

The Israeli Democracy Index

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The Israeli Democracy Index—2012 reveals that the public's assessment of Israel's current political situation and of the country's future is not significantly more negative than it was in 2011. As in the past, however, this year's figures point to considerable dissatisfaction, especially with the performance of Israeli politicians and political parties. Nonetheless, the degree of alienation from the political system is not profound enough to generate effective grass-roots pressure for revolutionary changes in government structures and processes.

The 2012 data were collected by Tel Aviv University's B.I. and Lucille Cohen Institute for Public Opinion Research from mid-April to mid-May 2012, based on a representative random nationwide sample of 1,025 respondents aged 18 and older.

Key Findings:

- The assessment of Israel's overall situation tends toward the positive: 38.1% characterize it as "good," 40.5% as "so-so," and the remainder (20.0%) as "bad."
- The level of optimism regarding Israel's future (75.6%) clearly exceeds the level of pessimism (21.8%).
- The level of solidarity of Jewish society in Israel (on a scale of 1 to 10, where 10 is "very strong solidarity") received an average rating of 6.2 among Jewish respondents and 5.4 among Arab respondents; i.e., a middling score.
- The assessment of government performance shows a negative tilt: the majority (59%) feel that the government is not doing a good job of handling the country's problems.
- Israelis' level of interest in politics is high, though it has declined in comparison with last year (66.7% versus 76.8%, respectively).
- Among both Jewish and Arab respondents, the majority feel that their ability to influence government policy is small or non-existent (61.5% and 68.6%, respectively).
- Only about one in three respondents (37.6%) feel that there is a political party today that truly represents their views.

■ The form of political participation seen as most effective is voting in Knesset elections (60.7%). This is followed (in descending order) by Internet protests, participation in demonstrations, membership in a civic organization, and party membership. Only a small minority (12.7%) considered the use of force to be an effective means of influencing government policy.

■ For the total sample, the primary factors affecting the decision to vote for a particular party are the party leader (26%) and the party platform (20.8%).

■ The majority of respondents feel that the protests of the summer of 2011 succeeded in raising media interest and public awareness regarding social/economic issues, but were less successful in changing government priorities, and failed to weaken the status of the wealthiest tier.

■ Among both Jews and Arabs sampled, the majority are uncomfortable with the notion of a “strong leader” (62.6% and 53.9%, respectively).

■ A majority of the Jewish sample (52.6%) agree that speakers should be prohibited from harsh public criticism of the state, while a majority of the Arab sample (68.6%) disagree with this statement.

■ The most common preference among the Jewish public (41.9%) is for the dual definition of Israel as a “Jewish and democratic” state. A total of 34.3% ascribe greater importance to the Jewish component, while only 21.8% favor the democratic one.

■ In categorizing the areas of friction in Israeli society, the tension between Jews and Arabs ranks as the most severe, followed (in descending order) by the tension between religious and secular, rich and poor, right and left (in terms of views on politics and security), and Mizrahim and Ashkenazim.

■ The sense of feeling part of the state and its problems differs greatly between Jewish and Arab respondents (72.9% and 27.7%, respectively). Those who took part in the protests of the summer of 2011 feel a stronger sense of belonging to the state than those who did not.

■ A majority of the Jewish respondents (58.3%) feel that Israel’s Arab citizens are not discriminated against, while a majority of the Arab respondents (74.9%) hold that they are subject to discrimination.

■ A majority of the Jewish sample (89.1%) are proud to be Israeli. Among the Arab respondents, the sense of pride is lower, representing a minority view (44.5%).

“To what extent do you trust each of the following individuals or institutions?” (to a large extent and to some extent; percent)

	Jews	Arabs
Political parties	33.8	35.6
Prime Minister	61.5	31.9
Media	43.5	59.7
Supreme Court	72.5	78.0
Police	60.6	62.3
President of Israel	84.3	51.8
Knesset	52.9	51.3
Army (IDF)	94.2	42.4
Government	60.3	40.3
State Comptroller	77.1	51.8



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