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### The Changing Population Profile of American Jews, 1990-2008

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# **The Changing Population Profile of American Jews 1990-2008**

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# 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**

| <b>U.S. NATIONAL SURVEY</b>                                  | <b>NSRI 1990</b> | <b>ARIS 2001</b> | <b>ARIS 2008</b>      |
|--|------------------|------------------|-----------------------|
| 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                |
| <b>JEWISH NATIONAL SURVEY</b>                                | <b>NJPS 1990</b> | <b>AJIS 2001</b> | <b>AJIS 2008</b>      |
| 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                                    |                  |            |                  |            |                            |    |
| <b>BJR</b>   | <b>Jewish Parent: Religion Judaism</b>    | 3,365,000        | 61         | 2,760,000        | 52         | <i>2,510,000</i>           | 48 |
| <b>JBC</b>   | <b>No Jewish Parent: Religion Judaism</b> | 174,000          | 3          | 170,000          | 3          | <i>170,000</i>             | 3  |
| <b>JNR</b>   | <b>Jewish Parent: No Religion</b>         | 813,000          | 15         | 1,120,000        | 21         | 1,288,000                  | 25 |
|              | CHIDLREN (under age 18)                   |                  |            |                  |            |                            |    |
| <b>JBR</b>   | <b>Jew By Religion (Includes JBC)</b>     | 856,000          | 16         | 700,000          | 13         | <i>650,000</i>             | 12 |
| <b>JNR</b>   | <b>Jew No Religion</b>                    | 307,000          | 5          | 590,000          | 11         | <i>600,000</i>             | 12 |
| <b>TOTAL</b> | <b>ALL AGES</b>                           | <b>5,515,000</b> | <b>100</b> | <b>5,340,000</b> | <b>100</b> | <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         |
| <b>TOTAL</b> | <b>Jewish &amp; Jewish Origins Population</b> | <b>6,847,000</b> | <b>100</b> | <b>7,690,000</b> | <b>100</b> |

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   |
| <b>Jewish Parentage</b>           | <i>Percent</i> | <i>Percent</i> | <i>Percent</i> |
| Both Parents                      | 78             | 37             | 7              |
| Mother Only                       | 6              | 21             | 27             |
| <b><i>Halakhically Jewish</i></b> | <b>(84)</b>    | <b>(58)</b>    | <b>(34)*</b>   |
| Father Only                       | 3              | 25             | 28             |
| Neither, Refusal, DK              | 13             | 17             | 37             |
| <b>TOTAL</b>                      | <b>100</b>     | <b>100</b>     | <b>100</b>     |

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  |
| <b>Region of Residence</b>            |           |           |           |           |
| 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**

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

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.

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