

Differential Demographic Growth in Multinational States: Israel's Two-Front War

MONICA DUFFY TOFT

"[In] Israel, a parliamentary democracy, Ultra-Orthodox Jews—who rarely work, pay no taxes and do not serve in the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF)—are bearing children at a far higher rate than all other groups combined. . . . [O]ver time this process of high reproduction and abstention from military service may threaten Israel's survival from within."

Imagine a fortress under siege. Imagine further, that within this fortress reside groups and factions with different visions of how to defend the fortress against those who seek to breach its walls and slay its inhabitants. One group believes that prayer and meditation is the way to proceed, while most other groups believe that only by force of arms and skilful management of resources can the fortress remain secure. Fortress leadership is based on the principle of majority rule, where the largest group has the biggest say; though all parties have at least some representation. Yet as the siege lengthens from years into decades, the prayer group is growing in numbers while the defense-by-force group dwindles. The prayer group gains control of education and insists that young people be taught to pray and meditate rather than to fight. A breach in a thinly defended section of the wall prompts a fierce debate. Some minority factions call for a change in the structure of leadership that will allow them to recruit defenders from all able-bodied inhabitants—by force if necessary. Others insist the risk of destruction is preferable to abandoning their democratic traditions. As they argue, the prayer group's

members are consuming a larger share of the fort's resources even as the number of its defenders dwindles. Eventually, there may be no one left to defend the walls.

This is a fictional and one might say unlikely story, but in many ways it resonates with the current situation of the state of Israel today. Israelis have always felt as though they lived within a fortress under siege—surrounded and at times actively attacked by hostile and more populous Arab states. And within Israel, a parliamentary democracy, Ultra-Orthodox Jews—who rarely work, pay no taxes and do not serve in the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF)—are bearing children at a far higher rate than all other groups combined. These children overwhelmingly become Orthodox Jews in turn, and over time this process of high reproduction and abstention from military service may threaten Israel's survival from within.

To explore the concept of the demographic disintegration of states, it is useful to begin with an overview of the interaction between the structure of government and differential population growth, as well as how diaspora issues affect local and regional politics. An introduction to and a comparison of Belgian, Yugoslav (Serb), and Israeli efforts to overcome the threat of demographic disintegration follow. Finally, it is possible to summarize lessons to be learned by Israel in its own struggles to survive in its current geopolitical context.

DEMOGRAPHY AND DEMOCRACY

Because there are thousands of nations and ethnic groups, but fewer than two hundred sovereign states worldwide, multinational states are the norm and ethnically homogeneous states are rare. This means that in almost any given state, two or more distinct peoples—with a distinct language, ethnicity, religious practice or territorial identification—reside side by side.¹ Most often these groups live together in peace, arguing about the distribution of this or that value but tacitly agreeing to resolve their differences within the framework of the state's governmental system.

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But when that state's governmental system is based on the democratic principle—the principle that the majority rules—the differential population growth of groups within a state can have dramatic political consequences. In the United States during the 1970s and 1980s, for example, young African-American women were reproducing at a rate far in excess of other ethnic groups, including Hispanic-Americans.² Conservatives argued that this was due to misguided welfare policies that gave increased benefits to mothers on welfare with multiple children. Liberals argued that the increased benefits were specifically targeted to help these children get the nutrition and education they needed to become responsible citizens. Yet many African Americans came to view bipartisan attempts at welfare reform in the 1990s as a form of genocide. They reasoned that in a democracy, more African-Americans would constitute an eventual threat to white rule and dominance, and by that logic, efforts to curb African-American population growth amounted to a deliberate and politically motivated threat.

In the state of California, these matters have actually come to a head. In the 1990s the voters of California passed a series of referenda reversing decades-long practices such as the provision of health care and education resources to the children of illegal (mostly Hispanic) immigrants (reversed in Proposition 187 in 1994) and affirmative action programs in the state's hiring and university selection processes (reversed in Proposition 209 in 1996). But Hispanic-Americans perceived these referenda as a direct insult and a targeted threat against them.³ Because they now constitute a majority of the state's population, the backlash against these "anti-Hispanic" referenda has been striking and far reaching. Regardless of the eventual outcome in terms of the distribution of resources and benefits in California, many non-Hispanics have been leaving and continue to leave California,⁴ thus accelerating the process by which Hispanic-Americans in California gain increased control of the state's government and economy.

There is of course a long history of multinational states attempting to tinker with the relative population growth rates of

their citizens. Even states without democratic systems of government—such as the Peoples Republic of China—have engineered dramatic policies aimed at altering the demographic composition of their states. In the 1930s and well into World War II, the Nazis promoted the birth of ethnic Germans, even minting a medal for German women who bore more than fifteen children. But for the most part, authoritarian regimes have had less to worry about from differential population growth of component ethnic groups because until recently such growth had no necessary political consequences, especially for large and powerful states.

But demographic difference can matter in another way that has to do with regime change from authoritarian to democratic. If a multinational authoritarian state in which there is a numerical gap between groups suddenly becomes democratic, the distribution of power should shift to favor the majority group at the expense of minority groups. Thus, instability or even violence may be an unintended consequence of the ongoing process of democratization so strongly fostered by the European Union, the United States and Japan, who control most of the world's trade. This means that for the foreseeable future differential growth rates and political liberalization will have considerable political consequences, especially for small states and especially surrounding the issue of diasporas.

Demographics, Diaspora and International Intervention

It is an unfortunate artifact of wars between states that the resolution of such wars often creates states whose boundaries either split national and ethnic groups or disperse them to other states. World Wars I and II, for example, dramatically altered the maps of Europe and divided or dispersed Germans, Jews, Poles, Czechs, Hungarians, Albanians and hundreds of other nationalities. When a dispersed group grows in proportion to its fellow nationalities in a new state, it may gain enough influence to cause that state to pressure a neighboring state about the treatment of fellow nationals within that state. In this way interstate

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tensions over differential demographic growth may increase the likelihood of interstate war.

In other situations, a state's efforts to resolve its own differential demographic growth problems may spark international intervention—including trade sanctions and even military action. This is what happened to the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia in its attempt to resolve its Kosovar Albanian “problem” by military action that amounted to grave breaches of the Geneva Conventions of 1948 and 1949.

Although the consequences of differential demographic growth are generally more severe for states whose governments are based on the principle of majority rule, they may strongly affect authoritarian states as well. Differential demographic growth may be an underestimated cause of civil wars as well as interstate wars. It is therefore a subject worthy of further study.

A THEORY OF DEMOGRAPHIC DISINTEGRATION

Under what conditions does differential demographic growth lead to the destabilization of multinational states? The logic of demographic disintegration is simple. Among a government's many other functions, few are as important as the control of the distribution of valued resources within a state (offices, employment, money, security). In many multinational states, the principles of distribution have little to do with race or ethnicity or nationality and are therefore unlikely to serve as the basis of a conflict that could escalate to violence. Such states are also less likely to be destabilized by differential population growth. But in states where there is some correlation between the distribution of benefits and group identity, differential population growth can be a major source of conflict, and a source with a potential to escalate to violence including terrorism and civil and interstate war.

Hypotheses on Demographic Disintegration

Four main variables explain the likelihood that differential demographic growth will lead to violence. First, there is the regime type of the state itself, which for simplicity's sake can be reduced to either democratic or authoritarian. Second, there is

the rate of growth relative to other groups (and the magnitude of the gap). Third, there is the perceived degree of threat from outside the state. Fourth, there is the degree to which the distribution of resources within a state is based on national or ethnic-group membership.

Reduced to testable propositions, we arrive at the following hypotheses:

H1a: democratic states are more likely to be *internally* destabilized by differential demographic growth than authoritarian states.

H1b: authoritarian states are more likely to be *externally* destabilized by differential demographic growth than democratic states.

H2: the more rapid the rate of differential growth between groups, and the closer in magnitude the growing group is to other groups, the more likely a democratic state is to be destabilized by differential demographic growth.

H3: the higher the perceived degree of threat from other states, the more likely the state is to be destabilized by differential demographic growth.

H4: the more a state's criteria for resource distribution are based on identity group membership the more likely it is to be destabilized by differential demographic growth.

TWO CASES OF DIFFERENTIAL DEMOGRAPHIC GROWTH: BELGIUM AND YUGOSLAVIA (SERBIA)

In Belgium, a potentially violent confrontation between two distinct groups—Flemings and Walloons—was deflected by a combination of careful and deliberate state policy, and by the fortunate circumstance that Belgium today exists relatively free from the fear of conquest by other states. In the Balkans, a number of smoldering ethnic conflicts dating back a thousand years (but mainly from World War II) turned violent in the early 1990s and have only ended for the time being due the active military intervention of and occupation by the world's preeminent military force, NATO.

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Belgium: Creative Solution to an Enduring Problem?

Like that of many multinational states, Belgium's national composition was determined by war. Specifically, Belgium's Dutch- and French-speaking peoples were thrown together into a single state in the 1830s. Yet it took nearly a century after that for the linguistic and religious differences that separated the communities to form into national identities with territorial attachments. Dutch-speaking or Flemish Belgians made up about 57 percent of the population and French-speaking or Walloons made up 42 percent (German-speaking Belgians were the remaining one percent).

The consequences of differential demographic growth: The internal political consequences of this division were at first not even noticed. But each of the three major wars that later swept through Belgium—the Franco-Prussian War (1870), World War I (1914) and World War II (1939)—served to exacerbate both divisions within Belgium (as occupiers the Germans made a policy of supporting Flemish autonomy as a divide-and-conquer strategy) and tensions between Flemings and Walloons. The biggest source of tension between the two groups, however, followed adoption of a one-man-one-vote electoral system in 1919, which, combined with the faster population growth of Flemings as opposed to Walloons, caused considerable alarm in the then Walloon-dominated government. This alarm was intensified by passage of a rapid series of laws that followed the domination of parliament by the more numerous Flemings in the 1920s. In 1921, the government agreed to allow Dutch to be used in all official affairs in the Flemish provinces, and in 1923, Dutch became the official language for all administrative affairs at the University of Ghent. In 1928 the Belgian army was divided into Dutch- and French-speaking regiments.

Other laws followed in the 1930s, and most were aimed at breaking the stranglehold of French language on the administrative, judicial and executive functions of the Belgian state. Attempts were made to divide the territory of Belgium into unilingual administrative districts, but although successful in many places, in others—such as the communes around Brussels, which

lay in formally in Flanders—such boundaries could not be drawn without violence. By the 1960s conflict between the two groups had escalated to a point where violence seemed likely.⁵ This set the stage for Belgium's attempted solution to the problem: constitutional reform.

The Belgian solution—constitutional reform: In 1970 Belgium became a federalized state. It was divided into three regions—Flanders, Wallonia and Brussels bilingual region—and recognized four linguistic areas: French, Dutch, German and Brussels bilingual. Parliament was split into French and Dutch language groups, with special provisions engineered to deal with relations between the communities (simple majority within each group and two-thirds majority overall). Belgium established a directly elected regional council for Brussels that required equal Dutch and French membership, though the provisions for Brussels were still a source of tension not entirely resolved.

This first wave of constitutional reforms was followed by a second, third, and fourth in 1980, 1988, and 1993 respectively. These reforms further devolved powers to the regions. In 1993 these came to include the right of regions to pursue their own foreign policies with regard to their specific competences: Before signing any treaty, Belgium would require the assent of all its government's various parts. Other reforms involved tax distributions and increased community control of agricultural and environmental issues.

Each series of reforms was accompanied by the passage of new laws designed to placate Fleming and Walloon grievances, and taken all together, they proved remarkably effective at halting any escalation of national tensions to the point of open or organized violence. The benefits of constitutional reform have not come without costs, however.

Analysis—Belgium and hypotheses on demographic disintegration: Belgium was a constitutional monarchy and did not become fully democratic until the reforms of 1919. Hypothesis 1a seeks to evaluate the degree to which a state's regime type affects the likelihood that a high rate of population growth in one group leads to demographic disintegration. The Belgian case

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does contain variation on the regime-type variable, but not variation on the demographic variable. It is an unusual case because real conflict between Flemings and Walloons did not begin until the regime changed to a full democracy in 1919. Prior to 1919 a Belgian's linguistic affiliation had some significance, but that was largely not political, in the sense that it could not form the basis of a demand for change. Now suddenly control of government and its distributional functions would be based on population proportions, and Walloons, a slight minority, became alarmed. Flemings, as observed above, did little to allay Walloons' concerns, passing law after law stripping Walloons of their traditional prerogatives. Hypothesis 1a is therefore supported in the Belgian case.

Hypothesis 2 gets at the question of the political consequences of the rate of differential group growth. Although it is true that Flemings had more children on average than Walloons, there has been essentially no change in group proportions over the last two hundred years. Hypothesis 2 is therefore not directly tested here.

Hypothesis 3 contains an international security variable in the form of perceived threat from other states. States threatened by conquest should be less likely to entertain autonomy claims from component groups. The logic of this argument is that dominant groups will be reluctant to weaken the state by sacrificing population and territory when faced with the threat of invasion. In Belgium's case this appears to be supported, because the Germans—a neighboring great power—made clear their intent to conquer and occupy Belgium in two wars and also made clear their strategy for occupation, which was to divide Belgium's resistance potential by supporting Flemish autonomy (from Belgium, not Germany). Each war and subsequent peace advanced the disintegrative effects of Fleming and Walloon identity politics, accelerating a series of crises that led Belgium to its process of constitutional reform. But Hypothesis 2 is not supported here, because there is simply no evidence that the threat of conquest by Germany caused Flemings or Walloons to regard each other's claims as a threat to Belgium's survival. This

may be due to the fact that Belgium's potential enemies would always be so powerful relative to Belgium that the outcome of a fight would never be in doubt: Belgium would be conquered. If true, then neither Flemings nor Walloons could alter the outcome of an invasion by threats of secession.

Finally, Hypothesis 4 evaluates the degree to which a state's principle of resource distribution is based on nationalist or religious group identification. In Belgium this was definitely the case, and the results are as predicted by the theory: Because linguistic affiliation was the chief criterion for the distribution of offices, benefits, military service and education, a change—not in the rapid growth of one group over another but of laws making the difference in populations politically salient—led to dramatic and enduring state instability. This instability has not been entirely resolved by constitutional reforms, though it has remained non-violent.

Serbia: If You Can't Out-Birth Them, Make Them Run Away

Although violence between Serbs and ethnic Albanian Kosovars did not begin until after the end of the Cold War, differential demographic growth began following World War II. From 1948 to 1953, for example, Serbs in Kosovo made up roughly 24 percent of Kosovo's population, but were growing at a rate of 10.45 percent. Kosovar Albanians made up a majority, 69 percent, but their growth rate was only 5.28 percent, or almost half that of the Serbs (the total population growth of Kosovo during this period was 11.04 percent). From 1953 to 1961, although population proportions remained similar (Serb 23.5 and Albanian 64.9 percent), the Albanian population was growing at a rate of 23.27 percent as compared to Serbs, who increased at a rate of 19.56. This trend intensified in the next four decades. From 1961 to 1991, the Serb proportion of Kosovo's population dropped precipitously, from 23.6 percent (1961) to 18.4, 13.2 and finally 9.9 percent in each respective decade. Kosovo's Serb population growth rate dropped as well. From 1961 to 1971 it measured only 0.55 percent as compared to Albanians, whose rate of growth jumped to 41.69 percent. From 1971 to 1981,

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and 1981 to 1991, the Serb rate went negative, dropping to –8.09 percent and –7.44 percent in each respective decade. Albanian population growth dropped slightly during the same period but remained a staggering 33.9 and 30.11 percent in each respective decade.⁶

The consequences of differential demographic growth: Serbia had long established the principle that ethnic identity determined not only the distribution of valued resources within the Yugoslav state but ultimately, life itself. Only Serbs would run the Serb state and after 1992, only Serbs would be allowed to live freely in a Serb state; a state whose boundaries were being unilaterally redefined by Serb ideologues.

Having established this principle, Serbs watched with growing concern as the proportion of ethnic Albanians within the republic of Kosovo became not only a majority but 90 percent of the republic's population. This shift in Kosovar demographics was due not only to the high birth-rate of ethnic Albanian Kosovars but to an economic depression in which many Serbs migrated to Serbia in search of work.

After the collapse of the Warsaw Pact in 1990, local communist leaders throughout Eastern Europe suddenly found themselves heading unpopular governments with no legitimacy and no Soviet military to keep them safe. Many hit upon the scheme of retooling themselves as nationalists. None were more successful than Slobodan Milosevic, who kept power by hawking nationalist propaganda. This was an evangelical nationalism: it was not enough to “be” a Serb in Serbia, being Serb meant acting to “take back” Serb lands. Once the contest had been defined in terms of ethnic identity rather than policy or action, then any Serb territory occupied by non-Serbs became a potential battleground, subject only to the limitation of the threat of direct military intervention by a European power.

But Europe failed to act in 1992, and in 1999 Milosevic clearly believed he could act again, hiding under the cloak of Yugoslav sovereignty over Kosovo. The result was a brutal campaign of ethnic cleansing.

The Serbian solution—ethnic “cleansing”: The Milosevic government set out to depopulate Kosovo of its ethnic Albanian majority by the systematic and deliberate use of murder, torture (including mass rape) and property destruction (nearly everything of value was looted before property was destroyed).

When the Albanian Kosovars resisted, first politically and then by violence, a full civil and mainly one-sided war erupted. Serb paramilitaries, supported by the Yugoslav National Army, swept into Kosovo. Their brutality sparked a flood of refugees who soon spilled over into neighboring states, causing economic disruption and imposing severe burdens on these states’ infrastructure.

But Milosevic miscalculated. He gambled that the Europeans would not act, and in 1992 he had been proven right. Now in 1999, already smarting over their previous failure to act decisively, Europe and the United States unleashed NATO air power on Serb armed forces and strategic targets within Serbia itself. When it became clear that NATO would send ground forces to invade Kosovo and then Serbia, Milosevic crumbled.

Analysis—Former Yugoslavia and hypotheses on demographic disintegration: Hypothesis 1a was not tested in this case, but Hypothesis 1b was both tested and supported. The Former Republic of Yugoslavia was an authoritarian regime: a collection of affiliated identities ruled by Serbia and disciplined by a Serb-dominated army. Yet the differential growth rate of ethnic Albanians in Kosovo ultimately led to the [further] dismemberment of Yugoslavia. Why?

The clear answer is that “democracy” has become an international norm: a powerful principle of legitimacy controlling the *international* distribution of valued goods. These goods include trade and aid and military assistance for democratic regimes. For authoritarian regimes there are economic sanctions, diplomatic isolation and even military intervention. So powerful and important has this norm become globally that the Albanian Kosovars were able to trump another age-old international principle—state sovereignty—with the argument that as the clear majority

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in Kosovo, they should have a say in its affairs, or at least security from Serb persecution.

Hypothesis 2 was supported. The rate of population proportions changed rapidly in Kosovo, but Serbia did not feel the need to act on the fact of this rapid growth for two reasons. First, because during much of this growth the principle of resource distribution within Yugoslavia did not strictly follow ethnic lines. Ethnic identities in communist Yugoslavia were not nearly as salient as they became (and remain) after 1990.⁷ Second, Yugoslavia's authoritarian regime type rendered the differences irrelevant *within Yugoslavia*. However, once the principle changed—a consequence of a nationalist tenure-maximization strategy by Yugoslavia's leadership—the ethnic composition became vitally salient and a threat to a new Serb identity as a warrior in the service of a greater Serbia.

Hypothesis 3 was tested only in its negative aspect, because Serb leadership did not perceive a high likelihood of European military intervention in Kosovo. As a result, Serbia remained unconcerned *in that context* about Albanian population growth. Ethnic Albanians from Kosovo were not a significant part of Yugoslavia's armed forces, and so their support or resistance in the event of a threatened invasion was considered irrelevant.

Finally, Hypothesis 4 was strongly supported. Milosevic altered the primary consideration for membership and rights within Yugoslavia from the traditional criteria of birth, wealth, education, and so on, to membership in a particular ethnic group, namely, Serbs. Serbs would be officers, Serbs would be judges, Serbs would be mayors and governors and big business owners. This made the ethnic composition—and rate of change in ethnic composition—of every component territorial unit within Yugoslavia a political issue of vital importance and a potential battleground for the new Serb warrior.

ISRAEL'S DEMOGRAPHIC DOOM?

Israel currently faces a crisis in that it perceives itself to be under extreme threat, while at the same time a growing portion of its population is exempt from taxation and from military service.

More than that, Israel is essentially faced with a two-front demographic war, because its population of Israeli Arabs has a high birthrate and its Ultra-Orthodox population is increasing at a very high rate. As if this were not trouble enough, Israel currently occupies territories almost entirely populated by Palestinian Arabs, who considerably outnumber Jews in the West Bank and Gaza and whose birthrates are, again, much higher than those of non-Ultra-Orthodox Jews. What is Israel to do?

Religious affiliation is among the most prominent factors in identity politics today in Israel. The Ultra-Orthodox community has the highest birth-rate in Israel. Its population currently stands at around one million, clustered in and around Jerusalem.⁸ But it is increasing at 4 to 5 percent per year and is projected to double every 18 years.⁹ For every one child born to a secular Israeli, an Ultra-Orthodox woman has three. Since the 1980s the projected birth-rate of Ultra-Orthodox Jews has risen about 15 percent: from six to seven children per woman by 1993.¹⁰

Ultra-Orthodox Jews are largely responsible for settlement of the lands they consider Greater Israel. After the capture of the biblical lands of Judea and Samaria following the 1967 war, new movements formed calling for the annexation of Arab territories and the settling of Jews there. Among the movements was the Bloc of the Faithful (Gush Emunim), whose members started illegally establishing settlements as early as 1968. They regarded Israel's conquest of these lands as the fulfillment of God's promise; settlement was not "only a right but a divine commandment that, if not fulfilled, would impede the redemptive process."¹¹

But the Ultra-Orthodox are not Israel's only demographic problem. Israeli Arabs and Palestinians have far higher birthrates than non-Ultra-Orthodox Jews. Israeli Arabs are the second-fastest growing group in Israel. They have full voting rights, including membership in the Knesset, but they do not serve in the IDF. From 1980 to 1984, Israeli Arab women had on average 5.98 children each; this number declined slightly to 4.65 from 1993 to 1996. Even so, Israel's Arab population is expected to grow from 18 percent of the total today to 23 percent by 2020.

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This is striking when compared to the proportion of Jews as a whole, which even with the help of the Ultra-Orthodox will decline from 82 percent today to 77 percent by 2020.¹²

Besides this rapid growth of one religious affiliation over all others, the threat of demographic disintegration becomes stronger because Israel's government is a parliamentary democracy with a proportional representation system that gives even small groups some say in Israel's political and economic policy. This explains why Israel has been so obstructive in efforts to measure the Arab population both within its own pre-1967 borders and especially within the Occupied Territories. In the Occupied Territories, Palestinian Arabs also have high birthrates relative to non-Ultra-Orthodox Jews. According to estimates, the Palestinian population is expected to triple in the next 20 years.¹³ Currently, there are about 1.6 million Palestinians in the West Bank, 1.02 million in Gaza, and 210,000 in Arab East Jerusalem. Palestinian women are having an average of 6.4 children each. By 2025 there will be 4.4 million Palestinians in the West Bank and 2.9 million in Gaza. The stakes are high. If Palestinian birth rates continue at current levels, in 10 years, Jews will be a minority in the combined lands of Israel, the West Bank and Gaza.¹⁴

Permanent settlement or annexation of these disputed territories would therefore be a disaster for Israel unless it altered its form of government to an Apartheid system. So real is this possibility that some Arab intellectuals have called upon Palestinian women to act as "biological weapons," overcoming Israeli occupation by birth rather than bullet.¹⁵ In short, in Israel, numbers matter.

But so does national identity. Israel was established as a *Jewish* state, and that Jewish character is as crucial to Israel's survival as its territorial integrity. A key component of Jewish national character in Israel is the practice of Orthodox Judaism, whose followers maintain a life strictly regulated by their interpretation of holy scripture. The vast majority of Ultra-Orthodox men do not work, opting to attend religious school (*yeshiva*) fulltime. They do not pay taxes nor serve in the IDF.¹⁶ Basically,

they contribute little to the material well-being of Israel, although they believe they make a significant spiritual contribution in the dedication and promotion of Judaic teaching and practices. For decades, most Israelis considered the presence of this group a small price to pay as compared to the benefits of its inclusion within the family of Jewish communities protected by a Jewish state. But the reproductive rate of Ultra-Orthodox Jews, combined with the widespread sense of siege and Israel's democratic institutions, have raised tensions and even alarm among many Israelis. Professor Asher Susser of Tel Aviv University, for example, claims that "Secular Israelis feel they're being taken for a ride, not only over what Israel will be vis-à-vis the Palestinians and their Intifada, but vis-à-vis the Ultra-Orthodox."¹⁷

The Consequences of Differential Demographic Growth

On the internal front, this differential demographic growth has as yet had no significant consequences. Israeli intellectuals and policy makers have raised the issue but come to no consensus on whether a change in government—say to increase the threshold necessary to gain representation in parliament—would help or harm. There has also been some discussion of the possibility of "incentivizing" non-Orthodox Jewish women to bear more children, by, for example, increased tax breaks. Finally, there has been a small movement within the Ultra-Orthodox Jewish community to take up arms in the defense of Israel; and there has been discussion within Israeli government circles of this same issue: should Ultra-Orthodox Jews be made to serve in the IDF or not?

But perhaps the chief consequence of differential demographic growth has been to push Israel to focus on raising the Arab siege—resolving the political threat to its existence or way of life—rather than to attempt to resolve its internal weaknesses by political reforms that may damage Jewish national identity and tear the government apart.

On the Israeli-Palestinian front, Israel has acted to deliberately obstruct census-taking in the Occupied Territories, and, as observed above, subsidized the birth of Jewish children wherever

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possible. Unfortunately for Israel's material well-being and security, the government's only success with increasing the birthrate of Jewish women has been among the Ultra-Orthodox. Thus progress on either front tends to come only at the expense of the other front, and Israel's risk of disintegration increases daily.

The Israeli Solution: Raise the Siege

After the latest Intifada, which began after Israel's current prime minister, Ariel Sharon, visited a contested holy site in Jerusalem, most Israelis came to believe that Israel's future could only be secured through war. War was something Israel excelled at, and eliminating the threat by force might render the impact of differential demographic growth irrelevant. The only meaningful question would be whether this threat would be eliminated by peace or by war.

Israel's choice of war was not without some justification, but it will ultimately prove fruitless. The choice of a former general as prime minister and war as the best policy option made sense to most Israelis because they had been led to believe that the previous government had offered to accede to every key Palestinian demand save one, a right of return for refugees of the 1948 war (a right that if granted would mean the end of Israel as a Jewish state). This was not entirely true. The issues were and remain complex, but the Palestinian state proposed by the Barak Administration would not have been a viable state. But it is also true that the Palestinians were poorly served by their chosen leader, Yassir Arafat, who apparently calculated that he could gain the remainder of Palestinian demands—including a right of return for 1948 refugees—by increasing the violence against Israel. It was a grave miscalculation, and it was followed by an equally grave miscalculation by Israel: that armed force can eliminate the threat of terror attacks in either the Occupied Territories or in Israel itself.

Thus, Israel's solution to its internal demographic threat was war. But what about the demographic threat from Palestinians?

Here Israel's thinking has not been resolved. On the one hand, the Sharon Administration and many even moderate Israelis clearly feel that the Palestinians will never be acceptable as

neighbors within a sovereign state (unless that state is Jordan). In this view, Palestinians do not deserve a state on lands many consider to be Jewish, and such a state would only be a threat to Israel's security over the long run. On the other hand, Israel's most important allies, the United States and Britain, have made clear their support for a viable and independent Palestinian state; and in any case the costs of annexation and settlement would likely be ruinous. As noted above, Israel would essentially cease to be a Jewish state. It would have to either engineer an Apartheid system or force the mass migration of Palestinian Arabs to neighboring Arab states; an "ethnic cleansing" policy that would count as a grave breach of the Geneva Conventions of 1948 and 1949.

Analysis: Israel and Hypotheses on Demographic Disintegration

Hypothesis 1 is supported in Israel's case, but in Israel the focus is so much more external than internal that one hesitates to say that democracy is the problem. In addition, Israel has so far resisted the temptation to alter its government or constitution in response to the growing threat of Ultra-Orthodox ascendancy under siege.

Hypothesis 2 is also supported here. The rate of population growth among the Ultra-Orthodox is high, but so far it has not reached a point where in overall numbers it threatens to capture the state. Its influence is likely to be higher than in other democratic systems, however, because Israel's threshold of representation in parliament is currently only three percent.

Hypothesis 3 was very strongly supported here. In fact it is the sense of external threat that more than any other factor has raised to salience the issue of differential demographic growth.

Finally, Hypothesis 4 was also supported. Although in general Israelis do not make nationalist group affiliation a criterion for distribution of benefits and offices, there are important exceptions for settler groups and for Ultra-Orthodox Jews. Because these group affiliations matter, the fact of differential demographic growth in Israel is much more politically significant than it would otherwise be.

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CONCLUSIONS

In this final section of the essay I offer a brief summary of its key findings, followed by an assessment of the policy recommendations it supports and an agenda for further research on this important issue.

Belgium, Yugoslavia (Serbia) and Israel

Belgium was beset by a creeping national identity crisis that took almost 200 years to come to a head. It has so far been able to dodge the worst consequences of its demographic threat by constitutional reforms, but in the process it has established principles and precedents that may compromise its existence as a unified state.

Serbia attempted to solve its own demographic threat by extreme violence. Attempting to resolve the demographic imbalance in Kosovo by depopulating it was not only immoral but unwise, given the international community's preexisting sensitivity to Serb actions in the 1992 Balkan violence. In the event, Serbian action precipitated the further dismemberment of the Yugoslav Republic and the criminal prosecution of much of its leadership for war crimes.

Israel has so far done little in the way of government reform aimed at heading off the demographic threat posed by the rapid increase of Ultra-Orthodox Jews as compared to other groups in Israel. This is mainly because Israel maintains—and has since its founding in 1948—a staunchly external view of its problems. If siege by its enemies is what makes differential demographic growth within fortress Israel a threat, then one way to eliminate the demographic threat would be to raise the siege. So far, Israel has chosen to attempt to do this by means of war against Palestinians and Palestinian terror groups. It has not relieved the siege but only threatened to intensify and extend it.

But Israel faces another problem. Even had it chosen peace without altering its current system of government, its Ultra-Orthodox minority would someday gain control of government. Efforts to head off this threat by economic incentives would then leave Israel vulnerable to increasing control by Israeli Arabs

or again, a choice between losing Jewish control of government and losing democracy.

Hypotheses on Demographic Disintegration

The following table summarizes the degree to which the four hypotheses on demographic disintegration found support in the cases:

**Table 1: Hypotheses on Demographic Disintegration:
Belgium, Yugoslavia (Serbia) and Israel**

	<i>Belgium</i>	<i>Yugoslavia</i>	<i>Israel</i>
<i>H1a</i>	supported	not tested	supported
<i>H1b</i>	not tested	strongly supported	not tested
<i>H2</i>	not tested	supported	supported
<i>H3</i>	supported	supported	strongly supported
<i>H4</i>	strongly supported	strongly supported	supported

The case studies and their analysis were presented in only the most cursory fashion, but their support of the hypotheses and this theory of demographic disintegration makes it clear that the theory is worth subjecting to more stringent tests.

Policy Recommendations

What should Israel do? Based on this early research and recent scholarship on counterterrorism and asymmetric conflict,¹⁸ Israel's best strategy is two-fold. First, it should seriously reconsider its policy of providing large economic subsidies to settlers in the Occupied Territories. This only aggravates Palestinian grievances and justifies, in their minds, the violence that the more radical among them perpetrate against Israeli civilians. More important, the money saved could be redirected toward giving incentives for non-Orthodox Jewish women to have more children. More generous tax breaks and parental leave policies might slowly help compensate for the high rate of growth among Ultra-Orthodox Jews without weakening the Israeli state.

Second, Israel should clear the settlements and pull back its armed forces from the Occupied Territories. It should wait for Yassir Arafat to die and then make peace with the Palestinians by offering them a viable state, with a piece of Jerusalem for

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their capital but no right of return for refugees of 1948. This would solve its *external* demographic war problem at a stroke and relieve its recurrent international isolation over the issue of its occupation of the West Bank and Gaza strip.

Overall, states under threat of demographic disintegration have a number of policy options short of violence or *de facto* disintegration by fiat. Besides state-sponsored attempts to alter birth rates directly, another intriguing possibility would be to alter the criteria for the state's distribution of offices and benefits. If such criteria are currently based on a group affiliation equilibrium, and that equilibrium is threatened by rapid differential demographic growth, then changing the principles could de-politicize the growth. This might be more logically appealing than politically feasible, however.

An Agenda for Future Research

This first cut at a theory of demographic disintegration leaves many questions unanswered. We do not know, for example, whether states threatened by differential demographic growth might fly apart for other reasons not related to demographic growth. In Lebanon, for example, differential demographic growth materially contributed to the state's disintegration. But future studies will demand a research design capable of discriminating between the demographic causes of disintegration and others, such as Lebanon's geopolitics (sandwiched between Syria and Israel) and its roles in providing sanctuary for the Palestine Liberation Organization and possible support for Nasser's United Arab Emirates.

We also do not know how well state-sponsored efforts to increase populations considered at risk work, or whether these might suffer unanticipated political consequences just as threatening as rapid differential demographic growth. If they do work, or if other creative non-destructive solutions can be found, then multinational states concerned by the threat of demographic disintegration can avoid the pitfalls of the other two paths: altering the form of government to make it either less democratic or (as in Belgium's case), multiple governments; or attempting to alle-

viate the internal threat by war against that threat (as in Yugoslavia's case) or an external threat (as in Israel's case).

In Belgium, we are likely to see the emergence of independent Fleming and Walloon states. In Yugoslavia, the nature of the attempted solution—ethnic cleansing—finally provoked international reaction in the form of an armed attack. It is not clear whether pogroms short of such atrocities as mass rape and murder would not have been equally effective at causing ethnic Albanian Kosovars to flee. But internal suppression by a weak state surrounded by strong states will not likely emerge as a sound strategy in any case. Finally, Israel's current strategy of attempting to lift its siege by war against the Palestinians—even if it worked—would not affect the likelihood that within three decades the Ultra-Orthodox will achieve enough influence in the Knesset to begin determining Israeli domestic and foreign policy. Israel may then be forced to alter its form of government to maintain its security and prosperity. Either way, the state of Israel as we know it would cease to exist.

To answer these questions and build a theory will require more empirical research and a more comprehensive research design. An ideal study would contain a statistical comparison of many cases, combined with a structured, focused comparison of historical case studies in order to establish causation. This essay has taken a first step toward that goal. ♣

Notes

¹ For an accounting of the distribution of state types and the consequences, see, e.g., Monica Duffy Toft, *The Geography of Ethnic Violence: Identity, Interests, and the Indivisibility of Territory* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, forthcoming, 2003).

² See "Birth Rates in The United States by Race and Hispanic Origin and Age of Mother for Selected Ages, 1960–1999," in *Trends in the Well-Being of America's Children and Youth: 2000* (Department of Health and Human Services Publication, 2000) p. 28.

³ See Pamela Constable, "Ready to Fight 'Tooth and Nail'; Area's Latinos Fear Effects of California's Prop. 187," *The Washington Post*, 19 November 1994, p. A1; and Patrick J. McDonnell and Bettina Boxall, "Affirmative Action Rul-

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ing Echoes Decision on Prop. 187," *The L.A. Times*, 28 November 1996, p. A3.

⁴ See Scott Martelle and Robin Fields, "Despite Flight, Whites Still Hold Slim Majority in O.C.," *The L.A. Times*, 31 March, 2001, p. A28.

⁵ The law of 24 July 1961 outlawed the use of language-related questions on Belgium's census. It is therefore difficult to specify the proportions of Flemings and Walloons over time from 1961 until today. See Alexander B. Murphy, "The Regional Dynamics of Language Differentiation in Belgium. A Study in Cultural-Political Geography" (The University of Chicago, Geography Research Paper No. 227, 1988) p. 132; and Richard Lewis, "The Example of Belgium" (Global Forum Series Occasional Papers. Center for International Studies, Duke University, 1996) p. 7.

⁶ See Gjonca Arjan, "Demography of Kosovo Before the War" (Paper Prepared for the World Bank, 1999).

⁷ As in Belgium in the nineteenth century, groups of Serb and Croat intellectuals had kept alive notions of ethnic group identity and nursed wounds from their fratricide during World War II. But these intellectual circles did not capture a significant part of the public imagination. Intermarriage was common, and groups that would later come to feel implacably opposed lived together without giving their ethnic identity much thought.

⁸ Piers Akerman, "Israel Heads for Orthodox Divide," *The Sunday Telegraph*, 25 November 2001, p. 101.

⁹ Shahar Ilan, "Seven Children for Every Woman," *Ha'aretz special* (for the online edition) 4 March 1998.

¹⁰ Dov Freidlander and Carole Feldman, "The Modern Shift to Below-Replacement Fertility: Has Israel's Population Joined the Process," *Population Studies* 47, No. 2 (July 1993) pp. 295–306.

¹¹ Jacqueline Portuguese, *Fertility Policy in Israel: The Politics of Religion, Gender, and Nation* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1998) p.43.

¹² Data taken from Israeli Bureau of Central Statistics, Table 2.27. Available online at <<http://www.cbs.gov.il>>.

¹³ See Philippe Fargues, "Protracted National Conflict and Fertility Change: Palestinians and Israelis in the Twentieth Century," *Population and Development Review* 26, No. 3 (September 2000) pp. 441–82; "Palestinian Population Total is Poised to Climb," Associated Press, 1 December 1998; Youssef Courbage, "Mirage of Palestinian Statehood—Demographic Stakes," *Le Monde Diplomatique*, April 1999.

¹⁴ In 2000, Jews were 50.5 percent and Arabs 49.5 of the population West of the Jordan River. Estimates are that by 2020 Jews will be 42 percent of the population and Arabs will be 58 percent. Inside the Green Line, however, Jews would 68 percent. Elaine Sciolino, "Is the Devil in the Demographics," *The New York Times*, 14 December 2001 and Gideon Alon, "Population Estimates Cause Knesset Storm over Demography," *Ha'aretz*, 17 July 2001.

¹⁵ See Tom Gross, "Palestinians Plan Demographic Coup," *The Sunday Telegraph* (London), 5 August 2001, p. 26; and Nina Gilbert, "Greater Israel Means Jewish Minority by 2020, Experts Say," *The Jerusalem Post*, 17 July 2001, p. 5.

¹⁶ Eli Berman and Ruth Klinov, "Human Capital Investment and Nonparticipation: Evidence from a Sample with Infinite Horizons (or: Jewish Father Stops Going to Work)," The Maurice Falk Institute for Economic Research in Israel, Discussion Paper No 97.05 (Jerusalem: May 1997).

¹⁷ Piers Akerman, "Israel Heads for Orthodox Divide," *The Sunday Telegraph*, 25 November 2001, p. 101.

¹⁸ See, e.g., Ivan Arreguín-Toft, "How the Weak Win Wars: A Theory of Asymmetric Conflict," *International Security* 26, No. 1 (Summer 2001) pp. 93–128.

