

Jews and the News: News consumption habits and opinions of Jews in Britain

Israel Survey Report, Number 2

David Graham

The **Institute for Jewish Policy Research (JPR)** is a London-based independent research organisation, consultancy and think-tank. It aims to advance the prospects of Jewish communities in Britain and across Europe by conducting research and developing policy in partnership with those best placed to influence Jewish life.

Author

Dr David Graham is Senior Research Fellow at JPR. He completed his DPhil at the University of Oxford and is an expert in the demography of Jews in Britain. He has published widely both nationally and internationally. His most recent publications include: *2011 Census Results (England and Wales): Initial insights about the UK Jewish population* (JPR/Board of Deputies, with Jonathan Boyd and Daniel Vulkan); *Education: a statistical analysis, Report Series of the GEN08 Survey* (Monash University, Australia, 2012); *Surveying minority groups online: An assessment of the methodological approach used in the 2010 Israel Survey* (JPR, 2011); *Home and away: Jewish journeys towards independence. Key findings from the 2011 National Jewish Student Survey* (JPR, 2011, with Jonathan Boyd); *Committed, concerned and conciliatory: The attitudes of Jews in Britain towards Israel* (JPR, 2010, with Jonathan Boyd); *Synagogue membership in the United Kingdom* (JPR/Board of Deputies, 2010, with Daniel Vulkan); and *Jews in Britain: A snapshot from the 2001 UK Census* (JPR, 2007, with Marlena Schmool and Stanley Waterman).

Table of Contents

Introduction	2
Changes to the news media landscape	2
Summary of findings	3
General news consumption	4
Television news	4
<i>Which TV news broadcasters do Jews in Britain watch?</i>	4
<i>Who's watching, who's not watching?</i>	4
Newspaper readership	4
<i>Which newspapers do Jews in Britain read?</i>	4
<i>Who's reading, who's not reading?</i>	5
<i>Readership by political persuasion</i>	6
<i>Comparisons with fifteen years ago</i>	7
News consumption about Israel	8
Internet news about Israel	8
What do British Jews think about BBC News' coverage of Israel?	9
When British Jews criticise Israel in the media	10
Conclusion	12

Introduction

The Israel Survey was carried out by JPR¹ in January and February 2010 and was the first national study dedicated to an examination of the attitudes of Jews in Britain towards Israel. Supported by Pears Foundation, the survey generated a total of 4,081 responses, the largest sample so far assembled of Jewish public opinion in Britain.

The first report on the findings focused on the attitudes of Jews towards Israel and showed that for a majority of respondents, Israel forms a very important aspect of their Jewish identities, with almost three-quarters describing themselves as 'Zionist'. Nine out of ten felt that Israel is the 'ancestral homeland' of the Jewish people and an even greater proportion had visited the country. The survey also explored territorial issues, the peace process, defence policy and Israeli society. The initial findings were received positively in all sections of the British media, as well as internationally.²

This second report explores the considerable amount of data that were gathered in the Israel Survey on a number of other related topics, in particular, the media and news consumption habits of Jews in Britain.³ The majority of this data has not been previously analysed or published and therefore is presented here in its entirety for the first time.

Changes to the news media landscape

A general decline in newspaper readership in Britain has been charted in consecutive surveys since the 1980s.⁴ For example, in 1983 three-

quarters of adults read a daily newspaper at least three times a week; by 2006 this number had fallen by half. However, this decline mostly took place in the tabloid market, while the broadsheets maintained, and even increased, their circulation. It also occurred as the Internet matured into a widespread and sophisticated news delivery medium. As access to more and more news sources has increased, the competition for people's attention and time has ballooned. Today, the neat division between printed and televised news has become increasingly blurred and internationalised, with online newspapers providing video and audio output and TV itself becoming accessible on demand and on mobile devices.

Understanding news media consumption habits is important because of the potential role the media plays in shaping political opinion, educating the public and influencing political decision-making. As a relatively highly educated group, Jews are more likely to consume news media than the UK population as a whole and therefore it is all the more important to understand these patterns.⁵ Although the power of the news media to shape public opinion should not be overplayed, it is nevertheless important to understand how, and from which sources, the Jewish community chooses to obtain its news.

In the first part of this report, we examine general news consumption patterns exhibited by respondents to the Israel Survey. In the second part, we assess the more specific case of Israel-related news consumption. This includes data on consumption habits, perceptions of fairness in reporting about Israel, and attitudes towards the use of media by Jews when they want to voice their own opinions about Israel-related issues.

1 The survey was designed by JPR and the questionnaire was hosted online by Ipsos MORI. For more details see: Graham D & Boyd J (2010), *Committed, concerned and conciliatory: The attitudes of Jews in Britain towards Israel. Initial findings from the 2010 Israel Survey*. Institute for Jewish Policy Research, London.

2 <http://www.jpr.org.uk/news/detail.php?id=168>

3 Note that due to limitations of space on the original questionnaire, radio news was not examined in the survey.

4 Curtice J and Mair A (2008), "Where have all the readers gone? Popular newspapers and Britain's political health" p163 Table 8.1, Ch.8 p161-172 in Park

A, Curtice J, Thomson K, Phillips M, Johnson MC and Clery E, *British Social Attitudes: The 24th Report* (Edition 2007/2008), Sage, London.

5 Graham D, Schmool M, Waterman S (2007), *Jews in Britain: A snapshot from the 2001 Census*. Institute for Jewish Policy Research, London. Miller SM, Lerman A & Schmool M (1996) *Social and political attitudes of British Jews: some key findings of the JPR survey*. Institute for Jewish Policy Research, London.

All Israel Survey data presented here are based on weighted findings.⁶ Even so, it should be noted that the data on which this report is based originate from a survey specifically about attitudes towards Israel. Therefore, these data may over-represent individuals with an interest in politics and international affairs. Further, the data were gathered at the beginning of 2010, and in the time that has passed since then, the modes by which news is delivered and consumed have continued to evolve, with the increasing penetration of smartphones and other portable electronic devices. These trends are not recorded in the data. Nevertheless, their value and significance are likely to grow over time, as they are used for comparative purposes in the future to assess change.

Summary of findings

- The BBC was by far the most important provider of **terrestrial and online news** among respondents to the survey. BBC TV news was viewed by nine out of ten people in the week prior to the survey and the BBC's online news service was viewed by one out of two—no other online news source was nearly as popular.
- The vast majority of respondents (four out of five) considered **BBC News's coverage** to be biased against Israel. Respondents who supported the Conservative Party were twice as likely to perceive the BBC as being 'heavily biased' against Israel as Labour Party supporters. Further, self-defined 'Religious' respondents were more likely than 'Secular' respondents to consider the BBC to be biased. On the other hand, respondents with higher levels of educational attainment were *less* likely to consider the BBC's news coverage to be biased than those with lower level or no qualifications. (*Note, no attempt is made in this report to adjudicate either way as to whether the BBC's reporting on Israel is, or is not, biased.*)
- Respondents were divided as to whether they felt it is ever justifiable for Jews to **publicly criticise Israel** in the media. A quarter felt criticism can 'Never' be justified, but a third felt that Jews should 'Always' feel free to do so should they consider it justified. Well over half of Labour supporters felt Jews should 'Always' feel free to express critical opinions if they wanted to, compared with less than a quarter of Conservative supporters. 'Religious' respondents were more than four times as likely to 'Never' consider criticism acceptable as 'Secular' respondents. And respondents with higher level qualifications were twice as likely to agree that criticism should 'Always' be acceptable as those with lower level qualifications.
- In 2010, terrestrial television and printed newspapers continued to be the dominant modes of news media consumption among this sample of Jewish adults.
- Relatively high levels of **printed** newspaper readership were reported. Nine out of ten respondents had read at least one printed newspaper in the week prior to the survey. *The Times* was the most popular printed newspaper read by almost half the sample. This title was also the most popular Jewish choice in 1995.⁷
- Three out of five respondents had viewed at least one **online** newspaper in the week prior to the survey. Respondents aged under forty were twice as likely to have watched TV news online and have read online newspapers as respondents aged sixty and above.
- In the month prior to the survey, a third of respondents had viewed the Israeli newspaper *Haaretz* online. Religious respondents were most likely to have accessed **news about Israel online**, and secular respondents were most likely not to have looked at any online news sources about Israel.

6 The data have been weighted in terms of synagogue membership, secular-religious outlook and educational attainment. See further: Graham D (2011), *Surveying minority groups online. An assessment of the methodological approach used in the 2010 Israel Survey*. London: Institute for Jewish Policy Research.

7 See: Miller et. al. (1996), *Social and political attitudes of British Jews: some key findings of the JPR survey*. London: Institute for Jewish Policy Research.

General news consumption

Television news

Which TV news broadcasters do Jews in Britain watch?

The online news market is an increasingly important mode of news delivery but in 2010, this sample was still more likely to access the news through the traditional medium of television (Figure 1). The most popular source of TV news was the BBC, viewed by nine out of ten respondents in the week prior to the survey. No other broadcaster came close to matching this proportion, although two in five had watched the news on at least one of Channel 4, ITN or Sky. The one clear exception to the relative lack of online news penetration was the BBC's online news service which, though not as popular as BBC TV news, was nevertheless the second most popular TV or online news source, viewed by half of all respondents. This highlights the importance of the BBC as a news provider and its dominating presence in the general online news market.

Who's watching, who's not watching?

Older people watch more news than younger people and men are more likely to watch the news than women (Table 1).

The preferred delivery medium for TV news among older respondents in 2010 continued to be terrestrial television, whereas the Internet was preferred by younger people (Table 2).

Newspaper readership

Which newspapers do Jews in Britain read?

Despite dramatic falls in printed (especially tabloid) newspaper readership in the last twenty

Table 1. "In the last 7 days, which TV news broadcasters, if any, have you watched or viewed to see the news?"

	I have not watched the news on TV	I have watched 3 or more TV news channels
Male	6%	55%
Female	11%	43%
18-39	18%	38%
40-59	9%	48%
60 and above	4%	57%

Figure 1: "In the last 7 days, which TV broadcasters, if any, have you watched or viewed to see the news?" (%)

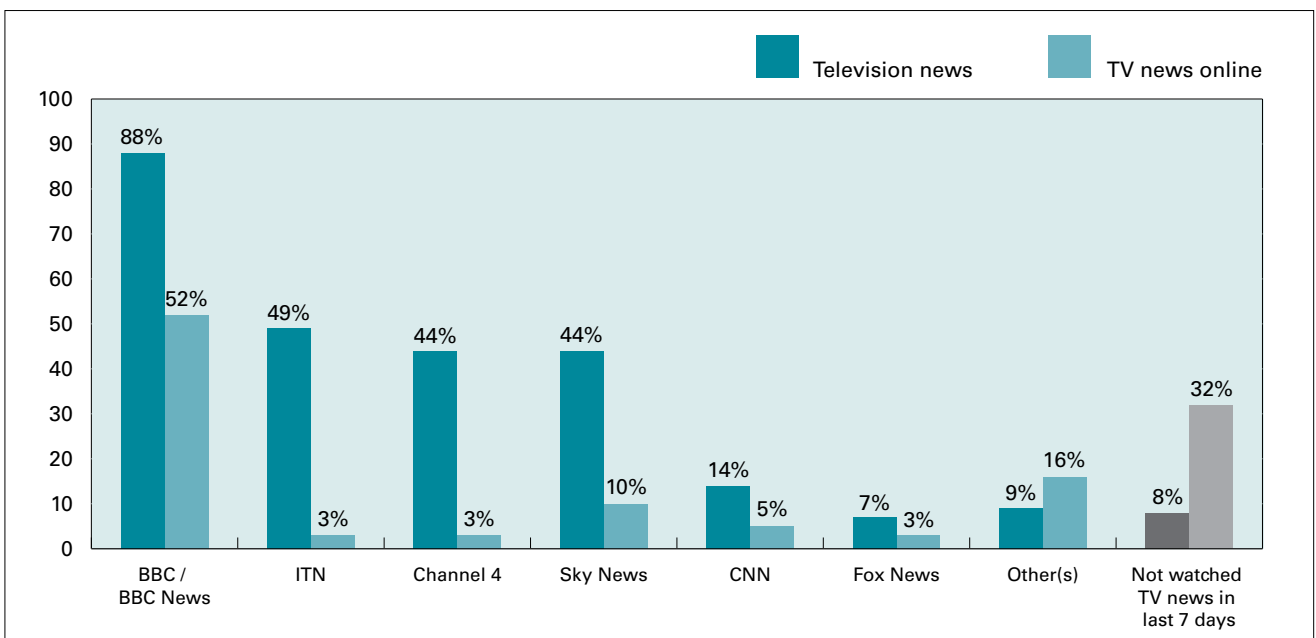


Table 2. "In the last 7 days, which *online* news broadcasters, if any, have you watched or viewed to see the news?"

	I have not watched or viewed the news online	I have watched or viewed 3 or more online news channels
Male	27%	24%
Female	40%	11%
18-39	15%	31%
40-59	30%	19%
60 and above	39%	15%

years,⁸ Israel Survey respondents reported relatively high levels of printed news consumption. Nine out of ten had read at least one printed newspaper in the week prior to the survey. *The Times* was the most popular printed paper, attracting almost half of the respondents and it was also the most popular online newspaper. The (free) *London Evening Standard* was the second

8 Curtice J and Mair A (2008), *op cit*.

most popular title. *The Guardian* has achieved relatively high online penetration among the sample, relative to the size of its print readership.

Free commuter dailies (*London Evening Standard* and *Metro*) are read predominantly in paper format, whereas 'Other' papers are more likely to be read online.

Three out of five respondents had viewed at least one online news source in the week prior to the survey. However, given the rapid rate of change in the market for handheld mobile devices in recent years and the change in news consumption habits this is generating,⁹ it is likely that this proportion has increased since this survey was carried out in 2010.

Who's reading, who's not reading?

In general, older people are more likely to read newspapers than younger people, but younger people are more likely to read them online than

9 http://www.comscore.com/Press_Events/Press_Releases/2012/3/Number_of_European_Smartphone_Users_Accessing_News_Surges_74_Percent_Over_Past_Year?piCID=66038

Figure 2: "In the last 7 days, which newspapers, if any, have you read?" (%)

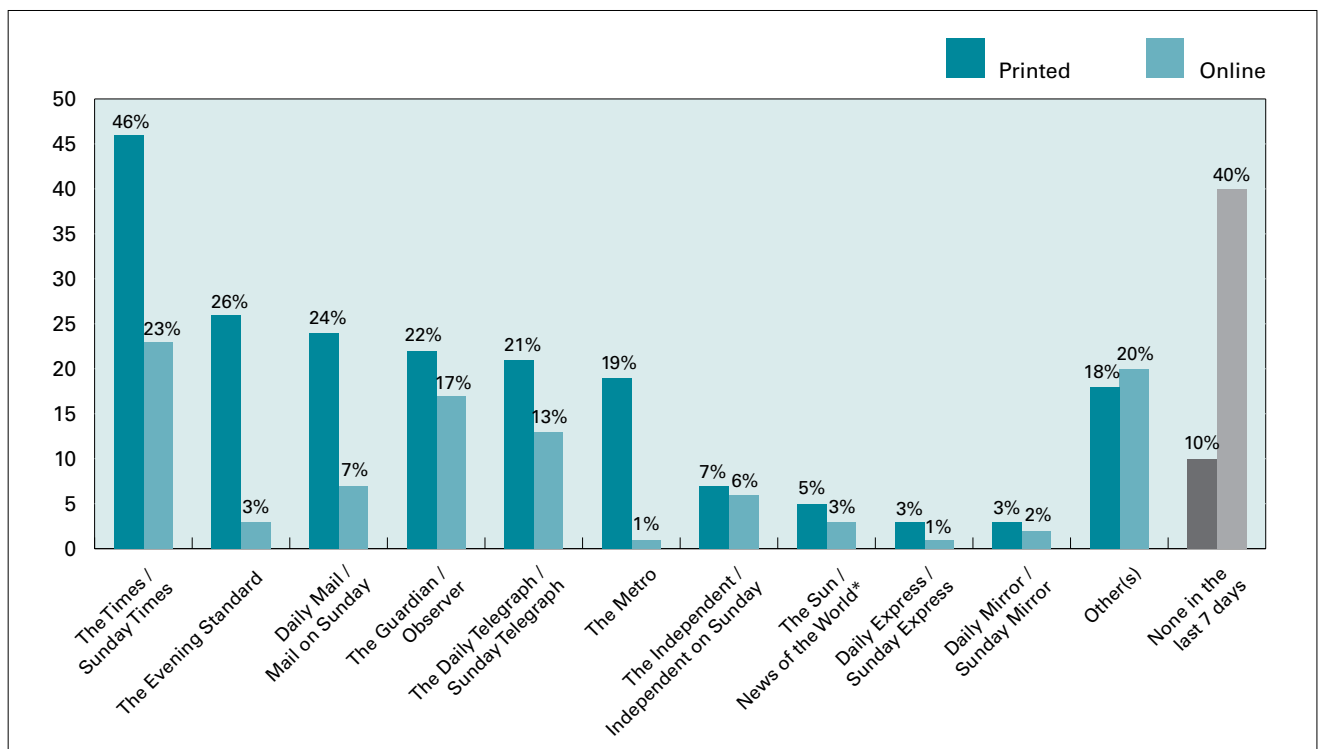


Figure 3: Market penetration by age: *The Times* (%)

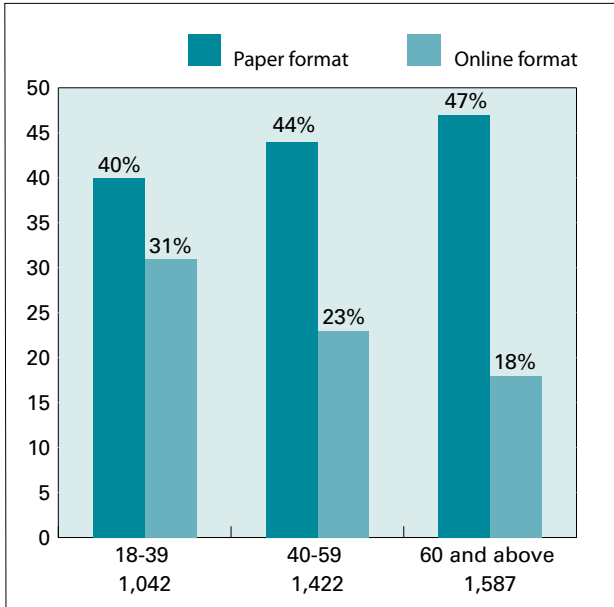
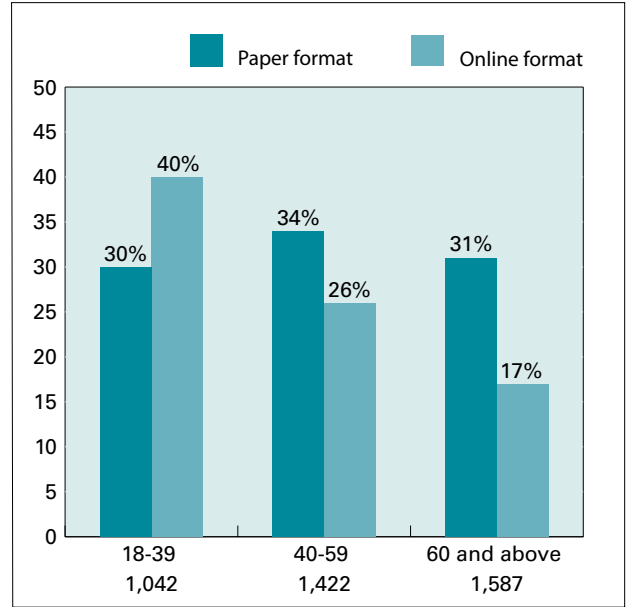


Figure 4: Market penetration by age: *The Guardian* (%)



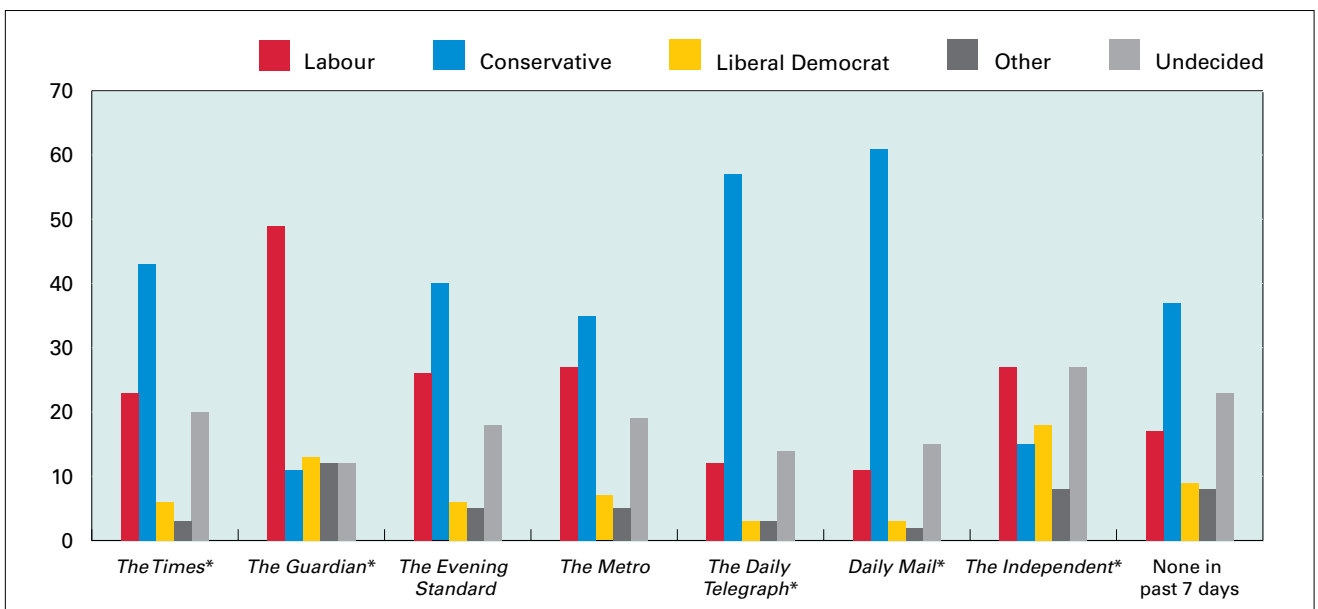
older people. *The Times* is the most widely read newspaper in paper format; even among younger respondents two out of five had read it in this format in the week before the survey (Figure 3). This contrasts with readership patterns for *The Guardian* (Figure 4). Here, age makes little difference to consumption patterns in paper format—about a third for each age group—but the young dominate online readership: two in five respondents under forty read *The Guardian*

online in the week before the survey, a greater proportion than read the publication in paper format (Figure 4).

Readership by political persuasion

It is not only age and gender that impact on news consumption habits; indeed one of the most important factors is political leaning. British daily newspapers have always been partisan, and this is reflected in the data. Almost half the readers of

Figure 5: “In the last 7 days, which [printed] newspapers, if any, have you read?” by political persuasion (%)



* includes Sunday editions

Table 3 Newspaper readership among Jews, by rank, 1995 compared with 2010

	1995	2010 printed	2010 online
Most popular	<i>The Times</i>	<i>The Times</i>	<i>The Times</i>
2nd most popular	<i>Daily Mail</i>	<i>Evening Standard</i>	<i>The Guardian</i>
3rd most popular	<i>The Daily Telegraph</i>	<i>Daily Mail</i>	<i>The Daily Telegraph</i>
4th most popular	<i>The Guardian</i>	<i>The Guardian</i>	<i>Daily Mail</i>
5th most popular	<i>The Independent</i>	<i>The Daily Telegraph</i>	<i>The Independent</i>

The Guardian support Labour, whereas over half of readers of the *Daily Telegraph* and *Daily Mail* are Conservative supporters (Figure 5). These patterns are largely repeated for online readership.

Comparisons with fifteen years ago

In 1995, JPR also explored the topic of newspaper readership (although at that time, of course, the topic was limited to the printed press only). Although the 1995 survey framed readership habits slightly differently¹⁰, it is nevertheless instructive to look at the comparison over time. Table 3 shows that *The Times* is consistently the most popular newspaper over the fifteen year

period, and has maintained this position online as well as in print. An interesting difference between 2010 and 1995 is the position of the *London Evening Standard*: it was the seventh most popular title (not shown in the table) in 1995, but had risen to become the second most popular daily amongst Jews by 2010. No doubt this change in fortunes was related to a decision in October 2009 to give the paper away for free to London's commuters.¹¹ It is possible, however, that this could change in the future, particularly if WiFi becomes widely available on all London Underground trains (it is already available in central London tube stations), and the Tablet and Smartphone markets continue to grow.¹²

10 Two questions were asked in JPR's 1995 Social and Political Attitudes Survey: "Finally, we turn to questions on newspapers and other publications. Can you please say which newspaper or newspapers you read at least 3 times a week, if any?" followed by: "Which Sunday newspaper and journals do you read at least once a month?" (see: Miller, Schmool and Lerman (1996), p.18. [*op cit*]) Because of these differences it is not possible to compare the data directly, however it is legitimate to compare relative rankings, as has been done here.

11 Note 60% of the sample lives in London, similar to the national Jewish population distribution.

12 <http://www.tfl.gov.uk/corporate/media/newscentre/24177.aspx>

News consumption about Israel

Internet news about Israel

As the Internet has matured, online newspaper provision has expanded, and it is increasingly possible to obtain news about Israel directly from Israeli newspapers and media outlets, especially considering several publish articles in English. Indeed, in the month prior to the survey, a third of respondents had viewed the Israeli newspaper *Haaretz* online—similar to the proportion that had viewed *The JC* online for Israel news.

A closer look at how people are, and are not, accessing news about Israel online shows that

religious respondents are most likely, and secular respondents are least likely, to do so. It is also notable that readership patterns differ by source. For example, *thejc.com* and *haaretz.com* are read equally by religious and secular respondents, whereas *jpost.com* (*Jerusalem Post*) tends to be read more by religious respondents than by secular respondents. These patterns are broadly reflective of these papers’ political stances.

As has been seen repeatedly in this report, the young are more likely than the old to source news online. This is no less true in terms of accessing

Figure 6: “In the past month, which of the following websites, if any, have you looked at to get news about Israel?”

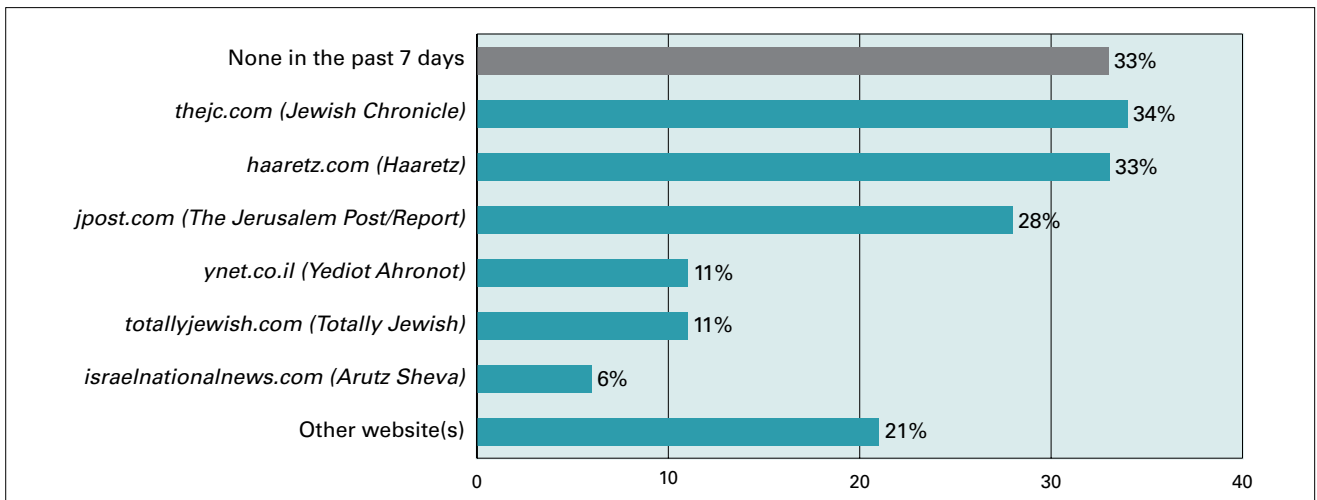


Figure 7: “In the past month, which of the following websites, if any, have you looked at to get news about Israel?” by secular/religious outlook

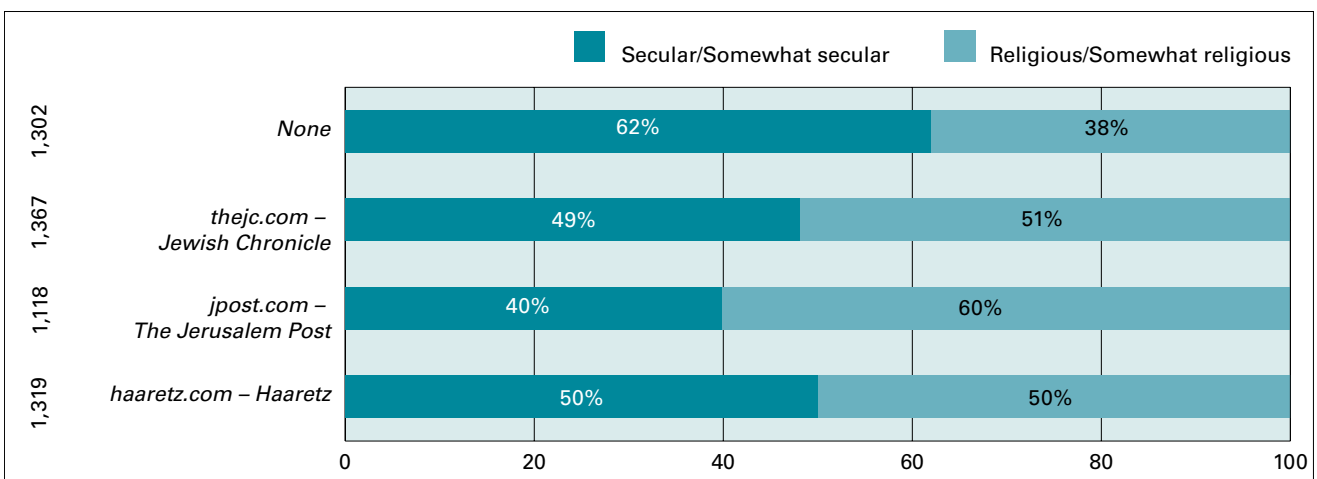
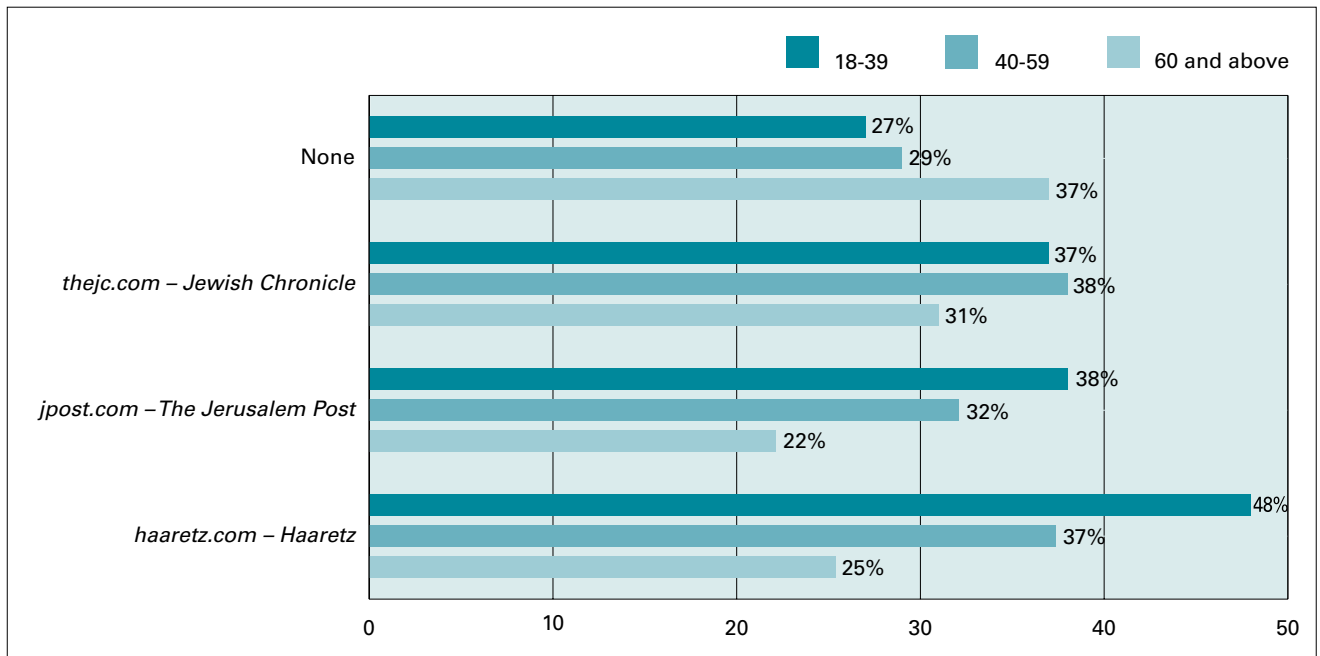


Figure 8: “In the past month, which of the following websites, if any, have you looked at to get news about Israel?” by age (Each bar shows proportion of age group responding ‘Yes’)



news about Israel (‘None’ in Figure 8). Indeed almost half of all respondents under forty had viewed *Haaretz.com* in the month before the survey, compared with just a quarter of those aged sixty and above.¹³ This suggests that the opportunities afforded by the internationalisation of news media are being more comprehensively exploited by the young than by the old.

What do British Jews think about BBC News’ coverage of Israel?

As a publicly funded body, the BBC is required by its charter to be free from both political and commercial bias. Given the important role played by the BBC in delivering news in general (page 4), and about Israel in particular, both to Britain’s Jewish and general population, it is instructive to understand whether respondents considered the BBC’s news coverage of Israel to be balanced.

13 Since the Israel Survey was carried out (early 2010) a number of changes have occurred to the online market for news about Israel. For example, *Haaretz.com* has become a subscription-only service and *The Times of Israel* (<http://www.timesofisrael.com/>) has entered the market.

Figure 9 clearly indicates that the vast majority (four out of five respondents) considered the BBC’s coverage to be biased *against* Israel. Only one out of five respondents considered the coverage to be fair or favourable towards Israel.

Figure 9: “Would you say the BBC’s news coverage of Israel over the last 12 months has been ...?” (N=3,972)

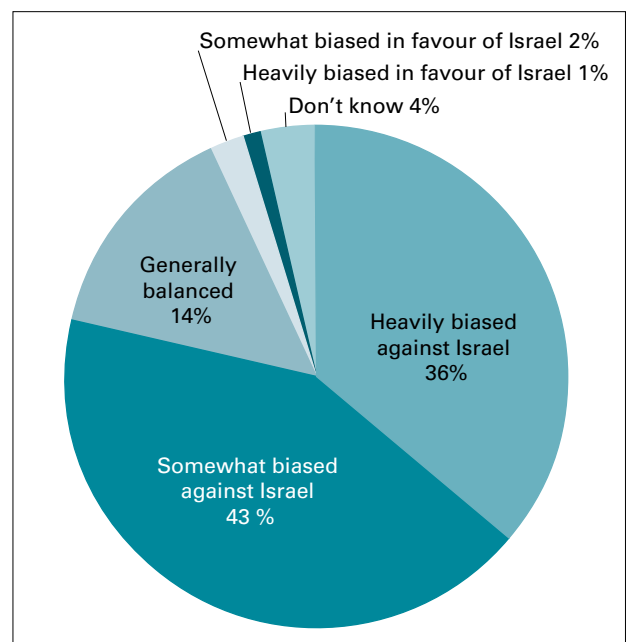
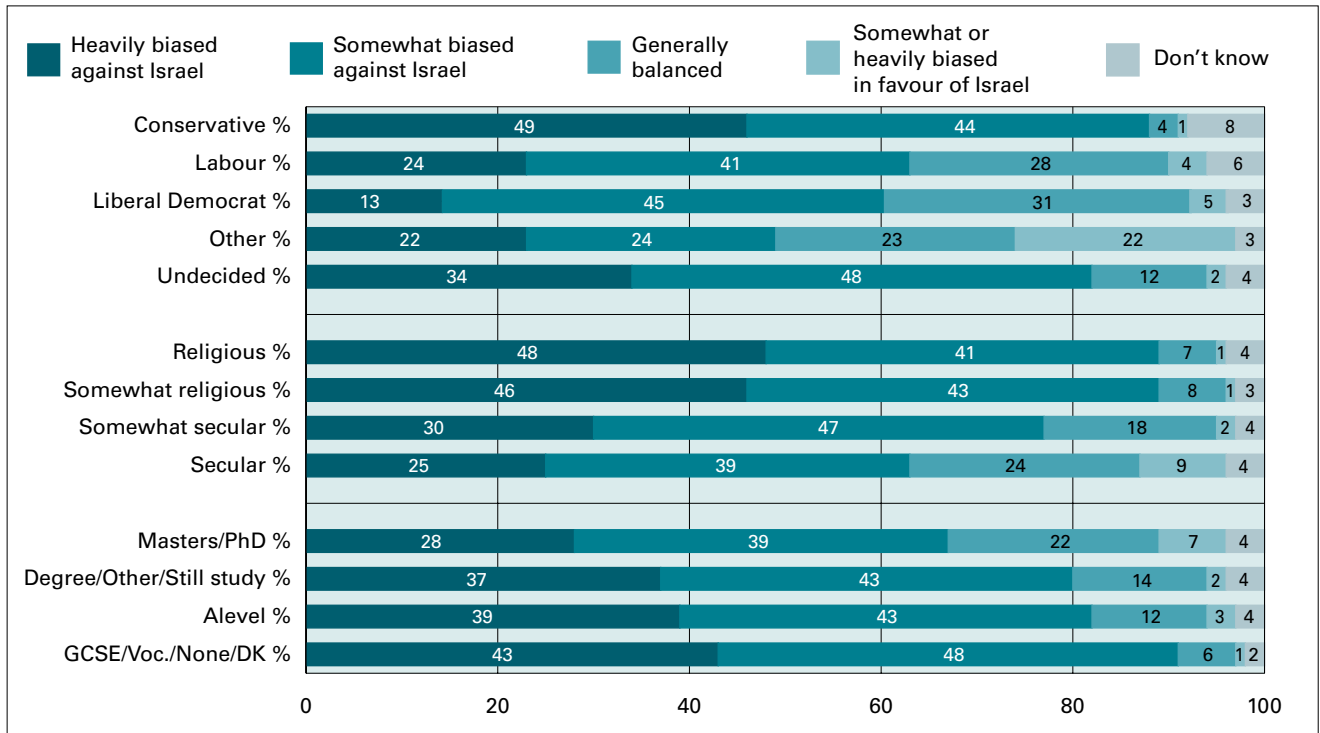


Figure 10: Perception of BBC bias by various indicators*



* Bars that do not sum to 100% is due to rounding. A separate analysis has shown that political persuasion, religiosity and level of secular education are the key predictors of Jewish attitudes towards Israel, above all others tested by the survey.

The bias of the BBC was perceived differently depending on the particular characteristics of the respondent (Figure 10).

Respondents who supported the Conservative Party were twice as likely to perceive the BBC as being ‘Heavily biased’ against Israel as Labour supporters. Supporters of ‘Other’ parties were least likely to view the BBC as being ‘Heavily biased’ against Israel.

Similarly, ‘Religious’ respondents were twice as likely as ‘Secular’ respondents to consider the BBC to be ‘Heavily biased against Israel’.

Educational attainment also appears to be related to perceptions of the BBC’s news coverage. The greater the level of educational attainment, the less likely respondents were to consider the BBC’s coverage to be biased (Figure 10). Two-thirds of those with post-graduate qualifications regarded the BBC as biased, compared with almost all of those with GCSE-level or no qualifications. Therefore, the overall result indicating that four out of five respondents consider the BBC’s coverage to be biased is even more striking.

When British Jews criticise Israel in the media

Overall, respondents were divided as to whether they felt it is ever justifiable for Jews to publicly criticise Israel in the general British media. Whilst a quarter felt criticism can ‘Never’ be justified, a third felt that Jews should ‘Always’ feel free to do so should they consider it to be necessary.¹⁴

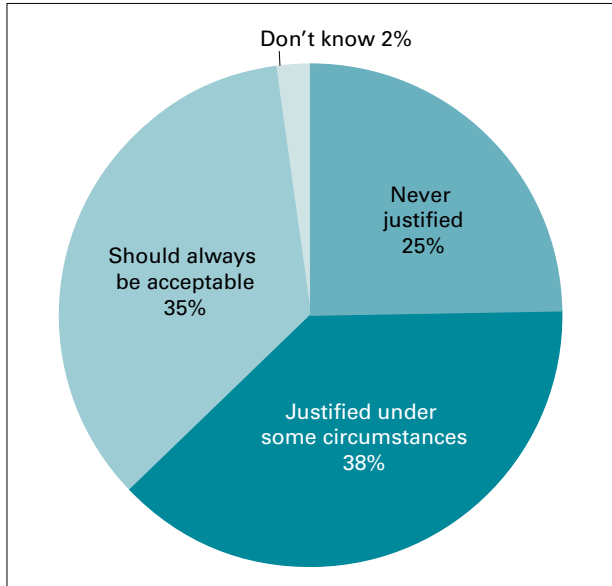
Respondents’ attitudes to this issue differed depending on certain characteristics (Figure 12).

The political position of respondents was closely related to whether or not they felt it was acceptable for Jewish people to criticise Israel in the media. Almost one in two Labour supporters felt that Jews should always feel free to express criticism if they wanted to, compared with one in five Conservative supporters.

The more religious respondents reported being, the less likely they were to consider public criticism of Israel by Jews to be acceptable. ‘Religious’ respondents were more than three

14 As reported in Graham & Boyd (2010), pp.33-34.

Figure 11: "To what extent, if at all, is public criticism of Israel by Jewish people in the British media ever justified?"* (N=3,972)

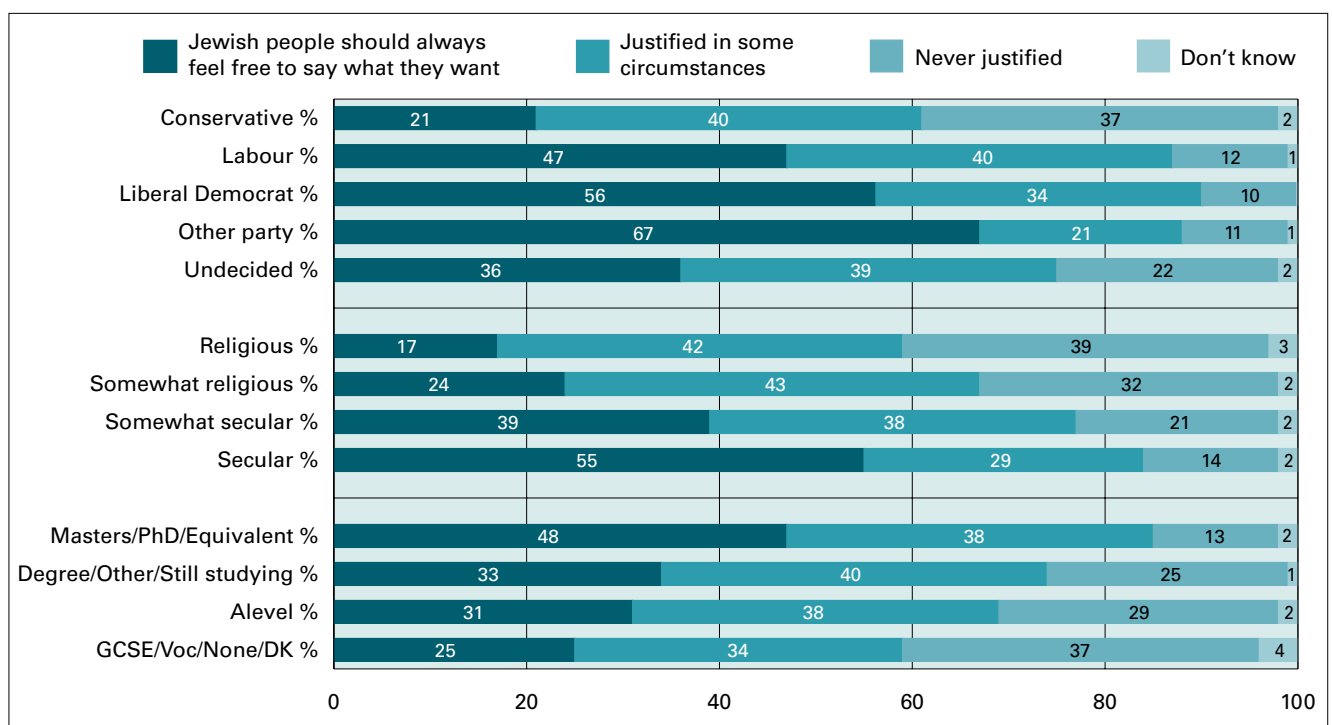


* The question asked was: "Thinking about the way Jewish people speak about Israel in the British media, which of the following statements would you say is closest to your opinion?" with the following response options available: Whatever the circumstances, there is never justification for Jewish people to criticise Israel in the British media; There are some circumstances when it is justified for Jewish people to criticise Israel in the British media; If Jewish people consider criticism of Israel to be justified, they should always feel free to say so in the British media; Don't know.

times as likely as 'Secular' respondents to consider such criticism 'Never' to be acceptable.

The greater the respondents' level of educational attainment, the more likely they were to consider criticism acceptable. Almost half of respondents with post-graduate qualifications agreed Jews should always feel free to criticise Israel in the British media if they wanted to, but this was the case for only a quarter of those with GCSE-level or fewer qualifications.

Figure 12: Extent to which criticism of Israel in the general British media by Jewish people is ever justified by various indicators*§



* "Don't know" responses not included; See Figure 11 for question wording. Bars that do not sum to 100% is due to rounding.

§ A separate analysis has shown that political persuasion, religiosity and level of secular education are, above all others tested by the survey, the key predictors of Jewish attitudes towards Israel.

Conclusion

The market for news delivery has changed beyond recognition since JPR last explored this topic in 1995. This is true of both the general media landscape and the specific case relating to news about Israel. The Internet has afforded news consumers huge flexibility in terms of variety and access and, together with the continuing development of portable electronic devices, this landscape continues to evolve rapidly. Nevertheless, in 2010, it was still traditional modes of news delivery that were most likely to be used by respondents. For example, BBC television news was the most common way of accessing TV news, and the print version of *The Times* was the most popular newspaper in any format. Only among younger respondents (those aged under forty) did we find evidence that the Internet will soon be the most common medium for viewing newspapers among Jews, if indeed this is not already the case.

The ease of access the Internet affords foreign media outlets is one of the major changes brought about by the rise of the Internet, and is most clearly demonstrated by the fact that a third of respondents had read the Israeli daily *Haaretz* in the month prior to the survey. This revolutionary development highlights the fact that we now have access to a multitude of new news sources when it comes to Israel.

The BBC dominates news provision for Jews in Britain, and so it is all the more important to

note that four out of five respondents perceived BBC News coverage of Israel to be biased against the country. Whilst this is **not** in any way an empirical verdict on whether the BBC is, or is not, biased, it is apparent from respondents' personal perspectives, that the BBC's news coverage does not reflect the way most Jews see Israel, which, as JPR's Israel Survey showed, means so much to so many Jewish people. Further work is required to understand why Jews feel the way they do about the BBC's news coverage, whether such views are held by other groups, and indeed, whether Jewish people feel the BBC is also biased in reporting on other topics, unrelated to Israel.

Finally, this report highlights the importance of personal characteristics when it comes to news consumption and views on the role of the media and the quality of its output. For example, religious and politically Conservative respondents are far more likely to perceive bias in the BBC's reporting of Israel than Labour and secular respondents. Furthermore, Religious and Conservative supporting respondents are also more likely than their secular and Labour supporting counterparts to feel that Jewish people should not criticise Israel in the mainstream media. Explaining why such differences exist is beyond the parameters of this study and further work is required if a full understanding of Jewish news consumption habits and attitudes towards the media is to be obtained.

jpr / report

Institute for Jewish Policy Research

© Institute for Jewish Policy Research 2013

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reprinted or reproduced or utilized in any form or by any means, now known or hereinafter invented, including photocopying and recording or in any information storage or retrieval system, without the permission in writing of the publisher.

Published by Institute for Jewish Policy Research

4th Floor, 7-8 Market Place London W1W 8AG

tel +44 (0)20 7436 1553

fax +44 (0)20 7436 7262

e-mail jpr@jpr.org.uk

website www.jpr.org.uk

Registered Charity No. 252626