

Peace Index Column—January 2015

Prof. Ephraim Yaar and Prof. Tamar Hermann

This month's index focused both on both the external and internal spheres, with the elections as the factor connecting the two on most of the questions.

The degree of U.S. commitment to Israel's security: Some 61% of the Israeli Jewish public sees the level of President Obama's commitment to Israel's security at present as very high or moderately high. Precisely the same rate (61%), however, thinks that if there is a breakthrough in the U.S.-Iranian negotiations, the chance is very high or moderately high that President Obama will give a green light to a nuclear agreement even if the serving Israeli government makes clear that in its view the agreement endangers Israel's security. It is interesting to note that there are dramatic gaps in the degree of confidence of the voters for the different parties in President Obama's commitment to Israel's security. Whereas, among those intending to vote for parties of the center and the left, a large majority sees the degree of his commitment as high (Labor 76%, Meretz 79%, Yesh Atid 89%), among those planning to vote for right-wing parties a much lower rate sees it that way (Habayit Hayehudi 37.5%, Yisrael Beiteinu 40%, Likud 51%). When it comes to approving an agreement with the Iranians, the gaps between the voters for the different parties are even wider. Thus, among Meretz and Labor voters there is overwhelming agreement (100% and 95% respectively) that President Obama will not give a green light to an agreement that the Israeli government views as harming Israel's security, while an almost identical rate among right-wing voters think Obama will give a green light to such an agreement (Shas 100%, Habayit Hayehudi 94%, Likud 93%, Yisrael Beiteinu 85%).

Among the Arabs, the rate of those who see Obama as committed to Israel's security is in fact lower than among the Jews (49%), though it exceeds the rate of those who think his commitment is moderately low or very low (39%). However, among the Arabs, in contrast to the Jews, a higher rate sees a moderately low or very low chance

that Obama will green-light a nuclear agreement with Iran if the Israeli government regards the emerging agreement as a security risk (low chance 45%, high chance 38%).

Netanyahu's scheduled speech to Congress: If the prevailing assumption in the Israeli Jewish public is that Obama will likely approve an agreement that is damaging to Israel, then it is quite surprising that a majority (57.5%) thinks Netanyahu should have rejected the invitation from the speaker of the House of Representatives, John Boehner, to give a speech to Congress that probably will be devoted to the Iranian threat. This view stems from the notion that American protocol is clear that heads of state should not make official visits to Washington a short time before elections in their country. The explanation for this apparent contradiction seems to lie in the finding that a large majority (67%) thinks the timing of Netanyahu's trip, right at the peak of the election campaign, was central to his decision to go to Washington and address Congress there; in other words, that he is using a speech abroad to influence the election results at home. A segmentation of the Jewish interviewees by their voting intentions in the coming elections reveals that it is only among those planning to vote for Likud or Habayit Hayehudi that a majority does not see the timing as playing a central role in Netanyahu's decision to go to Washington.

All of the findings so far apparently also shed light on why the Jewish public is evenly split (46% on each side) on the question of whether, given the opposition of Obama and members of his administration to the visit and the scheduled speech, Netanyahu's visit to Washington at this particular time will damage or benefit Israel's interests. Again, a segmentation by voting intentions reveals large gaps. Among those intending to vote for Labor, Meretz, or Yesh Atid, a clear majority sees the trip as damaging Israel's interests (80%, 73%, and 65% respectively). Among those intending to vote for right-wing parties, however, a clear majority regards it as benefiting Israel's interests (Likud 80%, Yisrael Beiteinu 70%, Habayit Hayehudi 58%).

Who is better suited to deal with the key issues of the election campaign?: The rate of Jewish Israelis who think a government headed by Netanyahu is better suited to deal with issues of Israeli security (57.5%) is considerably higher than the rate who view a government headed by Tzipi Livni and Isaac Herzog as better suited to this task (27%). Similarly, a clear majority of the Jewish public (59%) estimates that the right-wing bloc has a better chance to form the government after the elections than the center-left bloc (27.5%). A segmentation of the Jewish interviewees' responses to this question shows that among those planning to vote for the right-wing parties, an overwhelming majority are sure that the government will be formed by the right. Among voters for the center-left parties, however, in cases where a majority believes the government will be formed by the parties they plan to vote for, the majority is much smaller (indeed, among the interviewees who are planning to vote for Meretz, we found that the rate of those who expect the next government to be formed by the right-wing bloc is larger than the rate who think it will be formed by the center-left bloc—54% vs. 42% respectively).

Indeed, when the question is “Which bloc would you want to form the government after the coming elections?” the gap between the preferences for the two blocs narrows a bit, but here too the right-wing bloc has a clear lead over the center-left bloc (53% prefer the former, 38% the latter). These data are especially challenging in light of the fact that a higher rate (43%) of the Jewish public says that socioeconomic issues are what will determine which party they vote for in the coming elections (34% marked the political-security sphere as decisive for them), and a higher rate also believes that a government headed by Herzog-Livni will deal with these issues better than one headed by Netanyahu (52% vs. 30%).

Thus we face an apparent paradox in the calculations of the Israeli Jewish voter. On the one hand, the clear sectorial inclination of the Jews is to put Israel's security issues in the hands of a right-wing government headed by Netanyahu, and this sector also displays a higher preference for the right-wing political bloc forming the next government. On the other hand, at least on the declarative level, a higher rate says the

socioeconomic issue—which, as noted, a government headed by Herzog-Livni is perceived as better suited to tackle—will count for more when they go to the ballot box than the political-security issue.

Among the Arabs, the rate of those who think the center-left bloc will form the next government (40%) is higher than the rate of those who expect the right-wing bloc to do so (35%). Moreover, not surprisingly a much higher rate prefers a center-left government (54%) than a right-wing one (17.5%). Note that while in the past we found greater interest in the political-security issue among the Arab public, this time the pattern of responses leans to the domestic issues: 56% said that what will determine whom they vote for is the party's position on the socioeconomic issue compared to only 18% who chose the political-security issue as decisive for them.

Attitudes toward the United Arab List: The survey findings indicate that the decision to unify the Arab parties for the elections—a move that probably was not desirable for those who initiated the raising of the electoral threshold—was welcomed by a majority of the Arab public (78% are very satisfied or moderately satisfied with it) and only by a minority of the Jewish public (only 19% are very satisfied or moderately satisfied).

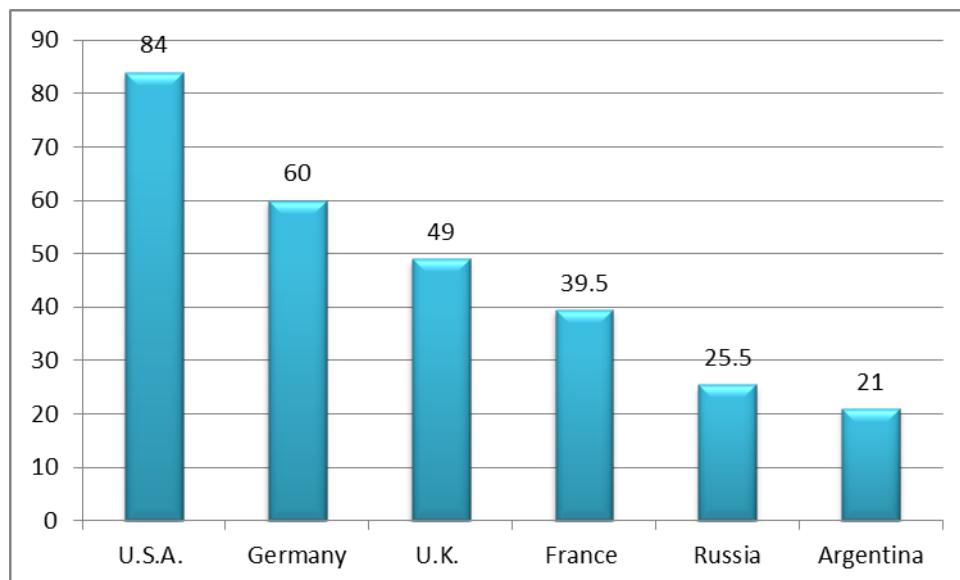
Degree of commitment of the world's governments to the security of their Jewish communities: On the background of the attacks on Jewish institutions and individuals in the world and the recent proliferation of antisemitic manifestations in various places, we checked to what extent the Israeli Jewish public trusts the governments of six countries with considerable Jewish populations—the United States, France, Britain, Germany, Argentina, and Russia—to make efforts to ensure the security of the Jewish communities that live in them. The responses reveal an interesting and not necessarily expected ranking, especially in a historical perspective. Not surprisingly, at the top of the “ladder of concern” for the security of the Jewish communities stand the U.S. authorities, whom 84% of the Israeli Jewish public trusts to make efforts to protect the Jews who live there. Less expected is the fact that Germany comes in

second (!), with 60% of the respondents trusting the authorities there to make such efforts. After Germany, in descending order in terms of the Israeli public's level of trust in the authorities' efforts to protect the Jews, are: Britain (49%), France (39.5%), Russia (25.5%), and Argentina (21%).

Where is it safer for Jews to live, in Israel or in other countries? We asked a rather provocative question regarding the same six countries: "Compared to those who live in Israel, which of course has known many wars and waves of terrorism, how secure are the Jews who live in each of these countries?" Here too the United States came out on top, and it is the only one of the countries for which a higher rate of Israeli Jewish respondents see the Jews as more secure than the Jews in Israel (44.5% think the Jews living in the United States are safer than those in Israel, 26% believe the security of the Jews in the two countries is similar, and 28% assess that the Jews living in the United States are less safe than those living in Israel). As for the rest of the countries, a majority of the Israeli Jewish interviewees view the situation of the Jews who live in each of them, though at different rates, as less secure than in Israel (more secure in Israel compared to: Germany 52%, Britain 54.5%, Argentina 63%, Russia 67%, France 71%). It is interesting that on this question as well, Germany is in second place.

Negotiations index: 47.4 (Jewish sample: 43.1)

Graph of the month: “To what degree do you trust the authorities in each of the following countries to make appropriate efforts to ensure the security of the Jewish communities that live there?” (%), greatly trust or moderately trust, Jews)



The Peace Index is a project of the Evens Program for Mediation and Conflict Resolution at Tel Aviv University and the Guttman Center for Surveys of the Israel Democracy Institute. This month's survey was conducted by telephone on January 27-29, 2015, 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 is $\pm 4.1\%$ at a confidence level of 95%. Statistical processing was done by Ms. Yasmin Alkalay.