

A PORTRAIT OF ISRAELI JEWRY

Beliefs, Observances, and Values among
Israeli Jews 2000

Highlights from an In-Depth Study
Conducted by the Guttman Center
of the Israel Democracy Institute
for The AVI CHAI Foundation

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CHAI


המכון הישראלי לדמוקרטיה

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Shlomit Levy

Hanna Levinsohn

Elihu Katz

אבי
חיי
אבי
חיי


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The study was conducted on behalf of The AVI CHAI Foundation.
The Guttman Center of the Israel Democracy Institute conducted
the study, and is responsible for its findings and conclusions.

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1 Introduction

1.1 Preface

Between June 1999 and January 2000, the Guttman Center of the Israel Democracy Institute carried out a comprehensive study of Jewish religious behavior in Israel and of how Israeli Jews define their own identity.* This study, the sequel to a similar study conducted in 1991, involved a national sample of 2,466 respondents from all over the country, with a maximum sampling error of 3%. It also included a supplementary representative sample of 373 Jewish immigrants from the former Soviet Union. Part 10 of this summary addresses the findings concerning the immigrant sample.

This study, like its predecessor, embraces a variety of topics: observance of religious traditions, Jewish and general beliefs and values, Jewish identity and identification, issues associated with the role of religion in public life, and relations among social groups. The unique scope of this study, and a comparison of its findings with those of the previous study, yield a comprehensive map of Israeli Jewish society and its values, beliefs, and lifestyle in everything related to Jewishness.

1.2 Abstract

Israeli Jews have a strong Jewish identity. A large majority want Israel to have a Jewish character—even though they cannot agree on the parameters of this character. A large majority consider themselves part of the Jewish people—even though their closeness to Diaspora Jewry is waning. Most Israeli Jews feel some sort of connection with Jewish tradition, observe at least some of its practices and life-cycle rituals, and mark at least some of its festivals.

Basically, Jews in Israel are committed to two distinct values: tradition and individual freedom

of choice. For the groups at the two ends of the religious identity spectrum—the haredim/strictly observant and the anti-religious—one of these values completely overshadows the other. The vast majority of Israeli Jews, however, attempt to integrate the two.

The lifestyles, values, and identity of most Israeli Jews reflect a profusion of efforts to maintain a bond to Jewish tradition, on the one hand, and maximum freedom of choice, on the other. The result is a fairly broad Israeli-Jewish consensus that reflects a commitment to Jewish identity, Jewish culture, and Jewish continuity, but does not accept *halakhah*—rabbinical law—as a system of binding imperatives and rejects anything that is perceived as religious coercion.

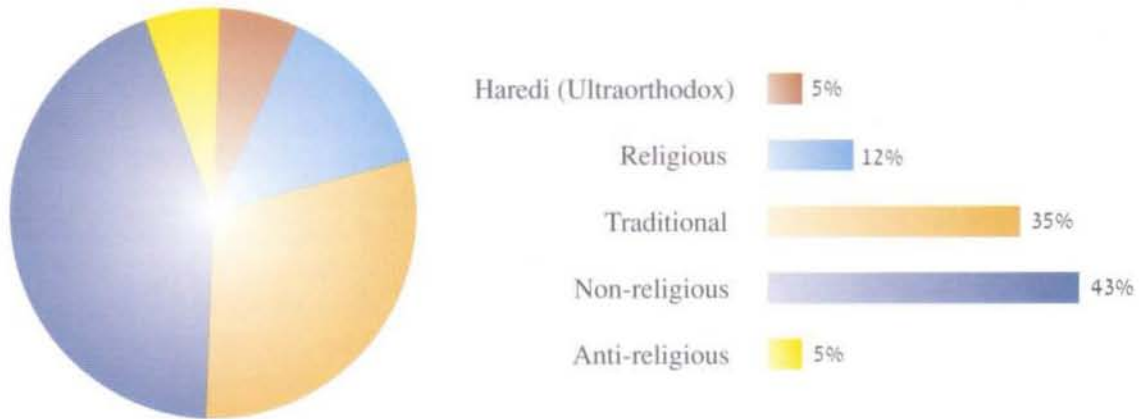
Several findings of this study are disturbing, notably the deterioration in the perceived quality of intergroup relations in Israeli Jewish society and an increasing distance between Israeli and Diaspora Jewry. The sense of intra-Israeli and pan-Jewish unity is eroding. Furthermore, among the non-religious (especially Ashkenazim and the better-educated), the intensity of Jewish identity is gradually declining, and there is confusion regarding the meaning of the term “Jew” and the definition of the character and attributes that the Jewish state should possess. Nevertheless, there is no doubt that what characterizes most Jews in Israel is their adherence to a personal Jewish identity alongside their wish to shape a public Jewish identity.

* The study was conducted before the outbreak of violence that began in October 2000.

2 Religious Self-Definition

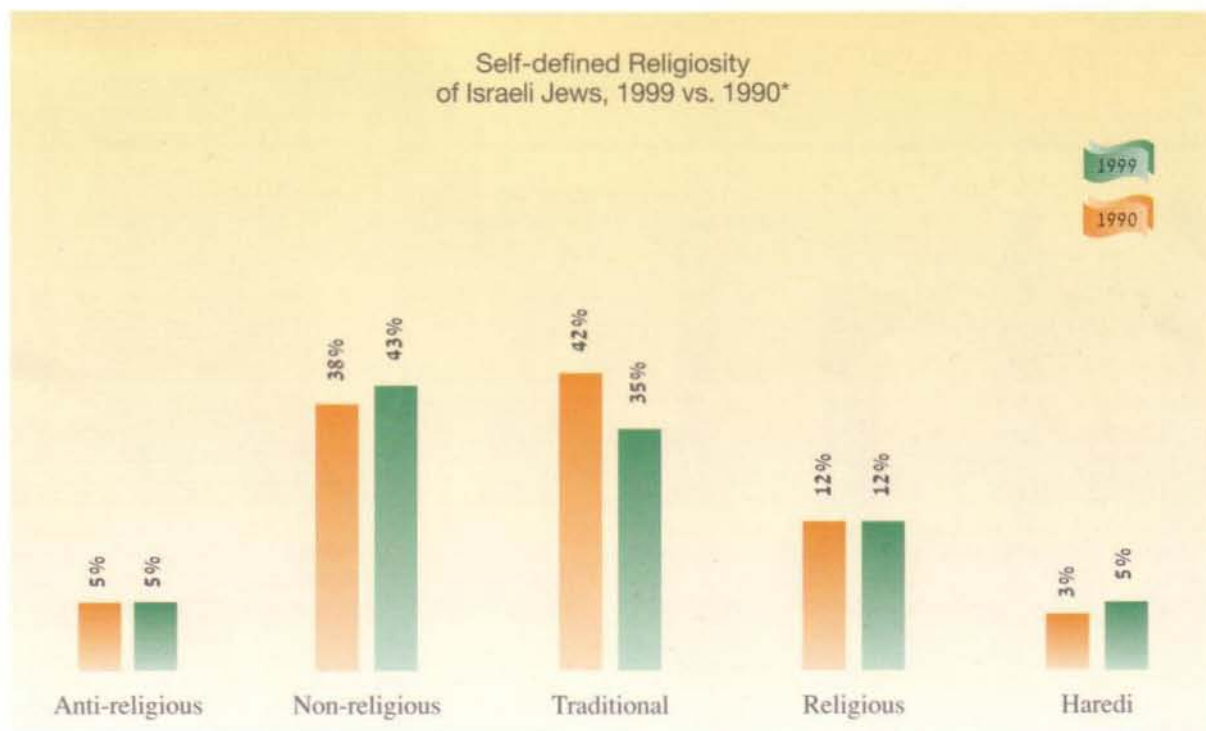
2.1 Religious Identity

The religious self-definition of Israeli Jews in 1999 was as follows:



This distribution is somewhat different from that of a decade ago. The “traditional” group declined by seven percentage points and the non-religious grew by five percentage points, so that the non-religious replaced the traditional as the largest

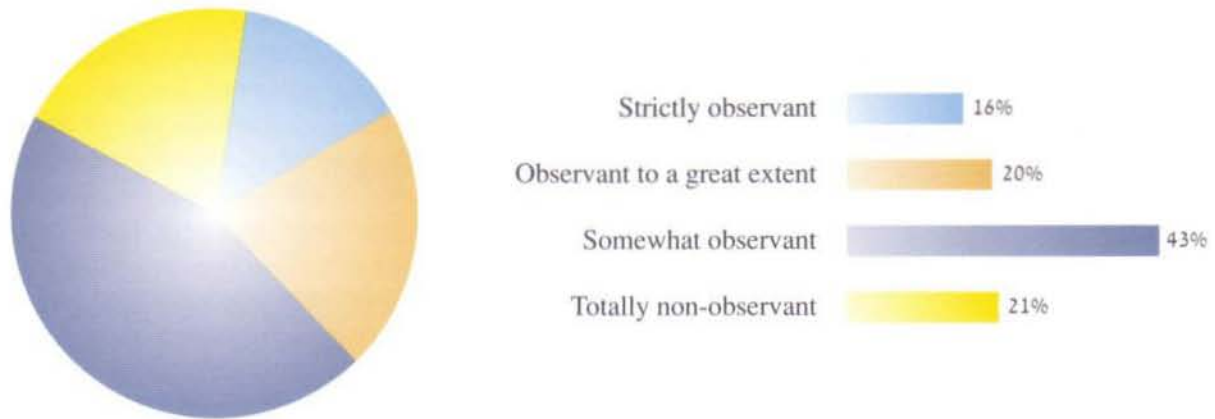
single group of Israeli Jews. During the same period, the haredi sector grew by two percentage points. These changes may indicate a polarizing trend.



* The religious identity of Israeli Jews in 1990 is based on the Guttman Institute continuing survey from August 1990, which was part of the study, “Leisure Culture in Israel.”

2.2 Observance of Tradition

In 1999, Israeli Jews assessed their own degree of religious observance as follows:



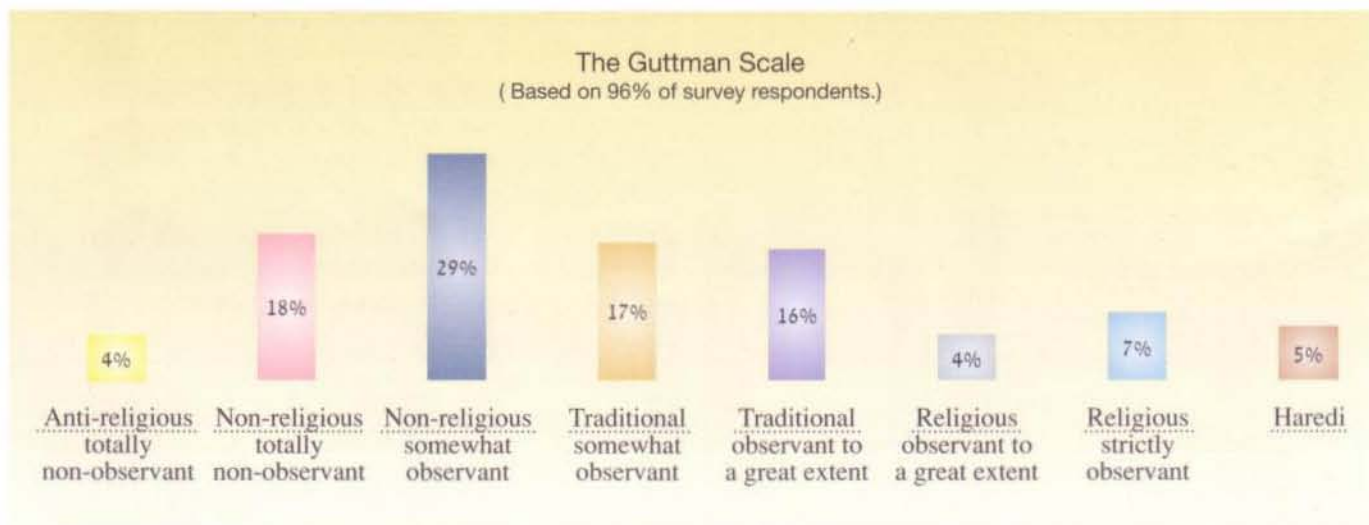
Here, unlike religious self-definition, little has changed since 1991 and there has been no decline in actual religious observance. Generally speaking,

Israeli Jews' assessment of their observance of religious tradition has been stable over the years.

2.3 The Religious Identity Scale

This research presents a new Guttman religious identity scale, which combines self-defined religiosity with assessment of one's level of

observance. In 1999, the distribution of the population according to this scale was as follows:



This breakdown shows that declared observance of tradition is much more prevalent than declared religiosity. Some 50% of respondents define

themselves as non-religious, but only about 20% describe themselves as "totally non-observant." The most conspicuous finding here is that nearly

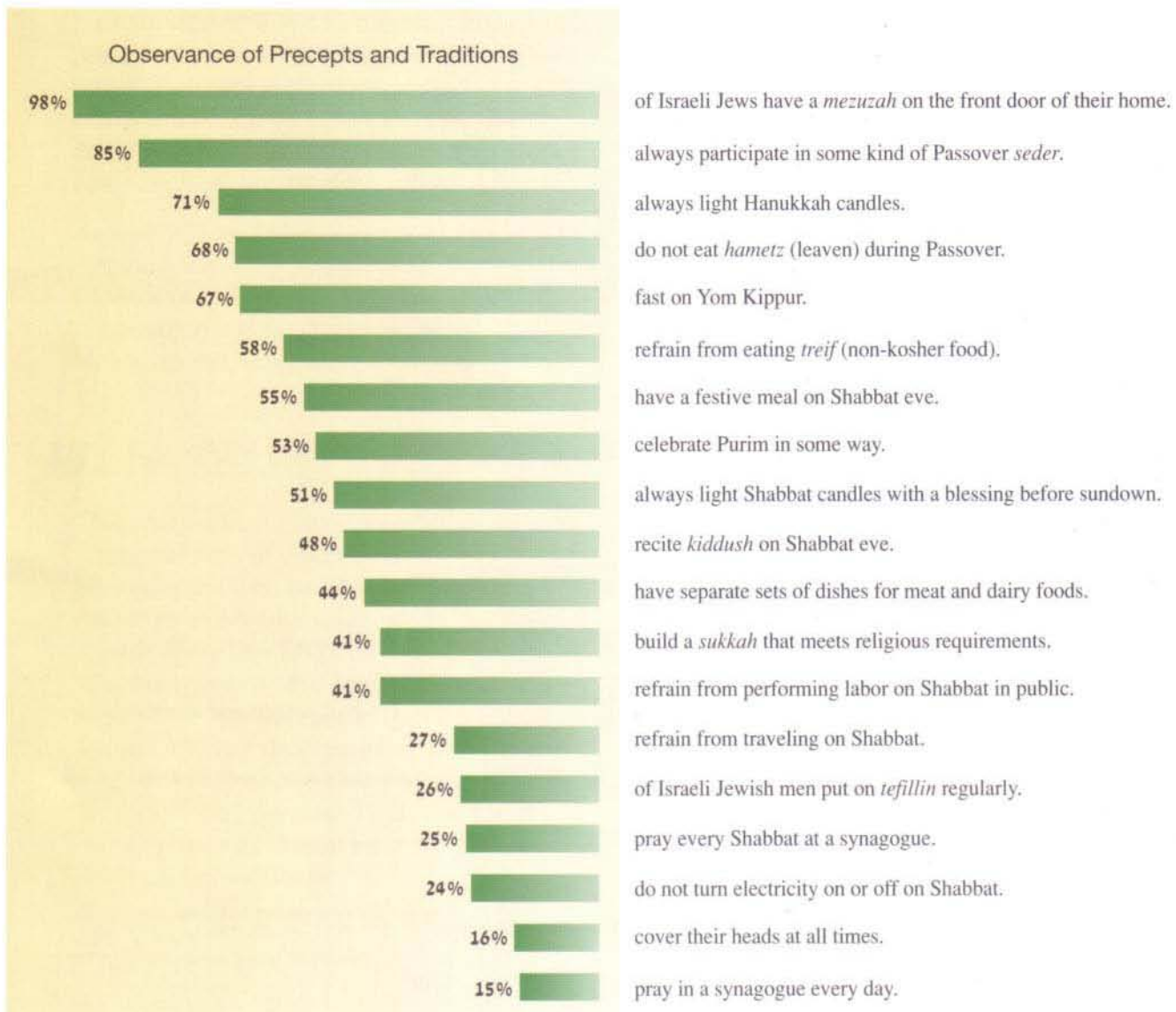
30% of Israeli Jews consider themselves to be both non-religious *and* somewhat observant. The current study is the first to profile this group, the largest of the eight on the Guttman scale. The seemingly paradoxical coupling of non-religiosity and some religious observance can be explained

by the fact that a large number of non-religious Israeli Jews nevertheless opt to observe certain religious or traditional practices. This is consistent with other findings about the lifestyle of Israeli Jews.

3 Observances

Seventy percent of Israeli Jews believe that they lead their lives in the spirit of Jewish values. Eighty-nine percent believe that a person can be

a good Jew even without observing religious tradition. However, the level of actual observance of specific precepts and traditions varies widely.



3.1 General Remarks

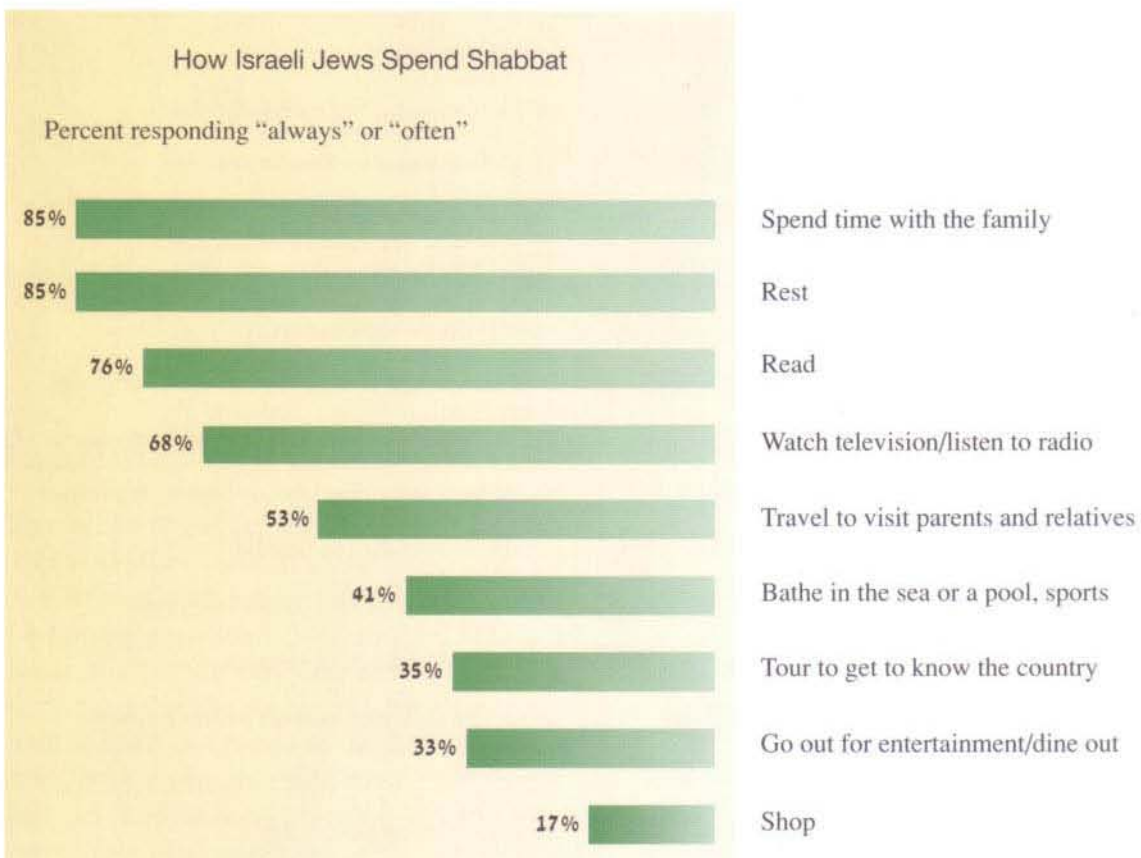
The proportion of Israeli Jews who never observe traditional practices ranges from 2% who never participate in a Passover seder, to 25% who do not mark Shabbat in any way or observe no aspect of kashrut, and 35% who never attend synagogue on Yom Kippur. Some 60%-65% never refrain from traveling or using electricity and the telephone on Shabbat.

The findings show that “keeping kosher” is more prevalent than “keeping Shabbat.” Passover, Hanukkah, and Yom Kippur are the holidays marked by a large majority of Israeli Jews. Only a small minority of 15%-25% are regular synagogue-goers.

3.2 Shabbat

As stated, 48%-55% of Israeli Jews observe some of the traditions associated with Friday evening (such as lighting candles, eating a festive meal,

and reciting kiddush). Some 24%-27% go to synagogue and refrain from traveling, turning electrical appliances on and off, or participating in paid entertainment. Forty-one percent refrain from performing labor in public; 37% refrain from doing so at home and kindling fires. Going beyond all this, however, a large majority of Israeli Jews tend to spend Shabbat in a family setting. When offered nine ways of spending Shabbat and asked to note the frequency of each, respondents revealed the existence of a sort of Israeli “Shabbat culture” that selectively observes certain traditions as part of a much broader pattern of quiet leisure activities with the family.



When the respondents were asked, in general terms, about the need to preserve a Shabbat atmosphere in the public arena, 70% (including about half of the non-religious and one-third of the anti-religious) answered in the affirmative. When asked specific questions, however, a large majority favored liberalization in the public observance of Shabbat:

- 72% favor allowing movie theaters, cafes, and restaurants to be open on Shabbat.
- 72% favor holding sporting events on Shabbat.
- 70% favor allowing shopping malls outside cities to be open on Shabbat.
- 65% favor running public transport on Shabbat.
- 61% favor allowing urban shopping malls to be open on Shabbat.

Some 12%-23% of those who define themselves as "religious" would permit these services and events on Shabbat, except for the opening of urban

shopping malls, which is supported by only 6%-10%.

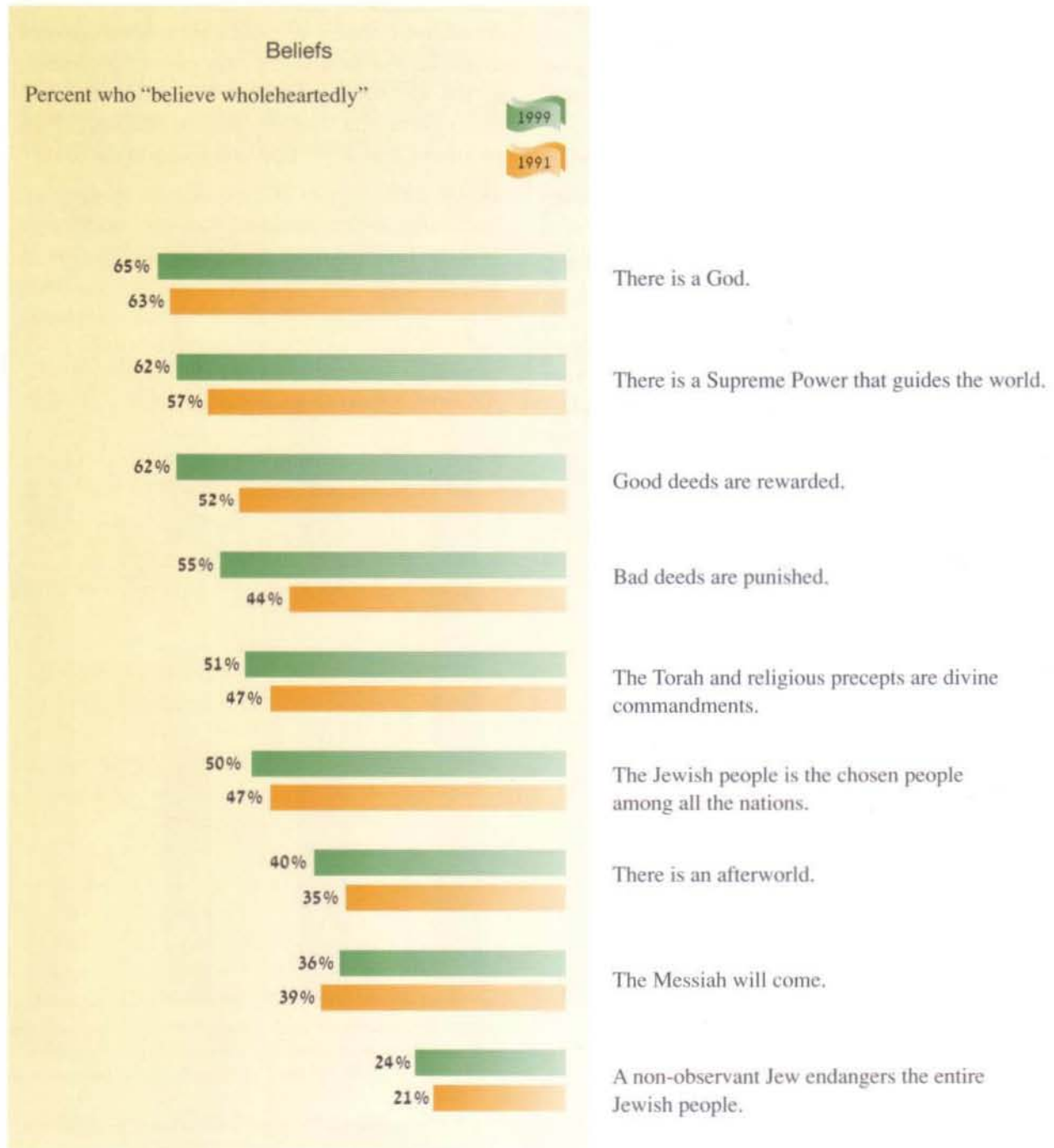
The overall impression is that most Israeli Jews prefer a quiet Shabbat with their family and want Shabbat in the public domain to have a unique character. On the other hand, they wish to retain freedom of choice and have all leisure options available. The most salient example of this contrast is the disparity between the proportion of respondents who regularly shop on Shabbat (17%) and those who favor open shopping malls (61%-70%).

4 Beliefs, Values, and Identity

4.1 Beliefs

The proportion of Israeli Jews who believe in the existence of God has risen slightly.* Belief in reward and punishment has increased considerably.

The graph below shows the percentage of respondents who stated that they “believe wholeheartedly” in each of the following beliefs:



* However, it still falls short of the corresponding percentages in the United States, Italy, Ireland, and Poland (approximately 80%).

4.2 General Values

The two general values that Israeli Jews rank most highly are family-related. "Honoring one's parents" is perceived as very important by 87% of respondents, and "raising a family" by 80%. "Being at peace with oneself" ranks almost as high. In contrast, "enjoying life" lies in the middle of the scale (65%), while "appreciating beauty" and "making a lot of money" fall at the bottom (31% and 23%, respectively).

"Being free to choose how to behave" is very important for the non-religious and the anti-religious (73% and 79%, respectively), but not for the religious/strictly observant (39%). Comparison of the civic and social priorities of the various sectors highlights an interesting phenomenon that has been noted in earlier studies: "religiosity" is associated with altruistic social values. For example, "contributing to society" is very important for 64% of the religious/strictly observant, as compared to 55% of the traditional/somewhat observant, 48% of the non-religious/somewhat observant, 41% of the non-religious/non-observant, and only 33% of the anti-religious. A similar pattern is evident for "being a good citizen" and "understanding another person's point of view."

The overall picture is that the values of family and personal integrity are common to all Israeli Jews, as is the relative unimportance of materialistic values. There is a perceptible difference, however, in the attitudes of the religious, the traditional, and the non-religious toward individual freedoms, on the one hand, and social and civic altruism, on the other. Religious and traditional respondents are committed, for the most part, to the collective, and not just in the national and religious contexts, whereas the prime commitment of non-religious and anti-religious respondents is to personal freedom of choice.

4.3 Jewish Values

The Jewish values that most Israeli Jews perceive as very important are "living in Israel" (65%) and

"feeling part of the Jewish people" (62%). Since 1991, however, there has been a drop of five percentage points in both values (from 70% and 67%, respectively). These values are much more important to the religious/strictly observant (approximately 90%) and the traditional/observant-to-a-great-extent (approximately 80%), than to the non-religious/non-observant (37% and 31%, respectively) and the anti-religious (30% and 17%, respectively).

The altruistic Jewish values of "helping the needy" and "giving charity" are also more important to the religious/strictly observant (81%) and the traditional/observant-to-a-great-extent (as high as 70%) than to the non-religious/non-observant (31% and 16%) and the anti-religious (28% and 12%). The pattern noted above, that religious and traditional respondents attribute greater importance to helping others than do the non-religious and anti-religious, recurs here. However, there has been a significant rise in the importance of these two altruistic Jewish values among Israeli Jews in general—from 32% to 42% ("giving charity") and from 41% to 56% ("helping the needy").

Fifty-four percent of Israeli Jews (including 46% of the non-religious/somewhat observant) consider it very important to celebrate Jewish holidays in some way. Forty-five percent (including 12%-23% of the non-religious) consider it very important to believe in God. Thirty-seven percent deem it important to keep kosher and 27% to observe Shabbat according to halakhah. Only 22% believe it is very important to be observant.

4.4 Jewish Identity and Self-Identification

Ninety-five percent of Israeli Jews consider themselves part of world Jewry: 68% feel this with certainty, and two-thirds say this feeling is very important to them. When asked if they would want to be reborn as Jews, 82% of the respondents answered in the affirmative.

Despite their strong personal identification with the Jewish people, however, 69% of Israeli Jews now feel that Israeli Jewry and Diaspora Jewry are different peoples (a considerable increase from the 57% of 1991). Similarly, the percentage of those who believe that Israeli and Diaspora Jews have a common fate has declined from 76% in 1991 to 70% today. Even so, this feeling is still very strong.

The identity components that exert the strongest influence on Israeli Jews' subjective sense of their Jewish identity are the establishment of Israel (70%), the wars they have endured in Israel (68%), their parents' home (68%), and living in Israel (65%). Three of the four are Zionist in nature; all are existential. By contrast, fewer respondents said that their Jewish identification is influenced by components associated with the Jewish religion and tradition: the religion of the Jewish people, 49%; lighting Shabbat candles, 44%; lighting Hanukkah candles, 42%. The Hebrew language strongly influences the identification of 57% of the respondents, whereas Hebrew literature ranks last, at only 29%. The thousands of years of Jewish history, too, have a relatively slight influence—39%. By contrast, the Holocaust is a central component of the respondents' Jewish identification (59%), only slightly behind the four Zionist-existential components. However, an objective examination of the relationship between the components of Jewish identity and the sense of belonging to the Jewish people shows that Jewish

identification is more strongly affected by the components associated with religion and the Jewish heritage than it is by the Zionist experience and modern Jewish history. Thus, Jewish identification is connected to the Jewish heritage, even though, subjectively, less weight is attached to the latter.

A comparison of the intensity of the Jewish identity components for different population groups reveals that, in addition to those related to religion and tradition, those associated with the Land of Israel, the Hebrew language, and the history of the Jewish people have a stronger influence on the religious and the traditional than on the non-religious and the anti-religious. All components related to Judaism—including those with a national element—speak more strongly to the religious and the traditional than they do to the non-religious.

5 Religion, State, and the Public Sphere

Seventy-eight percent of Israeli Jews believe the state should have a Jewish but not necessarily religious character. All sectors except for the haredim and the religious/strictly observant support this idea strongly (68%-88%). Even 79%-88% of the non-religious and anti-religious favor an Israel that has a Jewish character.

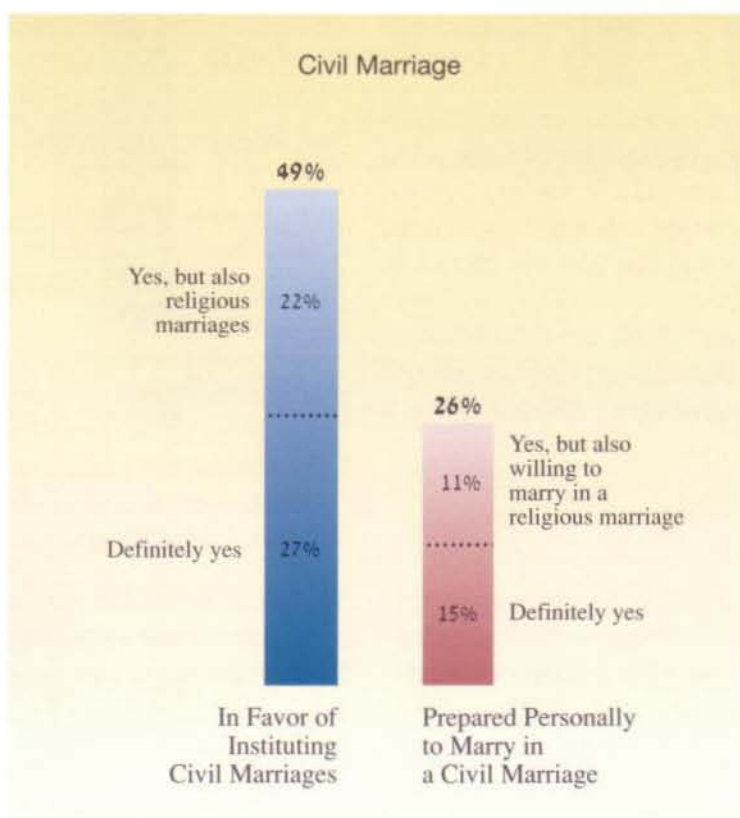
Opinions were divided, however, when the respondents were asked whether the state should ensure that public life be conducted in accordance with tradition; here only 50% answered in the affirmative. The proportion of affirmative replies among different sectors indicates polarization on this issue; it ranged from more than 90% of the haredim and the religious/strictly observant, through 56% of the traditional/somewhat observant, and down to 11%-14% of the non-religious/non-observant and the anti-religious.

As we have already seen, there is an inconsistency between the agreement by a large majority that Shabbat in the public sphere should have a unique

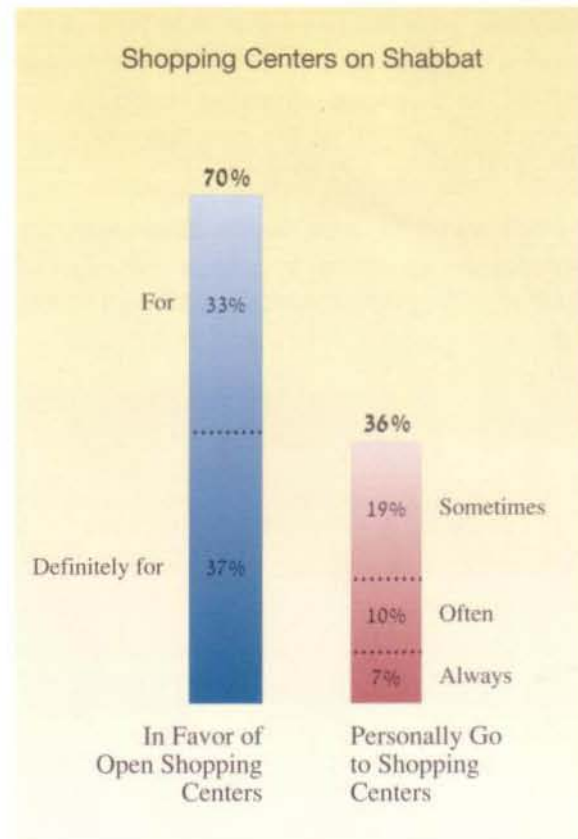
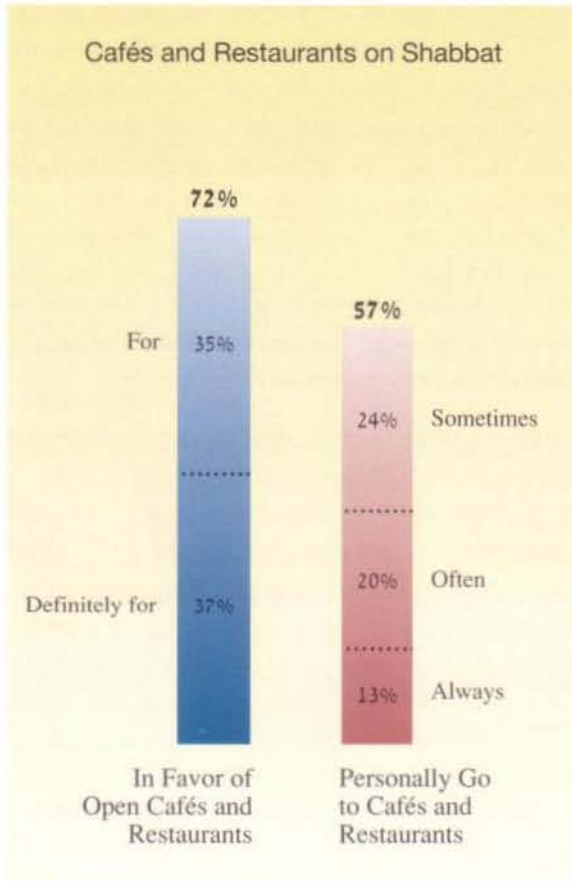
character and the very broad support for leisure and recreational activities, sports events, and public transport on Shabbat. There is a similar apparent incongruity between the widely expressed desire to maintain Israel's Jewish character and the staunch resistance to anything perceived as religious coercion.

Thus, 80% of Israeli Jews believe that food in public institutions should be kosher (down from 89% in 1991), but 60% disapprove of making kashrut certification conditional on the observance of other religious customs. Forty-nine percent favor the introduction of civil marriage (six percentage points higher than in 1991), even though only 26% consider this to be a viable option for themselves or members of their families.

Sixty-one percent favor continued governmental funding of the (Orthodox) rabbinate, but two-thirds favor granting the Conservative and Reform movements equal status with the Orthodox.



A similar distinction between the public and the private domains is expressed also in opinions regarding the opening of shopping and recreation centers on Shabbat.



Eighty-six percent of Israeli Jews favor conscription of yeshiva students. (All Jewish sectors except for the haredim strongly favor this.) About two-thirds also favor the conscription of religious girls.

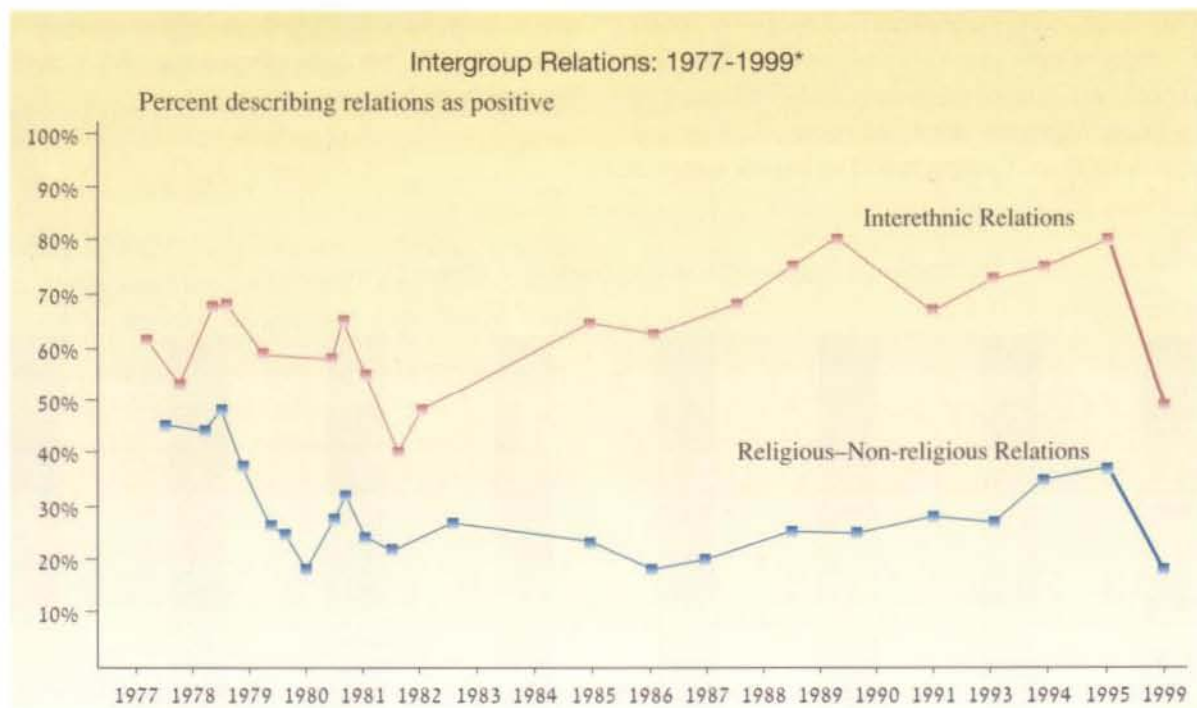
Sixty percent would like to see more Jewish studies in the schools and a similar percentage would like the programming of state and educational television to pay more attention to Jewish matters.

6 Intergroup Relations

Three flashpoints of social tension reflect intergroup relations in Israeli Jewish society: between Ashkenazim and Mizrahim (Jews of Eastern origin), between the religious and the non-religious, and between veteran Israelis and new immigrants. Perceptions of these relations have deteriorated since 1991: the number of respondents who said that relations between Jewish ethnic groups are good declined by nearly 20 percent between 1991 and 1999; the percentage of those who said that

relations between the religious and the non-religious are poor almost doubled.

In general, Israeli Jews are most critical of the relations between the religious and the non-religious: 82% assess these relations as poor, 16% as fairly good, and only 2% as very good. Since 1991, the number of those who assess positively these relations has declined from 28% to 18%.



Thirty-five percent of Israeli Jews assess positively the relations between new immigrants and veteran Israelis. Interestingly, immigrants have a better opinion of these relations than do veterans: 42% compared to 34%. Even though relations among Jewish ethnic groups are still considered to be the least problematic of the three intergroup relationships, their quality is perceived to have declined too. The percentage of respondents who assess positively relations between Ashkenazim and Mizrahim declined dramatically, from 67%

in 1991 to 49% in 1999. In 1999, only 7% regarded these relations as very good. Thus, the polarizing sociopolitical dynamics of the 1990s (the Oslo process and its opposition, the rise of Shas, the assassination of Yitzhak Rabin, and the bitter public debates during the tenures of the Netanyahu and Barak governments) seem to have left an imprint on intergroup relations in Jewish society. There is no doubt that relations between the religious and the non-religious remain the principal focus of friction in Israeli Jewish society.

* Based on data from the continuing survey of The Louis Guttman Israel Institute of Applied Social Research.

7 Religiosity and Ethnicity

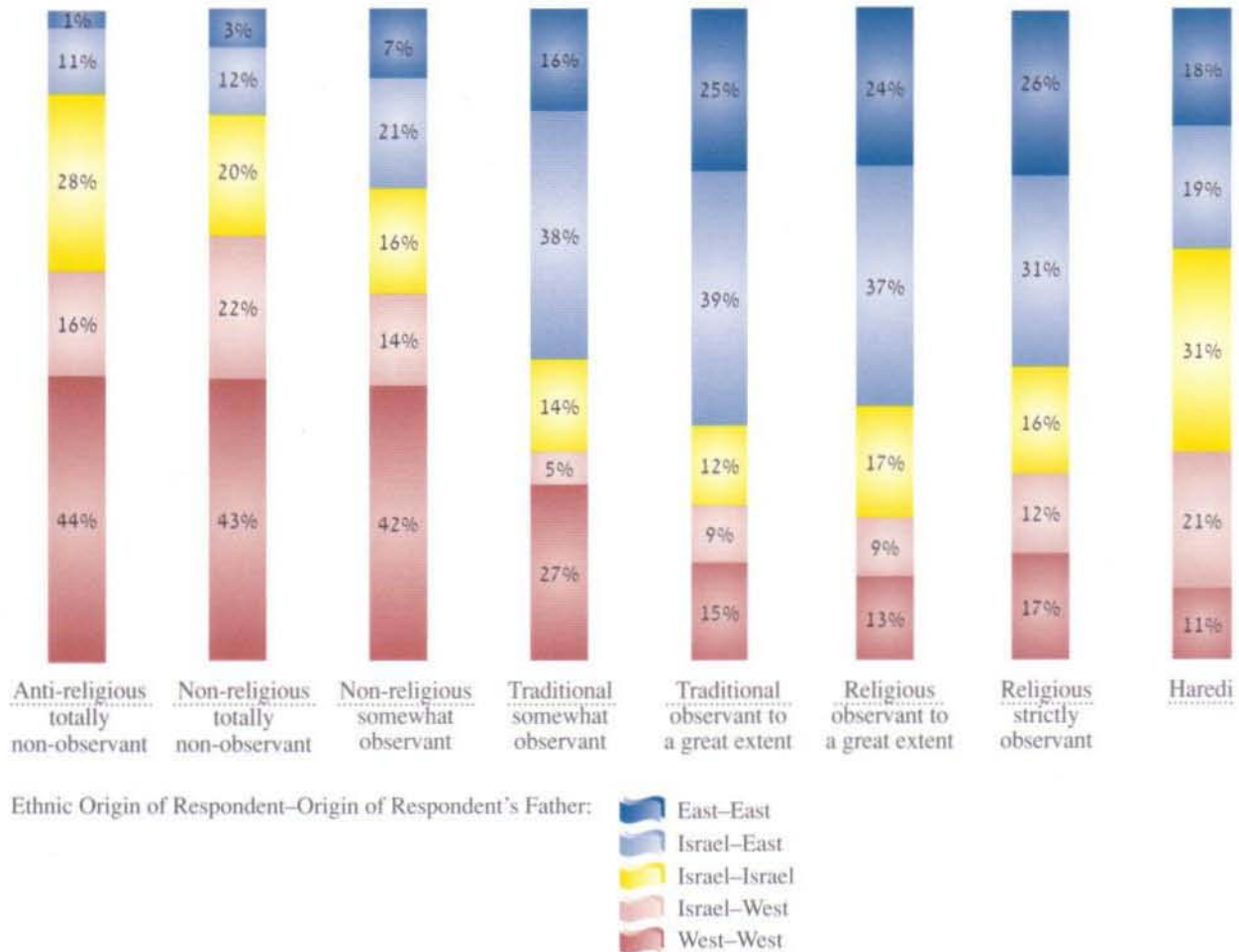
The Jewish population of Israel comprises several groups with respect to origin: those born in the Middle East and North Africa, referred to as “Mizrahim” (16%); Israeli-born Jews whose fathers were born in the Middle East or North Africa (30%); Israeli-born offspring of Israeli-born fathers (17%); Israeli-born offspring of fathers born in Western countries (15%); and those born in Western countries (21%). We shall sometimes refer to the first two groups collectively as “Mizrahim” and the last two groups as “Ashkenazim.”

This study, like its predecessor in 1991, found differences between Ashkenazim and Mizrahim in both self-defined religiosity and observance of tradition. Mizrahim are much more religious and observant than Ashkenazim. The haredi sector is

largely Ashkenazi, but all other religious and traditional groups have clear Mizrahi majorities. A large majority of the non-religious are Ashkenazi.

This trend is seen primarily in religious self-definition: only 3% of the non-religious/non-observant and only 1% of the anti-religious were born in Eastern (Mizrahi) countries; 43% and 44%, respectively, were born in Western countries. This gap narrows, however, among the second (Israeli-born) generation. Here, 12% and 11% of the non-religious/non-observant and the anti-religious, respectively, have Eastern-born fathers, as against 22% and 16%, respectively, of the children of Western-born fathers.

Religious Identity Groups According to Ethnic Composition



Most Mizrahim articulate a moderate religious identity. For example, 50% of the Mizrahim in Israel are traditional (compared to only 19% of Ashkenazim). By contrast, only 9% of Mizrahim are non-religious/non-observant or anti-religious (as against 34% of Ashkenazim).

There is also a marked difference between Mizrahim and Ashkenazim when it comes to lifestyle and patterns of observance: some 70% of Eastern-born Jews and 61% of their Israeli-born offspring recite kiddush on Shabbat eve, but only 30% of Western-born Jews and 35% of their Israeli-born offspring do so. Sixty-one percent of Eastern-born Jews and 50% of their offspring avoid labor in public on Shabbat, as against 33% of Western-born Jews and 28% of their offspring. Eighty-four percent of Eastern-born Jews and 74% of their offspring eat only kosher food, in contrast to 41% of Western-born Jews and 44% of their offspring. Some 80%-88% of Mizrahim fast on Yom Kippur, compared with 50%-54% of Ashkenazim.

Around 50% of Eastern-born Jews and 38% of their offspring make pilgrimages to the graves of *tsadikim* (righteous persons); only 15%-16% of Ashkenazim, of both generations, do so. Mizrahim are also more likely than Ashkenazim to believe

in the existence of God (78%-86% compared to 49%-52%) and in the chosenness of the Jewish people (62%-69% compared to 35%-36%). Mizrahim are less enthusiastic about instituting civil marriage in Israel (25%-42%, as against 62%-63% of Ashkenazim) and more strongly committed to assisting the needy (60%-69% vs. 50%-51%) and giving charity (48%-57% vs. 33%-34%).

Many of these findings express the correlation between ethnicity and religiosity that exists among Israeli Jews. Among the offspring of ethnically mixed marriages, identification and observance tend to be closer to Ashkenazi patterns.

An interesting phenomenon disclosed by the study is that the Holocaust is also an important component in the identity of Mizrahim. However, it ranks lower among the identity components of Mizrahim than of Ashkenazim.

8 Religious Identity and Intergenerational Processes

This study, like its 1991 predecessor, found a substantial difference between second-generation Mizrahim and their parents. In all categories of the religious identity scale, second-generation Mizrahim are less religious and less observant than their parents. For example, only 17% of Israeli-born Mizrahim are religious or haredi, as against 28% of their parents; 10% are non-religious/non-observant or anti-religious compared to 4% of their parents. Thus, the pattern of intergenerational change among Mizrahim has persisted over the decade.

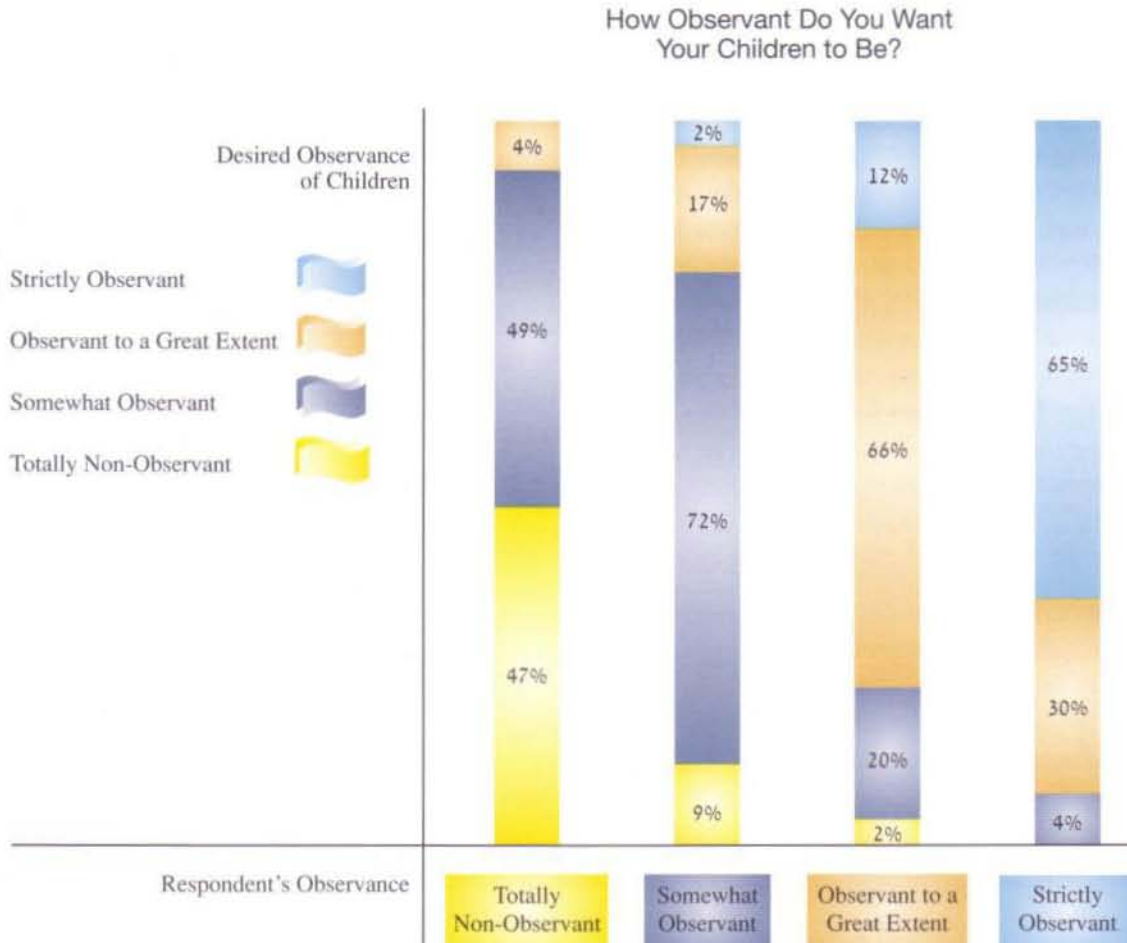
The 1991 study found that the religious identity of second-generation Ashkenazim was substantially

similar to that of their parents. During the decade between the two studies, however, there was a change. According to the current study, offspring of Western-born parents are slightly more religious but also less religious than their parents. For instance, there are more haredim among second-generation Ashkenazim than among their parents (7% vs. 4%), but the proportion who are non-religious/non-observant also has risen (from 22% to 31%). This finding may indicate a new polarizing trend among Israeli-born Ashkenazim.

Most respondents in all of the religious identity groups are committed to the continuity of Jewish tradition. They express this in the wish that their

children be at least as observant of tradition as they. This commitment to continuity is especially prominent among the totally non-observant; more

than half would prefer that their children be “somewhat” observant rather than completely non-observant.



9 Observance of Tradition by the Non-Religious

The most important finding of the first Guttman-AVI CHAI study was that a large majority of the Jews in Israel (79%) observed religious tradition at least to some extent: 14% strictly, 24% to a great extent, and 41% to some extent. Only 21% reported that they did not observe Jewish religious tradition at all. According to the 2000 Guttman-AVI CHAI study, this basic portrait has not changed: 16% observe tradition strictly, 20% observe to a great extent, and 43% observe it to

some extent. Only 21% report that they do not observe tradition at all—the same figure as in 1991.

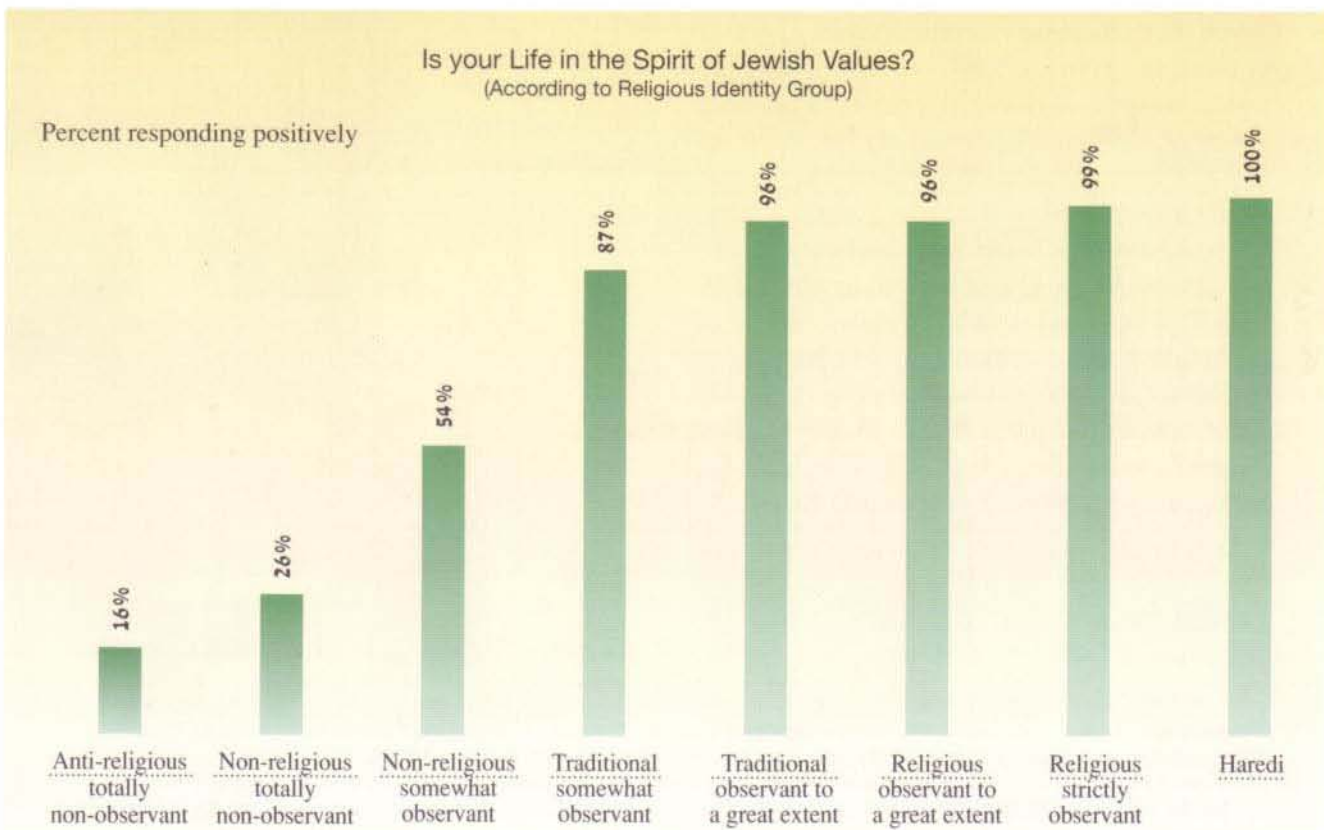
By using more sophisticated research methods, however, the current study draws a more accurate and detailed profile of the continuum of Jewish identity groups in Israel. For example, in-depth scrutiny of the intermediate groups—those farthest from the two poles of religious identity—shows

that the traditional/observant-to-a-great-extent group is closer to the religious pole and the non-religious/somewhat observant group is closer to the non-religious pole. The traditional/somewhat observant fall between these two groups.

The study makes it possible to identify what “traditional” Jews in Israel have in common. Most of those who define themselves as traditional mark Friday nights with rituals of welcoming Shabbat, observe kashrut, go to synagogue on Yom Kippur, and believe in God, reward and punishment, and the chosenness of the Jewish people. On the other hand, they do not observe some of the daily precepts, do not attend synagogue on Shabbat, and do not refrain from turning on electrical appliances and traveling on Shabbat.

Apart from this profile of the traditional sector and its internal distribution, the most important finding of the current study is its analysis of the non-religious/somewhat observant group. This sector, which is the largest religious identity group

among Israeli Jews (29%), has two salient characteristics: pronounced non-religious attitudes on issues of religion and state, coupled with observance, in some fashion or other, of a long list of Jewish traditional practices. Fifty-four percent of the non-religious/somewhat observant believe that they live in the spirit of Jewish values. Most of them fast on Yom Kippur, light Hanukkah candles, participate in a traditional Passover seder, avoid eating *hametz* (leaven) during Passover, and attribute importance to rituals such as *brit milah* (circumcision), *kaddish* (mourner’s prayer), and *shivah* (week of mourning). Members of this group tend to value both of their identities: the Jewish and the Israeli.



10 Immigrants from the Former Soviet Union

Immigrants from the former Soviet Union (FSU) now account for about one-fifth of the Jewish population of Israel.* By almost every criterion addressed in the study, this group's sense of identity differs from that of other Israeli Jews. For example, a large majority of these immigrants feel that they are Jews and Israelis (90% and 76%, respectively); but only 35% definitely feel part of world Jewry, as against 68% of non-immigrants.** Only one-fourth of the immigrants definitely feel Israeli, compared to three-fourths of non-immigrants. Immigrants, unlike non-immigrants, feel more Jewish than Israeli.

The Holocaust ranks highest among the components of the immigrants' Jewish identity; among other Israelis, the establishment of the State of Israel and other aspects of the Israeli experience rank highest. For FSU immigrants, religious rituals are a less influential component of Jewish identification.

Generally speaking, the immigrants are less religious, less observant of tradition, and less believing than the second-generation Ashkenazim whom they otherwise resemble. Seventy percent of them, as against 47% of non-immigrants, fall into the two non-religious categories of the religious identity scale (non-religious/somewhat observant and non-religious/non-observant). The largest single group among the immigrants is non-religious/somewhat observant—similar to the non-immigrants. About 40% of the immigrants fast on Yom Kippur, light Hanukkah candles, and mark the holidays with traditional dishes (dairy foods on Shavuot, avoidance of *hametz* during Passover). Their low rate of participation in any kind of Passover seder stands out. Surprisingly, more immigrants refrain from eating hametz than attend a seder.

The immigrants are differentiated from non-immigrants in the importance they ascribe to life-cycle rituals: the importance they attribute to circumcision and marriage rituals is 25 percent lower than non-immigrants. For bar-mitzva ceremonies and funeral and mourning customs, the figure is 10 percent lower.

FSU immigrants are strongly opposed to state-imposed religious restraints on the public sphere. They object to the enforcement of kashrut laws in public institutions, clearly favor civil marriage, and are not satisfied with the official status of the Chief Rabbinate. The proportion of immigrants who believe Shabbat should retain a unique public character is much lower than that of non-immigrants—48% vs. 72%.

In sum, immigrants from the former Soviet Union feel a bond to Judaism but are much less committed to its religious traditions, customs, and beliefs. They also seem much more skeptical about the role of tradition in public life. Their Israeli identity remains unsure.

It is premature to outline a comprehensive profile of FSU immigrants and their influence, because this sector, after decades of estrangement from Jewish cultural values, is still in the midst of its acculturation.

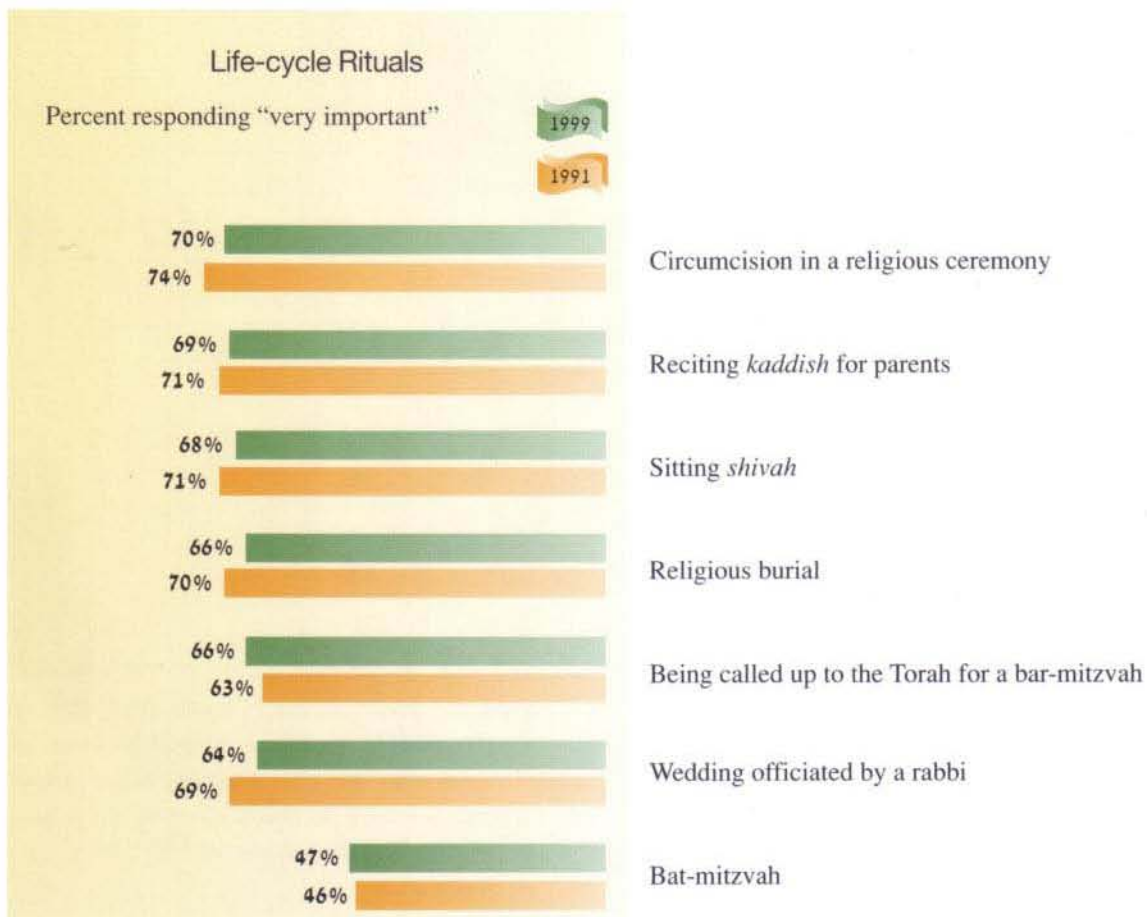
* This section is based on data from the responses of FSU immigrants who defined themselves as Jews (from a representative national sample of FSU immigrants who arrived in Israel since 1989).

** Analysis of the immigrants' responses points to the possibility of a response bias, reflected in their reluctance to choose the most positive category ("very important") when answering scalar questions. Despite the differences in percentages, however, the relative rankings of the immigrants' and non-immigrants' choices are often the same.

11 Long-Term Changes*

The Guttman-AVI CHAI study of 2000 identifies certain changes in Israeli Jewish society over the past decade. Between 1991 and 1999/2000, there was a slight trend toward polarization in personal religious identity, reflected in a decline in the proportion of the “traditional” and an increase in the proportion of the non-religious and haredim. During the past decade, there was also a slight but noticeable trend toward less religiosity in several categories. For example, the proportion of Israeli Jews who avoid non-kosher food decreased from 64% to 56%; the proportion of those who fast on Yom Kippur slipped from 71% to 67%; and the proportion who mark Shabbat by lighting candles (irrespective of when they do so and whether they recite a blessing) decreased from 56% to 50%.

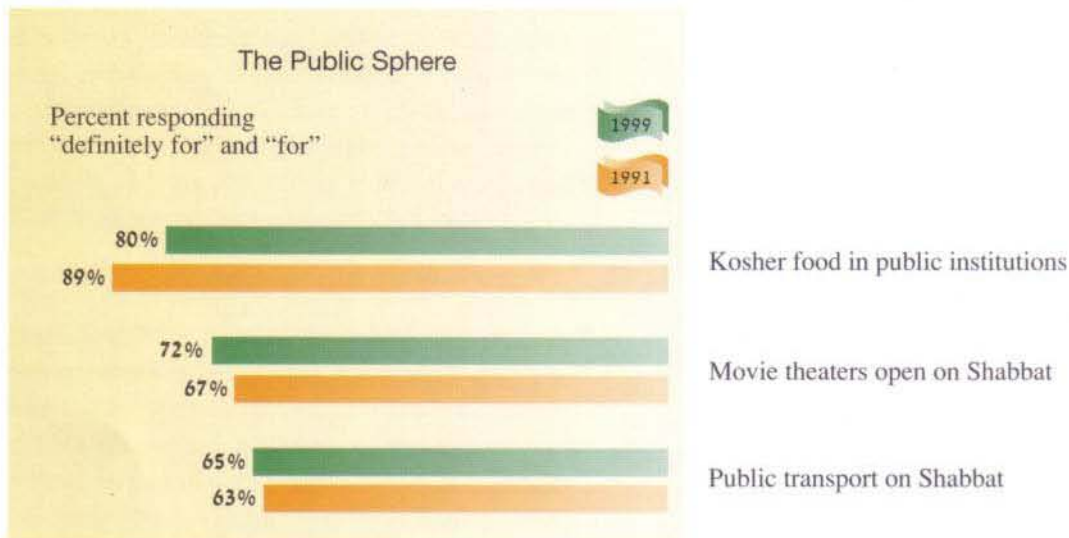
But the percentage who light Shabbat candles with a blessing before sundown held firm at 51%, and the percentage who observe the Shabbat prohibitions also was unchanged. There was a slight decline in the share of Israeli Jews who view life-cycle rituals as important—ritual circumcision (from 74% to 70%), religious burial (from 70% to 66%), and a wedding performed by a rabbi (from 69% to 64%). These changes may be related to the wave of immigration from the former Soviet Union. On the other hand, participation in a Passover seder increased from 78% to 85%. Since most of the changes are not large and pertain only to a few aspects of life, the overall picture is one of relative stability.



* The conclusions about long-term changes are based on a comparison of the 1991 and 1999 national samples.

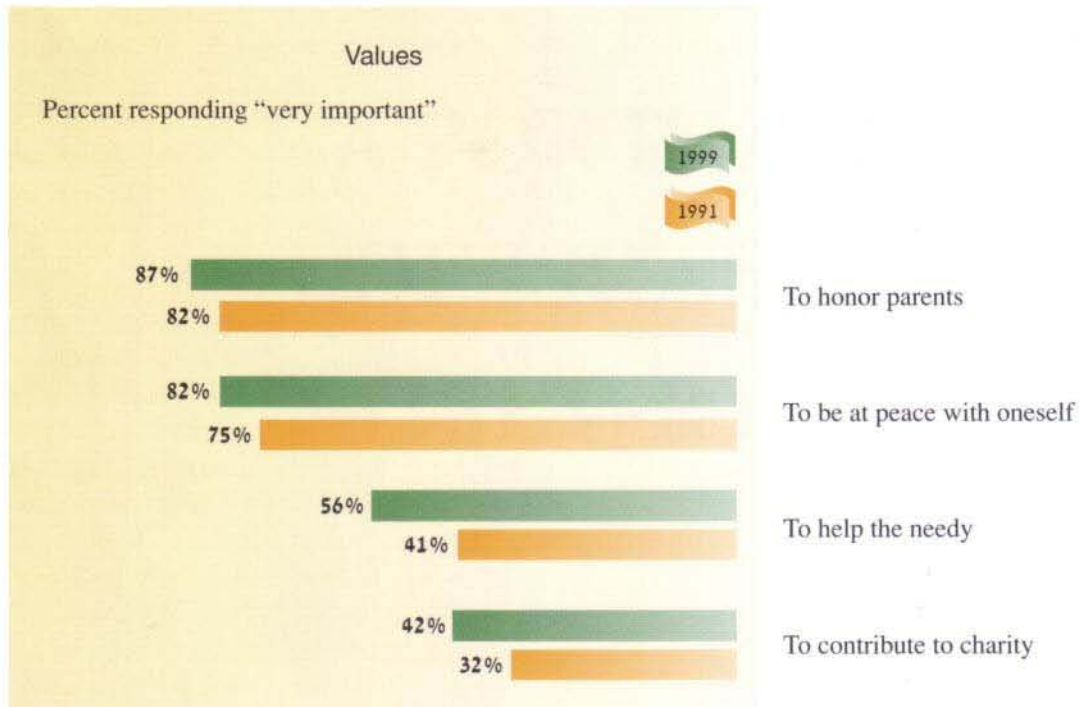
Parallel to changes in some aspects of lifestyle, some values also shifted correspondingly. The proportion of Israeli Jews who feel that it is very important to live in the Land of Israel declined from 70% to 65%; the proportion of those who consider it very important to be part of the Jewish people fell from 67% to 62%; however, the proportion of respondents who “definitely” feel themselves part of the Jewish people remained unchanged. Despite a strong personal Jewish identity, the proportion of Israeli Jews who feel a sense of shared fate with Diaspora Jews declined from 76% to 70% and the share of those who believe that Diaspora Jews are a distinct people rose from 57% to 69%.

During the 1990s, permissive attitudes about the public sphere rose on average by about five percentage points. The proportion of those in favor of the operation of movie theaters on Shabbat rose from 67% to 72%; in favor of public transport on Shabbat, from 63% to 65%; in favor of the introduction of civil marriage, from 43% to 49%; the proportion of those in favor of continued kashrut observance in public institutions declined from 89% to 80%.



By contrast, at the end of the decade Israeli Jews ascribed greater importance to family (honor for parents) and being at peace with oneself than ten years previously. The importance of contributing to charity also rose significantly (from 32% to 42%), as did that of helping the needy (from 41%

to 56%). A larger proportion of respondents reported that they volunteer “sometimes” to help others (from 31% to 37%). The proportion of respondents who said that it is very important to understand another person’s point of view also increased considerably (from 46% to 54%).



As noted earlier, this rise in family values (honor for parents) and volunteering over the decade took place in the context of a general sense of a widening social schism. The percentage of respondents who assessed relations between the religious and the

non-religious as poor rose from 19% to 36% during the past decade, and the proportion of those who assessed Ashkenazi–Mizrahi relations favorably plummeted from 67% in 1991 to 49% in 1999/2000.

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The Guttman Center of the Israel Democracy Institute conducted
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