

# Taglit Trip Extension and Return Trips to Israel

An Analysis

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November 2011

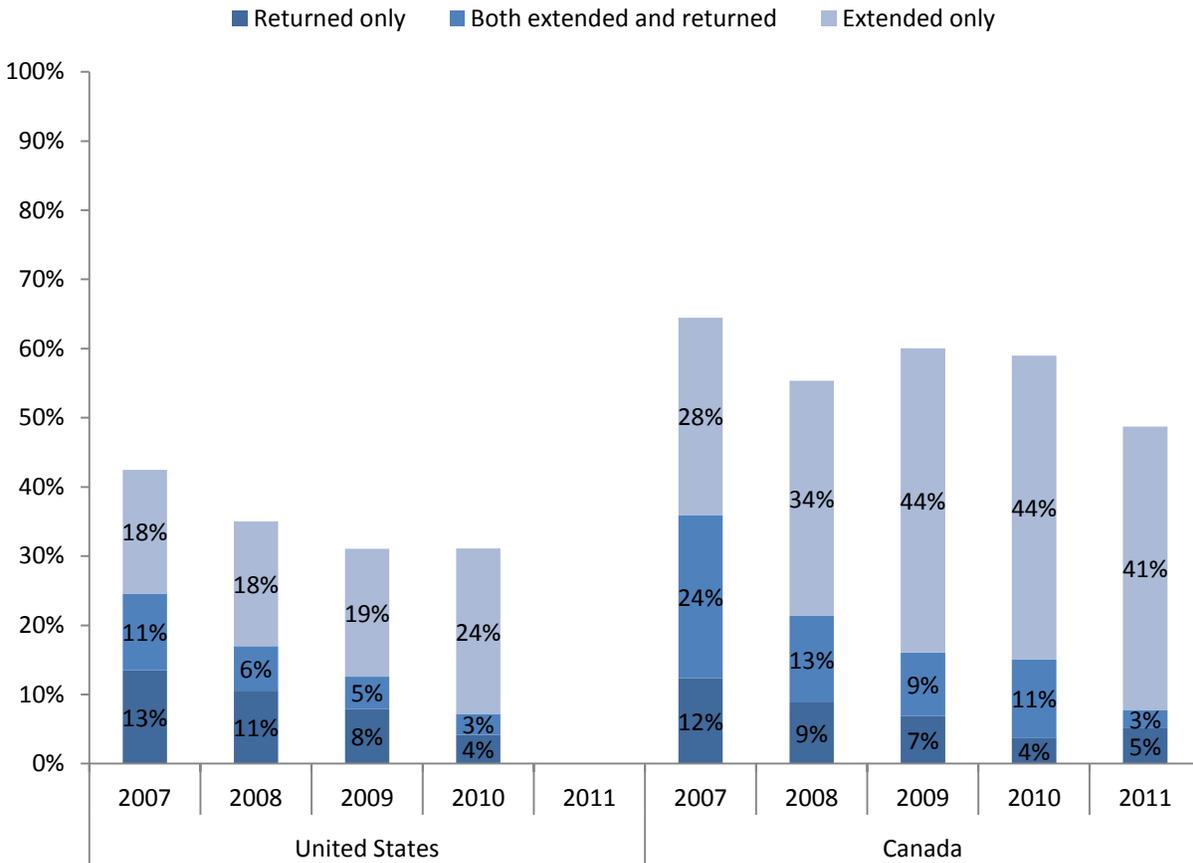
## Introduction

Taglit-Birthright Israel's goals are to promote Jewish identity, a sense of *ahavat Yisrael* (love of Israel) and a feeling of *klal Yisrael* (worldwide Jewish community). From Taglit's inception, however, skeptics have questioned the ability of the program to accomplish its goals in the ten day framework (see Saxe & Chazan, 2008). Along with questions about what kind of Jewish activities participants engage in on their return, key to understanding the impact of Taglit is whether participants return to Israel. The present brief report summarizes recent data about Canadian and U.S. Taglit participants, both in terms of their patterns of trip extensions, as well as their return trips to Israel.

Although Taglit is a ten day group educational tour, the program permits participants once in Israel to extend their trip. For most participants, it is easier to extend during the summer months (because they have more flexibility than during the winter), although in all cases, it depends on the availability of airline seats. Return trips are obviously a function of time: the longer the interval since a person's Taglit experience, the more opportunities he or she has had to return.

Based on surveys done in spring and fall 2011, with participants from cohorts that went on Taglit trips from 2007 to 2011, Figure 1 displays the proportions of individuals who extended, returned, or both extended and returned. The results make clear that for many U.S. and Canadian participants, Taglit is not simply a ten day trip. In recent years, between 20 and 30 percent of U.S. participants and about half of Canadian participants extended their Taglit trips. Furthermore, among U.S. participants who went on trips in 2007, nearly one quarter have returned to Israel in some capacity during the intervening years. Among Canadian participants, the number jumps to more than one third.

Figure 1: Trip extension and return by country and trip year

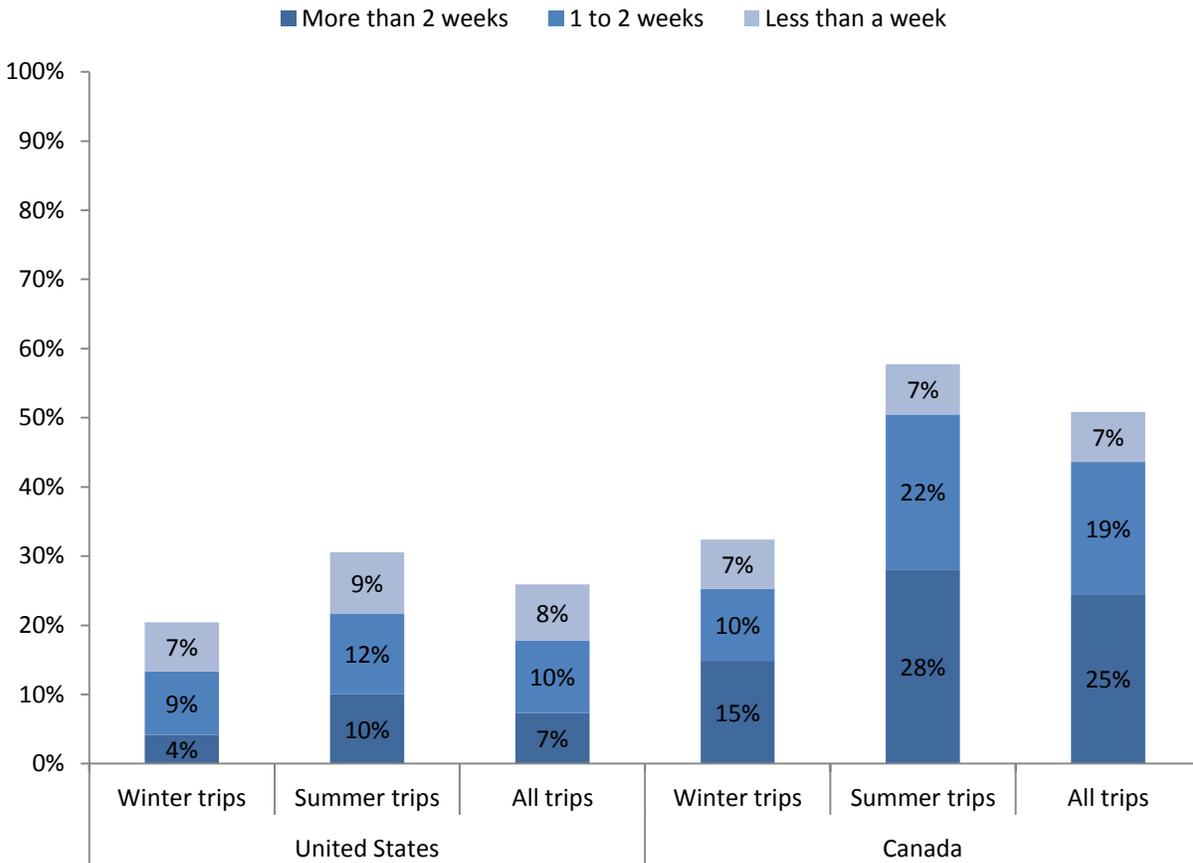


Source: CMJS Survey (2011) of U.S. applicants 2007-2010 and CMJS Survey (2011) of Canadian applicants 2007-2011.

## Extending the Trip

Overall, 25 percent of U.S. participants and 50 percent of Canadian participants chose to extend their Taglit trip (Figure 2). Some extended their trip for only a few days and others for more than two weeks. For both U.S. and Canadian participants, as expected, those who went on trips during the summer were more likely to extend their trip than those who went during the winter. The greater overall proportion of Canadians who extended their trip is partly explained by the greater proportion of Canadian participants who go on summer trips, over 70 percent, compared to only 55 percent for Americans. Even among those who extended their trip, however, Canadian participants were more likely to extend for longer, with almost half of Canadian participants who extended their trip staying for more than two weeks.

Figure 2: Trip extension by country and trip season

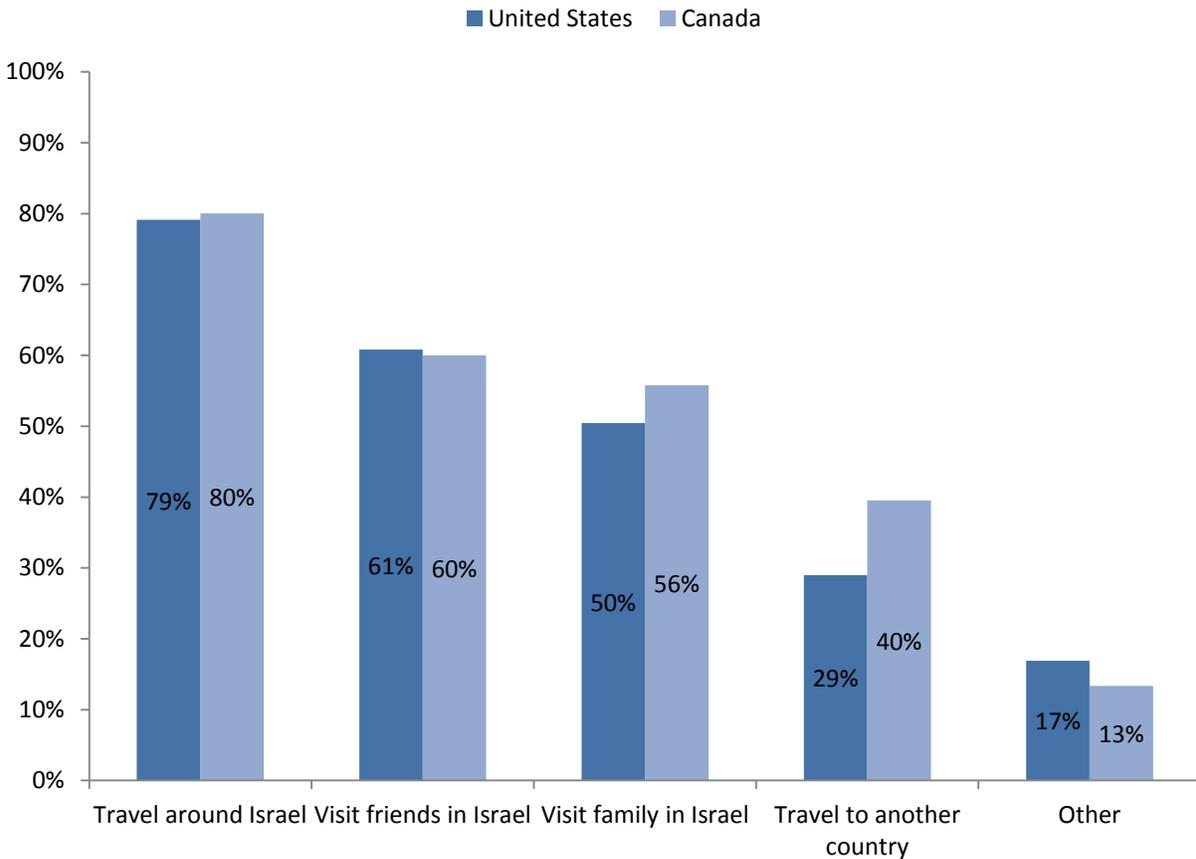


Source: CMJS Survey (2011) of U.S. applicants 2007-2010 and CMJS Survey (2011) of Canadian applicants 2007-2011.

What participants do during their extended time is important to understanding the nature of Taglit participants' relationships to Israel. Figure 3 shows what Taglit participants from the United States and Canada did during their additional time in Israel.<sup>1</sup> Large proportions of participants chose to explore more of Israel and visit friends and family. A smaller proportion chose to spend some of time travelling to another country. Among those who gave open-ended text responses, several participants mentioned studying at a seminary or yeshiva, participating in Ulpan or other formal programs, visiting the West Bank and working or volunteering on a farm or a kibbutz. Canadian participants were somewhat more likely than U.S. participants to visit another country.

<sup>1</sup> Survey respondents could select multiple responses, so the numbers do not sum to 100 percent.

Figure 3: Content of trip extension by country

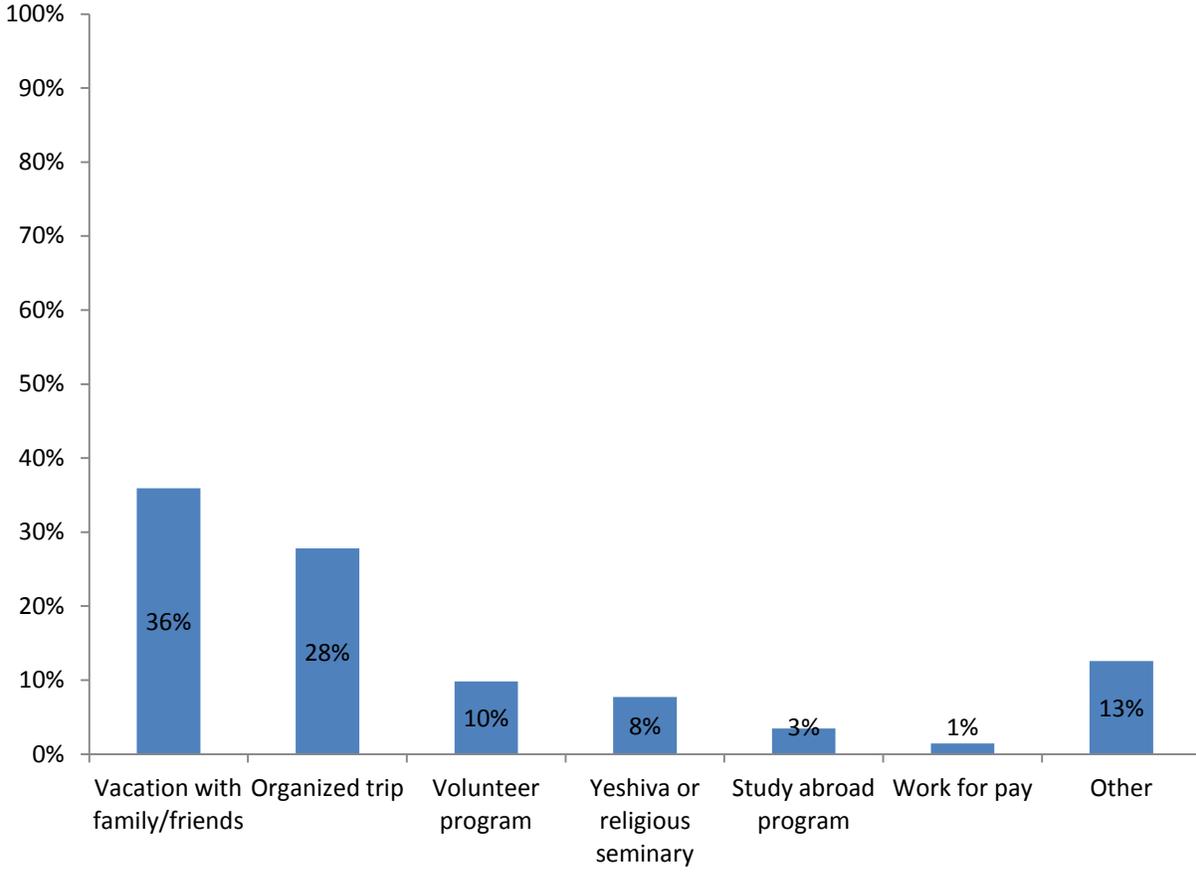


Source: CMJS Survey (2011) of U.S. applicants 2007-2010 and CMJS Survey (2011) of Canadian applicants 2007-2011.

## Returning to Israel

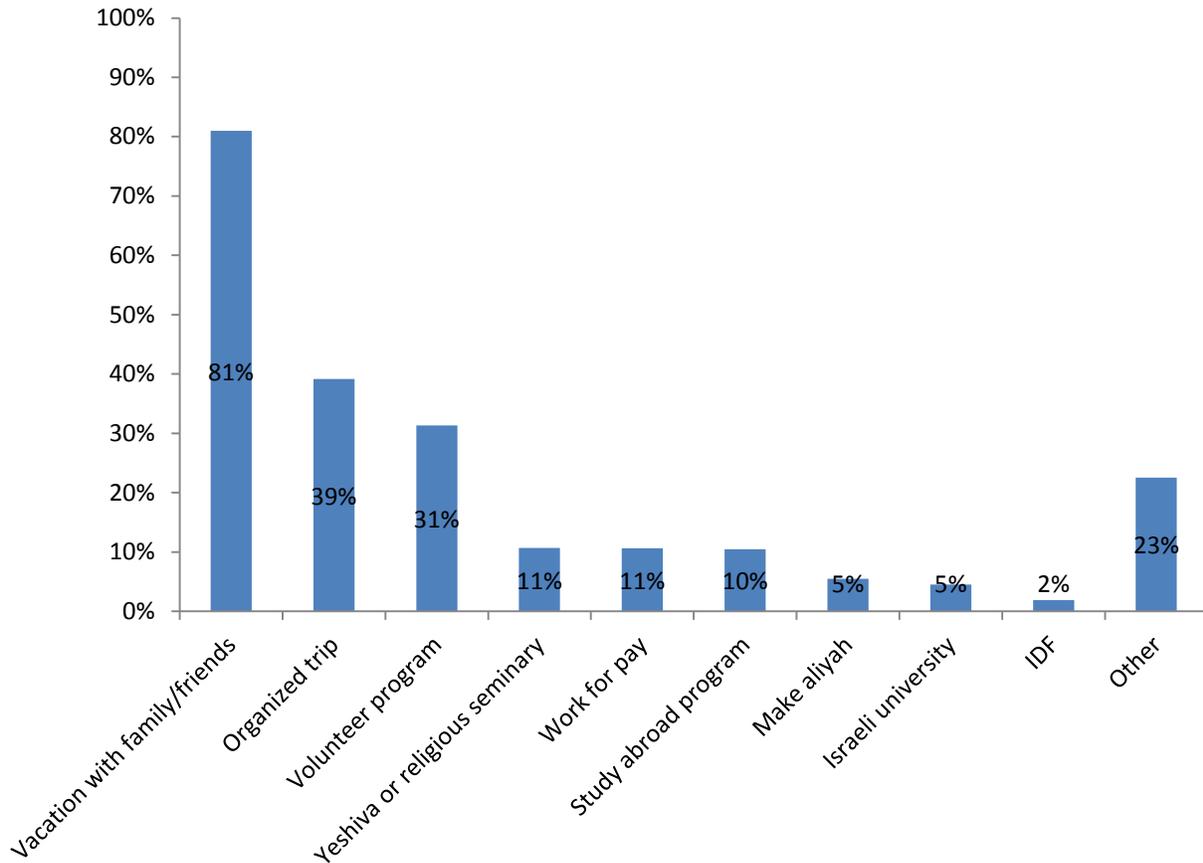
In terms of return trips to Israel, as shown in Figure 1, after four years, 24 percent of the U.S. participants had returned to Israel, while 36 percent of the Canadian participants reported having done so. As expected, the percentages are smaller for more recent cohorts. U.S. participants who returned to Israel were asked what they did on their *most recent* return visit (Figure 4). Simply going on a vacation was the most popular response, followed by participating in another organized trip. “Other” sorts of trips include returning to Israel for personal family events such as weddings, b’nei mitzvah or funerals. Canadians were surveyed separately and were asked a slightly different question. Canadian participants who returned to Israel were asked to list what they did on *all* of their return trips. Consequently, a number of additional categories are detailed in Figure 5, including making aliyah, which was selected by 5 percent of those who returned to Israel after Taglit.

Figure 4: Framework of most recent return trip to Israel, U.S. participants



Source: CMJS Survey (2011) of U.S. applicants 2007-2010.

Figure 5: Frameworks of all return trips, Canadian participants



Source: CMJS Survey (2011) of Canadian applicants 2007-2011.

## Predictors

To understand what is associated with extending and/or returning to Israel, a number of analyses were done to determine predictors of both decisions.

### Extending the Trip

The data indicate that for both U.S. and Canadian participants, a number of factors are associated with extending Taglit trips (see Figure 6). Many of the same factors are associated with extending the trip for participants from both countries, but there are a few areas where they differ.<sup>2</sup>

Logistical factors, or how feasible it was for a participant to remain in Israel for longer than 10 days, are perhaps the most important predictors of extending the trip. As previously noted, in both the United

<sup>2</sup> While the differences between the two countries could be due to true underlying differences, they could also be due to differences in the sizes of the two datasets. The U.S. sample is much larger and thus models run on it are able to identify smaller effects that are not detectable in the smaller Canadian sample.

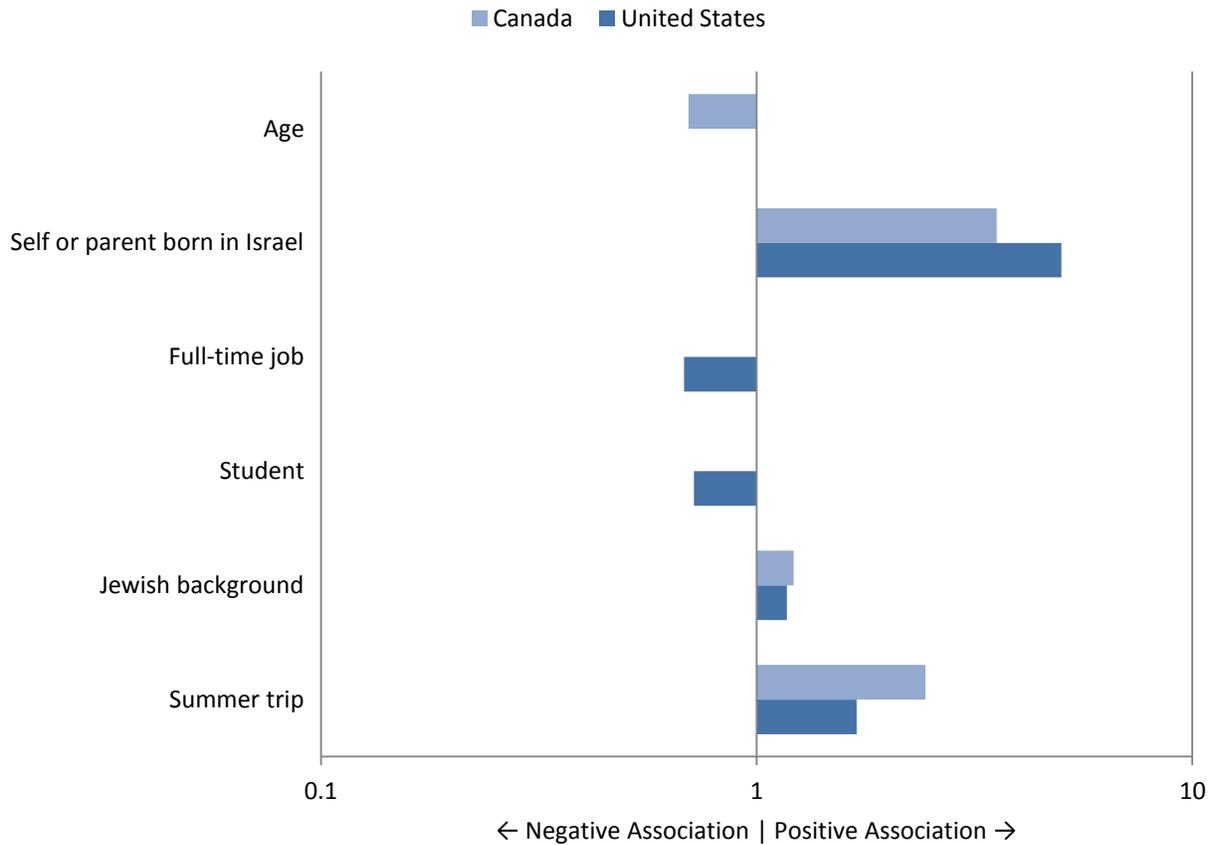
States and Canada, those who went on the trip during the summer (as opposed to the winter) were more likely to extend their trip, a factor clearly related to feasibility. U.S. participants who had a full time job were also less likely to extend their trip. Among U.S. participants with the same employment status, students were also less likely than non-students to extend their trips, although naturally, students were less likely to have full time jobs than non-students. Among Canadian participants, older participants were less likely to extend their trip.

Other factors related to extending the trip have to do with participants' backgrounds and, in particular, their prior connection to Israel. Those who were either born in Israel or have at least one parent who was born in Israel were much more likely to extend their trip compared to those with no direct family connection to Israel. Those with more intense Jewish backgrounds<sup>3</sup> were more likely to extend their trip compared to those with less intense Jewish backgrounds. It is noteworthy that those who went on more recent rounds were neither more nor less likely to extend their trip compared to later rounds. Gender was likewise not a factor in deciding whether to extend one's trip.

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<sup>3</sup> The scale summarizing the overall strength of respondents' Jewish backgrounds is comprised of four factors that hang together empirically: hours of Jewish education, high school ritual practice, being raised Orthodox and having inmarried parents. The scale consists of the sum of each variable's standard score ("z-score"), which standardizes the mean of each variable at zero and recodes the values of that variable to reflect the standard deviation away from that mean. Loevinger H scalability coefficients were used to determine the optimal scale composition. Respondents are categorized as scoring low, medium, high, or very high on the Jewish background scale.

Figure 6: Predictors of trip extension by country

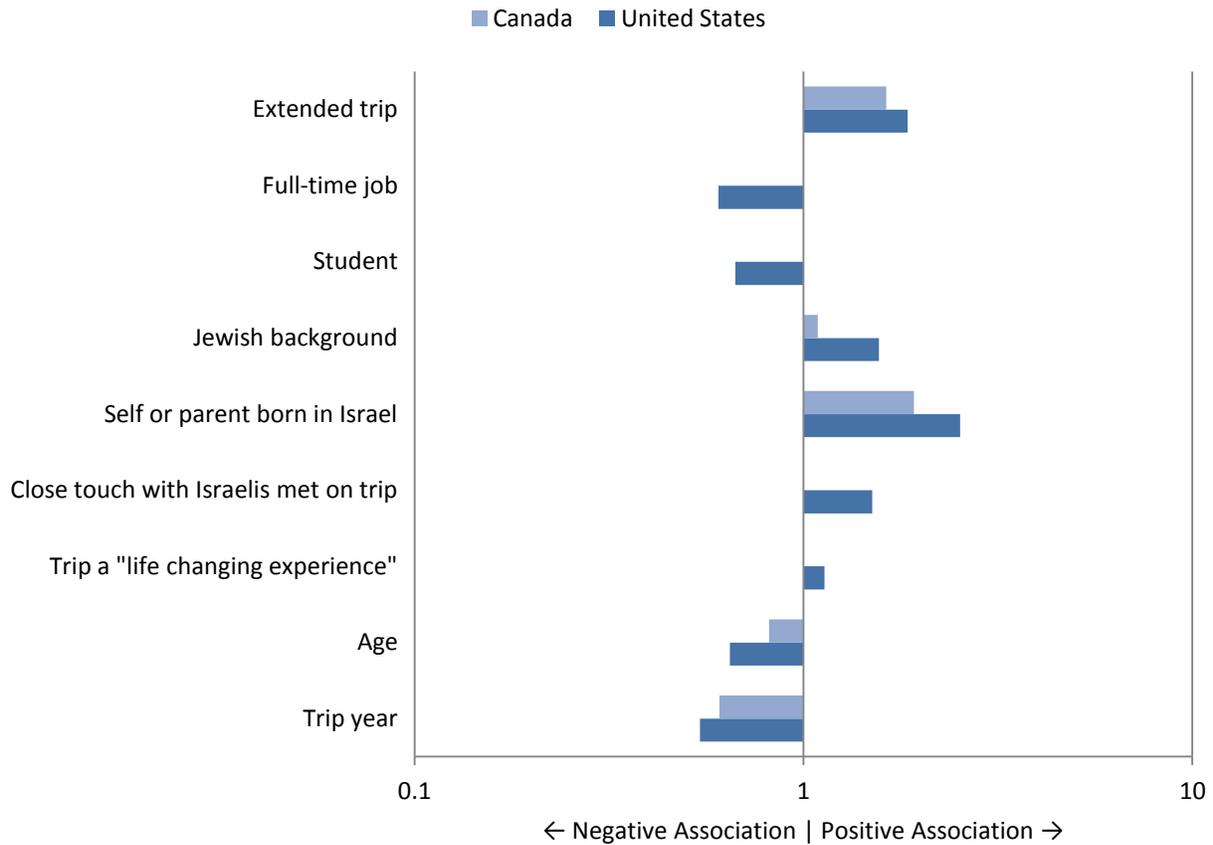


Note: Odds ratios from a logistic regression. Horizontal axis shows a logarithmic scale.  
 Source: CMJS Survey (2011) of U.S. applicants 2007-2010 and CMJS Survey (2011) of Canadian applicants 2007-2011.

### Returning to Israel

A number of factors were associated with choosing to return to Israel after Taglit for both U.S. and Canadian participants (see Figure 7). As noted, those who went on the trip more recently were less likely to have returned as of the date they were surveyed. Even after controlling for the date of trip, however, older participants were less likely to have returned than younger participants. This is potentially related to older participants being more likely to be “tied down” with jobs, family and other obligations. U.S. participants with full time jobs were less likely to return than those without, and after controlling for employment status, students were less likely to return than non-students.

Figure 7: Predictors of return to Israel by country



Note: Odds ratios from a logistic regression. Horizontal axis shows a logarithmic scale.  
 Source: CMJS Survey (2011) of U.S. applicants 2007-2010 and CMJS Survey (2011) of Canadian applicants 2007-2011.

For U.S. participants, there is some evidence that a positive the Taglit experience motivates participants to return: those who thought of the trip as a “life changing experience” were more likely to return. In addition, those who kept in touch more frequently with Israelis they met on the trip were more likely to return. However, this relationship is not necessarily causal: the increased contact with Israelis met on the trip could be *result* of their decision to return (asking for travel recommendations, etc.). These factors may affect returning to Israel for Canadians as well, but the smaller size of the Canadian sample precludes their detection.

Respondents who were born in Israel or who had at least one parent born in Israel were also much more likely to return relative to those who had no immediate family member born in Israel, as were those with more intense Jewish backgrounds. Also, those who extended their trip were more likely to return, even after controlling for many factors associated with extending the trip.

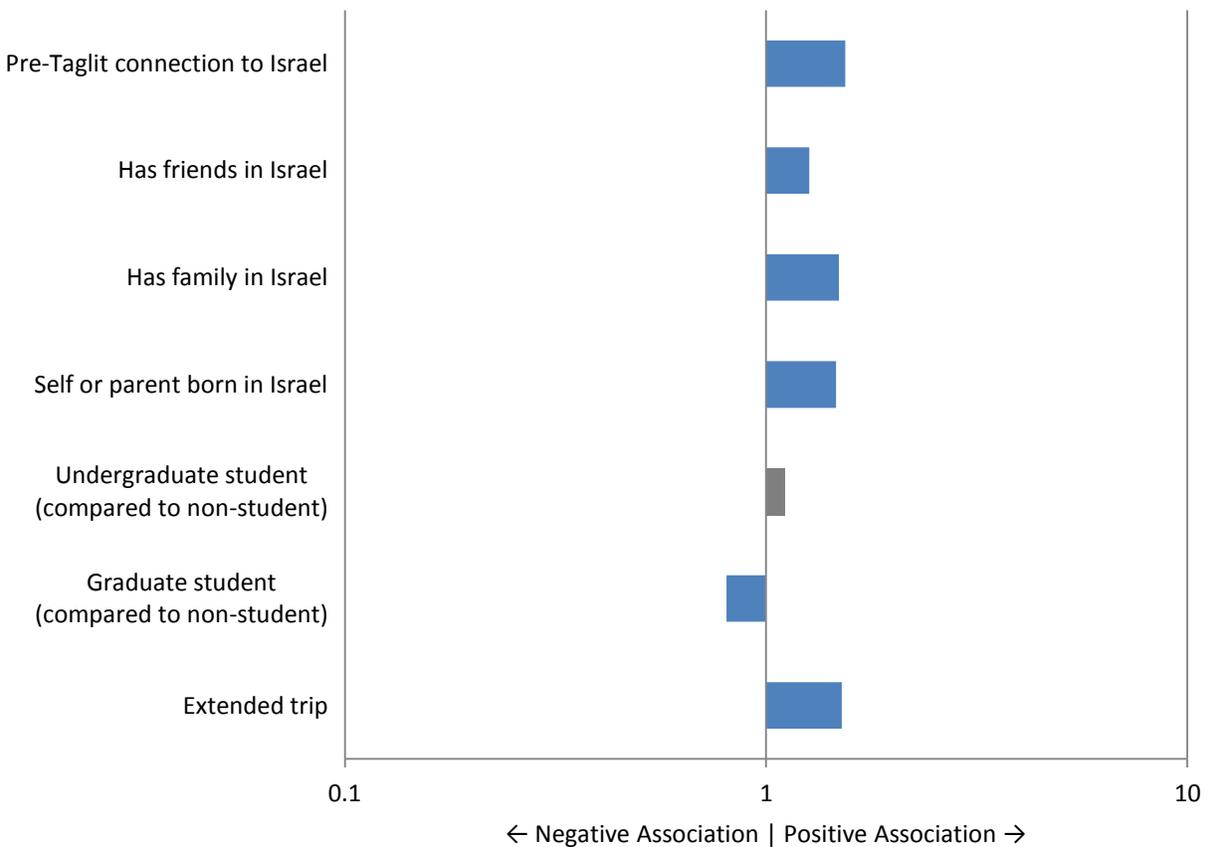
### Intent to Return

Although intentions do not always lead to action, examining Taglit participants’ intentions to return to Israel sheds light on the dynamics of return visits. Several months after their return from their trips, U.S.

and Canadian Winter 2007-08 Taglit participants were asked whether they had made any plans to visit Israel again in the future. Fifteen percent of participants had made some plans to visit Israel in the coming year, and another 23 percent planned to visit Israel in more than a year from the date they were surveyed.

Many of the factors that predict actual return to Israel also predict planning to return to Israel (see Figure 8). Those who extended the Taglit trip and those who were born in Israel or have a parent who was born in Israel were more likely to plan to return; graduate students were less likely to plan to return. Pre-trip level of connection to Israel, which functions here as a proxy for Jewish background, is also associated with increased likelihood of planning to return, as is having family in Israel and having friends in Israel.

Figure 8: Predictors of planning to return to Israel



Note: Odds ratios from a logistic regression. Horizontal axis shows a logarithmic scale. Gray indicates a non-significant coefficient.

Source: CMJS Survey (2008) of U.S. and Canadian applicants Winter 2007-08.

One of the most important factors in deciding to return is funding. Unless it is being subsidized by a program such as Taglit or MASA, a trip to Israel is prohibitively expensive for many young adults. Unfortunately, we have little data on the financial situation of Taglit participants. Partly, this is because it is difficult to untangle the income and financial situation of young adults from that of their parents.

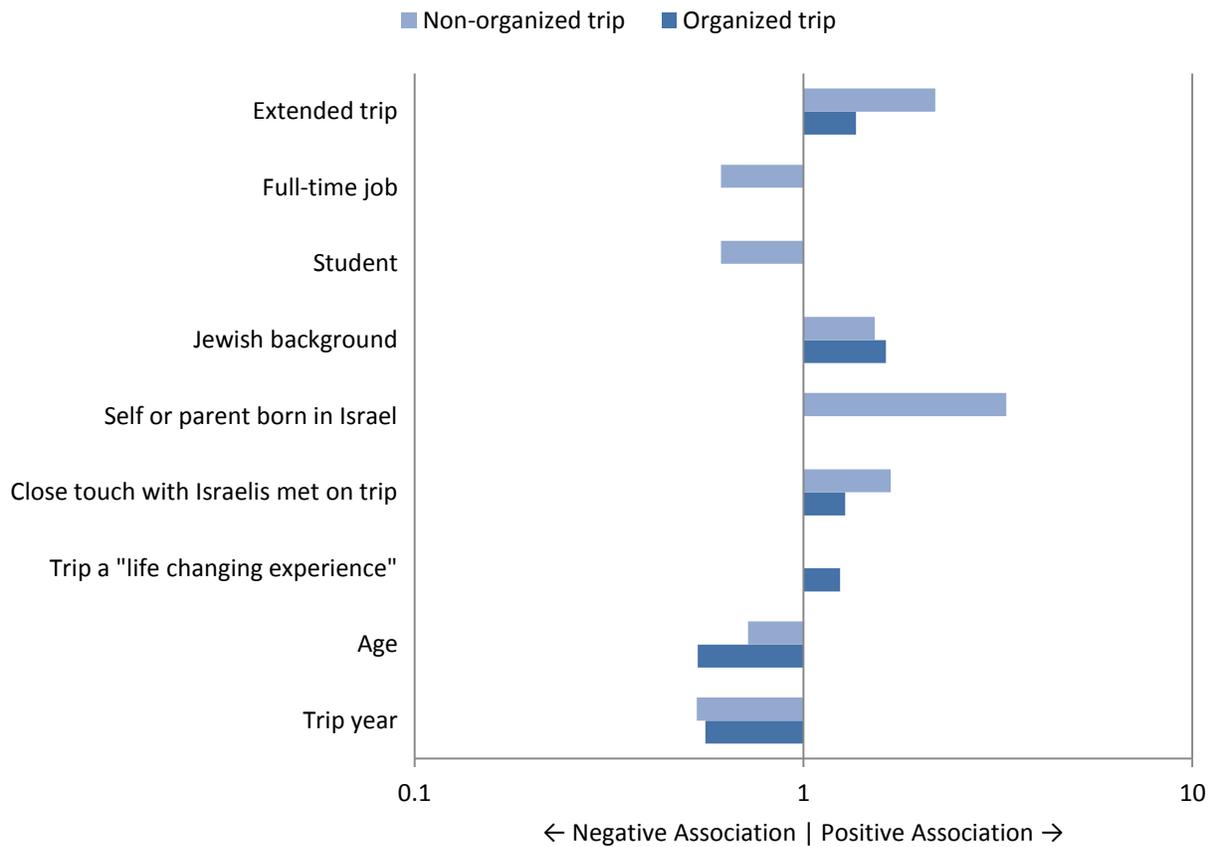
We have, however, asked questions of earlier cohorts of Taglit participants specifically focused on the financial issues involved in return trips to Israel.

For participants on Winter 2003-2004 trips, 39 percent of participants in that round said that it was “extremely” likely that they would return to Israel in the next two years (Saxe et al., 2004, p. 50). Participants also made clear that finances are the major barrier to returning to Israel, with 51 percent reporting that their personal financial situation makes it very difficult for them to return. A subsequent question asked participants how much they would be willing to pay to return to Israel on another Taglit trip. Nearly all (95 percent) participants were receptive to the idea of a return trip, and two-thirds were willing to pay at least \$400 for a second Taglit experience—a significant sum for young adults, but far less than a trip to Israel would cost if it were not subsidized. It should be noted that these data reflect the more engaged population that Taglit attracted in its earlier years and say nothing about the desire of participants to return to Israel in a *non*-Taglit context. Nevertheless, they illustrate that financial factors are a strong factor in return to Israel.

## Frameworks for Returning to Israel

As shown in Figure 4 and Figure 5, participants return to Israel in different frameworks. Some return on organized trips, such as those sponsored by MASA, AJWS or American or Israeli universities. Others go on non-organized trips, on a vacation, to get a job or to make *aliyah*. It turns out that different factors are associated with each of these types of return trips. For U.S. participants 2007-2010 (see Figure 4), one can distinguish those whose most recent trip was an organized trip (including those who went to returned to attend a Yeshiva or study abroad program or to participate in a volunteer program) from those who went on non-organized trips. To examine the way in which the two types of trips differ, participants who returned on each type of trip were compared to those who did not return at all (ignoring those who went on the other type of trip).

Figure 9: Predictors of returning to Israel on an organized or non-organized trip, U.S. participants



Note: Odds ratios from a multinomial logistic regression. Horizontal axis shows a logarithmic scale.  
 Source: CMJS Survey (2011) of U.S. applicants 2007-2010.

As shown in Figure 9, which displays the relative strength of the relationship among a number of factors predicting return trips to Israel, having extended one’s original Taglit trip, having an intense Jewish background and having a direct family connection to Israel were key predictors, along with having kept in touch with Israelis from the Taglit trip. The negative predictors were age (i.e., the older the participant, the less likely a return trip) and trip year. For the most part, predictors worked the same for return trips for organized programs *versus* non-organized, but the effects were stronger on non-organized trips for having extended or having an Israeli family connection. It makes sense that those with direct personal connections would travel to Israel outside of the context of a structured program.

## Conclusion / Discussion

Taking these data together it is clear is that, at least in the abstract, many Taglit participants want to return to Israel. Close to 40 percent of participants in the winter 2007-2008 cohorts reported having made plans to visit Israel after their Taglit trips. Prior research (see Saxe et al., 2008; Saxe et al., 2009;

Saxe, Sasson, & Hecht, 2006; Saxe et al., 2011) has demonstrated that connection with Israel and knowledge of news and events in Israel is high among Taglit participants.

Logistical factors seem to be one of the largest determinants of whether the desire to return to visit Israel is actualized. Data from 2003-2004 imply that participants view financial issues as a major impediment to visiting in Israel, and while participants would be willing to spend several hundred dollars of their own money to return to Israel on a Taglit-style trip, few are willing to spend the far greater amount required for an unsubsidized trip. In the current economy, financial issues may be even more important than they were eight years ago.

As young adults age, graduate and begin careers, they often become more financially stable, but they also form families and become settled into full time jobs. All of the data sources examined here indicate that participants, at least in the short term, are less likely to return to Israel as they age. In addition, in some cases those who had full time jobs or were full time students were even less likely to go than unemployed non-students of the same age. Clearly, travel to Israel requires a commitment of time as well as money, and may be more feasible for younger participants whose lives are still in flux than for those who have started to “settle down.” Our Jewish Futures study (Saxe et al., 2009; Saxe et al., 2011) will allow us to understand whether travel to Israel resumes once our target group is fully settled in their adult roles.

Aspects of the respondent’s upbringing can also influence their decision to return. Respondents who had an Israeli-born parent, or were Israeli-born themselves, were much more likely to return to Israel. Other variables also imply that growing up in a household that is “connected” to Israel in some way makes a participant more likely to return. This could be due to purely logistical factors, if a family friend or relative lives in Israel and can offer the participant a place to stay. Alternately, close ties to Israel could simply increase a participant’s desire and resolve to return after a Taglit trip.

Aspects of the trip itself can influence whether or not participants return. Most importantly, those who extended their trip were more likely to return, even after accounting for other factors. This is not necessarily a causal relationship: it is possible that a greater desire to “be” in Israel results in both the decision to extend the trip and, independently, the decision to return. However, it is also possible, and perhaps even likely, that many participants made additional connections to Israel during their extended trip that either increased their desire to return, or made it easier for them to do so.

It is also the case that the relative importance of each of these factors depends on the nature of the return trip itself. Return trips outside of formal programs seem to rely more on the participant having some direct connection to Israel, either a family connection, or one forged with Israelis met on the Taglit trip itself, or during an extension of the trip. Organized trips and programs, in contrast, are apparently more accessible to participants without relatives or friends in Israel, who nevertheless still wish to return, and may be more influenced by enjoyment of the structured environment of the Taglit trip. They are, however, much less popular with older respondents, who are less likely to return to Israel for any reason, but who especially seem unlikely to return on organized trips. Although there is no direct evidence for this, the self-funded nature of non-organized trips presumably makes them less feasible for

Taglit participants of limited financial means, compared to organized trips which can be partly or wholly subsidized.

Predictors of who returns to Israel notwithstanding, perhaps the most important finding of the present research is that nearly half of the participants in Taglit either extend or return to Israel within four years. Taglit is a short term experience, but these data suggest that to describe it simply as a ten day trip is inadequate. For the nearly one-quarter of participants who extend, the trip lasts significantly more than ten days and for many others it leads to a deep long-term relationship with Israel and Israelis. Extensions and return trips are, however, linked to prior Jewish engagement and direct connections with Israel. The challenge is to expand the reach of these efforts to those with have less intense Jewish backgrounds and don't already have family relationships to Israel.

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