

## Peace Index, December 2018

**Prof. Ephraim Yaar and Prof. Tamar Hermann**

The Peace Index for December focused mainly on issues connected to the calling of early elections in April 2019. The first issue we dealt with was how the public views the calling of early elections.

**The advancement of the elections and the national interest:** The survey findings show that a considerable majority of the Jewish public (56%) views the calling of early elections as a good move in terms of the country's interest. The gaps on this issue between the three politic camps are very small (right - 57%, center - 61%, left - 54%). This is the majority position among the Arab public as well: 60% see the early elections as a good thing from the standpoint of the country's interest.

**What caused Netanyahu to call early elections?** On this question there is no answer that wins majority consent. Thirty-seven percent of the Jewish public believes that what really caused Prime Minister Netanyahu to move up the elections was the desire that they should precede the attorney-general's announcement of his decision on whether to indict him. Twenty-five percent consider that the prime minister's motive for advancing the elections was his realization that a government based on only 61 members of Knesset cannot function properly. Twenty-four percent responded that both factors influenced him to the same extent. Whereas the right is divided on this question, in the center a small majority (51%) says Netanyahu's real motive was to get a head-start on the attorney-general; on the left a large majority (76%) thinks that was his reason for moving up the elections. In the Arab public as well, a small majority (51%) thinks so.

**The right timing to publicize the attorney-general's decision:** A majority of the Jewish public (52%) agrees with the claims that the attorney-general should decide on whether to indict Netanyahu and announce the decision before the elections. Only a minority (36%) thinks he should wait until after the elections because announcing the decision beforehand would constitute interference in the electoral process. A segmentation of the responses to this question by political camp reveals a majority in the center and on the left (78% in both cases), and in the Arab public (64%), who think the attorney-general's decision should be announced before the

elections. On the right the prevailing view (49%) is the opposite, namely, that it would constitute interference in the electoral process. Only 38% of those who defined themselves as right-wing want the attorney-general to announce his decision before the elections. Among the coalition parties, most of the voters for Likud and for the haredi parties think the attorney-general should wait until after the elections (Likud - 55%, Torah Judaism - 56.5%, Shas - 63%), while among Bayit Yehudi (39.5%) and Kulanu (24%) voters a minority takes that position.

**The outgoing government's performance:** How does the public view the performance of the outgoing Netanyahu-led government? We asked this regarding nine issues. The findings show that a majority of the Jewish public views the government's performance positively on three issues: conducting Israel's foreign relations (73% said the government performed very well or moderately well in this area), ensuring Israel's security from the military standpoint (65%), and ensuring economic stability (52%). The assessments of the government's performance on the other six issues were less positive, and on none of them did a majority see it as very good or moderately good. In descending order: maintaining the balance between the Jewish component and the democratic component (48%), providing equal rights to all sectors of the Israeli public (39%), strengthening trust between the people and its leaders (31%), reducing the economic gaps (25.5%), promoting a common identity between Jews and Arabs (22%), and reducing the cost of living (20.5%). Not surprisingly, the right endorses the outgoing government more than the center and the left and gives it positive evaluations in more areas - conducting Israel's foreign relations (82%), ensuring security (67%), maintaining the balance between the Jewish component and the democratic component (61%), maintaining economic stability (58%), and providing equal rights to all citizens (50%). The left, however, grants the outgoing government's performance a favorable assessment only in the area of maintaining security (54%). In the Arab public, the majority gave the outgoing government's performance positive assessments in two areas: conducting Israel's foreign relations (65%) and ensuring Israel's security from a military standpoint (60%).

**Israel defends itself successfully:** Given the view that the previous government performed satisfactorily when it came to ensuring military security, one can perhaps understand why a

majority of the Jewish (75%) and the Arab (58%) public agreed with Trump's assertion that Israel defends itself "very well."

**Who will win the upcoming elections?** We asked: "In your assessment, which government has more of a chance of being established after the elections?" The answers indicate that in the Jewish public's view, the competition is really only between two alternatives: a right-wing government (42%) and a center-right government (44%). The alternatives of a center-left and a left-wing government receive a combined total of only 4%. In the Arab public a majority (57%) believes that the government to be established after the elections will be a right-wing one.

**Whom don't you want in the next government?** We asked: "Would you or would you not want the haredi parties to be part of the next government?" The responses obtained from the Jewish public are unambiguous: a clear majority (65%) does not want a government with the haredim. On the right a majority (52%) does not want the haredi parties to be part of the next government. When the responses on the right do not include those of haredim, 60% do not want the haredim to be in the next government. Among the Arabs 86% do not want a presence of haredi parties in the government.

The same question was asked regarding the Arab parties. The picture in the Jewish public is similar but sharper: a very large majority (82%) answered that they do not want Arab parties to be in the next government. A segmentation of the Jewish public's responses on Arab parties in the government by political camps shows that on the right only 6.5% want Arab parties in the government, in the center 16.5%, and on the left 49%. Among the Arabs a very large majority (82%) does want Arab parties to be in the next government.

**Which electoral system does the public prefer?** We presented the interviewees with two alternatives: the current system in which there is a relatively low electoral threshold, enabling numerous population groups to get their preferences represented but leading to a coalition with numerous parties, or a different system with a higher electoral threshold that would produce a few large parties but reduce the number of groups that gain representation in the Knesset for their preferences and interests. The majority (58%) of the Jewish public chose the second system.

Here we did not find a significant disparity between the different political camps. Among the Arabs the majority (55%) preferred the existing system.

**Renewing the negotiations in the future?** With the peace issue having disappeared almost completely from the Israeli public discourse, and looking toward the future, we asked: “To what extent is it important or not important to you that the next government should work hard to renew the negotiations with the Palestinian Authority?” There was an interesting distribution of responses in the Jewish public: about half (47.5%) responded that it is important to them that the next government should work to renew the negotiations while just about the same rate (48%) responded that it is not important to them. A segmentation of the Jewish respondents by political camps turned up huge gaps: on the right only 30% answered that it was important to them that the next government strive to renew the negotiations, while in the center and on the left a large majority responded that it is indeed important to them (76% and 93% respectively). In the Arab public a clear majority (72%) said it was important to them that the next government should work hard to revive the diplomatic negotiations.

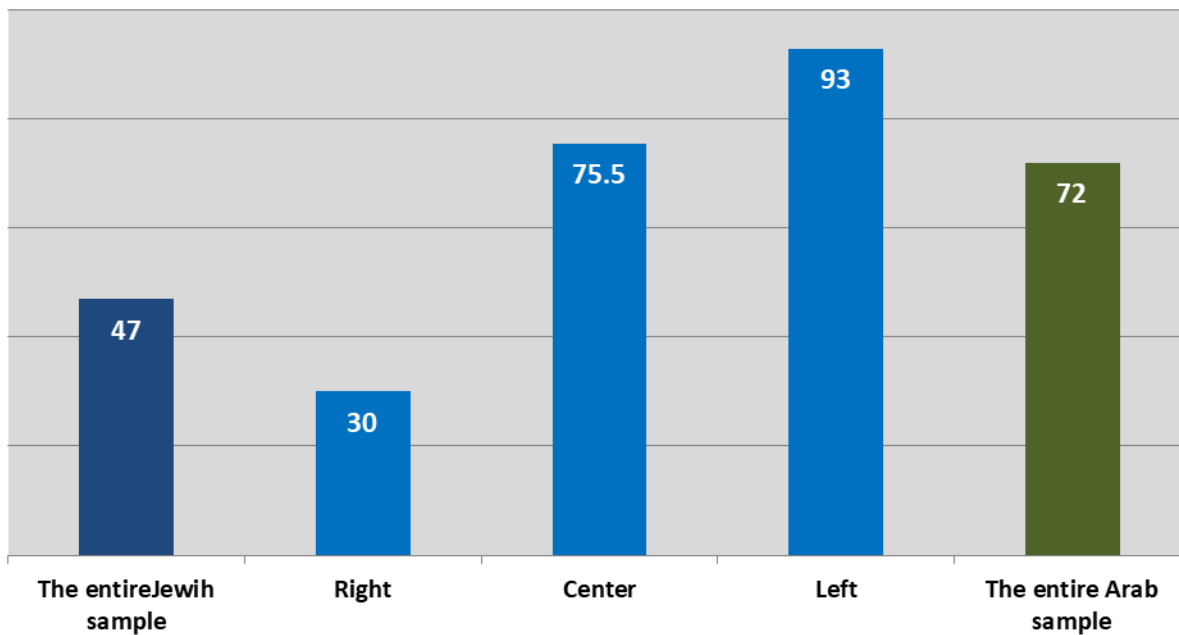
Another issue on the agenda this month was U.S. president Trump’s announcement on the pullout of U.S. forces from Syria.

**Withdrawing the U.S. forces from Syria:** We asked: “Does Trump’s decision to withdraw the U.S. forces from Syria harm or not harm Israel’s security interests?” In the Jewish public a majority (61%) does see the American president’s decision as harming Israel’s security interests. In the Arab public only 41% view it that way.

**Is the IDF prepared for war?** This month we asked again: “Former military ombudsman Gen. (res.) Yitzhak Brik keeps warning that there are grave shortcomings in the IDF’s preparedness for war. Outgoing chief of staff Eizenkot as well as the special committee he set up to examine the army’s preparedness have stated that the IDF is fit to deal with any anticipated military threat. Which do you believe more?” This time the rate of those who believe Gen. (res.) Brik (40%) is higher than the rate of those who believe Chief of Staff Eizenkot (37%). In October the rate of those who believed Eizenkot (38%) exceeded the rate of those who believed Brik (34%).

**Negotiations Index: 41.8 (Jewish sample - 41.9)**

**Diagram of the month: “To what extent is it important or not important to you that the next government should work hard to renew the negotiations with the Palestinian Authority?” (Arabs, Jews by political camp, %)**



*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 on the internet on January 2-3, 2019, 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>*

#### **Important Announcement**

**With this issue the Peace Index project, a cooperative effort of Tel Aviv University and the Israel Democracy Institute, has come to an end. Information on further surveys will be sent to you in the future.**

**All the data of the Peace Index can be found in the Israel Democracy Institute's database at: <https://dataisrael.idi.org.il>**