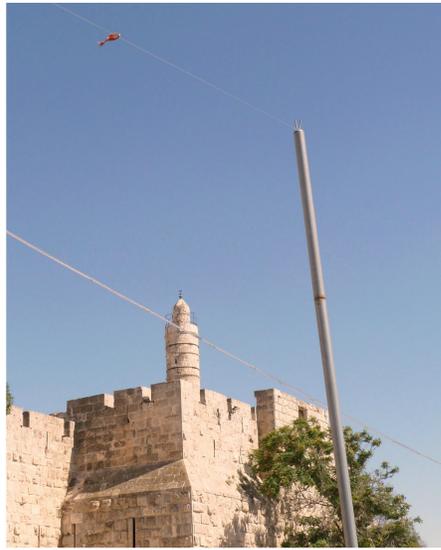


# Inside the Wire

## Economic Changes Between 2009 and 2014 in Montgomery County, Maryland's Eruv Communities

### Background



An *eruv* is a wire strung between telephone poles, buildings, and other elements of the built environment to create an enclosure around an area of several square miles. In Hebrew, the word *eruv* literally means “blending” or “mixing.” It was developed to circumvent the Jewish laws of the Sabbath that prohibit adherents from working. According to these same laws, carrying in public is considered working. Exceptions are made for “carrying” clothes on your body, for instance, but carrying a child, a book, or food into the public domain, is actually prohibited. According to Jewish law, an *eruv* effectively turns a public domain into a private domain. For observant Jews that adhere to these laws, life “inside the wire” can be much easier. *Eruvim* are a little known and understudied urban phenomenon. Residents living within one often don’t even know that they do—and that includes Jewish residents. The only people that benefit from the existence of an *eruv* are Orthodox Jews. Orthodox communities will come together, fundraise, and lobby local municipalities to have them erected—but not without controversy. Unsympathetic residents living within a proposed *eruv* zone often fear that its presence will change their neighborhood in undesirable ways. Residents may fear that an influx of Orthodox Jews will bring unwanted economic changes to the community. This project makes an attempt to demystify these changes by asking the question: **How do median household income and median home value within *eruv* communities change over time with respect to changes at the county level?**

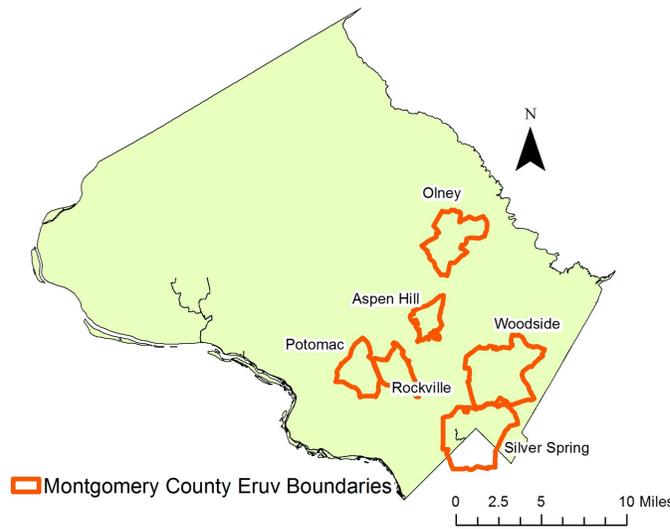
An *eruv* in Jerusalem's Old City

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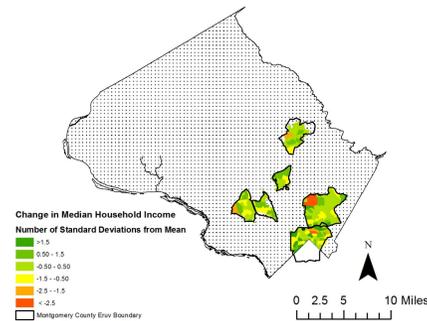
### Where is Montgomery County?



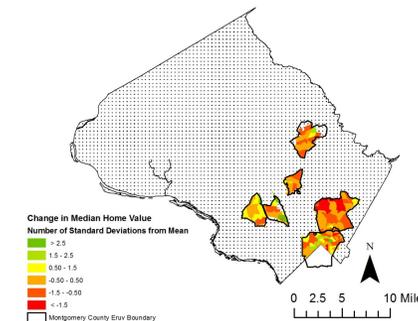
### The Six Eruvim



Change in Median Income in *Eruv* Areas from 2009 to 2014 by Block Group



Change in Median Home Value in *Eruv* Areas from 2009 to 2014 by Block Group



### Summary of Results

% Change in Eruv Communities Between 2009 and 2014

	2009 Eruv Area	2014 Eruv Area	% Change Eruvim
Median Home Value	\$550,352	\$487,438.50	-11%
Median Income	\$112,968	\$111,684.50	-1%

% Change in Montgomery County Between 2009 and 2014

	2009 County	2014 County	% Change County
Median Home Value	\$538,262	\$456,176	-15%
Median Income	\$101,815	\$98,704	-3%

Comparison of Change

	% Change Eruvim	% Change County	Difference in Change
Median Home Value	-11%	-15%	4%
Median Income	-1%	-3%	2%

### Discussion of Results & Conclusion

While it appears that the entire county suffered economically between 2009 and 2014, the *eruv* communities appeared to have suffered 4% less in median home value and 2% less in median household income than the county as a whole. Based on the premium that some residents are willing to pay to live within an *eruv*, it’s conceivable that the an *eruv* can act as a shield against negative macroeconomic changes. The study does not prove causation, but indicates a fascinating correlation. Perhaps the fear around the construction of *eruvim* has much more to do with prejudices against Orthodox Jews than with actual economic outcomes. Further research should be done on the topic to establish causation.

#### Data Sources

State – Political: “Maryland Political Boundaries – State Boundary,” MD IMAP: Maryland’s Mapping and GIS Data Portal; Accessed March 2016, Published 2012  
 State – Physical: “Maryland Physical Boundaries – County Boundaries (Generalized),” MD IMAP: Maryland’s Mapping and GIS Data Portal; Accessed March 2016, Published 2012  
 County – Political: “Maryland Physical Boundaries – County Boundaries (Generalized),” MD IMAP: Maryland’s Mapping and GIS Data Portal; Accessed March 2016, Published 2012  
 County – Physical: “Maryland Physical Boundaries – County Boundaries (Detailed),” MD IMAP: Maryland’s Mapping and GIS Data Portal; Accessed March 2016, Published 2012  
 Block Group – Political: “Maryland Census Boundaries – Census Block Groups 2010,” MD IMAP: Maryland’s Mapping and GIS Data Portal; Accessed March 2016, Published 2012  
 Base Map: “ESRI DataMap10: Census: Cities,” Accessed via Tufts M Drive on May 2016, Published 2010  
 Eruv Files: Physical Boundaries for the six Montgomery County Eruvim (Aspen Hill, Kemp Mill, Silver Spring, Potomac, Rockville and Olney) “Eruv Homes - Homes for Sale within Montgomery County MD Eruvin,” Ciment, Barbara; Accessed March 2016, Published 2015  
 US Government Census Data, 2009: American Community Survey 2009 (5 Year Estimate), Block Group and County Level; Accessed via Social Explorer, March 2016  
 US Government Census Data, 2014: American Community Survey 2014 (5 Year Estimate), Block Group and County Level; Accessed via Social Explorer, March 2016  
 Eruv Photo: By Utilisateur:Djampa - Own work, GFDL, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=34988406>

Projected Coordinate System: NAD\_1983\_NRS2007\_StatePlane\_Maryland\_FIPS\_1900\_FT\_US  
 Projection: Lambert\_Conformal\_Conic

### Methodology & Challenges

American Community Survey (ACS) census data from 2009 and 2014 were joined to block groups in Montgomery County, Maryland. Then, by selecting the block groups in the *eruv* areas, the relevant census data could be isolated to perform analysis. By using GIS as a “spatial calculator,” two fascinating trends were uncovered. The principal challenge in conducting this research was that the 2014 ACS data corresponds to 2010 census block groups and the 2009 ACS data corresponds 2000 block groups. The precise boundaries of the block groups can be, and often are, different. These differences were reconciled by performing a bilateral comparison of the block group boundaries and carefully screening-out block groups that change dramatically between censuses.

