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Framing Religious Conflict: Popular Israeli Discourse on Religion and State

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The role of religion in Israeli public life is hotly contested in the political and legal arenas, and conflicts over religious issues receive a great deal of media coverage. Recurrent news reports and commentary refer to the growing number of Israelis marrying abroad or choosing to live out of wedlock to avoid the state religious establishment, new immigrants, and others attempting to convert to Judaism but unable to satisfy strict rabbinic requirements, and legal clashes over official recognition of lifecycle rituals conducted by non-Orthodox rabbis. The media also cover conflicts over public observance of Sabbath and holidays (mandatory store closings and curtailment of public transportation), military exemptions for

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ultra-Orthodox yeshiva students, and public funding for religious institutions.

Many scholars of Israeli politics and society have portrayed conflicts over the role of religion in public life as increasingly strident, characterized by extreme positions, and uncompromising. Baruch Kimmerling has argued that declining Ashkenazi secular hegemony has spurred a *kulturkampf* between religious, traditional, and secular sectors of Israeli Jewish society.[1] Asher Cohen and Bernard Susser claimed that consociational arrangements that once mediated religious conflict have weakened and they predicted an "unprecedented collision" over the role of religion in the Israeli state.[2] Eva Etzioni-Halevy described increasing cultural and social segregation between religious and secular Israelis and warned of the potential "break up" of the country.[3] Seemingly supporting these assessments, the United States Department of State's 2009 report on religious freedom around the world noted that "animosity between secular and religious Jews continued during the reporting period. In particular, members of Orthodox Jewish groups treated non-Orthodox Jews with manifestations of discrimination and intolerance."[4]

In contrast, studies of Israeli public opinion about issues of religion and state suggest a more complex picture. On the one hand, religious and non-religious Israeli Jews do indeed express sharply divergent opinions regarding religious regulation of public life. Religious Jews tend to support religion-based regulation of public spaces, such as restrictions regarding commerce and transportation on the Sabbath, and rabbinic supervision of marriage, conversion,

1. Baruch Kimmerling, "Between Hegemony and Dormant *Kulturkampf* in Israel," *Israel Affairs* 4, no. 3–4 (1998): 49–72; Baruch Kimmerling, *The Invention and Decline of Israeliness* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001).

2. Asher Cohen and Bernard Susser, *Israel and the Politics of Jewish Identity: The Secular-Religious Impasse* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000).

3. Eva Etzioni-Halevy, *The Divided People: Can Israel's Breakup Be Stopped?* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2002). See also Jerold Auerbach, *Are We One? Jewish Identity in the United States and Israel* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2001); Noah J. Efron, *Real Jews: Secular Versus Ultra Orthodox and the Struggle for Jewish Identity in Israel* (New York: Basic Books, 2003); David Newman, "From Hitnachalut to Hitnatkut: The Impact of Gush Emunim and the Settlement Movement on Israeli Politics and Society," *Israel Studies* 10, no. 3 (2005): 192–224; and Chaim I. Waxman, "Religion in the Israeli Public Square," *Jews in Israel: Contemporary Social and Cultural Patterns*, ed. Uzi Rebhun and Chaim I. Waxman (Hanover: Brandeis University Press, 2004), 221–42.

4. Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, International Religious Freedom Report 2009. Washington: United States Department of State (The United States http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/irf/2009/127349.htm, accessed April 2, 2010).

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and divorce. Non-religious Jews tend to oppose such regulation.[5] At the same time, national surveys indicate that a large majority cutting across the two camps endorses the Jewish character of the state and supports compromises that would ameliorate religious conflicts.[6]

To further understand how Israelis respond to religious conflicts fought in the public arena by political elites, the present study examines the discourses of participants in a sample of focus group discussions. We begin by identifying the rival frames that organize the public (mass media) discourse on the role of religion in Israeli society. Next, we examine how focus groups of religious and non-religious Israeli Jews responded to the public debate. We find that religious and non-religious participants expressed substantial interest in and concern about religious conflicts and tended to favor the frames associated with their own particular side in the public arena. However, participants also occasionally expressed frames and values associated with the opposing side and solidarity with its members. We conclude by exploring the implications of our findings for understanding the dynamics of religious conflict in Israeli society, and by comparing the Israeli case to that of the United States.

Religious Conflict in the Public Discourse

This study adopts a constructionist approach to the analysis of media discourse and public opinion formation.[7] According to this approach, mass media comprise the modern public sphere by

5. Shlomit Levy, Hanna Levinsohn, and Elihu Katz, "The Many Faces of Jewishness in Israel," *Jews in Israel: Contemporary Social and Cultural Patterns*, ed. Uzi Rebhun and Chaim I. Waxman (Hanover: Brandeis University Press, 2004), 265–84.

6. Eliezer Ben-Rafael, "The Faces of Religiosity in Israel: Cleavages or Continuum?" *Israel Studies* 13, no. 3 (2008): 89–103; Yael Hadar and Naomi Himeyn-Raisch, *Who Are We? National Identity in the State of Israel* (Jerusalem: Israel Democracy Institute, 2008); Levy et al., "The Many Faces of Jewishness in Israel," 265–84; Aviezer Ravitzky, *Religious and Secular Jews in Israel: A Kulturkampf?* (Jerusalem: Israel Democracy Institute, 2000).

7. Myra M. Ferree, William A. Gamson, Jurgen Gerhards, and Dieter Rucht, *Shaping Abortion Discourse: Democracy and the Public Sphere in Germany and the United States* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002); William A. Gamson, *Talking Politics* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992); Donileen R. Loseke, *Thinking about Social Problems* (New York: Aldine de Gruyter, 2003); Gale Miller and James Holstein, *Challenges and Choices: Constructionist Perspectives on Social Problems* (New York: Aldine de Gruyter, 2003); Jonathan Potter and Margaret Wetherell, *Discourse and Social Psychology* (Newbury Park: Sage, 1987); Theodore Sasson, *Crime Talk: How Citizens Construct a Social Problem* (New York: Aldine de Gruyter, 1995).

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providing a platform for symbolic contests over issues and problems. Frame sponsors, including public officials, public intellectuals, lobbyists, and grass roots activists, vie with one another to promote particular issues and advance their preferred interpretive frameworks. They employ slogans, metaphors, historical examples, and other symbols to condense and convey their preferred interpretations of the issue at hand. "Interpreting reality means molding otherwise sporadic occurrences into narrative interpretive frameworks, based on known symbolic sets which are reanimated in the process of their employment."[8]

For their part, members of the general public draw on media frames together with other kinds of ideational resources (e.g., experiential knowledge, popular wisdom) to make sense of political issues. By invoking frames, "human beings can place daily encounters in perspective; they can impose meaning on experiences that emerge with each new day."[9] By selecting and combining ideational resources in distinctive ways, they express opinions that sometimes comport with, and sometimes confound, the comparatively neat categories evident in the media discourse.

Employing the constructionist approach, we first examined a sample of newspaper opinion columns, magazine articles, and political campaign advertisements to identify the rival frames that organize political debate over the role of religion in Israeli public life.[10] Israeli mass media, like media in other countries, tend to sensationalize conflict, heightening the significance of frames.[11] We discerned three frames that organize most of the discourse on the issue of religion and state. Table 1 provides a schematic overview of the frames and their constituent elements. In this section, we

8. Yaacov Yadgar, "The Media and the Israeli Public Sphere: Reflections in the Wake of the Rabin Assassination," *Journal of Modern Jewish Studies* 1, no. 2 (2002): 156. For an additional example of the constructionist method applied to the study of Israeli media and popular discourse, see William A. Gamson and Hanna Herzog, "Living with Contradictions: The Taken-for-Granted in Israeli Political Discourse," *Political Psychology* 20, no. 2 (1999): 247–66.

9. Karen A. Cerulo, "Establishing a Sociology of Culture and Cognition," *Culture in Mind: Toward a Sociology of Culture and Cognition*, ed. Karen A. Cerulo (New York: Routledge, 2002), 1–12.

10. Opinion columns were sampled from two national Hebrew daily newspapers, *Yedioth Achronot* and *Haaretz*, as well as the leading national religious newspaper, *HaTzofeh*. Opinion columns were sampled during "critical discourse moments" (see Gamson, *Talking Politics*, 1992) related to the issue of religious conflict, including release of the Tal Commission Report regarding military exemptions for yeshiva students (April 2000), the national election (February 2001), and the Gaza disengagement (August 2005), as well as during the period of field research (2004–2006).

11. Gadi Wolfsfeld, *Media and Political Conflict: News from the Middle East* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

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Table 1 Framing religious conflict

Frames	Sponsor	At issue	Key claim	Solutions (e.g.)	Symbols (e.g.)	Core value
Religious coercion	Non-religious	Religious laws affecting the public and private realms	The religious establishment seeks to impose religious lifestyle on all	Separate religion and state. Allow civil and Reform weddings. Abolish Orthodox state-rabbinate	"Live and let live"; "Each according to his/her faith"; "There is more than one way to be Jewish"	Individual choice
Assimilation	Religious	The Jewish character of the state	Israel is losing its distinctive Jewish character and becoming like all other Western nations	Increase Jewish education in the public state schools. Enforce laws regarding preservation of Saturday as a Jewish Sabbath	"Hebrew-speaking gentiles"; "Tel Aviv (secular culture) vs. Jerusalem"; "Nation like all other nations"	Jewish distinctiveness
Parasitism	Non-religious	Inequitable distribution of benefits and obligations	Ultra-Orthodox receive financial benefits without contributing. They unfairly shirk military service	Ultra-Orthodox men should be drafted to the military and encouraged to join the labor market	Draft exemptions. Ignoring Memorial and Independence days. Stipends for religious study and for Yeshivas	Social equality

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describe the frames and illustrate our descriptions with extracts from political advertisements aired on national television during the 1999 and 2003 Israeli parliamentary elections.

Religious Coercion frames conflict as a result of efforts by the religious establishment to impose a religious lifestyle on the general Jewish public. Proponents of the frame argue that as citizens of a modern, western democracy, Israelis should be free in their choices about marriage ceremonies, keeping kosher, shopping, traveling, and enjoying entertainment on the Sabbath. The frame as a whole is evoked by slogans such as "live and let live" and "a person should live according to his beliefs." The most prominent sponsor of this frame in the public discourse was Tommy Lapid, the former leader of the secularist Shinui party [Hebrew: Change]. The following illustration is taken from a Shinui campaign advertisement. Note that Lapid's name means "torch" in Hebrew.

> *Image: Six horizontal rows of black hats traditionally worn by ultra-Orthodox Jews, mostly replaced by a variety of colored hats.*
> *Voice: "There is a lapid [torch] for change."*
> *Cut to picture of Tommy Lapid, head of the Shinui party, sitting at a desk.*
> Lapid: "Are we out of our minds? In a normal state, political leaders ... don't tell you what you can eat and cannot eat. In a normal state, they don't tell you in what neighborhood you can travel [on the Sabbath]. In a normal state, they don't tell you if you are allowed to shop on the Sabbath. In a normal state, people don't curse the Supreme Court and if they do, they go to jail even if they are a rabbi. In a normal state, they have public transportation on all days of the week ... [and] they don't tell you who you can marry, when, how, or where. We have to stop this craziness. And it is the ultra-Orthodox who show that a small, determined group can make a difference. So don't give up ... Vote Shinui!"

In contrast, *Assimilation* frames conflict as a result of the secularization of Israeli society. The argument is that efforts to establish civil marriage, non-Orthodox conversion, and commerce on the Sabbath, weaken the state's Jewish character and threaten the unity of the Jewish people. The frame is evoked rhetorically by the slogan "a nation like all other nations" and the epithet "Hebrew-speaking gentiles" to pejoratively describe secular Israelis. The frame is illustrated by a National Religious Party televised election ad:

> *Image: A man is dancing in front of other dancers in a discotheque.*
> *Voice: The dancer's voice overtakes the background song.*
> Male dancer, singing: "Born free—to do what I want, any old time."
> *Dancer stops to talk to the viewers while the others continue dancing in the background.*
> Dancer: "Free, my brother, free. Free of Judaism, free of values. Conversion? Free! Marriage? How many times ... once, twice, three, four times?

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> In Cyprus? Free! Am [Hebrew for People], am, am, what's an am? Ah! Amsterdam! [implying drugs], free, because I'm free!"

The frame *Parasitism* emphasizes the way that ultra-Orthodox Jews take advantage of Israeli society and the resultant inequity. Ultra-Orthodox men, according to this frame, avoid military service and gainful employment and instead draw support from the state and secular Israelis. The frame is evoked rhetorically by anecdotes of backroom deals struck by ultra-Orthodox politicians to secure public funding for their sectarian educational institutions. The primary sponsors of this frame include the leaders of the avowedly secular parties, including Shinui and Meretz. The frame is illustrated by the following campaign ad of the leftist party, Meretz:

> *Image: Man in white shirt and tie is dangling in the air while holding on to a bar over his head.*
> Voice: "Give them military exemptions." Man: "Military duty, holding on."
> Voice: "Give them tax benefits." Man [as he drops down further, indicating the additional burden]: "Income tax, holding on."
> Voice: "Give them social security benefits." Man [slipping lower]: "Social [benefits], holding on . . ."
> Voice: "Give them tuition." Man [falling lower and struggling]: "Tuition, holding on."
> Voice: "Give to the ultra-Orthodox. Give to the fictitious [religious] entities that don't exist, but they take your money to pay for them. Give to the yeshivas and the yeshiva students . . .."
> *Man finally falls down.*
> Voice: "Wait, I was just beginning my list."

Focus Group Discussions

To learn how Jewish Israelis[12] relate to the debate over religion in public life, we convened a large number of focus group discussions. Our quota-based sampling frame sought broad representation of secular, traditionalist, and Orthodox Jewish Israelis, including both Ashkenazim (Jews of European origin) and Mizrachim (Jews of Middle Eastern origin).[13] Because the groups were composed of naturally occurring peer groups, they tended to be

12. Jewish Israelis comprise about three-quarters of the total population. Most Israelis who are not Jewish are either Muslim or Christian Arabs and their religious affairs and handled by separate religious authorities. Future research might examine the parallel question of how non-Jewish Israelis address the relationship between religion and state.

13. Approximately 5 percent of the Israeli Jewish public identify themselves, religiously, as ultra-Orthodox, 12 percent as Orthodox (also identified as "national religious"), 35 percent as traditional, 45 percent as non-religious-secular, and five percent as anti-religious-secular. See Levy et al., "The Many Faces of Jewishness in Israel," 265–84.

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homogenous in terms of the religious and ethnic identities of their members. Overall, we conducted thirty-five focus group discussions. In the present paper, we mostly categorize the groups according to the Hebrew convention: “religious” (*dati*) and “non-religious” (*lo-dati*). The latter category includes all non-Orthodox Jewish identities including traditionalist (*masorti*) and secular (*hiloni*).[14] Overall, the sample included thirteen religious groups (nine Ashkenazi and four Mizrachi) and twenty-two non-religious groups (eleven Ashkenazi and eleven Mizrachi). Ultra-Orthodox Jews (*haredi*) and non-Jewish Israelis were not the focus of our analysis and were not included in the discussion groups. Most discussions were held in the center of Israel (Tel Aviv and its suburbs) during the 2004–2006 period. Several of the Mizrachi groups were held in a development town located on the periphery of the urban center. Four of the religious groups were held in a West Bank settlement. In most cases, focus groups included five to eight participants. In all, 159 individuals participated in the focus group discussions.

Discussion participants completed a brief background questionnaire during the interview session. Analysis of their voting patterns in the preceding parliamentary elections suggests a fairly close match to the Jewish Israeli populations from which they were sampled. Table 2 compares the distribution of votes in the study sample (among the 87 percent who both voted and responded to the question) with the Israeli Jewish public as a whole. The study sample overrepresents supporters of the National Religious Party, a fact that reflects our decision to conduct a roughly equal number of religious and non-religious discussion groups. The remaining distributions are quite close to the Jewish Israeli population as a whole. The table does not include the parties of the ultra-Orthodox and Arab-Israeli sectors, as those parties did not receive more than a few votes from members of the study sample.

The groups were recruited and moderated by either one of the principal investigators or by a member of a trained staff of field

14. The Ashkenazi Jews in our sample tended to identify as either religious or secular, whereas the Mizrachi Jews tended to identify as religious, traditionalist, or secular. Mizrachi Jews are much more likely than Ashkenazi Jews to identify as traditionalists [see Yaacov Yadgar and Charles S. Liebman, “Beyond the Religious-Secular Dichotomy: Masortim in Israel,” *Religion or Ethnicity? Jewish Identities in Evolution*, ed. Zvi Gitelman (Rutgers: Rutgers University Press, 2009), 171–92]. However, in relation to most of the issues examined in this paper, the central cleavage in our data is between the religious, on the one hand, and the secularists and traditionalists on the other. We therefore report our findings mostly in terms of religious and non-religious, rather than in terms of religious, traditionalist, and secularist. The exception concerns discourse on Reform and Conservative Judaism in Israel, as discussed later.

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Table 2 Vote by party, 2003 national election and study sample

	Actual % 2003	Study sample %
Likud (Center-Right)	30	31
Labor (Center-Left)	15	20
National Religious Party	4	17
Shas (Mizrachi-religious)	8	7
Shinui (Secularist)	12	9
Meretz (Leftist)	5	9
National Union (Rightist)	5	3

researchers (all graduate students in the social sciences). The discussion of religious conflicts among Jews began with a general, open-ended question: "What are the religious conflicts among Jews in Israel? How serious are those conflicts and what if anything, can be done about them?" After participants responded to the general question and explored it in discussion, they were asked to respond to two alternative media frames on the topic of religious conflict.[15] They were then asked a follow-up question regarding the issue of legal recognition of non-Orthodox (i.e., Reform and Conservative) streams of Judaism.[16] The discussions were conducted and transcribed in Hebrew; translations that appear in the text are by the authors and names of discussion participants are pseudonyms.

Religious Conflict in Focus Group Discourse

The open-ended question that framed the discussion asked participants to identify religious conflicts among Jews. The participants were clearly very familiar with these issues. They readily identified the conflicts that dominate the media discourse, and their

15. Participants were asked to respond to the following statements, reflecting alternative frames on religious conflict:

(a) "The main reason for the conflict is that the Orthodox try to impose their own rules upon all the rest of us. Israel must follow the lead of other Western democracies and draw a clear line between synagogue and state."
(b) "The main reason for the conflict is that secular Jews want Israel to be like the United States, England, or Germany. They have no commitment to preserving the Jewish character of the state."

16. "Leaders in the Israeli Conservative and Reform movements complain that Israel's recognition of only Orthodox weddings, conversions, and divorces amounts to religious discrimination against non-Orthodox Jews. The country's Orthodox authorities counter that recognizing non-Orthodox weddings, conversions, and divorces will lead to a split in the Jewish people. In your view, how serious a problem is this, and what if anything should be done about it?"

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responses frequently cited issues, themes, and slogans from the media discourse. Moreover, like scholars of Israeli political conflict and public opinion, they were roughly divided over their estimation of the severity of conflicts over religion and state. Some participants described conflicts between Jews as typically relating to technical issues that are easily managed: "It's about small things . . . whether to close this or that road on the Sabbath, but all things considered, we get along." Others, however, declared that were it not for the conflict with the Palestinians, religious and secular Jews would wage a civil war against one another.

The discussion participants differed systematically in their responses to the public discourse on the topic. The religious groups mainly invoked and endorsed *Assimilation*, and the non-religious groups mainly invoked and endorsed *Religious Coercion* and *Parasitism*. However, the patterns were far from absolute, with participants in all of the groups occasionally invoking or indicating support for frames associated with the opposing camp, and non-religious groups dividing along ethnic (Ashkenazi, Mizrachi) lines in their discourse on the authenticity and legal standing of non-Orthodox movements. In the sections that follow, discourse on religious conflict in the religious and non-religious discussion groups is examined in greater detail.

Religious Groups

The religious groups invoked or endorsed *Assimilation* more than any other frame. In more than half of the religious groups, participants invoked the frame's claim that non-religious Jews wish to diminish or eradicate the Jewish character of the state. The following example is from a religious Mizrachi group:

> Sarah: If [Israel] wants to be like other countries, then that is impossible. Israel is . . . the Holy Land . . . There are restaurants where they eat pork and that are open on Shabbat and shopping malls [open on the Sabbath] and [the non-religious] are still trying to make a war with us? Why? They want the country to be like all other countries.
> David: Assimilation!
> Sarah: Assimilation! There won't be a state of Israel.
> David: There will be assimilation! The state won't survive if there is assimilation like in Germany . . . God forbid there should be such assimilation. We want to live in a Jewish state . . . If the secular want to go a separate way, then let them go, and the religious will go their own way. If they want to come closer to religion, welcome [and then] we have no problem. But to be a "free" [secular] country, no way! (Group 18)

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In the preceding extract, Sarah tacitly locates the state's Jewish character in public observance of the Sabbath and dietary laws. To the extent that secular Israelis oppose public regulation of such activities, she contends, they want Israel to be a "country like all other countries." If they have their way, Sarah and David agree, the result will be cultural "assimilation" and Israel will cease to exist as a Jewish state.

The following exchange, from a religious Ashkenazi group, further develops the core theme of *Assimilation*. The root cause of religious conflict, according to these discussion participants, is the desire of secular Israelis to escape their Jewish patrimony:

> Shula: The perception at the creation of the state was that we are aligning ourselves with the leaders of Israel throughout the generations, the Bible, and all those sorts of things, and today this has gone by the wayside, and much of the perception is that we are "a nation like all others," and [they want to] leave it at that.
> Moshe: [There are] already several generations . . . in the state that are cut off from the Torah . . . I think we are talking today about two communities that speak Hebrew, but each one speaks a different language and they don't really know what the other is saying.
> Shula: The question is, does the other side relate and have the desire to really define [Israel] as a Jewish state . . . I ask people about their secular orientation . . . how they are Jewish. The things they say relate to the Holocaust, or to the fact that they are living in Israel, or to the army. Now these declarations are not related to Judaism, but to being Israeli, which is perhaps part of Judaism . . . [but] this is a Judaism that cannot last for more than a generation or two.
> Yitzhak: Today, there is assimilation [abroad] with the *goyim* [gentiles] through intermarriage, and in Israel there is assimilation through disengagement from Jewish values. (Group 34)

In the preceding extract, Shula contends that secular Israelis have embraced a national identity that is focused on the Holocaust and army service. She claims that such an identity is not distinctively Jewish. Yitzhak then makes a play on the term "disengagement" which at the time of the discussion was part of the public discourse on the government's plan to withdraw (disengage) from the Gaza Strip—a move which Yitzhak regards as a repudiation of Jewish values (i.e., the value of settling the entire Land of Israel).

In several instances, religious discussion participants absolved those persons who are non-religious of personal culpability by describing them as "captured babes"—persons unknowingly brought up by their kidnappers as miscreants.[17] In fact, a rhetorical

17. Adam S. Ferziger, *Exclusion and Hierarchy: Orthodoxy, Nonobservance, and the Emergence of Modern Jewish Identity* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2005).

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maneuver evident in several religious groups was to accuse non-religious Jews of "secular coercion," in that they deny their children Jewish education. In harsher versions of the frame, secularists are depicted as disinterested in anything related to Judaism: "They do not even want the scent of Judaism" (Group 34). This latter claim was sometimes contested in those discussions in which it was expressed. In fact, it is noteworthy that *Assimilation* was a subject of debate in four religious groups, with some participants rejecting the frame's negative depictions of secular Jews.

Participants in all but one religious group also invoked *Assimilation* to repudiate non-Orthodox forms of Judaism: "To describe the Conservatives and especially the Reform as Jews—as people of Jewish faith—is ridiculous! They have created a separate religion for themselves" (Group 3). Orthodox respondents who indicated some sympathy for Reform programs were quickly challenged and generally backed down. Consider the following exchange that took place in an Ashkenazi group:

> Adina: I am not sure how that Judaism works, but the [Reform] synagogue in Tel Aviv . . . the very fact that it has Torah classes on Shabbat morning that are taught by religious people, and even if people go there by car—it is preferable to do that than to go to the beach . . . I don't agree that nothing is better than something.
> Tuvia: Legitimacy is dangerous. Just saying that it is legitimate to drive to a class on Shabbat is dangerous for Judaism.
> Zev: "Jews for Jesus" also cite verses from the Torah and everything. They sound like learned people and everything, but in the end it is *avodah zarah* [idolatry] . . . If you reach the wrong conclusion in the end, it is dangerous . . . Perhaps it is better to be a "captured babe" and uneducated than think "I'm ok, and I'm alright." (Group 3)

At this point the moderator noted that Adina signaled her acceptance of Zev's position by nodding her head in agreement and making a motion with her arms as if to say "you're right." This discussion illustrates the limited tolerance for alternate forms of Judaism other than traditional Orthodox Judaism. In other religious discussions, participants emphasized the high intermarriage rate of liberal Jews in the United States, and sometimes commented that the discussion itself had no great significance, since in any case, Reform Jews were assimilating into oblivion.

In short, the religious groups developed and deployed the *Assimilation* frame, decrying deterioration in the Jewish character of the public sphere and the values and traditional religious practices of non-religious Israelis. They employed many slogans and catch-phrases from the media discourse, including "nation like all others," a "free nation," and "Hebrew-speaking gentiles." Participants integrated these ideational resources with references to

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their own experiences, including, in the above quotations, Shula's account of her conversations with secular Israelis and Adina's experiential knowledge of Tel Aviv's Reform synagogue.

However, the discourse of the religious group members was hardly monolithic, and members of several religious groups expressed elements of *Religious Coercion* and/or affirmed its core claims against the Orthodox rabbinate when prompted. Invoking elements of the media discourse, they charged the official rabbinate with alienating secular Israelis through its corruption and inflexible rulings. One described the conduct of the official rabbinate as *hillul hashem* [desecration of God's name]. These individuals expressed opposition to "coercion" in favor of educational efforts to persuade the secular to adopt a more religious lifestyle. Drawing on their reservoir of popular wisdom, they also expressed the view that efforts to coerce non-religious Jews would "have the opposite effect" and cause them to reject Judaism. The following extract is from an Ashkenazi religious group:

> Revital: I am against [religious] coercion—it is a big part of the problem ... It is a terrible shame that a large portion of the secular [Jewish population], because of this "anti" [sentiment] created by coercion, that they don't have any clue [about Jewish tradition] and they don't have any basis or foundation of values. Not following [religious] commandments, they don't have roots, values, or heritage. They have nothing! And I blame the coercion for that, and the ultra-Orthodox are a large part of it. I think [coercion] creates the opposite [i.e., a boomerang effect]. And today, for that reason, the schools don't teach ... heritage and values. (Group 33)

Additionally, participants in a few of the religious discussion groups expressed a liberal orientation toward individual conduct, emphasizing that they were not interested in forcing other Jews to live religious lives. Such religious liberalism was typically expressed as part of a strategy for *kiruv* (educational, or what might be described as missionary activity, aimed at drawing secular Jews closer to religion).

> Miriam: I think that we have to find a way to bring people who believe in a different way closer [to Judaism] ... because we are losing them. We are causing them to hate the religious establishment and the whole framework of the rabbinate. (Group 2)

The argument embedded in Miriam's statement is that education is more effective in drawing people closer to religious Judaism than rulings issued by the state rabbinate, an institution perceived by the non-religious population to be antithetical to the needs of a modern society. The modern religious orientation of our respondents is in

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considerable contrast with the ultra-Orthodox character of the state rabbinate apparatus, and this rift surely affects perceptions. Indeed, in several discussion groups, individuals called for separating religion from state (two discussions) or for allowing civil marriage (one discussion): "Maybe the solution is to separate religion and state and then we will live our lives, and they will live their lives, and no one will coerce anyone" (Group 34). Such views were in the minority in the religious groups but indicative of more widespread discomfort with the notion that religious people seek to impose their beliefs on others who reject them.

Non-religious Groups

The non-religious groups invoked and/or endorsed *Religious Coercion* in nearly all of their discussions. The central theme in much of their discourse was the intolerable intrusion of the state's rabbinical courts on their rights as individuals to exercise choice with respect to religious behavior. The state has no right to impose religious restrictions on the citizens of a democracy, they argued. Consider the following two illustrations from a secular Ashkenazi group:

> Rachel: People should marry as they please. What's this nonsense that they're going to decide how and with whom I'm going to get married?
> Moderator: So that means that you do want the state of Israel to recognize weddings . . .
> Rachel: I don't want the state of Israel to recognize *any* wedding ceremonies. They should just provide [home] mortgages [to married couples] and that should be the end of it. . . . I don't see any reason why the state should authorize who I love. (Group 22)

In Rachel's view, the state has no business regulating the most intimate sphere of human affairs. Her sentiment is echoed in the following extract from a non-religious Mizrachi group:

> Yossi: I do believe that there is religious coercion in the state and I say that as a traditionalist [*masorti*], I am a person who does not eat *chametz* [leavened bread which is forbidden] on Passover, a person who fasts on Yom Kippur [the Day of Atonement], a person who, all things considered, is a believer. Still I think that people must live according to their own faith and that if people want to eat *chametz* on Passover, they should do so, and if they want to get married outside of the rabbinate, that's what they should do . . . We're talking about religious coercion . . . and there is no room for this kind of coercion. (Group 10)

The non-religious focus group participants stressed that, to quote Yossi, "each person should be able to live according to his own beliefs." A version of this slogan was expressed in over half of the non-religious discussion groups. Living according to one's own

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beliefs means not having to pretend to adhere to religious norms in order to satisfy edicts issued by the Orthodox controlled, state rabbinical establishment. Consider the following from another Mizrachi group:

> Devorah: Take, for example, weddings. [Women are] supposed to go to the *mikveh* [ritual bath, prior to the wedding night]. Now that's really a joke. I'm striking now at the heart of all of these issues of religion because it's an embarrassment that a girl should go to the *mivkeh* after five years of living with her boyfriend. It would be better if they eliminated the requirement because . . . you have to lie in order to obtain the marriage license, and you know that you're lying. (Group 26)

Devorah decries religious regulations that tacitly require secular Jews to lie about their personal lives and conduct: "Why because I'm secular should I have to live a lie for them?"

In addition to ideological opposition to what they regard as religious coercion, several participants in the non-religious groups complained about practical inconveniences and hardships, including closed shops and a lack of public transportation on the Sabbath. Consider the following extracts from Mizrachi discussion groups:

> Margalit: I'm not against religion in general, but [rabbinic authorities] who do nothing for the country shouldn't force it upon me. If I want to do my shopping on Shabbat then they should allow me that choice. They shouldn't choose for me. But I don't want to give up all of the holidays and our religious traditions, not at all. (Group 14)
>
> * * *
>
> Hannah: Everyone should be able to do what's comfortable. No one should be able to force anyone to be religious, like they're coming and saying to me that there won't be busses on Shabbat . . . They want to impose Shabbat on the whole country! (Group 23)

We did not prompt the discussion groups with the *Parasitism* frame.[18] Nevertheless, participants in half of the non-religious groups expressed the frame's core themes. In these exchanges, participants were sometimes careful to distinguish between the Orthodox national religious population, about whom they reported no qualms, and ultra-Orthodox Jews. Participants resented the ultra-Orthodox because of that group's dependency on public welfare and failure to send their young men to the army. Consider the following extract from a Mizrachi group:

18. The discussions covered many topics and, as a consequence, we limited the number of questions and prompts.

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> Shoshana: They should be like everyone else; they should work and have respect for themselves. They can be religious but they should get up and work and serve in the army; they should be soldiers like everyone else. The country is also your country! You can't remain apart. Who will protect you if not the soldiers?
> Dina: They [claim that they] are "soldiers of God!" They claim that it is by *their* merit that there is a state.
> Batya: And why should our children serve and not theirs?
> Shoshana: My son needs to go guard some religious guy so he can go pray? To risk his life [for him]? Where is their sense of responsibility?
> Dina: [Ironically] They are guarding the country with their prayers!
> Shoshana: They can pray and also work!
> Batya: Torah and work. It's also written in the Torah, Torah and work. (Group 26)

The key issue in this particular discussion is equity: "They" take without contributing while "we" do our fair share but receive less than we deserve. The argument made by the religious establishment that commitment to religious study constitutes a contribution to the state that is as important as actual military service is seen to be hypocritical. The charge of religious hypocrisy, evident in Batya's final comment, is also found in additional discussions. "In Judaism, it is clear [according to the Bible] which men do not need to go to the army," explained a participant in another discussion, continuing: "One who has built a house and not yet lived in it, one who has married and not yet consummated the marriage, and so forth; those are the ones who don't go to the army. All the rest have to serve in the army" (Group 14).

In short, like their religious counterparts, participants in the non-religious groups strongly embraced the frames sponsored by secularists in the public discourse. They borrowed heavily from the arguments, slogans, and catchphrases associated with the media frames *Religious Coercion* and *Parasitism*. They also introduced alternative sources of knowledge, including experiential knowledge (e.g., friends having to lie in order to receive marriage licenses) and religious discourses (e.g., biblical regulations regarding military duty). By combining components of media discourse with alternative sources of knowledge, the non-religious develop strong arguments against the prevailing religious regulatory framework and system of subsidies for the ultra-Orthodox.

However, in a fashion that mirrors their religious counterparts, participants in the non-religious groups also expressed limited support for the frame associated with the opposing camp. Indications of support for *Assimilation* took several forms. First, speakers in several non-religious groups expressed the main component of *Assimilation*, namely, the allegation that Israel is slowly losing its distinctive Jewish character.

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> Yossi: The core of the problem is coercion, not the ideas. I am in favor of religious values, and I'd even support adding two more years of Bible study in the schools; the country should preserve its Jewish character, and that's something that's rapidly disappearing, and it's missing. But don't turn it into coercion. (Group 11)

Second, in virtually all of the non-religious groups, speakers emphatically rejected the view that non-religious Jews oppose the Jewish character of the state. To the limited extent they feel disdain for Judaism, they explained, the cause is the oppressive behavior of the state's official rabbinical establishment. The following extract is from an Ashkenazi group.

> Gidon: One of the most damaging things the Orthodox did is to appropriate religion from the rest of us, to take ownership of [Jewish] religion... It's now black and white here, either you are Orthodox or you are nothing, and to my mind that doesn't enable one to grasp Judaism in a modern way... I am talking about their desire to create a *halachic* [religious law] state here, at least with respect to personal status matters [e.g., marriage, divorce, conversion]. They want there to be a *halachic* state, and I say that it is this radicalism that is truly leading to a split [in the Jewish people] and to the estrangement of young, secular people from Jewish culture, and that's what hurts me because it is very difficult to attract them to any kind of roots. I do believe that even a secular person needs cultural roots. (Group 8)

The claims of some religious respondents notwithstanding, almost all of the non-religious discussion participants stressed that they too want to preserve Israel's distinctive Jewish character. However, in their view, Israel's Jewish character should be preserved voluntarily, by religiously motivated individuals, as well as through state symbols (e.g., the national anthem and the flag), Bible instruction in public schools, and the Jewish holiday calendar. Consider the following statements from Ashkenazi and Mizrachi discussion groups:

> Yoram: I am in favor of preserving the Jewish character of the state.
> Amir: But not to be fanatical about it!
> Yoram: Not to be fanatical.
> Vered: Not by coercion.
> Yoram: There will always be those who don't fast on Yom Kippur and don't eat kosher on Passover, and that's okay by me. But we need to have the holidays, and we need to maintain the traditions; we are Jews and that is what unifies us. (Group 15)
>
> ***
>
> Guy: I believe that the problem begins with the fact that there has arisen here a mentality that religion should be mixed with politics, and that introduces the very problematic matter of coercion... I believe that it is very important that there should be a Jewish character here... I think

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> it's a good thing that there is Jewish marriage, and that divorce and burial are Jewish... I could have gotten married in Cyprus and returned the next day, but the thought never occurred to me.... On Friday nights, we prepare the table and light candles. Our son wears a *kippa* [head covering] and blesses the wine and [my wife] lights the [Shabbat] candles. I am absolutely not religious, but we go to the synagogue on Holiday evenings, and it's very nice, and we go to hear the reading of the *megilla* [a religious scroll, read on the festival of Purim], because I believe it is important to pass along some tradition to children. (Group 11)

As illustrated in the preceding extracts, many non-religious participants drew on their experiential knowledge to describe Jewish holidays, traditions, and practices as valuable sources of meaning, continuity, and social solidarity, even as they insisted upon the right to selectively choose the rituals and symbols they will observe and practice.

Ethnic Differences in Non-religious Groups

Participants in the non-religious discussion groups divided largely by ethnicity in their response to the question regarding non-Orthodox streams of Judaism.[19] The Ashkenazi secularists generally expressed support for the non-Orthodox denominations, employing a variant of the *Religious Coercion* frame. They often described liberal Judaism as a legitimate religious alternative that could potentially be attractive for non-religious Israelis. They also argued that the absence of accessible, liberal alternatives discourages religious participation among Israelis. For example, according to one participant, "the Conservative and Reform movements ... are well suited to the 2000s, insofar as they provide a solution for many people who do indeed want religion but without religious coercion." Similarly, another Ashkenazi secularist mentions the experiences of her relatives in the United States:

> Rachel: I have a large family in the United States, and most of the cousins are married to girls who converted through the Reform movement, and I must tell you that they are more Jewish—they represent Judaism much better than I do! And as far as I'm concerned, it's a travesty that they're not considered [by the Israeli Orthodox rabbinate] to be Jews... That one stream of Judaism [i.e., Orthodox Judaism] determines that there is only one way to live a Jewish life, that doesn't mean that it has the right to determine the correct way to live a Jewish life. Maybe there are other ways—other movements that understand and interpret Judaism differently? And if the religion... causes them to feel a connection to... tradition, to the Land of Israel, then... it doesn't matter if it is characterized by a particular form. (Group 8)

19. See fn. 14.

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In contrast, the non-religious Mizrachi groups sounded much like their religious counterparts. Mizrachi discussion participants, most of whom also defined their religious orientation as "traditional," tended to dismiss the non-Orthodox movements as inauthentic. Consider the following extract, in which a Mizrachi participant integrates the *Assimilation* frame's emphasis on the liberal movements' threat to Jewish unity with a bit of popular wisdom that defines the Torah as an "instruction manual":

> Osnat: Woe unto us if everyone . . . interprets the Torah in whatever way they want and starts to make new rules . . . That's how Christianity started. . . . We will become a million separate nations in our state.
> Interviewer: So [Reform and Conservative] divide the nation?
> Osnat: Of course, of course. It's as if the Torah were the instruction manual on how to live your life. Today you buy a microwave . . . and get an [instruction] book . . . how to use it . . . It's as if Yogav [a group participant] now comes and decides that you can place items in the microwave even though the instruction book forbids it . . . Is that right? It isn't in the original [manual]! The Creator, the Creator of the microwave knows better than you what is right and what is not right! (Group 25)

In another noteworthy formulation, a participant in a Mizrachi group described the relationship of Reform to Orthodox Judaism as identical to the relationship between soy protein and real meat—Orthodoxy being the original, genuine product.

In sum, although Mizrachi traditionalists opposed the rigidity of the Orthodox rabbinate, they also disdained the notion of alternative religious movements. In their near-consensus view, there should be one version of Judaism and it should be flexible and respectful of their lifestyles and choices. Ethnic differences in views regarding the authenticity of non-Orthodox versions of Judaism reflect differing orientations to Jewish tradition. As noted, most Mizrachi participants self-identified as "traditional" rather than secular. Their selective observance of Jewish religious practices does not make them any more supportive of religious regulation of personal status, transportation, or commerce but it does make them more inclined to assign exclusive legitimacy to the Orthodox rabbinate as the arbiter of authentic Judaism.[20]

Discussion

Our study has focused on members of the Jewish Israeli public who find themselves in a cultural environment in which religious conflict is prolonged and, indeed, intractable, and yet seemingly manage to get along with their partners-in-conflict quite well at

20. Yadgar and Liebman, "Beyond the Religious-Secular Dichotomy," 171–92.

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an interpersonal level.[21] The main parties to religious conflict in Israel, including religious party politicians and religious leaders, as well as representatives of parties and organizations committed to an anti-religious perspective, are heavily invested in the issues and seek to set the agenda for public discourse. While exposed to the public discourse and the manner in which the issues are framed in the media, ordinary people are more removed from the center of the conflict and less invested in it.[22]

In the conversations, the study participants expressed interest in the topics presented to them and drew readily on media frames and other ideational resources (e.g., experiential knowledge and popular wisdom) to express their opinions. Although most religious and non-religious discussion participants favored the frames associated with their own respective camps, this was not always the case. In many instances, participants challenged the more extreme versions of their side's frame(s) and/or expressed elements of frame(s) associated with the other side. The discourses of Israeli focus group participants were not stylized reproductions of the public discourse but rather complex negotiations with the frames they recognized as their own and those associated with the other side.

It is instructive to compare the Israeli case to that of the United States. James Hunter described conflicts between activists in the United States over cultural and religious issues, including abortion, gay rights, and school prayer in terms of "culture wars," a phrase which suggests tremendous conflict between the sides.[23] Subsequent research has found, however, that such conflicts rarely capture the attention and passions of members of the general public. Moreover, when ordinary Americans do pay attention to such issues, they tend to favor the policy options in the gray area between the extremes.[24] "Americans are far more united in their

21. Oren Shalev, "The Impact of Dialogue on the Relations of Religious and Secular Jews in Israel" (Unpublished Master's Thesis, Program on Conflict Resolution and Negotiation, Bar Ilan University [Hebrew], 2010).

22. T. Encarnacion, C. McCartney, and C. Rosas, "The Impact of Concerned Parties to the Resolution of Disputes," in *Issues in Third World Conflict Resolution*, ed. G. Lindgren, G. Wallensteen, and K. Nordquist (Uppsala: Department of Peace and Conflict Research, 1990), 42–96.

23. James D. Hunter, *Culture Wars: The Struggle to Define America* (New York: Basic Books, 1991).

24. Paul DiMaggio, "The Myth of Culture War," *The Fractious Nation? Unity and Division in Contemporary American Life*, ed. Jonathan Rieder (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 79–97; Paul DiMaggio, John Evans, and Bethamy Bryson, "Have Americans' Social Attitudes Become More Polarized?" in *Cultural Wars in American Politics: Critical Reviews of a Popular Myth*, ed. Rhys H. Williams (New York: Aldine de Gruyter, 1996), 63–99; Morris P. Fiorina with Samuel J. Abrams and Jeremy C. Pope, *Culture War? The Myth of a Polarized America,* 2nd ed. (New York: Pearson Education, 2006); James D. Hunter, *Before*

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opinions on social and cultural issues," writes Paul DiMaggio, "than talk of culture wars would lead one to believe."[25]

In contrast, the Jewish Israelis in our study were highly interested in and familiar with the debates over religion and state and drew heavily on the media frames that structure the Israeli public discourse. The discussions flowed with very little prompting on our part, indicating the salience of the issues and the central roles these topics played in the daily lives of our participants. Differences between the United States and Israel in the salience of religious conflict at the grassroots level directly reflect differences in the structural role of religion in the two countries. In the United States, separation of church and state minimizes religious regulation over the choices and practices of the non-religious population. In the Israeli case, the regulatory power of the state Orthodox rabbinate over aspects of the personal lives of non-religious Israeli Jews, and the religious regulation of certain aspects of the public sphere, clearly contribute to the salience of religious conflict at the grassroots level.

However, similar to the case of the United States, the Israelis in our discussions tended to express more moderate views than one might have expected on the basis of the Israeli public discourse alone. As we have noted, although focus group participants tended to express and respond positively to the frames sponsored by political elites in their own camp, they also expressed limited support for elements of the opposing camp's frames. Thus, participants in religious groups criticized some aspects of *Religious Coercion*, condemning the official state rabbinate for its heavy-handedness. Participants in non-religious groups expressed *Assimilation*, declaring their ardent support for preservation of the state's distinctively Jewish character, and, in the case of the Mizrachi groups, the authority of Orthodox Judaism. These findings are broadly consonant with survey research and underscore a degree of moderation and complexity in the positions and discourses of members of the Jewish Israeli public.[26] The findings also help to clarify why religious conflicts have been largely confined to the political and legal arenas and why there has been relatively little violence.

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the Shooting Begins (New York: Free Press, 1994); Christian Smith, Michael Emerson, Sally Gallagher, Paul Kennedy, and David Sikkink, "The Myth of Culture Wars: The Case of American Protestantism," *Culture Wars in American Politics*, ed. Rhys H. Williams (New York: Aldine de Gruyter, 1997), 175–95; Alan Wolfe, *One Nation After All* (New York: Penguin Books, 1998).

25. DiMaggio, "The Myth of Culture War," 80.

26. Ben-Rafael, "The Faces of Religiosity in Israel: Cleavages or Continuum?," 89–103; Levy et al., "The Many Faces of Jewishness in Israel," 265–84.

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Much of the complexity and moderation in the focus group discourse stems from shared values and feelings of ethno-religious solidarity. The strongest shared value evident in the discussions is the Jewish character of the state. Non-religious and religious participants differ, however, in how they understand "Jewish character." For non-religious participants, the state's Jewish character is manifest in symbols of state, the calendar and holidays, the Hebrew language, and Bible education in the public schools. For the religious participants, it also includes regulation of public spaces in accordance with Shabbat and dietary laws, as well as Orthodox rabbinic regulation of marriage, conversion, and divorce. Such legal restrictions focus on a fairly limited number of issues and therefore do not result in a state that most religious participants would characterize as governed by *halacha* (Jewish law) but rather establish the conditions they feel are necessary to preserve the cultural distinctiveness of a Jewish state.

Participants across the discussions also expressed commitment to the values of democracy and individual choice, albeit less comprehensively. For the non-religious, freedom to choose whether and how to observe Jewish commandments is a core value, one they believe to be intrinsic to a democratic state.[27] Among the religious, the value of individual choice was occasionally expressed directly, but more frequently by implication. Many religious participants expressed opposition to state imposition of religious norms, asserting that such coercion is bound to fail in a society characterized by a broader cultural context that values individual choice and regards it as an essential component of democracy. It is unclear whether and to what extent the individuals who advanced this line of argument themselves subscribed to the value of individual choice with respect to religiously prescribed behavior. What is clear is that many of the religious participants in the discussions recognized and were willing to accommodate, if not totally accept, the dominant culture's embrace of individual choice.

In sum, whereas conflicts in the public discourse about religion and state often reflect the clashing values of Judaism and democracy,[28] such conflicts tend to be moderated at the popular level by the broad reach of both sets of values throughout the Jewish

27. Here the focus is on the participants' use of the term "democracy" and "democratic state." There is a sizable literature on the nature and limitations of Israeli democracy. For an introduction to the issues, see Ilan Peleg, *Democratizing the Hegemonic State* (New York: Cambridge, 2007); and Joseph E. David, ed., *The State of Israel: Between Judaism and Democracy* (Jerusalem: The Israel Democracy Institute, 2003).

28. David, ed., *The State of Israel: Between Judaism and Democracy*; Nachum Langental and Shuki Freedman, eds., *Haconflict: Dat Umedina B'Yisrael [The*

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Israeli public. The attitudes that our respondents construct do not lead to the perception of mutually exclusive positions, but, rather, different emphases in their orientations. Religious Jews want Israel to be Jewish, but also democratic; non-religious Jews want the state to be democratic, but also Jewish.

Beyond sharing values, the readiness of each side to take the view of the other is enhanced by feelings of social solidarity and common fate. Such feelings were expressed in religious and non-religious groups alike. To be sure, in a few religious groups, participants expressed a willingness to have secular Israelis go their own way; however, this was clearly a minority view. More typically, religious Jews expressed dismay over the secularizing tendencies in Israeli society because they regarded such a trend as damaging for all Jews, religious and non-religious alike. The non-religious respondents, likewise, expressed support for preserving the state's Jewish character, because they felt a very deep tie to Jewish culture, civilization, and history and wanted to promote practices that unify the Jewish Israeli public. Such feelings were intensified by the broader political context that included, during the years data were gathered for the present study, an intense conflict with the Palestinians. It is likely that religious and non-religious Jews in the discussion groups felt more affinity for one another because of this external challenge.

In this context, the conclusion that religious conflicts tend to be moderated in the Jewish Israeli public by shared values and cross-cutting solidarities requires further qualification. The present paper examined only conflicts over issues of religion and state and not over the peace process with the Palestinians. Most of the secular parties tend to support and the religious parties to vehemently oppose any peace deal that would entail evacuation of Jewish settlements from the West Bank. However, polarization on this issue, as well, appears less extreme at the popular level due to the complexity of attitudes in the religious sector. Focus group discussions on the topic, reported elsewhere, revealed substantial disagreements within the religious camp, suggesting less unity among religious Israelis than one might suspect on the basis of the public discourse alone.[29] Further study will be necessary to determine whether members of the religious public would accept a peace deal of the sort under discussion in 2010, i.e., one that

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Conflict: State and Religion in Israel] (Tel Aviv: Yediot Aharonot: Sifre Hemed [Hebrew], 2002).

29. Ephraim Tabory and Theodore Sasson, "A House Divided: Grassroots National Religious Perspectives on the Gaza Disengagement and the Future of the West Bank," *Journal of Church and State* 49, no. 3 (Summer 2007): 423–43.

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would entail return of virtually all territories captured by Israel in 1967 including sections of East Jerusalem.

Conclusion

Religious conflicts waged in the Israeli public arena reverberate throughout Israeli society, and members of the Jewish public tend to express the frames associated with their own particular camps. However, as citizens of a modern state with an open public arena, they are familiar not only with the frames expressed by political elites with whom they identify, but also with the frames sponsored by opposing elites as well. In their own discourse, they borrow readily from all of the frames—as well as their personal reservoirs of experiential knowledge and popular wisdom—to develop nuanced positions that often appear moderate in comparison to the more polarized public debate. Most do so because they subscribe to the twin values of a Jewish and democratic state, as they understand them, and feel solidarity with other Jews. These largely shared values and feelings serve as centripetal forces leading Jewish Israelis to seek common ground and compromise even as they express their divergent views and sentiments. The existence of these shared values and feelings may also explain how Israel has thus far avoided conflict escalation and managed what appears to be an intractable crisis over the role of religion in the Jewish state.

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