

# The Israeli Democracy Index

# 2015

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## HIGHLIGHTS



THE ISRAEL  
DEMOCRACY  
INSTITUTE

# 2015

This year's Israeli Democracy Index focuses on perceptions of the functioning of Israel's government and institutions, solidarity and tensions in Israeli society, and the civil and social status of Arab citizens of Israel. Part of the survey was dedicated to the place of the assassination of Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin in Israeli collective memory, 20 years after this tragic event.



**The Israeli Democracy Index** is a public opinion poll project conducted by IDI's Guttman Center for Public Opinion and Policy Research. Since 2003, an extensive survey has been conducted annually on a representative sample of Israel's adult population. Each survey presents an estimate of the quality of Israeli democracy for that year. On the whole, the project aims at assessing trends in Israeli public opinion regarding the realization of democratic values and the performance of government systems and elected officials. Analysis of its results may contribute to public discussion of the status of democracy in Israel and create a cumulative empirical database to intensify discourse concerning such issues.

Data for **The Israeli Democracy Index 2015** were collected during April and May 2015. The study population was a representative national sample of 1,019 adults aged 18 and over. The maximum sampling error for a sample of this size is  $\pm 3.2\%$ .

## How is Israel Doing?

When asked how they see Israel's overall situation, the Israeli public most frequently deemed it to be "so-so" (38.7%). The share who describe Israel's situation as either "good" or "very good" (41.2%), however, clearly outstrips the share who see it as "bad" or "very bad" (18%). Jewish respondents deem Israel's situation to be positive more frequently than Arab respondents (43.7% vs. 28.8%) and Arab respondents deem Israel's situation to be negative more frequently than Jews (29.1% vs. 16%).

Israelis see their personal situation as even more positive than the country's situation. Some 74.7% of Israelis describe their personal situation as "good" or "very good," 19.8% classify it as "so-so," and 4.8% deem it "bad" or "very bad." When broken down by nationality, 76.5% of Jews categorize their situation as positive, as do 65.1% of Arab respondents.

When asked if they would want to emigrate from Israel if they could obtain citizenship in the United States or another Western country, a very large majority of respondents—84.3% of Jews and 83.4% of Arabs—indicated that they wish to remain in Israel.

### THERE'S NO PLACE LIKE HOME

**84%** .....

of Israelis would prefer to live in Israel even if they had the possibility of living elsewhere



# State and Governance

## ■ Trust in Government and Institutions

▶▶ **High marks** – The institution that enjoys the highest level of trust among Jews is the Israel Defense Forces (93.4%), with the President of Israel in second place (76%), and Israel's HMOs in third (70.6%). Among Arab respondents, the government institutions and public bodies that enjoy the highest rate of trust are Israel's HMOs (82.2%), the National Insurance Institute responsible for social security (65.3%), and the Supreme Court (63%).

▶▶ **Low marks** – The prevailing view of government performance in Israel is highly critical. A sizeable proportion of Israelis hold that government corruption is common; 45.4% of the Jewish public and 60.8% of the Arab public think that Israel's leadership is corrupt. A majority of Israelis (54.4%) feel that Knesset members do not work hard and are not doing their job as well as they should. A high percentage (77.7%) feel unable to influence government policy, and there is a pronounced lack of trust in key institutions of democracy. Trust in the government is 36.2%, trust in the Knesset is 35.4%, and trust in Israel's political parties is only 19.1%.

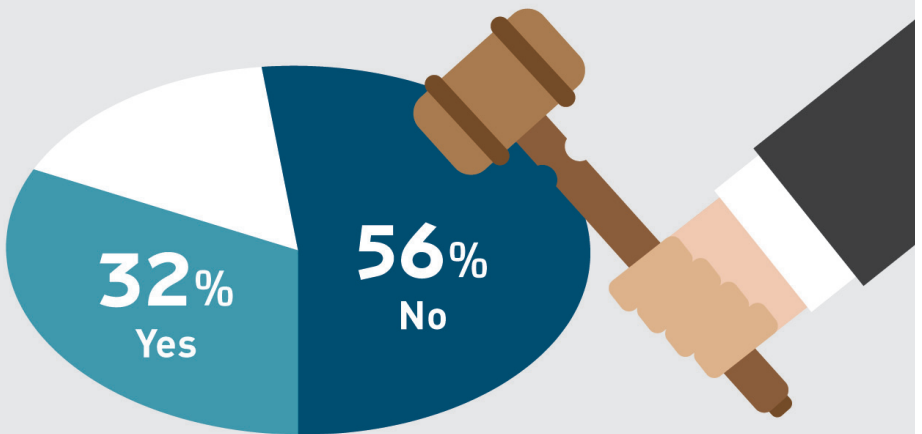
**Differing views** – In several areas, a great disparity was found between levels of confidence in institutions among Jews and Arabs:

- ▶▶ Whereas 93.4% of Jews have trust in the Israel Defense Forces, only 38.9% of Arabs have trust in the IDF.
- ▶▶ While President Reuven Rivlin enjoys the trust of 76% of Jewish respondents, only 38.9% of Israel's Arab citizens trust Israel's President.
- ▶▶ While the National Insurance Institute instills confidence in 65.3% of Arab respondents, it instills confidence in only 35.3% of Jews.

■ **The Status of the Supreme Court** – Approximately two thirds of Jews in Israel (62.2%) express a high level of trust in the Supreme Court, which enjoys more public confidence than the police (42.2%), the government (37.5%), the Knesset (33.8%), and Israel's political parties (15.1%). Trust in the Supreme Court is higher among the left (83.6%) than the right (50.1%), and is especially low among ultra-Orthodox and Orthodox Jews. Similar percentages of Jews and Arabs have trust in the Court (62.2% and 63% respectively).

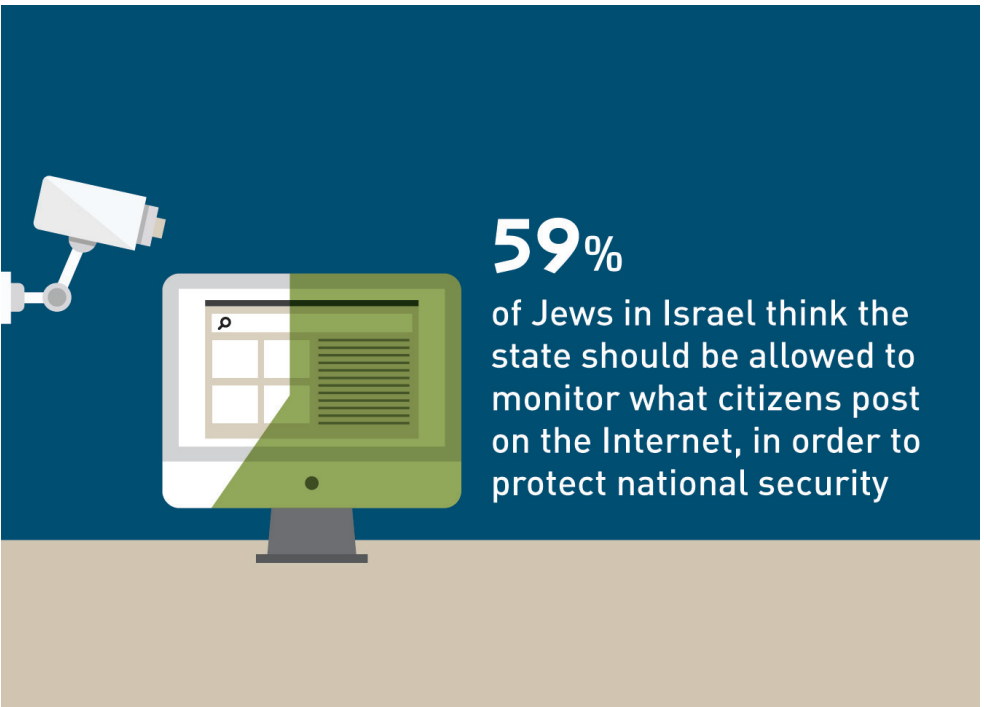
The majority of the public (56.0%) is opposed to changing the current system, in which the Supreme Court can overturn laws passed by the Knesset. Opposition to stripping the Supreme Court of the authority to overrule the Knesset is greater among Arabs (63.8%) and lower among Jews who identify themselves as politically right-wing (43.4%).

## SHOULD THE SUPREME COURT BE STRIPPED OF ITS AUTHORITY TO OVERTURN KNESSET LEGISLATION?



■ **Freedom of Expression and Privacy** – A majority of the Israeli public support freedom of expression, and specifically the right of citizens to criticize the state. When respondents were asked whether Israelis should be legally prohibited from expressing harsh criticism of the state in public, 70.4% of the total sample (69.2% of Jews and 76.2% of Arabs) expressed opposition to this notion. This opposition crosses all political lines, though it is more pronounced on the left than in the center or the right of the political map.

When asked whether they agree that in order to protect national security, the state should be permitted to monitor what citizens post on the Internet, 59.1% of the Jewish public supported such intrusions on individual freedom of expression. A majority of Arabs (53.8%), in contrast, oppose granting the state permission for such surveillance. Surprisingly, younger Jewish respondents are more strongly in favor of such monitoring than older ones.



## Israeli Society

- **Social Tensions** – When asked what the greatest area of friction is in Israeli society, both Jewish respondents (64.1%) and Arab respondents (43.7%) cited the tension between Jews and Arabs as the greatest tension. Overall, 47% of Israelis think that the greatest tension in Israeli society is the tension between Jews and Arabs.

When asked to assess the level of friction between members of specific pairs of contrasting population groups in Israeli society, 67.1% of the total sample rated tension between Jews and Arabs as high. This was followed by tension between the political right and left (deemed high by 59.7%), tension between rich and poor (50.6%), tension between religious and secular Jews (47.5%), and tension between Ashkanazi and Mizrahi Jews (24%).

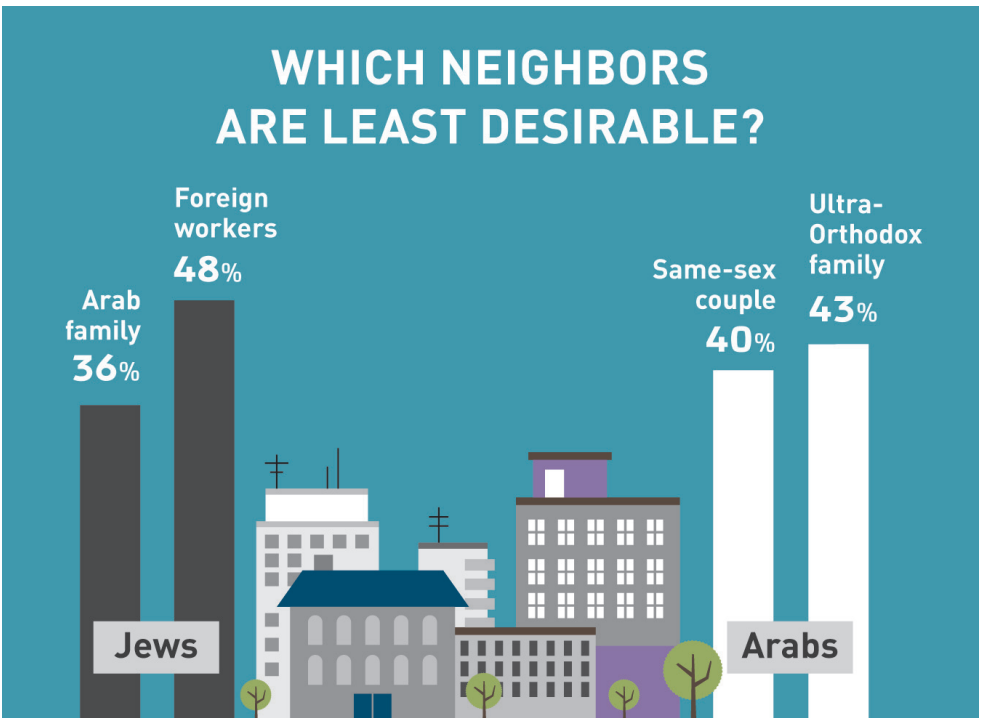
There was a sharp rise in the number of people who deem tension between Arabs and Jews and left and right to be high compared to 2014. Perceived tensions between rich and poor, religious and secular, and Ashkenazi and Mizrahi Jews in Israel have dropped slightly since 2014.

**47%** .....  
of all Israelis  
think the greatest  
tension in Israeli  
society is the  
tension between  
Jews and Arabs



■ **Attitude toward the “Other”** – Jews and Arabs differed considerably on the neighbors they would find least desirable. When asked if it would bother them to live next to eight groups of “others,” Jewish respondents indicated that they would be most troubled by the prospects of living next to foreign workers (48.5%), an Arab family (36.1%), and people with mental health disorders (31.5%).

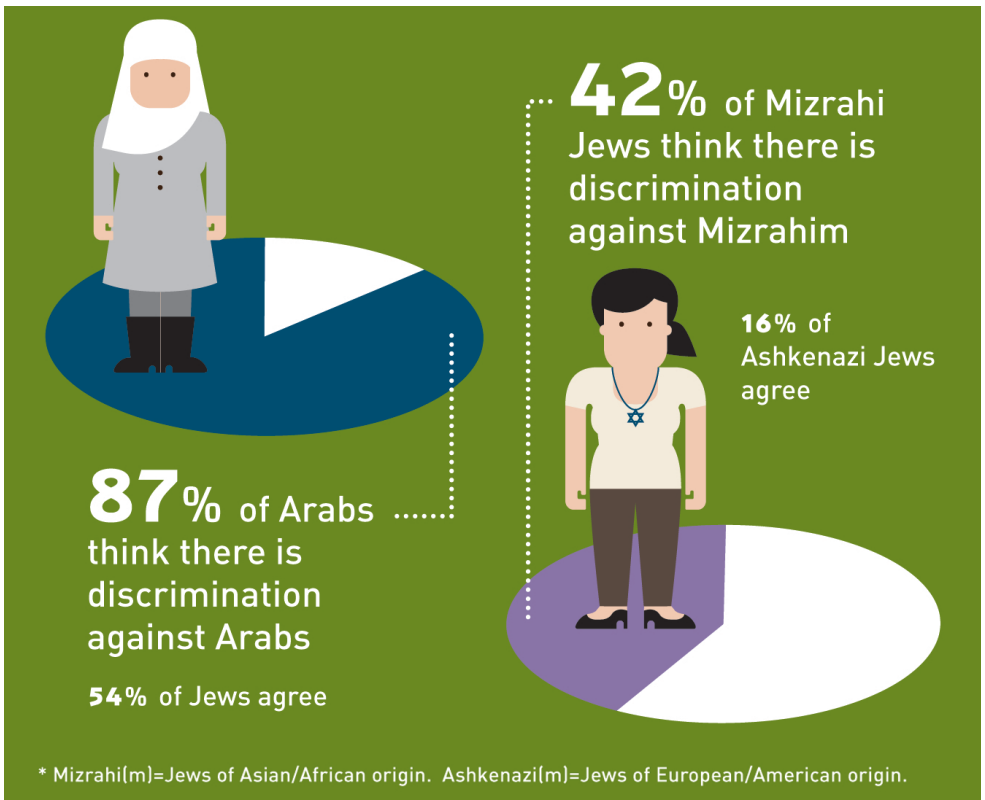
In keeping with the results of previous years, Arab respondents would be most concerned about living next to ultra-Orthodox Jews (42.6%). This was followed by a same-sex couple (40.4%) and people with intellectual/developmental disabilities (36.4%). Strikingly, only 11.4% of Arab respondents would be bothered by living next to a Jewish family.





■ **Discrimination** – There is a fairly broad consensus in the Israeli public that Arabs are discriminated against as compared to Jews. Israel's Arab citizens hold this view more than Jews (86.9% vs. 54.1%). Respondents who identify with the left think there is discrimination against Arabs more than respondents on the right (80% vs. 44%), Ashkenazi Jews hold this view more than Mizrahi Jews (58.2% vs. 52%), and secular Jews hold this view more than ultra-Orthodox Jews (65.8% vs. 33.3%).

There is less consensus regarding discrimination against Mizrahim (Jews of Asian/African origin). Some 59.2% of Israelis think there is no such discrimination, while 32.2% think there is. Among Jews, 27.7% think Mizrahim face discrimination, while 55.8% of Arabs share this view. Only 16.4% of Ashkenazi Jews agree that there is discrimination against Mizrahim, while 42.2% of Mizrahim agree that there is such discrimination.



## Arab-Jewish Relations

- **Jewish Attitudes toward Arab Citizens** – The attitudes of Israeli Jews toward Israel's Arab minority are complex. On the one the hand, 54.1% of Jewish respondents acknowledge that there is discrimination against Arabs. An equal share oppose allocating greater funding to Jewish localities than to Arab localities. Most Jews are also not opposed to being treated by an Arab doctor (77.8%) or to having Arab teachers in Jewish schools (74.4%).

At the same time, only a small percentage of Jewish respondents are prepared to involve Arabs in crucial state decisions: 73.6% of Jewish respondents would require a Jewish majority for decisions regarding peace and national security, while 53.6% would require a Jewish majority for matters of governance, society, and the economy. In addition, 56.6% of Jews are opposed to including Arab parties and ministers in the government, 55.7% believe that it is not possible to identify as a Palestinian and be a loyal citizen of Israel, 42.3% think that Israel's Arab citizens support the destruction of the state, and 39% think Arab citizens are a security threat.

### ATTITUDES OF ISRAELI JEWS TOWARD ARAB CITIZENS



**57%** are opposed to including Arab parties and ministers in the government



**78%** do not care whether the doctor who treats them is Jewish or Arab

A majority of the Jewish public (71.3%) are opposed to granting Jews greater rights than non-Jewish citizens. However, a majority of Jews (60.8%) favor making the right to vote for and be elected to the Knesset contingent upon the signing of a declaration of loyalty to Israel as a Jewish state and upon service in the IDF or a civilian alternative.

- **Mixed Marriages** – More than any other aspect of Jewish-Arab relations surveyed, the idea of marriages between Jews and Arabs elicited extremely strong opposition from both Jewish and Arab respondents. A considerable percentage of respondents in both sectors—36.8% of the Jews surveyed and 38.8% of the Arabs—support the activities of organizations that use forceful and even illegal means in order to prevent such unions.

## SUPPORT EFFORTS TO PREVENT MARRIAGES BETWEEN JEWISH WOMEN AND ARAB MEN

39%  
of Arabs



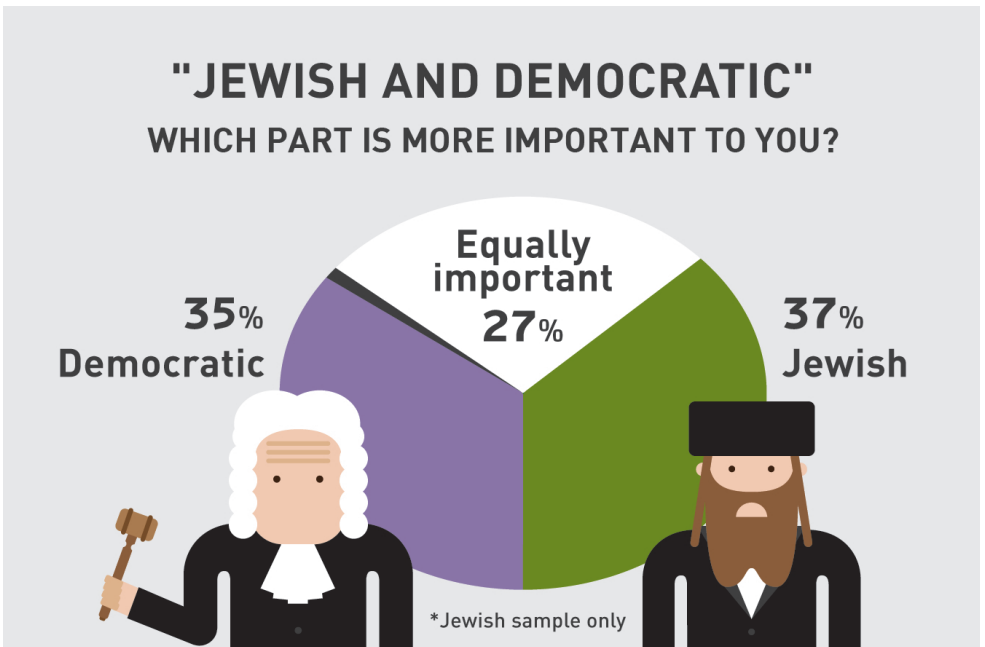
37%  
of Jews



## Jewish and Democratic

- **The Nature of the State** – Jewish Israelis are split fairly evenly between those who consider the “Jewish” part and those who consider the “democratic” part of Israel’s definition as a “Jewish and democratic state” to be more important. This year’s study revealed that 36.6% feel that the “Jewish” aspect is more important, 35.3% feel that the “democratic” aspect is more important, and 26.7% volunteered that the two aspects are equally important.

As in the past, preference for the Jewish aspect of Israel’s dual definition is stronger among ultra-Orthodox (100%), Orthodox Jews (70.9%), respondents on the political right (56.8%), and younger people. The democratic aspect is seen as more important by respondents on the political left (70.1%), secular Jews (53.4%), and respondents in older age groups.



# An International Comparison

In 2015, Israel is once again ranked at the midpoint or higher in most of the democracy indicators studied. Israel stands out favorably in measures of life satisfaction and political participation, but the areas of civil liberties and social policies have room for improvement.

- High Marks** – Israel ranks very high for political participation. Its position is second among 28 countries, just below Norway. Israel’s performance in life satisfaction also ranks very high—third out of 19 countries.
- Low marks** – Of the 17 countries included in the social policies indicator, Israel ranks rather low, tied for positions 12 and 13. Israel’s ranking for civil liberties is also low, as it is tied for positions 19 and 20 of the 28 countries studied.
- Average marks** – Of 28 countries, Israel ranked at or near the middle of the scale when it comes to a combined indicator of political rights and civil liberties (14th place), freedom of the press (13th place), functioning of government (tied for slots 10–15), and perceptions of corruption (tied for slots 11 and 12).

How Does Israel Rank Internationally?					
A Comparison of Eight Indicators in 28 Countries					
1 = best performance; 28 = worst performance					
Indicator	2015		2014		Change
Political rights and civil liberties	14	of 28	14-15	of 28	=
Freedom of the press	13	of 28	13	of 28	=
Functioning of government	10-15	of 28	7-11	of 28	▼
Political participation	2	of 28	3	of 28	▲
Civil liberties	19-20	of 28	20-21	of 28	▲
Perception of corruption	11-12	of 28	11	of 28	=
Life satisfaction	3	of 19	6-7	of 19	▲
Social policies	12-13	of 17	11-12	of 17	▼

▲ Improvement | = No change | ▼ Decline

# About Us

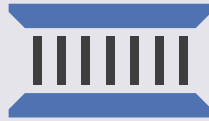
**The Israel Democracy Institute (IDI)** is a non-partisan “think and do tank” dedicated to strengthening the foundations of Israeli democracy. A 2009 Israel Prize recipient, IDI promotes political reform, democratic values, social cohesion, and solutions in the field of religion and state.

**The Guttman Center for Public Opinion and Policy Research** at IDI holds the largest, most comprehensive database on public opinion surveys in Israel. Over a span of 60 years, the Center, based in Jerusalem, has applied rigorous, innovative, and pioneering research methods enhanced by its unique “continuing survey.” It has documented the attitudes of the Israeli public regarding thousands of issues, in all aspects of life, in over 1,200 studies that have been conducted since 1947: from everyday concerns to politics, culture, ideology, religion, education, and national security.



Results of the 2015 Index, as well as the findings of all previous years, can be found in both Hebrew and English on the IDI website: [en.idi.org.il](http://en.idi.org.il)





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