

Jewish American Diversity Fact Sheet

These facts give an overview of the history of Jews around the world and in the United States, and highlights their diversity.

- Jewish Americans have come to the United States from all over the world and have brought a rich variety of different Jewish cultural traditions with them.
- The Jewish people originated about 3,000 years ago in Southwest Asia, in the land of Israel.
- Jewish Americans, like Jews everywhere, feel a strong connection to each other and to the ancestral homeland of Israel. Jewish tradition and rituals reinforce these connections in many ways, from the content and direction of daily prayers to Jewish holidays. For example, Jews around the world conclude the Passover Seder with “Next year in Jerusalem.”
- Jews are a distinct ethnic group connected by rich traditions, thousands of years of history, ancestry, language, and religion. Jewish American ethnic identity may be expressed through food, language, holidays, celebrations, a feeling of connectedness to other Jews (Jewish peoplehood), remembrances of historical and ancestral experiences, connections to Israel, a commitment to social justice, and cultural elements such as music, literature, art, and philosophy that are also part of Jewish life.
- Jews do not fit exclusively into predefined categories, and frequently self-identify as both an ethnic group and a people.
 - Jewish Americans are an ethnic group among diverse American ethnic groups.
 - The concept of Jewish peoplehood means that Jews around the world are connected to each other across time and geography and share a common destiny.
- There are several major Jewish ethnic subgroups:
 - Mizrahi Jews are racially diverse Arabic- and Farsi-speaking Jews indigenous to the Middle East and North Africa for over 2,500 years.
 - Sephardic Jews are originally Judeo-Spanish or Ladino-speaking Jews expelled from Spain and Portugal to North Africa, the Ottoman Empire, and Central and South America, beginning with Spain’s expulsion in 1492.
 - Ethiopian Jews are Amharic-speaking Jews originally from Ethiopia.
 - Ashkenazi Jews are or were Yiddish-speaking Eastern and Central European Jews.
- Major languages and literature of Jewish expression include English, Hebrew, Arabic, Yiddish, Ladino, and Farsi. Hebrew, the language of Jewish scripture, is often a lingua franca that has united different Jewish ethnic subgroups.

- The physical appearance of Jewish Americans is very diverse, and skin color can range from light skinned to dark skinned, and includes Middle Eastern Jews, African American Jews, Asian American Jews, Latino/a/x Jews, and Native American Jews. Jewish families include multiracial households and there are diverse appearances both within families and within communities.
- The majority of Jewish Americans emigrated from Eastern Europe, and while their racial appearance often reflects this, there is a range of physical appearances, reflecting the movement of Jews over time and place.
- For many Jews, Jewish identity is primary, but they may be classified by others based on their skin color. Therefore, Jews often experience a divergence between internal identity and external classification.
- Other Jewish Americans or their families emigrated from the Middle East (Iran, Iraq, Israel, Lebanon, Syria, Turkey, Yemen), North Africa (Egypt, Libya, Tunisia, Algeria, Morocco), East Africa (Ethiopia), Central Asia (Bukharan Jews from Uzbekistan and Tajikistan), Central and South America, and beyond, and are of Mizrahi and Sephardic heritage.
- American Judaism has a range of religious denominations, including Reform, Reconstructionist, Conservative, and Orthodox, with a range of observances and practices. At the same time, Jews are united by shared sacred texts, like the Torah, by celebrations, traditions, and a feeling of connection to other Jews around the world.
- A 2020 Pew Research Center survey found that among younger Jewish adults 18-29, 29% identify as Reform, 17% identify as Orthodox, 8% identify as Conservative, and 41% don't identify with any particular denomination. See <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2021/05/11/10-key-findings-about-jewish-americans/>.
- Jewish Americans have a wide range of opinions and beliefs about what it means to be Jewish, how Jewish identity is defined, and the extent to which they identify with the religion of Judaism.
- Across Jewish denominations, ancestry marks a person as Jewish regardless of the individual's personal level of religious observance. Traditionally, a person is considered Jewish if born to a Jewish mother. Reform Jews among others consider a person with a Jewish father to also be Jewish.
- Jews consider a person who converts to Judaism, without Jewish ancestry, to be as Jewish as any other Jew.
- Jews are part of the Jewish American community by birth, adoption, marriage, and by throwing their lot in with the Jewish people through conversion or being part of a Jewish family.