

Methodological Report
American Jewish Population 2015:
Estimating the Number of Jewish Adults who do not Identify their Religion as Jewish and
the Number of Jewish Children

The data synthesis yields model-based estimates of the portion of the adult population in the United States who self-identify as Jewish when asked about religion. Currently the synthesis does not include information about the number of Jewish children, or the number of adults who might identify their religion as none, or unaffiliated with any specific religious group even though they consider themselves ethnically or culturally as Jewish. Instead, recent targeted surveys of the Jewish population that include assessment of these additional groups are used to adjust the baseline model-based estimates of Jewish adults. There are too few surveys of this sort to be able to establish how reliable the estimates are in terms of reproducibility, but they do provide a general idea of the possible size of these additional groups.

The most recent national survey of the Jewish population was conducted by the Pew Research Center (2013). They reported that there were 5.3 million Jewish adults of whom 1.2 million self-identified as Jewish but not by religion (JNR). Note, this 5.3 million is a total over the specific areas of the US that were sampled and do not include outlying areas from more than 1,400 of the 3,100 counties in the US. This would correspond to 23% of the total Jewish population. They also estimated that there were 1.3 million children, or 20% of the population.

Pew's estimate of Jewish adults, however, excluded a substantial number of people who identified as Jewish (and had Jewish parents, and childhood religion was Jewish), but when asked about religion, they indicated that they were "something else", that is, they chose to provide a description of their beliefs rather than choose one of the specific categories of religious groups, and rather than identifying as "no religion" or "atheist". Review of the open-ended responses indicated many of these individuals described generalized beliefs in God, spiritual, "secular", or "not practicing"; that is, they were clearly unaffiliated with any organized religious group even though they had not said outright that their religious affiliation was "none". Including these individuals, the proportion of all Jewish adults who identify as Jewish but not by religion increases from 23% to 25%. (See [Methodology](#) for detailed information on the recoding of Pew data based on open-ended responses.) and the proportion of Jewish children increases to 21%.

These proportions were used for adjustments to the national model-based estimate of the number of adults who identify as Jewish by religion to yield total Jewish population estimates. For estimates of smaller geographic areas such as metropolitan areas and counties, local Jewish population surveys – where available -- were used to provide similar adjustments as applied to the national mode-based estimates. When no local sources of data were available, sub-national estimates from the Pew national survey were used depending on reliability and available sample size (See [Detailed List of JNR and Jewish Children Estimates](#)).