

The Diaspora Consciousness of Arab Americans: The Intersection of Social Identity and Global Politics

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Introduction

Reviewing data from focus groups composed of Jewish college students, pollster Frank Luntz let slip a revealing aside. After bemoaning the apparent detachment of young American Jews from “their Israeli cousins,” their “frighteningly weak and ill-defined” self-association with Israel, he boldly declared that such estrangement from their foreign counterparts “does not exist among young American Arabs . . .” (Luntz 2003).

Conservative activist and commentator Linda Chavez (2002) reached a similar conclusion after hearing a radio interview with several second and third-generation Palestinian Americans. “These young people may have been born in the United States,” she wrote, “but they are Palestinians first and foremost.” Indeed, she reported, the sentiments expressed by these native-born American citizens “could have come from the Jenin refugee camp in the West Bank or even from Hamas members.”¹

Many Middle East commentators portray Arab Americans as a monolithic bloc intensely mobilized on Middle East issues (Sandoval and Jendrysik 1993, 306). Whether such characterizations of Arab Americans are right or wrong is less interesting than the confidence with which they are made—especially in the absence of systematic data. These claims have an instant credibility precisely because they draw on durable stereotypes about Arab “otherness” deeply rooted in American political culture (Naber 2001).

¹ For evidence that such concerns are not restricted to Arab Americans, see Huntington (2004).

Such remarks interest us because they coincide with a general tendency among scholars to treat members of ethnic diasporas as universally concerned and committed to the needs of their homeland. Despite occasional recognition that community members differ widely in their concern for the putative homeland (Shain 1996), discussions of domestic influences on foreign policy frequently suggest a binary model where diasporas are either mobilized or not. The authoritative *Harvard Encyclopedia of Ethnic Groups* even listed “special interests with regard to politics in the homeland and the United States” as one of the defining traits of ethnic groups (cited by Jiobu 1988, 4-5).

We believe to the contrary that concern for the homeland among members of diaspora communities should be treated as a variable rather than a constant. In this paper, we draw on several bodies of theory to hypothesize about the factors that enhance or depress what we call “diaspora consciousness,” a term signifying the cognitive investment of members of a diaspora community in promoting homeland interests in their host nation. Because the problem of diaspora consciousness should engage both foreign policy and group behavior specialists, we will briefly review those two literatures to highlight the significance of the subject. The review yields a number of empirical hypotheses that we then test with survey data about the degree of Middle Eastern concern among Arab Americans. We conclude by discussing the implications of this case study for the larger issue of diaspora political consciousness.

Diasporas in Foreign Policy²

According to some theorists, the international system has entered an era of “transnational religion and fading states” (Rudolph and Piscatori 1997). As nations are

² This section is drawn from our companion paper (Wald and Williams 2005).

increasingly penetrated by global forces, losing their autonomy if not their sovereignty, the initiative in world politics has passed to “epistemic communities” defined by “common worldviews, purposes, interests and praxis” (2). Along with multinational corporations and various special purpose associations, ethno-religious institutions and movements are key players in this new “transnational civil society” of world politics (255).

The growing interest in ethnic mobilization marks a significant shift in the International Relations literature. In the realist paradigm, ethno religious groups are something of a nuisance because they constrain the range of a state’s strategic choices (integrated ethnicities = strong state, fragmented ethnicities = weak or vulnerable state) and create potential incentives/disincentives for interstate belligerence (Davis and Moore 1998). Constructivists, on the other hand, include international organizations, ethnic and religious groups, and other transnational groups in the realm of “players” within PRIE, the Politically Relevant International Environment (Risse 2002). These authors conceptualize states as composed of many competing actors with foreign policies that are the result of the interplay of these domestic forces and perceptions of international concerns.

Waltz (1979, 1996) and others in the realist and neo-realist schools of International Relations hold that foreign policy is really just domestic politics; that relations between states cannot be understood through the rhetoric of state governments or the competition among groups that shapes it. Instead, international relations comprise the actions of states *vis-à-vis* the anticipated actions/reactions of other states. In this conception, foreign policy is not particularly important, as even domestic power struggles

over control of foreign policy are ultimately determined by the systemic interaction at a higher level. This abstracts international relations even further from individuals than the earlier conception of foreign policy as “High Politics” that exists beyond the normal awareness and influence of all but a few elites.

Recent findings by Davis and Moore (1998) challenge the realist perspective and call for further study of alternative, more porous or complex models of the state.

Similarly, Kolsto and Edemsky (1995) and Stack (1997) see transnational ties between ethnic groups as equivalent to those between states. They ascribe high levels of influence on domestic foreign policy to these groups. These “ethnopolities” are important at the international level because of the confounding role of third-party actors in states’ strategic calculus. That is, either contender in a dyadic conflict involving transnational ethnic alliances can over- or underestimate third-party support and offer too many or too few concessions, the latter case leading to violence (Lake and Rothchild 1998).

Alternatively, diasporas alone may act to funnel host country resources to the homeland in terms of money, arms, and even troops through the increasing commercialization of combat support services (Hockenos 2003). Consequently, transnational ethnic ties expand the classical model of the PRIE to include state-state dyads that are important to each other despite lacking contiguous borders (Maoz 1997).

A host of other studies illuminate how domestic politics, particularly those by immigrants or minorities, have tipped the balance in favor of the homeland from the platform of a diaspora’s host country (Tucker et al. 1990; Clough 1994; Mathias 1981; Ellis and Kahn 1998; Portes 1999). In 1975, Glazer and Moynihan asserted that ethnic groups were “the single most important determinant of [U.S.] foreign policy” (23-24).

With the subsequent end of the Cold War, foreign policy has further devolved from the hands of a few elites to more open, democratic decision-making. Of the ethnic groups competing for influence in this expanding arena, it is widely thought that the American Jewish lobby has been the most successful (Shain 1994-5), exemplified by the apparently sub-optimal relations that have resulted for the U.S. within the world system.

Paul Hockenos' (2003) recent study of the effect of diasporas in the 1990s war in Yugoslavia reveals diasporas' involvement that goes far beyond lobbying for foreign policy support. The success of the Albanian diaspora in realizing its nationalist agenda stands out among the several cases in the region. In addition to raising hundreds of millions of dollars and advancing a strong lobby in the U.S., émigré Albanians maintained a shadow government for over a decade, and fielded a guerrilla army that led to eventual NATO intervention and the removal of Serbian troops from Kosovo in 1999. The possibility of such groups creating extra-state bodies by drawing on the resources of host countries gives new import to diasporas in the international arena.

Following the above, authors attempting to understand the role of ethnic groups in international conflicts approach the issue from two competing ontological orientations: instrumental versus affective (Suhrke and Noble 1977; Heraclides 1991; Carment 1993). The instrumental orientation attributes ethnic identification or attachment among group members to selective benefits they may acquire as a result of their membership. Through this instrumentalist lens, ethnicity is a button to be pushed by political entrepreneurs who employ effective symbolism in order to garner support for their personal ambitions (Lake and Rothchild 1998). Alternatively, affective considerations help explain ethnocentric behavior in the absence of such objectively rational motives. These are driven by

humanitarian concerns, a sense of historic or contemporary group-specific injustice, and ethnic or religious solidarity. Neither instrumental nor affective conceptions of transnational ethnic alliances pay much attention to diaspora consciousness at the individual level.

Our project offers new insight into the individual characteristics that promote knowledge of and attention to the plight of one's international fellows, stimulating political participation that activates a transnational alliance. This adds empirical evidence to Sidney Tarrow's (2001, 8) claim about a unique group of immigrants, "rooted cosmopolitans," defined as "people rooted in specific national contexts, but who engage in regular activities that require their involvement in transnational networks of contacts and conflicts." As such, it can help account for the differences in influence among transnational ethnic groups on interstate cooperation and conflict.

The Case of Arab Americans

The Arab American community, a population widely assumed to be underestimated at 1 million (Kulczycki and Lobo 2001, 263), is often portrayed as monolithic on America's Middle Eastern policy. If true, it would be perhaps the only uniform aspect ever detected in that community. On virtually every other dimension that has been studied—history, demography, national origin, gender, socioeconomic status, and social attitudes—Arab Americans have evinced considerable internal diversity. Two studies suggest that the diversity extends to attitudes about the Arab–Israeli conflict.

In a convenience sample of Palestinian Americans conducted during the late 1980s, Barghouti (1989) found significant political divisions associated with assimilation.

Compared to foreign-born Palestinians, the American-born were much less politically engaged by the Arab–Israeli conflict. He asked respondents whether the Palestine Liberation Organization was the sole, legitimate representative of the Palestinian people. Whereas immigrants agreed unanimously, half the American-born members of the sample did not even know enough to offer an answer and another five percent answered no (18-19). Among respondents who were not familiar with Arabic, another measure of assimilation, fully two-thirds similarly refused to answer the question and chose the “don’t know” option (19). Respondents who admitted they did not follow homeland affairs closely were equally unable to hazard a response to the question about the PLO (19). If there were any group of Arab Americans from whom we would expect unanimity, especially about the status of the PLO, it would be Palestinian Americans. The strikingly low level of opinionation about the PLO among assimilated community members should give pause to those who portray Arab Americans as monolithic.

With a larger and more representative sample of Arab Americans interviewed about the Gulf War, Sandoval and Jendrysik (1993) also found substantial attitudinal variation. Arab Americans differed hardly at all from other Americans about Iraq’s guilt, the necessity for Iraqi withdrawal from Kuwait, and the desirability of overthrowing Saddam Hussein. No less than other Americans, they were willing to have a child fight in the war (307). However, Arab Americans parted company with their fellow citizens on support for the military attack itself (308-9). Echoing Barghouti’s conclusion about Palestinian Americans, the authors found differences on this issue among Arab American respondents related principally to “time spent interacting with the general American culture” and “other characteristics that influence opinion across ethnicities . . .” (312).

More recently, Nagel and Staeheli (2004, 4) have utilized the case of Arab Americans to mount a frontal assault on the assumption that “contemporary immigrants, rather than assimilating, remain wedded to homeland-based or particularistic identities.” They contend rather that immigrants develop ways to balance identity and membership that do not require an either/or choice between homeland and host nation. Interviews with activists and examination of the content of Arab American websites led to the conclusion that “concerns with both homeland and national integration are closely related to each other and may simultaneously inform immigrants’ political activism” (5). Although Nagel and Staeheli do not make the connection, their Arab American interviewees strongly resemble Sidney Tarrow’s (2001) “rooted cosmopolitans”: grass-roots political elites who combine a strong attachment to place of residence with active psychological investment in the affairs of another country.

These studies strongly argue against the assumption of uniform interest in and commitment to the interests of overseas Arabs and Palestinians among members of the Arab American diaspora in the United States. They also identify variables that might distinguish individuals on the basis of their cognitive investment in the Middle East. In the next section, we discuss the hypotheses that will guide our analysis.

Hypotheses

We offer four hypotheses that predict which Arab Americans will be most likely to regard the Arab–Israeli conflict as highly salient. Three of the hypotheses are drawn from general theories about ethnic group cohesion, one from the particularity of the Arab American experience. Social identification theory (cf. Huddy 2003 for a thorough

review) argues strongly in favor of a cognitive predictor, subjective social identification with the Arab American community. This literature indicates that the more salient a particular identity to the individual's self-concept, the more it should influence attitudes and behavior and produce cohesion among group members. Accordingly, we anticipate that *the more strongly individuals construe themselves as Arab Americans, the more likely they are to express concern about the Arab–Israeli conflict*. If social identification promotes ethnic solidarity, assimilation has the opposite effect and we anticipate that *assimilation will depress Middle East concern*. Following studies of immigrant groups generally (Zsembik and Beeghley 1996; Lien, Conway, and Wong 2003) and Arabs particularly (Faragallah, Schumm, and Webb 1997; Kulczyki and Lobo 2002), we index adaptation to American culture by length of residence in the U.S., exclusive English language usage, age, endogamous social relations, out-group marriage, education, and affluence. When people are treated badly because of their association with a racial and or ethnic group, the typical reaction is to increase the salience of the group and thus to encourage strong adhesion to the group's collective beliefs. Empirical evidence that negative encounters with a dominant culture stimulate heightened ethnic consciousness among minorities (Marshall and Read 2003, 877; Lien, Conway, and Wong 2003, 470) prompts our third prediction: *There will be a greater degree of Middle East concern among Arab Americans who have personally experienced discrimination.*³

³ The literature provides conflicting findings about age. All other things being equal, assimilation theory suggests, individuals move away from ethnic particularity as they age and adapt to American cultural norms. If so, we should find lower levels of Middle East concern among older respondents. However, scholars have also identified factors that might invert the relationship between age and assimilation among Arab Americans. Immigrant families often experience generational conflict between adults who want their children to practice traditional ways and the young who are eager to join the mainstream by casting off what they see as archaic habits and customs (Ajrouch 2000). The extraneous orientations shed by the young might include collective consciousness. Moreover, if the Six Day War of 1967 forged a unified Arab American consciousness from a welter of nationalities, a common belief, older cohorts who experienced

The final hypothesis emphasizes factors peculiar to Arab Americans, homeland nationality and religious identification. *We predict higher levels of Middle East concern among Muslims (rather than Christians) and persons whose families immigrated from somewhere other than Lebanon and Syria.* The first large wave of Arab American immigrants came to the United States in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century from Christian territories in Syria and Lebanon. Drawn to America principally by prospects of better economic conditions and arriving before Arab nationalism had developed in the Middle East, they tended to identify with their clans, villages, and towns. Eschewing ethnic assertion in the American public realm, they embraced assimilation instead (Ismael and Ismael 1976, 393). As Christians from predominantly Muslim societies, less connected to the dominant public culture in the Arab world, they found it easier to merge with the Christian society of their new land.

In the post-World War II period and especially since 1967, the composition of the Arab immigrant stream shifted from predominantly Christian to overwhelmingly Muslim areas of the Middle East, and political motivations emerged along with economic incentives to migrate. Socialized to a strong pan-Arab identity in their nations of origin, the new immigrants were less reticent to assert Arab identity in the United States (Naff 24). Furthermore, the growing tendency by some religious authorities to frame the Arab–Israeli conflict in religious terms or, recalling the crusades, as a civilizational conflict between Muslims and Christians, should enhance the diaspora consciousness of the

the war directly are likely to have been more influenced by the new consciousness than their offspring. Given both conditions, age would promote Middle East concern. Nonetheless, we are more disposed to anticipate the traditional positive relationship between age and assimilation. The evident distaste for traditional cultural practice among the young should not be mistaken for a decline in the salience of Arab identity; rather, we believe, young Arab Americans are very conscious of their Otherness and, having been raised in an atmosphere of intense Arab–Israeli conflict and ascendant identity politics, are likely to assert a stronger political identity as Arab Americans than do their older counterparts (Suleiman 1994, 60).

newest residents. There is nothing intrinsic about Islam or nationality that promotes diaspora consciousness; rather, we believe, the impact of these factors is contingent on the way the conflict has been framed and accidents of historical timing.

We anticipate multiple and overlapping influences on diaspora consciousness among Arab Americans. The most recent immigrants, young Muslims from Palestine and Arab League states, possess three traits likely to enhance Middle East concern (recency of immigration, Muslim affiliation, and national origin) and a fourth, youth, which might either enhance or diminish such diaspora consciousness. Scholars are divided about which of these cleavages are paramount. Sandoval and Jendrysik (1993, 305) speculate that “most distinctions can in fact be traced back to a single factor: the immigration date,” rendering place of birth and other related factors as spurious. Other scholars consider religious affiliation the primary source of opinion differences among Arab Americans (Faragallah, Schumm, and Webb 1992, 185). By employing a multivariate model, we intend to sort out these conflicting claims.

Design of the Study

Data

The data were derived from a national survey of Arab Americans conducted by Zogby Opinion Research of Utica, New York. As part of a series of surveys known collectively as the “Culture Polls,” interviewers called an omnibus sample of the public from December 1999 through February 2000. Respondents were asked to indicate their ethnic background.⁴ This analysis uses the 501 respondents who identified as Arab.⁵

⁴ Respondents were asked “What ethnic background do you consider yourself?” and given the options (in order) of African American, Arab American, Asian, Hispanic/Latino, Italian, Jewish and Other. If the

Because inclusion in the sample required at least a minimal form of self-identification, the selection technique may have omitted respondents with some Arab background but who identified with another ethnic, religious, or racial group. As such, the sample could be biased against finding the full range of variability that might be present among the population of persons with some Arab heritage.

The timing of the study was fortuitous, representing something of a “normal” period in the Middle East conflict. The outbreak of the second Palestinian uprising, the “al-Aqsa Intifada,” was still some months away and the region had not yet spiraled into daily violence and terrorism. With the issue on something of a low boil by regional standards and the survey completed more than a year and a half before the events of 9/11, the findings should reflect diaspora consciousness under fairly routine circumstances.

The data will be analyzed with an OLS multivariate regression model.⁶ Such a model enables us to determine which of the factors identified in the hypotheses exert a direct influence and which either fail to affect diaspora consciousness or merely specify relationships via their connection with other variables.

Dependent Variable

Having defined diaspora consciousness as concern for the political interests of the homeland in the host nation, we operationalized the concept with a composite measure of

initial respondent was not a member of one of the seven targeted groups, the interviewer was instructed to ask to speak with an adult in the household who fell into one of the designated categories. If no such adult was available, the interview was terminated. When the target number was reached for each of the designated ethnic groups, no further members of the group were interviewed.

⁵ The core survey sampled respondents from published telephone lists. All calls were made from Zogby International headquarters in Utica, New York. Slight weights were applied to region, age, and gender to more accurately reflect the target population. The 5 percent Public Use Micro-Sample from the United States Census provides population parameters for Americans with Arab ancestry.

⁶ Although the dependent variable is ordinal, it has a true zero point and is normally distributed. These properties permit the use of OLS regression.

cognitive investment in the Arab–Israeli conflict. The additive scale of Middle East concern is based on three questions:

I. Which of the following statements best describes the importance of the Arab–Israeli conflict to you personally?

1. It is the single most important issue for me.
2. It is among the top three most important issues for me.
3. It is among the top five most important issues for me.
4. It is not among the top five most important issues for me.

II. In the next national elections, how important will the candidates' positions on the Arab–Israeli conflict be in your voting decision—very important, somewhat important, or not important?

III. Which of the following statements best describes the importance of U.S. support for Israel to you personally?

1. It is the single most important issue for me.
2. It is among the top three most important issues for me.
3. It is among the top five most important issues for me.
4. It is not among the top five most important issues for me.

The scale, with a 0.83 reliability coefficient, has two especially attractive properties. First, the questions emphasize the *personal* importance of the matter to

respondents, a question style that assesses the salience of an issue rather than recognition of the publicity it commands (Lavine 1996). Second, the scale can be validated by behavior. The survey asked respondents whether they had ever acted on their beliefs about the Middle East by contacting government officials. There was a significant relationship between responses to this question and Middle East concern; those who reported taking no action averaged just 4.21 on the scale versus 6.20 for the activists. Although adding this item would make the scale even more reliable, we wanted to avoid confusing cognitive orientation with a behavioral measure known to invoke some predictors (age, socioeconomic status, education) that are of theoretical interest.

On the reasonable assumption that strong attitudes about an issue induce attentiveness to it, we need to be assured that diaspora consciousness is a unique dependent variable.⁷ We would surely expect a positive relationship between strong pro-Arab attitudes about the Middle East and Middle East concern. Is the relationship too strong to disentangle the two concepts from each other?⁸ The model includes four measures to control for the potentially confounding influence of attitude direction on diaspora consciousness—three Likert items (pro-Israel bias in U.S. policy, support for an independent Palestinian state, and support for removing Iraqi sanctions) and a general measure of pro-Arab affect in the Israeli–Arab conflict.⁹ Bivariate analysis revealed that all four attitudinal measures were positively and significantly related to our measure of

⁷ The classic definition of “attitude” recognizes a construct with three dimensions—cognitive (what is believed), affective (the strength of the belief), and conative (a disposition to action). We are concerned that the cognitive and affective components may determine the conative.

⁸ We have identified the “pro-Arab” position as the option favored by most respondents. In practice, 82 percent of the sample agreed with the statement about a pro-Israel bias in U.S. policy, 57 percent favored lifting sanctions on Iraq, and 93 percent supported an independent Palestinian state.

⁹ As if to underline the diversity of Arab American opinion, the sample was almost evenly divided between respondents who sympathized primarily with the Arab side and those who said they sympathized with both Arabs and Israelis.

Middle East concern. However, the average tau-beta correlation of 0.26 was low enough to suggest that concern about the Arab–Israeli conflict—what we have described as diaspora consciousness—is not predominantly driven by attitudes about the conflict itself. Nonetheless, we will include these measures in the multivariate model as a check on that possibility.¹⁰

Independent Variables

To measure the extent of Arab social identification among respondents, we used both a direct self-identification question and a composite measure of the emotional ties between individuals and their ethnic group. Nominal self-identification drew from an item asking respondents to choose their preferred ethnic label among five options; the choices were “Arab American,” a hyphenated national origin label (such as Lebanese-American), both of these, neither of these, and some other label. The maximum value was assigned to respondents who selected only “Arab American” (20 percent) while the opposite extreme was reserved for those who chose “other” to define themselves (42 percent). The companion measure of affective attachment was constructed from questions about pride in ethnic heritage, importance of that heritage to the individual, and strength of the emotional tie to the ethnic homeland. Because the standardized reliability coefficient (0.66) was substantially higher than the unstandardized equivalent, the ethnic salience variable was represented by factor scores.

We used dummy variables to identify Muslims (22 percent), respondents who had personally experienced discrimination due to their ethnicity (39 percent), and persons of

¹⁰ Further establishing the independence of Middle East concern from substantive attitudes, tests of another three items tapping views on the Middle East did not exhibit any significant bivariate relationship to diaspora consciousness. These items were not included in the model.

Syrian or Lebanese ancestry (70 percent). The predictors of assimilation are fairly straightforward: level of formal education, age in years, generation (from foreign-born through fourth generation), economic resources, and extent of Arabic usage at home. We assessed inter-Arab endogamy by dummy variables for respondents who had Arab spouses and friendships restricted to other Arabs. These items were complemented by measures of the ethnic composition of the neighborhood and the frequency of attendance at religious services.

Analysis

Our assumption that diaspora consciousness is a variable rather than a constant was strongly confirmed by the spread of responses across the categories of the dependent variable. As Table 1 shows, the respondents were widely arrayed across the range of possible values with a mean of 4.85 and most cases clustered between 1.75 and 7.0. It is particularly worth noting that over a quarter of the sample had values of 3 or less, roughly twice the proportion that occupied the three highest values on the scale. While the Arab American community doubtless exceeds the American public in attentiveness to the Middle East, the portrait that emerges from Table 1 hardly supports strong claims about high levels of mobilization, yet alone unanimity.

Table 1. Diaspora Consciousness among Arab American Respondents

Value	N	%
0	29	7.6
1	40	10.2
2	40	10.3
3	34	8.8
4	44	11.2
5	38	9.7
6	37	9.6
7	43	11.0
8	28	7.3
9	25	6.3
10	15	3.9
11	16	4.2
Total	390	100.0

Before testing the hypotheses with a multivariate statistical model, we calculated the simple correlation coefficients for the 348 cases with full information on all variables. The patterns in Table 2 generally support the hypotheses. Consistent with H1, both social identification with the Arab American community and ethnic salience are positively related to Middle East concern. As predicted by the second hypothesis, length of residence, education, and economic integration diminish concern for the Arab–Israeli conflict. Except for attendance at religious services, all the endogamy variables significantly enhance Middle East concern. For reasons elaborated above (see note 3), we were not surprised by the absence of a significant relationship between age and the dependent variable. The experience of discrimination was positively related to diaspora consciousness as was being a Muslim and holding pro-Arab views about the Middle East conflict. Respondents of Lebanese-Syrian background were appreciably less likely to evince concern with the Arab–Israeli conflict. In general, these patterns suggest we are

looking in the right places for sources of variation in Middle East concern. Do these findings hold when we consider covariation among the predictor variables?

Table 2. Correlation of Predictors with Middle East Concern (N=328)

Variable	Pearson Correlation with Middle East Concern
Social Identification	
Arab American Identification	.150***
Ethnic Salience	.447**
Assimilation	
Education	-.184***
Age	.038
Generation	-.358***
Economic Resources	-.136**
Speak Arabic	.407***
Worship	.014
Ethnic neighbors	.116*
Ethnic friends	.214***
Ethnic spouse	.290***
Discrimination	.112*
Personal Traits	
Muslim	.308***
Lebanese-Syrian	-.158**
Middle East Attitudes	
U.S. Bias	.087
Drop Iraqi sanctions	.402***
Ind. Palestinian State	.192***
Arab Sympathy	.357***

* = $p < .05$ (1 tailed)

** = $p < .01$

*** = $p < .001$

Table 3 reports regression results for two different models. Model 1 regressed Middle East concern on just the four substantive attitudes about Middle East policy. This

provides a baseline to compare with equations that include the full set of predictors identified by the hypotheses (Model 2).

Table 3. OLS Regression Results Predicting Middle East Concern

Variable	Model 1 (n=383)			Model 2 (n=328)		
	B	SE	β	B	SE	β
Middle East Attitudes						
U.S. Bias	.065	.142	.022	-.051	.142	-.016
No Iraqi sanctions	.778	.109	.337***	.433	.122	.184***
Palestinian State	.104	.185	.027	.192	.191	.046
Arab Sympathy	1.357	.282	.242***	1.208	.282	.206***
Social Identification						
Arab American ID				.248	.118	.093*
Ethnic Salience				.742	.149	.237***
Assimilation						
Education				-.295	.180	-.085
Age				.015	.010	.075
Generation				-.194	.174	-.061
Eco. Resources				.106	.150	.034
Speak Arabic				.834	.256	.177***
Worship				.067	.129	.024
Ethnic neighbors				.340	.273	.056
Ethnic friends				1.619	.665	.110*
Ethnic spouse				.277	.320	.043
Discrimination						
				.254	.294	.040
Personal Traits						
Muslim				.829	.389	.108*
Lebanese-Syrian				.178	.372	.025
Model Statistics	Adj. R ² =.21, SE=2.75			Adj. R ² =.46, SE=2.38		

The base model with only the four attitudinal items about Middle East policy explains about one-fifth of the variance in the dependent variable. That is strong enough

to suggest that salience is at least somewhat the result of substantive attitudes but quite low enough to indicate the need to incorporate other predictors. Model 1 yielded only two significant predictors: preference for ending sanctions against Iraq and sympathy with the Arab side in the Arab–Israeli conflict, both of which predicted diaspora consciousness. Neither support for an independent Palestinian state nor the belief that U.S. foreign policy favors Israel exerted a significant influence on the dependent variable. Perhaps because these two perspectives are almost universally held by Americans of Arab background, they failed to differentiate among Middle East activists and bystanders. To a degree, what one believes about the Arab–Israeli conflict does influence how much one invests psychologically in the conflict.

Model 2 adds the other predictors to the equation with the attitudinal measures. Looking at the equation as a whole, the addition of the controls roughly doubled the explained variable and significantly reduced the standard error of the estimate. The addition of predictors did not change the role of substantive attitudes; both sympathy with Arabs in their conflict with Israel and commitment to ending Iraqi sanctions contributed positively to Middle East concern in the full equation. However, as the other coefficients demonstrate, substantive beliefs tell only part of the story.

Consistent with hypothesis 1, identification with the Arab American community generated greater concern with Middle East politics. A one-standard error increase in ethnic salience increased the dependent variable about three-fourths of a point while each additional one-unit step on the self-labeling continuum induced a one-fourth point jump in diaspora consciousness. Both effects were statistically significant. Based on these results, it does seem that simple cognitive association with the Arab American

community is a strong influence on the salience that individuals attribute to the Arab–Israeli conflict.

What of the assimilation hypothesis? In the multivariate model, speaking Arabic and having primarily in-group friendships were the only predictors to attain statistical significance. As expected, both were positively related to the dependent variable. Age, in-marriage, length of residence in the U.S., education, and economic integration, all of which demonstrated a bivariate impact on Middle East concern, fell below the accepted threshold of statistical significance in Model 2. The failure of the other measures of assimilation and cohesion does not appear to be due to multicollinearity because the tolerances registered well within range. Rather, it appears, other factors are simply better measures of assimilation than these variables. Apparently, speaking Arabic and maintaining Arab friendship circles trump other measures as indicators of assimilation. Thus the theory of assimilation appears to explain variations in diaspora consciousness once we choose the right variables to measure adaptation to American cultural forms.

We had also hypothesized (H3) that experiencing discrimination in the U.S. would increase diaspora consciousness. That proved not to be the case; the coefficient, while positive, could not be distinguished from zero at the .05 level.

Finally, we tested the hypothesis that people of Lebanese-Syrian background and non-Muslims would be less invested in the Arab–Israeli conflict. We did not find any nationality effects in the model, but being Muslim in itself significantly increased the score on the dependent variable by about one full point. We found this impact despite controls for factors related to Islamic identity, suggesting a genuine causal role for religious affiliation in promoting cognitive concern with the Arab–Israeli conflict.

Conclusion

We began this study by suggesting that images of Arab Americans as united in their concern for the Middle East conflict were likely to be inaccurate; we then suggested a set of predictors that would account for differences in the significance attributed to the Arab–Israeli conflict by Americans of Arab background. On the whole, our assumptions have been confirmed.

Rather than a monolithic bloc, we found that Arab Americans exhibited considerable variation in what we called diaspora consciousness. This variation persisted even in the face of controls for substantive attitudes about the conflict. At the least, this analysis should call into question the facile assumption that Arab Americans are automatically or invariably possessed by deep concern for their brethren in the Middle East. Much like American Jews (Wald and Williams 2005), they differ from one another on just how much importance they invest cognitively in Middle East politics.

We were also generally correct in our hypotheses about the source of Middle East salience. Cognitive identification as an Arab American, ethnic salience, Muslim affiliation, sympathy with Arabs in the Middle East, and support for ending Iraqi sanctions all boosted the level of concern for the Arab–Israeli conflict. Assimilation theory yielded two markers of ethnicity that enhanced diaspora consciousness—speaking Arabic and having primarily endogenous friendships. On the other hand, most of the other assimilation measures and the discrimination variable did not significantly predict concern for the Arab–Israeli conflict.

The failure of most of the assimilation measures in the multivariate equation was somewhat surprising, particularly because most of them worked as predicted in the bivariate model. We can quickly dispense with two logical explanations for this outcome, multicollinearity and the idea that these factors will be important only to Muslim Arabs. As already noted, the tolerances for the assimilation measures fell well below the levels that would suggest a problem with correlated predictors. Rather, as we suggested above, language and friendship may well be the best predictors of assimilation. Perhaps, to consider another possibility, the entire set of assimilation measures is relevant but only for Muslims. It is possible that Christian Arabs are assimilated automatically by virtue of their affiliation with the largest religious community in the United States, while the adaptation of Muslims might vary individually depending on personal traits. Yet when we created interaction terms for each of the assimilation measures and Muslim identification, they did not register a significant impact.

We consider another possibility, that the assimilation measures have an *indirect* influence on Middle East concern running through social identification. We found some evidence for that explanation when we regressed the ethnic salience measure on the assimilation predictors (not shown). Three of the predictors not significant in Model 2 achieved a significant positive influence on pride in the salience of Arab ethnic identity—discrimination, generation, and in-group marriage—and use of Arabic had a significant, positive coefficient in both models. On the other hand, two variables that predicted Middle East concern directly were not significant predictors of ethnic salience (Muslim identification and endogamous friendships), and economic resources, age, attendance at worship, neighborhood composition, and nationality failed altogether to predict either

salience of Arab heritage or Middle East concern. To further undermine this possibility, education turned out to increase ethnic salience—contrary to expectations based on other ethnic groups. Taken together, these findings provide very limited support for the notion that many measures of assimilation indirectly promote Middle East concern. Language and social networks matter much more and work directly on the dependent variable.

These findings bear on a crucial contested assumption in the realist vs. constructivist debate. As we noted earlier, critics of realism contend that international politics is not solely the province of unitary, rational actors (i.e., states), but also of individuals from the grassroots. Our data demonstrates that some rank and file members of one diaspora community do indeed pay attention to their homeland and have contacted their representatives in government to express their opinions about U.S. policy toward it. Their participation in the construction of foreign policy thus raises the possibility of sub-optimal behavior by the state. The “rooted cosmopolitans” (Tarrow 2001) found in our study are not unique to the specific case; hence, foreign policy is not the inaccessible high politics once portrayed as the norm. At the least, we believe, domestic considerations are not irrelevant to national conduct in the international sphere.

If that is so, how do these findings speak to the growing concern that “foreign attachments” (Smith 2001; Huntington 2004) provoke suboptimal foreign policy choices? To the extent that partisans of this position assume a constant state of mobilization among diasporas, the evidence supports a more nuanced perspective. Members of an ethno-religious group with a rooting interest in a foreign policy dispute vary appreciably in the salience they attribute to the conflict. Some rooted cosmopolitans, distinguished by high levels of group identification, deep immersion in group life, and particular religious

identities, are deeply invested in the conflict and thus amenable to mobilization. Yet many others in the community are little more than bystanders, to the community itself and to the foreign policy issues that animate the activists among them. They may be mobilized by vivid events or emergencies, but cannot be counted on to keep themselves in a state of readiness for political action. In sum, on the evidence of this case study, we need to recognize transnational alliances as variable rather than constant in strength and durability.

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