

ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Open Access

Fighting to belong: drivers for transnational diaspora military service in Israel and beyond



Lior Yohanani^{1*}

*Correspondence:
lioryohanani@gmail.com

¹ Department of Sociology and Anthropology, Tel Aviv University, 30 Chaim Levanon Street, Naftali Building, Tel Aviv, Israel

Abstract

Previous studies have explored two scenarios wherein diaspora members fight for their ancestral homeland: (1) in response to immediate threats, and (2) when the homeland's conscription laws mandate enlistment. This study investigates diaspora military service (DMS) in Israel, where DMS occurs voluntarily outside of acute crises or compulsory conscription requirements. Utilizing survey and interview data from over 1100 diaspora soldiers, it compares enlistment motivations across three diaspora groups with varied ties to Israel and Judaism: North Americans, Israeli Americans, and individuals from the Former Soviet Union. The study conceptualizes DMS as a state led effort to cultivate an engaged diaspora and advance Jewish immigration. This framework enables examining DMS, beyond the immediate military context, as a site for identity exploration, cultural assimilation, and contemplating permanent immigration. Despite varied emphases, results show that DMS occurs in a migratory context as soldiers from all groups recognize service as essential for immigration, integration, and acceptance in Israel. The study formulates three motivational models that drive transnational military engagement across contexts: the "ideological model" among conviction-driven actors; the "mobility model" among those focused on upward mobility; and the "reconnection model" for cementing national belonging and avoid stigma.

Keywords: Diaspora, Migration, Military, Transnationalism, Foreign fighters, Jews, Israel

Introduction

Existing research has explored two distinct contexts for diaspora military service (DMS): immediate homeland threats, prompting urgent diaspora response as seen in 1990s Yugoslavian Wars (Hockenos, 2003) and current Ukraine (Tidman, 2022); and obligatory conscription laws, compelling military service for citizens abroad like in South Korea (Song, 2015). However, the literature lacks an examination of DMS in non-emergency situations where conscription laws do not apply. When no acute triggers necessitate defense or laws mandate service, what motivates diaspora populations to voluntarily take up arms? Examining Israel's diaspora soldiers allows us to scrutinize DMS as an arena of immigration and integration, where diaspora individuals explore their presumed homeland, contemplate their future in it, seek integration, and claim belonging.

This article presents the first comprehensive examination of contemporary diaspora soldiers in Israel, utilizing original survey data from over 1100 soldiers and in-depth

interviews with 99. It utilizes a multi-step mixed methods analysis to characterize key motivational factors for military service and reveals variations across major diaspora groups: (1) American Jews from religious Zionist communities; (2) non-observant Zionist Israeli-Americans; and (3) non-observant Jews from the Former Soviet Union (FSU) with loose ties to Israel. Comparing diaspora groups with weaker to firmer ties to Israel and the Jewish faith surfaces crucial motivational differences. It highlights the multiplicity of ideological, personal, and pragmatic drives that spur diaspora military decisions.

This study situates DMS within broader discourses on state-diaspora relations and initiatives encouraging ethnic immigration and diaspora engagement (Brubaker, 2005; Kibria, 2002; Skrentny et al., 2007; Tsuda, 2009). Specifically, it conceptualizes DMS in Israel in relation to Israel's military culture (Lehrer, 2021; Levy, 2007, 2023) and the state's investment in heritage and immigration programs (Yohanani, 2022; Kelner, 2010; Cohen, 2021). Military service, the study argues, occurs within a migratory context, wherein diaspora individuals are driven less by the immediate military context of combat, and more by a desire to integrate into Israeli society and gain recognition and legitimacy.

This study contributes to scholarship on transnational military engagement (Arielli, 2018, 2023; Grasmeder, 2021; Hanson and Greenberg 2019; Malet, 2013) by identifying three common motivational models across contexts: the "ideological model" based on conviction, the "mobility model" focused on upward mobility, and the "reconnection model" for strengthening national belonging. These models emerge through parallels between diaspora soldiers in Israel and other contexts. FSU soldiers seeking better opportunities in Israel resemble military migrants pursuing citizenship and naturalization in Western armies. North American soldiers exhibit ideological motivations like other religiously-driven soldiers. Israeli Americans want to avoid stigma and reconnect to their homeland as second-generation soldiers do elsewhere.

Why and when migrants and diasporans take arms?

It is essential to first define "diaspora," as it has become a complex and contested concept. Once denoting exile and displacement, diaspora now encompasses expatriate communities, immigrants, and ethnic minorities more broadly (Adamson, 2019; Sheffer, 2003; Tölölyan, 1996). For this study, "diaspora" includes citizens of the homeland living abroad and their descendants, or co-ethnics oriented towards a shared homeland.¹ Importantly, diasporas are treated as fluid, continually reproduced constructs rather than static entities (Brubaker, 2005; Lainer-Vos, 2013). Within this framework, DMS represents both a successful diaspora-formation process and a means to further this process.

We can identify five main types of transnational military engagements in the literature: (1) voluntary diaspora mobilization in response to national or ethnic crises, as seen today in Ukraine (Tidman, 2022), in the Former Yugoslavia during the 1990s (Hockenos, 2003), and in 1948 Israel and Palestine (Arielli, 2014); (2) conscription requirements for citizens residing abroad, as exemplified by South Korea (Choi & Chung, 2018; Song,

¹ Despite controversy regarding "homeland" terminology, especially in relation to Israel-Palestine, this framing aligns with diaspora studies perspectives on how Jewish communities construe Israel (Sheffer 2003; Tsuda 2009). The language reflects the religio-political context that shapes motivations, not any political stance.

2015), Singapore (Teo and Cabuyao 2018), and Turkey (Sunata, 2016); (3) foreign military migration for socioeconomic mobility, as seen in the USA (Apteker 2015, 2023), the UK (Ware, 2012), and France (Porch, 2010); (4) voluntary foreign fighting, a broad category stretching from the Spanish Civil war to Ukraine and ISIS fighters (Arielli, 2018, 2023; Malet, 2013; Swed, 2023); and (5) temporary contracts, as in private forces (Grasmeder, 2021; Hanson & Lin-Greenberg, 2019). As this study examines diaspora groups in a migratory context, it focuses on the first three categories.

Voluntary diaspora mobilization in response to crises represents an extreme form of homeland engagement, though less common than political or financial support (Lainer-Vos, 2013; Moss, 2022). In recent decades, hundreds of thousands have returned as diaspora fighters, including Croats, Serbs, Jews, Armenians, Kurds, and more recently Ukrainians and Russians. Kinship ties, solidarity, social networks, activism histories, and long-distance nationalism often motivate this risky commitment (Arielli, 2014, 2018; Hockenos, 2003; Tidman, 2022; Weiss, 2020). While egoistic reasons and other push factors also come into play, patriotic and ideological concerns hold considerable weight.

While patriotism and homeland ties hold sway, rarely is volunteering situated within an immigration context. Diaspora fighting is usually viewed as a short term episode and fighters are assumed to simply return abroad after service, not consider relocating permanently. As Hockenos (2003, 265) observed about Kosovar soldiers in the Yugoslav Wars: “The men in the Atlantic Brigade would die for Kosovo, but they were not prepared to live there.” The possibility of military service initiating a longer-term immigration process goes overlooked.

Conscription requirements for expatriate citizens have become contentious amid high migration and enduring international conflicts. As more countries consider or reintroduce conscription laws, the terms in which conscription laws apply for expatriate citizens have become a point of friction between countries, domestic populations, and expatriates. While European nations largely exempt expatriates, Asia–Pacific countries like South Korea and Singapore enforce military service for citizens abroad, with severe penalties for noncompliance. However, research reveals complex motivations beyond legal obligation. For example, Korean Americans view conscription as a chance to boost cultural capital, avoid stigma, and enable potential return, not just a mandated duty (Choi & Chung, 2018; Song, 2015).

Foreign military migration. Some nations incentivize military service for faster naturalization, recruiting foreign personnel in exchange for citizenship and socioeconomic mobility (Aptekar, 2015, 2023; Grasmeder, 2021; Hanson & Greenberg 2019; Porch, 2010; Ware, 2012). This foreign military migration pathway has expanded since 9/11, with the U.S. and U.K. offering citizenship and naturalization for service. Russia and Ukraine now provide similar citizenship-for-service packages. For most migrant soldiers, instrumental motivations like acquiring citizenship, income, and better future prospects compel enlistment over ideological reasons. Military participation represents a strategic means to enhanced status and opportunity, not an end itself.

In summary, existing scholarship examines military mobilization in discrete contexts: crisis response, legal obligation, or in exchange for citizenship. How can we explain, however, DMS occurring outside of acute threats, compulsory conscription, or for citizenship acquisition?

Why Israel?

Israel's DMS diverges from existing frameworks, as it remains largely voluntary rather than legally required for citizenship. Under the Law of Return, all individuals of Jewish ancestry can obtain Israeli citizenship. Although the Security Service Law mandates conscription for citizens – men for 32 months and women for 24 months—immigrants can time their arrival and avoid conscription requirements. Immigrants arriving between 18 and 21 must serve, while those 22–27 can voluntarily enlist if desired. Additionally, children of Israelis abroad can apply for deferrals before 18 and exemptions after 21 to avoid service, which they commonly do. Thus, most diaspora soldiers voluntarily enlist by choice, not obligation. Still, some immigrants, especially those from the FSU who arrived earlier for Israeli high school programs face de facto compulsory service.

Another distinguishing aspect is that Israel's diaspora recruitment is not driven by immediate conflict as it often is elsewhere. Despite some low-intensity fighting, Israel has not faced dire existential threats for decades. Accordingly, rather than portraying service in emergency colors, as in other arenas (Malet, 2013), Israeli marketing resembles invitations to cultural heritage programs (Yohanani, 2022; Kelner, 2010). Serving is portrayed as a meaningful opportunity to integrate into society – to practice Hebrew, travel the country, and join society. Moreover, enlistment programs advertise principally as immigration avenues, downplaying the military focus to skirt disapproval from Western countries opposing foreign fighting by their citizens (Schmutz, 2022).

Thus, the Israeli case provides an opportunity to examine DMS within the context of institutionalized heritage programs (Kibria, 2002), albeit being riskier and lengthier compared to the typical volunteering or study-abroad programs promoted by homeland countries. Such programs are regarded as "acts of meaning" (Basu, 2017); they enable individuals to reestablish connections with their origins and embrace a more profound heritage narrative. However, critically, military service can initiate an extensive immigration process rather than just temporary sojourn, enabling engagement with Israel as a potential citizen rather than a short-term visitor. This distinguishes it from other homeland programs.

These perspectives enable us to move beyond the immediate military context and to further complicate the interplay between military service, diaspora, and immigration. They prompt us to examine a broader spectrum of motivations that extend beyond military ideals of commitment and patriotism. For example, does immigration the primary goal and military service the means to that end or vice versa? Furthermore, what mix of push factors in source countries versus pull factors in Israel drive enlistment?

Diaspora ("Lone") soldiers and immigration programs in Israel

Service in the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) is considered one of the central components of belonging in Israeli society. While the mandatory conscription law has never been uniformly and equitably enforced, the majority of the Jewish population holds the ethos of the IDF as the "people's army." As the people's army, the IDF has been

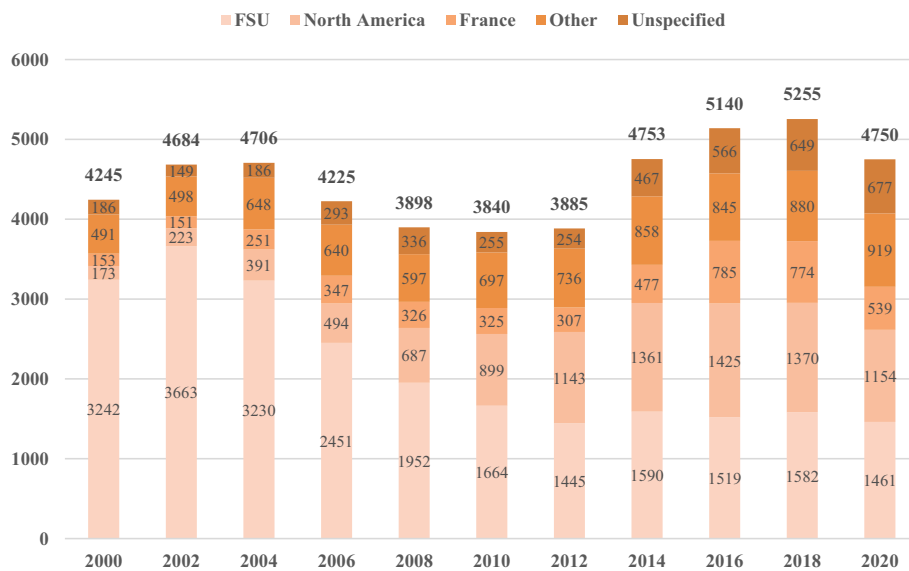


Fig. 1 Registered lone soldiers by year and region

viewed as a significant contributor to the Israeli (Jewish) melting pot, and a means of social mobility. However, critics argue this model has eroded, with military participation now reinforcing social hierarchies rather than promoting integration (Lehrer, 2021; Levy, 2007, 2023; Lomsky-Feder & Sasson-Levy, 2017). Still, enlistment remains central for belonging.

The IDF has recruited diaspora soldiers since Israel’s founding and the 1948 War, when experienced World War II veterans provided crucial support to Israel’s fledgling army (Arielli, 2014; Penslar, 2013). In 1975, the State of Israel and the IDF formalized the status of these individuals as Lone Soldiers—soldiers whose parents reside outside of Israel. Since 2000, around 4500 lone or diaspora soldiers have been registered in the IDF each year. About 90 percent of them have chosen the immigration path: they first obtain Israeli citizenship and are then subject to mandatory conscription, like other Israeli citizens.²

Data obtained from the IDF Spokesperson Unit shows over half of recent diaspora soldiers arrived from the FSU and North America (Fig. 1). Around 90 percent of North Americans came from the United States, while the remainder from Canada. Israeli-Americans comprise 25–33 percent of the North American contingent. Among FSU soldiers, approximately 40 percent hailed from Ukraine and 40 percent from Russia. Soldiers from France have a notable presence, however they were precluded from this study due to limitations. The remainder originated from over 60 other countries, with significant representation from the UK, Australia, Brazil and Argentina. Regarding gender, the percentage of female enlistees has steadily risen, reaching 35 percent in recent years (Fig. 2). However, as women serve shorter terms, they appear in fewer annual counts. In reality, women now account for close to 50 percent of new diaspora enlistees.³

² The other ten percent of diaspora soldiers enlist as foreign nationals in a special program called Machal, Hebrew acronym for “overseas volunteers.”

³ This study does not include gender-based analysis. While gender differences do exist, they were overshadowed by more prominent and conclusive differences based on national origin. The intersection of ethnicity and gender will be addressed in a separate article.

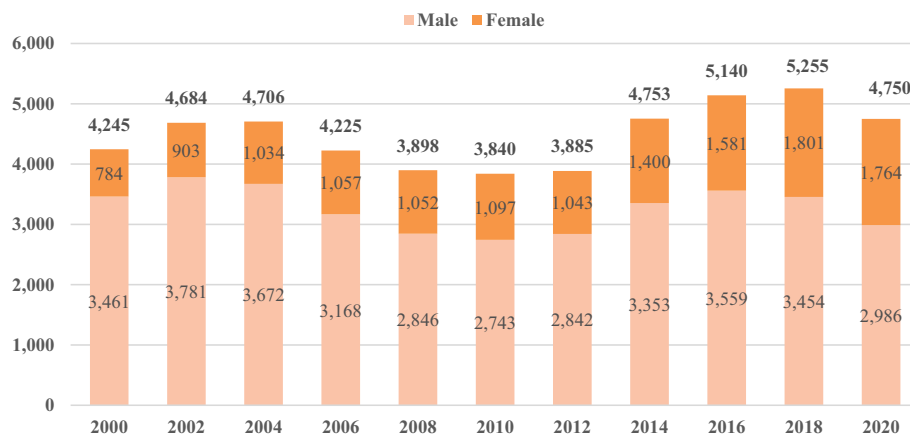


Fig. 2 Registered lone soldiers by year and gender

Since the 1990s, Israel has invested heavily in recruiting and supporting diaspora soldiers through a coordinated, multi-agency effort. This state-led initiative engages the Defense Ministry, Immigration Ministry, major Jewish NGOs, and overseas communities (Yohanani, 2022). Numerous programs provide end-to-end assistance—from overseas outreach to post-service integration. This includes preparatory seminars abroad, accommodating absorption packages, bureaucratic guidance, and continued benefits after discharge.

During service, diaspora soldiers receive benefits including higher pay, family travel funding, and housing assistance. Limited Hebrew speakers get language classes, while others attend Zionist history and culture programs. Soldiers who qualify for immigration but are not considered Jewish according to religious laws (Halacha) can participate in special IDF conversion courses. After discharge, support continues through tax exemptions, rent subsidies, free university tuition, and generous transition grants from non-profits. It is fair to assume that while ideological motivations may be common, these economic incentives offer material motives too.

Israel's substantial investment in diaspora soldiers occurs amid broader initiatives strengthening Jewish ties worldwide and encouraging immigration, including landmark programs like Birthright and longer post high-school gap year programs (Kelner, 2010; Sasson, 2014). Uniquely, Israel also operates adolescent immigration programs for FSU youth. The Na'ale program offers hundreds of students full high school education in Israel along with housing, food, health insurance and other benefits (Tartakovsky, 2012). The Sela program brings hundreds more FSU high school graduates for an acculturating gap year. Officials report the vast majority of graduates become Israeli citizens and enlist as lone soldiers.

Despite tens of thousands of diaspora enlistees in recent decades, scholarly attention to this phenomenon has been surprisingly limited. A few recent studies offer initial but restricted insights. Schmutz (2022) found Western soldiers frequently cite ideological motivations, often complemented by personal reasons. Shklyan (2022) highlighted the disappointment and return migration of U.S.-born soldiers. Yohanani (2022) found a clear college/career path differentiated Israeli Americans pursuing higher education from peers joining the IDF. While useful, these studies rely on small qualitative samples,

overlooking soldiers from non-western countries and the full range of motivations. The present analysis provides a more comprehensive, holistic perspective by employing a multimethod approach to examine both Western and non-Western soldiers.

Research design

Group selection, definitions, and expectations

This study explores soldiers who enlisted between 2012 and 2020 and were officially classified as lone soldiers. It focuses on three major groups: North American Jews, FSU Jews, and Israeli (Jewish) Americans. In addition to their size, these groups were selected for three key reasons. First, academic and public attention to FSU diaspora soldiers is limited despite their predominance numerically. Second, Israeli-Americans possess distinct attributes from broader American Jewish populations (Gold, 2002), requiring separate analysis. Finally, each pathway represents a distinct motivational profile that parallels other transnational soldier cases, enabling comparative understanding of transnational military engagements.

Elsewhere, I showed that soldiers from these groups have distinct social, economic, religious, and political backgrounds, mirroring their diaspora communities (Yohanani, 2023):

North American Jewish soldiers typically share similarities with American Jewish immigrants in Israel (Hirschhorn, 2017). They hail from middle-class, religiously observant, Zionist communities, absorbing such values from a young age. Their political leanings tend conservative compared to broader Jewish Americans. As their source countries offer more economic opportunities than Israel, ideology over material motives likely drives enlistment. They are expected to share similarities with diaspora and foreign soldiers elsewhere coming from dense ethnic communities in the Global North. North American Jewish soldiers are defined as individuals who were born in either the U.S. or Canada *and* neither of their parents was born in Israel.

FSU soldiers share similar characteristics with FSU immigrants in Israel (Dolberg & Amit, 2023; Remennick, 2007), hailing from lower socioeconomic status than other Jewish immigrants and holding weaker connections to Judaism and Zionism. They may pursue pragmatic motivations like military migrants elsewhere despite their diaspora status. FSU soldiers are defined as individuals who were either born in an FSU country or who were born in Israel to an FSU-born parent and left Israel for an FSU country.

Israeli American soldiers share similarities with the Israeli American community in the US (Gold, 2002; Rebhun and Lev-Ari 2010; Cohen, 2011). They are typically middle-class, liberal, non-observant, and prefer the public school system over Jewish private institutions. They maintain strong Israeli connections and identity. They are expected to be motivated by norms and stigmas associated with military service in Israel and challenges of assimilation in America. Israeli Americans are defined as first or second-generation North Americans who were *either* (1) born in Israel *and* left for North America before age sixteen; *or* (2) born in North America to a parent that was born in Israel.

While this analysis concentrates on the three outlined groups, individuals from other backgrounds were also surveyed and interviewed. Nonetheless, choosing to focus on these three groups means less attention given to individuals from other origins. Furthermore, examining cross-group patterns risks overlooking meaningful within-group

nuances. For instance, variations emerged between FSU soldiers from urban versus rural areas, American Jews across religious denominations, and Israeli Americans born in North America compared to those who left Israel when older. However, such variations paled compared to the more pronounced distinctions across national and ethnic origins. Concentrating on these larger between-group divergences provides the most salient insights, though future research could further explore intra-group differences as well.

Data

This study employed an explanatory and exploratory mixed methods approach (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2017) with three key phases: initial in-depth interviews, a survey based on initial findings, and an extensive follow-up interview process. This enabled exploration of an understudied phenomenon, creation of a survey grounded in qualitative insights, and in-depth interpretation of survey results using perspectives from the large number of follow-up interviews.

Survey

The survey was available online in English and Russian from December 2020 to March 2021. It was distributed through several programs supporting diaspora soldiers via listservs and social media channels. Primary assistance came from Nefesh B’Nefesh (“Soul-to-Soul”), whose Lone Soldier Program maintains records of about 90 percent of enlistees since 2012. Invitations were emailed to all former soldiers in their database from English- or Russian-speaking countries. Overall, I estimate that invitations were distributed to around 80 percent of the enlistee population, however, it is difficult to determine the precise proportion ultimately reached by the invitation.

The primary survey section for the present analysis featured a series of eighteen Likert statements (1- strongly disagree; 5- strongly agree) on enlistment motivations. The statements were drawn from and inspired by pre-survey interviews, studies on topics such as ethnic/diaspora return migration (Tsuda, 2009), Jewish immigration and attitudes towards Israel (Sasson, 2014), and transnational military engagements (Arielli, 2018; Ware, 2012).

The survey yielded 1166 responses, representing approximately 9 percent of the estimated 13,500 eligible soldiers from 2012 to 2020 (around 1500 enlistees per year). After excluding incomplete responses, 1058 complete cases remained. As Table 1 shows, 44 percent identified as FSU Jews, 27 percent as North American Jews, 18 percent as Israeli

Table 1 Participants by origin, gender, and mean age of enlistment

Group	Survey				Interviews		
	Men	Women	Total	Age (SD)	Men	Women	Total
NA Jews	162	128	290	20.6 (2.1)	15	10	25
ISR AM	74	114	188	19.4 (1.7)	18	22	40
FSU Jews	232	232	464	20.2 (2.0)	12	11	23
Other	61	55	116	20.4 (2.0)	8	3	11
Total	529	529	1058	20.2 (2.0)	53	46	99

Americans, and 11 percent as other origins. Gender distribution was equal overall, but variations within the North American and Israeli American groups are noticeable. In terms of age, North American and FSU soldiers enlisted at higher average ages compared to Israeli Americans, implying gap year and college degree completion prior to service were more common among the former groups. Indeed, 26 percent of North American Jews, 20 percent of FSU Jews, and 12 percent of Israeli Americans completed a college degree before enlisting, rendering conscription age requirements ineffective for these individuals.

The survey yielded sufficient responses for analysis, with oversampling of the three main groups. However, the overall low response rate and imbalanced gender representation within certain groups warrant cautious generalization. Potential reasons for the response rate range from non-delivery to self-selection biases, where those with positive or negative experiences may have been more or less inclined to participate. Additionally, respondents had already undergone military service's socialization effects. Hence, their motivational narratives do not necessarily reflect objective enlistment reality, but rather retrospective subjective interpretation of past decisions. Still, comparing motivational framing across groups elucidates distinct communal backgrounds and post-enlistment sense-making processes.

Interviews

The analysis draws on 99 soldier interviews conducted in two phases: 40 pre-survey in 2018–2019 using snowball sampling, and 59 post-survey in 2021 among survey respondents agreeing to follow-ups. Despite being the smallest group, Israeli-Americans were interviewed more than others in order to explore additional research questions addressed in a separate paper (Yohanani, 2022). Furthermore, twelve officials from relevant programs provided institutional perspectives that, while not analyzed here, informed the context, survey design, and group overview. The in-depth interviews covered soldiers' backgrounds, ties to Israel, and service motivations. To mitigate socialization and memory biases, questions were ordered chronologically starting with pre-enlistment life events before transitioning to open motivational narratives (Viterna, 2006).

Data analysis

I factor analyzed the responses to the 18 motivation items (Table 2). I found four distinct factors comprised of 14 loaded statements. I conceptualized these factors as four motivation meta-narratives: Integration and Legitimation, Zionist Ideology, Personal Growth, and Pragmatism. Four statements that were loaded on multiple factors were removed. I created variables averaging statement scores within each factor and used One-way ANOVA tests to compare mean differences across groups. For the qualitative analysis, I performed two coding passes. Initial inductive coding extracted motivational themes without preconceived categories. I then deductively recoded based on the 4 statistical narratives, enriching them with nuanced details from soldiers' voices. This sequential mixed methods approach integrated broad survey patterns with thick personal descriptions.

Table 2 Factor loadings and categorization of enlistment motivations

"I decided to enlist in the IDF because..."	Zionist Ideol	Personal growth	Pragmat	Integ. & Legit
I wanted to fight for Israel, defend and protect it	.83	.11	-.24	.10
the security situation in Israel at that time made me feel that I cannot stand aside	.70	.09	-.04	.06
I felt like I had to do my share, regardless of where I'll live later	.62	.13	-.06	.21
Because of religious reasons, e.g., because it's a mitzvah	.49	-.13	-.09	.06
because of antisemitism in the country I came from	.41	.20	.06	.10
I wanted to have a unique adventure, to do something different than everybody else	.10	.70	.00	.11
I needed a fresh start	.08	.56	.10	.07
I believed it would build my character, make me more mature and ready for life	.21	.56	-.07	.20
I did not know what I want to study or do in life	-.05	.49	.16	-.01
I believed Israel would have more to offer me, professionally and economically, than the country I came from	-.07	.19	.70	.03
because the law requires	-.16	-.11	.56	.06
I thought IDF service would look good on my resume	.01	.34	.49	.12
I believed it is important for being accepted in the Israeli society	.19	.04	.08	.67
I wanted to get to know better the people and culture of Israel, and military service is a good place for it	.16	.23	.09	.66
Eigenvalues	3.31	2.36	1.40	1.09
% of total variance	15.08	11.88	8.35	7.32
Total variance				42.64%
Reliability (Cronbach's α)	.75	.67	.61	.66

Extraction: common factor analysis; orthogonal varimax rotation; factor loadings > .4

Statements removed from the analysis: "I wanted to keep my options open, in case I'd like to live in Israel someday"; "I believed I would gain professional skills and/or social networks that would help me later in life"; "I felt that going to college was not right for me at that particular time"; "I wanted my friends/community to respect me"

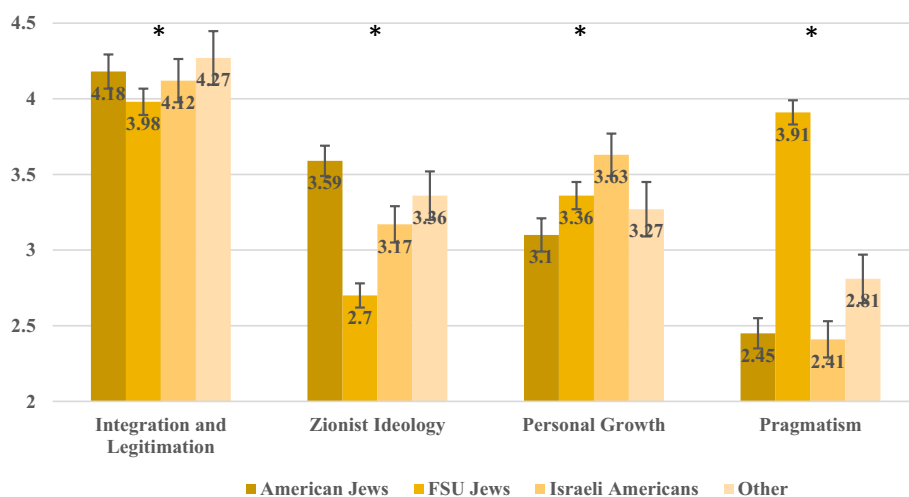


Fig. 3 Mean score of narratives by origin. Note: 95% CI Reported; p values from one way ANOVA test are displayed: *p<.01

Table 3 Percent of support in second most popular narrative by origin

	Zionist ideology (%)	Pragmatism (%)	Personal growth (%)	Total (%)
American Jews	57.9	9.0	31.4	98.3
FSU	9.5	61.0	25.9	96.4
Israeli Americans	29.8	5.3	63.8	98.9

30 cases with more than one popular narrative were excluded

Results

Narratives of motivations

Table 2 displays the factor loadings and motivation statements that constitute the four meta-narratives, while Fig. 3 presents the mean scores of these meta-narratives. Across all groups, *Integration and Legitimation* received the highest average, indicating military service is viewed first and foremost as an immigration and assimilation pathway. Statements about the IDF integrating into Israeli society and legitimizing belonging resonated universally. This situates IDF enlistment, first and foremost, within a migratory context, with shared views of service facilitating cultural immersion and earned membership.

The *Zionist Ideology* narrative encapsulates core Zionist principles. It combines a religious sentiment with the idea that Israel represents the sole secure Jewish homeland. From this view, immigration and military service constitute religious and moral imperatives, values underlying North American Jewish education. Accordingly, North American Jews aligned most strongly with this narrative, significantly higher than other groups. Their average 3.59 score demonstrates enduring resonance of Zionist values that valorize immigration and defending the ancestral homeland. Table 3 shows the *second* most identified narrative by origin group (with *Integration and Legitimation* being the most popular narrative across all groups). For 57.9 percent of North American Jews, *Zionist Ideology* was the runner-up motivation, significantly higher than other groups.

The *Personal Growth* narrative encompasses self-centered motivations like seeking adventure and self-improvement together with future uncertainty. This resonated most among Israeli Americans, averaging 3.63—significantly higher than other groups. *Personal Growth* was the second most popular narrative for 63.8 percent of Israeli Americans, but far less for North American and FSU soldiers. Interestingly, this aligns with research on mandatory domestic Israeli recruits who also emphasize self-development over national contributions (Waldman et al., 2022). Despite their foreign upbringing, it seems possible that Israeli Americans share more similarities with fellow Israeli peers than with North American Jewish soldiers.

The *Pragmatism* narrative reflects calculated cost–benefit assessments of military service. Pragmatic considerations resonated most among FSU soldiers, averaging 3.91—significantly higher than other groups. FSU soldiers typically considered military service a toll for access to Israel’s opportunities. They also emphasized benefits for post-army job prospects. Their pragmatic outlook mirrors economically driven migrant soldiers and ethnic migrants seeking upward mobility (Tsuda, 2009; Ware, 2012). *Pragmatism* was the second most popular narrative for 61 percent of FSU soldiers, but far less for North American and Israeli American soldiers who downplayed material motivations, potentially to avoid conflicting with their voluntary rationale.

In summary, Integration and Legitimation resonated most strongly across all groups, emphasizing military service as an integrator into Israeli society and source of legitimacy. However, noticeable differences emerged among origins across the remaining narratives. North American Jews identified second-most with Zionist Ideology, reflecting their communal socialization. Israeli Americans aligned next-most with Personal Growth, seeking self-development and independence like their domestic peers. Finally, FSU soldiers exhibited distinctly high Pragmatism, approaching IDF service as a strategic means to socioeconomic opportunities in Israel.

North American Jewish soldiers: ideology and alternative-seeking

The personal accounts of North American Jewish soldiers reveal a complicated mix of motives, with immigration to Israel (“Aliyah”⁴), military service, fitting in, personal struggles, status, and prestige frequently intertwined. Raised in middle- and upper-class Jewish communities, material considerations played a minor role. Attending Jewish day schools and summer camps cultivated a Zionist ethos valorizing Aliyah and IDF service. Jane, originally from Los Angeles, exemplified how major events in Israel throughout her upbringing fueled a dedicated military ambition:

I basically grew up in a very Zionist pro-Israel environment, I went to Jewish day schools my whole life. I remember when Roy Klein passed away and his parents came to my school to talk about him. He was a commander who jumped on a grenade to save his team. I was 12 at the time, and I was, like, super inspired. I wanted to be like him, not to jump on a grenade, but to fight for Israel and, you know, to save people. That’s kind of where the dream started. And then Gilad Shalit came home [an Israeli soldier held hostage by Hamas in 2006-2011]. It was this huge thing here and everybody was like “Wow Gilad Shalit came home.” We have been praying for him in my school for years. And then there was the thing that happened in Gaza in 2014, oh God I’m forgetting the name now [Operation Protective Edge], and that also, like, really got me. Like, I really wanted to put myself forward as somebody who would also fight for Israel.

Jane enlisted in a mixed combat unit for men and women, driven by ideological commitment cultivated through her Zionist upbringing. Notably for Jane, the main ambition was military service, while Aliyah itself was not a priority. Indeed, completing her service, she returned to the United States.

But unlike Jane, most interviewees did not feel as driven to serve in the military. They described a gradual process, with considerations about immigration and military service intermingled. They did not rush into the army or make a long-term commitment to stay in the country. Typically, they first experienced Israel through a gap year program, allowing them to see what life in Israel was really like, beyond the myths. They described military service as another, extended trial period, a way to immerse themselves in the real Israeli experience and become intimately familiar with the country’s people and culture, outside of the bubble of their gap year.

⁴ Aliyah, a Hebrew term for “ascent” or “going up,” refers to the immigration of Jews to Israel. It is a central concept in Zionist ideology.

Growing up in Cleveland, Ohio, Ron's goal was Aliyah, and serving in the military the means to become Israeli. He described his Jewish school as "a very Zionist school" and "a big promoter of Aliyah." Like many of his peers, Ron first came to Israel for a Yeshiva gap year program, decided to make Aliyah, and then joined the IDF. Despite having a pre-existing heart condition that could have excused him from duty, Ron had to insist on not just being accepted but being allowed to serve in a combat unit. He explains his thought process:

The main part was making Aliyah, not so much the army. I'm not like somebody who you'd look at and be like "ah he's going to be a great soldier." [about the decision to enlist:] I know you're looking for, like, Eureka moments, but honestly, there's not really any like. It was just like a slow long drive. I thought, like, I always knew I want to be part of Israeli society, so you have to go through this toll booth, which is the army. And I felt like it wouldn't be right for me just to become Israeli but not to go to the army. Being part of the military culture here was something I wanted to experience as well. It was more about learning Hebrew better and making Israeli friends.

As Ron exemplified, many North American soldiers expected military service would facilitate Israeli integration and belonging. More than for ideology, enlistment provided a gateway to society.

While Jane and Ron's stories emphasized the influence of a Zionist upbringing, for many Zionism offered a convenient narrative masking complex motivations. Some sought escape from community pressures to succeed academically, seeing Israel as an alternative route to success and social standing. Others aimed to break free from their community's strict and conservative culture, finding greater freedom to explore their beliefs in the military, away from home. Still others sought escape from difficult family environments.

Karen, raised in a modern-Orthodox family in New Jersey, was sent to an inexpensive ultra-Orthodox girls' school to save money for her brother's expensive schooling. At school, Karen felt alienated and alone. Ignored and underappreciated at home, she viewed Israel as a chance to start anew and gain approval she lacked.

I was looking to get away from my family, but I wasn't looking to go to Israel. I was just going to go to California, or Florida, or just somewhere. But if I had just run away, people would have been like "what a loser running away from home, like, what are you doing" ... Like, I would have been this 18-year-old girl who had no clue what she was doing. In Israel, everybody is helping me, people are like "you're so brave," and I'm like "oh I'm so Zionist." ... I remember they had like a whole thing in shul [in her hometown], one time, where they were honoring the lone soldiers, and I felt like oh I'm so cool.

In summary, most North American Jewish soldiers hailed from dense, observant, and middle-class communities. Their decisions around military service intertwined with contemplating immigration to Israel. Motivations blended ideological pull factors, like Zionist values instilled through education, with push factors such as escapism from personal struggles or restrictive social norms. Rather than driven by steadfast ideological commitment, enlistment typically followed an ambivalent journey of identity

exploration, in which the homeland – Israel – offers an alternative path for meaning and social standing.

Former Soviet Union jewish soldiers: pragmatism

FSU soldiers and North American Jewish soldiers are polar opposites in many respects. FSU soldiers hold a pragmatic attitude towards immigration and military service, eschewing ideological motivations. While Jewish ancestry made Israel an appealing destination, Zionism was not the primary factor. Rather, they saw Israel as offering greater economic and professional opportunities, accessible higher education, freedom, and less corruption. Most identified as Jewish but lacked religious practices and a strong Israel connection. Recognizing the economic benefits of serving, they preferred roles that would provide valuable civilian labor market skills – drivers, mechanics, medical assistants – over prestigious or combat positions.

Vlad's trajectory from a small industrial town in central Russia to the IDF was typical. Prior to the age of sixteen, Vlad did not identify as Jewish, and his family did not observe Jewish holidays. However, due to Russia's economic recession and increasing corruption, Vlad's family began contemplating immigrating to Israel. Their plan involved Vlad going to Israel first, taking advantage of the benefits available to lone soldier, finding employment, and eventually supporting his parents' immigration. He found out about the Sela program, the ten-month acculturation program for high school graduates, and decided to join in.

My parents didn't have a lot of money so I knew that if I stayed in Russia, I wouldn't be able to afford a good university ... I come from a small industrial city with lots of factories. You are born, go to school, and work in a factory. That's it. The air is so polluted that everyone has asthma and cancer. Israel isn't easy, of course, but it's like I was given a gift, a chance for a better life. And the weather... in Russia, winter lasts for eight months. In Israel, I can see the ocean from my window.

Vlad enlisted in 2016, after ensuring exemption from combat service due to his asthma. Upon joining his unit, the overseeing officer presented him with a choice between becoming a driver or a cook. Vlad recalls, "Obviously, I wanted to be a driver because I would receive a free driving license and have the opportunity to travel and explore the country."

As with North American Jewish soldiers, for FSU enlistees such as Vlad, the goal was immigration to Israel and military service provides the means to that end. However, unlike their North American counterparts, they were less driven by Zionist values and the purpose of acculturation, but rather by the material opportunities that Israel and IDF service offer.

Similar to North American Jewish soldiers, the majority of FSU soldiers did not immediately join the IDF without a preparatory period. Approximately one-third of the enlistees took part in the post high school Sela program, while another third participated in Na'ale, studying high school in Israel on student visas. Having spent their entire high school years in Israel with full sponsorship, Na'ale graduates often presented a blend of pragmatic motivations and a desire to contribute and integrate into Israeli society. The

secluded conditions in Na'ale made them eager to leave the “Russian Ghetto” and explore Israeli culture beyond its protective walls. Military service not only offered material benefits but also provided the opportunity to immerse themselves in the culture and form friendships with native Israelis.

Yuliya, from Ukraine, offered insights into life in Na'ale and how it shaped her motivations:

Na'ale was the best time of my life, but I wasn't like very independent. It's like a summer camp where everything is taken care of and you're isolated. In school, we felt different from Israeli students. They acted like they owned the place, while we were the "Russians." They even called us "orphans." They dressed sloppily and walked around barefoot. We didn't understand the culture. Some of the Israelis in our class made fun of us when we couldn't speak Hebrew properly. I was afraid to speak Hebrew because of that. We only spoke Russian with each other. I really wanted to connect with Israelis in the military, to speak Hebrew and understand how things work here ... I wanted to serve as a dental assistant with the hope that it would help me later to get into medical school. Then, on the first day of the training course, I found that 90 percent of the cadets were Russians.

In summary, FSU soldiers diverged markedly from North American Jews, with tenuous Jewish identity and scant Zionist affiliation. Their enlistment motivations centered on pragmatic socioeconomic advancement, resembling classic immigration incentives. However, pre-army immigration programs like Na'ale also cultivated some cultural integration goals. Still, the predominant drive remained practical, viewing military service as a strategic means to access Israel's opportunities, not an end itself. This cost-benefit calculus mirrors economically-motivated migrant approaches more than ideological diaspora solidarity.

Israeli Americans: reconnection, avoiding stigma, and personal growth

As second-generation immigrants, Israeli Americans grow up in “transnational social field” (Levitt & Schiller, 2004), navigating multiple cultural norms and expectations. Despite American upbringing, they often expressed a sense of otherness with a yearning to explore their Israeli roots (Lev Ari & Cohen, 2018). Approaching graduation, they face a dilemma between the American college path or the Israeli military path.

Enlistment motivations range from struggles assimilating in America, proving their Israeli belonging, solidarity with fellow Israelis, and a quest for independence and personal growth. However, the core driver is a belief that military service is integral to Israeli identity, an essential prerequisite for future life in Israel. Many used terms like “imposter” or “fake” to describe how they felt about not doing military service. Whether or not they plan to permanently reside there, they cannot envision future life in Israel without first fulfilling this national rite of passage. Dan, who left Israel for Boston, Massachusetts at the age of eight, shared his views:

I hear all these Israelis in America saying things like “Israel is my home” and whatever. I didn't feel comfortable with it. I think it's not fair to call it your home before

you do your duty. It's what makes it mine. I can't just enjoy the sun and the beach there, it's just not fair. It's the one thing that every Israeli should do for the country.

Along with the integral relationship between serving and living in Israel, expressed by Dan, the IDF represented a chance to reclaim and strengthen Israeli identity eroded by years overseas. As Roy, who moved to Washington, DC at four years old, explained:

Yeah, I speak Hebrew, but what did I really have in common with Israelis? Nothing. People think I am Israeli, but I grew up eating PBNJ. I didn't really have the Israeli mentality, that Israeli roughness. I didn't go to school here, I don't know the TV shows they watched, I don't have a hometown. The army is what I share with other Israelis. The army gave me that feeling of home, like I really belong. You go on the street wearing uniform and merchants call you for a free pizza and falafel. You don't feel like an outsider.

While Dan and Roy emphasized military service for identity reconnection and future life in Israel, others saw military service as a chance for personal development. Those feeling alienated from American society often saw enlistment as an opportunity for personal growth unattainable in college. Julie, who left Israel at four years old to Dallas, Texas, articulated her thoughts about school and college:

In high school we partied a lot. I went along to fit in, but I hated it. It felt so fake – people drinking together but not really being friends. Just seemed sad and lonely, even in a crowd. I knew I had to get away from that scene and those kinds of so-called friends. College felt like more of the same – parties all the time but no real connections. I needed a timeout to figure things out. Joining the army felt like the right move - a chance to do something meaningful and get my head straight. I was looking for purpose, not just parties.

Rachel, like Julie, rejected college culture and turn to military service seeking for empowerment, maturity, and distinctive skills. Born to Israeli parents in Los Angeles, she articulated this sentiment:

Honestly, it was super selfish. I did it for myself, not so much for the country. I wanted to step out of my comfort zone, meet new people, learn more about Israel, and discover more about myself – how to handle stress and become more independent. The army makes you stronger and more resilient. You have to overcome both physical and mental challenges. I wouldn't have experienced this in college. I would have shied away from it and stayed in my comfort zone.

In summary, as second-generation immigrants navigating complex identities, Israeli Americans predominantly join the IDF to cement their connection to Israel, avoid being perceived as free riders, and legitimize their right to live there someday. Military service represents the quintessential Israeli experience and renews their eroded sense of belonging after years abroad. Some also view enlistment as an opportunity for independence, adventure, and personal growth unavailable in the American college path many feel disconnected from.

Discussion and conclusion

Prior research has depicted DMS as a temporary, isolated event leading to eventual return to the source country. However, this study situates DMS in Israel within the country's broader efforts to encourage Jewish immigration and cultivate an active diaspora community. The analysis shows that military service provides diaspora individuals a platform to reflect on future life in the homeland, seek cultural integration, and gain acceptance. Despite varied motivational emphases across backgrounds, all origin groups recognized IDF service as an essential stepping stone for immigration, integration, and legitimacy in Israeli society.

It is important to note, however, that perceptions of the IDF as an inclusive melting pot reflect diaspora nostalgia more than current realities. In practice, the ethos of the "people's army" has declined amid falling recruitment and stratified tracks that reinforce hierarchies rather than promote integration (Lehrer, 2021; Levy, 2007). As such, soldiers' idealized expectations risk disillusionment and disappointment. Studies on ethnic return migration show unfulfilled high hopes frequently cause re-emigration (Tsuda & Song, 2018). Addressing this point, Shklyan (2022) explored integration struggles of Israel diaspora soldiers, highlighting cultural divides and failures to form lasting native Israeli friendships. However, Shklyan found no significant differences in integration struggles between those who ultimately stayed in Israel post-service versus those who left. Further research should scrutinize how unfulfilled expectations shape post-discharge residence plans and compare migration patterns between satisfied and disillusioned soldiers.

The distinct motivational patterns presented here allow for formulating three distinct models. The *ideological model* posits that cultivating a strong communal identity sets the stage for future, more demanding commitments. This resonates with other high-risk voluntary contexts like social movements and refugee rescue efforts (Fox & Brehm, 2018; McAdam, 2013), where early socialization and activism prime future mobilization. This model is observed among North American Jews raised in communities highly valuing Israel and Zionism. Their socialization readies them for potential riskier commitments. But ideological beliefs alone rarely suffice for military mobilization. It is the combination of a Zionist-religious background and personal struggles that propels individuals to Israel and the IDF. Thus, the model outlines an interactive process: communal identity establishes a foundation, but personal struggles transform passive affinity into active commitment. In other cases, major political upheavals can awaken a dormant ethnic identity, turning latent affinity into action, as observed among diaspora groups voluntarily enlisting to defend threatened homelands (Hockenos, 2003). In these instances, shared ethnicity provided latent solidarity actualized amid crisis.

While the ideological model readily applies to diaspora mobilizing into national forces, it also illuminates non-state actors' recruitment, like ISIS luring Global North Muslims (Benmelech & Klor, 2020; Dawson & Amarasingam, 2017). Certainly, differences exist, but parallels emerge in the role of religious upbringing within ethnic communities, personal struggles, and desire for a fresh start. Just as identity cultivation primes North American Jews for potential IDF service, ISIS leverages a sense of marginalization and calls to defend the faith. While controversial, comparing the interplay of ideology, personal catalysts, and protection of a presumed homeland between different case studies could provide valuable insights into diaspora military mobilization.

The *mobility model*, exemplified by FSU soldiers, prioritizes pragmatic motivations over ideology. It views military service as a strategic means for immigration, skills, and socioeconomic advancement. While FSU soldiers leverage ethnic ancestry for Israeli citizenship, they comply with military conscription to gain legitimacy, access benefits, and avoid returning to their source country. Their strategic approach resembles military migrants in other countries more than ideologically driven diaspora soldiers in Israel. Overall, the mobility model prompts reconsidering traditional view of DMS. It shifts focus from patriotism and homeland affiliation to calculated decisions for economic advancement like classic migrant cost–benefit calculations (Joppke & Rosenhek, 2002; Massey et al., 1998).

Lastly, the *reconnection model* pertains to individuals who *feel* obligated to perform military service as a means of reclaiming national belonging, avoiding stigma, and preserve future possibilities in the ancestral homeland. This typically pertains to children of expatriates from countries with military conscription laws, uncertain security, and strong military culture. It manifests in nations like Singapore and South Korea with obligatory conscription for expatriates, but also where service is technically optional for expatriates' children, as with Israel and Finland. As more countries consider, or reintroduce conscription laws, future research should explore the relationship between such countries and their expatriate communities, addressing how conscription policies shape expatriate identity and life trajectories.

In a final note, the contextual backdrop for the arguments presented in this paper lies in the political conditions preceding October 7, 2023, and the outbreak of the Israel-Gaza War. While the future remains unforeseeable, current events have already exceeded prior conflicts in scale and severity. Consequently, this ongoing war could profoundly reshape future diaspora military participation. Future studies should investigate the perspectives of upcoming cohorts in light of these evolving circumstances. The classification of diaspora military service in Israel as occurring during non-emergency periods might not align with the perceptions of future enlistees. Given the volatile security situation, several questions arise: Will there be an increase in soldiers joining out of Zionist convictions? Will there be a decrease in enlistees driven by pragmatic reasons, such as seeking a better life in Israel? Additionally, research should track impacts on overseas Jewish communities. If antisemitism rises abroad, might those communities view Israel as increasingly necessary for security, when previously this ranked as a minor factor? Although the long-term situation stays fluid, it is reasonable to assume that the present upheavals could reconstruct frameworks and reasoning underpinning diaspora military service.

Abbreviations

DMS	Diaspora Military Service
FSU	Former Soviet Union
IDF	Israel Defense Forces

Acknowledgements

I would like to express my gratitude to the following individuals for providing constructive criticisms and valuable suggestions: Yinon Cohen, Yossi Harpaz, Catherine Lee, Erez Marantz, Paul McLean, Yossi Shavit, Hana Shepherd, and Sorina Soare. Additionally, I am thankful to the anonymous reviewers and the editorial board of *Comparative Migration Studies* for their invaluable feedback. Additionally, my thanks go to the David Horowitz Research Institute on Society and Economy at Tel Aviv University for their financial support in publishing this article.

Author contributions

The author bears the sole responsibility for the data collection and analysis.

Funding

The expenses associated with publishing this article were covered by the David Horowitz Research Institute on Society and Economy at Tel Aviv University. The funders had no role in study design, data collection and analysis, decision to publish, or preparation of the manuscript.

Availability of data and materials

The datasets used and/or analysed during the current study are available from the corresponding author on reasonable request.

Declarations**Competing interests**

The author declares that they have no competing interests.

Received: 5 June 2023 Accepted: 16 January 2024

Published online: 02 February 2024

References

- Adamson, F. B. (2019). Sending states and the making of intra-diasporic politics: Turkey and its diaspora (s). *International Migration Review*, 53(1), 210–236.
- Aptekar, S. (2015). *The road to citizenship: What naturalization means for immigrants and the United States*. Rutgers University Press.
- Aptekar, S. (2023). *Green card soldier: Between model immigrant and security threat*. MIT Press.
- Arielli, N. (2014). When are foreign volunteers useful? Israel's transnational soldiers in the war of 1948 re-examined. *Journal of Military History*, 78(2), 703–724.
- Arielli, N. (2018). *From Byron to Bin Laden: A history of foreign war volunteers*. Harvard University Press.
- Arielli, N. (2023). Foreign volunteering: New trends in the historiography. In R. Rein & S. Zepp-Zwirner (Eds.), *Untold Stories of the Spanish Civil War* (pp. 12–25). Routledge.
- Basu, P. (2017). Roots tourism as return movement: Semantics and the Scottish diaspora. In M. Harper (Ed.), *Emigrant Homecomings: The Return Movements of Emigrants, 1600–2000* (pp. 131–150). Manchester University Press.
- Benmelech, E., & Klor, E. F. (2020). What explains the flow of foreign fighters to ISIS? *Terrorism and Political Violence*, 32(7), 1458–1481.
- Brubaker, R. (2005). The 'diaspora' diaspora. *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 28(1), 1–19.
- Choi, H. J., & Chung, G. Y. (2018). Divergent paths toward militarized citizenship: The "Unending" Cold War, Transnational Space of Citizenship, and International Korean Male Students. *Korea Journal*, 58(3), 76–101.
- Cohen, N. (2021). Israel's return migration industry. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 47(17), 4100–4117.
- Cohen, Y. (2011). Israeli-born emigrants: Size, destinations and selectivity. *International Journal of Comparative Sociology*, 52(1–2), 45–62.
- Creswell, J. W., & Clark, V. L. P. (2017). *Designing and conducting mixed methods research*. Sage Publications.
- Dawson, L. L., & Amarasingam, A. (2017). Talking to foreign fighters: Insights into the motivations for Hijrah to Syria and Iraq. *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, 40(3), 191–210.
- Dolberg, P., & Amit, K. (2023). On a fast-track to adulthood: Social integration and identity formation experiences of young-adults of 1.5 generation immigrants. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 49(1), 252–271.
- Fox, N., & Brehm, H. N. (2018). "I decided to save them": Factors that shaped participation in rescue efforts during genocide in Rwanda. *Social Forces*, 96(4), 1625–1648.
- Gold, S. (2002). *The Israeli Diaspora*. Routledge.
- Grasmeder, E. M. (2021). Leaning on legionnaires: Why modern states recruit foreign soldiers. *International Security*, 46(1), 147–195.
- Hanson, K., & Lin-Greenberg, E. (2019). Noncitizen soldiers: Explaining foreign recruitment by modern state militaries. *Security Studies*, 28(2), 286–320.
- Hirschhorn, S. Y. (2017). *City on a Hilltop*. Harvard University Press.
- Hockenos, P. (2003). *Homeland calling: Exile patriotism and the Balkan wars*. Cornell University Press.
- Joppke, C., & Rosenhek, Z. (2002). Contesting ethnic immigration: Germany and Israel compared. *European Journal of Sociology*, 43(3), 301–335.
- Kelner, S. (2010). *Tours that bind*. New York University Press.
- Kibria, N. (2002). Of blood, belonging, and homeland trips: Transnationalism and identity among second-generation Chinese and Korean Americans. In P. Levitt & M. C. Waters (Eds.), *The changing face of home: The transnational lives of the second generation* (pp. 295–311). Sage Publications.
- Lainer-Vos, D. (2013). *Sinews of the Nation: Constructing Irish and Zionist Bonds in the United States*. Polity Press.
- Lehrer, Z. (2021). The ethnic code: Selection practices and ethnic identities in the IDF. Tel Aviv: Van Leer Institute/Hakibbutz Hameuchad. (Hebrew).
- Lev Ari, L., & Cohen, N. (2018). Acculturation strategies and ethnic identity among second-generation Israeli migrants in the United States. *Contemporary Jewry*, 38(3), 345–364.
- Levitt, P., & Schiller, N. G. (2004). Conceptualizing simultaneity: a transnational social field perspective on society. *International Migration Review*, 38(3), 1002–1039.

- Levy, Y. (2023). Shooting without crying: The new militarization of Israel in the 2000s. Tel Aviv: Lamda. (Hebrew).
- Levy, Y. (2007). *Israel's materialist militarism*. Lexington Books.
- Lomsky-Feder, E., & Sasson-Levy, O. (2017). *Women soldiers and citizenship in Israel: Gendered encounters with the state*. Routledge.
- Malet, D. (2013). *Foreign fighters: Transnational identity in civil conflicts*. Oxford University Press.
- Massey, D. S., Arango, J., Hugo, G., Kouaouci, A., Pellegrino, A., & Taylor, J. E. (1998). *Worlds in motion: Understanding international migration at the end of the millennium*. Clarendon Press.
- McAdam, D. (2013). High and low risk/cost activism. In D. A. Snow, D. Della Porta, B. Klandermans, & D. McAdam (Eds.), *The Wiley-Blackwell Encyclopedia of Social and Political Movements*. Wiley.
- Moss, D. M. (2022). *The Arab spring abroad: Diaspora activism against authoritarian regimes*. Cambridge University Press.
- Penslar, D. J. (2013). *Jews and the Military*. Princeton University Press.
- Porch, D. (2010). *The French foreign legion: A complete history of the legendary fighting force*. Skyhorse Publishing Inc.
- Rebhun, U., & Ari, L. L. (2010). American Israelis: Migration, transnationalism, and diasporic identity. Leiden: Brill.
- Remennick, L. (2007). *Russian Jews on three continents: Identity, integration, and conflict*. Transaction Publishers.
- Sasson, T. (2014). *The New American Zionism*. New York University Press.
- Schmutz, T. (2022). "Lone Soldiers" in the Israeli Military—A Research Note on the Conceptualization of Foreign Fighters. *Terrorism and Political Violence*, 34(8), 1665–1678.
- Sheffer, G. (2003). *Diaspora politics: At home abroad*. Cambridge University Press.
- Shklyan, K. (2022). Disillusioned defenders? The integration challenges of American Jewish return migrants in the Israel Defense Forces. *Nations and Nationalism*, 28(1), 82–97.
- Skrentny, J. D., Chan, S., Fox, J., & Kim, D. (2007). Defining nations in Asia and Europe: A comparative analysis of ethnic return migration policy. *International Migration Review*, 41(4), 793–825.
- Song, K. Y. (2015). Between global dreams and national duties: The dilemma of conscription duty in the transnational lives of young Korean males. *Global Networks*, 15(1), 60–77.
- Sunata, U. (2016). Military service-migration nexus in Turkey. In I. Sirkeci, J. H. Cohen, & P. Yazgan (Eds.), *Conflict, Insecurity and Mobility* (pp. 147–157). Transnational Press London.
- Swed, O. (2023). Fighting someone else's war. *Footnotes*, 51(1).
- Tartakovsky, E. (2012). Factors affecting immigrants' acculturation intentions: A theoretical model and its assessment among adolescent immigrants from Russia and Ukraine in Israel. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 36(1), 83–99.
- Teo, T. A., & Cabuyao, P. (2018). Dual Citizenship and National Service in Singapore. In H. S. Huang & G. Ong-Webb (Eds.), *National Service in Singapore* (pp. 175–202). World Scientific.
- Tidman, Z. (2022, March 7). Over 66,000 Ukrainian men have returned from abroad to fight, says defence minister. Independent. <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/ukraine-russia-invasion-men-abroad-b2029212.html>
- Tölölyan, K. (1996). Rethinking diaspora(s): Stateless power in the transnational moment. *Diaspora: a journal of transnational studies*, 5(1), 3–36.
- Tsuda, T. (Ed.). (2009). *Diasporic Homecomings: Ethnic Return Migration in Comparative Perspective*. Stanford University Press.
- Tsuda, T., & Song, C. (Eds.). (2018). *Diasporic returns to the ethnic homeland: The Korean diaspora in comparative perspective*. Palgrave Macmillan.
- Viterna, J. S. (2006). Pulled, pushed, and persuaded: Explaining women's mobilization into the Salvadoran guerrilla army. *American Journal of Sociology*, 112(1), 1–45.
- Waldman, A., Tiargan-Orr, R., & Gal, R. (2022). Military Propensity Among Israel Defense Forces' Potential Conscripts: A re-examination and differentiation by personal preferences of enlistment motivation. *Armed Forces & Society*. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2F0095327X221101331>
- Ware, V. (2012). *Military migrants: Fighting for YOUR country*. Palgrave Macmillan.
- Weiss, N. (2020). Good radicals? Trajectories of pro-Kurdish political and militant mobilisation to the wars in Syria, Turkey and Iraq. *Critical Studies on Terrorism*, 13(3), 373–395.
- Yohanani, L. (2022). High-risk transnationalism: Why do Israeli-Americans volunteer in the Israeli military? *Sociological Forum*, 37(2), 533–556.
- Yohanani, L. (2023). *Fighting to Belong: Diaspora Soldiers, Immigration, and National Identity in Israel* (Doctoral dissertation, Rutgers University-School of Graduate Studies).

Publisher's Note

Springer Nature remains neutral with regard to jurisdictional claims in published maps and institutional affiliations.