

Peace Index column, May 2017

Prof. Ephraim Yaar and Prof. Tamar Hermann

This month the Peace Index survey focused on the Israeli public's positions on two notable events: U.S. president Trump's visit to Israel in May and the 50th anniversary of the Six Day War in June.

The degree of success of Trump's visit to Israel: About two-thirds of the Jewish public thinks Trump's visit to Israel was successful. For the Arab public, the picture is the reverse: the majority (52%) thinks the visit was unsuccessful while about one-third (35%) think the opposite. A segmentation of the Jewish interviewees' responses by political camp reveals that a large majority (73%) of those who defined themselves as right-wing saw the visit as successful, and that this was also the prevailing opinion among those defining themselves as centrist (68%). On the left, however, the highest rate (49%) defined the visit as unsuccessful and a little over a third (37%) defined it as successful.

The anticipated results of the visit: Despite the prevailing satisfaction with the visit, when we gauged the public's assessment of its likely results a rather different picture emerged. Despite Trump's declarations that one of his goals is to bring the Israelis and the Palestinians back to the negotiating table, the majority of the Jewish public (59%) views the chances of this happening as low. The public skepticism is even greater regarding the chances that, under Trump's sponsorship, an Israeli-Palestinian peace agreement will be achieved in the next year or two: there is near-unanimity (82%) that the chances of this are low. The low expectation that Trump will manage to return the Israelis and the Palestinians to the negotiating table, and the even lower assessment that a peace agreement will be reached under his sponsorship, are common not only to the three political camps, right, center, and left, but also to both the Jewish and the Arab Israelis.

The centrality of Israel's security to Trump's considerations: Only a small majority of the Jewish public (51%) thinks Israel's security is at present a central consideration for President Trump in formulating the U.S. foreign policy. On this point there is a large difference between the three political camps. Whereas, among those defining themselves as right-wing, the majority

(59%) thinks Israel's security is a central consideration for Trump, that is not the case among those defining themselves as centrist or left-wing: in those two camps only a minority (27% and 13.5% respectively) thinks so.

Somewhat paradoxically, in the Arab public an even higher rate than among the Jewish right, about two-thirds (67%) think Israel's security is a central consideration in designing Trump's international strategy.

Trump, Saudi Arabia, and Israel: The Israeli Jewish insecurity on the question of Trump's commitment to Israel's security is apparently the reason that, in the wake of Trump's visit to Saudi Arabia and the weapons deal that was signed there, far more think the U.S. president will pressure Israel to support the Saudi peace initiative as a basis for Israeli-Palestinian negotiations than do not think so (52% vs. 30%). On the question of whether this weapons deal endangers or does not endanger Israel's security, the Jewish public is almost evenly split: 40% think or are sure that it endangers Israel while 43.5% think or are sure that it does not. A segmentation by political camps reveals that, on the right, the rate who think the deal endangers Israel is almost double the rate of those who think the opposite (61% vs. 36%). In the center and on the left, however, the majority thinks the deal does not endanger Israel (center: 38% say that it endangers Israel, 50% that it does not; left: 25% say that it endangers Israel, 64% that it does not).

As for the Arab public, the majority (59%) estimates that President Trump will not pressure Israel to accept the Saudi initiative as a basis for future Israeli-Palestinian negotiations. An even larger majority (72.5%) does not see the U.S.-Saudi weapons deal as endangering Israel's security.

Arab-state involvement in reaching an Israeli-Palestinian peace agreement: An interesting finding is the existence of a majority among the Jews (55%) who think that the involvement of Arab states, such as Saudi Arabia, could help in reaching a permanent Israeli-Palestinian peace. Conversely, the large majority (61%) of the Arabs consider that such involvement could not contribute to achieving peace. A segmentation of the Jews' responses by political camps reveals that, on the right, 45% believe Arab states' involvement could be of benefit (44% believe the opposite); in the center, 64%; and on the left, 82%.

As noted, the second issue this month's survey dealt with is the Six Day War and the retrospective perception of its results after 50 years.

Is the control of the territories an occupation? We first wanted to know whether, in the interviewees' opinion, the Israeli control of the territories constitutes or does not constitute an occupation. As in the past, a majority of the Jewish public (62%) responded that it is not an occupation. A segmentation by political camps yielded the expected results: on the right and in the center, which are the largest political camps in Israel at present, only a minority (12% and 37% respectively) see it as an occupation. Only on the left, the smallest of the three camps, does an overwhelming majority (86%) say that the correct definition of the existing situation is occupation.

The Arab public is unanimous (91%) in believing that it constitutes an occupation.

Ramifications of the control of the territories: We sought to clarify how the Jewish public assesses the contribution or the damage associated with the control of the territories in different domains. It turns out that it is only regarding the security-military domain that a large majority (65%) views the control of the territories as contributing to Israel. An opposite pattern of opinions emerged regarding Israel's diplomatic and international status: here the majority (67%) thinks the control does not contribute to Israel. As for the other two domains—democratic strength and the economy—the positions are less polar. When it comes to the Israeli economy, a higher rate believes that it is damaged by the control of the territories—48%, compared to 43% who view the control of the territories as contributing to Israel. Concerning Israel's democratic strength, the opinions are quite evenly split: an identical rate (44%) sees it as contributing to it and as damaging it.

In all four domains, a large majority of the Arab public believes that the Israeli control of the territories is damaging.

After the war, should Israel have ceded territories for peace? A large majority of the Jewish public (65%) opposes the view that, immediately after the war, the Israeli leaders should have launched negotiations with the Arab states and offered, in return for a comprehensive peace agreement, to return the territories that had been conquered in the conflict. The Arab public is divided on this question: 46% think the Israeli leaders should indeed have launched peace

negotiations with the Arab states and offered the territories in return for peace, while 41% think the opposite. This may be because such an agreement would have been reached with the Arab states “over the head” of the Palestinians.

Would it have been wise to annex the territories immediately after the war? A majority (55%) of the Jewish public agrees with the assertion that “immediately after the victory in the Six Day War, Israel should have annexed via legislation all the territories it had conquered—as was done in the cases of east Jerusalem and the Golan Heights—and presented the world and the Palestinians with a *fait accompli*.” A segmentation by political camps shows that, on the right, a large majority (77%) thinks Israel should have annexed the territories in the aftermath of the war; in the center, 41.5%; and on the left, 15%.

In the Arab public there is almost fully unanimous (80%) opposition to the claim that Israel should have annexed the territories immediately after the war.

Annexing territories today: However, on the question of whether or not one supports the assertion that “the time has come for Israel to officially annex all the territories that were conquered in that war,” the Jewish public is evenly split between supporters (44%) and opponents (45%). A segmentation by political camps points to support for annexation among about two-thirds of the right, about a third of the center, and almost no support (5%) on the left.

About 80% of the Arab public currently opposes annexing the territories.

Settlements and peace: We asked: “From today’s perspective was various Israeli governments’ policy of building settlements in Judea and Samaria wise or unwise in terms of Israel’s national interest?” Fifty-one percent of the Jewish public thinks it was a wise policy. Moreover, 56% oppose the claim that the settlements are an obstacle to reaching peace with the Palestinians. A segmentation by political camps reveals that, on the right, a three-fourths majority believes it was a wise policy, compared to only a minority in the center (37%) and almost no support on the left (4%). Accordingly, a large majority of the left (89%) sees the settlements as an obstacle to peace, compared to about half of the center (48%) and a small minority of the right (18%).

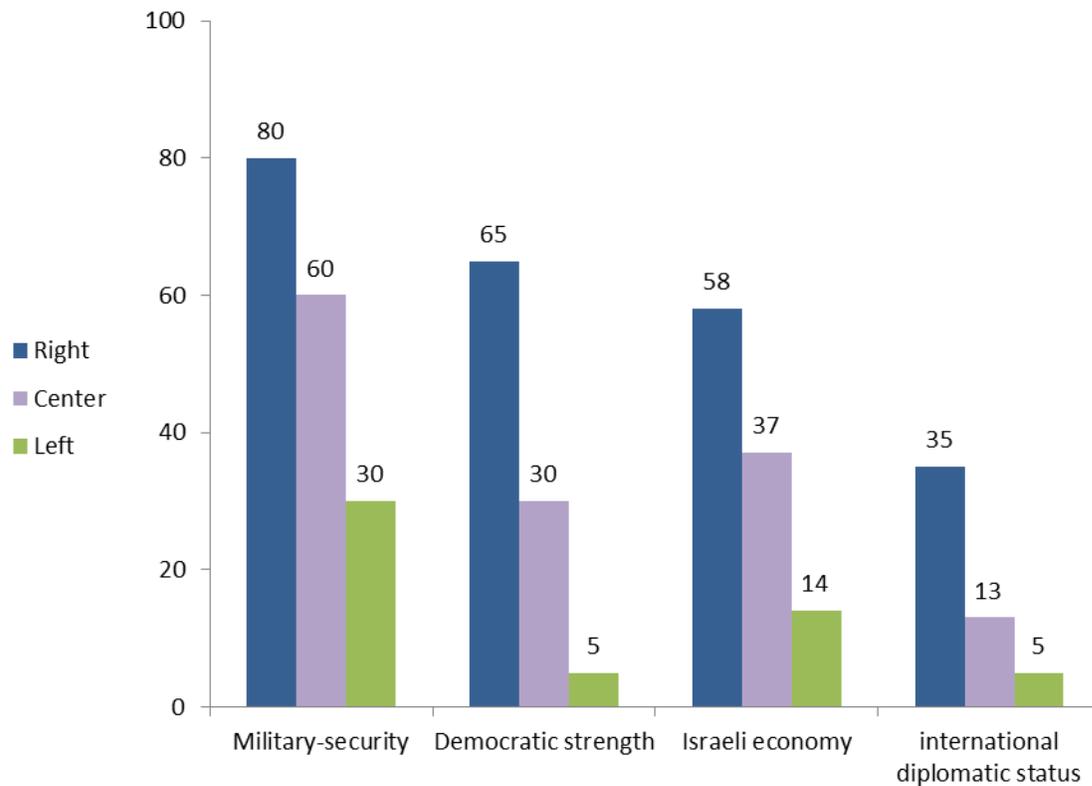
As for the Arab public, a large majority (69%) considers that it was unwise to build settlements and about the same rate (68%) thinks that they currently constitute an obstacle to peace.

Jerusalem is (not) united: A large majority of the Jewish public (64%) agrees with the assertion that “at present Jerusalem is actually divided into two cities: the eastern city and the western city.” A segmentation of the Jewish respondents by political camps shows that in each of them, a large majority—albeit of different sizes—agrees with the claim that in actuality Jerusalem is divided (right—55%, center—70%, left—90%).

Among the Arab public, 54% see the city as divided.

Negotiations Index: 47.4 (Jewish sample: 47.1)

Diagram of the month: Does Israel’s control of Judea and Samaria contribute to or damage Israel in each of the following domains (contributes, %, 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 May 28-29, 2017, by the Midgam Research Institute. The survey included 600 respondents (500 Jews and 100 Arabs), who constitute a representative national sample of the whole adult population of Israel aged 18 and over. The maximum measurement error for the entire sample is $\pm 4.1\%$.