

Berman Jewish DataBank

# Jewish Population in Canada, 2015

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## CURRENT JEWISH POPULATION REPORTS

Reprinted from the *American  
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## BERMAN JEWISH DATABANK

A Project of  
The Jewish Federations  
OF NORTH AMERICA



### Berman Jewish DataBank

A project of The Jewish Federations of North America  
*in collaboration with*

The Berman Jewish Policy Archive @ Stanford

The Center for Judaic Studies and  
Contemporary Jewish Life at the  
University of Connecticut

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***The American Jewish Year Book 2015***  
***The Annual Record of the North American Jewish Communities***

**This Report derives from Chapter 6 of the *American Jewish Year Book, 2015*.**

The *American Jewish Year Book* is "The Annual Record of the North American Jewish Communities." This volume is a very important and prestigious annual publication because it has acted as a major resource for academic researchers, researchers at Jewish institutions and organizations, practitioners at Jewish institutions and organizations, the media, both Jewish and secular, educated leaders and lay persons, and libraries, particularly University and Jewish libraries, for up-to-date information about the American and Canadian Jewish communities. For decades, the *American Jewish Year Book* has been the premiere place for leading academics to publish long review chapters on topics of interest to the American Jewish community.

***Obtaining The American Jewish Year Book, 2015***

Hard bound and Kindle copies are available at [www.amazon.com](http://www.amazon.com). Persons with access to University libraries that offer Springer's eBook Collection can obtain a soft cover copy or an electronic copy.

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The 2015 volume is 897 plus xvii pages.

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# **Jewish Population of Canada, 2015**

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## Jewish Population of Canada, 2015

For many decades, the census of the Canadian population provided an important opportunity to obtain a demographic "snapshot" of the Canadian Jewish community. A major census was distributed every decade and contained a wealth of information related to the social, cultural, and economic characteristics of Canadian Jews.<sup>1</sup> The two questions used to identify Jews, namely religion and ethnicity, were located on the census "long-form." However, in 2011, the long-form became voluntary rather than mandatory; hence, this instrument became a survey rather than a census.

The 2011 National Household Survey (NHS) was distributed to one-third of Canadian households, compared to the 20% who received the long-form in 2001. However, whereas the response rate for the census was nearly universal, it was 73.9% for the NHS. Moreover, because the sample was self-selected, it was difficult to know whether certain populations were less inclined to respond, such as economically disadvantaged individuals, the less educated, and recent immigrants.<sup>2</sup>

Statistics Canada applied rigorous statistical treatments to deal with possible gaps in the data, and assured users that it would only release information if it had confidence in its reliability. An examination of the final data sets related to Jewish communities, along with such key variables as poverty and intermarriage, seemed to indicate that the data did "make sense" in light of statistical trends extrapolated from previous censuses.

Respondents were identified as Jews according to the "Jewish Standard Definition," formulated by Jim Torczyner of McGill University in 1971, which used a combination of religious and ethnic identification. However, because the ethnicity variable has been slowly eroding in terms of its usefulness in identifying Jews (likely because respondents were increasingly identifying themselves as Canadian and as having no religion), the Jewish Standard Definition was revised in 2011 and expanded to include a further set of variables, such as having an Israeli ethnicity, and having knowledge of Hebrew or Yiddish.<sup>3</sup> All in all, this "Revised Jewish Standard Definition" did not result in a substantial increase to the final count of Canadian Jews, only adding about 6,300 persons.

Despite the limitations of the 2011 NHS, this instrument nonetheless represents an important opportunity for community leaders and planners to understand the demographic situation of the Canadian Jewish population better. We are fortunate to have a national survey which includes questions related to ethnicity and religion (as the American census does not).<sup>4</sup> Also, the NHS has a much larger scope than the Canadian Jewish community can undertake on its own.

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<sup>1</sup> A census is also distributed in the middle of every decade, but it does not contain a religion question, and therefore is much less useful for identifying Jews.

<sup>2</sup> In the case of Jewish communities, it is possible that the ultra-Orthodox were also under-represented in the final count.

<sup>3</sup> For a more comprehensive description of the erosion of the utility of the ethnicity variable in identifying Jews see Weinfeld and Schnoor (2015).

<sup>4</sup> More specifically, the US Census asks only one ethnicity-related question identifying respondents of Hispanic or Latino descent. The American Community Survey, an annual demographic study of the US population, does ask questions on "ancestry" and language spoken at home.

## Basic Demographics

According to the NHS, the Jewish population of Canada numbered 391,665 persons in 2011.<sup>5</sup> This represented an increase from 2001, when there were 374,060 Jews. Between 2001 and 2011, the Canadian Jewish population thus increased by 17,605 persons, or 4.7% (**Table 1** and **Figure 1**).

The gain between 2001 and 2011 was slightly larger than that between 1991 and 2001. In the latter decade, the community increased by 14,950 persons, or 4.2%. In short, at least for the past twenty years, the growth rate of the Canadian Jewish population has not been remarkable.

A more pronounced increase for the Canadian Jewish community was evident between 1981 and 1991, when it increased by 45,245 persons, or 14.4%. This is likely related to the beginning of significant immigration to Canada by Jews from the Former Soviet Union (FSU). In fact, this gain of 45,245 persons was the largest increase experienced by the national Jewish population since the large influx of immigrants in the 1950s.

All in all, the number of Canadian Jews has been rising steadily since the turn of the past century. In the 1930s, restricted Jewish immigration to Canada slowed some of the growth experienced in previous decades. Significant levels of immigration then resumed immediately after World War II.

Jews constituted 1.2% of the total Canadian population of 32.9 million in 2011, compared to 2.1% for the US (Sheskin and Dashefsky 2015). The total Canadian population has been increasing at a faster pace than the Jewish population. For instance, between 1991 and 2011, the Jewish population grew by 9.1%, compared to 21.7% for Canada's total population.

According to the 2011 NHS, the Jewish community ranked seventeenth among ethnic groups in Canada. The ten largest ethnic affiliations were British (6.5 million), Canadian (6.0 million), French (3.7 million), German (2.4 million), Aboriginal (1.8 million), Chinese (1.5 million), Italian (1.4 million), East Indian (1.1 million), Ukrainian (1 million), and Polish (644,700). It is noteworthy that the Jewish population ranked twelfth among ethnic groups in 2001, five rankings above its current status.

In 2011, the Jewish community ranked seventh with respect to religious identity. The five largest religious groups in Canada were Catholics (12.8 million), Protestants (8.7 million), Muslims (1.0 million), Christian Orthodox (550,690), and Hindus (497,965).

Almost one-quarter (23.9%) of the total Canadian population, or about 7.9 million persons, indicated that they had no religious identity. This category included persons who defined themselves as agnostics, atheists, or humanists, or who did not identify with any religion at all. It is not clear to what extent highly secular Jews said they had no religious identity. It is thus possible that these individuals were under-represented in the final count of Jews (unless they indicated a Jewish ethnicity).

Finally, the Canadian Jewish community was the fourth largest Jewish community in the world in 2012 (using the year closest to the Canadian census, but see DellaPergola 2015 for current figures). Israel had the largest Jewish population followed by the US,

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<sup>5</sup> All 2011 NHS data cited in this report were derived from Statistics Canada, special order tabulations for Jewish Federations of Canada - UIA, CO-1421. Most of the descriptions related to the data were adapted from Shahar (2014).

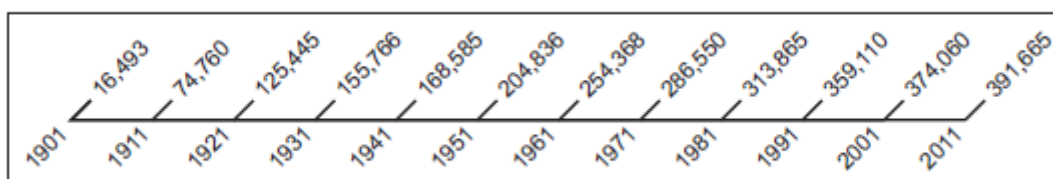
France (480,000), and Canada (391,665). The Jewish populations of the United Kingdom and the Russian Federation numbered 291,000 and 194,000, respectively.

The Canadian Jewish community constituted 2.8% of the total 13,746,100 Jews in the world in 2012, and 5.0% of the 7,845,000 Jews living in the Diaspora in 2012. The Jewish population of Canada comprised 6.8% of the Jews residing in North America.

**Table 1** Jewish Population of Canada: A Historical Summary

	Jewish Population	Change From Previous Census	% Change From Previous Census
2011	391,665	17,605	4.7%
2001	374,060	14,950	4.2%
1991	359,110	45,245	14.4%
1981	313,865	27,315	9.5%
1971	286,550	32,182	12.7%
1961	254,368	49,532	24.2%
1951	204,836	36,251	21.5%
1941	168,585	12,819	8.2%
1931	155,766	30,321	24.2%
1921	125,445	50,685	67.8%
1911	74,760	58,267	353.3%
1901	16,493	--	--

Note: 1991 to 2011 are based on the Revised Standard Jewish Definition described in the methodological discussion above. The rest of the figures are based on the Jewish Standard Definition (1971 and 1981), or were derived from either the religion or ethnicity variables individually (1901 to 1961).



**Figure 1** Jewish Population of Canada, 1901-2011



## Provincial & Metropolitan Population Distributions

**Table 2** and **Map 1** show the distribution of Jewish populations across provinces and territories. More than half (57.9%, or 226,610 persons) of Jews in Canada reside in Ontario.

Quebec has 93,625 Jewish residents, and about a quarter (23.9%) of the total Jewish population of Canada. British Columbia has 35,005 Jews, or 8.9% of the total Jewish population of Canada.

All other provinces have less than 5% of the national Jewish population. Alberta has 15,795 Jewish residents, or 4% of the country's Jewish population. Manitoba has 14,345 Jews, or 3.7% of the total. The Atlantic Provinces have 4,175 Jews, or 1.1% of the country's total Jewish population. Saskatchewan has 1,905 Jews, or 0.5% of the country's total.

There are 145 Jews in the Yukon, 40 in the Northwest Territories, and 20 in Nunavut. Although these numbers are quite small, it is nonetheless instructive that Jews populate just about every region of the country, including the northern territories.

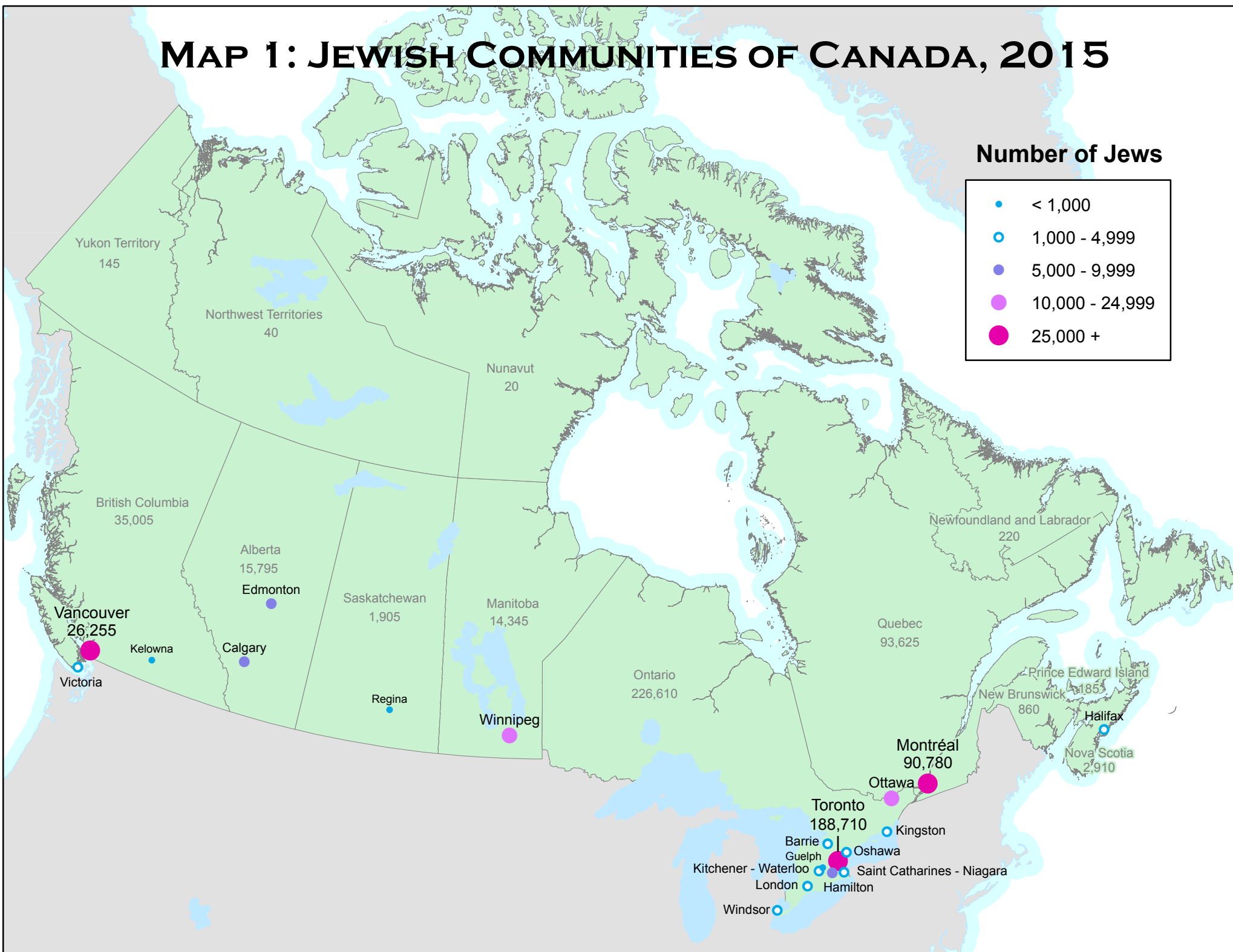
**Table 2** Jewish Population Distribution: Provinces & Territories

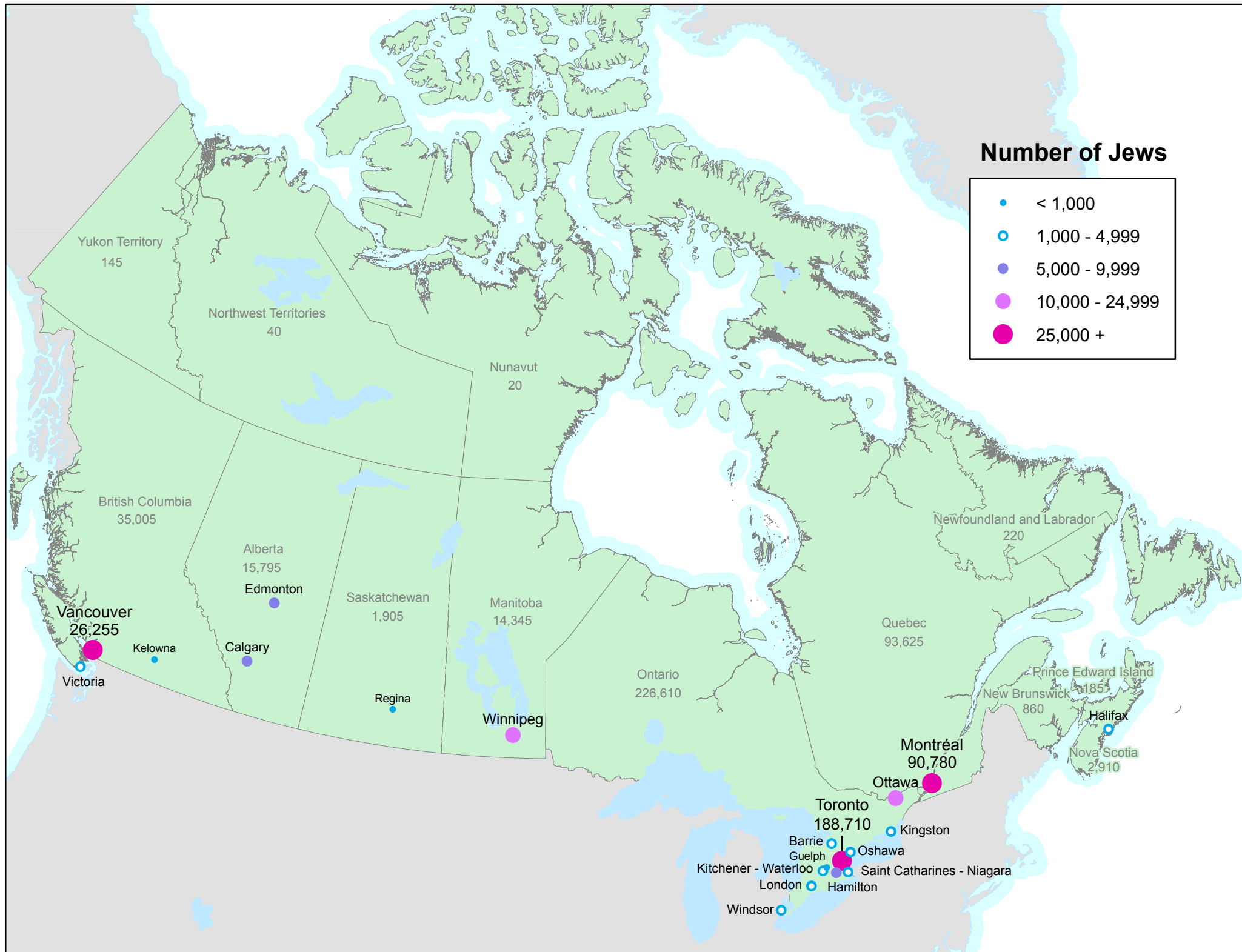
Province / Territory	Jewish Population	% of Canadian Jewish Population
Nova Scotia	2,910	0.8%
New Brunswick	860	0.2%
Newfoundland/Labrador	220	0.1%
Prince Edward Island	185	0.0%
<b>(Total Atlantic Canada)</b>	<b>(4,175)</b>	<b>(1.1%)</b>
Quebec	93,625	23.9%
Ontario	226,610	57.9%
Manitoba	14,345	3.7%
Saskatchewan	1,905	0.5%
Alberta	15,795	4.0%
British Columbia	35,005	8.9%
Yukon	145	0.0%
Northwest Territories	40	0.0%
Nunavut	20	0.0%
<b>Total Canada</b>	<b>391,665</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

# MAP 1: JEWISH COMMUNITIES OF CANADA, 2015

## Number of Jews

- < 1,000
- 1,000 - 4,999
- 5,000 - 9,999
- 10,000 - 24,999
- 25,000 +





**Table 3** presents the 20 largest Jewish communities in Canada, which account for 95% of Canada's Jewish population. The Toronto metropolitan area is home to 188,710 Jews, and includes about half (48.2%) of Canada's Jewish population. The Montreal community numbers 90,780 Jews, and constitutes about a quarter (23.2%) of the Jewish population of Canada. Vancouver has a Jewish population of 26,255, representing 6.7% of the national Jewish population.

The rest of the Jewish communities in Canada each number less than 15,000 persons. For instance, Ottawa has 14,010 Jews, Winnipeg has 13,690, Calgary has 8,335, Edmonton has 5,550, and Hamilton has 5,110.

### **Focus on the Age of the Jewish Population**

The Canadian Jewish population has a somewhat larger proportion of children (age 0-14) than the total population (18.2% and 17.0% respectively). The Jewish population has a similar percentage in the age 15-24 cohort compared with the total Canadian population (13.4% and 13.2% respectively).

In the economically productive age 25-44 cohort, the discrepancy between the two distributions is more marked. Less than a quarter (23.5%) of Jews fall into this age cohort, compared to 26.7% of Canada's total population. The Jewish community also has a somewhat smaller proportion in the age 45-64 cohort than the overall Canadian population (28.0% and 29.3% respectively).

Finally, a comparison of the two age distributions shows that the Jewish community has a significantly larger proportion of persons age 65 and over (16.9%) than the total Canadian population (13.9%).

The median age of the national Jewish population is 40.5 years, slightly higher than that of Canada's overall population (40.1 years), but a bit lower than the median age of 42 for US Jews, based on the 2000-01 National Jewish Population Survey. Ethnic groups with the oldest median ages include the British (48.7 years), Americans (45.9 years), French (44.8 years), Germans (40.7 years), Jews (40.5 years), Greeks (40.4 years), and Poles (40.3 years). These ethnic groups generally involve older, more established communities, whose peak periods of immigration to Canada have long passed. Since there has not been a large influx of recent immigrants among these groups, their median ages remain at fairly high levels.

The youngest median ages were reported by the Pakistani (26.0 years), African (27.9 years), Aboriginal (28.4 years), Arab (29.3 years), Latin American (30.1 years), Caribbean (31.2 years), and Korean (33.7 years) communities. Most of these latter populations have a large number of more recent immigrants, many of whom settled in Canada in the past two decades. This infusion of people, often involving younger families, has revitalized these communities, and has kept their median ages lower than the rest of the population.



**Table 3** Twenty Largest Canadian Jewish Communities

Metropolitan Area / Province	Jewish Population	% of Canadian Jewish Population
Toronto, ON	188,710	48.2%
Montreal, QC	90,780	23.2%
Vancouver, BC	26,255	6.7%
Ottawa, ON	14,010	3.6%
Winnipeg, MB	13,690	3.5%
Calgary, AB	8,335	2.1%
Edmonton, AB	5,550	1.4%
Hamilton, ON	5,110	1.3%
Victoria, BC	2,740	0.7%
London, ON	2,675	0.7%
Halifax, NS	2,120	0.5%
Kitchener / Waterloo, ON	2,015	0.5%
Oshawa, ON	1,670	0.4%
Windsor, ON	1,515	0.4%
Barrie, ON	1,445	0.4%
St. Catharines-Niagara, ON	1,375	0.4%
Kingston, ON	1,185	0.3%
Guelph, ON	925	0.2%
Regina, SK	900	0.2%
Kelowna, BC	900	0.2%
<b>Total</b>		<b>94.9%</b>

## Focus on Inter marriage

Inter marriage in the National Household survey (NHS) analysis was defined as a situation in which a person who falls under the Revised Jewish Standard Definition marries someone not included under this criterion. Individuals who converted to Judaism are considered as Jewish according to this definition. Thus, inter marriage as described in this report only examines situations in which the non-Jewish spouse did not convert to Judaism, which is consistent with the halachic definition. Note as well that the statistics on inter marriage include married individuals as well as individuals living in common law arrangements.<sup>6</sup>

According to the NHS, of a total of 184,705 couples in Canada in which at least one spouse is Jewish, 48,515 involve a marriage to a non-Jew, representing a couples inter marriage rate of 26.3%.<sup>7</sup> Of inter married couples, 54.4% involve households where the husband is Jewish and the wife is non-Jewish; and 45.6% involve households where the husband is non-Jewish and the wife is Jewish. In other words, Jewish men are more inclined to inter marry than Jewish women.

The couples inter marriage rate among Canadian Jews has risen in the past decade. The rate of inter marriage was 21.7% in 2001, compared to 26.3% in 2011. In 2001, 38,010 couple households involved an inter married arrangement, compared to 48,515 in 2011.

The inter marriage rate of Canadian Jews nonetheless is significantly lower than that of American Jews. A 2013 national study of American Jews by the Pew Research Center (2013) found that 61% of couples with at least one Jewish spouse are inter married, significantly above the Canadian inter marriage rate (26.3%) (Berman Jewish DataBank 2015).

Significant regional differences exist in Canadian inter marriage rates. Montreal (16.7%) and Toronto (18.0%) have the lowest inter marriage rates. These are considered to be more "traditional" communities, with significant numbers of ultra-Orthodox Jews. The highest inter marriage rates among major Canadian communities are found in Vancouver (43.4%) and Ottawa (40.4%). The Winnipeg Jewish community falls roughly in the middle of the distribution of inter marriage rates (25.4%).

Using the NHS, it is possible to crosstabulate inter marriage with a number of other variables to profile those most likely to marry non-Jews. For instance, the inter marriage rate in households where both spouses are under age 30 is 43.0%. It is 38.1% if only one spouse is between age 30-39, and 22.4% if both spouses are age 40 and over. In short, the inter marriage rate in households with younger spouses (under age 40) is significantly higher than those with older spouses.

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<sup>6</sup> The descriptions related to inter marriage were adapted from Shahar (2015).

<sup>7</sup> Inter marriage rates may be reported based on *married couples* or *individuals*. As an illustration, imagine that two weddings occur. In wedding one, Moshe (a Jew) marries Rachel (also a Jew). In wedding two, Abraham (a Jew) marries Christine (a non-Jew). Thus, there are two married couples, one of whom is inter married. In this illustration, the *couples' inter marriage rate* is 50%. Another method of calculating an inter marriage rate, however, is to note that there are three Jews (Moshe, Rachel, and Abraham) and one of the three (Abraham) is married to a non-Jew (Christine). In this illustration, the *individual inter marriage rate* is 33%. The inter marriage rates in this report are based on married couples.

The percentage of common law arrangements among intermarried households is significantly higher than among households in which both spouses are Jewish (26.4% and 4.2% respectively). In short, more than a quarter of households with intermarried couples involve common law partnerships.

The NHS findings suggest that a lower level of secular education is correlated with a higher rate of intermarriage among Canadian Jews, although the correlation is not a strong one. Studies in the US (Cohen 1989; Kotler-Berkowitz 2003) have also found such an inverse correlation between level of education and intermarriage.

The NHS data also showed that the highest income families (earning an annual income of \$150,000 or more) have the lowest rate of intermarriage. Trends from the National Jewish Population Survey (2000-01) in the US partly confirmed these findings. The American study found that intermarriage rates peaked in the middle of the income distribution, and were lower in the extremes.<sup>8</sup>

Finally, perhaps the most dramatic finding from the NHS showed that only 27.0% of the youngest children of intermarried couples are identified by their parents as Jews by religion; a much larger percentage (56.4%) have no religious identification; and the rest (16.6%) are identified as having other religions. In other words, almost three-quarters (73.0%) of children in intermarried households are not identified as Jews. It is difficult to say whether these children are having minimal or no exposure to Judaism, but the findings are suggestive nonetheless.

### **Focus on a Community: Montreal<sup>9</sup>**

Montreal has long been a major hub of Jewish life in North America. The Montreal Jewish community is the second largest in Canada, with a population of 90,780. It has about a quarter (23.2%) of the country's Jewish population.

The Montreal Jewish community likely reached its peak size in the mid-1970s. However, in 1976 a secessionist government was elected in predominantly French-speaking Quebec. This resulted in significant feelings of insecurity and malaise among Jews in Montreal, leading to steady outmigration and a population decrease.

The 1971 census reported 112,020 Jews in Montreal. In 1981, the Jewish community diminished by 7.4%, to 103,765 individuals. The period between 1971 and 1981 marked the first time the local Jewish population decreased since the turn of the past century. The Jewish community diminished further to 101,560 in 1991 and 93,540 in 2001. The 90,780 Jews in 2011 is well below the 1961 total of 102,724.

Aside from steady population losses, the local community has faced other challenges, including the highest rate of poverty (20.0%) of any major Canadian Jewish community. This mirrors the situation for the overall population of Montreal, which has a higher poverty rate (20.5%) than any other major metropolitan area in Canada. The poverty rate for Canadian Jews overall is 14.6%.

The Montreal Jewish population also has a higher proportion of seniors (age 65 and over) (20.4%) than any other major Jewish community in Canada. The proportion of

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<sup>8</sup> Special analysis done of NJPS 2000-01 and personally communicated to the author by J. Ament, Senior Project Director, Research Department, United Jewish Communities.

<sup>9</sup> Future reports will focus on other major Jewish communities in Canada.

seniors in the overall Canadian Jewish population is 16.9%. About one in ten individuals in the Montreal Jewish community is age 75 and over (10.7%).

The Montreal Jewish community is unique in many respects, particularly in a North American context. It has a large Sephardic contingent, numbering 22,225 persons in 2011, and comprising about one quarter of the local Jewish population. There is also a burgeoning local ultra-Orthodox community. Recent estimates suggest approximately 15,000 persons among the ultra-Orthodox community.<sup>10</sup> The intermarriage rate of Montreal Jews (15.0%) is among the lowest of any Jewish community on the continent. Finally, about 70% of Montreal Jews are bilingual, conversant in both English and French.

A recent community survey by the author indicates that the Montreal Jewish population continues to enjoy among the highest quality of Jewish life in North America. Its members exhibit among the highest levels of ritual adherence, synagogue membership, Jewish education, and connection to Israel of any Jewish center on the continent (Shahar 2010).

## Summary

The Canadian Jewish population has seen only modest growth in the past twenty years, following a more significant increase between 1981 and 1991. The latter decade coincided with the beginning of significant immigration by Jews from the FSU. Jews reside in every region of Canada including the Northern Territories, although they are concentrated heavily in the major urban centers. The metropolitan area of Toronto is home to 188,710 Jews, and includes about half (48.2%) of Canada's Jewish population. The Montreal community numbers 90,780 Jews. The median age (40.5 years) of Canadian Jews is slightly older than the national average, but much older than ethnic groups with large numbers of more recent immigrants.

The intermarriage rate among Canadian Jews (26.3%) is well below that of American Jews (61%). However, there are significant differences across Canadian metropolitan areas, with the lowest intermarriage rates evident in more traditional communities, such as Montreal and Toronto. Particularly relevant to the issue of Jewish continuity are the findings that the intermarriage rate among households with both spouses under age 30 is 43.0%; and only about a quarter of the youngest children of intermarried couples are identified by their parents as Jews by religion.

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<sup>10</sup> These estimates were derived by the author using household counts from current community lists and extrapolations of average household size based on Shahar (2003).



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