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Intermarriage of Jews and non-Jews: The global situation and its meaning

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/ Introduction[1]

Intermarriage between Jews and non-Jews is often a subject of concern in Jewish society. Such concern is not coloured by anxieties around racial or ethnic purity – after all, anyone can become a Jew via a process of religious conversion. Moreover, conversion is an act that is universally seen by Jews in positive or, at the very least, neutral terms, and converts are typically honoured after conversion. So the concern is rather existential; it reflects a genuine anxiety about the preservation of the Jewish People and Jewish families. Quantitative data consistently demonstrate that marrying a non-Jewish spouse often results in people drifting away from Jewish life, culture and religion. Statistically, a minority of children born to intermarried couples grow up with a strong Jewish identity. It would be wrong, however, to think of intermarriage exclusively as the 'first station' of assimilation. Indeed, in many instances the actual act of intermarriage is the final or penultimate station: people with a relatively weak connection to Jewish culture and religion may not hold marriage to a Jewish spouse as a top priority to start with. For them, intermarriage is a concluding, or advanced stage of assimilation into the wider non-Jewish environment. At the same time, for others, intermarriage is neither a result of, nor a vehicle for assimilation: on the contrary, their non-Jewish spouses convert to Judaism and join the Jewish People.

Just how widespread are concerns about intermarriage in Jewish society? A recent survey of Jewish attitudes in the USA, a country with one of the least traditional Jewish communities, has shown that about one in three Americans self-identifying as Jewish by religion say that it is *very important* to them that their grandchildren marry someone Jewish. However, great variation in this sentiment is observed across denominational groups: about 90% of orthodox Jews hold this view, compared with just 6%-14% of religiously unaffiliated and Reform Jews.[2] To contextualise these findings: about a quarter of American Jews also say that it is very important that their grandchildren share their core political convictions or carry on their family name.[3] In Israel, a much more traditional and homogeneous Jewish setting, a similar survey has shown that about 80%-90% of all Jews would be *not at all comfortable* with their child marrying a non-Jew, with nearly 100% of haredi and religious Jews and 60%-90% of secular Jews holding this attitude. By way of comparison, in a 2016 survey, 80%-90% of non-Jewish Israelis said they felt not at all comfortable at the thought of their children marrying Jews.[4]

Among non-Jews in the Diaspora too, similar attitudes exist. Among Americans, Pew Research Center data from 2012 demonstrate that about one third said they would be unhappy if a family member married someone of a different race or ethnicity.[5] In Europe, asked about their

[1] An earlier version of this paper was presented at a conference held by the Rabbinical Center of Europe (RCE) in Vienna, 13-15 March 2023 ("Prevention of assimilation in Europe"). The author thanks Sergio DellaPergola (Hebrew University of Jerusalem, emeritus), Alan Cooperman (Pew Research Centre) and Jonathan Boyd (Institute for Jewish Policy Research) for providing peer review and scientific editorial input.
[2] Pew Research Center. 2021. *Jewish Americans in 2020*, p. 103.
[3] Pew Research Center. 2021. *Jewish Americans in 2020*. Topline Questionnaire, p.36.
[4] Pew Research Center. 2016. Israel's religiously divided society. Topline Questionnaire, pp. 84-86.
[5] Pew Research Center. 2012. *The rise of intermarriage: rates, characteristics vary by age and gender.*

readiness to accept Jews as family members (a much harsher attitude than just thinking of out-marriage as undesirable), 20%-25% of the populations in UK and France said that they were not ready to do so (25%-40% were not prepared to accept Muslims). To put these figures into a wider context, Pew data from 2017 show that smaller proportions of Europeans felt that Jews and Muslims would be unacceptable to them as neighbours: 5%-10% and 10%-20%, respectively.[6] In brief, the perception of intermarriage as undesirable is significant among Jews, but it is not a uniquely strong preoccupation. Nor is this a sentiment absent in other ethnic and religious groups. On the contrary, religious or ethnic homogeneity in marriage is held as desirable by many groups, and when present, it is often rooted in anxiety about cultural or religious self-preservation rather than animosity.

In this paper, we present the state of intermarriage among Jews on a global scale. International comparisons of intermarriage among Jews have been published before,[7] but a lot of these data remain scattered across different publications, and some of the figures are incomparable, being based on different measures of intermarriage. Here, we do two things. First, we try to consolidate the existing data in the briefest and the most comparable form possible, in one place. This is timely because there have been several recent and very significant advances in research on the scope of Jewish intermarriage in Israel, where about 45% of all Jews in the world live, as well as in the United States of America, where another 40% of Jews live, and indeed in Europe and other parts of the Jewish Diaspora, containing in total about 15% of all Jews. Benefitting from these insights, this paper covers close to 100% of the global Jewish population.[8] Second, we consider the question of the impact of intermarriage on the growth or decline of Jewish populations.

The harshest and most extreme critics of intermarriage have sometimes used highly emotive language about it, describing its effects as akin to a 'plague' or even a second Holocaust.[9] But at the other end of the spectrum, some actively welcome intermarriage, maintaining that it actually serves as a means of growing the Jewish population. Beyond the sometimes volatile rhetoric, the data can help us to consider the issues more empirically. So here we explore the issues of whether intermarriage jeopardises the numerical stability of Jewish populations, first by establishing the basic dimensions of intermarriage across the Jewish world, and then by looking at those dimensions alongside data on another key factor affecting Jewish population growth and decline: Jewish fertility.

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[6] Pew Research Center. 2018. Being Christian in Western Europe. Topline Questionnaire.

[7] For some recent and historical publications see: (1) Ruppin, A. (1934). *The Jews in the modern world*. London: Macmillan and Co. (2) DellaPergola, S. (1976). 'Demographic perspectives of mixed marriage, in: *Encyclopaedia Judaica Yearbook 1975/76*. Jerusalem: Keter, 198-220. (3) DellaPergola, S. (1992). 'Recent trends in Jewish marriage', in: S. DellaPergola, L. Cohen (eds.) *World Jewish Population: Trends and Policies*. Jerusalem, The Hebrew University, pp. 65-92. (4) DellaPergola, S. (2009). 'Jewish out-marriage: a global perspective', in: Reinharz, S. and DellaPergola, S. (2009). *Jewish intermarriage around the world*. New Brunswick: Transaction publishers. (5) DellaPergola, S. and Staetsky L. Daniel. (2020(. *Jews in Europe at the turn of the millennium: population trends and estimates*. London: Institute for Jewish Policy Research. (6) DellaPergola, S. (2023). 'Demography of the Jewish family: continuities and discontinuities', in: H. Hartman (ed.) *The Jewish family*. Cham, Springer. (forthcoming).

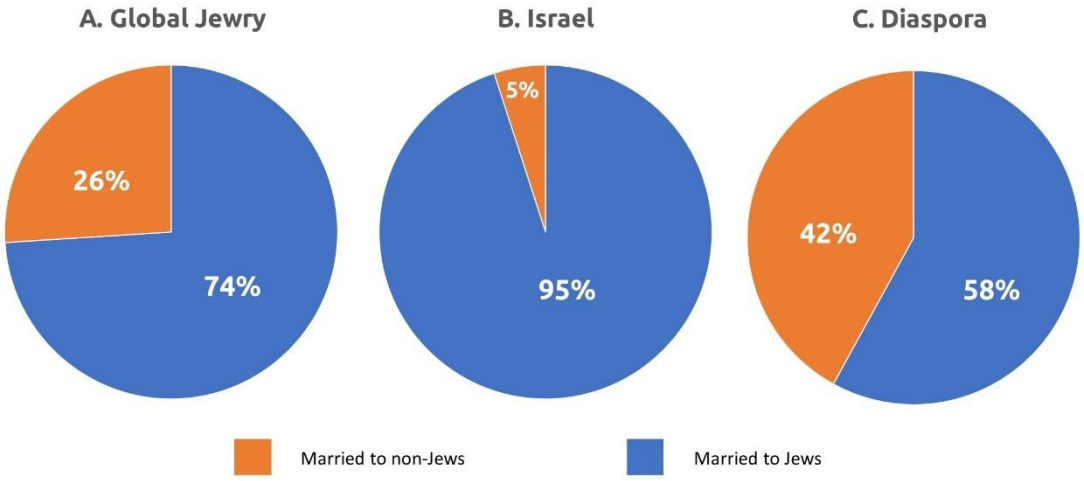
[8] All analyses are based either on the existing published estimates of intermarriage (sources are listed in the Appendix) or on processing the data from European and American surveys of Jewish communities. Europe: 2018 survey of European Jews by the EU Agency for Fundamental Rights (GESIS Data Archive, Cologne. ZA7491). Countries included (12 in total): UK, France, Germany, Italy, Spain, Hungary, Austria, Sweden, Denmark, Belgium, Netherlands, Poland. Analyses are based on 10,669 observations of Jews (by religion, ethnicity, heritage, parentage, culture, upbringing or something else) aged 16 years and over, married or in registered partnerships at the time of survey. (2) USA: Pew Research Center, 2020 survey of Jewish Americans. Analyses are based on 3,087 observations of Jews (by religion and no religion) aged 18 years and over, married or living with a partner at the time of survey. Partner's Jewishness was established in an identical manner to the respondent's Jewishness.

[9] Pruzansky, S. 'The consequences of intermarriage: opinion', *The Jerusalem Post*, July 24 2021.

/ Intermarriage: the global situation

Globally, approximately one in four married Jews today is married to a non-Jew (see Figure 1). In Israel, the share of intermarried Jews is much lower at 5%.[10] The relatively small group of intermarried Israeli Jews mostly owes its existence to the presence of non-Jews among immigrants to Israel from the former Soviet Union, where intermarriage is very prevalent. By contrast, in the Jewish Diaspora as a whole, about 40% of married Jews are intermarried. So there is a metaphorical abyss between Israel and the Diaspora when it comes to intermarriage, an unsurprising situation as Israel possesses a Jewish majority, so the chances of meeting a Jewish candidate for marriage in such an environment are naturally high. Vast differences in the scope of intermarriage exist across the Jewish Diaspora, as is discussed later in this paper. Communal size and the chances of meeting other Jews play important roles there too, yet do not explain the differences in the scope of intermarriage between Jewish communities in different countries. We will return to this issue in the next section of this paper.

Figure 1. Proportion of adult married Jews with a non-Jewish partner, 2020s, %



Note: Proportions of intermarried Jews globally and in the Diaspora have been obtained by weighting country specific rates on intermarriage by the shares of different Jewish populations in global Jewry.
Sources: (1) Data on intermarriage: database of data on intermarriage at the Institute for Jewish Policy Research. See Appendix for the original sources of data on intermarriage included in the database. (2) Data on Jewish populations: DellaPergola, S. 2022. 'World Jewish Population 2021.' *American Jewish Yearbook 2022*.

[10] There are several ways to measure intermarriage. One common option is to ask about the percentage of married Jewish individuals who are married to non-Jews, out of all married Jews. Another is to ask about the percentage of intermarried couples among all couples involving Jews. The timeframe is important too – one can examine all married Jews at a given point in a time, creating the *prevalence* of intermarriage across the married population as a whole, or the number of intermarriages among all marriages involving Jews in a recent five-year period for example, generating the intermarriage *rate* for those years. There is no single superior and correct way to measure the phenomenon, and the choice of a measure should depend on the aims of the inquiry, ensuring comparability across countries and times. Bearing in mind the aims of this inquiry, which is a panoramic picture of intermarriage across space and time, the first measure – the proportion of married Jewish individuals married to non-Jews – is the most appropriate.

The most tangible way to express the impact of these levels of intermarriage on the growth of Jewish populations is as follows. Children of intermarried Jewish women are considered Jewish, irrespective of the religion of the father. Whilst differences of opinion about Jewish status exist across the denominational spectrum, this view, grounded in Jewish law, is commonly accepted across the board. Yet, empirically, the degree to which the children of exogamous couples (for example, a couple including a Jewish mother and a non-Jewish father) feel attached to Judaism is generally lower than those of the children of endogamous couples (where both parents are Jewish). Thinking next about fertility, in the Western world it is relatively low, and the total fertility rate (TFR) – i.e. the average number of children born to a woman – in all European Union countries is below 2.1 children per woman, the approximate threshold necessary for maintaining the population size at current levels. Indeed, the highest levels of TFR in the EU in 2021 were observed in countries such as France and Sweden, at 1.7-1.8 children per woman. In the USA too, total fertility was at around 1.7 in 2021.[11] Even if Jewish TFR remains at a higher level than this, it is easy to see how the drifting away from Judaism of some of the children of intermarried mothers may render Jewish fertility insufficient for maintaining the population size at current levels, let alone for growth. When intermarriage is significant, and retention of Jewishness is only partial, even high fertility may not guarantee stability of population size.

Let us look at the interplay between different levels of intermarriage and fertility, by considering the American Jewish example. Fertility of American Jewish women stood slightly higher than average at about 1.9 children per woman in the 2010s.[12] American Jewish levels of intermarriage are about 45% (more on this shortly). If, for example, 80% of children of intermarried Jewish mothers in the USA remain within the Jewish fold (i.e. 20% of them cease to see themselves as Jewish), purely mathematically it would the same as 100% remaining within the fold, but the '*effective Jewish TFR'* being at a level of 1.7 children per woman.[13] To be sure, below replacement fertility at this level does not bring an immediate population collapse. British fertility, for instance, has remained below replacement since the early 1970s yet natural growth has continued.[14] Low mortality and a youthful age structure can 'rescue' the population from decline for a period, but not indefinitely. Should such low levels of fertility persist, population decline is inevitable, at least without significant immigration.

When Jewish communities, individuals and leaders voice concerns about intermarriage, this reality stands at the centre of their apprehension. Detailed demographic calculations are not and cannot be expected to be performed by people without demographic training. However, Jewish people's instincts are not wrong. Intermarriage is *not* a cause of existential concern if 100% of its offspring remain Jewish. But, in reality, this is not the case. Intermarriage is also less of a concern in places where Jewish fertility is high, but in many countries in the Diaspora it is similar to the levels found among American Jews. That said, in this day and age, it would be imprecise, or even incorrect, to see intermarriage as 'the threat' to Jewish demographic sustainability. Things are not as simple as that. It may have been different in the past, but today the main threat is low fertility, as we will see later.

[11] Sources: (1) OECD data-Fertility rates. Demography - Fertility rates - OECD Data. (2) Our World in Data. Fertility Rate - Our World in Data.

[12] Pew Research Center. 2021. *Jewish Americans in 2020*, p. 188. The figure relates to complete cohort fertility, which remained stable in 2013-2020.

[13] The method of calculating the 'effective Jewish TFR' was proposed by Dr Mark Tolts, and its implementation can be found in: Tolts M. (1996). 'Estimate of the 'Effectively Jewish' Total Fertility Rate', in: DellaPergola S., Tolts M. and Rebhun U. *World and Regional Jewish Population Projections: Russian Republic, 1994–2019* (Interim Report). Jerusalem: The A. Harman Institute of Contemporary Jewry, The Hebrew University of Jerusalem.

[14] Smallwood, S. and Chambarlain, J. (2005). 'Replacement fertility, what has it been and what does it mean?' *Population Trends* 119, pp. 16-27.

There are some criticisms of this way of thinking that should be considered. First, the very act of 'discounting' the children of intermarried Jewish mothers can be questioned. After all, as stated above, there is a broad consensus that the children of Jewish mothers are Jewish by definition. Thus the very idea that only 80% of these children remain Jewish runs the risk of creating class A and class B Jews in a spirit that is contradictory to Jewish law. Yet the assertion that transmission of Jewishness is partial in the case of intermarried mothers is not conjecture; it is based on empirical reality. The offspring of intermarried couples are less likely to identify as Jews than the offspring of in-married couples, and dispassionate population counts should reflect that, irrespective of what Jewish law says. Some level of discounting is needed to convey the demographic truth.

Another objection could be raised regarding the assumption that the children of intermarried Jewish fathers do not count as Jews automatically. If the definition of Jewishness is expanded to include them, as it is in some communities and denominational groups, more Jews could be gained and the whole perception of 'intermarriage as a threat' could be fundamentally overturned. Such a suggestion would be mathematically correct. Even if some of the offspring of intermarried couples disassociate from Judaism, relaxing the definition of Jewishness beyond the boundaries dictated by Jewish law could compensate for these losses. Indeed, theoretically, intermarriage could even be a source of numerical gain for Jews in this scenario: if disassociation from Judaism of some children of intermarried Jewish mothers reduces fertility from 1.9 to 1.7, the inclusion of some children of an intermarried Jewish father could bring it back up to 1.9 or even higher, all the way to replacement level and beyond. Whilst some make this case, particularly in the United States where progressive forms of Judaism dominate, it is highly controversial in more traditional circles. The unconditional inclusion of children of intermarried Jewish men (i.e. inclusion without a formal religious conversion) is not accepted by Orthodox Jewish law and is culturally unacceptable to at least 50% of the global Jewish population, including Jewish communities in Israel and around the world, not least some within the USA.

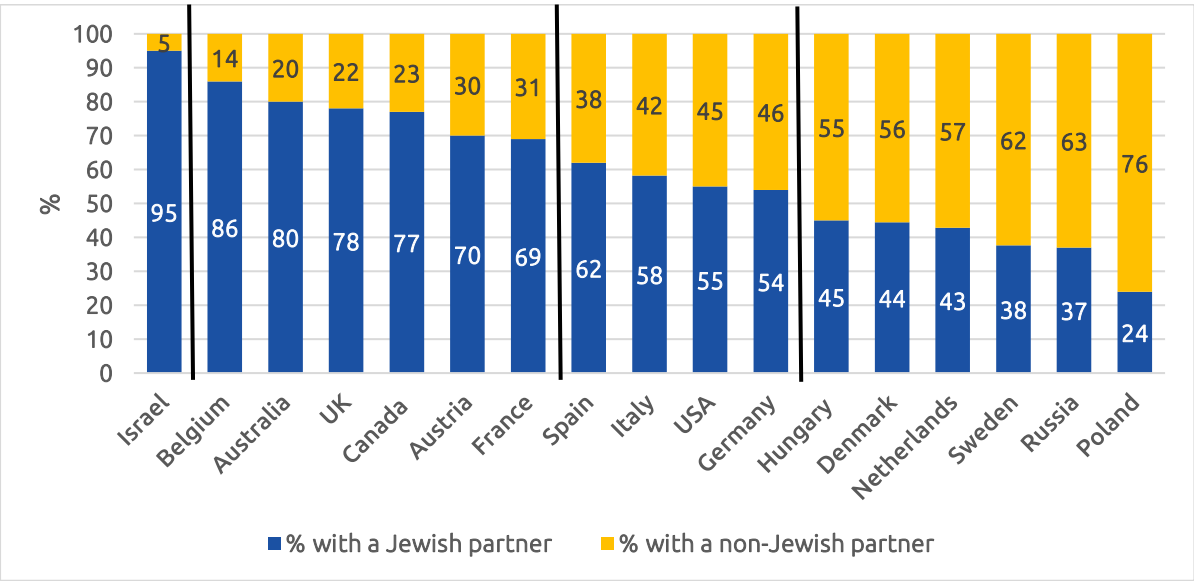
To sum up, in defining who is a Jew and, relatedly, the likely consequences of intermarriage, it is important to consider the definition of Jewishness dictated by Jewish law. This definition is broadly accepted by all Jews, while the modifications to it, or expansions, are not. It is important to be as explicit as possible about that, whilst at the same time not suggesting that the law is, or should be, immutable. The discussion about whether and how Jewish law should or could change is well beyond the limits of a demographic study. Instead, it belongs in the realm of rabbinical thought and should inform policy debate within Jewish communities, a point to which we will return.

/ Different types of Jews, different scope of intermarriage

The phenomenon of intermarriage exists in all Jewish communities today. As discussed already, levels contrast strongly between Jews in Israel and the Diaspora. In Figure 2 overleaf, we look more closely at differences between different Diaspora Jewish communities.

In terms of the prevalence of intermarriage, Eastern Europe forms the opposite pole to Israel. In Hungary, Russia and Poland, most Jews today are married to non-Jews. A similar situation can also be found among Jewish populations in Northern Europe, such as Sweden and Denmark. In Germany, where the majority of the Jewish population derives from Eastern Europe, the proportion of intermarried is only just below 50%. Interestingly, despite being geographically, culturally and politically remote from Central and Eastern Europe, the American Jewish population closely resembles some Central and Eastern European Jewish communities in terms of the scope of intermarriage. English-speaking Jewish populations outside the USA, as well as several major Jewish populations of Western Europe, most notably

Figure 2. Proportion of adult married Jews with a non-Jewish partner by country, 2020s, %



Note: In Belgium, Austria, Germany, Spain, Netherlands, Italy, Denmark, Sweden and Poland the figures relate to married and those in registered partnerships; in the USA, they relate to those married and those who live with a partner; in Israel, to those married and in intact marriages; in Canada, to those married or in common law; in Hungary, to those married or in a partnership; in the UK, France, Australia and Russia, to those married. Cohabitation is excluded from these figures, with the possible exceptions of Canada, Hungary and the USA.
Source: Database of data on intermarriage at the Institute for Jewish Policy Research. See Appendix for the original sources of data on intermarriage included in the database.

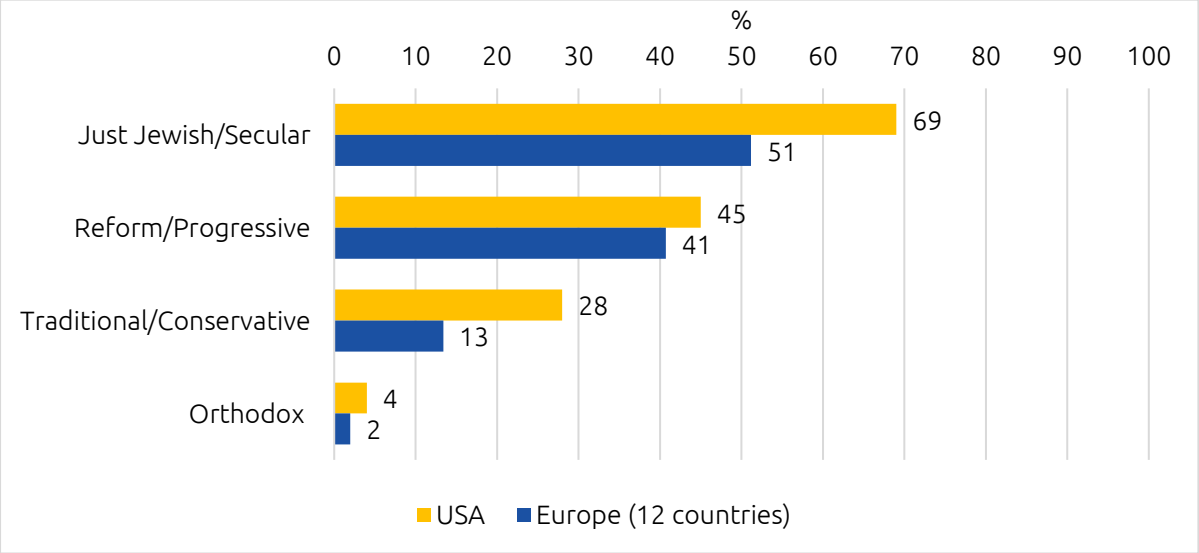
France, are situated between the Israeli pole and the situation in the United States. The prevalence of intermarriage in these places is in the approximate range of 14%-40%. One remarkable feature about Europe that arises from the presentation above is the sheer variety of levels of intermarriage across European Jewish communities. Metaphorically, there is no singular European pattern of intermarriage in that geographical zone. Both the high and low poles of intermarriage can be found there; indeed arguably, the highest and the lowest levels of intermarriage across the Diaspora (Belgium and Poland, respectively) are in Europe.

What underlies this range of situations with respect to intermarriage is a spectrum of traditionalism. Jewish populations with the lowest levels of intermarriage are those with the highest levels of traditionalism. Traditionalism is highest in Israel, where large proportions of Jews identify as 'very' religious, 'just' religious, or 'traditional'. Israel is then followed by Western European Jewish populations, as well as Canada and Australia. In Eastern and Northern Europe, the presence of traditional Jewish lifestyles is the lowest found anywhere. In Eastern Europe this is a legacy of many years of officially imposed atheism which affected Jews and non-Jews alike. In Northern Europe, organic, i.e. not officially imposed, processes of cultural secularisation are at their most advanced stage today. American Jews, perceived as a community with extraordinarily high levels of intermarriage from the viewpoint of Israeli and some European Jews, actually occupy a place around the middle of the spectrum. This too is understandable with reference to Jewish and non-Jewish levels of religiosity and traditionalism. Certainly, American society as a whole is nowhere near as low in religiosity as Eastern and Northern Europe are today, and neither are American Jews.[15]

[15] For useful empirical classification of different countries on religiosity and individualism see: Inglehart, R. and Welzel, C. (2005). *Modernization, cultural change, and democracy: the human development sequence*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

The connection between traditionalism, or religiosity, and the scope of intermarriage is further illustrated in Figure 3.

Figure 3. Proportion of adult married Jews with a non-Jewish partner by denomination, 2020s, %



Note: The presentation is based on the results of surveys of Jewish populations. In the US survey, the label 'Secular' includes Jews who self-identify as not practicing/not religious, secular, culturally Jewish, no particular denomination. The label 'Reform/Progressive' includes Jews who identified as Reform or Liberal/Progressive. The label 'Traditional/Conservative' includes only Jews who self-identified as Conservative. The label 'Orthodox' applies to those who identified as Orthodox, including strictly Orthodox. In Europe, the labels include Jews who self-identified as Just Jewish, Reform/Progressive, Traditional, Orthodox/strictly Orthodox (combined), respectively.
Source: (1) Europe: 2018 survey of European Jews by the EU Agency for Fundamental Rights (GESIS Data Archive, Cologne. ZA7491). Countries included: UK, France, Germany, Italy, Spain, Hungary, Austria, Sweden, Denmark, Belgium, Netherlands, Poland. (2) USA: Pew Research Center, 2020 survey of Jewish Americans.

In surveys of Jews, respondents are commonly asked to situate themselves in one of several identificational categories, such as 'Haredi', 'Orthodox', 'Traditional', 'Reform/Progressive', 'Secular', 'Mixed Jewish and non-Jewish' and 'Just Jewish'. The 'Just Jewish' category tends to attract the communally unaffiliated and those who do not associate with any of the other labels. Both in Europe and the USA, intermarriage is most prevalent among Jews identifying as secular or 'Just Jewish': nearly 70% of secular Jews in the USA and almost 50% in Europe are married to non-Jews.

Intermarriage is least prevalent among Orthodox Jews, with negligible percentages being married to non-Jews. Reform/Progressive Jews display noticeably lower levels of intermarriage compared to secular Jews, and this can be observed across all age groups, so is not an outcome of differences in age structure between 'Just Jewish' and Reform Jews, for example. Close examination of the European data reveals that the explanation is found in the fact that about 25% of Jewish partners of Reform Jews are Jews by conversion, in contrast to just 10% among Jews who identify as Just Jewish. It is reasonable to assume that many of these will have undergone a Reform conversion, which is not universally recognised as valid across all other denominations of Judaism. Interestingly, when analysis of intermarriage is limited to partners who are Jews by birth, 'Just Jewish' and Reform/Progressive Jews in Europe have identical levels of intermarriage: 44%-45% of them are married to Jews by birth and 55%-56% are married to non-Jews by birth.

In the opening paragraph of this paper, we highlighted assimilation, i.e. the weakening of religiosity and Jewish identity, as the main driving force behind intermarriage. In this section we explored the correlation between religiosity and intermarriage, developing essentially the same, or at least a related, theme. This may have come across as wilfully ignoring other factors. Critics will be right to ask: are there other factors affecting intermarriage? Are they not important? Certainly, the extent to which Jews have already assimilated or acculturated into wider society prior to marriage matters a lot, but other factors also play a role.

For example, people's choices of partners are sensitive to availability. In small or very diffuse Diaspora Jewish communities, the sheer probability of meeting another Jew, let alone another Jew with a profile suitable for marriage (e.g. age, sex or educational level) may be low. Educational level is worth highlighting: men and women tend to value compatibility in this respect, and any shortage of similarly educated Jewish partners may result in intermarriage. Further, past trends in fertility can interfere with availability. Strong fluctuations in Jewish fertility in the past may have created a lack of balance in marriage partners with a 20-30 year delay. That can happen when fertility drops suddenly, as happened during the Second World War, and then increases sharply, as happened after the war. Women born during a sudden increase in fertility may experience a deficit of male marriage partners: as men tend to be somewhat older than women at marriage, women belonging to the post-war large birth cohorts may not have enough potential grooms in the pre-war small birth cohorts. Similarly, migration, especially if it is sex-selective, can cause a deficit of marriage partners. This deficit, known also as a 'marriage squeeze', can affect men and women. However, our analysis suggests that, by and large, the impact of each of these factors is inferior to the impact of traditionalism.

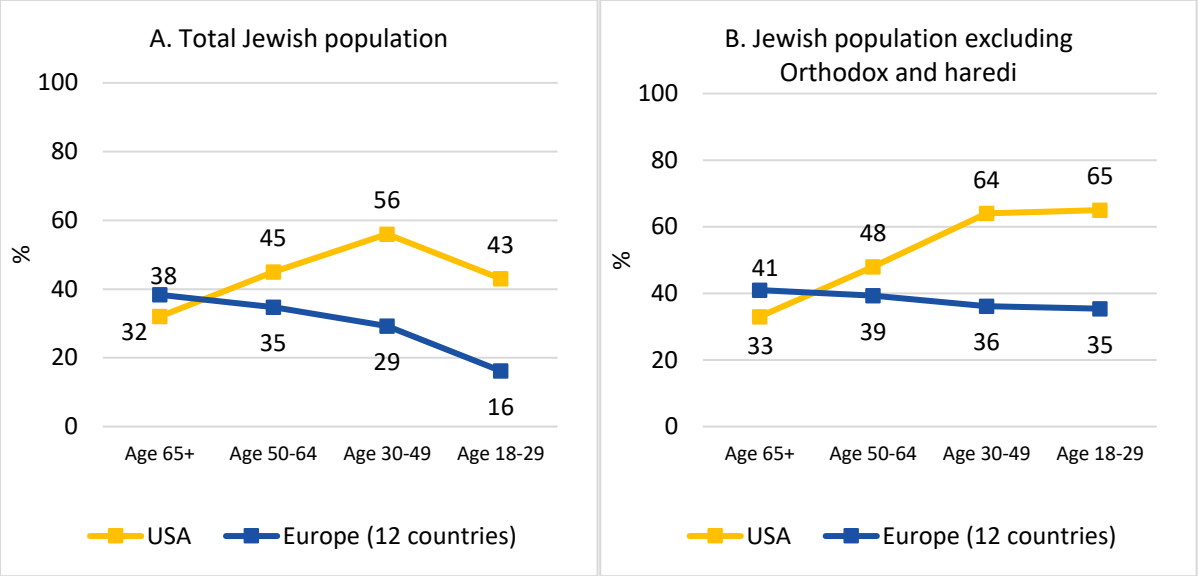
/ Trends in intermarriage

In the Jewish community today, there is often a common assumption of generational decline – that each generation is Jewishly less knowledgeable and engaged than the previous one. Applying this assumption to intermarriage, one would contend that each generation is more advanced than the previous one down the path of intermarriage. But is this so? Figure 4 overleaf brings some detail and nuance to this perception.

Looking at panel A of Figure 4, American data confirm this generational decline idea when comparisons are made between the three eldest groups shown: one third of married American Jews aged 65 years and over are intermarried, compared to close to half of those aged 50-64 years and more than half of those aged 30-49. The trend is indeed of increase in the scope of intermarriage. However, at the youngest age group, the trend appears to break. Among those aged 18-29 who are married, intermarriage is lower compared to the previous age group. In fact, 18-29-year-old American Jews are similar to 50-64-year-old American Jews with respect to the scope of intermarriage. Yet among Jews in Europe, the situation appears to be very different: there is no visible trend of increase in intermarriage at all across age groups.

Panel B of Figure 4 presents a similar estimation of the prevalence of intermarriage by age, but it removes all Jews who self-identify as haredi or Orthodox from the calculations. This clarifies what accounts for the somewhat surprising results in Panel A. Once removed, the picture more closely aligns with the common perception of generational decline. This is because the youngest age groups are compositionally relatively more traditional, or religiously observant, and Orthodox Jews have high fertility. Thus, when they are taken out of the calculations, we no longer observe a decline in intermarriage among young American Jews, but rather a levelling off at a very high level. The situation in Europe also changes in the same direction, but there the scope of intermarriage remains at more or less the same level across generations.

Figure 4. Proportion of adult married Jews with a non-Jewish partner by age, 2020s, %



Note: Age groups 18-29, 30-49, 50-64 and 65+ are for the USA. For Europe, age groups 16-29, 30-49, 50-59 and 60+ are used.
Source: 1) Europe: 2018 survey of European Jews by the EU Agency for Fundamental Rights (GESIS Data Archive, Cologne. ZA7491). Countries included: UK, France, Germany, Italy, Spain, Hungary, Austria, Sweden, Denmark, Belgium, Netherlands, Poland. (2) USA: Pew Research Center, 2020 survey of Jewish Americans.

We have written about this compositional change in Jews around the world recently: the proportion of haredi Jews out of the total Jewish population has been increasing and will continue to do so for the foreseeable future; it is an inevitable outcome of vast differences in fertility between haredi and non-haredi Jews.[16] However, it has not been sufficiently stressed that the impact of the growth of the more religious sector among Jews is felt strongest in the youngest age groups. The compositional change taking place in these groups is a precursor of what Jewish society at large is expected to experience in the future. So, when Jewish populations are analysed as a whole (Panel A), because the young age groups contain a greater proportion of more religious Jews, they also show a relatively low prevalence of intermarriage. When the analyses are limited to only non-Orthodox/non-haredi Jews (Panel B), the prevalence of intermarriage in the younger age groups is either greater than among the older age groups (the USA) or on par with them (Europe).

Thus, the generational decline narrative should be qualified. First, it is not universal: it exists in some places, most notably the USA, but not in others. Second, purely demographically, there is a powerful counterforce to intermarriage. Whilst intermarriage curtails the growth of Jewish populations, the increase in the proportions of haredi and Orthodox Jews, both groups with very high fertility, operates in the opposite direction. More will be said on the interplay of these forces in the following sections.

The final insight regarding the trend in intermarriage is a historical one. The state of the data today allows us a perspective of a hundred years (Table 1). For the current picture, we focus on the most recently observed levels of intermarriage best approximated by the percentage of young Jews who are intermarried.

[16] Staetsky, L. Daniel. 2022. *Haredi Jews around the world: population trends and estimates*. London: Institute for Jewish Policy Research.

Table 1. Incidence of intermarriage in historical perspective: % of Jews with non-Jewish spouse out of contracted marriages (see note below table for definitions)

Panel A. Historical, 1920s (%)		Panel B. Contemporary, 2020s (%)	
Hamburg, Germany	28	USA	43
Berlin, Germany	21	USA (without Orthodox)	65
Germany	19	Europe (12 countries)	16
Russia	12		
Hungary	12		
Vienna, Austria	12		
Ukraine	5		
Canada	4		
Belarus	3		

Note: Definition for Panel A: % of marrying Jews, contracting a marriage with a non-Jew (incidence of intermarriage). Definition for Panel B: % of Jews married to non-Jews, in the youngest age groups (a definition not identical to the one used in Panel A but sufficiently similar to allow comparison of the historical and the contemporary situations).
Sources: (1) Contemporary Europe: 2018 survey of European Jews by the EU Agency for Fundamental Rights (GESIS Data Archive, Cologne. ZA7491). Countries included: UK, France, Germany, Italy, Spain, Hungary, Austria, Sweden, Denmark, Belgium, Netherlands, Poland. (2) Contemporary USA: Pew Research Center, 2020 survey of Jewish Americans. (3) Historical data: DellaPergola, S. (1972). 'Jewish and mixed marriages in Milan 1901-1968.' With an appendix: frequency of mixed marriages among Diaspora Jews. *Jewish Population Studies*.

The highest levels of intermarriage in pre-Holocaust Europe were observed in Germany, where in certain locations the proportion of Jews marrying non-Jews reached about 30%. The lowest levels were seen in Eastern Europe, where the levels of intermarriage then resembled the levels observed among Orthodox Jews today (Panel A).

The interesting thing is that today's levels of intermarriage in Europe are not too different from those registered about 100 years ago. As a caveat, recent European data may somewhat understate the levels of intermarriage. The data come from a large survey of European Jews and the sample largely contains Jews on the mailing lists of the organised Jewish community, and Jews not on these lists, but closely connected to those who are. The least communally attached and the most assimilated Jews were less likely to be included in the sample. Although the survey data were adjusted to take this eventuality into account, one could still reasonably maintain that the real levels of intermarriage in Europe are 10-15 percentage points higher than stated.[17] Nevertheless, even allowing for such a radical upward correction, which would take the recent rate of intermarriage from 16% to about 30%, we end up with the same conclusion. European levels today hover at, or somewhat above, the higher end of the levels observed in Europe during the early 20th century. American Jewish levels of intermarriage (at 43%) – which do not require correction due to a more conventional methodology underlying data collection in the survey used to produce the estimate – are clearly above the 30% threshold but, arguably, not very far from it. Non-Orthodox American Jews display remarkably high levels of intermarriage, in historical perspective.

[17] See: DellaPergola, S. and Staetsky, L. Daniel. 2021. *The Jewish identities of European Jews: what, why and how*. London: Institute for Jewish Policy Research, pp. 12-25, on issues of adjustment and selectivity. See: Staetsky, L.D. 2019. 'Can convenience samples be trusted?' *Contemporary Jewry* 39 (1) for the size of possible deviation of unadjusted samples.

It is worth reiterating the meaning of 'Europe' in this context. It was highlighted earlier that Jewish Europe has, in fact, a wide spectrum of situations regarding intermarriage. In the last two comparisons in this section, the European Jewish average was used for convenience. The average is critically shaped by the situations of French and British Jews, the two largest European Jewish communities that also happen to be more traditional ones. Together, they comprise 72% of all Jews in the countries represented by the Jewish European average above. The experiences of the less traditional and small communities of Eastern and Northern Europe is, naturally, less visible in an average measure. Nevertheless, our findings stand, even though the averages tend to conceal some features of certain populations. At present, we lack the capacity to draw a clearer picture of generational change in the scope of intermarriage in the communities of Eastern or Northern Europe, for example. It is certainly possible that the generational decline narrative is present in some of them.

Finally, it ought to be remembered, not as a qualification but as useful background, that the Jewish European population today is not a result of the natural evolution of the Jewish European population a hundred years ago. Rather, it is a result of a revolution, an abrupt reshuffling of Jews brought about by often unsettling, and sometimes tragic political events. The bulk of European Jews in the 1920s were part of a pre-Holocaust population dominated by the Jewish communities of Central and Eastern Europe. By contrast, European Jews in the 2020s are dominated by the French Jewish community, which was heavily bolstered by the post-Second World War migration of North African Jews to France, and the British Jewish community, one of the few European Jewish communities relatively unscathed by the Holocaust. So whilst the cross-time comparisons stand, the dramatic re-making of the European Jewish population ought to be noted.

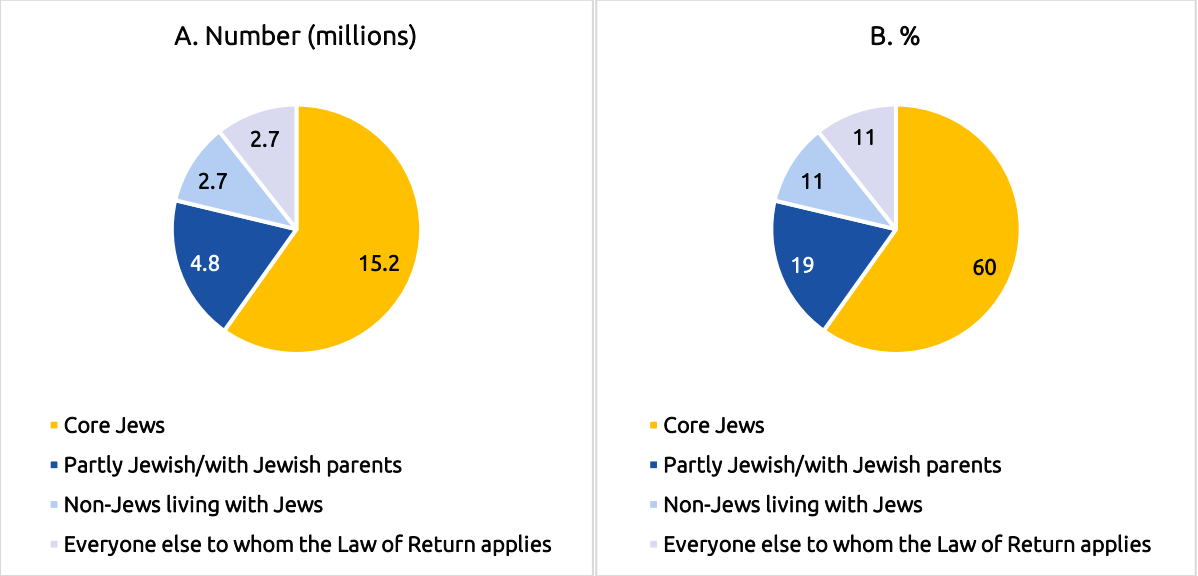
/ Intermarriage: the legacy

As the historical data clearly testify, intermarriage is not a new phenomenon in Jewish communities. Over time, it has undoubtedly been a cause of population loss, although the extent to which this is the case is unclear. The global Jewish population numbers about 15 million today – similar in scale to the total population of a medium-sized European country such as the Netherlands. The 'would be' Jewish population size today if the Holocaust had not happened has been estimated at 25-35 million.[18] No such 'would be' quantification exists for a scenario in which no intermarriage had occurred. Perhaps it would be a curiosity item if it existed, but arguably it would not be particularly useful. The most useful thing to examine is the actual legacy of intermarriage which, in demographic terms, expresses itself in the existence of the partly Jewish or the non-Jewish populations that exist today in close familial and social proximity to Jews. Indeed, particularly in the Jewish Diaspora, but also in parts of Israel, the boundary between Jews and non-Jews runs through families.

So, in addition to the 'core' 15 million Jews (i.e. Jews who identify as such when asked, for example, in a census or a survey, which in large part corresponds to the *halachic* (Jewish legal) definition of 'who is a Jew'[19]), another 10 million or so individuals exist who can be defined as 'Jewishly-connected'. Of these, about 5 million can be considered partly Jewish: they may have Jewish parents but they do not identify as Jews themselves. A similar number are Jewishly-connected non-Jews who are nevertheless eligible for immigration and settlement in Israel under the Israeli Law of Return. Globally, core Jews constitute 60% of the total including the Jewishly-connected population (Figure 5).

[18] DellaPergola, S. (1996). 'Between science and fiction: notes on the demography of the Holocaust', *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 10 (1): 34–52.
[19] According to *halacha* (Jewish law), a Jew is an individual born to a Jewish mother, or a convert to Judaism according to Jewish law.

Figure 5. Global Jewish and Jewishly-connected populations, 1 January 2021

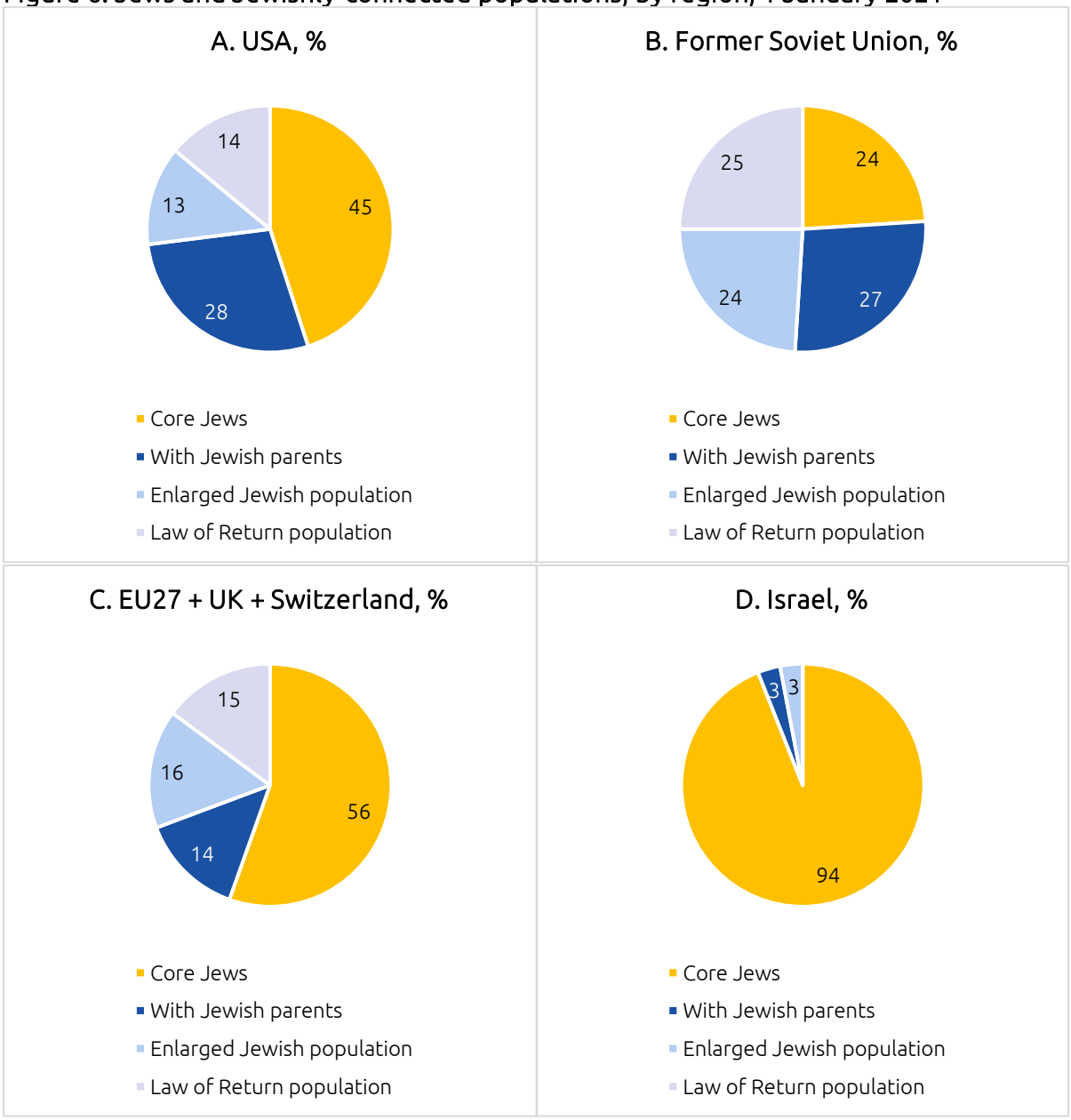


Source: Developed on the basis of statistical tables appearing in DellaPergola, S. (2022). 'World Jewish Population 2021.' *American Jewish Yearbook 2022*.

Naturally, the proportionate share of Jewishly-connected non-Jews varies across countries and regions, reflecting the historical legacy of intermarriage in each place. The share of non-Jews is lowest in Israel, as one would expect, and is highest in Eastern European countries and, in particular, the countries of the former Soviet Union with their very high levels of intermarriage (Figure 6 overleaf).

The Jewishly-connected non-Jewish population is being continuously replenished as a result of ongoing intermarriage. However, it would be a mistake to think that this population is expanding numerically, because at the same time as it is being replenished, it is simultaneously being 'drained' by further mixing of Jewishly-connected non-Jews with other non-Jews (for example, through marriage). While nobody so far has managed to quantify the balance between these two processes, it would be prudent to relate to the present size of the population of Jewishly-connected non-Jews in the Diaspora as stable rather than growing. In Israel, on the other hand, the Jewishly-connected population may eventually decline in size in the medium to long term because marriages of these people in Israel are likely to link them back to Jews, simply because Jews form a majority in Israel and, therefore, a large and accessible natural pool of candidate marriage partners. Therefore, a significant proportion of the offspring of these marriages is expected to be Jewish, religiously and/or culturally. In that sense, Israel is unique: there, because of the overarching demographic reality, the non-Jewish population can and will create more Jews in a process of reverse assimilation.

Figure 6. Jews and Jewishly-connected populations, by region, 1 January 2021



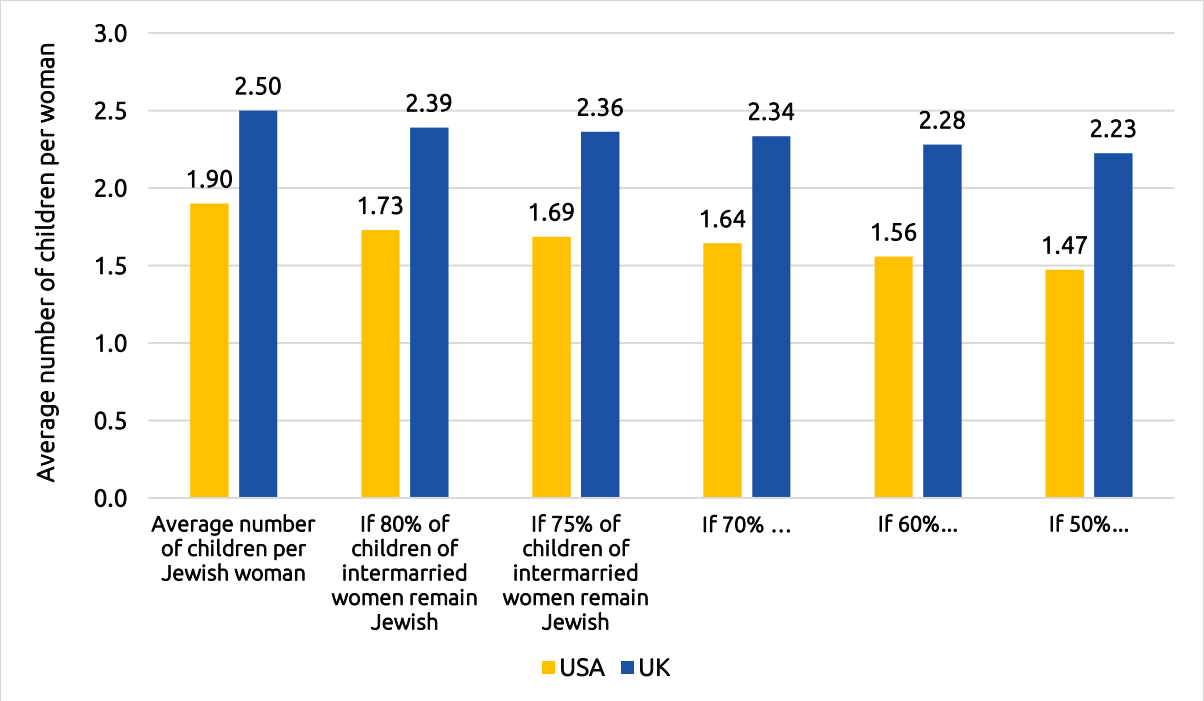
Source: Developed on the basis of statistical tables appearing in DellaPergola, S. 2022. *World Jewish Population 2021*. American Jewish Yearbook 2022.

/ The demographic meaning of intermarriage

Having examined the demographic legacy of intermarriage, we should now turn to its demographic meaning. Intermarriage is widely perceived as a threat to the stability or growth of Jewish populations. That perception, as has been pointed out already, is not fundamentally flawed. Intermarriage is conducive to the reduction of Jewish population growth because in the context of the Diaspora, the offspring of exogamous (Jew to non-Jew) marriages are more likely to distance themselves from Judaism, Jewish society and Jewish culture than the offspring of endogamous (Jew to Jew) marriages. But being correct in this substantive diagnosis of the situation, the 'threat perception' misses on the broader demographic context. That broader demographic context is low fertility, something that Jews in the Diaspora share with the populations surrounding them.

Let us consider the situation closely. About 40% of Jews today, and over 70% of Jews in the Diaspora, live in the USA. The latest estimates of Jewish fertility there put the average number of children per Jewish woman at 1.9.[20] That is somewhat below the conventional level of replacement fertility, which stands at approximately 2.1. To stress: this is before *any possible impact of intermarriage*, big or small, is taken into account. True, there are Diaspora Jewish communities where fertility is higher. For example, the Jewish communities of Austria and the United Kingdom display high fertility by Western standards – recent estimates put the average number of children born by a Jewish woman in both of these places at about 2.5. This is far above the national fertility in these countries (in the range of 1.5-2.0 children per woman), and closer to, or even above, fertility of Muslim populations in these countries, estimated to be in the range of 2.2 to 3.0 children per woman.[21] However, it is important to note that the high levels of Jewish fertility in Austria and the UK arise from the strong presence of strictly Orthodox Jewish (haredi) populations which have a TFR in the range of 6-7 children per woman, compared to the non-haredi segments of the Jewish populations which have fertility close to the levels seen in Western countries. The British and Austrian levels of intermarriage are close to the global figure, about 25%-30%. Figure 7 shows the possible impact of intermarriage on fertility for American and British Jews, assuming different levels of detachment of the offspring of intermarried Jews from Judaism.

Figure 7. Jewish fertility and the effects of intermarriage: American and British Jews compared



Note: Data on American Jewish fertility are sourced from: Pew Research Center. 2021. Jewish Americans in 2020, p. 188. British Jewish fertility have been estimated by the author on the basis of the 2011 Census. The method of calculating the effective Jewish TFR is credited to Dr Mark Tolts.

[20] See footnote 12.

[21] Sources: (1) Staetsky, L. Daniel and DellaPergola, S. (2020). *Jews in Austria: a demographic and social portrait*. London: Institute for Jewish Policy Research. (2) Staetsky, L. Daniel and Boyd, J. (2015). *Strictly Orthodox rising: what the demography of British Jews tells is about the future of the community*. London: Institute for Jewish Policy Research. (3) Pew Research Center. 2017. *Europe's growing Muslim population*, p. 34.

The picture is clear. Even in a scenario in which no cases of intermarriage were taking place, American Jewish fertility, at 1.9, is lower than it needs to be to maintain the Jewish population size in the long term. The only ways to do so would be through migration, conversion, or, indeed, expanding the definition of who is Jewish in order to be more inclusive. Moreover, critically, the level of 1.9 children per woman is a composite: the American haredi population is very fertile and accounts for about 12% of all American Jews; without this haredi factor, we estimate that American Jewish fertility would be at about 1.6-1.7 children per woman. However, critically, this composite estimate of American Jewish fertility at 1.9 is simply a point of departure. Figure 7 shows how intermarriage effectively brings it down further, deeper into the under-replacement level zone. With levels of retention of Jewishness at 60%, interestingly considered as encouraging by some commentators,[22] effective Jewish fertility approaches a level of 1.6 children per woman, which is clearly and decisively sub-replacement level. Yet importantly, *American Jewish fertility is low to start with*, and that is the root cause of the demographic fragility of this population. Intermarriage is currently secondary.

The British example amplifies this message and adds a further insight. In Britain, Jewish fertility is high, owing to the very strong presence of haredi Jews (about a quarter of the UK Jewish population today is haredi). Without them, British Jewish fertility would be close to American Jewish levels. Taking it 'as is', and accounting for the British Jewish levels of intermarriage (which are lower than American levels), leads to the conclusion that British Jewish fertility is far less vulnerable to the effects of intermarriage than American Jewish fertility. Its stays well above replacement level, namely in the region of 2.2-2.3 children per woman, even with very significant disengagement of the offspring of intermarried Jews from Judaism. Experimentation clarifies that should the level and effects of intermarriage among Jews in Britain reach American levels, levels of fertility among British Jews would remain sufficiently high to maintain overall Jewish population size. The secret of the robustness of British Jewish fertility, and hence its natural growth in spite of the effects of intermarriage, is simple: it has a very strong haredi presence.

/ Summary

This paper has presented a panoramic picture of Jewish intermarriage across the globe, consolidating existing estimates and adding some new insights. In particular, it has clarified the global level of intermarriage: about quarter of all married Jews in the world today are married to non-Jews. It has also shown the whole spectrum of community-specific situations: highlighting the lowest levels of intermarriage (in Israel at about 5%), the highest levels in Northern and Eastern Europe (approximately 55%-75%) and the intermediate levels in the USA and much of the rest of the Jewish Diaspora.

The observed spectrum of intermarriage, it appears, maps well onto the levels of traditionalism and/or religiosity. Across Jewish populations, the scope of intermarriage is correlated with the strength of the Jewish traditional component in a population. Simply put, strong religiosity or traditionalism drive the rates of intermarriage down. The same is observed across time: the growth of both the haredi and the religious non-haredi Jewish segments tends to drive down the rate of intermarriage. This last conclusion may sound somewhat surprising to those who are accustomed to the narrative of ever-increasing intermarriage. This narrative may have been generally true over the course of the twentieth century, during its earlier part or as a whole, when ideational secularisation proceeded at high pace. But in the twenty-first century, whilst true is some places, this is no longer universally

[22] See, for example: Sasson, T. (2013). 'New analysis of Pew Data: children of intermarriage increasingly identify as Jews', *Tablet Magazine*, www.tabletmag.com/jewish-news-and-politics/151506/young-jews-opt-in.

the case. Certain Diaspora Jewish communities, most notably the British, Austrian and Belgian ones, are currently undergoing de-secularisation by demography. The proportionate expansion of the haredi component in these communities means that some of their demographic clocks are 'going back'. These communities are showing growth (after many years of decline), their age structures are becoming younger (after a long period of ageing), and, unsurprisingly, they may also be showing declining levels of intermarriage.

Our analysis has gone a step further than simply presenting the prevalence of intermarriage and its correlates. It has considered the impact of intermarriage on Jewish fertility and population growth. It has shown that the impact of intermarriage on Jewish demographic sustainability is: (a) measurable in a rather straightforward manner; and (b) dependent upon fertility. Further, it has demonstrated that any demographic discussion of intermarriage not placed in the context of Jewish fertility is ultimately uninformative. When it is placed in the context of fertility, it emerges that – unsurprisingly from a demographic perspective – the main threat to Jewish demographic sustainability comes from low fertility, an issue of concern to the Jewish Diaspora mainly, but not Israel where fertility remains very high by Western standards. In this regard, Diaspora Jews are similar to the populations of the West, where fertility declined in the transition to modernity, and more recently fell to levels insufficient for population replacement. When fertility is low, as it is among American Jews, or very low, as it is in some Jewish communities in Eastern Europe, intermarriage and the population losses it causes are actually not very influential at this point in time. With zero intermarriage, these communities would still be bound to decline without immigration. Intermarriage is not the main engine of Jewish demographic decline there; low fertility is. Intermarriage is more of a 'tail wind'. In Jewish Diaspora communities with high fertility, intermarriage has little impact on growth. It trims growth, for sure, but not to the point where the demographic sustainability of the Jewish population becomes jeopardised. In all places with high fertility (e.g. the Jewish communities of the UK, Belgium and Austria), it is kept at high levels by the haredi and the religious non-haredi populations. Without them, fertility in Jewish Diaspora communities would be sub-replacement level, and demographic sustainability would be questionable with or without the added factor of intermarriage.

Hopefully, these findings will serve as reference material for policy makers and scholars alike. Drawing on these findings, policy makers, in particular, should be able to consider which scenario is observed in their own community, and act in a way informed by this knowledge. Two types of policy discussions would be particularly welcome. First, Jewish communities ought to clarify to themselves their position on intermarriage and, irrespective of that, the extent to which they are prepared to develop interventions in order to shape outcomes considered desirable. Intermarriage is a strong feature of Jewish life, so much so that in some communities it is the choice made by the majority of Jews. That does not make it normative when seen through the lens of Jewish tradition, but it is a stubborn fact of life. In this reality, the next critical question concerns how to treat the consequences of intermarriage (rather than the causes). How and to what extent, for example, should communities accept and incorporate the offspring and the spouses of intermarried Jews into communal activities, and can some normative standards be developed across the Jewish world?

Another policy scenario is possible. If intermarriage is defined as a problem – something to be solved in and of itself – then greater attention to its causes is merited. Earlier in this paper we highlighted loss of religiosity/traditionalism as a major correlate of intermarriage. In some communities, demographic reversal is happening as haredi and religious Jews increase in numbers and proportions. However, can anything be done to increase the volume of traditionalism? Is that a desirable goal for less traditional Jewish communities? Is it even possible in a social context where the drive towards secularism is so potent?

Over and above traditionalism, other factors should be taken into account. The availability of Jewish spouses is one such factor. A deficit of marriage partners, or marriage partners of a particular kind, may be an issue in some Jewish communities. Indeed, such a deficit of marriage partners is not an issue unique to Jews. It has been described elsewhere, in the American population at large and among the Arab population in Israel, for example.[23] There is much to be gained from the scholarship on this subject to inform thinking on Jewish intermarriage and policies regarding it, if any. Our central point here is that *if and when* in-marriage is strongly preferred, technical obstacles related to availability can be researched and mitigated. Haredi communities across the globe, with their strong preference not just for in-marriage but for uniformity of religious lifestyle of the prospective spouses, go a long way to overcome the constraints of availability. International matchmaking and migration for marriage are a norm in haredi society indicating that, put in the simplest possible way, where there is a will, there is a way. The 'haredi method' does not need to be followed to the letter but certainly could be in spirit. It suggests that the existing structures of opportunities for marriage could be improved, if they appear restrictive.

Finally, our findings suggest that some useful policy discussions are merited around the issue of fertility. It is intuitively clear that the impact of intermarriage on the stability of Jewish populations depends on how many children Jews have in the first place. The Jewish Diaspora is at a point where fertility is very low, except among the most religious. That is a feature shared with many Western societies. Just how to support or encourage Jewish fertility at a communal level, whilst clearly riddled with sensitivities, is nonetheless a valid discussion point, and as we have demonstrated here, no less important or urgent than any discussion on the causes or consequences of intermarriage.

[23] See (1) Weiss, I. and Stecklov, G. (2020). 'Assimilation and ethnic marriage-squeeze in early 20th century America: a gender perspective.' *Demographic Research* 42 (4), pp. 99-132. (2) Staetsky, L. D. (2019). 'Stalling fertility decline of Israeli Muslims and demographic transition theory.' *Population Studies* 73 (3), pp. 317-333.

Appendix: sources of data

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(4) Australia: Graham, D. (2014). *The Jewish population of Australia: key findings from the 2011 Census*. JCA, p. 19.

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(7) France: Cohen, E. (2015). *Jews in France today: identity and values*. Leiden: Brill, p. 102. Also: FRA 2018 survey of European Jews (GESIS Data Archive, Cologne. ZA7491).

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(11) Russia: Tolts, M. (2023). 'Russian Jewry in the Post- Soviet Era: Socio-Demographic Transformation.' In: Eli Lederhendler (ed.) *Becoming Post- Communist*. Oxford University Press. DOI: 10.1093/ oso/ 9780197687215.003.0007.

(12) Spain, Netherlands, Italy, Denmark, Sweden and Poland: FRA 2018 survey of European Jews (GESIS Data Archive, Cologne. ZA7491).

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