

Peace Index – March 2017

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This month the Peace Index survey focused on domestic and foreign-policy issues. In the domestic sphere we gauged the public's positions on the debate over the future of public broadcasting, as well as its preferences regarding the composition of the government if elections were to be held in the near future. In the foreign policy domain we asked what the public thinks about the Trump administration's initiatives to promote a solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, what should be Israel's policy toward Syria in light of Russia's backing for it, and how Israel's security and political-diplomatic situation can be characterized at present.

The debate on the future of public broadcasting: A majority (53%) of the Jewish interviewees in the sample responded negatively to the question, "Do you understand what the dispute between those supporting the establishment of the public broadcasting corporation and those opposing its establishment is about?" (41% said that they understood it). Among the Arab interviewees, 60% basically do not understand what the commotion is about.

Netanyahu's motives: When it comes to the motives of the prime minister in his vigorous efforts to make "major changes" in the media market, the distribution of answers is more clear-cut. Only a minority of the Jewish public (28.5%) thinks the prime minister is impelled by "the desire to improve the balance and quality of the Israeli media," while a definite majority (61%) holds the view that what mainly motivates him is "the desire to strengthen his political control over the Israeli media." A segmentation of the Jewish public by diplomatic-security camps reveals that, on the left and in the center, the majority believes Netanyahu is mainly motivated by the desire to strengthen his control of the media. The right, however, is split; those who think he wants to improve the balance and quality of the media have a slight lead over those who regard him as motivated by considerations of political control over the media (respectively, 46% and 43%). In the Arab public, a huge majority (84.5%) sees Netanyahu as primarily motivated by his desire to strengthen his control of the media.

Government intervention in the contents of public broadcasting: A clear majority of the public (60% of the Jewish public, 69% of the Arab public) thinks that the government is not

entitled to intervene in the contents and appointments of the public broadcasting networks if it finances these networks (35% and 36%, respectively, claim the opposite). A segmentation of the Jewish public by diplomatic-security camps showed that, on the left and in the center, an unmistakable majority opposes government intervention (respectively, 94% and 75%). On the right about half hold that view, but 47% think the opposite—namely, that it is permissible for the government to intervene in appointments and contents of state-funded broadcasting networks.

The preferred government: If elections were to be held in the near future, a decisive majority of the Jewish public (70%) would want a right-wing (34%) or center-right (36%) government to take office as a result. A minority (24%) would prefer a center-left (22%) or left-wing (2%) government. A similar pattern of responses, but more clear-cut, emerges on the question of what government would have higher chances of being established if elections were to be held soon: 81% of the Jewish respondents estimate that a right-wing (35%) or center-right (46%) government would have higher chances, while only 8% attribute higher chances to a center-left (7%) or left-wing (1%) government. In other words, the overwhelming majority of the Jewish public prefers the hegemony of the right and also believes this hegemony would continue if new elections were to be held soon. In the Arab public, 58% would want a left-wing or center-left government (26.5% do not know) to take office, but only 10% expect that this would happen if elections were to be held in the near future.

Is there a reason to hold elections soon? Those preferences are probably a principal reason why the prevailing opinion in the Jewish public (69%) is that there is no justification for holding Knesset elections anytime soon. A segmentation of the Jewish public by diplomatic-security camps revealed that, whereas in the center and on the right a majority opposes elections, the left is divided on the issue. As for the Arab interviewees, the prevailing opinion (48%) was in fact that it would be desirable to hold elections soon.

Whom would they vote for? In a similar vein, a majority of the public (53% of the Jewish public and 54% of the Arab public) are sure or think they would vote for the same party they voted for in the previous elections. Furthermore, given the fact that an overwhelming majority of the Jewish public prefers, in case new elections are held, that a right-wing or center-right government will be formed, it can be conjectured that most of those in the Jewish public who do not intend to vote for the party they voted for in the previous elections expect that if elections were to be held soon, they would vote for a right-wing party or for a

centrist party that would support a government led by the right and not a left-wing government of one kind or another.

The Israeli-Palestinian conflict in the Trump era: continuity or change? A large majority of the public (75% of the Jewish public and 88% of the Arab public) does not see Trump's invitation to Palestinian Authority chairman Mahmoud Abbas for an official visit to the White House as a negative indication from the standpoint of Israel and its relations with the United States. Opinions among the Jews are divided more or less evenly between those who think President Trump will continue the policy of the two-states-for-two-peoples solution pursued by his predecessor, Obama, and those who say he will not continue that policy (respectively, 43% and 41%). A segmentation of the Jewish sample by diplomatic-security camp reveals that, on the left and in the center, a majority (57% in both cases) believes Trump will continue Obama's policy in this regard, while on the right the majority (52%) does not think that will happen. In the Arab public, the majority (58%) does not expect Trump to continue his predecessor's policy.

Concern about expanding the settlements despite the U.S. position: Against the backdrop of the joint Israeli-U.S. statement that they have not reached agreement on the issue of building in the settlements, the majority of the Jewish public (56%) thinks or is sure that expanding the settlements without the U.S. administration's agreement would probably prompt a reaction painful to Israel. On this matter there is, at present, unanimity among the three diplomatic-security camps: the left, the center, and the right. In the Arab public, however, the majority (63%) does not foresee a painful reaction by the Trump administration if Israel keeps building in the settlements despite the U.S. position.

The Syrian arena and Russia's involvement: Against the backdrop of Russia's involvement on President Assad's side in the Syrian civil war, the prevailing opinion in the Jewish public (49%) is that this involvement is dangerous to Israel, while 37% think the opposite. In the Arab public, the majority (60%) does not view this Russian involvement as dangerous to Israel.

Despite this disparity, a large majority of both the Jewish (70%) and the Arab (61%) public does not think Israel's recent attack in Syria on a convoy that was transferring weapons to Hizbullah will cause Russia to intervene so as to prevent further Israeli attacks. Similarly, the Jewish public overwhelmingly supports (82.5%) Prime Minister Netanyahu's declaration that Israel will continue to attack targets in Syria if the professional security bodies assess

that doing so will serve Israel's security. A majority of the Arab public opposes Netanyahu's assertion (63%).

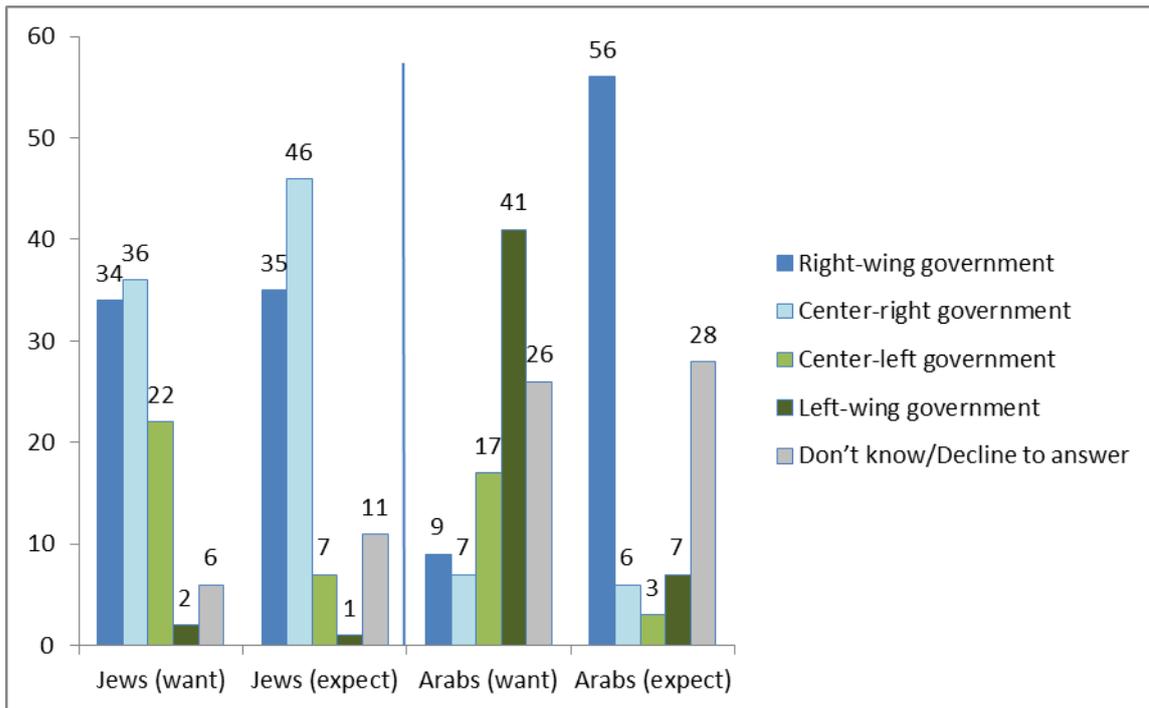
Russian-Israeli relations: A large majority (Jewish public—61%, Arab public—67%) defines the relations between Israel and Russia as very good or moderately good. Here, apparently, lies the explanation for the seeming contradiction between the view that Russia's involvement in Syria is dangerous to Israel's security and the support for continued attacks on Syria if necessary. That is, the Jewish public believes that the good relations with Russia mean Israel can continue its current policy despite Russia's support for Assad.

The chances of a war with Syria: This optimism apparently explains the prevailing assessment in the Jewish public (67%) that the chances of a war between Israel and Syria in the foreseeable future are very low or moderately low. In the Arab public, an even higher rate (75.5%) sees slim chances of such a war.

Israel's security and political-diplomatic situation: The view expressed in the media that Israel is isolated internationally and vulnerable in the security domain does not seem to affect public opinion: some 50% of the Jewish public defines Israel's security situation as good or very good while 35% characterize it as "so-so." Only a small minority (14%) views Israel's security situation as bad or very bad. The assessment of Israel's political-diplomatic situation is, indeed, less positive (31.5% of the Jews define it as good or very good, 38% as "so-so"). Yet, again, only a small minority (26%) sees Israel's situation in this regard as bad or very bad.

Negotiations Index: 46.9 (Jews: 45.4)

Diagram of the month: If elections were to be held soon, which government would you want to take office after them, and, in your view, which government would have higher chances of taking office if there were elections in the near future? (% , 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 on March 27-29, 2017, by the Midgam Research Institute. The survey included 600 respondents (500 Jews and 100 Arabs), who constitute a representative national sample of the 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>