

**Institute For Liberty and Responsibility
Reichman University**

Israeli Public Opinion on Civil Marriage

Report

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Israeli Public Opinion on Civil Marriage

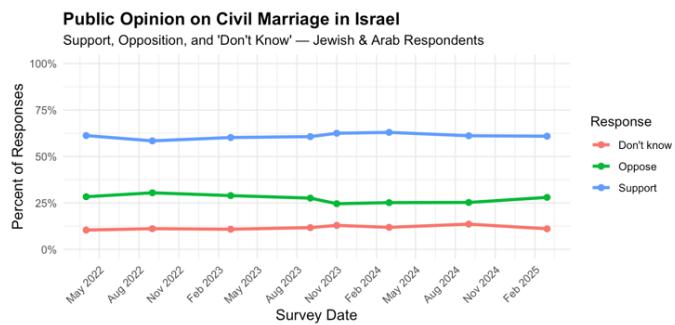
The relationship between religion and the state is complex in Israel due to its identity as both a democracy and a Jewish state. One of the most contentious issues arising from this is the lack of civil marriage in Israel. All marriages in Israel must be performed under religious institutions, a practice dating back to the Ottoman Empire, which was then preserved through the 1947 Status Quo Agreement. Each religious community - Jews, Muslims, Druze, Christians - is granted authority to regulate marriage within their respective groups, with Jewish marriages overseen by the Chief Rabbinate and Muslim marriages governed by Sharia law. This presents many challenges, specifically for interfaith and same-sex couples, as well as for those who are not religious who prefer not to go through religious institutions for performing their marriage. A notable example is the massive influx of immigrants from the Soviet Union. While many were granted citizenship under the Law of Return, the Chief Rabbinate does not consider them Jewish under Halakha, and they are therefore classified as not religious. While Israel's Supreme Court has expanded recognition of civil unions for those that are not religious as well as acceptance of marriages performed abroad, it still has yet to implement civil marriage, leaving thousands of Israelis without the ability to get married in their own country or have their marriage recognized by the state. This tension reflects the complex dynamic between public desire and institutional design.¹

This report aims to analyze public opinion in Israel regarding whether Israel should establish civil marriage. The data used are drawn from surveys conducted by the Institute for Liberty and Responsibility at Reichman University between April 2022 and March 2025. The report finds that overall, Israelis are supportive of having civil marriage. However, there are major differences in the level of support across religiosity, ideology, and age groups.²

¹ Golan-Nadir, Niva. "Marriage Regulation in Turkey and Israel ." Essay. In *The Jarring Road to Democratic Inclusion* , 193–216. Lanham, Maryland: Lexington Books, 2016.

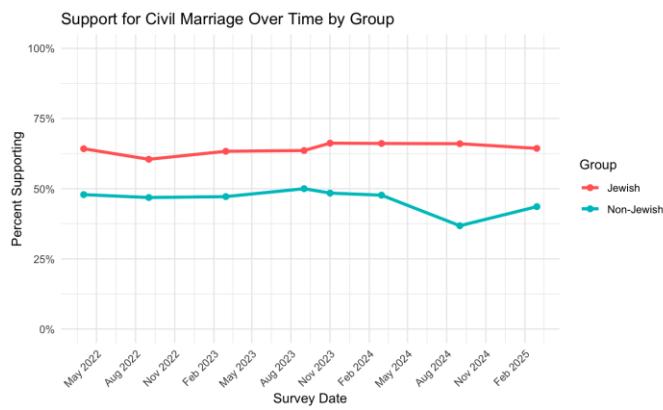
² Respondents, in this case only Jewish Israelis, were fielded with the question "Do you support or oppose civil marriage in Israel?" Respondents were then given five answer choices to select from: "strongly support", "support", "oppose", "strongly oppose", and "don't know". However in the analysis the "don't know" responses were filtered out.

Overall Trends Among Jews and Arabs



Overall trends (including both Jews and Arabs) show relative stability. Support remained consistent between 58.4% and 63.0% while Opposition remained consistent between 24.6% and 30.5%. Those unsure of their stance on civil marriage remained fairly low but consistent, fluctuating between 10.4% and 13.6%. The stability in trends reveals that sentiment towards civil marriage among Israelis has remained unchanged over time.

Differences between Jewish and Arab Populations



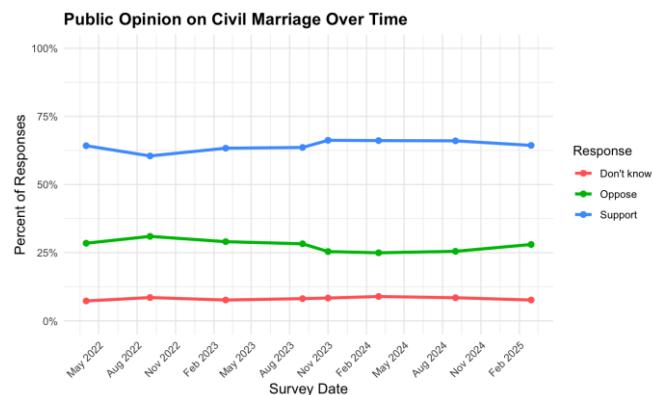
Overall, Jewish support over time seems to be relatively stable, while Arab support appears to be decreasing. Jewish support hovers between 60.5% and 66.2% while Arab³ support is stable at around 47% in September 2023, and then it starts to decrease until September 2024. However, it then goes up through March 2025. Israeli-Jews may be more supportive because they are subject to the Orthodox Rabbinate, making civil marriage more of a Jewish intra-cultural issue.

Arab communities are governed by their religious authorities and therefore are not impacted by the rules under the Orthodox Rabbinate. Nonetheless, support among Arabs is still moderate, suggesting that some less-religious Arabs may be looking for a non-religious marriage alternative.

The rest of the report will focus on Jewish respondents only. While Arabs also face marriage restrictions, the lack of civil marriage in Israel is a particularly a central issue in Jewish society, where it has been at the heart of ongoing public and political debates.

³ In Arab I include Israeli Arabs, across all religious groups – Christians, Druze, and Muslims. Muslims are the clear majority.

Overall Trends Among Jews

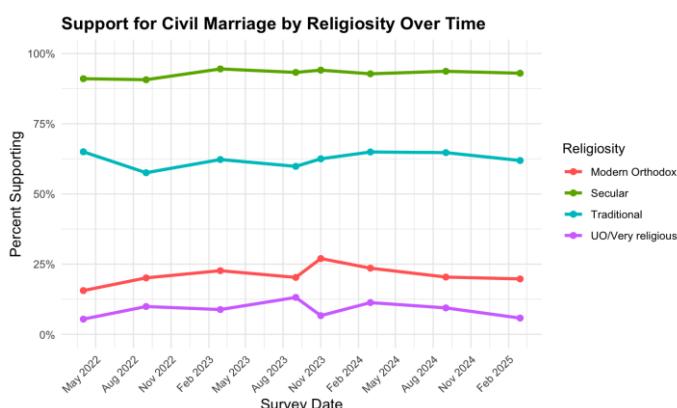


Based on Jewish respondents only, overall trends show that support for civil marriage is consistently high, fluctuating between 60.5% and 66.2%. Opposition remains low, fluctuating between 25.0% and 31.0%, but has remained stable. This indicates that while there are minor fluctuations, opposition to civil marriage is not growing significantly and is relatively stable. Lastly, those unsure of their stance on civil marriage (or refuse to answer for other reasons) remain consistently low, hovering around 7.3% and 8.9%. Overall, support for civil marriage among Israelis is high while opposition is low and consistent, indicating a growing desire for changing the traditional status quo.

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Trend by Religiosity

Looking at the level of support by religiosity reveals differences and stability among all religious groups. Secular and traditional Jews are the most supportive of civil marriage, with secular support remaining stable between 90.7% and 94.1% and traditional Jews' support ranging between 65.0% and 59.8%. In contrast, support among more religious groups remains significantly lower. Among religious Jews, support increased from April 2022 to a peak of 27.0% in November 2023, but then decreased until September 2024 and then remained at a stable level through March 2025. Ultra-Orthodox showed the most fluctuation. Support increased between April 2022 until its peak in September 2023 at 13.2% but then decreased through March 2025. Although Ultra-Orthodox Jews experience slightly more fluctuation in their support, their trends remain steady, only fluctuating about 7 points. These trends are consistent with broader ideological divisions: less religious Jews are more supportive of civil marriage in the hopes of promoting access to marriage for all Israeli citizens.

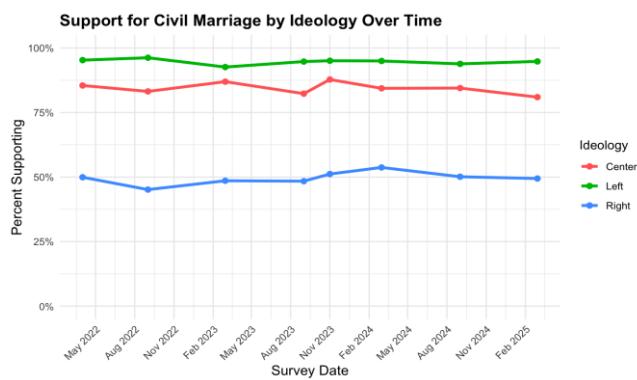


The vast differences in levels of support among religiosity groups likely stem from the Orthodox Chief Rabbinate's exclusive authority over Jewish marriage in Israel, as well as the lack of legal recognition for Conservative and Reform Judaism. In response, the Israeli Reform Movement has been performing symbolic marriage ceremonies based on its interpretation of Judaism. Couples can sign into a "couples

union" to be considered 'Common Law spouses,' which grants them legal recognition by the Ministry of the Interior. This gives them the same rights as an Orthodox marriage without pronouncing them legally married. While these ceremonies are a viable alternative, they are not officially recognized by the Chief Rabbinate and hence not regarded as married by Israeli law, thus encouraging the push for civil marriage among secular Jews.⁴ In contrast, more religious groups are much less supportive of civil marriage, viewing it as a violation to the promise made under the 1947 Status Quo agreement as well as a threat to Halakha.

Trend by Ideology

Among Jewish voters, support remains stable across all voting blocs.⁵ Left and Center voters consistently show high levels of support with little fluctuation. Support on the Left remains stable, fluctuating only slightly between 92.6% and 96.2%. Support among those in the center also remains steady between 81.0% and 87.8%. Right voters show significantly less support than Left and Center voters. Support overall stays consistent between 45.2% and 53.7%. Overall, all three blocks show mostly consistent support. However, the persistence of an ideological gap still occurs with the Left and Center Bloc offering about 25- 30% percentage points more support than the Right Bloc.



These trends likely reflect religious-political alignments. A chi-squared test examining the relationship between religiosity and ideology revealed a very strong and statistically significant association between the two ($\chi^2 = 2068.8$ and $p < 0.001$). The corresponding Cramer's V value of 0.323 indicates a moderate-to-strong relationship between religiosity and ideology. This means that Right-wing parties often align themselves with more religious

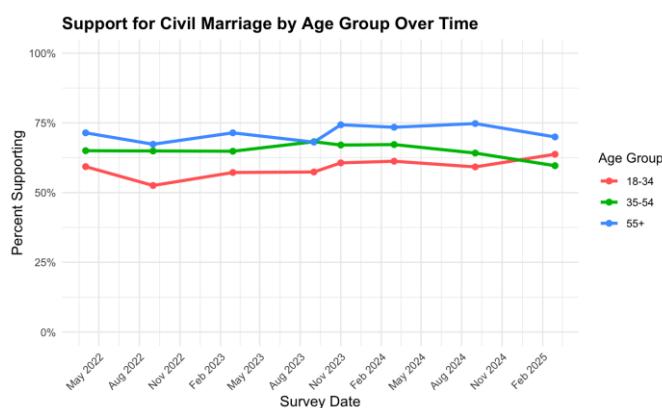
factions, including Haredi and Religious Zionist. These groups often oppose civil marriage over beliefs it violates Halakha and weakens the authority of the Chief Rabbinate. On the other hand, more Left-wing and Center parties are more secular and draw support from constituents who are more supportive of religious plurality, personal freedoms, and the separation between religion and the state.

⁴ Golan-Nadir, Niva. "Strategies to Legitimize and Enhance the Popularity of the Reform Marriage Ceremony among Israeli Jews." *Israel Studies Review* 39, no. 2 (June 1, 2024): 48–74.

<https://doi.org/10.3167/isr.2024.390203>.

⁵ When responding to each survey, respondents were asked to rank their political ideology on a scale from 1-7 with 1-3 indicating a more right-leaning view, 4 indicating a centrist view, and 5-7 indicating a more left-leaning view.

Trend By Age



Looking at the level of support by age group reveals no significant fluctuation across all three groups. Those aged 55 and older show the highest level of support, ranging between 71.1% and 68.1%. Support for civil marriage among those 35-54 fluctuated roughly between 59.6% and 68.2%. Those aged 18-34 showed the lowest support of the three groups. While support remained within a 10-point range (52.5% and 63.7%), it appeared to be following a slight upward trend. While there are slight dips and peaks during certain waves, the changes are relatively small and do not alter the overall consistent trend.

Conclusion

Overall, many Israelis, both Arab and Jewish, are supportive of civil marriage. Secular and traditional Jews offer the highest levels of support, while more religious Jews offer considerably less support. Concerning ideology, those on the Left and in the Center are most supportive, while those on the Right show less support but do not outright oppose. Older citizens, especially those aged 55 and older, tend to show the highest level of support. Altogether, the trends presented in the data illustrate a general and widespread support base for the implementation of civil marriage in Israel.

While alternatives such as foreign marriages, civil unions, and marriages performed by the Israeli Reform Movement and Tzohar are still not satisfactory in addressing the Orthodox Rabbinate's monopoly over marriage. Tzohar, a rabbinical NGO founded by a group of religious-Zionist rabbis, offers a more accessible Orthodox marriage process for younger, more secular Israeli-Jews. However, Tzohar still operates within the framework of the Orthodox Rabbinate to grant marriage legal recognition, meaning it merely softens rather than challenges the monopoly by the Chief Rabbinate.⁶ Therefore, it does not address the exclusionary nature of the current marriage system in Israel since it still cannot legally marry interfaith, same-sex, and non-religious couples. Similarly, while the Israeli Reform Movement provides symbolic marriage ceremonies, they are merely a legal workaround and not an outright solution as their marriages are still not recognized by the state. Ultimately, while the Israeli Reform Movement and

⁶ Golan-Nadir, Niva, Nissim Cohen, and Aviad Rubin. "How Citizens' Dissatisfaction with Street-Level Bureaucrats' Exercise of Discretion Leads to the Alternative Supply of Public Services: The Case of Israeli Marriage Registrars." *International Review of Administrative Sciences* 88, no. 4 (December 2, 2020): 977–94. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0020852320972177>.

Tzohar offer more inclusive options, they are unable to deliver complete marriage equality under Israeli law. Therefore, establishing civil marriage is necessary to expand access to legal marriage for all Israeli citizens.

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