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Jewish Continuity and the Canadian Census[I]

Abstract

Some researchers view acculturation—the assimilation of a minority culture into a dominant culture—as a force that undermines the continuity of Jewish communities. Other researchers view acculturation as an adaptive mechanism that permits Jewish communities to survive and flourish in modern environments. This paper examines what national counts of Canadian Jews can tell us about these competing interpretations of the effect of acculturation. It focuses on Canada's 2011 and 2021 national population counts in an effort to decipher whether they point to continuity or decline. The paper finds that both processes are reflected in recent census data, with continuity the predominant outcome.

Résumé

Certaines recherches considèrent l'acculturation – l'assimilation d'une culture minoritaire dans une culture dominante – comme une force qui sape la continuité des communautés juives. D'autres considérent considèrent l'acculturation comme un mécanisme adaptatif qui permet aux communautés juives de survivre et de s'épanouir dans des environnements modernes. Cette contribution examine ce que les données sur la population juive canadienne peuvent nous dire sur ces interprétations contradictoires de l'effet de l'acculturation. Elle se concentre sur les données du recensement national du Canada en 2011 et 2021 dans le but de déchiffrer si elles indiquent une continuité ou un déclin. L'article constate que si les deux processus émergent, la continuité demeure néanmoins le résultat prédominant.

Continuity or Discontinuity?

Epicurus was a third century BCE Greek religious skeptic who devoted his life to sensual pleasure. Taking a dim view of the Hellenization of some of their coreligionists, devout Jews of the era developed an eponymous term to refer to any Jew who deviated from strict religious observance: *epikoros* (Hebrew) or *afker* (Aramaic), later rendered as *apikoyres* in Yiddish. The persistence of this opprobrious descriptor across the three leading Jewish languages testifies to the fact that some Jews have widely regarded religious defection as a threat to Jewish continuity for millennia. Even today, much social scientific research on diaspora Jews is motivated by the desire to assess the extent to which departure from religious observance—and from normative non-religious Jewish behaviour—weaken the foundations of Jewish communal life.

Zvi Gitelman has offered an especially forceful argument favouring this view. Based mainly on research conducted in the United States, the United Kingdom, and Russia,

he documents the decline in synagogue attendance and affiliation, the large drop in membership of older mainstream Jewish organizations, including B'nai Brith and Hadassah, the falling rate of donating to Jewish causes, the dismal state of knowledge of Jewish languages, and other indicators of the weakening interests, institutions, and culture of diaspora Jewry. He concludes dismally that "we are all Russians now."[2]

Ariela Keysar and Barry Kosmin provide a comparably compelling assessment of the opposing viewpoint using US and some Canadian data to make their point.[3] It takes Kosmin and Keysar fully fifty-one typeset pages to recount all the formally and informally organized types of non-religious Jewishness thriving in the US.[4] In their own research, they intermittently interviewed and surveyed Conservative members of the American and Canadian bar/bat mitzvah class of 5755 (1994-95) over more than two decades. Keysar writes as follows about the individuals in this class who in due course came to identify with no religion. Such a person

> is not an empty vessel. Jewish millennials whom we classify as Nones are telling us, some explicitly, others only implicitly, "I'm not nothing." [...] Despite the erosion of religious observance, Jewish peoplehood has endured and even intensified among members of the bar/bat mitzvah class in their [late] thirties.[5]

My view is that both sides in this debate make valid points. Acculturation may cause Jewish communities to dissipate. But it may also help to ensure their continuity. In fact, both processes often operate simultaneously. The difficulty involves figuring out which force predominates in a given time and place. The remainder of this paper is devoted to outlining one way of accomplishing just that goal by examining detailed counts of Canada's Jewish population in 2011 and 2021.

Change in Population Size

Change in the size of any population between time points is the outcome of three socio-demographic processes: natural balance (births minus deaths), net migration (immigration minus emigration), and net cultural balance (cultural accretion minus cultural defection).

The effect of net cultural balance on population size is reflected in the way people define themselves in ethnoreligious terms. For example, people who consider themselves wholly or partly Jewish may regard themselves as Jewish by religion; as having no religion but identifying as Jewish ethnically or culturally; or as having a non-Jewish religion and thinking of themselves as Jewish by a non-religious criterion, such as ethnicity or culture. Furthermore, people who consider themselves Jewish by ethnicity may or may not include in their ethnic identity an admixture of non-Jewish ethnicities. Myriad types of Jewish identity thus exist.

As I discuss in greater detail later, these types may be arrayed on a scale to reflect the traditionality of Jewish identity. If comprehensive census or representative survey data are available on identity types at two time points, a scale of traditionality of Jewish identity will allow one to assess how much cultural accretion and cultural defection have taken place over the given period. Said differently, examining change over time in the way Jews define themselves can tell us something important about a community's resilience or vulnerability. Accordingly, in what follows I examine Canadian data on change in Jewish self-identification over time and assess what the data tell us about the state of Jewish continuity.

Counting Jews

Complications immediately arise. Counting Jews is no simple matter, especially in the diaspora. Counts are necessarily influenced by the definition of Jewish that researchers employ, the degree to which the same methods of counting are used in successive counts, and, in some countries, the failure of national censuses to ask appropriate questions.

The latter problem is especially acute in the United States because its census does not include questions on religion or detailed ethnic origins. Expensive nationwide sample surveys must therefore be conducted to arrive at Jewish population estimates. Recent surveys of American Jews are of high quality. Even so, disputes periodically erupt among social scientists over the question of who should be counted as Jewish. Current estimates of the US Jewish population consequently vary from about 6.3 to 7.5 million.[6]

In this regard, Canada is in an advantageous position compared to the United States. That is because our national census includes questions on religion and ethnic or cultural origin.[7] Even here, however, variation from one census to the next in question wording, sampling techniques, and varying definitions of Jewish affect how many people are counted as Jews.[8] What then are the main criteria that researchers use to distinguish Canadian Jews from non-Jews?

Charles Shahar has for decades been the foremost demographer of Canadian Jewry. He adopts what he calls the "standard" census definition of Canadian Jews.[9] According to this standard, Jews are individuals who say their religion is Jewish or who say they have no religion but state one or more ethnic or cultural origins that include Jewish. By this definition, even individuals with no religion who list Jewish as their fourth, fifth, or sixth ethnic or cultural identifier are counted as Jews. The only individuals who identify as Jewish by ethnicity or culture and are excluded from the count are those who identify with a non-Jewish religion.

The dean of demographers of world Jewry, Sergio DellaPergola, uses a definition that is more restrictive than the standard definition.[10] In addition to excluding individuals who identify with a non-Jewish religion yet identify as Jewish by ethnicity or culture, he does not count as Jewish those Canadians who say they have no religion and list their Jewish ethnic or cultural origins fourth, fifth, or sixth. In DellaPergola's view, the Jewish identity of such individuals is too weak to allow them to be counted as members of the community.

There is no right or wrong here. Note, however, that both Shahar's and DellaPergola's definitions exclude people who identify as Jewish to some degree and in one way or another. And there is a cost to doing so.

For example, neither definition is entirely sensible when applied to immigrants from the former Soviet Union (FSU), who comprise the largest category of Canadian Jewish immigrants and, with their Russian-speaking offspring, as much as 12 percent of Canada's Jewish population by the standard definition.[11] Some of these individuals identify as Christian by religion yet identify as Jewish by "nationality" (*natsional'nost'* in Russian).

Natsional'nost' occupies roughly the same conceptual space as ethnicity in English. The self-definition of some FSU immigrants as Jewish by *natsional'nost'* was made real and often reinforced by the internal passport system of the Soviet-era administrative apparatus, which allocated choice educational opportunities, managerial/administrative jobs, and the right to reside in certain locales based on ethnic quotas. From the 1960s on, the internal passport system was used to systematically discriminate against Jews in order to make room for other nationality groups in the upper reaches of the Soviet stratification system.[12] Apart from state-sanctioned anti-Jewish discrimination, strong memories of the Holocaust kept Jewish identity alive in the Soviet Union, even among Jews by *natsional'nost'* who considered themselves Christian.[13]

The Shahar and DellaPergola exclusions are also less than helpful if one wants to understand the implications of the Jewish population count for Jewish continuity. Table 1 takes what I regard as the most valuable approach for that purpose. It lets Canadians speak for themselves by including all Canadians in the 2011 and 2021 national population counts who considered themselves Jewish in any way and listing the criteria they employ in their self-definition. Let us briefly review the data before considering their implications.

Table 1 Jews in Canada by religion, no religion, and non-Jewish religion, 2011 and 2021

		A 2011	B 2011 percent	C 2021	D 2021 percent	E absolute change (C-A)	F percent change (C-A)/A*100
Religion Jewish		329500	76.2	335295	73.9	5795	1.8
No religion; Jewish by ethnicity or culture	Jewish single response	9790	2.3	11515	2.5	1725	17.6
	Jewish ranked 1st	11040	2.6	26940	5.9	15900	144.0
	Jewish ranked 2nd	17150	4.0	20265	4.5	3115	18.2
	Jewish ranked 3rd	9710	2.2	13055	2.9	3345	34.4
	Jewish ranked 4th, 5th or 6th	8160	1.9	8465	1.9	305	3.7
Subtotal for "No religion; Jewish by ethnicity or culture"		*55850*	*12.9*	*80240*	*17.7*	*24390*	*43.7*
Non-Jewish religion; Jewish by ethnicity or culture	Jewish single response	2620	0.6	2720	0.6	100	3.8
	Jewish ranked 1st	5480	1.3	7875	1.7	2395	43.7
	Jewish ranked 2nd	15590	3.6	11850	2.6	-3740	-24.0
	Jewish ranked 3rd	13010	3.0	9600	2.1	-3410	-26.2
	Jewish ranked 4th, 5th or 6th	10210	2.4	6400	1.4	-3810	-37.3
Subtotal for "non-Jewish religion; Jewish by ethnicity or culture"		*46910*	*10.9*	*38445*	*8.5*	-8465	*-18.0*
Total		432260	100.0	453,980	100.0	23740	5.0

Note: The 2011 and 2021 questionnaires containing the ethnicity question were distributed to 20 percent of Canadian households. Some respondents listed more than six ethnic labels in 2011 and 2022 but the number who did so is too small to be reliable, so data on these individuals is not included in this table. Percentages may not total 100.0 due to rounding.

Sources: Robert Brym and Feng Hou, "Twelve Degrees of Jewish Identity," in *The Ever-Dying People? Canada's Jews in Comparative Perspective*, ed. Robert Brym and Randal F. Schnoor (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2023), 73-84; Statistics Canada, custom tabulation from the 2021 census of Canada (2023).

Table 1 shows that, between 2011 and 2021, Canada's Jewish population as a whole, defined as broadly as possible, stood at 453,980. Over the decade under examination, it grew by 21,720 or 5 percent.

The total can be broken into three main categories that will prove useful in the following discussion:

1. The number of Canadians who defined themselves as Jewish by religion, which increased by 5,795 or close to 2 percent between 2011 and 2021.
2. The number of individuals who declared that they identify with no religion but regard themselves as Jewish by ethnicity or culture, which increased by 24,390 or nearly 44 percent over the decade under examination.
3. The number of Canadians who identified with a religion other than Jewish but who identified as entirely or partly Jewish by ethnic or cultural origin, which declined by 8,465 or 18 percent.

Why Did Two Categories of Jews Grow and One Shrink?

Prima facie, the three categories of Jews just listed may be arrayed on a scale of Jewishness. They range from the most traditionally Jewish type (Jews by religion) to the least traditionally Jewish type (Jews by ethnicity or culture with a non-Jewish religious identity). Secularized Jews with no religious identity lie between these two poles. Change in the number of individuals in each category between 2011 and 2021 indicate that ethnic Jews with a religious identity other than Jewish experienced shrinkage in their number, Jews by religion became slightly more numerous, and ethnic Jews with no religious identification became much more numerous.

Change in the size of the three categories is a function of natural balance, net migration, and net cultural balance within each category. Although we lack data that would allow me to unpack these three processes, available sources allow me to examine mainly circumstantial evidence suggesting why the size of the three categories changed in the way they did between 2011 and 2021 and infer the implications of these changes for Jewish continuity.

Consider Jews by religion first. Among Canadian Jews, Orthodox and especially Haredi women tend to give birth to more children than do women who identify with other Jewish denominations or say they are "just Jewish" and do not identify with any Jewish denomination. For example, the mean household size for Haredi Jews is 5.4 compared to 2.4 for all households with at least one Jewish adult.[14] In 2023, Haredi Jews made up nearly 9 percent of Canada's Jewish population by the standard definition. The absolute number of Haredim has grown at a brisk clip in recent decades, estimated at 3.3 percent per year. The small increase in the number of Canadian Jews by religion

between 2011 and 2021 was likely achieved by Haredi (and Orthodox) women giving birth to more children on average than did other Jewish women. Their relatively high birth rate helped to ensure Jewish continuity.

Turning now to the opposite pole in the scale of Jewishness, we lack net migration and natural balance data for individuals claiming identification with Jewish ethnicity and a non-Jewish religion, more than 8 percent of the Jews represented in Table 1. However, I suspect that antisemitism, which has been on the rise since the beginning of the twenty-first century, has significantly influenced Jewish identity among individuals in this category—and, indeed, in other categories too.[15]

In general, increasing animosity toward Jews strengthens Jewish identity. Jean-Paul Sartre put the matter hyperbolically but nonetheless insightfully when, reflecting on the Nuremberg laws, he wrote that "the anti-Semite creates the Jew."[16] He would find evidence supporting his argument in the fact that applications, applications for Jewish day school admissions and synagogue membership spiked in reaction to the wave of anti-Jewish and anti-Israel actions accompanying the 2023–24 Israel-Hamas war.[17]

However, I speculate that the effect of antisemitism on people who are only marginally Jewish may be just the opposite of the general trend. Heightened antisemitism can result in the most marginal Jews suppressing their Jewishness so they can conveniently pass as non-Jews at minimal cost to the integrity of their identity. The numbers in Table 1 are consistent with this observation. The 18 percent decline in the number of Canadian Jews identifying with a non-Jewish religion and Jewish ethnicity between 2011 and 2021 is driven entirely by the more than 28 percent decline in individuals with the most marginal Jewish identity, that is, individuals with a non-Jewish religion who list their Jewish ethnicity second, third, fourth, fifth, or sixth. The reaction of people in these subcategories to mounting antisemitism may be a denial rather than a strengthening of Jewish identity. The remaining Jewish community is consequently more resilient than it was before their defection.

We now arrive at the category of Canadian Jews experiencing by far the biggest surge in numbers between 2011 and 2021—those who identify with no religion but consider themselves Jewish only in an ethnic or cultural sense.

Secularization of Jewish Life in Canada

Sociologists have been analyzing secularization since the nineteenth century. The foremost early proponent of the secularization thesis was Max Weber.[18] He held that science, and rationalism more generally, is "disenchanting" the world, replacing supernatural understandings and explanations of natural processes and human affairs

with understandings and explanations based on systematic empirical observation. Although the secularization thesis had to be qualified beginning in the 1970s because of the rise of religious fundamentalism in the United States and elsewhere, secularization continues apace, resulting in a more polarized religious landscape between those who identify with a particular religion and those who do not.[19] Advancing secularization is reflected in the fact that, in 2021, the number of Canadian Jews by the standard definition who declared that they identified with no religion exceeded 19 percent of the total, up from over 14 percent in 2011. This category of Canadian Jews was almost 24 percent as large as the number of Canadian Jews by religion in 2021 (Table 1).

Non-religious Jewish organizations, both formal and informal, have proliferated in Canada, partly to meet the growing demand of secular Jews. For example, informal organizations range from the hundreds of members of WhatsApp antisemitism groups at the University of Toronto to a multitude of *havurot* (discussion groups) and Yiddish and Hebrew conversation circles in several Canadian cities. Formal organizations include community centres, day schools, libraries, film festivals, literary award lecture series, sports teams, concert series, and university courses on secular Jewish subjects; the Association for Canadian Jewish Studies (with 474 individuals on its mailing list as of this writing), the newly formed Alliance Combatting Campus Antisemitism (an umbrella organization composed of various Canadian medical organizations, each with hundreds of members), and the Network of Engaged Canadian Academics, which is composed of 320 representatives on 47 university and college campuses as of this writing); and several relatively new dissident Zionist groups, by which I mean organizations that strongly support the existence of a Jewish state in Israel but are openly critical of certain Israeli government policies (for details, see below).[20]

Survey data add depth to the 2021 census finding that more than 19 percent of Jews by the standard definition claim they have no religion. Thus, the *2018 Survey of Jews in Canada* found that, of Jews who belong to a Jewish formal organization of any type, 19 percent do not belong to a synagogue, temple, or other prayer group. In addition, some Jewish individuals who belong to a synagogue, temple, or prayer group are secularists who belong for social rather than religious reasons. The percentage of Jews who may be so classified is unknown, but it is revealing that, when asked in 2018 whether they believe in God or a universal spirit, nearly 17 percent of respondents who belong to a synagogue, temple, or other prayer group replied unequivocally "no."[21]

Of course, on the other side of the ledger, religious Jews also belong to non-religious Jewish organizations. But given that, in the *2018 Survey of Jews in Canada*, 35 percent of Canadian Jews said that observing Jewish law is "not essential" to being Jewish and

37 percent said that "attending synagogue" is not important, it is easy to understand why, when asked about their religious identification on the most recent census, more than 19 percent of Canadian Jews by the standard definition said they identify with no religion.[22]

To flesh out what membership in non-religious Jewish organizations may look like, I conclude by briefly considering the growth of relatively new dissident Zionist organizations.

Dissident Zionist Organizations

There are four Canadian organizations that strongly support the existence of a Jewish state in Israel yet are openly and often highly critical of certain aspects of Israel's government. Canadian Friends of Peace Now was formed in 1982 in support of the burgeoning Israeli peace movement and as a reaction against Israel's first Lebanon war.[23] The New Israel Fund of Canada originated in the same period with a mandate focusing on civil society. It was founded in 1986 to support "projects and programs in Israel that fight for social and economic justice, religious freedom, civil and human rights, shared society and anti-racism, Palestinian citizens, and democracy itself."[24] JSpaceCanada was formed in 2010. It defines itself as "a pro-Israel, pro-peace Zionist advocacy organization" that "champion[s] a two-state solution in Israel-Palestine."[25] All three of these organizations regard Jewish settlements in the West Bank as generally harmful to Israel's security. Arza Canada is the Zionist voice of Canada's Reform movement.[26] Founded in 1978, its chief aim is to support the growth of the Reform movement in Israel, but this goal has necessarily led it to be critical of religious parties currently part of Israel's governing coalition, which, among other things, are antagonistic to LGBTQ+ rights and support changes to the Law of Return that would eliminate the "grandparent clause" permitting anyone with a Jewish grandparent to gain citizenship immediately after making aliyah.

These organizations have been attracting new followers since they were formed. Most experienced especially rapid growth after the most right-wing government in Israel's history took power in December 2022. Notably, between the end of 2022 and the end of 2023, New Israel Fund of Canada followers increased in number by 33 percent, donors by 71 percent, and donations by 91 percent. For JSpaceCanada the trend was even more dramatic, with followers increasing by 90 percent, donors by 206 percent, and donations by 210 percent (Table 2).[27]

Table 2 Growth of dissident Zionist organizations in Canada, 2022-23

	Founded	% increase in followers, 2022-23	% increase in donors, 2022-23	% increase in donations, 2022-23
Canadian Friends of Peace Now	1982	4	29	53
New Israel Fund of Canada	1986	33	71	91
JSpaceCanada	2010	90	206	210

Note: Arza is not listed in this table because it (1) provided figures for the Jewish calendar years 2021-22 and 2022-23, thus excluding the period of the 2023 Israeli election, and (2) changed its dues system in the period under consideration, redefining what it means to be a donor. Its figures are therefore not comparable to those for the other organizations listed here.

Sources: Gabriella Goliger, Maytal Kowalski, Ben Murane, and Lee Weiser, directors, respectively, of Canadian Friends of Peace Now, JSpaceCanada, New Israel Fund of Canada, and Arza Canada.

Combined unique followers of all four organizations totalled roughly 13,000 at the end of 2023—nearly 10 percent of the number of individuals who are affiliated with the Jewish Federations of Canada, the umbrella organization of Canadian Jewry.[28] However, the proportion of Canadian Jews who are sympathetic to some or all of the principles for which these organizations stand is considerably larger than 10 percent. We know this from the large *2018 Survey of Jews in Canada* and three smaller surveys of Canadian Jews conducted in February and September 2023 and February 2024.

The *2018 Survey of Jews in Canada* shows that, even before the accession of the current Israeli government, secular Canadian Jews were much more likely than religious Jews to think that Jewish settlements in the West Bank harm rather than help Israel's security. This tendency is illustrated by the ratio of those claiming that the settlements harm Israel's security to those claiming that they help Israel's security: 2.2:1 for those who belong to a synagogue, temple, or prayer group compared to 3.7:1 for those who do not.[29]

The three 2023–24 surveys provide additional evidence of a rift in the Canadian Jewish community regarding certain Israeli government policies and proposed policies (Brym 2023a; 2024; forthcoming 2024). On some issues a large majority of Canadian Jews have attitudes that align closely with those of dissident Zionist organizations.[30] Seven findings from these polls illustrate the point:

- Fifty-six percent of Canadian Jews believe that Israel's government is moving "in the wrong direction," compared to 13 percent who say it is moving "in the right direction" (February 2023).
- Ninety percent of Canadian Jews oppose laws proposed by some members of Israel's governing coalition that would allow banning Pride parades and legalizing conversion therapy for LGBTQ+ people. Six percent support these proposed laws (February 2023).

- Eighty percent of Canadian Jews oppose the judicial reforms strongly favoured by the Israeli government that would make it "easier for the government to reverse Supreme Court decisions." Eleven percent support the reforms. (February 2023).
- Sixty-two percent of Canadian Jews oppose removal of the so-called "grandparent clause" in Israel's Law of Return. Eighteen percent of Canadian Jews favour the clause's removal (February 2023).
- Seventy percent of Canadian Jews support the weekly mass protests against judicial reform that took place beginning in early 2023. Eight percent oppose the protests (September 2023).
- Seventy percent of Canadian Jews who attend synagogue once a year or less for occasions other than weddings and funerals and have an opinion on the subject believe that the Israeli government should not allow construction of new Jewish settlements in the West Bank or expansion of existing Jewish settlements. In contrast, 30 percent of those who attend synagogue *more* than once a year for occasions other than weddings and funerals and have an opinion on the subject believe that the Israeli government should allow such construction and expansion (February 2024).
- Similarly, 70 percent of Canadian Jews who attend synagogue once a year or less for occasions other than weddings and funerals and have an opinion on the subject believe that "Israel and an independent Palestinian state [can] exist peacefully with each other." Thirty percent of Canadian Jews who attend synagogue *more* than once a year for occasions other than weddings and funerals believe this arrangement is not possible (February 2024).

In sum, secular Jews are a growing part of Canada's Jewish community. Non-religious Jewish organizations are therefore growing. These organizations embody Jewish principles, such as Zionism, and thus promote Jewish continuity. However, as illustrated by the attitudinal tendencies just enumerated, they may do so in ways that differ from those of religious and mainstream Jewish organizations even while reflecting the attitudes of most Canadian Jews.

Conclusion

The secularization of Canadian Jews is not an inexorable process with a self-evident endpoint. However, it should be clear from the foregoing that, to date, secularization has not endangered Jewish continuity in Canada. To the contrary, the growth and vibrancy of secular organizations like the dissident Zionist groups just enumerated, combined with the census numbers provided earlier, augur well for the continuity of Canada's Jewish community, albeit with change in its organizational makeup and worldview. Growth in the population of Canada's most religious Jews combined with decline in the number of individuals who say they are Jewish by ethnicity or culture

but identify with a religion other than Jewish reinforce my conclusion regarding trends in Jewish continuity.

Appendix A

Jews in the Canadian Census

The wording of the Canadian census question on religion has remained fairly stable over time. In contrast, the ethnicity question has undergone radical change (Table 3). In 1871 and 1881 it queried the respondent's "origin" as distinct from place of birth. After being dropped in 1891, it was reinstated as a question about "racial or tribal origin." It became a question about "racial origin" alone in 1931 and 1941, and then, when racial theories were widely disputed in the wake of Nazism, reverted to a question about "origin" alone in 1951. In 1961 and 1971, when Canada's multicultural policy was brewing, it referred to the "ethnic or cultural group of you or your ancestor on the male side on coming to this continent." In 1981, with the women's movement in full swing, "on the male side" was dropped and "first" was added before "coming." The phrase "on first coming to this continent" was dropped in 1986, and for the first time respondents were asked to specify "as many [ethnic or cultural groups] as possible" (changed to "as applicable" in 1991).

Question wording did not change again until 2016. In preceding censuses, examples of ethnic or cultural groups, including Jewish, were listed in the question stem. However, in 2016 "Jewish" was dropped as an example. This deletion was largely responsible for a 54 percent decline in the count of Canadian Jews by ethnic or cultural origin between 2011 and 2016. The 2021 census question asked, "What were the ethnic or cultural origins of [your] ancestors?" No examples were offered in the question stem, but respondents could click on a web link taking them to an alphabetized list of hundreds of ethnic labels, including Jewish.[31]

Table 3 Jews by religion and ethnicity, Canada, 1871-2021

Year	Religion	Ethnicity	Definition of ethnicity or related term	Notes
1871	1115	125	Origin	
1881	2393	667	Origin	
1891	6414	--	No ethnicity question included	
1901	16401	16131	Racial or tribal origin	
1911	74564	75681	Racial or tribal origin	
1921	125190	126196	Racial or tribal origin	
1931	155766	156726	Racial origin	
1941	168585	170241	Racial origin	
1951	204836	181670	Origin	
1961	254368	173344	Ethnic or cultural group of you or your ancestor on the male side on coming to this continent	
1971	276025	296945	Ethnic or cultural group of you or your ancestor on the male side on coming to this continent	
1981	286425	264020	Ethnic or cultural group of you or your ancestor on first coming to this continent	
1986	--	245855	Ethnic or cultural group of ancestors	Respondents asked to list "as many [ethnic/cultural groups] as possible"
1991	318070	245840	Ethnic or cultural group of ancestors	
2001	329995	348605	Ethnic or cultural group of ancestors	
2011	329495	309650	Ethnic or cultural group of ancestors	Voluntary survey
2016	--	143665	Ethnic or cultural group of ancestors	Jewish dropped as example; no religion question mid-decade
2021	335295	282015	Ethnic or cultural group of ancestors	Web link provided to list of ethnicities including Jewish

Note: Some individuals are included in both the religion and the ethnicity columns, so figures are not additive within rows.

Sources: Department of Agriculture/Census Office/Census and Statistics Office/Dominion Bureau of Statistics/Statistics Canada, *Census of Canada* (1871-2021); Department of Agriculture/Census Office/Census and Statistics Office/Dominion Bureau of Statistics/Statistics Canada, *Census Questionnaires* (1871-2021).

As this summary demonstrates, for 150 years the ethnicity question has referred to various population categories. Only between 1991 and 2011 was it worded the same and accompanied by the same instructions in more than two successive censuses. The result: The count of Jews by ethnicity recorded in the census is a product not just of the changing number of individuals who regard themselves as members of the Jewish ethnic group. It is also a product of the definitions employed by census-takers. This fact is well illustrated by variation in the ratio of ethnic to religious identifiers from 11 percent in 1871 to 108 percent in 1971, with an average of 84 percent over the entire 150-year period.[32] Under these circumstances there can be no precise and definitive count of how the number of Jews in Canada has changed over time.

An additional problem emerged in 2011, when the Conservative government replaced the scheduled 2011 census with the National Household Survey (NHS), a voluntary poll based on a probability sample of one-third of Canadian households. Just under 69 percent of contacted households participated in the NHS compared to nearly 94 percent in the immediately preceding 2006 census. Statistics Canada compared population data from individual tax files, immigrant landing data, and the Indian Register to NHS data. The comparison confirmed a high level of similarity between known population data and NHS data on age, sex, mother tongue, area of residence, income, immigration status, and Indigenous status.[33] This procedure increased confidence in the reliability of NHS data in general. However, there is no way of independently assessing the accuracy of the 2011 NHS count of Jewish Canadians in particular. We nonetheless continue to use the 2011 data because they are the best (in fact, the only) relevant data we have for that year.

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I am indebted to David Koffman, editor-in-chief of *CJS / Ejc*; Joshua Tapper, managing editor of *CJS / Ejc*; and two anonymous reviewers, who provided exceptionally useful comments on a draft, leading me to substantially revise, expand, and hopefully improve this paper.

2
Zvi Gitelman, "The Decline of the Diaspora Jewish Nation: Boundaries, Content, and Jewish Identity," *Jewish Social Studies* 4, no. 2 (1998): 112-132; "We are All Russians Now," *Forward*, November 4, 2013, https://tinyurl.com/3c6hh7p3.

3
Ariela Keysar, "We are All Jews," *Contemporary Jewry* 42 (2022): 203-213; Barry A. Kosmin, "Impermanent Boundaries and the Secularization of the Jew," *Contemporary Jewry* 42 (2022): 215-220; Barry A. Kosmin and Ariela Keysar, "American Jewish Secularism: Jewish Life Beyond the Synagogue," in *American Jewish Year Book 2012*, ed. Arnold Dashefsky and Ira M. Sheskin (Dordrecht, Netherlands: Springer, 2012), 3-54. See also Richard M. Heiberger, "The Non-Religious Component of the 'Jewish Enterprise,'" *Contemporary Jewry* 43 (2023): 519-550.

4
As conventionally defined, formal organizations have written rules while informal organizations do not.

5
Keysar, "We are All Jews," 208, 204.

6
Sergio DellaPergola, "World Jewish Population 2023," in *American Jewish Year Book 2023*, ed. Arnold Dashefsky and Ira M Sheskin (Cham, Switzerland: Springer, 2024), forthcoming; Elizabeth Tighe, Leonard Saxe, Daniel Parmer, Daniel Nussbaum, and Raquel Magidin de Kramer, "According to Their Numbers: Assessing the Pew Research Center's Estimate of 7.5 million Jewish Americans," *Contemporary Jewry* 43 (2023): 201-224.

7
Specifically (and remarkably from a Canadian point of view), the US census asks only one question about Hispanic, Latino/a or Spanish origin and one question about race with sixteen response options under six broad categories: American Indian or Alaska native, Asian, Black or African American, Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander, White, and "some other race."

8
On changes in question wording, sampling, and actual counts from 1871 to 2021, see Appendix A.

9
Charles Shahar, *2021: The Jewish Population of Canada* (Toronto: Jewish Federations of Canada, 2023); Jim Torczyner and Shari L. Brotman, "The Jews of Canada: A Profile from the Census," in *American Jewish Yearbook 1995*, ed. David Singer and Ruth R. Seldin (New York: American Jewish Committee, 1995), 227-260.

10
DellaPergola, "World Jewish Population 2023."

11
Robert Brym, "Canada's Jewish Population, 2023: Focus on Minorities and Attitudes toward Israel's New Government," in *American Jewish Year Book 2023*.

12
Victor Zaslavsky and Robert Brym, *Soviet-Jewish Emigration and Soviet Nationality Policy* (London: Macmillan, 1983).

13
Zvi Gitelman, *Jewish Identities in Postcommunist Russia and Ukraine: An Uncertain Ethnicity* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

14
Daniel Staetsky and Robert Brym, "Two Methods for Estimating the Size of Haredi Communities in Diaspora Cities: Ultra-Orthodox Jews in Montreal and Toronto, Canada," unpublished paper. If the numbers for mean household size seem small, recall that the average includes households consisting of only one person.

15
This is the case even though the rise in antisemitic incidents since the early years of this century is less dramatic than some Jewish advocacy agencies claim. See Robert Brym, "Jews and Israel 2024: A Survey of Canadian Attitudes and Jewish Perceptions," *Canadian Jewish Studies / Études juives canadiennes* 37 (2024): 28-30.

16
Jean-Paul Sartre, *Anti-Semite and Jew*, trans. George J. Becker (New York: Schocken, 1948 [1946]).

17
For relevant information I am especially grateful to Joan Garson, former president of Holy Blossom Temple, in Toronto, and Daniel Held, executive director of the Julia and Henry Koschitzky Centre for Jewish Education, UJA Federation of Greater Toronto. Similarly, a recent survey of American Jews found a surge in joining Jewish organizations and forging Jewish friendships in the wake of the war. Mimi Eisenman, Sarah Kravetz, and David Manchester, "'The Surge,' 'the Core' and More: What you Need to Know About the Explosion of Interest in Jewish Life," eJewishPhilanthropy.com, May 9, 2024, https://tinyurl.com/2nctrduu.

18
Max Weber, "Science as a Vocation," in *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*, ed. H. H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004 [1917]), 129-156.

19
Reginald Bibby, "Jews and the Christian Goliath," in *The Ever-Dying People? Canada's Jews in Comparative Perspective*, ed. Robert Brym and Randal F. Schnoor (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2023), 179-194.

20
I am grateful to Yoram Halevy for information on the University of Toronto WhatsApp groups, Renan Levine for information on Alliance Combatting Campus Antisemitism, Cary Kogan for information on the Network of Engaged Canadian Academics, and Jesse Toufexis for information on the Association for Canadian Jewish Studies.

21
Robert Brym, Keith Neuman, and Rhonda Lenton, *2018 Survey of Jews in Canada* (Toronto: Environics Institute, 2018). SPSS data set.

22
Ibid., 18, https://tinyurl.com/ywdfwufr.

23
Robert Brym, "Israel in Lebanon," *Middle East Focus* 6, no. 1 (1983): 14-19; Canadian Friends of Peace Now, 2024, https://www.peacenowcanada.org/.

24
New Israel Fund Canada, 2024, https://nifcan.org/.

25
JSpaceCanada, 2024, https://www.jspacecanada.ca/.

26
Arza Canada, 2024, https://arzacanada.org/.

27
As this paper was being written, a Canadian branch of the Israeli organization, *Omdim b'yakhad* (Standing Together), was formed. It seeks to mobilize "Jewish and Palestinian citizens of Israel against the occupation and for peace, equality, and social justice." More than 800 people signed up for its inaugural event in Toronto on 26 March 2024, with a similar event taking place in Vancouver three weeks later. Standing Together, 2024, https://www.standing-together.org/en; Jonathan Rothman, "Standing Together Believes Jews and Palestinians Can Live in Security and Prosperity—and Now the Israeli Group is Building Support in Canada," *Canadian Jewish News*, April 12, 2024, https://thecjn.ca/news/standing-together/.

28
For the figures in this paragraph and in Table 3 I thank Gabriella Goliger, Maytal Kowalski, Ben Murane, and Lee Weiser, directors, respectively, of Canadian Friends of Peace Now, JSpace Canada, New Israel Fund Canada, and Arza Canada. Of the four organizations, only Arza collects membership dues. "Followers" are therefore defined here as individuals who have agreed to be on the emailing list of one of the organizations. The denominator of the 10 percent figure is based on the 150,000 Jewish Federation of Canada affiliates claimed by the CEO of the Centre for Israel and Jewish Affairs, the Federation's activist arm, from which I subtract the Arza followers since it is a Federation affiliate. Shimon Fogel, "Letter to Gary Bettman," X (formerly Twitter), February 5, 2024, https://tinyurl.com/yc7c5rwj.

29
Brym, Neuman, and Lenton, *2018 Survey*; Elizabeth Moorhouse-Stein, "Attitudes and Activism Concerning Israel," in T*he Ever-Dying People?* 147-162.

30
The 2023 surveys were not designed to distinguish secular Jews from others, so I focus on the Canadian-Jewish population as a whole when discussing these polls.

31
Statistics Canada, "Guide to the Census of Population, 2021: Chapter 6—online questionnaire, 2022, https://tinyurl.com/4t4zm9vw.

32
Many individuals replied "Jewish" to the religion and ethnicity questions, so the sum of responses to the two questions is larger than the number of individuals who replied "Jewish" to the religion or ethnicity question.

33
Wayne Smith, "The 2011 National Household Survey—the Complete Statistical Story" (Ottawa: Statistics Canada, 2015), https://bit.ly/3sdHnv0.