

Asher Arian

Israeli Public Opinion on National Security 2003

The Jaffee Center for Strategic Studies

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Israeli Public Opinion on National Security 2003

Memorandum No. 67

October 2003



Jaffee Center for Strategic Studies

TEL AVIV UNIVERSITY

אשר אריאן

דעת קהל בישראל

בנושאי ביטחון לאומי 2003

English Editor: Judith Rosen
Graphic Design: Michal Semo
Production: Kedem Printing Ltd., Tel Aviv

Jaffee Center for Strategic Studies

Tel Aviv University
Ramat Aviv
Tel Aviv 69978
Israel

Tel. +972-3-640-9926
Fax. +972-3-642-2404

E-mail: jcss2@post.tau.ac.il
<http://www.tau.ac.il/jcss/>

ISBN: 965-459-056-5
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Jaffee Center for Strategic Studies
Tel Aviv University

About the National Security and Public Opinion Project

Launched in 1984, the National Security and Public Opinion Project monitors Israeli public opinion on issues related to national security. Surveys undertaken and cited in this report were comprised of representative samples of the adult Jewish population of Israel. The margin of error of the 2003 survey is ± 3.1 percent.

The survey presented here was conducted between April 27 and May 23, 2003. In the weeks preceding the survey, the US and Britain waged a war to topple the regime of Saddam Hussein. Also during that period, the al-Aqsa intifada (the popular uprising of the Palestinians against Israel) was in its thirty-second month. Terror actions continued to threaten Israelis.

The dates of the project's surveys were: (1) June 1985; (2) January 1986; (3) December 9, 1987-January 4, 1988; (4) October 2-30, 1988; (5) March 5-October 27, 1990; (6) March 16-31, 1991; (7) June 1-21, 1992; (8) January 1-15, 1993; (9) January 11-February 9, 1994; (10) January 4-February 7, 1995; (11) February 1996; (12) March 1-31, 1997; (13) January 26-March 9, 1998; (14) January 25-March 7, 1999; (15) January 24-February 26, 2000; (16) April 12-May 11, 2001; (17) January 30-February 27, 2002; and (18) April 27-May 23, 2003.

Sample sizes were 1,171 in 1985; 1,172 in 1986; 1,116 in 1987; 873 in 1988; 1,251 in 1990; 1,131 in 1991; 1,192 in 1992; 1,139 in 1993; 1,239 in 1994; 1,220 in 1995; 1,201 in 1996; 1,126 in 1997; 1,207 in 1998; 1,203 in 1999; 1,201 in 2000; 1,216 in 2001; 1,264 in 2002; and 1,103 in 2003.

All surveys were prepared, conducted, and analyzed by the author; fieldwork through 1995 was done by the Dahaf Research Institute, in 1996 by Modi'in Ezrachi, between 1997 and 2002 by the Almidan/Mahshov Research Institute, and in 2003 by the B. I. and Lucille Cohen Institute of Public Opinion Research.

Asher Arian, Project Director, is Professor of Political Science at the University of Haifa, and Distinguished Professor at the Graduate School of the City University of New York.

Contents

| | |
|---|----|
| Executive Summary | 9 |
| I National Security Issues 2003 | 11 |
| II The Mood | 19 |
| III Changed Perceptions and Expectations | 23 |
| IV Policy Implications | 29 |
| V The Israel Defense Forces..... | 37 |

Executive Summary

Israelis in 2003 were more optimistic regarding prospects for peace and supportive of the measures required to move the peace process forward compared to the respondents of the 2002 survey. For example, 59% of respondents in 2003 supported the establishment of a Palestinian state in the West Bank and Gaza in the framework of a peace agreement, up from 49% in 2002. The number of those who thought that a Palestinian state would be established in the next five years increased to 61% in 2003, from 54% in 2002 and 60% in 2001.

These are among the primary findings to emerge from the 2003 annual survey of the National Security and Public Opinion Project of the Jaffee Center for Strategic Studies. The survey was conducted between April 27 and May 23 through face to face interviews with 1,103 individuals, a representative sample of Israel's adult Jewish population.

Other issues charted a similar rise in support for conciliatory measures. Those who agreed to abandon all but the large settlement blocs increased from 50% in 2002 to 59% in 2003. The number of those supporting the idea of separation from the Palestinians by withdrawing unilaterally even if that meant abandoning settlements increased from 48% in 2002 to 56% in 2003. The percentage of those supporting the concession of Arab neighborhoods of Jerusalem in the framework of a peace agreement increased from 40% in 2002 to 43% in 2003.

Also significant is the heightened sense of security in 2003, far surpassing the low points recorded in the 2002 survey. For example, in 2003, 34% of respondents thought the chances were high or very high that war would break out in the next three years. This represents more than a 50% reduction from the 79% of 2002. In 2003, 43% predicted that peace would be strengthened between Israel and its neighbors in the next three years, a dramatic increase of more than 100% from the 21% of 2002.

An indication of the public's changed inclinations on security issues corresponds to its responses concerning the defense budget: 23% wanted the defense budget expanded, which represents a drop of 24 percentage points from the 2002 survey of

those wanting to expand the budget. Furthermore, in past surveys the group that favored increasing the budget has been between three to six times larger than the group that wanted it reduced. In 2002, the size of the group that wanted the budget increased was almost ten times bigger than those who wanted it decreased. In 2003, however, the size of the two groups was almost even.

Even in face of the ongoing violent conflict with the Palestinians, 83% of those questioned expressed worry that they or a member of their family would become victim of a terrorist attack, a drop from the 92% recorded in 2002, although still far higher than the low point of 58% recorded in 1999. Moreover, the percentage of respondents who thought that most Palestinians want peace rose to 47% in 2003 from 37% in 2002 and 46% in 2001. Fifty-four percent in 2003 thought it impossible to reach a peace agreement with the Palestinians, compared with 68% in 2002 and 56% in 2001. Yet despite this moderation of opinion, disillusionment with the peace process remained deep. Support for the Oslo process dropped to 31% in 2003 from 35% in 2002 and from 58% the year before.

In 2003, 38% of those questioned stated that the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) had become stronger or much stronger in the last five years, 25% thought the army had essentially maintained its level of strength, and 37% said that the IDF had become weaker or much weaker. The respective numbers for 2002 were strikingly less favorable, with 11% of respondents stating the IDF had become stronger, 34% the same, and 55% weaker.

Against the backdrop of the government's decision in June 2003 to dismantle illegal outposts, it is interesting to note that 73% of the respondents answered that a soldier may not refuse an order to evacuate settlers, and 27% said that such an order could be disobeyed. To the question of whether a soldier might refuse to serve in the territories, 75% answered that a soldier cannot legitimately refuse, and 25% affirmed the soldier's right to refuse the order. Two thirds of the sample answered that a soldier must obey orders in both situations, while 20% said that they supported the right of the soldier not to obey the command in either of the situations.

A slight majority - 52% - thought that the end of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict would not be reached through the intervention of a third party and that the parties themselves must work out the details. Sixty-eight percent of the respondents opposed the idea of the United States imposing a solution on the parties (a drop from 80% in 2002). This position correlates with the view, expressed by only 40% of Israeli Jews, that the roadmap would end the Arab-Israeli conflict. Notwithstanding these positions, two-thirds thought that American security guarantees could be relied upon.

National Security Issues 2003

The annual National Security and Public Opinion survey was conducted between April 27 and May 23, 2003 in face to face interviews with 1,103 individuals, a representative sample of Israel's adult Jewish population. Among the noteworthy results of the survey was the increased optimism regarding prospects for peace and greater support for conciliatory measures that might advance the peace process.

The results of the survey should be seen against the political background of the first months of 2003. Among the principal events of this period was the swift, dramatic military victory by the United States-led coalition forces in the war to depose Saddam Hussein. Unlike in the 1991 Gulf War against Iraq, Israel was not the target of any Scud attacks and retained its status of "onlooker" to the war. Perhaps even more important for Israel, though, was that the war against Iraq loomed as part of a larger Middle East effort by the United States and other Western countries to resolve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

The Quartet roadmap was presented to Israel and the Palestinians on April 30, but its general outline was well known much before. In face of the new American and European efforts to jumpstart the Israeli-Palestinian peace process, long frozen in light of the protracted violent Palestinian uprising known as the al-Aqsa intifada, Israel was quite cognizant of the intensifying international pressures it would confront. Specifically, it would be called upon to withdraw entirely from the Palestinian cities it had re-occupied during the violence, and then move to dismantle settlements and withdraw from the occupied territories. This international pressure would enhance mounting strong domestic pressure to withdraw from the territories, pressure that grew with increased support for a unilateral withdrawal and a "fence" to divide Israel from Palestinian areas and disengage itself from the Palestinian population.

Added to this was the increasingly urgent demographic reality facing Israel. As of 2003, one quarter of a million Jews lived alongside three million Palestinians in the territories, while Arabs totaled some 20% of Israel's citizenry. Israelis grew more

conscious of the threat to the Jewish and democratic nature of their state, a threat that promised to become more acute with the soaring Arab birthrate on both sides of the Green Line. Advocates as well as opponents of withdrawal from the territories seemed sensitive to the fact that the fate of Jewish settlement in the territories might be approaching a decisive moment.

These are some of the leading events and issues that dominated the popular mindset in early 2003 and influenced public thoughts on policy, civic-military relations, domestic demographic issues, and other questions that would chart Israel's course in the coming years.

A. Neighboring Peoples and Countries

Public opinion took a new turn in 2003 towards positions of greater concession and compromise. Following a decline in support for conciliatory positions in 2002 from the views expressed in 2001, increased support for such policies was charted by the 2003 survey. For example, in 2003, 59% of those questioned favored the establishment of a Palestinian state in the West Bank and Gaza in the framework of a peace agreement, up from 49% in 2002. Support in recent years for a Palestinian state has consistently been higher than in the years of the first intifada – in 1987, it was 21% and in 1993, 35% – yet the 2003 results reflect a substantive rise in support for the idea. Sixty-one percent thought it likely that a Palestinian state would be established in the next five years, an increase from 54% in 2002 and 60% in 2001 (figure 1).

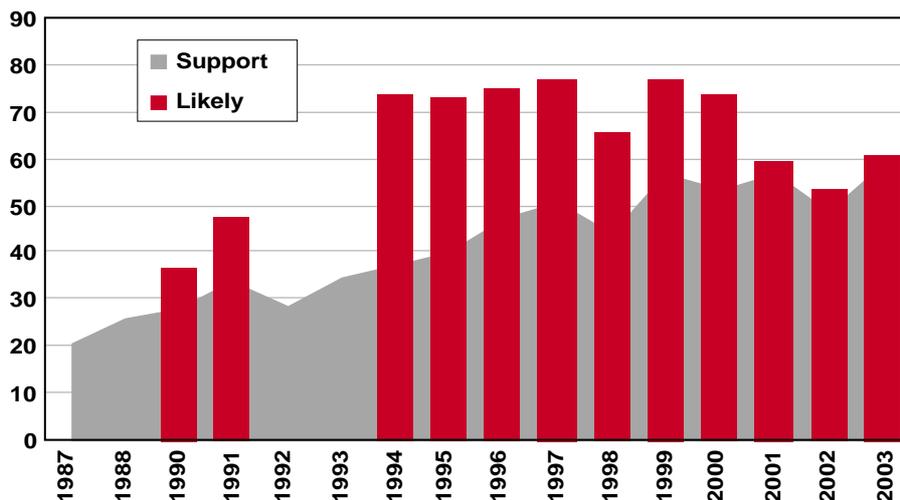


Figure 1. A Palestinian State, 1987–2003

The percentage of respondents who thought that most Palestinians want peace rose to 47% in 2003 from 37% in 2002 and 46% in 2001, although the idea was still less common than in previous years, 52% in 2000 and 64% in 1999. Fifty-four percent in 2003 thought it impossible to reach a peace agreement with the Palestinians, compared with 68% in 2002 and 56% in 2001. Yet despite this moderation of opinion, disillusionment with the peace process remained deep. Support for the Oslo process dropped to 31% in 2003 from 35% in 2002 and from 58% the year before. Moreover, only 45% recalled that they supported the Oslo accords when they were first signed, although various polls at the time indicated support among up to two-thirds of the population.

Most of the Israeli Jewish public attributed responsibility for the ongoing Israeli-Palestinian conflict to the Palestinians. A majority (56%) of the sample identified the Palestinians as being solely (17%) or mostly (39%) responsible for the continuation of the conflict, while only 7% thought Israel solely or mostly responsible, and 37% thought the responsibility was shared.

A slight majority (52%) thought that the end of the conflict would not be reached through the intervention of a third party and that the parties themselves must work out the details. Sixty-eight percent of the respondents opposed the idea of the United States imposing a solution on the parties (versus 80% in 2002). This may explain why only 40% of Israeli Jews felt that the roadmap would lead to an end of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Notwithstanding these positions, two-thirds thought that American security guarantees could be relied upon.

Opposition to returning all of the Golan Heights to Syria stood at a high 50%, similar to the percentage of the 1995 survey. In 1996 and 1997, the rate was 35% and 31%, respectively. With regard to southern Lebanon, public opinion split almost evenly on the security impact of Israel's withdrawal in May 2000. Thirty-eight percent thought Israel's security position was better as a result of the withdrawal, while 31% thought it was worse. The remaining 31% thought that the withdrawal did not have a significant impact on the security situation.

B. Settlements

Jewish settlement in the territories is a major and sensitive focus of the country's security dilemma. Some Jews see settlement as part of their returning to their homeland, while many Arabs see settlement as an expression of occupation. Jewish opinion is split regarding the settlements: 50% of the respondents agreed that

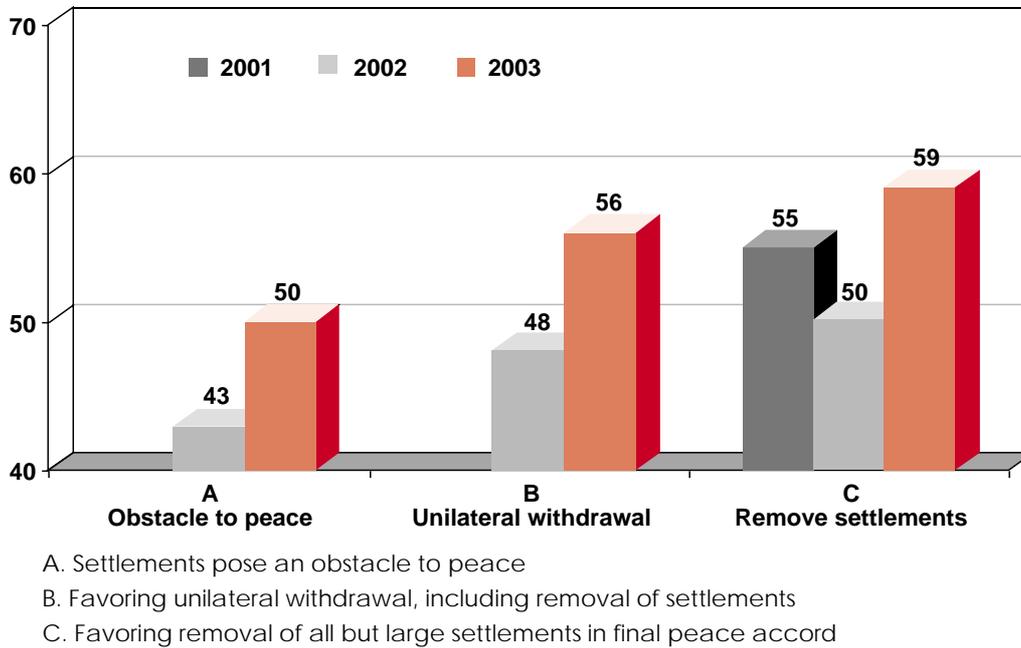


Figure 2. Attitude toward Settlements, 2001–2003

settlements pose an obstacle to peace, compared to 2002, when 43% saw the settlements as an obstacle to peace (figure 2).

In 2003, 59% agreed to abandon all but the large settlement blocs as part of a permanent status agreement, compared with 50% in 2002 and 55% in 2001. Fifty-six percent of those questioned supported a separation plan that required the removal of settlements, compared to 48% in 2002. However, only 42% (against 38% in 2002) agreed to a plan that called for Israel to withdraw from 80% of the West Bank and to retain 20% of the territory for future permanent status negotiations.

The turn to more conciliatory positions was similarly evident regarding almost every question asked. For example, 40% of the sample supported the principle of land for peace in 2003, compared to 37% in 2002. An additional 44% disagreed, and 16% took an intermediate position. In 2002, half the sample disagreed, while 13% were in the middle. The figures of 2003 suggest a swing towards the trend of previous years, when 47% in the 1999 survey and 53% of the sample in 1997 supported the principle of land for peace.

Respondents were asked if the peace process should be suspended even if that might lead to war. Eighteen percent answered affirmatively in 2003, compared to

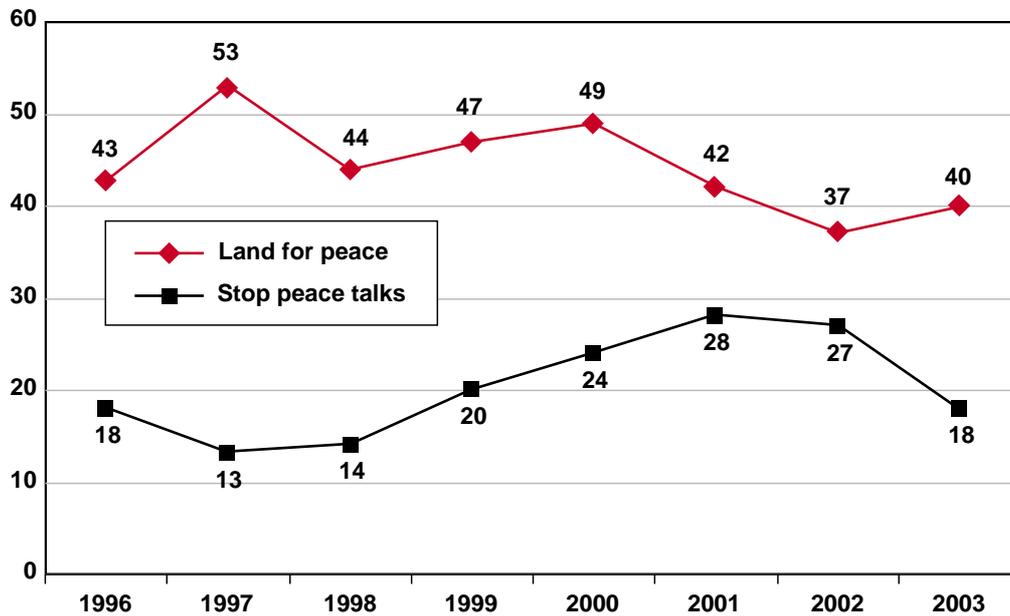


Figure 3. Policy Statements, 1996–2003

27% in 2002, 20% in 1999, and 13% in 1997; 69% disagreed in 2003, and 13% took an intermediate position. In 2002, 54% disagreed and 19% were in the middle (figure 3).

C. The Iraq War and the Nuclear Threat

The “unfinished business” of the Gulf War accompanied George W. Bush’s rise to the United States presidency in January 2001. His father, President George Bush, successfully ousted Iraq from Kuwait in 1991, albeit with Saddam Hussein remaining in power. The Chief of Staff of the US Armed Forces in 1991, Colin Powell, was named Secretary of State in 2001. Israel’s legacy from the Gulf War included the Scud missile attacks it sustained without engaging in any retaliatory action.

In the 2003 survey, conducted immediately after the Iraq War, 75% thought that the country had been prepared for a missile attack, a sharp increase from the 2002 survey, when 58% thought so.

Were Israel to determine that a country in the region had nuclear weapons capability, 47% of those questioned favored removing that capacity by any means available, and 16% favored asking for American protection. Nineteen percent opted for open nuclear deterrence, and 18% for trying to make the Middle East an area free of nuclear weapons by international agreement.

Most of the respondents (72%, up from 62% in 2002) supported Israel's policy of secrecy regarding nuclear weapons. Twenty-one percent were in favor of revealing the existence of such weapons, 5% favored giving them up, and 2% supported performing nuclear experiments.

D. Regional Prognosis

On questions relating to the greater Arab-Israeli conflict, 49% believed that the Arab-Israeli conflict could not be solved by military means, compared to 34% who thought it could (17% took a middle position). The parallel numbers for 2002 indicate the conceptual change that occurred in the public over the latter period of the second intifada: 36%, 45%, and 19%, respectively.

Respondents were asked to choose between a focus on peace talks and increasing military strength as the most effective policy to avoid another war with Arabs: 56% said the former and 44% the latter, confirming the dominant pattern of past surveys whereby support for peace talks is the more frequent choice. Only in the 1995, 2001, and 2002 surveys was strengthening military capacity the response more commonly given (figure 4).

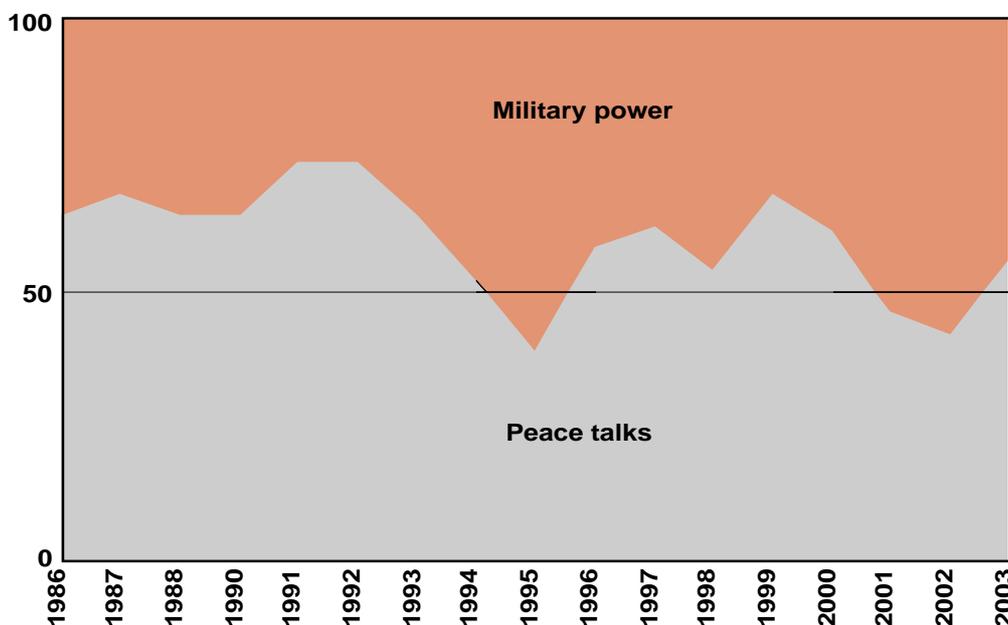


Figure 4. Military Power or Peace Talks, 1986–2003

In a similar vein, talk of moderation and conciliation reemerged in the 2003 survey as important themes, replacing the emphasis in the 2002 survey responses on the threat of war and violence. Thirty-four percent estimated the likelihood of war with an Arab state within the next three years as medium or high, compared with 79% in 2002, 70% in 2001, and 39% in 2000. Estimates of peace prospects also rebounded: 43% thought that peace between Israel and Arab states would be strengthened in the next three years, compared with 21% in 2002, 35% in 2001, and 70% in 2000 (figure 5).

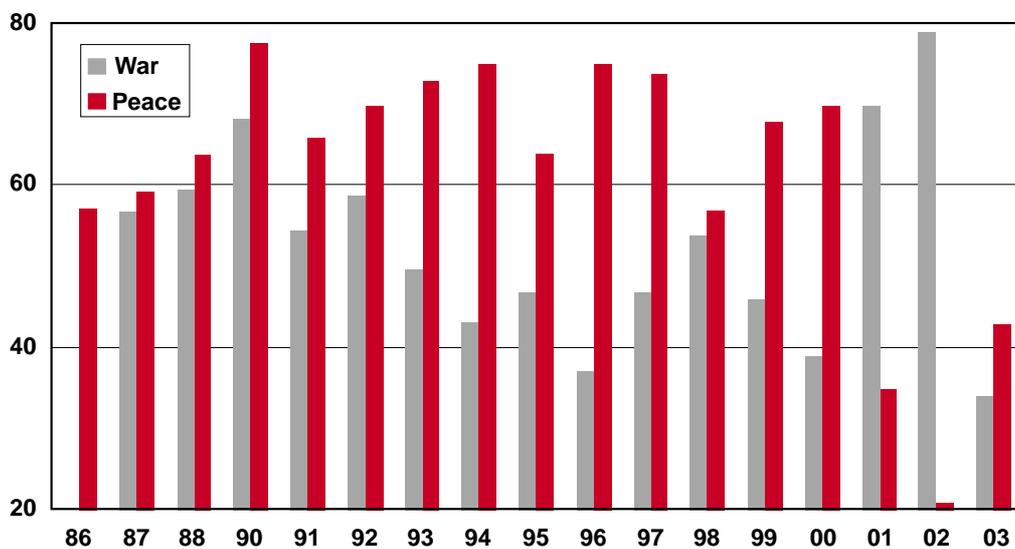


Figure 5. Likelihood of War and Peace in the Coming Three Years, 1986–2003

Thus, the gap between assessments of the prospects for peace and war is much narrower than in many years, with assessments of the likelihood of peace greater than the likelihood of war for the first time since the outbreak of the violence in September 2000 (figure 6).

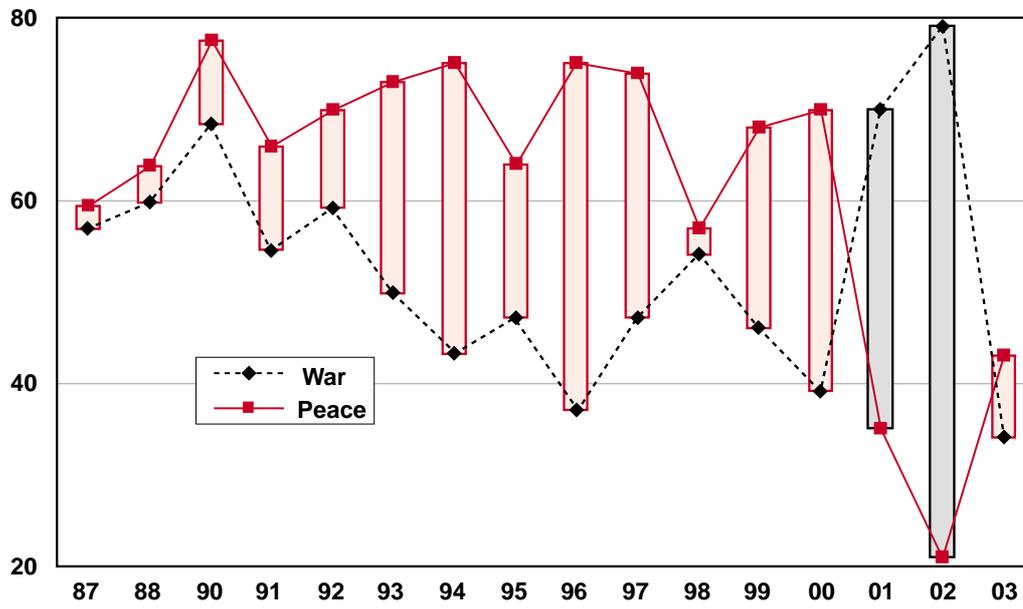


Figure 6. Likelihood of War and Peace Assessments, 1987–2003

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The Mood

As the terror continued and the casualty toll mounted, Israelis in 2003 continued to worry about both their personal security and Israel’s national security, but less comprehensively than in 2002. Eighty-three percent of those questioned expressed worry that they or a member of their family would become victim of a terrorist attack, compared to 92% in 2002, 85% in 2001, and 79% in 2000 (figure 7). A low point of personal fear was recorded in 1999, the year in which the percentage fell to “only” 58%.

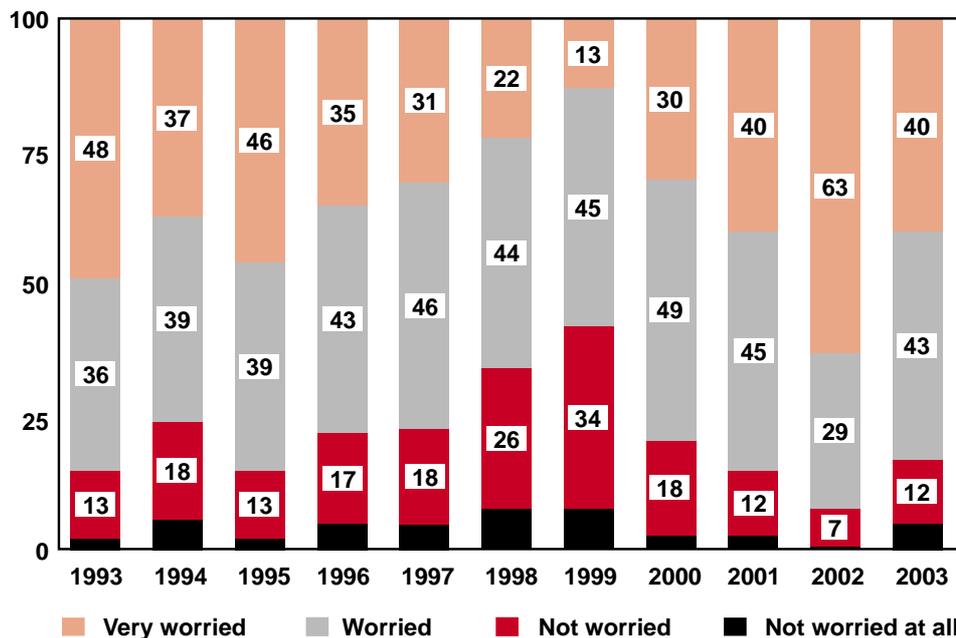


Figure 7. Concern over Personal Safety, 1993–2003*

* In figure 7 and some of the following figures, the percentages for very small values are not displayed because they unnecessarily clutter the graph. The numbers can be calculated by adding the other numbers and subtracting from 100.

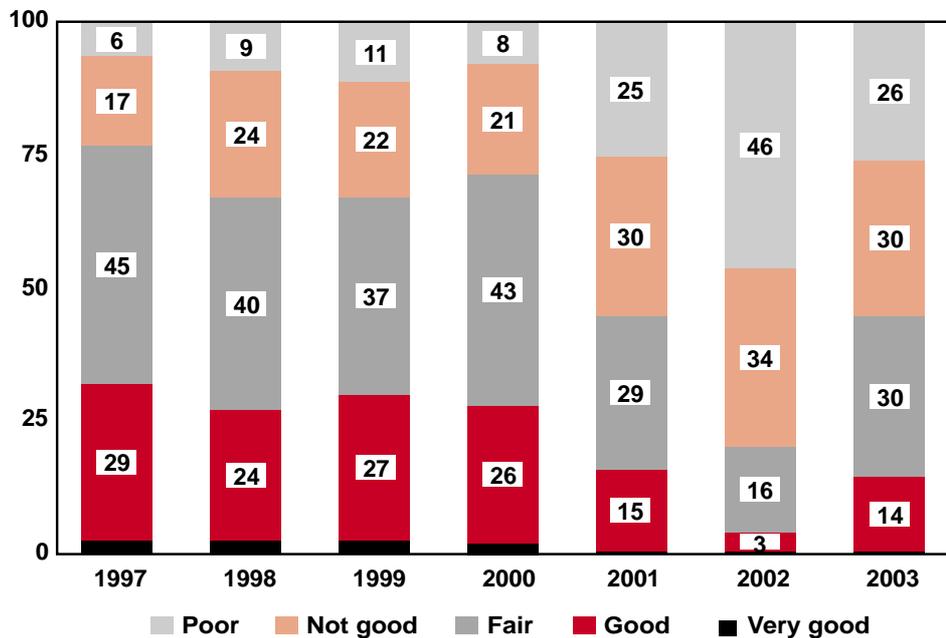


Figure 8. Condition of the Country, 1997–2003

The assessment of the condition of the country improved in 2003 from 2002. Fourteen percent of the sample reported that the condition of the country was good or very good, 30% fair, 30% not good, and 26% poor (figure 8).

Yet while the assessment of the condition of the country improved, the negative evaluation of the government's handling of the problems facing the country persisted. Figure 9 shows that 76% of the respondents thought that the government's performance was not good or poor (78% in 2002), despite the fact that Prime Minister Ariel Sharon and his Likud party had won a commanding victory in the January 2003 elections, and that at the time of the 2002 survey a National Unity government was in power. Sixty-one percent thought that the government was handling the war on terror very well or well.

The public remained skeptical as to the willingness of the population to make sacrifices commensurate with the problems facing the country. Forty-seven percent felt that most people were less willing than in the past to make necessary sacrifices (more taxes, longer army service) to achieve the country's security, compared to 29% who said the population was more willing, and 24% who perceived no change from the past. The 2003 survey numbers suggest that the fatigue noted in the past has persisted and that the resilience of the population is still an open question. Nonetheless,

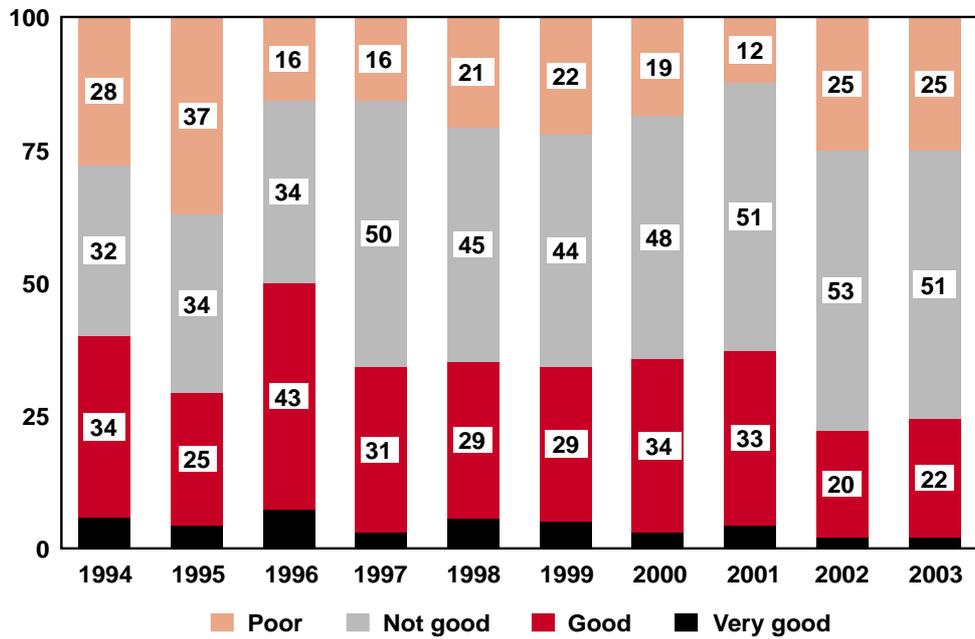


Figure 9. Evaluation of Government Performance, 1994–2003

the respondents were also more upbeat than in previous years (the corresponding numbers in 2002 were 51%, 21%, and 29%, or the even bleaker 2001 survey, 64%, 14%, and 22%, respectively).

An indication of the public’s changed inclinations on security issues corresponds to its responses concerning the defense budget and taxes. Regarding the defense budget, 23% wanted the budget expanded, 19% wanted it cut, and 58% wanted it to remain the same. This was a 24 percentage point decrease in those wanting to expand the budget from the 2002 survey: then, 47% wanted the budget enlarged, 5% wanted it smaller, and 48% thought it should remain as it was. The majority or near majority of respondents in past surveys have consistently thought that the security budget was appropriate. Yet what is particularly noteworthy in the 2003 survey concerns those who have advocated changing the budget. In previous years, the group that favored increasing the budget has been between three to six times larger than the group that wanted it reduced. In 2002, the size of the group that wanted the budget increased was almost 10 times bigger than the group that wanted it decreased. In 2003, however, the size of the two groups was almost even. The end of the Iraqi tension and the reduction in the number of suicide bombings at the time of the survey suggest the reasons for this change.

When asked if they were willing to pay more taxes to increase the defense budget, 30% in 2003 agreed, compared with 36% in 2002 and 33% in 2001. Despite the reduction from previous years, the response continues the trend of increased willingness to increase the budget through higher taxes following the low point recorded in 1999 (figure 10).

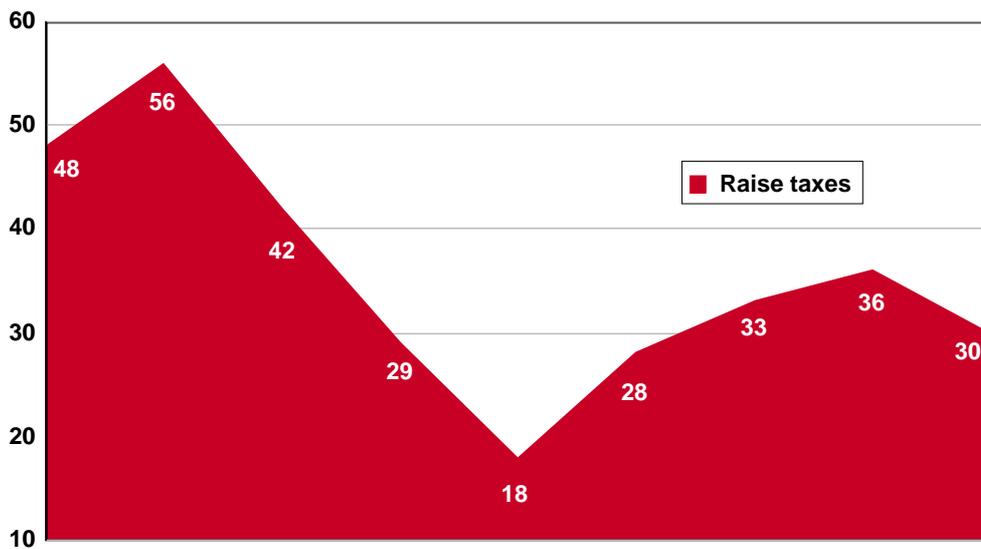


Figure 10. Willingness to Pay More Taxes to Increase Defense Budget, 1986–2003

Changed Perceptions and Expectations

Israeli public opinion perceived the aspirations of the Arabs in a less pessimistic manner than in 2002. Figure 11 demonstrates that the recorded rates for 2003 were reminiscent of those noted in the beginning of the 1990s. The bottom layer represents the most variation; it reports the percentage of respondents in each year's survey whose perception was that the Arabs aspired to conquer the country and to kill a large portion of the Jews in the State of Israel. In 2003, 37% of the respondents thought that the Arabs wanted to destroy much of the Jewish population of Israel, and an additional 23% thought that their goal was to conquer the State of Israel, together totaling 60%. In contrast, in 2002 a total of 68% gave those two answers. The two other possible responses were to regain all the territories lost in 1967 (29% in 2003) and regain some of those territories (11% in 2003).

Questions were posed about the goals of Yassir 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. Thirty-eight percent thought he wanted to achieve an interim agreement that included a limited Palestinian state, a quarter thought he wanted to achieve a peace agreement with the Palestinians, 20% that he wanted an interim agreement but no Palestinian state, 9% to keep the situation as it was, and 8% to topple Arafat and the Palestinian Authority. These figures represent a noticeable increase of those who felt Sharon was genuinely interested in reaching an agreement with the Palestinians. In 2002, about 25% of those sampled thought he was prepared to agree to a limited Palestinian state, another quarter that he wanted to achieve a peace agreement with the Palestinians, and another quarter that he wanted an interim agreement but no Palestinian state. Other responses included that Sharon aspired to maintain the status quo, or to topple Arafat and the Palestinian Authority.

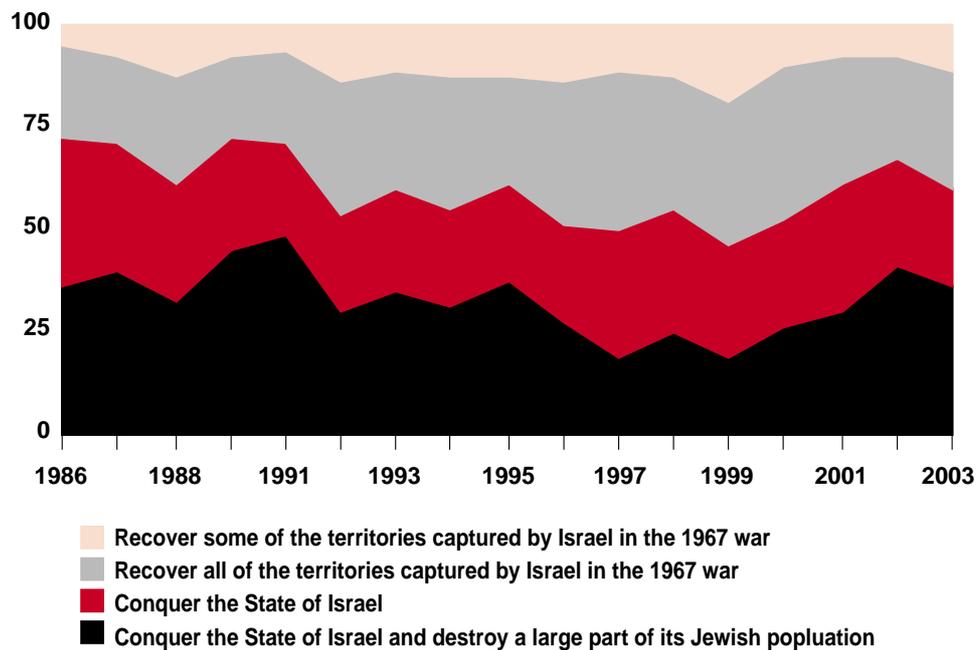


Figure 11. Perception of Arab Aspirations, 1986–2003

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

The swing towards support for more conciliatory measures and away from increased militancy is interesting against the backdrop of a change in expectations that has occurred over the years in the Israeli public's assessment of its security position. This shift is most notable when observing the percentage of those who thought that the Arab-Israeli conflict would end by signing peace agreements with the Palestinians and the Arab states. In 2003, only 35% thought that signing such treaties would mean an end to the conflict compared to 67% in 1999 and 53% in 1994 (figure 12).

This massive shift in public opinion captures the disillusionment many Israelis felt with the peace process of the 1993 Oslo accords. Table 1 presents a demographic breakdown of those who agreed with the statement that signing peace agreements with the Palestinians and the Arab states would signal the end of the Arab-Israeli conflict. Those who affirmed the statement are analyzed for 2003, 1999, and 1994, three surveys that generated very different distributions of responses to the question.

In the 2003 survey, 35% of the respondents overall agreed with the statement; 40% of the males and 31% of the females concurred. Those numbers are shaded and

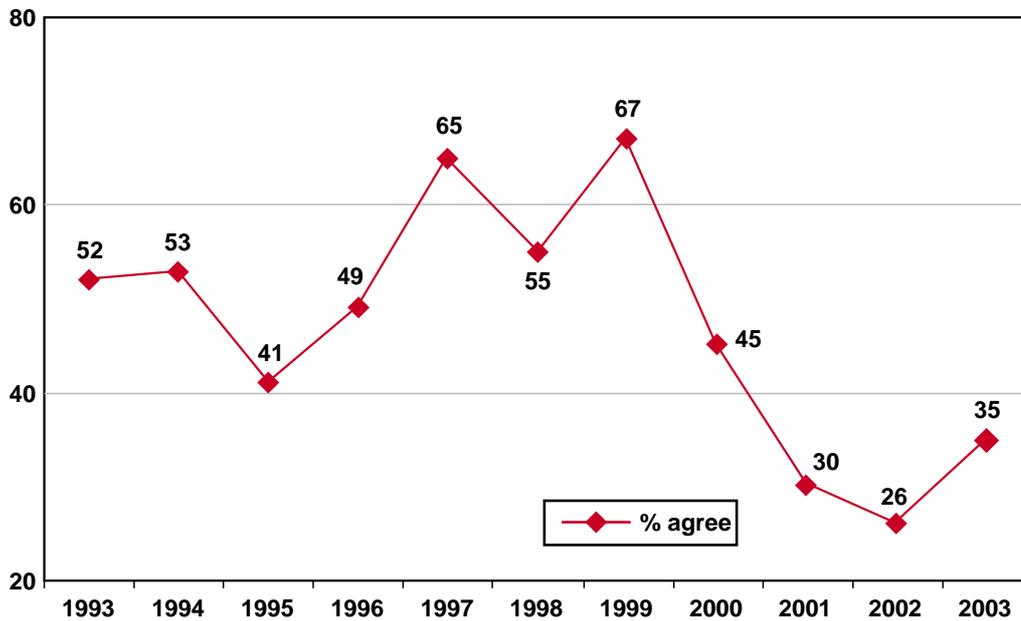


Figure 12. Treaties Translate to an End of Conflict, 1993–2003

presented in bold typeface, to indicate that the distribution is statistically significant.¹ On the other hand, the distribution for age groups was not statistically significant: in 2003, 30% of people under 30 supported the statement, compared to 37% each for middle aged and older respondents. Other variables that generated statistically significant distributions were place of birth, religious observance, and voting activity in Knesset elections.

Using this data, it is possible to consider what changes occurred in public opinion over time and in which groups were changes most pronounced. With regard to gender, in 1994 there was no overall difference in support between male and female respondents. However, in 1999, females were much more likely than males to feel that signed agreements would mean an end to the conflict. Moreover, female opinions changed radically between 1999 and 2003; there was a 39 percentage point difference between the two periods for women compared to a 24 percentage point difference for men.

¹ Based on the chi-square test, a statistical test that checks if observed data distribution differs from an expected distribution.

Table 1. Demographic Breakdown of those Affirming that Treaties Signify End of Conflict, 2003, 1999, and 1994
(Percentage of those who strongly agree and agree)

| | TOTAL | GENDER | | AGE | | | EDUCATION | | |
|------|-------|--------|--------|-------|-------|-----|-----------|------|-----|
| | | Male | Female | 18-29 | 30-59 | 60+ | 0-8 | 9-12 | 13+ |
| 2003 | 35 | 40 | 31 | 30 | 37 | 37 | 34 | 33 | 38 |
| 1999 | 67 | 64 | 70 | 64 | 68 | 70 | 70 | 65 | 70 |
| 1994 | 47 | 49 | 46 | 48 | 47 | 48 | 31 | 42 | 55 |

| | BIRTHPLACE | | | | | |
|------|-------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|--------|--------|
| | self father | Israel Israel | Israel As/Afr | Israel Eur/Am | As/Afr | Eur/Am |
| 2003 | | 32 | 31 | 46 | 32 | 38 |
| 1999 | | 70 | 60 | 75 | 62 | 72 |
| 1994 | | 56 | 37 | 63 | 50 | 40 |

| | ARMY SERVICE IN TERRITORIES | | | RELIGIOUS OBSERVANCE | | | |
|------|-----------------------------|----|-----------------|----------------------|------|------|-----|
| | Yes | No | No army service | None | Some | Most | All |
| 2003 | 40 | 40 | 26 | 44 | 38 | 30 | 13 |
| 1999 | 66 | 70 | 62 | 77 | 72 | 51 | 40 |
| 1994 | (not available) | | | 59 | 50 | 34 | 26 |

| | VOTING ACTIVITY | | | | | | | |
|------|-----------------|-----------|-------|----------------------|-------|------|-------------|---------|
| | Right | Religious | Likud | Shinui 03/ Center 99 | Labor | Left | No decision | No vote |
| 2003 | 21 | 11 | 34 | 39 | 56 | 70 | 41 | 31 |
| 1999 | 26 | 42 | 54 | 72 | 89 | 96 | 69 | 70 |
| 1994 | 23 | 26 | 27 | * | 75 | 77 | 55 | 39 |

* not relevant

Shaded series are statistically significant at $p > .05$ using the X^2 test.

The same methodology also indicates that age and army service did not generate statistically significant distributions in any of the surveys, and that education did so only in 1994. Place of birth, religious observance, and voting activity showed statistically significant distributions in the three surveys.

Those of Asian-African origin were associated with greater reservations about the efficacy of signed treaties and lower levels of support for the statement. Usually those of European and American background were more likely to think official agreements signaled an end to the conflict, with all groups experiencing a change of opinion between 1999 and 2003. The low level of support among the European-American group in 1994 can be explained by the many newly-arrived immigrants from the former Soviet Union. Their cautious militancy lowered the percentage of those agreeing with the statement. Evidently, in later surveys their responses conformed more to patterns that prevailed in the country.

Religious observance proved to be a variable that generated statistically significant responses in each of the three surveys. Secularists were much more likely to agree that treaties signaled an end to the conflict than were those who observed some or all of Jewish religious tradition. Similarly, voter preference was closely associated with the distribution of answers and remained an indicator of assessments of a treaty's ability to translate into an end of the conflict. Those selecting right wing parties and those intending to vote for religious parties were less likely to agree with the statement than were those voting for Labor or left wing parties. Voters for Likud and for Shinui in 2003 (the largest parties in the 2003 government coalition) were in the middle positions.

The data in Table 1 also shows the stability of the Right compared to the volatility of the religious votes. The gap between the Left and Labor grew. Perhaps most important from a political perspective is the narrowing of the gap between voters of Labor and the Likud. The difference between those groups in 1994 was 48 percentage points. This gap narrowed to 35 points in 1999 and to 22 points in 2003. Voters for Likud have become the "average voters" and their views often correspond to "public opinion." Prime Minister Sharon seems to be well aware of this, both following public opinion and at the same time leading it.

IV

Policy Implications

A. Permanent Status Arrangements

Attitudes in 2003 reflected high levels of militancy in fighting terror and at the same time greater willingness to pursue policies that might enhance conciliation than in the 2002 and 2001 surveys. Table 2 charts responses to a question regarding the policies Israel should follow until the renewal of talks with the Palestinians about a final settlement of the conflict.

Table 2. Until the Renewal of Talks, 2001-2003

| Until the renewal of talks with the Palestinians about a final settlement of the conflict, Israel should: | 2003 support | 2002 support | 2001 support |
|--|--------------|--------------|--------------|
| Eliminate (assassinate) those active in terror | 92% | 90% | 89% |
| Destroy homes of families of terrorists | 88% | n. a. | n. a. |
| Use tanks and fighter aircraft against the Palestinians | 79% | 80% | 71% |
| Use closures and economic sanctions | 72% | 73% | 68% |
| Invade Area A | 76% | 72% | 57% |
| Sign an interim agreement for the next few years | 63% | 48% | 50% |
| Unilaterally withdraw from settlements in Gaza to make defending the border easier | 55% | 47% | n. a. |
| Unilaterally withdraw from settlements in the West Bank and Gaza to make defending the border easier | 49% | 38% | 33% |
| Relinquish territories as part of a third withdrawal [an additional withdrawal from the territories as outlined by the Oslo accords] | 34% | 25% | 33% |

n. a. = not asked

The results indicate that support remained very high for eliminating those involved in terror, for destroying homes of terrorist families, and for invading Area A, the territories under Palestinian security control. Concurrently, there was a jump in favor of an interim agreement and of unilaterally withdrawing from settlements in the West Bank and in Gaza to make defending the border easier. It is likely that the increased support for unilateral withdrawal was based on tactical considerations regarding the way to protect Jewish lives best and not a rush to establish a Palestinian state. Support for the proposal to relinquish territories as part of a negotiated withdrawal returned to the 2001 level.

B. Transfer

As in previous years, the survey asked respondents if they thought the Israeli government “should encourage the emigration of Arabs from Israel.” In the 2003 survey, 57% agreed, compared to 53% in 2002 and 50% in 2001. In the early 1990s, however, about two-thirds of respondents supported the statement; support was lower near the end of the decade (figure 13).

A more potentially explosive question asked about transferring or removing Arabs from the territories and from Israel. In the 2003 survey, 46% supported transfer of Palestinians who live in the territories, and 33% favored the transfer of Israeli Arabs. These numbers are almost identical to those observed in 2002 and higher than in 1991 (figure 14).

C. Returning Territories

Table 3 charts the percentages of respondents agreeing to the return of territories to the Palestinians. Support for conceding the Arab neighborhoods of Jerusalem in the framework of a peace agreement was 43%. The corresponding number in 2002 was 40%, and in 2001 (after the abortive Clinton-Barak initiative) it was 51%. The percentages of those agreeing to return western Samaria (41%) returned to the 1999 level, and of those agreeing to give up Gush Etzion (29%) was identical to the previous year, and the percentage of those willing to cede the Jordan Valley (23%) was similar to the percentage rates of the late 1990s.

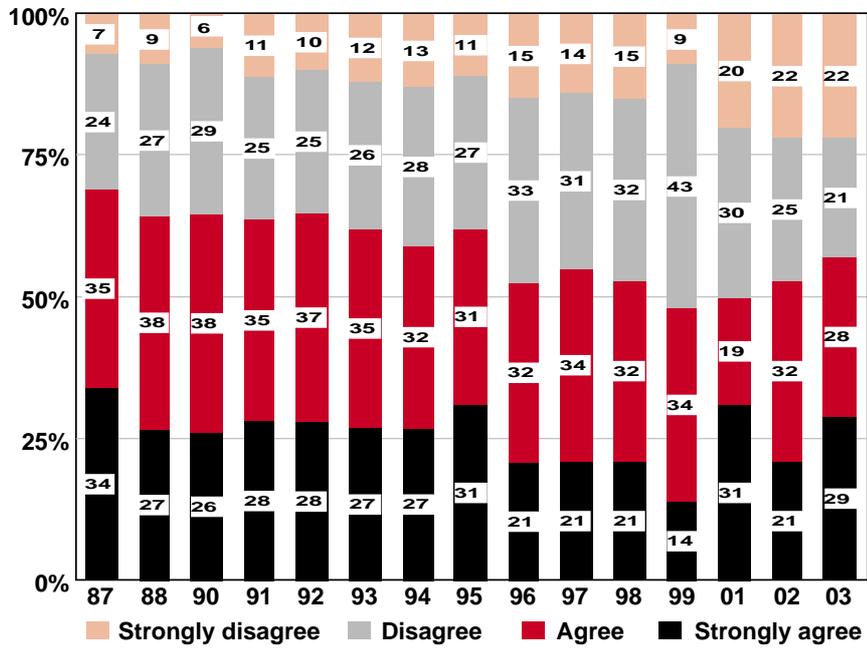


Figure 13. Encourage Emigration of Arabs, 1987–2003

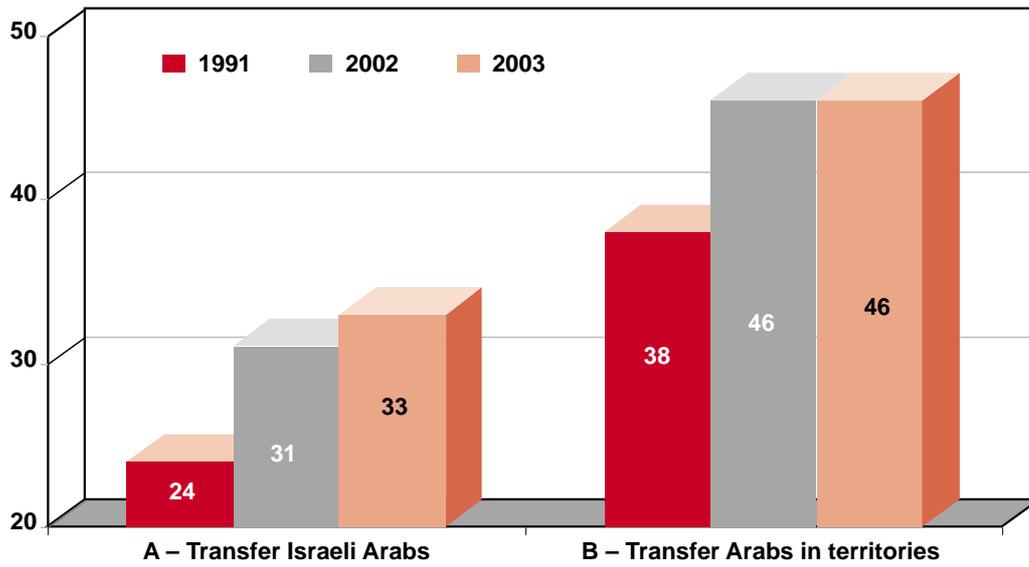


Figure 14. Support for Transfer, 1991, 2002, and 2003

Table 3. Support for Returning Territories

| | 1994 | 1995 | 1996 | 1997 | 1998 | 1999 | 2000 | 2001 | 2002 | 2003 |
|----------------------------------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|
| Arab neighborhoods of Jerusalem* | 10% | 9% | 12% | 20% | 17% | 21% | 24% | 51% | 40% | 43% |
| Western Samaria | 30% | 30% | 38% | 44% | 39% | 41% | 51% | 39% | 31% | 41% |
| Gush Etzion | 14% | 18% | 20% | 26% | 26% | 32% | 33% | 31% | 29% | 29% |
| Jordan Valley | 18% | 19% | 20% | 20% | 23% | 23% | 32% | 18% | 19% | 23% |

*Before 2001, “East Jerusalem”

D. The Clinton Proposals

The question of Jerusalem was posed in a different context as well. As in the 2001 and 2002 surveys, the 2003 survey included a series of questions concerning the bridging proposals put forward by the Clinton administration before both President Clinton and Prime Minister Barak left office in early 2001. These proposals for a peace agreement with the Palestinians demanded considerable Israeli concessions.

When asked about the entire proposal in 2003, 64% of respondents rejected it. Sixty-eight percent of the sample rejected it in 2002, compared to 60% in the 2001 survey. A smaller fraction of the samples supported the proposals in 2002 than in 2003 (excluding one issue) and 2001 when presented with the details (table 4).

E. The Intifada

Israelis continued to indicate that they have become more militant since the intifada began, although the percentage of this group is lower than in recent years. Thirty-four percent of respondents said they were prepared to make fewer concessions to the Palestinians since the beginning of the intifada, compared to 21% who said their opinions had become more conciliatory, and 45% who reported no change. In 2002, 41% said that they were more militant, compared to 10% who said their opinions had become more conciliatory. During the first intifada from 1987 to 1993, 20% claimed becoming more militant, 20% more conciliatory. The rest claimed no change.

Regarding the intifada, 77% of those questioned believed that it could be controlled by military activity, with 22% saying that it could be stopped altogether, and 55%

Table 4. Support for Details of the Clinton Plan, 2001-2003

| Do you support each of the following concessions to the Palestinians as part of a peace agreement? | 2003 | 2002 | 2001 |
|--|------|------|------|
| Establishment of a Palestinian state on 95% of the West Bank and Gaza, with Israel retaining clusters of settlements | 42% | 40% | 43% |
| Exchanging territories | 45% | 38% | 44% |
| Transferring Arab neighborhoods in Jerusalem to the Palestinians | 40% | 39% | 41% |
| Assigning the Temple Mount to Palestinian control, with the Western Wall to be retained by Israel | 29% | 31% | 33% |
| Israel yielding control of the Jordan Valley in a number of years | 21% | 16% | 18% |
| Allowing a limited number of Palestinian refugees to return to Israel | 19% | 14% | 22% |

stating that while military action could not stop the intifada it could curtail it. Thirteen percent thought military action would inflame the situation, and 10% reported that it would make no difference. These reflections of public opinion on the intifada were very similar to those generated in 2002 as well as during the first intifada between 1987 and 1993.

For the first time since the question has been posed by this survey, a majority of the respondents (58%) thought that the measures employed to ensure quiet in the territories were appropriate. Although generally the majority opinion has been that the policy is too soft, in 2003 only 29% responded this way, while 13% thought the policy was too harsh. Figure 15 charts how this division differs from past years.

Sixty-five percent of those polled favored postponing talks with the Palestinians until Arafat was replaced, an additional 21% opposed renewing the talks at all, and 14% favored beginning the talks immediately. Regarding talks led by Abu Mazen, 35% agreed to renew them if terror was stopped completely, and another 35% if the Palestinians began ending terror. Twenty-one percent favored an immediate resumption of talks, and 9% opposed the renewal of talks.

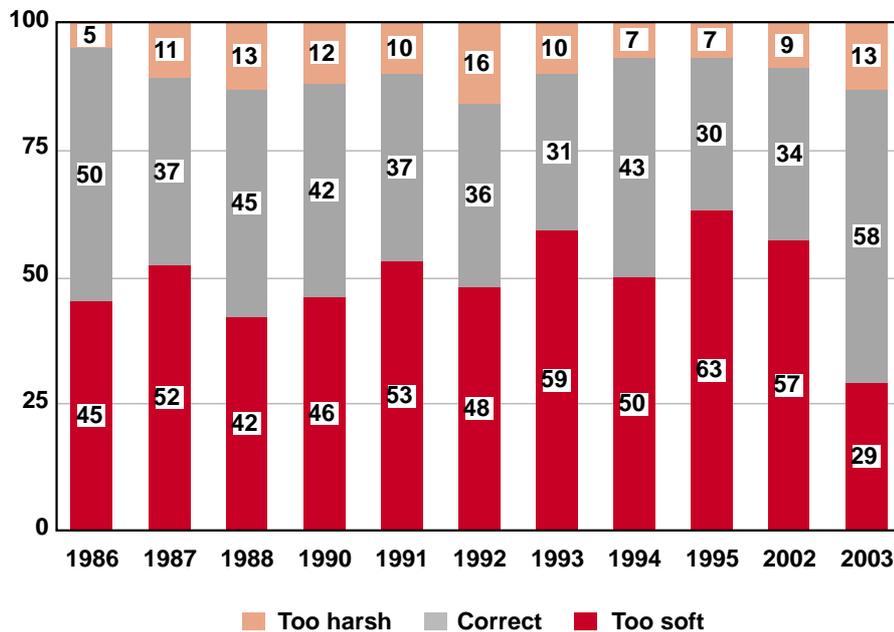


Figure 15. Attitude toward Government Policy in Territories, 1986–1995, 2002–2003

F. Attitudes Regarding Israeli Arabs

Negative attitudes toward Israel's Arab citizens were dulled slightly in 2003. Sixty-eight percent of those questioned opposed the inclusion of Arab parties in the governing coalition, compared with 72% in 2002, 67% in 2001, and 54% in the 2000 survey (figure 16). Two-thirds felt that Israeli Arabs are disloyal to the state, a smaller percentage than in the previous two years. Seventy-nine percent opposed allowing Israeli Arabs to participate in decisions on vital matters related to determining the state's boundaries, compared to 80% in 2002, 75% in 2001, and 64% in 2000.

Only 11% of respondents thought that Israel was solely (3%) or mostly (8%) responsible for the situation of Israeli Arabs, while 49% thought that the Arabs were solely (13%) or mostly (36%) responsible, and 40% thought that the responsibility was shared. The corresponding numbers in 2002 were 10%, 43%, and 47%, respectively. When asked if Israel should put emphasis on law enforcement regarding Israeli Arabs or on achieving equality with the country's Jews, 49% chose the former, 51% the latter. In the 2002 survey, law enforcement was the more popular response, chosen by 58%.

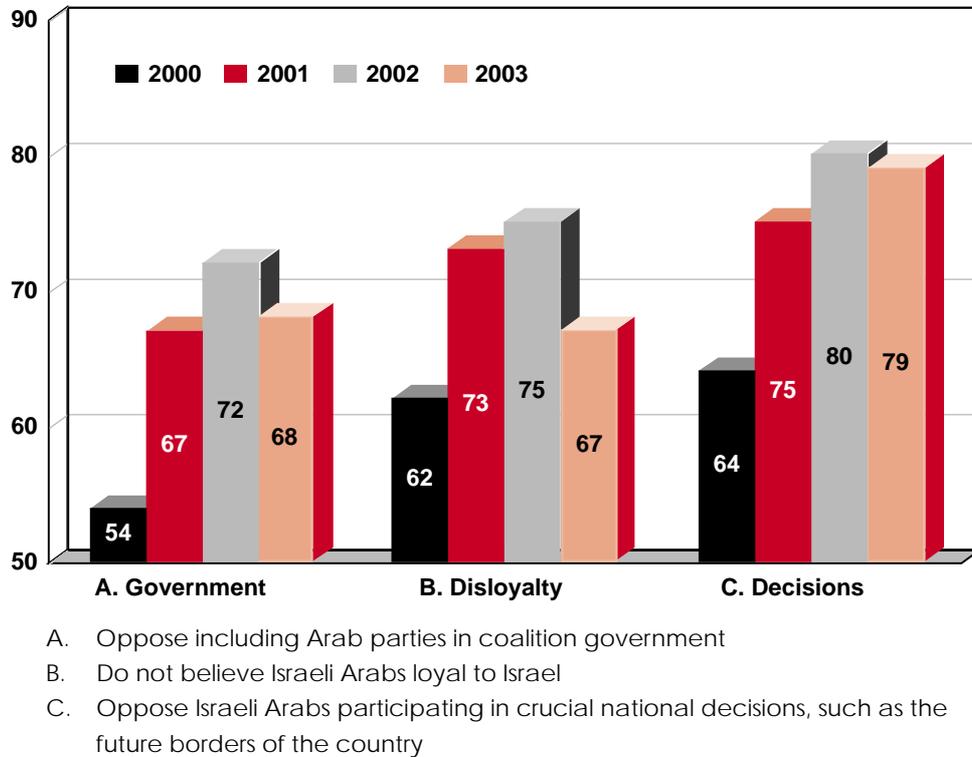


Figure 16. Israeli Arabs, 2000–2003

G. Rule of Law, Leadership, Democracy

When asked to place themselves on a 7-point scale if a choice had to be made between following the rule of law and security interests, most Israeli Jews opted for security interests. The mid-point of the scale is 4, so the 2003 mean of 3.5, while inclining toward the security pole, was almost as high as it had been in any survey, and much higher than the 2002 mean of 2.9 (figure 17).

The credibility of the leadership is a crucial factor in any political system, particularly in a democracy. The heads of the security organizations continued to enjoy higher levels of credibility than the political leaders of the country. In 2003, the gap between the two groups grew to 12 percentage points, an increase from a 7 point gap in 2002. The security leaders were 10 points higher than the political leaders in 2001; they had a 15 point lead in 2000 and a 23 point lead in 1999. In 2003, 78% of the respondents felt they could rely on the statements of security leaders compared with 66% who could rely on political leaders. The parallel numbers for 2002 were 75% and 68%, and for 2001, 76% and 66%.

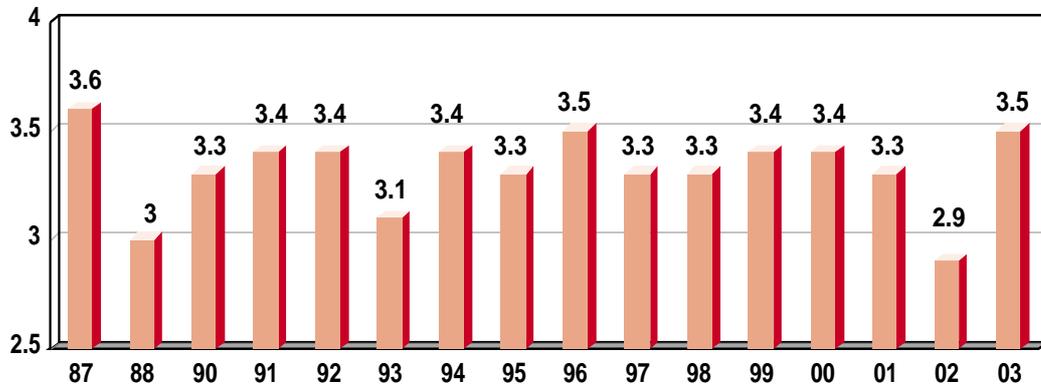


Figure 17. Legal Procedures vs. Security Interests, 1987–2003

Respondents were asked about the contribution three civic institutions make to the country's security. Only one received majority support: 54% thought that the judicial system (including the Supreme Court and the high court of justice) contributes positively to the country's security. The Knesset was next with 42% support, and the mass media third with 35% backing.

The Israel Defense Forces

In 2003, the favorable assessment of the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) increased markedly among respondents. Presumed factors for the change in opinion include the rapid military victory in Iraq led by the United States, whose army is similar to Israel's in military doctrine and technological capability, and the perceived decline of the al-Aqsa Intifada, in which the army displayed impressive capabilities and enjoyed widespread popular support.

The IDF has long been associated with Israeli might, pride, and independence, and the army is often described as a major agency of integration and socialization for immigrants. Change, however, has led to questioning many of the old assumptions. The introduction of technological advances to warfare challenges the need for a large standing army. The army has been assigned many police functions in the territories and plays an essential role regarding terror and the intifada. In addition, it has been compelled to grapple with "standoff" situations as in Lebanon, tasks that do not lend themselves to daring, initiative, and swift victories. Although army service is compulsory for Jews, many yeshiva students do not serve, thus raising questions of universality, equity, and motivation.

Since 1987, respondents have been asked whether the army is getting stronger or whether its strength is eroding. Figure 18 displays the array of responses over the years. Significant about the responses in 2003 was the increased favorable results for the IDF. In 2003, 38% stated that the IDF has become stronger or much stronger; a quarter thought there was no change; and 37% said that the IDF is getting weaker. At the same time, only 27% thought that the burden of military service was shouldered justly and only 41% assessed that time spent in reserve service was used efficiently.

Against the backdrop of the government's decision in June 2003 to dismantle illegal outposts, public opinion regarding soldiers' freedom to disobey orders is particularly intriguing. Seventy-three percent responded that a soldier may not refuse an order to evacuate settlers, and 27% said that such an order could be disobeyed. To

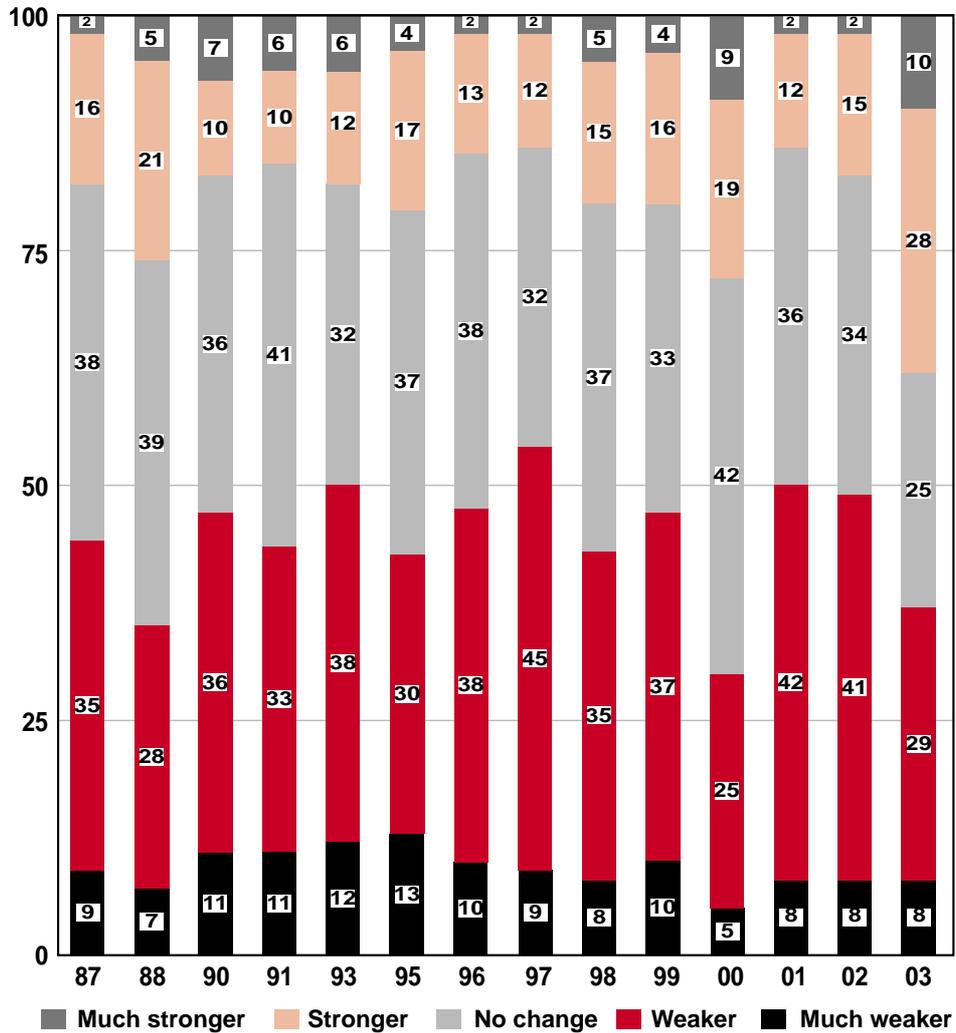


Figure 18. Assessment of the IDF, 1987–2003

the question whether a soldier might refuse to serve in the territories, 75% answered that a soldier cannot legitimately refuse, and 25% affirmed the soldier’s right to refuse the order. Moreover, two-thirds of the sample answered that a soldier must obey orders in both situations. Another 19% said that they supported the right of the soldier not to obey either command. The remainder took one-sided positions: 8% agreed that a soldier may refuse an order to remove settlers but not an order to serve in the territories, and 6% said that it was legitimate not to serve in the territories but not legitimate to disobey an order to remove settlers (figure 19).

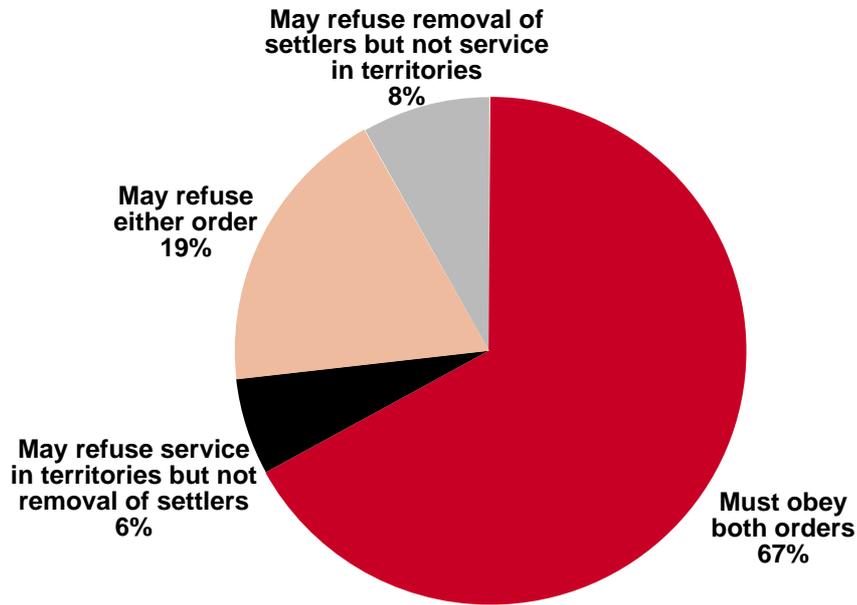


Figure 19. Refusing a Military Order

Table 5 presents the breakdown of obeying and disobeying orders by demographic characteristics. None of these distributions is statistically significant, probably because the group demanding that both orders be obeyed is so large. The insistence that both army orders be followed is higher among men than women and the old more than the young, as well as among Jews of Asian and African origin, those who observe most of the religious ritual, voters for Likud, those who have served in the territories, and the less educated. Those who observe all of the ritual may well be haredim. The men of this sector generally do not serve in the army and their connection with the state and the army is qualitatively different from the Orthodox National Zionist constituency; hence their lower rate of support for obeying commands.

Table 5. Must a Soldier Obey Commands? (percentage)

| To remove settlers To serve in the territories | Must obey Must obey | Must obey May refuse | May refuse Must obey | May refuse May refuse |
|---|------------------------|-------------------------|-------------------------|--------------------------|
| Group | | | | |
| Total | 67 | 6 | 8 | 19 |
| Gender | | | | |
| Male | 73 | 5 | 7 | 16 |
| Female | 61 | 8 | 10 | 22 |
| Age | | | | |
| 18-29 | 58 | 8 | 12 | 23 |
| 30-59 | 68 | 5 | 7 | 20 |
| 60+ | 75 | 6 | 7 | 13 |
| Education | | | | |
| Through 8 years | 74 | 3 | 10 | 14 |
| 9-12 years | 68 | 5 | 9 | 18 |
| +12 years | 64 | 8 | 7 | 21 |
| Place of birth | | | | |
| Israel, father Israel | 59 | 7 | 12 | 21 |
| Israel, father Asia or Africa | 68 | 4 | 10 | 19 |
| Israel, father Europe or America | 67 | 7 | 5 | 20 |
| Asia or Africa | 79 | 3 | 8 | 11 |
| Europe or America | 63 | 9 | 7 | 22 |
| Extent of religious observance | | | | |
| Observe none | 57 | 10 | 5 | 28 |
| Observe some | 69 | 6 | 7 | 17 |
| Observe most | 74 | 4 | 11 | 11 |
| Observe all | 66 | 3 | 14 | 17 |
| Army service in territories | | | | |
| Yes | 77 | 3 | 7 | 13 |
| No | 61 | 7 | 9 | 23 |
| No army service | 64 | 8 | 8 | 20 |
| If Knesset vote today | | | | |
| Right | 56 | 5 | 18 | 21 |
| Religious | 71 | 2 | 13 | 14 |
| Likud | 77 | 3 | 6 | 14 |
| Shinui | 65 | 13 | 6 | 17 |
| Labor | 61 | 11 | 10 | 19 |
| Meretz | 34 | 19 | 4 | 43 |
| No decision | 66 | 5 | 5 | 21 |
| Would not vote | 57 | 7 | 9 | 27 |

Of those who said that it was permissible to disobey the order to serve in the territories, 75% said it was also permissible to disobey the order to vacate settlers. On the other side, 69% of those who said that a soldier may disobey an order to vacate settlers said that a soldier may also refuse to serve in the territories.

Respondents in the political center tended to be more insistent about the obeying of both types of orders, whereas members of both ends of the political spectrum tended to be more willing to have a soldier disobey both orders. Table 6 shows that based on a 7-point political self-depiction scale, 44% of those placing themselves on the extreme left said it was permissible for a soldier to disobey an order to remove settlers, as did 35% on the extreme right. The range of support in the intermediate positions on the self-depiction scaled ranged from 17-30%. Similarly, 63% of those placing themselves on the extreme left said it was permissible for a soldier to disobey an order to serve in the territories, compared to 26% for the extreme right and 14-16% for the moderate right positions.

Table 6. Refusing an Order: Distribution by Political Self-Definition

| | Left 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | Right 7 |
|---|-----------|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|------------|
| Right to refuse to remove settlers | 44% | 30% | 28% | 26% | 17% | 21% | 35% |
| Right to refuse to serve in the territories | 63% | 39% | 28% | 25% | 14% | 16% | 26% |

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