

# RISING STREAMS

REFORM AND  
CONSERVATIVE  
JUDAISM IN ISRAEL

Dan Feferman



The Jewish People Policy Institute (Established by the Jewish Agency for Israel) Ltd. (CC)

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## REFORM AND CONSERVATIVE JUDAISM IN ISRAEL

Dan Feferman

Editors: Barry Geltman and Rami Tal



**המכון למדיניות העם היהודי** (מיסודה של הסוכנות היהודית לא"י) בע"מ (חל"צ)

**The Jewish People Policy Institute** (Established by the Jewish Agency for Israel) Ltd. (CC)

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

## Numbers

As many as 12-13 percent of Israeli Jews (~800,000) self-identify as Reform or Conservative in recent surveys; there are 125 total Reform or Conservative communities throughout Israel, 56 of them with permanent synagogues; there are 280 rabbis affiliated with the movements nationally, 85 of them working in communal capacities, and 8-10 new rabbis are ordained in Israel each year by the movements' seminaries. Both streams have small but active youth movements, with ~1800 members combined in 32 branches, pre-military *mechinot* programs and 3 kibbutzim. There is significant growth from just two and even one decade ago in all of these parameters.

## Lifecycle events

The movements' greatest success has been in conducting alternative Jewish lifecycle events for secular and traditional Israelis. Each year, the movements conduct around 1000 weddings, over 3000 bar/bat mitzvah ceremonies, around 400 conversions, and close to 1000 additional events such as funerals and circumcisions.

## Understanding the movements in the Israeli context

The movements report only 12,000 registered adult members combined. This stands in stark contrast to the above figures, especially when approached from an American context. We suggest this is due to a number of elements:

- Synagogues and organizational membership play a minimal role in Israel, as Israelis rarely “belong” to synagogues (rather pay-per-service) or movements and much of what the organized Jewish community provides abroad is provided in Israel by the state, schools, or public space.
- Most “Hiloni” Israelis are not really secular or detached from Judaism and largely engage in Jewish practice, holiday observance of some sort, and life cycle events. This connects to a general shift to post-materialist societies in the West, which has inspired some renewed interest in spirituality, religious practice, culture, and tradition.
- However, those secular Israelis are also turned off by Orthodox Judaism, more specifically the Rabbinate and the religious establishment, and are increasingly exposed to non-Orthodox alternatives through travel abroad and interaction with local communities, interactions with Diaspora Jews in Israel and attendance of Reform or Conservative bar/bat mitzvahs or weddings (1/2 of secular, 1/3 of traditional, 1/5 of Dati, and even 1/10 of Haredi Israelis have attended such events).

## Paradigm shift

This amounts to a significant shift in the reigning paradigm for understanding the normative religious identity and practice for secular and traditional Israelis. Historically, most Israelis would say, “the synagogue I do not attend is Orthodox,” meaning that they viewed Orthodox Jewish practice as the only authentic form of Judaism, although they were not observant. **Today, a significant and growing number of secular and traditional Israelis would also say, “they do not attend Reform and Conservative synagogues”.** This means that Reform and Conservative Jewish practice are now seen as authentic and preferable by these largely secular and traditional Israelis, who engage with such Jewish practice **primarily for lifecycle events and holidays.**

Although this has not translated into Reform and Conservative Movements with hundreds of thousands of dues-paying committed followers, it could mean that in the near future, as many as **20-30 percent of secular and traditional Israelis could similarly view Reform and Conservative Judaism as authentic and preferable forms of Jewish practice.**



## **Public attitude**

Overall, public attitudes toward the Reform and Conservative Movements in particular and pluralistic expressions of Judaism in general are positive. Sympathy is highest among secular Israelis on the political left and center, turning to mixed feelings or neutrality among traditional Israelis on the center-right and hostility among the Orthodox and Haredi on the political right. A majority of Israeli Jews favor granting recognition and equal rights to the movements on par with the Orthodox. That said, the hostility from the Orthodox and ultra-Orthodox is significantly more intense and active than is the level of support from the secular and traditional public.

## **Rights, Freedoms and Access**

### **Government funding**

The movements, and non-Orthodox organizations in general, receive significantly less funding and support than Orthodox and Haredi groups (millions vs. billions of shekels). However, the movements are able to access some funding, including for rabbi salaries, synagogues, and educational programs. They also garner significant cooperation from various government offices on specific programs (education) and some municipalities.



**Conversions**

The Interior Ministry recognizes Reform and Conservative conversions conducted abroad for the sake of granting citizenship and those conversions conducted in Israel for citizens for the sake of the population registry; but Reform and Conservative conversions performed in Israel for non-citizens do not confer citizenship. The Rabbinate does not recognize any of these conversions, which affects Reform and Conservative converts' ability to marry in Israel.

**Marriage and Divorce**

The Rabbinate has a monopoly, and civil marriage does not exist in Israel. All marriages conducted abroad are recognized by the state, but Jewish couples must divorce through the Rabbinate. Many couples, either through choice or necessity, are skirting the Rabbinate in favor of alternative (Jewish) ceremonies in Israel and registering as *yeduim batzibur* (domestic partnership), while many still marry abroad or go through *Tzohar*<sup>1</sup> to avoid, at least in part, the Rabbinate.

**Kotel access**

A small space has existed since 2000 for egalitarian prayer. A 2016 compromise that would have expanded it and given it equal status to the Orthodox one, with Reform/Conservative involvement in its management, was frozen in 2017. The government is implementing a physical upgrade of the non-Orthodox Kotel space.

**Education system**

Within the secular public-school system, pluralistic organizations are active and influential in shaping Jewish educational content.

## Implications for Policy

- The unequal status of the non-Orthodox movements in Israel is a constant point of contention between the Israeli government and many Diaspora Jews. Significant elements of the government and the constituencies they represent are strongly opposed to the liberal movements, and even to expressions of religious pluralism. At the same time, while there is wide support for these movements among the public, this support is not afforded high importance or priority by the supporters themselves. Thus, policies favorable to the movements may find favor with the Diaspora but will cause domestic political discord.
- Continued attempts by the Haredi parties to push legislation that would grant greater control to the Rabbinat and block the non-Orthodox movements (as well as Modern Orthodox groups), is driving many Israelis to bypass the Rabbinat altogether. Some of these bypassing efforts are led by Modern Orthodox groups alongside the Reform and Conservative Movements. This could make the Rabbinat irrelevant to a significant portion of Jewish Israelis if this trend continues (marriage, kashrut supervision, conversion, etc.).
- On certain issues and among certain segments of Israeli society, despite legal hurdles and public funding discrimination (or perhaps because of these), the Reform and Conservative Movements have succeeded in expanding physically, as far as new communities and to a greater number of Israelis in the past decade. This is certainly influenced by positive (appeal) as well as negative factors (rebellious statement against Rabbinat).
- At the same time, and on certain issues, when not specifically labelled “Reform” or “Conservative,” or when public attention is not drawn to a given issue, the government has an easier time allowing and supporting some activities and efforts of non-Orthodox Judaism in Israel. The Haredi parties are also often able to be more pragmatic and

compromise in such matters. This is most evident in the education system. This leaves the movements with a dilemma, whether and when to push for symbolic and public victories that will draw active pushback, or advance practical and gradual gains, quietly creating facts on the ground.

- Relatedly, the perceived alignment of the Reform and Conservative Movements with left-wing, liberal politics on a range of political and social issues inhibits a broader appeal to secular and traditionally minded, right wing sectors of the public, who might otherwise be drawn to the religious content the movements offer (but attracts other segments of society). Therefore, perhaps a market-segmentation strategic approach might be appropriate in order to expand to new segments of society.

# INTRODUCTION

Matters of religion and state, and specifically the status of the non-Orthodox Jewish movements in Israel, have featured prominently in the context of secular-religious and Israel-Diaspora relations in recent years.

In JPPI's 2017 Annual Assessment, we noted, "*The Israeli government decision on June 25, 2017, to freeze the Western Wall (Kotel) agreement and advance a conversion bill was dramatic, as were the responses from Jewish leaders and organizations in the United States, Israel and other countries.*"<sup>2</sup>

Similarly, in the 2016 Annual Assessment, we observed that, "*One of the ongoing sticking points in Israel-Diaspora relations is the disconnect between Israel's Jewish-Israeli public space and the expectations of some Jewish communities throughout the world. Non-Israeli Jews (and quite a few Israelis) complain of the lack of Jewish 'pluralism' in Israel. They mainly refer to the fact that Orthodox Judaism in Israel is accorded superior status to that of other Jewish denominations.*"<sup>3</sup>

Likewise, in the 2015 Annual Assessment, we wrote, "*Internal Israeli developments also influenced Israel-Diaspora relations. The new government... is moving in a direction that many of the world's Jews (especially in the U.S.) do not endorse. ...especially in regard to religion and state matters.*"<sup>4</sup>

Activists who advance pluralistic Judaism in Israel often claim that the Orthodox monopoly over government institutions and budgets essentially bars the progressive Jewish movements, specifically the Reform and Conservative Movements, from expanding in Israeli society and reaching new audiences. Opponents and skeptics argue that this is hardly the case, and that Israeli society is simply not interested in alternative liberal brands of Judaism. From time to time, polls and surveys are published, some

with an ideological skew, framing the research to exaggerate or minimize these movements in Israel. The passionate and increasing involvement of American Jewish organizations in this debate adds another element of complexity as American Jewry is largely liberal and approaches the subject from the American perspective of separation of church and state and, voluntary synagogue membership and organized religious movements. The warnings from the American Jewish community, 50 percent of which is either Reform or Conservative (and many more who are unaffiliated but identify with them), are also growing louder. They assert that Israel's religious policies are alienating American Jews, and Israel risks losing their critical support if it continues down its current path of exclusionary religious policies. (For examples, see the following articles linked in the endnote.)<sup>5</sup>

Considering these trends, this paper seeks to examine the state of the Reform and Conservative Movements in Israel, including:

- The Reform and Conservative Movements in Israeli society;
- The infrastructure and scope of activities of the Reform and Conservative Movements;
- The formation of a new, non-Orthodox Israeli Jewish identity;
- Israeli attitudes toward the Reform and Conservative Movements, religious pluralism and matters of religion and state;
- The legal status of the non-Orthodox movements across a range of practical issues, including marriage and divorce, conversion, burial, access to the education system and funding for rabbis, synagogue construction and more.

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Special thanks to my colleagues, Dr. Shlomo Fischer, Prof. Uzi Rebhun and Shmuel Rosner for their guidance throughout, to Dr. John Ruskay, Barry Geltman, Dr. Inbal Hakman, and Noah Slepko for their invaluable assistance, to JPPI President Avinoam Bar Yosef for his support, and to the entire JPPI staff, who consulted or assisted on various matters throughout the process.

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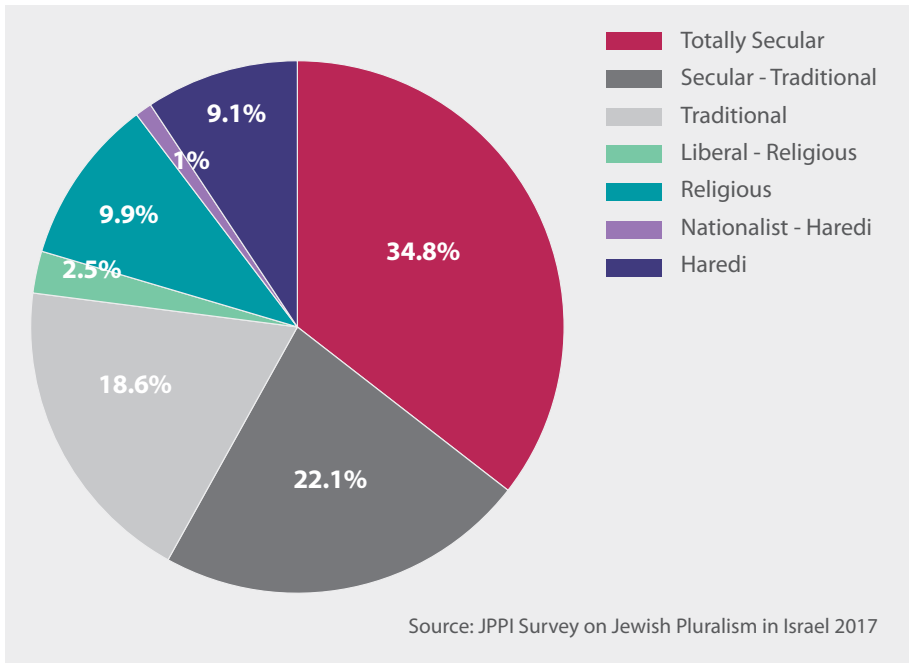
# REFORM AND CONSERVATIVE JEWS IN ISRAEL: BY THE NUMBERS

The first section of this report seeks to determine how many Reform and Conservative Jews there are in Israel. This is no simple task as it is not clear how to measure this in the Israeli context. In the U.S., the standard-bearer is synagogue membership, while estimates are based on self-declaration in surveys. In smaller Diaspora communities, surveys are occasionally conducted by community organizations, or based on the number of Jews eligible for social services. In Israel, it might be synagogue attendance but not membership, as the model and structure differ; that is, Israelis rarely “belong” to a synagogue, rather, at best, attend (and donate to) a close-by synagogue of their preference with varying degrees of frequency. However, we know that Reform and Conservative Jews, by nature, do not attend synagogue for the sake of regular prayer as much as do Orthodox Jews, so this might not work either.

Before we delve into the numbers, it is useful to examine general demographic and statistical breakdowns of Israeli society today. On the eve of Israel’s 70th anniversary (as of April 2018), Israel’s population stood at 8.84 million citizens, 75 percent of whom are Jewish.<sup>6, 7</sup>

According to JPPI’s survey of Jewish pluralism in Israel, among Israel’s 6.5 million Jews, 34.8 percent of the representative sample identified themselves Totally Secular (Hiloni), 22.1 percent as Secular – Traditional (Hiloni-Masorti), 18.6 percent as Traditional (Masorti), 2.5 percent as Liberal – Religious (Dati-Liberali),<sup>8</sup> 9.9 percent as Religious (Dati), 1 percent Nationalist – Haredi (Haredi-Leumi), and 9.1 percent as Haredi (ultra-Orthodox).<sup>9</sup> (See figure 1.)

**Figure 1 / Breakdown of Religious Identity of Israeli Jews**



This is comparable to the Pew data, (9 percent Haredi, 13 percent Dati, 29 percent Masorti and 49 percent Hiloni), and other surveys conducted in recent years.<sup>10</sup> The same Pew study, one of the more extensive in recent years, asked respondents with which religious stream they identify, if any, and 3 and 2 percent respectively, answered they identify as Reform or Conservative Jews. Meaning that according to Pew, 5 percent of Israeli Jews, or 325,000 people, identify as Reform or Conservative.

For the Pew researchers, coming from an American context, and for many in the American Jewish community, these numbers might seem small. As a point of comparison, among American Jews, the most significant community outside of Israel – 35 percent consider themselves Reform, 18 percent Conservative, 30 percent non-denominational and 10 percent Orthodox (6 percent Ultra-Orthodox and 4 percent Modern Orthodox), while another 6 percent is of another non-Orthodox denomination.<sup>11</sup>

Worldwide, the Reform movement claims 1.5 – 2 million members (out of nearly 15 million Jews),<sup>12</sup> while the Masorti/Conservative movement is also significant, although not as large. In the U.S., there were 570,000 adult members of Conservative congregations in 2013, and another nearly 400,000 adult American Jews who “identified with” Conservative Judaism but did not belong to a synagogue.<sup>13</sup>

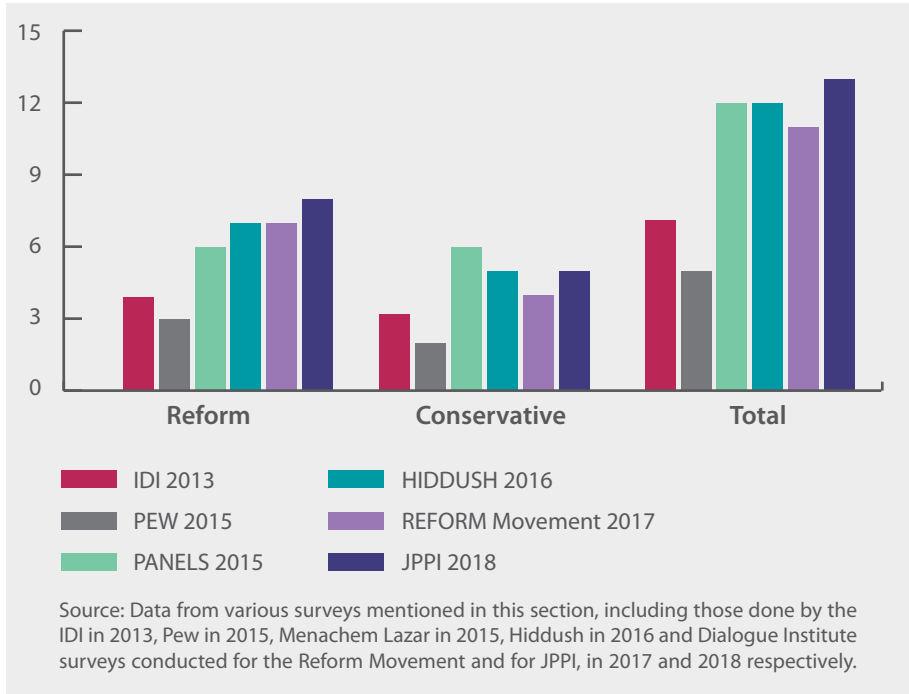
Beyond the Pew study, a number of studies in recent years that relate to the size of Israel’s Reform and Conservative populations have yielded varying results. One of the more extensive studies, conducted by Tamar Hermann and Chanan Cohen for the Israel Democracy Institute in 2013, asked Israelis whether they “feel that (they) belong to one of the denominations of Judaism, and if so, which one?” Here, 3.9 percent responded they “feel they belong” to the Reform denomination while another 3.2 percent identified with the Masorti/Conservative denomination. A previous study by Hermann, conducted in 2009, had a similar result. If we compare this with statistics from 1999, we find a 50 percent increase.<sup>14</sup> This would mean that roughly 500,000 Israeli Jews identify with Reform and Conservative Judaism and would constitute a significant jump from the Pew numbers.<sup>15</sup>

A more recent study, from 2015, by Panels Politics, showed that 12 percent of Israeli Jews identified with the Reform and Conservative denomination (6 percent each).<sup>16, 17</sup>

This statistic, even if close to accurate, would mean that the number of Israelis self-identifying as Reform or Conservative is roughly equal in size to that of the Dati or Haredi group and indicates a significant demographic shift in Israel. A 2016 Hiddush<sup>18</sup> survey also shows that 12 percent of Israeli Jews “affiliate themselves” with the Reform (7 percent) or Conservative (5 percent) movement.<sup>19</sup>

A more recent study by the Dialogue Institute conducted for the Reform Movement showed 11 percent (with 7 percent Reform and 4 percent Conservative);<sup>20</sup> JPPI’s upcoming report on Israeli Judaism (conducted by Rosner and Fuchs) shows 13 percent in all – 8 percent who identify as Reform and 5 percent as Conservative. (See figure 2.)

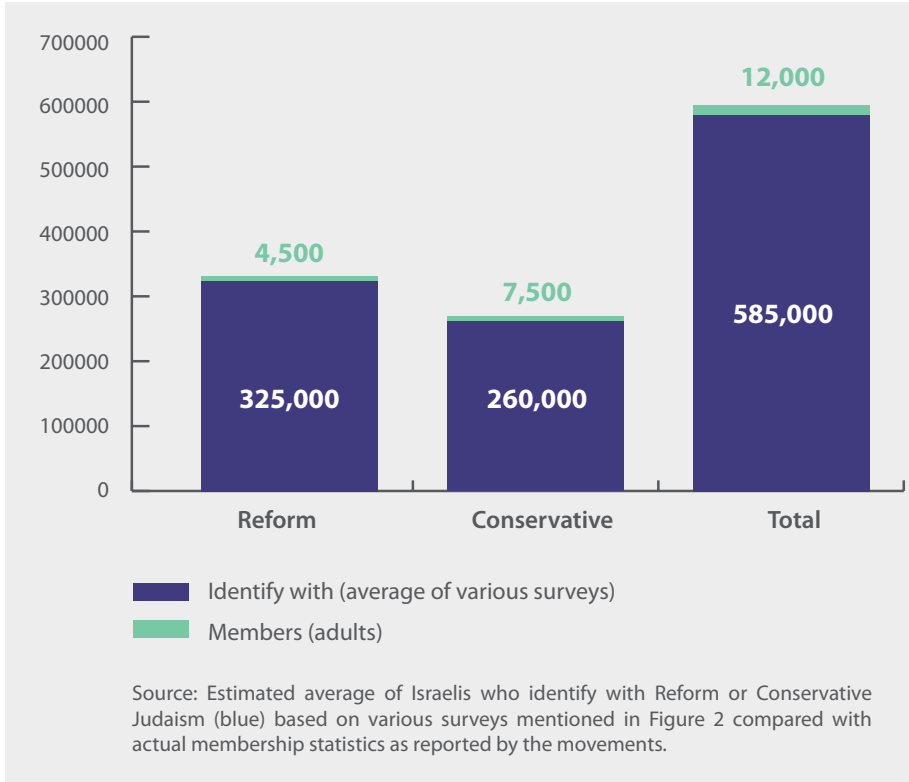
**Figure 2 /** Israeli Jews who Identify as Reform or Conservative - According to Various Surveys



These studies leave us with a significant discrepancy as to the actual size of the Reform and Conservative Movements in Israel, from 5 percent at the lowest (Pew) to 13 percent at the highest (Dialogue Institute), with IDI and Guttman-Avi Chai providing a middle ground of 7-8 percent. The most recent studies consistently place the number at over 10 percent combined.

However, even the 5 percent low mark stands in overwhelming contrast compared to the actual membership statistics of the two movements. The Israeli Movement for Reform and Progressive Judaism (hereafter: The Reform Movement) reported 4500 registered adult members as of 2017. The Masorti Movement in Israel (hereafter: the Conservative Movement)<sup>21</sup> reported 7500 registered adults as of 2017. (Were children to be included, we could estimate as many as 20,000 dues paying Reform and Conservative Jews. See figure 3.)

**Figure 3 / Israeli Jews who Identify with Reform or Conservative Judaism vs. Membership in those Movements**



While this is the first time the membership statistics of the movements are being published (to the best of our knowledge), their general scope was assumed by those familiar with the topic, and often touted by those skeptical of the need to pay much attention to non-Orthodox Judaism (and opponents of religious pluralism) in the Israeli public discourse.

# SCOPE OF INFRASTRUCTURE AND ACTIVITIES

## INFRASTRUCTURE

There are 47 Reform communities around Israel today, of which 30 have permanent synagogues and community center structures. In 1989, there were only 15, and 22 a decade ago.<sup>22</sup> The largest most active communities are in Tel Aviv, Jerusalem, Haifa, Ra'anana, Modiin and Mevaseret Tzion. These centers, as opposed to the smaller communities, host daily activities including lectures, discussion groups and, of course, religious services, and attract tens if not hundreds of individuals on a daily basis.<sup>23</sup>

Israel's Conservative Movement has 78 communities, with 26 fully functioning communities with permanent synagogues and another 52 that hold their activities in temporary structures, schools or community centers. Small groups regularly meet for study and prayer, in either a more or less traditional or formal setting, and larger events get significant turnout.

As a point of comparison, there are over 15,000 Orthodox synagogues in Israel, as of 2014, with roughly 200 new ones built each year. This statistic does not include regular prayer groups that meet outside of synagogues (thousands more of these exist).<sup>24</sup>

Rabbi Gilad Kariv,<sup>25</sup> who heads the Reform Movement in Israel, said his goal is that every city and town in Israel with a considerable secular population will have a Reform or Conservative synagogue. Rabbi Avi Novis Deutsch, who heads the Schechter Rabbinical Seminary the

Conservative Movement, thinks the goal should be to double the number of communities to give the average secular Israeli the option of which synagogue to attend.

Both movements maintain rabbinical seminaries in Israel – Hebrew Union College for the Reform Movement, which is a part of the HUC system based in the United States (Los Angeles, Cincinnati, and New York) and the Schechter Institute for the Conservative Movement. HUC in Jerusalem ordains 5 or 6 new Israeli rabbis yearly, while Schechter ordains 3 to 5.

Today, there are 25 full-time Conservative rabbis working in communities around Israel. This is out of a total 170 ordained Conservative rabbis in Israel who are members of the Conservative Rabbinical Assembly – which includes many ordained in the U.S. and other places, about half of whom are employed as rabbis or educators in some manner. The Reform Movement currently has 110 rabbis in the Reform Rabbinical Council in Israel, 60 of whom are actively working in Reform communities or educational frameworks in a professional capacity within Israel, while the rest either work in pluralistic Jewish education or are working abroad.

Beyond synagogues, the movements are active within the school system. Since the 1970s TALI (acronym in Hebrew for “Enriched Jewish Studies”), originally affiliated with the Conservative Movement, provides roughly 50,000 children in Israel in 325 public schools – 110 elementary and 215 preschools – with additional Jewish education in a pluralistic spirit (12 percent of all secular public schools).<sup>26</sup> Therefore, families who wish to include additional Jewish learning within a secular framework can do so through this program, supported in part by the American Conservative Movement (more on this in the “Access to the Education System” later in the paper).

The Reform Movement currently includes a small number of elementary and post-elementary schools in Jerusalem, Modiin, and Tel Aviv, as well



as the prestigious Leo Baeck High School in Haifa, the country's only Reform high school. Together these comprise 97 classes and, in 2017, 2,860 students. Additionally, there are 50 Reform kindergarten classes serving 1530 students. Ten public schools in Tel Aviv work with the Reform Movement to help prepare sixth graders for their bar/bat mitzvahs, and the movement aims to incorporate this tutoring to all of Tel Aviv's 60 secular public schools. Beyond that, the Reform Movement works with 100 secular public schools to provide special educational content centered around various holiday and life cycle events, and holds "Torah ceremonies," which involve 7000 students yearly.<sup>27</sup> The Conservative movement has 16 kindergarten classes serving 400 students.

As we will note later in this report, while there are few "Reform" or "Conservative" schools in Israel, many of the Mamlachti (Secular) public schools include Jewish educational content developed by pluralistic Jewish educational organizations. We can assume that many of those sending their children to Reform, Conservative or generally to pluralistic Jewish schools, or schools with enhanced Jewish studies, are doing so primarily because of the high quality of the education offered, and not because of the religious education provided. However, as explained by one such parent (a JPPI colleague, who considers themselves "Hiloni" and sends their child to a Reform school), although the quality of the education is what attracted them, and the religious aspects were a deterrent initially, they have come to value and appreciate the liberal, pluralistic religious education the school provides.

As a point of comparison, there are today in Israel, 2711 "Mamlachti" elementary and middle public schools serving Israel's Hiloni and Masorti populations, 809 "Mamlachti-Dati" schools ("public-religious") and 1511 private Haredi schools.<sup>28</sup> Moreover, the Conservative Movement, working with the school system, has, for the past 25 years, conducted bar and bat mitzvah programs for disabled children (who would not

normally be able to have such a ceremony), culminating in around 200 such ceremonies each year.

The Conservative Movement maintains an active youth movement, NOAM, which has 20 branches around the country with 1400 active members. The Reform Movement's youth movement, *Noar Telem*, includes roughly 400 participants in 12 branches (including in four new branches in the last two years),<sup>29</sup> which are recognized by the Education Ministry.<sup>30</sup>

The Reform Movement operates two pre-army academies (*mechinot*) since 2003, in Jaffa and Holon, with 75 students at a time, out of a national total of 40 *mechinot*. Twenty-five additional participants have completed a year of national service in Haifa and Kibbutz Lotan. The students enjoy a year of intensive study and exploration of Jewish heritage and Israeli identity prior to their military service.<sup>31</sup> This is recognized by the IDF and Ministry of Education.<sup>32</sup>

The Conservative Movement established a mechina in 2012, in the Conservative Movement's Kibbutz of Hannaton. In all, together with its other pre-military programs, it counts 90 participants.<sup>33</sup>

There are also a number of kibbutzim, or agricultural collectives, that are officially part of these movements. Yahel and Lotan are officially Reform kibbutzim, while Hannaton is part of the Conservative Movement. Notably, Reform and Conservative synagogues or prayer groups can also be found on other kibbutzim around Israel. A growing number of kibbutzim, once staunchly secular, hold synagogue services on Shabbat, holidays, and for life-cycle events; most are "Reform style," although unaffiliated.

**Figure 4** / Summary of Reform and Conservative Movements' infrastructure in Israel

<b>Reform Movement</b>	<b>Conservative Movement</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>47 communities today</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 30 with permanent buildings</li> <li>• Compared to 15 in 1989; 22 in 2008</li> </ul> </li> <li>• <b>Hebrew Union College Rabbinical Seminary (Israel campus)</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 5-6 new rabbis each year</li> <li>• 60 rabbis actively working around Israel</li> <li>• 110 Reform rabbis nationally</li> </ul> </li> <li>• <b>Noar Telem youth movement</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 400 members in 12 branches</li> <li>• Recognized by Education Ministry</li> </ul> </li> <li>• <b>2 pre-military “mechinot” and programs – 75 participants</b></li> <li>• <b>Kibbutz Yahel and Kibbutz Lotan</b></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>78 communities today</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 26 with permanent buildings</li> </ul> </li> <li>• <b>Schechter Rabbinical Seminary</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 3-5 new rabbis each year</li> <li>• 25 rabbis working full-time in communities</li> <li>• 170 Conservative rabbis in rabbinic council</li> </ul> </li> <li>• <b>NOAM youth movement</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 1400 members in 20 branches</li> <li>• Recognized by Education Ministry</li> </ul> </li> <li>• <b>Pre-military “mechina” in Hannaton – 90 participants</b></li> <li>• <b>Kibbutz Hannaton</b></li> </ul>
<hr/> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Major communities: Tel Aviv, Jerusalem, Haifa, Modi'in, Ra'anana, Mevaseret Tsion</li> <li>• Growing presence of Reform/ Conservative synagogues or Reform/ Conservative “style” synagogues on kibbutzim and moshavim.</li> </ul>	

## ACTIVITIES

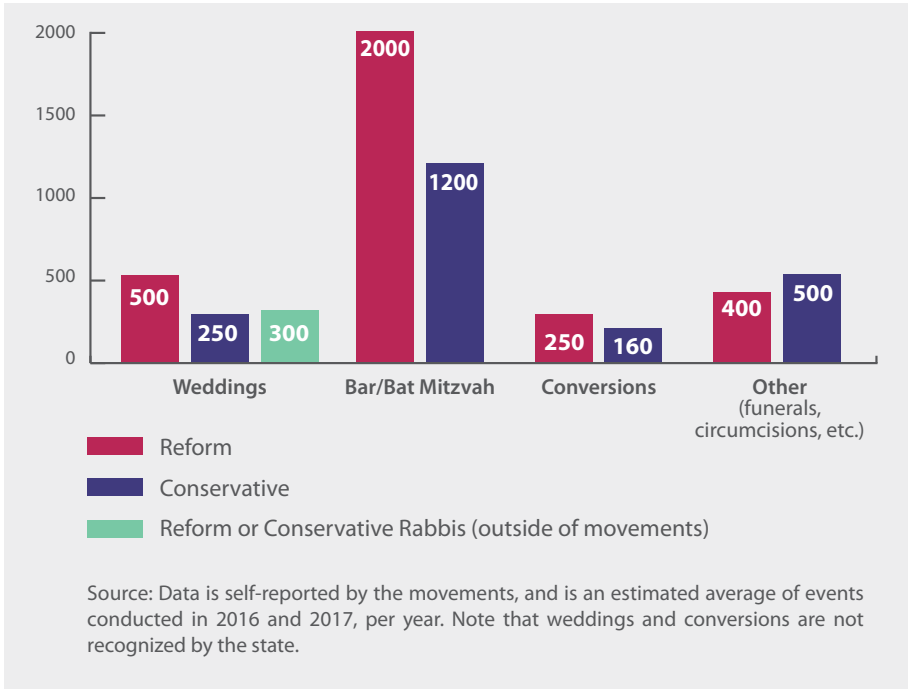
The movements have probably been most active and successful in providing Israelis with non-Orthodox alternatives for conducting life-cycle events – namely weddings and bar/bat mitzvah ceremonies. The Reform Movement estimates that it conducts about 500 weddings a year and about 2000 bar/bat mitzvah ceremonies within the official communities. The Conservative Movement estimates that it conducts about 250 wedding ceremonies a year and 1200 bar/bat mitzvah ceremonies. The vast majority of the participants are non-members who engage with the communities on a “pay-per-service” basis. There are also an estimated 300 hundred weddings conducted yearly that might be officiated by a Reform or Conservative ordained rabbi but are not conducted officially through the movements.<sup>34</sup>

The movements also conduct conversion ceremonies in Israel. The Reform Movement converts around 250 people in Israel a year; the Conservative movement conducted 160 conversions in 2016. Although these conversions are not recognized by the Rabbinat, the Interior Ministry recognizes non-Orthodox conversions undergone by Israeli citizens (mainly from the former Soviet Union) and registers the individual as Jewish.

In addition to these conversions, the Reform Movement conducted around 400 lifecycle event ceremonies in 2016 – including funerals, circumcisions and *pidyon ha-ben*.<sup>35</sup> The Conservative Movement conducts roughly 500 such lifecycle ceremonies each year, including around 100 burials. (See figure 5 for lifecycle events.)

To be sure, the number of life-cycle ceremonies conducted by the non-Orthodox movements pales in comparison to those conducted in Orthodox synagogues or by the Rabbinat (e.g., ~37,000 Orthodox weddings versus ~1000 Reform or Conservative weddings a year).

**Figure 5 / Lifecycle Events Conducted per Year (average - estimate) by the Reform and Conservative Movements**



# EXPLAINING THE DISCREPANCY

How can we explain the discrepancy between the 5 percent low mark and the 13 percent high mark found in the various surveys, which would put the number of Israelis identifying as Reform or Conservative anywhere from roughly 300,000 – 800,000, and between either of those figures and the roughly 20,000 people who are actually members of the movements (children included)?

## SOCIETAL DIFFERENCES

The explanation partly lies in the inapplicability of measuring the size of a religious movement in Israel with the membership approach commonly used in the United States and elsewhere. Although this approach might work in the Diaspora (although increasingly less so), it does not translate to Israeli society and the role that synagogue attendance and ritual observance play in people's lives. While Orthodox Jews attend a synagogue on a daily or at least a weekly basis, the same is generally not true for those identifying as Reform and Conservative Jews, whose observance and connection to religion plays out in a different manner. Beyond that, even most Israeli Orthodox synagogues do not function on a membership model, rather they receive voluntary donations and sometimes some government support in the form of tax exemptions, publicly allocated land and partial funding for construction and maintenance.

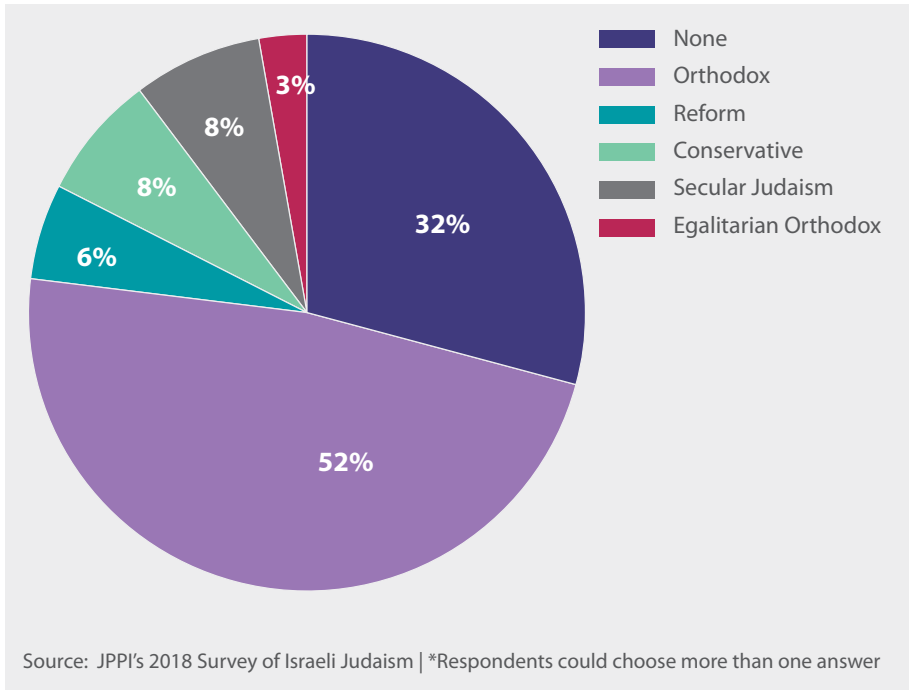
The membership or “synagogue attendance” models work in the Diaspora because even if people do not attend a synagogue regularly, synagogue membership signifies active and deliberate affiliation with the Jewish community. In the Diaspora, the synagogue acts not only as a place of worship and celebration of life-cycle events, but also, and perhaps more importantly, as a social and educational space.<sup>36</sup>

In Israel, synagogue membership does not necessarily signify broader community membership, since the country itself can be seen as “one big Jewish community center.” For religious and traditional Israelis, the synagogue is a place primarily for prayer and spiritual fulfillment. For Israeli Jewish society as a whole, and especially for secular Israelis, the synagogue is seen as a public service (provided by the state) for the occasional life cycle event, much like health care or education. In Israel, unlike the Diaspora, the national language is Hebrew, the national calendar and official holidays are Jewish, Tanakh (Hebrew Bible) is taught in public schools, public institutions are kosher and Shabbat observant, and official government rabbis lead or participate in certain public ceremonies. Unlike the Diaspora, the public sphere in Israel is defined by its very Jewishness and non-religious Jews need not seek a separate Jewish sphere to maintain their Jewish identity.

Looking at regular synagogue attendance in Israel provides more relevant data. Participants in JPPI’s Survey of Israeli Judaism<sup>37</sup> were asked if they had “attended a synagogue in the last year.” Although some respondents gave more than one answer, the survey found that 32 percent of Israeli Jews had not visited any synagogue in the past year, 52 percent had visited an Orthodox synagogue, 8 percent had visited a Conservative synagogue, 6 percent had visited a Reform synagogue, 8 percent had visited a “secular synagogue” (such as Beit Tefila Yisraeli),<sup>38</sup> and 3 percent visited an egalitarian Orthodox synagogue<sup>39</sup>. (See figure 6.)



**Figure 6 / Attended a Synagogue at Least Once in the Last Year**



JPPI's Survey of Israeli Judaism also found that 29 percent of Israeli Jews pray daily. Of the Orthodox, (a quarter of Israeli Jews) 62 percent pray daily. Twenty-seven percent of Conservative Jews, (5 percent of Israeli Jews) pray daily, and 17 percent of self-identified Reform Jews (8 percent of Israeli Jews) do so. Of those who do not identify with any stream, 8 percent pray daily.<sup>40</sup>

Another useful measure is participation in functions and events hosted by the movements. The Reform Movement estimates that roughly 120,000 Israelis attend Reform events (prayer, study, lectures, lifecycle events or holiday celebrations) at least four times a year. Similarly, the Conservative Movement estimates that roughly 200,000 Israelis attend Conservative Movement events at least four times a year.

This helps explain why the registered membership of the two denominations is not an accurate measurement of their size. However,

it does little to explain how the various surveys found that hundreds of thousands of Israeli Jews consider themselves Reform or Conservative. (To be sure, the number of people in the U.S. who self-identify as Reform or Conservative also exceeds the number of official members in each movement, just not by such a large margin.) To answer this, we need to look at a number of elements.

## ISRAELI SECULAR RELIGIOUS IDENTITY

According to the Israeli model of religious identity, “Hiloni” does not necessarily equate with “secular” or “atheist”, nor does it mean that Hiloni Israelis are uninterested in engaging with Jewish traditions or observing Jewish lifecycle events. Indeed, most Israelis who identified as “Reform” also identified as either “traditional” or “secular,” and most who identified as “Conservative” identify as “traditional” (as we will see later on), while few of either category identify as “religious.”

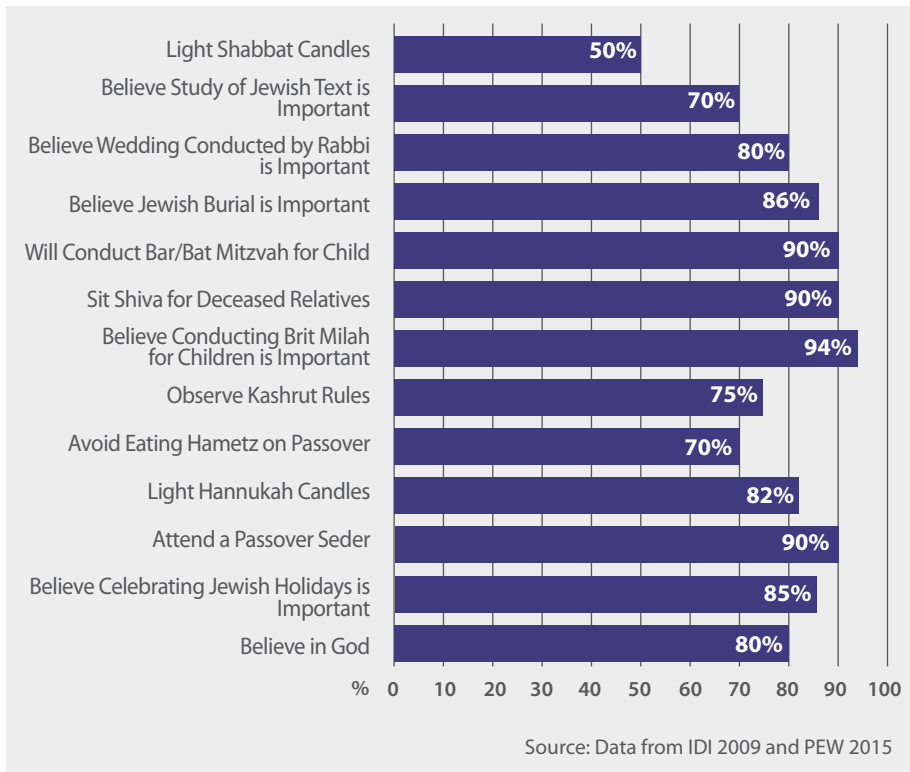
According to the Pew Israel study, 80 percent of Israeli Jews believe in God. For example, according to JPPI’s Survey of Israeli Judaism, 97 percent host or participate in a Passover Seder (vs. about 70 percent of American Jews who do so).<sup>41</sup> The JPPI study also found that on average, 64 percent of all Israeli Jews, and a clear majority of all but the totally secular read the Haggadah all the way through during the Passover Seder.<sup>42</sup>

A 2009 IDI study revealed that Jewish traditions are highly important to most Jewish Israelis: 85 percent noted that celebrating Jewish holidays was important; 90 percent attend a Passover Seder; 82 percent light Hanukah candles; almost 70 percent refrain from eating *hametz* (leavened products) on Passover; and roughly, three-quarters keep some manner of kosher observance. Furthermore, over 94 percent of Israeli Jews consider circumcision important; over 90 percent sit *shiva* (the traditional mourning period); around 90 percent consider a bar or bat mitzvah for their children important; 86 percent consider Jewish burial important; 80

percent think being married by a rabbi is important; and over 70 percent consider the study of Jewish text important (although few actually do it).<sup>43</sup>

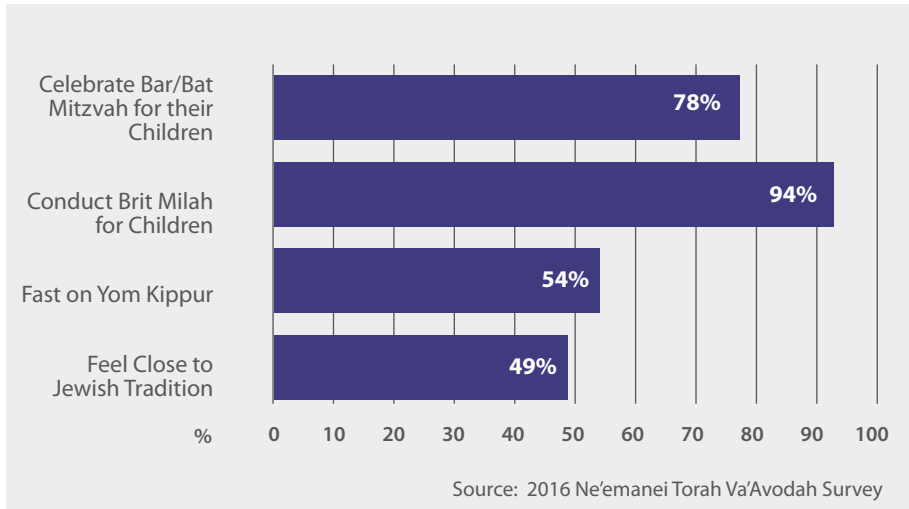
The 2015 Pew study found that 87 percent of Israelis who identified as secular host or attend a Passover Seder, and half of Israeli Jews light Shabbat candles. (See figure 7.)

**Figure 7 / Attitudes and Observance of Jewish Tradition**



Another 2016 survey from the Ne'manei Torah Va'avodah religious-Zionist organization, conducted by the Smith Institute, showed that half of self-identified secular Israelis felt close to religious tradition, over half fasted on Yom Kippur, 94 percent had ritual circumcision performed on their children, and 78 percent held a bar or bat mitzvah ceremony for their children.<sup>44</sup> (See figure 8.)

**Figure 8 / Secular Israelis' Views on Jewish Traditions**



What we cannot know from the data, and this is important to point out, is the rationale behind these behaviors. That is, whether those secular Jews who partake in Jewish traditions, occasionally attend a synagogue or conduct a lifecycle ceremony, do so out of a sense of tradition (“that’s just how it’s done”) or if there an added element of spirituality. If it were the former, then this would not be a consequential statistic rather a reflection of the fact that secular Israelis have always engaged with Jewish traditions to some extent. Data looking at Israelis on this does not exist before the 1990s, so we cannot know. However, if the motivation were (or also) of an individual spiritual fulfilment, it would constitute a sea change in the religiosity of secular Israelis (to be sure, the motivation behind the religious behavior of any individual, including Datiim and Harediim, is beyond the scope of this report).

The closest we can get to answering this question that in regard to Passover, JPPI’s Survey of Israeli Judaism found that about a quarter of respondents said they observe the tradition “because the Torah says so” while the rest responded that their observance was based on a mix of cultural, historical, and familial traditions.

## DISLIKE OF ORTHODOX JUDAISM

Another important element we suggest contributes to this trend is Hiloni Israelis' dislike of Orthodox, especially ultra-Orthodox Judaism. This is a sense the researchers get, primarily based on anecdotal findings and conversations with many Hiloni Israelis, as well as some correlative data. We know, for example, that Hiloni Israelis are uncomfortable with the thought of their child marrying a Haredi – even more than marrying a Christian (93 percent expressed discomfort with the thought).<sup>45</sup>

Similarly, there are few close friendships reported between Haredim and Hilonim and Datiim and Hilonim in surveys.<sup>46</sup> We also find that among totally secular Israelis, more than three-fourths believe that Haredim and Hilonim should not live in mixed neighborhoods in Israel, while among Haredim only 43 percent did not think the two groups should live in the same neighborhoods. As a point of comparison, few Israeli Jews had a problem with right-left or Ashkenazi-Mizrachi living in mixed neighborhoods.<sup>47</sup>

While secular Israelis may be interested in, or at least less antagonistic and more open to Jewish practice than before, the Orthodox approach, with its interpretation of Jewish law, seems archaic, restrictive, and alien to many secular Israelis. The average secular Israeli is generally liberal and modern in their world-view. Therefore, a religious system, at least in its practical applications, that is not similarly modern, or that places significant emphasis on the study and discussion of what are perceived as outdated practices or religious minutiae, holds little appeal to the Israeli public.

Reform and Conservative leaders claim that, secular and traditional Israeli Jews increasingly want to (re)connect to Jewish practice and text, but from a place of individuality, meaning, or tradition, and when convenient, rather than a place of obligation and blind observance. They assert that secular Israelis increasingly seek a Judaism that fits better with their

generally secular worldview, with respect to the role of science, non-literal approaches to Torah, and egalitarian gender models. Reform and Conservative Judaism, according to Gilad Kariv, seek to marry these very modern global values together with Jewish tradition, viewing them as inherently Jewish values, with Jewish traditions acting as moral anchors in a world of free will.

At the same time, it seems that the rabbinic, religious establishment is growing increasingly unpopular with secular Israelis. Alongside what is perceived as continued attempts by the ultra-Orthodox population to impose religious restrictions on the general public (regarding the Sabbath observance, especially), it seems, to secular Israelis, as if there are numerous cases of corruption in the press involving high level Orthodox and ultra-Orthodox figures, further bolstering the image of a “Judaism that has lost its way”. The cases of corruption fuse together, in the Hiloni Israeli’s mind, with the everyday culture clash with the Haredi public, or the obstinacy of the State Rabbinate when they must interact with it, to create a general reticence of most things Dati, especially Haredi.

Therefore, to some extent, we can surmise that many of those secular and traditional Israelis identifying as Reform or Conservative are not seeking liberal religious practice or looking much into the underlying theology. Rather, as JPPI’s Survey of Israeli Judaism and the Pew Israel study show, as non-Orthodox Israeli Jews reject the Orthodox establishment for various reasons, they turn to the increasingly visible Reform or Conservative Movements in protest but also perhaps because they prefer the more user-friendly and practically comfortable aspects. Secular Israelis are in that sense, quite similar in identity and attitudes to religion as most Reform or Conservative Jews in America who belong to such communities as a “normative” option of Jewish affiliation. The difference is, that in the Israeli context, they do not articulate or express their identity as primarily religious. Alternatively, as Rabbi Meir Azari, of Beit Daniel in Tel Aviv commented, “most secular Israelis are Reform Jews already, they just don’t know it.”

## GROWING EXPOSURE TO ALTERNATIVES

The third aspect relates to the gradual exposure to and awareness of alternative forms of Jewish expression. This has grown, in part, through the spread of Reform and Conservative Judaism, and pluralistic Judaism in general, in Israel. The movements claim to reach hundreds of thousands of Israelis each year through their educational work and alternative life-cycle events attended by tens or hundreds of family and friends, or large public events on major Jewish holidays. The 2009 Hermann - Cohen study backs this up, noting that nearly a third of Israeli Jews said they had attended an event or function led by a Reform or Conservative rabbi at some point. The more recent 2017 Dialogue Institute study conducted for the Reform Movement found that over half of secular, a third of traditional, a fifth of Dati and even a tenth of Haredi Jews had attended a wedding or bar/bat mitzvah ceremony conducted by a Reform or Conservative rabbi.

Furthermore, in an age of hyper-globalization, it is realistic to assume that more Israelis travel abroad, especially to the United States, and for extended periods. There, whether they relocate for business, or academia, or a myriad of leadership or other programs, they encounter local, mostly non-Orthodox communities who offer a new and different approach to Jewish practice detached from the pressures of Israel's social reality. Additionally, tens of thousands of Israeli soldiers have accompanied Birthright groups in Israel and been exposed to mostly Reform or Conservative Jews from around the world. This has made non-Orthodox Jewish practice less foreign to Israelis than it may have been before.<sup>48</sup>

Therefore, we can summarize this section by saying that most secular Israelis are not secular or atheists and largely seek to engage with Jewish practice around holiday commemoration and life-cycle events. However, as they are turned off from Orthodox Judaism, and are increasingly exposed to non-Orthodox alternatives, we witness a gradual process whereby over the past few decades, secular and traditional Israelis see the non-Orthodox Jewish movements as increasingly legitimate, and at times, a more

legitimate framework for these expressions than Orthodox ones. These three elements combine to help explain why anywhere from half a million to 850,000 Israeli Jews self-identify, in survey after survey, as either Reform or Conservative when “no stream” or Orthodox also appear as options.

## **ISRAELI NON-DENOMINATIONAL RELIGIOUS IDENTITY**

However, that hundreds of thousands of Israelis are familiar with, exposed to, and even identify as Reform or Conservative has not resulted in the importation of the North American (Western) concept of organized Jewish “streams” into Israel with large-scale membership. Rather, it seems, Israeli society is, at this time, largely non-denominational, perhaps anti-denominational. Israeli Jews who identify with the movements, beyond the few thousand registered hard-core members, hold a generally loose association that is likely as much political statement against the Orthodox and Rabbinate as it is a positive statement about their own identity. At this time, we do not have better data regarding such Israelis.

Conversely, many Jews who identify as Orthodox also likely only do so as it is still to a large extent the normative option, much like being Reform or Conservative is the normative option in the Diaspora.

We see from the other direction, a noticeable trend on the liberal reaches of the Religious Zionist, or Dati group. As Tamar Hermann points out in a 2014 IDI study, a full 12 percent of the Dati group identifies as liberal or Modern Orthodox.<sup>49</sup>

This is a significant sized group. As JPPI’s Shlomo Fischer points out, there are clear trends of decreased religiosity overall within the religious Zionist community, including a greater openness to pluralistic Jewish expressions, especially as relates to traditional gender roles.<sup>50</sup>

This includes numerous communities and synagogues exploring and debating various levels of female involvement in religious matters, ranging



from “partnership minyans” where women can participate more than in traditional Orthodox settings, to fully egalitarian prayer groups. Outside of Israel, such as in the hyper-denominational United States, such thinking might categorize some of these groups within Conservative Judaism, while the Open Orthodoxy movement has gained steam in recent years.

Anecdotally, when the author asked one group of liberal Orthodox Jews why they were pushing for an egalitarian prayer group, including the option of mixed seating in Orthodox settings, when they could simply attend the Conservative synagogue down the street, they answered almost reflexively, “Because we are Orthodox.” In this sense, Orthodoxy is not only an ideological religious definition for many Israelis but rather a social milieu that encompasses school, community, seminary study, youth groups, and even military service. Branching officially outside this milieu would constitute a social breach more than it would a religious one.

# CHANGING OF THE “SYNAGOGUE ISRAELIS DON’T ATTEND” PARADIGM

## EXPLAINING THE “SYNAGOGUE ISRAELIS DON’T ATTEND” PARADIGM

There is a well-known expression in Israel (said partly in jest) to explain the religious identity of the average secular Israeli, and to explain the limited presence of Reform and Conservative Judaism: “the synagogue most Israelis don’t attend is Orthodox”. Before presenting the claim that this paradigm is in the process of changing, we must first briefly explain the reigning paradigm.

For most of its existence, including in the pre-state decades, Israel’s religiosity breakdown described a spectrum of observance from secular to observant. This meant that secular Israelis, and certainly traditional ones, when they desired or demanded the occasional religious experience or ceremony did so according to traditional Orthodox Judaism (or not at all). Orthodox Judaism was viewed as the authentic, normative Judaism – to take or leave. Secular Israelis cared too little about Jewish practice (in the religious sense) to effect change, and traditional Israelis generally respected Jewish practice and the authority of observant Orthodox Jews over it. However, there is more to it than this.

In order to understand the “synagogue Israelis don’t attend” paradigm, it is crucial to look at the origins of the early Zionists. Zionism originated as a solution to maintaining Jewish identity and purpose in lands where it was increasingly untenable for Jews to live. The Zionist identity became an all-encompassing one, as it developed

and expanded largely in the Jewish centers of pre-enlightenment Eastern Europe. Identities and ideologies born in this environment, like Communism, tended to be all encompassing in their rejection of the old, as opposed to post-enlightenment societies that embraced concepts of reform. By contrast, Jews in post-enlightenment Protestant countries embraced Reform or Conservative Judaism more readily.<sup>51</sup>

These Zionists sought to shed Diaspora Jewish identity, shaped over centuries of powerlessness, rootlessness and victimization and create a new, rooted and powerful Jew. To do so, they needed to shed all vestiges of Diaspora Jewish life, including the Jewish religion, which they saw as part of the problem. They did however keep some symbolic aspects of the religion for the sake of cohesiveness, out of a sense of tradition, or in order to construct a new national culture centered on the return to the land and a physical existence. Their occasional usage of Jewish traditions and symbols did not define their identity; rather, it became a part of a new secular Judaism, or Hebrew culture that emerged.

There were in Israel's founding years, going back to the pre-state Yishuv, a small number of Dati and Haredi Jews. (In 1948, three percent of Israel's population was comprised of Haredi Jews.<sup>52</sup> Alternatively, we can estimate Israel's overall Dati and Haredi population in 1948 by considering that in the first Knesset elections in 1949, the United Religious Front, comprised Dati and Haredi factions, took 16 seats out of 120.)<sup>53</sup> The Haredi largely rejected Zionism while some Orthodox Jews found compartmentalized means to balance a pragmatic Zionism with traditional Orthodoxy. This, combined with the physical lack of Reform or Conservative Jews in Israel, created a dichotomy in which religious Jews were by default the guardians of Judaism, whose authentic representation was Orthodox.

We can juxtapose this with the Jewish experience in primarily Western Europe and later Protestant America, where most Eastern European Jewry migrated. The Protestant tradition, born out of the Reformation, is itself an agent of reform and modernization. The founding Americans

saw it as a useful tool to shape a modern, democratic and pluralistic society. The dissenting Protestant tradition, widespread in America, privileges individual conscience and interpretation of scripture. It was out of this atmosphere that Reform and later Conservative Judaism were born in a Protestant environment, where the religion itself can be an engine of change and constantly adapts to modernity. “Anyone can start a religion”, according to JPPI’s Shlomo Fischer, in this sense, and so an inherent pluralistic approach is part of this world-view, and for a long time was alien to the Israeli reality.

## **THE HISTORY OF REFORM AND CONSERVATIVE JUDAISM IN ISRAEL**

The Reform and Conservative Movements’ history in Israel began only a few decades after Israel’s establishment. Israel’s founders were, for the most part, staunchly secular - Orthodox. In Mandatory Palestine and during the formative years of Israel’s national identity and institutions, the only Jews representing religious practice in Israel were the Orthodox and Ultra-Orthodox, primarily from Eastern Europe. When the Jews from the Middle East and Muslim world immigrated en-masse in the 1950’s– they, similarly, brought no tradition of secularism or religious modernization.

Determining the Jewish nature of the nascent state was not a priority for the first Prime Minister, David Ben Gurion. However, when, Ben-Gurion decided, for pragmatic coalitional purposes, to strike deals with the religious parties regarding matters such as Shabbat, kashrut, weddings, conversions, and burials, etc., there were no alternatives to Orthodox Judaism in the Israeli reality – neither practically nor conceptually. Most segments of society accepted Orthodox Judaism as the “authentic” Judaism, even those who found it problematic.

Reform and Conservative Judaism, as movements that flourished in America, began germinating in Israel only in the 1960s – conveyed

primarily by American immigrants. Prior to that, there was a limited presence in Israel, such as the Leo Baeck Reform high school in Haifa, along with small Reform and Conservative communities in Jerusalem. (This was partly due to the frequent exchange of notable Jewish Studies scholars between the Jewish Theological Seminary (JTS), the Conservative Movement's seminary in New York and the Hebrew University, the two preeminent departments of classical Jewish studies at the time.)

In 1962, the Hebrew Union College (HUC), the Reform Movement's rabbinical seminary, opened a campus in Jerusalem. In 1964, the Israeli Movement for Progressive Judaism (IMPJ), officially formed, and in 1973, the World Union for Progressive Judaism moved its headquarters to Jerusalem. Throughout the 1970s, there were only six small congregations in Israel, whose rabbis and majorities of congregants were American expatriates.<sup>54</sup>

The Reform movement began to take root in Israel in the 1980s – it ordained its first Israeli-born rabbi in 1980<sup>55</sup> (HUC ordained its 100<sup>th</sup> Israeli rabbi in November 2017), began developing a deeper infrastructure, founded the Israel Religious Action Center in 1987 (its political and legal activist arm - more on this later), and expanded its presence around the country.

Similarly, in 1984, the Israeli Masorti Movement opened the Schechter Rabbinical Seminary in Jerusalem, and began ordaining rabbis in 1988. It has since ordained 92 rabbis who operate in Israel and abroad.<sup>56</sup>

In 1986, both the Reform and Conservative Movements received a major funding boost from American Jewish philanthropies and the Jewish Agency for Israel.<sup>57</sup>

Today, as noted, the two movements maintain a network of communities and synagogues, rabbis, rabbinical seminaries, youth movements, pre-military academies, and kibbutzim.

## THE “ISRAELIFICATION” OF REFORM AND CONSERVATIVE JUDAISM

The movements were long viewed as foreign transplants, almost entirely as the domain of “quirky American immigrants” importing an “irrelevant product” to the Israeli mentality and social reality.

Israeli society, similar to other modernized societies, began shifting with respect to spirituality and religion at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. As Israel modernized and enjoyed increasing economic prosperity – effectively joining the “first world” – a growing number of secular Jews began seeking more spiritual meaning and a reconnection to tradition. This was essentially the shift to post-materialist societies, which took place in Western Europe a few decades earlier.<sup>58</sup>

Within the Israeli context, this took the form of renewed interest in Jewish culture, ritual, history, and thought; for some, in the form of religious practice and spirituality. For a certain group of secular intellectual Israelis, this involved Jewish engagement outside of Orthodoxy. Perhaps, the “secular Zionist” religion so prevalent in the first generations of the state had lost some of its appeal as Israelis increasingly seek to discover what their parents or grandparents rejected – even if not in a strictly “Orthodox” sense. This trend is also reflected in the recent Rosner-Fuchs JPPI study on Israeli Judaism. We can draw a parallel to a similar process that took place among the million or so Soviet Jews, who were forcibly removed from Jewish practice for generations. Those who were young upon immigration, or the first generation born in Israel, were exposed, like native-born secular Israelis, to Jewish surroundings and practice for the first time.

This general process coincided with a sense among some secular Jewish elites that “their Judaism was being hijacked” by far-right wing religious “fanatics” (around the time of the Rabin assassination) and felt a need to reclaim their traditions. In addition, Israelis began to be exposed to

Reform and Conservative Judaism through extended periods abroad and interaction with local Jewish communities. Parts of Israeli society decreasingly perceived the movements as less “authentic,” and perhaps as more relevant to their worldview.

Today, some practical aspects of the movements’ “Israeli” character differentiate them from their foreign origins. Beyond conducting services in Hebrew, Hebrew fluency provides closer philological interaction in apprehending texts than is possible for most American or other Diaspora Jews. Beyond the obvious, participants in Israeli Reform services are more likely to don a head covering and tallit – whereas in the U.S. it is less common (although changing). In addition, the “creative” and modern twists to the service are decidedly different – in Israel, they draw specifically from Israeli-Hebrew culture and literature as opposed to the American or other non-Jewish and non-Israeli Diaspora environments.

More substantively, the Israeli Reform movement (and most of the Reform congregations outside of America), unlike their American (and British) counterpart, does not recognize patrilineal descent. It will accept those of patrilineal descent for the sake of conducting a bar/bat mitzvah service, although it views this as a launching point for a longer-term relationship with the family that will lead to conversion. Although interfaith marriages are common in the American Reform Movement, the Israeli Reform Movement will not conduct marriage ceremonies for those of patrilineal descent who have yet to convert.<sup>59</sup>

Like their American counterparts, however, they do place a strong emphasis on social justice – the concept of Tikkun Olam – including reaching out to minorities and the under-privileged and supporting political and national level lobbying efforts to advance pluralism and equality across a range of issues. This is in part why, the Israeli Reform Movement maintains a powerful and activist lobbying arm, IRAC – the Israel Religious Action Center, which beyond advocating for the rights of the Reform and Conservative Movements, and on matters of religion and state, works on broader issues of social justice and individual freedoms.

Similarly, the Conservative Movement operates Jewish Pluralism Watch, a watchdog organization that monitors matters of religion and state. (More on this in the section on Political Affiliation.)

Within the Israeli political context, these efforts and stances have positioned the movements in opposition to the current government coalition on a range of matters.

## JEWISH RENEWAL

Alongside the development of the Reform and Conservative Movements, it is imperative to look at a parallel development in Israeli society, that of the Jewish renewal movement (*Hitchadshut Yehudit*) or New Israeli Judaism (the Hebrew term itself was coined by *Panim* in the 1990s). This movement began roughly at the same time as the arrival and establishment of the Reform and Conservative Movements, and reached a similar scope of a few thousand secular intellectual elites. According to Rachel Werczberger, an expert on the Jewish Renewal Movement, while the older secular Zionist “religion” made use of Jewish iconography, such as the flag, state seal, Hebrew calendar or various ceremonies to create a collective narrative and identity, the *Hitchadshut Yehudit* used these to achieve some form of personal meaning for its participants.

In their study on the Jewish Renewal Movement among Secular Israelis, scholars Werczberger and Na’ama Azulay, track the development of a new Jewish culture within secular Israeli society, identifying it as a new social movement (NSM) and conclude it is more than a passing trend.<sup>60</sup>

They posit that since the early 2000’s, secular Israeli society has been developing an active and renewed interest in Jewish culture replete with pluralistic study, prayer, life-cycle rituals, holiday events, social justice projects and more. A decade earlier, such events might have only attracted a few thousand participants at most, while by the mid-



2000's, they claim a few tens of thousands could be counted, and today even more.

They firmly connect this trend to the post-materialist development, described earlier. In the Israeli case, as older inherited cultural identities erode, individuals seek anchors for new, voluntary or intentional identities, and Jewish traditions and texts provide an anchor for this.

Werczberger and Azulay note four distinct and trackable stages in the development of Jewish Renewal as a social movement in Israel. In the first stage, in the late 1960's and 1970's, a handful of secular intellectuals attempted to confront the Orthodox monopoly and engage in Jewish textual study. The second stage extended into the 1980's as the movement grew with the formation of regular study groups, secular-religious dialogues and some of the organizations mentioned in this report, seeking to develop Judaism as a cultural heritage. The third phase, from the mid-1990's through the mid-2000's, grew and expanded beyond textual study, to include holiday and Shabbat observance; and to the "new age" spiritual dimension prevalent in other parts of the West. The fourth and current stage involves the institutionalization and stabilization of structures and activities, and has taken root with life-cycle events, the springing up of new organizations, and the achieved legitimacy for mostly secular Jews to experiment and reinterpret Jewish tradition while, at the same time, affirming it.

Key to this are processes that began in previous decades and whose effects are crystallizing and taking hold. Thus, the teaching and training of two generations of Israeli-born leaders, the gradual integration in the school system, the formation and stabilization of a unified terminology, and most importantly, a collaborative network of organizations and groups that exhibits some measure of political lobbying and legal activism. Although it has yet to attract mass numbers, it has developed deep-enough roots to make it more than a passing trend.

## A NEW ISRAELI JUDAISM?

We initially set out to determine the nature, scope, and legal status of non-Orthodox Judaism in Israel, specifically the largest and most organized movements – the Reform and Conservative Movements. As is evident in the previous sections of this paper, the movements certainly exist, are active, growing and have a small but widespread and stable infrastructure – replete with synagogues, rabbis and a rabbinical seminary, youth movements, and more.

Yet, the movements, in a narrow sense, have not succeeded in attracting a large dedicated following – roughly 12,000 registered, committed, dues-paying adult members who seek the liberal religiosity the movements provide, as noted previously.

This is puzzling when juxtaposed with the range of recent studies that show as few as 5 percent many as 13 percent of Jewish Israelis identify as either Reform or Conservative, and when the movements self-report a few hundred thousand Jewish Israelis attend (at least 4 times a year) their programming – from prayer to lectures to cultural events, including and primarily life cycle events. Tel Aviv, Modiin, Haifa, Ra’anana, and Jerusalem are home to large, active and well-organized Reform and Conservative communities. It might not even be far-fetched to surmise that in Tel Aviv, Reform Judaism is as predominant as Orthodoxy, if not more so, among the largely secular public.

At the same time, most of these 5 to 13 percent identifying as Reform or Conservative simultaneously identify as secular or traditional – not “religious.” This leads to a conclusion that their affiliation model is one of low commitment and not a defining element of their identity.

The non-Orthodox movements as movements have not taken hold in Israel as they have in the Diaspora, especially North America, where communities and Jewish identity are voluntary, and for the most part involve official membership. To contrast, In North America, the largest

Diaspora community, Reform or Conservative Judaism are the normative options for secular Jews who seek to maintain an active Jewish identity and community. This means that the form of Jewish practice seen as “authentic” for most American Jews is either Reform or Conservative. The majority of Reform or Conservative Jews in the U.S., in this sense, would likely be Hiloni or Masorti the Israeli context.

What this amounts to is the emergence of a new Israeli Jewish identity, liberal and pluralistic by nature, which is achieving a level of “authenticity” in Israeli society, and gaining legitimacy as a normative Jewish identity for mostly non-observant Israeli Jews. This new Judaism is markedly different, however, from the organized Diaspora forms of Reform and Conservative Judaism. It has many influences and lines often blur - from the early secular Zionism to traditional (Orthodox) Judaism, primarily the more pragmatic and traditional forms practiced by Sephardi and Mizrahi Jews, new age mystical Chassidic thought and secular intellectual Judaism. It has also been shaped by the Reform and Conservative Movements, who pioneered such alternative practice and introduced it to Israel, have actively challenged the existing model, and who offer the physical framework and infrastructure necessary to bring it to a broader segment of Israeli society. It may also be that as of late, this new Judaism is influenced by and influences the more liberal and creative reaches of Modern Orthodoxy.

Perhaps, as writer Liam Hoare suggests, “Despite their failure to grab hold of the Israeli public consciousness, however, Reform and Conservative Judaism have not completely failed in influencing Israeli society.” {Interviewing Yossi Klein Halevi, he noted.} “I see their historic role in Israel as acting as catalysts and as incubators for indigenous forms of non-Orthodox Judaism that haven’t yet emerged and don’t yet have a name, but will all at least owe part of their existence to these Diaspora imports.”<sup>61</sup>

One of the effects indeed has been the slow erosion (not the shattering some had hoped to achieve) of the “Hiloni, Masorti, Dati, Haredi” divide

into something non-denominational and amorphous in which all but the fiercely Orthodox, including liberal Orthodox and most secular Jews, live on a fluid spectrum of Israeli Jewishness, which spans from culture to religion, tradition to new age, and atheism to deep spirituality. The pluralistic and egalitarian direction is clear and the cocoon of living in a mostly Jewish state and knowing Hebrew (which affords direct access to texts) allows connection and exploration along this spectrum without the threat of assimilation into a non-Jewish society.

In this reality, the Reform and Conservative Movements offer a nationwide infrastructure, which has enabled them to establish themselves as the largest (although not the only) provider of lifecycle event services for Israel's largely Hiloni and Masorti public.

Thus, if Hoare and Klein Halevy posit that this new Judaism developing in Israel points to the failure of Reform and Conservative Judaism to catch on, we suggest that it only shows the failure of a Reform and Conservative Judaism in the organized Diaspora format. Rather, what we are observing is the development of such liberal forms of Judaism in Israel, and it should not come as a surprise that they take on a distinctly Israeli form.

That said, Reform and Conservative leaders interviewed for the sake of this research argue that massive government subsidies and the legal monopoly held by the Orthodox on some issues create an unfair playing field that favors the Orthodox. Were the field leveled, and there was "more than one product on the shelf," as per IRAC head Anat Hoffman, things might be different, and Orthodoxy itself would likely adapt and change and remain more relevant and attractive.<sup>62</sup>

Perhaps though, this Orthodox monopoly is driving a growing number of Hiloni and Masorti Israelis away from the "religious establishment" and into the arms of the alternative movements.

**Figure 9 / New Israeli Judaism and factors affecting its development**



## CHANGING THE “THE SYNAGOGUE ISRAELIS DON’T ATTEND” PARADIGM

The old model, whereby the authentic Judaism with which most Israelis occasionally engaged (the synagogue they “did not attend”) was Orthodox, is no longer completely reflective of how secular and traditional Israelis engage with Judaism. The 2013 IDI study showed a significant overlap in identities, i.e. that the majority (67 percent) of those who identified as Conservative also defined themselves as “Masorti”, while those identified as Reform were largely split (41 and 41 percent) between also defining themselves as Hiloni or Masorti. Only a few percentage points (10 on some surveys, and as low as 1 or 2 on others) of both those who identified as Reform and Conservative Jews

self-identified as “Dati.” Recall that in Hebrew, when asked if Dati, the question is literally inquiring whether one is religiously observant and does not necessarily refer to whether one is Orthodox (or Reform, or Conservative), although that is almost always assumed.<sup>63</sup>

From a different angle, the recent Reform Movement study (not yet published) showed that 11 percent of Hilonim and 8 percent of Masortiim identify as Reform – while 3 percent of Hilonim and 9 percent of Masortiim identify as Conservative.

Thus, the traditional model for Israeli religious identity could be described as a unitary spectrum from Hiloni, through Masorti, Dati and Haredi – all based in terms of Orthodox Judaism, and various levels of intensity in practicing that Judaism.

The new model proposed does not presume a unitary relationship with differing intensity to Orthodox Judaism; rather, it allows for multi-dimensional relations and overlapping identities to exist. Thus, someone can be Hiloni but prefer to conduct their lifecycle events in a Reform or Conservative context or under Orthodox auspices as in the past (or not at all). Some consider themselves Masorti and prefer to engage with Jewish practice in Conservative or Reform synagogues, etc. There are even a small number (a few percent) of Reform and Conservative Jews who consider themselves religious, or Dati.

Of course, while a growing number of secular and traditional Israelis now see the non-Orthodox denominations as authentic and legitimate, many Hiloni and certainly most Masorti Israelis prefer to identify as “Israeli-Jews,” or continue to view Orthodox Judaism as the only legitimate form, or prefer no Jewish engagement whatsoever. For the most part, and at least for now, most Hiloni and Masorti Israelis still marry through the rabbinate or in civil ceremonies abroad, are buried in traditional cemeteries, and conduct their children’s bar mitzvah in the local Orthodox synagogue, or in no synagogue (usually in an event hall only).

Reform and Conservative leaders (such as Kariv and Hess, interviewed for this study) acknowledged this reality and said they do not envision hundreds of thousands of Israelis becoming actively Reform or Conservative in the religious sense. Rather, they seek to form, beyond a hard core of engaged and active individuals, the option of pluralistic Reform and Conservative Judaism standing equally alongside Orthodox Judaism for the mostly secular or traditional Israeli society for lifecycle events, public Jewish ceremonies, supplementary Jewish education, and more. Rabbi Meir Azari, who heads the Reform Beit Daniel in Tel Aviv, pointed out that among secular Israelis in Tel Aviv, Reform Jewish institutions might even be more acceptable for such expressions than Orthodox ones are today. In this sense, it is not outlandish to consider a future where as many as 20-30 percent of secular and traditional Israeli Jews prefer to engage with Jewish practice in this new manner.

To summarize, while for many secular and traditional Israeli Jews, the “synagogue they don’t attend”, i.e., the Judaism they see as authentic and normative even though they are not observant, is still either Orthodox or none at all, this can no longer be said for all Israelis. Today, a significant and growing number now also “don’t attend” Reform and Conservative synagogues. In other words, the normative form of Judaism through which they express and engage with Jewish practice is no longer limited to Orthodoxy, and is increasingly expressed through the Reform and Conservative denominations as legitimate and authentic alternatives.

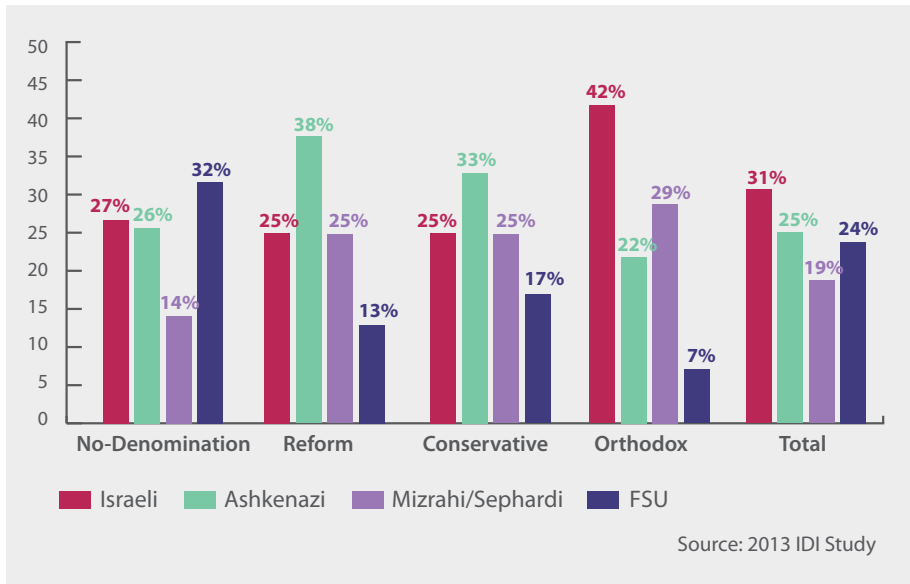
# PROFILE OF REFORM AND CONSERVATIVE JEWS IN ISRAEL

A commonly held stereotype of Reform and Conservative Jews in Israel is that they are mostly North American expatriates alongside a few intellectual, elitist, left-wing and usually older Ashkenazi Jews. Many view Reform and Conservative Judaism itself as foreign and mostly superfluous within the Israeli context. Alternatively, as one colleague described it, these are a form of cultural imperialism.

Although this may have been largely true once, especially of the small, hard-core membership, it is no longer the case and does not reflect the hundreds of thousands of Israelis who identify with the denominations (the Conservative Movement in Israel estimates that today, only about one-fifth of the hard-core membership is comprised of native English speakers). The 2013 IDI study reflects the transformation of the movements into something more broadly “Israeli.” The IDI sample group divided participants into Ashkenazi, Mizrahi/ Sephardi, Israeli and those from the former Soviet Union (FSU), and asked if they identified with Reform, Conservative, Orthodox or no denomination. Mizrahi/ Sephardi Jews were over-represented compared to their share of the sample group (they comprised 19 percent of the sample group, while 25 percent of those self-identifying as Reform and Conservative each were Mizrahi / Sephardi). Not surprisingly, those identifying as Ashkenazi (25 percent of the sample) were also over-represented as Reform or Conservative. (See figure 10.)

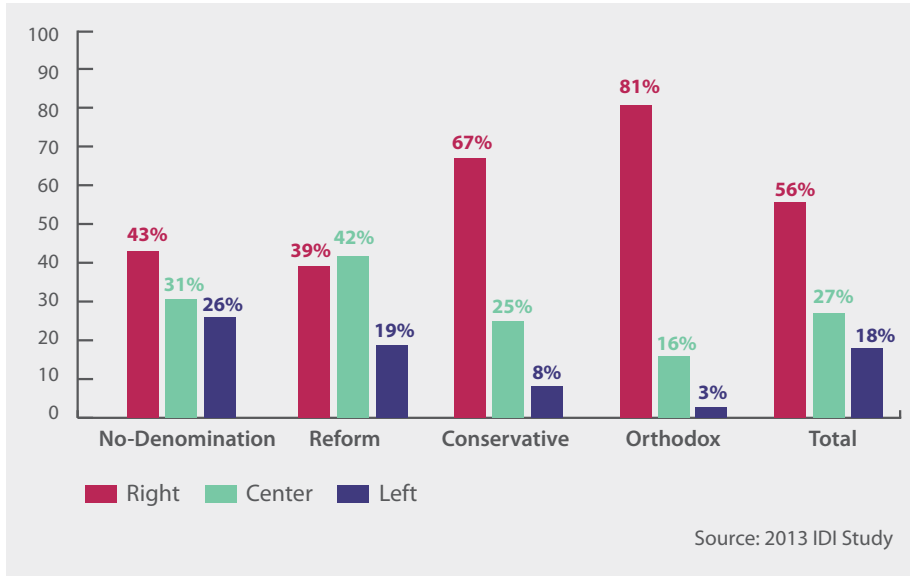


**Figure 10 / Identificaiton with Religious Denomination - by Ethnicity**



Moreover, contrary to the commonly held stereotype, not all Reform and Conservative Jews are left leaning. The 2013 IDI study also found that on socioeconomic issues, Reform Jews do indeed lean left – with half preferring leftist social-democratic economic policies, as compared to 39 percent of the total population. Conservative Jews tended to espouse more centrist views, 46 vs. 41 percent of the total sample. However, on political and security matters – 67 percent of Conservative Jews identified with the right, as opposed to 56 percent of the total sample. Among Reform Jews, 42 percent placed themselves as Centrists on political and security matters, and only 19 percent identified with the Left. (See figure 11.)

**Figure 11 / Position on Diplomatic-Security Issues - by Religious Denomination**



On a practical level, Conservative Judaism tends to be more traditional in its approach to prayer, textual study, and ritual observance than its Reform counterpart is. Conservative rabbis (as opposed to adherents) are mostly observant of Jewish law and might not be immediately discernible from a Modern Orthodox Jew. Conservative Jews in the Israeli context are, however, different from Masorti (traditional) Jews in that Conservative Judaism strives for active and critical engagement, as well as adherence to Jewish law, albeit with greater readiness to enact change, and, of course, in an egalitarian framework. Members of the Conservative movement, even those who are not observant, expect their leadership to be so. When they do attend a religious function, they prefer that it be conducted in a more traditional manner, as explained by Rabbi Avi Novis Deutsch, Dean of the Schechter Rabbinical Seminary. Deutsch notes that probably only 10 percent of Conservative Jews in Israel are actually observant, a number that reflects the IDI data. This active traditionalism differs, as Yizhar Hess, CEO of the Masorti (Conservative) Movement,<sup>64</sup>

explains, from traditional (Masorti) Israeli Jews, whose observance is more passive and accepting of the direction Orthodox Judaism sets.

As Rabbi Gilad Kariv explained in our interview, “Generally, Reform communities in Israel take a more traditional approach (to Jewish practice and prayer) than do Reform communities in North America or other parts of the world. This stems from the connection of Israelis to the Hebrew language and to the more traditional nature of Israeli society. The Israeli Reform Movement’s prayer book, for example, is heavily influenced by traditional prayer books. Another example is that the Israeli Reform Movement has not adopted patrilineal descent, as did the American Reform Movement. However, the Reform Movement is, at its core, liberal and progressive and places an emphasis on personal and communal autonomy. It sees Jewish law and tradition as sources of guidance and inspiration, but not of authority. Thus, prayer in Israeli Reform communities is less traditional than in Modern Orthodox or Conservative communities. Reform communities in Israel include musical instruments in Shabbat and Holiday services. Prayer and lifecycle event texts heavily employ modern and contemporary Israeli literature, and rabbis and prayer leaders wield individual influence over the style of prayer. We believe that this creative approach, which combines tradition and Israeli culture, fits the values and world view of most of the secular public in Israel as well as a significant portion of those who call themselves traditional.”

One stereotype that does seem to be largely accurate has to do with the higher socio-economic status and educational level of those drawn to non-Orthodox forms of Jewish religious practice. The movements seem to have made few inroads in the socio-economic periphery of the country, which remains largely traditional or religious.

# ATTITUDES TO JEWISH PLURALISM AND THE REFORM AND CONSERVATIVE MOVEMENTS IN ISRAEL

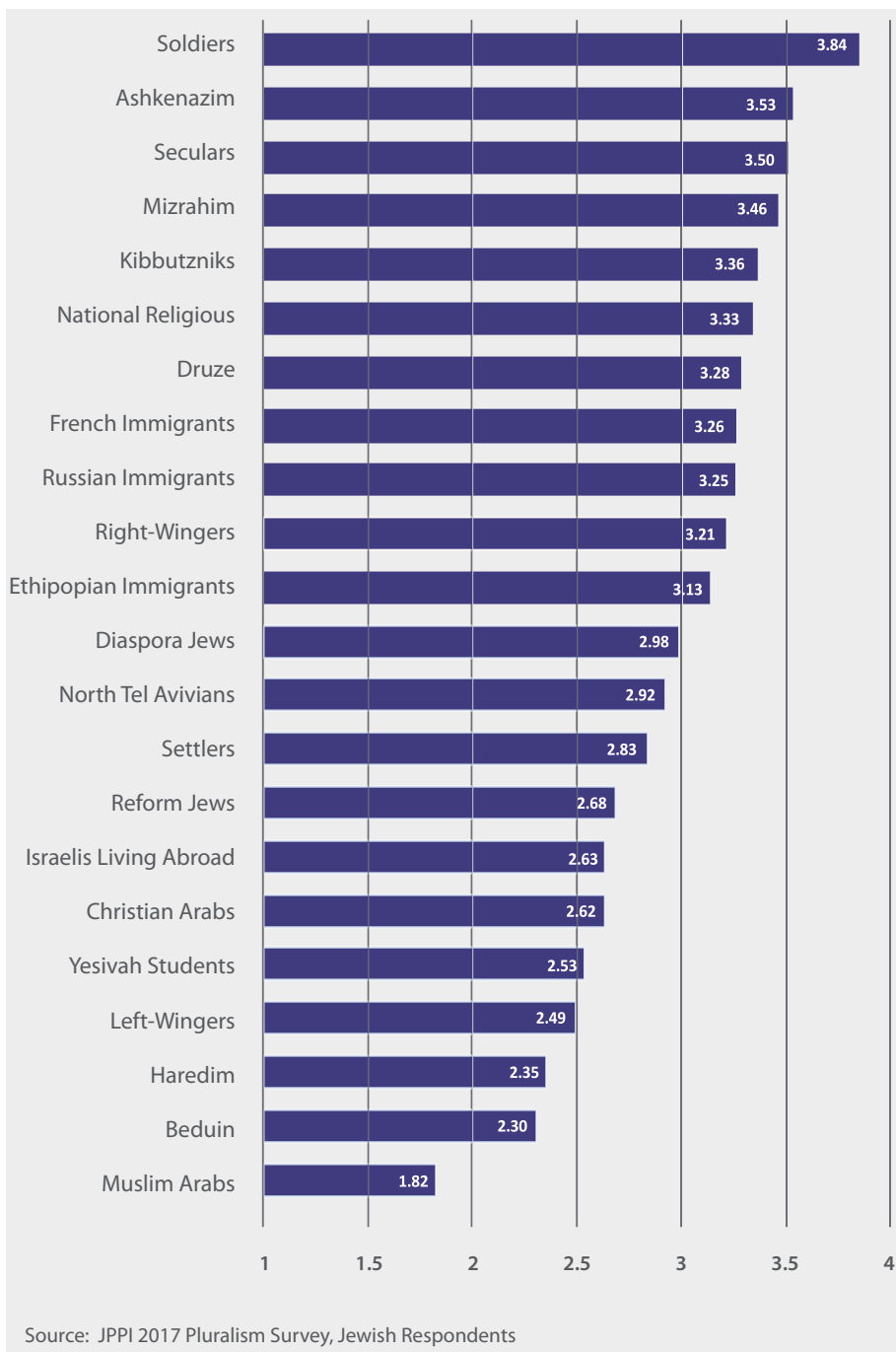
Israeli Jewish attitudes are generally positive regarding the Reform and Conservative denominations, and toward expressions of religious pluralism in general. While there is sympathy among secular Israelis on the political center and left, these tend to turn to mixed feelings or neutrality among many traditional Israelis on the center-right, and to outright hostility and rejection between Orthodox and especially Haredi Jews on the political right. Following are findings from various surveys regarding Israeli attitudes toward the Reform and Conservative denominations specifically, and religious pluralism and issues of religion and state more generally.

## OVERALL PERCEPTION

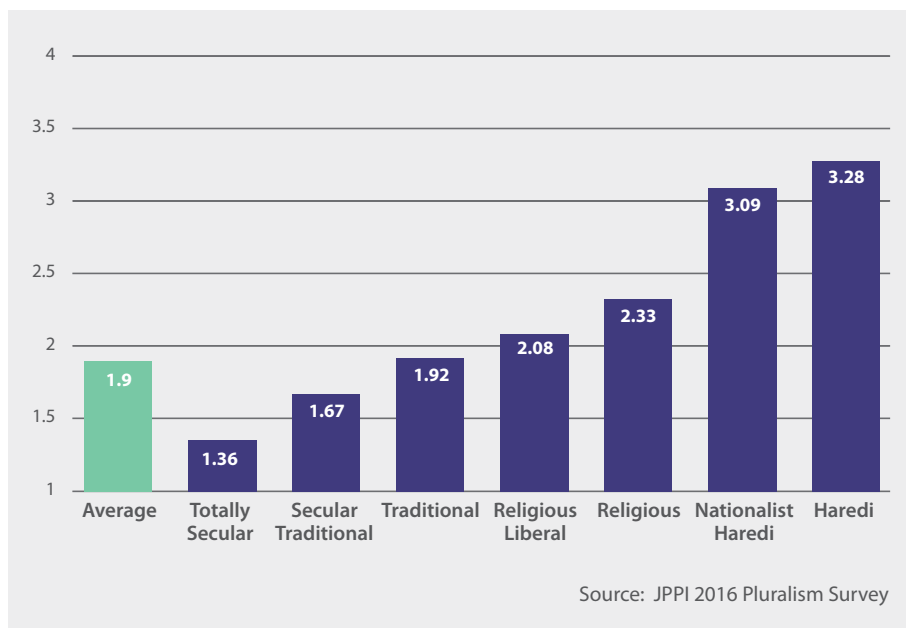
The 2017 JPPI Pluralism in Israel Survey asked a representative sample of Israeli Jews to rank various groups within Israel as “most contributing” or “least contributing” to society on a scale from 0-5. “Reform Jews” ranked generally positively among all Jewish groups from secular to traditional and liberal religious, except with those identified as Orthodox and Ultra-Orthodox, who ranked them among the lowest (together with Muslim Arabs and Bedouins – with the Ultra-Orthodox saying that Reform Jews contribute least to Israel’s success).<sup>65</sup> (See figure 12.)

JPPI’s 2016 Pluralism in Israel Survey study found that 72 percent of Israeli Jews did not agree with the statement: “Reform Jews are not really Jews.”<sup>66</sup> (See figure 13.)

**Figure 12** / Perceived Contribution to Israeli Society On a Scale from 1 (negative) to 4 (positive)

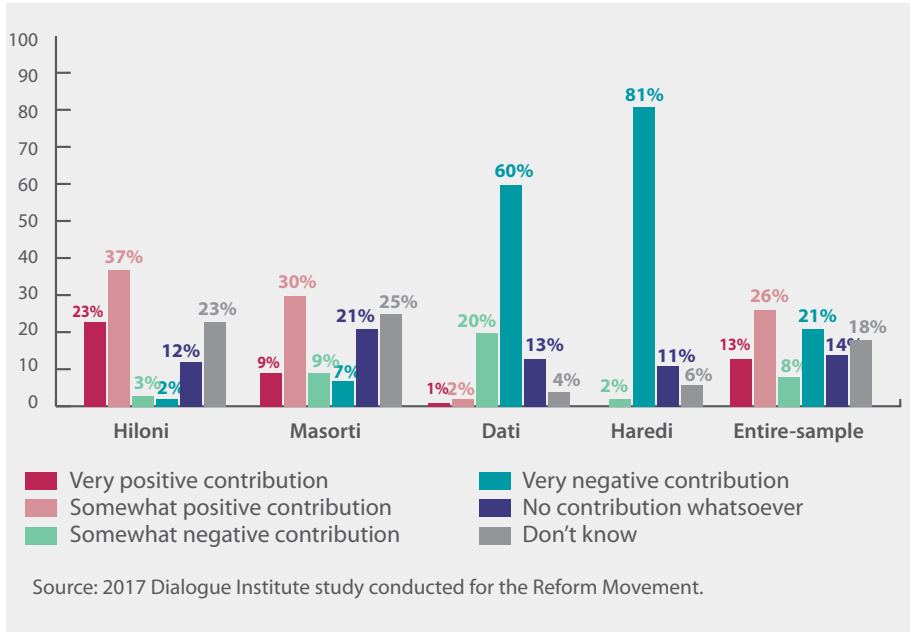


**Figure 13** / Agreement with Statement: "Reform Jews are not Really Jews" (Scale from 1 to 4 with 1 as "Totally Disagree" and 4 as "Totally Agree")



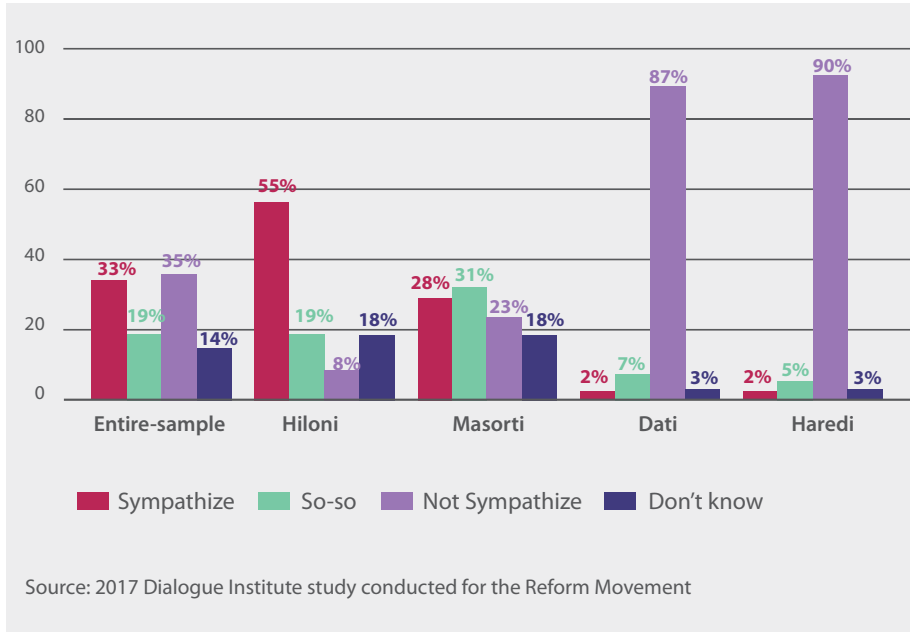
The Reform Movement study (Dialogue Institute 2017) asked a similar question with respect to the relative contribution to Israeli society of "Reform Jews".<sup>67</sup> Thirty-nine percent of Israeli Jews responded either "positive" or "very positive" when asked about the contribution of Reform Jews to society, while 14 percent were "neutral" and 29 percent "negative" or "very negative". As expected, 60 percent of Hiloni Israelis said that the contribution of Reform Jews was positive or very positive, 12 percent were neutral and 5 percent negative or very much so. Among Masorti Jews, 39 percent said Reform Jews had a positive or very positive contribution, 21 percent were neutral and 16 percent said they had negative or very negative contribution. Similarly, only 3 percent of Dati Israelis viewed the Reform contribution as positive, 13 percent were neutral and 80 percent negative or very negative. Among Haredi Jews, no respondents had positive views of "Reform Jews", while 11 percent were neutral and 83 percent had very negative views. (See figure 14.)

**Figure 14** / Perceived Contribution of Reform Jews to Israeli Society - According to Religious Identity



The 2017 Reform Movement study also asked Israeli Jews if they were sympathetic or not sympathetic to Reform Judaism. Similar to other studies, 23 percent of Israeli Jews are either highly sympathetic or sympathetic, while 19 percent were “so-so,” (*kakha-kakha*) sympathetic and 21 percent were either not sympathetic or highly unsympathetic. Fifty-six percent of Hiloni Jews were sympathetic or highly so, while 19 percent were “so-so” and 8 percent either unsympathetic or highly unsympathetic. The trend clearly reverses as one goes up the religiosity scale. Masorti Jews were 29 percent sympathetic or highly so, 31 percent “so-so” and 23 percent unsympathetic or highly so. Among Dati and Haredi Jews, only 2 percent were sympathetic in each group, 5 and 7 percent “so-so” respectively, and 87 percent and 90 percent unsympathetic or highly so respectively – mostly “highly unsympathetic.” (See figure 15.)

**Figure 15 / Sympathy for Reform Jews in Israel - by Religious Identity**



When broken down by political party affiliation, Likud, Yisrael Beitenu and Kulanu voters were spread fairly evenly on the spectrum between being sympathetic and being unsympathetic, Yesh Atid, Mahaneh Tzioni and Meretz were overwhelmingly sympathetic, and the Orthodox parties were overwhelmingly unsympathetic, according to the same Reform Movement study.

The same study asked whether respondents agreed or disagreed that “Orthodox is the authentic Judaism while Reform is a deviation from this”. Overall, 45 percent agreed or strongly agreed with this statement, while 45 percent disagreed or strongly disagreed with it. As might be expected, 72 percent of Hiloni and 41 percent of Masorti Jews disagreed or strongly disagreed, while 90 percent of Dati and 93 percent of Haredi Jews agreed or strongly agreed.



One point worth noting is the disparity in sentiment toward the liberal movements. Thus, antipathy for Reform Judaism is far more intense among Datiim and Haredim than is the support and sympathy of Hiloni and Masorti Israelis toward them. That is, since Dati and Haredi Jews view the Reform and Conservative denominations as “heretical” movements that demand their active objection.

## **LEGAL STATUS**

A Jerusalem Post Magazine survey (2016) showed that 62 percent of Israeli Jews favored official recognition of the Reform and Conservative Movements; including 87 percent of Hiloni Jews, and 62 percent of Masorti Jews.<sup>68</sup>

A 2017 Dialogue Institute study found that 61 percent of Israeli Jews thought the Reform and Conservative movements should share equal status with Orthodoxy, including 81 percent of Hilonim and 49 percent of Masortiim. Eighty-nine percent of Datiim and 97 percent of Haredi respondents disagreed.

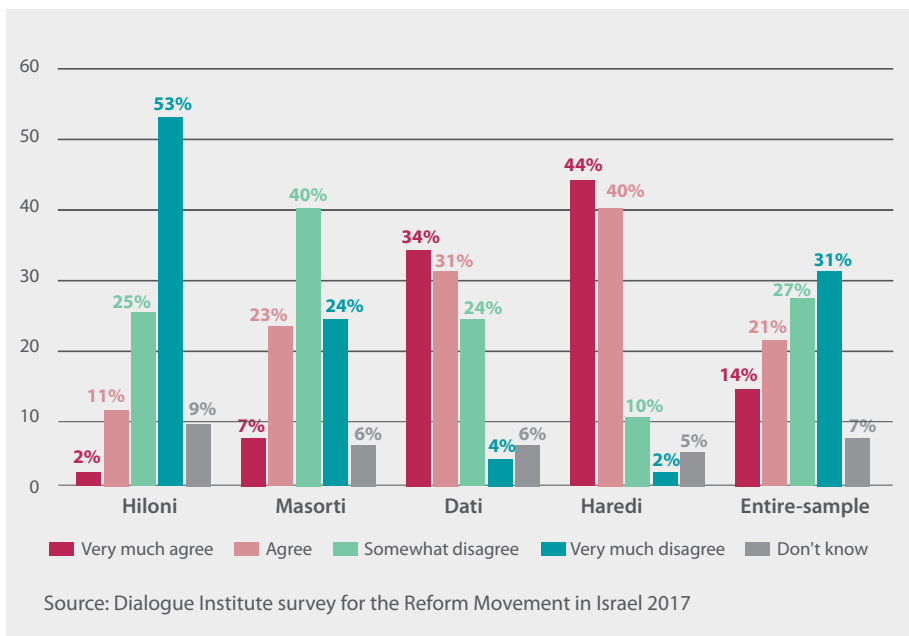
Similarly, the survey found that 48 percent of all Israeli Jews would accept non-Orthodox conversions, including 78 percent of Hilonim and 46 percent of Masortiim. Forty-three percent of Masortiim, 97 percent of Datiim and 99 percent of Haredim objected or strongly objected.

## **CRITICISM OF THE RABBINATE AND RELIGIOUS LEGISLATION**

A 2016 survey conducted by the Smith Institute for Ne’emanei Torah Va’avodah, a moderate Religious-Zionist organization, showed that 80 percent of Israeli Jews believe that the Rabbinate’s control over marriage and divorce “increases the number of Israelis who choose to wed ... abroad,” including 73 percent of traditional Jews and 56 percent of religious Jews. The survey also showed that 56 percent of Israeli Jews agreed that the “amount and content of religious legislation... is distancing Israelis from Judaism,” and 61 percent supported changing this status quo.<sup>69</sup>

Relatedly, the 2017 Dialogue Institute survey asked if respondents agreed that the Chief Rabbinate contributes to the Jewish identity of Israel and brings the public closer to Jewish tradition in a positive manner. Here, 35 percent of Israeli Jews who participated in the survey agreed or strongly agreed with the statement, while 61 percent disagreed or strongly disagreed. Among them: 13 percent of Hilonim; 30 percent of Masortiim; 65 percent of Datiim and 84 percent of Haredim agreed or strongly agreed with the statement. Conversely, 78 percent of Hilonim, 64 percent of Masortiim, 28 percent of Datiim and 12 percent of Haredi Jews disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement. (See figure 16.)

**Figure 16** / Agreement with Following: “The Chief Rabbinate Contributes to Israel’s Identity and Brings the Public Closer to Jewish Tradition in a Positive Manner”



## MARRIAGE

Overall, a majority of Israelis, and a clear majority of secular Israelis support the option of non-Orthodox marriage in Israel. JPPI found that 60 percent of all Israeli Jews support civil marriage.<sup>70</sup>

A 2017 Hiddush survey conducted by the Smith Institute found that 67 percent of Israeli Jews (including 90 percent of Hilonim and 68 percent of Masortiim) support recognition all forms of marriage – including civil, Conservative and Reform. Hiddush points out that in 2009, this number was at 53 percent and has risen gradually since. Hiddush further presents statistics regarding this question according to political party affiliation. They found that the majority of Likud (65 percent) and Kulanu voters (73 percent), and an overwhelming majority of Yisrael Beitenu voters (88 Percent), Zionist Union (91 percent), Yesh Atid (92 percent) and Meretz (100 percent) voters supported such marriage freedom. Forty-two percent of HaBayit HaYehudi voters supported such freedoms as well. Only 13 percent of Shas voters and no UTJ voters at all supported the availability of non-Orthodox officiated weddings.<sup>71</sup>

When respondents were asked which they would choose for themselves or their children, assuming all options were recognized by the state equally, half noted a preference for a non-Orthodox marriage ceremony (of these, 11 percent said they prefer Conservative or Reform, 30 percent civil marriage, and 9 percent said they would cohabit without any official marriage). According to the survey, 84 percent of Hiloni Jews preferred a marriage outside the Rabbinate and only 16 percent of Hiloni Jews still said they would prefer to be married through the Orthodox Rabbinate. While general interest in Orthodox weddings has decreased over the last few years among Hilonim, interest in Conservative or Reform weddings has remained steady (at about 17-20 percent of Hilonim), but interest in civil marriage has increased significantly - from 38 percent of Israeli Jews in 2015 to 53 percent in 2017.<sup>72</sup>

Given the current reality whereby Rabbinate-led weddings are the only legal option for Israeli Jews (inside Israel), 56 percent of Hiloni and 22 percent of Masorti Israeli Jews still said they would prefer a wedding independent of the Chief Rabbinate.<sup>73</sup> In all, 23 percent of all Israelis agreed with this sentiment (among these, 59 percent favored a civil wedding,

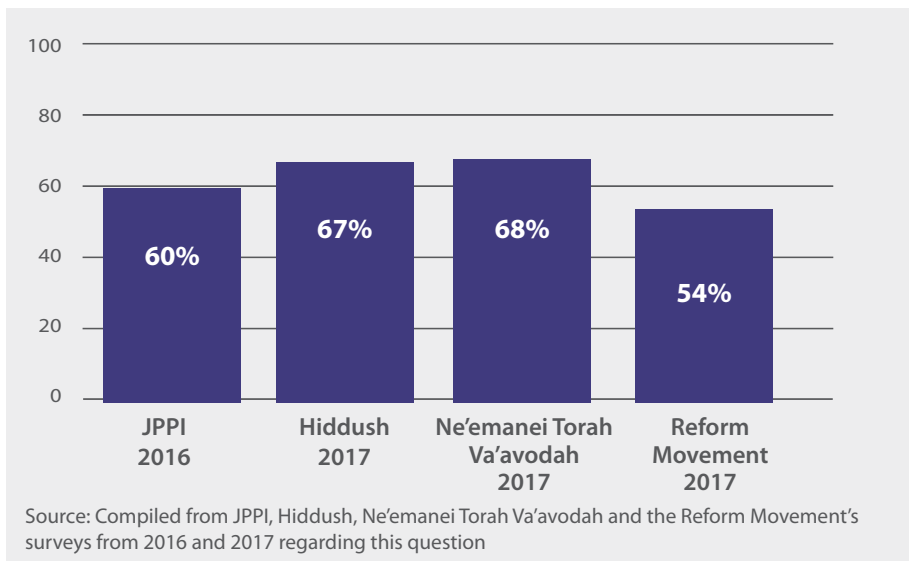
25 percent a Reform one, 7 percent a Conservative ceremony, and 9 percent an Orthodox wedding but outside the auspices of the Chief Rabbinate).

Similarly, a recent study by conducted by the Smith Institute for the conservative-Orthodox LIBA Center found that 71 percent of Israeli Jews preferred a wedding under the auspices of the Rabbinate, so long as no other official choice is available.<sup>74</sup>

The Ne’emanei Torah va’Avodah survey showed that 90 percent of Hiloni Jews and 50 percent of Masorti Jews support instituting civil marriage, while a quarter of Dati Jews also supported such a move. Overall, 68 percent of Israelis support recognizing non-religious weddings and 61 percent support changing the legal status quo.<sup>75</sup>

Similarly, the 2017 Reform Movement study asked if Israel should recognize weddings conducted by Reform rabbis as it does those by Orthodox rabbis. Fifty-four percent agreed, including 86 percent of Hiloni and 47 percent of Masorti Jews. Forty-two percent disagreed, including 44 percent of Masorti, 91 percent of Dati and 97 percent of Haredi Jews. (See figure 17.)

**Figure 17** / Overall Level of Support for Recognizing Reform and Conservative Weddings

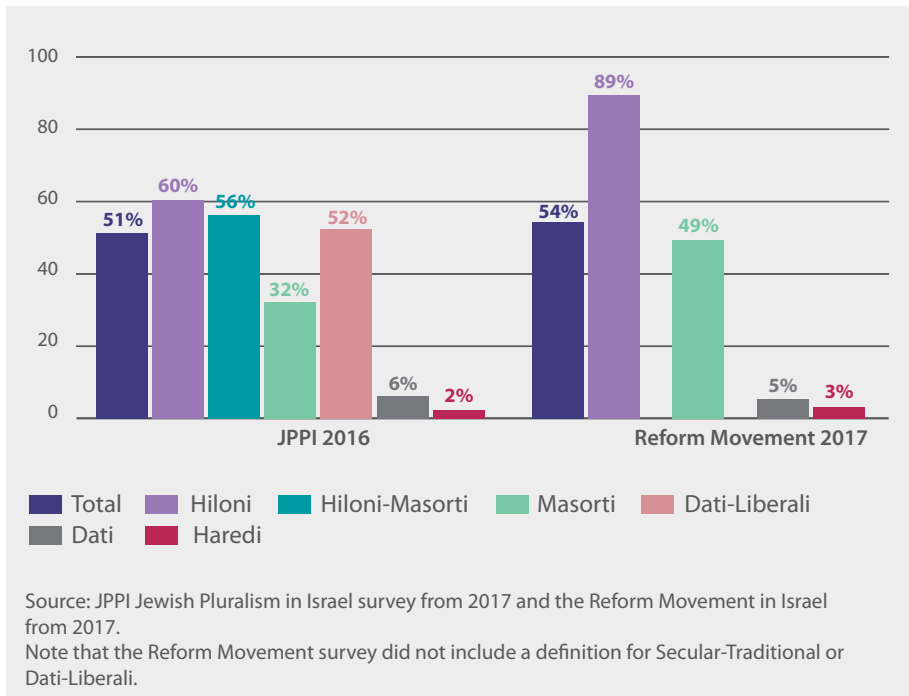


## MIXED GENDER SYNAGOGUES

Most Hiloni and Masorti (as well as some Dati) Jews hold non-Orthodox views regarding the role of women in religious life. Thus, JPPI's 2017 Pluralism Survey showed that over half of Israeli Jews would prefer attending a synagogue with mixed seating (men and women together - including over 60 percent of Secular and 52 percent of "liberal Dati" Jews).<sup>76</sup>

Similarly, the 2017 Reform Movement study found that 35 percent of Israeli Jews would prefer a "synagogue without a *mehitza*" (a barrier separating genders) while 19 percent said that the lack of a *mehitza* would not bother them. Only 46 percent preferred gender separation. It is notable that nearly half (49 percent) of those who self-identified as Masorti said they would not be bothered by the absence of a *mehitza*, some even answered that they would prefer it that way.<sup>77</sup> (See figure 18.)

**Figure 18** / Israeli Jews who would Prefer/ Not Mind Mixed Seating Synagogues - by Religious Identity



## THE KOTEL

According to Hiddush,<sup>78</sup> 60 percent of Israeli Jews, including 88 percent of Hilonim said they support the Western Wall (Kotel) compromise reached in early 2016 (and then shelved in mid-2017) and the establishment of an egalitarian section.<sup>79</sup> Seventy-eight percent of Datiim and 96 percent of Haredim opposed it.<sup>80</sup>

The 2017 Reform Movement study showed that 58 percent of Jewish Israelis support allowing egalitarian Reform and Conservative prayer services at the Kotel, while 33 percent said they do not. The same study asked which section of the Kotel respondents would prefer to visit. Overall, 49 percent of Israeli Jews preferred the traditional (Orthodox) section, including 14 percent of Hiloni, 58 percent of Masorti and almost all Dati and Haredi Jews. Conversely, 37 percent preferred the egalitarian section, including 66 percent of Hiloni and 27 percent of Masorti Jews. Seven percent of all respondents, including 12 percent of Hiloni Jews, reported no desire to visit the Kotel at all.

However, when shown a picture of women wearing tallitot (prayer shawls) and reading from a Torah scroll, 46 percent supported allowing the practice versus 44 percent who opposed. Among Masorti Israelis, only 37 percent supported such a practice while half were opposed.<sup>81</sup> Similarly, JPPI's 2016 Pluralism survey found that most Israeli Jews do not agree that women should be permitted to wear tefillin (phylacteries) at the Kotel.<sup>82</sup>

## RELIGION AND STATE

According to a 2016 study conducted by the Smith Institute for the Jerusalem Post Magazine, most (54 percent) Israelis disagreed with the extent of Orthodox influence on state laws (82 percent of Hiloni, 39 percent of Masorti, and 10 percent of Dati).<sup>83</sup>

Most (59 percent) Israelis prefer that public life in Israel be conducted in accordance with Jewish tradition, albeit of a national and not religious nature.<sup>84</sup>

## HOSTILITY TO REFORM AND CONSERVATIVE JUDAISM

Despite widespread sympathy, it would be a mistake to overlook the deep hostility from the Haredi and conservative reaches of the Dati camps toward Reform and Conservative Jews.<sup>85</sup>

For example, speaking at a Haaretz conference in June of 2017, Haredi political leader Moshe Gafni publicly commented that the “Reform Movement delegitimizes Judaism” and that he would rather “sit with an Arab than a Reform Jew.”<sup>86</sup> He has also stated that, “Reform Jews are stabbing the holy Torah in the back.”<sup>87</sup> At a recent conference, Gafni said: “We don’t recognize them (Reform Jews) at all, they hurt the Jewish people. The Reform Jews for me are the most serious problem. It’s the worst blow to the Jewish people.”<sup>88</sup>

Israel Eichler, another Haredi politician, said this about Reform Jews: “They’re not Jews because 80 percent of their kids are assimilators,” and that “whoever wants to uproot Jewish law to lead to heresy, to make the God of Israel something amorphous, to make the Torah of Israel into legends, that’s not Judaism. That’s the destruction of Judaism.” Eichler even accused American Reform-led institutions of corruption, claiming “they take money for Israel from innocent Jews and leave 95 percent of the money in the United States. Where does the money go? To the anti-Israel organizations.”<sup>89</sup>

Shas leader Aryeh Deri, while calling Reform and Conservative Jews “our brothers,” went on to note that their religious practice is “not the Jewish religion,” that it caused “incredible damage to Judaism,” and that it was an “imitation.”<sup>90</sup>

Shas MK and Religious Services Minister David Azoulay went so far as to say Reform Jews are not Jewish, but rather “something much further from Judaism than Christianity.”<sup>91</sup> He also said, “I cannot allow myself to call such a person a Jew.” Moreover, he stated that, “these are Jews who erred along the way.”<sup>92</sup> Azoulay’s son, Yinon Azoulay, who took over his father’s

Knesset seat for Shas, blamed Reform and Conservative Jews for the series of earthquakes in northern Israel in July 2018.<sup>93</sup>

Former Sephardic Chief Rabbi Shlomo Amar, who was behind the public pressure to cancel the Kotel arrangement, compared Reform Jews to Holocaust deniers in their rejection of Jewish law and their damage to the Jewish people. He called the Reform leaders “cursed evil people... (who) even marry Jews and non-Jews.... (who) don’t have Yom Kippur or Shabbat.... (who) want to desecrate the holy.”<sup>94</sup>

While markedly less hostile, a number of senior Religious-Zionist politicians have espoused dismissive and negative attitudes toward the non-Orthodox movements. Thus, Tzipi Hotovely, a Likud MK and deputy foreign minister recently asserted that Reform and Conservative Jews “emptied Judaism of substance.”<sup>95</sup> HaBayit HaYehudi (The Jewish Home party) firebrand MK Betzalel Smotrich called Reform Judaism a “fake religion.”<sup>96</sup>

In meetings conducted by the author with ultra-Orthodox and Dati individuals and groups, a number of things stood out. First, they do not view Reform (and Conservative)<sup>97</sup> Judaism as legitimate as it does not emphasize understanding or following Jewish law. Second, since intermarriage is so common, and even conducted (abroad) by Reform rabbis, they suspect a majority of Reform Jews (in America) are not really Jewish, and together with low birthrates, assess that Reform Judaism will disappear in a matter of a few generations. They further view Reform Judaism as “something other than Judaism” and some even said that were the Reform Jews to fight for equal rights as an entirely separate religious group (like Christians or Muslims), they would not meet with the Haredi community’s objection. Rabbi Yeshayahu Horowitz of Arachim,<sup>98</sup> a Haredi advocacy group that seeks to reach out to secular Jews, explained that the Haredi community would take less issue with the Reform and Conservative Movements were they to define their version of Jewish practice and thought as cultural and not as a reinvention of Judaism, something to which he feels they do not have the learning or authority to do.



This is partly why he and others tend to have less of an issue with the various expressions of Jewish renewal throughout Israel, many of which are substantively similar if not identical to the Reform and Conservative denominations.

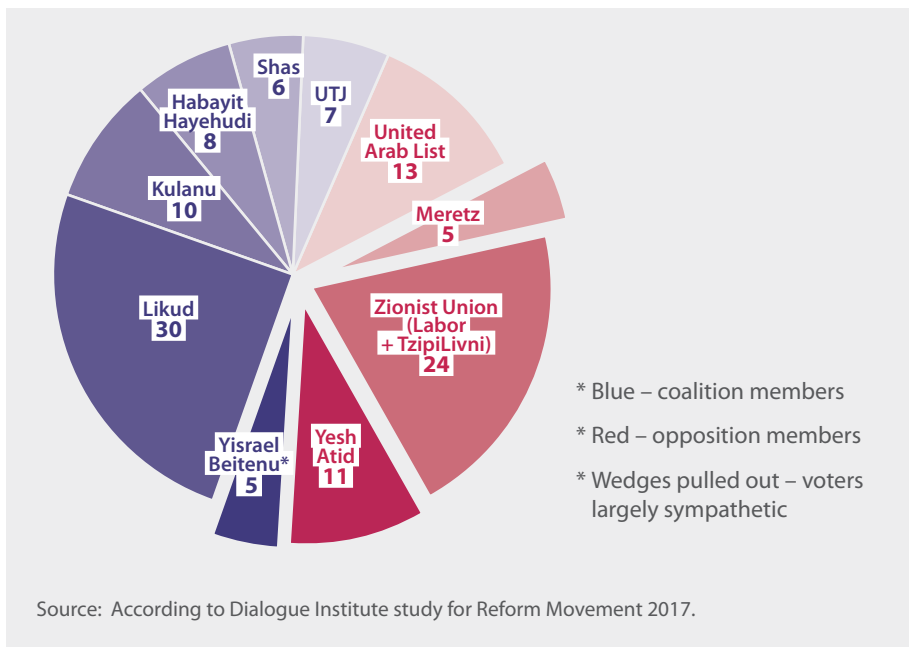
Furthermore, Horowitz noted, on this and other issues, his organization takes issue with the battle for religious pluralism in Israel as it seeks to change the status quo defined during the establishment of the state with non-democratic methods (through the courts) and not through the Knesset.

A 1998 booklet published by the ultra-Orthodox Manof – Jewish Information Center (that Horowitz helped write), used to educate the Haredi public in Israel on “American Reform Judaism” describes Reform (and Conservative) Judaism as failed attempts at managing the emancipation period by transforming Judaism into a Protestant-like religion with a “Jewish shell”; as a social movement and not a religious one; as a gateway to Christianity and a corridor toward assimilation. The book is replete with demographic and other statistics showing the high intermarriage rates as well as the low levels of commitment to Judaism and to Israel, and that due to lax conversion standards and even the welcoming of non-Jews into communities, Reform Judaism cannot be accepted as Jewish.<sup>99</sup> Anecdotally, a number of those hostile or dismissive of liberal Judaism interviewed (as well as heard on talk-radio, or from conversations with Orthodox and ultra-Orthodox Jews) mentioned Reform Jews conducting “bark mitzvah” ceremonies for their dogs, (which is not a very common or serious practice) as evidence, in their minds, that Reform and Conservative Judaism are ludicrous, shallow and not really Jewish.<sup>100</sup>

# POLITICAL INFLUENCE AND AFFILIATION

Unlike the Dati-Leumi (National-Religious) or Haredi in Israel, the Reform and Conservative Movements do not have specific political parties advancing their agendas.<sup>101</sup> Meretz, the far-left party, broadly advocates for religious freedom and separation of religion and state, agendas the Zionist Union (Labor + Tzipi Livni's faction) and Yesh Atid (centrist) parties also generally support while other sympathetic parties do not actively advance such causes. In contrast, at this writing, the three Dati and Haredi parties hold 21 of the 120 Knesset seats, clearly advance a religion and state agenda, and are members of the current governing coalition.<sup>102</sup> (See figure 19.)

**Figure 19** / Sympathy for Reform and Conservative Judaism - by Political Party Affiliation



Therefore, any influence or access the movements have been able to achieve have been through the judicial system. The Israel Religious Action Center (IRAC), regularly advances issues of equality through the courts and has successfully challenged the government and Rabbinate on a number of issues. Alongside IRAC's judicial efforts, it employs lobbying efforts and a full-time staffer for Knesset affairs.

Relatedly, the Conservative Movement operates a watchdog group, Jewish Pluralism Watch (*Al Mishmar HaKnesset*), which serves to “monitor Israeli elected officials’ positions, statements and legislative initiatives and voting in regard to state and religion in Israel.”<sup>103</sup>

IRAC's social activism, especially its constant challenging of the Rabbinate and ultra-Orthodox influence, keeps them firmly in opposition to the current right-wing government. Moreover, the government, which controls budgetary allocations, has no political or religious interest in strengthening its opponents.

The Reform and Conservative Movements exert little influence on the municipal level. Each city and regional council maintains a Religious Council (*moatza datit*) tasked with oversight of religion-related operations on the local level. This includes the supervision and granting of kashrut certification (inspectors), supervision and attendance of mikvehs (ritual baths), burial attendants at cemeteries, and eruv inspectors (city boundaries for religious purposes).

The head of each committee, a salaried position, is appointed by agreement between the parties that comprise the coalition on the local level. The rest of the council members are volunteers: 45 percent are appointed by the parties according to their weight in the local municipality; 45 percent are appointed by the Religious Services Ministry; and 10 percent are appointed by the Chief Rabbinate of that municipality. When a list is generated and agreed upon, it is presented to the Religious Services Ministry for final approval.

However, for any number of reasons, the sides cannot agree on a list in most cases. If an agreement is not reached within a year, the ministry appoints its own council head and deputy, which act without a larger democratically appointed council. In some cases, the ministry and political parties may disagree on a list; in others, the ministry and Rabbinates seek to circumvent a democratically appointed oversight committee or bypass directives to include women on the councils. (The previous Religious Services Minister Ben Dahan – HaBayit HaYehudi - mandated that at least one woman be included on each council. Later, Attorney General Avichai Mandelblit ordered that women constitute a full third of each council.)<sup>104</sup>

In practice, today, 70 percent of councils are appointed by the Religious Services Ministry, and therefore lack democratic representation and preclude the possibility that someone representing pluralistic Judaism could secure a seat on the council. Only a handful of actively Reform or Conservative individuals (appointments of Meretz) sit on the 30 percent of councils that are representative (including in Kfar Saba, Ra'anana, Ashdod and Emek Hefer).<sup>105</sup>

The movements attempted to gain influence through the councils during the 1980's and 1990's. However, according to Gilad Kariv and individuals interviewed who serve on councils (and asked not to be named), much of the funding allocated is already earmarked. This leaves only about 5 percent of the budget available for "Torah culture" activities, open to the influence of the members. In only a few cases were the Reform and Conservative members able to gain access to modest sums for pluralistic activities related to public holiday celebrations.

Because the Religious Affairs Ministry, religious parties, or municipal rabbis can simply bypass a representative council, should they want to silence voices opposed to their agenda, and given the limited influence one can have from within the councils, the Reform and Conservative Movements largely gave up on attempting to gain influence and access through this channel.

Conversely, Kariv notes that the Reform Movement is learning from the success of the Dati-Leumi movement and is working to build its influence and reach through a grassroots approach – focusing first on infrastructure and attaining budgets. According to Kariv, they realize that only through gaining greater public approval and identification will the movements be able to gain funding and public access commensurate with their actual scope and reach.

The Reform and Conservative Movements, however, have been successful, to an extent, in achieving a close level of cooperation with municipalities outside of the Rabbinates. In Tel Aviv, for example, the Reform Movement holds considerable influence and access in the city council and the municipality often sponsors public Reform Movement events. One can also look to Sha'ar HaNegev, a collection of 11 kibbutzim in the northern Negev region, which lists the local Reform rabbi on the official website alongside the Orthodox rabbi for those seeking religious services. In Holon, a Reform-affiliated school is being built and two Reform kindergartens already exist. According to Kariv, the mayor sees the positive effects (social and economic) of having a strong Reform presence, as can be seen in neighboring Tel Aviv, and thus is seeking to cooperate with the Movement.

# BUDGETS

The IMPJ's (Reform Movement in Israel) reported a yearly budget of NIS 24.5 million in 2017. According to its annual report: 25 percent of this came from private donations, mostly from the U.S.; 15 percent from North American Reform organizations such as ARZA, RIA and the WUPJ; 18 percent came from Foundations and North American Jewish Federations; 23 percent from semi-official institutions such as the Jewish Agency, JFNA and JNF; 9 percent from the Israeli government in the form of support for specific programs, support for synagogue construction and salaried rabbis; and roughly 10 percent from self-generated income, such as pay-per-services, the Reform preschools and kindergartens and the movement's hostels in Jaffa and Jerusalem. This means that close to three-quarters of the Movement's funding comes from North American sources.

This sum does not include what the individual communities manage to raise on their own, which in all, can reach more than twice that amount. The communities manage to raise funds in part through a pay-per-services model. Thus, for example, a wedding ceremony costs NIS 1500 (Reform), a conversion course and ceremony can cost up to NIS 1000 (Reform) or NIS 1700 (Conservative) and a bar/bat mitzvah preparation course and ceremony can range between NIS 2000-3000.

Beit Daniel, the umbrella organization for Reform Movement activity in Tel Aviv, conducts over 200 bar/bat mitzvah and between 300 and 400 wedding ceremonies a year. Between its fees for service model and its system of kindergartens, as well as a hostel it operates in Jaffa which hosts 60,000 tourists yearly, it is able to raise a budget of NIS 13 million in total, only 20 percent of which comes from fundraising (and another 2 percent comes from membership fees and government support).<sup>106</sup> Rabbi Meir Azari, who heads Beit Daniel, is convinced that this funding model, which relies on entrepreneurial and energetic leaders, is the only

way for non-Orthodox Judaism to survive in Israel so long it does not receive considerable government support. Rabbi Azari is also convinced that as communities in the Diaspora struggle to adapt to a new reality of decreased membership among the younger generation of Jews, this sort of pay-per-service model, that organizations like Chabad already employ, could be the future of fundraising.

The Reform Movement (IMPJ) reports that it spends 30 percent of its budget on IRAC for legal and public advocacy work, 33 percent on congregation and youth programming, 16 percent on its relations with world Jewry and tikkun olam projects, 13 percent on education, and 8 percent on administrative fees. It also helps support smaller communities while larger ones are more self-sustaining.

The movements have managed to obtain some government funding in recent years for individual programs. The Reform pre-army mechina (academy), for example, receives NIS 1.1 million a year, while the 8 government-funded Reform community rabbis bring in roughly another 1 million shekels in government funding. The movement also receives another NIS 300-400 thousand annually for educational initiatives and another million shekels a year for its *Domim* cooperative project from the Diaspora Affairs Ministry. This project seeks to connect between Reform communities around the world and those in Israel.

The Conservative Movement's 2017 budget amounted to NIS 25 million in all, including related operations, such as the education center at Kibbutz Hannaton and the kindergartens. This number is comprised of NIS 15 million in core budget for the Masorti Movement (Conservative), another NIS 4 million raised by the communities through the Movement, and another NIS 6-7 million raised directly by the individual communities. Sixty percent of the funding comes from foreign donations, 25 percent from Israeli donations and the Israeli government (7 percent), and 15 percent from self-generated income, mostly from the lifecycle services the movement conducts.

It is important to point out that these sums are paltry compared to the few billions of shekels granted Orthodox and Ultra-Orthodox groups and causes each year.<sup>107</sup> As there is no single Orthodox or Ultra-Orthodox movement or umbrella organization, it is difficult to estimate just how much government funding supports these movements, organizations, and causes, but allocations come from a myriad of government agencies. Kariv estimates well over a billion shekels; others estimate as much as 3 billion. A study released by *Haaretz* and Be Free Israel (*Yisrael Hofsheet*, an activist organization that seeks separation of religion and state), which took into account subsidies, direct funding, tax breaks, and more, put this number as high as NIS 8 billion in the 2016 budget allocated by various government ministries including the Religious Services Ministry, Chief Rabbinate, rabbinical courts, and the Education, Culture and Sports, Justice, and Agriculture Ministry.<sup>108</sup> Panim, the umbrella organization for pluralistic Jewish organizations, estimates this statistic to be exaggerated and puts the figure at around NIS 2-4 billion.<sup>109</sup>

**Figure 20** / Budgetary Summary of Reform and Conservative Movements in Israel

<b>Reform</b>	<b>Conservative</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Movement's core budget in 2017</b> ~NIS 25 million</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Movement's core budget in 2017</b> - ~NIS 15 million</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Individual communities' budget in 2017</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• an additional ~NIS 25 million</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Individual communities' budget in 2017</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- an additional ~NIS 10-11 million</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>~9% of budget from government sources:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 8 salaried rabbis</li> <li>• Some synagogue funding</li> <li>• Pre-military mechina</li> <li>• Educational or other programs</li> <li>• Partnership with Diaspora Ministry</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>~7% of budget from government sources:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 2 salaried rabbis</li> <li>• Some synagogue funding</li> <li>• Pre-military mechina</li> <li>• Educational or other programs</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<hr/> <p><b>Government funding for religious causes and organizations</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Additional few NIS millions for non-Orthodox Jewish organizations</li> <li>• Orthodox/Haredi organizations - few NIS billions each year</li> </ul>	



## ACCESS TO PUBLIC FUNDING

Public funding is allocated through various channels and arrangements and goes to pay for such things as community rabbis, and synagogues.

Government funding for non-Orthodox Jewish streams exists and is growing but is significantly less than for Orthodox ones. Total government funding for the Reform Movement stood at NIS 3.5 million in 2016-2017, while public funding for the Conservative Movement for the same period was around NIS 2 million. Additional government funding for non-Orthodox Jewish activities (outside of the movements) stood at another few millions of shekels.

### RABBIS

Funding for public rabbis is anchored in Israeli law, including the Israeli Rabbinate Law of 1980.<sup>110</sup> According to the Religious Services Ministry, there are three kinds of public rabbis: – city/municipal chief rabbis (*rabanei arim*); neighborhood rabbis (*rabanei shchunot*); and regional settlement rabbis (*rabanei hityashvut*). There are today 96 chief rabbis of cities, 126 neighborhood rabbis, and 290 regional rabbis. Since 2003, the neighborhood rabbis have begun a phasing out process, with no new rabbis hired according to this model. Instead of geographically bound “neighborhood” rabbis, the new model taking shape is one of “community rabbis” (*rabanei kehilot*). This is in addition to the two chief rabbis, Sephardic and Ashkenazic, who oversee all matters of religion in the public sphere.

According to Erez-Lahovsky of IRAC, the law does not explicitly state that such rabbis need be Orthodox. Therefore, in 2005, IRAC challenged the absence of publicly funded Reform or Conservative rabbis, which culminated in a landmark 2012 Supreme Court decision that there was no impediment to this, provided that several practical criteria could be met and verified. Criteria include showing that there is a local community

desiring such services, conducting a minimum number of events (services, learning sessions, etc.) and having a minimum number of participants attend said events.<sup>111</sup> Thus, in 2013, Rabbi Miri Gold, a Reform rabbi from the Gezer Regional Council, became the first publicly funded non-Orthodox community rabbi. Since then, nine more Reform and Conservative rabbis (eight Reform and two Conservative total) have met the criteria and received partial funding. To date, only regional councils or kibbutzim where there is no Orthodox presence have succeeded in meeting such criteria and receiving public funding. The movements have yet to succeed in gaining access to funding for rabbis in urban settings with mixed communities.

We note that in order to appease the Haredi parties, one of which controls the Religious Services Ministry (Shas), these positions are funded indirectly through the Culture and Sports Ministry and not directly by the Religious Services Ministry, as are the rest of the rabbis. This funding amounts to roughly NIS 1 million per year in all.

## **SYNAGOGUES**

Synagogues in Israel can be eligible for partial funding by the Religious Services Ministry and receive support from the local municipalities. The municipalities appropriate public land for synagogue construction. Funding for synagogue construction and upkeep comes partly from the Religious Services Ministry, which distributes tens of millions of shekels yearly for “religious structures” (in 2016 – 2017, 70 million shekels in allocations were planned, which includes construction and maintenance of synagogues and mikvehs (ritual baths)). In practice, the ministry apportions most of the funding to lower income neighborhoods, and roughly 10 percent of the funding is distributed through an “exceptions committee” intended for parts of the public not considered mainstream. It is in this manner that the Reform and Conservative Movements can access public funding for synagogues. In municipal areas where the movements can prove demand, they have been able to access funding and land to construct on average

one Reform synagogue a year and one new Conservative synagogue every three years. According to IRAC, the movements receive only a fraction of the amount they need to fully construct a synagogue (usually about NIS 200,000).

Kariv added that the Religious Affairs Ministry, although headed by Shas (a Haredi party), cooperates and allows this dynamic. He claims this is because otherwise, the ministry would become tied up in discrimination cases, and would thus not be able to construct any new structures. The Religious Services Ministry noted that it has no official policy of supporting a specific religious stream in this manner (Orthodox, Conservative, or Reform) and makes its funding decisions based on bottom-up demand on the local level. (Church and mosque funding is allocated to those religions by the Interior Ministry.)

# LEGAL STATUS AND LIMITATIONS OF THE REFORM AND CONSERVATIVE MOVEMENTS

The final section examines the legal status of the movements in Israel regarding specific and practical points of contention: conversion, marriage, access to the Western Wall (Kotel), access to the education system, use of public religious facilities like mikvehs, and burial. While no doubt the symbolic aspect of each is significant, we focus here more on the legal, technical, and practical aspects. We do not relate to functions that do not involve the state or public sphere such as prayer services, textual learning, bar/bat mitzvah ceremonies, circumcisions, etc., as the movements are able to fully and freely operate in these matters.

In large part, access or equality in these various matters, where it exists, has been achieved through the legal activism and lobbying efforts of IRAC where Israeli law does not explicitly mandate that certain issues must be Orthodox or controlled by the Rabbinate. Marriage and divorce are the only matters explicitly mandated under Israeli law as “Orthodox” and controlled by the Rabbinate, and are, thus, the practical issues in which Reform and Conservative Judaism have no authority whatsoever. At the time of this writing, the Government of Israel is seeking to pass a conversion compromise while the Reform and Conservative Movements attempt to advance their rights through the courts and the Haredi parties seek to advance legislation subverting these efforts.

**Figure 21 / Summary Table by Issue**

<b>Issue</b>	<b>Current Situation</b>	<b>Gap to Full Equality</b>	<b>Notes</b>
<b>Marriage / Divorce</b>	Rabbinat has monopoly – movements cannot marry; no civil marriage. All marriages abroad recognized – Jewish couples still must divorce through the Rabbinat.	State would allow either marriage equality to all streams and/or the civil marriage option.	Increased trend of unrecognized Reform/Conservative/ Orthodox/ civil wedding ceremonies and registration as “Domestic Partnerships” (yeduin batzibur) - bypassing Rabbinat.
<b>Conversion</b>	Conversions abroad recognized for citizenship; conversions in Israel for citizens recognized by Interior Ministry. Neither recognized by Rabbinat for marriage.	Rabbinat does not recognize – influences marriage only.	Current rights achieved in courts;
	Movements have taken role in National Conversion Institute, which in the end is Orthodox.	Movements seeking Interior Ministry recognition of conversions in Israel for citizenship after private Haredi conversion set precedent in court.	Government proposed compromise would grant Orthodox monopoly, but outside of Rabbinat; would cement rights of Diaspora communities to convert.
<b>Kotel Access</b>	Small egalitarian prayer platform in use since 2000; government set to upgrade and expand platform; expand Kotel holy site area to include egalitarian section as partial implementation of original compromise plan.	Compromise deal reached in Jan. 2016 and frozen in June 2017. Would have achieved equal status for movements: egalitarian section, equal access, funding, movements part of governing council.	Haredi parties passively opposed until pressure from Haredi public grew; parties then threatened to topple government if deal were implemented but willing to accept current situation.

Issue	Current Situation	Gap to Full Equality	Notes
<b>Burial</b>	Movements can conduct burials in public civil cemeteries and private cemeteries; burial in public Orthodox cemeteries only with approval of Orthodox Burial Society.	Government would grant movements own cemeteries or construct additional civil cemeteries around country.	
<b>Mikveh Use (ritual baths)</b>	Movements won right to use publicly-funded mikvehs used by state for conversion ceremonies; awaiting construction of public-funded mikvehs only for movements.	No gap in law – at times obstruction on local level. Awaiting funding (from government to JAFI) to construct Reform / Conservative mikvehs.	Rights were gained in the courts; Haredi parties seeking “Mikveh Law” to bypass court decision.
<b>Access to Public Schools</b>	Non-Orthodox, pluralistic Jewish education organizations active in secular school system – 1/3 of schools work on deep level with organizations, 40 schools built on “pluralistic” model, movements among 35 organizations providing extra-curricular Jewish education, organizations provide curriculum and textbooks.	While pluralistic Jewish organizations receive some government funding, Orthodox groups get far more funding, including for work in secular schools. This is in addition to Orthodox and ultra-Orthodox school systems.	Although practically similar, groups have easier access to school system and public funding when not officially called “Reform” or “Conservative” (see TALJ for example).
<b>Public Funding - Rabbis</b>	No law that public rabbis must be Orthodox; funding for 10 community rabbis; must meet minimal criteria.	Matter of numbers and geography; no public rabbis yet where there is an Orthodox presence.	Since 2013 court case; salary through Culture Ministry to appease Haredi controlled Religious Services Ministry.

Issue	Current Situation	Gap to Full Equality	Notes
<b>Public Funding - Synagogues</b>	No law funding must be for Orthodox synagogues; receive some funding for synagogue construction + cooperation and land from municipalities – Avg. 1 Reform / year and 1 Conservative / 3 years.	According to Reform Movement and Religious Services Ministry – movements have full rights and cooperation of government on this matter.	Through Religious Services Ministry, funding prioritized to low income areas rather than specifically Orthodox.
<b>Public Funding - generally</b>	The Movements and other non-Orthodox organizations get some funding – a few tens of millions NIS.	Movements demand funding in accordance with % of population who use their services.	Compared to billions of shekels to Orthodox and Haredi groups.

## CONVERSION (GIYUR)

The Reform Movement conducts approximately 250 conversions in Israel each year. The Conservative Movement conducted 160 in 2016.<sup>112</sup> As a point of comparison, the Conservative Movement estimates that it conducts around 2500-3000 conversions worldwide annually, and JPPI estimates that between 1500 and 3000 Reform conversions are performed in the United States each year.<sup>113</sup> In all, roughly 14 percent of the American Jewish community is composed of converts.<sup>114</sup>

Since 1989, Reform and Conservative conversions conducted abroad by recognized Jewish communities are accepted by the Israeli Interior Ministry for purposes of immigration under the “Law of Return” (following a Supreme Court decision).<sup>115</sup> The Interior Ministry considers such converts to be Jewish. However, the Rabbinate does not, which means that although they hold Israeli citizenship, they cannot marry in Israel.

Since 2002 (after another High Court victory), Israeli citizens who convert through the Reform or Conservative Movements inside Israel are

recognized as Jewish by the Interior Ministry following a legal procedure, and their status is changed. However, this also does not hold sway with the Rabbinate and so these Jews cannot marry inside of Israel.

The matter of conversion and who gets to decide “who is a Jew” rose to the top of the national agenda in the late 1990s. The government ordered a committee to propose a compromise solution, headed by the late Yaakov Ne’eman. The Ne’eman Committee proposed a compromise whereby a national Joint Conversion Center would be established, in which representatives of the three streams (Orthodox, Conservative and Reform) as well as secular Jews would teach as well as help establish a pluralistic conversion curriculum. Program graduates would then stand in front of a specially appointed Rabbinate *beit din* (religious jury) for the conversion itself, so that there would be a unified Orthodox conversion acceptable to all streams. While the report and recommendations themselves were not officially adopted by the government, the spirit of the compromise was and the Reform and Conservative Movements, as well as the Rabbinate, eventually agreed to cooperate. The Conversion Center was established in 1999, headed, until today, by Professor Benjamin Ish Shalom. It changed its name to NATIV, The National Center for Jewish Studies, Identity and Conversion, in 2015.<sup>116</sup>

Ish Shalom explained<sup>117</sup> that the curriculum was developed together with Reform, Conservative, and secular representatives, and quietly coordinated with the Rabbinate itself, something that has contributed to its continued success. He described between 4000 to 6000 candidates studying at any given time, with around 2000 converting through the program each year, the majority of official converts in Israel. Roughly, two-thirds of participants are civilians and one-third are soldiers, who participate in a special program run in conjunction with the IDF.

Overall, 87,234 individuals converted officially through the Orthodox Rabbinate between 1996 and 2016. 2,795 individuals underwent official conversion in 2016.<sup>118</sup>



There has been no shortage of criticism for the conversion program meant to serve as a compromise arrangement to resolve the conversion issue. Some of the criticism is of the program overall, such as described by a 2013 state comptroller report and others, claiming the program hadn't produced the anticipated number of converts given the massive government funds invested. Only about 8 percent of the country's potential converts have actually converted.<sup>119</sup>

According to ITIM head Rabbi Seth Farber,<sup>120</sup> the special conversion courts were not fully accepted by the rabbinical system initially. He recalled significant court cases from 2007 and 2010, in which the Supreme Court and then Chief Rabbi Shlomo Amar were forced to intervene to overturn local religious council decisions refusing to recognize the conversions of institute graduates and the rulings of the special conversion courts. Since then, Farber described two developments that led to the high failure rate we see today. The first was that the court cases and chief rabbi's decision led the Rabbinate to fully back and support the special conversion courts, which they had not initially done. The reverse side of this was that the judges sitting on the conversion courts raised the bar for accepting converts. Farber suggests that is because many of the judges do not take the NATIV program as seriously as other conversion programs.

Ish Shalom, referring to these challenges, added that from his perspective, NATIV has had, at times, to directly challenge the conversion courts when they were being overly scrupulous. As to the Reform and Conservative Movements specifically, he pointed to the continued presence and participation of the Movements in the program as to its overall success, despite occasional challenges. He further noted that many (around 15 percent) of those who enroll do not necessarily intend to convert, but rather are Jewish spouses of conversion candidates, seeking Jewish education, which helps explain the low graduation rates.<sup>121</sup>

Farber added that those conversion candidates who studied under Reform or Conservative teachers at the Institute, and especially those

who might be accompanied to the court by those teachers, can expect discrimination and an especially difficult experience before the courts. The few Reform and Conservative rabbis teaching within the program thus likely have to minimize their denominational affiliation in front of the courts so as not to handicap the outcome of the conversion court's decision. Moreover, he pointed to the relatively small number of Reform and Conservative representatives in the NATIV conversion program as a sign that the Ne'eman plan did not solve the issue as intended. He further speculated that perhaps, the Reform and Conservative Movements had hoped to eventually gain recognition through the compromise plan, which did not happen. This, together with their increased strength and influence today compared to two decades ago, explains why they are now seeking recognition for their own conversions in supersession of the compromise plan.

Thus, in 2015, IRAC initiated a Supreme Court appeal to grant citizenship to non-citizen residents who convert through the non-Orthodox movements in Israel. IRAC's claim was reinforced by a precedent set by a private Haredi conversion court, also not recognized by the Rabbinate.<sup>122</sup> The Court ruled in 2016 that a private Haredi conversion be recognized for the sake of bestowing citizenship.<sup>123</sup> IRAC estimates that as many as 300-400 such non-state conversions (Reform, Conservative, Orthodox and Ultra-Orthodox) take place each year in Israel and go unrecognized. Farber pointed to the *Giyur Kahalacha* (conversion by Jewish law) initiative, with which he is involved, which seeks to provide an Orthodox alternative to the Rabbinate on this issue. He estimates this private conversion program conducts roughly 300 Orthodox, non-rabbinic conversions each year.

In May 2017, a draft bill was introduced in the Knesset by the Ultra-Orthodox Shas party, intended to overturn the March 2016 High Court ruling granting state recognition, and thus citizenship, to private Orthodox conversions, and block the Court from recognizing Reform and Conservative conversions from conferring citizenship.<sup>124</sup> The ministerial

committee for legislation approved the bill on June 25, 2017, along with the Kotel agreement freeze, further drawing the ire of the Reform and Conservative Movements in Israel and abroad as well as the major American Jewish organizations.<sup>125</sup>

Were this bill to pass, it would not have directly affected foreign Reform and Conservative conversions, as “recognized Jewish communities” outside Israel have autonomy in such matters. However, Reform and Conservative leaders feared this would provide precedent for Haredi attempts to block recognition of Diaspora conversions and grant the Rabbinate a legal and official monopoly over conversion, which it currently does not have.

As noted in JPPI’s 2017 Annual Assessment:

“The bill’s supporters cite the need to maintain oversight over a process that grants citizenship, particularly to ensure that migrants and political asylum seekers, such as from Africa or the Palestinian territories, who are not considered sincere convert applicants, cannot take advantage of more lenient or even fake conversion processes to gain citizenship. Conversely, the heads of the Reform and Conservative movements in Israel note that they had already agreed to certain criteria as to the conversion applicants and that they would not conduct conversions on such asylum-seekers. They further fear that were the Rabbinate to gain greater control over the conversion process, it could eventually attempt to overturn the ability of community rabbis abroad, of any denomination, to convert for the sake of making Aliyah.”<sup>126</sup>

The bill was frozen by the prime minister in order to reach some form of compromise between the government, the Haredi parties, the Reform and Conservative Movements, and the American Jewish community.<sup>127</sup> In August 2017, the prime minister appointed former Justice Minister Moshe Nissim to review the conversion issue and propose a path to resolve it.<sup>128</sup>

In June 2018, Nissim presented his compromise proposal, whereby the recognition of Reform and Conservative conversions conducted

abroad would be cemented in law. Conversely, conversion in Israel would be moved from the purview of the Chief Rabbinate to a newly formed national conversion authority within the Prime Minister's Office. While it would remain Orthodox, it would no longer be a part of the Rabbinate, and the Chief Rabbis' role would be limited to serving on a committee that appoints the conversion courts and judges.<sup>129</sup> The Reform and Conservative Movements rejected this compromise, as it would enshrine in law the government's refusal to recognize Israeli Reform and Conservative conversions.<sup>130</sup> Conversely, Haredi and more hardline Dati politicians and rabbis reject the compromise on the grounds that it grants recognition to the liberal movements. Some Dati leaders also oppose the proposal on the grounds that it would weaken the Chief Rabbinate.<sup>131</sup>

The issue of conversion recognition also bears on such things as receiving state funding for the *brit milah* (circumcision ceremony), necessary for male converts. This procedure can cost as much as NIS 4000 (USD ~1000) for an older child or adult, which can be taxing for many individuals. IRAC noted they are working through the judiciary to receive such funding for their conversions as well.

## MIKVEHS

The use of mikvehs (ritual baths) is closely related to the conversion issue. According to Jewish law, traditional and observant Jewish women must immerse themselves regularly. Furthermore, the Rabbinate requires all Jewish women to make use of the mikveh ahead of their wedding day.

For such common uses, Reform and Conservative converts to Judaism meet with little trouble, as the attendants cannot and do not inspect the halachic status of those who walk through the doors.

The issue becomes problematic vis-à-vis conversion ceremonies, as mikvehs are essential in them, for both men and women. Moreover, unlike regular mikveh use, the converting rabbis accompany males for the conversion

immersion and trusted and knowledgeable females (rabbi's wife, female mikveh attendant, etc.) accompany women, to ensure full compliance with Jewish law and ritual (in Orthodox conversion). Further, they are conducted during daytime hours, which means the mikveh facility must be specially opened for such an occasion as they are often closed during the day.<sup>132</sup>

Mikvehs, like kashrut supervision and burial, are essential functions and cornerstones of (observant) Jewish communities and are thus publicly funded in Israel. The funding is allocated by the Religious Services Ministry while the management and attendants are managed through each municipality's religious council.

In February 2015, IRAC won a court case regarding the use of public mikvehs for Reform and Conservative conversions. As it stands, six public mikvehs are in use around the country for state-run conversion ceremonies. The Religious Services Ministry argued that the non-Orthodox movements could and already were using three mikvehs around the country for their conversions – Hanaton in the north (located on a Conservative kibbutz), Modiin in the center, and Omer in south.

The court ruled that any publicly funded mikveh used for state conversion ceremonies must also accommodate Reform or Conservative conversions. IRAC noted that they have not encountered problems at the six public mikvehs to which they turn, meaning the court order has been respected – so far.

As a reaction to this court decision, ultra-Orthodox lawmakers (United Torah Judaism) introduced a bill in early 2016 to circumvent it and give local religious authorities the discretion to ban individuals from using their facilities.<sup>133</sup>

A compromise was struck between the political parties and the non-Orthodox movements under which the Jewish Agency would construct four mikvehs solely for the use of the Reform and Conservative communities. The movements are, reportedly willing to accept such a compromise and in the meantime, are making use of the public mikvehs per court order.

According to the compromise, which is not in the legislative language, the government is to transfer NIS 10 million to the Jewish Agency for this purpose, which, to date, has yet to be done.

## **MARRIAGE AND DIVORCE**

Of the various practical and legal matters discussed, marriage is perhaps the most highly charged and widely discussed, as it affects every Israeli. Under the current Israeli system, a leftover of the Ottoman and British periods, marriage and divorce are the sole purview of each religious group. For Israeli Jews this means marriage is controlled by the Chief Rabbinate according to the rules of Orthodox Judaism. (Muslims, Druze, and Christians have similar authority over their adherents). This law has been in place since 1953. As of today, civil marriage does not exist in Israel.

Therefore, only Jews who can prove their status as a Jew by Orthodox standards, whether by birth to a Jewish mother or having undergone a recognized Orthodox conversion (in Israel or the Diaspora) can legally marry in Israel. Jews with Reform or Conservative conversions, and the offspring of such converts, as well as those considered Jewish under the Law of Return (Jewish father or grandparent but not mother) have no official matrimonial avenue in Israel.

Non-Rabbinate sanctioned marriage ceremonies, such as those conducted by the Reform and Conservative rabbis, non-recognized Orthodox rabbis, or secular ceremonies, are not recognized by the Rabbinate or the state.<sup>134</sup> Besides those who object to the Rabbinate's marriage monopoly on ideological grounds, these rules affect a large segment of Israeli society that cannot marry legally in Israel. This includes 350,800 Israelis (as of 2016) who identify as Jewish or as having no religion, mainly from the FSU, and who are unable to marry each other or recognized Jews. Another estimated 300,000 – 400,000 LGBTQ Israelis cannot officially marry one another. Jewish marriage is also prohibited between the roughly 80,000 Jewish men of priestly descent (Kohen) and the 270,000 female divorcees or the 50,000 or so female converts.<sup>135</sup>

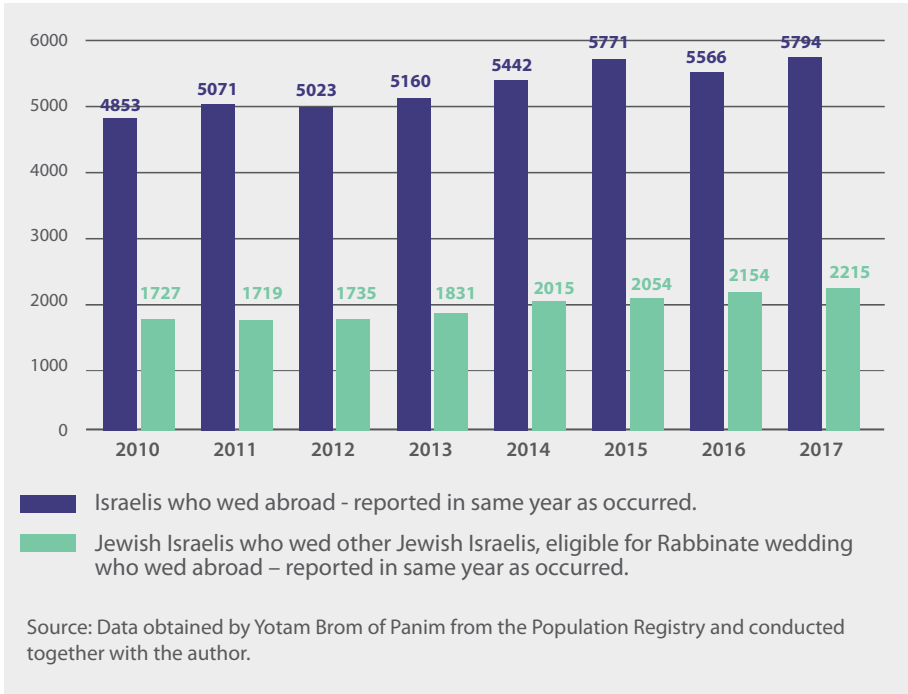
At this time, there are essentially two (imperfect) options available for those who cannot or do not wish to have a wedding conducted by the Rabbinate, and a third option for those “of no religion”.<sup>136</sup> These include marriage abroad which is recognized in Israel, domestic partnerships that confer most of the practical benefits of marriage, and a third option called a “couplehood contract” or “*brit zugiut*” available only to those “of no religion”, which bestows upon the parties a legal status akin to marriage.<sup>137</sup> These three options are sometimes accompanied by private, unrecognized Jewish ceremonies in Israel.

The most common practice to date has been to marry abroad, either in a civil or religious ceremony. Cyprus, the United States, and the Czech Republic are among the main destinations for this.<sup>138</sup> The marriages are then recognized by Israel’s Interior Ministry (but not the Rabbinate, unless the wedding was an Orthodox one). Same-sex marriages are recognized by the state, if conducted in one of the 25 countries around the world that permit them.<sup>139</sup>

It is worthwhile to compare the various alternative marriage statistics to official Jewish marriages, conducted and registered by the Rabbinate. In 2017, the Central Bureau of Statistics (CBS) recorded 36,205 Jewish weddings, as compared to 39,111 in 2015. Despite a steady growth in the general population, this amounts to a decrease of 8 percent in Rabbinate weddings, mostly in the Tel Aviv area and its surroundings.<sup>140</sup>

Related to this decrease in Rabbinate weddings is the role of Tzohar, a Modern Orthodox NGO working to effect reforms and present a more welcoming “Modern Orthodox” face to the general Israeli public. Tzohar assists secular and traditional-minded Israelis in navigating the rabbinic bureaucracy and conducts weddings that are recognized by the Rabbinate, and officiated by a “friendlier” Modern-Orthodox rabbi. Tzohar, founded in 1996, estimates that it conducts roughly 10 percent of the official Rabbinate-sanctioned weddings conducted in Israel each year.<sup>141</sup> According to a well-connected figure in the Rabbinate (who asked not to be named), Tzohar was able to “save the Rabbinate from itself” in this manner, by making it more relevant to a greater portion of the public. However, according to Panim, these have also been in decline.<sup>142</sup>

**Figure 22 / Israelis who Wed Abroad 2010 – 2017 (those who reported the wedding in the same year in which it occurred)**



Traditionally, marrying abroad was the preferable alternative for those who chose to or could not wed in Israel. Data on such weddings is partial, as they often are not reported to the Interior Ministry’s Population Registry the same year in which they occur. According to an analysis of Population Registry statistics,<sup>143</sup> between 12,000 – 13,000 Israeli individuals married outside of Israel each year between 2010 and 2016, the years for which we have such data (roughly two-thirds of the marriages are between two Israelis, the other third consists of Israelis marrying non-Israelis).

In order to be able to compare data points, we look at only those weddings that occurred in the year in which they were reported (roughly 40 percent in any given year). Overall, we observe a slight upward trend in such marriages between 2010 and 2017. We further examined only those marriages that took place between two Israeli Jews who would be eligible for a Rabbinic wedding in Israel. Here too we observe a slight increase (See Figure 22.)

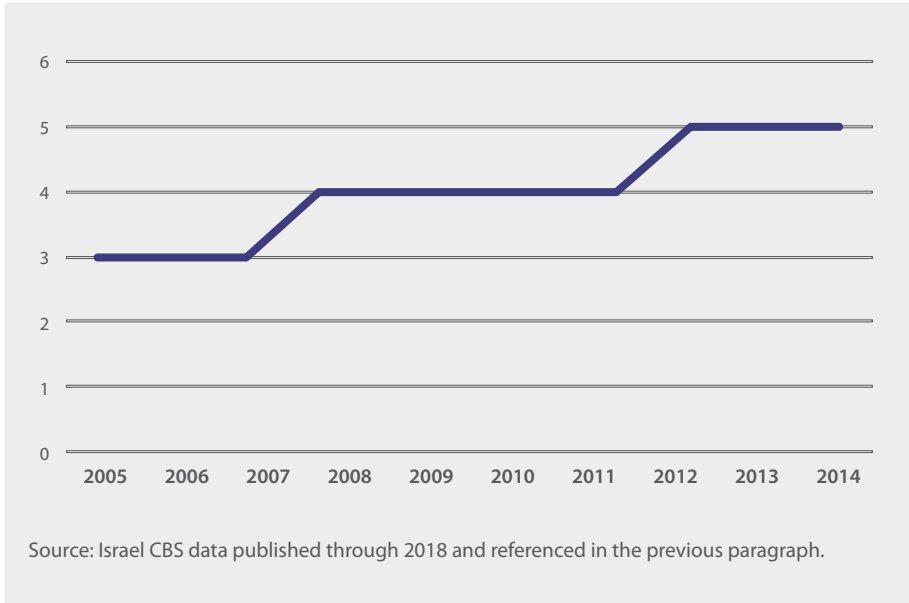


Note that in any given year for the 7 years we examined, about one-third of the total number of Israelis marrying abroad are Israeli Jews marrying other Israeli Jews abroad, while they could have married in Israel. Another roughly one-third are Israelis marrying non-Israelis (religion unknown) and another third are Israeli Jews marrying Israeli non-Jews.

Simultaneously, common-law marriage (domestic partnerships), known in Hebrew as *yedaim batzibur* (“recognized in the public”) is a growing trend in Israel. This arrangement allows couples living together to register as such and gain access to virtually all of the legal and financial benefits and rights granted to married couples.<sup>144</sup> Same-sex couples are eligible for this arrangement as well.<sup>145</sup> Increasingly, the Reform and Conservative Movements, as well as advocates of non-Orthodox Israeli Judaism in general and those advocating civil marriage, call for Israelis to have the wedding of their choice and then register as *yedaim ba'tzibur*. This is, since even if one marries abroad in a civil or non-Orthodox ceremony, divorce in Israel is granted through the Rabbinate (assuming the couple is Jewish), making domestic partnership the only path to fully avoid the Rabbinate at this time.<sup>146</sup>

According to the CBS, the rate of cohabiting couples is still relatively small in Israel (as compared to other developed countries), although it has been steadily growing in recent years. From 2005 to 2008, 3 percent of Israeli couples were unmarried and in a domestic partnership.<sup>147</sup> In 2009, this rose to 4 percent,<sup>148</sup> and by 2014, to 5 percent.<sup>149</sup> The most up-to-date CBS data shows 65,000 unmarried cohabiting couples between 2012 and 2014 with a jump to 84,000 such couples in 2015 and through 2016 (See figure 23).<sup>150</sup> Of course, it would be safe to assume that most of these couples have likely not held alternative wedding ceremonies and forgone any ceremony at all. Moreover, it is likely some of these unmarried couples eventually marry via one of the available legal options, especially when they wish to have children (as a number of Hilonim have said to the author, “what is the point of getting married if not to have children).

**Figure 23** / Percentage of Israeli Couples Cohabiting (unmarried) - 2005 - 2016



In recent years, public opinion has been turning against the institution of marriage under the Rabbinate's auspices. A May 2017 Hiddush survey found that 55 percent of Israeli Jews would prefer an egalitarian marriage independent of the Rabbinate. The survey noted that among Hiloni Israelis, this number was 81 percent, 61 percent for Hiloni-Masorti (secular-traditional) (not so close to religion as Hiddush phrased it), 40 percent for those more traditional (close to religion), 13 percent for Zionist Orthodox or Dati or National-Religious, and 0 percent for Haredi Israelis.<sup>151</sup>

Hiddush asserts that although Israelis generally dislike the Rabbinate, this was the first time in their polling that a majority expressed a clear interest in having the option of non-Rabbinate, egalitarian weddings. In the past, a majority of Israelis supported the general principle of marriage freedom but did not indicate that they would personally prefer such an alternative marriage ceremony.

A Hiddush survey conducted in February 2017 showed that as long as no legal alternative existed, the majority (67 percent) would still prefer the official Orthodox wedding. However, were alternatives legally recognized, 47 percent of all Jews and 78 percent of secular Jews would prefer such a marriage for themselves or their children. Sixty-four percent of Jewish Israelis, the poll also noted, supported recognizing same-sex marriages.

A 2016 Nemenei Torah V'avodah survey showed that 80 percent of Israeli Jews believe that the Rabbinates' control over marriage and divorce "increases the number of Israelis who choose to wed ... abroad". Also, 56 percent of Israeli Jews felt that the "amount and content of religious legislation... is distancing Israelis from Judaism" itself. The survey showed that 68 percent of Israelis supported recognizing non-religious weddings and that 61 percent supported changing the current status quo.<sup>152</sup>

Indeed, non-Rabbinate alternatives are becoming increasingly popular in practice, not just in opinion polls. The largest organizer of alternative wedding ceremonies (and religious ceremonies in general, alongside the Reform and Conservative Movements) is Havaya, a part of the Be Free Israel organization. According to its director, Inbar Oren,<sup>153</sup> Havaya has arranged roughly 5000 wedding ceremonies since it was founded in 2006, 400 of them in 2016, 500 in 2017 and she expects to reach 650 in 2018.<sup>154</sup> Among the group's "wedding conductors" are people of various religious streams and connections, including some with rabbinical ordination from the liberal streams. Oren noted that about 70 percent of the couples that apply to marry through Havaya seek an ideological alternative to the Rabbinate, while 35 percent were prohibited from marrying through the Rabbinate due to the Jewish status of one or both of the parties involved (these numbers may overlap – Oren did not know to what extent). Oren further noted that 7 percent of the couples that turn to Havaya are from the LGBTQ community. The vast majority of couples that marry through Havaya seek a wedding that comports with Jewish tradition (including liberal and modern adaptations) and only a small number sought purely secular ceremonies.

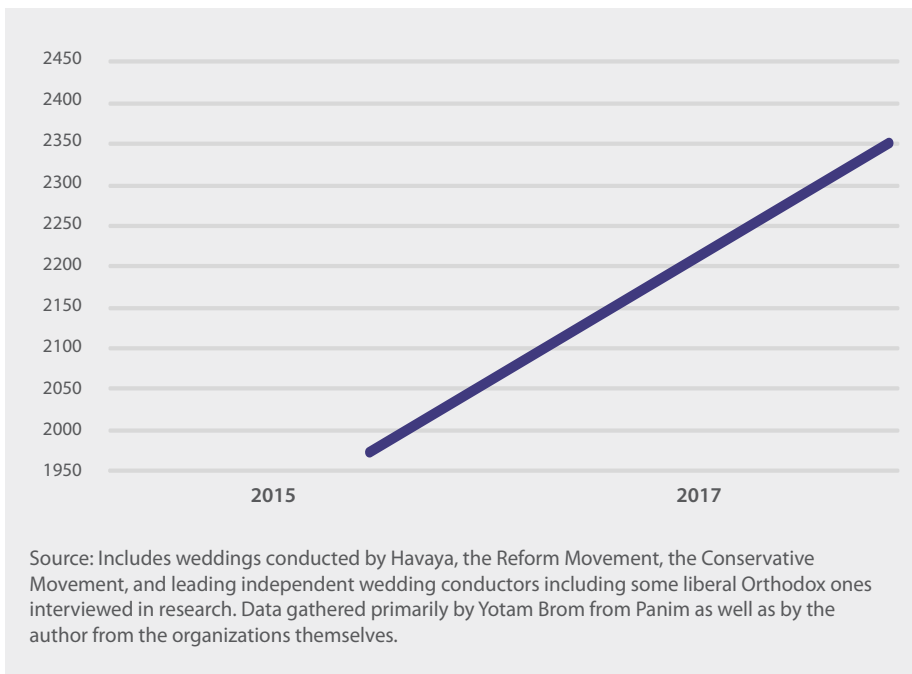
Brom, in his research, points out that of the various alternative weddings, and according to the wedding officiants he interviewed, 55 percent of the couples make use of this option out of secular or anti-Rabbinate ideology, 33 percent are those from the former Soviet Union, 8 percent are LGBT couples, and 4 percent are those couples who cannot officially marry in Israel, as their conversion would not be recognized, or they are a “Cohen” (Jewish man of priestly descent) marrying a divorcee or a convert (forbidden by Jewish law).<sup>155</sup>

Havaya estimates that beyond the non-Orthodox weddings it and other groups organize, another 200 or so Orthodox weddings take place each year outside of the Rabbinate. This, too, seems to be a growing trend among liberal-minded Orthodox couples and traditionally-minded liberal Jews. These couples wish to get married in complete accordance with Jewish law but bypass the Rabbinate in the process. They mainly cite the gender inequality of the traditional ceremony, and have found religiously acceptable (granted by more liberal Orthodox rabbis) ways to include the bride as an active participant in the ceremony.<sup>156</sup> More importantly, they wish to correct what proponents of this type of ceremony see as a major flaw regarding “agunot” or “chained women” by signing pre-nuptial agreements.<sup>157</sup> Gathering exact statistics of non-Rabbinate weddings in Israel is challenging, due to lack of any kind of official records and a plurality of independent wedding officiators throughout the country. Further, we estimate that many who choose wedding alternatives may not use any kind of organization or wedding conductor, rather make use of friends or family in an intimate ceremony.

The Reform Movement estimates it conducts around 500 ceremonies each year while the Conservative Movement estimates around 250. Gilad Kariv of the Reform Movement estimated another roughly 300 “Reform style” weddings each year, while Havayah conducts on average around 500-600 weddings. There are also roughly 200 Orthodox ceremonies outside of the Rabbinate each year.<sup>158</sup>

In his report on non-Rabbinite weddings in Israel, Brom took this further, and conducted interviews with dozens of independent ceremony conductors, alongside the Reform and Conservative movements, and estimated at least 2,400 such ceremonies in 2017. According to those he interviewed, this is an 8 percent increase from 2016.<sup>159</sup> Brom further estimates that were all non-Rabbinite weddings taken into account, the number might reach as high as 3,500 a year. (See figure 24.)

**Figure 24** / Non-Rabbinite Weddings - Estimate



In interviewing ceremony conductors, Brom points out if in the past, conducting such an unrecognized wedding was considered a deliberate act of rebellion and not acceptable in mainstream society, today it is far more normative, and is thus growing in popularity. He concludes three main elements that the majority of the wedding ceremonies have in common – they are egalitarian in nature, they are more personal and intimate, and are largely adhere to Jewish tradition.

Lastly, discussing the growing alternative of private Orthodox weddings, Brom pointed out that there are a number of regional councils who allow, at the request of the couple, for a more liberal rabbi to conduct the wedding, including in a more egalitarian manner. While it is difficult to say to what extent this occurs, it is interesting to point out that in certain areas around Israel, liberal and egalitarian-minded Orthodox couples are able to get married through the Rabbinate according to their wishes.

Notably, in the meantime, a majority of Israeli Jews still prefer to marry in the traditional fashion and through the Rabbinate's bureaucracy, with all its complexities. This is not to say that the trend of alternative weddings, whether abroad or through a non-official ceremony followed by a common-law union are not significant. Israeli society may be approaching (difficult to say when exactly) a tipping point, with respect to the Rabbinate's monopoly over marriage in Israel.

## **THE WESTERN WALL – KOTEL**

One of the most visible conflicts between the Reform and Conservative Movements on one side, and the state along with the Ultra-Orthodox elements that control religious aspects of the state on the other, and which has garnered considerable media attention and drawn the outrage of Diaspora Jews, has revolved around equal access to the Kotel (Western Wall). This conflict was exacerbated by the June 25, 2017 government announcement that it was freezing (essentially shelving) the landmark compromise agreement reached in January 2016.<sup>160</sup>

The Reform and Conservative Movements together with Women of the Wall and the Jewish Federations of North America negotiated an agreement, over the course of a few years, with the Prime Minister's Office, to officially establish an egalitarian section at the Kotel.

The compromise struck in early 2016 with the mediation and leadership of Natan Sharansky, then Chairman of the Jewish Agency, the Prime

Minister's Office, Kotel Rabbi Rabinovich, and with the awareness of the Haredi political parties, mandated the establishment of an egalitarian third Kotel space on par with the two traditional (men only and women only) sections. In addition, the area currently allotted to egalitarian prayer (since 2000), near Robinson's Arch, would be upgraded and expanded significantly.

According to the agreement, the egalitarian site would receive public funding for upkeep, prayer books, and Torah scrolls and lead to the establishment of a religious council to oversee it, which would include Reform and Conservative representatives as well as a representative of Women of the Wall. The "custom of the place" (*minhag hamakom*) was to include gender equality.<sup>161</sup> The current delineation of the Western Wall as a holy site was to expand to include the egalitarian site, which today is not officially designated as part of the Kotel. Most importantly, the agreement included anchoring in law the section as a space for pluralistic prayer.

According to the Religious Affairs Ministry and others interviewed, when word of the agreement reached the Haredi community, pressure mounted on the Haredi political parties and forced them to back out. While they initially opposed the plan, they only did so tacitly and did not work to actively prevent its implementation until pressure from their electorate demanded action. The ministry added that Chief Rabbi Lau claimed he had been kept out of the loop and the parties claimed that they did not read the agreement's fine print, especially regarding the establishment of the religious council.

In February of 2017, the government appointed Minister Tzachi HaNegbi to oversee the issue and advance a compromise between the parties involved, namely the Reform and Conservative Movements, Women of the Wall, and the Government of Israel. This was welcomed by the Reform and Conservative Movements as a step in the right direction.<sup>162</sup>

In June 2017, in a letter sent to the government, the Chief Rabbinate expressed its opposition to the compromise agreement and against any

agreement that might lead to mixed-gender prayer at the Kotel.<sup>163</sup> It is of note that the Chief Rabbinate's Legal Counsel refused to represent this position in the courts, forcing the Rabbinate to hire an independent counsel.

On June 25, 2017, after intense lobbying by ultra-Orthodox coalition members, the government announced it was freezing the implementation of the agreement, likely ahead of the June 26 High Court deadline for the government to respond to petitions by the Reform and Conservative Movements for an explanation why the deal had yet to be implemented.<sup>164</sup> However, the government announced it would continue with the planned physical upgrades to the current make-shift platform near Robinson's Arch. According to press reports from the week preceding the announcement, this was a "compromise" that the ultra-Orthodox parties were willing to accept – the key sticking point for them having been the establishment of the governing council.<sup>165</sup>

Given the intense and outraged reaction of the U.S. Jewish community,<sup>166</sup> Prime Minister Netanyahu announced a six-month freeze on the matter in order to strike some form of compromise. The matter drew attention from a number of members of Congress (Jewish, with large Jewish constituencies), the U.S. Ambassador to Israel David Friedman and even the White House, all calling for a resolution and calming of tensions.<sup>167</sup> This incident significantly strained Israel-Diaspora relations and led to heightened levels of disappointment and disapproval among Diaspora leaders. Prime Minister Netanyahu attempted to assuage some of this anger on a visit to the U.S., where he met American Jewish leaders (September 2017). Netanyahu reportedly addressed the tension inherent in Israel's political system regarding the Kotel, and defended his decision, stressing that "he didn't cancel the agreement, but merely froze one paragraph," the one relating to the governing council, further reiterating his intention to invest millions of shekels in government funding to upgrade and expand the existing egalitarian platform.<sup>168</sup> However, he did not help matters when it was reported (by Army Radio) that he accused the movements of trying to use the pretext of the joint administration clause as a secret back door to gain recognition.<sup>169</sup>



Israeli public opinion on this matter is largely supportive of the pluralistic movements. Recent polling shows that a majority of Israelis support establishing an egalitarian section at the Kotel. According to a September 2016 Jerusalem Post Magazine Poll, 61 percent of Israeli Jews, including 82 percent of Hiloni Jews and 59 percent of Masorti Jews favored this, while 83 percent of Dati Jews opposed such a move.<sup>170</sup> Another Hiddush poll taken days after the decision was frozen, (June 27, 2017) showed that 63 percent of respondents disagreed with the Israeli government decision to suspend the deal while only 37 percent supported the freeze. Not surprisingly, the split was largely according to party lines – virtually all Haredi respondents favored cancelling the deal, while strong majorities of Kulanu and Yisrael Beytenu voters (84 and 80 percent respectively) were against. Likud and HaBayit HaYehudi (Jewish Home) voters were evenly split.<sup>171</sup>

A poll conducted at the same time by the Schechter Institute of Jewish Studies (associated with the Conservative movement) and undertaken by the Geocartography Institute, similarly found 62 percent of respondents agreed that people should be allowed to pray in an equal manner (meaning an egalitarian platform equal to the traditional space), another 17 percent said people should be able to pray in an equal manner but with priority given for Orthodox/traditional prayer. Six percent responded that the non-Orthodox should have superior status while another 9 percent said that non-Orthodox prayer and Women of the Wall should be banned from the site altogether.<sup>172</sup> Most recently, an October 2017 Dialogue Institute poll conducted for the Reform Movement in Israel found that 58 percent of Jewish Israelis believe that “communal Reform and Conservative prayer should be allowed at the Kotel,” while 33 percent said it should not.<sup>173</sup>

However, as noted, the Ultra-Orthodox and many in the Orthodox world are firmly opposed to the establishment of an egalitarian section. Liba Center, an activist organization that promotes conservative Orthodox positions on matters of religion and state, is one such group.

Liba notes that the agreement would “represent a fundamental change from the current practice in the *Ezrat Yisrael* (egalitarian) section. From a

small area without official status (administrative, budgetary, or religious) this area would be turned into a ... space with status equal to that of the main Kotel Plaza...managed solely in accordance with Reform customs...” Liba claims that this would amount to a “tremendous hazard and breach of the status quo” and would “open the door for additional demands for recognition and equality in other matters of religion and state (conversion, marriage, kashrut).<sup>174</sup>

Rabbi Yeshaya Horowitz, of Arachim, an ultra-Orthodox organization in Israel that reaches out to secular Jews, noted that theoretically, he (and many Haredi Jews) could live with the establishment of the egalitarian section were they convinced the Reform and Conservative Movements were truly interested in a place to pray. However, the sense in the Haredi community is that the Reform and Conservative efforts regarding the Kotel was a provocative media stunt, leading to unnecessary resentment in his community.

According to Hiddush CEO Rabbi Uri Regev, and based on polling he has conducted, the Kotel issue is not without irony. That is, while a clear majority of secular and traditional Israelis support the egalitarian section and granting equality to the liberal movements, this is not an important priority for them. According to Regev, only 11 percent of the Israeli Jews polled thought this a high-priority matter; issues of religious restrictions on their daily lives weigh far heavier on their agenda – marriage, public transportation and shopping on Shabbat, etc. Conversely, he points out, this has become the flagship issue for American Jews, most of whom are not Orthodox, and who do not need to contend with issues of daily life in Israel.

While the Israeli Reform and Conservative Movements, and some civil society organizations will continue pushing for the agreement’s implementation, with the backing of the U.S. Jewish community, they simply do not have enough political power committed to this issue, unlike the Haredi parties who are able to use their entire coalitional weight to

block the agreement and threaten to bring down the government if the agreement is implemented.

At the time of this writing, and unless the political coalition reality in Israel changes to exclude the Haredi parties, the government is advancing with its plan to physically upgrade the egalitarian platform and extend the boundaries of the Kotel as a holy site to the southern area. Both of these actions were part of the original compromise agreement. The government will not however, as originally agreed upon, create a visible entrance on par with the traditional area, nor appoint Reform and Conservative representatives to a governing council.<sup>175</sup>

## ACCESS TO THE PUBLIC EDUCATION SYSTEM

Israel's public education system is comprised of three main tributaries, the Jewish-secular (*Mamlachti*), Jewish-national-religious (*Mamlachti-Dati*), and the Arab. The private parochial system in Israel includes the Haredi as well as the Christian schools, and receives considerable government subsidies.

As noted, the Reform Movement maintains five public schools, and conducts activities in 10 public schools in Tel Aviv and 100 public schools nation-wide to help prepare 6<sup>th</sup> graders for their bar/bat mitzvah ceremonies, Jewish holidays, and other life-cycle events. The movement estimates it reaches 7000 students annually in this manner and receives public funding for these efforts. This is alongside the dozens of pre-school and kindergartens run by the movement.

The Conservative Movement works according to a different model and does not operate individual schools. However, the TALI (acronym in Hebrew for Enhanced Jewish Studies) system was founded by members of the Conservative Movement although was soon after officially disaffiliated from the movement in order to gain recognition and funding

from the Education Ministry; its founders recognized that affiliation with the Conservative Movement would prohibit Dati and Haredi support, and certainly draw active opposition. The Conservative Movement has for the past 25 years run a bar/bat mitzvah program for special education students in the public-school system. Through this program, roughly 200 special needs students each year have bar/bat mitzvah ceremonies, something they would not normally be able to do in an Orthodox framework.

Although the movements themselves have limited direct activity in the schools, pluralistic Jewish education organizations are commonplace and active within the secular public system. These efforts date back to 1990s and are the results of a government commission (the Shenhar Commission) which examined the state of Jewish cultural education in the public-school system. The commission found that secular Jewish students were lacking in basic knowledge of Jewish history, culture, and basic texts.<sup>176</sup> Therefore, over the years, beginning under Education Minister Limor Livnat and later Gideon Sa'ar, additional classroom hours were added for Jewish education. Later, under Minister Shai Piron and finally under the current Minister Naftali Bennet, a comprehensive Jewish studies curriculum that spans through elementary and middle school was devised and implemented. Curriculum design and textbook production were undertaken by several NGOs, the majority of which are pluralistic or secular in their approach to Judaism.

While these efforts have been taking place on the grassroots level for decades, there were efforts to officially create a third educational “stream,” an inclusive system that would bring together secular, traditional, and religious Israelis, and incorporate Jewish texts, values and learning in a pluralistic manner. This passed in the Knesset in 2008, and while never implemented officially, in practice there is today such a third stream that will soon include around 40 schools.

According to Yuval Seri, who oversees Israeli Jewish culture for the secular school system in the Education Ministry, there is a vision and policy within

the ministry to encourage increased learning of and exposure to Jewish texts and traditions from a cultural and intellectual perspective. The Education Ministry works through several Jewish Renewal organizations, including granting them funding and approving curricula, who then work directly within the school system. Seri notes, as far as he is concerned, these organizations are fully a part of the education system.

There are essentially two ways Jewish studies are taught in the Mamlachti school system, one works under the Department for Jewish Heritage and the other for Jewish Culture within the Education Ministry. According to Panim, the Jewish Heritage Department is professional in its approach and contracts primarily with pluralistic Jewish education organizations, while the Jewish Culture Department is more politicized and often contracts with Orthodox organizations. The Jewish Heritage Department works in a more pedagogical and methodical manner, in developing curriculum, writing textbooks and providing long-term teacher training.

The major organizations working directly with the Education Ministry according to a matching funding model are Tali, The Hartman Institute's Be'eri program, Maarag – KIAH and Orot – the only one of the four that is not pluralistic according to Panim. These organizations receive anywhere from NIS 1 to 5 million shekels in Education Ministry funding each year.

Seri added that beyond curriculum, the Education Ministry works with 35 organizations involved in Jewish Renewal, including the Reform and Conservative Movements, which provide an array of 281 extra-curricular enrichment activities, generally focusing on particular holidays or lifecycle events. Most of these organizations and activities are pluralistic. Individual principals can choose to enlist such programs at their own discretion and receive a subsidy from the Education Ministry.

In addition to the schools with enhanced Jewish (mostly pluralistic) education, there are 34, soon to be 40, schools working on an "integrated" third model that are neither secular nor religious. These programs are

run by Meitarim and Tzav Pius, pluralistic Jewish education groups that promote the integrated approach. These are schools that were either previously secular (mostly) or religious, where enough parents ask to transition to the new model, or new schools started at the kindergarten level that grew organically.

Panim's research points out that most of the pluralistic organizations utilize a deeper model of effecting change, through building up the school's existing teachers and textbook development. According to them, the Education Ministry's professional echelon much prefers this pedagogical model. Despite this, they claim that through various funding channels, and perhaps due to the politically appointed positions currently within the ministry, Orthodox organizations that provide direct student programming (which they claim are less successful) receive more funding.

When JPPI asked Panim to assess the level and scope of pluralistic Jewish education in the secular school system, Panim estimated that over 25 percent of public-schools (out of roughly 1300 secular primary schools) have implemented multi-year teacher training programs and have on-site Jewish education coordinators. Moreover, the entire secular school system uses Jewish studies textbooks written primarily by pluralistic or secular organizations. Beyond this, there are nearly 40 schools working with an integrated secular-religious model.

## **EXAMPLES OF THE LARGER INITIATIVES TODAY**

Several initiatives have been operating within the system for decades. It is important to note that for the organizations interviewed for this report, all stressed that the demand for additional Jewish, non-Orthodox education in the secular school system is bottom-up, as demanded by parents, schools or municipalities. All information is self-reported.

The **TALI** system provides enriched Jewish studies in 110 elementary schools and 215 pre-schools around the country (12 percent of public

schools). It has also recently begun working with two high schools and three middle schools. TALI was originally founded by the Conservative Movement although is no longer officially affiliated with it. This program reaches 45,000 students each year and receives 6 to 7 percent of its NIS 13 million budget from the Israeli Education Ministry. The majority of its budget is funded by American philanthropy, including the American Conservative Movement; the Israeli Conservative Movement provides 12 percent of its funding.

**TALI** works to develop and provide pedagogical training and curriculum development for the schools' teachers and pedagogical training. Individual schools or municipalities seeking to improve and increase their Jewish educational programming approach TALI, who then provides a four to five year training program for that school or city's teachers. The idea is that by the end of the training, the teachers themselves will self-sufficiently deliver Jewish education to their students. To date, 6,000 public school teachers have received such training.<sup>177</sup>

**Meitram** is the main organization operating the "integrated" school model, inspired by the rabbi and former Knesset Member Michael Malchior. Since 2000, it has sought to offer "religiously pluralistic, coeducational frameworks in which students from different backgrounds learn together about their common Jewish heritage," According to Ranit Hyman, who heads the organization. The program currently operates in 80 institutions (40 kindergartens, 22 elementary schools, 13 middle and high schools and 5 post-high schools), reaching 6,700 students. Meitram has an annual budget of NIS 5 million, all of which is funded by private donors.<sup>178</sup>

According to Hyman, Meitram seeks to correct one of Israel's "original sins" whereby the secular and religious school systems were divided – leaving secular students ignorant in religious studies and religious students ignorant in secular studies. She noted that until now, Meitram

has worked completely through private funding, but now that it has proved its success and worth, it sought and will soon receive some government funding.

**Oranim**, based at the Oranim teachers' college in northern Israel, is another program that has provided educational training and programming since the 1990s. According to its educational director, Ilana Abu Golan, Oranim writes and publishes books and designs programs for the Education Ministry and prepares and trains teachers as well.<sup>179</sup> Since Oranim is associated with an accredited college, the training is recognized by the Education Ministry. It develops the Jewish education, Zionism, and civics curricula for the Education Ministry in a number of municipalities in the north. It is currently working with the schools of Kiryat Tivon, Kiryat Ata, and Mateh Asher.<sup>180</sup>

While Oranim also works directly with students, their prime impact is in teacher training, which they believe to be the most effective model to implement change. Abu Golan estimates that 100-200 teachers undergo Oranim's training and accreditation annually, and cooperates with a number of similar pluralistic educational programs around the country.<sup>181</sup>

The **Be'eri** program of the Shalom Hartman Institute operates in Israeli secondary public schools. Be'eri works to provide pluralistic Jewish education and values in 132 middle and high schools throughout the country and 10 municipalities have adopted the program as their educational platform for Jewish-Israeli culture. The program has also recently begun cooperation with the Israeli Scouts movement. It works, like TALI, by educating and training teachers and is supported in part by the Education Ministry.<sup>182</sup>



# BURIAL

Burial in Israel is a public service, the cost of which is covered by the National Insurance Company (Bituach Leumi), which includes those in alternative or civil (non-Orthodox) cemeteries as well as those in smaller towns and on kibbutzim. The only circumstances in which the family of the deceased must cover part or all of the expenses is when non-residents wish to be buried in Israel or residents wish to be buried in “exclusive plots” (as opposed to “high density”, multi-level cemeteries).<sup>183</sup>

According to the Reform Movement, although a law passed in the Knesset two decades ago allowing civil burial and requiring adequate burial facilities throughout the country, most public cemeteries in Israel are run by the Orthodox burial societies. There are currently ten public secular cemeteries around the country (although not in major population centers like Tel Aviv or Jerusalem). While intended for residents of that municipality, anyone can be buried in any of these for an additional fee. Additionally, there are private cemeteries around the country (smaller towns and kibbutzim) that allow and even encourage ceremonies conducted by the Reform and Conservative Movements as well as non-religious funerals.<sup>184</sup>

According to the Reform Movement, a few Orthodox-run public cemeteries allow the family of the deceased to choose a funeral officiator on their own, as long as that individual coordinates with the Orthodox Burial Society and conducts the service in line with Orthodox tradition. Many of the roughly 200 burials conducted by the non-Orthodox movements each year are conducted in this fashion.<sup>185</sup>

However, according to Hess of the Masorti Movement, the reality is more complex as this approach entirely depends on the flexibility and goodwill of the local Burial Society and an Orthodox rabbi willing to provide the deceased’s family an official cover so that a non-Orthodox rabbi can preside over the ceremony.

# IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICY

The research presented in this paper leads to a number of conclusions and policy implications that decision makers in Israel and community leaders in the Diaspora should consider.

Despite the long-held belief whereby “all Israelis are Orthodox”, the overwhelming evidence shows that this is no longer true among secular and traditional Israelis. At the same time, those voices from the staunchly secular-left in Israel are also missing the mark, in that, a majority of non-observant Israeli Jews care about and largely observe Jewish practice and tradition, at least as far as life-cycle events and holidays. However, they approach this in a largely liberal and non-Orthodox manner. Diaspora leaders should be aware that although the Reform and Conservative Movements are influential in shaping and providing a platform for this emerging observance, the vast majority of these Israelis are not “Reform” or “Conservative”, at least in the Diaspora sense of committed membership, synagogue attendance and a clear religious identity.

Notwithstanding the common-held view among many Diaspora Jews who advocate for religious pluralism in Israel, and who often believe the liberal movements have few or no rights, it is worthwhile to understand that in fact, liberal Judaism and the movements and organizations who comprise it, have a significant (although not full) amount of freedom to conduct religious life as they see fit.

In any case, these rights, freedoms and access to public funding pale in comparison to what Dati and Haredi groups are able to access. This has mostly to do with the political representation of the Dati and Haredi populations in Knesset. Moreover, what was achieved by the liberal Jewish groups was, in many ways, done so through legal efforts within the courts. And yet, it is important to recall that Israel, unlike the U.S. and other countries with major Diaspora communities, has no separation of religion

and state. Israel was established as a Jewish State (the meaning of this is constantly being debated), and for historical and demographic reasons, the representative of that Judaism in Israel was and remains Orthodox.

The unequal status of the non-Orthodox movements in Israel is a constant point of contention between the Israeli government and many Diaspora Jews. Significant elements of the government and the constituencies they represent are strongly opposed to the liberal movements and expressions of religious pluralism in general. At the same time, while there is widespread sympathy and support for these movements among the public, this support is not afforded high importance or priority by the supporters themselves. Thus, policies favorable to religious pluralism may find favor with the Diaspora but will cause domestic political discord.

Continued efforts by the Haredi parties to push legislation that would grant greater control to the Rabbinat and block the non-Orthodox movements (as well as Modern Orthodox), is driving many Israelis to bypass the Rabbinat altogether. Some of these efforts are even joined by Modern Orthodox groups alongside the Reform and Conservative Movements. This could make the Rabbinat irrelevant to a significant portion of Jewish Israelis if this trend continues (marriage, kashrut supervision, conversion, etc.).

On certain issues and among certain segments of Israeli society, despite legal hurdles and public funding discrimination (or perhaps because of these), the Reform and Conservative Movements have succeeded in expanding physically, as far as new communities and to a greater number of Israelis in the past decade. This is certainly influenced by positive (appeal) as well as negative (rebellious statement) factors.

At the same time, and on certain issues, it is worthwhile to note that when not specifically labelled “Reform” or “Conservative,” or when public attention is not drawn to a given issue, the government has an easier time allowing and supporting some activities and efforts of non-Orthodox

Judaism in Israel. The Haredi parties are also often able to be more pragmatic and compromise in such matters. This leaves the movements with a dilemma, whether to push for symbolic and public victories that will draw active pushback, or advance practical and gradual gains, quietly creating facts on the ground.

Relatedly, the perceived alignment of the Reform and Conservative Movements with left-wing, liberal politics on a range of political and social issues inhibits a broader appeal to secular and traditionally minded, right wing sectors of the public, who might otherwise be drawn to the religious content the movements offer (but attracts other segments of society). Therefore, a market-segmentation strategic approach might be appropriate in order to expand to new segments of society.

# APPENDIX 1: NOTES ON TERMINOLOGY

- A few notes on the terminology used in this report.
- The Israeli Reform Movement is officially known as the IMPJ, The Israel Movement for Reform and Progressive Judaism. We will refer to it as the *Reform Movement*.
- The Israeli Conservative Movement is officially known as the Masorti Movement in Israel. Masorti means “traditional” in Hebrew, and is similarly used to identify traditional Israeli Jews. To prevent confusion, we will refer to the Masorti Movement as the *Conservative Movement in Israel*, although we aware that the movement does not refer to itself as such.
- Secular Israelis will be interchangeably referred to as *Hiloni* or *Hiloniim* (plural).
- Traditional Israelis will be interchangeably referred to as *Masorti* or *Masortiim* (plural).
- National – Religious, or Zionist – Religious, National – Orthodox, or Zionist – Orthodox, will be interchangeably referred to as *Dati* or *Dati-Leumi*, *Datiim* or *Datiim-Leumiim* (plural) as they are known in Hebrew. They are most similar to Modern-Orthodox outside of Israel.
- Ultra-Orthodox will be interchangeably referred to as *Haredi*, or *Harediim* (plural).
- We also make reference at times to three less commonly referenced groups: *Hiloni-Masorti* (secular somewhat traditional), *Dati-Liberali* (liberal-religious) and *Haredi – Leumi* (Haredi-Zionist).

- Egalitarian – Orthodox or its American counterpart, Open Orthodoxy, attempts to expand the role of women in public Jewish life, especially prayer, from within Orthodoxy. These efforts can range from full egalitarianism to various levels of participation in traditionally public male roles within synagogue and ritual life.
- Halacha – Jewish law. Refers to the canon of Jewish law established and expanded upon over the centuries relating to all aspects of private and public life. Orthodox Judaism (and to a lesser extent Conservative Judaism) is defined by its adherence to Halacha.

# ENDNOTES

1. Tzohar is a national-religious rabbinical organization that seeks to bridge social gaps between religious and secular, and offers a more “user-friendly” marriage option from within the Rabbinate.
2. JPPI. 2017 Annual Assessment. Section on Bonds Within and Between Communities. Project head: Shlomo Fischer
3. JPPI. 2016 Annual Assessment. Section on Bonds Within and Between Communities. Project head: Shlomo Fischer
4. JPPI. 2015 Annual Assessment. Section on Bonds Within and Between Communities. Project head: Shlomo Fischer
5. For examples, see the following articles: Goldenberg, Tia. “American Reform rabbis warn of alienation from Israel.” Times of Israel. March 1, 2016; Sherwood, Harriet. “Jewish diaspora angry as Netanyahu scraps Western Wall mixed prayer plan.” The Guardian. June 26, 2017; Borschel-Dan, Amanda. “Devastating survey shows huge loss of support among Jewish college students.” Times of Israel. June 21, 2017; Shapiro, Daniel. “Israel and American Jewry: Stepping Back from the Brink.” INSS Insight no. 959. July 31, 2017.
6. TOI Staff. “At 70, Israel’s population is 8.842 million, 43% of world Jewry.” Times of Israel. April 16, 2018.
7. The other 25% of non-Jews is comprised of 4.5% non-Arab Christians from the FSU, 15% Muslim Arab, 2% Christian (mostly Arab), 2% Druze and 1% other (Pew 2016).
8. The Hebrew “Dati-Liberali” translates to liberal-religious. We use liberal-Orthodox for clarity.
9. Rosner, Shmuel, Popper, Steven W., Slepko, Noah. “2017 Pluralism Index Survey Results.” JPPI. April 20, 2017.
10. Pew Research Center. “Israel’s Religiously Divided Society.” March 8, 2016. <https://goo.gl/6f9FnH>
11. Pew Research Center. “A Portrait of Jewish Americans.” October 1, 2013. <https://goo.gl/gkRzfv>
12. Wolff, Laurence. “The Reform Movement in Israel: Past, Present, and Future.” Institute for Israel Studies, University of Maryland. July 6, 2015.
13. Cohen, Steven M. “Conservative Jewry’s numbers plummeting, but core engagement steady.” JTA. November 10, 2015.
14. Wolff, Laurence. Op. Cit.
15. Hermann, Tamar and Cohen, Chanan. “The Reform and Conservative Movements in Israel: A Profile and Attitudes.” The Israel Democracy Institute. 2013.

16. Blog Post (Hebrew Characters). Minim, Hearot Ktzarot al Enyanei Datot. "Sheur HaReformim vekaKonservativim Omed al 12% mehatuchlusia?" July 13, 2017. (The Percentage of Reform and Conservative Jews stands at 12% of the population?)
17. Rosner, Shmuel. "The number of Conservative/ Reform Jews in Israel goes up (again)." Jewish Journal. July 21, 2015.
18. Hiddush is non-profit organization that promotes religious freedom and equality in Israel. Its CEO is Rabbi Uri Regev, a prominent Israeli Reform rabbi, who previously served as President of the World Union for Reform Judaism.
19. Hiddush. "The 2016 Israel Religion and State Index." April 10, 2016.
20. The Reform Movement's study, conducted by the Dialogue Institute, is not yet published. The data was reported to the author by the IMPJ.
21. We are aware that the Conservative Movement in Israel and around the world, besides the U.S., refers to itself as the Masorti Movement. We will refer to it, in English, as the Conservative Movement, so as not to confuse with Masorti (traditional) Jews.
22. Wolff. (2015), Op. Cit.
23. All data in this section, if source is not specified, was provided by Rabbi Gilad Kariv, CEO of the IMPJ, and Dr. Yizhar Hess, CEO of the Masorti (Conservative) Movement of Israel.
24. Gil, Chaim. (Hebrew Characters). "Mitpalelim b'misparim, netunim statistiim v'shemot batei hakneset." Mikdash Me'at. February 2, 2014. Published on www.hagabay.net <https://goo.gl/TqBGg8>
25. All quotes or information attributed to Rabbi Gilad Kariv are from a series of interviews and electronic correspondence conducted with him by the researcher in preparation for this study, unless otherwise noted.
26. TALI, as explained by its CEO, Dr. Eitan Chikli, was founded by members of the Conservative Movement but is not officially associated with that movement. In this manner, it is able to gain full cooperation and some funding from the Education Ministry without opposition from Dati and Haredi lawmakers.
27. Wolff. Op. Cit.
28. According to Israel's Education Ministry <http://apps.education.gov.il/imsnet/itur.aspx> While the number of Haredi schools may seem high as compared to Mamlachti and Mamlachti-Dati schools, this is likely as most Haredi schools are significantly smaller in comparison.
29. This is a part of the larger Netzer Olami movement, the Zionist youth movement of the Union for Progressive Judaism worldwide, with some 16,000 members in different countries.
30. Noar Telem (Hebrew Characters). Hatnuah HaReformit: Noar Telem. <http://www.reform.org.il/Heb/Youth/Youth.asp> (accessed on July 1, 2018)



31. Wolff. Op. Cit.
32. The Israel Movement for Reform and Progressive Judaism (IMPJ) Mechina young leadership program in Jaffa and Holon. <http://www.hamechina.org.il/english> (accessed on July 1, 2018.)
33. Hannaton Educational Center. (2018). Mechina at Hannaton. [online] Available at: <http://www.echannaton.org/our-programs/hannaton-mechina/> [Accessed July 1, 2018] and <http://yachadisrael.org/mechina/list/general/hanaton-12>. (Accessed on July 10, 2018)
34. All data in this section are self-reported by the Reform and Conservative Movements, unless otherwise noted.
35. Pidyon HaBen is a ceremony in which a first-born son must be symbolically redeemed by the father from a Cohen, a descendent of the priestly tribe, at 30 days old.
36. This model in the American Jewish community, for example, is also in the process of change.
37. Rosner, Fuchs. Soon-to-be published study on Israeli Judaism.
38. Beit Tefila Yisraeli, for example, is a secular Jewish movement that connects to Jewish tradition in non-Orthodox and innovative ways, drawing on Israeli culture. It is similar to Reform Judaism in many practical aspects. See <http://btfila.org/>
39. There are a small number of synagogues and prayer groups (minyanim) forming organically around Israel. These are generally from the liberal reaches of Orthodoxy and seek halachically acceptable (to some) ways to be more inclusive of women in traditional prayer.
40. We note that, although the Rosner-Fuchs study is based on a relatively large survey of 3000 Jewish Israelis, the level of accuracy of the secondary breakdown (17% of 8% of the total) will naturally be less representative.
41. It is worthwhile to point out that in the Pew report (p.77), there is a marked difference between the participation levels of American ‘Jews by religion’ versus ‘Jews of no religion’. Thus, while overall, 70% of American Jews participated in a Seder, that number jumps to 78% of ‘Jews by religion’ who did so, but drops to 42% of ‘Jews of no religion’ who participated in a Seder. As expected, 99% of Orthodox participated in a Seder, while 80% of Conservative Jews, 76% of Reform Jews and 47% of Jews of No Denomination did so. Pew Research Center. “A Portrait of Jewish Americans.” October 1, 2013.
42. Rosner, Shmuel and Prof. Fuchs, Camil. “Who reads the “Haggadah” all the way through?” JPPI. March 27, 2018.
43. Arian, Asher and Keissar- Sugarman, Ayala. “A Portrait of Israeli Jews: Beliefs, Observance and Values of Israeli Jews 2009.” The Israel Democracy Institute. 2012.
44. Sharon, Jeremy. “Poll shows high religious sentiment among religiously traditional and secular Israelis.” Ne’emanei Torah Va’Avodah. August 10, 2016.

45. Pew Research Center. "Israel's Religiously Divided Society." March 8, 2016.
46. Pew Research Center. "Israel's Religiously Divided Society: Chapter 11: Intergroup marriage and Friendship." March 8, 2016 Pew Israel Study
47. Rosner, Shmuel, Popper, Steven W., Slepko, Noah. "2017 Pluralism Index Survey Results." JPPI. April 20, 2017. JPPI 2017 Pluralism Survey
48. Many secular Israelis are also exposed, often for the first time, to different expressions of Orthodox Judaism outside of Israel, especially Chabad, similarly decreasing their hostility to Jewish practice.
49. Hermann, Tamar. "The National Religious Sector in Israel 2014: Main Findings." The Israel Democracy Institute. 2014.
50. Fischer, Shlomo. "Religious Zionism in Israel Today: Toward the Center". JPPI 2016 Annual Assessment.
51. According to my colleague from the JPPI, Dr. Shlomo Fischer.
52. Rebhun, Uzi and Malach, Gilad. "Demographic Trends in Israel." The Metzilah Center for Zionist, Jewish, Liberal and Humanist Thought. 2009.
53. Knesset website. Knesset.gov.il. Parliamentary Groups – United Religious Front. Accessed on 12 July 2018. [https://knesset.gov.il/faction/eng/FactionPage\\_eng.asp?PG=93](https://knesset.gov.il/faction/eng/FactionPage_eng.asp?PG=93)
54. Wolff. Op. Cit.
55. "Israel Rabbinical Program". 2018. Hebrew Union College - Jewish Institute Of Religion. <http://huc.edu/campus-life/jerusalem/israel-rabbinical-program>. (Accessed on July 10, 2018)
56. The Schechter Rabbinical Seminary. <http://www.schechter.edu/schechter-rabbinical-seminary/about-the-rabbinical-seminary/>(accessed July 1, 2018)
57. Wolff. Op. Cit.
58. As described by political scientist Ronald Inglehart - Roser, Max. Materialism and Post-Materialism. Ourworldindata.org <https://ourworldindata.org/materialism-and-post-materialism> (accessed on July 1, 2018)
59. The American Reform Movement was the first major community to adopt patrilineal descent in 1983. The UK adopted patrilineal descent in 2015. This was a recognition of social realities where Reform Jews were intermarrying at high rates. Other communities will accept those of a Jewish father for community involvement but, like in Israel, they must undergo a conversion to marry. Fishkoff, Sue. "Why is patrilineal descent not catching on in Reform worldwide?" Jewish Telegraphic Agency. February 15, 2011.
60. Werczberger, Rachel and Azulay, Na'ama. "The Jewish Renewal Movement in Israeli Secular Society." 17 March 2011, Springer Science.

61. Hoare, Liam. "Reform and Conservative Judaism have failed in Israel. And its Their own fault." *The Tower Magazine*. March 2015
62. Hoare, Liam. Op. Cit.
63. This issue was raised during the presentation of JPPI's 2017 Pluralism Index, in which the presentation did not include a representation of how many Israelis identified as Reform or Conservative, much to the dismay of the representatives of those movements who were present. JPPI responded, during the presentation and later in the *Times of Israel*, that while Israelis often assume Orthodoxy when asking about religiosity, in fact the two are not synonymous and the JPPI study did not look at religious affiliation, only level of religiosity. This will be taken into account in future JPPI surveys. For more, see: Rosner, Shmuel. "JPPI does not leave out Reform and Conservative: Half of Israeli Jews prefer mixed-seating synagogues." *The Times of Israel*. April 23, 2017.
64. All quotes or information attributed to Dr. Yizhar Hess are from interviews and electronic correspondence conducted between he and the researcher in preparation for this study, unless noted.
65. Conservative Judaism was not a survey option as most Israelis do not grasp the difference between them and generically refer to both as "Reform".
66. The Jewish People Policy Institute Pluralism Survey 2016. Rosner, Shmuel and Slepko, Noah.
67. We note that this study was conducted in Hebrew, and the results were shared directly with JPPI by the Reform Movement. All translations of questions into English were conducted by JPPI.
68. Hoffman, Gil. "Majority of Jewish Israelis want egalitarian prayer site at Kotel." *Jerusalem Post*. September 16, 2016.
69. YNet. (Hebrew Characters). "Seker: Chatuna BaRabanut Marhika et HaYisraelim Menisuim Datiim." *Ynet*. September 8, 2016. ("Survey, Rabbinite marriages distance Israelis from religious weddings.")
70. JPPI Pluralism in Israel Survey 2016. Rosner, Shmuel and Slepko, Noah.
71. Hiddush. "67% of Jewish Israelis Support freedom of choice in marriage." *Hiddush*. July 8, 2017.
72. *Ibid*.
73. Hiddush, 2016 Survey.
74. Hiddush points out the misleading LIBA statistic, as LIBA's phrasing of the question infers that non-Rabbinite weddings are not official. Regev, Uri. "Fake News? LIBA declares 71% Israelis prefer to marry via Rabbinite!" *Hiddush*. August 17, 2017.
75. Ynet. (Hebrew Characters). "Seker: Chatuna Barabanut Marhika et HaYisraelim menisuim datiim." *Yedioth Aharonot*. August 9, 2016. (Survey: Rabbinite weddings distance Israelis from religious weddings.)

76. JPPI 2016 Pluralism in Israel Survey. Rosner, Shmuel and Slepkov, Noah.
77. Sharon, Jeremy. "Poll: Majority support pluralistic prayer at Kotel." Jerusalem Post. November 3, 2017.
78. Hiddush. "The 2016 Israel Religion and State Index. October 4, 2016.
79. To be clear, and as I explain later in the report, such an area has been in use since 2000.
80. Hiddush. 2016 Religion and State Index. Op. Cit.
81. Sharon, Jeremy. "Poll: Majority support pluralistic prayer at Kotel." Jerusalem Post. November 3, 2017.
82. Rosner, Shmuel. Popper, Steven W., Slepkov, Noah and Dr. Fischer, Shlomo. "JPPI Launches Its Pluralism Index in Israel." The Jewish People Policy Institute. May 8, 2016.
83. Hoffman, Gil. "Majority of Jewish Israelis want egalitarian prayer site at Kotel." Jerusalem Post. September 16, 2016.
84. Stern, Prof. Yedidia Z. "Religion, state and the Jewish Identity crisis in Israel." Brookings Institution Center for Middle East Policy. 2017.
85. Once again, public references tend to specifically refer only to the Reform Movement, often lumping it together with the Conservative Movement.
86. Landesmann, Carolina. "Reform Jews in exchange for peace." Haaretz. June 22, 2017.
87. JTA. "Ultra-Orthodox lawmaker says Reform are 'not Jews'." The Forward. November 11, 2015.
88. Landsmann, Carolina. "Reform Jews in exchange for peace." Haaretz. June 22, 2017.
89. JTA. "Ultra-Orthodox lawmaker says Reform are 'not Jews'." The Forward. November 11, 2015.
90. Sharon, Jeremy. "Deri: Non-Orthodox Jewish streams not Judaism." Jerusalem Post. November 7, 2016.
91. JTA. "Ultra-Orthodox lawmaker says Reform are 'not Jews'." The Forward. November 11, 2015.
92. Kershner, Isabel. "Israeli Minister says Reform Jews are not really Jewish." New York Times. July 7, 2015.
93. Sharon, Jeremy. "'Earthquake caused by Reform, Conservative Jews' says Shas MK. Jerusalem Post." July 4, 2018.
94. Sharon, Jeremy. "Reform Jews are worse than Holocaust deniers, says Chief Rabbi of Jerusalem." The Jerusalem Post. September 6, 2017.
95. Ahren, Raphael. "Hillel president apologizes to Hotovely for Princeton slight." The Times of Israel. November 8, 2017.

96. TOI Staff. "Jewish Home MK: Reform Judaism is a 'fake religion.'" The Times of Israel. July 28, 2016.
97. Most Israelis refer generically to Reform Judaism while meaning either pluralistic movement, and are not aware of the significant ideological differences between the movements.
98. All quotes or information attributed to Horowitz stem from an interview conducted with him by the researcher, unless otherwise noted.
99. Manof: Jewish Information Center. (Hebrew)."Who are you Reformers?" 1997
100. Wikipedia contributors, "Bark Mitzvah," Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bark\\_Mitzvah](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bark_Mitzvah)
101. There are two Ultra-Orthodox political parties in Knesset – United Torah Judaism (which represents Ashkenazi Haredim) and Shas (which represents Sephardi Haredim). The Jewish Home party serves the Dati-Leumi public. There are also a number of prominent religious members of the Likkud Party.
102. "Current Knesset Members". 2018. Knesset.Gov.II. [https://knesset.gov.il/mk/eng/mkindex\\_current\\_eng.asp?view=1](https://knesset.gov.il/mk/eng/mkindex_current_eng.asp?view=1).
103. <http://www.mishmar.org.il/rp.php?rpId=141>
104. Hiddush. (Hebrew characters) "Be'ekvot ma'avak hiddush, hayoamash hechlit lemanot 30% nashim bamoatzot datiot." Hiddush. 2018 <https://goo.gl/2SBzLG>. (accessed on July 1, 2018)
105. There are organizations, like Shatil, who track the level of involvement of women in the public sphere, but no organization, including the Reform and Conservative Movements, who track the involvement of Reform and Conservative Jews on this level.
106. Ironically, the Reform Movement noted that its hostels maintain an official kashrut certificate from the Rabbinat, so that they can attract Orthodox guests as well.
107. Hoare, Liam. Op. Cit.
108. Avital, Tomer. "Revealed: The Hidden Cost of Israel's Public Spending on Religious Services." Haaretz. April 14, 2016. <https://goo.gl/XAQj7t>
109. The exchange rate per 1 USD, at time of publishing (October 2018), stood at around 3.65 NIS.
110. "Chief Rabbinat of Israel Law Of 1980". 2018. Knesset.Gov.II. [https://www.knesset.gov.il/review/data/heb/law/kns9\\_rabbinat.pdf](https://www.knesset.gov.il/review/data/heb/law/kns9_rabbinat.pdf).
111. According to Hess of the Conservative Movement and Kariv of the Reform Movement, communities numbering between 50-250 members warrant partial (half) funding while communities of over 250 warrant full funding. Communities must conduct religious activity, prayer or study, on at least 40 Shabbatot each year, and on all major Jewish holidays.

112. As estimated by the movements.
113. The Conservative Movement estimate is based on a rough extrapolation of the number of conversions in the Los Angeles area, undertaken by the head of that movement. The statistic on Reform conversions was extrapolated by JPPI based on Pew Research Center data. Neither movement keeps country-wide or global conversion statistics. Heilman, Uriel. "Conversion to Judaism: Denomination by Denomination." Haaretz/ JTA. October 9, 2014.
114. Heilman, Uriel. "9 Things to know about Reform Jews." The Times of Israel. November 3, 2015.
115. 2018. Reform.Org.il. <http://www.reform.org.il/Assets/reformdatumedinah-gyur.pdf>.
116. Nativ. (Hebrew characters). Al Hagiur. 2018. <https://goo.gl/4oMY6v> (accessed July 1, 2018)
117. All information attributed to Ish Shalom resulted from an interview conducted with him by the author, unless otherwise specified.
118. According to official conversion data, as presented in Netanel Fisher's publication, a significant portion of converts through 2015 were Ethiopian in any of the given years. The NATIV program explained to the author that by this point, the majority of eligible converts of Ethiopian origin were converted, thus explaining the sudden drop in overall conversion numbers. The statistics further specify converts from the former Soviet Union – roughly two-thirds in 2016 – and those not of Ethiopian origin nor from the former Soviet Union – roughly one-third. Fisher, Netanel and Stern, Yedidia. Editors. "Conversion in Israel: Vision, Achievements and Challenges." The Israel Democracy Institute. 2018. (Hebrew). Page 141.
119. Friedman, Shuki. (Hebrew characters). "Estrategia Leumit Legiyur." The Israel Democracy Institute. June 6, 2016. (National Conversion Strategy)
120. In an interview conducted with him by the author.
121. Ettinger, Yair. "State Comprtroller's Annual Report// Israel's Spending on Conversion to Judaism Increased, as Number of Converts Declined." Haaretz. May 7, 2013.
122. Ettinger, Yair. (Hebrew characters)"Bagatz menapetz et monopol harabanut: giyurim pratiim yukru beyisrael."Haaretz. March 31, 2016. (Supreme court shatters Rabbinate monopoly: private conversions will be recognized in Israel.)
123. Maltz, Judy. "New Bill would reject all Israeli conversions performed outside Orthodox-sanctioned State system." Haaretz. May 11, 2017.
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158. This is an estimate for yearly numbers for the past few years, based mostly on self-reported statistics.
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177. Information on TALI is from an interview conducted with TALI CEO Dr. Eytan Shikli by the author, unless otherwise specified.
178. Information on Meitarim is from an interview conducted with Meitram CEO Ranit Hyman by the author, unless otherwise specified.
179. Information on Oranim is from an interview conducted with Educational director, Ilana Abu Golan by the author, unless otherwise specified.
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