

After Seven Months of War, Israeli National Resilience Is Clearly in Decline

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In the seven months since the outbreak of the war in the Gaza Strip, it is evident that Israeli society has not yet recovered from the collective trauma of the horrific events of October 7. The Hamas massacre significantly undermined the resilience of Israeli society. In addition, the lackluster state of the war in Gaza, the fate of the hostages and the campaign being waged by their families, the challenging conditions facing people evacuated from their homes in southern and northern Israel, the incessant conflict with Hezbollah, and the possibility of a direct front with Iran all further challenge Israeli resilience. The dysfunction of the government and the political establishment, the increased rifts within the government, and the toxic public discourse are also undermining resilience. This article examines the characteristics of national resilience and its trends, as manifested in 15 public opinion polls conducted by the Institute for National Security Studies since the outbreak of the war, compared to the findings of the most recent poll, which was conducted between April 14–16. The current state of Israeli resilience is complex. Although there are some encouraging signs, as the war continues, the overall picture of Israel's resilience demonstrates a clear decline.

Resilience is usually defined as the capacity of any system to successfully deal with a severe disruption/disaster (natural or man-made), to maintain reasonable functional continuity during the event, recover from it as quickly as possible, and subsequently rise to a higher level of systemic functioning. In this article, we will examine four of the main elements of resilience, as manifested in 15 public opinion surveys conducted by INSS since the start of the war, the most recent of which was held between April 14–16, 2024.¹

Trust in State Institutions

The surveys examined the level of trust that the Israeli public feels toward the IDF, the Israel Police, and the government of Israel. The data shows a high and steady level of trust in the IDF, reaching close to 90% among the Jewish population (see Figure 1). At the same time, the longer the war in Gaza continues, there is a clear and consistent decline in the percentage who express confidence in the IDF's ability to win the war,

¹ The surveys are led by the Data Analytics Desk at INSS. The fieldwork was carried out by the Rafi Smith Institute; 600 men and women were interviewed on the internet and by phone in Hebrew and 200 in Arabic, constituting a representative sample of the adult Israeli population (age 18 and above). The maximum sampling error for each sample is $\pm 3.5\%$ at a 95% confidence level.

from 92% at the start of the conflict to 64% in the most recent survey (see Figure 2). There has also been a decline in the percentage of those who believe that the goals of the campaign in Gaza will be achieved (see Figure 3). Just 10% of Jewish respondents believe that the goals of the war will be fully achieved. The gap between the very high level of trust in the IDF and these figures could be explained by the emotional connection that the Israeli public has with the IDF and the need to believe in it, more than a sober assessment of its capabilities.

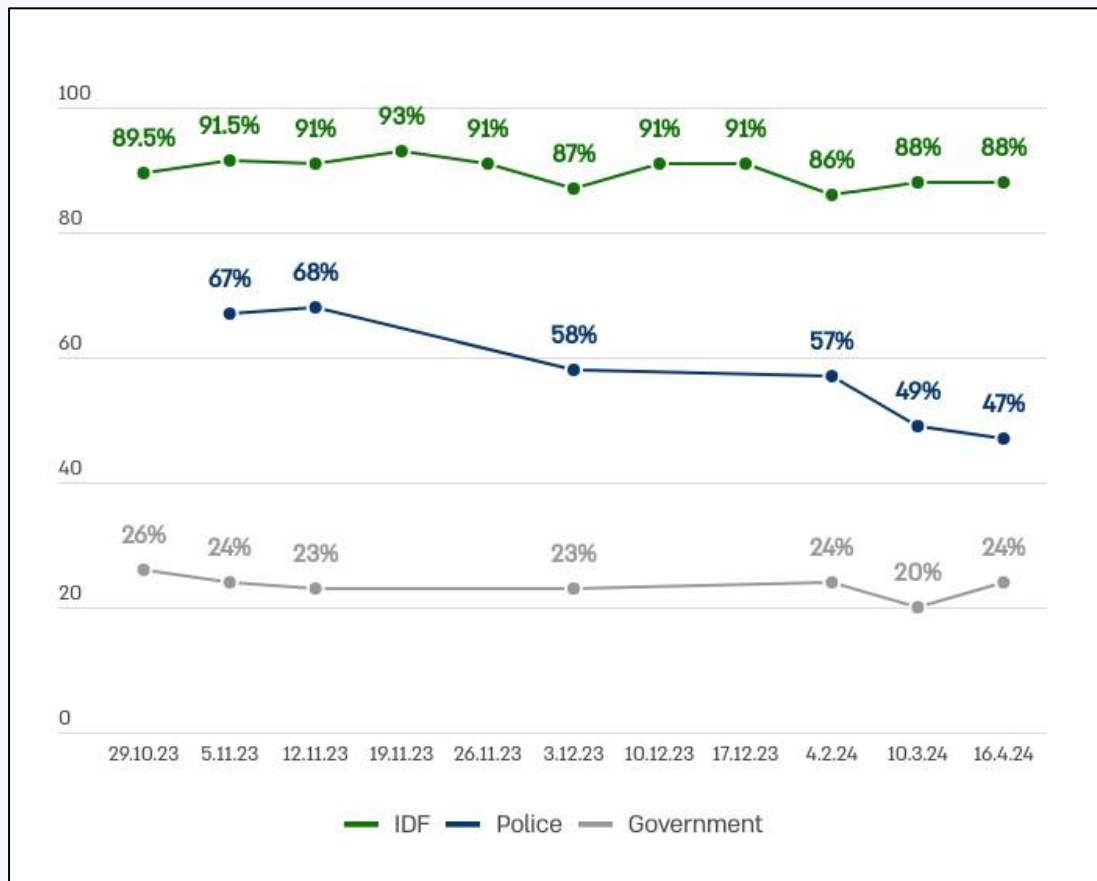


Figure 1. Level of trust in state institutions (Graph reflects Jewish population only)

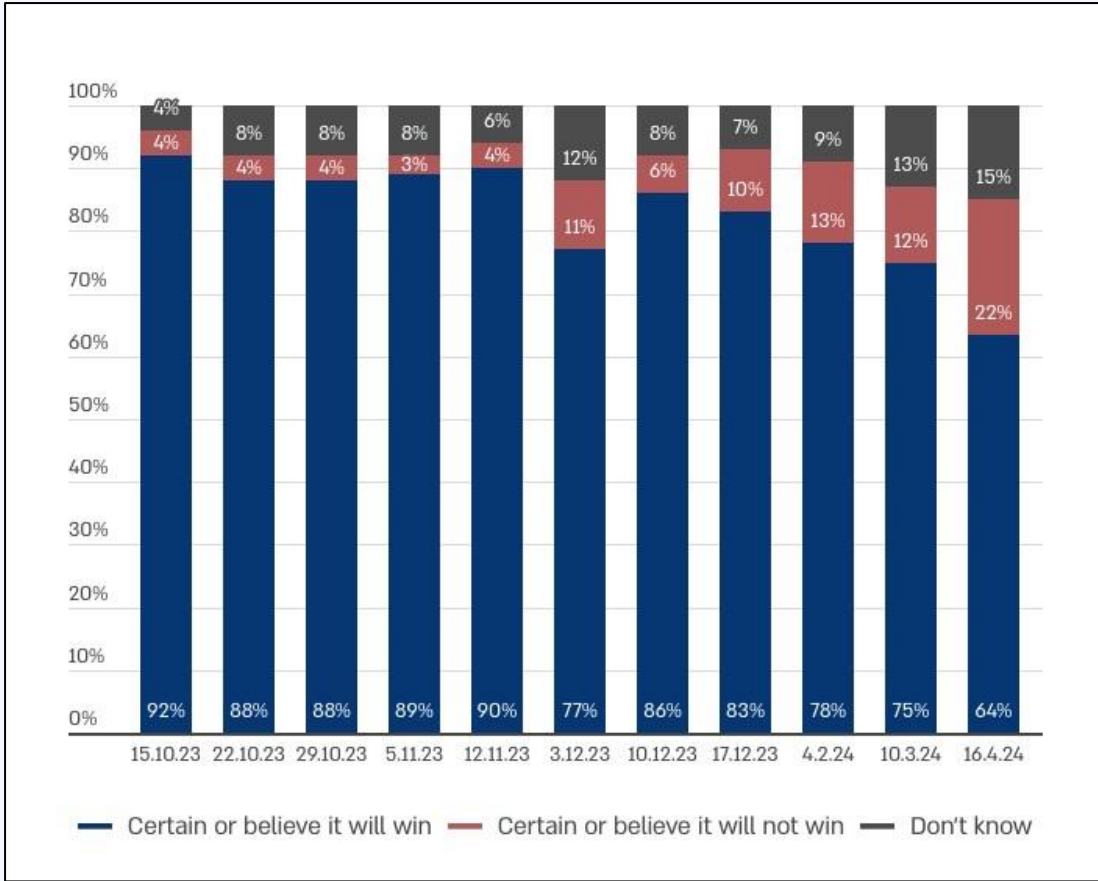


Figure 2. In your opinion, will the IDF win the war in Gaza or not? (Graph reflects Jewish population only)

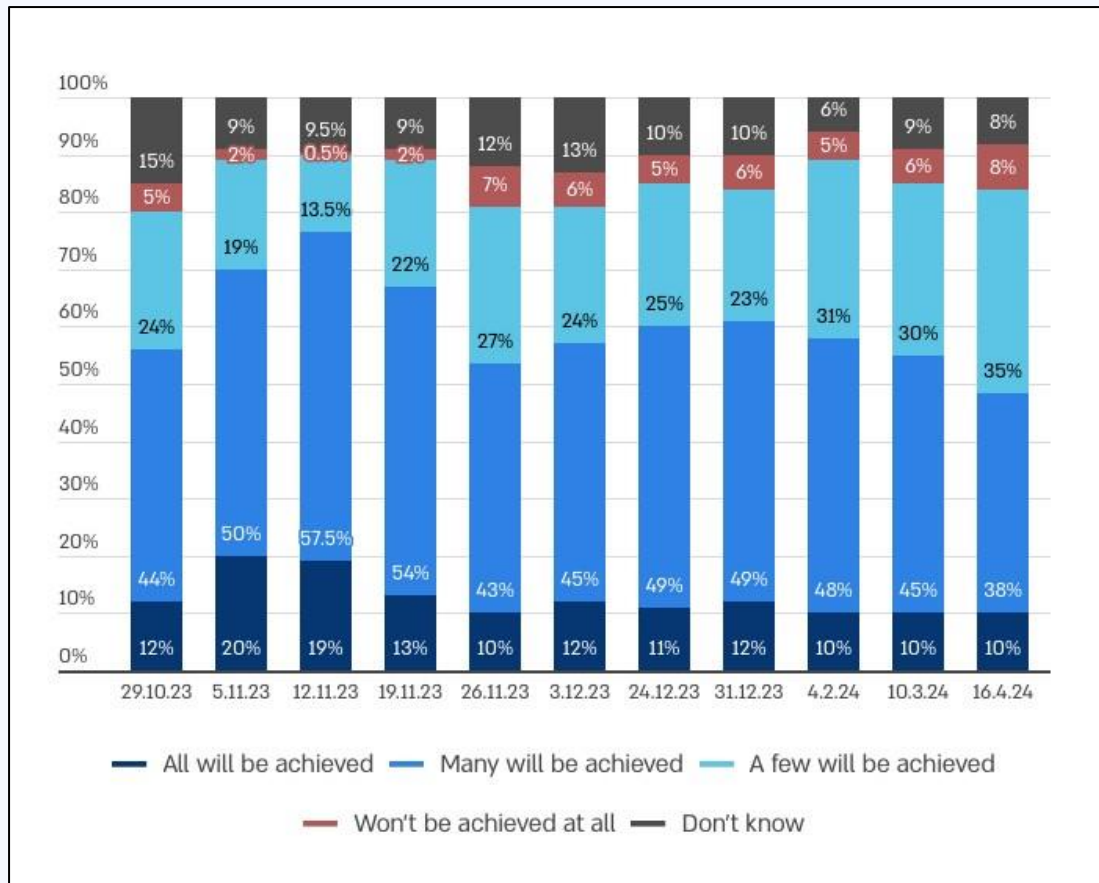


Figure 3. In your opinion, will the goals of the Gaza war be achieved? (Graph reflects Jewish population only)

The faith of the Israeli public in the police has also consistently declined. At the start of the war, 68% of the Jewish respondents expressed a high level of trust in the police; however, in the most recent poll, that trust dropped to 47%. This decrease can be attributed to the fact that some time has passed since the events of October 7, when police officers in the south acted heroically. The officers’ resumption of their regular duties, including policing demonstrations and political protests, seems to have gradually returned the public’s trust to a level that is more commensurate with routine times.

One particularly negative finding—a significant impediment to resilience—is the public’s trust in the government. According to the survey, the level of trust in the government remains consistently low, between 20% and 28%. The significant gap between trust in the government and trust in the IDF is especially problematic and directly contributes to lower levels of national resilience. It reflects public criticism of the government’s performance, both in terms of its responsibility for the failures that led to October 7 and its conduct since then, including in civilian matters.

Among the Arab population, levels of trust are even lower. In the most recent survey, 47% of the Arab respondents expressed a high level of trust in the IDF, 27% said that

they believed the IDF would win the war in Gaza, and 21% said that some or all of the goals of the war would be achieved. In addition, 27% of the Arab respondents expressed a high level of trust in the police and 19% expressed a high level of trust in the government.

Social Solidarity and Support for the War Effort

The most concerning finding regarding solidarity is the declining support among the Jewish population for the objective of the war—the dismantling of the Hamas regime in the Gaza Strip. Those who strongly supported this objective decreased from 84% in December to 67% in mid-March (see Figure 4). Public support for the war’s objectives expresses the willingness of Israeli society to unite behind a common cause, despite the heavy price, reflecting solidarity. While the overall level of support for the war’s objectives remains high, fewer Israelis support the objectives the longer the war continues. This may be due to disappointment with the military situation and concern about the feasibility of the defined objectives. In the Arab sector, support for the objectives of the war remains steady, although the percentage of those expressing little or no such support has grown since the start of the war, from 27% in November 2023 to 41% in the most recent poll.

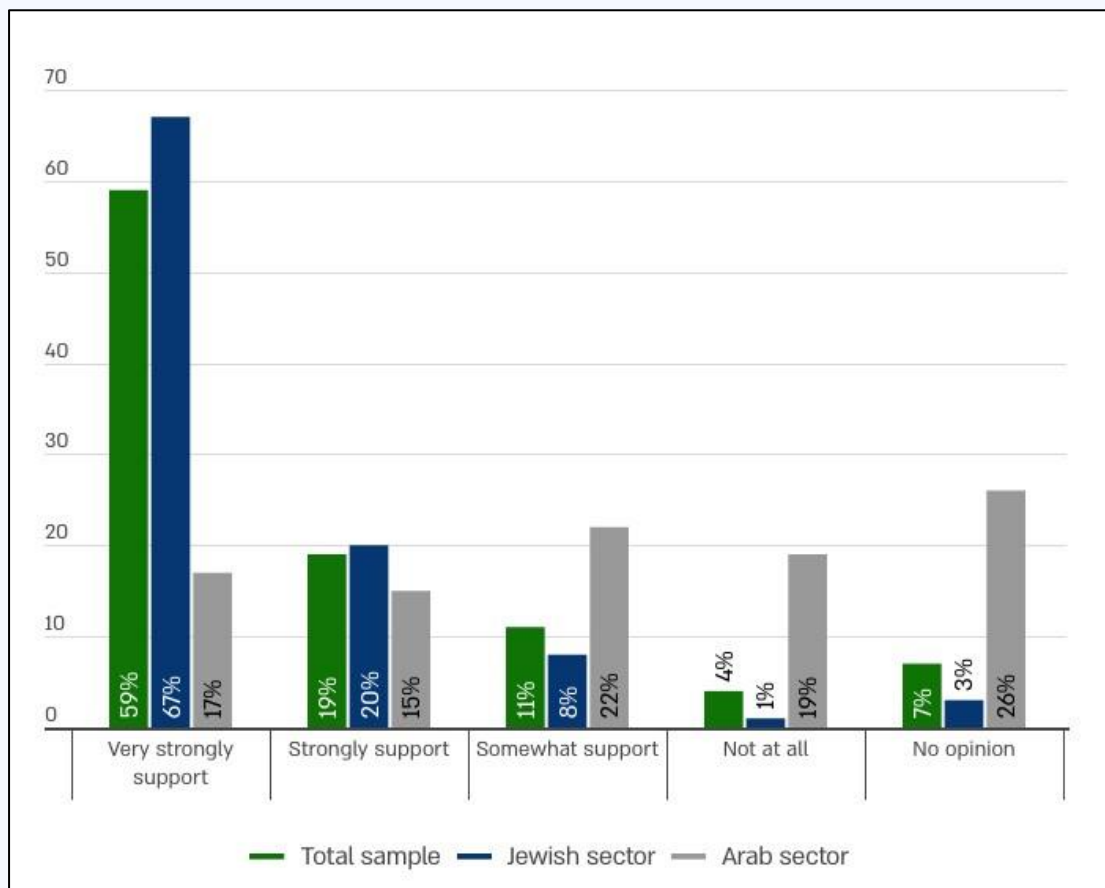


Figure 4. Israel’s political echelon determined that the goal of this war is to bring down Hamas’s regime in the Gaza Strip. To what extent do you support this goal?

Immediately following October 7, a large majority of Israelis believed that the sense of solidarity in Israeli society had grown stronger. Since then, however, the percentage of people who believe so has significantly decreased and now stands at less than 50% in the Jewish sector (see Figure 5). In the Arab sector, just 31% in the most recent survey believe that the sense of solidarity in Israeli society has increased a lot or even somewhat.

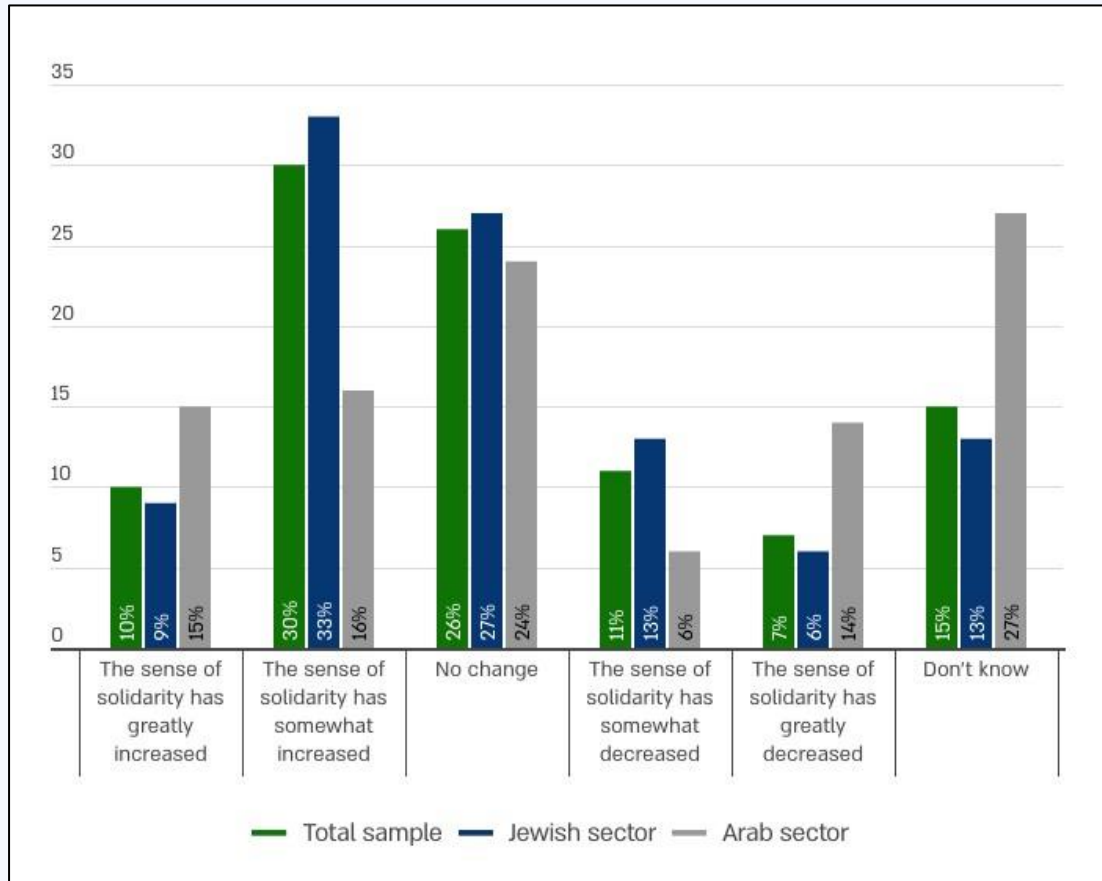


Figure 5: In your opinion, has there been a change in the sense of solidarity in Israeli society of late?

It is interesting to note a decline in the percentage of those who believe that the relationship between Jews and Arabs has deteriorated since the outbreak of the war. In the December survey, 50% of Jews and 54% of Arabs believed that the relationship had deteriorated, while in the most recent survey, just 43% of Jews and 47% of Arabs thought so. This finding could be seen as an encouraging indicator.

Another interesting finding in the most recent survey (see Figure 6) is that almost half of those surveyed (48%) are more worried by social and national tensions within Israel than by external security threats to the State of Israel (43%). This is a significant finding, which indicates that there is concern for the decline in social solidarity.

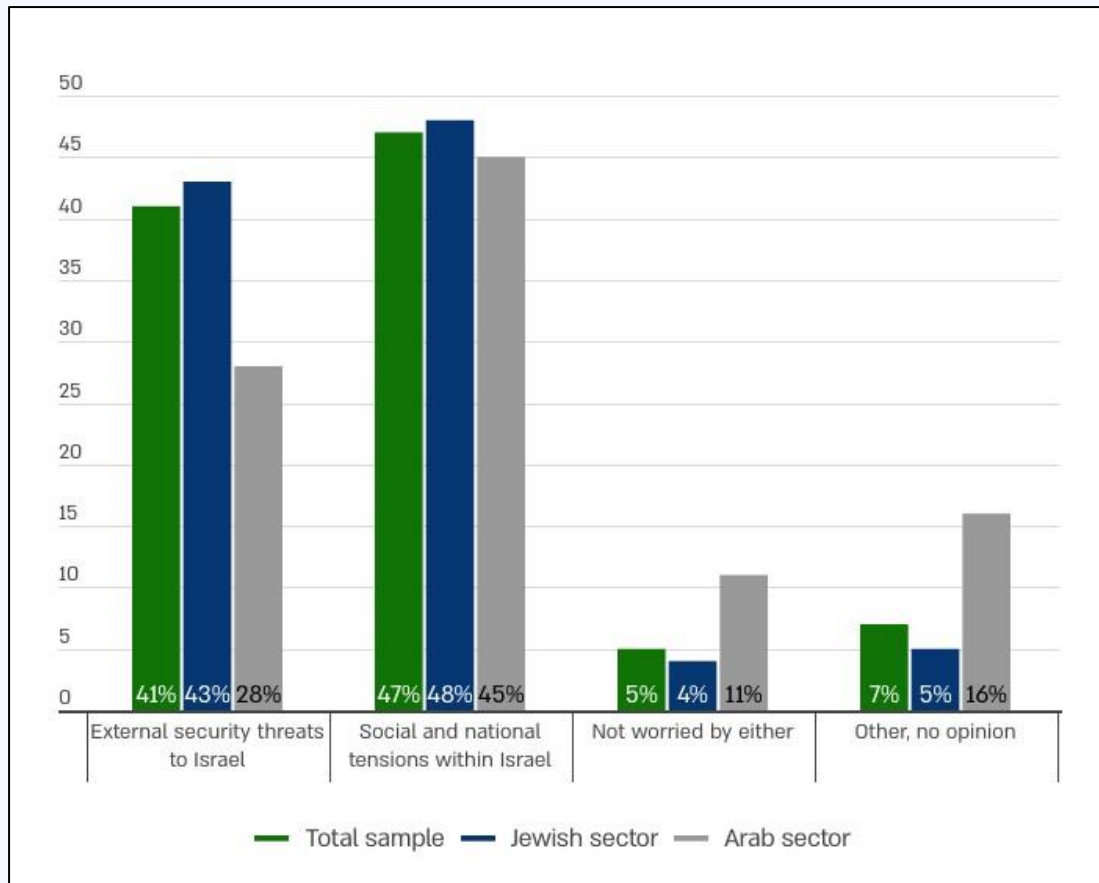


Figure 6. What worries you more?

Optimism and Hope

Another aspect of national resilience is the level of optimism and hope among the public. In addition to the declining confidence in the IDF’s ability to win the war in the Gaza Strip, other issues are also concerning. For example, although initially more than 80% of the Jewish sector surveyed said that they were optimistic about Israeli society’s ability to recover and thrive after the crisis, the percentage of optimists has decreased as the war continues. In the most recent poll, 65% described themselves as such (see Figure 7). Although this figure is still relatively high, it is likely to continue to decline as the war persists in its current form.

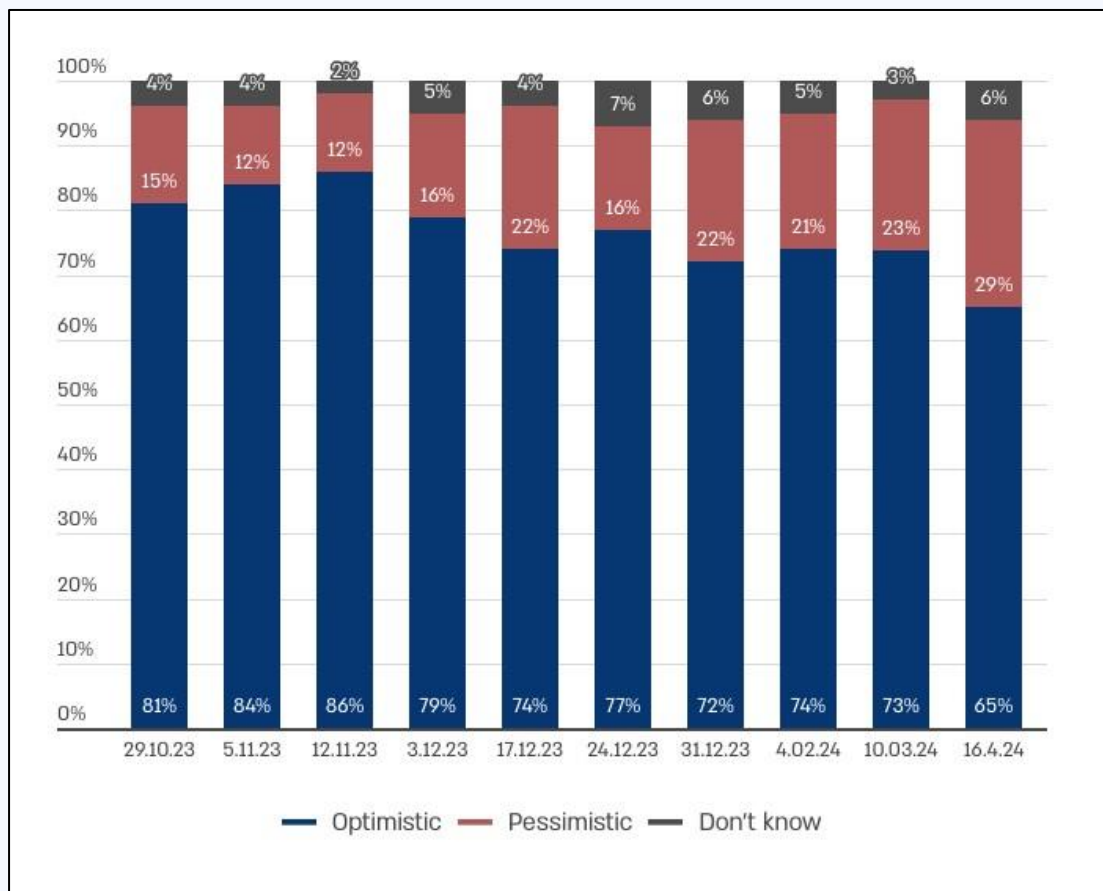


Figure 7. To what extent are you optimistic about Israeli society's ability to recover from the crisis and grow? (Graph reflects Jewish sector only)

In parallel, there has been a slight increase in the percentage of those who are extremely concerned about the state of Israel on the day after the war (see Figure 8). While in November, 56% were concerned, 64% are concerned according to the latest survey.

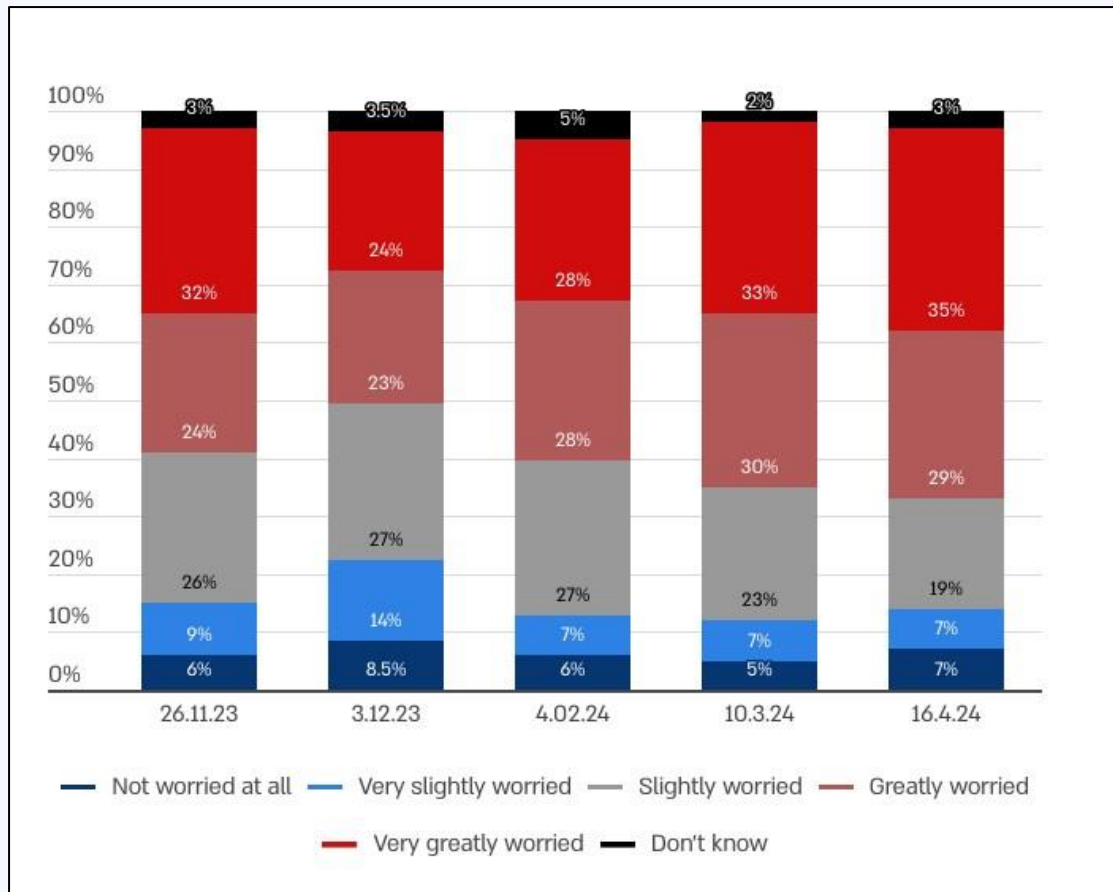


Figure 8. To what extent are you worried or not worried about the state of Israeli society the day after the war? (Graph reflects Jewish sector only)

Personal Routine and Functional Continuity During the Disruption

The ability to ensure functional continuity during an ongoing disaster is an indicator of a high level of resilience, and vice versa. Functional continuity also serves as the foundation for a quick recovery and return to growth. As the war progresses, there is a noticeable improvement in the return to routine and functional continuity among most segments of Israeli society. This phenomenon, however, does not extend to the Israelis evacuated from the north and only partially extends to those forced to leave their homes in the south.

In the most recent survey, those surveyed did not report any significant improvement in the sense of personal security (see Figure 9). It is possible that this finding is linked to the extensive Iranian missile and UAV attack on Israel just days before the survey was conducted, which created a sense of threat among many Israeli citizens.

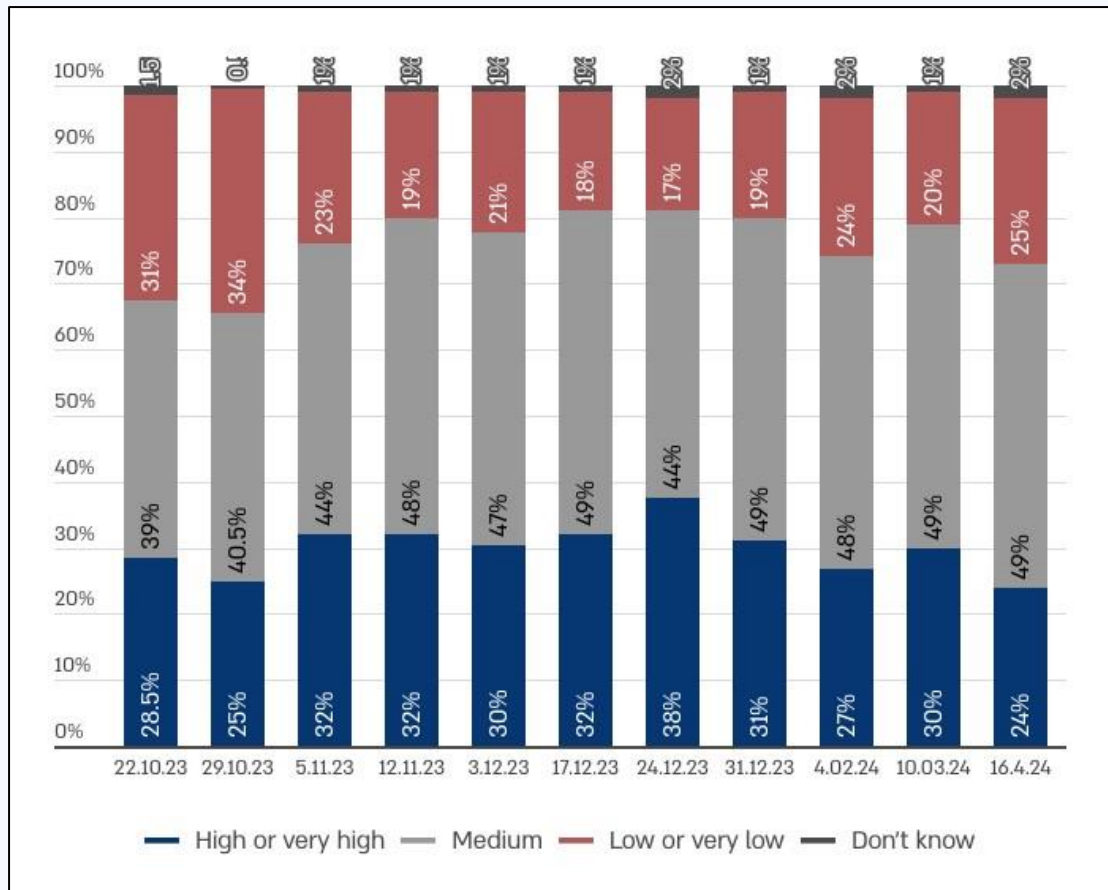


Figure 9. How would you describe your level of personal security these days? (Graph reflects Jewish sector only)

Conclusion

In conclusion, the overall situation of Israeli society’s resilience during the ongoing war in the Gaza Strip and the fighting on the northern front remains complex. On the positive side, there has been some improvement in the return to routine and functional continuity for most Israelis, due to the (temporary) decrease in the intensity of the fighting in Gaza, and despite the ongoing conflict on the Lebanese front, as well as the Iranian military threat, which failed to affect Israel’s civilian home front. Moreover, confidence in the IDF remains high. However, there are negative indicators, including 1) a significant drop in confidence that the IDF can win the war and achieve its declared objectives; 2) a consistently low level of trust in the government’s functioning; 3) a decrease in support for the war’s objectives, which may now be seen as unattainable; and 4) an ongoing decline in solidarity, optimism, and hope.

The main factors negatively affecting Israeli society’s resilience are linked to the fact that internal political disagreements are becoming as important as the war itself and are having a major impact on the discourse—even on the sensitive issue of the fate of the hostages. This is happening at a time when the interaction between an increasingly polarized society and the lack of progress on any front is aggravating social and political

tensions and undermining national resilience. It seems likely that the government's handling of the war is being influenced by narrow political interests and there is no appropriate response from the government to strengthen national resilience, which is crucial at this challenging time. Such an appropriate response could increase the chances of Israeli society recovering from the October 7 attack and the war and rebuilding itself before "the day after" the war. The government's failure to recognize and internalize this is a direct and significant blow to national resilience.

Editors of the series: Anat Kurtz, Eldad Shavit and Ela Greenberg