

## Peace Index February 2015

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**On the eve of the elections, which bloc is likely to form a government?:** The results of the present Peace Index survey show that the events of the recent weeks and days had no influence on the Jewish public's assessment of which bloc has a greater chance to form the next government. Two weeks before the elections, 61% believe the right-wing bloc's chances are greater (compared to 59% who thought so in January and 60% in December). Assessments of the center-left bloc's chances were less stable, with a downward trend—22% in the latest survey compared to 27.5% and 24% in the previous ones, so that in the last month the gap in favor of the right-wing bloc (39%) was the largest. However, on the question "Which bloc would you want to form the government after the upcoming elections?" a different tendency emerged. Over the past three months the gap between the two blocs has diminished considerably, from 22% favoring the right-wing camp in December to 15% in January and 13% in February. In other words, while the gap has indeed narrowed, when it comes to the preference of the Jewish public the scale still tips rightward, and with so little time remaining before the elections the chances of a dramatic change in the center-left's favor are small. Interestingly, the largest share of the Arab public (43.5%) goes to those unable to assess which bloc—right or center-left—has the better chance to form a government. Meanwhile there is a clear preference here for a government headed by the center-left: 48% compared to only 11% who would rather see a right-wing government.

**Netanyahu's speech in Washington:** The survey, which was conducted concurrently with the prime minister's speech in Washington, shows that at that time the rate of Jews who thought Netanyahu's speech would benefit Israel was greater than the rate who thought it would cause damage to the country (39% vs. 29%). The rest were divided between those who thought the visit would neither be harmful nor beneficial (18%) and those who could not decide (14%). On this question the gaps in assessment between the right and the left are huge: whereas, among those who identified themselves as on the right, 69% thought the speech would primarily benefit Israel, 73% of those who defined themselves as left-wing thought it would mainly cause damage. On this question as well, the largest group among the Arab interviewees opted for "Don't know" (36%).

In light of the recent statement by U.S. national security adviser Susan Rice that Netanyahu's decision to address Congress was destructive to U.S.-Israeli relations, we

asked to what extent this assertion is a bad sign of the state of U.S.-Israeli relations. It turns out that the Jewish public does not think it is: a majority (54%) totally or mostly disagrees with Rice's claim that Netanyahu's decision augurs poorly for the two states' relations, while 36.5% say the opposite. Note that a segmentation by self-affiliation with political camps showed that, whereas among those defining themselves as right and moderate right about three-quarters disagree with Rice, on the left and the moderate left (together constituting about 14% of the entire Jewish public) a majority of 70% sees Rice's assessment is correct. On this question the rate of "Don't knows" among the Arab interviewees was even higher than on the previous ones (43%).

We also gauged the Jewish public's view of Netanyahu's main motive for making the speech to Congress. In January we found that a large majority of the entire Jewish public (67%) thought the trip's timing, right at the peak of the Israeli election campaign, was key to Netanyahu's decision to speak in Washington; in other words, that he was using the address abroad to sway the election results at home. In the present survey we asked a different question about the prime minister's motives: we presented a first main motive—advancing his electoral status, and a second one—belief in his ability to change the U.S. policy on an agreement with Iran. This time 45% of the interviewees thought that the main motive was Netanyahu's sincere belief that the speech could change the Americans' position on an agreement with Iran, while 41% said the electoral consideration was what guided him. At the same time, among those defining themselves as left and moderate left there was, this month, a very large majority (about 80%) who thought domestic electoral factors were what motivated Netanyahu to go and address Congress (compared to only about one-fourth of those identifying themselves as right and moderate right who attributed that motive to him).

**U.S.-Israeli relations:** Against the background we have mentioned, we asked who was more responsible for the recent deterioration in relations between the Israeli government headed by Netanyahu and the U.S. administration headed by Obama. Among the Jewish public, the most common response (34%) is that both sides are equally responsible. For the rest of the Jewish public, however, the rate who cast most of the blame on the Obama-led U.S. administration (32%) is a little higher than the rate who mainly blame the Netanyahu-led Israeli government (27%). Note that among those defining themselves as on the right, a majority of 60% pin the responsibility for the deterioration on the Obama administration, while again, among those defining themselves as left and moderate left, about 80% said the Netanyahu government was to blame.

At the same time, when we gauged the Jewish public's positions on the claim that the reactions to Netanyahu's speech by President Obama and members of his administration are an intentional attempt to harm his chances in the Israeli elections, the number of those who denied such intentions (49%) exceeded the number of those who affirmed them (43%). A check of the positions on this question by political identity shows that the suspicion toward the Obama administration's intentions is, as expected, higher among those who identified themselves as right or moderate right. Among this group 49% see the administration as having such aims, while only 4% of those defining themselves as left or moderate left see it that way.

Among the Arabs, too, the prevailing opinion is that the two sides are equally responsible for the deterioration in U.S.-Israeli relations (40%). However, here the rate casting most of the blame on Israel (21%) is clearly higher than for those who see the Americans as culpable for the situation (8%).

Does the Jewish public's inclination to belittle the likely consequences of Netanyahu's latest visit to Washington reflect the importance this public attributes to U.S.-Israeli relations with their various aspects? The answer to this question is clearly negative. The Israeli public is well aware of Israel's high dependency on the United States. At the head of the "ladder of dependency" stands the military-security domain, with an 83% majority considering that Israel is dependent on the United States to a very great or moderately great extent; next come the diplomatic-political (75%) and the economic domain (71%). That is, along with the backing that a large part of the Jewish public gives to Netanyahu's criticism of the U.S. position on the Iranian question and to his attempts to bring about a change in that position, the public well understands to what extent Israel is dependent on the United States, notwithstanding the view of some right-wing spokespersons who have claimed on different occasions that Israel is capable of managing even without the United States. This apparent contradiction between the findings can be resolved by hypothesizing that the public tends to believe the relations between the two states can be rehabilitated in the foreseeable future, especially with the end of Obama's tenure (and perhaps also of Netanyahu's). On all of the parameters the Arab public, too, sees very great or moderately great Israeli dependency on the U.S.

**The future of the peace process after the elections:** The prevailing assessment is that a center-left government would indeed formulate a different policy from that of the Netanyahu government, that this would improve the relations with the U.S. administration, but it would not positively influence the Palestinian side in the direction of moderating its positions. Two-thirds of the Jewish public are sure or think that if a government headed by HaMahane HaTzioni (the Zionist Camp) were to be

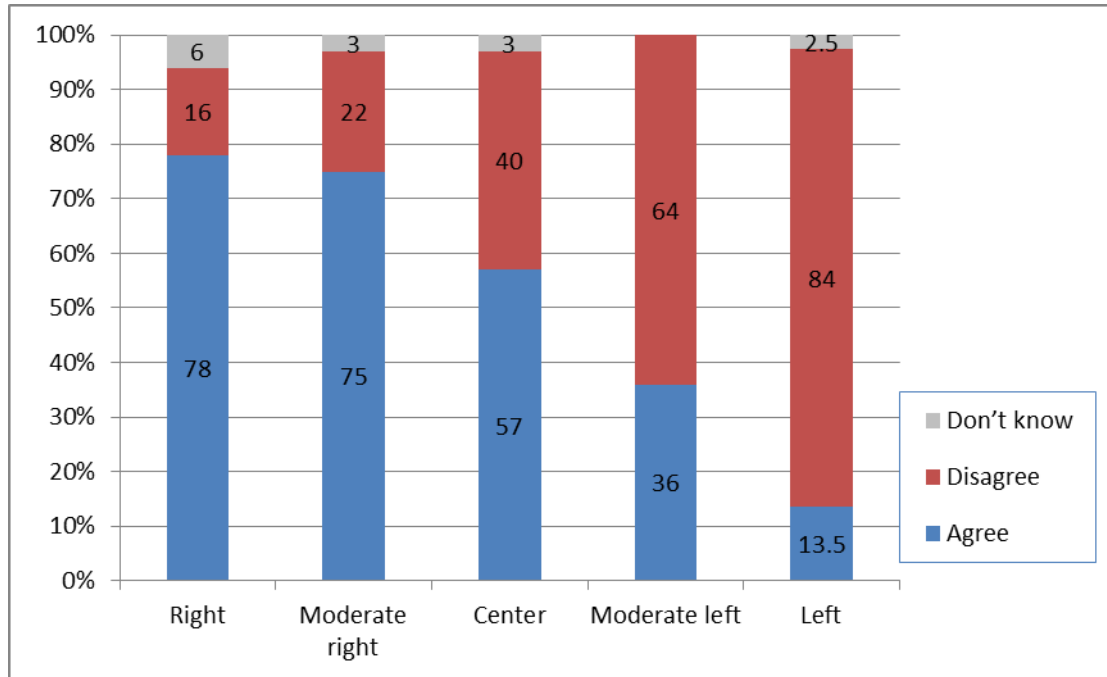
formed, the policy on building in the settlements in Judea and Samaria would change. Moreover, the most common opinion (48.5%) is that the U.S. administration's disposition toward such a government would be friendlier than toward the Netanyahu government, while 33% believe it would not change. However, at the same time, a clear majority (63.5%) strongly or moderately agrees with the claim that "No matter which party forms the next government, the peace process with the Palestinians will not advance because there is no solution to the disagreements between the sides." In addition, a large majority of the Jewish public (again, 63.5%) considers that the Palestinian leadership would not show greater flexibility and readiness for concessions even if a government headed by HaMahane HaTzioni were to emerge from the elections. At the same time, among those defining themselves as left or moderately left, 60% do think that the Palestinians, faced with a government headed by HaMahane HaTzioni, would be prepared to moderate their positions.

In the Arab public the rate of those who would expect a change in the policy on building in the settlements under a HaMahane HaTzioni-led government is higher than the rate who would not expect one (40% vs. 27%). The most interesting finding, though, is that just like among the Jews, the rate of Arab interviewees who think such a change would not lead to a moderation of the Palestinians' positions exceeds the rate of those who would anticipate such a change under a government headed by HaMahane HaTzioni (35% vs. 22%).

**The status of same-sex couples in Israel:** This is another issue that has arisen during the election campaign. Although it is not directly connected to the issues of the Peace Index, we saw fit to report on it because of the interesting results. We asked: "Do you support or oppose same-sex couples in the state of Israel having legal rights like those of other couples?" It turns out that, whereas a large majority (62%) of the Jewish public supports giving equal rights to same-sex couples, an even larger majority of the Arabs (77%) opposes doing so.

**Negotiations index: 45.9 (Jewish sample 43.4).**

**Graph of the month: “No matter which party forms the next government, the peace process with the Palestinians will not advance because there is no solution to the disagreements between the sides” (% , Jewish sample, by self-placement on a right-left spectrum).**



*The Peace Index is a project of the Evens Program for Mediation and Conflict Resolution at Tel Aviv University and the Guttman Center for Surveys of the Israel Democracy Institute. This month's survey was conducted by telephone on March 1-3, 2015, by the Midgam Research Institute. The survey included 600 respondents, who constitute a representative national sample of the entire adult population aged 18 and over. The maximum measurement error is  $\pm 4.1\%$  at a confidence level of 95%.*