

# Close to half of Israelis back annexation, less than a third think it'll happen

Poll finds a slight majority of Israeli Jews back advancing sovereignty in parts of West Bank, though even many supporters are doubtful government will actually go ahead with it soon.



An Israeli flag is seen in the E1 area of the West Bank on January 2, 2017. (Yonatan Sindel/Flash90)

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Slightly fewer than half of Israelis back plans to annex parts of the West Bank, and even fewer people think the government will actually go through with its annexation plans, according to a survey released Sunday.

Asked whether they back annexation in the near future, 44.7 percent of respondents to an Israel Democracy Institute survey said they support or strongly support the move. The poll found 31.8% oppose annexation, and 23.5% didn't know or didn't answer.

A slight majority of 51.7% Israeli Jews support annexation, the poll found, while among Israeli Arabs, only 8.8% were in favor. Among Jews, 27.9% opposed annexation, and 20.4% didn't know or didn't answer. Among Arabs, 51.9% were opposed, and 39.4% didn't know or didn't answer.

As part of their coalition agreement, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Blue and White chief Benny Gantz agreed the government that is due to be sworn Wednesday can begin moving forward with applying Israeli sovereignty to settlements and the Jordan Valley after July 1, a move expected to enjoy backing from a majority of lawmakers in the current Knesset.

Support for annexation among Jews was unsurprisingly divided on political lines, with 71% of self-defined right-wing Jews backing it, along with 31% of centrists and only 8% of left-wingers.

Overall, 31.8% of Israelis think the government will actually push ahead with annexation in the coming year. The survey found that many who don't support the move still think the government will actually carry out the controversial measure, while some supporters were pessimistic it would happen.

Among Jews, 33% thought the government would in fact annex, and 25% of Arabs believed the same. The survey found that 42% of right-wingers think it will happen over the coming year, as do 27% of left-wing Jews and 18% of centrists.

The survey also asked what political status, if any, should be extended to Palestinians in areas slated for annexation.

A plurality of Israelis (32.1%) said the Palestinians' political status should remain unchanged, while 24.6 % supported giving them full citizenship and 20.5% back permanent residency without the right to vote.

Among only Jews, 37% said the Palestinians' status should remain unchanged, 24% backed giving them permanent residency and 20% said they support granting them full citizenship.

Among Arabs, 47% supported full citizenship, while 4.5% were okay with permanent residency and 9% think their status should remain unchanged.

The poll was made up of the responses of 769 Israelis and had a margin of error of 3.7%.



A Bedouin shepherd walks with his herd of sheep in the Jordan Valley in the West Bank on September 11, 2019 (Ahmad Gharabli/AFP)

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According to the Peace Now settlement watchdog, there are 107,070 Palestinians living in the areas of the West Bank that the Trump plan envisions will be part of Israel.

When announcing plans last year to unilaterally annex the Jordan Valley, Netanyahu claimed no Palestinians living there would be absorbed by Israel.



Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu (L) and US Ambassador to Israel David Friedman (2nd-L) at the northern West Bank settlement of Ariel on February 24, 2020. (David Azagury/US Embassy Jerusalem)

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In exchange for backing Israeli annexation, the US says Israel must freeze building in parts of the West Bank under its control that won't be included in its envisioned borders and agree to negotiate with the Palestinians on the basis of the Trump plan, including backing for a Palestinian state.

David Friedman, the US ambassador in Jerusalem, said in an interview last week that Israel has met those conditions and therefore could apply sovereignty in parts of the West Bank as soon as the coming weeks.



Blue and White chairman Benny Gantz (C) speaks to reporters during a visit to the Jordan Valley on January 21, 2020. (Elad Malka/Blue and White)

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Annexation is also expected to feature prominently in talks during US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo's visit to Israel on Wednesday.

While Netanyahu has voiced his unqualified support for advancing annexation,

Gantz has welcomed the Trump plan but said in January that Israel should only apply sovereignty over the Jordan Valley in coordination with the international community, apparently fearing the move could damage Jerusalem's diplomatic ties with Jordan and other countries.

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