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**National Jewish  
Population Study**

**NATIONAL  
AND REGIONAL  
POPULATION  
COUNTS**

**Facts for Planning**

*One of a series of reports on the study findings*



Council of Jewish Federations  
and Welfare Funds  
315 Park Ave. South, New York, N. Y. 10010

This is one of a series of reports on the findings of the National Jewish Population Study sponsored by the Council of Jewish Federations and Welfare Funds. This is the first comprehensive national study made of the Jewish population of the United States.

The NJPS, under the direction of Dr. Fred Massarik of the University of California of Los Angeles and a distinguished group of colleagues, was based on a sample scientifically chosen so as to be representative of the total U.S. Jewish population. This sample included communities of all sizes and in all parts of the country, with random samplings to include Jews not on any organizational lists as well as those who were.

While the NJPS data are of interest and value to many individuals concerned with Jewish life, the Federations which financed the study have as their purpose the use of the findings in local, regional and national planning. The initial set of reports will, therefore, be elements relating most closely to these concerns.

Each community will also now have facts which set a national perspective for its own local situation. In addition, the projections for the future made possible by the national study should enable Federations to anticipate in their planning the demands brought about by changing population patterns.

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THE JEWISH POPULATION OF THE UNITED STATES IN 1970: A NEW ESTIMATE

by  
FRED MASSARIK AND ALVIN CHENKIN\*

There were 5,370,000 Jews in the United States in 1970. This estimate was derived from the first national comprehensive sample study ever undertaken.

The 5,370,000 persons were in Jewish households (defined as households that have one or more Jewish members). When Jewish residents of institutions are added, the number would be increased by up to 50,000.

The total number of persons, Jewish and non-Jewish, in Jewish households, was 5,800,000. This figure is comparable in definition to the levels usually cited in previous estimates of Jews.

REGIONAL DISTRIBUTION

Almost two-thirds of the Jewish population were in the Eastern part of the country (63.6 per cent). The Central Region had 17.1 per cent (larger than previous estimates); the Western Region 10.9 per cent (less than previous estimates); and the South 10.9 per cent. (Table 1)

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.

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\* The authors acknowledge the contribution of Professor Bernard Lazerwitz, who is responsible for the NJPS sample design and for the initial computations on which the population estimates are based.

TABLE 1

PERSONS IN JEWISH HOUSEHOLDS COMPARED BY MAJOR REGIONS<sup>a</sup> - 1970

<u>Region</u>	<u>Persons</u>	<u>Per Cent</u>
East	3,690,000	63.6
Central	990,000	17.1
South	486,000	8.4
West	<u>632,000</u>	<u>10.9</u>
TOTAL	5,798,000	100.0

Regions are defined as follows:

<u>East</u>	<u>Central</u>	<u>South</u>	<u>West</u>
Connecticut	Arkansas	Alabama	Alaska
Delaware	Illinois	Florida	Arizona
Dist. of Columbia	Indiana	Georgia	California
Maine	Iowa	Kentucky	Colorado
Maryland	Kansas	Louisiana	Hawaii
Massachusetts	Michigan	Mississippi	Idaho
New Hampshire	Minnesota	No. Carolina	Montana
New Jersey	Missouri	Oklahoma	Nevada
New York	Nebraska	So. Carolina	New Mexico
Pennsylvania	No. Dakota	Tennessee	Oregon
Rhode Island	Ohio	Texas	Utah
Vermont	So. Dakota	Virginia	Washington
	Wisconsin	W. Virginia	Wyoming

<sup>a</sup> - Further refinements in numerical computations, particularly regional differences in response rates, may have the effect of somewhat reducing the Central and increasing the South and West regional estimates.

EFFECT OF DIFFERENCES BETWEEN TWO POPULATION DEFINITIONS

While the average household size for all persons (Jewish and non-Jewish) in Jewish households closely approximates three persons (2.98), the average number of "Jewish persons in Jewish households" was 2.76. (Table 2) This is a difference of about 7.4 per cent. The differences in household size are apparent in Table 2. There are more single person households in tabulating only Jews, and smaller proportions of units with three or more Jewish members.

TABLE 2

PER CENT DISTRIBUTIONS OF "JEWISH HOUSEHOLDS"  
BY NUMBER OF "ALL PERSONS" AND BY NUMBER OF JEWS

<u>Households Classified by Number of All Persons Present</u>		<u>Households Classified by Number of Jews Present</u>	
<u>Number in Household</u>	<u>Per Cent</u>	<u>Number in Household</u>	<u>Per Cent</u>
1	14.7	1	18.4
2	30.8	2	31.1
3	15.7	3	14.1
4	23.6	4	20.7
5	10.5	5	9.8
6	3.7	6	3.1
7	0.4	7	0.3
8	0.1	8	0.1
9+	0.2	9+	#
NR	<u>0.3</u>	NR	<u>0.4</u>
TOTAL	100.0		98.0(a)
Average Size	2.98(b)		2.76(b)

NR - Not Reported

# - Less than .05 of one per cent

(a) - In two per cent of all households reached, respondents revealed in the course of the interview that, reflecting current attitudes, the household contained no "Jewish" persons. Here, non-Jewishness is defined by the respondent's own description, although some Jewish ancestry or heritage would have been in evidence

(b) - Data based only on households interviewed; no adjustment for presumed smaller household size among households where interview could not be taken

CONVERSION AMONG HOUSEHOLD HEADS

A further aspect affecting Jewish population estimates is conversion into or out of Judaism, or informal change in the person's self-description as Jew or non-Jew. There are indications that some persons shift their own identification in religious-cultural ideology, - as from being non-Jewish to being Jewish, or vice versa, - by changes in their personal attitudes, even though they do not necessarily confirm this change by formal conversion.

In this context, TABLE 3, Heads of Jewish Households by Jewishness at Birth and Now, provides relevant information: nearly 95 per cent of the household heads included in the NJPS indicate that they were born Jewish and are now Jewish. However, some 2.6 per cent are not Jewish now and indicate that they were not born Jewish, presumably representing mainly non-Jewish household heads in intermarriages. An additional 1.2 per cent were born Jewish but are not Jewish now indicating drift from or conversion out of Judaism. The reverse, not born Jewish but now Jewish, accounts for 1.1 per cent of household heads.

For household heads at least, "loss" due to conversion out is nearly counter-balanced by conversion "in". Ninety-six per cent, more or less, were born Jewish. A similar proportion now identify as Jewish.

The findings in TABLE 3 must be interpreted with some caution because for household heads who have converted out of Judaism or made a purposeful move to completely cut ties with anything Jewish (and where associated household members are likewise non-Jewish), there may be a tendency in actual field operations to miss some of these households despite the definitions employed.

Furthermore, the proportion now non-Jewish in Jewish households would be higher if TABLE 3 was based on all individual adults rather than on household heads only. The key factor is intermarriage. There are proportionately more households headed by some one 65 and over out of all households than there are adults aged 65 and over out of all adults. Since intermarriage rates are heavier in the younger age groups, TABLE 3 tends towards a minimal figure. Also, in intermarriage, the male (generally classified as the household head where husband and wife both are present), is more than twice as likely to be Jewish than the female spouse.

TABLE 3

PER CENT DISTRIBUTION OF HEADS OF JEWISH HOUSEHOLDS  
BY JEWISHNESS AT BIRTH AND NOW

Current Status \ Born	Jewish	Not Jewish	Total
	Jewish	94.9	1.2
Not Jewish	1.1	2.6	3.7
Total	96.0	3.8	99.8*

\* Data not available on .2 of one per cent of household heads

TABLE 4 - Number of Jewish Grandparents - is consistent with the findings of the previous Tables. Ninety-five per cent of household heads report that all their grandparents were or are Jewish. A mixed pattern of two or three Jewish grandparents characterizes slightly less than two per cent, and an additional three per cent trace their origins to entirely non-Jewish grandparental ancestry.

TABLE 4

NUMBER OF JEWISH GRANDPARENTS  
REPORTED BY HEADS OF JEWISH HOUSEHOLDS

<u>Number of Grandparents</u>	<u>Per Cent of Total Heads of Households</u>
0	3.1
1	-
2	1.8
3	0.1
4	95.0
TOTAL	100.0

## STUDY BACKGROUND

To assure representativeness, the National Jewish Population Study took account of the varied characteristics of the United States Jewish population, including its geographic distribution, and those not affiliated with organized Jewish life. Prior estimates erred in the direction of higher levels of Jewish identification when only "master lists" of known Jewish households were used as a basis for interviews and estimates, rather than including in the sample unaffiliated Jews. Also, indirect procedures, such as estimates of Jewish population by analysis of public school absences on Yom Kippur, have become less accurate over time; nor can United States Census data be directly employed to indicate United States Jewish population size or distribution. No "religious preference" question has been included in a decennial census nor, since 1957, (when a special United States Census sample addressed this issue of religious preference) been included in sample projects.

Finally, many prior estimates of the United States Jewish population have been derived principally by "adding up" local Jewish community estimates. These, in turn, were obtained by means of significantly differing procedures, ranging from "educated guesses" to rigorous research. While practically useful, the scientific validity of these estimate baselines was uncertain. The NJPS used a scientific sample design that took specific note of overall variations in Jewish community size, local Jewish population concentrations, and that reached marginal Jews as well as those normally known by their participation in Jewish communal activity.

## THE NJPS DEFINITION OF 'JEWISHNESS'

To qualify a household for inclusion in the NJPS, at least one person within it was required to be "Jewish". The chosen definition was purposely broad: A "screening section" in the interview provided a formal basis for determining whether a person was to be considered "Jewish", and whether the household therefore was to be included in the Study. If the person responding provided a "yes" reply for himself and/or for one or more household members to one or more of the following questions... (1) "was person born Jewish?"; (2) "is person Jewish now?"; (3) "was person's father born Jewish?"; (4) "was person's mother born Jewish?"; - ...the household was considered eligible for inclusion in the NJPS. In practice, beyond this definition, there often occurred a rapid overall voluntary affirmation that the entire household was Jewish, particularly if all household members were characterized by affirmative replies to each of the four screening questions - or alternatively a quick end to the interview if the household clearly was not Jewish.

It is these definitions which distinguish between the concepts "persons in Jewish households" and "Jewish persons in Jewish households". The latter include only persons who meet the 'screening section' criteria given above.