Israel Today:
Society, Identity, and Political Affinities

Pluralism and Democracy in Israel Program
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1. Introduction

One of the central characteristics of Israeli society is its diversity. Jews and non-Jews; citizens and foreign workers; immigrants and natives, with a broad range of ethnicities; secular and religious, including those belonging to Judaism's main streams (Orthodox, Conservative, and Reform); different socio-economic strata; and of varying political positions, live alongside one another. These differences come on top of the population's basic demographic characteristics, such as age, gender, and place of residence. The appearance of groups with different social and cultural characteristics in the public sphere, and the discourse regarding them, has become more pronounced in recent years with the strengthening of individualism and pluralism gradually replacing the 'melting pot' paradigm with the ethos of multiculturalism. This trend is likely to increase internal tensions, but at the same time allow each individual and group greater expression of its particularity and open opportunities for mutual recognition and respect.

This paper presents and analyzes the social, identity, and political preferences of Israeli society while mainly focusing on Israel's Jews. It portrays the development of these traits over Israel's existence, with a special emphasis on the past 25 years. Although each of these characteristics stands on its own, this analysis connects each examined characteristic with what preceded it. This approach allows detailed insights into the pieces that together compose Israel's human mosaic.

Changes in a population's characteristics generally occur as a result of two main factors. The first is a non-uniform change in the size of its sub-groups due to selective natural growth or immigration rates; the second is the

shifting patterns of behavior that result from personal achievement or changes in social and cultural preferences. Often, both factors are at play as a population's composition and characteristics changes. As much as it is possible, we will attempt to point to each factor's influence and discuss its significance for public policy.
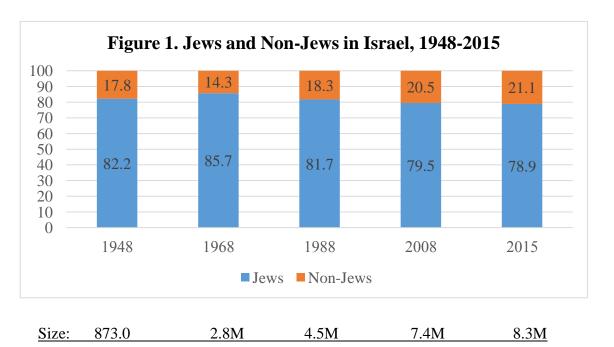
2. Population Size and Place of Birth

Toward the end of 1948, shortly after its establishment, Israel's population stood at 873,000 people. Since then, and in a gradual manner, Israel's population grew to 2.8 million in 1968, 4.5 million in 1988, 7.4 million in 2008, and 8.3 million at the beginning of 2015. This reflects a ten-fold increase in a period of less than seven decades (Figure 1). By way of comparison, during the same period, Belgium's population grew by one third and Sweden's grew by slightly more than 40 percent.

At the time of Israel's founding, Jews represented 82 percent of its total population; the Jewish population peaked at 89 percent in 1958. Thereafter, we have witnessed a gradual decline of the proportion of the Jews: to 86 percent in 1968, 82 percent in 1988, and 75 percent in 2015. Notably, Israel's population today includes an influx of immigrants and their descendants, mostly from the FSU, who meet the Law of Return's criteria but are not halachically[1] Jewish, and are thus categorized as having "no religion." In the main, these people identify with Israel's majority Jewish society.

Today, this sub-group comprises 300,000 people, or 4 percent of Israel's total population. Therefore, Jews and those of Jewish background ("with no religion") together constitute 79 percent of Israel's total population.

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[1] Halacha is the body of Jewish religious law.

Figure 1. Jews and Non-Jews in Israel, 1948-2015

	1948	1968	1988	2008	2015
Non-Jews	17.8	14.3	18.3	20.5	21.1
Jews	82.2	85.7	81.7	79.5	78.9

■ Jews ■ Non-Jews

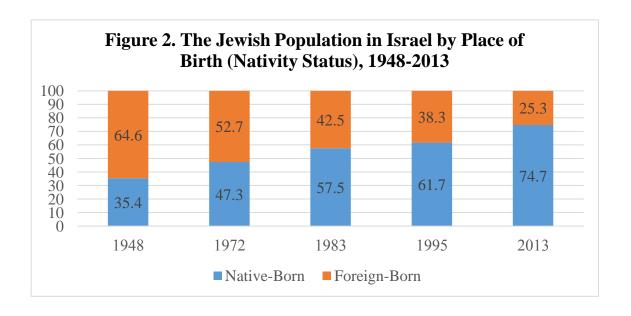| Size:	873.0	2.8M	4.5M	7.4M	8.3M

*Adopted from: Central Bureau of Statistics, **Statistical Abstract for Israel**, for various years. Jews include those of "no religion."*

The growth of the number of Jews in Israel is attributed to natural increase on one hand, and a positive immigration balance on the other (immigrants vs. emigrants). For the entire period since Israel's founding, natural increase has contributed 60 percent of its growth, and immigration the remaining 40 percent. In certain periods, especially immediately after the establishment of the state, but also during the last decade of the 20th century, immigration was a paramount factor in Jewish population growth. Therefore, Israel is defined as an immigrant country, and one of the important distinctions of the Jewish population in Israel is its nativity status, namely those born in Israel vs. the foreign-born.

At the state's founding, native-born Israelis composed slightly more than a third of the Jewish population, and two-thirds were born abroad (Figure 2). Following the mass immigrations in Israel's early years, the rate of native-born Israelis rose gradually until 1961. This trend strengthened greatly in the following two decades, and the share of native-born and foreign-born Israelis reached equilibrium in the mid 1970s. Ever since,

most of the population has been native-born. In a clear growth trajectory, the proportion of native-born Israelis was slightly less than two-thirds in 1995, and is three-fourths today. In other words, since Israel's founding, the nativity composition of its Jewish population has shifted from a foreign-born majority to a native-born majority. From a social vantage point, the majority of Israeli Jews today have been raised in an Israeli milieu, and at similar life stages have undergone shared social processes in the education system (in its various forms), fulfill, with some notable exceptions, the civic duty of military/national service, have Hebrew as their mother-tongue, and experience times of crisis together.
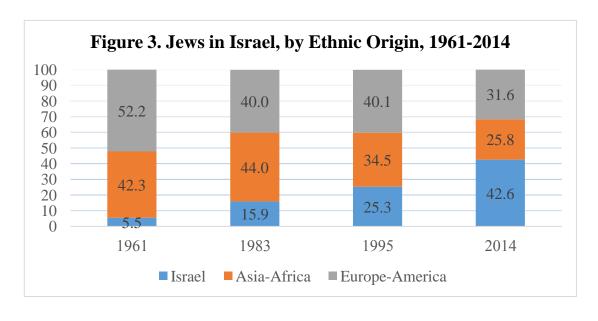
Figure 2. The Jewish Population in Israel by Place of Birth (Nativity Status), 1948-2013

Year	Native-Born	Foreign-Born
1948	35.4	64.6
1972	47.3	52.7
1983	57.5	42.5
1995	61.7	38.3
2013	74.7	25.3

*Adopted from: Central Bureau of Statistics, **Statistical Abstract of Israel**, 2014.*

3. Ethnic Origin

Aliyah (immigration to Israel) has brought Jews from all over the world to Israel. Jews have come to Israel from Asia, Africa, Europe (East and West), America, and Oceana. In social research, it is common practice to distinguish between immigrants, and their Israel-born offspring, from Asia
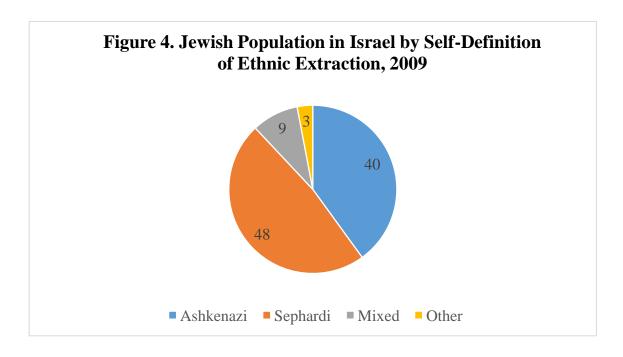
and Africa and those from Europe and America; those born in Israel to an Israeli-born father are categorized as "Israeli."

Following the post-founding large wave of immigration, only 5 percent of Israeli Jews were the second generation of native-born Israelis; much of the Jewish population were immigrants and their descendants, with over half of European or American origin (52.2 percent), and four of ten (42.3 percent) of Asian or African descent (Figure 3). The trend in the following two decades, and until 1983, was in a clear direction of growth for the Israeli-born group; stability in the growth rate of those from Asia and Africa (mostly due to significant immigration in the early 1960s and high birth rates); and a dwindling of the proportion of those from Europe and America. In the next decade, alongside the population growth of Israelis, the trends reversed for each of the other groups: the rate of those from Asia and Africa diminished; the rate of those from Europe and America remained fairly stable, due to the large FSU immigration wave (meaning that the immigration compensated for the aging and mortality in the population from Europe and the rapid growth of the other two sub-groups). Since then and through 2014, as immigration rates to Israel were low overall, and birth rates for those of Asian or African origin and those of European or America origin converged, the share of each of the African-Asian and European-American ethnic groups decreased and the share of the Israelis grew. Overall, the growth trend of native-born Israelis described above is also expressed in the permutation of the ethnic make-up of the total Israeli Jewish population.

Figure 3. Jews in Israel, by Ethnic Origin, 1961-2014

Year	Israel	Asia-Africa	Europe-America
1961	5.5	42.3	52.2
1983	15.9	44.0	40.0
1995	25.3	34.5	40.1
2014	42.6	25.8	31.6

*Adopted from: Central Bureau of Statistics, **Statistical Abstract of Israel, 2014**.*

A complementary view of the population's ethnic composition is achieved when the individual is provided the ability to designate his/her own ethnic belonging (Figure 4). This subjective approach emphasizes three main subgroups: Mizrachi (Middle Eastern descent), 48 percent; Ashkenazi (European descent), 40 percent; mixed ethnic identity, 9 percent; and a fourth group of "other," 3 percent. The differences in the population breakdown between the first "objective" approach and the second "subjective" approach suggest that more "Israelis," (those born in Israel to Israel-born fathers) are of Asian/African descent, and indeed this group makes up the proportionally larger part of the Jewish population. Furthermore, these findings suggest that ethnic origin is an important identity component and that most Jews prefer to identify with a specific geographic and socio-cultural background (whether singular or mixed), than as local-Israelis.

Figure 4. Jewish Population in Israel by Self-Definition of Ethnic Extraction, 2009

- Ashkenazi: 40
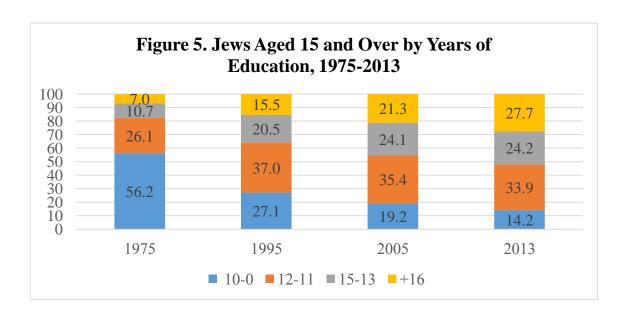- Sephardi: 48
- Mixed: 9
- Other: 3

If this is the case, the growth rate of second or third generation native-born Israelis has not weakened ethnic awareness. It would seem that the increase of inter-ethnic marriage (from 10 percent of marriages in 1950, to over a quarter of marriages today)[1] has not blunted the ethnic aspect of one's identity or their children's, and has, at most, given rise to a mixed identity. The hold of ethnic identity is a cause or result of personal achievement and integration in the social mainstream, or, alternatively, exclusion from the mainstream along ethnic lines. In any case, claiming ethnic identity rather than Israeli identity holds the potential to create tension and distancing between groups.

4. Social Stratification

Opportunities to attain human capital are not equally dispersed among people. These differences arise from a number of reasons, including variance in the pace of development or modernization in the immigrant group's country of origin, inter-generational transmission of ethnic
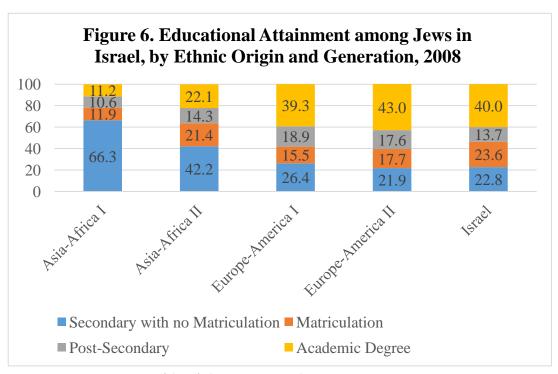
attributes, development level of place of residence in Israel, and family size. These factors, on their part, generate a socio-economic stratification of the population. Main measurements of stratification include education levels and economic attainments.

An analysis of the distribution of educational levels in the adult Jewish population reveals that in 1975 slightly more than half did not graduate from high school; another quarter had 11-12 years of schooling, and less than one-fifth held any sort of post-secondary education – among them only 7 percent had the 16 or more years of schooling required to earn a university degree (Figure 5). The portion of those with lower education levels gradually declined, and the share of the two highest levels of education increased – especially those with 16 years of school or more. In fact, over the years, the education pendulum among Jews in Israel has swung from most not having a full high school education to a majority with post-secondary education.

Figure 5. Jews Aged 15 and Over by Years of Education, 1975-2013

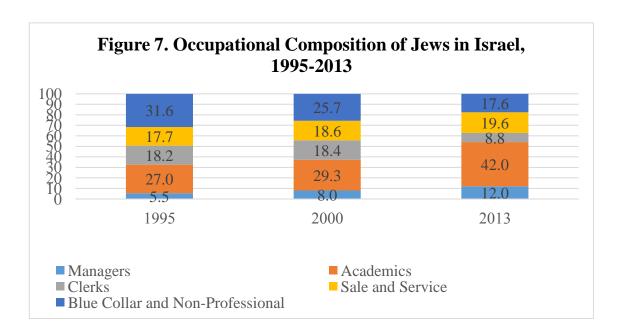|	1975	1995	2005	2013
+16	7.0	15.5	21.3	27.7
15-13	10.7	20.5	24.1	24.2
12-11	26.1	37.0	35.4	33.9
10-0	56.2	27.1	19.2	14.2

*Adopted from: Central Bureau of Statistics, **Statistical Abstract of Israel**, various years.*

These shifts reflect an improvement in education levels across ethnic backgrounds. We examine this by comparing the first generation (those born abroad) with the second generation (those born in Israel) for each Asian/African and European/American ethnic group, as well as with the third generation of those born in Israel to Israel-born fathers (Figure 6). While two-thirds of the first generation from Asia/Africa lack high school education, the proportion was reduced to 42.2 percent among the second generation; further, the share of those with at least a bachelor's degree increased twofold: from 11.2 percent in the first generation to 22.1 percent in the second. The inter-generational changes among those of European/American origins were more moderate, perhaps because the first generation already had significant academic achievements. Another important contribution to the educational achievements of Israel's Jewish population is expressed in the third generation ("Israeli"), which includes the offspring of either ethnic group, who adopted the higher educational patterns associated with the second European/American generation.

Figure 6. Educational Attainment among Jews in Israel, by Ethnic Origin and Generation, 2008

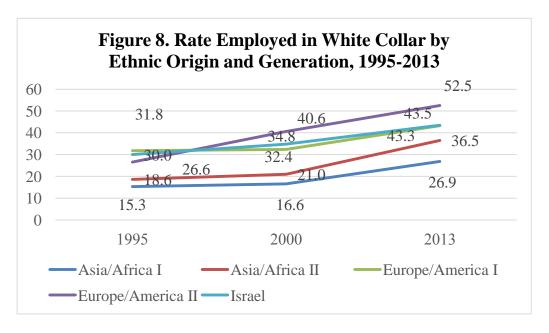*Analyzed from the data **file of the 2008 Israeli Census***.

From an economic perspective, occupation is a central characteristic of social stratification. Profession, in large part a result of educational level, is an explanatory factor of individual earning power. We have witnessed significant structural changes in the past two decades: a decline in the proportion of blue-collar workers and non-professionals, along with a rise in the proportion of academics and managers (Figure 7). Thus, while in 1995, roughly a third (31.6 percent) of Jewish employees worked in the industrial, agricultural, construction, or non-professional sectors, this decreased to 17.6 percent by 2013. Conversely, the proportion of academics, engineers, and technicians, rose from 27 to 42 percent, and that of managers rose two-fold (from 5.5 to 12 percent).

Figure 7. Occupational Composition of Jews in Israel, 1995-2013

	1995	2000	2013
Blue Collar and Non-Professional	31.6	25.7	17.6
Sale and Service	17.7	18.6	19.6
Clerks	18.2	18.4	8.8
Academics	27.0	29.3	42.0
Managers	5.5	8.0	12.0

*Adopted from: Central Bureau of Statistics, **Statistical Abstract of Israel**, various years.*
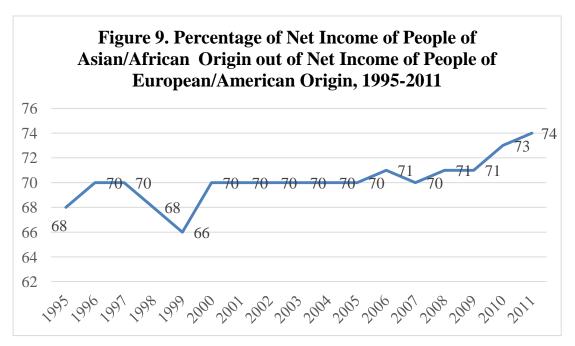
These trends apply both to those of European/American descent and those of Asian/North African descent, and stand out especially among the second generation (Figure 8). If we take the two disparate ends of each ethnic

group, which reflect long-term trends – the first generation in 1995 and the second generation in 2013 – it becomes apparent that the rate of those employed in white-collar professions among people of Asian/African descent increased from 15.3 to 36.5 percent, and from 31.8 to 52.5 percent among those of European/American origin. Indeed, at any point in time and in any generation separately, the proportion of white-collar workers among those of European/American origin is higher than those of their Asian/African counterparts. Nevertheless, the processes were faster among those of Asian/African origin. Hence, the inter-ethnic differences in professional stratification diminished: from a 2.1 ratio of white-collar workers in the first generation of Europe/America descent vs. the first generation of Asian/African descent in 1995, to a ratio of only 1.4 among the second generation of these ethnic groups in 2013. Recently, the third generation, those born in Israel to an Israeli-born father, is found somewhere in the range between the second generation of the two ethnic groups.

Figure 8. Rate Employed in White Collar by Ethnic Origin and Generation, 1995-2013

*Adopted from: Central Bureau of Statistics, **Statistical Abstract of Israel**, various years.*

Throughout these processes, income gaps decreased between ethnic groups (Figure 9). While in 1995, the income of those of Asian/African origin (first and second generation) was 68 percent of those of European/American origin, by 2011 that gap diminished to 74 percent. However, even after this gap diminished, those of Asian/African origin earn, on average, 26 percent less than their European/American peers. These income gaps according to ethnic origin remain clear even after controlling for differences in main worker characteristics, such as age, gender, education, and work experience. These findings could reflect discrimination in the work place directed at Israelis of Asian/African origin.[2]

Figure 9. Percentage of Net Income of People of Asian/African Origin out of Net Income of People of European/American Origin, 1995-2011

*Adopted from: Momi Dahan. 2013. "Has the Melting Pot Succeeded?" **The Israel Economy** 60 (1-4): 107-152.*
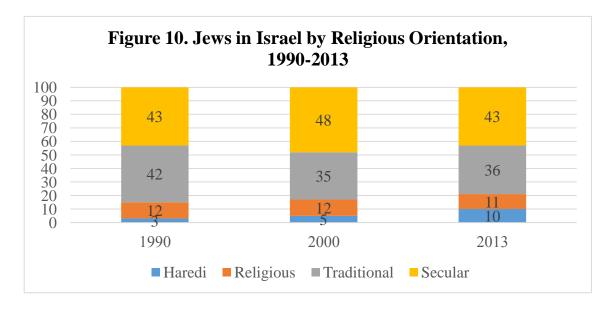
5. Religiosity

In Israel, people tend to define their Jewish identity according to their religious orientation. A generally accepted differentiation is between

Haredi (ultra-Orthodox), Orthodox, traditional, and secular (including anti-religious). Certainly, each of these groups is not monolithic, but rather comprises a range of people along a spectrum of religiosity. This is especially salient among those who call themselves traditional, where this ranges from the traditionally-religious to those who are traditional but not religious. In any case, these are subjective definitions and are not dependent on any specific practices or beliefs.

In 1990, 3 percent of Jewish adults in Israel defined themselves as Haredi (Figure 10). Another one of every ten defined themselves as religious, and the rest were either traditional (42 percent) or secular (43 percent), the latter included a small number of those who called themselves anti-religious. In the following decade, the two groups at the opposite ends of the spectrum grew: Haredim at one end (5 percent) and secular at the other (48 percent). While the rise in the numbers of Haredim can be attributed mostly to high birth rates, there is also a growing "Haredization" of Jews of Asian/African origin. The growth of secular Jews should be attributed to the large influx of immigrants from the former Soviet Union. This brought a large number of Jews who for decades lived in an environment that suppressed any attachment to religious faith. Thereafter, there is a clear trend of an increased proportion of Haredim and a decrease in the secular.

One can also examine Israeli Jewish society as one comprised of three parts with different religious connections. The first can be defined as "religious" and includes Haredim, religious, and traditional-religious constituting roughly a third of the Jewish population; the second is "traditional" and comprises about a quarter of Jewish Israelis; the third is the "seculars," which includes about four of every ten Jews. Whether we adopt a detailed or a more aggregate view, it seems that the Jewish population in Israel is spread out across a definitional range of religious

identity, and, simultaneously, a general trend of a strengthening religious component of the Israeli Jewish population.
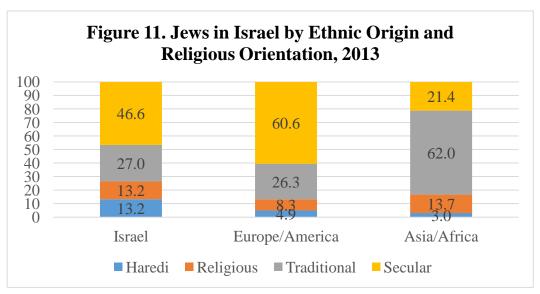
Figure 10. Jews in Israel by Religious Orientation, 1990-2013

Year	Haredi	Religious	Traditional	Secular
1990	3	12	42	43
2000	5	12	35	48
2013	10	11	36	43

*Adopted from: Shlomit Levy, Hanah Levinson, Elihu Katz. 1993. **Beliefs, Observances and Social Interaction among Israeli Jews.** Jerusalem: The Guttman Israel Institute of Applied Social Research and AVI CHAI; Shlomit Levy, Hanah Levinson, Elihu Katz. 2002. **A Portrait of Israeli Jewry: Beliefs, Observances and Values among Israeli Jews, 2000**. Jerusalem: The Guttman Center of the Israel Democracy Institute and AVI CHAI; Tamar Herman, Elle Heller, Chanan Cohen, Gilad Be'ery and Yuval Lebel. **The Israeli Democracy Index 2014**. Jerusalem: The Israel Democracy Institute.*

Not only have there been changes over time in the composition of society according to religious identity, there have also been differences, at times small and at times significant, according to birthplace. Based on nativity status, i.e., those born in Israel vs. those born abroad, there are larger numbers of Haredim among the latter and more religious among those born in Israel (data are not presented here).

The relation between ethnic origin and religious identity is also strong. Figure 11 shows that the European/American origin group includes less Haredim than the average, and more secular: 4.9 and 60.6 percent respectively, with fewer people defining themselves as traditional. In contrast, Jews of Asian/African origin tend to fall in the middle of the
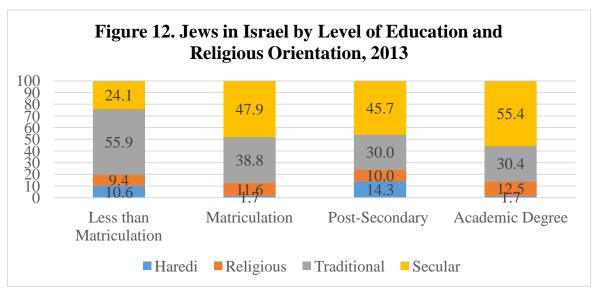
religiosity spectrum, with 62 percent considering themselves traditional and small numbers of both Haredim and the secular. Those of the third generation, Israel-born to Israeli born fathers, highlight the development of a Jewish identity trend in Israel toward a more religious and Haredi orientation – 26.4 percent taken together, another 27 percent are traditional, and slightly less than half are secular.

Figure 11. Jews in Israel by Ethnic Origin and Religious Orientation, 2013

	Haredi	Religious	Traditional	Secular
Israel	13.2	13.2	27.0	46.6
Europe/America	4.9	8.3	26.3	60.6
Asia/Africa	3.0	13.7	62.0	21.4

*Adopted from: Israel Democracy Institute, **The Israeli Democracy Index, 2014**. The data file was provided by the Guttman Institute for Social Research at the Israel Democracy Institute.*

Religious orientation also varies according to educational attainment (Figure 12). Notably, the education of adults in yeshivas (higher religious education) is considered post-secondary education. Therefore, it is not surprising to find an especially high rate of post-secondary education among those who identify as Haredim (14.3 percent). However, as Haredim do not register for matriculation exams, they are not counted among those with a high school diploma.

At the same time, few of those who hold an academic degree are Haredim. Generally, education levels below having a high school

diploma are tied to a traditional religious affiliation. Concurrently, among those with academic education there is a high proportion of secular people: among people who do not hold matriculation the rate of traditional is about twice as high as among people with academic diploma, whereas the rate of secular people among the least educated is lower by more than half among those with academic degree.

Figure 12. Jews in Israel by Level of Education and Religious Orientation, 2013

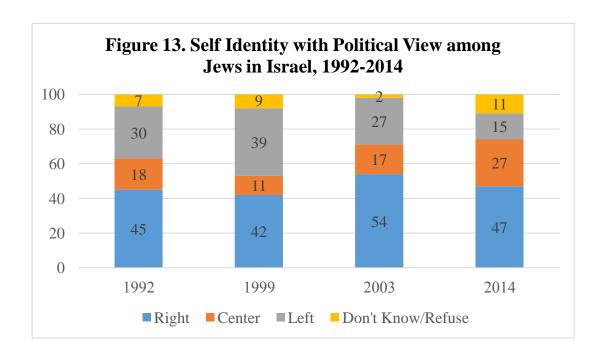| Category	Haredi	Religious	Traditional	Secular
Less than Matriculation	10.6	9.4	55.9	24.1
Matriculation	1.7	11.6	38.8	47.9
Post-Secondary	14.3	10.0	30.0	45.7
Academic Degree	1.7	12.5	30.4	55.4

*Adopted from: Israel Democracy Institute, **The Israeli Democracy Index, 2014**. The data file was provided by the Guttman Institute for Social Research at the Israel Democracy Institute.*

6. Political Views

One's position or self-placement on the political spectrum is also important. Political orientations in Israel run from "left" to "center" to "right." Both the right and the left include some who identify with each in a moderate manner. There is a large group that does not identify politically, or refuses to report their political identity. There is a solid basis for assuming that many of these people are Haredim, who avoid the voting booth in high numbers, and, therefore, have little electoral influence.
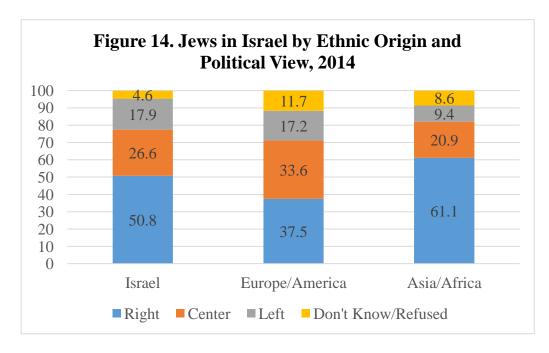
Examining trends over the past two decades (1992-2014) reveals that despite slight fluctuations, the right is the larger political block; the center has gained significant strength, and the left has declined (Figure 13). More specifically, in 1992, roughly 45 percent of all adult Jews identified as right wing; this rose to 54 percent by 2003, and, in recent years, has returned to slightly less than half the Jewish population. The share of those identified with the center, which stood at 18 percent in 1992, dropped to 11 percent in 1999, and has since grown two and a half times to slightly over a quarter (27 percent) in 2014. Support of the left block gained strength in the 1990s peaking at 39 percent, but has since dropped to as low as 15 percent. This trend may correspond to events or processes in the Israeli-Arab conflict: the intensive Oslo negotiations between Israel and the Palestinians until 2000, which sharpened the conflicting stances between right and left and led to diffused political system with a small center; the Second Intifada of the early 2000s weakened the left's power, especially in favor of the right; a continuing lack of faith in the likelihood of achieving a solution in light of recent events, especially on the southern border after the unilateral Gaza disengagement; and, perhaps, the general instability in the Middle East or, alternatively, a growing trust of Israel's ability to manage the conflict in its current form (until the events of Fall 2015), rather than resolving it. Another explanation is the rapid demographic growth of the religious and Haredi populations, which, as shown below, tend to be right wing on political and security issues.

Figure 13. Self Identity with Political View among Jews in Israel, 1992-2014

Year	Right	Center	Left	Don't Know/Refuse
1992	45	18	30	7
1999	42	11	39	9
2003	54	17	27	2
2014	47	27	15	11

Adopted from: Asher Arian, Nir Atmor and Yael Hadar. 2006. **The 2006 Israeli Democracy Index - Changes in Israel's Political Party System: Dealignment or Realignment.** *Jerusalem: The Israel Democracy Institute; Tamar Herman, Elle Heller, Chanan Cohen, Gilad Be'ery and Yuval Lebel.* **The Israeli Democracy Index 2014.** *Jerusalem: The Israel Democracy Institute.*

Data not presented here suggest that there are no significant differences between those born in Israel and those born abroad in regard to political affiliation. What especially stands out is the high rate of those born abroad who did not know or refused to report their political affiliation (17 percent among those born abroad, and 7 percent of those born in Israel). More significant differences were found among Jews according to their ethnic background. The data in Figure 14 show that six of ten of Asian/African descent identify as right-wing on political or security issues, a fifth positioned themselves as centrists, and less than a tenth as leftists. Their counterparts of European/American descent are more spread out along the spectrum with a similar proportion of a third in each of the blocks of right and center, and less than a fifth on the left. Those of the third generation in Israel, native-born Israelis whose fathers were born
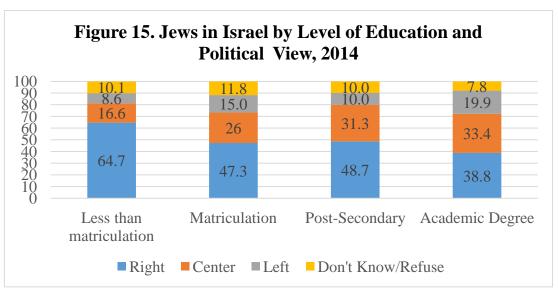
also in Israel, tend to fit between the two groups, with fewer people who do not know or refuse to answer, which slightly raised identification with the left.

Figure 14. Jews in Israel by Ethnic Origin and Political View, 2014

Political View	Israel	Europe/America	Asia/Africa
Don't Know/Refused	4.6	11.7	8.6
Left	17.9	17.2	9.4
Center	26.6	33.6	20.9
Right	50.8	37.5	61.1

*Adopted from: Israel Democracy Institute, **The Israeli Democracy Index, 2014**. The data file was provided by the Guttman Institute for Social Research at the Israel Democracy Institute.*

Political stances are tied closely to education (Figure 15). Those with lower education levels tend to lean further right on the political map, while a rise in education levels coincides with a preference for the center or left. Thus, while almost two-thirds (64.7 percent) of Israeli Jews without a high school diploma identified with the political right, this was true for more than a third (38.8 percent) of those with an academic degree. Further, only 8.6 percent of those without high school diplomas identified as left vs. more than twice as many (19.9 percent) of those holding academic degrees. The education-political nexus is especially strong among those with low education levels; conversely, those with academic degrees are more spread out among the political blocks, with
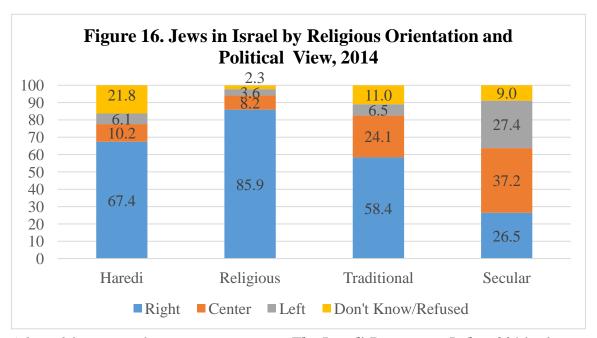
high rates identifying as right wing or the centrist. Therefore, if we examine the data not from the vantage point of educational attainment but rather from that of political affiliation, we can surmise that among those with more right-wing views there is a greater range of academic attainment – both high and low; whereas those with left-wing views, most of whom hold academic degrees, tend to be more homogenous. One of the reasons for the relatively high rate of academic degree holders identified with the right is the growing trend of the religious population, lately even the Haredim, to attain an academic degree.

Figure 15. Jews in Israel by Level of Education and Political View, 2014

	Less than matriculation	Matriculation	Post-Secondary	Academic Degree
Don't Know/Refuse	10.1	11.8	10.0	7.8
Left	8.6	15.0	10.0	19.9
Center	16.6	26	31.3	33.4
Right	64.7	47.3	48.7	38.8

■ Right ■ Center ■ Left ■ Don't Know/Refuse

*Adopted from: Israel Democracy Institute, **The Israeli Democracy Index, 2014**. The data file was provided by the Guttman Institute for Social Research at the Israel Democracy Institute.*

Finally, we examined the extent to which political identification is associated with religiosity (Figure 16). The main differences found were between religious and secular: while close to nine of ten religious people (85.9 percent) placed themselves on the right of the political spectrum, this was true for only a quarter (26.5 percent) of secular people. At the same time, only a tenth (11.8 percent) of the religious identified with the center or the left, while nearly two thirds (64.7 percent) of the secular did

so. We should note that the religious population is highly uniform in its political affiliation, while the secular public is more diverse and rather evenly spread among the various camps on the Israeli political map. Traditional-minded Jews tend to lean right politically or toward the center; only a small number identified with the left wing. A high rate (over a fifth) of Haredim refused to answer, but it is likely that they identify mostly with the right. Despite this, an interesting finding is that roughly a fifth (16.3 percent) of the Haredim identified themselves with the political and security positions of the center and the left.

Figure 16. Jews in Israel by Religious Orientation and Political View, 2014

	Haredi	Religious	Traditional	Secular
Don't Know/Refused	21.8	2.3	11.0	9.0
Left	6.1	3.6	6.5	27.4
Center	10.2	8.2	24.1	37.2
Right	67.4	85.9	58.4	26.5

■ Right ■ Center ■ Left ■ Don't Know/Refused

*Adopted from: Israel Democracy Institute, **The Israeli Democracy Index, 2014**. The data file was provided by the Guttman Institute for Social Research at the Israel Democracy Institute.*

7. Summary and Discussion

Israel's Jewish population is a living laboratory of groups of people with varying social, identity, and political characteristics. The composition of the population according to these key attributes is not static and changes over time, including in recent years. These trends develop, on the one hand, in a direction of greater similarity of certain social patterns; and on

the other, the strengthening of connections between the attributes emphasizing variations and particularistic patterns of behaviors and attitudes among defined segments of the population.

Insights into the Jewish society in Israel evince 12 key conclusions:

1) The proportion of Jews (together with those of "no religion") from the whole of the Israeli population has remained stable over time.

2) Among Jews, the proportion of those born in Israel is growing, and has become a majority over the foreign-born.

3) Therefore, there is a noted decrease in the proportion of the first and second generations of European/American and Asian/African descent in favor of those born in Israel to an Israel-born father.

4) Despite this aforementioned trend, ethnic origin still constitutes an important part of identity among second and third generation Israelis.

5) There is an improvement in the educational and economic achievements of Jewish Israelis, and the gaps once prevalent between different ethnic origins have diminished.

6) The population proportion of the Haredim has grown, while that of the traditional Jews has diminished.

7) There is a strong association between ethnic origin and religious identity: Ashkenazis tend to be both more Haredi and more secular; Mizrahis/Sephardis tend to be more in the middle of the religious spectrum and mostly self-identify as traditional.

8) A strong connection was found between education and religious identification: a large concentration of Haredim are among those with less than high school diploma or have post-secondary education, while there is a high proportion of secular Jews among

those with academic degrees. A high proportion of those with no matriculation are traditional.

9) Half of Jewish Israelis identify with right-wing political and security views, and this has remained stable for the past two decades. In contrast, the number of those identifying with the center has grown while that of the left has shrunk.

10) A high rate of those of Asian/African descent identify with the right; those of European/American descent are more evenly dispersed among the various political camps. Those of Israeli descent fall somewhere in the middle.

11) Low educational levels increase the likelihood of identifying with the right, while higher education tends to reinforce more left-leaning political and security positions. The connection between education and political views stands out especially among those with low educational attainment; those with academic degrees tend to be more evenly spread among the various political camps.

12) Religious Jews tend to identify more with the right; secular Jews are more spread out across the political spectrum; and those who are traditional tend to be more right wing or centrist, but not left wing.

The Jewish society in Israel is moving toward stronger characteristic similarities, such as nativity status (native born Israelis), education attainment (high), and political affiliation (center and right). A trend is emerging of movement toward the poles of religious identity – Haredi on one end and secular on the other. The traditional middle is weakening. Concurrently, people grant importance to their ethnic origins. Despite that, in each ethnic group – Ashkenazi and Sephardi – individuals span the entirety of the political and religious spectrums (with the notable exception that those of Middle Eastern backgrounds who are religious or Haredi, who

do not identify with the center or left on political or security issues), there is a positive link between ethnic extraction and religious identity, and between ethnicity and political identification. For example, eight of every ten Mizrahim self-identify as traditional/religious/Haredi, while among Ashkenazim the rate is only 39.5 percent; among Mizrahis, close to two-thirds tend to be more right wing on political/security matters, and this is true for slightly more than one-third of Ashkenazim. There is a strong connection between religious identification and political affiliation.

One could claim that few combine similar identifying features in all social, religious, and political facets. In other words, group belonging is more intersecting than congruent. Apparently, contact points and joint interests of groups from different parts of the society hold the potential for openness and respect for others, i.e. pluralism. However it seems that a similarity in one attribute does not always moderate contrasts or differences of worldview and life style in other areas, which can create inter-group tensions. Indeed, tensions such as these exist and at times stand out: half of Jews perceive these tensions in the areas of economics, religion, and politics as formidable, while a quarter characterizes the tension between ethnic groups as strong.[3]

This position paper presents a profile of the Jewish population of Israel along main social, identity, and political metrics. These characteristics can offer a point of reference for any attempt to analyze inter-group tensions and for drawing policy recommendations to reduce them. Impact of the research will demand examination of how people perceive inter-group tensions in Israel, the characteristics of people with different assessments of inter-group tensions, and how similarities between people in some areas can help mitigate contrasts, disagreements, and tensions in other aspects of life in Israel.

Notes

[1] Sicron, Moshe. 2004. **Demography: Israel's Population – Characteristics & Trends**. Jerusalem: Carmel. Central Bureau of Statistics, unpublished data.

[2]Momi Dahan. 2013. "Has the Melting Pot Succeeded?" **The Israel Economy** 60 (1-4): 107-152.

[3]Tamar Herman, Elle Heller, Chanan Cohen, Gilad Be'ery and Yuval Lebel. 2014. **The Israeli Democracy Index 2014**. Jerusalem: The Israel Democracy Institute.