

JEWISH AMERICAN HERITAGE MONTH

History



May is Jewish American Heritage Month – On April 20, 2006, President George W. Bush proclaimed that May would be Jewish American Heritage Month. The announcement was the crowning achievement in an effort by the Jewish Museum of Florida and South Florida Jewish community leaders that resulted in resolutions introduced by Rep. Debbie Wasserman Schultz of Florida and Sen. Arlen Specter of Pennsylvania urging the president to proclaim a month that would recognize the more than 350-year history of Jewish contributions to American culture. The resolutions passed unanimously, first in the House of Representatives in December 2005 and later in the Senate in February 2006.

The month of May was chosen due to the highly successful celebration of the 350th Anniversary of American Jewish History in May 2004, which was organized by the Commission for Commemorating 350 Years of American Jewish History. This coalition was composed of the Jacob Rader Marcus Center of the American Jewish Archives, the American Jewish Historical Society, the Library of Congress and the National Archives and Records Administration.

Who are the Jews?

The Jewish People are an ethno-religious group and nation originating in the Land of Israel, which is the current location of the State of Israel. Jews lived under Jewish self-rule in the Land of Israel off and on for many centuries in ancient times. However, as various empires

conquered the land, they engaged in mass expulsions of Jewish residents, the final and most comprehensive of which was carried out by the Roman Empire in 70 CE. While a small number of Jews always remained in the Land of Israel, as a result of these expulsions from the Land of Israel, Jews settled throughout the Middle East, Africa, Asia, and Europe. In later centuries, they made their way in significant numbers to North and South America as well. These communities of Jews outside of the Land of Israel are known as the Jewish Diaspora. From the Middle Ages until the mid-twentieth century, Jews were periodically expelled from some of these places in the diaspora as well. Until there was a State of Israel, such Jews often had no place to go.

Despite being scattered throughout the world, Jews remained, and continue to remain, connected to one another and to the Land of Israel through shared history, liturgy, customs, religious practices, literature, and familial ties. Jews also share a common language of Hebrew, which through most of history was only used for prayer, Bible study, and rabbinic discourse. Today, Hebrew is the national language of the modern State of Israel, which was founded in 1948. Although few diaspora Jews are fluent in Hebrew, Jewish educational institutions throughout the Jewish Diaspora continue to teach it as a modern spoken and written language as well as a sacred tongue.

Rosh Hashanah 5782: World Jewish Population at 15.2 Million

10 largest Jewish populations by country:

1 Israel 6,930,000	2 United States 6,000,000	3 France 446,000
4 Canada 393,500	5 United Kingdom 292,000	6 Argentina 175,000
7 Russia 150,000	8 Germany 118,000	9 Australia 118,000
	10 Brazil 91,500	



Core Jewish population according to estimates by Sergio Della Pergola, the Hebrew University; to be published in the American Jewish Year Book, 2021.



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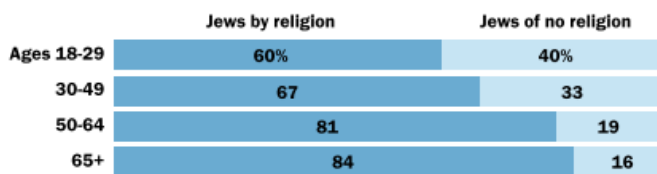
U.S. DEMOGRAPHICS

The United States has the second largest Jewish population, next to Israel. It had been a hub of Jewish immigration since the nineteenth century, as Jewish people sought to escape persecution in Europe by emigrating across the Atlantic. The Jewish population in the U.S. is largely congregated in major urban areas, such as New York, Los Angeles, and Chicago.

U.S. Population

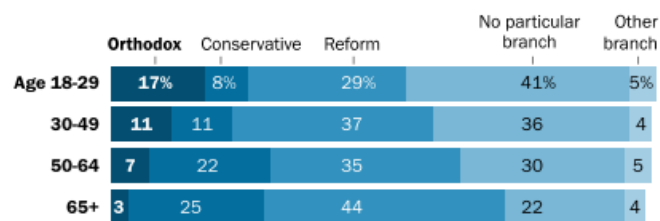
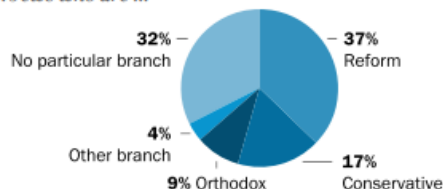
According to the Pew Research Center, there were about 7.5 million Jews of all ages in the U.S., or 2.4% of the total U.S. population in 2020. About 27% of Jewish adults do not identify with the Jewish religion, but consider themselves to be Jewish ethnically, culturally, or by family background.

U.S. Jewish identity, by age



Younger Jewish adults are much more likely than older Jews to identify as Orthodox. Roughly four-in-ten Jewish adults under 30 identify with either Reform (29%) or Conservative Judaism (8%), compared with seven-in-ten Jews ages 65 and older.

% of U.S. Jews who are ...



Age

Jewish adults are older than the U.S. public as a whole. The median age in the Jewish population is 49 – slightly older than the median age of adults in the general public (46). Roughly half of Jewish adults are ages 50 and older (49%), compared with 45% of adults in the general public. Among Jews by religion, 56% are 50 and older, compared with just 32% of Jews of no religion. Orthodox Jews (median age of 35 among adults) are *younger* than Conservative Jews (62) and Reform Jews (53).

Geography

About four-in-ten Jewish adults (38%) live in the Northeast – roughly double the share of U.S. adults overall who live in that census region (18%). A quarter of Jewish Americans reside in the West (25%), and a similar share live in the South (27%). Just one-in-ten Jewish adults live in the Midwest.

Racially Diverse

The U.S. Jewish population is becoming more racially and ethnically diverse. Overall, 92% of Jewish adults identify as White (non-Hispanic), and 8% identify with all other categories combined. But among Jews ages 18 to 29, that figure rises to 15%. Already, 17% of U.S. Jews surveyed live in households in which at least one child or adult is Black, Hispanic, Asian, or multiracial.

Education

Nearly 6 in 10 Jews are college graduates, including 28% who have obtained a postgraduate degree. By comparison, 3 in 10 US adults have are college graduates, including 11% who have a postgraduate degree.

% of U.S. Jews who completed ...

	High school or less (%)	Some college (%)	College degree (%)	Postgraduate degree (%)
NET Jewish	20	22	30	28=100
Jews by religion	19	21	30	30
Jews of no religion	21	27	30	22
Orthodox	43	20	17	20
Conservative	18	27	25	30
Reform	16	20	33	30
No particular branch	20	23	32	24

Economics

Jews are a relatively high-income group. About one-in-four Jews (23%) say they have family incomes of \$200,000 or more. By comparison, just 4% of U.S. adults report that level of household income. However, 1 in 10 Jews report annual household incomes of less than \$30,000, far fewer than the average 26% of all U.S. adult under \$30,000.

[Data from Jewish Americans in 2020 – Pew Research Center](#)

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JUDAISM

Judaism

Judaism is one of the world's oldest religions, dating back nearly 4,000 years, and is considered to be the original Abrahamic faith (which include Islam and Christianity). As a monotheistic faith, followers of Judaism believe in one God who was revealed through ancient sages and prophets, including Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, Samuel and others.

Key among a number of sacred texts — the most important of which is the Torah — Jews believe that the Ten Commandments are holy laws handed down to Moses by God. Worldwide, there are about 14 million Jews today, who worship in religious centers known as synagogues.

Jewish movements — also sometimes referred to as streams, denominations, or branches — are the principal categories of religious affiliation among American Jews. These movements are mainly distinguished from one another on the basis of their philosophical approaches to Jewish tradition, and their degree of observance and interpretation of traditional Jewish law, or halacha. These movements include:

- **Orthodox Judaism:** Orthodox Jews are typically known for their strict observance of traditional Jewish law and rituals. For instance, most believe Shabbat shouldn't involve working, driving or handling money. Orthodox Judaism is diverse and includes several subgroups, including Hasidic Jews. This form started in the 18th century in Eastern Europe and emphasizes a mystical experience with God.
- **Reform Judaism:** Reform Judaism is a liberal category of the religion that values ethical traditions over strict observance of Jewish laws. Followers promote progressive ideas and adaptation. A plurality of religious Jews living in the United States follow Reform traditions.
- **Conservative Judaism:** Many people consider this form of Judaism somewhere between Orthodox and Reform Judaism. Typically, conservative Jews honor the traditions of Judaism while allowing for some modernization. Unlike Orthodox Judaism, Conservative Judaism is fully gender-egalitarian.
- **Reconstructionist Judaism:** Reconstructionism dates back to 1922 when Mordecai Kaplan founded the Society for the Advancement of Judaism. This sect believes that Judaism is a religious civilization that's constantly evolving.
- **Jewish Renewal:** Jewish Renewal started in the 1960s with the leadership of Rabbi Zalman Schachter-Shalomi, whose approach emphasized the joy of Hasidism without the Orthodox approach to law. Jewish Renewal emphasizes holistic consciousness and a diverse approach to religious observance.
- **Humanistic Judaism:** Rabbi Sherwin Wine founded this denomination of Judaism in 1963. Humanistic Jews celebrate Jewish history and culture without an emphasis on God.
- While there are various denominations of Judaism, many Jews don't identify with a particular classification and simply refer to themselves as Jewish.

Resources

[Jewish American Heritage Month](#)

[History Channel - Judaism](#)

[American Jewish Committee – Who are the Jews?](#)

[Pew Research Center – Jewish population](#)

[Pew Research Center – Jewish Americans 2020](#)

[Pew Research Center – Jewish Economics and Well-being](#)

[Anti-Defamation League](#)

[My Jewish Learning – Jewish denominations](#)

