JEWISH FUTURES PROJECT

Birthright Israel's First Decade of Applicants: A Look at the Long-term Program Impact

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The Cohen Center for Modern Jewish Studies (CMJS), founded in 1980, is dedicated to providing independent, high-quality research on issues related to contemporary Jewish life.
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Begun in 2009 as an outgrowth of our Birthright Israel evaluation studies, the Jewish Futures Project is a program of research designed to understand the long-term impact of Birthright Israel on the Jewish trajectories of a generation of young adults. We feel privileged to have the opportunity to conduct a rigorous assessment of Birthright using a longitudinal panel study. Although the project has been made possible by individuals and philanthropies, the research was conducted independently and the conclusions are the responsibility of the authors. We are grateful to Birthright Israel’s professional leadership, including Gidi Mark (CEO), Carolyn Kupietzky (Director of Planning and Strategy Implementation), and Dr. Zohar Raviv (Director of Education), all of whom have encouraged our work and have been serious students of the findings.

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Birthright Israel’s 20th year stands as an appropriate moment to take stock of how the program, which aims to foster the Jewish identities of young adult diaspora Jews, has impacted a generation of Jewish young adults.

For over a decade, the Jewish Futures Project (JFP) has been following multiple cohorts of Birthright participants and others who applied to the program but did not go. In the sixth wave of the JFP study, we explore whether Birthright’s long-documented impact on connection to Israel and engagement in Jewish life persists, as participants grow older, and the trip recedes further in their memory. Because spouse or partner choice is an indicator of engagement in Jewish life, we examine Birthright’s impact on this measure and the extent to which it reverberates out to other areas of Jewish life.

The JFP panel is composed of a stratified random sample of individuals who applied to go on Birthright trips between 2001 and 2009. Data for the sixth wave of the study were collected through an online survey conducted between June and December 2019. A total of 2,567 panelists responded to the survey, representing an overall response rate (AAPOR RR2) of 47%.

**KEY FINDINGS**

- Birthright participants are much more likely to have a Jewish spouse or partner compared to similar nonparticipants: 55% versus 39%.

- Birthright’s impact on choice of spouse is evident among those with one Jewish parent as well as among those with two Jewish parents.

- Birthright’s impact on choice of spouse is concentrated among those who marry for the first time between the ages of 26 and 32.

- Birthright’s impact on participants has two pathways. Birthright increases participants’ likelihood of engagement in Jewish life because they are more likely to have a Jewish partner (indirect impact). Birthright also increases Jewish engagement in some areas of Jewish life, regardless of whether that participant had a Jewish partner or not (direct impact).

- Because Birthright participants are more likely to be partnered with other Jews, they are more likely than similar nonparticipants to raise their oldest child Jewish, to have **brit milah** for their oldest son, to be connected to Israel, to be
synagogue members, to volunteer for Jewish or Israeli causes, to participate in events sponsored by Jewish organizations, to have Jewish friends, to celebrate Shabbat, to attend Jewish religious services, and to celebrate Jewish holidays. These effects represent Birthright’s indirect impact.

- Birthright has an additional, direct impact on partnered participants, even on those who have non-Jewish partners, in some of these domains. Birthright participants who are partnered with non-Jews are more likely to feel connected to Israel, to have Jewish friends, to attend Jewish religious services, and to celebrate Rosh Hashanah and Passover.

These findings provide strong evidence of Birthright’s impact. Few other educational interventions (in the Jewish world or otherwise) demonstrate similar evidence of long-term effects. The size and scope of Birthright’s impact, as demonstrated through rigorous evaluation, underscores the unique role of intensive peer educational programs. Although the COVID-19 pandemic has temporarily shuttered the program, the present findings suggest the importance of resuming trips when the safety of participants and staff can be assured.
INTRODUCTION

The present report describes the findings from the sixth wave of a long-term follow-up study tracking Birthright’s impact on those who went on trips during the first decade of the program. As Birthright passes its 20th year, it is an important moment to take stock of how the program, which aims to foster the Jewish identities of young adult diaspora Jews (Saxe & Chazan, 2008), has increased young adult engagement with Israel and promoted a greater sense of involvement with the Jewish people over a period of two decades.

Since 1999, Birthright has enabled almost half a million North American Jewish young adults to travel to Israel on 10-day educational trips. As part of its systematic program of research on Birthright, the Cohen Center for Modern Jewish Studies launched the first wave of the Jewish Futures Project (JFP) in 2009. This longitudinal panel study followed multiple cohorts of Birthright participants and similar peers who applied for the program but did not go (Saxe et al., 2009). Since then, the JFP has continued to track Birthright Israel’s long-term impact on its participants, by resurveying the same individuals to see how their lives have changed. The first wave of the JFP focused on those who had applied to Birthright in the early years of the program’s existence, but over time, the panel expanded and now includes applicants from the first decade of the program.

The characteristics of the JFP panel have changed significantly since the study began a decade ago. Many of the older panel members who applied in the early 2000s are no longer young adults but are now approaching middle age. Others who applied to Birthright between 2006 and 2009 and who had yet to marry or have children in the first few waves of the study, have now done so. The focus of the current report is on understanding how a Birthright experience continues to affect the trajectory of their lives.

Each wave of the study has consistently found strong evidence for the positive impact of Birthright on participants, especially with regard to their sense of connection to Israel (Saxe et al., 2009, 2011, 2012). Even a decade after the trip, Birthright participants were about twice as likely to feel “very much” connected to Israel, compared to their peers who did not go on the trip (Saxe et al., 2017). Birthright also had a striking impact on partner choice. This finding surfaced in the 2009 study and continued to appear in subsequent waves. Those who participated in Birthright trips between 2001 and 2004 were significantly more likely to be married to other Jews compared to their peers who applied to participate in the program during the same period but did not go (Saxe et al., 2009). Subsequent waves of the JFP study confirmed this finding, even as an increased share of the panel got married (Saxe et al., 2011, 2012, 2014, 2017).
The JFP highlights Birthright’s impact on partner choice for two reasons: First, the magnitude of Birthright’s impact on this measure is large and second, having a Jewish partner is associated with greater engagement with Jewish life (Fishman & Cohen, 2017; Hartman & Hartman, 2009; Shain et al., 2019; Saxe et al., 2017).

That partner choice is a key indicator of Birthright’s impact on participants’ Jewish life was demonstrated in the 2017 report describing results from the fifth wave of the JFP study (Saxe et al., 2017). That report highlighted the centrality of partner choice to the mechanism by which Birthright produces positive effects in multiple areas of Jewish life. The findings demonstrated that Birthright had both an indirect impact (by way of partner choice) as well as a direct impact (regardless of partner choice) on participants’ engagement in Jewish life. Compared to their peers who did not go on the trip, married or partnered Birthright participants were more likely to engage in various forms of Jewish life because they were more likely to have a Jewish partner. This is Birthright’s indirect impact. At the same time, that study found that Birthright not only affected participants through its impact on partner choice, but also had an additional direct impact on some aspects of participants’ involvement in Jewish life, regardless of whom they married or partnered with (Saxe et al., 2017).

In the sixth wave of the JFP study, we explore whether Birthright’s long-documented impact persists, as participants grow older and the trip recedes further in their memory. Because spouse or partner choice is an indicator of engagement in Jewish life, we examine Birthright’s impact on this measure and the extent to which it reverberates out to other areas of Jewish life.

We begin the report by describing Birthright’s impact on participants’ choice of spouse or partner. We then focus on those participants who are married or in a committed relationship to explore Birthright’s indirect and direct impacts on multiple areas of Jewish life and relationship to Israel.
The present study is the sixth wave of the Jewish Futures Project (JFP). The current JFP panel is composed of a stratified random sample of individuals who applied to go on Birthright trips between 2001 and 2009: the same population analyzed in the previous (fifth) wave of the JFP. Data were collected through an online survey that took place between June and December 2019. A total of 2,567 panelists responded to the survey, representing an overall response rate (AAPOR RR2) of 47% (56% for Birthright participants and 36% for nonparticipants).1

With the exception of estimates related to choice of partner, this report presents estimates for partnered panelists from the 2001-09 cohort.2 Although not all panelists are partnered,3 estimates for single panelists are not included in the report. Research has found that marriage and partnership decisions powerfully influence many aspects of Jewish life, such as the celebration of Shabbat and Jewish holidays, participation in Jewish communal events, and synagogue membership, which tend to be centered on the family. Past research has found that single adults with no children are far less likely to be engaged in these forms of Jewish life (Cohen & Kelman, 2007; Sheskin & Kotler-Berkowitz, 2007).

Although the JFP Panel includes respondents who were raised Orthodox, they are excluded from analyses presented in this report. Because of their high baseline levels of Jewish engagement, respondents who were raised Orthodox—whether or not they participated in Birthright—are also currently highly engaged in Jewish life. Their outcomes show little or no variance on most measures examined in this report. Because of this “ceiling effect,” and because they were not the central target of the Birthright Israel intervention, we exclude them from these analyses.

To assess the impact of Birthright, we use statistical models to control for pre-existing differences between participants and non-participants. Except where otherwise noted, results presented below are generated from these models, holding demographic characteristics at their “average” value both for participants and nonparticipants. Full details of the study methodology can be found in Technical Appendix A. Complete results, including confidence intervals and statistical models are presented in Technical Appendix B. The complete survey instrument can be found in Technical Appendix C.
FINDINGS

BIRTHRIGHT’S IMPACT ON MARRIAGE AND PARTNERSHIP

Because partner choice is a key indicator of Birthright Israel’s impact on engagement in Jewish life, we begin by examining Birthright’s effect on whether participants are married to, or are in a committed relationship with another Jew. We first examine partner choice through the panelists’ first marriage—the marriage that was closest in time to the Birthright trip itself. This analysis focuses on the 68% of panelists who in 2019 had been married at least one time.

We then shift our focus to panelists who are currently married or in a committed relationship with another Jew, to understand the impact of Birthright on current Jewish behaviors. This analysis focuses on the 75% of panelists who were married or in a committed relationship at the time of the survey. In the remainder of the report, we refer to this group as “partnered panelists.”

75% of panelists are currently partnered. This group includes those who are currently married to their first spouse (62%), those who have remarried after they were divorced or widowed from their first spouse (2%), and those who were never married but are currently in a committed relationship (11%).

68% of panelists have been married at least once. This group includes those who are currently married to their first spouse (62%), those who have remarried after they were divorced or widowed from their first spouse (2%), and those who are divorced or widowed and currently single (4%).

25% of panelists are currently single. This group includes those who have never married and are currently still single (21%) and those and those who are divorced or widowed and currently single (4%).
Likelihood of First Spouse being Jewish

Overall, Birthright participants were substantially more likely to have a Jewish spouse compared to similar nonparticipants: 55% versus 39% (Figure 1).

Figure 1: Having a Jewish spouse (first marriage)

Note: Excludes those married before Birthright application. Predicted probabilities from logit model of first marriage to a Jew on Birthright participation. The following variables were held at their mean values: current age, parental marriage type, Birthright applicant cohort, and gender. See Tables B1 and B2 in Technical Appendix B.

Birthright’s impact on the likelihood of marrying a Jew appears regardless of whether the participant had one or two Jewish parents. Among those with two Jewish parents, Birthright participants had a 63% likelihood of having their first marriage be to a Jewish, compared to 47% for nonparticipants. Among those with only one Jewish parent, Birthright participants had a 31% likelihood of having their first marriage be to a Jewish, compared to 19% for nonparticipants (Figure 2).6

Birthright’s impact on marrying a Jew is related to the age at which participants get married. Those who married before age 26 were highly likely to marry another Jewish, regardless of whether they went on Birthright or not. Among those who married between the ages of 26 and 32 (the age range in which the majority of JFP panelists got married), Birthright participants had a higher likelihood of marrying a Jewish, compared to nonparticipants. This difference became smaller as the age at which participants first married increased. Among those who married after age 34, there was no significant difference between participants and nonparticipants in the likelihood of marrying a Jewish (Figure 3).
We now turn to examine Birthright’s impact on current relationships and then examine how they affect current involvement in Jewish life. Birthright participants were more likely than similar nonparticipants to have a partner who is Jewish. The likelihood of Birthright participants having a current partner who is Jewish is 55%, compared to 39% among nonparticipants (Figure 4). The results are almost identical to those presented in Figure 1 (“Having a Jewish spouse – first marriage”).
In 2017, when the overall share of marriages was lower, we found that women who participated in Birthright tended to marry at a slightly later age compared to women who did not participate. This difference is no longer evident in 2019: Birthright participation does not seem to have a significant impact on the likelihood of marriage at any age for either men or women.

In 2017, we reported that the magnitude of Birthright’s impact on choice of spouse was greater for men than it was for women. However, as more members of the panel have married, the magnitude of this gender difference has declined, and in 2019 is no longer statistically significant.
BIRTHRIGHT’S IMPACT ON JEWISH LIFE

This section explores the impact of Birthright on participants’ Jewish choices for children; participants’ relationship with Israel; and their communal, religious, and social engagement in Jewish life.

We examine two pathways of Birthright’s impact: indirect and direct as illustrated in the diagram below (Figure 5). When we report that Birthright has an indirect impact we mean that because Birthright participants are more likely to have a Jewish partner; this in turn, increases their likelihood of being engaged in various forms of Jewish life. Birthright may also have an additional, direct impact. Birthright may lead participants to become more engaged in Jewish life, or more connected to Israel, on top of its impact on partner choice, regardless of whether or not their partner is Jewish.7 Table 1 summarizes Birthright’s indirect and direct impact across 18 outcomes.

Figure 5: Birthright’s indirect and direct impact on engagement with Jewish life
Table 1: Birthright’s impact on Jewish life - summary

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th><strong>Indirect impact</strong></th>
<th><strong>Direct impact</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(Because participants are more likely to have Jewish partners)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Jewish choices for children</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Raising oldest child Jewish</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✗</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Any male child had Jewish circumcision</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✗</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Any female child had Jewish naming ceremony</td>
<td>✗</td>
<td>✗</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Any child had formal Jewish education</td>
<td>✗</td>
<td>✗</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Any child in Jewish day camp</td>
<td>✗</td>
<td>✗</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Israel</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Connection to Israel</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Talk about Israel</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seek news about Israel</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Community involvement</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Synagogue member</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✗</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Donation to Jewish/Israeli causes</td>
<td>✗</td>
<td>✗</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Any Jewish volunteering</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✗</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attending Jewish community event</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Social engagement</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Talk about Judaism</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✗</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jewish friends</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Jewish religious rituals</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shabbat meal</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✗</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religious service attendance</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jewish holidays celebration</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Jewish Choices for Children

Partnered Birthright participants who have children were more likely than similar nonparticipants to report that they are raising their oldest child Jewish. Partnered Birthright participants who have children had an 84% likelihood of saying that they are raising their oldest child exclusively Jewish (either by religion or “Jewish aside from religion”) as opposed to another religion or not having decided yet (Figure 6). Among similar nonparticipants, the comparable figure was 77%. Birthright’s impact on raising Jewish children was indirect—the differences between participants and nonparticipants were due to Birthright participants being more likely to have a Jewish partner. Among panelists who have non-Jewish partners, there was no significant difference in the likelihood of participants and nonparticipants saying they are raising their oldest child Jewish.10

Figure 6: Raising oldest child Jewish

Overall, 58% of partnered panelists are parents to at least one child. More than half of the parents have two children or more. (Table 2).

Table 2: Number of children (partnered panelists)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No children</th>
<th>One child</th>
<th>Two children</th>
<th>Three or more children</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>42%</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Nearly two thirds (64%) of parents in the panel reported that their oldest child is age five or younger. Thirty-four percent of parents stated that their oldest child is between the ages 6-14, and only 1% have a child who is age 15 or older.

Similarly, Birthright had an indirect impact on having a brit milah for male children. Birthright participants were more likely to have a brit milah for their oldest son because they are more likely to have a Jewish partner (not shown). Birthright did not have a detectable impact on other Jewish choices for children: Birthright participants and nonparticipants were no different in terms of having a Jewish naming ceremony for their oldest daughter, in having any of their children participate in any form of formal Jewish education (Jewish preschool, part-time Hebrew school, or Jewish day school), or sending their children to a Jewish day camp.

Note: Partnered panelists only. Predicted probabilities from multinomial logit model of raising oldest child Jewish on Birthright participation. The following variables were held at their mean values: current age, parental marriage type, Birthright applicant cohort, and gender. See Tables B9 and B10 in Technical Appendix B.
Relationship with Israel

Birthright’s long-term impact on partnered participants’ feelings of connection to Israel continued in the sixth wave of the study. Overall, the likelihood of Birthright participants to be “very much” connected to Israel was 29%, compared to 15% among nonparticipants (Figure 7). Birthright had an indirect and an additional direct impact on connection to Israel. Differences between participants and nonparticipants were partly due to participants being more likely to have a Jewish partner, but were also due to Birthright’s additional direct impact on participants, regardless of whether they have a Jewish partner.

Birthright’s impact on connection to Israel appeared for participants with one Jewish parent and those with two Jewish parents. Partnered participants with two Jewish parents had a 33% likelihood of being “very much” connected to Israel, compared to 17% among similar nonparticipants. Birthright’s impact was also substantial among those with only one Jewish parent. The likelihood of partnered Birthright participants from this group to feel “very much” connected to Israel was 20%, compared to 10% among similar nonparticipants (Figure 8).

Birthright’s impact on connection to Israel was especially noteworthy when comparing those who only went to Israel on a Birthright trip to those who had never been to Israel. The likelihood of partnered Birthright participants for whom Birthright was their sole Israel experience to be “very much” connected to Israel was 17%, compared to 6% among those who had never been to Israel (Figure 9).

Birthright also influenced other aspects of participants’ relationship with Israel. Birthright participants were more likely to talk about Israel with family and friends and were more likely to seek news about Israel, compared to nonparticipants (not shown). Birthright’s impact on these measures had indirect and direct components: Birthright participants were more likely to engage in these behaviors in part because they are more likely to have a Jewish partner, but were also more likely to do so regardless of whether they have a Jewish partner.

Figure 7: Connection to Israel

Note: Partnered panelists only. Predicted probabilities from ordered logit model of connection to Israel on Birthright participation. The following variables were held at their mean values: current age, parental marriage type, Birthright applicant cohort, and gender. See Tables B11 and B12 in Technical Appendix B.
Figure 8: Connection to Israel by having one versus two Jewish parents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>One Jewish parent</th>
<th>Two Jewish parents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nonparticipant</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not at all</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A little</td>
<td>41%</td>
<td>34%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somewhat</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very much</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not at all</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A little</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somewhat</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>36%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very much</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>36%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Partnered panelists only. Excludes those married before Birthright application. Predicted probabilities from ordered logit model of connection to Israel on Birthright participation and parental marriage type. The following variables were held at their mean values: current age, Birthright applicant cohort, and gender. See Tables B11 and B13 in Technical Appendix B.

Figure 9: Connection to Israel by no trip versus Birthright trip only

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Never been to Israel</th>
<th>Only went to Israel on Birthright</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Not at all</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>36%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A little</td>
<td>45%</td>
<td>36%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somewhat</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very much</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Partnered panelists only. Predicted probabilities from ordered logit model of connection to Israel on type of Israel experience. The following variables were held at their mean values: current age, parental marriage type, Birthright applicant cohort, and gender. See Tables B14 and B15 in Technical Appendix B.

RETURNING TO ISRAEL AFTER BIRTHRIGHT

Among those participants whose Birthright trip was 10-18 years ago, 34% returned to Israel at least once.
Community Involvement

Birthright participants were more likely to attend an event sponsored by their local Jewish community, compared to similar nonparticipants. Overall, partnered Birthright participants had a 61% likelihood of having attended such events at least “occasionally” in the past year, compared to 51% among similar nonparticipants (Figure 10). These differences were partly due to Birthright’s *indirect impact*, but also due to Birthright’s *direct impact*. That is, Birthright participants were more likely to participate in Jewish-sponsored events because they are more likely to be partnered with other Jews, but were also more likely to attend events compared to similar nonparticipants regardless of whether or not they have a Jewish partner.

Birthright also had an impact on other areas of community involvement. Birthright participants were more likely to belong to a Jewish congregation and to volunteer for Jewish or Israeli causes (not shown). Birthright’s impact on these measures was *indirect*—Birthright participants were more likely to engage in these behaviors because they are more likely to have a Jewish partner. Birthright did not have a detectable impact on making charitable donations to Jewish or Israeli causes.

Social Engagement

Partnered Birthright participants were more likely to have mostly or exclusively Jewish friends, compared to similar nonparticipants. Partnered Birthright participants had a 26% likelihood of reporting that most or all of their close friends are Jewish, compared to 16% among similar nonparticipants (Figure 11). This difference was both *indirect*—due to Birthright participants being more likely to have Jewish partners—and *direct*, regardless of whether a participant had a Jewish partner or not.

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**Figure 10: Participation in event sponsored by a Jewish organization (past year)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Occasionally</th>
<th>Often</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nonparticipant</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>39%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>44%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Partnered panelists only. Predicted probabilities from ordered logit model of participation in event sponsored by Jewish organization on Birthright participation. The following variables were held at their mean values: current age, parental marriage type, Birthright applicant cohort, and gender. See Tables B16 and B17 in Technical Appendix B.

**Figure 11: Having Jewish friends**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Half</th>
<th>Most or all</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nonparticipant</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Partnered panelists only. Predicted probabilities from multinomial logit model of proportion of Jewish friends on Birthright participation. The following variables were held at their mean values: current age, parental marriage type, Birthright applicant cohort, and gender. See Tables B18 and B19 in Technical Appendix B.
Jewish Religious Rituals

Partnered Birthright participants were more likely to engage in a number of Jewish religious rituals, compared to similar nonparticipants. For example, Birthright participants had a 77% likelihood of attending any Jewish religious services in the past year, compared to 65% for nonparticipants (Figure 12). These differences were partly due to Birthright’s indirect impact—because participants are more likely to have a Jewish partner—but also due to Birthright’s additional direct impact, regardless of whether or not participants partnered with another Jew.

Partnered Birthright participants were also more likely to celebrate a number of Jewish holidays compared to similar nonparticipants. Birthright participants had an 88% likelihood of doing something to celebrate Passover and 81% likelihood of celebrating Rosh Hashanah, compared to 81% and 72%, respectively for similar nonparticipants (Figure 13). In both of these cases, Birthright had a direct and indirect impact on holiday observance. Birthright also had an impact on having a special meal on Shabbat. This impact was indirect—Birthright participants were more likely to have a Shabbat meal because they are more likely to have a Jewish partner (not shown).

Figure 12: Jewish religious service attendance (past year)

Note: Partnered panelists only. Predicted probabilities from multinomial logit model of proportion of attending Jewish religious services on Birthright participation. The following variables were held at their mean values: current age, parental marriage type, Birthright applicant cohort, and gender. See Tables B20 and B21 in Technical Appendix B.

Figure 13: Holiday observance (past year)

Note: Partnered panelists only. Predicted probabilities from logit models of celebrating Rosh Hashanah or Passover on Birthright Israel participation. The following variables were held at their mean values: current age, parental marriage type, Birthright applicant cohort, and gender. See Tables B22-B25 in Technical Appendix B.
Ten to 20 years after returning from their educational experience in Israel, the lives of Birthright participants continue to be shaped by the program. The findings from the sixth wave of the Jewish Futures Project highlight the ways in which Birthright has altered the trajectory of participants’ Jewish lives, as they enter adulthood and middle age.

Along with increasing participants’ attachment to Israel, one of Birthright’s most substantial long-term impacts is on choices related to marriage/partnership. Overall, Birthright participants have a 55% likelihood of their first spouse being Jewish, compared to 39% among similar nonparticipants. Birthright’s impact on having a Jewish spouse or partner is important because it is associated with a number of “spillover” effects on other domains of Jewish life. These “spillover” effects, or Birthright’s indirect impact, result from Birthright participants’ higher likelihood of having a Jewish partner. Because they are more likely to be partnered with other Jews, Birthright participants are more likely than similar nonparticipants to have a stronger relationship with Israel, to raise their oldest child Jewish, to have a brit milah for their oldest son, to be synagogue members, to volunteer for Jewish or Israeli causes, to participate in events sponsored by Jewish organizations, to have Jewish friends, to celebrate Shabbat, to attend Jewish religious services, and to celebrate Jewish holidays. But Birthright also has a number of additional, direct impacts on partnered participants, even for those who have non-Jewish partners. Compared to similar nonparticipants, Birthright participants who are partnered with non-Jews are more likely to be connected to Israel, to have Jewish friends, to attend Jewish religious services, and to celebrate Rosh Hashanah and Passover.

Although our study identified multiple Birthright effects, there are other areas of Jewish life where participation in a 10-day Birthright trip does not seem to have a demonstrable impact. Although Birthright participants are more likely to raise their children Jewish, and to have a brit milah for their sons, Birthright appears to have little or no impact on other decisions regarding childrearing, such as having a Jewish naming ceremony for daughters, or enrolling children in any form of formal Jewish education (including preschool) or in Jewish day camp. Furthermore, some of Birthright’s impact on community involvement and social engagement is small in magnitude, even when the indirect effects of having a Jewish partner are included.
Nevertheless, the fact that key differences between participants and nonparticipants persist 20 years later is itself surprising. Since their decision to apply to the program 10 to 20 years ago, members of the JFP panel have likely experienced many events that shaped their Jewish identities and current engagement with Jewish life.

Even among those panelists who did not participate in a Birthright trip, some traveled to Israel on their own, became involved with Hillel or other campus Jewish groups during college, and participated in Jewish communal activities after college. Many of these individuals chose to marry a Jewish partner, who themselves participated on a Birthright trip. All of these experiences are likely to have influenced the way in which panel members are involved in Jewish life today. Despite the cumulative effects of these intervening events, a consistent pattern emerges: Those who participated in a 10-day Birthright Israel trip are more involved in Jewish life today than those who did not have a Birthright experience.

**CONCLUSION**

While the demonstrable effects of Birthright persist, the world in which the program operates has changed dramatically. The program, which has made a host of incremental changes since its inception, will likely have to reengineer itself for the post-COVID-19 world. The pandemic has fundamentally altered the educational and travel landscape in the United States and around the world. Birthright Israel’s educational model—emphasizing international travel, personal connections, and intimate, face-to-face encounters between Diaspora and Israeli Jews—is particularly vulnerable to the disruptions of the pandemic. Substantial creativity will be needed to craft a new form of the Birthright experience that provides the intensity of the original program, but also protects the physical health and safety of participants, staff, and others with whom they are in contact.

The findings of this study suggest that these efforts will be worthwhile. Few other educational interventions in the Jewish world or otherwise have similar evidence of Birthright’s long-term effects. Over the course of only ten days, the program produces long-term changes in participants across a number of dimensions of Jewish life. The persistence of these changes decades after the trip, underscores the importance of the program and the role that intensive peer education play in shaping individuals’ lives.
NOTES

1 Nearly all data for this survey (98% of all responses) was collected before the end of 2019. A small number of responses were collected in early 2020. Only individuals who met the eligibility criteria for the program at the time of their applicant were considered to be eligible for the survey. See Technical Appendix A for complete details on eligibility criteria and field operations.

2 The estimates presented in this report are not directly comparable to those presented in previous reports. The 2017 report presented estimates from applicants in the 2001-06 cohorts, as those who applied between 2007-09 were too young to produce stable estimates for the marriage and family-focused outcomes that were of central interest in that report.

3 Twenty-five percent of panel members are currently single.

4 Those who are in a committed relationship are those who indicated that they are living with their significant other and/or are engaged to be married.

5 Applicants whose first marriage was prior to their Birthright Israel application were excluded from these analyses.

6 As documented in previous years (Saxe et al., 2017), Birthright also had a significant impact on likelihood of having a Jewish spouse even for those for whom Birthright was their sole Israel experience, compared to those who have never been to Israel (Table B4 in Technical Appendix B).

7 We consider Birthright to have an indirect effect on an outcome if the coefficient for Birthright participation was positive and statistically significant at p<.05 in a model that controls for demographic factors but not partner status. We consider Birthright to have a direct effect on an outcome if the Birthright coefficient remains positive and statistically significant even after a control variable for having a Jewish partner is included in the model. See Technical Appendix A.

8 Includes Jewish pre-school, Jewish supplementary school, and Jewish day school.

9 Only Passover, Hanukkah, and Rosh Hashanah.

10 In 2017, the findings suggested that, among participants who had a non-Jewish spouse, Birthright had an impact on raising the oldest child Jewish, and this impact was concentrated among men. This direct impact is no longer evident in the current (sixth wave) of the study.
REFERENCES


