THE QUEST FOR RELIGIOUS FREEDOM AND PLURALISM IN ISRAEL
An American Comparative Perspective

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Although religious pluralism does not currently exist in Israel, Orthodoxy can coexist with pluralism given the right conditions. The author suggests these keys to change that will further the quest for religious freedom and pluralism in Israel: reform of the Israeli political system, recognition of alternative Jewish religious modes, cultivation of a culture of democracy, and lessening the social distance that separates the Orthodox from the non-Orthodox.

When considered in the Israeli context, the quest for religious freedom and pluralism necessarily involves the question of the coexistence of Orthodoxy and pluralism. The issue is best approached from whatever we have learned from social experience involving the intersection of Orthodoxy and pluralism, rather than as a basic ideological or theological conflict between religious authority and pluralism, two doctrines we tend to view as mutually hostile and exclusive.

BACKGROUND

The social and intellectual changes brought forth by the Enlightenment and the Emancipation, their varied development and pace, elicited different responses in Western and Eastern Europe. By and large, the response in the West centered on reform of Judaism and a focus on the individual. In the East, there were reactions of secularization, including Zionism, and defensive posturing by those who correctly felt their traditional way of life most threatened and proceeded to construct high walls around it (Dawidowicz, 1967; Goldscheider and Zuckerman, 1984; Katz, 1961/1971, 1973).

It was primarily representatives of the latter two modes of response from Eastern Europe who came to and made their positions felt in Israel, thereby setting the stage for the prolonged clash between religious and secular in the midst of which Israel still finds itself. Missing by and large in Israel was the reformist response more typical of Western Europe and later the United States (Jick, 1976; Temkin, 1974).

A climate of tolerance and a culture of democracy are necessary, though by themselves insufficient, conditions for the existence of pluralism. Those perspectives are largely absent from the background of a majority of inhabitants of Israel, who originate from countries of Eastern Europe, North Africa, or the Middle East. Although immigrants from Germany and other Central European locales came to Israel, they came primarily as refugees and set neither the ideological nor institutional tone in the Yishuv and fledgling Israeli society.

RELIGIOUS AND SECULAR SOCIAL CONTEXT: A COMPARISON OF ISRAELI AND AMERICAN SOCIETY

The dynamics and outcome of the Orthodoxy–pluralism equation depend in the first instance on the social context, both structural and cultural, in which the interaction takes place. For example, there is the matter of who are the Jewish populations interacting along these dimensions.

In the United States, in addition to the early date and significant nature of the immigration from Western and Central Europe, established American patterns reinforced the focus on reform and on the individual rather than the group (Gordon, 1964; Halpern, 1956; Higham, 1975; Showstack, 1988; Williams, 1951). Emphasis in the

and Friedlander, 1983; Leibowitz, 1963; Yaron, 1976). There is an official, state-supported rabbinate, including two chief rabbis. Political parties stand for election and have representatives who sit in the Knesset explicitly and officially as religious parties. Whether Israelis are religious—observant of a particular corpus of religious law—or not likely determines where they live and what schools their children attend, their choice of political party, mode of dress, choice of leisure-time activities, and more. Those who do not live in religious neighborhoods, send their children to religious schools, dress in the style or with the accessories of Orthodoxy, vote for religious parties, and so on are likely to define themselves by contrast as non-religious. Ask any secular Israeli the somewhat unfair and misguided question, "Are you primarily an Israeli or a Jew?," and he or she, hearing "Jew" and envisioning ultra-Orthodox neighborhoods and garb, will answer "Israeli." Scratch the surface and the picture may change, but the point is clear (Herman, 1971, 1973, 1977).

The lack of separation of church and state and the official location of religion in various settings in Israeli society have serious structural implications for religion there. Issues at stake become control of government ministries and bureaucracies, the funding of a vast network of religious (Orthodox) institutions, and whether or not a growing segment of the population will perform compulsory army service (Gutmann, 1972; Liebman and Don-Yehiya, 1984). These structural issues, of course, spill over to and have direct impact on religious-secular relations, mutual perceptions, and attitudes.

Finally in this context, in Israel the differences between religious and secular entail and are expressed as different visions not only for *ha'olam habah*, the world to come, which are distant and thus might be relatively easy to overcome or at least overlook. Rather, they involve different and often opposing visions for *ha'olam hazeh*, affairs of this world—essentially different visions of the Jewish state, the Jewish people, and the world.

RELIGIOUS PLURALISM IN ISRAEL

Succinctly stated, religious pluralism within the Jewish community in Israel simply does not exist. There is neither freedom *of* religion nor freedom *from* religion (Gordis, 1982; Tabory, 1982). As a non-Orthodox Jew, one can neither be married nor divorced in a civil ceremony, nor have one's non-Orthodox rabbi perform one's marriage nor eulogize one in the cemetery. Further compounding the *structural* interconnection of church and state in Israel is the absence of a cultural tradition of pluralism, including religious pluralism.

The relationship between religious and secular oscillates between peaceful coexistence at best, maintained through a rigidly defined status quo, to cold war and occasional open warfare. The situation is at its worst when one focuses on the Orthodox establishment and its attempt to preserve hegemony over alternative understandings and modes of Judaism, be they represented by Reform and Conservative rabbis or Ethiopian *kessim* (Ellenson, 1984; Elliman, 1986).

The ripple effects of the Israeli situation are felt in the Diaspora as well. These effects are for the most part negative. Witness the breakdown of Orthodox–non-Orthodox cooperation that formerly was characteristic in the American Jewish community, as currently even the more moderate Orthodox are forced into a posture of constantly "looking over their shoulder" at their more extreme brethren lest they be labeled as less than legitimate. Witness the shock wave occasioned by the potential delegitimation of non-Orthodoxy and the alienation from Israel that would have ensued upon a change in the definition of "Who Is A Jew" (Kimelman, 1990). On the other hand, this very threat served as a catalyst for some positive self-assertion by Reform and Conservative Judaism, which pursued with renewed zeal election to world Zi-

(Combined Jewish Philanthropies of Greater Boston, 1987). Even if the Orthodox were randomly distributed within the community, which they clearly are not, it would be safe to say that most greater Boston Jews would have very little contact with Orthodox Jews as neighbors.

A similar situation exists in most Jewish communities in the United States. Baltimore, where 20% of the Jews identify themselves as Orthodox, is clearly an exception. More typical are the percentages in Chicago (6%), Cleveland (9%), Los Angeles (5%), Miami (11%), Milwaukee (7%), New York (13%), and Washington, D.C. (3%) (Tobin, 1986). Especially in light of Orthodox residential concentration, the separation is all the more pronounced. Additionally, most Orthodox children are probably in Orthodox day schools. Further, there is evidence of some difference in patterns of voting and leisure-time activities. Once again, in terms of marriage, there is a clear implication that one potential partner would have to change rather dramatically, if in fact Orthodox and non-Orthodox young men and women meet at all given their different life patterns.

Thus, in America, given the combined effects of different beliefs, world views, and visions, the negative influence of the Israeli situation, and some degree of social distance, the potential for crisis exists (Gillman, 1988; Greenberg, 1985; Kimelman, 1987; Showstack et al., 1990). In the United States, however, the situation is less severe than in Israel for reasons that include the structural differences explained earlier, as well as local cultural traditions that support pluralism. Although tension may be generated in the American Jewish community as well around the allocation of communal resources, such issues are not fought out so publicly in the conflict-ridden political arena and not nearly so viciously as in Israel.

KEYS TO CHANGE

What are the keys to change, to movement in the quest for religious freedom and pluralism in Israel? Political change is certainly among them. There is a need to break the Orthodox hegemony in areas of religious and personal (marriage, divorce, etc.) life and laws. Various plans for reform of the Israeli political system currently under discussion or consideration would lead to some progress in this area. It is precisely for this reason that most such plans are opposed by the official representatives of the Orthodox political parties. Under the current political system, change could only occur if the major parties were able to form a government coalition without the participation of one or more of the Orthodox parties and also was confident that it would not need the Orthodox vote in the foreseeable future as well. Thus, even when Labor and Likud sat together in recent "national unity" governments and constituted or could have constituted a clear majority without Orthodox parties, each bloc nonetheless looked ahead to a time when it would be able to form a narrow coalition without its chief rival and would once again need to court Orthodox participation.

Also contributing to the curtailing of Orthodox domination would be an effort to find or force a religious breakthrough in the form of recognition and acceptance of some, almost any, alternative Jewish religious mode. That might be recognition of the legitimacy of Ethiopian *kessim*, Masorati (Conservative) rabbis, or women. It is perhaps precisely for this reason that any recognition of the legitimacy of any non-establishment trend and group is opposed so consistently and vehemently by the Orthodox religious and political establishment.

Cultivating a culture of democracy that can nurture pluralism is also necessary. The maintenance in Israel of a *structure* of democracy, given the lack of prior experience in democratic process that characterizes the majority of immigrants to Israel and in the face of the constant external threat and internal divisions along deeply held opposing ideological positions, is nothing short of extraordinary. This democratic

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grows as one moves outward, away from older, established, and more densely Jewish areas to the more sparsely and more recently settled suburban and exurban areas. Across the United States, intermarriage varies regionally. The West has the highest rates, followed by the South (excluding South Florida); next in line is the Northeast quadrant of the United States (the Midwest, Northeast, and New England), with New York City at the lowest level.

Communities also vary considerably with respect to per capita contribution to UJA/federation campaigns, as well as levels of synagogue affiliation (Rabinowitz, et al., 1992; Tobin & Lipsman, 1984). As a general rule, these key measures of formal Jewish affiliation are higher in smaller communities and lower in larger communities. They are also higher in more residentially stable, more well-established Jewish communities and lower in areas where Jews have arrived only recently in large numbers (S. Cohen, 1983). In line with these generalizations about size, stability, and recency of settlement, it comes as no surprise that such places as Cleveland, Detroit, Baltimore, St. Louis, Minneapolis, and Pittsburgh—to name just a few representative communities—enjoy reputations in federation, synagogue, and Jewish Community Center circles as highly organized, well-functioning, and professionally desirable Jewish communities. These communities are smaller, more stable, and of older vintage than such places as Denver, Phoenix, or, most recently, North Broward County, Florida.

In light of these patterns, it stands to reason that communities should also vary in terms of per capita participation in Israel experience youth programs. Accordingly, this study seeks to begin to understand geographic variation in participation in Israel experience programs, those short-term programs that take place during the summer months. Excluded from consideration are individual or family tours, long-term programs (more than ten weeks), or those occurring outside the summer. This study addresses the following related questions:

- To what extent do per capita participation rates vary across the United States? That is, which communities produce higher "yields" of participation, and which are least productive in terms of youngsters traveling to Israel in organized programs?
- Why do some communities generate far more Israel experience participants than others?
- To what extent do certain programs recruit more successfully in certain regions than in others—and why?

DATA AND METHODS

The data for this study derive from several sources. At the core is a roster of home zip codes of Israel experience participants in 1991 and 1992, gathered in a survey of program directors conducted by Jay Levenberg and Peter Geffen for the CRB Foundation. Professional leaders from 28 of the larger short-term Israel experience program sponsors (some of whom run several programs) supplied their participants' addresses including zip codes. The responding agencies included all the major Zionist and synagogue youth movement programs, several locally sponsored programs, and a few special interest programs, such as Bronfman Fellows and Nesiya. (Although the Alexander Muss High School program lasts for seven weeks, and therefore does not qualify as a short-term summer program, it does compete in the same market as the short-term programs. Excluding this program would cause a significant drop in participation levels in the Miami-South Florida area, where about half of the Muss students reside.)

Table 1 reports levels of participation for 25 national and local programs and a few smaller ones collected under the rubric "other." In 1991, these programs reported 2470 participants; in 1992, the comparable figure rose to 4404, for a total of 6874 in

Israel summer programs were included in the 28 programs surveyed by the CRB Foundation staff in 1991 and 1992. The most significant programs not included in the 1991 and 1992 surveys include the university summer courses, the Gadna paramilitary programs, a small number of yeshivahs, and several private sector initiatives, as well as multinational programs where North Americans make up only a minority of participants. Other exclusions bear mentioning. By focusing on short-term, summer programs, this study overlooks programs that serve predominantly Orthodox clientele. Orthodox youth—who have very high rates of travel and study in Israel—tend to participate in long-term programs, such as a year of yeshivah study. This tendency diminishes the level of participation in short-term programs in those areas where Orthodox Jews are highly concentrated, such as parts of New York. This consideration must be borne in mind when examining the results presented below.

This study is built around a key statistic: per capita rates of participation by community—the number of youngsters who attended summer programs per 1,000 Jews aged 14-21. The number of students participating in Israel experience programs was taken from the CRB Foundation geo-coded survey; that is, the analysis used the participants' zip codes to count the number of participants in 32 regions. The 1993 *American Jewish Year Book* provided the estimates of each region's Jewish populations. These figures were multiplied by the fraction of the population aged 14-21 as estimated from published Jewish population studies conducted during the 1980s and 1990s, or from the 1990 National Jewish Population Survey (NJPS) itself, where published studies were unavailable.

A recent national survey of American Jewish parents and teenagers supported by the Joint Authority for Jewish-Zionist Education found that the $50,000 income level represents a significant threshold in participation in Israel experience youth programs. Families above that level are far more likely to send their youngsters on these programs than those earning less than $50,000. Accordingly, this analysis measures the financial capability of the local Jewish populations in terms of the percentage of households reporting incomes of at least $50,000. The NJPS and several local studies provided these figures for much of the country, and the recently conducted New York Jewish Population Study (Horowitz, 1993) supplied income estimates within the New York metropolitan area. For some smaller communities, the small number of NJPS cases makes the data unreliable. Recognizing the approximate nature of these data, the analysis avoided the fallacy of excessive precision and simply distinguished among three broad categories of income (high, moderate, and low), as determined by the proportion of families with incomes of at least $50,000.

The levels of synagogue affiliation were taken from published recent Jewish community surveys where available or the NJPS where they were not available. This too allowed for division of the 27 regions into three broad categories.

The analysis also examined the impact of other community-wide aggregate data on levels of Israel experience participation. These include the proportion of Orthodox, Conservative, and Reform, as well as the proportion of mixed married couples, again using local studies where possible or the NJPS where local studies were unavailable. These variables have an insignificant influence upon per capita Israel experience participation, once we control for population size, income, and synagogue affiliation.

FINDINGS

Table 2 provides the detailed raw data on program participation by community for 1991 and 1992. Areas with the largest shares of participants are Long Island (9%), Northern New Jersey (8%), Miami-South Florida (7%), Los Angeles (7%), Philadelphia (5%), and Chicago (5%). These six areas are home to over 40% of Israel pro-

group, with a total population of 19,000 Jews aged 14 to 21, supplied over 600 teen participants in the responding Israel experience programs. The latter group, with a total population of nearly 180,000 young Jews, supplied just 1200 participants. Comparing the two groups of communities, the latter—with nine times as many youngsters—produced only twice as many teenagers as the highest performing communities. On a per capita basis, the very high-yield communities outperformed the very low-yield communities by a factor of over four to one.

In other words, a Jewish teenager living in places like Westchester or Baltimore had a four times greater chance of going on an Israel experience program than his or her counterpart living in the four outer boroughs of New York City (not Manhattan), Los Angeles, or the Boston area.

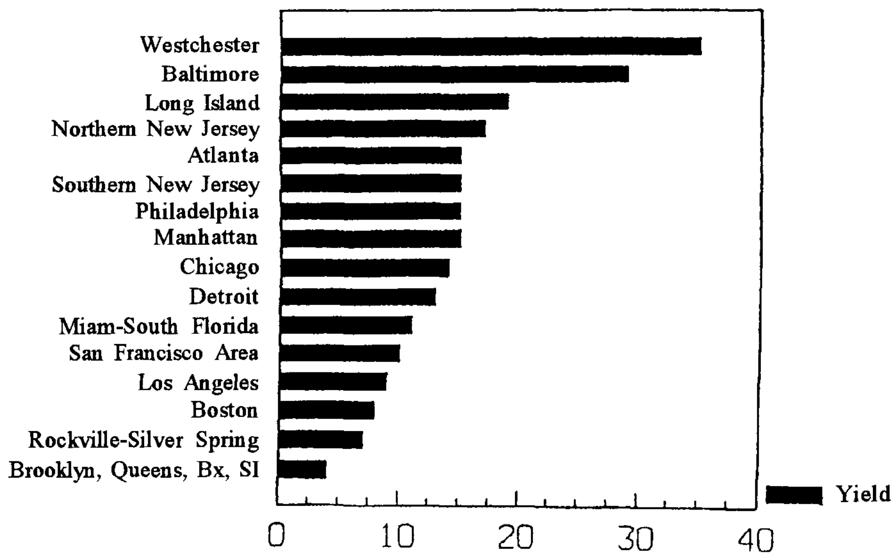
Accounting for the Variations

Why are some communities so much more productive than others in recruiting Israel experience participants? To some extent, local peculiarities may explain some of the variation. However, the analysis demonstrates clear patterns of relationships between the per capita yield in program participation and certain community-level factors. In particular, the analysis uncovered three critical variables that go a long way to explaining inter-regional variation in yields: (1) population size, (2) income levels, and (3) synagogue affiliation rates.

That is, yields are higher in communities with relatively smaller Jewish populations, higher incomes, and higher rates of synagogue affiliation. The analysis divided communities into high, moderate, and low levels on each of these variables and found that, on each of these three variables, the difference in yields between communities with the high and low rankings is on the order of roughly 2:1. For example, communities with high rankings on income reported average yields about double those with low rankings on income. The same can be said for synagogue affiliation rates, and in reverse for population size.

The explanation for the impact of income is rather straightforward. Wealthier Jews are more able to contemplate spending

Figure 1. Yield (number of participants per 1,000 local Jews, aged 14-21) in 1991 and 1992 for selected Jewish communities.



Muss High School was founded by Miami-based individuals. There are no real surprises here. The key point is that recruitment for Israel experience programs conforms to larger patterns of institutional affiliation. Jewish communal variations influence both the total number of participants, as well as those attracted to specific programs.

IMPLICATIONS

With respect to the objective of expanding the number of Israel experience participants, these results point—albeit not always clearly—to some critical analytical and policy implications.

First, they reinforce the observation that American Jewish communities vary widely in their overall cohesiveness and in terms of specific dimensions, be they Israel experience participation, synagogue affiliation, intermarriage, or philanthropic behavior. Just as Canadian Jewry has been shown to differ sharply from American Jewry (Cohen, 1993) and New York Jewry has been shown to differ markedly from Jews in the rest of the country, this research underscores the diversity of an American Jewish population numbering close to six million.

Second, specifically with respect to marketing the Israel experience, the results suggest that standards for success and expectations need to take the community factor into account. The variations among communities are both wide and predictable based on just a few key indicators—size, income, and synagogue affiliation. At one extreme are smaller, wealthier, and more highly affiliated communities with a history of high rates of participation; at the other extreme are larger, poorer, and less affiliated communities with a history of low rates of participation. Expectations need to take note of prior Israel participation, size, wealth, and affiliation. A certain per capita level of participation could be judged a success in one sort of community and a dismal failure in another community. To draw an imperfect analogy, a Democratic presidential candidate who fails to carry Massachusetts easily or a Republican who squeaks by in Utah is certainly destined to go down to defeat.

Third, and most critically, the results have implications for which communities should be targeted for special Israel program recruitment efforts. Yet, here, the precise implications are more murky. We know which communities specifically and which attributes generally are associated with higher (or lower) rates of Israel experience participation. Assuming that we divide the country into thirds—that is, into high-yield, moderate-yield, and low-yield markets—which market demands the most attention? Which most warrants the expenditure of limited financial and personnel resources?

An argument in favor of low-yield markets, such as Boston or Los Angeles, would emphasize that these are the areas with the largest number of youngsters who are currently unlikely to participate in Israel programs. The field here is the most wide open. The moral necessity of providing the Israel option is the most pronounced.

The argument for the moderate-yield markets, such as Chicago or Philadelphia, resembles that made on behalf of triage, be it in a Mobile Army Surgical Hospital or in other contexts. Thus, the high-yield markets—the argument goes—are succeeding adequately without special assistance. The low-yield markets are low yield for good reason: they lack the appropriate size, affluence, or affiliation patterns to make good use of external assistance. By this logic, the moderate-yield markets are "just right." Unlike the high-yield markets, they have a distance to travel; unlike the low-yield markets, the communities are sufficiently fertile to respond to targeted assistance.

The argument for focusing on high-yield localities, such as Baltimore or Westchester, draws upon that made for the moderate-yield markets. The key consideration here is that the high-yield markets are far from saturated. Even in high-yield environments, the vast majority of Jewish young-