For a number of years it has been an article of faith in Jewish communal circles that young non-Orthodox Jews are drifting away from Israel. Sociologists blamed interfaith marriage and assimilation; traditionalists blamed liberal Judaism; Peter Beinart blamed mainstream pro-Israel groups.

But a study by Steven M. Cohen and Samuel Abrams for the Workmen’s Circle is threatening to turn conventional wisdom on its head. It found that levels of emotional attachment to Israel are actually higher among a non-Orthodox cohort 18-34 than they are for those ages 35-44 (they rise again for those 45 and up). What’s more, this expressed attachment correlates with travel to Israel: Among those young adults under 35, 34 percent have been to Israel as compared with just 22 percent of those 35-44. This led Cohen to speculate about a “Birthright Bump” — that is, the cumulative impact of the free trips to Israel that have been offered to nearly 300,000 Jews between the ages of 18 to 26 since 2000.

This attachment to Israel among younger people, however, is matched by their ambivalence toward Israel’s current policies. Among those under 35, 40 percent oppose settlement construction, while only 22 percent support it. According to the study, 45 percent of recent Birthright participants from this cohort have “very little knowledge” of the Palestinian question.

This research indicates that pro-Israel activism among young people is indeed more complex than political scientists have traditionally assumed. While it follows up on the results of previous studies indicating that young people do support Israel, it also shows a generational divide that is not necessarily reflected in the views of older generations. The younger generation is more skeptical of Israel’s policies in the West Bank and Gaza, but also more supportive of the state of Israel itself.

The results of this study are important because they suggest that the future of pro-Israel activism may lie with younger generations. However, the study also indicates that younger people are not monolithic in their views on Israel and that there is a significant degree of ambivalence among them.

Thus, it is important for the Jewish community to continue to engage with younger people and to provide them with a voice in the debate about Israel. This includes providing them with accurate information about the situation on the ground, as well as giving them opportunities to participate in Jewish communal life and to develop their own views on the subject.

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