

Peace Index, August 2018

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Now that 25 years have passed since the signing of the first Oslo agreement in September 1993, and against the backdrop of the ongoing conflict between Israel and the Palestinians, the main part of this month's Peace Index survey explores different aspects of the public's positions toward the conflict in the present and the future. The second part of the survey gauges what the public thinks about Israel's situation in the New Year, including the main issues the government should focus on and a few day-to-day concerns.

An independent Palestinian state? To the question "In your opinion, in principle do the Palestinians deserve or not deserve an independent state of their own?" half of the Israeli public responded positively. A slightly lower rate (43%) says the opposite - that the Palestinians do not deserve an independent state. That is, the Jewish public is divided on this question with a slight advantage for those who endorse the Palestinian right to self-determination. A segmentation of the Jewish sample's responses by political camp reveals a large majority on the left and in the center who favor the Palestinians' right to a state in principle (90% and 68% respectively). Only a minority (30.5%) hold that view on the right, which nowadays is the largest political camp in Israel. A segmentation by age shows that the support on this basic issue rises with age: among those aged 18-34 only a minority (35%) supports the Palestinians' right to a state, 54% of those aged 35-54 support it, and in the oldest age group a 61% majority supports it.

The Israeli Arabs believe unanimously (94%) that the Palestinians are entitled in principle to an independent state of their own.

Peace based on the two-states-for-two-peoples formula: We found a similar division, even more balanced, in the Jewish sample's responses to the question: "Do you support or not support at present the signing of a peace agreement based on the formula of two states for two peoples?" Forty-seven percent of the Jewish sample responded that they support an agreement based on this formula while 46% answered that they do not. A segmentation of the responses to this question by political camp yielded a similar picture to the previous question: on the right only 25% favored a solution according to this formula, in the center 70%, and on the left 91.5%. A

segmentation by age gave this picture: in the 18-34 age group only 32% supported the formula, in the intermediate 35-54 age group 47% supported it, and in the oldest age group, 64%.

In the Arab sample a majority of 73% supported a peace agreement based on the two-states-for-two-peoples formula.

Feasibility of a peace agreement based on the two-states-for-two-peoples formula: The majority of the Israeli public (56%) holds the view that if a peace agreement were to be signed based on the two-states-for-two-peoples formula, it would be impossible to implement. The rate of those who think so among the Jewish and Arab interviewees is almost identical. There is, however, a difference between the two populations on the question of which side would have more difficulty implementing such an agreement: In the Arab public the prevailing assessment (43%) is that both sides would find it difficult to the same extent. Among the Jews, however, the most common view is that the Palestinians would encounter more difficulties with implementation (42%). An interesting finding in this connection is that in the Jewish sample, among those who situated themselves politically on the right, the rate who think it is Israel that would have more difficulties carrying out such an agreement (29%) is much higher than the rate who think so on the left (17%) and in the center (14%). This may indicate that the right anticipates stronger domestic resistance to such an agreement than the left does.

Obstacles to peace: We wanted to know which elements of a peace agreement constitute a red line for the Israeli public that cannot be crossed. So the interviewees were presented with this sentence: Let's assume that the Israeli government and the Palestinian leadership had almost arrived at a formulation of a permanent peace agreement. In order to prove to the Palestinians and to the world that the Israeli government truly wants peace, would you support or oppose Israel agreeing to: declare East Jerusalem to be the capital of the Palestinian state; evacuate all the isolated settlements in Judea and Samaria; recognize that in the War of Independence a catastrophe was caused to the Palestinian people; an open border between Israel and the Palestinian state that would enable the Palestinians to enter and exit Israel freely- for example, for work; release the Palestinian prisoners being held in Israel; absorption in the Palestinian state of all the Palestinian refugees who want to settle in it. In the Jewish sample we found that a majority opposed each one of these measures. The greatest opposition was to releasing the

Palestinian prisoners (81%). After that in descending order came: Israeli recognition of the catastrophe caused to the Palestinians (77%), declaring East Jerusalem the capital of Palestine (75%), an open border between the two states and evacuation of the isolated settlements (71%). The lowest rate of opposition (57%) was recorded for the absorption of refugees within the Palestinian state. In other words, a majority of the Jewish public opposes, to different but clear-cut extents, all the conditions that the Israeli government would presumably have to accept in order to reach an agreement and prove that Israel truly wants peace.

In the Arab public a majority supported each of those measures, with release of the Palestinian prisoners gaining the highest support (91%).

Palestinian recognition of Israel as the nation-state of the Jewish people: A wide consensus (83%) of the Jewish public holds the opinion that “the Palestinians must recognize Israel as the nation-state of the Jewish people before peace talks with them can be revived.” We found a majority in favor of demanding such recognition in all three political camps: on the right 91%, in the center 82%, and on the left 59%. In the Arab public the majority (72%) opposes this demand.

What do the Palestinians really want? At least a partial explanation for these staunch positions of the Jewish public can be found in the high rate (66%) of those who agree that “most of the Palestinians have not come to terms with Israel’s existence and would destroy it if they could.” This rate has remained more or less constant, with slight fluctuations, since the first Peace Index survey was conducted in June 1994. A segmentation of the Jewish sample by political camps revealed that 84% of those on the right consider that this is the Palestinians’ intention. In the center 53% think so, but on the left only 20.5%.

Among the Arab interviewees 57.5% also agreed with this claim.

Will there be peace? In light of all that has been said here, it comes as no surprise that an overwhelming majority of the Jewish public (89%) sees “the chances that in the year soon to begin there will be a positive breakthrough in Israel’s relations with the Palestinians” as low. The Arab public, too, shares this pessimistic perception; 71% responded that the chances of such a breakthrough are slim.

From there we moved on to some current issues:

The contacts with Hamas: Based on the media reports on ceasefire negotiations between Israel and the Palestinians, we wanted to know whether or not the public supports such contacts. We found that a majority (57%) of the Jewish public favors the negotiations with Hamas. Whereas on the right the positions on this issue are divided (with 45% support and 47% opposition), in the center and on the left there is majority support (70% and 81% respectively). In the Arab public 60% support the negotiations with Hamas.

Making an agreement conditional on the return of the soldiers' bodies: The Goldin and Shaul families have been striving for some time to convince the Israeli public and decision-makers that an arrangement with Hamas must be made conditional on the return of their sons' bodies. It appears that in the public arena, at least, they can record a considerable success for themselves. We asked: "If the negotiations arrive at understandings with Hamas about an ongoing ceasefire in the south, then in your opinion could Israel, at this stage, forgo the return of the bodies of the two soldiers being held by Hamas, Hadar Goldin and Oron Shaul, in order to achieve quiet?" Over three-quarters of the Jewish public (78%) replied that Israel could not forgo the return of the soldiers' bodies even in return for quiet in the south. It is interesting that on this issue there is agreement across the three political camps: on the right 82%, in the center 75%, and on the left 66%.

And from here to some everyday matters:

The debate over the Yehudit Bridge over the Ayalon Highway: We found that a majority of the Jewish public (62%) agrees more with the opinion that the work should be done on Shabbat so as to prevent huge traffic jams on Israel's main transportation artery. Only 25.5% agree more with the claim that there is no justification to carry out the work on Shabbat because it amounts to a desecration of Shabbat that is not for the sake of saving lives. A segmentation by religiosity yielded the expected findings: all the haredim against doing the work on Shabbat and almost all the secular in favor. The somewhat surprising finding on this issue was that about one-fourth of those defining themselves as religious supported carrying out the work on Shabbat.

The length of the vacation days in the schools and nursery schools: As the school year begins, the question of the vacation days during the holiday period - as always - arises. We found that a considerable majority of the Jewish public (59%) sees the number of vacation days that the educational system allots for the Israeli holidays as too large. Thirty percent hold the opinion that the number is appropriate while only 4% think this number is too small. Interestingly, among the more religious groups (haredi, religious, and religious traditional), the most common answer is that the number of vacation days for Israeli holidays is appropriate. This is despite the fact that these sectors have more children than the nonreligious traditional and secular seculars, where the prevailing answer was that the number of vacation days is too large.

And as the New Year approaches:

How, from the country's standpoint, was the year that is soon ending? Close to two-thirds of the Jewish public (64%) responded that from Israel's standpoint the year that is soon ending was moderately good or very good. On the right and in the center, a majority thinks so (71% and 65.5%); on the left, 48%. Half of the Arabs think the year was a good one.

How will the coming year be from the country's standpoint? Forty-six percent of the Jewish interviewees anticipate that it will be like the one that is ending, 29% think it will be a little or much better, and only 12% expect it to be a little or much less good. In the Arab public, too, the majority thinks the coming year will be like the one that is ending or better than it, with 35% expecting it to be less good. In other words, the public's forecast is that the country's good situation in the present will remain as it is or further improve in the coming year.

What should the government focus on in the coming year? The following are the Jewish public's responses in descending order of priority: closing the socioeconomic gaps (22%), improving the economic situation (18%), cleaning up governmental corruption (16%), strengthening unity among the people (14%), strengthening the IDF and Israel's security (12%), reaching a peace agreement with the Palestinians (7%). The rest did not know or answered that all the issues are important to the same extent. Although there is much variety in the public's preferences regarding the importance of the issues, it is hard to ignore the fact that the peace

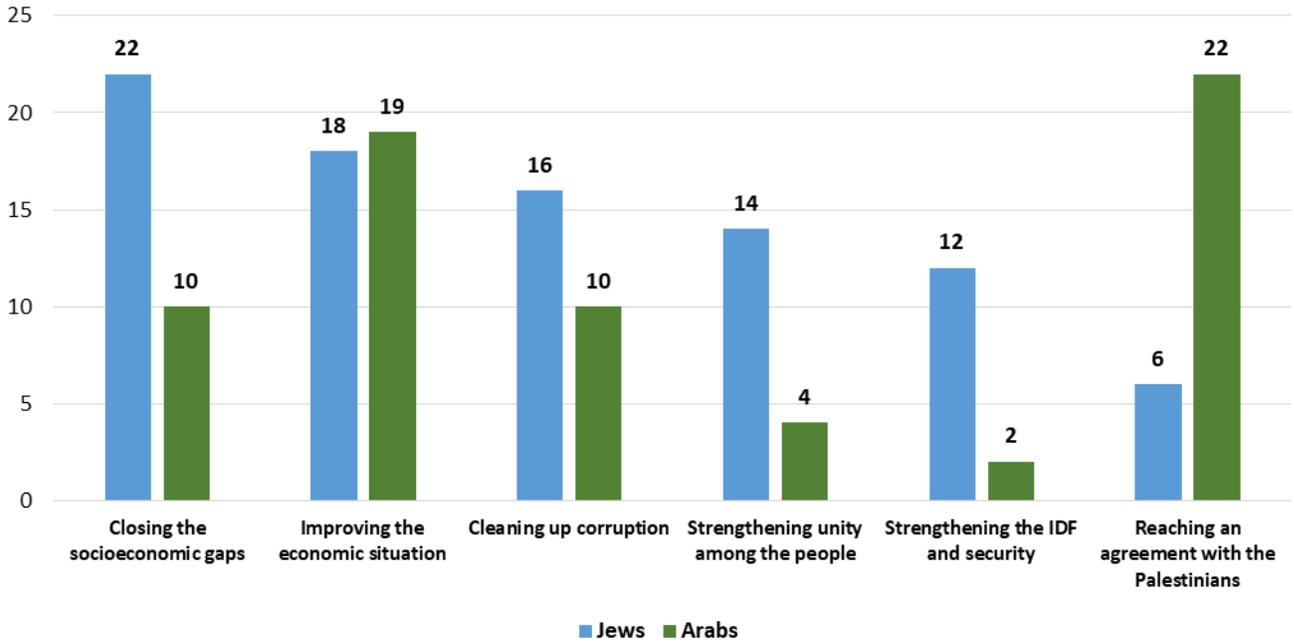
issue is ranked at the bottom, a finding that dovetails with the mood that emerges from the responses we presented in the first part of the survey. Also noteworthy is that the corruption issue is ranked third, which may indicate that most of the public is not indifferent to the media's ongoing reports about corruption cases in the various entities while also not seeing this as a problem of the first order.

The Arab public's order of priorities regarding the government's focus in the New Year is different: in first place comes the goal of reaching a peace agreement with the Palestinians (22%) and just beneath it is improving the economic situation (19%). All the way at the bottom are strengthening unity among the people (4%) and strengthening the IDF and Israel's security (2%).

How do you feel about holiday meals for the family? Despite the constant complaints about this family ritual, a large majority of the Jewish public (85%) strongly or moderately likes the holiday meals for the family while only 14% do not like them so much or at all.

Negotiations Index: 47.1 (Jewish sample - 46.7)

Diagram of the month: The main issue the government should focus on in the New Year (% , Jews and Arabs)



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 and internet on August 28-29, 2018, by the Midgam Research Institute. The survey included 600 respondents, who constitute a representative national sample of the adult population of Israel aged 18 and over. The maximum measurement error for the entire sample is $\pm 4.1\%$ at a confidence level of 95%. Statistical analyses were done by Ms. Yasmin Alkalay. <http://www.peaceindex.org>