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Deter or Engage?

The Demographic Structure of Ethno-Nationalist Mobilization

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WOMBFARE IS OFTEN A TACTIC DEPLOYED BY FUNDAMENTALISTS who foment intra-ethnic conflict, but as the case of Israel demonstrates, can also be seized upon by rival ethnic groups contending for power, land, or symbolic primacy. Demography need not be actively wielded to result in conflict, however. In fact, unintended differences in the timing of fertility transition between ethnic groups can also set the stage for violence.

We have a pretty good understanding of the conditions affecting fertility, of the groups that are prone to conflict, and where discord is likely to arise. By contrast, the microcausal mechanisms that drive the probability of violence,

the onset of violence, and its intensity remain elusive, especially insofar as demography is concerned. This chapter posits demography as an intervening variable that affects the propensity of groups to resort to violence over choosing alternative strategies. Whereas most variables in the social sciences principally lend themselves to *ex post facto* analysis, the ability to project fertility and mortality trends into the future with a remarkably high degree of certainty distinguishes demographic factors as independent variables in their own right that stand to be harnessed to project risk and guide efforts at mitigating and preventing conflict.

Provided that Fearon (2006) is correct in asserting that the mere desire to resolve conflict is insufficient, what conditions affect the decision of ethnic groups to enter into violent conflict or engage in peace negotiations? Starting from the proposition that “the simple phenomenon of differential population growth rates is translated into changing political potentials” (Wriggins and Guyot 1973, p. 16), this chapter offers a theoretical exploration supported by indicative empirical evidence of the logic(s) by which demographic structure is thought to affect conflict.

A controlled comparison accounting for alternative explanations such as the relationship between a group’s size and access to political power (Posner 2004; Cederman, Wimmer, and Min 2010) is beyond the methodological scope of this chapter. Instead, it confines itself to two natural experiments to generate hypotheses. Relative group size, shifts in group size, and their trajectory towards transition (groups becoming close in size) have already been posited as independent demographic variables (Toft 2007a), as have youth bulges (e.g., Urdal 2006, 2007). Size and youth, however, are merely symptomatic of population structure. The comparative study of population age structures allows us to control for both size and youthfulness. Demographic projections have the added advantage of factoring in migration. Although complementing other work on population size and youth, relative age structure provides a more comprehensive and reliable independent variable.

Israel/Palestine

In an apocalyptic article entitled “The Demographic Jinni: The End of Zionist Dream?” geographer Arnon Soffer presents projections by Israel’s Central Bureau of Statistics to draw attention to the changing demographic balance between “Jews and Arabs in the Land of Israel.” “The Jews in the Land of Israel want clear and concise answers” to what Soffer refers to as “the demographic

problem.” That article was published in *Ha’aretz* in March 1988. The answer came in December in the form of the first Intifada. Of course, the Intifada was not an “answer” to counterassertions by an Israeli geographer. But Yasser Arafat, an architect of the Intifada, is on record as having said that the Palestinian woman’s womb is his best weapon, a reference to God’s promise in Genesis 18-21 that Sarah’s dead womb would bring forth life. Similarly, future Israeli Prime Minister David Ben-Gurion testified to the Central Committee of the Histadrut on December 30, 1947 that:

In the area allocated to the Jewish State (by the United Nations) there are not more than 520,000 Jews and about 350,000 non-Jews, mostly Arabs. Together with the Jews of Jerusalem, the total population of the Jewish State at the time of its establishment, will be about one million, including almost 40 percent non-Jews. Such a [population] composition does not provide a stable basis for a Jewish State. This [demographic] fact must be viewed in all its clarity and acuteness. With such a [population] composition, there cannot even be absolute certainty that control will remain in the hands of the Jewish majority.... There can be no stable and strong Jewish state so long as it has a Jewish majority of only 60 percent. (Masalha 1992, p. 176)

Indeed, demography has long been identified as a key fault line between Israeli Jews and Palestinians (e.g., Fargues 2000; Soffer 2000).

The proportion of Arabs in historic Palestine has been growing apace.¹ A recent census counted about 5.4 million Israeli Jews. That contrasts with 1.4 million Israeli Arabs (not all naturalized) and 4 million more Arabs in the West Bank and Gaza. By 2025, the populations of the West Bank and Gaza are projected to burgeon to 4.4 and 2.9 million, respectively. Parity between Jews and Arabs currently residing in historic Palestine had been forecast to be reached between 2007 and 2013 (Courbage and Fargues 1997, p. 157). It has already been reached, with population growth among Israeli Arabs outpacing the Israeli average by 15 percent and growth among Arabs in the Gaza Strip and West Bank outpacing the Israeli average by 50 percent.

The relative number and rate of growth of Israeli Jewish and Arab populations is controversial. In absolute terms, Arab increase has been formidable: From 156,000 who remained after the dispersion of 1948—all of whom were granted Israeli citizenship—to 1.4 million today. In the last two decades alone, Israel’s Arab population has doubled. Similarly, the population in the Occupied Territories has more than doubled, to 4 million, in 30 years—and it is expected to double again in the next quarter-century. Growth of this magnitude is indicative of a youthful population structure. Indeed, almost half the population

is under 15. On average, a third of the Palestinian population is 15 or younger, but in Gaza this rises to well over half the population.

Although the proportion of youth has now peaked, it is only projected to decline marginally over the coming years. Concomitantly, the total fertility rate (TFR) is still about 5.6 children per woman. While a handful of countries have a greater proportion of youth and/or higher TFRs, Gaza actually has among the highest TFR of any jurisdiction in the world. These figures are well above the average for Arab states. As a result, the United Nations projects the annual rate of natural increase in the Occupied Territories between 2001 and 2015 at 3.3 percent, well above the Arab-state average of 2.1 percent. The discrepancy is even more impressive when one considers that the arc of Muslim countries stretching from Egypt to Pakistan have the second-highest rates of natural increase in the world (behind sub-Saharan Africa).

Compared to other Islamic societies and the Middle East, natural increase among Palestinian Arabs constitutes an aberration. The Palestinian population in smaller Israel entered its demographic transition two generations earlier than the Palestinian population in the Occupied Territories. The former peaked at an average annual rate of natural increase of 43.5 per 1,000 during the period 1961–1965. Trends in the Occupied Territories are reversed: Natural increase has been on the rise since the early 1970s—largely due to improvements in health care and sanitation, decelerated emigration, and a burgeoning population pyramid (Gilbar 1997, pp. 12, 19–20, 23–24, 53–56). The current rate of natural increase in Gaza is estimated at 3.95 percent, in the West Bank it is 3.32 percent—compared with 1.48 percent for the Jewish population.

By contrast, the proportion of Arabs among the population of smaller Israel appears to have remained constant at 19 percent since the inception of the state in 1948. In 1948, 872,700 people lived in Israel, four-fifths of whom identified as Jewish. Of the 6.5 million people who lived in smaller Israel in 2001, a historic nadir of 77 percent identified as Jewish.² Those figures include Israeli settlers in the Occupied Territories and an undisclosed proportion of the 700,000 Israeli citizens estimated to reside in the United States. If these two groups are factored out, the proportion of the Jewish population of smaller Israel is closer to 70 percent. By 2020, that proportion is projected to contract by another 5 percent. Notwithstanding apparent continuity, the ratio between Jewish and Arab residents has been shifting (even once the negligible 4 percent of Israel’s population that identifies as neither Arab nor Jewish is factored in).³

The two populations’ age structures are also shifting. In 1982, the median age of Israeli Jews was 25.1, while that for Israeli Arabs was 16.9. By 2001, the gap had widened. The median age of Israel’s Jewish population was now 30,

while the average age of the Arab population was only 19.6. Half of Israel's Arab population is under 20 years of age and 40 percent is under 15. The corresponding proportion for Jews is only a third (Census of Israel 2001). By contrast, the proportion of youth among the Israeli population is 28.1 percent, its TFR is 2.7, and the United Nations projects Israel's annual rate of natural increase at 1.6 percent.

In addition, the balance of net Jewish migration in recent years has been negative. This calls into question Israeli's nation-building strategy of demographic dominance of the Jewish population (Lustick 1999; Yonah 2004).⁴ It is no accident that Israel's main airport is named after the strategy's architect and country's first prime minister. David Ben-Gurion noted:

Without high, constantly growing, Jewish immigration to Israel, without a significant increase in the rate of Jewish births in the country, we are condemned to become a minority, even if the threats of the Arab dictators to exterminate Israel are thwarted by our national army. To ignore this danger is tantamount to the attitude of *après moi le déluge*. (cited in Courbage and Fargues 1997, p. 153).

Migration is causing the gap between Jewish and Arab populations in greater Israel to close more rapidly. During the late 1960s, high mortality and emigration among Palestinians compounded to cancel out any demographic gains from natural increase. Twenty years hence, the available avenues of emigration had been closed and fertility cut in half. For all intents and purposes, total growth now equaled natural increase (see Figure 15.1).

Arabs have grown exclusively through natural increase. Hampered by a comparative disadvantage in TFR, the primary source of Jewish population growth in Israel has been immigration, not natural increase (CBS 2001, Table 2.2; Courbage and Fargues 1997, p. 156; Goldscheider 2002, p. 25). Notwithstanding a spike in immigration over the past twenty years, Figure 15.2 shows that the requisite immigration underpinning Israel's nation-building strategy has proved elusive, especially in light of strong population growth among Palestinians in the Occupied Territories.

In recent years, Jews have been leaving Israel at an annual average rate of about 3.3 per 1,000 residents.⁵ By contrast, the rate of *aliyah*—the “ingathering of exiles” of an estimated world Jewry of 12.9 million of whom only about one-third actually lives in Israel—is only about 1.1 per 1,000 residents (CBS 2001, Table 2.2 in loc. cit.). These observations are confirmed by Israel's Central Bureau of Statistics registering an annual excess of departures over arriving passengers at Ben Gurion airport.

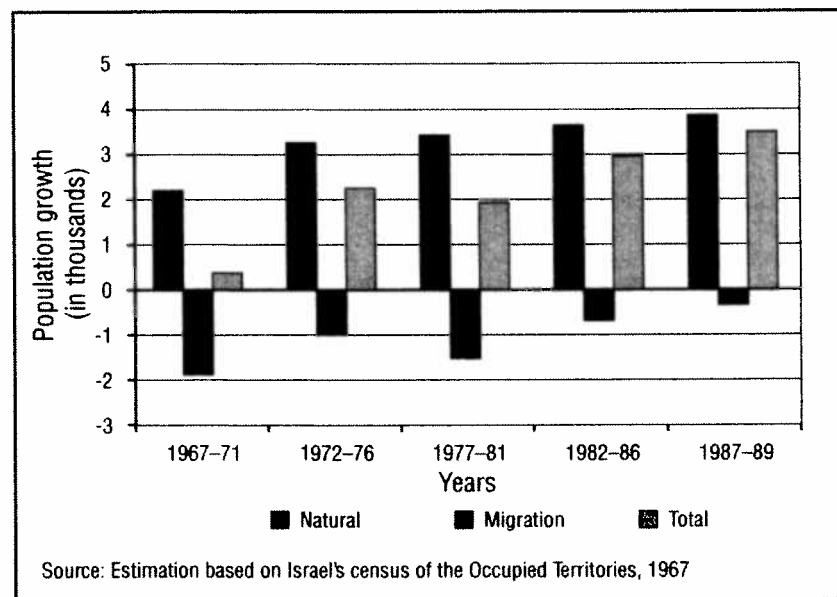


Figure 15.1 Components of Population Growth Among the Arab Population in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, 1967–1989

Counterfactually, had there been no immigration in the 1970s, the proportion of the Jewish population in Israel would have been only 65 percent instead of 85 percent (Friedlander and Goldscheider 1979, Table 7.6). In the 1990s, Israel welcomed 200,000 to 300,000 non-Jewish, non-Arab immigrants, mostly from the former Soviet Union (Dellapergola 1998). This is confirmed by the 2001 census, where an unprecedented 4 percent of those surveyed identified neither as Jewish nor Arab. While the practice of non-Jewish immigration may keep Palestinians at bay, it also accelerates the growth in the proportion of Israel's non-Jewish population.

Jewish numbers also mask severe intra-Jewish divergence between the disproportionately high (and rising) fertility of ultra-Orthodox (Haredim) and other more conservative religious Jewish groups (e.g., Fargues 2000; Toft 2002; Kaufmann 2007). Haredim, who do not serve in the military, oppose the Zionist idea, and largely do not pay taxes, are considered by many Israeli Jews to be a security liability. When they are factored out, the Zionist majority in Israel shrinks significantly. The fact that the Haredim and Arabs now account for half of Israeli primary schoolchildren is a matter of great concern to Israeli policymakers (Cincotta and Kaufmann 2009).

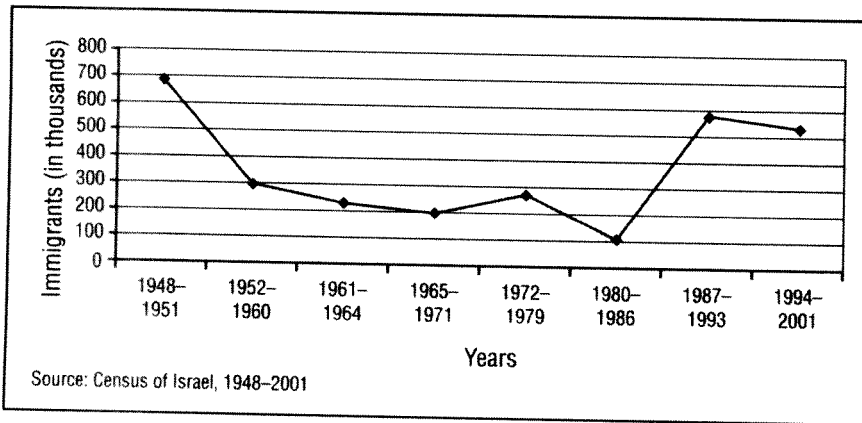


Figure 15.2 Total Immigration to Israel, 1948–2001

Curiously, one outcome of soaring ultra-Orthodox fertility has been a shift in the balance of Israel's population back toward Jews (Morland 2009). Meanwhile, Israeli Arab fertility is falling, and while Israeli Arab women still bear, on average, in excess of four children, this represents a decline of 33 percent from an average of six children per woman only two decades earlier. The convergence of Arab and Jewish Israeli fertility suggests that ethnic change will slow down, limiting the long-term threat to smaller Israel's Jewish majority. Indeed, projections suggest that by 2020, the Arab proportion of Israel's population will rise only marginally, to 23 percent.

Northern Ireland

"The basic fear of Protestants in Northern Ireland is that they will be outbred by the Roman Catholics. It is as simple as that," surmised Terence O'Neill, Unionist Prime Minister of Northern Ireland, in the wake of his resignation in 1969.⁶ As in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, demographics have long been identified as a putative driver of conflict in Northern Ireland (Doherty 1996; Poole 1983; Boal 1995; Compton 1991).

When the province of Northern Ireland was created in 1921, Protestants outnumbered Catholics 65:35. But, owing to a higher TFR, natural increase among Catholics has long had the intrinsic potential to undermine the Protestants' majority (Hepburn 1994, p. 116). Northern Ireland's Protestant majority entered the demographic transition—from high to low birth and death rates—60 to 80

years earlier than the Catholic minority (Jones 1960, p. 155; Compton 1976, p. 441). However, Catholics' disproportionate emigration rates offset their fertility advantage until the 1950s. The Catholic minority supplied 60 percent of the province's emigrants prior to this period (Lyons 1971, p. 745; Compton 1982, p. 91). Emigration thereby acted as a "pressure valve" that "released" part of the Catholic population. For a variety of reasons, including the structure of relative opportunity and transaction costs associated with migration, emigrants have empirically been shown to fall primarily between the ages of 15 and 40. By altering the age structure among Catholics artificially, emigration further undermined their population growth until emigration slowed in the 1950s.

However, in the 1950s, due in part to the spread of the British welfare state, Catholic emigration slowed, permitting population growth to drive ethnic change. The compound effect of age-structure differences and higher fertility (Figure 15.3) in the Catholic population has been to increase the Catholic proportion of the population since the end of World War II. Today's ratio is about 53:47, a significant development given, as Figure 15.3 shows, that this is the largest share Catholics have enjoyed since 1861. Demographic developments over the past 150 years are thus an inextricable part of the conflict—and the peace—in Northern Ireland. Indeed, the proverbial writing had been on the wall for Protestants since Catholic demographics rebounded in the 1930s.

The upswing is a function of age structure. In 1971, between 38 percent and 47 percent of the Catholic population was under the age of 16, whereas

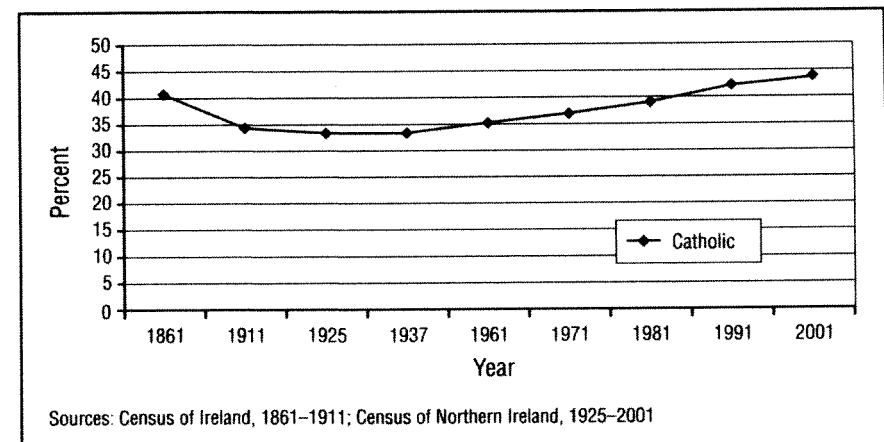


Figure 15.3 Proportion of Catholics in Northern Ireland, 1861–2001

Table 15.1 Catholic and Protestant Age Structures in Northern Ireland, 2001

	Catholic	Protestant
Under 18	53.8%	46.2%
18–65	48.9%	51.1%
65+	37.7%	62.3%

Source: Census of Northern Ireland 1926–2001. Data aggregated by author based on disaggregated information in table CAS306: Age By Community Background [Religion or Religion Brought Up In].

Note: The term *Catholic* includes those respondents who gave their religion as Catholic or Roman Catholic. Protestants include "other Christians." These data exclude those who state "none" or "other" as their faith. Some thus claim that the dyadic coding Protestant/Catholic is increasingly unsuitable (Doherty & Poole 2002).

only 28 percent of Protestants fell into that category.⁷ In other words, the reproducing cohort of the Catholic population was about 50 percent larger than that of the Protestant population. Crude Protestant birthrates were healthy compared to the European standard: 19.3 per 1,000 in 1961 and 18.0 per 1,000 in 1971. Despite waning fertility, Catholics continued to enjoy a comparative advantage over Protestants: Their rates stood at 28.1 in 1961 and 25.4 in 1971 (Compton 1982, p. 86–89). The peace process in Northern Ireland coincides with two demographic phenomena. First, the Unionist majority has been steadily diminishing, and a majority of school-age children in the province are now Catholic (see Table 15.1).

Second, fertility rates have been declining recently, especially among Catholics. As the Catholic population entered the demographic transition in the 1960s, it started to age. Yet Catholics maintained significantly higher fertility (3.2 to 2.3) and larger families (3.1 to 2.4 children) as late as 1991 (Compton 1991). Although natural increase decelerated as a result, in the initial stage of the demographic transition, the large base of the Catholic population pyramid still produced a high number of crude births, hence the Catholic advantage we see in 2001 (Table 15.1). However, in the long term, although the Catholic population remains younger than the Protestant population, the probability of violence is likely to be tempered by slower Catholic growth in the future.

Population Trends and Ethnonationalist Conflict

Intuitively, immigration by the majority might be thought to stoke conflict by bolstering the majority's demographic dominance. Yet, neither immigration by

Protestant Unionists to Northern Ireland post-1922 nor by Jews to Israel during the second half of the twentieth century confirms that proposition. Demographic consolidation among the majority does not appear to affect the demographic equilibrium with respect to conflict. By contrast, as a minority's demographic advantage founders, the cost of conflict rises, which precipitates a strategic shift toward nonviolent engagement. The Irish Republican Sinn Fein party warming up to the peace process as the Catholic fertility advantage over Protestants began to wane is a case in point.

In Northern Ireland, we find (1) a compound effect of population aging among groups in conflict, and (2) a diminished fertility premium of the minority over the majority as a result of converging population age structures among populations going through the demographic transition. The slowing Catholic demographic advantage helped Protestants overcome commitment problems and enabled a shift from violence to successful bargaining and, eventually, a mutual commitment to a sustainable bargain. By contrast, in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, we observe just the opposite: The age structures of the groups in conflict differ substantially and fertility convergence is a long way off. The result is both a proportionally larger youth cohort and a relative advantage in size for the minority. Examining age structure in addition to crude population size and fertility differences allows us to analyze—and project—population trajectories more accurately.

Perhaps an even more significant finding is that emigration serves as an independent variable in explaining within-case variation in violence: In both Northern Ireland and Israel-Palestine, emigration appears to have tempered violence by manipulating population structure and, in the process, mitigating both the size and youthfulness of minority populations. Conversely, as this exit option ceased, the propensity for violence rose in both cases.

In Northern Ireland, emigration—an intentional strategy of the Protestant-dominated Stormont regime (Patterson and Kaufmann 2007)—had artificially distorted the age structure of the Catholic population. Without emigration, the proportion of the 15–40 cohort would have been larger and, by virtue of the reproductive cohort being larger, the base of the Catholic population pyramid would have been broader because the children of emigrants would not have been born abroad. This would have generated a larger youth cohort and accelerated asymmetric population growth. Emigration delayed that development, but a decline in emigration after World War II exacerbated the cleavage of ethnic fertility differences to power differential population increase.

Similarly, in Israel age structures had stabilized artificially. On the one hand, Palestinians were either dispersed or emigrated. On the other hand, diaspora

Jews immigrated to Israel. By the mid-1990's, however, the sources of Jewish immigration had largely been exhausted and, in recent years, Jews have increasingly resorted to *yerida*—commonly defined as the emigration of Jews from Israel—to the point where Israel's net migratory balance is now negative. At the same time, migration has become increasingly difficult for Palestinians. The impact of the younger Palestinian population structure on differential growth was amplified as a result. Palestinians now brought to bear the brunt of their younger population structure unmediated by either Jewish or Palestinian migration.

Conversely, population aging among Catholics coincided with violence gradually subsiding. Aging among both the Protestant and Catholic populations preceded the peace process. Still, differential growth proceeds apace. Time is on the Nationalists' side, just as—as Arafat's remark about the weapon of the womb exemplifies—it is on the side of Palestinians in the Occupied Territories. In Muslim legend, a *jinni* is a spirit associated with demonic forces and powers. Demography appears to have that Janus-faced potential: Demographic change can be as much a source for deterrence as for engagement. The evidence marshaled from the conflicts in Israel-Palestine and Northern Ireland generates the following hypotheses. The propensity for violence decreases:

H1: as the population structures of groups in conflict enter the demographic transition and age; and;

H2: the further their population structures converge.

Furthermore,

H3: migration is an intervening variable insofar as it moderates or aggravates both population structure and the pace of convergence.

For the purposes of early intervention and preventative diplomacy, then, these findings suggest we should be concentrating our efforts on conflicts where at least one of the two parties has a young age structure, with particular emphasis on cases where the age structures of groups in conflict differ significantly. In such conflicts, we must be alert to the potentially destabilizing effects that can issue from a failure to resolve the conflict: Demographic pressure will continue to mount as long as minority grievances linger.

Notes

1. References to territory in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict are inexorably political and wrought with controversy. None of the territorial references in this article should be mis-

construed as implicitly biased. To this end, references to the "West Bank" and "Gaza" are to population developments in one or both of these territories respectively as delineated today. Historic Palestine refers to the territory covered before the creation of the state of Israel, that is, current-day Israel, the West Bank, the Gaza Strip, but also territory stretching into what is today the Golan Heights. Greater Israel refers to the Land of Israel as laid out in God's covenant with Abraham in Genesis 15:18-21. It is commonly taken to include Israel, the Palestinian territories, Lebanon, parts of Syria, Jordan, Egypt, and possibly portions of Iraq, Saudi Arabia, and Egypt. In the Israeli vernacular, however, it is almost interchangeable with Historic Palestine, that is, it refers to the state of Israel, the Palestinian territories, and the Golan Heights. Finally there is smaller Israel, which refers to the state of Israel as delineated prior to 1967.

2. Using the same data, CBS 2001 Table 2.27, Toft (2002) pegs the Jewish proportion of the State of Israel at 82 percent. The arithmetic by which the proportion of Jews among the Israeli population is arrived at by subtracting the proportion of the Arab population from the whole is based on the spurious assumption that any non-Arab Israeli must be a Jew.

3. Effectively, this ratio refers to residents, not citizens: About 20 percent of Arabs on Israeli territory, including Arabs in East Jerusalem and the Golan Heights, have been denied Israeli citizenship.

4. One Israeli diplomat observes: "The Palestinians have never made a secret of their intention to try to bring down the Jewish state by flooding it with hundreds of thousands of Arabs from abroad" (Shoval quoted in *New York Times* [1994, p. 3]). The actual size of the Palestinian diaspora may be controversial. Uncontroversial, by contrast, is that the Palestinian diaspora bordering the State of Israel is larger than the state's total Jewish population. Of 1.5 million Palestinians in Jordan—half of Jordan's population—1 million, that is, one-third of Jordan's population, are refugees. The proportion of refugees among the Palestinian population in Lebanon is 85–90 percent (332,000), 90 percent in Syria (302,000), 40 percent in the West Bank, and two-thirds in Gaza. Ergo, any right of return would inexorably have detrimental consequences for the numerical balance of power between Jews and Palestinians in Israel and the areas west of the Jordan river. See also Curtiss (1997).

5. The Central Bureau of Statistics records only "Departures and Returns of Israeli residents remaining abroad continuously for one year or more." No inference can be drawn from these figures about the demographic impact of emigration on the Jewish character of the Israeli state. In fact, Jewish immigrants continue to be counted as de jure "residents" of Israel, providing they visit Israel at least once every four years (Curtiss 1997). That means many of the (estimated) 700,000 Israeli citizens residing in the United States, with the exception of their children providing they have never been "residents" of Israel, would continue to count as residents of Israel. If that is indeed the case, then there may already be fewer than 4 million Jews permanently residing in Israel.

6. From a speech shortly after he resigned as Prime Minister of Northern Ireland, cited in Gillespie and Jones (1995, p. 105).

7. Due to an estimated 9 percent of (probably mainly Catholic respondents) who failed to identify their religious identification (which is different from identifying with no religion at all), estimates of the Catholic cohort for the 1971 census vary (Compton 1982, 98-100).