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Torah or Military Service? Haredi Public Opinion in the Shadow of War

A recent public opinion survey reveals changes in attitudes of the public and the Haredi community in light of the current war



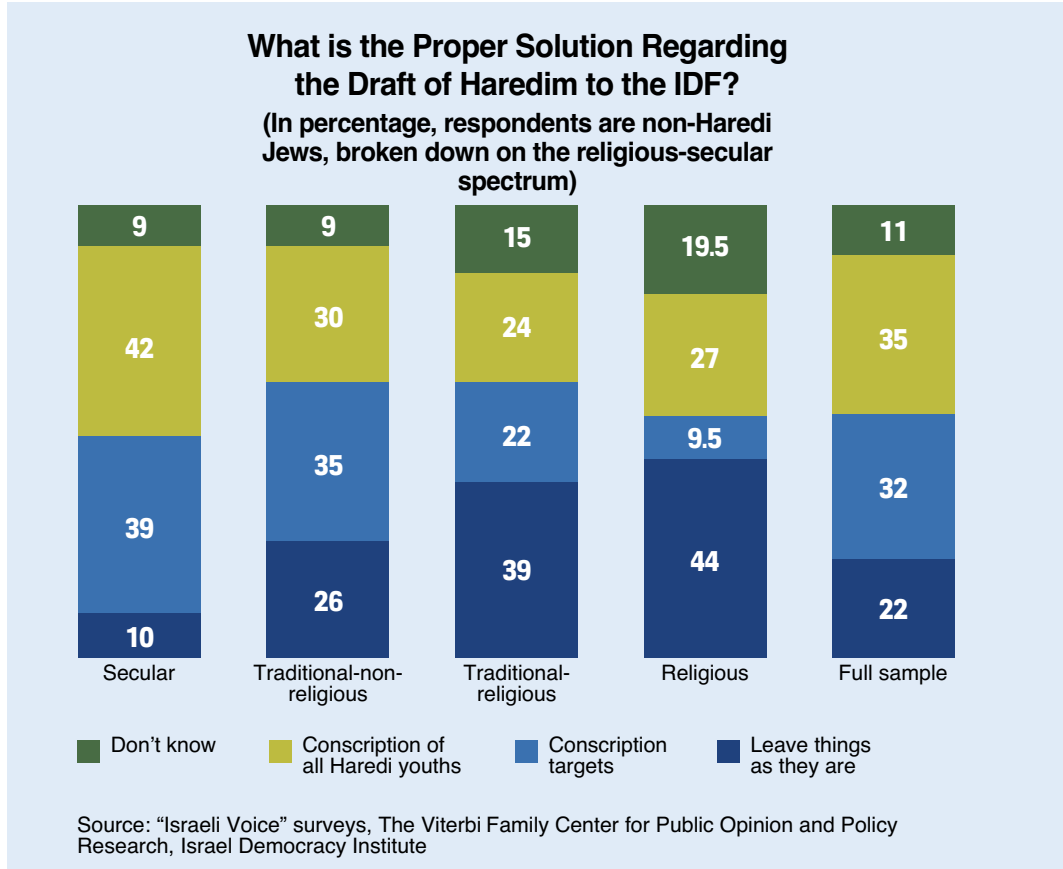
In Israel 2024, the parallel lines not only do not meet but have no visual connection between the two worldviews they depict. The Haredi public feels that they bear Israel's security on their shoulders or at least are equal partners in it."

The results of a survey conducted by the Israel Democracy Institute on the topic of conscription, revealing enormous gaps between the sectors in Israel, reminded me of the famous optical illusion - a drawing which shows a young lady to one observer, while another sees an old woman. This is the reality of Israel in 2024. Parallel lines that not only do not meet but have no visual connection between the two worldviews they depict.

We asked the Haredi public what contributes more to the war effort today: military service or prayers and Torah study? 52% replied that prayers and Torah study are preferable, and 41% believed both are equally significant. In other words, the Haredi public feels that, in their own way, they bear most of the security of Israel on their shoulders, or at least are equal partners in it. This ideological-value perspective meets with sharp criticism from the non-Haredi public, feelings of inequality, and even immorality.

Do the Haredim accept the moral criticism of their behavior? 75.5% of them believe the criticism is unjustified. They also think the halachic claim that the current war is a "war by commandment," obligating all Jews to serve, is not justified. Among young people, there is stronger opposition. 76% of those aged 18-29 do not find the criticism justified, compared to 47% among those aged 60+.

Modern Haredim stand out as an exception. This group constitutes at least 11% of the Haredi society (and possibly double that number or more, depending on how they are counted), where the majority view military service as equivalent to Torah study. 33% believe the claim of immorality is



justified, and 41% believe the war is a "war by commandment."

Supporting Roles

Interestingly, not only the Haredim believe they contribute to the war effort. 46% of non-Haredi respondents thought the Haredi public contributed to the fighting (in addition to 'civilian aid'), compared to an almost identical rate (47%) who thought otherwise. It seems that half the public views cooking for soldiers, studying, and praying as contributing to fighting itself.

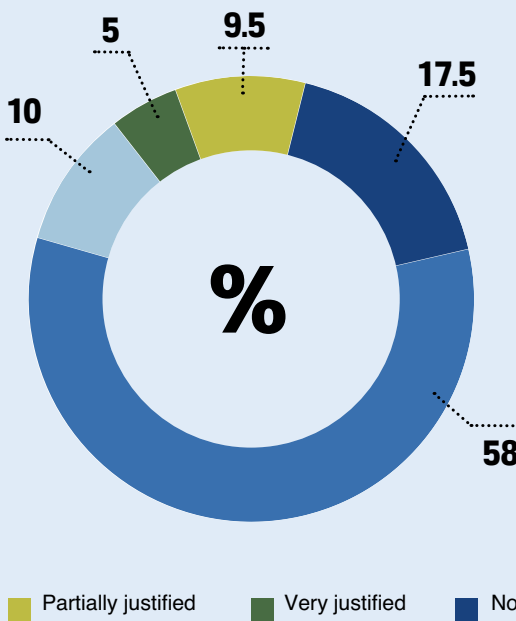
The Haredi ideological stance also translates into a practical position. In response to whether young Haredim should be encouraged to enlist in the

army as part of the war effort, 68% said no, while about a quarter (23%) answered yes. The answers changed when we asked about the willingness for partial conscription solutions, given the withdrawal of yeshiva budgets due to the war. 56% still refused any change, while 34% agreed to the presented service arrangements given certain conditions—23% agreed to enlist non-studying Haredim, 3% to conscript married men, and 8% to national-civilian service.

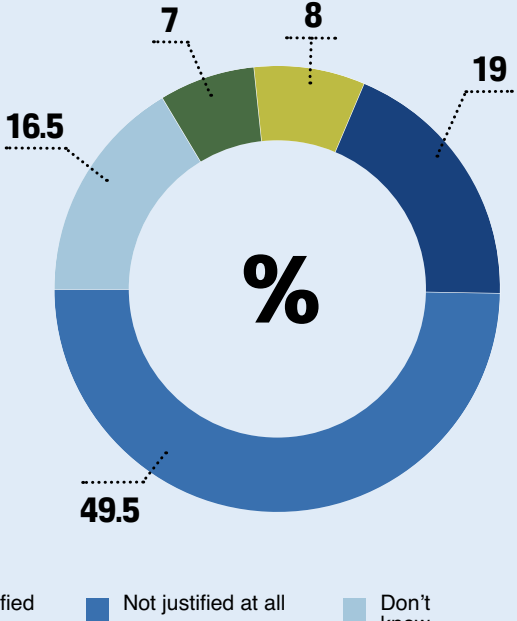
Mandatory Alternatives

When we asked non-Haredi Jews about the right solution for drafting Haredim into the military

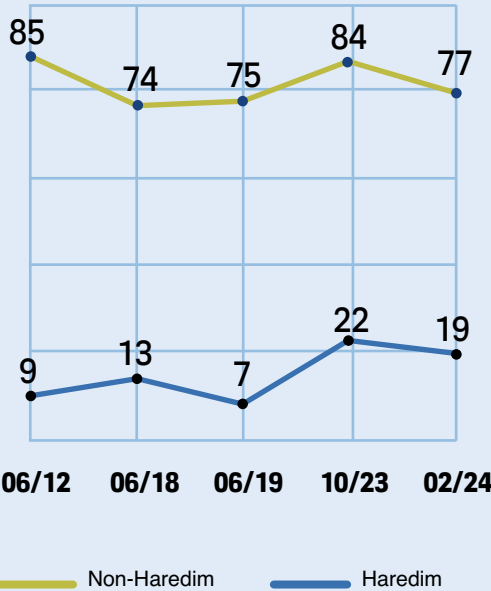
Is the Widespread Claim Justified That it is Immoral for Haredim to Not Serve in the IDF, and Therefore have Far Less Injured and Fallen Soldiers? (Haredim)



Is the Claim that the Current War is a War by Commandment, Obliging All to Serve, Justified?



Support for Canceling the Exemption from Military Service for Haredim (Percentages)



(the question was asked in a survey related to the war, but the war was not explicitly mentioned), we received a mirror image: 67% supported drafting Haredim in one of two alternatives, while 22% wanted to maintain the existing arrangement. In a breakdown by political identification, 84% of the left, 80% of the center, and 58% of the right supported conscription.

Contrary to expectations, we found that civilian national service for Haredim does not receive higher support among the Haredi public than military conscription. Only 8% support this solution, even if budgets are withdrawn. On the other hand, there is consensus among the non-Haredi public on the matter of civilian national service. 85% believe Jews who are exempt from service should be required to do national-civilian service (76% think the same for Arabs). The high percentages stand across the political spectrum (93% on the left, 89% in the center, and 82% on the right) and religious-secular spectrum (88% of the secular, 86% of non-religious traditionalists, 80% of religious, and 78% of religious traditionalists).

Social Changes

Three changes in the Haredi perspective can be identified in the shadow of the war. The first is a decrease

in the opposition of modern Haredim to conscription and even moral discomfort with the situation. The second is the majority support of the Haredi public for Haredim who decided to enlist. In the past, Haredi soldiers returning to their neighborhoods in uniform received negative and even aggressive treatment. Today, support for a family member or friend enlisting in the war is high. 54% of all Haredi respondents would support enlistees in their community (at least under certain circumstances), and only 26% would maintain their opposition. Support among men (60%) is higher than among women (48%), and among modern Haredim, it jumps to 77%.

The third change appears to be a low level of trust Haredim have in their leaders. In response to the question, "To what extent do you feel that the Haredi political leadership represents you during the war?" 37% of Haredim said they felt represented to a great or very great extent, while 42% did not feel represented or felt minimally represented. Despite Haredi women not being elected to the Knesset, more men feel unrepresented (45%) than women (38%). Similarly, modern Haredim feel less represented (62%) than more conservative groups, and young people aged 18-29 (49%) and those aged 60+ (44%) feel less represented than middle-aged groups.

Previous surveys conducted by the Israel Democracy Institute's Viterbi Center in recent years show a shift in attitudes towards Haredi conscription, such that immediately after the events of October 7th, the number of non-Haredim supporting the cancellation of the exemption rose to 84%, and even among Haredim, it reached a peak of 22%, which slightly declined in the following months (77% and 19% respectively).

However, a chasm continues to exist between the sectors, with the Haredi public seeing the current situation as an ideological-moral ideal, not a political-practical one, while the non-Haredi public is bearing a heavy burden and calling for hands to "carry the stretcher," so to speak.

(The full survey is available in Hebrew on the Israel Democracy Institute website. The survey was conducted in January 2024 via phone among 508 Haredim (Askria) and online among 536 non-Haredi Jews (iPanel), all aged 18+, with the assistance of the Viterbi Center for Public Opinion and Policy Research at the institute. The sampling error range is ±4.3%).

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