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*Perceptions of antisemitism among Hungarian Jews*

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Between March and November 1999, under the auspices of the Minority Research Institute of the Department of Sociology, Eötvös Loránd University, I conducted a sociological survey of the current situation of the Jewish community in Hungary. In the course of the survey, 2015 respondents were interviewed.<sup>1</sup> The most important demographic and social data were collected for four generations – from respondents’ grandparents to their children. Participants in the survey were asked to respond to questions concerning their relationship towards Jewish traditions and their acceptance or rejection of various forms of Jewish identity. They were also asked for their opinions on assimilation, integration and dissimilation, on Israel, and on the current significance of the Holocaust. Finally, an attempt was made to gauge the opinions of Hungarian Jews on the state of their own community, on their relationships with non-Jews, and on antisemitism in post-communist Hungary.

My purpose in this article shall be to analyse the data that we collected in this latter area. Firstly, I shall reveal how Jews living in Hungary define antisemitism, and whether – when it comes to classifying particular statements as antisemitic – there are any significant differences between younger and older groups of Jews, between those who are better educated and those with less education, and between those with a stronger and those with a weaker sense of Jewish identity.

I shall then explore how the various respondent groups judge the extent, intensity and gravity of anti-Jewish sentiment in the country, examining in particular whether respondents themselves have experienced such sentiment or have been subjected to discrimination. I shall

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<sup>1</sup> The costs of the research were paid for by the *American Jewish Committee*, the *American Joint Distribution Committee*, the *Claims Conference*, the *Jewish Agency*, the *Magyar Zsidó Hitközségek Szövetsége* [Association of

reveal whether respondents think that antisemitism will increase or decrease in the coming years. Finally, I shall touch upon the policies that respondents consider desirable when it comes to tackling antisemitic phenomena.

Evidently, the images formed by Jews and non-Jews shall determine in large part the relations between the two groups of one other. In his well-known article on antisemitism, István Bibó specifically identified as one of the causes of modern antisemitism the development of situations in which Jews and non-Jews typically form negative images of each other in the course of regular and repeated social interactions (Bibó, 1986. [1948] 685-704). In Bibó's view, such situations arise owing to "disturbances in societal development". There is no doubt that Jews will relate differently to their non-Jewish environment where they perceive strong antisemitism around them – instead of an environment that is friendly and accepting. The data compiled during our survey allow us to examine whether or not perceptions of antisemitism influence interactions between Jews and non-Jews in ordinary everyday life. I shall deal with this particular issue in the final part of the study.

## ***I. Perceptions of antisemitism***

### *1. What is antisemitism, and who are the antisemites?*

If, within a given society, there is agreement between Jews and non-Jews on what constitutes antisemitism, then in such a society antisemitism will probably be a negligible problem. Usually, however, the situation is not so harmonious. As recent acrimonious political and cultural debates demonstrate – two typical examples of which are the Walser-debate in Germany and the debate following the publication of the Sebastian-diary in Romania<sup>2</sup> – even today there are great divisions of opinion within non-Jewish society with regard to the statements, attitudes and phenomena that society should regard as antisemitic. But agreement on this issue is also lacking among Jewish groups – with their different social status and level of integration and representing

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Hungarian Jewish Communities], the *Magyar Zsidó Örökség Közalapítvány* [Hungarian Jewish Heritage Foundation], and the *Ronald S. Lauder Foundation*.

<sup>2</sup> For the Walser-debate, see, for example, *Die Zeit*, 6 June 2002. For the article on Mihail Sebastian's "Diary" that provoked the Romanian debate, see Gabriel Liiceanu, 'Sebastian, mon frere' in 22, 29 April – 5 May 1997. For subsequent reactions, see George Voicu, 'L'honneur national roumain en question' in *Les Temps Modernes*, Nr. 606, Novembre/Décembre 1999, pp. 143-152.

the various versions of Jewish identity: they also define antisemitism in different ways. Indeed, currently, it is often in such differences of view, as well as in the associated disputes, that the various options connected with Jewish identity and the relationships with non-Jewish society are formulated. Therefore, when examining perceptions of antisemitism, we should pay particular attention to the ways in which Hungarian Jews define antisemitism and to whether or not there are any differences between the various groups of Jews in their perceptions of antisemitism. We should also examine whether these opinions differ from the typical opinions of non-Jewish groups in society.

In the course of our survey, we asked respondents to tell us whether, in their view, seven statements that are regularly repeated in the course of debates on antisemitism were antisemitic or not. Several years earlier, we had posed this same question about identical statements to a representative sample of the Hungarian adult population.<sup>3</sup> The division of responses is shown in Table 1.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> This survey was made in 1995 with a sample of 1500 people. For the findings of the research, see *Antisemitic Prejudices in Contemporary Hungary. Analysis of Current Trends in Antisemitism, Acta no. 16.*, The Vidal Sassoon International Center for the Study of Antisemitism, The Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 1999.

<sup>4</sup> The responses of the Jewish sample were compared with the responses of the sample of the full Hungarian population and the responses of the sample of Budapest residents with high school education – this group being the closest to the Jewish population in terms of social status.

Table 1.

## How should antisemitism be defined in Hungary today?

*(I – total adult population; II – residents of Budapest with high school education or more)*

(Percentage, excluding don't knows)

In your opinion, is a person an antisemite if he or she...

	<i>Not an antisemite</i>			<i>An antisemite</i>		
	<i>Jews</i>	<i>I</i>	<i>II</i>	<i>Jews</i>	<i>I</i>	<i>II</i>
... always registers who is Jewish among his/her acquaintances	65	66	74	30	23	21
... would not marry a Jew	29	36	42	66	52	52
... thinks that Jews have recognisable features	61	70	84	33	19	12
... thinks that the interests of Jews in Hungary are very different from the interests of non-Jews	24	50	58	67	35	35
... thinks that Jews are no longer capable of integrating into Hungarian society	17	38	43	76	48	49
... thinks that the crimes committed against the Jews were no greater than those committed against the victims of Communism	12	51	62	80	30	33
... thinks that Jews are hostile to the Christian faith	14	39	47	77	42	43

The results demonstrate an interesting pattern. Both a majority of Jews and a majority of non-Jews are agreed that a person is not an antisemite merely because he/she “always registers who is Jewish among his/her acquaintances” or “thinks that Jews have recognisable features”. There is also agreement between the two groups that a person who “would not marry a Jew” may be considered an antisemite. Nevertheless, even in the case of these three statements, we may already identify the differences that become so obvious when we come to look at judgements of other statements. Thus, in general, Jews are more likely to consider these statements antisemitic than are non-Jews. And the discrepancies are the greatest between the Jewish sample group and the group comprising educated Budapest residents. For instance, while just 61-65 percent of the Jewish group consider these statements – which express an awareness of difference – to be non-antisemitic, 74-84 percent of the educated Budapest residents’ group are of the same opinion.

Whereas a majority of respondents do not consider statements that register Jews as an external social group to be antisemitic, the responses do indicate stark differences of opinion in

connection with two other statements. While the great majority of Jews (80 percent) consider people who equate the abuses of communism with the persecution of the Jews to be antisemitic, the majority of non-Jews (51 percent) – and above all a considerable majority of the educated Budapest residents' group (62 percent) – do not consider such a view to be antisemitic. Similarly, the two groups fall into opposing camps when it comes to determining whether or not someone is antisemitic if he/she thinks that Jews constitute a separate interest group within modern Hungarian society.

One of the great antisemitism debates of the early 1990s arose after the well-known Hungarian poet Sándor Csoóri stated that, after their experiences of persecution, the Jews of Hungary were no longer capable of integrating into post-war Hungarian society.<sup>5</sup> Today, some years after Csoóri made these remarks, both a majority of Jews and a majority of non-Jews consider them to be antisemitic – although in the latter group the majority is merely a relative one (48 percent) because large numbers expressed no response to this question. The relative majorities of the two groups appear, however, on opposing sides in their judgement of people who state that Jews are hostile towards the Christian faith: according to a majority of respondents from the educated Budapest residents' group, this is not an antisemitic statement.

Generally speaking, the breakdown of opinions indicates a latent tension. Whereas at least two-thirds of the Jews consider five of the seven statements to be antisemitic, the absolute majority of non-Jews consider merely the rejection of marriage to be an antisemitic attitude. The differences arising in connection with statements comparing the Holocaust with the abuses of Communism or expressing Jewish hostility towards Christianity, demonstrate that tensions are greatest in areas linked to the ideological conflicts of the past ten years, and that tensions are particular great between the Jewish group and the group having the most similar social status, i.e. the educated Budapest residents' group.

If we examine the breakdown of opinions among the Jewish group, we see that – although the great majority of Jews consider five of the seven statements to be antisemitic – there are characteristic differences between those who consider fewer of the statements to be antisemitic in

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<sup>5</sup> See Sándor Csoóri, 'Nappali Hold I-IV' [Daytime moon I-IV] in *Hitel*, 22 August 1990 (vol. III no. 17, 2.and 4-6.1.), 5 September 1990 (vol. III, no. 18, 4-7.1.), 10 September 1990 (vol. III, no. 19, 4-6.1.), 3 October 1990 (vol. III, no. 20, 4-7.1.). For an analysis of the debate, see Monika Kovács, 'Kategorizáció és diszkrimináció. Az antiszemitizmus, mint csoportnyelv [Categorisation and discrimination. Antisemitism as group language]', *Világosság*, May 1993, pp. 52-59.

their content and those who consider more of them to be antisemitic. Overall, 25 percent of the full Jewish sample defined six or seven of the statements as antisemitic, while 14 percent of the respondents considered two or fewer of the statements to be antisemitic. As we examined the differences, it became obvious that sensitivity towards antisemitism is not unrelated to the relationship of respondents towards Jewish identity. In the course of an analysis of typical Jewish identity strategies, we found a group among the respondents whose members had become detached from Jewish tradition during the lives of the last two generations: the parents of such respondents still preserved some elements of Jewish tradition, but the respondents themselves did not. Two-thirds of this group belong to the older generation – having been born prior to 1945. In the post-war years, this group was characterised by rapid social mobility and attempts to make up for the obstacles to mobility that were imposed upon them during the years of persecution. The characteristics of this group strongly resemble the attributes of the group that is most sensitive to antisemitism: its members are over-represented in the older age-group (aged over 55) and among college (but not university) graduates, the well-off, and former HSWP (Hungarian Socialist Workers Party, the ruling party before 1990) members. (Within this group, the university graduates differ from those with lower educational qualifications in that they are more likely to regard statements expressing an awareness of difference as antisemitic.) It is well known that antisemitism plays an important role in the formation and construction of certain Jewish identities. It seems that this is the group where this role is the greatest. On the other hand, in groups that became detached from Jewish religious or cultural traditions generations ago, or which still preserve and maintain (or have recently returned to) such traditions, there is less sensitivity towards antisemitism: these groups consider merely an average (or below average) number of the statements to be antisemitic.

As the next step in our survey, we examined whom the respondents consider to be antisemitic in Hungarian society today. Respondents were asked to indicate which of the groups listed below are characterised to a greater or lesser degree by antisemitism, and to identify “manifestly antisemitic” groups. The results are shown in Table 2.

Table 2

Who are antisemites in Hungary today?  
(Percentage)

	<i>Strong antisemitism</i>	<i>A greater or lesser degree of antisemitism</i>	<i>No choice made</i>
MIÉP <sup>6</sup> supporters	90	5	2
Conservative politicians	14	51	29
Former Communist functionaries	2	23	66
The conservative media	20	46	28
Priests	8	34	49
Descendants of the old ruling classes	14	35	42
Practising Christians	5	26	62
Intellectuals	2	22	69
The poor	7	30	55
Young people	2	27	62
Old people	4	28	60
Uneducated people	27	43	24
Residents of Budapest	3	28	52
Rural inhabitants	5	27	57

Summarising the responses, we see that almost one-quarter of respondents (23 %) consider merely a few (0-3) groups to be antisemitic, whereas almost one-third (32 %) identify 10-15 groups as antisemitic. Males, Budapest residents, members of the 35-54 age-group, and the well-off are particularly likely to suspect antisemitism among the various groups. It seems that social status and the strength of Jewish identity together determine the apperception of antisemitic groups: in groups that have become detached from Jewish traditions and whose sense of Jewish identity is weak, it is those of a higher social status that identify a greater than average number of antisemitic groups and those of a lower status that identify a lower than average number of antisemitic groups. This may also indicate that antisemitism is a stronger identity-forming factor in the assimilated groups of a higher social status than among assimilated Jews of a lower social status. On the other hand, among Jews who maintain Jewish traditions in some manner or another, it is those of a lower social status who perceive a greater than average number of antisemitic groupings within society.

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<sup>6</sup> MIÉP (Hungarian Truth and Life Party) has been the extreme right party of the Hungarian parliament between 1998-2002. The party received ca. 250 000 votes at the elections in 2002, which was not enough to take the 5 % threshold for entering the parliament again.

A majority of respondents make no link between antisemitism and groups formed on the basis of age or place of residence. Nor do they link antisemitism to poverty, religious beliefs, or Communist convictions. The majority tends to search for the social core of antisemitism on the rightwing of current Hungarian politics, among the descendants of groups having influence in interwar society, and in poorly educated sections of modern society. Members of the group that preserve Jewish traditions and possess relatively low social status evaluate the categories arising in respect of this issue in a remarkably undifferentiated manner. On the other hand, those with leftwing social and political attitudes, as well as former Communist Party members, identify social groups connected with the pre-war regime as the main bastion of antisemitism, while middle-aged Budapest residents (35-54 age-group) with a higher education perceive greater than average antisemitism among the current representatives of the rightwing – i.e. among conservative politicians and the conservative press. Older members of this group are particularly wary of the traditional spectre of fascism: according to them, it is MIÉP supporters and “people with no education” that constitutes the core of antisemitism.

Based on responses to the two previous series of questions, we may isolate a group whose members regard at least six of the listed statements and at least ten of the listed groups as antisemitic – that is to say, in whose eyes antisemitism is rife throughout non-Jewish Hungarian society. This group, which constitutes 10% of the total sample and whose members typically live in Budapest, contains a lower than average number of young people and a higher than average number of people aged 55-69. The poorly educated are under-represented in this group, while college graduates are over-represented. Former membership of the HSWP is a characteristic feature of members of this group. As we have already noted, the core of this group, which is highly sensitive to antisemitism, comprises people who reached adulthood during the first decade and a half after the Second World War and who probably took advantage of the opportunities for social mobility that were available during the post-Holocaust period but who nevertheless failed to attain a high social status. This is the group whose members – whilst becoming very much secularised during their rise in society – are still not detached from Jewish traditions by more generations. An indication of the acute identity problems faced by members of this group is their high level of support for assimilation: below average numbers of people in this group are in favour of avoiding the complete assimilation of the Jews. On the other hand, however, the number of people in the group who agree that Jews have been incapable of integrating fully into

society ever since their wartime persecution is greater than average. This means that although many in the group would like to get rid of their Jewishness – which they perceive as a stigma – they nevertheless consider such a move to be impossible. Perceptions of antisemitism obviously play a great role in the construction of this stigmatised identity.

## 2. Estimates of the intensity of anti-Jewish sentiment

Concerning their judgement of anti-Jewish sentiment, the respondents may be divided into three groups of equal size: one-third of respondents considering antisemitism in Hungary today to be a minor problem, just over one-third (37%) regarding it as a widespread phenomenon, and about one-third considering it to be quite a problem. Five percent of respondents were of the opinion that antisemitism is “very widespread” in the country. The proportion of people who think that antisemitism is a minor problem is slightly higher than average among young people.

Table 3

Perceptions of the extent of antisemitism in the country, according to the age of respondents (Percentage)

Age-groups	under 34	35–54	55–69	over 70	Total
A minor problem	39	33	32	27	32
Quite a problem	28	31	29	35	31
A widespread problem	33	36	39	38	37
<i>Total</i>	<i>100</i>	<i>100</i>	<i>100</i>	<i>100</i>	<i>100</i>

Respondents were asked to indicate on a scale of five their perceptions of antisemitism (5 = a very major problem, 1 = a negligible problem). The sample average on the scale was 3.06. This result may be compared with the results of a survey conducted on a sample of the full adult Hungarian population in June 2002, according to which the average of the answers of respondents to the same question on a scale of four was 2.00, while the average of the answers of respondents who were Budapest residents with a high school education (who most closely resemble the social and demographic composition of the Jewish population) was 2.18 – that is, considerably lower than the value measured among the Jewish sample.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>7</sup> Due to the two types of scale, any comparison of the averages should be treated with caution. The size of the national sample was 1000 people, and the survey was performed by TÁRKI. The following basic divisions arose on a scale of four: antisemitism in the country is very widespread – 4 %, widespread – 16 %, a minor problem – 44 %, a very minor problem – 24 %, don’t know – 12 %. Compared with the results for the Jewish sample, many more

In the course of the survey, we also asked respondents to estimate the size of groups harbouring anti-Jewish sentiments. Based on responses to this question, we arrived at a set of data that may be evaluated somewhat differently.

Table 4

How many people in Hungary (as a percentage of the country's total population) are currently hostile towards Jews?  
(Percentage)

In your opinion, what percentage of people are hostile towards Jews?	Share of responses (percentage)
0	11
1–10	27
11–20	16
21–30	18
31–50	17
51–X	11
<i>Total</i>	<i>100</i>

If – somewhat arbitrarily, of course – we say that an estimate of 0–10 percent corresponds to a non-existent or “negligible” level of antisemitism, then we may say of 28% of respondents that according to them hostility towards Jews is absent or hardly present in Hungarian society today. The group that estimates that 11–30 percent of people are hostile towards Jews corresponds roughly with those who perceive antisemitism to be “quite a problem”. On the other hand, 28 percent of respondents think that, currently, at least one in three people in Hungary view Jews with hostility.<sup>8</sup>

According to almost two-thirds of respondents (63%), antisemitism has increased in Hungary in recent years.

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respondents in the full sample thought that antisemitism in Hungary is a “very minor problem” (24 % as against 2 %), while the share of those who thought that antisemitism is “very widespread” was about the same (4% as against 5%). It is worthwhile comparing the results of the research on the national sample with the results of the research carried out in 1995 – also on a national and representative sample: At that time 2 % of participants in the survey stated that antisemitism is “very widespread” and 21 % that it is “widespread”. Meanwhile 49 % thought that it was “a minor problem” and 17 % that it was a “a very minor problem”. Thus, compared with 1995, the ratio of those who have chosen an extreme position on the scale has risen.

<sup>8</sup> According to sociological surveys carried out during the past decade, about 25% of the Hungarian adult population have antisemitic prejudices, and 8–10 % are extreme antisemites. Therefore 18% of respondents correctly estimated the proportion of people who are hostile towards Jews.

Table 5

Has anti-Jewish sentiment increased or decreased in recent years?

(Percentage)

Anti-Jewish sentiment has...	Under 34	35–54	55–69	Over 70	Total
Decreased	10	5	4	6	6
Remained the same	32	28	30	33	31
Increased	58	67	66	61	63
<i>Total</i>	<i>100</i>	<i>100</i>	<i>100</i>	<i>100</i>	<i>100</i>

There are great differences between respondents in their judgement of recent changes in the level of anti-Jewish sentiment: the share of respondents who think that antisemitism has increased in Hungary in recent years is more than ten times as large as the proportion of those who think that there has been a decrease. In each of the age-groups, the share of those who think that antisemitism has strengthened is larger than the share who think that it has weakened. The difference is the greatest in the 55–69 age-group (in this age-group, the former group is almost seventeen times larger than the latter). On a scale of five (5 – antisemitism has very much increased, 4 – has somewhat increased, 3 – has stayed the same, 2 – has somewhat decreased, 1 – has very much decreased) the average response was 3.39. Once again this result may be compared with the results for samples of the full adult population and of educated Budapest residents: the average on a scale of five for the full adult population was 3.11 and for educated Budapest residents 3.29 – that is, Hungarian public opinion has also perceived an increase in hostility towards Jews in recent years – even if the perceived increase is less than that perceived by those directly affected by such hostility.<sup>9</sup>

If we examine opinions relating to the strength and dynamism of antisemitism together, we find a correlation between evaluations of the strength and dynamics of hostility towards Jews: the stronger a person perceives antisemitism to be, the more he or she will be inclined to regard it as dynamic – more than three-quarters of those who perceive antisemitism to be widespread consider levels of antisemitism to have increased in recent years, while this view is shared by only 40% of those who perceive antisemitism to be merely a minor problem. (By way of

<sup>9</sup> In the full Hungarian population, 23 % of respondents were of the opinion that antisemitism had increased, while 49 % thought that it had stayed the same, and 15 % that it had declined. In the course of the 1995 research, 33 % of respondents thought that antisemitism had increased, 32 % that it had stayed the same, and 22 % that it had declined. Thus, during the past decade, 23-33 percent of the adult population essentially perceived a constant increase in the intensity of antisemitism.

comparison, just one-fifth of those who consider antisemitism to be widespread, see no change in the intensity of antisemitism in the recent past). Nevertheless, the fact that most of the members of the group perceiving low levels of antisemitism still consider antisemitism to have increased also demonstrates that this is the dominant perception amongst the Jewish population.

The opinion of respondents concerning the intensity and extent of antisemitism is based primarily on information acquired through mass communication, signs on the street (graffiti), and the comments of strangers on the street. Between two-thirds and three-quarters of the interviewees stated that they had encountered manifestations of antisemitism during the last decade. 20-25 percent of respondents stated that they had witnessed displays of antisemitism in the house they live, in their neighbourhood or at their place of work. 16 percent stated that they had perceived antisemitism in some manner at state institutions or government authorities. Nevertheless, the majority of perceived antisemitic phenomena had not been directed at the respondents themselves: when we asked respondents whether they personally had “experienced some kind of grievance or disadvantage that was linked to their being Jewish”, 82 percent said that they had not. A majority of those reporting personal encounters with antisemitism identified the public expression of antisemitic remarks as the source of their personal grievances.

Expectations with regard to the future are somewhat brighter than evaluations of the past. Half of respondents think that the degree of anti-Jewish sentiment is unlikely to change in the coming decade. Meanwhile the other half believe that there will be a change: although the number of people who think that antisemitism will increase is twice as high as the number of people who expect a decrease, this ratio is still just half of the proportion of people who perceive that antisemitism has grown in the recent past (33% as against 63%). The age factor has a limited influence on respondents’ expectations for the future. At best, we may merely state that the ratio of those who think that antisemitism will increase is somewhat lower among members of the oldest group.

Table 6  
Will antisemitism increase or decrease in the next ten years? Breakdown by age of respondents (Percentage)

<b>Antisemitism will...</b>	<b>Under 34</b>	<b>35–54</b>	<b>55–69</b>	<b>Over 70</b>	<b>Total</b>
decrease	18	14	16	15	16
stay the same	47	51	51	58	51
increase	35	35	33	27	33
<i>Total</i>	<i>100</i>	<i>100</i>	<i>100</i>	<i>100</i>	<i>100</i>

A majority of respondents consider it unlikely that there will be antisemitic discrimination in the future. Just 4 percent think that there is “a serious likelihood of Jews being persecuted” in Hungary in the next ten years. One-third of respondents consider this to be out of the question, while more than 60 percent think that there might be some antisemitic discrimination, but that such measures are rather improbable. The age of respondents did not influence expectations.

Table 7

Breakdown of the various age-groups according to whether or not they fear that Jews will be persecuted during the next ten years in Hungary  
(Percentage)

	<b>Under 34</b>	<b>35–54</b>	<b>55–69</b>	<b>Over 70</b>	<b>Total</b>
No	32	29	32	32	31
Possibly	65	66	65	65	65
Yes	3	5	3	3	4
<i>Total</i>	<i>100</i>	<i>100</i>	<i>100</i>	<i>100</i>	<i>100</i>

As the answers to the four analysed questions (evaluation of the intensity of antisemitism [1], forecasts for previous [2] and future [3] trends and evaluation of the likelihood of discrimination [4]) indicate, the opinions of Jews in Hungary are very much divided in their judgement of the extent of antisemitism and the threat posed by it. If we combine the answers to the questions, we see that *28 percent of respondents providing valid responses* consider antisemitism to be *insignificant* in the country and do not expect it to strengthen in the near future, *59 percent of respondents* perceive *some antisemitism* and are *somewhat afraid* that it might increase, while *12 percent of the sample* consider *antisemitism* to be *widespread* in the country and to pose a *real threat*.

Next, we examined the factors that led respondents to achieve high scores on the indicator formed on the basis of respondents’ answers to the four questions. We may call this indicator “the fear of antisemitism indicator”.<sup>10</sup> The analysis produced the interesting result that the social and demographic variables (with the exception of gender) had no great influence on opinions: age, level of education, family income, household equipment did not significantly influence the development of opinions. On the other hand, women were far more likely than men to fear

antisemitism, and such fears were, on average, stronger among Budapest residents than among residents of other towns and villages. The groups that have great fears of antisemitism are to be found among the lower levels of the Jewish social hierarchy (members of this group are typically minor bureaucrats and “other white-collar” workers); they adhere strongly to Jewish traditions and are somewhat more religious than average.

The fear of antisemitism is far better explained by certain attitudes of respondents than by the above social and demographic variables. The data show that respondents who on the one hand have a strong Jewish identity and on the other hand felt more at home under the old pre-1990 system have greater fears of antisemitism than do others. The feeling of “being at home” under the old system does not amount to a political opinion or position: former Communist Party members are no more afraid of antisemitism than are people who were never party members. The fear of antisemitism is primarily characteristic of those people who consider the old system to have been more transparent, simpler, and more caring, and who fear the effects of a market economy, crime and violence. This group comprises people for whom the change of political system has brought the loss of routine rules and norms of behaviour, as well as the creation of new and challenging life situations.<sup>11</sup> Among such groups, the fear of an uncontrolled eruption of antisemitism clearly gives rise to a law-and-order mentality and provides a motive for supporting stricter policies in this area. Indicatively, the group with the greatest fears of antisemitism considers antisemitism to have been far stronger during the 1956 revolution than do other Jewish groups, and at the same time this group’s appraisal of the Kádár era is the most favourable and its evaluation of the decade after the change of political system the least favourable – in both cases its evaluation is significantly different from that of the other groups of the sample.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> We established the indicator in the form of a principal component. The four statements constituted one PC, whose eigenvalue was 2.037, explained variance 50.9 percent, and the loading of the various components: [1] .728; [2] .761; [3] .712; [4] .649.

<sup>11</sup> In order to explain the intensity of fear of antisemitism we used regression analysis. We defined as the dependent variable the principal component described in note 7. We included as an independent variable in the analysis basic social and demographic variables as well as several attitude variables. As a result of step-by-step analysis, seven independent variables were left among the series of independent variables: strength of Jewish identity (beta= .171), the feeling of “being at home” under the old system (beta= .164), gender (beta= .124), doubts in the justice system (beta= .107), opposition to economic liberalism (beta= .075), place of residence, towards Budapest (beta= .057), and support for conservative norms (beta =.054). These variables explain 11 % of the variance of the dependent variable ( $R^2 = 11\%$ ).

<sup>12</sup> We also used a scale of five for the evaluation of the historical-political periods. The respondents had to evaluate on the scale which of the listed historical periods had been “positive or negative for Jews living in Hungary” (1- clearly negative, 5 – clearly positive). Amongst those groups in the Jewish sample who greatly fear antisemitism, the

Thus, we measured perceptions of antisemitism using two different but interrelated indicators. The indicators were designed to demonstrate the estimated strength of antisemitism and the degree of fear of antisemitism. Summarising our findings, we may state that there are two groups of Jews whose perceptions of antisemitism and fears of antisemitism are greater than average. The two groups share many social and demographic characteristics: their members are primarily Budapest residents; they are less educated than the sample average (they are typically people with college or high school qualifications); and they are situated rather low down on the employment hierarchy. The difference between the two groups pertains to their relationship towards Jewish tradition. One of the groups forms part of a relatively closed cluster of Jewish population that maintains tradition and fosters religious belief. Among the members of the other group, there are greater than average numbers of people who broke away from Jewish traditions during the first decade after the Second World War, following changes in social status and the associated process of secularisation.

### *3. Policies for tackling antisemitism*

During the past decade, public debate has examined on several occasions the policies that should be employed under the new democratic system in the struggle against political and ideological extremism. Supporters of permissive liberal solutions have been against any legal restriction or sanctioning of the public expression of extremist views – including antisemitism and denial of the Holocaust – unless such views include an incitement to violence. The opposing side – with reference to the example of the legal provisions in force in most European countries – has considered certain restrictions on the freedom of speech to be admissible in extremist cases. The findings of our survey, which have been analysed elsewhere, demonstrate that the great majority of Hungarian Jews have liberal social and economic attitudes and express opinions reflecting such liberal convictions.<sup>13</sup> In the following, we shall examine whether or not respondents support the liberal position in the debate on the freedom of expression of extremist opinions.

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average evaluation of the Kádár-era was 3.40, whilst among other groups it was 3.17. The average evaluation of the decade after the change of political system was 2.37 in the first group and 3.06 in the second.

<sup>13</sup> See András Kovács (ed.), *Zsidók és zsidóság a mai Magyarországon. Egy szociológiai kutatás eredményei* [Jews and the Jewish community in today's Hungary. The findings of sociological research], published by Szombat, Budapest 2002.

According to our findings, with regard to this particular issue, a majority of respondents rejects liberal views. Even though – as we have already noted – only a small proportion of respondents fear antisemitic discrimination in the next ten years, a great majority of them (85%) are nevertheless of the opinion that people should not be allowed to disseminate anti-Jewish views. This proportion hardly differs from the figure for the full adult population, even though with regard to other issues – for example, abortion, homosexuality, etc – Jews express opinions that are more liberal than are those of non-Jews.<sup>14</sup>

In respect of this issue, there is a notable difference between younger and older age-groups – in the case of the over 55s and particularly in the case of the over 70s (see Table 8). The number of people in the oldest age-group that consider the dissemination of antisemitic views to be unacceptable is ten percent higher than in the youngest age-group. And while just 8 percent of the older group would tolerate the dissemination of antisemitic views, one-fifth of the younger group consider the public expression of antisemitic views to be admissible (or admissible subject to certain restrictions).

Table 8

Should people who regularly make anti-Jewish statements be allowed to disseminate their views freely?  
(Percentage)

	Under 34	35–54	55–69	Over 70	Total
They should not be allowed	81	80	88	92	85
They should be allowed	17	18	10	8	13
They should be allowed, subject to certain restrictions and regulations	2	2	2	0	2
<i>Total</i>	<i>100</i>	<i>100</i>	<i>100</i>	<i>100</i>	<i>100</i>

Opinions are somewhat more divided in respect of an question that has split Hungarian public opinion in recent years: should the publication and sale of *Mein Kampf* be permitted in the country? While more than two-thirds (70 %) of respondents think that the distribution of *Mein Kampf* should be banned, 17 percent of them were against any restrictions and 9 percent thought that the sale of the book should be permitted subject to certain regulations.

<sup>14</sup> During the 1995 survey of a national sample, it was found that 83 % of the adult population were against the free dissemination of views by people who regularly make antisemitic statements, and that just 9 % support their being allowed to do so.

Liberal opinions are most often voiced when it comes to the third delicate issue, the criminal prosecution of people who deny the Holocaust. While a majority of respondents fully agreed (47 %) or essentially agreed (12 %) that “persons who cast doubt on the Holocaust should be brought to justice”, 11 percent only partly agreed and 26 percent disagreed with the legal sanctioning of the denial of the Holocaust. Thus, in all three subject-areas, the majority of Jews are clearly inclined to accept restrictions on the public expression of antisemitic views. The permissive liberal position is most often expressed by university or college-educated men aged less than 45 who reside in Budapest and enjoy a high social status.

#### 4. Summary

Our survey does not, of course, serve as a basis for drawing conclusions on the strength of antisemitism in present-day Hungarian society. What it does do, however, is provide an impression of how *Hungarian Jews perceive* antisemitism in the society in which they live. Their judgements may be correct, but it is also quite possible that respondents under/overestimate the intensity and dynamics of anti-Jewish sentiment. Based on the findings of our survey, it is impossible to say whether the responses distort the real situation – and if so, in which direction.

There are considerable differences of opinion between Jews and non-Jews concerning the definition of particular statements and views as antisemitic. Such differences are the greatest between the Jewish population and the educated Budapest residents’ group, whose members are of similar social status. This indicates the presence of considerable tension, because this is the social milieu in which most Hungarian Jews live and communicate on a day-to-day basis.

About one-third of Hungarian Jews think that antisemitism is insignificant in the country. Nevertheless, one-third of them consider antisemitism to be widespread. Indeed 5-10 percent of Jews feel that they are living in a particularly hostile environment. As we have noted, the opinion of non-Jews on this matter is quite different: they consider the intensity of antisemitism to be far less. This discrepancy may stem from the fact that certain views regarded by Jews as antisemitic are not considered to be so by non-Jews. But it is also possible that non-Jews pay little attention to statements made at various forums that Jews regard as antisemitic. Such statements, however, greatly influence Jews as they attempt to appraise the real situation: many of the reports of encounters with antisemitism refer to phenomena observed in the symbolic and political sphere –

in the media, at public meetings of extremist political organisations, or in the form of street graffiti. Only a minority of respondents had perceived antisemitism in ordinary everyday life, and almost none reported personal experiences of discrimination or of antisemitism coupled with violence.

The great majority of Jews expect the State to offer protection against manifestations of antisemitism, even where these amount to no more than expressions of hatred. Action by the State against antisemitism is also condoned by a majority of non-Jews. The question is, however, whether the two groups are thinking about the same statements of abuse, when giving their approval to restrictions on free speech.

The social behaviour of the various societal groups and their interactions with adjacent groups are greatly influenced by the images of the external social world of group members. And this is so, regardless of whether such images are distorted or accurate. The findings of our research indicate that there are great differences between Jewish and non-Jewish groups in Hungarian society in respect of their judgements of issues connected with antisemitism. This doubtless contributes to the creation of group boundaries as well as the development of mutual expectations that serve to determine interactions between members of the two groups.

## ***II. Perceptions of antisemitism and intergroup communication***

Recent research on relations between Jews and non-Jews has revealed (for example, see Kovács, 1992, Karády, 1992) that the images developed by Jews and non-Jews of each another, as well as the expectations they bring to interactions with members of the other group, play an important role in the development of intergroup relations. Interactionist sociology analysed the mechanisms that are used by an actor to integrate the image formed of the Other (i.e. the interactional partner) into his own action strategy. At the same time it has also shown that the behaviour of the Other is influenced by these mechanisms, too: his reactions are largely determined by his perception of the nature and origin of his image that forms the basis of his interactional partner's actions. This image and the impressions formed about its development are important factors in the personal and social constitution of the partner. In this "mirror in the mirror" interactional situation, each one of the interactional partners is inclined to view himself through the eyes of the other, and shall determine the supposed direction of the other's gaze on the basis of the image of the other that

prevails inside him. If, however, this image is a threatening one, there will be constant breakdowns in communication between the two groups. Very often dual communication – internal and external – will arise. Communication with the external and supposedly threatening group will often take place on the basis of communication strategies that are designed to minimise perceived or real dangers. At the same time – as part of the defensive strategy – mechanisms serving to disguise this duality will also develop. Nevertheless, strategies that seek to disguise the duality and to manage the communication conflicts do not go unnoticed, but become themselves objectivised, that is, they become part of the external image of the group applying these strategies. The perception of intensive antisemitism and a fear of antisemitism typically lead to the development of such action strategies in Jewish groups living in the Diaspora and thus largely integrated into adjacent society.

In post-war Hungary, communication between Jews and non-Jews was often characterised by such communication failures – the causes of which were the images formed of each other. István Bibó deals with this phenomenon in depth in the study that I have cited above. After the wartime persecution, many Jews who remained in the country and who wished to follow the path of integration developed a strategy for avoiding confrontation with the perceived or real antisemites. An element in this strategy was the concealment or denial of Jewish descent. In such families, elements of the dissimulation strategy included not only the concealment of Jewish descent from the outside world but also attempts by parents to keep their Jewish identity a secret from their children. They hoped in this way to protect their children from any possible conflicts with their social environment. According to the findings of a survey that we carried out in the 1980s, the parents of more than one-quarter of interviewees born after 1945 concealed their Jewish descent from their children, and a further one-fifth of interviewees were “enlightened” only under pressure of certain circumstances. Other families elaborated procedures aimed at the strict division of the inner and outer world (for more information on this, see Kovács, 1992, Erős, Kovács, Lévai, 1985).

Such forms of behaviour were also often present in the families of interviewees taking part in the current piece of research: just 71 percent of respondents stated that they had known since early childhood of their Jewish identity because such knowledge was quite natural in their families. 18 percent of interviewees stated that they had been told of their Jewish descent by their parents while they were still children, while 10 percent discovered that they were Jewish only

later (2 % as adults) – and not from their parents. Nevertheless, in the age-group – i.e. respondents born between 1945 and 1965 – which served as the basis of our previous survey, 18 percent of respondents grew up in families that concealed their Jewish descent.

These figures indicate that even today many Jews perceive substantial communication difficulties between Jews and non-Jews.

We measured the communication difficulties using a series of questions consisting of nine statements.<sup>15</sup>

Table 9.

Communication between Jews and non-Jews  
(Percentages and averages on a scale of 1-5)

	Agree rather than disagree (4-5)	Disagree rather than agree (1-2)	Average
Many Jews consider any unfriendly remarks to be antisemitism	41	29	3.10
Many non-Jews think that Jews conspire against them	27	41	2.73
Many Jews are inclined to explain their failures in terms of antisemitism	29	39	2.77
It is embarrassing to talk about certain Jewish matters with non-Jews	41	36	2.99
Many non-Jews always register who is Jewish among their friends and acquaintances	42	23	3.34
Even many non-antisemites would not want their children to marry Jews	31	34	2.96
Non-Jews are often perturbed if they have to communicate with Jews	17	53	2.34
There are things that a non-Jew cannot understand	62	22	3.69
It is better if people at work don't know that one is a Jew	28	43	2.65

The responses indicate that participants in the survey strongly agree with the statement referring to the supposed cognitive difficulties of communication: almost two-thirds of them think that there are things that a non-Jew cannot understand. Nevertheless, only somewhat less than half of this group think that there are matters that are embarrassing to talk about with non-Jews – i.e. this must be the size of the group that is characterised by dual communication. A

<sup>15</sup> The results of statistical analysis supported the hypothesis, that the nine statements measure the very same dimension. The Cronbach-alfa value for the nine statements = .7069

major element in this group are the one-quarter of respondents who think that it is better to keep one's Jewish background a secret from colleagues at work.

As the breakdown of responses demonstrates, respondents trace the communication problems to a variety of causes. In the course of our analysis, we encountered three such causal-groups.<sup>16</sup> The group of responses that we have presented above indicates that one group of respondents perceives the social distance between Jews and non-Jews to be of such magnitude that it greatly hinders communication in both a cognitive and an emotional sense: members of this group feel that in some issues non-Jews simply cannot understand Jews, and that it is embarrassing for Jews to talk about such matters with non-Jews – indeed, that it is better if one's Jewish identity remains a secret in public places – e.g. the workplace.

Another group of respondents, however, attributes the communication difficulties to the fact that both Jews and non-Jews harbour a groundless distrust of one another. Jews often surmise the presence of antisemitism where there is none, while non-Jews are suspecting secret Jewish conspiracy everywhere.

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<sup>16</sup> The three causal-groups were established through principal component analysis of the nine statements included in the analysis. The three principal components explained 53% of the distribution of the variables. The results of analysis were the following:

<i>Factor values</i>	
Factor 1	
Many Jews consider any unfriendly remark to be antisemitism	.785
Many non-Jews think that the Jews are conspiring against them	.719
Many Jews tend to explain their failures in terms of antisemitism	.784
Factor 2	
It is embarrassing to talk about certain Jewish matters with non-Jews	.774
There are things that a non-Jew cannot understand	.669
It is better if people at work do not know that one is a Jew	.697
Factor 3	
Many non-Jews always keep a record of who is Jewish among their friends and acquaintances	.781
Even many non-antisemites would be against their children marrying Jews	.811
Non-Jews are often perturbed if they have to mix with Jews	.692

Finally, however, there are a group of respondents who consider the cause of the communication difficulties to be quite simply the aversive and dismissive conduct of non-Jews.

Obviously, the various explanations of the communication difficulties are not mutually exclusive. We therefore examined the combinations of explanations that are accepted by the various groups of Jews. We found that in general and based on the perceptions of communication difficulties and the explanations of these difficulties, the sample population could be divided up into five groups of similar size (Table 2).<sup>17</sup>

Table 10.

Perceptions of communication difficulties  
(Average scores on the factor variables; cluster groups)

Causes of the communication difficulties

	Mutual distrust	Feeling of distance	Feeling of rejection	N and percentage
Group 1	- 1.07	- 1.09	- 1.20	345 = 18 %
Group 2	0.18	0.59	- 0.63	365 = 19 %
Group 3	- 0.84	0.34	0.55	393 = 20 %
Group 4	0.92	0.93	1.13	400 = 21 %
Group 5	0.67	- 0.79	- 0.06	438 = 22 %

The *first group* – 18 percent of the sample – scored below the average for the full population on each of the three factor-variables indicating communication problems – this group, therefore, has no major communication problems with its non-Jewish environment. Further analysis revealed the over-representation in this group of Jews in the process of full assimilation. A characteristic feature of members of this group is that even their parents had already broken away from Jewish religious and cultural traditions. Many of them are the offspring of mixed marriages and have themselves married non-Jews. Most of them live in towns or areas (outside Budapest or in the outer districts of eastern Budapest) where the Jewish proportion of the total population is below average, and they would not like to move to areas where Jews are more numerous. Few members of this group have mainly Jewish friends, and many of them believe

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<sup>17</sup> We established the groups by using the SPSS quickcluster program.

that their acquaintances have no knowledge that they are Jewish. In general, members of this group do not fear antisemitism. They think that there are not many antisemites in the country and that the level of antisemitism has declined in recent years and will continue to do so in the future. Members of this group consider their Jewish descent to be of no importance when it comes to marriage, friendship or work relationships. They think that there is no likelihood of discrimination. The group's average score on each of the variables measuring the strength of Jewish identity is significantly lower than that of any other group. The smallest discrepancy between them and members of the other groups relates to their judgement of the role of persecution in fostering identity: persecution and remembrance of the former generations represent the strongest elements of their identity. Men, young people, the poorly educated, and people with modest incomes are over-represented in the group. The group includes a subgroup that broke away from other parts of Jewish society some time ago and consists mainly of poorer elderly people. These are probably people who, after the period of persecution, found themselves under circumstances that prevented them from maintaining any contacts with Jews – because, for instance, they were living in villages or rural areas.

The *fifth group* (22 %) perceives somewhat more communication problems than does the first – but the perceived problems are still relatively few. Members of this group typically tend to think that the communication difficulties are caused by mutual and groundless fears on the part of both Jews and non-Jews. Members of this group tend to be college or university educated, well-off, and young or middle-aged. Most of their friends are Jews, and they do not conceal their Jewish identity. They do not, however, fear antisemitism. In their opinion, there is little antisemitism and its intensity has not changed much in recent years and is unlikely to do so in the future – although it was greater at the time of the change of political system, than before. Generally speaking, members of this group have liberal attitudes and are opposed to restrictions on freedom of speech – even in cases of explicit antisemitism. Members of the group score below average on the variables measuring the intensity and content of identity – with the exception of the variable measuring interest in Jewish culture. This may be linked to the group's relatively high level of education. Jewish traditions were absent even among the parents' generation of members of this group, but the main reasons for this appear to have been the rapid and upward social mobility of their parents after the war and the associated process of secularisation rather

than their (forcible) detachment of any Jewish life – which appears to have been the main reason in the case of the previous group.

The other three groups perceive more serious communication difficulties. The *second group* (19 %) considers the causes of such difficulties to be in part mutual distrust and in part problems of comprehension due to social distance. The group is not characterised by feelings of rejection, but its members are of the opinion that Jews and non-Jews are divided by firm group boundaries and that this division causes cognitive difficulties in the course of communication. There may be emotional consequences of this: if the Other is incapable of understanding certain things, then it may become “embarrassing” to talk about them. This is why many in the group think that the easiest way of avoiding difficulties is to restrict communication. Those who think that it is best to keep their Jewish identity a secret outside the family are applying the extreme version of this strategy. Members of the group have mostly Jewish friends. Nevertheless, their colleagues at work are not normally aware that they are Jewish, and they are convinced that being Jewish is a handicap when it comes to promotion at work. People with a college education are over-represented in this group.

Still, concealment characterises merely one of the group’s segments. The boundaries of another subgroup may also be identified – of people who have returned in some manner to Jewish traditions in the course of the past decade. The Jewish identity of people in this sub-group is stronger than average and they tend to attach above average importance to maintaining a circle of Jewish friends and to choosing Jewish marriage partners. Nevertheless, the emotional relationship with Israel is weaker than average in this group. This may be a consequence of the fact that members of the group perceive relatively little antisemitism and do not fear discrimination. Members of this group typically live in Budapest and are young with a college or university education. They tend to be well-off and have mainly Jewish friends.

The *third group* (20 %) is characterised not only by an awareness of being different but also by feelings of rejection. Once again this group consists of two sub-groups. Both sub-groups comprise relatively old and poorly educated people who live rather modestly. In the judgement of members of the group, antisemitism is very widespread and is increasing in strength. They even think that there may be anti-Jewish discrimination in the future. One of the subgroups comprises elderly and religious Jews with traditional Jewish identities. Members of this group live in exclusively Jewish environments and their responses reveal a stronger than average Jewish

identity. The other subgroup, however, has become separated from Jewish traditions, which were still present even among the parents' generation. Thus the main determinant of their identity would seem to be a fear of antisemitism.

The *fourth group* (21 %) has the greatest communication difficulties with non-Jewish society. This group perceives both detachment and rejection, as well as mutual distrust. Its members include significantly large numbers of people born between 1930 and 1944. Most of them have homogenous Jewish family backgrounds and they were young during the first period of the Communist system. Higher than average numbers of them were Communist Party members, and even today they tend to be dismissive of liberalism. They perceive high levels of antisemitism and are very anxious about antisemitism and the prospect of discrimination. A sign of anxiety in their everyday lives is that, although they are currently living in relatively closed Jewish environments, they would still prefer to live somewhere “with more Jews than at present”. Their Jewish identity is strong, and their families still enact certain elements of Jewish tradition even though they are no longer traditionalist Jews. Their identity is defined primarily by the experience of persecution, identification with other Jews stemming from a shared fate, and the fear of antisemitism. Many of them would like to discard the stigma of being Jewish: most of them would typically advise members of the current younger generation to “head for assimilation”.<sup>18</sup>

Overall we may state that two-thirds of Jews perceive lesser or greater communication difficulties in relationships with surrounding groups. About 25 percent of respondents perceive grave communication problems and are strongly inclined towards dual communication. A further quarter of respondents, however, do not perceive such a conflict. A large group considers Jewish distrust to be a cause of the difficulties – among the causes making communication more difficult, many respondents (41 %) place in second place the fact that many Jews consider any unfriendly remark to be antisemitism – but a greater number of respondents regard the distance between the two milieus and hostility towards Jews to be at the root of the conflict. Women are significantly more numerous among the group reporting communication difficulties, as also are

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<sup>18</sup> We used discriminant analysis in order to identify the factors determining the degree and nature of the communication difficulties. We defined – as the dependent variable – the group divisions presented here and – as independent variables – the basic social and demographic variables and various attitude variables. As a result of stepwise method, four variables remained in the analysis. The above division of groups is most effectively explained by the fear of antisemitism, while the second explanatory variable is religious identity. The third variable is age,

respondents who became adults during the taboo-ridden decades of the post-Holocaust period – i.e. people who were born between 1930 and 1945.

Perceptions of communication difficulties are characteristically divided according to generation. Elderly respondents – aged over 70 – are over-represented in the almost fully assimilated group that perceives no communication problems as well as among sections of Jewish population with traditional identities where people report serious communication difficulties. Young people aged between 18 and 34 appear on the one hand in the assimilated group and on the other hand in the group that perceives social distance and therefore restricts communication and conceals identity – which is also indicative of the pressure to assimilate. The middle generation is also divided into two groups: older respondents – those aged 55-69 – perceive the gravest conflicts with their environment. Younger respondents – those aged 35-55, and in particular those with a college or university education – perceive the communication difficulties in a manner that is far more balanced and perhaps best suited to resolving conflicts – by revealing these difficulties to be merely the consequences of mutual distrust.

A separate category is formed by those young Jews who have made great efforts during recent decades to return to Jewish traditions. This group, which accounts for about 10-15 percent of the total population, also perceives communication difficulties between Jews and non-Jews as well as the mutual distrust arising from such difficulties. Nevertheless, rather than blaming such difficulties on anti-Jewish sentiments, it considers them to be the consequence of perceived group differences. Members of this group oppose, however, the liquidation of group differences. Indeed they attach importance to the survival of a separate and discriminatory Jewish tradition. Thus, rather than dismantle group boundaries, they wish to eradicate communication difficulties by introducing new communication strategies.

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while education is the fourth. Using these variables, the correctly predicted group membership for the five groups is 33%.

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