

Returning to the Homeland

Examining the effects of Taglit-Birthright trips to Israel
on the political attitude and behavior of young
American Jews

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Preface and Acknowledgements

In the summer of 2012, I traveled to Israel for 10 days alongside dozens of fellow University of Michigan cohorts through a program called Taglit-Birthright. As it was for many of the Jews who have participated in the all-expenses-paid experience, the trip was eye-opening, enriching, and at times, overwhelming. Never before had I been to a place where the people were so collectively affected by their history. Israel is merely a small strip of desert in the Middle East roughly the size of New Jersey, but every site there has a story, and some stories date back thousands of years. When we visited the Western Wall in Jerusalem, I met a middle-aged European Jew visiting Israel for the first time. After saying a prayer and stuffing a note between the ancient stones, as countless others have done, he held his cell phone up against the wall so a loved one could say a prayer from back home. That image presented a powerful mix of ancient history and modernity, and one that struck me as particularly epitomical of many sites in Israel today. Like other Taglit-Birthright participants who hadn't given Israel much thought before the trip, I unexpectedly found myself overcome with emotion when we visited sites like the Western Wall, Mount Herzl, Independence Hall, and Mount Masada. Suddenly Israel felt like home, perhaps because it *was* home for my ancestors. Indeed, the Taglit-Birthright program stresses to participants that Israel is the one place that every Jew can call home.

After the trip, I wondered what some of the consequences of these newfound feelings are. Upon doing some initial research, I found that a great deal of trip participants feel the same way I do — more connected with Israel and with Judaism

— and I will discuss those studies in the review of literature that follows. But as a political science student, and as someone who suddenly found himself much more engaged with current events surrounding Israel and the rest of the Middle East, I was disappointed to find that literature regarding how these trips affect young American Jews in the political arena is lacking. Without drawing some kind of connection between the already proven effects of Taglit-Birthright and the resulting political implications, the existing studies lack some degree of practical importance. A desire to find those implications motivated me to pursue this study.

Many individuals helped me complete this thesis. For so many reasons, this would not have been possible without the support of my parents, Joan and Ian, who not only pushed me toward success throughout all my years of schooling, but also encouraged me to attend Taglit-Birthright and ultimately to write a thesis on the matter. I was initially skeptical of doing so, as I am of most things they encourage me to do, but I am so grateful I ultimately took their advice. Completing this thesis has become one of the defining experiences of my academic career, and I am thankful I will always have this to look back on. I also have to thank my two older brothers, Josh and James, who have taught me through example the value of hard work. I would also like to thank Professor Mika LaVaque-Manty, whose words of encouragement over the past eight months did wonders to keep me calm throughout this stressful process. Of course, I am also tremendously grateful for the help provided by Professor Zvi Gitelman. He and I did not have a relationship prior to the meeting in which I asked him to advise me on my work, and he welcomed me

with open arms. He consistently sent me newspaper clippings and journal articles that pertained to my work, he proofread my pages very closely, and he loved pointing out holes in my methods. Lastly, I would like to thank my friends who occasionally convinced me to come out with them instead of locking myself in the stacks, which helped keep me sane throughout this process.

Introduction

American Jewish voters have tended toward the left of the political spectrum since the early 20th century. At the time, it was rather expected — liberal candidates represented the views of the low and middle working classes, which were composed in large part by European immigrants. In the decades since, the Democratic Party has maintained a mostly reliable stronghold on the Jewish vote in national presidential elections, even though the issues that American Jews find salient have shifted considerably. In the late 1940s, with the establishment of the Jewish state of Israel, American Jews embraced politicians who supported the Zionist movement, a movement that at the time received bipartisan support. Thus, Jewish support for the Democratic Party was still mostly unwavering. In the 1960s and 1970s, American Jews continued to value pro-Israel politicians, which was partly illustrated by their discontent with progressive politicians who were hostile toward Israel in the midst of the Israeli occupation of the West Bank and Gaza Strip. However, in recent decades, a great deal of empirical evidence suggests that American Jews' commitment to the state of Israel is waning, particularly among Jewish youths and young adults. Some scholars attribute this shift to a temporal distancing between the birth of Israel and newer birth cohorts of American Jews. That is, newer generations have less of a connection with the horrors of the Holocaust and the unbridled U.S. support of Israel that was customary following Israel's inception. This observation is widely considered a major inspiration for the formation of Taglit-Birthright Israel in 1999 — a program that sponsors free trips to Israel for young Jewish adults around the world. The program was established

through funding from Jewish philanthropists, the Israeli government and a number of Jewish community organizations, with the objective of fostering a renewed relationship between Israel and young Diaspora members from around the world.

Over a decade since its establishment, studies have shown that Taglit-Birthright has been a very positive experience for its participants. They have reported that travelers find the program to be a life-changing experience and that they feel an increased connectedness to the state of Israel. Participants are also more likely to marry a Jew later in life, and they express a greater interest in raising future children in the Jewish faith. However, an important question has gone mostly unanswered: do Taglit-Birthright trips to Israel affect the political attitudes and behaviors of the participants? Scholars have examined why young American Jews do not feel a strong connection with Israel, and they have marveled at Taglit-Birthright's ability to repair that disconnect. But it would also be constructive to see what the political ramifications of that reparation are. Taglit-Birthright is at least partially politically funded (through the Israeli government), and there is much speculation that the philanthropists who donate are, indeed, politically motivated. That is, they may hope that participants will return home from the trip and become more likely to vote for candidates who display unquestioned support for Israel, especially in times of Middle Eastern conflict. Moreover, they may want to ensure that a future generation of leaders will look at their Biblical homeland as fondly as their parents and grandparents — those whose lives have a much closer temporal proximity to the birth of Israel. Though Israel is a particularly unique country in regard to its religious significance and its tenuous relations with neighboring

countries, the answer to this question could also be applicable to other countries that have launched programs similar to Taglit-Birthright (i.e. — Birthright Armenia launched in 2003 and the Birthright Greece alliance in 2007).

To find the political ramifications of Taglit-Birthright trips, I looked to gain a better understanding of how young Jews develop their political opinions. Because the focus is on young adults, the participant pool consisted of a random sampling of Jewish college students at the University of Michigan. Their backgrounds vary — some are actively involved with the University’s Hillel chapter or other Jewish student organizations, some may have gone on a Taglit-Birthright trip, and others may not be very involved in Jewish social life at all. A similar study conducted by Brandeis University professors that looked at the effects of Taglit-Birthright trips surveyed well over a thousand program applicants and participants, and it controlled for certain pre-trip variables using statistical regression. However, I lack both the resources and time to conduct such an extensive survey, so my study focuses on a much smaller sample group, and my survey questions are far more open-ended, allowing for engaging interviews and adequate qualitative analysis. Before addressing political stances in the survey, I asked subjects questions about their Jewish background and upbringing (questions about parental influence, Hebrew school education, degree of observance, etc.) and their Jewish social life (involvement in youth groups, student organizations, etc.). By gathering this information, I can group subjects together based on their backgrounds and perceived “Jewish-ness,” and their responses regarding the Birthright trip and

political opinions can be compared within the group, as well as across other groups. This processed is explained further in the methods section.

I expect that because subjects feel more connected to Israel as a result of Taglit-Birthright participation, there will be a significant effect on political attitude, as trip participants should be more likely to embrace an ideology they feel is “pro-Israel.” However, I do not believe there will be a significant effect on the political behavior of participants because a change in attitude will not be strong enough to affect the vote on Election Day.

Review of Literature

Before introducing research regarding the political implications of Taglit-Birthright trips to Israel, a thorough literature review is needed to become adequately acquainted with the history, circumstances and political tendencies of this study's subjects. First, an understanding of the Americanization of Jews is crucial to understanding the make-up of this study's subject pool. One's political attitudes and behaviors are often a product of one's history, and for reasons that become apparent through the literature review, this tends to be especially true among American Jews. Second, there has been ample literature that investigates why American Jews have acted as they have within the political arena — at times, their political behavior seems enigmatic, but explanations abound. Next, with those foundations in place, I look at literature that takes a closer look at today's situation and why it appears that young American Jews have been distancing themselves from Israel. And because that effect provided the impetus for the founding of Taglit-Birthright, I finish with a review of Taglit-Birthright's beginnings and some initial studies that have evaluated the program's effectiveness.

The Americanization of Jews

The vast majority of Jews in the United States are the descendants of European immigrants who arrived between 1881 and 1914. However small a minority Jews represent in today's American population, they were a significant slice of the new masses at the turn of the century — roughly 10 percent of the 22 million immigrants who made it to U.S. soil during that period were Jews from

Russia and Eastern Europe (Chiswick 39). Between the assassination of Russian Tsar Alexander II in 1881, which prompted pogroms that sparked mass emigration, and the beginning of World War I in 1914, about one-third of the Jewish population throughout Eastern Europe fled to the United States (Dwork 102). Rabbi Lee Levinson also clarifies in his history of American Jews that although poverty was a major impetus for Jewish emigration from Eastern Europe, it was the persecution of Jewish communities that made that particular wave of emigration unique. He noted, “The German Jews had come over to America with German Christians, but the migration from Russia was strictly a Jewish migration; they came alone ... because of the special persecutions,” (269).

Jewish immigrants quickly carved out an occupational niche in lower-class industrial jobs to provide for their families. Ironically, the persecution of Jews who had lived under the Russian May Laws in the 1880s — Jews who were prohibited from owning and renting land outside of major cities and forced to pack into urban centers — played into their favor after voyaging across the Atlantic. The May Laws had forced them to give up occupations of specialized craftsmen and artisans to take growing urban industrial jobs. The period between 1880 and 1900 saw a great deal of industrial development in urban centers of Eastern Europe, as well as the United States, which gave many Jews the human capital needed for immediate employment in major cities. According to Deborah Dwork, many European Jews took sewing lessons in the months and years leading up to emigration specifically to prepare for

jobs in the booming American garment industry (102-103)¹. Marc Raphael also points out that it was no coincidence that the country's ready-made clothing businesses exploded into an enormous U.S. industry in the midst of mass immigration. By 1915, over 90 percent of workers in the cloak and suit trades were Jewish, and most were from Eastern Europe (Raphael 47). Over the same period, the transfer of the synagogue and Jewish social structures from Russia to the United States was relatively smooth. Jewish communities in major cities formed *landsmanshaftn*, where pockets of Jews from the same areas of Eastern Europe would come together in a mutual-aid society of sorts. Such an environment allowed the traditional Jewish communal infrastructure — synagogues, kosher-eating traditions, collective charity — to thrive, at least temporarily, in American cities (Chiswick 43).

By and large, the subjects in the pool for this study hardly resemble the blue-collar working class profile of their Jewish ancestors who came to the United States three or four generations ago. Today, Jews have a decisively American economic and religious profile that differs from that of Jews elsewhere. A number of scholars explain that this occurred through decades of assimilation, while others argue it was a result of the ideals of the immigrants themselves. I contend that it's most likely a combination. First-generation Jewish immigrants, though forced to accept grimy industrial jobs with poor work conditions, were determined to be a one-generation blue-collar class. As Lucy Dawidowicz put it, the immigrants were "neither the sons

¹ Dwork does not present a great deal of empirical evidence but does point out that even though Jews constituted just 10.3 percent of the total immigration population from 1900 to 1925, they accounted for a quarter of skilled industrial workers throughout the United States.

nor the fathers of workers,” (160). Just as they had in Eastern Europe, Jewish families placed especially high value on secular education for their children. By the end of World War I, Jewish unions became the first American unions to develop educational programs that taught members English, economics, and history. Jewish enrollment in higher education grew rapidly, and with it, so did Jewish employment in middle-class professions (Dawidowicz 161). By the end of World War II, poverty among American Jews was rare, and the group’s stable presence in high-level professional and managerial occupations throughout the postwar period has been remarkable.

But climbing the U.S. socioeconomic ladder necessitated sacrifices in Jewish religiosity. Carmel Chiswick explains such a phenomenon using economics, defined as the study of how people allocate their resources when such resources are limited. The upwardly-mobile children of Jewish immigrants were absorbed with issues of economic assimilation, which required time and energy, of which they devoted less and less to the Jewish community (Chiswick 10). Religious leadership was forced to accommodate in ways consistent with the new, relatively high cost of time and energy — accommodation that led to the proliferation of the Conservative and Reform Jewish movements that liberalized many Jewish practices (i.e. — keeping kosher, weekly observance of Shabbat, etc.)

Background of the American Jewish Vote

After the period of mass immigration from 1880 to 1914, most Democratic politicians fought for the working class and pushed to achieve egalitarian ideals, so

it should come as little surprise that first-generation Jews aligned decidedly left-of-center in the political arena. Through the 1920s and 1930s, the Jewish electorate, along with its representation in Congress, took a dramatic shift to the left. There were five Jewish representatives in the 66th Congress (1919-21), only one of whom was a Democrat. By the 75th Congress (1937-39), there were 10 Jewish representatives, and only one was a Republican (Feingold 103). In the Depression 1930s, President Roosevelt's New Deal politics was overwhelmingly popular among Jews — a movement that Feingold contends was responsible for locking up the Jewish vote for Democratic candidates in national elections for the next few decades. The Yiddish-speaking generation of Jews would say there are “*dray velten: die velt, yene velt, un Roosevelt,*” which translates to “three worlds: this world, the next world, and Roosevelt,” (Feingold 107). But as the children and grandchildren of first-generation American Jews assimilated and found greater success in the workplace, the Jewish vote became more difficult to explain.

Several studies have tried to find why American Jews have avoided shifting toward conservatism, for the most part, as they have shifted away from an immigrant out-group population. Lee Sigelman defines the term “pocketbook voting” as, “the tendency to support or oppose the ... candidate on the basis of improving or deteriorating personal economic circumstances,” (977). As American Jews have improved their financial footing over time, their voting patterns have not reflected that progression — so they have not been pocketbook voters. As Robert Lerner and many others have observed, conservative support is highly correlated to a high socioeconomic status, but even as Jews have reached that status, they remain a

mostly liberal ethnic group (330). Stanley Feldman provides one explanation for that phenomenon, though his analysis of pocketbook voting is more general and pertains less to American Jews. He theorizes that the link between personal economic well-being and political affiliations is superficial and actually not as strong as the public makes it out to be. He claims that the strong American belief in economic individualism encourages people to accept responsibility for their own financial circumstances, which causes most Americans — not just Jews — to actually avoid pocketbook voting (447). Under such circumstances, it should be no surprise that Jews persist in voting for Democratic candidates as they've secured financial success. But, as Lawrence Fuchs pointed out, pocketbook voting is ultimately still less of a factor among American Jews than in most other voting blocks, as American Jews are the only ethno-religious group whose voting patterns do not split across Democratic-Republican lines in *any* significant correlation with “occupational prestige, amount of income, or education,” (387). Perhaps there are simply other facets of Jewish life that have kept American Jews from defecting to conservatism.

Lerner et al. provide a good starting point, as they compared characteristics of American Jewish and non-Jewish elites, especially focusing on their economic and political attitudes. They found that Jewish elites are more liberal than their non-Jewish counterparts, on multiple measures of liberalism, based on attitude and not just voting patterns (335). They also found very few differences between the attitudes of religiously reformed Jews and religiously conservative Jews, which shows that the unified political liberalism among Jews in the U.S. is quite comprehensive (not including the very small percentage of American Orthodox Jews,

the attitudes of whom tend to be politically conservative) (338). Lerner concludes, as others have, that this unity is a result of Jewish marginality of the past — this refers to Jews being an immigrant out-group throughout history. It is simply the natural inclination of immigrant out-groups to unify in such a manner. He adds that traditional Jewish family values allow parental political ideologies to flow through generations very easily, which helps to pass that unity on from grandparents to parents to children. And this ties in well with a study conducted by Andrew Cherlin and Carin Celebuski on the dynamics of the American Jewish family. They found that there are few differences between Jewish and non-Jewish families in general, but when it comes to child rearing, Jewish parents tend to play a particularly large role in their children's social, economic and intellectual developments — a larger role than parents of non-Jewish families (908). So, it appears that ideologies of Jewish parents could be passed down to children fairly easily and could be a major reason that Jewish liberalism persists through socioeconomic progression.

Uzi Rebhun takes a different approach to explain the liberal unity among American Jews, arguing that such political attitudes are better explained by the common denominators in the Jewish religion. He insists that if political scientists are to make judgments on the motivations of political orientation among American Jews, they must understand the customs of Jewish families better (50). Rebhun concluded that there are very close ties in the relationships between subgroups of Judaism — more so than in other religions and ethnicities. And Jews are particularly linked in their generally positive view of a Jewish state (to be discussed at greater length in the next section) and on their observance of Yom Kippur — the Jewish Day of

Atonement (55). Because of such links, the actions of American Jews tend to be relatively cohesive, and although Rebhun did not comment much on the political behavior of Jews, finding those common denominators provides a possible reason why American Jews tend to act so collectively liberal in elections. Stephen M. Cohen agrees with Rebhun when using holiday observance as a partial measure of determining how Jewish some American Jews are. He contends that practicing the traditions of holidays like Yom Kippur connects today's Jews with their immediate family, their family memories (parents), and their family aspirations (children) (407). Perhaps such a religious connection is at least a partial reason why liberalism persists from an immigrant population of Jews to an assimilated population of their descendants.

Jonathan Sarna provides another link within the Jewish religion, claiming that one of the major 20th-century reforms of the American Jewish synagogue was its involvement in social action (224). Jewish leadership wanted to prove that Judaism is no less concerned than Christianity about societal ills, and Tzedakah — the Hebrew word for charity — became a major component of Jewish life. It is possible that many Jews throughout the 20th century merely believed liberal ideas of social reform were consistent with their Jewish ideals and more important than voting with their pocketbooks.

Growing distance from Israel

To this point, I have purposefully avoided discussion of Israel, which has had a profound influence on American Jewish political attitudes and behaviors since the

country's inception in 1948. I believe it was important to first establish the Jewish peoples' persistent connection with liberalism and introduce research on the matter before compounding that work with political support for Zionism. Indeed, the American Jewish vote can be puzzling enough as it is, and Israel's influence on it comes with its own set of research. As Feingold pointed out, support for Israel after 1948 was not merely a matter of political attitude and behavior — it was an important component of identity for Jews in the United States. Few American Zionists actually believed it was necessary for American Jews to go resettle in the Biblical homeland and physically build a Jewish society. Rather, they believed, in the wake of the Holocaust, that Israel deserved political advocacy and representation before the “American seat of power” (Feingold 110). Such sentiments were by no means fresh at that point — Louis Brandeis had spearheaded an American Jewish Congress whose goal was to “secure Jewish development in Palestine” as early as 1915 (Raphael 114-115). But by the end of World War II, such views had finally permeated throughout the American Jewish community.

Initially, the birth of Israel did not have a major impact on Jewish liberalism in elections because Democrats and Republicans alike supported the Zionist movement. It wasn't until the late 1960s and 1970s, a period that saw growing hostility toward Israel from progressive politicians, that Jews had a particularly tough choice to make. During those years, Jews turned out in large numbers to vote for Republican Party candidates in Congress, and some Republicans believed the Jewish vote would realign for good (Wald 6). Feingold points out that supporting Israel sometimes forced American Jews to abandon liberal universalist principles

like the right of national self-determination — especially for Palestinians — in favor of Israel’s tenuous security, which at times required questionable preemptive use of military power (110). However, that shift in attitude initially did not alter Jewish voting patterns significantly in *national* elections, partly because presidential candidates typically appeased Jewish voters by adopting pro-Israel standpoints. Jews did not shift significantly to the right in a presidential campaign until they became dissatisfied with Jimmy Carter during his term in office. The Carter administration openly supported a Palestinian homeland and condemned Israel’s settlements in occupied territories. And by his 1980 campaign for re-election against a fiercely pro-Israel Ronald Reagan, the Jewish voting block was ready to send a message. Carter became the only Democratic candidate since 1920 to fail to receive a majority of the Jewish vote, winning by a relatively narrow six-point margin (Maisel 153). Ultimately, the shift to the right was temporary — in Ronald Reagan’s decisive victory over Walter Mondale in the 1984 election, Mondale controlled 67 percent of the Jewish vote. And from 1992 to 2008, the Democratic ticket in presidential elections never took less than 76 percent of the Jewish vote. Jerold Auerbach argued that such a choice in the 1980 election shouldn’t have been overly difficult to foresee. Israel was a “constant thorn in the side” of American liberalism, and there was only so much time before the unbridled support for Israel that blossomed after the Six-Day War would last among liberal politicians (147). Auerbach was onto something, but how today’s Jewish voters would have reacted to Jimmy Carter’s opinions on Israel is much less clear.

More recent political science studies have shown that over time, American Jews — particularly the younger adults and their children — have begun to feel less connected to the state of Israel, and they are thus less likely to “vote for Israel” than for their liberal values. Cohen and Ari Kelman have put forth two separate theoretical explanations — a life cycle effect and a birth cohort effect. The life cycle effect suggests that Jews in different stages of life are simply more inclined to have a different viewpoint than their parents until they grow up, become married, have children, etc. At that point, they’d be expected to mature and eventually come to embrace the values their parents so strongly supported. However, the study ultimately favors the birth cohort effect, in which younger and younger birth cohorts were born into different histories, with different surroundings (Baby Boomers are to The Beatles as Generation X is to Nirvana, as the study puts it) (11). Theoretically, the argument makes sense. The oldest living generation of American Jews — those born before World War II — is very connected to and very supportive of Israel because they remember, firsthand, the horrors of the Holocaust and the state’s inception. The Baby Boomers also exhibit high levels of attachment to Israel because they remember the Six-Day War and ensuing U.S. support for Israel. However, the attitude begins to shift with American Jews born in the mid-1970s, when actions taken by Israel from that point forward were considered to be a bit more morally and politically complex than the actions taken in the early days of the country. Cohen and Kelman point to the First Lebanon War in 1982, the first and second Intifadas, and the Second Lebanon War as examples.

With data from the 2007 National Survey of American Jews, which Cohen and Kelman themselves commissioned, they were able to quantify this birth cohort effect to demonstrate attachment to Israel is not just waning for the youngest American Jews, but rather it has declined from birth cohort to birth cohort, over time:

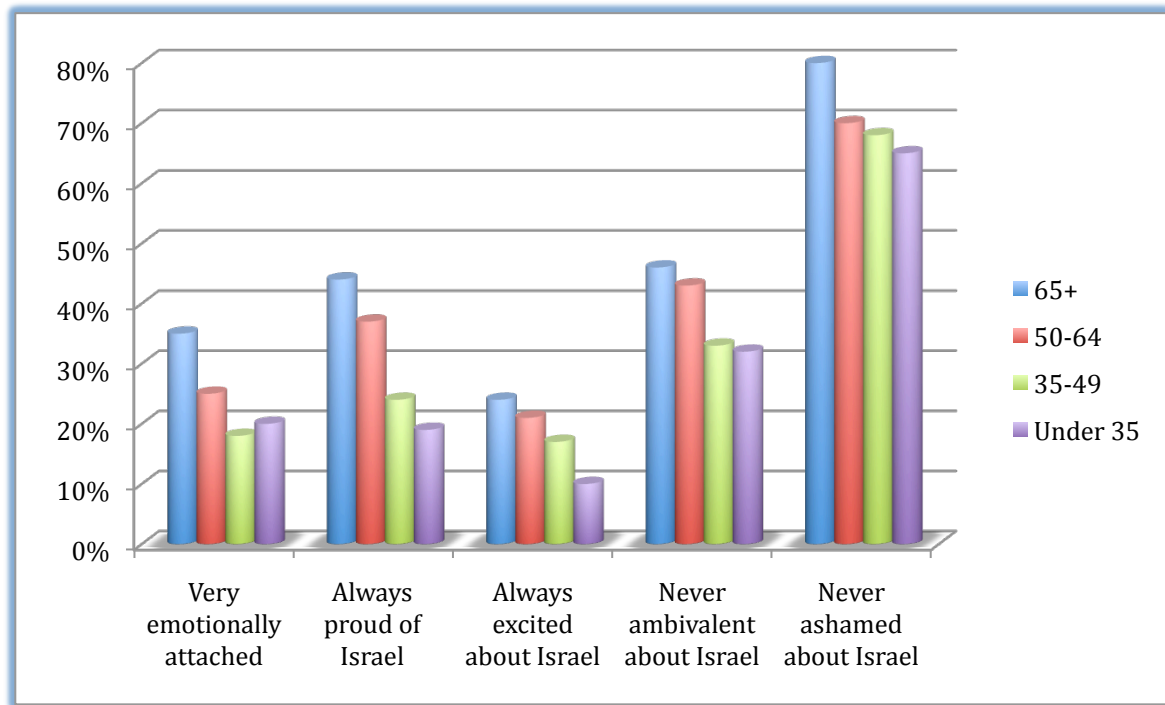


Figure 1: Attachment to Israel²

The Birth of Birthright

The Hebrew word Taglit translates literally to “discovery” in English, as the program is designed to allow its participants to discover the Jewish homeland they

² The 2007 National Survey of American Jews elicited responses from over 1,800 Jews either by email or snail mail, and Orthodox Jews were kept out of the sample pool. It covered a very wide range of viewpoints and attitudes regarding Israel. Here, Cohen and Kelman draw from question 10: “Below are the different ways people may feel about Israel (proud, excited, ambivalent, ashamed). In each case, how often would you say that you feel this way about Israel — never, sometimes, often or always?”

previously felt they had little-to-no connection with. In deciding who is eligible to travel with Taglit-Birthright, the program has chosen criteria that seem to target precisely those people who may feel such a disconnect — people aged 18 to 26 with at least one Jewish grandparent and who do not practice a religion other than Judaism. Applicants who have previously travelled to Israel with another organized group (i.e. — youth groups, high school trips, etc.) are disqualified from consideration. Over the program's 13 years of existence, it has provided free trips for hundreds of thousands of that cohort. According to Taglit-Birthright's website, there have been over 300,000 participants from 59 countries (the majority is from the United States), dating back to 2000. The number of participants travelling annually has been growing rapidly lately, and the program's new goal is to send 51,000 Jews worldwide to Israel in 2013. Such an expansion has been made possible by a growth in the program's three branches of funding: wealthy philanthropists, Jewish community organizations, and the Israeli government. Since the program's inception, the philanthropists have generally been the most financially supportive of the program. Some big-name donors include hedge-fund titan Michael Steinhardt and Seagram Company's Charles Bronfman — who founded the organization together — as well as Las Vegas Sands CEO Sheldon Adelson, whose family foundation doled out a \$37 million contribution in 2008 when Taglit-Birthright was strapped for cash (Shemer). But the other branches have been especially supportive more recently. The Israeli government, upon insistence from Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, pledged \$100 million over three years, from 2011 to 2013. In response, North American Jewish federations and private philanthropists together

decided to match the Israeli contribution with \$240 million over the same span (Shemer).

More than anything else, Steinhardt and Bronfman say they founded Taglit-Birthright to halt, or at least slow down, the “crisis of continuity.” Today’s young Jews feel less and less of a need to marry in-faith and/or raise their children Jewish, and many feel that will lead to an eventual Jewish extinction. The concern is most certainly justified — the intermarriage rate among Jews was merely nine percent for those married prior to 1965, and the rate between 1985 and 1990 was already up to 52 percent (though it was later adjusted down to 47 percent). Of intermarriages, only a bit more than a quarter are reported to raise children Jewish, while the rest either raise children without a faith or in a non-Jewish faith (Ritterband 393). In the 1970s, as intermarriage started to become a growing concern, many Jewish communities altered their stance from outrage to outreach. Instead of trying to slow intermarriage rates, which appeared to be an unstoppable force, they refocused their attention to helping intermarried couples raise their children Jewish (Mayer 420). But it wasn’t enough, and intermarriage rates continued to rise. In 1999, Taglit-Birthright was a new method of outreach praised as a method to target Jews, in most cases, before they are married. Issues of intermarriage are not explicitly discussed on the trip — rather, the belief of the founders was that an enriching experience in the Jewish homeland would inspire the young Diasporas to reconsider their Biblical roots and take them more seriously (Powers 9).

The Birthright Effect

Taglit-Birthright trips provide an intense 10-day experience of practically non-stop travel, and each component of the trip is framed in a way that is intended to be meaningful for the participants. On the first day, trip leaders inform participants that the trip will not be a vacation —rather, it will be an educational experience that provides “a connection between Israel, the Holocaust, contemporary Jewish life, and your personal Jewish identity,” (Ten Days 39). The climbing of Mount Masada is a great example of this type of framing. After taking time to relax on the hilltop and take pictures with the Dead Sea and sunrise in the background, the designated trip leader takes over to explain the historical significance of Masada. After the Romans destroyed the Temple of Jerusalem in 70 C.E., Masada represented the final location of Jewish independence before the Romans took full control. In April of 73 C.E., General Flavius Silva surrounded Masada and prepared to conquer the final insurgents. But instead of surrendering, most of the remaining men jumped off of the cliff to commit suicide and avoid subjecting themselves to inevitable slavery. Today, the Hebrew saying, *shenit Masada lo tipol* (Masada will never fall again), has come to mean that Jews will always fight back to defeat an enemy and thus will never face such grave circumstances again. Of course, different trip leaders are flexible to apply their own brand of the story of Masada and its historical significance, but either consciously or subconsciously, participants acknowledge that Masada is a meaningful symbol of Jewish continuity under the threat of invading foreign forces (Ten Days 41).

Another crucial aspect of Taglit-Birthright trips is the *mifgash*, which is Hebrew for “encounter” or “cultural exchange.” Midway through the trip, several active Israeli Defense Force soldiers join the group and travel with the participants for four or five days. This aspect of the trip was incorporated by Taglit-Birthright in 2002, when the founders were concerned that although many aspects of the trip were profoundly moving, the participants were still looking in from an outsider’s perspective (Ten Days 73). During the *mifgash*, Diasporas learn a great deal about their Israeli contemporaries, particularly the differences in their Jewish culture, but perhaps more importantly the similarities. Many participants report being surprised that the IDF soldiers do not resemble the religious zealots they had imagined prior to the trip, and they are often surprised that they share many of the same interests. One of the most moving experiences for participants is when they visit Mount Herzl — Israel’s national military cemetery — along with the IDF soldiers. More often than not, at least one of the soldiers knew a buried serviceman or servicewoman in that cemetery very well, and he/she will share memories of the fallen with the group. Many participants report feeling overwhelmed or incredibly humbled by the experience, as it is generally difficult visiting the graves of 18, 19 and 20-year-olds, especially when you make that visit with soldiers who are committed to making the same sacrifice for their country (Ten Days 85).

If success of Taglit-Birthright trips is measured in intermarriage rates — the issue that inspired the organization, according to the founders — they have been quite effective. A non-Orthodox participant with intermarried parents is 700-percent more likely than a non-Orthodox nonparticipant with intermarried parents

to marry a Jew later in life. And the corresponding figure for those with inmarried parents is 128 percent (Intermarriage 161-62). But considering that these trips create such an intimate bond between participants and Israel, there are many other effects we can study. Through a survey study administered in 2009 to trip applicants who traveled between 2001 and 2004, Saxe et al. found that participants are 23 percent more likely than nonparticipants to feel “very much connected to Israel,” 24 percent more likely to strongly agree with the statement, “I have a strong sense of connection with the Jewish people,” and 30 percent more likely to view raising children Jewish as “very important.”³ Moreover, when participants are asked to think about the trip and its effects in retrospect, a vast majority says that they feel much closer to Israel than prior to the trip (Generation Birthright 9):

³ Saxe, et al considered these values predicted probabilities. They produced these results through a regression analysis of survey data that assessed whether Taglit-Birthright had an impact on certain outcomes when taking pre-existing conditions into account. These regression models attempted to control for differences in variables between participants and nonparticipants (i.e. — gender, age, having attended Jewish day school for eight years or more, attendance of Jewish supplemental school, scale of ritual practice, having intermarried parents, etc.)

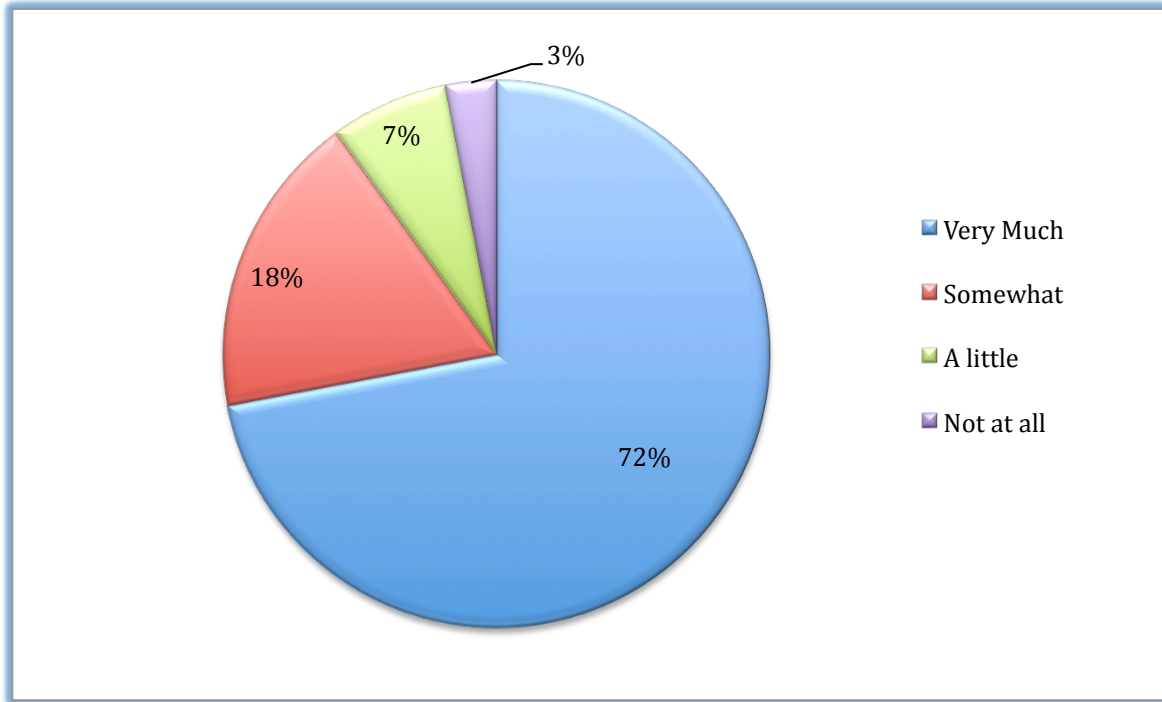


Figure 2: Participants' Perceptions of How Much the Trip Made Them Feel Closer to Israel⁴

The evidence presented by Saxe is compelling, and he thoroughly accounted for a wide range of the program's effects on the participants, many of which are not mentioned here for lack of relevance to the proposed question. But he neglected to answer two very important questions in his research — though Taglit-Birthright trips may have succeeded, to date, in addressing the founders' main concerns regarding Judaism (i.e. — outmarriage) and inspiring a connection between Diasporas and Israel, do the trips also affect the political attitudes and political behaviors of the same cohort? In the following section, I will detail why such questions are important, and how I will answer them.

⁴ This chart from Saxe et al, unlike the predicted probabilities, was merely based on estimated proportions — simple weighted tabulations of the data. The regression model was not used here.

New Research

Justification

Leonard Saxe and Barry Chazan claim that Taglit-Birthright is the largest educational experiment ever attempted in the context of the contemporary Jewish community, and they measured the social effects of the experiment using outmarriage rates and a sense of connection with Israel (Ten Days 4). I don't doubt the assertion nor the measurements, but I believe they overlooked the possibility of profound political consequences. That is, I believe they left out a major dependent variable, and with it, a good portion of the discussion we should be having. The relationship between the United States and Israel is mutually symbiotic — for the United States, Israel represents a beacon of democracy in the Middle East and a place where Jews can always have a home, and in return, Israel gets military and diplomatic support from the United States that it very much relies on. In the United Nations, for example, Israel's interests have been defended by a U.S. veto in the Security Council more than forty times between 1972 and 2011, oftentimes when it was the only veto (Eizenstat 267). But what is to come of that relationship when today's young Americans, many of whom don't identify with — and some of whom denounce — the Israeli cause, become tomorrow's leaders? Regardless of what Taglit-Birthright trips do for outmarriage rates and Judaism, the political effects are perhaps just as powerful. Each year, tens of thousands of new program alumni go back to their synagogues and communities more inspired to fight for Israel. Taglit-Birthright CEO Gidi Mark proclaims that former travelers “go back to anti-Zionists

on their campuses and say to them, ‘Don’t tell me what you saw on CNN — I was there’ ” (Feldman, K. 2).

Mark also claims that Taglit-Birthright is a totally apolitical organization. But frankly, given the above quote, that seems utterly contradictory. A new generation of American Jews reenergized to stand up for Israel and fight against anti-Zionists is precisely a political effect, regardless of any apolitical ambitions the program may also espouse. It is also worth noting that a good deal of the organization’s funding does come from politically charged sources. Many of Taglit-Birthright’s initial funders —including Steinhardt and Bronfman — were trustees of the Washington Institute for Near East Policy, a mostly conservative pro-Israel think tank inspired by AIPAC, which is a very powerful pro-Israel lobby. AIPAC actually sponsors Taglit-Birthright trips every year, even though J-Street — a more liberal pro-Israel lobby that advocates a two-state solution — was turned down for a sponsorship in February 2011 on grounds that it is a political organization (Feldman, K. 2). Of course, the Israeli government itself has made considerable investments in the program, especially in recent years as reports have more conclusively determined the positive effects it’s had on participants. Perhaps Israel sees such donations as long-term political investments, as the trips may groom a base of future American support (though it is also worth noting that Taglit-Birthright produces immediate economic incentives for Israel as well, like Americans pumping millions into the tourism and restaurant industries) (Shemer).

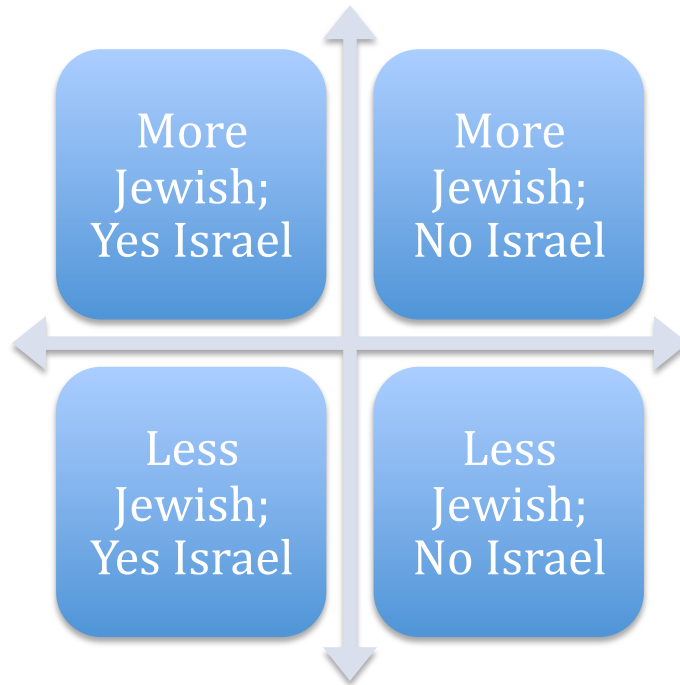
Taglit-Birthright is a very young organization, and many of the potential political effects may be long term, but it’s worth knowing if we can see any

immediate impacts to date. To do this, I surveyed college-age Jews to determine the trips' effects on political attitude — whether the trip made a participant more likely to support Israel politically — and on political behavior — whether such support manifests itself in a particular vote come Election Day.

Methods

My analysis of the effects of Taglit-Birthright trips is based on an extensive survey distributed to Jewish undergraduate students at the University of Michigan. The students were reached via email through the University Hillel chapter, meaning each of the subjects have the common denominator of being registered on Hillel's mailing list. Such a subject pool does provide a random sampling of University Jews (at least at Michigan), as the students on the Hillel mailing list range from very involved in Hillel activities to not involved at all, and from a practice of Orthodox Judaism to Reform Judaism, as well as some students who don't observe the faith at all but still identify themselves as Jews. To help avoid a selection bias in which the people actually clicking on the survey link would be characteristically more involved in Hillel or more Jewish than those not clicking the link, I did provide the incentive of a \$50 gift card raffle upon full completion of the survey. The survey consists of six distinct sections: identification questions, Jewish upbringing, Jewish social life, experience in Israel (if applicable), parental political attitudes/behaviors, and personal political attitudes/behaviors.

Though the survey is mostly qualitative, the initial identification questions allow me to set up a coding system to place students into one of four categories:



Separating the subjects into these four groups is essential because my subject pool is not nearly extensive enough to provide a meaningful statistical regression with quantitative analysis that accounts for pre-trip variables. Researchers like Leonard Saxe have a working relationship with the Taglit-Birthright organization and thus have had access to contact information for thousands of participants nationwide. Unfortunately, I am not afforded the same luxury. So, by breaking up subjects based on their pre-trip characteristics, I can at least effectively compare survey results between like-minded individuals in my smaller sample pool, which would then allow for a meaningful qualitative analysis. For example, it would not be particularly prudent for me to compare the political attitude and behavior of Student A, a non-Bar Mitzvah and non-High Holy Day observer who has not been to Israel, with Student B, a Bar Mitzvah and frequent Shabbat observer who has been to Israel. It is very likely that student B would be more pro-Israel than Student A,

regardless of whether or not student B had actually gone to Israel. It would be much more helpful if I could actually compare like-minded Jews. What are the differences in opinion between the less Jewish students who have not been to Israel and the less Jewish students who have been to Israel? And what is the same difference for the more Jewish students? Below are the identification questions, along with each answer's point value in parentheses:

Have you had a Bar/Bat Mitzvah?

- No (0)
- Yes (1)

Have you been confirmed?

- No (0)
- Yes (1)

With which denomination do you most identify?

- Orthodox (3)
- Conservative (2)
- Reform (1)
- None (0)
- Just Jewish (0)
- Other (-)

Do you observe Shabbat?

- No (0)
- Occasionally (1)
- Often (2)
- Always (3)

Do you observe the High Holy Days and/or Passover?

- Both (1)
- One or neither (0)

How involved have your parents been in your Jewish upbringing?

- Not involved (0)
- Somewhat involved (1)
- Heavily involved (2)

Are you involved with Jewish life on campus?

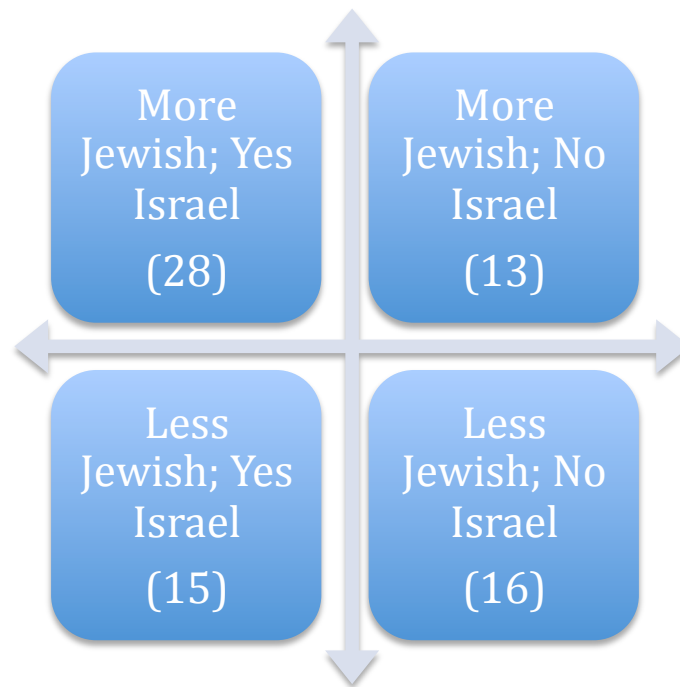
- Not involved (0)
- Somewhat involved (1)
- Heavily involved (2)

Have you been on a Taglit-Birthright trip to Israel (or another organized peer trip)?

- No
- Yes

Each of the above questions is important to ask in establishing the subjects' level of "Jewishness," and I drew heavily from Uzi Rebhun's work in picking the criteria. Issues of Jewish education (which is typically required for Bar/Bat Mitzvahs and confirmation), denomination, observance, parental involvement and community

involvement (in this case, the campus) are all important metrics. The cutoff in order for subjects to qualify as “more Jewish” was 6.5 points. Then, they were split up by whether or not they had been on an organized peer trip to Israel. Although BBYO-sponsored trips, Ramah seminars and others may vary a bit in curriculum and itinerary from Taglit-Birthright, they are still likely to have similar affects on the mindset of young American Jews (Shay 90). Ultimately, 72 subjects answered the survey, and they broke into the four groups as follows:



The meat of the survey is the final page, on which I ask students about their personal political opinions about Israel, as well as their behaviors (i.e. — what they consider at the polls). It is important to recognize that there are different ways to approach support or neglect for the state of Israel. I don’t merely ask if Israel is a voting issue, as that would be making a complex concept too black and white. The following are the questions asked on the final page:

1. Does Judaism play a role in your political views. If so, how?

2. How supportive are you of the state of Israel in times of conflict in the Middle East?

3. Do you consider U.S. support of Israel to be a minor or major political issue?

4. Do your views on Israel affect your overall political stance (i.e. — are you more conservative/liberal overall because of your views on Israel?) Please explain.

5. Do your views on Israel affect your vote in national elections? If so, how?

6. Why is Israel important/unimportant to you when it comes to voting in national elections?

7. If you have been to Israel, have you altered your political views based on information you learned on the trip, or based on a personal reaction from the trip? If so, how?

8. Are you more or less inclined to vote for a particular party in national elections because of your views on Israel since the trip? Why?

The two most important questions in the above group are the fourth and fifth — whether Israel makes the subject more liberal or conservative overall, and whether Israel pushes the subject's vote in a particular direction. Respectively, these are measures of political attitude and political behavior. Additionally, the other questions in this group and on the previous survey pages, as well as their open-ended nature, clue me in on how the subjects develop their political opinions and behaviors. Different subjects may vary greatly in aspects of their Jewish upbringing, their Jewish practices, and their experience in Israel, as well as how those characteristics affected their politics. Throughout the survey, I give subjects the opportunity to explain their circumstances.

Hypothesis

I believe that Taglit-Birthright trips, along with other organized peer trips to Israel, will have a significant impact on political attitudes, but not on political behavior. There has been sufficient evidence, as presented in the review of literature, that shows that the trips spark a deeply emotional reaction in participants, and I think that it may very well lead subjects to lean a particular direction in the political arena. However, I still do not believe that participants will look at Israel as an all-important voting issue, so even if they care deeply about Israeli support, it may not be enough to trump their views on domestic issues or even other foreign policy issues. Such a result would not necessarily mean that there are no long-term effects on behavior — it's very possible Israel will become a much more important voting issue in the future, or maybe domestic issues will become less important, in which case a former participant's attitude regarding Israel would matter a great deal more. However, in the short-term, I do not believe political behavior changes as a result of Taglit-Birthright participation.

Findings

Political Attitude

The main focus for determining the effect of a trip to Israel on political attitude was whether or not subjects felt more conservative or liberal ideologically as a result of their support for Israel. Per the methods section, I compared the responses of the more Jewish group that had been to Israel with the more Jewish group that had not been to Israel, and I did the same between the two less Jewish groups as well. As expected, it does appear that subjects who have been to Israel are at least slightly more likely to alter their overall political attitude with Israel in mind. Below are the summarized statistics from the first comparison, between the two more-Jewish groups. Many open-ended responses were coded to represent the intentions of the subject.⁵

Identified ideology	Israel	No Israel
Liberal	68.2%	62.5%
Conservative	9.1%	12.5%
Moderate	22.7%	25.0%
Israel affects attitude?		
No	75.0%	87.5%
Yes	25.0%	12.5%

Table 1: More-Jewish political attitude comparison

For the most part, the results regarding how Israel affects political attitude is consistent with the subjects' identified ideologies, which were determined four questions prior. In the Israel group, for example, there were five subjects who indicated that Israel affects their overall political attitude, and of those five, four

⁵ There were a few subjects who indicated a struggle between identifying themselves as liberals versus identifying themselves as moderates by listing them both in their answer. Those subjects were considered moderates, as they were decidedly more so than other subjects who put just liberal, and others who said that they were very liberal.

explained either directly or indirectly that their allegiance to Israel makes them feel more conservative⁶. Those four subjects consisted of the only two conservatives of the group, as well as two of the five total moderates. That is consistent with a host of research presented previously, which indicates that support for Israel is more consistent with conservative ideologies, or support for Israel is at least not so consistent with liberal ideologies (Wald, Feingold, Auerbach). However, the fifth subject in the Israel group that indicated being affected by supporting Israel was previously identified as a liberal, and the subject indicated being *more* liberal precisely because of that support. This is inconsistent with what previous research has implied about political attitudes. The subject's responses lacked sufficient explanations for such viewpoints, so I contacted the subject for a follow-up interview to dig deeper on this issue:

I'd say it's because in Israel, on Birthright, despite it being a Jewish state we spoke to non-Jews too. It struck me as interesting that these people willingly chose to live in a land dominated by a different religion and culture. So I'd say I was probably thinking of a government free from religious beliefs, as I was impressed that people from other religions found a homeland in Israel as well. I'm sure there were other reasons, but that's one I remembered right away.

Such a viewpoint demonstrates the complexity of Israel's situation. Commonly, American liberals denounce Israel's pre-emptive and sometimes questionable use of

⁶ Subjects were not always particularly clear about how Israel affected their overall political attitude. I established that four of the five were more conservative: two indicated that clearly, while the other two merely indicated that Israel is an important political issue and they want what's best for Israel. However, of those latter two, I determined through the context of their other answers that they believe conservatism is indeed better for Israel.

military force, as well as its continued occupation of the West Bank. Remember, American Jews are very much influenced by their immigrant roots, and many of them embrace liberalism because liberalism embraces the egalitarian values that allowed them to succeed in the United States. Today, many of those Jews feel that the Israeli government acts in ways that blatantly oppose those values. However, there are others, like the subject whose viewpoint is presented above, who recognize that Israeli politics is not completely devoid of such values. Taglit-Birthright trips, though they may intend to remain apolitical and uncontroversial, do present some of the facts to their students. Currently, roughly one-fifth of the Israeli population is comprised of Arabs, and many Taglit-Birthright trips make it an objective to at least briefly introduce the participants to non-Jewish citizens. Additionally, Israel undeniably has a much better record on a number of issues of social justice, especially women's rights, than most other Middle Eastern governments.

For the more-Jewish group that had not been to Israel, there were actually no subjects who clearly indicated that their political attitudes were affected by support of Israel. However, there was one subject (which, due to a number of subjects in the group who skipped some answers, accounted for 12.5 percent of the group), who indicated being "sometimes" affected. A request for a follow-up interview went unanswered, but through the context of other answers, there is some indication of how the subject's views are affected. The subject, who was self-identified as a moderate, indicated that her biggest concern for Israel was finding a long-term plan for non-Jewish Israelis/Palestinians and Jewish Israelis to live in peace with one

another. Additionally, the subject said, “It is a big turnoff for me if a candidate expresses his support for Israel by showing he is anti-Palestinian.” That statement is more applicable to political behavior than to political attitude, but such a sentiment suggests that the subject is in favor of a two-state solution for Israelis and Palestinians — a solution put forth by liberals more often than conservatives. This may be an indicator that the subject is in fact more liberal because of her support for Israel ⁷, as she believes a primarily liberal foreign policy agenda is the answer for driving long-term peace. However, a two-state solution doesn’t always conform to a perfect ideological split. There are some conservative Republican politicians — Secretary of Defense and former Nebraska senator Chuck Hagel, for example — who are outspoken supporters of a two-state proposal. Thus, general assumptions can be made about the subject’s ideological movements as a function of her support for Israel, but they are not concrete.

The comparison between the two less-Jewish groups looks relatively similar to that of the more-Jewish groups. Below are the summarized statistics for the political attitude comparison:

⁷ The subject did mention in a previous question that she is very supportive of Israel, even at times when she does not agree with the country’s actions.

Identified ideology	Israel	No Israel
Liberal	58.3%	58.3%
Conservative	0.0%	16.7%
Moderate	41.7%	25.0%
Israel affects attitude?		
No	58.3%	83.3%
Yes	33.3%	16.7%

Table 2: Less-Jewish political attitude comparison⁸

Just as the comparison between the more-Jewish groups revealed, the less-Jewish group that has been to Israel is slightly more likely than the less-Jewish group that has not been to Israel to be ideologically affected by support of Israel. However, there was little indication that those subjects self-identified as being affected were more conservative because of their support for Israel. In this comparison, it was more difficult to discern if an affected subject moved to the right or to the left, and for the discernable ones, it was more likely he/she moved to the left.

For the less-Jewish group that has been to Israel, four subjects indicated that they are affected by their support of Israel. Of those four, one clearly specified that support of Israel makes her feel more liberal. The other three indicated that they struggle with the issue and that they want to support viewpoints that are best for Israel, but there was not a clear movement to the right or to the left in order to secure what is best for Israel. One of them was particularly elaborate on why she struggles with the issue:

Yes (I am affected) — I think this largely stems from the influence I receive at home, in that my political views as (they) relate to the conflict are quite conservative. However, I'm also at a period where I'm questioning that

⁸ For the less-Jewish group that has been to Israel, the percentages for Israel affecting attitude (no and yes) do not add up to 100% because there was one subject who indicated being unsure. A request for a follow-up interview went unanswered, and context from other questions was unreliable.

approach as (it) relates to Israel — clearly something needs to change. I have a cousin who took part in the seeds of peace program that brings Israeli and Palestinian children together for a summer. Here, they get to know each other as individuals and not as members of an opposing party, and it is this sort of initiative (separate from a conservative vs. liberal mindset) that I try to stress. I realize its extremely idealistic, but with such complexities and never-ending conflict, it feels ok to be somewhat idealistic.

Such a viewpoint provides further evidence that former research suggesting that conservatism is more in line with support of Israel than liberalism, as presented in the review of literature, may be somewhat outdated. As conflict between Israelis and Palestinians persist, it appears that some young American Jews feel the status quo of Palestinian alienation is no longer the answer. Such a sentiment has led some strong supporters of Israel to lean more to the left (or at least not to the right) as a result of their support because conservatism often pushes for the status quo.

Responses like the one above intimate that Jews are starting to feel that more liberal ideas, like a two-state solution, are just as congruous with Israeli support as conservative ideas. And in some cases, Jews are starting to believe that those liberal ideas are precisely what Israel needs to secure a more stable future in the Middle East. That sentiment was echoed in the less-Jewish group that had not been Israel, in which just two subjects indicated that they were affected by support of Israel. Of those two, one clearly expressed being more liberal as a function of his support for Israel, and the other merely indicated that he is interested in what is best for Israel. Again, there was no indication of movement to the right.

Ultimately, even though it was clear that the attitudes of subjects who had been to Israel were more likely to be affected by support of Israel than subjects who

had not been to Israel, most were unaffected regardless of whether they had been or not. The most common explanation given amongst those who said they were unaffected was that even though they support Israel's interests, such support is not important or strong enough in determining an overall ideological stance. Many of those subjects are self-identified liberals who admit to being more conservative in their views regarding Israel, but such views are not influential enough to actually push them to the right overall. Other subjects said their political stance was unaffected because the U.S. will always support Israel, regardless of whether conservatism or liberalism is the ruling ideology in Congress and the White House. The response below, though it pertains more to political behavior (voting) than attitude, is indicative of such a sentiment:

It seems that most Jewish Americans who treat Israel as a hot-button issue lean Republican. This never made any sense to me. Why support Republican candidates when the difference between them and Democrats' views on Israel is marginal at best(?) Republican candidates are more vocal about their support so they can pander to certain sectors of their base. Obama is no less supportive of Israel than Romney. To say otherwise would be ignorant.

Other unaffected subjects didn't even address the issue from a left-right perspective, saying that it is somewhat imprudent to be affected politically by the issues of a U.S. ally, instead of basing your ideological stance on domestic issues like jobs and health care. That response might be an indication of the temporal influence on this survey, which was administered around the time of the 2012 U.S. presidential election (some were given before and some after). With the 2012 campaign in mind, many subjects probably considered domestic issues regarding jobs, health care, gun

control and disaster relief (hurricane Sandy) to be more important issues than Israel because those were the main issues surrounding the campaigns.

Political Behavior

After asking how support for Israel affects the subjects' political attitudes, subjects were then asked if their views on Israel affect how they would vote in national elections. This was my main evaluation in determining how a trip to Israel affects the political behavior of young American Jews. As mentioned previously, I hypothesized that unlike political attitude, behavior would go unaffected. That is, I did not believe there would be a significant difference in political behavior between the more-Jewish-Israel group and the more-Jewish-no-Israel group, nor would there be a significant difference between the less-Jewish-Israel group and the less-Jewish-no-Israel group. The data confirmed that prediction, and explanations that subjects gave for their behavior were relatively similar from group to group.

		Israel	No Israel
More Jewish	No	70.0%	75.0%
	Yes	30.0%	25.0%
Less Jewish	No	75.0%	83.3%
	Yes	16.7%	16.7%

Table 3: "Do your views on Israel affect your vote in national elections?" -- all groups⁹

For the two more-Jewish groups, most of the responses were consistent with what the subjects said in regards to their political attitude. For example, as mentioned in the previous section, there were five subjects in the more-Jewish-

⁹ For the less-Jewish group that has been to Israel, the percentages for Israel affecting attitude (no and yes) do not add up to 100% because there was one subject who indicated being unsure. A request for a follow-up interview went unanswered, and context from other questions was unreliable.

Israel group who indicated that support of Israel affected their attitudes. Those same five subsequently answered in this question that support of Israel also affects their vote in national elections, and they would vote in ways that reflect their attitude shift. For example, the subject who had indicated that support of Israel makes him feel more conservative also said that support of Israel encourages him to vote for the conservative candidate. The subjects who merely indicated in the attitude question that they want what is best for Israel also said they would vote in a way they feel is best for Israel. Interestingly, there was a sixth subject in this group who had not indicated an attitude effect but nonetheless said that his views on Israel would affect whom he votes for in national elections. However, his explanation suggests that the effect is conditional, not absolute: "If a candidate was anti-Israel, I would not vote for them." But what exactly is the metric for how that subject determines whether or not a candidate is anti-Israel? It is quite possible that the subject has never actually seen a candidate, nor will he ever see a candidate, who meets his criteria for being anti-Israel. In such a case, his condition is merely hypothetical and doesn't actually reflect a behavioral effect.

However, it is also possible that his metric is more sensitive. Perhaps he considered Barack Obama to be an anti-Israel candidate merely because the White House denied a request from Israeli Prime Minister Bibi Netanyahu to meet while he was on a trip to the United Nations General Assembly in September 2012. A request for a follow-up interview went unanswered. Because of the conditional nature of the subject's response, it was still considered positive for a behavioral effect, but it was a softer effect than others who indicated a behavioral effect in the more-Jewish-

Israel group. For example, another subject explained, "I am more likely to support a candidate who has been vocal in his/her support of Israel." This response is somewhat similar in that the subject supports the more pro-Israel candidate, but the behavior is not contingent on one of the candidates being anti-Israel.

The more-Jewish-no-Israel group exhibited a similar trend. The only subject who indicated an attitude effect also suggested a behavioral effect. As discussed in the last section, this subject would probably not vote for a candidate who expressed his/her support for Israel via an expression of anti-Palestinian sentiment.

Additionally, there was another subject who did not indicate an attitude effect but did suggest a conditional behavioral effect very similar to the one in the more-Jewish-Israel group. That is, this subject would be unlikely to vote for a visibly anti-Israel candidate. A request for a follow-up interview went unanswered, so this subject was given a soft-yes just like the one in the more-Jewish-Israel group. It is worth noting that even though my prediction of there not being a significant difference in behavior between the two more-Jewish groups proved correct, this effect was ultimately not achieved in the way that I thought it would be. I had suspected that for both groups, some of the subjects who had indicated an attitude effect would not be affected behaviorally. That is, I believed that, of the subjects who are interested in what is best for Israel, at least some would still not consider Israel a significant enough voting issue to affect behavior. Instead, all of subjects in those two groups who had an affected attitude also had an affected behavior. Perhaps the pre-trip variables that classified these subjects as more Jewish (religious observance, heavy parental involvement in upbringing, etc.) make them more likely to connect

their support for Israel to a particular vote. And ultimately, the gap in affected attitude between the two groups closed for affected behavior because of certain subjects who indicated a behavioral effect even though there was no attitude effect.

The two less-Jewish groups answered the political behavior question more in line with how I expected they would. Of the four subjects in the less-Jewish-Israel group who had indicated that support for Israel affects their political attitudes, just two of them felt that their support for Israel also affects their vote. One of them merely mentioned that she generally intends to vote for the candidate who is best for Israel, without specifying specifically what is best for Israel. And the other votes based on how candidates have handled and experienced U.S. relations with Israel:

In this particular election (2012), I was very sensitive to the rocky relationship Obama had with the state of Israel. His responses to Israel's most recent (actions) against Hamas, however, I thought were very sensible and in line with an invested interest in Israel's right to defend itself ... I want (Israelis) to be safe and to be able to live in a place with peace and fulfillment, just like I have here in the United States.

The other two subjects gave separate explanations for why they were positive for an attitude effect but negative for a behavioral effect. The first said that domestic issues are simply more important voting issues in U.S. presidential elections than policies regarding Israel. This was a sentiment echoed by many of the subjects who answered “no” to this question, regardless of whether or not they had indicated an attitude effect. Many young Diaspora Jews support Israel and want what's best for it, but they feel they have a priority to consider their actual homeland — not necessarily the Biblical homeland. The other subject in this group with an attitude

effect but no behavioral effect said she wasn't sure if Israel would be enough to "sway" her in an election. In a follow-up interview, she elaborated on this response:

This is a difficult question for me to answer because I don't fully know where I stand on the political spectrum yet, but I guess what I mean is that my view on Israel (in this case my support) is definitely something I factor into my political opinion. If a candidate were entirely anti-Israel and extreme, that could easily be enough to sway me to change my vote. However, I don't think it is likely that a candidate in today's society would ever be completely anti-Israel, so I guess my practical answer is that I wouldn't change a vote over it.

This response is akin to the conditional-yes responses seen in the two more-Jewish groups, but in this case, the subject specified that such a condition would not occur in U.S. politics and was thus counted as negative for a behavioral effect. Many of the subjects replied similarly, saying that any candidate in a national election would be supportive of Israel, so supporting Israel as a voter would not be conducive to any particular candidate. Ultimately, the less-Jewish-Israel group, a third of whom had exhibited an attitude effect, had the same percentage of behaviorally affected subjects as the less-Jewish-no-Israel group (just 16.7 percent). Thus, my expectation proved correct.

Other Findings

Prior to asking subjects questions about their personal political attitudes and behaviors, it was important to dig into their Jewish upbringing to find if there were any compelling relationships between those answers and any specific pre-trip variables. Parental involvement, for example, is of particular interest because of the unique nature of the Jewish parent-child relationship. As was discussed in the

literature review, studies have shown that American Jewish parents tend to be more involved and influential early in their children's lives than American non-Jewish parents (Lerner, Cherlin). For that reason, parental involvement in Jewish upbringing was a coding factor in determining the group cutoff between more-Jewish and less-Jewish subjects. But in order to make such a factor more applicable to the overall objective of this study, there was a section of the survey that looked further into the dynamics of parental involvement, specifically if it had effects on the *political* views of the subjects — not just the religious views. So, the survey asked subjects about their parents' political attitude and behavior much in the same way as their own. They were asked, "Do your parents' views on Israel affect their overall political stance (i.e. — are they more conservative/liberal overall because of their views on Israel?)" And then, "Do your parents' views on Israel affect their vote in national elections?" After each question, subjects were asked to explain their responses. This way, it was possible to determine if more-Jewish groups were more likely to exhibit the same political views as their parents. Ultimately, there were no major cross-group differences in whether or not subjects adhered to the attitudes and behaviors of their parents:

		Attitude Similarity	Behavioral Similarity
More Jewish; Israel	Parent No's	92.3%	80.0%
	Parent Yes's	80.0%	85.7%
	Overall	88.9%	82.4%
More Jewish; No Israel	Parent No's	100.0%	100.0%
	Parent Yes's	33.3%	50.0%
	Overall	71.4%	71.4%
Less Jewish; Israel	Parent No's	77.8%	88.9%
	Parent Yes's	100.0%	50.0%
	Overall	81.8%	81.8%
Less Jewish; No Israel	Parent No's	87.5%	100.0%
	Parent Yes's	33.3%	50.0%
	Overall	72.7%	81.8%

Table 4: Generational mobility rates of political attitude and behavior¹⁰

The above data did not yield any significant cross-group differences or trends. That is, it does not appear that a subject of one group is any more likely to indicate the same attitude and behavioral tendencies as his/her parents than a subject in any other group. Additionally, the survey asked in the same section whether, during childhood, parents encouraged the subject to pursue his/her own opinions regarding Israel or to adopt similar opinions as his/her parents. Previous research has determined that American-Jewish parents tend to be heavily involved in child-rearing, but this question asks what such involvement might entail. Most of the subjects, throughout the four groups, indicated that their parents encouraged them to come to their own opinions, but it was at least slightly more likely for more-

¹⁰ The rates shown in the table represent the percentage of subjects whose support of Israel affects their political attitude and behavior in the same way as their parents. For example, 92.3 percent of subjects in the more-Jewish-Israel group whose parents did not exhibit an affected attitude (Parent No's) likewise did not indicate an affected attitude themselves.

Jewish subjects to have parents that wanted their children to adopt the same viewpoints that they themselves espoused.

Encouragement Direction	More Jewish	Less Jewish
Own viewpoints	57.1%	70.8%
Same viewpoints	35.7%	25.0%
Both	7.1%	4.2%

Table 5: Parental influence on viewpoints

It is also worth noting that 13 out of the 16 total subjects who indicated that their parents want them to adopt the same political attitude and behavior regarding Israel actually did exhibit the same attitude and behavior themselves later in the survey (81.3 percent). Overall, however, this was not significantly different than the subjects whose parents encouraged them to form their own beliefs — the subjects were very likely to adopt an attitude and behavior similar to their parents’ regardless of what they were encouraged to do. Thus, it appears that even though there is a correlation between a subject’s level of Jewish-ness and the extent to which that subject’s parents pushed their viewpoints on the subject, there is no discernable effect of such parental involvement. One possible explanation for such a phenomenon may simply be because the political views of parents have ways of rubbing off on their children regardless of what their involvement entails. One subject who said his parents encouraged him to form his own viewpoints explained (and others echoed this sentiment):

My parents definitely share their viewpoints with me, but have not forced them upon me. I agree with them on some things, but I am completely free to form my own opinions. When it comes to Israel, I think we have similar viewpoints not because they urged them on me, but because I came to that same conclusion.

In a way, this type of result corroborates findings from Cohen and Kelman on the birth cohort effect, which theorizes that the reason young American Jews appear to have distanced themselves from issues regarding Israel is that, over time, American Jews have become less connected to events like the birth of Israel and the Six-Day War. Regardless of the extent of parental involvement and the type of encouragement pursued in parental involvement, this effect exists. So, it appears that even though most of the subjects did exhibit the same attitude and behavior as their parents, there will still be some who peel off in a different direction, possibly due to the birth cohort effect. One subject whose views differed from his parents even though they urged him to adopt the same viewpoints expressed, “(My parents are) a lot more pro-Israel than I am and don’t understand why my views are shifting and they think I should always support Israel.” And another who fell into the same category said, “They expect me to have the same opinions, and I have not yet told them my views have shifted.”

Another interesting finding within the results — now coming back to attitude and behavior shifts among the subjects themselves — was how they personally believed they were affected by the trip to Israel. As described in the methods section, the survey questions were organized so that I could objectively determine each subject’s attitude and behavior and then compare responses across the groups. I was curious to see if a subjective approach would yield the same or similar results, so I added two questions at the end of the survey to be answered by the two groups who have traveled to Israel. Would the groups who have been to Israel think they themselves were affected or not affected in the same ways that I assessed them to

be? In order to figure that out, the first question addressed attitude and asked, “Have you altered your political views based on information you learned on the trip, or based on a personal reaction for the trip? If so, how?” And the second question, addressing behavior, asked, “Are you more or less inclined to vote for a particular party in national elections because of your views on Israel since the trip? Why?”

		Attitude effect	Behavior effect
More Jewish; Israel	No	60.0%	61.1%
	Yes	35.0%	27.8%
	Not Sure	5.0%	11.1%
Less Jewish; Israel	No	66.7%	75.0%
	Yes	25.0%	25.0%
	Not Sure	8.3%	0.0%

Table 6: The trip in retrospect, a subjective approach

For the most part, it appears that the subjective approach yielded very similar results to the truer, more objective questions. A majority of respondents did not believe their attitudes nor their behaviors were affected by their trips to Israel. Their explanations for such responses are also similar to answers given in some of the previous questions. In many respects, the trip made subjects feel more pro-Israel at heart, but it did not necessarily translate to a shift in political attitude or behavior.

Moreover, it is worth noting that the less-Jewish-Israel group was slightly more likely than the more-Jewish-Israel group to declare itself unaffected, both in attitude and behavior. That result is surprising because one would believe that a trip to Israel would have the most profound effects on participants who are less connected or committed to their faith, rather than on those who may already have strong opinions about Judaism and Israel.

Drawbacks

It is possible that some of the conditions surrounding the administration of the survey for this study at least slightly affected the findings, and they are worth mentioning here. Perhaps the most important was the fact that Israel's conflicts with government and military entities that surround it are very much ongoing, and responses may have been affected by then-current events in the Middle East. A majority of the respondents answered the survey questions in November and December of 2012, in the midst and aftermath of Israel's Operation Pillar of Defense. Beginning on November 14, in response to Palestinian militant groups launching rockets from the Gaza Strip into Israeli civilian territories, including Tel-Aviv and Jerusalem, Israel Defense Forces fired back with air strikes over an eight-day span that targeted militant sites operated by Hamas's armed wing and the Palestinian Islamic Jihad. Even though the targets in Gaza were considered terror sites, dozens of Palestinian civilians were killed. In the survey, many respondents expressed strong sentiments of Israel having the right to defend itself against recent attacks, and some pointed out that Israel relies on military support and weapons from the United States. Those people may have been more inclined to indicate that they want to vote in a way that favors U.S. military support of Israel — more so than if they took the survey prior to Operation Pillar of Defense or during a ceasefire. When asked how supportive subjects are in times of conflict in the Middle East, subjects may have been more likely to respond with answers like, "I stand with Israel no matter what," and "I believe Israel has a right to protect herself." When asked why Israel is either important or unimportant when it comes to voting in national

elections, a subject may be more likely to respond with, “I do not want Israel to have to face war without the support of the U.S.”

Many responses that expressed unconditional support of Israel in times of conflict were balanced with an expression of dismay over the lives lost on both sides of the battle. The qualitative nature of these responses, in which subjects were allowed to explain why they feel and act the way they do in the political arena, showed that perhaps their responses would be different if the survey were taken during a time of relative peace in the Middle East. For example, a number of respondents may have favored a diplomatic solution to violence that includes a two-state solution — a decidedly more liberal policy agenda — but in the light of the Operation, such opinions were more tempered. One subject wrote that traveling to Israel and learning more about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict “helped me realize that the two-state solution is the best option in the long run, but I don’t think it will work right now.” Another subject who had travelled to Israel felt similarly about finding a diplomatic solution, but in this case also felt Israel had a right to defend itself, saying, “I learned (on the trip) that the vast majority of Arabs are extremely nice people who are extremely similar to me, more so than I thought they’d be ... Israel needs to go further out of its way to prevent civilian casualties when engaging terrorist organizations.” If the survey were taken a year ago, or perhaps today, these subjects may feel that diplomatic solutions are more attainable, and their responses may be different.

Another factor that may have altered the results of this survey is an apparent selection bias. That is, it appears that certain Jews who received a request to answer

the survey were more likely than others to actually fill it out. For example, nearly half of respondents reported being conservative Jews (in the religious sense), which seems like a disproportionately high percentage compared to the American Jewish community at large. Literature suggests that from generation-to-generation from the time Jews immigrated to the United States, the American Jewish religion has been modified from Orthodoxy to Conservatism to Reform. Ritterband wrote, "The Reform movement is rapidly becoming the modal Jewish religious identity for the mass of American Jews." The National Jewish Population Survey published in 2005 showed that 34 percent of the American Jewish population was Reform, and 26 percent was Conservative; the rest of the population was split between Orthodox, Reconstructionist and Just Jewish (Ament 9). It is some cause for concern that the survey reached more Conservative Jews than Reform Jews because there are a number of possible differences in their respective upbringings. Conservative Jews are more likely to have a formal Hebrew education, and such education is generally more formal than corresponding education in the Reform denomination. Holiday observance and parental involvement in Jewish upbringing are also typically stronger in Conservative Jewish families (Keysar, et al. 38-41). However, much of this selection bias was likely limited due to how subjects were split across groups. The initial identification questions helped determine each subject's pre-trip variables (like Conservative Judaism and its associated effects) so that comparisons could be made between similar-minded Jews. Even though more Conservative Jews answered the survey than Reform Jews, it was unlikely that the responses of a very

religious Conservative Jew were compared closely with those of a non-practicing Reform Jew.

Lastly, even though the survey reached many Jews at the University of Michigan, response rate was low, and survey data was relatively limited. Seventy-two students opened the survey and answered some of the questions, but just 52 responses were actually answered sufficiently enough to analyze political attitude and behavior. This problem was foreseen and was one of the main reasons the survey was so open-ended — the subjects who did complete the survey in its entirety did elaborate on most of their responses, explaining their personal circumstances and opinions. The qualitative nature of such responses provided an opportunity to determine if, how, and why opinions varied from group to group, and many snippets were included in the findings so as to represent the viewpoints of a number of subjects.

Conclusion and Discussion

Because Taglit-Birthright has already provided trips for over 300,000 young adult Jews from all over the globe, it is well worth the effort to investigate the various effects that the program has on its participants. Many travelers find the trip to be life-changing — having finally experienced first-hand the Western Wall in Jerusalem, the bustling city of Tel Aviv, the scenery and symbolism of Mount Masada and the Dead Sea, and the similarities they share with their Israeli peers, participants come home with an enriched sense of commitment to Israel and Judaism. Later in life, it's probable that that commitment will manifest itself in former participants marrying in-faith and raising their children Jewish. But this study adds a new layer to the analysis by treating former Taglit-Birthright participants as members of the U.S. political landscape. Whether the Taglit-Birthright program has political motivations is debatable, but regardless, the funding and leadership of the organization is derived from politically charged sources. Thus, it is worth finding whether the participants' enriched commitment to Israel also leads to a shift in political attitude and behavior among young American Jews.

The study first addresses how the trips affect political attitude, and it was measured by how Jews who have been on a peer trip to Israel compared with like-minded Jews who have not been on a trip. The results showed that former travelers to Israel were slightly more pro-Israel in their political attitude than subjects who have not traveled to Israel. In other words, subjects who have been on a trip are more likely to alter their political attitude (i.e. — liberalism versus conservatism)

based on what they feel is best for Israel than their counterparts who have not been on a trip. Explanations for such responses varied, though, and it did not appear that political attitudes shifted as a result of the trip in any unified direction. Some subjects indicated that they feel more conservative politically because conservative politicians are generally more likely to support strong U.S.-Israeli relations, whereas liberals may be a bit more critical. Other subjects reported feeling more liberal politically because they feel liberal politicians are more likely to push for a two-state solution, which they believe will offer a more stable and peaceful future for Israelis. A third group of affected subjects did not move in any discernable direction, but its members indicated that they felt more pro-Israel and wanted to support Israel through the American political arena. Ultimately, subjects who have gone on a trip to Israel were more likely to have their political attitudes affected in any of these three ways than subjects who have not gone on a trip.

Next, the study determined how the trips affect political behavior, measured by how Jews who have been on a trip to Israel vote in presidential elections compared with like-minded Jews who have not been on a trip. The results showed that former travelers were no more likely than non-travelers to be affected by their views on Israel when they go to the polls. So, it appears that even though the trips have an attitude effect, such a change does not manifest itself in a vote for a particular type of politician. Additionally, it was less likely for an attitude effect to lead to a behavioral effect in the less-Jewish groups than in the more-Jewish groups. This is worth noting because Taglit-Birthright often looks for less-Jewish participants, since those are the Jews who are most in need of education via a trip to

Israel. However, if the program's underlying private goal is to have those Jews come home and vote in ways that benefit Israel, this study shows that there is no major payoff. The two most common explanations given for unaffected behavior was that Israel has support from both sides of the aisle, regardless of whose running for president, and that domestic issues are simply more important than U.S.-Israeli relations.

Ultimately, this study is just a starting point for determining how Taglit-Birthright affects the U.S. political environment. The organization itself is still just 13 years old and growing. As these trips become more common and slowly start to become a major part of American Jewish identity, the political effects — especially regarding behavior — may very well grow. Recently, U.S.-Israeli relations are not as tightly bound and unconditional as they were a few decades ago. At times, even though the United States supports Israel's right to defend itself, many politicians are critical of Israel's occupation of the West Bank and Gaza Strip and are growing impatient with Israel's hesitance to consider diplomatic solutions with its neighbors. What happens if diplomatic relations between the United States and Israel only become more strained in the coming years? There were a number of subjects in this study that indicated that if a politician running in a presidential election was openly anti-Israel, they would not vote for such a candidate. Today, such a condition has not occurred, but in the future, the possibility of that condition would clearly affect political behavior among American Jews. And American Jews who have been on a Taglit-Birthright trip to Israel may be more likely to act on such a condition. So, who

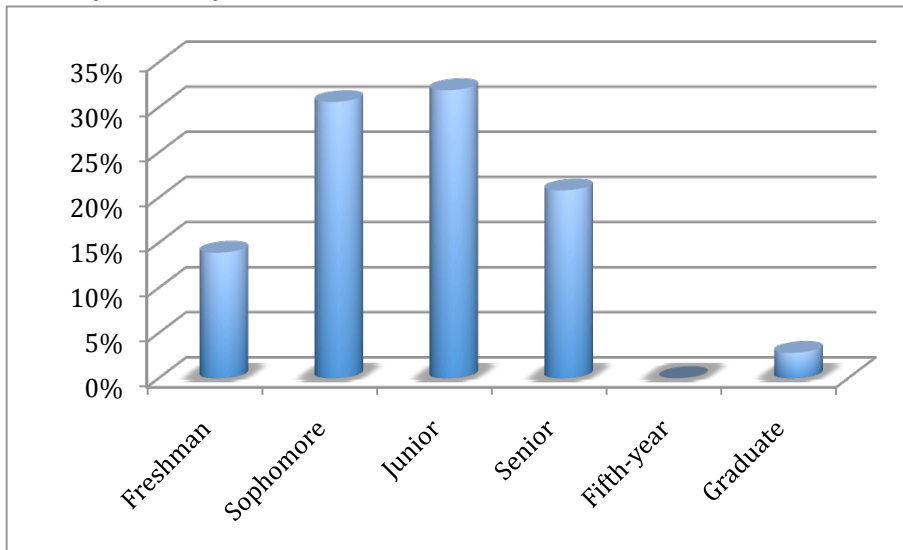
knows if or when the political effects of Taglit-Birthright will actually come to fruition?

Appendix

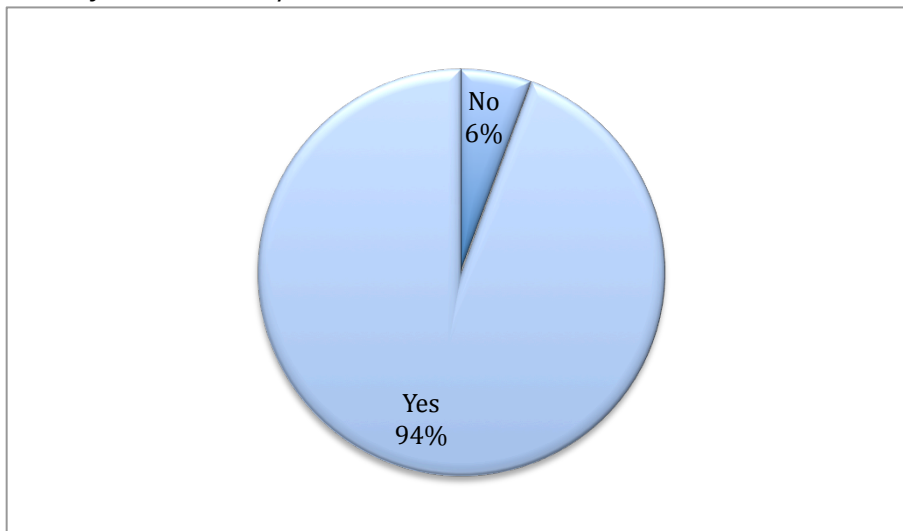
Below is the overall survey data. Seventy-two survey responses were collected, though not all subjects completed it in its entirety. Open-ended questions are listed here, but they are not charted.

ID questions:

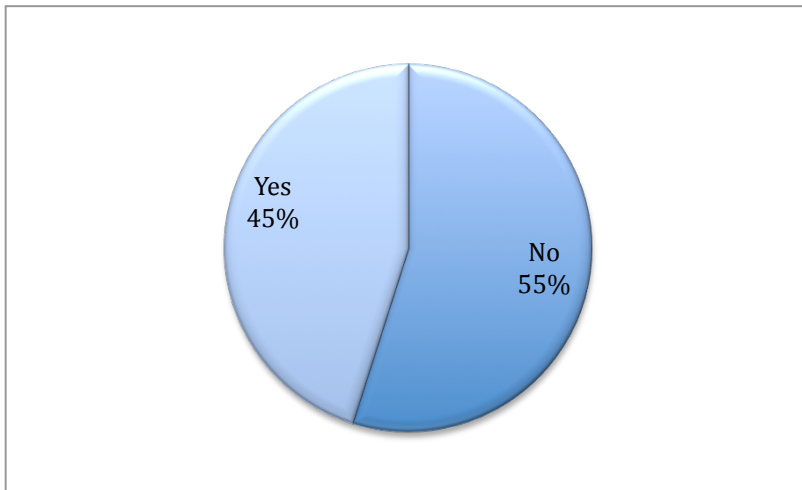
1. What year are you in at U of M?



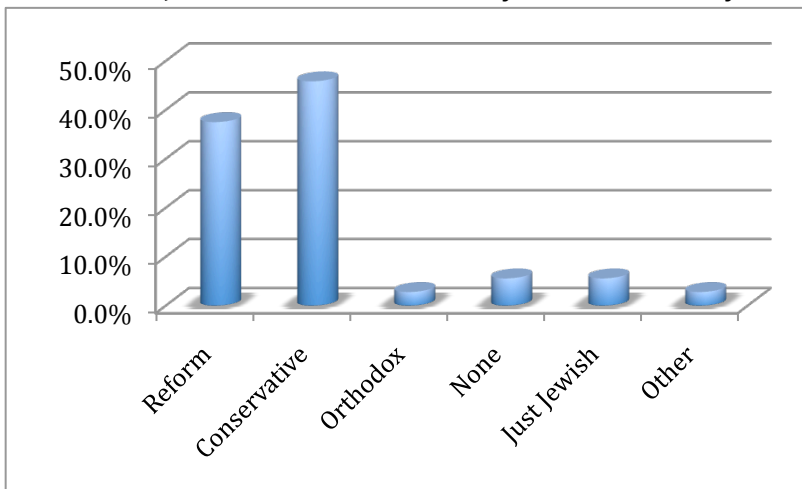
2. Have you had a Bar/Bat Mitzvah?



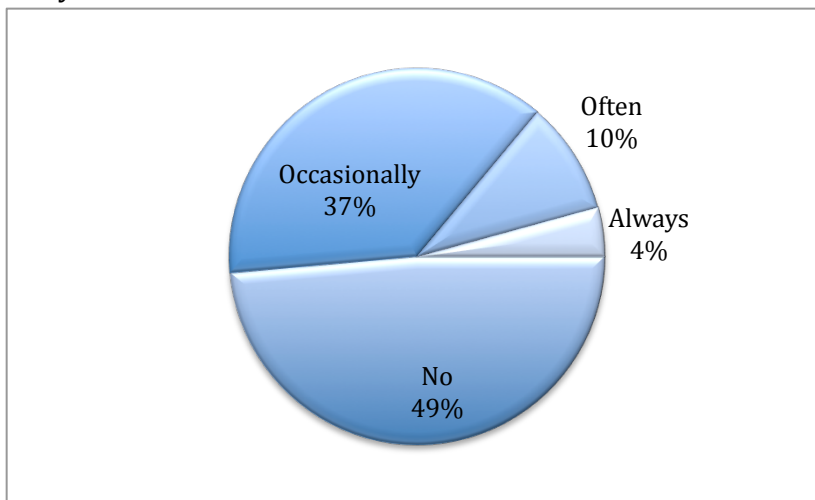
3. Have you been confirmed?



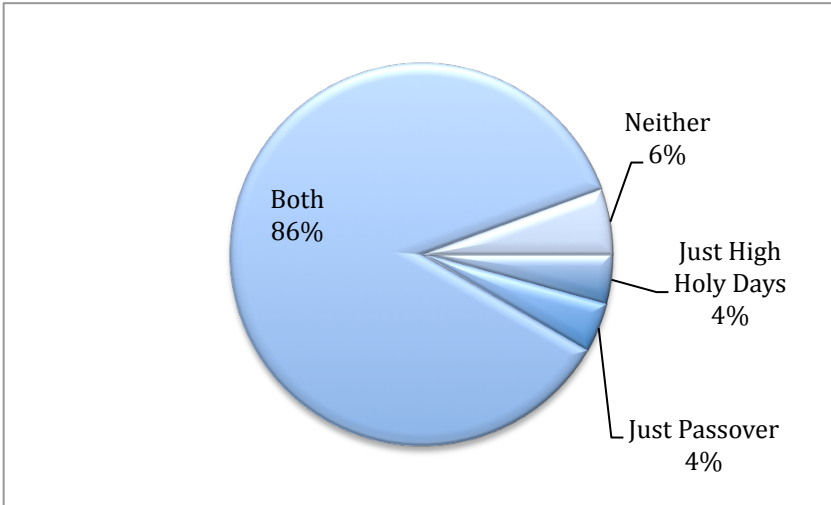
4. With which Jewish denomination do you most identify?



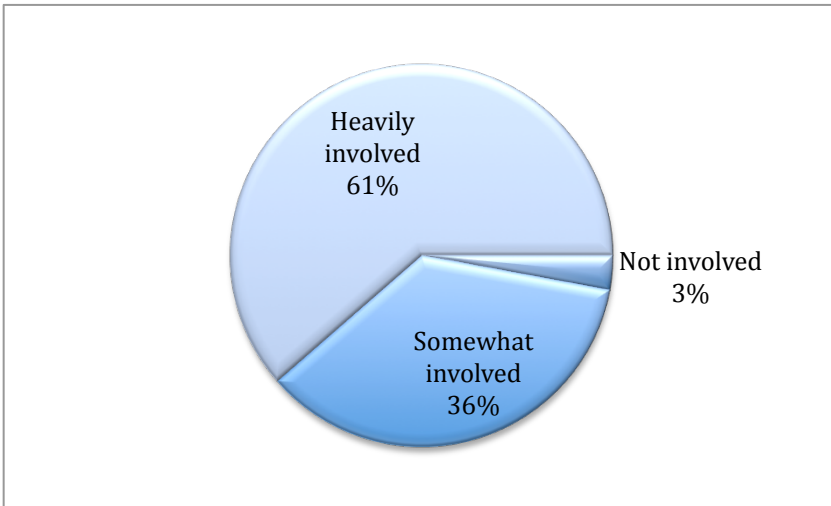
5. Do you observe Shabbat?



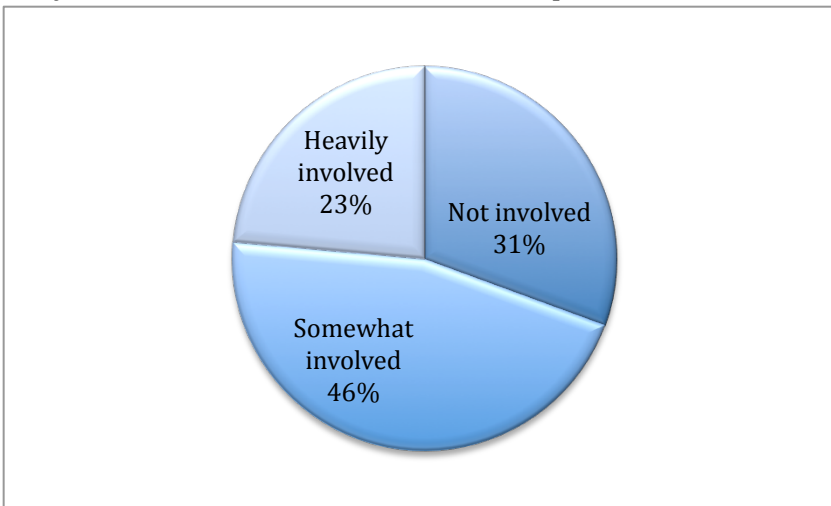
6. Do you observe the High Holy Days and/or Passover?



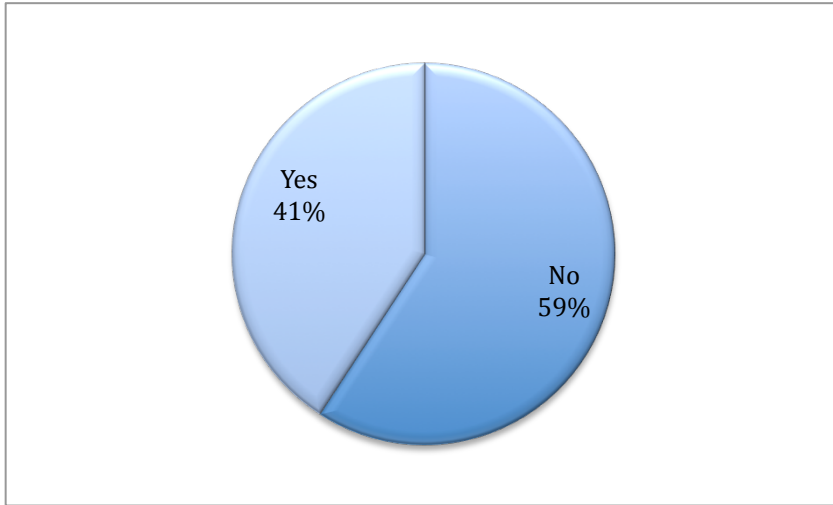
7. How involved have your parents been in your Jewish upbringing?



8. Are you involved with Jewish life on campus?



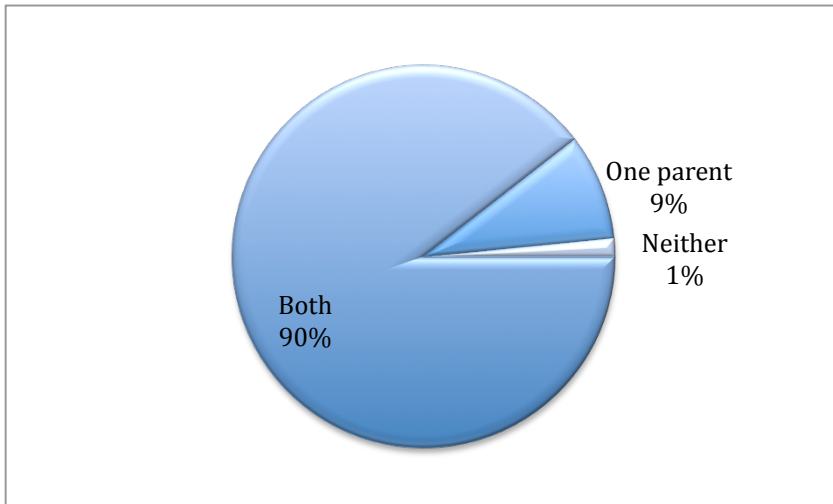
9. Have you been on a Taglit-Birthright trip to Israel (or another organized trip)?



10. Please provide your Michigan uninqname.

Jewish upbringing

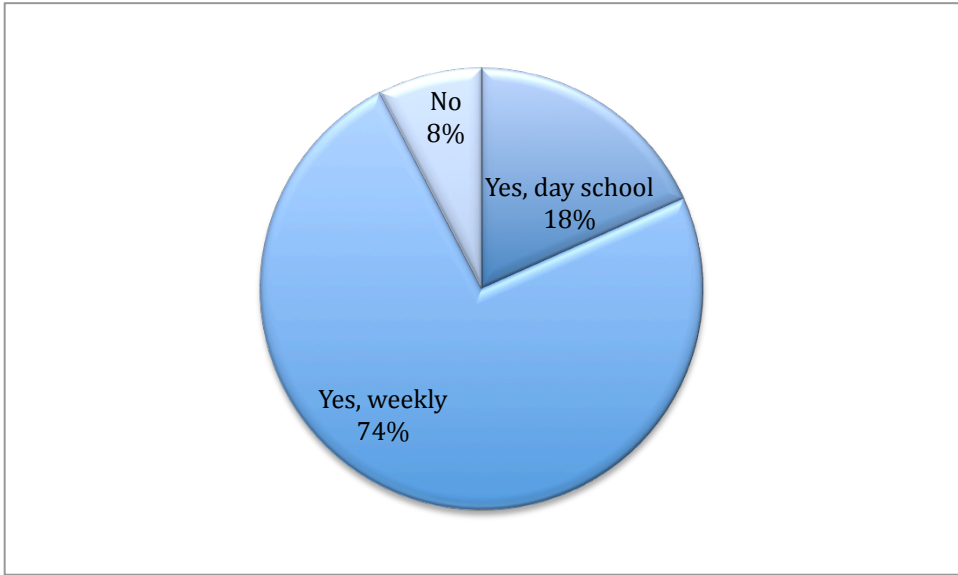
11. Are your parents Jewish?



12. How did you and your family observe Shabbat, if at all?

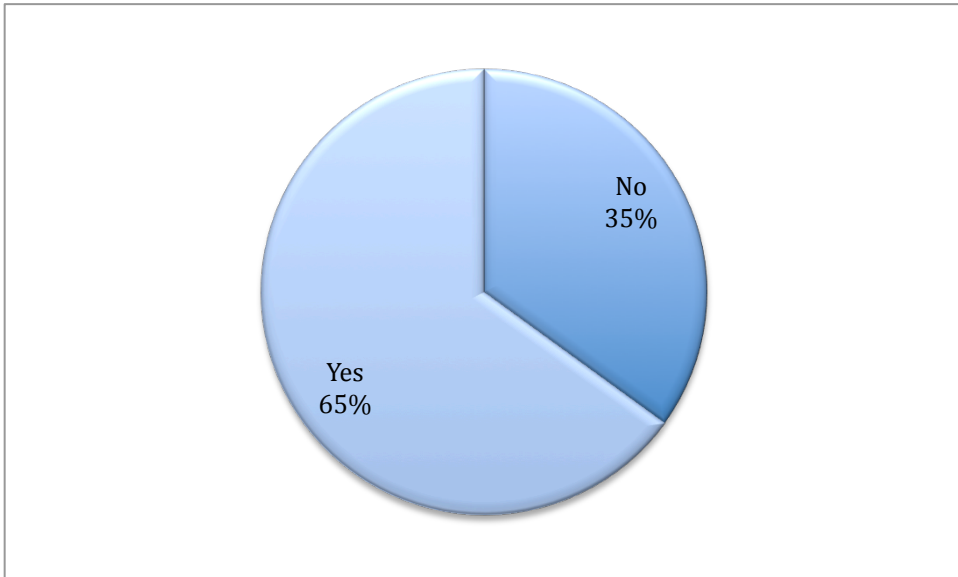
13. How did you and your family observe holidays like Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur, and Passover, if at all?

14. Did you attend Hebrew school growing up?



Jewish upbringing, continued (if answer to 14 was no, 15-18 were skipped)

15. Did you continue with your Hebrew education after the age of Bar/Bat Mitzvah?



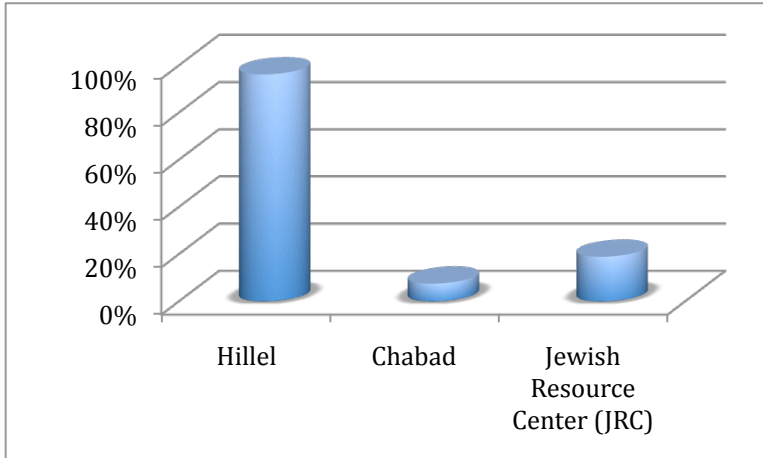
16. Was the continuation/discontinuation of your Hebrew education a personal choice or did your parents influence your decision? Please explain.

17. In Hebrew School, to what extent did you discuss topics related to Zionism? Please explain.

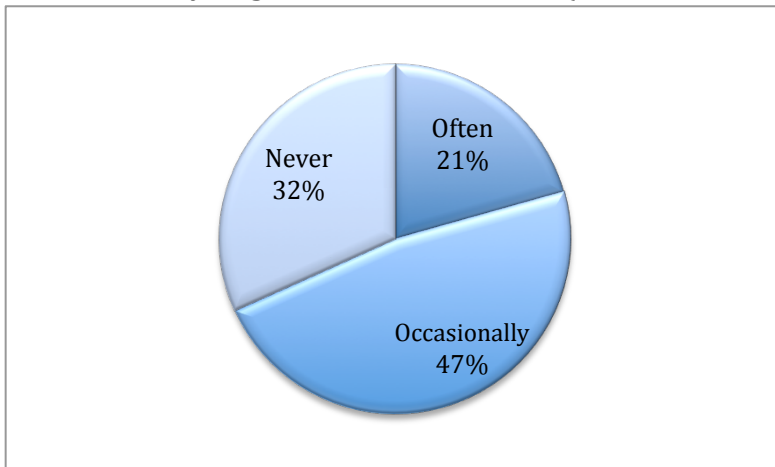
18. Did Hebrew School play a role in the development of your political beliefs? If so, how?

Jewish Social Life

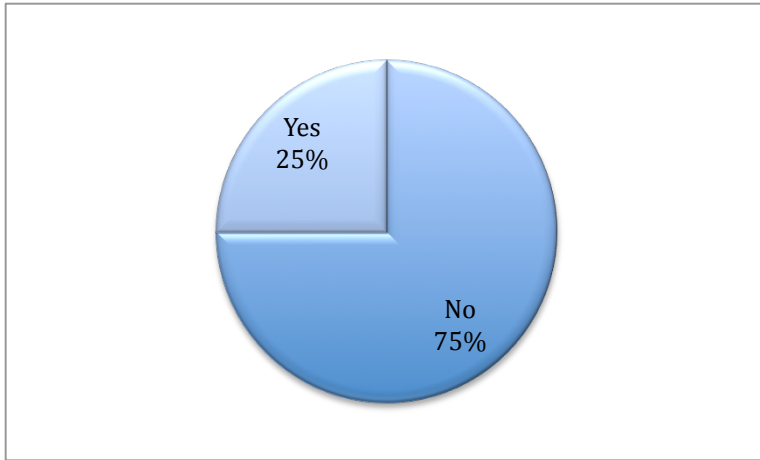
19. Which are you registered with on campus? (Check all that apply.)



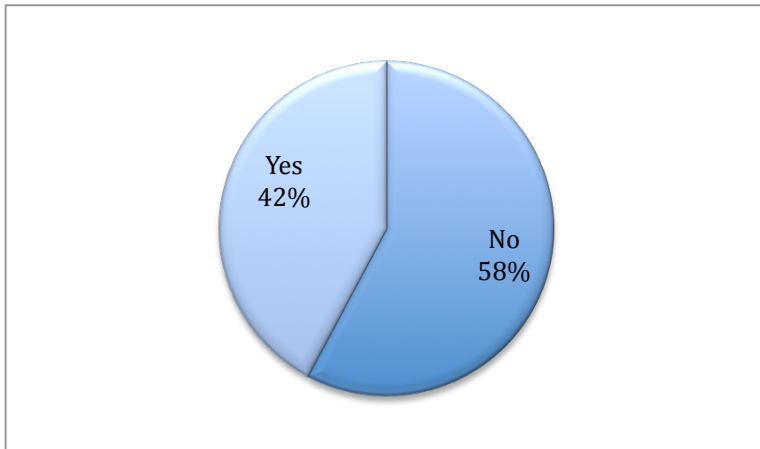
20. How often do you go to Hillel or Chabad? (And for what occasions?)



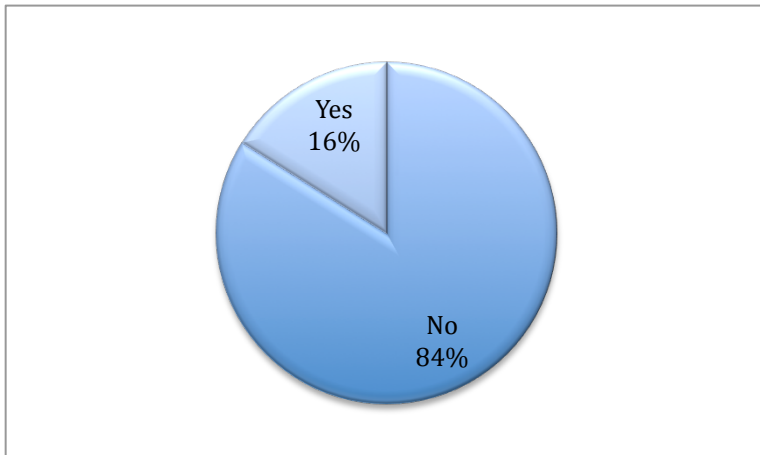
21. Are you in a social fraternity or sorority with a Jewish affiliation or a primarily Jewish membership?



22. Does associating with other Jews on campus affect your religious views/practices in any way?

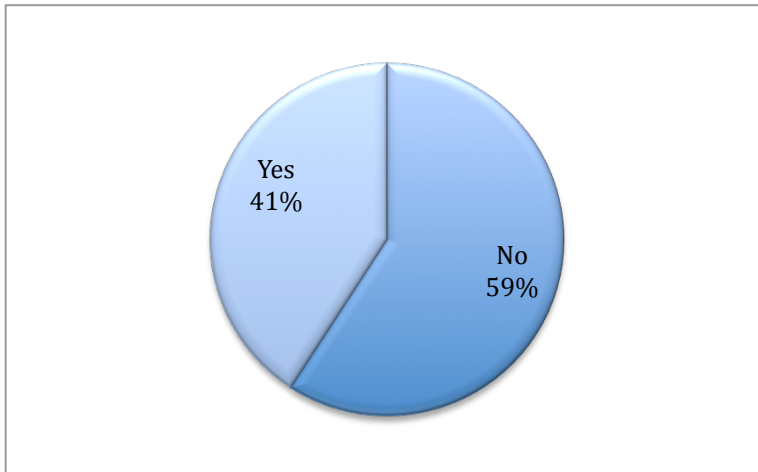


23. How about your political views?



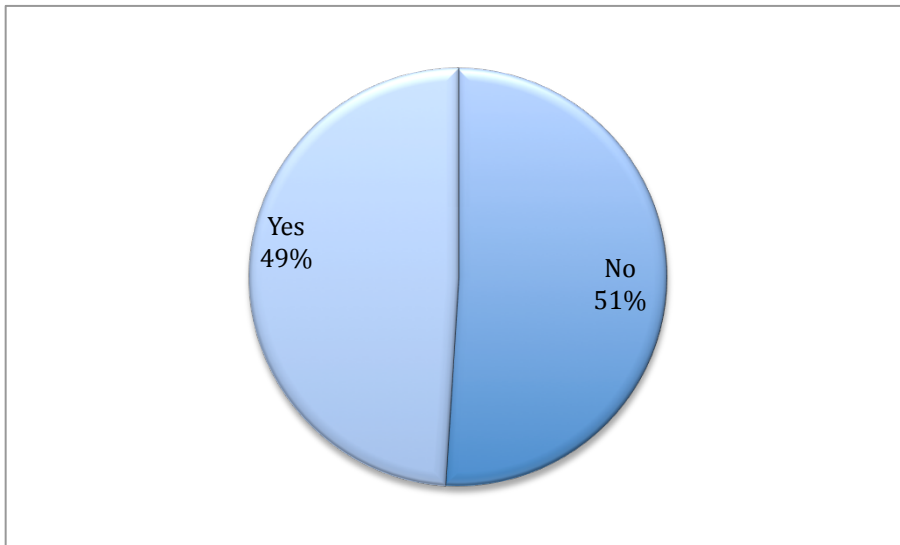
Israel

24. Have you ever been to Israel?



Israel, continued (if answer to 24 was no, this page was skipped)

25. Was the trip organized by Taglit-Birthright?



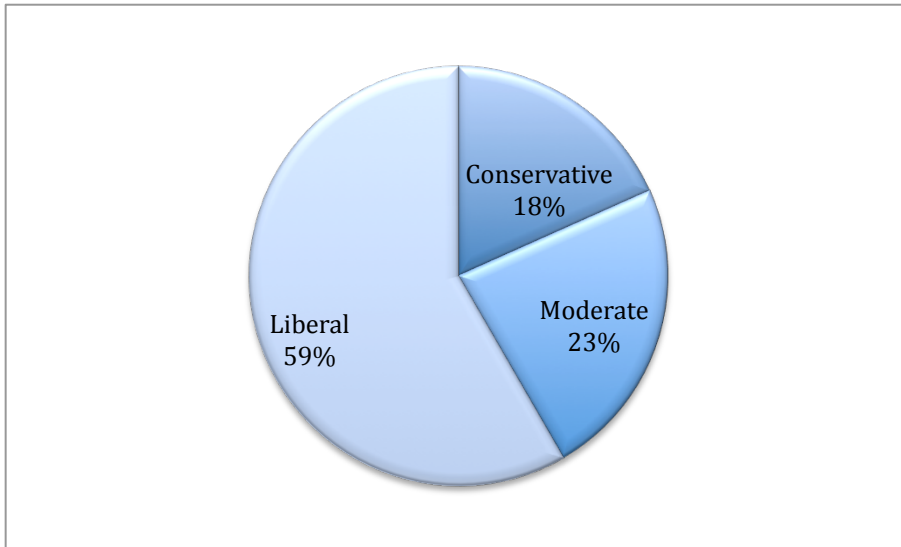
26. *Did the trip affect your commitment to Judaism in any way? If so, how?*

27. *Do you practice your Judaism in different ways since the trip? (Go to temple more often or less often, observe holidays you previously did not, etc.)*

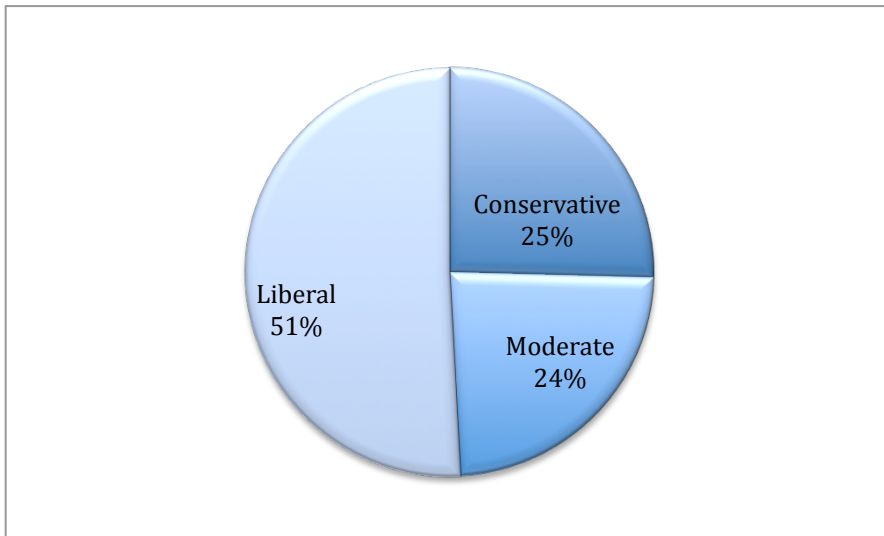
28. *How has the trip affected how connected you feel to the state of Israel?*

Political attitude/behavior, parents

29. How would you describe your mother's political stance?

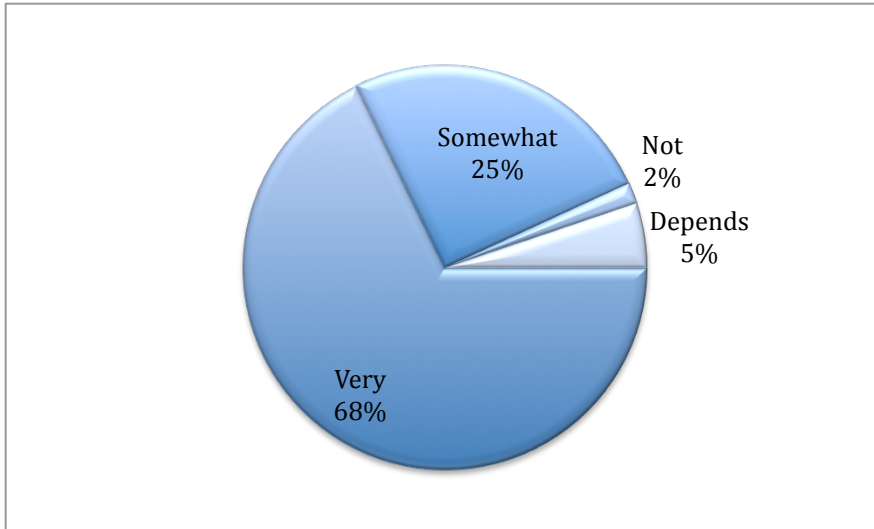


30. How would you describe your father's political stance?



31. Does their Judaism play a role in their political views, and if yes, how so?

32. How supportive are your parents of the state of Israel in times of conflict in the Middle East? (Please explain.)



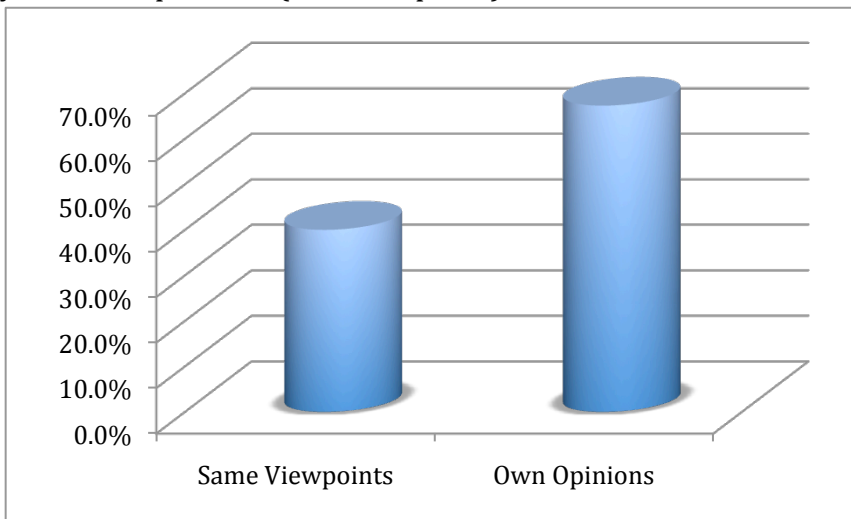
33. Do your parents consider U.S. support of Israel to be a minor or major political issue?

34. Do your parents' views on Israel affect their overall stance (i.e. — are they more conservative/liberal overall because of their views on Israel?) Please explain.

35. Do your parents' views on Israel affect their vote in national elections? If so, how?

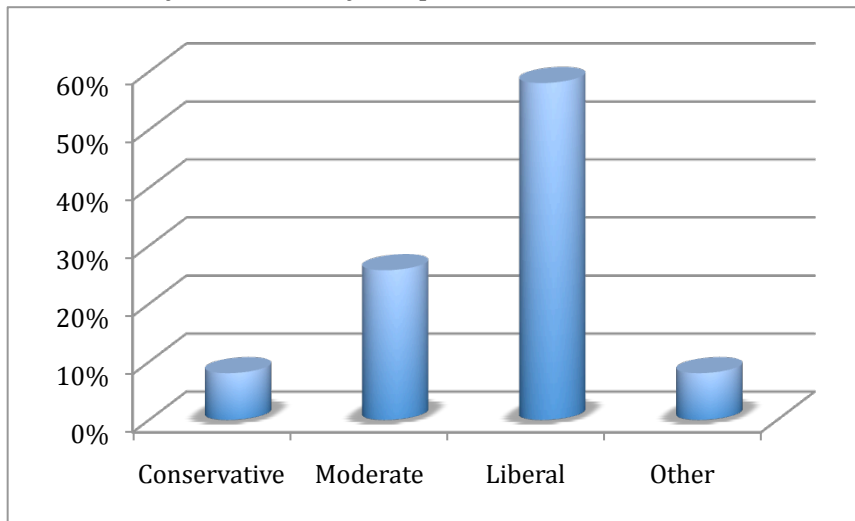
36. Why do you think Israel is important/unimportant to them when it comes to voting in national elections?

37. When your parents voice these opinions to you (concerning Israel), do they encourage you to support the same viewpoints or do they encourage you to form your own opinions? (Please explain.)



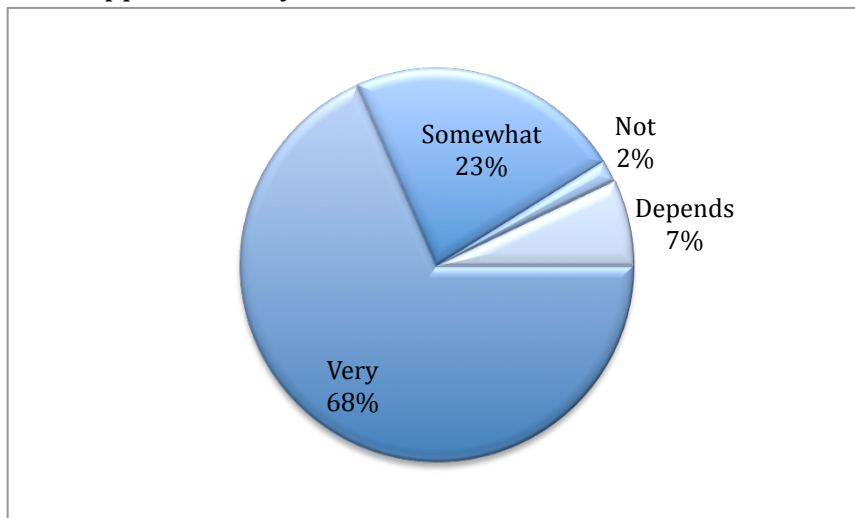
Political attitude/behavior, subject

38. How would you describe your political stance?



39. Does Judaism play a role in your political views? If so, how?

40. How supportive are you of Israel in times of conflict in the Middle East?



41. Do you consider U.S. support of Israel to be a minor or major political issue?

42. Do your views on Israel affect your overall political stance (i.e. — are you more conservative/liberal overall because of your views on Israel?) Please explain.

43. Do your views on Israel affect your vote in national elections? If so, how?

44. Why is Israel important/unimportant to you when it comes to voting in national elections?

45. If you have been to Israel, have you altered your political views based on information you learned on the trip, or based on a personal reaction from the trip? If so, how?

46. Are you more or less inclined to vote for a particular party in national elections because of your views on Israel since the trip? Why?

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