

Jewish Demography in California: The Use of Aggregated Survey Data

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Except for a one-time Census study in March, 1957 (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1958; Goldstein, 1969), demographic studies of American Jewry are seriously limited by methodological problems in obtaining large, randomly selected samples. The National Jewish Population Study (NJPS) of 1970–71 is the only large-scale national study of Jews (Massarik and Chenkin, 1973) but, like most Jewish studies, it has a bias toward sampling identified Jews, its sampling is based on inexact figures for the Jewish population, and for many items it is out of date.

Large survey organizations like Gallup and the National Opinion Research Center proffer an alternative. By utilizing sophisticated techniques to obtain national samples they avoid the special problems of sub-national groups and in the process they also provide sub-sample information. Their shortcoming is that even an unusually large national sample of 2,000 contains only 45–65 Jews, useful for some questions but not as a very precise measure because of a wide sampling error range.

These national surveys become much more utile when they are conducted frequently over a short period and repeat exactly the same questions. Then we can aggregate the responses across several studies. Although this does not occur often for political or social questions, personal information items are asked regularly, thus permitting amalgamation. This technique of aggregating surveys, though not used frequently, has been used by four separate investigators for Jewish samples, and Fisher has shown that responses from Gallup data generally match those of the NJPS (Lazerwitz, 1961; Reed, 1975–76; Cohen, 1982; Fisher, 1983).

The advantages are basic and significant. Because we can define the national population (and its geographical distribution) of all adults much more accurately than that of Jewish adults, the sampling techniques of the national surveys leave less room for error than those which study only sub-populations like Jews. Jews in these national samples are selected much more randomly than those taken from a region which is estimated to contain a certain number of Jews. Second, these polls permit a long-range perspective and thus a view of change over time. The third advantage is practical but very real – money. It is much cheaper to borrow someone else's data than to collect one's own.

The disadvantages are equally clear. First, we cannot control the structure of the survey and can borrow only those questions which have been asked, not what we want to ask. Second, because of the small Jewish sample, we need to select within a reasonable time framework many individual polls, each of which asks not only questions that are identical but have the same answer categories. That eliminates all but a handful

of polls, some of which are not publicly accessible. Third, it also requires time and expertise to get access, clean up, and run the data, which is sometimes a problem with older polls that have fallen into a state of desuetude.

Data in this project are gleaned from an on-going public opinion poll of California residents. The California Field Poll has been conducted regularly since 1959, an average of five times per year, and contains a series of standard demographic measures for a median sample size of 1,163 (including 43 Jews). Like most national surveys Field uses telephone interviews, based on a sample clustered by counties within California, weighting for age within gender against Census data. Beyond that there is neither weighting nor standardizing, and information (except occupation) is based on respondent, not head of household.

Telephoning – which has also been utilized in many of the Jewish community studies (Tobin and Chenkin, 1985; Goldstein, 1981) – introduces at least two major biases: it screens out households without any telephones (5% in California, 1980), and people who feel uncomfortable responding by phone. The implications are most dramatic for socioeconomic status items, especially education: respondents of telephone polls are of significantly higher education than those reported by the Census. For most other items – gender, age, region, marital status, race – the poll data closely match Census data for the State. Because Jews are of comparatively high socioeconomic status, the consequent bias for them is not as great as for the State as a whole. For example, field data collected from in-home interviewing show that Jews (a small sample) are significantly less likely to be without a telephone than are non-Jews, thus making the Jewish sample more representative.

Contemporary California, 1980–1984: Jews Versus Non-Jews

The greatest differences between California Jews and non-Jews lie in socioeconomic status, particularly education. California Jews are much more accomplished than both other Californians and Jews elsewhere in the United States. According to the field respondents, only one out of five Jews has no college experience compared with almost two out of five non-Jews, suggesting not only that local Jews take advantage of the State's widespread and comparatively inexpensive higher educational facilities, but that California is attracting highly educated Jewish migrants. Almost one third of the Jews have schooling beyond a four-year college degree, compared with just under one seventh of all the non-Jews.

Table 1 suggests that although differences exist between white non-Jews and those who are non-white or Hispanic, these differences pale in contrast to those with the Jews. Among Jews themselves, women are of considerably lower education than men. More than one third of the men have gone beyond a four-year college degree compared with less than one quarter of the women. In turn, Jewish women are significantly more educated than non-Jewish women with the differences almost exactly matching those for men. Using post-graduate education as a standard (1.00 = parity), the proportion of Jews to non-Jews is 2.21 for men and 2.24 for women.

Although the sampling procedure upwardly distorts educational attainment, the relative differences between Jews and non-Jews are likely to be accurate. Even revising the figures downward, it is still clear that Jews are very highly educated, which predicts

TABLE 1. EDUCATIONAL LEVELS OF JEWS AND NON-JEWS, BY GENDER AND ETHNICITY, CALIFORNIA, 1982-1984 (PERCENT)

Educational level	Males		Females		Total		
	Jews	Non-Jews	Jews	Non-Jews	Jews	All non-Jews	Anglo non-Jews
N	524	12,494	493	13,164	1,017	25,658	19,781
Total*	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Less than 8th grade	1.0	2.5	0.6	2.7	0.8	2.6	2.1
Some high school	1.9	6.7	1.2	8.0	1.6	7.4	6.3
High school graduate	12.8	21.2	20.1	28.5	16.3	25.0	24.6
Trade school	0.4	2.0	2.0	3.0	1.2	2.5	2.5
Some college	30.1	37.0	35.3	37.1	32.6	37.0	36.8
College graduate	17.6	14.2	17.0	10.1	17.3	12.1	13.0
Some graduate school	7.3	4.4	5.3	4.3	6.3	4.3	4.8
Master's degree	13.9	6.7	12.4	4.3	13.2	5.4	5.8
Greater than Master's	15.1	5.4	6.1	2.0	10.7	3.6	4.0

a. Errors due to rounding.

Source: California Field Polls (numbers 8,001 to 8,402).

that they will be well represented among the professional class and thus will enjoy relatively high income.

Occupation clearly reflects education and according to data from the early 1980s about three-fifths of the employed Jews (who are household heads) work as professionals (43%) or as managers (18%). The only other single category with more than 7% is that of sales. At the bottom, Jews are found only in small numbers. Combining all levels of labor and service jobs yields only about 13% of the employed Jewish heads of households (compared with 34% of the non-Jews – and this probably understates the figures more for the latter).

Among Jewish household heads who work, 40% are self-employed, almost exactly double the figure for non-Jews. In a separate question, a sample of employed Jews is not significantly different from others (11% vs. 14%) in working for the government, and whatever difference exists is also in the direction of Jews being less likely to work for somebody else. These data challenge the idea that the Jewish work force has moved in mass from being small, independent business people to salaried professionals (Leventman and Leventman, 1976).

Educational and occupational differences do indeed extend to income. Between 1981 and 1984, 44% of the Jewish respondents had a household income of more than \$40,000 compared with 23% of the non-Jews. At the lowest level (less than \$7,000), however, the proportions are closer (4.5% vs. 6.6%) and with Anglo non-Jews (5.6%) they virtually disappear. If one loosely defines the poverty line at \$9,000 – and the cost of living in California, especially Los Angeles and San Francisco, is higher than in the rest of the country – then almost 10% of the Californian Jews live in poverty.

One of the reasons for the higher incomes among Jews is that they are more likely

to work for a living than are other Californians – fewer are unemployed, retired, or housekeepers. Jewish households are more likely than others to have two adults working for a living, strongly suggesting that Jewish women are more prone than others to work at a paying job, reflecting their higher educational levels. This advantage for Jews in the proportion of active workers, however, is not likely to occur in communities where Jews are significantly older than the population since more Jews will be retired.

Data for marital status are limited by a smaller sample size because the question was not asked regularly until 1983.¹ However, because the entire sample almost exactly matches the Census data, much of the confidence is restored. Most Jews aged 18 and older (54%), like most other Californians (57%), are married (Table 2). However, the stereotype of the married couple with children at home is no longer the norm for Californians, especially for Jews. More than one quarter of the adult Jews have never been married and one fifth are widowed, separated, or divorced. Only 41% of adult Jews live in households with more than two people compared with 49% of other Californians. Similarly, only 8.8% of all adult Jewish respondents (1980–84) report living in a household with a child less than six years old, compared with 16.6% of the non-Jews. (For Anglo non-Jews that figure is 14.4%.) The same general relationship exists for older children and teenagers.

As Table 2 shows, gender differences among Jews generally parallel those among other Californians: men are slightly more likely to be married and significantly more likely to be single (never-married), especially for non-Jews. Widows dramatically outnumber widowers (more than 6:1 among Jews). One contrasting gender differential across the religious boundary is that non-Jewish women are more likely than men to be separated or divorced, whereas for Jews this is reversed; but the difference among Jews is small and not significant. The more noticeable and important cross-religious difference is that Jewish women are more likely than other women (23% vs. 16%) to be single. That is, at least in part, a reflection of the higher education and professional status of Jewish women.

The ecological impact of living in California is seen in the racial and ethnic composition, even of Jews. Although from other sources there are repeated signs of non-whites (about 0.5%) within the larger Jewish community (Fisher, 1983, pp. 118–120), in these polls they comprise 1.8%, primarily the children of mixed marriages, since Blacks and Asians account for 0.4% each. Also, 3.3% claim Latin descent, undoubtedly much higher than in Jewish communities in the rest of the country. Within California, of course, the Jewish community contains many fewer (adult) non-whites and Hispanics than does the State as a whole (11.8 and 10.4%, respectively, according to the poll data, which are notably lower than Census figures).

Slight irregularities over time in the age distribution of Jews make comparison with non-Jews imprecise. However, the differences that existed between the two groups in the early 1980s are the same as those found generally over the last 25 years. At both the upper and lower adult ranges the differences are small: people over 65 comprise 13.3% of the adult Jewish population compared with 12.5% of the non-Jews. At the opposite end, 13.9% of Jewish adults are aged 18–24 compared with 15.2% of other Californians. What differentiates Jews in California from Jews in most other areas – especially more established eastern communities – is the relative similarity of their age structure with that of the non-Jewish population.

TABLE 2. MARITAL STATUS OF JEWS AND NON-JEWS, BY GENDER AND ETHNICITY, CALIFORNIA, 1983-1984 (PERCENT)

Marital status	Jews		Non-Jews		Both genders	
	Males	Females	Males	Females	Jews	Non-Jews
N	173	178	4,290	4,630	351	8,920
Total ^a	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Married	54.9	52.8	58.4	56.5	53.8	57.4
Separated/divorced	15.0	13.5	11.9	15.9	14.2	13.9
Widowed	1.7	10.7	2.6	11.4	6.3	7.2
Never married ^b	28.3	23.0	27.1	16.2	25.6	21.4

a. Errors due to rounding.

b. See text note 1 for redistribution of 'living together'.

Source: California Field Polls (numbers 8,301 to 8,403, 8,405).

Jews do differ greatly from non-Jews in political party affiliation and voting. In spite of their considerably higher status and wealth, Jews are much more likely than others (60% vs. 38%) to identify with the Democratic party and much less likely (14% vs. 32%) to vote Republican. Rates for independents and minor parties are similar. Comparing Jews with Anglo non-Jews of the same income, these party differences become even more evident.

Change and Trends, 1959-1984

One methodological advantage of examining longitudinal data is that it reduces the impact of the sampling bias since that usually tends to remain stable over time. Although the recent sample may be of higher education than the population circa 1960, we suspect that a generally similar distortion exists in 1984. Thus any change which occurs in the sample is likely to be close to the real change in the population.

The most overriding generalization that applies to all the variables is that over time both Jews and non-Jews move in the same direction. Whatever happens to all Californians happens to Jews. There is no escape from demographic developments in an open society.

For all groups the most dramatic change occurred in education. From 1960 until 1982² the percentage of Jewish college graduates doubles, from 24% to 48%; those with at least some college education increase from 48% to 80%. (An equivalent proportional change, but at lower levels occurs for non-Jews.) All the Field numbers are above Census data but the Census also shows that the figures for Californians, especially Anglo non-Jews, are far above those for the rest of the country.

The percentage of Jews who work as professionals increases from 25% (1960) to 43% (1982). The corresponding decrease occurs primarily among managers and business people. Although there were not many physical laborers in the early 1960s, there are even fewer in the early 1980s. The pattern for other Californians is closely parallel; for almost all the years the proportion of non-Jewish to Jewish professionals remains between .60 and .67; but that ratio is slightly higher in the 1980s than 20 years earlier, a sign of a possible trend toward less differentiation.

Although family size decreases, the number of wage earners per family increases. Fewer Jewish families have nobody working and in more families two adults work, suggesting that for an increasing majority of married Jews both partners are employed.

The increased number of couples working combined with higher educational levels and a rise in vocational status lead to much higher levels of income. Although part of this increase obviously reflects inflation, real income has risen strikingly as well. Whereas about two-fifths of the Jews had a family income of over \$15,000 in the late 1960s, by the early 1980s more than one-half earn above \$30,000. Economically, as a group, the Jews have very much made it in society.

The economic comparison between Jews and other Californians is partly a function of income categories. Using only the highest economic level (which changes from \$20,000+ to \$40,000+), from 1971 to 1982 the proportion of Jews to non-Jews drops marginally from 2.04 to 1.90. However, in data parallel with Gallup findings (which also have a low ceiling), using the category of \$30,000+ in 1982, the corresponding proportions drop over approximately five-year periods from 2.04 to 1.77 to 1.44 (Fisher, 1983, pp. 125–126). At the lowest income levels, even in the 1980s differences remain small.

Changes in marital status for Jews also match developments in the larger society – more adult Jews have never been married (an increase from 16% to 26% over slightly more than one decade) and noticeably fewer are currently married (from 68% to 54%), while the figures for the separated and divorced have increased (6.1% to 14.2%).

With fewer people married, household size declines. (Californian data are generally low, and the 1970 findings are biased by a minimum age of 21 rather than 18.) In the early 1970s, 35% of the Jewish households had at least four family members whereas ten years later the comparable figure is only 23%, a very substantial decline. The percentage of single-person families increases gradually from 17% to 22% while the modal number of two people households goes from 33% in 1970 to a relatively stable 38% from 1975 onwards.

The same general findings obtain for number of children in each age category. But since so few Jewish families had children, there is not much room for a decrease: those with any child less than six years old drop from 13.2% to 8.8% and those with more than one young child slip from 5.1% to 1.7%. The differences from 1969 to 1984 tell a story of small Jewish households becoming even smaller. And what has happened to the numbers of children in Jewish families has happened in equal measure among non-Jewish (especially Anglo) families.

Changes in age reflect the dynamics of California's population. As a State, California has aged much more slowly than the country as a whole. According to national Census data, from 1960 to 1984 the proportion of adults who are at least 65 jumps from 13.7% to 16.0% whereas in California it goes from 13.6% to 14.0%. For Jews, the numbers fluctuate and so the data are not as clear as those regarding education. Using Field data, and looking only at adults over 21, between 1960–64 and 1980–84 the proportion of both Jews and non-Jews aged 60 and above increases by less than one percentage point. Like other Californians, as a group, the population of Jews has aged relatively slowly.

The explanation for California's youth lies in the residuals of the last great baby boom and in migration – both domestic and international. Unlike Florida, people come to California not to retire but to build their lives, they are the upwardly mobile,

many of whom attend school in California, while others come for greater job opportunities.

Review and Prognosis

California Jews occupy a space between American Jews and Californians. For several measures of position – both vertical and horizontal – California Jews more closely resemble Jews across the country than other Californians. On a series of related socioeconomic variables, California Jews stand out within the State for: higher education, higher vocational status, and higher income. These traits are mutually reinforcing and contribute to other characteristics: greater concentration in metropolitan areas, more liberal attitudes on civil liberties and social-cultural issues, and a greater incidence of bachelorhood, delayed marriage, as well as fewer children.

Living in California has also shaped Jewish life. Jews invariably move in the same direction that other Californians, especially Anglo non-Jews, are moving. This includes not only the socioeconomic variables but marital status and family size, patterns of residential mobility and in racial/ethnic composition, reflected by the growth in the number of Black, Asian, and Hispanic Jews.

The present and the immediate future of California are a function of immigration patterns, both domestic and (much more so than for the rest of the country) also international. Largely younger and on the economic move, these migrants have swelled the numbers of Californians and the number who are moving up the socioeconomic ladder. The California Jewish population explosion, marked by an increase from about 430,000 (1955) to over 790,000 (1984), reflects this immigration, and includes about 50,000 foreign-born Jews in southern California alone, mostly recently emigrated from Israel, the Soviet Union, and Iran (Herman and LaFontaine, 1983). These immigrants tend to be upwardly mobile, educated young people from middle-class backgrounds.

Now that migration has slowed and the children are assimilating into California life, the future of California Jewry lies in its present population. What makes California almost unique – especially for Jews – has been its relative age maintenance. Because that is a result of specific migration patterns, it is not likely to be duplicated elsewhere or even again in California. Presently, three potential migration groups have the power to accelerate or to retard this normalization trend: the influx of older people, orthodox families (who often have more children), and another wave of Soviet immigrants. However, as the population increases in size, the addition of new groups will have less statistical impact.

What gives California added significance is that it tends to change before the rest of the country, as a precursor of national trends. We can expect to find demographic change among California Jews to be duplicated across the country except for the traits related to age. And soon that too will change. In the immediate future, if patterns persist, we should expect to see the continuation of upward mobility, more professionals, more singles, smaller families and greater ethnic diversity. If the numbers of Jews are to increase – by means other than external immigration – it will follow a societal reevaluation of marriage, work, and the family, especially for the highly educated.

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Notes

1. In order to increase the sample size for marital status, four 1984 polls were used, three of which had a new category for 'living together.' For the sake of continuity, those few responses (3.8% for the Jews) were redistributed into the separated/divorced or never married categories according to their relative proportions for all the 1984 polls combined.
2. Reference to a specific year denotes the three or four year period surrounding that (middle) year.

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