

## JEWISH POPULATION OF BUDAPEST IN 1941 AND 1945

### [BUDAPESTI ZSIDÓ NÉPESSÉG 1941-BEN ÉS 1945-BEN]

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**Abstract.** One of the most important issues in the debate about the Holocaust is whether it is a historical or non-historical tragedy. Unexpected natural disasters, such as earthquakes and meteor strikes, are events outside human history - an important common feature is that their survival is only slightly related to people's social position. The more analogous the Holocaust is to this, the more extra-historical the Holocaust is. An important socio-historical feature of historically integrated ethnical, religious, class -based persecutions, on the other hand, is that people become less victims than other members of the persecuted group because of their wealth or their capital of connections with the persecutors, connections to the non-persecuted groups. Comparing the Jewish population of 1941 with the Jewish population of 1945 - based on specific housing registers - the study clearly concludes that the Budapest Holocaust is embedded in history: those with non-Jewish family members, the wealthier and those in occupations where the likelihood of being acquainted with the public sector and Christian colleagues is higher are much more likely to survive. This also implies that more active participation by non-Jews could have increased the number of survivors to a statistically significant extent.

**Keywords:** surviving, Holocaust, historical sociology, Budapest, Hungary

Concerning<sup>a</sup> the sociological aspects of the Hungarian Holocaust, two competing hypotheses have arisen in the social discourse (Erős, 2007; Karády, 2002; Karsai 2001; Komoróczy, 2000; Kovács, 1984; Várady, 2010).

The two hypotheses do not merely reflect the differing views of historical experts; they also constitute - like many aspects of the Holocaust narrative - alternative ways for society to face up to, or come to terms with, the Holocaust. These alternatives relate in part to whether the Holocaust should be viewed as a "historical" or "extra-historical" event, an issue of both anthropological and philosophical importance.

According to the first hypotheses, there is nothing in a sociological sense to say about those who fell victim to the Holocaust. In this narrative, the anti-Jewish laws designated the individuals who were to be denied their rights and then removed them from society, doing so on the basis of two socially relevant pieces of information - their religion and the religion of their grandparents. Then, as part of

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- 86 -

the “final solution”, the Hungarian and German governments murdered the people who had been thus selected. For many commentators, the uniqueness of the Holocaust lies in the fact that, unlike other historical persecutions and mass murders, the Holocaust machinery made no distinction between men and women, adults and children, the educated and uneducated, rich and poor. Instances of people being rescued or successfully fleeing were limited to a small number of individuals and were random in a historical sense.

According to the second hypothesis, while the *intent* to murder may have been non-differentiating, the *success rate* of the mass murder exhibits a systematic (i.e. non-random) pattern in a sociological sense. Individual factors, such as status within Jewish society and the amount of solidarity received from members of non-Jewish society, helped certain individuals or families to escape. Thus, different groups in Jewish society were affected by the Holocaust to varying degrees. Accordingly, the probability of an individual being able to survive the Holocaust was not random. This latter narrative places the Holocaust firmly within history (thus also making it a part of Hungarian history). Rather than portray – or even excuse – the events as a “natural disaster” or even “supernatural disaster”, it places the emphasis on the causal chain, whereby the murderous destruction is exposed as the outcome of the actions, interests and (im)moral decisions of real people, who were fellow citizens, existing in history both before and after the Holocaust. That is to say, in a didactic sense, we might even claim that the events could have taken a different course: a greater number of people might have become involved in rescuing the Jews, the number and range of people rescued might have been greater, and so forth.

Holocaust memory amply supports both hypotheses: on the one hand, many people fall victim who would have been able to flee, had there been any kind of social rationale or selection criteria. On the other hand, the debates on the Jewish councils and the discourse surrounding the composition and selection of the Kastner group of refugees have drawn attention to the systematic (non-random) pattern of the rescue actions and survival rates.

Efforts to compare and contrast the pre- and post-Holocaust Hungarian Jewish populations – first and foremost the work of Viktor Karady – have necessarily been subject to the statistical limits of the sources. The censuses of 1930 and 1941 present, in great detail, the social demographics of adherents to Judaism, but they provide only the most basic data on the other people who were classed as Jews under Hungary’s anti-Jewish laws. Meanwhile the only salient data from the 1949 census relates to the regional distribution of the Jewish population. While such census data is extremely significant, for methodological reasons it tells us nothing about the

<https://doi.org/10.59531/ots.2023.1.1.85-95>

- 87 -

social specifics of the destruction wrought by the Holocaust: five factors become inextricably mixed:

- the different course and destruction level of the Holocaust in *event history* terms in Budapest and outside Budapest;
- the socially systematic (non-random) pattern of those Jews who were residing outside Budapest at the time of the 1941 census but who were Budapest residents in 1944 when the Holocaust struck;
- the systematic (non-random) pattern according to which Jews originally from outside Budapest survived the Budapest ghetto, the death marches and the concentration camps to return to their native cities, or to remain in Budapest, or to leave the country;
- the systematic (non-random) pattern according to which survivors switched occupations between 1945 and 1949, exploiting the opportunities that arose from the abolition of formal discrimination or from the emigration in 1945 and 1948 of non-Jewish government officials and state security personnel;
- the systematic (non-random) pattern whereby, at the time of the 1949 census, some people chose to make use of the enhanced opportunities for declaring no religious affiliation, which had not really been an option in 1930 or in 1941.

It is universally acknowledged that it is not possible to solve an equation of five variables by means of a single equation – between the two sets of data comprising the aggregated data for the Jewish population in 1941 and 1949. Data published independently of the two censuses have not been filtered in such a way that they might assist us in distinguishing between the various factors in an accurate manner. (Stark 1995, 41-75, World Jewish Congress, Bulletin no. 1, February 15, 1947, 4-5, Karády 2002, 68-74)

Source research of a sufficiently multidimensional nature is *only* possible if we are able to define the selected group of *individuals* prior to the Holocaust and then relocate these same individuals in the post-Holocaust setting (in 1945).

That is to say, rather than examine aggregate statistical figures, we need to look at a single element (our ability to locate a person) in a prosopographical study.

My research, conducted in cooperation with Viktor Karady over the past 20 years, has established several name databases, which can now be used to examine the systematic (non-random) character of Holocaust survival.

While still enormous in size, the database with the narrowest range relates to the elite Jewish population (individuals with public reputations). For individuals featuring in the *Magyar életrajzi lexikon* [Hungarian Biographical Encyclopaedia] or

<https://doi.org/10.59531/ots.2023.1.1.85-95>

- 88 -

the *Magyar nagylexikon* [Great Hungarian Encyclopaedia], who were born before 1910 and who were still alive in 1941, we can determine, with statistically sufficient accuracy, those who were affected by the provisions of the anti-Jewish laws. When determining this group of individuals, we can also turn to other databanks containing relevant information, including the 1929 *Magyar zsidó lexikon* [Hungarian Jewish Encyclopaedia], interwar Jewish magazines (classified as Jewish on the basis of the self-identification of the editorial boards), individuals listed as authors, translators or illustrators in certain book series, intellectuals who were denied membership of professional associations in consequence of the anti-Jewish laws, and individuals who were identified as Jews in the Kolosváry-Borcsa bibliography of 1944 in anticipation of the burning of books in Hungary. Adherents to Judaism can also be identified on the basis of lists drawn up at grammar schools or on registration at university; admittedly, this does not cover the entire Jewish population.

If in a statistical sense – that is, neither to the full extent nor with complete certainty – we can identify those individuals featured in the encyclopaedias who in effect received death sentences from the Hungarian and German states, then, based on the disparities between those alive in 1945 and those murdered at some point between 1941 and 1945, we can determine the probability of survival for specific social groups. Using the data in the biographical encyclopaedia, we can consider several factors: occupation, age, a foreign or Hungarian surname, place of birth – all of which are known in almost all the cases. We also have access to generally relevant data, which can be coded into statistical categories, for positions held in the 1930s and 1940s, the place of employment, academic career, and the objective extent of domestic or foreign recognition. All these factors may have influenced the probability of survival.

Another type of source – providing information only on adherents to Judaism – comprises the registration documentation for secondary school and university. Despite the limited educational opportunities, we find a number of Jewish individuals among secondary school and university students in the period 1941-1944. The registration documents for such students contain information on gender, names, and the place of education. Often, the occupations of parents and their place of birth and residence are also available. Some of these school and university students continued their studies after 1945. While acknowledging that not all the individuals absent from the post-1945 registration data were dead, we may still identify systematic (non-random) statistical differences in the social backgrounds and group characteristics of those whom we were able to locate and those who were lost.

The third databank is based on the 1941 and 1945 surveys of Budapest dwellings and their inhabitants (the Budapest household surveys) and on a comparison

<https://doi.org/10.59531/ots.2023.1.1.85-95>

- 89 -

between the two sets of data. These two databases offer information on all Budapest's social groups. In theory, we can seek to locate the individuals residing in Budapest in the 1941 in 1945 surveys. Of course, this is merely a theoretical possibility, because our ability (or inability) to locate a person in 1945 will depend on additional factors other than the Holocaust – natural death or outward migration from Budapest. Further, many Jewish men who served in the labour battalions were subsequently held as prisoners of war; they will evidently account for some of the people missing in 1945.

Despite these drawbacks, this is the only source providing mass data (i.e. data that is not based on a person's educational level and that is representative of contemporary Jewish society), which can therefore be used to identify individuals in a systematic manner in the pre- and post-Holocaust periods. This exceptional feature explains why, in this lecture, I shall focus on these two sets of data.

Evidently, the theoretical opportunity could only be realised in the event of a prior investment of tens of thousands of euros: a survey of all the relevant documents in several hundred boxes at the Budapest Archives would require this amount of financial support.

In the 2000s, the resources at our disposal enabled us to complete a five-percent sample. The sample was produced – the technical details of the procedure will have significance later on – by first determining the number of dwelling sheets in certain archive boxes and then proceeding from the dwelling at the very back of the box in a reverse fashion, covering the data of 5 percent of the dwelling sheets in the various boxes. Having determined the street name and number found on the last dwelling sheet in a given box, we then proceeded further in a reverse fashion, so that the dwellings in the given house were recorded in full. This supplementary rule slightly increased the size of the sample in inner-city districts where houses (buildings) tended to include a large number of dwelling units, and it slightly decreased the size of the sample in outlying districts where houses (buildings) tended to comprise a smaller number of dwelling units. We accepted this distortion, however, because it greatly increased the number of houses (buildings) that we could analyse in full.

The samples taken from the 1941 and 1945 surveys are representative when viewed in separation, but since we are talking about five-percent samples, the sample overlap would in theory be very small, covering no more than 0.25% of the population. This rate of coverage – even though we are talking about the country's largest Jewish community – would clearly be insufficient for an analysis of the probability of survival based on occupation.

In fact, however, the situation is a lot better than this. The dwelling sheets were not placed in the various boxes in a manner that would have made optimal use of the

<https://doi.org/10.59531/ots.2023.1.1.85-95>

- 90 -

space. Instead, regardless of how much space was left in a box, the archivists closed boxes, once they had placed in the box the last dwelling sheet for the last house (building) in a given enumeration district. They then opened a new box for houses and dwellings in the next enumeration district. The boundaries of the enumeration districts were the same in both 1941 and 1945, and it seems that the order of houses within the enumeration districts was also fixed.

Thus, in addition to the fact that the samples for 1941 and for 1945 are representative in separation, the manner in which boxes were opened and closed and the aforementioned sampling method mean that we have many houses (buildings) that are included in both samples.

In 1941, out of the 2956 houses (buildings) in the sample, we found Jewish inhabitants in 1024 houses. (Jews formed a majority of residents in 212 houses, but there were only 26 houses – mostly smaller detached houses – inhabited exclusively by Jews.) We may conclude therefore that in 1941 the Jewish and non-Jewish populations of Budapest were very mixed, in consequence of social historical and housing market processes. This is true despite the fact that Budapest had certain districts with an under- or over-representation of Jews.

*Table 1. Christians and Jews in the sample*

	Christians	Adherents to Judaism	Non-adherents to Judaism classed as Jews under Anti-Jewish law	Total
Males	28574	6184	702	35460
Females	35243	6980	739	42962
Total	68062	13245	1447	82754

The share of adherents to Judaism in our sample is 16.0%, compared with 15.8% in the census. As we anticipated, therefore, our random sampling method proved very effective. In contrast, the percentage of non-adherents to Judaism classed as Jews under Hungarian law is 1.7% in our sample, whereas it was 3.3% in the census. This disparity is rather large. Evidently, this indicates that in the course of the Budapest household surveys there were certain opportunities for individuals classed as Jews under Hungarian law to conceal their "Jewishness" – but we are unable to re-construe the precise circumstances under which this could happen. (Arguably, this phenomenon may reflect differences in the respective control mechanisms employed by the national office of statistics, which conducted the censuses, and by the Budapest municipal authorities, which oversaw the household surveys. Such disparities may, in turn, reflect attitudinal differences between the two institutions.) Concealment of identity does not distort the gender ratio: in our sample, males

<https://doi.org/10.59531/ots.2023.1.1.85-95>

- 91 -

account for 48.3% of non-adherents to Judaism classed as Jews under Hungarian law, and this is almost equal to the corresponding male ratio of 48.5% in the census. Nor do we find much of a distortion in terms of the religious affiliation of non-adherents to Judaism classed as Jews: the only significant under-representation in the sample appears to be Calvinists classed as Jews.

*Table 2. The religious affiliation of non-adherents to Judaism classed as Jews*

	<b>In the census</b>	<b>In the household survey</b>	<b>In the sample</b>
Roman Catholic	13966	63.1	64.5
Greek Catholic	127	0.6	1.0
Calvinist (Reformed)	4232	19.1	16.5
Lutheran	3222	14.6	15.0
Greek Orthodox	137	0.6	0.3
Unitarian	299	1.4	2.0
Unknown	139	0.6	0.8
<b>Total</b>	<b>22122</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>

Karady's hypothesis that the survival chances of Christians classed as Jews were likely to have been greater than the survival chances of Jews who were adherents to Judaism – as the former were more likely to have Christian relatives and friends who were willing to offer assistance – cannot really be tested on the basis of our sample, for we may rightly assume that the small percentage of such individuals (1.6%) who were able to conceal their Jewishness at the time of the household survey were also the ones who – according to this rationale – would later have a greater chance of survival.

Indirectly, however, we are able to prove that Christian ties did improve the chances of survival. We found that 36.8% of Jews with spouses who were *not* classed as Jews were still living in the same dwellings in 1945 as in 1941, whereas the corresponding percentage for Jews with Jewish spouses was only 19.7%. Having a Christian spouse increased an individual's chances of survival by a factor of 1.9. (The percentage ratios are always problematic, for a 90% figure can hardly be viewed in terms of a multiple factor of 80%. In this lecture, however, I employ such methods because we are talking exclusively of probability groups within a range of 15% to 42%.)

In terms of occupation, we found that individuals with a higher level of education or in "higher status" occupations had better chances of survival. We proved this within the various categories by presenting comparable aggregate figures. Although

<https://doi.org/10.59531/ots.2023.1.1.85-95>

- 92 -

the aggregates differ in size and the boundaries between the categories are disputable (as with all categorisations), we shall see in the following that there is always a link (a relationship) when we compare and contrast the fate and chances of individuals in “higher status” and “lower status” occupations.

In 1945 we find 24.1% of the skilled workers who had been recorded as Jews in 1941, but only 15.7% of the unskilled workers. Being a skilled worker seems, therefore, to have increased the chances of survival in the lower half of Jewish society in Budapest by a factor of 1.5. The traditionally more organised nature of skilled workers (trade unions and guilds) evidently explains in part this disparity (alongside other explanatory factors, such as higher levels of education and income and stronger ties to middle-class society). In addition, the modest rescue capacities of the political left-wing were more likely to have targeted skilled workers.

It is not easy to divide intellectuals into groups. In 1945 we find 21.4% of the public sector intellectuals (teachers, museum employees etc.) who had been recorded as Jews in 1941, but only 15.8% of the private sector intellectuals (journalists, artists etc.). Of course, it is likely that by 1944 – when the probability of being murdered dramatically increased – most of the intellectuals who had been employed in the public sector in 1941 were no longer in their former jobs. This circumstance, however, makes their enhanced chances of survival – relative to the chances of their fellows in the private sector – even more noteworthy. This is because if an individual lost his or her job at some time between 1941 and 1944, then he or she was more likely to have moved away from the rented dwelling (the rent of which had previously been covered by the officially guaranteed housing supplement for public employees), and so we are even less likely to find the individual in the same dwelling in 1945. Thus, the above piece of data, which shows that the survival chances of public sector intellectuals were greater than the survival chances of private sector intellectuals by a factor of 1.4, should be regarded as an underestimate.

Our assumption that many teachers and cultural employees lost their jobs between 1941 and 1945 must apply to an even greater extent to senior public officials, for the attraction of senior posts was clearly greater in the eyes of those who wished to benefit from the “changing of the guard”. That is to say, we may assume that even greater efforts were made to remove Jews from such positions. Even so, in 1945 we find 31.3% of the leader elite of public officials who had been classed as Jews in 1941. This figure seems particularly high when compared with the corresponding figure – 16.7% – for public employees of lower positions. Being in a senior position increased an individual’s chances of survival by a factor of 1.9. Evidently, by the summer/autumn of 1944, none of the senior public officials were still in their posts.



<https://doi.org/10.59531/ots.2023.1.1.85-95>

- 93 -

None the less, they had evidently retained their contacts in non-Jewish society and they also enjoyed greater prestige within ghetto society.

The disparity is much smaller in the private sector, but the trend is the same. In 1945 we find 27.8% of the senior private sector employees who had been classed as Jews in 1941. This compares with a figure of 22.7% for the junior private sector employees. Here, the disparity factor is only 1.2.

Grouping the occupations together, we find that the chances of survival in comparable occupational categories were always greater for those in more senior positions and for those working in the public sector of the economy. Despite a worsening of employment prospects due to the anti-Jewish laws, we may hypothesise that social ties – particularly the strength of relations with non-antisemitic sections of non-Jewish society – that could more easily be established (and maintained) by individuals in senior positions and/or working in the public sector than by individuals in junior positions and/or working in the private sector, exerted a direct or indirect effect on the probability of survival.

Irrespective of occupational position, financial wealth may be interpreted as another independent factor increasing the chances of survival. Although wealth may provoke envy and murderous intent as well as increase the risks of concealing Jewish identity (and thus of death), nevertheless it seems that wealth acted to raise the chances of survival: there was a greater chance of securing life-saving medicines and food items on the black market, and there was more money to spend on obtaining false papers or on bribing police personnel or Arrow Cross members. The increased survival chances of individuals in senior occupational positions can be interpreted from this angle too. Still, the effect of financial wealth is more clearly shown in the fact that in 1945 we find 42.0% of the "great" industrialists and wholesalers who had been classed as Jews in 1941, while the corresponding figure for "small" industrialists and wholesalers is only 23.8%. Here, the disparity factor is 1.8 to the advantage of the wealthier group.

Another of our suppositions was that the special skills and knowledge required for life in the ghetto improved an individual's chances of survival, perhaps even superseding the hierarchy seen in ordinary life. This supposition turned out to be only partially true. Skilled workers and "small" industrialists were evidently less educated, but they had more practical knowledge and were apparently better able to deal with the physical challenges of ghetto life than were intellectuals in the free professions or junior public or private employees.

Surprisingly, however – and I have not yet found an explanation for this – at the other end of the social spectrum, "practical usefulness" does not seem to have provided an advantage: in 1945 we find 21.4% of the medical doctors who had been

<https://doi.org/10.59531/ots.2023.1.1.85-95>

- 94 -

classed as Jews in 1941, whereas the corresponding figure for lawyers is 29.6%. The higher figure for the latter group appears to contradict the “usefulness theory”. A hypothetical albeit insufficient explanation is that the main healthcare problem in the ghetto was the absence of medicines and medical equipment rather than a lack of qualified medical staff. If this was the case, then the type of knowledge capital held by lawyers – the ability to negotiate with the authorities and familiarity with police procedures – counterbalanced the fact that mere legal knowledge must have been more difficult to convert into food (food required for one’s survival) than medical knowledge. A role may also have been played – as Viktor Karády pointed out to me, after he kindly read through my lecture notes – by the fact that far-right supporters accounted for a particularly high share of the membership of the professional associations for doctors and medical students – 36% of non-Jewish doctors in Budapest. Accordingly, we may assume that only a relatively small number of doctors would have been prepared to risk their own jobs in order to help their Jewish colleagues. Indeed, it seems many of them welcomed – or actively promoted – the removal of “the competition”.

In summary, of the alternatives formulated at the beginning of this lecture, the second hypothesis has proved correct: the probability of survival was influenced not only by the circumstances that are known to us from event history and were foreseeable in an anthropological sense – residence in Budapest or outside Budapest, age, etc. – but also by the position of an individual within Jewish society in Budapest and by his or her distance from non-Jewish society, given that the latter group clearly had more opportunities for rescuing Jews. This finding serves to confirm – to a limited extent – the view that the Holocaust was not “extra-historical”. Rather, it happened within history. In other words, we should view it as an event embedded in Hungarian social history.

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- 95 -

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**Absztrakt.** A holokausztról szóló viták egyik legfontosabbika, hogy történelmi vagy történelmen kívüli eseményről, tragédiáról van-e szó. A váratlan természeti katasztrófák, pld. földrengések, meteor becsapódások, az emberi történelmen kívüli események - fontos közös jellemzőjük, hogy túlélésük csak nagyon kis mértékben függ össze az emberek társadalmi pozíciójával. Minél hasonlatosabb ehhez, annál nagyobb mértékben történelmen kívüli esemény a Holokauszt. A történelemben integrálódott üldöztetéseknek viszont fontos történet-szociológiai jegye, hogy az emberek gazdagságuk, vagy az üldözökkel, a nem üldözöttekkel való kapcsolati tőkék alapján kevésbé válnak áldozattá, mint az üldözött csoport többi tagja. Az 1941-es zsidóságot összevetve az 1945-ös zsidósággal – konkrét lakásjegyzékek alapján – a tanulmány egyértelműen megállapítja, hogy a budapesti holokauszt történelemben ágyazott: a nem zsidó családtagokkal rendelkezők, a gazdagabbak és az olyan foglalkozásúak, ahol a közszférával, a keresztény kollégákkal való ismeretség valószínűsége nagyobb, sokkal több a túlélő. Ebből egyben az is következik, hogy a nem zsidó társadalom aktívabb részvétele statisztikailag kimutatható mértékben növelhette volna meg a túlélők számát.

## APPENDIX

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<sup>a</sup> This text is a version of my study „The Sociology of Survival: The Presence of the Budapest Jewish Population Groups of 1941 in the 1945 Budapest Population”. – In: Randolph L. Braham and András Kovács (eds.). The Holocaust in Hungary: Seventy Years Later. Central European University Press, Budapest-New York (pp. 183-194)