

Sociodemographic Surveys of World Jewry in the 1990s: Aims, Techniques, Implications

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The Sociodemographic Disciplinary Context of Jewish Population Research

From the general disciplinary viewpoint of population and social studies, it appears that in the relatively open context of contemporary societies, identity, continuity and survival of population minorities (or subpopulations) depend on a complex of different factors. Some of these consist of *biologic-demographic* processes, such as family formation, generational replacement, morbidity and mortality patterns, geographical mobility, and changing population composition. Other equally significant trends relate to changing types and intensities of individual or community identification, and patterns of accession or secession to and from a given subpopulation, whose nature pertains to the *psychosocial/cultural* domain. Each of these different processes and their interactions may affect the size and composition of a given minority, the definition of its boundaries vis-a-vis other groups, its rate of increase or decrease, the modes of identification of individuals with their group(s) of reference—whether current or past—, and the groups' longer-term chances for sociodemographic continuity, expansion or erosion.

One of the most interesting questions in a general analytical context is whether the leading trend of contemporary population minorities is to lose their distinctiveness in the framework of a broad process of convergence and assimilation, or, on the contrary, to become more sharply defined through differential population processes. Because of the particularly broad and complex historical, geographical and sociological perspective offered by the Jewish experience, studies of this specific group may offer excellent tests of propositions of a wider applicability in the field of social demography.

One conceptual aspect appears to be of great significance in the study of contemporary Jewries, and of general relevance in the investigation of subpopulations. An effort should be made to define the group in question according to criteria that are as comprehensive as possible, and attention should be paid to the differential sociodemographic trends within the minority's clearly recognizable "core", and its periphery of marginal, uncertain, or former members. A further relevant concept is the "enlarged" minority, which also includes those individuals who are not group members themselves but live in households which include one or more members of the group investigated. This "core/enlarged" typology of subpopulations is both the

product of past demographic and identificational processes, and an important possible determinant of their future development. Focus on these internal distinctions, as well as comparisons with other relevant groups, constitute some of the prerequisites in the scientific study of Jewish population worldwide, in the framework of a general disciplinary perspective.

The Jewish Community Context

Looking at the same questions in a Jewish community context, over the last several years, researchers, community leaders and professionals seem to have become more interested in the main demographic, socioeconomic and identificational trends affecting Jewish populations in the Diaspora and in Israel. Growing awareness exists of the mutual link between adequate knowledge of Jewish population trends, the likelihood of successful planning of Jewish community life, and continuity of the Jewish people.

A lively debate has developed about the major thrust and implications of Jewish population changes which may affect the size and composition of Jewish communities in the Diaspora at the local and national levels, and, consequently, world Jewry globally. Conflicting interpretations of recent Jewish demographic trends have been proposed by various scholars stressing respectively the key-words *continuity*, *transformation* and *erosion*—sometimes based on different readings of the same empirical evidence, but more often as a result of different approaches to the meaning, representativity and validity of available data (Schmelz, 1981; Goldscheider, 1986; DellaPergola and Schmelz, 1989; Goldstein, 1989).

These debates are not only a matter of academic confrontation between supporters of different theoretical approaches in the study of Jewish population and society. Understanding the basic levels and changes in Jewish family formation and dissolution, socioeconomic stratification, residential redistribution, patterns of Jewish identification, and a variety of other measurable aspects of Jewish population dynamics and community life has immediate and wide-ranging practical implications. Indeed, intellectual command of the evolution of each of these variables and processes constitutes an essential prerequisite to the daily effort of the organized Jewish community to cope with the needs of a demanding, sophisticated and mobile Jewish constituency. In spite of these controversies, and as a matter of general consensus, at least as a declarative proposition, the issue of interrelations between *quantity*—the number and sociodemographic characteristics of the Jews—and *quality*—the cultural contents of Jewish community life—has become a standard item on the contemporary Jewish agenda.

Unfortunately, available data on the characteristics of contemporary Jewish populations tend to be segmented and partial in geographical coverage, lacking minimal methodological coordination, often of poor reliability, and obsolete—if not missing altogether. While the Jewish population in Israel is continually and thoroughly documented through the activities of the local Central Bureau of Statistics, much of what we know about diaspora Jewry reflects a data base heavily influenced by research efforts conducted during the 1970s. Public response to some

of the challenges evoked by such research may have been adequate, but the world, and the Jewish world in particular, is evolving rapidly. Given this situation, the Jewish world of the late 1980s has *not* been adequately investigated.

The need for a fresh round of data collection on Jewish population and community characteristics and trends has been felt for years, keeping in mind both the specific requirements of local communities, and the relevance of comparisons across communities based on similar sets of information. Comparisons can provide highly useful insights by showing in which respects and how much a particular community differs from others of the same size or in the same region of the world. Such data touch upon topics of relevance both to the academic study of Jewish society, and to the daily management of Jewish community services. The organization of effective Jewish community services, whether aimed at children and youth, at heads of households and spouses, at the elderly, at the community in its totality or at any specific sub-group within it, requires a precise knowledge of facts relevant for planning. Frequent updating of such information is essential for the process of decision-making to be effective.

The need for relevant Jewish data becomes even more pressing in the context of the rapid ongoing changes on the world scene, particularly the new political equilibrium in Eastern and Central Europe, the improved chances for Jewish international migration from those areas, and the complex process of immigrant absorption in the countries of resettlement.

Main Topical Focus

Rapid changes in Jewish population patterns have nearly everywhere created new challenges both to the understanding of the processes, and to the corporate facing of them. In our view, thanks to research conducted over the last several years, seven major topics command special attention. Each holds a central position at the crossroads between a purely social scientific perspective and the actual needs of a Jewish community wishing to ensure its own continuity:

1. *Changes in family formation and structure*: shifting patterns of singlehood, marriage, divorce, and their implications for Jewish household structure and sex-role allocation; the conventional Jewish family type, predominant in the past vs. its growing and manifold alternatives.
2. *Intermarriage and its implications*: frequency, group identification of partners and modes of identity transmission (patrilinear, matrilinear, or otherwise) to children of intermarriage; community attitudes toward intermarriage.
3. *Jewish fertility*: levels, differentials and implications for the changing size and characteristics of the Jewish child population and for the age structure of the Jewish population in general.
4. *Jewish education*: types, levels, program intensity, quality, and returns; effects of demographic trends on the size and structure of the Jewish educational system.
5. *Changes in age structure of the Jewish population*: aging and its implications for community resource investments for the different age brackets of which a community is composed, and for the elderly in particular.

6. *Residential changes of national and local scope*: metropolitan and regional concentration vs. dispersion, keeping close to traditional primary locations of the Jewish community vs. large scale relocation; the variable size and density of a community as a background to relevant sociodemographic processes; more specific to the urban context, suburbanization vs. gentrification, and their implications for the location and viability of Jewish community facilities and services.
7. *International migration and its absorption in the countries of destination*: the renewal of large-scale Jewish international migration imposes an attentive evaluation of the numbers and characteristics of potential migrants, and of the types of decision making necessary for their successful absorption in a new environment (in Israel or elsewhere).

In each of these areas, which only relate to the most fundamental socio-demographic and identificational processes, data-based planning appears to be extremely important for the future of the Jewish community. From the viewpoint of research bound to take place in the near future, this requires that proposed survey instruments incorporate adequate coverage of each of the topics mentioned above, as well as of others—whether in the main core questionnaire, or as additional modules to be submitted to relevant population subsamples.

A New Round of Surveys

As a response to these perceived or foreseeable research issues and policy requirements, a major international Symposium on Jewish population trends and policies was held in Jerusalem in 1987, with the participation of prominent researchers and Jewish community leaders. One of the aims of the Symposium was to review the current status of knowledge, and the relevant sources of data available in the field of Jewish population research.

Following the 1987 Symposium recommendations, the undertaking of a new series of sociodemographic surveys of Jewish populations was decided upon as a joint effort by the World Zionist Organization, the World Jewish Congress, the Israeli Government, and the major Jewish community organizations in the different regions and countries. The Institute of Contemporary Jewry of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem offered scientific coordination of the project. An international scientific advisory committee (ISAC) was set up to establish the guidelines to such a large-scale project. ISAC, co-chaired by Roberto Bachi (The Hebrew University) and Sidney Goldstein (Brown University), includes experts in Jewish population studies in North America, Latin America, Western Europe, and Israel (ISAC, 1989).

The proposed surveys are aimed at providing a wealth of data on the demographic, socioeconomic, and sociocultural—including Jewish identification—characteristics in a variety of Jewish communities throughout the world, including most of the larger ones. The concept of *sample surveys* should be emphasized here—instead of the term *census*, as often erroneously used in the media. Sample survey techniques offer a much cheaper, in fact the only feasible mode of data collection

about Jewish populations in the diaspora. They also eliminate from the outset any doubts that might arise in connection with certain interpretations of traditional Jewish laws forbidding the taking of censuses of the Jews.

Complementary Sources of Data

Before addressing this new round of surveys, it should be recalled that in some countries, including Israel, Canada, South Africa, Australia, the Soviet Union, and a few others, recent national censuses did include a question on religion or ethnic origin of the population. These data are sometimes available for analysis. Census data usually provide information about basic socio-demographic characteristics of the Jewish group. On the other hand, the majority of world Jewry is not covered by census data, which makes documentation contingent on Jewish sponsored research initiatives.

TABLE 1. SYNOPSIS OF DATA RESOURCES ON JEWISH POPULATIONS - EARLY 1990s

Country	Estimated Jewish population	Jews per 1,000 total pop.	Accuracy rating	Last census /pop. registr.	Last national Jewish survey	Good Jewish master list	Jewish vital stats.
	"	"	"	"	"	"	"
<u>North America</u>							
Canada	310,000	11.3	C	1991			M
United States	5,575,000	21.8	A		1989-90		
<u>Central America</u>							
Bahamas	300	1.1	C	1970	1973		
Costa Rica	2,000	0.6	C			V	
Cuba	700	0.1	D		1970	V	
Dominican Republic	100	0.0	D				
Guatemala	800	0.1	A		1983	V	
Jamaica	300	0.1	B			V	BDM
Mexico	38,000	0.4	A	1990	1991	V	BD
Netherlands Antilles	400	2.3	D				
Panama	5,000	2.0	C		1960		
Puerto Rico	1,500	0.4	C				
Virgin Islands	300	2.8	C				
Other	300	0.0	D				
<u>South America</u>							
Argentina	213,000	6.4	C	1960		V	DM
Bolivia	700	0.1	B			V	
Brazil	100,000	0.6	C	1980		V	
Chile	15,000	1.1	C	1970	1982	V	D
Colombia	6,500	0.2	C		1977	V	
Ecuador	900	0.1	C			V	
Paraguay	900	0.2	C			V	
Peru	3,100	0.1	B			V	D
Surinam	200	0.5	B			V	
Uruguay	24,000	7.7	C			V	D
Venezuela	20,000	1.0	C			V	D
<u>Oceania</u>							
Australia	89,000	5.1	C	1991			D
New Zealand	4,500	1.3	C	1991			
Other	100	0.0	D				

Several additional materials potentially exist, and should be collected, in the form of vital statistics based on registrations routinely made in the framework of the organized Jewish communities. These other data may not only complete the picture of available information, but—integrated with survey and census data—may make it possible to address important analytic issues that would otherwise be omitted. By integrating these different sources of data for various countries a comprehensive profile of the Jewish population worldwide might eventually be completed.

In this respect, a concise inventory of available national Jewish population data resources is reviewed in Table 1. For each country, the inventory points to the availability of official population censuses, recent sample surveys, good centralized Jewish lists, and reliable Jewish vital statistics. Certain continental patterns should be noted. For example, in Latin America Jewish community membership lists often

TABLE 1 (Continued)

Country	Estimated Jewish population	Jews per 1,000 total pop.	Accuracy rating	Last census /pop. registr.	Last national Jewish survey	Good Jewish master list	Jewish vital stats.
<u>West Europe, EC</u>							
Belgium	31,800	3.2	C				
Denmark	6,400	1.2	C		1968		BDM
France	530,000	9.3	C		1988		DM
Germany	42,500	0.5	C	1987	1991	V	BDM
Greece	4,800	0.5	B			V	BDM
Ireland	1,800	0.5	B	1986			
Italy	31,100	0.5	B		1986	V	BDM
Luxembourg	600	1.6	B	1970			
Netherlands	25,600	1.7	C	1971	1966	V	BDM
Portugal	300	0.0	B			V	
Spain	12,000	0.3	D				
United Kingdom	300,000	5.2	B			(V)	BDM
<u>Other West Europe</u>							
Austria	7,000	0.9	C	1981		V	BDM
Finland	1,300	0.3	A	1990			
Gibraltar	600	19.4	C	1981			
Norway	1,000	0.2	B	1987			BDM
Sweden	15,000	1.7	C				BDM
Switzerland	19,000	2.8	C	1990		(V)	BDM
Other	100	0.1	D				
<u>Former USSR in Europe</u>							
Belarus	58,000	5.6	B	1989			
Estonia	3,500	2.2	A	1991			
Latvia	15,800	5.9	B	1989			
Lithuania	7,300	1.9	B	1989			
Moldova	28,500	6.5	B	1989			
Russia*	430,000	2.9	B	1989			
Ukraine	325,000	6.1	B	1989			
<u>Other East Europe and Balkans</u>							
Bulgaria	2,200	0.2	C	1965			
Czechoslovakia	7,700	0.5	D				
Hungary	56,500	5.4	D	1949			
Poland	3,700	0.1	C		1960-61		
Romania	16,800	0.7	B	1991	1988	V	
Turkey*	19,600	0.3	C	1965	1988	V	BDM
Yugoslavia	4,300	0.2	C	1981	1986	V	

include a high share of the total Jewish population—thus allowing relatively easy and efficient sampling; in Western Europe there still are visible traces of the earlier tradition of collecting Jewish vital statistics.

The World Jewish Population Survey: Project Status

What is the current status of this major research initiative? Actual concrete steps have been taken in a few countries, while there is growing interest in several others. By far the most important ongoing activities concern the United States (Goldstein, 1988). A National Jewish Population Survey was completed in 1989-1990 in the US—

TABLE 1 (Continued)

Country	Estimated Jewish population ^a	Jews per 1,000 total pop.	Accuracy rating ^b	Last census /pop. rgstr.	Last national Jewish survey	Good Jewish master list	Jewish vital stats. ^c
Israel	4,144,600	819.3	A	1991		V	BDM
<u>Former USSR in Asia</u>							
Armenia	300	0.1	B	1989			
Azerbaijan	16,000	2.2	B	1989			
Georgia	20,700	3.8	B	1989			
Kazakhstan	15,300	0.9	B	1989			
Kirghizstan	3,900	0.9	B	1989			
Tajikistan	8,200	1.5	B	1989			
Turkmenistan	2,000	0.5	B	1989			
Uzbekistan	55,500	2.6	B	1989			
<u>Other Asia</u>							
Hong Kong	1,000	0.2	C				
India	4,700	0.0	B	1981			
Iran	28,000	0.2	D	1986			BDM
Iraq	200	0.0	D				
Japan	1,000	0.0	C				
Korea, South	100	0.0	D				
Philippines	100	0.0	D				
Singapore	300	0.1	B			V	
Syria	4,000	0.3	C	1960			BDM
Thailand	200	0.0	D				
Yemen	1,700	0.1	B				
Other	300	0.0	D				
<u>Africa</u>							
Egypt	200	0.0	C	1966		V	
Ethiopia	1,500	0.0	B		1991		
Kenya	400	0.0	B			V	
Morocco	8,000	0.3	D	1970			BDM
South Africa	114,000	2.9	C	1980	1991		DM
Tunisia	2,200	0.3	D	1956			BDM
Zaire	400	0.0	C				
Zambia	300	0.0	C				
Zimbabwe	1,000	0.1	B			V	
Other	1,000	0.0	D				

a. Adapted from: U.O. Schmelz and S. DellaPergola, "World Jewish Population, 1991" in D. Singer and R. Seldin (eds.), *American Jewish Year Book*, Vol. 93, 1993.

b. Ranked from A = accurate, to D = conjectural.

c. B = births; D = deaths; M = marriages.

d. Including Asian regions.

sponsored by the Council of Jewish Federations (CJF), and with the additional support of some major local Jewish Federations and other national Jewish organizations. Through the services of a commercial firm specializing in public opinion research, about 125,000 American households were scanned through random digit dialling between April 1989 and April 1990. A sample of eligible Jewish households was selected, through the use of four alternative criteria of present or past Jewish identification of the respondent or any of his/her household mates. Interviewing of the actual net sample of about 2,500 Jewish households (comprising at least one person defined as Jewish by any of the chosen criteria) started about May 1990—just after the completion of the US national population census—and was completed by September 1990. First preliminary results were released at the General Assembly of the Council of Jewish Federations in November 1990. The data file was processed at the North American Jewish Data Bank of CJF and CUNY Graduate Center in New York.

Similar data collection efforts were completed in two other countries. In South Africa, a national survey sponsored by the Kaplan Centre for Judaic Studies of the University of Cape Town was conducted in 1991. The sample included about 1,800 Jewish households in the five major metropolitan areas.

In Mexico, a survey of the Jewish population of the capital's large metropolitan area was carried out in 1991, sponsored by the Hebrew University of Jerusalem and its Association of Mexican Friends, and the Center for the Study of Demography and Urban Development (CEDDU) of the Colegio de Mexico. The survey, originally aimed at 2,000 households, actually reached a representative sample of about 900, with a total of about 3,000 individuals. Sampling strata were formed within each of the major Jewish religious and recreational centers and organizations in Mexico, to provide adequate coverage of the pluralistic organizational structure of the community. A sub-sample of non-affiliated Jews was also located and interviewed.

Similar projects are at different stages of planning in several other countries, such as France, the United Kingdom, Italy, Canada, Argentina, Chile, Venezuela, and Australia.

Each of these countries presents particular local features and problems. Beyond solving these locally, some centralized support is required to ensure basic comparability of information collected, as well as to reduce costs by transferring accumulated knowledge from one country to another, thus cutting fixed investments.

Procedures and Techniques

The current status of the global data collection project is still to a large extent exploratory and tentative. Looking ahead, though, systematic thought and planning must be devoted to several key issues that generally recur in Jewish population studies. Several delicate and important problems must be overcome in order to achieve a successful and valuable Jewish population survey. These include:

1. *Sponsorship*: an appropriate balance should be created between academic and communal, and between local, national and international sponsoring institutions.

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2. *Financing*: will require, too, a combination of local, national and international resources, in accordance with the situation of the Jewish community in each country.
3. *Coordination and standardization*: maximum comparability of results should be aimed at, both with a given country's major national sources (such as the census), and with Jewish surveys in other countries.
4. *Defining the target population*: as already noted, standard use should be made of the concept of "enlarged" Jewish population for purposes of both design and analysis. Different narrower definitions of the Jewish population may suit an analyst's purposes once a survey reaches the stage of data processing.
5. *Sampling frames and sampling techniques*: while there is no real substitute for a good probabilistic sample, advantage should be taken of available knowledge on Jewish population characteristics (such as geographical, onomastic or other types of clustering) in order to create sampling strata and sub-samples, and to reduce costs.
6. *Questionnaire structure and contents*: a common core of main topics adopted for each national Jewish alike should be supplemented by specific modules relating to topics of specifically local relevance.
7. *Methods of data collection*: the feasibility of telephone versus face-to-face interviewing should be judged according to the situation in each country.
8. *Public opinion incentives*: the Jewish press and other internal communication media within the community should be used to create a favorable attitude toward the survey.
9. *Confidentiality*: maximum privacy of collected materials should be guaranteed, especially in view of past tragic experiences with misuse of census data before and during World War II in Europe.
10. *Dissemination and analysis of data*: once available, findings should be circulated promptly and in appropriate, different formats among the various relevant executive and academic audiences.

Each of these matters requires a very careful evaluation of the conditions that prevail locally, and of the solutions most appropriate in each case. Clearly, numerous internal political, organizational and technical steps must be undertaken to ensure the successful completion of a Jewish-sponsored survey, let alone the World Jewish Population Survey initiative.

Conclusion

At the dawn of the 1990s, academics, Jewish community lay leaders and professionals are called to share augmented challenges and responsibilities in the field of Jewish population research. It is up to them to sharpen the perception and conceptualization of emerging or new needs, and to suggest appropriate responses. Data collection is a clear prerequisite for the correct functioning of a modern Jewish community. It seems likely that academics and community executives will be increasingly asked to determine together the list of issues which appear to be prioritarian for research because they are crucial for planning. Academics and

executives, in particular, will hopefully be called to base their macro level planning—and the latter, their daily intervention at the micro level—on the digested information that only serious and systematic research can provide. Improved knowledge is also a basic requirement for a broad educational process aimed at increasing awareness among the Jewish public of the issues that can be expected to arise.

We can foresee collaboration between Jewish research specialists with community leaders and executives in the common aims of a better understanding of contemporary Jewish population and society, and a better and more meaningful Jewish life for the community. A unique opportunity has emerged to implement these goals through the help of serious and systematic research. This opportunity should not be missed.

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