Latin America

Mexico

National Affairs

THE PERIOD 1994 AND EARLY 1995 in many ways marked a turning point in the history of contemporary Mexico and in the development of its Jewish community. Dramatic changes occurred in the country's economic, political, and sociocultural structures, impelled by a newly activist and sophisticated populace pushing for reform and greater democratization. At the same time, elements critical of the regime and the slow pace of reform were the source of violence and turmoil. Even as the government of former president Carlos Salinas de Gortari was about to reap the major gains of the radical reforms it had implemented—most significantly the signing of the North American Free Trade Agreement between Mexico, the United States, and Canada—on the very day that the treaty went into effect, January 1, 1994, Mexican society was shaken by news of guerrilla warfare in the southeastern state of Chiapas.

Major gaps in wealth distribution, an unjust division of land, and the continuing oppression of the mainly Indian population by local authoritarian regimes were some of the causes behind the uprising, but they struck a chord nationally. The uprising exposed the deep socioeconomic and ethnic rifts in Mexican society, which only periodically resulted in open conflict and urgent calls for greater democratization. Mexican society embraced the previously unknown National Liberation Zapatista Army (EZLN) with ambivalence, the most conservative elements urging the government to act forcefully against the rebels, the intellectual and political leaders of progressive circles welcoming the Zapatista army's activities as a spur to the development of a more open and pluralistic system.

Although the ruling Revolutionary Institutional Party (PRI)—which had governed Mexico for over 60 years in an essentially one-party system—had since the late 1980s seen the emergence of a reform element committed to implementing serious structural change, the minor uprising in Chiapas showed that the system was unable to keep popular opposition movements in check. At the same time, the assassination in March 1994 of Luis Donaldo Colosio, the PRI's presidential candi-
date, while campaigning in northern Mexico, was generally acknowledged to be linked to the conflicts within the PRI between reformers and "dinosaurs," or conservatives, reflecting the deep split in the party. In fact, at the beginning of 1995 suspects were charged in the case who had close links to the antireform faction.

Federal elections for president and Congress on August 21, 1994 proved to be a litmus test of the system's willingness and ability to implement democracy in the country. Fear of what change could imply was apparently behind the almost 50-percent figure that put Ernesto Zedillo of the PRI in power, while the candidate of the moderate rightist National Action Party (PAN) came in second, and combative "leftist" Cuauhtemoc Cardenas third. The Chamber of Deputies and the Senate, which had been almost exclusively under the PRI's control, now opened their doors to a significant number of opposition representatives (more than 40 percent), forcing the government to build alliances in order to implement its program.

Mexican society was shocked once again, in September, by the murder of Jose Francisco Ruiz Massieu, general secretary of the PRI and leader of the party's majority faction in the Chamber of Deputies, which was to be sworn in in November. This time the investigation pointed clearly to an open conspiracy. Ruiz Massieu was a prominent ideologue for reform and a key liaison with the opposition. On the last day of February 1995, Raul Salinas, brother of Mexico's former president Carlos Salinas de Gortari, was arrested on charges of plotting the murder.

Upon taking office in December 1994, President Zedillo stated his willingness to promote an ongoing dialogue with the opposition and took important steps to seek a peaceful solution in Chiapas. However, in a reprise of events at the beginning of the year, the end of 1994 was characterized by turmoil. With speculative foreign investment and unrestricted imports flooding the market, Mexico's commercial balance showed a distressing deficit. The peso had been subsidized artificially for too long, and a major devaluation, resulting in a volatile currency and a sharp rise in prices, shocked rich and poor alike. The bottom line was a loss of confidence in government institutions and the prospect of an acute financial and political crisis.

The U.S. government put together a $20-billion loan as part of an international bailout package of $52 billion, but the tough conditions imposed by the International Monetary Fund to insure repayment halted economic growth and froze government spending. The administration concentrated its efforts on stabilizing the peso, putting a brake on inflation, which was expected to rise beyond 40 percent, and attracting foreign investment through high yields. These severe measures, which included hikes in the prices of gas and public utilities and higher taxes, harmed President Zedillo's standing, especially as he was unable to rally the public behind his efforts to restore the country's finances.

In the political arena, dialogue was reestablished in Chiapas. However, opposition forces demonstrated continually against the terms of international loans, the handling of the Chiapas conflict, and the lack of accountability of the previous administration, which they viewed as having betrayed—through mismanagement and corruption—the great expectations most Mexicans had for political stability and
economic development. Hence, the national mood in mid-1995 was not at all optimistic.

Israel and the Middle East

In December 1991, Mexico had been one of 85 countries cosponsoring the initiative to revoke the United Nations "Zionism is racism" resolution. This act signaled a growing disposition on the part of the Mexican government to reconcile its bilateral and multilateral relations with Israel. For the last four decades, close economic and cultural links were promoted at the federal level and by local groups, such as many associations of friends of Israeli universities and the Israel-Mexico Cultural Institute. These ties, which had been tested during the 1973 embargo, when Mexico sold oil to Israel despite Arab threats, contrasted sharply with Mexico's consistent anti-Israel voting pattern in international forums, especially during the 1970s, when Third World and nonaligned anti-Zionist rhetoric pervaded the UN and associated agencies. Mexico's policy, according to both official and nonofficial sources, was intended as a statement of opposition to the United States and had nothing to do with an anti-Israel bias. However, it was a continuing source of contention with the Israeli government and the Mexican Jewish community. Although Mexico did officially denounce the bombing of the Jewish community building in Buenos Aires on July 18, 1994, and the terrorist attacks against Jewish institutions in London in July and against civilians in Tel Aviv's Dizengoff Street in October, its continuing support for the self-determination of the Palestinian people kept the government from openly condemning anti-Semitism, Palestinian extremism, and Islamic fundamentalism.

Another irritant, though on a bilateral scale, was Israel's trade deficit with Mexico and the fact that until very recently no serious effort was put forth to close the gap. In 1994, however, Israel increased and diversified its exports to Mexico in the area of communications and agricultural technology.

Despite the problems in the diplomatic and economic spheres, Israeli culture was much in evidence in Mexico—both within the context of the Jewish community and outside it. (See "Israel-Related Activities," below.) The Israel-Mexico Cultural Institute, working very closely with the Israeli embassy, presented at its downtown Mexico City premises an array of concerts, art and photo exhibits, lectures, and Hebrew classes, all aimed at acquainting the Mexican public with different aspects of Israeli life.

At the beginning of 1994 and again in 1995, the Mexican Association of Friends of the Hebrew University presented programs titled "Three Women, Three Expressions," with lecturers from the university speaking on a wide range of subjects in academic and community forums.

In February 1995, in connection with the 35th anniversary of the Israel Museum, the exhibit "Treasures of the Holy Land"—the largest collection of antiquities to travel outside of Israel to date—was shown in one of Mexico City's most prestigious...
museums, the Cultural Center of Contemporary Art. Teddy Kollek, the former mayor of Jerusalem and acting honorary chairman of the Association of Friends of the Israel Museum, attended the exhibition opening. In conjunction with the display, several conferences on Mexican and Israeli culture were organized by local archaeology museums.

Several Israeli public figures visited Mexico during 1994. On May 26 and 27, Foreign Minister Shimon Peres met in Mexico City with President Salinas, Finance Minister Pedro Aspe, and his counterpart, Manuel Tello. He also delivered a talk at the Jewish Sport Center and had dinner with some of Mexico's leading intellectuals.

Israel's Ashkenazic chief rabbi, Israel Meir Lau, met with President Salinas at the end of June 1994 at the president's official residence in Los Pinos. During the first week of November, Deputy Foreign Minister Yossi Beilin took part in the Conference of Latin American Jewish Communities, organized by the World Jewish Congress and the Jewish community of Mexico. His talk emphasized the need for a change in the dynamics of Israel-Diaspora relations, with an emphasis on reciprocity and acknowledgment that the ties could not be exclusively financial. In this session, Yehiel Leket, chairman of the Jewish Agency, presented a different view, based on his institution's traditional position.

Anti-Semitism and Extremism

Attitudes toward Jews in Mexican society stem from a variety of sources and are often contradictory. A legacy of intolerance dating back to the 16th-century Inquisition contrasts sharply with the warm welcome bestowed at the beginning of this century upon new immigrants, who found in Mexico a hospitable promised land.

In modern Mexican history, except for the 1930s, anti-Semitism has never been sponsored or promoted by the government, nor has it been central to the agendas of political parties or organized movements. Nevertheless, a certain level of anti-Semitism persists in society at large. The extreme right, for example, has formed clandestine cells, some of which—based mainly in the city of Guadalajara—express their anti-Jewish messages through publications available by subscription, though these have limited circulation. One such is Salvador Abascal's *La Hoja de Combate* (Combat Newsletter). This newsletter publicized a myriad of books by former journalist Salvador Borrego, who is undoubtedly the most prolific anti-Semitic author in Spanish, his books being distributed in Latin America and the southern United States.

Mexico is among the most active publishers and distributors of anti-Semitic literature on the American continent. Classic anti-Jewish works such as Henry Ford's *The International Jew* and the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion* are part of an extensive collection that is published locally and circulated in Mexico and abroad. With the strengthening of racism and neo-Nazism worldwide, the extreme right in Mexico has found fertile ground for promoting its pernicious messages. References
to an international Jewish conspiracy as well as the deicide accusation even appear from time to time in respected media.

Although Holocaust revisionist movements have not developed in Mexico, the Institute for Historical Review, a revisionist group based in California, has tried to get a foothold in the country through the distribution of propaganda in strategic places and the introduction of works by British revisionist David Irving. Lyndon LaRouche's political cult has been active as well through the Movement for Iberoamerican Solidarity, which publishes a newspaper that continually emphasizes a "British Zionist conspiracy." Popular movements containing remnants of the extreme left have at times expressed anti-Semitic/anti-Zionist messages. These derive from traditional Marxist ideology or from an anti-imperialist posture.

During the 1970s and 1980s, a major anti-Israel propaganda effort was launched by the local Arab camp—Arab embassies and Arab communities, the Arab League, the PLO office, and PLO-supported groups—which at times included anti-Semitic references. With Mexico now seeking to change its international profile and abandoning Third World rhetoric, and with the developments in the Middle East peace process, this activity was toned down.

In the last few years, a potential center of Muslim fundamentalist activity was detected in the northern city of Torreon, which boasts the only Shi'ite mosque in the country. Torreon is the headquarters of propagandist Augusto Hugo Peña, who sent a steady stream of virulent anti-Semitic letters to the daily *Excelsior*, denouncing Israel as a terrorist state and questioning Mexican Jewry's loyalty to the country.

Viewed against this general background, and in the turmoil that prevailed in 1994 and the first half of 1995, anti-Semitism in Mexico actually remained at a significantly low level. Several factors may account for this: (1) Mexican society's preoccupation with the presidential succession and the political crises occurring throughout the year; (2) developments in the Middle East peace process, which neutralized one of the main sources of anti-Zionist/anti-Semitic propaganda; (3) Mexican Jewry's enhanced status in the new climate of tolerance of diversity and pluralism (see below); (4) public-relations activity conducted by Tribuna Israelita, the community's official human-relations and antidefamation agency, aimed at sensitizing political, religious, media, and intellectual circles to the legitimate concerns of Mexican Jewry and building alliances based on national issues.

On the positive side, the media, traditionally open to presenting anti-Semitic expressions and views, were almost completely free of this type of material during this period. Analysts and editorial writers preserved a balanced outlook on developments, even at critical moments. Whether it was Hebron, Buenos Aires, or Tel Aviv, the vast majority of Mexican commentators remained staunch supporters of the peace negotiations and firm critics of terrorism and fundamentalism. Moreover, the appearance of anti-Semitic "letters to the editor," previously commonplace, decreased significantly.

On the negative side of the ledger, the traditional tactic of singling out Jews for blame during times of crisis was adopted by advocates of a new ideology that took
root in Mexico in the early 1990s and became increasingly overt and aggressive. Dubbed “Neo-Mexicanism,” its adherents promoted an idealized image of Mexico’s Indian past and scorned Europe’s role in forging the national identity. In this context Jews were singled out as the culprits, blamed for the acute problems haunting Mexico and other Latin American nations. Its most vicious proponent, the Mexican Eagles Party (Partido de las Aguilas Mexicanas), which daily covered the outer walls of Mexico City’s cathedral with anti-Jewish graffiti, claimed that Mexican Jewry (which ostensibly includes the former and present presidents of Mexico as well as many other government officials) controlled the politics and finances of the country and should be held accountable for, among other things, the conflict in the state of Chiapas and for exploiting the poor. Spokespersons for other right-wing radical groups—among them LaRouche’s Dennis Small during one of his lectures at the beginning of 1994—also blamed the Jews, especially Sephardic Jews, for involvement in the Chiapas uprising (presumably on the assumption that because the guerrilla leaders had Spanish names, they must be related to Sephardic Jews).

The signs of recession evident even before the December devaluation increased social tensions, producing a gloomy outlook for Mexico’s future only partially mitigated by peaceful elections in August. Throughout the year there was a significant increase in the appearance of swastikas and anti-Jewish graffiti, especially in Jewish residential areas; however, this often occurred during election campaigns in Mexico.

The further deterioration of the Mexican economy in the first half of 1995 and the severe measures imposed on the population by the international bankers provoked a rash of popular demonstrations in Mexico City’s main thoroughfares. Jews were one of the targets, based on the alleged link between Jews and the International Monetary Fund, which was blamed for Mexico’s diminished sovereignty.

With future perspectives still uncertain, with Mexico immersed in economic recession and political and social instability, the Jewish community was closely monitoring anti-Semitic indicators.

JEWISH COMMUNITY

Demography

According to a sociodemographic study conducted by the Hebrew University of Jerusalem and El Colegio de Mexico in 1991, sponsored by the Mexican Association of Friends of the Hebrew University, the estimated Jewish community of Mexico numbered 40,000. Most of Mexico’s Jews lived in the capital and its suburbs in the state of Mexico, while the rest (about 2,500) resided in the cities of Guadalajara, Monterrey, and Tijuana.
Community Relations

Although Mexican society as a whole was beset by crisis and uncertainty in the period under review, Mexican Jewry, somewhat paradoxically, actually felt itself strengthened. Its legitimacy within the national context gained in validity, and its self-image as an integral and active part of civil society was enhanced. In a meeting with delegates to the Conference of Latin American Jewish Communities in November 1994, outgoing president Salinas asserted that “the Jewish community of Mexico is an integral part of our national family. We share a deep respect for differences. Jewish presence contributes to diversity which enriches our homeland, enabling all of us to push jointly toward national goals.”

Two important developments opened the way for the more visible and dynamic participation of Mexican Jewry in the country’s public life. One was the growing acceptance of pluralism as a social ideal for modern Mexico. Although the legal status of Jews in Mexico had been—since the first waves of immigration at the beginning of the century—beyond question, their status as a legitimate, integral part of Mexican society had never been entirely settled. Now, however, on both a collective and an individual basis, Jews faced unique opportunities. There was a clear acknowledgment of the important role that the Jewish minority could play in contributing to a tolerant environment. At the same time, young Jewish technocrats had become increasingly active in public administration up to the ministerial level. (See “Personalia,” below.)

A second development was the opening of the political structure to greater participation by nongovernmental entities, as political parties and some institutions were discredited. This allowed many previously marginal segments of society, like the Jews, to have input in the decision-making process, to become actors rather than observers. This change had an impact on the agenda of the Jewish community of Mexico, which now saw itself as capable of influencing issues pertaining to its well-being and survival. As Mexican Jewry’s feeling of belonging was strengthened, it was able to take a more visible and assertive stance. This was seen in the unprecedented meetings that Jewish leaders held during the first half of 1994 with most of the candidates for the presidency, presenting them with a specific agenda of concerns that included both national and Jewish issues. Among the latter were the presence of anti-Semitic groups in Mexico and the pressing need for antiracist legislation.

The significance of these meetings was reflected at a later stage with the publication in July 1994, in Mexico’s leading newspapers, of an open letter condemning anti-Jewish terror and anti-Semitism in Buenos Aires, Panama, and London. Undertaken at the initiative of Tribuna Israelita, the letter was signed by more than 150 political, intellectual, and social leaders, including the nine candidates for the presidency. Because of this broad sponsorship—up to that point in the campaign, this was the only document signed jointly by the nine candidates—the letter effectively declared a national consensus against anti-Semitism.

The changing profile of Mexican Jewry was underscored in other encounters
between Jewish leaders and government officials and influential figures. At the beginning of 1995, President Ernesto Zedillo requested a meeting with Jewish leaders to exchange views on the country's present and future direction and to encourage their support for the national effort to overcome the crisis. Mexico City's attorney general, Jose Antonio Gonzalez Fernandez, was invited to a luncheon at the headquarters of the Ashkenazi community in February 1995 to discuss government measures to halt and deter the crime wave that had become a major cause of social instability. In March 1995, Oscar Espinoza Villareal, Mexico City's mayor, urged Jewish representatives to support development programs for this urban center of 20 million inhabitants, with its dramatic contrasts between haves and have-nots.

As part of the growing activism of nongovernmental organizations, especially those pushing for democratic reform, the Jewish community participated in forums with groups and sectors that shared similar concerns. The wide range of Jewish women's organizations devoted to social, cultural, and philanthropic work played a dynamic role in national as well as community projects. The Mexican Council of Jewish Women sent food and clothing to the displaced Indian population of Chiapas as well as to that of the state of Chihuahua, hard-hit by drought. Other women's organizations, like the Jewish Mexican Volunteers, Wizo, and Na'amat increased their work in the spheres of education and health.

At the beginning of 1995, the Jewish community launched a series of meetings with opinion shapers, including religious figures, to discuss issues that affect the whole nation but that have a special bearing on minority groups. During the first meeting in February, Dr. Nathan Lerner, renowned international jurist and authority on human rights, exchanged views on the status of minorities with journalists, social scientists, and representatives of Baptist and Jesuit groups. One of the topics discussed was the harassment of Jesuits for espousing liberation theology as well as for their supposed links to Bishop Samuel Ruiz, spiritual leader of the Chiapas Indians, who was accused of fostering violence in that state.

CHURCH-STATE MATTERS

During 1993 the "Jewish religion of Mexico," together with up to 2,000 local "religious associations," was officially recognized by the Mexican government and granted legal status. The constitutional amendment making this possible was an effort to ease the hostility to religion embodied in the liberal constitution of 1917, which made Mexico—officially, at least—a secular state. Under the new law, members of the clergy could participate as voters and candidates in the electoral process and their associations could own and transfer property. Although public education in Mexico was legally "secular," Catholic schools had always been allowed to include religious instruction; most Jewish schools had courses in Judaic studies and tradition and sometimes even religion.
Jewish-Christian Relations

Even though there had been contacts between the Catholic Church and Protestant groups and the Jewish community since the 1960s, conducted primarily by B’nai Brith, Mexican Jewry was trying to find different approaches to interfaith dialogue, based more on mutual national concerns than on theological issues.

Despite three decades of efforts to promote interfaith dialogue in the country, the Mexican Catholic Church had never condemned anti-Semitism openly and in general refrained from political pronouncements relating to the Jewish community. Some Catholic leaders did, however, agree to sign the open letter condemning anti-Semitism and terrorism that was published in leading newspapers after the bombing in Buenos Aires.

In February 1994, Tribuna Israelita sponsored the participation of Dr. Manuel Olimon Nolasco, head of the history department of the Pontifical University, in a conference in Jerusalem on “Religious Leadership in a Secular Society.” Olimon was accompanied by Rabbi Marcelo Rittner of Mexico’s Bet-El Community. The two joined more than a thousand Jewish, Christian, and Muslim leaders from all over the world to deliberate on such topics as genetic engineering, religious education in pluralistic societies, and ethnicity, multiculturalism, and integration.

In June 1994, a conference on “The Role of the Churches in Today’s Mexico” was organized by the Interior Ministry and the Center for the Study of Religions. It was the first effort to bring together representatives of the country’s different religions in order to create a common agenda based on tolerance and the acknowledgment of pluralism. Mauricio Lulka, president of Tribuna Israelita, participated, along with more than 50 religious leaders.

Communal Affairs

The Jewish Central Committee (Comité Central Israelita de México), the political arm and representative body of Mexican Jewry, continued to foster the active participation of Jews in national affairs and to promote cordial and open relations with the government. Seminars and lectures were organized to increase awareness of the changes taking place in the Mexican political system and to examine the role that the community could play in the new order.

As the socioeconomic status of Mexican Jews became increasingly strained by the recession, the Central Committee undertook the creation of a credit union with rates indexed to each debtor's financial situation. Also, through its International Relations Commission, it explored the possibility of working with American Jewry on joint projects and participated in conferences organized by the American Jewish Committee and the Council of Jewish Federations.
RELATIONS WITH LATIN AMERICAN JEWRY

Following the bombing of the Jewish community building in Buenos Aires in July 1994, all Latin American Jewish communities experienced a sense of increased vulnerability and awareness of the ever-present threat to their physical and emotional well-being. In this atmosphere, the establishment of effective channels of communication between communities for the exchange of experiences, information, and strategies assumed greater importance than ever. An expression of this need was the Conference of Latin American Jewish Communities that took place in Mexico City, November 7–9, 1994, under the auspices of the regional branch of the World Jewish Congress and hosted by Mexican Jewry. Over 250 leaders of Jewish communities in ten countries exchanged views on the role of Latin American Jewry in the future development of the continent and in the strengthening of liberal principles. The gathering was also a forum for denouncing anti-Semitism and terrorism.

Enrique Iglesias, president of the Interamerican Development Bank, and the renowned Mexican writer Hector Aguilar Camin took part in a session devoted to analyzing the future of the continent. Workshops focused on the multiple faces of anti-Semitism, the presence and participation of the Jewish communities within the general society, and the Jewish quality of life in the region. The final document produced by the meeting reinforced the commitment to Jewish continuity, strengthening the links between Israel and the Diaspora, and to building alliances in the fight against intolerance, racism, and anti-Semitism.

As it had done for almost two decades, Mexican Jewry continued to support the Jewish community of Cuba in its efforts to maintain Jewish identity and life on the island. In addition to providing ritual objects and educational materials, Mexican Jewish community leaders made frequent visits, and Mexican university students established ties with Cuban youth who shared common interests, such as Israeli folk dance. Mexican rabbis were available to perform essential life-cycle rituals, and, as in previous years, the community shipped matzah and pareve foods to Cuba for Passover, in quantities greater than required for the festival, because of the chronic Cuban food shortage.

ISRAEL-RELATED ACTIVITY

Mexico's ambassador to Israel, Rafael Rodriguez Barrera, met with the Jewish Central Committee of Mexico in October 1994 to provide an overview of the present state of relations between both countries and to urge them to share in his efforts to promote Mexican culture in Israel.

In the area of science and technology, the Mexican Association of Friends of the Weizmann Institute provided scholarships and awards on a yearly basis to outstanding Mexican high-school students to spend time in Rehovot doing advanced work in their particular fields of interest. The organization also coordinated lectures
featuring Mexican and Israeli scientists speaking on subjects of current interest. The Haifa Technion, for its part, had developed projects in rural areas for utilizing Mexico's natural resources to generate energy.

During the period under review, ORT followed up on its efforts to train 4,000 low-income Mexicans for technical jobs and to work with government and nongovernmental agencies to implement the latest technological advancements. It also continued to aid local Jewish schools that have ORT workshops where students are taught diverse trades and are exposed to the most advanced computer technology.

As in previous years, more than 200 high-school juniors and seniors from Jewish schools, as well as university students, joined thousands of Jewish young people from all over the world in the "March of the Living" organized by the Jewish Agency-Keren Hayesod in April 1994. The participants traveled to Poland to visit centers of Jewish life before the Holocaust and also Treblinka, Majdanek, and Auschwitz. From Poland the group traveled to Israel to join in that country's Independence Day celebrations.

Religion

Twenty synagogues provide religious services to Mexican Jewry, all but two of them—which belong to the Conservative movement—Orthodox. The synagogues are also organized along ethnic lines—as is the Central Committee—that is, division into "sectors" (kehilot, in Hebrew) based on the place of origin of the members' forebears. There are also more than a dozen yeshivas and kolelim associated with various kehillot. Liturgical or ideological disputes are relatively rare, based on a consensus that community solidarity is primary. Each "sector" has its own rabbi or rabbis, day school, kashrut supervisor, rabbinical court, publications, and cemetery.

Education

One of the outstanding assets of the Mexican community is its network of schools. Eight day schools, attended by up to 75 percent of Mexican Jewish children, combine the official state school curriculum with Judaic studies. The oldest of these schools, the Colegio Israelita de Mexico, also known as the Yiddishe Shul, and part of the Ashkenazic sector, turned 70 in 1994. Its founders were Jewish immigrants who sought to maintain Jewish continuity while integrating into the larger society. It served as a model for other Jewish educational options seeking to instill in young people an awareness of their complementary and complex identities.

Instruction in the schools belonging to the Ashkenazic sector originally reflected the ideologies of their founders, such as Bundism and secular or religious Zionism; some remnant of this remains in the teaching of Yiddish or the inclusion of religion in the curriculum. The schools belonging to the "Arab" (Syrian) and Sephardic
sectors emphasize origins over ideology. Since private schools receive no government funding, Jewish schools are financed by their sponsoring communities or by student fees and philanthropists.

A program of Judaic studies was established at the Iberoamericana University in Mexico City in 1985, to satisfy a growing interest in Judaism in Mexican society at large and to make up for the absence of any courses on the subject on the campus. With the financial and academic support of Israeli universities, the program offers a degree in Judaic studies, from which three classes of students have now graduated.

Culture

Since the creation 80 years ago of Alianza Monte Sinai (Mount Sinai Alliance), the first communal Jewish institution in Mexico, three generations of Mexican-born Jews have built a thriving community, with a myriad of institutions relating to almost every aspect of modern Jewish life. This organizational framework has given rise to a native culture reflecting the synthesis between the Mexican and Jewish identities and has stimulated efforts, using a variety of approaches, aimed at examining what it means to be a Mexican Jew. During the last decade in particular, serious research on the history of Mexican Jewry has intensified, eliciting much interest on the part of Jews and non-Jews alike.

In 1992 the Jewish Central Committee of Mexico and Tribuna Israelita, in conjunction with the National Autonomous University of Mexico, published Imágenes de un Encuentro: La Presencia Judía en México durante la Primera Mitad del Siglo XX (Images of an Encounter: The Jewish Presence in Mexico During the First Half of the 20th Century). The research team, under the direction of Judit Bokser Liwerant, produced a graphic documentary history combining sociohistorical analysis in an artistic format. In 1993 the book received an award from the prestigious Mexican Chamber of Publishers.

In 1994 the Ashkenazic community published a work on its history and development: Generaciones Judías en México: La Kehila Ashkenazi (1922–1992) (Jewish Generations in Mexico: The Ashkenazi Kehila [1922–1992]), coordinated by Alicia Gojman de Backal. Similar studies were undertaken by the Maguen David (Aleppo), the Monte Sinai (Damascus), and the Sephardic (Balkans) sectors, and by the Colegio Israelita de Mexico (Yiddishe Shul in Meksike).

Jewish life in Mexico was also recorded on film and video. Keren Hayesod videotaped highlights of the “March of the Living” experience of Mexican Jewish youth. A documentary on the origins and evolution of anti-Semitism in Mexico was produced by Tribuna Israelita in 1994. The same year, Daniel Goldberg’s documentary Un Beso a esta Tierra (A Kiss to This Land) was aired. Part testimony, part dramatization, the film chronicles the travails and first impressions of Jewish immigrants arriving in Mexico during the first decades of this century.

Over time, a number of cultural programs had become fixed traditions in the community. The annual Tuvie Maizel Music Festival was named for its founder,
Yiddish writer and professor Tuvie Maizel, the creator of the local Holocaust Museum, housed in the building of the Ashkenazic community and a landmark for those interested in the subject.

The Fernando Jeno literary awards were presented in 1994 to Eli Schechtman (U.S.A.), Boris Blank (Argentina), and Margalith Matitiahu (Israel). For 18 years Jewish writers from all over the world have submitted works to this competition for appraisal in three categories—Yiddish, Hebrew, and Spanish—the winner in each receiving $2,000 (U.S.) dollars.

More than 1,500 young people representing Jewish schools, youth movements, and community institutions competed in the 20th and 21st annual Aviv Dance Festivals in April 1994 and 1995. A major community event considered the best of its kind in the international Jewish world, the festival is organized by the Jewish Sport Center—a social, cultural, and athletic institution whose membership includes up to 90 percent of Mexican Jewry—and is attended by some 4,500 people. Each festival featured dozens of groups performing dances based on Jewish religious and historical themes, including semiprofessional troupes from Canada, the United States, Israel, Latin America, and Mexico itself.

Among the prominent personalities who visited from abroad in 1994 and early 1995 were renowned sexologist Dr. Ruth Westheimer, who spoke at the Bet-El Community (Conservative) on the subject of “Sexuality in Judaism.” Author Chaim Potok lectured on “How I Came to Write The Chosen,” also at Bet-El Community. In addition, literally dozens of lectures, concerts, art exhibits, and workshops were held at diverse institutional facilities, reflecting the cultural interests of the different segments of Mexican Jewry.

Publications

A variety of periodicals—magazines, newspapers, and newsletters—reflected the different political, cultural, and ideological trends in the community. Among these were Maguen David, La Voz de la Kehila, Emet, Presencia Judía, WIZO, Desafío, Periódico CDI, and Desde Bet-El. There were also two independent publications catering to the general community, Kesher and Foro.

Recent years saw a spate of publications by well-known first- and second-generation Jewish writers about the experience of growing up as Jews in Mexico. Among these were Rosa Nissan’s short novel Novia que te Vea (Ladino expression, “I hope to see you as a bride”), which was turned into a movie by director Guita Schifter; Jose Woldenberg’s Las Ausencias Presentes (The Present Absences); Sabina Berman’s La Bobe (Grandmother, in Yiddish); Gloria Gervitz’s Kadish; and various works of fiction and poetry by Esther Seligson.
Personalia

At the beginning of 1995, Alfredo Achar assumed the position of president of the Jewish Central Committee of Mexico, while Jorge Salamonovitz became president of Tribuna Israelita. They replaced Simon Nissan and Mauricio Lulka, respectively, who headed these institutions during the previous four years.

Several Mexican Jews were named to positions in President Ernesto Zedillo's administration: Arturo Warman, secretary of agrarian reform; Santiago Levy, undersecretary for expenditures; Jaime Zabludovsky, undersecretary for international commercial negotiations; Aaron Dichter, undersecretary for communications; Jacques Rogozinsky, director of Fonatur, the government office for the promotion of tourism. Esther Koleteniuk was elected a representative on Mexico City's Council.

Jose Woldenberg was named one of six “citizen advisers” to the Federal Electoral Institute, charged with overseeing the integrity of the 1994 federal elections and implementing basic electoral reform in Mexico.

DINA SIEGEL
Argentina

National Affairs

The period 1994 and the first half of 1995 saw a continuation of relatively stable democratic government under President Carlos Menem. He was reelected with a convincing majority in May 1995, his Justicialist Party (PJ) also increasing its representation in both houses of Congress. While such triumphs were accomplished on the strength of the degree of economic stability achieved since 1991 (notwithstanding the economy’s poorer performance in 1995 and/or the social costs of the economic adjustment measures), they also occurred against a backdrop of rising voter apathy.

 Argentine Politics and the Jewish Community

The changes in Argentina’s political situation, along with the country’s international realignment in recent years, have had important beneficial consequences for Jews. Additionally, Menem’s almost complete abandonment of Peronist nationalist baggage has forced those rank-and-file who lacked an affinity for Jews (or Jewish matters) to conceal and/or revise their views, or risk marginalization.

Economic hardships notwithstanding, certified manifestations of Judeophobia have fallen since 1983 (though certainly not disappeared), especially if one interprets—as many have done—the March 1992 bombing of the Israeli embassy and that of the Buenos Aires Jewish community building in July 1994 as primarily anti-Israel, rather than anti-Jewish, incidents. Nevertheless, for the time being, such a fall is far from irreversible. Long-lasting changes in political cultures are not consolidated overnight, and the 19th-century liberal architects of Argentina’s immigration policy tended to equate newcomers’ integration with a measure of uniformity on various levels, including the religious one. Moreover, the claimed drop in anti-Jewishness is accompanied by relatively high levels of bigotry vis-à-vis migrants from neighboring countries, Koreans, and Middle Easterners.

This said, a 1992 public-opinion survey commissioned by the American Jewish Committee (AJC) and Argentine Jewry’s political roof organization, the DAIA (Delegation of Israelite Associations in Argentina), and conducted several months after the Israeli embassy attack, revealed significant pluralist attitudes among interviewees. For instance, 69 percent of respondents considered it better that Argentina’s inhabitants had diverse origins, customs, and religions, while 46 percent declared that Jews had made a positive contribution; 7 percent supported the notion that the country would be better off without Jews. While corroboration of such
results would require successive comparable polls, the outcome of this one can be reasonably attributed to changes going back to 1983 and the end of military rule.

Menem's first term in office (1989–1995) also brought about constitutional reform that had important political repercussions for Jews. As important as was the antidiscrimination legislation initiated by President Raúl Alfonsín and passed by Congress in 1988, with bipartisan support, the constitutional reform of Menem's presidency may well be a longer-term legacy for Jews and other non-Catholics. Best known for allowing incumbent presidents to seek a second term in office and for reducing the presidential term from six to four years, the reform also enfranchised non-Catholic aspirants to leadership of the government. The original magna carta prescribed that the chief executive and his deputy must be Catholic. (Gen. Roberto Levingston, one of Argentina's de facto rulers in the early 1970s, was the grandchild of a Prussian Jewish immigrant, but a Catholic.) Such a requirement has now been dropped, although government support for the Catholic Church remains in place in the new constitution.

The removal of a formal hurdle for non-Catholic politicians is relevant for the relatively large number of Jewish participants in elected and appointed positions since 1983 (many of whom openly declare their Jewishness, unlike some of their predecessors during this century's earlier Radical (UCR) and Peronist governments). However, the opening of the chief executive's office to non-Catholics is not likely to find one of them voted into the presidential palace any time soon. In the aforementioned 1992 AJC/DAIA-sponsored opinion survey, 45 percent of respondents indicated they would not support a Muslim presidential candidate, while 41 and 39 percent, respectively, held similar views in respect of a Jew and a Protestant. Using this measuring stick, it is clear that a sizable proportion of the Argentine public is not yet ready for a head of state who is formally non-Catholic.

Even though Menem's Syrian-Muslim ancestry did not bar his way to the top, his baptism in 1963 did not prevent a mainstream opposition legislator from referring to him as "a Muslim deity," nor a key public-opinion molder and a former political friend from portraying him, among other derisive ethnic labels, as a "wali" and a "caliph." Because of the local media's historical equation of Arab with Islamic (despite the fact that most Middle Eastern immigrants in Latin America were Christian), and possibly influenced by other considerations as well, it is not surprising that Argentina's Federation of Arab Entities (FEARAB) should have petitioned the elected reformers to retain the Catholic imperative for presidential hopefuls in July 1994.

**Israel and the Middle East**

With few modifications until the 1990s, Argentina's governments traditionally adhered to a foreign policy that sought to avoid the appearance of being aligned with one or another party to remote conflicts, including the Arab-Israeli one. Initiated by Juan Perón in the 1940s, such a pragmatic approach to relations with Israel and
the Arab world was generally endorsed by his civilian and military successors, UCR politicians, and members of the mass movement Perón had created as well as nationalist and liberal army officers. During the second half of the 1970s and early 1980s, this approach resulted in important Argentine acquisitions of military hardware from Israel. This was a contentious issue for the Argentine and Israeli relatives of the several hundred Jewish desaparecidos, those who disappeared during the years when such deals were concluded. (An estimated 450 Jews were reportedly secretly helped by Israeli envoys to leave the country in the same period.) The Argentine approach also resulted in intense courtship of the Arab states in international forums. Arab support was sought at first to quash resolutions condemning the human-rights record of the then military regime (1976–83), with its thousands of disappeared, and later for the Argentine case in the Malvinas (Falklands) conflict with Britain.

Only after Menem’s 1989 election triumph did efforts to align the country firmly with the United States—thereby overcoming the distrust which successive Argentine administrations had elicited in Washington and among U.S. public-opinion molders—have important repercussions for Argentine foreign policy in the Middle East. During Menem’s first term Argentina left the nonaligned movement, abandoned the German-brokered association with Egypt (and indirectly with Iraq) in the Cóndor missile project, was the sole Latin American state to participate in U.S.-led operations in the Persian Gulf, endorsed the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, and scrapped a nuclear servicing contract with Iran.

Government awareness of Saudi-Iranian competition for the hearts and minds of Argentina’s Muslims—estimated at between 8,000 and more than 650,000, depending on whether one considers projections based on census data, ethnic self-estimates, or other sources—and the fact that the sole Buenos Aires mosque was built in the 1980s with Iran’s sponsorship, apparently impelled the government to send a bill to Congress granting Saudi Arabia a Buenos Aires site for the erection of a mosque and community center. The initiative followed a visit by Menem to the Wahabite kingdom in May 1992. However, once approved by the upper house in the first half of 1994, it unleashed an adverse campaign by the right-wing Tradición, Familia y Propiedad (TFP) group, which considered the notion of such a Muslim religious and educational facility “an insult to the Catholic conscience of the Argentine Nation.” Although the TFP campaign was launched before the bombing of the Jewish community building and speculation about Iranian involvement, it sought to blur the distinction between Iran and Saudi Arabia: it suggested that the Quranic school that would be part of the project was likely to be staffed by Iranians, thereby turning this center “of anti-Christian fanaticism” into “a terrorism school.”

Argentina’s earlier concern for equidistance in the Arab-Israeli conflict gave way to a definite shift in Israel’s favor, whether at the UN or in other multilateral organizations. A further symbol of the country’s clear alignment with the United States, this tilt led to Argentina’s intercession, for example, with Damascus on behalf of Syrian Jewry, and with Brasilia in support of the repeal of the UN
resolution equating Zionism with racism (a resolution, *inter alia*, which Argentina, unlike Brazil, Cuba, Grenada, Guyana, and Mexico, had failed to support in 1975 during Perón’s third term in office). Moreover, the man who predicted Israel’s disappearance in a 1963 Arab League periodical, when Nasserism had caught the imagination of the politically aware among Argentine Arabs, and who also portrayed the opponents of Arab unity as allies of imperialism and accomplices of Zionism, in 1991 became the first Argentine head of state ever to visit Israel. Consistent with his political mutation, President Menem eventually also toured the conservative Arab states, but the symbolism of Tel Aviv as his first Middle East destination was not lost on the Syrians—undoubtedly a possible reason for their refusal to welcome a Syrian-descended Argentine head of state until late in 1994.

*The Bombings*

Despite Argentina’s attempts to preserve a semblance of evenhandedness—as highlighted, for example, by Menem’s offer of Buenos Aires as an alternative venue for the Madrid Peace Conference and his expensive touring of the Middle East—one cannot dismiss the possibility that the changes in Israel’s favor may have had something to do with the devastating car bomb that demolished the Israeli embassy in March 1992 and the more deadly device that reduced to rubble the AMIA building in Buenos Aires on July 18, 1994. This building housed the headquarters of AMIA, the Argentine Israelite Mutual Association, the central social welfare and cultural body of Buenos Aires Jewry, and the headquarters of DAIA, the Jewish political umbrella organization, as well as offices of other organizations, a library, and a theater. Whereas Israeli embassies in El Salvador and Guatemala had been previously targeted by local opponents of Israeli foreign policy in Central America, and two unaffiliated Palestinians attacked the embassy in Paraguay in 1970, none of these incidents was as violent as the bombings of the diplomatic representation and Buenos Aires Jewish community building. Indeed, while an embassy clerk was killed in Asunción, the toll of the first Buenos Aires blast included up to 30 deaths and 250 injured, with up to 86 killed in the second outrage and more than 200 injured. Some government and other analysts hastily—though not altogether unrealistically—connected such terrorist operations with the displeasure caused in Iranian circles, as well as among Tehran-supported Shiites in Lebanon, by the Middle Eastern ramifications of Argentina’s international realignment. This is consistent with the fact that several Middle Eastern parties had recourse to powerful car bombs, and more specifically with a claim on Lebanese TV that an otherwise unknown Muslim group, Ansarallah, was responsible for one of the attacks.

In practice, though, it has been impossible to turn into convincing and/or convicting evidence the presumed responsibility of Islamic militants—who may have subcontracted parts of, if not the whole of, these operations to local anti-Jewish elements, or to others. Thus far, the sole detainee is the man who delivered the van used in the second attack, despite investigating magistrate Juan Galeano’s by now
exclusive devotion to the case and his 50-man team. In turn, the inability to resolve both cases has fueled intense speculation about the bombers, their motives, and their connections with well-placed Argentines, past and present, especially as Argentina's State Intelligence Agency (SIDE), as well as the federal and Buenos Aires province police forces, are not particularly known for their Judeophilia. However, the patent lack of progress suggests that Argentina's investigative failures are equivalent to those of countries far more experienced than Argentina with Middle East-related terrorism, which have quite a few unsolved cases on their books. Unwilling to accept this reality, a number of people have tended to equate the obvious and imagined imperfections of the probes with a sheer political unwillingness on Argentina's part to identify the culprits, even suggesting that the cases are hard to solve given the strength of Arab influence in Argentina today. However, the sober conclusion of the Antisemitism World Report 1995 (Institute of Jewish Affairs and American Jewish Committee) in respect of the second attack may well be relevant for both: "In the absence of solid evidence to substantiate any hypothesis, speculation on the motives and actual perpetrators of this outrage has been rife, with some claims reflecting better on their authors' political agendas than on the facts on the ground."

Clearly, if the bombings were meant to provoke a shift in foreign policy, they failed. Instead, they led to strained relations with Iran and Lebanon and made life more uncomfortable for Argentina's population of Syrian and Lebanese parentage, self-estimated at around 2.5 million. On one level, an accumulated trade surplus with Iran of more than $10 billion since 1984 helps explain the government's obvious reluctance to consider downgrading relations, especially without more solid evidence of Tehran's involvement than that stemming from a dubious Iranian informer. On another level, and irrespective of creed, Lebanese and other Arab nationals, as well as non-Arab Muslims, have found it harder to visit relatives or tour Argentina and two of her neighbors, because of stricter visa requirements. Additionally, Arab-descended Argentines have witnessed a rise in anti-Arab and anti-Muslim expressions in the country's media.

On a different level, both bombs gave rise to a spate of anonymous telephone threats against Jewish institutions, with fears of a third attack, some of them plainly feeding on reckless press sensation-mongering, leading to the installation of anti-car-bomb devices in front of Jewish public facilities and other security measures, a temporary halt of interinstitutional sporting competitions at Jewish venues, and a perceptible increase in the Jewish sense of vulnerability. Without minimizing such consequences for Jews, one should also not lose sight of the public expressions of sympathy for the Jewish community, highlighted, for instance, by multipartisan support in Congress for a lower-house statement strongly condemning the 1992 embassy attack, and the presence of Menem and members of his cabinet, former President Alfonsín and opposition legislators, as well as the city's archbishop, Cardinal Antonio Quarracino, among the up to 130,000 participants in a march to repudiate this blast. The AMIA attack reportedly drew not less than 150,000 marchers in solidarity with the victims, some of the same public figures included.
Among the latter demonstration's banners were some proclaiming "We are all Argentine Jews," in line with press comments that the embassy and AMIA attackers had violated Argentine sovereignty.

A novel feature in both cases were messages repudiating the attacks and/or supporting the victims by Argentine Arab institutions and local personalities of Arab descent. Among the factors helping to account for such pronouncements one could point to developments in the Middle East, the Menem administration's own role in seeking to translate advances toward an Arab-Israeli peace into something tangible locally, and concern about possible backlash attacks on Argentine Arabs. The embassy bombing was condemned by the Tucumán Pan Islamic Association and Buenos Aires Islamic Centre, two Syro-Lebanese institutions; the Palestine Information Office, a locally created precursor of the Palestine National Authority's diplomatic representation; as well as a score of personalities of Arab ancestry. Two years later, the leader of an Iran-supported Buenos Aires mosque repudiated the AMIA bombing, while a FEARAB leader expressed his solidarity with the shocked Jewish community (quite unlike FEARAB's attitude vis-à-vis the Israeli embassy blast, when it had raised the possibility that it was due to explosives stored at the diplomatic representation). Against the backdrop of such a sea change, it is perhaps unsurprising that Menem should have attended the 60th-anniversary celebrations of the DAIA's founding in July 1935 in the company of the president of FEARAB, an umbrella organization for a host of institutions created by Syrian and Lebanese immigrants, whether Christian, Muslim, or nondenominational, which was inspired by Syria's ruling Baath party.

**Nazi War Criminals**

Having embarked upon a neo-liberal economic program and adjusted the country's foreign policy accordingly, Menem's government aligned Argentina with the United States in a way his predecessors—whether civilian or military, Peronist (PJ) or Radical—plainly resisted. Such resistance was at the root of many caricatures of Argentina as a former Axis asset and den of leading war criminals, and of Juan Perón himself as a "megalomaniac Nazi," as he was inaccurately described by U.S. assistant secretary of state Spruille Braden in the 1940s. The effort to persuade U.S. public opinion, not just the Washington administration, that Argentina was undeserving of the Nazi stigma attached to the Peronist movement's founder and his following can be seen as lying behind President Menem's announcement in February 1992 that he was releasing official files on the postwar influx of Nazis into the country, a measure that paved the way for his government's later grant to Argentina's Holocaust Foundation of a centrally located Buenos Aires building where a museum is being set up.

The Argentine government's decision has yielded easier access to a mass of documents that were already in the public domain (and that were studied without fanfare by Argentine, Israeli, and other scholars long before this announcement),
as well as allowed consultation of a smaller number of recent files, e.g., that of Abraham Kipp, a Dutch collaborationist war criminal (sentenced to death in absentia), whose extradition was requested by Holland during President Raúl Alfonsín's incumbency (1983–89). During the early months of Menem's first term, a judge ruled that Kipp would not be sent back to the Netherlands, among other reasons, because of loopholes in the Argentine-Dutch extradition treaty of 1893. The same magistrate, though, decided in June 1995 to grant an Italian request for the extradition of Erich Priebke, a former Gestapo officer in Rome who fled to Argentina in 1948 and was identified in 1994 by ABC News. Priebke would be the country's third deportee: the first was Gerhard Bohne in 1966; the second, Josef Schwammberger in 1990, both to Germany.

Priebke's detention prompted then Interior Minister Carlos Ruckauf to announce that a police unit would be set up to investigate whether other Nazis on the run were still living in the country. In reality, even if the relevant personnel worked with unrivaled zeal to track down war criminals among a dwindling population of octogenarian Nazis and collaborators, their effort was unlikely to result in a significant number of detentions and extraditions. By way of contrast, Nazi-hunting units in Australia, Britain, Canada, and the United States were being scaled down or closed altogether, among other reasons because of the difficulties presented by such investigations.

Academic and other experts have yet to agree on the number of Nazi and collaborationist war criminals who may have taken refuge in postwar Argentina. Two things are clear, though. Firstly, the memoirs of some of the beneficiaries suggest that, regardless of numbers, Argentina warmly welcomed former Nazis, especially—though not only—those with scientific and technical skills, who arrived during the short interregnum between the demise of the Third Reich and the onset of the Cold War. Thereafter things changed. Since 1949, no Allied policies prevented the departure of former Nazis to Argentina (as had been the case with Eastern Europeans since 1947), but the slowing down of Argentine economic growth forced many of those hired by the Perón government to look for employment opportunities elsewhere. Secondly, irrespective of the revisionism under way, the sensationalist estimate of 60,000 fugitive Nazi war criminals in Argentina has been seriously questioned, explicitly or otherwise. A headline-grabbing report in the New York Times (December 14, 1993) alluding to a list of more than 1,000 Nazi and collaborationist war criminals, compiled on the strength of the Argentine files, was cautiously declared by the Antisemitism World Report 1994 as being subject to verification. The topic was discussed by an array of Argentine and other specialists at two international academic events held in Buenos Aires in 1993–94. One was organized by, among others, the head of Testimonio, the research project on Argentina's Nazi files set up by DAIA in 1993, and has already yielded a Spanish-language volume of proceedings; the second enjoyed the academic sponsorship of three foreign-based Jewish bodies: London's Institute of Jewish Affairs (IJA), the Latin American Jewish Studies Association, and the Agudat Mehkar Yahadut Amerika
HaLatinit in Israel—with Spanish- and English-language collections of papers in preparation.

Reservations about the actual number of Nazis are not meant to cast doubt on Argentina's documented participation in the race for the academic and scientific spoils of the Third Reich, or the reception of Nazi and collaborationist war criminals. For the time being, though, Menem's friendly attitude on this and other issues of Jewish concern won him favor in Jewish circles. The World Jewish Congress awarded him its Nahum Goldmann Medal in late 1991, in the course of a visit to New York during which he met with representatives of major Jewish organizations, while the Anti-Defamation League of B'nai B'rith excluded his country—this was before the discovery of Priebke—from its list of Latin American states harboring Nazis evading justice.

JEWISH COMMUNITY

Demography

The absence of serious demographic studies, as well as unscientific assessments of real and purported flaws in national statistics, and the notion that the larger a group's numerical strength the greater its entitlements to influence and/or other benefits have tended to skew self-estimates by Argentina's ethnic and religious groups, whether Jews, Muslims, Ukrainians, or others. Not surprisingly, until the 1970s, self-estimates of Argentina's Jewish population were particularly inflated, only differing in the scope of exaggeration from some of the extravagant figures offered by sources inimical to Jews. The first major demographic study of Argentine Jews was carried out in the 1970s by the Hebrew University's Institute of Contemporary Jewry (ICJ). It established that Argentina's Jewish inhabitants, Ashkenazic in their majority, numbered some 225,000 souls. Although this figure is based on substantial research, it is not beyond refinement. In some respects, Argentina is a country like France, with a large and growing proportion of marginal Jews, i.e., those born into Jewish households who, whatever their reasons, are unaffiliated. Hence, following French sociologist Dominique Schnapper's methodological considerations, it is legitimate to suggest that the ICJ's estimate could be higher. Indeed, if the French case is anything to go by, an upward revision of up to 20 percent may well be justified.

Be that as it may, ICJ demographers unwittingly lent an important degree of credibility to Argentina's national censuses, whose figures were considerably closer to the mark than many had been prepared to believe. After 1960, though, these no longer included an item on religious affiliation. Whereas the 1947 census identified 249,000 Jews, ICJ demographers now think that the real number was 285,800. The gap between these figures is partly explained by an estimate of individuals who legalized their situation as a result of a Perón government amnesty of 1948, aimed
at all extralegal arrivals. Although the number of its Jewish beneficiaries was calculated on the basis of local Jewish records to be in the region of 10,000, it was originally estimated to be more than three times bigger by sources as politically divergent as the American Jewish Committee and the Peronist Organización Israelita Argentina. If the latter were correct, the gap with those quantified by the census looks definitely closed. Additionally, whatever the real number of those who had to enter the country in unorthodox ways (the latter due to a decreasing interest in Jewish and other atypical and unwanted immigrants by Argentina's elites and governments after the late 1920s), and who, once there, lived relatively unharassed, Jews no doubt were one of the groups for whom the amnesty, which also benefited Nazis and others, was most rewarding.

EMISSION

Over the years, political and economic turmoil fostered emigration. This, together with assimilation and intermarriage, generally accounts for the decreasing Jewish presence in Argentina. Israeli statistics reveal that some 50,000 Jews from Argentina moved permanently to the Jewish state during 1948–93, where they far outnumber all those hailing from the rest of Latin America. Although Argentine Jewish emigration to countries outside Israel—whether other Latin American states, the United States, Europe, or elsewhere—remains unquantified, direct observation and oral accounts support the assumption that it is substantial. Most Jews, however, have chosen to remain in Argentina.

SOCIOECONOMIC STATUS

Although generally perceived as urban middle-class, Argentine Jewry cannot be treated as a homogeneous group. An illustration of this is the occupational profile of the 1,317 Jews who enrolled with the job center of the Buenos Aires Jewish Community (AMIA) in the course of a six-week period during April-May 1995. Rather than an exclusive sample of people looking for work as accountants, business administrators, computer experts, engineers, journalists, psychologists, social workers, and sociologists, i.e., persons equipped with higher educational degrees, there were many seeking nonprofessional jobs as beauticians, carpenters, cashiers, clerks, hairdressers, locksmiths, nurses, plumbers, receptionists, salespersons, sales representatives, and telephone operators, as well as a third group consisting of bricklayers, cooks and kitchen helpers, drivers, maintenance workers, messengers, and porters.

Like fellow Argentines of similar socioeconomic standing, Jews have been affected by economic changes going back to 1975. These include the serious erosion of possibilities for upward mobility and the reality of downward mobility resulting from the growing gap in income distribution, and the associated rise in poverty and social marginalization that accompanied adjustment policies aimed at overcoming
the economic instability of the 1980s. Indicative of this are the following AMIA figures: whereas an average of 400 job seekers registered monthly with AMIA during March 1993-June 1994, that number more than doubled by 1995.

At the same time, the Jewish community's social structure, different from that of Argentina as a whole, helps explain the comparably small number of needy Jews. This is illustrated by the fact that AMIA's social-welfare department assisted some 2,000 have-not families in 1986, a number that has since reached an internally estimated level of over 2,500 families. Adding the smaller numbers aided by Sephardic and German-Jewish institutions, it appears that aid recipients did not exceed a maximum of 3,000 families in 1995, or some 12,000 needy Jews in the community.

**Education**

At the beginning of the 1995 school year, scholarships were granted to 6,000 students attending Jewish schools, about a third of the Jewish school population in the federal capital and greater Buenos Aires. Such scholarships, together with the mergers of smaller and less viable educational establishments, helped prevent a sharp drop in the level of school enrollment in an area encompassing some 80 percent of the country's Jews. Enrollment in kindergarten, primary, and secondary education institutions rose 14.2 percent from 1980 to 1989, to 18,023 Jewish school students, but that number had fallen to some 17,600 by 1995. Still, the above-mentioned measures helped to maintain a level of enrollment that was higher than that of 1980.

**Communal Affairs**

The bombings of the Israeli embassy and the AMIA building exacerbated some long-simmering internal tensions in the Jewish community. Since local Jewish leaders openly discuss these matters in the Argentine media, and the country's press has shown a hitherto unrivaled interest in Jewish community affairs, these tensions can hardly be swept under the carpet.

One source of controversy was the Israeli embassy. Since it had been initially acquired and furnished by members of the Jewish community—as clearly recalled in the rich memoirs of Israel's first diplomatic representative in Buenos Aires, Jacob Tsur—it is hardly surprising that its destruction was followed by a fund-raising drive to erect a new building. This well-meaning effort was deemed unwarranted by many, however, especially those aware both of the difference in Israeli circumstances in the 1940s and 1990s and the Jewish community's diminishing ability to assist its neediest without the injection of funds from foreign donors. While such criticism did not prevent the purchase of a plot in a residential quarter that hosts other diplomatic representations, Israeli ambassador Yitzhak Aviran objected to the site, the project design, and other elements. As a result, the initiative was abandoned after an official ground-breaking ceremony was attended by, among others, Foreign
Minister Guido Di Telia and Argentine Jewish leaders. The apparently insurmountable differences between the ambassador and the Argentine Jewish donors may be taken as an indication of developing changes in Israel-Diaspora relations.

After the second bombing, the president of the DAIA (whose headquarters were in the destroyed building), Rubén Beraja, came under attack by some frustrated with the slow pace of the government’s investigation. Public criticism of Jewish leaders is nothing new. Accusations of indifference, if not worse, were leveled at the DAIA by the Argentine and Israeli relatives of the “desaparecidos,” in the latter half of the 1970s, when many more Jews—largely (though not only) unaffiliated—were killed than in the two recent bombings or in any other anti-Jewish incidents since Argentina’s independence (the 1919 Tragic Week possibly excepted). In fact, some of those most unhappy with the DAIA’s record during 1976–83, with the small number of officers prosecuted under Alfonsín for their involvement in human-rights violations (their cases still being without precedent in the annals of Argentine history), and with Menem’s pardons, were the most critical of the Jewish umbrella organization’s president. So far, evidence of Beraja’s closeness to Menem and other political figures within the ruling PJ was not any stronger than that regarding the ties of other Jewish leaders to earlier military and civilian rulers. Nor was there evidence that Beraja had compromised Jewish community interests, as was reported by the case with some episodes in the 1976–83 period. Insinuations against him need to be understood in the context of Argentine Jewish political culture and the fact that Beraja is only the fourth non-Ashkenazi to head the DAIA since its inception in 1935. Unlike Ashkenazic contenders for leadership of the community, who have traditionally been aligned with Israeli political parties, many Sephardic Jews in Argentina and elsewhere have historically been lukewarm toward political Zionism, more at home with Sephardic religious institutions than with the more traditional sources of Israeli influence. Thus, whatever the merits or demerits of the anti-Beraja claims, he is clearly an economically successful Jew of Syrian parentage, well-rooted in Argentina, but in certain respects viewed as an outsider by the traditional Ashkenazic establishment.

When all is said and done, the bombings, especially the second one, promoted stronger links between Argentine Jewry and Jewish bodies abroad, whether in Israel or the Diaspora. This is attested by the compilation of a collection of press reports on the second bombing by the Madrid-based Hebraica as well as in the more practical trilateral linkage between the Buenos Aires and Chicago Jewish communities and the Tel Aviv municipality.

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