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## The 2003 Social Services Survey

The Center for Social Policy Studies in Israel conducts an annual public opinion survey to examine the public's views on various social policy issues. The survey is conducted by the Smith Institute, headed by Rafi and Hanoch Smith. In the survey, 1,000 men and women who constituting a representative sample of Israel's adult population (Jews and Arabs aged 18+) were asked twenty-two questions on important social issues – education, health, social disparities, personal security, income, and employment – and nine background questions about their group affiliation in terms of gender, education, income, residence in the country, and the like.<sup>1</sup>

The survey is a complementary tool to those used by the Center to analyze resource allocation for social services by reflecting the views of service recipients, that is, the public at large. This year, as every year, we varied some of the questions. We continued to ask certain questions without changing their wording in order to obtain an indication of trends in the public's views on these social issues.

The survey questions fall into three broad categories:

1. Questions relating to the respondents' assessment of the overall social situation and changes that have occurred in it, with reference to the level of inequality and the social gaps.
2. Questions relating to changes during the past year in the economic situation and the level of service that citizens enjoy, both generally and personally.

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<sup>1</sup> The survey was performed in June, 2003; the sampling error is 3.1 percent.

3. Questions relating to the respondent's attitude toward socioeconomic policy issues in matters that lie at the heart of the public debate. One may also regard the responses to these questions as a reflection of the respondents' ideological and political preferences.

We analyze the results of the survey in three sections, each section examining one of the groups of questions. The analysis makes reference to the overall picture and to the distribution of responses among the various population groups.

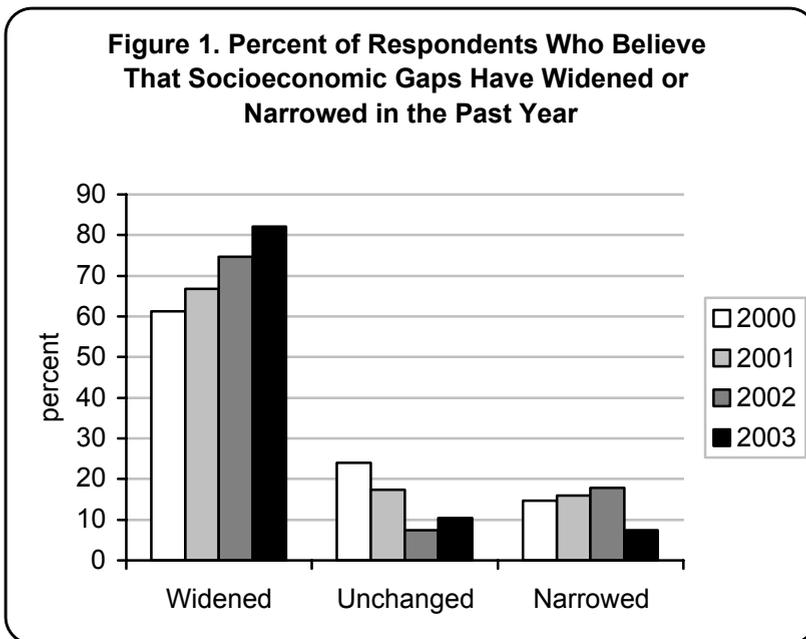
## **1. Equality and Social Gaps**

Israel has been buffeted in recent years by an economic crisis that stems from the global economic slowdown and domestic security events. The crisis, and the ways in which the government has been coping with it, obviously affect the state of Israeli society. Against this background, we asked the public what it felt about the intensity of the social gaps, what influence the government has over widening or narrowing the disparities generally, and how the disparities are reflected in education and health. This part of the analysis includes responses to the following questions:

1. Have the socioeconomic gaps widened or narrowed in the past year?
2. How, in your opinion, have the government's economic policies been affecting the social gaps?
3. In your opinion, do different schools in Israel offer significantly different levels of studies?
4. To what extent, in your opinion, is the education system helping to narrow Israel's social gaps?
5. In your opinion, do all segments of the population receive the same level of health services?

**a. Widening of Social Disparities**

The survey participants' responses definitely revealed the feeling that the state of social equity has been changing recently. Some 82 percent of participants replied that the socioeconomic disparities have worsened during the past year. The entire increase occurred in the group of respondents who believed that the gaps have widened perceptibly. At the same time, the number of those who believed that the situation has not changed increased, and the number of those believing that the gaps have narrowed declined significantly. In short, the feeling of widening social gaps is growing; in 2000, 61 percent of respondents felt this way.

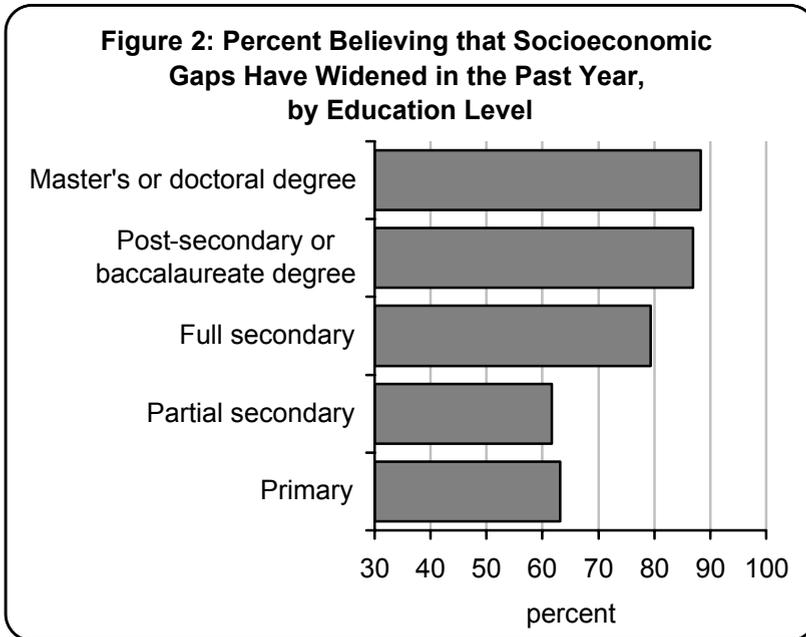


It is common in the Israeli public discourse to point to several social schisms, of which the most noteworthy are country of

origin (Israelis of Asian-African origin and those of European-American origin), religious vs. nonreligious, Arabs vs. Jews, low-income earners vs. high-income earners, immigrants vs. nonimmigrants, residents of peripheral areas vs. those in the center of the country, and women vs. men. Since the first two questions about social gaps were worded generally, it is useful to examine the attitudes broken down by these social groups.

As a rule, there is no significant difference between the origin groups in the assessment of Israel's social gaps. Members of both groups believe that the gaps have widened severely. However, those of Asian-African origin (including Israel-born persons of Asian-African extraction) and former Soviet immigrants stood out in relative terms: the percent of members of these groups who believed that the gaps have widened was lower than among European-American origin Israelis and Israel-born of the second generation. Furthermore, the proportion of members of the Asian-African origin group who believed that the gaps have narrowed or greatly narrowed was almost twice that of the population at large (13 percent as against seven percent).

We found a correlation between education level and the belief that the disparities have worsened. The higher the level of education, the higher the percent who believe the gaps have widened. Nearly two-thirds of those with relatively low education level believe that the gaps have widened; nearly 90 percent of the higher level education believe so. By the same token, about one-fifth of the low education level, as against only a small percent of the higher level of education, stated that the gaps have narrowed.



As for differences by national origin, the events and tensions in the past two years led us to believe that Arabs citizens would be more critical about the widening of social disparities than Jewish citizens. The results surprised us: 70 percent of Arabs who took part in the survey, as against 83 percent of Jews, believed that the gaps have widened and 18 percent as against six percent, respectively, believed that the gaps have narrowed.

When we examined the distribution of responses to the question about the existence of disparities broken down by the respondent's self definition of level of religiosity, we found that the results, on the whole, were similar to the overall pattern of responses. In other words, generally speaking, there was no difference among the groups. Again, however, level of education was a differentiating factor: the more education the respondents had, the more inclined they were to answer the question about whether the gaps have widened in the affirmative.

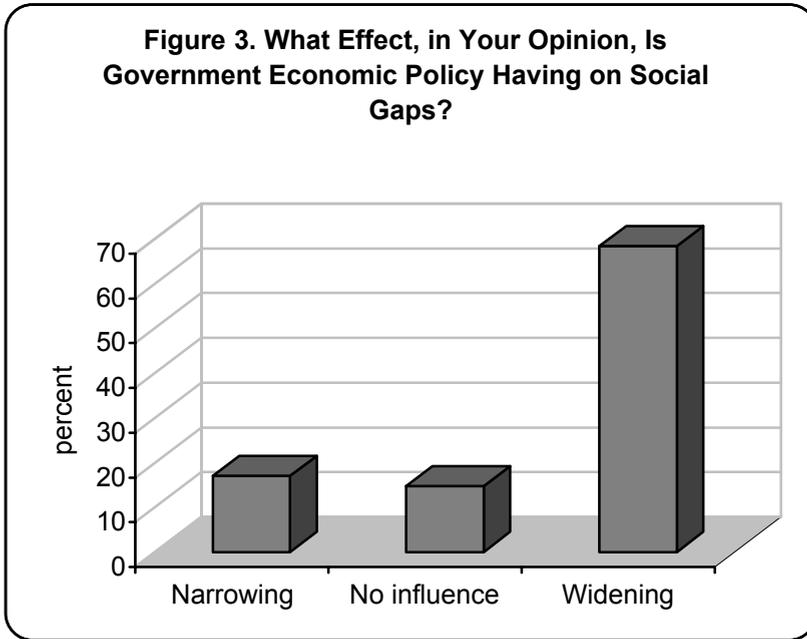
As for the gender distribution, women were more inclined than men, on the whole, to reply that the gaps have widened. This difference was found across all educational levels. Again, however, it was noted that the higher the level of education, the higher the proportion of respondents in the group who believed that the gaps had widened.

Interestingly, too, the respondents' assessments of the extent of widening of gaps did not differ markedly when they were broken down by their level of income. However, the proportions of very low-income and very high-income persons who believed that the disparities had widened were slightly below the average.

***b. The Government's Contribution to Narrowing the Gaps***

Following to these questions, we asked the respondents to gauge the extent of responsibility of government economic policy for the widening of social gaps. This year, much like last year, we found that 70 percent of respondents believe that the government's economic policies are causing the gaps to widen. The remaining responses were equally divided between those who believed that the government has no such influence and those who believed that government policy is contributing in the opposite direction, i.e., helping to narrow the gaps.

With regard to assessing the government's contribution to the situation, the findings resemble those in the previous question about the widening of gaps: a below average proportion of members of weaker social groups – for example, former Soviet immigrants and Arabs – believed the governments policies are widening the gaps and an above average proportion believed that the government is helping to narrow the gaps.



**Table 1. Government’s Contribution to the Narrowing of Gaps – Estimation of the Population, by Origin**  
(percent)

	Total	Israel	Asian-African	European-American	FSU immigrants	Arabs
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100
Narrowing gaps	17	14	18	11	26	27
No influence	15	14	15	12	22	16
Widening gaps	68	72	67	77	52	57

The respondents' assessments of the contribution of government policy to the narrowing of disparities also corresponded to their level of education: the higher the educational level, the more inclined respondents were to judge the government's contribution to the widening of disparities as less effective. As for the cross of origin and education, we found that among the highly educated (master's degree and up), the proportion of persons of Asian-African origin who are convinced that the government is helping widen disparities was far above the average (more than 90 percent as against 75 percent). The percentage of former Soviet immigrants in the same education group who held this belief, however, remained under the average at around 60 percent.

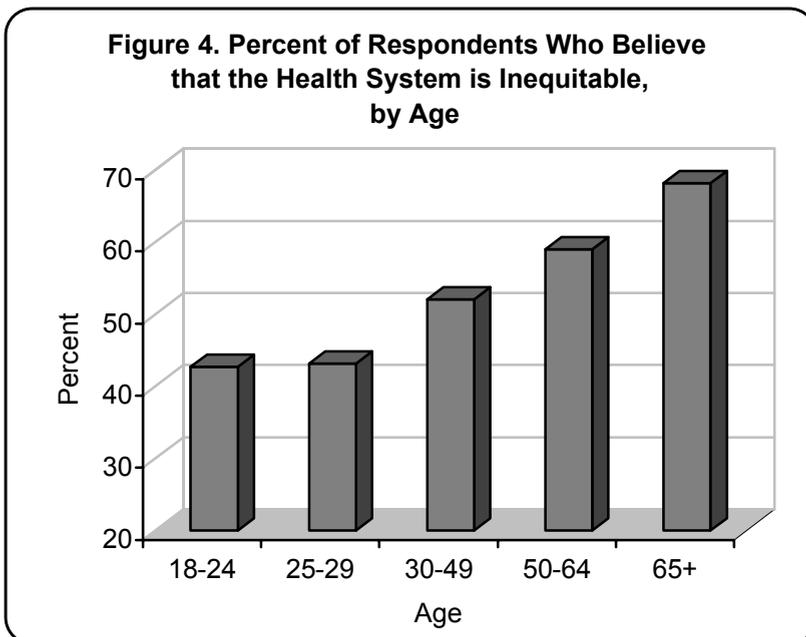
Differences by level of education also stand out on the other side. Whereas no Israel-born respondent with higher education believed that the government is acting to narrow the disparities, about ten percent of the poorly educated believed the government is, in fact, trying to narrow gaps. Furthermore, whereas only a low percentage of highly educated members of the Asian-African origin group believed the government is acting to reduce disparities, 40 percent of the poorly educated in this origin group believed so.

Very interestingly, no significant differences were found among respondents by income level; about two-thirds of members of each income group believed that the government is widening the social disparities.

**In sum**, during the past year, even more so than in last year, people have felt that the socioeconomic gaps have been widening and are blaming the government's economic policies for this. Next we examine these feelings in two important fields, the health system and education.

### ***c. Equality and the Health System***

When survey participants were asked whether all segments of the population receive the same level of health services, they expressed some distinctly negative attitudes about the Israeli health system. Even though the State Health Insurance Law, which purports to deliver equal services to all, guarantees a given level of health services countrywide, many people feel that different population groups receive different levels of service. This year, like last year, more than half of the respondents expressed the belief that there is a large discrepancy in the level of services, and another fourth spoke of a small discrepancy. Only about one-fifth of those questioned believed that the system delivers its services equally. Here, too, we found that the higher educated perceive larger disparities than those with lower education level.



Since there are age related differences in the use of health services, it is of interest to examine the public's opinion about this topic broken down by age. It transpires that the elderly, those aged 65+, are more convinced than members of other groups that the health services are inequitable. Two-thirds of the elderly believe that there are large or very large differences in the level of health services given to the population, as against about half on average in the population at large.

**In sum**, the public perceives the Israeli health system as being inequitable, and the older members of the population, those who on the whole make the greatest use of medical services, are the most convinced of it.

#### ***d. Contribution of the Education System to Equality***

Our previous surveys showed that the Israeli public takes a dim view of the country's education system. One-third of respondents believed that the level of education is not good, one-third gave Israeli education a "passing" grade, and only one-third expressed satisfaction with the level of education.

This year, too, we focused on questions pertaining to the public's assessment of the extent of equality in the education system and the system's contribution to the narrowing of social disparities. This year, much like last year, a large majority of respondents (three-fourths) answered firmly that there are significant discrepancies in the level of studies among schools in Israel. Another one-fifth of respondents spoke about the existence of small discrepancies. Here, as we found in regard to disparities generally, awareness of the gaps was stronger among the higher educated. Additional groups that considered the education system inequitable are those of European-American origin, the religious, and inhabitants of the Southern District (84 percent of respondents in each group).

It is interesting to focus on the responses of members of two specific age groups: the 18-24 year old cohort, recent graduates of the education system, and the 30-49 year old cohort, most of

whom have children in the education system. It turns out that the younger people, those aged 18-24, are less critical on average than the parent group, those in the 30-49 year old cohort. The more critical population is obviously the one made up of consumers of education services (for their children). Therefore, this finding is as relevant as the critical opinion of persons aged 65+ about health services.

If most of the public perceives the education system as inequitable, then presumably the public also considers the system incapable of helping to narrow social gaps. Indeed, when the survey participants were asked whether the education system is narrowing social disparities, one-fourth, a similar ratio to that in the 2002 poll, replied that the system is widening the gaps and another 40 percent believed that it is having no effect whatsoever.

**In sum**, the respondents stressed the disparities in level of studies among schools. Half of the public believes that the education system has had no effect on social gaps in the best case and is exacerbating them in the worst case.

## 2. General versus Personal Situation

We asked for the respondents' *general* opinion about the economic and social situation and asked them whether their *personal* situation had worsened or improved. We wanted to see, among other things, whether they responded in a typical way of indicating grave general social flaws but viewing their own situation in better terms. This item includes responses to ten questions:

1. To what extent, in your opinion, are the recent budget cuts harmful to the level of social services?
2. To what extent, in your opinion, have you or your family been harmed by the recent budget cuts?
3. Has your standard of living and that of your family improved or declined in the past year or two?

4. To what extent does your income level allow your family to meet its basic needs?
5. In comparison with the situation a year or two ago, has there been a change in the level of health services that you and your family receive?
6. During the past year, have you – or a member of your family – refrained from using a vital medical service, such as a visit to the doctor, medicine, or medical equipment due to its cost?
7. Do you, or does a member of your family, feel vulnerable to the possibility of becoming unemployed?
8. To what extent do the current pension arrangements assure the retirement age population an adequate standard of living?
9. To what extent do you feel that the security situation is affecting your daily life or that of your family?
10. To what extent do you feel that you and members of your family are vulnerable to personal violence and crime?

***a. Standard of Living and Level of Social Services***

The responses to the first question, concerning the effect of the recent budget cuts on the social services, clearly showed that a firm majority of Israelis believe that the cuts have caused severe harm to social services. More than 70 percent of the public feels this way and an additional 20 percent believe that the cutbacks have been somewhat harmful.

When we broke the responses down by level of education, we found that while there is a correlation between level of education and opinion about the effect of the budget cuts on social services, the correlation was negative. In other words, the higher the education level, the less inclined respondent's are to believe that the budget cuts have caused a decline in social services.

One may also gauge the differential effect of the government's budget cuts by the differences found among respondents of different income levels. The share of respondents who believe that the budget cuts have harmed the social services

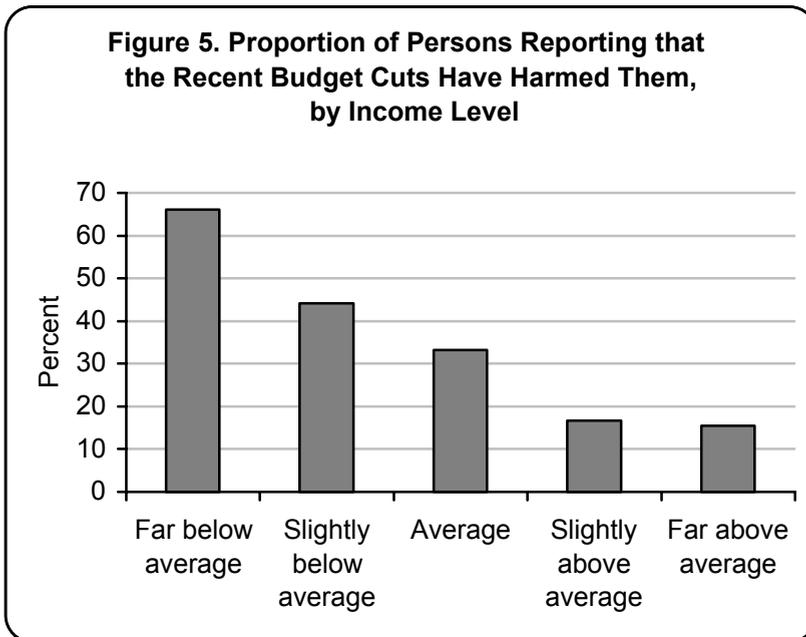
was substantially lower in the high income group than in the low income group (60 percent vs. 77 percent, respectively). Furthermore, while in 2002 the unemployed and *yeshiva* students stated more than other groups that the cutbacks had not harmed the social services, this year a large majority of members of both groups believed that the government budget cuts have been harmful. (This change is most likely due to the targeting of cutbacks in the economic plan.)

Following the general question about the effect of the government budget cuts, we asked the respondents several questions about their own economic situation. We prefaced our discussion by noting that it has been found that there is a tendency amongst respondents to describe their personal situation as better than the general situation. This was somewhat the case in our survey as well. The participants did give negative responses to the questions about their own situation but they were slightly less extreme than the impression given from their responses to the previous question. Some 58 percent of participants stated that their standard of living had fallen during the past year; only eight percent said that it had improved. In 2002, 46 percent of respondents noted a decline in their standard of living, and in the 2001 survey, this was 24 percent, less than half of the rate today. Furthermore, 40 percent replied that they feel severely harmed by the recent cutbacks, and “only” about one-third stated that their level of income hardly allows them to meet basic needs (similar to the previous year).

Generally speaking, we found that persons of high education level and high income judged the adverse effect of the budget cuts on the social services as less severe than members of weaker population groups did. As for the sense of having suffered personally, we found a considerable negative correlation between respondents’ income level and the sense of personal damage caused by the cutbacks: the higher the income level, the lower the proportion of respondents who believed that

they had been severely affected by the budget cuts (Figure 5). The percent of those who felt harmed by the cuts among those whose income level is far below the average was twice as high as that among persons of average income and four times (or more) higher than those in the above average income group.

We also found differences in reporting about personal harm by level of education. A large majority (80 percent) of those with low education levels (those who have a primary education only) replied that they and their families have been “severely” or “very severely” harmed by the recent cutbacks – as opposed to one-third of higher educated participants. Persons with medium level of education had a moderate rate of reporting severe harm in view of the cutbacks.



It is interesting to note differences in the effect of economic policy on persons of the same education level but with different income levels. Some 60 percent of those with low education levels (up to eleven years of education) reported that they had been “severely” or “very severely” harmed. The share of respondents who had *both* low education and low income and were “severely” or “very severely” harmed climbed to three-fourths. At the other extreme, that of the highly educated, about half of the respondents in this group who had below-average income reported having been severely harmed, whereas the share of those severely harmed among those with above-average income was much smaller – about one-fifth. This shows that the economic policy has also had negative effects on the stronger social groups.

It is of interest to form an impression of the groups who, in their own judgment, have been less affected by the economic policy measures. The share of respondents who reported having been harmed was under the average among former Soviet immigrants (about one-fourth) and pensioners (about one-third). What impression should these findings give us? It could be that the economic policy was not as harsh on the weaker groups, or their economic situation may have been bad even before the recent budget cuts, making the additional negative effect of the recent cutbacks relatively slight.

We found that 60 percent of respondents reported a decline in their standard of living. The decrease, however, was greater among those whose incomes were far below the average (three-fourths of them), those with low education level (72 percent), and the unemployed (65 percent). Whose standard of living rose during this time? As stated, only eight percent of respondents said that this had occurred, but they accounted for nearly one-fifth of those in the high income group. No significant correlation was found between level of education and perceived changes in standard of living.

***b. Household Income and Basic Needs***

When the participants were asked about their ability to meet basic needs – theirs and those of their households – they responded similar to last year. One-third said that they could hardly get by on their income (or could not get by at all). About half (45 percent) responded that they could meet their basic needs reasonably well, and one-fifth (22 percent) said that they could meet their needs with no difficulty or without great difficulty.

Unsurprisingly, we found a strong correlation between the responses to this question and the respondents' economic situation. One-third of all respondents claimed that they could hardly meet their needs on their income, but the proportion rose to 60 percent among those of low income and was only seven percent among those whose income greatly exceeded the average.

Interestingly, the responses of former Soviet immigrants resembled the average among the population at large, i.e., one-third. The proportion of those reporting that they cannot meet their needs on their income – 36 percent – is even lower than the rate among those of Asian-African origin, 41 percent. These rates are an indication that the economic integration of the former Soviet immigrants has succeeded to some extent. It is also interesting that one-fourth of the highly educated reported that they could hardly meet their needs on their income, a rate that does not fall far short of the general average.

It is of interest to compare the responses to this question among three groups that are known for their low socioeconomic level: former Soviet immigrants, *haredim* (ultra-orthodox), and Arabs. About one-fifth of *haredim* (21 percent) stated that they could meet their basic needs without difficulty on their income, a rate almost identical to that among overall respondents (22 percent). The rates were slightly lower among former Soviet immigrants (18 percent) and Arabs (17 percent). For those who

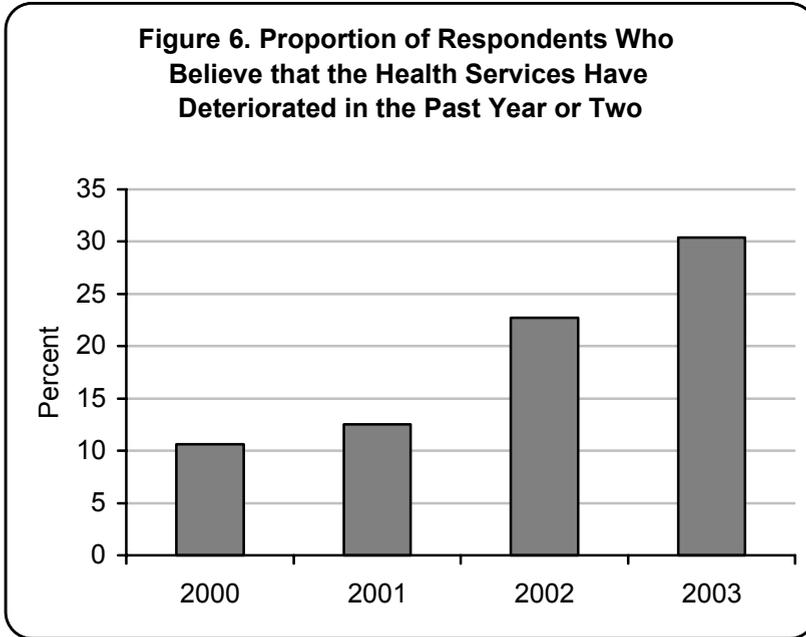
responded that they can hardly meet their needs or cannot meet their needs at all, the rates among the groups at issue – *haredim*, immigrants, and Arabs – were around 40 percent (42 percent, 36 percent, and 44 percent, respectively). Despite the similarity in rates, it is evident that the Arabs are in the poorest situation. The *haredim*, despite their relatively low labor force participation rate, according to self-report are better off.

**In sum**, it is clear, in the respondents' subjective estimation, that the standard of living in Israel is declining and that much of the population has difficulties in meeting basic needs.

### *c. Satisfaction with Health Services*

Previous surveys showed health as one of the fields in which services generally function to the public's satisfaction. A large majority of participants judged the level of health services as "good" or "very good" and fewer than one-fifth gave the health system a failing grade. The current survey shows that a troubling phenomenon noted last year is gathering strength; that is a rising trend in the proportion of respondents who indicate that the level of health services has been declining in recent years. Last year, about one-fourth of the public held this belief; this year the proportion was close to one-third. The proportion of those who believe that the health services have improved declined drastically, from 42 percent to only 16 percent.

Additionally, the share of those who describe the situation as having worsened rises steeply with age and comes to half of the members of the oldest group, 65+. Thus, the "heaviest" users of medical services are far less satisfied with them than the public at large. Profiling the respondents by education, we found that those with less education felt more strongly than the others that the health services have deteriorated.



Interestingly, this year, like last year, a slightly higher proportion of the Arab population than of the Jewish population stated that the health services have improved. A similar trend was evident among *haredi* and religious Jews, among whom a larger share than among the non-religious pointed to strong improvement. This probably reflects an improvement in their access to health services during the past decade and, especially, in the past few years.

In contrast, in an especially troubling finding, about one-fifth of respondents stated that they had had to refrain at least once in the past year from obtaining a vital medical service due to the required co-payment. This rate rose to about 30 percent in the weakest groups (and 40 percent among those with low education levels). This is cause for concern. Moreover, five percent of the population at large, eight percent of those in the 65+ age group, and more than ten percent of former Soviet immigrants and

those of low income reported having had to refrain from obtaining vital medical service “many” or “very many” times. In a breakdown by education level there were even higher rates, e.g., almost 15 percent among those with low education level refrained from use.

There are those who maintain that this is positive and is an indication that the public is refraining from using services unnecessarily. It is hard to believe though, that the weaker population groups, of all people, are best able to judge when a medical service is needed and when it is not.

#### ***d. Sense of Job Security***

Employment was the first field to be affected by the onset of the economic crisis. The downward trend in employment, which was especially distinct during the past year, is reflected in the past three years’ surveys. When asked, “Do you, or does a member of your family, feel vulnerable to the possibility of becoming unemployed?” more than two-thirds of respondents this year answered that they felt highly or somewhat vulnerable to this possibility. A large number of respondents, about 40 percent, claimed that they feel highly or very highly vulnerable to the possibility of unemployment, and another one-fourth said that they were somewhat vulnerable.

This year’s survey results, like last year’s, show clearly that the gap between the rich and the poor in Israeli society has been widening in recent times and has become evident in regard to personal job security. Low income persons express greater concern than high income persons about the prospect of becoming unemployed. One possible explanation for this is that they are employed in occupations that are more prone to layoffs. However, the finding also reflects their lack of financial reserves, which makes unemployment much more real and menacing.

As the adverse effects of protracted unemployment ripple into widening social strata, disparities among origin groups in

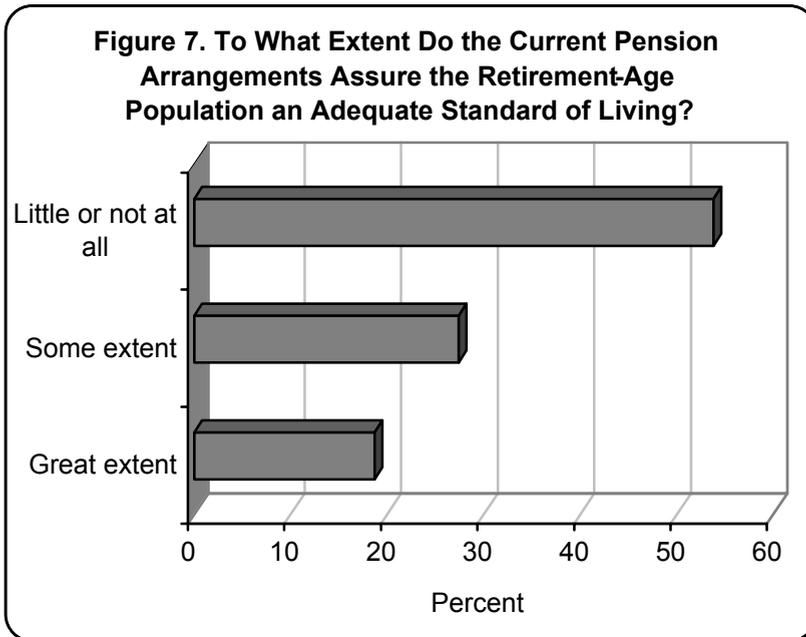
this respect are becoming blurred. The proportion of Arabs who believe that they are highly vulnerable to the possibility of unemployment is slightly higher than the share of Jews who hold this view (48 percent and 42 percent, respectively). The proportion of respondents of low educational level who are afraid of unemployment is only slightly higher than that of the well educated. When we break down the responses on this issue by parent's country of origin, for the Israel born, we find slightly greater differences: 41 percent of the second generation Israel born (the lowest proportion encountered), 45 percent of the Israel born of European-American origin, and 51 percent the Israel born of Asian-African origin. The share of former Soviet immigrants is around 40 percent, approximating the overall average. Last year, *haredim* exhibited less concern about the risk of unemployment; this year, however, the share of *haredim* who have this concern resembles the countrywide average.

**In sum**, much of the Israeli public suffers from perceived job insecurity and expresses serious concern about the possibility that they or some member of their family will become unemployed. This feeling crosses lines of education, nationality, and origin; differences remain between income groups.

#### *e. Adequacy of Pension Arrangements*

As unemployment rises and jobs become more difficult to find, especially for older people, the pension issue is becoming increasingly significant. Accordingly, we asked the survey participants about the extent to which the current pension arrangements assure the retirement-age population an adequate standard of living. More than half of the participants believed that the current pension arrangements do not provide such an assurance and, at the other extreme, only one-fifth believes that the arrangements are very adequate. It is especially interesting that no significant difference was found in the responses by age; the proportion of young people who consider today's pension arrangements inadequate is actually higher. It is important to

note that the survey was conducted before the recent changes in pension arrangements went into effect. It is likely that a more serious picture would be obtained today.



#### ***f. Sense of Personal Security***

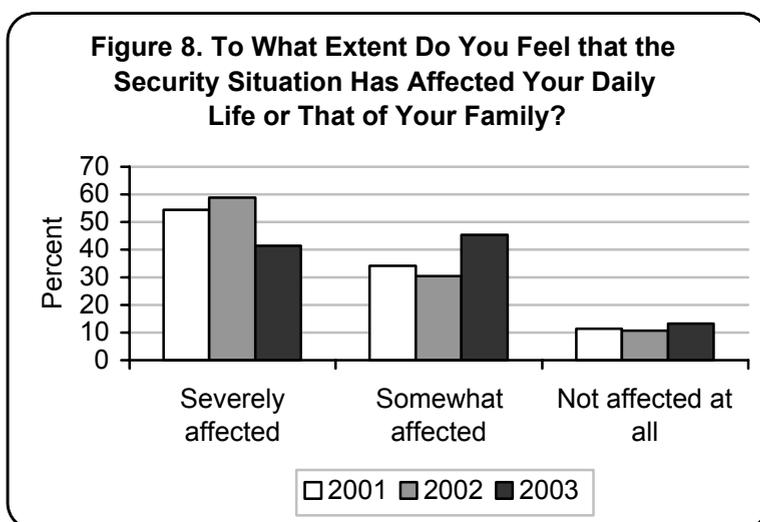
Israelis in the past few years have been living in the shadow of the protracted and intensified conflict with the Palestinians. The period of severe security concern for most Israelis has been greatly lengthened and many Israelis live in a constant state of fear of terror attacks. Additionally, since there has been a simultaneous steep increase in personal violence and crime, the Israeli way of life is also accompanied by concern about the possibility of becoming a casualty of non-terror related violence. We asked the public what it feels about these two dimensions of personal security.

**The effects of the security situation.** Some 40 percent of respondents in the 2003 survey stated that the security situation has seriously affected their daily lives and those of their families. This high rate indicates that, on the whole, Israelis remain considerably fearful. Nevertheless, citizens' sense of physical security is one of the aspects of Israeli life that have improved relative to the past. In 2002, nearly 60 percent of respondents reported having been severely affected by the security situation in terms of their lifestyle. The decline in the share of those who gave this response may reflect an improvement in the sense of security due to the intensive military and other security actions that have taken place. It may also mean that the public has become emotionally accustomed to life amidst a serious security situation and has rearranged its daily affairs to adapt to the new reality (shopping in protected places, enhancing the security of children's travel by using private vehicles and organized transports, conducting leisure activities in private homes instead of public places, etc.). A third possibility is that the economic hardships have crowded out the security concerns from the public's consciousness.

This year, like last year, different population groups expressed different feelings regarding their security. At one extreme were those of Asian-African origin – especially those born in Asia or Africa – and former Soviet immigrants, who reported above average rates of a violation of their personal security. The sense of vulnerability among respondents of European-American origin was under the average. We examined whether the differences in feeling are rooted in income differences between the origin groups and found that the inter-group disparity in level of anxiety remained at most income levels.

We found that Israeli Arabs had an average level of anxiety that usually tended to rise with income level, possibly because Israeli Arabs who have high incomes are more engaged with the Jewish population and, therefore, feel more exposed to

terrorism. Last year, Arabs reported at much higher rates than Jews that the security situation had affected their daily lives. This year the tables were turned; a higher proportion of Arabs (37 percent) than of Jews (26 percent) reported that the security situation had had little or no effect on their way of life. The proportion of those reporting a severe effect was nearly identical in both groups.



Women expressed much more anxiety about the security situation than men (one-half as against one-third). An inverse correlation was found between the individual's economic situation and their feelings of vulnerability: low income respondents felt more vulnerable than those of high income. This may have to do with the extent of exposure to public transport and more crowded shopping centers that are more difficult to protect.

**Vulnerability to crime.** More than 60 percent of respondents reported at various levels that they feel vulnerable to criminal violence. About one-fourth reported that they feel somewhat

vulnerable and 18 percent that they feel severely vulnerable. Almost 40 percent of respondents reported that they do not feel vulnerable to criminal violence at all.

Differences were found when we divided the population along a number of socio-economic factors. The group that felt most susceptible to violence was the poorly educated, 30 percent of whom reported feeling severely threatened. Among the origin groups, those born in Asia or Africa stood out for their sense of severe vulnerability to crime (35 percent gave this response). At the other extreme were *haredim* and Arabs, who reported in relatively high percentages that they did not feel exposed to violence at all. As for immigrants, we found an above average sense of safety from criminal violence. Thus, previous findings that pointed to a strong feeling of exposure to crime among immigrants were not replicated.

In view of the many publications about the extent of violence against women, it was interesting to find no difference between men and women in terms of sense of vulnerability. In fact, more men than women (ten percent vs. six percent) felt severely exposed to personal violence. Obviously, the question made no specific reference to the issue of domestic violence and the responses may not express the sense of vulnerability in this respect. Those in the oldest group of participants (65+) did not express a strong feeling of vulnerability to crime or personal violence. About half felt that they were not exposed at all to criminal violence – a greater proportion than among younger age groups; only a small percent felt very severely exposed.

It is also interesting to note that the public's feeling about the extent of its vulnerability to criminal violence has not changed over the years: about one-fifth of the public continues to feel severely or very severely exposed to criminal violence.

### **3. The Public's Views on Ideological Social Issues**

In preparing this year's survey, we chose to include several questions regarding societal and individual values – matters beyond day-to-day problems. Thus, the group of questions discussed in this part of the report allowed participants to express general ideological views about various social issues.

It was of interest to see whether we could find a common denominator in the public's responses that represents a coherent underlying set of values relevant to the specific issues of the questions raised. For example, would a person who favors the narrowing of social gaps also tend to favor the equalization of working conditions for foreign and Israeli workers or more lenient terms for granting unemployment compensation at times of rising unemployment? How would this person feel about using a means test in determining eligibility for National Insurance benefits? On the other hand, it is possible that a person's attitude is determined solely by his/her specific situation in each matter addressed by the survey questions. For example, an unemployed person may simultaneously favor more lenient terms of unemployment compensation, a tougher policy toward foreign workers, and the elimination of means tests for the receipt of benefits. Similarly, a person with a large household may favor continued use of the existing child-allowance payment criteria even if he/she has a relatively high income. And so on.

This part of the report concerns itself with the following survey questions:

1. Assuming that there is no choice but to cut the state budget, which of the following areas should be affected the least?
2. In your opinion, should National Insurance benefits be reduced or even eliminated for members of high income groups?
3. The current method of paying child allowances is clearly skewed in favor of large families. Do you favor this?

4. In view of the economic situation and the rise in unemployment, should the terms of eligibility for unemployment compensation be changed?
5. What policy should be applied toward foreign workers?
6. To what extent, in your opinion, do labor unions such as the Histadrut protect workers' rights?
7. Some claim that there is an essential conflict between a policy that aims to narrow social and economic gaps and one that encourages economic growth. Do you agree?

***a. The Desired National Priorities***

Last year (2002), we asked the survey participants the following question: in order to improve the state of social services in Israel, which area – several options were given – is especially worthy of bolstering up in the state budget? More than 40 percent of respondents chose the issue of reducing unemployment, as opposed to 36 percent in 2001 and 30 percent in 2000. Education ranked second on the list of urgent problems in 2002; one-third of respondents specified this area (in contrast to 2001, when education and unemployment were of equal importance, and 2000, when it exceeded unemployment and all other fields).

This year, we asked a slightly different question: “Assuming that there is no choice but to cut the state budget, which of the following fields should be affected the least?” We presented the participants with the following options: defense, health, education, infrastructure, public security, welfare services, and support for weaker population groups. Notwithstanding the difficult security and economic situation, in 2003 education was the field chosen by the highest proportion of respondents as the one that deserves protection from budget cuts. About one-third of respondents believed that education should be left unscathed. About one-fifth chose welfare services and support for weaker population groups; slightly less than one-fifth chose defense.

It turns out that respondents' insistence on protecting education from budget cuts rises in correlation with their level of education – from 20 percent among the poorly educated to 40 percent among those with higher education. Only the poorly educated considered welfare services and support for weaker population groups more important than education. (About one-third of respondents in this group favored welfare services, as against less than one-fourth who favored education.)

**Table 2. Which of the Following Fields Should Be Affected the Least by Budget Cuts? Responses Itemized by Respondents' Education Level**

<b>Field</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>Primary an partial secondary</b>	<b>Completed Secondary</b>	<b>Higher Education</b>
Education	31	23	27	35
Defense	19	19	19	19
Welfare services	22	30	23	21
Health	14	14	14	13
Other	14	14	17	12

Beyond the differences related to education in prioritizing social issues, there were also notable differences between other groups. For the *haredi* population, for example, the most important field to protect is education (one-third chose it), followed by welfare services and support for the weak (30 percent) and health (15 percent). Defense attracted only a small percentage of respondents in this group. For the religious, in contrast, the priorities were headed by welfare services and support for the weak (28 percent), followed by education (about one-fourth) and, defense (one-fifth of respondents). The non-religious population assigned the greatest importance to education, as the *haredim* did and at an even higher rate (35 percent), followed by defense (more than one-fifth of respondents) and welfare services and support for the weak.

As for breakdown by income, low income respondents gave education priority, followed very closely by welfare services and support for the weak (one-fourth of respondents), whereas more than twice as many high income respondents favored education over welfare services.

Interestingly, only the group of former Soviet immigrants assigned marked priority to defense (30 percent). One may explain this partly by noting the immigrants' responses to the question about the harm they perceived by the security situation. As we recall, they had the highest rates (more than half) of reporting that the security situation has severely affected their lives. This may have to do with their economic situation, since they make greater use than other Israelis do of public transport, which is susceptible to terror attacks. They may also feel that their economic circumstances force them to live in more dangerous and vulnerable places, resulting in higher levels of anxiety.

The priorities of the Arab population strongly resemble those of the Jewish population. The difference is that Arab respondents rank health above defense while Jews rank defense in third place, ahead of health. The slight differences between the population groups are interesting in view of the vast social and economic gaps that separate them.

### ***b. The Social Safety Net***

The policy of slashing social service budgets has brought the issue of National Insurance benefits to the fore in public debate in Israel. Various ideas about the methods of reducing these benefits have been broached in many discussions about the matter. The next three questions in our survey deal with social security, a field for which the National Insurance Institute is largely responsible. At issue here are benefits that are usually paid out without means tests (child allowance, general disability benefit, and old-age pensions) and unemployment compensation. We wished to examine the possibility of finding

a pattern in the responses to these questions that would give an indication of the public's attitude toward the general issue of social benefits in the Israeli welfare state.

**The first question concerned National Insurance benefits for persons with high income.** The public's views on this issue have changed since last year (2002). In the 2002 survey, one-third of respondents favored the total elimination of benefits for economically strong population groups, one-fourth demanded severe cutbacks, and more than 40 percent preferred to either leave the situation unchanged (26 percent) or to reduce benefits slightly (17 percent). In the current survey, almost 40 percent favored the elimination of benefits for high income earners and another 30 percent supported the possibility of cutting them back severely. Only 15 percent favored the status quo and the same percentage preferred to lower the benefits only slightly.

Interestingly, we found a similarity between the two extreme income groups, the lowest and the highest. About one-third of respondents in both groups favored the total elimination of benefits. The moderate income groups, in contrast, expressed higher levels of support – 40-50 percent – for the total elimination of benefits for persons of high income.

The second question pertained to a matter that has recently attracted the public's attention – **the current method of paying out child allowances, which works to the benefit of large families.**<sup>2</sup> Less than half of the public (44 percent) strongly or very strongly favors the current method. About one-fifth favored the method somewhat and another 36 percent very strongly opposed it. The previous survey elicited similar results, although a slight move toward opposing the current method is evident.

On this issue, respondents' levels of income and education correspond to their support of continued use of the current child-

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<sup>2</sup> It should be borne in mind that the survey was performed in June 2003, before the most recent changes in the child-allowance system were implemented.

allowance method. All population groups that have a high proportion of large families favored the existing method at above the average rates – *haredim* (95 percent), the poorly educated (nearly 70 percent), the religious, those whose incomes are far below the average (60 percent), and the Asian-African born and the Arabs (55 percent).

An interesting change took place in the attitude of former Soviet immigrants toward this issue. In the previous survey, more than 40 percent of former Soviet immigrants favored the current child-allowance method even though their families, on average, have fewer children than non-immigrant families. In the current survey, the share of those in favor fell to less than one-third.

The third question that we asked the participants had to do with **unemployment compensation** and whether the terms for receiving it should be changed. About 40 percent responded that the terms should be toughened severely or somewhat (at equal rates); the rest were divided equally between those who wished to leave the situation as it is and those who would like to ease the terms.

The most noteworthy finding is, not surprisingly, that the unemployed and members of groups that expressed greater fear of unemployment are much more likely than the average to favor more lenient terms for the granting of unemployment compensation. The strongest supporters of greater leniency were those in the lowest income groups, the *haredim* and the unemployed (roughly 40 percent in each group). Similar rates were found among former Soviet immigrants and people in the 25-29 year old age cohort.

Several groups were markedly in favor of tougher unemployment compensation terms. The strongest support for such a change, at a rate of 60 percent, was expressed by those with slightly above-average income, followed closely by employers and respondents with income far above the average – more than half of whom favored stiffer terms. We found similar

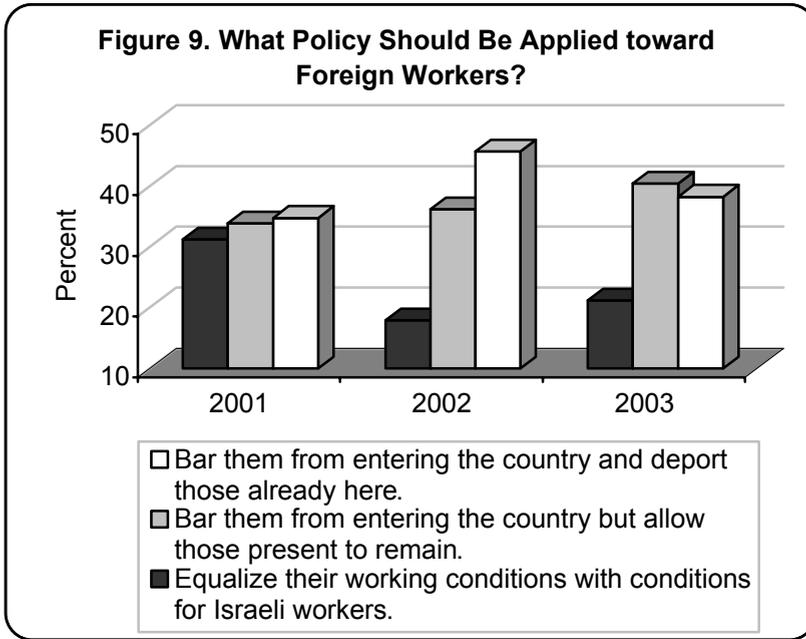
rates among those born in Europe-America and those in the 50-64 year old age cohort. The findings leave no doubt that members of more affluent social groups tend to favor tougher terms for unemployment compensation.

### ***c. The Foreign Worker Issue***

Although the issue of foreign workers is a separate one, the public tends to link it to other issues related to labor and unemployment. The public's views on foreign workers changed slightly in the past year. In the 2002 survey, almost half of the participants demanded the closing of the country's borders to foreign workers and the deportation of those already in the country. This year, the proportion of those who felt this way fell to less than 40 percent, approximating the level in previous years. At the same time, the proportion of those who favored the equalization of foreign workers' working conditions with those of other workers in Israel increased slightly, from 18 percent in 2002 to 21 percent this year. Admittedly, the changes are slight; they indicate that there is a great deal of resistance to the presence and employment of foreign workers. However, this may signal the beginning of a trend of change in the public's attitude toward the phenomenon, i.e., the view that the best way to tackle the issue is by eliminating the incentive to employ cheap labor.

Respondents who are directly or indirectly affected by the influx of foreign workers are strongly represented among those who favored barring the entry of foreign workers. Arabs (60 percent), the Asian-African born, and the poorly educated (about half of the respondents in each group) stand out among them. We also found differences in the population's attitude toward foreign workers by extent of religiosity. *Haredim* were exceptionally strong in their demand to bar foreign workers from the country and to deport those already here (nearly 60 percent) and about half of the religious felt the same way. The religious opposition to foreign workers may have an ideological

dimension, that is to maintain the Jewish nature of the state, and may not be prompted by economic factors alone.



At the other extreme, we found that respondents of European-American origin took a slightly more liberal attitude toward foreign workers. Even among them, however, the rates of support for the equalization of working conditions did not exceed 30 percent.

#### ***d. Evaluating the Labor Unions***

With the reality of continuing unemployment, as social services face repeated cutbacks, and as the social safety net has ever-widening “holes” in it, it is very important to have institutions that can protect workers and defend them from erosion of their rights. The same may be said in regard to toughening the terms of eligibility for unemployment compensation, revising the

pension rules, establishing means test for National Insurance benefits, and similar matters. A strong labor union is definitely such an institution, and the ability of such organizations to do their job depends to a great extent on the public's faith in them and willingness to support them in their struggles.

Against this background, we asked the participants about **the extent to which, in their opinion, labor unions such as the *Histadrut* protect workers' rights**. It should be borne in mind that we asked the question at the height of the *Histadrut's* struggle against the government's economic plan.

We found that proportionately few members of the public credit the labor unions with doing their job. Fewer than one-fifth of our survey participants believed that these organizations are protecting workers' rights to a large extent and more than half view them as protecting the public little (31 percent) or not at all (21 percent). As one would expect, we found differences among population groups, some of which are supposed to receive a maximum of protection from the labor unions.

The Arab population held the labor unions in the highest esteem; 40 percent of Arab respondents believed that they protect workers to a large extent.

When we broke the respondents down on the basis of their work status, we found that the share of employees, low-wage earners, and the unemployed who believe that the unions are protecting their rights does not exceed one-fourth and is usually about one-fifth. The elderly and the pensioners, those who need the labor unions' protection the most, are strongly critical: only 14 percent of them believe that the unions are protecting their rights and nearly 60 percent believe that they are not doing so. Even former Soviet immigrants generate slight support for labor unions; only ten percent of them believe that the organizations are protecting workers' rights while 70 percent believe that they are not doing so at all. One of the most interesting phenomena that we found is that employers and employees feel basically the same way and are close to the overall average. The public's

responses to this question suggest that the heads of the labor unions should give the matter their attention and thought.

*e. Narrowing of Gaps or Economic Growth – Are They Really Mutually Exclusive?*

The next question was presented as a summation of sorts for the cluster of “ideological” questions: **“Some claim that there is an essential conflict between a policy that aims to narrow gaps and one that encourages economic growth. Do you agree?”**

The responses indicate that the Israeli public is severely divided about the value of equality and the importance of narrowing social gaps. The public has not really made up its mind about what it prefers – to narrow the gaps or to achieve economic growth. The survey participants’ responses were divided more or less equally, one-third giving preference to the narrowing of gaps, one-third asserting that economic growth should come first, and one-third replying that the two goals are not mutually exclusive.

When we examined the correlation between the respondents’ answers and their socioeconomic background, we found that the distribution of responses by income usually confirms the notion that “social being determines consciousness.” About 40 percent of participants with below average income preferred a policy that would attempt to narrow gaps; only 20 percent of persons with above-average income shared this preference. In contrast, 40 percent of those with income far above the average preferred economic growth, as against about one-fourth of those whose incomes were far below the average. Respondents of European-American origin, people with income slightly above the average, and those with higher education (about half of members of each group) did not consider the narrowing of gaps and economic growth mutually exclusive.

**In sum**, our analysis of the responses to the survey questions indicates that, when asked for their opinion about the existing situation and when asked to compare the current situation with

the past, respondents tend to reply on the basis of their immediate and cumulative experience. This occurred in the responses of elderly and retired participants in regard to health services, those of the unemployed and the poor concerning fear of unemployment, and those of respondents at large in respect to changes in their standard of living.

As for questions about issues that touch upon the respondent directly, we found that the responses were rather predictable and correlated with the respondent's immediate interest. Thus, for example, *haredim* and Arabs favor the continuation of the current child-allowance system and unemployed and low income respondents prefer more lenient criteria for unemployment compensation.

When the direct motive is less evident and a more general opinion is solicited, additional factors apparently begin to have an effect. They include strong ideological factors, as in the attitudes of *haredim* against foreign workers and those of former Soviet immigrants against labor unions.

The responses to a large portion of the questions are influenced more by respondents' education and income than by other factors. Even when, at first sight, the most influential factor would appear to be ethnic origin or extent of religiosity, it turned out that after the respondents' education and income were controlled for, the influence of the group affiliation factor has almost no effect. We did, however, find areas in which the affiliation factor influenced the responses even after the education and income factors were controlled. In this context, *haredim*, former Soviet immigrants, and Arabs behaved uniquely in their responses to a large proportion of questions.

As for the general impression given by the responses, one may say with certainty that the public is feeling the effects of the economic crisis acutely. In most respondents' opinion, the level of social services has deteriorated, the socioeconomic gaps have widened, and the standard of living has declined. The prevalent feeling among the public is that the government and its policies

have a strong influence on the situation. By extension, if the government wishes to correct the situation, it would seem to have a rather broad public mandate to act simultaneously to stimulate economic growth and to narrow social gaps. Furthermore, there is broad support for measures that would base social benefits on a means test and reduce the population of foreign workers. The steps that would earn the widest support are those that would advance the education and health systems, even at the expense of the defense budget.