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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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Editorial

May 9, 2016

Dear Friends,

My experience over the years has been that Diaspora Jews and Israeli Jews both want to ensure that Israel remains a Jewish state, and both, as a rule, do not want the State of Israel's Jewish identity to move toward theocracy or religious coercion. Rather, **the vast majority of all Jews around the world believe that pluralism and religious freedom should reign in Israel.**

Our Diaspora and Israel communities have somewhat different priorities when it comes to matters of religion and state in Israel, as we have seen recently. For example, American Jewry ascribes great significance to prayer arrangements at the Kotel, which are not the most significant issue for me as an Israeli. Similarly, for

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Jewish Pluralism Index survey released by JPPI

The RRFEI analysis:

A recent survey conducted by the Jewish People Policy Institute, as part of JPPI's Jewish Pluralism Index, indicates that secular Israelis, the largest segment of the Jewish population, are the group that feels the "least at home" in Israel. **The survey reveals that the majority of Jewish Israelis are open to pluralism and the new Jewish reality, not defined by religious Jewish law.** The ultra-Orthodox population was ranked by survey respondents at the bottom of those who contribute to Israeli society, despite being the religious sector receiving the most government financial support. Thus, the new JPPI study shows, once again, the extent to which the policies of nearly all successive Israeli governments continually fail to represent the public's will.

According to the JPPI press release (available in full below):

"There is a significant gap between the problematic image of Israel held by some of World Jewry as a

obvious reasons, the question of all Israelis sharing the civic and military burden equally is more concerning to Israelis than to Diaspora Jews.

The difference, therefore, is in the details, rather than in the increasing levels of dissatisfaction expressed by both Jews in Israel and Jews in the Diaspora.

In this week's bulletin, we provide you with the RRFEI perspective on the Jewish People Policy Institute's new study, which was released just yesterday. You may find the JPPI press release and our remarks in the right hand column.

For context, we greatly encourage you to also explore [JPPI's earlier, seminal study on world Jewry's perspectives on Israel as a Jewish and democratic state, available for download here: \[link\]](#).

This study, more than any previous study, **emphasizes how concerned world Jewish leadership is regarding issues of religion and state in Israel.** They cannot reconcile the current state of affairs with Israel's identity as a Jewish and democratic state; moreover - they believe it is detrimental to Jewish communities around the

liberal, open and welcoming society, and the picture that arises from the research that led to building the index... The bulk of the differences arise from the gaps between the desire of the vast majority in Israel to maintain a unifying structure and a Jewish character to the state, and between the goal shared by many communities in the Diaspora, especially their more liberal elements, to welcome and embrace all those who identify as Jews and who feel some sort of connection to their roots."

However, this question of the difference in perception between Diaspora Jewry and Israelis does not hold true when it comes to specific issues such as marriage freedom. According to this same JPPI study, 60% of Israeli Jews support legalizing civil marriage in Israel, and [Hiddush's recent public opinion survey \[link\]](#) showed that **60% of Jewish Israelis also welcome the involvement of Diaspora Jewish organizations in advocating for marriage freedom in Israel.** In this regard, both Israel and the Jewish communities of the Diaspora maintain the same view: both want to see the current coercive policies in Israel changed, and Israelis welcome the Diaspora's involvement in advancing our shared vision. Additionally, [Hiddush's annual Religion & State Indices \[link\]](#) highlight the public's increasing dissatisfaction with the Government's religion and state policies, and survey respondents express their desire for fundamental changes in Israeli society that will establish true religious freedom and equality in Israel.

The right to family is a basic human right, recognized under the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights. To our shame, Israel has elected to enter a reservation regarding this right, as it ratified the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. The Covenant anchored in international law the principles of the Universal Declaration, but Israel stated that regarding personal law, it does not see itself subject to international norms when they conflict with religious law, as mandated under Israeli marriage and divorce laws. **The significance of surveys of this kind is that they consistently demonstrate the political leadership's betrayal of Israel's electorate, in exchange for a mess of**

world, not only to the Israeli population.

Despite the wishes of international Jewry, **theocratic political and religious leaders are ever active, ever pushing Israel towards becoming a state ruled by halakha.** This season, as we marked Yom HaShoah and now move into Yom HaAtzmaut, we were once again reminded of this ugly (and all too real) phenomenon, for [the Yated Ne'eman editorial proclaimed the theological link between Israel and international antisemitism \[link\]](#), even as we prepared to mourn those lost to us in the Shoah. Lest we forget, this is the official publication of Degel HaTorah, a partner in the current Government Coalition...

And so, reminded of the Anti-Zionist and anti-democratic forces eating away at the foundations of the modern Jewish state's government, we must all turn our attention to this most recent JPPI report. The stakes for Israel-Diaspora relations have never been higher.

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porridge and some political clout. The government betrays not only the fundamental principles of democratic society and human rights, but also the will of the majority of its citizens, including many who voted for the parties that are partners in the current Government Coalition.

The full JPPI Press Release: 60% of Israeli Jews want civil marriage legalized in Israel

- Soldiers contribute the most to the success of Israel, significantly more than other groups
- At the bottom of the list: Muslim-Arabs and ultra-Orthodox (haredi) are viewed as contributing least to the success of Israel
- Diaspora Jews are viewed more favorably than Israelis who live abroad
- Majority appreciate Ethiopian immigrants' contribution to the State

Jerusalem, May 8, 2016...The results of a survey published today as a part Jewish People Policy Institute's Jewish Pluralism Index, supported by the William Davidson Foundation, finds that almost 90% of Jewish Israelis feel "comfortable" or "very comfortable" to be themselves in Israel. The sense of comfort is greater among those who define themselves further to the right on the political or religious spectrum. Among those who define themselves as left (4.9% of the sample), nearly half do not feel comfortable being themselves in Israel. Among those on the right (22% of the sample) over 90% feel "very comfortable" or "quite comfortable" being themselves. Most of the Jewish public in Israel (over 80%) feels that "secular, traditional and religious Jews are all equally good Jews."

Public perceptions of about certain sectors of Israel society and whether they "contribute" more or less to the success of the country, show that soldiers are perceived most positively, significantly more than any other group. The two groups whose children tend not to serve in the military, Muslim-Arabs and the ultra-Orthodox, are perceived as contributing least to the success of the country. Interestingly, the Druze were perceived in a relatively positive light. Other interesting finding include: Diaspora Jews are more positively perceived than Israelis who choose to live abroad; and the majority of Israelis appreciate the contribution of Ethiopian immigrants. "This is because Israelis care most about those who share the burden of living in the state," according to JPPI President Avinoam Bar Yosef.

[\[link\]](#)

Best wishes,

Uri Regev

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Resources

- [Western Wall compromise agreement](#)
- [Chief Rabbi Lau attacks Bennett over pluralism](#)
- [J-REC / AJC Mission to Israel](#)
- [Giyur K'halacha](#)
- [Acts of violence](#)
- [Kashrut regulations for hotels and event halls](#)
- [JFNA Israel Religious Expression Platform](#)
- [JPPI report: Jewish & Democratic](#)

Contact us

email: organizers@rrfei.org

Phone (US): [646-334-5636](tel:646-334-5636)

Phone (Isr): [054-779-1179](tel:054-779-1179)

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The index finds that there are different and sometimes opposing understandings of the meaning of the word pluralism and the way in which it should be implemented in the Jewish-Israeli society. Despite this, the Jewish public tends to agree on pluralistic values even with the sharp religious and political differences among the various groups in the society. JPPI defines Jewish pluralism in Israeli, in the context of this project, as "The condition in which Jews of different social classes, ideologies, religious streams, levels of beliefs and practices, genders, and ethnic backgrounds have equal opportunity to legitimately exercise their differences in the public sphere."

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Bar Yosef said that the index and the survey conducted are part of an in-depth project to study pluralism in Israel and among the Jewish people. The project is led by JPPI Senior Fellow Shmuel Rosner. "At this point, the research will focus on the Jewish population in Israel. Next year, JPPI will undertake a special effort to examine how sustaining a Jewish framework affects minorities living among us."

Bar Yosef added that "The index is intended to provide a yearly and objective measurement as to the ability of each Jew to feel at home in the Jewish state. Seemingly, there is a significant gap between the problematic image of Israel held by some of world Jewry as a liberal, open and welcoming society, and the picture that arises from the research that led to building the index. My assessment, based on the research conducted so far, is that the bulk of the differences arise from the gaps between the desire of the vast majority in Israel to maintain a unifying structure and a Jewish character to the state, and between the goal shared by many communities in the Diaspora, especially their more liberal elements, to welcome and embrace all those who identify as Jews and who feel some sort of connection to their roots."

Sixty percent of Israeli Jews believe there should be civil marriage in Israel according to the JPPI survey. More than 56% of Israeli Jews think the Israeli government should be more considerate of minority opinions while almost 48% feel there is too much freedom of

expression in Israel. Additionally, the survey finds that 44% of Israeli Jews would like non-Jews to also attend their children's schools.

Other issues relating to pluralism examined in the survey show that most Jews feel that "There is no need to allow women to wear tefillin (phylacteries) at the Western Wall. A significant majority is opposed to the statement that "It is preferable that homosexuals not serve as Knesset members."

The survey, conducted by Panels Politics, sampled 1000 individuals who defined themselves as – 30.4% secular, 20.8% secular traditional, 22.5% traditional, 4% as liberal religious, 10.3% as religious and 10.1% as ultra-Orthodox (haredi).

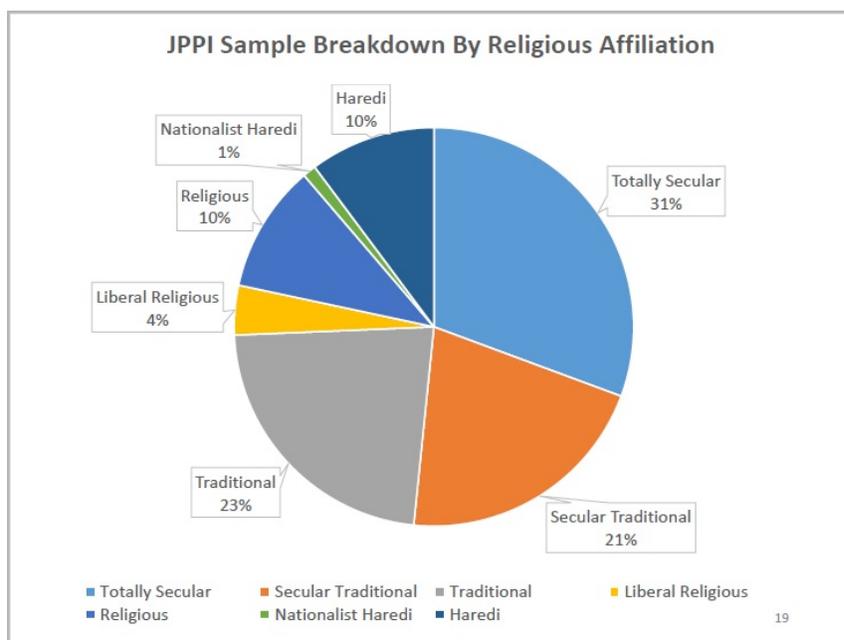
Statistical analysis for the Pluralism Index and the methodological development was led by Professor Steven Popper, a Senior Fellow at the Institute, together with JPPI Senior Fellows demographer Professor Uzi Rebhun, sociologist Dr. Shlomo Fischer, Shmuel Rosner and Institute Fellow Noah Slepko.

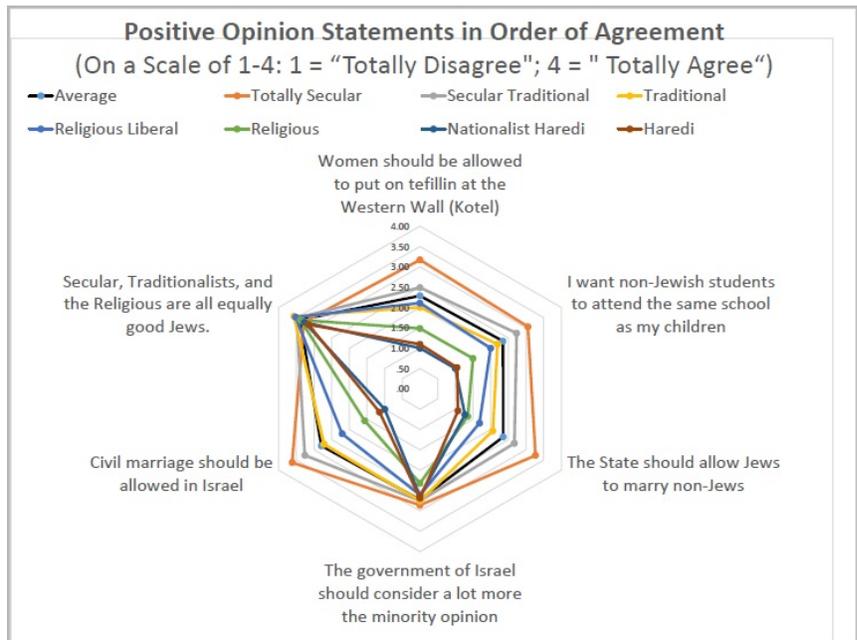
[Click here to download JPPI's full survey.](#)

JPPI is an independent policy planning think tank. The mission of the Institute is to ensure the thriving of the Jewish people and the Jewish civilization by engaging in professional strategic thinking and action-oriented policy planning on issues of primary concern to world Jewry.

For further information or to interview JPPI experts contact Laura Kam

laura@kamgs.com, 054-806-8613





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

Website: WWW.RRFEI.ORG | Email: organizers@rrfei.org | Tel. [US] [646-334-5636](tel:646-334-5636); [Israel] [054-779-1179](tel:054-779-1179)

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Freedom of Religion for Israel
182 East 95th St., Suite 24G
New York, New York 10128
US

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