

Unfortunate Misplacement:

Israeli public perceptions of Israel's place in the Middle East

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I. Introduction¹

The question as to whether it is desirable for Israel, as a country situated in the Middle East, to seek economic, political, and cultural integration among the peoples of the region, or, instead, to continue upholding its long-established “Western” orientation is often raised, particularly when envisaging a peace reality.² It is no secret that from the very beginning of the Zionist movement, which emerged in Europe and followed the footsteps of the European nationalist movements, through the formative pre-state era, as well as in the post-independence years and up to the present, the Western concept of the nation-state, along with its political, economic and cultural traditions, were adopted as a model for the building of the Jewish new society in *Eretz Israel*. In fact, the vast majority of Jewish immigrants to Palestine during the pre-state period were of European origin. This, and the ongoing violent conflict between the Jewish and Palestinian communities, which emerged as result of the implementation of the Zionist vision and developed into a full-fledged conflict with the entire Arab world, and has not lost momentum until the present day, largely explains the negative sentiments of Israeli Jews toward everything associated with the Middle-East (with the notable exception of certain food products of the region, such as *humus* and

¹ We are thankful to Yasmin Alkalay for the statistical and computing assistance.

² For the Western orientation of Israel as far as its foreign policy was concerned, see, e.g., Uri Bailer, *Cross on the Star of David: The Christian world in Israel's foreign policy* (Indiana University Press, 2005). For the Western, mainly American, orientation, see, e.g., Maoz Azaryahu, “McIsrael? On the ‘Americanization’ of Israel,” *Israel Studies*, 5(1), (2000), 41-64; Uzi Rebhun and Chaim I. Waxman, “The ‘Americanization’ of Israel: A demographic, cultural and political evaluation,” *Israel Studies*, 5 (2000); Anat First and Avraham Eli, “Globalization/Americanization and negotiating national dreams: Representations of culture and economy in Israeli advertising,” *Israel Studies Forum*, 22(1), (2007), 54-74.

falafel).³ In fact, as previous studies pointed out, even Jews of Middle Eastern origin who were born in Arab countries, as well as their descendents, a social category which could be expected to have stronger motivation to turn eastward, seem not to be very fond of the integration idea.

Over the years, there have been voices challenging this orientation, calling to draw Israel closer to the Middle East and cultivate a close affinity with its Arab neighbors. Early examples of such voices, going back to the 1940s and 1950s, represented by the Canaanite intellectual circle and the *Ha'Ivrim Ha'Zeirim* movement, led by poet Yonatan Ratosh, followed by journalist and politician Uri Avnery's idea of the "Semitic space" and his small circle, *Eretz Israel Ha'zeira*. It is worth mentioning that by and large, both endeavors were led and followed by Ashkenazi Israelis. More recently, several Mizrahi intellectuals, like author Shimon Balass,⁴ have argued that Israel would be better off by being "geopolitically" integrated into the countries of the Middle East. Others holding similar views called for closer regional affinity based on the alleged shared grievances of the Arabs and the non-Ashkenazi sectors in Israel, who, in their claim, have been oppressed, humiliated and abused by the Israeli Ashkenazi establishment and elites. Yet, under the leadership of its dominant elites from both Left and Right, Israel as a state and Israeli society as a whole have consistently maintained over the years an unmistakable Western orientation, manifested in three major spheres of activity of state and society—political, economic, and cultural.

Against this background, in this study we address three interrelated questions concerning the hegemony of Israel's Western orientation. First, to what extent is this orientation favored by citizens of Israel? Second, are the public preferences in the choice between East and West consistent across the three spheres? Third, in which ways and to what extent is Israeli society unified in terms of these preferences (for

³ In the "golden days" of the Oslo process, when peace between Israel and the Palestinians seemed to be on the horizon, it seemed as if the completion of the process would entail some significant changes in Israel's political, economic and cultural nature. Some envisaged that it would also result in growing Westernization of the state and society. See e.g., Sammi Smooha, "The implications of the transition to peace for Israeli society," ANNALS AAPSS 555. Pdf (1998).

⁴ From statements by Prof. Shimon Blass during a discussion on Avirama Golan's program on Channel 2 of Israeli television, "On a First Reading," 13 December 2003.

example, are the attitudes of Ashkenazi and Mizrahi – or “Arab Jews,” as the latter have been labeled by certain Mizrahi intellectual/activists⁵ – alike, or does the ethnic origin of these and other groups affect their priorities in this regard)?

To answer these questions on empirical grounds, we have used data collected in the context of the Peace Index Project (PIP), and mainly the survey of February 1995, as well as a designated survey, conducted in May 2010.⁶

II. Findings

Before even touching on the issue of regional integration, some background information on Jewish Israelis’ estrangement from the Middle East is worth keeping in mind. First, according to the 2010 PIP survey, about three quarters (73.1%) do not read, write or speak Arabic (14.3% speak but do not read nor write, and only 5.8% read, write and speak the most widespread language in the region). Two-thirds (66%) have never visited an Arab country (Jordan, Egypt, Morocco, etc.) and 66% of these say that they are not interested in going there. This negative attitude seems not to be influenced by the fact two-thirds of those who did visit one or more Arab states stated that they felt comfortable or very comfortable during their visit there. The detachment from the region is further expressed by the fact that from their replies, it appears that an overwhelming majority (84.1%) never watch Arab TV stations, and another 10.5% watch them very rarely. On a different level, the conflict is apparently viewed as unrelated to the Western orientation of Israelis: over two thirds – 68% – disagreed or strongly disagreed with the hypothetical argument that if the Zionist Jewish immigrants who came to Palestine in the first half of the 20th century had tried to integrate into the Middle East and had maintained less strong relations with the West and their Western characteristics, the Israeli-Arab conflict might have not deteriorated to its present state.

⁵ See Yehuda Shenhav (2003). *The Israeli Arabs* (Tel Aviv: Hakibbutz Hameuhad, 2003, Hebrew)

⁶ Until 2000, the PIP samples, comprising about 500 interviewees, represented the Jewish population only. Since then, they have also included the adult population of Israel’s Palestinian-Arab citizens and the sample size has increased to about 600, with the latter represented according to their share in the population. For the sake of methodological consistency, the numbers in Table 1 on both dates refer to the Jewish sample only. Israeli Arab citizens’ attitudes are discussed hereafter.

The overall impression created by the above data is that, at least at present, the vast majority of Jewish Israelis are not interested in deepening their roots in the Middle East nor do they view this as a factor in the development of Israel's unfavorable relations with its neighbors.

Regional integration preferences

The main questionnaire item that was used to examine Israelis' preferences for regional integration was formulated as follows: “In each of the following areas—the political, the economic, and the cultural—are you interested in having Israel integrated into the Middle East or into Europe-America?” This question was asked in exactly the same wording on two occasions: February 1995 (sample size: 503)⁷ and June 2010 (sample size: 513).⁸ The findings of these two surveys allow us to address this question by comparing the results of the first poll and the one, taken over 15 years later (Table 1).⁹

Table 1: Attitudes on political, economic and cultural integration into the Middle East (% responding positively, Jewish sample)

	Political		Economic		Cultural	
	1995	2010	1995	2010	1995	2010
Middle-East	29.1	22.6	23.4	12.4	14.4	11.5
Europe/America	50.1	62.6	61.0	70.5	64.1	71.9
Neither (unassisted)	5.4	2.7	1.8	0.9	8.2	4.9
Both (unassisted)	6.4	7.8	6.9	14.8	6.2	10.3
Don't know (unassisted)	9.0	4.3	6.9	1.4	7.1	1.5
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

The figures in Table 1 reveal the existence of a clear and consistent pattern that can be briefly summarized as follows: First, at both points in time, the Israeli Jewish public preferred the West over the East with respect to all three spheres of integration.

⁷ This survey was conducted under the auspices and with the financial support of the Tami Steinmetz Center for Peace Research, Tel Aviv University.

⁸ This survey was conducted under the auspices and with the financial support of the Evens Program for Mediation and Conflict Resolution, Tel Aviv University and of the Israel Democracy Institute, Jerusalem.

⁹ Since the 1995 survey did not include the Arab population, the comparisons over time relate to the Jewish sector only.

Second, over the years, the Western bias has increased and the interest in the Middle East per se has declined consistently across the political, economic and the cultural dimensions. Although a minor option, the interest in a dual integration (the “Both” option) has increased particularly with reference to the economic and cultural realms. Third, notwithstanding these uniformities, it can be observed that at both points in time, the stronger appeal of the West was not uniform across the three spheres, being most salient in the realm of culture, followed by the economy and polity, in that order.

We took it one step further and moved from the level of attitudes to that of expectations. We therefore asked in 2010: “In your opinion, what are the chances that Israel will get integrated politically/economically/culturally into the Middle East in the next 20 years?” Apparently, the majority of the Jewish Israeli public is not too optimistic in this regard (Table 2).

Table 2: Chances of Israel's integration into the Middle East in the next 20 years (% , 2010 Jewish sample)

	High or very high	Low or very low	Don't know (unassisted)	Total
Politically	15	81.8	3.2	100%
Economically	35.8	61.9	2.3	100%
Culturally	26	69.5	4.5	100%

Apparently, Israeli Jews are very skeptical about the chances for political integration (81.8% estimate them as low or very low and 15% as high or very high), second comes cultural integration (69.6% estimate that the chances for this are low or very low and 26% as high or very high), while, as one may expect, economic integration is perceived as more likely (with 61.9% estimating the chances for this to happen as low or very low and over a third, 35.8% as high or very high).

An argument can be made that those who do not expect that political, economic and cultural integration will materialize, will develop resistance to the very idea, i.e., will say that they are not interested in the Middle East, in order to avoid a cognitive dissonance while those who see integration as a feasible possibility - will be more supportive of it. We therefore crosstabulated the relevant questions. The findings are

quite conclusive – amongst the "believers" as well as among the "non-believers" the majority is uninterested in regional integration.

Regional integration preferences and socio-demographic characteristics

Since the results of Table 1 show that there is still a non-trivial minority of Israeli Jews that does not share the views of the majority, hence suggesting that Israel would prefer the East over the West, it seems pertinent to try and find out if this minority has any unifying features and forms a "group" in terms of its demographic and social attributes. For this purpose, we performed a series of analyses in two stages: 1. Cross-tabulation and, 2. regression analysis.

Ethnic origin

It is almost trivial to assume that ethnic descent would serve as a significant factor in determining an individual's position vis-à-vis the question of regional integration. Intuitively, one would assume that Israelis of Mizrahi origin would be more open to the idea that Israel should become integrated into the Middle East. However, the data suggest that this is hardly the case, and that the attitudes in this regard of Mizrahi and Ashkenazi Israeli Jews are not significantly different, and in the present even more so than in the past (Table 3).

Table 3: Support for integration into the Middle East (West) by ethnic origin

Politically										
	1995					2010				
	ME	West	Neither	Both	DK	ME	West	Neither	Both	DK
Mizrahi (1st Gen)	46.7	33.3	2.7	12	5.3	28.3	50.0	2.1	15.3	4.3
Ashkenazi (1st Gen)	28.7	51.5	7.9	7.9	4.0	27.6	62.1	1.7	3.4	5.2
Israel	23.5	61.2	4.7	7.1	3.5	21.6	64.7	2.9	6.9	3.9
Mizrahi (2nd Gen)	25.2	51.0	7.3	7.9	8.6	22.1	64.6	3.5	8.0	1.8
Ashkenazi (2nd Gen)	26.4	51.6	9.2	9.9	9.9	26.6	63.8	1.1	4.3	4.3
USSR	-	-	-	-	-	16.3	61.3	3.8	11.3	7.5

Economically										
	1995					2010				
Mizrahi (1st Gen)	36.0	43.0	2.7	8.0	5.3	19.1	57.4	2.1	21.3	-
Ashkenazi (1st Gen)	22.8	61.4	2.0	8.9	5.0	13.3	68.3	-	16.7	1.7
Israel	18.8	74.1	1.2	3.5	2.4	15.8	72.3	1.0	8.9	2.0
Mizrahi (2nd Gen)	21.9	59.6	3.3	5.3	9.9	8.0	77.0	0.9	13.3	0.9
Ashkenazi (2nd Gen)	23.0	60.4	-	7.7	9.9	18.3	68.8	-	11.8	1.1
USSR	-	-	-	-	-	5.1	67.9	1.3	23.1	2.6
Culturally										
	1995					2010				
Mizrahi (1st Gen)	24.0	56.0	6.7	8.0	5.3	19.1	63.8	9.1	14.9	-
Ashkenazi (1st Gen)	19.9	66.3	8.9	7.9	4.0	10.0	73.3	5.0	8.3	3.3
Israel	15.3	69.4	9.4	2.4	3.5	8.8	71.6	3.9	13.7	2.0
Mizrahi (2nd Gen)	15.9	60.9	9.3	6.6	7.3	12.6	71.2	8.1	7.2	0.9
Ashkenazi (2nd Gen)	6.6	69.2	5.5	8.8	9.9	14.0	73.1	4.3	7.5	1.1
USSR	-	-	-	-	-	6.3	75.9	1.3	13.9	2.5

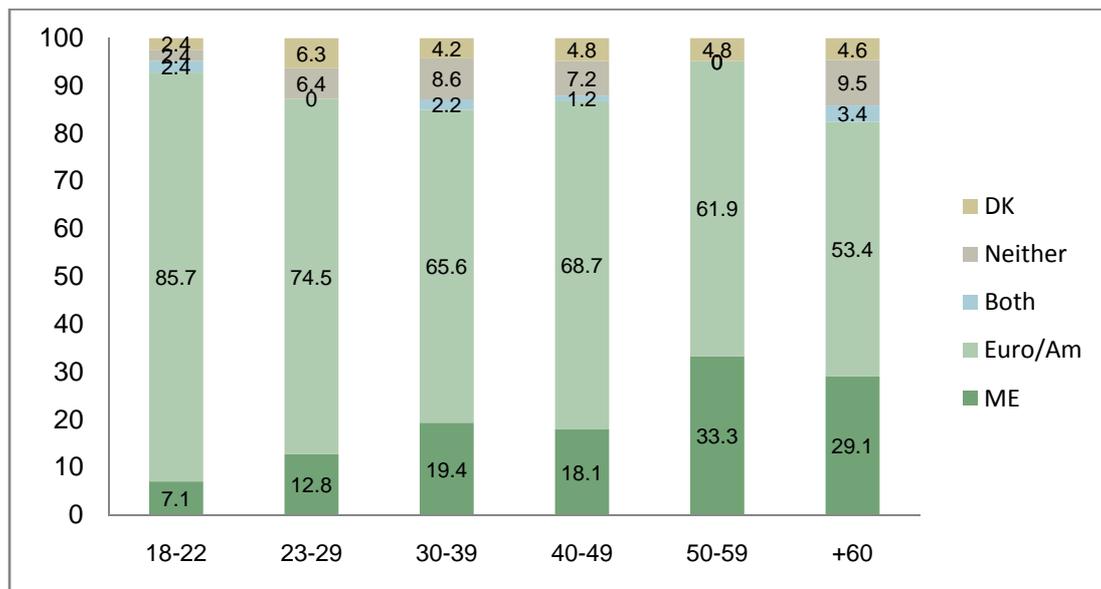
Although the overall patterns are identical across all ethnic groups – the majority in each of them favors the West over the East, in all realms there are still some differences between them worth noting. In 1995, Mizrahi respondents (first generation, i.e., who were themselves born in the Middle East) were clearly more supportive of the integration idea than all other ethnic groups, including second generation Mizrahi regarding all three spheres, and particularly regarding the political one. In fact, regarding the latter, the plurality of this group favored the Middle East over the West. However, as of now, their support for Israel's integration into the Middle East, although still somewhat higher than that of the other groups, is of the same pattern. Furthermore, first generation Mizrahi show a much sharper decline in their willingness to see Israel becoming integrated into the Middle East compared to the other groups, and were "assimilated" in this regard into the general Israeli Jewish public. The second generation Mizrahi seem to be consistently closer in this regard (in certain cases even supersede them) to the Ashkenazi groups, rather than to their parents' generation.

As for the newcomers from the USSR, in all three spheres, they are even less enthusiastic than all other Jewish groups about the idea of Israel's integration into the Middle East.

Age

Unlike other closely related political issues, for example, peace talks, regarding which age has turned out empirically to be an inconsequential demographic factor in today's Israeli Jewish society, it appears that support for political integration into the Middle East is systematically influenced by this independent variable (Graph 1). Indeed, all age groups are more in favor of regional integration into Europe-America. However, the younger Jewish Israelis seem to be significantly more reluctant to become part of the Middle East and are much more interested in becoming integrated into the West. This may be part of the global Western orientation, as well as the result of the younger generation's political socialization in times of severe conflict with the Palestinians (first and second Intifadas, second Lebanon War), and the daily manifestations of hostility towards Israel, mainly by Arab, but also by non-Arab Muslim (Iran and more recently, Turkey) actors in the neighborhood.

Graph 1: Interest in political regional integration by age groups (2010 Jewish sample).



A similar distribution was found regarding economic integration. Thus, none of the interviewees of the youngest (18-22) age group was interested in integration into the

Middle East, compared to 6.5% of the 22-29 age group, 13.7% of the 30-39 group, 8.3% of the 40-49 group, 19% of the 50-59 age group and 19% of the 60 and above age cohort. However, there seems to be no linear correlation between age and desire for cultural integration into the Middle East. Here 9.5% of the 18-22 age group are in favor, and so are 2.1% of the 23-29 age group, 14.9% of the 30-39, 9.8% of the 40-49, 20% of the 50-59 and 12.8% of the over 60 age cohort.

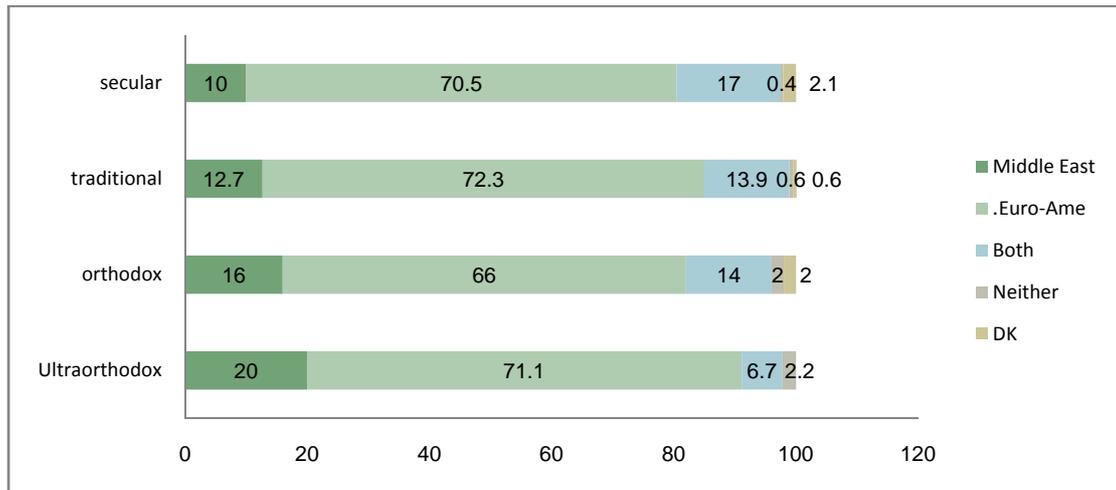
Religiosity

The PIP surveys have indicated numerous times that in Israel, the individual's level of religious observance is closely correlated with his or her perceptions on peace related matters. Surprisingly enough, this has not been the case as far as political integration into the region is concerned. Indeed, all groups are more in favor of integrating into the West. In addition, the differences between ultra-orthodox, orthodox, traditional and secular Jews are apparently hardly significant. Hence, while 19.6% of the ultra-orthodox wish to integrate into the Middle East, so do 20% of the orthodox, 24.7% of the traditional and 22.1% of the secular. As for integration into Europe/America, the numbers are also very similar: 65.2% for the ultra-orthodox, 66% – orthodox, 62.1% traditional and 62.1% – secular.

As far as cultural regional integration is concerned, once more, the majority of all groups dislikes the idea of integrating into the Middle East. Moreover, much like in the case of political integration, level of religiosity does not have a systematic influence. Hence, while 20% of the ultra-orthodox are interested in such integration, only 9.8% of the orthodox compared to 13.8% of the traditional and 8.3% of the secular have the same preference.

With reference to economic integration into the Middle East or the West, here the level of religiosity seems to be more influential (Graph 2) although again, the majority in all groups prefers that Israel integrate into the West. Beyond that, apparently, the more religious one is, the more one prefers such integration.

Graph 2: Preferences regarding economic regional integration by level of religiosity



Regional integration preferences and attitudes toward negotiations with the PA

One may assume that attitudes towards the peace process would be correlated in one way or another with regional integration preferences. We therefore cross-tabulated the Jewish public responses to the question: “What is your position regarding the peace negotiations with the Palestinian Authority?” (Table 4).

Table 4: Regional integration preferences by support-opposition to peace negotiations (% , Jewish sample, 2010)

Sphere:	Political		Economic		Cultural	
	Support	Oppose	Support	Oppose	Support	Oppose
Middle-East	26.2	13.4	13.3	11.2	15.3	10.1
Europe/America	59.7	69.7	69.3	72.7	68.7	73.5
Neither	2	5	0.6	2.1	0.8	6.0
Both	8.8	5.6	15.5	11.9	14.5	8.5
DK	3.3	6.3	1.3	2.1	0.7	1.9
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

In all three realms, both the supporters and those in opposition to peace negotiations with the Palestinian National Authority are more enthusiastic about integration into the West than into the Middle East. There are however, some differences between the two groups, with the most salient being their attitude toward political integration in the region: here, twice as many, 26.2%, of the supporters, compared to only 13.4% of those who oppose, favor Israel's integration into the Middle East. The differences

between the two groups in relation to economic and cultural integration are smaller. Interestingly, whereas among the supporters the order of preferences regarding integration into the Middle East is economic, cultural and political, among the opponents, the order is cultural, economic and political, like in the overall Jewish population.

We tried to determine whether the respondents saw a necessary correlation between the prevalence of peace and Israel's chances of becoming integrated into the region. We therefore asked, "Some argue that if a peace treaty between Israel and the Palestinians is signed, a door would open for Israel to become integrated politically/economically/culturally into the Middle East. However, others maintain that this would not be enough for Israel to be admitted politically/economically/culturally into the Middle East. With which of the two opinions do you agree more?" (Table 5),

Table 5: Jewish Israelis' Estimation of Israel's acceptance in the Middle East if peace prevails (%)

	Politically	Economically	Culturally
Admitted	29.0	48.7	28.9
Not admitted	67.2	48.0	64.7
Don't know	3.8	3.3	6.4
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0

Multiple Regression Analysis:

The results of the cross-tabulation indicate that the differences in the choice between East and West according to demographic and socio-cultural attributes of Jewish respondents are relatively small. Nevertheless, it seems worthwhile to examine the extent to which individual attributes exert significant effects on this choice, and in what direction. Given that the latter is a dichotomous variable, we used logistic regressions for the purpose. The main results of these regressions can be summarized as follows (with detailed outcomes provided in the appendix).

Political Integration

Of the six independent variables in the regression analysis, only one variable – age – appears to have a significant influence, with the youngest age group having the

strongest Western orientation and the oldest the least. For example, the chance that the youngest age group (18-29) would prefer the West over the East is 2.64 higher than that of the middle age group (30-49) and 5.41 higher than that of the oldest age group (50+).

Economic Integration

The impact of the individual attributes in this sphere is more pronounced, with significant effects of religiosity and age and, to a lesser extent, party voting. Accordingly, a higher degree of religiosity and older age reduce the likelihood for a Western preference. As to the last variable, voters for parties on the Left (Labor, Meretz and Rakah, the Israel Communist Party) are somewhat less likely to prefer economic integration into the West.

Cultural Integration

The only attribute having a significant influence with regard to the cultural domain is religiosity. As in the case of the economic domain, a higher degree of religiosity is less conducive to cultural affinity with the West.

Taken together, the results of the regressions are generally in agreement with the conclusions derived from the cross-tabular analysis; namely, that the Israeli Jewish community tends to be relatively homogeneous in its Western orientation with regard to the political, cultural, and economic spheres, with the notable exception of age and religiosity. In fact, even the significant disparities generated by age, religiosity, and party voting were quite limited, given that in each of the categories comprising these variables, the West was preferred over the East across the three spheres. As to the remaining individual attributes – years of schooling, gender, and ethnic origin, the latter is of particular interest since, as noted earlier, one might have expected that the common heritage of the Arab people and of Israeli Jews of Middle-Eastern origin would draw the latter closer to the former, especially in the cultural domain. Yet, their preferences are almost indistinguishable from those of Ashkenazi Jews who immigrated to Israel from European countries.

Israeli Arab citizens – attitudes towards regional integration

While the prevalent Western orientation of Israeli Jewish citizens is well known and in fact rather expected against the background of the ongoing Israeli-Arab conflict and other cultural and political inputs mentioned above, it is certainly much less self-evident or expected in the case of Arab citizens of Israel. Yet, our findings suggest that although proportionally less strongly, the Israeli Arab sector also manifests significantly greater interest in integrating into the West than into the Middle East (Table 6).¹⁰

Table 6: Regional integration preferences of Arab Israeli Citizens (% 2010)

Dimension:	Political	Economic	Cultural
Middle-East	30.0	22.2	16.7
Europe/America	41.2	45.6	43.3
Neither	13.3	10.0	10.0
Both	12.2	16.7	26.7
DK	3.3	5.6	3.3
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0

The data confirm that in all three realms, the Western orientation of the Arab Israeli public is stronger than toward the Middle East, although as mentioned, the proportions are different – in the Arab case, a plurality, not a majority, prefers the West over the Middle East. The order of preferences is also somewhat different than that of the Jewish Israeli sector: economic integration comes first (45.6%), then cultural (43.3%) and political (41.2%). The only visible difference perhaps is the second option of the cultural realm – among the Israeli Arabs, the proportion of those interested in integrating into both worlds, West and Middle East (26.7%) is significantly higher than among the Israeli Jewish population (10.3%).

As for Arab Israelis' expectations regarding the integration of Israel into the Middle East in the next twenty years, again, in the same direction however with lesser intensity, Arab Israeli citizens are also rather pessimistic. Furthermore, much like their Jewish counterparts, they view economic integration as least unlikely and political integration as most unlikely (Table 7).

¹⁰ As the Arab sample is small (N=90), we were unable to analyze it by subgroups and reach valid conclusions.

Table 7: Israeli Arab citizens' expectations regarding regional political, economic and cultural integration (%)

	High or very high	Low or very low	Don't know	Total
Political	28.9	67.7	3.4	100
Economic	43.3	55.6	1.1	100
Cultural	37.8	60.0	2.2	100

What then, in the Arab Israelis' view, is the expected influence of a peace treaty between Israel and the Palestinians as far as Israel's integration into the Middle East is concerned? On this question, Arab Israeli citizens seem to be significantly more optimistic than their Jewish counterparts. They are not "unrealistic" in the sense that half of them estimate that even with peace, no door to integration into the Middle East will open for Israel. At the same time, a significant minority does believe in the feasibility of such opportunities if and when peace prevails (Table 8).

Table 8: Arab Israelis' estimation of Israel's acceptance to the Middle East if peace prevails (% , Arab sample 2010)

	Politically	Economically	Culturally
Admitted	48.9	47.8	47.2
Not admitted	50.0	50.0	50.6
Don't know	1.1	2.2	2.2
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0

Concluding remarks

Taking into consideration the extreme fragmentation of Israeli society and the prevailing perception that the "national consensus" has been critically shaken in the last two decades or so, it is actually amazing to find such substantial similarity, almost unanimity, between Left and Right, Ashkenazi and Mizrahi, old and young, Jews and Arabs, on the topic of regional integration. The most striking finding presented in this article is that the majorities of all these otherwise contending public sectors, which hold rather antithetical views on almost all other political matters, are, in fact, united in their unwillingness to integrate into the Middle East politically, economically and culturally. Nevertheless, there are some significant differences in the level of their respective resistance to such regional integration and in their interest in integrating

into the West. Furthermore, their reasons for holding such an attitude (or perhaps sentiment) are by no means identical. However, the bottom line is the same: the majority of Israelis, regardless of ethnic origin, nationality, age or political affiliation, turn their back on the Middle East and look to the West.

Most Israelis are indeed quite skeptical about the possibility of Israel being welcomed by its neighbors in the region politically, economically or culturally. One may well argue that this is the classic 'chicken and the egg' syndrome – as the Israelis feel unwanted in the region, they turn away from this "club" which they expect will decline to grant them membership. Yet, the data presented here suggest that this is not the case, as the majority, even of those who do believe in the possibilities of political, economic and cultural integration in the foreseeable future, are reluctant. Neither, as we showed, is the willingness, or actually the unwillingness, to integrate into the Middle East a derivative of Israelis' support for or opposition to peace negotiations.

Is this really surprising? Apparently, taking into consideration the bitter disagreements that characterize Israeli society today, the solid consent described above is fairly unexpected. However, beyond that, Israelis seem to be of a very similar opinion to people throughout the world, including many in the third world and even in the Arab world, who would prefer to become individually or collectively part of what they see as the prosperous, modernized, and democratic, although obviously far from perfect, West. This is true, even if it means losing some of their specific traditional identities and increasing the potential for domestic and external conflicts with their immediate environment. Indeed, when patterns of international migration are examined, Western countries are places that people typically try to move into, whereas Middle-Eastern countries are places they tend to wish to move out of.

Will this Western orientation create an impediment to the resolution of the Middle East conflict? Not necessarily. Not only are some convinced that high fences make good neighbors, but also, certain students maintain that this same attraction to the West is quite prevalent among wide circles in Palestinian society who only take refuge in Islamic anti-Western fundamentalism due to the dismal repercussions of the protracted conflict with Israel. If this is the case, peace can expand the common ground of the two people and bring them closer together.

Appendix: Logistic Regressions

		Political Integration				Economic Integration				Cultural Integration			
		B	SE	Sig	Exp (B)	B	SE	Sig	Exp (B)	B	SE	Sig	Exp (B)
A	AS-AF	-0.840	0.541	0.120	0.432	-1.220	0.694	0.079	0.295	-1.729	0.748	*0.021	0.177
	USSR	0.053	0.514	0.917	1.055	0.342	0.826	0.679	1.408	-0.876	0.772	0.257	0.417
	IS-IS	-0.707	0.490	0.149	0.493	-1.315	0.653	*0.044	0.268	-0.978	0.752	0.194	0.376
	IS-AS-AF	-0.489	0.482	0.310	0.613	-0.316	0.711	0.656	0.729	-1.261	0.719	0.079	0.283
	IS-EU-AM	-0.387	0.464	0.404	0.679	-1.047	0.621	0.092	0.351	-1.206	0.708	0.089	0.300
B	Left Vote	-0.634	0.459	0.168	0.530	-1.109	0.544	0.042	0.330	-0.585	0.579	0.312	0.557
	Floating Vote	-0.134	0.399	0.736	0.874	0.499	0.537	0.353	1.647	0.324	0.525	0.538	1.383
	Right Vote	0.218	0.407	0.593	1.243	0.419	0.536	0.435	1.520	0.259	0.508	0.610	1.296
C	Religiosity	0.093	0.152	0.540	1.098	0.517	0.191	*0.007	1.677	0.471	0.184	*0.011	1.601
D	Young	0.971	0.439	*0.027	2.641	1.596	0.724	*0.028	4.934	0.878	0.551	0.111	2.407
	Old	-0.717	0.318	*0.024	0.488	-0.921	0.431	*0.033	0.398	-0.137	0.398	0.732	0.872
E	Y's- Education	-0.014	0.046	0.762	0.986	-0.075	0.059	0.205	0.928	0.016	0.057	0.782	1.016
F	Gender	0.159	0.262	0.543	1.173	0.126	0.346	0.717	1.134	0.313	0.329	0.341	1.368
	Constant	1.530	1.077	0.155	4.619	2.037	1.373	0.138	7.671	0.816	1.357	0.548	2.261

* Statistically significant (p<0.05)

Coding:

A=Country of origin

Reference category: born in Europe or America

AS-AF: born in Asia or North Africa

USSR: born in the former Soviet Union

IS-IS: respondent and father born in Israel

IS-AS-AF: respondent born in Israel, father born in Asia or North Africa

IS-EU-AM: respondent born in Israeli, father born in Europe or America

B=Party voting in the last general elections

Reference category: Kadima party (centrist)

Left (Labor, Meretz, Arab parties)

Floating vote

Right (secular and religious parties on the right)

C=Religiosity

Rank order scale: 1=Ultra-orthodox;

2=Orthodox; 3=Traditional; 4=Secular

D=Age

Reference category: middle age (30-49)

Young: 18-29

Old: 50+

E=Education

Natural scale: years of formal schooling

F=Gender

Reference category: female