

2009

The Changing Population Profile of American Jews, 1990-2008

Barry A. Kosmin

Trinity College, barry.kosmin@trincoll.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <http://digitalrepository.trincoll.edu/facpub>

 Part of the [Jewish Studies Commons](#)

The Changing Population Profile of American Jews 1990-2008

**Barry A. Kosmin
Trinity College, Hartford, CT**

**Paper Presented at the Fifteenth World Congress of Jewish Studies
Jerusalem, Israel - August 2009**

Table of Contents:

About ARIS and AJIS	3
Part I: Population Size	
Table 1. Adult Jews by Religion (JBR) Population Estimates 1990-2008	4
Table 2. Core Jewish Population Estimates 1990, 2001 & 2008	5
Part II: Population Change & the Rise of the Nones – the No Religion (JNR) Population	
Section A Population Change	6
Section B The Rise of the Nones	6
Part III: The Expansion of the Jewish Ancestry & Kindred Population	
Table 3 Jewish & Jewish Origins Population 1990 & 2001	7
Table 4 The Parentage of America’s Jewish Adults 2001	8
Part IV: Validation of the Data – Consistency of the Findings and Trends over Time	
Table 5 Socio-Demographic Profile of Adult Jewish Identity Types 2001 & 2008	9
Table 6 Regional Distribution of Core Jewish Population 1990, 2001 & 2008	10
Select Bibliography	11

About ARIS and AJIS Time Series

The ARIS Time Series

The ARIS (American Religious Identification Survey) time series tracks changes in the religious loyalties of the American public. It comprises a set of three large replicate, representative, national surveys of adults in the continental U.S.A. (48 states & DC) in 1990, 2001 and 2008. They have a common and consistent research design and methodology using random digit dialed telephone interviews, and the same unprompted, open-ended key question: What is your religion, if any?

The value of this unique series of national surveys, which allows scientific monitoring of change over time, has been recognized by the U.S. Bureau of Census. The Census Bureau itself is constitutionally precluded from such an inquiry into religion, and so has incorporated NSRI/ARIS findings into its own official publication the *Statistical Abstract of the United States* since 2003.

The AJIS Time Series

The 3 surveys contain large nationally representative sub-samples of self-identified Jewish respondents which then form a weighted national Jewish data set.

The research design of the AJIS - American Jewish Identification Surveys of 2001 and 2008 replicates that of the 1990 National Jewish Population Survey.

A full household roster and special modules of “Jewish” questions were collected in 1990 and 2001. In 2008 a question on ethnic origin and ancestry, including a Jewish category, was asked of respondents with no religion.

Thus in 1990 and 2001 the larger Jewish sample size is the result of a more complex screening process identifying all households containing a Jewish resident whereas AJIS 2008 is limited to self-identifying Jewish survey respondents only (see Table 1).

Part I.

Population Size

Table 1.

Adult Jews by Religion (JBR) Population Estimates 1990-2008

U.S. NATIONAL SURVEY	NSRI 1990	ARIS 2001	ARIS 2008
Sample size	113,723	50,281	54,461
Initial screening estimate ARIS series	3,137,000	2,831,000	2,680,000
Population change	-	-306,000	-151,000
Annual loss		-27,800	- 21,600
Item Refusal rate	2.3%	5.4%	5.2%
Potential Adjustment for refusals	72,000	153,000	139,000
Adjustment for Hawaii & Alaska	-	10,000	10,000
Adjustment for Stage 3, immigrants, institutional population	402,000	90,000	80,000
JEWISH NATIONAL SURVEY	NJPS 1990	AJIS 2001	AJIS 2008
Jewish sample size	2,441	1,668	967
Total of Adult Jews by Religion	3,539,000	2,930,000	2,700,000 - 2,900,000

Table 1 illustrates the 2 stage process in the creation of Jewish population estimates i.e. the actual surveys findings of the adult population that self-identifies as Jewish by religion in the NSRI/ARIS national surveys and how national Jewish population estimates in NJPS/AJIS are adjusted upward and extrapolated on the basis of these numbers.

The consistency of the downward trend and the volume of losses to Judaism over the 18 year period clearly emerge.

Table 2.

Core Jewish Population Estimates 1990, 2001 & 2008

Code	Jewish Identity Category	1990		2001		2008	
		Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
ADULTS							
BJR	Jewish Parent: Religion Judaism	3,365,000	61	2,760,000	52	<i>2,510,000</i>	48
JBC	No Jewish Parent: Religion Judaism	174,000	3	170,000	3	<i>170,000</i>	3
JNR	Jewish Parent: No Religion	813,000	15	1,120,000	21	1,288,000	25
CHILDREN (under age 18)							
JBR	Jew By Religion (Includes JBC)	856,000	16	700,000	13	<i>650,000</i>	12
JNR	Jew No Religion	307,000	5	590,000	11	<i>600,000</i>	12
TOTAL	ALL AGES	5,515,000	100	5,340,000	100	<i>5,200,000-5,400,000</i>	

Italicized numbers are author's estimates

Table 2 covers the Core Jewish Population, a category with a long history in Jewish demography, consisting of self-identifying Jews by religion (JBR) and persons of Jewish origin who claim no religion (JNR).

Since the AJIS 2008 is limited in scope no details are available on the upbringing or parentage of children, nor on the religious/ethnic identities of other household members beyond the respondent.

Nevertheless the population estimates arising from the AJIS 2008 data show patterns consistent with previous surveys as well as expected social and demographic trends (cf. DellaPergola).

AJIS 2008 indicates that the total size of the U.S. Core Jewish Population lies in the range of 5.2 – 5.4 million people.

ARIS 2008 reveals that (Judaic) Jews (JBR) comprise 1.2% of the adult American religious population while Jewish Nones (JNR) are 3.8% of the adult American Non-theistic population.

PART II.

Population Change and the Rise of the Nones – the No Religion (JNR) Population

A. POPULATION CHANGE

Though the total Jewish population is relatively stable in size, disaffection from Judaism and intermarriage have combined to change the identity profile of American Jewry in the past 20 years.

Fewer American Jews self-identify on the basis of religion and fewer have two Jewish parents or four Jewish grandparents.

The total population of all ages adhering to any type of Judaism is around 3.3 – 3.4 million people (Table 2). Only a minority of the population that self-identifies as Jewish on the basis of religion is Orthodox (c. 25%)

The adult Jewish by Religion population (JBR) seems to be declining currently by around 22,000 persons a year (Table 1).

B. THE RISE OF THE NONES

The adult No religion population (JNR) rose by an average of 28,000 a year in 1990s and 24,000 a year in 2000s (Table 2).

The No Religion fraction of the Jewish population (JNR) has risen from around 20% in 1990 to around 37% in 2008 (Table 2). Over the same period the U.S. adult population of “Nones” grew from 8% to 15% increasing from 14 to 34 million persons for a gain of 138% while the Jewish “Nones” adult population rose by 58%.

These figures suggests that the Jewish population is further ahead in the process of secularization than Americans in general (cf. Keysar)

The Population of Jewish “Nones” has 4 sources of origin:

- A. Born Nones - Children with two Jewish parents (i.e. secular or Cultural Jews) raised in no religion.
- B. Born Nones - Children of intermarriage brought up in a compromise “religiously neutral” home.
- C. Persons who switch out of Judaism.
- D. Children of intermarriage raised in Christianity who switch to No Religion (or atheism, agnosticism, humanism etc.)

PART III.

The Expansion of the Jewish Ancestry & Kindred Population

Table 3.

Jewish & Jewish Origins Population 1990 & 2001

Code	Jewish Identity Category	1990		2001	
		Number	%	Number	%
JBR/JNR	Core Jews (all ages)	5,515,000	81	5,340,000	69
JOR	Adults of Jewish Parentage: Other Religions	625,000	9	1,470,000	19
JCOR	Children of Jewish Parentage: Other Religions	707,000	10	880,000	12
TOTAL	Jewish & Jewish Origins Population	6,847,000	100	7,690,000	100

The “extended” population of Jewish ancestry in the U.S. is continually expanding as a result of mixed unions. When mixed marriages and unions affect half the adult population then two mixed households are formed for every homogeneous Jewish household. The population with some Jewish ancestry but following another religion then expands geometrically.

The population of recent Jewish parentage following other religions (JOR) is estimated at around 2.5 million.

Non-Jewish adults in Households with Core Jewish or Jewish origin population number around 2.2 million.

This suggests an “Extended Jewish population” in the U.S. on the basis of Israel’s “Law of Return”, which was estimated at 8 million people in 1990, currently numbering of over 10 million persons.

Table 4.

The Parentage of America's Jewish Adults 2001

AJIS 2001	JBR	JNR	JOR
	N= 2,930,000	N= 1,120,000	N= 1,470,000
Jewish Parentage	<i>Percent</i>	<i>Percent</i>	<i>Percent</i>
Both Parents	78	37	7
Mother Only	6	21	27
<i>Halakhically Jewish</i>	(84)	(58)	(34)*
Father Only	3	25	28
Neither, Refusal, DK	13	17	37
TOTAL	100	100	100

In AJIS 2001 all respondents were asked a detailed question on parentage. The total number of Jewish adults defined on a matrilineal (halakhic) basis in 2001 was then estimated as 3.6 million.

*Since 34% of the JOR population reported that their mother was Jewish it was estimated that there were around 500,000 matrilineal Jewish adults following another religion, mostly a branch of Christianity.

PART IV.

Validation of the Data – Consistency of the Findings and Trends over Time

Table 5.

Socio-Demographic Profile of Adult Jewish Identity Types 2001 & 2008

Social Characteristics	JBR 2008	JBR 2001	JNR 2001	JOR 2001
Number of adults	2,680,000	2,930,000	1,120,000	1,470,000
Proportion of Male/Female	49/51	49/51	52/48	45/55
Median Age	50 years	51 years	44 years	42 years
Percent Married	54/59	59	45	59
Percent of Married With Jewish Spouse	N/A	77	16	-
Percent White Non-Hispanic	90	92	N/A	N/A
Percent College Graduates (25+)	57	58	57	36
Percent Employed (FT/PT)	48/16	49/13	56/13	63/13
Percent Registered Voters	84	85	76	85
Percent Democrat v. Republican	49/17	55/13	41/13	28/40
Percent own their home	76	77	67	69
Median annual household income	\$81,000	\$72,000	\$58,000	\$54,000
Region of Residence				
Percent in Northeast	39	43	26	20
Percent in South	28	26	31	36
Percent in Midwest	12	10	9	13
Percent in West	21	21	34	31

The JBR population shows an almost identical socio-demographic profile in 2001 and 2008. The ARIS 2008 JBR data is also very similar to the Pew Religious Landscape Survey 2007 findings

Whereas the 3 “Jewish” populations shown in 2001 have very different profiles in Table 5, interestingly JNRs are slightly closer (more Jewish) to JBRs than they are to JORs (cf Keysar).

Table 6.

Regional Distribution of Core Jewish Population 1990, 2001 & 2008

Region	NJPS 1990	AJIS 2001	AJIS 2008
<i>Northeast</i>	44	38	38
<i>South</i>	22	27	25
<i>Midwest</i>	11	12	11
<i>West</i>	23	23	26
TOTAL	100	100	100

American Jews like the national population have been moving their residential center of gravity south and west for several decades.

The influence of the Jewish Nones makes the Core Jewish population less Southern and more Western.

The data suggest that the Northeast region has not had a majority of either the religious Jewish population or the total Core Jewish Population since before 1990.

This geographical dispersal of the American Jewish population both explains and fuels the social and demographic changes illustrated in this presentation.

Select Bibliography

- DellaPergola, Sergio. 1999. *World Jewry beyond 2000: The demographic prospects*, Oxford Center for Judaic & Hebrew Studies.
- Goldstein, Sidney & Barry Kosmin. 1992. "Religious Self-Identification in the United States 1989-90: A Case Study of the Jewish Population" *Ethnic Groups*, 9, 219-245.
- Keysar, Ariela. 2009. Secular Jews and Other Secular Americans: New Findings. Paper presented to the 15th World Conference of Jewish Studies, Jerusalem, Israel.
- Kosmin Barry A. 1992A. "Counting for Something: The Why and Wherefore of the CJF 1990 National Jewish Population Survey, *Journal of Jewish Communal Service*, 68 (4), 292-298
- Kosmin Barry A. 1992B. "The Permeable Boundaries of Being Jewish in America," *Moment*, (August).
- Kosmin Barry A. 2001. "As Secular as They Come", *Moment*, (June).
- Kosmin Barry A., Sidney Goldstein, Joseph Waksberg, Nava Lerer, Ariela Keysar and Jeffrey Scheckner. 1991. *Highlights of the CJF 1990 National Jewish Population Survey*. New York: Council of Jewish Federations.
- Kosmin, Barry A. & Seymour Lachman. 1993. *One Nation Under God: Religion in Contemporary American Society*, New York, Harmony Books.
- Kosmin, Barry A., Egon Mayer & Ariela Keysar. 2001. *American Religious Identification Survey 2001*, New York, Graduate Center CUNY.
- Lerer Nava, Ariela Keysar & Barry Kosmin. 1997. "Being Jewish in America: Religion or Culture?" In David M. Gordis & Dorit P. Gary, eds., *American Jewry: Portraits and Prognosis*, (pp. 51-64) West Orange NJ, Behrman House
- Mayer, Egon, Barry A. Kosmin & Ariela Keysar. 2001. *American Jewish Identity Survey 2001*, Graduate Center CUNY.