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# Together we Stand?

Exploring National Identification Among Israeli Arabs, Jews and Immigrants Following Israeli Military Successes

## 1 Introduction

Notwithstanding differences between social subgroups in contemporary Israeli society, a majority of both Jewish and Arab Israelis have proclaimed their pride over the past decade in being Israeli and have done so despite the fact that they have frequently experienced political violence. This interesting data illustrates the complex nature of group identification, as Israeli Arabs constitute a national minority that has little connection with the State of Israel's core Zionist ethos. Additionally, Israeli Arabs suffer from ongoing discrimination (even in the eyes of the majority of the Jewish public, see Hermann et al. 2016), and are in a "tight spot" where the ongoing Israeli-Palestinian conflict is concerned.

Group identification is regarded as an important phenomenon by social scientists, especially as it pertains to national identification. The importance of one's sense of national identification was previously researched as part of nation-building processes (see Bendix 1980) and was more recently addressed with regard to the European refugee crisis, Brexit and the resurgence of right-wing political parties across the globe (see Bekhuis et al. 2013; Gusterson 2017; Kaufmann 2016; Osborne et al. 2017). While identity salience<sup>1</sup> changes over time and in

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<sup>1</sup> Scholarship emphasises the multidimensionality of the self and conceptualises the self in terms of multiple role-based concepts (e.g., McCall/Simmons 1978, Rosenberg 1979). Social psychologists and sociologists tend to "conceive important parts of self as identities, or internalized role designations ... thus the organization attributed to self often pertains to the way in which discrete identities relate to each other" (Stryker/Serpe 1994: 17). Parts of the self, also referred to as *identities*, are organized hierarchically according to salience or psychological centrality (Stryker/Serpe 1994). According to Brenner, Serpe, and Stryker "... the likelihood of a given identity being played out in social interaction will be significantly impacted by the salience of the identity relative to the salience of other identities the person holds" (2014: 232). Identity Salience refers to "the probability that a given identity will be invoked in social interaction" (Stryker 1968, [1980] 2003) or, alternatively, as a substantial propensity to define a situation in a way that

relation to broader societal perceptions (see Gilroy 1997: 305), violent conflicts pose a threat to national identification and, as a result, profoundly affect it. Whereas threats to identity were found to enhance identity salience, their effects vis à vis group identification remain insufficiently understood.

How resilient is the national identity of individuals in the face of persistent political violence? Whereas the relevant literature considers political violence a unitary phenomenon and primarily focuses on the effects of exposure to the violence itself, it consistently overlooks the impact of its outcome. Do distinct outcomes of political violence (such as wars and military operations) affect national identification in different ways? Does group performance (success vs failure) or membership in an ethnic group (ethnic minority vs majority) influence the impact?

According to social identity theory, one of the most comprehensive theories of group relations (see Abrams/Hogg 1990; Emler/Hopkins 1990; Tajfel 1974; Tajfel/Turner 1979; Turner 1975), a prime motive for individuals to identify with a specific group is that it enhances their esteem, both in their own eyes and in the eyes of others. Whereas individuals are motivated to proclaim their association with a successful group, this may have negative social consequences for members with a low status or who belong to a losing group. It is thus to be expected that victories and defeats will have distinct impacts where group identification is concerned. Therefore, this paper aims to explore the impact of the aftermath of political violence (based on group performance framed by the local media) on national identification across social groups in Israeli society (Jews, Arabs, and Immigrants). Bearing in mind the multi-layered nature of individual identities, mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion within national and religious communities, and Israel's political history, the various social groups are expected to illustrate distinct impacts.

## 2 Theoretical framework and hypotheses

In the past, most countries were assumed to be nation-states that mainly encompassed a single dominant ethnic group (see Smith/Jarkko 1998). However, minorities seeking self-determination, along with immigration and modern politics, led to the prevalence of multi-ethnic, heterogenic states (such as the UK, Canada and Spain) (see Gurr 2000).

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provides an opportunity to perform that identity (Stryker/Serpe 1982; Brenner/Serpe/Stryker 2014: 232).

National identity is considered “the cohesive force that holds nation-states together” (Smith/Jarkko, 1998: 1). Affinity with the state or a sense of patriotism has not only been associated with government effectiveness (see Ahlerup/Hansson 2011), tax compliance (see Konrad/Qari 2012), pro-trade preferences (see Mayda/Rodrik 2005), support for a united European community (see Risse 2015), and life satisfaction at an individual level (see Morrison et al. 2011; Reeskens/Wright 2011), but also with nationalist attitudes (see Smith/Jarkko 1998; Wagner et al. 2012). In this study, *national pride* is used as a proxy for Israeli national identification. This operationalisation is appropriate given Smith/Kim’s definition of “national pride” as “the positive effect that the public feels towards their country, resulting from their national identity” (2006: 127). National pride is both the sense of esteem that a person has for one’s nation as well as the self-esteem<sup>2</sup> that one derives from their national identity (see Smith/Kim 2006).

Whereas individuals strive to maintain or enhance their self-esteem and achieve a positive self-concept, social identity theory posits that an essential part of an individual’s sense of self is derived from membership in social groups (i.e. social identity) (see Emler/Hopkins 1990; Tajfel 1959; Tajfel/Turner 1979). In other words, the self-esteem of individuals was found to be associated with their group’s status/value (see Tajfel 1981). Values connotations associated with groups are the result of social comparisons between one’s in-group and a relevant out-group. Consequently, groups compete not just for material resources, but for anything that can enhance their self-definition: i.e. positive social identity (see Abrams/Hogg 1990; Oakes/Turner 1980; Turner 1981). Consequently, individuals are motivated to Bask in Reflected Glory (BIRGing) and proclaim their associations with a successful group, and to Cut Off Reflected Failure (CORFing), which, in other words, means to dissociate oneself from a losing group.

**BIRGing** is a strategic impression management technique that enables individuals to raise their esteem in the eyes of others by publicising their connection with a successful other (see Hirt et al. 1992) without having been instrumental to that success. BIRGing involves a process of unit formation between the individual and the successful group (see Cialdini et al. 1976) and is considered an essential means by which individuals maintain a positive self-concept (see Tesser 1988). The tendency to BIRG explains the “fair weather” fandom that is observed when sports teams are successful (see Becker/Suls 1983; Cratty 1983; Hirt et al. 1992) and, following a positively evaluated group performance (e.g. victory in a war, or

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<sup>2</sup> Self-esteem was explicitly referred to as a motivation behind intergroup behaviour. (Tajfel/Turner 1979: 40).

the successful completion of a military operation - H1), contributes to an expected increase in in-group identification among the general population.

While identifying with a group may affirm an individual's sense of self-worth, a group's debacle may lead to negative and unavoidable consequences (see Edwards 1973; Roberts 1976). Accordingly, an important corollary to BIRGing is **CORFing**, an image protection tactic that enables individuals to avoid being associated with an unsuccessful other and to distance themselves from them (see Snyder et al. 1983). A classic example of the tendency to CORF is the "killing/shooting the messenger" metaphor, which describes peoples' reluctance to deliver bad news as a means to avoid association with the message and the negative evaluations that follow (see Manis et al. 1974).

Whereas the general Israeli population is expected to follow H1, relevant scholarship identified asymmetric attitudes towards one's country within minority and majority groups. According to Staerklé et al. (2010), ethnic, linguistic and religious majorities tend to identify more with the nation and are more inclined to strongly endorse a nationalist ideology than minorities do. Staerklé et al. also found that the most considerable difference between minorities and majorities exists in ethnically diverse countries (see 2010: 491). Dowley & Silver (2000) obtained a similar finding and attributed it to a cohort effect (see Smith/Jarkko 1998). Consequently, and against the backdrop of the aforementioned academic literature, members of distinct minority groups are not expected to follow the general relationship between group identification and group performance (which in this case corresponds to increased national identification following Israeli military successes) (The "Minority Hypothesis": H2).

## 2.1 Israeli society in context

Israeli society, with its high heterogeneity of various groups representing class, religious, national, ethnic and cultural differences, is often seen as the ultimate "laboratory conducive to the study of the development of negative political attitudes towards various minority groups" (Canetti-Nisim et al. 2008: 91). The main ethnic groups, Jewish and Arab Israelis<sup>3</sup>, split into subgroups with distinct identities. Jews divide according to levels of religiosity, ethnic background<sup>4</sup> and time

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<sup>3</sup> According to current reports by the Central Bureau of Statistics (2020c), Jews constitute 73.9% of Israel's population, Arabs/Palestinians constitute 21.1%.

<sup>4</sup> Ashkenazi Jews exiled to Europe and Sephardic/Mizrachi Jews exiled to Spain, North Africa and Middle Eastern countries.

of immigration (new immigrants and old-timers). Non-Jews mainly split into Christian Arabs, Muslim Arabs, Druze and Bedouin.

External threats are known to function as cohesive factors. Consequently, Israel's security situation and past wars have served to entrench a deep sense of shared destiny (e.g., Bar-Tal, 2013). However, studies on the aftermath of political violence also point to negative attitudes and fragmentation among various social groups in Israel (cf. Sullivan et al., 1985; Pedahzur & Yishai, 1999; Canetti-Nisim & Pedahzur, 2003).

Two notable minority groups in contemporary Israeli society are Arab Israelis and immigrants. The former constitutes an ethnic minority<sup>5</sup> in a country widely perceived as the “Jewish state” and the homeland of the Jewish people (see Herzl 1896). The latter are distinguished from the native population due to their foreign origin and, at times, religion<sup>6</sup>. Members of both groups often report a sense of social exclusion and marginalisation alongside a feeling of being treated as second-class citizens (see Ghanem 2016; Raijman 2010, Raz 2004).

One can hypothesise that due to processes of marginalisation and social and political exclusion, these minority group members may not perceive the states' victory as “their own”. With this being the case, an increase in national identification following Israeli victories is unlikely to manifest itself among members of the two observed minority groups. The more segregated and discriminated against the members of these groups perceive themselves to be, the more likely that they will experience a **decrease** in national identification following Israeli victories. Due to the context of the warfare being analysed (the Israeli-Palestinian conflict), this is especially true for Arab Israelis.

## 2.2 The use of emphasis and equivalence framing in shaping individual opinion

This research is predicated on the fact that national identification within Israel (operationalised as national pride) fluctuates following discrepant outcomes of political violence that Israel participated in. Assessments of outcomes that were

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<sup>5</sup> As such, the overall level of national identification among Arab Israelis is expected to be lower than that of the (predominantly Jewish) general population and of Jewish Israelis.

<sup>6</sup> While FSU immigrants to Israel are predominantly Jewish, according to the Israeli Ministry of the Interior, 61.5% of Russians (about 34,552 persons) and 66% of Ukrainian (26,256 persons) immigrants that arrived in Israel between 2012 and 2019 are not Jewish (as they are decedents/partners of Jews, they were granted Israeli citizenship according to the Law of Return (Nahshoni 2019). See further discussion under the “Discussion” section).

conducted by individuals are rarely based on the measurement of objectives (military achievements, deaths inflicted by each party, etc.). Politicians, interest groups and media outlets strive to shape the preferences of ordinary individuals, whose opinions affect electoral outcomes and often guide day-to-day policy decisions (e.g. Erikson/MacKuen/Stimson 2002). They often do so by employing specific communication frames (see Druckman 2011; Gitlin 2003; Iyengar 1990).

“Framing’ refers to ‘the way the story is written or produced’, including the orienting headlines, specific word choices, rhetorical devices employed, narrative form, etc.” (Jamieson/Cappella, 1997: 39). As highlighted by Druckman, “the frame leads to alternative representations of the problem and can result in distinct evaluations and preferences” (2011: 6). A competition over which many substantively distinct values or considerations should carry the day results in a *strategic* political environment of *competing* information (see Berelson et al. 1986; Schattschneider 1960). Two common frames include emphasis framing and equivalence framing.

Emphasis framing is a persuasion technique that draws attention to specific aspects that encourage certain interpretations of the relevant context and discourage others (see Schutz 2013a). It applies to a broad range of decisions where no “correct answer” exists. Politicians, interest groups and media outlets strive to shape the preferences of ordinary individuals whose opinions affect electoral outcomes and often guide day-to-day policy decisions (e.g., Erikson/MacKuen/Stimson 2002).

Equivalence framing is defined as purposely stating or logically portraying equivalent information in a way that encourages specific interpretations and discourages others. This is in order to alter our preferences. Whereas emphasis framing focuses on different information, equivalence framing focuses on the same information while attempting to phrase it in the most compelling way (see Schutz, 2013b). For example, Nelson, Clawson and Oxley (1997) studied people’s willingness to allow hate groups to conduct a rally. They found that specific framing was significant in affecting an individual’s views of the opposing arguments (free speech vs public safety) and caused them to adjust their preferences accordingly.

In the current research, both frames were employed by the Israeli press in communicating the aftermath of each episode of political violence (either successful or unsuccessful from the Israeli point of view), which affected each Israeli’s national identification.

### 3 Data, measures, method

To test the effect of discrepant outcomes of political violence on individual national identification at the micro level, it was necessary to focus on one particular country. Due to theoretical and methodological considerations, the study was restricted to Israel. As the theory that formed the basis of this study required group members to respond to various outcomes of political violence, it was necessary to identify a country that experienced recurrent violence with diverse outcomes. Israel has experienced chronic and persistent political violence that has been characterised by periods of fighting, such as wars and military operations. During the years that the study was conducted, from 2003 to 2013, Israel endured nine periods of political violence, which thereby fulfilled the aforementioned prerequisite.

Furthermore, political violence has a salient presence in the lives of Israelis, as the country is only 22,072 km<sup>2</sup>, and the relevant fighting periods concerned both its southern (“Pillar of Defence” and “Protective Edge”) and northern borders (“Second Lebanon War”). Given the high levels of exposure to political violence, both in scale and in frequency, along with the availability of micro-level survey data, the case of Israel is particularly suitable for studying the relationship between discrepancy and national identification in the aftermath of political violence. In addition, until recently national identification in Europe had largely declined across generations. This was in reaction to the extreme nationalism that led to World War II, and to globalisation and political integration (see Smith/Kim 2006). In this regard, Israel is an exception.

Whereas Judaism is a cohesive element for most of the country’s residents and a core element in Israel’s existence as a Jewish nation-state (despite undeniable religious-secular disputes, Levy et al. 2002), Israeli society is characterised by high heterogeneity, with class, religious, national, ethnic and cultural differences separating the various groups that it is comprised of.

In its early years of nationhood, Israel’s cohesive value was establishing pioneer settlements (see Eisenstadt 2019), and it based its new Israeli-Jewish identity on the concept of Zionism (see Sachar 2013). However, during the last several decades, the consensus surrounding the question “what does it mean to be Israeli?” has been subject to extensive scrutiny. Nowadays, this meaning is defined differently by each of the social subgroups. Recent trends in Israeli social and academic discourse even include “post-Zionism” or “anti-Zionism”, casting doubt on the need for Israel to be defined as “the Jewish state” (see Arian et al. 2007).

Despite its high heterogeneity, one observes many signs that there are high levels of national identification, both in ordinary times and during periods of national crises (see Arian et al. 2010). Lastly, the methodological considerations for

using Israel as a case study include the availability of high-quality survey data and the ability to control for country-specific characteristics.

### 3.1 The selection of episodes of political violence

Following Schneider et al. (2017), the episodes of political violence used in the current research were identified by the Penn State Event Data Project (PSEDP) based on a temporal criterion. The PSEDP uses automated coding of news reports in order to generate political event data that has the Middle East, the Balkans and West Africa as its focus. The project researchers coded Reuters and Agence France Presse (AFP) articles using two different coding schemes: World Event Interaction Survey (WEIS) and Conflict & Mediation Event Observations (CAMEO). As in Schneider et al. 2017, the CAMEO scheme was chosen over the WEIS scheme, as the former is available until 2015. The AFP CAMEO Levant data set includes 246,382 events (after duplicate filtering) and covers April 1979 to March 2015. After removing events in which Israel was not involved and events that did not occur within the study's timeframe, the project researchers selected events coded as “fight”<sup>7</sup>.

Nine episodes of political violence were identified following the cross-referencing of events that were coded as “fight” with data from secondary sources (the Israeli Defense Forces spokesperson unit’s website, the IDF’s news archive search engine, the Al Jazeera website). A manual check was also conducted in order to validate that the events were not incorrectly coded. The list was also checked for consistency with events coded as “ceasefires”, as several of the chosen fighting episodes were concluded with a ceasefire. Due to data availability, five of the nine episodes of political violence (four military operations and one war) were analysed in the current research<sup>8</sup> (see tab. 1).

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7 The AFP CAMEO dataset uses seven codes for conflict-related events: “Use conventional military force”, “Impose blockade & restrict movement”, “Occupy territory”, “Fight with small arms and light weapons”, “Fight with artillery and tanks”, and “Employ aerial weapons”.

8 Other operations (‘Rainbow’, ‘Summer Rains’, ‘Autumn Clouds’, ‘Hot Winter’, and ‘Returning Echo’, aka March 2012 Gaza–Israel clashes) took place during this period. However, given that their outcomes were undetermined due to insufficient media coverage, they were excluded from the analysis.



**Tab. 1:** Episodes of Political Violence Used in the Research 2004–2013

ID	Name Given by the IDF	Short Background	Start Date	End Date	Actors Involved	Outcome Perceived by Israelis <sup>9</sup>
1	Operation “Days of Penitence/Repentance”	Most substantial IDF incursion into Gaza since the start of the Al-Aqsa intifada in September 2000, launched following the death of two Israeli children from a rocket launched by militants in the strip.	29/09/2004	16/10/2004	IDF & Palestinian terror organisations, primarily Hamas	Favourable
2	Operation “First Rain”	Israeli Air Force week-long offensive launched against Hamas and Islamic Jihad targets in Gaza following the extensive firing of rockets at Israeli communities in southern Israel.	23/09/2005	01/10/2005	IDF, Hamas & Islamic Jihad	Favourable
3	Second Lebanon War	Israeli joint airstrike and ground invasion of southern Lebanon precipitated by the firing of rockets from Lebanon at Israeli border towns and the abduction of two IDF soldiers by Hezbollah.	12/07/2006	14/08/2006	IDF & Hezbollah	Unfavourable
4	Operation “Cast Led:”/Gaza War	A vast three-week military operation by Israeli air, naval, artillery and ground forces in the Gaza Strip. Resulted in a high casualty rate.	27/12/2008	18/01/2009	IDF & Hamas	Favourable

<sup>9</sup> Constructed by the author based on a manual evaluative assertion analysis – a type of content analysis used to “extract from a message the evaluations being made of significant concepts” (Osgood et al, 1956: 47).

ID	Name Given by the IDF	Short Background	Start Date	End Date	Actors Involved	Outcome Perceived by Israelis <sup>9</sup>
5	Operation "Pillar of Defense"	An eight-day IDF operation in the Hamas-governed Gaza Strip. Commenced in response to the killing of the chief of the Gaza military wing of Hamas and the launch of over 100 rockets towards Israel for 24 hours.	14/11/2012	21/11/2012	IDF, PRC, Al-Aqsa Martyrs, Hamas,	Unfavourable

### 3.2 Survey measures

The data concerning Israeli national identification originates from five social surveys that were administered between 2005 and 2013 as part of the Israeli Democracy Index (IDI). The data was collected by the Guttman Center for Public Opinion and Policy Research, a branch of the Israeli Democracy Institute (see Arian et al. 2009), which holds the most comprehensive database on public opinion in Israel. IDI surveys evaluate the quality and functioning of Israeli democracy by collecting quantified and comparable information regarding three main aspects: institutions, rights & stability and social cohesion (see Arian et al. 2003). Annual interviews were conducted with representative samples (about 1,200 individuals) of the adult population in Israel in Hebrew, Arabic and Russian. While 12 surveys were conducted during the specified timeframe, only those that took place following the conclusion of each episode of political violence were analysed.

### 3.3 National identification

The dependent variable in the empirical analysis is national identification, proxied by national pride, the positive feeling that individuals have about their country as a result of their national identity (see Smith/Kim 2006). National pride was found to be a function of a variety of individual-specific characteristics (see Evans/Kelley 2002) such as national identification (see Dimitrova-Grajzl et al. 2016), market conditions (see Lan/Li 2015) and contemporary events (see Kavetsos 2012). *National Pride* was operationalised through respondents' answers to the

question “*How proud are you to be Israeli?*”<sup>10</sup>. Responses ranged from “not proud at all” to “very proud”.

### 3.4 Perceived aftermath of political violence

The independent variable was constructed based on a manual evaluative assertion analysis (see Schneider et al. 2017) of relevant articles and commentaries that originated in the three daily newspapers with the largest total readership in Israel (see Mana 2015): *Yediot Aharonot*, *Ma’ariv* and *Ha’aretz*. Since the research examines changes in national pride levels among Israelis, objective measurements that may reflect “success”, if they even exist, are unbeknownst to Israelis. Consequently, they are less likely to shape public opinion than the media frames that Israelis are exposed to. *Perceived outcome* was operationalised as the perceived aftermath of each episode of political violence (according to table 1) from the Israeli point of view: favourable/victory (1) and unfavourable/defeat (0).

### 3.5 Control variables

Since no relevant panel data is available in Israel, it was deemed necessary to control for those respondent personal characteristics that were likely to affect national identification (see Coenders/Scheepers 2003; Stubager 2009). Consequently, *religiosity*, *education*, *age*, *gender* and *social class* are also included in the analysis. Assessing respondents’ membership in social and ethnic groups was based on the *social group* variable, which refers to the social group that respondents chose to associate themselves with (Jews/Arabs/Immigrants).

Whereas in the past, anti-nationalist arguments for nationhood were wielded mainly by the political left, and arguments ranging from anti-universalist premises to positive national values usually originated in the political right, left-wing liberals and social democrats now deploy a nation-affirming set of arguments as often as conservatives (see Benner 1997). Consequently, political affiliation was expected to play a pivotal role in determining the impact of Israeli military operations on national pride. Political orientation was measured on a 5-point scale, ranging from right to left. Two macro-economic indicators of the performance of

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**10** One should take into consideration the problematic nature of using social surveys to collect this type of data. The usage of vague concepts such as “pride” leaves room for various interpretations, thus creating the problems of interpersonal incomparability (Bauer et al. 2014; King et al. 2003) or measurement inequivalence (e.g. Davidov et al. 2014; Freitag/Bauer 2013).

Israel's economy were also added as controls; *economic growth* and *inflation rate*<sup>11</sup>. While the former can elevate national pride levels, the latter might depress it.

## 4 Findings

Being comprised of different ethnic and religious minorities, contemporary Israeli society is highly diverse. The Israeli public chronically and persistently experienced political violence: between 2004 and 2013, Israel experienced nine periods of fighting, each lasting from a few days to up to several months.

In order to get a preliminary sense of the fluctuation of national pride within the relevant timeframe, Figure 1 charts the perceived outcomes of this violence and the mean values of national pride across various social groups in Israel. As answers to the relevant question ranged from (1) very proud to (4) not at all proud, it is important to note that a lower mean marks a higher level of national pride.

Jewish Israelis demonstrate the highest levels of national identification, whereas Arab Israelis demonstrate the lowest levels when compared with Jewish Israelis and the general population. National identification levels among Israeli immigrants are similar to those observed by the overall population: low compared with the majority group (native Jewish Israelis), and high compared with the largest ethnic minority group (Arab Israelis). The existence of fluctuations in national identification across social and ethnic groups is also apparent.

When considering the difference in mean values following Israeli victories and defeats among the broader Israeli society, these appear to be relatively small. An increase in overall national pride levels is apparent after the successful completion of operations "First Rain" and "Days of Penitence" in 2004–2005 (-.11). A sharp decrease is observed following the unsuccessful cessation of the Second Lebanon War (in which the Israeli Defense Forces failed to secure the return of Israeli soldier Gilad Shalit<sup>12</sup>) in 2006<sup>13</sup> (+0.22). The successful termination of operation "Cast Lead" (aka the Gaza war) seems to bring about a slight increase in

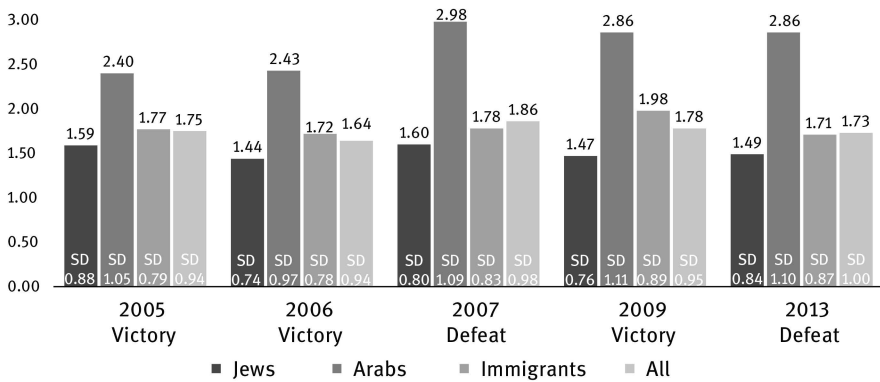
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**11** The measures are based on annual World Development Indicators for Israel for the year of the surveys. *Economic growth* is Israel's real GDP growth per survey year and *inflation* is the rate of inflation in consumer prices.

**12** Shalit was captured by Hamas militants on 25/06/2006 in a cross-border raid via tunnels near the Israeli border with the Gaza strip. He was eventually released on 18/10/2011 in a prisoner exchange deal (see Bergman 2011).

**13** As this war was fought in the summer of 2006, the following survey, which took place in 2007, was utilised (thus appearing under 2007 in Figure 1).

national pride (-.8). Finally, a very mild increase in national pride (-.5) appears in 2013, following the unsuccessful completion of operation “Pillar of Defense”.



**Fig. 1:** Mean Values of National Pride Levels Across Social Groups in Israel Following Various Victories and Defeats.

Apart from the latter<sup>14</sup>, fluctuations in national identification appear to align with predictions based on social identity theory: the successful completion of Israeli military operations are associated with increased national identification among the general population and vice versa.

When considering the fluctuations in national identification among minority groups, the data appears to be only partially consistent with the “minority hypothesis”. Among Israeli immigrants, an increase in national pride was registered following the victory in 2005 (-0.05), but not following the successes in 2006 (+0.06) and 2009 (+0.2). Moreover, whereas the defeat in the Second Lebanon War was associated with decreased national pride (+0.06), the unsuccessful completion of operation “Pillar of Defense” in 2013 is associated with increased pride (-0.27).

Among Arab Israelis, an opposite tendency is observed: among members of this ethnic minority, a decreased national pride level was associated with Israeli victories (+0.3 in 2005 and +0.55 in 2006). In contrast, the defeat in the Second Lebanon War in 2006 was associated with increased pride (-0.12). No change in national pride was registered following the Israeli loss in 2013.

<sup>14</sup> This may be the result of using a smaller sample size for the 2013 survey (1,000 respondents compared with 1,200 in previous years) and a larger maximum sampling error (3.2 compared with 2.8 in previous surveys).

**Tab. 2:** The Effects of Outcomes of Episodes of Political Violence on Israeli National Pride

	<b>Model 1</b>	<b>Model 2</b>
<b>National pride</b>		
Victories (-defeats)	-0.303*** (-5.97)	-0.177*** (-3.46)
<b>Individual-Level Variables</b>		
Observing tradition	-0.092*** (-3.31)	-0.094*** (-3.43)
Social class	0.009 (0.22)	0.011 (0.30)
Social group: Arabs	1.946*** (9.80)	1.963*** (9.47)
Social group: Immigrants	0.772*** (3.57)	0.760*** (3.67)
Education	0.055** (2.93)	0.054** (2.84)
Gender	0.036 (0.99)	0.037 (1.00)
Age	-0.009*** (-6.40)	-0.009*** (-6.12)
Political identity	0.196*** (4.83)	0.190*** (4.78)
<b>Country-Level Variables</b>		
Economic growth		0.016 (1.16)
Inflation		0.067*** (8.41)
cut1_cons	1.062*** (9.05)	1.380*** (5.74)
cut2_cons	2.593*** (18.61)	2.912*** (11.93)
cut3_cons	3.858*** (34.38)	4.178*** (20.22)
AIC	10184.02	10178.48

	Model 1	Model 2
BIC <sup>15</sup>	10203.5	10197.96
LogL (model)	-5089.009	-5086.24
<b>N</b>	4,886	4,886

Note: The estimations are the result of ordinal logit regression (STATA 14). The table reports coefficients, and t statistics can be found in parentheses. Clustering according to survey year.  
\*  $p < 0.05$  \*\*  $p < 0.01$  \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$ .

As is apparent from the preliminary findings (which are descriptive and do not assume causation), discrepant political violence outcomes (whether favourable or unfavourable from the Israeli point of view) seem to be influenced by membership in a social/ethnic group. I now turn to the statistical analysis of these relationships.

Table 2 depicts the results of two ordinal logistic regression models<sup>16</sup>. In Model 1, I examine the effects of individual-level predictors and the outcomes of episodes of political violence on national pride levels among Israelis. In Model 2, country-level predictors are added to the analysis. Military results (victories versus defeats) achieve a high level of significance in both models. As is the case with the preliminary findings, a decrease in value marks an increase in pride. This is due to the utilisation of the dependent variable.

## 5 Discussion

With its communities of various origins, Israel is a multi-ethnic, deeply divided society that is split along social, ethnic, cultural, religious and political lines.

The results of the statistical analysis of the different models point to a positive effect that victories have on the national pride of the general Israeli population – this was highly associated with an increased national identification. As such, it supported the prevailing hypothesis based on social identity theory (H1).

Membership in minority groups, both ethnic (Arab Israelis) and social (Immigrants), was found to be highly significant insofar as decreased national pride is

<sup>15</sup> Akaike and Bayesian Information Criterion (AIC, BIC) are probabilistic statistical measures meant to quantify the performance of the model on the dataset (log-likelihood), alongside the complexity of the model (see Browniee 2020).

<sup>16</sup> Due to lower BIC and AIC values, the ordinal logistic models are superior to the multilevel mixed-effects ordered logistic models. Consequently, results from the former model are reported in the text.

concerned. In other words, Israeli victories were not associated with increased national pride for Arab Israelis and Immigrants. Quite to the contrary: military operations that ended favourably (from the Israeli point of view) were associated with decreased national pride among members of these two minority groups. Consequently, this supported the “minority hypothesis”.

### **5.1 What can account for the observed decrease in national pride following Israeli victories among members of the examined minority groups?**

As a homeland of the Jewish people that was founded on a Zionist-Jewish narrative, no plurality of ethnic discourse existed in Israel for over 50 years (see Hadar 2019: 21). Yet Israel is home to a large Arab population (constituting one-fifth of the country’s population), most of whom self-identify as Palestinians. Consequently, both Palestinian nationalism and Israeli citizenship shape the collective identity of the Arab community in Israel (see Peleg/Waxman 2011: 31). Exploring identity shifts among Arab Israel in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, Peleg & Waxman (2011) point to a process of “Palestinisation” – a gradual transition from an Arab Israeli identity (a result of “Israelisation” – integration into Israel’s Jewish society) to a more entrenched Palestinian identity (see Peleg/Waxman 2011, 27).

As the largest ethnic minority, Arab Israelis have full citizenship and are guaranteed equal protection under Israeli law. However, as non-Jews, Arab Israelis are, by definition, excluded from the national Jewish narrative and full participation in society (see Tessler 1977: 313). According to Abu-Saad (2006): “The centrality of the notion of 'Jewishness' to Israel's national identity has been translated, in practical terms, into the subordination of the indigenous Palestinian Arab minority [...] to the Jewish majority” (Abu-Saad, 2004, Lewin-Epstein and Semyonov, 2019).

Israeli exclusionism and discriminatory practices against its largest outgroup – Arab Israelis – include interpersonal and institutional ethnic discrimination (e.g., Daoud et al. 2018, Enos et al. 2018), ethnic segregation, income inequality (e.g., Lewin-Epstein/Semyonov 1992, Semyonov/Lewin-Epstein 2011) and limitation of citizenship rights (see Alcott 2018, Saïd 2020). Persistent ethnic intolerance and racist incidents against Arab Israelis were also documented by reports produced outside of the academy (see Hermann et al. 2012, Adalah 2016, Amnesty International 2021).

While Judaism, the Holocaust and the Israeli–Palestinian conflict were instrumentalised in creating a cohesive Israeli (Jewish) society during Israel’s first



decades of nationhood, Arabs were villainised (see Hadar et al. 2022). This further contributed to the exclusion of Arab Israelis from Israeli society.

When it comes to the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict, Arab Israelis are caught between a rock and a hard place. On the one hand, Arab Israelis are loyal to their Palestinian brothers and sisters and support their quest for self-determination (see Russell 2021). On the other hand, Arab Israelis have personal and economic interests that are equally and existentially threatened when Israel experiences political violence with a negative outcome.

Immigrants are an example of another large minority group in Israeli society<sup>17</sup>. Israel's active encouragement of Jewish immigration since its very inception (1948) resulted in a constant flow of immigrants arriving from various countries. Over 3.3 million immigrants made Israel their home, about 44.3% of whom immigrated from 1990 onwards (see Central Bureau of Statistics 2020a). In the two and a half years that followed Israeli statehood, approximately 687,000 Jewish immigrants entered the state, mainly from Europe. This was followed by 1.6 million Immigrants from Arabic-speaking Middle Eastern countries and North Africa. The collapse of the Soviet Union (1989–1991) marked the beginning of yet another massive immigration wave to Israel.

Over a million citizens of the former Soviet Union (FSU) have arrived in Israel since 1989 (see Galili 2020), 80% of whom immigrated between 1990 and 2001. As the Israeli population in 1988 was roughly 4.4 million, it is no wonder that the tension between native Israelis and immigrants became one of the prevalent social rifts in Israeli society (see Al Haj 2004). Immigration from the FSU continues to this day, but at a much slower pace<sup>18</sup> (see Central Bureau of Statistics 2019). While they are predominantly Jewish, and thus belong to the majority ethnic group, FSU immigrants constitute a distinct cultural and linguistic group in Israeli society (see Galili/Bronfman 2013).

Jewish immigration to Israel was established in the “Law of Return” enacted in 1950, which stated the right of every Jew to immigrate to Israel. As discrepancies<sup>19</sup> exist between the definition of “Jewish’ according to the Law of Return and

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**17** In 2019, immigrants constituted 21% of the Israeli population. The main countries of origin are FSU (49%, Morocco (7%) and the United States (5%) (OECD 2021).

**18** Even in recent years, the vast majority of immigrants to Israel arrive from the FSU (Central Bureau of Statistics 2020a). In 2015, immigration from France peaked (6,628 immigrants arrived in Israel). However, a decrease in the number of immigrants from France is apparent in recent years (Central Bureau of Statistics 2020a). At the end of 2019, approximately 87,500 Ethiopian-born persons lived in Israel (Central Bureau of Statistics 2020b).

**19** The “Law of Return” utilises a wide definition of the term for citizenship purposes. According to the law, a person that had, or was married to a person who had one Jewish grandparent

the Rabbinical Law (Jewish religious law), more than 340,000 Russian-speaking Israeli citizens are not considered Jewish from a religious perspective (see Haskin 2016, Tolts 2017). The results of this discrepancy are not insignificant, especially since the Chief Rabbinate of Israel has sole jurisdiction over many aspects of Jewish life, including personal status issues (marriages, divorce, burial, etc.) (see Tarkovsky 2012). As such, “the gap between the strict religious definition of ‘kosher Jewishness’ and a broader view of proper ‘Israeliness’ has remained a high-profile social issue for Russian *olim* (immigrants)” (Remennick/Prashizky 2012: 61).

National consensus regarding the constant threat to Israel’s survival and the compulsory army service for the majority of the Israeli population (Jewish men and women<sup>20</sup>) secured the role of the Israeli Defence Force (IDF) as a key to Israeli-Jewish identity (see Herzog 1998). As the defender of the Jewish nation-state and the country’s most universal social institution (see Perko 2003), the IDF was crucial in cultivating national consciousness and patriotism among Israelis during Israel’s first decades of statehood (see Hadar/Häkkinen 2022). While the depiction of the IDF as “a people’s army” has lost some of its strength<sup>21</sup>, the IDF remains an instrument of conveying a sense of national identity among Jewish Israelis<sup>22</sup>. Arab Israelis are exempt from mandatory service in the IDF, whereas Jewish immigrants are either exempt from service or serve a shorter time than native Israeli Jews (depending on their age). As such, it is no surprise that members of these minority groups exhibit lower levels of national identification in comparison with the Jewish native population. Moreover, the fact that these populations were not directly instrumental in favourable military outcomes supports the findings of this study.

Consistent with the academic literature, most of the control variables reached significant levels. Whereas both age and level of religiosity (observance of tradition) have a strong and positive effect on national pride, education has a negative effect, but is less significant. Interestingly, political affiliation was found to be highly significant in decreasing national pride. While social class and economic growth yielded insignificant results in this regard, inflation appears to profoundly and negatively affect national pride.

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qualifies for Israeli citizenship. As per Rabbinical law, Jewishness passes through the maternal line only, and only Orthodox conversion to Judaism is acknowledged.

**20** Religious women and ultra-orthodox men and women are exempted. Non-Jews (Muslims, Bedouins, Druze, etc.) may choose to volunteer for service, but are not legally obliged to serve.

**21** Due to the growing segments of the Jewish population that are being excused from duty.

**22** Even nowadays, serving in the IDF is regarded by many Israelis as a rite of passage to full citizenship where immigrants are concerned (see Hadar/Häkkinen 2022).

## 5.2 A vicious cycle of exclusionism and violence

The analysis of the impact of Israeli warfare on national identification among social groups revealed that the impact is highly influenced by the perceived outcome of the warfare (from the Israeli point of view) and by subgroup membership (minority vs majority). It was argued that the marginalisation of minority groups might account for the discrepancy in outcomes, as members of such groups may not view Israeli military success as their own. Yet we should also note that increased social exclusion was found to be a long-term effect of exposure to political violence.

Scholarship exploring the relationship between threat perceptions, political extremism and exclusionism points to the impact of these factors on social identity and, consequently, group identity (e.g., Canetti-Nisim et al. 2009; Canetti et al. 2008; Canetti et al. 2017; Shamir/Sagiv-Schifter 2006).

Threat perception<sup>23</sup> has been considered by many as the “single best predictor of hostile intergroup attitudes” (Canetti-Nisim et al., 2008: 90 citing Sullivan, 1985; Quilliam 1985; Stephan & Stephan 2000). While much research focuses on the relationship between the views of the Jewish communities towards Arab Israelis, Riek et al. (2006) and Stephan et al. (2009) highlighted that threats could also promote animosity towards out-groups not directly related to the threats.

Immigrants, for example, are often seen as both real threats to the political and economic power of the in-group and symbolic threats, as they may differ in values, beliefs and attitudes (see Stephan/Stephan 2000; Esses et al. 2001; Stephan et al. 2005). As such, studies also pointed to the relationship between threat perceptions and different types of anti-immigrant exclusionism (e.g., Sniderman et al. 2004; Stephan et al. 2005; Halperin et al. 2009). Consequently, according to social identity theory, recurring instances of warfare seem to solidify social fragmentation and the derogation of out-groups (see Tajfel/Turner 1986). At the same time, exclusionism and marginalisation of minority groups reinforce their self-perception as out-groups, which may account for why they exhibit decreased national identification (even following Israeli victories).

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<sup>23</sup> Alongside the impact of emotions triggered as a result of exposure to violence (e.g. fear, hatred and anger, Halperin 2008).

## 6 Conclusion

In this paper, I raise several important yet neglected questions: what is the impact of discrepant political violence outcomes on group identification? Is the impact influenced by group performance (success/failure from the Israeli point of view) and does it vary across social groups (minority vs majority) within Israeli society? These questions are critical when the longevity of national identification is concerned and when a country is faced with recurring episodes of political violence. Due to its diverse society, multiple episodes of political violence with various aftermaths, and available data, Israel has proven to be an excellent case for examining the aforementioned questions.

The experience of being subject to persistent political violence, framed as successfully or unsuccessfully completed by the local media, had an interesting effect on the Israeli public. The study demonstrates that different outcomes of political violence significantly affect group identification. Consistent with social identity theory and the self-esteem protection/enhancement strategies derived from it (BIRGing and CORFing), the general Israeli population experienced an increase in national pride following Israeli victories.

Upon disaggregating Israeli society, a clear difference emerged between the three largest communities in Israel: Arab Israelis, native Jewish Israelis and immigrants. Compared with native Jewish Israelis, members of minority groups (both ethnic Arab Israelis and social/cultural immigrants) did not exhibit increased national pride following Israeli military victories. Quite to the contrary: Israeli victories were associated with decreased national pride among members of both groups. This finding is consistent with academic literature exploring minority groups. One may attribute this to the well-documented marginalisation of these groups, which underpinned their view and self-perception as “out-groups” (whereas native Jewish Israelis are perceived as an “in-group”).

Israeli Arabs, the largest minority group in Israel, shares neither the country’s Jewish narrative nor its Zionist ethos. Immigrants, predominantly from the FSU, experience marginalisation along cultural and religious lines. The latter can be attributed to the discrepancy between the civic and religious definition of “Jewish”. Additionally, as both groups are not directly instrumental to favourable military outcomes, group members do not perceive Israeli military successes as “their own”. Decreased national pride among Arab Israelis following Israeli victories can also be attributed to the ethnic nature of the warfare, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and the fact that Arab Israelis often identify as Palestinians.

The erosion of national identification among marginalised minority groups is a worrying phenomenon not only for Israel, but for any highly heterogeneous

society experiencing recurring political violence, even if it has a successful outcome.

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