



THE JEWISH PEOPLE POLICY INSTITUTE  
המכון למדיניות העם היהודי

A Jewish People Policy Institute Report

# WHO IS A JEW? VIEWPOINTS OF ISRAELI JEWS

SHMUEL ROSNER | PROF. CAMIL FUCHS | NOAH SLEPKOV

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JPPI, Givat Ram Campus, P.O.B 39156, Jerusalem 9139101, Israel  
Telephone: 972-2-5633356 | Fax: 972-2-5635040 | [www.jppei.org.il](http://www.jppei.org.il)

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# FOREWORD

Who is a Jew? What is the essence of belonging to the Jewish people? These questions are a whole world unto themselves. They can be answered from a sociological point of view, from a cultural perspective, through philosophical reflection and, of course, through the prism of religion. Is what was once regarded as a single integrative essence – “Judaism” – a nationality, a religion, or a culture? And from the collective to the individual: Is the determination that someone is Jewish necessarily based on objective criteria applied to people from without, or should decisive importance be granted to an individual’s personal choice to identify as a Jew?

Being classified as a “Jew” affects a person in all spheres of life – the personal, the familial, and the public. As we know, the halachic legal system assigns to the “Jew” unique obligations and rights: only a Jew is obligated to observe the mitzvot. The Israeli legal system also sets Jews apart in specific contexts. For example, the right to make aliyah and receive Israeli citizenship – the Right of Return – is reserved exclusively for Jews (and their family members, as defined by law). Israel is defined as the nation-state of the Jewish people, but what definition determines who belongs to this people – the collective to which the Basic Law: “Israel as the Nation-State of the Jewish People” refers? Indeed, to the extent that the question of belonging to a collective is decisive in real-life matters it must also be addressed in legal rules whose purpose is to determine status.

But beyond the normative importance of the definition of Jewish identity, the issue is primarily one of consciousness: Who belongs to “our” circle of identity – the brothers/sisters toward whom we feel a unique sense of personal closeness, intuitive solidarity, and even a degree of responsibility – and who is outside it? It is difficult to approach this question with analytical tools. We have trouble reaching an answer because we live in a world where each person can embrace diverse identity affiliations without committing to any one of them in a way that overshadows the others. The choice to belong to a given group or to stand apart from it can now be made with relative ease, usually at no major cost. The unequivocal definition that religion offers regarding a person’s Jewishness, in an era when most Jews do not strictly adhere to religious law, is no longer the sole option, and many are seeking alternatives. In a reality where global culture is achieving dominance at the expense

of particular cultures, doubts arise regarding the solidity of the particularist identity required to call someone a “Jew.”

It is also important to observe the differences between different places: In Israel the public sphere is Jewish in character, meaning that no significant effort is necessary to maintain Israelis’ sense of Jewish identity. This is a “Jewish by default” situation. By contrast, those who live outside of Israel, in a non-Jewish public realm, must work actively to preserve their Jewish identity, both outwardly and within themselves. They must choose to be Jewish, in both intention and deed.

The research before us does not seek to decide the question of “Who is a Jew.” Its purpose is modest but important: it presents current perspectives of Jews in Israel on the question. Drawing this picture is necessary because the identity of a group, in the sense of its consciousness, is not dictated “top down” (e.g., by law) but is, rather, the product of complex social processes from the “bottom up.” We live in an age of intensive “identity politics,” which manifests in pressure from different directions on the traditional definition of “Jew.” This study examines the attitudes of Israeli Jews regarding the flexibility of Jewish identity (Do definitions of Jewishness coalesce differently in each generation, or is it a fixed matter of fact that is not subject to influence?); regarding authority (If the definition changes from time to time, who is authorized to decide on it, and how?); and regarding content (What is the appropriate or accepted definition today?).

The Jewish People Policy Institute undertook this task out of an understanding of the great value of this information for anyone interested in formulating a position or policy on issues at the center of how the Jewish collective is defined. The study is not judgmental, only descriptive. It does not describe the current reality, but rather how that reality is perceived by Israeli Jews with respect to the question of defining a person’s Jewishness.

Many thanks are due to the researchers who prepared this study – Shmuel Rosner, Camil Fuchs, and Noah Slepko. They have managed to present a complex topic in a way that makes it accessible for all readers. There is no doubt that the study’s findings will serve as a point of departure for any future discussion of these issues.

**Prof. Yedidia Stern, President**

The Jewish People Policy Institute

# MAIN POINTS

Several theoretical issues pertaining to aspects of the “Who is a Jew” question are currently being fiercely debated in the Israeli public arena. Among other things, the recently dissolved (December 2022) government and Knesset had sought to change the institutional format of Orthodox conversion recognized in Israel. Furthermore, the “Grandchild” clause of the Law of Return, and its implications for immigrant absorption in Israel, have been placed on the public agenda, and the discussion is far from over. At the same time, Israel is absorbing immigrants from Ukraine and Russia – people fleeing the war – who are eligible for Israeli citizenship per the Law of Return. This special Jewish People Policy Institute report highlights new data that allows us to take a fresh look at areas of disagreement and consensus on the Who is a Jew? issue. Policy recommendations are also offered, which according to the authors are driven by the data.

# AREAS OF AGREEMENT AND THEIR IMPLICATIONS

**Most Israeli Jews feel that Jews are those who were born to a Jewish mother.**

This significant fact must be taken into account in any arrangement regarding conversion, marriage, Law of Return eligibility, and more. However, the consensus on this point is not total, which puts Israeli Jewry in a position of disagreement with many Jewish communities in the Diaspora.

**Most Israeli Jews view Jewishness as an identity that cannot be partial.** The demand for identity-exclusivity could pose difficulties both for mixed families in Israel, and for Israel-Diaspora relations, given that Diaspora Jewry comprises a growing number of people whose Judaism is partial, including at the self-definition stage.

**Despite clearly disagreeing over the details, most Jews feel that the rules establishing a person's Jewishness should be identical everywhere – in Israel and in the Diaspora.** This consensus creates an opportunity for those wishing to undertake an effort to reach a broadly supported definition of Jewishness. However, our research shows that finding such a definition, one that would be accepted in Israel and abroad, would be a complicated, challenging affair. Therefore, the benefit would have to be weighed against the damage that an endeavor so fraught with controversy might be expected to produce.

Pursuant to the previous point: **Only a minority of Israeli Jews feel that the authority to implement the rules establishing Jewishness should be vested in a single central entity.** What this means is that, even if an effort is made to reach a widely-agreed-upon definition, its implementation would presumably remain decentralized, which would leave a considerable grey area with regard to implementation.

**Most Israeli Jews accept those who have undergone Conservative/Reform conversion as Jews, especially if the process took place in Israel.** This fact has ramifications on the state's ability (even should the conversion process undergo reform) to significantly increase the proportion of those who choose Orthodox conversion, which is naturally more stringent in its demands on the prospective convert.

# AREAS OF DISAGREEMENT AND THEIR IMPLICATIONS

**Attitudes regarding the issue of Jewish identity and the nature of Jewishness are significantly related to levels of traditional observance and to ideological-political views.** This fact makes it hard to reach a broad consensus, as disagreement on matters of Jewishness is not point-specific, but rather bound up in a complex contextual web with views on other topics.

Regarding observance of tradition: **Jews who observe the Sabbath and Jews who do not observe the Sabbath are divided on the nature of Jewish identity: the former generally see it as a matter of religion and ethnicity, while for the latter it is a matter of culture, nationality, and values.** These differing definitions of the main component of Jewishness also engender differing expectations at the practical and ideological levels, based on affiliation with this or that Jewish subgroup.

Regarding politics: **Definitions of the chief components of Jewishness have significant political manifestations: The farther one moves from right to left, the weaker Religion becomes as a main component of Jewishness, and the greater the emphasis on culture.**

**There is a major gap in Israeli and Diaspora attitudes toward self-definition as a decisive element in establishing Jewishness.** In Israel, the tendency is toward group determination of the elements necessary for Jewish affiliation. In the Diaspora, the emphasis is on individual determination.

# POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS:

(A detailed discussion of, and rationale for, the recommendations appear at the end of the report)

- There are signs of pressure to change the Law of Return but change to so foundational a law should be raised and considered only in a framework of broad-based discourse respectful of the Diaspora Jewish communities. There should be awareness of the fact that change to the Law could prove detrimental to significant populations that identify with Israel and regard themselves as Jewish.
- So long as the criteria for aliyah remain unchanged, we should prepare for a continued rise in the share of Israelis whose Jewishness is not recognized in all corners and try to reduce the friction arising from this situation.
- Knowledge should be disseminated in Israel to counter negative attitudes toward Diaspora Jewry – attitudes stemming from major differences in how Jewish identity is understood. (Knowledge should also be disseminated to Diaspora Jewry for the same reason.)
- Act to implement a solution for those who wish to marry in Israel but whose Jewishness is not recognized by the Chief Rabbinate (alternatively, one must take into account that there will be a gradual and significant decrease in the rate of official marriages conducted in Israel).
- Efforts should be made to strengthen and diversify the presence of holidays and festivals in the Israeli public sphere, and to strengthen non-religious Jewish identity, as a partial response to conflicting attitudes regarding the components of Jewish belonging.

# EXPLANATION AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

During the summer of 2021, an interactive digital game was conducted online regarding the “Who is a Jew” question, with thousands of Israeli Jewish participants.<sup>1</sup> The game was developed by THEMADAD.COM,<sup>2</sup> and marketed by the Kan News network.<sup>3</sup> Data from the game was featured on the Kan News website, and in radio and television broadcasts. Viewers, listeners, and readers of the various Kan News media were offered the opportunity to participate in the game, which centered around a multi-stage questionnaire addressing different aspects of Jewish identity and characteristics of the Jewish people. The data presented in this report is based on the information collected in the framework of that media research project. It has been weighted by Professor Camil Fuchs, in order to represent the views of the Israeli Jewish public.

In the appendices of this report, you can find data on the composition of the original questionnaire’s respondent group. It should be noted that all respondents answered some of the questions, while another set of questions was intended for only a portion of the respondents, based on their earlier answers. Accordingly, the present report includes some data pertaining to only a segment of the Jewish population who responded in a certain way to specific questions.

Those interested can register for the project and see for themselves how the questions were posed. The report presented here is based on a full calculation of the answers given by 2500 respondents, and from time to time, as needed, on data gathered after. At the time of writing, the number of respondents was 5000. It should be noted that, in addition to the Hebrew questionnaire, a similar, though not identical, questionnaire was prepared in English, which has also been posted online.

With the aid of this questionnaire, we hope to gather data on the views of non-Israeli Jews regarding the questions presented here, and to publish a comparative report that would indicate similarities and differences in the views of Israeli and non-Israeli Jews, as well as other distributions of views in the Jewish world with regard to issues raised in the study.

The Jewish People Policy Institute wishes to thank all those involved in the initiative. Special thanks are due to Tomer Brand, the digital editor of Kan News, and to all the other employees of his department, who helped greatly in setting up and promoting the project.

# THE STUDY POPULATION

We are living in an exceptional period in Jewish history.” With these words, which still apply, we chose to begin an earlier comprehensive report of the Jewish People Policy Institute, which addressed questions pertaining to the collective identity of the group known as the Jewish people.<sup>4</sup> The report was based on a series of dialog encounters with Jews around the world; an effort was made to describe some of the challenges faced by Jews seeking to forge a shared identity for themselves.

At the heart of that report is the recognition that, a century ago (or a little more) it was quite easy to define and identify members of the Jewish collective. Ethnic affiliation was the chief deciding membership factor. Jews were nearly always regarded as those born to a Jewish mother or, in much rarer cases, those who converted in accordance with Halacha (Jewish law). By contrast, as discussed in the earlier report, although ethnicity still remains decisive for those who identify as Jews, it is now eroding as the primary factor. More and more people whose self-identity is Jewish have non-Jewish parents, and as family members of Jews, no longer see a need to convert. At the same time, in an age that elevates the importance of the individual’s self-determined identity, people sometimes choose to self-define their identity as they see fit, and not always based on rules set by an amorphous collective that lacks institutions with the authority to decide on the matter.

The earlier report, again, was concerned with all Jews around the world, and was based on information gathered via conversations with selected groups, and on questionnaires administered to those groups. The report yielded important and fascinating conclusions, but the information analyzed in it – as noted in the study itself – did not claim to represent, nor would it have been capable of representing, the opinions of all Jews.

This study differs from the previous report in several aspects. Two major points are:

1. It deals solely with Jews in Israel and their approach to the questions raised in the study. We will also occasionally offer comparisons to studies of Jewish attitudes in other places.
2. The report is based on information gathered and quantitatively analyzed. Meaning, it can answer the question of what Israeli Jews think about the relevant issues, if we ignore (and we must ignore) the methodological problem arising from the study's attempt to determine Who are considered Jews, based on the opinions of Jews, as though the question the study is attempting to address is already answered.

Other differences between the previous study and the present one:

- The fact that the present study was conducted in Israel and with Israelis makes it possible to focus on questions relevant to the Israeli arena (which includes institutional and legal features), in which Jewishness plays a different role from that played by Jewishness in the Diaspora.
- The online questionnaire's presentation in a game format, and with the backing of a major media outlet, made it possible to collect information from a very large group of respondents who answered a relatively large number of questions, including background questions that facilitate weighting and characterization of the respondents.

The study's reference group is Israeli Jews. Their affiliation with the collective was determined, as is common in studies on these topics, by what the respondents said about themselves. In the Jewish People Policy Institute's Annual Assessment, we present yearly estimates of the number of Jews worldwide that combine objective and subjective definitions of group belonging. Regarding Israel, the JPPI Assessment estimates are based on halachic criteria. The numbers are clear and absolute. The state records the number of Jews. In the case of reporting on the number of Jews in most other countries, the data is based on self-definition measured via surveys and research studies.

The halachic definition is what determines the size of Israel's Jewish population from the perspective of the Central Bureau of Statistics.

On Rosh Hashanah Eve 2022, Israel was home to 7,069,000 Jews, per the definitions employed by CBS. These Jews constitute 74% of the total Israeli population. Most

Jewish population growth comes from natural increase. A fifth of the population designated as Jewish and Other, comes from migration. CBS explicitly tracks the share of those born to Jewish mothers (73.8% in 2020), who constitute nearly all the Jews in Israel.

In addition to them, 5% of Israeli citizens are designated as Others and are not classified by religion in the Population Registry. Most of these are descendants of Jews (though not the children of Jewish mothers), mainly from the FSU immigrant community. By Rosh Hashanah Eve 2022 this number had reached approximately half a million (498,000). Their population share is gradually increasing, with the arrival to Israel of immigrants with Law of Return eligibility, most of whom, in recent years, have not been Jewish as legally defined. Of the immigrants who arrived during the decade 2010-2019, only 14% were recognized as Jews by the Chief Rabbinate.<sup>5</sup> It must be said, however, that some of those who came on the basis of Jewish descent, claim, or feel that they are Jews, and this will be their self-definition. The CBS will not include them in the Jewish population group but rather in the Others category, but in our study, for both technical and substantive reasons, they are classified as Jews.<sup>6</sup>

Earlier studies indicated the importance of Jewish identity to Israeli Jews, including the Jewish People Policy Institute's Israeli Judaism study, according to which "a very large majority of Israeli Jews feel Jewish. Or at least they say they feel Jewish." On one of the study's rating scales, over half of Israeli Jews stated that they feel Jewish at a level of ten out of ten, while the rest rated their sense of Jewishness at a high level.<sup>7</sup>

"This is true of a substantial majority of religious and secular Jews, a substantial majority of Mizrahim and Ashkenazim, a substantial majority of city and rural-area dwellers, of those on the right and on the left, of Orthodox Jews and those unaffiliated with any religious stream, of synagogue attendees and those who go shopping on Shabbat, of those with many children and those with fewer."<sup>8</sup> The behaviors of Israeli Jews are diverse, the self-definitions are similar: nearly all feel Jewish. Nearly all (87%<sup>9</sup>) also say it is important that they are Jews. For nearly all (86%), it is important that their children will also be Jewish.

# WHAT IS JUDAISM?

The question of Jewishness and its nature can be discussed on several levels. It can be addressed through intellectual engagement with Jewish texts, with Jewish history and the Jewish ethos, with Jewish law and justice. It can be addressed through practical discussion regarding inclusion and exclusion, patterns of admission to, and participation in Jewish frameworks (which in the State of the Jewish people has additional meanings). It can also be addressed in the framework of public opinion research, which constitutes the bulk of the following discussion. Such discussion itself embodies the basic premise that Jews' opinions on questions pertaining to their collective identity are important. That is, that the collective itself, at a given time and in the particular mood prevailing in it at that moment, has something to say about its identity – and that that statement is important and that an effort should, therefore, be made to understand it in depth.

This is a basic premise that can be defended in various ways to be discussed shortly, but it is not necessarily agreed-upon and shared by all Jews.

The idea that the viewpoints of all Jews are worth investigating as a significant element in the definition of the collective, entails the following assumptions:

1. Judaism is a living culture, whose typologies are established anew in every generation by those who identify themselves with the Jewish collective.
2. A living culture cannot exist in isolation from the desires and beliefs of those who are supposed to be maintaining it.
3. Large-scale global change is forcing today's Jews to reorganize their thoughts about the framework that sustains their culture.
4. A group's thinking about its identity is not an orderly, top-down process, but rather an evolving and chaotic process. Identifying emergent patterns of thought and potential conclusions within that process requires effort.

In order to organize our thinking about the needs to be examined in the framework of the process, we chose to address three major components, each

of which constitutes the basis for a discussion in its own right within the general framework:

1. **Flexibility** – that is, the question of whether and to what degree Judaism is a culture of fixed foundations that cannot be changed, a given, in contrast to the opposite idea: that although Judaism is built layer upon layer in philosophical, literary, and historical terms, nevertheless each generation has a very high, perhaps unlimited, degree of flexibility to shape it.
2. **Authority** – that is, the question of who is authorized to set the boundaries of maneuverability for Jewish culture (permanence versus flexibility), and what interpretative tools are permitted for use by the authorized parties in the shaping of their generation's identity.
3. **Content** – that is, what is the outcome of the process in which the authorized parties examine their identity in a given period, in light of the set boundaries of maneuverability.

In the present study, we will be devoting separate sections to each of these three questions, within (as noted above), the limited framework emphasizing public opinion – the viewpoints of Israeli Jews on the questions of:

- Flexibility – **does** Judaism change?
- Authority – **who** determines whether change happens, and how?
- Content – **what** changes?

Ideological investigation of these questions is of course also necessary, and many studies have indeed performed extensive investigations of this kind. We will occasionally mention the results of such inquiries as background to our main discussion, pertaining to the opinions of Jews themselves. However, our primary focus is on determining what those opinions are, not on how they clash with investigations of a theological, philosophical, or historical nature.

Our discussion may begin with the assertion that Israeli Jews, while they usually agree that their being Jewish is important and meaningful, nevertheless do not agree on the question of how their shared Jewishness is defined. The lack of such consensus can be discerned at the preliminary stage of analysis of a standard question posed to all of the participants in the new study. Such a question

appears in different versions in other studies in Israel and elsewhere and enables the research population to point to the main element of Judaism. That is, to say whether Judaism is mainly Culture, Religion, or Nationality – or other things.

There are studies that allow respondents to choose a combination of several components, which makes things easier for the respondents, but results in a somewhat less clear picture of Jewish attitudes. There are studies that ask respondents to choose a single component. But even when only one component is at issue, there is still a variety of possible answers, both in terms of:

- Number – one component out of how many?
- Content – a single component of what?

Of course, the way in which the question is asked, and the response options, have a significant impact on the response distribution.

Here are some examples of studies that posed similar questions.

In a Pew Research Center study of Jewish Americans (2020)<sup>10</sup> about half of the respondents (46%) chose different combinations of the Religion, Culture, and Ethnicity components. Of the other half of the survey respondents, a fifth (22%) chose Culture only, another fifth (21%) chose Ethnicity only, and a tenth (11%) chose Religion only. The question was posed thus: “Being Jewish is mainly about ...”

This formulation, as we shall see, is not the same as that of our research question.

In a counterpart Pew Center survey of Israeli Jews (2015), three options were also presented. The one chosen by the largest number of respondents was Ethnicity (35%). Religion was chosen by 22%, and Culture by 10%. The rest chose combinations of two of the three options, or all three.<sup>11</sup>

The questionnaire used in the Jewish People Policy Institute’s Israeli Judaism study (2018)<sup>12</sup> gave respondents four options to choose from in two rounds, with no possibility of combination within each round. The respondents were thus able to rank the component of Judaism that they regarded as being of greatest importance, and then the second-most-important component – but they could not mix different components.

- In the first round 43% of Israeli Jews ranked Religion first.
- In the second round 40% of Israeli Jews ranked Nationality first.

Overall, nearly an identical share of Jews chose Religion (1) and Nationality (2), or Nationality (1) and Religion (2) as the chief components of Judaism.

It is interesting to compare these findings with those of the Pew Center’s Israel survey, in which far fewer respondents chose Religion than in the Israeli Judaism survey. This is, apparently, because many of the Pew respondents preferred a combined category that was not available in the Israeli Judaism survey.<sup>13</sup>

As seen by comparing surveys conducted on this topic in Israel within the space of just a few years, the wording of the question, the number of components available to choose from and the option (or lack of) to choose a combination of several components, all have a significant effect on the responses and the relationships between them.

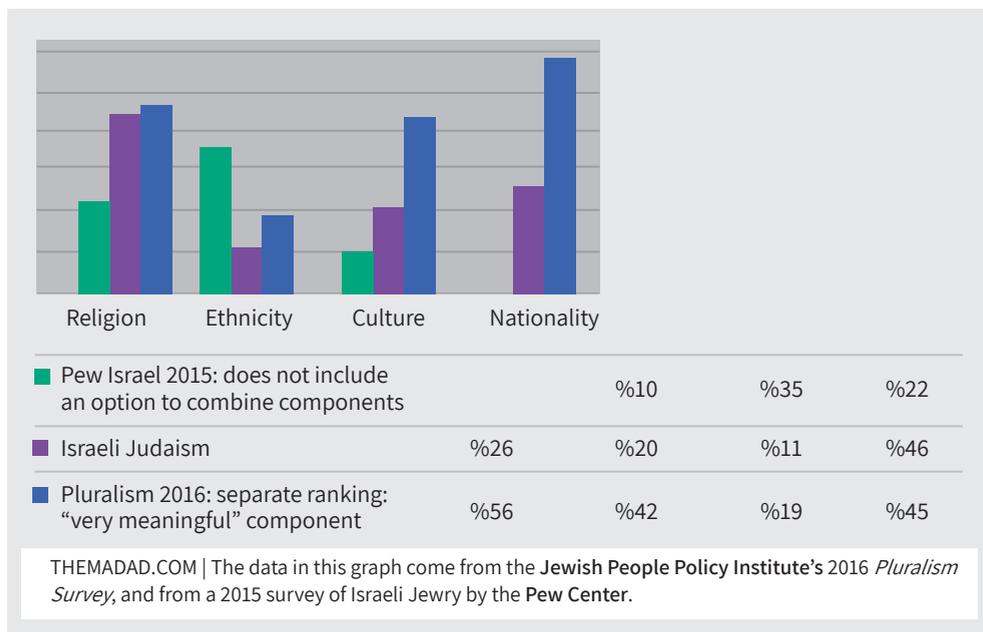
The fact that the Pew survey does not contain a nationality component is meaningful, both because it reflects Pew’s basic assumption that regards Judaism as, above all, a religion, and because it omits a possible category to choose from.

The option of saying that nationality is a meaningful component as provided in the Jewish People Policy Institute’s Pluralism survey (2016<sup>14</sup>) is also significant; we can see that, when such an option is given, over half of Israeli Jews avail themselves of it. However, they do this only when they are able to choose several components, and not when they have to select a single component. In the Pluralism survey they had to indicate, for each of four components, the degree to which it was meaningful. For this reason, the total obtained is much more than 100%.

The “Who is a Jew” project on whose data we rely in this study posed a question that differs slightly in several aspects from that posed in the earlier surveys. The differences are:

1. It allows respondents to choose one of five options (versus four and three, not including combinations, in earlier studies). The component added to the new study that does not appear in previous studies is Values, which was selected by a minority of the participants, though not an inconsiderable minority. This

## Comparison of Earlier Surveys Conducted in Israel: Components of Jewishness



minority is important, as it is a characteristic and specific group for which a component such as Values provides an identity element that is better suited to its needs.

2. The wording of the question posed in the present study: "Of the following definitions, do you think that Jews are defined mainly in terms of ..." is not the same as earlier wordings.

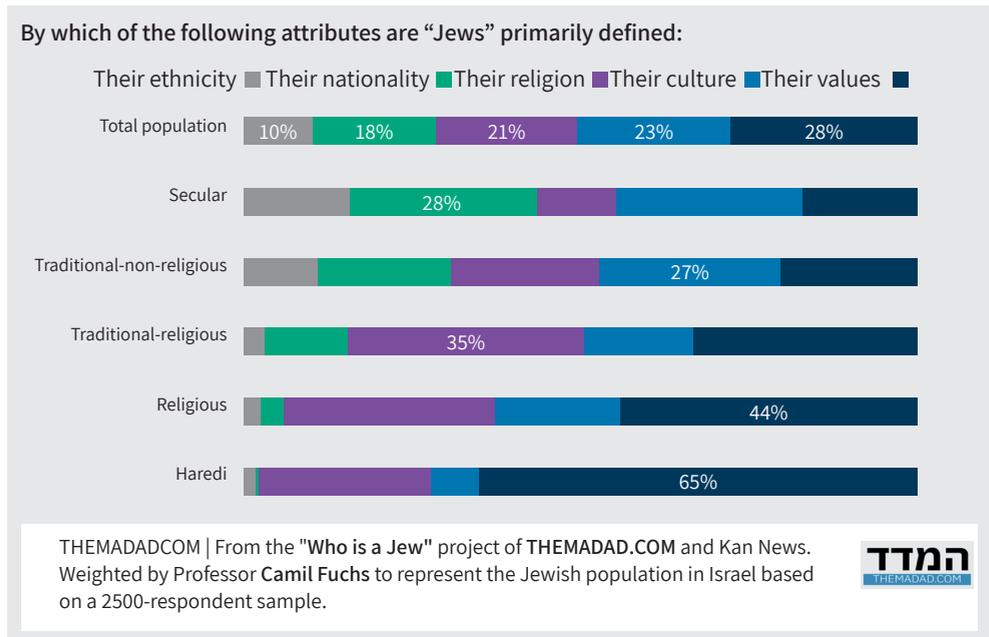
The definitional question in the present study was posed after a considerable number of earlier questions relating to Jewish identity, which could conceivably have influenced the respondents. There were also previous questions in other studies, but not the same questions, meaning that the effect, if there was one, might have been different. Later, we will present a few instances where Israelis' choices of various categories correspond to their responses to other research questions.

In the following graph, you can see five categories offered for selection to a representative sample of the entire Israeli Jewish population, as well as a breakdown into five sectors by level of traditional observance. For each of these sectors, we noted the exact percentage of those who chose the leading category for that sector.<sup>15</sup>

We can see for the religious (Datim) (non-Haredi religious) and Haredi (ultra-Orthodox) sectors that Ethnicity is the main component selected, followed by Religion. This opinion, which is shared by slightly more than a quarter of Israeli Jews largely reflects a religious-halachic outlook, according to which Jewishness is a matter of birth.

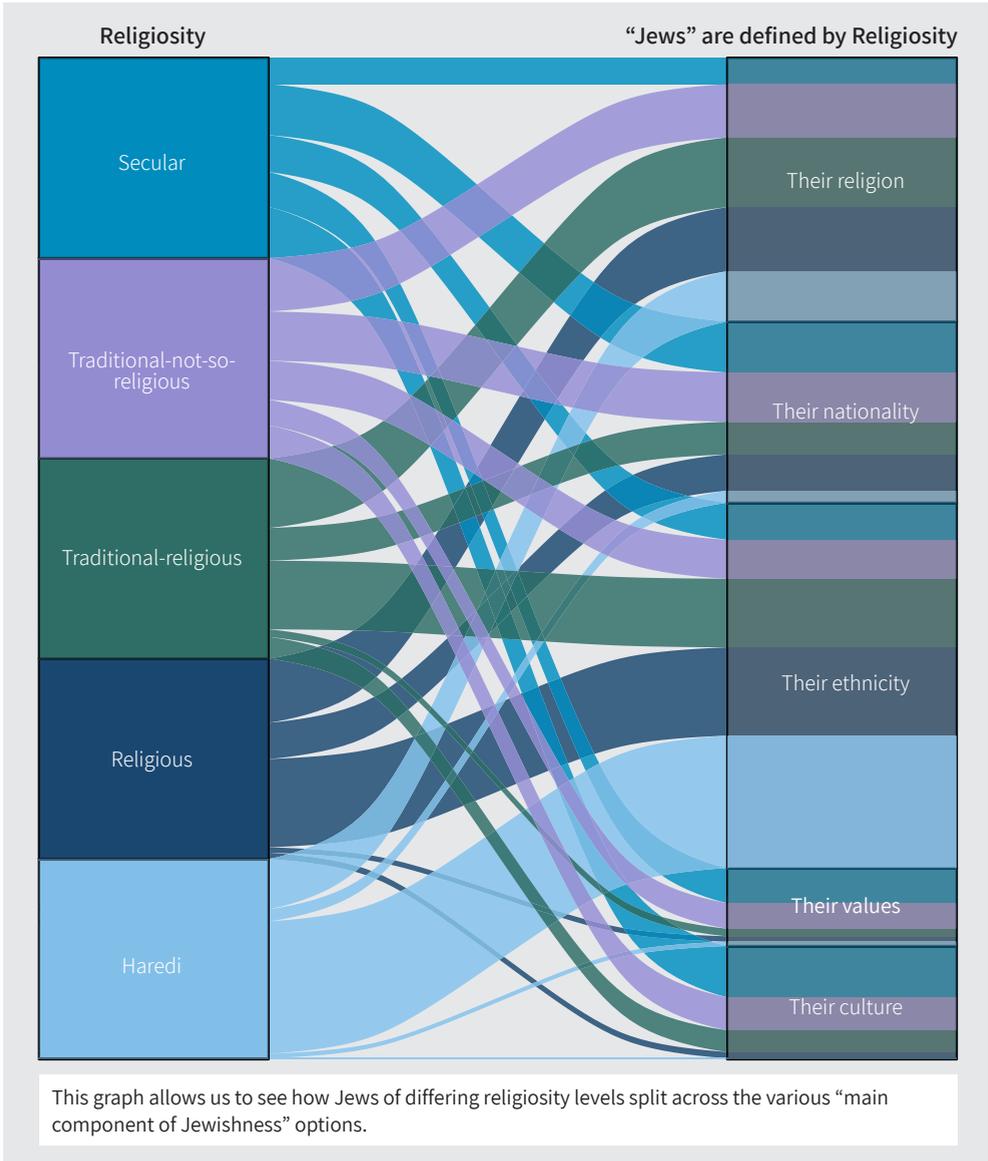
For these respondents, the determining factor is almost always a Jewish mother, as we shall see below. The answer is the same for Masorti (traditional-religious) respondents, though with opposite weighting. Religion slightly overtakes Ethnicity. However, we can see that the weight given to Ethnicity and Religion as the main elements defining Jewishness declines significantly in the less-traditionalist groups, which are the largest groups in Israel, together accounting for two-thirds of Israeli Jews. This group gives greater weight to Nationality, the leading choice of the traditional-non-religious and to Culture, the leading choice of seculars.

## Who are the Jews?



As noted, this data should be treated with a degree of caution, as it is influenced by the wording and by the options available. We will draw a few conclusions from it later on, when we connect it to the answers to other questions that shed light on its meaning.

It is, after all, unclear whether all those who choose a component such as Ethnicity or Values are necessarily referring to the same thing. However, based on a rough breakdown, the data clearly points to a preference among half of Israeli Jews for the more traditional definitions of Jewishness (Ethnicity, Religion), while half choose definitions from a modern context (Nationality, Culture, Values). When we look at the definitions in light of the religiosity scale, we can also discern that the more traditional the subgroup (i.e., traditional-religious, religious, or ultra-Orthodox), the more strongly focused and homogeneous the choices of its members. In other words: in the conservative groups there is an understanding of Jewishness that is relatively uniform, while the less-religious groups exhibit a decentralized (some might say confused) understanding of the nature of Jewishness.



# THE FLEXIBILITY COMPONENT

“Judaism,” said Kabbalah scholar Gershom Scholem, “is what every generation of Jews chooses from the past, takes from it and adds to it, and redefines as the essence of Judaism in the eyes of the current generation.”<sup>16</sup> This is a statement that is hard to argue with on the factual plane. But we may add to it a question that has no unequivocal answer:

To what degree do Jews in any generation enjoy latitude to add to Judaism or subtract from it; and to what degree are they able to redefine the essence of Judaism so that it will still be recognizable to members of the current and future generations as Judaism?<sup>17</sup>

This question is woven in various ways throughout the present study; in many of the dilemmas that we presented to the participants, the choice is, in effect, between adherence to tradition and flexibility/change to tradition. As we begin our discussion of the flexibility component, we can already say that:

1. Flexibility levels differ depending on the issue at hand.
2. Not all Jews display the same level of flexibility.
3. Many Jews are inconsistent: on some issues they make choices evincing flexibility, while on others they display a lack of flexibility (and it is not always clear why).

In the following pages we will briefly address a few aspects and examples of the Flexibility component. It should be clarified that our discussion of this component in the present study refers solely to Flexibility in terms of delineating and understanding the space of **belonging to the Jewish collective**. Clearly, with regard to other Jewishness-related questions, ones pertaining to beliefs, opinions and, in particular, to the observance of Jewish practices, most Jews worldwide see themselves as free to move about within the Jewish space with great flexibility. This space, which was discussed in detail in an earlier JPPI study (#IsraeliJudaism), includes Jews who for the most part are not halachic, meaning that they do not see themselves as subject to certain behavioral imperatives in

the expression of their Judaism. The vast majority do not adhere to a Jewish way of life in the traditional sense. They are not Shabbat-observant. A recent THEMADAD.COM study found that a substantial majority not only travel on Shabbat but also go shopping on Shabbat, do not attend synagogue services, do not comply with modesty requirements or halachic kashrut, do not don tefillin (phylacteries), and more.

## **The Jewish Mother**

An important issue through which we can study spheres of flexibility is that of the automatic transmission of Jewishness from generation to generation. Age-old Jewish tradition, which is not a matter of dispute, maintains that Jewishness is automatically transmitted from a mother to her sons and daughters. There is no certainty, and disagreement exists, about when and why this tradition began.

Nevertheless, there are both major branches of the Jewish people and important thinkers among the Jewish people who feel that, in the modern age, flexibility regarding this unyielding tradition is called for, and that that tradition should be changed.

In 1983 the American Reform movement made the tremendously important decision<sup>18</sup> to recognize, under certain conditions, the Jewishness of the offspring of a Jewish parent, father or mother. The two documents issued by the Reform movement at the time set forth the rationale and the rules pertaining to the decision. The report of the committee handling the issue focused on the sociological crisis then facing the American Jewish community, a crisis that the community still confronts today. A counterpart public statement by Reform rabbis discussed halachic changes in the definition of Jewishness over the generations. The outcome of the investigation carried out by the Reform movement was a new sphere of flexibility. Children with one Jewish parent who formally identify with the Jewish faith and the Jewish people will, according to the Reform approach, be considered as Jews by birth. Today, most of the non-religious Jewish communal institutions accept the offspring of a Jewish father as full Jews, including them in the Jewish population counts of each community. For example, the Chicago community study (2020) looked at whether participants had a Jewish parent, without asking whether that parent was the mother or the father. In all instances

of a Jewish parent and Jewish identification, the participant was counted as a member of the Jewish community.<sup>19</sup>

The factors behind this decision by the Reform movement, and the consequent inclusive policy of communal organizations around the world, have mainly to do with the lifestyle of US Jews and other Diaspora communities and with the challenges they face. They do not pertain to Israeli Jewry to the same degree. The adoption of a flexible approach to the automatic transmission of Jewishness was mainly intended to cope with the high prevalence of mixed marriages in the Diaspora – a phenomenon that has become even more widespread since the Reform movement’s decision was made.

The most recent figure for mixed marriages in the US is 61%, for those married after 2010.<sup>20</sup> In Israel, where Jews are the majority, there is only a low rate of intermarriage between Jews and non-Jews; accordingly (as clearly seen in the Israeli Judaism study), the degree of confidence among Jews regarding the Jewish continuity of their descendants is very high, and their need for flexibility in defining Jewishness is, apparently, not great.

It should be noted, however, that a substantial majority of Israeli Jews support the possibility of civil marriage, which does not presently exist. Such an option could potentially open the door wider, given a dimension of governmental legitimization, to marriages between Jews and non-Jews in Israel. Although, and this can be seen in some of the data presented below, mixed marriages outside of Israel ultimately result in a strong possibility of slipping away from the Jewish people within one, two, or three generations (per current data<sup>21</sup>). These marriages are not the same as mixed marriages in Israel, where the outcome is continued everyday life amid the Israeli-Jewish majority.

In the present study we can see that a large majority of Israeli Jews tend to favor the traditional rules and to rely on transmission from mother to child when determining how Jewishness will be passed down automatically from generation to generation. A major gap thus exists between the accepted norm in a large number of Diaspora communities, both on a practical level and in terms of consciousness, and the Israeli norm. This is also true regarding the question of whether patrilineal descent is a possible means of transmitting Jewishness (most Israeli Jews answer in the negative). It is also true regarding the weight of

self-definition in determining a person's Jewishness. Self-definition carries great weight in the Diaspora, but little or none in Israel.

### **Israeli Views in Detail**

On the question of whether Jewishness is a matter of self-definition only, or whether additional criteria are needed to be considered a Jew, a substantial majority of respondents say that other criteria are necessary beyond that of self-definition.

When we look at these criteria, we find a significant preference for the Jewish mother as the factor defining a child's identity, compared with all other options. Thus, among more than a quarter of Israeli Jews who chose Ethnicity as the chief component of Jewishness – thereby already emphasizing the familial context of Jewishness – 74% feel that ethnicity means having a Jewish mother.

Incidentally, a 2022 Israel Democracy Institute survey yielded a similar finding:<sup>22</sup>

- 70% of the Jewish Israeli public do not consider those with a Jewish father and a non-Jewish mother to be Jews.
- 26% see them as Jews.
- 4% don't know.

A breakdown of the data by religiosity level indicates that the more secular the respondent, the more likely s/he was to see the children of a Jewish father as Jews. Even so, a small majority (50% versus 44%) of the secular do not regard such people as Jews.

In our study we found that:

- 13% concurred with a position similar to that of the American Reform movement, indicating that a Jewish parent is an acceptable option for them.
- 14% felt that it was enough to have some kind of Jewish ethnic background, i.e., dating to the grandparents' generation, for a person to be designated Jewish.

A similar preference could also be seen among other questionnaire respondents who chose Nationality, Culture, and other main components of Jewishness.

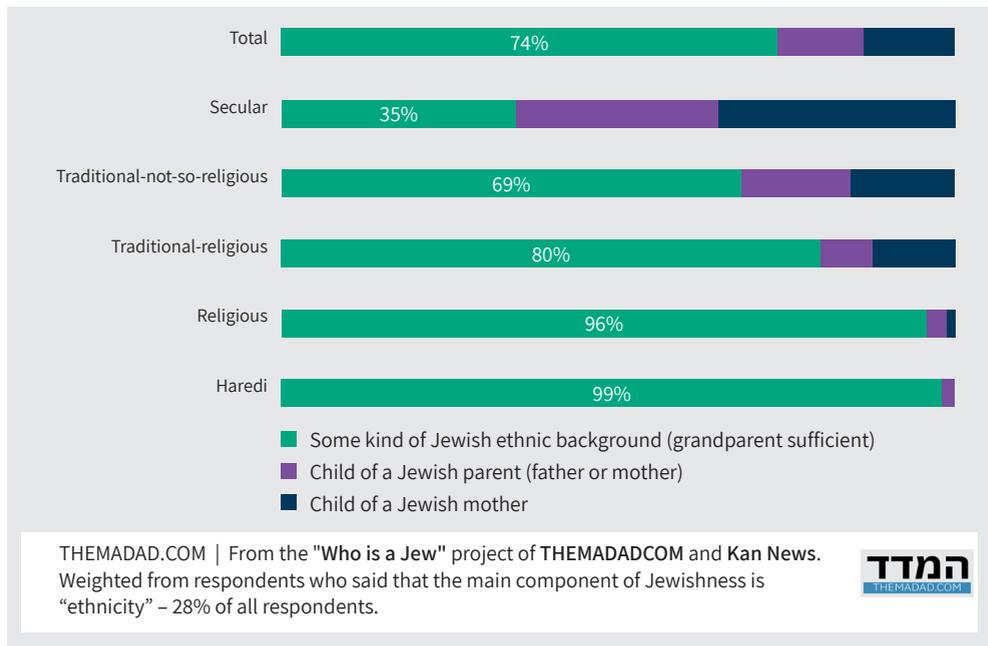
Among these respondents, the percentage of those who chose Jewish mother was five times greater than the percentage of those who chose Jewish parent as a Jewishness-defining criterion.

One must, of course, consider the possibility that this response on the part of Israeli Jews is largely a matter of habit. The Jewish-mother test has been accepted by Jews for many generations, and in Israel no urgent need has ever arisen to rethink this definition. The data indicates that the habit has been devoutly maintained in conservative circles that have no wish to create a large leeway for defining affiliation with the Jewish collective. By contrast, the data also shows that Jews from sectors that do not see themselves as obligated to the same degree by stringent tradition (i.e., those who self-define as secular) have a much stronger tendency to allow Jewish classification not only on the basis of matrilinear descent, but also on the basis of other possible options (Parent, Ethnicity, or Self-definition).

Accordingly, two-thirds of the secular who feel that Jewishness is a matter of Ethnicity also accept Ethnicity via a Jewish parent, or some kind of Jewish ethnic background (not necessarily via the mother) as a sufficient test of belonging. Furthermore: a third of secular Israeli Jews agree that Jewishness is a matter of self-definition, that is, they are willing to allow maximal flexibility that would define Jewishness as an individual affair with no other conditions beyond personal decision. In other, more traditionalist sectors, the percentage of those who accept self-definition as a sufficient condition for Jewishness, or who agree that Jewishness can be passed down automatically from a Jewish parent or via some kind of Jewish ethnic background, is much lower.

## Which of the following conditions are necessary for a person to be considered a Jew?

(of all respondents for whom Jewishness is primarily a matter of ethnicity)



The tendency of Israeli Jews to rely on the Jewish-mother criterion as the factor that determines a person's Jewishness is very easy to identify when we look at the responses to the study's first questions.

As mentioned above, the study was conducted, in part, as a kind of game. One feature of the game was the presentation of 12 fictional characters, each of which came with a brief description – a kind of résumé. The respondents were asked to decide, for each character, whether s/he was Jewish or not Jewish, or to state their inability to decide. The characters appear in the Appendix of this document.

When all the characters presented to the study participants are divided into two groups – those whose résumés mention a Jewish mother, and those whose résumés do not mention a Jewish mother – we can discern, even without reviewing the characters' detailed biographies, that Jews almost universally regard having a Jewish mother as a meaningful, and usually decisive, criterion of Jewish affiliation. Each fictional character in the study has other attributes

besides maternal parentage:

- Some converted while others did not.
- Some see themselves as Jews while others do not.
- Some live in Israel while others do not.

However, excluding Conversion, most of these attributes are largely overridden by the matrilineal issue. Basically, apart from Zamir (who, according to his résumé, converted in Israel, and is discussed in detail below), all those who do not have a Jewish mother were not designated Jewish by most participants who had an opinion on the matter.

By contrast, all characters with Jewish mothers were declared to be Jews by most of the participants who had an opinion, regardless of how the character currently self-identifies. Some of the characters' descriptions explicitly state that they do not identify as Jews.

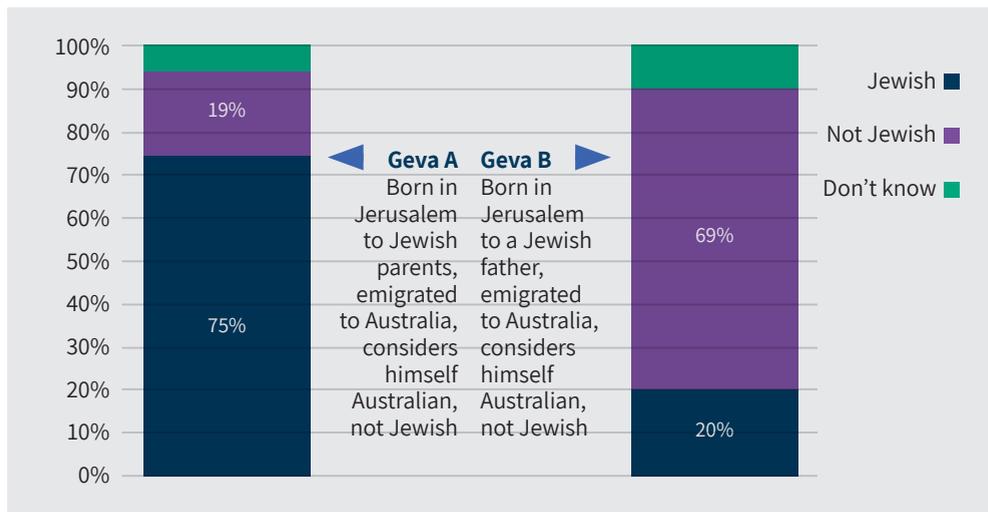
No Jewish mother	Non-Jews	Jews	Jewish mother
		64%	Ilya
Betty	58%		
		75%	Geva A
Geva B	69%		
		87%	Dana
Helena	49%		
		53%	Vlady
		86%	Chemi
Yael	65%		
		82%	Daniel
Miriam	65%		
Exceptions: no Jewish mother, converted			
Zamir	33%	61%	Reform conversion in Israel
Tavi	45%	45%	Reform conversion abroad

The insights gleaned from the chart listing all characters are emphasized when we investigate a specific character for whom we made an explicit effort to examine the maternal component.

During half of the research process, the fictional Geva was described as having Jewish parents (mother and father). This was later changed slightly and Geva was described as having only a Jewish father. Apart from this, no other changes were made to the character. When we examined the discrepancy between these two versions of Geva, which we refer to here as Geva A (Jewish parents) and Geva B (Jewish father), we saw clearly how the switch from a Jewish father and mother to a Jewish father, negated Geva’s Jewishness in the opinion of most Jewish respondents:

- Geva A is **Jewish** for 75% of the Jewish respondents.
- Geva B is **not Jewish** for 69% of the Jewish respondents.

### Is the son of a Jewish father Jewish? Geva A versus Geva B



### Flexibility and Traditionalism

As with nearly all questions pertaining to Jewishness, whether ideological or practical, the Flexibility component was closely linked to the traditionalism scale for Israeli Jews, and it does not matter whether traditionalism is divided into four, five, or seven levels.

In the analysis of the present study, use was primarily made of a corresponding Central Bureau of Statistics scale:

- Secular
- Traditional-not-so-religious
- Traditional-religious
- Religious
- Haredi

In JPPI surveys we sometimes use a seven-group scale:

- Totally secular
- Secular-somewhat traditional
- Traditional
- Liberal religious
- Religious
- National Haredi
- Haredi

However, it should be noted that the traditionalism level, which for the survey participants sets the rules pertaining to the basic level of affiliation with the Jewish collective (the need for a Jewish mother) does not necessarily imply binding behaviors beyond that.

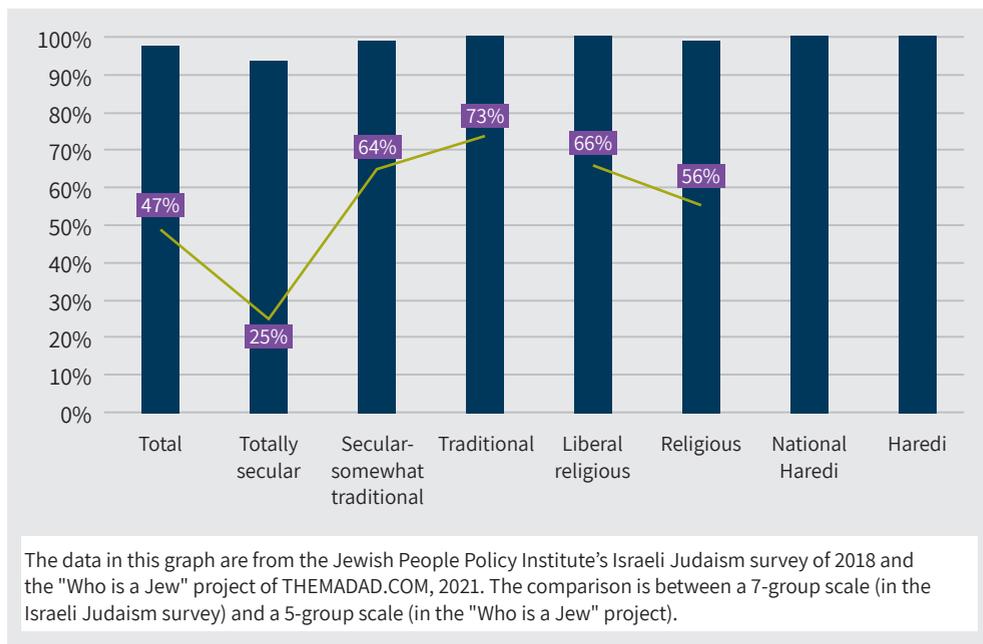
The fact that the desire exists to use a traditional-halachic criterion to determine Jewishness does not attest to a desire to implement halachic criteria on other issues of any kind. The fact is that when we consider the critical stance taken by many Israeli Jews toward the Rabbinical establishment, and the reality that a substantial majority of Israeli Jews do not observe Halacha, we can assume that, at least for some Israelis, the Jewish-mother criterion was not chosen because it is the accepted halachic criterion of the Rabbinate (or of rabbis), but rather despite its being the Rabbinate's accepted halachic criterion.

Accordingly, only a very small number of Jews, whether from the secular or the religious and Haredi (ultra-Orthodox) ends of the spectrum, agree with the statement: "Jews are only those who observe mitzvot (religious commandments)." One percent of all Jews, and 5% of the Haredi sector (the

highest level of agreement) concur with this statement. The idea that Jewishness depends on faith in God also receives little backing from any of the sectors. Only 7% of all Israeli Jews agree with that criterion. The sector with the highest level of agreement is the traditional-religious sector, at 12%.

The gaps pertaining to flexibility and its absence can thus be discerned mainly with regard to the formal basis of belonging to the Jewish collective and not in terms of expectations about specific behaviors, beliefs, or opinions of Jews. Even regarding a custom such as circumcision, which a near-absolute majority of Israeli Jews uphold (per the Israeli Judaism study), we find a considerable percentage of Jews (over half of all Jews) who do not see it as a criterion of Jewishness or agree with the statement that those who do not observe the custom are less Jewish than others. We see the answer to this question as a kind of testimony to Jews' hesitation to set a behavioral criterion of any kind for determining who is a Jew or even who is "more" Jewish.

### Circumcision: Who does it, who thinks it is necessary (to be considered Jewish)

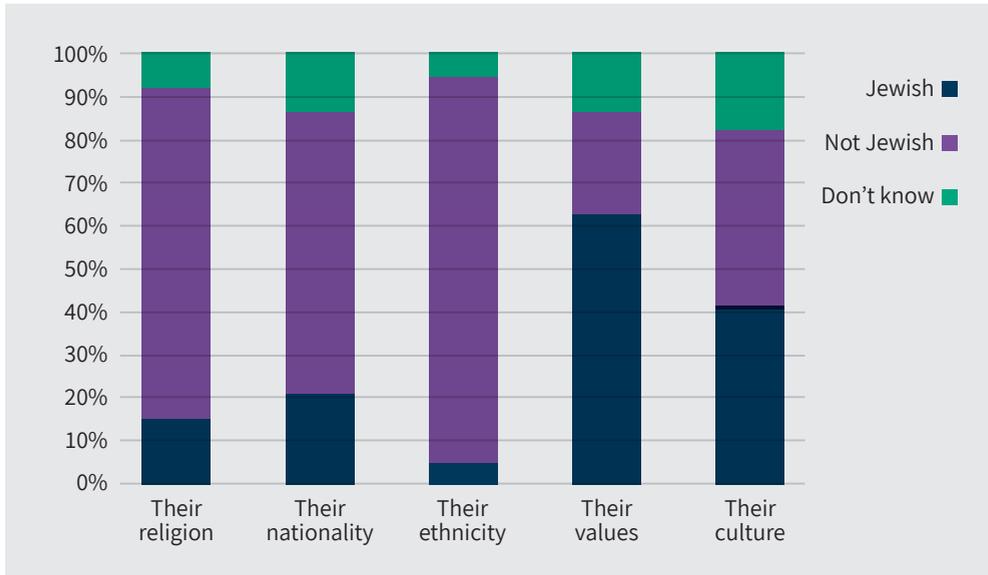


## Principles and Reality

One conclusion that clearly emerges from a review of the respondent data is that a great many Jews find it very hard to maintain complete consistency in their answers, especially with regard to complex human situations. The game structure of the “Who is a Jew” project did not only present the participants with abstract theoretical questions, as noted; it also confronted them with fictional characters, each of whom had a story of their own. The participants were asked to say, about each of the characters, whether they considered him or her Jewish or not.

In most cases, we could see a correspondence between the participants’ abstract views and the way in which they judged and understood the specific situations of the characters to whom they were introduced. For example, the game included a character named Yael, whose story was that she had been raised in Los Angeles by non-Jewish parents, but had decided, as an adult, to live according to Jewish values. When participants were asked to say whether, in their opinion, Yael was Jewish or not, most of those who had said that Jewishness is primarily a matter of ethnicity stated that Yael was not Jewish in their view as she does not have Jewish parents or grandparents. They stated that Yael is not Jewish in their view as she does not have Jewish parents or grandparents. On the other hand, most of those who said that Jewishness is mainly values, recognized Yael’s Jewishness (63%). In general, one finds that those who chose softer definitions of Jewishness, definitions based on personal choice regarding values, or on culture, tended to regard Yael as Jewish. By contrast, those who chose the stricter definitions of a distinct collective (Nationality, Religion, Ethnicity), tended not to see Yael as Jewish.

**Who is a Jew: Yael was born in Los Angeles to non-Jewish parents. She decided to live according to Jewish ethical values.**



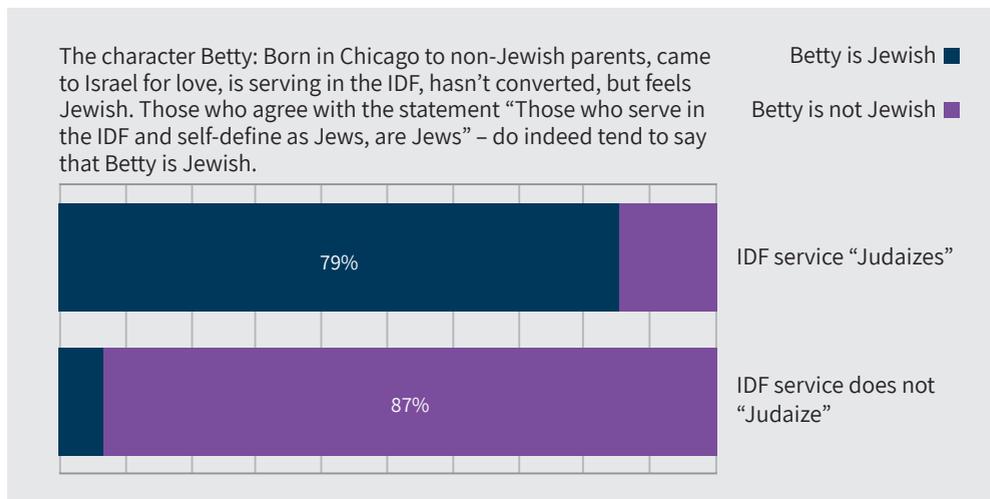
However, also regarding Yael we can see that a fair number of Jews said one thing in a theoretical context about the requirements of Jewishness, and another in a practical context of whether Yael is Jewish. For example, between 10% and 20% of those who stated that being Jewish is a Religion first and foremost, felt that Yael, by virtue of her decision to self-define as a Jew, deserves to be considered as belonging to the Jewish collective (which they regard as primarily a religious collective).

Such discrepancies can also be seen in other instances. Here is another example: The game included a character named Betty, born to non-Jewish parents, who came to Israel for love and is serving in the IDF. Most Israeli Jews (58%) see her as non-Jewish, but a substantial minority (34%) think that Betty should be considered a Jew. Why? Apparently, living in Israel and serving in the IDF are the explanations for this, as is evident from a cross-referencing of the responses pertaining to Betty’s Jewishness with those of another question, in which the participants were asked whether they agree or disagree with the statement “Those who serve in the IDF and self-define as Jews, are Jews.”

Four out of ten Israeli Jews concur with the proposition that IDF service reflects a process of joining the Jewish people. Among secular Jews 64% agree. Agreement declines among the more traditional groups with traditional-not-so-religious – 36%, traditional-religious – 18% and so on.

In order to test the consistency of the responses, we cross-referenced the answers given in the specific case of Betty, the IDF soldier, with those given to the theoretical question about IDF service constituting a gateway to Jewishness. The correspondence level was very high.

- 79% of those who feel that IDF service is enough for someone to be considered Jewish also said that Betty is a Jew.
- 87% of those who did not agree that IDF service is a key to Jewishness said that Betty is not a Jew.
- 10% of those who felt that IDF service is sufficient, nevertheless declared Betty non-Jewish.
- 5% of those who stated that IDF service is insufficient, nevertheless said that Betty is a Jew.
- Nearly 10% were unable to say whether they considered Betty a Jew.



## The Exclusivity Question

In one question, the respondents were asked to answer directly regarding the degree to which they feel that Jewishness entails exclusivity. The question was worded in a focused manner, such that responses to it cannot be seen as comprehensive statements about possible preferences for flexibility versus rigidity. However, the question may be able to provide indications on this matter as well. We asked: “In your view, is being Jewish a Yes or No situation, or can one also be a partial Jew or Jewish to a certain degree?” Israeli Jews lean toward exclusivity in answer to this question, with 70% saying that Jewishness is a binary state. One is either Jewish, or not. Even most secular respondents stated that there is no partial state of Jewishness, though a significant proportion (45%) do feel that such a state is possible.

The question about the exclusivity of Jewishness is especially interesting to analyze in comparison with another question: “If someone self-defines as Jewish, but says s/he also has another identity (such as Buddhist, atheist), is this person a Jew in your opinion? Not all of the survey participants were requested to answer this question. It was answered mainly by secular participants, a large majority of whom felt that it is possible to have both a Jewish identity and an additional identity. When these respondents were posed a follow-up question presenting a list of possible identities and were asked to state which could or could not be maintained alongside a Jewish identity – that is “Do you regard someone who says s/he is both a Jew and a ... as Jewish?” – it emerged that several parallel identities, such as Jewish and French were acceptable to nearly all respondents, while other combinations like Jewish and Christian were matters of dispute. However, as we can see, there are a fair number of Jewish Israelis who feel that it is possible, in theory, to be both Jewish and Christian. A similar percentage feel that one can be both Jewish and Muslim. A larger percentage feel that it is possible to be both Jewish and Buddhist. And a still larger percentage think that one can be both a Jew and an atheist.

Various types of identity were deliberately included in the options list, including:

- An additional national Jewish and French identity.
- Ideological position regarding God’s existence (Jewish and atheist or agnostic).

- Additional religious identities, referring to sister faiths (Christianity and Islam), and to religions theologically and historically distant from Judaism (Buddhism).

Most secular respondents to the questionnaire, who feel that one can be both Jewish and Christian, or Jewish and Muslim, were probably not taking a halachic stand. Their answer is based on other modes of reasoning. For example: there are those who feel that Judaism is primarily affiliation with the Jewish nation. If that is the main thing, and if the religious element of Judaism is less important, than a person can, at least in theory, belong to the Jewish nation even if s/he adheres to a different religion, say, Islam. Furthermore: there are those who accept the idea of Jewishness with an additional identity based on the understanding that in the postmodern world, people sometimes maintain several different, and occasionally conflicting, identities simultaneously.

It is worth noting that even this question has implications for relations between Israeli Jews and Diaspora Jews, who are accustomed to a category of Jewishness that is not an exclusive identity. Studies conducted in the US have indicated that a fair number of people see themselves as both Jewish and something else. In a 2013 Pew Center study, 34% of the respondents said that they see no contradiction between Jewishness and believing that Jesus is the Messiah. Several years later in a study conducted by the known and respected Brenner Institute, which sparked professional controversy, a fifth of young Jews believe that Jesus is the son of God. Returning to last year's study of Jews in Chicago, 7% of all those designated Jewish by the researchers were classified as Jews of several faiths. That is, people who are not exclusively Jewish, at least in terms of their religion.<sup>23</sup>

This is an interesting position for many reasons, one of which is the Israeli legal stance, as established in the Rufeisen ruling (discussed in the next section), according to which Jews who have converted to other faiths are not considered Jews.

But in the context of Israeli research, a similar situation can be based on that found in other communities, in which no active conversion takes place and people are educated from the outset to embrace a dual identity, Jewish and something else. (Israeli Supreme Court interpreted conversion as a choice to leave the Jewish people).

Such a situation exists among a certain percentage of mixed families in communities around the world.<sup>24</sup> As noted, 30% of Israeli Jews feel that there can be a Jewishness that is not exclusive, but rather coexists with another identity that leaves Jewishness as a partial identity.

### **The Rufeisen Case**

In 1962 a priest named Shmuel Oswald Rufeisen (known as Brother Daniel) petitioned the Supreme Court to instruct the state to recognize him as a Jew according to the Law of Return. Rufeisen was born Jewish but converted while hiding in a Catholic convent during the Holocaust. In the late 1950s he came to Israel as a Carmelite priest. He asked to be recognized as a Jew, despite having embraced a different faith. The Supreme Court denied his request, arguing that Jews themselves do not regard a Jew who converts to another religion as Jewish. The justices did acknowledge that according to Halacha, Rufeisen would be considered a Jew. This is not a consensus view of all halachic decisors but is accepted by a large proportion of them.<sup>25</sup> However, the term Jew in the Law of Return is not a matter of religious law but rather reflects a national and cultural outlook, according to which an apostate is not considered Jewish.

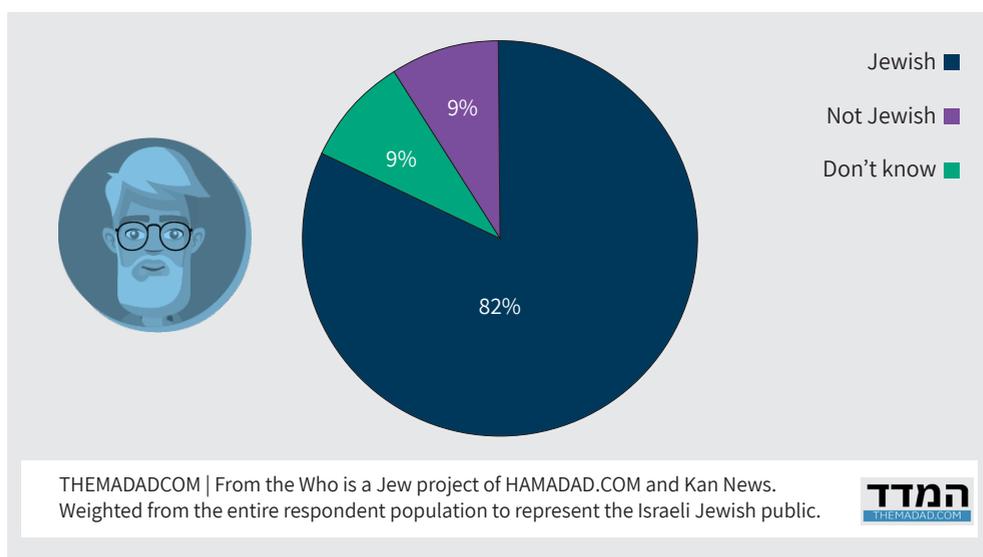
In essence, as the late Professor Ruth Gavison noted, the Supreme Court decided that the “test of a person’s affiliation with the Jewish people per the Law of Return is not subjective (dependent solely on the petitioner’s sense of belonging), nor is it halachic (since, according to Halacha, a Jew who converts to another religion remains Jewish for some purposes), but is objective, popular.” By this, the Court meant that, because the accepted view among the general public is that a person who has converted to Christianity is no longer a Jew, the Law of Return should make the same determination. Justice Haim Cohen gave the minority opinion, stating that “all those who declare in good faith that they are Jewish, even if they adhere to another faith, should be registered as Jews”.

Justice Berensohn, for instance, put it thus: “The people [...] decided otherwise and acted otherwise throughout the generations. For the people, an apostate has dissociated himself not only from the Jewish faith, but also from the Jewish nation and has no place in the community of Israel. It is not for nothing that a Jew who converted to another faith was called a meshumad (a destroyed one),

as from a national point of view he was seen as one who was exterminated and cut off from the people, he and his descendants, and his family would ritually rend their garments as for a dead person and cut off all contact with him. In the people's common understanding, Jew and Christian cannot coexist in the same person, Jew and Catholic priest even less so, they are a contradiction."

In this study, we sought to put to the test the Supreme Court's ruling on what Justice Berensohn called "the people's decision," i.e., the popular view regarding a Jewish apostate. In practice, we did this by presenting a fictional character with a very similar story to that of Brother Daniel. We called this character Daniel, and his brief biography states that he converted in order to survive the Holocaust. He remained Christian and came to live in Israel, considers himself both Christian and Jewish. What do the Jews say about this? The answer is that today, at least among Israeli Jews, a large majority feel that he is Jewish. Furthermore: a substantial majority in all Israeli sectors regard Daniel as a Jew, from the secular (87%) to the ultra-Orthodox (90%). Basically, of all the characters we presented, Daniel was one of the least controversial. What the Supreme Court justices debated over seems altogether clear –and the opposite of what the justices decided! – fifty years later.

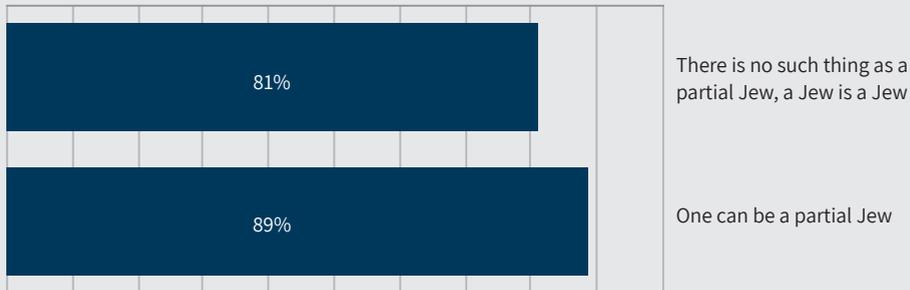
### **Daniel – Converted to Christianity in order to survive the Holocaust, remained Christian, and came to live in Israel; considers himself both Christian and Jewish**



This is a fascinating outcome, and a number of conjectures can be made about the factors behind it. But first we should note that the question in the study, unlike the issue faced by the Supreme Court justices, was not whether Daniel is entitled to be admitted to Israel as an immigrant per the Law the Return, but whether the respondents consider him a Jew. The question on which the Court deliberated was that of the Law of Return's applicability – who is a Jew in the context of the Law of Return. The question asked in the study was: “Who is a Jew in your opinion?” One may reasonably speculate that the answers would have been similar had we asked about the Law of Return's applicability to Daniel, but this is not certain.

This being the case, what are the potential explanations behind so very unequivocal an opinion on the part of Israeli Jews? One possibility is that the popular decision effectively aligns with the halachic view, and because Jewish law tends toward recognizing a Jewish apostate as still being Jewish, so do Israeli Jews. This possibility is definitely supported by the fact that a large majority of ultra-Orthodox and religious respondents said that Daniel is Jewish in their opinion. It is difficult, however, to fully embrace this option, as a majority of non-religious or non-ultra-Orthodox Jews are unlikely to be well-informed about Jewish law on this issue. Another possibility, therefore, is that the popular view in this case is influenced less by the viewpoint held by Daniel who says that he is a Jew, or that he feels Jewish, than by his life circumstances (Holocaust survivor). In our estimation, a substantial proportion of Israeli Jews may justifiably assume that someone whose extreme life circumstances led him to apostasy should not be judged according to standard criteria, and that his expressed desire should be prioritized over common custom. Here it is absolutely worth noting that when, in a different question, we asked whether a person can be Jewish and Christian, a large majority of the respondents from all sectors except the secular sector did not answer in the affirmative. Also note that when we looked at how the respondents answered regarding Daniel compared with how they responded on the exclusivity of Jewishness (whether one can be part Jewish, or whether a Jew is a Jew), a large majority of those who felt that Jewishness is a binary state also said they consider Daniel (the Jew and Christian) to be Jewish.

Most of those who say that it is impossible to be a partial Jew (and even more of those who say that one can be a partial Jew) feel that Daniel, despite being Christian, is still a Jew



## THE AUTHORITY COMPONENT

The Rufeisen ruling, and the Shalit ruling issued many years later, are milestones in the development of Israeli philosophy regarding the “Who is a Jew” issue. However, as we have noted, there is a significant gap between legal rulings or governmental policy, which aim to regulate a specific issue by virtue of their authority, and questions pertaining to how all Jews feel with regard to affiliation, identity, and identification. It is clear that on issues that directly relate to state policy, state institutions are the bodies authorized to determine guiding principles. But on the question of broader authority to decide on affiliation with the Jewish collective, there is no such clarity. To this question, a few theoretical answers may therefore be proposed.

1. There are **fixed rules** that are decisive on this issue. In such cases, it is still necessary to determine who is qualified to investigate whether someone meets the conditions. But this is fundamentally a technical question, one of set rules. For example: let us suppose it has been decided that someone with a Jewish mother is also a Jew. All that then needs to be done is to find out whether the mother is indeed Jewish, and the question is merely one of who does the checking and confirms the information.

2. There are **rules that change** from time to time, and the question is **who is authorized to change them** and according to what criteria. For example: many now agree, due to the modern world's changing norms and a change in outlook among a large segment of the Jewish people, that those who have a Jewish father should now be considered Jews if they so desire. This is a decision that was made by the Reform movement in the US during the 1980s, but it has not been accepted by all streams of Judaism. The question of whether the Reform movement was authorized to make such a decision is a matter of controversy.
3. **There are no agreed-upon rules**, and it is doubtful whether a consensus could be reached on rules regarding who is a Jew. The question, rather, is that of **the spectrum of possibilities** that lie within the range of the Jewish people's consensus, and who draws the boundaries of that range? For instance: Is the person in the earlier example, recognized as Jewish by the Reform movement, also accepted as a Jew by the Jewish collective in some way or other, or can no consensus be reached on this issue either?

The Authority question has at least four decision-making levels.

1. Personal level of decision, each person for themselves, both with regard to who s/he is, and with regard to how s/he identifies others.
2. Vaguer level of Jewish institutions with a broad, sometimes global, sphere of influence, which include organizations such as the Jewish Agency, Jewish Federations and the like, that aspire to shape policy not specific to a community but rather to the Jewish people.
3. Basic communal level, each community according to its size (synagogue, Jews in a given city, Jews belonging to a particular movement, etc.), and according to how it defines those whom it accepts as Jews and how it defines their affiliation.
4. The State of Israel for whom decisions are fundamentally different for two reasons:
  - a. It is the only one of the four institutions that is not voluntary. Citizens of Israel are subject to the state's decisions and authority, whether they want to be or not.

- b. It is the only institution whose decision-making processes are clear and regulated. There is no theoretical difficulty in deciding via the authorized bodies (the Knesset, the cabinet, the courts) what the rules are for determining affiliation with the group that the state defines as the Jewish collective. Of course, the state's definition will not necessarily be accepted by all Jews, but it will be binding on all issues subject to state authority.

Israeli public debate on the “Who is a Jew” question has generally focused on the fourth level of decision-making: the formal level, that of Israeli state decisions. This is both because the question has been placed on the agenda in the context of public controversies or proposed legislation aimed at institutional regulation of the issues arising from it, and because this is the level at which matters can most easily be clarified, as it is oriented toward the legal-bureaucratic end of things, rather than the identity-investigation end. This, for example, is how an Israeli jurist established a clear connection between the state's position on an institutional question and the deep and fundamental issue of modern Jewish identity: Jewishness is a religion. And yet, from the time the Law of Return of 1950 determined that every Jew has the right to come to this country as an *oleh*, and from the time the Law was amended in 1970 to state “a Jew is a person who was born of a Jewish mother or has become converted to Judaism and who is not a member of another religion and can receive Israeli citizenship”, the state has effectively been the one to determine who is a Jew.”<sup>26</sup>

None of the terms or expressions used in this brief passage are straightforward. Is Jewishness *per se* a religion? We have already seen that most Jews do not view Religion as the main component of Jewishness. Even if we assume that the court or the state does regard Judaism as a religion (and that is not the case), this does not mean that the opinion of the court/state outweighs that of the rest of the people, in terms of making an authoritative decision. Furthermore: does the state actually determine who is a Jew? The answer to this question is also negative. The state actually determines who will be considered a Jew for purposes of definition in a given matter. Who is a Jew for purposes of the Law of Return, marriage, registration, or any other issue in which the state has an interest and a need for definitions. But this does not constitute deciding on the question of “who is a Jew” but rather on a much more limited question relating to specific issues that the state has chosen to define as pertaining to Jewishness.<sup>27</sup>

It would, of course, be possible to decide that this determination is also what defines who is a Jew generally, but that is a decision that the state itself has no interest in making, if only because most Jews are not its citizens, and it would be a highly controversial decision that would probably be best left in the hands of other institutions.

Justice Moshe Zilberg, sitting on the Supreme Court panel that deliberated on the Shalit affair (the controversy over recognition of Captain Binyamin Shalit's children, whose mother was not Jewish, as Jews<sup>28</sup>), gave colorful expression to this view when he called the issue "A shoe that is bigger than all of our feet, and even of the collective foot of all of the state's inhabitants." He did, of course, ultimately render a decision, but only because "the die was cast – the application was submitted – and we are no longer free to avoid addressing it." That is, the Court has no choice but to provide remedy to petitioners even on issues whose natural place is not the court.

In any event, when we examine the responses to our questionnaire, we have to consider the possibility that they were given with reference to various possible strata of the question. When one of the respondents tells us that a Jew is someone whose mother is a Jew, s/he may mean that this, in their view, is correct in an identity context, but s/he may also mean that this is how it should be in a formal context. Or, to use another example, when a respondent states that the only form of conversion s/he regards as valid is Orthodox conversion, s/he may mean that, in their view, the state should not recognize any other form of conversion, or s/he may mean that they themselves do not regard those who undergo non-Orthodox conversion as Jewish.

The possibilities can also be set forth as follows:

- Are those whom you consider to be Jews those whom the state should consider to be Jews?
- Those whose friends should consider them as Jews?
- Those whom you would agree to include in a synagogue minyan (prayer quorum)?

Each of these interpretations leads to a slightly different way of understanding the survey responses, and even if, in drafting the questions, an effort was made to clarify that the study aims to illuminate issues of identity, as opposed to

formal-legal issues, we must admit that in some of the cases we have no means of knowing exactly what the respondents meant.

### **Individual Authority**

A hidden assumption supports this study, namely that the decisions of Jews as individuals are important in terms of setting criteria for Jewishness. Those who do not feel this way (and a few such responses were received, though not many), may decide not to participate in the survey, for fear of creating the impression that they accept this hidden assumption, which may contradict their assumption that the authority lies in other hands (the state, the rabbis, the Jewish Agency, whoever). Beyond this hidden assumption, we also included questions in the study that could testify to the importance that participants attach to the opinions of the Jews themselves, versus the views of authoritative entities above the level of the individual. Among other things, the array of fictional characters we presented included several who made a personal decision, and we examined whether their decisions were accepted by other Jews. We also explicitly asked about the possibility that a personal decision could be what determines a person's Jewishness.

An over two-thirds majority of the participants do not accept the idea that people can decide for themselves, with no external criteria, whether they are Jews. The only sector in which there is broad acceptance of such a possibility, among half of the respondents, is the secular sector. We can see in this both an answer to the concrete question about self-definition's validity as a test of Jewishness, and an answer to questions about several fictional characters. One example is that of Miriam, an athlete who lives in Israel, has won an Olympic medal for the country, and wants to be recognized as Jew, but without converting. A substantial majority of all Jews (65%) do not see Miriam as Jewish. However, among the secular respondents, about half (48%) view her as Jewish, versus a smaller group (41%) who do not accept her Jewishness. The rest have no opinion.

This gap between secular and non-secular Jews does not stem directly from their understanding of the Jewish question, but rather from the strong emphasis placed by secular society on the right of all individuals to self-definition. This gap is highly visible in the context of Jewishness, just as it is visible in the context of defining gender identity.

## Conditions of Change

In the “Who is a Jew” project we can see different and sometimes conflicting approaches, both toward the Jewish-establishing criteria themselves (fixed or varying, and subject to change by whom), and toward the entities that aspire to make decisions on the matter (from the individual to the state). On this score, the wider Jewish collective is no different from expert groups of various kinds that have tried to propose frameworks for decision-making, but have never reached points of consensus that would be accepted either by all of their members or by the public at large. This is true of voluntary forums that have addressed the “Who is a Jew” question, as well as of various professional committees, and the courts. The Shalit ruling, which embodied focused legal attention to the “who is a Jew” question, ultimately caused the issuing authority to be diverted from “who is a Jew” to “who is a convert” (the matter having been decided by the legislative branch). A question that remained open to recurrent and point-specific ruling by the courts.

In any case, only a small number of all Jews who responded to the survey, hold the view that favors fixed rules that are not subject to change, and only a few felt that the issue of authority had already been decided in a non-controversial manner.

The following is a marginal example of this point, which we see as reflecting the general situation: A substantial majority of the ultra-Orthodox respondents feel that the main component of Jewishness is Ethnicity (65%). All these respondents feel that Ethnicity means having a **Jewish mother**. On this point there is broad consensus among the ultra-Orthodox. Moreover: nearly all of the ultra-Orthodox feel that conversion is possible, and that conversion means Orthodox conversion (97%). The question of authority would, in any case, seem relatively simple where the ultra-Orthodox are concerned. The ultra-Orthodox feel that the decision about who is a Jew belongs to the Orthodox rabbis. Yet even this opinion requires clarification: Who is the Orthodox rabbi whose decision is valid? On this question, which is one of authority, there is no consensus. A quarter of the ultra-Orthodox accept any Orthodox conversion, while others accept only conversions by the Chief Rabbinate, or say that they accept “only some conversions.”<sup>29</sup> That is: even within a group whose views on the chief identity component are relatively homogeneous, the authority question remains not

fully resolved. This situation will remain to a much greater degree if and when the conversion bill proposed by the former Minister of Religious Services, Matan Kahana is passed. It appears that the bill pertains only to conversions accepted by the Orthodox Jewish society as a whole, but in reality it puts the authority question to the test. The large Israeli religious/ultra-Orthodox population that opposes the proposed legislation does not accept the government's authority to decentralize the institution of conversion which, at present, is concentrated, until such time as the legislation is passed, in the hands of the Chief Rabbinate.

A significant majority of the ultra-Orthodox feel that the rules establishing affiliation with the Jewish collective are identical in Israel and outside it. This is a point that merits discussion, as the question of uniform rules in Israel and abroad gives an interesting indication regarding the potential for flexibility, both in defining affiliation and on the matter of authority. Clearly, those who feel that the rules are unbendable will see no reason why a Jewish woman in Israel should be subject to different rules of belonging from those that apply to a Jewish woman in Chicago. Indeed, the position of most Israeli Jews on this question is quite unyielding. Only a small percentage (10%) feel that different rules may be applied to Jews in Israel and the Diaspora, while a large majority believe that the same rules of affiliation should be applied, and a considerable subgroup supports both the application of these rules, and the appointment of the same deciding entities to determine who is a Jew.<sup>30</sup>

Thus, a significant gap exists on this question between the actual situation (Jewish communities abroad are not, nor do they normally see themselves as, subject to Israeli decisions on matters of Jewish identity) and the situation desired by most Israeli Jews for identical rules. That is, that Jews abroad will conform to the Israeli position on this issue, or that Israelis will change their approach and adapt it to the outlooks of other communities.

The reason for this sizeable gap between the actual and the desirable might be a lack of awareness. Israeli Jews do not understand that the situation in the Diaspora leads to other rules and entails other sources of authority. The gap might, alternatively, stem from dissatisfaction with the situation. Israeli Jews actually are aware of this but feel that it is wrong. Public opinion surveys in Israel have generally found Israeli Jews to be critical of the situation of Diaspora Jewry, particularly with regard to mixed marriages and assimilation. Half of Israeli

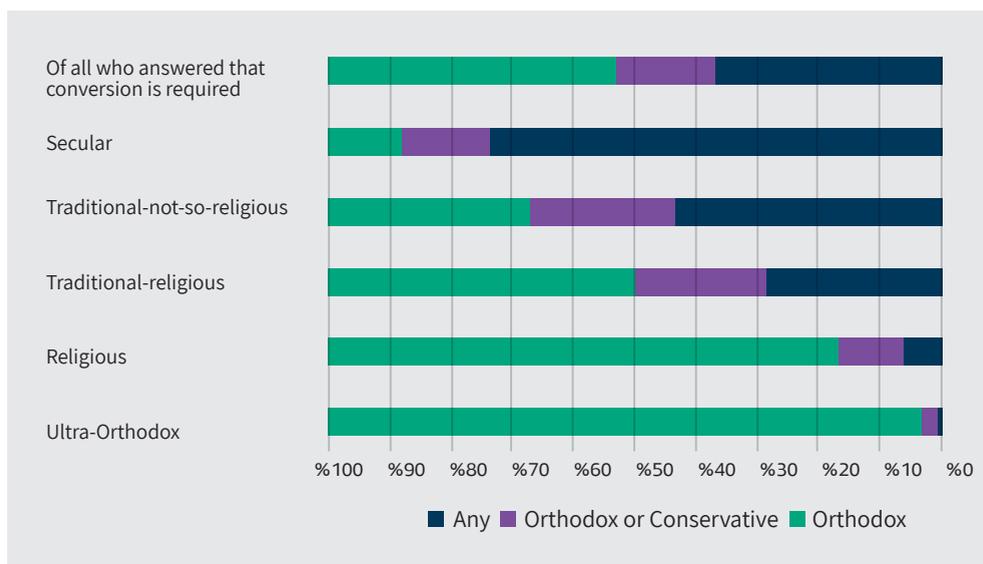
Jews see mixed marriages, which are very common among Diaspora Jews, as a significant threat to the Jewish people.<sup>31</sup>

When we look at the responses to the question about similar rules applying in Israel and the Diaspora, we must distinguish between the following different types of respondents:

- Those prepared for maximum flexibility (different rules and different decision-makers), who constitute a relatively small minority.
- Those who would allow flexibility with regard to authority but not with regard to the rules (different decision-makers only), who constitute the majority.
- Those who feel that full uniformity is required on the rules and the deciding authorities in all Jewish communities (a third of all who responded to the question).

It is of course not certain that the respondents to this specific question brought a high level of awareness to it, on whose basis firm conclusions could be drawn about their exact intentions. However, even an instinctive tendency to demand uniformity of rules, and often at the decision-making level, attests to a desire for a definition of Jewishness whose degree of uniformity is relatively high. This tendency is discernible also in another question, one pertaining to the idea of different degrees of Jewishness, which could potentially mean flexibility of definition, as opposed to a binary definition of Jewishness that would mean inflexibility (Jewishness with clear boundaries). On this question, there is a clear majority (70%) who deny the possibility of partial Jewishness or of being Jewish to a certain degree, and effectively assert that membership in the collective must be full membership if it is to be considered membership at all. The meaning of full membership in the collective is that the individual complies with a specific set of rules, and from that moment belongs to the collective. What these rules are is another question. Another question which we will now address, is that of whether only some of the rules need be met to ensure full membership in the collective.

## If conversion is necessary – what kind of conversion?



Two characters presented in the survey allow us to look at the question of authority from several interesting perspectives.

1. Zamir – described as follows: “Born in Netanya, non-Jewish mother, converted by a Reform rabbi in Israel.” In this case, 61% of the respondents said he is Jewish and 33% said he is not. Understandably, those who did not regard him as Jewish are the Jews who do not accept the authority of Reform conversion (an absolute majority of the ultra-Orthodox and a large majority of the religious).
2. Tavi – described as follows: “Born in Paris, non-Jewish parents, converted by a Reform rabbi in France, married to a non-Jew.” In this case, 45% said the character is Jewish, and 45% said he is not. Among the ultra-Orthodox and the religious there was no significant difference regarding Tavi, but among the traditional and the secular a difference could be detected. For example, while nine out of ten secular respondents said that Zamir is Jewish, only seven out of ten said that Tavi is Jewish.

This gap requires an explanation, and the explanation should be sought within two main issues:

1. Zamir underwent conversion in Israel.
2. Tavi married a non-Jewish woman after converting.

It is worth noting, however, that in both cases the conversions were performed by Reform rabbis. Thus, if we assume that a Reform rabbi has the authority to convert a non-Jew and make them a Jew, then there should not, in theory, be a major gap between the two converts. However, up to now no attention has been paid to an additional possibility that arises in the question with which we are currently concerned: Are the rules for establishing Jewishness identical in Israel and the Diaspora? Those who assume that the rules are the same will find it much harder to justify the decision to recognize Zamir's Jewishness while not recognizing Tavi's. This is still possible, if we establish that the marriage to a non-Jew is what made the difference. Those who assume that the rules are different, encounter no such difficulty. They can say that they recognize the authority of a Reform rabbi in Israel, but not that of a Reform rabbi in France (it is not very hard to justify distinguishing between the two cases).

Using the numerical data, we cross-referenced this question with another one, and the result makes it a little harder to provide a satisfactory explanation for the difference between Zamir and Tavi. Only 12% of those who say that Zamir is Jewish while Tavi is not, also say that there is no need to uphold the same rules of Jewishness in Israel and elsewhere. That is, a large majority of those who distinguish between these two converts do so despite the fact that, in theory, they believe that the rules should be identical. Theoretically, they should say that if one is Jewish then so is the other, or that if one is not Jewish then neither is the other.

This brings us back to three options:

1. This is one of the instances where the answers are inconsistent, and we should not draw conclusions from them about the respondents' true positions.
2. Most of the respondents feel that Reform conversion is valid only when it is performed in Israel. That is, on the question of authority, they recognize only the authority of Reform conversion in Israel.
3. These same respondents feel that Reform conversion is valid so long as the convert does not marry a non-Jew. That is, on the question of authority, they recognize the authority of Reform conversion, but only if it is not followed by the establishment of a household with a non-Jewish partner.

It appears, in any case, that two conclusions may be drawn from these examples:

- Most Israeli Jews recognize Reform conversion in Israel (the fact that they recognized the Jewishness of Zamir).<sup>32</sup>
- Most Israeli Jews seem to find it easier to accept Reform conversion in an Israeli context than in a non-Israeli context.

## THE CONTENT COMPONENT

The “who is a Jew” question is inextricably intertwined with that of “what is Judaism.” Some also link who is a Jew with the question of whether Judaism entails practices, faith, or a specific mode of conduct. That is, some feel that a connection to Judaism does not presuppose a content component, while others feel that it does. In this section we will discuss the content component, seen as necessary by the latter group. Accordingly, we will ask questions like:

1. Is Judaism a religion whose adherents must fulfill its ceremonial obligations?
2. Is Judaism a nationality whose members must face common challenges together?

Sub-questions will be derived from each of these questions:

1. How many of the obligations must be fulfilled in order to be considered Jewish?
2. What about those who do not meet their Jewish quota?
3. How about those who act contrary to the requirements?
4. What aspects of the activity/behavioral quota (if such a thing exists) are more or less important?

Many of these questions are hard to answer clearly, let alone in a manner that represents a consensus. But a process of gradual clarification enables us to map some of the contours of how Jews (in Israel) understand this thing that they call Judaism.

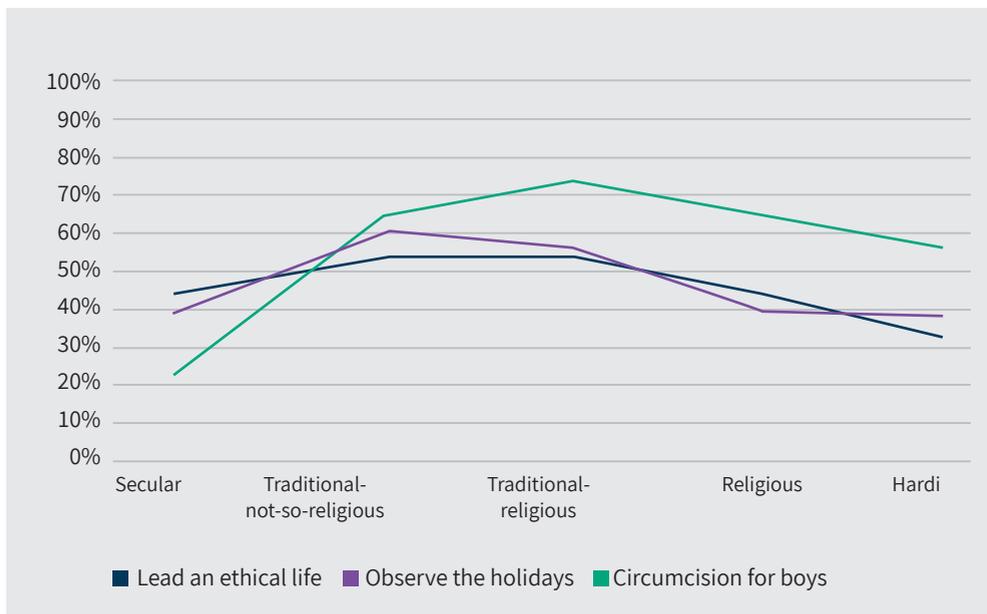
### **Secular Jews: Holidays and Torah**

We found no common element that all Israeli Jews, or even a large majority of them, agree is indispensable – a specific belief that one must share, or a specific

action that one must perform, in order to be Jewish, with those who do not share the belief/engage in the action being considered less Jewish. Of all the options we offered, it turned out that even things that most Israeli Jews feel should be done, such as remembering the Holocaust, are not prerequisites for membership in the Jewish community. In the case of Holocaust remembrance, for instance, only half of Israeli Jews say that those who do not remember the Holocaust are less Jewish than others (50%). This is the category that gained the highest share of agreement, followed by celebrating the holidays, circumcision, and leading an ethical life, each of which earned 47% agreement.

Of course, the overall share of those who agree in each category does not give an exhaustive picture of public attitudes. It is true that an identical percentage feel that circumcision is important and that leading an ethical life is important, but this percentage comes from different population groups in each case. Basically, there is one group that diverges from the others – the secular. In all the other groups, circumcision is a Jewish obligation that enjoys the highest degree of consensus; only among the secular is circumcision a matter of relatively low consensus (25%), with two other categories (living ethically and celebrating holidays) getting higher levels of agreement.

### What all Jews must do



Moreover: the secular tend, as a rule, to choose fewer categories of obligation. That is, they have a harder time identifying faith or any particular activity as adding to, or detracting from, a person's Jewishness. For many of them, a person is Jewish as such, without added criteria of continuing obligation. The sole category that most secular Jews see as binding is that of remembering the Holocaust (57%). By contrast, there are several categories for which their disregard is unequivocal and obvious compared with the other groups. This is naturally true of the categories pertaining to religious practice, such as fasting on Yom Kippur.

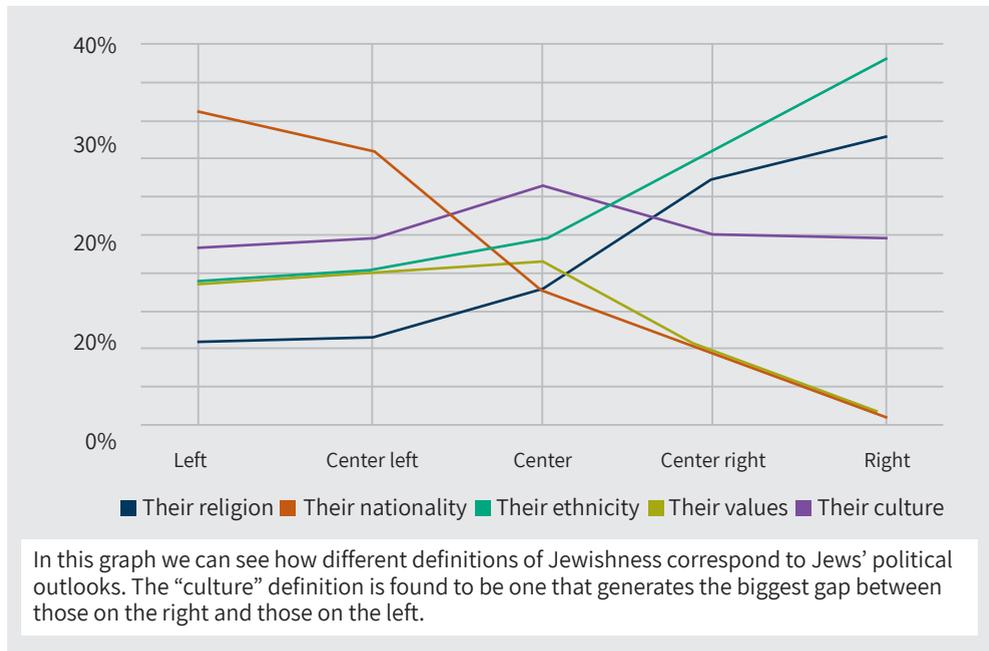
If we try to draw an overall conclusion from the data, we find that there are groups that more easily identify what Jewishness is in their opinion, while others find it harder to say precisely what it is that they share. This is what stands out among the secular in particular. Most secular Jews view Judaism as a culture or a nationality (together 60%). When we look at what they mean when they choose these definitions, we find that holiday and festival observance is a dominant marker of Jewishness for those who chose culture.

The widespread secular choice of a Jewishness of culture, (which is also the choice representing the widest gap on the political views scale – see the following graph), illuminates another intriguing characteristic, one relating to definitions and the way in which they are interpreted by respondents. Note the gap: when we asked whether Torah study is something that all Jews need to do, only 3% of secular participants responded in the affirmative. In general, Torah study does not enjoy a high level of consensus. Among the ultra-Orthodox the percentage is quarter to a third. By contrast, when we asked those who chose Judaism as a culture, whether they meant by this, the study of Jewish texts and Jewish history, nearly 60% of the secular population who had chosen that category gave an affirmative answer.

This means that there are many more secular Jews who view the study of Jewish texts as a meaningful component of Jewishness, and many fewer secular Jews who view Torah study as a necessary component of Jewishness. Of course, this is not a precise comparison of identical categories, as the questions were worded differently and were directed at groups of differing characteristics. Still, such a large gap between the answers raises suspicions that the word Torah, which has religious connotations, is what repels the secular, who essentially believe that the study of Jewish texts is actually an important identity element.

Over a quarter of the secular respondents chose Nationality as the chief component of Jewishness. This selection also sheds light on interesting differences vis-à-vis similar but not identical questions. When we asked whether all Jews are obligated to love Jews (especially), 13% of the secular participants responded in the affirmative. When we asked those who had answered Nationality if they were referring to a sense of connection to all Jews whoever and wherever they are, 63% said Yes. Again – there is a difference between the questions, from which we can learn something about the way in which secular Jews prefer to relate to their Judaism. The first question talks about obligation to all Jews. The secular, in general, feel less comfortable with obligation. It is no coincidence that they are also called *chofshiim* (free) in Hebrew.

In the second question the matter is not one of obligation, but of nationality, in which the secular have an interest. Furthermore: the first question asks about especially loving Jews, a statement that hints at the exclusion of other groups (loving Jews more than others). The second question asks about a fictive connection to all Jews, with no hint of preferring Jews to others. These differences seem to be what enables a much higher share of secular respondents to accept the second suggestion (connection to Jews) rather than the first (special love for Jews), even if these are actually very similar actions or tendencies.



## Judaism as a Religion

One out of five Israeli Jews sees Religion as the main component of Jewishness. Among them the presence of religious and traditional-religious Jews stands out: a third of these latter groups chose Religion (32% and 35%, respectively). When we asked the participants who chose this category what the Religion definition means to them, we could again discern gaps between different groups.

Most secular respondents who chose Religion (12% of all secular respondents), said that they meant observing holidays and fasts. Although they chose the Religion pathway rather than the Culture pathway, the final destination was the same. Both groups of secular respondents were referring, above all, to holiday observance as the most important element of Jewish life. By contrast, most of the traditionalist and religious Jews (from traditional-not-so-religious to ultra-Orthodox) who chose Religion identified belief in God as a main component. For the traditional-religious, religious, and ultra-Orthodox respondents, this was the most commonly chosen component of Jewishness. The next-most-frequently chosen component was observance of all/some of the mitzvot (religious commandments).<sup>33</sup>

The issue of belief in God appeared in two separate places in the questionnaire:

- As a binding demand “Only those who believe in God are Jews.”
- As a major component among an array of Jewishness components.

When we compare the two questions it is completely clear that a categorical demand for faith as a condition of Jewishness is rejected by a very large majority of Jews, including those belonging to groups whose members self-identify in very high percentages as believers. On the other hand, it is clear that belief in God is still a central element of Jewishness in the opinion of major Jewish subgroups.

Earlier studies, including JPPI studies, found that the percentage of Israeli Jews who believe in God is 80%, with most of these Jews saying they “believe with perfect faith” (58%<sup>34</sup>). Per JPPI research, the only group with a majority of non-believers, those who answered that they “believe there is no God” or “don’t believe in God, but sometimes I think maybe there is a God, even so” is the totally secular group. In all the other groups there is a substantial majority of believers, even among the secular-somewhat traditional, over two-thirds believe

in God. Thus, it is not especially surprising to find that faith is still a meaningful component of identity in the opinion of many Israeli Jews, even if they do not feel that it is a necessary component.

## **Judaism as Values**

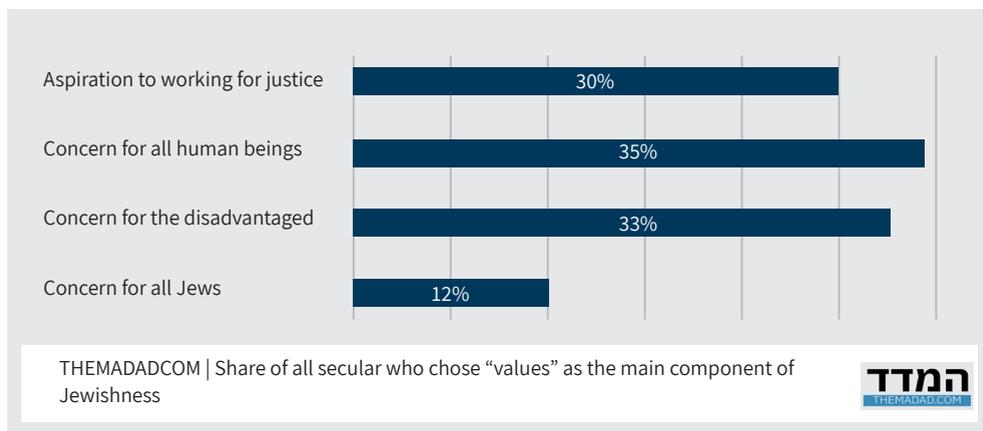
A fair number of Jews include among their chosen Jewish identity components, the aspiration to uphold values that are important to them, such as justice, equality, concern for the disadvantaged, and the like. Half say that those who do not lead an ethical life are less Jewish than those who do. The ultra-Orthodox diverge slightly on this issue, with a smaller share of those who view Living Ethically as a binding category. A third of the Jews feel that “concern for the disadvantaged in society” is also a binding category and those who do not share such concern are less Jewish. On this question, the ultra-Orthodox also diverge from the other groups. However, when the participants were given the option to choose Values as the main component of Jewishness, only a minority (10%) did so, most of whom were secular. But note: even among the secular, those who choose Values are a small minority (16%); they are simply a larger minority than in the other groups (3% of the religious).

The Values category was deliberately included in the category set so that Israeli Jews could have an option that corresponds with a very meaningful aspect of Jewish identity in the American-Jewish sister community, the world’s largest Jewish community. Studies of this community repeatedly indicate that a large proportion of American Jews regard general humanistic values of concern for others, aspiration to justice, and more, as major components of Jewish identity. When the Pew Center offered for a second time, in 2020, a set of options to Jewish Americans, 72% chose “leading an ethical and moral life” as essential to being Jewish, while 59% chose “working for justice and equality in society.” These are much higher percentages than for the options of “continuing family traditions” and “caring about Israel” as central identity components.

What do (the mainly) secular Israelis mean when they say that Values are the chief element of Jewishness? Those who make this choice are, of course, small in number relative to the entire Israeli Jewish community, but they also exhibit a desire to adopt humanistic, sector-transcending, rules of behavior and ethics

as an expression of Jewish identity. Thus, they ranked such components as “concern for the disadvantaged” and “concern for all human beings” much higher than “concern for all Jews.”

### What do you mean when you say “values?”



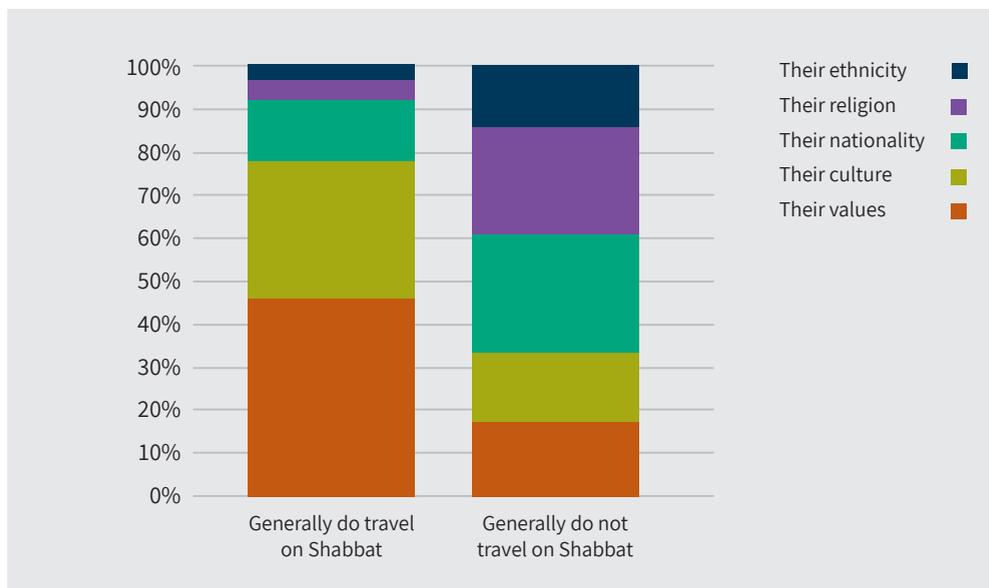
### Judaism as Culture

Culture as a defining element of Jewish identity is the first choice of the secular public, and the second choice of the traditional-not-so-religious public. This is a choice that also has a clear political dimension and is distinctly associated with a large percentage of those on the left of the political spectrum. Among the ultra-Orthodox and the religious, only a few think of Judaism as primarily a Religion (0% and 3%, respectively), while among the non-mitzvah-observing Israeli subgroups, the proportions ranged from a fifth to a quarter.

If we divide Israeli society into two groups based, say, on whether they travel on Shabbat or do not travel on Shabbat, i.e., clear categories of mitzvah observance and non-observance, we find that each of these groups has its own notable Judaism components. Sectors that do not generally travel on Shabbat (ultra-Orthodox, religious, and traditional-religious, most of whom still do not travel<sup>35</sup> (on Shabbat) largely prefer the Religion and Ethnicity identity definitions. Sectors that generally do travel on Shabbat choose Culture and Nationality (with a small number also choosing Values).

The breakdown is, of course, not exact. Here there are ultra-Orthodox who chose values, and there are certainly not a few secular Jews who chose Ethnicity. But the sector-typical nature of the breakdown presented in the graph testifies to the possibility that in Israel there are, in effect, two languages of Jewish identity.

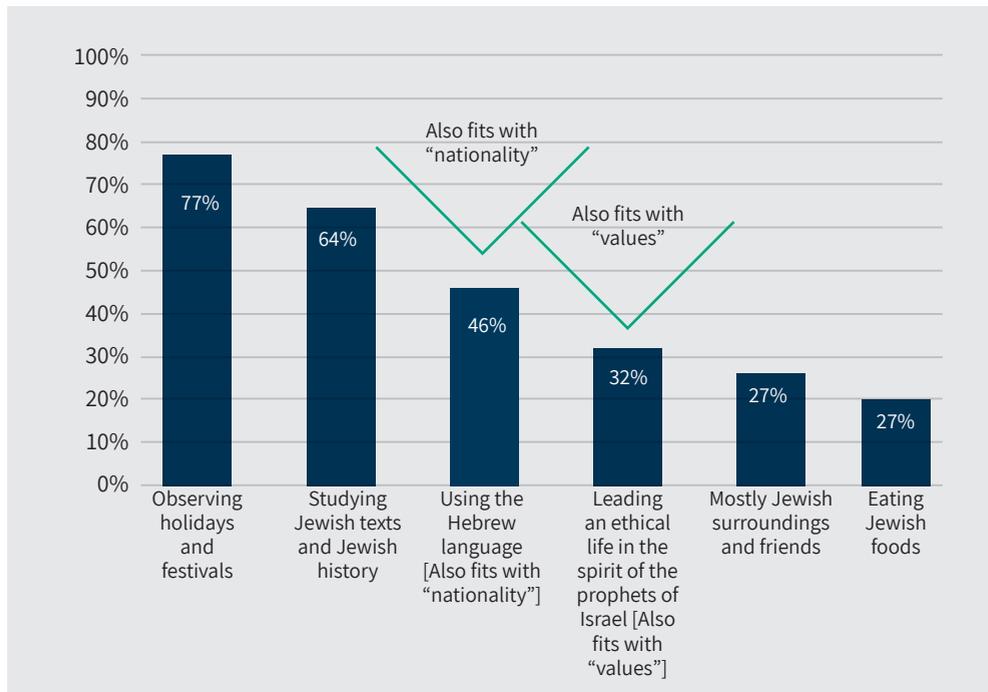
- Conservative, based on the foundations of religion and ethnicity. The choice of Ethnicity is also essentially a religious choice, as religious precepts hold ethnicity to be the chief defining factor for belonging to the Jewish people.
- Modern, corresponding to the possibility of a Jewishness free from religious tradition and from the ethnic emphasis (which has connotations that do not accord with Western liberalism) via a national or cultural definition.



What is the cultural basket of those who selected Culture as the chief component of Jewishness? One of the advantages of the Culture component is that it is relatively easy to pack it with a wide variety of categories from different fields. Thus, it contains a holidays element that can be included (and which we did include, with slightly different wording, for those who also chose Religion). It has an element of using Hebrew, which is unquestionably a marker of culture, but also a major element of the sense of nationality shared by Israeli Jews. And more: we included in the cultural category the option: “leading an ethical life in

the spirit of the Prophets,” which a third of those who selected Culture marked as an element that expresses their outlook. This is an item that was taken from Israel’s Declaration of Independence, and we can definitely argue that it relates more to Values than to Culture.

### You chose “culture”: what does it mean?



Most of those who chose Culture are, as noted, members of the travel on Shabbat group, which consists of secular and traditional-non-religious respondents. For the secular, Culture is the first choice, but this does not mean that those who selected it are enthusiastic about it or know better than others what to do with it. In some of the internal categories of Culture we can see that the traditional-non-religious are actually those who show greater interest in it. For example, nearly 60% of the secular participants who chose Culture say that for them culture is studying Jewish texts and Jewish history, while among the non-religious traditional respondents, the percentage is much higher (72%). This is also the case with regard to “mostly Jewish surroundings and friends,” another area in which a major gap can be seen between the two groups (41% of the traditional versus 26% of the secular). The elements that the secular group prefer to a greater degree than the traditional,

though with smaller gaps, are the more universal and neutral ones in terms of the religious and social baggage they bear. The secular are slightly more likely than the traditional to choose the Ethical life and the Eating Jewish foods options.

## SECULAR VERSUS TRADITIONAL

Having stopped to examine the gap between the two non-Shabbat-observing groups within the Israeli Jewish population, we will now linger a little longer over the differences between them. In earlier studies, including ones by the Jewish People Policy Institute, we could already see large (sometimes very large) disparities between Israelis who self-define as secular (and even more so for the distinct definition of totally secular), and Israelis who are secular-traditional, or the category closest to it, traditional-not-so-religious.”<sup>36</sup>

These gaps were reflected in questions pertaining to:

- Faith, such as the share of believers and non-believers in God.
- Viewpoints. For example, which approach entails the definition Jewish.
- Jewish practice. For example, the share of those who light Hanukkah candles or who fast on Yom Kippur.

In the “Who is a Jew” questionnaire we also find interesting gaps between the two groups, making it possible to say, and not for the first time, that a secular-religious division is too crude, as there are major differences between different religious and secular subgroups.

A few questions illustrate the significant gap between two groups of Jews who travel on Shabbat:

- 25% of all non-religious traditional Jews feel that Jews are obligated to fast on Yom Kippur, versus only 4% of secular Jews.
- 64% of traditional Jews feel that Jews are obligated to circumcise their sons, versus 25% among the secular Jews.
- 33% of traditional Jews say that Jews should sympathize with other Jews, a similar proportion to that documented among religious and ultra-Orthodox Jews. 13% of secular Jews also feel this way.
- 66% of secular respondents believe that those who serve in the IDF and self-define as Jews – are Jews, versus only 36% of traditional Jews.

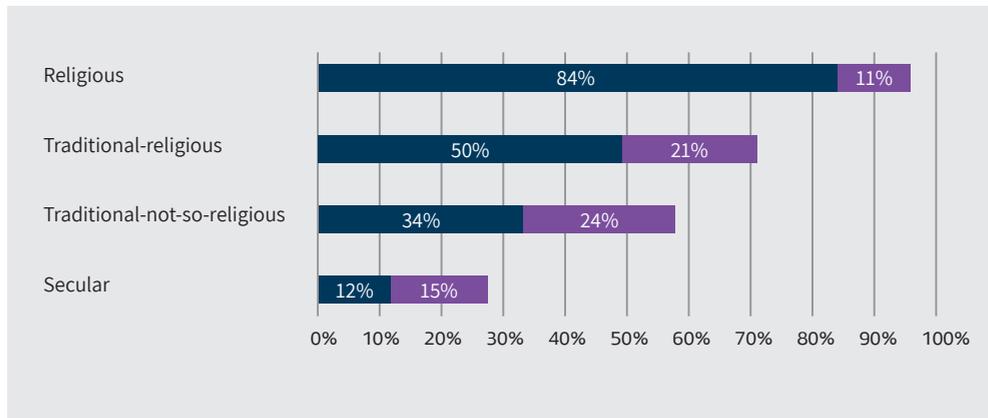
- A similar disparity can also be seen regarding the idea that those who have married Jews and who self-define as Jews are Jews. 66% of secular respondents agree with this suggestion, while only 33% of traditional respondents expressed this opinion.

These gaps are also observed regarding the content questions, on which the respondents take diverging paths. As mentioned above, the largest segment of the traditional-non-religious view Jewishness primarily as a nationality, compared with the secular, more of whom chose Culture. However, of the traditional Jews who chose Nationality, the main emphasis is on connection to all Jews, while the secular placed less emphasis on this. Of the traditional Jews who chose Religion as the main component, about 53% feel that this means observing some of the mitzvot. And, as noted, there is also a very considerable gap with regard to belief in God being linked to the set of Jewishness components. A large majority of the secular respondents who chose Religion as the main component did not, thereby, signal an intention of introducing a faith element into Jewishness. By contrast, most traditional Jews (55%) say that when they chose Religion they meant, among other things, faith.

In many areas it is evident that the traditional-non-religious are closer on the religiosity scale to the religious groups (traditional-religious and above) than to the secular group. An example of this can be seen when we analyze the questions about the conversion tracks necessary in order to become Jewish. Firstly, many among the secular (and almost solely among the secular) believe that Jewishness is a matter of self-definition and that there thus is no need for conversion at all in order to become Jewish; in their view, the individual's decision is enough. But when looking at who responded to the conversion question (those who feel that conversion is necessary) and that self-definition is not sufficient to become a Jew (the most secular are conservative in this regard), we see that a large majority of the secular (73%) respondents to the conversion question feel that some kind of conversion is enough to become Jewish. By contrast, most traditional Jews (57%) do not accept just any form of conversion, but only Orthodox or Conservative conversion.

## Those who accept Orthodox + Conservative conversion only

(among the respondents to this question)



## POLICY IMPLICATIONS

The “Who is a Jew” project was conducted as an ideological clarification effort. Its chief purpose was to attain a better and clearer understanding of the various aspects of Jewish identity in Israel. A considerable proportion of the insights and facts yielded by the project do not necessarily have implications that would entail policy change in any area. More generally, caution would be in order, as past experience shows that when attempts are made to channel identity processes in a given direction via policy, whether through legislation, the education system, or by delineating institutional or governmental policy, the results are not good. Such efforts often unnecessarily exacerbate tensions.

The project did, however, produce insights regarding several issues on the agenda, from which we may try to gather policy recommendations.

### **Recommendation 1: The Law of Return’s “Grandchild Clause”**

This report is being completed at a time when a new Israeli governmental coalition is being formed, some of whose members have already announced their intention of attempting to change the Law of Return so that it will no longer allow the entry and naturalization of the grandchildren of Jews. There are several million people

who are eligible for Israeli citizenship under the Law in its current form (depending on the type of change, an estimated 3 to 10 million prospective citizens could be affected). No one disputes the fact that Israel is currently home to half a million people who immigrated on the basis of the Law of Return but who are not recognized as Jews according to Halacha, or according to Israeli law. And no one disputes the fact that in recent years the share of Law of Return immigrants who are not Jews according to Halacha or Israeli law has come to exceed the share of immigrants recognized in Israel as Jews. According to a report of the Knesset Research and Information Center, over the 30 years since the Soviet Union opened its gates to would-be emigrants – the main source of aliyah to Israel – the share of olim recognized as Jews dropped from 93% (in 1990) to 28% (in 2020).

How to address this situation is not a factual matter, but rather a question of principle and ideology. One approach views the current state of affairs as problematic and holds that the Law of Return in its present form is not fulfilling its purpose: to bring people recognized as Jews to Israel. Furthermore, the Law of Return is accelerating the growth of a population group whose degree of belonging to the Jewish collective is subject to dispute. Therefore, according to this approach, the Law should be changed. Another approach notes that immigrants to Israel, some of whom have a personal-familial-cultural attachment to Judaism and all of whom fall into the category of *zera Yisrael* (blood descendants of Jews who are not, however, halachically Jewish), ultimately integrate with the Jewish majority, contribute to a flourishing Israeli society, and undergo a gradual process of “sociological conversion.” Over time, according to this second approach, “sociological conversion” narrows the culture gaps between those Law of Return immigrants who are not halachically Jewish (by Orthodox criteria) and halachic Jews. This report aims to present the opinions of Israeli Jews and thus, in our view, no firm conclusions should be drawn from it about whether the Law of Return should or should not be changed. However, we would like to note a few issues that should be taken into consideration before a decision is made to keep the Law of Return as it is or to change it:

**First consideration:** Legislation would exacerbate already-existing tensions regarding half a million Israeli citizens – immigrants who are not recognized as Jews and are designated as being of “no religion.” These citizens could find themselves represented – if only *ex post facto* – as people whose immigration and

naturalization contradict the ethos of the State of Israel. This in turn could make it difficult for them to integrate in Israeli society, and undermine their sense of full belonging to the Israeli Jewish community. The fate and status of these Israelis, many of whom have a strong sense of Jewish-Israeli identity, must be taken into account.

**Second consideration:** Any change to the Law of Return that is not managed responsibly and in consultation with Diaspora Jewry will create difficulties and perhaps even lead to confrontation with the Jewish communities abroad. The justifications for changing the Law of Return in its current form are countered by major arguments against such change. Although it is ultimately, and obviously, an Israeli prerogative to make decisions regarding Israeli immigration law, it would be appropriate for discussion of so foundational a law as the Law of Return to be broad-based and respectful of the Diaspora Jewish communities.

**Third consideration:** It should be taken into account that change to the Law of Return, even if preceded by respectful discussion with Diaspora Jewry, could prove detrimental to large populations that identify with Israel and see themselves as Jews. A large proportion of current support for Israel and of Israel's potential immigrant pool consists of Jewish families with a sense of connection to Israel. These families comprise individuals with and without Jewish parents, all of whom are integral, desirable, and esteemed family members. The Jewish People Policy Institute implores all those involved in the debate over the Law of Return to conduct that debate in a spirit of responsibility, moderation, and respect for the viewpoints of all Jews, between whom, as the present report shows, major differences subsist in how Jewishness should be understood today.

**Fourth consideration:** Some of the support for changing the Law of Return stems from a lack of confidence in the quality of the attachment to Judaism of some Law of Return immigrants. In reality, however, there are many "grandchildren of Jews" around the world who have a sense of connection to the Jewish people, and for whom immigration, or the right to immigrate, is not a quality of life maneuver but rather an expression of that identity. We should, therefore, consider whether Israeli immigration policy might be formulated in such a way as to distinguish between these two groups, not necessarily via the Law of Return, but through the channeling and focusing of aliyah resources. A policy change that would achieve the outcome desired by Israeli legislators could prevent the crisis that would result

from change to a law as symbolic and as important as the Law of Return and would allow the continued influx of immigrants who have a true attachment and desire to belong to the Jewish people, even if they are not recognized as Jews (prior to their conversion).

Fifth consideration: The Law of Return issue should be addressed from a broad perspective and be part of a “package deal” that would include other measures as well – ones that would give expression and emphasis to the State of Israel’s obligation to the Jewish people, and to its continued dedication to maintaining a real and living relationship with all Jews.

## **Recommendation 2: Israel-Diaspora Relations**

The study indicates the existence of major gaps between Jewish consciousness in Israel and the kind of Jewish consciousness demonstrated by Diaspora-based studies (with an emphasis on the US). This has mainly to do with Israeli Jews’ relatively strong adherence to an outlook that defines Jewishness in terms of ethnicity, usually that of the mother. This outlook generally corresponds to the Israeli situation, where a very large majority of Jews have Jewish mothers, and where only in relatively rare cases (though the prevalence is rising, due to a growing number of Law of Return immigrants registered as having no religion) do situations or questions about Jewishness arise based on something other than the mother’s ethnic background.

It appears that this attitudinal gap has no practical ramifications of any kind, as there is no problem with Israeli Jews defining Jewishness one way, and American Jews taking a more flexible approach. But the gap does affect the two communities’ ability to engage in respectful dialog, as Israelis (per the present study) actually expect the rules for defining Jewishness to be uniform and identical across the Jewish world, and do not accept the idea that each community will act according to its own specific rules. Only a little over 1 in 10 Israeli Jews agree that there is no need for uniformity: each place should have its own rules and decision-makers. That is: Israelis expect uniformity, and often give answers that are not consistent with the prevailing reality in other communities. This state of affairs could lead (and is, in fact, known to be leading) to discomfort with what is happening in other Jewish communities, sometimes to the point of disdain and unwillingness to recognize those communities’ authenticity.

This situation poses a problem for which three solutions may be proposed, each of which has different ideological implications:

1. Consider an intervention that would persuade Israeli Jews to change their stance on the question of Jewish identity.
2. Consider an intervention that would change the actual situation, and the attitudinal situation, in Jewish communities around the world.
3. Consider an effort aimed not at changing opinions, but at changing the attitude toward other opinions. That is: Jews everywhere will maintain their opinions, but agree to accept that there are other opinions, and recognize their legitimacy.

None of these options are easy to put into practice, and they pose a variety of challenges, both on a practical level (how to persuade people) and on a theoretical/ideological level (what would one be trying to convince people of?). It should be noted, however, that the present situation also poses problems, and exacerbates gaps between the communities. Thus, the first questions to be discussed should be whether a policy-change effort is likely to achieve its goal, and how great the risk that such an effort would both fail to achieve its goal and emphasize, or even widen, the gaps between the communities.

### **Recommendation 3: Jewishness Rankings within Israel**

Not surprisingly, the “Who is a Jew” project reveals major identity gaps within Israeli Jewish society, with real consequences for social relations and for recognition and acceptance of the other. This is especially true when we consider the large number of those eligible for citizenship per the Law of Return, who are not Jewish in the eyes of the Chief Rabbinate, and who do not pursue conversion. This large community is integrating with the Jewish majority, making the identity controversy a concrete issue. Members of this community, certainly those who already see themselves as Jews, can find a place in secular Jewish society, which is not meticulous about halachic definitions of Jewishness. The outcome is a proliferation of what halachically oriented Jews would call mixed marriages and, in effect, the creation of families which a large proportion of the Israeli public (mainly the secular) recognize as Jewish, though another large proportion see these families as non-Jewish, even attaching negative labels to the phenomenon, such as assimilation or a danger.<sup>37</sup>

This situation poses challenges on several levels:

1. Clarifying social relations with Law of Return immigrants. These relations could weaken due to conflicts over recognition and legitimacy for various subgroups.
2. Worsening of tensions between secular and religious Jews, due to major gaps in how these groups identify the main components of Jewish identity, and the ramifications of those gaps.
3. Actual erosion of the ability of various groups to connect socially and on the familial plane, effectively splitting Jewish society into different categories of Jewishness.

The solutions that might be proposed to this situation are quite similar to those suggested in the previous section. However, as on the issue of relations with world Jewry, this challenge is hard to address because it encompasses not only practical questions but also weighty theoretical/ideological issues. Those who already consider themselves Jewish, or who attach no special importance to being recognized as Jews, will not want to take upon themselves the yoke of Judaization in order to gain legitimacy in the eyes of other groups. By contrast, those who see themselves as obligated by strict rules for Jewish affiliation feel unable to display flexibility beyond a certain point with regard to accepting the legitimacy of those who have no particular interest in complying with these rules. The outcome is a progressive, and apparently inevitable, process of societal division, unless we assume that demographic realities will, at some point, entail attitudinal change, or eliminate the problem.

Of course, one of the proposed solutions to this challenge is that of conversion, which is the topic of the next section.

#### **Recommendation 4: Conversion in Israel**

A quarter of Israeli Jews feel that self-definition is sufficient for someone to be considered Jewish. Some of these Jews contradict themselves later by stating that conversion is necessary in order to be Jewish. Even so, there is no mistaking the sentiment: many Jews, though not the majority, do not think conversion is necessary, and certainly not a specific (Orthodox) type of conversion, let alone one

that is particularly stringent. Basically, only a minority of Jews insist on Orthodox conversion, the form of conversion required in Israel today for those wishing to marry in accordance with the law (i.e., via the Rabbinate).

The gap that has erupted and widening between the Orthodox insisting on their form of conversion (here it is unimportant whether Orthodox or another form associated with another stream of Judaism) and the feeling by the majority of Jews whether conversion is required at all (self-definition is enough), or required but not necessarily via an Orthodox rabbi, has ramifications on several levels.

First, there are consequences for the Jewish public's relationship with the conversion establishment, which is perceived as one that imposes its system, the minority system, on the majority. Secondly, there are consequences for the willingness of Israelis to convert, or for their concern to undergo conversion that is accepted by the chief converting institution.

As the data shows, those who undergo Reform conversion are accepted by most Jews, and by a sweeping majority (90%) of secular Jews, as Jewish. These Jews will in any case see no need to convert a Jew who has undergone Reform conversion, and if they are unable to marry such a Jew because the Rabbinate, or someone else, doesn't recognize their conversion, then many will bypass the obstacle by marrying outside the Rabbinate's auspices, or by simply living together without being officially married.

Today, most institutionally proposed solutions to the challenges of conversion, solutions intended primarily for Law of Return immigrants designated as being of no religion, still revolve around an Orthodox conversion process. This study's findings do not justify the assumption that expanding this process (as in Religious Services Minister Matan Kahana's proposal to extend it to municipal rabbis) or making it more lenient (in the hope that certain rabbis will agree to lower the demands) will spark meaningful change in the conversion rate. Most of those who fall into the No religion category, start families with each other, or with secular Israelis who see no need for conversion – or, who, if they do, are satisfied with some kind of conversion (3 out of 4 of the responding secular Jews feel that conversion is necessary).

The conclusions of the implications of this policy are as follows:

1. Knesset and government-driven efforts to change the conversion format may be important in and of themselves (as a means of weakening the Rabbinate's monopoly in this sphere), but disagreement prevails over whether such efforts can significantly increase the number of conversions, or seriously encourage those of no religion to convert (under Orthodox or other auspices).
2. Under these circumstances, one of two likely scenarios should be considered. The first is a substantial and continuous rise in the share of Jews who do not marry officially (because they cannot marry via the Rabbinate, the sole permissible path to matrimony). The second is growing pressure, to the point of a decision being made, for civil marriage or other alternatives to be instituted that would allow couples whom the Rabbinate does not recognize as Jewish to formalize their relationships.

One way or another, the number of families who see themselves as Jewish but whom certain sectors regard as mixed is expected to rise. This will exacerbate already-existing tensions, against the background of demands for the inclusion or exclusion of Israelis and non-Israelis and disagreements over their Jewishness.

### **Recommendation 5: The Jewish Space**

Of all the Jewish identity components, the one that found the greatest acceptance among the respondents and generated the least controversy was that of the holidays and festivals. Israeli Jews who disagree on theoretical/ideological identity components to a degree that is very hard to resolve, still feel that holiday and festival observance gives expression to their Jewishness. This finding, though not surprising in the light of earlier studies (especially the Jewish People Policy Institute's Israeli Judaism study), should propel institutions and organizations into joint action aimed at increasing the agreeable presence of the Jewish holidays in Israeli public and private space. It is to be hoped that active participation in holiday observance will bring about one of two possible positive outcomes:

- For those who continue to see halachic criteria as the main basis for Jewish belonging, holiday observance, at least in the public realm, will soften the perceived foreignness of those whose Jewishness is suspect. It will also facilitate at least a partial sense of identification with these groups as they play an active role in the public realm.
- For those for whom halachic criteria are not important, holiday observance will promote rapid absorption of those who are not halachically Jewish in the public realm, to the point of full assimilation within it.

Of course, such a situation will create problems for halachic Jews (who may decide to maintain genealogies in order to uphold what they view as Jewishness), but other major segments of Israeli-Jewish society will have a reasonable sociocultural solution to a complex situation.

When setting such processes in motion, special attention must be paid to the feelings that will be aroused among Israelis by the use of language and terminology associated with Jewish activity. JPPI's most recent Annual Assessment (2021) contains among its recommendations the proposal that the new government "encourage measures that foster the development of a non-religious Jewish identity." This recommendation is supported by the present study. The study has demonstrated much greater willingness among Jews to study Jewish texts than to learn Torah, although it is clear that at least in some cases these activities can effectively be identical. In response to this and other findings, those who plan holiday activities should use the language of Jewish culture rather than the language of Jewish religion, especially with regard to activities oriented toward secular and traditional-non-religious populations that are wary, sometimes very wary, of anything that sounds like religious language (since in Israel Jewish religiosity is associated, to its detriment, with the political arena).

# IDENTITY TRAJECTORIES

The following diagram and its accompanying text monitors the response trajectories of five of the survey respondents. Their names have been changed, but the response trajectories are identical to those of five Israeli respondents who participated in the study. We deliberately chose as the point of departure five different answers to the question about the main component of Jewishness.

Each of the five respondents gave a different answer to the question, and from there the paths proceeded to diverge and unite at various points on the subsequent questions.

The percentages next to the arrows indicate the overall share of respondents who gave the same answer to each question as the specific respondent. In some cases, the respondents we track belong to the majority, while in other cases they give minority answers. Some give very similar responses throughout the survey while others are inconsistent, whether because they are asked different questions, or because they give different answers.

To be clear: The trajectories presented here are only part of the full survey trajectory. This is the part where the respondents sometimes split from different answers to different subsequent questions.



**Shemi**

19% →

Their culture



**Aviva**

13% →

Their values



**Itai**

20% →

Their religion



**Benny**

23% →

Their nationality



**Orit**

26% →

Their ethnicity



Do you agree that all those who self-define as Jewish are Jewish (and that there are no other conditions for determining Jewishness other than self-definition)?

51% → Yes

64% →

Let's assume that someone self-defines as Jewish, but says s/he also has another identity (such as Buddhist, atheist, Catholic, or anything else that s/he considers comparable to Judaism). Do you consider them Jewish?

4% → No, Jews are exclusively Jewish

74% →

Yes, one can be Jewish and have an additional identity

In your view, which additional identities may coexist with Jewish identity (mark all those you consider valid options)

86% → No

70% →

Which of the following conditions must be obtained in order for you to consider someone to be Jewish (choose the answer that is closest to what you think):

63% → Child of a Jewish mother or convert

37% →

Child of a Jewish mother or convert

One can hold Christian, Muslim, French, Buddhist, and atheist identities in addition to Jewish identity, but not be agnostic or Scientologist

Which of the following conditions are necessary for you to consider a person Jewish by ethnicity (choose the answer that is the closest to what you think):

64% →

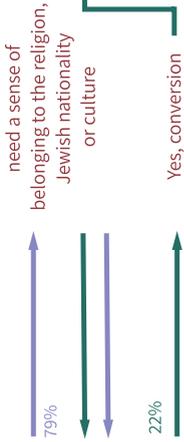
If the child of a Jewish mother

Let's assume that someone self-defines as Jewish, but says s/he also has another identity (such as Buddhist, atheist, Catholic, or anything else that s/he considers comparable to Judaism). Do you consider them Jewish?

31% →

No, Jews are exclusively Jewish

Please clarify what it means to self-identify as Jewish



If a non-Jew wants to be Jewish, do you think conversion is necessary?

74%

No. In my view, personal decision and personal conduct are enough

Does conversion to Judaism have to be Orthodox conversion, or do you think that conversion through other streams (e.g., Reform or Conservative, or a secular ceremony) is valid?



Do you feel that all Orthodox conversions are sufficient, or do you accept some but not others?



Do you feel that the Jewishness of Israeli Jews and of non-Israeli Jews should be determined in the same way and according to the same rules?



Both the rules and the deciding entities should be the same

The same rules, but every community should have its own deciding entities

No need for consistency: each place should have its own rules and decision-makers

Is being Jewish a Yes or No situation, or can one also be part Jewish or Jewish to a certain degree?



Either you're Jewish or you're not Jewish. There are no degrees of Jewishness

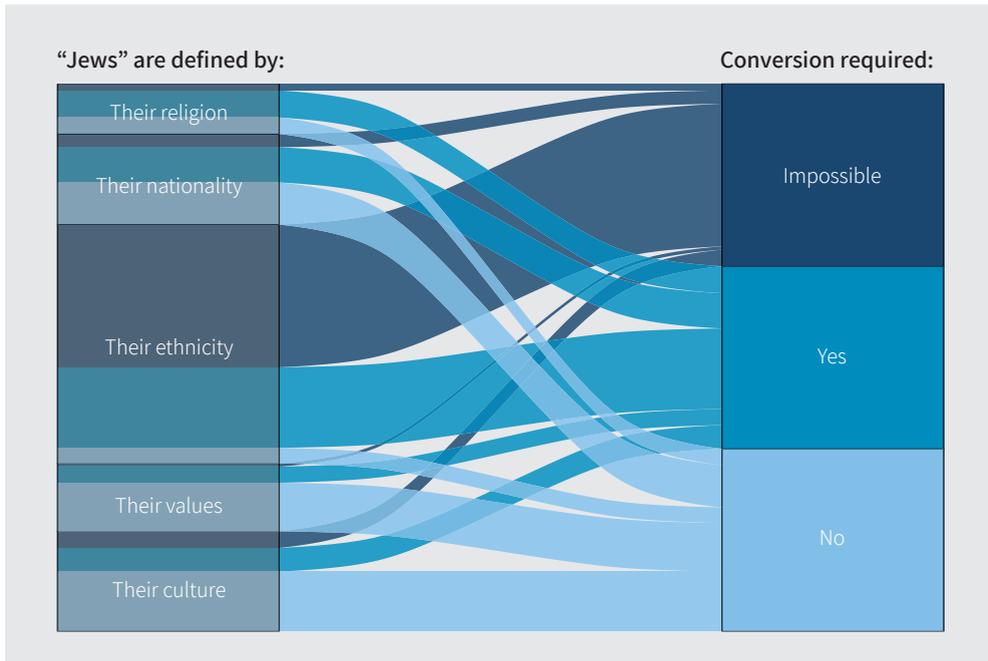
One can be Jewish to a certain degree, more Jewish or less Jewish

One can be Jewish to a certain degree, more Jewish or less Jewish

## One Jewish Man: Shemi's Trajectory

Shemi was born in Israel in 2000. He is secular, Ashkenazi, and votes for center-left parties. In the last round of elections he voted for Yesh Atid. In his opinion, Judaism is primarily a Culture. His culture. In this, he resembles 33% of secular Israeli center-left and left-wing voters. His outlook on what defines this culture is atypical for respondents who chose Culture as the main component of Jewishness. He agrees with the majority opinion that Jewish culture means celebrating Jewish holidays (76%), and with the majority who did not choose leading an ethical life in the spirit of the Prophets as a meaningful component (72%), as well as with the majority who did not choose Jewish food as a meaningful component (79%). But he belongs to the minority who say that Jewish culture means speaking Hebrew (46%) and living alongside other Jews (30%). He did not choose (59% did) to characterize Jewish culture as studying Jewish texts and Jewish history.

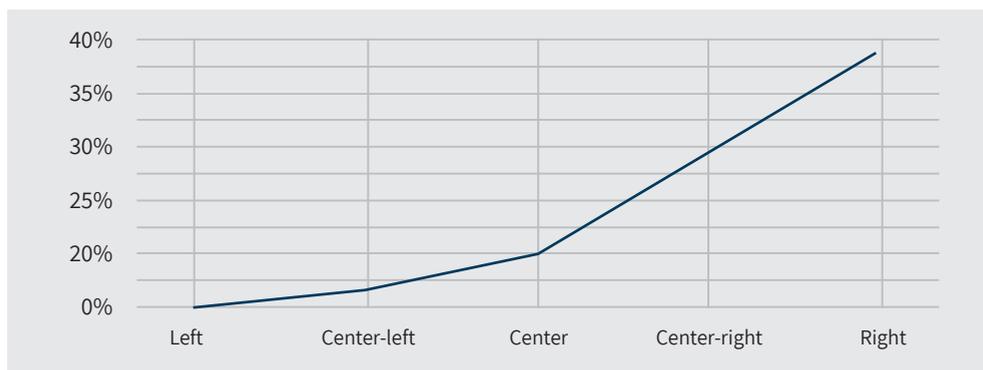
Shemi is one of the relatively few respondents who feel that self-definition is what determines whether someone is Jewish or not (28%), with no need for an additional criterion. But among those who chose Judaism as Culture, this is not a minority, but rather a slight majority (52%). On the other hand, Shemi feels that a person cannot be Jewish and something else besides, such as Buddhist or Catholic. In this he belongs to a 7% minority of those asked that question. Shemi thinks that all those who self-define as Jewish are Jewish, but like the vast majority of respondents (75%) he also wants these people to have a sense of belonging to the Jewish faith, nationality, or culture. Shemi's view that conversion is not necessary for someone to become Jewish is shared by most of those respondents who define Jewishness as Values, Culture, or Nationality. By contrast, most of the participants who define Jewishness as Religion or Ethnicity believe that conversion is necessary in order to make someone a Jew. This relationship is shown in the following graph. Shemi also belongs to a small minority (13%) who feel that there is no need for a uniform standard of Jewishness. He sees no problem with someone being considered Jewish in one community but not Jewish in another community.



### One Jewish Woman: Orit’s Trajectory

This is Orit: born in Israel in 1993, Mizrahi, right-wing, secular-traditional and a Likud voter. Orit believes that being Jewish is mainly a matter of Ethnicity. This is the most common view among the participants, though only 26% agree with her. Among those on the political right, like Orit, the percentage of respondents who see the chief component of Jewishness as Ethnicity rises to 40%. Basically, when we seek a correlation between definitions of Jewish identity and political views, the highest correlation is that of right-wing views and ethnicity. The farther one moves from the right to the center and left, the lower the tendency to choose Ethnicity, by 10% per leftward step (from right to center-right, to center, to center-left, and to left).

## Percent who say Jewishness is mainly a matter of Ethnicity



Like a large majority of those who say Jewishness is mainly a matter of ethnicity (65%), Orit feels that ethnicity means having a Jewish mother. When she chose which of the fictional characters in the survey are Jewish and which are not, Orit was consistent, and identified as Jews only those with Jewish mothers.

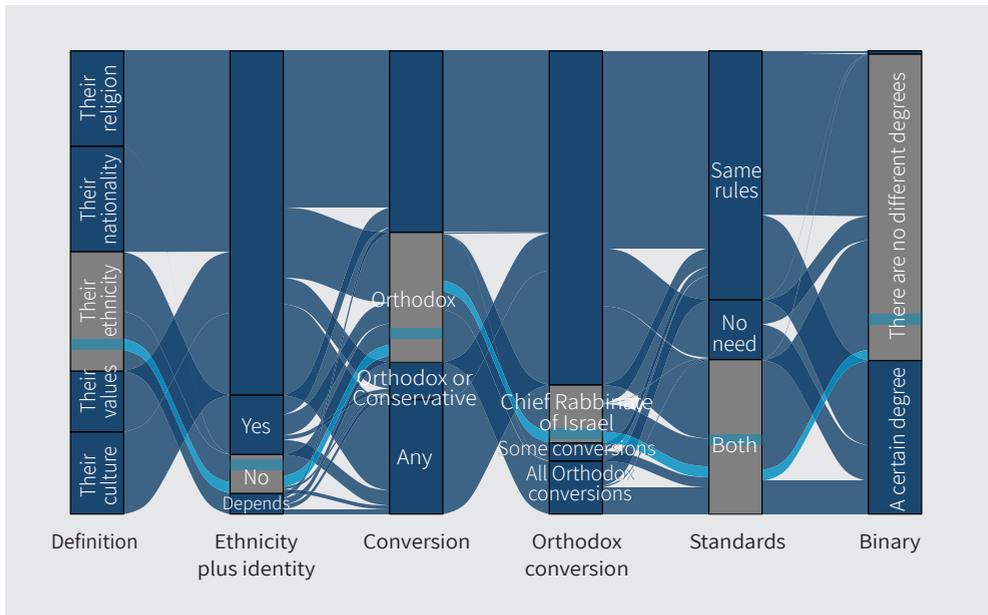
Orit doesn't think that one can be Jewish and also have another identity. On this issue she is in the minority. Of those who chose Ethnicity as the main component of Jewishness, only 30% agree with Orit on this point. On the other hand, if we focus exclusively on those respondents who, like Orit, feel that Jewishness is established solely by having a Jewish mother, then she moves from this smaller minority to a larger group of respondents (44%) who agree that one cannot be a Jew and something else besides.

Orit accepts only Orthodox conversion as valid. This is the opinion shared by most respondents of her type (61%), that is, those who feel that Jewishness is a matter of ethnicity. And in her view, Orthodox conversion is conversion accepted by the Chief Rabbinate. This puts her in line with the largest group of respondents (45%) to the conversion question.

A minority of Israeli Jews, about a third, feel that Jews in Israel and Jews abroad should have the same rules and the same entities deciding who is a Jew and who is not. But this is not the situation with Orit, or with most of those who want Rabbinate conversion as a condition for being recognized as Jewish. The 70% of those who chose the Rabbinate as the conversion authority, feel that all Jews around the world should have common rules and decision-making institutions for determining Jewishness.

The concept modeled below shows the flow of respondents via the questions about the type of conversions they recognize, which Orthodox conversions they recognize, and whether there should be standardized rules. We see, for instance, that 59% of those who recognize only Orthodox conversion want both a unified governmental body and the same set of rules, while this is true of only 32% of those who also recognize Conservative conversion. In slight contradiction of this, we find that 20% of those who recognize all types of conversion still say they want to see standardized rules.

The flow chart we have appended for Orit opens with the choice of a main component of Jewishness and follows her and those who responded like her (the light blue line) to the following links in the question chain. At the same time, it allows us to see how other groups of respondents diverged via the various options.



### One Jewish Man: Benny's Trajectory

This is Benny: he was born outside of Israel in 1952, self-defines as totally secular and identifies as a political centrist. He usually votes for leftist parties; in the last elections he voted for Blue and White. Benny feels that the main component of Jewishness is Nationality. This was the second-most-common response in our survey, chosen by 23% of the participants (27% among the secular, the second-

most-common choice after Culture). Politically centrist respondents tend to choose Nationality as a main component of Jewishness (27%), and when asked what they mean by Nationality, Benny's answer, like that of two-thirds of the respondents, was "connection to Jews whoever and wherever they are." Benny, like most other respondents, does not believe that affiliation with the Jewish nationality necessarily means support for Israel (38% of those who answered Nationality chose support for Israel as an element of the Nationality criterion).

Like most of the study participants (63%), and like an even larger majority of those who view Judaism as a nationality (70%), Benny does not accept as Jewish those who simply identify as Jews, with no other conditions or requirements. He believes that a Jew is someone who has a Jewish mother, the most common view among the respondents, and especially among those who regard Judaism as primarily a Nationality (46%).

Benny accepts any type of conversion to Judaism, thereby agreeing with most of those who think of Judaism as mainly a Nationality (55%), but not with most of those who say that Judaism is primarily an Ethnicity. Only 27% of those who feel that Jewishness is mainly Ethnicity accept all types of conversion. To the question of whether the rules for establishing Jewishness should be standardized for all of world Jewry, Benny responds like most members of the Nationality group. He is in favor of standardizing the criteria for belonging to the Jewish Nationality, but not in favor of a single central authority for all Jews that would decide who meets the criteria.

### **One Jewish Woman: Aviva's Trajectory**

Aviva is an Israeli woman who self-defines as totally secular. She was born in 1972 and identifies as center-left, of mixed ethnic background. She votes for the Labor Party and belongs to a minority (13%) who said that Jewishness is mainly a matter of values (hereinafter: values-oriented Jews). Although secular respondents who identify with the left tend more than others to associate Jewish identity with Values, it is still an uncommon view even within this group. Only 17% of those who are secular and leftist make this choice.

There are a few obvious differences between values-oriented Jews and all of the other respondents. One is that 64% of them, including Aviva, feel that self-

definition is the sole criterion necessary for a person to decide that s/he is a Jew. A large majority of Jews (70%) do not agree with this position.

We asked Aviva, and other respondents who said that Judaism is exclusively a matter of self-definition, if this would block anyone who simply calls himself or herself Jewish, regardless of whether they have Jewish parents or underwent conversion. Aviva and nearly all the other respondents (96%) said “yes – that is what they mean”. When we tried to clarify what is meant by self-definition:

- 18% said that it refers to declaration only.
- 76% said that there is a need for the person to feel a sense of belonging to Jewish Culture, Religion, or Nationality.
- 6% said that the person must also exhibit a Jewish way of life.

Aviva responded in accordance with the majority (sense of belonging).

Like most of the participants (71% - 75% of the values-oriented Jews), she feels that one can be Jewish as well as something else. In her case, Jewish and Christian, Muslim, French, Buddhist, or atheist. Aviva does not believe that one can be a Jew and a Scientologist. Interestingly, the number of respondents who said that one can combine Judaism and Scientology was the lowest (58%) of all the combinations.

Aviva said that, in her opinion, conversion is necessary for a person to become Jewish. This answer contradicts the idea that self-definition alone is needed, and it differs from the response of most values-oriented Jews (77%). However, Aviva agreed with those values-oriented Jews who feel that conversion is necessary by stating any type of conversion is acceptable to her (80%). Values-oriented Jews are twice as open to all forms of conversion as the other respondents to the conversion question, only 40% of whom accept all forms of conversion.

# APPENDICES

## Appendix 1: Data Related To The Study

The following table shows the breakdown of the study participants, the data on whom was weighted in this report (2500 Israelis, Jews by self-definition), divided into sectors by degree of religiosity per Central Bureau of Statistics data. Because the survey contained many questions in two main sections, we included data on those who completed all of the survey questions, and on those who completed the first section only.

	Percentage of total population	Completed the survey	Participated but did not complete the survey
Secular	44%	56%	58%
Traditional-not-so-religious	21%	13%	16%
Traditional-religious	13%	6%	5%
Religious	12%	18%	16%
Haredi	10%	8%	5%

Those who registered with THEMADAD.COM, a group that includes all of the “Who is a Jew” questionnaire respondents, number twenty thousand Israelis. As we can see from the following comparison of the first ten thousand registrants with the data from the Jewish People Policy Institute’s Israeli Judaism study, this broad panel of registrants does not accurately represent the sectoral breakdown of Israeli Jewish society (in this case, the breakdown is into 7 sectors), and leans significantly toward the secular end of the spectrum. The results thus entail processing and adjustment (performed by Professor Camil Fuchs). However, the large number of registrants and participants makes it possible to obtain a satisfactory sample of respondents from each sector.

Seven sectors	THEMADAD.COM registrants	Actual breakdown per the Israeli Judaism study
Totally secular	41.84%	28%
Secular-somewhat traditional	26.88%	21%
Traditional	7.51%	19%
Liberal religious	7.22%	5%
Religious	6.44%	10%
National Haredi	5.27%	7%
Haredi	4.84%	9%

## Appendix 2: Data Cluster

Those who said "I agree"	Secular	Haredi	Religious	Traditional-religious	Traditional-not very religious	Entire sample
In my opinion, those who have served in the IDF and self-define as Jews, are Jews (even if they don't have a Jewish parent and haven't converted)	64%	0%	4%	18%	36%	<b>39%</b>
In my opinion, only those who believe in (the Jewish) God are Jews	4%	6%	7%	12%	8%	<b>7%</b>
In my opinion, those who have married Jews and self-define as Jews, are Jews (even if they don't have a Jewish parent and haven't converted)	67%	1%	5%	20%	41%	<b>42%</b>
In my opinion, only those who observe mitzvot are Jews	1%	5%	2%	3%	1%	<b>1%</b>
In my opinion, only those who raise their children as Jews are Jews	14%	3%	6%	15%	21%	<b>13%</b>
In my opinion, only those who care about other Jews are Jews	19%	3%	8%	15%	22%	<b>16%</b>

**Mark what you think all Jews should do (with those who don't do these things appearing less Jewish in your opinion)**

	Haredi	Religious	Traditional-religious	Traditional-not very religious	Secular	Total sample
Fast on Yom Kippur	46%	43%	43%	24%	4%	22%
Support Israel	15%	39%	53%	55%	41%	43%
Circumcise sons	56%	66%	73%	64%	25%	47%
Observe the holidays	37%	39%	55%	60%	43%	47%
Lead an ethical life	32%	44%	52%	54%	46%	47%
Remember the Holocaust	21%	38%	47%	59%	57%	50%
Care about the disadvantaged	25%	33%	39%	43%	40%	38%
Study Torah	32%	27%	28%	16%	3%	15%
Love Jews in particular	35%	36%	35%	30%	13%	24%
None of the above	57%	31%	15%	14%	25%	25%

**In your view, is being Jewish a Yes or No situation, or can one also be part Jewish or Jewish to a certain degree?**

	Haredi	Religious	Traditional-religious	Traditional-not very religious	Secular	Entire sample
Yes or no	94%	87%	83%	73%	55%	70%
One can be part Jewish	6%	13%	17%	27%	45%	30%

### Appendix 3: The Full Questionnaire

The question of “Who is a Jew” has been a matter of concern to Israel and the rest of the Jewish world for decades. It has led to political, social, and legal crises. The purpose of the following questionnaire is to find out how you would decide on the “Who is a Jew” issue. How should it be done? First we will play around with a few fictional characters, and try to figure out which of them you consider to be Jews. Then we will present you with a list of questions. When the data has been collected and processed, we will know “Who is a Jew” in the opinion of Israeli Jews.

In our first question, we will introduce you to 12 fictional characters, and give you a few facts about each one. Do you consider them to be Jews or non-Jews? Please indicate what you think about each character:

**Ilya** Born in Russia, Jewish mother, non-Jewish father, no contact with any organization or institutions belonging to the Jewish community, doesn’t consider himself a Jew but rather a Russian atheist.

I consider him a Jew

I consider him a non-Jew

It’s very hard for me to decide

**Betty** Born in Chicago to non-Jewish parents, came to Israel for love, is serving in the IDF, hasn’t converted but feels Jewish.

I consider her a Jew

I consider her a non-Jew

It’s very hard for me to decide

**Geva A** Born in Jerusalem to Jewish parents, emigrated to Australia, considers himself a non-Jewish Australian

**Geva B** Born in Jerusalem to Jewish father, emigrated to Australia, considers himself a non-Jewish Australian.

I consider him a Jew

I consider him a non-Jew

It’s very hard for me to decide

**Dana** Born in Berlin to Jewish parents, married an Israeli Arab, lives in Nazareth

I consider her a Jew

I consider her a non-Jew

It's very hard for me to decide

**Helena** Born in Amsterdam, married a Jew, converted by a Chabad rabbi, is divorced from the Jew, and no longer considers herself a Jew.

I consider her a Jew

I consider her a non-Jew

It's very hard for me to decide

**Vlady** Born in Lithuania, Jewish mother, father unknown, considers himself a Christian.

I consider him a Jew

I consider him a non-Jew

It's very hard for me to decide

**Zamir** Born in Netanya, non-Jewish mother, converted by a Reform rabbi in Israel.

I consider him a Jew

I consider him a non-Jew

It's very hard for me to decide

**Chemi** Born in Tel Aviv, Jewish parents, married a Jew and they live in Israel, considers himself a non-Jewish Israeli

I consider him a Jew

I consider him a non-Jew

It's very hard for me to decide

**Tavi** Born in Paris, non-Jewish parents, converted by a Reform rabbi in France, married a non-Jew.

I consider him a Jew

I consider him a non-Jew

It's very hard for me to decide

**Yael** Born in Los Angeles to non-Jewish parents. Decided to live according to Jewish ethical values.

I consider her a Jew

I consider her a non-Jew

It's very hard for me to decide

**Daniel** Converted to Christianity in order to survive the Holocaust. Remained a Christian and came to live in Israel, considers himself both Christian and Jewish.

I consider him a Jew

I consider him a non-Jew

It's very hard for me to decide

**Miriam** Athlete of Bosnian extraction, grew up in Israel, earned a gold medal in the Olympics, wants to be recognized as a Jew (without conversion).

I consider her a Jew

I consider her a non-Jew

It's very hard for me to decide

**Please indicate whether you agree or disagree with the following statements:**

1. In my opinion, those who serve in the IDF and self-define as Jews, are Jews.
2. In my opinion, only those who believe in (the Jewish) God are Jews.
3. In my opinion, those who have married Jews and self-define as Jews, are Jews (even if they do not have a Jewish parent and have not undergone conversion).
4. In my opinion, only those who observe mitzvot (religious commandments) are Jews.
5. In my opinion, only those who raise their children as Jews are Jews.
6. In my opinion, only those who care about other Jews are Jews.

**Please indicate what, in your opinion, all Jews should do (and if they don't do these things, they are less Jewish in your opinion):**

1. Fast on Yom Kippur
2. Support Israel
3. Circumcise their sons
4. Observe the holidays
5. Lead an ethical life
6. Remember the Holocaust
7. Care about the disadvantaged members of society
8. Study Torah
9. Love Jews (especially)
10. None of the above

**Of the following definitions, do you think that Jews are mainly defined in terms of (choose one definition that you view as most important):**

1. Their religion
2. Their nationality
3. Their ethnicity
4. Their values
5. Their culture

**At this point the questionnaire is split. For each question the relevant respondent group is indicated.**

**For those who answered "Their culture"**

**When you said that Judaism is mainly culture, to what elements of culture were you referring?**

1. Observing holidays and festivals
2. Studying Jewish texts and Jewish history
3. Eating Jewish foods
4. Using the Hebrew language

5. Leading an ethical life in the spirit of the prophets of Israel
6. Mostly-Jewish surroundings and friends

### **For those who answered “Their religion”**

**When you said that Judaism is mainly religion, to what elements of religion were you referring?**

1. Full observance of all the mitzvot
2. Observance of some of the mitzvot
3. Observing Jewish holidays and fasts
4. Belief in God
5. Torah study

### **For those who answered “Their nationality”**

**When you say that Judaism is mainly Nationality, to what elements of nationality are you referring?**

1. Living in Israel
2. Support for Israel
3. Feeling connected to all Jews, whoever and wherever they are

### **For those who answered “Their values”**

1. Caring about the disadvantaged members of society
2. Caring about all Jews
3. Caring about all human beings
4. Aspiration to justice
5. Safeguarding democracy
6. Adhering to the truth in all areas
7. Non-conformity
8. None of the above, I had something else in mind

### **For those who answered “Their ethnicity”**

**You said that Jewishness is a matter of ethnicity. Which of the following conditions are necessary in order for someone to be considered ethnically Jewish in your eyes?**

1. Son/daughter of a Jewish parent (father or mother)
2. Son/daughter of a Jewish mother
3. Some kind of Jewish ethnic background (grandparent is sufficient)

### **For everyone except those who answered “Their ethnicity”**

**Do you agree that all those who self-define as Jews are Jews (and that there are no other conditions that determine Jewishness – self-definition is the sole deciding factor)?**

1. Yes
2. No

### **For those who answered “Yes” to the previous question**

**Let’s assume that someone self-defines as Jewish but says s/he also has another identity (such as Buddhist, atheist, Catholic, or anything else that s/he considers comparable to Jewish). Is this person a Jew in your opinion?**

1. Yes, a person can be Jewish while also having another identity
2. It depends on what the other identity is
3. No, a Jew is someone who is only Jewish

### **For those who answered “A Jew is someone who is only Jewish”**

**You said that “those who self-define as Jews are Jews.” We would like to know, just for clarification purposes: Does this mean that, for you, a Jew can also be someone whose parents aren’t Jewish, who hasn’t undergone conversion, and who has simply decided (for reasons of his own, and in his own way) to identify as a Jew?**

1. Yes, this is what I meant
2. No, this isn’t what I meant, I’d like to change my answer

### **For those who answered “Yes, this is what I meant”**

**We would like to clarify what is meant by “self-identifying as a Jew”**

1. It’s enough for the person simply to say that s/he is a Jew
2. There has to be a sense of belonging to the Jewish religion, nationality, or culture
3. It refers to a Jewish way of life (ceremonies, holidays, and the like)

### **For everyone else**

**In your opinion, what other identities can a person have in addition to a Jewish identity (mark all those you consider appropriate)**

1. Christian and Jewish
2. Muslim and Jewish
3. French and Jewish
4. Buddhist and Jewish
5. Atheist and Jewish
6. Agnostic and Jewish
7. Scientologist and Jewish

### **For those who answered the previous question**

**When a non-Jewish person wants to become Jewish, do you think a conversion process is required?**

1. No, I consider personal decision and personal behavior to be enough
2. Yes, conversion is necessary
3. In my opinion, it’s altogether impossible for a non-Jew to become a Jew

### **For those who answered that “it’s impossible to become a Jew”**

**Although conversion has been practiced for many generations among the Jewish people, and although a number of the great rabbis have been converts, you have said that, in your view, it’s impossible for a non-Jew to become a Jew. We would like to clarify your position:**

1. I made a mistake, would like to change my answer
2. In my view, Judaism is solely a matter of ethnicity (one's parentage), and that cannot be changed in any way

### **For those who answered “No” to the self-definition question**

**Which of the following conditions must obtain in order for you to consider someone a Jew (choose the answer that is closest to what you think):**

1. Son/daughter of a Jewish mother, or conversion
2. Son/daughter of a Jewish parent (father or mother), or conversion
3. Jewish ethnicity (a grandparent is sufficient) or conversion
4. Sense of belonging to the Jewish nationality or culture
5. Leads a Jewish life (ceremonies, holidays, and the like)
6. Both Jewish mother and sense of belonging / way of life required
7. Both Jewish parent and sense of belonging / way of life required
8. Both Jewish ethnicity and sense of belonging / way of life required

### **For all those who gave answers that included “or conversion” (others referred to the question “Is conversion required?”)**

**Let's focus on conversion. Does conversion to Judaism have to be Orthodox conversion, or are other forms of conversion (such as Reform, Conservative, or a secular ceremony) valid in your eyes?**

1. Only those who have undergone Orthodox conversion are Jews
2. Those who have undergone Orthodox or Conservative conversion are Jews
3. Those who have undergone any form of conversion are Jews

### **For those who answered as stated in the question**

**You've confused us a little. On the one hand you said that someone of Jewish ethnic background (a grandparent is sufficient) is Jewish. This is not an Orthodox view. On the other hand, you said that for conversion purposes, you require Orthodox conversion. What exactly do you mean?**

1. I also got confused. I'd like to update my answer regarding who is a Jew, from someone of Jewish ethnicity to someone with a Jewish mother
2. I also got confused. I'd like to update my answer regarding conversion
3. There's nothing to be confused about. That's exactly what I meant. For ethnicity purposes I accept grandparents as well, but for conversion purposes I specifically require Orthodox conversion

### **For those who answered "Orthodox conversion"**

**You said that in your view, only those who have undergone Orthodox conversion may be considered Jews by conversion. Please clarify: Do you think that any Orthodox conversion is sufficient, or are there some Orthodox conversions that you accept, and others that you don't?**

1. Accept all Orthodox conversions
2. Accept some Orthodox conversions (depends which rabbi)
3. Accept only conversions authorized by the Chief Rabbinate of Israel

### **For those who answered "Orthodox or Conservative conversion"**

**You said that in your view, only those who have undergone Orthodox or Conservative conversion may be considered Jews by conversion. Please clarify: is any Orthodox or Conservative conversion sufficient, or do you accept only Orthodox or Conservative conversions by specific rabbis (for example, those recognized by the institutions of those streams)?**

1. Accept all conversions of these types
2. Accept some conversions of these types (depends which rabbi)

### **For everyone**

**We are nearly done. In your opinion, should the Jewishness of Israeli Jews and of non-Israeli Jews be determined in the same way and according to the same rules?**

1. Both the same rules, and the same deciding entities
2. The same rules, but each community should have its own deciding entities
3. No need for uniformity: each place should have its own rules and decision-makers

**For those who answered “No need for uniformity”**

**Just to make sure we understand: According to your response, someone could be considered Jewish in one place but not Jewish in another place. Is this what you meant?**

1. Yes, that is what I meant
2. No, I'd like to go back to the previous question and change my answer

**For everyone**

**In your opinion, is being Jewish a Yes or No situation, or can one also be part Jewish or Jewish to a certain degree?**

1. Either you're Jewish or you're not. There aren't different degrees
2. One can be Jewish to a certain degree, more Jewish or less Jewish

# ENDNOTES

1. The game: <https://themadad.com/whojew/> [In Hebrew]
2. <https://themadad.com/> - HaMadad (The Index): Politics, Society, Culture and Identity in Israel. Editor: Shmuel Rosner, Scientific Advisor: Camil Fuchs, Analyst: Noah Slepko. [In Hebrew]
3. <https://www.kan.org.il>
4. Exploring the Jewish Spectrum in a Time of Fluid Identity. Special Report of the Jewish People Policy Institute, Shmuel Rosner and John Ruskay, 2016.
5. See: Ministry of Interior Correction: Most Olim from Russia and Ukraine – Not Jews; Most Olim from the US and France – Jews, Kobi Nachshoni, 2019, Ynet. [In Hebrew]
6. Because the background questions do not include a question about the mother's identity, we have no way of identifying these respondents versus the others who identify as Jews. The share of FSU olim in the study, whom we can identify, is not particularly high, meaning that we have no reason to assume that the share of respondents in the study who are not Jewish according to Halacha is higher than their share in the general population. It should therefore be added that in the vast majority of studies of world Jewry, the accepted definition is self-definition, not a halachic test.
7. 88% rate their Jewishness 7,8,9, and 10.
8. Quoted from the book that summed up the study #IsraeliJudaism: Portrait of a Cultural Revolution, Shmuel Rosner and Camil Fuchs, Dvir and the Jewish People Policy Institute, 2018.
9. The percentage of those who answered Important and Very important. The share of those who answered Somewhat important is 8%, while the share of those for whom it is not important at all is 5%. This is also true of the next question.
10. The full study: <https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2021/05/11/jewish-americans-in-2020/>
11. The full study: <https://www.pewforum.org/2016/03/08/israels-religiously-divided-society>
12. For all publications of the #IsraeliJudaism study: <https://ij.jppi.org.il/he/about> [in Hebrew]
13. If we combine Religion, Religion and Ethnicity, and Everything in the Pew survey, we obtain a similar share to that obtained for the Religion category in the Israeli Judaism survey (slightly over 40%), which allows us to assume that, had only one option been available, those who chose a combination would have selected Religion rather than the additional component.

14. Date from the 2016 survey: <http://jppi.org.il/he/article/aa2016/part2/bonds/jewish-pluralism-in-israel/#.YhSCKC8RqU0>
15. Per the Central Bureau of Statistics report [Statistical Abstract?] (2021), 44.8% of the Jewish population (ages 20 and over) defined themselves as not religious, secular; 33% self-defined as traditional (Masorti); 11.7% self-defined as religious (non-ultra-Orthodox – Dati); and 10% self-defined as ultra-Orthodox (Haredi).
16. Scholem quoted in: What [Kind of] Religion Is Judaism? Part 1, Rachel Elior, Odyssey, 2015. [in Hebrew]
17. For more on this topic, see: The Jews: 7 Frequently-Asked Questions, Shmuel Rosner, Dvir and ANU – Museum of the Jewish People, 2016. Chapter: “What Is Judaism?” [in Hebrew]
18. For further discussion of this decision: Fathers of the Faith? Three Decades of Patrilineal Descent in American Reform Judaism, Annual Assessment of the Jewish People Policy Institute, 2013. [In Hebrew]
19. <https://scholarworks.brandeis.edu/esploro/outputs/report/2020-Metropolitan-Chicago-Jewish-Population-Study/9924025011701921#file-2>
20. Pew 2020, page 93.
21. Scholars of American Jewry are deeply divided on this issue. However, based on the data currently available (no one is able to determine whether and how things may change later on), when considered through a multigenerational lens, one finds an erosion in Jewish affiliation among the offspring of intermarriage. See: <http://jppi.org.il/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/Raising-Jewish-Children-Research-and-Indicators-for-Intervention.pdf>
22. Special Survey, Religion and State Conference [Inaugural Biennial Statistical Report on Religion and State], Ariel Finkelstein, Ayala Goldberg, Adv. Shlomit Ravitsky Tur-Paz, September 2022.
23. It should be noted that not all studies include people who meet this definition as Jews. In a Pew Center study (2020), no such definition was included regarding the Jewish population.
24. Between the two most recent Pew surveys of the American Jewish community (2013, 2020), an interesting change was made; the earlier survey gave Jews the option of identifying as partial Jews, while the later one did not.
25. A rabbi who stood out for disagreeing with the idea that Rufeisen would be considered Jewish according to Halacha is Rav Aharon Lichtenstein. See: Musar Aviv: On Ethics, Faith, and Society. Maggid and Yeshivat Har Etzion, 2016. [In Hebrew]
26. See: Who Is Considered to Be a Convert? History and Outcomes of the Legal Struggle, Dr. Shuki Friedman, Israel Democracy Institute. [In Hebrew]

27. In JPPI's report Exploring the Jewish Spectrum in a Time of Fluid Identity, we included a kind of graph of Jewishness with two axes, one for role and situation, the other for criteria. On this graph we showed that every situation essentially calls for different criteria and, therefore, for a different definition of the required Jewishness. See Page 88.
28. See the Shalit ruling: [https://openscholar.huji.ac.il/sites/default/files/hebrewlaw/files/bnymyn\\_shlyt\\_bshmv\\_vbshm\\_yldyv\\_vrn\\_vglyh\\_shlyt\\_ngd\\_shr\\_hpnym\\_vpqyd\\_hryshvm\\_mkhvz\\_khyph\\_bgts\\_ms\\_58-68.pdf](https://openscholar.huji.ac.il/sites/default/files/hebrewlaw/files/bnymyn_shlyt_bshmv_vbshm_yldyv_vrn_vglyh_shlyt_ngd_shr_hpnym_vpqyd_hryshvm_mkhvz_khyph_bgts_ms_58-68.pdf)
29. It should be noted that even those who say, "an Orthodox conversion" may be referring only to some of the conversions that self-define as Orthodox. It may be that "any Orthodox conversion" means "any conversion that is Orthodox in my opinion," which in turn means "only some conversions."
30. The response options were: both identical rules and identical deciding entities; the same rules, but each community has its own deciding entities; no need for uniformity: each place has its own rules and deciding entities.
31. See Survey, Ministry of Diaspora Affairs, 2016, p. 54. [In Hebrew]
32. The Israel Democracy Institute survey data are not consistent with this finding. Per the IDI survey, "the Jewish public is split down middle with regard to non-Orthodox conversion: 44% do not consider someone who has converted in this way to be Jewish, 40% do view them as Jewish, and 16% don't know."
33. An interesting difference was found between ultra-Orthodox, most of whom chose the "all the mitzvot" option, and the religious, many more of whom chose the "some of the mitzvot" option. The question is whether this is a difference in level of expectation regarding mitzvah observance, or in level of willingness to explicitly say that there is an aspiration to full mitzvah observance.
34. This figure is from the #IsraeliJudaism study, 2018. [In Hebrew]
35. According to a Fall 2021 THEMADAD.COM survey for Israel Hofsheet, 76% of the traditional-religious do not travel on Shabbat, while 88% of those in the traditional-not-very-religious category do travel on Shabbat.
36. On the levels and means of overlap between the various groups, see THEMADAD.COM's report for Israel Hofsheet on traditional Jews in Israel. [In Hebrew]
37. On this issue see a Haaretz review of a discussion held in the Kan studio: In Live Broadcast, Kalman Liebskind Performs Selection on Mixed Couples in Israel. <https://www.haaretz.co.il/gallery/television/tv-review/1.10390067> [In Hebrew]