

# Israeli media increase division between people

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The power that the Israeli media once used to create a sense of community is increasingly separating groups, according to a Penn State Altoona political scientist.

A study of Israeli newspapers indicates that both religious and secular newspapers are using their ability to select and present information to divide groups of Israeli citizens, said Matt Evans, assistant professor, political science.

"The media has immense power to influence people by the way they frame information," said Evans. "Instead of working to heal differences, they are actually exacerbating the social cleavages."

Journalists frame information by determining what articles they publish, where articles are placed in the paper and how the articles are written. They can also use photos and artwork to frame the information, said Evans, who reported his findings in the current issue of the *Middle East Journal*.

Evans said media framing is often unintentional.

"I do not think the media are being used to deliberately divide people," said Evans. "Rather there is a downward spiral as each side makes its case to its core audience."

According to Evans, media framing in Israeli newspapers is largely

aimed at separating secular and religious Jewish communities. Newspapers run by the ultra-orthodox Haredim, such as Yated Ne'eman and HaModia, provide more obvious examples of how media framing divides people.

Since most Haredi avoid secular media, the newspapers are the primary news sources for the group's members. However, the Haredi press typically omits stories about religious public officials involved in crimes or scandals. Haredi reporters also use such phrases as "wonderful boys" or "brilliant young men," to sarcastically describe secular political figures.

Secular newspapers use more subtle media framing techniques to divide groups, according to Evans. For example, secular newspapers use pictures of conservatively clad Haredi five times more than moderate modern orthodox community members, even though the majority of orthodox citizens are modern orthodox. Evans said that the portrayal of religious citizens as Haredi plays on fears that orthodox citizens are threatening to exert political influence. Secular citizens fear change in the neighborhood standards, such as closing stores on the Sabbath.

Newspapers are important sources of news in Israel. Most Israelis read two or more newspapers on the weekend and in a 1995 survey on Israeli [newspaper](#) readership, 88 percent of the Jewish respondents read a daily paper, according to Evans. Israel is the only country in the Middle East that has a free press, according to the Global Press Freedom Rankings.

Evans said the use of media framing to divide groups is a global problem.

"The power the media is using to divide people isn't just found in Israel, and it's not just being used to exacerbate the differences between secular and religious groups," Evans said. "In the United States, for instance, you

can see how MSNBC, on the left, and Fox News, on the right, frame coverage to change how we see Republicans and Democrats."

Provided by Pennsylvania State University

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