



**American Friends
Service Committee**
Quaker values in action

Survey on the Militarization of Israeli society

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American Friends Service Committee

Israel Program

Jerusalem Office



Background:

Israel is a highly militarised society. Conscription, militarisation of education, the presence of former generals in senior political positions and an economy that is more and more dependent on the military industry, create a culture that glorifies and values military service and militarised perspectives.

Mass conscription and the social norms that delegitimize those who do not serve in the military, are not only symptoms of a highly-militarized society, but also serve to perpetuate it. The narrative that “all Israelis” serve in the military helps creating a social context in which any criticism on the military and militarization is prevented. “Universal” conscription elevates the military and its actions to a place where they are beyond criticism, even though in reality about half of young people in Israel do not serve in the military, and many cut their military service short¹.

Palestinian citizens of Israel are not drafted (though a few dozen volunteer for service annually²), and out of the overall conscripted population (Jewish men and women and Palestinian-Druze men) only 65% do actually serve³. According to official governmental statistics enlistment rates are generally at a decline, partially due to demographic factors (exempted population, mainly Ultra-Orthodox Jews who are exempt for religious studies, are disproportionately growing in numbers), and partially due to a slow but steady increase in health exemptions, including mental health, which is seen socially as the easiest way to opt out of service. Official governmental statistics about enlistment, as well as those collected through the work of civil society organizations show that poorer communities have lower enlistment rates⁴, and that many people opt out of military service due to the need to guarantee an income for them and their families, something that mandatory military service cannot guarantee⁵. Economic reasons alongside a faster growth in demographics among those that do not serve in the military (such as Ultra-Orthodox, religious women etc), contribute to the overall decline in enlistment rates.

As per the Israeli Military Industry Complex, Israel is ranked sixth in the world in arms and defense exports and is ranked first in defense exports per GDP. Israel can compete with the economic powerhouses of the United States, Spain, Japan, China, Britain, and Russia in producing and selling military equipment because of the experience the Israeli military and the military industries have gained over the years in the everyday management and control of the civilian population in the Occupied Palestinian Territory (OPT). Israeli weapons, technologies and military exports fuel many bloody conflicts around the world. In Sri Lanka, South Sudan and Brazil, during apartheid South Africa and Serbia during the Balkan Wars, Israel has played and continues to play a key role in arming governments and armed groups that are responsible

¹ אמיר בוחבוט, שוויון בנטל? 50% לא מתגייסים; שילוב האתיופי בצה"ל בקרטע, 19.11.2015, וואלה!,
<https://news.walla.co.il/item/2908320>

² Paul Goldman, Arab Israelis Are Joining the IDF in Growing Numbers: Officials, NBC news, 26.2.2017,
<https://www.nbcnews.com/news/world/arab-israelis-are-joining-idf-growing-numbers-officials-n724586>

³ חזקי ברור, כ-65% מהחייבים בגיוס מתגייסים לצה"ל, 25.1.2017, מקור ראשון,
<https://www.inn.co.il/News/News.aspx/338636>

⁴ יואב זיתון, נתוני הגיוס: מדד התרומה של צה"ל לפי יישובים, YNET, 5.12.2017,
<https://www.ynet.co.il/articles/0,7340,L-5051837,00.html>

⁵ יניב קובוביץ, 70% מהחיילים בכלא הצבאי סובלים מבעיות כלכליות, 5.7.2018, הארץ,
<https://www.haaretz.co.il/news/politics/.premium-1.6244216>



for human rights abuses. Currently there is no legal framework in Israel to restrict arms export if/when used in human right violations.

Methodology:

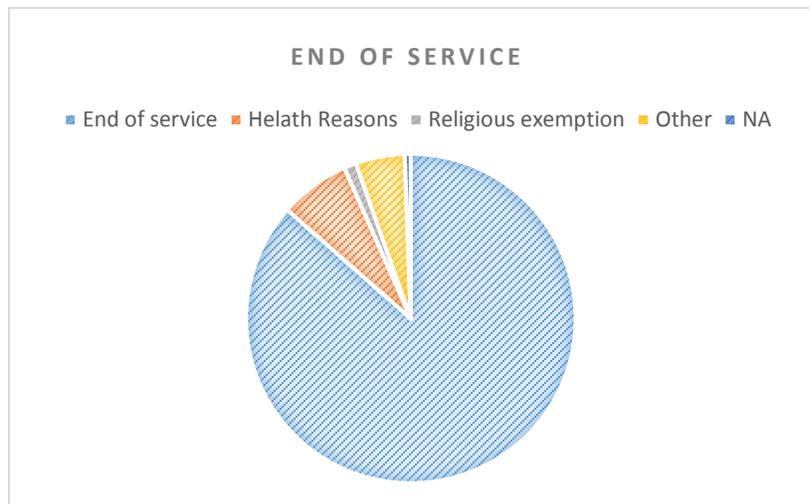
The survey was done among 604 people, all of which are Jewish citizens of Israel over 18 years of age (n-604). The margin of error is 4.5%. The final questionnaire consisted of 33 questions and additional demographic questions: Gender, Income level, Ethnicity and age. The full results of the survey are attached.

Main Findings:

52.2% of the people responding self-identified as women and 47.9% as men, one person did not identify as either. 35.4% identified as Ashkenazi (white Jews, originally from European countries) and 42.7% as Mizrachi (originally from Arab countries) and the rest did not identify as either. 27.8% come from households with above average income, 29.8% around average and 30.5% under average and the remaining 11.9% did not self-identify. 7.8% were between the ages of 18 and 21 (conscription age), 38.9% were 22-35 years old, and 53.3% over 35 years old.

Most of the participants in the survey served mandatory service in the military (80.5%), in a wide range of positions: 26.8% as combatants, 27.9% combat support, 11.1% intelligence and the rest 30% in different positions. While the majority of the respondents did not continue to the reserve (which is not mandatory for all soldiers, but it is for most men, and some women) 22% did continue to serve in the reserve.

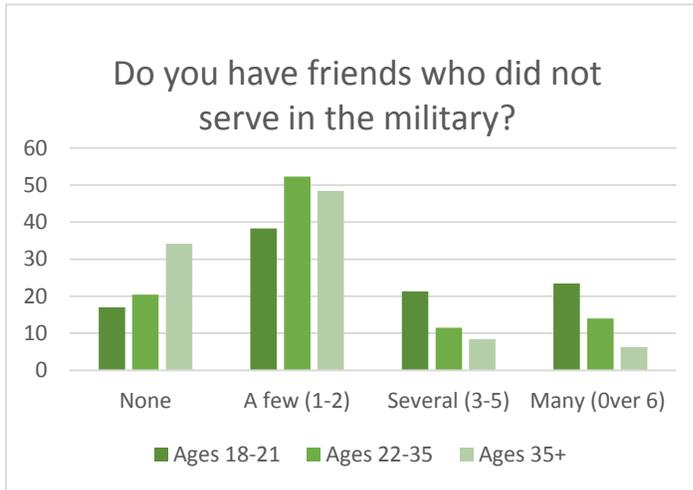
86.4% of the participants who did serve in the military, completed their service, while the rest got exempt on different grounds, most commonly on health reasons (6.9% of those who served) which includes both mental and physical health reasons. Mental health exemptions are considered the easiest and most common way out of military service. An additional 4.8% did not finish their service on “other” grounds. This may include people exempt on mental health grounds that did not perceive that as medical reasons, as well as people exempted on “incompatibility” – an exemption usually given to people for “poor behavior”, often after repeated imprisonment.





Attitudes towards conscription and those who do not serve

When asked whether respondents had friends who did not serve in the military, the vast majority had at least some (70.4%), and 10.6% had over 6 friends who did not serve in the military. When breaking this



information down to age groups, a clear trend appeared: the younger people are, the more people they know who did not serve in the military. This is explained by the fact that enlistment rates are constantly declining, and hence, younger generations would likely know more people who did not serve in the military. The second interesting aspect to highlight is that respondents from lower economic classes know more people who did not serve in the military: 28% of participants with below average income had

several or many friends who did not serve in the military, while only 11.9% of those above average income had friends who had not served. This can easily be explained as mentioned above (p. 2) with the fact that people from low-income families often opt out of military service for economic reasons, and so people from those economic classes are likely to have more friends who did not serve.

It could be assumed that having more friends who did not serve in the military may change attitudes towards not serving. However, this was not seen in the responses. There were two sets of questions to measure the attitudes.

To the question whether you would be bothered if someone who did not serve in the military worked with you, people from Ashkenazi origin were more bothered by this than those of Mizrachi/Safardi decent: 53.3% of people from Ashkenazi decent vs. 45.3% of people from Mizrachi/Safardi origin. As per the economic status, people from under average income households were more bothered (53%) by having someone who did not serve in the military work for them in comparison to those over the average income (45.2%) When we look at this question from the income and ethnicity perspectives, the correlation is not that clear.

The survey has shown that there are more Mizrachi below average income than Ashkenazi. Given the percentages above to the question of who is more bothered, one could assume that more Mizrachis are bothered by someone who has not served. However, the data indicates otherwise. With this in mind, the lack of correlation in attitudes towards lack of military service between income levels and ethnicity is interesting and cannot clearly be explained through the findings. How is it that lower income people are more bothered by lack of military service, while at the same time Ashkenazi people are more bothered? One can suggest that as almost a third of the participants did not identify as either Mizrachi or Ashkenazi, the variations may lay there.

Another interesting power dynamic question arises from these series of questions. While most participants said they would be bothered by having someone who did not serve in the military **work for**



them (49.5% said it would bother them, while only 35.1% said it would not), people seem to be slightly less bothered by **working for** someone who did not serve in the military (42.1% said this would bother them, while 41.6% said it would not).

Another aspect to take into account is how theoretical these questions are to people: working for someone might be less of a theoretical question for most than having someone work for you. Alongside this, people might be less bothered by working for someone who did not serve as that is less seen as their choice, as opposed to hiring someone in which one can make a more active choice. Another possible explanation has to do with conformity – possibly, people would rather have more conforming people working for them, rather than people who chose to resist authority, who could be seen as potential “trouble makers”.

When asked directly “how do you feel about restricting the Human Rights of people who do not fulfill citizen duties, including military service”, most participants were supportive of this idea (67.8% very supportive-somewhat supportive, and only 24.2% strongly oppose-somewhat oppose). The phrasing of the question reflects the discourse that connects citizens’ rights and duties⁶, and one that in Israeli society is often centered on military service. As the question did not specify what people meant by *restricting rights*, it is hard to assess the level of restriction participants would have been supportive of, and in the future, this could be a question to develop further.

Another question looking at attitudes towards those who do not serve was specifically directed to those refusing military service. To the question “in your mind, are Jewish Israelis who refuse to serve in the military part of Israeli society?”, 13.9% of participants responded “not at all”, in comparison to 22.2% who said that they are “very much” part of Israeli society. Another 58.9% said to some extent or to a small extent – it seems that this is where most of the participants are.

To balance this, we also asked about attitudes towards abolishing conscription and instituting a fully professional military army instead. It seemed that this question split the participants equally, with 44.1% saying they would be supportive or somewhat supportive of abolishing conscription and instituting a professional military, and 45.1% opposed or somewhat opposed. This is particularly interesting as it seems that there is not at all an agreement among the public on this issue, yet there is no political or public debate about it either.

Military service as a stepping stone

It is often socially established in Israel that military service, as part of being an entry point to Israeli society, also opens doors in people’s lives and provides skills and connections that will later help in employment in the civilian market place. To assess this point, we asked two questions: one measuring the resemblance of one’s working environment to their military service environment, and the other directly asking if the skills and connection made in the military were helpful in finding employment afterwards. Here we found

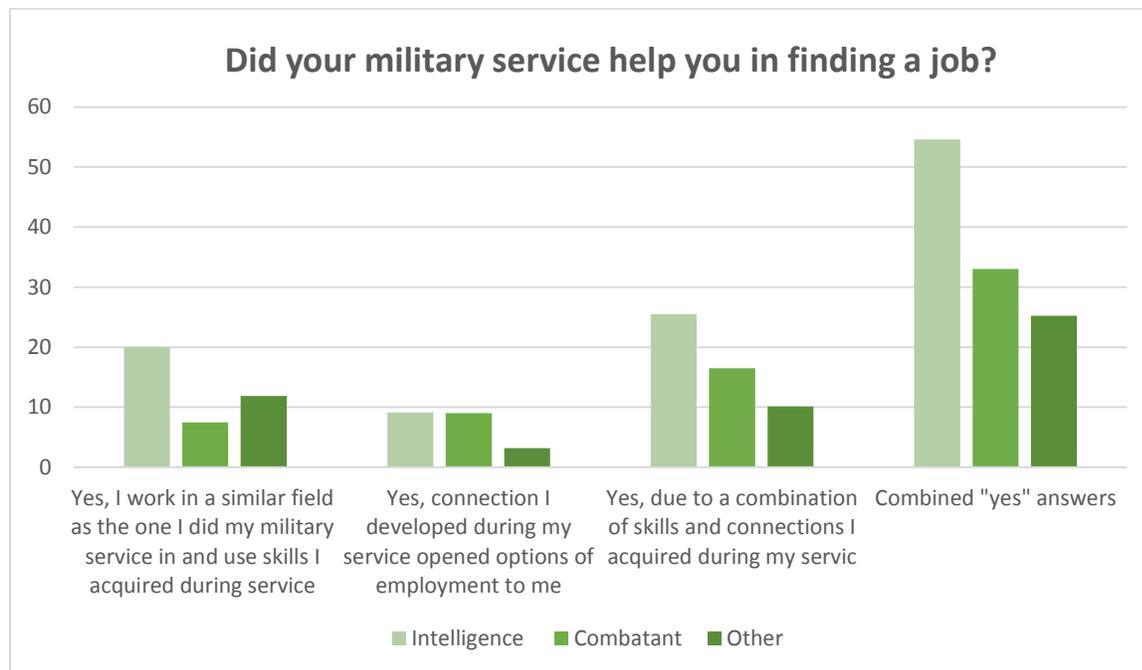
⁶אסא כשר, חיילים במשימות לא צבאיות, הקתדרה לאתיקה מקצועית ולפילוסופיה של הפרקטיקה ע"ש לאורה שוורץ-קיפ, אוניברסיטת תל-אביב, המכללה לביטחון לאומי



that men found their military service more helpful in finding employment than women (60.7% of men said their military service did not assist them in finding a job, and 69.4% of women). Having said this, most people did not find the skills or connections made in the military useful for finding employment later (64.4%), and this was true across economic divides.

We also crossed this question against the different roles people had during their military service and found stark differences between different kinds of roles. 54.6% of those who serve in intelligence roles found that their military service contributed to their employment either by using skills they acquired during service, through connections they made during service, or both. Only 33% of combat soldiers, and an even lower percentage within the rest of the military roles (25.2%) found this correlation. This means that intelligence soldiers were more than twice as likely to have their military service contribute to their civilian employment relative to the majority of other military positions.

This means that more demanded positions in the military can and are translated into opportunities in civilian life, which begs the question who and how are people drafted into these positions. There is a general correlation between certain military positions, such as intelligence, and social economic classes, and so skills and connections acquired in the military might serve to perpetuate these.

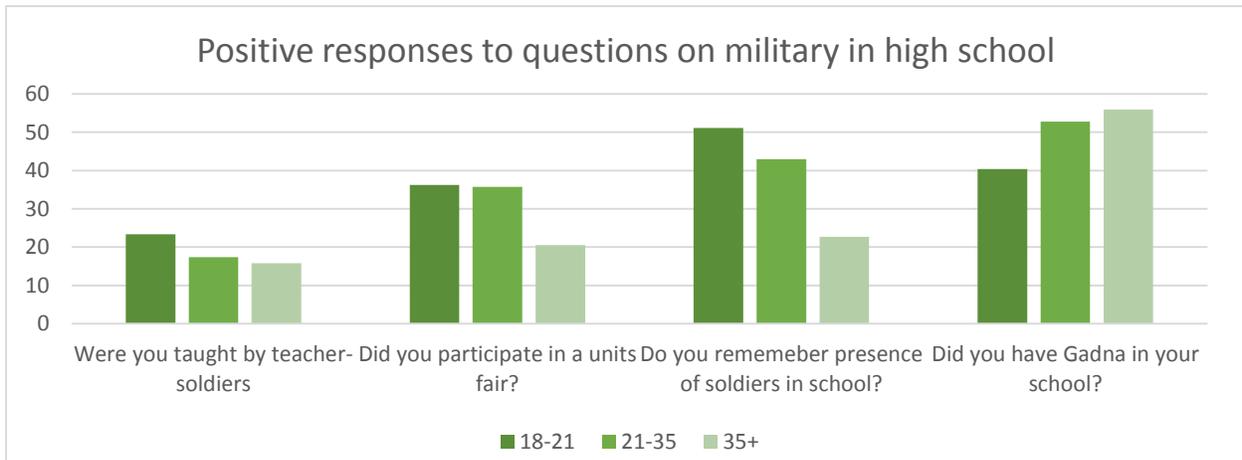


It was clear from the beginning that the survey would not find a representative sample of respondents who had not serve in the military. Hence, the survey cannot measure the effects of not having served in military on people’s employment.

Military in education



In the next section we wanted to check the perceptions of people on the military presence in education. We asked the participants to indicate whether they do or do not remember presence of teacher-soldiers in their schools (77.6% did not remember, 17.1% did), participating in Gadna – a week long military



training program for 11th grade students (53.5% did participate), participating in a units fair day (68% did not participate) and presence of soldiers in their school (only 23.8% indicated they recall this presence). Mizrahi participants remembered military presence in their education at a slightly higher rate than Ashkenazi (33.7% of Mizrahi participated in a unit fair while only 17.8% of the Ashkenazi; 36.4% of the Mizrahi participants remember presence of soldiers in schools while only 25.2% of the Ashkenazi do). Generally, among all the survey participants, the rates were lower than expected. One thing that was very clear here was the age gap – other than the Gadna program, which seemed to decrease with the years, in all other criteria the younger the respondent, the more he/she recalls military presence.

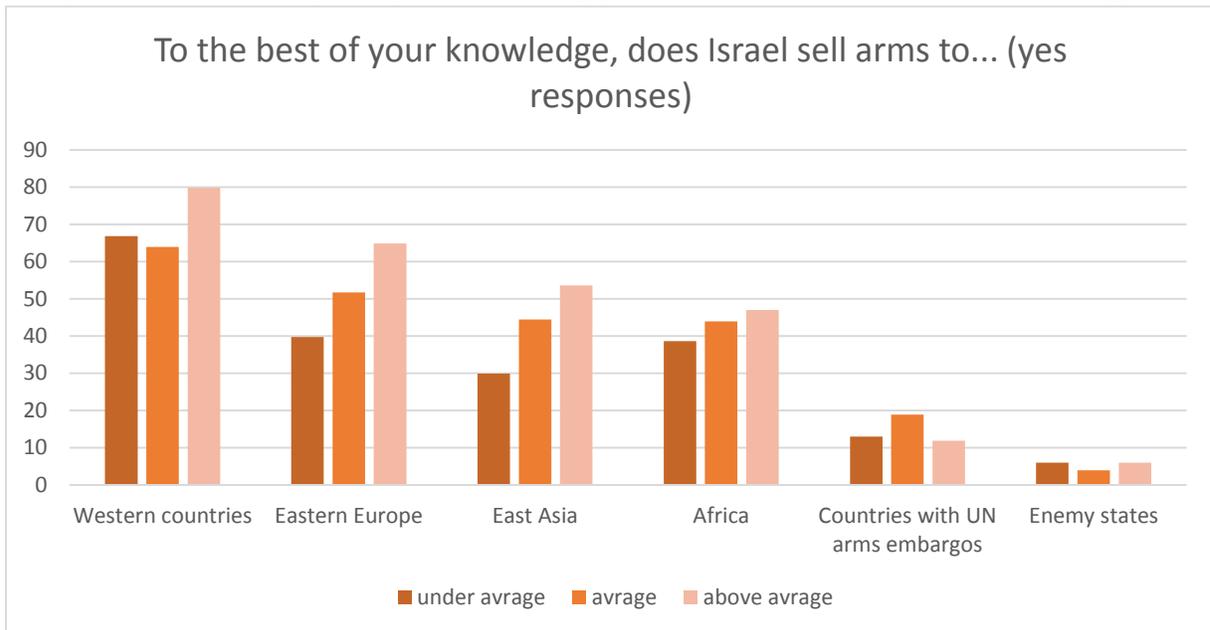
In effect, according to the military 28,000 students, who are 52% of the relevant year group, participate annually in the Gadna program today. We must ask if it is really the case that there is less presence of military in schools, of whether the responses reflect more the normalization of the military presence to an extent that it is not perceived as something that stands out. This might also be true for the differences in age groups that have to do more with fresh memories than actual difference in military presence.



Attitudes towards Israeli arms export

The second part of the survey focused on Israel’s arms export – a subject which only recently has begun to make its way into public discourse through media exposure, civil society engagement, and litigation and legislation attempts.

Before assessing people’s attitudes on the subject, we wanted to see the level of knowledge, and so we asked if, to the best of the participants’ knowledge, Israel sells or not arms to different categories of



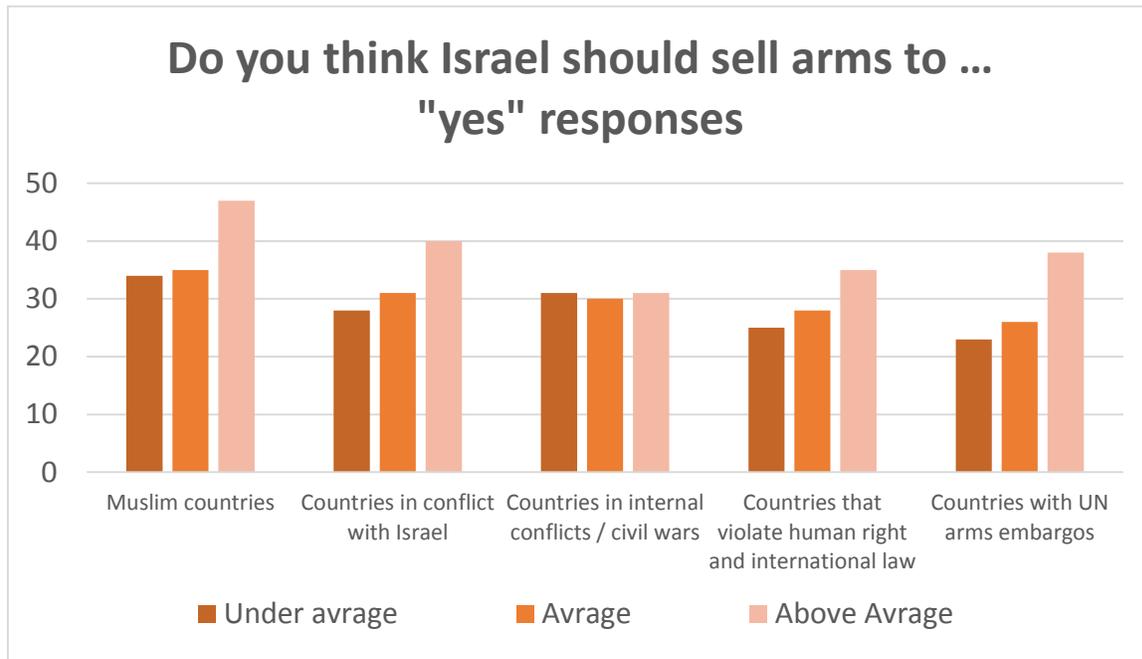
countries. Across the board we found that people with higher incomes had more knowledge about where Israel does or does not sell arms to. While Israel does officially sell arms to all category of countries asked, except for enemy states, the vast majority of participants believed that Israel does not sell arms to countries with UN arms embargos on them (only 15.4% believed Israel sells arms to those countries). In all categories of this question about a third of the participants did not know whether Israel sells or not to these countries – the highest “don’t know” response in the entire survey. It is clear that knowledge on this issue is still very low.

The data shows that with regards to all categories of countries asked – (countries around which there is controversy on whether Israel should or should not sell arms) less than half of the respondents were supportive to export weapons to these countries. Most Israelis thought that Israel should not export arms to Muslim countries (45% said no, only 38.9% said yes), countries in conflict with Israel (55.5% said no, only 33.6% said yes), countries in internal conflict /civil war (43% said no, only 31.8% said yes), countries



that violate human rights and international law (52.5% said no, only 30.3% said yes) and countries with UN arms embargos on them (49.8% said no, only 30.3% said yes). Generally speaking the numbers did not differ much from category to category, and it would seem that the divide is between people who support restrictions, and people who would rather not have them, more than about specific categories of restrictions – again, with the majority of people thinking that they should be in place (on average 49.1% thought Israel should not sell arms to the different categories of “problematic” countries presented and 32.9% thought Israel should).

Interestingly enough when looking at the attitudes towards this in the question “Do you think Israel should sell arms to the same list of country categories,” we found a correlation with income where people with

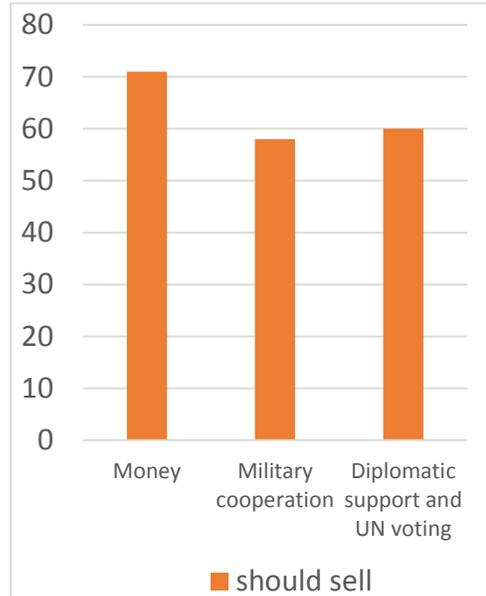


higher incomes thought that Israel should sell more while people with lower incomes thought it should sell less – this was true in all country categories.

When trying to understand this correlation we found a few possible explanations. One is that people from higher income levels see themselves as part of the same class or potential group that makes a profit out of these sales while lower income do not. Another explanation is that people from lower income levels are more effected by human rights violations and so they are less supportive of participating in them. Given that the survey did not include focus groups, we cannot provide qualitative information that could shed more light on this question.



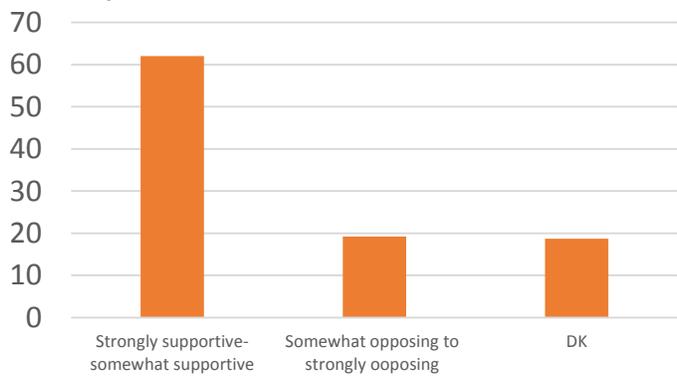
In order to measure what is seen as legitimate reasoning for military exports, especially in controversial circumstances, we asked if Israel should or should not sell arms to countries under a UN arms embargo if in exchange Israel would gain money, military cooperation or diplomatic support (all reasons commonly given by the military industry and political establishment for arms export). Surprisingly we found that money was the number one reason to make such sales, more than military cooperation (associated with Israel’s security) and diplomatic support.



Furthermore, we wanted to see how people feel about the profit made from these sales specifically in relation to the marketing of military systems after their use against Palestinians. This was the only question in the survey which directly mentioned the occupation, and this was done by using a quote of an official in one of the biggest Israeli military industries. The question that was asked was *“Eli Gold, an IWI official said in 2014: after every operation such as the one now in Gaza, we see an increase in our clientele abroad”. Do you think it is legitimate or not that Israeli companies make a profit as a result of military operations?”*. 67.7%

of the participants found it legitimate, and only 17.7% found it illegitimate. Significantly more women found it illegitimate than men (27.7% of women as opposed to only 7.7% of men).

MKs Yehuda Glick (Likud) and Tamar Zandberg (Meretz) are submitting a bill to include restrictions on military export to security forces that committed gross violations of Human rights. Do you support or object this bill?



Lastly, in order to address whether Israelis support legislation introducing human rights restrictions in arms exports we found that there is vast support for this type of bill with 62% of participants somewhat to strongly supporting it, and only 19.2% showing opposition.



Summary and recommendations:

This survey set out to achieve three objectives: To act as a baseline for the future work of the Israel Program in order to assess changes in attitudes towards militarization within Israeli society on conscription and the Israeli Military Complex; To learn and expose the real attitudes of Israelis as opposed to the commonly assumed ones about these issues; To help the Israel Program and our partners to re-evaluate the assumptions about Israeli attitudes, on which the programming is developed, and make changes accordingly.

While the first objective, of acting as a baseline, can only be measured in the future, many interesting things can already be pointed out regarding the two other objectives. One of these are advocacy and communication direction that the survey can point those working on these issues towards. As an example, it would be useful to communicate in advocacy work that the majority of Israelis support legislation limiting arms sales to Human Rights violating countries or the fact that the idea of the military being a stepping stone to Israeli society in regards to employment is only true to very specific position in the military held by certain groups. In addition to this, and the survey allows to create new assumptions and strategic direction that can be integrated into programming based on the findings.

On **militarism in education**, one of the main surprising findings was that people identified military presence in their school far less than the reality. Every school in the country has a “youth counselor” given by the military that must visit the school, soldiers on uniform who graduated from a specific school will be present at the school’s ceremonies on Soldiers Memorial day, and more than half of each class will participate in Gadna. And so we must try to explain the gap between reality and people’s responses. Beyond things that can be attributed to age, memory etc. that were addressed in the findings, we would suggest that much of this has to do with the presence of soldiers in schools. The level of normalization of military presence in school is such that we do not see soldiers visiting a school as “military presence in a school”. A soldier, on uniform, coming to a ceremony at his old high-school, is likely not seen by most Israelis as “military presence in schools”. This can be checked more thoroughly in a follow-up survey (see recommendations below), but also shows us the blurry lines in Israeli society between military and civilian, not only as a theoretical framework, but also individually in the way that people see a soldier, once he is not on duty, as an individual (former student, friend, child etc.) before they perceive them as soldiers. This comes to say that when we try to highlight militarism in education, there is a need to spell it out more clearly, and to make visible such presence.

While the first part of the survey dealing with social militarism showed that the attitudes towards those who do not serve are generally negative, and that military service is still seen as a value, as soon as we posed **an alternative to the draft**, the picture became more complicated. When asked to decide between a draft and a professional military, the surveyed participants were divided right in the middle in a way that was not seen in any of the previous questions on the matter. This means that Israeli militarism and popular support for the draft exists because there no alternative presented. The lack of discourse about an alternative – a professional military – is not due to the pressure against it from the majority of society, nor due to a strong military objection (in 2003 this shift was actually recommended by a military



committee⁷), but rather an absence of debate in society. Hence, this could be considered an interesting and important entry point moving ahead.

In regards to the arms industry, and specifically arms sales to countries that commit gross human rights violation and/or have UN arms embargos, phrasing the same question in different ways got us very different answers. While when asked if Israel should sell arms to countries with UN arms embargos only 30% answered positively, when asked if Israel should sell to countries with UN arms embargos if in exchange Israel receives money (the very definition of selling) this number jumped to 70%. When asked if they would support a bill restricting Israeli arms sales to these countries, again the picture changed with a majority supporting such restrictions (62%). This is to say that **wherever we put the focus in the question (on the human rights violating countries, or on the profit to Israel either material, diplomatic or otherwise)**, people's answers change. This means that when talking about these issues, it is better to focus on the violations and not **focus** on what is gained by Israel (such as money) even in a framing that shows that as a positive thing (profiting from human suffering) as the focus on the return to Israel makes the objections to these sales decrease.

In the context of the support for the a bill restricting Israeli arms sales to these countries it is also important to note that the question was phrased to include the support of both right and left wing Israeli politicians, thus framing the subject within a specific, but very wide, political space, giving people a reference point to the subject related to their knowledge of the political map. This is a useful tactic when speaking on this, and other issues, **allowing people to find their opinion on the issue beyond, or maybe even through, their existing political identity**. On both this issue, and the issue of a professional military as opposed to a draft, as there is support from both the political left and right, these could be interesting ways to frame communications around this to gain support.

The last issue is the relationship between the very strong security state of mind in Israeli society, and the economic-capitalist point of view. The data showed clearly that there was a correlation between people with higher income and support for arms export (across the different categories we presented). Especially with taking into consideration our categories included sales to countries that are in conflict with Israel, it would seem that there is a group, especially of those from higher income levels, for which **economic interests trump security considerations**. Together higher support among all populations for selling arms in exchange for profit, rather than in exchange for security collaboration, we must address the issue of economics VS security. As we see this strong correlation between choosing economic interests over security ones with higher income levels, this can be explained in two ways: People from higher income levels are more likely to see themselves as part of the same group that directly or in indirectly can see the profit of these sales; **The sense of security among people with higher income levels is stronger, and this manifests itself in them thinking in terms of profit before thinking in terms of security (or lack thereof)**. This is something we should reflect on while thinking on how to speak about these issues with people whose sense of security generally is more fragile, and with people who have less of an economic vested interest in these industries.

⁷ תוכנית: מצבא העם לצבא שכירים, YNET ,24.9.2003, <https://www.ynet.co.il/articles/0,7340,L-2766855,00.html>



In addition to these, as the existing quantitative data left many **questions open**, there are some questions that could be added if such a survey is repeated in the future. These could include, but are not limited to:

Breaking down what kind of restrictions on Human Rights would be considered positive measures against those who do not perform their civic duties including military service? What other forms of civic duties should be sanctioned in the same way? Would attitudes towards those who do or do not do alternative civil service be different etc. Regarding the question whether Jewish Israeli refusers are part of Israeli society, there is a need to break down what we mean by being part of a society.

While looking at the presence of military in schools, and the gap between people's experience and reality, it would be interesting to ask the general question about presence of soldiers in schools again, but followed by specific examples (such as soldiers in school ceremonies, preparation for service days etc.) and see if the answers change.

In regards to arms export, specifically around the question of legitimacy of making profit from military operations, there is room to develop questions to understand if people were aware of this happening, before taking a stand on the issue, as well as seeing if the profit being private or state makes a difference, and whether showing it as a system rather than through an example makes a difference. Could we also be addressing people's general sense of security (including economic) as part of this framing? Another category of questions we could not pose in this survey, are question targeted to those who did not serve in the military. These could include similar questions to this survey, by to a targeted audience that would allow a statistical representation of trends, attitudes and experiences of those who do not serve and how this choice effects them.