

of the *omer*.


What is it, then, with Jews and counting? The real issue is not “counting,” but whether the counting applies to a “what” or a “who.” When it comes to counting time (When, precisely, is Shabbat over? When, exactly, are the eleven months of kaddish concluded?), Jewish tradition not only sanctions, it obsesses. When it comes to counting people (*minyan*, for example), Jewish tradition not only discourages, it dissimulates. What accounts for the discrepancy?

Time is an arbitrary category. Nanki-Poo, the hero of Gilbert and Sullivan’s *The Mikado*, famously suggests to his bride that in the face of his anticipated execution at the end of 30 days, “We’ll call each second a minute, each minute an hour, each hour a day, and each day a year. At that rate, we’ve about 30 years of married happiness before us!”

But while time is abstract and demarcations are arbitrary, anyone conscious of aging knows that however it is measured, time is real. Defining time, then, becomes determinative; it is the mechanism through which our culture and tradition define a great deal: “There is a time for every purpose under heaven.” Seven days of *shiva*; 30 days of *shloshim*; eight days

until *brit mila*; 49 days of the *omer*.

Counting is but one refraction of the broader categories of measuring, assessing, identifying, and defining. Precisely what we can do with things, so the tradition seems to teach, is what we cannot do with a person. How would we numerically “measure” a person? How would we “assess” or “define” or “identify” someone’s essential nature? How do we define the boundaries of a life? What is too short? How much is enough? What, in the case of suffering, is too much? By what standards are we judged, and according to whom are we evaluated? Who do we need to tell us that “we count”?

Psalm 90 teaches, “Let us number our days, so we may attain a wise heart.” But the psalmist leaves ambiguous whether we are to count the days already past or those that lie ahead. Both are finite. One is a known quantity; the other is an open question. Where should we focus — on what has happened and cannot be changed, or on what lies ahead? Should we focus on determining how that time is filled or used or sanctified? In a paradoxical way, knowing that the time we have left is by definition finite opens up an array of opportunities that are infinite. 

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## Demographic Trends in Israel

UZI REBHUN, GILAD MALACH, & RUTH GAVISON

What level of Jewish majority does Israel need in order to be both Jewish and democratic? The question — though an issue since the beginning of statehood — became more acute after the 1967 Six-Day War; it is also, though, relevant within the confines of Israel’s Green Line.

The goals of Israeli society reach beyond being Jewish and democratic; Israel also aspires to be a developed and prosperous country that upholds human rights and is committed to the welfare of all its residents and citizens. This essay presents findings from the 2009 report\* of the Metzilah Center for Zionist, Jewish, Liberal and Humanist Thought in Jerusalem. Our underlying premise is that accurate demographic information is essential for both intelligent public debate and decision making about how to define and fulfill a demographic policy that will allow Israel to survive as a developed and democratic state — one that is attuned to the welfare of all its inhabitants and in which the Jewish people can fulfill their right to self-determination.

In its 62-year history, Israel’s population has grown in a dramatic way — unprecedented in the West — from fewer than 900,000 persons at the time of the first census (1948) to 7.5 million at the end of 2009. The Jewish majority, however, has been clearly diminishing since it peaked in the early 1960s at 89 percent. In 2009, Jews (including “others,” i.e., non-Jews who are allowed to immigrate under the Law of Return) accounted for 80 percent of the total population. Three main factors explain the erosion of the Jewish majority: (a) higher natural increase of the Arab population (especially Muslims), (b) the annexation of eastern Jerusalem in 1967, and (c) periodic downturns in Jewish immigration.

Various subgroups of the two major populations — Jewish and Arab alike — also underwent important demographic changes. The number of Haredi (“ultra-Orthodox”) Jews has grown rapidly over the past 20 years. During this time, the proportion of Jews who define themselves as Haredi increased from 3 percent to roughly 9 percent. In 1990, fewer than 10

\* This essay was adapted from the position paper “Demographic Trends in Israel” of the Metzilah Center for Zionist, Jewish, Liberal and Humanist Thought, Jerusalem (2009). To read the full report, visit [www.metzilah.org.il/?p=362](http://www.metzilah.org.il/?p=362).

percent of Jewish children attended Haredi schools; in 2008, some 21 percent did so. The share of Muslims in the Arab population has climbed from 70 percent when the state was founded to 83 percent today.

The geographical distribution of populations is also of interest. Jews in Jerusalem have remained a steady 10 percent of the Jewish population in the country. About half the Jews live in the central regions of the country and the Tel Aviv area, where they form a clear majority. In the Galilee, on the other hand, Arabs have become the majority.

The most conspicuous trend in the Jewish sector during these years is an upturn in the total fertility rate, due in large measure to the proportional growth of the Haredi population. Concurrently, immigration has fallen off severely, to less than 20,000 per year, after mass immigration in the 1990s delivered almost 1 million people to Israel's shores.

In the Arab sector, the fertility rate has been falling steeply (18 percent) in recent years, especially among Muslims. The Negev Bedouin population recorded a 27-percent decline. And the "family unification" phenomenon, which at its peak in 1995–2000 allowed thousands of Arab migrants to enter the country each year, has declined perceptibly due to legislation limiting it.

### Future Trends

Looking into the future (toward 2030), we juxtapose two demographic scenarios: one pursuant to the Central Bureau of Statistics, and an original alternative scenario derived from the entire set of pervasive trends in recent years — a scenario that assumes a continued increase in Jewish fertility and the contraction of Muslim fertility.

According to the first scenario, the Jewish (and other) majority will narrow to around 76 percent by 2030 and Jewish (and other) children will account for fewer than 70 percent of all children in Israel. By contrast, in the alternative scenario, the erosion of the Jewish majority is gentler and Jews' share in the population in 2030 is anticipated to come to 77 percent. The difference reflected by the long-term trend is more conspicuous. The proportion of Jewish and other children, in the second scenario, will be slightly higher in 2030, resembling the Muslim fertility rate. Thus, we are witnessing a possible change that may allow the balance of Jews and Arabs in Israel to stabilize in the long run.

A second aspect of these two projections

concerns the continued proportionate growth of the Haredi population. By 2028, 15 percent of Israel's population and more than 20 percent of its Jewish population are expected to be ultra-Orthodox. Even more salient is the projection that, among children, roughly one-third of the Jewish children will be Haredi.

### Implications for Public Policy

Any public policy should ensure Israel's survival as a Jewish, democratic, developed, and prosperous state that protects human rights and promotes the welfare of its residents and citizens. Israel will not be Jewish and democratic, let alone developed and prosperous, unless it has a stable Jewish majority that will facilitate stable majority–minority relations and an economy oriented to growth and development.

Three major actions may help to maintain Israel's Jewish majority. The first is Jewish migration, including an effort to bring back to Israel emigrant Israelis and their families — a group that is estimated at more than half a million persons. External processes and a policy tailored to this population may influence thousands of people to return to Israel each year. Second is the continued reduction of Palestinian migration to Israel, especially following the 1990s family-unification policy and the subsequent amendment of the Citizenship Law, which limits such migration. And, third, reversing the annexation of Arab neighborhoods of Jerusalem may buttress Israel's Jewish majority and the Jewish complexion of its capital.

As it pursues the goals of democracy, welfare, prosperity, and the safeguarding of human rights, Israel also needs to develop civic cohesion and civic participation in national life while, of course, acknowledging the plurality of groups, nationalities, and cultures. To that end, we suggest a substantial cutback in allowances that will contribute to a decline in fertility among the country's economically weak groups. Other suggestions: strengthening core studies in primary and secondary schools in the Haredi educational system; improving the quality of studies that confer knowledge and social-integration skills for Arab pupils; requiring national civic service for Haredim and Israeli Arabs in order to strengthen civic cohesion and future participation in the labor force; and, finally, encouraging labor-force participation, especially of those with the lowest participation rates — Arab women and Haredi men — in order to reduce the poverty rate.

We saw that two challenges operate

### by the numbers

*Throughout this issue on counting, you will find the numbers that matter to this journal — for example, how much it costs to print and distribute each issue, and how many readers, writers, employees, volunteers, and contractors are associated with the publication. What matters most, of course, can't be quantified. It's your satisfaction, your engagement, your curiosity — how you turn over new ideas and how you wrestle with questions as you read each issue.*

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simultaneously for Israel: how to maintain its Jewishness and concern for its future as a developed and prosperous state. Prosperity requires changes of policy regarding both Arabs and Jews. The Jewish majority has been eroding in recent years and is expected to continue eroding in the foreseeable future. Policies seeking to slow down that erosion are justified so

long as such policies fall within the constraints required by upholding citizens' and residents' human rights. Accordingly, two contrasting views — that Israel is inevitably moving toward binationalism and that the current trends are not threatening the preservation of the Jewish majority — should be revisited and assessed with greater caution. 

## Counting What Matters: A Roundtable

**Shawn Landres:** *I'd like this conversation to engage your thinking both as social scientists — speaking methodologically — and as advocates. For the first question, why is it important to count Jews? In 2010, who gains and what is gained by that counting and what has changed since 1971, 1990, or 2001?*

**Benjamin Phillips:** One wants to know how many Jews there are and where they live. We want to have some sense of how this is changing over time, because it's going to influence questions of resource allocation as well as questions of communal policy. However, counting Jews has become increasingly difficult and what is probably more important today is having a sense of what leads to what — that is, the connections between factors — because that will help shape communal policy. What factors are associated with raising Jewish children? With communal engagement?

**Jack Ukeles:** Steven M. Cohen and I spent five months trying to generate support for a national Jewish study in 2009. Because of the state of the economy, we were unsuccessful in getting support. I think the failure to have national data is a disaster for national Jewish policy making. Without quantitative and qualitative information about Jews and their behaviors and interests, there is no information to resolve debates. Everyone makes up the reality that suits their perspective. The lack of data has a paralytic impact on the policy process. With data, for example, we know where Jews live and where they're moving and can plan accordingly — end of debate, end of paralysis.

**Shawn Landres:** *Is there anything that's different today — since the last population survey — that would change what we need to know, or whom we need to count?*

**Benjamin Phillips:** Clearly, the sea change since 1970 has been intermarriage. Most Jewish population studies will differentiate between

populations of Jews, people with some Jewish origin. Today, the question, "Who is a Jew?" has come to the fore — there's greater diversity as a result of intermarriage.

**Keren McGinity:** Studies in the 1970s were done differently and yielded different answers. When surnames were used to identify Jews, only those with distinctive Jewish names were counted, missing all those Jews who had changed their names, whether for social mobility or marriage. Today, in addition to including Jews who do not have Jewish names, we're also adding the perspective of those who aren't necessarily Jewish or aren't connected in any way to the Jewish community. For those who see Jews as being overrepresented or everywhere, determining that the numbers, relatively speaking, remain significantly small compared to other populations is relevant to understanding the larger American picture.

**Jack Ukeles:** The critical change affecting the way we do research in this field is the widespread use of cell phones. One can't learn anything about young Jewish adults in the United States by surveying land lines, which is the way most, though not all, studies are still done. The second significant change is simply on the question of what does it mean to be Jewish. It used to be a fairly straightforward question: Are you Jewish, yes or no? Now, the boundaries of the Jewish community have become incredibly porous and one can get an array of complicated answers. People defeat any categories you set for them, so it's increasingly unclear what it means when someone says, "I am Jewish."

**Shawn Landres:** *Beyond counting the number of Jews, assuming that we agree on who gets counted, which behaviors and attitudes count the most? Does it count more as a Jewish behavior to light Shabbat candles or to do tikkun olam in Africa with a non-Jewish agency?*

**Tobin Belzer:** I think that hierarchical

**Tobin Belzer** is a sociologist of American Jewry and a research associate at the Center for Religion and Civic Culture at the University of Southern California. **Keren McGinity**, author of *Still Jewish: A History of Women and Intermarriage in America*, is working on a history of Jewish men, intermarriage, and fatherhood during the second half of the 20th century. She is affiliated with the University of Michigan's Frankel Center for Judaic Studies and the Cohen Center for Modern Jewish Studies at Brandeis University. **Benjamin Phillips** is an associate research scientist at the Steinhardt Social Research Institute and the Cohen Center for Modern Jewish Studies at Brandeis University. **Diane Tobin** is president of the Institute for Jewish and Community Research in San Francisco, and founder and director of Be'chol Lashon, which advocates for the growth and diversity of the Jewish people. **Jack Ukeles** is president of Ukeles Associates Inc., a New York-based consulting company involved in policy research, planning, and management consulting. They spoke with **Shawn Landres**, a member of the *Sh'ma* Advisory Committee, who is the co-founder, CEO, and director of research for Jumpstart, a nonprofit that supports Jewish innovation and social entrepreneurship.