

Peace Index – September 2015

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This month's Peace Index survey was conducted just at the beginning of the current wave of violence, and it focuses on two topics: (1) Israel-Palestinian relations and their future, and (2) Russia's growing involvement in Syria.

How much longer?: Before the violence mounted, we asked how long, in the Israeli public's opinion, the present situation can continue without a third intifada erupting if there is no progress toward peace. The prevailing opinion (44.5%) in the Jewish public is that the situation can continue for only a short time—up to a year. About one-fifth believe it can go on for two or three years, while only a minority (26%) thinks the current state of Israeli-Palestinian relations can continue for more than three years without large-scale violence erupting, even if an agreement is not reached. In the Arab public the most widespread view (48%) is that even if an agreement is not reached, the current situation can continue for a long time. About one-fourth (26%) think it can only go on for a short time without a third intifada breaking out. The Arab public's views on this question, then, tend to be the opposite of the Jewish public's.

Is the idea of "two states for two peoples" dead or alive?: In the aftermath of Netanyahu's recent speech at the United Nations General Assembly, in which he again expressed support for a two-state solution, we wanted to know what the Israeli public thinks on this issue. We found a small lead for the view that the idea has not died (50%) compared to those with the opposite view (46%). In the Arab public, however, the rate of those who think the idea has died (57%) is considerably higher than the rate of those who say the opposite (35%).

Between two states and one state: In the Jewish public the rate of those who think Israel's future will be better if the land is divided and a Palestinian state is

established beside Israel (46%) is higher than the rate of those who think it would be preferable to annex the territories and establish a single state in the whole land under Israeli rule (36%). At the same time, a large majority (68%) agrees with the assertion that if a peace agreement is signed, at least the large settlement blocs should remain under Israeli sovereignty. In other words, their vision of two states does not include a return to the 1967 borders. On the question of what is better for Israel's future, the Arabs' position is much more clear-cut: about two-thirds (64%) think its future will be better if the land is divided. As for annexing the settlement blocs, the rate of those among the Arabs who agree that they should remain under Israeli sovereignty (42%) is slightly higher than the rate of those who disagree (37%). By the way, our survey revealed that in the Jewish public the rate of those who do not believe Netanyahu is genuinely committed to the two-state solution (59%) is double the rate of those who believe what he says. Only among the voters for his own party, Likud, is there a majority who think he sincerely means what he says (57%). In the Arab public the rate of those who do not believe his words comes to 72.5%!

And what will happen if a single state is established?: A clear majority of the Jewish public (60%) opposes the assertion that "If the territories are annexed and a single state is established under Israeli rule, there will be no choice but to give the Palestinians full and equal civil rights." Not surprisingly, the Arab public shows a reverse pattern of responses: 53% agree that Israel will have to give the Arabs equal rights. Similarly and more sweepingly, a wide consensus of the Jewish public (87%) sees small chances that "Sometime in the future Jews and Arabs will be able to live in a single state as citizens with equal rights who recognize each other's rights." Here the Arab public's assessments are similar to those of the Jewish public: 68% regard the chances of egalitarian coexistence as small.

Hand back the keys?: Despite the Jewish public's widespread expectation of a violent outbreak if an agreement is not reached, a large majority (73%) sees only low

chances that the Palestinian leaders will “hand back the keys” and leave the responsibility for governing the West Bank’s Palestinian population in Israel’s hands. Similarly, 71% of the Arabs do not expect the keys to be returned.

International intervention?: The Jewish public shows greater uncertainty on whether one should expect a substantial intervention by the international community in the near future aimed at pressuring the sides to sign an agreement. The rate of those who do not foresee such an intervention (48%) is only a little higher than the rate of those who think the opposite (41%). In the Arab public a clear majority (55%) believes the international community will keep refraining from such an intervention, while only 28% expect the opposite.

Managing the security situation in Jerusalem: The survey reveals that the Jewish public is more or less split between those who think the government’s management of the security situation in Jerusalem is good and those who regard it as poor, though the weighted average of the responses (2.26 on a scale from 0 [poor] to 5 [excellent]) indicates that the appraisal tends slightly in the negative direction. As for the Arab public, the rate of those who think the government’s management of the security situation in Jerusalem is poor is considerably higher than the corresponding rate for the Jewish public, with an average of 1.63 on the same scale.

Jewish prayer on the Temple Mount: A majority of the Jewish public (57%) favors allowing Jewish prayer on the Temple Mount, while 81% of the Arabs believe it should not be allowed.

From here we moved to questions involving the international arena:

The Russian involvement in Syria and its implications for Israel: The Jewish public tends to take a positive view of Russia’s intervention and Putin’s declaration that Russia will help Assad remain in power and join him in fighting ISIS and the other radical Islamic forces. About half the respondents (49%) see leaving Assad in power as desirable from Israel’s standpoint, while about one-fourth (27%) take the opposite view. The rate of those who do not know (25%) is higher than usual. Nevertheless,

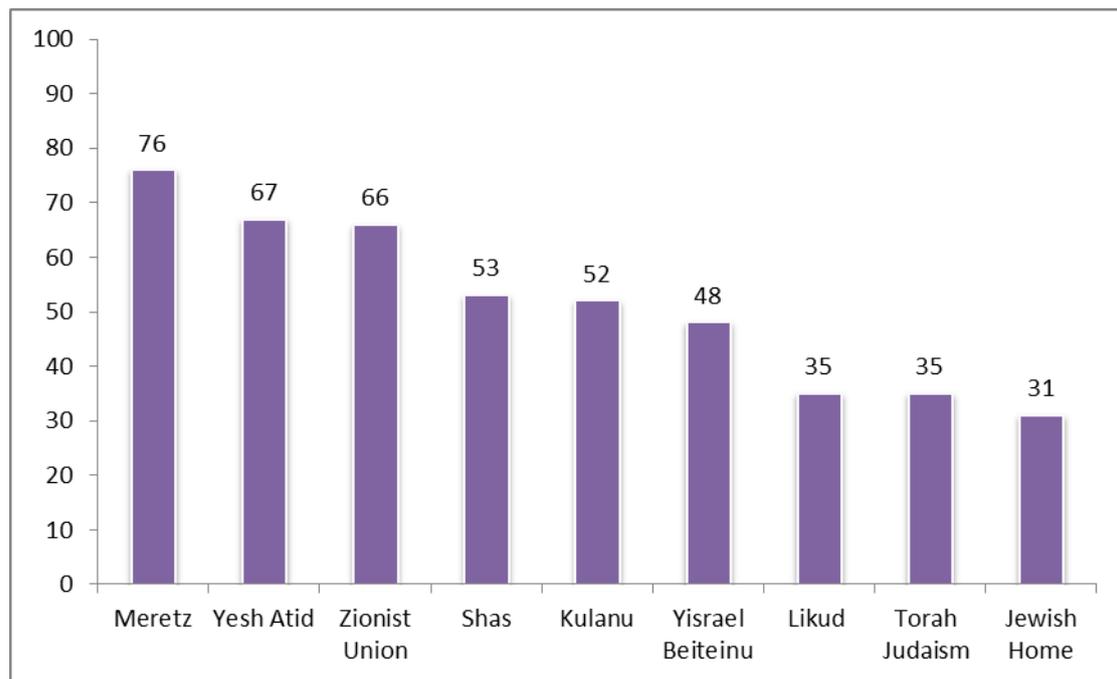
the majority (56%) sees only small chances that Assad, with Russia and Iran's help, will be able to fortify his rule in Syria. The data for the Arab public indicate vacillation or uncertainty about whether the Russian intervention in Syria is good for Israel, with a particularly high rate for those who do not know how to answer the question (37%). Yet, in contrast to the Jewish public, among the Arabs the rate of those who believe that Assad, with Russia and Iran's help, will be able to remain in power (48%) is double the rate of those who do not believe so (24%).

Which is preferable for Israel—Russia or America?: In the eyes of about half the Jewish public (50.5%), the president of Russia is a more impressive leader than U.S. president Obama. Only about one-fourth (23%) see Obama as a more impressive leader. As for the claim that in recent decades Israel has been too close and dependent on the United States and should make an effort to draw closer to Russia, opinions are split between those who agree (47%) and disagree (44%). It appears, however, that these assessments have only scant influence on which of the two countries—Russia or the United States—is seen as a more desirable ally for Israel. On the critical question—which of the two, Russia or the United States, will be a more loyal and trustworthy ally for Israel—there is wide agreement in the Jewish public (78%) that the United States is the preferable ally. Moreover, the majority (50%) believes that by drawing close to Russia, Israel would harm U.S.-Israeli relations.

In the Arab public Obama and Putin come up almost even in popularity: 27% regard Obama as the more impressive of the two and 29% see Putin as the more impressive leader. Similarly to the Jews, the Arabs tend more to agree with the claim that Israel is too dependent on the United States (39%); 27% disagree with it and about one-third do not know. As for the question of which of the two will be a more loyal ally for Israel, the Arabs' position is very similar to that of the Jewish public with 71% "choosing" the United States. Unlike the Jews, however, the highest rate—close to half the Arab public (46%)—do not see a warming of Israeli-Russian ties as affecting Israel's relations with the United States one way or the other.

Negotiations index—44.1 (Jewish sample—41.7)

Graph of the month: To what extent do you agree or disagree with the statement that the idea of two states for two peoples has died? (Disagree, Jews, according to voting in the 2015 elections, percentages)



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 6-8, 2015, 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 processing was done by Ms. Yasmin Alkalay. <http://www.peaceindex.org>