

Israel Off Their Minds:

The Diminished Place of Israel in the Political Thinking of Young Jews

The Berman Jewish Policy Archive at NYU Wagner 2008 National Survey of American Jews

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When they go to the nation's polls next week to vote for President on November 4, young non-Orthodox Jews will be far less likely than their elders to be thinking about the security of Israel.

In fact, among the non-Orthodox, Jews 65+ are almost twice as likely to rate the Israel-Palestine conflict as a major consideration in their vote for President as are Jews their children's age, those 21-34. Jews 35-64, report levels of concern about Israel intermediate between their younger and older counterparts.

Among those 65 and over, 54% rate "high" or "very high" the Israel-Palestine conflict as a consideration in determining their vote for Obama or McCain. This figure comes in contrast with far lower levels among younger non-Orthodox Jews: 39% among those 35-54, and just 29% among those under 35.

The Berman-NYU Survey

These results emerge from the 2008 National Survey of American Jews sponsored by the Berman Jewish Policy Archive at NYU Wagner. Fielded by Synovate in early September, 2008, the survey consists of 1596 Jewish respondents. All are members of Synovate's Global Opinion Panel and completed the survey way of the mail and the web (see appendix for more methodological details). The Charles H. Revson Foundation helped underwrite the survey, and with the Mandell L. and Madeleine H. Berman Foundation support the Berman Jewish Policy Archive at NYU-Wagner.

The particular survey question upon which these findings rely read as follows:

For each issue-area below, how important will it be in your vote for president -- extremely important, very important, somewhat important or not important?

Respondents evaluated fifteen issue areas, including "The situation involving Israel and the Palestinians." Among all Jews, 52% answered extremely important or very important. (This

figure is about double the number -- 26% -- among the 1520 non-Jews who responded to a parallel simultaneously conducted national survey.)

The Young Orthodox Remain Steadfast in Concern for Israel

In contrast with the vast majority of non-Orthodox Jews, among the Orthodox, no variation by age emerges. That is, younger Orthodox Jews are just as highly committed to Israel as a consideration in their vote for President as are older Orthodox Jews.

Among Orthodox young adults, a whopping 81% rate the importance of Israel as a high or very high concern in their vote as compared with only 29% of their non-Orthodox age peers. The patterns of declining commitment to Israel, then, are restricted to the non-Orthodox who are the sole focus of this report.

Importance of Being Jewish Not an Explanation

The diminished concern for Israel as a factor in the young adults' vote for President comes despite several counter-balancing factors. First, younger non-Orthodox Jews are no less likely than their elders to say that being Jewish is important or very important to them. Among both old and young, 81% of non-Orthodox Jews rate being Jewish as "somewhat" or "very" important to them. Thus, it's not that they care less about being Jewish and thus care less about Israel -- their "Jewish-caring" levels match their elders. Diminished concern with Israel in the election does NOT reflect diminished importance attached to being Jewish.

Limited Impact of One Trip to Israel

Second, as a group younger non-Orthodox Jews have visited Israel as much, if not more often, than their elders. The high rates at which they have ever been to Israel are striking in that, by virtue of their youthful age, younger adults have had less of a chance to have visited Israel in their, as yet, shorter lifetimes.

Among those under 35, 36% have been to Israel, as compared with 37% among those their parents' age. Even more striking, we find that more non-Orthodox youngsters have been to Israel twice or more than those 65 and beyond: 17% for the younger Jews versus 13% for their older counterparts. Apparently, Birthright Israel (a program to bring young Jews to Israel for 10-day visits free of charge) has already begun to elevate the Israel-visit rates among younger Jews.

The power of two trips to Israel to generate widespread concern for Israel in the election is readily apparent. It is only among those who've visited Israel twice that the age-related gap in Israel-concern disappears. Each trip to Israel is associated with leaps in levels of caring about Israel as a factor in the Presidential election. However, for young people especially, the second trip to Israel is the true watershed in boosting their caring for Israel. The young-old gap in concern for Israel as a factor in the vote remains for both those who have never visited Israel and those who have been there just once. Among those non-Orthodox Jews with one trip, we find the familiar age-related slide in concern for Israel in the election -- from 70% among the oldest, to 52% among those 35-64 to just 33% among those under 35.

Thus, while younger Jews have been visiting Israel more widely than their elders probably did at their age, and while visits to Israel are associated with increased concern for Israel's security, young adults still report relatively low levels of importance attached to the Israel-Palestine conflict in their thinking about the upcoming Presidential election.

A Generational Effect

These trends of diminished young adults' concern for Israel in the election come hard upon an extensive report last year (*Beyond Distancing*, Steven M. Cohen and Ari Y. Kelman, Reboot, <http://www.acbp.net/About/PDF/Beyond%20Distancing.pdf>) that showed dramatic declines in Israel attachment among younger non-Orthodox Jews, as compared with their elders. Likewise, this study – a year later -- demonstrates that with the passage of time, not only is the level of attachment to Israel likely to decline among non-Orthodox Jews, but so too

is the breadth of political support for the Jewish State. That said, expanded repeat travel to Israel consisting of two or more visits appears capable of offsetting these declines.

Implications: A More Orthodox and More Hawkish Pro-Israel Constituency

The implications for Israel's support among American Jewry are profound. Absent any significant change in current trends, Orthodox Jews will come to play a more significant role as political advocates for Israel in the United States. Their numbers will increase as will the number of Orthodox Jews who move to Israel, further cementing the ties of Orthodox family and friends with the Jewish State. At the same time, while the Orthodox population is likely to grow over time, the non-Orthodox population may well decline once the Baby Boom generation passes from the scene.

Orthodox and non-Orthodox Jews differ dramatically not only in their levels of relative concern for Israel, but also in terms of their political stances in American life, and their approaches to the conflicts between Israel and the Palestinians. The Orthodox are significantly more identified with conservative politics and the Republican Party and take a commensurately more "hawkish" posture on Israel's search for peace and security. If these tendencies continue, and the growth of Orthodoxy as a share of the pro-Israel Jewish constituency in the United States unfolds, the posture and politics of that constituency will change in predictable directions.

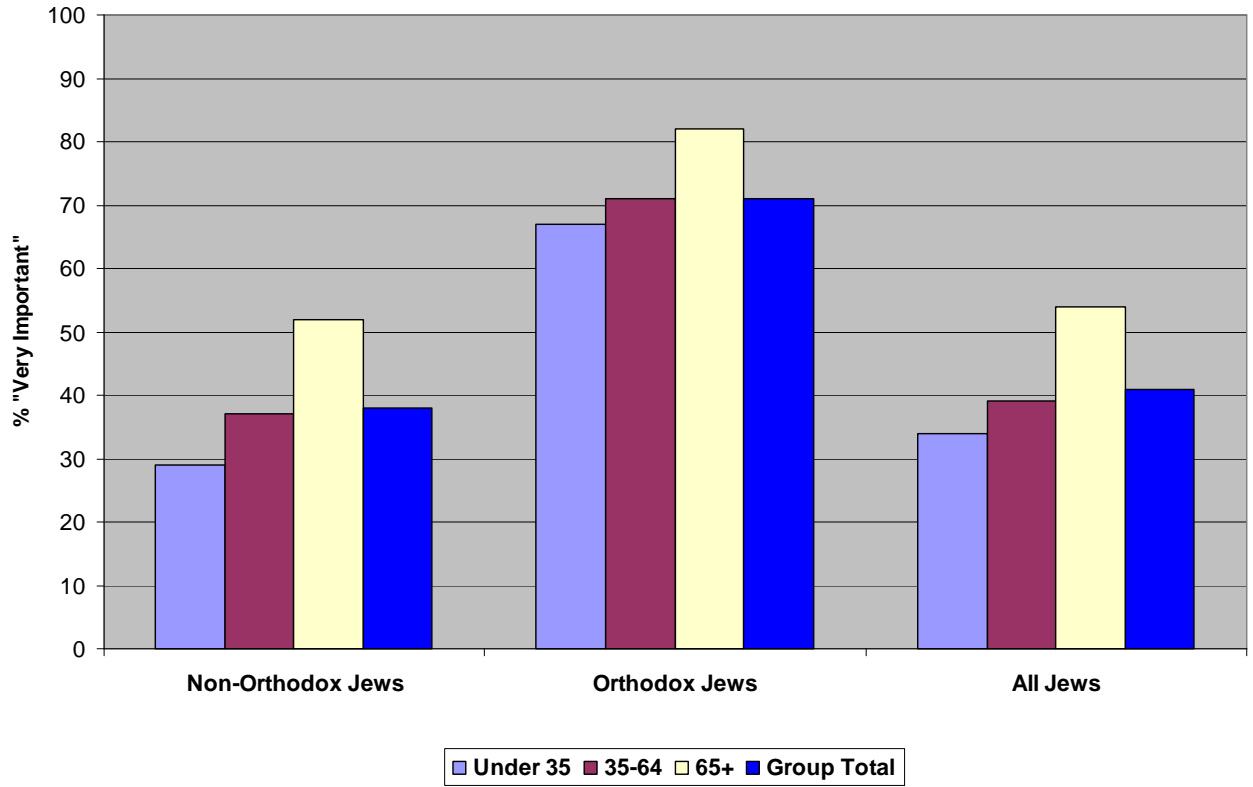
About the Berman Jewish Policy Archive at NYU Wagner

This report can be found at www.bjpa.org, the website of the Berman Jewish Policy Archive at NYU Wagner. The website will contain thousands of social scientific articles that will be text-searchable and downloadable. Associated with the Robert F. Wagner School of Public Service at NYU, and funded by the Mandell L. and Madeleine H. Berman Foundation, the Berman Jewish Policy Archive at NYU Wagner's website will be fully operational in February, 2009. The archive is directed by Prof. Steven M. Cohen.

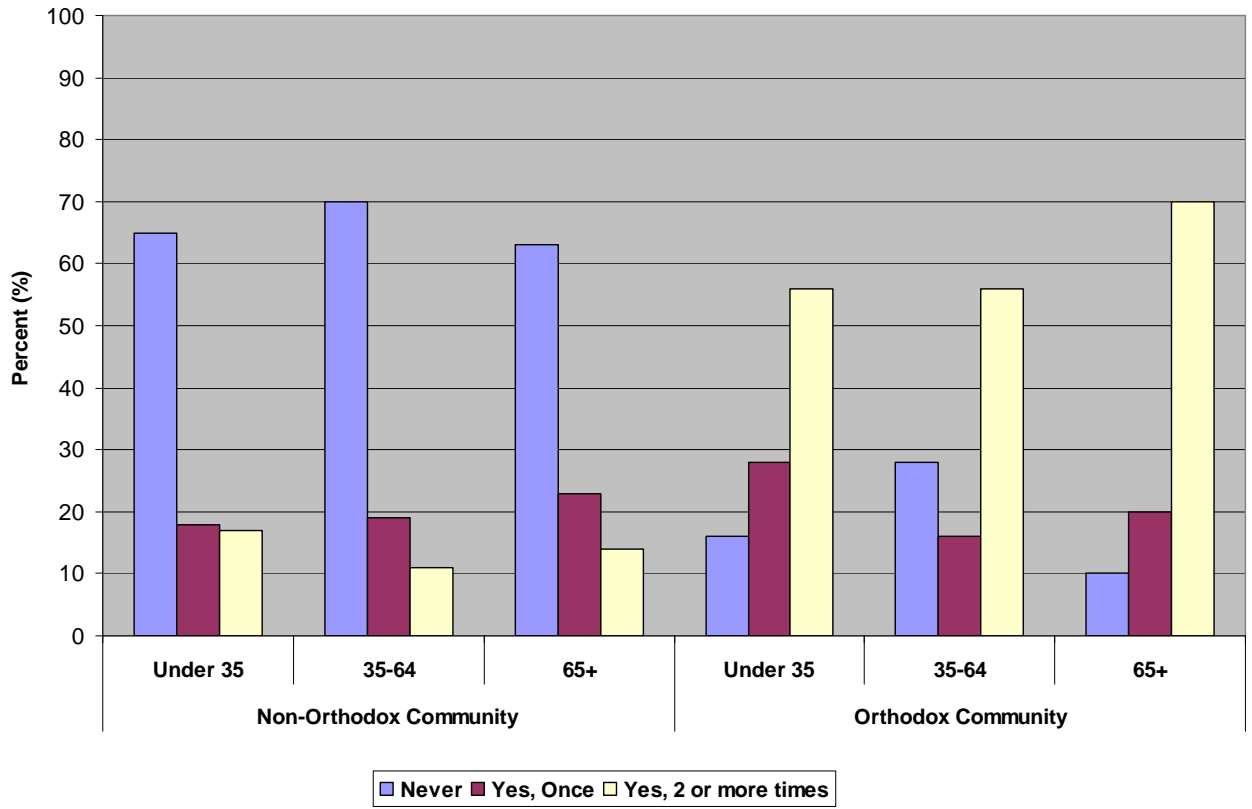
About NYU Wagner

Established in 1938, NYU Wagner is a top-ranked graduate school where students arrive with the desire to serve the public, and leave with the skills, experience, and personal velocity to bring about change. Combining coursework in management, finance, and policy with cutting-edge research and work experience in urban communities, the NYU Wagner education enables them to transform their ideals and commitment into public leadership and social impact.

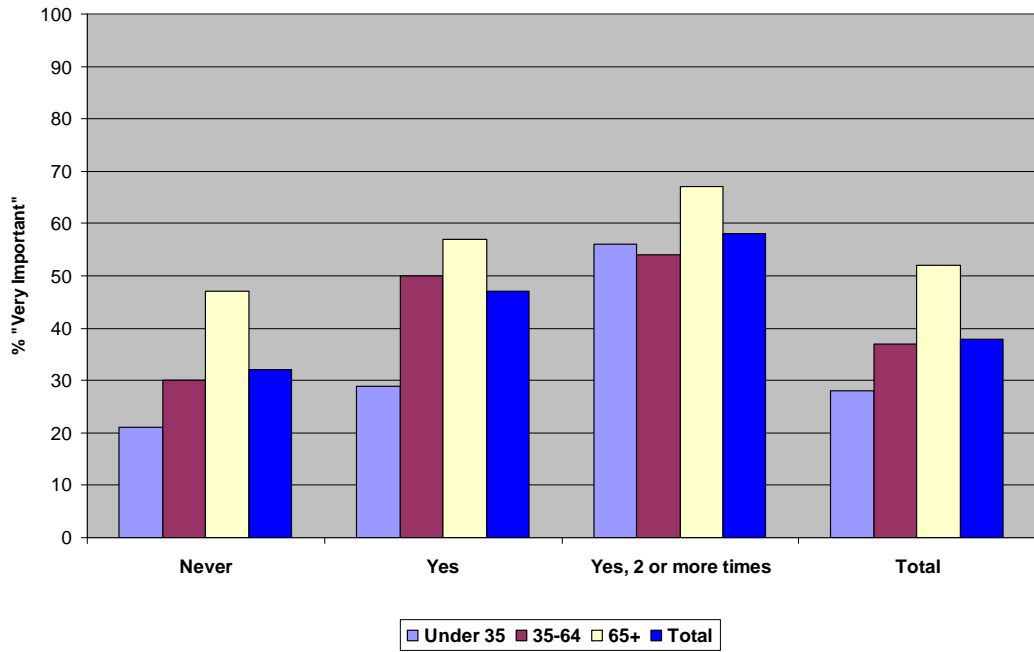
The Israel-Palestine Conflict is "Very Important" in One's Vote Choice for President, by Age and Religious Denomination



Number of Trips to Israel, By Age and Religious Denomination



The Non-Orthodox Jewish Community
The Israel-Palestine Conflict is "Very Important" in One's Vote Choice for President,
by Age and Frequency of Visits to Israel



The Israel-Palestine Conflict is “Very Important” in One’s Vote Choice for President, by Age and Religious Denomination

	Non-Orthodox Jews	Orthodox Jews	All Jews
	%	%	%
Under 35	29	67	34
35-64	37	71	39
65+	52	82	54
Total	38	71	41

Number of Trips to Israel, By Age and Religious Denomination

	Never	Yes, Once	Yes, 2 or more times
% within Age 3 groups			
Non-Orthodox Community			
Under 35	65	18	17
35-64	70	19	11
65+	63	23	14
Orthodox Community			
Under 35	16	28	56
35-64	28	16	56
65+	10	20	70

The Israel-Palestine Conflict is “Very Important” in One’s Vote Choice for President, By Number of Trips to Israel and Religious Denomination

	Never	Yes	Yes, 2 or more times	Total
	%	%	%	%
Non-Orthodox Community				
Under 35	21	29	56	28
35-64	30	50	54	37
65+	47	57	67	52
Total	32	47	58	38
Orthodox Community				
Under 35	59	53	77	67
35-64	42	89	79	70
65+	100	73	81	82
Total	53	65	78	71
Total Jewish Community				
Under 35	22	34	63	34
35-64	31	52	60	39
65+	48	58	70	54
Total	32	49	63	41

The Data

In September 2008, we fielded the 2008 National Survey of American Jews. Undertaken by Synovate, Inc., the survey respondents consisted of members of their Global Opinion Panel whose 1.3 million members agree to participate in occasional surveys. Households are recruited by invitation through special mailings or intercepts on web sites. Key demographic variables about each household are captured when respondents complete their member forms. This information includes household composition, income, age, employment, employment type, etc. and is updated periodically. A Jewish respondent is determined by a question in the screening questionnaire that reads, "Please mark whether you are (or your spouse is): Catholic, Protestant, Jewish, Other/None."

By way of a combined mail-back and web-based survey of this panel, we interviewed over 1596 American Jews. For this study, the Jewish sample was weighted by the number of adult Jews in the household, age, sex, region, and education to approximate the distributions found in the *2000-01 National Jewish Population Study*. The table below compares the Synovate sample after the application of sample weights with the *2000-01 National Jewish Population Study* results, with respect to socio-demographic and Jewish engagement characteristics. With some exceptions, the gaps between the two surveys are small, suggesting that, with caution, we can rely upon the results from the Synovate sample.

A Comparison of the Berman-Wagner, Pew and NJPS Survey Demographics

	Berman-Wagner Survey %	Pew %	NJPS %
Gender			
Male	49	52	47
Female	52	48	53
Age			
18-34	27	28	24
35-44	14	14	16
45-54	22	17	22
55-64	16	19	13
65+	22	22	26
US Census Regions			
NE	44	41	43
MW	10	12	12
South	23	26	22
West	23	21	22
Marital Status			
Married	58	57	60
Never married	24	19	21
Divorced/separated	13	9	10
Widowed	5	8	8
Living with someone	--	6	1
HH Size			
One	24	--	22
Two	41	--	41
Three	16	--	14
Four	14	--	13
Five	5	--	6
Six	0	--	3
Seven or more	0	--	2
Education			
HS or Less	39	22	44
Some College	--	19	13
BA or Equiv	36	24	26
Grad	26	35	17

	Berman-Wagner Survey	Pew	NJPS
	%	%	%
HH Income			
<\$100K	77	54	68
>\$100K	23	46	32
Most or all Jewish friends	31	--	40
Percent Inmarried Jewish Denomination	70	--	75
Orthodox	8	--	10
Conservative	23	--	26
Reform	27	--	35
Reconstructionist	2	--	2
Other Jewish	40	--	27
Synagogue member	37	55	46
Attend services at least once a week	13	16	17
Religion very important	26	31	32
Being Jewish very important	49	--	52
Fast Yom Kippur	59	--	60
Usually light Shabbat candles	26	--	28
Been to Israel	38	--	41
Partisan Identification			
Democrat	58	--	58
Republican	16	--	14
Independent/Not sure	26	--	28