



## Rabbis for Religious Freedom & Equality in Israel



“The State of Israel... will guarantee freedom of religion and conscience...”  
Israel's Declaration of Independence (May 1948)

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### Gader and s'yag / גדר וסייג

By Rabbi Mark H. Levin,  
DHL

September 2015

Israel is building or has built protective fences on segments of borders with Lebanon, Syria, Jordan, the West Bank and the Sinai Peninsula. Prime Minister Netanyahu's announced goal is to surround Israel with fences.<sup>[1]</sup> Their intentions are to keep out undesirable incursions: terrorists, infiltrators and refugees primarily. But borders can become a mentality, not just a physical boundary, establishing a mindset about non-security policy areas, repelling anything that challenges current structures.

Besides military גדרות, the Rabbinate has built halakhic סייגים to protect their ever narrowing definition of Judaism. The Chief Rabbinate insists that the

Dear colleagues, we are excited to share [the new 2015 Israel Religion and State Index](#) with you, just in time for Rosh HaShanah as promised! We hope you will find the compelling data of interest and will share it with congregants and many others. It's of great importance, we believe, that you and your spheres of influence realize that Israelis too are eager to see Israel move towards religious diversity, freedom of choice and equality!

**Shana Tova**  
May this be a year of  
religious freedom,  
tolerance and solidarity  
Together we can make it so

*Rabbis for Religious Freedom  
& Equality in Israel*

Shana Tova from Rabbis for Religious Freedom in Israel

**On Ynet:**

**80% of Israelis disapprove of religion-state**

modern Jewish superhighway consists of a single cowpath across their land. In the spirit of the Hatam Sofer that "the new is forbidden by the Torah," itself ironically a new talmudic interpretation of the laws of שדח, we see continuous attacks on the rights and dignity of women including, among others: banishing women's public appearances and pictures of same, refusal to sit next to women on airplanes, segregating transportation by sending women to the back of the bus, and forbidding women to read Torah liturgically even in exclusively women's groups. As we know, a man was severely beaten for passing a Torah into the women's section at The Kotel so that the Women of the Wall could read from it. Protection of Judaism has morphed into politicized elitism and ever narrowing boundaries, in which even Orthodox Rabbi David Stav can be venomously described as a kippah-wearing Reform rabbi, pronounced with the invective of the word חזיר. The laws of conversion have been altered to meet the ever constricting requirements of competing rabbis.

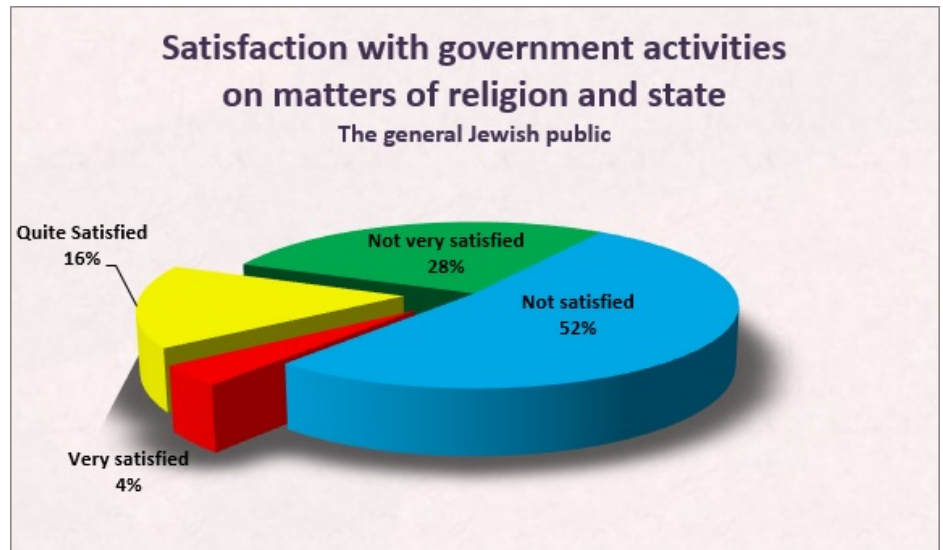
All of this has been complicated by the

## relationship

**Religion and State Index published annually in Ynet on eve of Jewish New Year shows that over 60% would completely separate religion and state, 65% prefers a government without haredi parties, and vast majority supports at least some public transportation on Shabbat**

**Kobi Nachshoni, 09-11-2015**

<http://www.ynetnews.com/articles/0,7340,L-4700080,00.html>



Satisfaction with Government activities in matters of religion and state  
Among Israeli Jews

Most Jewish Israelis have traditional lifestyles and worldviews, but support freedom of religion and separation of church and state, according the annual Israel Religion and State Index published on Ynet on the eve of the Jewish New Year.

The Hiddush Association's Religion and State Index, a comprehensive annual research project published in cooperation with Ynet for the seventh time, questioned participants on a number of controversial issues, including civil marriages, Shabbat, military service, and more.

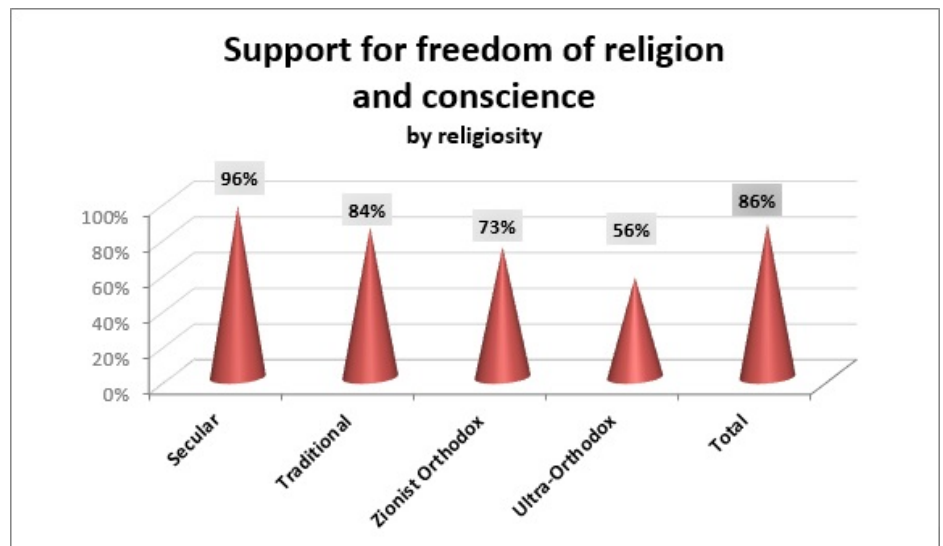
Eight hundred people participated, a sample representing the adult Jewish population in Israel. The margin of error was 3.5 percent.

Eighty-six percent of participants agreed that all people should have freedom of religion, while 61 percent would completely sever the relationship between church and state.

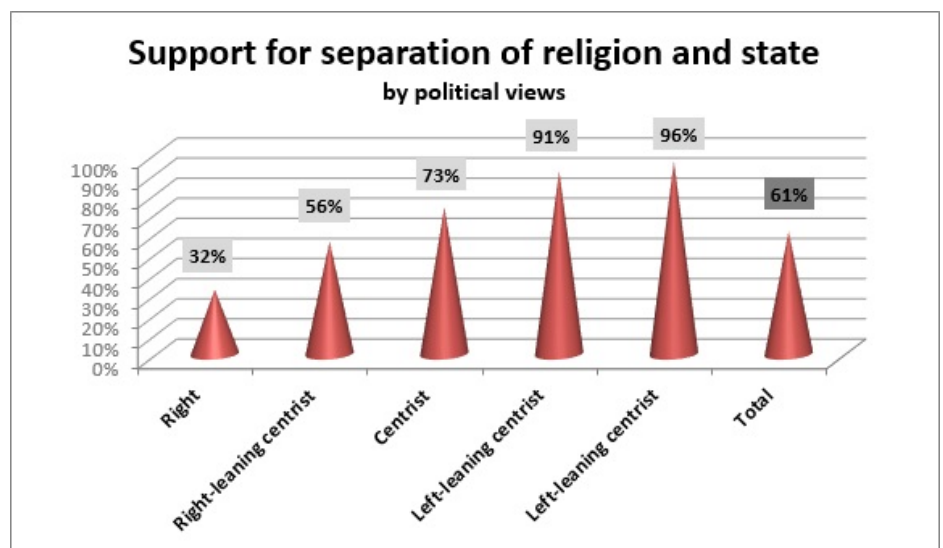
invocation of the universally acclaimed goal to protect our people from harm or even decimation. Where to draw the line?

Israel can build protective boundaries physically and open borders spiritually. Clearly, Israel's exclusivist religious policies are not only a betrayal of her Declaration of Independence, but, as reported in Hiddush's Religion and State Index, released today, 80% of Israel's Jewish population are not satisfied with Israel's government approach to כפייה דתית, and an eye popping 86% in the new survey favor freedom of religion and conscience! Fully 61% of all Jewish Israelis, חרדי to חילוני, support completely separating religion and state. Clearly, the mandate to bring Israel into the company of democratic nations not only knocks at the door but demands entry onto Israel's actual, day by day, political agenda!

I would like to know what you believe is our appropriate role in this debate. After my first column, a longstanding friend wrote that she is not certain our voices have standing unless we live there. That approach will ensure a future bifurcated international Jewish



Support for Religious Freedom among Israeli Jews



Support for Separation of Religion and State among Israeli Jews

However, further questioning revealed a more conservative outlook.

For example, while 64 percent support Reform, Conservative, and civil marriages, 63 percent said they would choose a wedding according to Jewish law for themselves or their children, even if all options were open to them. Of the remainder, 19 percent would prefer a civil marriage, 10 percent Conservative or Reform, with eight percent saying they supported common-law marriage.

According to 64 percent of survey participants, if civil marriage is approved in Israel, it should include same-sex couples. This issue saw a notable increase in support of 14 percent relative to 2013.

Four-fifths of respondents were dissatisfied with the government's treatment of the church and state issue. Among these were most haredi and secular Jews, while religious Jews were almost perfectly split – 51 percent satisfied, 49 percent not.

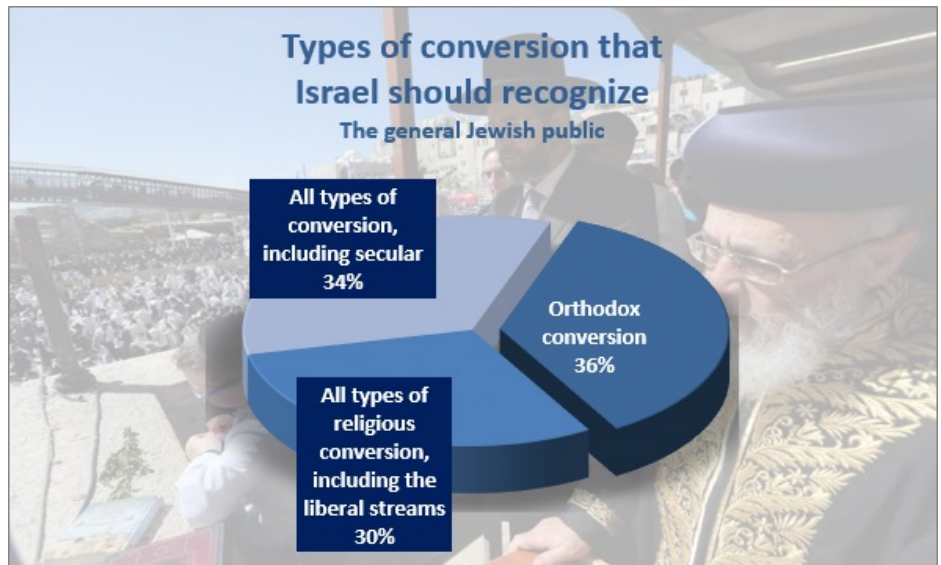
The question of kosher laws has reemerged as a subject of public

community. But Israel needs world Jewry, and at the moment is in the process of excluding all but the ultra-Orthodox from not only participation but also from consideration. Everyone else is a "bad Jew."

Diaspora Jewry has thrived while debating issues of maintaining Jewish identity and being inclusive for 200 years. While Israel, a majority Jewish state, certainly operates by different dynamics, its diversity and the demands of modernity clamor insistently for a Judaism that will answer contemporary religious needs and not be mired in perspectives concretized in the Middle Ages when we were people without a country and constantly subject to expulsion. The starting place for discussion of the "stranger" can neither be convert nor dangerous outsider. Women cannot be viewed as a seductive force and an implicit source of evil. Such operational methods of thinking cannot undergird and thereby structure the philosophical approach of the Jewish future without seriously damaging a sovereign state that must exist within the family of world democracies, and be both egalitarian and pluralistic.

debate in the past few months, as the High Court of Justice has been petitioned to strike down the existing law giving the Chief Rabbinate a monopoly on the issue, while some attempt to push legislation to maintain the status quo.

Forty-nine percent of respondents said that any professional body should be allowed to provide a kosher certificate, 27 percent supported the status quo, while 24 percent expressed interest in competition, but only between Orthodox bodies.



Support for different forms of conversion among Israeli Jews

Regarding conversions, also publicly debated recently, 36 percent said the government should only recognize conversions according to traditional Jewish laws. Thirty-four percent supported recognizing all conversions, while 30 percent would only accept religious conversions – Orthodox, Conservative, or Reform.

As many Israelis in various cities urge public transportation on the Shabbat, 45 percent of survey participants said it should be implemented on a small scale, and 27 percent said it should be fully implemented. Meanwhile, 18 percent supported preserving the status quo, and 10 percent thought even the little public transportation currently functioning on Shabbat should be ceased.

The proportion of those supporting implementing the move partially or fully is a consistently rising trend, with a total rise of 36 percent in 2010-2015.

Respondents were also asked about their Shabbat habits. The results showed that 30 percent observe Shabbat according to Jewish law, 32 percent are not strict but see it as a special day of rest, and 16 percent observe some of the Shabbat laws, while 22 percent see it as a regular day off work.

On the controversial subject of drafting yeshiva students, 70 percent

We welcome your opinions, which we will share with other members of the RRFEI. Also, we are looking for a few rabbis who enjoy writing/editing to participate in the newsletter. Please email me at: [organizers@rrfei.org](mailto:organizers@rrfei.org).

לשנה טובה תכתבו ותחתמו, and גמר חתימה טובה to you and those you love. We look forward to your responses.

Rabbi Mark H. Levin, DHL Chair, Editorial Committee

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[1] "To the extent that it is possible we will encompass Israel's borders with a security fence and barriers." NYTimes, Netanyahu Rejects Calls..., Isabel Kershner, 09-06-15.

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## Resources & News

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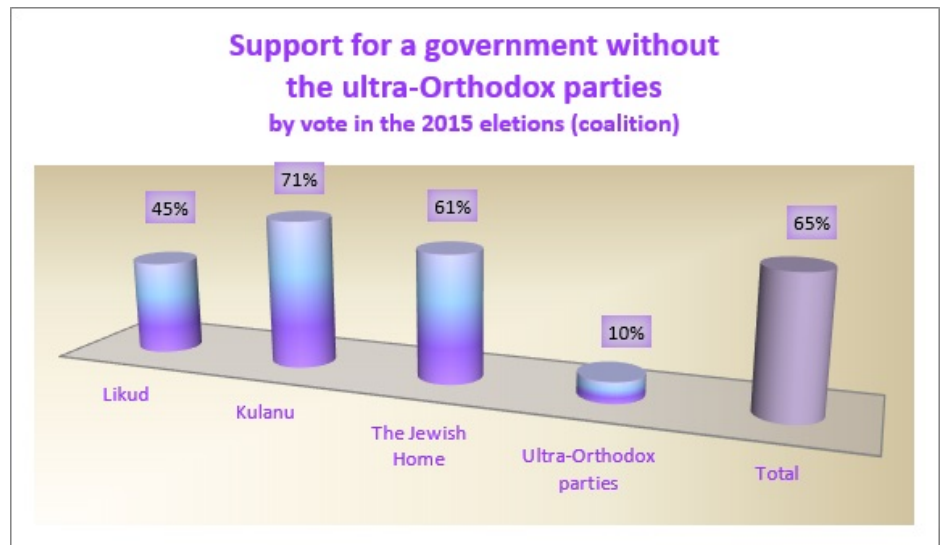
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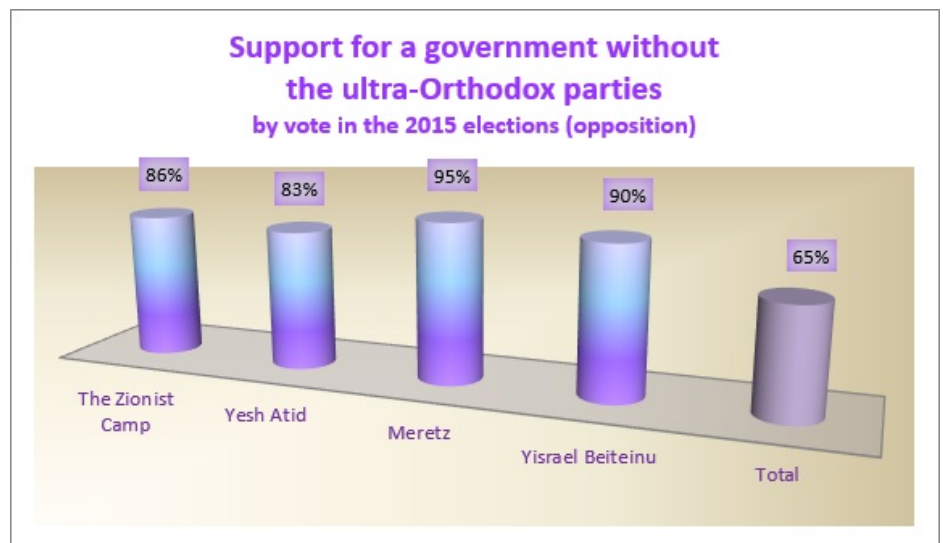
said military or civil service should be mandatory for all Israelis. Meanwhile, 16 percent supported setting a limited quota for students who would be granted exemption, and 14 percent said all of them should receive a special status saying that "the Torah is his vocation".

On a related topic, 82 percent supported requiring haredi educational institutions to include core subjects in their curriculum.

Meanwhile, based on the survey, 65 percent of the Israeli public prefers a government without the participation of haredi parties.



Support for Government without Haredi parties among Coalition voters



Support for Government without Haredi parties among Coalition voters

One question dealt with freedom to practice non-Jewish religions in Israel, and follows controversy last year around Christian prayer in the Cenacle (traditionally believed to be the site of the Last Supper), which is above King David's Tomb in Jerusalem's Old City. A majority of 61 percent said this freedom should be permitted in every case, 28 percent supported permitting prayer, but under restrictions,

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like today, and 11 percent said Christians should be entirely prevented from praying at the holy site.

Israelis see conflict between haredi and secular Jews as secondary to the political division between left and right, according to the poll, and the majority of haredim did not even see it as particularly severe. That said, the rift is greater in the eyes of respondents than tensions between rich and poor, Mizrahi and Ashkenazi Jews, and immigrants and long-time residents.

The proportion of those ranking the haredi-secular split as one of the two most serious rifts in the country fell by 13 percent compared to last year, while those pointing to a Mizrahi-Ashkenazi conflict went up by 37.5 percent.

The CEO of Hiddush, Attorney Rabbi Uri Regev, said of the survey results that it "reveals an intolerable gap between the public's positions and those of the coalition, which has had a fire sale of freedom of religion and equal sharing of the burden for haredi parties."

According to Regev, coalition agreements with haredi parties Shas and United Torah Judaism are "shooting the Israeli economy in the foot, and directly sabotaging the future of the country and of Zionism."

[Read More »](#)

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Rabbis for Religious Freedom and Equality in Israel represents a broad spectrum of Jewish belief and practice, and champions the values of religious freedom and equality fundamental to World Jewry, in partnership with Hiddush for the realization of these principles in Israel and the Diaspora.

Rabbis for Religious Freedom and Equality in Israel

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