

# Rabbi Engagement with the Peace Process in the Middle East\*

Anand E. Sokhey, *The Ohio State University*

Paul A. Djupe, *Denison University*

*Objectives.* Support for Israel has been a hallmark issue of the Jewish lobby in American politics. But what do Jewish religious leaders think about U.S. policy toward Israel and the peace process, and how often do they address these issues? *Methods.* Using a sample of more than 400 rabbis drawn from the four major movements of American Judaism in the fall of 2000, we investigate rabbi views of and speech about foreign affairs, especially about Israel. *Results.* Contrary to conventional wisdom, we find considerable diversity in opinion among rabbis (if not public speech), particularly on issues concerning Israel and the peace process. *Conclusions.* We conclude that the Jewish community—really, several communities organized by movement—is hearing a diversity of opinions about the peace process. We argue that reference group theory and movement socialization help explain this diversity.

Speaking before an anti-war forum in Washington, DC in March 2003, Representative James Moran, Jr. (D-VA) commented: “If it were not for the strong support of the Jewish community for this war with Iraq, we would not be doing this . . . The leaders of the Jewish community are influential enough that they could change the direction of where this is going . . .” (Hsu, 2003). Moran later claimed that he was attempting to make a general point about the potential power of religious organizations in anti-war efforts. However, the Congressman’s comments generated immediate response and outrage. Jewish organizations called Moran’s remarks “anti-Semitic,” and leaders from both sides of the aisle quickly condemned the statement (Anderson, 2003; Hsu, 2003). Moran’s words even prompted Secretary of State Colin Powell to testify before a House Appropriations

\*Direct correspondence to Anand Sokhey, Department of Political Science, The Ohio State University, 2140 Derby Hall, 154 North Oval Mall, Columbus, OH, 43210 (sokhey.2@osu.edu). The data are archived with the North American Jewish Data Bank; either author will share data and coding sufficient for the replication of results. The authors thank Andy Katz, Irfan Nooruddin, the anonymous reviewers, and Keith Boone for their helpful comments and/or support at various stages of the project. A previous version of this article was prepared for the 2003 Annual Meeting of the Midwest Political Science Association. The research was supported by a small grant from the Denison University Research Foundation. Any opinions, findings, or conclusions expressed are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of Denison University.

subcommittee that policies toward Iraq have not been “driven by any small cabal” of pro-Israel American Jews (Sands, 2003).

Support for Israel and the concern for its security needs have been hallmarks of many American Jewish advocacy organizations (JAOs). And, as the statements by Moran and Powell intimate, some extreme anti-war groups have taken this history as evidence, charging American Jews with eagerly and effectively lobbying for war. However, opinion polls conducted before the beginning of the current campaign indicated that support for a war in Iraq among American Jews was either equal to or lower than that of voters on the whole (e.g., Sands, 2003).

What could help explain some of the differences in opinion on security issues between these advocacy organizations and their constituencies? One possible answer is the focus of this article: rabbis. By virtue of their position, rabbis hold a special place and authority within the Jewish community, and their beliefs and agendas can inform and influence others; rabbis may mediate the information flows from JAOs. Accordingly, we ask several questions about American rabbis: What beliefs about international affairs do they hold? What structures those beliefs? How often do they talk about these issues and why? In looking at these elites, we hope to advance scholarly understanding concerning the nature of influence of ethnic interests on foreign policy—something that has often been misunderstood (Ribuffo, 2001).

### **Data: The 2000 American Rabbi Study**

The data result from a mail survey of rabbis conducted in the fall and winter of 2000 in the four major movements of American Judaism—Conservative, Orthodox, Reconstructionist, and Reform. After obtaining the membership directories of the rabbinical associations of each movement, randomly selected rabbis were sent surveys, amounting to roughly half of all rabbis in these movements (about 1,600 of the 3,200 rabbis). From that initial mailing and two follow-up waves, 517 surveys were returned, though not all were usable. The overall response rate, therefore, was right about one-third (32.3 percent) and the usable rate was just below one-quarter (23.6 percent).<sup>1</sup> The rates vary by movement and decline with increasing orthodoxy of the movement—the overall response rate for Orthodox rabbis is 22 percent, 30 percent for the Conservatives, 32 percent for the Reform, and 29 percent for the Reconstructionists. Rabbis from the Reform movement form a slim majority of the sample—roughly their proportion of the rabbinical population. In our analyses, we weight the data so that each movement is

<sup>1</sup>High response rates are desirable, but we do not feel that our low response rates warrant concern—there is still considerable variance, and the rates are not far out of line with movement representation in the rabbinical population. Furthermore, a growing body of survey-related scholarship makes the argument that low response rates are not necessarily a problem because they do not automatically translate into bias (e.g., Keeter et al., 2000).

represented in accordance with its proportion of the population of American rabbis.<sup>2</sup>

### **Religion and Foreign Policy**

There is good reason to examine the opinions and behavior of religious interests when it comes to international affairs. Although there was once a consensus that public opinion did not factor into foreign policy formulation and implementation, that consensus no longer exists (e.g., Holsti, 1992). Research has found public foreign policy opinion to be “real, stable, differentiated, consistent, coherent; reflective of basic values and beliefs; and responsive (in predictable and reasonable ways) to new information and changing circumstances” (Page and Shapiro, 1992:172). Scholars have also documented the impact that particular religious interest groups can have on foreign policy (e.g., Hertzke, 2001). Although religion has *not* often factored into investigations of foreign policy attitudes among the public (but see Green et al., 1996), it has been more commonly seen in studies of group influence, working in tandem with ethnicity. Groups often become influential in the policy process when they have a tie to the country for which the policy is being created (Huntington, 1999); these individuals and their opinions can be mobilized by their social ties and links to organized interests.

Religious interest groups have been involved in foreign policy making from the beginning of the United States—notably, of course, in the decision over whether to form an independent country (Ribuffo, 2001). Whether debating and supporting American intervention in the world wars or protesting the Vietnam War, faith-based groups have long maintained a presence in foreign policy matters (Noll, 1990; Ribuffo, 2001; Wald, 1997).

A canonical example is the American Jewish community (Goldberg, 1990; Hertzke, 2001); American Jews have strong, salient opinions about American foreign policy toward Israel and countries with Jewish populations under pressure or threat (e.g., Russia) (Wald and Martinez, 2001). And, of course, the Jewish community is represented by a range of high-profile, resourceful, savvy groups—the most well known of which is the American Israel Public Affairs Committee, better known as AIPAC (Bennis and Mansour, 1998).

However, the nature of the presence and influence of ethnic religious groups appears sometimes to be misunderstood. Ribuffo (2001) is quick to point out that the impact of religion on foreign policymakers has been indirect and that major historical diplomatic decisions have not been swayed solely by religious concerns. Nevertheless, scholars have reported causal relationships between the efforts of ethnic interest groups—specifically, the

<sup>2</sup>We determined the proportion of rabbis for each movement from the membership lists obtained from the four movements. In 2000, there were 1,620 rabbis in the Reform movement (50.5 percent of the total number of 3,209), 781 Orthodox rabbis (24.3 percent), 630 Conservative rabbis (19.6 percent), and 178 Reconstructionist rabbis (5.5 percent).

pro-Israel efforts of the American Jewish community—and American foreign policy efforts (e.g., Trice, 1977; Watanabe, 1984).

### **Theory: Influences on the Political Behavior of Religious Leaders**

A large literature has documented the myriad ways in which clergy involve themselves in social and political issues (e.g., Beatty and Walter, 1989; Djupe and Gilbert, 2003; Jelen, 2001; Morris, 1984; Olson, 2000). Though the mix of forces affecting the political behavior of clergy has long been understood (e.g., Campbell and Pettigrew, 1959), the weight that particular factors may carry has been of some debate (see Djupe and Gilbert, 2003). Essentially, denominational clergy minister to particular congregations in distinctive communities, so while clergy find the balance of their inspiration to act politically from within themselves, they also receive cues from denominational, congregational, and community reference systems. Moreover, the roles that clergy take on vary as well. Although clergy generally represent their faith and values, at times they may see themselves as representatives of their faith *and* secular communities (Djupe and Gilbert, 2002, 2003; Djupe and Sokhey, 2003a, 2003b; Olson, 2000). Either way, clergy involve themselves in social and political issues by exerting influence as opinion leaders within their congregations and communities (Beatty and Walter, 1989; Jelen, 2001; Morris, 1984), and by gathering support on issues that resonate with faith teachings (Wald, Owen, and Hill, 1988).

We follow this tack, theorizing that rabbi political action should be the result of personal interests and theological orientations, but also the result of needs and influences of the congregation, movement, and community. By nature of their positions, rabbis mediate these levels. As religious professionals serving a congregation, it only makes sense that they would be influenced by both personal orientations reflecting their considerable education and experience and a mix of external influences representing their ministries. Of course, the structure of influence is a bit different in the context of foreign policy. Although personal attributes (ideology) should matter, congregations and immediate communities likely have a lesser effect on the foreign policy attitudes and actions of American rabbis. Broader forces, however, such as Judaic movement and the efforts of media outlets and Jewish advocacy organizations, may have a greater impact.

Though it is common practice to refer to one Jewish community, in reality there are significant differences between the movements within Judaism—differences that will play out in the results of this article. Therefore, as helpful context before we further discuss the importance of this factor, we offer thumbnail sketches of the Jewish movements in the United States.

Orthodox Judaism is smaller in the United States, but holds a stronger position worldwide (particularly in Israel). Adherents view the Torah as recorded law, believe in a set of orally passed laws and traditions called the

*Halakha*, and both written and oral laws are seen as universally present and applicable. Orthodox Jews strictly keep the Sabbath (choosing not to work from sunset Friday to sunset Saturday), wear *yarmulkas*, and hold strict conventions on gender (men and women are segregated in the synagogue, and women cannot become ordained rabbis). Orthodox Judaism attempts the maintenance of tradition in the face of modernity (Vara, 2000).

The Reform movement of Judaism is more liberal in dealing with the Torah and *Halakha*, though it still maintains much ritual. Reform Judaism advances the notion that revelation continues through teachers and scholars and that modern interpretations and personal evaluations can be applied to faith. Reform Judaism relaxes gender conventions: it allows men and women to sit together in services and consents to the ordination of female rabbis. In 1983, American Reform rabbis angered Orthodox Jewry by accepting the patrilineal passing of the religion, meaning that children of Jewish fathers and non-Jewish mothers could be considered Jewish—a change that broke the ancient maxim of matrilineal descent defining Jewish identity (Vara, 2000).

Conservative Judaism formed in reaction to changes introduced by Reform movement leaders of the 19th century, including Issac M. Wise. The movement upholds the observance of religious traditions and laws, though it recognizes that these must evolve. Conservative Jews do not take the Torah literally and accept the ordination of women, but disagree with both the “personal autonomy” of the Reform movement and the notion of patrilineal descent (Vara, 2000). In turn, Reconstructionism does not focus on a God-centered theology, but instead stresses Judaism as a religious civilization with a unique culture and history (Chanes, 1999). The Reconstructionist movement is generally regarded as more liberal, focusing on both social and personal improvement. An offspring of Conservatism and grounded in the work of Rabbi Mordechai Kaplan, the movement is the most recent faction in American Judaism (Vara, 2000).

### **Rabbis and Foreign Policy: The Importance of Movement**

Discussing some of the domestic determinants of American-Israeli policy, Novik (1986:5) talks about “the weight of the historical-moral commitment.” He asserts that the perception of support of Israel as a moral obligation to the victims of the Holocaust, once strongly held, is now fading with an aging American public. Younger generations, viewing those events as historical rather than memories, may not feel an obligation to resolutely support Israel.<sup>3</sup> Certainly, it is possible that Novik’s arguments may apply to some younger rabbis; these individuals may see the United States’ relation-

<sup>3</sup>Cohen and Liebman (1997) examine competing explanations for the liberalism of American Jews, including theories focusing on “historical circumstance,” “minority group interests,” and “religious modernism.” See also Greenberg and Wald (2001), Lipset and Raab (1995), and Djupe (2006).

ship with (and commitment to) Israel differently than older members of the rabbinate.

One of the more important forces driving opinion and action on the Middle East and Israel is surely the “theology” of rabbis, which means their notions about what Jewish law dictates. How are Jews defined, what role should women play, and can the dictates of religious teachings be overlooked for practical gain? These questions are perennial, and the responses draw the boundaries around movements. Because of Orthodox dominance in Israel, a non-Orthodox stance on Jewish law may bring opposition to Israel state policy. Although peace is desired, it is the process of arriving at that point that is contested. If Israel is a gift from God, as some believe, its integrity must not be compromised. But, if Israel is just a place where many Jews live, then it is easier to believe that peace can be best accomplished through concession. *Overall, a more orthodox perspective on Jewish law will drive down openness to compromise on the status of Israel.*

Some of the more contentious issues in Judaism concern the role of women—whether they should be allowed to join the rabbinate and worship alongside men. These issues map onto movement divisions quite closely, so a rabbi’s gender may not find purchase on issues of foreign policy. However, we do have explicit measures of opinions on both sets of issues and thus the ability to parse this out. Overall, *we expect that female rabbis (and possibly those supportive of women in the rabbinate) will be more likely to adopt a peace and justice perspective* (e.g., Olson, Crawford, and Deckman, 2005), which lends itself to advocating compromise with the Palestinians.

Relations of rabbis to the larger Jewish and non-Jewish communities differ considerably by movement, and Djupe and Sokhey (2003a) posit that reference group theory helps explain these differences. Reference group theory suggests that groups can serve in both normative and comparative functions (Kelley, 1952)—the normative function encourages individuals to take on the norms and behaviors of the group, while the comparative function suggests that groups define norms and behaviors in opposition of those of another group. In terms of foreign policy attitudes, we posit that *significant social barriers against the outside community, such as those erected by Orthodox and, to a lesser extent, Conservative Judaism, will lead a rabbi to take a hard line stance on issues pertaining to Israel.*

In commenting on the political development and involvement of Jews in America, Isaacs (1974; see also Goren, 1999) writes that “religion was a surrogate for ethnicity, a more acceptable basis for group distinctiveness.” The Jewish community has struggled to maintain some semblance of “social insulation” and group identity in the American milieu of cultural assimilation (Dollinger, 2000).<sup>4</sup> The Orthodox have been particularly adept at

<sup>4</sup>See also Liebman and Cohen (1990) on the distinct political culture of American Jewry versus that of Israeli Jews, and Wald and Martinez (2001) for a comparison of religiosity and political attitudes between American and Israeli Jews.

maintaining insulation, flowing from religious practices (Kelley, 1972; Finke and Stark, 1992). Following a stricter religious canon, the Orthodox are ardent supporters of the preservation of Jewish tradition and community. *Movement socialization should exert a potent influence on rabbi beliefs about Israel and foreign policy*—greater concerns about threats to the faith as viewed through the movement (as from intermarriage, etc.) should translate into greater concern about Israel and its security needs.

Of course, not all Jews advocate unflinching support of Israel by the United States—a break that has become a source of contention within the community. Novik (1986:69) writes that the debate over support for Israel “reflects a perception of unease and vulnerability stemming at least in part from the fear of being accused of dual loyalty.” Although some American Jews may disagree with the actions of the Israeli government in dealing with the Palestinians or other Arab neighbors, others are afraid of increased anti-Semitism at home as a response to strident support of Israeli policies. *This suggests that those faced with a greater incidence of anti-Semitic incidents in their community (operationalized as their state) will favor compromise in the peace process.*

Rabbi concern with foreign policy may also be structured by other external factors, most prominently mobilization efforts of the Jewish advocacy organizations (Djupe and Sokhey, 2003a). The JAOs have been called the first line of defense for the Jewish community and search diligently for issues that might concern Jewish security. Along with anti-Semitism, Israel has been the polar star guiding the activity of the JAOs. *Greater identification with the JAOs will lead to a harder line on the peace process and augmented engagement with foreign policy issues.*

In the end, a combination of factors will affect rabbi views on Israel, the Middle East, and American foreign policy. As representatives of their congregations and communities, rabbis may feel an obligation to address these issues as part of guarding the flock. This call to service is likely to be motivated by personal views and a response to the call of the community and congregation for leadership. Of course, these dynamics surely change when Israel is experiencing more direct threats. Recently, the outrageous words of the Iranian government and the electoral victory of Hamas are both likely to dampen beliefs that peace can be achieved with compromise. Crisis likely serves to reduce opinion variance, which we cannot assess with cross-sectional data.

## **Opinions about Peace in the Middle East and International Affairs**

We asked a number of questions probing opinions about Israel and the Middle East—most of them were concerned with the conflicts in the region, a few tapped opinions on American involvement, and others concerned particular movement issues in Israel. We begin by reporting the opinions of

TABLE 1

Rabbi Opinions on Israel and the Middle East and American Foreign Policy Issues  
(Percent that Strongly Agree or Agree with the Following Statements)

Issues	Reconstructionist	Reform	Conservative	Orthodox	Total
<i>Israel and the Middle East</i>					
Israel should cede land in the Golan Heights	60.0	47.5	14.5	8.0	36.7
Israel should not be willing to dismantle Jewish settlements in the West Bank	20.0	17.9	19.1	59.8	28.2
A lasting peace will require Israel to make greater concessions to the Palestinians	50.0	47.2	35.8	22.0	38.8
Israel and the Palestinians will achieve lasting peace in the near future	20.0	17.9	12.0	11.4	15.3
The only way to achieve a lasting peace is to maintain separation	10.5	12.6	24.6	41.6	22.0
<i>American Foreign Policy</i>					
The U.S. embassy should be moved to Jerusalem	43.0	73.5	80.9	94.3	78.2
The U.S. should spend more on the military and defense	9.5	13.8	10.4	38.9	19.1
China should not be given permanent normal trading status until it has stopped religious persecution	63.3	48.0	54.4	60.9	53.3
<i>N</i>	46	198	50	64	358

SOURCE: The 2000 American Rabbi Study.

rabbis of the four major American movements on Israel and the Middle East.

In Table 1, over one-third of rabbis agree with the statement that "Israel should cede land in the Golan Heights to achieve peace with Syria." But support varies dramatically by movement; this is a pattern to be repeated often. Sixty percent of Reconstructionist and nearly one-half of Reform rabbis believe that Israel should surrender portions of the Golan Heights, but less than 15 percent of Conservative and only 8 percent of Orthodox rabbis agree. A similar question on the need for concessions with the Palestinians to achieve peace also breaks down into two camps, with Reconstructionist and Reform rabbis on one side, and Conservative and Orthodox rabbis on the other. This time, however, the difference is not nearly as dramatic—approximately half of Reconstructionist and Reform rabbis agree, while 35 percent of Conservative rabbis and just over 20 percent of Orthodox rabbis agree.

In late 2000, Israel began a dramatic new initiative: the construction of walls around settlements in the West Bank. In the time since these walls have



been under construction, peace has been attempted by means of enforced separation. When asked about the segregation of peoples in the region as a path to peace, rabbis seem to believe that a lasting peace can be achieved without it. Only about one-fifth agree that “the only way to achieve a lasting peace is to maintain separation of people of different religions.” Once again, the numbers by movement break down into two groups. Although only about a 10th of Reconstructionist and 12.6 percent of Reform rabbis agree with the statement, nearly one-fourth of Conservative and over 40 percent of Orthodox rabbis believe that Middle Eastern people of different religious traditions cannot live together peacefully. Conservative and Orthodox rabbis (12 percent for each) are also more pessimistic that Israel and the Palestinians will achieve a lasting peace in the near future. The liberal camp is almost equally dour on the chances for peace, an outlook borne out in recent developments in the region. A slightly higher number of Reconstructionist (approximately one-fifth) and Reform rabbis (18 percent) expressed optimism about the chances for a lasting peace.

The relative agreement of Conservative and Orthodox rabbis on these issues lends support for the importance of movement socialization. Both the Conservative and Orthodox movements of Judaism emphasize the maintenance of religious traditions and laws—preserving religious tradition is a high priority. Because the status of Israel is seen as a religious issue, these rabbis seem less willing to compromise and, therefore, are less optimistic about the prospects for peace. That these sentiments are even more extreme for Orthodox rabbis is no surprise, for their adherence to religious law and tradition is more extreme than that of Conservative rabbis. The particularly strong position that Orthodox Judaism holds in Israel could also help explain this pattern.

Though Conservative and Orthodox opinions on international affairs often seem to coincide, Orthodox rabbis can still be regarded as distinctive. For example, while one-fourth or less of the rabbis in the Reconstructionist, Reform, and Conservative movements agree that Israel should *not* be willing to dismantle settlements in the West Bank, nearly three-fifths of Orthodox rabbis agree. This again reinforces the importance of reference groups and movement socialization in opinion formation on international affairs.

Do rabbinical opinions about Israel fit in with a broader ideology of international affairs? To examine this, we first asked about whether the United States should move its embassy to Jerusalem and, with the exception of the Reconstructionists, rabbis across the board strongly agree that the United States should move its embassy. Roughly 80 percent are in agreement and this increases with the orthodoxy of the movement.

We next asked about whether more resources should be devoted to American military and defense spending. Less than one-fifth of all respondent rabbis agree that more funding should be provided. Again, we see a sharp break in opinion, as nearly two-fifths of Orthodox rabbis believe that the United States should spend more money on the military, while only

about a 10th of other rabbis agree. Aside from Orthodox rabbis, this pattern seems to lend some support to a “selective interventionist” view of American foreign policy—a willingness to push American interests and presence abroad, yet with a reluctance to commit military resources (Novik, 1986).

Though these questions tap only a few specific issues, responses begin to reveal a structure of rabbinical beliefs about American foreign policy. Rabbis seem to believe that the United States should make at least a stronger symbolic showing of support for Israel (by moving the embassy to Jerusalem). Likewise, many support a refusal to grant China permanent normal trading status (PNTR) in light of human rights abuses—another highly symbolic act. At the same time, rabbis do not believe that the United States should increase spending for the military and defense—one means for more direct action abroad. Overall, the results point to much variation within the Jewish community, especially on issues central to the peace process and governance of Israel. What seems clear is that matters pertaining to the Middle East are structured by movement, but that other issues (defense and PNTR for China) are not. *That is, we see the most diversity where we expected the most unity.*

### Multivariate Models of Opinion

Having developed a sense of the general forces that structure the political behavior of rabbis, it is appropriate to operationalize and test our hypotheses more systematically. This we do in Table 2, which presents multivariate estimation results of a Middle East affairs index composed of agreement with four statements: Israel should cede land in the Golan Heights to achieve peace with Syria; Israel should not be willing to dismantle Jewish settlements in the West Bank; a lasting peace in the Middle East will require Israel to make greater concessions to the Palestinians; and the U.S. embassy should be moved to Jerusalem. The combination of these elements was confirmed with an exploratory factor analysis; the index earns a respectable Cronbach's  $\alpha$  of 0.71. We also estimate two variables from the index separately—whether the United States should move the embassy to Jerusalem and whether Israel needs to make concessions to the Palestinians—in order to look for different influences among the items. We chose these two items since the former involves the United States, and the latter is suggestive of how the peace process should proceed.

The explanatory factors in Table 2 are presented in several categories roughly paralleling the discussion above. Essentially, we are looking for effects from religious movement, the community, and individual political and religious law inspirations.

The model results explain an adequate amount of the variance, especially for the index (the adjusted  $R^2 = 0.319$ ; see the first column of Table 2). This suggests that rabbinical opinions about Middle East affairs are highly

TABLE 2

Estimated Opinions of Rabbis on a Middle East Affairs Index and Selected Components of the Index (OLS Regression Estimates)

Variable	Middle East Affairs Index		Move U.S. Embassy to Jerusalem		Israeli Concessions Needed for Peace	
	Coeff.	(S.E.)	Coeff.	(S.E.)	Coeff.	(S.E.)
<i>Personal Attributes</i>						
Age	-0.001	(0.013)	0.002	(0.004)	0.007	(0.005)
Sex	0.221	(0.566)	0.098	(0.185)	-0.125	(0.223)
<i>Jewish Movement</i>						
Orthodox rabbi	-0.153	(0.924)	0.393	(0.303)	0.164	(0.364)
Conservative rabbi	0.084	(0.522)	0.094	(0.171)	0.008	(0.205)
Reconstructionist rabbi	1.127	(0.850)	0.510	(0.273)*	0.042	(0.334)
<i>Political and Theological Orientations</i>						
Partisanship	-0.359	(0.149)**	-0.045	(0.049)	-0.020	(0.059)
Political ideology	-0.493	(0.140)***	-0.092	(0.046)**	-0.172	(0.055)***
Jewish law stances index	-0.208	(0.048)***	-0.048	(0.016)***	-0.050	(0.019)***
<i>Community Factors</i>						
State anti-Semitic incidents, 2000	0.000	(0.001)	-0.001	(0.000)**	0.000	(0.000)
Constant	16.09	(1.280)***	2.812	(0.418)***	4.012	(0.502)***
N	294		298		296	
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	0.319		0.110		0.116	
Standard error of the estimate	3.202		1.050		1.259	

\*\*\*p < 0.01; \*\*p < 0.05; \*p < 0.10.

VARIABLE CODING: *Partisanship*: 1 = strong Democrat, 2 = weak Democrat, 3 = leaning Democrat, 4 = independent, 5 = leaning Republican, 6 = weak Republican, 7 = strong Republican. *Political Ideology*: "Many people use the terms liberal, moderate, and conservative to recognize different political opinions. On a scale from 1 to 5, where 1 is the most liberal position and 5 the most conservative, where would you rank yourself when you think of your general political views?" *Jewish Law Stances Index*: An additive index, ranging from 7 to 35, including the following statements, each coded 1 = strongly agree to 5 = strongly disagree: "Orthodox rabbis who refuse officially to recognize Reform and Conservative rabbis are right to do so"; "*Halacha* must sometimes be ignored for the sake of Jewish unity"; "In my eyes, the child of a Jewish father and a non-Jewish mother is a Jew"; "Women should be able to become rabbis"; "Women should be confined to the women's section at the Western Wall in Jerusalem"; "Reform rabbis are most responsible for the divisions among Jews"; "Jewish unity is not as important as pluralism." *Middle East Affairs Opinion Index*: An additive index, ranging from 4 to 20, including the following statements, each coded 1 = strongly agree to 5 = strongly disagree: "Israel should cede land in the Golan Heights to achieve peace with Syria"; "Israel should not be willing to dismantle Jewish settlements in the West Bank"; "A lasting peace in the Middle East will require Israel to make greater concessions to the Palestinians"; "The U.S. Embassy should be moved to Jerusalem." *State Anti-Semitic Incidents, 2000*: Obtained from Anti-Defamation League for each state in 2000. See their website for how the data were collected ([http://www.adl.org/main\\_anti\\_semitism.asp](http://www.adl.org/main_anti_semitism.asp)).

SOURCE: 2000 American Rabbi Study.

structured by a few variables (interestingly, *not* including age or movement). Political ideology and views on Jewish law (roughly comparable to a theological orthodoxy measure for Christians) are strong and significant predictors of these opinions.<sup>5</sup> The more conservative and more religiously orthodox are more hard line on the peace process, disagreeing with a compromising stance (hence the negative sign on the coefficients). When these effects are controlled for, no movement variables attain significance. However, this serves to identify the true mechanism of influence from the movements, rather than downplaying their importance.

We see a similar pattern of effects for the other two dependent variables (Columns 2 and 3 in Table 2), except that sporadic other variables appear significant. Reconstructionist rabbis, compared to the excluded Reform category, are more in favor of moving the embassy to Jerusalem. Reconstructionists value the communal dimension of religion and the embassy move would come closer to uniting religious symbolism and political reality. Interestingly, though the effect is small, more anti-Semitic incidents in the rabbi's state in 2000 predict increased opposition to moving the U.S. embassy to Jerusalem. Perhaps rabbis exposed to a more antagonistic climate are more hesitant to back a move that might heighten tensions between Jews and Muslims. Still, these other effects tinker on the margins of well-developed, consistent opinions structured along ideological lines.

### Speaking Out on the Middle East

We have investigated rabbinical opinions about the Middle East and American foreign policy and what might structure those beliefs. We now turn to activity, for rabbinical opinions only matter to the extent they are shared. How often do rabbis speak out about Israel and the Middle East?

In Table 3, four-fifths of sampled rabbis report "often" addressing the peace process in the Middle East in 2000. Orthodox rabbis lead the way, with nearly 87 percent reporting addressing this issue, but activity is high across movements. A good portion of rabbis also report addressing the status of non-Orthodox Jews in Israel in 2000. Reform rabbis report at the highest rate (about 75 percent), followed by Conservative and Reconstructionist rabbis. That Reform rabbis speak about this issue in the highest percentage comes as no surprise; it is probably explained by the heated disagreement between their movement and Orthodox Judaism over the issue of patrilineal descent.

<sup>5</sup>One might suspect that the Jewish law index may be collinear with movement, and it is. The concern is what effect this has on model estimation. The variance inflation factor (VIF) is a common diagnostic measuring multicollinearity's impact on estimation precision (Fox, 1991; Gujarati, 2003). We obtained VIF scores for the independent variables, and none came close to the rule of thumb denoting a problem, a score of 10 (Gujarati, 2003:362). Orthodox movement earned a 4.0, followed by the Jewish law index at 3.5, suggesting collinearity, but not at problematic levels.

TABLE 3

Rabbi Frequency of Speech on Israel and the Middle East and Other International Issues (Percent Reporting Very Often/Often Addressing these Issues in 2000)

Issues	Reconstruc- tionist	Reform	Conser- vative	Orthodox	Total
<i>Issues Involving Israel and the Middle East</i>					
The peace process in the Middle East	84.2	80.4	71.6	86.8	80.3
Status of non-Orthodox Jews in Israel	63.2	74.1	72.1	56.0	68.8
<i>Other U.S. Foreign Policy/International Issues</i>					
U.S. policy toward Israel	47.4	63.2	47.0	83.1	63.7
International trade policy	10.5	8.7	6.3	17.4	10.2
Religious persecution abroad	21.0	29.0	4.5	45.8	27.2
Approximate number of cases	42	179	49	55	325

SOURCE: The 2000 American Rabbi Survey.

Over 60 percent of all rabbis report having addressed U.S. policy toward Israel, but this varies greatly by movement. Just under one-half of Reconstructionist and Conservative rabbis report talking about the issue; over 60 percent of Reform rabbis do the same. However, Orthodox rabbis are again distinct; over 80 percent report talking about American policy toward Israel. This distinction remains when looking at speech on religious persecution abroad. Nearly half of Orthodox rabbis address this issue compared to the next highest group—Reform rabbis—at close to 30 percent. Differences between movements are further demonstrated by looking at the number of rabbis who report talking about international trade issues; movement socialization is again underscored by the higher rates of speech for Orthodox rabbis.

Overall, on issues pertaining to Israel and the Middle East we see fairly high rates of speech among all rabbis. In a certain sense this may not be surprising, for perhaps a rabbi (regardless of movement) discussing issues pertaining to Israel touches on issues of identity in a way that, for instance, an evangelical minister preaching on gay rights does not. Again, however, the most notable observation is that once again we see great variation in speech on the issues for which we might expect to see the least—those pertaining to Israel and the Middle East.

**Multivariate Models of Public Speech**

As we noted above, opinion leaders, such as rabbis, are only important actors insofar as they share their opinions publicly. Therefore, we estimate

the effects of variables affecting rabbis' frequency of public speech on Middle East affairs. We estimate three models. The first uses an index of three items capturing speech on a range of Middle East issues: U.S. policy toward Israel, the peace process in the Middle East, and the status of non-Orthodox Jews in Israel (Cronbach's  $\alpha = 0.80$ ). We choose two of the items to model individually: speech on U.S. policy toward Israel and the status of the non-Orthodox in Israel. The first is clearly political; the second should show much more division within the Jewish community, tapping both civil rights and religious concerns.

The determinants that we use change slightly from those used in Table 2. We add a measure describing one facet of the relationship between the congregation and rabbi—the number of years the rabbi has served in the current congregation. Some studies have found that over time clergy build capital that can be expended from time to time on political or other controversial matters (Guth et al., 1997). Of course, addressing the Middle East is unlikely to be a controversial matter in the Jewish community, but we expect longer-serving rabbis to speak out more often. We also add several opinion items with the notion that those with certain foreign policy opinions may engage them publicly more often; primarily, we have an eye on whether there is any effect that would suggest an imbalance of information presented to congregants. We also include an item asking whether peace will be achieved soon, thinking that it taps a form of efficacy—that is, if there will be peace soon rabbis may feel a greater motivation to address related issues.

Jewish advocacy organizations (JAOs) are often considered the political voices of the Jewish community. As such, they command the respect and attention of policymakers and community members. Rabbis have a rather lukewarm relationship with the JAOs, preferring to keep their distance from the organizations while supporting many of the same causes through other avenues (Djupe and Sokhey, 2003a). Still, we suspect that rabbis' public engagement with U.S. policy toward Israel will be driven by JAO mobilization, and test this notion with an index capturing how closely rabbis feel to the three major JAOs.<sup>6</sup>

The estimation results are presented in Table 4 and reveal some hints about the structure of action on these issues. A theme running through the results is that the differences in addressing these issues are organized around stable, long-term attributes. In the model for speech on U.S. policy toward Israel, the coefficient for age just barely misses significance, suggesting that older rabbis speak out more often. Older rabbis, likely, are more steeped in the history of World War II and its legacy and see Israel as integrally linked to the fate of the Jews worldwide. Across the three models, female rabbis appear to address Middle East affairs more frequently. Women more than

<sup>6</sup>The three major Jewish advocacy organizations (JAOs) are commonly acknowledged to be the American Jewish Committee, American Jewish Congress, and Anti-Defamation League.

TABLE 4

Estimated Public Speech of Rabbis on a Middle East Affairs Index and Selected Components of the Index (OLS Regression Estimates)

Variable	Middle East Affairs Speech Index		U.S. Policy Toward Israel		Status of Non-Orthodox in Israel	
	Coeff.	(S.E.)	Coeff.	(S.E.)	Coeff.	(S.E.)
<i>Personal Attributes</i>						
Age	0.010	(0.012)	0.008	(0.005) <sup>0.122</sup>	-0.002	(0.005)
Sex	-1.024	(0.574)*	-0.372	(0.208)*	-0.478	(0.228)**
<i>Jewish Movement and Congregation</i>						
Orthodox rabbi	-1.894	(0.811)**	-0.761	(0.347)**	-0.343	(0.337)
Conservative rabbi	1.449	(0.444)***	0.723	(0.184)***	0.173	(0.180)
Reconstructionist rabbi	0.129	(0.807)	0.160	(0.320)	-0.070	(0.325)
Years with current congregation	-0.005	(0.017)	-0.006	(0.007)	-0.002	(0.007)
<i>Political and Theological Orientations</i>						
Partisanship	0.230	(0.131)*	-0.014	(0.054)	0.195	(0.053)***
Political ideology	-0.021	(0.113)	-0.010	(0.047)	0.010	(0.046)
Middle East affairs opinion index	0.035	(0.054)	0.000	(0.023)	0.028	(0.022)
Peace will be achieved in the M.E.	-0.026	(0.174)	-0.007	(0.073)	-0.054	(0.071)
Jewish law stances index	0.082	(0.043)*	0.012	(0.018)	0.047	(0.018)**
<i>Community Factors</i>						
State anti-Semitic incidents, 2000	0.001	(0.001)	0.000	(0.000)	0.000	(0.000)
Closeness toward JAOs	0.245	(0.209)	0.123	(0.088) <sup>0.167</sup>	0.007	(0.086)
Constant	4.791	(1.790)***	2.097	(0.723)***	1.850	(0.717)**
N	217		215		217	
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	0.093		0.158		0.093	
Standard error of the estimate	2.407		0.999		0.973	

\*\*\*p < 0.01; \*\*p < 0.05; \*p < 0.10; specific p values slightly above 0.10 are listed.

VARIABLE CODING: See notes for Table 2 for most variables' coding. *Middle East Affairs Public Speech Index*: An additive index, ranging from 3 to 15, including the following issues, each coded 1 = never, 2 = rarely, 3 = seldom, 4 = often, 5 = very often: "U.S. policy toward Israel"; "The peace process in the Middle East"; "The status of non-Orthodox Jews in Israel." *Peace will be achieved in the Middle East*: 1 = strongly agree, 2 = agree, 3 = neutral, 4 = disagree, 5 = strongly disagree. *Closeness to the JAOs*: An average of the closeness ratings given to the Anti-Defamation League, American Jewish Committee, and American Jewish Congress. It ranges from 1 = very far to 5 = very close.

SOURCE: 2000 American Rabbi Study.

likely are concerned about the treatment of Israeli women who labor under laws and norms generated by the dominant Orthodox factions in Israel—that is, they are concerned with these issues primarily as they concern civil rights.

Another factor that suggests the long-term, stable nature of speech patterns is the effect of movement. Orthodox rabbis speak about the Middle East less often, while Conservatives speak out more (compared to Reform rabbis, the excluded reference category). More liberal stances on Jewish law (favoring women as rabbis, accepting pluralism, etc.) also drive up discussion on the index, and on the more specific issue of the status of the non-Orthodox, which is no surprise. Religious concerns (as operationalized by our “Jewish law stances index”) have no bearing on the more political item of U.S. policy toward Israel, suggesting a degree of unity in the frequency of addressing this and related issues. Also, there are no systematic differences in public speech frequency based on particular opinions held about the peace process.

At the same time, feeling close to the JAOs appears to drive up speech on U.S. policy toward Israel (it is close to significance,  $p = 0.167$ ; see Table 4), showing at least one short-term influence on the public speech of rabbis. Since Israel and the peace process occupy a near permanent place on the agendas of American Jews, it is not surprising that organizations dedicated to keeping these issues hot can periodically ignite discussion. However, the JAOs are limited in the effect that they have on these opinion leaders, since their efficacy rests on the openness of rabbis to their efforts, and relatively few rabbis are so open (Djupe and Sokhey, 2003a).

## Discussion

At this point, it is useful to combine these two analyses to derive an estimate of what the religious Jewish community is hearing from rabbis. This we attempt in Table 5, which presents cross-tabulations between our opinion measures and selected speech items. Of course, a correlation does not mean that rabbis’ speech takes the same direction as their opinions. Table 5 presents the data in two ways: the amount of speech for those with various opinions (row percentages) and the opinions of those speaking out in varying amounts (column percentages).

Either way the data are sliced, there are no significant differences. Roughly 80 percent of rabbis speak out frequently about the peace process in the Middle East regardless of their own opinion about how that process should or will go. From the row percentage results, the only opinion measure that approaches a meaningful distinction is about whether peace will be achieved in the near future, which produces a seven-point difference.

The column percentage results, while again yielding no differences of statistical significance, give us a flavor of the messages reaching the Jewish



TABLE 5

An Estimate of the Messages Heard by the Religious Jewish Community—Cross-Tabulations Between Speech and Opinions on the Peace Process

Issues	Row Percentages			Column Percentages		
	Infrequent Speech	Frequent Speech	Chi-Square	Infrequent Speech	Frequent Speech	Chi-Square
<i>Israel should not be willing to dismantle Jewish settlements in the West Bank.</i>						
Agree	19.7	80.3		24.5	25.4	
Disagree	20.9	79.1	$p = 0.814$	75.5	74.6	$p = 0.884$
<i>A lasting peace in the Middle East will require Israel to make greater concessions to the Palestinians.</i>						
Agree	20.4	79.6		39.6	35.5	
Disagree	18.2	81.8	$p = 0.625$	60.4	64.5	$p = 0.549$
<i>Israel should maintain complete jurisdiction over Jerusalem.</i>						
Agree	20.6	79.4		50.8	58.1	
Disagree	18.7	81.3	$p = 0.681$	49.2	41.9	$p = 0.302$
<i>It is likely that Israel and the Palestinians will achieve a lasting peace agreement in the near future.</i>						
Agree	12.8	87.2		16.2	11.5	
Disagree	20.2	79.8	$p = 0.230$	83.8	88.5	$p = 0.355$
<i>The U.S. Embassy should be moved to Jerusalem.</i>						
Agree	19.9	80.1		75.9	75.8	
Disagree	18.2	81.8	$p = 0.751$	24.1	24.2	$p = 0.993$

NOTE: “Very often” and “often” were collapsed as frequent speech, while “seldom,” “rarely,” and “never” were collapsed into an infrequent speech category.

SOURCE: The 2000 American Rabbi Study.

community. Rabbis who speak out on the peace process frequently, on balance, urge granting land concessions to advance the peace process, but express trepidation about dealing with the Palestinians. At the same time, they desire a religious alignment of church and state by moving the U.S. embassy to Jerusalem; they also desire that Israel maintain complete jurisdiction over Jerusalem. All in all, *few outspoken rabbis have any faith in the efficacy of the peace process in the near future.*

Are rabbis having any effect? Although the comparison is perilous (since opinion data on American Jews are not broken down by movement, and because only a portion attend a synagogue regularly), it is at least interesting to note that there is some diversity within the Jewish community on the peace process. For instance, from the 2000 Annual Survey of American Jewish Opinion (AJC, 2005), 36 percent say that Israel should be willing to compromise on the status of Jerusalem. Thirty-two percent disagree that American Jews should support the policies of the Israeli government even if they disagree with that government’s pursuit of the peace process. This has

to be seen, of course, in the context of unity of support for the concept of Israel, represented in one way by only 10 percent agreeing that "Israel no longer needs the financial support of American Jews." On the subject of dealing with internal policies of Israel, however, 72 percent of respondent Jews blame ultra-Orthodox Jews in Israel for sharpening tensions with the non-Orthodox.

In the 2002 annual survey, a bare plurality (49 to 47 percent) supported the establishment of a Palestinian state; 41 percent were now willing to compromise on the status of Jerusalem, and 65 percent suggested Israel should dismantle all (10 percent) or some (55 percent) Jewish settlements to advance the peace process. This pattern accords roughly with the opinion measures asked of our sample—roughly 70 percent of rabbis suggested that Israel should make concessions on Israeli settlements, and 56 percent thought Israel should maintain complete jurisdiction over Jerusalem.

## Conclusion

We began this article with the comments of Representative James Moran, who provided an oversimplified, incorrect, and perhaps even offensive characterization of the opinions of the American Jewish community—one labeling it politically (if not ideologically) united—especially on issues pertaining to Israel and the Middle East. We might speculate that the loud messages of Jewish advocacy organizations, though rational and serving legitimate purpose, may in some ways contribute to the false perception of unanimity held by some individuals.

Regardless, the findings in this article certainly discredit the notions described above. Reflecting the greater Jewish community, American rabbis display a diversity of opinions concerning Israel and the Middle East. Their patterns of speech on the issues are equally manifold. Interestingly, the status of Israel occasions the most diversity of opinion among American rabbis, breaking fairly cleanly along religious lines. Importantly, we find the greatest diversity in opinion where we would expect to find the least.

Overall, we find solid support for the notion that rabbi opinion and action on the Middle East is determined by movement socialization, and reference group theory is a powerful explanation for these between-movement differences. We also find that rabbis fit reasonably well into theories posited for the political behavior of other religious elites, namely Christian clergy (e.g., Djupe and Gilbert, 2003; Jelen, 2001; Olson, 2000).

American rabbis' opinions concerning Israel and the Middle East are heavily influenced by theological orientations (i.e., stances on Jewish law); however, their political ideology also plays a key role. Thus, their views on these issues have tangible referents in U.S. politics. American rabbis are receiving information from multiple sources, and their responses are structured both by these sources and their personal conceptions of rabbinical

mission and propriety. Surely, the opinions of American rabbis will continue to evolve along with the nature of the United States' involvement in the Middle East and the relationship between the Israelis and the Palestinians.

In an early study explaining support for Israel in the U.S. Senate, Trice (1977) concluded that the organizational strength of pro-Israel groups had tremendous political effects. Recent scholarship has questioned this understanding of the nature of the influence of ethnic groups in foreign policy (e.g., Ribuffo, 2001). Rather than assuming direct, causal effects, we should recognize that influence may be indirect and, importantly, acknowledge the need to examine the networks that connect ethnic lobbying groups to their constituencies. By looking at elites in the American Jewish community, our study helps advance a more complex conception of how groups mobilize opinion. As opinion leaders and mediators of information flows, American rabbis do not speak with one voice on issues involving Israel, American foreign policy, and the Middle East. Thus, we have one explanation for disjunctures between public support and interest group actions on behalf of the Jewish community.

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