Jewish Self-identification and Political Compromise: Evidence from the Israeli–Palestinian Conflict

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Abstract: This paper explores the relationship between Jewish self-identification and their attitudes to political compromise in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, grounded in social identity theory. The multifaceted dimensions of Jewish identity, such as religious, cultural, and national ones, and their impacts on political stances and peace negotiations. Through semi-structured interviews, the study reveals that Jewish collective identity significantly influences their political positions and behavior. Most respondents held that their Jewish identity shapes their views on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, mainly due to experiences of being persecuted and the establishment of Israel after the Holocaust, which lead them to a cautious attitude to political compromise, especially regarding security or sovereignty. Additionally, internal divisions within Jewish community (e.g., conservative to progressive) significantly influenced their attitudes to the conflict and a two-state solution. It emphasizes the important impact of recognizing and respecting Jewish identity on fostering inclusive dialogue, bridging ideological gaps, and promoting peace. It is necessary to pay attention to the crucial role of historical memory and cultural heritage in shaping political positions for effective conflict resolution strategies. This study offers insights but also exists limitations, suggesting future research, such as quantitative analysis and widening data collection to capture evolving political attitudes within the global Jewish diaspora.

Keywords: Jewish self-identification, political compromise, Israeli–Palestinian conflict

1. Introduction

1.1. Background

The Israeli-Palestinian conflict is one of the most enduring and complex geopolitical conflicts in contemporary world. Rooted in competing territorial disputes and historical rancour, the conflict has profoundly shaped the political landscape of the Middle East and garnered international attention for decades.

The conflict between Palestine and Israel dates back to the late 19th and early 20th centuries, marked by the Balfour Declaration of 1917. This expressed British support for a Jewish homeland in Palestine [1]. Following World War II and the Holocaust, international sympathy and Zionist aspirations culminated in the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948. This event, celebrated by Jews worldwide, also sparked displacement and dispossession among Palestinian Arabs, laying the groundwork for decades of strife [2].

The Six-Day War in 1967 was a pivotal moment, resulting in Israel's occupation of the West Bank, Gaza Strip, and East Jerusalem, territories Palestinians seek for their future state. Subsequent attempts at peace, such as the Oslo Accords of the 1990s, aimed to resolve these issues through negotiations, yet durable peace has remained elusive.

Today, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is characterized by ongoing disputes over borders, security concerns stemming from violence and terrorism, and the stalemate in peace processes. Efforts at achieving a two-state solution have faced significant challenges, including settlement expansion, internal political divisions among Palestinians, and differing interpretations of historical and religious claims to the land.

1.2. Research Objectives

The paper aims to explore how different dimensions of Jewish self-identification (e.g. religious, cultural, and national) affect their attitudes to political compromise in the context of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Based on this, objectives of this essay are as following:
1. To investigate the relationship between Jewish self-identification and political compromise.
2. To understand the internal divisions within the Jewish community in Israel.
3. To assess the implications of these findings for conflict resolution and peace building efforts.

1.3. Research Questions

Based on the research aim and objectives, research questions of this essay are as following:
1. How does Jews' self-identification impact their political attitudes to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict?
2. What are the correlations between different dimensions of Jewish identity and political compromise, from religious, cultural, and national aspects?
3. How do the internal divisions within the Jewish community influence the broader discourse on conflict resolution?

2. Literature Review

2.1. Significance of Identity

Identity, whether defined by religious, cultural, or national affiliations, plays a crucial role in shaping individuals' and communities' political attitudes and behaviors in the Israeli-Palestinian context. Jewish self-identification, in particular, encompasses a spectrum of beliefs and values that influence perceptions of security, sovereignty, and the feasibility of political compromise.

2.2. Social Identity and Political Attitudes

2.2.1. Social Identity Theory

Developed by Tajfel and Turner [3], this theory explains how individuals construct self-concepts and self-worth based on the social groups to which they belong. This theory provides important for understanding political behavior. According to the theory, people categorize themselves and others into various social groups, based on race, nationality, religion, political affiliation and so on. This categorization leads to in-group favoritism and out-group discrimination, which can profoundly affect political behavior.

Tajfel and Turner [3][4] concluded that individuals tend to classify themselves and others into different social groups, namely, in-group and out-group that this classification helps they simplify information processing in complex social environments. Meanwhile, individuals tend to compare

their in-group with their out-group in order to maintain or promote the status of their in-group. The positive image and dominant status of the in-group can improve individual self-esteem. In addition, individuals enhance their self-worth by identifying with specific groups. A person's self-concept is determined in part by the group to which they belong and their position within the group.

2.2.2. Social Identity in Political Behavior

Social identity theory explains why people strongly identify with a particular political party [5]. An individual's self-concept is usually integrated with the party identification so that people consistently stand for the positions and policies of the party they support in political decision-making [6]. This suggests that an individual's identity is largely tied to the group to which they belong (for example, a political party). Thus, even though party positions may evolve over time or be at odds with personal interests, people may still tend to support the positions and policies of their party, reflecting the profound influence of party identity on political behavior [7].

Individuals often advocate political policies designed to protect and advance the interests of the group to which they belong, acting out of a sense of loyalty and solidarity with the group and a belief that the prosperity of the group is inextricably linked to their personal well-being. Therefore, people would rather give priority to the group interests than other factors that the effects of group identity on individuals' political preferences and behavior are probably amplified [8]. Jewish voters in the United States, for example, often make their choice based on which party's policies are more in line with their interests and values when they decide to support whether Democrats or Republicans. It means that political leaders need to take into account the characteristics and potential interests of the groups they represent as formulating policies and negotiating, for ensuring that the final rectification results will not adversely affect the fundamental interests and characteristics of the party as well [9].

In addition, social identity theory interprets the strong bond between individuals and the group to which they belong and how this bond can lead to hostility and exclusion towards outside groups, thereby exacerbating political conflict and division [10]. For individuals, the strong connection between themselves and the group to which they belong is likely to lead to their hostility and rejection to external groups so that political conflicts and relations becoming strained. In other words, such strong internal loyalties and the external exclusion they lead to probably exacerbate existing divisions, as well as weaken individuals' incentives to engage in constructive dialogue or seek common ground, thereby exacerbating political polarization, such as the voting patterns in election campaigns and the intensification of political divisions.

2.3. Influence of Religious Belief on Political Attitudes

Religious identity is an important factor that inevitably needs to be considered when discussing the Jewish question, which have played a crucial role in the conflict between Palestinians and Israelis. It have played a decisive role in political attitudes, positions and actions of both sides, making this conflict more complex and difficult to resolve.

For most Jews, they believe that the land of Israel, including the West Bank was given to the Jewish state by God's will. This belief is the core rationale for defending the so-called Jewish settlements in these areas and opposing any form of territorial compromise [11]. Due to Jewish religious beliefs and historical legends, their long-standing ties to the land was highlighted and the insistence on national sovereignty reinforced, which shaped policies focusing on preserving Jewish historical sites and cultural heritage [12]. Further, some religious Zionists insists that the establishment of modern Israel is a key part of the God to Messianic age. This belief may have inspired political initiatives to expand Israel's governing-related right, and to oppose any territorial concessions that appear to run counter to this ideal vision. In particular, for religious Zionists living

in the West Bank, religious beliefs drove to build and maintain Jewish settlements in those areas, as well as profoundly influencing their political attitudes to negotiations and peace.

In the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, religious beliefs have significantly shaped political views of both sides. Religious teachings and stories of Judaism and Islam have influenced each side's claims to land, their perceptions of sovereignty and governance, and their those of justice and responsibility. These religious dimensions are accompanied by national identities, history, and cultures, which makes conflicts more complex. It is critical to recognize the great influence of religious beliefs on political positions for understanding the potential factors of parties in conflict and finding peaceful solutions [13]. On the one hand, Palestinians' national identity is related to their faith in Islam. For most Muslims, it is their duty to protect Palestinian territorial integrity and national rights [14]. On the other hand, religious claims to land have often led to an extreme all-or-nothing mentality in Jewish and Muslim communities that compromise seems to run counter to religious teachings. This value resulted into rigid positions, which in turn makes it difficult to have political dialogue and negotiations. That is, the religious integration and national identities not only strengthen their political resolve against occupation, but also drives their initiatives and activities in support of Palestine as a sovereign state [15].

2.4. Impact of Jewish Self-identification on Their Attitudes and Behavior in Political Compromise

Jewish self-identification significantly influences that they lean politically to compromise, which further influences the positions they insist and actions they take. Jewish community owns a high sense of collective identity which plays an important role in the political decision-making process, prompting them to consider group interests and respect the common value [16]. Their self-identification is shaped by their historical experience and cultural traditions so as to lead them to be significantly sensitive to power distribution and social justice. Further, their experiences of being subjected to persecution and social exclusion have also led them to take a more cautious and vigilant stance to political compromise, especially when these issues are closely related to social justice [17].

In addition, a wide range of political spectra within Jewish community varies from conservative to progressive and their different positions have a significant influence on their perspectives of political compromise, determining whether their support a particular issue or not. Faced with political compromise, Jews usually explore ways to achieving long-term goals by collaboration so as to achieve strategic purposes, such as ensuring the well-being of the community or promoting positive social change.

3. Methods

3.1. Data Selection and Collection

Data in this study was selected by snowball sampling, in consideration of capturing comprehensive and diverse voices within Israel's Jewish community. As for the analysis method, considering that open-ended questions in semi-structured can encouraged participants to provide detailed responses on varied topics. By asking in-depth questions, the researchers aim to reveal the logic, emotions, and personal histories behind the participants, such as religious beliefs, ritual practices, cultural affiliation, national identity, views on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, positions on political negotiations, and visions for peace. All of these are closely related to the themes mentioned above that not only deeply obtained the information about participants' attitudes, beliefs, and personal experiences with regard to political compromise, but were closely linked to their Jewish self-identification and relevance in the context of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

3.2. Reasons for Applying Semi-structure Interview

There are some reasons for using the semi-structured interview in this study. Firstly, such interviews allow participants to articulate their complex views and enable them to expound their personal experiences and convictions in detail. Given the complex and diverse nature of Jewish identity and its influence on their political stances, adopting interview as the main approach can motivated participants express their real positions. Meanwhile, researchers can to tailor questions and inquiries based on respondents' responses so as to facilitate new topics and insights that may be ignored in structured questionnaires. This flexibility is indispensable for capturing the broad spectrum of perspectives and diversity within the Jewish community.

3.3. Ethical Considerations

During the whole data collection process, strict ethical guidelines were followed to ensure informed consent, privacy and confidentiality. Participants were clearly informed of the purpose of the study, their right to withdraw from the study at any time, and what to do with their sensitive information.

4. Results

4.1. Jewish Self-Identification and Political Attitudes

Studies have shown that Jewish self-identification largely determines their political positions, especially when it comes to views on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Seventy-five percent of respondents said their Jewish identity (including religious, cultural, and ethnic dimensions) influenced their political views. Of these, 40% emphasize the religious aspect, 30% emphasize the cultural aspect, and 25% emphasize the national aspect as the most influential. Sixty-five percent of respondents agreed that their Jewish identity had a significant impact on their views on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, with 20 percent saying it had little impact and 15 percent saying it had little impact. Fifty-five percent of respondents said their Jewish identity makes them more wary of political compromise, especially where security or sovereignty threats are involved.

4.2. Influence of Group Affiliation on Political Behavior

About 70 percent of respondents acknowledged the influence of their Jewish faith on political behavior, a high percentage that highlights the important role social identity plays in shaping political attitudes. This finding is consistent with social identity theory. Social identity theory holds that an individual's self-perception comes from the connection with the group to which he belongs. Twenty-five percent of respondents said group identification had a moderate impact on their political attitudes, suggesting that there is a complex interplay between group identification and political positions, with other factors such as personal experience and beliefs also playing a role. While 5 percent of respondents reported minimal impact, this could indicate a degree of personal independence in political decision-making, or it could point to specific groups in the community whose sense of Jewish identity is more ambiguous or fluid.

4.3. Impact of Polarization on Consensus-Based Compromises

Half of the respondents believed that different opinions within the Jewish community prevent consensus-based compromise, showing relative difficulty in achieving unity and collective action to foster peace. It seems necessary to develop strategies to narrow ideological differences and promote a more inclusive dialogue. 30% respondents held the view that a strong sense of loyalty to group acted as a major factor in political polarization. They believes group-identification can both enhance

internal cohesion and be a barrier to compromise, which calls for action to promote understanding among different groups, while affirming the group's identity.

4.4. Perception of Compromise

In this survey, 45% of respondents see compromise as a mutually beneficial resolution strategy, which embodies a positive approach to conflict resolution. This perspective is essential to creating an environment that encourages negotiations to be viewed as an opportunity from which both sides can gain, rather than as a unilateral loss. Thirty-five percent of respondents viewed compromise as a concession, reflecting a more cautious or defensive stance driven by concerns about security, sovereignty or historical issues. This perspective may require additional efforts to build trust to show how compromise can lead to long-term benefits for all parties involved. Another 20 percent of respondents held an uncertain or complex view of compromise, revealing the diversity and complexity of conflict within the community. This group may be more receptive to education and information on the benefits and necessity of compromise in the peace process.

While most respondents recognized that their Jewish identity had an impact on their political stance, a significant portion of the community remained less aware or uncertain about the role of this identity in political compromise. This diversity of views is both a challenge to conflict resolution and a potential opportunity to advance the peace process. To reduce division, interventions should focus on deepening understanding of group identity to enhance flexibility in political attitudes and recognition of common goals that cut across group boundaries. Consensus-building efforts must also respond to the concerns of those who see compromise as a sacrifice and demonstrate to them how compromise can advance the achievement of security, justice and mutual benefit.

5. Discussion

This study provides a multi-dimensional analysis of Jewish self-identification, exploring its impact on attitudes to political compromise in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, at religious, cultural, and ethnic levels. It can be seen that Jewish identification is deeply shaped by their history of persecution, experience of the Holocaust, and the establishment of Israel after World War II, which directly resulted the heightened concern about security within Jewish community around the world and also prompted them to take a more cautious attitudes to political compromise, especially when moral and social justice challenges are at stake.

Jewish community emphasize collective resilience and the traditional heritage preservation, which further strengthens their sense of safeguarding group rights in political negotiations. A wide range of political ideologies within Jewish community, from conservative to progressive, has led to their different perspectives on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Conservatives tend to prioritize security and historical rights to land, advocating limited compromise and a firm defense policy, while Progressives put more emphasis on social justice, human rights, and promoting peace through diplomatic dialogue and compromise. The diversity of views within these communities influences support for or opposition to a particular political strategy, which in turn determines the community's stance on conflict resolution. This diversity is both an opportunity to advance peace processes and a challenge to conflict resolution, requiring a deeper understanding of group identities and common goals to mitigate differences and demonstrate greater flexibility in political attitudes.

6. Conclusion

6.1. Insights and Implications for Conflict Resolution

It is difficult to discover the relationship between Jewish self-identification and their political attitudes in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. But understanding this division benefits to formulate a programme which respects and recognizes the diversity of the Jewish community. Primarily, it is important to recognize the diversity of Jewish identity, and then to foster an inclusive philosophy to promotes reconciliation within different political beliefs. For this, it is necessary to understand the effects of Jewish historical memory and cultural heritage in shaping their political positions. Divisions within the Jewish community present both a challenge and an opportunity to resolve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Based on mutual recognition and respect for beliefs, narrowing the ideological gap through education, inter-religious dialogue and interaction can alleviate polarization and promote peaceful development.

6.2. Limitations and Future Research Directions

Although the study provides some valuable insights into the bifurcation of Jewish self-identity and political compromise, the study itself has limitations.Future research on this issue could validate the findings by expanding the scope of the study to include quantitative analysis, as well as finding differences in the views of different groups within the Jewish community.A deeper understanding of how the global Jewish diaspora has evolved over time in terms of political attitudes and changing contexts requires more rigorous longitudinal studies and cross-cultural comparisons.To address historical grievances and promote inclusive governance and lasting peace, policymakers and stakeholders involved in conflict resolution should use these insights to design targeted interventions and approaches.

In conclusion, this study contributes to a deeper understanding of how Jewish self-identity can influence political attitudes toward relative compromise in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.Given the complexity of self-perception of identity beyond politics, stakeholders can come up with smarter and more effective strategies to accelerate the arrival of sustainable peace.

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