

Estimating and Understanding the Jewish Population in the United States: A Program of Research

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Abstract It is inherently difficult to conduct socio-demographic studies of the Jewish population in the United States. This paper describes a multi-stage program of research that addresses the methodological and substantive challenges of providing valid socio-demographic data on the contemporary American Jewish population. The premise is that no single study or approach, and no single dataset, provides sufficient empirical support to understand a complex, ever-changing population. The program of research relies on multiple ways to integrate data sources and uses them in conjunction with one another to develop estimates of the size of the population and its characteristics. It includes data synthesis, targeted surveys, use of data synthesis in weighting of targeted surveys and triangulation. Examples of the application and utility of these methods are provided. It is estimated that as of 2010, there are a total of 6.5 million Jews in the United States. This includes 4.22 million adults who identify as Jewish by religion, and 975,000 Jews who identify as Jewish but do not consider it their religion; in addition, it incorporates 1.3 million children (under 18 years of age) who are being raised exclusively as Jewish. The proposed methods help to overcome many of the limitations and threats to validity that have plagued single studies of the population and, although imperfect, enhance our understanding of the American Jewish population.

Keywords Jewish population · US Jewry · Socio-demographics · Survey methodology · Data synthesis · American Jewish community

Socio-demographic studies of the Jewish population in the United States have played a central role in scholarly analyses, as well as in policy discussions within the Jewish

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