

Shaking the Wrong Hand? How the Israeli Zionist Left Perceives the Support of the American Christian Right

Daniel Arnon
Political Science
The University of North Carolina at Asheville
One University Heights
Asheville, North Carolina 28804 USA

Faculty Advisor: Dr. Peter Hascke

Abstract

Since 2001, the Israeli right has dominated every government, and has been the primary policy maker. In the 2013 elections the center-left gained four seats in its parliament, running on a platform of domestic issues. The perceived calm and permanency of the occupation in the West Bank and Gaza, has allowed Israelis to focus primarily on these issues. Economic and political support of Israel by American individuals and governments has been strong, and recently deemed unshakable. Until recently, the core supporters of Israel in the U.S. were from the Jewish community. However, in the past two decades the Christian Right has become increasingly vocal in its support of Israel, and has formed a strong alliance with conservative Israeli governments and organizations. This study explores, through interviews with the Israeli leftist elite, the attitudes of this emerging power bloc toward the American Christian Right.

1. Introduction

The growing tide of the Christian Right's support of Israel was at first greeted in Israel with suspicion because of their apocalyptic message and the fear of proselytizing. But since 2001, with the Israeli right consecutively heading Israeli governments, Israel has come to embrace the American evangelicals and has come to rely on their support in Congress. In this paper I will identify the underlying reasons for why the Israeli left supports or opposes Israel's ties with the Christian Right. Using intensive interviews with 10 individuals from the Israeli left, including politicians, journalists and scholars, I will explain the factors influencing their attitudes on this issue.

Prior research has focused on the evangelicals' motives for supporting Israel and has accepted Israeli receptiveness to its support as a given. Using Zaller's (1992) model for explaining political attitudes through life experiences, the interviews served as a medium for exploring these individuals' personal experiences with the evangelical support of Israel. In order to explain the variation of attitudes among the interviewees, I identified three factors that theoretically may influence their attitudes on these issues: Policy maker vs. non-policy maker, the individual's relationship with religion, and previous personal or professional interactions with evangelicals. I find that variation in these categories explains the variation in attitudes of the interviewees towards the American Christian Right.

2. Theory

Rational people have greater regard for their own interests than those of others', and when they must make a choice, they will sacrifice other people's interests instead of their own. Political agents, both office seekers and policy seekers, will operate under the same logic.

Political agents are rational people, who try to find an optimal position that will best serve their interests. Office seekers act "solely in order to attain income, prestige and power. They treat policies purely as a means to the at-

tainment of their private ends, which they can reach by being elected” (Downs 1957, 28). Office seekers will craft their policy positions based on their perceptions of the public opinion. They will act strategically, rather than ideologically, in order to maximize their ability to get elected. Therefore they are more limited in their policy options and restrained by public opinion, or at least their perceptions of it. Policy seekers, on the other hand, attempt to influence office seekers’ policy positions in order to deliver a certain policy. This allows policy seekers to maintain a certain ideological “purity” that is not restricted by or responsive to public opinion.

The tool that the constituency has to show their approval (or disapproval) of an elected official are elections. Issues that directly concern the “general public” will require political agents to be attentive to their constituents. But with regard to issues that the constituency is not generally concerned with, as is the issue in this paper, office seekers have more leeway to decide independently of the general public’s perception on the issue. Office seekers are more likely to leverage an issue to the benefit of their constituency, whereas the policy seekers are more likely to maintain their ideological stance. For example, if the constituency is not concerned with a foreign policy issue, their elected official will attempt to gain political benefits from acting on this issue, while disregarding their constituencies’ interests, because they don’t care about the issue very much. A policy seeker will speak out on this foreign policy issue according to his ideological stance, because there is little political benefit to be gained. On issues that the general public is not concerned about, policy seekers and office seekers may diverge in their attitudes.

Political agents’ policy positions stem from their political attitudes. These attitudes come from “a person’s lifetime experiences, including childhood socialization and direct involvement with the raw ingredients of policy issues, such as earning a living, paying taxes, racial discrimination and so forth” (Zaller 1992, 23). Lifetime experiences are diverse and have a different effect on each individual. To fully understand the formation of individuals’ attitudes extensive interviews are the preferred method of investigation.

Assuming that lifetime experiences and their political position as office seeker or policy seeker influences the interviewee’s political attitudes, it is possible to explain why some of the interviewees responded positively to the evangelical support of Israel, and some responded negatively.

3. Background on the Israeli-American Relationship

Since its formation in 1948, Israel has been a central ally of the United States in the Middle East. Eleven minutes after the state of Israel was declared, President Truman recognized the provisional Jewish government as the de facto authority in the newly born state. The Holocaust played a significant role in the justification for recognizing it. Although the U.S. needed oil from the Middle East, and the impending Cold War directed its foreign policy on many international issues, with regard to Israel the moral justification trumped real-politick. Nineteen years later, with the Israeli victory in the 1967 Six Day War, Israel and the U.S. had become more than just allies. Replacing France and Britain, the declining imperial powers in the area, the U.S. forged strong ties with Israel and came to see it as its “small but muscular cohort in the Cold War” (Oren 2007, 37). Since the end of the Yom Kippur War, in 1973, Israel has received by some estimates over \$200 billion, in humanitarian and military aid from the U.S. (Hever 2010).

After the Six-Day War Israel administered its occupied territories, with its millions of Palestinian residents, through military law. The Palestinian popular resistance, the First Intifada, brought the Palestinians’ situation under Israeli military and civil control to the world’s attention. The growing awareness of human rights and the later successful fight against apartheid in South Africa bred a generation that became more aware of both post-colonial uprisings and of the ability of the U.S. to support a human rights agenda. The Palestinian struggle against the occupation has been accepted with increasing warmth in the U.S. Led by prominent American figures, including former president Jimmy Carter, the Palestinian Human Rights issue has challenged traditional perceptions of a natural alliance between Israel and the U.S. (Carter 2006).

3.1 Jewish-American Support Becomes Less Effective

Traditionally, American Jewry has been the most active supporter of Israel. In addition to the American government’s aid, donations made by American Jewish organizations, according to some estimates, have reached 1-2 billion dollars annually and comprise 16 percent of annual donations made by Americans for international aid (Fleisch and Sasson 2012). The extent of the support is not limited to philanthropy. The lobbying group American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC), has extensive influence on Capitol Hill and support for Israel is considered bipartisan both in the House of Representatives and the Senate (Mearsheimer and Walt 2007).

Though American Jewish support has remained strong, the emergence of the Palestinian Human Rights agenda has caused the more liberal Americans' interests in the Middle East to diverge with Israel's. Israel's policy of continued occupation is an attempt to preserve the status quo, but has antagonized the current administration. With the growing isolation of Israel in the international community and the consensus of supporting Israel weakening, Israel is seeking to reinforce its "special relationship." This has led Israeli policy makers to seek additional support in the United States.

3.2 The Religious Right as an Alternative Ally

One source of expanded political support for Israel in the U.S. is the Christian Right. For millions of Evangelical Christians the swift Israeli victory in the Six Day War was a sign of the beginning of the fulfillment of prophecies and the coming of a messianic age. In the past decade the Christian right has become a major supporter of Israel by lobbying for stronger diplomatic and institutional ties, and by providing philanthropic support (Clark 2007). For example, Christians United for Israel (CUFI) has become an important player alongside AIPAC affecting congressional support.

The evangelical community constitutes over 25 percent of the U.S. population and their ability to mobilize has made them an important force in U.S. politics. Evangelical support for Israel is based on the historical connections between Israel and Christianity. The often cited verse "I will bless those who bless you, and curse those who curse you" (Genesis 12-3), is used by biblical literalists to explain why Israel and the Jewish nation should be supported by Christians. Support of Israel can also be explained by the centrality of Israel in many evangelicals' eschatological views. In their view the imminent return of Jesus Christ (also known as the rapture) depends on Israel's existence, and its possession of Jerusalem. (Weber, 2004).

In Israel, evangelical support has been embraced by the Israeli religious right. The ties between National-Zionist religious groups and the evangelical groups have grown substantially in recent years, and the American Religious Right has proven to be a strong ally. Any possible theological conflicts that may arise have dissipated, with the groups often jokingly stating that "when the messiah comes we'll ask him if it was his first visit or his second" (Hagee 2007, 136). This alliance has been welcomed by Israel's conservative governments that have adopted a hard line approach to the nation's security. But with the perceived permanency of the occupation or at least the relative diminution of Palestinian violence against Israel, a new discourse revolving around social issues has been added to Israel's political agenda. This has made Israel's left an increasingly potent force in the country's domestic politics. For example, the Israeli center-left added five seats in the most recent election in 2013 (a significant increase from 16 seats to 21 – out of 120 seats total in the Knesset), and according to most recent polls, is continuing to gain popularity. This leads to the question of whether center-left parties, should they come to power, will be able to overcome fundamental ideological differences and work with and cultivate relationships with the Christian Right.

4. The Model - Understanding the Attitudes

Why does a political agent from the Israeli center-left support or oppose the evangelical support of Israel? Through the interviews I conducted, I singled out three significant factors that explain the differences of opinion among them. These are: whether the individual was in a policy making position, their relationship with religion, and whether they had had personal or professional experiences with evangelicals. Using these distinctions

4.1 Policy Maker – Pragmatism Influences Attitudes

The first factor explaining their attitude towards the American Christian Right is being in a policy making position. Office seekers will act strategically in order to maximize their ability to get reelected. Being in a position to make decisions that will influence other people's lives will influence the policy makers' attitudes because of the pragmatic aspects to policy making. Elected officials, who want to stay in office, must be responsive to their constituency and make decisions that will influence their daily lives. This requires policy makers to decide on the basis of an implicit cost benefit analysis, especially if the decision is one that is not the elected official's area of expertise, or part of the platform he/she was elected for. On the issue of evangelical support, one that is not a major issue for a politician in Israel, the attitude will be informed by its pragmatic benefits, inflow of money and the political support of the American evangelical constituency. On the other hand there are the pragmatic costs, the possibility of "punishment" from their constituency. For someone who is not a policy maker, their attitudes can be solely based on their ideological

stance. Their general attitude and cue taking from experts on the American Christian right will inform their specific attitude to this issue, or their personal interest in it. This kind of attitude comes with no cost/benefit analysis and it can remain an ideological stance that has few practical consequences whereas a policy maker is confined by her strategic cost-benefit analysis.

4.2 Personal Interactions With Evangelicals – Personal Experiences Influences Attitudes

Since attitudes are informed by life experiences, a factor that may inform people of their attitudes toward evangelicals is their exposure and their personal experiences with them. Most Jewish Israelis living in Israel have little exposure to evangelicals. The vast majority of Israelis are either Jewish or Muslim, with a small Arab minority who is Christian, as well as a very small, activist evangelical community. Since people tend to generalize from their personal interactions with people about a community as a whole, a factor that would influence a person's attitude towards the evangelical support is their personal interactions with evangelicals, and the context in which the interaction has happened. Another way to measure this factor would be if the interviewee spent a significant amount of time in the U.S., she is more likely to have had direct interaction with evangelical individuals or at least to have been exposed to the community as a whole and developed a specific attitude towards the community. The context within which the interviewees had encountered the evangelical community and their personal interactions with them also may inform their attitudes towards the community as a whole.

4.3 Religiosity – Attitude Towards Personal Religion And Religion In General Influences Attitudes

Religion and religiosity are a major factor in an individual's life experiences. It forms their childhood experiences, and serves as a basis upon which they will form their future attitudes. In Israel religion plays a significant role in state issues, as Israel is defined as a Jewish State. But religiosity varies significantly within the Jewish Israeli population. Judaism is regarded as a religion, a culture, a tradition and a nationality. Judaism as a religion is first and foremost about practicing Judaic law, and an individual's degree of religiosity can be measured by their level of adherence to the rules of Rabbinic Judaism. The common classifications of Jewish religiosity in Israel are: Secular – Jewish by culture and nationality but does not practice Judaic law; Traditional – Jewish by culture, nationality and religion, but practices few Judaic laws; Religious/Orthodox – sees Judaism primarily as a religion and adheres to the majority of the body of Judaic law; Ultra-Orthodox – adherent to majority of Jewish law, and most of life is dedicated to practicing these laws. Religion and religiosity informs political attitudes in Israel. The character of the Israeli right is more religious and traditional whereas the character of the Israeli left is mostly secular, and is generally less informed about Judaism as a religion, and about religion in general.

The Israeli left is mostly secular and uninterested in understanding Judaism or religion in general, yet they still form their identities around these religious definitions. Since my interviewees all come from the center and center left, the standard classification of religiosity may be irrelevant to understanding the attitudes of the Israeli left. In order to understand how an interviewee's attitude is related to religion, I will define it as their degree of interest in their religion and their relationship with Judaism. This is shown by the levels of knowledge they showed about Judaism, in the interview, but also through their changed positions in life. A person who has made a conscious decision to grapple with the questions of religion is more likely to question the role of religion in the public sphere and to understand the importance of religion in one's daily life than someone whose position on religion is static and unquestioning.

5. The Interviewees' Responses - Categorized

The interviewees all responded to similar questions. After the interviews I scaled and classified their responses methodically. I fit their responses into the three possible explanations for the variation in their answers. The scores the interviewees received are based on my impressions from the interview, and were not self-identified.

5.1 Policy Making Position

Policy making is an important factor because it requires people in this position to make decisions while weighing other considerations. Their attitudes are formed out of the cost-benefit analysis they conduct, therefore acting strategically, rather than taking a pure ideological stance on this issue. This may serve as a possible explanation for the variation in the interviewee's responses.

Table 1 lays out the responses of the interviewees. Of the ten interviewees, I spoke with three individuals had been or currently are in a policy making position – Barry, Harry and Bruno. Another three were active politicians, Carry is serving as a member of Knesset (MK), and Zeke and Oppie were on a party's list but did not get into the Knesset. Although they are politicians, they have not been in active policy making positions, and therefore are not categorized as policy makers. Sheldon, Garry, Goldie and Parker are scholars, journalists and think-tank members, and are not categorized as policy makers.

Table 1. interviewees responses - categorized by policy making position

Name	Policy Maker (Yes/No)	Level of Support (1-5)
Barry	Yes	5
Harry	Yes	4
Bruno	Yes	3
Zeke	No	2
Parker	No	2
Sheldon	No	1
Garry	No	1
Goldie	No	1
Carry	No	1
Oppie	No	1

5.1.1 supportive of evangelical support

I spoke to three individuals that held either municipal or national ministerial positions, which put them in a position to make practical decisions with regard to the evangelical support. Of them Barry and Harry are characterized as supportive of the evangelical support (scored 5 and 4, respectively).

Barry was highly supportive of Israel's relationship with American Evangelicals and took pride in his extensive relationships with evangelical leaders around the world. When talking about the evangelical support, the justification for his support was first given through his political reasoning. He cites the evangelical influence on American politics and its extensive relationship with the Israel lobby. Even before being asked about the theological differences, he preempted the question by stating that: "any organization that is not Jewish, and supports the Zionist, Jewish Democratic state we have, and helps it, no matter what its interests are, is fine by me. And I've heard all the stories about hidden interests about the coming messiah and such." He had no problem overcoming the theological differences as a futuristic and imagined problem that is of no concern to the present. There was a strong similarity between his response to this question and the oft quoted response from evangelical leaders stating that "when the Messiah comes, we'll ask him if it's his first or second visit". Although Harry was a little more hesitant of the relationship between the evangelicals and the Israeli right, he still viewed their support positively and welcomed the income that evangelical tourism produced and especially their political clout in Washington. He defined the relationship with the American evangelicals as "a very important strategic asset" for Israel.

5.1.2 ambivalent towards evangelical support

Bruno was ideologically opposed to the relationship with evangelicals, but accepted their support from a pragmatic standpoint, and is characterized as an ambivalent supporter (scored 3).

Bruno's attitude towards the evangelical support was unquestionably more oppositional to his fellow policy makers, of the same party. He emphasized the theological differences between his definition of Jewish Zionism and the pre-millennial attitudes of the evangelicals who are supportive of Israel. He directly related their messianic beliefs to their desire for a "Greater Israel", and strongly opposed their "promoting of anti-liberal laws in the U.S.." Although he was clearly opposed to their support in an ideological sense, Bruno's ambivalence towards this issue became clear when he spoke about evangelical direct investment and donations to "social projects" in Israel. When asked why he took money from an organization he so vehemently opposed, he said "when I needed it, I took it. That's being pragmatic." He explained the contrast between his ideological opposition and his pragmatic support as a result of the "constraints of reality". The benefits of working with this group were their direct contributions to projects he thought needed monetary support.

5.1.3 opposed to evangelical support

Of the other seven people I interviewed, Carry is a current MK, but is a freshman legislator and is not holding a ministerial position, Zeke and Oppie were on a party list but did not get into the Knesset, Parker is a scholar, Garry and Sheldon are journalists and Goldie works at a progressive think tank. Of all of these seven who were opposed to the relationship. Two (Parker and Zeke) were only somewhat opposed and the other five were highly opposed to it.

Of the five strongly opposed to the relationship, the character of their opposition varied. When pointed out to the pragmatic benefits of the evangelical support, and to their donations to projects they potentially supported, it did not change their mind about the evangelical support. Whether for theological or political reasons, they characterized the support as "dangerous", "disturbing" and "intimidating" and provided a coherent voice that was opposed to the evangelical ties. Most mentioned that the relationship would hinder Israel's ability to reach a peace agreement with the Palestinians and from their political perspectives viewed this negatively. Their attitudes towards the evangelical support, whether well informed or based on broad perceptions and generalizations, were to some degree informed by their ideological position. For example, Goldie, an American who has been living in Israel for some time, spoke about the illiberal character of evangelical politics in the U.S., highlighting an ideological stance towards their support that disregards any pragmatic approach. Garry, on the other hand, who has researched the topic of evangelical relationship with Israel extensively felt that his opposition was well informed. He disregarded the pragmatic aspects because he felt that the costs outweighed the benefits noting that "their agenda is so far to the right of anybody in Israeli politics." He added that the pragmatic implications of their opposition to a peace agreement has practical implications on the life of his son serving in the military, and his ability to live peacefully in his country.

It became clear that these interviewees attitude towards the Christian Right was informed by the political attitudes primarily when discussing the topic with interviewees who were well informed about the evangelical community (Sheldon, Gary and Zeke). They made the distinction that the evangelical support that is tied to the right-wing agenda of a "Greater Israel" is what they were opposed to. Zeke and Sheldon positively mention evangelical support that is based on a human rights agenda, and were specifically opposed to evangelicals who supported a "Greater Israel". Others who were not as well informed agreed to the broad characterization of evangelical support of Israel as tied to a "Greater Israel" agenda.

5.2 Summary of "Policy Making Position"

This explanation is strong, and serves as a clear explanation for why the interviewees supported or opposed the evangelical support. Policy makers act strategically, and since this issue is not part of their platforms and not a salient issue for their constituents, they have more leeway to act independently. They accept the support because it has clear benefits and very low costs. Whether they strongly support it or acquiesce to it, they see a clear electoral advantage of the evangelical support in the form of increase political clout in Washington and in the form of access to their philanthropic projects.

The interviewees who were not in a policy making position mostly opposed the evangelical support based on their ideological stand, and their perception of the evangelicals as opposed to their political goals. They were able to maintain a purity that the policy makers could not.

5.3 Personal Interactions With Evangelicals (Positive/ Negative), And The Context Of These Interactions

People tend to generalize and form an opinion about a broader group based on their personal interactions with few individuals. The context of an individual's interaction (professional or personal) and the amount of personal interaction they've had shows the origin of an attitude, since attitudes are influenced by past experiences. For example, if you never met an evangelical you may tend to prescribe to a stereotypical view of them, but through personal interactions your feeling is more informed and generalized on the basis of that interaction. Every interviewee had an opinion about the evangelical ties to Israel regardless of their knowledge or interactions with this topic; this factor allows us to see if personal interactions influence their attitudes. I classified the amount of interactions the interviewees had based on their responses on a scale from one to five. Table 2 lays out the interviewees responses.

The evangelical community is very small in Israel and is barely visible, whereas in the U.S. people know of the evangelical community. Most Americans will be familiar and have at least a broad perception of the evangelical community, whereas in Israel most people will not know anything about them. For this reason the amount of time and period an Israeli spent in the U.S. may influence his attitude towards evangelicals. Of the ten interviewees Goldie and Garry, were brought up in the U.S. and moved to Israel in their twenties. Garry is currently fifty nine years old and has spent the majority of his adult life in Israel, whereas Goldie moved to Israel close to two years ago and is twenty six. Harry and Bruno have spent time in the U.S., Harry received his B.A from an American university and Bruno received his PhD from an American university and then lived in Washington DC prior to returning to Israel in 1990. Zeke has spent the last three years in the U.S. working for an Israeli Human Rights organization, and has been involved with American political organizations on the Israel issue. Carrie, Parker, Sheldon, Oppie and Barry have all visited the U.S. multiple times but have not lived here for extended periods.

Of the ten interviewees, Harry, Zeke, Garry and Sheldon have had extensive personal interactions with evangelicals. Barry and Bruno have had extensive professional interactions with evangelicals, that may have become personal, but the original intent of the interaction was of a political/professional nature. Carry and Parker have interacted with this topic as scholars, but have had minimal personal interactions. Oppie has encountered evangelicals primarily from his political opposition to their support. Although Goldie grew up in the U.S., she has had minimal personal interactions, but has informed opinions about the evangelicals as a community through growing up in the U.S. in the 1990's and 2000's.

Table 2. Interviewees Responses – Categorized By Personal Interactions With Evangelicals

Name	Amount of Personal interactions with evangelicals (1-5)	Time Spent in U.S. (Visited, lived in U.S. before 90's, lived in U.S. recently, American)	Context of interactions (personal/ professional/ both)	Overall experience with evangelicals (Positive/Negative)	Level of Support (1-5)
Barry	3	Visited	Professional	Positive	5
Harry	5	Lived before 90's	Both	Positive	4
Bruno	2	Lived before 90's	Professional	n/a	3
Zeke	5	Lived recently	Both	Ambivalent	2
Parker	1	Visited	n/a	n/a	2
Sheldon	3	Visited	Professional	Ambivalent	1
Garry	5	American/Israeli	Both	Negative	1
Goldie	2	American/Israeli	Personal	Ambivalent	1
Carry	1	Visited	n/a	n/a	1
Oppie	1	Visited	n/a	n/a	1

5.3.1 supportive of evangelical support

Harry has spent significant amounts of time in the U.S., but this was prior to the 1980's. Since then he has been mostly in Israel. In our interview he mentions the extensive ties of his family and himself to the Christian world, and specifically to evangelicals. Due to these ties, his family is attributed with bridging the gap between Jews and Christians after the holocaust, and therefore his interactions start from a positive perspective. But his ties to the evangelical community gain weight primarily from his ministerial role as Minister of Tourism and Minister of the Diaspora Relations in the 2000's. It is reasonable to assume that although he was predisposed positively towards Christians, the bulk of his positive attitude towards the evangelical community was formed in these years. He even states that "evangelicalism is a denomination not well known here [in Israel] up until close to ten years ago." He speaks of his interactions with the evangelical community fondly, and although he criticizes their ties to the Israeli right, his overall conclusion was that "when I was minister of welfare, I was convinced that they are very serious people and they are doing very serious projects."

Barry has had little exposure to the evangelical community outside of Israel. He has visited the U.S., and has even attended the National Prayer Breakfast, but the context of his interactions has been primarily of a political nature of forming alliances with power brokers in U.S. politics. He has engaged with the evangelical community first of all from his ministerial position, and has had minimal interactions with the evangelical community in any other context. In our interview he said of his interactions with evangelicals "95% have been about security and diplomacy issues – you know Palestinians, what to give up, Jerusalem and refugees and such. The other 5% have been about economical left and right, like capitalism vs. socialism." Later in the interview he mentions that he has not spoken to them once about broader matters within the American domestic context, and the reason for their interactions is support of Israel.

5.3.2 ambivalent towards evangelical support

Although Bruno has spent a significant amount of time in the U.S., he has been in Israel since 1990. When he speaks of the evangelical support of Israel he states his opposition to them for two reasons: their messianic belief and their illiberal character. He claims that both these issues are dangerous to Israel because Israel's character must be liberal and one that "connects east and west". When the topic comes up he immediately refers to their ties to the Israeli Right, and the "total identity of interests, of [wanting] a Greater Israel." His attitudes are informed primarily by his general negative attitude towards religious messianism, and the evangelical ties to the Israeli Right. Furthermore, the lack of personal interactions allowed him to generalize about evangelicals easily, but his acquiescence with them is highly pragmatic. Even though he is opposed to this relationship, when asked whether he would act differently in a position of power, he only expects "more caution" and is not opposed to it their support on principal.

5.3.4 opposed to evangelical support

Garry, Goldie and Zeke have spent significant time in the U.S., whereas Parker, Carry, Oppie and Sheldon have not. Sheldon's blog is in English and its audience is primarily American.

Garry and Goldie both grew up in the U.S., and came from a Modern-Orthodox Jewish home. The age differences between them are significant and their political experiences growing up are significantly different. Goldie, who is 25, has been engaged in the Jewish community in the U.S. for most of her life and has had few interactions with evangelicals during her time there. Goldie's attitude towards the evangelical community comes from her general perceptions of them as part of American politics, and only to some extent with regard to their support of Israel. She states that: "there are certain irrational fears that we as people have, like spiders or heights. I am irrationally afraid of evangelical Christians". Garry on the other hand has engaged in the community and respects their religious beliefs from the point of view of a scholar, and opposes it from a place of reverence rather than fear: "These are not just people with different theological conceptions and people with different practical political conceptions who grow out of that. The naiveté of politicians who see this as a strategic alliance, don't understand who they're dealing with and it is somewhat disturbing". He is aware of the differences within the evangelical community and spoke about the specific evangelical organizations he was opposed to. Similar to Garry, Zeke who has also spent several years in the U.S. recently, as the director of a prominent Israeli human rights organization, speaks of the evangelicals with a sense of nuance. He refuses to treat the evangelical support of Israel as a monolithic community, and consistently points out evangelical organizations who support Israel from a human rights perspective and are very close to his view of Israel. He mentions that prior to his time in the U.S. he was familiar with the evangelical agenda as one to which he was strongly opposed. During his time in the U.S. his opinion about evangelicals changed. He was able to name different denominations and churches, and which pro-Israel organizations amongst the evangelical community

he felt had similar agendas to his, and which were dangerous to Israel. Engaging with this community gave him the ability to find allies within the evangelical community that would support a perspective of Israel that was not only theological but appealed to their human rights agenda, too. “Some of the evangelicals are aligned with the more conservative elements, but actually on the topic of Israel, some are trying to shape a different attitude towards Israel.” It’s interesting to note that Sheldon who had not spent much time in the U.S., but encountered and cooperated with evangelicals of the human rights activists community in Israel and the Palestinian Authority, also insisted on differentiating evangelicals, and viewing them according to their respective agenda. He had reported on an evangelical event in Israel and was appalled by their message, but took a personal liking to the individuals he encountered. Similar to Zeke, he was vehemently opposed to the influence of the right-wing evangelical support, but was fine with a political alliance that suited his opinions about politics in Israel.

Carry and Parker, both religious scholars viewed the evangelical community as a monolith and explained their opposition to their support from a theological standpoint. Carry had had few personal experiences to base her attitudes on, and spoke about them conclusively while apologizing if she misunderstood them appropriately: “On both sides (Jewish and Christian fundamentalists), I am concerned about a cooperation of people that prefer a messianic view of the world over one (that centers around) people.”

Oppie who had had only very few encounters and spent minimal time in the U.S., was opposed solely on the basis of their activity in Israel, which he perceived as harmful and dangerous because of its affiliation with the Israeli settler right.

5.4 Summary of “Personal Experiences with Evangelicals”

This explanation allows us to gain a more nuanced understanding of interviewees’ perceptions of the evangelical support, yet the amount of interaction with evangelicals didn’t have a clear effect. Harry, who had had extensive interactions with evangelicals, viewed them and their support positively, whereas as Garry, who also had extensive interactions with evangelicals was highly opposed to their support. The interviewees who viewed the evangelicals’ support positively, also viewed them to some degree, as monolithic. They were mostly unaware of the nuances within the evangelical community, and their views were generalized based on their positive personal interactions. Of the interviewees who opposed the evangelicals’ support, some were able to distinguish between liberal evangelicals and conservative evangelicals, and like Zeke, this made them more ambivalent overall to the evangelicals’ support of Israel.

5.5 Religiosity and relationship with religion

Religiosity refers to the degree of religious adherence. Instead of using these categories, I classified the interviewees according to their relationship with religion - the attitudes and changes in one’s life with regard to their religion. For example, if someone grew up as an Orthodox Jew and became more secular during the course of their lives, this signifies a transition or shift in their personal beliefs and their attitude towards Judaism. Some interviewees took multiple sentences using multiple definitions to describe their religious attitude, feeling that the common labels did not apply to their attitude, whereas some felt comfortable using a specific label, feeling that the label was sufficient. In Israel being religiously adherent to Judaism is usually affiliated with a right-wing political attitude. Some of the interviewees, who clearly defined their political attitude as leftist, felt the need to explain their religious attitude, because being leftist and religious is an anomaly among Israelis. Table 3 lays out the responses of the interviewees.

Religiosity and one’s relationship with religion is an important factor in shaping attitudes because it impacts the prism through which they view the world. Classifying the interviewees through religiosity had indeterminate results, because all but one of the interviewees either defined themselves as secular (Barry described himself as traditional), or gave a “complicated” answer and didn’t like the common labels and felt that using a specific label was simplistic. The concept of “relationship with religion” refers to how much thought the interviewee had put in their relationship with religion. I categorized a person’s relationship with religion on a 1-3 scale, where one is simple acceptance of a label, two means some hesitancy but acceptance of label, and three means either an unrecognized label or refusal to accept one. This is significant because making a conscious decision about their relationship with religion shows that they value it, and do not wish to be treated using simplistic labels. It would imply that they feel the same way about other people’s religion. With regard to the evangelical support it would imply that the interviewee does not take one’s religion lightly.

Table 3. interviewees responses – categorized by their relationship with religion

Name	Self Declared Religious Label	Relationship with religion (simple – complex, 1-3)	Level of Support (1-5)
Barry	Traditional (Masorti)	1	5
Harry	Secular	1	4
Bruno	Secular/ “Man of Faith”	2	3
Zeke	Traditional (Masorti)	3	2
Parker	Secular/Traditional – Scholar of Religion	3	2
Sheldon	Secular	1	1
Garry	Skeptical - Orthodox	3	1
Goldie	Modern Orthodox/Halakhic Egalitarian	3	1
Carry	Secular – Jewish Scholar	3	1
Oppie	Secular	1	1

5.5.1 supportive of evangelical support

Barry and Harry, the two individuals who were supportive of evangelical support of Israel were unquestioning of their relationship to their own religion. Their religious self definitions were conclusive and they had no qualms on this issue. Barry stated that he “lives a practicing life of a secular Jew ... [but] lives a traditional lifestyle ... I am a man of faith, I believe in the Jewish God, and I believe in the bible and the Torah.” Barry explained his positive attitude towards evangelicals also on a religious basis and cited the coming of the messiah approvingly, and as a bridge between evangelicals and Jews. Barry was the only one of the interviewees who stated his acceptance of the coming of the messiah as part of his Jewish beliefs. Harry did not speak approvingly of the evangelical reference to the coming of the messiah, and spoke of it in passing in a negative context with regard to hate mail he had received from some American evangelicals and their hawkish stance on Israel. Harry, a secular Jew made no references to religion in our interview. He was focused solely on the issue as a political one and viewed evangelical support positively primarily as a result of their strategic importance for Israel in American politics.

Although Harry and Barry are members of the same party, Barry would score significantly higher on the religiosity scale than Harry. Both felt comfortable about their religious label (secular and traditional, respectively), and did not feel that it was important to explain it any further.

5.5.2 ambivalent towards evangelical support

Bruno, who is a member of the same party as Harry and Barry, went to great lengths to explain his relationship with Judaism. “I am a person of faith, and I do not observe Judaism. I know the Bible and the Jewish texts well, and I use them and read them quite often. For me the spiritual aspect of Judaism is what drives me. He tied Judaism to the enlightenment movement and to liberal values. He referred to messianic beliefs as a “dangerous fantasy” and claimed that “we are endangering our existence with our association to these extremists groups who want everything, whether Jewish or Christian.” Bruno, who considers himself a Zionist and a liberal, was speaking in the language of the historical Labor-Zionist movement which sees the Bible as a source of inspiration that should be studied, but not as an authoritative source. He feared extremism and constantly talked about pragmatism and moderation. Bruno seemed to feel comfortable with his religious labels, but almost every time he mentions Judaism, it was tied to liberal values – “the whole idea of Judaism is enlightenment.”

Although Bruno was not questioning his personal faith, it was clear that he felt it necessary to define, in length, his relationship with Judaism. After expressing his pragmatic support toward evangelicals, he repeatedly attacked their illiberal views. Since he attached Judaism and liberal values as the basis of his opposition to the evangelical sup-

port, it is hard to make distinctions about its source. There was a clear dissonance between his values, either Jewish or liberal and his pragmatic approval of the evangelical support.

5.5.3 opposed to evangelical support

Of the seven interviewees who were opposed, only two (Sheldon and Oppie) had no qualms with attaching the religious label of secular with themselves. They were both opposed to the evangelical support from a political standpoint and pointed out its negative effects on the possibility of reaching peace and stability in the region. Sheldon mentioned that he “respect[ed] many aspects of the evangelical life, for example the strong community” but viewed the evangelical support of Israel as ignorant. Oppie was mostly unaware of religion in general, and did not cite it as an explanation for his opposition. He generally showed a lack of interest in the conversation about either Jewish or Christian religion. Of the other five, each made a point to explain their religious views, and were hesitant to use a specific common label such as secular, traditional or orthodox. They either made up their own label, like Goldie and Garry did, or accepted the label and felt the need to explain it. Zeke, who worked for an Israeli human rights NGO, that is affiliated with the left, kept kosher at the restaurant we ate at (quite a challenge in an Asian restaurant in D.C), and said that he was “a faithful person who lives in a secular community and circle. If I have to choose between the three categories I will say Masorti (Traditional).”

Being attached to Judaism in the Israeli center-left and left is a rather new phenomenon. The historic labor left in Israel was mostly secular, and saw the Jewish sacred texts as a source of inspiration only. There used to be a clear dividing line between the right and left according to the individual’s religiosity, with the left being secular and the right being more traditional and orthodox. This dividing line is becoming less clear with many voices on the left reclaiming Judaism. Carrie, who is a MK from a centrist party is a scholar of Talmud, being elected to fight for a more inclusive definition of Judaism in the Knesset. Parker, who is a scholar of religion, is a strong voice of the Israeli left, which is supplanted in his understanding of Judaism and religion. Garry and Goldie are unwilling to let go of the struggle for their Jewish identity, while trying to constantly redefine the labels themselves. Zeke works for an internationally lauded Human Rights organization and insists on keeping kosher and being a Masorti (Traditional) Jew even though his surroundings are mostly secular. These individuals who made a conscious decision to question and define their personal relationship with Judaism, also insisted, in our interviews, to base their opposition on not only political explanations, but on religious ones too. Garry explained that the Israeli left’s politicians fundamentally don’t understand religion and religious people - “they don’t understand what they’re about; they can’t understand what they’re about. They do not have the basic educational tools to read an essay by Shlomo Aviner, by Avi Haimasny, or Tzvi Yehuda Kook [Rabbis of the Israeli Right] And you want them to understand the distinction between a liberal protestant and a conservative protestant, and a conservative protestant and a fundamentalist? A dispensationalist and a non dispensationalist, and a pre-millennialist and a post millennialist, give me a break! So they just don’t get it.” The interviewees who had taken the time to explore their religion felt that they did “get it”, and felt that their explanation to their opposition was broad and nuanced. Most of them, even if they were not scholars of Christianity, insisted on making nuanced points and refused to use a monolithic definition of the evangelical community, but were opposed only to the vocal evangelicals who support Israel in a way they were opposed to.

5.6 Summary of “Relationship with Religion” Explanation

The interviewees who didn’t feel comfortable with a specific religious label were mostly opposed to the evangelical support. Only Sheldon and Oppie were comfortable with the label “secular” and still opposed it. Although Harry and Barry each used a different religious label, they both were strong supporters of the evangelical support, and had very few qualms with it.

6. Conclusions

Individuals from the Israeli left who were most supportive of Israel’s ties to American evangelicals were people in policy making positions, who have had positive past interactions with evangelicals and have an uncomplicated and

largely unreflective relationship with religion. While the policy making explanation was the strongest, the additional explanations of attitude towards religion and personal experiences with evangelicals allowed us to see other factors influencing their attitudes towards the evangelical support.

Barry and Harry, who represented staunch support of the evangelical ties, were active politicians who had been in policy making positions many times. They accepted the evangelical support, and declared it as a strategic alliance. They were acting strategically – by accepting evangelical money to support constituency projects, and by recognizing that their support will benefit Israel in the larger political scheme of its relationship with the U.S. and the world. Both Harry and Barry aligned their ideological beliefs with the evangelical support with very little reluctance. Bruno, on the other hand, was a classic example of a politician acting strategically. He stated that he was opposed to their support ideologically, but accepted their monetary support for the financial benefits that came with it. He acquiesced to their support because he stood to gain from it, and even asked that his ideological opposition stay off the record. The other interviewees had not been in a policy making position, and as policy seekers were able to maintain their ideological stance on this issue.

The individuals' personal experiences with evangelicals and their relationship with religion explain the variation within the confines of their policy position. It explains the degree to which they were supportive or opposed, but could not explain their overall position. For example, while Zeke was clearly opposed to the evangelical support, his extensive relationships with them allowed him to view them in a more complementing light than Goldie who not only vehemently opposed their support, but feared their motives and influence.

The issue of the evangelical support of Israel has been researched primarily from the American standpoint, but has received very little attention from the Israeli perspective. Although the general public in Israel is becoming increasingly aware of it through growing media reports, the Israeli left has barely responded to publicly to this issue. The politicians who have been in policy making positions support or acquiesce to the evangelical support because there are few, if any, consequences to not responding to it. The non-policy makers – policy seekers, were interested in influencing the office seekers' positions, but generally felt that there were more pressing issues to attend to. They were opposed to it mostly in a general sense, even though some of them viewed the evangelical ties as “dangerous” or “scary.”

The Israeli political discourse is flooded with pressing issues that include domestic social and economic concerns, and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. In the latest elections, the social and economic issues became the flagship of the Israeli left, and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict was relatively marginalized. With the increased pressure on Israel due to the latest peace initiative, the Israeli left will have to address the Israeli-Palestinian conflict clearly as part of its platform. The evangelical support of Israel is a subset of where the Israeli left stands on this issue, and will have to address it in the near future. This research has provided a window into the views that the Israeli left will take on this issue.

Further researchers may be interested in continuing this work. The sample size used was relatively small, and more interviews will allow us to make more far reaching conclusions on this topic.

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