

Brandeis University

Maurice and Marilyn Cohen Center for Modern Jewish Studies

JEWISH FUTURES PROJECT

The Impact of Taglit-Birthright Israel:
2012 Update

Executive Summary

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Executive Summary

Taglit-Birthright Israel's ambitious goal was to foster the Jewish identity of a generation of young adults who it was feared would not feel a connection to the Jewish community and Israel. Although there was widespread agreement about the importance of facilitating young adults' Jewish engagement, skeptics argued that a short trip (10 days) could not meaningfully affect one's core identity and lifelong engagement with Jewish life. Today, however, with over 200,000 North American alumni and numerous evaluative studies of Taglit, there is substantial evidence of the impact of the experience on participants. The present report is the third in a series that examines the long-term impact of Taglit on alumni. The focus is on participants six to eleven years after their visit to Israel. The goal is to understand whether, and to what extent, participation in Taglit alters individuals' Jewish identities and leads to engagement with Jewish life and Israel.

This study is based on data from a survey of a sample of individuals who applied to Taglit between 2001 and 2006. Interviews, both telephone and web, were conducted with nearly 2,000 respondents. The sample of applicants includes both participants and nonparticipants. The present study represents the third wave of data collection in a broad longitudinal study aimed at understanding young adults' Jewish trajectories and assessing the long-term impact of Taglit. The first two waves of the study (conducted in 2009 and 2010) showed strong effects of Taglit participation, and the current analysis, with a sample that is more Jewishly diverse and includes older individuals who are more likely to be

married, increases confidence in the previous findings.

The findings focus on respondents who were not raised Orthodox, and the analysis compares responses of Taglit participants to a comparison group of individuals who applied to the program but did not participate. At the time of application/trip, there were few systematic differences between participants and nonparticipants. Overall, the results indicate that, despite the increasing time lag since the Taglit experience, there is substantial evidence of the program's positive impact on a broad range of measures having to do with an individual's Jewish identity, relationship to Israel, and connection to the Jewish people.

- Taglit participants are 42 percent more likely to feel "very much" connected to Israel compared to individuals who did not go on the program.
- Participants are 22 percent more likely to indicate that they are at least "somewhat confident" in explaining the current situation in Israel as compared to those who did not go on Taglit.
- Taglit participants are 45 percent more likely than nonparticipants to be married to someone Jewish. Taglit's impact on inmarriage was constant across all levels of childhood Jewish education.
- Taglit's influence extends beyond participants themselves: seven percent of nonparticipants are married to Taglit alumni (25 percent of participants are married to other participants, who they did not necessarily meet on the trip).

- Among respondents whose spouses were not raised by Jews, participants' spouses are over three times more likely to have formally converted to Judaism at the time of the survey than nonparticipants' spouses.
- Virtually all inmarried parents are raising their children as Jews and close to half of parents who are intermarried are doing so. Taglit participants and nonparticipants who are intermarried are equally likely to be raising their oldest child Jewish. Among respondents who are not parents, Taglit participants are 23 percent more likely than nonparticipants to view raising their children as Jews as "very important."
- Although the effects were small, Taglit participants are more likely to belong to a Jewish congregation (synagogue, temple, minyan, etc.), to have a special meal on Shabbat, to celebrate Jewish holidays, and to donate to Jewish or Israeli organizations.
- Taglit participants are more likely to have heard of and have an opinion on AIPAC (American Israel Public Affairs Committee) as compared to nonparticipants.

Across a diverse set of attitudinal and behavioral measures, Taglit has a significant impact on Jewish engagement and involvement. The mechanisms by which Taglit is able to achieve these results in such a short time frame will continue to be the focus of ongoing investigations. The extent to which these findings will continue over time as participants become more removed from the experience remains to be seen. The results of the present study, however, provide an optimistic assessment of the millennial generation's likelihood of maintaining a strong identification with the Jewish community and potential for contributing to Jewish life in America.

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