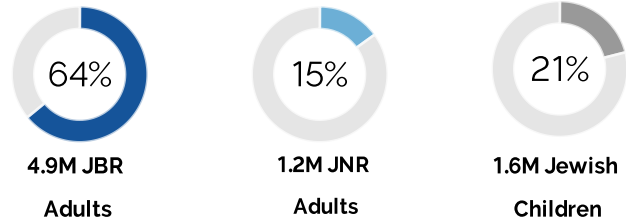
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For estimates of Jewish children, the definition was based on how the local community defined Jewish children in a household, which was consistent with the definition AJPP used in the analysis of the Pew survey: a child in a household with at least one Jewish adult and the child was being raised as Jewish in any way. This definition differs slightly from Jewish adults in part because the children have not reached an age when they can self-identify, independent of family upbringing, as Jewish or with another religion also. Estimates of Jewish children based on an analysis of national and local community studies ranged from a low of 4% in areas of Midtown and Lower Manhattan, New York to a high of 43% in areas of Brooklyn, New York, yielding a total estimate of 1.6 million Jewish children in the United States.

The sum of these three groups – Jewish adults by religion, Jewish adults of no religion, and Jewish children – comprise the total Jewish population of 7.6 million (see Fig. 1). Adults who are Jewish by religion account for the majority of this total (4.9 million or 64%). Jewish adults of no religion make up 15% of the total Jewish population (1.2 million). Jewish children are 21% of the total Jewish population.

(1.6 million). Although this total population figure appears different from other estimates, it is actually comparable to [other recent estimates of the US Jewish population](#).

Fig 1: Total Jewish Population



How AJPP Compares to Other US Jewish Population Estimates

Pew Research Center: In 2013, the Pew Research Center conducted one of the largest studies of US Jewry in the past decade and estimated a total Jewish population of 6.7 million. Of these, 1.8% (4.2 million) were adults who identified their religion as Judaism. This was identical to AJPP's 2013 data synthesis estimate, which also found that 1.8% of US adults identified as Jewish by religion.¹⁷ The current AJPP estimate of this group is 1.9%, which reflects the upper end of the 95% credible interval of the 2013 estimate.

There are two primary differences between AJPP's current estimate of the total Jewish population and Pew's 2013 estimate. The first reflects the different time periods of the estimates. The second reflects estimates of Jewish adults who do not identify as Jewish by religion (JNR adults) and Jewish children, neither of which are represented in general population surveys. The Pew estimate, although published in 2013, was based to the census total population count of 311,591,919 for the year 2011, nearly 10 years prior to our present estimates.¹⁸ The AJPP 2020 estimate is based to population counts for the year 2020, with a total population in households of 322,777,950.¹⁹ This difference of approximately 3% growth within the US population count over this time period would be reflected in the difference between the Pew 2013 and the AJPP 2020 estimate.

Estimates of the groups not represented in the data synthesis – Jewish adults who do not identify as Jewish in response to questions about religion, and Jewish children – currently can only be obtained through targeted surveys of the population, such as the Pew (2013) national survey. Pew provided an estimate of JNR adults that included any adult who self-identified as Jewish, had at least one Jewish parent, and identified their religion as “Atheist,” “Agnostic,” or “Nothing in particular.” Secondary analysis of the Pew survey indicated there were many Jewish adults who responded to the religion question with “Other, specify” rather than “Atheist,” “Agnostic,” or “Nothing in particular,” and a review of open-ended responses indicated that many Jewish adults’ responses to “Other” were equivalent to statements of no religion, for example, “not practicing,” “secular,” or general statements of belief in God.²⁰

Secondary analysis of the Pew survey indicated there were many Jewish adults who responded to the religion question with “Other, specify” rather than “Atheist,” “Agnostic,” or “Nothing in particular,” and review of open-ended responses indicated that many Jewish adults’ responses to “Other” were equivalent to statements of no religion.

For Jewish children, both Pew and the AJPP include any children in a household with at least one Jewish adult, who are being raised Jewish in any way. The AJPP estimate also includes children of the additional JNR adults identified through review of open-ended responses. With these additional groups, Pew's 2013 estimate would be higher and differ from AJPP's current estimate only in terms of the population change between the years 2011 and 2020.

American Jewish Year Book (AJYB): The AJYB's most recent estimate (2019), compiled by editors Ira Sheskin and Arnold Dashefsky, is a total US Jewish population of 7 million.²¹ This estimate is not substantially different from the AJPP estimate of 7.6 million – considering that the AJYB estimate is based on the simple aggregation of reported population counts only from known Jewish communities and from a variety of sources which might have differing levels of accuracy and wide time frames. The primary sources come from organized Jewish communities, in particular those that are part of the Jewish Federations of North America (JFNA) and have conducted a local Jewish population survey. Many of these surveys exclude areas that are located outside of the federation's service area. In other areas where the AJYB has identified a Jewish community, population estimates are based on best “guesstimates” made by local key informants, internet searches, or newspaper articles. In these areas, the coverage and accuracy of the Jewish population estimates are unknown.

Irrespective of the source of population estimates, whether they are from a systematic study of the Jewish community or from a best "guesstimate," the timing and frequency of estimates in the AJYB varies widely, with some estimates older than 1997.

Although the editors provide some adjustments to the community estimates for population growth over time, most of the community studies were conducted more than a decade ago. Because they are a simple aggregation of estimates, there is no way to estimate margins of error. In contrast, the AJPP analysis of general population surveys covers the entire United States; and, its narrower and more recent time frame for surveys, along with poststratification to the most recent census figures, provides the best alternative for current and accurate estimates of the population.

DellaPergola: Prof. Sergio DellaPergola, Hebrew University, diverges most substantially from AJPP and estimates the total "core" US Jewish population as 5.7 million.²² This estimate is used by the Israeli government²³ and has remained virtually unchanged²⁴ since 1990 when it was estimated to be 5.5 million with a "range between 5.3 and 5.7 million for the core Jewish population."²⁵

DellaPergola describes the difference between his estimate and that of AJPP and the AJYB as mostly definitional.²⁶ DellaPergola defines the "core" Jewish population as "the group who consider Judaism their mutually exclusive identification framework, including both those who do see or do not see religion as a major avenue for identification."²⁷ This "mutually exclusive identification" means that individuals who identify as Jewish by religion do not identify with any other religion. It also means that those who identify as Jews of no religion, identify exclusively—and fully—as Jewish.

That estimates of the core Jewish population should exclude those who currently belong to another religion is widely accepted and such an approach is consistent with previous definitions of the "core" Jewish population. What it means, however, to identify "exclusively" as Jewish outside of the context of religious identity is unclear.

DellaPergola's restrictive definition relies on a screener question from the 2013 Pew survey regarding whether respondents considered themselves to be Jewish.²⁸ He excludes nearly 1 million Jewish adults who identified as "partially" Jewish, even though many were raised Jewish, and both of their parents were Jewish. Many who chose this option said it was because they consider themselves culturally Jewish, or because they are not religious, the very definition of the group and consistent with DellaPergola's own "mutually exclusive identification framework."

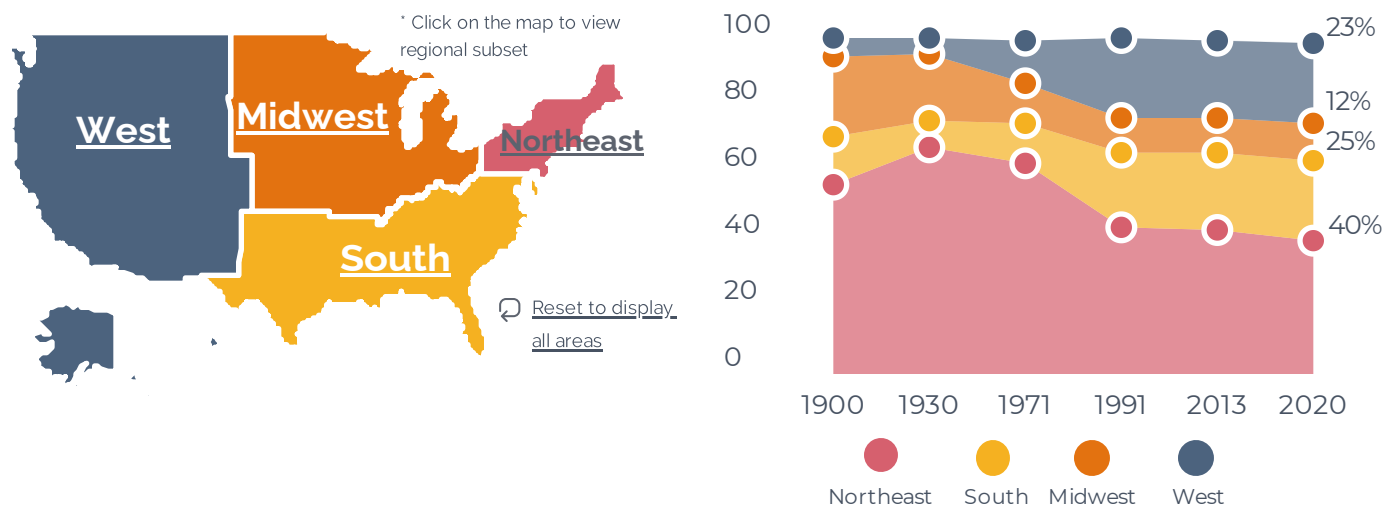
We disagree with the conclusion that those who respond "partially" should not be considered part of the core Jewish population, and we include those individuals in our population estimate.²⁹

The primary source of the AJYB estimate comes from organized Jewish communities that have conducted a local Jewish population survey. In other areas where the AJYB has identified a Jewish community, population estimates are based on best "guesstimates" made by local key informants, internet searches, or newspaper articles. In these areas, the coverage and accuracy of the Jewish population estimates are unknown.

Where Jews Live

More than two decades ago, following the publication of the 1990 National Jewish Population Survey, sociologists Sidney and Alice Goldstein remarked: "Population dispersion and emergence of a continental Jewish community have serious implications for the national organization of the community, for regional and local institutions, and for individual Jews and their families."³⁰ The AJPP data synthesis not only provides estimates of how many Jews there are in the United States, but also where they reside across the country, in US census regions (Northeast, Midwest, South, West), states, metropolitan areas, and counties. This section highlights particular areas where the US Jewish population is concentrated. Although a majority reside in large urban centers, the report and accompanying [interactive online map](#) also illustrate the nearly one in five Jews who live in smaller or less dense areas.

Fig. 2: Total Jewish Population, Census Region 1900 to 2020



Source: 1900-1991 see Goldstein and Goldstein, (1995), pp. 38-39; 2013 see Pew Research Center (2013), pp. 46; 2020 see AJPP (2020).

The greatest proportion of the Jewish population is in the Northeast (40%) (see Fig. 2). Nearly equal percentages of Jews live in the South (25%) and West (23%), followed by the Midwest (12%). This pattern has shifted over the past century. For example, nearly a century ago, two thirds of the Jewish population lived in the Northeast (68%), and very few lived in the West (5%). These regional patterns obscure the fact that although the Jewish population is spread throughout the country, they are concentrated in a relatively small number of states and metropolitan areas.

Most Jews Live in Five States

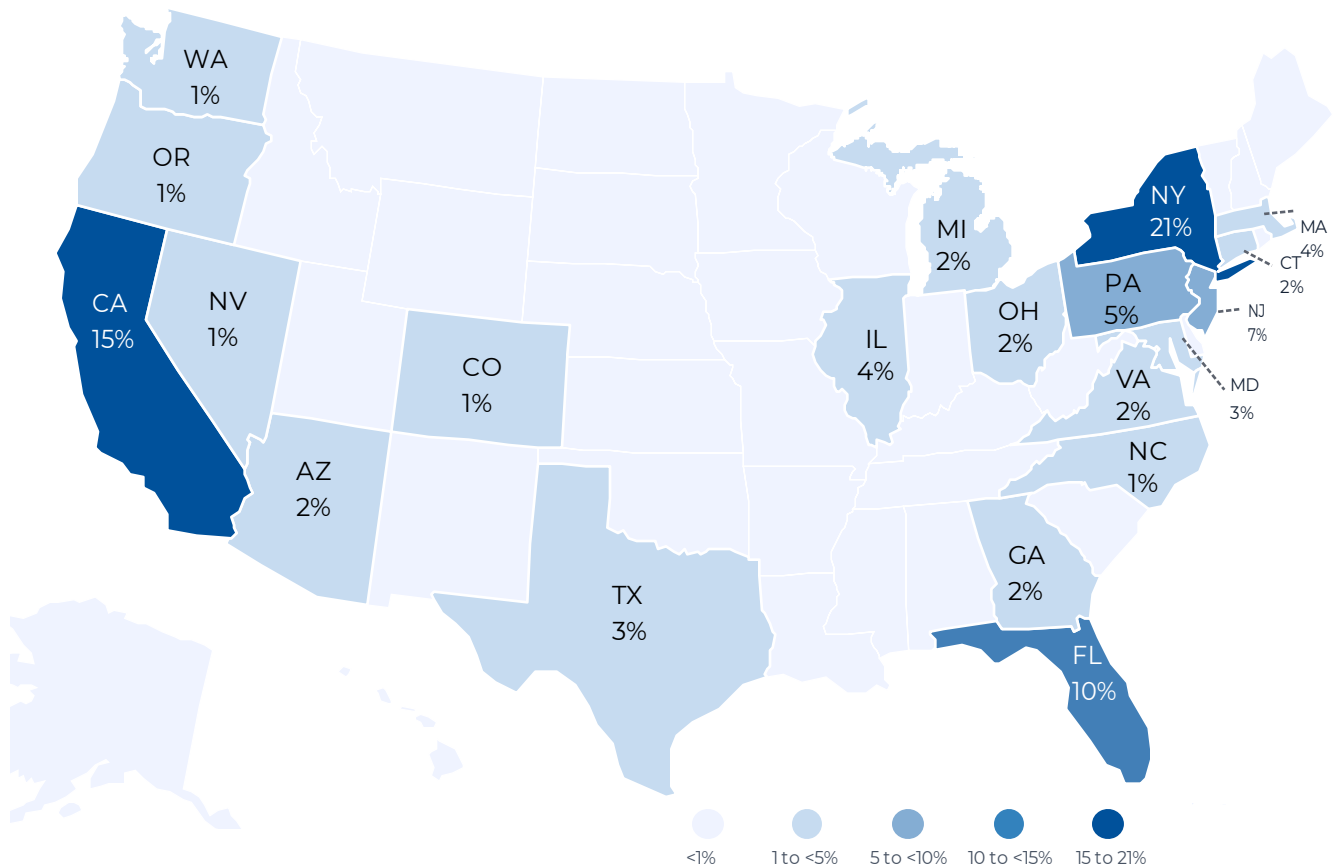
More than nine in ten Jews (91%) in the United States are located in just 20 states (see map in Fig. 4) and about six in ten Jews (59%) reside in the top five states of New York, California, Florida, New Jersey, and Pennsylvania (see Table 2). The Jewish population in New York accounts for one in five (21%) of all Jews in the United States, followed by 15% in California and 10% in Florida. The Jewish population in these three states alone comprise more than 3.5 million adults and children. Among the less populous states shown in Figure 4, the bottom 10 states – Ohio, Arizona, Virginia, Georgia, Michigan, Colorado, Washington, North Carolina, Nevada, and Oregon – account for just 15% of the total Jewish population, a figure equal to the Jewish population of California.

Table 2: Total Jewish Population, States

State	Total Jewish Pop.	Pct. of Total Jewish Pop
New York	1,598,000	21%
California	1,174,000	15%
Florida	778,000	10%
New Jersey	572,000	8%
Pennsylvania	348,000	5%

Note: View the full Table of Total Jewish Population for all states and Washington, DC: ajpp.brandeis.edu/data

Fig. 4: Pct. Within Total Jewish Population, Top 20 States



The Jewish Population is Concentrated in and around Large Urban Centers

The Jewish population, along with being concentrated in a relatively small number of states, is also clustered in and around large urban centers, continuing a longstanding trend going back decades.³¹ The top 40 metro areas, as defined by the US Census Bureau, account for 80% of the total Jewish population in the United States; more than half (55%) of Jews in the United States are located in just the top seven metro areas (see Table 3). In the New York metropolitan area alone (including portions of New Jersey), there are more than 1.9 million Jews, or approximately 25% of the total US Jewish population. Over 600,000 Jews reside in the Los Angeles metro area, and approximately 525,000 Jews live in the Miami-Fort Lauderdale-Pompano Beach metropolitan area.

New York Metro Area

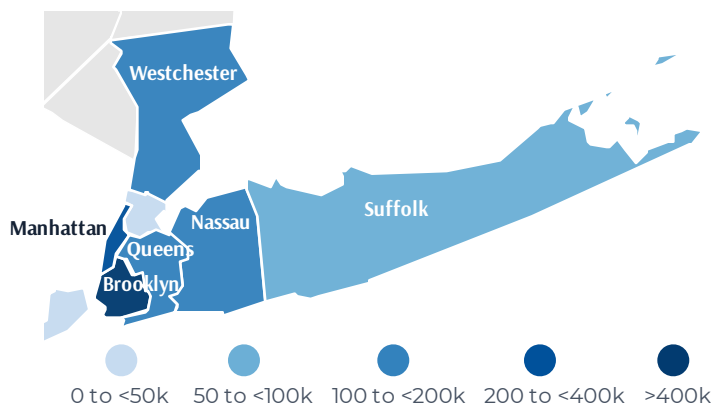
The New York metro area, consisting of the five boroughs of New York City, and Nassau, Westchester, and Suffolk counties, accounts for one quarter of all Jews in the United States (Fig. 5). These eight counties are home to a little over 1.3 million Jews. Brooklyn has the largest total Jewish population in the eight-county area with over 480,000 Jewish adults and children, followed by Manhattan (247,000) and Nassau County (192,000).

Table 3: Total Jewish Population, Metro Areas

Metro Area	Total Jewish Pop.	Pct. of Total Jewish Pop.
New York-Newark-Jersey City, NY-NJ-PA	1,912,000	25%
Los Angeles-Long Beach-Anaheim, CA	617,000	8%
Miami-Fort Lauderdale-Pompano Beach, FL	525,000	7%
Chicago-Naperville-Elgin, IL-IN-WI	315,000	4%
Philadelphia-Camden-Wilmington, PA-NJ-DE-MD	310,000	4%
Boston-Cambridge-Newton, MA-NH	284,000	4%
Washington-Arlington-Alexandria, DC-MD-VA-WV	235,000	3%

Note: View the full Table of Total Jewish Population for the top 40 metropolitan areas: ajpp.brandeis.edu/data

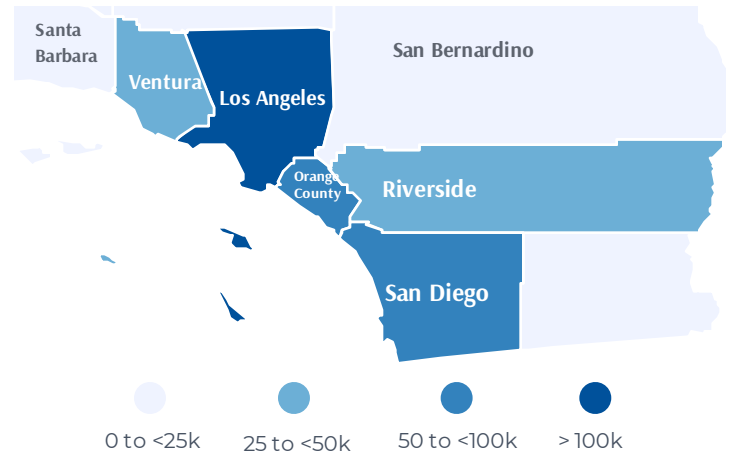
Fig. 5: Total Jewish Population, New York Metro



Los Angeles

The Los Angeles metro area, including Orange County, accounts for 8% of the US Jewish population and over half of all Jews in California. These two counties are home to 617,000 Jews. When combined with other surrounding areas (Fig. 6), including San Diego County (94,000), Ventura County (41,000), and Riverside, San Bernardino, and Santa Barbara Counties (64,000), more than 70% of the Jewish population in California lives in the Southern California region. Los Angeles County has the largest Jewish population of any single US county: 530,000 —7% of all Jews in the United States.

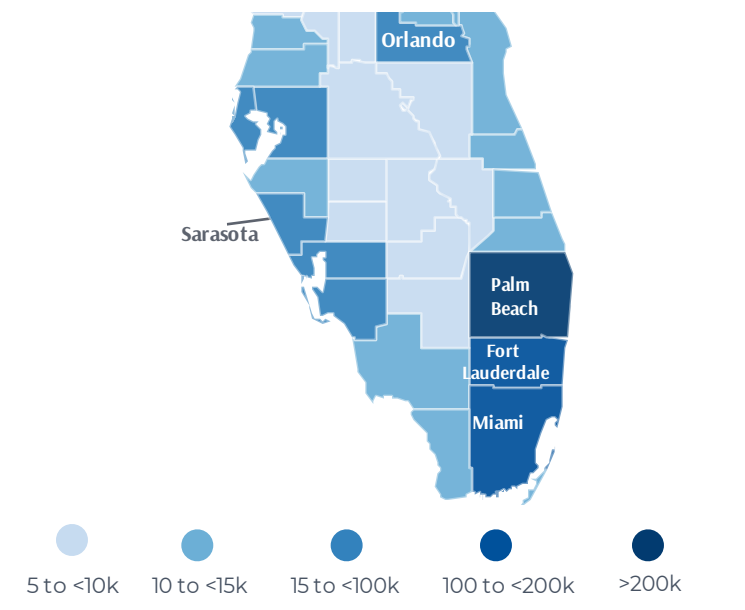
Fig. 6: Total Jewish Population, Southern CA



Miami-Fort Lauderdale-Pompano Beach

The Miami-Fort Lauderdale-Pompano Beach metropolitan area (Fig. 7) comprises 7% of all US Jews and about two thirds (67%) of the Jewish population in Florida. Smaller population areas throughout the state range from 56,000 in the Tampa-St. Petersburg-Clearwater metropolitan area to 41,000 in the Orlando-Kissimmee-Sanford metropolitan area, and fewer than 20,000 Jews in Sarasota.

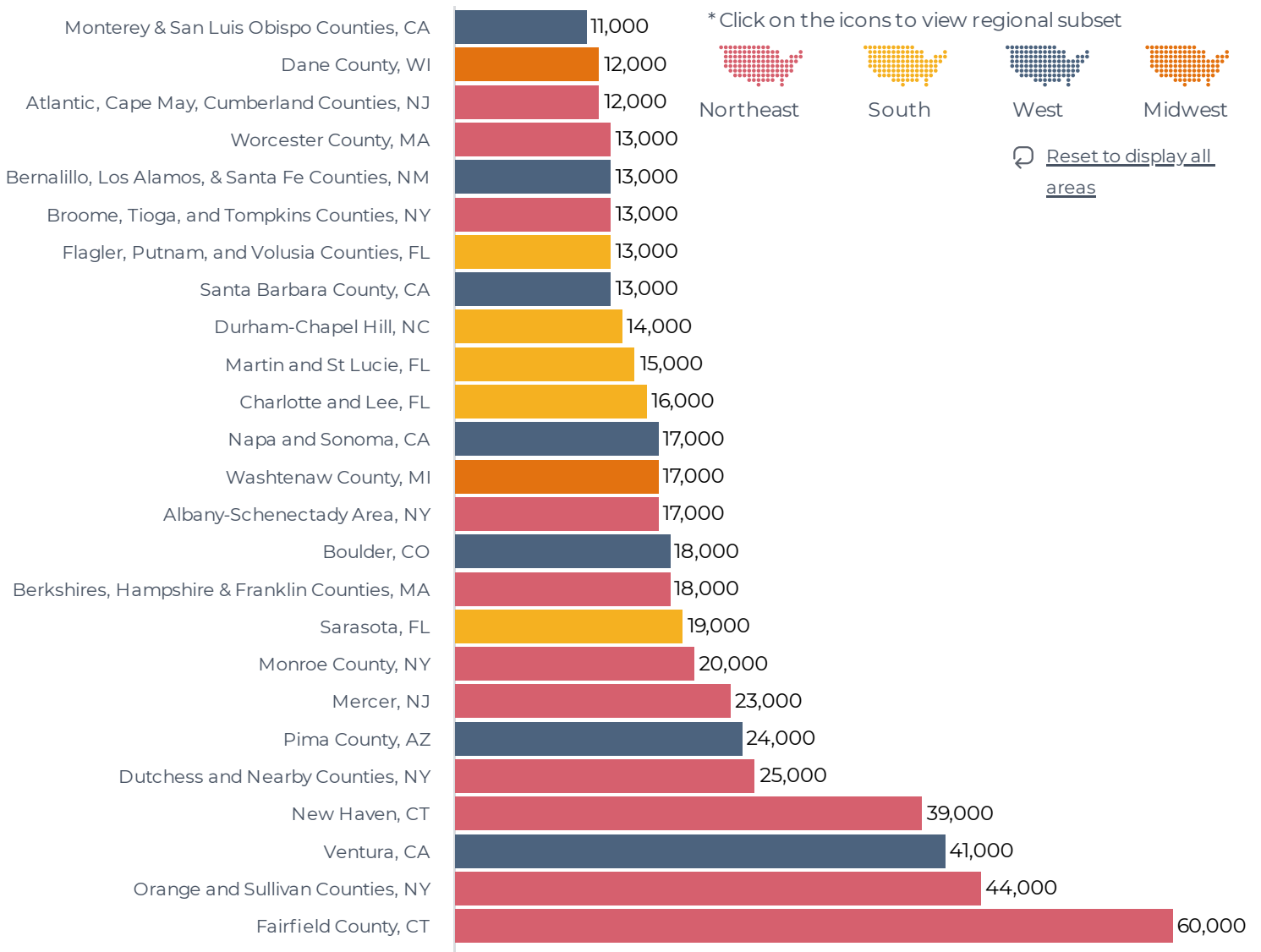
Fig. 7: Total Jewish Population, Florida



One in Five Jews Live Outside the Top 40 Metro Areas

Although the majority of Jews live in the top 40 metropolitan areas in the United States, about 1.6 million Jews – accounting for nearly 20% of the total Jewish population – live outside these areas. Figure 8 displays locations outside of the top 40 where there is a Jewish population greater than 10,000. This includes eleven areas in the Northeast census region, such as Fairfield County, CT (Fairfield and Stamford) with a Jewish population of 60,000 and Orange and Sullivan counties, NY whose Jewish population of 44,000 includes the Orthodox community of Kiryas Joel. In the West, there are seven places including Ventura County, CA, which has a Jewish population of 41,000 and Pima County, AZ (Tucson), with a Jewish population of 24,000. In the South, there are five areas outside of the top 40 metros with a Jewish population greater than 10,000, including Sarasota County, FL (19,000) and the Durham-Chapel Hill area in North Carolina (14,000). Just two areas with these parameters are found in the Midwest census region: Washtenaw County, MI, (Ann Arbor) with 17,000 Jews and Dane County, WI (Madison) with a Jewish population of 12,000.

Fig. 8: Areas Outside the Top 40 Metro, Jewish Population > 10,000



Characteristics of Jewish Adults

Data on the demographic composition of Jewish adults³² can help communities and organizations understand variations within the Jewish population and differences between Jewish adults and US adults more generally. These data can be used to identify areas with higher or lower concentrations of subgroups based on age, educational attainment, or race and ethnicity. Absent census data on the Jewish population, these vital statistics at sub-national levels can also provide a critical source of information for researchers who conduct targeted studies of Jews in the United States.

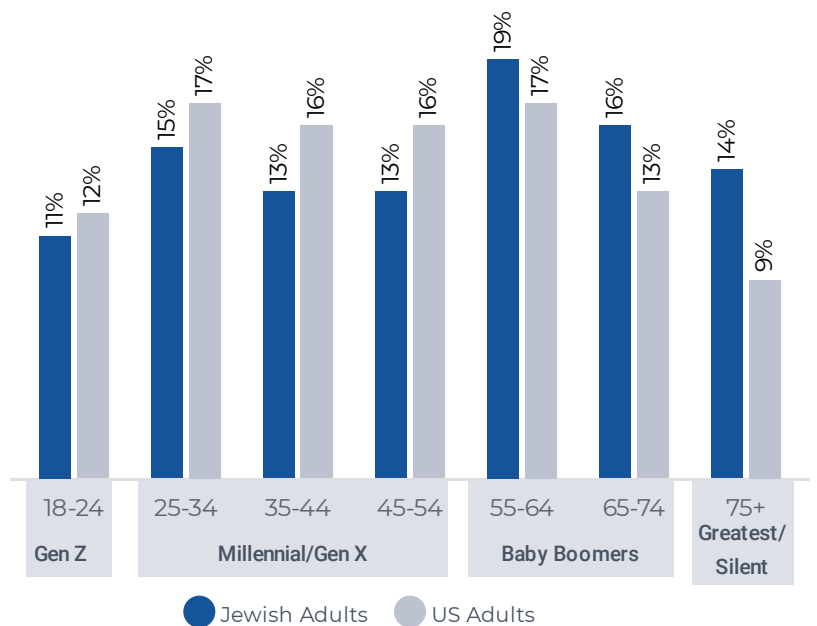
Age

Compared to all US Adults, Jewish Adults are Disproportionately Older

As described in detail below, compared to all US adults, Jewish adults are older. The gap between Jewish adults and all adults ages 65 or older is a difference of 8 percentage points (30% of Jewish adults vs. 22% of all adults). This gap is partly explained by differences in longevity and increased life expectancy among higher educated white adults in the United States.³³

The age distribution among Jewish adults highlights the Baby Boomer generation, those ages 55 to 74 years old, who represent more than one third (35%) of Jewish adults (see Fig. 9). Those in the Boomer generation straddle the typical retirement age (between 65 to 67 years old), which may have tremendous importance in the coming years. About half of Baby Boomers are entering retirement years (ages 65-74). Thirty percent of Jewish adults are seniors ages 65 years and older, compared to 22% of all US adults. Within this group of seniors, about half of Jewish adults are ages 75 or older. This age group represents the Silent and Greatest generations, those born in 1945 and before.

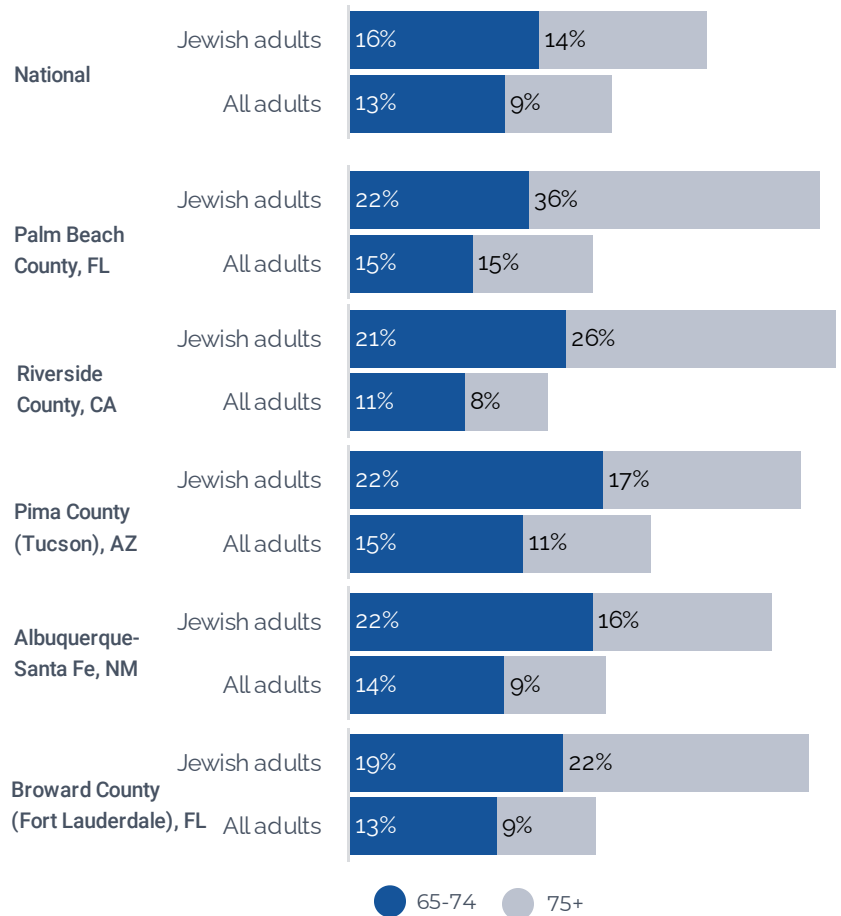
Fig. 9: Pct. Age & Generation, Jewish Adults



In some areas, regional variations not only illustrate how the Jewish population compares to itself, but also how similar or dissimilar the Jewish population is to the general population in that location.

In many areas, especially across the Sunbelt region of the United States where several popular retirement communities are located, the percentage of Jewish adults who are ages 65 and older exceeds the national average (see Fig. 10). Whereas nationally 30% of Jewish adults are ages 65 and older, in Palm Beach County, 58% of Jewish adults are 65 and older. The percentage of all adults in Palm Beach County who are ages 65 and older is just 30%. Likewise, in Riverside County, (Palm Springs, CA) 46% of Jewish adults are ages 65 and older, compared with just 19% of adults in the county's general adult population.

Fig 10. Pct. of Jewish Adults 65+, National and Top County Areas in Sunbelt Region



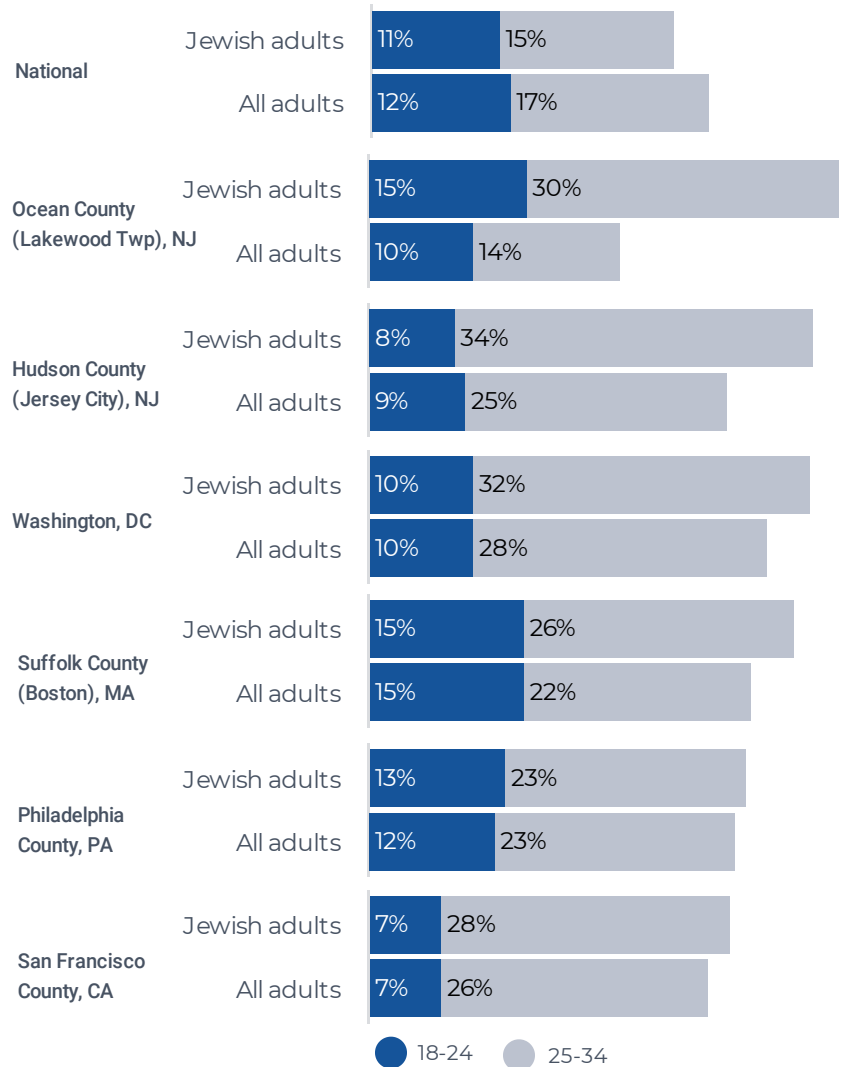
Note: The Albuquerque-Santa Fe area consists of Santa Fe, Los Alamos, and Bernalillo Counties.

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On the other end of the age distribution are Jewish young adults, those ages 18-34, who comprise 25% of Jewish adults nationally. Unlike older Jewish adults ages 65+ who are disproportionately older than the general population, the percentage of younger Jewish adults is more similar to the percentage of young adults in the general population at the national level but varies substantially by region (see Fig. 11).

Eleven percent of Jewish adults are ages 18 to 24 years, compared to 12% of all US adults. Fifteen percent are ages 25 to 34 years, compared to 17% of all US adults. In Ocean County, NJ, an area that includes Lakewood Township and neighboring suburbs that have a large number of Ultra-Orthodox Jews, 45% of Jewish adults are 18 to 34 years of age, compared to 24% of all adults. Similarly, in Hudson County (Jersey City and surrounding areas), 42% of Jewish adults are ages 18 to 34, compared to 34% of all adults. According to census data, both of these New Jersey counties have experienced tremendous growth over the past two decades.³⁴ Other areas that have high percentages of younger adults ages 18 to 34 include those with a large college or university presence or the presence of high-tech job sectors, such as Washington, DC (42%), Suffolk County, MA (Boston) (41%), Philadelphia County, PA (36%), and San Francisco County, CA (35%).

Fig 11. Pct. of Jewish Adults 18-34, National and Top County Areas by Percentage of Young Adults



One in Ten Jewish Adults are Part of Gen Z

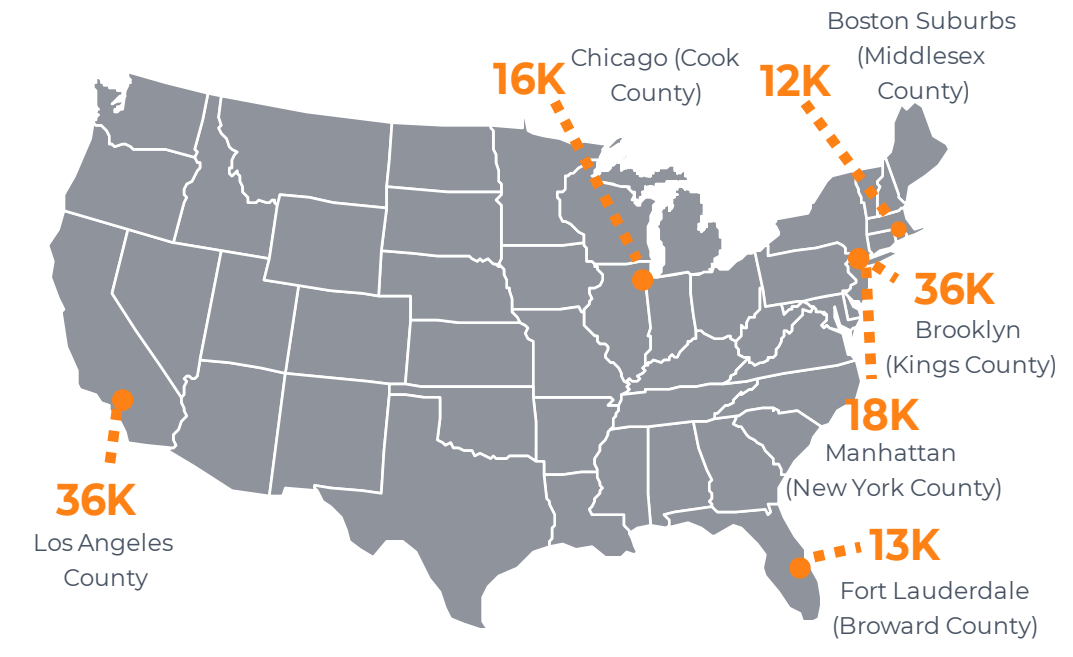
Millennials, the youngest of whom are now approaching age 30 and the oldest who are nearly 40 years old, no longer comprise the youngest generation of adults. A cohort born, for the most part, in a post-9/11 world succeeds them. Although both generations may be considered digital natives, Gen Zers are often distinguished by having never known a time pre-internet, with most coming of age in an ever-connected world of smartphones, high-speed internet, and wireless technologies. These defining characteristics will likely shape Gen Zers and how they engage in civic and Jewish life.

Fig. 12: Gen Z Jewish Adults



Some of the largest concentrations of Gen Zers are in counties with major urban areas (see Fig. 13). In both Los Angeles County, CA in the West and Kings County, NY (Brooklyn) in the East, there are an estimated 36,000 Jewish adults ages 18 to 24. In Manhattan (New York County), there are 18,000 Gen Z adults. There are 13,000 Gen Z adults in Broward County, FL (Fort Lauderdale), 16,000 in Cook County, IL (Chicago), and 12,000 in Middlesex County, MA (Boston suburbs of Cambridge and Newton).

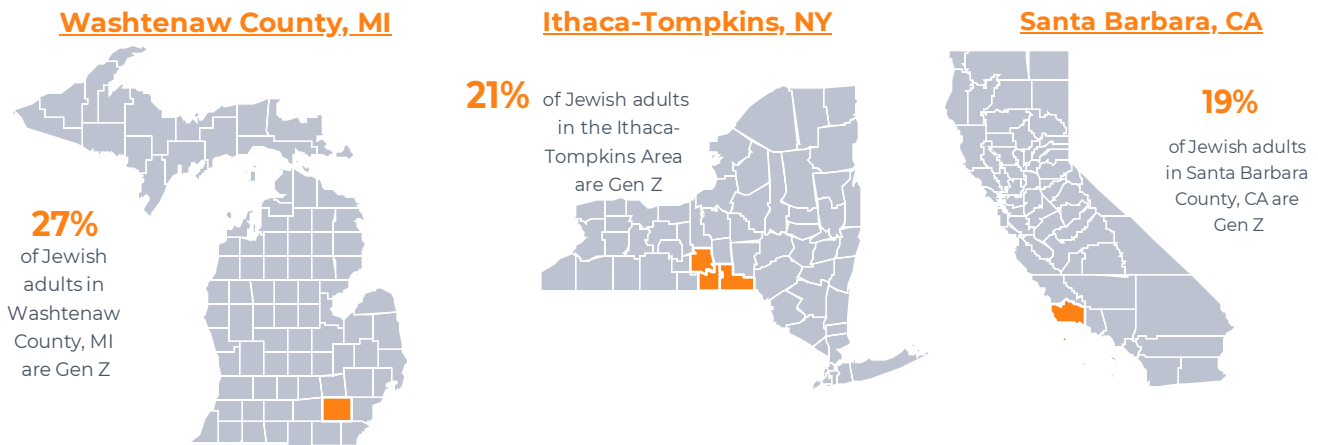
Fig. 13: Est. Gen Z Jewish Adults (Ages 18-24), Top Metro Areas



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Outside these major urban centers, and in college towns in particular, the percentage of Gen Z Jewish adults is much higher than the national average of 11%. In Washtenaw County, MI, an area consisting of Ann Arbor (University of Michigan) and home to about 14,000 Jewish adults, 27% are between 18 to 24 years of age. In the Ithaca-Tompkins, NY area (Cornell University and Ithaca College), a three-county area with about 10,000 Jewish adults, about one in five (21%) are part of Gen Z. And in Santa Barbara, CA (University of California, Santa Barbara) nearly 20% of the 10,000 Jewish adults are Gen Zers.

Fig. 14: Pct. Gen Z Jewish Adults, Non-Metros

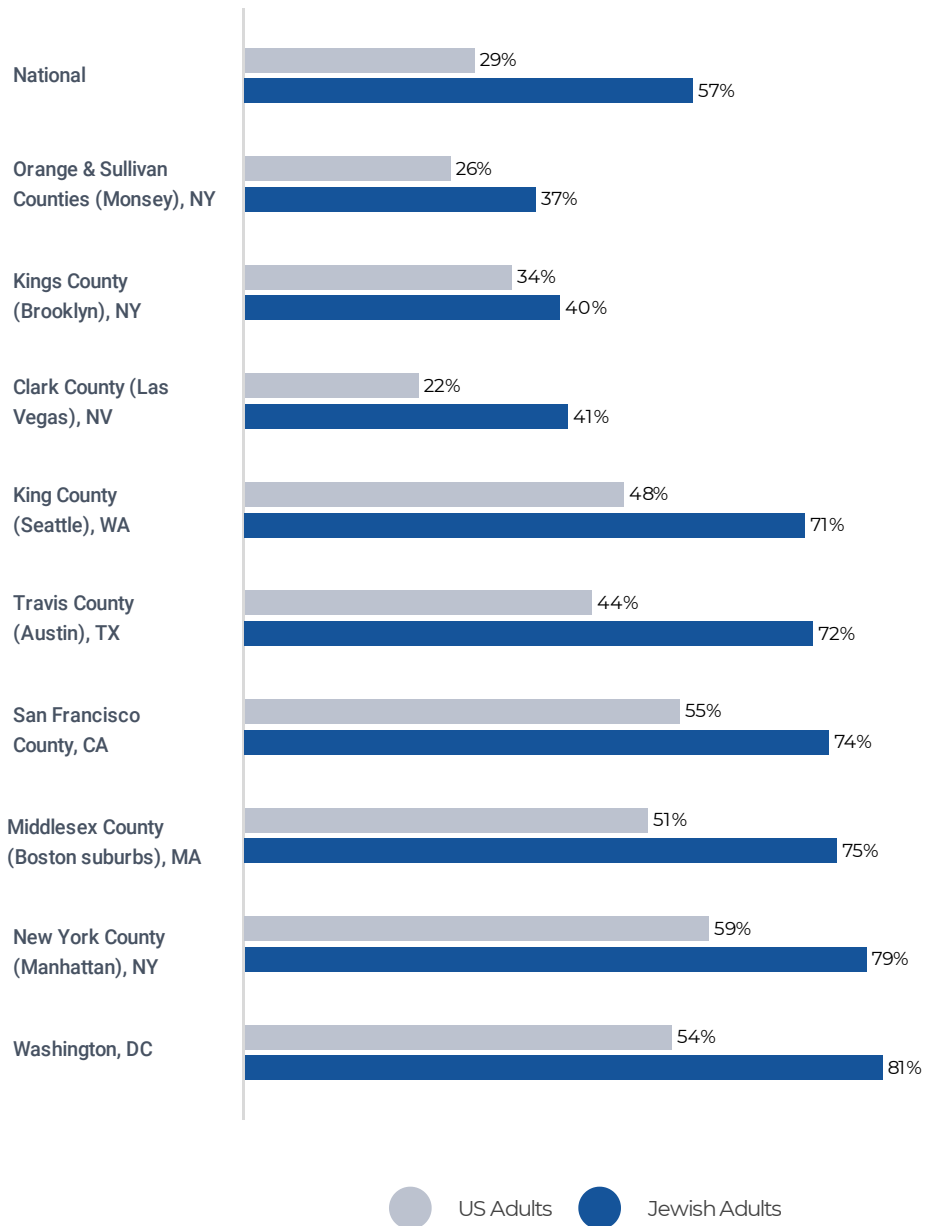


Educational Attainment

Jewish Adults are Nearly Twice as Likely as US Adults to be College Educated

Jewish adults are nearly twice as likely to be college graduates (58%) as US adults (29%). Across the United States, however, there are areas where Jewish adults deviate from this average. In places with large populations of Orthodox Jewish adults, such as Kings County, NY (Brooklyn) or Orange and Sullivan Counties, NY (Monsey), the percentage of Jewish adults with a college degree or greater is still higher than the general population but to a lesser extent. For example, in Brooklyn 40% of Jewish adults are college graduates, a percentage that is lower than the national average for Jewish adults (58%) but higher than all adults in Brooklyn (34%). In areas with large percentages of younger adults or areas where high-tech job sectors are growing, both Jewish adults and the general population outpace the national averages. Washington, DC has the highest percentage of Jewish adults with a college degree (81%), followed by areas such as New York County, NY (Manhattan) (79%), Middlesex County, MA (Boston suburbs) (75%), and San Francisco County, CA (74%) (see Fig. 15).

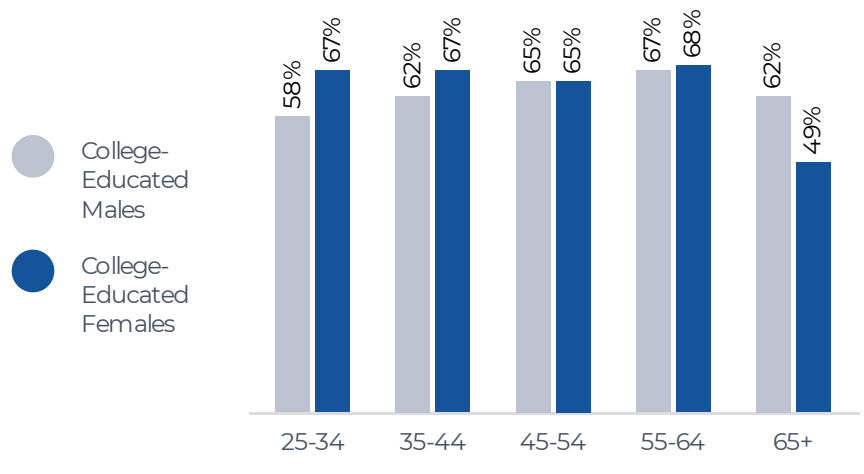
Fig. 15: Pct. College Education among Jewish Adults, County Areas with Highest and Lowest Pct. College



Millennial Jewish Women are More Likely to Have a College Degree than Jewish Male Peers

The disparity in educational attainment between millennial men and women is reversed compared to older Jewish adults (see Fig. 16). Sixty-seven percent of Jewish women ages 25 to 34 are college graduates, compared to 58% of similarly aged Jewish men, whereas among those ages 65 and older, Jewish women are less likely than men to be college graduates (49% vs. 62%, respectively). Similar patterns of disparity in educational attainment among men and women are observed in the general population also.

Fig. 16: Pct. College Education by Gender, Jewish Adults



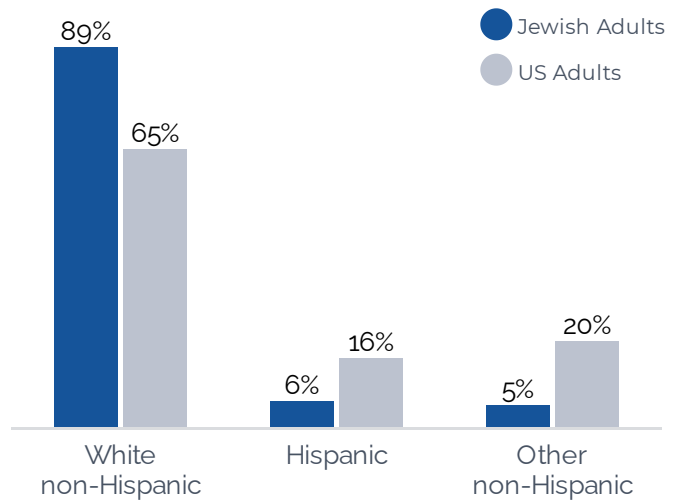
Race & Ethnicity

Using 2010 census definitions of race and ethnicity,³⁵ 89% of Jewish adults are white non-Hispanic (see Fig. 17). Six percent of Jewish adults are Hispanic, and five percent are “other non-Hispanic,” a group that includes all other racial groups (Black, Asian, Pacific-Islander, etc.) as well as all who identify with multiple groups, and those who identify with no groups at all. It should be noted that identifying as “Hispanic”, or “other non-Hispanic” is not necessarily equivalent to being a Jew of Color. For example, many Hispanics, including those within the Jewish population, likely also identify as “white.”³⁶ Understanding the racial and ethnic diversity of American Jews is a focus of ongoing research and will be influenced in part by the 2020 census, which included new questions about racial identity.

Younger Jews are More Likely to Identify as Hispanic or Some Other Race

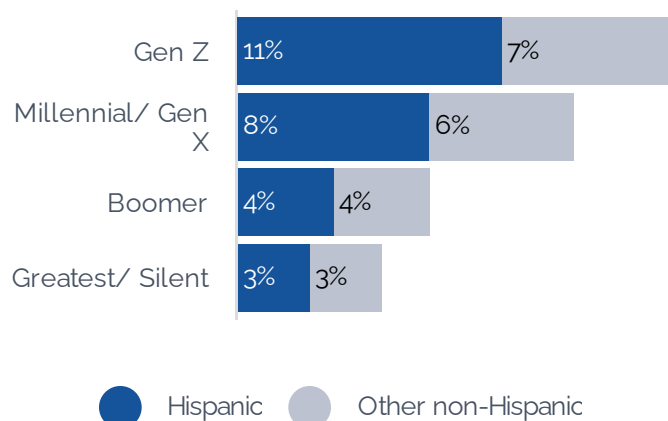
Younger Jewish adults, those in Gen Z and the millennial and Gen X generations, are far more likely to identify as Hispanic (11% and 8%, respectively) than the Boomer and Greatest/Silent generations (4% and 3%, respectively). Gen Zers, shown in Figure 18, are more than two times as likely to identify with a race or ethnicity other than white, non-Hispanic compared with Boomers or the Greatest and Silent generations. One possible explanation for the increase in Hispanic identification is that a large number of Jews have migrated to the United States from Latin American countries over the past few decades.³⁷

Fig. 17: Pct. Race and Ethnicity, Jewish Adults and US Adults



Note: "Other non-Hispanic" includes all other racial groups (Black, Asian, Pacific Islander, etc.) as well as those who identify with multiple groups and those who identify with no group.

Fig. 18: Pct. Hispanic & Other non-Hispanic, Jewish Adults



Note: "Other non-Hispanic" includes all other racial groups (Black, Asian, Pacific Islander, etc.) as well as those who identify with multiple groups and those who identify with no group.

Summary/Discussion

The latest AJPP population estimates highlighted in this report indicate that the US Jewish population remains consistently at just over 2% of the total US population in households, or 7.6 million individuals. This estimate is based on a data synthesis of hundreds of survey samples of US adults that yielded an estimate of 1.9%, or 4.9 million US adults who identify their religion as Jewish. The additional 2.7 million are estimates of Jewish children and Jewish adults of no religion, estimates based on an analysis of local Jewish community studies and the last national Jewish population study conducted by the Pew Research Center.

This data synthesis is the largest to date, with over 1.3 million US adults, and covers all 50 US states and the District of Columbia. With this large sample of surveys, this is the first AJPP national model that takes the ZIP Code of respondents into account. The ability to reliably estimate the distribution within some of the largest counties in the United States improves the estimates for these counties overall.

One quarter of the US Jewish population is in the major New York-Newark-Jersey City, NJ NY statistical area. Within this area, Brooklyn has the largest Jewish population, followed by Manhattan. On the West Coast, Los Angeles County, CA has the largest Jewish population. The next largest county is Palm Beach County, FL, followed by Cook County, IL.

One benefit of the AJPP data synthesis is that it provides estimates across the United States, including areas where there are known Jewish population centers such as Federation areas, as well as areas outside of known Jewish population centers where there are limited resources for conducting local population studies. Another benefit of the data synthesis approach is that it provides a demographic profile of Jewish adults in addition to the overall population counts. For example, Jewish adults are more likely to have college degrees than US adults. Even in areas of the country where rates of college graduates are highest, such as Manhattan, NY, Jewish adults have higher rates of college graduates than the general population in those areas.

Also, consistent with previous studies of the US Jewish population, Jewish adults in the United States are disproportionately older, with a greater percentage who are ages 65 years and older compared to all US adults.³⁸ The greatest disparity was among those ages 75 years and older. This age disparity might, in part, reflect the greater likelihood of older adults to identify with religion, and conversely, the decreased likelihood of younger adults to identify with religion.³⁹ It might also be related to the disparity in education. With education as a proxy for social class and income, there is a strong association in the United States between income and longevity.⁴⁰

Having an independent source of data that provides a baseline population profile of Jewish adults is useful, particularly for researchers who conduct more in-depth studies of the population nationally and in local communities. For example, these data have been used in recent Jewish community surveys of Baltimore,⁴¹ Twin Cities,⁴² and Cincinnati.⁴³ For a complete list, see the Cohen Center for Modern Jewish Studies [Local Jewish Community Population Studies](#).



The latest AJPP population estimates highlighted in this report indicate that the US Jewish population remains consistently at just over 2% of the total US population in households, or 7.6 million individuals.

American Jewish Population Project


The AJPP program of research addresses a need that has challenged the social scientific study of the US Jewish population for the past 50 years – from the early work to design a national survey in the 1970s to current efforts. At a 1982 conference to launch the creation of the Center for Modern Jewish Studies at Brandeis University, scholars recognized the challenges facing the nascent field. In remarks prepared for the conference, Calvin Goldscheider, a sociologist at Brown University, noted that the (then) current state of Jewish demography was “based on a series of bits and pieces from national and local Jewish community studies of varying degrees of quality, for different periods of time, and for limited demographic issues.”⁴⁴

On the utility of Jewish sample surveys, Goldscheider remarked that they “include a larger number of Jewish cases but usually do not include comparative data on non-Jewish population” and that “issues of sample design, particularly full coverage of the Jewish population, remain problematic.”⁴⁵ These concerns, particularly the need for comparative data on the non-Jewish population and sample design, are critical for purposes of population estimation. One solution, he offered, was to collect “a reliable source of continuous systematic data to evaluate the changing demographic patterns of American Jews.”⁴⁶ The AJPP population estimates program of research is designed to be one source that can fill this gap in Jewish population research.

What is apparent in Goldscheider’s remarks is not that the challenges were unknown or that scholars lacked the foresight required to overcome the limitations; rather, there existed an absence of resources and the computational power needed to perform the kinds of statistical procedures to synthesize data from general surveys. Today, we have those capacities, as our AJPP data synthesis demonstrates.

Still, challenges in estimating the Jewish population and describing its characteristics remain. One question that has particularly perplexed observers,⁴⁷ is why estimates of the Jewish population vary, sometimes substantially, depending on the source. Journalists and Jewish professionals, perhaps unsure or unaware of the nuance involved in population estimation, may simply rely on a commonly cited source of estimates.⁴⁸ Even the State of Israel, in its official statistics of Jews in the world and in Israel, publishes an estimate of just 5.7 million Jews in the United States—undercounting the number of Jewish adults by at least 1 million individuals because they identified as “partially” Jewish, despite the fact that many were raised Jewish and both of their parents were Jewish.

The disparities in Jewish population estimates are better understood within the larger context of data synthesis. Any survey, no matter how well designed, might over- or under-represent the Jewish population as a matter of sampling. In the data synthesis, individual surveys range from a low of 1% to as high as 3%. The goal of data synthesis is to distill from these disparate estimates, a better representation of the true underlying population.



The AJPP program of research addresses the need that has challenged the social scientific study of the US Jewish population for the past 50 years: a single source to provide estimates of the US Jewish population with the full coverage, along with comparative data on the non-Jewish population.

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Although AJPP meets the need for a reliable source of data on the majority of the Jewish population – Jewish adults by religion – there remains a need to develop as rigorous a resource for estimation of Jewish children and Jewish adults of no religion. Currently, estimation of these two groups continues to rely on single surveys, which may vary in time and do not provide coverage of the entire United States. Future research should include examination of how to incorporate results from AJPP into the design and analysis of targeted surveys of the population to improve the reliability of estimates of these subgroups. In addition, more work needs to be done to develop comprehensive estimates of these groups nationally.

Despite remaining challenges, it is clear that the myth of the “vanishing American Jew,” once dominant in the discourse of Jewish population research, has been disconfirmed. For more than a decade, the program of research developed by the AJPP using data synthesis techniques has demonstrated that the Jewish population has not declined in the intervening decades since the first national Jewish population survey in 1971; rather it has increased, with a consistent estimate of the percentage of US adults who identify as Jewish by religion. It is our hope that the work of AJPP serves as a point of reference for the community as a whole, and for those who conduct targeted surveys of the population.

Our Method

The foundation of AJPP's estimate is a data synthesis of nationally representative samples of the US population that assess the religious identification of US adults. Adults who identify as Jewish by religion are the majority of Jewish adults. Past estimates of this population range from 80% of Jewish adults (NJPS 1990 & 2000) to 70% (AJIS 2008).⁴⁹ We then use the most recent national Jewish population survey⁵⁰ and recent Jewish community studies⁵¹ to estimate the population not represented in the base estimate: Jewish children and the Jewish adults who do not identify as Jewish when asked about their religion.

Similar to the US Census Bureau's American Community Survey (ACS), detailed estimates are based on the pooling of the most recent five years of available data.⁵² Surveys in the synthesis include the American National Election Studies, the General Social Survey, Pew Political and social surveys, Gallup Daily Tracking poll, and other surveys. Individual records from all surveys—corresponding to over 1.3 million US adults—are combined and analyzed using methods of Bayesian multilevel regression with poststratification (MRP).

Why a Data Synthesis Rather than a Survey?

The synthesis of general population surveys was designed to address longstanding concerns regarding the challenge of Jewish population estimates in the United States:

"Previous estimates were based upon the judgments of communities, in most cases without actual research. They were therefore susceptible to over-representation of a few large communities, while under-representing the population of small communities in a region." - Massarik and Chenkin (1971)⁵³

At less than 3% of the US population of over 330 million people, the Jewish population is considered a "rare" population. Because there are no official statistics on the Jewish population, researchers rely on targeted surveys of the Jewish population in order to both estimate the size of the population as well as describe the characteristics of the population. Rare populations present unique challenges when it comes to establishing accurate and reliable estimates of the size and prevalence of the group.⁵⁴ These challenges include the need for known probabilities of selection in order to design a survey to ensure high coverage of the population. As Lazerwitz lamented in the design of the 1970 Jewish population survey:

We sought from this survey that very piece of information required to design the survey creating a sort of circular situation with the connecting link missing. -Lazerwitz (1970)⁵⁵

Not only are population numbers needed for the design of a survey to know what the probability of selection might be, but also, absent census data, there is no way to determine whether the sample in any single survey—no matter how well designed—might over- or under-represent the population as a whole or subgroups of the population.

The data synthesis approach provides estimates of the population in a way that takes into account all available sources of data, standardizes the time period for the estimate, the methods of assessment, and ensures coverage of the entire United States, including areas of known Jewish community and areas less or not known.

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The Bayesian method employed by AJPP to synthesize general population surveys has been validated by using data from Canada and the UK and comparing the results to Canadian and UK Census data. (Unlike the US Census, those sources include assessment of religious identification.)⁵⁶ In the study of Canada, a comparison of three different methods for data synthesis provided evidence that the Bayesian analysis yielded estimates that were on par with the Canadian Census and out-performed alternative methods.⁵⁷ In the study with UK data, the method was demonstrated to yield accurate estimates of the Jewish, Muslim, and Hindu populations over a 20-year period.⁵⁸

The data synthesis approach also addresses concerns by earlier researchers who emphasized the need for local and national studies of the Jewish population in addition to national and local general population surveys:

The best alternatives are surveys in which information on religious identification is collected. Three types of such surveys are relevant to our concern: 1) national and local omnibus surveys; 2) local studies of the Jewish population; and 3) a national Jewish population survey. -Goldstein et al. (1988)⁵⁹

Several of the largest Jewish communities in the United States do now invest in research of their own communities. The frequency and timing of the surveys are inconsistent. The JFNA website indicates that there are 146 federations and a network of more than 300 smaller communities. In the past 10 years, there have been 38 community studies, representing approximately one quarter (26%) of the main federations and fewer than 10% of all JFNA communities. These studies cover roughly two thirds (68%) of the Jewish population reported in the *American Jewish Year Book*, however, eight of the studies were not designed to provide population estimates. These include marketing surveys, needs assessment surveys, voter polls, or updates to older studies using new samples without updating the population estimate.

The Model

The MRP method is generally described as a model-based approach to estimation. Factors that are involved in the design of survey weights, those that affect the probability of selection and the representativeness of the sample, are included in the model directly rather than as survey weights.⁶⁰ To combine data over multiple independent samples, the multilevel regression includes the clustering of respondents within surveys in addition to sampling and weighting factors common across the surveys. All surveys include some stratification by geographic area. The lowest level of geography available for analysis is the ZIP Code of the respondent. There are too few observations per ZIP Code, so ZIP Codes were clustered into groups within counties based on their proximity, population density, and Jewish population incidence. Other factors related to weighting in the surveys include sex, age, race/ethnicity, and educational attainment. The model also includes significant interactions of age by educational attainment, geographic area by age, and geographic area by educational attainment.

The model yields the proportion of US adults who identify as Jewish in each geographic and demographic group represented in the model. Estimates are then poststratified to distributions of the US adult population across the poststratification factors included in the model. These distributions (and population counts) are based to ZIP Code population estimates by sex and age. The American Community Survey is used to adjust these population counts for distributions by race and Hispanic origin, along with educational attainment, and percentage of the population in households.

Total Population

To extrapolate the AJPP model-based estimates of Jewish adults based on religious identification to the total Jewish population, supplemental sources of data are used to estimate the portion of the population not represented in the model-based estimate. For counties and ZIP Code groups, estimates for these two groups are based on analysis of recent local Jewish community studies where available, and where not available, estimates are based on the Pew national survey.

The AJPP continues to add new sources of data to update population estimates and to improve estimation with the inclusion of lower levels of geography such as ZIP Code of respondents. The current database includes data for over 2.9 million US adults and spans the years 1997 to 2020.

For detailed discussion of the methods used in this report, see [*Technical Report: ZIP Code-based Jewish Population Estimates 2020*](#)

NOTES

1. DellaPergola, Sergio. "World Jewish Population 2019." *American Jewish Year Book 2019*. Springer International Publishing, AG, 2020, pp. 263-353.
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6. For detailed reviews of challenges, see: Kadushin, Charles, et al. "National Jewish Population Survey 2000-01: A Guide for the Perplexed." *Contemporary Jewry*, vol. 25, no. 1, 2005, pp. 1-32; also Saxe, Leonard, et al. "Measuring the Size and Characteristics of American Jewry." *The Social Scientific Study of Jewry*, 2014, pp. 37-54.
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8. The demographic profile of US Jewish adults—distributions of age, sex, education, race and ethnicity—is based on the data synthesis of general population surveys included in this study. As such, the distributions are based on Jewish adults who identify as Jewish by religion (approximately 81% of all Jewish adults) and do not include Jewish adults of no religion. Estimates of the number of Jewish adults include adults who identify as Jewish by religion and Jews of no religion. However, for ease of readability, the term "Jewish adults" is used in both applications.
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12. See Aronson, Janet Krasner, et al. " 'All Politics is Local': Challenges in the Study of Local Jewish Communities." *Contemporary Jewry*, vol. 36, 2016, pp. 361-380.
13. Pew Research Center, 2013.

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16. See Boxer, Matthew, et al. "2015 Nashville and Middle Tennessee Population Study." Cohen Center for Modern Jewish Studies, 2015.; Boxer, Matthew, et al. "The 2019 Cincinnati Jewish Community Study." Cohen Center for Modern Jewish Studies, 2020.
17. See Tighe, Elizabeth, et al. "American Jewish Population Estimates: 2012" Steinhardt Social Research Institute, 2013. Retrieved from ajpp.brandeis.edu/documents/2012/AmJewishPopEst2012.pdf.
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26. DellaPergola, Sergio. "World Jewish Population, 2019," p. 267.
27. Ibid, p. 270.
28. Pew Research Center, 2013.

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33. Olshansky, S. Jay, et al. "Differences In Life Expectancy Due To Race And Educational Differences Are Widening, And Many May Not Catch Up." *Health affairs*, vol. 31,8, Project Hope, 2012, pp. 1803-13. doi:10.1377/hlthaff.2011.0746.
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39. See "The Age Gap in Religion Around the World" Pew Research Center, 2018, Washington, D.C.; Jones, Robert P. and Daniel Cox. "America's Changing Religious Identity: Findings from the 2016 American Values Atlas" PRRI, 2017, Washington, D.C.
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42. See Aronson, Janet Krasner, et al. "2019 Twin Cities Jewish Population Study." Cohen Center for Modern Jewish Studies, 2020.
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48. See for example the Jewish Virtual Library entry for the US Jewish Population that notes "DellaPergola figures. Sheshkin and Dashefsky estimate the US Jewish population is approximately one million higher - 6,700,000 in 2019. Since all other data is from DellaPergola, we are using his estimate for consistency." Retrieved from <https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jewish-population-of-the-world#A>

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