

This paper does not represent US Government views.



Unpromising Demography in a Promised Land: The Growth of Dissonant Minorities and the Escalation of Demographic Politics in Israel

Prepared By
Richard P. Cincotta¹
H.L. Stimson Center
and
Eric Kaufmann²
University of London

This paper is part of a series on demography which the National Intelligence Council is sponsoring to better understand the potential political and economic impact of upcoming demographic changes. The NIC identified demography as one of the major drivers in reshaping the geopolitical landscape in its Global Trends series. Other publications in this series include *Global Trends 2020: Mapping the Global Future*; *Global Trends 2025: A Transformed World*; a study on Russian demographics, and *Iran's Demography to 2025: Middle East Tiger or Shi'ia Hawk*? This and other papers are drawn from commissioned works provided by recognized outside demographic experts.

The National Intelligence Council sponsors workshops and research with nongovernmental experts to gain knowledge and insight and to sharpen debate on critical issues. The views expressed in this report do not reflect official US Government positions.

NIC 2010-05
July 2010

¹ Demographer-in-residence, H.L. Stimson Center, 1111 19th St., NW, Washington, DC 20036, USA.

² Reader in Politics and Sociology, Birkbeck College, University of London, Malet Street, London WC1E 7HX, UK.

This paper does not represent US Government views.

Summary

Israel's demographic challenge is more complex and immediate than most Middle East analysts assume. Secular and religiously traditional Israeli Jews, both native-born and immigrant, upon whose Zionist hopes and political ideals Israel was founded and maintained, are experiencing a "demographic squeeze"—the rise of two dissonant ethno-religious minorities: the Haredim (Ultra-Orthodox Jews), who typically harbor political sympathies to the right; and Israeli Arabs, whose political sympathies lie largely to the left. With each passing year, Israeli Arabs and Haredim, both of whom express grievances with the Zionist political and sectarian order, assume a larger proportion of the country's population.

The two-decade forecast that we present, from 2010 to 2030, is the unweighted average of three demographic projections: a constant-fertility variant, a replacement-fertility variant, and a high-fertility variant. Because the brevity of this publication format precludes an examination of the 27 permutations possible from these projections, this essay's forecasts and conclusions are necessarily generalized to portray much of the uncertainty suggested by the variation among these permutations.

Taken together, this set of projections suggests that Israel will retain a Jewish majority for the foreseeable future and that growth in the number of adherents of Haredi (Ultra-Orthodox) sects will account for an increasingly significant proportion of growth among the Jewish population. Our projections indicate that by 2030 children of Israeli Arabs and the faster-growing Haredim could make up as much as 55 percent, or more, of Israeli primary-school students, five to nine years old, and are likely to constitute about half of all 15- to 19-year olds. In contrast, the non-Haredi, non-Arab group, which comprises more than three-quarters of Israel's eligible voters in 2010, is projected to slip to about two-thirds by 2030.

Both demographic and political trends suggest that Israel's Jewish voters will continue to drift politically rightward. These indications include the rapid growth of Haredim, the rising popularity of Yisrael Beytenu—a secular nationalist party focused on land-for-land swaps, redefining citizenship, and the rights of immigrants—and the sustained strength of the religious Zionist parties and settler movement. The right is divided, however.

A significant element among right-wing voters remains antagonistic to the Haredi leadership's power over Jewish life and to Haredi privileges, their educational system, their access to state subsidies, and their low level of economic contribution to the state. Rather than translating directly into newly realized political power for either the Haredi or the Israeli-Arab leadership, the growth of these communities more likely will exacerbate tensions among political parties competing for the middle-ground Jewish majority.

Contents

	<i>Page</i>
Summary	1
Discussion	5
Israel's Ethno-religious Dynamics	5
Ethno-religious Projections	7
Projection Outcomes	8
Trends and Their Political Implications	9
 Annex:	
Estimating and Projecting the Haredi Population	13

Discussion

This paper argues that secular and religiously traditional Israeli Jews, both native-born and immigrant, upon whose Zionist hopes and political ideals Israel was founded and maintained, are experiencing a “demographic squeeze”—the rise of two dissonant ethno-religious minorities: the Haredim (Ultra-Orthodox Jews), who typically harbor political sympathies to the right; and Israeli Arabs, whose political sympathies lie largely to the left. This dynamic, we hypothesize, will ultimately relegate to minority status the very citizens whose political sympathies remain most consistent with Israel’s founders and with the political leadership that governed the Jewish state during the second half of the 20th century.

For the purposes of discussion and demographic projection, we divide Israel’s citizenry into three relevant groups: Israeli Arabs, the Haredim, and the remainder of the Israeli population, whom we refer to as “secular and traditional Jews” (this includes recent immigrants and all others). The two-decade forecast that we present, from 2010 to 2030, is the unweighted average of three demographic projections: a constant-fertility variant, a replacement-fertility variant, and a high-fertility variant.

Our projections strongly suggest that within the two-decade time frame an ongoing compositional shift will significantly modify the ethno-religious composition of the younger portion of Israel’s age structure. According to our set of projections, the slim majority currently held in primary school by the children of secular and traditional Jewish families, plus the children of immigrants, will be replaced by 2030 with a clear majority (probably at least as high as 55 percent) of Israeli-Arab and Haredi children, each in their

own school system. Our projections suggest that, by way of contrast, in 2030 the non-Haredi, non-Arab group—secular and traditional Jews—will retain a majority, about two-thirds of eligible voters (down from 76 percent in 2010) among Israel’s electorate (18 years of age and older).

Similar to more detailed analyses,³ our projections, if extrapolated beyond their twenty-year horizon, suggest the continued presence of a Jewish majority population in Israel for the foreseeable future. However, the source of that Jewish population growth, increasingly Haredim in its identity, is reshaping Israel’s ethno-religious composition in a manner that, we believe, is likely to exacerbate tensions among the politically fractionated Zionist majority.

Israel’s Ethno-religious Dynamics

Israel’s ethno-religious demography has been a central political issue since the Jewish state’s inception. At Israel’s independence in 1948, the Jewish population within the Green Line (pre-1967 borders) is estimated to have numbered roughly 718 thousand (82 percent of residents), up from 543 thousand (30 percent) in 1946, and 384 thousand (28 percent) in 1936.⁴

At Israel’s independence, its secular Zionist founders’ hopes of maintaining a Jewish

³ Goldscheider, C. 2002. *Israel’s Changing Society: Population, Ethnicity, and Development*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press.

⁴ Rabinovich, I. and Reinharz, J., eds. 2008. *Israel in the Middle East: Documents and Readings on Society, Politics, and Foreign Relations, Pre-1948 to the Present*. Waltham, MA: Brandeis University Press., (Appendix 5, pp. 571-572), online at: http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/Society_&_Culture/israel_palestine_pop.html

majority rested on keeping up a brisk pace of childbearing among Jews and on steady streams of Jewish immigrants. Over the long run, they trusted in the powers of prosperity and modernity to turn Israel's kaleidoscopic assortment of Jewish and non-Jewish ethnic communities into a modern multi-ethnic population whose women would be raised to embrace European-like aspirations and to desire a European-like family size.

The outcomes, so far, are mixed. Descendents of European and American Jewish émigrés have stayed somewhat above the two-child replacement level, unlike secular Jews who remain overseas. Jewish immigration to Israel, however, has been more episodic than continuous. The post-independence wave (1948-51), which brought about 700,000 immigrants to Israel's shores, was followed by nearly four decades of much lower levels and then another great wave, from 1990 to 2000, of more than 900,000 mostly Soviet émigrés.⁵ Today, most sources put Israel's net annual influx from overseas at under 20,000 individuals, a figure that probably puts it somewhat below 18 percent of the country's annual population growth.⁶

Much of the hoped-for fertility convergence has already occurred. While women arriving from traditional North African, Middle Eastern, and Asian Jewish communities averaged well over five children in the 1950s, their granddaughters now average less than three. Israeli Arab fertility, too, has dropped, albeit at a slower and periodically halting pace, from a total fertility rate (TFR)⁷ over 7 children per woman in the

1950s to about 3.6 today. Within the Israeli Arab population, which now comprises about 20 percent of Israel's 7.4 million citizens, the TFR of Arab Muslims (83 percent of Israeli Arabs) is estimated by the Israeli Central Bureau of Statistics (CBS) at 3.8 children per woman. Arab Christians currently make up just over 8 percent of Israeli Arabs and experience a TFR of 2.1 children per woman.⁸ The remaining 8 or so percent are Druze, a religious minority integrated into Israeli's secular political and military spheres. Druze serve as officers in the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) and are Knesset members in parties on the left, center, and right. The CBS estimates the Israeli Druze TFR at 2.5 children per woman.

The other minority of demographic interest is the Haredim, a Jewish minority composed of the adherents of several Ultra-Orthodox sects. Although the religious movements that spawned these sects originated in Eastern Europe in the 19th century, Israel's Haredi population now includes adherents from Sephardic and Mizrahi communities. Because the group is currently not represented by an Israeli census category, official statistics are as yet unavailable from the CBS (for a review of methods used by other authors to estimate and project the current Haredi population, see Annex).

Very little is currently known about the net rate of recruitment (conversion into, minus defection from a population) among the Haredim. Some commentators suggest that, because the social costs of defection (secularization or conversion) from Ultra-

⁵ Goldscheider, 2004.

⁶ See UN Population Division. 2009. Population Prospects, the 2008 Revision. United Nations: New York; US Census Bureau, International Program Center. International Data Base. <http://www.census.gov/ipc/www/idb/> (accessed, Feb. 10, 2010).

⁷ The total fertility rate is a "period measure"; a snapshot in time of lifetime childbearing. Formally,

TFR is the lifetime number of children born per woman, on average, if she followed the average childbearing behavior exhibited by the population.

⁸ Central Bureau of Statistics. 2009. Statistical Abstract of Israel, Jerusalem: Government of Israel.

Orthodox life are high, the frequency of defection is probably low.⁹

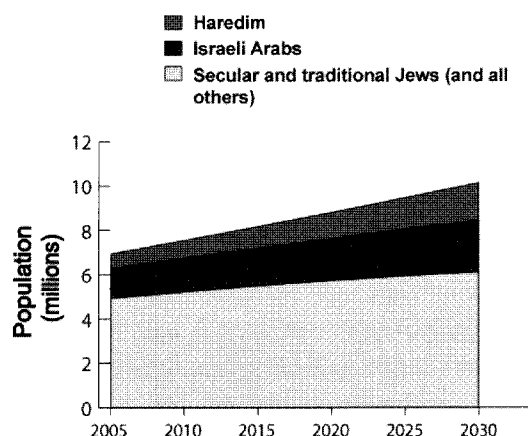
Ethno-religious Projections

Focusing on three groups—Israeli Arabs, Haredim, and (the remainder) secular and traditional Jews—while ignoring finer ethnic and religious disaggregation makes it possible to estimate their current male and female age-specific populations (in five-year groups) and fertility and mortality schedules, from published census-derived data, reports, academic publications, and reasonable assumptions.

For Israeli Arabs and for the total Israeli population, age-specific data were obtained from the CBS website and from research by Goldscheider.¹⁰ Whereas the Haredi population characteristics are not available from the CBS, the Demographic Yearbook of Israel lists “Ultra-Orthodox” as an educational supervisory category. For this category, the CBS estimates and projects first grade student numbers and the rate of growth. To obtain our current estimate of Israeli Haredim, we matched an array of stable age structures of varying TFRs (6.0 to 7.5 children per woman, in increments of 0.1) and population sizes to the most recent 2010 projection of the population of Ultra-Orthodox-supervised first-grade students and the 2010-to-2014 annual growth rate of children in Ultra-Orthodox-supervised first grade (3.9

percent).¹¹ The TFR 6.4 model and a 2010 population of 798,000 (10.6 percent of Israel’s reported population) produced a close match.

Three fertility variants—projections varying only in their fertility assumptions—were generated using the component cohort method and algorithms for producing smooth declines in age-specific fertility and mortality: constant-fertility, replacement-fertility, and high-fertility variants. The constant-fertility projection assumes that the current fertility schedule of each population continues unchanged to the end of the projection in 2030. The replacement-fertility projection assumes that Israeli Arabs and secular and traditional Jews attain replacement fertility in 2030 and that the TFR of Haredim declines by 1.4 children per woman—from 6.4 in 2010 to 5.0 in 2030. The high-fertility variant assumes that the TFR of each population will increase by 0.5 children per woman by 2030.

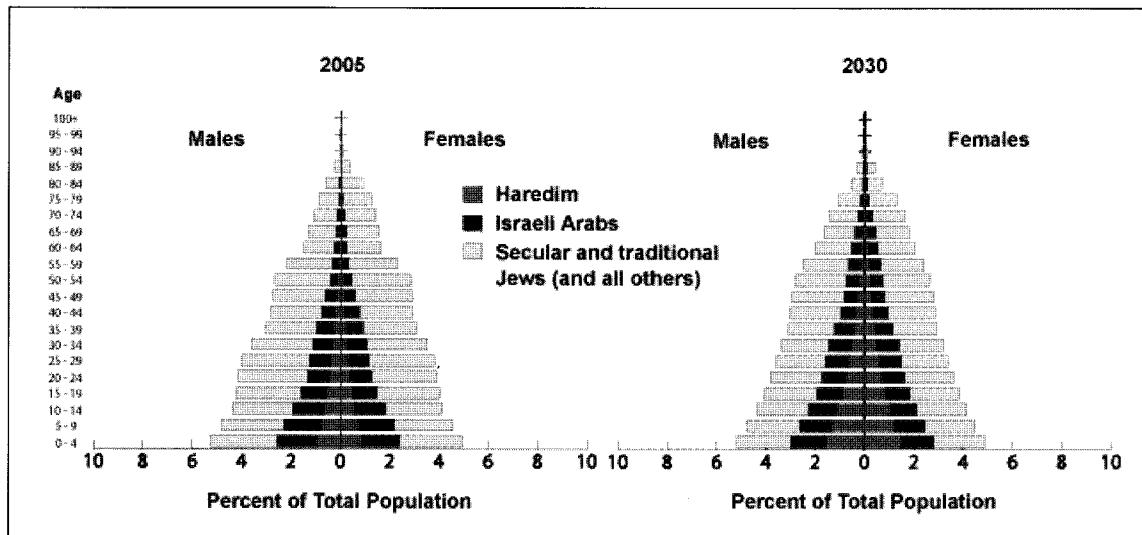


⁹ Efron, N.J. 2003. *Real Jews: Secular vs. Orthodox and the Struggle for Jewish Identity in Israel*. New York: Basic Books; also see: Sharp, H. 2010. “High Cost of Leaving Ultra-Orthodox Judaism.” in *BBC News Online*.

http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/8435275.stm

¹⁰ See CBS. Statistical Abstract of Israel, Jerusalem: Government of Israel, 8.11, p. 383; Israeli Central Bureau of Statistics. 2009. “Israel in Figures, 2008.” Jerusalem: Government of Israel, p. 26; Goldscheider. 2002.

¹¹ CBS. 2009. Statistical Abstract of Israel; also see statements by the Taub Center in: Selig, A. 2009. “Study: 48% of pupils are Arab, haredi.” in *JerusalemPost.com*. Jerusalem. <http://www.jpost.com/servlet/Satellite?cid=1251145151803&pagename=JPArticle%2FShowFull>; the full interview is at: Ben-David, D. 2010. “Interview with Dan Ben-David, Taub Center for Policy Research.” Jerusalem: IFAT Media Information.

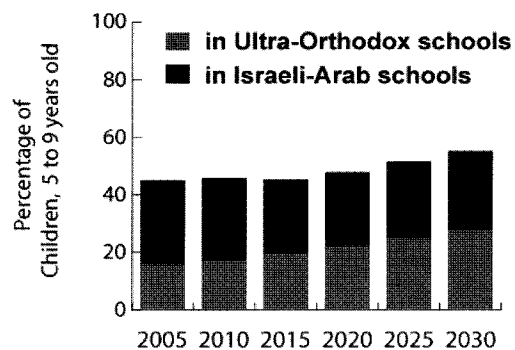


Projected changes in the ethno-religious composition of Israel's age structure, 2005 to 2030. This forecast averages the three scenarios generated for each of the ethno-religious populations projected in this study.

Projection Outcomes

By 2030, the high-fertility, constant-fertility and replacement-fertility projections generated Israeli populations totaling 10.7 million, 10.4 million and 9.9 million, respectively. The average of these, which we use as our forecast, projects a 2030 Israeli population of 10.3 million—a figure somewhat above the 10.0 million people projected by the Israeli CBS medium variant for 2030 and well within their high and low variant projections of 10.6 and 9.6 million. This forecast suggests an Israeli age structure in 2030 that is moderately pyramidal and somewhat similar to its present age distribution. However, by 2030 Israeli Arabs and the faster growing Haredim are projected to claim significantly larger shares of the under-20 population.

Whereas the CBS estimated that 15 percent of students in the Israeli primary school system in 1960 were receiving either an Arab or Ultra-Orthodox-supervised education, this source reports that by 2009, 48 percent were



counted in those two educational categories.¹² Our projections indicate that by 2030 at least 55 percent of primary school students, and perhaps more, will be children from those two groups (constant-fertility projection, 57 percent; replacement-fertility projection, 53 percent). However, it will take two to three more decades beyond our projections for these two politically disparate ethno-religious groups to make similar inroads into the

¹² Ben-David, D. 2010. "A Demographic Look Ahead at Israel." Taub Center Bulletin. 2(1): 10-11.

portions of Israel's age structure in which citizens are eligible to vote (18 years and older). By 2030, the combined population of Haredim and Israeli Arabs is likely to be very close to composing half (47 to 53 percent, in our projections) of all 15 to 19 year olds.

Trends and Their Political Implications

What long-term political shifts can Israelis expect? It is difficult to say. Israeli Arabs, who in 2010 comprise about 17 percent of eligible voters and whom we project to rise to 22 percent by 2030, have cast their votes for lists of Israel's left and center-left, often significantly augmenting Labor's tally. Because the political sentiments of Haredi voters—presently about 6 percent of those eligible—lie overwhelmingly to the right,¹³ it is logical to expect the Knesset's political center of gravity to shift further rightward by 2030, when our forecast suggests they will account for 12 percent of the eligible electorate. Such a shift would make Arab votes even more critical to left-center coalitions. As logical as this scenario seems, it may, however, underestimate the complexity of Israeli politics.

The sheer number of political parties, their fractiousness, and the opportunistic behavior of the Haredi “religious parties”—United Torah Judaism (UTJ) and Shas—combine to make Israel's political playing field extraordinarily fragile. The Ashkenazi Haredim, who comprise the vast majority of the Haredi population, have overwhelmingly cast their votes in recent elections among the two religious parties running candidates on the UTJ list: Degel HaTorah (led by Lithuanian rabbis) and Agudat Israel (led by Hasidic rabbis). For these non-Zionist

parties, which currently hold five seats in the 18th Knesset, domestic religious and welfare issues hold more sway than foreign policy. Although UTJ participates in the current Likud-led government, in the past its parties have expressed their willingness to join center-left governments in order to secure yeshiva (rabbinical school) and family subsidies for Haredim. In contrast, the most influential religious party, Shas (11 Knesset seats), a product of the leadership of the less numerous Sephardic Haredim, receives most of its votes from the non-Haredi Sephardic and Mizrahi (Asian and North African) communities. In an effort, perhaps, to resonate more with their non-Haredi constituency, Shas joined the World Zionist Organization in early 2010, maneuvering away from the UTJ political position and closer to Likud's.

Despite the unambiguous trend in Haredi demographics and their comfortable position in the current Likud-led government, it would be a mistake to believe that gradual changes in the ethno-religious distribution of eligible voters will be reflected each election by a predictable shift in electoral outcomes. In fact, UTJ and Shas each lost one seat in the 2009 Knesset elections. Rather than translating quickly into newly realized political power for either of these communities, the growing proportion of Israeli Arab and Haredim among the voting public will more likely widen the gap between the Israeli right and center, precipitate legislative action designed to constrain Haredi and Israeli-Arab rights and limit their access to political power, and play further into the rhetoric and positioning of political parties within the context of vote competition for the middle-ground Jewish majority.

Two recent events may foreshadow this effect: the rapid rise of Yisrael Beytenu, the right-wing secular nationalist party headed by

¹³ Ilan, S. 1998. “To the Right of the Right.” in *Ha'aretz*, March 11. Jerusalem (in Hebrew, cited in Berman, 2000).

Moldovan émigré Avigdor Lieberman, currently the Israeli government's foreign minister; and the growing incompatibility between centrist Kadima, led by Tzipi Livni, and the Haredi parties. Unlike most other parties on Israel's political right, Yisrael Beytenu's Knesset members support the establishment of a Palestinian state and the passage of a pro-immigrant secular marriage law. Unlike those to the center and left, however, the party calls for an oath of loyalty as a prerequisite to the full rights of Israeli citizenship—a scheme that would likely purge a substantial portion of the growing Israeli Arab population from voting rolls and quite possibly disenfranchise some non-Zionist Haredim who, on scriptural and political grounds, object to the current Jewish state.

Yisrael Beytenu also proposes to hinge eligibility for social benefits on fulfillment of military or community service, driving a wedge between groups who, by law, are conscripted into the IDF and those who are not. Not only native-born and non-native Jewish citizens fulfill compulsory IDF service; so do émigrés of mixed origin, Israeli Druze, and Circassian citizens. Significant numbers of Muslim Bedouin have served voluntarily. On the other side of this demographic divide are Haredim, who obtain deferments to attend yeshiva,¹⁴ and Muslim and Christian Arabs, who are not conscripted, nor sought after, nor do they typically seek IDF service. But perhaps the most contentious element of Yisrael Beytenu's demographic agenda is entitled *land for land, peace for peace*. Rejecting government *land for peace* initiatives with neighboring Arab states, it proposes instead to swap Israeli-Arab

border towns (and Israeli Arabs) for close-in Jewish settlements on the West Bank.

The widening fissure between Kadima and the Haredi parties initially surfaced with Livni's reluctance to form a coalition government with those parties following the 2009 election and the Haredi political leadership's objections to serving under a woman prime minister. In May of 2010, Livni appealed publicly to Netanyahu to replace Likud's religious-party partners with Kadima, forming a new coalition with the strength to advance reforms that would begin to integrate the Haredim into Israel's secular society and economy. Although Netanyahu rejected Livni's proposal, her argument has since resonated among local politicians and the press.

Looming ahead are contentious debates over the educational standards required of Haredim-supervised schools and the subsidization of Haredi adult students and families. Israeli Haredi communities are typically poor. Most yeshiva students leave their studies with few skills and are unqualified to sit for the matriculation exam (*bagrut*). As the proportion of Haredim grows, popular objections from both the political left and right to religious subsidies, family support, and military-service deferments are likely to grow stronger and gain even more electoral attention.

It is probably unwise to attempt near-term predictions for a political system where new break-away parties, co-mingled electoral lists, and governments composed of strange political bedfellows are commonplace. We offer two: (1) as the political power of secular and traditional Jewish voters recedes, the focus of Israeli politics is likely to shift to its ethno-religious composition; and (2) the political middle ground's power will indeed

¹⁴ Berman, E. 1999. "Subsidized Sacrifice: State Support of Religion in Israel." *Contemporary Jewry* 20(3):905 – 953; Berman, E. 2000. "Sect, Subsidy, and Sacrifice: An Economist's View of Ultra-Orthodox Jews." *Quarterly Journal of Economics* 115(3): 905 - 953.

recede, unless, of course, there are changes in the “rules of the game.”

What rule changes should analysts be looking for within the Israel’s political institutions? As Israel’s composition changes, be alert for growing support for alterations to the qualifications for citizenship, modifications of Israel’s borders, or reforms to the electoral system—or even something more novel. In Israel’s democracy, perhaps more than in any other, the frequency of surprises is unsurprising.

Annex:

Estimating and Projecting the Haredi Population

Several authors have sought to tackle the problem of estimating and projecting the Haredim population. Using data drawn from Israel's Labor Force Survey, Berman classified families as Haredim when a head-of-household reported a yeshiva (rabbinical school) as the last school attended.¹⁵ From data associated with these households, Berman estimated fertility schedules for 1982 and 1995, which yielded total fertility rates (TFR) of 6.4 and 7.6 children per woman, respectively. From these and the CBS-reported mortality schedule for Israeli Jews, Berman estimated an Israeli Haredi population of 280,000 in 1995 and projected its rise to 510,000 in 2010. Berman's estimates indicated population increases among the Haredim that he could not explain as a product of age-specific fertility. He attributed this growth to positive net recruitment (conversion minus defection) to Haredi sects).

DellaPergola counted on the residential segregation of Haredim and their voter preference to identify Haredi neighborhoods. Applying this method to Jerusalem's neighborhoods, DellaPergola estimated a TFR of 6.4 children per woman in neighborhoods where 70 percent or more of the residents voted for a religious party.¹⁶ For the *American Jewish Year Book*, DellaPergola, Rebhun and Tolts estimated that in 2000 the Haredim comprised about 7 percent (~350,000) of Israel's Jewish population.¹⁷ Estimates appearing in the Israeli and international press between 2004 and 2010, several attributed to DellaPergola and several lacking attribution, indicated a significantly larger population—between 500,000 and 700,000—roughly 8 to 10 percent of Israel's total population.¹⁸

In this research paper (Cincotta and Kaufmann) we estimated the 2010 Haredi population by generating a series of stable age distributions produced by many iterations of a model youthful age structure at TFRs from 6.0 to 7.5. The age-specific fertility schedule for each of these iterations was drawn from Berman's research and fit to the specified TFRs using the Coale-Trussel Method. After establishing Haredi and Israeli-Arab population parameters, age-specific populations and rates for secular and traditional Jews (the remaining group) were calculated to satisfy country-level (total Israeli) populations and rates. We applied the UN Population Division's schedule for annual net migration and added these individuals exclusively to secular and traditional Jews, distributing them to male and female age cohorts using a distribution associated with labor migration to Central Europe. Defection from one group to another—a factor relevant to the projection of Haredim and to secular and traditional Jews but poorly understood, undocumented in either direction, and assumed to be small—is absent in the three fertility-variant projections (constant, replacement and high). In all variants, male and female life expectancy at birth for each ethno-religious group is set to increase by two years during the two decade-long projection. DemProj (software available from USAID's Health Policy Initiative) was employed to generate our projections.

¹⁵ Berman, E. 1998. "Sect, Subsidy, and Sacrifice: An Economist's View of Ultra-Orthodox Jews." Discussion Paper 98-08. Jerusalem: Maurice Falk Institute for Economic Research in Israel. Berman, E. 2000. "Sect, Subsidy, and Sacrifice: An Economist's View of Ultra-Orthodox Jews." *Quarterly Journal of Economics* 115(3):905 - 953.

¹⁶ DellaPergola, S. 2001. "Jerusalem's Population, 1995-2020: Demography, Multiculturalism and Urban Policies." *European Journal of Population* 17(2): 165-199.

¹⁷ DellaPergola, S., U. Rebhun, and M. Tolts. 2000. "Prospecting the Jewish Future Population Projections, 2000-2080." *The American Jewish Year Book* 100: 103-146 (p. 130).

¹⁸ Wagner, M. and T. Halkin. 2005. "Haredi Population to Double by 2020." Online at *Jerusalem Post.com*, Nov. 9, <http://israel.jpost.com>; Addelman, M. 2007. "Majority of Jews will be Ultra-Orthodox by 2050." Press Release. Manchester, UK: University of Manchester; Leibler, I. 2010 (Feb. 3). "The Impending Haredi Implosion." Jerusalem: Jerusalem Post.