

Peace Index – August 2016

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The Peace Index for August focused on a variety of political and social issues, including the trial of the soldier Elor Azaria, the public's trust in the IDF, Ehud Barak's criticism of Prime Minister Netanyahu's conduct, the Israeli public's attitude toward the Israeli education system, its preferences regarding the candidates in the U.S. presidential elections, and its positions on the question of the burkini in light of numerous French towns' decision to prohibit this garment at the seashore.

The trial of the soldier Elor Azaria: Amid the ongoing trial of the Kfir Brigade soldier who shot a wounded terrorist who had carried out a stabbing attack in Hebron, a large majority of the Jewish public (65%) justifies Azaria's act and upholds his claim that he shot the terrorist in self-defense out of fear that he was wearing an explosive belt. Only 25% support the military establishment's position that Azaria violated the open-fire regulations and shot the terrorist out of a feeling of vengeance; the rest (10%) did not answer. Among Jews belonging to the right-wing camp, the support for Azaria is overwhelming (83%); it is also quite high in the centrist camp (51%), and even exists among a minority of the left-wing camp (20%). Support for Azaria is especially high (84%) among young people of army-recruitment age—those aged 18 to 24. Especially high support was also recorded for haredim (95%) and the religious (79%), though a majority of the traditional and the secular support Azaria as well.

Similarly, though with a slightly smaller majority, 51.5% of the Jews support the measure taken by a group of reserve soldiers who recently announced that they will not report to reserve duty as long as Azaria's trial continues and until he is completely exonerated; 43.5% oppose the move. On this question, it is only in the right-wing camp that a majority (71%) supports the refusal to serve; in the centrist camp the support rate stands at 31.5%, and in the left-wing camp at 14%. It should be noted that these political camps are not equal in size; the right-wing camp alone now constitutes more than half of the Israeli Jewish public.

We sought to further clarify whether the support for Elor Azaria reflects a basic stance of the Jewish public against the IDF value of the "purity of arms," which permits soldiers to use force only in cases of danger to life or operational necessity and not for purposes of punishment. We asked the Jewish public: "Some claim that any Palestinian who carries out a terror attack against Jews should be killed on the spot, even if he has been captured and

clearly does not pose a threat. Others claim that the moment he has ceased to pose a threat, the Palestinian attacker must be handed over to the legal authorities. With which of the two claims do you agree more?" The survey reveals a balanced distribution of opinions, with 47% favoring the first claim and 45% the second (the 2% gap is within the range of the sampling error). Support for killing the terrorist at the scene of the attack is especially high among right-wingers (62%), young people aged 18 to 24 (69%), haredim (63%), and the religious traditional (72%). Hence it appears that, to a considerable extent, the sweeping support for Azaria's act manifests a basic attitude of the Jewish public that at the time of terror attacks one can take the law into one's own hands, and stems less from the specific circumstances of the case.

Trust in the IDF: Because the Israeli public's support for Elor Azaria contradicts the position of the military establishment, including the chief of staff and other senior officers, we looked into whether this contradiction has affected the public's overall trust in the IDF. To that end, we gauged the public's trust in four different institutions: the government, the Knesset, the Supreme Court, and the IDF. The findings show that rates of trust in the government and in the Knesset are very low, with only one-fourth having a lot of trust or quite a lot of trust in these two institutions. The rate of trust in the Supreme Court stands at 54%; for the IDF the figure is 87%. These data are very similar to measurements of trust in the state institutions in The Israeli Democracy Index surveys of recent years. These numbers indicate that not only is the IDF in first place, well ahead of the institutions included in the comparison, but also that almost the entire Jewish public puts trust in it. Hence it turns out that at least at this stage, the Elor Azaria affair, despite the fierce opposition it arouses toward the military establishment to the point of approving refusal to serve, has not affected the Jewish public's supportive attitude toward the IDF with all its components and ranks. One can hypothesize that because the IDF is such a major, vital entity, responsible for the country's security, the public "has to" put trust in it and ignore or downplay its shortcomings.

Ehud Barak's criticism of Netanyahu: Former defense minister Ehud Barak recently said that, in the last several months, something had occurred that had caused grave security damage to Israel because of an error of judgment by Prime Minister Netanyahu and because of his troubled relations with the U.S. president. In the Jewish public only few credit the purity of Barak's intentions in making this statement; 10% responded that he had made it out of genuine concern for Israel's security, while 68% (!) thought he had been motivated by a

political interest in condemning Netanyahu. In the Arab public a higher rate (27%) responded that Barak had made his assertion out of genuine concern for Israel's security, but here, too, the prevailing rate (42%) saw political interest as the spur. Even in the left-wing camp and among Zionist Union voters, the highest rate (42% in both cases) thinks Barak said what he said out of a political interest and not out of real concern for Israel's security. On the question of whether it is good or not good for the state of Israel if Ehud Barak returns to the political arena, 65% of the Jews answered that it is preferable that he not return. The opposition to Barak's return to political life is shared by all the political camps: it exists on the right (72%), and also among centrists (54%) and on the left (59.5%). Conversely, 52% of the Arab interviewees responded that it is preferable for Barak to return to the political arena.

The functioning of the education system: With the start of the new school year, we examined how the public assesses different aspects of the Israeli education system's functioning. We asked: "On a scale of 0 (poor) to 10 (excellent), what grade would you give the Israeli education system?" The average that we obtained (5.58) shows that the education system gets a slightly-above-average grade. The Arabs gave the education system a slightly higher grade than the Jews (an average of 5.85 compared to 5.53). A segmentation by religious/secular streams showed that the religious gave the Israeli education system the highest grade (6.37); after them came the religious traditional (6.18), the nonreligious traditional (5.60), the secular (5.28), and the haredim (4.46). These findings may point to greater satisfaction with the state-religious educational stream than with the state stream or the independent-haredi stream, though this was not gauged directly.

To put the education system's functioning in a time perspective, we asked whether it has been improving or deteriorating over the years. The responses indicate that the Jewish public is not in agreement on this question, though the rate who think it is deteriorating (49%) is decidedly higher than the rate who say it is improving (40%), while 11% do not know. Also on this question, the most critical sectors are the secular and the haredi: about 55% of both groups see the system as deteriorating. The Arab public showed a balanced distribution between those who think the system is improving or deteriorating (48% vs. 46%).

Given that one of the main declared objectives of Israeli compulsory education is to provide equal opportunity to all Israeli children, we asked whether, in the interviewees' estimation, the education system indeed offers true equal opportunity to children of every background and sector. The distribution of answers to this question is much less balanced, with the majority of the entire Israeli public (54.5%) moderately or strongly holding the view that the

education system does not give equal opportunity, compared to 40% who take the opposite view. The perception that the education system is inequitable is more common among leftists (74%) and centrists (64%). Among rightists there is an equal division between those who think it is equitable and those who think it is not (46% in both cases). It appears, therefore, that the Israeli public continues to view the issue of equal opportunity as a weak point of the education system.

The U.S. presidential candidates—assessments and preferences: A large majority of both the Jewish and the Arab public (62%) expects that Hillary Clinton will win the November election in the United States. Only less than a quarter think the winner will be Donald Trump, and the rest do not know. On the question of which of the two candidates will be better from the standpoint of the Israeli government’s policy, a slightly higher rate of the Jewish public thinks Trump will be better (38.5%) than Clinton (33%). Nevertheless, on the question “And whom would you want to win the U.S. presidential elections: Donald Trump or Hillary Clinton?” a higher rate prefers Clinton (43%) over Trump (34%). In other words, for some of the Jewish public the preferences are not solely determined by the consideration of which of the two candidates will be “better for the Jews.” A segmentation of the Jewish public by political camps showed, on the left, an overwhelming preference for Clinton (86%) over Trump (9%); in the center as well, a clear preference for Clinton (57%) over Trump (23%); while the right indeed prefers Trump (49%) over Clinton (23%), but a large number (over a quarter) responded that they did not know whom they prefer. It appears, then, that the ambivalence about Trump’s personality, which is found on the American conservative right, is also reflected in the preferences of the Israeli right.

In the Arab public, the highest rate (40%) thinks that Clinton will in fact be better from the standpoint of the Israeli government’s policy, while 31% think both candidates will be good for Israel and only 14% expect Trump to be better. On the question of “Whom would you want to win the elections?” the Arab public shows a clear inclination to Clinton (58%) over Trump (11%), with a quite high rate (31%) responding that they do not know whom they would want to win the U.S. presidential elections.

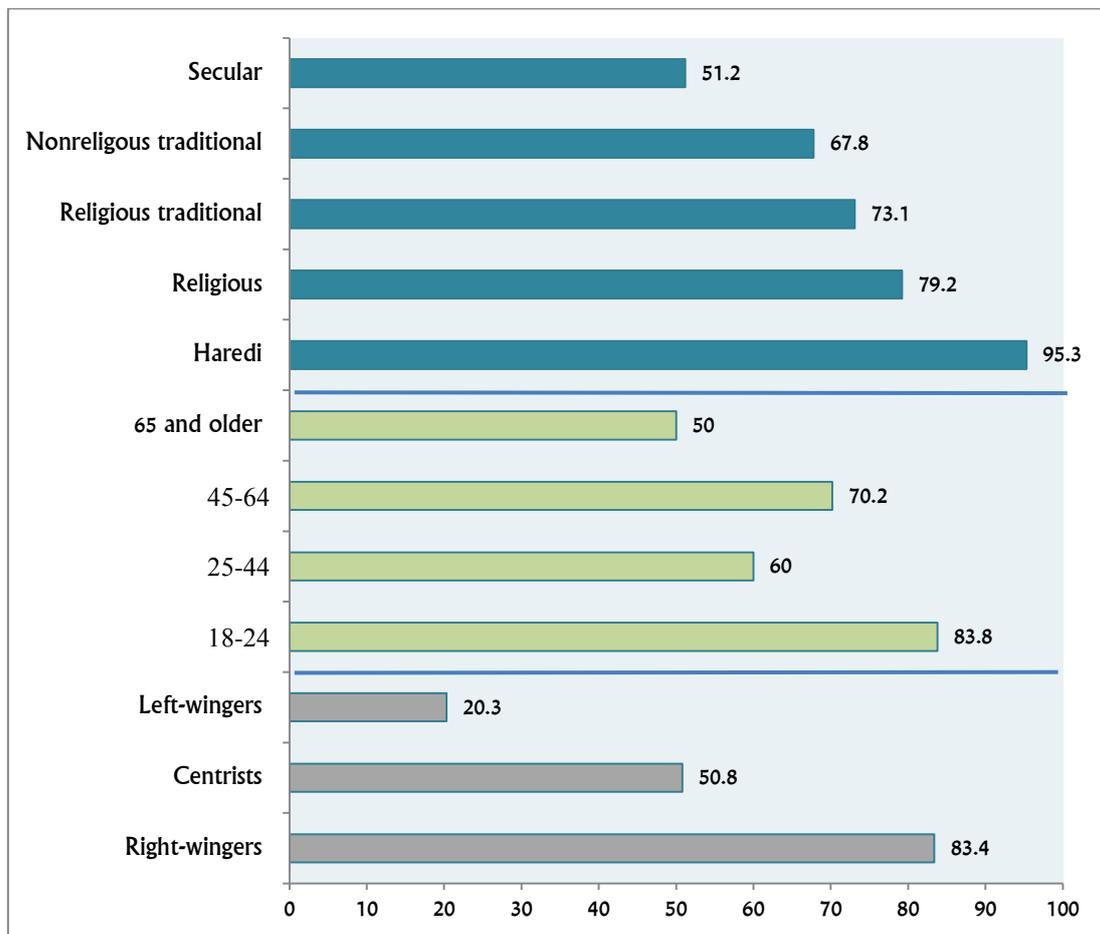
The burkini affair: Recently dozens of French towns decided to prohibit the wearing of the burkini—a swimsuit that completely covers women’s bodies. On this background, we asked whether the prohibition stems from security concerns (for example, fear of the hiding of an explosive belt under the garment) or from religious-cultural concerns (because the wearing of the burkini contravenes secularist values in France). The findings show that a considerable

majority of the Jewish public (55.5%) thinks the prohibition stems mainly from religious-cultural concerns, while only 25% see it as stemming from security concerns, 9% view it as reflecting both concerns, and the rest do not know. Similarly, in the Arab public 38% think the opposition stems from religious-cultural concerns, compared to 27% who say it stems from security concerns and 10% who believe it stems from both concerns together. It should be noted that no less than 14% of the Arabs responded that the opposition does not stem from either security or religious-cultural concerns (an answer that was not read out in the survey); apparently these respondents attribute opposition to the burkini to hatred of Muslims and their symbols among the French public.

We went on to ask for the public's position on the basic issue, namely: "With which of the following two claims do you agree more: 'The burkini symbolizes the subjugation of the Muslim woman and therefore it is justified for the French to oppose it' or 'A democratic state must permit every woman and man to dress as they wish in the public arena, including in the case of traditional and conservative clothing'?" The responses testify that a large majority of the Jewish public favors freedom of attire, with 60.5% agreeing with the second claim and only 28% favoring the first opinion. The preference for freedom of attire in the public sphere over imposing a secular dress code is common to all the political camps in the Israeli Jewish arena: from the right (59%) to the center (61%) to the left (73%). Women expressed support for freedom of attire more than men did (67% vs. 58%). A segmentation by belonging to a haredi, religious, traditional, or secular group reveals that the support for freedom of attire is shared by all the groups. Among the Arabs as well, the majority (71%) affirms that a democratic state should allow each person to dress as he or she wishes in the public sphere, including in traditional and conservative clothing, and should not impose a dress code.

Negotiations Index: 46.7 (Jews: 43.8)

Diagram of the month: Last March the soldier Elor Azaria shot a neutralized terrorist who had perpetrated a stabbing attack in Hebron. Azaria claimed he had fired out of self-defense because he feared that the terrorist was wearing an explosive belt. The military establishment claimed that Azaria had violated the open-fire regulations and shot the terrorist out of a feeling of vengeance. To what extent do you justify or not justify Elor Azaria's act? (% strongly justify or moderately justify, Jews by political camp, age group, and religious group)



The Peace Index is a project of the Evens Program for Mediation and Conflict Resolution at Tel Aviv University and the Guttman Center for Public Opinion and Policy Research of the Israel Democracy Institute. This month's survey was conducted by telephone on August 30-31, 2016, by the Midgam Research Institute. The survey included 600 respondents (500 Jews, 100 Arabs), who constitute a representative national sample of the entire adult population aged 18 and over. The maximum measurement error for the entire sample is $\pm 4.1\%$ at a confidence level of 95%. Statistical processing was done by Ms. Yasmin Alkalay. <http://www.peaceindex.org>