Were Jews Political Refugees or Economic Migrants? Assessing the Persecution Theory of Jewish Emigration, 1881-1914

**Abstract:** In the late 19th century, over 1.5 million Jews left Russia for the United States. This mass migration is often solely attributed to a flight from religious violence. However, the annual timing of Russian Jewish migration matches other migrations from Eastern and Southern Europe. Relative wages and employment rates in Russia and the United States and the size of American Jewish community (a measure of migrant networks) are important determinants of the migration flow, indicating that Jewish migrants responded to economic conditions. Persecution was not unimportant: migration rates are significantly above trend in the years after recorded pogroms, and, given the importance of chain migration, these short-run shocks had long-run effects on migration levels.