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Konrad Zieliński
University of Maria Curie-Skłodowska in Lublin
Warsaw Ghetto Museum
ORCID 0000-0002-5180-5517

THE SOCIO-DEMOGRAPHIC PICTURE OF THE JEWISH POPULATION IN POLAND IN THE SECOND HALF OF THE 1930S

The great economic crisis, the progression of fascism across Europe, the rise of nationalist and xenophobic sentiments, and finally, the escalation of radical anti-Semitism in the 1930s did not leave the situation of Jews in Poland unaffected. The public mood and the political situation in the final years before the war were not conducive to stability, nor did they give a sense of security to the Jews living here. This was compounded by identity tensions accompanying the processes of secularisation, emancipation and modernisation of society, particularly noticeable among the younger generation of Polish Jews. It should also be remembered that in 1939, despite the post-partition unification of the country and the passage of almost 20 years since Poland regained its independence, Polish Jews did not form a single and cohesive community. Internal divisions were considerable, and the legacy of the partitions was still visible in, among other things, the nature of the communities, the model of religiosity, occupational traditions, the level of wealth, political sympathies and antipathies, and, finally, relations with the non-Jewish population.[1]

[1] See G. Bacon, "One Jewish Street? Reflections on Unity and Disunity in Interwar Polish Jewry," in *New Directions in the History of the Jews in the Polish Lands*, ed. by A. Polonsky, H. Węgrzynek, and A. Żbikowski (Boston, 2018), pp. 324–337.

The article outlines the demographic and socio-economic situation of the Jewish population in Poland in the second half of the 1930s. The activity of the participants in political life, the "state of possession" of individual parties and organisations or their policy assumptions are not analysed. Nonetheless, the national policy of the state affected the situation of the Jewish population and its economic position, and behind some laws, there was a solid ethnic prejudice. Therefore, more attention is paid to the phenomena of social life and to the pieces of legislation whose implementation, regardless of the motives behind their adoption, directly affected the situation of Jews and Jewish religious communities towards the end of the Second Polish Republic.

In the last dozen years, many valuable publications have appeared on the publishing market on, among other things, the demographic relations of the Jewish population in Poland. This study draws primarily on works whose authors cite statistical data. Reference was most often made to a study by Andrzej Gawryszewski, who analysed, among other things, the results of censuses.[2] Also very helpful were Bina Garncarska-Kadary's book on Jewish workers,[3] Tomasz Kawski's study on Jewish communities in interwar Poland,[4] and Szymon Rudnicki's work on Jewish parliamentarians in the Second Polish Republic.[5] The works of Jerzy Tomaszewski are also instrumental in researching the Jewish population's social situation and economic condition in the interwar period.[6] Of the studies published before the war, reference has been made, among others, to the two-volume work *Żydzi w Polsce Odrodzonej* (Jews in the Reborn Poland) and the statistics compiled by Bohdan Wasiutyński.[7]

As the 1931 census was the last one taken in the Second Republic, the results of the 1931 census were most often relied upon, with a possible reference to the 1921

[2] A. Gawryszewski, *Ludność Polski w XX wieku* (Warsaw, 2005).

[3] B. Garncarska-Kadary, *Żydowska ludność pracująca w Polsce 1918–1939* (Warsaw, 2001).

[4] T. Kawski, *Żydowskie gminy wyznaniowe w II Rzeczypospolitej. Studium historyczno-administracyjne* (Bydgoszcz, 2014).

[5] S. Rudnicki, *Żydzi w parlamencie II Rzeczypospolitej* (Warsaw, 2004).

[6] See their selection published in the Klasycy Historiografii Warszawskiej Series, J. Tomaszewski, *Żydzi w Drugiej Rzeczypospolitej*, ed. by A. Markowski and S. Rudnicki (Warsaw, 2016).

[7] *Żydzi w Polsce Odrodzonej*, ed. by I. Schiper, A. Tartakower, and A. Hafftka, vol. 2 (Warsaw, 1936); B. Wasiutyński, *Ludność żydowska w Polsce w wiekach XIX i XX. Studjum statystyczne* (Warsaw, 1930).

census, to compare certain phenomena and processes. Available statistics from 1931–1939 were also considered, although these concerned only specific sectors. The death of Józef Piłsudski and the so-called decomposition of the ruling camp mark the conventional lower boundary of the work. However, many references were made to data from before 1935 for understandable reasons. Attempts were made to consider the historical and socio-cultural context of the processes in question and to present the cited data on the Jewish population against the background of the country's demographic situation and national structure.

Share of Jewish Population in Poland's Total Population

According to the 1931 census, the state's 387,000 sq km territory was inhabited by slightly more than 32 million people, with a population density of 82.6 persons per sq km. As much as 72.6% of the population lived in villages, although given the actual level of urbanisation of small rural-urban settlements, this percentage is probably higher.

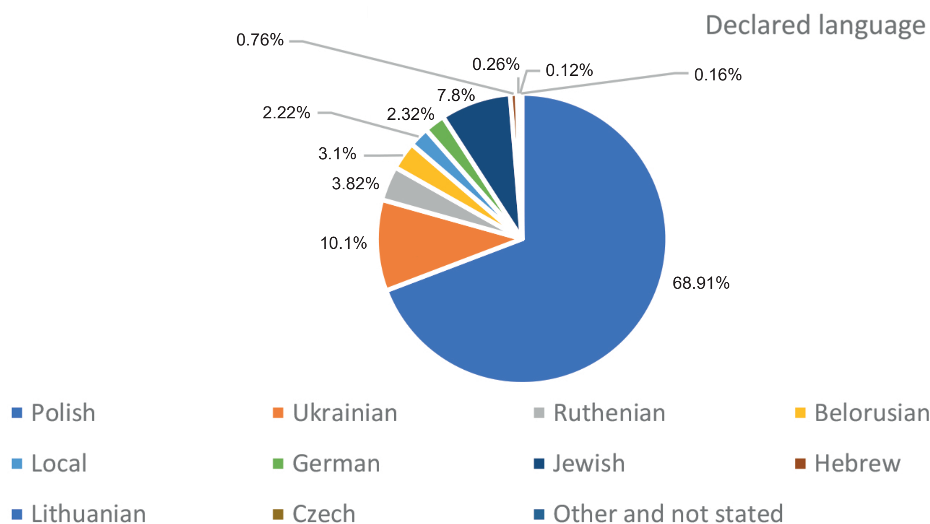
In 1931, the nationality question was not asked, as in 1921, but respondents were asked about their mother tongue. The census results were published in 1938–1939 according to the administrative division as of 1 January 1933 (for central and eastern voivodeships) and 1 August 1934 (for western and southern voivodeships). Polish was declared by nearly 69% of respondents, Ukrainian by 10.1%, Ruthenian by 3.82% (languages of Ruthenian ethnic groups, mainly Lemkos and Boykos), Belarusian by 3.1%, German by 2.32%, "local" (which was asked about only in the Voivodeship of Polesie) by 2.22%, Russian by 0.43%, Jewish (Yiddish) by 7.8%, and Hebrew by 0.76%.[8] The latter was often an ideological and political statement rather than the language of the family home.[9] The other languages spoken daily by other nationality groups in Poland did not exceed the figures for Russian (this predominantly applied to Czech and Lithuanian). As in 1921, the reliability of the 1931 data concerning nationality statistics, especially in the eastern territories, was

[8] *Drugi powszechny spis ludności z dn. 30 XII 1931 r. Mieszkania i gospodarstwa domowe. Ludność* (Warsaw, 1938), p. 15.

[9] Z. Landau and J. Tomaszewski, *Zarys historii gospodarczej Polski 1918–1939* (Warsaw, 1999), pp. 31–32; J. Żarnowski, "Epoka dwóch wojen," in *Społeczeństwo polskie od X do XX wieku*, ed. I. Ihnatowicz, A. Mączak, B. Zientara, and J. Żarnowski (Warsaw, 1988), p. 632.

disputed by Polish statisticians and historians and by researchers or commentators speaking on behalf of minorities.[10]

Fig. 1. Language Structure of Poland's Population according to the 1931 Census (in percentage terms)



Source: *Drugi powszechny spis ludności z dn. 30 XII 1931 r. Mieszkania i gospodarstwa domowe. Ludność* (Warsaw, 1938), p. 15.

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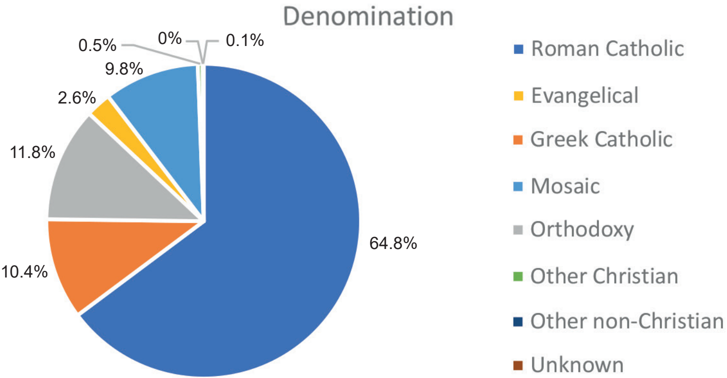
[10] The 1921 census form contained questions on nationality, mother tongue (these results were not published) and denomination. Still, it was conducted before the new state's borders were finally established, so it did not cover the entire territory of Poland. The figures for national minorities were underestimated, and some respondents equated the question on nationality with citizenship, which had the effect of overestimating the number of Poles. For this reason, in the 1931 census, the question on nationality was eliminated, while the ethnic structure was to be established on the basis of answers to the question on the mother tongue. The reliability of the data on the minorities in the 1931 census was also questioned, among other things, due to manipulation and falsification both during the census and in the data processing process. This mainly concerned Slavic minorities (the census takers crossed out the words "Belarusian" or "Ukrainian" in the mother tongue column and wrote down "Polish" instead). One of the languages that could be indicated was Ruthenian, which was spoken, apart from Lemkos, by a part of the Ukrainian population. The separate inclusion of Ukrainian and Ruthenian in the official census results was favourable from the point of view of the policy of the Polish authorities of the time, as it reduced the number of Ukrainians. In the form for the Voivodeship of Polesie, the word "Ruthenian" was omitted since most of the local Orthodox population used it to describe Ukrainian, Belarusian and Russian nationality, and it was replaced by the term "the local language." This enabled the number of Poles to be overestimated (M. Barwiński, "Spisy powszechne w Polsce 1921–2011. Określanie czy kreowanie struktury narodowościowej?," *Acta Universitatis Lodziensis. Folia Geographica Socio-Oeconomica* 21 [2015], pp. 54–59).

Therefore, those declaring Jewish (Yiddish) or Hebrew accounted for 8.6% of the country's population, and 12.3% of the population of Mosaic faith did not list Jewish or Hebrew as their mother tongues – half as many as in the 1921 census. Such figures indirectly indicate the unreliability of the first census regarding nationality relations and that declaring Polish as the mother tongue was not equivalent to assimilation. Nationality relations in the Second Republic were closely linked to matters of religion. The Roman Catholic religion was the religion of the vast majority of the ethnically Polish population (in 1931, about 21 million people belonged to the Roman Catholic Church). The Greek Catholic Church, to which the vast majority of Ukrainians in the former Austrian partition belonged, was a forge of national and political cadres for the leaders of the Ukrainian national movement. After the dissolution of the church union in 1875, Ukrainians in the former Russian partition were mainly adherents of the Orthodox Church. Orthodoxy was also the religion of most Belarusians and those identifying as 'locals' in the eastern provinces, although some were Roman Catholics. Evangelicals of various denominations were grouped in several church communities, with Lutherans and Calvinists having the most significant number of believers. Of the 835,000 Evangelicals in 1931, some 600,000 declared themselves as German-speaking and 220,000 as Polish-speaking.[11]

Fig. 2. Poland's Population in 1931 by Denomination (in percentage terms)



Source: C. Leszczyńska, *Polska 1918–2018* (Warsaw, 2018), p. 97.

[11] Żarnowski, *Epoka dwóch wojen*, p. 639.

Religion and nationality coincided to the greatest extent in the case of the Jewish minority of around three million. Although the last decades of the nineteenth century saw the emergence of an ideology that preached a national revival of the Jewish people, in the form of Zionism and made great strides in the struggle for the "rule of the Jewish souls," for many Jews, religion remained the sole or primary determinant of their identity.[12] The attitude towards the Mosaic faith and religion notwithstanding, every Jew was still, by the first significant legal act regulating the question of Jewish communities, specifically the decree of the Chief of State of 7 February 1919, a member of the Jewish community in a given town or covering several localities, and belonged to the Jewish Religious Union, which was given the nature of a compulsory corporation.[13]

Determinants of the Demographic Situation of the Jewish Population in Poland

After repatriation and post-war emigration ended, the main factor determining demographic change was the birth rate, which was consistently higher in the eastern voivodeships. By December 1931, the Jewish population had grown by 352,500 to 3,113,900 persons. This growth rate of 12.8%, calculated from the 1921 census, was lower than that of the Roman Catholics (30.9%) or the Orthodox (34.8%), although higher than that of the Greek Catholics (10.1%). The highest dynamics of the Jewish population occurred in the western voivodeships due to the inclusion in the census of the Voivodeship of Silesia, annexed to Poland after 1921. A similar situation happened in the Voivodeship of Vilnius (the previous census covered only the Vilnius Administrative District without so-called Central Lithuania). In central Poland and the southern voivodeships, the number of Jews

[12] The movement that represented the religious supporters of Herzl's ideology and advocated building a Jewish state in Palestine, based on the Torah and Talmud, was the 'Mizrachi' organisation founded in Vilnius in 1902, but the development of secular Zionism, especially in the first decades of the twentieth century, occurred at the expense of, among others, religious milieus (K. Zieliński, "Between tradition and modernity: the Polish shtetl in the first two decades of the 20th century," in *Jewish Space in Central and Eastern Europe: Day-to-Day History*, ed. by J. Šiaučiūnaitė-Verbickienė and L. Lempertienė [Newcastle, 2007], pp. 121–133).

[13] A. Lewicka, "Status formalnoprawny żydowskich gmin wyznaniowych w II Rzeczypospolitej," *Studia Żydowskie. Almanach* 2/2 (2012), p. 32.

increased, while it decreased in the Voivodeships of Poznań and Stanisławów, mainly due to emigration.[14]

Between 1927 and 1938, official emigration from Poland to non-European countries reached over 398 thousand people, of which the most significant number went to Argentina (over 113 thousand), Canada (over 100 thousand), Palestine (over 73 thousand), USA (over 46 thousand), Brazil (over 32 thousand) and Uruguay (8 thousand). Jewish emigrants numbered around 179,000, and apart from Palestine, where Jewish emigration covered almost 100% of emigrants, they went mainly to the USA, Argentina, and Canada. The latter as a destination country was popular among the Ukrainian-speaking population, while Poles from the former Kingdom of Poland mainly emigrated to Brazil. Emigration was mostly "for bread," with overseas emigration being permanent and family-based, whereas emigration to European countries was primarily seasonal. The exception was the Jews, who also left for European countries permanently or treated their stay there as a stopover on their way to the Americas. As a result of the migration restrictions imposed by individual countries and connected with the economic crisis, it was not until 1937–1938 that the volume of emigration, especially European emigration, increased. In the period mentioned above, just over 19,000 Jews left for European countries permanently, mainly France and Belgium.[15]

In the case of Jews, emigrants came from all over the country,[16] whereas in the population of Christian denominations, the inhabitants of the most overpopulated rural areas in the south and east of the country prevailed; it was also where agricultural labourers for seasonal work in German agriculture and the Baltic countries most often came from. Inhabitants of Silesia and the Zagłębie region found work in the mining and metallurgical industries of France, Belgium and Germany.[17] In

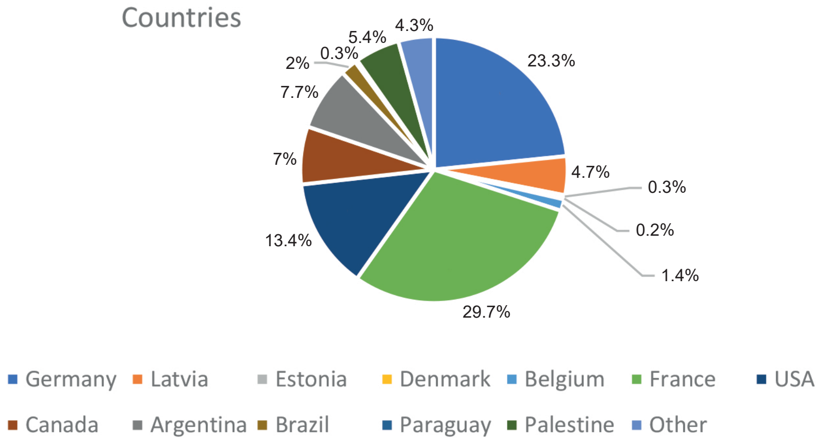
[14] Gawryszewski, *Ludność Polski*, pp. 287–288.

[15] *Ibid.*, pp. 425–427.

[16] In the 1930s, when the demand for the emigration of Jews from Poland became widespread because the government saw it as the primary means of "solving the Jewish question," it was pointed out that, due to the socio-occupational structure, emigration should primarily concern the Jewish inhabitants of the Voivodeships of Łódź, Białystok, Lublin, and Polesie (Z. Trębacz, *Nie tylko Palestyna. Polskie play emigracyjne wobec Żydów 1935–1939* [Warsaw, 2018], pp. 362–363).

[17] If we omit individual persons, graduates of Western universities of technology, until the outbreak of the First World War, the only major group of Jewish labourers employed in the German heavy industry

Fig. 3. Main Directions of Seasonal and Permanent Emigration from Poland between 1918 and 1938 (in percentage terms)



Source: P. Kusiak, "U źródeł idei kolonialnych. Wychodźstwo z Polski 1918–1939," in *Człowiek wobec problemów XIX i XX wieku*, ed. by M. Franz and M. Kardas (Toruń, 2011), p. 184.

general, there were relatively few emigrants professionally connected with mining and industry (about 58,000), but during the period in question, nearly 13,000 of them went to Palestine, and they were Jews.

The economic impact of the emigration of Polish Jews to Palestine was significant, not only in the form of funds sent to families remaining in the "old country," in addition to business ties between entrepreneurs in Poland and the Middle East, the emigrants brought with them certain consumer habits, resulting in a marked increase in the value of Polish exports to Palestine.[18] Professionals and teachers were the minor groups of emigrants; the directions of their emigration were scattered, but the exceptions were those going to Palestine.[19]

were Polish Jews working under an experimental programme of the Prussian government in the mines of Silesia (N.L. Green, *Jewish Workers in the Modern Diaspora* [Berkeley–Los Angeles–London, 1998], pp. 56–58).

[18] M. Sroka, "Emigracja Żydów polskich w latach 1918–1939. Zarys problematyki," *Państwo i Społeczeństwo* 2 (2010), pp. 117–120.

[19] Gawryszewski, *Ludność Polski*, pp. 427–428; P. Kusiak, "U źródeł idei kolonialnych. Wychodźstwo z Polski 1918–1939," in *Człowiek wobec problemów XIX i XX wieku*, ed. M. Franz and M. Kardas (Toruń, 2011), pp. 179–180.

The gender structure in Poland in the first decade of independence was heavily distorted, which was the outcome not only of the generally more extended life expectancy of women but also of wartime activities and increased emigration. In 1931, the ratio of women to men increased somewhat, with 106.9 women per 100 men. The predominance of women was noticeable above all in the cities, which had a total of 112.8 women per 100 men, while for the countryside, the feminisation ratio was 104.7. Similar values also applied to the Jewish population. The war left lasting traces also in the age structure – in 1931, the low numbers of those born during the war stood out, being part of the group aged 10–14 and partly 15–19. "The group of children aged 5–9 was almost as numerous as the 0–4 group, reflecting the increase in the number of births in the post-war years and the renewed decline in the later years."[20]

Between 1936 and 1939, the birth rate for the Jewish population was 8.5‰, lower than the rate recorded for the general population, which was 11.2‰. The lower birth rate among Jews was offset by a lower death rate, 18.9 (births) and 10.4 (deaths). The figures for the non-Jewish population were 25.3 and 14.1, respectively.[21]

In the late 1920s and early 1930s, life expectancy for newborns in Poland was 49.8 years, one of the shortest in Europe; only the USSR and Bulgaria had a lower life expectancy of 46.3.[22] On the other hand, infant mortality in Poland in the second half of the 1920s (1927–1928) dropped, but it remained high. The situation was particularly dire in the eastern voivodeships, where 216 infants per 1,000 live births died annually. In the remaining voivodeships, infant mortality was much lower but twice as high as in many European countries. In 1930, the percentage of deaths of infants and children under one year of age was 14.3‰, including 11.9‰ in Warsaw alone, whereas in Czech Prague and Vienna, these figures were 9.0‰ and 7.1‰ respectively.[23] It must be remembered, however, that the data on infant mortality, except for the rates for the western voivodeships, are unreliable. The duty to report births and deaths to the registry offices was disregarded in villages and small towns, especially in the Eastern Borderlands, both by the rural Christian

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[20] Gawryszewski, *Ludność Polski*, pp. 208, 220–221.

[21] Garncarska-Kadary, *Żydowska ludność*, p. 259; Wasiutyński, *Ludność żydowska*, pp. 183–190.

[22] Gawryszewski, *Ludność Polski*, p. 196.

[23] J. Sadowska, *Lecznictwo ubezpieczeniowe w II Rzeczypospolitej* (Łódź, 1990), p. 152.

population and by Jews.[24] In the central and eastern voivodeships, for example, only 55–67% of the actual number of births of children of the Mosaic faith were registered due to delays in registration or a failure to report births of girls and infant deaths. An example of the inaccuracy of the official data can be seen in the results of a survey conducted in 54 cities of the central voivodeships among the population of the Mosaic faith, according to which in 1927–1930, the number of births was even 60–80% higher than that registered by the Central Statistical Office.[25]

The incompleteness of the data on the natural movement of the country's population also applied to deaths. In the first half of the twentieth century, statistics on the causes of death in Poland were very inaccurate, which was due to the lack of medical personnel (in many regions, it was common to use folk healers, patients often died without getting any medical help and, therefore, without the diagnosis of the disease, etc.), but also to the lack of organisation of medical statistics. However, even inaccurate data allow us to claim that poor sanitary and hygienic conditions were accompanied by infectious diseases, which took a hefty toll during epidemics caused, among other things, by migrations (as in the years of the First World War and in the post-war years, when cholera ravaged many shtetls in the Congress Kingdom). Although the situation in this regard improved with the progress of medicine and the spread of ambulatory and medical care, the so-called "dirty hands" diseases, such as dysentery and typhoid fever, continued to take a heavy toll. Smallpox, poliomyelitis and tuberculosis were among the most common causes of death as late as the 1930s.[26] A gradual increase in the significance of cardiovascular diseases and cancer could be observed in the structure of deaths. In 1938, only in towns with more than 100,000 inhabitants, for which we have statistical data, the death rate was 110.9 per 10,000. The most common causes were infectious and parasitic diseases – 25.6; tuberculosis – 13.4; circulatory diseases – 21.2; respiratory diseases – 13.5; cancer – 10.7; gastrointestinal diseases – 9.8. The rate of deaths caused by external causes was 4.4, half of which were suicides.[27]

[24] Gawryszewski, *Ludność Polski*, p. 190.

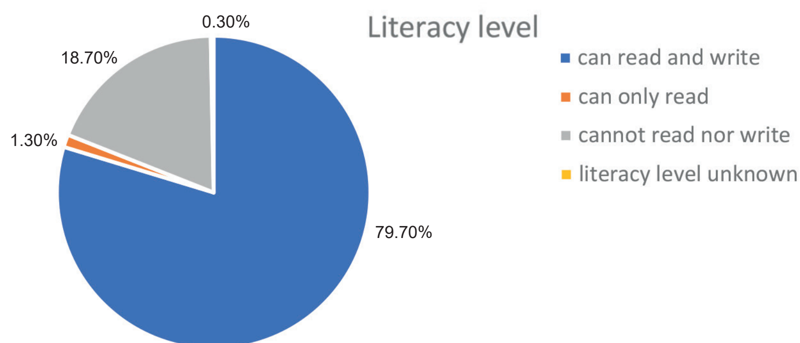
[25] T. Wysocki, "Zaawansowanie przejścia demograficznego w grupach narodowościowych i wyznaniowych w Polsce okresu międzywojennego," *Studia Demograficzne* 153–154/1–2 (2008), p. 57.

[26] Gawryszewski, *Ludność Polski*, pp. 181, 186, 188.

[27] *Ibid.*, p. 189.

Another indicator of the civilisational development of societies is the level of illiteracy. Independent Poland made up for the losses from the time of the partitions within a relatively short period. Although the differences between individual neighbourhoods, religious and national groups or rural and urban areas did not disappear, there was a significant improvement. This had to do with the spread of primary education and enforcing compulsory schooling. In the first decade of Poland's independence, illiteracy dropped from 44.5% to 27.6%. This was also noticeable in the least developed and most backwards eastern voivodeships, where the percentage decreased from 71.7% to 45.8% for the population over nine. Taking into account the denominational criterion, the lowest level of education and the highest rate of illiterates were registered among the Orthodox and Greek Catholic populations. According to the 1931 census, 69.6% of the Polish population aged five and over could read and write, and the highest percentage declaring both skills was characteristic of Protestant and Mosaic believers, 83.3% and 79.7%, respectively. In the case of Jews aged five and over, 18.7% could not read and write, and girls slightly prevailed in this age group.[28] However, we do not know whether the census counters considered the knowledge of Jewish languages in each case. It is also unclear how to approach an even passive knowledge of Old Hebrew used in the liturgy.

Fig. 4. Literacy among Jews aged five and over (in percentage terms)



Source: T. Wysocki, "Umiejętność czytania i pisania w grupach wyznaniowych zamieszkujących Polskę w świetle wyników spisu powszechnego z 1931 roku," *Rozprawy z Dziejów Oświaty* 44 (2005), p. 108.

[28] T. Wysocki, "Umiejętność czytania i pisania w grupach wyznaniowych zamieszkujących Polskę w świetle wyników spisu powszechnego z 1931 roku," *Rozprawy z Dziejów Oświaty* 44 (2005), pp. 106–114.

In the interwar period, there was a significant increase in the number of secondary school graduates (although the number of schools remained at a level similar to that of 1921 and the time of the partitions). After the so-called Jędrzejowicz reform, an increase in the number of vocational school pupils was observed. The so-called high school diploma (a secondary school graduation diploma, Polish: *matura*), obtained by some 250,000 people in the interwar period, opened up considerable opportunities for social advancement (although this advancement was available to a lesser extent to representatives of national minorities). They were then severely restricted in the wake of the economic crisis. Compared to the decade before and the 1924/1925 academic year, the number of students, despite the appearance of new universities, was declining, linked to the impoverishment of a part of the population and the shrinking labour market. On the other hand, in that same period, ca. 83,000 people in Poland completed higher education.[29]

In the academic year of 1934/1935, the number of Jews who studied at 24 Polish universities was 7,114, which accounted for 14.9% of all students.[30] However, in the case of Jewish students, the decline was close to 16%, against about 3% for all students. This should be linked to the emigration of many well-educated, "idealistic" young people to Palestine, as well as to the increasing discrimination and harassment encountered by Jewish students at Polish universities. The academic and state authorities also tried to limit the number of places in certain faculties, especially medicine and law, which were traditionally popular with the Jewish youth. Jewish students in technical faculties were very few, not least because of poor employment prospects in the large industries owned mainly by the state. In any case, the rate of decline in the percentage of Jewish students was systematic in the mid-1930s and amounted to about 0.6% annually.[31] We do not know the number of Jews studying at universities abroad. Still,

[29] Gawryszewski, *Ludność Polski*, pp. 319–326.

[30] Z. Przybysz, "Żydowscy studenci na polskich uczelniach wyższych w Drugiej Rzeczypospolitej – próba statystycznego ujęcia," *Vade Nobiscum* 7 (2011), pp. 95–96.

[31] *Ibid*.

fragmentary data allow us to claim that chemistry studies in Switzerland, medical and pharmaceutical studies in Czechoslovakia, technical studies in Latvia and – until the Nazis came to power – in Germany, as well as the traditional universities and art academies of Vienna and Paris were quite popular. Studying abroad was, of course, associated with high costs and, as such, was accessible to few.

Distribution of the Jewish Population

For Poland as a whole, migration from rural to urban areas resulted in a faster urban population growth than the rural population. However, as Gawryszewski points out, it did not change the distribution pattern of the population.[32] Also, Jews participated in the migration to the more developed western voivodeships, taking place vacated by Germans of Jewish origin. Although the influx of newcomers from Galicia, the Congress Kingdom and the Eastern Borderlands did not compensate for the losses, it did break the stagnation prevailing in the religious communities there.[33]

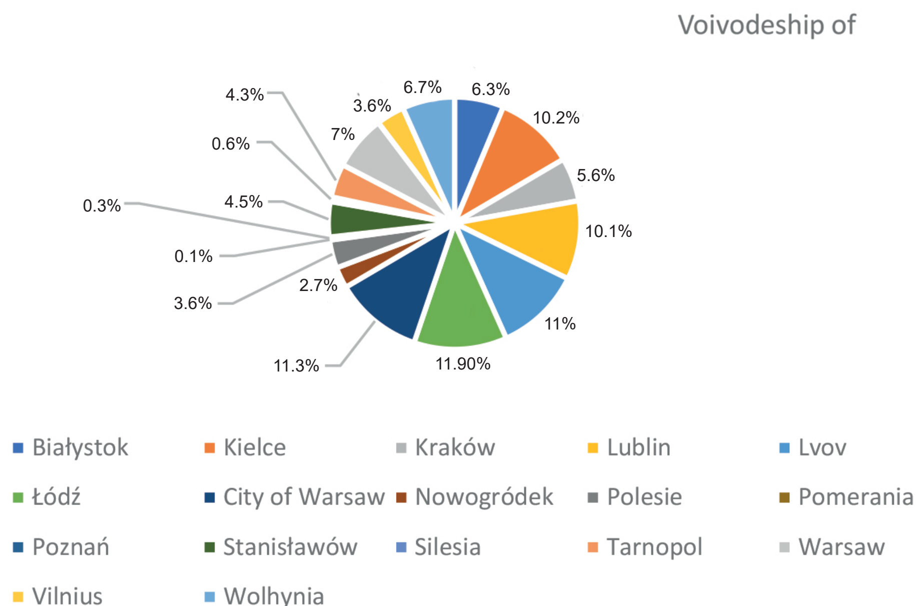
Jews lived dispersed throughout the country, with the most significant percentage of the total population in a given voivodeship in the Voivodeships of Łódź, Lublin, Białystok, Lvov and Polesie (over 10% of the population). In the Voivodeship of Warsaw, Jews accounted for 8.7% of the total population. Still, in the capital itself, which had the largest Jewish population in Europe, they accounted for 30.1%.[34]

[32] Gawryszewski, *Ludność Polski*, p. 85.

[33] A. Skupień, "Ludność żydowska w województwie poznańskim 1919–1938," *Dzieje Najnowsze* 37/2 (2005), p. 137.

[34] Kawski, *Żydowskie gminy wyznaniowe*, p. 63.

Fig. 5. The Share of the Jewish Population by Voivodeships in 1931 (in percentage terms)

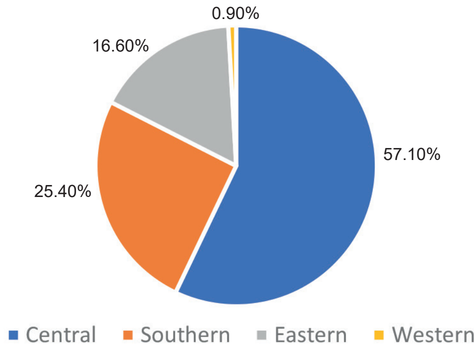


Source: T. Kawski, *Żydowskie gminy wyznaniowe w II Rzeczypospolitej. Studium historyczno-administracyjne* (Bydgoszcz, 2014), p. 63.

Broken down into groups of voivodeships, the most significant percentage of the Jewish population lived in the central voivodeships (Warsaw, Łódź, Kielce, Lublin, Białystok), which reached 57.1%, then southern voivodeships (Cracow, Lvov, Stanisławów, Tarnopol) – 25.4%, eastern voivodeships (Vilnius, Nowogródek, Volhynia, Polesie) – 16.6%. The smallest percentage was in the western voivodeships (Poznań, Pomerania, Silesia) – 0.9%.[35]

[35] Garncarska-Kadary, *Żydowska ludność*, p. 257.

Fig. 6. Distribution of the Jewish Population in Poland in 1931 by Voivodeship Group (in percentage terms)



Source: B. Garncarska-Kadary, *Żydowska ludność pracująca w Polsce 1918–1939* (Warsaw, 2001), p. 257.

When analysed by county, no distinct concentrations could be discerned; in none of the counties did the population of this religion constitute a majority. In 1931, the highest percentage of the population of the Mosaic faith by county was found in 11 urban counties: Białystok – 43.0% of the population, Lublin – 34.7%, Łódź – 33.5%, Radom – 32.3%, Lvov – 31.9%, Warsaw – 30.1%, Vilnius – 28.2%, Cracow – 25.8%, Częstochowa – 21.8%, Bielsko – 19.8%, and Sosnowiec – 19.1%. In five rural counties, the population of this religious group exceeded 15% of the total population: Brzeziny – 16.8%, Grodno – 16.7%, Włodawa – 16.0%, Radzyń – 15.7%, and Siedlce – 15.2%. The lowest share of this population was characteristic of the counties of the western voivodeships, where, in principle, it did not exceed 1% of the total population, except four urban counties (Grudziądz – 1.3%, Bydgoszcz – 1.4%, Chorzów – 2.8%, and Katowice – 4.5%) and two rural counties (Bielsko – 2.0% and Cieszyn – 2.4%). The smallest population of the Mosaic religion was in the counties of Międzychód (11 persons per 31 thousand inhabitants) and Kościan (24 persons per 78.9 thousand inhabitants).[36]

[36] Gawryszewski, *Ludność Polski*, pp. 254–257, 287–288; Wasiutyński, *Ludność żydowska*, pp. 5, 179–188.

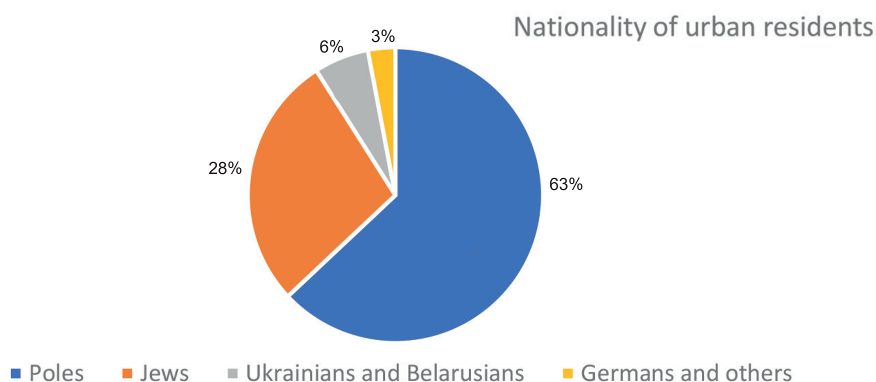
In terms of town and country distribution, the concentration of Jews in the central parts of the cities was striking, which was particularly evident in smaller towns. In the metropolises and large cities, it was not difficult to find nationally mixed streets and neighbourhoods (this applied mainly to prestigious, "better" streets and labourers' districts). Still, also specific "urban shtetls" existed, inhabited almost exclusively by Jews, examples being Warsaw's Nalewki, Cracow's Kazimierz or Lublin's Podzamcze. In the interwar period, the boundaries between the Jewish ghetto and areas traditionally inhabited by non-Jews slowly became blurred, but they remained clear until 1939. A characteristic phenomenon was the shtetls in central and eastern Poland, towns whose centres were inhabited mainly by Jews. In some of them, such as Bereźne and Lubomla in the Voivodeship of Volhynia, the percentage of Jewish inhabitants exceeded 90%.[37]

Jews were the most urbanised population group in the Second Republic. 76.4% of all Jews in Poland lived in cities, and – according to the 1931 census – they constituted nearly 28% of all urban residents. At the time of the census, almost a quarter of the Jewish population lived in five major Polish cities, comprising a fourth and a third of the total population. These were Warsaw, Łódź, Lvov, Vilnius and Cracow. In contrast, according to Szyja Bronsztejn's findings, the highest percentage of Jews living in the countryside was in the Voivodeships of Volhynia and Lublin, at 4.6% and 6.4%, respectively.[38] Jewish agricultural settlements were very few, mainly in the Voivodeships of Lvov, Polesie, and Nowogródek.

[37] *Szlakami sztetli. Podróże przez zapomniany kontynent*, ed. by E. Majuk (Lublin, 2015), pp. 358, 381.

[38] As cited in J. Tomaszewski, *Zarys dziejów Żydów w Polsce w latach 1918–1939* (Warsaw, 1990), pp. 11–12.

Fig. 7. Nationality Structure of the Urban Population, Compiled from the 1931 Census Data (in percentage terms)



Source: B. Garncarska-Kadary, *Żydowska ludność pracująca w Polsce 1918–1939* (Warsaw, 2001), pp. 65–66.

Membership in the Jewish community of people of this nationality in the Second Republic was obligatory. Although there were ways to leave it, they were not used often (this usually involved a change of religion). In the early 1920s, the number of Jewish communities ranged between 770 and 780; by the end of that decade, their number had risen to over 900, only to drop to 825 on the eve of the outbreak of the Second World War; 83 of these were large communities, with more than 5,000 members. The most significant number of large communities existed in the Voivodeships of Warsaw (14), Lvov, and Łódź (10 each). It should be remembered that the group of large communities included both the Warsaw community, in which over 11% of Poland's Jewish population lived (352,000) in 1931, and the Płońsk community, situated in the same voivodeship, which had 5,300 members.[39]

Occupational Structure of the Jewish Population

Pre-war Poland was a country full of contrasts – the living conditions, the standard of the transport infrastructure, the saturation with schools in the metropolitan areas of Warsaw and Łódź or in heavily industrialised Silesia differed enormously

[39] Kawski, *Żydowskie gminy wyznaniowe*, pp. 62, 73.

not only from the muddy Polesie but also from central voivodeships, such as that of Lublin or Kielce. The wealth and standard of living of the various social strata were no less different, which also applied to the Jewish population.

In the 1920s and 1930s, the employment structure in Poland did not change much compared to the time of the partitions. The 1931 census, despite all its faults, provided data on the occupational structure of the population by religion and social status. The Jewish population was characterised by a high percentage of those employed in industry (this term also covered craftsmen using mechanical machinery) and commerce. However, this most often meant stalls, small businesses and workshops, either one-man or of a family nature, and persons working in the liberal professions. However, the first decade of independence brought little change in the primary sources of livelihood for the Jewish population – there was a slight increase in the proportion of making a living from industry at the expense of trade. Regardless, commodity trading and the clothing industry (tailoring, shoemaking, making shoe uppers, tricot-making, hat-making) remained the primary livelihood source for many Jews.[40]

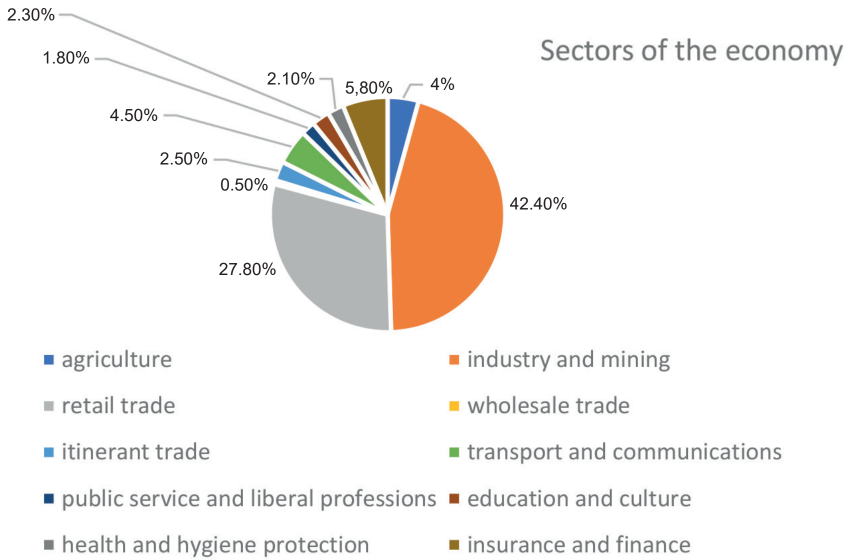
In 1931, only 2% of Jewish workers were employed in large-scale industry and mining, while 10% were employed in medium-sized enterprises. About 88% of the Jewish industrial workforce worked in small-scale industry and craft workshops. One can, therefore, speak of a kind of "labour ghetto" of Jewish labourers.[41] By comparison, 29% of the Roman Catholic population of the total working population in this category were employed in industry and mining. Cottagers had the weakest position, being the lowest group in the occupational hierarchy – 41% of them were Jews employed in the broadly defined garment industry. In addition, not counting trade and insurance, Jews prevailed in the structure of those working in watchmaking, jewellery, tinsmithing and glassmaking industries.[42] Over 42% of the Jewish working population was employed in industry and mining (Fig. 8), and this industry consisted mainly of grocery, clothing, chemical and small-scale factories.

[40] Gawryszewski, *Ludność Polski*, pp. 347–349; C. Leszczyńska, *Polska 1918–2018* (Warsaw, 2018), p. 99.

[41] J. Tomaszewski, "Robotnicy żydowscy w Polsce w latach 1921–1939 (Szkic statystyczny)," in *id.*, *Żydzi w Drugiej Rzeczypospolitej*, pp. 229–230, 241.

[42] Leszczyńska, *Polska 1918–2018*, p. 99.

Fig. 8. Employment structure of the Jewish working population by sectors of the economy in 1931 (in percentage terms)



Source: R. Szuchta, *1000 lat historii Żydów polskich. Podróż przez wieki* (Warsaw, 2015), p. 167.

The concentration of Jews in selected sectors and industries stemmed from socio-historical and religious conditions (for example the prohibition of work on Saturdays). However, the reluctance to employ Jews in state and local government establishments and institutions or the uniformed services also had an impact.[43] This discrimination also applied to representatives of other national minorities, especially in the Eastern Borderlands.[44] For example, the share of minority workers in the employment structure in public sectors, such as the postal service, telegraph service, telephone service and railways, during the year 1921 was 4.2%, 3% and 1.9% for Belarusians, Ukrainians and Jews respectively. Among those earning their living from a job in the postal, telegraph and telephone service, Poles accounted for 88.5% during that year, and this percentage did not change much throughout

[43] Garncarska-Kadary, *Żydowska ludność*, pp. 58–59.

[44] See for example E. Horoch, "Plan eliminacji Ukraińców ze służb publicznych i ważniejszych gałęzi własności prywatnej w województwie lubelskim 1939–1941," in *Pogranicze. Studia z dziejów stosunków polsko-ukraińskich w XX wieku*, ed. by Z. Mańkowski (Lublin, 1992), pp. 43–45.

the interwar period.[45] This expulsion of minorities from state-owned enterprises or their exclusion from specific employment sectors was nothing unique in the Europe of the 1930s. During the construction of the Central Industrial District (Centralny Okręg Przemysłowy, COP), which began in 1935, very few Jews, Ukrainians or Ruthenians living in the municipalities and counties where the COP's investments were being built found employment in the industrial plants established then. The ethnically and religiously heterogeneous Second Republic, whose inhabitants enjoyed equal rights under the Constitution and other legal acts, was nevertheless a nation-state, a state of and for the Polish nation. The nation was treated primarily in ethnic terms, which determined the situation of all minorities in the state.

A problem the Second Republic faced throughout its existence was mass unemployment, which also affected the Jewish population. Under the Unemployment Security Act, introduced in 1924, only labourers in enterprises employing more than five people were liable to compulsory insurance, and an unemployment benefit of 30–50% of earnings, but no more than 2.50 zlotys per day, was paid only for 13 weeks.[46] Workers in smaller establishments were not included in the insurance system, and these made up the majority of Jewish businesses, which were often family-run or employed workers unofficially. Nearly two-thirds of the Jewish labourers are estimated to have been employed in establishments not covered by collective bargaining agreements.[47]

In the case of Jews, the assistance provided by the state and local authorities in the form of public works played little role. In the 1930s, an increase in the percentage of women employed in various branches of small industry and various jobs could be observed throughout the country. It is worth noting, however, that women were generally paid lower wages than men. This professional activation of women also involved Jewish women.[48] Unemployment, however – despite the relatively good economic situation in the final years before the outbreak of the war – remained high throughout the interwar period. The smaller and

[45] Gawryszewski, *Ludność Polski*, pp. 351–352; Żarnowski, "Epoka dwóch wojen," p. 637.

[46] Gawryszewski, *Ludność Polski*, pp. 368–370.

[47] J. Tomaszewski, "Sytuacja Żydów w Polsce," in *id.*, *Żydzi w Drugiej Rzeczypospolitej*, p. 202.

[48] J. Dufrat, "W okresie powolnej modernizacji. Kobieta w II Rzeczypospolitej – próba bilansu," *Zeszyty Naukowe Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego. Prace Historyczne* 147/4 (2020), pp. 817–819.

larger state and private investments of the Second Republic could not keep up with the rapidly growing labour supply, much of which joined the ranks of the unemployed. In the first half of the 1930s, this resulted in rapid pauperisation and severe social unrest.

While a small percentage of the Jewish population made a living from agricultural work, among the labourers in some urban centres, the rate of Jews was sometimes considerable. This was the case in the textile industries of Łódź or Białystok, among others. However, there, too, the Jewish owners preferred to employ Christians, who were less organised than the Jewish workers, who were under the strong influence of the socialist Bund.[49] In general, the post-war social welfare benefits and real wage increases most often did not apply to Jewish labourers, whose percentage in large-scale industry, most often state-owned, was low. Although the restructuring of the employment structure also took place in private enterprises and pro-worker social provisions appeared, the process was very slow. Tomaszewski argued that "the surge in state investment perpetuated the existence of the 'labour ghetto' for Jewish workers."[50] Those employed in the brush industry in Międzyrzec Podlaski or small grocery manufacturing factories, such as the cigarette tubes factory or the mineral water factory in Lublin, had no chance of real wage increases if they managed to maintain employment stability at all.

Garncarska-Kadary argues, too, that the situation of the Jewish working population had deteriorated in the last years leading up to the war – despite the gradual easing of the Great Depression. While industrial wages improved between 1938 and 1939, this did not extend to all workers in large and medium-sized industrial plants and only marginally affected those employed in small factories and craft workshops. Thus, due to the employment structure of Jewish workers, not only did their situation deteriorate in comparison with non-Jewish workers, who made up the majority of those employed in large and medium-sized industries, but their fundamental purchasing power also declined.[51] Jewish cottage industry workers

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[49] I. Chorosz, *Podróż po przemysłowej strefie osiedlenia (Szkice podróżnicze technika). Polski przemysł włókienniczy. Żydowskie wytwórnie i żydowscy robotnicy*, transl. by J. Szumski, ed. by A. Markowski (Warsaw, 2019), pp. 86, 99, 118, 163–173.

[50] Tomaszewski, "Robotnicy żydowscy w Polsce," p. 244.

[51] Garncarska-Kadary, *Żydowska ludność*, pp. 145–146.

covered the depreciation cost of their tools and workshops. Still, according to the 1935 law excluding folk and home-based industry and cottage industry work from the provisions of the industrial law, they had to purchase licences on their own, pay taxes and, as they were deprived of social insurance, cover the costs of medical care in case of illness themselves.[52]

On the other hand, in 1931, for example, 51.5% of all enterprises in chemical, mineral, timber, paper, textile, leather, clothing, printing, construction, metal and food industries in Warsaw belonged to Jews, whereas in Łódź it was 60.2%, in the Voivodeship of Białystok – 55% and the Voivodeship of Kielce – 49.7%.[53] Category IV–VI establishments, staffed by working family members or employing a minimum number of salaried workers, were by far the predominant category, but the proportion of Jews – employers, owners and shareholders of companies – should be considered high.[54] In earlier historiography, the social stratum referred to as the bourgeoisie, according to the 1931 census data, comprised 3.3% of all economically active Jews (excluding agriculture). In relation to the total bourgeoisie, estimated at 81,000, Jews accounted for 45%.[55] Separate research is required to establish the actual number of Jewish urban property owners and rentiers, of whom there was a general perception that there were relatively many.

It was probably thanks to this that the basic socio-economic activity of the Polish Jewry was possible and that the minimum conditions of existence of a significant part of the Jewish population were maintained. It is estimated that in 1929, 10% of the income of the wealthier half of the Jewish community consisted of financial transfers to the poorer half, which, despite generational, ideological, religious or

[52] *Dziennik Ustaw* (The Journal of Laws) 42 (1935), items 282, 283.

[53] Garncarska-Kadary, *Żydowska ludność*, p. 254. For more on the Kielce voivodeship, see E. Majcher-Ociesa, *Aktywność gospodarcza ludności żydowskiej w województwie kieleckim w latach 1918–1939* (Kielce, 2013).

[54] "The economic character of Polish Jewry was determined by the existence of a large majority of petty merchants, shopkeepers, artisans, and *luft-mentshn* […]. There was also a narrow but important stratum of wealthy businessmen, industrialists, professionals, and intellectuals. The penury of the Jewish masses was proverbial, but at the same time, it was undeniable that the Jews played a major role in the economy and in cultural life." These words referred to the 1920s; nevertheless, one can similarly characterise the socio-economic situation of Jews in Poland in the following decade (see E. Mendelsohn, *Zionism in Poland: The Formative Years, 1915–1926* [New Haven–London, 1981], p. 7).

[55] J. Orlicki, *Szkice z dziejów stosunków polsko-żydowskich 1918–1949* (Szczecin, 1983), p. 50.

party disputes, united many sectors of the Jewish community in Poland.[56] Centos (Union of Associations for the Care of Jewish Orphans), founded in 1924, stood out among the many non-religious charities. In addition to the aid provided by the American Joint, it benefitted from the financial support of its members, whose number in the inter-war period never fell below 40,000. Thanks to them, nearly 30,000 children were supported in 1937, and the aid provided ranged from educational subsidies, the organisation of extracurricular activities and the financing of summer camps to food or clothing. Centos supported nearly 10,000 orphans in 205 of its institutions the following year.[57]

Vagrancy and beggary, which increased during the Great Depression, resulted from the economic situation. The Jewish population also experienced them, although the broader network of charitable institutions and the systemic support of the Jewish community were more effective in reducing these phenomena among the Jews than among the Christians. A permanent feature of the urban landscape was, according to press reports, the scourge of prostitution.[58] Women of all religions and nationalities practised registered and illegal fornication, although fragmentary data indicate that the percentage of Jewish women proportionally exceeded that of Christian women.[59] Prostitution was an 'urban' phenomenon, so the high degree of urbanisation characterising the Jewish population was reflected in the statistics. The bad reputation of the Varsovia Association, a criminal organisation more widely known as the Cwi Migdal, also reinforced the view that behind prostitution were mainly Jews. The members of the organisation, founded in Argentina by pimps and brothel owners specialising in trafficking women from Eastern Europe, were mostly Jews from Polish lands.[60] Indeed, in the second half of the 1930s (1937), in the category of offences against personal rights, only pimping and pandering were more prevalent among Jews than among

[56] Bacon, "One Jewish Street?," p. 337.

[57] S. Martin, "How to house a child: providing homes for Jewish children in interwar Poland," *East European Jewish Affairs* 41/1 (2015), p. 30.

[58] U. Glensk, *Historia słabych. Reportaż i życie w dwudziestoleciu (1918–1939)* (Cracow, 2014), pp. 81–196.

[59] See for example M. Rodak, *Przestępczość osób narodowości żydowskiej w II Rzeczypospolitej. Casus województwa lubelskiego* (Warsaw, 2012), pp. 59–93.

[60] Glensk, *Historia słabych*, pp. 102–106. For more, see A. Jakubczak, *Polacy, Żydzi i mit handlu kobietami* (Warsaw, 2020).

non-Jews, and far less common among Jews were the most severe crimes, such as murder and robbery.[61]

Interwar Poland was a poor country. Zbigniew Landau and Jerzy Tomaszewski, using the national income per capita in Poland in 1929 as a baseline and setting it at 100, determined that in the same year, Great Britain's national income per capita was significantly higher at 551. Meanwhile, Germany's stood at 308, and Latvia and Hungary had a similar national income per capita, each at 126. The index was still lower in Greece and Romania (91 each), but Poland was at the bottom of the table. These researchers argue that the rural population's material situation worsened considerably compared to the pre-independence period; in the case of workers, the wage improvement mainly concerned highly qualified professionals, i.e., the "workers' aristocracy" employed most often in state-owned enterprises. This group was also covered by social legislation and pension security, but, as mentioned above, it was not numerous. The profound unemployment among workers held economic implications and bore significant psychological weight. This high unemployment rate posed challenges to personal milestones such as starting a family, a struggle that isn't easily quantifiable compared to more tangible measures of workers' living conditions or consumption levels.[62]

Among the national groups in Poland, the Jewish minority boasted the highest percentage of intelligentsia, estimated at 6.6% of the group's total population. In comparison, this figure was about 6% for Germans, 5% for Poles, and did not exceed 2% for Slavic minorities.[63] The situation of the intelligentsia improved thanks to the establishment of the independent state and the replacement of the administration, courts or schools of the partitioning states with Polish ones. However, the enormous economic crisis and economic stagnation of the 1930s caused high unemployment among this group and made it difficult for secondary and higher education graduates to find employment. As for large-scale industrial workers, we must remember that Jews were reluctantly employed in state and local administrations. Therefore, a representative of the Jewish intelligentsia in

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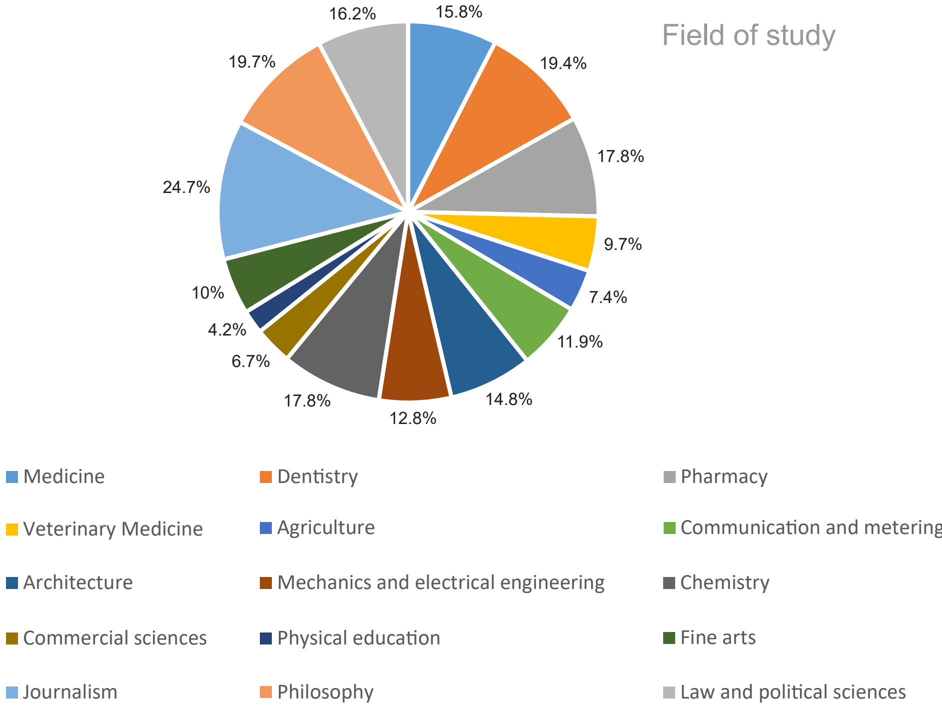
[61] S. Bronsztejn, "O przestępczości wśród Żydów w Polsce w latach dwudziestych XX wieku (w pięćdziesięciolecie ukazania się książki Liebmana Herscha)," *Biuletyn ŻIH* 3–4 (1988), pp. 135–147.

[62] Landau and Tomaszewski, *Zarys historii gospodarczej*, pp. 308–311.

[63] Orlicki, *Szkice z dziejów*, p. 50.

the 1930s was most often a teacher in Jewish schools, a private property manager, a journalist, or a liberal professional, usually a lawyer or a doctor. In the latter case, in 1931, Jews accounted for 46% of all medical doctors in Poland and 55% of all practitioners, although they most often provided services in private practice and Jewish institutions.[64] State-run health care funds employed them far less often.

Fig. 9. Jewish students by field of study in the 1934/1935 academic year (in percentage terms)



Source: Z. Przybysz, "Żydowscy studenci na polskich uczelniach wyższych w Drugiej Rzeczypospolitej – próba statystycznego ujęcia," *Vade Nobiscum* 7 (2011), p. 101.

After 1935, demands already raised in the 1920s for introducing a *numerus clausus* for Jewish students were increasingly replaced by demands to introduce

[64] For example, the Jewish Health Care Society, the popular TOZ, until 1939, managed 368 hospitals and establishments in 72 towns and employed 1,000 doctors, nurses and social workers (K. Steffen, "Contested Jewish Polishness: Language and Health as Markers for the Position of Jews in Polish Culture and Society in the Interwar Period" in *New Directions*, pp. 378–379).

a *numerus nullus*.[65] The academic national youth resorted to blackmailing the rectoral authorities with the threat of disrupting the universities' operations, and this threat sometimes proved effective. Although not legally sanctioned, attempts to introduce a *numerus clausus* at universities and in professional corporations worsened the Jewish intelligentsia's situation, and the difficulties that school graduates had to overcome to obtain jobs matching their education became incomparably more significant.

The "overproduction of the intelligentsia" in the 1930s led to unemployment, and declining wages affected even the traditionally not-so-badly-paid lawyers. By the end of the 1930s, some barristers earned little more than an average labourer.[66] In Galicia, already after 1918, as part of the unofficial re-Polonisation of the clerical corps, some Jewish clerks and about 3,000 railwaymen were dismissed, while among the 27,000 postal clerks, only about 200 were Jewish.[67] In 1931, Jews accounted for 5% of those employed in the central and local government, including the judiciary and the bar. We do not have complete data for the later period. Still, after 1935, when the *Sanacja* regime was already fully implementing this unique alliance with national politicians, and the situation of the Jewish population had deteriorated, there were probably even fewer Jewish officials or teachers in state schools and those maintained by the local government.

The non-employment of Jews in state-owned enterprises and institutions was particularly acute for graduates in engineering. Nearly half of the engineers in Poland at that time worked in positions dependent on the state and often linked to the defence industry, where there was no place for representatives of minorities. The same was true of professional corporations, including those for technical workers, in which Jews were never numerous. In 1937, for example, engineers from the State Engineering Works (Państwowe Zakłady Inżynierii) in Warsaw

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[65] The authors of a leaflet advertising an organisational meeting of the National Party's Academic Department of the Young, distributed at the University of Poznań in 1932, informed: "We are fighting for the complete removal of the Jewry from the nation's life. Remember that every 6th student – is a Jew who takes away the bread in Poland from the lawyer, the medic, the humanist and even the farmer" (as cited in W. Mądry, "Stosunki polsko-żydowskie na Uniwersytecie Poznańskim w latach 1919–1939 w świetle materiałów archiwalnych," *Sprawy Narodowościowe. Seria nowa* 52 [2020], p. 11).

[66] Przybysz, "Żydowscy studenci," p. 99.

[67] Kawski, *Żydowskie gminy wyznaniowe*, p. 155.

and Czechowice submitted a motion to remove Jews and persons of Jewish origin from the Association of Polish Mechanical Engineers. This demand was put into effect by introducing, on 30 November 1937, the so-called Aryan provision into the by-laws of the Association.[68]

The liberal professions, especially the legal profession, in which the proportion of people of Jewish origin was high, resorted to similar practices. Nevertheless, some corporations and associations condemned anti-Semitism, which sometimes led to splits.[69]

It was rare to encounter Jews in the police and among professional military men – they were generally not wanted in the uniformed services, but for various reasons did not flock to them themselves. Like all citizens of the Republic, they were liable for compulsory military service. However, the percentage of Jews drafted and serving in the Polish army was never representative of the rate of the total Jewish population in the country. In 1937, it reached 6.55%, and the following year – 6.08%. An officer's career for a Jew in peacetime was rare; apart from the field rabbis, Jews usually served in the medical or veterinary corps and were involved in administration. The proportion of Jewish trainees in other branches of the army was even lower, and it was almost zero in the air force, liaison corps, armoured troops, and the navy.[70]

Military service forced the use of the Polish language. Compulsory education, the establishment of the Polish statehood and the Polish administration meant that the Polish language was no longer foreign, especially for the younger generation. Although Polish was increasingly heard on the Jewish streets in addition to Yiddish, Yiddish continued to be used in the internal correspondence of the Jewish communities. In 1925, the governor of Lvov wrote to the Ministry of the Interior: "Any regulation that affirms the rights of this language (jargon) is bound to reinforce Jewish separatism in relation to the Polish State. It will also inadvertently lead to greater dissemination of the jargon among the Jews. It will, in any case,

[68] J. Piłatowicz, "Żydzi na wyższych uczelniach technicznych w Polsce do 1939 r.," *Kwartalnik Historii Nauki i Techniki* 42/2 (2001), p. 108.

[69] Tomaszewski, "Sytuacja Żydów w Polsce," p. 218.

[70] T. Gąsowski, "Żydzi w siłach zbrojnych II Rzeczpospolitej – czas pokoju i wojny," in *Udział mniejszości narodowych w różnych formacjach wojskowych w czasie kampanii wrześniowej 1939 r.*, ed. by T. Muś and L.M. Nijakowski (Warsaw, 2009), pp. 16–17.

obstruct and delay the development of a sense of citizenship towards the Republic of Poland within the Jewish masses."[71]

Leaving aside the terms of the so-called Little Treaty of Versailles and the minority language obligations imposed on Poland, little was done to forge "this sense of citizenship towards the Republic of Poland within the Jewish masses," in the following years, the voivode questioned the legitimacy of the obligation for civil servants and police officers to be trained to use Yiddish.[72]

The elimination of Jews from schools and state institutions may have been a catalyst for developing their own culture and education. It is difficult to answer unequivocally whether access to employment by state agencies and local government institutions, free from discrimination based on religion and nationality, would have slowed down the development of Jewish culture and education. Still, the participation of Jews in culture in its most comprehensive sense was significant. Suffice it to mention that almost the entire cinema industry in Poland was in the hands of Jewish producers and producers of Jewish origin, and of the 103 theatres operating in Poland in 1936, fifteen were Jewish, of which eight were permanent stages.[73] An analysis of the data concerning the budgets of Polish and Jewish workers' families in Warsaw for 1938 makes it possible to conclude that, overall, expenditure for "culture, education and social purposes" for Polish families in the respective income groups (from the lowest to the highest), amounted to 1.7, 3.5 and 5.8%, while for Jewish families it reached 5.5, 7.3 and 6.6% of monthly income respectively.[74] This highlights the comparatively more significant emphasis on education and training within the Jewish community, as opposed to the Polish population, leading to a higher level of Jewish engagement in a wide range of cultural activities. Such engagement could be as straightforward, yet impactful, as the regular purchase of newspapers. It is worth remembering that at the turn of 1938 and 1939, the legally published, multilingual Jewish press in Poland numbered 160 titles, with a daily circulation of 790,000

[71] As cited in Kawski, *Żydowskie gminy wyznaniowe*, p. 152.
[72] *Ibid.*, p. 153.
[73] Orlicki, *Szkice z dziejów*, p. 50.
[74] Garncarska-Kadary, *Żydowska ludność*, pp. 59, 243, 267.

copies.[75] Another example is the reading statistics at the Main Judaic Library at the Great Synagogue on Tłomackie Street in Warsaw. Between 1 January and 1 June 1937, 6,628 volumes were borrowed and read, of which nearly 2,000 loans were made by "workers, traders, merchants and craftsmen."[76] It is worth adding that the library was a specialist and scholarly institution. In contrast, the Jewish working class used party and private lending libraries, and religious Jews tended to use hundreds of synagogue book collections.

Jewish Religious Communities in Poland in the 1930s

In 1939, there were over 800 Jewish communities in the Republic of Poland, whose financial condition varied considerably, although it – in most cases – deteriorated in the last years before the war. The creation and liquidation of communities was a part of the process of unification and streamlining of the functioning of the state, but, as Kawski demonstrates, the authorities interfered in the structure of the community network with extreme caution. This was most often caused by demographic changes, associated with the depopulation of some rural settlements and towns and migration to larger urban centres or emigration abroad, as well as the enlargement of the administrative borders of large cities and metropolises by absorbing neighbouring localities and, consequently, merging of communities. Communities that could not exist independently, for example, due to the destruction of the community infrastructure, were liquidated or connected with the neighbouring communities when those belonging to the community could not bear the financial burden of rebuilding the synagogue or a bath. However, this was more often the case in the first years after independence and was related to the war and its aftermath. Essential community institutions and a streamlined administrative structure were crucial for the operations of the community. For that reason, the process of depopulation often led to a community's liquidation or a merger with a community in a neighbouring locality. On the other hand, it meant a rise in the demographic potential of the larger communities, especially in the intensively developing urban centres.[77]

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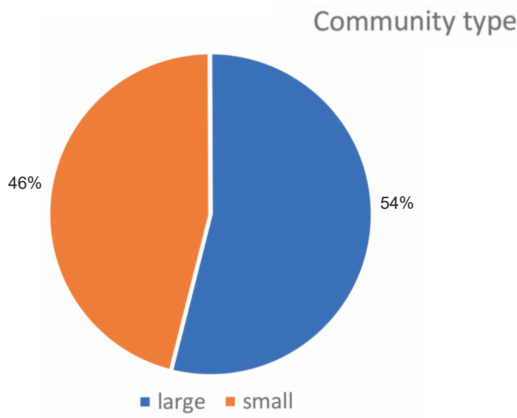
[75] Orlicki, *Szkice z dziejów*, p. 50.

[76] *Głos Gminy Żydowskiej* 1 (1937), p. 27.

[77] Kawski, *Żydowskie gminy wyznaniowe*, pp. 58–59, 71, 82–83.

Fig. 10. Members of religious communities, large (over five thousand) and small in 1931 (in percentage terms)



Source: Kawski, *Żydowskie gminy wyznaniowe*, p. 63.

The increase in the demographic potential generally benefitted the latter, although it posed new challenges for their boards. This included not only the need to expand the community's infrastructure but also to deal with various local separatisms, which became apparent in the compilation of lists of synagogue contribution payers and the setting of the amount of the contribution, the election of a rabbi or the allocation of the budget funds. In the communities in the north-eastern voivodeships, groups of adherents of traditional Judaism conflicted with immigrant Hasidic groups; in Greater Poland and Pomerania, a small number of German Jews and newcomers from the former Congress Poland and Galicia remained after 1918. These disputes lost their importance shortly before the outbreak of war; the escalation of nationalist sentiment and the worsening international situation eventually overshadowed local conflicts."[78]

Unifying legal and administrative systems within the state also impacted Jewish communities, leading to improvements such as rationalising their financial management. This was often associated with the emergence of new elites, drawn to some extent from secular and progressive circles, increasingly successfully vying for seats on the community's boards. In central and south-eastern Poland, this

[78] *Ibid.*, pp. 81–82, 112–113.

was a continuation of the emancipation of the Jewish population from the influence of orthodox spheres, which had already begun during the years of the First World War and even before 1914. One could observe this in larger communities; the process was slower in towns scattered across the Eastern Borderlands. Jewish communities did not employ women, although they occasionally employed them as typists and shorthand typists in larger cities. Still, the position of the secretary of the Jewish community, held by a woman in Brody, was an exception. Nonetheless, the community still supported female doctors, dentists and nurses in Jewish hospitals. The electoral law for boards and councils and the rules for the rabbis' election excluded women, besides which Orthodox circles expressed resistance to their employment.[79]

Irrespective of the local conditions and the history of the partitions, the foundation for the communities' operations was their self-financing, the main elements of which were the synagogue contribution and ritual slaughter. However, some communities also derived significant income from leasing or renting property. The former Prussian partition communities enjoyed the best and relatively stable financial situation. They had rather large movables and immovables at their disposal and had little or no debt. Before the Great Depression, it even happened that, faced with a deteriorating financial situation, the community clerks resigned from receiving salaries and fees from people engaged in ritual slaughter or religious teaching. Communities in Greater Poland, Kuyavia, Pomerania and Silesia had relatively few members, but their wealth level was usually higher than in other regions of the country.[80]

An examination of the budgets of Jewish religious communities from the 1930s reveals that nearly all of them allocated specific funds not only for the upkeep of community institutions such as asylums, hospitals, or Talmud Torahs but also provided direct support to the most impoverished, particularly during the period leading up to holidays.[81] When discussing the budget of the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare, Salomon Seidenman, MP for the last parliamen-

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[79] *Ibid.*, pp. 287–288.

[80] *Ibid.*, p. 206.

[81] S. Piątkowski, "Żydowska Gmina Wyznaniowa w Radomiu," in *Życie codzienne w międzywojennym Radomiu*, ed. by G. Łuszkiewicz-Dzierżawska (Radom, 2009), p. 129.

tary term, pointed out that while in 1936, 24.6% of all Jews applied for holiday support, in 1937, the figure was already 26.2%. At the same time, the support amounted to only a few zlotys per person.[82] The occasional aid given to the community members on Passover in 1934 went to 23.3% of all small-town residents; by 1937, almost one-third of the community had already benefitted from this form of philanthropy.[83]

The financial situation of many communities was still aggravated by the still quite common practice whereby entrepreneurs and wealthier individuals living in large cities and owning businesses or properties in small towns paid the synagogue contribution in these towns, as it was generally lower there. This was a frequent reason for complaints from the boards of the affected communities. During the crisis, the synagogue contribution, even at a minimum amount, was an unbearable burden for many indigent craftsmen and merchants. By the end of the 1930s, problems with closing the community budget were widespread, lists of debtors lengthened, and auctions of the community properties occurred. This affected almost all Jewish communities, although, in the western voivodeships, it translated to a lesser extent into the livelihood of the community members. On the other hand, the provisions of the law on ritual slaughter[84] affected the communities in the Voivodeships of Pomerania and Poznań, where the percentage of the Jewish population did not exceed 3% of the total population. Therefore, there was a complete ban on slaughter outside designated municipal slaughterhouses.[85]

As indicated above, there were significant differences in income between the communities. Of course, the larger the community, the more potential sources of income it had, but there were also higher expenses. For example, in the religious

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[82] Rudnicki, *Żydzi w parlamencie*, p. 402.

[83] It is estimated that from 1930 onwards, the value of foreign currency remittances from abroad to the residents of small religious communities reached 150 million zlotys per year (Orlicki, *Szkice z dziejów*, p. 52).

[84] In 1937, the Ministry of Religious Denominations and Public Enlightenment issued a regulation ordering that the salaries of rabbis should be set at the level of the emoluments provided for in the 1935 budgets, which resulted in mass demands for an increase in their current emoluments, as these had declined between 1935 and 1937 due to the reduction in income from ritual slaughter (T. Kowalik, "Żydowskie partie i organizacje społeczne w Puławach okresu międzywojennego," in *Historia i kultura Żydów Janowca nad Wisłą, Kazimierza Dolnego i Puław. Fenomen kulturowy miasteczka – sztetl*, ed. by F. Jaroszyński [Janowiec nad Wisłą, 2003], p. 144).

[85] Kawski, *Żydowskie gminy wyznaniowe*, p. 215.

community of Łódź, which had about 200,000 members, the income in 1926 amounted to 882,000 zlotys; in the community of Cracow (excluding Podgórze), which had about 50,000 members, the revenue amounted to 73,000; and in the community of Lvov, which was less than twice as large, the income was more than three times higher and amounted to 258,000 zlotys. The situation regarding the community's property was similar, although this was no longer the rule. For example, the community of Brzezany had assets worth almost half a million zlotys, while in the much larger community of Będzin, they were valued at 277,000.[86] However, the community's assets were not always indicative of the wealth of its members.[87]

While carrying out reforms in community administration, primarily concerning accounting and the regulation of slaughtering practices, existing boards were occasionally disbanded and replaced with temporary ones. This was due to the inability to meet the financial obligations of the community but also to conflicts on political, religious or personal grounds. It does not seem, however, that the appointment of new boards was unduly exploited by the state authorities for political purposes, although there were probably fewer objections to the candidature of an Agudist rabbi, a general Zionist or a supporter of integration supporting the Non-Partisan Bloc for Cooperation with the Government than of people nominated by the workers' Bund or Poale Zion.

The situation became more complicated during the election of a rabbi. The law stipulated that a candidate for this position had to demonstrate a fluent knowledge of the Polish language, both spoken and written, which was sometimes difficult to achieve. In the eyes of an Orthodox voter, a rabbi candidate's knowledge of Polish was far less important than his knowledge of the Torah and Gemara. The

[86] *Ibid.*, pp. 73, 231, 280.

[87] An example from Łódź: in 1933, the local religious community, regarded as one of the wealthiest in Poland, managed, after a long struggle, to persuade the rabbi of Lublin and the rector of the local Yeshiva to take the position of senior rabbi. In return, the citizens of Łódź agreed to donate 100,000 zlotys to the Chachmei Lublin Yeshiva synagogue, to contribute 3,000 to its maintenance every month, and to pay the rabbi himself a salary of 5,000 per month. This was a very high salary, considering that a sub-rabbi, acting as a rabbi, received 920 zlotys. The willingness of Łódź residents to cover the high costs associated with the recruitment of the well-known and popular Majer Szapira testified to the wealth of the local community and the influence of the orthodox spheres, although it did not mean that the financial situation of all the Jews of Łódź was good (K. Zieliński and N. Zielińska, *Jeszywas Chachmej Lublin* [Lublin, 2003], p. 144).

community's operations and interactions with the local administration were hindered, mainly due to the rabbis' limited proficiency in Polish. This was especially true for older rabbis and those serving in smaller towns. Unfamiliarity with the official language was a significant obstacle to taking up a rabbinical post. Although the authorities provided the possibility of waiving this requirement or granting a temporary dispensation, they did not always use it. One can understand the attitude of the state authorities since, from the point of view of the modern state, the traditional filling of the position of a rabbi by members of distinguished rabbinical families or the not-always-fair pushing of their candidacies in elections, regardless of the formal requirements, undermined the dignity of the office and lowered the authority of the state. On the other hand, it allowed the authorities to interfere in the lives of the communities, which for many was unacceptable and contravened customs that had been established for centuries. The problem was most often solved in the same way as in Russian times and in the years of the Kingdom of Poland held by the Central Powers – a rabbi who was not approved by the authorities performed the function of a private or "clerical" rabbi or was approved as a sub-rabbi. Officially, the office of a rabbi became vacant.[88] The problem of staffing rabbinical offices in a way that would satisfy all parties involved could not be solved between the wars. Still, in 1936, the payments and pensions of rabbis and their families were regulated.[89]

The Polish administration complained about the lack of transparent procedures, how accounting and records were kept, the widespread use of Yiddish, and the inability to vet the communities. Still, very few non-Jewish officers knew Yiddish and the Hebrew alphabet, and even then, their knowledge of the language was most often limited to the spoken form. Jews were hired reluctantly, and the state administration showed little interest in educating its officers in minority languages. This problem most often affected the smaller communities, although not exclusively – in Vilnius, Polish did not appear in the accounts until 1938.[90] Discussions concerning the recognition and use of Yiddish continued throughout the interwar period.

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[88] K. Zieliński, *Żydzi Lubelszczyzny 1914–1918* (Lublin, 1999), pp. 155–161.

[89] Kawski, *Żydowskie gminy wyznaniowe*, pp. 186–187.

[90] *Ibid.*, p. 153.

Legal Regulations in the 1930s and the Situation of the Jewish Minority

The legal status of the Jewish minority in Poland and its protection was set out in many acts of domestic and international law, which do not need to be discussed here.[91] Let us point out that despite the abolition of the laws of the partitioning states and the obligations imposed on Poland in the so-called Little Treaty of Versailles, the newly enacted laws contained provisions that directly or indirectly discriminated against the Jewish population. Some of them, such as the law on the so-called Sunday rest, came into force even before the May coup (in 1924), and others – in the 1930s.

Under the Act of 13 March 1931, exceptional provisions related to the origin, nationality, language, race or religion of the citizens of the Republic expired. This was an essential piece of legislation from the Jewish communities and their members' point of view. Until then, despite the enactment of the March Constitution, for example, provisions of Russian legislation discriminating against the Jewish minority were in force in the area of the former Russian partition. Admittedly, they were not always applied literally, but with the officials' ill will, they could make the operation of the communities and the lives of its members difficult. Notably, under the law above, the provisions from the partition times lost their validity even if separate legal acts did not repeal them. [92] Another thing to note is that almost immediately after it was passed, National Democracy MPs tabled several motions, which had to be dealt with by the relevant parliamentary committees, concerning issues such as the *numerus clausus* in academic schools or the so-called "Jewish corpses."[93] The 1935 Constitution did not significantly change the legal situation of religious unions; most of the provisions relating to this issue contained in the 1921 Constitution were upheld.[94]

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[91] See for instance M. Łysko, "Ochrona praw mniejszości w II Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej w świetle postanowień tzw. małego traktatu wersalskiego z 1919 r.," *Miscellanea Historico-Iuridica* 18/1 (2019), pp. 109–132.

[92] *Dziennik Ustaw* 31 (1931), item 214.

[93] N. Aleksiun, "Christian Corpses for Christians!: Dissecting the Anti-Semitism behind the Cadaver Affair of the Second Polish Republic," *East European Politics and Societies* 25/3 (2011), pp. 393–409; Przybysz, "Żydowscy studenci," p. 97; Rudnicki, *Żydzi w parlamencie*, pp. 347–348.

[94] Lewicka, "Status formalnoprawny," pp. 35–36.

In 1932, the educational situation also changed, and although this was not the legislature's intention, the school reforms hit the minority school system in a particular way. The Act on the System of Schooling and the Act on Private Schools and Scientific and Educational Establishments passed by the Sejm on 11 March 1932 created the legal basis for a new school reform. The reform, unifying school education, introduced three types of schools: a seven-year primary school, a four-year lower general secondary school and a two-year upper general secondary school; upon completing this and obtaining a maturity certificate, one could apply for entry into a higher education institution. The new legislation increased control over private education and gave the authorities broader powers to close down schools, which was criticised especially by minority communities. In addition, creating a separate upper general secondary school and the unification of lower general secondary schools made it difficult for existing private educational establishments to obtain public school rights. There were also protests against the reduction of subsidies for Jewish vocational schools, whose legal situation the reform, after all, failed to regulate.[95] In turn, it was not until July 1939 that detailed rules were introduced to define the competencies of teachers of the Mosaic religion in schools.[96]

Criticised in many circles, the reform, called the Jędrzejowicz's reform after the minister in charge, unified the school system in Poland and was intended to raise the level of education. Still, it made further education much more difficult for rural children and many children from minority backgrounds, for whom public schools were often the only facilities allowing them to acquire knowledge in their mother tongue. Furthermore, the reform was implemented during a financial crisis. This decreased the competitiveness of private schools relative to public schools, which were progressively becoming less available to Jewish students. This situation was detrimental to both the proprietors of the schools and the pupils.[97] Irrespective of this, the state and local governments avoided subsidising minority schools, just as they sought to avoid supporting cultural and educational institutions or charities.

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[95] Rudnicki, *Żydzi w parlamencie*, pp. 358–359.

[96] Kawski, *Żydowskie gminy wyznaniowe*, pp. 186–187.

[97] K. Zieliński, "Jaka szkoła? O oświacie i wychowaniu dzieci i młodzieży żydowskiej w Polsce międzywojennej," *Rozprawy z Dziejów Oświaty* 54 (2019), pp. 199–200.

In 1936, regulations on ritual slaughter were introduced, with adverse consequences for the communities' finances. Detailed, often difficult to comply with requirements and restrictions on the marketing of kosher meat forced communities to change the way they collected slaughter fees.[98] The competence of the voivodes in setting slaughterhouse rates and the financial resources that the communities had to allocate to, among other things, the training of personnel, were reflected in the budget. The press, and not necessarily the National Socialist press, moulded public opinion and wrote extensively about the cruelty to animals that was supposed to characterise slaughter according to the principles of shechita. Articles in its defence appeared in the Jewish press, and some columnists realised that non-ritual slaughter in the Polish reality was usually at least equally inhumane and, at the same time, carried out in conditions that violated the principles of hygiene. Still, the false concept of "humane slaughter," namely non-ritual slaughter, appealed to the readers. What is more, it went to the chagrin of those who, through the law, wanted to undermine an essential part of Jewish commerce and strike at one of the fundamental principles of Judaism.[99] As it seems, any move that might have contributed to the nationalisation, or "Polonisation" of trade and industry, and induced Jews to emigrate was welcome.

The Slaughter Act was enacted in 1937, coinciding with the passage that same year of a law that restricted the production and distribution of religious artefacts by individuals who do not belong to the respective faith. The duty from the same year to place the business owner's name next to the business's name on the signboards of shops, workshops and service outlets met the demands of the National Socialist militias. At their discretion, some town halls moved market days to Saturdays, which excluded many Jewish merchants and traders from access to the market. Similarly, the provisions on the bar, the introduction of the *numerus clausus* and *numerus nullus* for Jewish youth in some faculties, the bench ghettos, the non-admission of Jews to professional and student corporations, the minimal chances of Jewish academics and secondary school graduates to obtain jobs in administration or public education were part of the trend of economic anti-Semitism.[100]

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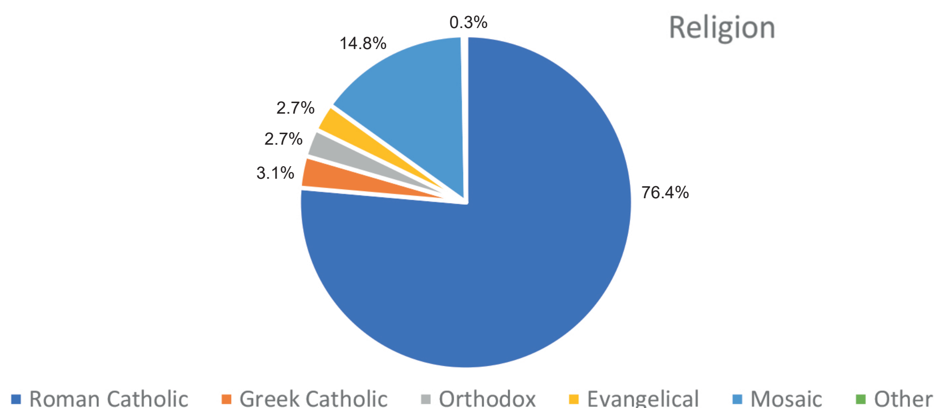
[98] Kawski, *Żydowskie gminy wyznaniowe*, pp. 158–159.

[99] Glensk, *Historia słabych*, pp. 222–226.

[100] Kawski, *Żydowskie gminy wyznaniowe*, p. 155.

Fig. 11. Students of state-owned and private higher education institutions in Poland in the 1934/1935 academic year by religion (in percentage terms)



Source: Przybysz, "Żydowscy studenci," p. 100.

The Jewish Population and the Political Situation in the Second Half of the 1930s

The national camp, and after 1935, openly also the ruling camp, saw getting rid of the Jews from the country as the best solution to the so-called Jewish question. It was a solution desired by Zionist Revisionists, whose military training and illegal emigration to Palestine were co-financed by the Polish government. Still, it does not alter the fact that the concept of state consolidation and assimilation, in which – at least in theory – minorities remained loyal to the state and interested in its reinforcement in exchange for security and opportunities for development after 1935, became a thing of the past.

The political ideology of the Piłsudski faction experienced notable shifts compared to earlier times, primarily due to a redefinition of the nation's identity: The Polish nation was no longer seen as a political entity but rather as an ethnocultural community.[101] There was no place for Jews in a thus-conceived community (or at least not for all). The economic situation, the geopolitical situation, the need to reckon with the growing national right, and the popularity of fascist slogans meant

[101] W. Paruch, "Myśl polityczna formacji piłsudczykowskiej w Polsce (1926–1939) – cechy podstawowe," *Annales UMCS* 21/2 (2014), Sectio K, p. 129.

that xenophobia, nationalism and emigration pressures were increasingly evident in the *Sanacja* regime's policy. The differences between the Piłsudski-ites and the National Right were about the pace of migration and the scale of administrative measures to be used. On economic issues, the postulates of the National Party and the *Sanacja's* Camp of National Unity coincided – the goal was to remove the Jews. The Declaration, pronounced by Colonel Adam Koc on the radio and printed in newspapers throughout the country, read:

> About the Jewish population, our position is as follows: we value too highly the level and content of our cultural life, as well as law, order and peace, without which no state can do without – to be able to approve of acts of arbitrariness and violent anti-Jewish impulses which offend the dignity and solemnity of a great nation. On the other hand, the instinct for cultural self-defence is understandable, and the desire of Polish society for economic independence is natural.[102]

Government plans for Jewish emigration have become a part of the political culture, including the political scene outside the Parliament.[103] The great pilgrimage of academics to Jasna Góra, under the patronage of the National-Radical Camp, and the so-called Jasna Góra vows took place in the same year, 1936, which saw mob attacks on Jewish shops and workshops in cities and towns. Ksawery Pruszyński, in a reportage published in *Wiadomości Literackie*, entitled "Przytyk i stragan" (Przytyk and a Stall), wrote as follows:

> The movement, which rolled across the Opoczno and Radom lands, was not opposed – it must be noted – by any force. There was only a policeman. A representative of the intelligentsia was missing. A rural teacher was missing. And yet, the villages all over the Przytyk region have teachers and schools. Przytyk, after all, has a teacher. […]. The little Korczaks and the little Minkowskis are fighting at their best. Hatred from the street moves onto the school bench. It encounters no dam on its way […].[104]

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[102] *Echa Pracownika Śląskiego* 2 (1937), p. 16.

[103] Trębacz, *Nie tylko Palestyna*, p. 362.

[104] Korczak and Minkowski are the names of one of the perpetrators and one of the victims, respectively, of the pogrom at Przytyk (as cited in C. Miłosz, *Wyprawa w Dwudziestolecie* [Cracow, 2011], p. 515).

Objectively, the direction of the state's economic growth made it difficult for the Jewish community to continue its traditional income-generating activities in trade, services and various forms of intermediation. Even socialists saw an opportunity to improve the economic situation in (voluntary) Jewish emigration. Jan M. Borski (real name: Essigman), in a brochure published by the PPS's *Robotnik* in 1937, entitled "Sprawa żydowska a socjalizm" (The Jewish Case and Socialism), stated: "We do not see a single solution to the Jewish question in Poland. […] a part of the Jews deeply connected with the Polish country and culture will remain forever. A large part, however, should emigrate. […] And Polish socialists, sooner or later, will adopt an emigration programme."[105]

The provisions mentioned above of the 1935 Law on the Exclusion of Folk and Household Industries and Cottage Industry Work from the Industrial Law hit many Jewish wage earners. They cannot be regarded as "deliberately anti-Jewish," as they also harmed, for example, the agricultural population, which earned its living by producing on farms. However, the many Jewish workers employed in the garment industry probably felt their effects most severely.[106] "The shifts in the economic structure, whether they were the result of natural evolution or government efforts to modernise the country, had a significant impact on the smaller sectors. These sectors were the very ones that a large portion of the Jewish population relied on for their livelihood."[107]

In turn, the systemic restriction of participation in the liberal professions by limits on access to corporations and the non-employment of Jews in administration, large state industry, transport and communications affected their situation in the labour market. This phenomenon intensified in the second half of the 1930s. The statement from the new Prime Minister Felicjan Sławoj Składkowski in his June 1936 exposé is viewed as a pivotal moment in government policy, marking a shift towards anti-Jewish positions: "My government believes that no one in

[105] As cited in Orlicki, *Szkice z dziejów*, p. 96.

[106] The problematic situation of subcontractors in the clothing industry and independent tailors-craftsmen was, to some extent, exacerbated by parcels of old clothes sent in bulk from the USA and Canada. In the second half of the 1930s, this was pointed out by the Jewish press abroad and by the Polish consul general in New York (*ibidem*, p. 52).

[107] Tomaszewski, "Sytuacja Żydów w Polsce," p. 201.

Poland can be harmed. […] Economic struggle, yes, but no harm."[108] Irrespective of the fact that the Prime Minister's opinion on the issue of relations with the Jewish community was placed in a speech, as it were on the margin of his attack directed against the National Democrats and his condemnation of the pogroms, it was interpreted as an acceptance of the boycott and a "green light" for economic nationalism. The words were said, whatever the Prime Minister's intentions, ill will or lack of political imagination. They coincided with the government's foray into formal and informal restrictions on national minorities.[109]

The projects to adapt the Jewish population's socio-occupational structure to the country's economic realities and thereby eliminate the causes of prejudice and conflict were eventually replaced by a programme of Jewish emigration.[110] It is difficult to estimate the losses that Jewish merchants, traders, entrepreneurs and craftsmen suffered due to these professional adjustment attempts and the nationalisation of the economy combined with a boycott campaign. For example, the head of the Zamość garrison not only cut off Jews from supplies to the army but also actively joined the movement of harassing soldiers of non-Polish nationality, which from the autumn of 1937 was seconded by the new voivode of Lublin and Polesie, Jerzy de Tramecourt.[111]

However, the *Sanacja* regime condemned the violence, sought to prevent it, and punished its perpetrators, especially when its political opponents initiated it.[112] In a high-profile march on Myślenice by members of the National Party led by Adam

[108] Przybysz, "Żydowscy studenci," p. 98.

[109] A. Adamczyk, "Felicjan Sławoj Składkowski i Bogusław Miedziński wobec kwestii żydowskiej w ostatnich latach Drugiej Rzeczypospolite," *Acta Universitatis Lodziensis. Folia Historica* 66 (1999), pp. 160–164.

[110] P. Waingertner, "'Naprawiacze' w Obozie Zjednoczenia Narodowego," *Acta Universitatis Lodziensis. Folia Historica* 66 (1999), pp. 143–144, 152.

[111] G. Krzywiec, "Życie codzienne, 'walka o stragan' i 'unarodowienie' polskiej twórczości. Przypadek prowincjonalnego Szczebrzeszyna (1935–1939)," in *Stosunki polsko-żydowskie*, vol. 3: *Lokalność. Wsie, miasteczka, miasta na ziemiach polskich od XVI do XX wieku*, ed. by A. Landau-Czajka (Warsaw, 2020), pp. 231–232.

[112] Senator Konstanty Terlikowski said at a meeting in March 1936 that the anti-Semitism the National Democrats were reaching for was the only way for the party to reach the broader masses of society. He also blamed the riots and accused the Nationalists of not putting forward any constructive solution to the Jewish question. "The national camp […] has come up only with a bludgeon and a knuckle. But this method will not solve the Jewish issues […]." (as cited in Orlicki, *Szkice z dziejów*, p. 97; see also: Rudnicki, *Żydzi w parlamencie*, p. 375).

Doboszyński on the night of 22–23 June 1936, a synagogue was burnt down, many Jewish shops were demolished, and a police station was smashed, from which the protesters stole several weapons. It is symptomatic that official communiqués generally failed to mention that the direct victims were mainly Jews – they wrote about "an attack at night on the sleeping and defenceless" without underlining their nationality. Nevertheless, a police raid ordered by Składkowski led to the capture of the leaders of the attack, who were sent to Bereza Kartuska under an administrative procedure. In contrast, the county division of the National Party in Cracow was dissolved.[113]

In the wake of the events in Myślenice, there were often declarations that lacked effective measures to prevent acts of aggression. Until the outbreak of the war, the government and the parliamentary majority did not accept the formal segregation of the population. Still, only communists and activists of the Polish Socialist Party stood up for the civil rights of the Jews, with few exceptions.[114] Protests were also voiced by members of the Democratic Party, gathered in democratic clubs formed from 1937 onwards, bringing together a section of the Polish intelligentsia, often of the Polish Legions' and Piłsudskiite origin, including university staff.[115] Despite the authority some of its members enjoyed, the Party was not very influential. The participants of pogroms were criticised in articles and mocked in satirical illustrations published in liberal and left-wing magazines, in which acts of anti-Semitic aggression were presented as a manifestation of dehumanisation and savagery, but – perhaps because of censorship – the authorities were usually not criticised for failing to react.[116]

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[113] Adamczyk, "Felicjan Sławoj Składkowski," p. 167.

[114] See for example M. Skwara, "Żydowskie wspomnienia i polskie archiwalia. O stosunkach polsko--żydowskich w międzywojennym Pruszkowie," in *Stosunki polsko-żydowskie*, vol. 3, p. 134; M. Trębacz, "Polska lewica wobec antyżydowskiej przemocy lat 30. XX wieku," in *Pogromy Żydów na ziemiach polskich w XIX i XX wieku*, vol. 3: *Historiografia, polityka, recepcja społeczna (do 1939 roku)*, ed. by K. Kijek, A. Markowski, and K. Zieliński (Warsaw, 2019), p. 404.

[115] Tomaszewski, "Sytuacja Żydów w Polsce," p. 216; D. Winiarska-Twaróg, "Mniejszości narodowe w myśli politycznej Stronnictwa Demokratycznego," in *Mniejszości narodowe w polskiej myśli politycznej XX wieku*, ed. by J. Jachymek (Lublin, 1992), pp. 196–207.

[116] D. Konstantynów, "Pogromy i inne akty przemocy fizycznej wobec Żydów w zwierciadle rysunków z prasy polskiej (1919–1939)," in *Pogromy Żydów na ziemiach polskich w XIX i XX wieku*, vol. 1: *Literatura i sztuka*, ed. by S. Buryła (Warsaw, 2018), p. 362.

The Catholic Church and the "Jewish Question"

The importance and role of the Catholic Church in forming the attitudes of the population of interwar Poland cannot be overestimated, and the views of probably the majority of the lower clergy towards the Jews do not require extensive comment. The writings of Father Józef Kruszyński, Father Stanislaw Trzeciak or Father Maximilian Maria Kolbe enjoyed tremendous popularity, regardless of what themes prevailed in them: anti-Semitism, anti-Judaism or unsophisticated proselytism.[117]

It should be noted, however, that while after 1918 the Church supported the National Democracy, Nationalist and Christian-Democratic parties on many issues, in the second half of the 1930s, the Church's ties with the ruling *Sanacja* regime became increasingly close. The platform of agreement here was not only the recognition of the unique position of the Catholic Church in Poland but also the attitude towards the so-called Jewish question. The Koc's Programmatic Declaration stated that the Polish nation was "spiritually bound with the Catholic Church." Simultaneously, when it comes to other religions, it "adheres to the principles outlined in the Constitution and those derived from Poland's traditional religious tolerance."[118] This tolerance varied, and statements by Catholic clergy and publicists left little space for illusions. Father Franciszek Dyżewski, active in organising the parish life and editor of *Dzwon Żbikowa* (The Bell of Żbików) monthly published by the Catholic Action, declared in a poem of his authorship: "Neither Freemasonry nor a wicked Jew will rip Christ out of our Polish soul".[119] Examples of similar, though not always equally graphomaniacal statements can be multiplied. The editor of the widely read *Rycerz Niepokalanej* (Knight of the Immaculate Virgin Mary) reported in the May 1938 issue that "de-Judaisation" was beginning in Hungary. The prelude will be a law removing the excessive number of Jews employed in the press, theatres and film companies."[120] The circulation of this magazine, which was distributed, among others, in churches and parishes all over the country in the final years before the war, was as high as

[117] D. Libionka, "Obcy, wrodzy, niebezpieczni. Obraz Żydów i 'kwestii żydowskiej' w prasie inteligencji katolickiej lat trzydziestych w Polsce," *Kwartalnik Historii Żydów* 3 (2002), pp. 320–322.

[118] *Nasza Praca* 9 (1937), p. 2.

[119] Skwara, "Żydowskie wspomnienia," p. 132.

[120] As cited in A. Juszczak, "Obraz Żyda na łamach Rycerza Niepokalanej 1922–1939," *Studia Żydowskie. Almanach* 5/5 (2015), p. 93.

800,000. He was echoed by the editor of *Przewodnik Katolicki*, who demanded that Jews leave Poland not out of fear, as in Germany, but "out of gratitude for the long-standing hospitality," and stated that he would "gladly escort them to the railway station."[121]

The higher ecclesiastical hierarchy, in the persons of, among others, the Primate of Poland August Hlond and the Metropolitan of Cracow, Bishop Adam Sapieha, called for an end to violence against Jews. Adam Sapieha called for an end to violence against Jews, but at the same time, the hierarchy's segregationist demands "were usually perceived as an endorsement of the boycott campaign."[122] It is impossible to read otherwise, for example, in Hlond's pastoral letter of 1936, in which the Church dignitary states that "very many Jews are believers, honest, just, merciful, charitable people," but "it is true that Jews fight against the Catholic Church, are stuck in free-thinking, are the vanguard of godlessness, the Bolshevik movement and subversive action".[123] In merchant relations, instructs Hlond, "it is good to consider one's own before others, to avoid Jewish shops and stalls at the fair, but it is not allowed to ravage a Jewish shop". Moreover, the influence of Jews on "morality" was stated to be pernicious; they promoted pornography, committed fraud and usury, and engaged in human trafficking, and the impact of the Jewish youth on Catholics was "generally religiously and ethically negative."[124] It's not by chance he noted that synods of diocesan bishops advocated for discontinuing the practice of educating Polish and Jewish children and youth together in the same schools.

In the fight against sectarianism, which, among other things, the activity of the Bible Students was considered to be, the Church resorted to arguments and slogans taken straight from the Protocols of the Elders of Zion. The Diocesan Institute of the Catholic Action in Łódź, which the Church had included in the fight against sectarianism, lectured in August 1938 that the students were utterly submissive to the Jewish influence and "form a Jewish cell within Christianity,

[121] As cited in Trębacz, *Nie tylko Palestyna*, p. 319.

[122] G. Krzywiec, "Narodowa Demokracja wobec pogromów i zbiorowej przemocy antyżydowskiej od odzyskania niepodległości do 1939 roku," in *Pogromy Żydów na ziemiach polskich*, vol. 3, pp. 388–389.

[123] As cited in A. Molisak, "'Zapisywanie pogromów' – kilka uwag o języku prasy polskiej doby międzywojnia," in *Pogromy Żydów na ziemiach polskich*, vol. 1, pp. 86–87.

[124] *Ibid*.

proclaiming the beginning of a new era – the era of Jewish rule over the world."[125] With all might, a Polish Catholic should oppose such temptations, as it was often called for by, among others, the activist of the Academic Union "All-Polish Youth" Wiktor Nowosad.[126] He wrote: "As Poles, we fight against the Jewish people, and as Catholics against the Talmudic Jewish religion. Hence, the whole Catholic-national revival is aimed at the Jews and will force them sooner or later to leave Poland."[127]

Escalation of the Anti-Semitic Sentiment on the Eve of the War

The concerns brought up by Jewish parliamentarians during the Sejm's final term of office in their interpellations aptly highlight the challenges Jews in Poland were confronting on the brink of war. They also tell a lot about the situation and the sentiment prevailing in the country.[128]

After the electoral law amendment allowed the government to push its 'own' candidates effectively, there were five Jewish deputies in the 208-seat parliament and two Jewish senators in the senate. The representation was, therefore, very modest,

[125] D. Pałka, "Warunki dialogu Kościoła katolickiego z Żydami w II Rzeczypospolitej," *Poznańskie Studia Teologiczne* 18 (2005), pp. 151–152.

[126] D. Waniek, *Ruch narodowy w Polsce wczoraj i dziś. Ideologia, organizacja, praktyka działania* (Warsaw, 2014), p. 36.

[127] As cited in A. Dawidowicz, "Problematyka mniejszości żydowskiej w myśli politycznej Stronnictwa Narodowego (1928–1939)," *Wschód Europy* 3/1 (2017), p. 74.

[128] Elections to the Sejm of the fifth term of office were held on 6 November 1938. The amendment of the electoral law following the adoption of the so-called April Constitution de facto gave the Government control over the electoral assemblies, which selected the names of the candidates. The assemblies were attended by representatives of the local government and professional self-government, as well as by delegates nominated by 500 voters, and at a time of the increasing omnipotence of the state and the dependence of many institutions of social life on the *Sanacja* regime, such a structure gave the government control over the assemblies and thus often effectively prevented the election of deputies who did not suit the authorities. The regression of democracy in Poland did not, of course, hit only ethnic and national minorities. Despite this, their generally weak position in the state, with the growing resentment of a large part of society, meant that any restrictions affected them in a particular way. This is why, the critical attitude towards the electoral law of some Jewish parties notwithstanding, most Zionist organisations, Aguda, the Orthodox, as well as the Central Union of Merchants and the Central Chamber of Retail and Small Merchants, appealed to their members and supporters to take part in the elections, with different motivations. The Folkists, the Bund, and the Central Committee of the Zionist Organisation in Poland called for a boycott of the elections. In the face of the boycott of the elections by the Polish opposition parties, Jews tried to justify their participation by pointing out the different positions of the minorities and the fact that – regardless of the political situation – no one forced the Polish peasants and workers to emigrate. For this reason, the position was taken that the Jewish minority could not afford to be pushed entirely outside the country's socio-political life (see Rudnicki, *Żydzi w parlamencie*, pp. 397–399).

with those elected representing general Zionists, Agudists and assimilationists. The Fifth Sejm was in session only for a few months. In their addresses, Jewish parliamentarians emphasised the importance of societal mobilisation and unity in the face of the impending war. They also appealed to the displaced individuals from Germany residing in a camp in Zbąszyń.[129] Nevertheless, the personal safety of Jews remained one of the most critical issues. In many cities and towns, the daily routine was disrupted by picketing in front of stores, the destruction of market stalls, and frequent incidents of verbal and physical aggression. Although their scale was incomparably smaller, these scenes were reminiscent of what was going on in Nazi Germany.

Jewish MPs' interpellations also concerned security at universities (in November, two Jewish students were murdered at the Jan Kazimierz University in Lvov).[130] The attitude of the police and law enforcement officers pacifying anti-Semitic riots at the universities towards the students initiating them, regardless of the level of thuggery they represented, was relatively lenient and permissive, and the administrative authorities often waived criminal proceedings.[131] Anti-Semitism was apparently a mitigating circumstance and "justified" the aggression. At the same time, participants in peasant revolts, workers' demonstrations and unemployed protesters were treated with the full severity of the law. At times, extreme actions were taken to soothe the public's sentiments.[132]

It was not only students who were harassed but also primary and secondary school pupils, which was often accompanied by a passive attitude of the manage-

[129] In April 1938, the Polish government announced in *Dziennik Ustaw* the new citizenship law passed by the Sejm in March of that year, invalidating the passports of Polish citizens who had been continuously residing abroad for more than five years. This was a reaction to the deterioration of the situation of Jews with Polish citizenship in the Reich and their possible mass return to the country. The final date for carrying out the directive of the Minister of the Interior regarding passport registration and the inclusion of a validity note was 29 October 1938; meanwhile, on 26 October, a decree was announced in Germany on the immediate expulsion of all Polish Jews from the country. This so-called *Polenaktion* was halted, but several thousand people were declared stateless and camped at the Polish-German border and in the transit camp at Zbąszyń. Their unclear situation was the subject of an interpellation by the members of the Jewish Circle (see *Dziennik Ustaw* 22 [1938], item 191).

[130] In May of the following year, a few months before the outbreak of war, a student of the University of Technology was also murdered in Lvov (Rudnicki, *Żydzi w parlamencie*, p. 400).

[131] P. Cichoracki, J. Dufrat, and J. Mierzwa, *Oblicza buntu społecznego w II Rzeczypospolitej doby wielkiego kryzysu (1930–1935). Uwarunkowania, skala, konsekwencje* (Cracow, 2019), p. 257.

[132] A. Leszczyński, *Ludowa historia Polski. Historia wyzysku i oporu. Mitologia panowania* (Warsaw, 2020), pp. 463–465, 472–473.

ment and teaching staff. What is more, there were cases of harassment by the teaching staff. The treatment of soldiers of Jewish origin in the Polish Army was also the reason for numerous interpellations by the Club of Jewish Deputies.[133] It should be recalled that the immediate cause of the anti-Jewish incidents in Mińsk Mazowiecki in 1936 was alleged to be the killing of the sergeant-master Jan Bujak by his former subordinate.

Those affected began to regard attacks of various kinds and the ubiquitous anti-Semitic propaganda in the last years before the war as "an organic part of the hostile environment and reality of the time."[134] Incidents and assaults on Jews should not, however, be solely associated with the members of the National Democrats and extreme nationalist organisations. Members of other groups, predominantly rural or urban dwellers, also took part in them, driven by a desire to accumulate wealth, eliminate competition, or for other personal reasons. Importantly, as highlighted by the authors of the extensive study, *Oblicza buntu społecznego w II Rzeczypospolitej* (The Face of the Social Revolt in the Second Republic), during the period of anti-Semitic rhetoric from 1935 to 1939, confrontations between the instigators and law enforcement, such as clashes that arose as a result of attempts to reclaim detainees, were typically not documented, unlike in previous times. Admittedly, during the 1936 march on Myślenice, a State Police station was attacked, but, for example, in Mińsk Mazowiecki, Przytyk or Brest clashes with the intervening officers did occur; however, it was not the police representing the *Sanacja*-ruled state who were the target.[135]

The liberal and ideologically "neutral" press tended to downplay reports of pogroms and anti-Jewish riots, while titles published by supporters of the right identified the culprits and provocateurs, who were always … Jews.[136] In the 1930s, press drawings and caricatures were readily used as an effective and visually appealing tool to spread anti-Semitic propaganda.[137]

In 1938–1939, an interpellation was also tabled on the anti-Jewish propaganda broadcast by the Polish Radio. Jewish parliamentarians intervened in person with

[133] Gąsowski, "Żydzi w siłach zbrojnych," p. 16.

[134] Krzywiec, "Życie codzienne," pp. 227, 229.

[135] Cichoracki, Dufrat, and Mierzwa, *Oblicza buntu społecznego*, pp. 201–204.

[136] Molisak, "'Zapisywanie' pogromów," pp. 73–94.

[137] Konstantynów, "Pogromy i inne akty przemocy," pp. 321–323.

Prime Minister Składkowski, rectifying the inflated data regarding the participation of Jews in economic life, which were supposed to speak in favour of more decisive steps to be taken by the government administration in the area of emigration of Jews and the introduction of economic restrictions for Jewish merchants and entrepreneurs. The purpose, nature and manner in which similar demands were made by the Camp of National Unity (Obóz Zjednoczenia Narodowego, OZN) MPs are well-illustrated by the words of Wojciech Wydra in February 1939: "Point number one. The Jews of Poland must go. Point number two. The sooner they go, the better for them. Point number three. Since they are not very eager to go, it seems they must be helped by special legislation. I do not see any other solution."[138]

Zionist MPs, while calling for support for the Jewish emigration to Palestine, at the same time stated that it could not be combined with civil and legal discrimination. In doing so, they cited Marshal Piłsudski's authority and his declared and implemented policy towards minorities. However, in the second half of the 1930s, this did not make much of an impression on anyone.[139] In the last months of the Sejm, attacks on the Jewish population by the OZN deputies intensified, and the common denominator of most speeches was the postulated emigration of Jews from Poland. This was advocated by government representatives, who asserted that they believed that the only practical solution to the Jewish question was to reduce the number of Jews in the country significantly. They claimed this aligned with "the Polish public opinion" expectations. The MPs also voiced demands for the drafting of appropriate laws that would cause Jews to leave their positions in public life and close down their workplaces, deprive them of citizenship, or grant "separate citizenship" to specific groups. In official spheres, including the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, there were also ideas of revising citizenship and imposing a particular "emigration" tax on Jews. MP Juliusz Dudziński of the OZN, previously a staunch critic of the *Sanacja*, even proposed that 600,000 Jews aged 18–40 should

[138] As cited in Rudnicki, *Żydzi w parlamencie*, p. 401.

[139] The cult of Piłsudski among Jews, present at least since the Great War, flourished after his death. "He was to justify, by invoking the highest authority of the state, that the persecution of the Jews was more than just discrimination against this minority – it was a misappropriation of the idea of the founder of independent Poland." Anti-Semitism thus profaned the memory of Marshal. See A. Landau-Czajka, "Wodzu nasz, Piłsudski! Postać Marszałka w polskojęzycznej prasie żydowskiej okresu międzywojennego," *Studia Żydowskie. Almanach* 3/3 (2013), p. 55.

be mobilised and sent to labour battalions. Earthworks, land drainage, and roadworks were the best ways for them to prepare for work already in exile.[140]

It was only a short way from similar proposals to Poland following in the footsteps of Germany, Hungary or Romania. [141] The Jewish question, specifically the desire to rid the country of Jews, united the hitherto strongly antagonised *Sanacja*, the People's Party and the National Democrats. The latter, as we read in the Ideological Declaration of the National Camp of the National Democratic councillors from Łódź in 1937, openly proclaimed that the Jews were the source of the greatest misfortune of contemporary Poland.[142] For some National Democratic journalists, the measures used in neighbouring Germany to "solve" the Jewish question were a source of unabashed admiration.[143] On the other hand, interestingly, the *Sanacja* regime, which had the entire administrative apparatus of the state at its disposal and did not shy away in its political struggle from electoral manipulation, intimidation or incarceration of opposition leaders in detention camps (see the elections of 1930), was able to suppress the anti-Jewish rhetoric much more effectively. Alicja Gontarek argues that the ruling camp, treating anti-Semitism in an instrumental and objectified manner in its fight against the opposition, is co-responsible for the wave of anti-Jewish incidents in 1935–1939.[144]

Closing Remarks

The years succeeding the Great Depression and the transformation in ethnic and political dynamics determined the livelihood of a typical Jewish merchant or

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[140] Rudnicki, *Żydzi w parlamencie*, pp. 401–405.

[141] E. Mendelsohn, *The Jews of East Central Europe between the World Wars* (Bloomington, 1987), pp. 112–126, 202–211; P.T. Nagy, "The first anti-Jewish law in inter-war Europe," in *The numerus clausus in Hungary. Studies on the First Anti-Jewish Law and Academic Anti-Semitism in Modern Central Europe*, ed. by V. Karady and P.T. Nagy (Budapest, 2012), pp. 63–65; J. Rothschild, *East Central Europe between the Two World Wars* (Seattle–London, 1998), pp. 177–199, 293–296, 307–318; L. Volovici, *Nacjonalizm i "kwestia żydowska" w Rumunii lat trzydziestych XX wieku*, transl. and ed. by K. Jurczak (Cracow–Budapest, 2016), pp. 126–127, 136–139, 145, 198–204.

[142] Dawidowicz, "Problematyka mniejszości żydowskiej," p. 69.

[143] K. Kocik, "Problem przemocy wobec ludności żydowskiej na łamach *Myśli Narodowej* w latach 1921–1939," in *Przemoc antyżydowska i konteksty akcji pogromowych na ziemiach polskich w XX wieku*, ed. by K. Zieliński and K. Kijek (Lublin, 2016), pp. 141–145.

[144] A. Gontarek, "Polityka sanacji wobec ruchu narodowego w latach 1926–1935 a kwestia współodpowiedzialności obozu rządowego w rozpowszechnianiu idei antysemickich," in *Przemoc antyżydowska*, pp. 155–189.

artisan. The job security system, the catastrophic effects of the economic crisis, the competitive pressures, and the impediments and restrictions imposed on the pursuit of professional activities led to the massive pauperisation of Jews in Poland. It is estimated that one in six small-town Jews relied partly or entirely on the help of his relatives who had emigrated from Poland.[145]

Poverty affected everyone, regardless of party affiliation or worldview. One of the entrants in a competition for autobiographies of Jewish youth announced by the Yidisher Visnshaftlekher Institut (Yiddish Scientific Institute) in Vilnius wrote in a letter to Max Weinreich:

> I can conclude that our reds here are mainly in a good material situation by today's standards. They work and earn, although it is true that their earnings suffice for only one man and do not offer the prospect of marriage. Their fear of the future is expressed in their hope for a social revolution. By contrast, the more significant part of today's HeHalutz is an element that cannot wait long, suffers from chronic unemployment, cannot be lulled to sleep by the music of the future and is already ready to emigrate.[146]

In the case of the two groups cited by the embittered author, social revolution or emigration was supposed to be the only solution to this plight. Still, he admitted that both options were "music of the future." The author of the letter, a resident of Bielsk Podlaski writing under the pen name of Beniamin R. (Beniamin Brawerman), calls his views "the Zionism of despair." In its Polish translation, the author who penned the introduction to Brawerman's autobiography asserts that the source of his views was not strictly ideological, so "it was not the aspiration to migrate to Palestine to build a new individual and a new Hebrew nation in the sole 'Jewish homeland'". Instead, it was the escalating loss of confidence in the 1930s in the potential for bettering the situation of Jews in Poland and Europe.[147]

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[145] Orlicki, *Szkice z dziejów*, p. 52.

[146] Beniamin R., *"Płonęli gniewem". Autobiografia młodego Żyda*, transl. by A. Kałużna and A. Szyba, ed. and introd. by K. Kijek (Warsaw, 2021), p. 108.

[147] *Ibid.*, p. LV.

Not infrequently, similar were the reasons for Jewish youth joining the ranks of Communist parties and organisations, in which the proportion of Jewish people, especially at neighbourhood, city or district leadership levels, was indeed high.[148] As it seems, the most common reason why young people from specific backgrounds decided to join a party or a far-left organisation was their material situation and the lack of life prospects. Also, a sense of exclusion and informal discrimination made those who rejected the possibility of emigration and Zionist ideology look for a place for themselves.[149] There were more people disillusioned with the new Poland: the idea of equality and social justice or the desire to oppose xenophobia and growing anti-Semitism also attracted young people from the Jewish intelligentsia, merchant families, and wealthy entrepreneurs.[150] The growing popularity of the Bund, Communists or Zionist Revisionists was indicative of the ferment in Jewish society and its progressive secularisation, as well as the declining popularity of political parties perceived as more or less conservative, including the general Zionists or Agudists, not to mention the assimilationists. Such trends were observable throughout the country: in the workers' city of Radom and the town of Puławy, between Warsaw and Lublin, the borderland city of Vilnius and the Galician city of Drohobycz.[151] Another thing is that far-reaching factionalism remained a permanent feature of Jewish political life in Poland until the end of the Second Polish Republic. [152]

It should also be remembered that the representatives of the generation entering adulthood in the 1930s already lived in a world of values and symbols entirely dif-

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[148] H. Cimek, *Mniejszości narodowe w ruchu rewolucyjnym w II Rzeczypospolitej* (Rzeszów, 2011), pp. 145–150; J. Potaczek, "Żydzi w strukturach Komunistycznej Partii Zachodniej Ukrainy i na terenie międzywojennego powiatu sanockiego i leskiego," in *Polscy Żydzi dla Niepodległej (1918–1939)*, ed. S.J. Żurek (Lublin, 2020), pp. 287–289.

[149] K. Zieliński, "Uwiedzeni, zmanipulowani, zdesperowani? Młodzież komunistyczna w Drugiej Rzeczypospolitej 1914–1939," in *Metamorfozy społeczne 7. Procesy socjalizacji w Drugiej Rzeczypospolitej*, ed. by A. Landau-Czajka and K. Sierakowska (Warsaw, 2013), pp. 76–84, 90.

[150] S. and W. Leder, *Czerwona nić. Ze wspomnień i prac rodziny Lederów* (Warsaw, 2005), pp. 7–11.

[151] E. Kirwiel, "Życie polityczne mniejszości żydowskiej na Kresach Północno-Wschodnich Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej w okresie międzywojennym. Zarys problematyki," *Wschód Europy* 3/1 (2017), pp. 132–133; Kowalik, "Żydowskie partie," pp. 111, 115–121, 133–136; K. Thomas, "Stosunki polsko-żydowskie w Drohobyczu 1918–1939," in *Stosunki polsko-żydowskie*, vol. 3, pp. 109–111; P.A. Tusiński, "Żydowskie życie polityczne w Radomiu przed drugą wojną światową," in *Społeczność żydowska Radomia w I połowie XX wieku. Kultura – Zagłada – Rozproszenie*, ed. by Z. Wieczorek (Radom, 2008), pp. 117, 120–121.

[152] Bacon, "One Jewish Street?," p. 329.

ferent from those of their parents. In the life of this generation, suspended between tradition and progress, a party, a youth organisation, a sports club or a Hashomer Hatzair team played an increasingly important role.[153] Kamil Kijek notes that in the 1930s, the description of the Jewish community was already escaping the traditional criteria of division into Zionists and opponents of Zionism, religious and secular, national and assimilationist. Increasingly, especially for young people, they were confronted with identity tensions.[154] These people were torn between religiosity and irreligiosity, Polishness and Jewishness, youth or party organisation and the attachment to religion and tradition they had acquired at home. And few expected the problems to be solved in the foreseeable future. The fact that this generation was brought up in the Polish school system and was familiar with the Polish language and culture probably exacerbated their frustrations.

As mentioned, it is difficult to determine the economic significance of anti-Semitism for the Jewish minority in Poland, but it intensified the sense of threat. Slogans about the separate identity of Jews and the urgent need to solve the Jewish question, which for a long time had been the domain of mainly the National Democrats, officially became an element of the Piłsudski camp's[155] political ideology. Stanisław Pawłowski, a geographer and the rector of the University of Poznań, wrote in a brochure *O emigracji Żydów z Polski i o ich kolonizacji* (On the Emigration of Jews from Poland and their Colonisation) published in 1937 by the Maritime and Colonial League:

> A country where the indigenous population is beginning to be cramped cannot look indifferently at who emigrates from the country and who stays there. After all, besides the country's economic development, its national character and defence are at stake. Not only can Poland not increase the number of Jews in the country because of the considerable tightness of space, but on the contrary, it is the only country which has and experiences an excess of them. For this reason, Poland is now the most important Jewish emigration country.[156]

[153] Garncarska-Kadary, *Żydowska ludność*, pp. 226–233.
[154] Introduction to Beniamin R., *"Płonęli gniewem,"* pp. XXXIV, XXXIX.
[155] Adamczyk, "Felicjan Sławoj Składkowski," p. 161.
[156] S. Pawłowski, *O emigracji Żydów z Polski i o ich kolonizacji* (Warsaw, 1937), p. 29.

Only emigration could improve the situation of the Jewish population in rural and overpopulated Poland, where, he argued, "competition for the Jewish population increases with each passing day, both among the Jews themselves and among the non-Jewish population, the impoverishment of the Jewish population makes intimidating progress, the concentration of the Jews in the cities becomes greater and greater, the possibilities of proper dispersion throughout Poland diminish".[157] The solution, according to the rector, could be a departure to Palestine, Birobidzhan, the United States, Canada, and South American countries. He also pointed to specific, eased passport procedures and the need for consular care for the refugees. He suggested further cooperation with Zionist circles and increased diplomatic action.

It may be said that the atmosphere in Poland in the last years before the outbreak of war was becoming increasingly stuffy. The editor of *Głos Pruszkowa* reported with satisfaction in 1938 that "today all Poles, irrespective of the party and position, recognise the necessity of organising the Polish state of affairs," a manifestation of which was, for example, the establishment of circles of the Polish Union in Poznań.[158]

In his article on the provincial Szczebrzeszyn, Grzegorz Krzywiec writes that in the final years before the war, the "cold neighbourhood" began to be replaced by a "hot conflict."[159] The situation became increasingly dangerous, and the boycott campaign, intense in many regions of the country after 1935, was ever more often accompanied by active attacks on Jews, including destruction and theft of their property.[160] Some of them, as in Mińsk Mazowiecki or Przytyk, became pogroms. It is no coincidence that the question of the physical safety of the Jewish population and interventions in specific cases were a constant subject of Jewish MPs' interpellations in the Sejm of the last term. Poland did not introduce laws and regulations that openly discriminated against minority groups, in this case, Jews, as happened in the neighbouring countries, nevertheless tolerating acts of violence or not responding firmly enough to them, as well as the actual clerical practices

[157] *Ibid.*, pp. 60–61.

[158] Skwara, "Żydowskie wspomnienia," p. 129.

[159] Krzywiec, "Życie codzienne," pp. 218–219.

[160] *Ibid.*, pp. 228–233; Z. Trębacz, "'Tłum jak oszalały pędził ulicą'. Pogrom w Bielsku-Białej, wrzesień 1937 r.," in *Pogromy Żydów na ziemiach polskich w XIX i XX wieku*, vol. 2: *Studia przypadków (do 1939 roku)*, ed. by K. Kijek, A. Markowski, and K. Zieliński (Warsaw, 2019), pp. 431–447.

taking place in many areas of life, was far from the democratic principles declared in the Basic Law and other legal acts.

The reality of Polish Jewry in the final years before the outbreak of war was very complex. Gershon Bacon writes it was a community which was:

> Internally torn and divided by ideological and political rivalry, but maintaining social solidarity in the face of economic crisis, growing poverty and government inaction; a community unable to unite even in the face of severe political threats, but having a strong sense of separate identity and a growing sense of belonging to Poland.[161]

This community numbered 3.3 to 3.35 million people on the eve of the war. The losses it suffered during war and occupation are estimated at 2.7 to 2.9 million. Approximately 425,000 survived.[162]

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[161] Bacon, "One Jewish Street?," p. 337.

[162] Leszczyńska, *Polska 1918–2018*, p. 96.

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SUMMARY

The Jewish community of the Second Polish Republic on the eve of the outbreak of war numbered 3.3–3.35 million people. Jews, who were the most urbanised ethnic and religious group in Poland, were spread out across the country. However, their highest concentration in proportion to the total population was in the central voivodeships, which encompassed the regions of the former Russian partition and Galicia. In 1939, there were more than 800 Jewish communities whose nature and financial condition varied greatly, but the latter usually deteriorated in the final years before the outbreak of the war.

Even though unification efforts had been underway since 1918, by 1939, Polish Jewry was fragmented and lacked cohesion. In the latter half of the 1930s, this community, characterised by internal diversity and economic challenges, faced increasing hostility and anti-Semitic attacks. Despite political divisions and differing views on the future of Jews, the Polish Jewish community maintained a distinct identity and a sense of relative solidarity. The article outlines the demographic and socio-economic situation of the Jewish population in Poland in the second half of the 1930s, referring mainly to the results of the 1931 census and the available statistics from the later period.

KEYWORDS

Jews • Second Republic of Poland • minority • statistical picture • economy • demography