

American Haredi Jews' Beliefs, Practices and Attitudes:

A Potpourri of Findings Drawn From Recent Research

Mark Trencher, Nishma Research

mark@nishmaresearch.com — <http://nishmaresearch.com/social-research.html>

Presented to the Haredi Research Group
January 9, 2025

Presentation Outline

- **Research Challenges and Data Sources**
- **Some Population Statistics**
- **What's On Haredi Minds... The "20,000 Foot View"**
- **Religious Beliefs and Practices**
- **Most Important Issues Confronting the Community**
- **Political Leanings and Key Issues**
- **Israel and Zionism**
- **Finances**
- **Sources of News and Information**
- **Coronavirus, COVID and Vaccines**
- **Those Who Leave (OTD - "Off the Derech")**

Research Challenges and Data Sources

American Haredi Research Challenges

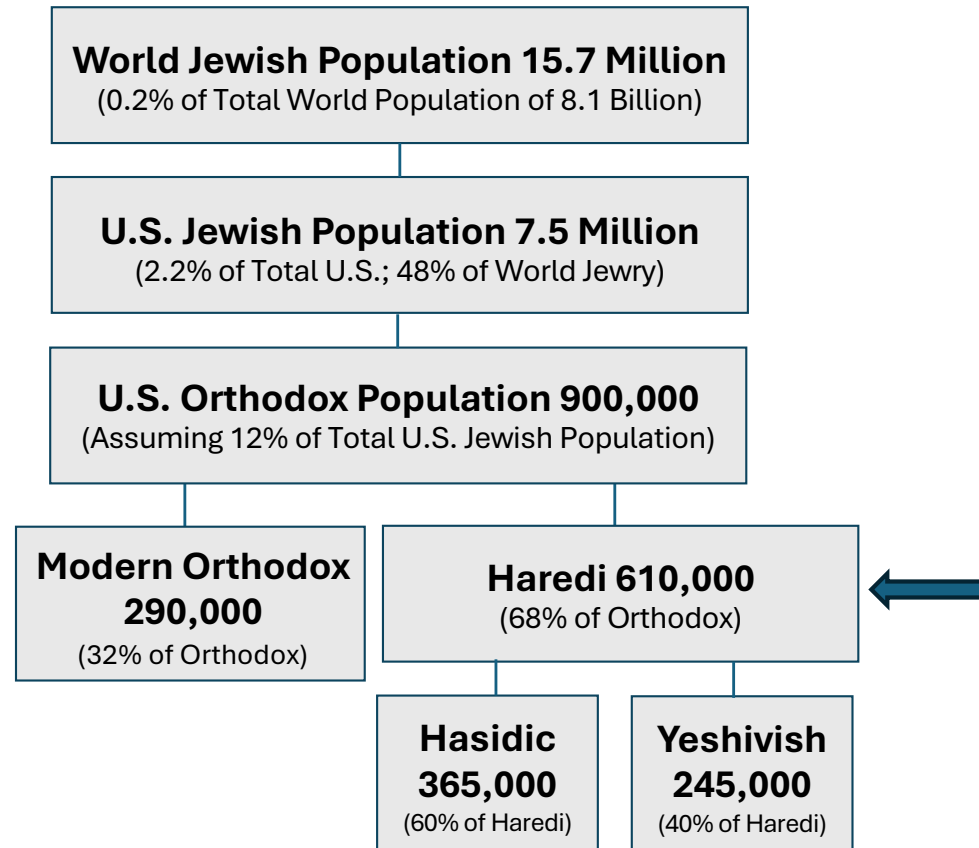
- **Since 2016, Nishma Research has done 20 broad Orthodox community surveys. Most have included a sizeable sample of Haredi respondents, and this report summarizes some of the more interesting findings. Most of these studies compared Haredi responses with those of Modern Orthodox, and we include the latter in some of the data presented.**
- **In large-scale community studies (e.g., Federations, Pew), Orthodox are often comingled; and even when Modern Orthodox and Haredi are split (not often done), there are notable differences between the Hasidic and Yeshivish segments that are blurred.**
- **In general, quite a bit of research is done among Haredim, often relying on qualitative techniques. As an insular group, Haredim are more difficult to reach and, lacking any census or community lists, the logistics in conducting quantitative research are challenging.**
- **Representative samples (to the extent possible) require creative approaches in study recruitment and often stratified sample weighting (to the extent that data or reasonable assumptions are available to create the weights).**

Data Sources Cited in This Report (Downloadable at <http://nishmaresearch.com/social-research.html>)

- 1. Starting a Conversation: A Pioneering Survey of Those Who Have Left the Orthodox Community: An exploration of journeys, practices, beliefs, identity, community and relationships – across Chasidic, Yeshivish and Modern Orthodox Segments. June 19, 2016 (Haredi n = 534).**
- 2. The Nishma Research Profile of American Modern Orthodox Jews – Religious beliefs and practices, views on the importance of Orthodoxy as a part of life, shul life, Jewish study, women’s roles, children’s education, sexuality, Israel connection and advocacy, overall successes, opportunities and challenges. September 28, 2017. (Haredi n = 493).**
- 3. Three Covid-Related studies were done: (1) Health, Emotional, Financial & Religious Impacts of the Coronavirus Pandemic in the Jewish Community. June 2020. (Haredi n = 72). / (2) Ten Months Later – Where Do We Stand? The U.S. Jewish Community’s Views on Coronavirus and COVID-19 Vaccines, January 18, 2021. n = Modern Orthodox 716, Haredi 356). / (3) COVID-19 Attitudes and Vaccine Hesitancy in the U.S. Orthodox Jewish Community: Views Among the Chasidish, Yeshivish, and Modern Orthodox Segments (Sponsored by Hatzalah). June 2021. (Haredi n = 2,936).**
- 4. The Finances of Orthodox Jewish Life. December 2021. (Haredi n = 972).**
- 5. Perceptions and Experiences of Antisemitism Among American Orthodox Jews (collaboration with Prof. S. Heilman). June 28, 2022. (Haredi n = 270 for English language survey and n = 97 for Yiddish language survey) .**
- 6. The Nishma Research 2023 Jewish Community Profile: Beliefs, Practices, Attitudes and Priorities Across the Jewish Community With a Focus on U.S. Modern Orthodox and Haredi (Chasidish and Yeshivish) Sectors. March 1, 2023. (Haredi n = 591).**
- 7. Three Political / Israel Connection surveys were done in collaboration with Prof. David Myers: (1) Orthodox Jewish Political Attitudes and Behaviors. September 2023. (Haredi n = 1,224). / (2) Israel, Zionism, Politics, and the Impact of Israel's War With Hamas. February 2024. (Haredi n = 590). / (3) A Survey of Orthodox Jewish Political Views: Haredi and Modern Orthodox Sectors. September 2024. (Haredi n = 678).**

American Haredi Population Size

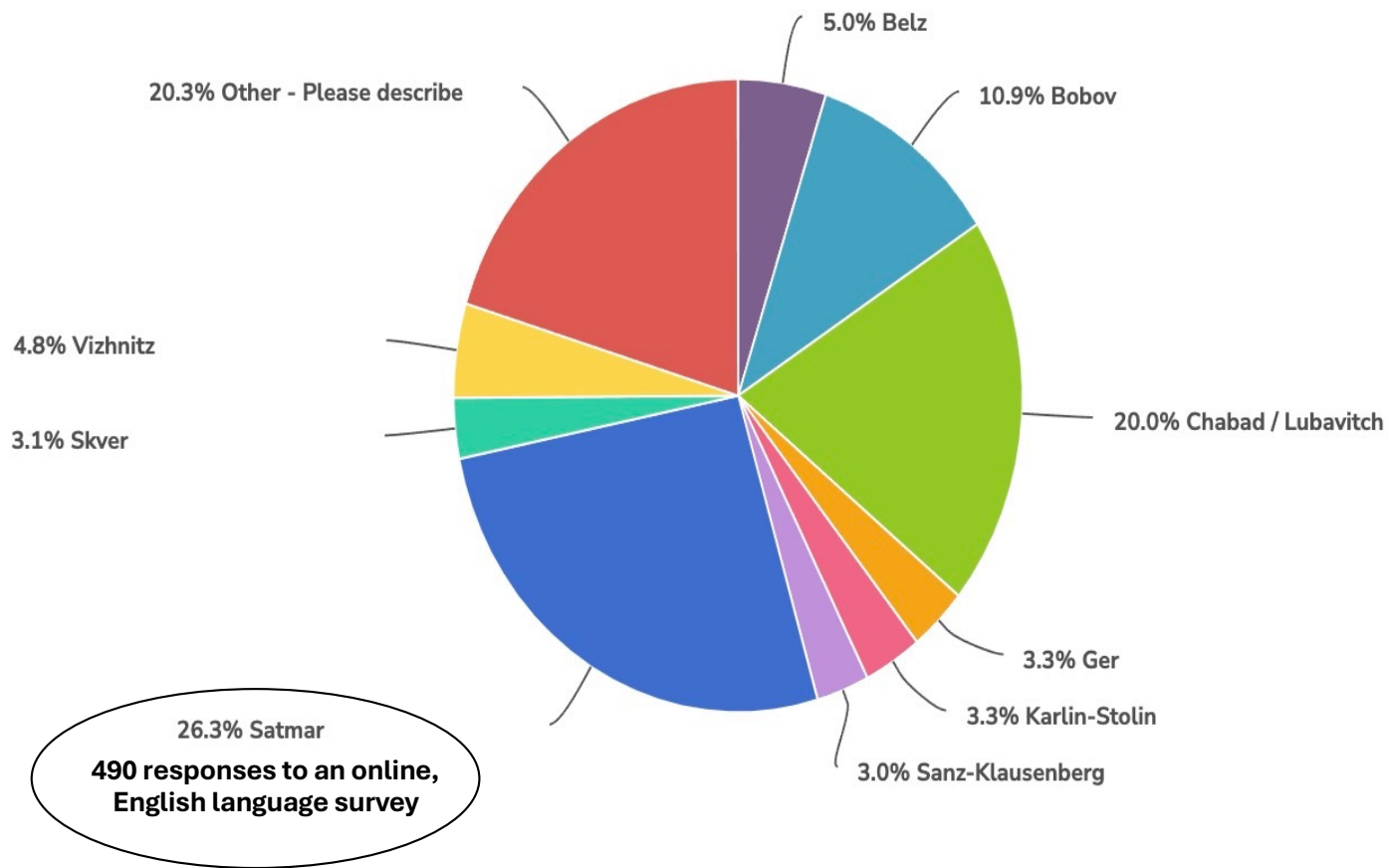
American Haredi Population Size – There is no census of Orthodoxy, but there are data that inform an estimate of Haredi population. Based on recent overall population estimates and growth rates, reasonable current estimates are as follows.



* The Jewish Agency, the demographic work of Profs. Della Pergola, Sheskin and Dashefsky, Pew Research, and Marcin Wodzinski's Historical Atlas of Hasidism

Hasidic Courts – A 2021 Hatzalah-sponsored Covid survey illustrates the large number of Hasidic courts. There are commonalities, but not uniformity, across the courts. This survey also showed how a survey email invitation from a known, respected entity can be effective.

In which Chasidish group do you belong?



What's On Haredi Minds ... The “20,000 Foot View”

Importance of Their “Orthodox Jewishness” as a Part of Their Life – 96% of Haredim rate “their Jewishness” as an extremely important part of their life (a rating of 9-10 on a scale of 0-to-10 ... the Net Promoter Score business commonly used these days).

My Orthodoxy is ...	Haredi	Modern Orthodox
An extremely important part of my life (9-10)	94% (87% Rate 10)	73% (57% Rate 10)
A moderately important part of my life (7-8)	3%	18%
A less important part of my life (0-6)	3%	9%
Average Rating	9.6	8.9

Source: The Nishma Research Profile of American Modern Orthodox Jews. September 28, 2017. (n = 481). Question Text: “On a scale from 0 to 10 — where 0 = do not agree and 10 = fully agree — to what extent to you agree with the statement: Being an Orthodox / Observant Jew is an important part of my life.”

What They Like – “What gives the most satisfaction, joy or meaning to your life as an Orthodox / Observant Jew?”

Orthodox Judaism is seen as a holistic framework that provides meaning, direction, and a sense of belonging, enriching both individual lives and the collective Jewish experience. Haredi Jews find profound meaning and satisfaction in various aspects of their faith and lifestyle:

Community and Belonging

- Strong sense of support, camaraderie, and shared values within their communities.
- Joy in celebrating Shabbat, holidays, and milestones together.
- The community’s commitment to chesed (kindness) and helping each other.

Family and Education

- Raising children with Torah values and seeing them grow in their Jewish identity.
- Pride in passing on traditions and fostering a sense of purpose in their families.
- The role of parents, especially mothers, in setting a spiritual tone at home.

Connection to Hashem

- Personal relationships with God through prayer, learning, and mitzvot.
- The belief that life has purpose and meaning under divine guidance.
- Finding solace and joy in emunah (faith) and trust in God’s plan.

Torah Study and Observance

- Engagement with Torah learning, often in group settings or with family.
- Deep appreciation for the structure and moral clarity provided by halacha (Jewish law).
- Joy in fulfilling mitzvot and living according to God’s commandments.

Cultural Continuity and Identity

- Pride in being part of a tradition spanning thousands of years.
- Connection to ancestors and shared heritage.
- A sense of grounding in a meaningful and purposeful lifestyle.

Spiritual Fulfillment

- Experiencing inner peace, clarity, and moral alignment through Judaism.
- Observing Shabbat and holidays as times for spiritual connection and family bonding.
- The ability to grow in character and emulate divine attributes.

Challenges and Resilience

- Acknowledgment of difficulties in observance, yet finding them rewarding.
- Disappointment with certain aspects of community attitudes but striving for personal growth and understanding.

What They Dislike – “What, if anything, causes you the most pain or unhappiness as an Orthodox / Observant Jew?”

Key themes of dissatisfaction reflect a mix of personal, communal, and societal concerns.

Community Dynamics and Interpersonal Issues

- Dishonesty and Ethical Failures: Observant Jews engaging in dishonesty, theft, and unethical behavior, causing *Chilul Hashem* (desecration of God's name).
- Division and Lack of Unity: Internal conflicts, judgment, and lack of harmony between different Orthodox sects.
- Negative Treatment: Bigotry, lack of *middos* (character refinement), and *derech erez* (proper behavior) within the community.
- Lack of Leadership: Absence of accessible and nurturing rabbinic and community leaders who provide guidance and support.
- Superficial Observance: Frustration with people going through the motions of observance without genuine feeling or connection.

Societal and External Challenges

- Anti-Semitism and Misrepresentation: Pain caused by external prejudice and stereotypes about Orthodox Jews.
- Misguided Modern Trends: Concerns about influences from secular culture and reinterpretations of Orthodox practices.

Financial and Logistical Burdens

- Financial Strains: The high cost of living an Orthodox lifestyle, particularly housing, tuition, and community expectations.
- Pressure to Conform: The social pressure to meet unrealistic standards, often leading to stress or unethical behaviors.

Faith and Practice

- Disconnected Observance: Struggles with meaningful prayer, understanding Torah, and connecting with Hashem.
- Challenging Halachic Standards: The difficulty of maintaining observance in a secular world (e.g., kosher food, modesty, Shabbos laws).
- Concern for the Next Generation: Worries about children leaving the faith (*off the derech*), educational gaps, and materialism.

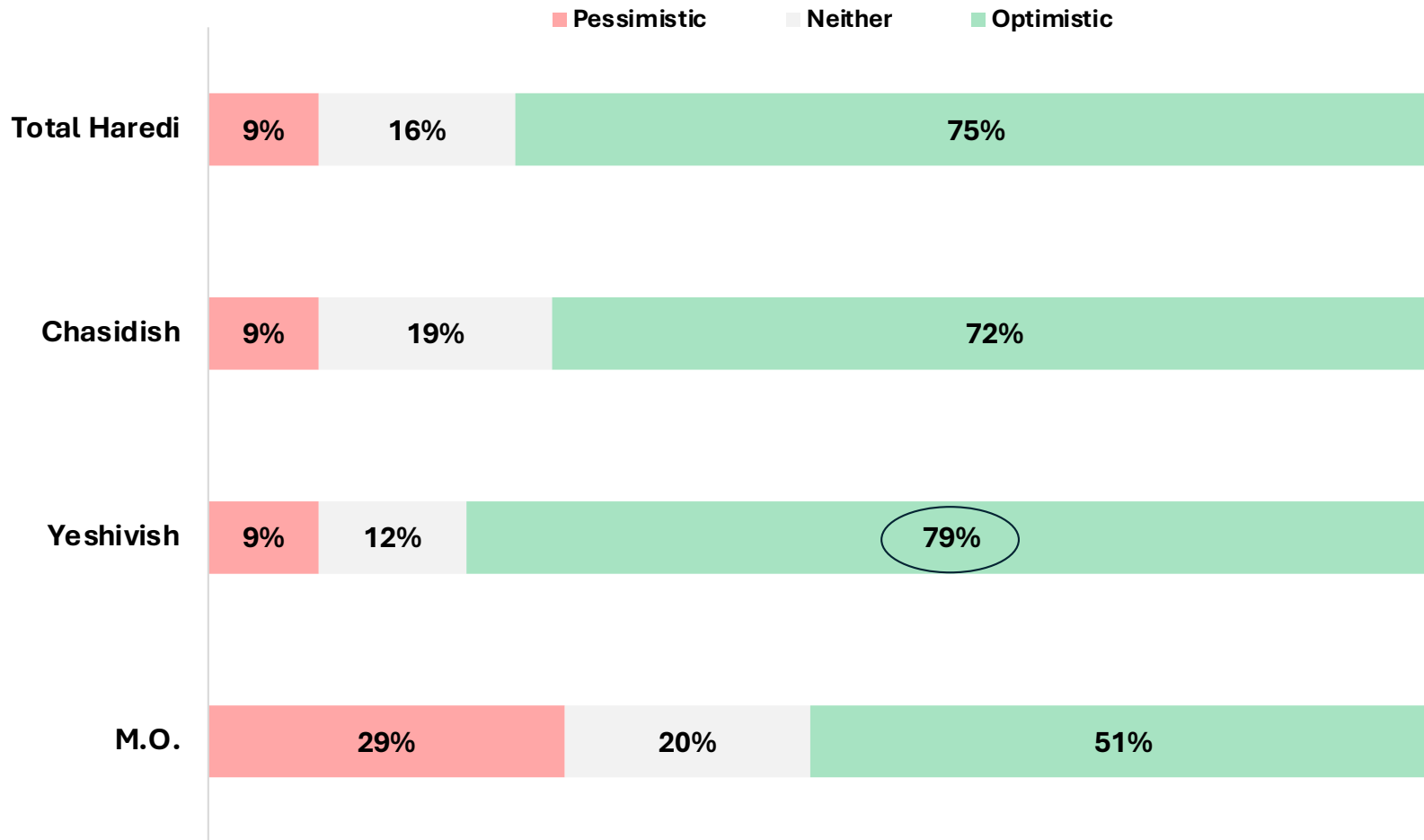
Broader Jewish Pain Points

- Suffering Among Jews: Challenges faced by others, including infertility, mental health struggles, and intermarriage.
- Missed Opportunities: A lack of Torah education and appreciation among secular Jews.
- Spiritual Disconnect: Observant Jews not embodying Torah values or showing *Ahavas Yisroel* (love for fellow Jews).

Individual Struggles

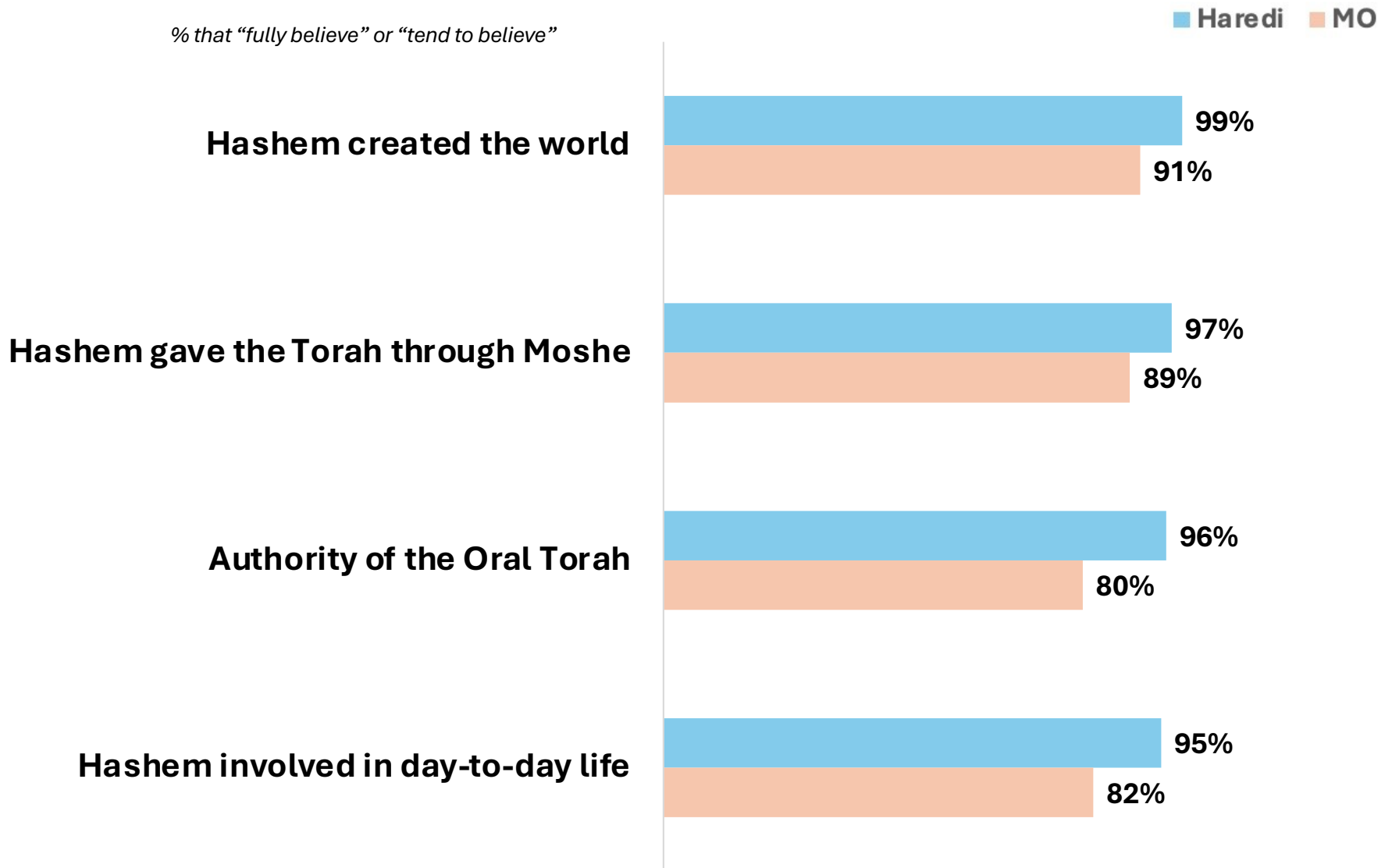
- Isolation and Loneliness: Feeling disconnected from the community or unsupported in personal journeys.

Optimism About the Future of Their Orthodox Sector – Haredim Are optimistic about the future of the American Haredi sector. The Yeshivish sector is most optimistic among all sectors probed.

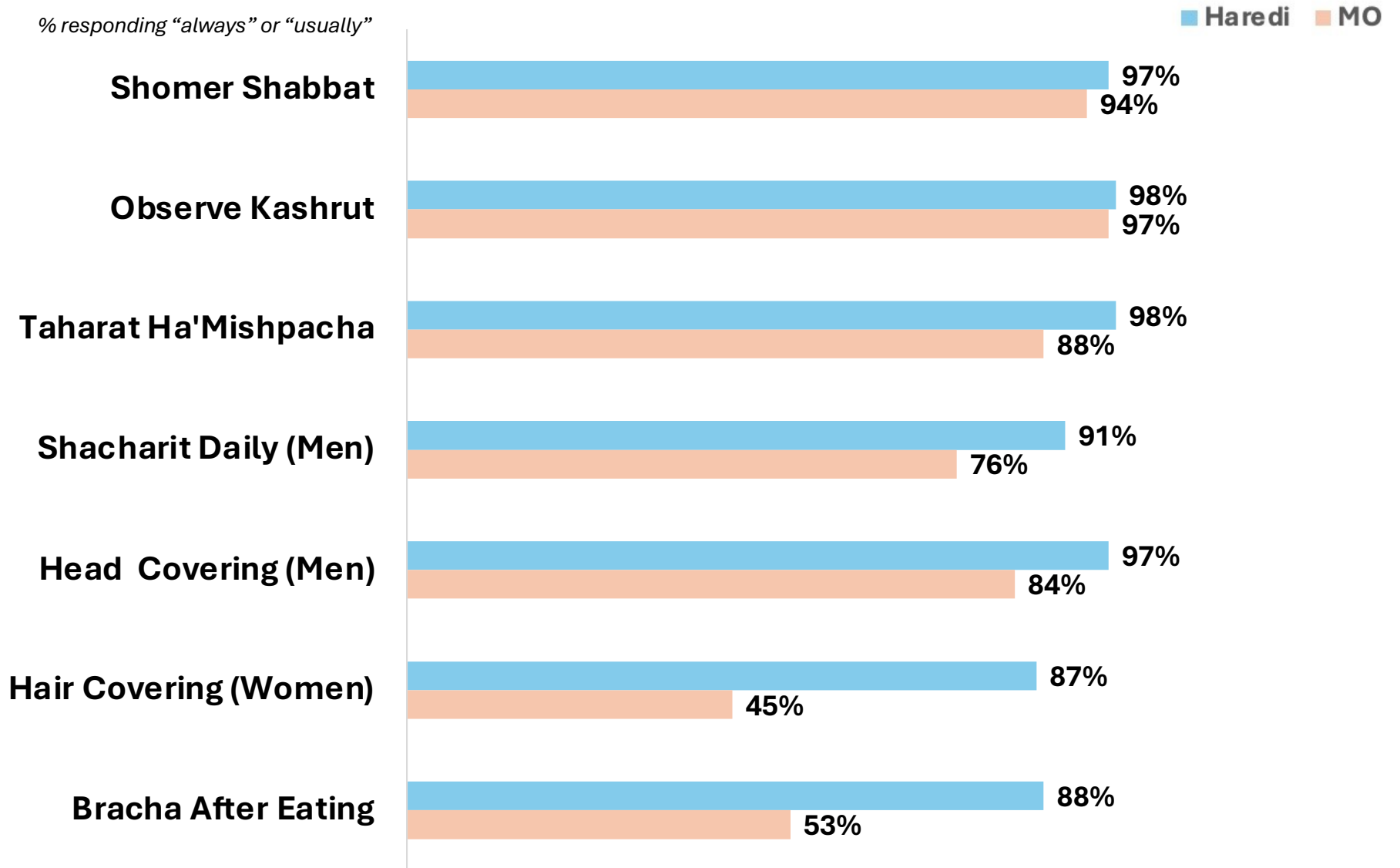


Religious Beliefs and Practices

Theological Beliefs – On average, 97% of Haredim ascribe to the key normative theological beliefs.



Observance Practices – On average, 98% of Haredim comply with the “big three” (Shabbat, Kashrut, Mikveh) normative Orthodox observances.



Most Important Issues Confronting the Community

The Importance to Haredim of Various Community Issues – A great many issues are seen as important!

How important is it that the overall Orthodox Jewish Community pays more attention to these issues over the next 10 years? (% responding “a top issue we must address” – top box of 3)	2023	2017
Dealing with those who commit abuse	81%	29%
Cost of Jewish education	80%	
People going off the derech	75%	43%
Cost of maintaining an Orthodox home	75%	48%
Shidduchim	68%	49%
Substance abuse (alcohol or drugs)	64%	32%
Intermarriage / assimilation	60%	
More togetherness among Orthodox	60%	38%
Agunot	52%	
Divorce rates	50%	35%
Reducing materialism	50%	
Empathy / caring for Orthodox minorities	50%	
Fighting antisemitism	49%	
Doing better as <i>Ohr La’goyim</i> (a “light unto the nations”)	38%	
Approaches to Orthodox LGBTQ+	28%	
Access to reliable news, information	25%	
Deciding on community roles for women	17%	
Climate and environment	5%	

Sources: The Nishma Research 2023 Jewish Community Profile. March 1, 2023. (Haredi n = 591) Page 11.

2017 data are from The Nishma Research Profile of American Modern Orthodox Jews. September 28, 2017. (Haredi n = 493) Data extract (not shown in published report) is the percentage citing each issue as a “serious problem” (top box of 3-point scale).

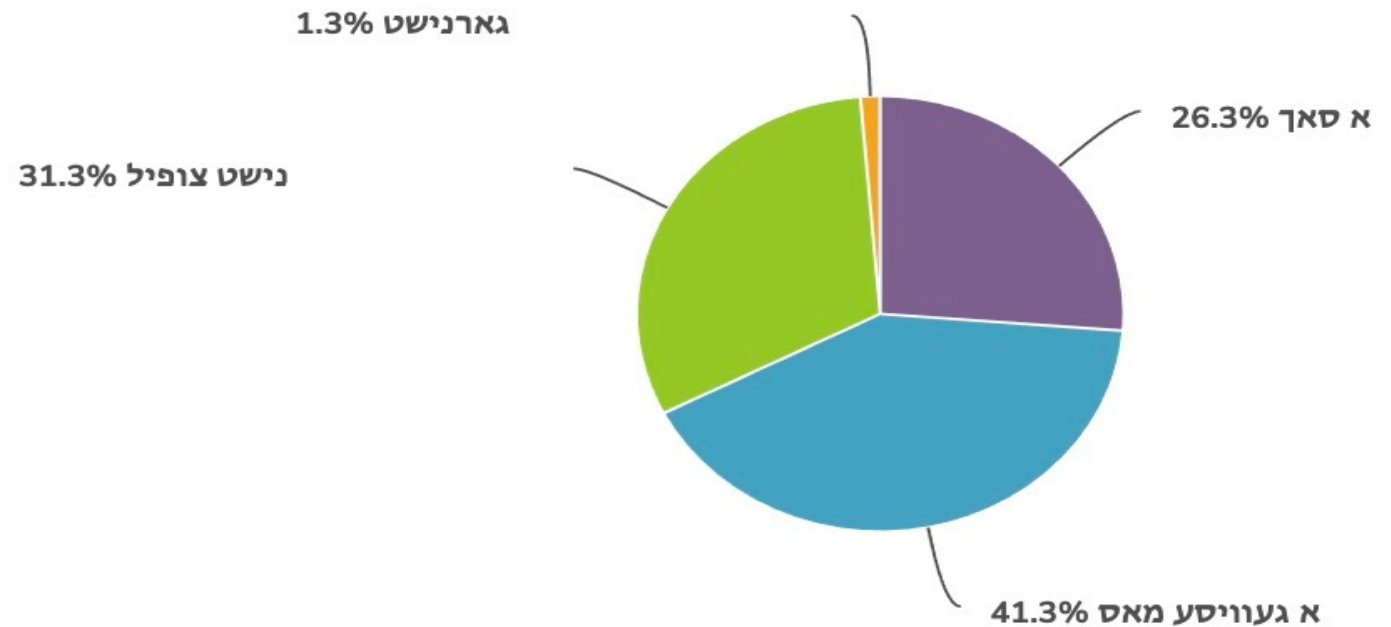
Views on Antisemitism – As shown below, antisemitism has risen to a virtual tie with Israel and the Middle East as the most important issues to Haredi voters.

- **2017 – 38% rated antisemitism as a “serious problem facing their Jewish community,” ranking it as the 14th most pressing need among 27 issues listed.**
- **2023 – 49% indicated that “fighting antisemitism” is an issue that “the overall Orthodox Jewish Community should pay more attention to over the next 10 years,” ranking as the 13th most pressing need among 18 listed.**
- **2022 Study (with Prof. S. Heilman – Modern Orthodox 38% agree there is a lot of antisemitism, virtually the same as Haredim: Yeshivish 34%, Hasidic 35% (Yiddish 26%). Variations in appearance mean that some Orthodox Jews are more obviously Jewish than others; on the other hand, those groups that are the most obviously Jewish are also the most insulated, and do not interact as much with the outside community. Given the low level of variations in perceived incidence of antisemitism, these factors may be offsetting each other.**
- **September 2024 Political Survey (with Prof. David Myers) – Among the issues most important to Haredim as voters were Israel and the Middle East (68%), antisemitism (67%), the economy (50%) and crime (45%)**

A Yiddish Survey – This 2022

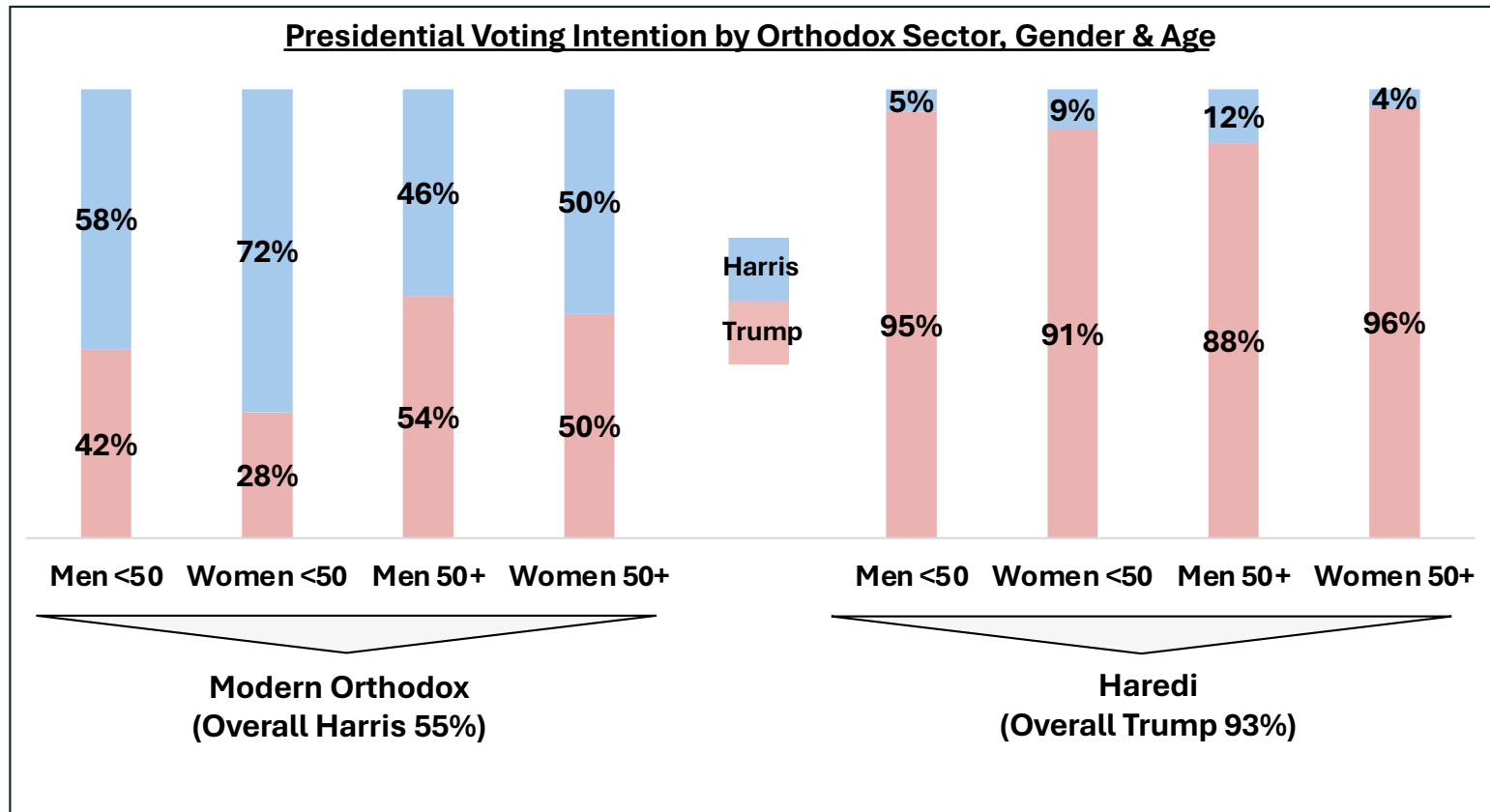
antisemitism survey (done with Prof. Sam Heilman) was fun but reaching a representative sample of the most insulated Hasidim, including Yiddish speakers, is still not achievable.

וויפיל אנטיסעמיטיזם האלט איר איז דא היינט אין אמעריקע



Political Leanings and Issues

2024 Presidential Voting Intention (Early September) – Haredim were 93% for Trump, up from about 88% a year earlier.



Voting Preference by Level of Secular Education

Modern Orthodox – With post-BA education, Harris 56%; with BA or less, Harris 52%.
Haredi – With post-BA education, Trump 88%; with BA or less, Trump 96%.

National Issues Most Important to Haredi Voters – Israel and antisemitism top the list. Further down the list, views are notably different from those of Modern Orthodox voters.

What issues are most important to you as a voter? Please check up to your top 4 issues.	%	
1. Israel, the Middle East (Iran, etc.)	68%	
2. Antisemitism	67%	
3. Inflation, the economy, jobs	50%	M.O.
4. Crime	45%	23%
5. Education/schools, government dealing with Jewish schools, availability of subsidies	41%	16%
6. Religious freedom	35%	14%
7. Immigration	29%	21%
8. The state of American democracy	19%	48%
9. Foreign affairs (Ukraine/Russia, China, etc.)	16%	34%
10. Health care	13%	34%
11. Availability of welfare programs	5%	
<i>Respondents could check up to 4 issues as being most important to them.</i>		

Issues more important to Haredim than to M.O.

Issues less important to Haredim than to M.O.

Among those who checked “Israel” as one of their four most important issues, 47% of Modern Orthodox and 46% of Haredi say it is “the single most important issue in their decision on whom to vote for.”

Why Haredim Vote For Trump: Sample Verbatim Responses

- ***“Not a perfect human being at all, but he understands the grave danger the world is in if Israel doesn't finish off Hamas, and Iran. Also is tough enough to take on the horrible protesting Demorats (not a typo) and has tough enough skin to not take criticisms personally.”***
- ***“His support for Israel and economic policies.”***
- ***“His main points, outside of his sometimes ridiculous rhetoric, are good for the country economically. He also sits on the centrist/conservative line, which is a whole lot more easy to swallow than what the Democrats want to do to this country. I'm afraid of how a Harris administration will further deal with the migrants, the economy, the woke issues, and, of course, Israel and the Jews.”***
- ***“I feel that his policies are good for the economy and I feel Jews will be safer with him as President.”***
- ***“Not alt left/progressive/anti Israel, is more fiscally responsible.”***
- ***“Trump has his faults, but he is a better candidate then Harris who will bring down the country. She is weak and will have all the liberals in the democratic running it instead of her.”***
- ***“He is a trusted Friend to Israel He does what he campaigns for; I found most politicians don't do what they say during a campaign He is a successful businessman our country needs someone who understands business.”***
- ***“He is the best for the country's economy, security, and to combat antisemitism. Best for jews.”***

Local Issues Most Important to Haredi Voters – Haredi local voting is very pragmatic. Every issue was rated as more important by Haredim than by Modern Orthodox respondents, except for political party.

How important are these factors in your voting choices at the local level? (% responding “very important” – top box of 3)	
Haredi	%
1. Specific issues affecting the Jewish community	89%
2. Broad issues in the community	76%
3. The candidates’ ability to provide for the Jewish community	69%
4. Positions on Substantial Equivalency Requirements (pushing yeshivas to teach more secular subjects)	56%
5. Instructions that I get from Jewish community leaders	39%
6. News that I get from the Jewish community and news media	31%
7. The candidates’ personality	31%
8. Political party	24%

Israel and Zionism

Israel Connection and Zionist Views – Relatively few (28%) Haredim are strongly Zionist, although the vast majority (83% ... nearly as much as among the Modern Orthodox) feel a very strong connection to Israel.

How would you describe your Zionist views at this time?			
	M.O.	Haredi	Satmar
Strongly Pro-Zionistic	76%	28%	0%
Somewhat Pro-Zionistic	18	23	0
Total Zionist	94%	51%	0%
No Zionist feelings either way	1	30	27
Somewhat Anti-Zionistic	3	10	18
Strongly Anti-Zionist	2	9	55

Has your approach to Zionism changed since October 7?			
	M.O.	Haredi	Satmar
Became more Pro-Zionistic	40%	24%	6%
No Change	55	70	64
Became more Anti-Zionistic	5	6	30

How emotionally connected to Israel do you feel at this time?		
	M.O.	Haredi
Very strong connection	87%	83%
Somewhat connected	10	11
Total connected	97%	94%
A little bit	1	3
Not at all	1	34
% Very strong connection – 9/23 survey – Change since 9/23	82% +5%	72% +11%

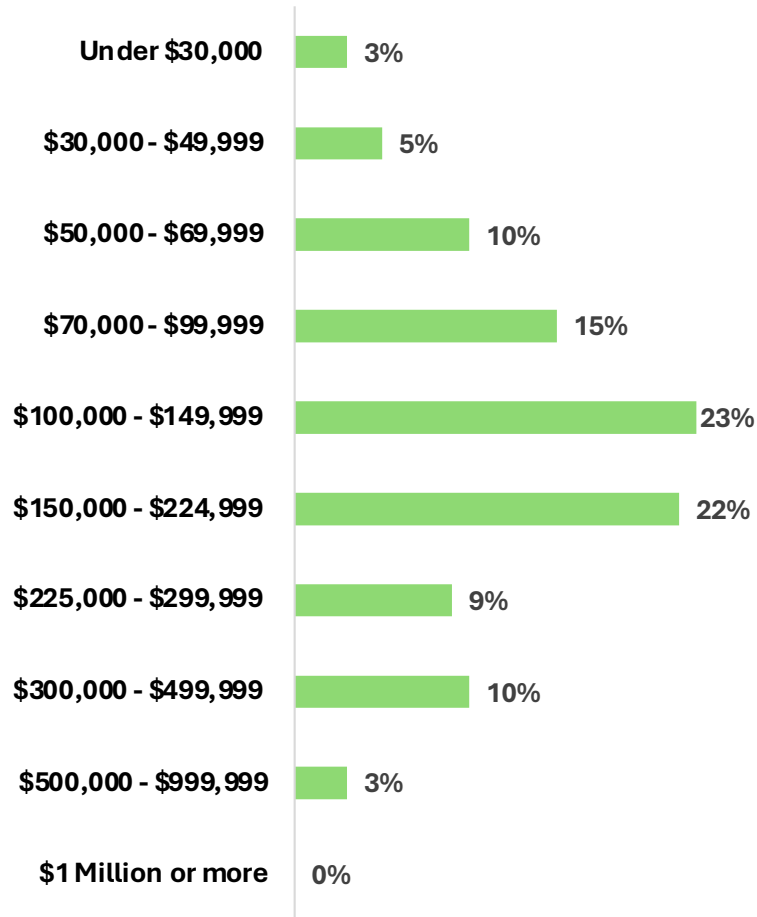
Views on Haredim Serving in the IDF – While few (8%) Haredim feel that Haredi men should be required to enlist and serve in the Israel Defense Forces, a notable minority (40%) say it should not be required, but should be strongly promoted.

What are your feelings on Haredi men enlisting and serving in the Israel Defense Forces?		
	M.O.	Haredi
It should be required	48%	8%
It should not be required, but should be strongly promoted	43	40
There should be no change in the current status	3	43
Don't know	6	9

Finances

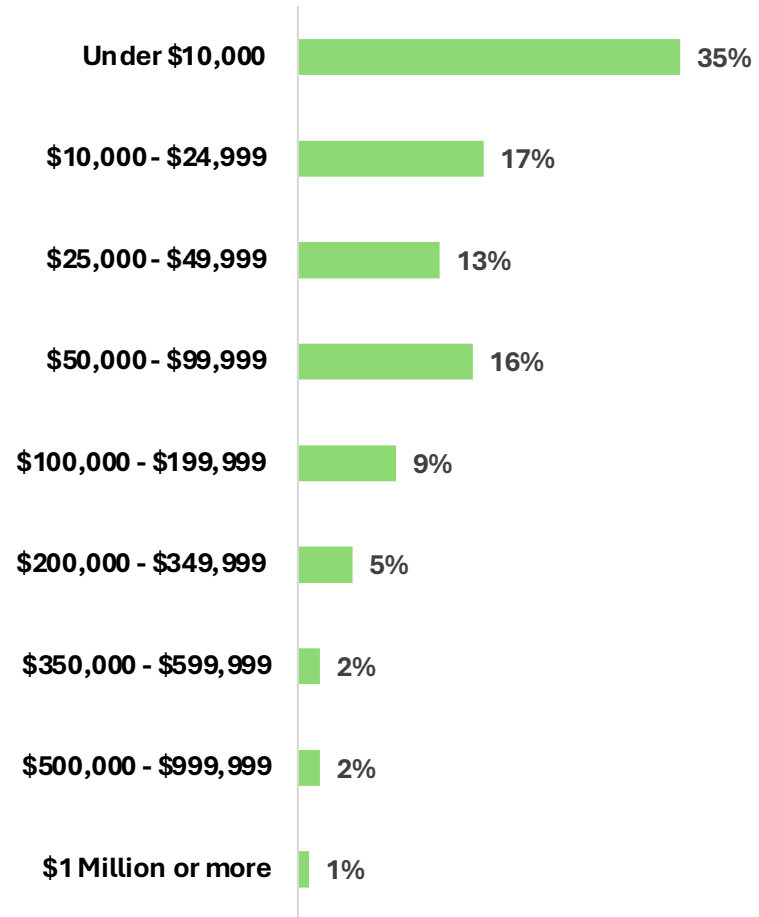
Income and Non-Retirement Savings – Median household income is \$135K; for families that mostly live in the expensive Northeast U.S. and have many children.

Household Income



Median \$135K

Savings

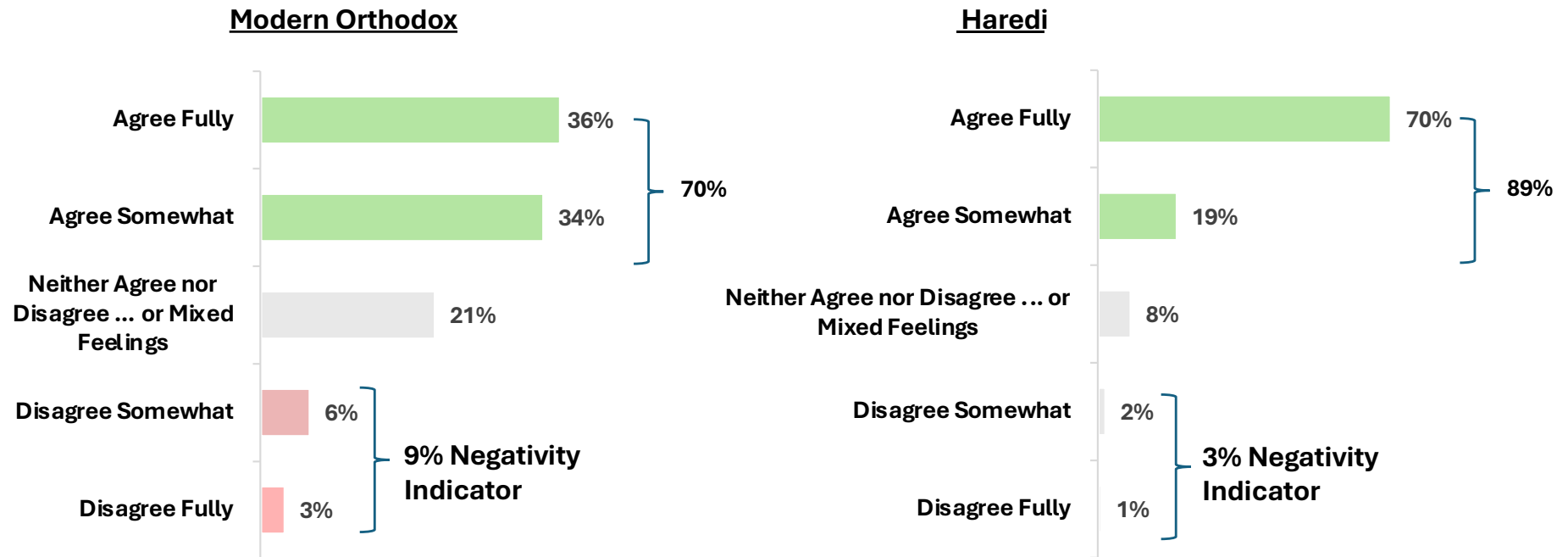


Median \$23K (2 months income)

Financial Comfort Levels – Responses illustrate the challenging financial situation confronting many Haredim.

	% Agree Fully	% Agree Fully or Somewhat
My household income covers expenses.	47%	79%
My household income lets me to save money for a “rainy day fund” or just general savings.	28%	57%
My household income lets me save for retirement.	21%	46%
My household income lets me buy some luxuries.	21%	55%
If I had to quickly come up with \$2,000 to cover an unexpected expense, I would be able to do it.	59%	83%
If I had to quickly come up with \$5,000 to cover an unexpected expense, I would be able to do it.	47%	71%
I am comfortable with the amount of money my household currently has in savings (not including retirement).	16%	39%
I am comfortable with the amount of money my household has saved to date for retirement.	11%	28%
I am comfortable that I will have enough retirement savings when I retire.	11%	29%

The “Bottom Line” – Are the Additional Costs of Orthodoxy Worth It?



- *Everything in life is a priority. People who are not Orthodox, or not Jewish, have their priorities. Being Orthodox comes with priorities and costs. It's all about choices.*
- *I want to raise my children up loving orthodox life and although I am sometimes anxious about higher costs (even if it doesn't impact my budget) I don't want to relay that stress to my kids*
- *HaShem is priceless*
- *It's not a question of whether I will spend a lot to prepare amazing shabbat food for the family - it's a necessity; same with other necessities for living an orthodox life*
- *Our life gives us connection to hashem. It is the ultimate. The best things in life have a cost. And they're always worth it*
- *There's a lot of frivolous spending on entertainment in the secular world that we don't involve ourselves in. The issues are primarily if you are worried about keeping up with the Jones's in our circles.*

Sources of News and Information

Where Haredim Get Their News

What are your main sources of information relating to the coronavirus and the COVID-19 vaccine? (June 2021)	
Medical professionals	54%
Social media (Facebook, WhatsApp, etc.)	50%
Personal connections (family, friends, people in community)	36%
Other (non-government(websites	36%
Secular newspapers	32%
Government websites	29%
Jewish newspapers	22%
Radio	18%
Religious leaders	14%
Television	10%
Spouse	8%
Political leaders	5%
Other	4%

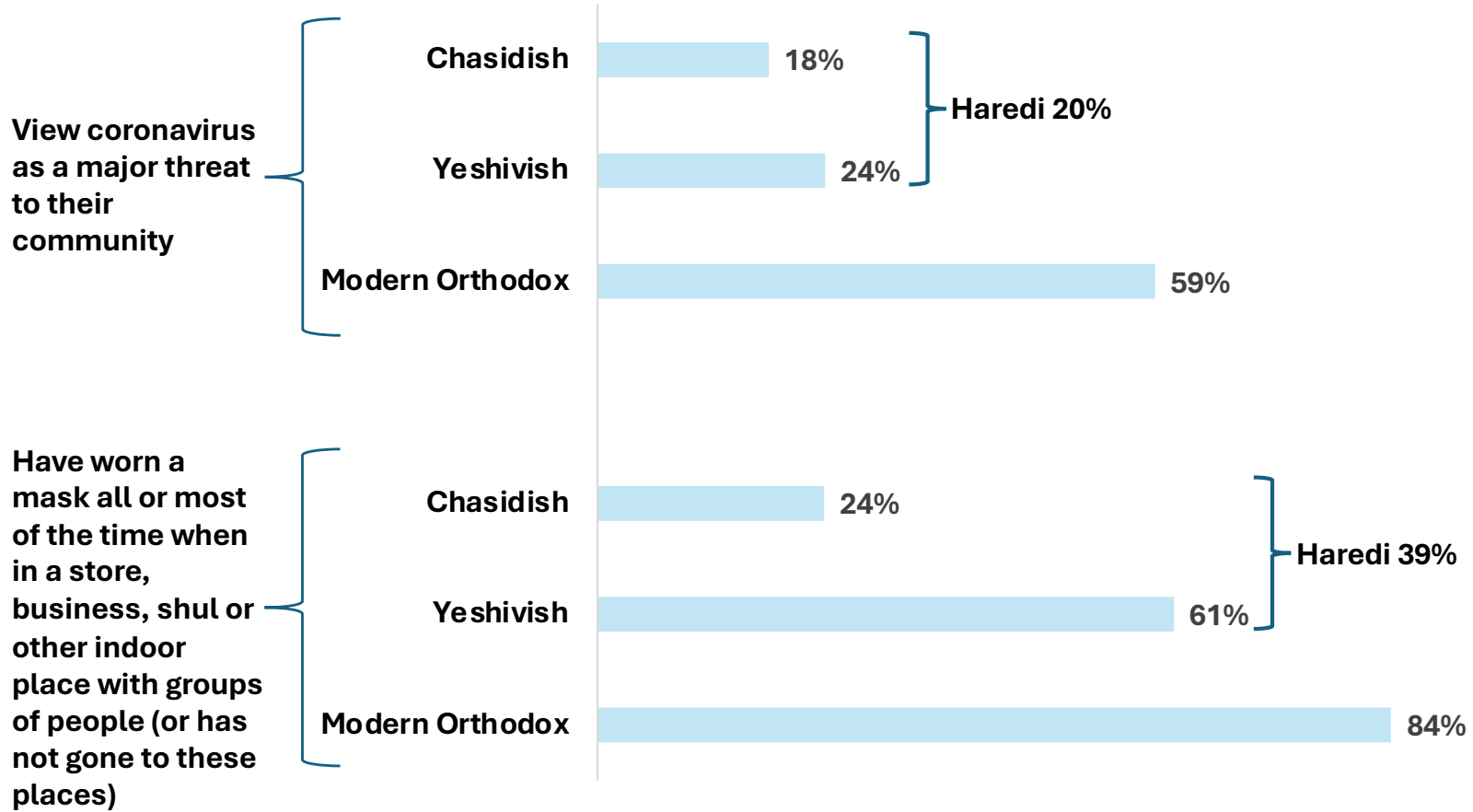
Where do you get information about politics? (September 2023)	
English-language Jewish newspapers, magazines	60%
Internet (unfiltered, unblocked)	49%
Social media (WhatsApp, Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, etc.)	35%
Non-Jewish newspapers, magazines	32%
Non-Jewish radio or TV	30%
Internet (filtered, blocked)	29%
Spouse or family members	27%
Personal connections (other family, friends, people in your community)	26%
Religious leaders – your rav, rosh yeshiva/rebbeim, shul rabbi, etc.	17%
Yiddish-language Jewish newspapers, magazines	10%
Jewish radio programs	7%
Billboards, posters, <i>Pashkevilin</i>	1%
Other	5%

Coronavirus, COVID and Vaccines

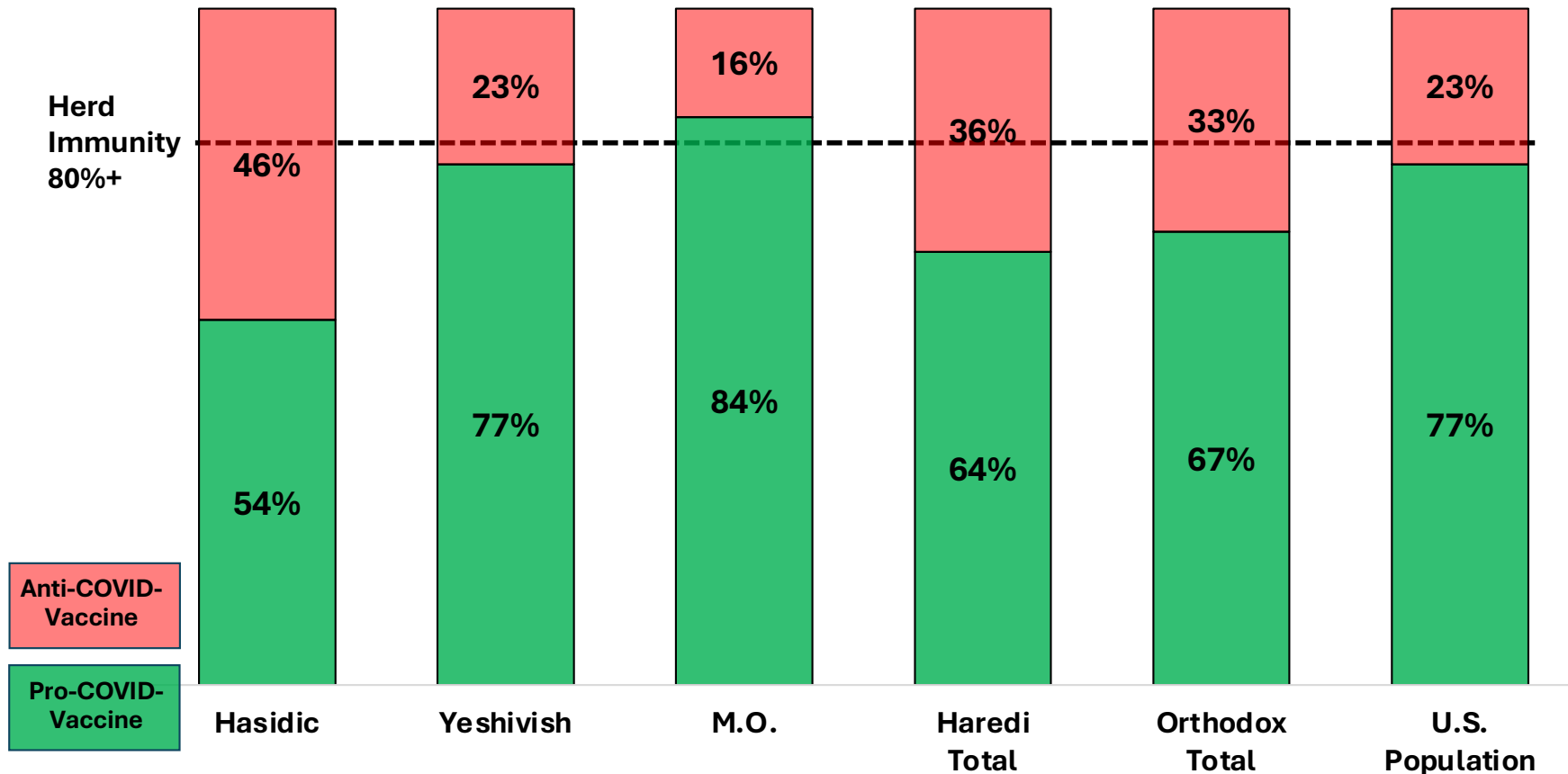
Emotional Impact of Coronavirus (Mid-2020) – More Haredim said their “feelings of Jewishness” (e.g., community connection) were strengthened than did other sectors of the Jewish community.

Have your experiences since the start of the coronavirus pandemic affected how you feel "Jewishly"? This might include such aspects as sense of connection, community, involvement, spirituality, etc.?			
	Haredi	Modern Orthodox	Non-Orthodox
Have become strengthened	38%	22%	18%
Have become weakened	1%	5%	3%
Are mixed; in some ways strengthened, but in some ways weakened	15%	18%	18%
No real change	46%	55%	61%

Perceptions of Coronavirus as a Threat (Mid-2021) – Few Haredim viewed coronavirus as a major threat to their community (20%) or wore masks (39%).



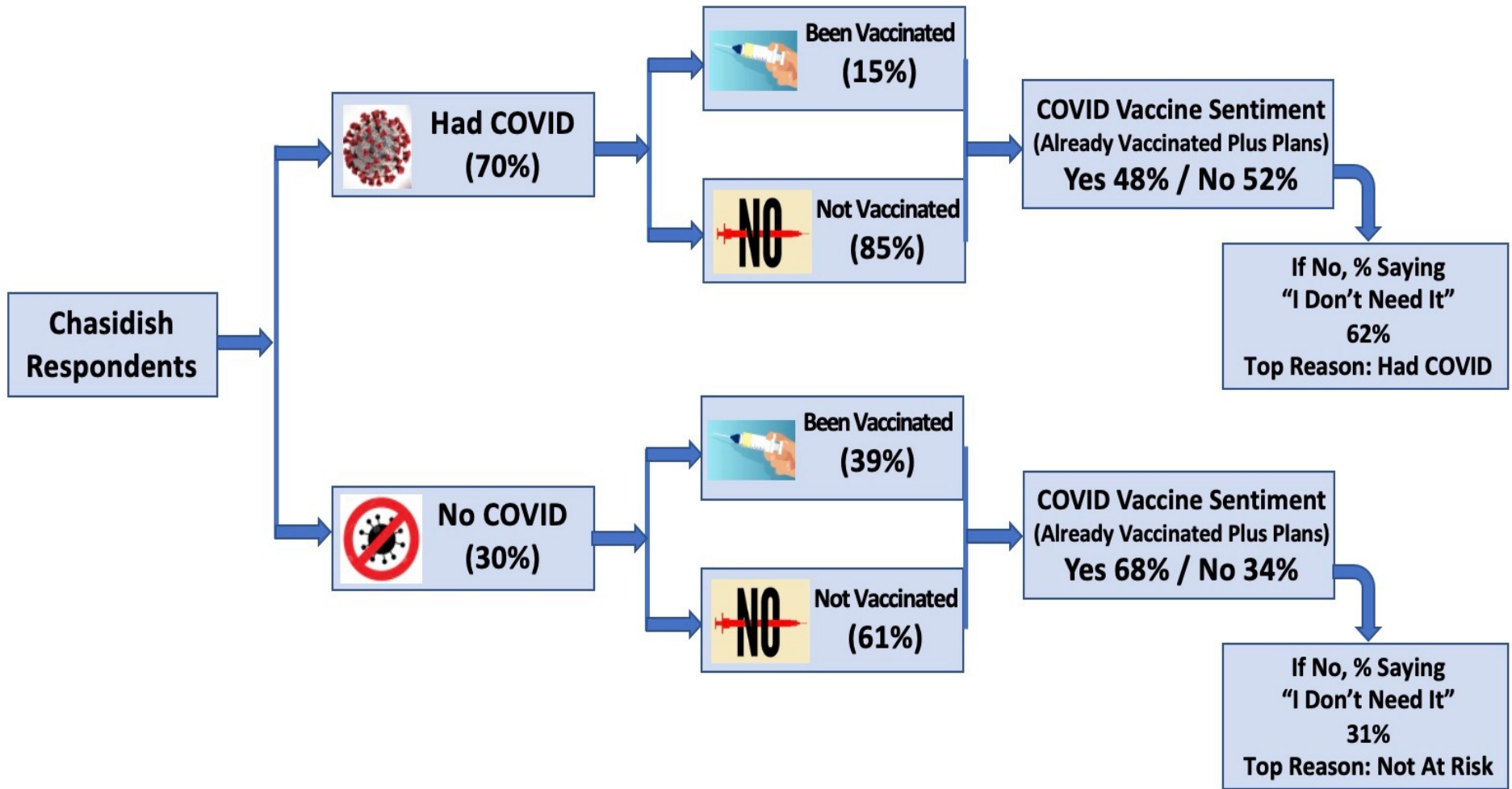
COVID Vaccine Sentiment (Mid-2021) – Haredim were highly “vaccine hesitant.”
 There were notable differences between the Hasidic and Yeshivish, as well as variations among the various Hasidic courts.



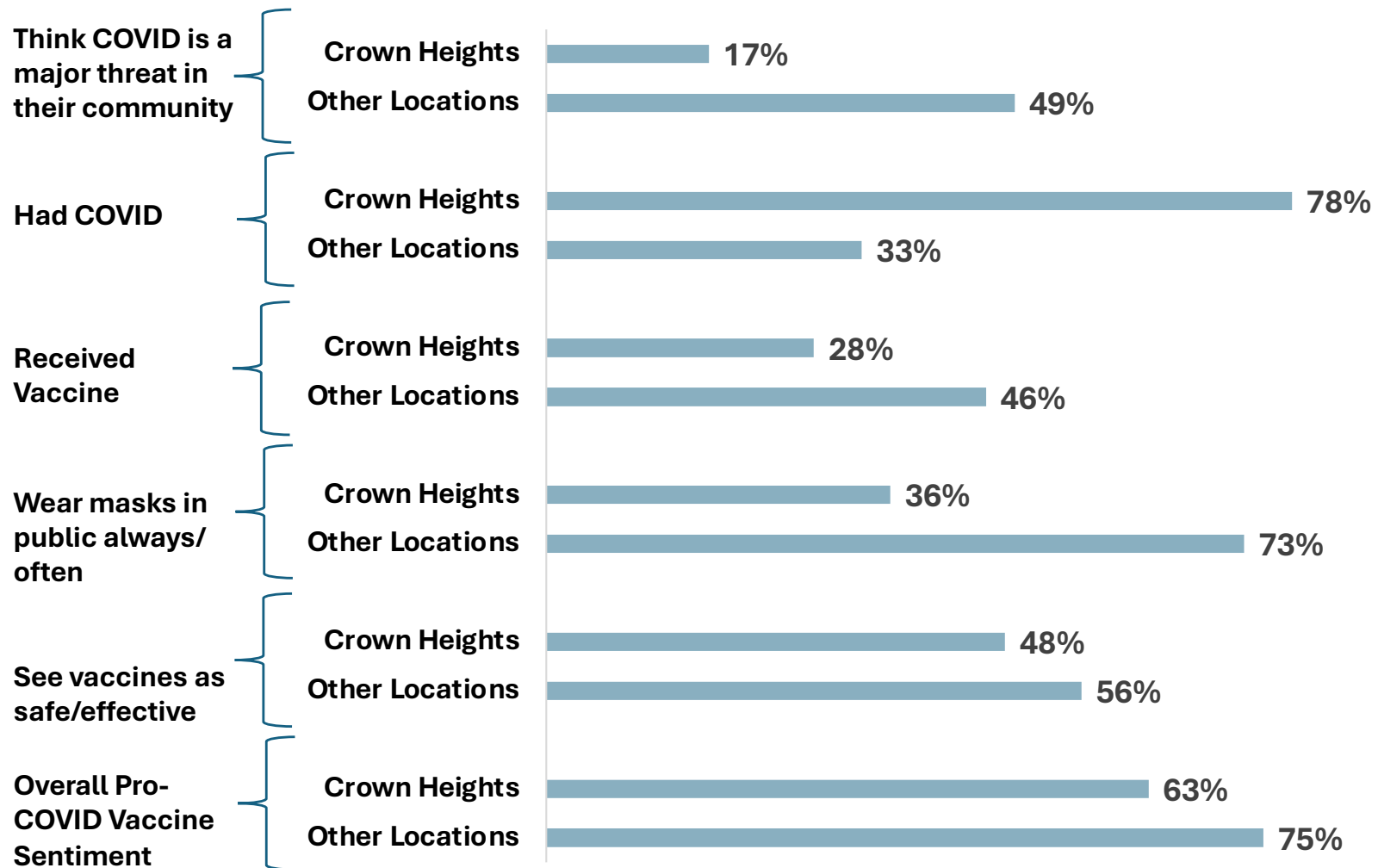
81% of Modern Orthodox get a flu shot annually, compared to 56% of Yeshivish and 34% of Hasidic

Sources: COVID-19 Attitudes and Vaccine Hesitancy in the U.S. Orthodox Jewish Community. June 2021. (Haredi n = 2,936). Page 12.
 Ten Months Later – Where Do We Stand? The U.S. Jewish Community’s Views on Coronavirus and COVID-19 Vaccines, January 18, 2021. n = Modern Orthodox 716, Haredi 356.
 (Unpublished data).

COVID Incidence & Vaccine Sentiment Flow







Impact of the Community – Chabad/Lubavitch in Crown Heights are strikingly different from Chabad/Lubavitch in Other Locations, i.e., *Shluchim*.






Those Who Leave (OTD - “Off the Derech”)

Why They Leave

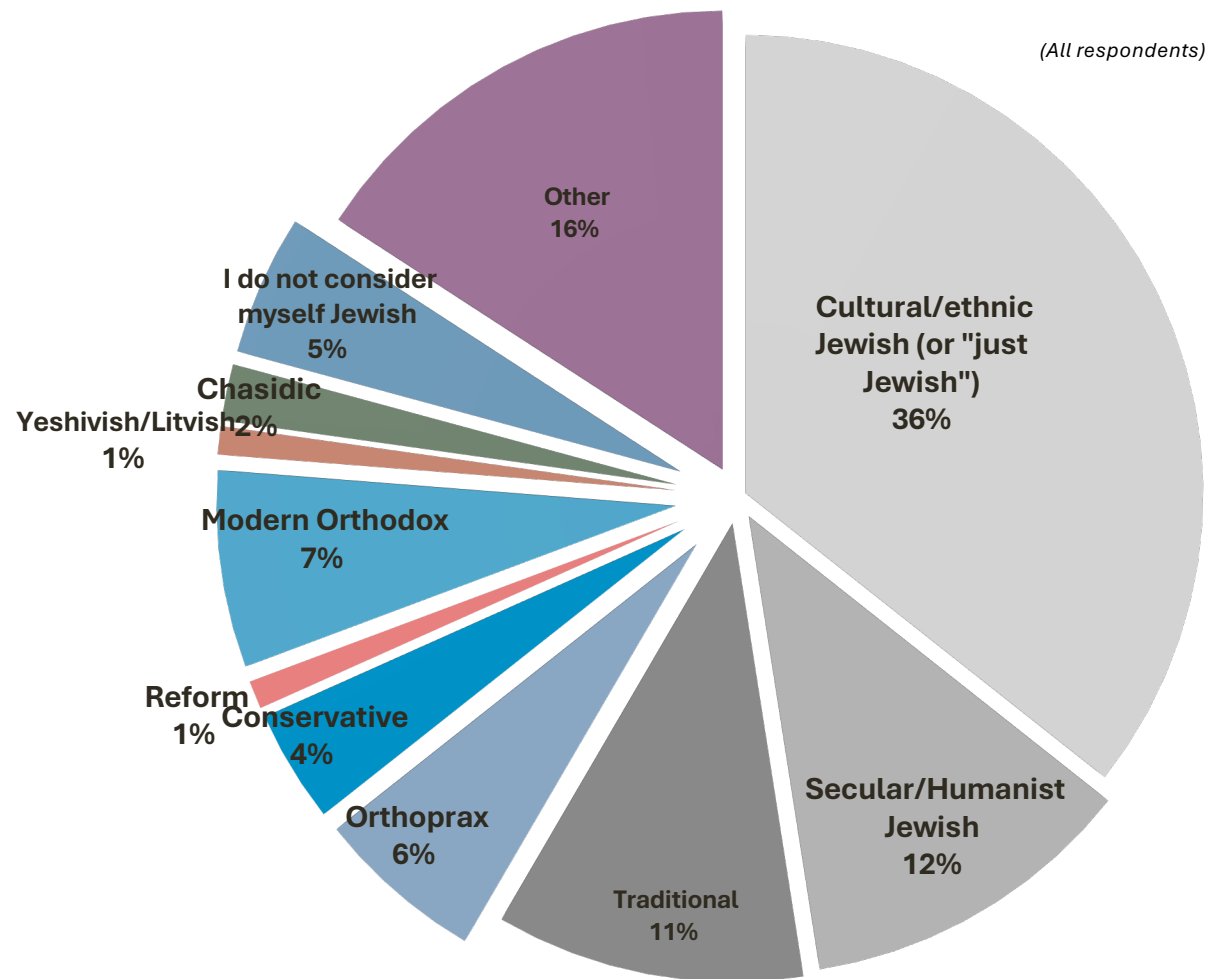
Hasidic	%
Things I read/learned, contradictions, no proof	20%
General doubts, loss of faith	15%
Thought for myself, intellectual, preferred rationalism	14%
Community hypocrisy, double standards	11%
Corrupt leaders, disliked role/worship of rabbis	11% 
Sexual abuse, physical abuse, domestic violence	7%
Religion too restrictive, stifling	7%
Wanted more control in life, to do more, be creative	7% 
Immoral behaviors, community ethics, scandals	6%
Role and status of women	7% 

Yeshivish	%
Things I read/learned, contradictions, no proof	21%
Thought for myself, intellectual, preferred rationalism	19% 
General doubts, loss of faith	14%
Community hypocrisy, double standards	12%
Religious practice, chumrahs, minutiae, no spirituality	11% 
Role and status of women	10%
Corrupt leaders, disliked role/worship of rabbis	7%
Science knowledge	7%
No questions, unanswered questions, lack of openness	6%
Religion too restrictive, stifling	6%

Chabad	%
Thought for myself, intellectual, preferred rationalism	14%
Wanted more control in life, to do more, be creative	12% 
Things I read/learned, contradictions, no proof	10% 
General doubts, loss of faith	10%
Sexual abuse, physical abuse, domestic violence	10%
Community hypocrisy, double standards	9%
Weak secular education	9% 
Religious practice, chumrahs, minutiae, no spirituality	7%
Religion too restrictive, stifling	5%
Immoral behaviors, community ethics, scandals	5%

Source: Starting a Conversation: A Pioneering Survey of Those Who Have Left the Orthodox Community. June 19, 2016. (Haredi n = 534; Hasidic (excl. Habad) 216; Habad 97; Yeshivish 221). Pages 25-27. Question text: Please think back to when you started moving away in belief or practice from the Orthodox community in which you were raised. What were the key things that caused your beliefs and practices to change? (Open-Ended)

How OTDers Self-Identify – Pew (2013) found that 70% of U.S. Jews identify with a denomination (Reform 35%, Conservative 18%, Orthodox 10%, Other Denominations 6%, None 30%), a much higher percentage than among our respondents (21%).



Jewish Practices Retained – Friday night candle lighting and a Shabbat meal are the most common retained practices.

