

Peace Index column, July 2017

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Against the backdrop of the investigations of associates of the prime minister in the submarine affair, and also of the security and diplomatic events involving the Temple Mount, this time we focused on these two issues specifically, along with some questions concerning the Israeli-Palestinian conflict more generally.

The prime minister's handling of the Temple Mount crisis: The survey findings show that a majority of the Jewish public (64%) does not see the prime minister as handling the current crisis on the Temple Mount judiciously. A segmentation of the Jewish interviewees' responses by political camp revealed that even among those defining themselves as right-wing, most do not view the prime minister as managing the crisis judiciously, and that this view is even more pronounced in the center and on the left, though apparently for different reasons than among the right-wingers. In the Arab public, the rate of those who do not regard Netanyahu as contending well with this issue comes to about three-fourths (74%).

The installation of the metal detectors at the entrances to the Al-Aqsa Mosque: At the same time, on the question of whether the prime minister acted properly in deciding to install the metal detectors at the entrances to the Al-Aqsa Mosque, even though according to media reports the IDF and the Shabak opposed the measure, the Jewish public is almost evenly split between those who think he acted properly (45%) and those who maintain the opposite (47%). In the Arab public a lopsided majority (82%) considers that Netanyahu did not act properly in deciding to install the metal detectors.

Is the prime minister using the Temple Mount crisis to divert attention from the investigations? In the Jewish public the majority (57%) rejects the claim that the prime minister is not trying to alleviate the Temple Mount crisis because he wants to divert the public's attention from the investigations of his associates in the different corruption affairs. In the Arab public a majority—not large (54%)—believes Netanyahu is indeed making use of the Temple Mount crisis to divert public attention from the investigations of his associates.

The submarine affair: The prevailing position in the Jewish sample (44%) rejects the claim that “the prime minister’s decision on the issue of purchasing the submarines was influenced by personal considerations no less, and perhaps even more, than by pure security considerations” (39% think the opposite—that the decision was indeed influenced by personal considerations). In the Arab sample the rate of “Don’t knows” (45.5%) was too high to allow validity for the distribution of responses to this question among those who did know. However, on the question of whether the prime minister knew or did not know about his associates’ involvement in the submarine affair, a considerable majority of the Jewish public (56%) thinks or is sure that he did. A segmentation by political camps showed that a majority of the left and of the center thinks or is sure that the prime minister knew, while on the right that is the most common position but it is not held by a majority. Here too the rate of “Don’t knows” in the Arab sample (44%) was too high to draw any conclusions from the distribution of responses to the question.

Did the Muslim religious authorities know beforehand about the intended terror attack on the Temple Mount? The Jewish public is divided on the question of whether the Muslim religious authorities (the Wakf) knew or did not know in advance about the intention to perpetrate a terror attack against IDF and Israel Police forces near the Al-Aqsa Mosque. The highest rate (48%) thinks or is sure that the authorities knew, while 39% believe the opposite. A segmentation by political camps shows that, whereas there is a solid majority on the left who think or are sure that the Muslim authorities did not know, in the center and on the right only a minority takes that view. In the Arab public a large majority (83%) is sure or thinks that the Wakf had no prior information about the planned attack.

Assessing the support for the terror attack on the Temple Mount among the Israeli Arab population: Because the terror attack on the Temple Mount was perpetrated by three young men who were Arab citizens of Israel, we looked into what, in the Jewish public’s assessment, is the extent of support for this act in the Israeli Arab population as a whole. The opinions on this matter are not homogeneous: while the most common response (38%) is indeed that almost no one or only a minority supports the attack, at the same time 26% think that about half of the Israeli Arabs support the attack and 31% believe that most or almost all of them support it. That is, a majority of the Jewish public (about 57%) thinks that about half or more of the Israeli Arab population identifies with the terror attack on the Temple Mount.

The terror attack in Halamish: In the same direction, but more decisively, 47% of the Jewish public considers that a majority or almost all of the Palestinian population supports the stabbing attack in Halamish, 24.5% see the rate of supporters of the attack as about half, while only 23% think that only a minority or almost nobody among the Palestinians supports the attack.

Terror attacks and despair over the situation: In the wider context of the conflict between the two nations, in the Jewish public there is widespread opposition (77%) to the claim that the current wave of terror attacks results from the Palestinians' despair over the lack of progress in the talks on a peace agreement between the Palestinian Authority and Israel. In other words, from the viewpoint of the Jewish public, the recent Palestinian terror is not an outcome of the dead-end that the talks have reached. These data are almost identical to those yielded by the same question in October 2015. A segmentation by political camps revealed that a majority of those locating themselves on the left think that despair pushes the Palestinians to use the weapon of terror attacks (54%), compared to only a minority in the center and on the right (28% and 8% respectively). An interesting finding is that in the Arab public as well, there is no majority that sees despair as impelling the Palestinians to use the terror-attack weapon. Indeed, a higher rate (49%) disagrees that the terror wave is a result of despair, compared to the 46% who affirm that it is. Here there is a bit of a change compared to 2015, when about half of the Arab public thought the terror attacks resulted from despair and slightly fewer disagreed (50% vs. 44%).

The death penalty for terrorists? The defense minister, the prime minister, and other top officials recently reaffirmed the right to give the death penalty to the terrorist who was captured alive after the Halamish attack, and to terrorists in general. We wanted to know the public's position on this issue. We asked: "Since the recent terror attack in Halamish there have been calls for imposing and implementing the death penalty for terrorists. Do you support or oppose the execution of Palestinians found guilty of murdering Israeli civilians for nationalist reasons?"

¹The distribution of the responses testifies that the overwhelming majority of the Jewish public (70%) supports the death penalty under such circumstances. A segmentation by political camps showed that, on the right and in the center, a solid majority favors such a punishment, while on

¹It should be noted that we did not look into whether the public makes a distinction between Jewish civilians who are settlers and Jewish civilians who live within Israel.

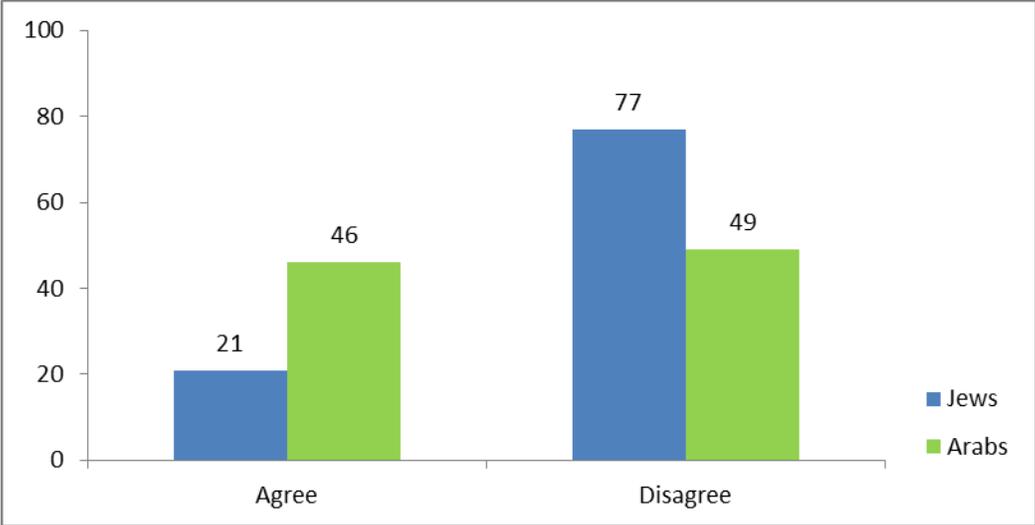
the left a minority—though not negligible, about a third—holds that view. A similar distribution of opinions emerged when the question concerned the murder of Israeli soldiers for nationalist reasons: the rate of supporters of the death penalty in such cases stands at 66%. That is, in the view of a majority of the Jewish public, it makes no difference whether the victims of terror attacks are civilians or soldiers; in both cases a majority favors the death penalty.

The punishments that the courts mete out to terrorists: Even more decisive positions emerge regarding the punishments that the Israeli courts usually impose on Palestinians who have perpetrated terror attacks. Seventy-nine percent of the Jewish public thinks these punishments are too light. In 2015, presented with an identical question, 70% answered that the punishments the courts mete out are too light. A segmentation by political camps revealed a majority on the left who think the punishments the courts give are appropriate, and a much larger majority in the center and on the right who think the punishments imposed on the terrorists are too light. The Arab public, too, shows considerable stability in responding to this question: this time 63% answered that the punishments the courts impose are too heavy, while in 2015 60% gave that answer.

The nature of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict: We presented to the interviewees three definitions of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and asked them to characterize it. Is it more religious, more national, or religious and national to the same extent? There is apparently quite broad agreement in the Jewish public that it is a mixed religious and national conflict and hence presumably more complicated when it comes to a solution; 55.5% chose that definition as the most appropriate. Twenty-five percent see it as a more national conflict, 17% as a more religious one. A segmentation by political camps shows a similar pattern in all three of them, though on the right there is a slightly stronger tendency than in the center and on the left to define the conflict as primarily religious, which makes sense in light of the fact that a larger portion of those identifying themselves as right-wing are religious and hence the issue has a more fundamental significance for them. A similar distribution exists in the Arab public: 50% think it is both a religious and a national conflict, 36% identified it as a more national one, and 11% thought it was more religious.

Negotiations Index: 44.3 (Jewish sample: 45.2)

Graph of the month: To what extent do you agree or disagree with the claim that the current wave of terror attacks is a result of the Palestinians' despair over the lack of progress in the talks on a peace agreement between the Palestinian Authority and Israel?



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 in Hebrew, Arabic, and Russian on July 25-27, 2017, by the Midgam Research Institute. The survey included 600 respondents (500 Jews and 100 Arabs), who constitute a representative national sample of the entire adult population of Israel aged 18 and over. The maximum measurement error for the entire sample is $\pm 4.1\%$.