



The Israeli Public and Human Rights 2016: Threats and Opportunities

A poll conducted for the Association for Civil Rights in Israel on Israeli public opinion on human rights paints a complex and challenging portrait. A majority of the public respects human rights and seeks to advance equality; however, many believe that the applicability of rights is limited to certain groups. As such, it seems that the universal foundation of human rights - equal rights for every woman and man, regardless of their opinions or status - has been forgotten. It is difficult to distinguish between the weakness of the universal value of human rights in Israel in 2016 and the ongoing political and national conflict of the occupation, as opposition to rights is expressed - primarily though not entirely – through this lens. The poll findings indicate weaknesses in Israeli society regarding understanding, accepting, and applying rights in the Israeli reality, alongside support for positive values.

This report is based on a quantitative poll of a representative sample of Israeli society that included 500 Jews and 200 Arabs (males and females). The Jewish public was interviewed in Hebrew online and the Arab public was interviewed by phone in Arabic. The margin of error stands at 4.4. The questionnaire was drafted and analyzed by Dr. Dahlia Scheindlin and New Wave Research collected the data.

1. Equality, Rights, and Responsibilities

What is Most Important? According to the poll, Israelis place greater importance on social rights than political rights. As such, the general public's most important right is the right to earn a decent living (24%), followed by the right to equality among citizens (22%), the right to housing (21%), and the right to health and education services (20%). Israel's Arab citizens expressed a greater urgency to advance equality among citizens. However, among Arabs as well, following the right to equality, social issues (income, health, education, and housing) are considered more urgent than civil rights (fair trial and freedom of expression).

No Illusions of Equality Between Jews and Arabs: The perception among most Jews and Arabs is that the lack of equality between Jews and Arabs in Israel is a fact. Some 65% of Jews acknowledge its existence, as do 85% of Arabs.

Striving for Overall Equality: An overwhelming majority of respondents, 75%, believe that Israel must improve the level of equality among all of its citizens, regardless of their political opinions. Some 92% of those identified with the left support this statement, as do 77% of centrists, and 66% of those identified with the right wing.¹ Among Arabs, 86% support improving the level of equality among citizens.

¹ The groups of right, center, and left refer to a self-description of those polled, both Jews and Arabs. A significant number of Arabs (62%) did not identify with any ideological position; therefore the distribution to right, center, and left primarily reflects the Jewish public.



Rights and Responsibilities: Despite significant support for advancing equality in general, Jews express a strong link between rights and responsibilities. Some 82% of Jews support the following statement: “Those who do not fulfill all of their responsibilities as citizens do not deserve full rights.” Some 53% of Arabs, as well as 61% of Haredis (ultra-Orthodox Jews),² support this statement, although claims are oftentimes made in Israel that these specific groups do not fulfill their societal responsibilities. It appears that most of the Israeli population believes that those who do not contribute should not get returns. As such, more than three-quarters of the Israeli public rejects the basic premise of human rights, according to which all people have unconditional rights.

Equality in Daily Life: Somewhat surprisingly, most Israeli citizens (59%) do not recall experiencing discrimination. This finding may reflect lack of awareness on the matter, which makes it difficult for people to identify such incidents. On the other hand, 39% experienced at least one instance of discrimination, a significant number that reflects behavioral patterns that adversely affect different sectors of the population in their daily lives. The main places in which people felt discriminated against were at work (19%), in public institutions (15%) and while shopping or getting any type of service (13%).

2. Perceptions Regarding Human Rights in Israel

In regards to equality and civil rights, the Israeli public exhibits progressive views on a range of questions. For example:

- 80% believe that equal rights should be granted to same sex couples and heterosexual couples.
- 85% believe that the state should provide a minimum amount of water and electricity to impoverished citizens.
- 69% oppose the separation of Jews and Arabs in public places.
- 79% oppose reducing the presence of women at public events.
- 81% oppose granting health service privileges to wealthy individuals.

The “progressive spirit” is also evident in other responses, although less significantly:

- 68% believe that the police should allow controversial demonstrations.
- 55% believe that children of foreigners in Israel be granted the same rights as Israeli children.
- 56% oppose restricting freedom of expression on topics that are generally agreed upon (the question was only asked of Jews regarding examples including the Holocaust, the state’s Jewish identity, or calls for a boycott on settlements)

There is a significant and worrisome minority that supports opposite views. This minority is not random, and reflects different factions in society. For example:

² The distinction of religious, Haredi (ultra-Orthodox), secular, and traditional refers only to Jews. Arabs were divided differently, and religiosity was hardly found to affect their positions. The number of Haredis polled was low (some 60 people), and therefore poll findings pertaining to Haredis reflect a general trend rather than precise data.



- 30% of those polled support a separation of Jews and Arabs in public places. Among right-wingers, 52% believe in such a separation; two-thirds of those affiliated with the nationalist religious movement support it, and nearly 80% of Haredis polled support such a separation.
- 44% of Jews support restricting freedom of speech on the issues enumerated above (Holocaust, the state's Jewish identity, or calls for a boycott on settlements). Among those who identify with the right-wing, 61% support such restrictions.
- 43% of those polled oppose granting the children of foreigners in Israel the rights that Israeli children receive. Support for this is widespread among the religious and Haredi individuals who were polled; 35% of secular respondents and 20% of Arabs expressed opposition to granting children of foreigners in Israel the same rights granted to Israeli children.
- Some 18% of the population favors reducing the prominence of women at public events, out of respect for religious individuals' feelings. The data was influenced by poll participants adhering to nationalist religious views (37%), as well as those who are Haredi (more than 80%).

The rift continues among the Israeli public regarding disclosure of violation of human rights, which constitutes a foundation of a democratic society: Most poll respondents (52%) believe that such a disclosure weakens the state, while some 44% believe that disclosing such occurrences strengthens the state.

3. Human Rights Under Military Occupation

The main issue on which disparities between Jews and Arabs, and those on the left and right, are expressed is in regard to human rights in the occupied Palestinian territories. On this matter, Jews and Arabs have completely different perspectives. For example, responses by Jews and Arabs to a question on whether the human rights of Palestinians in the territories are upheld were virtually reversed: 86% of Jews believe that Israel respects the human rights of Palestinians in the territories, while 15% of Arabs share this belief. It should be noted that 36% of Arabs did not answer this question.

Among Jews, this issue divides the right/center and left: A majority of 95% of self-identified rightists and 80% of centrists believe that Israel maintains the human rights of Palestinians in the territories, while 40% of leftists share this view. A slightly different response to the question comes when distributing along religiosity: 76% of secular individuals believe that Israel upholds the human rights of Palestinians in the territories, while 90% of Jews with traditional beliefs, 98% of religious individuals, and 100% of Haredis polled share this belief.

Jewish respondents display much higher sensitivity to the infringement of human rights of settlers in the territories. In this regard, questions were asked on specific actions taken against Palestinians (restrictions on movement, destruction of terrorists' homes), as well as those taken against settlers (restrictions on construction and administrative detention). Respondents were asked to determine whether these actions constitute a violation of human rights and if they are justified.



The breakdown among Jews was as follows:

| | Actions against Palestinians | Actions against Settlers |
|---------------------------|------------------------------|--------------------------|
| No Violation / Violation | 78 / 22 | 48 / 52 |
| Justified / Not Justified | 89 / 11 | 54 / 46 |

The table can be summarized thusly: An overwhelming majority of Jews believe that state actions against Palestinians do not constitute a violation of human rights, and that such actions against Palestinians are justified. Slightly more than half of Jewish respondents believe that similar actions against settlers do constitute an infringement of human rights, and slightly more than half believe that such actions against settlers are justified. These questions and answers expressed the deepest division between the right and left, as the center alternates support between the right and left. In general, the positions do not seem to derive from an advanced grasp of human rights, but rather from what respondents believe is good for the country.

As expected, an analysis of the Arab population's response to these questions paints a different portrait:

| | Actions against Palestinians | Actions against Settlers |
|---------------------------|------------------------------|--------------------------|
| No Violation / Violation | 14 / 56 | 40 / 18 |
| Justified / Not Justified | 9 / 56 | 11 / 51 |

Among Arabs one can see greater identification with the violation of Palestinians' human rights. In regards to justifying the infringement, Arabs express a more universal and less tribal worldview: More than half of the respondents believe that the violation of human rights cannot be justified, whether directed at Palestinians or settlers. It should be noted that one-third of Arabs did not answer this question or selected "I don't know."

4. Summary

In general, the discourse of human rights in Israel is unstable and characterized by apparent contradictions. This is expressed in many ways, including a relatively strong dependence between fulfilling responsibilities and receiving rights. There is also a strong link between level of religiosity, political opinions, and nationality in everything pertaining to human rights, and the issue exposes deep divisions in Israeli society. On the other hand, there is broad consensus on social rights, income, housing, education, and health, apparently due to the lack of socio-economic security experienced by significant swaths of the public.

Israeli society as a whole expresses a relatively progressive fundamental stance on civic affairs, including the need to improve equality overall, recognition of inequality between Jews and Arabs, opposition to separation and exclusion, support for LGBTQ rights, opposition to restrictions on freedom of expression, recognition of the state's duty to ensure an adequate subsistence level for individuals without means, and opposition to privileges for the wealthy. Despite sensitivity and significant opposition in the public discourse to the term "human rights" (as indicated in other polls), nearly

האגודה לזכויות האזרח בישראל

جمعية حقوق المواطن في اسرائيل

The Association for Civil Rights in Israel



half support the need to expose violations of human rights as a means of repairing flaws.

Opinions regarding the occupation and the conflict determine many positions regarding equality and human rights, and often overshadow them. The conflict is the moral foundation among Jews for violation of Palestinians' human rights, and it appears that most Jewish respondents accept this and justify it.