

A Further Turn to the Right

Israeli Public Opinion on National Security – 2002

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Introduction

Israeli public opinion continued to shift to the right in 2002, as the terror campaign waged by Palestinians since September 2000 escalated. Israelis were gloomier than ever about the prospects for peace and about the state of the nation's security. While there was general support for unilateral separation from the Palestinians, that support diminished considerably when the extent of the withdrawal and its impact on Jewish settlements in the West Bank and Gaza was delineated. The perceived threat to security was associated with increased support for transfer of Arabs from the territories captured in the 1967 Arab-Israeli War, and even for transfer of Arab-Israelis.

By February 2002, the uprising of the Palestinians against Israel (the intifada) was well into its second year. Acts of terror were carried out against Israel on a regular basis. In fact, February 2002 had been one of the bloodiest months for both sides of the confrontation since the outbreak of the violence.

In the previous intifada, which erupted in 1987 and continued through the signing of the Oslo Accords in 1993, the Palestinians engaged in protest by stone-throwing and by confronting, largely without

the use of firearms, Israeli forces occupying Palestinian towns and villages.

However, this more recent violence was different in nature, owing both to the means used and to political changes that had taken place since the signing of the Oslo Accords. Terrorist acts (suicide bombings, shooting attacks, etc.) against Israeli forces and against Jewish settlers were rampant within the Palestinian territories, and within Israel itself. Combatants on the Palestinian side included suicide bombers and trained terrorists, and even involved security personnel from the Palestinian Authority (PA), a body that had not existed prior to the signing of the Oslo Accords. In all, those actively involved in the violence reflected less of a cross-section of the Palestinian population than in the previous intifada.

The 2002 annual survey of the National Security and Public Opinion Project of the Jaffee Center for Strategic Studies was conducted between January 29 and February 27, 2002. The sample was representative of the adult Jewish population of Israel ($N = 1,264$), and the survey was conducted by the Almidan/Mahshov Research Institute with a $\pm 3.1\%$ margin of error. Because of the killing

and the indiscriminate terror, Israelis were worried about their personal security and were concerned about the state of Israel's national security. Ninety-two percent of the survey sampled expressed worry that they or a member of their family would fall victim to a terrorist attack, compared with 85% in 2001, 79% in 2000, and 68% in 1999.

Seventy-eight percent said that Israeli citizens' personal security had deteriorated since the beginning of the peace process, compared with 66% in 2001. In contrast, only 53% said that the personal security of Israeli citizens had worsened since the Sharon government took office in March 2001. The disparity between the higher sense of the worsening situation compared to the lower percentage that felt a worsening during the first year of the Sharon government indicates the positive orientation of many of the respondents to Sharon and to his national unity government, despite the much higher fatality rates since his election.

Indeed, as terror and violence spiraled ever upward, the majority of public opinion supported the policies pursued by Sharon's national unity government in its declared search for peace and security.

Expectations and Aspirations

Changed expectations explain the shift to the right. There was a sharp drop in the percentage of respondents who thought that an end to the Israeli-Arab conflict would be achieved by reaching peace agreements with the Palestinians and the Arab states. In 2002, only 26% thought that signing such treaties would mean an end to the conflict, compared with 30% in 2001 and 67% in 1999.

This dramatic change in expectations indicates just how deep the disillusionment with the peace process was. Support for the Oslo process dropped sharply to 35% in 2002, from 58% a year before. The percentage of those surveyed who thought that most Palestinians wanted peace slid to 37% in 2002, compared with 46% in 2001, 52% in 2000, and 64% in 1999. Sixty-eight percent in 2002 thought it impossible to reach a peace agreement with the Palestinians, compared with 56% in 2001.

Talk of moderation and conciliation was replaced by the perceived threat of war and violence. Seventy-seven percent assessed the likelihood of war between Israel and an Arab state within the next three years as medium or high, compared with 70% in 2001 and 39% in 2000. Only 21% thought that peace agreements between Israel and Arab states would be strengthened in the next three years. The gap between assessments of the likelihood of war and peace was the highest ever measured.

Similarly, trust and optimism declined dramatically. Thirty-two percent, compared with 44% in 2001, thought it possible to reach a peace agreement with the Palestinians. Only 37% of respondents thought that most Palestinians wanted peace, down from 46% in 2001, 52% in 2000, and 64% in 1999.

Approval of the establishment of a Palestinian state in the West Bank

Talk of moderation and conciliation among Israelis was replaced by the perceived threat of war and violence.

and Gaza in the framework of a peace agreement dropped by eight percentage points, to 49% in 2002 from 57% in 2001. Nonetheless, this was still much higher than during the first intifada; in 1987 it was 21% and in 1993, 35%.

At the time of the 2002 survey, most of the Israeli Jewish public felt the Palestinians bore all or some of the responsibility for the continued conflict. Almost half (49%) identified the Palestinians as being solely (14%) or mostly (35%) responsible for the continuation of the conflict, while only 5% thought Israel solely or mostly responsible. Forty-three percent thought that the responsibility

was shared. This last number probably includes most of that segment of Israeli Jews who support a unilateral withdrawal from the territories and from the settlements, and those who are sympathetic to the political claims of the Palestinians. This group may be the nucleus for future movements of peace and reconciliation.

The assessment of the condition of the country reached a new low point among the annual surveys. Only four percent of the sample reported that the condition of the country was good or very good, while 16% said it was fair, 34% not good, and 46% bad.

A majority (51%) thought that the population was less willing than before to make necessary sacrifices (phrased in the form of more taxes, longer army service) to ensure the country's security, compared with 21% who said the population was more willing, and 29% who perceived no change from the past. While the 2002 numbers indicate a sense of fatigue on the part of the population, they were even bleaker in the 2001 survey. There the parallel percentages were 64, 14, and 22, respectively.

The turn to less conciliatory positions was evident regarding almost every question asked. For example, 53% of the sample supported a peace policy based on territorial compromise ("land for peace") in 1997, as did 47% in the 1999 survey; in the 2002 survey that percentage had dropped to 37%. In 2002, half the sample opposed a land for peace policy, and another 13% took an intermediate position.

Respondents were asked if the peace process should be suspended, even if doing so might lead to war. Twenty-seven percent answered affirmatively in 2002, compared with 20% in 1999 and 13% in 1997. Fifty-four percent disagreed in 2002, and 19% took an intermediate position.

Forty-five percent believed that the Arab-Israeli conflict could be solved by military means, compared with 36%, who thought it could not; 19% took a middle position. Support for stronger military action, however, was higher: 54% supported 'unleashing' the army, 29% opposed, and 17% were in the middle.

Despite the claims by Palestinian leaders that Palestinian goals are limited, Israeli public opinion emerged suspicious of the aspirations of the Arabs, if not outright incredulous. The 2002 responses are reminiscent of those from the late 1980s when the question as to what the Arabs hoped for was first asked in these surveys (see Figure 1). The bottom band, which charts the percentage of respondents who believed that the Arabs aspired to conquer the country and kill a large portion of its Jewish population, represents the most variation over the years. In 2002, 42% of the respondents thought that the Arabs wanted to kill much of the Jewish population of Israel, and an additional 26% believed their goal was to conquer the State of Israel, together totaling 68%. By contrast, in 1999 a total of 47% gave those two answers. The two other possible views were that Arabs

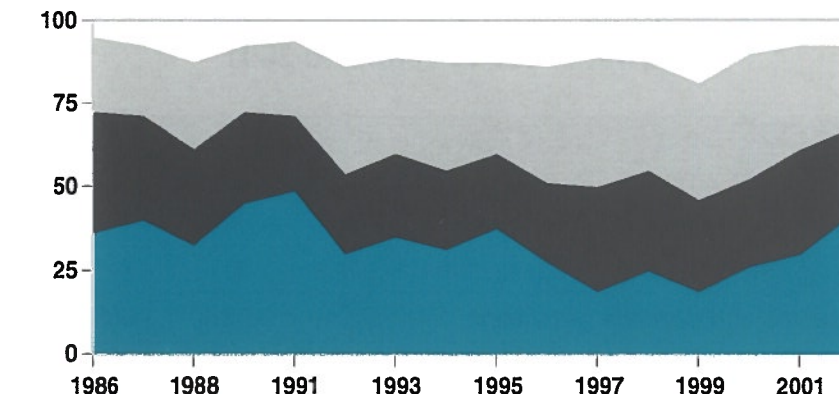


Figure 1. Question: What do you think are the Arabs' ultimate aspirations regarding Israel?

- To regain some of territories captured by Israel in the 1967 War
- ▒ To regain all of the territories captured by Israel in the 1967 War
- To conquer the State of Israel
- To conquer the State of Israel and destroy a large part of its Jewish population

aspired to regain all the territories lost in 1967 (25% in 2002) or regain only some of those territories (7% in 2002).

Questions were also posed concerning the goals of the two leaders, Yasir Arafat and Ariel Sharon. Half the respondents thought that Arafat was out to destroy Israel, with a quarter identifying his goal as forcing Israel to abandon the settlements.

There was much less agreement regarding Sharon's aspirations. About a quarter of those sampled thought he wanted to achieve a peace agreement with the Palestinians. Another quarter said that he wanted an interim agreement but no Palestinian state, and another quarter said that he was prepared to agree to a limited Palestinian state.

Sixty-six percent said that their opinion of Arafat had dropped as a

result of the intifada, with only one percent reporting an improved opinion of him, and 33% reporting no change. Regarding Sharon, 20% expressed a more negative evaluation since he took office, 19% a more positive one, and 62% reported no change.

People and Territories: Settlements, Transfer, Separation

The demographic facts that provide the background to the intifada are that three million Arabs live in the territories, Arabs comprise some 20% of Israel's citizenry, and that a quarter of a million Jews live in settlements in the territories captured by Israel in 1967. Both Israelis and Palestinians understand the importance of settlement patterns in determining future borders. That is why right-

Table 1. Support for Various Israeli Measures until the Renewal of Talks, 2002 and 2001

Until the renewal of talks with the Palestinians about a final settlement of the conflict, Israel should:	2002 support	2001 support
Eliminate (i.e., kill) those active in terror	90%	89%
Use tanks and fighter aircraft against the Palestinians	80%	71%
Use closures and economic sanctions	73%	68%
Invade areas under full Palestinian control ('A' areas)	72%	57%
Sign an interim agreement for the next few years	48%	50%
Unilaterally withdraw from settlements in Gaza to make defending the border easier	47%	Not asked
Agree to station an international force between Israel and the Palestinians	46%	48%
Unilaterally withdraw from settlements to make defending the border easier	38%	33%
Relinquish territories as part of the third withdrawal	25%	33%

wing Jewish groups put such a high premium on settling, why left-wing Jewish groups oppose settlement, and why most Palestinians see the settlements as a manifestation of occupation and colonialism.

Attitudes in 2002 were equivalent to or slightly more militant than those recorded in the 2001 survey regarding Israel's policies until the renewal of final settlement talks with the Palestinians (see Table 1).

Support for invading 'A' areas (i.e., the territories under full Palestinian security control), increased by 15 percentage points. Concurrently, there was a jump of five percentage points in favor of unilaterally withdrawing from settlements to make defending the border easier. It is likely that the increased support for unilateral withdrawal stemmed from

tactical considerations (i.e., a desire to protect Jewish lives in the most effective way), rather than a rush to establish a Palestinian state. Support for the proposal to relinquish territories as part of the third withdrawal decreased by eight percentage points.

In general, support for separation from the Palestinians was high, but that support diminished considerably when the extent of the anticipated withdrawal was spelled out. Thus, the unilateral establishment of separation zones that did not require withdrawal of the Israel Defense Forces and the dismantling of settlements won the support of 81% of respondents in 2002. In contrast, less than half (48%) supported a separation plan that required the

removal of settlements, and only 38% agreed to a plan that called for Israel to withdraw from 80% of the West Bank and retain 20% of the territory for future permanent status negotiations. In the 2001 survey, where the questions were posed in a slightly different manner, 74% supported separation between Israelis and Palestinians. In both 2001 and 2002, 62% thought that such separation was a feasible idea.

Jewish settlement in the West Bank and Gaza is a major focus of the security dilemma; while many Jews see settlement as part of their return to their homeland, many Arabs see settlement as an expression of occupation. Israeli Jewish public opinion regarding the settlements is split.

In 2002, 50% agreed to abandon all but the large settlement blocs as part of a permanent status agreement, as compared with 55% in 2001. A third of the sample rejected the notion of removing any settlements. Fifty-seven percent disagreed with the assertion that settlements are an obstacle to peace.

Evaluating the repertoire of solutions, some Jews supported distancing themselves from the Palestinians through separation of the two peoples, and some by removing (i.e., transferring) Arabs from the territories. The notion of transfer of Arabs, prominent in the 1980s and before the Oslo accords, resurfaced in the political debate in 2002. In the 2002 survey, 46% supported the transfer of Palestinians who lived in

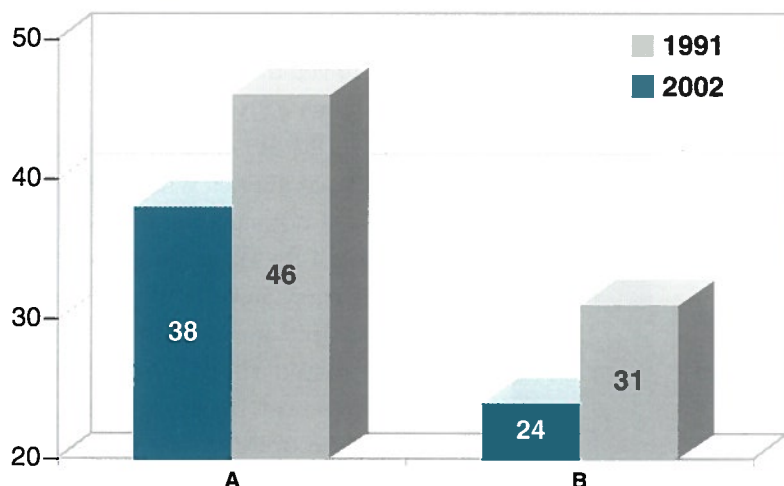


Figure 2. Support for Transfer of Arabs, 1991 vs. 2002

Key: A: Supports Transfer of Arabs from the 1967 Territories
B: Supports Transfer of Arab-Israelis

the territories, and 31% favored the transfer of Arab-Israelis. These numbers were startling, but the pattern was not a new one. In the 1991 survey, the parallel numbers were 38% and 24%, respectively (see Figure 2).

The possible permutations of the two factors (transfer and separation) generate four substantial groups, as can be seen in Figure 4. A sizeable portion (some 40%) of those who supported separation favored transfer. Two groups of 26% each opposed transfer, with one group supporting and the other opposing separation. Twenty-nine percent supported separation but not transfer, and 19% supported *both* separation and transfer. The polarized nature of Israeli opinion was clearly demonstrated. The "separation and no transfer" group likely includes many who would support a return to the 1967 borders, while the "no separation and transfer" group

contains many who think in terms of retaining Jewish sovereignty over the entire historical land of Israel. Neither of these groups commands a majority for their political visions, making the groups in the middle crucial for governing. At least two sets of conflicting values are at play here: one regarding the land of Israel with its perceived strategic, historical, religious, and emotional importance, and the other a concern for the collective and individual rights of

Arabs who live in the land.

The rates of agreement for ceding territories to the Palestinians were generally lower than in 2001, but not much below previous patterns (see Table 2). The number of those agreeing to return Western Samaria (31%) was lower than in 2001, and the percentage of those willing to cede the Jordan Valley (19%) was similar to rates of the mid-1990s, although slightly higher than in the previous year.

Support for ceding the Arab neighborhoods of Jerusalem in the framework of a peace agreement was 40%. The corresponding number in 2001 was 51%, after the abortive Clinton-Barak initiative.

The issue of Jerusalem was presented in an additional context as well. As in 2001, the 2002 survey included a series of questions concerning the bridging proposals reportedly put forward by the Clinton administration before leaving office in early 2001. These proposals for a peace agreement with the Palestinians required considerable Israeli concessions. When asked about the entire proposal, 68% of the sample

Table 2. Support for the Ceding of Various Territories, 1994-2002

	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002
Western Samaria	30%	30%	38%	44%	39%	41%	51%	39%	31%
Gush Etzion	14%	18%	20%	26%	26%	32%	33%	31%	29%
Jordan Valley	18%	19%	20%	20%	23%	23%	32%	18%	19%
East Jerusalem	10%	9%	12%	20%	17%	21%	24%	51% ^a	40% ^a

^a In 2001 and 2002, "Arab neighborhoods of Jerusalem"

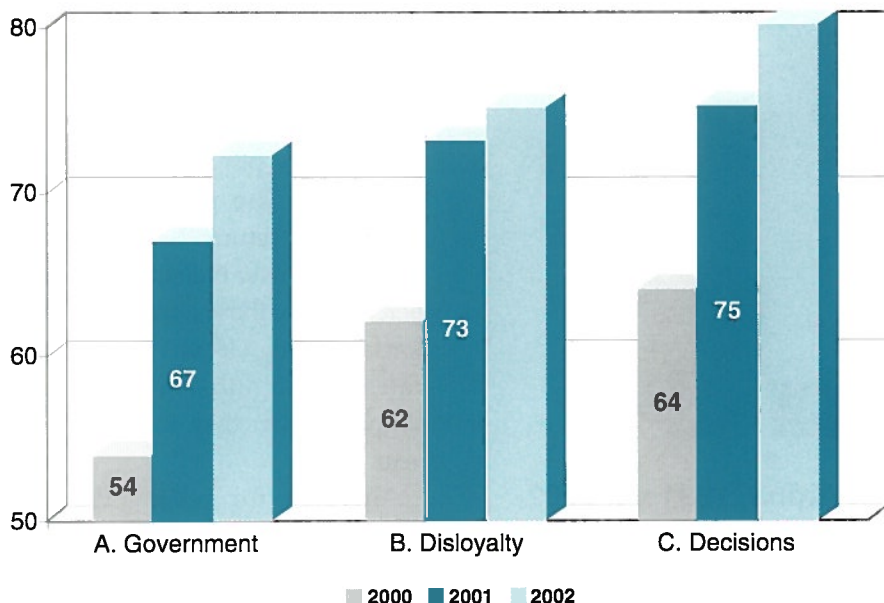


Figure 3. Attitudes Regarding Arab-Israelis, 2000-2002

- A. Opposes including Arab parties in government coalitions
- B. Does not believe Arab-Israelis are loyal to Israel
- C. Opposes having Arab-Israelis participate in crucial national decisions, such as determining the future borders of the country

rejected it in 2002, compared to 60% in the 2001 survey. A smaller fraction of the samples supported the proposals in 2002 than in 2001, when presented with it on a point-by-point basis (see Table 3).

In general, public opinion became less conciliatory at the beginning of 2001 after the Palestinians rejected the overtures made by US President Bill Clinton and Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak. When formed, the Sharon national unity government was buttressed by two very different emotions: relief within the Israeli right that the Barak-Clinton offer had been rejected, and disillusionment among the Israeli left, resulting from the

rejection of what many of them saw as a serious and substantial offer.

Implications

By their own indications, Israelis had become much more militant since the intifada began. Forty-one percent said they were prepared to make fewer concessions to the Palestinians than they were before the intifada, compared with 10% who said their opinions had become more conciliatory. Over the years of the first intifada, from 1987 to 1993, 20% noted that they had become more militant, and 20% more conciliatory. The rest claimed no change.

Regarding the ongoing

Palestinian-Israeli violence: 75% believed that it could be controlled by military activity, with 23% saying that it could be stopped altogether, and 52% saying that while military action could not stop the intifada, it could curtail it. Fourteen percent thought military action would make the conflict more intense, and 10% reported that it would make no difference. These numbers regarding public opinion are very similar to those generated during the first intifada, between 1987 and 1993.

The sample was opposed to recognizing a Palestinian state in the event of a unilateral declaration of independence. When asked how Israel should respond in the event of such a declaration, the responses were as follows:

Recognize the new state, and negotiate with it	23%
Recognize it, but annex areas 'B' and 'C'	16%
Neither recognize it nor negotiate with it	39%
Do not recognize it, and invade the new state	22%

Israelis had also lost confidence in PA Chairman Arafat personally. Sixty-five percent favored delaying talks until Arafat was out of power, and 75% sided with expelling Arafat from the territories and not allowing him to return.

The sour mood also had domestic implications, specifically regarding attitudes toward Israel's Arab citizens.

In the 2002 survey, 72% opposed the inclusion of Arab parties in the governing coalition, compared with 67% in 2001 and 54% in the 2000 survey (see Figure 3). More respondents than in the past said that Arab-Israelis were disloyal to the state. Eighty percent opposed allowing Arab-Israelis to participate in decisions on vital matters related to determining the state's boundaries, compared with 75% in 2001 and 65% in the survey of 2000.

When asked if, regarding Arab-Israelis, Israel should emphasize law enforcement over achieving equality

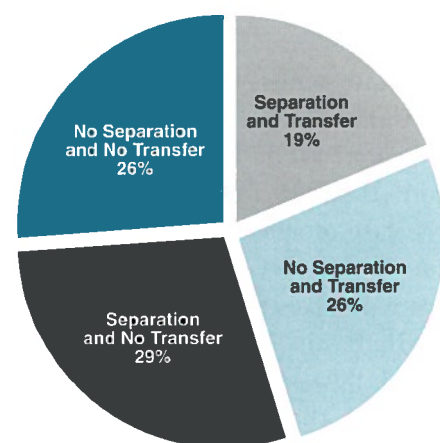


Figure 4. Support for Unilateral Separation and Transfer

Table 3. Support for Details of the Clinton Plan, 2002 and 2001

Do you support or oppose each of the following concessions to the Palestinians as part of a peace agreement?	2002 support	2001 support
Establishment of a Palestinian state on 95% of the West Bank and Gaza, with Israel retaining clusters of settlements	40%	43%
Transferring Arab neighborhoods in Jerusalem to the Palestinians	39%	41%
Exchanging territories	38%	44%
Designating the Temple Mount to be held by the Palestinians; the Western Wall to be retained by Israel	31%	33%
Israel would give up control of the Jordan Valley in a number of years	16%	18%
A limited number of Palestinian refugees would return to Israel	14%	22%

with the country's Jews, 58% answered affirmatively, choosing the former as a priority. Only 10% thought that Israel was solely (2%) or mostly (8%) responsible for the current situation of Arab-Israelis, while 43% thought that the Arabs were solely (10%) or mostly (33%) responsible, and 47% thought that the responsibility was shared.

Faced by violence and terror, Israeli public opinion supported right-wing positions more than they had in the past. Non-conciliatory positions extended to Arab-Israelis as well. The further movement to the right underscores the reality that this was perceived as a time of struggle, and not of bargaining.