

Executive Summary

Trends in Religiosity Among the Jewish Population in Israel

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What will the religious makeup of Israel's Jewish population look like in the coming decades? According to the projections of the Central Bureau of Statistics (CBS), the Haredi (ultra-Orthodox) population will compose about 50 percent of Israel's Jewish population by 2059.

These projections have raised serious concerns for Israel's future economic growth given the education and employment patterns of contemporary Haredim. However, there are a number of significant demographic shifts occurring, some of which, it seems, have not been fully accounted for in the CBS forecasts.

This study examines trends in religious mobility among Israeli Jews, as reflected in the movement of students between sectors in the education system, and finds that the majority of the movement is towards less religious streams.

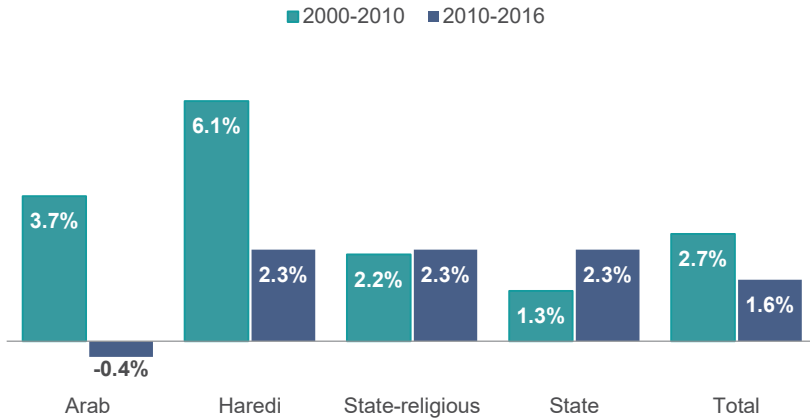
First grade enrollment and fertility rates

The study determines the number of students in 1st grade according to type of school supervisory authority, and compares this to their expected number given their subpopulation fertility rates. Fertility rates are much higher among Haredi Jews than among National Religious Jews, and higher among National Religious Jews than among traditional and secular Jews.

As expected, the number of students enrolled in the Haredi education stream increased at the fastest rate between 2001 and 2015: from about 16,700 1st graders to about 28,000. In the State-religious stream, the increase was from about 15,000 to about 21,500 students, and in the State education stream from about 45,000 to about 62,500.

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Figure 1. Average annual change in the number of 1st grade students



Source: Nachum Blass and Yossi Shavit, Taub Center
 Data: Ministry of Education, *Transparency in Education: Budget*

However, when those growth rates in 1st grade enrollment are disaggregated into different periods within the 15-year timespan, significant changes in growth can be seen. As shown in the figure above, growth rates were much lower in the Arab and Haredi sectors between 2010 and 2015 than in the preceding 10 years, and they were much higher in the State (secular) sector. Only in the State-religious sector was there similar growth rates in both periods.

Net flow towards less religious education streams

Between 1st and 8th grade, many more students move toward less religious education streams than in the opposite direction. Specifically, between 2001 and 2015, there was a net flow (subtracting transfers in the opposite direction) of 9.0 percent of boys and 6.4 percent of girls from Haredi to one of the less religious streams by 8th grade (about 60 percent to State-religious schools, the rest to State-secular schools).

Likewise, there was a net flow of 16.4 percent of boys and 11.7 percent of girls away from State-religious schools toward the State education stream. Meanwhile, almost 98 percent of the students who attended State schools in 1st grade remained in this stream in 8th grade.

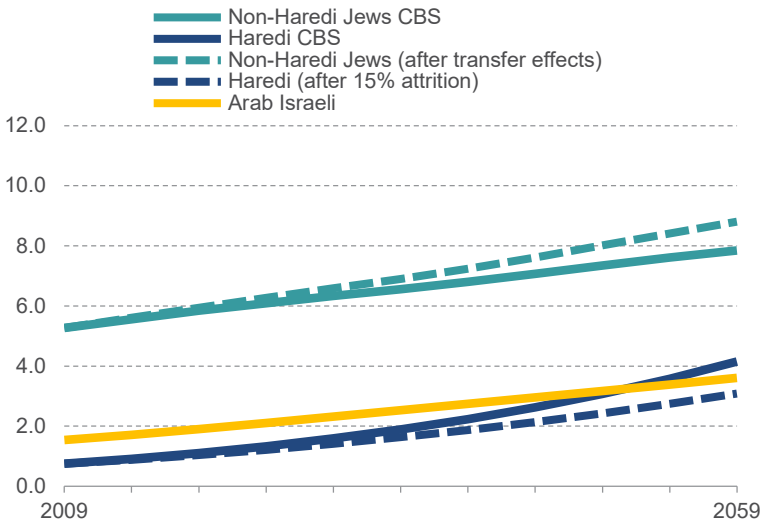
Religious mobility in Israel: Towards secularization

The mismatch between prior fertility and 1st grade enrollment, in addition to the net flow of students from more to less religious education frameworks, point to the importance of understanding religious mobility in Israel. Higher fertility of Haredi and religious families does not automatically translate into higher growth rates in these populations because there is significant religious mobility, and its net effect is to push more people away from religious orthodoxy than toward it.

If these trends continue, they will have a significant impact on the future composition of Israeli society. Though the CBS projections predict that for every 100 non-Haredi Jews in 2059 there will be about 50 Haredim, taking recent trends in religious mobility into account suggests there will be closer to 35 Haredim for every 100 non-Haredi Jews.

Figure 2. The effect of net religious mobility from Haredi to non-Haredi sectors on long-term population projections

Number of individuals in each religious stream, in millions



Note: Based on the medium growth projection of the CBS.

Source: Alex Weinreb and Nachum Blass, Taub Center

Data: CBS, *Long-Range Population Projections for Israel 2009-2059*