

Peace Index – October 2016

Prof. Ephraim Yaar and Prof. Tamar Hermann

At the outset of the new year, we looked into how the public views Israel's overall situation at present and what it expects its situation to be in various domains during the year that is now beginning. And in hindsight, we explored the public's positions on different aspects of the state funeral of the late president Shimon Peres, the most notable national event of the past month. This time we also looked into a question that repeatedly comes up in different circumstances: the price, in terms of releasing Palestinian prisoners from Israeli jails, that Israel should (or should not) pay for the release of Israelis held captive, whether they are alive or after their death. Finally, as in the previous months, we gauged the public's positions on the chances of the two U.S. presidential candidates, Clinton and Trump, and on their preferability from Israel's standpoint.

Israel's situation at present and the forecast for the new year: The prevailing opinion in the Jewish public (44%) is that Israel's overall situation at present is moderately good (34%) or very good (10%). Thirty-seven percent see its situation as medium, while only 19% regard it as moderately poor (13%) or very poor (6%). That is, the prevailing view today in the Jewish public as a whole is that Israel's situation is much more positive than negative. However, a segmentation of the responses by political camps reveals that on the right, the highest rate (about half) define the situation as very good or good, whereas in the center and on the left the prevailing position is that the situation is medium (42% and 38% respectively). A segmentation by religiosity shows that while in the three religious groups (haredi, national-religious, and traditional religious) a majority of about 58% assesses the situation positively, among the nonreligious traditional this rate comes to 43%, while among the secular only about a third (32%) see the situation today as very good or good. It should be noted that these two findings accord with those of surveys conducted earlier this year, a validation that is especially important in light of the prevailing opinion in the media discourse, and also in the discourse among different professional circles, that Israel's situation is not great. That is, the public assesses the situation more positively than various credentialed observers. As for the prognosis for the coming year, the majority of the Jewish public as a whole expects the situation to remain as it is. In the Arab public the most common view is that the situation will improve.

When it comes to assessing the future situation in different domains—military-security, socioeconomic, political-diplomatic, and the domain of disputes between different parts of the public—the prevailing opinion in the Jewish public regarding all of them is that the situation will remain as it was last year. At the same time, while regarding the military domain a higher rate (27%) think the situation will improve and only 12% think it will worsen, when it comes to the rest of the domains the rate assessing that the situation will worsen exceeds the rate who think it will improve. The proportion of pessimists is especially high regarding the domain of disputes between different parts of the public: worsen—32%, improve—10%. Assessments among the Arab interviewees were more positive: a plurality responded that the situation in all the domains is likely to improve or remain as it was.

The funeral of the late president Shimon Peres: There is broad agreement in the Jewish public (77%) that the large participation of world leaders in this funeral was only in honor of the man because of his efforts to promote peace and not a manifestation of Israel's good international standing (18%). Arab interviewees had the opposite opinion: the higher rate (49%) thought that the large participation of leaders from abroad reflected Israel's good standing in the international community.

As for the participation in the funeral by the head of the Palestinian Authority, Mahmoud Abbas (Abu Mazen), notwithstanding the harsh criticism leveled at him by some elements on the Palestinian side, about a third of the Jewish public interpreted his participation as a sign of the Palestinian desire to return to the negotiating table. However, the majority (64%) thought otherwise. Among the Arab interviewees the picture is the opposite: 56.5% think his participation in the funeral, despite the domestic criticism, reflects the Palestinians' desire to renew the negotiations.

In the same context we asked whether, in his speech at the ceremony for the funeral, Netanyahu should or should not have referred to the presence of the head of the Palestinian Authority. The answers indicate that the Jewish public is almost evenly split on this question, though the rate of those who think he should have specifically referred to Abbas (49%) is slightly higher than the rate of those who think he should not have (46%). In the Arab public the picture is similar: the majority (51%) thinks it would have been appropriate for Netanyahu to refer in his funeral oration to Abbas's presence.

The heads of the Joint Arab List declined to participate in Peres's funeral on the grounds that he was a security-minded leader who supported the occupation, and we asked whether this

avoidance was politically wise or unwise. The Jewish public's position on this question is unequivocal: 81% think the abstention was unwise. Similarly, 77.5% of the Jewish public says the Joint List leaders' avoidance of participating in the funeral was also unjustified from the basic standpoint of the Israeli Arab public. Although at a much lower rate, the prevailing position (49%) among the Arab interviewees as well was that the abstention was an unwise political move. Many (42.5%) also thought it had no basic justification.

In the ceremony for Peres's funeral his three children—his two sons and his daughter—said the *Kaddish* prayer for him. We asked: "In your opinion, was it appropriate or inappropriate that Peres's daughter, too, said *Kaddish* for him even though according to Orthodox religious practice women do not say *Kaddish* for a parent who has died?" The answers indicate that the majority of the Jewish public (59%) thinks it was appropriate that the deceased's daughter as well said *Kaddish* for him, despite the fact that this deviates from Orthodox practice. At the same time, a segmentation of the responses by self-definition of religiosity shows that only among the secular is there a clear majority who think the act was appropriate (85%). Among the religious and the nonreligious traditional only about half see it positively, while among the traditional religious and the haredi only a small minority accept such an action (29.5% and 18% respectively).

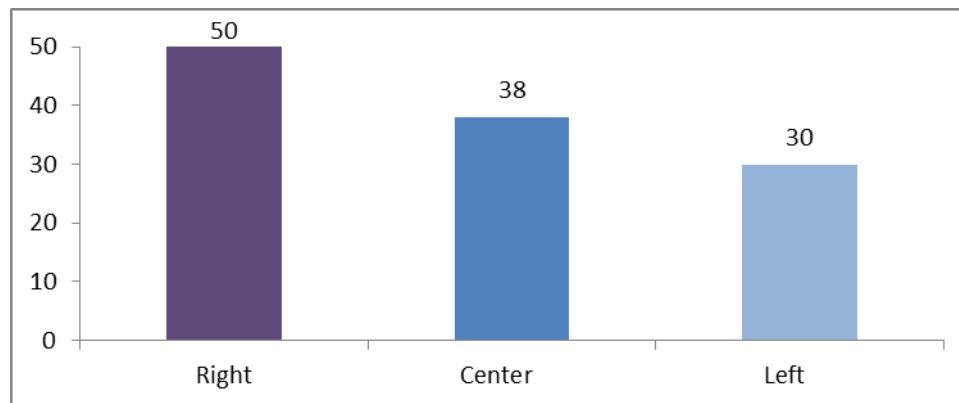
Releasing Palestinian prisoners for Israeli captives: Every few years the question again arises as to what price, in the coin of releasing Palestinian prisoners from Israeli jails, Israel should or should not pay for the release of Israelis held captive by the enemy. It turns out that the Jewish public clearly distinguishes between different situations in which Israel faces that question. When it comes to the freeing of live soldiers who are in captivity, a clear majority (57.5%) supports their release in return for Palestinian prisoners. However, when the exchange involves the return of bodies of IDF soldiers, the pattern of responses is the opposite: 68% think prisoners should not be released. We obtained similar responses, though with a smaller disparity, regarding the freeing of Israeli civilians who have crossed the border intentionally or by mistake and been taken captive: 56% of the Jewish public opposes releasing Palestinian prisoners for the return to Israel of civilian captives.

Clinton or Trump? At this time a clear majority (55%) of the Jewish public holds the opinion that Hillary Clinton will win the U.S. presidential elections, while only 25% believe that Donald Trump will be elected (note that the survey was conducted before the publication of the "hot-mic tape"). With a smaller but still considerable disparity, a majority of the public (42%) thinks that from Israel's standpoint it is preferable for Clinton to be

elected, while 26.5% see it as preferable for Trump to be elected. At the same time, an overwhelming majority (63% vs. 8%) assesses that if Clinton is elected she will exert heavier pressure on the Israeli government to renew the negotiations with the Palestinians. Among the Arab interviewees the picture is very similar: 57% anticipated that Clinton would be elected, 41% saw her as preferable from Israel's standpoint, but only 30% thought she would exert stronger pressure on Israel regarding the conflict with the Palestinians. The highest rate (34%) of the Arab interviewees assessed that neither of the two candidates for the U.S. presidency will exert pressure on Israel to return to the negotiating table.

General Negotiation Index: 48 (Jews 44.7).

Graph of the month: In your opinion, what is Israel's overall situation today? (% very good and good, 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 on October 5-9, 2016, by the Midgam Research Institute. The survey included 600 respondents, 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>