Israel and American Jewish Philanthropy

Gary A. Tobin, Director
Cohen Center for
Modern Jewish Studies
Brandeis University

Policy and Planning Paper 5
Fall 1990
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Cohen Center for Modern Jewish Studies
Brandeis University
Waltham, MA 02254-9110

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I would also like to thank Robert I. Evans, National Campaign Director, State of Israel Bonds, who first asked me to address the issues in this report at the City Director’s Conference of the Israel Bonds Organization.

Introduction

Donating money to support Israel has been a cornerstone of American Jewish philanthropy for decades. In many ways American Jewish support for Israel has been reflexive. Jews who witnessed the horrors of the Holocaust and the miracle of Israel’s birth developed deep and strong emotional ties to Israel. First and second generation Jews are linked to Israel as birthing partners, bonded by a difficult and yet exultant history. Their philanthropic behavior toward Israel is rooted in tragedy and redemption.

American Jews express their support for Israel in many ways. Jewish organizations are active advocates for Israel. Many Jews buy State of Israel Bonds, visit Israel, and support elected officials who are sympathetic to Israel. Most Jews also donate money to organizations to send funds to Israel. Indeed, a sophisticated and efficient fund raising apparatus has been developed to organize Jewish philanthropy on behalf of Israel.

The Holocaust and birth of Israel, however, are much more distant historical events for younger Jews. Third, fourth, and fifth generation Jews now comprise a large majority of American Jewry. Their attitudes, and therefore philanthropic behaviors, are influenced by a different history. The war in Lebanon, the intifada, and the “Who is a Jew?” issue can be as salient to younger Jews as the birth of Israel. Their support for Israel is high, but not as reflexive as that of older Jews, and cannot be taken for granted. Their philanthropic support requires more nurturing, care, and education. Among these younger, more Americanized Jews basic good feelings for Israel are present, but building on these feelings and translating them into financial support for Israel can be a greater challenge.
It is also a challenge to keep those who are already most supportive of Israel at high levels of commitment and involvement. Their support for Israel is critical. The largest contributors to Israel often hold positions of influence in Jewish organizations. They help form public opinion through the media, have access to elected officials, and provide a large proportion of the funds for Israel. While their support is extremely strong, it cannot be assumed to be unequivocal any longer. American Jewish philanthropic leadership needs to be reassured and nurtured as much as less committed groups of Jews.

This report analyzes data from several recent quantitative and qualitative studies and focuses on the relationship between American Jewish attachment to Israel and Jewish giving. It utilizes quantitative data from several Jewish demographic studies which were conducted in the mid to late 1980s. It also draws on personal interviews and focus group research among American Jewish leadership and other groups of Jews during 1988-1989. In addition, the report also utilizes recent studies of American Jewish attitudes toward Israel. This combination of quantitative and qualitative data provides a rich source of information about American Jews and their relationship to Israel. It examines how they feel about Israel and efforts to support the Jewish state financially and otherwise, their experiences with visiting Israel, and the relationship between their attitudes, experiences and philanthropic behavior. A special emphasis is placed upon the attitudes of large donors to organizations that support Israel. Together, the data provide some guidelines which will assist Jewish communal organizations to strengthen American Jewish financial support for Israel.

This report will begin by looking at some preliminary background research about attachment to Israel. It will then analyze quantitative data from recent demographic studies about

Methodology

The data for this report were drawn from a variety of sources. The background material on attachment to Israel was taken from Steven M. Cohen’s 1989 survey of American Jewish attitudes toward Israel and Israelis. This research was done in 1989 and published by the American Jewish Committee.¹

The second primary source of data for this analysis is comprised of a variety of demographic studies completed in local Jewish communities in the United States in the late 1980s. These include Cleveland, Dallas, Essex and Morris Counties (New Jersey), Rhode Island, and San Francisco. The communities were selected as representative of the different regions of the United States and also represent Jewish communities of various sizes. The smallest community studied is Rhode Island, with

approximately 20,000 Jews, and the largest is San Francisco, with well over 200,000 Jews. These communities also vary by demographic configurations, as well as by the religious identity and organizational behaviors of the Jewish population.²

The third primary source of data for this report is a series of personal interviews and focus groups. The personal interviews have been conducted under the auspices of the Cohen Center for Modern Jewish Studies for a variety of research projects concerning philanthropy and volunteerism. The focus groups have been sponsored by individual Jewish federations in Essex and Morris Counties (New Jersey), Dallas, South Broward (Florida), and San Francisco. Approximately twenty focus groups and thirty personal interviews were conducted.

The focus groups are structured interviews with groups of approximately eight to twelve individuals who have common demographic and behavioral characteristics. The focus group research explored reasons for Jewish giving, attitudes toward

²Each of these studies was sponsored by the Jewish Federation in the local community, and a variety of scholars have participated in this research, including Calvin Goldscheider, Sidney Goldstein, Gary Tobin, and others. A full listing of reports cited is found in the Bibliography. Data from these studies have been recalculated at the Cohen Center for Modern Jewish Studies and are presented here for the first time, in many cases. Percentages have been rounded, and therefore may not always sum to 100%. The sampling method in each of these studies included random digit dialing producing representative samples of the Jewish populations in these communities. Telephone interviews were the primary form of data collection. Sample sizes in the individual studies range from approximately 900 to over 2500. Full methodological notes can be found in each of the individual studies.

The table on visits to Israel cites a large number of demographic studies. The methodologies for these individual studies can be found in the study reports. This essay also refers to the National Jewish Population Study conducted under the auspices of the Council of Jewish Federations in 1971.

Israel, and how Jewish organizations could be more effective in promoting Jewish philanthropy. This qualitative research adds a great deal of depth to the large-scale quantitative studies that are cited earlier in the report.

The focus group research was designed to help Jewish organizations develop ways to keep leadership involvement and to recruit new leadership. The scripts were devised to test hypotheses about philanthropic and organizational behavior. The research was designed to help Jewish organizations increase contributions and volunteerism for local Jewish philanthropies as well as support for Israel. The focus groups were segmented by age, geography, giving level, and organizational involvement. Many of the focus groups were structured to interview leadership in Jewish organizations, major donors to Jewish philanthropies, and those with high levels of volunteerism for Jewish organizations.

Attachment to Israel

Understanding the relationship between American Jewish attitudes toward Israel and giving patterns requires some understanding of American Jewish attachment to Israel. Current research provides some important background information about American Jewish attitudes toward Israel and various levels of emotional and personal views about Israel.

Current studies demonstrate a number of important aspects about American Jewish attachment to Israel. First, levels
of attachment remain high for most Jews in America. The proportion of Jews who feel that Israel is an important part of being Jewish is indicative of the central role Israel continues to play in Jewish identity. For example, studies show that almost three out of every four Jews surveyed in 1989 stated that caring about Israel is a very important part of their being Jewish. Only 15% disagreed with this statement, while 13% were not sure (see Table 1). Furthermore, these figures have not changed substantially since 1983. About two out of every three Jews in 1989 agreed with the statement: “If Israel were destroyed I would feel as if I had suffered one of the greatest personal tragedies in my life.” About 17% disagreed with this statement, and 18% were not sure.3

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Not Sure</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1989</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1988</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1986</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1983</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


There has been some change over time in this particular factor since 1981, which may be partially due to changes in sampling technique. In that survey year, 83% agreed with the statement:

“If Israel were destroyed I would feel as if I had suffered one of the greatest personal tragedies in my life,” and 5% were not sure (see Table 2). There has not been a very noticeable change since 1981 in the proportion of those who disagree with this statement. The real shift has been in those who aren’t sure. These figures reflect some growing discomfort, as will be shown later in the qualitative data, with certain Israeli government policies rather than a lack of support for the State of Israel.

Despite some assertions in the press and elsewhere about the impact of widely publicized events in Israel and the supposed distance developing between the American Jewish community and Israel, other data from Steven M. Cohen’s studies do not support these conclusions. Only 9% of the respondents surveyed in 1989 agreed with the statement: “I am sometimes uncomfortable about identifying myself as a supporter of Israel.” These figures have not changed at all since 1983. While more than three out of every five Jews agreed that they are “often

Table 2*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Not Sure</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1989</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1988</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1986</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1983</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1981</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


troubled by policies of the current Israeli government,” only 13% agree that “because of the recent violence I feel less warmly about Israel than I used to.” Eighty-two percent agreed with the statement that even when they disagreed with the actions of the Israeli government, “that doesn’t change how close I feel with Israel.”

Attachment to Israel can be shown in other ways as well. Sixty percent of the sample in Cohen’s study indicated that they often talked about Israel with friends and relatives. Furthermore, about 75% said that they paid special attention to articles about Israel when reading newspapers and magazines. This number has decreased since 1983, when 92% said they paid special attention. Again, Cohen’s sampling techniques changed during this period, which may account for some of the difference. However, Jews may tend to avoid the glut of extremely negative articles about Israel in newspapers and magazines over the past two years. Some Jews may tend to ignore what they perceive to be biased reporting and avoid reading a barrage of bad news.

Taken together, these figures are indicative of strong support for Israel among American Jews. Personal feelings may change, but caring about Israel is still important to the Jewish identity of the vast majority of American Jews. The data also indicate that while American Jews may disagree with certain Israeli government policies, this disagreement does not necessarily generate less support for Israel. American Jewish criticism of Israel’s government therefore should not be interpreted as a lack of support for Israel. To infer that criticism of the Israeli government signifies a lack of support for Israel is almost certainly a misreading of the mood of the majority of American Jews.

Certain events in Israel or certain Israeli government policies may create some uncertainty on the part of American Jews about how to support Israel, how to express their support, and the way they express themselves about Israel. But the data from Cohen’s studies show that support remains high among most American Jews and that attachment remains deep for the vast majority of American Jews. In interpreting the variables that do change, a variety of factors may be at work. But overall there is little indication that the core support for Israel is diminishing to any great degree. Of course, there are differences by subgroups, particularly, as one might guess, between different age and generational groups. These differences are explored more carefully in the next section.

New Demographic Studies

The data in this section come from a number of demographic studies conducted in the late 1980s. Information is drawn from a variety of questions about attitudes toward Israel. Some communities asked the same questions, while others asked questions that were not replicated in any other communities. These data are suggestive of trends likely to be occurring in many Jewish communities throughout the United States. They cannot be interpreted as definitive representations of all Jews in all communities. They do reveal a great deal about attitudes toward Israel and can be used to interpret the changing feelings of American Jews toward Israel.

---

Attitudes Toward Israel Change by Age, Generation, and Other Jewish Involvements

The effects of age differences can be seen in responses to the question, “How important is the State of Israel in your life?” which was asked in the 1987 Rhode Island Jewish community’s demographic study. Younger respondents were much more likely to indicate that Israel was “not very” or “not at all important” in their lives than were their older counterparts. While around 21% of those over the age of 65 said that Israel was not very or not at all important in their lives, the figure rises to about 32% for those ages 35 to 55, and almost 50% for those under the age of 35 (see Figure 1). Similar results were found in generational differences in Rhode Island (see Figure 2). Thus, while overall levels of support remain strong, they are definitely weakening among younger Jews and third and fourth-generation Jews.

Figure 1
Importance of Israel in Your Life
Percentages Responding “Not Very” or “Not at All” in Rhode Island, by Age

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age Group</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>65+</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>55-64</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45-54</td>
<td>32%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35-44</td>
<td>31%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25-34</td>
<td>49%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18-24</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

■ “Not Very” or “Not at All” Important

Figure 2
Importance of Israel in Your Life
Percentages Responding “Not Very” or “Not at All” in Rhode Island, by Generation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Generation</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>First</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Second</td>
<td>24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Third</td>
<td>34%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fourth</td>
<td>46%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

■ “Not Very” or “Not at All” Important
Israel and American Jewish Philanthropy

However, other studies in several communities as diverse as San Francisco and Dallas show that when Jews were asked whether they would favor sending U.S. troops to protect Israel's security, neither youth nor Americanization appears to influence American Jewish attitudes in the manner we described above (see Table 3 and Table 4). Younger and third and fourth-generation Jews support sending U.S. troops to Israel as much as first or second-generation Jews. This statement, which constitutes a strong measure of support for Israel, shows that security issues, which touch on most basic forms of support for Israel, find younger age Jews and third or fourth-generation Jews as strongly supportive as middle-aged Jews and those of the first and second generation. Indeed, the group most disapproving of sending troops are Dallas Jews over age 65 (34%). If Israel's security is actually threatened, many Jews who now seem distant or critical may become more supportive. Ultimately, Israel's security is of paramount importance to very high proportions of the Jewish population.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dallas</th>
<th>18-24</th>
<th>25-34</th>
<th>35-44</th>
<th>45-54</th>
<th>55-64</th>
<th>65+</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Strongly approve</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Approve</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disapprove</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly disapprove</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3
Sending Troops to Israel for Security
Percentages by Age

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dallas</th>
<th>Generation</th>
<th>First</th>
<th>Second</th>
<th>Third</th>
<th>Fourth</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Strongly approve</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Approve</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disapprove</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly disapprove</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4
Sending Troops to Israel for Security
Percentages by Generation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dallas</th>
<th>Generation</th>
<th>First</th>
<th>Second</th>
<th>Third</th>
<th>Fourth</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Strongly approve</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Approve</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disapprove</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly disapprove</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Attitudes toward donating money to Israel are also related to generation. In Essex and Morris Counties, New Jersey, for example, 47% of first-generation Jews say that financial support of Israel is very important to them. This drops to 41% for second-generation Jews, and only 24% of third and fourth-generation Jews (see Table 5). Third or fourth-generation Jews were more than twice as likely to say that money could be used better elsewhere than were first-generation Jews. While this increase is not very large, it does indicate levels of weakening support among third and fourth-generation Jews for donating money to Israel.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Feelings</th>
<th>First Generation</th>
<th>Second Generation</th>
<th>Third &amp; Forth Generation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Very important</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moderately important</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opposed</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Money used better</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

While security continues to be paramount, no clear relationship exists in the minds of many U.S. Jews between security and Israel-related philanthropy. Sending money to Israel and supporting those organizations that send money to Israel weakens with each successive generation. While 47% of all Jews in Dallas strongly approve of supporting organizations that send money to Israel, the figure drops to 38% for second-generation Jews, 31% for third-generation Jews, and 20% for fourth-generation Jews. Similar results were found in San Francisco (see Figure 3). Weakening support is also manifested when we look at the impact of age, where the proportion of Jews who strongly support organizations that send money to Israel declines substantially from those over the age of 65 in Dallas to those under the age of 65 (see Table 6).

![Figure 3](image)

**Table 5**

Importance of Donating Money to Israel Percentages in Essex-Morris Counties by Generation

**Table 6**

Support Organizations Sending Money to Israel Percentages by Age
Positive feelings about Israel do not always translate into behavioral support for Israel. Thus, while high proportions of Jews may strongly support Israel's right to exist, expect to feel a sense of tragedy if Israel were destroyed, or feel proud of Israel's accomplishments, they may not necessarily support Jewish political or fundraising activity on behalf of Israel.

Synagogue Membership, Denomination, and Support for Israel

The strong association between organizational and institutional involvement and attitudes toward organizations which give money to Israel is also shown in Table 7. Those who belong to a synagogue are more supportive of Israel. Thirty-nine percent of those who belong to a synagogue say that financial support of Israel is very important to them, compared to 22% of those who do not belong to a synagogue. While only 8% of those who belong to a synagogue say monies raised should be used for purposes other than Israel, 22% of non-members indicate money could be used better elsewhere.

Positive support for Israel is associated not only with synagogue membership but other measures of Jewish identity as well. For example, 63% of those who identify themselves as Orthodox indicate that donating money to Israel is very important to them (see Table 8). This compares with 37% of Conservative Jews, 25% of Reform Jews, and 20% of those who identify themselves as Just Jewish. Relatively small proportions of the Jewish population say the money is better-used elsewhere: virtually no Orthodox Jews agreed with this statement, and only 10% of Conservative Jews, 13% of Reform Jews, and 25% of those who identify themselves as Just Jewish.

Younger Jews are less supportive of Israel in some ways, but they are receptive to having their children learn more about Israel. For example, Jewish education about Israel is seen as a very important by 72% of the Jews in Rhode Island, and somewhat important by 24%, a total of 96%. Having
Table 9
Importance of Israel in Jewish Education
Percentages in Rhode Island

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Degree of importance</th>
<th>Generation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>First</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somewhat</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not at all</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Israel as a component in Jewish education is valued by Jews regardless of generation. Thus, 80% of first generation Jews in Rhode Island indicate that in terms of Jewish education, Israel is very important, while almost seven of every ten (69%) fourth-generation Jews say that Israel is very important for Jewish education (see Table 9). Similarly, only about 3% of the Jews in Dallas say that developing strong feelings for Israel is a very \textit{unimportant} goal for Jewish education curricula. These figures are consistent for all age groups, although as in Rhode Island, about one in ten fourth-generation Jews indicate that developing strong feelings for Israel is a very \textit{unimportant} goal for Jewish education.

The importance of Israel in Jewish education gives some guidance for policy. While attitudes and feelings toward Israel may be changing for the younger generations and those in younger age groups, they are clearly receptive to the idea of their children having more Jewish education about Israel. We may speculate that they themselves are open to learning more about Israel as well, although the data do not specifically explore that question. Therefore, inadequate knowledge or negative attitudes about Israel may be approached through increased education about Israel. Education about Israel may be the key to changing attitudes. Clearly, educational possibilities in this area should be explored as a way of enhancing support for Israel among younger Jews, defined either by generation or age.

Visits to Israel

Visits to Israel provide an important indicator of American Jewish attachment to and involvement with the Jewish State. American Jewish visits to Israel are obviously facilitated by increased Jewish affluence and a general increase in overseas tourism. However, even accounting for these factors, the fact remains that Jews choose Israel as a primary place to visit. Therefore, even increased ability to visit Israel would not necessarily result in large numbers of Jews visiting Israel without some predilection to spend time in the Jewish State.

Visiting Israel is in itself a strong statement on the part of American Jewry about its support for Israel. The growing numbers of Jews who have visited Israel serve as a concrete demonstration of strong emotional ties. The proportion of Jews who have visited Israel varies by community. Studies done throughout the 1980s show much higher proportions of Jews having visited Israel than had been the case in 1971.
Depending on the community, between approximately 27% and 46% of Jewish households have someone in them who has visited Israel at least once. This figure is noticeably higher than the modest levels recorded in 1970 when, according to the National Jewish Population Study, only 16% of American Jews had visited Israel (see Figure 4).

Furthermore, studies also show that large numbers of Jews say they intend to visit Israel in the future. Steven M. Cohen’s study indicates, for example, that three of every five Jews say that they intend to visit Israel in the future; additionally, one out of five says that s/he intends to visit Israel in the next three years. Of course, there may be some normative response in these findings: individuals may say that they intend to visit Israel because they feel that they ought to say so. But this pattern of increased travel has developed over the past twenty years. Therefore, even if normative responses are discounted, it should be expected that ever increasing proportions of Jews will visit Israel at least one time. It is likely that within the next ten years as many as 50% or more of American Jewish households will have someone in them who has visited Israel at least once. These figures can be strongly influenced by organizational and institutional programs both in the United States and Israel.

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Visits to Israel and Giving to Jewish Philanthropies

Having visited Israel is indeed highly associated with giving to Jewish philanthropies. While about nine out of ten Essex-Morris County, NJ Jews who have visited Israel make a contribution to a Jewish philanthropy, about seven in ten of those who have not visited Israel make contributions. A similar pattern exists in Rhode Island where 91% of those who have visited contribute, versus 78% of those who have not visited Israel, in Dallas 79% versus 61%, and in San Francisco, 75% versus 49% (see Figure 5). While it is true that an impressive percentage of American Jews who have never visited Israel contribute to Jewish philanthropies, it is nevertheless clear that the association between visiting Israel and giving to Jewish philanthropies is strong. Encouraging an individual to visit Israel may result in increased contributions to Jewish philanthropies, regardless of levels of identity or commitment to Jewish philanthropies at the outset.

Not only is giving itself connected to visiting Israel, but so is the amount given. The amounts contributed to Jewish philanthropy are also strongly related to visits to Israel. About two-thirds of the $1000 plus contributors in Rhode Island have been to Israel, as have 69% of those in Essex-Morris Counties, New Jersey; 64% in Dallas and 86% in San Francisco (see Table 10). The lower the contribution level, the lower the proportion who have visited Israel.
Of course, travel and income levels are also associated. But studies done by Rimor and Tobin\textsuperscript{7} show that when controlling for income, visiting Israel was one of the best predictors both for giving and for the amount given to Jewish philanthropies.

**Attitudes Toward Israel and Jewish Philanthropies**

Positive attitudes toward giving money to Israel are associated with high levels of participation for any Jewish philanthropies, including Jewish philanthropies which fund local and national American Jewish causes. For example, data from Essex-Morris Counties, NJ show that one in three Jews indicated that giving money to Israel was very important, 95% of whom made a contribution to some Jewish philanthropy (see Table 11). About half of the Jews in Essex-Morris Counties indicated that giving money to Israel was somewhat important, 80% of whom contributed. Almost half of the 14% of Essex-Morris Counties Jews who believed money could be used better elsewhere, contributed to Jewish a philanthropy.


\textbf{Table 11}

\textbf{Importance of Donating Money to Israel by Actually Making Jewish Contributions Percentages in Essex-Morris Counties, NJ}

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Feelings</th>
<th>All Essex-Morris Counties Jews</th>
<th>Contribute to Jewish Philanthropies</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Very important</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>95%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somewhat important</td>
<td>52%</td>
<td>80%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Money better used elsewhere</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>47%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Similar results were found in Rhode Island (see Table 12). Non-contributors to Jewish philanthropies were far more likely to say that Israel is not very important in their lives or not at all important, 42% and 11% respectively, compared to contributors to Jewish philanthropies, 21% and 2% respectively. Thus, positive feelings toward Israel are strongly associated with tendencies to contribute to any Jewish philanthropy.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Importance of Israel Among Jews</th>
<th>Contributors</th>
<th>Non-Contributors</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Extremely</strong></td>
<td>16</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Very</strong></td>
<td>61</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Not very</strong></td>
<td>21</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Not at all</strong></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Changing Attitudes of Large Givers: Findings from the Qualitative Research

A series of focus groups among large givers explored the relationship between attitudes toward Israel and their contributions to Jewish philanthropies. This section focuses on those who contribute more than $10,000 per year to Jewish philanthropies. Their support for Israel is vital.

The interviews indicate that while support for Israel is very high, attitudes toward Israel are changing. Israel is viewed more critically, but commitment to its well being is still overwhelming. Israel continues to provoke a deeply positive emotional response, even if it is no longer viewed through rose-colored glasses.

Jewish Identification with Israel

Jewish leaders feel a deep attachment to the country, to the principles of American Jewish support for Israel, and to the place of Israel in American Jewish identity. The State of Israel is linked to positive feelings about Judaism and about being a Jew. One respondent describes the role of Israel in his life in the following way:

What I think of is what Israel has done for me as an individual, and just relate it to my own life experiences. I spent forty years in the United States armed forces, either active or reserve, and I always emphasized my Jewishness at all times—in my biography and so forth—and it made me feel that because Israel was there, these guys thought hey, this guy must be one tough guy like those
Israelis. And as juvenile as that sounds, it always gave me a great feeling to take pride in my Jewishness, which I have to think I wouldn’t have had were it not for the fact that Israel gave me that great pride.

Israel also is growing in importance for some Jews. Support may increase because Israel continues to have a deep religious meaning for many Jews.

Most of us are secular Jews, or mainly secular, rather than religious Jews, and I think Israel, at least for me, grows more important as I grow older. I think Israel has almost replaced the Jewish religion with me, as a religion. I think my Jewish identification grows stronger as I grow older, as I read more, as I learn more about our history, I see the precarious position we [Jews] are in the world.

But for many, the role of Israel is changing. They see it as central to Jewish identity, but not to the totality of feeling Jewish. In response to the notion that Israel equals Judaism, one respondent said the following:

I, too, feel just as strongly as I’ve ever felt about Israel. I have come to the point where I no longer regard Israel as the centrality of Judaism, which I did at one point in time. Someone said here that the religion of the average American Jew is Israel. I think that we’ve come to a point in our relationship with Israel—and in Israel’s life—where we in this country have got to take on an awesome responsibility of building a strong American Jewish community, which will be just as central and just as focal to the future of Judaism as Israel has appeared to be up to a rather recent point in time.

Familiarity also brings a more realistic assessment. As Jews travel to Israel, meet with Israelis, and the “miracle” dimensions fade, there is an emerging sense of equality on the part of Jewish leadership as opposed to awe:

I’m looking at it a little different than they are. At one time Israel was Israel above, and Israelis could do no wrong. My love for Israel hasn’t diminished, my approach to them is different. I’m really looking at them as part of my extended family, and it’s a different kind of feeling. I look at them as family, rather than somebody on a pedestal, and rather than somebody with whom I no longer question a lot of things they do.

This familiarity is discussed further by another respondent:

The more you understand about a place and its people, the more fault you’ll find with it. If you’re just looking for the first time—you go study a great painting and the first time you see it, it’s going to knock you out. The more you look at it, the more likely you will be to find a flaw or two. So, as everyone becomes more experienced with Israel and more knowledgeable about it, you’ll find more flaws with it.
Right-wing influence in Israel creates a strong negative emotional response among some of the largest givers. Most dislike the Likud and political parties to the right, although they say their giving has not been affected thus far. While no one said that they could envision a time when they would not support Israel, some said that they would seriously assess the way they give, how they view Israel, and the levels of their support, should the religious right gain more control of Israel. As one respondent indicated:

If the right-wing in Israel would get control of the government and control what’s going on there, all of us—many of us, I should say—could live with the law of return on the basis that maybe it is just a rallying point, rather than a fact. But, if Sharon-type individuals got control in conjunction with the religious party, I think that would be serious [consequences].

Jewish Identity and “Who Is a Jew?”

Problems for Jews in the United States are seen as more pressing than those in Israel. However, these interviews were conducted before the new wave of immigrants from the Soviet Union began to arrive in Israel and new interviews might yield different responses in this area. All of the large givers believe that assimilation, loss of Jewish identity, and lack of Jewish education are the most important problems facing American Jewry today. They are deeply concerned about the possible disappearance of American Jewry into the mainstream of the host Christian culture. Some believe this is due primarily to a lack of Jewish education, some believe it is the removal from generational ties to old-world Judaism, while some believe the cause is interfaith marriages. Many see these factors as interrelated. All were in agreement, however, that assimilation poses a major threat to contemporary American Jewry. Many had interfaith marriages in their own families.

Because they are concerned about the future of American Jewry, the “Who is a Jew?” issue is of extreme importance. It is a barometer of right-wing influence for many. Most respondents were Reform and Conservative Jews, and dislike “Ultra-Orthodox” influence in Israel. A few said flatly that if the law of return were changed they would stop supporting Israel monetarily. Others said even this would not change their financial support, although they would be very upset and feel betrayed.

These feelings can be expressed through decisions to give or not to give to Jewish philanthropies that support Israel. Feelings about the “Who is a Jew?” issue are summarized well by one respondent:

The issue to me is that I feel as though my brother slapped me in the face. Although I love my brother, the question is how do I explain to him how hurtful it’s been. My single voice has no meaning. The only voice that they really understand, that has any major power, is the Jewish community—the UJA. And I feel as though the UJA and the Federation somehow has to take up the battle and explain to my brother because I don’t have the ability to do it.

Others are resentful because they view the policies as destructive to Israel itself, both for Israelis and for the relationship of Israel to the United States:
I don’t resent the morality; morality is not the issue. What I resent is the stupidity. What I resent about Israel is when Israel acts stupid. When they shoot themselves in the leg, when they have very, very parochial, narrow visions, play politics with something like the law of return, that is stupidity.

Others see the “Who is a Jew?” issue as a reflection of similar struggles in the United States. Therefore, the role of the Orthodox community within America is reflected in this issue, and the tensions felt by many Reform and Conservative Jews is reflected in their concern about the law of return. Some believe the emotional response has as much to do with the internal workings of the American Jewish community as it does the relationship to Israel:

I think we lose sight of the fact that throughout Jewish history there have always been groups that have certain very strongly held feelings, and what we have tried to do in this country is to work with the things that were in common with us and to try to understand the different groups. Orthodoxy, Conservative, Reform, Reconstructionist, non-believers. What we have tried to do in this country is bring these diverse groups together on the things that are common to us, and not dwell on the things that pull us apart. I have my feelings on the “Who is a Jew?” issue. I have no problem with the Orthodox saying that we have to have a standard for conversions. My objection to them is that they are the only ones who can perform a formal conversion, and I think that this is something that we’re going to have to face in our own community. I think we’ve been afraid to face it among ourselves, so it’s a lot easier to blame the Israelis for something that we have in our own community. You don’t have to go to Israel for these stresses within the religious community; they’ve always been there.

Even with these feelings, most of the respondents said that they would continue to support Israel financially, even if the law of return is changed. But it is the single most emotional issue for many of the respondents, and will affect giving to some extent.

Changing Attitudes and Levels of Financial Support

Yet even with these problems, Israel provides the significant inspiration and motivation to give to all Jewish philanthropies. Individuals would double their gifts if they perceived Israel to be in jeopardy. The most oft-stated reason would be an emergency in Israel if its security were threatened. Thus, even among some of those who said that they are more interested in local services than sending money to Israel, Israel produces the greatest response in terms of giving.

For most, perceived problems in Israel will not diminish their giving. As one person said:

Even democracies are entitled to make mistakes. You don’t just discontinue support of them because they made a decision you don’t like.

Furthermore, genuine emergencies evoke an immediate response. Many of the individuals feel compelled to support Israel in its times of need. In a forecast of the Operation Exodus campaign to resettle Soviet Jews in Israel (two years prior to the actual campaign), one respondent said the following:
On my first mission to Israel, Herb Friedman, who was at that time Executive of National UJA, spoke to the national young leadership cabinet sitting on the shores of the Mediterranean. He said, if they ever open the doors of Russia, I expect every one of you to take out a second mortgage. If there's an emergency, there's an emergency.

The support for Israel, knowledge of Israel, and philanthropic behavior toward Israel are all affected by the type of visit to Israel. The qualitative research adds important understanding about the role of sponsored missions to Israel. Those who were interviewed all agreed that missions were the single most important means of increasing their commitment to Jewish philanthropies. Many of those interviewed indicated that the total mission experience or a specific event on a mission was the turning point in their Jewish philanthropic career, deepening and perpetuating their commitment to Jewish philanthropy. A number of individuals said that while their initial interest in missions was a given, the emotional and intellectual impact of the mission was the cement for their future Jewish philanthropic behavior.

Furthermore, the missions increase giving levels of those who are already at high giving points. The dynamics of the mission itself moves people even further along in their giving:

I knew I was going on a mission and I know that I'm a leader of the community, and before I went on the mission I was first solicited by the national chairman in June of '88 and I made a gift at that time, but at the same time I knew that when I went on the mission I was going to make another increase. I feel that I'm a 100% committed person who gives to the maximum of ability to give and that I have to program [myself], to provide an example for other people. I know that I'm going to be on that mission, and I know that I'm going to solicit maybe thirty people face-to-face, or maybe more on a particular mission, so I want to be able to solicit them effectively.

Policy Conclusions

Taken together, the qualitative and quantitative data suggest a number of policy directions. First, the communal mandate for Jewish education programs focusing on Israel, coupled with the information that visiting Israel is connected to levels of support for Israel, suggests a need for more Jewish education programs that involve an Israel experience. This may include both formal and informal education experiences, including classes, retreats, visiting Israel for courses in Jewish history, Israeli society, and Jewish holidays. Jewish education experiences should be planned for children, young adults and adults as part of their Jewish education. Utilizing more visits to Israel has the dual effect of strengthening commitment to Israel and at the same time strengthening American Jewish commitment to philanthropy in general.

Second, visiting Israel needs to be promoted among American Jews as a means to reinforce Jewish identity at home. Since
American Jews are as concerned about assimilation as they are, they may be receptive to any programs that they feel will help combat the disintegration of American Jewry and the Jewish nature of their own families. The target group of American Jews solicited to visit Israel or send their children to visit Israel must go beyond those who already feel strongly supportive. Family pilgrimages, life-cycle celebrations, family life education, and other incentives for visiting Israel should be designed and promoted specifically to strengthen American Jewish identity. Thus presented, they may have a great appeal for many American Jews.

And last, among other types of Israel visits, more missions and a greater variety of missions will both reach new visitors and attract veteran visitors. These missions should be arranged under the auspices of any Jewish organizations which have agendas which involve strengthening American-Israeli relations. Increasing the number of missions per year for specific groups as well as varying the content so that people do not feel that they are repeating the same experience on a mission every time they go is important.

American Jewish support for Israel remains strong. However, the levels of active commitment among younger Jews are somewhat lower compared to older Jews. Yet even among younger Jews, identification with Israel, concern for its security, and emotional attachment remain at high levels. Connecting these core levels of identity to active support for Israel through increased philanthropic behavior is essential. Examining American Jewish leaders—who are, after all, the Jews most involved with Israel—can provide us with critical guidance. Increasing the number of visits to Israel by American Jews is essential.

Policy Conclusions

Insuring that high proportions of American Jews visit Israel should be a top priority of all Jewish organizations in the United States.

Organized missions were the most important event in most leader’s high levels of philanthropic support for Israel. Expanded and more creative mission programs, and a greater number and variety of other types of programs can be a highly effective educational and motivational tool for increased philanthropic support for Israel. It is incumbent upon the organized Jewish community to convert latent good feelings about Israel into active philanthropy and involvement.
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