

THE PSYCHOLOGICAL DIMENSION OF RESILIENCE IN THE UKRAINE AND ISRAEL CONFLICTS

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Abstract: *The text explores the concept of resilience in the face of conflict, comparing Ukraine and Israel as case studies. Resilience is significantly influenced by psychological factors and the ability of societies to adapt to and recover from traumatic events. In Ukraine, national resilience was initially high due to a surge in national unity and international support but declined over time due to prolonged conflict, war fatigue and decreased trust in the government. Israel, on the other hand, has maintained a higher and more stable level of resilience due to its historical experience with conflict, strong governmental support, social cohesion and well-established mental health and social support systems.*

Key factors of resilience identified include trust in government, patriotism, social integration and trust in state institutions. Both countries demonstrate that government support, social cohesion and trust in institutions are crucial in fostering resilience during prolonged conflicts. Israel's continuous state of preparedness and effective mental health infrastructure contribute to its consistently higher individual resilience and morale compared to Ukraine.

Keywords: *resilience, mental health, social cohesion, morale, conflicts*

METHODOLOGY

This methodology is designed to rigorously examine the psychological resilience of populations in Ukraine and Israel amidst ongoing conflicts. It focuses on the impact of governmental support, social cohesion and trust in institutions on national and community resilience. The study aims to provide comprehensive insights into how these factors influence the ability of societies to adapt and recover from traumatic events. The research employs a mixed-methods approach, integrating both quantitative and qualitative data collection and analysis. This approach ensures a holistic understanding of the psychological dimensions of resilience in conflict zones. Existing data from sources like the World Health Organization (WHO), United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and local health ministries will be analysed to supplement survey findings. The resilience indicators and coping mechanisms will be compared between Ukraine and Israel to identify similarities and differences. This comparative analysis will help in understanding the unique and shared factors influencing resilience in these conflict zones.

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INTRODUCTION

Resilience in the face of conflict is a phenomenon deeply influenced by psychological factors and the ability of societies to adapt and recover from traumatic events. The conflicts in Ukraine and Israel provide insightful case studies into the dynamics of resilience under extreme stress and prolonged adversity.

According to Professor's Shaul Kimhi¹ from Tel Aviv University approach, of the three types of resilience, national resilience is the most affected and declines throughout the ongoing war, to a great extent. Factor analysis indicates that the most decreased component in the Ukrainian war was due to a decline in the trust in the government and in the Prime Minister. One of the signs that should cause concern is the decrease in the level of hope. Hope has been found in several earlier studies to be the best predictor of national resilience. At the same time, the level of morale increases. Resilience and coping indicators are largely influenced by the degree of support for the government, as well as broader political attitudes and worldviews. In his opinion, there are several factors of national resilience, such as: trust in the government and its leader, connection to the country (patriotism), social integration (solidarity) and trust in state institutions.

In what concerns the trust in government and leadership, we usually think of political stability and public confidence. High levels of trust in government and its leaders are correlated with a high national resilience. Trust enhances social stability and the population's willingness to follow governmental directives during crises. Moreover, when citizens believe in the competency and integrity of their leaders, they are more likely to remain calm and cooperative, reducing panic and fostering collective action.

Patriotism, seen as the connection to the country, comprises of national identity and morale. Therefore, a strong sense of patriotism and national identity can bolster resilience by creating a shared purpose and unity among citizens. This collective identity helps communities withstand and recover from adversities. In other words, patriotism can serve as a powerful motivator, encouraging individuals to participate in defence efforts, volunteer work and other supportive activities that enhance national resilience.

As for solidarity or social integration, this wouldn't be possible without community support networks and collective effort. Social integration and solidarity strengthen the fabric of society, making it easier for individuals to find support and resources during difficult times.

¹ From the presentation of Professor Shaul Kimhi (PhD), during the National Military Behavioural Sciences Conference (11th of July, 2024, Bucharest, National Military House).

Communities with high social cohesion tend to have lower levels of stress and better overall mental health. The belief that the community can effectively work together to achieve common goals reinforces resilience. Solidarity helps distribute the burden of crisis management across the population, reducing individual stress.

The trust in state institutions rely on effectiveness on the institutions' part and compliance and cooperation between the state institution and population. Trust in state institutions, such as healthcare, law enforcement and emergency services becomes defining for resilience. When these institutions are perceived as reliable and effective, individuals are more likely to seek and receive the help they need. Trust in institutions encourages compliance with public safety measures and cooperation with governmental initiatives, which are essential during periods of crises.

EMPIRICAL EVIDENCE FROM UKRAINE AND ISRAEL

During the Russian invasion, Ukrainian resilience was heavily influenced by governmental support and social cohesion. Studies highlighted that trust in the government and state institutions played a vital role in maintaining national morale and facilitating coping mechanisms². Governmental efforts, such as establishing mobile clinics and psychosocial centres, were crucial in providing mental health support and reinforcing community resilience³. These services have been significant in managing trauma and stress, helping individuals and communities to cope with the psychological impacts of war⁴. Social cohesion in Ukraine has been a keystone of resilience. The Partnership Fund for a Resilient Ukraine (PFRU) has been instrumental in uniting communities and laying the groundwork for social, economic, and political post-war recovery. Initiatives like the Donbas SOS hotline have provided critical legal and administrative support, helping thousands of Ukrainians navigate the complexities brought on by the war. Such efforts have fostered a sense of solidarity and mutual support, essential for resilience⁵. Programs focused on local socio-economic development and cultural identity have also played a significant role. As seen in the USAID's document ("Social Cohesion in Ukraine"), revitalization projects in liberated areas, such as Harkov, Sumy, Chernihov

² Idem.

³ Sinziana Iancu, *Psychological factors that influence resilience in societies impacted by war*, available at <https://resiliencejournal.e-arc.ro/wp-content/uploads/2023/12/EARJ-2-2023-S-Iancu.pdf>, 2023, accessed on 02.09.2024.

⁴ USAID, *Social Cohesion in Ukraine*, available at https://www.undp.org/sites/g/files/zskgke326/files/2024-03/PUB_Social-Cohesion-in-Ukraine_Feb.22.2024.pdf#:~:text=URL%3A%20https%3A%2F%2Fwww.undp.org%2Fsites%2Fg%2Ffiles%2Fzskgke326%2Ffiles%2F2024, accessed on 02.09.2024.

⁵ PFRU / Partnership Fund for a resilient Ukraine, Partnership fund for a resilient Ukraine, available at <https://pfru.org.ua/>, s.a, accessed on 03.09.2024.

and Odessa, have helped communities rebuild and recover. These projects include policy planning, transitional justice and direct support to veterans and their families, which have collectively strengthened the social fabric of Ukrainian society⁶.

The interplay between governmental support and social cohesion has been essential in sustaining Ukrainian resilience during the Russian invasion. Trust in government, supported by effective mental health services and strong community support, has enabled Ukrainians to maintain morale and cope with the ongoing conflict. These efforts underscore the importance of comprehensive support systems and cohesive social structures in building and maintaining resilience in times of crisis.

At the same time, Israel's continuous conflict with Hamas has shown that trust in government and strong patriotic feelings significantly contribute to the nation's resilience. Effective governance and reliable leadership foster public confidence and cooperation, essential during crises. The Israeli government's comprehensive mental health support systems, including the National Health Insurance Law, have been fundamental in maintaining public morale and social stability. Social integration and perceived social support have been identified as key factors in moderating symptoms of PTSD, anxiety and depression among Israeli citizens. The National Health Insurance Law of 1994 ensures that all Israeli residents receive psychiatric, psychological and social work care, contributing to a stable and supportive environment during conflicts⁷. The National Health Insurance Law and subsequent reforms have established a robust mental health support system in Israel. This includes multidisciplinary mental health care clinics, independent psychiatrists, hospital outpatient clinics and emergency services available 24/7, as seen on websites like GethelpIsrael⁸, Mental Healthcare Guide⁹ and others. These services provide comprehensive care, from immediate crisis intervention to long-term therapeutic support, which is crucial in mitigating the psychological impacts of conflict. Social integration and perceived social support are key factors in moderating symptoms of PTSD, anxiety and depression among Israeli citizens.

⁶ USAID, *Social Cohesion in Ukraine*, available at https://www.undp.org/sites/g/files/zskgke326/files/2024-03/PUB_Social-Cohesion-in_Ukraine_Feb.22.2024.pdf#:~:text=URL%3A%20https%3A%2F%2Fwww.undp.org%2Fsites%2Fg%2Ffiles%2Fzskgke326%2Ffiles%2F2024,2024, accessed on 03.09.2024.

⁷ Yoel Angel, Adi Niv-Yagoda, Ronni Gamzu, *Adapting the Israeli national health insurance law to the 21st century – a report from the 19th Dead Sea Conference*, available at <https://ijhpr.biomedcentral.com/articles/10.1186/s13584-020-00432-y>, 05 January 2021, accessed on 03.09.2024.

⁸ Psychiatric Services in Israel: An Overview, available at <https://gethelpisrael.com/psychiatric-services-in-israel-an-overview/>, accessed on 03.09.2024.

⁹ Mental Healthcare Guide, available at <https://www.yadlolim.org/healthcare/mental-healthcare-guide>, accessed on 03.09.2024.

Programs like “Clalit Health Services”, “Nefesh Amit” initiative train resilience coaches to provide immediate mental health support and integrate participants into the mental health system from the first day of training¹⁰. This approach ensures that individuals in distress receive timely and appropriate care, fostering a sense of community and mutual support.

The combination of trust in government, mental health support systems and strong social integration plays an important role in maintaining resilience among the Israeli population. These elements ensure that individuals receive the support they need to cope with the psychological impacts of ongoing conflicts, fostering a resilient and stable society.

MENTAL HEALTH AND RESILIENCE

The conflict in Ukraine has led to widespread mental health issues, including PTSD, anxiety and depression. According to the WHO, approximately 9.6 million Ukrainians are expected to suffer from mental health conditions due to the ongoing conflict. Efforts to improve mental health care, such as the establishment of psychosocial centres and mobile clinics near conflict zones, play a crucial role in enhancing resilience. These initiatives help individuals cope with trauma and maintain social stability¹¹.

Israel's ongoing conflict with Hamas, particularly during the Gaza Wars, highlights the psychological resilience of its population. Resilience in Israel is influenced by factors such as perceived social support, trust in government and national morale¹². Research indicates that at least 4.9% of Israeli adults, or about one in twenty, experience a serious mental illness within a given year¹³. Almost half of the Israeli population encounters mental health issues at some point in their lives, with approximately 28% suffering from anxiety disorders and around 20% from depression. According to data from the Israel Ministry of Health, approximately 250,000 people in Israel currently require psychiatric treatment, while many others are receiving psychological care. The unstable security environment has prompted Israel to allocate substantial resources to support civilians in overcoming the stress caused by both acts of terrorism and open conflicts. The National Health Insurance Law of 1994 entitles Israeli citizens to psychiatric, psychological and social work care, providing all residents with

¹⁰ Gal Itay, *Mental health in Israel: One in three may suffer post-trauma disorders*, available at <https://www.jpost.com/health-and-wellness/mind-and-spirit/article-782330>, 16 January 2024, accessed on 03.09.2024.

¹¹ Sinziana Iancu, *Psychological factors that influence resilience in societies impacted by war*, available at <https://resiliencejournal.e-arc.ro/wp-content/uploads/2023/12/EARJ-2-2023-S-Iancu.pdf>, 2023, accessed on 04.09.2024.

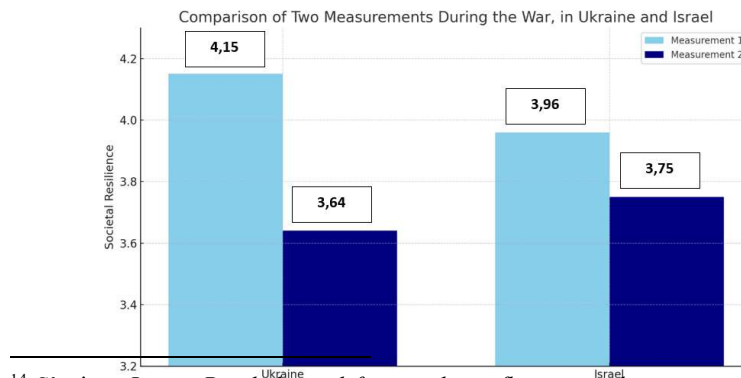
¹² Idem.

¹³ Idem.

mandatory health insurance¹⁴. In 2023, Legatum Institute Foundation ranked Israel sixth in its list of countries with the best healthcare systems in the world¹⁵.

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

Both Ukraine and Israel demonstrate how psychological resilience is deeply rooted in the interplay between individual, community and national factors. Key aspects such as government support, social integration and trust in institutions are critical in fostering resilience during prolonged conflicts. Effective governmental policies and support systems are essential in maintaining morale and providing necessary mental health services during times of crisis. In both countries, community support and social cohesion are vital in helping individuals and communities cope with the psychological impacts of conflict. During the Behavioural Sciences Conference, organized by the Military Psychology Society (ASPM) themed “The Psychological Dimension of Current Conflicts: Between Risk and Resilience”, Professor Shaul Kimhi has shown two measurements taken during the war in Ukraine and the war in Israel, regarding societal resilience. Keeping his parameters, we have shown through the chart below, his findings. According to his first measurement, taken at the beginning of the war, Ukraine has reached a higher resilience within societal reaction. However, according to the second measurement, taken during the war, Ukraine has decreased in societal resilience as compared to Israel. Therefore, below, I will show through specific diagrams, which I have created based on Professor Shaul Kimhi’s measurements, the comparison between different variables, such as societal resilience, individual resilience and morale of the population.



¹⁴ Sinziana Iancu, *Psychological factors that influence resilience in societies impacted by war*, available at <https://resiliencejournal.e-arc.ro/wp-content/uploads/2023/12/EARJ-2-2023-S-Iancu.pdf>, 2023, accessed on 04.09.2024.

¹⁵ Eyal Lichter, *Health care in Israel- statistics & facts*, available at <https://www.statista.com/topics/11308/health-care-in-israel/#editorsPicks>, 21 december 2023, accessed on 04.09.2024.

According to Mr. Shaul Kimhi's conclusions, at the onset of the war, Ukrainian society likely experienced a surge in national unity and solidarity. When a country is suddenly attacked or finds itself in a state of war, there is often an initial wave of resilience as people band together to face a common enemy. This unity can boost societal resilience, as citizens rally around shared goals, such as defending their homeland. Ukraine's situation might have been bolstered by the significant international support it received early in the conflict. The widespread condemnation of the aggression against Ukraine and the support from Western nations may have strengthened the morale and resilience of Ukrainian society. Moreover, Ukrainian society had been under the threat of conflict for several years before the full-scale invasion, especially after the annexation of Crimea in 2014. This extended period of heightened tension may have led to a certain level of psychological preparedness, which contributed to a higher resilience at the war's onset.

However, over time, the ongoing conflict likely caused significant war fatigue among the Ukrainian population. The prolonged exposure to violence, displacement, and economic hardship can erode the initial resilience that was observed. The toll of continuous stress, loss, and uncertainty may have led to a decrease in societal resilience as the conflict dragged on¹⁶. Unlike Israel, which has experienced numerous conflicts over the years and has developed coping mechanisms within its society, Ukraine may not have had the same level of institutional or societal resilience infrastructure in place. As the war continued, the initial unity might have been replaced by exhaustion, trauma, and disillusionment. The resources available to support societal resilience, such as healthcare, social services, and economic stability, may have been severely strained in Ukraine as the war continued. This strain could contribute to a decline in societal resilience, as the systems that support mental health and community solidarity become overwhelmed.

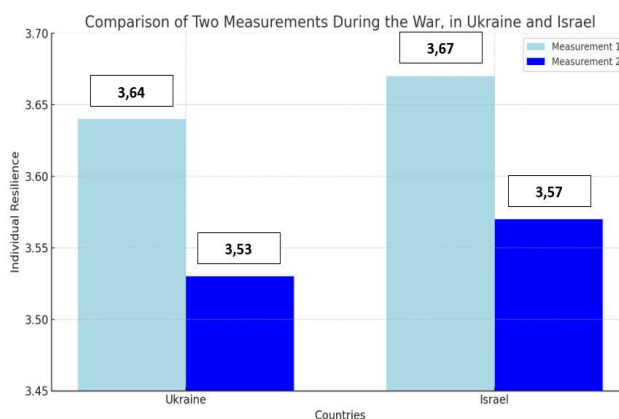
Israel, having faced multiple conflicts over decades, has a more established infrastructure to maintain societal resilience during times of war. This includes good mental health services, community support systems and a population that, while still deeply affected by conflict, has developed certain coping mechanisms over time. Israel's mandatory military service and the continuous state of alertness in the population might contribute to a more sustained level of resilience during prolonged conflicts. The population is more accustomed to living under threat, which might explain why Israel's societal resilience did not decrease as sharply as Ukraine's in

¹⁶ Siriwardhana et al., 2014.

the second measurement. Israel's relatively strong economy and technological advancement could also play a role in maintaining resilience. Even during conflict, the ability to keep critical infrastructure functioning and provide basic services can help sustain societal morale and resilience.

The initial higher societal resilience in Ukraine can be seen as a natural response to the early stages of war, where unity and a strong national identity play critical roles. However, as the conflict wore on, the sustained pressures likely led to a decrease in resilience, as seen in the second measurement. In contrast, Israel's societal resilience remained relatively stable, possibly due to its experience, preparedness and institutional support systems. The differences in these trajectories highlight the complex interplay between immediate psychological responses to conflict and the longer-term capacity to sustain resilience in the face of prolonged adversity.

Regarding the individual resilience, both of the measurements taken at the beginning and during the conflict show a higher individual resilience in Israel as compared to Ukraine.



The consistently higher individual resilience in Israel compared to Ukraine, as indicated by both measurements taken at the beginning and during the conflict, can be explained by several factors related to cultural, social and historical contexts, as well as differences in the nature of each country's experience with conflict.

Israel has a long history of dealing with conflict and threats to its national security. Since its founding, the country has faced multiple wars, ongoing security challenges and terrorist threats. This history has embedded a culture of resilience within Israeli society, where individuals are psychologically prepared to handle adversity. Many Israelis have experienced multiple rounds of conflict, which has fostered a collective and

individual resilience that is deeply entrenched. As aforementioned, Israel's mandatory military service plays a significant role in building individual resilience. Nearly all Israeli citizens are required to serve in the military, where they receive training that emphasizes mental toughness, problem-solving under pressure and a strong sense of duty. This experience often translates into greater personal resilience during times of conflict, as citizens are more accustomed to handling stressful and dangerous situations. Also, Israel has developed strong community support systems that reinforce individual resilience. These include well-established mental health services, community centres and support groups that help individuals cope with stress and trauma. The presence of these support structures ensures that people have access to the resources they need to maintain their resilience.

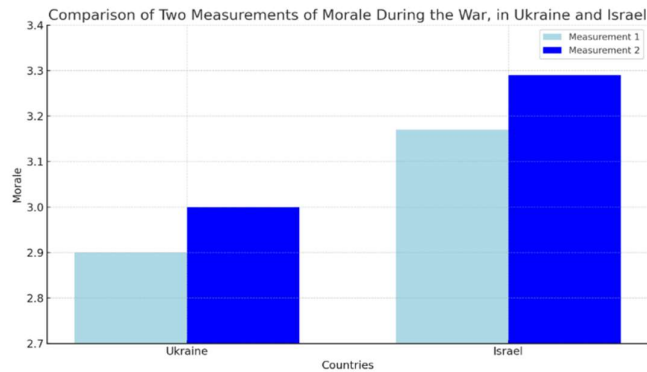
The sense of collective identity in Israel, where individuals often feel a strong connection to the broader national purpose, can enhance individual resilience. People are more likely to endure hardship when they perceive it as part of a larger, meaningful struggle. This collective identity can provide a psychological buffer against the stresses of conflict. Social capital, which includes the networks of relationships among people who live and work in a particular society, tends to be high in Israel. This means that individuals have strong support networks of family, friends, and neighbours who can provide emotional and practical support during difficult times. Such networks are crucial for maintaining individual resilience. Israelis are often described as having a resilient mindset, characterized by adaptability and a pragmatic approach to adversity. The ability to quickly adapt to changing circumstances and find practical solutions to problems is a key component of individual resilience.

On the other hand, Ukraine, while having experienced significant geopolitical tensions and conflict, particularly since 2014, does not have the same historical context of constant threat that Israel does. The relatively recent and intense nature of the conflict in Ukraine, especially with the full-scale invasion, may have caught many individuals and communities off-guard, making it harder for them to quickly develop the same level of resilience seen in Israel. Ukraine has faced significant socioeconomic challenges, including economic instability and political upheaval, even before the current conflict. These challenges can erode individual resilience by increasing stress levels and limiting access to resources that support mental health and well-being. The ongoing conflict in Ukraine has caused massive displacement and disruption of social structures. When communities are torn apart and people are forced to flee their homes, the social networks that typically support individual resilience are weakened, making it harder for individuals to maintain their resilience in the face of prolonged adversity.

While Ukraine has received significant international support, the perception of being under siege and the existential nature of the conflict might weigh heavily on the individual psyche. In contrast, Israel's long-standing relationships and consistent support from key allies might provide a sense of stability and security, even during times of conflict, contributing to higher individual resilience. In Israel, there is an expectation that conflict could erupt at any time, which has led to a society that is more psychologically prepared for such eventualities. This expectation likely contributes to a more resilient mindset among individuals, who have learned to cope with and manage the stresses of conflict as a part of life.

The higher individual resilience observed in Israel, both at the beginning and during the conflict, can be attributed to the country's long history of dealing with conflict, the societal structures in place to support resilience, and a cultural mindset that emphasizes adaptability and strength in the face of adversity. In contrast, Ukraine's relatively recent and more disruptive experience with large-scale conflict, coupled with socioeconomic and structural challenges, may have contributed to lower levels of individual resilience during the same period.

Concerning the morale, in both measurements, again, Israel has the highest values.



Israel has been in a state of near-constant conflict since its founding in 1948. The frequent wars, military operations, and ongoing security threats have fostered a collective mindset in which the population is accustomed to dealing with adversity. This prolonged exposure has cultivated a national psyche that is resilient and often united in the face of external threats, which directly contributes to higher morale. The existential nature of Israel's conflicts, where the survival of the nation is perceived as being at stake, tends to rally the population around a common cause. This strong sense of

purpose and identity can boost morale, as individuals see their struggles as part of a larger, meaningful effort to protect their homeland and way of life.

Israel benefits from a high level of social cohesion, where community ties and national solidarity are strong. During times of conflict, this cohesion can enhance morale, as people feel supported by their communities and united in their goals. The sense of belonging and mutual support can help individuals maintain a positive outlook even in difficult circumstances. As already mentioned, Israel's mandatory military service for most of its citizens means that a large portion of the population has undergone training that emphasizes not just physical preparedness, but also psychological resilience and the importance of morale. This military experience fosters a collective understanding of the importance of maintaining morale during crises. Again, the Israeli mindset is often described as one that values resilience, adaptability and a pragmatic approach to challenges. This cultural emphasis on overcoming adversity can naturally result in higher morale, as individuals are conditioned to remain positive and solutions-focused even in the face of conflict.

The Israeli government and military have developed effective communication strategies to keep the public informed and motivated during conflicts. Clear communication about the situation, the actions being taken, and the successes achieved can play a significant role in maintaining public morale. When people feel informed and see progress, they are more likely to maintain high morale. Israel's culture places a strong emphasis on resilience, both individually and collectively. This cultural trait is reinforced by education, media and communal activities that celebrate the ability to overcome adversity. This focus on resilience naturally leads to higher morale, as people are encouraged to stay strong and optimistic. Israel has invested in mental health and social support services that are specifically designed to help the population cope with the stress of living in a conflict zone. These services can help mitigate the negative psychological impacts of war and contribute to sustaining morale by ensuring that individuals have access to the support they need.

Ukraine's conflict, on the other hand, especially with the full-scale invasion, has been relatively recent and extremely disruptive. The rapid escalation of violence, massive displacement, and the scale of destruction might have taken a significant toll on morale, particularly as the population might not have been as psychologically prepared or as accustomed to prolonged conflict as Israel's population. Furthermore, Ukraine's ongoing economic challenges, political instability, and social disruption may further impact morale. In a country where people were already facing difficulties, the additional burden of war can exacerbate feelings of uncertainty and stress, leading to lower morale. As the conflict in Ukraine continues, the initial surge of morale driven by patriotism and unity may wane due to war

fatigue. The ongoing hardships, loss of life and destruction can lead to a decrease in morale as the population grapples with the prolonged nature of the conflict.

The consistently higher morale in Israel compared to Ukraine can be largely attributed to Israel's historical experience with conflict, strong social cohesion, cultural emphasis on resilience, and effective institutional support. These factors combine to create a society that is well-prepared, both mentally and socially, to maintain high morale even in the face of prolonged adversity. In contrast, Ukraine's more recent and disruptive experience with large-scale conflict, combined with socioeconomic challenges and the toll of ongoing war, may have contributed to lower morale levels.

FINAL CONCLUSIONS

Understanding the psychological dimensions of resilience in conflict zones like Ukraine and Israel offers valuable insights into how societies can better prepare for and recover from traumatic events. Enhancing mental health support, fostering social cohesion and ensuring strong governmental support are significant strategies in building resilience and mitigating the long-term psychological impacts of conflict.

Israel's long history of conflict and well-developed support systems contribute to its higher levels of both societal and individual resilience, as well as morale, compared to Ukraine.

Ukraine's initial high resilience, driven by unity and external support, decreased as the conflict dragged on, highlighting the toll of prolonged adversity and the importance of sustained governmental and social support.

Both case studies emphasize the critical role of trust in government, social cohesion and effective mental health services in maintaining resilience during crises. Israel's preparedness and institutional robustness are key to its ability to maintain high morale and resilience over time.



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