

# The 2005 Social Survey

## 1. Introduction

For the past six years, the Taub Center has been conducting an annual social survey<sup>1</sup> – a public opinion poll that sheds light on the sense of well-being and social confidence of the Israeli public. The survey presents the public's responses to questions about their standard of living, employment situation, personal security, and the quality of education and health services. Survey questions also examine social policy issues and reflect the public's value preferences in regard to several matters on the public agenda. For example, the survey addresses social disparities, a recurrent issue on the social and economic agenda, in two dimensions: what the public thinks about the nature of changes taking place; and, its judgment about how government policy in various spheres has helped to ease or exacerbate the disparities. This issue cuts across many of the topics in the survey and it appears that the public's feelings about the intensity and widening of social gaps correspond to findings in various other studies conducted in Israel.

The survey also attempted to ascertain the public's evaluation of the effects of economic developments, with questions relating to the assessment of the respondent's personal situation, including expectations of improvement. The twenty-six survey items were coupled with nine background questions about the

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<sup>1</sup> The survey is conducted annually by Hanoach and Rafi Smith Research and Consulting, Ltd. This year's survey took place in July 2005 and the sampling error was 3.1 percent. The survey addressed a representative sample of the adult population in Israel (Jews and Arabs aged 18+): 1,003 men and women.

respondents' age, gender, education, income, date of immigration, level of religious observance, and so on.

Importantly, the survey is a tool that complements the Center's analysis of social service allocations presented every year in its Annual Report. The survey illuminates the views of consumers of social services – the public at large – and, within the limitations that are typical of tools of this kind, is a reliable indicator of public attitudes.

This year, as in past years, questions were added in some areas and withdrawn from others. Several questions were repeated without changing the wording from previous years in order to examine trends in attitudes.

The results of the survey, combined with those of previous surveys and other socioeconomic analyses at the macro level – some of which are reflected elsewhere in this report – give a relatively firm basis for the characterization of several key developments:

1. The prevailing sense among respondents is that the economic polarization is widening and social and economic disparities are growing. The trend toward economic improvement in the past two years has not helped to change the public's feeling about the intensity of the disparities. In fact, the survey indicates that society's strong groups have become stronger and its weaker groups weaker.
2. The public believes that the government's socio-economic policy in its various spheres is only serving to exacerbate the disparities.
3. Several social groups – mainly immigrants from the former Soviet Union (FSU), Arabs, and *haredim* (the “ultra-Orthodox”) – differ noticeably from the rest of the population in their responses to quite a few survey questions.

Many of the questions relate to various aspects that are basic elements of the respondents' sense of social confidence. This year, an effort was made to develop an indicator that gives a

more comprehensive picture of social confidence. The “Taub Index” was developed as a simple method to quantify long-term changes in the public’s sense of social confidence. It also enables comparisons of different population groups through calculation of an index score for those subgroups.

The trends that the Taub Index brings to light and the variance of the index among groups of survey participants are shown below in Section 2. After these findings, the survey results are presented in item clusters. The next section focuses on the respondents’ standard of living and the changes reported during the past year (Section 3). Subsequent sections present clusters of items on employment (Section 4), personal security (Section 5), the level of health services (Section 6) and education services (Section 7). The last two sections explore the participants’ views about socioeconomic policy (Section 8) and their value attitudes (Section 9).

## **2. The Taub Index of Social Confidence**

The Taub Index weights the survey responses to a group of questions that relate directly to the most basic elements of the sense of personal social confidence – chiefly changes in standard of living, the sense of being vulnerable to violence, basic economic security, and fear of unemployment. The responses are converted into weighted values to derive a single index on a scale of 0 (extreme lack of social confidence) to 100 (maximum social confidence).

In 2005, the Taub Index, computed for the entire survey population, was 54.5 points. Over the past five years, the following picture is obtained: in 2001 (the first year the index was calculated), it stood at 57.9 points (out of 100). In 2002 and 2003, the index fell to 47.9. The decline reflected the undermining of the public’s social confidence amidst deepening recession, escalating unemployment, and the most intensive

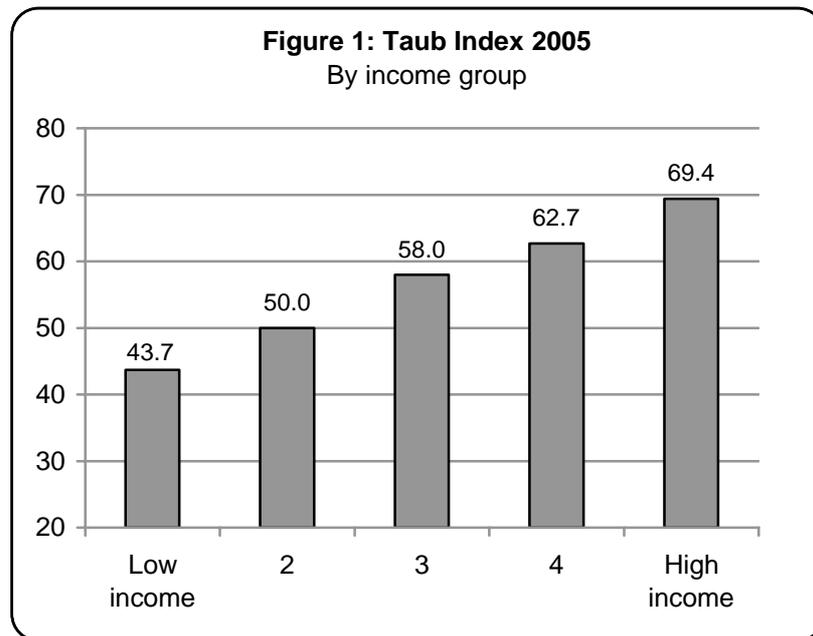
phase of the cutbacks in social service budgets, especially income maintenance.

The public's sense of confidence turned around in 2004, as the index rose to 53.1. The trend continued in 2005, although much less vigorously. The value calculated from this survey (2005), 54.5, remains below the 2001 level.

These data relate to the entire survey population and conceal significant differences in the sense of social confidence between different population groups. The index for the population group that report a "far above average" income level was almost 70 points in 2005; the figure for the group reporting a "far below average" income level came to only 44. The result for those with a "slightly below average" level of income also fell short of 50.

It is not only the relatively large absolute differences among the population groups that are troubling; the different directions in which the index for these groups is moving should also sound an alarm for socioeconomic policymakers. Until 2004, the indices for the different income groups moved in similar directions: down in 2002–2003 and up in 2004. The 2005 index, in contrast, points to an increase in polarization and widening of disparities in the sense of social confidence of different population groups. Thus, the Taub Index for the well-off population *rose* by around 6 index points relative to the previous year while the index for weak population groups *dropped* by about 2 points.

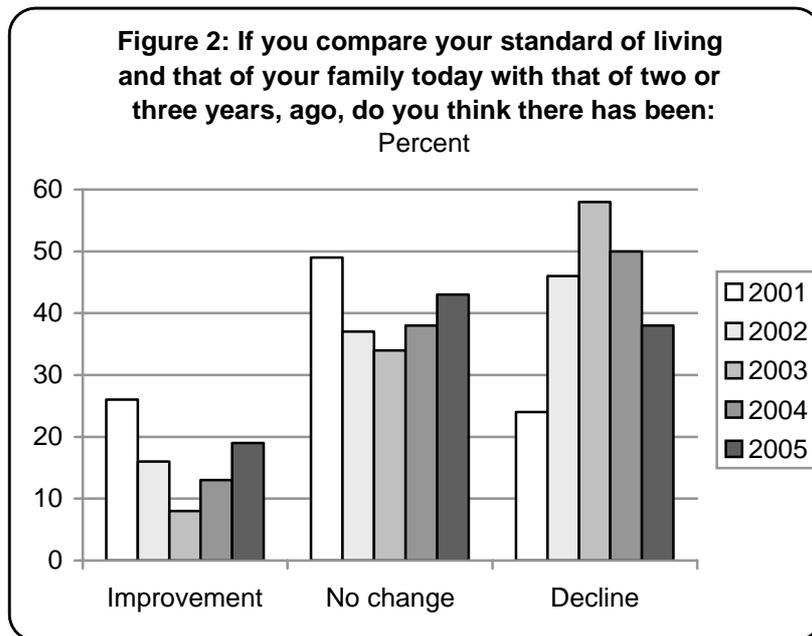
In sum, the Taub Index for 2005 points to a gentle upward trend and a turning point in the public's sense of socio-economic confidence after the deterioration that occurred in previous years. The improvement, however, has been confined to the affluent strata of the population and has not affected those with below-average incomes.



### 3. Standard of Living

The impression of the public's situation in the past year, based on the responses to several survey items, combines to provide a general picture of widening polarization. First, respondents were asked directly about their level of well-being compared with the previous two or three years.

The question was: *If you compare your standard of living and that of your family today with that of two or three years ago, do you think there has been:* (Considerable improvement, Some improvement, No change, Some decline, Considerable decline)?



Each survey in the past five years has repeated this question. The responses definitely acquire greater validity when examined relative to previous years. Thus, in the past two years, the answers reflect a sense of improvement in the situation relative to the 2002 and 2003 surveys, although the sense of improvement that the participants reported in 2001 has not recurred. The rate of those reporting an improvement in their standard of living rose from a low 8 percent in 2003 to 13 percent in 2004 and 19 percent in 2005. Concurrently, the rate of those reporting a decline in their standard of living has fallen gradually in the past two years. However, three times as many respondents reported a *severe* decline than a *considerable* improvement.

This picture masks separate trends among different social groups. The 25–29 age cohort reported a significant improvement in its situation; respondents with far-above-

average income did the same. Other groups, however – people with only a primary or partial-secondary education, Arabs, and people with far-below-average income – reported a greater than average decline in their standard of living. Thus, the strong seem to have become stronger and the weak still weaker.

The next question about the public's standard of living was: *To what extent does your income allow you and your family to meet basic needs?* The responses (percent) follow.

	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005
Without any difficulty	19	19	12	11	10	12	11
Without too much difficulty	..	..	15	9	12	11	11
Reasonably	52	50	45	46	46	43	42
With difficulty	25	26	25	29	27	27	29
Absolutely impossible	4	5	3	5	4	6	7

The responses to this question, which was asked in almost identical wording in previous years, show a clear trend. The share of respondents whose income allows them to meet basic needs with no difficulty or without too much difficulty has been stable for the past four years at 22–23 percent. The share of respondents whose income affords them only a reasonable standard of living fell to 42 percent this year, and the proportion of respondents who reported that it is “hard to get by” with their current level of income climbed to 36 percent.

By adding up the responses, we find a trend of increased polarization: a shrinking group in the middle and growing groups on either end. It may be that when the average standard of living rises and the definition of goods and services perceived as basic changes gradually (since the assessment of basic needs is subjective), the percentage of people who cannot or find it hard to afford the goods and services that society now considers

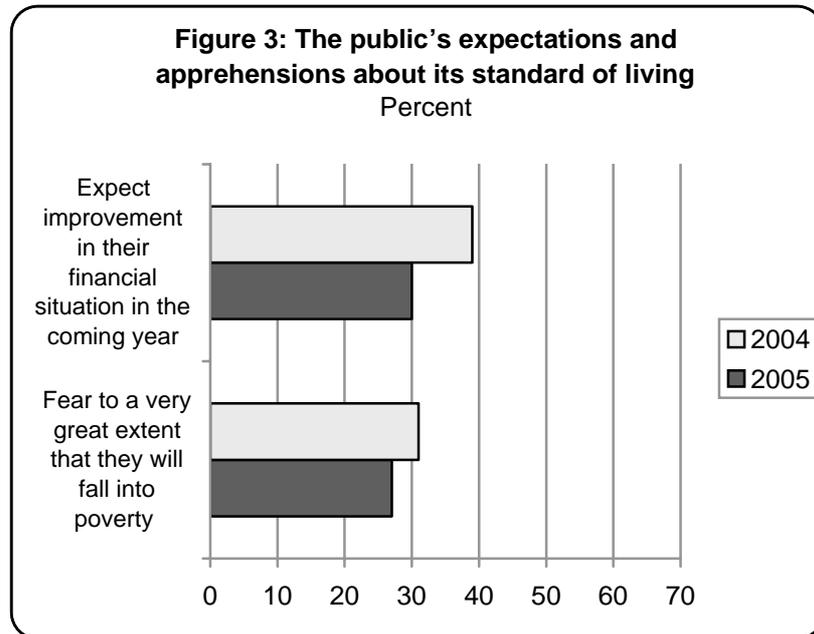
basic also increases. This, however, should not diminish the significance of the findings. Almost half the respondents in the main working-age cohort (30–49) replied that they can not manage or manage with difficulty. The proportion is higher among *haredim*, FSU immigrants, Arabs, the unemployed, the poorly educated (primary or partial-secondary), and those who have far-below-average income.

Not surprisingly, a correlation was found between responses and income: Only 2 percent of those with far-below-average incomes replied that they could manage without difficulty, as against 46 percent of those with far-above-average incomes. There was also a correspondence with the respondent's occupational status: self-employed respondents were more likely than salaried employees to state that they could manage on their income without difficulty.

Two questions in this cluster concerned the public's expectations and apprehensions about its standard of living. The combined results appear in Figure 3.

The first question was: *How do you expect your economic situation and that of your family to change in the coming year?* The responses (percent) follow.

	2004	2005
Considerable improvement	6	5
Some improvement	33	25
No change	47	55
Some decline	11	13
Considerable decline	2	3



Even though the objective economic situation has changed for the better, optimism is waning. Most of the public believes that its situation will not change. Fewer than 30 percent of this year's respondents, as against almost 40 percent last year, expect their personal situation to improve. To complement these findings at the other extreme, it should be noted that the share of the public that expects its economic situation to deteriorate rose from 13 percent last year to almost 16 percent this year. It is possible that last year, when the overall economic situation was worse, people had greater expectations of improvement than in 2005, when the situation began to improve and their personal situation became clearer. Thus, it would be precisely then that expectations of further improvement would wane. It may also be that much of the public has lost faith in the government's promises of improvement.

The latter explanation is somewhat reinforced by the fact that the groups that feared deterioration the most – those with far-below-average incomes, Arabs, the unemployed, and FSU immigrants – stood out clearly from the public at large. However, among the relatively optimistic population groups there were also young people, *haredim*, and Arabs. It seems somewhat incongruous for groups of equally weak social status to express conflicting attitudes. This, however, may be partly explained by divisions *within* the groups.

This is particularly marked among the Arab population, in which the in-between group, which expects no change, is relatively small compared with the two relatively large groups at either end, i.e., those that expect a change for the better or for the worse. It is also possible that population groups of particularly low income entertain greater expectations of improvement but, in the absence of economic security, maintain a higher sense of vulnerability and apprehension.

In the response to this item, too, differences between salaried employees and the self-employed were found: the self-employed were more optimistic. There were also differences in optimism between men and women with women being more “conservative” in their assessment of the likelihood of deterioration or improvement.

The question in regard to expectations was: *Are you concerned about the possibility that you or your family may fall into a situation of poverty or economic distress?* The responses (percent) follow.

	2004	2005
Very greatly concerned	17	13
Greatly concerned	14	14
Somewhat concerned	29	27
Hardly concerned	15	16
Unconcerned	25	30

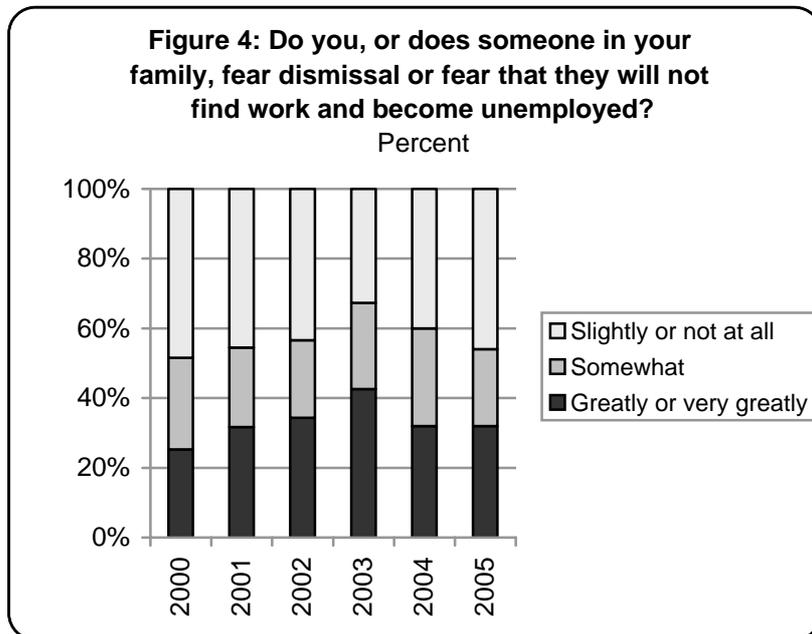
In response to this question, there were slight indications of an improvement in the mood – a small decrease in the extent of fear of falling into economic distress or poverty relative to last year. As with other questions in this cluster, the weak groups were more apprehensive than the strong ones. The extent of concern also increased with age.

#### **4. Employment, Income, and Working Conditions**

Work is one of the most significant elements in individuals' lives and is usually the source of economic and social security for themselves and their families. It allows people to provide for themselves and their families, does much to determine their social status, and has a decisive effect on their quality of life and self-esteem. This year the scope of inquiry was slightly expanded by including several items that went beyond the aspects addressed in previous surveys.

Employment is the first area affected by the onset of an economic crisis. However, it improves rather slowly even when the state of the economy begins to improve. This year, as in previous years, the question was asked, *Do you, or does someone in your family, fear dismissal or fear that they will not find work and become unemployed?*

The trend of improvement first discerned last year, after a rather long period of very great fear of unemployment, continued this year. The share of respondents who replied that neither they nor anyone in their family feared unemployment at all or feared it only slightly rose from 40 percent last year to 46 percent, as against 30 percent in 2003. At the other extreme, the number of respondents who very greatly feared unemployment dropped slightly in the past year. The decrease in fear of unemployment may reflect the objective situation, in which an improvement in various economic indicators has lessened the risk of unemployment.



Fear of losing one's job was greater among women than among men; only one-third of women, as against 43 percent of men, did not fear dismissal. The clearest and most significant connection concerns the differences among respondents by levels of income. Only 3 percent of those with far-above-average incomes reported fear of dismissal or unemployment, as against 28 percent of those with far-below-average incomes. Concurrently, 63 percent of high-income respondents did not fear dismissal at all, as against only 24 percent of those with far-below-average incomes. A similar correlation was found with respondents' education level.

The self-employed expressed a much higher sense of security. Thus, the proportion of self-employed who did not fear that a family member would be dismissed (or would not find work) was much higher than the proportion of salaried

employees who felt this way (55 percent vs. 34 percent). Arabs constituted another group of survey participants who expressed strong fear of becoming unemployed.

The next two questions in this cluster concerned the participants' income and working conditions. The first, related to income, was: *Have there been changes in your level of income in the past year?* The results (percent) follow.

Considerable improvement	17
Slight improvement	11
No change at all	50
Slight decline	17
Considerable decline	5

It is interesting that despite indications of an economic upturn, a higher proportion of the public reported a decline in income than an improvement – 26 percent vs. 17 percent. The picture on average for the survey population as a whole may not be so bleak, but the findings mask the differences experienced by distinct population groups.

Only 7 percent of the far-above-average income group reported a decline and almost none reported a considerable decline, as against 40 percent among the low-income group who reported a decline or a considerable decline in their income. The education factor showed a similar picture: 18 percent of the poorly educated (primary and partial-secondary education) reported a decline in income as against only 5 percent among those who had an academic education.

Presumably people with higher incomes and higher education work in places that are better protected by labor agreements and feel better protected against loss of income. By the same token, a significant share of the population among weak groups is employed by personnel agencies or in unprotected positions,

where employers exploit the economic crisis and the threat of dismissal to worsen their employees' working conditions.

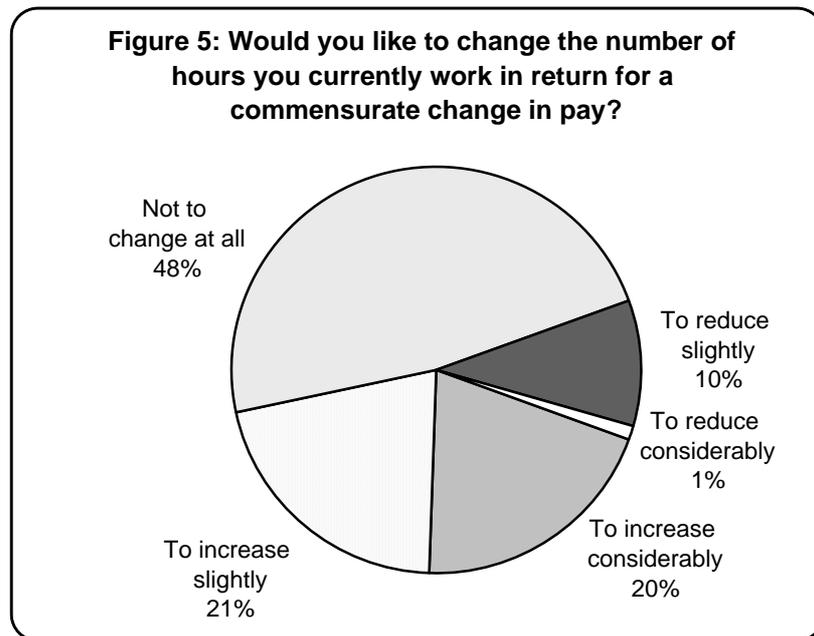
The second question concerned changes in working conditions other than income. The distribution of responses resembled that for the previous question (percent):

Considerable + slight improvement	12
No change whatsoever	66
Slight + considerable decline	21

It is evident that with regard to changes in working conditions, those with high incomes experienced less of a change for the worse than those with low incomes, and the poorly educated were harmed more than the well educated. Employees were harmed slightly more than the self-employed; women were somewhat worse off than men.

Another question in the employment cluster was designed to determine whether the public is content or merely "makes do" with the conditions of its employment: ***Would you like to change (increase or decrease) the number of hours you currently work in return for a commensurate change in pay?***

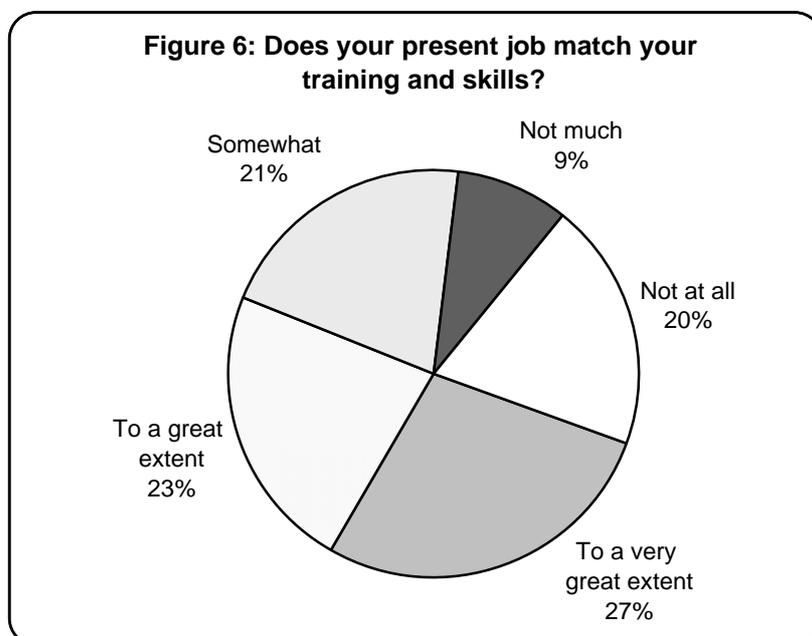
The responses are shown in Figure 5. They are consistent with the views expressed by the respondents that their current wage level is too low to meet living needs. A rather high proportion of survey participants – over 40 percent – would like to increase their number of work hours and their income, as against only 10 percent who would like to work fewer hours. The high proportion of respondents wishing to increase their hours may say something about an aspect of unemployment that is not reflected in the official unemployment figures. Instead, it is expressed in a sense of underemployment, i.e., unwilling employment in part-time jobs.



Which groups would like to work many more hours? Men more than women (24 percent vs. 18 percent), young people more than older people, the well educated more than the poorly educated (22 percent of university graduates vs. 15 percent of those with only primary schooling), the self-employed more than salaried employees (26 percent vs. 19 percent), low-income earners more than high-income earners (35 percent vs. 15 percent), and immigrants more than non-immigrants.

Who wants to work fewer hours? Arabs and those with far-above-average incomes were considerably more inclined than others to wish to reduce their work hours. Interestingly, women were less interested in increasing their number of hours than were men, a finding that corresponds with the preponderance of women in part-time positions.

The last question about working conditions concerned the respondents' sense of match between their place of work or type of occupation and their skills. The results are shown in Figure 6.



It transpires that almost 30 percent of the respondents believed that their work does not match their training and skills. This proportion seems very high; it may reflect a temporary situation, i.e., many people took jobs that did not correspond to their skills and expect the situation to change. This explanation would be satisfactory if the proportion of young people who gave this response were much higher than the rate of older people. Although there is an age correlation, it does not explain the findings. Thus, 37 percent of people aged 25–29 reported that their job does not match their skills, 24 percent in the 30–49 age cohort did so, and 29 percent of those aged 50–64 did the same.

Which groups stood out? The most significant group of dissatisfied respondents in this respect were the immigrants, 53 percent of whom reported that their job did not correspond to their skills. These feelings undoubtedly reveal the price of immigration and the situation of immigrants, who often have to compromise by accepting jobs that do not necessarily match their skills and training. There was also a high lack of correspondence among half of the pensioners. Presumably a large proportion of pensioners who wish or have to continue working and earning a wage must accept casual, temporary, or part-time jobs in order to supplement their pension income, and these jobs entail skills and experience that fall far short of those that they possess.

As a rule, it is possible to find a clear correspondence in the responses between the way the participants judged the match between their work and skills and abilities and their level of education and income. The higher the income and level of education, the higher the match reported.

An interesting finding shows that here, too, there is a difference between salaried employees and the self-employed. Most of the self-employed (67 percent) believed that their work matches their skills, as against 50 percent of employees. Similarly, only 19 percent of the self-employed, as against 29 percent of employees, believed that their work does not match their skills.

## **5. Personal Security and Vulnerability to Violence**

Manifestations of violence in society are bound to social and cultural definitions and mean different things in different societies and at different times. Some would define shoving and an attempt to jump the queue as violence; others would regard this as normal behavior. Some regard crude language and profanity as acts of violence; others view them as nothing more

than coarseness. The survey questions concerned criminal violence and criminal offenses. Since the term violence was not precisely defined in the survey, the responses should be treated with caution and the reader should assume that the survey participants view violence in different ways. There is no doubt, however, that the Israeli public has a rather broad consensus about many manifestations of violence, their classification, and their gravity, particularly in respect to criminal violence. There is also a consensus about the contribution of this element to an individual's sense of well-being.

Respondents were asked three questions about exposure to crime and violence. The questions examined the issue at three levels, first concerning the sense of vulnerability to violent crime. This question has been asked in all surveys since 2000 and reflects the public's changing sense of the matter over those years. The second question asks whether the respondents and members of their families had actually been victims of personal crime. In the third question, respondents were asked if they had changed their habits in view of their sense of being increasingly vulnerable to violence.

The first question was: *To what extent do you and members of your family feel vulnerable to violent crime and criminal acts?* The results (percent) follow.

	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005
To a very great extent	6	5	8	8	8	9
To a great extent	11	12	11	11	11	12
To some extent	23	24	22	21	27	23
Slightly	29	29	23	23	20	21
Not at all	31	29	36	37	34	35

The most significant finding from the questions in this cluster is that the public lacks a sense of personal security. Only 35 percent of participants stated that they were not exposed to violence at all, more than a fifth (21 percent) reported a strong

or very strong sense of vulnerability, about a quarter felt somewhat exposed to criminal violence, and 21 percent felt only slightly exposed. These results take on a graver complexion when compared with those of previous years because they show an increase in the extent of the violence felt by the public. Thus, a higher proportion responded that they are severely or very severely exposed to violence, as against a minor decrease in reporting of slight exposure (particularly compared with 2000 and 2001). In contrast, the proportion of respondents who do not feel exposed to violence at all rose slightly, from around 30 percent in 2000 to 35 percent, as stated, in 2005.

Weak social groups were found to have a higher sense of being exposed to criminal acts and violence. Thus, whereas 20 percent of the population at large felt severely or very severely exposed, 25–27 percent of respondents among the 50+ age cohort, FSU immigrants, those with primary or partial-secondary education, pensioners, and those with far-below-average incomes felt this way.

A very large increase in the sense of vulnerability took place in the 65 and over age cohort. In 2003, only 4 percent of respondents in this age group reported that they felt very exposed to personal crime; in 2005, the percentage rose to 12. Furthermore, the share of seniors who felt wholly unexposed fell from more than 50 percent in 2003 to only 36 percent in 2005. There was also a very large increase in the sense of vulnerability in the 25–29 age cohort, from 15 percent in 2003 to 22 percent in 2005.

Interestingly, there was almost no difference between men and women in the findings about the vulnerability to crime. FSU immigrants felt more exposed to criminal activity than non-immigrants, and the more religious the population, the less exposed it felt to violent crime. In regard to the *haredim*, this may be explained by their living in separate neighborhoods that pursue a unique way of life characterized by insularity.

The second question, not asked in previous surveys, related not to the sense of vulnerability but to actual attack: *Have you or anyone in your family recently been the victim of violence that was directed at you?* The results (percent) follow:

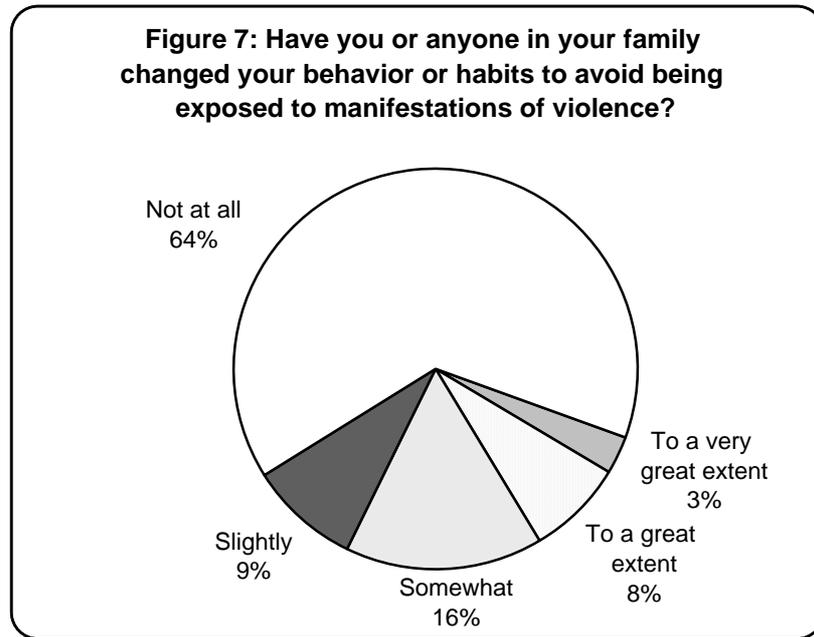
Very often	0.5
Often	1
Several times	5
Once or twice	8
Never	86

Some 86 percent of the public responded that they had never been victims of personal crime. However, 15 percent responded that they had experienced and been exposed to violence and criminality. The 25–29 age cohort was often exposed to criminality and violence. The groups that spoke of fewer attacks included those aged 65 and over, those with primary or partial-secondary education, the *haredim*, and the religious (among whom more than 90 percent had not been attacked even once).

The third question, also asked for the first time in 2005, was: *Have you or anyone in your family changed your behavior or habits to avoid being exposed to manifestations of violence?*

The responses are shown in Figure 7.

The responses to this question are particularly interesting. Although 85 percent of the interviewees had not experienced crime or been exposed to violence, only 65 percent reported that they had not changed their behavior and habits to prevent such exposure. This response corresponds with the first question, indicating that the sense of exposure to violence is greater than the rate of actual incidents. The 25–49 age cohort was conspicuous among those who responded that they had changed their behavior patterns.



## 6. Health Care

Israel's health care system has undergone many changes in recent years. For over a decade, the State Health Insurance Law has established a "basket" of services to which the public is entitled. All persons with resident status are entitled to services from the sick fund of their choice and are entitled to change sick funds. What is more, the level of health care in Israel is considered rather high by international standards. Over the years, however, the burden of patient co-payments – for visits to specialists, essential treatments, the use of x-ray and imaging services and other medical apparatus or equipment, and, of course, medicines – has been rising. The chapter on health care in this Annual Report shows that the share of private funding rose again in the past year, to 30 percent of total national health expenditure.

The public's satisfaction with the health services has been examined since the first Taub Center Survey in 1999. This year, the public was again asked what it feels about the health care services that it receives. Since this is one of the areas in which the public's feelings have been monitored continuously<sup>2</sup> this year's findings are further validated by the continuity of the survey results. After asking about the level of health care services, respondents were asked whether they had forgone essential services due to difficulty in affording the co-payments.

The first question was: *Compared with the situation a year or two ago, do you think there has been any change in the level of health services that you and your family receive?* The results (percent) follow:

	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005
Significant improvement	7	14	10	12	3	5	4
Some improvement	29	35	28	30	13	18	14
No improvement	44	41	50	35	53	40	55
Some deterioration	14	9	10	15	21	23	18
Significant deterioration	6	1	2	8	9	14	9

The findings point to a change in the level of the public's satisfaction with the services that it receives, particularly since 2003. The decline began in 2000 and has intensified. The proportion of the public that reported a sense of improvement was high in the early years (particularly those who reported **some** improvement) but has been declining steeply since 2003.

<sup>2</sup> Although the question about health care services has appeared in the survey every year, the wording varied slightly. From 1999 to 2002 and again in 2004, it related to the health care services in a general manner while in 2003 and 2005 respondents were asked in a personal way about the services that they and their families received.

Interestingly, the respondent's level of education and income did not significantly affect the responses. Age, however, did play a part; the older the participants were, the greater their tendency to respond that the level of their health services had declined. This means that the "heavy" users of health care services, for whom the services should be more accessible, are less satisfied than the public at large.

It is also interesting that the *haredim* and the Arabs report an improvement in health care services – a trend that was also observed in the past. External data about the geographic distribution of health services and improved accessibility to services in these sectors may help explain the survey findings.

The next question that was asked elicited one of the most serious findings of the survey in regard to health care and corroborates similar findings from other public opinion polls: *In the past year, have you or has anyone in your family refrained from obtaining an essential medical service, such as an appointment with a doctor, the purchase of medication or medical equipment, etc., because of the price that you have been asked to pay for the service?* The results (percent) follow:

	2003	2004	2005
Very often	1.5	2	2
Often	3	4	3
A few times	7	9	10
Once or twice	7	7	7
Never	80	78	78

This question was asked for the third consecutive year and the picture that emerges from the responses is troubling. Some 20 percent of respondents had to forgo an essential medical service at least once during the past year and the share of responses in all categories (except for "never") has been climbing. The most troubling finding is the high rates of elderly

and FSU immigrant respondents who had to forgo an essential medical service at least once – approximately one-third.

The correspondence between income and education and use of services is particularly significant: 96 percent of high-income participants and approximately 80 percent of those with academic education did not have to forgo an essential medical service even once, in contrast to 15 percent of the poorly educated and 10 percent of low-income participants who responded that they had had to forgo an essential medical service very often.

## 7. Education

Education has been prominent in the public debate during the past year. The press and electronic media, as well as many public and professional forums, have devoted time and space to discussing the recommendations of the new reform proposed by the Dovrat Commission. The discussion has revolved around issues related to the teacher training, dismissal, classroom hours, and total teacher workloads, and the possibility of moving to a five-day school week. The discussion also related to questions of curriculum, such as the decision to make all school systems adopt a compulsory core curriculum.

Each year the Taub Center Survey examines the public's attitude toward the quality of the education system, its contribution to narrowing social disparities, identification of the system's main problems, and the measures required to solve them. Given the public's great concern about education issues, this year's Social Survey examined the topic in greater depth and devoted more questions to it. Some of the questions had been asked in previous surveys; others appeared in 2005 for the first time.

In a new question the survey looked into the extent of resources available to the education system. Respondents were asked: *What is your opinion of the extent of resources*

**currently allocated to the education system?** The response was unequivocal: a sizeable majority (84 percent) believed that the system deserves more than it is getting. Most respondents, however, also believed that the increase should be implemented mainly by revising the budget priorities and not by charging parents more or earmarking a tax increase for education.

The Arabs stood out in the high proportion of responses, relative to those of the population at large, in favor of augmenting the budgets by means of parental payments. This may derive from the fact that, generally speaking, the level of parental payments in this sector is much lower than the accepted level in the Jewish sector.<sup>3</sup>

The results (percent) follow.

Resources should be increased, mainly by increasing parental payments	5
Resources should be increased, mainly at the taxpayer's expense	19
Resources should be increased, mainly by cuts elsewhere	58
The current level of resources is adequate	12
The level of resources should be reduced	4

Interestingly, although the proportion of respondents who favored increased parental payments as the way to increase the education budget was low overall, it was twice as high among the poorly educated than among the well educated and slightly higher among those of low income than among those of high income. This unexpected finding may be a result of the relatively large sums that the well educated and the well off are already spending for their children's education; consequently, they may be unwilling to pay more. Those with lower education and income, in turn, are paying less; their attitude may be based on the assumption that the burden of further parental funding

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<sup>3</sup> There are also differences within the Arab sector. For example, parental payments for children at private church-run schools are rather high.

would not fall on them. Alternatively, since they pay relatively little at the present time, they may be willing to increase their funding of education due to their awareness of its immense importance.

The question *Where should the emphasis be placed in order to improve the education system?* has been asked in almost all previous surveys (excluding 2003), although the response options have varied slightly over the years. The responses in the first three surveys showed significantly that the measures most strongly preferred by the public to improve the education system were to reduce class size and improve the level of teaching. In the past two years, 2004–2005, when different options were offered, the responses were divided: about a quarter preferred smaller classes (26 percent), roughly a quarter chose altering the curriculum (23 percent), slightly under a quarter (21 percent) opted for reducing school violence, and a similar proportion (20 percent) favored improving teachers' pay. Only 10 percent opted for extending the school day.

The differences in preferences become visible when the subgroups of respondents were examined separately. Women favored smaller classes more than men did – 30 percent vs. 21 percent, respectively. Reducing class size was also preferred by over 30 percent of the 50–64 age cohort, those with an academic education, non-religious Jews, and people with above average incomes. Those with primary and partial-secondary schooling had different priorities: 38 percent of them considered reducing violence paramount, followed by improving teachers' pay; a smaller proportion – 12 percent – favored smaller classes. This may be an appropriate set of responses for schools that serve weaker population groups, where improving school infrastructure and extending the school day (or adding hours of study) are not the highest priorities.

	1999	2000	2001	2002	2004	2005
Improve teachers' pay	..	..	..	31	21	20
Make classes smaller	35	31	30	25	14	26
Extend the school day (or add hours of study)	17	15	18	17	10	10
Revise the curriculum	..	..	..	20	23	23
Reduce school violence	..	..	..	..	31	21
Improve the level of teaching	32	42	42	..	..	..
Improve school infrastructure	10	12	12	6	..	..

.. option not offered that year

As for raising teachers' salaries as opposed to dealing with other issues in the education system, it turned out that only 20 percent of the public made this their top priority. In view of the intense public debate over teachers' pay, an explicit question about this issue was included for the first time this year: *The average teacher earns about NIS 7,000 per month, similar to the national average wage. In your opinion, what should the target for teachers' salaries be?* The results (percent) follow:

Much higher than the national average wage	23
Slightly higher than the national average wage	35
No change	37
Slightly lower than the national average wage	4
Much lower than the national average wage	1

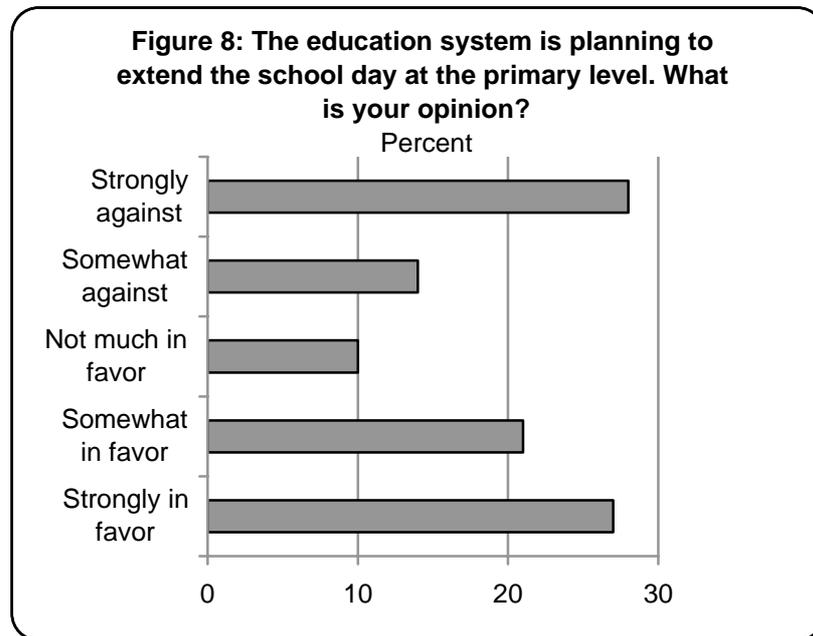
The public believes that the teachers deserve a raise (23 percent believe they should receive a large one and 35 percent a small one). Another 37 percent of respondents think that teachers' pay should be left as it is and only 5 percent believe that it should be reduced.

There was a clear correspondence between education level and income and the opinion that teachers' pay should be increased. The higher the respondents' income and education,

the stronger their attitude about the need for an increase in teachers' salaries. Respondents in the weaker groups (low income, poor education, and FSU immigrants) tended less often to recommend pay increases for teachers than those belonging to more affluent social strata. The self-employed also favored a pay increase for teachers more than salaried employees did.

The next question pertained directly to a key recommendation in the Dovrat Commission Report about extending the school day. The education system has concerned itself with this question for years; the Knesset passed the Long School Day Law in 1997 and the government drafted a plan for its implementation. Nevertheless, implementation has been postponed every year except for a few selected parts of the system. The Dovrat Commission Report included this element in its recommended reform of the education system. The question was: ***The education system is planning to extend the school day at the primary level to 4:00 p.m. and to eliminate classes on Fridays. What is your opinion?*** (Strongly in favor, Somewhat in favor, Not very much in favor, Somewhat against, and Strongly against). The results appear in Figure 8.

About half of the respondents (48 percent) somewhat favored or strongly favored extending the school day and eliminating school on Fridays. Another tenth of the public was not highly in favor of this proposal. Less than half the respondents, 42 percent, opposed the long school day.



It is interesting to examine which groups favored the reform more and which less. Socio-economically weaker groups viewed the long school day more favorably than economically stronger groups did. The Arabs and the *haredim* were exceptions to this pattern; they expressed opposition to the proposed option. The *haredim* may have felt this way because the option is linked to eliminating classes on Fridays and since their schools already offer a long school day. They may also have been expressing fear of losing resources, directly or indirectly, if the long school day were introduced throughout the system, because this would deprive them of an advantage that their schools offer the public (a unique feature of the *haredi* sector).

## 8. Government Socio-Economic Policy

In this section several questions asked the respondent to rate directly the government's socio-economic policy. First, respondents were asked about the economic policy in general; then they were asked about the effect of the government's policy on social disparities and the success of the policy in reducing unemployment and expanding employment.

The first question tapped the public's attitude toward government policy in broad general terms. Since the question was also asked in the previous survey, it was of interest to ask it again in view of indicators of an economic upturn during the past year.

The question was: *To what extent are you in favor of/against the government's economic policy?* The results (percent) follow:

	2004	2005
Strongly in favor	12	10
Somewhat in favor	21	25
Not much in favor	18	20
Somewhat against	18	17
Strongly against	32	27

The responses indicate that the level of support for the government's economic policy has hardly changed; most of the public (65 percent vs. 67 percent last year) continues not to support it. This does show, however, that the extreme reactions to the government's economic policy were slightly less extreme. Thus, the distance between those strongly opposed and those strongly in favor narrowed a bit, from 20 percentage points in 2004 to 17 percentage points in 2005.

Like last year, when respondents are divided by gender the replies show that the proportion of women who supported the plan was lower than that of men (31 percent vs. 41 percent).

This finding stands out even though the proportion of women supporting the plan increased this year while the percentage of men hardly changed. Age did not affect the level of support, apart from slightly above-average support in the 25–29 age cohort – 41 percent vs. the general average of 35 percent.

Supporters and opponents of the policy were differentiated by income group, though. Last year, 22 percent of the far-below-average income group favored the policy, as against almost 60 percent of the high-income group. The rate of support among the low income group did not change but support in the high income group fell to 47 percent. This is an unexpected change, since the economic policy has allowed those with high incomes to move ahead. The changes at the other end (the opponents) also point to similar development in the public's attitude. Last year, 63 percent of low income respondents opposed the policy strongly or somewhat while only 26 percent of those with far-above-average incomes felt this way. The results from the latest survey were 58 percent and 32 percent, respectively. Thus, low income respondents toned down their opposition but the proportion of opponents among the high income group rose.

This finding is contrary to expectations, and it may suggest that the main beneficiaries of the current economic policy – the high income group – are increasingly aware of its negative social aspects. Similar attitudes toward the policy were expressed when respondents were divided by education level. Notably, however, both the poorly educated and the highly educated favored the policy this year at a rate 5 percentage points higher than last year, while the rate of opposition remained the same.

Several groups stood out from the rest of the population in their response patterns. Particularly significant was the strong and growing opposition of the *haredim* to the economic policy: their rate of opposition rose from 72 percent to 82 percent between 2004 and 2005. Noteworthy in contrast was the strong

support of FSU immigrants for the economic policy, which rose from 34 percent in 2004 to 48 percent this year. In both years, the FSU immigrants expressed different opinions from those of the public at large on quite a few issues, particularly in comparison to the non-religious.<sup>4</sup>

Thus, the general public opposes the economic policy despite reports of its success. Importantly, the opposition was less strong in 2005 than in 2004, steady among the weaker strata, and lower among the well educated and affluent groups.

The feelings elicited by the previous question and the differences that were found among different population groups are related to the issue of social disparities. The disparities issue was included in this cluster of questions in order to examine the public's opinion about what the government policy has done to narrow or widen them.

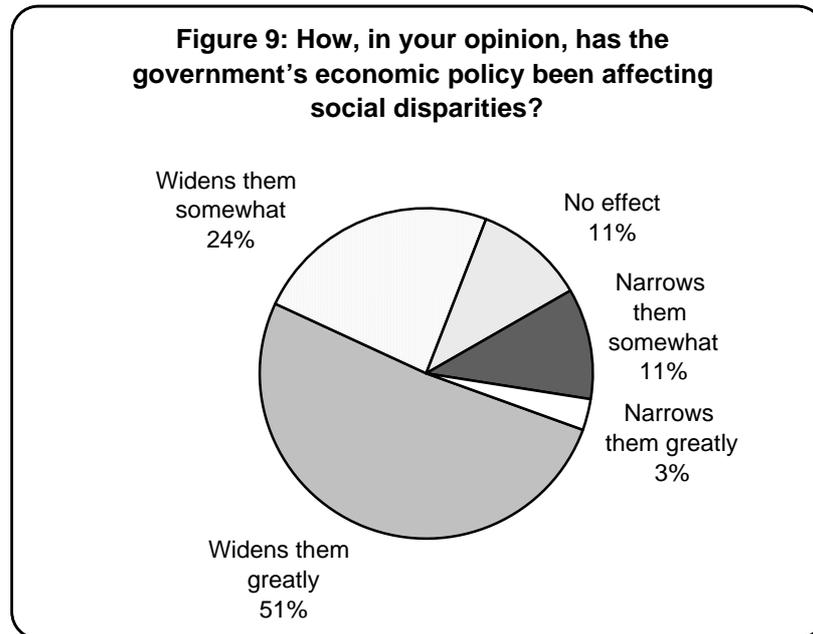
The question was: *How, in your opinion, does the government's economic policy affect social disparities?* (Widens them greatly, Widens them somewhat, Does not affect them, Narrows them somewhat, Narrows them greatly) The results appear in Figure 9 below.

Assuming that one purpose of any social policy is to narrow social disparities, the public's response to this question represents a pointed condemnation of government policy. More than half the public believes that the government's policy is widening the disparities greatly and another quarter believes that it is doing so to some extent.

The public does not seem to believe that the government policy aims at narrowing the disparities; its high rates of response in this matter exhibit no large differences among subgroups. Nevertheless, the better educated respondents were, the more critical they were of the government policy. The *haredim* stood out for their critical attitude.

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<sup>4</sup> One should bear in mind that since much of the FSU immigrant group belongs to non-religious public, the differences are actually even greater.



Reducing unemployment is also supposed to be one of the government's main goals, alongside the aspiration to reduce social disparities. Unemployment has been a central issue on Israel's social agenda for years; the government has undertaken to make perceptible efforts to find employment solutions, on the one hand, and to protect the unemployed, on the other. This survey asked the public what it thinks about the government's success in attaining this goal.

The question was: *What is your opinion of the government's success in increasing employment and reducing unemployment?* The results (percent) follow:

Very successful indeed	2
Very successful	8
Somewhat successful	24
Not very successful	36
Totally unsuccessful	30

Most of the public (66 percent) believes that the government has not succeeded. Particularly critical were the *haredim* and those with far-below-average incomes, 45 percent of whom replied that the government had failed **totally** in its effort to reduce unemployment. However, even one-fourth of people with high incomes and higher education, the groups that have benefited most from government economic policy in recent years, shared this view. Women were more critical than men; 71 percent of them, as against 60 percent of men, believed that the government policy in this area had not been very successful or had totally failed.

## 9. Value Priorities of the Public

This year the survey again examined several dimensions of respondents' ideological value system. The first question concerned the goals that ostensibly guide policy. This question complements the questions in the previous section about the public's attitude toward government policy and its goals and achievements.

The first question was, *Some claim that there is a conflict between a policy that aims to narrow social disparities and a policy that promotes economic growth.* The purpose was to gain an impression of the public's attitude toward the possibility of tackling these two perennial serious problems on Israel's economic agenda and to infer respondents' priorities. The results (percent) follow:

	2003	2005
There is a conflict and narrowing disparities should come first	34	33
There is a conflict and economic growth should come first	30	26
There is no conflict between these two courses of action	36	41

Analysis of the responses was not simple. First, 127 respondents – almost 13 percent of the total – did not respond at all (a significantly high rate relative to the share of non-response to other questions). Second, notably, more than 40 percent of those who responded believe there is no conflict between these courses of action (a higher proportion than in 2003). From the respondents who claimed that there is a difference between the goals and expressed a preference, one can gain some impression of the country's social mood.

First, the groups are not far apart but a larger proportion of the total sample considered it preferable to narrow social disparities. Comparison of the distribution among subgroups with the distribution of the sample as a whole (the overall average) focuses the spotlight on several groups. FSU immigrants preferred economic growth to the narrowing of disparities (35 percent vs. 23 percent, respectively); those with primary or partial-secondary education showed a similar preference (35 percent vs. 26 percent), and Arabs and pensioners did the same. Salaried employees preferred to narrow disparities more strongly than the self-employed did, but the groups that preferred this option most clearly were the *haredim* and the unemployed. No real difference was found in the preferences of the population when they were divided by income.

The second question concerned the universal nature of National Insurance benefits: ***National Insurance benefits are given to all households with children, to all persons of pension***

***age, etc. In your opinion, should benefits to high income population groups be reduced or eliminated?***

The question has a distinctly “ideological” nature because it tackles the dilemma of choosing between universal and selective transfer payments. Support for universality stresses, among other things, the insurance nature of the benefits. It strives to prevent social stigma and to preserve the value of the benefits. The preference of selective benefits, in contrast, is prompted chiefly by considerations of efficiency (focusing on helping the needy) and preventing the wastefulness of paying benefits to people who do not need them.

The results (percent) follow:

	<b>2002</b>	<b>2003</b>	<b>2004</b>	<b>2005</b>
Eliminate them entirely	33	38	41	30
Reduce them very greatly	8	10	8	10
Reduce them greatly	17	21	18	17
Reduce them slightly	16	16	13	14
Leave things as they are	26	15	20	28

Public opinion on this matter changed somewhat last year. Between 2002 and 2004, the preference for selective payment showed an upward trend; in 2005, the pro-universality view, reflecting the opinion that benefits should not take the beneficiary's current income into account, made a comeback. In a complementary finding that stood out this year, more people believed that the situation should remain as it is and fewer recommended eliminating benefits for those with high incomes. Importantly, the change was reflected in the intensity of feelings and opinions on this subject and the differences among the population groups. Most of the public, however (72 percent as against 80 percent last year) still seems to believe that some kind of means test should be applied.

The group that stood out most in its demand to eliminate benefits for the high income population was the 50–64 age cohort (40 percent in 2005, 52 percent in 2004, 45 percent in 2003). The groups that were most conspicuous in favoring the status quo, like last year, were the Arabs (40 percent) and the self-employed (38 percent). The distribution of responses in 2005, as in 2004, was only slightly affected by the respondents' financial situation. Among the respondents as a whole, however, support for eliminating benefits for the economically well-off decreased from around 40 percent to approximately 30 percent.

Another value priority question concerns *education*. Respondents were asked about the contribution of the education system toward narrowing social disparities, an issue raised many times in earlier surveys. In all previous surveys, it was found that respondents think the education system is not contributing enough toward narrowing educational and social disparities and may even be contributing to them. Given this view, coupled with the prominence of the education issue on the public agenda, respondents were asked how important they think this issue is relative to scholastic achievements.

The question was: *What, in your opinion, should be the main consideration in resource allocation for the education system?* The results (percent) follow:

Distinct preference for pupils of weak socio-economic background	36
Distinct preference for pupils who have strong scholastic achievements	11
Standard allocation for all pupils	53

Responses were surprising. Given the findings of the previous surveys, the expectation was that respondents would prefer that the education system strive to narrow disparities, i.e., to prefer a policy of affirmative action in the allocation of Education Ministry resources. Instead, most respondents prefer a

policy of “official” equality, reflected in standard allocation of resources rather than affirmative action. Nevertheless, it should be noted that the proportion of respondents who believed that affirmative action should be the main criterion in allocating resources was three times greater than those who think high achievers deserve preference. The groups that most strongly favored affirmative action for socio-economically weak pupils were those with low education and religious Jews.

FSU immigrants, on the other hand, expressed different opinions. Only 28 percent of them believed that pupils of weak socio-economic background deserve priority and 36 percent believed that priority should be given to outstanding pupils.

Another sphere that was included among the value priority questions was *labor relations*, with emphasis on the importance that respondents attach to union involvement in making decisions that affect workers. The labor relations system has undergone many changes in recent years. The status of the unions seems to have fallen somewhat; this is connected to the decline in the status of the *Histadrut* (General Federation of Labor) in the eyes of workers and the public at large.

Earlier surveys indicated that the respondents felt the contribution of labor organizations like the *Histradrut* toward protecting workers' rights had decreased. In the 2003 survey, over half of the participants believed that the unions offer workers little protection or none at all (see table). In 2001, a smaller proportion of respondents felt this way.

The question in the previous surveys was: ***To what extent do you think that trade unions such as the Histadrut protect workers' rights?*** The results (percent) follow:

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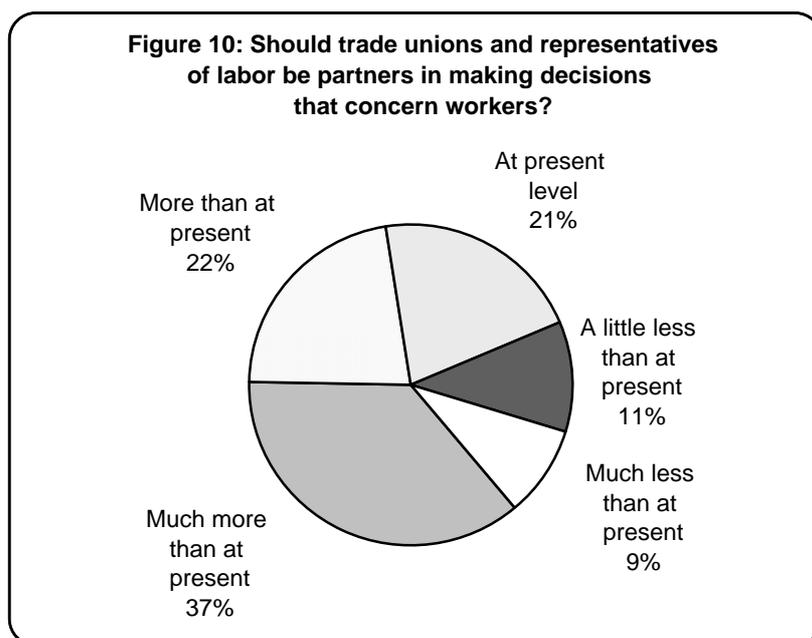
	2001	2003
To a very large extent	5	6
To a large extent	13	12
To some extent	39	31
To a small extent	28	21
Not at all	16	30

In this year's survey, respondents were asked, *Should trade unions and representatives of labor be partners in making decisions that concern workers?* The responses seemed to contradict the dim view of trade unions that had been expressed in the previous surveys. Almost 60 percent of the participants believed that trade unions should play a greater role in decision making than they normally do today. The results are shown in Figure 10.

Thus, while the public is critical of the contribution of trade unions to workers' welfare, it neither opposes nor belittles the involvement or importance of these organizations. On the whole, the public continues to believe that trade organizations have a role to play in labor relations and actually would like to see them become more involved. In the respondents' opinion, the idea of an organization that protects workers is not bankrupt; more than one-third chose the option of "much more [involvement] than at present."

Not all respondents shared this "socialist" attitude. First, the higher their income, the more they opposed union involvement in decision-making. Whereas 70 percent of low-income respondents believed that unions should be more involved than today in making decisions that concern workers, only 47 percent of high income respondents felt this way. The disparity is large and unsurprising; it is only surprising that half of the high income respondents believed it important to increase the involvement of labor organizations in decision-making.

A significant difference was found between salaried employees and the self-employed (some of whom, of course, are also employers): 60 percent of the former and only 36 percent of the latter favor more union involvement. Interestingly, however, more than one-third of the self-employed thought that union involvement should be increased.



FSU immigrants were relatively more opposed to the involvement of the trade organizations than the population at large. This attitude may derive from a tendency to reject anything reminiscent of socialism and the world they left behind.<sup>5</sup> Even so, 51 percent of this group still believed that the unions' involvement should be increased.

<sup>5</sup> For more extensive treatment of this topic, see the Social Survey chapter in the Taub Center report, *Israel's Social Services 2004*.