

ISRAELIS IN THE UNITED STATES: THEIR ADJUSTMENTS AND INTENTIONS

ESTER G. SMITH, PH.D.

*Director of University Support Program, Execucom Systems Corporation
and*

RITA J. SIMON

*School of Public Affairs,
The American University, Washington, D.C.*

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INTRODUCTION

There are some 500,000 Israelis living in the United States. Israelis call immigrants "olim," meaning they have gone up or elevated themselves by their act of immigration.^{1a} On the other hand, emigrants are called "yordim," meaning they have descended or lowered themselves by emigrating.

The negative appellation is perhaps less widely used today than in the first quarter of a century of Israel's existence, by those remaining or is felt less intensely by those who leave. Some mitigation of feelings about emigration stems from the fact that it is so commonplace. It has become one of Israel's major concerns for many reasons. One, immigration to Israel has declined drastically since the 1950s when survivors of the European Holocaust and the North Africans and Middle-Easterners arrived.

Based on a thesis "A Comparative Assessment of the Relative Adjustment and Attitudes of Two Ethnic Groups Concerning Their Settlement in the United States," that partially fulfilled the requirements for Dr. Smith's Ph.D. at the University of Illinois.

1a. Drora Kass and Seymour Martin Lipset, "Israelis in Exile," *Commentary*, November 1979, pp. 68-72; and *The Jerusalem Post*, October 3, 1987, p. 17.

Secondly, the Soviet Union and the United States are today the two numerous Jewish communities whence appreciable immigration might be expected, and except for a number of "ultra-religious Jews," few American Jews have opted to come to Israel. However, some 100,000 of those Soviet Jews granted exit visas in the early 1970s arrived in Israel.^{2a} Later in the decade, when the Soviet Jews had a choice between going to Israel or to other parts of the world (mainly the United States, Canada, and Australia), the large majority chose not to go to Israel. From about 1980 on the Soviet government effectively halted the emigration of Jews from their country. In this most recent period of *perestroika* and *glasnost*, there has been an increase in the number of visas the Soviets have granted to Jews who declared a desire to leave; and, again, only a minority of those who received exit visas have gone to Israel.

Thirdly, the characteristics of the persons who opt to leave Israel represent a great loss to the society. Immigrants to Israel are usually young, energetic, highly motivated people who contribute positively to their adopted homeland and whose loss is sig-

2a. Zvi Gitelman, *Becoming Israelis*, New York, 1982, p. 33; and Bruce Leimsidor, "Refugees Leave Soviet Union," *World Refugee Survey*, 1980, p. 35.

nificant for their country of origin. Examination of the educational and occupation status of Israeli immigrants in the United States also reveals that they are highly educated professionals and technicians whose skills and talents create a drain on the Israeli society they leave.

Over the years, Israel has introduced various incentive programs to entice its emigrés to return. The major ones have included long term loans to cover the fare to Israel, financial help in purchasing housing, two years of free high school education for the children, business loans, and customs and tax concessions that would allow remigrants to bring into Israel, tax free, electrical appliances, tools for their professions, and a motor vehicle. The privileges given to returning emigrants were practically identical to the help provided to immigrants when they settle in Israel. The programs were discontinued after the absorbing agencies realized that the rates of return did not change markedly. Only a small percentage of those who returned to Israel admitted that they came back mainly because of these concessions. Israel still maintains a limited version of these policies, allowing returning residents to bring with them, tax free, used electrical appliances and professional tools. No help in housing, business loans, and travel loans is provided, however.

The draconian measure of refusing to grant exit visas is one from which Israeli officials have clearly shied away. Such an action would arouse enormous public protest (even among Israelis who are critical of those who opt to leave) and would contradict basic values of the society which prides itself on its democratic institutions and its respect for personal freedom. It would, of course, also align Israel with the Soviet Union in that regard, which Israeli officials and public opinion would find untenable. The emigration problem, however, continues to increase and to cause consternation and loss to the society. This article describes the characteristics, attitudes and types of adjustments and

adaptations Israelis made to the United States in the early 1970s.

An important reason for publicizing the findings of this study today is to call attention to the need for more research on the Israeli community in the United States. In the past 15 years, their numbers have increased, and the relationship between Israeli and American Jews have become more, rather than less, complicated. Israeli immigrants also continue to differ from most other immigrants to American shores. Unlike traditional immigrants, Israelis rarely say "We have come to start a new life." Most describe their status in the United States in tentative and temporary terms. This article reports in detail what they said and did in the 1960s and early 1970s. What we have learned from these data may be useful in designing a new study to include more recent arrivals from Israel.

METHOD AND DESIGN

Based on data collected for a doctoral dissertation completed in 1975, the senior author interviewed 226 Israeli immigrants who arrived in the United States between 1960 and 1972 and were located in Los Angeles (60), Chicago (59), New York (52), Detroit (28), Milwaukee (11), Boston (12), and Cincinnati (4). That sample was matched against Scandinavian immigrants (from Sweden, Norway and Denmark) who also arrived in the United States between 1960 and 1972 and who were living in Illinois and Minnesota. Tourists, exchange visitors, and students were not included in the study.¹ The Scandinavians

1. Briefly, the sources of data and the decisions made about the sample frame were as follows: The Israeli population which settled in the United States between 1960 and 1972, as estimated by the Immigration and Naturalization Department, was 45,951 people. The Scandinavian population, according to the same source, totaled 58,357 people of whom 15,743 were Danes, 20,803 Norwegians, and 21,811 Swedes.

Names and addresses were obtained, after over-

represent the traditional immigrants that we alluded to a few paragraphs ago.

The major thrust of the study was to compare the social adjustments, acculturation and intentions about remigration of two categories of immigrants whose migration was voluntary, who had a choice about which country to go to, how long to stay, and whether to return to their former homelands. In most instances also, these immigrants were not living in dire economic circumstances. Economically then, as well as politically and psychologically, the Israelis and Scandinavians who left their homelands did so voluntarily. Exactly why they chose to leave, how and why they selected the United States as their target country, how they felt about their subsequent adjustment in this country, how they felt about the countries they left, and the likelihood of their remaining in the United States or returning to their homelands were the foci of the study.

In particular, the purpose was to find out whether Israelis are different from other voluntary immigrants in their adjustments and acculturation, in the intensity of their ties to their homeland, and in

their intentions to return to their country of origin. The Scandinavian sample was the control group against whom were compared the Israeli responses.

One person per family, preferably the person who made the decision to leave the home country and chose the United States as the target destination, was interviewed. If that person was not available, another adult in the household, usually the spouse, became the respondent. In cases in which the decision to move to the United States was mutual, either one of the respondents was eligible for the interview. When both individuals in the household came separately to the United States, if time permitted, both were interviewed.

Briefly, the interviews included the following topics: background and demographic information such as age, education, occupation, and place of employment; factors involved in respondent's decision to leave his/her country of origin and the major considerations in choice of destination; initial reaction to the new country; subsequent demographic information including marital status, ethnicity of spouse, number of children and occupational mobility; friendship patterns; organizational affiliations, especially those of a religious and ethnic variety; language patterns; types and intensity of ties to former homeland; political attitudes toward former and new countries; decision to become or not to become a citizen; and future plans.²

coming considerable obstacles, through a variety of sources. In general, the consulate of each country was one major source. In addition, names were collected from private organizations such as ethnic clubs, ethnic-historical societies, chambers of commerce, religious organizations, academic-professional agencies, and ethnic employment bureaus. The Department of Immigration and Naturalization was contacted as well; after a prolonged examination of our request, they provided us with a sample selected on the basis of criteria outlined by the investigator.

Many difficulties were encountered in the ten months devoted to construction of an adequate sample: the hesitation of the Israeli consulates in the United States to supply names of Israelis residing in this country mainly reflected security precautions. The non-existence of Israeli ethnic organizations through which such information could be obtained and the fact that most of the members of the Scandinavian ethnic organizations and clubs came to the United States before the designated time contributed to the difficulties of establishing lists from which Israeli and Scandinavian samples could be drawn.

2. The completion of the Israeli interviews required ten months: from February to December 1973. One reason for the prolonged period in the case of the Israeli group was the face-to-face method of interviewing. The second, unanticipated, reason was the Middle East October War. As a result of the war, the interviewing was stopped for nearly two months and finally resumed late in November 1973. The nearly thirty interviews completed in November and December were analyzed separately to see if the October War might have affected responses. When no significant difference was detected between the interviews completed before and after the war, the two groups were merged.

Potential respondents were first contacted by a letter explaining the nature of the study and then by telephone to schedule either a personal or a telephone interview. The interviews were conducted by trained Israeli and Scandinavian interviewers and carried out in a language preferred by the respondent, either English, Hebrew, Swedish, Norwegian, or Danish. The fact that the interviewer came from the same country as the respondent, chose to reside in the United States, and had probably experienced similar difficulties and encountered similar problems, permitted the respondent to be more relaxed and more candid in answering what were sometimes painful questions. The rate of response was between 90 and 95 percent for both samples.

ISRAELI AND SCANDINAVIAN IMMIGRANTS: THEIR SIMILARITIES AND THEIR DIFFERENCES

We found the Israelis and Scandinavians to be similar in such demographic characteristics as age, marital status, ethnicity of spouse, number of children, length of residence in the United States, and intergenerational occupational mobility. The groups differed in their reasons for emigration and in their level of education, and types of occupations. A significantly larger number of Israeli respondents came to the United States to further their education, while most Scandinavians came to better themselves economically, and to satisfy their sense of adventure. Considerably more Israeli nationals occupied professional positions in the United States, while a majority of Danish, Swedish, and Norwegian respondents were engaged in white collar or skilled occupations.

The majority of respondents in both categories corresponded with their families and friends overseas, paid occasional visits home, and participated in local ethnic organizations. The Scandinavians, however, were less interested—and as a result, less

involved—than the Israelis in events in their country of origin. Although the majority of both groups celebrated their national holidays, more Israeli than Scandinavian respondents subscribed to newspapers and magazines published in their home countries, followed news about their former country more closely than they followed American news, and were more involved in their country's political debates. More Israeli than Scandinavian respondents supported their home country's governing parties and expressed a higher degree of interest in and agreement with the domestic and foreign policies of their homeland.

Considerably more Israeli than Scandinavian parents claimed that their children learned their native language, viewed themselves as foreigners rather than as Americans, and wished to live in their homeland permanently. More Israelis than Scandinavians also continued to speak their native language at home.

While Israeli respondents maintained intense emotional ties with their homeland on both personal and national levels, Scandinavian emotional ties were predominantly personal and weaker than those of the Israelis. On the personal level, significantly more Israeli respondents regarded their overseas friends as their closest friends, while more Scandinavian respondents indicated that local people were among their closest friends. Similarly, more Israelis sought out other Israelis in the United States as their friends, while Scandinavian immigrants sought out Americans as their friends.

Attachment to their home country and feelings of patriotism were expressed only by Israeli respondents. Many Israelis asserted that they felt obligated to help their country during a crisis and that they felt obligated to return to Israel permanently. Against the strong national identity of the Israeli nationals and their deep sense of community, the Scandinavians presented themselves as individualists whose main concern involved their immediate family.

Contrary to expectations, nearly three times more Israeli than Scandinavian respondents had acquired American citizenship. But note that acquisition of American citizenship affects the two groups differently. Israeli nationals who reside in the United States are legally allowed to maintain dual citizenship. Scandinavian nationals, on the contrary, must surrender their original citizenship once they accept foreign citizenship. Thus, for many Israelis the acquisition of American citizenship neither affected their status as Israeli citizens nor reflected their degree of identification with their host country. For Scandinavian nationals, becoming an American citizen necessitated a formal break with their homeland. Therefore, only Scandinavians who were determined to remain in the United States surrendered their Scandinavian citizenship. The others preferred to remain in the United States as permanent residents although they said they did not intend to remigrate to their former country.

The majority of Israeli respondents reported that they planned to return to Israel. Scandinavian respondents, on the other hand, were more definite about their intentions to stay in the United States. While Israelis perceived their settlement abroad as a temporary venture, Scandinavians intended from the start to reside permanently outside their home country.

A COLLECTIVE PROFILE OF THE ISRAELI IMMIGRANT

The remainder of this article describes in detail the characteristics of the Israeli sample, their adjustment to the United States, their relationship to the American Jewish community, and their expectations and plans about returning to Israel. Compared to other recent immigrant communities in the United States, e.g., Soviet Jews, Cubans, Koreans, Mexicans, relatively little is known about the Israelis. The author's hope is that publication of these

findings will inspire additional research, with special emphasis on the children born to Israelis in the United States, and their ties to the American Jewish community.

More than half of the Israeli respondents were born in Israel. About 40 percent of those who were not born in Israel immigrated to Israel, then Palestine, before 1948. The rest arrived between 1948-1956. Their average age was 36.8 years. The youngest were between 24 and 28; the oldest between 44 and 50 years old. The large majority were married (88 percent); 54 percent had married in Israel. Sixty-four percent of the married respondents had Israeli spouses, 33 percent married American Jews, three percent were married to American non-Jews. Of the married respondents, 82 percent had children.

They attended school for 13 years on the average before coming to the United States. Twenty percent of the respondents finished either a vocational, commercial, or agriculture high school; 19 percent graduated from an academic secondary school; and three percent completed their matriculation examinations externally. Thirty-three percent of the respondents attended a university in Israel and an additional nine percent went to post secondary professional schools, such as nursing, engineering, and teacher's colleges. Of the remaining 16 percent, half had only eight years of elementary education, the other half attended elementary and secondary schools abroad before they immigrated to Israel.

Limited occupational and educational opportunities, economic hardships and a general feeling of dissatisfaction were the major factors which motivated respondents to leave Israel and select the United States as their target destination. The list on the following page shows their reasons in order of importance.

Twenty-four percent of the Israeli respondents listed economic difficulties and occupational disappointments in Israel and more attractive opportunities in the United States as their major reasons for

MAJOR REASONS FOR
COMING TO THE UNITED STATES

	(in percent)
Economic reasons, to get a better job	24
Complete education, training	46
Join relatives	18
Adventure, curiosity	3
Came as a tourist and decided to stay	6
Other: health and personal reasons	3
	N = 226

OCCUPATION IN ISRAEL
AND IN THE UNITED STATES

	Israel N = 177	United States N = 193
	(in percent)	
Professional	15	35
Management-		
Business	16	23
Sales	3	7
White Collar	28	13
Teacher	6	2
Skilled	26	13
Unskilled	6	7

emigration from their home country to the United States. This high percentage can be partially explained by the economic depression and high rate of unemployment which prevailed in Israel during the early 1960s.

While attractive economic opportunities induced one-quarter of the Israeli respondents to move to the United States, nearly twice as many arrived in order to pursue educational and professional careers—to begin or continue their college education and to specialize in professions which they acquired in Israel. Friends, immediate family members, and American relatives induced 18 percent of the Israeli respondents to come and join them.

Only four percent of the Israeli respondents mentioned adventure as a major factor for emigration. Six percent of the respondents who arrived in the United States as temporary visitors remained here on a more permanent basis after they met their future spouses or were offered suitable employment. The rest came because of health or personal problems. No Israeli respondent mentioned the continuous conflict with the Arab nations and the tense security situation in Israel as a relevant reason for emigration.

Seventy-five percent of the Israeli respondents attended educational institutions at the undergraduate and graduate levels in the United States. Engineering and the natural sciences were the most common choices of curricula. The figures that follow compare the respondent's occupational distribution in Israel and in the United States.

Note that the increase in respondents' level of education after their arrival in the United States shifted respondents from white collar and skilled occupations into professional jobs.

Fewer respondents, eight percent in the United States compared to 33 percent in Israel, were employed in public offices, and more in private companies and universities: 67 percent in this country compared to 24 percent in Israel. The percentage of Israeli respondents who owned their own businesses increased from 10 percent in Israel to 19 percent in the United States, while the number of people working in industry did not change: 6 percent.

Membership in clubs and organizations in the United States was reported by nearly 75 percent of the Israeli respondents. Most claimed they were affiliated with ethnic clubs such as the Israeli Students Organization, B'nai Brith, Jewish community centers, and Hadassah. The few non-ethnic types of organizations were professional, sports, and charity organizations. Less than a third of the Israeli respondents with organizational affiliations were active in those organizations or attended meetings frequently. The majority joined the clubs and associations for either social, business, or professional purposes.

Attendance at religious services is an affiliation that might serve to strengthen relationships between the Israelis and American Jewish communities. But one-third of the respondents reported they never attended synagogue. Of the re-

spondents who did attend religious services, most did so only two or three times a year, mainly during the High Holidays. Half of the respondents claimed they did not attend religious services even in Israel. But Israeli national holidays that did not have religious or traditional significance were celebrated by 88 percent of the respondents.

Sixty percent of the respondents reported that they subscribed to Israeli newspapers and magazines. Respondents generally reported that they followed Israeli news more intensely than they did news about the United States.

Between a third and one-half of the Israeli respondents still regarded their friends in Israel as their closest friends, and the majority reported close relationships with other Israelis in the United States rather than with Americans.

Most Israelis conversed with their friends in the United States in both Hebrew and English. The majority of those with Israeli spouses conversed in Hebrew, while most of the Israelis who married Americans communicated in English. More respondents with American spouses (38 percent) than respondents with Israeli spouses (25 percent) reported that their children did not know Hebrew. Respondents with American spouses were more likely to speak English with their children; but respondents with Israeli spouses were as likely to converse only in Hebrew as to communicate both in Hebrew and English.

The spouse's ethnicity also significantly affected the child's identification. While most of the Israeli respondents, regardless of the spouse's ethnicity, identified themselves as Israeli nationals, significantly more Israeli couples than Israeli-American couples reported that their children classified themselves as Israeli nationals rather than as Americans. Similarly, more children of Israeli parents (57 percent) than children of Israeli-American parents (38 percent) expressed their intentions to settle in Israel when they became adults.

Parents who did not intend to acquire U.S. citizenship, who planned to return to their homeland, and who provided their children with an Israeli education, were more likely to have children who perceived themselves as Israeli nationals and who intended to live in Israel permanently.

One of the major objectives of the study was to predict whether some types of respondents, in contrast to others, would be more likely to report specific and definite intentions to return to Israel. The findings showed that native-born as opposed to foreign-born Israelis were more likely to acquire professional positions in the United States, less likely to acquire U.S. citizenship, and more likely to state that they intended to return to Israel.

Respondents who did not acquire U.S. citizenship (32 percent of the entire sample and 75 percent of those eligible on the basis of length of stay in the United States) were more likely to be native-born Israelis with higher education who were employed as professionals. They were most likely to report that they came to the United States, initially, to complete their education and less likely to say they came to join relatives or improve their economic status.

Those who did not apply for U.S. citizenship were more likely to have Israeli friends, to speak Hebrew with their children, and to report that they expected their children to live in Israel when they are adults.

The relationship between respondent's self identification and plans to return to Israel showed that 99 and 94 percent of those who said they "definitely plan to return" or plan to return "sometime in the future" described themselves as Israelis. Even 83 percent of those who said they were "undecided" about whether they would return to Israel described themselves as Israelis. Fifty percent of those who said they had no plans to return to Israel described themselves as Israeli, 21 percent as American Jews, 21 percent as Israeli-Americans, and 4 percent as Jews.

It is most interesting that intentions to remigrate or to remain in the United

States had no significant effect on how closely respondents followed news about Israel. And a higher percentage of respondents who said they had no plans to return agreed with Israeli domestic policy (50 percent) in contrast to the 30 percent who agreed, among those who said they definitely planned to return. Almost all of the respondents said they agreed with how the government was conducting its foreign policy in general, and its policy vis-à-vis the Israeli-Arab conflict in particular. An explanation for these responses, it seemed to us, is that policies and issues that affect the survival of the State of Israel concerned all respondents regardless of whether they planned to return to Israel. Issues that involved taxes, salaries, involvement with the bureaucracy, ethnic tensions, and housing shortages mostly concerned respondents who intended to return to Israel in the near future, because they would be most affected by them on a day-to-day basis. Those who did not plan on ever returning to Israel were less interested in domestic issues, hence more of them agreed with the government's policy.

Responses to the item that asked "How would you act in case war broke out?" revealed clear differences in attachments to Israel. Sixty-five percent of those who "definitely" planned to return and 60 percent of those who plan to return "some-time in the future" said they would make every effort to go back and help in the war, in contrast to 25 and 35 percent of those who said they did not plan to remigrate, or were undecided.

Finally, when respondents were asked what were the major considerations that would lead them to remain in the United States or return to Israel, economic and professional considerations ranked highest for remaining in the United States (e.g.,

"cannot afford to return," "opportunities are better in the United States"); ethnic and family attachments and loyalty (e.g., "I belong to Israel") ranked highest for why they would return.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

We return to the theme on which we introduced our data. The findings reported in this article were based on a study conducted in 1973. Fifteen years have gone by. During that time Israel engaged in its first "controversial" war, the invasion of Lebanon. Arabs in the West Bank and Gaza, and even Israeli Arabs, have engaged in open and violent protest against Israeli rule. The rate of emigration from Israel to the United States has increased. How would Israelis living in the United States today respond to the questions posed in this study and how would they describe their status in the United States? Not much is known about the half-million or so Israelis currently residing in the United States. A study should be done that probed their involvement or lack of it with the American Jewish community, that asked about their perceptions of themselves as sojourners or temporary residents preparing eventually to remigrate to Israel or as recent immigrants whose children they believe will move toward integration into the American culture and eventually change their hyphenated identity of Israeli-Americans to Americans. If it is the latter identity and path they have assumed or are likely to follow, what feelings do they have about their own, and their children's Jewish ties and commitment to the American community? And how would they like the American Jewish community to respond to them?