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Israel's Longest War - The Challenges of the IDF's Reserves

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Abstract

The current study examines the confidence and motivation of reservists one year after the "Iron Swords" war, focusing on the war's goals and achievements. The methodology combines online questionnaires (over 1000) and telephone interviews (70). Main findings: an increase in the sense of capability in the Lebanese arena, a decrease in the willingness to fight in the Gaza arena, and a growing sense of political influence. Correlations show a connection between service area and security in achieving goals. The interviews emphasize economic and family challenges and the importance of returning the abductees. The study contributes to the examination of the continuation of reserve mobilization.

Keywords:

Israel, Hamas, Hezbollah, Gaza, Lebanon, Reserve Soldiers "Iron Swords" War

1. Introduction

The "Iron Swords" war has created a complex reality for reservists in Israel and their families, due to prolonged and repeated enlistment. This situation has led to a great deal of congestion in various areas, from family dynamics to economic stability .

The prolonged service disrupts family life and causes emotional stress and financial difficulties. The absence of reservists for long periods of time causes instability and an increase in mental health challenges among spouses and children. The economic pressure is felt due to the loss of income and the growth of debt, resulting from the inability to maintain permanent employment. Moreover, the constant concern for the well-being of loved ones on the front lines emotionally burdens families, causing anxiety and mental health problems (Gil-Ad & Fox, 2024).

The continuation of the war raises questions about the ability of the reservists to continue serving for more months. Studies show that there is a high willingness to serve in the reserves, but there are also difficulties in the IDF's preparation and in the state's assistance to reservists (Itsik, 2023).

In addition, confidence in the ability to win a war has a direct impact on the motivation of reservists to serve. A sense of self-efficacy and faith in the goals of the war strengthen the willingness to enlist and contribute, even in difficult conditions. On the other hand, doubts about the chances of victory or the goals of the war are liable to weaken motivation and cause burnout among the reservists.

The issue of ultra-Orthodox conscription has made headlines against the backdrop of the burden placed on the regular army and reservists. The Chief of Staff emphasized the need to integrate the ultra-Orthodox in order to ease the burden, and noted that any regular ultra-Orthodox battalion would reduce the use of reservists (Ynet, 2024). However, the proposed ultra-Orthodox conscription law arouses controversy and criticism, as it is perceived as exacerbating inequality and harming national security. (Walla, 2024) The reluctance of some Haredi communities to enlist, together with political tensions, make it difficult to achieve an egalitarian conscription policy.

In light of this, there is a demand for internal and external solutions to ease the burden on the reservists. Within the IDF, maximizing the potential of discharged reservists can increase the number of conscripts and ease the burden. Outside the army, ultra-Orthodox conscription, despite the challenges involved, is seen as a critical step toward a more equal distribution of the burden of service.

Purpose of the study

The study examines in a comparative manner the level of confidence and motivation among Israeli reservists a year after the launch of the "Iron Swords" campaign. The study focuses on the impact of factors such as clarity of war objectives, identification with these objectives, and operational achievements on the morale of the reservists and their willingness to serve long-term. In addition, the study examines the effect of other factors, such as political discourse, socio-economic factors, and equipment readiness, on the satisfaction and confidence of reservists .

Research Question

How does the continuation and expansion of the "Iron Swords" war affects the positions of IDF reservists in the context of their ability to make decisions in the various arenas, the motivation to continue to serve, and the social trends in Israel?

The research has the potential to make a significant contribution – the ability to continue the multi-front campaign that was forced on Israel in October 2023 requires an extensive and ongoing military effort, focusing on the need to mobilize reservists for unprecedented periods of time. In fact, it can be assumed that the results of the "Iron Swords" campaign will be significantly influenced by the State of Israel's ability to continue to recruit reservists, with an emphasis on their willingness to report to the polls .

The study presents a broad picture of the factors that affect the willingness of reservists to continue to report to the polls, and enables the formulation of responses in order to improve the effectiveness of dealing with the military, personal, and family challenges that such prolonged conscription entails .

2. Literature Review

Factors Affecting Motivation for Reserve Service in Israel

The motivation to serve in the reserves in Israel is a complex phenomenon that is influenced by a variety of internal and external factors. The research literature points to a number of key factors that influence the willingness of reservists to serve.

One of the most significant factors is the sense of mission and contribution to the country (Israeli, 2018). Many reservists see their service as part of their civic duty and an expression of their identification with the values of the state. This feeling is reinforced when reservists feel that their service is essential and significant to the security of the state (Tzur, 2018). In addition, a sense of professional competence and the opportunity for personal fulfillment during service also contribute to motivation (Israeli, 2018). Other studies indicate that a sense of self-efficacy directly affects the motivation of reservists, and that investing in training and equipment can strengthen this feeling, along with a sense of trust in commanders and the military system (Friedman, 2015).

However, there are also factors that reduce motivation for reserve duty. Individualistic values and the perception of service as contradictory to economic opportunities in the free market may lead to a decrease in motivation (Rein-Sapir, 2008). In addition, a negative military experience, a sense of distrust in the military system, and a dismissive attitude on the part of the military harm motivation. Personal fears, lack of family support, and harm at work or school are other factors that can negatively affect motivation (Heiman, 2024). It has also been argued that privatization and globalization processes weaken the concept of the "people's army", and that as a result, people with an individualistic orientation will be more deterred from reserve duty (Levy, 2019). It was also argued that the lack of adequate compensation and recognition by society impairs the commitment of reservists (Itsik, 2022).

Studies indicate that the motivation to serve in the reserves is also influenced by the social attitude toward those who serve. A decrease in public appreciation for service, a sense of deprivation in the sharing of the service burden (Rein-Sapir, 2008). Therefore, maintaining a sense of equality, fairness, and recognition on the part of society and the state are essential elements in strengthening motivation for reserve duty.

The Impact of Continuous Reserve Service

Prolonged periods of service create heavy burdens on reservists and their families, and pose significant challenges to Israeli society. Prolonged periods of reserve duty affect the continuity of civilian life, harming employment, studies, and family life (Heiman, 2024). Female reservists report emotional difficulties, weight changes, and use of mind-altering substances (Hefetz, 2024). The children of reservists are dealing with sleep difficulties, a decline in academic achievements, and emotional difficulties. (Hefetz, 2024) Students who serve in the reserves are at a more difficult starting point than those who are not, and face difficulty in meeting the same academic conditions (Rein-Sapir, 2008). Frequent absences impair confidence in a student's abilities (Hefetz, 2024).

In these situations, the reservists take various steps to ease the load. Some are trying to shorten or cancel the reserve order (Rein-Sapir, 2008), while others are looking for support within the military unit or the civilian community. At the same time, a sense of unfairness in the distribution of the burden and a lack of sufficient support from the state are liable to increase frustration and burnout among reservists. Some emphasize the importance of providing an individual response to reservists who are dealing with difficulties, taking into account their personal circumstances – a sense of loneliness and disconnection from civil society makes it difficult for reservists to cope with the burdens (Itsik, 2022).

The ability of the reservists to cope with these burdens depends to a large extent on the support they receive from the military system, the government, and society. Respectful conditions of service, a fair compensation system, and support for the families of reservists and students are essential elements in improving their ability to cope.

Attitudes of reservists regarding Long-term service

One of the main issues that arises among reservists in Israel is the division of the burden of service in society. Studies indicate a sense of deprivation among those who serve, which stems from a perception of unequal distribution of the burden. It is also argued that the feeling of deprivation is strengthened when reservists see that others are evading service and do not bear the burden (Friedman, 2015).

The increased sense of deprivation stems, among other things, from the fact that certain populations, such as the ultra-Orthodox, do not participate equally in military service (Heiman, 2024). This situation arouses resentment among the reservists, as they see themselves as fulfilling their civic duty, while others evade it.

The sense of injustice is exacerbated when reservists are forced to deal with economic and employment difficulties as a result of their service (Kenneth-Portal, 2024) .

Therefore, a more just and equal distribution of the burden of service is perceived by reservists as an essential component in strengthening their motivation. Expanding the circle of those who serve, while incorporating additional populations into military service, is likely to reduce the burden on existing reservists and contribute to a sense of fairness.

Government actions regarding the reserve system

Studies indicate that in the last generation, families of conscripts' point to the Israeli government and its attitude toward conscripts as a significant variable in its influence on attitudes toward reserve service in Israel (Lebel & Rochlin, 2009).

In the last generation, the Israeli government has taken a number of actions in order to improve the motivation to serve in the reserves. The Reserve Service Law (2008), is intended to regulate the rights and obligations of reservists, while addressing military and civilian aspects (Rein-Sapir, 2008). The law sought to strengthen the operational competence of reservists, while minimizing the harm to their civilian lives.

In addition, the state has acted to provide rewards and recognition to those who serve in the reserves, as well as to protect their places of employment and support students (Rein-Sapir, 2008). These measures are intended to deal with the erosion of public appreciation for service and to provide a proper reward for the sacrifice. However, the IDF's compensation policy was criticized by many reservists, who claimed that it was unfair (Tzur, 2018). There are those who argue that it is necessary to re-examine the compensation system, and to create mechanisms adapted to the unique needs of reservists – government actions are not always perceived as effective, and that there is a need to improve communication between the state and reservists (Friedman, 2015).

Reserve service in the "Iron Sword" War

The "Iron Sword" war intensified the public debate about reserve service in Israel, and emphasized the importance of reservists in national security (Reserve Staff, 2023). The war exposed the heavy burdens placed on reservists and their families, and once again raised the issue of burden-sharing in Israeli society (Heiman, 2024). In addition, the war raised the need for increased support for the reservists, both financially and emotionally, in order to maintain their motivation to continue to serve.

However, a study conducted a month after the outbreak of the war indicated a very high motivation among the reservists, with the most influential variable being their confidence in their ability to achieve the goals of the war, the main challenge of which was the integration of the northern and southern arenas (Itzik, 2023). It is argued that the level of confidence of the reservists in achieving the goals of the war, along with the understanding of their vitality, offsets negative effects such as the precarious state of the combat equipment, and less effective assistance from the government.

The literature indicates that motivation to serve is influenced by a variety of factors, including a sense of mission, personal and economic conditions, and social attitudes toward those who serve. In addition to that, protracted wars create heavy burdens on reservists and their families, and emphasize the need for increased support from the state and society. A sense of deprivation in the sharing of the burden harms motivation and requires creative solutions to expand the circle of those who serve.

The continuing of the "Iron Sword" intensified the public debate about reserve service, and emphasized the need to improve conditions and support for reservists. The findings of past studies emphasize the importance of adapting policy to the changing needs of reservists, taking into account issues of equality, social solidarity, and the concept of the "people's army," and improving communication between the state and reservis. Yet, this war has unique characteristics and in many unprecedented aspects: it lasts more than a year, it includes 3 to 4 active fronts, and it leads to an unprecedented burden on the reservists.

These issues raise significant questions regarding the ability to continue operating the reserve system in this war – what is their level of motivation to continue? Has there been a change in the effects of individualistic aspects in light of the accumulation of achievements alongside failures in the war? And how do these aspects affect their confidence to continue to achieve the goals of the war as defined by the Israeli government?

3. Methodology

The study is comparative to the findings of a previous study conducted shortly after the beginning of the war in Gaza (Itzik, 2023), which used a combined methodology: quantitative and qualitative. This method provides a comprehensive understanding of the subject being examined .

Over 1000 respondents participated in a detailed and semi-structured online questionnaire, both in December 2023 and in November 2024. The questionnaire was distributed online through social networks, and the information was collected through GOOGLE FORMS. This approach allows a large number of participants to be reached in a short time, and without location restrictions, while reducing the chance of typing errors .

Furthermore, 70 participants were randomly selected from among the respondents to the questionnaire, with whom a semi-structured personal telephone interview was held. The personal conversations lasted at least 45 minutes with each interviewee.

Characteristics of the participants in the study

No. of Pariticipants	1028
Avg. age	25
Officers	25%
Combat duty	52%
Male	78%
Female	22%
Employees	62%
Self-employed	11%
students	27%
Avg. day of resrv duty	181
Frontier Settlements	16%
Distant Periphery	35%
Close Periphery	21%
Residents of Central Israel	28%

Research Limitations

A number of limitations may affect the interpretation of the findings: it is possible that the information collected does not fully represent the diversity of opinions and experiences of the reservists, despite the fact that the sample is broad and very diverse, with an emphasis on the fact that the data is self-reported by the participants. Second, there may be potential biases in surveys or interviews, where participants may present a partial or biased picture of their situation. Finally, the time frame for data collection may affect the results, as changes in the state of combat or government policy may lead to changes in the perceptions and morale of reservists.

4. Findings

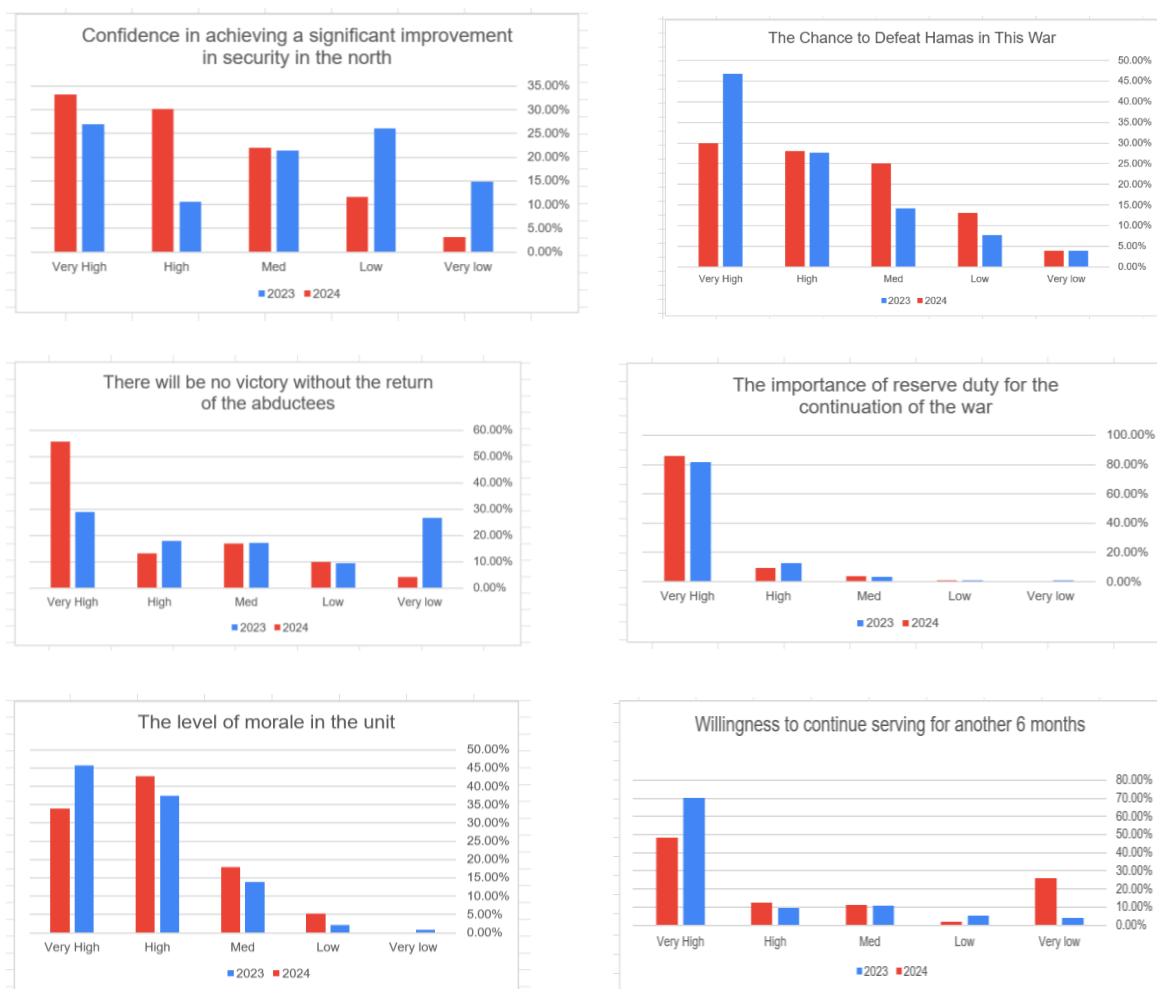
The Statement	2023		2024		Change Lvl	Consensus Lvl
	Average (up to 5)	Var	Average (up to 5)	Var		
Hamas's Defeat	4.06	1.12	3.64	1.15	--	=
Improving security in the north	3.09	1.42	3.78	1.12	+++	+
The importance of the reserves	4.73	0.67	4.81	0.5	+	++
There is no victory without the return of abductees	3.84	1.33	4.05	1.23	+	+
Continued reserve service in the war	4.34	1.11	4.4	1.09	=	=
The Impact of Political Struggles on Decision Making	2.99	1.48	2.58	1.39	--	+
The Need for Continued Fighting in Gaza	4.69	0.76	4.54	0.88	-	-
The need for changes in the government	3.27	1.58	3.74	1.39	++	+
Importance of the investigation - events of October 7	3.06	1.6	4.11	1.24	+++	+++
Quality of Government Assistance to Reserve Soldiers	2.6	1.18	2.64	1.22	=	=
Willingness to serve 60 days at the end of the war	4.08	1.16	3.52	1.21	--	-
The level of morale in the unit	4.26	0.82	4.05	0.85	-	=
The level of combat equipment	2.79	1.22	2.99	1.27	+	=
Improvement						
Worse						

Table 1 - Analysis of the Attitude to Statements

An analysis of the response to these statements indicates changes at the end of 2024 compared to the end of 2023, close to the outbreak of the war :

- An increase in the sense of ability to change the security situation in the north, and the general consensus on this.
- A decrease in the level of willingness to continue fighting in the Gaza Strip, which is related to the need to return the abductees.
- A sense of strengthening the influence of political aspects on the conduct of the war.
- A sharp trend in understanding the need to investigate the events of October 7, 2023.
- A decline in the readiness to serve in the security forces for long periods of time due to the results of the war.
- Clear criticism of the quality of government assistance to reservists and their families.

Levels of support for statements



Figures 1-6 - Levels of support and attitudes

The graphs above describe the perception of reservists after a year of fighting, during which they fought an average of more than 180 days, a number that is unprecedented for the days they served in the past two decades (no more than 20 days of reserve duty per year), and compared to previous wars that did not exceed two months. The data indicate a decline in confidence in the perception of victory vis-à-vis the Gaza arena, a significant increase in the issue of abductees held by Hamas as a factor influencing the terror organization's ability to decide, and similarly, changes in morale and motivation to continue serving in the framework of the war.

Variables in the study

Period - Period of Reserve Service - 2023, 2024 and Beyond

Geo - Ordinal, Living Area, Range from center

Age - Participant's Age

Dut_Pos - Reserve duty, home front to fighter

Exp - Total number of years as a reserve soldier

OF_NC - Officer or NCO

HMS - The level of trust in the IDF's victory over Hamas

HIZB - The level of trust in the IDF's victory over Hezbollah

EXT_SVC - Willingness to continue serving in the reserves as part of the war

MORAL - The level of morale in the unit

GOV_AID - Position on the Effectiveness of Government Aid

		PERIOD	GEO	AGE	DUT_POS	EXP	OF_NC	HMS	HIZB	EXT_SVC	MORAL	GOV_AID
PERIOD	Pearson Correlation	1.00	-.01	.00	.10	.07	.02	-.16	.22	.03	-.11	.02
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.805	.942	.001	.017	.576	.000	.000	.385	.000	.536
	N	1028	1028	1028	1028	1028	1028	1028	1028	1028	1028	1028
GEO	Pearson Correlation	-.01	1.00	.03	-.13	-.07	.11	-.09	-.05	-.11	-.14	-.18
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.805	.321	.000	.019	.000	.005	.105	.000	.000	.000
	N	1028	1028	1028	1028	1028	1028	1028	1028	1028	1028	1028
AGE	Pearson Correlation	.00	.03	1.00	.10	-.20	-.06	.05	.01	-.05	.00	.02
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.942	.321	.001	.000	.074	.122	.741	.080	.968	.528
	N	1028	1028	1028	1028	1028	1028	1028	1028	1028	1028	1028
DUT_POS	Pearson Correlation	.10	-.13	.10	1.00	-.01	-.26	.09	.08	.03	.04	.03
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.001	.000	.001	.820	.000	.004	.013	.398	.249	.423
	N	1028	1028	1028	1028	1028	1028	1028	1028	1028	1028	1028
EXP	Pearson Correlation	.07	-.07	-.20	-.01	1.00	.13	.01	.06	.13	.14	.06
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.017	.019	.000	.820	.000	.802	.060	.000	.000	.039
	N	1028	1028	1028	1028	1028	1028	1028	1028	1028	1028	1028
OF_NC	Pearson Correlation	.02	.11	-.06	-.26	.13	1.00	-.10	-.08	.02	.00	-.05
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.576	.000	.074	.000	.000	.001	.016	.609	.912	.111
	N	1028	1028	1028	1028	1028	1028	1028	1028	1028	1028	1028
HMS	Pearson Correlation	-.16	-.09	.05	.09	.01	-.10	1.00	.56	.17	.25	.29
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000	.005	.122	.004	.802	.001	.000	.000	.000	.000
	N	1028	1028	1028	1028	1028	1028	1028	1028	1028	1028	1028
HIZB	Pearson Correlation	.22	-.05	.01	.08	.06	-.08	.56	1.00	.19	.22	.24
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000	.105	.741	.013	.060	.016	.000	.000	.000	.000
	N	1028	1028	1028	1028	1028	1028	1028	1028	1028	1028	1028
EXT_SVC	Pearson Correlation	.03	-.11	-.05	.03	.13	.02	.17	.19	1.00	.34	.21
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.385	.000	.080	.398	.000	.609	.000	.000	.000	.000
	N	1028	1028	1028	1028	1028	1028	1028	1028	1028	1028	1028
MORAL	Pearson Correlation	-.11	-.14	.00	.04	.14	.00	.25	.22	.34	1.00	.26
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000	.000	.968	.249	.000	.912	.000	.000	.000	.000
	N	1028	1028	1028	1028	1028	1028	1028	1028	1028	1028	1028
GOV_AID	Pearson Correlation	.02	-.18	.02	.03	.06	-.05	.29	.24	.21	.26	1.00
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.536	.000	.528	.423	.039	.111	.000	.000	.000	.000
	N	1028	1028	1028	1028	1028	1028	1028	1028	1028	1028	1028

Table 2 - Correlations between Variables

An examination of the correlations indicates significant connections and a significant level of influence :

- For those serving in the southern arena – the longer the reserve period, the lower the confidence in Hamas's ability to defeat Hamas in Gaza – more pronounced among fighters and officers, who express a high level of willingness to continue their service in this arena.
- For those serving in the northern theater – the longer the reserve period, the higher the level of confidence in the ability to defeat Hezbollah, which is more pronounced among veteran fighters.
- A clear and powerful connection (0.56) between the perception of Hamas and Hezbollah – indicates an understanding of the inter-arena effects and the implications of a decision in one arena on the other.
- A significant and powerful connection (approximately 0.3) between the level of government assistance required and confidence in the ability to make decisions in both arenas, in the southern arena, is more significant.

Summary of Descriptive Statistics Findings

Combat Roles and Security Levels

The data indicate that participants who are actively involved in combat roles demonstrate higher levels of confidence in achieving their objectives, both in the northern and southern arenas. This correlation emphasizes the effect of direct combat experience on the perceived likelihood of success in military operations .

Regional differences in morale and government aid

A strong positive correlation was identified between living in peripheral areas and a number of key factors: unit morale, willingness to continue service, and the perceived effectiveness of government assistance. Service personnel living in these areas report higher morale in their units and a greater willingness to extend their service, along with a more positive view of the government support mechanisms.

Seniority and morale

A positive correlation was found between seniority in the reserves and similar factors: unit morale, willingness to continue service, and the effectiveness of government assistance. Experienced reservists demonstrate higher morale and a stronger commitment to continued service, along with a more positive assessment of government aid.

Officers vs. Soldiers

A striking distinction arose between officers and non-commissioned officers, with officers demonstrating a higher level of morale in their units. This gap points to the potential impact of leadership and responsibility roles on overall morale.

Political bias

The findings also reveal signs of political bias affecting all the parameters studied. Service personnel who tend to support the government demonstrate greater confidence in their ability to achieve goals in all arenas and demonstrate a higher motivation to continue serving. This finding suggests that political affiliation may play a significant role in shaping perceptions of military effectiveness and personal commitment.

Analysis of Multivariate Regression Models

Model Summary (EXT_SVC)					
R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate		
.25	.06	.06	1.07		

ANOVA (EXT_SVC)					
	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Regression	81.08	7	11.58	10.10	.000
Residual	1170.02	1020	1.15		
Total	1251.11	1027			

Coefficients (EXT_SVC)					
	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients		Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta	t	
(Constant)	6.51	2.32		.00	.005
PERIOD	.03	.08		.01	.679
GEO	-.07	.03		-.07	.034
AGE	.00	.00		-.04	.241
DUT_POS	.03	.05		.02	.495
EXP	.02	.00		.10	.001
OF_NC	.06	.08		.02	.486
GOV_AID	.18	.03		.19	.000

Table 3 - Explained variable - willingness to continue serving

In the regression model presented in Table 3, it is possible to identify the level of influence and significance of the perception of government aid on the motivation to continue serving in the war. The variable of government assistance is significant and exceeds the influence of other variables on several levels, such as: seniority in the unit and area of residence. This result more than hints at the political bias of the perception of war among the reservists. This is not government aid as a functional matter, but rather the way in which the effectiveness of this aid is analyzed – an issue that will be expanded on later in the framework of the qualitative analysis.

Model Summary (TOT_VIC)					
R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate		
.24	.06	.05	1.08		

ANOVA (TOT_VIC)					
	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Regression	74.05	7	10.58	8.99	.000
Residual	1200.17	1020	1.18		
Total	1274.22	1027			

Coefficients (TOT_VIC)						
	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients		t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta			
(Constant)	1.18	2.35			.00	.50
PERIOD	.12	.08			.05	1.63
GEO	-.02	.03			-.02	-.54
AGE	.00	.00			.02	.77
DUT_POS	.06	.05			.04	1.15
EXP	.00	.00			.01	.30
OF_NC	-.17	.08			-.06	-2.02
GOV_AID	.19	.03			.21	6.72

Table 4 - Explained variable - factors that affect the feeling of victory

Even in the regression model described in Table 4, which tries to explain the effects on the variable of the perception of victory in the various arenas, it can be seen that government aid is the most significant and influential, which leads to the insight that the sense of operational achievement is significantly influenced by the perception of government aid, as mentioned, not in the functional context, but in the effective and political context.

The analysis before us reveals significant insights into the perception of reservists in connection with the war and its outcomes. The findings highlight clear differences in the levels of perception and trust among different segments of the population, and reveal a charged political interpretation of the results of the war and a significant gap between residents of the periphery and the center of the country.

In summary, the findings of the quantitative chapter indicate that the interpretation of the war has become largely influenced by political biases. This bias shapes how different groups perceive combat achievements and its consequences. One of the most striking conclusions is the significant difference in attitudes between residents of the periphery and those living in central areas. This gap indicates a deep socioeconomic gap, with those in the periphery demonstrating a different level of trust and morale compared to the central region.

The analysis also highlights a striking trend in the levels of trust in the defeat of terrorist organizations: there is significantly higher trust in the decisive abilities vis-à-vis Hezbollah than in Hamas. This difference may reflect perceptions of organizational efficiency or strategic success, which contribute to different levels of trust, including the continuation of the fighting in Gaza.

The findings reveal a certain downward trend in the morale of the combat units: this decline may have implications for the effectiveness and cohesion of the military forces and their willingness to continue to serve in the reserves later on – aspects that require attention and intervention on the part of commanders and systems. The variable of seniority in reserve service emerges as a decisive factor in shaping trust and willingness to continue serving. Veterans who serve demonstrate greater confidence in their decision-making abilities and greater willingness to continue serving in war, apparently under the influence of socioeconomic factors. For example, students and young families may face larger challenges, which affect their perspectives and levels of commitment.

5. Qualitative Findings

Categorical division:

Subject	Frequent Topics	Focus	Miscellaneous
Multitude of challenges	Great difficulty at the family level, the financial burden	The Economic status, Family and Personal Aspect	Excellent for social support (In the community)
Victory Consciousness	Emphasis on the return of the abductees in the Gaza arena	The multifaceted and complex nature of expectations	The high importance of the issue in the consciousness of the fighters in the south
The object of pride	A sense of belonging to a historical and national goal	Active participation in operational activity and success in neutralizing the enemy's capabilities	Emphasizing the unity among the Israeli public and the solidarity displayed by the home front
The object of disappointment	The government prefers political interests over values and effective leadership.	Widespread dissatisfaction with the government's decisions	Exacerbating the Existing Divisions in Israeli Society

Interviewees' Frazes

The Challenges of the Hour

"Lately I have been feeling the difficulty in balancing reserve service with daily life. Between work, studies and trying to maintain balance at home, this is a real challenge. The financial pressure, the impact on one's career, and the time away from one's family – all of these add up. Sometimes I feel that the burden is not shared equally, and it can be difficult to cope. But I know I'm not alone in this".

"I try to balance reserve duty, work and family life, and it's hard. Between the burnout, the financial pressure, and the distance from my loved ones, it's hard to maintain a balance. I need better support – fair compensation, understanding from my wife's employers, and help for the family".

"The burnout, the fatigue. Being away from family for so long takes a toll. It's not easy. Employers don't always understand this, and the economic pressure is real. It feels like the burden is on a few while others don't pick up the gauntlet. How do we continue with these conditions"?

"They talk about the 'elephant in the room' – the challenges of being a reserve soldier in Israel. We don't just talk about the time we are away from home, but also about the financial difficulties, the impact on our relationships, and the feeling of burnout. We are expected to put our lives on hold, but the bills keep coming. We don't ask for much, just a little understanding and support. We need to feel that we are not alone in this, that our country is behind us. We are not only reservists, we are also parents, spouses, and employees" .

Victory in the campaign

"Our defensive and offensive action not only succeeded in destroying the enemy's capabilities, but also underscored the enormous progress we made in the war".

"I feel that we have reached a critical turning point. We all want our kidnapped friends and family to return home safely, and we already see the day on the horizon when we can walk our streets without looking over our shoulders. Maybe it's time for a significant change – we're trying to put an end to the threats that have been hovering over us for too long".

"The return of the hostages and the dismantling of Hamas – this is everyone's concern. There will be no choice – at least in the short term, to take control of key areas in Gaza. We just want to live without fear and see an end to the threats".

"We are tired of empty promises and failed solutions to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. It's time to think outside the box and consider new approaches. One thing is for sure – we cannot continue to do the same thing and expect different results. The time has come for real change and a solution that will bring peace and security".

"I hope for the safe return of the hostages and the end of this war. The time has come for us to set real goals and define what "victory" really means, instead of sticking to empty slogans. Perhaps the time has come for a new approach in Gaza that will ensure security and encourage a better future for all involved".

"We need to seriously rethink our approach to Gaza. We've tried the same tactics over and over again, and it doesn't bring us the peace or security we so desperately want. Isn't it time that we consider new solutions that will lead to lasting change"?

"Many of us want to see the safe return of the abductees, and certainly to see that Hamas bears responsibility for its actions and disappears. I call for the establishment of a new government in Gaza that will prioritize the welfare of its residents. The Israel Defense Forces should have full freedom of action to defend the south. There is no other way to feel safe and protected in our homes ".

An object of pride

"The social support for our reservists was unwavering, and demonstrated the unity that exists between us, especially within the reserves. This partnership, the supportive home and the understanding of our children about the importance of our absence from home, nourish our motivation and desire to win".

"We went from defense to offense, striving for victory in an unbreakable spirit. To be an active part of a national event of this historic magnitude is a privilege. We are witnessing the unity of our people and our army, the mobilization of all of them, and the defeat of our enemies. The mass mobilization of the country's residents for service and social assistance shows our strength in unity and our precious human capital".

"Israeli society stood firm. The assassinations of senior enemy figures and the operational successes of the IDF and security forces emphasize our determination. It's critical".

"We are very proud, with an emphasis on the young generation that is often underestimated, and the stories of heroism and courage inspire us all. Regardless of political positions. The achievements on the battlefield, both in the south and in the north, are a testament to our unity and resilience".

"In these difficult moments, the people of Israel have united, showing solidarity and mutual support. We belong to a legacy of strength and courage, defending our homeland as our ancestors did. Our military successes, the resilience of our people, and the unity of our soldiers emphasize that when we stand together, nothing is insurmountable".

The object of disappointment

"I write to express a collective sense of disappointment and urgency about the current situation. The ongoing war and the myriad problems that stem from it have exposed deep flaws in our political and social fabric that require immediate and serious attention".

"The lack of a decisive victory against Hamas is worrisome. The goal of "returning the settlements" alone does not address the root of the problem".

"The government's opaque conduct, and the ongoing polarization in politics and the media, severely damage national solidarity. It not only lowers morale, but also erodes trust and unity".

"I am very disappointed with the level of the national leadership: the inequality in bearing the security burden, including the ultra-Orthodox sector, is a critical issue. The failure to punish those responsible for past and present failures, both on the military and political levels, increases public frustration. The press coverage and political discourse that exploit the plight of the abductees and the ongoing war for political purposes deserve strong condemnation".

"The government's failure to enlist all sectors of society for service, along with the widespread exemptions for certain populations, creates a sense of inequality and resentment. The intensifying polarization and hatred among the people, fed by politicians and certain groups, are tearing apart our social fabric".

"The increasing burden on those who serve, in contrast to the marginal compromises that were given, emphasizes a lack of real support and appreciation on the part of the government. The slow and often inadequate response to immediate needs in times of crisis further increases the frustration felt by many".

Summary of the interviewees' frazes

The qualitative findings highlight significant challenges facing reservists, who also extend beyond the battlefield, for example, economic, family, and personal areas. The economic burden is particularly pronounced, affecting both individual income and national economic stability. Reserve soldiers report difficulties in balancing military duties with academic and career advancement, which exacerbates the economic pressure and harms professional growth. Family tension is another critical issue, with prolonged absences leading to emotional challenges.

In addition, an unequal division of the responsibilities of military service, and especially the exemption of certain social groups, harms morale and cohesion among reservists. Tackling these multifaceted issues requires comprehensive policies that provide financial support, ensure protection in the workplace, and promote equitable distribution of services.

The findings emphasize the multifaceted and complex nature of expectations and demands, especially with regard to the war, especially in Gaza. The prevailing sentiment among the participants is that military action will be decisive, and that it will ensure long-term security and stability. This is reflected in frequent calls for extensive military measures aimed at destroying Hamas and all its components, to the point that they cannot and do not want to pose a future threat - so far, these steps have not been taken decisively from the perspective of the reservists (Levy, 2025).

A significant aspect of the discussion is the emphasis on the return of the abductees – the narratives reiterate the importance of their safe return, and emphasize the importance of the issue in the national consciousness. The return of the abductees is perceived not only as a humanitarian concern, but also as a critical component of a national victory.

The findings also present a broader geopolitical perspective, with participants expressing concern about a political agreement that would preserve Hezbollah's capabilities in Lebanon. The discussion points to a comprehensive approach to regional security that includes neutralizing threats from Gaza and Lebanon. This indicates an understanding that the security of the State of Israel is closely linked to the stability of the areas adjacent to it .

In summary, participants' expectations are deeply intertwined with issues of security and governance. The calls for decisive military action, the return of the abductees, and the regularization of governance in Gaza reflect a desire for a comprehensive and sustainable solution to the ongoing conflict.

These findings provide important insights into public opinion and can assist decision-makers in their efforts to address the region's complex dynamics.

The findings also reveal that active participation in operational activity and success in neutralizing the enemy's capabilities are significant sources of pride. Furthermore, the study emphasizes the importance of social support for reservists, while emphasizing the unity among the Israeli public and the solidarity displayed by the home front. The motivation derived from the collective national effort and the shared historical context are also prominent issues .

In addition, the findings highlight the emotional and logistical support from family and friends, as well as the broader Israeli society, which plays a crucial role in maintaining the morale of reservists. The sense of belonging to a historical and national cause, together with the visible unity and resilience of the people of Israel, significantly improves the motivation and pride of those who serve in the reserves.

These findings offer important insights into the psychosocial dynamics of military service in Israel and contribute to a broader understanding of military morale in conflict zones.

The interviewees' statements illustrate dissatisfaction with the government's decisions and the perceived failure to release the hostages. The data reveal a sense of frustration with the politicization of critical issues, including the ongoing conflict and the treatment of abductees. In addition, there is significant criticism directed at the government's indecision and lack of strategic planning.

The emotions expressed emphasize a widespread belief that the government prefers political interests and power over values and effective leadership. The public's discontent also extends to the management of the reservists, with many feeling unsupported by both the government and big business. This perceived neglect exacerbates existing divisions in Israeli society, including concerns about the influence of extremist groups and an inadequate response to threats from elements such as Hamas and Hezbollah.

6. Discussion

The findings of the study point to a complex picture of the experience of reserve service in Israel at the end of 2024. On the one hand, the willingness of reservists to continue to enlist in the war remains high following the findings of December 2023, which indicates a deep commitment to defending the country. The massive participation of the reservists in the war and their success in neutralizing the enemy's capabilities are a source of national pride, while the sense of success in the northern arena and the solidarity shown by the home front contribute to strengthening motivation. Emotional and logistical support from family, friends, and the wider Israeli society plays a critical role in maintaining the level of willingness to serve, despite the unprecedented prolongation of the war .

However, in this unique war, reservists face extreme challenges beyond the battlefield, especially in the economic, family, and personal spheres, with the economic burden perceived as particularly acute. The difficulty in balancing military duties with academic and career advancement exacerbates the economic pressure and harms professional growth. These trends harm the willingness to serve in the reserves in the future, for example, in the framework of the Reserve Corps, and with an emphasis on the fact that in their view, the government's policy in the field of assistance is insufficient, and especially does not support the family in the way they expect .

Dissatisfaction with the government's decisions is also growing with regard to the perceived failure to release the abductees by Hamas, and the failure to conduct investigations into the circumstances of the outbreak of the war. This dissatisfaction is accompanied by frustration with the politicization of critical issues and criticism of the government's indecision and lack of strategic planning .

The findings of the current study have significant practical implications for government policy, military management, and social cohesion. First, the government is required to formulate a comprehensive policy of financial support for reservists and their families, taking into account the heavy economic burden they bear. Second, the government must act decisively to release the abductees held by Hamas in the Gaza Strip, as continued failure on this issue could widen the reservists' sense of distrust of the political system, and subsequently significantly harm their willingness to face future security challenges.

It is worth emphasizing that more than a year after the "Iron Swords" campaign started, the general level of willingness to continue serving in the reserves remains high, despite the criticism of the political echelon, as well as the senior military echelon. The variables examined in this study provide an answer to the question of why,

despite the enormous difficulty, such a level of readiness is maintained – and the answer is that it seems that the operational achievements perceived by those who serve during an existential struggle, along with unit cohesion, constitute a decisive factor, and it is worth emphasizing family pride – all of which succeed at the current point in time to recharge the "containers" of motivation to continue to serve. It is worth emphasizing here that the chain of events in Lebanon in October 2024 apparently marked a high point in terms of decisive power vis-à-vis Hezbollah, an issue that at this point in time last year was marked as a significant weakness (Carter, 2024).

Nevertheless, looking to the future, it is worth understanding that stretching the reservists for an additional period of time in the current campaign must have an operational purpose that has possible operational achievements in terms of a clear improvement, as they perceive it, in the security situation of the country. This issue requires an informed strategy in the operation of the reserve system from now on, alongside a consistent government policy in the context of the required assistance to the families of those who serve, or to young soldiers who are students, who are in the early stages of developing their independent lives – these have been severely damaged in the past two years, and they expect the state to support them as compensation for a dramatic period in life.

7. Conclusions

The prolongation of the "Iron Sword" war has a significant impact on the Israeli reserve forces: as time passes, more and more reservists view their service through a political lens, which is liable to harm their operational achievements and their willingness to serve. This change in perspective could lead to a decrease in motivation, which until now has been influenced mainly by a sense of contribution to national needs, first and foremost security. The operational burden on reservists is enormous, with many coping with unprecedented periods of service that put an extreme strain on their personal and professional lives .

The Operational Achievement of the War

Reserve soldiers, after a year of intense fighting, feel great vitality in their service and in their operational contribution in all combat arenas. At the same time, there is a decline in trust in the achievement of the goals in the Gaza arena – in the view of the reservists, there is frustration in the context of the lack of progress on the issue of the abductees, which is beyond the purpose of war – in their view, this is a moral goal, the failure of which clearly harms the sense of victory in the south.

On the other hand, there is a clear sense of success in the Lebanese arena in the face of the required operational achievement, and it can be assumed that also following the deep damage to Hezbollah that took place during October 2024, led by the assassination of Hezbollah's leader, in addition to the damage to the organization's operational capabilities, and success in clearing the area of villages near the northern border .

The Challenges of Family Resilience

The unprecedented scope of reserve service during the war has a significant impact on the resilience of the families of the reservists. The ongoing war requires long periods of service and re-enlistment, which places a considerable strain on family dynamics and stability. Reservists face the challenge of balancing their military obligations with their family responsibilities, which leads to growing concern about the well-being and resilience of their families, a phenomenon that characterizes long periods of service and distance from home—the frequent and prolonged absences of reservists disrupt the family's routine and increase the emotional burden on family members, especially spouses and children.

In this context, monetary rewards, especially direct grants, along with emotional support have been identified as the most effective means of supporting reservists and their families. These financial incentives help alleviate some of the economic pressures faced by families due to loss of income and other expenses incurred during ongoing military service during a war. By providing direct economic support, the government can reduce the negative impacts on family resilience and improve the overall well-being of reservists' families. Financial rewards also serve as a tangible recognition of the sacrifices of reservists and their families, thus raising morale and motivation to continue serving despite the ongoing challenges.

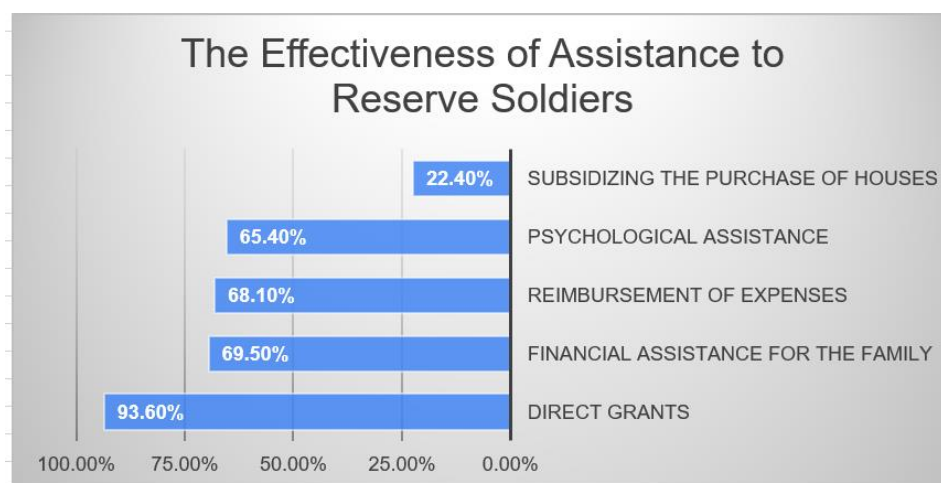


Figure 7 – Assistance Effectiveness

Growing adoption of a political angle

The political dimension further complicates the situation for the reservists. The continuation and expansion of the war and the refusal to investigate the circumstances of its opening lead to different opinions regarding the achievements in the Gaza arena, and frustrations over the number of abductees captured by Hamas, which characterize perceptions of fighting while holding prisoners in the hands of enemy forces. These frustrations are exacerbated by the perceived inefficiency of the political leadership, which not only highlights the political tensions surrounding the war, but also reflects broader social debates over sharing the burden and national duty.

In addition, the political discourse surrounding the war affects perceptions and morale among the reservists. As the war drags on, a sense of disappointment permeates the reservists, who feel that the sacrifices they make are incompatible with a decisive diplomatic move. This feeling is exacerbated by the ongoing criticism of the political leadership, which may undermine the sense of unity of purpose and commitment of the reservists (Calcalist, 2024). The need for re-evaluation of strategies by decision makers is evident, with a focus on operational achievements and supporting families to maintain high resilience and willingness to serve (Ynet, 2024).

Ultra-Orthodox conscription

The enlistment of the ultra-Orthodox population for reserve duty enjoys a broad consensus among reservists, as the burden of reserve duty is increasing. Many reservists' express frustration over the exemption given to ultra-Orthodox people from service, seeing it as an unequal division of national responsibility (Calcalist, 2024). The political leadership's hesitation to enforce conscription among this population has led to growing criticism, emphasizing the operational burden on the existing forces and questioning the sustainability of the reliance on a limited pool of reservists (Ynet, 2024). Addressing this issue is critical to ensuring a more equitable and effective defense strategy.

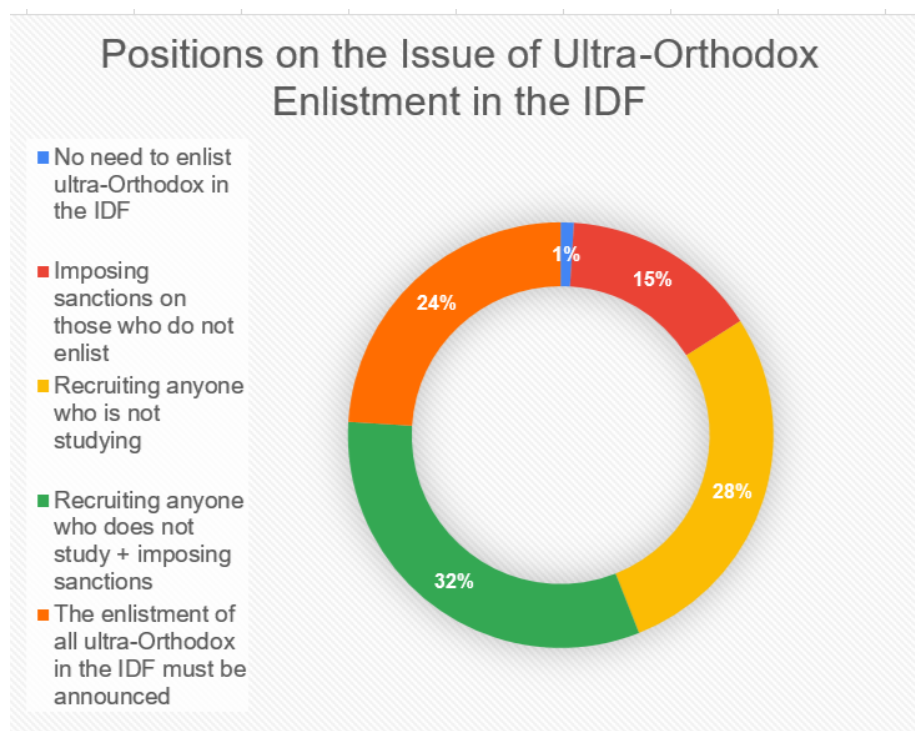


Figure 8 - Ultra-Orthodox enlistment in the IDF

In summary, a high level of vitality and motivation is maintained among the reservists, which relies mainly on a sense of success on the battlefield, and in light of a war with a multi-front challenge. At the same time, there is an erosion trend that is rooted mainly in the policy of the Israeli government, both in the context of the abductees held by Hamas and in the context of the policy of assistance to those who serve and their families.

At the point in time of December 2024, after the stabilization of a ceasefire in the northern arena, and in light of the abductees agreement that was decided upon in Gaza, this may be a high point in the motivation to continue to serve, and in this context, from now on, we can expect to identify increased erosion that requires national and military strategic attention in the continued operation of the reserve system in the context of the current campaign, as well as in the expansion of sources of recruitment to the IDF, with an emphasis on populations that are not partners in this national mission.

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