
A Demographic Profile of Latin American Jewry

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A problem for anyone laboring in the field of Latin American Jewish studies is that no one knows just how many Latin American Jews there are, or how to count them. Official data are scarce, the attitudes of the various Jewish communities toward the taking of a census have been defensive, and even the question of who is a Jew is controversial. No official census of the Jews of Latin America has ever been conducted, nor is one likely to be.

U. O. Schmelz and Sergio Della Pergola, the leading demographers at work on this subject, provide some estimates of the size of Jewish populations in South and Central America in the 1982 edition of the *American Jewish Year Book* (see Table 1). Although some of the figures are estimates only, they are the most reliable data available.

The dimensions of the Latin American Jewish population are considerably less ample than believed by those who embrace the most generous definition of Jewish identity. In recent years, the best-received estimates were from 800,000 to 825,000 for Latin America as a whole, some 500,000 to 550,000 of these in Argentina alone. But Schmelz and Della Pergola calculate that there may actually be as few as 493,250 Jews in all of South and Central America today, 249,000 of them in Argentina. To understand why the claimed figures had to be scaled down, it is necessary to understand how they were arrived at. In the process, we will learn something about the dimensions and characteristics of this population, and also about the psychology of the communal agencies which were responsible for the earlier, inflated, figures.

Estimating the Size of Jewish Populations

Special problems beset the field of Jewish demography generally; some others bedevil Latin American Jewish demography specifically.

Fundamental to any enumeration of Jews is the determination of who is a Jew. According to Jewish religious law (*halakhah*), a Jew is a

person who was born of a Jewish mother and has not accepted conversion to another religion; or who has been converted to Judaism according to halakhic procedures. In practice, some persons in marginal categories regard themselves as Jews while others do not: for example, persons born of Jewish fathers and non-Jewish mothers. Also, there is the question of those who qualify under halakhic definition but choose to dissociate themselves from Jewish life. Are such individuals to be counted as Jews? Because of the existence of "marginal" Jews, the practice has arisen of adding to Jewish census data an estimate of the number of such persons, thus occasionally producing an error equal to the difference between the figure thus obtained and the figure that existed before any correction was attempted. Reliance on estimates is, however, a necessity for all Jewish populations outside the State of Israel.

In countries that have separated church and state, the collection of information regarding religious preference is regarded as invidious, since the registration of individuals as Jews has been used as the basis for discriminating against them.¹ Many Jews living in Latin America entered their present countries of residence on baptismal certificates, and would be unwilling to compromise their status for the sake of a census. Such life experiences combine with more remote memories of the Spanish Inquisition to limit the willingness of Latin American Jews to check the category *israelita* on a census.

In recent years, five Latin American nations have included a question on religion in their national censuses. Most of these produced puzzling results. The Chilean census of 1960 showed 11,700 Jews in the country, or about one-third the number actually affiliated with Jewish institutions at that date. Conversely, the Mexican census of the same year showed 100,750 Jews, an impossible 470 percent increase over the 1950 census.² Despite the theoretical possibility of deriving information on Jewish communities from national censuses, these must be handled with extreme care.

Until recently, most of our knowledge has come from studies prepared by Jewish community-service organizations. From 1966 to 1975, the series *Comunidades Judías* was compiled biannually by community leaders and social-welfare professionals in each republic, and edited by staff of the Comité Judía Latinoamericana. This came to an end due to the harassment and eventual flight of the staff.

Table 1: Estimated Jewish Population
Distribution in the Americas, 1980

Country	Total Population	Jewish Population	Jews per 1,000 Population	Accuracy Rating ^b
Canada	23,690,000	308,000	13.0	A 1971
U.S.A.	220,584,000	5,690,000	25.8	B 1970-71
Total Northern America		5,998,000		
Bahamas	224,000	500	2.2	B 1970
Costa Rica	2,193,000	2,500	1.1	C
Cuba	9,775,000	1,000	0.1	D
Dominican Republic	5,275,000	200	0.0	D
El Salvador	4,435,000	350	0.1	C
Guatemala	7,046,000	1,100	0.2	C
Haiti	4,919,000	150	0.0	D
Jamaica	2,162,000	250	0.1	D
Mexico	69,381,000	35,000	0.5	C
Netherlands Antilles	260,000	700	2.7	C
Panama	1,881,000	2,000	1.1	C
Trinidad	1,127,000	300	0.3	D
Total Central America ^a		44,050		
Argentina	26,729,000	242,000	9.1	B 1960
Bolivia	5,425,000	1,000	0.2	C
Brazil	118,645,000	110,000	0.9	B 1960
Chile	10,917,000	25,000	2.3	D
Colombia	26,360,000	7,000	0.3	B 1977
Ecuador	8,146,000	1,000	0.1	D
Paraguay	2,973,000	700	0.2	C
Peru	17,293,000	5,000	0.3	C
Surinam	381,000	500	1.3	C
Uruguay	2,878,000	40,000	13.9	D
Venezuela	13,515,000	17,000	1.3	D
Total Southern America ^a		449,200		
Other		700		
Total		6,491,950		

a. Total of countries reported in detail

b. A—reliable, B—less accurate, C—partial or old data, D—conjectural.

Source: *American Jewish Year Book*, 1982, p. 284.

Community records, however, are never complete. There is no centralized recordkeeping for births, marriages, or deaths among Jews. Thus, Jews who are not organized do not get counted. Gaps in data are difficult to fill because of uncertain political conditions that make field work impracticable. In practice, some efforts to fill in lacunae in Jew-

ish census data, if not objectively verifiable, are logically persuasive. Furthermore, much Jewish history has been written without the assistance of official information-gathering agencies. It would be self-defeating to assert that, where there is no certainty, there can be no knowledge. Much can be learned from the sources that are available, and even more from integrating information derived from them all.

In attempting to construct a demographic portrait of Latin American Jewry, the most weight will be given to three studies that encompass the bulk of the populations and were carried out by qualified researchers. The demographic dimensions of the Jewish community of Argentina were defined through computer analysis of the national census of 1960.³ São Paulo's Jewish population was surveyed in 1969 under the direction of a sociologist.⁴ In Mexico, a non-computer analysis of the census of 1950 was conducted by a Jewish demographer.⁵

It is not necessary to impose on the data—derived from widely different sources by way of a wide variety of techniques—an artificial *gleichshaltung* that in the nature of things would only intensify inaccuracies. The data as found present a startlingly clear pattern. When this pattern in turn is compared with the demography of the matrix populations, the distinctive profiles of Jewish and non-Jewish populations appear in sharp relief.

Characteristics of Latin American Jewish Populations

The 1936 municipal census of Buenos Aires identified 120,195 Jews, comprising 5 percent of the population of the city. This figure was credited by Ira Rosenswaike, the researcher who analyzed the census for its Jewish component.⁶ He further enlarged this figure by a factor of from 8 to 12 percent to include persons who were ethnic Jews but who had declared themselves to be without religion. The Jewish population of the country as a whole he assessed at 230,955.

In an effort to arrive at a rate of natural increase, Rosenswaike utilized data derived from national and municipal censuses, as well as the records of Jewish institutions, particularly the Jewish Colonization Association, which had conducted its own census in 1909. From these, Rosenswaike inferred three decreasing rates of natural increase during the twentieth century. The 1.5 percent rate of natural increase compu-

ted by Simon Weill, director of JCA, was accepted for the early years of the century. "However, after World War I the Jewish rate of natural growth throughout the western world suffered a sharp decline. Everywhere the birth rate reached unprecedented lows, while the mortality rate generally fell but slightly."⁷ Seeking to confirm or refute the existence of this worldwide trend among Argentine Jews, the demographer turned to the Buenos Aires municipal census of 1936. In that year, native-born *israelitas* of less than fifteen years of age accounted for 23.5 percent of the *israelita* population; by comparison, 21.8 percent of the total population were under fifteen. Assuming a lower rate of infant mortality among Jews, Rosenswaike inferred that the Jewish and non-Jewish birth rates in the city were about the same. That figure stood at 19.3 per 1,000 for the general population in 1931-35, and it was accepted for the Jewish population as well. The Jewish death rate was ascertained from the number of burials in Jewish cemeteries: 9 per 1,000 population in 1934. Taken together, the figures indicated a rate of natural increase of 10 per 1,000 per year.⁸

Despite this evidence of a low birth rate, Argentine Jews as well as outside observers did not believe the official census returns that showed fewer *israelitas* in 1947 than in 1935; 249,330 compared to 253,242. Reasoning that Jewish and non-Jewish demographic trends must be similar, they assumed that the figures were in error. Estimates of the number of Jews continued their steady upward trend. In 1947, the *American Jewish Year Book* suggested 350,000; thirteen years later, the same publication increased this to 400,000, although the preliminary census returns for 1960 recorded just 275,913 *israelitas* over age five. In 1962, the *American Jewish Year Book* estimate jumped another 50,000, and in 1968 yet another 50,000, with *Comunidades Judías* adding still another 50,000 for good measure in 1970, for a total of 550,000 Jews in Argentina. But a 25 percent increase in population over a period of ten years implies a growth rate of 2.1 percent annually (or even greater, considering additional factors such as emigration and outmarriage). So high a rate of natural increase is not characteristic of any developed area of the world, nor does it exist in Argentina, nor is it characteristic of Jews worldwide. The rate of natural increase among the Jews of Canada (a population very similar in its origins to that of Argentina) is considerably less than 1 percent.⁹ Furthermore, the fragmentary evidence that could be assembled pointed to a declining birth rate.

When the Argentine census of 1960 became available in full, it recorded 291,877 Jews. This number represented about three-fourths the number believed by the Jewish establishment to be living in the country. The discrepancy was accounted for by the fact that the census had been taken on the eve of Yom Kippur: after sundown, observant Jews were not at home but at the synagogue. In addition, some 5 percent of the population, almost one million people, declared themselves to be "without confession." As a result of the omission of both religious and marginal Jews, it appeared that the size of the Jewish population had been seriously underestimated by the government.

This anomaly was taken up by Schmelz and Della Pergola, who analyzed the computer tape for "Jewish" and "without confession" responses. In a persuasive analysis, they determined that the published census total might be supplemented by 6 percent to take in the proportion of respondents living in Buenos Aires (the area where most Argentine Jews are concentrated) who were born Jewish and answered "no religion" or "without confession" to the question on religion. Having considered the data on these nonrespondents, the authors adopted a corrected total of 310,000 Jews in Argentina in 1960, the bulk of these in Buenos Aires. The new total was the most significant datum to emerge since the establishment of Jewish settlement in Argentina, since it meant that one-quarter of the presumed 1960 population did not exist, that presumed rates of natural increase were inoperative, and that 1970 estimates of half a million were even more off the mark. Furthermore, it called into question accepted population figures for Jews in other parts of Latin America. These had been rising *pari passu* with population estimates for Argentina, and now had to be scaled down in similar fashion. For the area exclusive of Argentina, the *American Jewish Year Book* estimated 237,850 in 1948; 302,250 in 1960; and 324,000 in 1970. These totals included large rounded sums for cities such as Santiago, Bogotá, Mexico City, Montevideo, and Caracas, despite the fact that in a large metropolis it is very nearly impossible to sift out Jewish individuals without an official census. Taking into account recent findings for Argentina, it had to be assumed that rates of growth for other Latin American Jewish communities were overly generous. Quite probably, there were no more than 240,000 Jews living in Latin America exclusive of Argentina, or about the same number as in 1948.

Birth rate. Information on the demographic characteristics of Latin American Jewry displays an internal consistency that confirms the existence of a group that is quite distinct from the majority members of the matrix populations. The gravest difference appears in the contrasting birth rates. For whatever country we examine, the Jewish birth rate is just half that of the matrix population. In 1965, the crude birth rate for Argentina as a whole was 22 per 1,000; during the same period, the Argentine Jewish birth rate was 10.5 per 1,000 (see Table 2).⁷⁰ The number of Argentine Jews in each age cohort born since 1953 shows steady attrition. In 1960, there were 4,434 children aged eight, but only 3,662 aged four and 3,022 aged one. In the group below age four, there were to be found only three-quarters of the number of children aged five to nine. The proportion of children dwindled faster than the number of Jewish women of childbearing age, because of a continuous drop in completed fertility, and also because of a continuous rise in the frequency of mixed marriages, in the majority of which the children are not reared as Jews. The completed fertility rate of Argentine Jewish women in 1960 yielded a ratio of 947 daughters per 1,000 mothers, more than 5 percent short of the number required for replacement of the parent generation.

The São Paulo Jewish community was surveyed during the five-month period January–May 1969. The precise number of births, extrapolated over a one-year period, yielded a birth rate of 2.4 percent per year. This rate obtained during a period when the Brazilian population as a whole was experiencing a birth rate of 4.4 percent per year.

*Table 2: Estimates of Vital Rate Among Argentine Jews
(Yearly Averages per 1,000 population, 1946-1980)*

Years	Birth Rate	Death Rate	Balance
1946-50	16.5	8-9	7.5-8.5
1951-55	15.5	9-10	5.5-6.5
1956-60	11.0	10	1.0
1961-65	10.5	10-11	-0.5-0.5
1966-70	10.5	11.5	-1.0
1971-75	10.5	12	-1.5
1976-80 (est.)	11.0	15	-4.0

Source: Schmelz and Della Pergola, *Hademografia shel hayehudim*, p. 164.

Ninety-five percent of Jewish families have fewer members than the average Brazilian family. Moreover, there is a secular trend toward fewer children in Brazilian Jewish families. In an earlier study carried out in 1965, Henrique Rattner found that Jewish university students in São Paulo belonged to families with an average of 2.7 children, but that their parents' families had averaged 5 children per family. The Brazilian Jewish birth rate is declining during a period when the country as a whole is experiencing accelerating population growth.

Working with the Mexican national census of 1950, Tovy Meisel found that the Jewish community experienced a birth rate of 23 per 1,000, contrasted with 46 per 1,000 among the population at large. Again, though the figures are higher, the Jewish birth rate shows up as one-half the prevailing rate.

Low fertility rates characterize all Jewish populations of the diaspora except those in Asia and North Africa. Worldwide, the birth rate, and consequently the rate of natural increase, is lower among Jews than among the general populations of their respective countries. Accordingly, and considering that the Jewries of all the Latin American republics proceeded from the same immigrant streams, it is reasonable to infer similar low rates for Jewish populations in those parts of Latin America for which there are no data. The inference is backed up by scattered available data on Jewish age structure in Brazil, Chile, and several small Central American communities.

This phenomenon reflects modernized attitudes toward the family, the status of women, and child-rearing practices. In modern times, Jews preceded the populations among whom they lived "firstly, in reducing mortality, and subsequently in lowering fertility."¹¹

Evidently, emigration does not change the patterns of Jewish fertility. The United States trial census of 1957 showed that, for Jewish women still of childbearing age, fertility was 20 percent below that of the rest of the urban population, 25 percent below that of the entire white population, and almost 30 percent below that of the total United States population. Evidence from community surveys taken since that date indicates that the birth rate continues to fall. Jews imported low birth rates into their present countries of residence, and the Latin American experience has not converted them to high levels of fertility.

Death rate. A complete record of deaths among Ashkenazic Jews of Buenos Aires exists for the years 1953-63. It shows continuous in-

crease, being 40 percent greater at the end of that period than at the beginning. In 1963, there were three and a half times more burials than marriages within the Ashkenazic community of Buenos Aires. This partially reflects increasing resort to marriage by civil contract. Nevertheless, a decline in the number of persons who identify as Jewish is undeniable.

The major cause of the rising death rate is the aging of the population. In 1963, the single year for which records are available for all Jews in Buenos Aires, 2,438 Jewish deaths were recorded. Subtracting 35 stillbirths, Schmelz and Della Pergola compute a rate of 10 deaths per 1,000 Jews of Greater Buenos Aires. The death rate for the general population of the city that year was lower, standing at 8 per 1,000.

The composition of the two mortality rates was different. Infant mortality (death in the first year of life) was 9.3 per 1,000 among Jews, compared with 40 per 1,000 among the general population of Greater Buenos Aires in 1961 and 57 per 1,000 among the general population of Argentina in 1967.¹² The Jewish death rate continues low until age sixty, when mortality starts running higher than among the general population. Compounding the trend, the death rate among Jews was rising at a time when the Argentine death rate was declining.

By the 1960's, the Jewish mortality rate surpassed that of the general population, due to aging. It also surpassed the Jewish birth rate. There is now a negative balance of deaths over births within the Jewish community, with an estimated 15 deaths to 11 births per 1,000 population per year.

The mortality rate among São Paulo Jews is 1.6 percent per year; the rate among the Brazilian population as a whole is 1.1 percent per year. The national figure includes a high rate of infant mortality. In fact, the hazards of infancy in Brazil are so great that expectation of life at birth was calculated at forty-three years in 1950.¹³ The rate of infant mortality among Brazilian Jews is almost nil, and the majority of deaths occur after age sixty.

Meisel found the Mexican Jewish mortality rate to be 9 per 1,000 as compared to 15.5 per 1,000 among the general population. Both groups were growing in 1950; Jews at the rate of 1.4 percent per year, the majority population at 2.9 percent per year.¹⁴ Over the next fifteen years, Mexican mortality dropped sharply as measures of public hygiene took hold. Mortality dropped by a third while the birth rate de-

creased only slightly, resulting in one of the highest rates of natural increase in the world. Among infants, the most vulnerable sector of the population, mortality continued high, with 61 infant deaths per 1,000 live births. However, there was no infant death among the approximately 20,000 Ashkenazim of Mexico City during several years of the 1960's.

Infant mortality is at a very high level throughout Latin America. Considering only Argentina, Mexico, and Brazil, the location of a majority of Latin American Jews, the rate of infant mortality for the first two countries is 60 and 61, respectively. Brazil does not supply data on infant mortality to the United Nations; for the state of Guanabara alone (site of the former capital city of Rio de Janeiro), the rate of infant mortality in 1959 was 94.4 per 1,000 live births, and in 1960, 700 per 1,000. In these countries, as we have seen, the rate of infant deaths within the Jewish communities tends toward nil.

Here again, a global demographic pattern is working itself out. Infant mortality among Jews worldwide is extremely low, and it appears that Latin American Jews follow the pattern of other Jews, rather than the national pattern characteristic of their matrix populations. There have been systematic and far-reaching changes in health care universally. These are now penetrating Latin America, as the declines in the death rate show. The speed of the process differs, but because Jews in Latin America are in a more advanced time frame than their matrix populations, their infant mortality rate is considerably lower.

Infant mortality rates are a commonly accepted index of modernization. The capacity to save infants from death caused by endemic disease is dependent upon relatively low levels of technology and a modest expenditure of funds. The inability or disinterest of governments in providing elementary hygienic services is a salient characteristic of underdeveloped countries. The contrast between the high rates of infant mortality throughout Latin America and the low rate within the region's Jewish communities throws into relief the modernized character of Jewish life as contrasted with the traditional pattern of human wastage that continues to prevail in Latin American society at large.

Longevity. The anticipated life-span of Jews and non-Jews in the city of Buenos Aires is almost the same, being 68.9 and 73.9 for Jewish males and females respectively, and 67.9 and 74.2 for non-Jewish

males and females. Uruguay and Venezuela fall into the same long-lived category as Argentina. Outside the modernized sectors of the continent, life expectancy drops sharply for the majority populations but remains high for Jews. For example, in 1968, 40 percent of São Paulo Jews were over age forty, 14 percent over age sixty. In the same year, only 25 percent of the general population of São Paulo were past forty, and just 6 percent were past sixty.¹⁵ Jews achieved their pattern of longevity independent of their immediate environment. Among the general population of the city, those over forty gained 5.5 percentage points between 1950 and 1968, reflecting improved health conditions; but the Jewish age distribution showed no material change over this eighteen-year period.

Within the Guatemalan community in 1965, some 130 individuals, or 10 percent of the Jewish population, were aged sixty and over. Comparable data do not exist for the Guatemalan population as a whole; but expectation of life at birth for the Guatemalan population was 49.5 in 1950, and had not changed significantly in 1973. It is thus most unlikely that 10 percent of Guatemaltecos live to age sixty-five.¹⁶

Since many of the health practices that eliminate infant mortality also work to prolong the life-span, it is not arbitrary to conclude that life expectancy among Jews in areas for which no data exist approximates the modernized model of Buenos Aires more closely than it does the traditional rate still prevalent in most of Latin America.

Low fertility, low infant mortality, and extended life expectancy among the Jewish populations contrast with high fertility, high infant mortality, and low life expectancy among the non-Jewish populations (with the exception of Argentina). The result is a higher median age for Jewish than for non-Jewish populations (see Table 3).

A longer life-span, in addition to being its own reward, enables individuals to develop their skills to the utmost. The blighting of promising careers through early death is far less frequent among Jews than in the general population. Furthermore, survival into the sixties ensures that most parents are able to nurture their children to maturity. The phenomenon of parentless children is comparatively rare.

Family size. Small families are typical of Jewish populations. In countries that maintain traditionally high birth and death rates, the Jewish family stands out in sharp relief as having passed through a demographic transition: there are fewer wasted pregnancies, fewer chil-

dren per family, and more of these children reach maturity. In Latin American nations that have passed as an entity through the demographic transition from traditional to modern patterns of family life, Jewish populations are less clearly differentiated—except in the matter of infant mortality.

The average family size of members of the Asociación Mutual Israelita Argentina, the principal Ashkenazic organization of that country, diminished from 4.53 to 4.14 between 1920 and 1930. By that date, Jewish families were smaller in Argentina than in Central Europe. By 1960, Jewish families were smaller than non-Jewish families in Buenos Aires, with an average 2.2 children being born to Jewish married women, as compared with 2.7 for non-Jewish women.¹⁷ Jewish households averaged a fraction under four persons each. The downward trend shows up clearly in Quilmes (a district of Gran Buenos Aires) in a 1963 survey which found an average 3.45 persons in Ashkenazic families.

Sephardic families tend to be somewhat larger (see Table 4). Modernization was a distinctively European phenomenon. Jews originating in Arabic or Balkan lands did not participate in it as directly as did Jews of Central, Western, or even Eastern Europe. There is thus a consistent difference in family size between Ashkenazic and Sephardic families in all communities for which we have data. Greater traditionalism in Sephardic life results in higher fertility rates and larger families.

The less-developed countries, as is well known, are presently experi-

Table 3: Median Age of Population

Area and Date	Jewish	General
Argentina, 1960 ^a	34.7	27.0
São Paulo, 1969 ^b	33.78	27.2
Quilmes, 1963 ^c	32.15	26.61
Guatemala, 1965 ^d	26-35	n.a. ^e

a. Schmelz and Della Pergola, *Hademografia shel hayehudim*, p. 66.

b. Rattner, *Tradição e mundança*, p. 23.

c. AMIA, *Censo de la Comunidad Judía de Quilmes*, p. 19.

d. Jacob Shatzky, "Guatemala," p. 302.

e. Not available. But with 46 percent under age 15, the median age could not lie in the 26-35 group.

encing a population explosion. Forty-three percent of the population of Brazil, for example, is below the age of fifteen. The corresponding figure for São Paulo City is 36 percent for the general population; but it is just 21.3 percent for the Jewish population.¹⁸ Urban families whether Jewish or non-Jewish tend to be smaller than rural families. But Jewish families are smaller than the São Paulo norm, and as a practical matter, since almost all Brazilian Jewish families are urban, Jewish families in Brazil are distinctly smaller than non-Jewish families.

There are age-distribution charts for two other communities: that of Guatemala and that of Argentina. The Guatemalan Jewish community consisted of 1,030 persons in 1965. In that year, 26 percent of the Jewish population was under age fifteen.¹⁹ In the Guatemalan population as a whole, 46 percent of the population was below that age.

Twenty percent of Argentine Jews are under age fifteen, compared with 30 percent among the general population of the country.²⁰ An attempt to draw a Jewish "age pyramid" results in a boxlike graph, with each five-year cohort below age sixty containing an almost equal number of persons. Only two categories differ. The group that was aged fifty to fifty-four in 1960 contains larger numbers, men predominating, and reflects the migratory wave that peaked in the years just preceding World War I. The base of the "pyramid" narrows drastically, reflecting the declining birth rate and the assimilation of infants into

Table 4: Family Size in Selected Cities

City and Date	Number of Family Members	
	Ashkenazim	Sephardim
Córdoba, 1969 ^a	3.82	4.09
Quilmes, 1963 ^b	3.45	4.48
Tucumán, 1962 ^c	3.3	4.2
Valparaiso, 1960 ^d	3.1	4.19
Mexico City, 1950 ^e	3.3	4.6

a. Joseph Hodara, "Hayehudim ba-Cordoba," *Dispersion and Unity* 2 (June 1960): 34-51.

b. AMIA, *Censo de la Comunidad Judía de Quilmes*, pp. 34-35.

c. AMIA, *Primer Censo de la Población Judía de la Provincia de Tucumán*, p. 35.

d. Benny Bachrach, "Ha-yishuv hayehudi ba-Valparaiso, Chile," *Dispersion and Unity* 2 (June 1960): 40-47.

e. Meisel, "Yidn in Medsike," p. 406.

the general population via the intermarriage of their parents.

Part of the gestalt of underdevelopment is a high dependency ratio. Families must provide for large numbers of children, many of whom do not survive to become themselves contributors to the family welfare. Jewish families, with their reduced number of children, do not suffer this handicap, but neither do they have the population reservoir out of which future growth might occur.

Rate of natural increase. The São Paulo Jewish population exhibits a rate of natural increase of 0.8 percent annually, based upon birth and death rates alone.²¹ If one were to take into account emigration and outmarriage, for which no statistics exist, it is probable that the community would be found actually to be decreasing in numbers. Rattner believes that the demographic pattern revealed by his study is applicable to the rest of Brazil. Considering the present high rate of population growth of the country, Jews—who already comprise fewer than 1 percent of the population—will be even more negligible statistically in the future, if present trends continue.

Other communities likewise report insufficient numbers of births to compensate for deaths. Paraguay, for example, declined from 1,500 to 1,000 Jews in recent years.²² The Bolivian community is in process of decay. In Mexico, where the Jewish community doggedly refuses to permit a census, the population estimate of 35,000 offered by *Comunidades Judías* in 1972 could not be sustained by the estimated rate of natural increase of 1.5 percent. Even if the Mexican community actually numbers 35,000 today, as Table I suggests, it still constitutes a less significant proportion of the Mexican population than it did a generation ago, considering the rapid growth in the general population.

Migration. The Jewish communities of Latin America have not added to their numbers through immigration since the dispersal of Hungarian and Egyptian refugees in 1957. It is estimated that no more than 350 Jews were admitted to Argentina in any one year between 1953 and 1960. Since that time, probably more Jews have left than entered the country. The brutal civil war of the seventies resulted in the death or disappearance of an unknown number of Jews, followed by the departure from the country of many others in search of physical security.

In times of political and economic stress, Jews like other nationals tend to leave their homelands. Chile is believed to have lost 6,000 Jews

during the Allende years; the entire Jewish community of Nicaragua abandoned the country on the fall of the dictator Somoza, and most Jews have now left El Salvador as well. Uruguay, which reported 55,000 Jews in 1970, claimed only 48,000 two years later, and Schmelz and Della Pergola conjecture that there may now be only 40,000.

Even in quieter times, Jewish youth tend to abandon the smaller communities in quest of an education—if not in the capital city of their own country, then in the universities of the United States, France, and Israel. With a numerically small community to start with, departure of the college-bound reduces the number of potential mates so drastically that parents are encouraged to send abroad other children, particularly girls, whom they would otherwise have kept at home, but whom they wish to see marry endogamously. While some of these students remain in Latin America, many who are sent to the United States or Israel apparently depart with their parents' blessing to emigrate permanently if possible. The result is to impoverish Latin American Jewish community life and challenge its ability to survive intellectually.

Intermarriage. It is not possible to know with precision just how many Jews marry non-Jewish mates in a given year; nor could one deduce from such a figure whether or not the individual continued to regard himself as a Jew, and whether or not his children would be raised as Jews. Observation, confirmed by some studies, leads one to believe that substantial numbers of Jews do intermarry, that more men than women marry out of the Jewish faith, and that most children of mixed marriages are not raised as Jews. Several calculations enable us to advance beyond such observations in order to estimate the extent of assimilation among Argentine Jews.

First, the Argentine census of 1960 showed that more Jews married that year than could be accounted for in the records of the Jewish community. Approximately 25 percent of the Jews (male and female) who married in 1960 were married in non-Jewish rites (whether the partner was Jewish or not). Augmenting the figures by 6 percent for marginal Jews and subtracting non-Jewish-rite marriages in which both partners may in fact have been Jews, we are left with an estimated rate of 30 percent for outmarriage.²³

Second, clues derived from gaps in the statistics confirm the observation that more men than women drop their affiliation with the Jewish community. For example, in the age group fifteen to forty-four,

there were 930 men for every 1,000 women, according to the 1960 census. The inference is that more young and middle-aged males than females declined to identify themselves as Jews.

Third, a distinction must be made between the completed fertility rate of Jewish women (i.e., including all their children) and the rate of Jewish births (i.e., including only births of infants who are considered Jewish and thus increase the Jewish population). Using the first calculation, based on the number of live births reported by Jewish mothers, the current generation of Jewish women is not replacing itself. Schmelz and Della Pergola projected the 1960 birth rate onto the known number of Jewish women aged fifteen to forty-nine in 1960, and found a shortfall not of the anticipated 5 percent, but of 29 percent: 16,300 infants aged four or less in place of the expected 21,700. The difference represents infants born to Jewish mothers who had intermarried.²⁴

The high and rising rate of intermarriage among Argentine Jews has been noted ever since Jews first settled in that country. Its extent has never before been charted. Its ultimate impact, unless the trend is reversed, will be the assimilation of Argentine Jews into the general population. Consistent with their hopes for Jewish survival, the tendency of Jewish organizations has been to deplore the trend to assimilation while continuing to count the offspring of mixed marriages as Jews. Recent research, however, forces the observer to face facts squarely. The Argentine Jewish community is steadily dwindling in size and faces a real question of viability, not because of government repression, but because of popular acceptance of intermarriages in which one partner is a Jew.

Summing Up

Jewish demography is of an entirely different nature than the demography of the matrix populations among whom Jews live. The matrix peoples have high rates of natural increase (Argentina the exception), preponderantly young populations, and a high growth potential capable of being unleashed by minimal expenditures on public hygiene. But Jews passed through the period of population expansion owing to health care during the nineteenth century. They have already responded to the enhanced life chances of infants by limiting the number

born. Thus, there is no scope for a Jewish "population explosion" based on better health care. The only source of population growth among Jews would be an increase in the birth rate; and such a trend was not observed in any country studied. To the contrary, Jewish populations are aging, and their mortality at present tends to run higher than their birth rate. Inter-marriage, while it contributes to the genetic pool of the general population, subtracts from the specifically Jewish component of that population. Emigration is also taking its toll. In light of these facts, the probable fate of Latin American Jewry, already an insignificant numerical minority, is to become still less significant numerically in the future.

This phenomenon was hidden from view for many years by a welter of assumptions, all of which proved to be wrong: that Jews were reproducing at the same rate as non-Jewish *latinos*, that Jews who left the fold would return, that the children of mixed marriages would be raised as Jews. As a result, Jewish communal leaders continued to count as Jews thousands of individuals who had ceased to consider themselves as such and who were not raising their children to be Jews. The reason why this was done is unclear; perhaps wishful thinking played a part. The result was to obscure the dimensions of the communities, a situation that is just beginning to right itself as more and more scholars enter the field of Latin American Jewish studies.

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Notes

1. The United States Current Population Survey of 1957 posed a religious question in a trial run for the 1960 census. The results were suppressed at the instance of Jewish organizations that regarded the collection of separate official statistics on religion as a breach of the First Amendment. The figures were released ten years later as a result of passage of the Freedom of Information Act and have been a fertile source of information.

2. U. O. Schmelz, *Jewish Population Studies, 1961-68* (Jerusalem: Hebrew University, Institute of Contemporary Jewry, and London: Institute of Jewish Affairs, 1970), p. 104.

3. U. O. Schmelz and Sergio Della Pergola, *Hademografia shel hayehudim be-Argentina ube-artzot aherot shel America halatinit* (Tel Aviv: Tel Aviv University, 1974).

4. Henrique Rattner, *Tradição e mudança: A comunidade judaica em São Paulo* (São Paulo: Atica, 1970).
5. Tovyve Meisel, "Yidn in Meksike," *Algemeine Entsiclopedia* 5 (New York: Dubnow Fund, 1957).
6. Ira Rosenswaike, "The Jewish Population of Argentina," *Jewish Social Studies* 22 (October 1960): 195-214.
7. *Ibid.*, p. 201.
8. *Ibid.*, p. 202. At that date, the League of Nations *Statistical Yearbook* gave the Argentine birth rate as 29.7, the death rate as 12.8, and the rate of natural increase as 16.9 for the country as a whole.
9. Schmelz, *Jewish Population Studies*, p. 38.
10. Throughout the remainder of this article, national demographic data are drawn from Charles L. Taylor and Michael C. Hudson, *World Handbook of Political and Social Indicators* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1972).
11. Schmelz, *Jewish Population Studies*, p. 14.
12. Schmelz and Della Pergola, *Hademografia shel hayehudim*, p. 54.
13. Eduard E. Arriaga, *New Life Tables for Latin American Populations in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries* (Berkeley, University of California Press, 1968) pp. 1-4.
14. Meisel, "Yidn in Meksike," p. 407.
15. Rattner, *Tradição e mudança*, pp. 23-24.
16. Jacob Shatzky, "Guatemala," *Jewish Journal of Sociology* 7 (December 1965): 302-303.
17. Schmelz and Della Pergola, *Hademografia shel hayehudim*, p. 45.
18. Rattner, *Tradição e mudança*, pp. 24 and 178.
19. Shatzky, "Guatemala," p. 302.
20. Schmelz and Della Pergola, *Hademografia shel hayehudim*, p. 65.
21. Rattner, *Tradição e mudança*, p. 33.
22. Comité Judío Americano, *Comunidades judías de Latinoamérica* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Candelabra, 1971-72), p. 193.
23. Schmelz and Della Pergola, *Hademografia shel hayehudim*, p. 59.
24. *Ibid.*, pp. 46-47.