

Peace Index

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Summary of Findings

To talk or not to talk (and what will come of it?) – 71.5% of the Israeli Jewish public supports holding talks with the Palestinians but only 32.3% believe they will lead to peace. This wide gap between high support for talks and low belief in their outcomes has characterized public opinion on this issue consistently since the signing of the Oslo agreement in 1993.

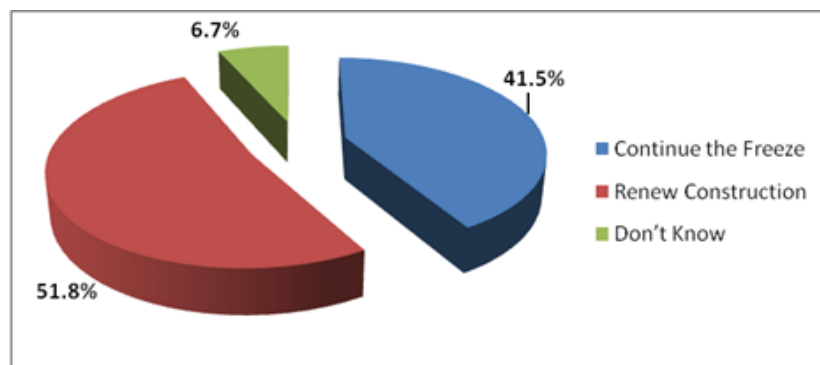
How to talk? – A clear majority (62%) supports direct dialogue, while only 14% prefer indirect dialogue in the form of the proximity talks mediated by U.S. envoy George Mitchell. The rest have no clear opinion. A segmentation of the preferences on this matter by voting for the Knesset in the most recent elections reveals that among voters for all the parties, without exception, the preference of the overwhelming majority is for direct talks!

And how are the leaders doing? The prevailing view is that Netanyahu's policy regarding the talks with the Palestinians is balanced (42.5%), with the rest divided between those who see it as too yielding (29%) or too tough (17%). As for Washington's position, today as in the past a considerable majority (57.5%) thinks President Obama leans too much to the Palestinian side. Twenty-eight percent see him as neutral, while only 8% say he leans more to the Israeli side.

Whither the Shalit protest? About one-fifth (21%) of the Jewish interviewees said they had participated or intended to participate in protest activities for the freeing of Gilad Shalit – an unprecedented rate in Israel, and perhaps in the world, for public participation in civil protest. At the same time, the public is divided on whether the Shalit family should intensify its protest measures: 48.5% favor such an intensification and 43% oppose it. A segmentation of the positions by voting in the latest Knesset elections shows that among Labor (63%), Kadima (56%), and Torah Judaism (54.5%) voters, a majority favors an intensification. However, among voters for Jewish Home (62%), Yisrael Beiteinu (56%), Shas (55%), and Likud (50%) a majority says the Shalit family should not step up the protest. The views of Meretz and National Union voters are evenly divided between supporters and opponents of an intensification.

To freeze or to melt? As the September date for ending the construction freeze in the settlements draws near, a not-large majority of the public (52%) favors renewed construction, on the ground that continuing the freeze means capitulation to the Americans and the Palestinians. Some 41.5% favor continuing the freeze, on the ground that it will help advance the negotiations with the Palestinians and improve Israel's image in the international community. A segmentation of the preferences on this issue by voting in the latest Knesset elections finds that among voters for Meretz (88.2%), Labor (62.5%), and Kadima (60.2%) there is a clear preference for continuing the freeze, while among voters for the rest of the parties, and especially Shas (81.2%), Yisrael Beiteinu (73.8%), and Torah Judaism (67.8%), the definite preference is for ending it. Nevertheless, the rate of those who expect the government to continue the freeze (45%) is higher than that of those who expect it to resume building (37%).

Diagram of the Month: To Freeze or to Renew Construction?



And at greater length

A large majority (71.5%) of the Israeli Jewish public supports holding talks with the Palestinians but only 32.3% believe they will lead to peace. This wide gap between high support for talks and low belief in their results has characterized public opinion on this issue consistently since the signing of the Oslo agreement in 1993. The Israeli Arab public's rate of support for talks is even higher – 83.7%, and so is the rate of those who think they will bear fruit in the foreseeable future – 58.7%. For this public too, though, the rate of supporters is considerably higher than of those who believe the talks will pass the test of results.

Also on the question of how to conduct the talks, there is a high level of unanimity: a clear majority (62%) of the Israeli Jewish public supports direct dialogue, with only 14% preferring indirect dialogue as in the proximity talks mediated by U.S. envoy George Mitchell. Some 14.5% think it makes no difference how the talks are conducted, since they will not bear fruit in any case. The rest do not have a clear opinion. A segmentation of the preferences on this issue by voting for the Knesset in the most recent elections reveals that among voters for all the parties without exception, the preference of the overwhelming majority is for direct talks. The Arab public is similarly inclined: 48.9% favor direct talks and only 7.8% prefer that they be indirect. However, here 25%, or one-fourth of the interviewees (!), claim that it makes no difference whether the talks – futile in any case – are indirect or direct.

The prevailing view in the Jewish public is that the Netanyahu policy toward the talks with the Palestinians is balanced, that is, estimable (42.5%), with the rest divided between those who see it as too yielding (29%) or too tough (17%). A cross-check between the positions on this question and Knesset voting in the latest elections shows a substantial majority for those who think Netanyahu's policy is balanced among Likud (59.7%), Torah Judaism (59.3%), and Jewish Home (50%) voters. Only among Meretz (88%) voters does a majority say his policy is too tough, and only among National Union (75%) voters does a majority view it as too yielding. Kadima voters are almost evenly split between the three alternatives, while the prevailing view among Labor voters (46%) is that his policy is balanced (46.9%), with exactly one-fourth regarding it as too tough and 6% as too yielding. The picture is similar for Yisrael Beiteinu voters, though here the rate of those favoring a tougher policy is higher than the rate of those who want a more flexible one: balanced, 47.6%; too tough, 11.9%; too yielding, 31%.

The distribution of views in the Arab public is, as expected, different: a very large majority of 62.9% think Netanyahu's position on the negotiations with the Palestinians is too tough, while only 22% see it as balanced. A mere 1.1% regard his stance as too yielding.

With Netanyahu having been warmly received in Washington last week, we checked whether President Obama's image among the Israeli public has improved. Currently among the Jews, as in the past, a considerable majority (57.5%) claims that President Obama leans more to the Palestinian side. Twenty-eight percent view him as neutral, and only 8% consider that he leans more to the Israeli side. As for the Arabs, the picture at present is the diametrical opposite: 56.5% say Obama is more pro-Israeli, while 33.7% regard him as neutral. Only 13% of this sector sees him as being more pro-Palestinian.

As the September date for ending the construction freeze in the settlements approaches, we checked the public's stance on this critical issue. It turns out that a not-large majority of the Jewish public (52%) favors renewed construction, on the ground that continuing the freeze means capitulating to the Americans and the Palestinians. Some 41.5% support continuing the freeze, on the ground that it will help advance the negotiations with the Palestinians and improve Israel's image in the international arena. A segmentation of the preferences on this issue by voting in the latest Knesset elections found among Meretz (88.2%), Labor (62.5%), and Kadima (60.2%) voters a clear preference for continuing the freeze, while among voters for the rest of the parties, and especially Shas (81.2%), Yisrael Beiteinu (73.8%), and Torah Judaism (67.8%), the clear preference is for renewed construction. And yet, the rate of those who expect the government to continue the freeze (45%) is higher than the rate of those who think it will renew the building (37%). In the Arab public there is almost a full consensus – 88% – in favor of continuing the freeze, with only a small minority – 8.7% – for resuming construction. Here too ambiguity about the future prevails, but still, in contrast to the Jewish public, the higher rate – 46.7% – expects the government to end the freeze and renew construction while only 42.4% see it as sustaining the freeze policy.

After a long interlude, and on the background of the many recent protest actions against the fence in Bilin, against the harm to the Palestinian residents in Sheikh Jarrah, and of course in favor of the freeing of Gilad Shalit, this month we again checked whether a large majority of the Israeli public still supports legal protest regarding the peace talks or, instead, a shift has occurred. In the Jewish sector, a clear majority of 68.4% indeed supports the right to protest in this context, and on condition that the protest is legal. Twenty-four percent also support illegal but nonviolent protest, while 4.6% support protest that is illegal as well as violent. A quite similar picture emerges regarding protest on the Shalit issue.

The Arab public shows much higher support for illegal and also violent forms of protest. Some 41.8% favor protest solely in the framework of the law. About one-third (31.9%) also support illegal but nonviolent protest, while about one-fifth (19%), almost four times the rate in the Jewish public, support illegal as well as violent protest. As for protest on behalf of Shalit, the picture here is similar, but the rate of support for illegal as well as violent protest declines by about half to 10.9%.

And on the subject of protest on Shalit's behalf, about one-fifth (21%) of the Jewish interviewees said they had participated or intended to participate in the protest activities for his release. This is an unprecedented rate in Israel, and perhaps in the world, for public



participation in civil protest. At the same time, the Jewish public is divided on whether the Shalit family should intensify its protest measures: 48.5% favor an intensification and 43% oppose it. A segmentation of the positions by voting in the latest Knesset elections discloses that a majority of Labor (63%), Kadima (56%), and Torah Judaism (54.5%) voters support such an intensification. Among Jewish Home (62%), Yisrael Beiteinu (56%), Shas (55%), and Likud (50%) voters, however, a majority opposes the Shalit family stepping up its protest. Views among Meretz and National Union voters are evenly split between supporters and opponents of an intensification. Quite surprisingly, and assuming that this is not a phenomenon of social ingratiation – that is, trying to please the interviewer – about one-third of the Arab interviewees (30%) responded that they had participated or intended to participate in protest on the Shalit issue.

The Peace Index project is conducted under the auspices of the Evens Program for Conflict Resolution at Tel Aviv University and the Israel Democracy Institute. The survey was carried out by telephone on 6-7 July by the Dahaf Institute. The measurement error for a sample of this size is 4.5%. Statistical processing: Ms. Yasmin Alkalay. An overview of the Index was published in Yediot Aharonot