

The Controversy Over Equitable Burden-Sharing In Israel's National Defense

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ABSTRACT: The war in the Middle East has intensified the longstanding debate over the conscription of Haredi (ultra-Orthodox) men into the Israel Defense Forces (IDF). For decades, ultra-Orthodox communities have been largely exempt from military service, instead focusing on religious studies, a policy that has become increasingly contentious as the Haredi population grows. The evolving relationship between Israeli society and the IDF indicates broader social transformations within the country. The rise of liberal ideologies raises important questions about the future of the citizen-soldier model and its implications for national security. The war has underscored the need for a unified defense strategy, challenging the existing social contract between the state and ultra-Orthodox communities. As Israeli society struggles with these tensions, the need for a dialogue that bridges ideological divides becomes increasingly critical for fostering a cohesive national identity capable of addressing internal and external challenges. This paper examines how the military conflict has heightened the national conversation around equitable burden-sharing, with many Israelis advocating for including Haredi men in national defense efforts. This paper explores the potential implications of the war on future policies regarding military conscription, assessing whether the current conflict may lead to significant shifts in Israeli society and governance.

KEYWORDS: Middle East Conflict; National Defense; ultra-Orthodox; military conscription; Intersectionality

INTRODUCTION

The war in the Middle East has amplified longstanding societal and political debates in Israel, particularly regarding the conscription of Haredi (ultra-Orthodox) men into the Israel Defense Forces (IDF). The issue of Haredi military service has been a contentious one for decades, rooted in the unique social and political fabric of Israel, where religious communities are granted exemptions from military service in favor of religious study. This exemption has become increasingly divisive, particularly in times of national crisis, such as the current conflict with Hamas and Hizballah.

The war has intensified the public discourse around national responsibility as Israel faces heightened security threats that demand a unified military response. As the ultra-Orthodox population grows, so too does the debate over their participation in national defense, with many arguing that all citizens, regardless of religious affiliation, should share the burden of protecting the state.

The recent escalation of violence and the public discourse surrounding the war that Israel is involved with have led to increased scrutiny of Haredi exemptions from military service. As the state struggles with security concerns and social cohesion, the political leverage held by ultra-Orthodox parties may shift. The urgency of national service could create new political alignments, with Haredi politicians seeking to balance community interests against the backdrop of national unity in times of crisis.

The war is catalyzing the re-evaluation of civil-military relations within Israeli society. The perceived legitimacy of Haredi exemptions may wane as societal pressures mount for broader participation in national defense efforts. This paper explores the war's implications for the debate over Haredi conscription, analyzing the issue's sociopolitical, religious, and legal dimensions and assessing how the current conflict may shape future policy decisions.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The dynamics between the Israeli state, the ultra-Orthodox (Haredi) community, and the war with Hamas and Hizballah provide a complex interplay of social, political, and religious factors. In Israel, identity is multifaceted, encompassing religious, ethnic, and national components. The Haredi community has historically perceived itself as distinct from the secular majority, leading to an in-group mentality that prioritizes religious observance and communal values over national service obligations. The war intensified these social identities, and the question that should be asked is if the threat to national security may prompt some Haredi individuals to reconsider their positions in military service, leading to shifts in identity and social norms.

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The concept of intersectionality highlights the interconnected nature of social categorizations such as race, class, and religion and how these intersections can create overlapping systems of discrimination or disadvantage. Intersectionality is a theoretical framework that examines how various social identities, such as race, gender, sexuality, class, religion, and ability, intersect and interact to shape individual experiences, social dynamics, and systemic inequalities. Intersectionality highlights that individuals do not experience discrimination or privilege through a single identity but rather through a complex interplay of multiple identities that can compound the effects of oppression or advantage (Crenshaw, 1989).

The intersectional approach is vital in understanding how the recent war impacts various segments of society, including the ultra-Orthodox. The community's responses to military service obligations may differ based on individual circumstances, such as socio-economic status and religious observance. The war exacerbates existing inequalities while also presenting opportunities for solidarity across different groups within Israeli society.

The concept of intersectionality highlights the interconnected nature of social categorizations such as race, class, and religion and how these intersections can create overlapping systems of discrimination or disadvantage (Crenshaw, 1991). Nash (2008) argues that intersectionality became the primary analytic tool to analyze identity and oppression, as it acknowledges that each person holds multiple identities, which can affect their social status and access to resources. This framework emphasizes that the impact of these intersecting identities is context-dependent, meaning that the same identity can result in different experiences depending on other social factors and the environment (McKinzie & Richards, 2019).

Intersectionality illuminates the power structures that perpetuate inequality, recognizing that systemic issues cannot be addressed without considering the interconnectedness of different forms of oppression (Hankivsky, 2014). The intersectional approach is vital in understanding how the recent war impacts various segments of Israeli society, including the ultra-Orthodox. The community's responses to military service obligations may differ based on individual circumstances, such as socio-economic status and religious observance. The war has exacerbated existing inequalities while presenting opportunities for solidarity across different groups within Israeli society. Due to its complex identity, intersectionality is highly relevant to the research on the ultra-Orthodox community. This population represents a unique intersection of religious, ethnic, and cultural identities that shape their experiences and responses to military service and societal expectations (Hoffman, 2019). Many ultra-Orthodox individuals face socioeconomic challenges that intersect with their religious identity. This can impact their views on military service, as financial stability and access to resources can differ significantly among community members (Harel, 2020).

The ultra-Orthodox community has distinct gender roles, with men prioritized for religious study while women may engage more in the workforce. Exploring how gender interacts with religious and national identity can provide insights into how military service is perceived differently across genders within the community (Cooper et al., 2018). Sasson-Levy (2005) argues that hegemonic masculinity is identified with the masculinity of the Jewish combat soldier and is perceived as the emblem of good citizenship.

The war serves as a backdrop for examining how the ultra-Orthodox community navigates their identities during periods of national crisis. Intersectionality helps to understand how community members may experience pressure to conform to societal norms regarding military service while also grappling with their religious obligations and cultural practices (Friedman, 2022).

The research employing an intersectional lens can inform policies that address the ultra-Orthodox community's unique needs and perspectives. Recognizing this group's multiple identities and experiences can lead to more effective engagement strategies regarding military service and broader societal integration. The question is whether the growing dissatisfaction among the Haredi community's pockets of change and integration will translate into extensive action that challenges the community's insular and isolationist norms. Ziv (2024) explains that the ultra-Orthodox community faces unique ideological and political challenges that differentiate it from other groups within Israeli society.

Intersectionality provides a valuable framework for understanding the complexities of the ultra-Orthodox community's attitudes towards military service. By analyzing how various identities intersect, the research can offer deeper insights into the community's perspectives, challenges, and opportunities, ultimately contributing to a more comprehensive understanding of Israeli society's dynamics in times of conflict.

METHODOLOGY

This study explores the war's implications for the ultra-Orthodox (Haredi) community's attitudes toward military service in Israel. It aims to provide rich insights into the evolving attitudes of the ultra-Orthodox community toward military service, particularly in the context of the ongoing war in the Middle East.

The war has significant implications for the social dynamics within Israeli society. The military conflict influences the attitudes and behaviors of various community segments, particularly the ultra-Orthodox population, which represents a unique and growing demographic segment that has historically maintained a degree of separation from mainstream Israeli society. By exploring how the military conflict shapes their perspectives on military service, this research sheds light on broader issues of social cohesion and national identity within Israel. As tensions escalate, the potential for increased polarization among different societal groups rises, making it essential to understand how shared experiences or opposing views may affect community relations and national solidarity.

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Israel's military service is central to its national identity and security framework. The research investigates the ultra-Orthodox community's attitudes toward military service and provides insights into the factors that drive resistance or support for military enlistment among Haredim. The research is particularly relevant as the ultra-Orthodox community experiences changes in societal expectations, pressures, and attitudes toward military service participation, as it highlights evolving trends within the Haredi population, such as increasing interactions with secular society and shifts in traditional beliefs about military service. Understanding these dynamics is crucial for comprehending how the ultra-Orthodox community adapts to contemporary challenges and changes in Israeli society.

This study aims to contribute to academic discourse and practical applications within Israeli society by addressing critical social, military, and policy implications. The importance and relevance of this research lie in its potential to enhance understanding of the ultra-Orthodox community's evolving attitudes towards military service in the context of the military conflict. Analyzing the ultra-Orthodox community's responses to the current conflict can provide valuable insights into how this group might react to future security threats or military engagements. Understanding their perspectives could help anticipate potential challenges or opportunities for unity and cooperation in times of crisis. Therefore, the research should foster dialogue and understanding among different societal groups in Israel. By highlighting the perspectives and experiences of the ultra-Orthodox community regarding military service, the study can encourage more inclusive discussions about national service and citizenship. Such dialogue is essential for building bridges across societal divides and promoting a more cohesive and resilient Israeli society.

MILITARY CONSCRIPTION AS A PROMINENT AREA OF CONTENTION

Ultra-Orthodox parties, representing the interests of the Haredi communities, encounter conflicts with secular parties over key societal and policy issues, such as military conscription, education, and public funding for religious institutions. These conflicts are rooted in fundamental differences in values and priorities between Haredi communities and the broader secular population. Neuberger (2020) argues that Israel is an unstable democracy since the legitimacy of the state is often contested, especially among various ethnic and religious groups, which can undermine its democratic foundations. He maintains that the extent of consensus within society and among political elites regarding fundamental national issues is essential for democratic stability. At the same time, deep divisions exist among different sectors of society, resulting in a fragmented party system that hinders effective governance and leads to instability.

The electoral system, characterized by proportional representation, encourages various political parties and allows diverse representation. Cohen (2023) explains that these factors, together and separately, have led to an inability to form a stable government with sufficient electoral power to lead long-term policy processes, which results in fragmented legislatures and unstable coalitions. Yavetz et al. (2024) further explain that the multiparty system results in fragile coalition governments, particularly when coalition partners have divergent interests. Political polarization exacerbates these challenges, increasing tension and conflict within the political landscape. At the same time, issues such as poverty, housing shortages, and inequality among different ethnic and religious communities which maintain tremendous political influence contribute to social tension and can destabilize the democratic fabric of society.

The issue of military conscription is a prominent area of contention. Haredi parties advocate for exemptions from mandatory military service for their community members, emphasizing their religious study commitments as an alternative form of national service (Ben-Ari, 2023). This position is supported by the view that religious study contributes to Israeli society's spiritual and moral fabric. Their contributions through religious study provide societal benefits that justify their exemption from military service (Choshen, 2023).

The ultra-Orthodox community traditionally claims exemption from military service to focus on religious study, based on the argument that Torah study is a form of national service. This stance contrasts the secular perspectives, which emphasize civic duty and the need for all citizens to contribute to the state's security, creating significant political and social tension (Sullivan, 2021).

As the religious population grows, this dynamic is expected to make Israeli society increasingly right-wing and religious. The symbiosis between the IDF and Israeli society is deeply rooted in the "citizen-soldier" model, which emphasizes that military service is a shared responsibility and a key component of national identity. This model has historically served as an essential Israeli strength and unity, reflecting a broad consensus about the importance of military service as a civic duty and a binding force within Israeli society (Golan, 2022). This further explains that shifts in societal values, driven by liberalism and post-modern social trends, have led to changes in how Israelis perceive their relationship with the military. These changes have introduced more individualistic and diverse viewpoints into Israeli society, challenging some traditional norms and values associated with the citizen-soldier model (Nisbet, 2020).

Secular Israelis view the exemption of ultra-Orthodox men from military service as one of the most contentious issues in Israeli society. In contrast, ultra-Orthodox communities view military conscription as a threat to their way of life and religious study (Levy & Michal, 2021). Shafir & Peled (2002) explain that seculars view citizenship benefits as connected to rights and demand active participation in the common purpose understood by the state. However, there are significant differences in the education systems for secular and ultra-Orthodox children. The ultra-Orthodox education system focuses heavily on religious studies, often at the

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expense of subjects like science and math, leading to debates about state funding and the integration of Haredi students into the broader economy. Yadger (2021) explains that issues like the Sabbath observance, dietary laws, and the role of religion in public life often lead to conflicts between secular and religious Jews. Legislation reflecting religious norms can also be a point of contention, with ultra-Orthodox parties pushing for stricter adherence to religious laws.

The prominent and divisive issue is that the exemption of ultra-Orthodox men from mandatory military service is a cornerstone of Israeli society (Harel, 2024). Ultra-Orthodox parties vigorously defend this exemption based on religious grounds, while many secular and non-Orthodox parties argue for equality in national service obligations. This conflict highlights the challenge of balancing religious ideology with broader societal values. Cohen (2023) explains that the Haredi approach is characterized by isolation from secular media to protect religious integrity. Its focus is completely separating from secular media to preserve religious values and maintain a distinct cultural identity.

Israel's Haredi minority has long lived apart from the nation's mainstream, but fighting has both widened that divide and, in some ways, helped to bridge it. The ultra-Orthodox population demonstrates a higher natural growth rate than the general population, yet the employment rate among ultra-Orthodox men remains significantly lower. This has implications for enhancing economic outcomes and understanding the intricate interplay between religion, social norms, and employment decisions. As a result, poverty among this population and its impact on the standard of living is much more significant than in the rest of the Israeli population.

THE EROSION OF THE CITIZEN-SOLDIER MODEL

The citizen-soldier model is predicated on the idea that military service is a civic duty, integral to the identity and values of Israeli society (Ben-Shalom et al., 2024). The IDF has traditionally embodied the national ethos, where service in the military is seen as a rite of passage for young Israelis, fostering a sense of shared responsibility and unity. However, the influx of liberal ideologies and the increasing influence of individualism have begun challenging this paradigm. The rise of civil society movements advocating for social justice and human rights has led to a more critical view of military service, particularly concerning issues such as the occupation of Palestinian territories and the ethical implications of military actions (Zandberg, 2018).

The tensions peaked in 2023 when the Israeli government proposed controversial judicial reforms to alter the power balance between the Supreme Court and the Knesset (Israeli parliament). The proposed reforms sparked widespread protests across various segments of society, signaling a growing discontent with governmental policies perceived as undermining democracy (Ben-Porat, 2023). The situation escalated when IDF reservists refused to serve if the reforms were enacted. This act of dissent is emblematic of a broader disconnection between the military and segments of Israeli society, particularly among younger Israelis who are increasingly skeptical of state policies (Cohen, 2023).

The ongoing conflict poses significant implications for society's resilience and national security. As the fabric of social cohesion frays, the foundational principles that underlie the citizen-soldier model may be at risk. If large segments of the population increasingly view military service as incompatible with their values, this could undermine recruitment and the IDF's overall effectiveness (Koppel, 2021). Moreover, the ideological schism can compromise the collective commitment necessary for the state's defense, exacerbating existing security challenges. This division primarily stems from the diverse political, religious, and ethnic affiliations within Israeli society, which can undermine unity and cohesion in the face of external threats.

Israel's society is marked by a wide array of ideologies, ranging from secular liberalism to religious nationalism. These differing perspectives create a complex social fabric that can lead to fragmentation rather than unity, especially in national security matters (Smootha, 2002). For example, the ultra-Orthodox community prioritize religious laws and practices while secular groups emphasize democratic values and civil rights, leading to conflicting priorities regarding military service and national defense.

The rise of political polarization has been increasingly evident, particularly between the right and left. This polarization results in a lack of consensus on critical security issues, and the effectiveness of the Israeli government in formulating a unified defense strategy can be severely compromised. The ideological divide impacts military service, a critical component of Israel's national defense, as the ultra-Orthodox community has historically sought exemptions from military service, citing religious obligations (Ravitzky, 2013). This exemption creates a gap in the workforce needed for defense, raising concerns about the commitment of all societal segments to the collective defense of the state. When segments of society are perceived as not contributing equally to national security, it can foster resentment and division, further complicating Israel's defense efforts.

Ideological schisms can further erode social cohesion and the collective commitment necessary for effective defense. According to Ben-Porat (2013), when segments of society prioritize their ideological or religious beliefs over national interests, it can lead to a lack of trust and solidarity among different groups. This fragmentation undermines the collective will required to respond to security threats effectively. The failure to present a unified front can embolden adversaries and exacerbate security challenges. As noted by Cohen (2010), the persistent threat of violence from both state and non-state actors has necessitated a robust national defense. However, ideological divisions can hinder a coherent defense strategy, as different groups may advocate for divergent security and conflict resolution approaches. Liebman and Don-Yehiya (2020) argue that the diversity of beliefs and values can lead to political polarization, affect military service participation, and erode social cohesion, which is detrimental to Israel's security posture.

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The relationship between society and the IDF has significant implications for the ultra-Orthodox community. Traditionally, this community has maintained a complex and ambivalent relationship with the Israeli military, characterized by both resistance and negotiation regarding military service and the broader societal norms that govern it. This dynamic is influenced by cultural values, political representation, and the changing landscape of society, particularly in light of recent social protests and governmental reforms.

The community has been granted exemptions from military service, rooted in the belief that studying the Torah is a vital contribution to the Jewish people (Shahak, 2019). This exemption has fostered a distinct separation between the IDF and the Haredi population, contributing to a perception of the military as a secular institution that conflicts with their religious values (Sullivan, 2021). The evolving political landscape has prompted a re-evaluation of this relationship and a growing engagement with Israeli state institutions, including the military (Liebman & Don-Yehiya, 2020).

THE CHANGING DYNAMICS OF THE CITIZEN-SOLDIER MODEL

The rise of liberal ideologies and social movements has created new challenges for the ultra-Orthodox community. As Israeli society becomes more polarized around military service, civic duty, and national identity issues, the Haredi community finds itself navigating a delicate balance between its traditional values and the pressures exerted by broader societal shifts (Zerubavel, 2022). The protests against judicial reforms, which included calls for accountability, resonated within the ultra-Orthodox community, highlighting their ambivalent relationship with the state (Choshen, 2023).

The ultimatum issued by IDF reservists, which challenged the government's reforms, is particularly relevant to the ultra-Orthodox community, as it raises questions about loyalty, service, and the legitimacy of dissent within the military ranks. While most Israelis disapproved of the reservists' actions, members of the Haredi community empathized with the underlying grievances regarding state authority and social justice (Ben-Ari, 2023). This highlights a potential ideological alignment between segments of the ultra-Orthodox population and the liberal protesters, suggesting a growing intersection of interests despite historical divisions (Maoz, 2024).

The changing dynamics of the citizen-soldier model, particularly in the context of social protests, have implications for the national security framework in which the ultra-Orthodox community operates. As tensions rise between traditional values and the pressures of modern Israeli society, there is a risk that Haredi youths will feel increasingly marginalized within the military context, further complicating their relationship with the state (Friedman, 2022). This dynamic exacerbates existing tensions between the IDF and the ultra-Orthodox community, particularly if young Haredim begin to question the legitimacy of military service as a civic duty. Israeli society is undergoing a shift where traditional divisions between secular and religious communities are increasingly being challenged. The war has fostered a greater sense of unity in some respects but has also heightened existing tensions. The growing demands for Haredi participation in military service reflect a broader societal push toward more integrated national service and shared citizenship. At the same time, the ultra-Orthodox community faces internal and external pressures to reconsider its stance, as younger generations within this group express varying levels of openness to national service.

In this changing environment, the relevance of the ultra-Orthodox community's involvement in the IDF is becoming a critical issue for Israel's future. While resistance to Haredi conscription remains strong within the community, the changing political and social dynamics following the war suggest that the debate is far from settled. The need for national unity in the face of external threats may eventually lead to more significant compromises and reforms regarding Haredi military service, fundamentally altering the relationship between the ultra-Orthodox and the state and shaping the course of Israeli society for the future.

These challenges are multifaceted and encompass social, economic, and religious dimensions. Meanwhile, ultra-Orthodox parties aim to secure funding and policy concessions that support their religious institutions, social services, and communal needs. Ziv (2024) argues that funding these institutions to maintain the delicate balance of religious and secular interests adds to the growing list of social controversies that Israel faces.

The result of this funding is that ultra-Orthodox men often prioritize religious study over formal employment, leading to higher poverty rates and limited economic integration. This reliance on state welfare creates tension with secular Israelis, who view it as a financial burden. Ultra-Orthodox communities tend to have large families, further exacerbating economic challenges and increasing their dependence on social welfare programs. Malach et al. (2022) explain that ultra-Orthodox women play a vital role in the workforce, often as primary breadwinners, while also balancing their roles as mothers. Their participation in the labor market is essential for supporting their families and communities, but it also highlights the gender dynamics within these communities.

There is a persistent struggle to balance modernity with religious traditions. Some ultra-Orthodox groups resist technological advancements and secular education, leading to tensions with broader societal trends toward modernization. Younger generations within the ultra-Orthodox community face a dichotomy between maintaining religious traditions and integrating into broader Israeli society. This generational divide creates internal conflicts and external pressures. The ultra-Orthodox community emphasizes social cohesion, relying on a network of communal organizations and charities to support their members. This reliance on communal support systems reinforces their insularity and resistance to external influences.

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Ultra-Orthodox political parties wield significant influence in coalition governments, allowing them to secure concessions that align with their ideological goals (Cohen & Kizel, 2022). However, this political leverage often leads to accusations of disproportionate influence and favoritism. They navigate ideological divides by forming strategic alliances with various political factions, sometimes leading to pragmatic compromises prioritizing communal interests over broader ideological commitments. They resist conscription on religious grounds, viewing it as a threat to their religious study and way of life, creating a significant point of contention with the broader Israeli society. These ideological and political challenges highlight the complexities of integrating the ultra-Orthodox community into society while respecting their religious values and traditions. The tensions between maintaining religious autonomy and participating in a modern democratic state create ongoing challenges that require nuanced and sensitive policy approaches.

THE IMPACT OF THE WAR

The war in the Middle East influences internal dynamics within the Haredi community. The collective experience of war often leads to greater unity, with leaders urging communal prayer and charity for those affected by the conflict. While the ultra-Orthodox traditionally adopt a more insular stance, some Haredi groups have become more politically active regarding Israel's security issues during times of war. For example, Haredi parties participate in Knesset discussions on military and defense budgets, which, in turn, impacts their community's relationship with broader Israeli society (Friedman, 2024). However, the Haredi community's involvement in military service remains a contentious issue. While many Haredi men received exemptions from military service to focus on religious study, the war brought renewed public debate about whether more Haredim should serve in the IDF.

The war also has psychological and social implications for Haredi families. Like other Israelis, they are exposed to the trauma of rocket attacks and the fear of civilian casualties. However, their relatively closed community structure can sometimes create a sense of detachment from the broader national discourse about the conflict. For some Haredi families, the focus remains on prayer and Torah study, while direct engagement with the political or military aspects of the war is minimal. During escalations, rabbinic leaders call for increased prayer, charity, and introspection, framing the war within a religious narrative emphasizing divine intervention and protection. As Stadler (2009) discusses, the communal response to external threats is often couched in religious terms, reinforcing the notion that spiritual practice is a form of resistance or defense.

Since the onset of the war, there has been a noticeable shift in the Haredi community, with many Haredi men expressing a desire to enlist in the IDF. This change is driven by shared fate and national solidarity during the conflict, contrasting with the community's traditional opposition to military service. The war has prompted some Haredi individuals to reconsider their role in national defense, reflecting a broader sense of unity amid the ongoing crisis. It has intensified the already polarized debate surrounding the conscription of Haredi men into the army, bringing the issue of equitable burden-sharing to the forefront of Israeli national discourse. As Israel faces heightened security challenges, the exemption of a significant portion of its population from military service is increasingly seen as unsustainable by many segments of society. The conflict has further highlighted the tensions between the secular and religious sectors, raising fundamental questions about the role of ultra-Orthodox communities in the collective national effort. The war's impact on Israeli society has demonstrated the urgency of revisiting existing policies regarding military service, with growing pressure on the government to reconsider Haredi conscription. While the current political landscape and religious sensitivities make immediate reforms unlikely, the debate has gained renewed momentum, potentially paving the way for future changes. Ultimately, the resolution of this issue will require careful balancing of national security needs with respect for religious traditions, and it may significantly shape Israel's social and political landscape in the years to come.

The war highlighted the IDF's tremendous security challenges, including a lack of workforce. Amid the war in Gaza, many traditional allies of the Haredim on the political right have begun to question the exemption. With the country potentially on the cusp of a major political realignment, the collapse of the Haredi exemption could reshape Haredi culture, politics, and possibly Israeli society (Israel Policy Forum, 2024).

In the first ten weeks of the war, two thousand Haredim attempted to join the military, a small fraction of those eligible but twice the community's annual average. Still, Haredi political leaders maintained that they would leave the government, triggering elections, if it did not pass a permanent conscription exemption for Torah students, angering non-Haredi Israelis who have had to increase their service to compensate for the lack of Haredi military participation (Lipkind, 2024).

The war has prompted flashes of greater solidarity between sections of Israel's ultra-Orthodox Jewish minority and the secular mainstream, as fears of a shared threat have accelerated the integration of some of Israel's most insular citizens. As the war in Gaza drags on and Israeli reservists are called to serve elongated or additional tours of duty, long-simmering divisions about military exemptions for the country's most religious Jews are again at the center of a national debate. While concluding of Haredi's response to the war is still complex, Kingsley (2024) argues that Israelis of all stripes found a common cause in what they saw as an existential fight for Israel's future and have been collectively stung by international criticism of Israel's retaliation in Gaza. Accordingly, in parts of the ultra-Orthodox community, whose reluctance to serve in the military had been a source of division before the war, there are signs of an increased appreciation for - and in some cases, involvement in - the armed forces.

The war has not only intensified the debate surrounding Haredi conscription but also underscored broader societal changes within Israel. The conflict has deepened the sense of collective responsibility across different sectors of Israeli society, leading to increased

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calls for a fairer distribution of the security burden. In particular, the secular public's frustration with the exemption of Haredi men from military service has been amplified, as many perceive the growing security threats as necessitating a more inclusive defense effort.

CONCLUSION

The debate over Haredi conscription reflects broader tensions in Israeli society between secular and religious populations. As the ultra-Orthodox community grows, their political influence and ability to resist integration into national military service have become more pronounced. The war in the Middle East has brought this issue to the forefront, as calls for equitable military service grow louder. However, any resolution to this issue will likely require significant political compromise, as ultra-Orthodox parties maintain substantial influence within Israel's coalition government.

The war has intensified the debate over Haredi military conscription, with increasing pressure from secular Israelis for the ultra-Orthodox community to share in the responsibilities of national defense. While the war has highlighted the deep divisions between Israel's religious and secular populations, it has also provided an opportunity for political leaders to push for reform. The outcome of this debate will have lasting implications for Israeli society, potentially reshaping the relationship between the ultra-Orthodox community and the state.

The interplay between religion, politics, and national security in Israel has intensified due to demographic shifts and the ongoing military conflict. The power of the religious right, exemplified by ultra-Orthodox and national-religious parties, has created a political environment where the interests of these groups clash with those of the secular majority. As Israel navigates the current war, these internal divisions are likely to persist, raising questions about the future of conscription laws and the broader relationship between religion and state.

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