

War and Peace Index – February 2009

Prof. Ephraim Yaar and Prof. Tamar Hermann

Only a small minority of the entire Israeli public (17%) is satisfied with the results of the recent elections (43% are dissatisfied, 35% are in between, and the rest do not know). Yet close to 90% of all those who voted would vote again for the same party even if they knew the election results from the start. That is, their perception is that it's the other voters, not themselves, who erred. Among those who did not vote but, in light of the results, would do so if given another opportunity (16%, with the overwhelming majority, 69%, saying they would not vote even if given a further chance to do so), 30% would opt for Kadima and 27% for Likud, with the rest of the parties receiving only a few percentage points. In other words, if the nonvoters went to the booths, Kadima would keep its small lead over Likud. In the court of public opinion, the two prime-ministerial candidates are in a very close race: 37.5% prefer Livni, 37.6% favor Netanyahu. Taking the sampling error into account, the meaning of these results from a statistical standpoint is a tie between the two.

As for the coalition that stands to emerge, there is a clear preference for a combination of Likud, Kadima, and Labor (36%), with the rest of the preferences divided between a coalition of Likud, Yisrael Beiteinu, and the other right-wing parties (22%) and a coalition of Likud, Kadima, and Yisrael Beiteinu (16%). A segmentation of the preferences by voting in the elections reveals that among voters for the religious parties (Torah Judaism, the Jewish Home, the National Union, and Shas), and to a lesser extent among Likud voters, the clear preference is for a decidedly right-wing coalition, while among Meretz and Labor voters the majority prefers a Likud-Kadima-Labor coalition—meaning the Labor Party's idea of sitting in the opposition is not very popular among left-wing voters.

Since, as in the past, security issues played the central role in the latest election campaign (perhaps one should note here that currently in the Israeli public as a whole, 43% define themselves as Right, 26% as Center, and 20% as Left; the rest do not know), we checked whom the public most trusts to have the responsibility for these issues. Interestingly, the Likud candidate for defense minister in this coalition,

former chief of staff Moshe (Boogie) Yaalon, is considered the “right person” by only 14% of the public as a whole, while Ehud Barak leads by a large margin with 45% seeing him as the preferred candidate. Shaul Mofaz has the support of 13% of the public, and Avigdor Lieberman of 10%. Barak is, interestingly, also preferred as defense minister by the right-wing public, though by a smaller margin compared to the other candidates. In any case, Ehud Barak’s popularity as defense minister could explain why there is a preference for a coalition that includes Labor.

Over a month since the end of Operation Cast Lead, the entire Israeli public’s assessment of its results appears to be divided almost evenly between the disappointed (33%) and the satisfied (36%), with the rest (29%) either in the middle or not knowing. The Jewish public, though, evidences a clear lead for the satisfied: 39% versus 25% who are dissatisfied (the rest have no clear opinion on the matter). The dissatisfaction seems to stem mainly from the majority’s opinion (56% of the entire public and 66% of the Jewish public) that Israel should have continued the operation until Hamas surrendered rather than give in to the international pressure to stop the fighting. Thus, in the public as a whole, 22% (24% of the Jewish public) think the operation was ended in time and 15% think it should have been ended earlier (6% of the Jewish public think so).

Since the data reveal a sense among the public that the operation did not achieve any unequivocal result, we again checked the positions on negotiations with Hamas. While a majority still says there is no place for such negotiations, the proportion that thinks otherwise is large: 45% of the entire Israeli public (40% of the Jewish public) believe today that Israel should hold negotiations with Hamas. A segmentation of the preferences by voting in the elections shows that in the Jewish public, there is a majority favoring negotiations with Hamas among voters for Meretz (93%), Labor (56%), and Kadima (53%), while for all the other parties a majority opposes it.

On the issue of Gilad Shalit, there is broad agreement (77% of the entire public and 85% of the Jewish public) that his release must be a precondition for a ceasefire with Hamas, even if this means no agreement is signed and Hamas renews the massive fire against the southern communities. In a similar spirit, an overwhelming majority

(77% of the entire public and 70% of the Jewish public) supports a deal in which, in return for Gilad Shalit's release, Israel would free hundreds and possibly even more Palestinian prisoners including many with "blood on their hands." A segmentation by voting in the elections shows that in the Jewish public there is a majority of supporters of such a step in all the parties except the Jewish Home and the National Union, whose voters apparently see releasing terrorists as a real danger or an unwise capitulation.

General Negotiation Index—50.4 points (for the Jewish sample—47.0)

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The telephone interviews were conducted by the B. I. Cohen Institute of Tel Aviv University on February 17-18, 2009 and included 598 interviewees who represent the adult population of Israel (including the territories and the kibbutzim). The sampling error for a sample of this size is 4.5%.