

## Peace Index, March 2018

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The Peace Index survey for February-March dealt with both domestic and foreign issues. The survey was conducted on Tuesday and Wednesday, March 13-14, that is, at the peak of the latest political crisis. Whereas the Tuesday interviewees still did not know whether or how it would be resolved, the Wednesday interviewees knew that, at least for the moment, the idea of holding new elections had been shelved. We will note the questions for which the difference between the two days turned out to be relevant.

We will start with the domestic issues.

**Do people believe Netanyahu?** The first question we explored on this issue concerns the degree of the prime minister's innocence. We asked: "Do you believe or not believe Prime Minister Netanyahu's statements that 'There will be nothing because there is nothing'?" It turns out that the majority of the Jewish public (59%) does not believe these statements of Netanyahu's (in the Arab public an even higher rate- 75%- disbelieves the prime minister). A segmentation of the Jewish sample's answers to this question according to the interviewees' self-placement on the right-to-left spectrum revealed that among those defining themselves as right-wing, the majority (52%) believes Netanyahu. In the center and on the left, however, a very large majority does not believe him (82.5% and 90% respectively). We also found that among those who were asked this question on March 14, when it turned out that early elections were not in the offing, there was a significantly higher rate of those believing Netanyahu than on the previous day, particularly among the right-wing voters. A possible explanation for this shift is that, while some right-wing voters assumed that Netanyahu wanted to advance the elections so that they would be held before the attorney-general submitted his recommendations to the government, the removal of that threat bolstered their support for the prime minister's position that "There will be nothing because there is nothing."

**Do people support Netanyahu?** Even though, as we have seen, the majority does not believe Netanyahu, the current public discourse reflects a strong impression that despite the investigations, large parts of the population have not withdrawn and may even have increased their support for the prime minister. We asked the interviewees for their view on how much of the public currently supports Netanyahu. For the Jewish public, the most common answer is that about half of the public supports him (44.2%). Another part of this population, only slightly smaller (40.0%), believes that the large majority of the public or all of it supports him. Only 13% consider that only a minority now supports him. Again we segmented the Jewish interviewees' responses by self-placement on the right-to-left spectrum. Among those who situated themselves on the right, the majority (55%) believes that most or all of the public now supports Netanyahu. In the center and on the left, a (small) majority sees only about half now supporting him (57% and 51.5% respectively). In other words, despite the differences of opinion between them on almost every issue concerning the investigations of the prime minister, across the Israeli political camps there is now a near-consensus that half or more of the public currently supports Netanyahu.

In the Arab public, the prevailing view is that a large majority or all of the population supports Netanyahu at present (40.5%); in second place are those who see about half of the public supporting him (31%). Here too, then, only a minority thinks Netanyahu has lost his standing among the public.

**The Netanyahu investigations and trust in the arms of the law:** To the question "Do you trust the professionalism of the police in handling the investigations of Netanyahu?," 50.5% of the Jewish public responded that they do trust their professionalism while only a slightly smaller rate (45.4%) answered the opposite. In other words, the public is almost evenly divided between those who trust and those who do not trust in the professional considerations of the police in investigating Netanyahu. As for Attorney-General Avichai Mandelblit, who will make a professional decision when the police findings on the Netanyahu investigations are submitted to him, again slightly more than half (56%) trust him while 33% do not. When it comes to the Israeli legal system as a whole, here too a bit more than half (53%) trust it while 43% do not. Overall, it appears that a large minority of the Jewish public does not trust the legal system with

its different branches. As the table shows, a segmentation by political camps turned up large disparities between them:

	Right	Center	Left
% who trust the professionalism of the police in conducting the Netanyahu investigations	39*	67	71
% who trust that Mandelblit will decide professionally on the Netanyahu investigations	59	60.5	50
% who trust the professionalism and integrity of the legal system	39	77	74

\* In the December 2017 Peace Index the rate of those trusting the police among right-wingers came to 56%.

On these questions the distribution of views in the Arab public is generally similar to that in the Jewish public.

**If Netanyahu is indicted, should he resign?** Given the limited trust in the legal system, it comes as no surprise that a large minority of the Jewish public (42%) says Netanyahu should not resign even if the attorney-general recommends indicting him on one of the issues he is being investigated for. The law states that the prime minister does not have to resign as long as he has not been convicted in court. Fifty-two percent, however, consider that he should resign under such circumstances even though the law does not require it. A segmentation of the Jewish public by self-placement on the right-to- left spectrum revealed that on the right, only a minority thinks Netanyahu should resign under such circumstances (35%), compared to large majorities holding that view in the center and on the left (73% and 86% respectively).

**The possibility of a pardon or plea bargain for Netanyahu in return for an admission of guilt:** Recently several articles in the media have expressed support for the idea that, if Netanyahu accedes to the charges against him and resigns at this stage, a deal could be worked out with him in which he is pardoned and avoids a prison sentence. The supporters of this solution maintain that sending Netanyahu to prison would cause an irreparable rift in the Jewish public, to the point of civil war. We gauged the public's attitude on this issue. It turns out that the

large majority of the Jewish public (some 70%) opposes this idea. Such a majority was found in all three camps - right, center, and left - though perhaps for different reasons. On the right, the main reason is apparently the desire that Netanyahu continue to serve as prime minister, while the center and the left fear civil insurrection among the right-wing voters, who constitute a large majority of the Jewish voting public. In the Arab public, a small majority (54%) also opposed the idea of avoiding a trial for Netanyahu.

**Reasons for dissolving the coalition:** Recently the haredi parties demanded the passing of a law that would exempt young haredim from conscription into the IDF. The parties made their support for the 2019 state budget, which was crafted by Finance Minister Kahlon, conditional on such a law. The finance minister asserted that if, because of the haredi ultimatum, the budget he had put together was not approved on the predetermined date (even though from an administrative standpoint the deliberations could have been deferred until late autumn), and he would resign from the government. Against this backdrop, we looked into what the public thought about these two opposing threats. Regarding the threat by the haredim, the responses show that an overwhelming majority of the Jewish public (78%) did not support it. A segmentation of the Jewish sample's responses by religiosity revealed that, while 87% of the haredim did support the haredi parties' demand, among all the other groups - the religious, the traditional of different stripes, and the secular - only small minorities supported it. But it was not only the demand by the haredim that was not well received by the public. Although somewhat less so, Finance Minister Kahlon's threat to resign if the budget was not approved also got a cold shoulder from the public, the majority of which (55%) expressed opposition to it. Interestingly, in the Arab public the rate who supported Kahlon's stance was higher than the rate who opposed it (45% vs. 31.5%). When we segmented the Jewish sample's responses to this question by voting for the Knesset in the 2015 elections, we found majority backing for Kahlon's stance only among Kulanu voters (67%). Among the voters for all the other parties, a majority (of varying sizes) opposed it. It appears, then, that while there were indeed more opponents of the haredi threats, Kahlon's threat was not popular either, whether because most of the public does not want early elections or because it dislike threats to resign from the government stemming from sectorial or personal considerations. We also found that among those who took the survey on March 13, the

rate of those who “strongly supported” the haredi parties’ demand, and also of those who “strongly supported” Finance Minister Kahlon’s demand, came to 9%, while the next day, after the lifting of the threat of elections, the rates of those strongly supporting the haredi demand and Kahlon’s demand rose to 20% and 21% respectively. As we saw with the support for the motto “There will be nothing because there is nothing,” this increase occurred mainly among the right-wing voters. We conjecture that in this case as well, the change is related to the removal of the fear of early elections. It bears emphasizing that, so long as there was a threat to move them up, the rate of support for the conditions posed by the haredi parties and by the finance minister was relatively low, while from the moment this fear was removed, the support for those conditions grew.

**The public’s order of priorities:** From time to time we return to the question: “Which issue does the Israeli government need to address as top-priority?” The five issues that were presented to the interviewees (in varying order) were: closing the socioeconomic gaps; the fight against corruption; the Iranian threat; integrating the haredim into the economy and the labor market; and the diplomatic negotiations with the Palestinians. In the Jewish public as a whole, the main preference (45%) was for closing the social gaps. The fight against corruption came in second (20%), well behind the issue of the social gaps; after that, in descending order, came the Iranian threat (17%), integrating the haredim into the economy (8%), and the negotiations with the Palestinians (7%). Note that closing the social gaps was the highest-ranked goal in all the political camps (right, center, and left). No less interesting is the finding that even on the left, the negotiations with the Palestinians did not take precedence; only 9% of those defining themselves as belonging to this camp put it first among the government’s objectives.

For the Arab public, the highest-ranked goal is the fight against corruption (41%), in second place is the negotiations with the Palestinians (27%), and in third place is closing the social gaps (24%). Only small numbers preferred the other options.

**Anticipated effects of moving the American embassy to Jerusalem:** The majority of the Jewish public (61%) sees a high chance that moving the American embassy to Jerusalem for Israel’s 70<sup>th</sup> Independence Day will ignite a violent outbreak against Israel on the Palestinian side (the rate who think so in the Arab public is the same). To those who responded that the

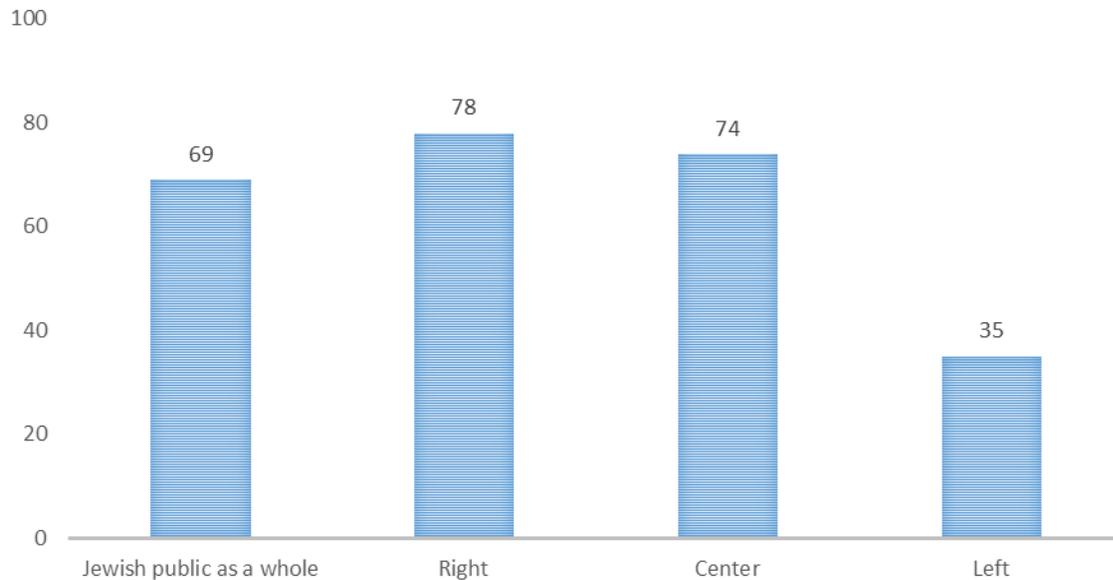
chance of violence is high, we posed the question of whether it would, then, be prudent or not for Israel to request that the United States postpone the transfer of the embassy to a different date. The distribution of responses to this question in the Jewish public was clear-cut: 69% think that even in light of the expectation of violence, Israel should not ask the Americans to postpone moving the embassy. In other words, even though the majority sees the situation as combustible, they are against any concession aimed at forestalling possible violence. In the Arab public, the large majority (77.5%) takes exactly the opposite stance, favoring a request to defer the transfer of the embassy.

**Anticipated effects of Mahmoud Abbas stepping down as head of the Palestinian Authority:** Amid reports of the fragile health of Palestinian Authority chairman Mahmoud Abbas, we asked whether his exiting the stage would be likely to prompt a violent escalation on the Palestinian side. The prevailing opinion in the Jewish public (48%, compared to 34% who thought the opposite) is that there is a high chance of such an outcome. In the Arab public, however, a large majority (70%) sees the chances of this as low.

**The importance of renewing the Israeli-Palestinian negotiations:** According to media reports, U.S. president Donald Trump recently said that “if the Palestinians refuse to return to the negotiating table, there will be no peace.” We asked: “In your opinion, from Israel’s standpoint, how important or unimportant is it that the peace talks with the Palestinians be renewed soon?” The responses show that a majority of the Jewish public, albeit not large (58%), views the peace talks as important from the standpoint of Israel’s interests. The response of the Arab public seems surprising: the majority (53%) said that from Israel’s standpoint it is not important to return to the negotiating table. Presumably, though, Arab respondents understood the question in terms of the importance Israel ascribes to renewing the talks, not in terms of whether such talks would actually serve Israel’s interests.

**Negotiations index: 44.1 (Jews - 43.6).**

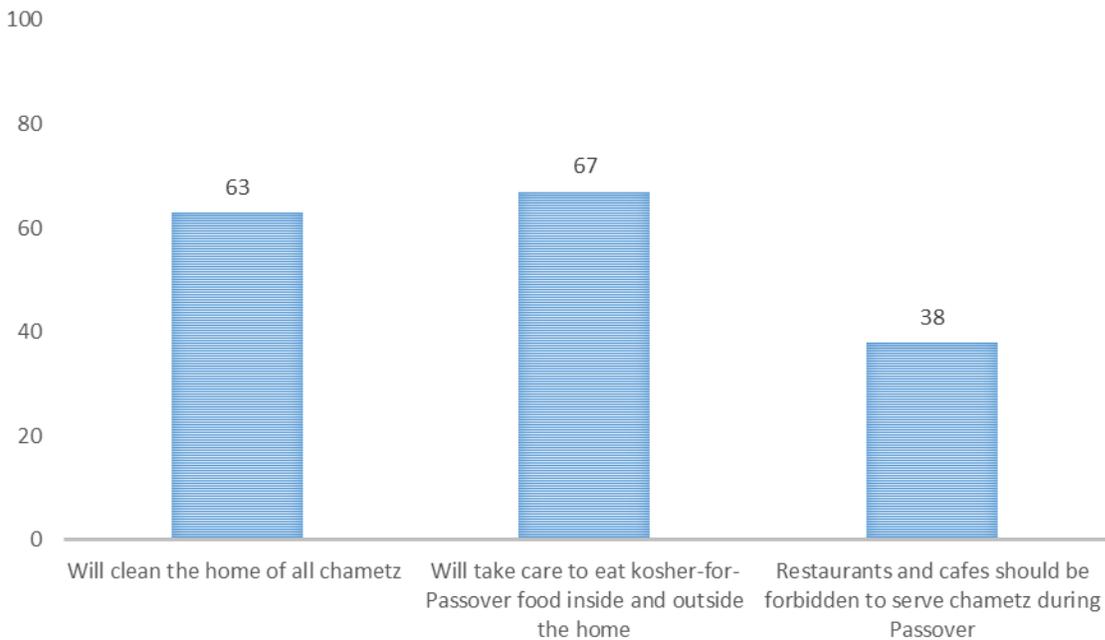
**Graph of the month: In light of the chances of a violent outbreak, should or should not Israel request that the United States postpone the transfer of the embassy to Jerusalem to a different date? (% saying that Israel should not request a postponement, among the Jews who responded that moving the embassy would ignite violence)**



*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 March 13-14, 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>*

## From section 2, to be published toward Passover

With the emotionally fraught Passover holiday on the way, we looked into the Jewish public's approach to keeping kosher for Passover. When we asked the interviewees whether they would clean their homes of all chametz (leaven and leavened food), 63% answered positively. A slightly higher rate (67%) said they would take care to eat kosher-for-Passover food both inside and outside the home. In this light, it is very interesting to find that the majority of the public (58%) thinks or is sure that restaurants and cafes should not be required to serve kosher food during Passover, while only 38% favor such a requirement.



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