

ORTHODOXY AND SUPPORT FOR ISRAEL: INFERENCES FROM THE 1990 NATIONAL JEWISH POPULATION SURVEY

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Political and financial commitment to Israel have long been recognized as hallmarks of Jewish communal activism. The two comprise the bulk, if not the sum, of ethnoreligious identity among substantial segments of America's Jews. As such, they occupy a large proportion of the time, program, and funds expended by professionals in Jewish communal service and the organizations they represent.

Yet, in the past 15 years, an interesting trend has emerged in the pattern of that support that has gained little notice outside a select portion of academia. It is the simple fact that, among American Jews, the Orthodox consistently exhibit the highest levels of support for Israel and Zionism on virtually every measure employed. This trend may have profound consequences for the nature of Zionism and the means by which it is managed and developed in the United States.

Generally, support for Israel has been seen as a secular expression of Jewish national identity, with American Zionist groups and their communal counterparts proud of their areligious bent. However, it may be just as likely that support for Israel is one element in a constellation of Jewish values that relate to ritual behavior and denominational choice. If so, American Jews with the strongest commitment to tradition and faith may exhibit similar levels of commitment to Israel and Zionism.

Further, the emphasis on a secular Zionism frequently results in an indifference to the many traditionally religious elements

from which Zionism emerged. Strong Orthodox support for Israel may not surprise savvy communal leaders, both lay and professional. Yet, its implications have been avoided for a variety of historical and organizational reasons, reinforcing what is often a natural isolationism even on policies of broad and interdenominational communal concern.

This article examines data compiled in the 1990 National Jewish Population Survey about denominational choice and attachment to Israel or Zionism; sets these findings into the context of myriad other studies compiled over the past decade-and-a-half; and offers several inferences regarding the communal organization and implementation of Zionist activism and support for Israel in the United States.

UNDERCOUNTING OF ORTHODOX JEWRY

The most recent comprehensive data available regarding the American Jewish community are from the National Jewish Population Survey (NJPS) of 1990.¹ The survey was intended to coincide with the decennial U.S. Census for purposes of comparison and contrast. The unweighted data were gathered from some 2500 households nationally and included a large number of respondents

¹The data utilized in this presentation were made available by the North American Jewish Data Bank (NAJDB). Neither the original source or collectors of the data nor the NAJDB bear any responsibility for the analysis or interpretations presented here. The analysis is based on a series of cross-tabulations in which various measures of support for Israel were used as dependent variables. For purposes of brevity, simplicity, and clarity of interpretation, the results were then summarized in the tables provided in the text.

This article is dedicated to the memory of my beloved mother, Mrs. Chana Schnall.

who were outside of, though somehow associated with the Jewish community by traditional definition. For example, Gentile partners to an intermarriage, children of such marriages no matter how raised, or those born Jewish but currently practicing another faith were included in one of many available rubrics.

Using a complex methodology and a formidable questionnaire, the study gathered information regarding demographic, social, philanthropic, political, and communal concerns, including several questions dealing with Israel and Zionism among American Jews. For logistical reasons, however, these items were offered differentially to various "waves" of respondents. As a result, some questions were asked of all subjects, whereas others, including some of those relating to support for Israel, were asked only of a smaller group.

This fact is of particular concern when focusing on a subsample. By the most generous definition, American Jews identifying themselves as Orthodox constitute a small proportion of the national community. Consequently, a representative sample of American Jews must perforce turn up less than an optimal number of Orthodox Jews for purposes of extensive analysis and statistical control.

The problem is exacerbated by the nature of the Orthodox community. Numerous prior analyses have identified the tendency to underweight the Orthodox in statistical samples. Some studies have introduced sophisticated weighting procedures intended to reduce the inaccuracy in projections for the entire population (Cohen, 1989b; 1991a). Others have simply despaired of reaching a representative group of Orthodox respondents; in particular, one that includes its more parochial and insulated contingents (Heilman & Cohen, 1986).

At least in regard to its raw and unweighted data, the NJPS may have fallen prey to this tendency to undercount the Orthodox Jewish subsample as well. Depending upon one's definition of the American

Jewish community, the survey yielded findings that suggest an Orthodox subgroup of slightly over 6%. This contrasts with projections of 9% offered by those who directed the NJPS just before its initiation (Kosmin, 1988). Of course, these projections were based upon a "9-Cities File" of major urban centers, rather than a national sampling. The inference is confirmed, however, by the preliminary evaluations issued with the initial NJPS findings, a tribute to the professionalism and intellectual honesty of those who directed the study (Kosmin et al., 1991).

Notwithstanding these shortcomings, a sufficient number of Orthodox respondents was available to allow tentative comparisons with members of other denominations on many items dealing with support for Israel and Zionism. In addition, these findings were compared with those of previous studies to detect patterns before any conclusions were drawn.

RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN DENOMINATION AND SUPPORT FOR ISRAEL IN THE 1990 NJPS

To test the relationship between denominational choice and support for Israel in the 1990 NJPS, seven items were chosen and somewhat arbitrarily divided between those regarding activities and attachments reflected at home and personal connections in and travel to Israel. Table 1 provides a composite of the former: whether respondents celebrate Yom Ha'Atzmaut (Israel Independence Day), whether they speak about Israel often with friends or relatives, and whether they consider themselves "extremely attached" to Israel. These are cross-tabulated by denomination, including "Just Jewish" or "Secular." All responses are based upon self-report and suggest no further level of observance, affiliation, or activity.

As the data indicate, Orthodox respondents are significantly more likely to celebrate Israel's independence, talk about Israel often, and report an extreme attach-

Table 1. *Measures of Pro-Israel Activity in the United States Cross-Tabulated by Denominational Affiliation*

Denomination	Celebrate Yom Ha' Atzmaut ^a	Often Talk About Israel ^a	Extremely Attached to Israel ^b
Orthodox	30.6%	58.6%	50.0%
Conservative	22.5	32.5	15.0
Reform	11.3	17.5	4.0
Reconstructionist	17.6	9.1	23.1
Just Jewish/Secular ^b	7.4	18.7	6.9

^aStatistically significant $P < .0001$.

^bCombined because of small sample size on many items.

ment to Israel than are other respondents. In general, such sentiments seem to fall along the slope of denominational traditionalism, with Reconstructionists and those choosing no affiliation confounding the pattern somewhat. The finding suggests that, aside from denominational affiliation, ritual and religious observance may also yield valuable insights regarding support for Israel, a point confirmed elsewhere (Cohen, 1987; 1991a).

As an aside, celebrations of Yom Ha' Atzmaut do not seem to be popular among American Jews. Only one in three of the Orthodox respondents support such observances, as do even smaller proportions of Jews in other denominations. This low level of support may suggest that change is needed in the organization and content of such programming in the future. Or, it may simply mean that this is not the way American Jews choose to express their sentiments.

Talking about Israel or citing a strong attachment to it represents a relatively weak degree of commitment, akin to what has often been called "arm-chair" Zionism. It is support that requires little sacrifice, expenditure, or discomfort. A much "tougher" measure of commitment is reflected in visits to Israel, encouraging one's children to visit, and maintaining contact with friends and relatives there. Table 2 examines these items to determine whether the pattern of strong Orthodox support noted above is confirmed.

As the data clearly indicate, the same pattern emerges. Respondents claiming Orthodox affiliation are far more likely to have close friends or family in Israel and to have visited Israel themselves. Younger family members (the question specified those under the age of 25 and living in the same household) are at least twice as likely to have made the journey as their non-Orthodox peers, and a resounding 75% intend for some member of the household to visit within the next 3 years. Thus, when examining these more demanding forms of commitment, it is clear that Orthodox ardor has not cooled and remains significantly stronger than that reported by respondents of other or no denominational preference.

Although not listed in Table 2, it is also notable that almost 70% of all subjects reported never having visited Israel, and about two-thirds expressed no intention to visit in the next 3 years. Only among the Orthodox do a majority respond in the affirmative to these two items. Although it has long been recognized that aliyah (settlement in Israel) is not a serious option for the broad majority of American Jews at this time, it seems that much the same can be said about tourism, an issue that should be of concern to authorities and leaders on both shores.

A closer inspection of the 1990 data yields another finding of interest to our analysis. The survey asked respondents about the nature of their religious upbringing-

Table 2. *Measures of Pro-Israel Activity in Israel Cross-Tabulated by Denominational Affiliation*

Denomination	Close Friends /Family in Israel ^a	Never Visited Israel ^a	Young Family Members Visited ^a	Plan Visit in Next 3 Years ^a
Orthodox	65.5%	42.0%	44.7%	75.0%
Conservative	34.5	63.0	22.3	34.1
Reform	21.6	78.3	10.9	28.5
Reconstructionist	35.3	64.7	14.3	16.7
Just Jewish/Secular ^b	26.2	77.4	11.4	23.1

^aStatistically significant $P < .0001$.

^bCombined because of small sample size on many items.

ing. About 75% of those reporting that they were raised Orthodox presently claim loyalties elsewhere, with almost half being Conservative.

Yet, an important residual effect of their upbringing emerges in their stated support for Israel. It is by no means as distinct and notable as those who currently claim Orthodox affiliation, some 90% of whom report also being raised Orthodox. Nevertheless, it does frequently set them apart from their colleagues. Table 3 shows the relationship between religious upbringing and the first group of items reflecting support for Israel among those respondents not currently affiliated with Orthodoxy.

Unfortunately, too few respondents reported being raised in Reconstructionist homes to allow for meaningful analysis. Nevertheless, for the data available, it is clear that Orthodox affiliation, if only during youth, continues to have a profound effect upon support for Israel in adult life. Respondents no longer identified with Orthodoxy but reporting it as the denomination of their religious upbringing are significantly more likely to celebrate Yom Ha'Atzmaut and to claim an extreme attachment to Israel than those raised in another denomination. Although they also report a greater tendency to talk about Israel often, the differences are not statistically significant and therefore allow no inference.

In addition, as before, the pattern of support increases with traditionalism. Those raised Orthodox are most supportive and those with no denominational upbringing are least.

Similar findings emerge when examining the more demanding tests of support for Israel: friendship or family patterns, as well as personal/household travel. On all four available items, those raised Orthodox but no longer expressing that denominational affiliation report stronger support than those raised in other denominations (Table 4). In addition, the findings generally follow the pattern exhibited above. Support for Israel descends along with the traditionalism of denominational upbringing, from Orthodoxy to "Just Jewish/Secular," with the latter category occasionally confounding the trend.

However, on only two items—close family or friendships in Israel and at least one visit to its shores—are the findings statistically significant. That they are not significant in regard to the travels of younger family members or future intentions to visit may reflect the receding influence of Orthodoxy as a catalyst to Zionist identification among those no longer within its denominational borders. Not surprisingly, the ebb emerges in considerations of future plans or those of the next generation who have had no such upbringing. Equally, it may reflect

Table 3. Measures of Pro-Israel Activity in the United States Cross-Tabulated by Denomination Raised Among Those Not Currently Affiliated with Orthodox

Denomination Raised	Celebrate Yom Ha'Atzmaut ^a	Often Talk About Israel	Extremely Attached to Israel ^a
Orthodox	24.7%	31.5%	17.7%
Conservative	16.2	25.7	9.9
Reform	9.0	17.6	4.5
Just Jewish/Secular ^b	10.8	15.3	4.6

^aStatistically significant $P < .0001$.

^bCombined because of small sample size on many items.

the general travel plans of a broad American Jewish spectrum or the increasing and more evenly distributed popularity of study tours to Israel among American Jewish youth (Friedlander et al., 1991; see the article by Halpern in this issue).

OTHER STUDIES OF THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN DENOMINATION AND SUPPORT FOR ISRAEL

The 1990 NJPS findings are no surprise. Several earlier studies demonstrate that Orthodox attachments to Israel are stronger than those exhibited by other Jews. For example, an analysis of the 1970 National Jewish Population Study compared social and ritual differences to ascertain the sa-

lience of denominational affiliation. It found that, in addition to higher levels of Jewish education, synagogue membership, and ritual observance, Orthodox respondents were more likely to have visited Israel than those of other or no denomination (Lazerwitz & Harrison, 1979).

A more recent national survey conducted by the *Los Angeles Times* (Scheer, 1988) attempted to identify the place of Israel in the political values of American Jews and to determine their reactions to contemporaneous developments in the Middle East. The study found that Orthodox respondents were the only ones to list Israel first among all other concerns in evaluating a presidential candidate. They were also far more likely to claim a "very close" attachment to Israel and to value it as a "homeland."

Table 4. Measures of Pro-Israel Activity in Israel Cross-Tabulated by Denomination Raised Among Those Not Currently Affiliated with Orthodox

Denomination Raised	Close Friends/Family in Israel ^a	Never Visited Israel ^a	Young Family Members Visited	Plan Visit Next 3 Years
Orthodox	39.7%	54.4%	22.7%	34.8%
Conservative	29.9	69.4	15.5	27.4
Reform	19.6	80.3	11.9	28.5
Just Jewish/Secular ^b	27.9	74.1	7.7	15.0

^aStatistically significant $P < .0001$.

^bCombined because of small sample size on many items.

There is also reason to believe that the findings are not limited to the older generation. In a study of American university students, for example, those identifying themselves as Orthodox scored higher on scales of overall support for and pride in Israel. They were more likely to consider themselves Zionists and to favor aid to Israel even if they no longer deemed it to be in American interests (Verbit, 1985).

Jewish religious leaders reflect the same values, as a recent study of the American rabbinate indicates (Heilman, 1991). In this analysis, a group of 525 rabbis and 138 rabbinic students were asked about a broad variety of Jewish issues, including attitudes toward Israel and Israelis. Orthodox rabbis and students reported having visited Israel more often than their colleagues and feeling a closer link between Israelis and American Jews. In addition, they were three times more likely to answer in the affirmative when asked, "Do you plan to move to Israel permanently"?

Finally, the most direct and extensive prior exploration of this issue emerged in a series of studies of American Jewish attitudes toward Israel and Israelis (Cohen, 1987, 1991a and b). These studies used numerous individual questions and indices measuring such concerns as attachment to Israel, ties with Israelis, familiarity with Israeli life and the Hebrew language, willingness to visit or live in Israel, and attitudes toward foreign policy and toward specific groups within the Israeli populace. The results are by now predictable. To quote the author:

Orthodox attachment to Israel, however measured, significantly exceeded that of the other denominations. Moreover, differences between Orthodox and non-Orthodox were sharpest on the most demanding measures of involvement — receptivity to aliyah (settling in Israel), familiarity with several Israelis, and fluency in Hebrew (Cohen, 1987, p. 17).

AREAS OF FUTURE RESEARCH

Needless to say, a full sociological inquiry into the relationship between Jewish denominational affiliation and support for Israel and Zionism requires additional evaluation. What is offered here is tentative and exploratory and should be interpreted cautiously, notwithstanding the general support in previous work for the propositions delineated. More sophisticated future studies would do well to apply such multivariate techniques as factor analysis and regression models to assess the relative importance of Orthodox affiliation against the influence of other variables.

In particular, careful application of demographic controls will be helpful on several levels. Studying the age of respondents would tell us if the younger contingent of Orthodoxy is responsible for current findings as compared to youth elsewhere. Conversely, might commitment to Israel be a largely elder phenomenon, which is receding across denominations?

Especially in regard to Orthodox upbringing, the chronological distance between the respondent and his or her Orthodoxy will be a valuable consideration in understanding the "shelf-life" of denominational attachments as determinants of adult behavior. It will also illustrate the efficacy of Orthodoxy, comparing its more current American form with its prewar European counterpart.

Similarly, items having to do with travel may reflect differences in economic class, rather than religious identification. Although Orthodoxy is not generally associated with wealth, it may be that those raised in Orthodox homes but now located elsewhere have greater financial reach, which would go far in explaining the article's findings.

It would also be interesting to analyze the influence of Jewish education and levels of ritual observance. Doing so would enable us to see whether it is denominational

affiliation that makes the difference or whether support for Israel wanes along with religious commitment, training, and participation — both within and between denominations. These form the objectives of papers to come.

IMPLICATIONS FOR THE IMPLEMENTATION OF ZIONIST PROGRAMMING IN THE UNITED STATES

The current data suggest that, although they constitute a small fraction of the Jewish population, Orthodox members of the Jewish community are not a fringe element that can be ignored when planning community functions or fund-raising efforts for Israel.

If only to build on the foundation of commitment and support for Israel that this segment of the community represents, it is imperative that its needs be filled and its concerns be confronted when implementing communal programs. It is a simple matter to consider their sensibilities in regard to kosher food restrictions, the timing of events, or appropriate representation on boards and the dais. Yet, although these are important first steps, they may not be enough.

To encourage the participation of Orthodox Jews, care will have to be given to program content as well. If strong support for Israel is exhibited by those religious traditionalists or at least those raised as such, programs might also have traditionally religious elements injected — not just in their benedictions but in their body and substance. For example, it may be helpful to develop a cadre of speakers, performers, and programmers for public and private functions who are visibly steeped in the religious traditions of Zionism. This cadre would complement the already substantial number of professionals whose training and experience emerge from more secular ranks. Similarly, teaching about Israel and Zionism, whether in Hebrew schools, Centers, Jewish camps, or day schools might better reflect Zionism's religious and traditional

moorings, alongside the political and historical approaches that form a more common bent.

The Jewish calendar is filled with fasts and festivals linked to various aspects of life in ancient Israel. With appropriate application and sensitive interpretation, these too can form the basis of effective programming to attract and satisfy Orthodox participants and to increase the cultural awareness of all.

In addition, these efforts may yield important financial benefits. Measured as a proportion of the whole, Orthodox donations or Israel Bond purchases are relatively small, a function of their limited representation in the Jewish population. Yet, the current data give us reason to believe that, despite lower levels of family income, Orthodox respondents are per capita more prone to Jewish philanthropy than are their brethren of other affiliation.

Unfortunately, the NJPS did not include items related specifically to financial support for Israel. However, numerous items dealt with support for Jewish charities in the United States. Although the full analysis of these data has yet to be completed, even a cursory glance is instructive for our purposes. For example, above and beyond parochial school tuitions and organizational dues, respondents identifying themselves as Orthodox were more likely than others to report that in 1989 they made a donation to a Jewish charity (77.3%). Further, a larger proportion of them reported donating at least \$1,000 to such a cause (29.4%). Finally, with regard to organizational dues, Orthodox respondents were also more likely to report payments of at least \$1,000 to Jewish organizations for that same year (27.9%). Indeed, these points have already been noted in regard to levels of ritual practice, religious affiliation, and attendance at religious services, if not Orthodoxy per se, and seem to hold true in the American population at large (Hodgekinson & Weitzman, 1986; Ritterband & Silberstein, 1988; Winter, 1989, 1990).

Add the earlier-documented propensity of Orthodox Jews to visit Israel and to send

their youth as well and the potential return for the assertive community planner is formidable. Indeed, the single arena in which their performance waxed unimpressive was a lukewarm support for UJA-federation, a point that informs the very sensibilities of which we speak.

Two very difficult issues must also be confronted, however. The studies cited above reflect yet another important characteristic of American Orthodoxy in its relationship to Israel and Zionism. They have consistently found Orthodox respondents to score higher on measures of "hawkishness," to hold more hostile perceptions of the Palestinians, and to be more likely to favor Israel's handling of the *Intifada*, as compared to cohorts elsewhere in the American Jewish community (Cohen, 1987, 1989, 1991a; Heilman, 1991; Scheer, 1988; Verbit, 1985).

Although the introduction of more traditionally religious content into public programming may not engender much opposition from the broader Jewish community, politically partisan content might be less tolerable and should probably be avoided. Nevertheless, the challenge of balancing political and religious concerns in organizing community events and campaigns is an inherent aspect of communal service and doubtless worth the effort.

Finally, a substantial portion of the issue inheres not in communal exclusion of the Orthodox, but in their own sense of isolation. In part this is grounded in a fear that the broader community is ignorant and/or indifferent to their sensibilities. It also stems from a natural suspicion of such overtures and the motivations that inspire them.

Yet, in addition to that sense of isolation, one can ill ignore the very real ideological concerns that complicate full Orthodox participation in interdenominational activities, no matter how benign or even affirmative the content, no matter how forthcoming others choose to be. It is those concerns that have frequently encouraged an actively involved Orthodoxy to "go it alone" on

many projects in support of Israel.

That is a reality that must inform, though never discourage, those engaged to serve the entire community. It certainly ought not to deter from an active effort to maximize available strengths and resources, such as those represented by the strong support for broad communal concerns and the support Israel enjoys within American Orthodoxy.

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