

The 2007 Social Survey

The Taub Center has been conducting the Social Survey for almost a decade.¹ The survey helps highlight the Israeli public's sense of well-being, social confidence and its attitudes on various social issues. This year, as every year, several questions were repeated with identical phrasing in order to allow an analysis of trends in the public's attitudes. Several new questions on matters relevant to the recent public debate were also added. The survey provides an important complement to the objective indicators of the economy and society presented in this Report by showing opinion and personal assessment trends. A review of these main trends shows the following:

- The public's social confidence is continuing to improve. This is indicated by the responses to several of the survey questions, the aggregate "Taub Index of Social Confidence" and responses to a direct question on this topic. Some 40 percent of those surveyed reported a sense of good socioeconomic confidence (9 percent felt "very good") and 43 percent had a fair sense of social confidence. In contrast, only 4 percent reported feeling "not good at all" and 11 percent "not so good" about their socioeconomic confidence.
- In a question about the current situation relative to two or three years ago an improvement was found. The share of respondents who reported that their situation had worsened, 24 percent, was significantly less than previous years, and the proportion of those reporting an improvement rose to 27 percent. However,

¹ The survey is conducted annually by Smith Research and Consulting, Ltd. It was conducted in September 2007 over a representative sample (1,000) of the adult population of Israel. The sampling error is 3.1 percent.

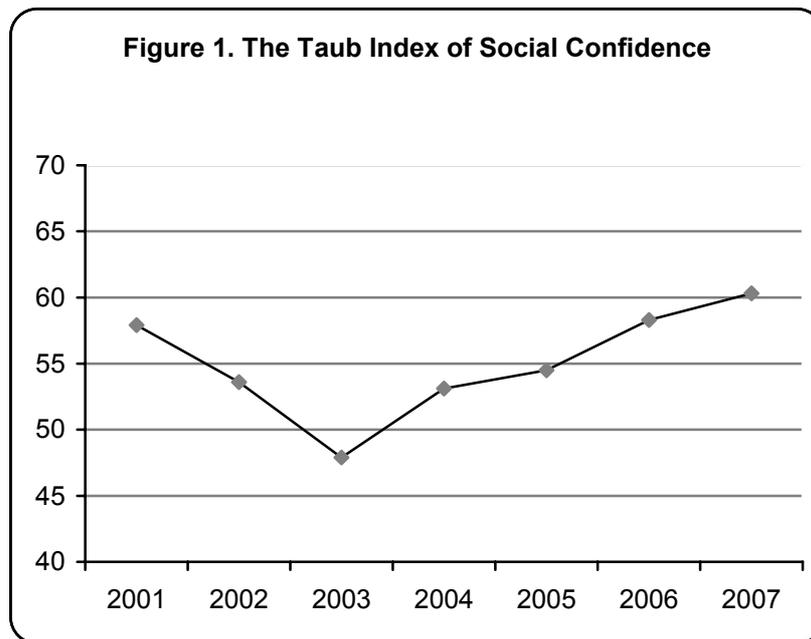
the share of respondents who stated that their income does not suffice or hardly suffices for basic needs remained constant at about one-fourth.

- The importance that the respondents attributed to national security issues changed markedly between 2006 and 2007. The public believes today, more than in the past, that security should stand at the top of the national agenda. It relegates fighting poverty and social disparities to second place far below security (at 32 percent vs. 47 percent, respectively). Evidently, this reflects the cumulative impact of the Second Lebanon War, the continued firing of mortar shells and *Qassam* rockets on Israel's southern localities, tension on the Syrian border, and the Iranian nuclear threat, which has become a fixture on the public security agenda.
- This year's survey corroborates the general feeling that the improvement in the Israeli economy in recent years is beginning to affect the public at large but is not doing so equally among all population groups.
- The public debate sometimes fails to distinguish between the issue of poverty and that of economic and social disparities. The impression from the survey responses in this regard is that most of the public considers poverty more serious and troubling than the widening social disparities.
- The public is of two minds about the need to adopt affirmative action policies toward weak social groups. About half of the respondents expressed opposition to affirmative action for society's two weakest groups, the Arabs and the *Haredim* ("ultra-Orthodox"); affirmative action was more strongly opposed for *Haredim* than for Arabs.
- In the 2007 survey, as in the past, the responses of several population groups to many survey questions identify these groups as having distinct attitudes. For the most part, this

finding pertains to immigrants from the former Soviet Union, Arabs, and *Haredim*. Throughout the following analysis and presentation of findings, the attitudes of these groups are highlighted whenever they stand out relative to the general view.

1. The Taub Index of Social Confidence

The Taub Index of Social Confidence is a weighted aggregate score of responses to a set of questions that address the most basic components of the sense of social well-being. The index provides a more inclusive picture than that obtained from the responses to individual items and deals with changes in standard of living, the sense of exposure to violence, basic economic security, and fears of becoming unemployed.



The 2007 Taub Index stood at 60.3 points as against 58.3 in 2006. This is the highest level obtained since the Index was created in 2001. (The Index ranges from 100, denoting an optimum situation, to 0, denoting a complete lack of social confidence.) The continuity and consistency of the data indicate that the public's sense of social confidence is improving steadily.

The aggregate data pertaining to the entire survey population masks large differences in the social confidence of different sub-population groups, though. For example, the Index for the group that has "far-above-average" income² stood at 70 points in 2007, while the Index score for those with "far-below-average" income was 50. Interestingly, in 2006 the results were 73 and 48, respectively. Thus, the gap remains large but has narrowed by some 5 points. Furthermore, the score for those in the lowest income group was the highest since measuring began. It is also noteworthy that while the score for the highest income group has fluctuated up and down, that for the lowest income category has been improving steadily.

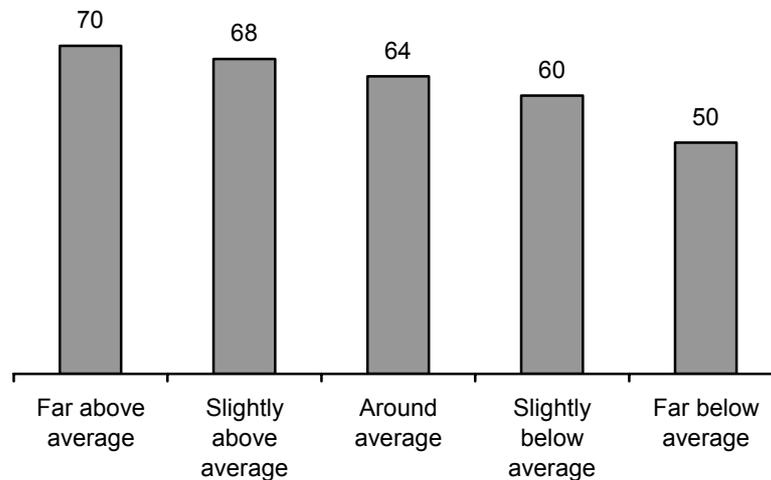
When the sample was divided by level of education, the differences among population groups were much less noticeable but the trends were similar: a general improvement in the Index score and a parallel but very small narrowing of the disparities among the groups.

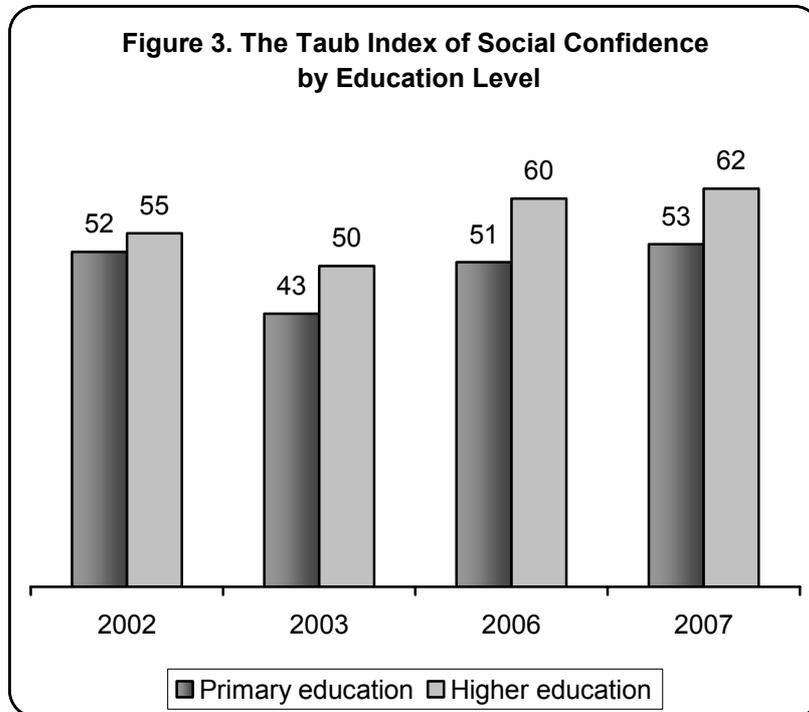
Table 1 illustrates the improvement in the socioeconomic confidence of all population groups relative to 2003, when the Index stood at its lowest level. The gains were especially strong among *Haredim* ("ultra-Orthodox", 15 points), persons with an academic education (13 points), and those with far-above-average income (11 points); it was lowest among new immigrants (only 5 points).

² Respondents chose the category that defines their income level relative to the national average wage.

Table 1. Taub Index of Social Confidence for Selected Population Groups

	2002	2003	2006	2007
Primary or partial-secondary education	52	43	50	52
Academic education	55	50	60	63
Far-below-average income	49	41	48	50
Far-above-average income	61	59	73	70
<i>Haredim</i>	60	50	58	65
Arabs	50	44	53	55
Immigrants since 1990	47	50	57	55

Figure 2. The Taub Index of Social Confidence by Income Group, 2007



In 2007, the following general question was added to the survey: *“Generally speaking, how would you define your and your family’s sense of socioeconomic confidence?”* The purpose was to obtain a single direct measure for the population’s social confidence. The general response indicates that most of the public feels economically and socially confident. It is especially noteworthy that twice as many respondents rated their sense of confidence as “very good” as judged it to be “not good at all,” whereas the share of those who felt “good” was almost three times greater than that of those who felt “not so good.” Some 43 percent of respondents expressed a moderate sense of confidence.

Table 2. Responses to the question, “Generally speaking, how would you define your sense of socioeconomic confidence and that of your family?” – 2007

Sense of socioeconomic confidence	Percent
Very good	9
Good	33
Moderate	43
Not so good	11
Not good at all	4

The Taub Index illustrates a steady and continuous improvement in the public’s sense of social confidence, accompanied by a narrowing of disparities among groups, although it should be emphasized that those who feel the best are the ones with the highest income levels. Surprisingly, immigrants from the former Soviet Union indicated a very low rate of “strong satisfaction” and the highest rate of dissatisfaction, almost equal to the (low) proportion among the Arabs. The impression is that the improvement in the immigrants’ economic situation and employment security, as reflected in their responses to other questions in this survey and in other data, is not being translated into a general sense of socioeconomic confidence. In contrast, the survey indicates that the *Haredim* are highly satisfied with their situation; about half of them reported a “good” or “very good” level of social confidence, far exceeding the general average.

Table 3. Responses to the question, “Generally speaking, how would you define your and your family’s sense of socioeconomic confidence?” – 2007 (Percent)

	Very good/ good	Not so good/ not good at all
Primary or partial-secondary education	27	21
Academic education	44	15
Far-below-average income	19	34
Far-above-average income	86	7
<i>Haredim</i>	49	15
Arabs	37	14
Immigrants since 1990	19	35

This year the Taub Index was also calculated by locality of residence. The resulting Index score was 56 for residents of the north, below that of inhabitants of the south (almost 60) and those of the central district (62). As for locality size, residents of small localities and medium-sized towns³ had lower scores than residents of the major cities⁴ (59.7, 59.9, and 62.1, respectively).

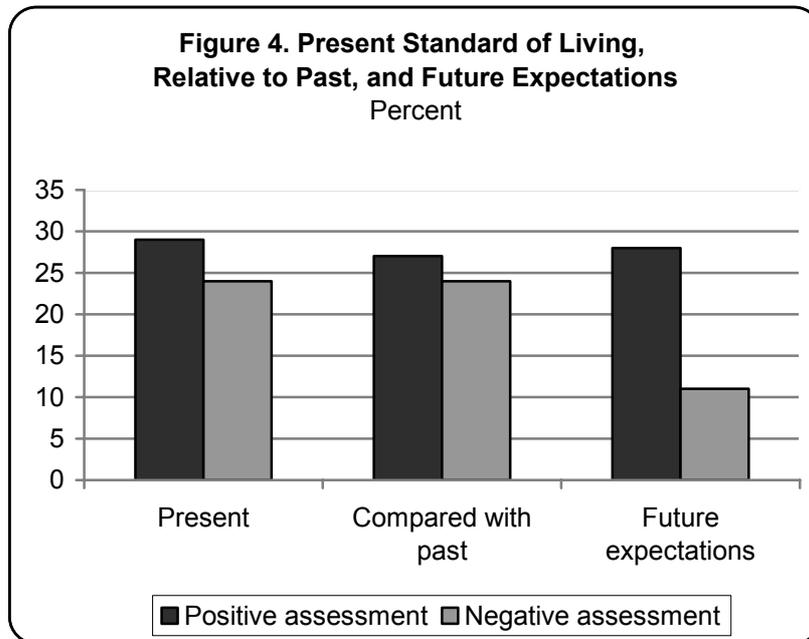
The finding that residents of the central district and the major cities have a stronger sense of social confidence than residents of the north is supported by the response to the single question, “How would you define your sense of socioeconomic confidence?” – 46 percent of residents of the central district replied “good” or “very good,” as against 35 percent of residents of northern and southern districts. Furthermore, a large share (46 percent) of residents of the major cities reported feeling “good” or “very good” as against 42 percent of residents of small localities and 30 percent of residents of medium-sized cities.

³ Towns with populations of 100,000-200,000.

⁴ Cities with populations greater than 200,000: Ashdod, Haifa, Rishon LeZion, and Tel-Aviv.

2. Standard of Living

All of the Taub Center surveys have included several questions about standard of living. Three survey questions compare respondents' feelings about their present standard of living with that in the recent past and their expectations for the future. Although each of the questions is distinct, a positive assessment of the current situation may influence a more positive assessment of the recent past and may also affect the respondent's expectations of the future.



The first question relating to the present situation was *“To what extent does your income allow you and your family to meet basic needs?”*

The second question was a comparison with the past *“If you compare your and your family's standard of living with that of two or three years ago, in your opinion has there been a considerable improvement, a slight improvement, no change whatsoever, a slight decline, or a large decline?”*

The third question, *“Do you expect your and your family's situation to change in the coming year?”* examined expectations for the future.

Table 4 shows the responses to these three questions. Among the sample at large, the feelings about the present situation are more-or-less equally divided between positive and negative. Not surprisingly, those with far-above-average income stand out among those who believe that their income suffices to get by without difficulty and those with an academic education are next. Thus, 75 percent of those with far-above-average income reported being able to get by on their income without difficulty as against the 38 percent among those with an academic education. This may reflect erosion in the economic situation of entire population groups that regarded entry into occupations requiring academic education as an important path to economic mobility. Perhaps, too, the strikes that took place recently among those with an academic education – teachers, social workers, psychologists, university staff, and so on – also reflect these groups' sense of disillusionment.

Among the weaker social groups, those with far-below-average income reported being the worst off and the immigrants from the Former Soviet Union the best off. A similar picture – although slightly less extreme – arises from an examination of the respondents' sense of their present situation relative to the past. Future expectations were more optimistic than pessimistic and positive expectations were reported at a significant rate even

among population groups that are ordinarily considered weak. Some 43 percent of *Haredi* respondents expected their situation to improve as against only 3 percent who expected it to deteriorate. Among Arabs, the respective rates of response were 33 percent and 17 percent.

This being the case, the extent to which the public's feelings about its present standard of living are indicative of their expectations of improvement, no change, or deterioration relative to previous surveys was also analyzed.

The first question was "*To what extent does your income allow you and your family to meet basic needs?*" Comparison of the responses to this question over time shows that, in all surveys conducted, the share of low income respondents who rate their income as enough to meet basic needs with little or no difficulty at no time exceeds 8 percent. The share of respondents who judge their income as hardly sufficient to get by on or as insufficient for basic needs, exceeds 50 percent in all surveys. In the 2007 survey, however, the picture was the most optimistic since 2001. Furthermore, whereas in 2001-2006 more families felt that they were in economic distress than felt that they were living well, in 2007 this had changed for the first time: 29 percent of families felt that they were doing well and 24 percent felt that they were in distress.

Table 4. Responses to Questions about Present Standard of Living, Comparison with the Past, and Future Expectations
(Percent) (“+” = good situation/improvement;
“–” = poor situation/deterioration)

	2001		2004		2006		2007	
	+	–	+	–	+	–	+	–
<i>Present situation</i>								
<i>Total</i>	27	28	23	34	25	32	29	24
High income	71	5	59	12	75	0	75	8
Low income	8	64	8	53	5	65	8	53
Well educated	60	16	47	20	28	20	38	16
Poorly educated	11	47	11	58	12	59	17	48
<i>Haredim</i>	8	32	17	32	14	48	17	22
Arabs	15	48	16	46	11	61	18	41
Immigrants since 1990	29	48	13	50	20	34	24	28
<i>Compared to Past</i>								
<i>Total</i>	38	13	23	37	18	35	27	24
High income	52	18	29	31	24	18	54	9
Low income	15	36	8	69	8	54	16	43
High education	36	23	13	47	22	28	32	22
Low education	17	32	1	65	13	50	22	31
<i>Haredim</i>	20	20	13	43	13	48	18	23
Arabs	23	34	13	63	15	47	31	32
Immigrants since 1990	25	26	18	24	26	32	32	24
<i>Future Expectations</i>								
<i>Total</i>			29	13	26	16	28	11
High income			55	9	26	12	35	5
Low income			43	22	22	28	20	20
High education			35	16	22	13	27	10
Low education			48	21	29	21	21	16
<i>Haredim</i>					21	21	43	3
Arabs					40	22	33	17
Immigrants since 1990					20	17	23	18

In an additional question regarding changes in the individual's standard of living relative to previous years, it was found that in contrast to 2006, when a larger share of respondents (almost twice as large) estimated its standard of living as having declined and more respondents held this belief than thought that their situation had improved, in 2007 the rates were equal. Nevertheless, the optimism in 2007 remained far from what it had been in 2001. Thus, 27 percent believed in 2007 that their situation had improved as against 38 percent who felt this way in 2001, and 24 percent felt in 2007 that their situation had deteriorated as against 15 percent in 2001.

By focusing on the situation of the three population groups that are conventionally considered weak – Arabs, immigrants (from the former Soviet Union since 1990) and *Haredim* – the following improvements are noted:

Immigrants are notably better off and their socioeconomic acculturation is progressing steadily. Although the percent of those in 2007 who said that their income allows them to get by without difficulty was still below the rate in 2001, the share of those who judged their income as hardly allowing them to get by declined consistently, from 48 percent in 2001 to 28 percent in the latest survey. These data, which closely resemble the average among the sample at large, attest to the continued integration and acculturation of the immigrants. This process was noted last year as well.

The situation of the *Haredi* population improved significantly in 2007. The proportion of *Haredim* who described their income as hardly sufficient fell to the lowest level since 2001, and the share of *Haredim* who reported having an income that allows them to get by without difficulty was twice as large as in 2001. The responses to other survey questions also reinforce the impression that the standard of living of the *Haredi* population has improved. The *Haredim* may feel that their distress has eased because some of the cutbacks in child allowances, which had an especially severe effect

on the large *Haredi* families, have been eased. The sense of improvement may also reflect the upward trend in the labor force participation rates of the *Haredi* population stemming partly from labor force participation programs that have targeted them in the government's general policy efforts to relieve economic distress.

The Arab population's standard of living also seems to have improved in 2007 relative to 2006. As an indication, the proportion of Arabs who described their income as hardly sufficient for basic needs fell from 61 percent in 2006 to 41 percent in 2007. Despite the improvement that these data reflect, it is believed that in addition to the cutbacks in child allowances, the more strict terms of qualification for unemployment compensation also deteriorated the situation of the Arab population. Also the Arabs were much worse off in the base year 2001, when 48 percent of them described their income as hardly sufficient for basic needs.

As for the assessment of present situation relative to previous years, the share of high income respondents who felt that their situation had deteriorated was less in 2007 than in all previous years (9 percent) and the rate of those who reported an improvement rose from 24 percent in 2006 to 54 percent in 2007. Thus, high income Israelis definitely feel better off. An improvement in this direction also occurred among low income respondents, but it was much less intense: 16 percent reported an improvement in their standard of living as against 8 percent in 2006, whereas 43 percent reported a decline in 2007 as against 54 percent in 2006.

When the sample was divided by levels of education, similar significant differences were found between respondents. The sense of improvement was general but there were notable differences between the well educated and the poorly educated. Among those with an academic education, the share of respondents who believe that their situation has deteriorated is declining steadily and the proportion of those who sense an improvement is rising. A similar

pattern was found among those with lower education levels. However, the share of respondents who reported an improvement was higher among those with an academic education and the share of those reporting deterioration was higher among the poorly educated.

When individuals were asked to assess their chances of falling into poverty, it was found that Arabs and those of far-below-average income were the most troubled by this possibility. The *Haredi* population was notably unconcerned about this issue in 2007; only 15 percent of *Haredi* respondents reported being greatly concerned about a serious decline in their economic situation and 51 percent said they were totally unconcerned or only slightly concerned about this possibility. This may have to do with the relatively strong dependency of the *Haredi* population on social benefits (about the continuation of which they are relatively confident in times of a stable and growing economy) as a supplement to other income.

This year differences in the sense of well-being and standard of living were also examined in relation to residential locality. As expected, economic well-being is higher among inhabitants of the central district than among those in the northern and southern districts. Thus, about one-third of residents of the central district described their income as sufficient to meet basic needs with little or no difficulty, as against approximately one-fourth of those in the north and south. Furthermore, more than one-third (35 percent) of residents of the five largest cities reported having an income that suffices for basic needs with little or no difficulty, as against 30 percent of residents of small localities and only 22 percent of inhabitants of medium-sized towns.

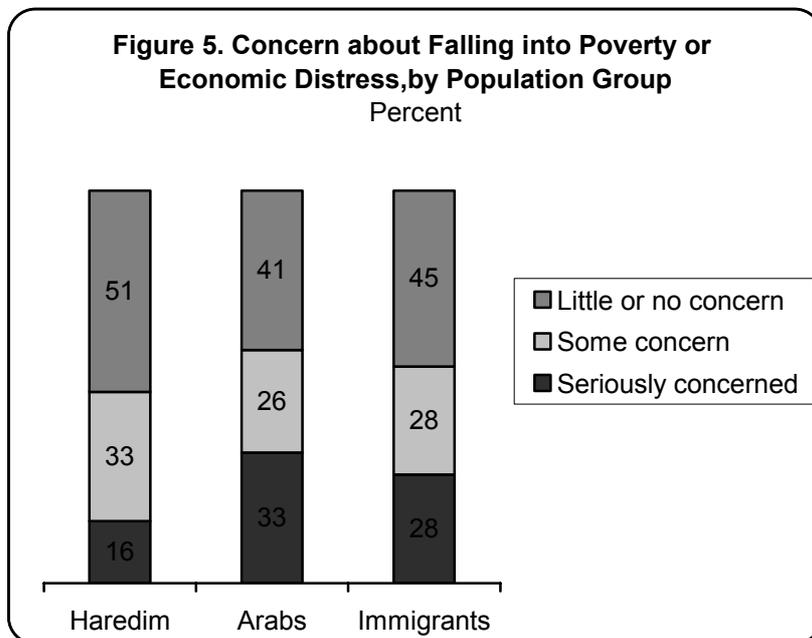
Table 5. Responses to the question, “Are you concerned about the possibility that you or your family may fall into poverty or economic distress?” (Percent)

a. Entire population, selected years

	2004	2006	2007
Very greatly or greatly concerned	31	18	18
Somewhat concerned	43	23	24
Slightly concerned or not concerned at all	26	58	58

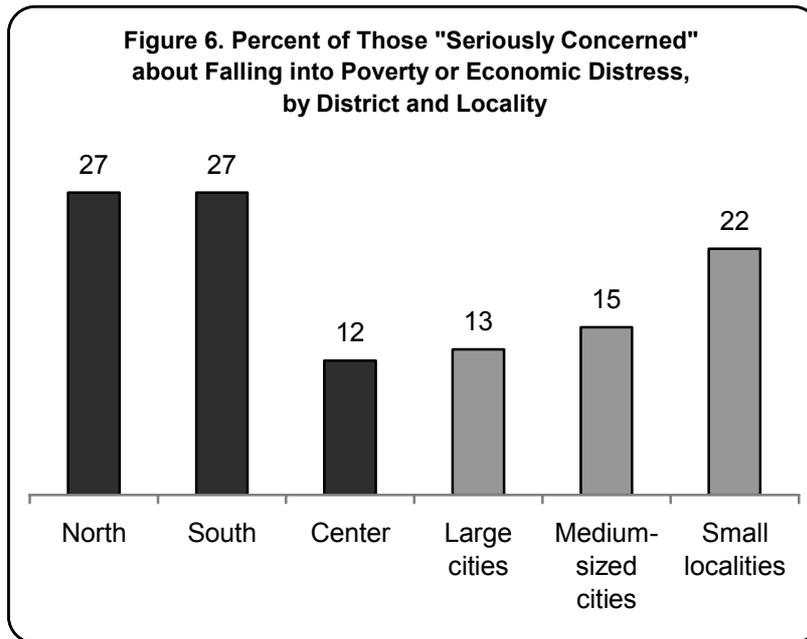
b. By population groups – 2007

	Very greatly or greatly concerned	Slightly concerned or not concerned at all
<i>Total</i>	18	58
High income	17	80
Low income	37	33
High education	13	64
Low education	28	52
<i>Haredim</i>	16	51
Arabs	33	41
Immigrants since 1990	28	45



Most residents of the central district and the major cities did not sense a significant improvement in their standard of living relative to two or three years ago (only 23 percent reported an improvement) as against slightly higher rates among inhabitants of the north and the south (30 percent and 28 percent, respectively). Responses to the question about expectations of future improvement, however, revealed a difference: almost one-fifth of inhabitants of the north expected their economic situation to deteriorate somewhat or severely in the coming year as against 8 percent of residents of the central and southern districts. The question relating to concern about falling into poverty or economic distress disclosed a more significant difference between the center and the periphery: a very high proportion of inhabitants of the north and south (37 percent) reported severe or very severe concern

as against only 12 percent of residents of the central district. Interestingly, too, this concern was much more prevalent among inhabitants of small localities (22 percent) than among residents of major cities (13 percent) and medium-sized towns (15 percent).



In sum, the survey data show that the public's standard of living has been rising in recent years – this is reflected in all questions – but there are large differences among population groups, with the affluent and strong socioeconomic groups making larger gains. In the past year, however, the weaker groups also seem to have benefited from the positive economic momentum.

3. Employment, Income, and Working Conditions

Work is one of the most significant elements in the lives of most working-age people, and is also the source of economic and social security for most individuals and their families. It allows people to provide for themselves and their families, does much to determine their social status, and has an effect on quality of life and self-esteem.

Employment is usually the first area to be affected by the onset of an economic crisis. However, when the state of the economy begins to improve employment may be slow to recover. In 2007, as in previous years, survey respondents were asked several questions about their sense of employment security. A more positive sense was reported this year than in previous years. This was expressed most notably in the low proportion of respondents who were concerned about being laid off and the rise in the sense of job security among all population groups, including the weaker ones. The proportion of those concerned about being laid off was lower than that of those who felt secure in their jobs. However, if those who were greatly concerned (18 percent) and those who were somewhat concerned (26 percent) are aggregated, 44 percent of respondents were still afraid of losing their jobs – a state of mind that may reflect both past experience and the present situation. Generally speaking, the improvement seen in the 2007 survey marks the continuation of a trend that was identified in the past three years. The decline in the proportion of those greatly concerned stands out, as does the proportional increase in the share of those who were only mildly concerned or not concerned at all.

Table 6. Responses to the question, “Do you, or does someone in your family, fear dismissal or fear that they will not find work and become unemployed?” (Percent)

a. Entire population, selected years

	2001	2004	2006	2007
Very greatly or greatly concerned	32	32	22	18
Somewhat concerned	22	28	21	26
Slightly concerned or not concerned at all	46	40	56	56

b. By population groups – 2007

	Very greatly or greatly concerned	Slightly concerned or not concerned
<i>Total</i>	18	56
High income	13	67
Low income	38	42
High education	16	56
Low education	30	48
<i>Haredim</i>	11	67
Arabs	23	43
Immigrants since 1990	20	57

Despite the general economic improvement, the percent of low income respondents who feared becoming unemployed at the end of 2007 was still almost three times higher than amongst high income respondents (this marks an improvement relative to 2006, when the difference was almost five times greater); the share of high income respondents who felt secure in their jobs was 1.5 times that of low income respondents.

As for the three weakest population groups, the immigrants' sense of employment security in 2007 resembled the overall rates of concern – further evidence of their successful economic acculturation. Arabs continued to be more concerned about their employment situation than the population at large and *Haredim* were much less concerned.

4. Workers' Protection and the Right to Strike

Following the survey questions about employment security, two questions examined the issue of workers' rights. One examined the respondent's opinions on who should be responsible for protecting workers' rights on the job; the other looked into the extent of public support for limiting the right to strike in the public sector.

Globalization processes and the transition to non-traditional methods of employment (greater use of personal contracts, employment agencies, etc.) have greatly diminished trade union membership and reduced the power of the *Histadrut* (General Labor Organization). Against this background, it was not surprising to find a relatively low number of respondents (18.6 percent) who consider workers' rights an issue to be regulated collectively (in negotiations between unions and employers), and a higher proportion (43 percent) who favored assigning this responsibility to the state. About one-fourth of respondents believe that employers or management should be responsible for workers' rights and some 14 percent thought that employees should bear the responsibility. This response shows the declining power of unions, which are perceived as less able than in the past to protect workers. Hence the belief that worker's should be individually responsible or that the state should protect individual worker' rights via systematic legislation.

The idea of holding the state responsible for safeguarding workers' rights is more prevalent among weak population groups,

especially the poorly educated (52 percent), Arabs (50 percent), and low income respondents (53 percent). This approach may reflect dissatisfaction on the part of weaker population groups with their current situation, in which high profile works committees are perceived as looking out mainly for “stronger” groups of employees.

There was also a preference among immigrants from the former Soviet Union for holding the state responsible for workers' rights (62 percent) – the highest rate of support for this option among all the population groups examined. The expectation was that these immigrants – who in other respects display considerable individualism and disapproval of collective regulation – would disapprove of the regulation of labor rights by means of works committees or the state and to prefer a *laissez faire* approach. Their attitude may stem from personal distress in the Israeli labor market, where they initially found themselves in low wage, no benefit jobs with little apparent regard for their rights as employees. Being skeptical of works committees and realizing their lack of power to stand up to employers, immigrants see the state, with its labor laws, as better able to protect their rights as employees.

The tendency to prefer seeing works committees as the agent responsible for workers' rights rises with age and is relatively high among those in the 65+ age cohort where more than one-fourth believe that it is the responsibility of works committees and trade unions to guard worker's rights. This preference evidently stems from the older workers' richer experience with the labor relations system that was prevalent in Israel in previous years, in which trade unions had an important role in protecting workers' rights.

The second question, relating to the right to strike, examined the public's willingness to limit the right to strike in the public sector or to prohibit such strikes altogether. In the past, striking was perceived as a legitimate tactic in the process of bargaining and negotiation between labor and management, and in this context the

government was perceived as management. Over the years, however, Israel's labor relations system has undergone changes and the right to strike in the public sector has been limited by legislation. Although the limits apply mainly to vital public services, they have also caused an erosion in the perceived overall legitimacy of the right to strike.

The analysis of the responses to the question about the right to strike in the public sector should consider the possibility that the responses were affected by the timing of the survey, September 2007. At that time, the education system was involved in ongoing and escalating unrest due to teachers' threats and a strike of the post-primary system. (The ensuing strike which began in early October lasted for over 60 days.) The teachers' threats increased public awareness of the cost of public sector strikes in terms of disruptions to ordinary life and might have made the public more willing to consider the option of restricting this right.

Thus, it was surprising to find that a large majority among the public – some two-thirds – opposed limiting the right to strike and 37 percent of those sampled believed that the right to strike (apart from minor restrictions) in the public sector should not be restricted at all. Unqualified support of the right to strike was typical of young people (49 percent), Arabs (54 percent), and above-average-income respondents (41 percent). Support for the unrestricted right to strike was shared by weak and strong population groups, but possibly for different reasons. The weak regard the strike as a way to safeguard their rights in the labor market; whereas those of high income could defend the right to strike because of their unlikely need to have to resort to this measure in regulating their terms of employment, which are often through personal contracts. Perhaps, too, those of higher income oppose limiting the right to strike because they do not consider public sector strikes very harmful to them.

In contrast to them were immigrants from the former Soviet Union, who stood out by favoring severe limitations on the right to strike or even believed that this form of labor action should be prohibited, at 29 percent and 35 percent, respectively, as against average rates of 18 percent and 16 percent, respectively, among the sample at large. The poorly educated also displayed support for a total ban on strikes (27 percent of those with primary or partial-secondary education).

In sum, the attitudes of immigrants from the former Soviet Union toward Israeli labor relations issues are unambiguous: they prefer legislation of worker's rights and want the state to safeguard them. Their responses reflect consistent support of the view that the state should prohibit strikes and take care of working conditions at its own initiative. This stance may attest to the immigrants' lack of experience in a free labor market. They reached the Israeli market with values and outlooks from their previous environment, in which the state was in charge of everything, and their responses may also reflect the difficulties that they faced at the outset of their occupational integration in Israel.

5. Education

Each year, the survey examines attitudes about the education system, the main problems that the system has to cope with, and what has to be done to solve them.

The first question this year was, "*What, in your opinion, is the main reason for the problems that characterize the field of education?*" Generally speaking, the respondents tended to blame the problems on the management of the education system, insufficient budgets, and pupils' and parents' attitude toward schools. Only 15 percent considered the level of teachers to be the most problematic issue.

Table 7. “What, in your opinion, is the main reason for the problems that characterize the field of education?”
(Percent)

	Management of the educa- tion system	Insufficient budgets	General situation in Israel	Level of teachers	Pupils’ and parents’ attitude toward the schools
<i>Total*</i>	28	28	8	15	19
High income	43	43	9	20	13
Low income	26	26	8	17	21
High education	34	34	5	15	16
Low education	17	17	7	18	29
<i>Haredim</i>	36	36	7	13	24
Arabs	21	21	12	10	23
Immigrants since 1990	39	39	6	23	15

* The table omits those who responded “other” (some 4 percent of the total population)

Most groups tended to judge system management as the prime cause of the problems, with budget insufficiency chosen as the second most common problem. Arab respondents ranked budget insufficiency as the main reason for the problems and pupils’ and parents’ attitude toward the schools as the second most important factor. Interestingly, the poorly educated ranked pupils’ and parents’ attitude toward the schools as the main issue. The *Haredim* also rated this matter relatively high but, like the general sample, placed the management problem first and the attitude toward the schools second. Presumably, these differences reflect differences in the social and pedagogical outlooks of these diverse population groups. However, they may also express differences among schools in levels of education and available resources,

which lead to the provision of unequal education services to different population groups.

The second question that was asked about education was, “*To improve the education system, where should the emphasis be placed?*” In 2007, as in 2006, those surveyed emphasized the need to improve teachers’ wages and working conditions; almost 30 percent of the respondents ranked this above all other important goals. The second emphasis was change in the contents of study; and, third was reducing class size. Only afterwards did the sample refer to the needs of weaker population groups and activities to reduce school violence. Reducing school violence ranked much less important in 2007 than in previous years (Table 8).

Table 8. Responses to the question, “*To improve the education system, where should the emphasis be placed?*” (Percent)

	2006	2007
Improving teachers’ wages and working conditions	26	29
Changing contents and programs of study	22	22
Reducing class size	21	20
Increasing resources for students from weaker population groups	11	15
Reducing school violence	21	13

Almost one-third of the respondents believed that teachers’ working conditions and wages should be improved; this feeling has been rising steadily over the years. This shows that most of the public accepted the teachers’ principal claim – that wage conditions are unsatisfactory and have to be improved – even before the teachers’ strike began. The teachers’ second demand, the reduction of class size, also had the support of 20 percent of the public. Thus, roughly half of the public agreed with the teachers and their unions’ central demands.

Table 8a. Responses to the question, “To improve the education system, where should the emphasis be placed?” by population groups, 2007 (Percent)

	Improving teachers' wages and working conditions	Changing contents and programs of study	Reducing class size	Increasing resources for students from weaker population groups	Reducing school violence
<i>Total</i>	29	22	20	15	13
High income	45	26	11	12	6
Low income	23	23	22	16	16
High education	34	19	25	13	10
Low education	31	17	13	20	19
<i>Haredim</i>	15	54	9	9	13
Arabs	26	22	16	20	16
Immigrants since 1990	23	30	30	3	15

Another change in this year's responses is a slight increase in the share of those who believe that students from weak population groups deserve affirmative action in resource allocation – even though the public ranks the importance of this objective as only the fourth among the goals. It is difficult to explain the low preference for this objective, since it was found that almost half of the respondents (44 percent) believe that the education system, instead of narrowing social disparities, is either widening them or having no effect on them whatsoever. (For further analysis see the Education chapter of this report which discusses developments in affirmative action policy.)

When the responses are divided by population groups, the high income respondents stand out in their high rate of support for improving teachers' wages relative to the other groups: more than 45 percent of them believe that this is the most important issue to

address. The well educated shared this conviction at the rather high rate of 34 percent, much higher than their choices of other important objectives that the survey offered. The *Haredim* stood out among all groups in their demand for a change in the contents of study (54 percent). More recent immigrants also held this view (30 percent) but were equally inclined to prefer the reduction of class size.

6. Value Preferences and Assessments of Government Socioeconomic Policy

This year, as in previous years, the survey examined several dimensions of the public's ideological and value preferences and its assessment of government policy. The first question pertained to the central goals that should guide the government's socioeconomic policy: "*Some claim that the government should cut its social budgets (e.g., for education, health care, and social transfers) in order to meet urgent defense needs. What do you think?*" To a large extent the public does not share the view that social budgets ought to be cut in order to meet urgent defense needs. This is an interesting finding in view of the response to a previous question, in which the public indicated the importance of defense on the national scale of priorities. Interestingly, however, proportionally fewer respondents opposed social budget cuts in favor of defense in 2007 than in 2006, at 63 percent and 76 percent, respectively. This decline in the importance that the public attributes to social services may originate in rising concern among the public for defense related issues.

There is an interesting correlation between concern for social budgets and respondents' level of education: the more years of education respondents have, the more they oppose the cutting of social budgets in order to pay for defense. It was also found that former Soviet immigrants stood out strongly among the respondent

groups in their opposition to paying for defense by downsizing social expenditure.

Another question asked the following: “*Which of the following fields, in your opinion, should be the government’s highest priority?*” The responses to this question indicated a change between 2006 and 2007, with a greater emphasis on defense and less support for social policy objectives. Dealing with reducing poverty and social gaps ranked lower this year, and there was relatively less emphasis on reallocating resources for action to reduce unemployment. These changes can be linked to the prolonged lack of security caused by continued rocket fire and mortar shellings in the south, concern about a larger scale military operation expected in that part of the country, the reported recovery of *Hezbollah* in Lebanon, tension with Syria in the north, and the general regional debate about Iran’s obtaining nuclear weapons. The differences between districts on security issues are noteworthy: 56 percent of residents of the southern district placed security at the top of their ranking while only 46 percent of inhabitants of the central district and 43 percent of those in the north did so. In addition, 35 percent of residents of the central district thought that fighting poverty and narrowing social gaps should be the top priority, as against 28 percent of those in the north and 24 percent of those in the south.

Table 9. Responses to the question, “Which of the following fields, in your opinion, should be the government’s highest priority?” (Percent)

	2006	2007
Defense	34	47
Fighting poverty and narrowing social gaps	41	32
Economic growth	13	13
Reducing unemployment	9	5
Other	3	3

Interestingly, former Soviet immigrants, who expressed strong opposition to cutbacks in government social expenditure, attribute very low importance to the allocation of resources for fighting poverty, narrowing social gaps, and reducing unemployment (only 15 percent as against 32 percent on average for the entire sample). In contrast to this, *Haredim* stood out for their preference for fighting poverty and narrowing social gaps as the most important issue (43 percent). Arabs rated the need for government action in accelerating economic growth as relatively important (26 percent as against 10 percent among Jews) and, interestingly, this sector also considers defense very important, admittedly at lower rates on average than the Jewish population (36 percent versus 49 percent, respectively), but at a higher rate than fighting poverty and narrowing social gaps.

The next question asked whether a policy that aims to narrow social disparities clashes with one that promotes economic growth. The responses here were especially interesting in view of those given to the two previous questions.

Table 10. Responses to the question, “Is there a clash between a policy that aims to narrow social gaps and one that aims to promote economic growth?” (Percent)

	2003	2005	2006	2007
There is a clash, and narrowing disparities should be preferred	34	33	30	27
There is a clash, and economic growth should be preferred	30	26	21	21
The two goals do not clash	36	41	49	52

The most notable finding in 2007 was the belief of a majority of the public that the two goals do not clash. The clear upward trend in the share of those who hold this view over the past four years in which this question has been asked is also interesting. This issue is increasingly prevalent in the public debate to which survey participants are exposed. Also, as in past years, a larger proportion of the respondents prefer narrowing social gaps over pursuing higher economic growth.

This year’s survey included questions about the need for affirmative action for two population groups that are known for their economic weakness relative to the others: Arabs and *Haredim*.

The results obtained are interesting and even somewhat surprising. First, the public seems to display slightly stronger solidarity with the Arabs than with the *Haredim*. Arguably, some of the poverty of *Haredim* is perceived by some respondents as being “by choice” and that of Arabs is perceived of as the result of years of government policies and historical developments. This seems to contradict, to some degree, the numerous surveys that point to racist and alienated attitudes of the Israeli public, foremost the Jewish public, toward the distress of these two “minority” groups.

Table 11. Responses to the question, “Most of the Arab/Haredi population is socioeconomically weak. In your opinion, should the government allocate more resources to this population group than to others in order to narrow the gaps?” (Percent)

	Affirmative action for Arabs	Affirmative action for <i>Haredim</i>
Give them very strong preference	10	9
Give them strong preference	22	16
Give them a little preference	22	23
Give no preference	37	43
Decrease their share relative to the rest of the population	9	9

The most notable finding here is the one that demonstrates the erosion of public solidarity in Israel: about half of the public opposes an affirmative action policy for (both) weak population groups and one-tenth actually demands that the resources for this purpose be reduced. This is in line with the growing support for the reduction of National Insurance benefits (as in the latest Economic Arrangements Law) and neo-liberal attitudes that emphasize personal responsibility. It influences, but is also influenced by, attitudes that favor reducing the role of the welfare state— views that have become increasingly common among the public and that have been manifested in government policies in recent years.

The distribution of the responses to these two questions is even more interesting. First, the share of Jews who favor the allocation of government resources for affirmative action for Arabs exceeds the rate of those who believe this should be done for *Haredim*.

Examining the responses among Arabs and *Haredim* – the two population groups at issue – the following results were found:⁵ 80 percent of *Haredim* believe that affirmative action resources should not be allocated to Arabs but only 33 percent of Arabs believe that such resources should be withheld from *Haredim*. The more religiously observant the Jews define themselves, the less willing they are to allocate affirmative action resources to Arabs. (*Haredi* Jews are more opposed than those defining themselves as religious, religious Jews more than traditional Jews, and traditional Jews more than secular Jews.) On the other hand, support for affirmative action for *Haredim* declines in parallel with a decline in respondents' reported level of religious observance. Thus, affirmative action for *Haredim* is favored by 85 percent of *Haredim*, 56 percent of the religious, 46 percent of the traditional, and only 30 percent of the secular. It was also found, among the sample at large, that the level of support for affirmative action for Arabs rises commensurate with the increase in income. The opposite occurs in regard to *Haredim*: the higher the income level, the less willingness there is to promote affirmative action on behalf of *Haredim*.

Here the regional findings expose the differences in the national and religious composition of the various districts. A high proportion of residents of the north (52 percent) believe that the Arabs should be given strong preference in resource allocation, as against 28 percent of residents of the central district and 22 percent of those in the south. At the other extreme, a relatively high proportion of inhabitants of the south (14 percent), as against 9 percent of residents of the central district and only 5 percent of

⁵ Arabs accounted for 17 percent of the total sample and *Haredim* only 9 percent. This composition may have an effect when subgroups containing both Arabs and *Haredim* are analyzed. However, it has no effect when Arabs' responses are compared with those of *Haredim*.

those in the north, wish to see affirmative action for the Arab population cut back.

Table 11a. Responses to the question, “*Most of the Arab/Haredi population is socioeconomically weak. In your opinion, should the government allocate more resources to this population group than to others in order to narrow the gaps?*” (Percent)

	Affirmative action for Arabs		Affirmative action for <i>Haredim</i>	
	Favor	Oppose	Favor	Oppose
<i>Total</i>	54	46	48	52
High income	54	46	41	59
Low income	61	39	52	48
High education	69	31	39	61
Low education	53	47	58	42
Jews	47	53	44	56
Arabs	87	13	67	33
<i>Haredim</i>	20	80	85	15
Immigrants since 1990	35	65	31	69

It is also of interest that 30 percent of residents of the north (the district that has the highest percentage of Arabs) believe that the economically weaker *Haredi* population should be given strong preference in resource allocation, as against 23 percent of those in the central and southern districts who feel this way. This finding evidently expresses the greater sympathy among Arabs for *Haredim* than among *Haredim* for Arabs.