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Study: Young US Jews don't see Israel as campaign issue

By HAVIV RETTIG

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When young, non-Orthodox American Jews vote in next week's US elections, they will be far less likely than their elders to be thinking about Israel's security, according to the 2008 National Survey of American Jews, sponsored by the Berman Jewish Policy Archive at New York University.

The key finding of the study, released over the weekend: Just 29 percent of non-Orthodox Jews younger than 35 say "the situation involving Israel and the Palestinians" is either "high" or "very high" as a consideration in determining their vote for president.

That figure nearly doubles to 54% among non-Orthodox Jews over 65, and stands at 39% for those aged 35-54.

The figure among young non-Orthodox Jews was similar to that of non-Jews (26%) found in a parallel simultaneous national survey.

At 81%, Orthodox young adults report the highest concern for Israel among their peers, a figure as high as that of their elders. Among all Jews, the figure stands at 52%.

Regarding the young non-Orthodox demographic, the study found that the detachment from Israel was not connected to a detachment from Judaism.



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"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," the study states.

"Younger non-Orthodox Jews are no less likely than their elders to say that being Jewish is important or very important to them," reads the study.

Among the non-Orthodox, 81% rate being Jewish as "somewhat" or "very" important to them, with no difference between older and younger respondents.

The study noticed a marked rise in visits to Israel among American Jews, attributing this partly to birthright Israel. 36% of non-Orthodox Jews under 35 have visited Israel, compared to 37% of non-Orthodox Jews of their parents' generation - a marked increase considering that they had fewer years in which to make the visit.

Seventeen percent of the young Jews came on a second visit, compared to just 13% of their parents' generation.

Of second trips, the study finds: "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."

In all, "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."

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