

**Paper on “Managerial Values and Accountability Pressures:
Challenges of Crisis and Disaster”, 2004,
Robert Schwartz and Raanan Sulitzeanu-Kenan, *Journal of Public
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by Lorenzo Kamel**

Schwartz and Sulitzeanu-Kenan deal in their paper with governmental reaction to disaster and crisis. Specifically, they ask, “When is disaster or crisis insufficient to produce a political climate favoring changed aimed at preventing recurrence? What is the durability of policy change in the long term?” (Schwartz and Sulitzeanu-Kenan 2004, 79). Schwartz and Sulitzeanu-Kenan find three political-administrative cultural variables which influence long term policy change:

the strength of production results values, the make-up of the policymaking agenda and the level of development of citizens advocacy groups (Schwartz and Sulitzeanu-Kenan 2004, 81).

Specifically, they show this by the analysis of five cases of the U.S. and Israel. First, they compare reaction to banking disasters in both countries. For Israel, they observe the 1983 bank shares crisis, and show that over the long term, banks are still run by the same controlling parties, that recommendations of a Commission which dealt with the crisis were partially ignored, and that the Bank of Israel still tolerates risky behavior by some banks. This case is contrasted with the U.S. American Savings and Loan Debacle between 1980 and 1990, which in the long term lead towards a shift to rectitude values. The second comparison is between the reaction to environmental disasters. For Israel, the Yarkon River Tragedy is analyzed, and there was no significant, long-lasting reaction to this, however. For the U.S., the Exxon-Valdez Oil Spill is researched which led to a lasting increase in safety values. Last, the event of the hijacked bus 300 in Israel is observed. On this respect, the authors deal with the treatment of the terrorists through the General Security Service, which tortured and killed them and the authors observe that the “predominance of production results values over rectitude values continues” (Schwartz and Sulitzeanu-Kenan 2004, 95).

The authors explain the big discrepancies between the U.S. and the Israeli cases with the absence of a coherent advocacy coalition in Israel, the dominance of production values in Israelis culture of smooch (trust-me), and with the agenda overload, i.e. with the prevalence of defense and foreign affairs issues.

On the positive side, the paper deals with a very relevant subject, which also seem especially pressuring today, when we think about the reaction to the current economic crisis and that many of the factors which lead to the crisis are still not abandoned. Furthermore, the paper has a high practical relevance for Israeli politicians to consider, as in the long term it would be beneficial for Israel to deal with these political challenges in order to remain at pace with the Western democracies. Also, it contributes to theoretical development and especially the finding concerning the pressure from civil society groups (even though there could be more discussion of the causal factors of this interesting variable).

However, the paper also has some shortcomings. First of all, the authors should better clarify why they chose to compare the U.S. and Israel. Furthermore, and maybe more importantly, they should better mention why they chose those specific five cases out of the history of disaster and crises in the U.S. and Israel. At least, they should discuss in general, if there are also cases that can possibly contradict their findings. One could consider, for example, to discuss the case of Guantanamo or Abu Ghraib as a comparative case to the Israeli GSS case. Here, it is not so clear if the U.S. actually implemented safeguards to protect prisoners of war from torture in the future and in this case, the US might not be so different from Israel. Then, the identified variables of the authors might only apply to some areas, like ecological or economical disasters, but less to the security area, which is a puzzling finding per se and indicates the need for further research into this question.

In addition, the authors identify the above mentioned three factors, but there should also be a discussion of possible omitted other factors, especially when conducting such a small, qualitative study. Such factors could be: the importance of general public awareness of long-term challenges like in relation to ecological or human disasters, the degree of democratization of a system which leads to pressure on the parliament to react to such disasters, legal and bureaucratic cultures of a country, or the importance of learning from other cases.