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The Homeland Kaleidoscope: Perceptions of Threats and Coping Among Israeli Civilians in a Diversity of Conflict Zones

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Abstract: This paper explores perceptions of threat and the subjective ability to cope with belligerency in conflict zones using the diversity of Israel's security arenas. Three research populations were defined, all adult residents in Jewish or mixed localities with a high probability of involvement in a security conflict or in which confrontations occurred between 2002 and 2014: residents of the northern border area (n = 385), residents of the Gaza area (n = 262), and residents of Judea and Samaria (n = 496). Stratified sampling was conducted in each population to generate representative samples. The fourth research population served as the control group for this study: a representative random sample of all Israeli residents aged 18 and over living in Jewish localities (n = 493). The main insight that arises from this study is that residents' attitudes and understanding of the security situation, their perceptions of threat, and their ability to cope with threat are not exclusively shaped by concrete security incidents. Instead, their attitudes and perceptions are the product of multiple formative factors acting concurrently. In each region and population group, it is possible to identify a "cumulative context" that crystallizes from four key factors that shape residents' perceptions: (a) the socio-economic background of the population and the community, (b) factors related to community organization, (c) geographic proximity to the source of threat, and (d) experience and memories of past events.

Keywords: border zone; terror; coping; resiliency; Israel

1 Introduction

In the past two decades, the literature on community resilience and coping with emergency situations has proliferated. This body of literature addresses, among

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other issues, the various social capital resources required to cope with challenges that emerge during an emergency (e.g. Christopherson, Michie, and Tyler 2010; Kimhi et al. 2022). This article seeks to expand the perspective on this issue by exploring the formative context that shapes the perceptions and attitudes of residents concerning coping with security threats. Through an examination of the case of Israel, it explores how the characteristics of the population, community, geographic region, and history of security incidents affect residents' perceptions of threat and coping ability.

Since its independence in 1948, Israel has faced security threats of various types. The intensity of the security confrontations and their geographic location have varied over time. Although the majority of Israel's residents are subject to security threats, specifically to the threat of terror attacks that may be committed at any location nationwide, specific geographic areas have been subject to more intense and/or more frequent friction, threats, and security incidents. This article examines three such conflict-affected areas in Israel – the Gaza Envelope area, Judea and Samaria, and the northern border area – and shows how security perceptions are shaped in those areas, specifically, residents' perceptions about the security threats to which they are subject, and their perceived ability to cope with these threats.

1.1 Security Events in Israel: From Armies at War to Low-Intensity Conflicts

In the early years of its independence, Israel faced several conventional wars in which the armies of Arab countries battled against the Israel Defense Forces (IDF). Friction mainly involved national armies and took place on the frontlines. Throughout its history, however, Israel also faced limited hostilities, guerilla wars, and terror attacks (Arian 1999; Eran-Jona 2017). Since the 1980s, and more intensely since the year 2000, it is possible to identify a change in the features of Israel's confrontations (and in the confrontations involving other Western countries) and a growing frequency of low-intensity conflicts (LICs).

The term "low-intensity conflict" describes a political-military confrontation with the following features. First, a LIC refers to confrontations that are of lower intensity compared to a total war but higher in intensity than ordinary inter-state tension and competition. LICs typically combine political, economic, military, and psychological means (the latter, through the use of the media), and typically involve a limited use of military power (US Army 1990).

Of the unique features of LICs, we focus here on three. First, the direct impact on geographic areas is limited, although in Israel, LICs indirectly affect the entire country (Michael, Kellen, and Ben Ari 2009). Second, an approach that emerged in

recent years identifies the cyclic dynamics of LICs, that is, cycles in which escalation of hostilities is followed by a period of calm, together with the belief that hostilities will recur from time to time (Moshe and Frankel 2016). Third, citizens play a role in the conflict. In conventional wars, there is a relatively clear-cut distinction between the warring forces and the civilian population. In numerous contemporary wars, however, battles are "war among the people," and the main goal of combat is to affect the public's consciousness, desires, and beliefs, not merely to achieve military goals (Smith 2006).

1.2 Resilience and Coping Resources

In recent years, there has been abundant writing on "community resilience," the ability to cope with emergency events, and the factors that affect such resilience and capabilities, both in Israel and worldwide. The term "resilience," which evolved in the exact sciences and served as an organizing concept for classifying material features, originally addressed the ability of materials to cope with stress and maintain their original features. Later, the term was borrowed by various disciplines, including ecology and the social sciences (Bruneau et al. 2003; Holling 1996; Norris et al. 2008). It is perhaps this fact, alongside the semantic mismatch of this concept in the Hebrew language, that is why it is so difficult to find an agreed definition of resilience, including in Israel and in Hebrew (Dolev 2018; Kimhi et al. 2022). Nonetheless, most definitions of resilience arguably share a common foundation based on the understanding that resilience reflects a manifestation of an ability to cope with a force or threat and the ability to recover from a crisis after a threat is realized. The literature subsequently expanded to address the factors that build and affect resilience and coping abilities.

The socio-economic characteristics of a population, for example, are highly significant for the ability to cope with and recover from various emergency events. When an event requires a response and coping with the harm caused by an emergency situation, populations poor in economic capital are more vulnerable due to their limited resources (Cutter, Burton, and Emrich 2010). Studies have found that, beyond the lack of economic resources required for reorganization, resource-poor populations also suffer from negative psychological effects (Norris et al. 2008).

Economic capital, readiness, and the ability to cope with emergencies are significant, not only at the individual and family levels but also at the community level. Communities with limited economic resources are at higher risk of damage, especially due to their more limited effective investments in efforts to reduce risks and respond to the repercussions of an emergency event. Such communities will also

encounter greater challenges in garnering support and resources after the event (de Girolamo and McFarlane 1996; Kaniasty and Norris 1995; Norris et al. 2008).

Norris and colleagues (Norris and Stevens 2007; Norris et al. 2008) extend this perspective to identify additional factors that are related to communities' coping abilities in an emergency, including place of residence, sense of community, social support, the existence and use of organizational ties, and actions to enhance trust, reinforce sources of knowledge, and promote decision-makers' capabilities. Together, these factors are expected to form community capabilities of security, hope, mutual ties, adaptability, economic prosperity, social capital, and effective communication.

Many studies point to an association between community resilience and social trust. Social trust leads to the assumption that other people can be relied upon to lend assistance when needed and promotes collaboration between community members (Cacioppo, Reis, and Zautra 2011; Poortinga 2011). Social capital may contribute significantly to coping during a crisis or a threat and constitutes a significant factor in developing social cohesion and trust among community members, which is cultivated through joint action and discussion (Billing et al. 2006; Cohen et al. 2013; Mehmet and Mehmet 2004). In addition to the receipt of actual assistance, social support is considered to affect individuals in extreme situations (Drogendijk et al. 2011). Research has found that trust in institutions (the most prominent of these being the state and, in Israel, the military), not only in individuals and the community, is significant for coping with security threats (Herman, Anavi, and Heller 2018; Herman and Heller 2016; Ladd 2007; Mueller 1970, 1994; Tiargan and Eran-Jona 2016).

The ability to cope with threats varies across groups. According to Hobfoll (1998, 2001), social support constitutes a significant resource for coping with a crisis when an individual's resources diminish or are threatened and the balance between the individual's needs and their resource pool is disrupted. The threatened resource pool comprises various types of resources, including physical entities, personal characteristics, and conditions. Therefore, groups that lack such resources are, from the outset, more vulnerable when facing a need to cope with emergency situations.

Past coping experience is another factor found to be associated with resilience and an ability to cope with a crisis. On the one hand, past experience may have a positive effect on coping by reducing the sense of one's surprise (Chandra et al. 2010), but on the other hand, intense exposure to stressful situations may diminish community resilience in comparison to communities that experienced less intense episodes of stress (Kimhi and Shamai 2004).

In view of the above, this article describes, from an Israeli perspective, the attitudes of groups in conflict-affected areas, their characteristics, and how these

characteristics affect attitudes toward threats and coping. The research question was defined as follows: What are the factors that shape differences in the perceived threats and perceived coping abilities of residents of conflict-affected zones in the context of protracted belligerency? We hypothesized that the combination of the features of the population, the community (size and type of locality), and past security incidents jointly shape the perceptions of threat and perceived coping abilities of the population in a given location. Specifically, we hypothesized that:

a. Residents in conflict zones will have a higher perception of threat and lower perception of coping as compared to the national perception of threat.
b. Residents of rural localities will have a higher perception of coping as compared to cities.
c. Residents in low socio-economic status localities will have a lower perception of coping as compared to high socio-economic status localities

2 Methods

The study was conducted by the IDF as a joint project with the Department of Behavioral Sciences of the IDF and the Homeland Command of the IDF.

2.1 Population

Four research populations were defined. The first population comprised adult residents (over the age of 18) of Jewish or mixed localities in Israel (including Jewish and non-Jewish residents). Three additional populations comprised residents living in specific areas involved in a security confrontation between 2002 and 2014 or that have a high risk of being involved in a conflict in the future. These groups are described below.

2.1.1 Residents of the Northern Border Area

This group comprised residents aged 18 and over of Jewish or mixed localities in proximity to the Israel–Lebanon border (up to 10 km from the border fence) or in the Golan Heights.

The security context: The Syrian border has been relatively quiet for several decades (since the October War of 1973). Shortly before the data collection stage of this study, and for the first time in many years, this relative calm was disrupted

from time to time by the civil war in Syria. In contrast, the residents living close to the Lebanese border experienced a series of security events in those decades, ranging from rockets and terrorist infiltrations in the 1970s, through the First Lebanon War in 1982 and the many years in which the IDF occupied a security strip in south Lebanon, to the most recent significant event of the Second Lebanon War in 2006, which is considered the most intense armed conflict involving Israel in recent decades. Since 2006, this area has been relatively peaceful, with the exception of several local, isolated events on the border, which primarily targeted Israeli military forces.

The spatial-community context: most of the population in the northern border area live in small rural communities, which belong to regional councils that serve as the local government. They have local autonomy and self-management in various fields and activities. In addition, the northern border area has four small- to moderately sized towns – Maalot Tarshiha, Nahariya, Kiryat Shmoneh, and Shlomi – with moderate socio-economic status (socio-economic clusters 5 and 6 (of 10), based on the 2013 socio-economic classification index of the Central Bureau of Statistics; see Israel Central Bureau of Statistics 2013).

2.1.2 Residents of the Gaza Envelope Area

This group comprises residents over the age of 18 of Jewish settlements who live in proximity to the border between Israel and the Gaza Strip (up to 10 km from the border). This population is divided into two sub-groups: residents of the city of Sderot and residents of the rural localities.

The security context: Since 2000, when the Second Intifada erupted, Gaza Envelope residents have faced multiple threats, including rocket and direct anti-tank missile fire and infiltration through underground tunnels. Moreover, in the decade preceding this study, four military operations were conducted in the Gaza Strip: Summer Rains (2006), Cast Lead (2008), Pillar of Defense (2012), and Protective Edge (2014). These operations did not aim to capture the whole Gaza Strip but instead had limited objectives: deterrence, restoration of quiet to the area, strikes against terror infrastructure, prevention of rocket fire against Israel's civilian population, and deferral of the next confrontation. The survey whose findings were used in this study was conducted approximately 18 months after Operation Protective Edge, the largest and most intense of these military operations. During the IDF's fighting, the residents of this area were subject to significant rocket fire, and many chose to leave their homes temporarily and relocate to safer areas (Eran-Jona 2017). In this period, Gaza Envelope residents also experienced a significant improvement in Israel's defense capabilities in the form of the

Iron Dome, a missile defense system that has been in operation since the late 2000s.

The spatial-community context: Several rural villages, with typically extensive community life, are located in proximity to the border with the Gaza Strip. In addition, the city of Sderot is located close to the border. The city's socio-economic status is significantly lower than the remaining settlements in the area: Sderot is ranked in socio-economic cluster 4, while the remaining settlements are ranked in clusters 5–7 (Israel Central Bureau of Statistics 2013).[1]

2.1.3 Residents of Judea and Samaria

This group comprises the population aged 18 and over of rural settlements and several cities in the Judea and Samaria area. The settlements selected for the current study were divided into four groups: three groups of religious or ideologically motivated settlers (residents of Haredi settlements, residents of settlements with a religious majority, residents of settlements with a secular majority) and one group defined on the basis of geographic location (residents of the Jordan River Valley). The latter group was selected due to its unique characteristics of being located on the border with Jordan and its settlements being relatively remote from Palestinian settlements.

The security context: the Israeli settlements in Judea and Samaria began to be established in the late 1960s after the 1967 Six-Day War. The large number of small settlements and roads that are located adjacent to Palestinian settlements continue to cause intense friction between Palestinian locals and the residents of these settlements, which manifests in diverse violent incidents. Many rural settlements have their own defense squads, which are formed by their residents and operate alongside the military units that are stationed to protect them. Nevertheless, the security situation varies across Judea and Samaria. While settlements located in the depths of this region, in proximity to Palestinian settlements, face ongoing threats, the settlements near the international border experience much more moderate friction. During the data collection stage of the current study, the security situation in this area deteriorated as the number of attacks committed by terrorists, many from Judea and Samaria, increased.

The spatial-community context: the profile of the population of Judea and Samaria shows a high degree of variance across the region, ranging from ideologically motivated settlers, who belong mainly to religious Zionist groups, to settlements populated exclusively by Haredi individuals, whose involvement in the social life in

1 Sderot Regional Council – socio-economic cluster 5; Eshkol Regional Council – socio-economic cluster 6; Shaar Hanegev and Hog Ashkelon Regional Councils – socio-economic cluster 7.

Israel is limited. These settlements contain a preponderance of children and a high percentage of individuals living in poverty. The final group of settlements is populated by secular Jews who live in rural communities. In terms of geographic dispersion, settlements can be divided into two types: remote, isolated settlements, far from other Israeli settlements (these are typically small settlements), and settlements that belong to the "settlement blocs," which are located along the "Green Line" (the 1949 ceasefire line).

2.2 Data Collection

Data was collected from the relevant study groups in a telephone survey conducted by the Shiluv survey institution in November 2015.

2.3 Sample and Sampling Method

Stratified sampling was performed for each region, and statistical random sampling was used inside every region. The data was examined for accuracy of representation of every region according to gender, age, and religious beliefs. Table 1 presents a summary of the participants by target population.

Table 1: Study population and samples.

Population	Sub-group	Total interviewees	Maximum sampling error (% in each direction)
Northern border area	Total	385	5.1 %
	Small settlements – Lebanese border	130	8.8 %
	Cities – Lebanese border	127	8.9 %
	Golan Heights – Syrian border	128	8.8 %
Gaza Envelope	Total	262	6.2 %
	Small settlements	178	7.5 %
	City (Sderot)	84	10.1 %
Judea and Samaria	Total	496	4.5 %
	Haredi settlements	162	7.8 %
	Religious settlements	117	9.2 %
	Secular settlements	117	9.2 %
	Jordan Valley settlements	100	10 %
National total	Total	493	4.5 %
Total		1636	

2.4 Instruments

We used quantitative questionnaires that included 13 closed-ended questions on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (very low) to 5 (very high). The items focused on the following topics: the security threat to Israel and to participants' region of residence; participants' perception of the current security situation (on a continuum from state of emergency to routine); participants' perceptions of their coping ability; and participants' trust in the IDF and institutions that are expected to operate during an emergency. Where relevant, data was compared with the findings of three surveys conducted by the IDF Department of Behavioral Sciences between 2006 and 2019 involving some or all of these population groups.

3 Findings

First, we present the general findings for all conflict-affected areas and the sample of Jewish residents of Israel. These will be followed by detailed findings for the subgroups in each region to gain a deeper understanding of the general picture.

3.1 General Comparison of Study Groups

Table 2 presents security and threat perceptions by study group.

The findings show that the groups vary significantly in their understanding of the security situation, with great differences in most of the items (F [3,1696] ranged between 2.76 and 20.11, $p < 0.01$). The results do not fully support our first hypothesis that residents in conflict zones will have a higher perception of threat and a lower perception of coping compared to the national perception of threat. For example, residents of the Gaza Envelope area (Mean = 2.46, SD = 1.28) and Judea and Samaria (Mean = 2.53, SD = 1.38) reported that the current security situation was affecting their everyday lives. However, this contention does not necessarily reflect a sense of distress. Gaza Envelope residents did not report a sense of fear for the future (Mean = 2.90, SD = 1.54), which is lower compared to the nation in general (Mean = 3.28, SD = 1.58).

Another interesting finding is that the main threat that concerns all of the groups is "Palestinian infiltration," but "military operations in Gaza" are perceived equally across all groups, including by residents near the Gaza borders. Residents of the northern border region apparently feel the safest among residents of all conflict-affected areas. This group reported the lowest indicators of concern and the highest measure of feeling safe. The assessments of Judea and Samaria residents are similar

Table 2: Perceived security situation and threat – conflict-affected areas and Jewish population sample.

		Nationwide *n* = 493		Northern border *n* = 385		Gaza Envelope *n* = 262		Judea and Samaria *n* = 496		F (3,1696)
		M	SD	*M*	SD	*M*	SD	*M*	SD	
To what degree does the current security situation affect your everyday life?		2.34ab	1.22	2.25a	1.31	2.46b	1.28	2.53b	1.38	3.21*
There is a sense of a national state of emergency		2.79b	1.43	2.56a	1.42	2.87b	1.46	2.86b	1.48	4.29**
In your opinion, what is the chance that each of the following events will occur in the near future:	Infiltration of terrorists into Israeli territory	3.71b	1.07	3.54a	1.16	3.81b	1.05	3.77b	1.04	5.10**
	A military operation in Gaza	3.24a	1.10	3.13a	1.11	3.17a	1.32	3.34a	1.08	1.42
	A military confrontation with Iran	2.08a	1.02	2.10ab	0.98	2.26b	1.10	2.15ab	1.08	2.76*
	A war on the northern border	2.71a	1.07	2.73a	1.28	2.77a	1.09	2.85a	1.02	0.94
I feel safe in my place of residence		3.95b	1.23	4.13c	1.20	4.02bc	1.22	3.43a	1.50	20.11**
I am fearful about what will happen in the future		3.28b	1.58	3.05a	1.54	2.90a	1.54	3.34b	1.52	6.56**

*$p < 0.05$; **$p < 0.01$. The letters 'a', 'ab', 'b' imply significant differences in Duncan's multiple range test (MRT).

to those of the Gaza Envelope residents, except for one issue: this group is more concerned about the future than all other groups.

Table 3 presents residents' perceptions of their ability to cope with the security situation. The findings show that the groups vary significantly in their understanding of their coping ability (F [3,1696] ranged between 7.03 and 20.73, $p < 0.01$). First, compared to the residents of the conflict-affected areas, the general population group is much less confident in its own ability and the ability of the community and the local municipality to cope with an emergency situation. Trust in the IDF, while high, is relatively low among the general population group compared to the remaining groups (especially Judea and Samaria). It is also interesting to see that Gaza Envelope and Judea and Samaria residents, who are ostensibly subject to the most serious security threat, have a great sense of confidence in their own coping ability compared to the remaining groups. Moreover, although perceptions of threat and

Table 3: Coping ability – conflict-affected areas and national sample.

	Nation-wide *n* = 493		Northern border *n* = 385		Gaza Enve-lope *n* = 262		Judea and Samaria *n* = 496		F (3,1696)
	M	SD	*M*	SD	*M*	SD	*M*	SD	
To what degree can you and the members of your household cope with an emergency situation in the area of your residence?	3.54a	1.08	3.73b	1.01	3.66ab	1.00	3.88c	0.92	7.03**
I can rely on people in my area of residence to come to my help during an emergency situation.	3.67a	1.22	4.01b	1.02	4.16bc	1.09	4.20c	1.08	20.73**
To what degree do you rely on the ability of your community's defense system to deal with a security-related state of emergency in the area of your residence?	3.25a	1.14	3.57b	1.10	3.54b	1.22	3.62b	1.05	6.64**
To what degree do you rely on the ability of your local government's ability to deal with a security-related state of emergency in the area of your residence?	3.13a	1.15	3.33b	1.15	3.33b	1.19	3.54c	1.08	12.31**
To what degree do you rely on the IDF's ability to deal with a security-related state of emergency in the area of your residence?	4.18a	0.94	4.39b	0.72	4.18a	1.00	4.32b	0.74	6.39**

*$p < 0.05$; **$p < 0.01$. The letters 'a', 'ab', 'b' imply significant differences in Duncan's multiple range test (MRT).

coping ability fluctuate over the years, the inter-groups that emerge in our findings are consistent with data collected at other points in time among these populations.

3.2 Residents of the Northern Border

In the previous section, we saw that, in general, residents of the northern border area feel slightly less threatened compared to the remaining groups. Tables 4 and 5 present a more detailed look at the main survey findings pertaining to these residents' perceptions of the security situation and security threats and their coping ability.

Table 4 indicates differences in the perceived security situation across the sub-groups that comprise the northern border population. The sub-groups similarly consider the current security situation as a state of emergency yet differ in their perceptions regarding all other issues. Residents of the Golan Heights settlements apparently feel safest and are optimistic about the future. We can say that this population feels less threatened compared to all the other groups in the current study. In contrast, residents of the cities on the Lebanon border settlements feel less secure than the remaining sub-groups.

Differences across the sub-groups also emerge in respondents' perceived coping ability in three of the five indicators (F [2,375] ranged between 7.71 and 20.91, $p < 0.01$). Residents of the cities on the Lebanon border report a much lower coping ability compared to the remaining northern border sub-groups. Their confidence in the assistance of people in their community is especially low (F [2,375] = 20.91, $p < 0.01$] as compared to the remaining northern border sub-groups), as is their trust in the community defense system (F [3,375] = 7.71, $p < 0.01$] and in the local government's ability to cope with an emergency situation (F [2,375] = 9.86, $p < 0.01$]). The residents of the rural settlements, both in the Golan Heights and on the Lebanon border, expressed much greater confidence in their ability to cope with security threats and in the coping ability of the relevant community and governmental agencies than residents of northern border cities. No significant differences in these perceptions were found between rural settlements in the Golan Heights and rural settlements on the Lebanon border. The results support our second hypothesis that residents of rural localities will have a higher perception of coping compared to city residents.

3.3 Gaza Envelope Residents

The next comparisons reveal support for the third hypothesis, according to which residents of low socio-economic status localities will have a lower perception of

Table 4: Perceived security situation and threat – Northern border residents.

		Lebanon border settlements *n* = 130		Lebanon border cities *n* = 127		Golan Heights settlements *n* = 128		F (2,375)
		M	SD	*M*	SD	*M*	SD	
To what degree does the current security situation affect your everyday life?		2.25a	1.26	2.49a	1.40	2.11a	1.22	2.14
There is a sense of a national state of emergency		2.53a	1.42	2.66a	1.44	2.53a	1.41	0.38
In your opinion, what is the chance that each of the following events will occur in the near future:	Infiltration of terrorists into Israeli territory	3.59ab	1.03	3.34a	1.31	3.76b	1.10	2.93*
	A military operation in Gaza	2.99a	1.00	3.24a	1.14	3.19a	1.11	1.69
	A military confrontation with Iran	2.16a	0.99	2.20a	1.04	2.03a	0.84	0.50
	A war on the northern border	2.71a	1.04	2.82a	1.16	2.72a	1.15	0.37
I feel safe in my place of residence		4.11ab	1.09	3.88a	1.23	4.43b	1.05	2.93*
I am fearful about what will happen in the future		3.37a	1.46	3.14ab	1.55	2.82b	1.52	3.63*

*$p < 0.05$; **$p < 0.01$. The letters ‘a’, ‘ab’, ‘b’ imply significant differences in Duncan’s multiple range test (MRT).

Table 5: Coping ability – northern border residents.

	Lebanon border settlements *n* = 130		Lebanon border cities *n* = 127		Golan Heights settlements *n* = 128		F (2,375)
	M	SD	*M*	SD	*M*	SD	
To what degree can you and the members of your household cope with an emergency situation in the area of your residence?	3.88a	0.98	3.62a	1.07	3.69a	0.99	1.10
I can rely on people in my area of residence to come to my help during an emergency situation.	4.12b	0.99	3.44a	1.21	4.39b	0.88	20.91**
To what degree do you rely on the ability of your community's defense system to deal with a security-related state of emergency in the area of your residence?	3.63b	1.04	3.21a	1.10	3.84b	1.06	7.71**
To what degree do you rely on the ability of your local government's ability to deal with a security-related state of emergency in the area of your residence?	3.66b	1.17	3.17a	1.10	3.77b	1.09	9.86**
To what degree do you rely on the IDF's ability to deal with a security-related state of emergency in the area of your residence?	4.41a	0.69	4.29a	0.69	4.49a	0.70	2.00

*$p < 0.05$; **$p < 0.01$. The letters 'a', 'ab', 'b' imply significant differences in Duncan's multiple range test (MRT).

coping compared to residents of high socio-economic status localities. Tables 6 and 7 present the main findings that emerged from the survey of Gaza Envelope residents' perceptions of the security situation and threat and their perceived coping ability, shown separately for residents of Sderot and residents of the area's rural settlements.

With regard to perceptions of the security situation, there are considerable differences between residents of Sderot and residents of the rural settlements (significant differences were found across all items; T [1,260] ranged between 4.06 and 23.11, $p < 0.01$). On all the dimensions we examined, Sderot residents feel much more threatened than residents of the rural settlements in the area. Taking a broader view, we can say that residents of Sderot feel the most serious sense of threat of all the groups in the current study.

Table 6: Perceived security situation and threat – Gaza Envelope residents.

		Sderot *n* = 84		Rural settlements *n* = 178		T (1,260)
		M	**SD**	***M***	**SD**	
To what degree does the current security situation affect your everyday life?		3.00	1.52	2.30	1.24	17.14**
There is a sense of a national state of emergency		3.09	1.57	2.76	1.43	9.51**
In your opinion, what is the chance that each of the following events will occur in the near future:	Infiltration of terrorists into Israeli territory	3.96	1.05	3.69	1.02	4.06*
	A military operation in Gaza	3.34	1.10	3.04	1.05	4.37*
	A military confrontation with Iran	2.42	1.19	2.03	1.00	7.59**
	A war on the northern border	3.14	1.16	2.71	0.93	9.51**
I feel safe in my place of residence		2.82	1.58	3.71	1.37	23.11**
I am fearful about what will happen in the future		3.62	1.43	3.20	1.54	4.70*

*$p < 0.05$; **$p < 0.01$.

Table 7: Coping ability – Gaza envelope residents.

	Sderot *n* = 84		Rural settlements *n* = 178		T (1,260)
	M	**SD**	***M***	**SD**	
To what degree can you and the members of your household cope with an emergency situation in the area of your residence?	3.77	0.87	3.92	0.95	1.79
I can rely on people in my area of residence to come to my help during an emergency situation.	3.76	1.40	4.40	0.83	22.66**
To what degree do you rely on the ability of your community's defense system to deal with a security-related state of emergency in the area of your residence?	3.29	1.16	3.72	0.99	7.59
To what degree do you rely on the ability of your local government's ability to deal with a security-related state of emergency in the area of your residence?	3.05	1.11	3.77	0.98	29.60**
To what degree do you rely on the IDF's ability to deal with a security-related state of emergency in the area of your residence?	4.57	0.55	4.20	0.79	15.76**

*$p < 0.05$; **$p < 0.01$.

Consistent with their perceptions of threat, considerable differences were found on all dimensions between the perceived coping ability of Sderot residents and the residents of rural settlements. In general, we can say that Sderot residents have much less confidence in their ability to cope with security threats and much lower trust in various community and government agencies (excluding the IDF) compared to the residents of the surrounding rural settlements. In fact, Sderot residents expressed the weakest ability to cope with security threats of all the groups in the current study.

3.4 Residents of Judea and Samaria

Tables 8 and 9 present the main findings by sub-group regarding the perceptions of the security situation, threats, and coping ability of the residents of Judea and Samaria.

It appears that the differences between these groups are not as large as other comparisons. Only three indicators were found to be significantly different across sub-groups (F [3,483] ranged between 2.89 and 5.14, $p < 0.05$). Residents of the Jordan Valley feel safer and are less concerned, both in general and with respect to the probable realization of specific threats, than the remaining sub-groups in Judea and Samaria. In contrast, residents of the religious settlements in this area (whose population comprises a high percentage of ideologically motivated settlers) feel relatively less safe in their place of residence and are concerned by a relatively high threat of hostilities and infiltration of terrorists. Residents of the Haredi and secular settlements do not significantly differ in their assessments and perceptions compared to the mean perceptions of all residents of Judea and Samaria.

Table 9 presents Judea and Samaria residents' perceptions regarding their ability to cope with the security situation by sub-group. There were differences between sub-groups in their sense of coping (F [3,483] ranged between 4.61 and 10.78, $p < 0.01$). The most prominent finding is that, ostensibly, residents of the Haredi settlements feel much less capable of coping with the security situation and feel that the community, local government, and the IDF also have limited capabilities to do so.

A deeper investigation of the findings reveals that, in most cases, respondents in this group answered "I don't know how to assess this" with respect to both their own coping ability and the abilities of other organizations and agencies. This response may be explained by Haredi settlement residents' faith in a supreme power that will help them cope rather than by a sense of individual helplessness. It is also evident that residents of the Jordan Valley reported stronger coping abilities with the security situation, in several aspects of coping perceptions, compared to the remaining groups in the Judea and Samaria area.

Table 8: Perceived security situation and threat – Judea and Samaria.

		Haredi settlements *n* = 162		Religious settlements *n* = 117		Secular settlements *n* = 117		Jordan Valley settlements *N* = 100		F (3,483)
		M	SD	*M*	SD	*M*	SD	*M*	SD	
To what degree does the current security situation affect your everyday life?		2.60a	0.83	2.58a	1.24	2.37a	1.25	2.38a	1.46	1.12
There is a sense of a national state of emergency		2.88a	1.50	3.20b	1.30	2.62a	1.46	2.72a	1.50	5.14**
In your opinion, what is the chance that each of the following events will occur in the near future:	Infiltration of terrorists into Israeli territory	3.73Aab	1.07	3.91b	1.09	3.79ab	1.06	3.63a	1.06	1.33
	A military operation in Gaza	3.20ab	1.15	3.34b	1.08	3.06ab	1.11	2.95a	1.19	2.89*
	A military confrontation with Iran	2.52b	1.15	2.29ab	1.12	2.18ab	0.98	2.18a	1.07	1.90
	A war on the northern border	2.92a	1.08	2.68a	1.05	2.71a	1.08	2.76a	1.12	1.00
I feel safe in my place of residence		3.88ab	1.23	3.76a	1.29	4.15b	1.11	4.21b	1.14	3.88**
I am fearful about what will happen in the future		3.07a	1.54	2.99a	1.40	2.89a	1.62	2.63a	1.60	1.15

*$p < 0.05$; **$p < 0.01$. The letters 'a', 'ab', 'b' imply significant differences in Duncan's multiple range test (MRT).

Table 9: Coping ability – Judea and Samaria.

	Haredi settlements *n* = 162		Religious settlements *n* = 117		Secular settlements *n* = 117		Jordan Valley settlements *N* = 100		F (3,483)
	M	SD	*M*	SD	*M*	SD	*M*	SD	
To what degree can you and the members of your household cope with an emergency situation in the area of your residence?	3.31a	0.99	3.74b	0.94	3.74b	0.99	3.81b	1.03	4.61**
I can rely on people in my area of residence to come to my help during an emergency situation.	4.06	1.15	4.28	1.06	4.17	0.97	4.31	1.13	10.78**
To what degree do you rely on the ability of your community's defense system to deal with a security-related state of emergency in the area of your residence?	2.98a	1.21	3.85b	1.15	3.58b	1.12	3.86b	1.14	4.97**
To what degree do you rely on the ability of your local government's ability to deal with a security-related state of emergency in the area of your residence?	3.07a	1.22	3.61b	1.10	3.27ab	1.15	3.46b	1.30	10.17**
To what degree do you rely on the IDF's ability to deal with a security-related state of emergency in the area of your residence?	3.81a	1.22	4.16bc	0.99	4.49C	0.66	4.40bc	0.73	10.16**

*$p < 0.05$; **$p < 0.01$. The letters 'a', 'ab', 'b' imply significant differences in Duncan's multiple range test (MRT).

4 Summary and Conclusion

Much knowledge has been collected over the years, especially during hostilities, about the perceptions of residents who live in Israel's conflict-affected areas (Eran-Jona et al. 2022; Kimchi and Marciano 2018). However, the areas that are most sensitive to changes in the security situation, which in many cases are the areas adjacent to the border fence, have received somewhat less attention. The findings of the current study present a complex picture of the perceptions of threat and coping of various populations living in conflict-affected areas in comparison to Israel's general population and, in addition, between sub-groups within these areas.

These sub-groups are characterized by complex attitudes concerning perceived threat and perceptions of their coping ability. In general, our first hypothesis was not

supported as residents in proximity to danger indeed perceive that they are threatened. However, they are also capable of coping better compared to the general population. According to our hypotheses, rural and established communities have higher perceptions of their coping ability than residents of cities and low socio-economic status localities.

A notable finding is that the residents of the Gaza Envelope Area reported the lowest sense of security, and although this area appears to be subject to the highest security threats, residents feel capable of coping with them. These residents also expressed a high degree of trust in their community's ability to lend assistance during a security emergency. Considerable differences were found across the sub-groups of the Gaza Envelope area. For instance, residents of Sderot felt much more strongly threatened than residents of the surrounding rural settlements. Sderot residents also reported a lower ability to cope with security threats and a lower level of trust in the coping ability of their communities and local government (excluding the IDF) compared with the other sub-groups in this area. Residents of the northern border area feel the safest of all groups. Analyzing the sub-groups shows that the residents of Golan Heights expressed the highest perceived security of all groups in the current study. Like the residents of Sderot, residents of cities in the vicinity of the Lebanon border reported a more limited coping ability than residents of rural settlements in the northern border area.

Overall, the perceptions of the residents of Judea and Samaria are similar to those of the Gaza Envelope area. More specifically, the various sub-groups of Judea and Samaria show differences in their assessments of the security situation, but these are not clear-cut. For example, Jordan Valley residents feel slightly safer and less concerned about the future compared to the other sub-groups. In contrast, residents of the religious settlements in Judea and Samaria feel less safe in their place of residence and believe they are subject to a relatively high threat of hostilities and terrorist infiltration. Residents of the Haredi and secular settlements in Judea and Samaria gave similar assessments of the security situation.

On the topic of perceived coping ability, the most prominent finding for the Judea and Samaria area is that the residents of the Haredi settlements feel much less capable of coping with the security situation compared to other sub-groups in Judea and Samaria and have a lower sense of trust in the IDF. The findings show that Jordan Valley residents reported the highest coping ability in several aspects compared to other sub-groups.

Another interesting finding is that Israel's general Jewish population feels that they, their community, and their local municipality are much less capable of coping with the security situation if the perceptions reported by residents of conflict-affected areas are taken into consideration. Their trust in the IDF, while high, is also lower than that expressed by residents of conflict-affected areas.

Table 10: Kaleidoscope of threats.

	Intensity of perceived threat	Perceived coping ability	Notes
Proximity to the border	+	+	Proximity to the border creates a sense of threat and sensitivity to a specific threat, which is also related to the need to prepare for and cope with the threat.
Community organization	–	+	There is lower coping ability and higher perceived threat in cities than in rural settlements.
Socio-economic profile		+	Individuals with more socio-economic resources have a higher perceived coping ability.
Memory of past events	+	Depends on the memory	Memories of a specific threat affect the perception of future threats.

+/– = stronger/weaker perceptions.

In summary, perceptions and assessments of the security situation, threats, and coping ability are not formed exclusively on the basis of the objective security threat. Rather, they are the product of multiple local factors. For each area and population, it is possible to identify an "aggregate context" that crystallizes through four key factors: the socio-economic profile of the community and the population, community organization, geographic proximity to security threats, and (memories of) past experiences. A change in any one of these factors affects perceptions of threat. We can therefore address threat perceptions as a varied "kaleidoscope" of perceptions of threats and powers of coping. Table 10 presents an analytical model of these sources.

4.1 Geographic Proximity to the Border

Unsurprisingly, proximity to the source of a threat shapes attitudes toward it. When multiple threats exist, the most proximal threats are perceived as the most serious. Geographic proximity is also related to preparedness, as proximity to the threat may prompt greater preparedness. Populations who live near peaceful borders, as in the Golan Heights, particularly feel they are in a state of safety. However, all the groups living close to a source of threat feel more capable of coping compared to other populations, which may be the result of heightened preparedness at both the individual and organizational levels.

4.2 Community and Population Organization

As shown by many researchers in the field of resilience (e.g. Aldrich 2012; Bonanno, Romero, and Klein 2015; Norris and Stevens 2007; Norris et al. 2008), the profile of a community and its organization play a key role in individuals' perceived coping ability. The current study's findings indicate considerable differences in perceived coping ability between cities and small, community-oriented settlements in border areas. In the smaller, rural settlements (mainly kibbutzim and moshavim), a significant percentage of respondents expressed a strong sense of trust that people in their community will come to their assistance during an emergency and also indicated a greater ability to cope with future emergency events. Another factor that characterizes the small settlements close to the border is related to the modes of communication and the dissemination of information concerning security events in the vicinity: residents of these settlements reported making extensive use of unofficial and local sources of information (e.g. notifications from the local council or community-based emergency response teams).

4.3 Socio-Economic Profile

According to resource conservation theory (Hobfoll 1998, 2001), it is easy to understand that of all groups affected by security threats, civilians are the most strongly affected and have the most limited coping resources, especially in socio-economic terms. In Israel, several cities in conflict-affected areas (Gaza Envelope and the northern border areas) are characterized by low socio-economic status. Residents of these cities have a greater sense of threat compared to residents of the surrounding settlements and also feel less capable of coping with security threats.

4.4 Past Experiences

Individual and community experiences with security events shape perceptions and assessments of potential or new events. Past events form a benchmark and point of reference through which subsequent potential events are imagined, both in terms of assessing the threat and its limits and in terms of expectations (e.g. the ability to defend the home front). Past events also constitute a point of reference when a threat is realized, as each security incident is compared to previous events and stresses the differences between past and present events.

The Israeli public has faced recurrent events that have escalated yet share similar features. Surveys offer evidence of a trend of increasing perceptions among

the public of their ability to cope with security incidents and hostilities. This can be explained by the prevalent public assumption that future events will essentially be similar to past events, with which the public has experience and against which effective defense systems exist, such as the Iron Dome (IDF Behavioral Science Department, 2001–2018).

Examining the issue of the most disconcerting threat to the public by region, the findings show that the residents of each region are most concerned by threats that mirror previous incidents that occurred locally. It is interesting to see that what is perceived as a major threat in one region is not perceived as a significant threat by the residents of another. For example, the terror tunnels in the south were mentioned by respondents in the Gaza Envelope area but were absent from the responses of residents of other regions, despite the fact that the question asked what the greatest security threat to Israel was and was not focused on the respondent's place of residence.

4.5 Limitations and Future Research

In sum, the various contextual dimensions (threat, community, and socio-economic/demographic resources) create a complex, multi-faceted picture for the population in each region. Deepening our understanding of this issue beyond the national level by focusing on each conflict-affected area separately, each with its own specific sensitivities and each subject to specific threats, may lead to the development of working assumptions, coping tools, and practices customized to each population group. Broadening the scope of the analyses to gender, religious, and age differences will further develop our understanding. Finally, it should be underlined that this study is preliminary and descriptive in nature, and future research should be expanded using explanatory models with concrete hypotheses and longitudinal designs. Gaining such an understanding, based on the existing threats specific to each case, is vital for researchers of society, the military, and researchers of national resilience.

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