

The Israeli Public's Perception of the IDF: Stability and Change

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Abstract

This article attempts to shed light on Israel's civil–military relations by employing the public's trust in the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) as a key parameter. The study is based on a series of public opinion polls conducted between 2001 and 2010, during periods of military confrontation as well as periods of relative quiet. The findings show that despite increased criticism toward the IDF and claims by researchers, the Jewish-Israeli public's trust in the IDF generally remains very high and stable and strengthens significantly when the cannons start to roar. We also found a fixed pattern of change in public opinion during low-intensity conflicts. In a comparative perspective, the findings suggest that the “rally 'round the flag” effect is relevant in the Israeli case both in conventional war and in limited conflicts. Moreover, the findings indicate that the public's trust in the army is not a uniform perception but a complex one that may have different and sometimes conflicting facets.

Keywords

public opinion, trust, Israel, civil–military relation, Low Intensive conflict (LIC)

In a democracy, it is the responsibility of the armed forces to gain the public's confidence. A military that is not trusted by the population lacks legitimacy and will have difficulty justifying its expenses and even its existence. Therefore, the level

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of trust that citizens have in their armed forces is one of the key parameters in civil–military relations. Based on public opinion polls that we conducted during the last decade, this article tries to clarify Israel’s civil–military relations, using the public’s trust in the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) during military confrontations and periods of relative quiet,¹ as the main parameter. The fact that Israel had to cope with different types of military conflicts of various degrees of intensity over the last decade (from high and low intensity conflicts to periods of relative calm) makes Israel a unique and cogent case for examining this issue.

The main research questions that our article addresses are as follows: how security events affect the public’s trust in the IDF during high-intensity conflicts (HICs) and low-intensity conflicts (LICs) compared to periods of relative quiet; can a pattern be identified in the fluctuation of public trust in the military during military confrontations; has trust in the army declined over the past decade; and do differences exist between the public’s trust in the army’s ability to deal with limited conflicts compared to its general trust in the army?

Democracy and Trust

Trust is considered the prerequisite for political order. As Luhmann claimed, “*A system—economic, legal or political—requires trust as an input condition.*”² Trust is a necessary condition for both civil society and democracy. It is produced by democracy and helps to sustain democracy. Piotr Sztompka’s comprehensive theoretical account of trust as a fundamental component of human action states that the culture of trust is more likely to appear in a democracy than in any other type of political system.³

Nevertheless, some scholars see an inherent paradox in the relationship between democracy and trust. Classical liberal political theory is based on the distrust of government. Christensen and Lægread⁴ note that the legitimacy of political and administrative institutions and the key players in the political process are based largely on trust. Nevertheless, an essential element in democracy is “the healthy lack of trust in” or at least skepticism toward those who hold the power. An Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development study noted that a certain level of distrust in government is healthy and may be functional since it serves as a guarantee of accountability.⁵

War situations and LICs are crisis events (especially in the Israeli context where the confrontation takes place inside the country or on its borders). As Brecher and Wikenfield note,⁶ when the crisis departs from routine, democratic regimes may behave in a way that deviates from democratic principles. One observes that the public opinion mechanism freezes when society’s basic values are being compromised, when reaction time is limited, when violent involvement may be called for. Public opinion unifies the ranks and overwhelmingly supports the political level’s decisions and actions in dealing with the crisis. The research literature terms this phenomenon the “rally ’round the flag effect.” The American political scientist John Mueller⁷

coined the term in the 1970s with regard to American society. He described “rallying ’round the flag” as the sharp and sudden public backing of the president that occurs in response to different types of international crises, especially between states.⁸

Mueller’s theory spawned two approaches that we see as complementary: The first observes that during a crisis the American public perceives the president as the embodiment of national unity; the second approach sees “rally ’round the flag” in situations where criticism of the administration by members of the opposite party in Congress declines. Thus, when the opposition supports the president, the media’s ability to depict an interparty conflict is weakened and results in the public viewing the president’s performance as successful.

Baker and Oneal⁹ measured the changes in presidential popularity in all 193 Militarized Interstate Disputes between 1933 and 1992 and found that the size and form of approval of the president’s actions depended primarily on how the crisis was presented to the public via media coverage, bipartisan support, and White House spin. The characteristics of the rally effect that Mueller noted also appear in earlier studies in a wide range of contexts. Thus, for example, the phenomenon of “unity and strengthening of hearts” among urban dwellers in the London Blitz in World War II has been described.¹⁰ A similar phenomenon was observed in the 1962 Cuban Missile Crisis, Operation “Desert Storm” (the 1991 Gulf War), the post-September 11 period, and so forth. Lai and Dan¹¹ examined the “rally” effect in Britain over the course of five decades. The findings indicate that unity of the ranks in Britain generally occurs when national interests are under an intense and direct threat. The “rally” effect also explains processes taking place in states with nondemocratic regimes. A recent example is the tenacity of public support in Iran for the regime’s nuclear policy despite the West’s economic sanctions and the price that Iranian citizens pay.¹²

Trust in the Armed Forces in Western Democracies

Two decades ago, Burk and Moskos¹³ claimed that in postmodern societies, the public’s attitude toward its armed forces is characterized by skepticism, apathy, or both. Since the dissolution of the Soviet Union, people no longer consider defense a national priority. Threats have become diffuse and nebulous, the upshot is that the military has become less visible and less central in people’s lives. During the 1990s, armed forces in the Western democracies were increasingly directed toward peacekeeping missions and humanitarian aid, which may explain why their popularity was somewhat higher than in the Cold War. The public regarded peacekeeping missions, which are generally tasked with guaranteeing stability and assisting populations in disaster areas, as noble causes, although in the long run they became more difficult to justify as casualties mounted and their mandates appear vaguely defined.¹⁴

During the last two decades, armed forces in Western Europe have undergone organizational and operational changes.¹⁵ The annulment of compulsory military

service in most Western democracies on the one hand and the involvement in the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan on the other were followed by political debate and public protest. A European Union (EU) study conducted in 2001 showed that the level of confidence in the army was higher (71 percent expressed trust the army) than in sixteen state organizations (the police, the educational system, and so forth), in all fifteen countries the level of trust in the military was above 60 percent.¹⁶

The situation was different in the postcommunist countries in Europe in the early nineties. According to the New Democracies Barometer surveys of popular trust in fifteen institutions in nine Eastern and Central European countries, skepticism predominates. The surveys indicate that the public in the postcommunist societies expresses very little trust in any of the civil or political institutions. Only three institutions have positive overall levels of trust: the army (mean: 4.4), the church (4.1), and the presidency (4.0).¹⁷

The comparative data on the changes in trust in the army are based on the World Value Survey which compared 1999–2001 with 2005–2007. The survey came to two main conclusions: first, the research pointed to a difference in the degree of trust between different armies, as the rest of the studies that we reviewed affirm; second, differential changes occur in public trust in the armies over time. Thus, while trust in the American army did not change from the beginning to the middle of the decade, trust in the army rose in Italy, Holland, France, Finland, Canada, and Australia, and decreased in the United Kingdom, Norway, India, and South Korea.¹⁸ On the other hand, a more recent study on Britain, for example, showed that the degree of the public's trust in the army remained stable during the decade when in 2011, 83 percent of the UK public expressed a high or very high opinion of the UK armed forces, a level similar to that of the previous decade.¹⁹

As stated, there are significant differences in the public's trust in the army, between nations. Public opinion regarding the US military has gone through dramatic changes over the years. King and Karabell found that in the last thirty years the US military has come full circle from being one of the most derided American institutions to one of the most trusted after it evacuated Vietnam, abolished the draft, dealt seriously with drugs and racism, embarked upon a sophisticated and effective marketing campaign, and carried out successful operations.²⁰ Recent polls show that the military is the most respected government institution in the United States.²¹ The perceived threat after 9/11 also undoubtedly contributed to the turnabout in the public's attitude toward the military.

Furthermore, a comparative study (published in 2006) undertaken by David Beetham for the Inter-Parliamentary Union on trust in state institutions (parliaments, political parties, legal systems, police, and army) found that across the globe the public places greater trust in the military than in other institutions: East Asia (64 percent), the European Union (61 percent), Africa (52 percent), East Europe (44 percent), and Latin America (35 percent).²² Despite the differences between countries in trust in the army, the research literature indicates that armies seem to inspire greater trust than other national institutions in most European democratic countries and other states.²³

Trust in Armed Forces during LIC

Although a considerable amount of literature exists on trust in the military in periods of quiet and wartime, there is little literature on trust in the army during LIC. The US army defines LIC as a political–military confrontation between contending states or groups below conventional war and above the routine, peaceful competition among states. It frequently involves protracted struggles of competing principles and ideologies. It is waged by a combination of means, employing political, economic, informational, and military instruments.²⁴

LIC literature is part of a broader discussion of what Frank Hoffman calls “hybrid wars,”²⁵ a term that captures the blurring of public and private, state and nonstate, formal and informal nature of the “new wars.”²⁶

We found the term LIC as most appropriate for describing most episodes inside Israel and on its borders during the last decade: Operation “Defensive Shield” (April 2002), Operation “Summer Rains” (June 2006), and Operation “Cast Lead” (December 2008–January 2009). What these conflicts have in common is the asymmetry between Israel and terrorist and semi-state organizations (Hamas in Gaza; the Palestinian Authority in the West Bank). All of these conflicts posed a significant threat (as well as actual damage) to Israel’s home front, whether from suicide bombings in the heart of Israeli cities, rocket attacks from Gaza, or long-range missiles from Iraq in the Gulf War. Unlike the LICs, we defined the Second Lebanon War as an HIC since it was the only armed conflict in this period that Israel officially labeled as “war” (although the definition is disputed).

In most of the literature, trust in the armed forces is measured during international crisis or armed conflict between states, or in times of routine. Few studies have examined it during LICs. Jonathan Ladd²⁷ studied the “rally” phenomenon in the context of post-9/11 and found evidence for its appearance as a result of that mega event. His research leads to the conclusion that during a LIC with a nonstate entity the state tries to redirect public discourse along the lines of an interstate struggle.

Turning to the Israeli context, Gez-Langerman and Gilboa²⁸ noted various types of crises (international confrontations and LICs with nonstate entities) and found that the “rally” effect had to be studied in territorial conflicts close to or within a state’s borders, such as the Israeli–Palestinian conflict and the confrontation with Hezbollah in Lebanon.

Civil–Military Relations in Israel and Trust in the IDF

Since the early 1970s, the IDF’s lofty status and Israel’s image as a “nation in uniform” have gradually changed. The shift in the public’s image of the IDF parallels global socioeconomic trends and transformations in Israeli society and the nature of war.²⁹ The reasons for these changes in Israel are many and diverse:

liberal ideology gradually surpassed socialist ideology and the state's collectivist orientation;³⁰ liberal paradigms increased the demand for transparency and clean governance;³¹ the boundary between the frontlines and the home front grew progressively blurred in wartime as the home front became more vulnerable and the army's ability to provide full protection against missile attacks, which surged in the last decade, became more limited;³² decades of wars and LICs heightened criticism of the army and led to the refusal on the part of conscientious objectors from the right and left of the political spectrum to serve in the IDF;³³ and last but not least, the army's involvement in controversial, politically loaded "national missions," such as the disengagement from Gaza in 2005, intensified public criticism. These trends have resulted in a gradual increase in public and media criticism of the IDF's budget management, use of force, ethical conduct, combat proficiency, and so forth.³⁴

The change in the IDF's status in Israeli society is also reflected in new control mechanisms: the media has become an active player in the public discourse on security issues.³⁵ Since the 1990s, a growing number of social movements have been challenging the IDF³⁶ and government ministries have instituted new monitoring mechanisms to inspect the army's modus operandi.³⁷ The army's special status vis-à-vis other government bureaus has been truncated. Yet despite frequently heard claims that the IDF's status is deteriorating, a comparison of the public's trust in state institutions and the IDF reveals that the latter's status remains generally high and stable, and outscores all other major institutions in Israel. For example, according to a 2011 poll conducted by Hermann and others, 93 percent of the Israeli public expressed confidence in the IDF compared to 84 percent in the president, 64 percent in the Supreme Court, 59 percent in the police, and 36 percent in the political parties³⁸ (similar results appear in a study by Vigoda-Gadot and Mizrahi).³⁹

The data from a longitudinal survey show that in the last decade the degree of trust in the IDF is on a moderately downward trend from 90 percent in 2000 to 79 percent in 2009. A high level of stability was found in the Jewish public's trust in the IDF (from 91 percent in 2000 to 90 percent in 2009) with a slight drop during 2007–2008 (to 80 percent and 79 percent, respectively). On the other hand, among the Arab population, there was a sharp decline in trust (from 70 percent who expressed trust in the IDF in 2000 to only 16 percent in 2009).⁴⁰

It should be mentioned that the last decade was significant for the IDF and Israeli national security. After a long period in which a comprehensive peace settlement seemed on the verge of being signed, the decade witnessed successive outbreaks of confrontation: the al-Aqsa Intifada erupted in 2000 and lasted five years; Operation "Defensive Shield" in 2002; the Second Gulf War in 2003, which entailed massive preparations on the home front (though Israel was fortunate not to have been directly involved); Operation "Summer Rains" in 2006 (following the abduction of the IDF soldier Gilad Shalit); the Second Lebanon War in 2006; and Operation "Cast Lead" in the Gaza Strip (December

2008–January 2009). As Rachel Suissa claims, Israeli society is both supportive and critical of the IDF. Although the army still stands at the head of the national bodies that have the public's trust, its status does not appear as secure as it was in the past.⁴¹

Hypothesis

The question of trust in the army is of keen interest, especially as Israeli society has undergone two conflicting processes in the last decade that may have influenced civil–military relations in the opposite direction. On the one hand, the decade was full of military confrontations, including a large-scale war, that may have enhanced the army's relevance and the public's trust in it; on the other hand, it was a decade of public and media criticism regarding the military's performance in the wake of new control mechanisms that were imposed on the army and the frequently made claims that the army's special status vis-à-vis other government bureaus has been truncated. The following hypotheses are designed to examine the impact of these processes on the public's trust in the IDF during the first decade of the twenty-first century:

Hypothesis 1: During military confrontation, the Israeli public's trust in the IDF is higher than in times of quiet.

Hypothesis 2: A fixed pattern of change exists in the distribution of public trust during and after military conflicts of various intensities.

Hypothesis 3: The Jewish public's trust in the IDF remained stable throughout the last decade.

Hypothesis 4: The general trust in the IDF is higher compared to the trust in its ability to deal with threats characteristic of a limited conflict.

Methods

Population and Sample

This study is based on a series of opinion surveys conducted between 2001 and 2010 ($N = 21,245$). The target population consists of Israelis eighteen years and older living in Jewish or mixed (Jewish-Arab) residential municipalities; therefore, most of the interviewees were Israeli-Jews. The data were gathered from phone interviews during periods of relative quiet and during five military conflicts, four of which we considered LICs and one, the Second Lebanon War, an HIC. During the research period, 12,039 interviews were conducted in periods of relative quiet and 9,206 interviews during armed conflicts or emergency situations as seen in Table 1.

Table 1. List of Surveys by Dates and Fighting Event.

Year	Month	N	Military confrontation
2001	March	580	
2001	November	503	
2002	April	1,328	Operation "Defensive Shield"
2002	May	150	
2002	August	1,053	
2003	February	279	
2003	March	1,239	Second Gulf War
2003	August	256	
2004	January	469	
2004	May	435	
2004	June	456	
2004	September	178	
2005	January	511	
2005	May	518	
2005	July–August ^a	2,371	
2006	January	591	
2006	June	1,061	Operation "Summer Rains"
2006	July–August	4,369	Second Lebanon War
2006	August (end)	513	
2007	January	513	
2007	May	535	
2007	August	678	
2008	August	451	
2008	December 08–January 09	1,209	Operation "Cast Lead"
2009	December	539	
2010	October	460	

Note: During military confrontations, we conducted a number of surveys (3–7) in each fighting event, some on a daily or bi-daily basis. The data presented here are sometimes summarized.

^aIn this article, we consider Israel's "disengagement" from the Gaza Strip as a "relatively quiet period" because no military confrontation occurred, even though it was a unique event as an Israel Defense Forces (IDF) assignment and in Israeli public opinion.

Measures

The surveys focused on three basic issues: how the Israeli public perceives the security situation (short and long term threats, the current situation compared to other periods, and so forth), public endurance, and the degree of trust in the IDF (based on various parameters). We examined trust in the IDF, starting with two basic statements: "the IDF is highly esteemed in Israeli society" and "I have confidence in the IDF's fighting abilities." Other statements were "I trust the IDF's senior commanders," "the IDF is a moral, highly principled army," "I trust the IDF's professionalism," "I trust the IDF's ability to protect me and my family in emergency situations," and "the media depicts the IDF in a positive light." Statements

regarding the limited conflict situations were “I trust the IDF’s ability to protect me and my family from terrorist attacks” and “I trust the IDF’s ability to protect me and my family from Qassam rockets.”

The phrasing of the statements and the nature of the sampling remained the same throughout the years, although not all the statements were asked in the surveys and some of them were altered. All of the statements were examined according to five degrees on an agreement scale. In this article, we focus mainly on trends in the respondents’ rating in positive categories (“strongly agree” or “agree”).

Findings

How Do Security Events Affect the Public’s Trust in the IDF?

To examine the first hypothesis, we compared the degree of the public’s trust in the IDF in periods of relative quiet to its trust during military confrontations (LICs and HICs). Table 2 shows the distribution of responses to various questions regarding trust in the IDF.

Table 2. Percentage of Respondents Who Answered Positively to the Statements during Armed Conflicts and Periods of Relative Quiet.

	Military confrontations			Relative quiet		
	Responded positively (percentage)	<i>n</i>	95 percent CI	Responded positively (Percentage)	<i>N</i>	95 percent CI
“The IDF is highly esteemed in Israeli society”	87	4,892	[86, 88]	76	9,649	[75, 77]
“I have confidence in the IDF’s fighting abilities”	84	7,730	[83, 85]	76	9,674	[75, 77]
“Trust in senior IDF commanders”	79	6,591	[78, 80]	71	11,768	[70, 72]
“The IDF is a moral, highly principled army”	83	6,998	[82, 84]	77	7,758	[76, 78]

Note: Positively = “Strongly agrees” or “agrees.” Not all the questions were presented in all of the polls. CI = 95 percent confidence interval for proportions. IDF = Israel Defense Forces; CI = confidence interval.

Our findings indicate that in all of the parameters the Israeli public generally expresses a high degree of trust in and esteem for the IDF in times of conflict and periods of relative quiet. In periods of relative quiet, 76 percent of the public felt that the IDF is highly esteemed in Israeli society and the same percentage expressed trust

in the IDF's fighting ability; 71 percent expressed trust in IDF commanders; and 77 percent believed that the IDF is a moral, highly principled army.

When hostilities erupt, the public's trust in the IDF rises by 6 percent to 12 percent in all of the parameters. The differences in all of the parameters were significant. The findings confirm the first hypothesis. In all of the fighting events that the IDF was involved in during the last decade, we found the "rally 'round the flag" effect in the form of a rise in the public's trust in it. In other words, the "rally" effect that Mueller and others noted is also present in the Israeli (Jewish) case in LICs and HICs. These findings should not come as a surprise considering the public's perception of the IDF as a major social institution and considering the nature of the conflicts that included not only palpable threats but actual attacks on Israel's civilian home front.

Is There a "Pattern" in the Fluctuation of Public Trust?

In the longitudinal study, which examined the second hypothesis, we looked for a pattern in the fluctuation of public trust in the military during military confrontations. We examined the respondents' rating in positive categories to questions of trust during different stages of the combat event (before, during and after). This examination was conducted separately for HIC and LIC combat events.

The findings indicate that in almost all of Israel's armed conflicts in this period, the public displayed a consistent pattern of attitude fluctuation. At the onset of an event, public trust in the IDF and the use of force surges. During the fighting, it stabilizes at a relatively high level compared to periods of relative quiet. Toward the end of the conflict, a change occurs. And at the conclusion of the armed conflict, all parameters remain significantly higher than they were prior to the event and gradually return to the previous level. Figure 1 illustrates this pattern during Operation "Defensive Shield."

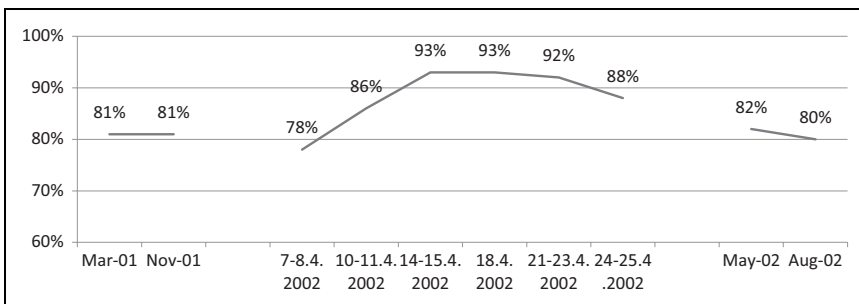


Figure 1. Percentage of respondents who replied positively to the statement: "I have confidence in the IDF's fighting ability" during Operation "Defensive Shield" (March 29, 2002–May 3, 2002).

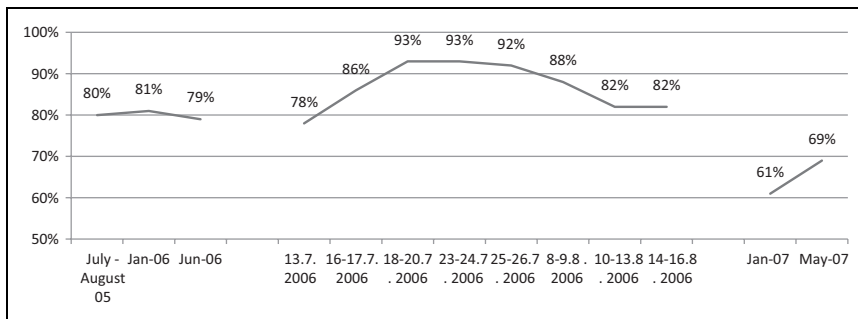


Figure 2. Percentage of respondents during the Second Lebanon War who answered positively to the statement: “The IDF is highly esteemed in Israeli society” (July 12–August 14, 2006).

These patterns were repeated in all of the military confrontations in the last decade with the exception of the Second Lebanon War (2006). After the war, public opinion polls point to a sharp drop in the public’s confidence in the IDF (see Figure 2). During the war, the pattern of answers was similar to that in other military confrontations, but after the war confidence in the IDF plummeted and remained low for a relatively long period (about two years) as Figure 3 shows. The public’s assessment of the IDF stayed on a relatively low plane until the next major military flare-up, Operation “Cast Lead” in 2008 (Figures 3 and 4).

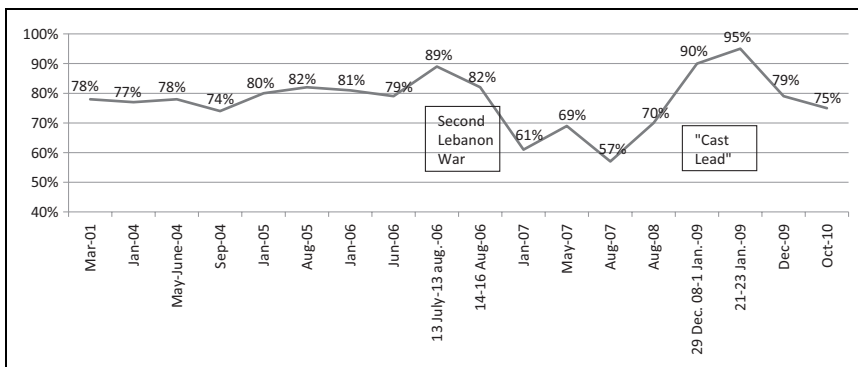


Figure 3. Percentage of respondents who replied positively to the statement: “The IDF is highly esteemed in the Israeli society” 2001–2010. During the Second Lebanon War and Operation “Cast Lead” surveys were conducted daily.

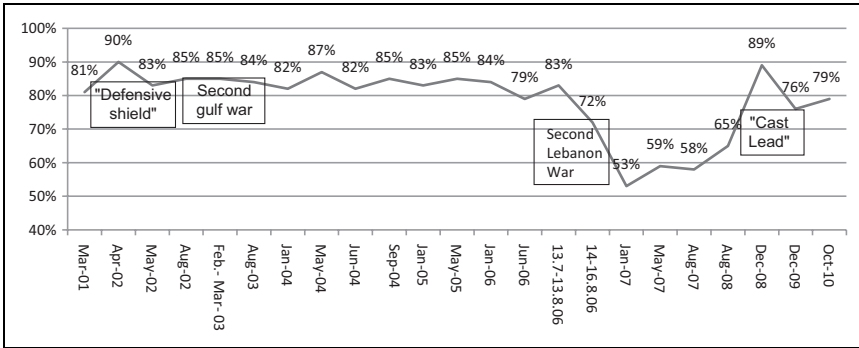


Figure 4. Percentage of respondents who replied positively to the statement: “I have confidence in the IDF’s fighting ability.” During Operation “Defensive Shield,” the Second Gulf War, the Second Lebanon War and Operation “Cast Lead” surveys were conducted daily. IDF = Israel Defense Force.

Therefore, our second hypothesis was partially confirmed regarding all the LIC events that we examined, except for the Second Lebanon War that was defined as the only HIC event in the decade that we studied. Throughout that war, the pattern was only partially preserved, since at the end of the fighting the levels of trust did not return to antebellum levels. We assume that the “shift” from the expected pattern is mainly the result of public criticism of the military campaign.⁴² The public’s perception of the Second Lebanon War as a military failure hurts the IDF’s ethos as a professional organization and may explain the sharp decline in public trust. It may also explain the different pattern in the fluctuation of public trust that we found after the Second Lebanon War compared to LIC events. The public’s view of Operation “Cast Lead” (2008) as a military success helped restore its confidence in the IDF to previous levels.

Is the Israelis’ Trust in the IDF Gradually Declining?

The third hypothesis was that the Jewish public’s trust in the IDF remained stable throughout the decade. We conducted an average analysis of the percentage of the respondents who answered positively in the surveys carried out each year from 2001 to 2010. We repeated the analysis for the two main questions that examined trust in the IDF. The data from the surveys were organized according to the year it was collected and then compared with other years. The goal was to blur specific influences of the date collection and reduce possible influences on the different sizes of the sample in the different periods. A simple average was conducted for each year, so that each of the periods in a given year had an equal weight. The findings appear in Figures 5 and 6.

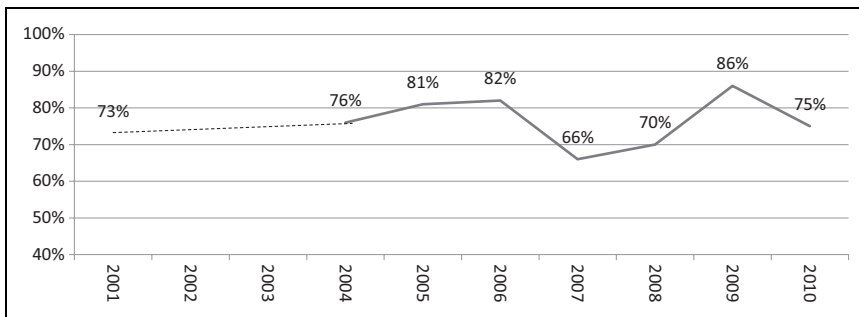


Figure 5. Annual average percentage of respondents who replied positively to the statement: “The IDF is highly esteemed in Israeli society.” During the Second Lebanon War and Operation “Cast Lead” surveys were conducted daily. IDF = Israel Defense Force.

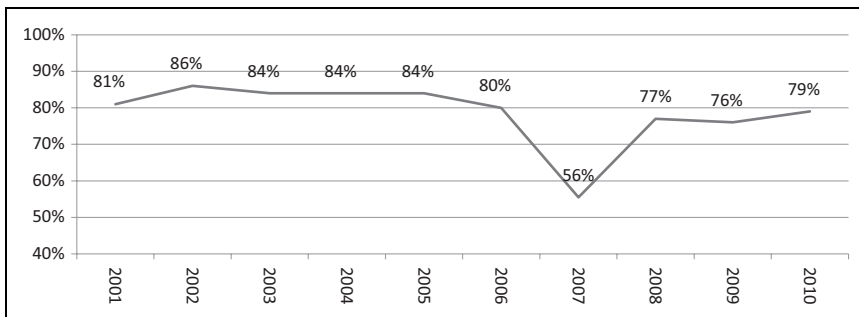


Figure 6. Annual average percentage of respondents who replied positively to the statement: “I have complete confidence in the IDF’s fighting ability.”

The analysis leads to a number of insights. In general, we found significant changes in the response patterns in questions that explore the public’s trust over the years. However, in the long run, the trust rates seem to remain relatively stable at high levels, with approximately 80 percent of the respondents expressing trust in the army and its military capabilities. One exception was the two-year period (2006–2008) from the conclusion of the Second Lebanon War to the launching of Operation “Cast Lead” that witnessed a significant decline in public trust in the IDF.

Our third research hypothesis was partially confirmed. Despite the drop in the public’s trust in the army after the Second Lebanon War, the basic level of trust in the IDF seems to have remained high throughout most of the first decade of the new millennium. Our findings match those of previous studies that found that the Jewish public’s confidence in the IDF remained stable throughout this decade.⁴³

Table 3. Percentage of Respondents Who Answered Positively to the Statements ("Strongly Agree" or "Agree").

	February–March 2003, N = 796		June 2004, N = 425		January 2006, N = 520		June 2006, N = 618	
	Percentage	95 percent CI	Percentage	95 percent CI	Percentage	95 percent CI	Percentage	95 percent CI
"I have confidence in the IDF's fighting ability"	85	[83, 88]	89	[86, 92]	84	[81, 87]	79	[76, 82]
"I trust in the IDF's professionalism"			89	[86, 92]	88	[85, 91]	90	[88, 92]
"I trust the IDF's ability to protect me and my family in emergency situations"	79	[76, 82]	84	[81, 88]				
"I trust the IDF's ability to protect me and my family from terrorist attacks"	52	[49, 56]						
"I trust the IDF's ability to protect me and my family from Qassam rockets"					44	[40, 48]	46	[42, 50]

Note: The questions were asked in selected polls, when they were relevant to the ongoing events and public discourse. Confidence Interval (CI) = 95 percent confidence interval for proportions. IDF = Israel Defense Forces.

The Public's Trust in the IDF during Limited Conflict

The last hypothesis we examined was that general trust in the IDF would be higher compared to trust in the army's ability to deal with threats characteristic of a limited conflict. We analyzed the differences between the patterns in the answers to the main questions about trust and the answers to questions about trust in the IDF's ability to cope with threats characterizing a limited conflict.

The results reveal a complex picture. Although the Israeli public holds the IDF's combat proficiency in high esteem, we found that it has little trust in the IDF's ability to protect it from specific threats that characterize limited conflicts. According to Table 3, in January 2006, at the peak of the Qassam rocket attacks on southern Israel, only 44 percent of the public expressed confidence in the IDF's ability to protect the home front from the rockets. At the same time, confidence in the IDF's combat ability and professional level was high (84–88 percent). Similar figures also appear in later surveys.

The answers to an open question asked on January 2006 ($n = 520$) reveal two possible main reasons for the public's perception of the IDF's inability to protect the home front from Qassam rockets. The first relates to the nature of the threat: the Qassam was perceived as a primitive, homemade rocket, easy to operate and difficult to spot; the second relates to decisions at the political level that restrained the military's ability to eliminate the threat. The interesting finding is that both explanations acquit the IDF of responsibility for protecting the homeland and lay the blame on external factors.

A similar picture emerged for other threats characterizing the limited conflict, such as suicide attacks during the Second "Intifada" when only 52 percent of the Israeli public agreed with the statement: "I trust the IDF's ability to protect me and my family from terrorist acts" (February–March 2003, $n = 796$).

The research findings confirm the fourth hypothesis that despite the awareness of the army's limitations in certain LIC situations, the Israeli public still retains a high level of trust in the IDF and its abilities. In other words, the public's trust in the IDF is nuanced and aware of the problematic nature of the confrontation and the limitations of military force. The public seems to perceive the IDF as a highly professional army but realizes its limited ability to cope with the complex challenges of LICs.

Summary and Discussion

This article attempts to clarify Israel's civil–military relations by employing the Israeli-Jewish public's trust in the IDF as a key parameter. The question of trust in the army is of keen interest, especially as Israeli society has undergone two conflicting processes in the last decade that may have influenced civil–military relations in the opposite direction. On the one hand, the decade was full of military confrontations, including a large-scale war, that may have enhanced the army's relevance and the public's trust in it; on the other hand, it was a decade of public and media

criticism regarding the military's performance in the wake of new control mechanisms that were imposed on the army and the frequently made claims that the army's special status vis-à-vis other government bureaus has been truncated. The research findings contribute to the empirical and theoretical understanding of the interface between the Israeli public and the military as a primary national institution. We found that in times of conflict, the "rally 'round the flag" phenomenon was expressed in a surge in trust toward the IDF and avoidance of criticism. From a comparative point of view, the findings suggest that the "rally 'round the flag" effect is relevant in the Israeli case both in conventional wars and in limited conflicts. In other words, the presence of a threat, whether an HIC or an LIC, may create the social cohesion needed to deal with it. In Israel, where the population lives under perpetual threat and the battlefield is close to home, the "limited conflict" has become a mechanism that maintains public support of the army.

Moreover, we have identified a fixed pattern of fluctuations in the public's trust in most of the armed conflicts in the last decade, apart from the Second Lebanon War (which was the only event that was defined as HIC during that period). The Second Lebanon war influenced the public's trust differently from other limited military conflicts during the decade. It was the only event that reduced the levels of trust in a longitudinal comparison. We assume that this was due to the public's perception of it as a military failure in the two years after it was over.

Nevertheless, the results point to a consistent degree of trust in the IDF throughout most of the decade, and which remained generally stable despite developments that strengthened the civilian monitoring mechanism and the public's criticism. These findings challenge the academic debate on Israeli civil-military relations and the frequently heard claims that the IDF's image is gradually declining. In our view, this stems from historical and sociological processes: the establishment of the IDF and its role as a "people's army" that shaped its image as a key social institution and highly professional organization; and the ongoing struggle between Israel and its neighbors that has created the perception of an existential threat and the IDF's identity as the national protector.

Another interesting finding is that the public trust in the IDF is not uniform but complex and nuanced. We recognize a parallel between the high confidence in the military's combat capabilities and the lack of confidence in its ability to protect the public from certain types of conflicts. In other words, the Israeli-Jewish public's perception of the army is discerning, and it is aware of the army's limitations in suppressing the terror attacks and rocket fire characteristic of LICs.

This research is unique for two reasons: first, it examines trust in the IDF by employing a series of questions that examine a wide range of aspects of the trust concept, as opposed to employing one overarching question on trust in the army, as was done in the majority of studies. Second, it is the only study that examines trust in the IDF in conflicts of varying intensities and compares them to periods of relative quiet in the same decade. The majority of studies examined this issue on a one-year basis that was generally characterized as a period of quiet. In a broader context, the study

hopes to contribute to the body of literature on trust in armed forces in democratic countries, especially because of the paucity of research on the subject in the context of counterterrorism and LICs. Are the patterns that we identified unique to Israel? This question can only be answered by further comparative research.

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Notes

1. Using Dandeker's phrase: "An era of unstable violent peace," C. Dandeker, "International Security and Its Impact on National Defense Roles," in *Facing Uncertainty: The Swedish Military in International Perspective*, Report No. 2, ed. B. Boene, C. Dandeker, J. Kuhlman, and J. Van Der Meulen (Karlstad, Sweden: Swedish National Defense College, 2000), 108.
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