

**Civilian Resilience in Israel and the COVID-19 Pandemic: Analysis of a
CBS Survey**

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A survey conducted by the Central Bureau of Statistics (CBS) paints a complex picture regarding Israeli societal resilience following two months of a successful response to the coronavirus: the significant public health accomplishment has exacted a heavy price on the economy and society. The picture indicates a growing sense of stress, loneliness, and above all, profound anxiety concerning the implications of the economic situation. At the same time, it seems that a large majority of Israelis have adapted rapidly to the serious challenges imposed by the restrictive guidelines to deal with the coronavirus. This is reflected in the broad compliance with the lockdown instructions, the high level of trust in the government and, to an even greater extent, in the local authorities. Given these findings, it is clear that along with the need to track morbidity rates is the need to track the social and economic ramifications of the pandemic. Such monitoring would be relevant in possible future crises as well. Proposed, therefore, is the establishment of a permanent professional mechanism to provide a Civil Resilience Index that will serve as a reliable basis for decision making during a crisis, be it a civilian or a security event.

Israel's Central Bureau of Statistics (CBS) conducted a quick survey during the final week of April 2020, seeking to provide a snapshot of the Israeli public's civil resilience during the coronavirus pandemic. The sample population consisted of 2,792 individuals aged 21 and over, of whom 56 percent responded by telephone.

Main Findings of the Survey

Mental state during the coronavirus pandemic: Of those questioned, 22.5 percent reported that their mental state had worsened during the crisis. Close to 28 percent reported that their children's emotional state had deteriorated. Among the Arab public, over 36 percent reported their mental state as negative.

Stress and anxiety were reported by over 34 percent of the respondents; 16 percent reported feelings of depression, and 23.5 percent reported loneliness. Depression, stress, and anxiety were reported at higher levels among the Arab public than among the Jewish

public. Among respondents over 65, more than 30 percent said they had suffered from stress and anxiety, with women (39.6 percent) at higher levels than men (28.9 percent).

Domestic tensions: 22.6 percent of those who do not live alone reported a moderate to great degree of tension among members of the household in the wake of the pandemic. Among households with four or more persons, the level rose to 27 percent.

Economic situation: Over 46 percent (57 percent among Arab respondents) reported that their economic situation, and that of their families, had worsened due to the crisis. Over 50 percent of Jewish and over 60 percent of Arab respondents expressed concern about their ability to pay bills. Almost 16 percent reported they were afraid they might lose their homes. Around 14 percent reported they had skipped meals during the previous week, primarily due to economic constraints. Over 20 percent expect to see an improvement in their economic circumstances over the coming 12 months, while over 27 percent expect their economic situation to worsen.

Compliance with Health Ministry guidelines: Over 80 percent reported they had complied with the guidelines to a large extent.

Trust in the establishment: 38 percent (almost 49 percent among the Arab population) expressed a high degree of trust in the government's handling of the coronavirus crisis, and an additional 33 percent expressed "some trust." Around 28 percent said they had no confidence in the government's handling of the situation. (There was considerable variation in the level of trust in the government between the big cities, ranging from 85 percent in Petah Tikva to 54 percent in Tel Aviv.) Public confidence in the performance of the local authorities was markedly higher: about 47 percent expressed a high degree of trust in their local authority (62 percent among Arabs) and an additional 32 percent expressed some trust.

Significance

The results of the CBS survey reflect the magnitude of the shock inflicted on the Israeli public by the coronavirus pandemic two months after its outbreak. Despite the well-known reservations about extracting general and long term conclusions from surveys, some preliminary conclusions may be drawn. The data show the public's complex attitude toward the ramifications of the crisis in the short and medium terms. The survey also points to several phenomena that warrant a degree of optimism. It indicates that the Israeli public has responded reasonably well to the challenges of the pandemic, in part likely due to the low mortality rate and the recent marked improvement in morbidity – certainly compared to the dire forecasts made at the outset of the crisis. Civil resilience has been reflected in the public's sober attitude toward the significant and inevitable

deterioration in the socio-economic functional continuity and in the tendency to express optimism regarding future recovery. In addition:

- a. While the survey charts an increased sense of stress, anxiety, and tension, as well as uncertainty regarding future COVID19-related developments, a clear majority of the respondents – as high as two-thirds to four-fifths – suggested that their mental state was reasonable or not significantly changed. Furthermore, two-thirds of the respondents expressed their belief that their financial situation will improve or will not worsen.
- b. Most Israelis seem to justify the government's policy concerning the imposed lockdown. It appears that the public recognized the danger and the need for the restrictive policy, despite its high social and economic price. Trust in the government was generally high, with trust in local authorities even higher.
- c. As expected, significant variance is evident among different groups of respondents, a phenomenon familiar from other social surveys: women and older people expressed concerns over the situation more than men and younger people; Arabs as a minority perceive themselves as victims of challenging events more than Jews. Harmful consequences of the coronavirus pandemic tend to exacerbate preexisting socio-economic weaknesses. Those who entered the crisis without an economic "safety net" or those who lost their livelihood during the crisis are more vulnerable to the effects of unemployment and are more concerned about their future.
- d. The larger group of those who reported difficulties and stress due to the current crisis present a social warning sign, as society's resilience usually depends on the feelings and conduct of its more vulnerable sectors. This was represented by the increase in the number of emergency calls reporting domestic violence to Eran (an emotional first-aid call center), from 537 in January-February to 729 in March-April, an increase of more than one-third (*Haaretz*, April 2020).

This complex picture is of great significance as a basis for shaping government policy concerning the ramifications of the pandemic, in particular concerning the necessary steps for generating economic recovery and social stabilization. The majority of the Israeli public seems to respond to the crisis in a way that reflects considerable adaptability on the personal and public level. Resilience is also evidenced by the widespread volunteerism seen in the community.

Recommendations

Clearly, there is an immediate need to direct special attention and effective assistance to the population's more vulnerable groups as well as to the many in the middle class – the backbone of the economy – who have been severely affected by the crisis. Growing economic and emotional pressures may intensify the challenge among those who have

difficulty adjusting to the coronavirus “new normal.” While the gradual reopening of the economy is expected to produce a relative improvement in the economic situation, many will be left behind and their lot might worsen. It is important to monitor their situations and provide them with effective assistance.

The high degree of public trust in the local authorities suggests that their functional participation in the COVID19 crisis and its dire socio-economic ramifications should be expanded. They should receive additional powers and funds to enhance their capacities to deal directly with their populations. This will also be necessary in other future crises in the civilian domain, including those that result from a security event. Furthermore, the relatively high degree of trust in the government shown by the Arab sector should be leveraged to improve relations between Arabs and Jews in order to expand cooperation between the two sectors in addressing social issues that plague the Arab sector, including crime and violence.

The CBS survey points to a critical need to establish a professional state mechanism to monitor reliable economic and social data in order to create a credible Civil Resilience Index both for further management of the severe repercussions of the present crisis and as a basis for formulating response policies in future crises.