

## Peace Index column, February 2014

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The Israeli public shows a high level of skepticism about the motives and considerations of U.S. secretary of state John Kerry in attempting to reach a framework agreement, and the measures taken so far do not appear to have had a favorable effect. That is what this month's Peace Index survey reveals.

- A large majority (74%) of the Jewish public is convinced that the Americans are exerting more pressure on Israel than on the Palestinians to accept the secretary of state's framework agreement, even though its details are not yet clear. Only 5% think the Palestinians are being pressured more while 12% think the two sides are being evenly pressured. The Israeli Arab public perceives greater balance: 29% see the pressure exerted on the Palestinians as stronger, 25% think so regarding Israel, and 25.5% view the pressures on the two sides as similar.
- Despite this disparity and others between the Jewish and Arab populations that we will present later, the data show that both populations cast doubt on John Kerry's motives in trying to reach a framework agreement. Among the Jews, 61% think he is mainly motivated by a personal interest in "going down in history as a statesman who succeeded where others before him failed," while only 22% hold the view that his efforts reflect honest concern for the future of the two sides. Among the Arabs, the picture is very similar: 56% mainly attributed a personal motive to Kerry's activity while 16% say the good of the two sides is what matters to him.
- In the same critical vein, two-thirds of the Jewish public does not trust Kerry's framework agreement to take account of Israel's security as a crucial factor. The picture for the Arab public is similar, though apparently for a different reason: 53% think Kerry is not putting Israel's security interest first, with 32% believing the opposite.
- As expected, the Jewish public's positions on these issues are consistently influenced by the interviewees' political identity in the political-security domain. The rate who see Israel as under more pressure than the Palestinians stands at 85.5% of those with a rightwing identity, 57% of those who define themselves as center, and 50% of those who place themselves as left. Thus, despite the differences between the camps, in all three a majority sees stronger pressures on Israel than on the Palestinians. However, on the other two issues—what motivates Kerry and to what extent he can be trusted on the matter of Israel's security—the gaps are wide to the point of being diametrically opposed. On the right, the rate of those who trust Kerry on the security issue stands at only 18%; in the center, 39% trust him; while on the left, he has the trust of a 79% majority. And on the issue of what primarily

motivates Kerry, the gaps are no less large—75% of the right, compared to 50% of the center and only 26% of the left, see him as having a mainly personal motivation.

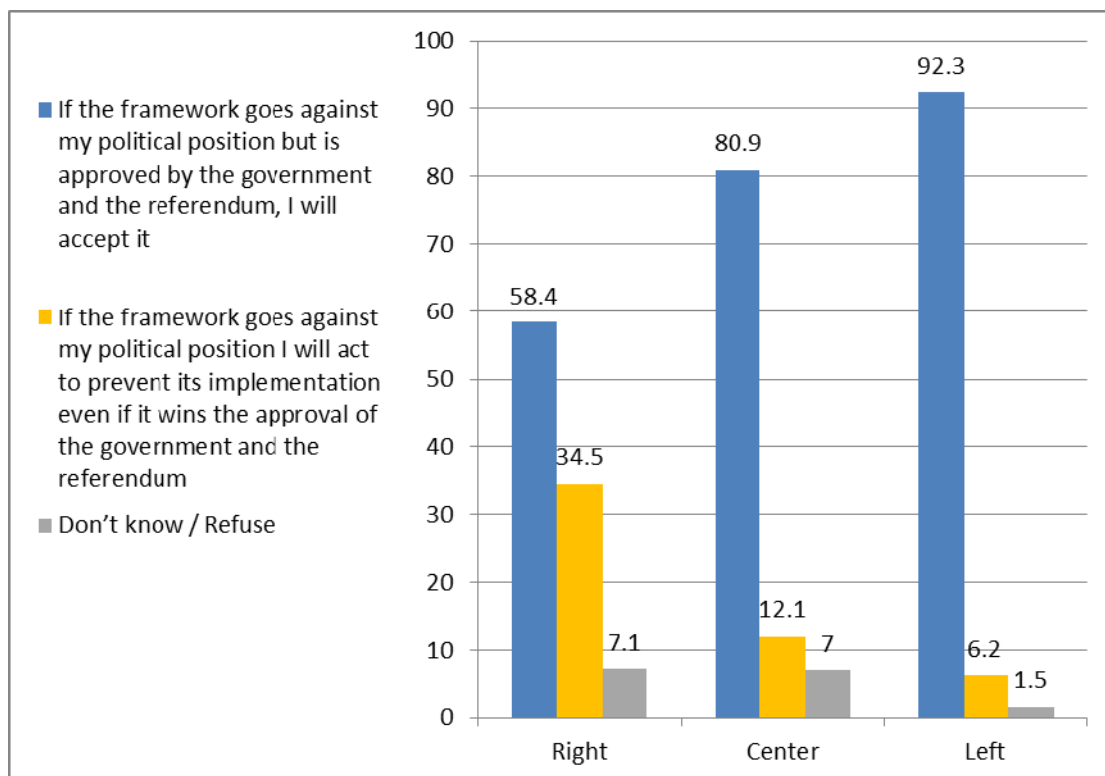
- Not only does the Israeli public view Kerry's motives and considerations unfavorably, it also perceives U.S. influence on the Israeli government as low. The survey was done before the results of Prime Minister Netanyahu's meeting with President Obama were known; the latter, of course, supports the framework agreements. And yet, in response to a question on whether Obama will succeed or not succeed to convince Netanyahu to accept this agreement, 63% of the Jewish interviewees and 57% of the Arab ones said they think or are sure that he will not succeed. Interestingly, on this question there are almost no gaps between the three political camps. The right may well see this as indicating a laudable resilience on Netanyahu's part, while the left may well regard it as obstinacy. In any case, President Obama is perceived as having little sway over Netanyahu.
- When it comes to distributions according to self-identification by political camp, one should be aware that the rate of those Israelis identifying themselves as right or moderate-right now stands at 51%, with the corresponding rates for the center and the left coming to 28% and 13% respectively. In other words, these camps are not equal in either size or political weight.
- Despite the critical attitude toward the framework agreement and the U.S. pressure on Israel, when it comes to concrete issues related to the talks with the Palestinians, the Jewish public appears less "hawkish." On a question of whether Israel should or should not show flexibility on the framework agreement so as to avoid a direct confrontation with the United States, two almost equal, disagreeing camps emerged: 50% of the Jewish public thinks Israel should show flexibility while 45.5% believe it should not. Likewise, the Jewish public is split between supporters of a continued freeze on building in the settlements in light of the U.S. pressure (48.5%) and opponents of a freeze (47%). Not surprisingly, in the Arab public a large majority (69%) thinks Israel should moderate its stance so as to prevent a confrontation with the United States, and a large majority of 71% favors a continued construction freeze in the settlements.
- Amid the ongoing disputes on this issue, we looked into the public's positions on whether the framework agreement should, as Netanyahu demands, include Palestinian recognition of Israel as a Jewish state, or whether one can settle for somewhat toned-down Palestinian recognition of Israel as "the national home of the Jewish people" (wording similar to that of the Balfour Declaration). It emerges that about half of the Jewish interviewees (53%) oppose settling for the alternative formulation while 39.5% support it. That is, a majority, albeit not overwhelming, favors insisting on the recognition of Israel as a Jewish state.

- An issue that has arisen only recently in the context of the framework agreement concerns reparations for Jews who left Arab countries. This week's survey revealed considerable flexibility in the Jewish public's position on whether the framework agreement should already include a basic commitment to reparations for the Jews who departed from Arab countries and left private assets behind, or whether, instead, the issue can be set aside for a later stage of the peace talks. The findings show that 69% say the issue can be postponed while only 20% believe a commitment on reparations should already be part of the framework agreement. Surprisingly, a segmentation of the replies by ethnic extraction turned up no disparities on that basis.
- If reparation payments arrived for the Jews who left Arab countries, could the state of Israel be trusted to distribute and transfer them fairly, or would there be a need for a special, nongovernmental, public body that would be in charge of doing so? The responses manifest the public's widespread distrust toward the government on this issue, with 69% of the Jewish public apparently not trusting the government and instead favoring a special public body for this purpose. The lack of trust in the government on this matter may well be influenced by various Israeli governments' behavior in distributing the reparation payments that were designated for Holocaust survivors and their descendants.
- Even though the prevailing Israeli Jewish mood is rightwing, it emerges that upholding the democratic rules of the game is a central, deeply rooted value in the majority group, though not to equal extents. We asked what will happen if Kerry's framework agreement is approved by the government and subsequently by a referendum. Over two-thirds of the Jewish interviewees (68%) said they would accept the agreement even if it contravenes their political position. It cannot be ignored, however, that about one-fourth (23%) already say that they will act to prevent its implementation even if it is approved by the government and a referendum. As the graph below shows, there are wide gaps between the political camps on this issue even though, in each camp, the majority favors upholding the rules of the game (58.4% of the right, 80.9% of the center, and 92.3% of the left). In the Arab public, at least on the declarative level, willingness to accept the rules of the game is lower: less than half (42.5%) said they would accept the verdict while 34% said they would keep acting against the implementation of an agreement that is not acceptable to them, even if it is approved by the government and the referendum.
- And on the subject of democratic values, we gauged where the public stands on the recent debate concerning political discourse in schools, which was sparked by a dispute between the high school student Sapir Sabah and her civics teacher Adam Verete. We asked: "Recently a high school student named Sapir Sabah complained about statements made in class by her civics teacher, Adam Verete, that included criticism of the IDF. The incident inspired a controversy in Israel, with some claiming that a teacher should never express

political positions in class and some maintaining that so long as freedom of speech is maintained for everyone, it is all right for a teacher to express political positions. With which side do you agree more?" Among the Jewish interviewees, a majority of 55% thought a teacher should never express political positions in class, while 41% said this was permissible so long as freedom of speech is maintained for the full range of opinions. A reverse picture emerged for the Arab interviewees, with the large majority (71%) believing that, in light of freedom of expression, teachers may express political positions in class; a minority of only 25.5% thought the opposite.

**Negotiations index:** 47.2 (Jewish sample: 43.9)

**Graph of the month: If the framework agreement that Kerry proposes goes against your political position but is approved by the government and afterward by a referendum, will you then accept the framework or act to prevent its implementation? (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 Israel Democracy Institute. This month's survey was conducted by telephone on March 3-4, 2014, by the Midgam Research Institute. The survey included 603 respondents, who constitute a representative national sample of the entire 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.*