

Religious Leadership and Support for Israel: A Study of Clergy in Nineteen Denominations

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Abstract

In recent years, much attention has been directed at the way religious factors influence American policy toward the Middle East. Scholars have discovered that many religious groups hold distinctive views on the issues affecting that region. In this paper, we consider one possible source of those views: the attitudes of religious “opinion leaders,” namely, parish clergy. Using a study of pastors from nineteen Christian denominations, we examine the theological, organizational, personal and political origins of their perspectives, and uncover the factors prompting activism on these issues. In addition, we provide strong circumstantial evidence that clergy opinion does indeed influence attentive members of their congregations, especially in evangelical Protestant denominations.

Religion has long been ignored as a possible influence on public attitudes toward American foreign policy (Hero 1973; Jelen 1994). In recent years, however, journalists and scholars have been fascinated—and sometimes alarmed—by evidence that religious faith may now be shaping both opinion and participation in the realm of foreign policy (Boyer 2005; Urquhart 2005; Carter 2005; Phillips 2006). Indeed, the popular press has recounted religious activism on issues ranging from the Iraq war to global climate change (Brooks 2005), and although scholars have been slower to address the evidence, recent books and articles have contended that faith and foreign policy do connect (see e.g. Mead 2004, 2006; Guth 2004; Hertzke 2004; Guth et al. 2005.)

Perhaps no such linkage is as much studied—and as controversial—as religious influence on public attitudes toward Israel, and its consequences for American policy (Merkley 2001, 2004). Although this debate long centered on the lobbying of American Jews, in the past decade attention has turned to evangelical Protestant support for Israel (Sizer 2004; Northcott 2004). In fact, scholars have found that evangelicals are more likely to back Israeli interests than any other American Christian group (Mayer 2004). Some analysts go further and argue that aside from Jews, evangelicals hold the *only* distinctive attitudes on this issue. Columnist Charles Krauthammer (2006) recently asserted, for example, that evangelicals are “the only remaining Gentile constituency anywhere willing to defend that besieged Jewish outpost.” Another journalist has argued that Jimmy Carter’s recent book on the Middle East is primarily an effort “to convince American evangelicals to reconsider their support for Israel” (Goldberg 2006).

Claims for the uniqueness of evangelical attitudes may result more from the absence of careful analysis than from some special trait of that religious community. Although studies of public attitudes toward Israel now highlight the distinctive postures of Jews and evangelicals, they often neglect other religious communities. In fact, as we have shown elsewhere, by the early

1990s clergy, religious activists, and laity in several religious traditions had acquired distinct postures toward the Middle East (Guth et al. 1996; Wald et al. 1996). Mainline Protestants were more sympathetic to Arab interests than their evangelical brethren, and Roman Catholics, black Protestants, and secular citizens were sometimes even more “balanced” in their preferences (cf. Pew Center 2006).

Why do Americans in different religious traditions hold distinctive stances on Middle East policy? At least part of the explanation may lie in the highly visible positions adopted by institutional elites. Much attention has been paid to the vocal pro-Israel policies of Jewish lobbies such as the American-Israel Public Affairs Committee (Tivnan 1987; Mearsheimer and Walt 2006), and of Christian Right organizations, such as the Christian Coalition (Micklethwait and Wooldridge 2004: 215). Among mainline Protestants, the National Council of Churches and its constituent denominations have often criticized Israeli policies and identified with Palestinian aspirations, paralleling the historic orientation of the Vatican and the United States Catholic Bishops Conference.¹

Although the statements of national religious elites have been clear (and distinctive), most such pronouncements go unnoticed and unheeded by the faithful. We strongly suspect that the guidance of local ministers, priests or rabbis may have more influence, both on laity’s views and in raising the issue to visibility. But we have little systematic data about the perspectives that local religious leaders convey to their congregations. One exception to this dearth of analysis is

¹ Among the larger religious groups, both mainline Protestant and Roman Catholic churches have adopted institutional stances that are often much more pro-Arab than those held by Jews and evangelicals. The mainline missions dating from the 18th and 19th century have created lines of communications and identification with Arab Christians. Catholic institutional connections with local Christians are of even more ancient origins. In addition, shifting theological frameworks have played a role. As Christian supercessionism and anti-Semitism were replaced by recognition of religious commonalities after World War II and Vatican II, the mainline Protestant and Catholic churches saw little or no theological significance in the State of Israel. At the same time, the growing influence of liberation theology in these religious circles actually produced a theological bias for the Palestinian cause. As a result of all these factors, the institutional leaders of mainline Protestant and Catholic churches usually take a rather different stance on regional issues than do their Jewish and evangelical counterparts (Merkley 2001). In recent years, this has often created notable tensions between mainline and Jewish religious leaderships (see e.g. Stockton 2005).

Sokhey and Djupe's recent (2006) study of Jewish rabbis. They argue that local religious leaders offer a more nuanced message than that promulgated by Jewish lobbying organizations such as AIPAC, perhaps explaining some variation in community opinion on American and Israeli policies in the Middle East.

In this paper, we provide a parallel analysis for Christian clergy in nineteen major denominations. We want to answer several questions: What views do clergy hold on Middle East policy? Do those attitudes differ substantially by denomination? What other factors structure clergy opinion? How often do clergy address such issues in their professional lives? What factors encourage or inhibit them in “going public” on Middle East issues? Is there evidence that such expressions influence their congregations? After this analysis, we hope to understand better one source of the distinct policy views exhibited by religious adherents in the mass public.

Data and Methods

This paper utilizes data from the Cooperative Clergy Study Project, coordinated by Corwin E. Smidt, director of the Paul Henry Center for the Study of Christianity and Politics at Calvin College, conducted just after the 2000 national elections. The survey included clergy from twenty denominations and represents by far the most extensive study to date of the political lives of American clergy. (For full details, see Smidt 2004.) Here we focus on nineteen Christian denominations, excluding the Jewish sample discussed by Sokhey and Djupe (2006).

Our working assumption is that clergy attitudes on Middle East policy will be structured by religious identities and theological beliefs, by the religious and communications networks of which they are a part, by their personal characteristics and finally, by their political orientations. We assume that their actual involvement will be influenced by some of the same factors, but also by others that encourage or discourage citizen political participation generally. In the pages that

follow, we will elaborate on these expectations and subject them to empirical tests.

Hypothesis 1. Clergy attitudes will vary by denominational identity, reflecting the specific historical, theological and political traditions of each.

Because of their special theological perspectives, clergy in historically premillennialist and dispensationalist² denominations should exhibit the strongest support for the state of Israel. Here this group includes the Assemblies of God (AOG), the Evangelical Free Church (EFC), and the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC), as well as the predominantly African American Church of God in Christ (COGIC). Other denominations with some historical experience with premillennialism may also demonstrate more support for Israel, such as the Church of the Nazarene, or the American Baptist Churches (ABC). Evangelical denominations without any premillennialist history or actual antipathy toward that theology, such as the Christian Reformed Church (CRC), Churches of Christ (COC), or the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod (LCMS), will be less supportive of Israel. Evangelicals in the peace church tradition, such as Mennonites, are also likely to exhibit more sympathy for the Palestinians.

Mainline Protestant clergy, especially in the Lutheran and Reformed traditions, will prefer either a balanced approach to Middle East policy, or actually favor the Palestinian or Arab side. This preference reflects a host of theological and institutional orientations discussed in note 1 above (Merkley 2001). For similar reasons, Catholic clergy will be even more prone to support the Palestinian cause. Finally, in the absence of any theological warrant at all for supporting Israel, combined with denominational concern for “Third World” issues, the theologically liberal and pluralist Unitarian-Universalist clergy should take the strongest pro-Palestinian stance.

² In this paper we will use *dispensationalist* and *premillennialist* interchangeably, although technically the former theology represents a special and rather elaborate variant on the latter. Both historic theologies have had a powerful impact on large portions of American Protestantism, and both tend to see the establishment of the contemporary state of Israel as an important theological as well as secular development, although this posture is usually far more developed in dispensationalist thought. In the real world, many evangelical clergy would find it hard to elaborate on distinctions between the two theologies, and our survey questions do not usually allow us to make careful distinctions. For additional information, see Weber, 1983 and 2004, Poythress 1987 and Sizer 2004.

Hypothesis 2. Clergy views will vary substantially by personal theological orientations, whatever the stance of their denomination.

First of all, adherents of *Christian Zionism*—the belief that the state of Israel has a role in divine plans—should be most sympathetic to Israel (Sizer 2004). Christian Zionism is central to classic dispensationalism and some other premillennial theologies, but those theologies also have other tenets contributing to pro-Israel attitudes (Weber 2004). A literalist view of Scripture, for example, may lead to the conclusion that God’s “promise” of the land of Canaan to the Jews remains valid today. Thus, we use separate measures of Christian Zionism and *fundamentalist orthodoxy*. On the other side, we expect that clergy adopting “liberation theologies” may support the Palestinians, as the very sort of oppressed people always at the center of God’s concern. Finally, clergy adhering to *American civic religion* (Guth et al. 1997) or what other observers call “American religious exceptionalism” (Mead 2006; Skillen 2006) will be firm allies of Israel, even controlling for other religious beliefs.

Hypothesis 3. Clergy attitudes will be influenced by the organizational and communications networks of which they are a part.

Denominational leaders are not the only source of political cues for clergy. Religiously based political groups may actually supply more immediately accessible guidance. As a result, clergy enmeshed in Christian Right and Christian Left religio-political networks should be more supportive of Israel and the Palestinians, respectively, reflecting both the policy positions and the active agendas of those networks. In a similar vein, media sources may provide additional cues. Clergy who rely heavily on religious broadcasting—predominantly evangelical and pro-Israel in slant—should be warmer toward Israel, while those depending on other sources, especially public TV and radio (often accused of an anti-Israeli bias), may gravitate toward the other side of the conflict.

Hypothesis 4. Clergy attitudes will be influenced by personal demographic traits.

We expect that some traits influencing the mass public attitudes toward Israel may have similar effects among clergy: if so, highly educated, urban and older ministers and priests should tend to back Israel, while female and “ethnic” clergy will be more supportive of the Palestinians. Given the special professional characteristics of clergy that may counter these mass public tendencies, however, we have less confidence in these predictions.

Hypothesis 5. Clergy attitudes will be influenced by partisanship and ideology.

Based on recent studies of the mass public and Congress, we expect that Republicans and conservatives will support Israel more than Democrats and liberals (Pew Center 2006; Oldmixon, Rosenson and Wald 2005). If so, such results among clergy may confirm the increasing partisan divisions, rooted in competing theologies, which have appeared among clergy in all American religious traditions (Guth et al. 1997).

Hypothesis 6. Clergy activity on Mideast issues will be influenced by the same factors that influence clergy attitudes, but will also be affected by the variables that encourage political participation among professional elites and the mass public.

The theological, network and political variables that influence attitudes may also encourage or discourage activity, but we suspect that what Verba, Schlozman and Brady (1995) call the *personal resources* of clergy, such as education, age and experience, and their *political engagement*, will have a vital impact. In addition, *issue mobilization* will also help explain involvement: the stronger their views on any issue, the more likely clergy are to act.

Results

To ascertain the attitudes of clergy on the Middle East conflict, we asked for a response to this statement: “*A lasting peace in the Middle East will require Israel to make greater*

concessions to the Palestinians." Although we would have preferred additional items to create a broader scale, we think this question reveals the basic structure of clergy opinion, tapping their views of a critical issue in Middle East "peacemaking." And, in fact, Table 1 reveals massive differences of opinion. Note first the collective gap between evangelical and mainline Protestants. Whereas evangelicals as a group exhibit a small plurality against Israeli concessions, mainline pastors favor them by a substantial majority, with most of the rest "not sure." But the range of opinion is much wider among evangelicals. As we anticipated, the strongest support for Israel appears in denominations most influenced by dispensationalism and premillennialism: the Assemblies of God, the Evangelical Free Church and the Southern Baptist Convention; all have a majority of ministers opposing concessions. Some such influences have recently affected the Nazarenes and PCA ministers, whose traditional Holiness and Reformed theologies might not be expected to have had the same pro-Israel impact.

[Table 1 about here]

The remaining evangelical churches are much friendlier to the Palestinians, perhaps reflecting their historic rejection of premillennialism as much as institutional ties, in some instances, to Arab Christians. Keep in mind, however, that we have weighted the denominations equally;³ in "real" numbers of clergy and parishioners the Assemblies, Southern Baptists and their premillennialist allies far outnumber the "pro-Palestinian" evangelicals. The latter find allies elsewhere, however: all mainline churches show solid margins for Israeli concessions. Indeed, in most mainline bodies the margin is overwhelming. Only among American Baptists, who still include many premillennialists, do hardliners constitute a sizable minority. Churches in

³ In the tables we have weighted the subsamples of denominational clergy equally ($N=500$), although the actual number of respondents varies (see Smidt 2004). Were we to weight each sample in proportion to the actual population in the various denominations, many would be reduced to a handful in the weighted N. As we are not attempting to characterize the distribution of opinion among a representative sample of all American clergy, but rather seeking the sources of such attitudes, this seems a reasonable strategy. Still, the reader should keep in mind that the Catholic, Southern Baptist and United Methodist clergy are massively underrepresented by this equal weighting approach.

the Reformed and Lutheran traditions are strongly pro-concession. Among Catholics and Unitarians, opinion favoring concessions approaches unanimity.

The African American Protestant clergy present a more complex picture. As a group, these pastors are narrowly split with less than a third favoring either Israel or the Palestinians, and a little more than a third “not sure.” But this general portrait hides clear denominational and theological differences. COGIC is an African American offshoot of the original Pentecostal movement, deeply shaped by dispensationalist theology. Not surprisingly, COGIC pastors give a solid plurality to Israeli resistance to concessions, while the “mainline” Wesleyan AME pastors tilt the other way (by an almost identical margin). At least on the surface, it appears that the theological factors dividing white pastors may well influence African American clergy as well.

Ministers may well hold strong opinions on Middle East policy, but that opinion remains primarily personal until made public in some way. After a lengthy battery on political involvements, we asked clergy how often their public activities addressed specific issues, including “Israel and the Middle East.” The third column in Table 1 reports the percentage responding either “very often” or “often.” Once again, we find major differences among evangelicals, with the premillennialist denominations reporting high activity. Among other evangelicals, only the peace church Mennonites address these issues frequently. Thus, in the evangelical camp pro-Israeli clergy are most likely to carry their argument public. The mainline bodies are quite uniform in activity, with about a third of the pastors speaking frequently, but the overwhelmingly pro-Palestinian Catholic priests and Unitarian ministers are much less active. Black pastors are vocal by comparison, led by COGIC clergy, more friendly toward Israel. All in all, both sides in the policy conflict appear well-represented, with the outspoken premillennialist bodies facing a fairly engaged mainline clerical corps.

Sources of Policy Attitudes

To explain the Middle East policy perspectives of Christian clergy, we begin with religious factors, presumably central to religious professionals, and then move to traits shared with other citizens. Table 2 reports results from four OLS regression analyses, using the full five-point item on Israeli concessions as the dependent variable. We have coded the question so that a positive coefficient represents support for Israel (opposition to major concessions) and a negative coefficient represents approval of concessions to the Palestinians. Model 1 uses theological measures as predictors. Model 2 incorporates religio-political organizational involvement, as well as the information sources routinely used by ministers in making political decisions. Model 3 tests personal traits often shown to influence attitudes on Middle East policy. Finally, Model 4 considers ideological and political variables.

The distribution of denominational attitudes in Table 1 hints that policy stances are powerfully influenced by basic theological orientations. First, we use a question tapping *Christian Zionism*, the belief that modern Israel plays a special role in God's plan. This tenet is often central to dispensationalist theologies but is found in other contexts as well. Although we lacked enough items to construct a full measure of premillennialist or dispensationalist orientation, we have a reasonable proxy in *fundamentalist orthodoxy*, made up of seven items by means of factor analysis. A third theological measure produced by the same analysis we call *liberationism*, which taps support for liberation theology and similar "liberal" or "progressive" readings of the Christian gospel. Our fourth theological measure is *American civic religion* (Guth et al. 1997), positing a special religious meaning for the United States, an orientation that Walter Mead (2004) has argued is central to evangelical foreign policy attitudes (see appendix for items and scales). We expect Christian Zionism, fundamentalist orthodoxy, and civic religion to foster support for Israel, and liberationism to work in the other direction. These expectations are clearly

met in Table 2, with liberationism and Christian Zionism having the most impact. Combined, the four theological measures perform quite well, explaining about a third of the variance.

[Table 2 about here]

Of course, theology may simply be a proxy for the organizational networks and communication channels of which clergy are a part. Model 2 examines the impact of several scales describing these networks and channels. The Christian Right and Christian Left indexes combine felt proximity, membership and involvement in a wide range of religiously based political organizations (see appendix). As Christian Right groups have been vocal supporters of Israel, and Christian Left groups have expressed more sympathy for the Palestinians, it is hardly surprising that involvement in each network moves clergy in the expected direction, with the Christian Right impact slightly stronger. Media sources also have a distinct influence, even with organizational involvement in the equation. Ministers relying on religious radio and TV for political information are distinctly more pro-Israel, whereas those who favor newspapers and newsmagazines shift somewhat to the other side, and those leaning on PBS and NPR favor the Palestinians. Model 2 explains almost a quarter of the variance, not quite matching theology.

Our analysis confirms that theological orientations and religio-political networks have considerable influence on clerical attitudes, but clergy no doubt respond to many of the same forces as do other Americans. In Model 3 we look at predictors of support for Israel often found in studies of the mass public, such as education (here both secular and religious), gender, age, size of community and ethnicity. Among demographic traits, education has the largest impact, but in a surprising direction: clergy with *fewer* years of secular and seminary education are more supportive of Israel, as are those who attended a Bible college (often based in a dispensationalist tradition). Higher education, then, tends to reduce clergy support for Israel, perhaps by eroding its theological underpinnings. As in the mass public, women are more sympathetic to the

Palestinians, as are older clergy and those from metropolitan communities. Ethnicity has differing impacts: Hispanics are more pro-Israel, perhaps reflecting their primary location in Pentecostal and other evangelical churches, but black pastors (and Asians) do not differ systematically from white clergy. Demographic factors are relatively weak, however, explaining only about one tenth of the variance in attitudes.

Political traits are much more powerful, as expected. Pro-Israel attitudes dominate among Republicans and conservatives, as well as among those favoring more defense spending and wary about close relations with Cold War rivals Russia and China. Moral conservatism has a modest pro-Israel effect, but social welfare liberalism predicts much stronger backing for the Palestinians (see appendix for items and scale construction). All in all, political characteristics explain about three-tenths of the variance, almost matching the theological variables in Model 1 and outperforming the network variables in Model 2 and personal traits in Model 3.

Of course, the variables tested in Table 2 are often interrelated. As we have shown elsewhere, theology and political attitudes are strongly linked among clergy, and distinctive positions on each may characterize clergy in particular denominations. To test a fully specified model, we include all the religious, organizational, personal and political factors and also incorporate a dummy variable for each denomination, to test whether that identity still retains influence, even after other important religious and political variables are included.⁴ After considerable exploration, we produced a reduced model that provides a good fit, explaining almost four-tenths of the variance.

As the reader can see, denominational location still has some impact on attitudes toward Israel, even with the other influences in the equation. Perhaps because of the strong dispensationalist history of both denominations, AOG and COGIC ministers are more pro-Israel

⁴ We have used the American Baptists as the omitted reference group in the equation, as these pastors fall quite near the sample mean and also fall on the border between evangelical and mainline Protestant traditions.

than other factors would predict, but most other denominations, especially the Lutheran and Reformed ones—both evangelical and mainline—are more sympathetic to the Palestinians. Catholic priests are also significantly more pro-Palestinian, but once all other variables are in the mix the sign for Unitarians actually moves in a slightly pro-Israel direction. These findings suggest that factors specific to denominational tradition may still shape clerical attitudes, although it is important to note that the dummies for the two largest Protestant denominations, the SBC and UMC, drop out of the equation, as they are indistinct from the omitted centrist reference group, the ABC.

[Table 3 about here]

Of the four theological variables, pro-Israeli Christian Zionism dominates, with liberationism also surviving the final analysis, producing more support for concessions to the Palestinians. Orthodoxy and civic religion drop out; experimentation shows that their impacts are clearly mediated through the policy variables tapping domestic liberalism and international “hawkishness.” Involvement in the Christian Right (but not the Christian Left) adds explanatory power, as do all three types of media use. Of the ideological orientations, domestic policy liberalism has a powerful pro-Palestinian impact, while conservative identification and pro-defense postures move clergy less distinctly toward Israel. (The sign for Republican partisanship actually moves to the other side, once the theological and ideological factors are in the equation, perhaps reflecting an older GOP tradition of “even-handed” policy in the Middle East.) Most personal traits drop out. Women are actually more pro-Israel once other factors are in the equation, and ethnic identity retains a small influence in the expected directions.

Thus, we have a fairly clear picture of the sources of the clerical alignment. The pro-Israel camp comprises Christian Zionists (drawn primarily from premillennialist denominations), Christian Right activists, users of religious radio and TV, and pro-military conservatives. The

pro-Palestinian contingent is found in most mainline and some non-premillennialist evangelical denominations, is bolstered by liberationist theologies, and draws on public media sources, as well as domestic policy liberalism.

Sources of Clerical Activity on Middle East Issues

What about activism? As Table 1 showed, clerical activity on Middle East policy was distributed quite differently than attitudes. And although we are interested in the way that theological and professional factors shape clerical political involvement (Guth et al. 1997; Olson 2000; Djupe and Gilbert 2003), we know that clergy are also influenced by the same factors that spur or inhibit activism among citizens generally. Thus, we draw on general theories of participation as well. First, the *personal resources* and *political engagement* of ministers might well have a bigger impact on their activity than on their policy views (cf. Verba, Schlozman and Brady 1995). In addition, we need to consider *organizational mobilization* (Rosenstone and Hansen 1993). We have already considered one organizational factor—religio-political group involvement—but clergy also work in a professional context of local congregations and clergy groups that may well shape activism. And, finally, we want to test Verba, Schlozman and Brady's (1995) argument for *issue mobilization*, that intense feeling on an issue is itself an important activating force.

Although religious variables provide some help in predicting *behavior* of clergy on Middle East issues, they certainly explain less than they do about clergy *attitudes*. As Table 4 shows, Christian Zionism, the civic gospel and liberationism all encourage activity, but orthodoxy actually reduces involvement. Thus, the greater involvement of orthodox clergy on the Middle East results primarily from their frequent adherence to Christian Zionism and the civic gospel; once these are accounted for, theological orthodoxy adds nothing to pro-Israel

expression. Not surprisingly, perhaps, involvement in religio-political networks increases activity, both on the Right and Left, as does religious media, on the one hand, and public radio and TV, on the other. Use of newspapers and newsmagazines actually predicts less involvement. Once again, Model 2's explanatory power is modest, less than half of that of the theological variables.

Perhaps clergy action is explained better by some of the same factors that encourage political participation in the mass public, most notably what Verba, Schlozman and Brady (1995) call *political engagement* and *personal resources*. Although we might think that professional clergy would be quite uniform in such matters, in fact, there are major variations in both categories. Mainline Protestant and Roman Catholic bodies usually demand extensive educational preparation for their clergy, but many evangelical and black Protestant churches do not. In the same vein, some denominations have long fostered a theology of political engagement, encouraging ministerial interest in public affairs, but others have inculcated anti-political attitudes among clergy and even laity.

[Table 4 about here]

Model 3 reports some findings familiar to students of political participation, but also a few unexpected ones. Not surprisingly, indicators of *political engagement* such as interest in politics, approval of clerical activism, and a sense of ministerial political efficacy all help explain greater involvement, with interest and approval of activism most effective (cf. Guth et al. 1997). Unlike political activism in the mass public, however, clerical activity on Middle East issues is *negatively* associated with higher education, but has a modest positive relationship to Bible college attendance. As in the mass public, older ministers are more vocal, as are those with longer careers, but female clergy do not differ from the norm. Hispanic, but not black, clergy are slightly *more* likely to address the Middle East. Still, these personal resources do not explain

quite as much variation as theology does.

Of course, parish clergy work in an environment suffused with important “others”—especially congregation members and clergy colleagues. Earlier studies found that several traits of the organizational environment may influence pastoral activism: parishioners’ approval, the church’s social class and political status, the size and geographical location of the church, the clergyperson’s tenure, and even support offered by other clergy. And in fact, most do affect action on the Middle East, although not always in the anticipated direction (Model 4). Activity rises with congregational approval, among clergy for whom political involvement is part of their job description, and among those with long tenures in their congregations. More surprisingly, activism increases among those ideologically *different* from their flock, whether to right or left. (As we shall see below, this probably reflects the intensity with which such clergy hold political attitudes.) Similarly, activism is greater among pastors with smaller churches and working class congregations. Members of local ministerial councils are more active than non-members, but interestingly, perceived encouragement from other clergy does not generate activism.

Finally, we must consider *issue mobilization*. As Verba, Schlozman and Brady (1995) and others have pointed out, strongly held attitudes on public issues often provide motivation for public expression. As strength of opinion is often asymmetrical, this effect may give one side in political controversies an advantage over the other, less intense side. Here we hypothesize that strong pro-Israel and pro-Palestinian opinions should lead to greater involvement, with the former perhaps having the greater effect. That is exactly what we find in Model 5. Issue mobilization slightly exceeds the impact of political engagement and personal resources, almost doubles that of congregational context, but does not quite match the effects of theology.

Once again, a combined model provides even greater explanatory power. As Table 5 shows, denominational tendencies toward greater or lesser public engagement certainly appear,

with two historically premillennialist denominations and COGIC pastors more active (note that the SBC dummy drops out), joined in more modest degree by ELCA and Mennonite pastors. Four evangelical (LCMS, CRC, PCA and COC) and two mainline (RCA and PCUSA, but not the UMC) denominations join Catholic and Unitarian clergy as less vocal.

Christian Zionism remains a robust influence, aided slightly by civil religion. Christian Left involvement adds activism, but Christian Right participation just misses statistical significance. Reliance on PBS and NPR increases activity, as does religious media use (although the small coefficient misses significance with $p=.09$). Political engagement still contributes to activism, as both interest in politics and approval of clerical activism have solid positive coefficients. Older clergy are more active, as are those with *less* education. Most congregational effects remain, but the two variables tapping the minister's relative ideological position vis-à-vis the congregation drop out, as these effects are absorbed by issue mobilization, which remains a powerful force. As the table shows, strong pro-Israel sentiments constitute a greater stimulus than strong opinion on the Palestinian side. All in all, the model explains a fifth of the variance in activism on Middle East issues.⁵

[Table 5 about here]

This analysis suggests that insofar as local religious leaders become active in attempting to shape national policy, either by direct action or by influencing their parishioners, the *participatory distortion* (Verba, Schlozman and Brady 1995) favors the pro-Israel forces. Attitudes favorable to Israel, support for Christian Zionism, and location in a premillennialist denomination all predict greater activism. And although the national organizations speaking for

⁵ An alternative specification would include a measure of overall clerical political involvement, on the grounds that pastors most active generally would be most likely to be involved in a single issue. If we add a measure of overall political activity in Model 4, the coefficient is large and significant, but changes very few of the other coefficients and adds only modestly to the variance explained. The reason is quite simple: this measure simply "replaces" the approval of activism measure, with which it is highly correlated. Ministers who approve political activism are usually politically active.

mainline Protestants and Roman Catholics are quite vocal in demanding justice for the Palestinians, such calls have not been fully reflected in the activity of local clergy.

Discussion and Implications

What is the significance of these findings? Clearly, the relative influence of denominational lobbies might well be determined by the degree to which national policy pronouncements are bolstered by local clerical activism. Of greater significance, perhaps, is the impact that pastors may have as “opinion leaders” shaping public attitudes—or at least those of the larger religious publics. But as many scholars have noted, the influence of clergy over their congregations is one of the most methodologically intractable questions confronting the student of clerical politics (Crawford and Olson 2001). In the present case, the reader may well ask, “but do clergy views really influence parishioners’ thinking about Middle East issues”?

We have no congregational samples matched to the clergy we studied in 2000, but can produce a reasonable facsimile from the 2004 University of Akron-Pew Forum National Survey on Religion and Politics. Although that survey used a different item on the Middle East, the religious patterns in the mass public reflect quite closely those we saw among clergy in Table 1, although in less dramatic form (data not shown). Do clergy play any role in producing those patterns? This is not easy to determine. If we find, for example, that Assemblies of God laity favor Israel, does that reflect the almost unanimous views of AOG clergy? Or, are pastors and people alike responding to a central tenet of Pentecostal dispensationalism? Or, perhaps, are they both following cues from GOP leaders, such as President Bush, for whom they voted in overwhelming numbers in 2004? We will attempt to sort out at least some of these possibilities.

Table 6 reports the Middle East attitudes of laity in the major American religious traditions (and in a few large denominations). To test the possibility that clergy may shape

parishioners' views, we examine three groups: irregular church-goers, weekly church-goers, and weekly church-goers whose clergy spoke out on the Iraq war and terrorism. (We know from other evidence that this is a reasonable proxy for comments on the Middle East generally.) Although unfortunately we lack information on the *direction* of clergy statements, we should find "listening" evangelical church-goers friendlier toward Israel (given pro-Israel sentiment among evangelical pastors), with the reverse effect among attentive mainline and Catholic laity, whose pastors more are critical of Israel. We also control for other relevant influences.⁶

The evangelical laity clearly confirms our expectations. First, note that evangelicals are indeed much friendlier to Israel than are other religious groups. Even among irregular attenders, 48 percent favored Israel over the Arabs, compared to only 28 and 31 percent of their mainline and white Catholic counterparts. For evangelicals, pro-Israel sentiment rises among church-goers, but jumps even more dramatically when the pastor has spoken. This pattern is especially strong in two of the largest evangelical contingents, the AOG and the SBC, with the difference of means tests significant even in the face of small *Ns*. Hispanic Protestants are somewhat less supportive of Israel overall, but experience the same increases as first attendance, and then clerical pronouncement are added. Black Protestants, as other studies show, are quite critical of Israel, but support still rises with regular attendance and clerical discussions (Pew Center 2006).

The evidence is less conclusive for mainline Protestants and Catholics. In each case, support for Israel is higher among regular church-goers than among the less observant. This may well reflect the greater theological conservatism of the faithful: higher views of biblical authority among both mainline and Catholic church-goers work to Israel's advantage. In both instances,

⁶ To maximize the chances that the result is not an artifact of other factors, we control for partisanship, ideology, education, income, gender and political knowledge by adjusting the mean scores through multiple classification analysis (MCA). As we noted above, support for Israel in 2004 was strongest among Republicans, conservatives, and men. Education, income, and political knowledge had minor and varying effects. In another analysis not shown, we also controlled for theological orthodoxy, and among Protestants, for dispensationalist views. These controls reduced only slightly the differences between groups shown in Table 6.

however, clerical pronouncements may counter such tendencies, although the results are stronger in the bivariate than in the adjusted data. The difference of means barely meets statistical significance among Catholics, but does not come very close among mainliners ($p=.244$). Still, the pattern is compatible with an inference of modest influence, and findings for two of the larger mainline bodies, the United Methodists and PCUSA, show some sign of impact.⁷

Of course, local clergy compete with other sources of religious cues that need to be incorporated in a more comprehensive assessment. Evangelicals, for example, are also avid consumers of religious TV and radio, which usually serve to reinforce the pro-Israel views of denominational leaders and local clergy. Mainline churches, on the other hand, have a smaller, but still significant, coterie of parishioners who receive these same media messages, but for whom the messages run contrary to views disseminated by denominational elites and parish ministers. In fact, when religious media use by mainline parishioners is taken into account, the impact of mainline clergy statements among regular worshippers shown in Table 6 increases slightly, from a difference of 35 to 33 percent, to one of 36 to 31 percent (full analysis not shown). In the end, however, the evidence strongly suggests that evangelical clergy have greater influence over congregational attitudes, supporting conclusions in earlier studies (Jelen 1993).

[Table 6 about here]

Our findings assist us in understanding the strong support that Israel has in American public attitudes. If we remind ourselves that premillennialist denominations constitute by far the largest contingent in American evangelicalism, which in turn accounts for a quarter of the American electorate (and much more of the GOP “base”), we understand the religious basis for the persistence of that support. The large numbers of evangelical clergy who have an intense

⁷ Allowing for the small N , the results for the PCUSA are especially provocative, given the hot internal controversy over denominational divestiture of stocks invested in Israel, and the ensuing conflict between PCUSA and Jewish leaders (Stockton 2005).

interest in Middle East issues and a fervent attachment to the success of Israel provide fertile grounds for recruitment by Christian Zionist organizations, constantly proliferating in recent years. Biblical interpretation and exposition by these clergy in their congregations—and sometimes beyond through local Christian radio and TV stations—is likely to have a considerable cumulative impact on their listeners.

Israel's critics are not without voice in the American religious context, however. Catholic priests, mainline ministers, as well as some evangelical and African American pastors, have considerable sympathy with the Palestinian cause. But that sympathy is voiced more often in denominational pronouncements than in the local congregational or political context. And where that expression is heard, it appears less effective in convincing parishioners, or in modifying their attitudes. Nevertheless, this alternative voice on Middle East affairs is one of the few institutional forces counter-balancing the general trend of American attitudes supportive of Israel. As such it may provide a valuable alternative perspective in this vital area of foreign policy.

Appendix Variables and Scales

Many of the variables used in the statistical analysis are straight-forward, self-descriptive measures (*age, female, length of tenure at church*), or are the standard measures used in the discipline (*party identification*). Some of those most central to the analyses are factor scores or scales produced from single items, however. Here we describe how these variables were constructed and some of their measurement traits:

Fundamentalist orthodoxy is the score from the first of two components derived from a principal components analysis of fourteen five-point Likert scale theological items with varimax rotation. The items loading strongly on this factor are: the Virgin Birth (.88), literal existence of the Devil (.86), the Second Coming (.84), Jesus as the only way to salvation (.83), opposition to gay clergy (-.78), Adam and Eve as historical persons (.75), rejection of evolution (.69), and inerrancy of Scripture (.67). The second rotated factor is *liberationism*, with the strongest item loadings on: favoring liberation theology (.77), seeing social justice at the heart of the gospel (.74), favoring women clergy (.73), endorsing feminist theology (.70), preferring a “social” to an “individual” religious transformation (.49), rejecting Biblical inerrancy (.48), and holding a non-literal view of Adam and Eve (.46). The *theta* reliability for the two scores is .95.

American civic religion is a factor score from a principal components analysis of five Likert scale items. The loadings for the items are: US is a Christian nation (.76), only one correct Christian view on most political issues (.75), hard to be a true Christian and a political liberal (.74), religious freedom is threatened in US (.73), government should protect our religious heritage (.69), and free enterprise is the only economic system compatible with Christianity (.69). *Theta*=.85.

Christian Zionism is a single five-point Likert strongly agree-strongly disagree (1 to 5) item: “Modern-day Israel is a special nation blessed by God.” Mean=3.10; SD=1.34.

Christian Right and *Christian Left Involvement*. Four-point scales in which clergy were credited with 1 point for feeling close to at least one of four listed Christian Right or Left organizations, 1 point for membership in at least one such organization, and 1 point for attendance at meetings of at least one organization. *Alpha*=.53 and .61, respectively.

Religious media (religious TV and radio), *common media* (newspapers and newsmagazines), and *public media* (public TV and radio). These additive scales were based on individual items asking how important each media source was to the respondent: (0) Not used; (1) Some importance; (2) Great importance. *Alpha*=.71, .79 and .75, respectively.

Social welfare liberalism is a factor score based on the following items (with loadings): need larger federal role in providing social welfare (.81), favor national health plan (.79), want less reliance on private enterprise (.78), more strong environmental action (.76), more legislation on women’s rights (.76), favor affirmative action (.75), oppose death penalty (.74), favor handgun control (.71), and oppose stringent welfare reform (.68). *Theta*=.90.

Pro-defense is a factor score based on the following items (with loadings): favor caution in relations with Russia (.81), favor more military spending (.78), and oppose closer relations with China (.65). *Theta*=.62.

Moral conservatism is a factor score based on the following items (with loadings): favor abortion amendment to Constitution (.82), favor teaching creationism in schools (.74), favor school vouchers (.74), favor alternatives to public schooling (.69), oppose sex education in schools (.69), oppose more gay rights legislation (.67), and support a school prayer amendment to the Constitution (.62). *Theta*=.82.

Interest in Politics is a factor score based on three items (with loadings): attention to the 2000 campaign (.92), attention to daily news (.87), and general interest in politics (.86). *Alpha*=.86.

Approval of Clerical Activism is a factor score from the first principal component of an analysis of fourteen items asking pastors whether they approve of ministers undertaking various political actions. All but two items had loadings above .5. *Theta*=.86.

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TABLE 1. Pastors' Support For Israel And Frequency Of Addressing Middle East Policies (In Percent)

	<i>Pro-Israel</i>	<i>Pro-Palestinian</i>	<i>Addressed “Very Often or Often”</i>
<i>Evangelical Protestant</i>	37	32	33
Assemblies of God (AOG)	73	10	65
Evangelical Free Church (EFC)	52	23	43
Southern Baptist Convention (SBC)	50	21	46
Church of the Nazarene	45	21	41
Presbyterian Church in America (PCA)	38	23	17
Churches of Christ (COC)	23	33	15
Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod (LCMS)	22	39	17
Mennonite Church	19	60	38
Christian Reformed Church (CRC)	14	53	19
<i>Mainline Protestant</i>	16	55	35
American Baptist Churches (ABC)	29	39	36
United Methodist Church (UMC)	20	47	34
Disciples of Christ (DOC)	15	56	36
Presbyterian Church (USA)	13	58	33
Reformed Church in America (RCA)	12	59	30
Evangelical Lutheran (ELCA)	9	70	38
<i>Black Protestant</i>	29	28	45
Churches of God in Christ (COGIC)	37	19	51
African Methodist Episcopal (AME)	20	36	40
<i>Roman Catholic</i>	5	71	26
<i>Unitarian Universalist (UUA)</i>	6	74	23
<i>Question:</i>	“A lasting peace in the Middle East will require Israel to make greater concessions to the Palestinians.” “Strongly agree” or “agree” coded as “pro-Palestinian”; “disagree” and “strongly disagree” as “pro-Israel.”		
<i>Question:</i>	“How often have you addressed these issues: Israel and the Middle East?”		
	<i>Response options:</i> very often, often, seldom, or never.		

TABLE 2. Influences On Pastors' Support For Israel

	<i>Model 1 Theology</i>	<i>Model 2 Religious Networks and Media</i>	<i>Model 3 Personal Traits</i>	<i>Model 4 Political Factors</i>
	B	B	B	B
<i>Theological Orientations</i>				
Christian Zionism	.279***			
Orthodoxy	.112***			
Civic Gospel	.132***			
Liberationism	-.306***			
<i>Religious Networks and Media Use</i>				
Christian Right Involvement		.183***		
Christian Left Involvement		-.177***		
Religious Media Use		.178***		
Common Media Use		-.122***		
Public Radio and TV		-.155***		
<i>Personal Characteristics</i>				
Secular Education			-.153***	
Seminary Education			-.112***	
Attended Bible College			.058***	
Female			-.094***	
Age			-.051***	
Size of community			-.072***	
Hispanic			.041***	
African-American			-.016	
<i>Political Factors</i>				
Republican identification				.111***
Conservative identification				.135***
Social Welfare Liberalism				-.310***
Pro-Defense				.178***
Moral Conservatism				.092***
<i>Adjusted R squared</i>	.316	.235	.009	.298

***p<.001, **p<.01, *p<.05.

TABLE 3. Combined Model Of Pastors' Support For Israel

	<i>All Factors</i>
<i>Denomination</i>	
Assemblies of God (AOG)	B .077***
Churches of God in Christ (COGIC)	.050***
Unitarian (UUA)	.029**
Mennonite Church	-.027**
Churches of Christ (COC)	-.034***
Evangelical Lutheran (ELCA)	-.037***
Presbyterian Church (USA)	-.039***
Evangelical Free Church (EFC)	-.040***
Christian Reformed Church (CRC)	-.040***
Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod (LCMS)	-.057***
Reformed Church in America (RCA)	-.060***
Roman Catholic	-.071***
<i>Theological Orientations</i>	
Christian Zionism	.202***
Liberationism	-.088***
<i>Religious Networks and Media Use</i>	
Christian Right Involvement	.029**
Religious Media Use	.030**
Common Media Use	-.034**
Public Radio and TV	-.043***
<i>Personal Traits</i>	
Female	.029***
Black	-.026*
Hispanic	.032***
<i>Political Factors</i>	
Republican identification	-.037*
Conservative identification	.057***
Social Welfare Liberalism	-.311***
Pro-Defense	.076***
<i>Adjusted R squared</i>	.391

***p<.001, **p<.01, *p<.05.

TABLE 4. Factors Influencing Pastors' Speaking On The Mideast

	<i>Model 1 Theology B</i>	<i>Model 2 Networks B</i>	<i>Model 3 Personal B</i>	<i>Model 4 Church B</i>	<i>Model 5 Issues B</i>
Theological Orientations					
Christian Zionism	.251***				
Orthodoxy	-.075*				
Civic Gospel	.186***				
Liberationism	.115***				
Religious Networks and Media Use					
Christian Right Involvement		.080***			
Christian Left Involvement		.125***			
Religious Media		.086***			
Common Media		-.120***			
Public Radio and TV		.060***			
Political Engagement					
Interest in politics			.112***		
Approval of activism			.105***		
Political efficacy			.041***		
Personal Resources					
Education level			-.106***		
Attended Bible college			.026*		
Age			.056***		
Years in ministry			.058***		
Female			.015		
Hispanic			.027**		
Black			.017		
Congregational Context					
Congregational approval				.063***	
Political activity part of job				.129***	
More liberal than church				.039***	
More conservative than church				.058***	
Size of church				-.058***	
Social class of church				-.068***	
Length of tenure at church				.058***	
Local clergy council member				.065***	
Support of other clergy				.007	
Issue Mobilization					
Strongly pro-Israel					.293***
Strongly pro-Palestinian					.180***
<i>Adjusted R squared</i>	<i>.076</i>	<i>.031</i>	<i>.060</i>	<i>.046</i>	<i>.072</i>

***p<.001, **p<.01, *p<.05.

TABLE 5. Combined Model Of Pastors' Action On Israel

	B
Denomination	
Churches of God in Christ (COGIC)	.078***
Assemblies of God (AOG)	.076***
Evangelical Free Church (EFC)	.062***
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA)	.024*
Mennonite	.022*
Reformed Church in America (RCA)	-.036***
Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod (LCMS)	-.050***
Roman Catholic	-.058***
Christian Reformed Church (CRC)	-.059***
Unitarian (UUA)	-.077***
Presbyterian Church in America (PCA)	-.074***
Churches of Christ (COC)	-.083***
Theological Orientations	
Christian Zionism	.121***
Civic religion	.033*
Religious Networks and Media Use	
Christian Right Involvement	.020
Christian Left Involvement	.064***
Religious Media Use	.021
Public Radio and TV	.093***
Political Engagement	
Interest	.080***
Approval of activism	.065***
Personal Resources	
Age	.081***
Education	-.034**
African-American	-.026
Congregational Context	
Political activity part of job	.070***
Congregational approval	.034***
Size of church	-.028*
Social class of church	-.026*
Local clergy council member	.047***
Issue Mobilization	
Pro-Israel	.192***
Pro-Palestinian	.167***
Adjusted R squared	.201

***p<.001, **p<.01, *p<.05.

TABLE 6. Impact Of Pastors' Speaking On The Mideast
 (Percent of Parishioners Supporting Israel Over the Arabs)

	<i>Not Regular Attenders</i>	<i>Regular Attenders, No Clergy Statements</i>	<i>Regular Attenders Clergy Statements</i>
<i>RELIGIOUS TRADITION</i>			
<i>All Evangelical</i> (N=650)	48	53	66***
Assemblies of God (N=30)	42	85	92*
Southern Baptists (N=167)	49	53	75**
<i>Hispanic Protestant</i> (N=71)	25	37	58**
<i>Black Protestant</i> (N=254)	16	19	35**
<i>All Mainline</i> (N=432)	28	35	33
United Methodists (N=137)	30	35	31
Presbyterian USA (N=46)	16	19	1
<i>Roman Catholic</i> (N=447)	31	36	33*

Source: 2004 National Survey of Religion and Politics, University of Akron-Pew Forum

***p<.001, **p<.01, *p<.05

Means adjusted for partisanship, ideology, education, income, gender, and political information by use of Multiple Classification Analysis.