

Chapter 2

Executive Summary

Pew Research Center

2.1 Overview¹

American Jews overwhelmingly say they are proud to be Jewish and have a strong sense of belonging to the Jewish people, according to a major new survey by the Pew Research Center. But the survey also suggests that Jewish identity is changing in America, where one-in-five Jews (22 %) now describe themselves as having no religion.

The percentage of US adults who say they are Jewish when asked about their religion has declined by about half since the late 1950s and currently is a little less than 2 %. Meanwhile, the number of Americans with direct Jewish ancestry or upbringing who consider themselves Jewish, yet describe themselves as atheist, agnostic or having no particular religion, appears to be rising and is now about 0.5 % of the US adult population.²

The changing nature of Jewish identity stands out sharply when the survey's results are analyzed by generation. Fully 93 % of Jews in the aging Greatest

Reprinted with permission from the Pew Research Center.

¹This is the overview section of a longer report published by the Pew Research Center, a nonpartisan fact tank that informs the public about the issues, attitudes and trends shaping America and the world. Its Religion & Public Life Project seeks to promote a deeper understanding of issues at the intersection of religion and public affairs. The project conducts surveys, demographic studies and other social science research to examine a wide range of issues concerning religion and society in the United States and around the world – from shifting religious composition to the influence of religion on politics to the extent of government and social restrictions on religion.

²Estimating the size of the Jewish population is complicated and depends heavily on the definition of who is a Jew. Chapter 1 of the full report provides more details on the estimated number of US Jews using a variety of possible definitions and including children as well as adults. For an explanation of the main categories used throughout this report, see the sidebar: “Who is a Jew.”

Pew Research Center (✉)
, Pew Research Center Washington, DC, USA

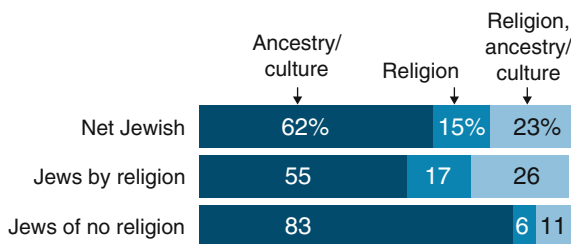
Generation identify as Jewish on the basis of religion (called “Jews by religion” in this report); just 7 % describe themselves as having no religion (“Jews of no religion”). By contrast, among Jews in the youngest generation of US adults – the Millennials – 68 % identify as Jews by religion, while 32 % describe themselves as having no religion and identify as Jewish on the basis of ancestry, ethnicity or culture.

This shift in Jewish self-identification reflects broader changes in the US public. Americans as a whole – not just Jews – increasingly eschew any religious affiliation. Indeed, the share of US Jews who say they have no religion (22 %) is similar to the share of religious “nones” in the general public (20 %), and religious disaffiliation is as common among all US adults ages 18–29 as among Jewish Millennials (32 % of each).³

Secularism has a long tradition in Jewish life in America, and most U.S. Jews seem to recognize this: 62 % say being Jewish is mainly a matter of ancestry and culture, while just 15 % say it is mainly a matter of religion. Even among Jews by religion, more than half (55 %) say being Jewish is mainly a matter of ancestry and culture, and two-thirds say it is not necessary to believe in God to be Jewish.

Being Jewish More About Culture and Ancestry than Religion

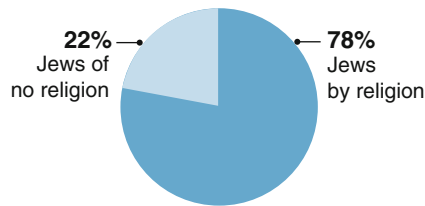
% saying being Jewish is mainly a matter of ...



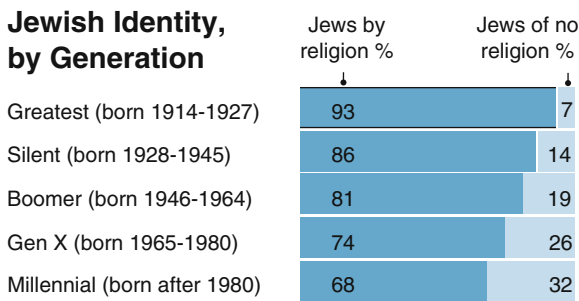
Note: “Ancestry/culture” is the net percentage saying that being Jewish is mainly a matter of ancestry, mainly a matter of culture or volunteering that it is both ancestry and culture. “Religion, ancestry/culture” is the percentage volunteering that being Jewish is a matter of both religion and either ancestry or culture, or all three of these.

³For more information, see the Pew Research Center’s October 2012 report “‘Nones’ on the Rise,” <http://www.pewforum.org/2012/10/09/nones-on-the-rise/>.

U.S. Adult Jewish Population, 2013



Jewish Identity, by Generation



2.2 Intermarriage and Childrearing

Compared with Jews by religion, however, Jews of no religion (also commonly called religious but also much less connected to Jewish organizations and much less likely to be raising their children Jewish. More than 90 % of Jews by religion who are currently raising minor children in their home say they are raising those children Jewish or partially Jewish. In stark contrast, the survey finds that two-thirds of Jews of no religion say they are *not* raising their children Jewish or partially Jewish – either by religion or aside from religion.

Intermarriage is a related phenomenon. It is much more common among secular Jews in the survey than among Jews by religion: 79 % of married Jews of no religion have a spouse who is not Jewish, compared with 36 % among Jews by religion. And intermarried Jews, like Jews of no religion, are much less likely to be raising their children in the Jewish faith.

Nearly all Jews who have a Jewish spouse say they are raising their children as Jewish by religion (96 %). Among Jews with a non- Jewish spouse, however, 20 % say they are raising their children Jewish by religion, and 25 % are raising their children partly Jewish by religion. Roughly one-third (37 %) of intermarried Jews who are raising children say they are not raising those children Jewish at all.

Jewish Child Rearing

Among those who are parents/guardians of minor children in their household, % raising their children...

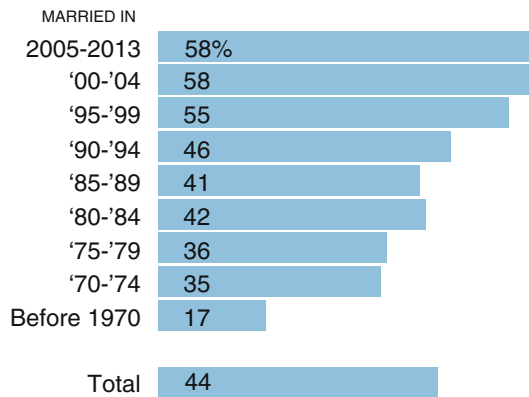
	Jewish by religion	Partly Jewish by religion	Jewish not by religion or mix [^]	NOT Jewish	Other	N
	%	%	%	%	%	
NET Jewish	59	14	8	18	1=100	907
Jews by religion	71	15	7	7	*=100	764
Jews of no religion	8	11	11	67	2=100	143
Among Jews married to ...						
Jewish spouse	96	2	1	1	0=100	551
Non-Jewish spouse	20	25	16	37	1=100	257

[^]Includes those who are raising their children Jewish but not by religion as well as those who are raising multiple children Jewish but in different ways (Jewish by religion, partly Jewish by religion and/or Jewish but not by religion).

Moreover, intermarriage rates seem to have risen substantially over the last five decades. Among Jewish respondents who have gotten married since 2000, nearly six-in-ten have a non-Jewish spouse. Among those who got married in the 1980s, roughly four- in-ten have a non-Jewish spouse. And among Jews who got married before 1970, just 17 % have a non-Jewish spouse.⁴

Intermarriage, by Year of Marriage

% of Jews with a non-Jewish spouse ...



Based on current, intact marriages.

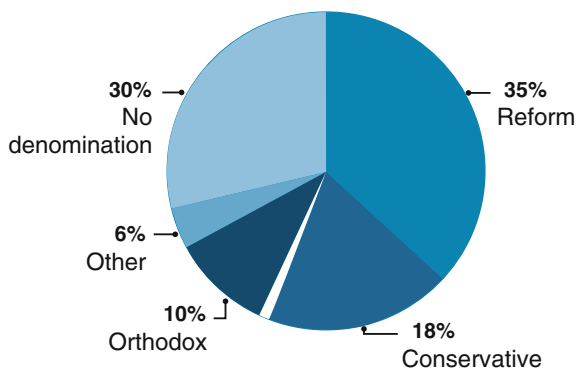
⁴These figures are based on current, intact marriages. For more details on intermarriage, see Chap. 2 of the full report.

It is not clear whether being intermarried tends to make U.S. Jews less religious, or being less religious tends to make U.S. Jews more inclined to intermarry, or some of both. Whatever the causal connection, the survey finds a strong association between secular Jews and religious intermarriage. In some ways, the association seems to be circular or reinforcing, especially when child rearing is added into the picture. Married Jews of no religion are much more likely than married Jews by religion to have non-Jewish spouses. Jews who have non-Jewish spouses are much less likely than those married to fellow Jews to be raising children as Jewish by religion and much *more* likely to be raising children as partially Jewish, Jewish but not by religion, or not Jewish at all. Furthermore, Jews who are the offspring of intermarriages appear, themselves, to be more likely to intermarry than Jews with two Jewish parents.

2.3 Denominations

The survey also shows that Reform Judaism continues to be the largest Jewish denominational movement in the United States. One-third (35 %) of all U.S. Jews identify with the Reform movement, while 18 % identify with Conservative Judaism, 10 % with Orthodox Judaism and 6 % with a variety of smaller groups, such as the Reconstructionist and Jewish Renewal movements. About three-in-ten American Jews (including 19 % of Jews by religion and two-thirds of Jews of no religion) say they do not identify with any particular Jewish denomination.

Jewish Denominational Identity



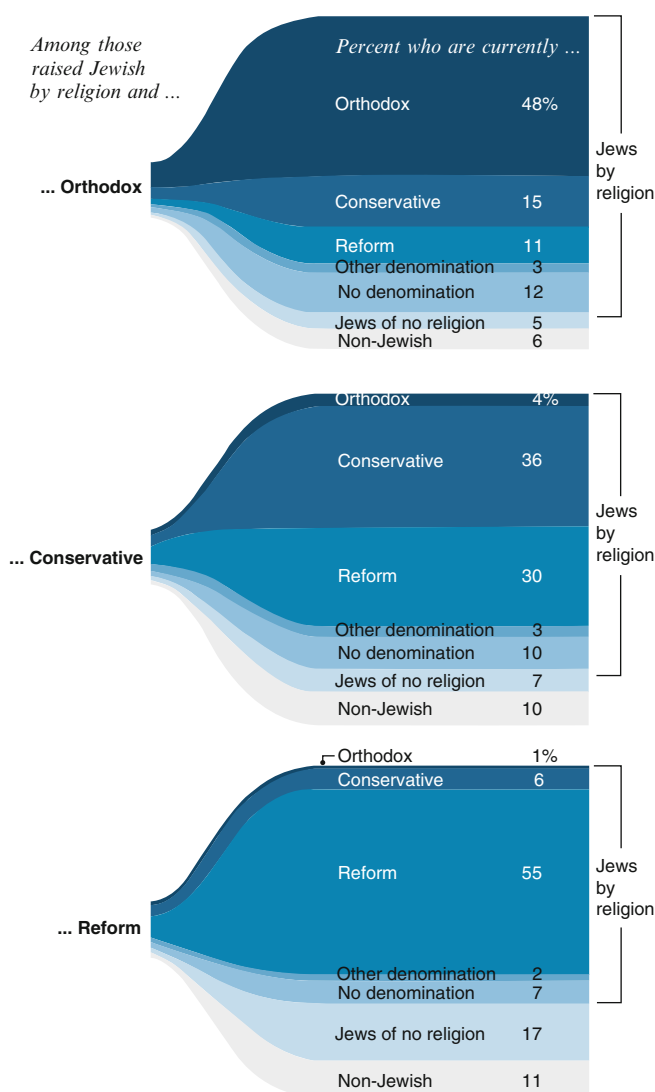
Based on the net Jewish population
(both Jews by religion and Jews of no religion)

Though Orthodox Jews constitute the smallest of the three major denominational movements, they are much younger, on average, and tend to have much larger families than the overall Jewish population. This suggests that their share of the Jewish population will grow. In the past, high fertility in the U.S. Orthodox community has been at least partially offset by a low retention rate: Roughly half of the survey respondents who were raised as Orthodox Jews say they are no longer Orthodox.

But the falloff from Orthodoxy appears to be declining and is significantly lower among 18-to-29-year-olds (17 %) than among older people. (See discussion and table in Chap. 3 on page 49 of the full report.)

Within all three denominational movements, most of the switching is in the direction of less-traditional Judaism. The survey finds that approximately one-quarter of people who were raised Orthodox have since become Conservative or Reform Jews, while 30 % of those raised Conservative have become Reform Jews, and 28 % of those raised Reform have left the ranks of Jews by religion entirely. Much less switching is reported in the opposite direction. For example, just 7 % of Jews raised in the Reform movement have become Conservative or Orthodox, and just 4 % of those raised in Conservative Judaism have become Orthodox.

Denominational Switching Among U.S. Jews



2.4 Actions, Attachments, and Attitudes

These are among the key findings of the Pew Research Center's survey of U.S. Jews, conducted on landlines and cellphones among 3,475 Jews across the country from Feb. 20-June 13, 2013, with a statistical margin of error for the full Jewish sample of plus or minus 3.0 percentage points.

Attachment, Attitudes About Israel

<i>How emotionally attached are you to Israel?</i>	NET Jewish %	Jews by religion %	Jews of no religion %
Very attached	30	36	12
Somewhat	39	40	33
Not very/Not at all	31	23	55
Don't know/Refused	<u>1</u>	<u>1</u>	<u>*</u>
	100	100	100
<i>Been to Israel?</i>			
Yes	43	49	23
No	57	51	77
Don't know	<u>*</u>	<u>*</u>	<u>0</u>
	100	100	100
<i>Impact of continued building of Jewish settlements on Israel's security</i>			
Helps	17	19	9
Hurts	44	40	56
Makes no difference	29	31	21
Don't know	<u>11</u>	<u>10</u>	<u>14</u>
	100	100	100
<i>Believe God gave Israel to Jewish people?</i>			
Yes	40	47	16
No	27	27	27
Don't know	5	6	3
Don't believe in God [^]	<u>28</u>	<u>20</u>	<u>55</u>
	100	100	100

[^]Includes those who said "don't know" or declined to answer when asked whether they believe in God.

The new survey also finds that seven-in-ten Jews (70 %) say they participated in a Passover meal (Seder) in the past year, and 53 % say they fasted for all or part of Yom

Kippur in 2012. These measures of observance appear to have ticked downward slightly compared with a national telephone survey conducted more than a decade ago, the 2000–2001 National Jewish Population Survey.⁵ In that poll, 78 % of Jews said they had participated in a Seder in the past year, and 60 % said they had fasted on Yom Kippur. If there has been any decline on these measures, however, it appears to be attributable to the rising number of Jews of no religion; rates of Passover and Yom Kippur observance have remained stable among Jews by religion.

Despite the changes in Jewish identity in America, 94 % of U.S. Jews (including 97 % of Jews by religion and 83 % of Jews of no religion) say they are proud to be Jewish. Three-quarters of U.S. Jews (including 85 % of Jews by religion and 42 % of Jews of no religion) also say they have “a strong sense of belonging to the Jewish people.” And emotional attachment to Israel has not waned discernibly among American Jews in the past decade, though it is markedly stronger among Jews by religion (and older Jews in general) than among Jews of no religion (and younger Jews in general).⁶

Overall, about seven-in-ten Jews surveyed say they feel either very attached (30 %) or somewhat attached (39 %) to Israel, essentially unchanged since 2000–2001. In addition, 43 % of Jews have been to Israel, including 23 % who have visited more than once. And 40 % of Jews say they believe the land that is now Israel was given by God to the Jewish people.

At the same time, many American Jews express reservations about Israel’s approach to the peace process. Just 38 % say the Israeli government is making a sincere effort to establish peace with the Palestinians. (Fewer still – 12 % – think Palestinian leaders are sincerely seeking peace with Israel.) And just 17 % of American Jews think the continued building of settlements in the West Bank is helpful to Israel’s security; 44 % say that settlement construction hurts Israel’s own security interests.

What Does It Mean To Be Jewish?

<i>% saying...is an essential part of what being Jewish means to them</i>	NET Jewish
	%
Remembering Holocaust	73
Leading ethical/moral life	69
Working for justice/equality	56
Being intellectually curious	49
Caring about Israel	43
Having good sense of humor	42
Being part of a Jewish community	28
Observing Jewish law	19
Eating traditional Jewish foods	14

⁵Comparisons with the findings of the 2000–2001 National Jewish Population Survey are made sparingly and cautiously in this report because of differences in methodology and question wording. For a longer discussion of comparisons between the Pew Research Survey of U.S. Jews and the NJPS, see page 79 of the full report.

⁶For more details, see Chap. 5 of the full report, *Connection With and Attitudes Toward Israel*.

A key aim of the Pew Research Center survey is to explore Jewish identity: What does being Jewish mean in America today? Large majorities of U.S. Jews say that remembering the Holocaust (73 %) and leading an ethical life (69 %) are essential to their sense of Jewishness. More than half (56 %) say that working for justice and equality is essential to what being Jewish means to them. And about four-in-ten say that caring about Israel (43 %) and having a good sense of humor (42 %) are essential to their Jewish identity.

But observing religious law is not as central to most American Jews. Just 19 % of the Jewish adults surveyed say observing Jewish law (halacha) is essential to what being Jewish means to them. And in a separate but related question, most Jews say a person can be Jewish even if that person works on the Sabbath or does not believe in God. Believing in Jesus, however, is enough to place one beyond the pale: 60 % of U.S. Jews say a person cannot be Jewish if he or she believes Jesus was the messiah.

What is Compatible With Being Jewish?

<i>Can a person be Jewish if he/she ...</i>	Yes	No	DK
	%	%	%
... works on the Sabbath?	94	5	1=100
... is strongly critical of Israel?	89	9	2=100
... does not believe in God?	68	29	3=100
... believes Jesus was messiah?	34	60	6=100

Based on the net Jewish population.

By several conventional measures, Jews tend to be less religious than the U.S. public as a whole. Compared with the overall population, for example, Jews are less likely to say that they attend religious services weekly or that they believe in God with absolute certainty. And just 26 % of U.S. Jews say religion is very important in their lives, compared with 56 % of the general public. (Orthodox Jews are a clear exception in this regard, exhibiting levels of religious commitment that place them among the most religiously committed groups in the country.) But while relatively few Jews attach high importance to religion, far more (46 %) say *being Jewish* is very important to them.

2.5 Other Findings

- Jews from the former Soviet Union and their offspring account for roughly one-tenth of the U.S. Jewish population; 5 % of Jewish adults say they were born in the former Soviet Union, and an additional 6 % say they were born in the U.S. but have at least one parent who was born in the former Soviet Union.
- Jews have high levels of educational attainment. Most Jews are college graduates (58 %), including 28 % who say they have earned a post-graduate degree.

Number of Completed Interviews

NET Jewish	3,475
Jews by religion	2,786
Jews of no religion	689
Non-Jews of Jewish background	1,190
Jewish affinity	467

Interviews were conducted in English and Russian by random digit dialing on both landlines and cellphones. In order to reach Jewish respondents most efficiently, the survey focused on telephone exchanges for counties where previous surveys indicate that at least some Jews reside. Overall, the survey covered geographic areas that are home to more than 90 % of U.S. adults. Counties were excluded from the survey *only* if (a) no Jews had been interviewed in those counties in more than 150 Pew Research Center surveys conducted over the past decade *and* (b) no other surveys in a Brandeis University database had ever interviewed a Jew in those counties *and* (c) no synagogues or institutions of Jewish education were known to be located in those counties at the time of the Pew Research survey.⁷ Based on this geographic coverage, more than 95 % of the Jewish population, including 99 % of the Jewish by religion population, is estimated to have been eligible to be called for the survey. A more detailed explanation of the survey’s methodology is provided in Appendix A of the full report.

In addition to interviewing Jews, the survey interviewed 1,190 people of Jewish background – U.S. adults who were raised Jewish or had at least one Jewish parent, but who now have a religion other than Judaism (most are Christian) or who say they do not consider themselves Jewish (either by religion or aside from religion). Finally, the survey also interviewed 467 people with a Jewish affinity – people who have a religion other than Judaism (or have no religion) and who were not raised Jewish and did not have a Jewish parent, but who nevertheless consider themselves Jewish or partially Jewish in some way.

This report focuses primarily on Jews by religion and Jews of no religion, which are combined into a “net” Jewish category. The size and characteristics of people of Jewish background and Jewish affinity are summarized in Chap. 1 (Population Estimates) and Chap. 7 (People of Jewish Background and Jewish Affinity) of the full report.

⁷Based on analyses conducted prior to the commencement of interviewing for this study. In expanding their database subsequent to the finalization of the sampling plan, Brandeis researchers identified a very small number of Jews in counties located in the excluded stratum. Brandeis researchers also identified one county in the excluded stratum that is home to a Jewish educational institution. The Religious Congregations and Membership Study indicates that there are 11 US counties that are home to a synagogue that did not appear on the commercial list of synagogues used in designing the sampling plan.

Sidebar: Who Is a Jew?

One of the first decisions that had to be made in conducting this study and analyzing its results was to answer the question, “Who is a Jew?” This is an ancient question with no single, timeless answer. On the one hand, being Jewish is a matter of religion – the traditional, matrilineal definition of Jewish identity is founded on halacha (Jewish religious law). On the other hand, being Jewish also may be a matter of ancestry, ethnicity and cultural background. Jews (and non-Jews) may disagree on where to draw the line. Is an adult who has Jewish parents but who considers herself an atheist nevertheless Jewish, by virtue of her lineage? What about someone who has Jewish parents and has converted to Christianity? Or someone who has no known Jewish ancestry but is married to a Jew and has come to think of himself as Jewish, though he has not formally converted to Judaism?

Various readers will have their own answers to these questions. The approach taken in this survey was to cast the net widely, seeking to interview all adults who answer an initial set of questions (the “screener”) by saying (a) that their religion is Jewish, or (b) that aside from religion they consider themselves to be Jewish or partially Jewish, or (c) that they were raised Jewish or had at least one Jewish parent, even if they do not consider themselves Jewish today. Anyone who said “yes” to any of these questions was eligible for the main interview, which included many more questions detailing religious beliefs and practices; denominational affiliations such as Reform, Conservative and Orthodox; synagogue and Jewish community connections; the religious affiliation of parents, spouses, partners and children in the home; attitudes toward Jewish identity; social and political views; and demographic measures such as age and education. This wide-net approach gives readers (and scholars who later conduct secondary analysis of the survey data) a great deal of flexibility to apply whatever definitions of “Jewish” they think are appropriate.

This report analyzes the survey data using four main categories. These are defined to be as consistent as possible with previous major surveys of U.S. Jews (e.g., by counting as Jewish not just religious Jews but also people of Jewish upbringing, even if they are not religious) while still making intuitive sense to a general U.S. audience (e.g., by not counting as Jewish anyone who describes him/herself as a Christian or who does not consider him/herself Jewish). The categories are:

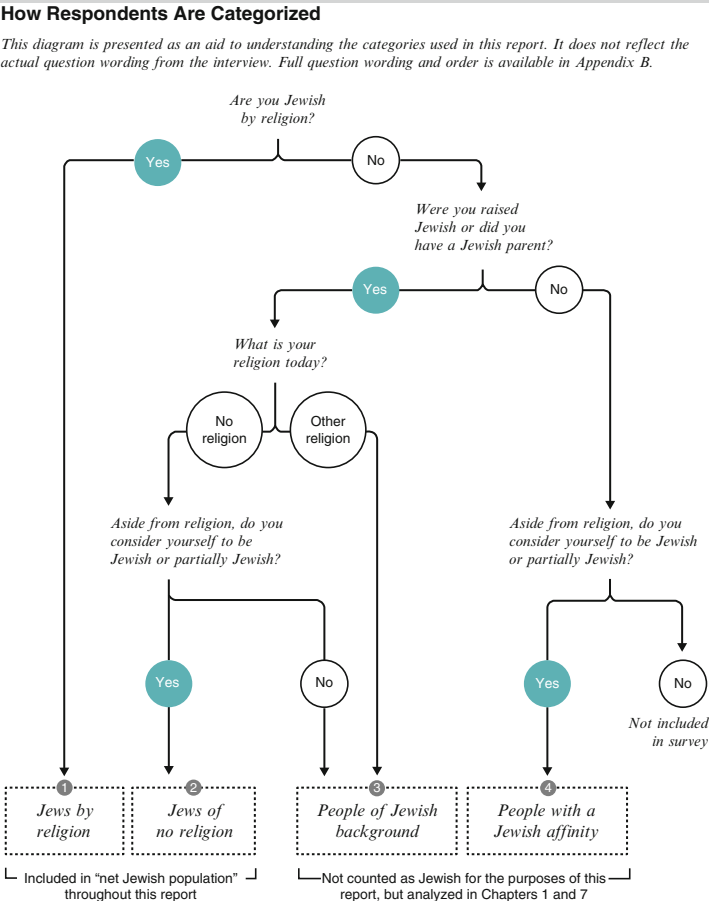
- *Jews by religion* – people who say their religion is Jewish (and who do not profess any other religion);
- *Jews of no religion* – people who describe themselves (religiously) as atheist, agnostic or nothing in particular, but who have a Jewish parent or were raised Jewish and who still consider themselves Jewish in some way.

These first two groups constitute, for the purposes of this analysis, the “net” Jewish population. In addition, the survey interviewed:

(continued)

- *Non-Jewish people of Jewish background* – people who have a Jewish parent or were raised Jewish but who, today, either have another religion (most are Christian) or say they do *not* consider themselves Jewish;
- *Non-Jewish people with a Jewish affinity* – people who identify with another religion (in most cases, Christianity) or with no religion and who neither have a Jewish parent nor were raised Jewish but who nevertheless consider themselves Jewish in some way. Some say, for example, that they consider themselves partly Jewish because Jesus was Jewish, because “we all come from Abraham” or because they have Jewish friends or relatives.

Most of this report focuses on the net Jewish population (Jews by religion and Jews of no religion). Whenever the views or characteristics of U.S. Jews (or just “Jews”) are discussed, this refers to the combined categories of Jews by religion and Jews of no religion. The characteristics and attitudes of people of Jewish background and people with a Jewish affinity are discussed separately in Chap. 7 of the full report.



2.7 Roadmap to the Report

The rest of this report details the survey's findings on the size, beliefs, practices and attitudes of the U.S. Jewish population. The first section estimates the size of the American Jewish population using various definitions of who is a Jew. The second section covers intermarriage and demographic characteristics, such as age, education and income. The third section examines aspects of Jewish identity, including questions about what is essential to Jewish identity, what is incompatible with being Jewish, friendship networks, Jewish education and child rearing. The fourth section explores religious beliefs and practices, including attendance at religious services, lighting Sabbath candles and participating in the Passover meal. The fifth section looks at attitudes toward and connection with Israel, including views on a two-state solution and the Israeli-Palestinian peace process. The sixth section discusses political views and social attitudes, including political party identification, views of President Obama, attitudes toward homosexuality and perceptions of discrimination. The seventh section describes the characteristics of people of Jewish background and Jewish affinity, including their answers to an open-ended question about the ways in which they consider themselves Jewish. The survey methodology, topline and full questionnaire are included in appendices.

The online version of the report includes two interactive features – one illustrating Jewish denominational switching and the other allowing the user to calculate the size of the Jewish population based on his or her own definition of who is a Jew.

2.8 For the Full Report

This is the overview section of a longer report that details the survey's findings. For the full report, including survey methodology and topline questionnaire, visit <http://pewrsr.ch/16IN5U4>.

American Jewish Year Book 2014

The Annual Record of the North American Jewish
Communities

Dashefsky, A.; Sheskin, I.M. (Eds.)

2015, XVIII, 923 p. 58 illus., Hardcover

ISBN: 978-3-319-09622-3