

## The 2004 Social Survey

For the past five years, the Taub Center has been conducting a survey of the public's views on a variety of social policy issues.<sup>1</sup> The survey complements our analysis of allocations for the social services by illuminating the opinions of the service recipients – the public at large – and enriches the debate at the Taub Center on major issues in the social services: education, health, social disparities, personal security, income, and employment. This year's survey asked twenty-three questions, in addition to eight background questions providing information on the respondent's gender, education, income level, religious observance, time of immigration, and so on.<sup>2</sup> The survey was conducted in March 2004. In some areas the questions differed from those in previous surveys; in other areas, the same questions were asked to allow an examination of trends and changes in the public's attitude towards these social issues.

The findings are presented in three main dimensions: the public's attitude toward current social policy and its effects on society; the effect of social policy on the individual's personal situation; and, the public's attitudes on issues relating to values and ideologies. The longitudinal aspect allows an analysis of changes in the public's sense of its well-being and its evaluation of government policy in various fields and, in other cases, reveals its attitudes toward important social policy issues.

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<sup>1</sup> As in previous years, Hanoach and Rafi Smith Research and Consulting Ltd., conducted the survey.

<sup>2</sup> The survey sample included 1,000 men and women, a representative sample of the adult population in Israel (aged 18+); the sampling error is 3.1 percent.

The findings indicate significant differences in response patterns between population groups. The criterion for significance used here is a difference of more than 10 percent between responses of one distinct group relative to the general population wide average. Table 1 presents the findings. The table shows that the responses of four population groups – those with incomes far above average, those with primary or partial secondary education, Arabs, and the *haredi* (ultra-Orthodox) population – were significantly different from the responses of other groups. Two additional groups – those with the incomes far below average and immigrants from the former Soviet Union (FSU) – answered the questions somewhat differently from the rest of the population.

Due to this finding, special attention is paid to the variables of income, nationality, and religious observance in the review that follows. In cases where other variables were noteworthy, the findings are presented with particular reference to differences by sex and immigrant/non-immigrant status. It is important to stress that the distinct patterns of response of some groups on socio-economic questions are not at all surprising. In fact, it would have been surprising if people with high income, Arabs, and the *haredi*, for example, expressed similar views. Nevertheless, in some cases, the significant differences between groups were unexpected.

**Table 1. Responses in Which a Given Group Significantly Differs (>10%) from the Population-Wide Average**

<b>Number of differing responses</b>	
Far above average income	15
Arabs	13
Primary or partial-secondary education	12
<i>Haredi</i>	10
Far below average income	7
Immigrants from former Soviet Union	6

## 1. What the Public Thinks about Social Policy Issues

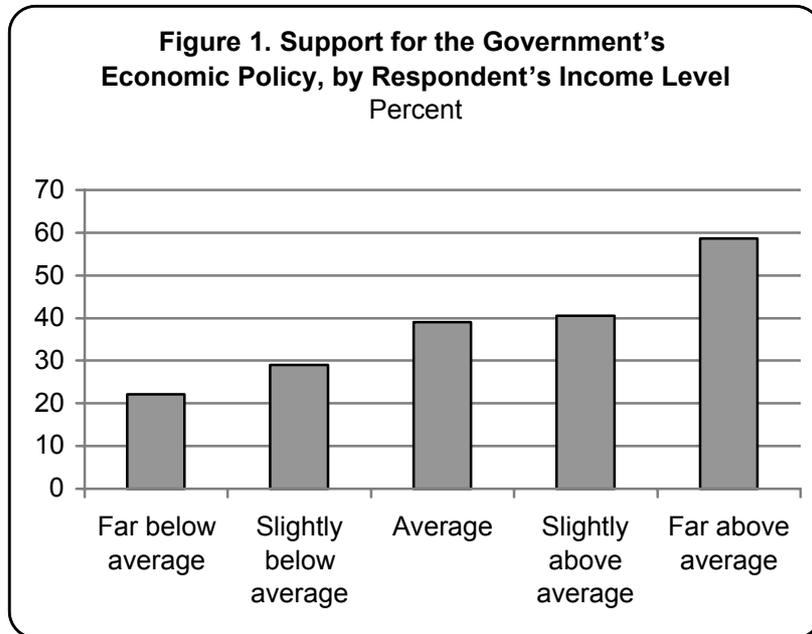
### *What is your opinion of the government's economic policy?*

The first question examined the public's attitude toward the government's economic policy. The question was clear and unambiguous, although its wording referred to general policy and not specifics. This was included in the current survey because it was the subject of much public debate during the past year. The responses show that most of the public is not in favor of the government's economic policy. Furthermore, the number of those who strongly oppose it is almost three times greater than those who are strongly in favor of it (32 percent as opposed to 12 percent).

The lowest rates of support for the economic policy and the highest rates of opposition were found among Arabs and the *haredi* (10 percent in favor, 70 percent opposed). The opposition of these two groups, both of which are typified by very low income levels, may reflect their feeling that the current government disregards their needs on many levels even beyond economic issues, like social and political concerns. It is also possible, however, that various socio-economic policies, primarily the cutbacks in child allowances, were more harmful to these groups than to others.

There is a clear correlation between respondents' income level and their support for government policy. Only one-fifth of respondents in the lowest income group favored the policy; 60 percent of those with high income favored it. While 63 percent of those with low income strongly or very strongly opposed the policy, only about one-fourth of those with very high income opposed it. A similar attitude toward economic policy is found when the population is ranked by education level, although the differences between those with relatively low education (primary or partial secondary) and those with an academic

education was smaller (22 percent and 40 percent in favor, respectively).



Interestingly, women were less inclined than men to support the government's economic policy (27 percent and 40 percent, respectively). Moreover, the proportion of supporters of the policy rises with age. This seems surprising in view of the damage that the policy has imposed on pension plans and benefits. Nevertheless, those in the 65+ age group were the strongest supporters of the policy. Even among them, however, the supporters are a minority (40 percent support or strongly support the policy; 43 percent oppose or strongly oppose it.)

Immigrants from the former Soviet Union are noted for an above average representation among single-parent families, persons of low income and the elderly, that is, members of economically weak groups. They, too, expressed relatively weak opposition to the government's economic policy: only 40 percent opposed the policy strongly as against about half of the population at large. The difference in attitude between the public at large and these two groups – the 65+ age group and immigrants from the FSU – is puzzling. There are several possible explanations for their attitudes.

First, since FSU immigrants gave above average support to the parties that constitute the current government coalition, they may tend to accept this government's socioeconomic decisions. However, at the time of the previous elections, the main issue on the general public political agenda was the political-security issue, so that support for the government does not necessarily also imply support for the government's handling of economic issues.

Second, the cuts in child allowances, a prominent element in the overall cutbacks during the past year, may have had less of an effect on FSU immigrants than on other groups due to their smaller family size. On the other hand, cutbacks in old age allowances, income maintenance, and single parent benefits affected the FSU immigrant group more than others. Nevertheless, their opposition to government economic policy is generally less than that of other groups.

A third possible explanation is that, for some FSU immigrants, their current standard of living, although low relative to that of nonimmigrants, is not all that low and may well be above their pre-immigration level, at least in terms of possibilities as a consumer. Therefore, the policy may seem less harmful to them. It may also be that FSU immigrants have a lower subjective level for "getting by" than other Israeli

population groups, who were raised in the reality of a more affluent society.

Interestingly, when the test for the survey responses' deviation from the population at large is lowered to 5 percent, then the former FSU immigrant group's responses differ significantly for almost all questions (20 out of 23). As a group, FSU immigrants seem usually less critical of the policies of the decision-makers in the areas covered by the survey.

**In sum**, it can be said that the Israeli public opposes the government's economic policy, weak socio-economic groups oppose it more strongly than stronger socio-economic groups, and the extent of opposition decreases with increasing education and higher income.

***What is your opinion about the current level of government allocations for dealing with poverty and assistance to poor families?***

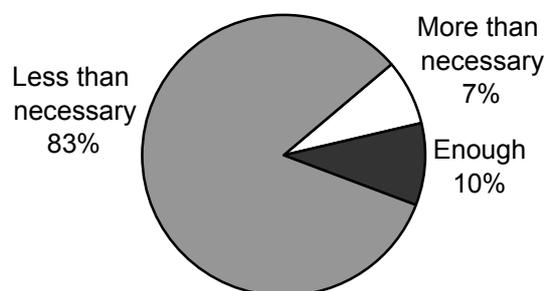
Respondent's answers to the second question are largely consistent with their responses to the first one (and to the question about viewing poverty as a social phenomenon in the next section).

A very significant majority of 83 percent believes that the government is investing too little in dealing with poverty and poor families. Interestingly, stronger socio-economic groups responded in a similar manner. Only a small percent of those with an academic education and very high income (8 percent and 11 percent, respectively) believe that the government is investing much more than necessary in the weaker population groups. Nevertheless, a rather clear trend was observed when respondents were ranked by income: those with higher income tend to a greater extent to respond that the government's investment in poor households is too high or adequate. In regard to this item, like the previous one, FSU immigrants responded similarly to those of high income even though their socio-economic situation generally differs greatly.

Immigrants from the FSU may exhibit relatively strong support of the government's economic policy because they tend not to regard poverty as a problem of society at large. Some members of this group may perceive the poor as people who do not try hard enough to overcome their economic distress and are even directly responsible for their plight. They may perceive things this way having experienced the realities of life in a society where anyone who was willing to work was assured a job by the state. This perception creates a situation where an entire group that seems to have been badly harmed by the government's socio-economic policies objects less to these policies than other groups. What is more, this group supports policies that are intended to force people to go out to work even when no jobs may be available.

**Figure 2. What is Your Opinion about the Current Level of Government Allocations for Dealing with Poverty and Poor Families?**

Percent



It is worth noting the responses of those 65 years and older to this question. The proportion of seniors who believe the state has invested much more than necessary, or enough, in dealing with poverty is higher than among any other group (more than one-fifth). This is difficult to explain in view of what is known about the level of old age benefits, the way they have been reduced, and the proportion of seniors who have no entitlement to any other form of pension. Their stance may reflect a “conservative” approach of the elderly that favors reliance on oneself and “taking responsibility.” Perhaps, however, respondents in this age group fear that any further resource allocation for dealing with poverty will be at the expense of resources earmarked specifically for the elderly. The segment of the elderly population that judges the government’s investment in dealing with poverty to be adequate may also be the one that is relatively comfortable economically (i.e., that have a substantial source of income in addition to old-age benefits).

It was found that women are more likely than men to believe that the state is allocating too little for the treatment of poverty problems. The difference, however, is not very marked and is between respondents who believe that enough or too little is being invested.

***Do you believe that the country’s economic gaps are likely to change over the next few years?***

The public consistently tends to believe that Israel is heading toward widening social gaps. Only 14 percent expect the gaps to narrow; more than half believe that they will grow. The responses to this item clearly reflect the public’s feelings about the cumulative, long-term effects of the government’s economic policy, on the one hand, and of the prevailing economic, social, and political conditions, on the other.

The most pessimistic are the *haredi*, 67 percent of whom expect the disparities to widen. Among respondents with post-secondary education, a rather high proportion – 61 percent – felt

this way. In contrast, Arab respondents stood out for their relatively “optimistic” stance on this topic. “Only” 40 percent of them expect the disparities to widen and nearly one-third (as against 14 percent of the population at large) expect them to narrow.

An interesting phenomenon that surfaced in the responses to this item: the oldest respondents were also the most optimistic about the narrowing of economic gaps and were less pessimistic than others about their widening. (Some 40 percent expected the disparities to widen as against an overall average of 52 percent, and 60 percent in the 25–29 age cohort; 20 percent expected the disparities to narrow as against 14 percent of the population at large and 9 percent of those in the 25–29 group.)

The responses to this question do not follow the usual correlation between education and income. Although respondents at different income levels did not show an identifiable trend on this issue, the more education (the trend is slightly less notable among those with academic education), the more they are convinced that social gaps will continue to widen in the future.

## **2. The Effect of Social Policy on the Respondent’s Personal Situation**

In this chapter, the respondents’ feelings about their personal situation are examined, against the background of their feelings and attitudes toward the general state of society. Some of the items were phrased generally; others pertained to specific areas such as health status, concerns about crime, fear of unemployment, etc. Three items dealt with respondents’ feelings about their current economic situation and their estimation of its likelihood to improve in the future. To some extent, these items represent the respondents’ perspectives on the past, the present, and the future:

- (1) If you compare your and your family's standard of living today to that of two or three years ago, do you believe there has been a considerable improvement, some improvement, no change, some decline, or a severe decline?***
- (2) To what extent do you believe that you or your family have been harmed by the recent budget cuts?***
- (3) Do you expect your economic situation and that of your family to change in the coming year?***

Since the first two questions were also asked in past surveys, this allows an examination of changes in the public's responses about their standard of living. Comparing the replies today with those of the past few years, there is a slight improvement in the public's feeling about its economic situation. In 2003, only 8 percent of respondents reported a considerable improvement or some improvement and almost 60 percent reported a decline. This year, the figures were 15 percent and 50 percent, respectively. It should be stressed that with regard to these figures the responses indicate that the public considers its situation much worse than in 2002 and particularly worse than in 2001.

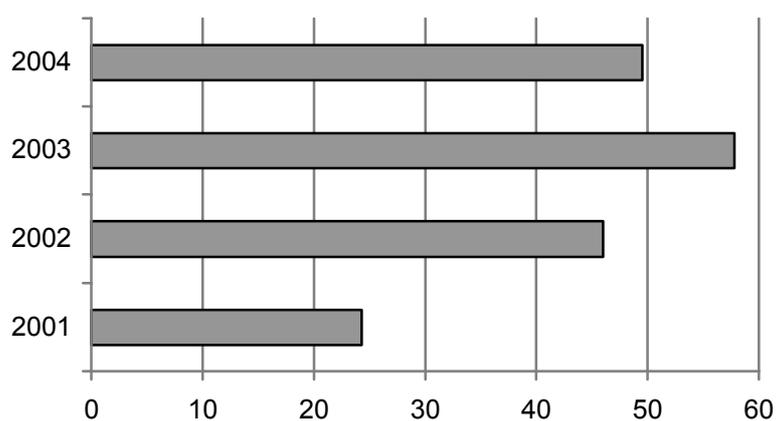
It is important to note that relative to 2003, the sense of decline in standard of living was greater among the low education and low-income respondents than among the public at large. In contrast, regarding a sense of improvement, in 2003, 18 percent of high income respondents reported an improvement in their standard of living. This year, 30 percent of those with far above average income and 16 percent of those with slightly above-average income reported an improvement.

**Table 2. If you compare your and your family's standard of living today to that of two or three years ago, do you believe there has been...**

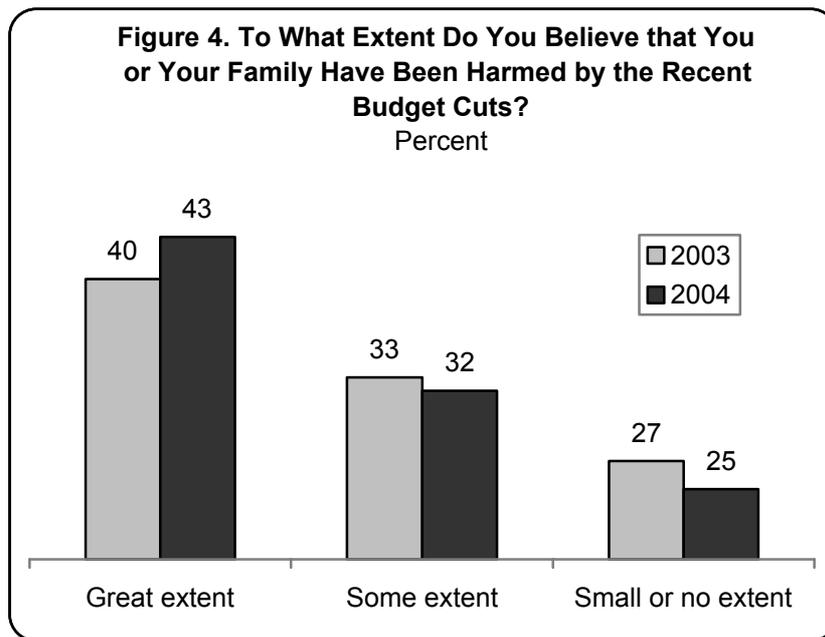
	2001	2002	2003	2004
Considerable improvement	5	5	2	3
Some improvement	21	12	6	10
No change	50	37	34	38
Some decline	19	31	41	43
Severe decline	5	15	17	15

**Figure 3. Proportion of Respondents Who Reported a Decline in Their Standard of Living in the Past Two to Three Years**

Percent



Most of the sub-population groups showed no discernable pattern correlating group characteristics and improvement in standard of living. With regard to the income variable, however, the pattern is clear: the higher the respondent's income level, the more his or her economic situation seems to have improved during the past year. These responses provide an indication that the economic policy has indeed worked primarily to the advantage of those with a firmer economic base.



A large proportion of respondents – 90 percent – replied that the recent budget cuts have harmed them and 43 percent, as against 14 percent in 2003, estimated the effect as severe or very severe. Of particular interest in this context is the difference between men and women. Women felt that the damage caused by the past year's economic measures was more severe: 46 percent of women, as against 39 percent of men, estimated the

harm caused to them and their families by the budget cuts as severe or very severe. This may be due to the “division of labor” by sex and women’s greater exposure to the rising cost of ongoing household management.

It is also noteworthy that with regard to this question, as with the previous one, two groups that would be expected to reply in ways indicating severe harm as a result of the budget cuts – those aged 65+ and FSU immigrants – actually stand out for their relatively “favorable” responses. Only 29 percent of respondents aged 65+ (as against 43 percent of the public at large) assessed the personal effect of the budget cuts as severe or very severe and only 36 percent of FSU immigrants felt this way. Does this imply that retirees on fixed pensions feel less harmed than people who have lost their jobs? Or is it that persons of low to middle income (who are more strongly represented in these two groups) were less severely affected than those who earn the lowest incomes?

The relation between education and income and the extent of personal harm caused by the economic policy also stood out in particular. As education and income declined, the more severe they judged the harm inflicted on them by the economic policy. Thus, only about one-fifth of respondents with higher than average income and one-third of those with higher education stated that the budget cuts had harmed them severely or very severely. The *haredi* expressed suffering the most serious harm due to the economic policy: 60 percent of them judged the damage to have been severe or very severe. Sixty-three percent of those with the lowest levels of education and income felt that the personal harm had been severe or very severe. The 2003 survey found similar results.

***Respondents were asked if they expected their economic situation and that of their families to change during the coming year?***

The responses were especially interesting when compared to responses to the previous question about general social expectations of the narrowing or widening of social disparities. While most of the public expects the social disparities to widen, respondents expect their personal situation to improve or to remain unchanged. Only 13 percent of respondents expect their economic situation to deteriorate. Women are less optimistic – and perhaps, some might say, more realistic – than men. As the respondents' age rose, their hope for an improvement in their economic situation dropped dramatically – from 44 percent of those aged 18–24 to about one-fourth of those in the 65+ age group. Interestingly, the poorly educated were more optimistic about an improvement in their economic situation than the well educated and no trend on the basis of income levels was found. (However, a trend was found with regard to concern about a decline in economic situation. About one-fifth of respondents with far below average income expected their situation to worsen, as against only 9 percent of those with far above average income.)

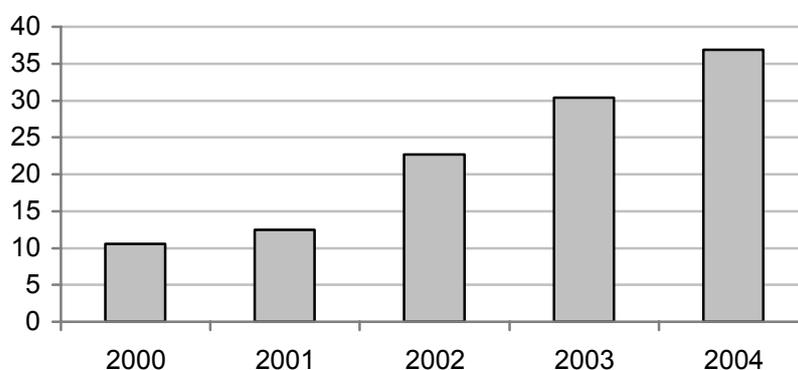
***Level of Health Care Services***

The survey pointed to a clear strengthening in the public's perception that the level of the health care services that it receives has declined, and its ability to obtain necessary care has been harmed. This trend is consistent with that found in the surveys of the past few years.

The higher the respondent's levels of education and income, the more strongly, for the most part, did he or she feel that the level of health care services has worsened. The perception of the decline in the level of services also tends to rise with age. Thus, the proportion of age 50–64 respondents who believe that the

quality of health care services has declined is twice as high as among the 18–24 age cohort. This indicates that the “heavy” users of health care services were more affected personally, they feel that services have declined, and express less satisfaction with health services than the public at large.

**Figure 5. Percent of Respondents Who Believe that the Level of Health Care Services Has Declined Relative to the Situation a Year or Two Ago**  
Percent



There was a slight difference between Arabs and Jews in the proportion of respondents who reported an improvement in health care services in the past year: 29 percent as against 23 percent, respectively. However, 40 percent of Arabs reported a decline, as against 37 percent of Jews.

When we profiled the Jewish population by religious observance, we found a difference: 27–28 percent of *haredi* and traditional Jews pointed to an improvement in health care services as against only 17 percent of the non-observant.

Respondents' satisfaction with the services of their Sick Funds declined significantly. (Eighteen percent were "somewhat dissatisfied" or "wholly dissatisfied," as against 11 percent in 2003.) The responses to this question did not vary widely among groups. The difference between the group most satisfied with Sick Fund services (the 18–24 age group, among whom 60 percent were satisfied) and the most dissatisfied group (those of far above average income) was 17 percentage points and most groups concentrated around the average of 50 percent.

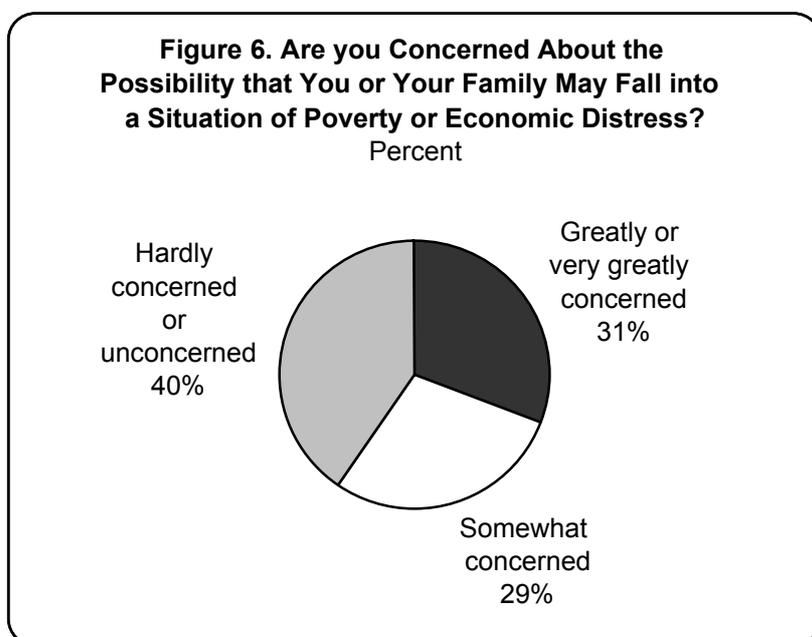
The phenomenon of people with national health insurance coverage who forgo a vital medical service due to its cost occurred again this year and even worsened relative to 2003. The proportion of those forced to forgo, at least once during the year, a medical service that they needed rose to 22 percent. This situation, in which about one-fifth of survey respondents state that they went without a medical treatment or medicine because of the level of co-payments, is definitely troubling. It is especially severe among those in the 65+ group: nearly 10 percent of them replied that often or very often during the year they went without a medical treatment that they needed due to its cost. The situation is even worse among FSU immigrants at 12 percent and among respondents who had primary or partial secondary education, at 13 percent.

### ***Concern about Decline in Economic and Job Security***

The Israeli public remains concerned about the personal risk of falling into a situation of poverty and economic distress. Some 60 percent of respondents were worried about these outcomes; almost one-third to a great or very great extent, and nearly 30 percent were somewhat concerned. Anxiety was especially prevalent among the poorly educated (primary or partial secondary), among those with far below average income, and among Arabs; half of the respondents in each group described themselves as greatly or very greatly concerned. Since many in

these groups are already poor or suffering economic distress, their responses to the question, which was phrased in reference to the future, indicate that they are afraid of a further deterioration.

Concern about becoming poor is related to susceptibility to unemployment. In the survey, we asked, “Do you, or does someone in your immediate family, feel susceptible to the possibility of becoming unemployed?” In fact, this year’s survey shows some improvement in this matter relative to 2003. About one-third of respondents answered that they feel severely or very severely susceptible to unemployment, as against 43 percent in 2003. About 40 percent assessed their susceptibility to unemployment as slight or nonexistent, as against 33 percent who felt this way in 2000.



The survey results showed clearly that the disparity among population groups, which has been widening steadily, is also manifested in the extent of individuals' job security. This effect was also found in 2003. Low income respondents displayed greater concern about the possibility of becoming unemployed than high income respondents (47 percent as against 15 percent) and the poorly educated were more concerned about unemployment than those with an academic education (49 percent as opposed to 27 percent), Arabs (41 percent) more than Jews (31 percent), women slightly more than men, and FSU immigrants more than the Israeli average (39 percent as against 32 percent) but still less than the weakest socio-economic groups.

Obviously, many Israelis are not secure in their jobs and fear the possibility that they or someone in their family will lose their jobs. The feeling crosses lines of education, national groups, and immigrant status. It is important to note that the concern is related to the transformation of unemployment into a phenomenon that characterizes Israeli life at levels that the country had not known previously.

### **3. Attitudes of the Public on Issues of Value and Ideology**

The survey included several questions relating to issues of ideology and values in order to look at the public's attitudes during the past year (2004). In 2003 we also attempted to examine several ideology and value issues, such as the desired socio-national order of priorities, and attitudes towards the social safety net, foreign workers, labor unions, and social disparities. This year, the survey focused on attitudes toward poverty, its causes, and how to deal with it.

In response to the first question asked, whether the public believes that poverty is a social problem in Israel, the answer

was unequivocal: 83 percent of the public believes that poverty is a severe or a very severe social problem. Large majorities in all population groups agreed. Next, the survey examined whether the public assigns responsibility for the poverty to the poor themselves or to a government policy that has reduced its support for the poor and the weak. To find out, two questions were asked. The first was:

***Some claim that most recipients of social benefit payments from the state could get by without them if only they wanted to. Express your opinion.***

Although the often reported claims that government benefits are detrimental to people's motivation to work, more than half of the Israeli public (52 percent) believe that the recipients of these benefits could not manage financially without them. About one-fifth of respondents, however, strongly or very strongly agreed with the statement that benefit recipients could get by without them. This corroborates somewhat, and is consistent with, the responses to the question of whether the government is investing enough in dealing with the issue of poverty.

Unsurprisingly, we found that a large majority of *haredi* (72 percent), respondents of far below average income (61 percent), and the poorly educated (60 percent) believe that benefit recipients cannot get by without the benefits. In contrast, somewhat surprisingly, almost one-third of Arabs believed strongly or very strongly that benefit recipients *can* get by without them. A similar proportion of FSU immigrants felt the same way.

Since most of the public considers poverty a serious problem and believes that benefits are essential for their recipients, it is of interest to examine the public's views on the extent of governmental and public support of the weak and the poor.

The following question solicits a complementary impression of the public's attitudes toward this matter:

***Some claim that unemployment compensation and income maintenance benefits are overly generous and cause their recipients to refrain from finding work. What do you think?***

The responses were not distributed in the manner expected from the responses to the previous question. Thus, although more than half of the respondents believed that benefit recipients cannot get by without the benefits, 60 percent agreed that unemployment compensation and income maintenance benefits are overly generous. The reason may be that these particular benefits are paid directly to people who, at least in part, seem able to work (are actually working or are unemployed) whereas the previous question addressed itself to benefits at large. Some benefits (child allowances, old-age pensions, etc.) are definitely unrelated to the recipient's objective or subjective ability to work fully or partly.

Furthermore, 40 percent of the public do not accept the claim about the disincentive to labor that unemployment compensation and income maintenance benefits ostensibly create, even though this attitude is widely held by government decision makers. We also found, for the most part, that the distribution of responses to this question among subgroups does not exhibit clear trends. The exception was a correlation with income level about half of low income respondents disagreed with this statement while only one-fifth of the very high income respondents disagreed. Amongst respondents in the highest income group, 45 percent felt that this statement is correct as against one-third of those in the lowest income group.

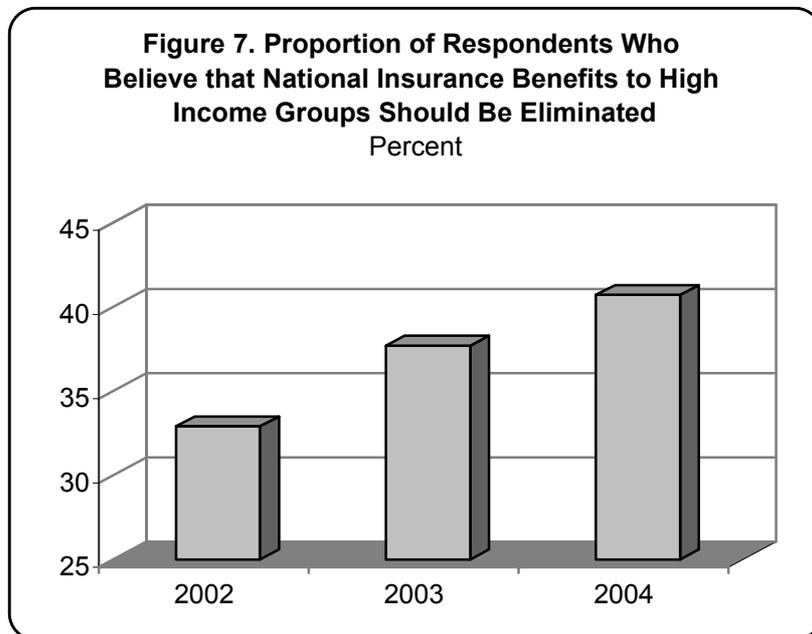
The last question, which was also included in the two previous surveys (2003 and 2002), was:

***Should National Insurance benefits for members of high income groups be reduced or eliminated?***

Support for the selective payment, or elimination, of National Insurance benefits for high income groups has risen perceptibly during the three years in which our survey included this

question: from 33 percent in 2002 to 41 percent in 2004. Thus the public indicates increasing consent to the downscaling or complete elimination of National Insurance benefits for those with high income. However, there was also a slight increase (as against 2003 but not as against 2002) in the number of respondents who wish to see the benefits unchanged.

Interestingly, the distribution of responses in this matter (as in 2003) was only slightly affected by the respondents' economic situation. About half of the respondents in the high income group favored the elimination (or the very severe restriction) of benefits for the "rich" (resembling the overall average) and one-fifth of them favored leaving the situation as it is (also not far from the overall average).



FSU immigrants again exhibited a unique pattern of responses to this question: Almost 60 percent of them believe that benefits for persons with high income should be eliminated or severely cut back, as against 50 percent of the public at large.