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Connections to and Perspectives on Israel

UNDERSTANDING Jewish young adults' connections to and perspectives on Israel was not the main purpose of this study. More research is needed to understand the relationship Jewish young adults have to Israel beyond what we have learned, which is that Israel for them is a complex subject. As one focus group participant put it: "I honestly have very mixed emotions when it comes to Israel, both very good and not always great, so not like a clean emotion." Another described: "It's very complicated—like a relationship with a distant family member," adding, "You love them, but you know there are a lot of things they can do better." Fifty-seven percent of survey respondents express appreciation for Israel's contributions to the world, and 41 percent feel at least some emotional attachment to Israel. One in 10 says that being uncomfortable with the tie between

being Jewish and Israel is a barrier to connecting with a Jewish community.

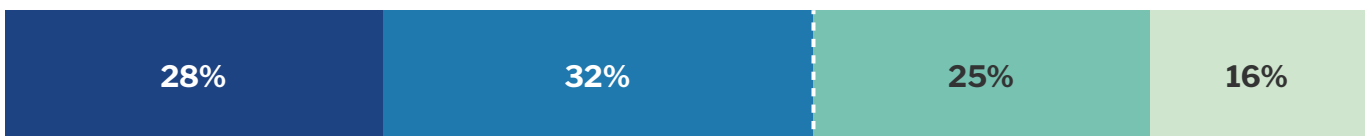
About one in five survey respondents have family in Israel, and two in five have visited the country with family and friends or through some Jewish programming. Those who have visited describe the experience favorably. "I felt so much more connected

"I honestly have very mixed emotions when it comes to Israel, both very good and not always great, so not like a clean emotion."

FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANT

How well does the following statement describe you?

I feel an emotional attachment to Israel.



■ Does not describe at all ■ Describes a little ■ Somewhat describes ■ Completely describes

to Judaism once I was there,” said a focus group participant. For many, though, that sense of connection was not long-lasting. “I felt connected when I came back.... When I came off the plane I was like, ‘I’m going to learn all about Judaism, I want to go back to Israel and learn everything.’ That lasted like a week,” another focus group participant said.

Beyond firsthand experience, news coverage is a primary factor that influences views. The most commonly cited news outlets for information on Israel include BBC, CNN, Fox News, and NPR. Many Jewish young adults note that coverage is centered mostly around conflict and tends to skew negative, which in turn serves to drive them away. “Honestly, I try not to follow it closely because it’s so depressing,” according to an online focus group participant.

While news coverage influences views, only 14 percent of survey respondents say that the statement “I regularly follow news about Israel” completely describes them. This finding suggests that a knowledge gap exists when it comes to current affairs in the country. There is also consistently a desire among focus group participants for coverage beyond conflict, such as through content that highlights Israel’s culture, society, and contributions to the world. “I think it would have a very different meaning to me if it wasn’t for all the constant broadcast of the conflicts and bombings and death,” one online focus group participant said. Another concurred: “It’s slanted to look like a lot of war. ... Not the beautiful country that it is.”

Some struggle with the idea of Israel as a Jewish homeland because it invokes a feeling of exclusivity. “Why do we need a place all to ourselves?” One focus group participant asked. “Instead of trying to create a sense of togetherness, it seems like a ‘separate but equal’ situation,” said another. This unease with the Jewish state is especially true for some focus group participants. “History has just proven that a homogenous culture or a homogenous state just doesn’t work,” one said. Another reported feeling “frustration, that there has not been peace resolved and that I think Israel’s being treated like a favored child.”

Russian-speaking Jewish survey respondents differ from their counterparts related to Israel. They are more likely to have family living in Israel, more likely to say a connection to Israel makes them feel Jewish, and also more likely to say appreciating Israel’s contributions to the world describes them.

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