

# A Portrait of Israeli Jews

Beliefs, Observance, and Values of Israeli Jews, 2009



## Abstract

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**Data Analysis and Report: Ayala Keissar-Sugarmen**

The Guttman Center for Surveys  
of the Israel Democracy Institute  
for The AVI CHAI – Israel Foundation

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**The Israel Democracy Institute** is an independent, non-partisan body on the seam of academia and politics. The Institute plans policy and devises reforms for government and public administration agencies, and for the institutions of democracy.

In its plans and endeavors, the Institute strives to support the institutions of Israel's developing democracy and consolidate its values. The Institute's serious research work is followed up by practical recommendations, seeking to improve governance in Israel and foster a long-term vision for a stable democratic regime adapted to the structure, values, and norms of Israeli society. The Institute aspires to further public discourse in Israel on issues placed on the national agenda, to promote structural, political, and economic reforms, to serve as a consulting body to decision makers and the broad public, to provide information, and present comparative research.

Researchers at the Israel Democracy Institute are leading academics directing projects in various areas of society and governance in Israel. The Institute's publications department produces, markets, and distributes the results of their work in several series: books, policy papers, the Israeli Democracy Index, the Caesarea Economic Forum, and conference proceedings.

The Israel Democracy Institute is the recipient of the 2009 Israel Prize for Lifetime Achievement – Special Contribution to Society and State.

**The Guttman Center for Surveys** was established in its present form in 1998, when the Guttman Institute for Applied Social Research became part of the Israel Democracy Institute. Professor Louis Guttman founded the original Institute in 1949 as a pioneering center for the study of public opinion and the advancement of social science methodology. The goal of the Guttman Center is to enrich public discourse on issues of public policy through the information retrieved from the Center's databases and through public opinion surveys conducted by the Center.

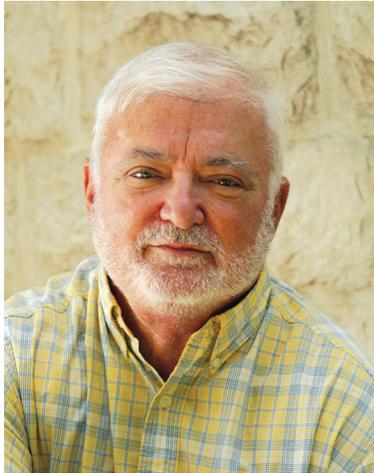
**The AVI CHAI – Israel Foundation**, a private foundation established in 1984, operates in Israel, North America, and the former Soviet Union. In pursuit of its commitment to the perpetuation of the Jewish people, Judaism, and the centrality of the State of Israel to the Jewish people, AVI CHAI has two main objectives:

- Encouraging mutual understanding and sensitivity among Jews of different religious backgrounds and with differing commitments to observance.
- Encouraging all Jews to have a stronger commitment to Jewish tradition and increasing their understanding and appreciation of the Jewish heritage, its precepts, customs, and values.

In cooperation with various outside parties, AVI CHAI initiates and funds diverse projects aimed at realizing these objectives.



## Professor Asher Arian z"l (1938–2010)



Professor Asher Arian was among the foremost political scientists in Israel and a world-renowned expert on election studies and public opinion polls. He was born in Cleveland, Ohio, in 1938 and immigrated to Israel in 1966.

Prof. Arian held a doctorate in political science from Michigan State University. In Israel, he founded the political science department at Tel Aviv University and served as its first head. In 1977, he was appointed dean of Tel Aviv University's Faculty of Social Sciences, after which he held the university's Romulo Betancourt Chair in Political Science. In 1979, Arian was a founding member of the Israel Political Science Association, which he also chaired. In 1986, he was appointed Distinguished

Professor in Political Science at the Graduate Center of the City University of New York, and in the early 1990s joined the Political Science Department at the University of Haifa, where he served as full professor until his retirement.

During Prof. Arian's years of extensive research activity, he published dozens of books and articles in the fields of governance, elections, public opinion, and political behavior in Israel. Two of the major projects under his leadership were a series of surveys and books on elections in Israel (the most enduring research project in political science in Israel, initiated by him in 1969) and the National Security and Public Opinion Project of Tel Aviv University's Jaffee Center for Strategic Studies.

Prof. Arian was one of the first Senior Fellows of the Israel Democracy Institute. In this capacity, he spearheaded the incorporation of the Guttman Institute for Applied Social Research into the IDI. In addition, he initiated and led the Democracy Index project, which offers a yearly assessment of the state of democracy in Israel from a comparative, historical, and international perspective.

Prof. Asher Arian passed away in 2010. He will be greatly missed by all of us.

May his memory be a blessing.



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## Preface

In the first half of 2009, the Guttman Center for Surveys of the Israel Democracy Institute was commissioned by AVI CHAI-Israel to conduct a survey of the Jewish profile of Israeli society, with regard to religiosity, belief, values, and tradition and practices. The survey also related to Jewish Israelis' attitudes toward religion, the state, and public life, relations between different sectors of Israeli Jewish society, and relations between Israeli Jews and Diaspora Jewry.

This survey is a sequel to two earlier studies carried out by the Guttman Center in 1991 and 1999. Taken together, the three surveys present a unique continuum of Jewish religiosity and tradition in Israel. The return to the "field," using similar questionnaires, permits a comparison of the different periods and a diagnosis of the trends in religious observance over the past two decades.

A representative sample of the adult Israeli Jewish population (age 20 and over) was assembled for each of the three periods. As in the previous surveys, the 2009 sample was devised to give appropriate representation to various sectors of the Israeli Jewish population (based on the data of the Central Bureau of Statistics): categories of religious identity (Secular, Traditional, Orthodox, Haredi [ultra-Orthodox]), ethnic origins, geographic districts in Israel, and recent immigrants from the former Soviet Union as against other Israeli Jews. The 2009 sample consisted of 2,803 Israeli Jews. The data were collected by frontal interviews conducted in two languages—Hebrew and Russian—depending on the subject's mother tongue.

The present report offers findings of the 2009 study, which relate to the entire adult Israeli Jewish population and the intermediate hues that mark its various sectors. The report also refers to the most prominent trends of the past two decades.

The full report is available on the Israel Democracy Institute's website: [www.idi.org.il](http://www.idi.org.il); and on The AVI CHAI-Israel website: <http://avichai.org>.

## Executive Summary

The three surveys, conducted in 1991, 1999, and 2009, show that Judaism is present in the lives of Israeli Jews, although in different modes and doses and with internal contradictions between overt intentions and behavior.

Israeli Jews define their religiosity in a way that is essential and fundamental; whether an individual is secular or religious is often a package deal that combines distinct and distinguishing characteristics and attitudes. An analysis of the data collected in 2009 reveals that the level of Jewish religiosity is consistently linked to the divisions between different sectors of the Israeli population—ethnic groups, classes defined by education and income—as well as to positions on issues such as democracy, the Law of Return, “Who is a Jew,” and the status of women. Some differences, though not consistent, were found between men and women and between respondents of different age cohorts.

From 1991 to 1999 there was a certain decline in attachment to Jewish tradition and religion, apparently under the impact of the mass immigration from the former Soviet Union. From 1999 to 2009 there was an increase in this attachment, which returned to and in some aspects even surpassed the level measured in 1991. This reversal of the trend (between 1999 and 2009) may be evidence that the immigrants from the former Soviet Union have been assimilated into Israeli society and adopted Jewish practices and tradition; it may also reflect an increase in the demographic weight of the Orthodox and Haredim (ultra-Orthodox). It is plausible that were it not for the mass immigration from the former Soviet Union beginning in the early 1990s, the increase in affinity to tradition and religion from 1991 to 2009 would have been constant.

In 2009, one can say that many Israeli Jews have an interest in the place that religion occupies in the State of Israel and in the meaning of a “Jewish state”; they are sympathetic toward manifestations of religion and tradition in the public space. Nevertheless, they want to preserve freedom of individual choice, chiefly with regard to Sabbath observance in the public sphere.

Many Israeli Jews are also interested in the issue of “who is a Jew” and accept the official stance of the state, which supports Orthodox conversion only. Nevertheless, roughly half of the respondents favor recognition of non-Orthodox conversion. Support for allowing Jews to make *aliya* and immediately acquire Israeli citizenship is overwhelming, but qualified for those who are not Jewish according to halakhah (Jewish religious law).

The findings of the survey indicate that most Israelis believe that Israel can be both a Jewish state that observes religious law and a democratic country. They disagree, however, about how the two should be reconciled in the event of a conflict between them: almost half believe that democracy should always take precedence over halakhah. Some would follow halakhah in some cases and democracy in others. Only a few believe that halakhah should always prevail. The preference for halakhah over democracy is stronger, quite naturally, among the Haredim, Orthodox, and Traditional sectors than among secular Jews.

Finally, the survey findings indicate that most Israeli Jews feel a strong sense of belonging to and affinity for the State of Israel and Judaism: for the vast majority it is important to live in Israel and to feel they are part of Israeli society and the Jewish people. The findings with regard to intergroup relations in Israel suggest that there was less friction between the secular and the religious in 2009 than in 1999 (this conclusion is not categorical, however, because it is based on only one question in the survey).

A similar trend was found in Israeli Jews’ sense of solidarity with world Jewry. The weakening observed in 1999 (as compared to 1991) has been checked; in 2009 (as compared to 1999) more Israeli Jews feel that Jews in Israel and Jews in the Diaspora share a common destiny and feel themselves part of the Jewish people worldwide.

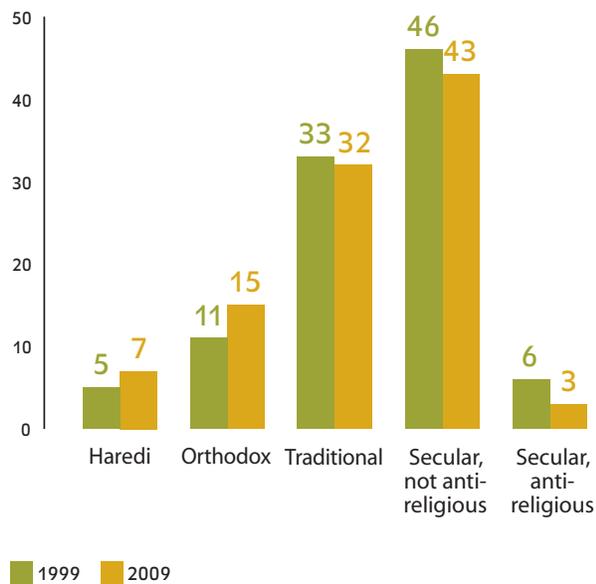
## Self-Definition of Religiosity and Observance of Tradition

Two parallel issues—religiosity and the extent of observance of tradition—were examined, separately and in relation to each other:

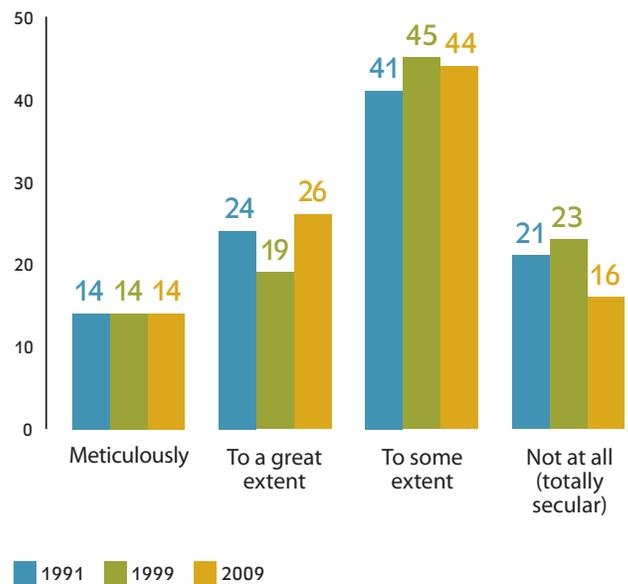
## Main Findings

Figure 1: **Self-defined religiosity and observance of tradition** (By year; percent)

### How would you define yourself from a religious perspective?\*



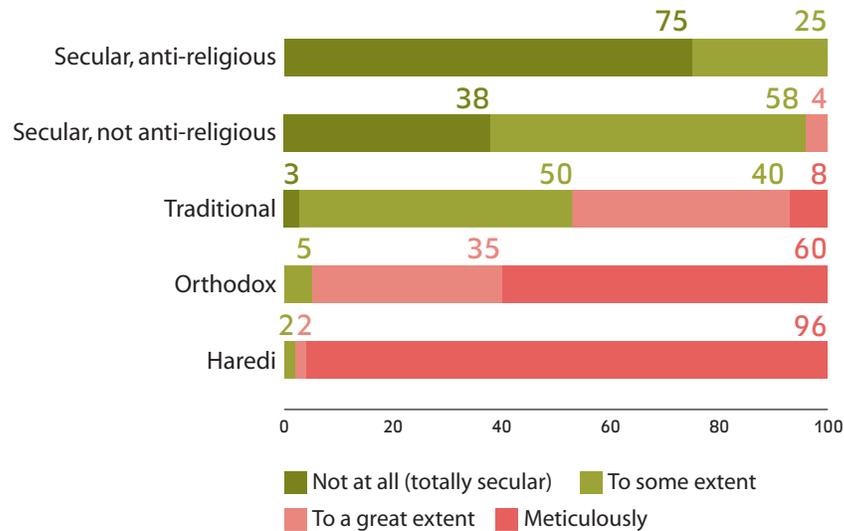
### To what extent do you observe tradition?



\* This question was not asked in 1991.

The passage of the years has seen certain changes in how Israeli Jews define their religiosity and the extent to which they observe religious tradition. Between 1991 and 1999 there was a decline in the percentage of Israeli Jews who defined themselves as observing tradition “to a great extent” (from 24% to 19%). This trend has been reversed; between 1999 and 2009 there was an increase in the percentage of Israeli Jews who observe tradition “to a great extent” (from 19% to 26%). In addition, more Israeli Jews identified themselves as Orthodox or Haredi in 2009 than in 1999 (22% and 16%, respectively). Correspondingly, a smaller percentage of Jews defined themselves as secular in 2009 than had done so in 1999 (46% and 52%, respectively).

The findings reveal a strong correlation between level of religiosity and observance of tradition. The Orthodox and Haredim report that they observe tradition “to a great extent” or observe it “meticulously.” The Traditional were divided among those who observe “to a great extent” and those who observe “to some extent.” Most of the secular who are not anti-religious observe tradition “to some extent,” while the anti-religious do not observe it at all (Figure 2).

Figure 2: **Observance of tradition** (By religiosity; 2009; percent)

## Jewish Lifestyle and Practices

Jewish traditional practices—such as lighting Sabbath candles, attending a Passover *seder*, observing *kashrut*, having a religious wedding and a Jewish burial—are present in the lives of many Israeli Jews. Although the survey found that a stronger religious identity is correlated with greater observance of Jewish traditional practices, Israeli Jews who define themselves as secular but not anti-religious, and even the anti-religious, observe some of these practices.

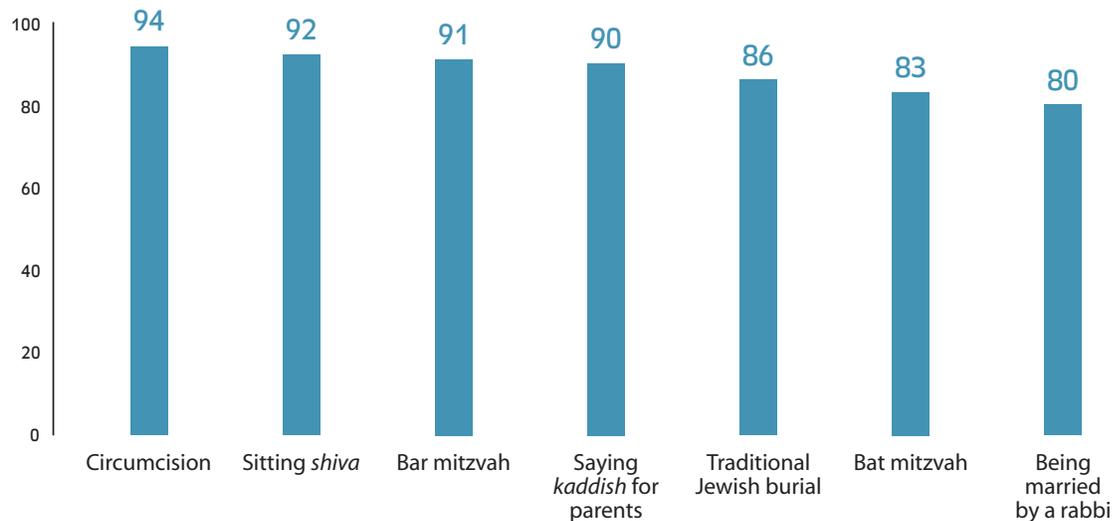
A statistical analysis of the role of tradition in the lifestyles and practices of Israeli Jews reveals gradations: Israeli Jews are strongly loyal to Jewish rites of passage; less (although still to a fairly great extent) report about following practices such as keeping kosher, fasting on Yom Kippur, lighting Sabbath candles and reciting *kiddush* on Friday night, and avoiding violation of the Sabbath prohibitions. Tradition exerts a moderate influence on day-to-day matters, such as deciding on the number of children in the family, selecting a profession or spouse, and how one dresses. At the bottom of the scale is observance of practices such as going to synagogue and visiting the tombs of the righteous; even lower are those reporting about “contemporary” interest in Judaism, such as surfing the Internet for Jewish topics, and interest in New Age, mysticism, and spirituality.

## Jewish Lifecycle Ceremonies

An overwhelming majority (more than 90%) of Israeli Jews believe that it is “important” or “very important” to observe the main Jewish lifecycle rituals—circumcision, sitting *shiva*, celebrating a bar mitzvah, and saying *kaddish* for one’s parents (Figure 3).

Most of those who said that it was “important” or “very important” to circumcise their sons, and most of those who said that a bar mitzvah is “important” or “very important” think it is important for religious reasons, and less so for family or social reasons.

Figure 3: Respondents for whom Jewish life-cycle ceremonies are “important” or “very important” (2009; percent)

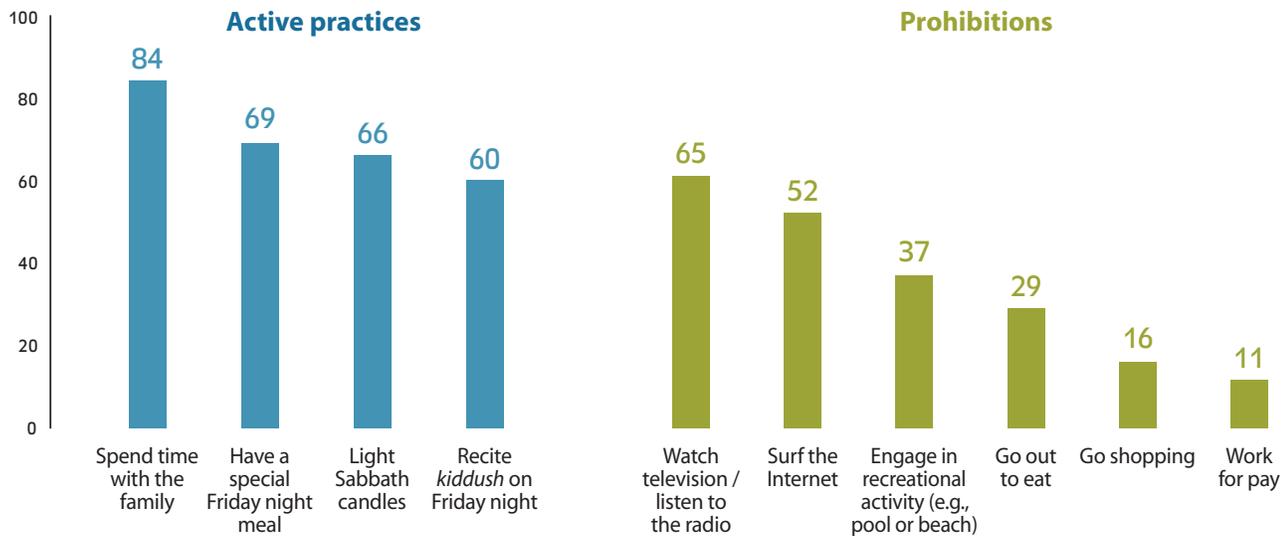


Although a majority of Israeli Jews believe that it is “important” or “very important” to have a religious wedding (80%), their stand on this is not unequivocal. Only about half of Israeli Jews (54%) reject the possibility that they or a family member might opt for civil marriage, were it available in Israel.

### The Sabbath

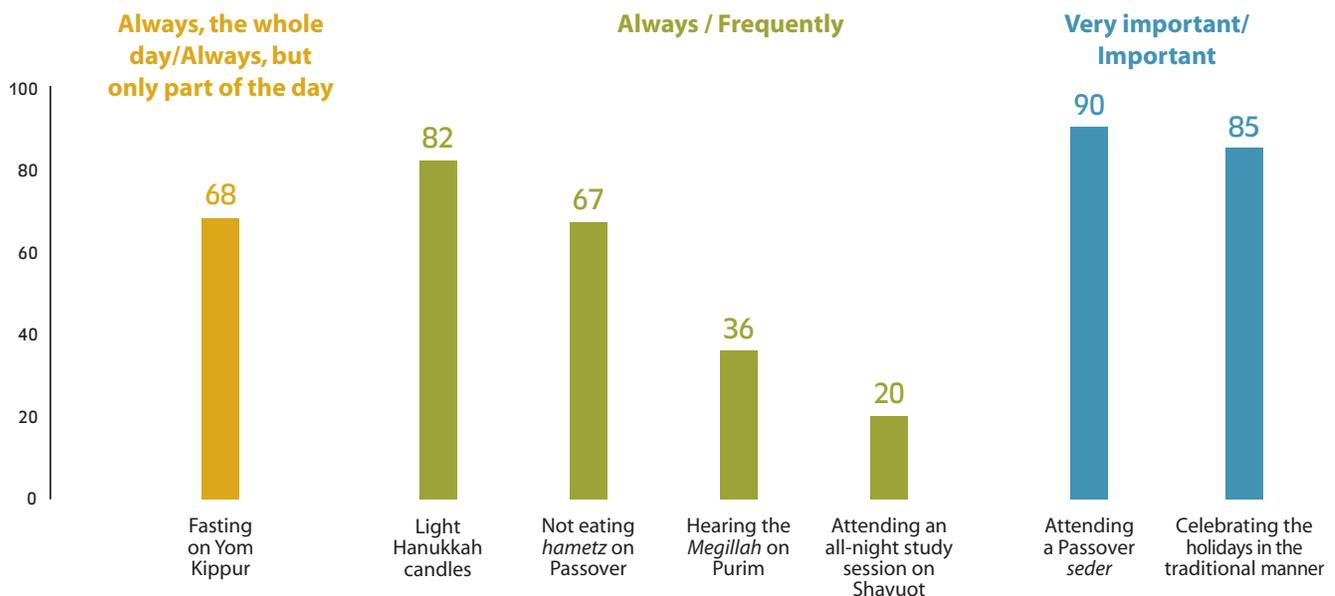
Half of Israeli Jews mark the Sabbath in one fashion or another—especially by trying to be with their family then (80%) and having a special dinner on Friday night (70%). In addition, most Israeli Jews do not violate Sabbath prohibitions (they do not go out to eat or for recreation or shopping and do not work at a paying job). Nevertheless, most of them favor allowing individual freedom of choice and permitting weekday activities on the Sabbath in the public sphere (see below). Most of them watch television and around half surf the Internet on the Sabbath. Only a third of the respondents said that they observe the Sabbath “meticulously” or “to a great extent” (Figure 4).

Figure 4: **Observe Sabbath practices and prohibitions** (Responding “frequently” or “always”; 2009; percent)



A majority of Israeli Jews (85%) say that it is important to celebrate Jewish holidays in the traditional manner, but they do so selectively. An overwhelming majority (90%) think this about the Passover *seder*; many (82%) say that they light Hanukkah candles. A smaller percentage refrain from eating *hametz* (bread) on Passover (67%), fast on Yom Kippur (68%), listen to the public reading of the Scroll of Esther on Purim (36%), or take part in an all-night study session on Shavuot (20%) (Figure 5).

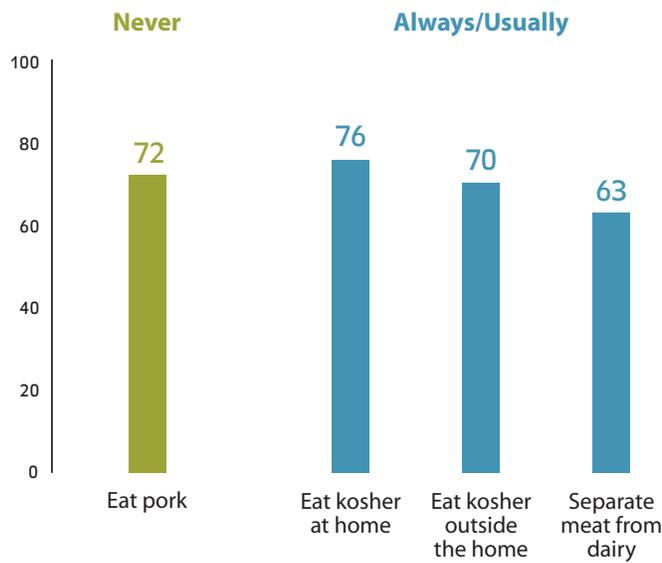
Figure 5: **Importance of observing holiday practices and actual observance** (2009; percent)



## Kashrut

Most Israeli Jews eat only kosher food at home (76%) and outside the home (70%) and separate meat from dairy (63%). Most report never eating pork (72%), saying they avoid pork for religious motives (Figure 6).

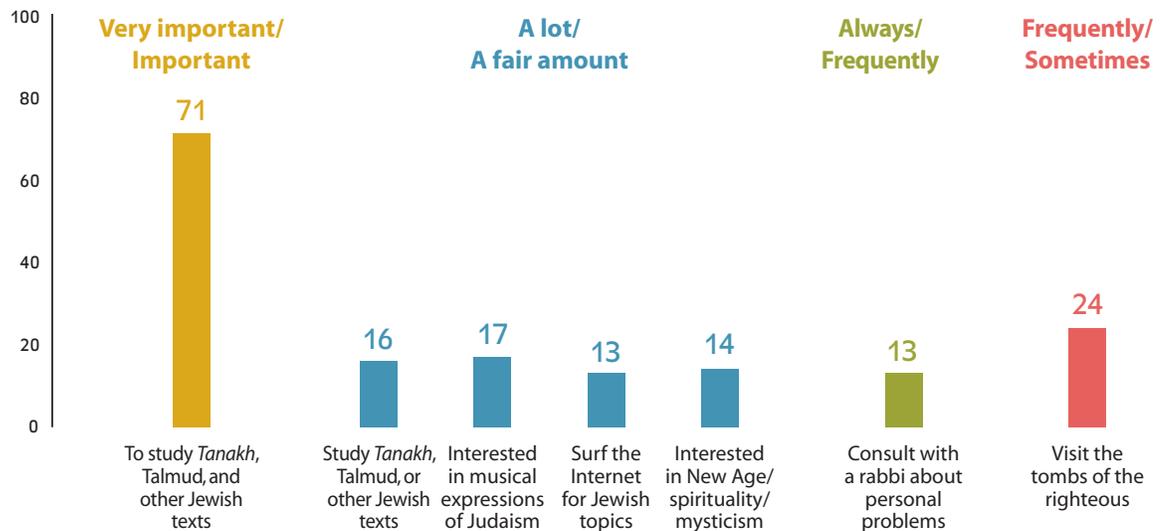
Figure 6: To what extent do you observe *kashrut*? (2009; percent)



## Studying about Judaism

Most Israeli Jews say that it is “very important” or “important” to study *Tanakh* (Bible), Talmud, and other Jewish classical texts. But only a few (16%) actually do so, surf the Internet for Jewish topics, or are interested in manifestations of Judaism in music. A small minority (13%) consult a rabbi about personal problems; about a quarter make pilgrimages to the tombs of the righteous. There was little interest in New Age, spiritualism, and mysticism (Figure 7).

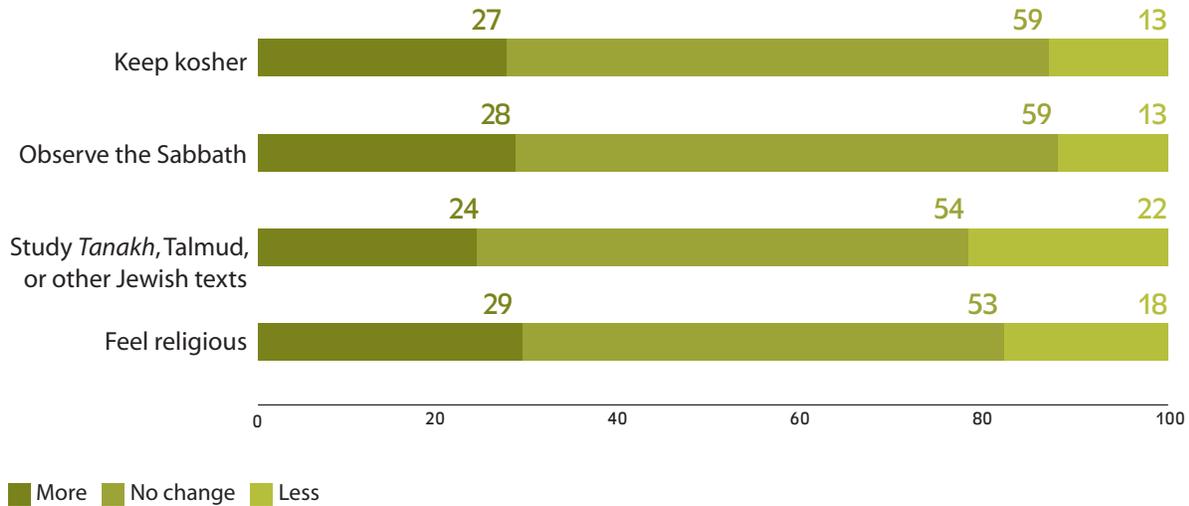
Figure 7: Studying about Judaism (2009; percent)



Respondents' reports of changes in their sense of religiosity and behavior were also examined. The data indicate that more than half of Israeli Jews say that this has remained stable; almost half say that there has been some change in their sense of religiosity and behavior. Among those who said that there has been a change, more reported that they had moved closer to religion (more observant of the precepts, a strong religious feeling, more study of religious texts) than have moved away from it (see Figure 8).

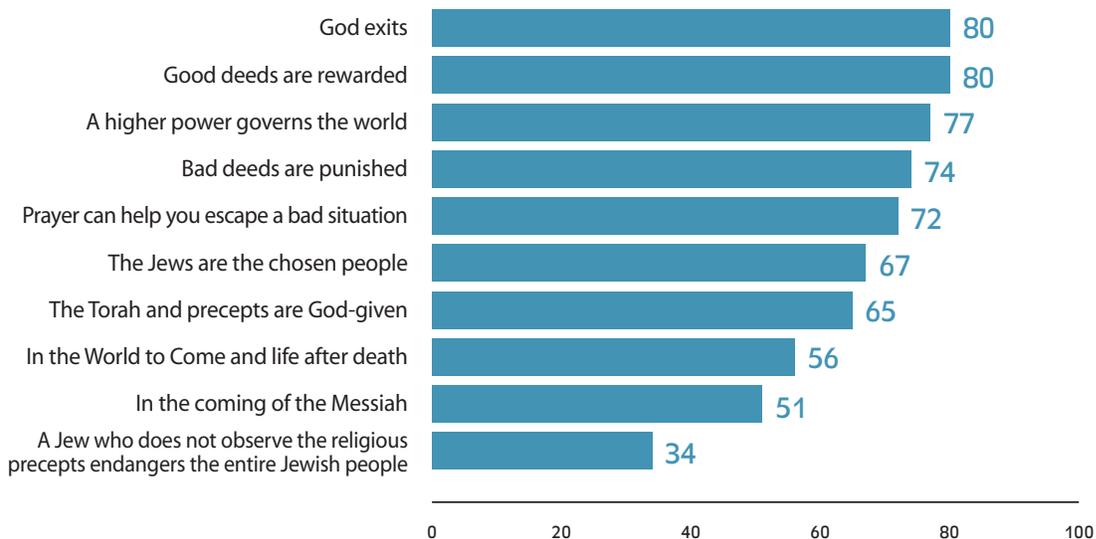
Closer scrutiny of these trends in different sectors of the population<sup>1</sup> indicates that whereas the trend to grow closer to religion is reported prominently by the Orthodox and Haredim and to some extent by the Traditional, among the secular who are not anti-religious and especially the anti-religious there is no change or even a slight movement away from religion. That is, the secular sector of Israeli society makes no contribution to the situation in which more people report moving toward religion than moving away from it.

1 Chi-square tests found significant differences for all the variables investigated (changes in one's feeling of religiosity, keeping kosher, observing the Sabbath, and studying *Tanakh*, Talmud, and other Jewish texts) as correlated with self-defined religiosity ( $p < .001$ ).

Figure 8: **Today, as compared to the past, I ...** (2009; percent)

## Religious Belief

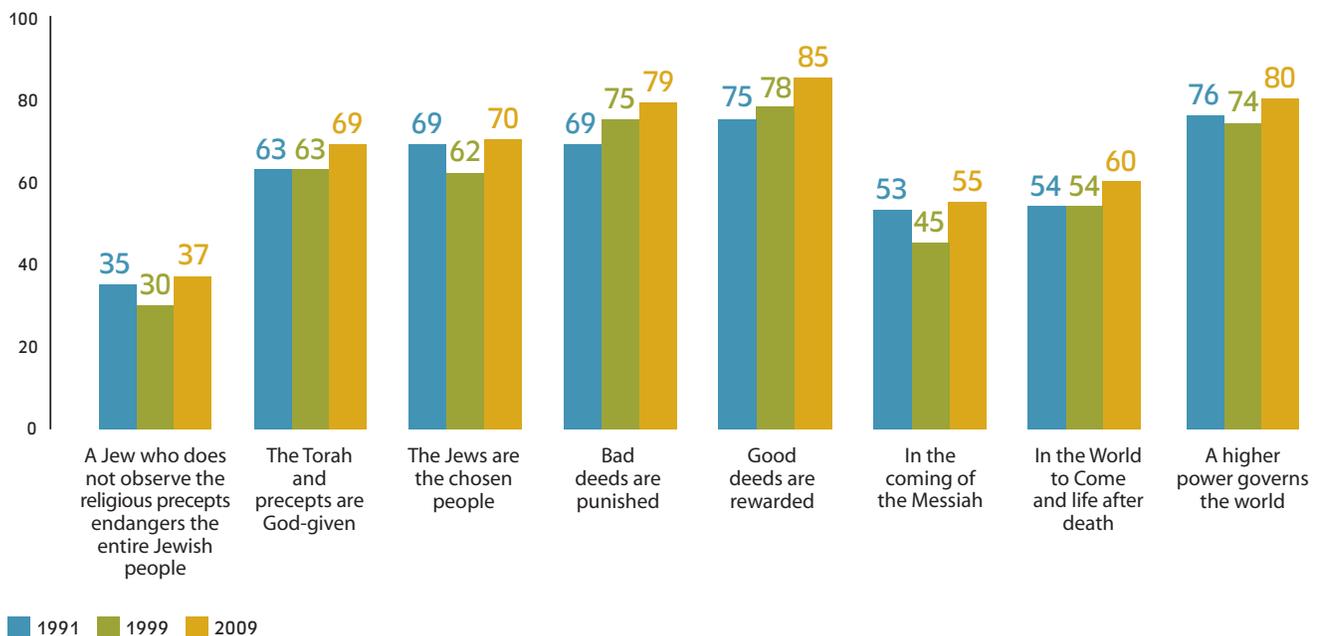
Most Jewish Israelis say that they believe in a higher power that governs the world. A smaller percentage—though still a majority—reported that they hold specifically Jewish beliefs, such as that the Torah and precepts are of divine origin or that the Jewish people have been chosen above all the nations.

Figure 9: **To what extent do you believe or not believe that ...** (Answering “believe wholeheartedly” or “believe but sometimes doubt”; 2009; percent)

Between 70% and 80% of the respondents believe in God or in a higher power, that they will be rewarded for good deeds and punished for misdeeds, and in the power of prayer. About two-thirds also reported a strong belief in the unique character of the Jewish people and the Torah. Smaller percentages (about half) indicated a belief in the World to Come and the Messiah; about a third reported a strong belief that a Jew who does not observe the precepts endangers the entire Jewish people (Figure 9).

Two main trends in religious belief are evident over the years (1991, 1999, and 2009). With regard to universal religious beliefs, such as the existence of a higher power that governs the world, there has been a slight increase. With regard to specifically Jewish items, such as the coming of the Messiah, the percentage of believers was lower in 1999 than in 1991 but had returned to the 1991 level in 2009 (Figure 10).

Figure 10: **To what extent do you believe or not believe that ...** (Answering “believe wholeheartedly” or “believe but sometimes doubt”; 1991, 1999, 2009; percent)

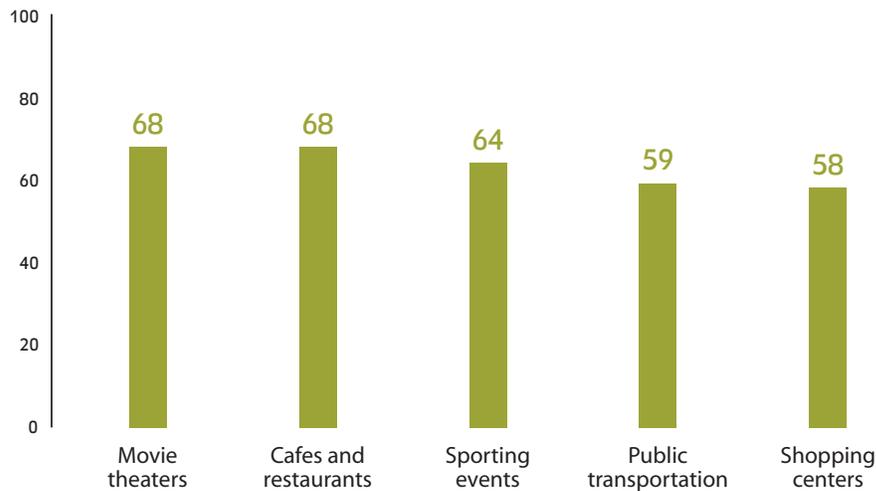


## Religion and Tradition in the Public Sphere

Many Israeli Jews express a favorable attitude toward manifestations of religion and tradition in the public arena, though they also want to preserve individual freedom of choice. Most (61%) believe that public life in the State of Israel should be conducted according to tradition. An overwhelming majority (87%) believe that food served in public institutions must be kosher.

In addition, most (80%) believe that a Jewish wedding is important, although half believe that civil marriage outside the rabbinate should be instituted in Israel (51% answered “absolutely,” “yes,” or “perhaps yes”).

**Figure 11: Are you in favor of the operation of the following on the Sabbath**  
(Responding “in favor” or “strongly in favor”; 2009; percent)

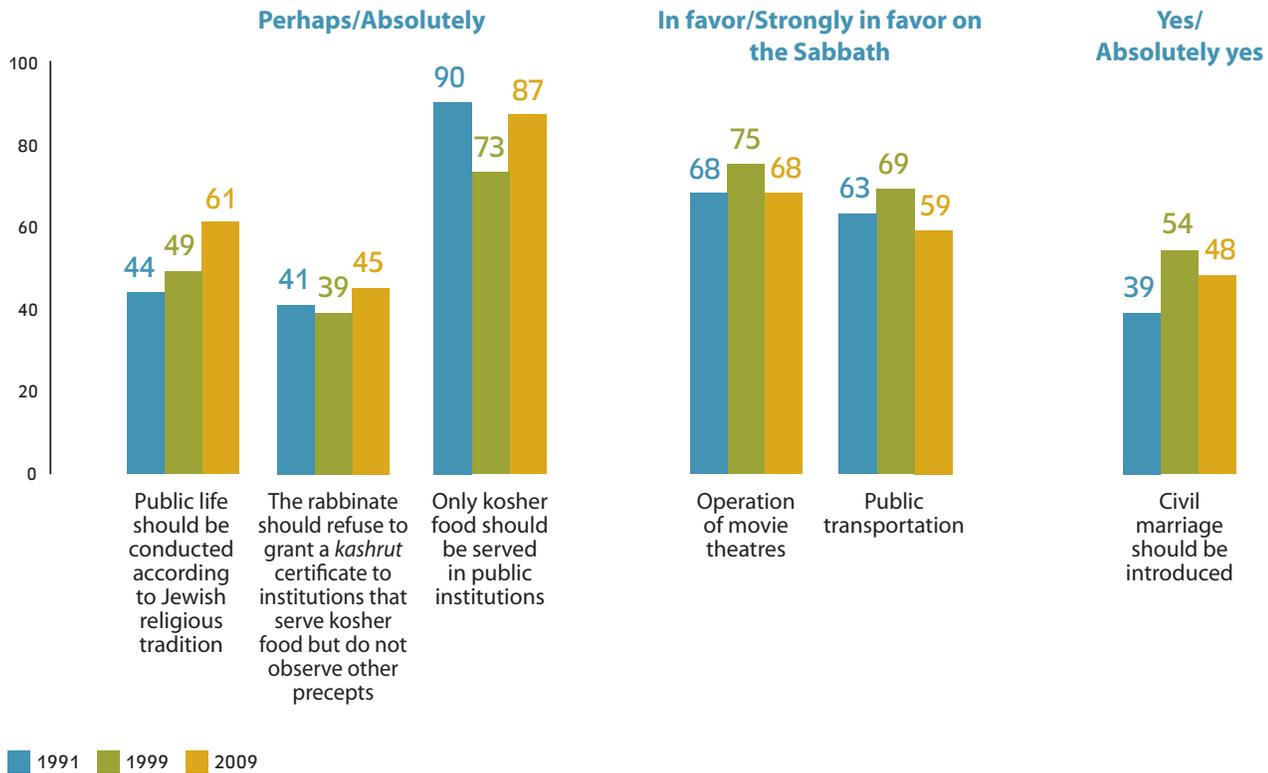


A majority of Israeli Jews (more than 60%) support permitting weekday activities on the Sabbath—allowing movie theaters, cafes, and restaurants to be open and sporting events to take place. A slightly smaller percentage (58%–59%) support public transportation on the Sabbath and permitting shopping centers to do business as usual (Figure 11).

Most Israeli Jews are “interested” or “very interested” in the place of religion in the State of Israel (65%) and in the meaning of a “Jewish state” (70%). About half of them believe that public life in the country should continue to be conducted as it is today; about a quarter believe that Israel should be more religious than it is today, and about a quarter believe that it should be less religious.

Certain differences were found on items in this category that were included in all three surveys. With regard to respondents’ agreement with the statement that public life in Israel should be conducted according to Jewish religious tradition, there was significant and steady increase from 1991 to 2009 (44% in 1991, 61% in 2009). For all other questions, there was a downward trend of support for traditional and religious positions from 1991 to 1999, followed by a rise from 1999 to 2009 (this is consistent with the other findings) (Figure 12).

Figure 12: **Positions on manifestations of tradition and religion in the public sphere** (1991, 1999, 2009; percent)



### The Law of Return and “Who is a Jew”

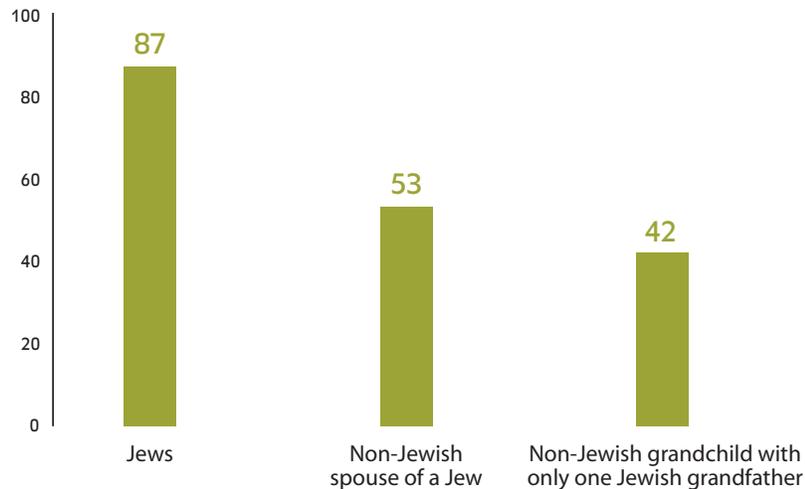
Many Israeli Jews are interested in the issue of “who is a Jew” and accept the official stance of the state, which supports Orthodox conversion only. Support for allowing Jews to make *aliya* and immediately acquire Israeli citizenship is overwhelming among all sectors of the population; but is qualified for those who are not Jewish according to halakhah.

Some 62% of the respondents are interested in the issue of “who is a Jew.” Orthodox respondents expressed the greatest interest, followed by Haredi respondents and Traditional respondents (86%, 79%, and 72%, respectively). Secular not anti-religious and secular anti-religious respondents were much less concerned by it (47% and 20%, respectively).

Some 87% support allowing Jews to immigrate to Israel and receive citizenship immediately; but only about half (53%) support this privilege for the non-Jewish spouses of Jews, and even fewer (43%) for the non-Jewish grandchildren of a Jewish grandfather (Figure 13).

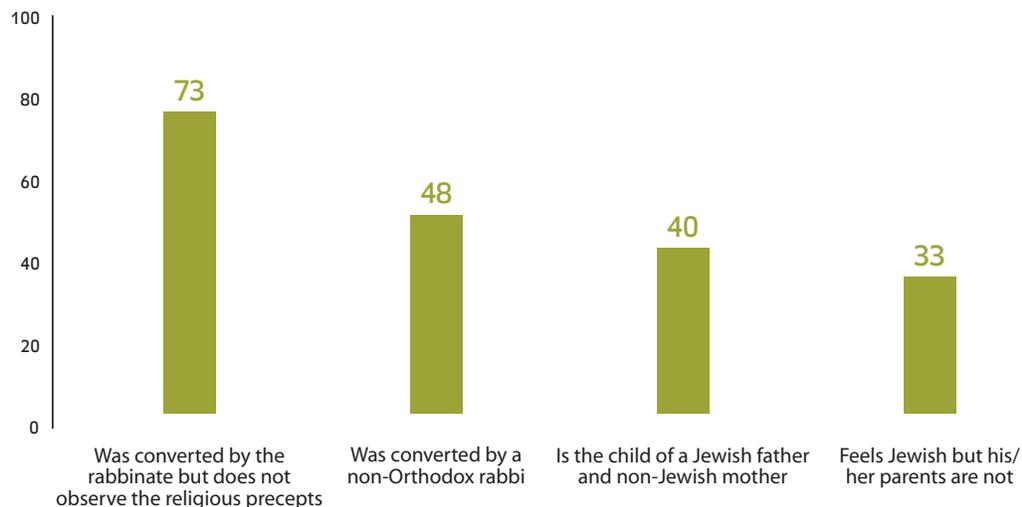
There was broad agreement with the notion that a Jew can be a good Jew even if he or she does not observe tradition (92% of respondents). Smaller percentages, although still a majority of Israeli Jews (61%), agree that the Conservative and Reform movements should have equal status with the Orthodox in Israel.

**Figure 13: Respondents who “support” or “totally support” allowing immigration to Israel and immediate acquisition of Israeli citizenship for ... (2009; percent)**



A majority of Israeli Jews (73%) accept the official position that Orthodox conversion is the path leading to recognition of a person’s Jewishness (even if he or she does not observe the precepts). Fewer (48%) accept non-Orthodox conversion (Figure 14).

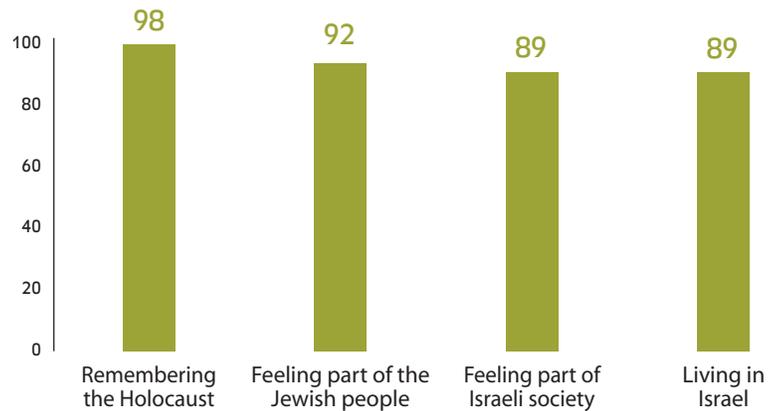
**Figure 14: Do you consider a person to be Jewish if he/she ... (Responding in the affirmative; 2009; percent)**



### Israeli and Jewish Sense of Belonging and Individual Identity

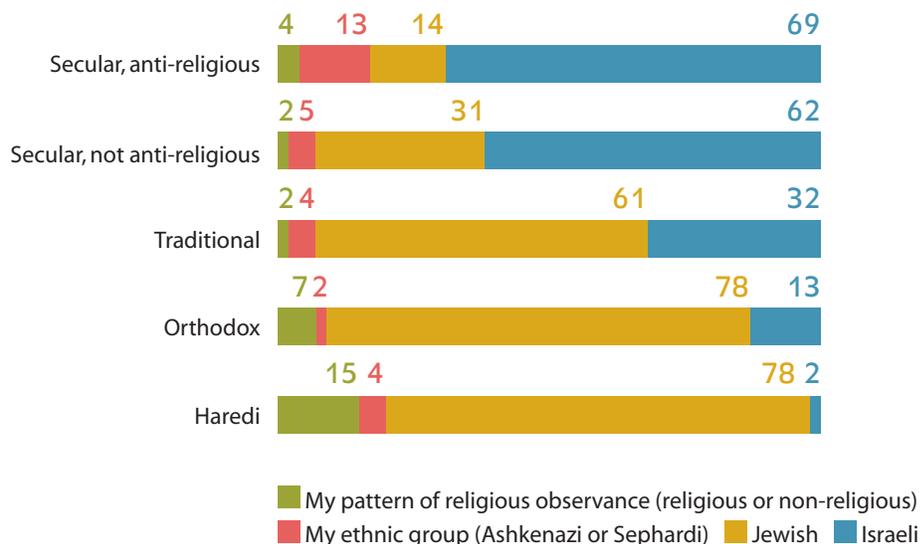
The survey found that most Israeli Jews have a strong sense of membership in and attachment to the State of Israel and the Jewish people. The vast majority say it is important to live in Israel, to feel that one is part of the Jewish people and Israeli society, and to remember the Holocaust.

Figure 15: **Guiding principles of respondents' lives** (Responding "fairly important" or "very important"; 2009; percent)



Most respondents (88%) would like to live in Israel in the long term (answering "certainly yes" or "yes but not certain"); a similar percentage (84%) consider themselves to be Zionists ("absolutely yes" or "yes").

Figure 16: **Which of these terms best defines your identity?** (By self-defined religiosity; 2009; percent)



Half of Israeli Jews define themselves primarily as Jews; 40% define themselves as Israelis. As expected, secular Jews who are not anti-religious and secular Jews who are anti-religious define themselves chiefly as Israelis, whereas the Traditional, the Orthodox, and Haredim define themselves mainly as Jews (Figure 16).

### **Attitudes about Relations between the Religious and the Secular**

The data on intergroup relations suggest a decline in the friction between the secular and religious in 2009, as compared to 1999 (although this conclusion is not unambiguous, because it is based on only one question in the survey). The decline in the percentage of those who believed that relations between the religious and the non-religious are “fairly good” or “very good” from 1991 to 1999 was followed by a strong rebound in 2009 (29% in 1991, 17% 1999, 43% in 2009).

However, in 2009, more than the half of the respondents (55%) still believe that relations between the religious and non-religious in Israel are “not so good” or “not at all good.” Most of them (59%) have few or no close friends who differ from them with regard to observance of the religious precepts (“more observant or less observant than you are”). Nevertheless, three-quarters would agree (“to some extent” or “strongly”) for their children to attend a school that enrolls both secular and religious children.

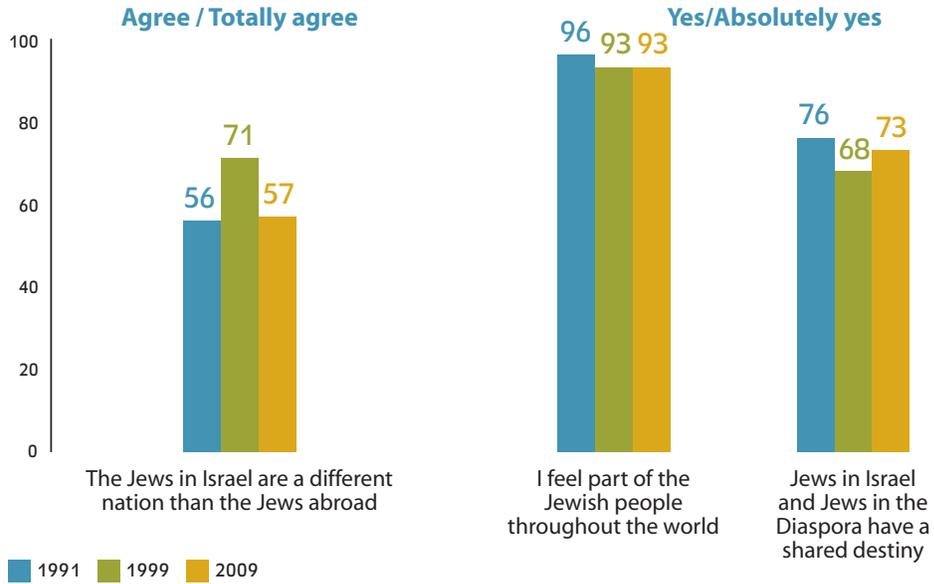
With regard to the controversial issue of the conscription of yeshiva students into the Israel Defense Forces, there was a sweeping consensus (about 85% of the respondents “agree” or “totally agree”) that yeshiva students should be subject to the military draft.

### **Israel and the Diaspora**

An upward trend was also found with regard to Israeli Jews’ sense of solidarity with the Jewish people throughout the world. The weakening of such solidarity observed in 1999 (as compared to 1991) has been stemmed; in 2009, more Israeli Jews felt that they shared a common destiny with Jews abroad than did in 1999 or that they were part of the Jewish people wherever they live.

A majority (81%) also agreed that without the Jewish religion the Jewish people would no longer exist. A smaller percentage, although still a majority, believes that Israeli Jews and Diaspora Jews have a shared destiny (73%). Nevertheless, more than half of the respondents agree that the Jews in Israel are a different nation than the Jews abroad (Figure 17).

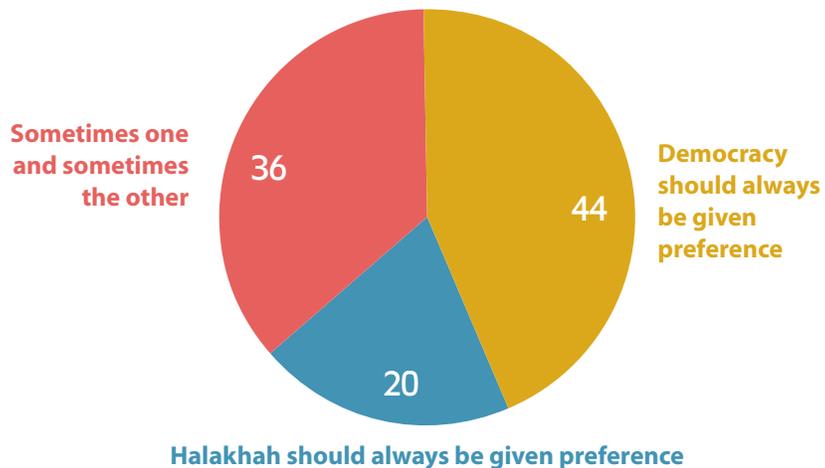
Figure 17: **Attitudes about the bond between Israel and the Diaspora** (1991, 1999, 2009; percent)



### Attitudes about Democracy and the Bond to Tradition and Religion

The survey findings indicate that most Israelis (73%) believe that Israel can be both a Jewish state that adheres to halakhah as well as a democratic state. But they disagree about the nature of the appropriate balance between the two. Almost half 44% said that democracy should always take precedence over halakhah; 36% said that each case must be judged on its own merits; and 20% believe that halakhah should always be preferred (Figure 18).

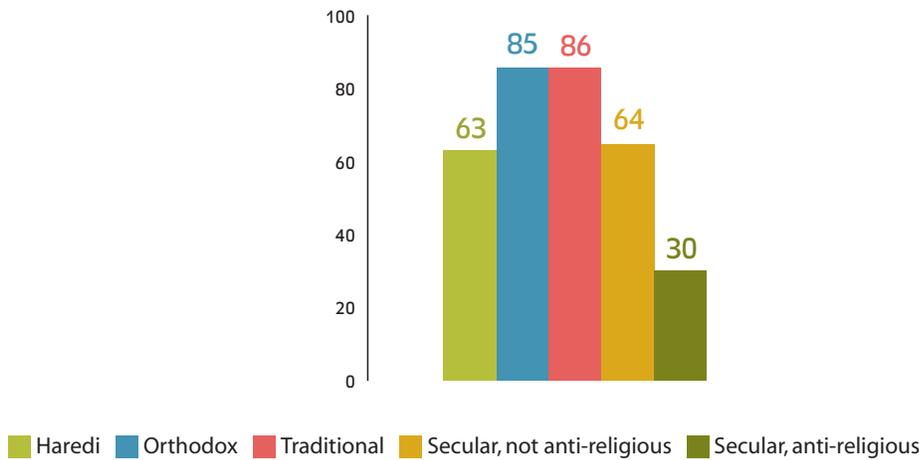
Figure 18: **If there is a contradiction between halakhah and democratic principles, which should be given preference?** (2009; percent)



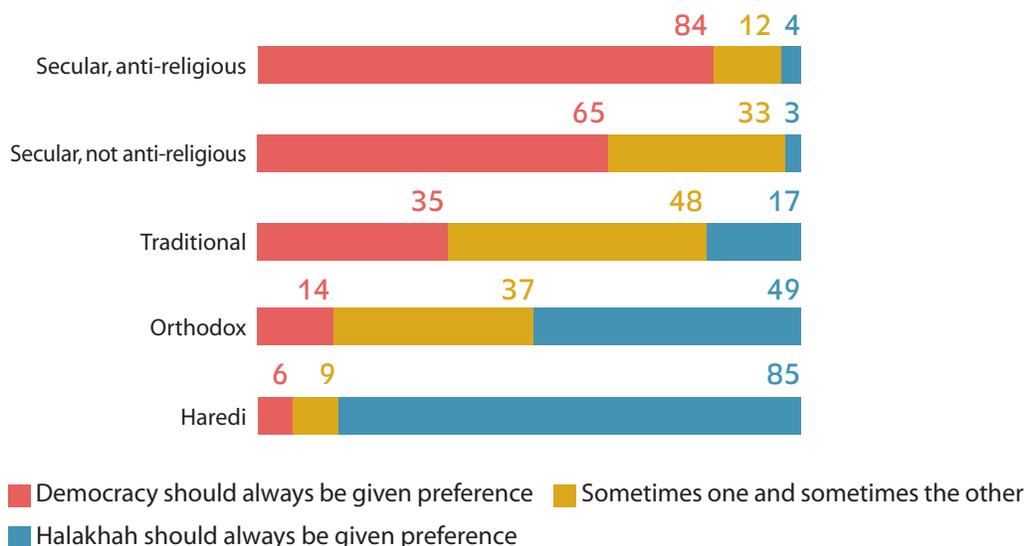
Scrutiny of these positions in the various sectors of Israeli Jewish society offers a somewhat complex picture: The percentage of Orthodox and Traditional who believe that Israel can be both a Jewish country complying with halakhah and a democratic state exceeds that of the secular who are not anti-religious and of the Haredim. Most respondents in the first two groups see no contradiction between the two. By contrast, only a minority of the anti-religious secular believe that democratic principles and halakhah are compatible (Figure 19).

There was a correlation between the strength of respondents' religious belief and their preference for halakhah over democracy when the two clash (Figure 20).

**Figure 19: Can Israel be both a Jewish state that observes halakhah and a democratic state?** (Answering “absolutely” or “absolutely yes”; 2009; percent)



**Figure 20: If there is a contradiction between halakhah and democratic principles, which should be given preference?** (2009; percent)



## Manifestations of Religion and Tradition in Different Sectors of Israeli Society, 2009

Israeli Jews' definition of their religiosity and observance of tradition is essential and fundamental, because, as the data analysis shows, it is consistently linked to manifestations of belief, lifestyle, practices, and attitudes toward religion in the public sphere, as specific to the various groups and sectors of Israeli society.

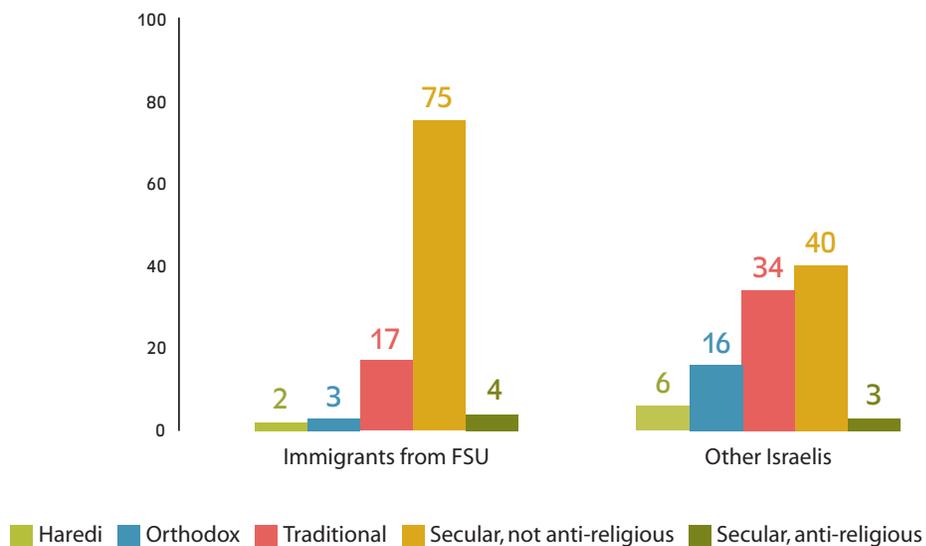
Profiles of the religiosity of the different sectors of Israeli Jewish society—immigrants from the former Soviet Union as opposed to other Israeli Jews, women as opposed to men, Mizrahim as opposed to those of mixed parentage, and Ashkenazim—follows, as well as each group's relationship to religion and tradition as defined by their income and education levels.<sup>2</sup>

### Differences between Immigrants from the Former Soviet Union<sup>3</sup> and Other Israeli Jews

As might be expected, the immigrants from the former Soviet Union are significantly more secular than are other Israeli Jews.

The percentage of immigrants from the former Soviet Union who define themselves as secular but not anti-religious (75%) including a few who are secular and anti-religious (4%) is much higher than the figure for other Israeli Jews (40% and 3% respectively). A high percentage of Israeli Jews (56%) define themselves as Traditional, Orthodox, or Haredi, as compared to immigrants from the former Soviet Union (22%) (Figure 21).

Figure 21: Self-defined religiosity of immigrants from the former Soviet Union and other Israeli Jews (2009; percent)



2 The differences between age groups were negligible.

3 Who immigrated since 1989.

The immigrants from the former Soviet Union report a weaker religious faith than the rest of the population (an average score of 1.6 as against 2.1, on a scale of 0 to 3). They report less observance of traditional and religious practices. The differences are most prominent especially with regard to this group's lesser observance of rites of passage—circumcision, bar/bat mitzvah, and Jewish burial (a score of 3.5 among the immigrants as against 4.4 among the rest of the Jewish Israeli population, on a scale of 0 to 5). They are less likely to observe practices such as keeping kosher, fasting on Yom Kippur, and lighting Sabbath candles and reciting *kiddush* on Friday night (2.5 and 3.8, respectively); and they are less likely to follow practices such as going to the synagogue and visiting the graves of the righteous (0.9 and 1.6, respectively, on a scale of 0 to 5).

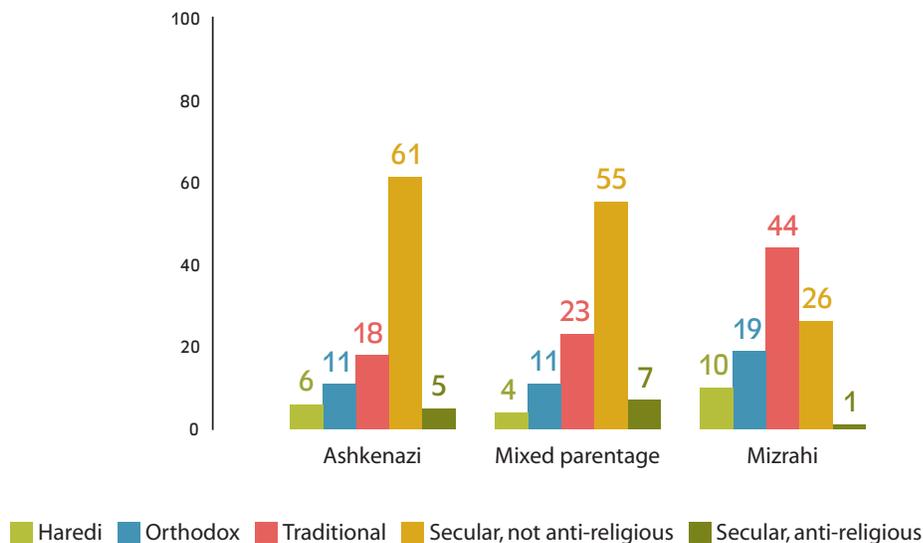
The immigrants from the former Soviet Union are less accepting of manifestations of tradition and religion in the public sphere than the rest of the population (average scores of 1.6 and 2.5, respectively, on a scale of 0 to 5).

Finally, the sense of belonging to Israel and membership in the Jewish people is fairly high among the immigrants from the former Soviet Union, but still less than that among the rest of the population (average of 3.0 and 3.4, respectively, on a scale of 0 to 4).

### Differences by Ethnic Origin<sup>4</sup>

For all aspects investigated, Mizrahim reported a stronger bond to religion and tradition than did Ashkenazim. Those of mixed parentage were closer to Ashkenazim than to Mizrahim. Most Ashkenazim and those of mixed parentage are secular but not anti-religious (61% and 55%, respectively), including a few who are anti-religious (5% and 7%, respectively); by contrast, most Mizrahim are Traditional, Orthodox, or Haredi (73%) (Figure 22).

Figure 22: Self-defined religiosity, by ethnic origin (2009; percent)



4 Ethnicity was determined by respondents' answer to the question: "What is your ethnic origin? 1. Ashkenazi / 2. Mizrahi/Sephardi / 3. Mixed (both Ashkenazi and Sephardi) / 4. Other (please specify)."

Respondents of Mizrahi origins reported stronger religious faith than did those of mixed parentage and those of Ashkenazi origin (average scores of 2.4, 1.8, and 1.6, respectively, on a scale of 1 to 3). Respondents of Mizrahi background reported more intensive observance of all the traditional and religious practices investigated than did the respondents of mixed parentage and Ashkenazim. The difference was particularly prominent with regard to practices such as going to the synagogue and visiting the tombs of the righteous (an average of 2.1 for Mizrahi respondents, 1.1 for Ashkenazi respondents and those of mixed parentage, on a scale of 0 to 5) and the importance of tradition for aspects of daily life, such as deciding on the number of children in the family, selecting a profession or spouse, and how one dresses (2.9 for Mizrahi respondents, 2.0–2.1 for Ashkenazim and those of mixed parentage, on a scale of 0 to 5).

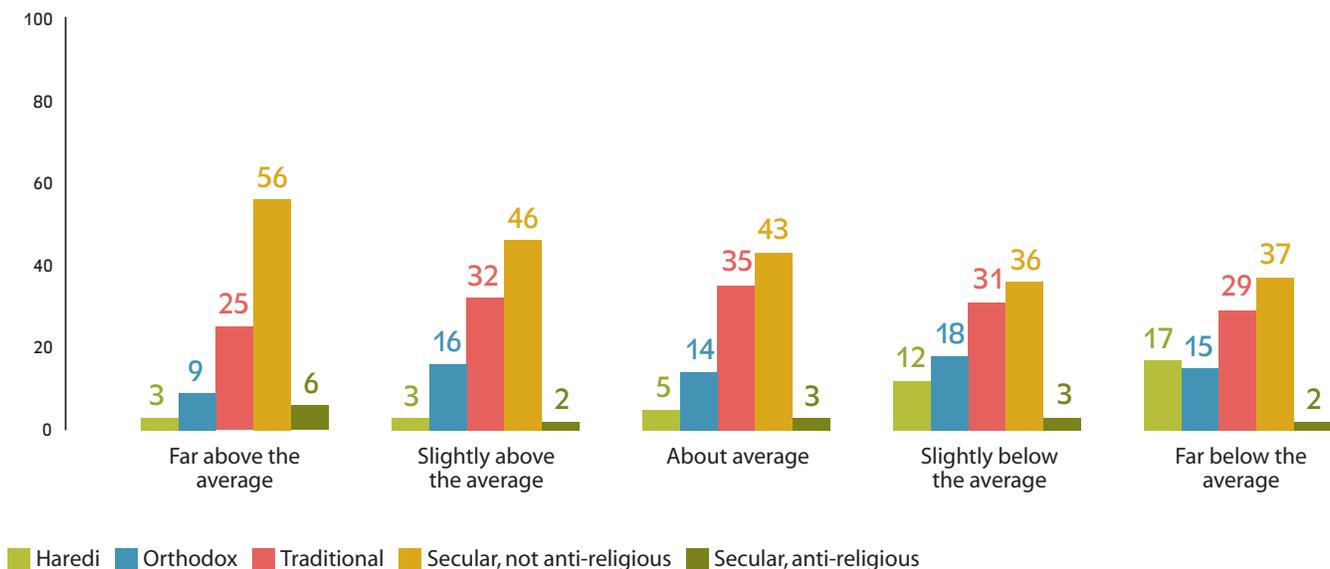
Mizrahi respondents are more likely to accept manifestations of religious tradition in the public sphere than are Ashkenazim and those of mixed parentage (averages of 3.0, 1.9, and 2.1, respectively, on a scale of 0 to 5).

Finally, Mizrahim report feeling a stronger bond to Israel and the Jewish people than do Ashkenazim and those of mixed parentage (averages of 3.5, 3.2, and 3.2, respectively, on a scale of 0 to 4).

### Differences by Income Level<sup>5</sup>

In general, there is a negative correlation between Israeli Jews' income and their bond to religion and tradition, as the following data show.

Figure 23: Self-defined religiosity, by income level (2009; percent)



5 Respondents' income level was determined by their answer to the question: "Last month, the monthly income of an average four-person family in Israel was NIS 9,500 net. Is your income: 1. Far above the average / 2. Slightly above the average / About average / Slightly below the average / 5. Far below the average?"

Most of those with an income far above the average define themselves as secular but not anti-religious or as secular and anti-religious (62%, as compared to 39% to 48% in all other income categories). Conversely, most of those with a lower-than-average income define themselves as Traditional, Orthodox, or Haredi (61%). Among the low-income groups, there is a relatively larger proportion of Haredim (12%–17%, as against 3%–5% in the other categories).

The religious self-definitions of those with an average income or an income slightly above average were fairly similar (Figure 23).

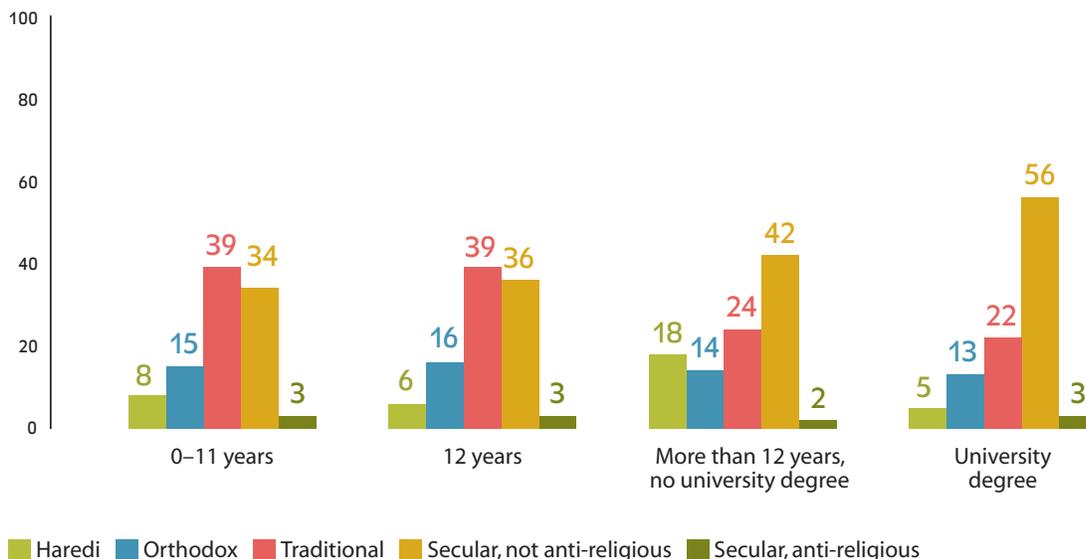
It was found that the lower the income, the stronger a respondent's religious belief (from an average score of 2.2 for those with an income far below average to 1.6 for those with an income far above average, on a scale of 0 to 3). Low-income respondents are also more likely to observe religious practices and traditions than are high-income respondents. High-income respondents are less supportive of manifestations of religious tradition in the public sphere than are low-income respondents.

### Differences by Educational Level

In general, religiosity is higher among those with a lower educational level. Those with more than 12 years of education but no academic degree constitute an exception to this rule (most of them are Haredi men who studied in yeshiva).

Respondents who define themselves as Traditional are the most common group among those with 11 to 12 years of education. Conversely, secular not anti-religious make up the most common group among those with more than 12 years of education and with university degrees (Figure 24).

Figure 24: Self-defined religiosity, by educational level (2009; percent)



Those with less education report stronger religious faith (average score of 2.2 for those with 0 to 11 years of schooling, as against 1.7 for those with a university degree, on a scale of 0 to 3).

Finally, those with a university education are less supportive of manifestations of religious tradition in the public sphere than are members of the other groups.

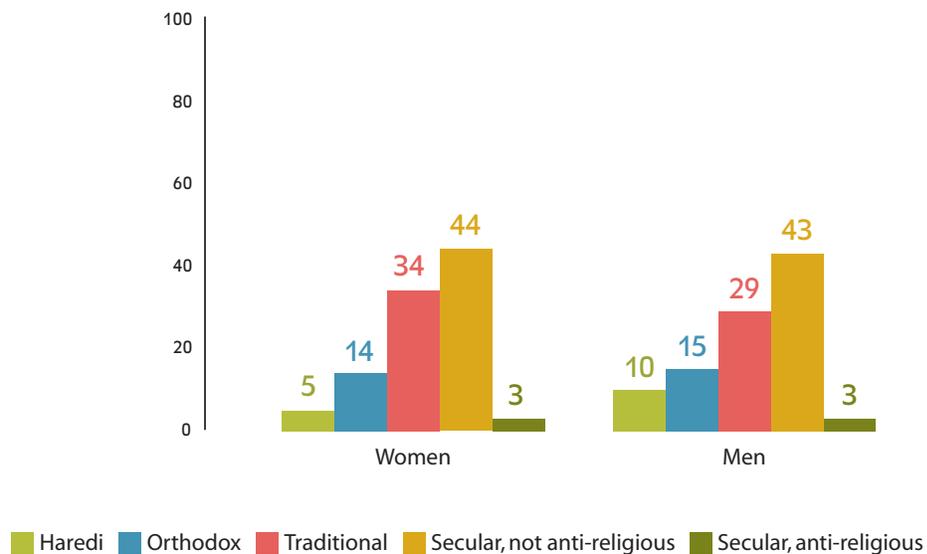
### Differences by Gender

Some differences were found in how women and men define their religiosity and observance of the practices included in the survey.

More women than men defined themselves as Traditional (34% and 29%, respectively); more men than women defined themselves as Haredi (10% and 5%, respectively) (Figure 25).

A higher percentage of men observe practices such as going to synagogue, hearing the public reading of the Scroll of Esther, taking part in an all-night study session on Shavuot, and visiting the tombs of the righteous. Men also report a stronger effect of tradition on their daily lives—choosing a profession, deciding on the number of children in the family, how one dresses, etc.

Figure 25: **Self-defined religiosity, by gender** (2009; percent)



## Research Team

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