FILLING THE INFORMATION GAP:

Telegram's Rise Following October 7th and the Challenges for Democracies

Inbal Orpaz

PUBLICATION CREDITS

Note on the use of this publication

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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Inbal is a consultant for the Israeli Innovation Authority in the fields of research, data, and tech macroeconomic analysis. Her experience includes a tenure as a researcher at the Institute for National Security Studies (INSS), where she focused on democracies and national security in an era of post-truth and fake news. Her latest research, backed by the Israeli Ministry of Intelligence, exposed patterns of foreign interference campaigns on Israeli social media. At the INSS, she also researched the digital arena during *Operation Guardian of the Walls* (2021), deepfakes and national security, and using technology to identify and combat disinformation.

Formerly a senior tech correspondent for TheMarker, a leading financial newspaper, Inbal has established herself as a consultant and public speaker on tech ecosystems and macro-economics, gender diversity in tech, the future of work, and integrating AI tools into daily tasks.

Her contributions have been recognized with her election to the Forbes Under30 list for 2017, the Tech12 most influential people in social media, and Geektime's list of the 100 most influential figures in Israeli high-tech for 2015.

Inbal holds an MBA from Tel Aviv University, where she also participated in an international exchange student program at New York University (NYU). She graduated cum laude with a BA in Film Studies and Economics from Tel Aviv University.

SUMMARY

Since the onset of the *Iron Swords* war on October 7, 2023, Telegram has rapidly become a go-to source for Israelis seeking immediate updates. **In the first three months of the war, the seven largest Hebrew-language current affairs Telegram channels collectively gained approximately 1.4 million new subscribers** – a more than 2.5-fold increase. Survey data representative of the Israeli Jewish population conducted in late 2024 further highlights this trend: **62% of respondents identify as active Telegram users, with 36.5% of them joining after the war began.** Of these newcomers, 75% signed up right after October 7th, reflecting how uncertainty drives people toward platforms offering unfiltered, on-demand news.

This paper examines the drivers behind Telegram's wartime popularity, the nature of its content, and the broader implications for liberal democracies in crisis.
– to post updates directly to followers without being subjected to editorial checks Telegram's do core pby with testcablishledv etabicdn in journalostsi squicetimes. During the early stages of the war, many Telegram channel admins disseminated graphic Hamas-produced footage seldom shown on mainstream Israeli media, raising concerns about potential misinformation, psychological terror, and breaches of Israeli censorship rules. This highlights **a tension between the platform's ability to provide unfiltered updates and the risks associated with its unregulated nature.**

This rapid growth in Telegram's use underscores the platform's double-edged nature: while this expansion helps fulfill the public's demand for unfiltered updates, it also magnifies the risks posed by the platform's lack of regulation. **These factors may have collectively impacted the resilience of the Israeli public during the ongoing war, potentially resulting in heightened stress and emotional strain.**

In the "Telegram era", traditional censorship practices, including government-mandated content controls, are increasingly bypassed. As a result, subscribers may encounter distressing material, sometimes graphic, hours before it is released by official outlets, if at all.

The survey data was collected roughly a year into the conflict, in late October 2024 – following key events such as the assassination of Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah, the killing of Hamas leader Yahya Sinwar, and during the Israeli invasion of Lebanon.

Drawing on this survey, the study reveals **a tension between reliability and immediacy**. Traditional outlets (radio, TV, and online news sites) remain widely trusted. However, **Telegram has emerged as a leading choice in emergencies, with**

a quarter of respondents relying on it first for breaking news. This demonstrates how public demand for raw, rapid updates can overshadow concerns about fact-checking and accuracy.

To address these risks, the paper advocates for enhanced digital and media literacy, particularly around Telegram channels that might spread misleading or psychologically unsettling content. It also calls for transparency about channel administrators' identities and for fostering a comprehensive discussion on the implications of censorship within the context of social media. Furthermore, it is crucial to explore Telegram's potential as a growing platform for disseminating critical information, recognizing the opportunities it offers for real-time updates in emergency situations.

Ultimately, Israel's experience offers a compelling case study for other democracies confronting emergencies. By examining how **citizens turn to decentralized platforms when traditional media is perceived as slow or filtered**. Policymakers, journalists, and public sector officials can better navigate and mitigate the trade-offs between speed and reliability. Balancing the public's demand for immediate information with the need for factual, responsible reporting remains crucial to safeguarding both national security and societal resilience in times of crisis.

Summary of Findings

The following are the main findings of this study, offering a comprehensive analysis of how the war reshaped Israeli news consumption patterns and positioned Telegram as a leading platform for real-time updates. These findings are contextualized within the broader transformations in media practices and trust dynamics during the war.

News Consumption During The War and the Rise of Telegram:

- 74.5% of respondents reported increased news consumption due to the security situation in Israel post October 7th.

- The heightened security situation in Israel also led 56.9% of respondents to diversify their news sources, using a wider variety of outlets.

- The most popular media outlets for news consumption are news websites, social media platforms, and news channels on television, with approximately 80% of respondents using each at least several times a week.

- Social media platforms, including WhatsApp groups and Telegram channels, were characterized by high-frequency use for staying updated on news, with many users accessing them multiple times daily.

- **For breaking news, the most popular platforms are news websites, Telegram channels, and television news channels, with approximately 25% of respondents relying on each.** This underscores Telegram's position as a central platform for real-time updates, comparable to traditional news outlets.

Telegram News Channels and Usage Habits During the War:

- In the first two days of the war (October 7th-8th), seven major Hebrew-language Telegram news channels collectively gained over 440,000 new subscribers, marking a combined 52% increase. Within the first three months after the war began, these channels collectively grew from 850,000 subscribers on October 6th (the day before the war) to 2.24 million – a 2.6-fold increase.

- The rapid subscriber growth observed in Telegram channels during the initial days of the war slowed afterward.

- Over the course of the year since the war began, subscriber numbers for Hebrew-language Telegram news channels steadily increased, with surges observed around major news events.

- 62.5% of survey respondents were active Telegram users: 32.6% engaged frequently, 29.9% reported using it occasionally. 34.0% were familiar with the app but not using it.

- 36.5% of users began using Telegram after the war started, with 75% adopting it immediately after the outbreak.

- **Over half of Telegram users reported checking news updates on the platform at least once a day.**

- Telegram "Power Users" – those who use the platform at least once a day for news – are primarily men and aged 25-54 (55% daily use). They tend to trust the government and to have joined Telegram after October 7th.

Key Characteristics of Hebrew-Language Telegram Channels for Wartime News Updates

Content and Style:

- Visually Rich Content, Including Explicit Material: Posts feature uncredited images or videos, often graphic and absent from traditional Israeli media.

- Short, Informal, and Occasionally Biased Style: Updates are brief, often reflecting administrators' opinions or using slang.

User Behavior and Platform Dynamics:

- High Subscriber Engagement: Posts often receive hundreds of emoji reactions

Filling the Information Gap

and comments, indicating active interaction.

Credibility and Verification:

- Anonymity of Channel Admins: Many administrators are unidentified, sparking concerns about transparency and accountability.
- Publication of Content from Hostile Sources: Channels distribute material from entities like Hamas or Hezbollah, often considered "psychological terror."
- Absence of Journalistic Ethics and Standards: These channels often disregard journalistic ethics, regularly spreading unverified information.
- Spreading Unverified Rumors via Telegram Channel Comments: Comment sections often serve as platforms for misinformation and speculation.

Reasons Explaining the Surge in Telegram Usage Among Israelis Post-October 7th

Type of content consumed in Telegram:

- Among Telegram users, more than half of respondents (55.6%) reported using the platform primarily for accessing news channels.
- Hebrew-language Telegram news channels with large subscriber bases, often run by anonymous or unfamiliar administrators, dominate as the primary sources for news updates, with 62.7% of respondents who use Telegram relying on them. Channels like 'Israel News on Telegram,' 'Israel News Without Censorship,' and 'Abu Ali Express' exemplify this strong reliance on unofficial sources for real-time news.
- The second most popular categories are channels run by Israeli journalists (27.7%) and official Israeli entities, such as the IDF or Home Front Command (23.6%). This demonstrates Telegram's dual role in providing both mainstream and alternative news.
- A minority of respondents reported following non-Israeli Telegram channels, mainly to access information unavailable in Israeli media or Hebrew-language Telegram channels.

Reasons for starting to use Telegram and for current use:

Before the war, the most common reason for starting to use Telegram was entertainment. With the onset of the war, these motivations shifted significantly toward consuming news, particularly news that is quickly disseminated, uncensored, and unavailable in mainstream media.

Perceptions of Telegram

- Respondents most frequently described Telegram as providing "Uncensored information" (63.2%) and "Immediate news" (60.6%), while 28.5% referred to it as a source of "Exclusive reports ('scoops')."

- **Over 60% of respondents reported viewing Telegram as "the best way to get news updates quickly."**

- Users also acknowledged Telegram's association with unreliable information: 39.9% described it as a "source of rumors," and 30.3% referred to it as "irresponsible media channel."

Media and Telegram Credibility and Trust

While traditional media retains a baseline of credibility, many respondents remain skeptical about its transparency:

- 49.2% of respondents reported trusting news from major TV channels and newspapers.

- 42% of respondents indicated believing that media organizations hide important information from the public.

- 38.5% of respondents declared preferring to consume news in its raw form, such as videos or images, without mediation or interpretation.

- **21.3% of respondents claimed to prioritize immediate news updates, even if they are not always accurate.**

Telegram is positioned between traditional media and social media platforms in terms of reliability:

- Traditional media platforms were seen as significantly more reliable than social media and messaging platforms. Radio was rated the most reliable (65.1% of respondents), followed by television channels (54.3%), and news websites (54.1%).

- Conversely, only 20.1% of respondents reported trusting news disseminated on social media more than traditional media outlets

Telegram's speed and accessibility made it a vital source for real-time information, but its perceived ties to misinformation and lack of transparency undermined trust:

- **58.3% of respondents agreed that "There is a lot of fake news on Telegram".**

- Telegram was labeled a "source of rumors" by 49% of opposition-supporting respondents, compared to 35% of coalition-supporting respondents.

- 37.1% of respondents were concerned about the anonymity of Telegram channel administrators, while 34% expressed little or no concern.
- Coalition-aligned respondents showed greater trust in Telegram, with 45% rating it as "very reliable" or "extremely reliable," compared to only 25% of opposition-aligned respondents.

Media Orientation and Information Sharing

- When asked about fact-checking habits for news received from unofficial channels like WhatsApp or Telegram, 36.7% of respondents said they rarely share news updates.
- 36.2% of respondents reported fact-checking by verifying if the content is also published by official sources.
- 18.8% of respondents admitted they don't fact-check because they trust the content they receive.
- 46.9% of respondents stated verifying Telegram information before sharing it.
- 28.5% of respondents admitted to frequently sharing news from Telegram without explicitly verifying its accuracy.

Research Framework and Methodology

This study examines the substantial growth in Telegram usage in Israel during and after the outbreak of the war, which began on October 7th, 2023, aiming to quantify this growth, explore the underlying reasons and motivations for this surge, and understand how Telegram is perceived by its users.

To achieve these objectives, this research employed a mixed-methods approach incorporating:

1. **Data from Telegram analytics tools** (such as TGStat), which provide quantitative insights into channel activity, including the number of subscribers per channel, the daily number of posts, and other relevant metrics.

2. **Content analysis of major Hebrew-language Telegram news channels,** conducted through manual monitoring from the start of the war (October 7, 2023) and throughout the following year, focusing particularly on peak events and their reflection on the platform.

3. **A survey** designed to understand user motivations for adopting Telegram and their perceptions of Telegram and other media outlets.

Survey Methodology

- The survey was administered online, utilizing an online panel using the Israeli sample provider "Panel4All".

- The survey period: 23-27 October 2024.

- Data collection was conducted with a sample size of 518 participants over the age of 18 representative of the Israeli Jewish population (including a pilot sample of 100 respondents). Additional respondent demographic information is provided in the respondent demographics appendix (Appendix B).

- The margin of error is up to 4.4% at a 95% confidence level.

- Data collection and analysis as described below was carried out by the Sarid Research Institute.

The process

- Panel members received email invitations offering them the opportunity to participate in the survey, with incentives provided as compensation for their

involvement.

- Participants were informed that the survey focused on digital and news consumption habits within Israel.

- The questionnaire was tested with a pilot group of 100 respondents.

- During data collection, quotas were employed to ensure the sample's representativeness within the Jewish population[1] concerning age, gender, and levels of religious observance (for more details, see Appendix B: Respondent Demographics).

- The survey provided participants with different sets of questions based on their Telegram usage. Participants who indicated they used Telegram were asked about their specific usage habits, while those who did not use the platform were asked about their reasons for avoiding it. Both groups were also asked about their perceptions of Telegram

- A digital copy of the questionnaire is available in Appendix A.

Survey Data Analysis

The data analysis of the survey responses involved several key steps. Initially, descriptive statistics were calculated for each survey item to summarize the data. This was followed by hypothesis testing and the application of regression models to address the research questions. Finally, cluster analysis was employed to identify distinct groups based on usage patterns and attitudes towards Telegram, allowing for further examination of these groups in terms of demographic and other characteristics.

Explanations for each phase of the analysis are provided in detail:

1. **Step One: Descriptive Statistics**

   Each survey item's responses were calculated and represented by a visual representation, typically a chart, illustrating the distribution of responses. These were analyzed in combination with other relevant variables to facilitate comparative analysis. The majority of survey variables were either categorical or ordinal; ordinal variables were predominantly measured on a 1-5 Likert scale to capture the extent of respondents' agreement with specific statements.

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[1] The data collection methodology selected for this research, i.e., online panel, has some shortcomings when it comes to representing the non-Jewish (mainly Arab) population in Israel. The non-Jewish population in online panels is biased towards younger ages, and a good representation of this subgroup is hard to obtain. Hence, in this instance we chose to focus on the Jewish population which comprises 80% of the population.

2. Step Two: Hypothesis Testing and Regression Models

The second stage of analysis involved hypothesis testing and regression modeling. Chi-square tests were employed for comparisons of categorical variables, while logistic regression models were used to identify predictors of specific outcomes. Significant findings ($p < 0.05$, and in certain cases $p < 0.1$ following false discovery rate correction) were highlighted.

Univariate logistic regressions were applied with binary dependent variables. In these cases, a model of one dependent variable against one explanatory variable was fitted, and its significance evaluated. The Odds Ratio[2] and its associated p-value are reported for these univariate tests.

3. Step three: Cluster analysis

In the third phase of data analysis, the population was segmented into distinct groups ("clusters") using the clustering method, grouping together observations with similar characteristics, according to the classifying variables.

The K-means clustering algorithm, which utilizes an iterative process to group observations based on their proximity, was employed until a satisfactory outcome was reached, ensuring that points within each cluster were close together and distinct from those in other clusters.

Following segmentation, the results were analyzed in relation to both classifying variables and demographic characteristics. The optimal number of clusters was determined by evaluating inter-class and intra-class distances. This approach offered deeper insights into the population, establishing a structured framework for understanding news consumption patterns, attitudes, and their influence on individuals' relationships with Telegram across different clusters.

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2   The Odds Ratio is the exponentiated coefficient from the logistic regression model. It represents the change in the odds of the outcome (dependent variable) occurring given a one-unit increase in the predictor variable. A significant odds ratio indicates a statistically significant association between the predictor and outcome variables.

Background: The Telegram Platform

Telegram is an instant messaging platform launched in 2013 as a mobile-based social network. According to company reports[3], as of November 2024, it has 950 million users worldwide. Its headquarters are in Dubai.

A key feature of Telegram is its channels, which allow a single user or a group of administrators to send messages to a large number of followers. **Telegram allows users to create channels with an unlimited number of subscribers** – some channels have hundreds of thousands, or even millions, of followers. The popular WhatsApp platform later introduced its own similar "channels" feature for updates, but most communication on WhatsApp occurs within closed groups or as a direct communication tool between individuals, rather than public channels. Additionally, **Telegram channels allow subscribers to interact with messages using emojis or text comments. This facilitates discussions and the sharing of additional information related to channel update**s.

Telegram was launched as a mobile-based social network by the Russian brothers Pavel and Nikolai Durov, who also founded the Russian social network VKontakte, and developed Telegram as a side project. In 2014, Pavel Durov stepped down as CEO of VKontakte. He claimed[4] that he left due to growing pressure to remove content that he felt infringed upon freedom of expression during the war in the Crimean Peninsula, which he cited as his breaking point. Shortly thereafter, he announced in a Facebook post[5] that he was seeking a new location for his "new initiative", Telegram. This is how Durov described the ideal location for the new company headquarters from his perspective: "We dislike bureaucracy, police states, big governments, wars, socialism and excessive regulation. We like freedoms, strong judicial systems, small governments, free markets, neutrality and civil rights".

And indeed, **Telegram was founded with the vision of creating a platform that prioritizes freedom of expression and privacy** – of a kind that was not achievable for the Durov brothers in Russia. Relative to other networks, like those owned by Meta (including Facebook, Instagram and WhatsApp), Telegram has minimal content moderation[6].

Telegram's features have facilitated the creation of channels and accounts

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3 Telegram FAQ

4 Pavel Durov Resigns As Head Of Russian Social Network VK.com, Ukraine Conflict Was The Tipping Point | TechCrunch

5 https://www.facebook.com/durov/posts/pfbid0qAKkzX2C9N4kGg7fXeTt4ySZwBkPwdHc5PksqHpsVN9eS1DEXoqn5R8T9QaGHnmYl

6 A Safe Space to Hate: White Supremacist Mobilisation on Telegram

distributing content related to a broad spectrum of activities, some of which are illegal. Examples include drug trafficking, various other criminal activities, the non-consensual sharing of intimate images, some generated through deepfake technologies, and content associated with extremist groups and terrorist organizations[7]. Among other things, Telegram was widely used among ISIS activists[8].

In the context of Telegram's use during the war in Ukraine, Durov addressed the platform's limitations in a wartime environment on February 27, 2022[9]: "Telegram channels are increasingly becoming a source of unverified information related to the Ukrainian events. We do not have the physical ability to verify all channel publications for accuracy. **I urge users from Russia and Ukraine to be skeptical of any data that is currently being distributed in Telegram.** We do not want Telegram to be used as a tool that exacerbates conflicts and incites ethnic hatred". These limitations are also relevant to the situation in Israel following October 7th.

In Durov's original message, an additional sentence was written that was later deleted: "If the situation escalates, we will consider the possibility of partially or completely restricting the work of Telegram channels in the countries involved for the duration of the conflict".Later that day, he published another message[10], stating: "Many users have asked us not to consider disabling Telegram channels during the conflict, as we are their only source of information. In connection with these requests, we have decided not to consider such measures. However, I ask you once again to double-check and not to take on faith the data that is published in Telegram channels during this difficult period".

This sequence of events demonstrates the challenges associated with the usage of platforms such as Telegram, which facilitate the rapid and unregulated dissemination of information, during emergencies. These issues will be explored in greater depth within the context of Israel in subsequent sections of this publication.

On August 24, 2024, Durov was arrested after landing in his private plane in France and questioned about the use of the platform for criminal activity. Media reports[11] stated that Durov was charged with failing to curb extremist and terrorist content after days of questioning and released on €5 million bail. Durov used his Telegram channel to criticize the arrest and interrogation, which he argued

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7   Aleksandra Urman & Stefan Katz (2022) What they do in the shadows: examining the far-right networks on Telegram, Information, Communication & Society, 25:7, 904-923, DOI: 10.1080/1369118X.2020.1803946

8   (PDF) Telegram: the Mighty Application that ISIS Loves

9   https://t.me/durov_russia/40

10 https://t.me/durov_russia/41

11 Pavel Durov: Telegram founder says France arrest is 'misguided', After CEO was arrested, Telegram says it will now turn some bad actors' data over to law enforcement | CNN Business

were based on outdated laws predating the smartphone era[12]. He claimed that the company cooperates with law enforcement. In his message published in his English Telegram channel after his release, he stated: "If a country is unhappy with an internet service, the established practice is to start a legal action against the service itself. Using laws from the pre-smartphone era to charge a CEO with crimes committed by third parties on the platform he manages is a misguided approach".

Later that month, Durov announced that Telegram had updated its terms of service and privacy policy. According to the message[13] he posted "We've made it clear that the IP addresses and phone numbers of those who violate our rules can be disclosed to relevant authorities in response to valid legal requests".

These events and Telegram's architecture design illustrate the challenges posed by a platform that allows content sharing – including problematic and criminal content – with minimal content moderation. Certain aspects of these challenges will be discussed in this paper.

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12 https://t.me/durov/342
13 https://t.me/durov/345

Media Consumption Habits in Israel Before October 7th

Before the war, Israelis relied on various platforms for news consumption. According to the 2022 Social Survey by the Israeli Central Bureau of Statistics (CBS),[14] **television was the main source of news for about half of the population** (47%), and its usage increased with age. 42% primarily obtained news from Israeli news websites, and **15% primarily relied on social media**.

Regarding pre-war perceptions of information in the media, according to the Social Survey, 49% believed that news information published online could replace news broadcasts in traditional media outlets. Only 35% of survey respondents considered traditional media outlets to be reliable sources of information. However, according to the survey, the credibility of traditional media outlets (radio, print, and television) was perceived as higher than that of social networks. Television was perceived as credible (to a large or some extent) by 44% of the public, compared to 28% who perceived social networks as credible.

Compared to other countries, Israelis reported relatively low pre-war reliance on social media for news. According to GWI data published in Meltwater's October 2023 global review report[15] 26% of Israeli social media users cited reading news stories as their main reason for using these platforms, compared to the global average of 34%.

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14 Data collection from the 2022 Social Survey on attitudes toward media and social networks, CBS
15 DIGITAL 2023, OCTOBER GLOBAL STATSHOT REPORT, Meltwater

Figure 1

Percentage of social media users aged 16-64 who say that reading news stories is a main reason for using social media
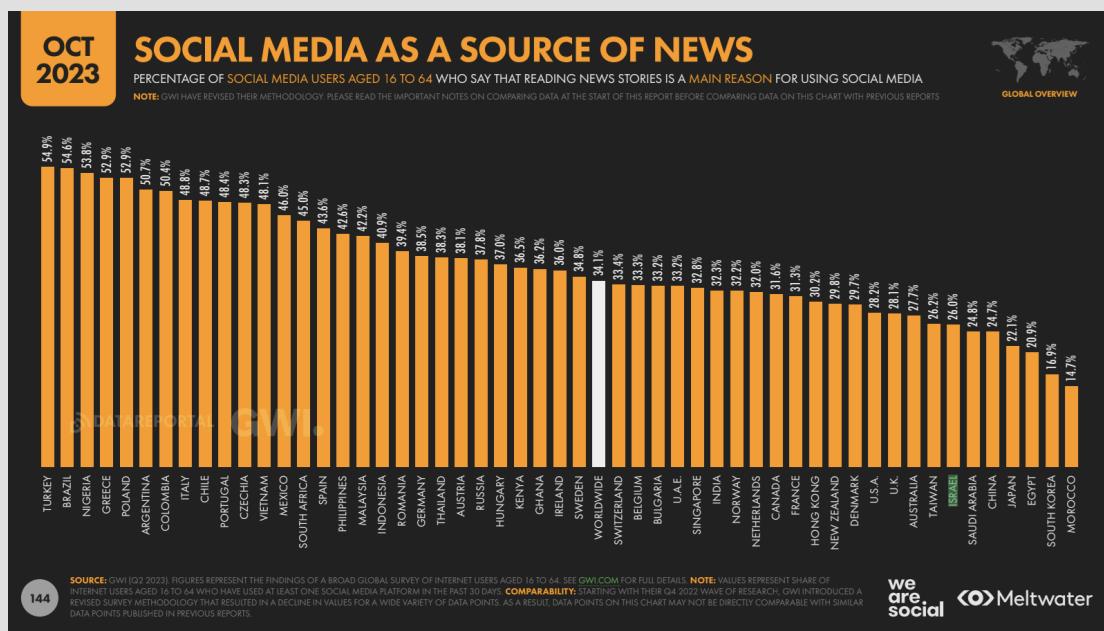
Source: DIGITAL 2023, OCTOBER GLOBAL STATSHOT REPORT, Meltwater

Compared to other social media platforms, **Telegram usage in Israel before the war was relatively limited**. According to a survey conducted by the Israel Internet Association in January 2023[16], as of that time, 97% of the population used YouTube, 95% used WhatsApp, 90% used Facebook, and 70% used Messenger or Instagram. In comparison, **54% of respondents reported using Telegram**; of these, about half used it at least three times a week. Telegram use, according to the survey, was more common among men: almost a quarter (24%) of men used Telegram daily, compared to less than a tenth of women (9%). The age group that used Telegram in Israel was mainly 22-39 year olds (46% of respondents in these age groups).

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16 Social Media and Digital Platforms Use in Israel (2023) - Israel Internet Association - (ISOC-IL)

Digital Media Consumption After October 7th

The October 7th terror attack and the subsequent war led to increased news consumption in Israel. According to survey data from this study, 74.5% of respondents reported increased news consumption due to the security situation in Israel. 18.7% maintained their previous level of news intake, and 6.8% reported a decrease.

News consumption increases with age: 36% of individuals aged 60 and above report consuming news for 3-4 hours daily, compared to only 13% of individuals aged 20-24. In addition, the survey findings indicate that **women were significantly more likely than men to increase their news consumption due to the security**

Figure 2

Has the volume of your news consumption changed due to the current conflict (security situation)?

Decreased
6.8%

Didn't Change
18.7%

Increased
74.5%
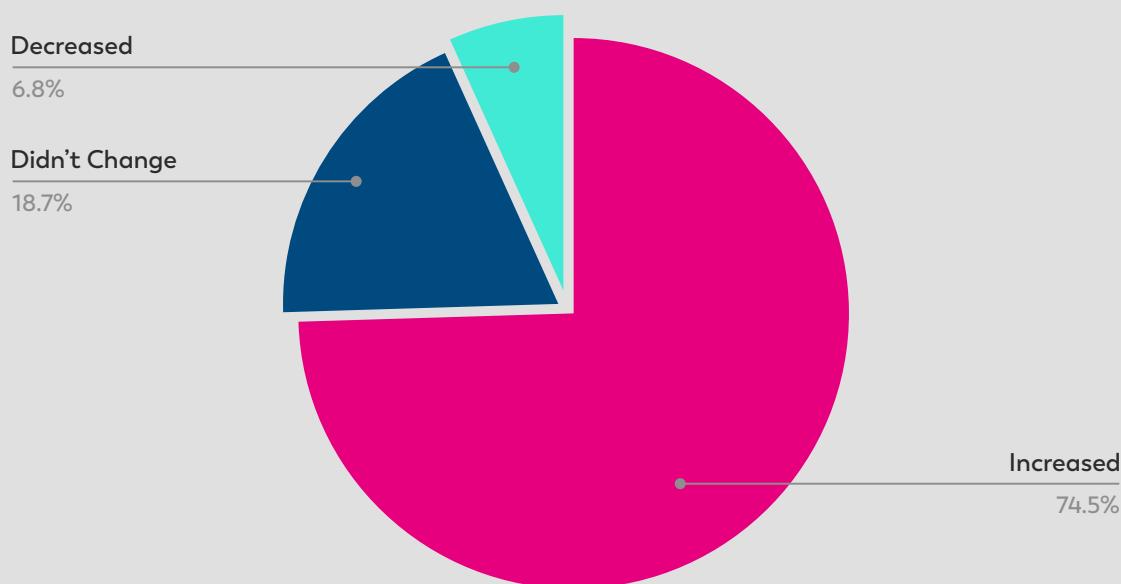
Source: *"Filling the Information Gap" Study Survey, October 2024*

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17 Based on survey data analyzed using a univariate logistic regression model. The Odds Ratio (OR) for females compared to males was 2.3 (p-value < 0.001), indicating that women were 2.3 times more likely than men to report increased news consumption due to the security situation.

The heightened security situation in Israel also prompted a **diversification of news sources**: **56.9% of respondents reported using more sources due to the security situation in Israel**, 38.8% maintained the same sources, and 4.2% reported using fewer sources.

Figure 3

As a result of the security situation, how has the variety of sources from which you consume news changed?

Less Sources
4.2%

Same Sources
38.8%

More Sources
56.9%
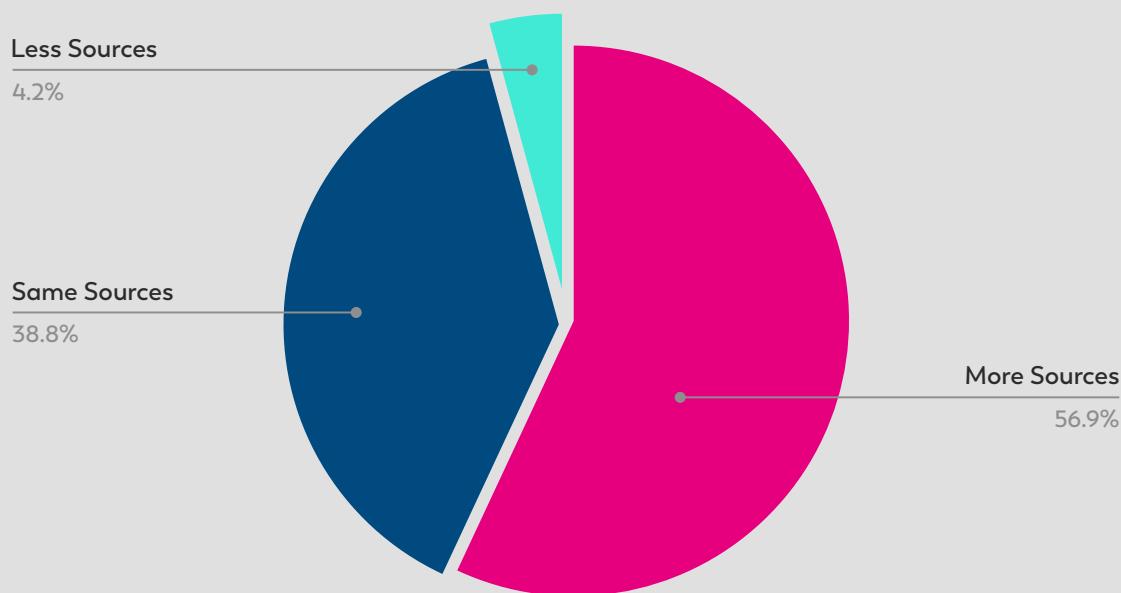
Source: "Filling the Information Gap" Study Survey, October 2024

Analysis of these shifts in news consumption habits shows that 51.7% of respondents increased both their overall news consumption volume and the number of sources they used due to the security situation in Israel. 22.8% increased their total news consumption volume but used the same number or fewer sources.

Most respondents reported consuming news for up to two hours per day. 42.5% of the respondents consume up to one hour of news daily, 35.1% consumed one to two hours, and the remaining 22.3% consumed more than three hours of news daily and can thus be considered "heavy news consumers".

According to the survey, several factors are associated with spending a significant amount of time consuming news during the was[18]: Older individuals, particularly those aged 50 and above, are significantly more likely to report increased

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18 At least three hours a day

consumption compared to the 18–22 age group. Increased trust in the government and support for coalition parties are also positively associated with higher news consumption.[19]

Figure 4

Typically, how much time per day do you dedicate to consuming news? (Across all platforms, including watching television, reading news websites, checking Telegram channels, etc.)

News Consumption per day

- A few Minutes or less: 9.1%
- Up to 1 Hour: 33.4%
- 1-2 Hours: 35.1%
- 3-4 Hours: 15.4%
- Above 4 Hours: 6.9%
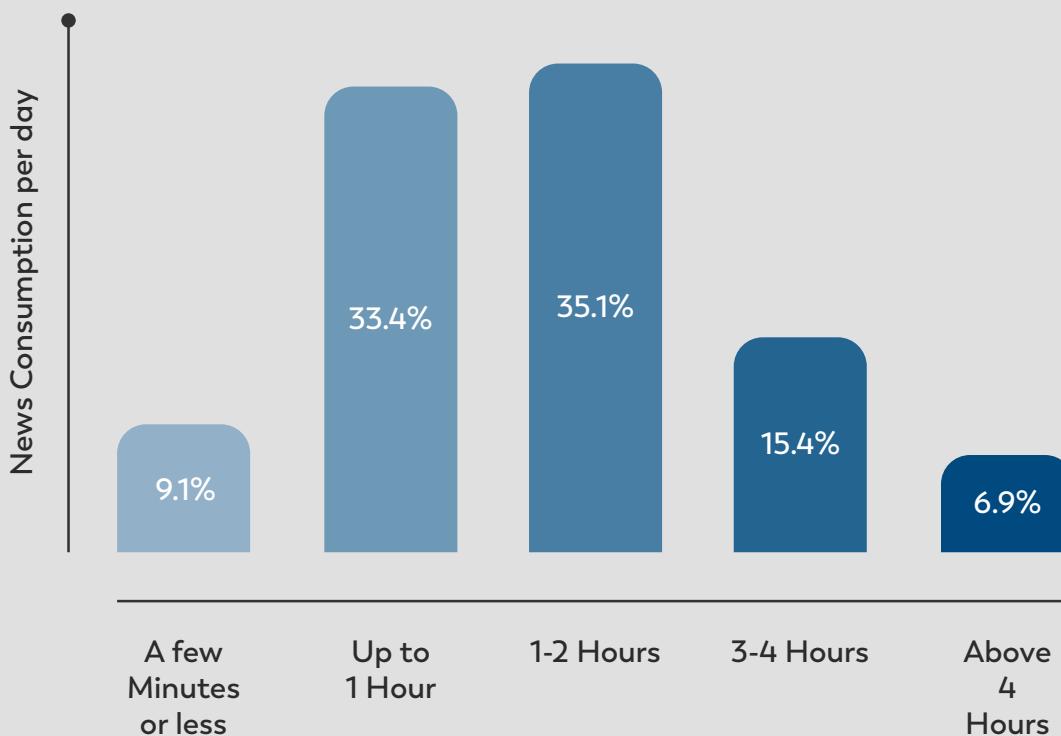
Source: *"Filling the Information Gap" Study Survey, October 2024*

The outbreak of war on October 7th triggered an immediate shift in media consumption, reflected in a substantial increase in internet usage, as evidenced by several information sources. **In the first week of the war, daily average browsing volume increased by 35%**, according to a Bezeq report on the state of communications in Israel during the first month of the war[20]. This increase

19 Logistic regression analysis showed higher Odds Ratios (OR) for increased news consumption among individuals aged 50–59 (OR 2.6, $p < 0.1$) and 60+ (OR 3.46, $p < 0.05$), compared to the 18–22 age group. Additional associations include trust in the government (OR 1.16, $p < 0.1$) and coalition party support (OR 1.4, $p < 0.1$).

20 Iron Swords War 7.10-7.11, Special Report on the State of Communications in Israel

subsequently moderated to 18% above pre-war levels.

More specifically, Bezeq reported a 44% increase in household social media usage time after the war broke compared with pre-war era. In the month following the outbreak of the war, Bezeq reported almost five hours of daily usage per household on social media platforms. These monthly rises were driven mostly during the first week of the war, where usage spiked dramatically. Bezeq noted that after the first week of the war, social media usage returned to routine levels.

Facebook household usage increased to an average of 127 minutes per day in the first week of the war (compared with 80 minutes per day the week before the war). On TikTok, usage rose to an average of 134 minutes per day per household (compared with 96 minutes), and on Instagram to 101 minutes (compared with 64 minutes).

Bezeq's data also shows a notable increase in upload traffic, suggesting increased content sharing in addition to content consumption.

News Consumption Habits

The survey presented in this paper, explored the characteristics of news consumption habits across different media outlets. Results show that **the most popular media outlets for news consumption are news websites, social media platforms and news channels on television.** Specifically, 80.7% of respondents consume news via social media platforms at least several times a week, while 79.3% and 77% use news websites and television news channels, respectively. Fewer respondents consume news via radio and print journalism: 54.2% listen to news on the radio at least several times a week and 23.1% read news in the printed press at least several times a week.

Figure 5

For each of the following platforms, please indicate how frequently you consume news content from it

Legend: Not at all | Few times a Month and less | Few times a Week | Once a Day | Several times a Day

	News Websites	Social Media Platforms	Television Channels	WhatsApp Groups	Radio	Telegram Channels	Newspapers
Not at all	10.8%	12.5%	13.7%	23.6%	29.9%	40.3%	53.3%
Few times a Month and less	9.8%	9.8%	9.3%	7.1%	15.8%	8.7%	23.6%
Few times a Week	18.9%	10.8%	11.0%	8.5%	17.4%	9.8%	12.7%
Once a Day	19.1%	14.3%	27.4%	11.8%	18.5%	9.1%	8.7%
Several times a Day	41.3%	55.6%	38.6%	49.0%	18.3%	32.0%	*1.7%
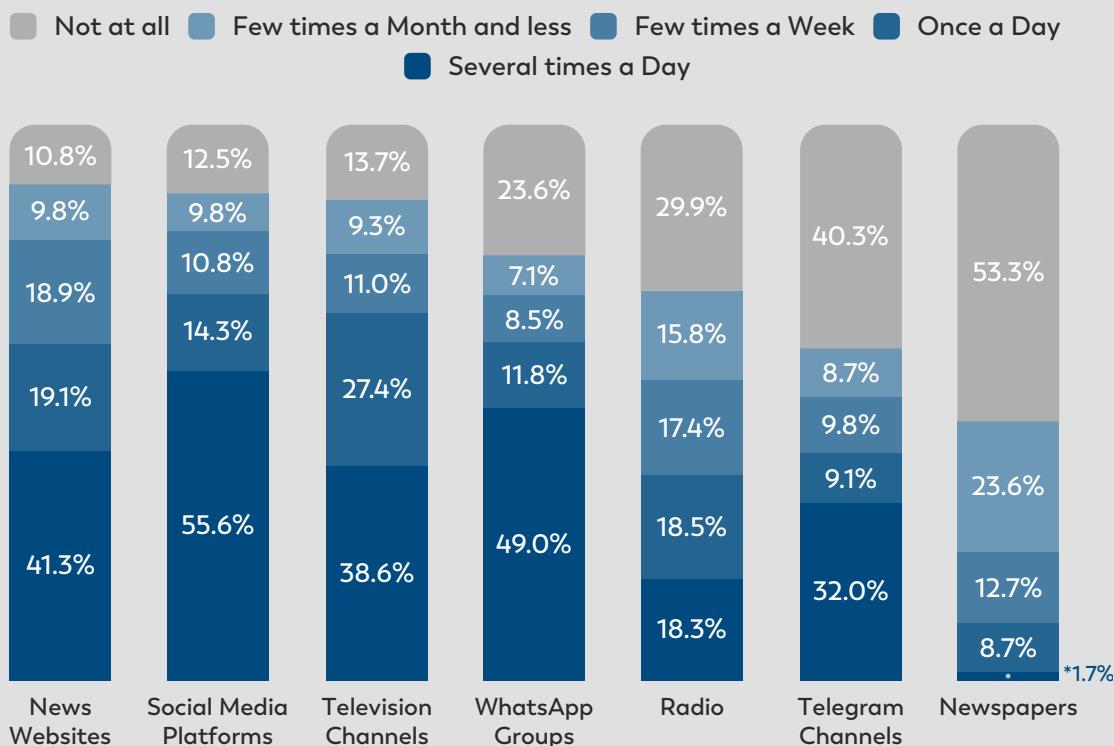
Source: *"Filling the Information Gap" Study Survey, October 2024*

Zooming in to the new consumption patterns indicated differences in the frequency of use of the various media outlets for news consumption. **The communication channels characterized by high frequency of use for staying updated on the news (meaning a high rate among their users who use them several times a day) are the social media platforms, specifically WhatsApp groups and Telegram channels.** Among users of WhatsApp groups for news consumption, 64.1% do so several times a day and an additional 15.4% once a day. Among Telegram users, 53.7% do so several times a day and 15.2% once a day. Thus, among users who consume news on these social media platforms, the majority do so daily.

The survey also investigated which media outlet is the first the respondents access in the case of a breaking news event. This question aimed to examine which media outlets are perceived as those that are updated quickly with information about news events.

In case of a breaking news event, a similar proportion of respondents access news websites, Telegram channels, and news channels (approximately 25% for each). This finding indicates that **Telegram has established itself as a central channel for staying updated on unfolding events.** Social media platforms in general, among them Facebook, X, Instagram, and others were chosen by 11% of the respondents as the first source they access during a news event and 8% marked WhatsApp groups. Consequently, Telegram stands out in comparison to other social media platforms as well as other forms of media. Later in this document we will discuss the reasons for this disparity.

Figure 6

In the event of breaking news, the first source I would turn to for updates is?

Radio — 2.9%
WhatsApp Groups — 7.5%
Social Media Platforms — 11.2%
Television Channels — 24.7%
Other — 2.7%
Newspapers — 0.2%
News Websites — 25.7%
Telegram Channels — 25.1%

Source: "Filling the Information Gap" Study Survey, October 2024
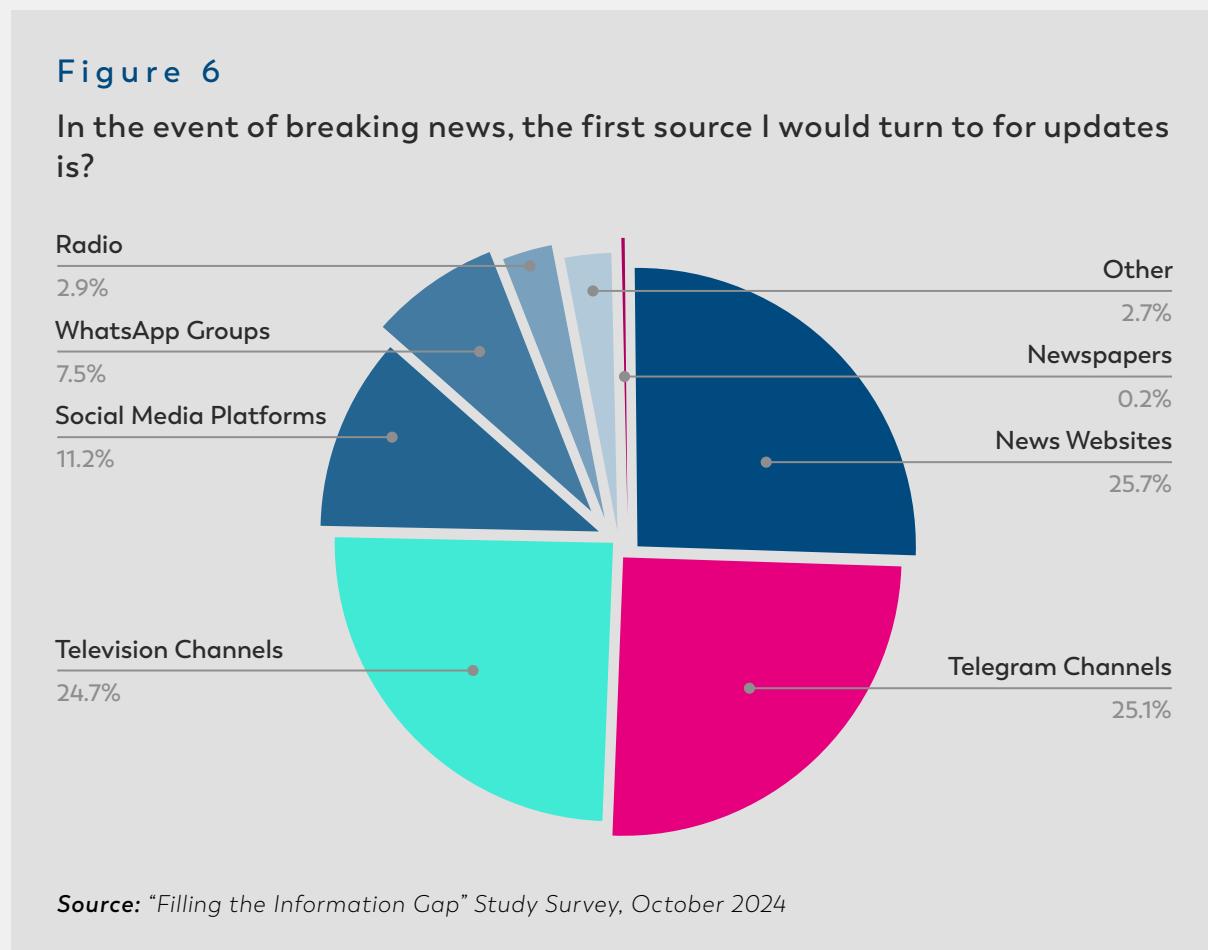
In summary, media consumption habits following October 7th demonstrate that the majority of Israelis significantly increased the volume of their news consumption due to the security situation. Additionally, they diversified the sources they use for news. News websites, social media platforms, and television are the primary sources for news. However, in cases of breaking news events, Telegram has emerged as one of the three most significant sources of information.

Activity in Hebrew Telegram Channels Since October 7th

The war began with a surprise attack by Hamas on October 7th. On the first day of the war, before the situation became clearer, there was widespread uncertainty and much information regarding the situation in the affected communities and the kidnapping of Israeli citizens was missing. **The nature of the events, combined with the shock and the lack of reliable information, contributed to a vague public understanding of the situation.** The Israeli media struggled to provide a comprehensive portrayal of the unfolding events, as information was released gradually and in a limited manner.

A central topic that emerged on Israeli social media on the first day of the *Iron Swords* war was **the gap between the reports in the traditional media, particularly on television channels, and the information disseminated through social media, which presented a more severe situation.** Monitoring of social media platforms on the first day of the war revealed that this gap may have contributed to a loss of trust of the public in decision-makers and the military, who were perceived as withholding information.

Due to the perceived lacuna of traditional media, it appears that the Israeli public sought alternative sources of news and information on social media to obtain unfiltered information. In several instances, the videos, images, and **information disseminated on social media platforms – particularly Telegram – included misinformation or graphic content depicting individuals whose families were still unaware of their fate**.

To assess the growth of Telegram usage in Israel during and after the outbreak of the war, seven major Hebrew-language Telegram channels were examined three months after October 7th[21].

In the first two days of the war (October 7–8th), the number of subscribers to these seven Telegram channels increased by over 440,000, a 52% surge. Over the first three months of the war[22], these channels gained approximately 1.4 million new subscribers, rising from around 850,000 on October 6th (the day before the war) to approximately 2.24 million – a 2.6-fold increase[23]. Consequently, **after three months, roughly 60% of these channels' subscribers were new,**

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21 The largest channels as of January 2024, according to the Telegram analytics website TGStat. The channels examined are: @amitsegal, @sdarotali, @newsil_tme, @TheBigBadShadow, @abualiexpress, @danielamram3, and @yediotnewsil.

22 The analysis covers the period from October 7, 2023, to January 7, 2024.

23 Subscribers to multiple channels within this group may be counted more than once.

having joined after October 7th.

Figure 7

Number of Subscribers to Major Hebrew-Language Telegram Channels

Legend: @amitsegal @sdarotali @newsil_tme @TheBigBadShadow @abualiexpress @danielamram3 @yediotnewsil
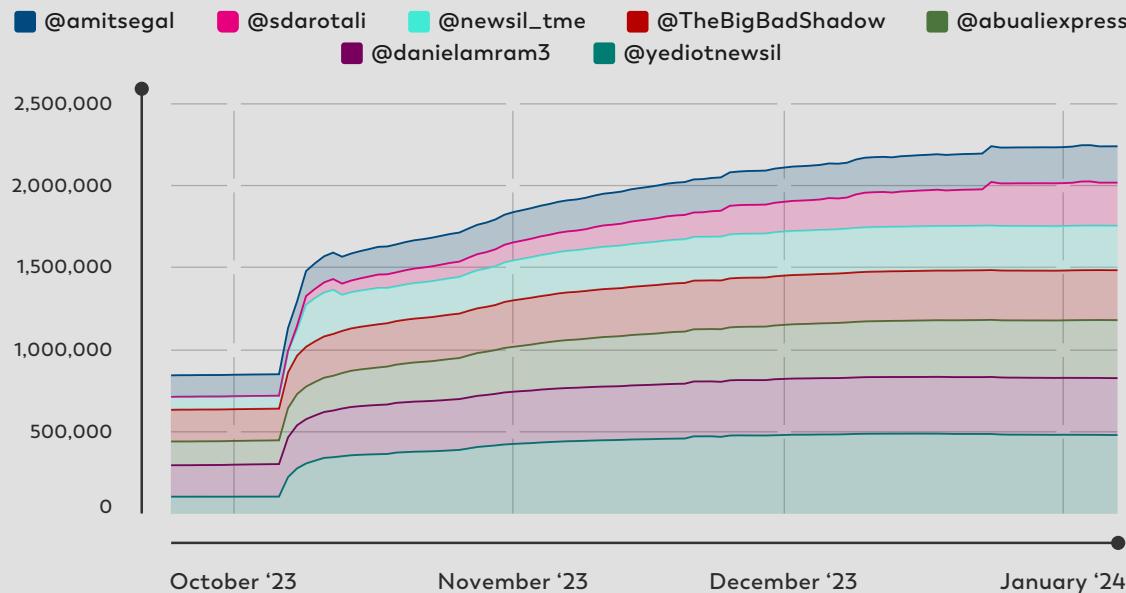
Source: *Analysis of TGStat data*

However, this rapid subscriber growth observed in Telegram channels during the initial days of the war slowed afterward. This trend may reflect a diminishing need for alternative news updates as the conflict evolved.

During the second month of the war, new subscriptions to the seven examined Hebrew-language Telegram channels constituted approximately 30% of the first month's total. This figure further decreased by more than half in the third month, with approximately 30% of that month's growth stemming from a single, smaller channel[24].

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[24] The majority of the growth is attributable to a one-time spike on a date not correlating with any organic interest in the channel's content (e.g., a significant event in the war), which raises the possibility of purchased followers/subscribers.

Filling the Information Gap

Figure 8

Number of Monthly New Subscribers to Israel's Seven Largest Telegram News Channels (First Three Months of War)

News Monthly Subscribers

768,883

231,756

106,035

1st Month   2nd Month   3rd Month
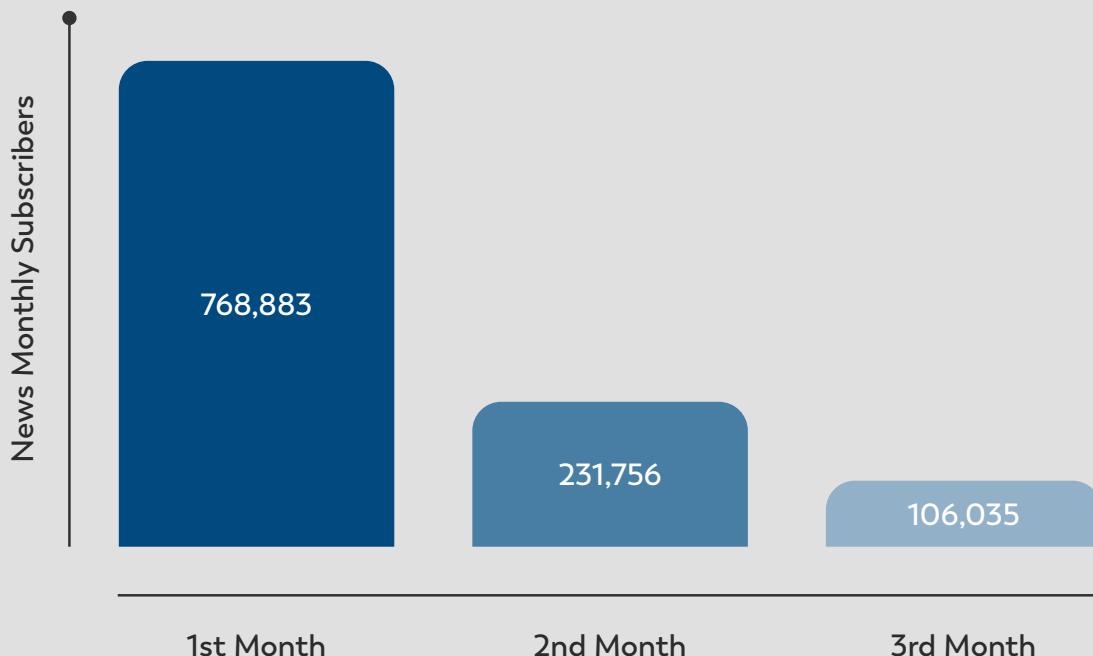
Source: *Analysis of TGStat data*

It is important to note that subsequent analyses revealed that, over the course of the first year of the war, subscriber numbers for Hebrew-language Telegram news channels saw a steady increase, with surges observed around major news events. For instance, such surges occurred around the Iranian drone and missile attack on Israel on the night of April 13-14, 2024, and the Iranian attack on Israel on October 1, 2024.

Figure 9

Number of Subscribers to the Telegram Channel "News from the Field" (November 23, 2024)
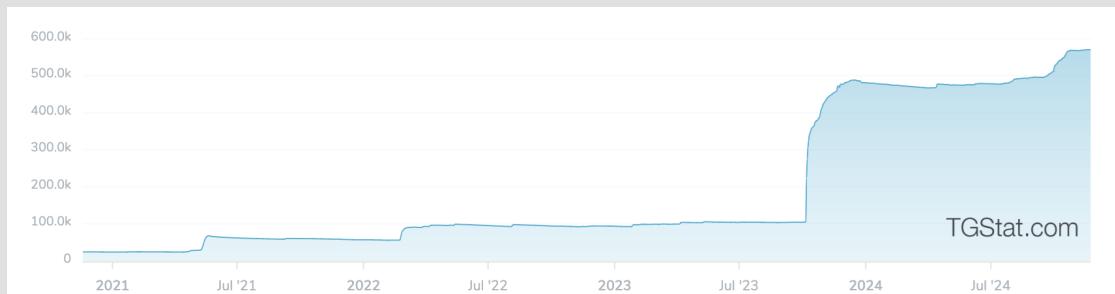
Source: TGStat Data

Two additional metrics reflecting the initial surge in Telegram usage at the beginning of the war, driven by the need for real-time news updates, are the daily post views and daily posting frequency per channel.

For example, the posting frequency between January 2023 and January 2024 was examined for the largest Hebrew-language Telegram news update channel as of January 2024 ("News from the Field on Telegram", @yediotnewsIL). During the first two days of the war (October 7-8), posting on this channel peaked at 219 messages per day. Following this initial peak, daily and weekly posting frequencies steadily declined. By early January 2024, three months after the war began, daily updates on "News from the Field on Telegram" had fallen to just a few dozen.

Similar posting patterns were observed in most other examined Telegram channels. In one such channel, approximately 700 updates were posted on the first day of the war alone.

Furthermore, a similar increase in posting activity on Hebrew-language Telegram news channels was observed during Operation *Shield and Arrow*, which commenced on May 9, 2023. This observation further illustrates the correlation between security events and increased posting activity on these channels.

Figure 10

Weekly Number of Posts on the "News from the Field on Telegram" Channel (2023)
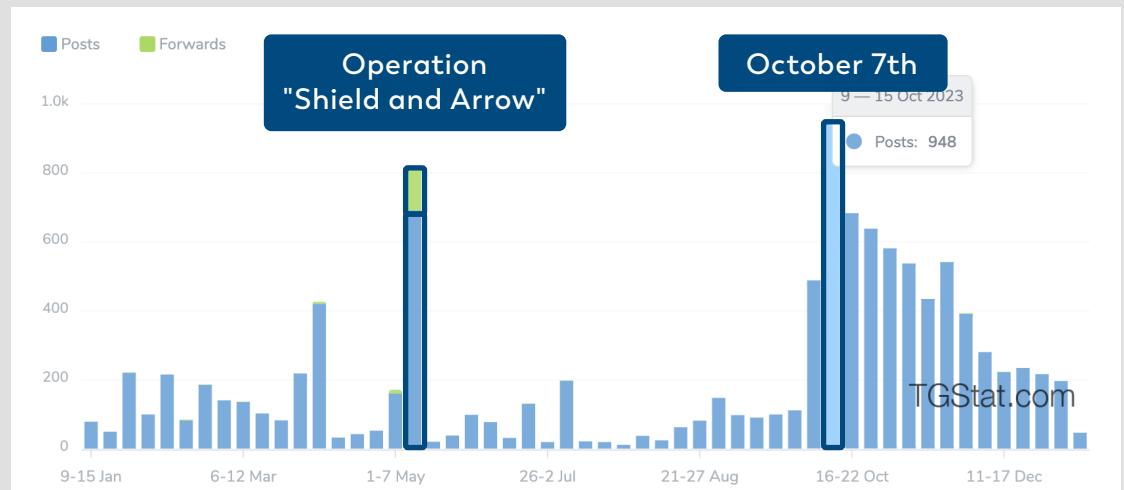
Source: TGStat Data

Post view analysis revealed a similar pattern, peaking during the initial days of the war and then declining. For example, the "News from the Field on Telegram" channel recorded 15.3 million total views across all posts on October 9th (the third day of the war), falling to roughly 3 million daily views three months later. This still-substantial viewership, three months into the war, was the result of each post receiving over 100,000 views on average, combined with the continued daily publication of dozens of new posts.

Figure 11

Daily Number of Post Views on the "News from the Field on Telegram" Channel

Source: TGStat

Survey Findings on Telegram Usage Following October 7th

The survey findings indicate that 96.5% of respondents are aware of the Telegram application, showcasing its high level of recognition and active user base. **Among respondents, 62.5% are active Telegram users**, with 32.6% engaging frequently and 29.9% using it occasionally. 34.0% of respondents, while familiar with the app, do not currently use it. This group includes 22% of respondents who have never used the platform despite being aware of it, and 12% who used the app in the past but have since ceased their engagement. Only a small fraction, 3.5%, reported being entirely unfamiliar with Telegram.

Figure 12

Are you familiar with the Telegram application?

Not Familiar
3.5%

Used in the past but not anymore
12.0%

Familiar and use it frequently
32.6%

Familiar but never used it
22.0%

Familiar and use it occasionally
29.9%
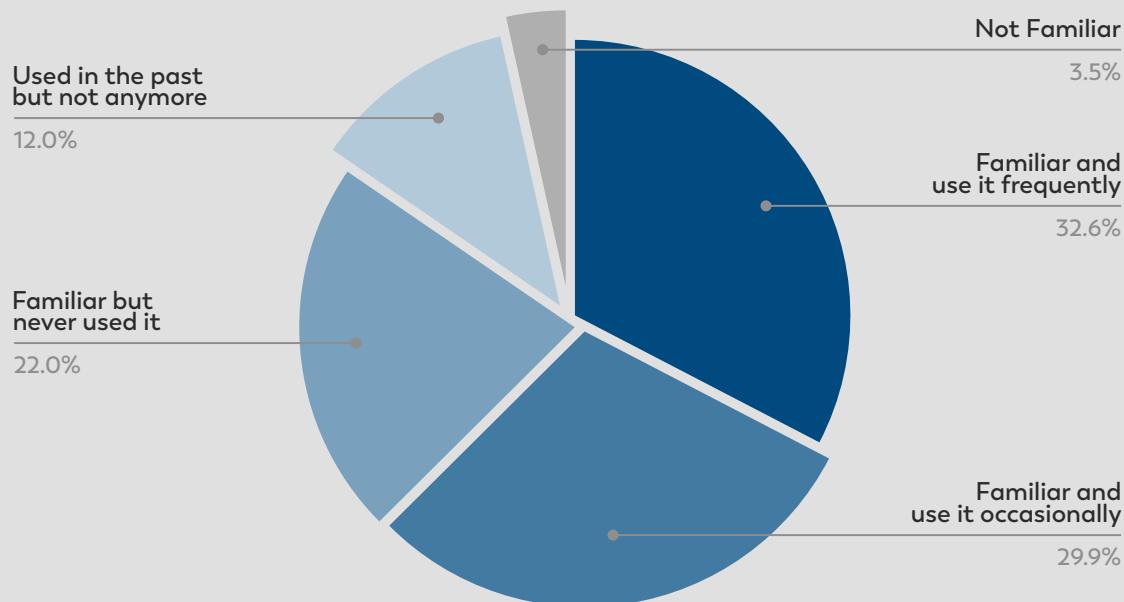
Source: *"Filling the Information Gap" Study Survey, October 2024*

The survey explored when respondents began using Telegram in connection with the outbreak of the war on October 7th, 2023. Among all Telegram users, the majority (63.5%) reported that they started using the platform several years ago, indicating a long-standing user base. The remaining **36.5% of users began using Telegram after the war began.**

Most users (74.5%) who joined Telegram during the war began using it immediately after it broke out, indicating a rapid surge in adoption following the outbreak. Following this initial surge, the adoption rate of Telegram has slowed.

Additional sources confirm increased Telegram usage at the onset of the war[25]. On October 8th, the second day of the war, Telegram CEO, Durov, announced on his Telegram channel[26] that hundreds of thousands of users in Israel and the

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[25] In a survey conducted by Dr. Gal Yavetz from the Department of Political Science at Bar-Ilan University in the fifth week of the war, 48.5% of respondents reported turning to new content and information sources due to the war. Among those who turned to new information channels, Telegram was the most popular channel: 73% of Jewish respondents and 33.5% of Arab respondents reported joining the application since the beginning of the war.The survey included 651 people respondents. Source: More Israelis are using Telegram since the war. How dangerous is it? - Globes

[26] https://t.me/durov/228

Palestinian Authority were joining the platform. He also announced the launch of a Hebrew-language interface. According to Durov, "Everyone affected should have reliable access to news and private communication in these dire times".

Du Rove's Channel ✔

Hundreds of thousands are signing up for Telegram from Israel and the Palestinian Territories.

In addition to Arabic, we've just added support for Hebrew in the Telegram UI. Everyone affected should have reliable access to news and private communication in these dire times.

t.me/durov/228   2.0M 👁 Oct 8, 2023 at 20:24
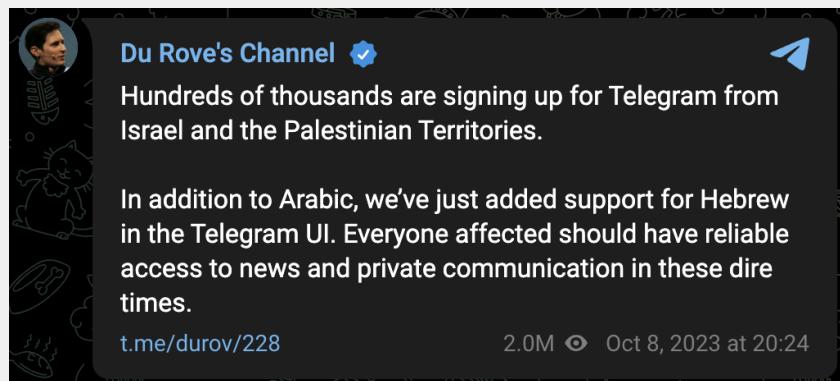
The following section provides an analysis of the factors influencing Telegram adoption both prior to and following the onset of the war.

Figure 13

When did you start using the Telegram app?

This question was presented to respondents who indicated in the previous question that they use Telegram

I started using it several Months ago
7.3%

I started using it immediately after the war began
27.2%

I started using it within the past month
3.5%

I started using it several Years ago
63.5%
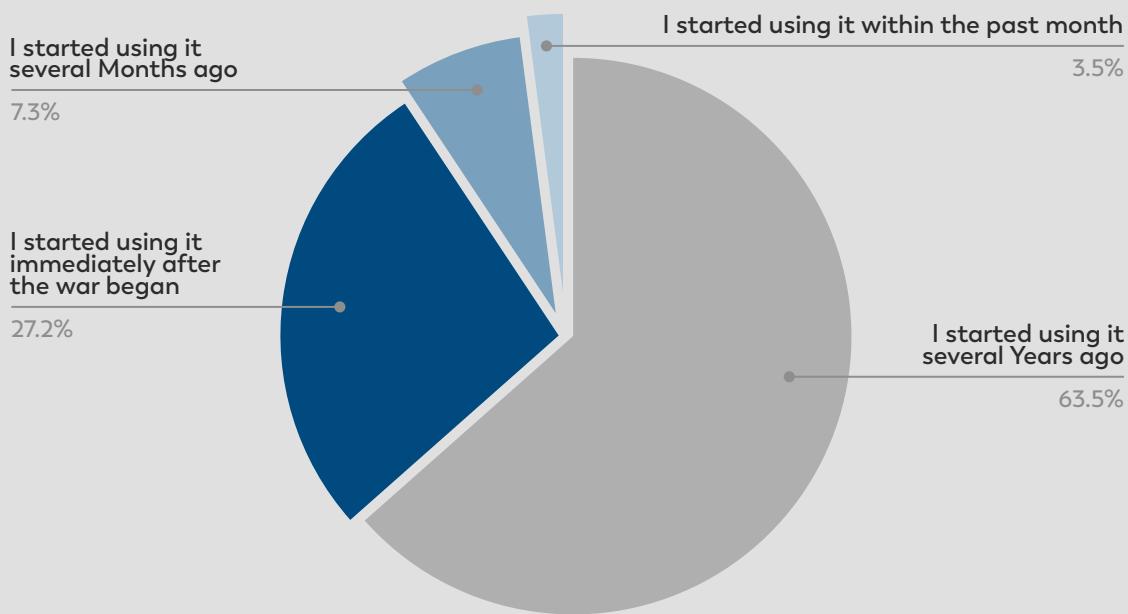
Source: *"Filling the Information Gap" Study Survey, October 2024*

Data published by the Israel Internet Association (ISOC-IL)[27], regarding overall Telegram usage (not limited to news consumption), strengthens the findings presented here regarding the surge in Telegram adoption. According to ISOC-IL, **Telegram experienced significant growth during the war, rising from 54% market penetration in early 2023 to 70% in early 2024**. Furthermore, ISOC-IL data reveal **a notable increase in Telegram usage among women** between 2023 and 2024, narrowing the gender gap: while 43% of women and 67% of men used Telegram in 2023, these figures rose to 63% and 76%, respectively, in 2024. Finally, the increased popularity of Telegram is evident across various age demographics, with particularly notable growth among both younger (18-22) and older (50-59) users. Usage in these groups increased by 15 percentage points, from 62% to 77% among younger users and from 47% to 62% among older users.

Bezeq, the Israeli national communications company, reported a twofold increase in the number of devices using the Telegram application after the outbreak of the war. There was also a 50% rise in the average number of logins to the Telegram app. According to Bezeq, "Telegram is the surprising platform of the war".

The survey conducted for this paper examined the frequency of Telegram usage to assess the extent to which users rely on the platform for updates. The findings show that **the majority of Telegram users engage with the app at least once a day**, underscoring its role as a timely information source.

Specifically, **36.0% of respondents check news updates *every few hours or more often*, while 19.9% check *once a day*.** Together, these groups form a substantial core of **"power users"**, whose frequent engagement increases their exposure to the app's content and potential impacts.

In contrast, usage frequency declines among other users: 12.4% check updates only *several times a week*, 8.3% *several times a month*, and 3.1% *once every few months or less*. 16.3%, meanwhile, do not check updates at all. This pattern reflects a high-engagement majority with a tapering tail.

"Power users", defined as survey respondents using the platform at least once daily, are predominantly male, with 64% of men using Telegram daily or more frequently, compared to 46% of women. Age also plays a significant role, with usage peaking among individuals aged 25-54, where 55% report daily use. In contrast, the proportion drops to 28% among respondents aged 20-24 and 55+. **Frequent users are more likely to have higher trust in the government and to have joined Telegram after October 7th**, while those with below-average incomes are less likely to belong to this group[28].

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27 Social Media and Digital Platform Use in Israel (2024) - Israel Internet Association - (ISOC-IL)

28 The logistic regression model shows that males are more likely to be frequent Telegram users (odds ratio 2.14, p-value < 0.001). Trust in the government and joining after October

Figure 14

How often do you check news updates on Telegram?

*This question was presented to respondents who indicated in the previous question that they use Telegram

36%	19.9%	12.4%	8.3%	3.1%	2.3%	16.3%	1.6%
Every few Hours or more	Once a Day	Several times a Week	Several times a Month	Once every few Months or less frequently	Only when there is a news event I am interested in	I do not check updates on Telegram	Other
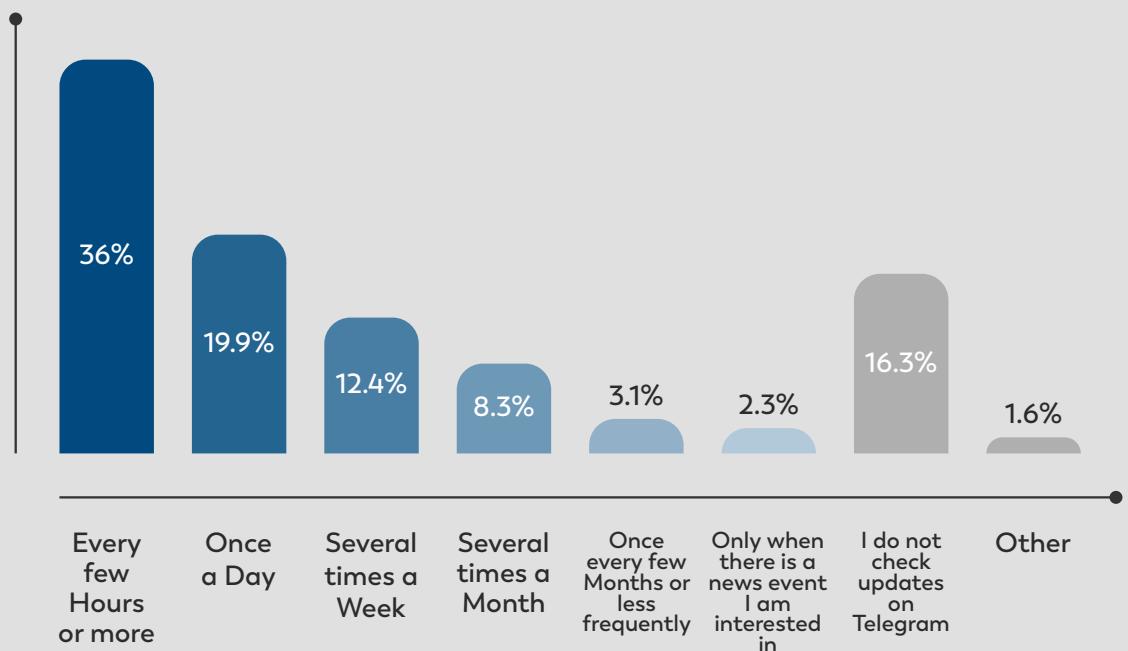
Source: "Filling the Information Gap" Study Survey, October 2024

7th increase the likelihood of usage (odds ratio 1.24 and 4.15, respectively; p-value < 0.001). Below-average income decreases likelihood of Telegram usage (odds ratio 0.63, p-value < 0.05).

Filling the Information Gap

Characteristics of Hebrew Telegram Channels for Wartime News

The following section details and categorizes the common characteristics of Hebrew-language Telegram channels used for news updates during the war.

Content and Style

Visually Rich Content, Including Explicit Content

Posts on Telegram news update channels are almost invariably accompanied by visual content, such as photos and videos, often including explicit material (e.g., violence, such as images of corpses, not typically shown in traditional Israeli media). Frequently, the original source of this visual content is uncredited.

Short, Informal, and Occasionally Biased Style in Telegram News Updates

Text updates on Hebrew-language Telegram news channels are typically brief, especially compared to traditional news reports (on news websites or in print). Updates may consist of a single sentence or just a few words. While often aiming to mimic the style of traditional news updates, they frequently incorporate commentary reflecting the channel administrators' personal opinions. Moreover, the phrasing occasionally employs slang, informal language, and biased expressions, as part of an overall tone markedly different from traditional media (e.g., "A most deadly ambush by IDF forces"; "Hezbollah released a poster of its 158 martyrs since the start of the war. 🍾🍾🍾🍾 How many champagnes is that worth?"). In some cases, the phrasing also reflects administrators' stances on domestic Israeli issues (e.g., using negative terms to refer to demonstrators at rallies for the return of captives).

User Behavior and Platform Dynamics

High Subscriber Engagement

Subscribers actively engage with Hebrew-language Telegram news channels content through emoji reactions, and some channels also permit comments. Posts frequently generate hundreds of interactions (emoji reactions and comments). In channels allowing comments, posts of significant public interest (e.g., IDF

spokesperson announcements regarding casualties) often receive dozens, or even hundreds, of comments.
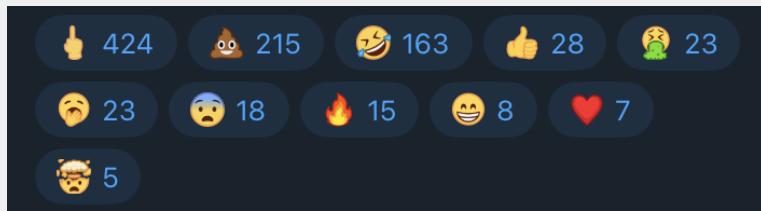
Example: Emoji Reactions to a Post on a Hebrew-Language Telegram News Channel

Credibility and Verification

Anonymity of Channel Admins

Unlike traditional news outlets (newspapers, television channels, radio stations, or news websites), where the identities of journalists and editors are typically known, many Telegram channels are operated anonymously by unidentified administrators. While some channels are clearly associated with identifiable figures – such as the update channels of Channel 12 political commentator Amit Segal, internet personality Daniel Amram, or rapper and right-wing political activist *The Shadow* (HaTzel, Yoav Eliasi) – the administrators of many large and growing channels remain anonymous. These administrators control the content and information flow on their respective channels, and this lack of transparency raises various concerns.

Publication of Content from Hostile Sources

Some Hebrew-language Telegram news update channels disseminate visual and other content originating from hostile entities outside Israel (e.g., Hamas or Hezbollah). These channels sometimes feature visual content not broadcast by traditional Israeli media outlets, such as videos from Hamas or Palestinian armed groups depicting Israeli captives, or material generally deemed "psychological terror" by Israeli media. As the war progressed, established Israeli media began broadcasting more of this type of content, usually with the permission of the families of hostages.

Absence of Journalistic Ethics and Standards

Despite their extensive reach – sometimes exceeding that of established news organizations – major Hebrew-language Telegram update channels are not subject

to, nor do they adhere to, journalistic ethics and standards[29]. As previously noted, channel administrators often remain anonymous and do not operate according to journalistic principles. Consequently, the sources of information presented, and their reliability, are frequently unknown. Information published on these channels is occasionally unverified.

Moreover, disseminated information sometimes violates military censorship, releasing information hours ahead of its authorized publication (if at all) by media outlets that comply with censorship guidelines (either within the channels' updates themselves or in subscriber comments). In addition, advertisements on these widely-viewed channels can contain problematic content, including, for example, the promotion of illegal drugs in Israel. Finally, sponsored content is not always appropriately identified as such.

Spreading Unverified Rumors via Telegram Channel Comments

The comment sections enabled on some Hebrew-language Telegram news channels facilitate interaction among subscribers, but also frequently become platforms for disseminating rumors and misinformation later revealed to be false. This is especially true of unverified information published before the lifting of censorship restrictions on sensitive war-related information (e.g., regarding soldier casualties, fatalities among hostages, or rescues), sometimes even before the families are informed formally.
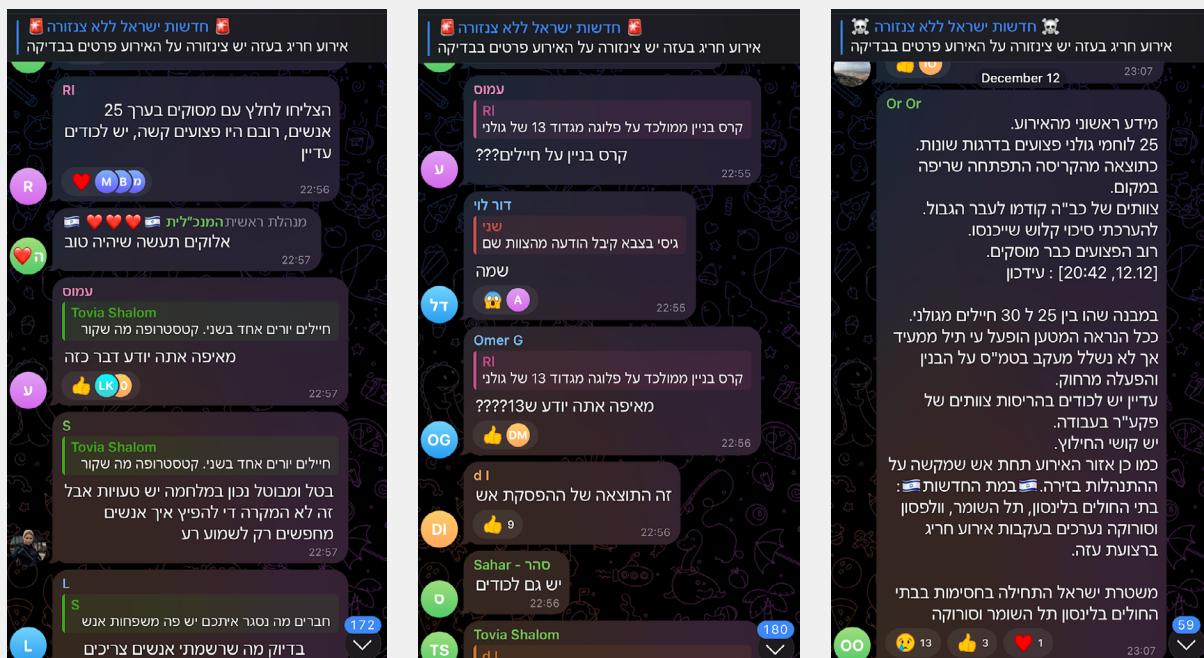
Example: Comments on Telegram channel updates about an incident involving Golani forces, including speculation about casualties before official announcements (December 12, 2023).

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29 Israel Press Council: Rules of Professional Ethics of Journalism

Left screenshot:

🆘 חדשות ישראל ללא צנזורה 🆘
בשורה קשה מאוד הערב (שני): השחקן והזמר עידן עמ

D M
כל אחד עם מידע אחר. תפיצו להפיץ שמועו
לצערי זה לא פייק וזה לא "הפצה" יש
למעלה מ 10 הרוגים וגם כאלה נעדרים
שלא ידוע אם חטופים או שלא מצליחים
לזהות את הגופוף
😱🇮🇱 19:50

אדון שוקו
פאק
19:50

עידית
רפואה שלמה בעזרת השם אמן אמן כן יהי
רצון שייצא מזה בשלום 🙏🙏🙏
19:50

Eti S
רפואה שלמה במהרה אמן
19:51

אבוקדו
רפואה שלמה ובשורות טובות
19:52

אופק
e l
לצערי זה לא פייק וזה לא "הפצה" יש למעלה
נראה לי אתם לא מבינים את הקונספט
של מלחמה
19:52

Right screenshot:

חדשות ישראל בטלגרם
כאב של לוחמים: הזמר והשחקן עידן עמדי נפצ
20:12

טובה
זה לא פייק,קרה אסון יש גם 12 הרוגים
ועשרות פצועים
😱 M 20:12

Mr.bach
טובה
זה לא פייק,קרה אסון יש גם 12 הרוגים ועשרו
מאיפה את יודעת
20:13

Menny
אתם מפירים צו איסור פירסום של דובר
צהל!!
❤️ M 20:13

O C
רפואה שלמה 🙏
20:13

D
טובה
זה לא פייק,קרה אסון יש גם 12 הרוגים ועשרו
אל תאמינו . לא ככה פועלים מבצעים
צבאיים. אני מכיר את הפרטים. מדובר
בנושא תחום
20:14

avishay daniel

Example: Comments on Telegram channel updates about an incident involving the actor and singer Idan Amedi before the official and authorized information was released. Comments include a discussion whether the rumors are fake news and various numbers of people killed in the incident (January 8, 2024).

Reasons for the Surge in Telegram Usage

Since October 7th, 2023, Telegram has seen a significant surge in usage in Israel, particularly during the early days of the war, as shown in the previous sections. This chapter focuses on the motivations behind this increased reliance on the platform and aims to uncover the reasons for this shift. It will explore the types of content consumed by Telegram users, the specific reasons individuals cited for turning to Telegram, and the factors that led to engagement with non-Israeli Telegram channels during this critical period.

To understand the popularity of Telegram in light of the ongoing war in Israel, this section first explores the types of content they consume on the platform. It then turns to the reasons for joining Telegram. The survey examined the types of Telegram channels respondents consumed news updates from in the past two years, revealing notable preferences and patterns of engagement. **Hebrew news update channels – such as 'Israel News on Telegram', 'Israel News Without Censorship' and 'Abu Ali Express' – emerged as the most widely used** – with **62.7%** of respondents selecting this category. **These channels often have large subscriber bases and are characterized by the often anonymous or unknown identity of their operators, indicating a reliance on unofficial news sources**.

Additionally, **27.7% of respondents reported consuming updates from channels operated by Israeli journalists**, including notable figures such as the journalists Amit Segal (*News 12*) and Michael Shemesh (*Kan 11*). Official Israeli channels, such as those affiliated with the IDF or Home Front Command, were selected by 23.6%. Compared to large news channels, those channels have a smaller user base.

Hebrew influencer channels, such as '*The Shadow*' and Daniel Amram, accounted for 22.5%, underlining the centrality of opinion leaders and independent commentators in news dissemination.

On the other hand, foreign media channels (9.3%) and channels affiliated with hostile entities (8.8%), such as *Gaza Now* or those linked to Hamas, Hezbollah, or Iran, were selected by a smaller proportion of users.

This distribution highlights **Telegram's role as a platform for consuming both mainstream and alternative news**, where large, anonymous channels coexist with institutional and personal media sources.

Figure 15

From which types of Telegram channels have you consumed news updates in the last two years? *(Multiple-choice question)*

This question was presented to respondents who indicated in the previous question that they use Telegram

Category	Percentage
News update channels (Hebrew)	62.7%
Journalist channels (Hebrew)	22.7%
Official Israeli channels (e.g., IDF, government)	23.6%
Influencer channels (Hebrew)	22.5%
Foreign media channels (in English or other languages)	9.3%
Channels affiliated with hostile entities	8.8%
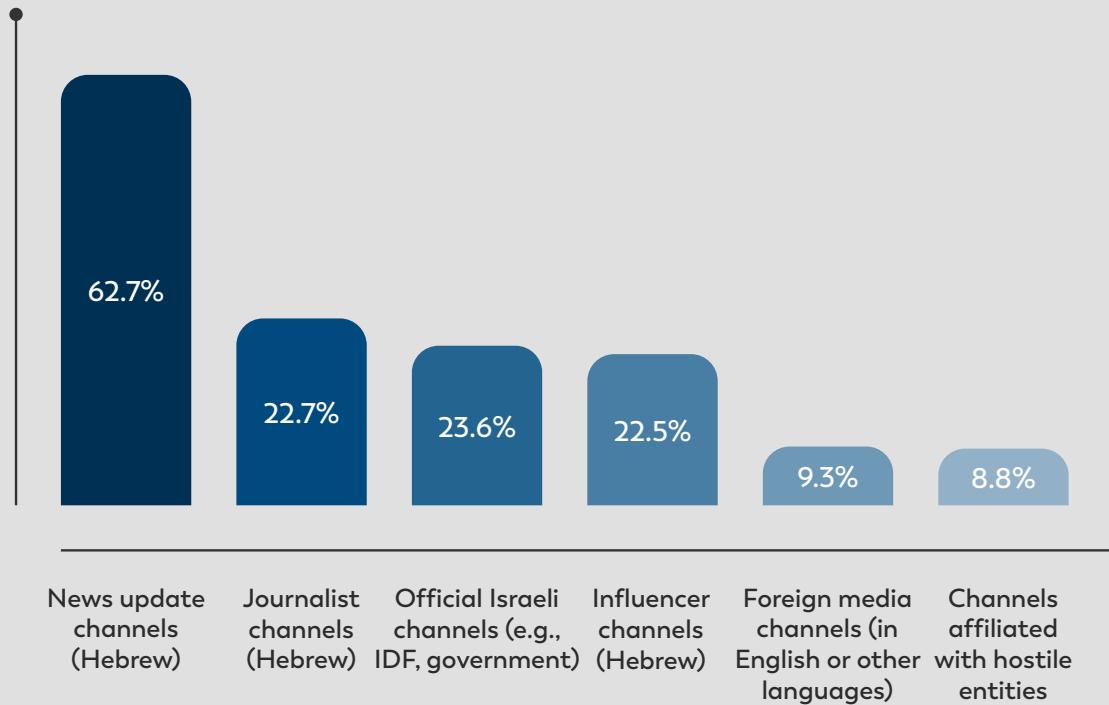
Source: "Filling the Information Gap" Study Survey, October 2024

The subsequent focus was on examining the motivations behind respondents' consumption of information from non-Israeli Telegram channels. A diverse set of reasons emerged, primarily centered on content availability during specific events or crises. **The two most frequently cited motivations were that these channels "publish information not available in Israeli media outlets" and "publish information not available on Hebrew Telegram channels",** each selected by 56.4% of respondents. This highlights **a perceived gap in information coverage within traditional media and Hebrew-language Telegram channels, prompting users to seek alternative sources.**

Additionally, **50.9% of respondents indicated they consume such channels because they are "interested in what the enemy is publishing",** reflecting an interest in alternative perspectives or unfiltered content, such as censored events. A substantial proportion (38.2%) also highlighted the importance of war-related information as a key motivation for accessing these channels, including updates on hostages and on injured or killed soldiers.

Furthermore, 18.2% of respondents cited convenience in consuming information "in other languages," suggesting that a subset of users values multilingual content accessibility.

These findings underscore that **users turn to non-Israeli Telegram channels primarily to access information perceived as unavailable, censored, or underreported within domestic platforms.** Motivations like monitoring oppositional sources and accessing critical war updates highlight the essential role of these channels during crises.

Figure 16

Why do you consume information from non-Israeli channels? *(Multiple-choice question)*

*This question was presented to respondents who indicated in the previous question that they use Telegram
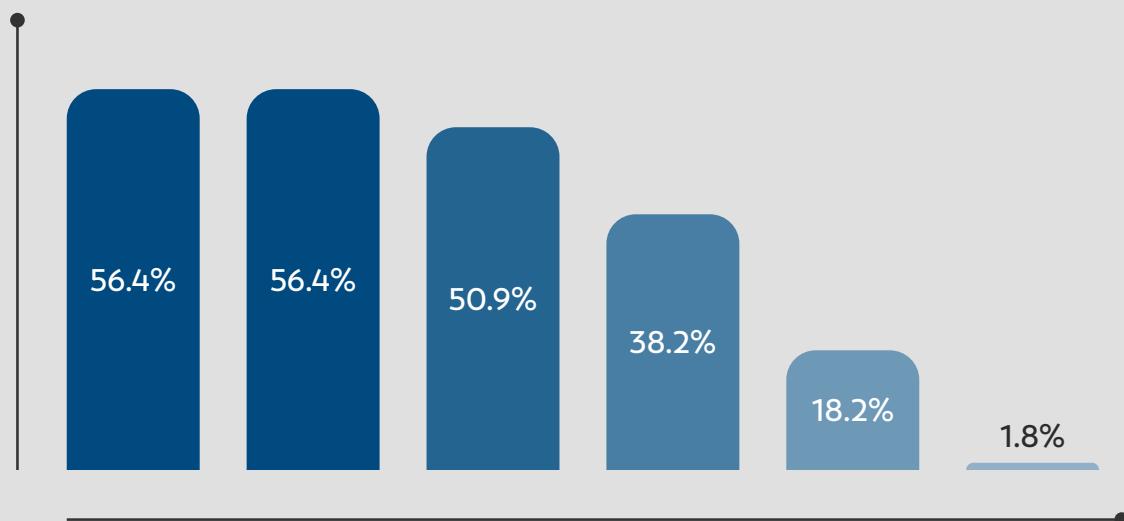
They publish information not available in Israeli media outlets	They publish information not available on Hebrew Telegram channels	Interested in what the enemy is publishing	Important war information is published there (e.g., hostages, soldiers)	It's convenient to consume information in other languages	Other reasons
56.4%	56.4%	50.9%	38.2%	18.2%	1.8%

Source: "Filling the Information Gap" Study Survey, October 2024

Key Drivers for Starting to Use Telegram: Before the War and Since It Started

As part of the survey, an analysis examined whether the reasons for starting to use Telegram shifted after the outbreak of the war. The findings indicate that the war served as a catalyst for the platform's adoption. Prior to the war, the primary motivations for starting to use Telegram were largely centered on entertainment, such as watching TV series, movies, and sports. Another key use of the platform was as an interpersonal communication tool. However, **with the onset of the war, these motivations shifted significantly toward news consumption, particularly news that is disseminated quickly, is uncensored, and includes content not covered by mainstream media**. Additionally, some users perceive Telegram as a reliable platform, further incentivizing its use.

Survey respondents were presented with an open-ended question: "Why did you start using the Telegram app?". Their responses were manually analyzed and categorized into key themes. This involved identifying recurring patterns and grouping similar reasons together, reflecting the underlying motivations shared by the respondents. These themes were compared between users who adopted the app before the war and those who started using it after its outbreak.

Figure 17

Breakdown of Major Reasons for Adopting Telegram by Time of Adoption?
(Open-ended question)

*This question was presented to respondents who indicated in the previous question that they use Telegram

Started using Telegram after the war began   Started using Telegram before the war

Category	After the war began	Before the war
News and Current Affairs	62%	14%
Uncensored and Fast News	44%	10%
General Information Source (e.g., sports, finance)	10%	13%
Reliability	7%	2%
Communication Tool	3%	12%
Entertainment	2%	24%
Marketing or Commercial Use	1%	8%
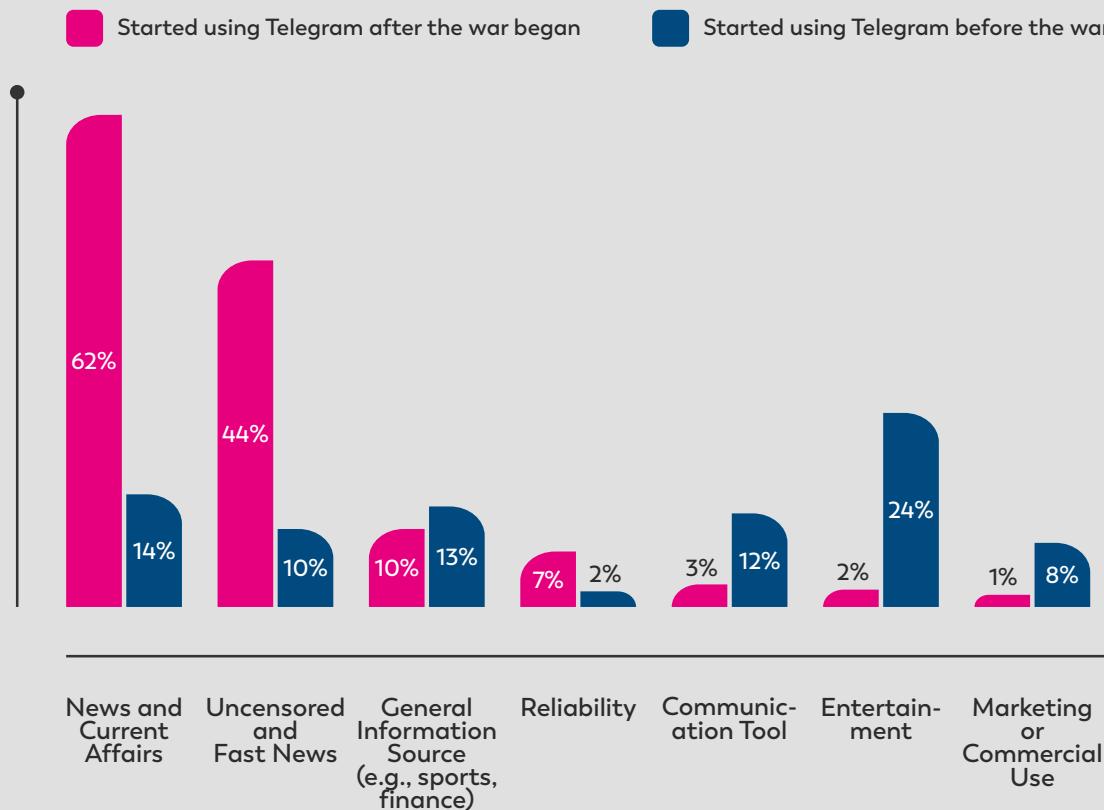
Source: "Filling the Information Gap" Study Survey, October 2024

Entertainment emerged as the most frequently cited reason among **users who started using Telegram before the war** (24%), followed by its use as a communication tool (12%) and for marketing or commercial purposes (8%). News and current affairs were significantly less of an adoption motivation for pre-war adopters, compared to post-war ones with only 14% mentioning news and 10% citing uncensored and fast news as their reason for joining Telegram before the war. A small number of respondents indicated that they joined Telegram in response to major news events, such as the COVID-19 pandemic or the war in Ukraine. Additionally, 13% of pre-war users highlighted Telegram as a source of general information, such as updates on sports or finance, reflecting broader use cases beyond current affairs and news.

Post-war adopters predominantly cited news and current affairs (62%) and uncensored, rapidly disseminated news (44%) as their primary reasons for joining

Telegram, emphasizing its function as a key source of real-time updates during the war. This group's adoption was highly situational, driven by the need for timely and relevant information amidst heightened uncertainty. Unlike pre-war adopters, they showed minimal interest in entertainment (2%), communication (3%), or marketing purposes (1%), reflecting an almost-singular focus on news-related content.

Below are some illustrative responses to the survey question "Why did you start to use Telegram?" from post-war users:

– "I felt the need to get more information and stay better informed."

– "It's where news appears before television and offers more than traditional channels".

– "I could get updates before they were published in mainstream media".

– "It provides fast news updates, before television channels".

– Many respondents emphasized Telegram's speed and reliability, with statements like: "To quickly find out about unusual events".

– Some pointed to the uncensored nature of the content, emphasizing how it provided access to material unavailable through mainstream channels: "To see the horrifying videos Hamas released" and "Images of hostages I couldn't find elsewhere", which they viewed as critical for understanding the situation.

– Finally, users expressed trust in Telegram's independence, with one writing: "I trust reliable, professional individuals who run Telegram channels free from the influence of major media outlets".

The findings highlight that Telegram's perceived value shifted significantly depending on the time of adoption. For pre-war users, Telegram served as a versatile platform used for a variety of purposes, from entertainment to communication and marketing. In contrast, post-war adopters were drawn to the platform primarily for its ability to provide uncensored, real-time news during a period of crisis. The war catalyzed a distinct wave of adoption centered on its role as a critical news source.

A related survey question examined current users' primary purposes for using Telegram. **Over half of respondents (55.6%) identified following news channels as their main purpose for using the app**, underscoring its transformation into a news-centric platform. Marketing or receiving coupons was the main purpose for 16.4%, followed by 9.3% who cited using it for the traditional use of messaging apps – communication with friends. Only 5.2% cited following governmental and military run channels (for example, IDF spokesperson) Finally, 13.6% listed "Other Uses", primarily for downloading or watching films and series. These findings emphasize Telegram's unique role as a broadcasting tool, prioritizing content

dissemination over personal communication.

While many users that joined before the war indicated that they initially adopted Telegram for reasons such as entertainment, the current primary usage has shifted significantly toward consuming news. This transition underscores a fundamental change in Telegram's positioning, evolving from a versatile communication and entertainment platform to a predominantly news-centric medium, particularly during times of crisis.

Figure 18

What is your primary purpose for using the Telegram app?

This question was presented to respondents who indicated in the previous question that they use Telegram

Governmental and
Military Run Channels
5.2%

Communication
with Friends
9.3%

Other Uses
13.6%

Marketing (coupons)
16.4%

News Channels
55.6%
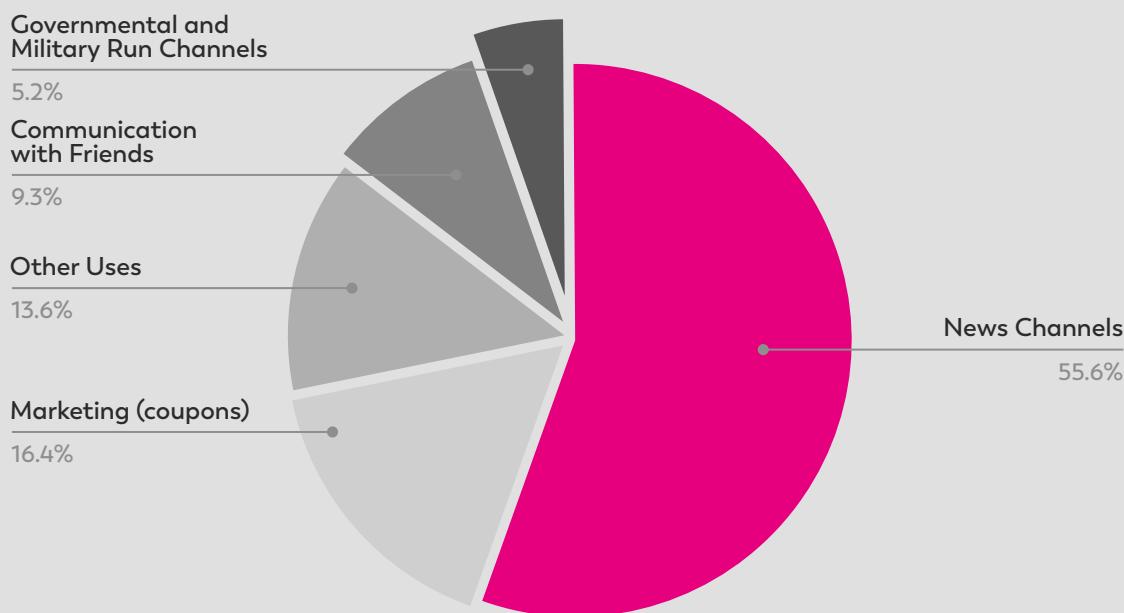
Source: *"Filling the Information Gap" Study Survey, October 2024*

Perceptions of Telegram and Its Role During Crises

This chapter examines user perceptions of Telegram, following the exploration of the motivations and purposes behind its adoption after October 7th. It aims to uncover the underlying reasons for Telegram's popularity during the war, while also considering the broader implications of this popularity for traditional media. Furthermore, it examines the shifting information needs of individuals in crisis situations, primarily access to real-time updates and uncensored content.

In the survey, Telegram users were asked to describe the platform by selecting the statements they felt best represented it. Additionally, respondents evaluated three statements about their use and perception of Telegram. The responses highlight Telegram's perceived strengths and limitations.

Figure 19

Which of the following statements do you think best describes Telegram?
(Multiple-choice question)

*This question was presented to respondents who indicated in the previous question that they use Telegram

Statement	%
Uncensored information	63.2%
Real-time news	60.6%
Source of rumors	39.9%
Irresponsible media channel	30.3%
Exclusive reports ("scoops")	28.5%
Reliable information	14.0%
Polarizing discourse	11.7%
A threat to the country	11.4%
None	5.4%
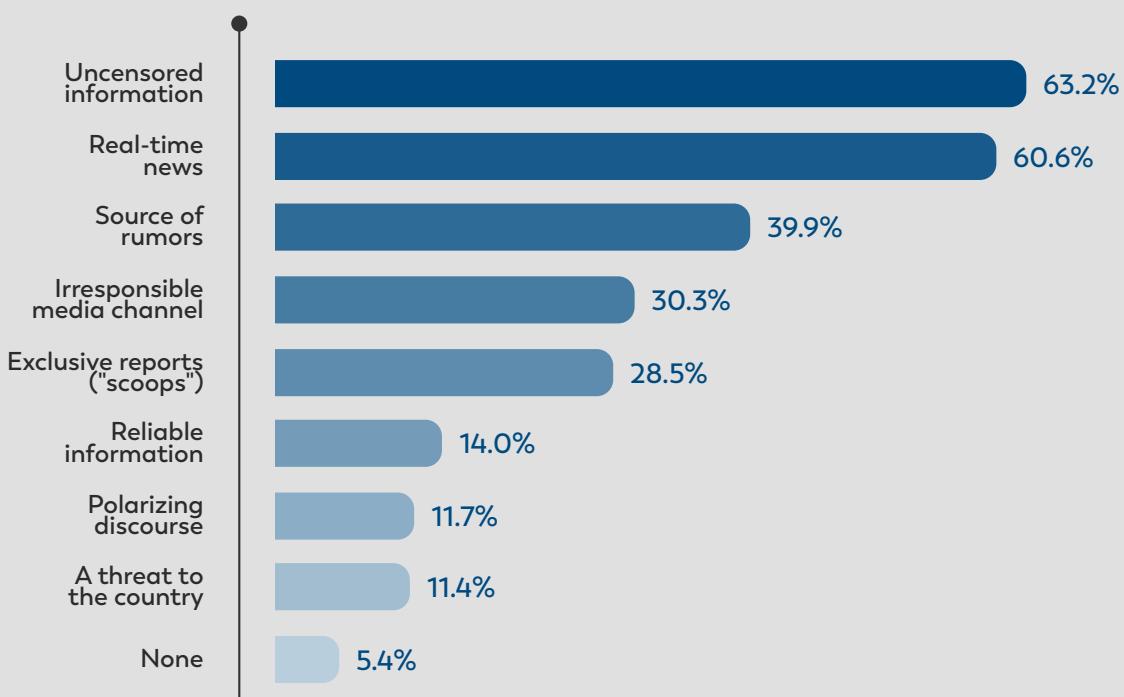
Source: "Filling the Information Gap" Study Survey, October 2024

Figure 20

To what extent do you agree with the following statements regarding information on Telegram?

This question was presented to respondents who indicated in the previous question that they use Telegram

Statement	1 - Not at all	2	3	4	5 - To a very great extent
Telegram is the best way to get news updates quickly	7.3%	5.7%	25.1%	36.5%	25.4%
Telegram meets my need to access information that isn't published in other media outlets	13.2%	9.3%	27.7%	31.1%	18.7%
When I see a video on Telegram that might contain graphic violence, I usually watch it	24.9%	18.9%	24.6%	19.2%	12.4%
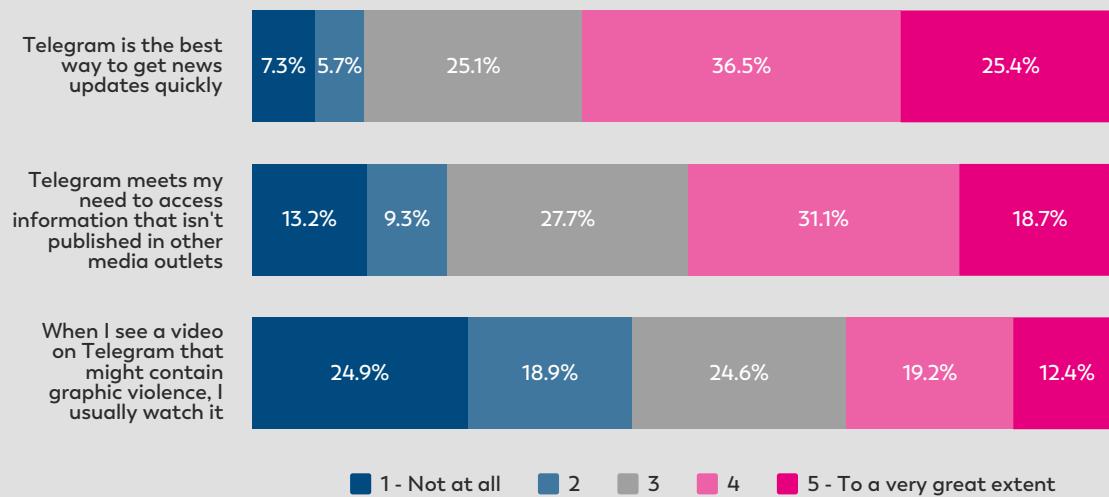
Source: "Filling the Information Gap" Study Survey, October 2024

The most frequently selected descriptions of Telegram were "Uncensored information" (63.2%) and "Real-time news" (60.6%). These findings align with the evaluation of Telegram as the "best way to get news updates quickly:, with 36.5% agreeing "to a great extent" and 25.4% "to a very great extent" with this statement. This indicates that **over 60% of respondents highly value Telegram's speed in delivering real-time updates**. Only 7.3% disagreed completely ("not at all"), and 5.7% "to a small extent", further reinforcing its reputation as a platform for rapid information dissemination.

A smaller proportion of users (28.5%) valued Telegram for its "Exclusive reports ('scoops')". Additionally, nearly half of respondents agreed that Telegram meets their need to access information not published in other media outlets, with 31.1% agreeing "to a great extent" and 18.7% "to a very great extent" with this being a reason for using it. As this shows, **nearly 50% of users value Telegram for providing exclusive or hard-to-find information**.

Users often associate the platform with its capacity to avoid traditional media filters, providing quick and unfiltered access to real-time updates – particularly during breaking news events where traditional media may withhold information due to censorship or other restrictions.

However, **users also acknowledge Telegram's association with the spread of**

unreliable information. **"Source of rumors" and "Irresponsible media channel" were selected by 39.9% and 30.3% of respondents, respectively, as descriptors of the platform.** Some respondents highlighted other negative associations with Telegram, such as "Polarizing discourse" (11.7%) and being "a threat to the country" (11.4%).

Responses about graphic content also revealed polarized perceptions. About 19.2% of respondents agreed "to a great extent" and 12.4% "to a very great extent" that they engage with graphic material on Telegram. Conversely, 24.9% disagreed completely ("not at all"), and 18.9% disagreed "to a small extent", showing a division in attitudes toward raw, unedited content.

Only 14.0% of respondents regarded Telegram as a source of "Reliable information", reflecting widespread skepticism about its credibility. The next chapter will further discuss the credibility and trust of Telegram.

To further explore how Telegram users perceive the platform, respondents were asked to rate the likelihood of recommending Telegram to others on a scale from 0 (not at all likely) to 10 (very likely). This Net Promoter Score (NPS) question[30] revealed a diverse range of opinions. Over half of the respondents (52.4%) fall into the Detractor category (scores 0–6).

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30 Net Promoter Score (NPS), introduced by Fred Reichheld in a 2003 Harvard Business Review article, is a method for evaluating customer loyalty by classifying respondents into three categories: Promoters (scores 9–10), Passives (7–8), and Detractors (0–6). The NPS score is calculated by subtracting the percentage of Detractors from the percentage of Promoters. This single-question methodology aims to predict business growth by measuring the likelihood of customers to recommend a company's product or service. Source: Reichheld, F. F. (2003). The one number you need to grow. Harvard Business Review, 81(12), 46-54.

Figure 21

To what extent would you recommend using the Telegram app to people around you? *[Scale 1–10, where 0 = Not at all]*

■ Detractors   ■ Passives   ■ Promoters

7.8%   3.1%   3.4%   4.4%   4.4%   17.1%   12.2%   17.1%   13.5%   8.3%   8.8%

0   1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8   9   10
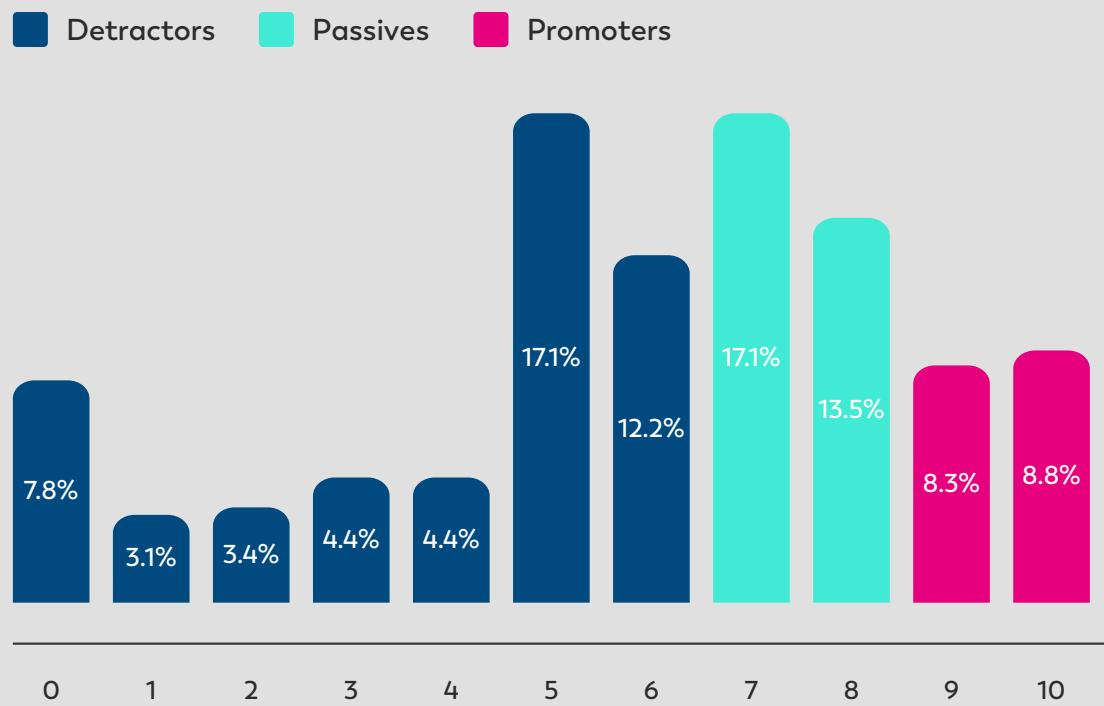
Source: "Filling the Information Gap" Study Survey, October 2024

Meanwhile, only 17.1% of respondents are enthusiastic about recommending Telegram (scores 9–10), reflecting a low Promoter base. A substantial 30.6% of respondents fall into the Passive category (scores 7–8), indicating moderate satisfaction without strong advocacy. The resulting NPS for Telegram is -35, signaling a significant proportion of dissatisfaction and hesitancy among users.

In conclusion, Telegram is perceived as a platform that excels in providing uncensored and real-time information, appealing to users seeking real-time updates. However, this unregulated nature also facilitates the spread of rumors and misinformation, with relatively few users considering it a reliable source. This dual perception underscores Telegram's unique position as both an essential information hub and a platform facing significant challenges related to trust and content regulation challenges.

Reasons for Avoiding Telegram

Understanding why people avoid using Telegram reveals important aspects of its public perception. In the survey, users who have never used Telegram or who had previously used Telegram but stopped were asked in an open-ended question to specify why. Their answers were then manually categorized by identifying recurring themes and grouping similar responses together to form key categories.

Figure 22

For those who answered in the previous question that they have used Telegram in the past but no longer use it, or that they are familiar with it but have never used it – please specify why? *(Open-ended question)*

I don't need it / Not interested / Irrelevant	Uncensored and harsh content	It's unreliable	Media overload or using other platforms	Other
59%	33%	27%	16%	15%
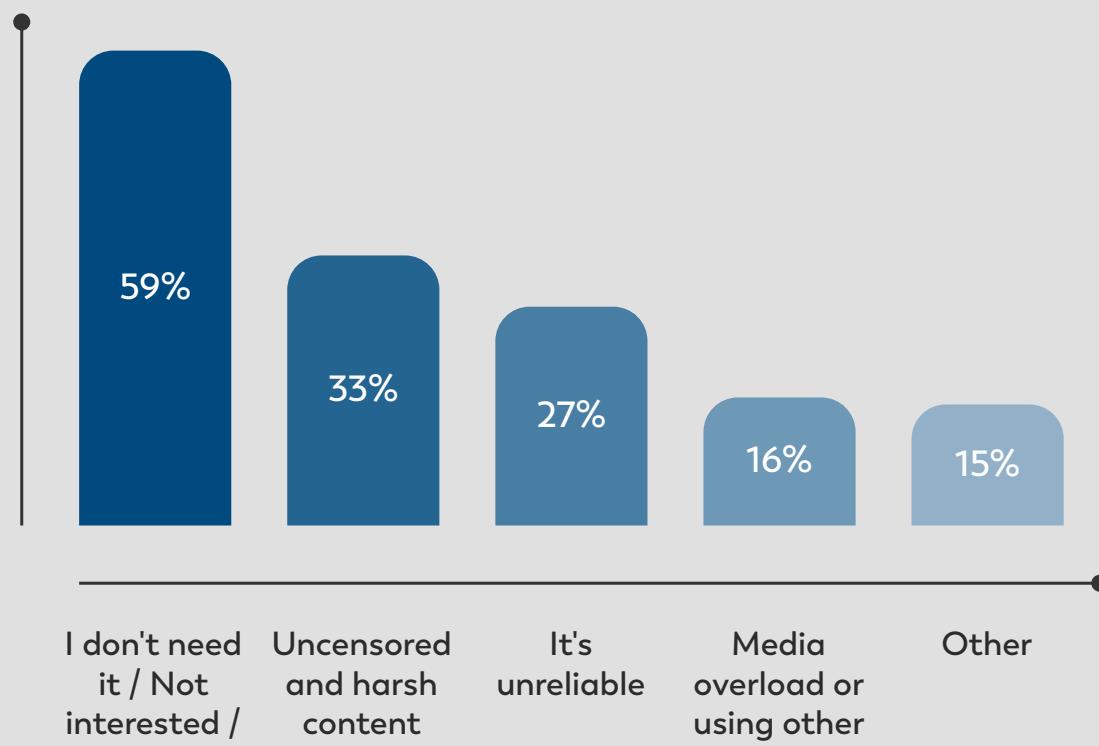
Source: "Filling the Information Gap" Study Survey, October 2024

The most common reason cited for not using Telegram (with 59% of respondents) was a lack of need or interest in the platform. Examples include individuals who rely on others (e.g., spouses) to relay information to them, or those who believe their current media consumption habits, which don't include Telegram, are sufficient. One respondent noted: "I don't feel the need; my husband uses

Telegram and updates me when there's something interesting".

Concerns about the uncensored nature of content on Telegram, including exposure to harmful materials, were commonly reported, with 33% citing issues with uncensored or graphic materials. This included explicit videos and images from traumatic events, such as those shared from October 7th and afterwards. Respondents expressed discomfort with raw and potentially disturbing content, with one respondent stating: "On October 7th, for example, horrible videos of the massacre we experienced were published there. I do not want to expose myself to such graphic content because it increases my anxiety and fear, which are already at their peak", and another stating:"I avoid uncensored content because I think it hurts many people".

Issues of credibility and misinformation were raised by 27% of respondents, who expressed skepticism about the trustworthiness of information shared on Telegram. Common complaints included a lack of content verification, the spread of rumors, and concerns about unaccountable sources. One respondent stated: "I don't trust the people sharing information there". Another remarked: "There is too much false or misleading information without any oversight". Additionally, one respondent noted: "Rumors and updates about casualties and hostages, which aren't necessarily accurate, are spread there, creating unnecessary panic".

A smaller but notable group (16%) indicated that they avoid Telegram due to an overload of communication channels or a preference for other platforms. Respondents felt that their existing platforms, such as WhatsApp, were sufficient for their needs. One individual commented: "There are too many communication channels; what I already use is enough".

The remaining 15% cited miscellaneous reasons for avoiding Telegram, including a preference to avoid overuse of social media or news platforms, distrust of Telegram specifically, and concerns about addiction or ethical issues. One respondent referred to Telegram as a "malicious application", while another noted: "I'm not interested in using this app so I don't become addicted to another social media and news app".

These findings reveal that Telegram's uncensored nature, while a key strength for some users, is a significant deterrent for others. Respondents often referenced a tension between the platform's ability to provide raw information and the psychological toll of engaging with graphic or distressing materials. The widespread association of Telegram with unreliable or unchecked information reinforces earlier findings and highlights a critical barrier to adoption for some skeptical users.

The aversion to graphic or raw content also reflects the emotional toll of traumatic material, particularly during periods of heightened conflict, as illustrated by

concerns of exposure to graphic material from the October 7th events. Ethical concerns about the platform's lack of moderation further deter users who prioritize structured and verified information.

In summary, **the primary reasons for avoiding Telegram reflect a combination of personal preferences, content-related aversions, and credibility concerns.** While some respondents view Telegram as unnecessary or redundant, others actively avoid it due to its uncensored content and association with misinformation.

An analysis of demographic differences illuminates different characteristics among Telegram non-users as compared to those who use the platform. Non-Telegram users tend to be older, with an average age of 45 compared to 38 among users, and are more likely to be women (67% of non-users). Unsurprisingly, they perceive Telegram as less reliable, with only 13% considering it reliable compared to 42% of users. Additionally, non-users exhibit less trust in social media news in general compared to traditional media (13% strongly trust social media news versus 22% of Telegram users). Non-users are also less motivated by speed or exclusivity in news consumption, with fewer stating that they prefer fast or exclusive news updates. Moreover, during the war, 62% of non-users reported relying on the same or fewer information sources, compared to 36% of Telegram users, suggesting a broader pattern of more limited information consumption.

Filling the Information Gap

Media and Telegram Credibility and Trust

As previously shown, only 14% of respondents described Telegram as "reliable information". While users value Telegram for its ability to deliver fast, uncensored news updates, they are also aware of its trust and credibility limitations. This section explores whether this is a unique perception of Telegram or reflective of broader attitudes toward Israeli media in general.

To begin, the survey explored respondents' perceptions of the media in general, focusing on trust and credibility. Respondents were asked to rate their agreement with a series of statements about these topics.

Figure 23

To what extent do you agree with the following statements?

Statement	1 - Not at all	2	3	4	5 - To a very great extent
I suspect that the media organizations are hiding important information from the public	5.8%	18.0%	34.6%	23.6%	18.0%
Consuming news causes me strong negative emotions	12.3%	20.6%	28.3%	23.0%	15.8%
I prefer to consume raw news content, such as videos or images, without mediation or interpretation	11.3%	18.3%	31.9%	25.8%	12.7%
Overall, I trust the news information that comes from major TV channels and newspapers	6.9%	12.6%	31.2%	39.1%	10.1%
I trust news disseminated on social networks more than those from established media organizations	32.3%	18.5%	29.1%	14.1%	6.0%
I prefer to receive news reports immediately, even if they are not always accurate	28.6%	23.5%	26.6%	15.9%	5.4%
I want to receive news quickly to be the first to tell my friends before anyone else	43.7%	21.5%	18.7%	11.3%	4.8%

Source: *"Filling the Information Gap" Study Survey, October 2024*

The data reveals a notable disparity in respondents' trust in traditional media. **49.2% of respondents express a great extent of trust in news from major TV channels and newspapers**. This level of trust represents the highest agreement among respondents in statements expressing attitudes towards media trust. 39.1% agreed to a great extent of it, and another 10.1% to a very great extent. In addition, 31.2% expressed a moderate extent of trust.

In contrast, a significant **41.6% suspect that media organizations are hiding important information from the public** (23.6% to a great extent and 18.0% to a very great extent), highlighting a contrast between trust and suspicion. This suggests that **while traditional media retains a baseline of credibility, many respondents hold skeptical views of its transparency.**

This skepticism creates a gap in perceived transparency, which pushes users toward platforms like Telegram, widely perceived as uncensored and unfiltered. This aligns with earlier findings highlighting Telegram users' preference for alternative sources of information.

The survey data shows that coalition supporters are more skeptical of major TV channels and newspapers than opposition supporters. Only 39.0% of coalition respondents expressed high levels of trust (4 or 5) in news from major TV channels and newspapers, compared to 58.9% among opposition supporters. In contrast, coalition supporters expressed significantly higher levels of agreement with the statement *"I suspect that the media organizations are hiding important information from the public,"* with 51.3% indicating that they suspect the media is hiding information to a "great extent" or a "very great extent" (4 or 5). This compares to only 32.4% of opposition supporters.

A strong preference for raw and unmediated content is also evident, with **38.5% of respondents preferring to consume news in its raw form, such as videos or images, without mediation or interpretation** (25.89% to a great extent, 12.7% to a very great extent).

At the same time, the emotional toll of news consumption is significant, with **almost 39% reporting that consuming news causes strong negative emotions** (23.0% to a great extent, 15.8% to a very great extent).

Despite the growing popularity of social media platforms as a source of news updates, respondents express limited trust in social platforms as sources of credible information. Only **20.1% trust news disseminated on social media more than traditional media outlets** (14.1% to a great extent, 6.0% to a very great extent). This skepticism reflects a broader concern about misinformation and unverified content.

Furthermore, while speed is often associated with digital platforms, only **21.3% of respondents prioritize receiving news immediately, even if it is not always**

accurate (15.9% to a great extent, 5.4% to a very great extent). Similarly, social motivations for consuming news are weak, with only 16.1% agreeing strongly that they want to receive news quickly in order to share it with their friends before others do (11.3% to a great extent, 4.8% to a very great extent).

In conclusion, **respondents may rely on traditional media for its perceived reliability in fact-checking and professional reporting, but simultaneously many believe it withholds sensitive or controversial information**, possibly due to perceived institutional biases or external pressures[31].

This contradiction underscores a nuanced view of traditional media: trusted for its fact-checking and professional reporting, yet distrusted for concealing sensitive information. This skepticism, combined with the emotional toll of news consumption, highlights a **complex relationship with news that pushes users toward alternative platforms like Telegram**.

Ultimately, this skepticism regarding traditional media's transparency drives users to platforms like Telegram that are seen as uncensored and unfiltered, fulfilling the need for alternative narratives and bypassing perceived institutional biases in traditional media.

Perceived Reliability of Telegram Compared to Other News Outlets

Survey data reveals that the **lack of trust in Israeli media is a widespread phenomenon and not unique to Telegram.** To examine the perceived reliability of information on Telegram in comparison to other platforms, survey respondents evaluated various news outlets and platforms based on their perceived credibility.

Respondents were asked to rate different news channels and platforms in terms of how reliable they considered the information they provide for consuming news content. These included Telegram channels, television channels, WhatsApp groups, social media platforms (e.g., Facebook, X, Instagram, TikTok), printed newspapers (e.g., *Yedioth Ahronoth*, *Israel Hayom*), news websites (e.g., *Ynet*, *Walla*), and radio (e.g., *Kan Reshet Bet*, *Galei Tzahal*).

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31 There has been a significant long-term decline in Israeli public trust in the media. The Israeli Democracy Index, published annually by the Israel Democracy Institute, reports that the proportion of Jewish respondents in Israel who trust the media has dropped from approximately 50% two decades ago to 27% in 2024, a figure that has remained largely unchanged in recent years.

Filling the Information Gap

Figure 24

For each of the following platforms, please indicate how reliable you consider the information on the platform for consuming news content. You may also rate platforms you do not use if you have an opinion about them, or select "Don't know".

- 1 - Not reliable at all
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5 - Very highly reliable

	Radio	Television Channels	News Websites	Newspapers	Telegram Channels	Social Media Platforms	WhatsApp Groups
1 - Not reliable at all	4.1%	6.7%	5.1%	9.3%	12.9%	11.6%	14.5%
2	6.4%	9.7%	11.9%	11.2%	19.9%	26.4%	27.9%
3	24.3%	29.4%	28.9%	29.5%	30.6%	44.1%	37.5%
4	45.2%	38.5%	41.5%	38.1%	28.8%	13.6%	16.1%
5 - Very highly reliable	19.9%	15.8%	12.6%	12.0%	7.8%	4.3%	4.0%
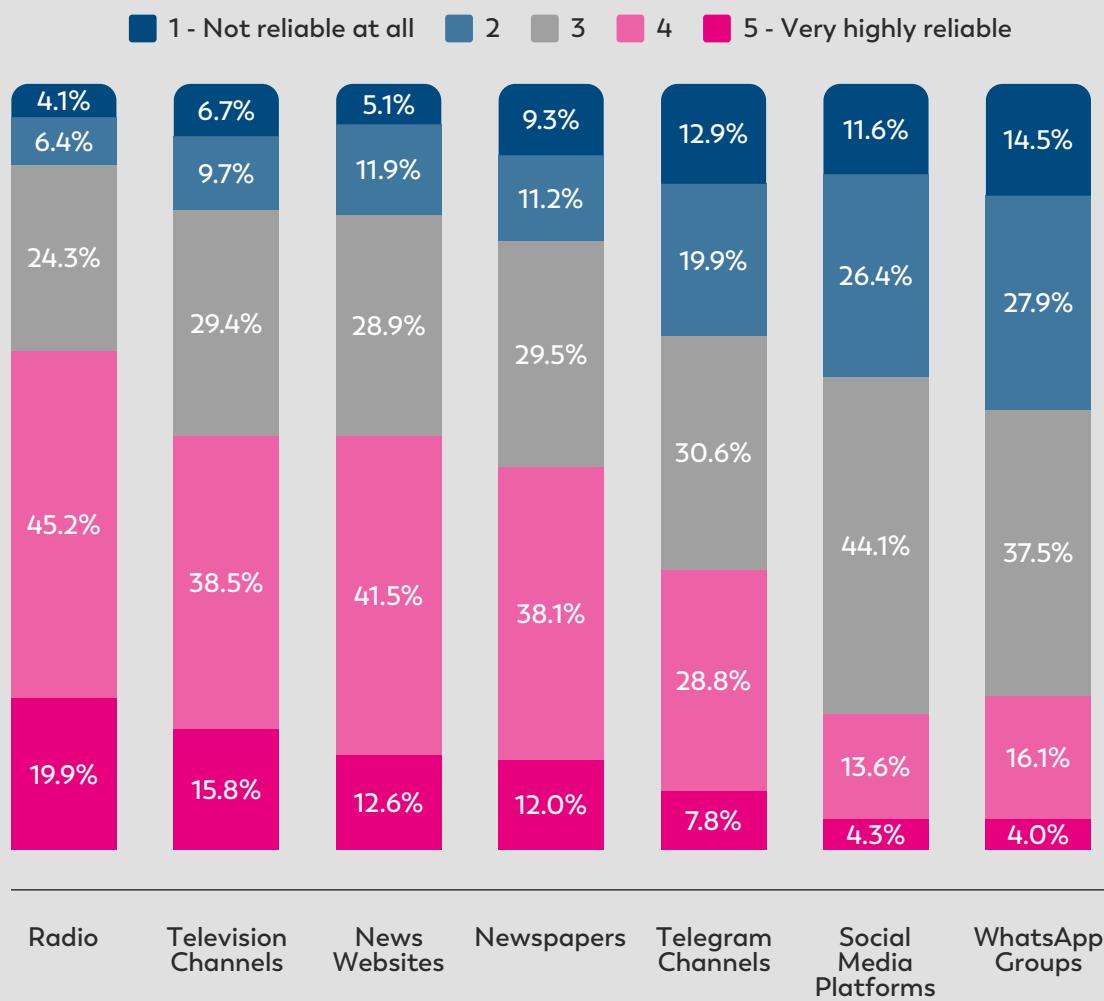
Source: *"Filling the Information Gap" Study Survey, October 2024*

The findings demonstrate that **traditional media platforms are perceived as significantly more reliable than social media and messaging platforms**. **Radio is rated as the most reliable**, with 65.1% of respondents considering it either highly reliable (45.2%) or very highly reliable (19.9%). This reflects its long-standing reputation for professionalism and accountability, even though it is not frequently used.

Television channels and news websites follow closely, with 54.3% and 54.1%,

respectively, rating them as highly or very highly reliable (38.5% and 15.8% for television; 41.5% and 12.6% for news websites). Printed newspapers, though less commonly used today, are still trusted, with 50.1% of respondents considering them highly or very highly reliable (38.1% highly reliable, 12.0% very highly reliable).

In contrast, **digital platforms face significant skepticism.** Telegram channels, though moderately trusted compared to traditional outlets, are rated as highly reliable (28.8%) or very highly reliable (7.8%) by 36.6% of respondents. **This positions Telegram between traditional media and social media platforms.**

Social media platforms, including Facebook, X (formerly Twitter), Instagram, and TikTok, rank the lowest in trust, with only 17.9% of respondents rating them as highly or very highly reliable and a substantial 38.0% deeming them only slightly reliable or not reliable. Similarly, WhatsApp groups, often used for peer-to-peer news dissemination, are perceived as unreliable, with only 20.1% rating them highly or very highly reliable and 42.4% considering them slightly reliable or not reliable.

Misinformation and Transparency on Telegram

To understand public perception of Telegram in this context, respondents evaluated their agreement with statements addressing misinformation, reliability, and transparency with regards to the platform.

Figure 25

To what extent do you agree with the following statements regarding information on Telegram?

Statement	1 - Not at all	2	3	4	5 - To a very great extent
There is a lot of fake news on Telegram	1.6%	7.8%	32.4%	31.9%	26.4%
It bothers me that I don't know who manages the Telegram channels I follow	14.8%	19.2%	29.0%	22.3%	14.8%
Most of the information on Telegram is reliable	10.4%	15.5%	44.3%	24.9%	4.9%
I trust the information published by Telegram channel admins	12.2%	17.6%	45.1%	21.8%	3.4%
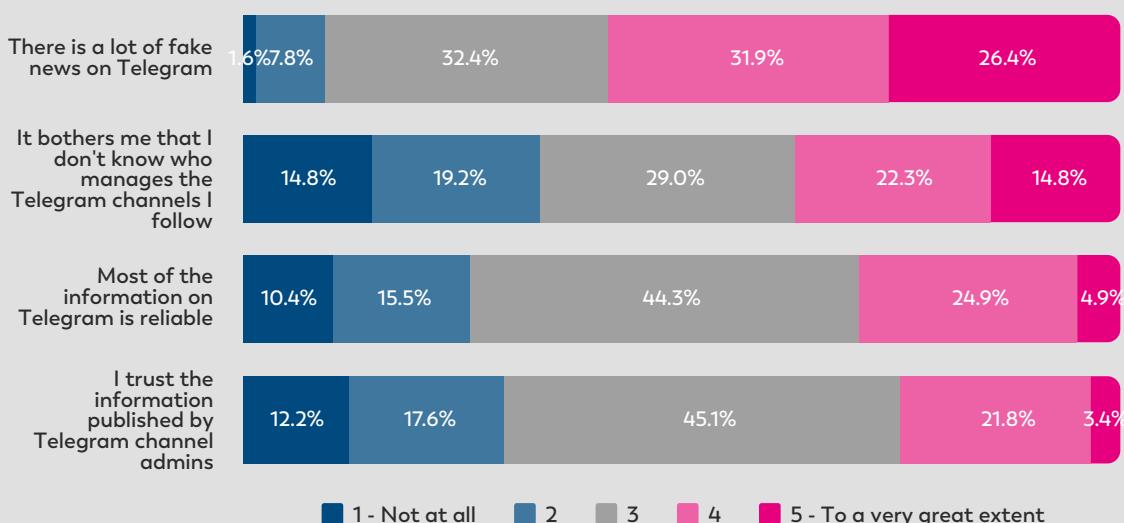
Source: *"Filling the Information Gap" Study Survey, October 2024*

The findings reveal substantial concerns about misinformation, with **58.3% of respondents agreeing that "There is a lot of fake news on Telegram"**, reinforcing the platform's association with unverified information. Only **29.8% considered most of Telegram's information reliable**, and just **25.2% expressed trust in information published by Telegram channel administrators**.

Transparency issues also proved significant, with **37.1%** of respondents agreeing to a great or very great extent that **"It bothers me that I don't know who manages the Telegram channels I follow"**. This highlights a key challenge for Telegram: many channels, including some of the most popular ones, operate anonymously, complicating accountability for the information users consume. However, **34% expressed little or no concern about this issue**, indicating that some users prioritize unfiltered, real-time updates over transparency regarding channel administrators.

These findings underscore a significant credibility gap for the platform. **While Telegram's speed and accessibility make it a key source for real-time information, its perceived ties to misinformation and lack of transparency negatively impact broader trust. The** anonymity, in particular, undermines accountability and complicates users' ability to assess the reliability of the information they receive.

Political affiliation further influences perceptions of Telegram's reliability. Coalition-aligned respondents demonstrated greater trust in Telegram, with 45% rating it as "very reliable" or "extremely reliable", compared to just 25% of opposition-aligned respondents. Conversely, **opposition-aligned respondents expressed greater skepticism**, with 67% agreeing that "there is a lot of fake news on Telegram", compared to 55% of coalition-aligned respondents. Similarly, Telegram was described as a "source of rumors" by 49% of opposition respondents, compared to just 35% of coalition respondents. Additionally, 43% of opposition respondents viewed Telegram as "irresponsible media channel", compared to 31% of coalition respondents.

Media Orientation and Information Sharing

Since Telegram is widely associated with uncensored and unfiltered information, the survey examined media literacy and fact-checking behaviors to understand how users manage the risks of misinformation. The data suggests a growing awareness of the importance of fact-checking and cautious information-sharing behavior on Telegram. However, variation in responses highlights the need for continued education and tools to help users discern accurate information from misinformation.

When asked about their fact-checking habits for news content received from unofficial channels such as WhatsApp groups, Telegram, or social media, **36.7% of**

respondents reported that they rarely share news updates. Additionally, **36.2% said they fact-check by verifying if content has also been published by official sources**. However, a notable **18.8% admitted that they don't fact-check because they trust the content they receive**. This reveals a vulnerability to misinformation among nearly one-fifth of respondents, as these unofficial channels are known to often be unreliable.

Advanced fact-checking practices were found to be rare, with only **5.3% of respondents reporting checking whether videos or images had been reused in other contexts.** This statistic is significant as reused media can mislead audiences by presenting outdated or out-of-context information as current or authentic. This points to a significant gap in digital literacy, as more nuanced verification techniques are essential for mitigating misinformation, particularly in fast-paced information environments.

Telegram-specific behaviors echoed these trends. While 59.8% of respondents claimed they refrain from sharing rumors published on Telegram with friends or family until verified by official sources, and **46.9% indicated they personally verify Telegram information before sharing it, 28.5% admitted they frequently share news observed on Telegram without explicitly confirming its accuracy.**

The findings regarding responsible online behavior may be influenced by social desirability bias. This is a common limitation in self-reported surveys, as participants may have over-reported socially acceptable behaviors, such as fact-checking and refraining from sharing unverified rumors, to align with socially acceptable norms. This creates a potential gap between their reported actions and their actual behaviors.

These findings underscore the need for greater public awareness of fact-checking practices and digital literacy tools, particularly in the context of Telegram. Equipping users with the skills to critically evaluate and engage responsibly with information is essential.

Figure 26

Do you fact-check (verify the accuracy of information) news content received from unofficial channels (e.g., WhatsApp groups, Telegram, social media) before sharing it? *(Multiple-choice question)*

36.7%	I rarely share news updates
36.2%	I check if it's been published by official sources as well
18.8%	I don't fact-check because I trust the content
5.3%	I check if videos/images have been used in other contexts before
3%	Other
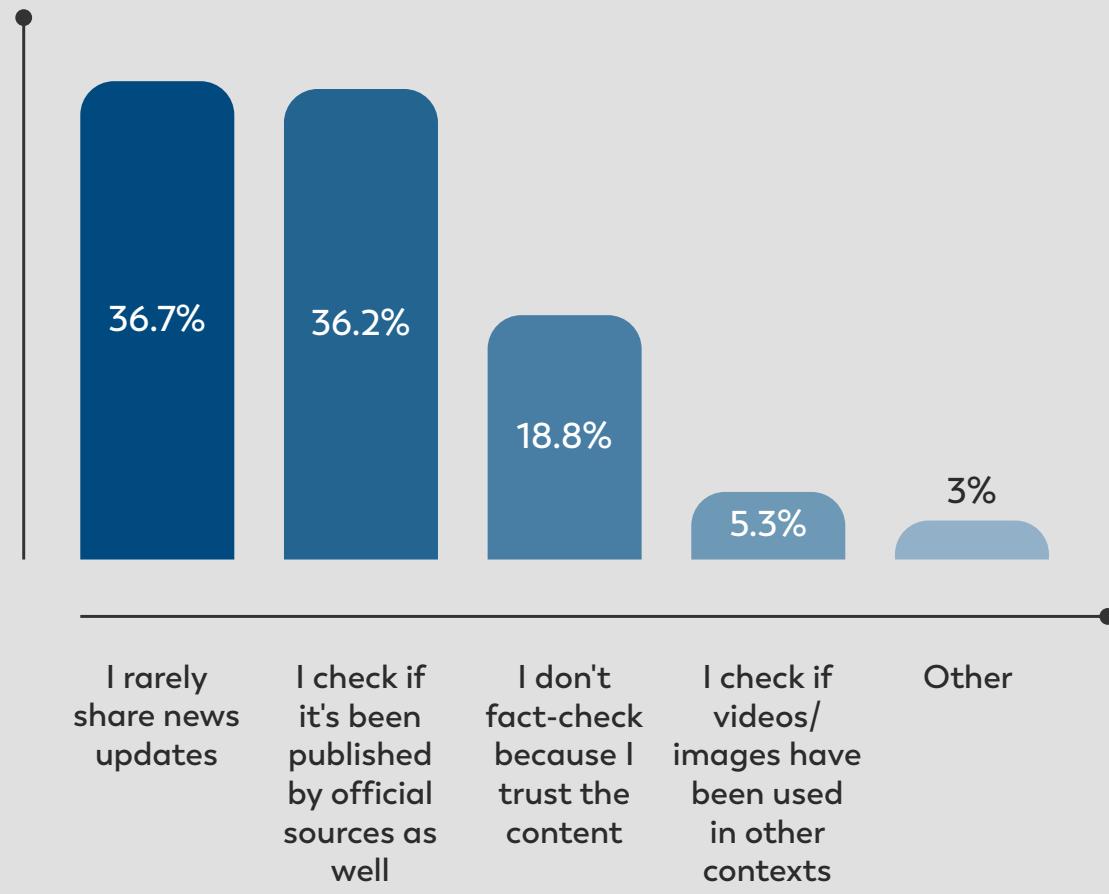
Source: "Filling the Information Gap" Study Survey, October 2024

Figure 27

To what extent do the following statements accurately reflect your use of Telegram?

This question was presented to respondents who indicated in the previous question that they use Telegram

If rumors are published on Telegram, I won't share them with friends or family until they are verified by official sources
- 7.6%
- 8.7%
- 23.9%
- 28.7%
- 31.1%

Before I share information from Telegram with friends or family, I check if the information is correct
- 17%
- 11.8%
- 24.4%
- 32.5%
- 14.4%

I often share news information that I saw on Telegram with friends or family
- 28.5%
- 20.3%
- 23.7%
- 16.5%
- 11.1%

Legend: ■ 1 - Not at all ■ 2 ■ 3 ■ 4 ■ 5 - To a very great extent
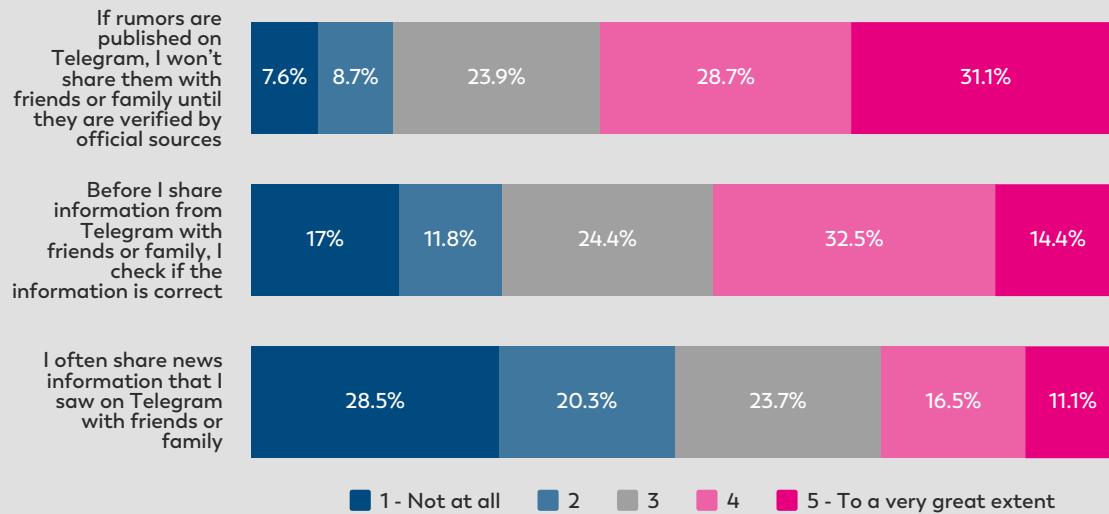
Source: *"Filling the Information Gap" Study Survey, October 2024*

Discussion and insights

On October 7th, a dramatic news event unfolded in Israel, marked by uncertainty and a lack of reliable information. This situation catalyzed a sharp surge in Telegram usage, as analyzed through survey data and Telegram analytics in this paper. **The surge in Telegram adoption and usage reflects a broader pattern of intensified news consumption and news source diversification during times of war** , as the survey data reveals.

This rise in Telegram usage represents a notable shift during an emergency situation towards a news source that is non-institutional, unfiltered, and positioned as an alternative to traditional media. The most pronounced growth in Telegram adoption occurred immediately following the outbreak of the war, with additional spikes observed during major escalatory events.

These patterns underscore **Telegram's role as a central platform for real-time updates, particularly during moments of heightened news intensity**. Following October 7th, Telegram emerged as a leading choice as a news source in breaking news events, with a quarter of respondents relying on it first for breaking news, alongside news websites and television news channels. Furthermore, more than half of Telegram users report using the platform at least once a day, indicating a high frequency of usage.

The study examined the reasons behind this surge in Telegram usage in light of the war and the platform's perceptions by its users. Findings reveal **a tension between the platform's immediacy and concerns about its reliability.** Users acknowledge the potential credibility issues of Telegram content, but continue to rely on the platform to address their urgent need for urgent, rapid information during crises.

The next parts of this section will discuss the challenges that Telegram poses, particularly in the context of its usage during emergencies. This will be followed by an exploration of the broader challenges liberal democracies face with the rise of new platforms. These platforms require increased awareness and strategic consideration to balance their benefits and risks.

Challenges Arising from Telegram Usage

1. Telegram Fills the Gap Left by Traditional Media and the Need for Timely Information

While 49.2% of respondents expressed trust in traditional media outlets, such as major TV channels and newspapers, 42% suspected these outlets of withholding important information, illustrating a tension between trust and suspicion. This skepticism has fueled the rise of platforms like Telegram, which are perceived as providing unmediated access to information.

Telegram's ability to provide raw, unmediated content aligns with the preferences of 38.5% of respondents who seek direct access to information without editorial mediation.

The platform meets a dual need for timely information and an expanded range of sources, including raw unfiltered information, filling gaps left by traditional and social media. On average, Telegram users report a more diverse range of information sources during the war compared to non-users. This may reflect a proactive search for complementary sources to traditional media, which Telegram facilitates through its decentralized and open channel structure.

2. Telegram's Structure Influences Content Popularity

Telegram's design and operational structure significantly influence the nature of the content shared and its reception by users, particularly through its lack of algorithmic curation and its emphasis on direct, unmediated communication. As Marshall McLuhan argued[32], "the medium is the message," and Telegram exemplifies this notion. On the one hand, it allows information to reach users in real time, offering immediacy, accessibility, and directness. On the other hand, Telegram's emphasis at the time of its founding on freedom of expression and privacy has turned it into a fertile ground for the dissemination of uncensored content, including rumors, psychological terror, disinformation, and enemy propaganda. This is partly enabled by the anonymity of channel administrators, who often avoid accountability for the information shared with large audiences (one-to-many communication).

Moreover, unlike other platforms such as Facebook or X (formerly Twitter), where content exposure is heavily influenced by algorithms, Telegram delivers notifications for every new post in a subscribed channel. Therefore, the content reaches the followers immediately and encourages constant engagement with it. **This direct communication ensures that content reaches followers'**

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[32] McLuhan, Marshall (1964). Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man.

feeds without needing to "appease the algorithm." As a result, exposure on Telegram depends primarily on the number of followers and their engagement levels as well as the channel's posting frequency. Consequently, channels that publish provocative, graphic, or unique content often have a structural advantage in attracting followers.

3. Mental Impact of Telegram on Public Resilience and Anxiety

As this research highlights, the publication of uncensored content on Telegram – such as Hamas or Islamic Jihad videos showing Israeli hostages – attracts users and meets a public demand for that type of information. However, **exposure to psychological terror, graphic footage, and unverified rumors may heighten public anxiety and undermine erode resilience**. While these impacts are not the primary focus of this research, e**vidence has emerged since the war began regarding the psychological toll of intensive news exposure**, particularly on Telegram. It is important to further investigate this impact and share findings with the public in order to raise awareness about the psychological costs of media exposure and encourage more mindful consumption. For instance, research examining the mental and psychological effects of the October 7 events on Israel's population (Yamin et al., 2023b)[33] found a significant correlation between viewing gory videos, documenting in real-time the terror attack particularly on platforms like Telegram during the first week following the events, and increased rates of PTSD, even after adjusting for factors such as age, sex, socioeconomic status, and religiosity[34].

4. Telegram News Channels May Become Fertile Ground for Foreign Interference Campaigns

Telegram news channels have the potential to become fertile ground for foreign interference campaigns. **The anonymity of channel operators can turn these platforms into instruments for foreign actors, making it easier to manipulate public discourse**. Already, operators of foreign interference campaigns have used Telegram channels to disseminate content targeting Hebrew-speaking audiences[35]. Since the outbreak of

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33 Yamin, D., Lev-Ari, S., Mofaz, M., Elias, R., Spiegel, D., Yechezkel, M., Brandeau, M. L., & Shmueli, E. (2023b). Risk and early signs of PTSD in people indirectly exposed to October 7 events. medRxiv (Cold Spring Harbor Laboratory). https://doi.org/10.1101/2023.12.15.23300048

34 The researchers noted that the October 7 events were extensively documented in real-time, often with GoPro cameras, and then disseminated on social media platforms like Telegram, with 88.4% of their survey respondents reporting that they had seen such content on the platform. This real-time, graphic documentation is cited as a factor contributing to higher PTSD rates after the October 7 events compared to 9/11.

35 Orpaz, I., & Siman Tov, D. (2024). Foreign interference and Iranian influence on social networks in Israel. Institute for National Security Studies (INSS) - Special Report. https://www.inss.org.

the war, the Israeli media has reported multiple cases of Iran attempting – and in some instances succeeding – to recruit agents in Israel through Telegram[36]. These reports underscore the platform's role in facilitating such activities. As Telegram's popularity continues to rise, so does this risk. The fact that the identities of operators behind some of the most-followed Telegram news channels are often unknown further heightens this issue. It is possible that some of these channels are, or will be, operated by actors with foreign interests who recognize the platform's potential.

Moreover, in the last two years, **generative AI technologies have become widely accessible, enabling the rapid production of high-quality text, images, and videos in large quantities. This capability amplifies the threat of foreign interference**: Indicators that have historically helped identify fake accounts run by foreign actors – such as inverted question marks characteristic of Persian keyboards or poor Hebrew – are likely to diminish as technology improves, making it increasingly difficult for the public to detect or suspect content on channels operated by foreign actors.

5. Telegram's Regulatory Challenges and Limited Transparency

Telegram was founded on the ideals of freedom of expression but has since become a hub for controversial content. The arrest and investigation of Telegram CEO Pavel Durov in Paris during the summer of 2024 illustrated the tension between the platform and governmental authorities worldwide. Following his release, Telegram announced in September changes to its privacy policy, agreeing to share user details with authorities in cases of confirmed criminal activities that violate the platform's terms of service. As stated by Telegram[37], "If Telegram receives a valid order from the relevant judicial authorities that confirms you're a suspect in a case involving criminal activities that violate the Telegram Terms of Service, we will perform a legal analysis of the request and may disclose your IP address and phone number to the relevant authorities."

Alongside this policy change, Telegram introduced a transparency report detailing requests from authorities. In Israel, between January and September 2024, no requests for IP addresses or phone numbers were submitted to Telegram, resulting in no affected users. Data for the fourth quarter of 2024

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il/wp-content/uploads/2024/11/special-publication131124.pdf

36 For example, Job ads and a call for a military coup: How Iran is trying to recruit Israelis on Telegram;A Bnei Brak resident followed a nuclear scientist, while a couple from Lod photographed the Mossad headquarters and military graves. ; Directed by Iran: Young Israelis were recruited on Telegram to create chaos in the country.

37 Telegram Privacy Policy

in Israel is unavailable. In the United States, by contrast, Telegram fulfilled 14 requests affecting 108 users during the same period[38]. From October to December 2024, this number increased significantly to 900 requests, impacting 2,253 users – a sharp rise in government requests processed by Telegram during this period. Furthermore, in response to growing pressure, Telegram reported[39] on a moderation page launched in December 2024 that it had removed approximately 16 million suspect groups and channels throughout the year, leveraging AI-based moderation technology[40].

Since its launch, Telegram's minimal data-sharing policies and limited cooperation with authorities have set it apart from other social platforms, making it more difficult to address harmful content on the platform effectively. Companies like Meta, for instance, publish regular reports on platform threats and coordinated inauthentic behavior in influence campaigns[41]. Additionally, major social networks maintain local representation or official channels in Israel, enabling authorities to request the removal of harmful content when necessary. Telegram, however, offers limited avenues for such communication, complicating oversight and enforcement efforts.

Recent developments on platforms like X (formerly Twitter), now owned by Elon Musk, and changes to fact-checking policies on Facebook introduced by Mark Zuckerberg after Donald Trump's election, have raised concerns about the future of social networks in regulating public discourse within the digital town square. This issue requires a separate in-depth discussion.

On October 13, 2023, just days after the outbreak of the war, Telegram CEO Durov responded[42] to criticism regarding Telegram's approach to removing problematic content and the complexities of covering wars and political conflicts. According to Durov, Telegram's content managers and AI moderation tools removed millions of harmful posts daily. He posed a question to his critics: "Earlier this week, Hamas used Telegram to warn civilians in Ashkelon to leave the area ahead of their missile strikes. Would shutting down their channel help save lives – or would it endanger more lives?".

He further explained, "Such complex situations require thorough consideration that should also take into account the differences between social platforms. [..] on Telegram, users receive only the content to which they specifically subscribed. As such, it's unlikely that Telegram channels can be used to significantly amplify propaganda. Instead, they serve as a unique source of

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38 Telegram Hands U.S. Authorities Data on Thousands of Users
39 https://t.me/durov/383
40 https://telegram.org/moderation
41 Coordinated Inauthentic Behavior Archives | Meta
42 https://t.me/durov/230

first-hand information [..]. While it would be easy for us to destroy this source of information, doing so risks exacerbating an already dire situation."

In November 2023, the Israeli Internet Association (ISOC) addressed the regulatory and enforcement challenges[43] that national authorities face with Telegram as a growing platform, particularly during the war. "Unlike other social networks, Telegram lacks community guidelines and operates under very limited terms of use," the ISOC explained. "Telegram adopts an almost absolute policy of non-enforcement and non-intervention regarding content, with the only restrictions it imposes being on promoting violence or distributing illegal pornography in public channels and groups. As an exception, Telegram is obligated under EU regulations to remove terrorist-related content in public channels upon explicit governmental request."

The ISOC further noted that Telegram allows secure and anonymous communication without requiring user verification or cooperating with investigative authorities, making it difficult for law enforcement or victims to identify those engaging in illegal activities. In the absence of platform enforcement, this facilitates publishing without consequences. "In other words," the ISOC summarized, "even when problematic content is posted on Telegram or fake accounts operate within it, removing them is highly challenging." Nevertheless, the ISOC acknowledged that Telegram has, over the years, provided information and removed content in rare cases due to public and political pressure, primarily when human lives were at risk.

Despite recent changes, Telegram remains a relatively unregulated platform compared to major social networks, leaving governments and the public with minimal influence over its content moderation. Given its dominance as a news source, especially during emergencies, this presents a significant state-level challenge. It raises broader implications for governance, including ensuring public safety and managing the spread of harmful content.

Broader Implications for Liberal Democracies

1. The Need to Access Real-Time News During Major Events

There are moments, particularly during dramatic events like war, when access to real-time information is critical. This need was especially pronounced in the initial days of the Israel-Gaza war, when traditional media struggled to deliver timely updates. These gaps can arise from factors such as event complexity or

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43 Telegram's Content Policy, Use, and the Challenges of State-Level Regulation and Enforcement, ISOC

restrictions in information flow that prevent a clear understanding of events. During the early days of the war, those who consumed news via Telegram appeared to comprehend the magnitude of the disaster before those relying solely on television channels, due to Telegram's faster updates and direct access to diverse sources.

The research highlights how **major news events, such as the outbreak of war or a global pandemic, intensify the demand for alternative news sources to bridge informational gaps**. It is vital for media outlets, governments, and public organizations to recognize the human need for immediate updates on unfolding events. Institutions should make concerted efforts to address this need with accuracy and professionalism. This includes **promptly releasing official information instead of withholding it while rumors quickly spread. This would help prevent reliance on faster but unreliable sources that may spread misinformation** and result in significant societal harm.

2. Monitoring Media Consumption Trends and Leveraging Them for National Needs

It is crucial for official entities to identify emerging and growing platforms for information dissemination. These platforms can then be utilized to communicate and share important updates with the public. Monitoring media consumption trends and establishing a presence on platforms before they become mainstream can help official entities stay ahead of emerging opportunities and respond effectively to public needs.

Official Israeli entities are currently active on Telegram, including the Ministry of Health (which launched a Telegram account during the COVID-19 pandemic), the Home Front Command, and the IDF Spokesperson's Unit. Since the outbreak of the war, the number of followers of the IDF channel has increased more than tenfold, while the Home Front Command channel's following has more than quadrupled. However, these channels still have relatively fewer followers compared to major news update channels.

Despite this growth, official channels' Telegram content has not been specifically tailored for the platform. Much of the material is repurposed from other platforms, and thus lacks the short, visual, and engaging formats suited to success on Telegram. There is significant potential for official entities to expand their use of Telegram, especially given its widespread use for breaking news events and its highly engaged audience.

Additionally, it is **important for official entities to establish collaborations and relationships with major channel operators**. Recognizing the large audience these channels attract, official entities should consider briefing and supporting them in conveying critical information to the public – similar to the

ways in which traditional media organizations are routinely engaged. In some cases, the follower base of certain Telegram channels may exceed that of traditional media outlets. Partnerships should also be explored with relevant channels in foreign languages in order to broaden access and ensure critical information reaches diverse audiences.

Figure 28

Number of subscribers to the IDF channel on Telegram (idfofficial@)
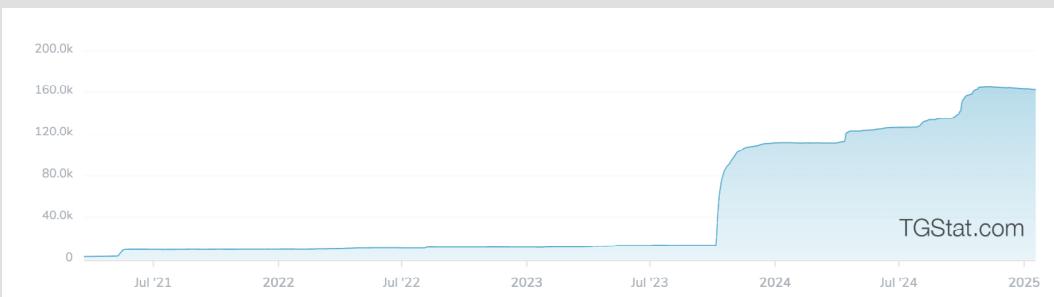
Figure 29

Number of subscribers to the Home Front Command channel on Telegram (PikudHaOref_all@)
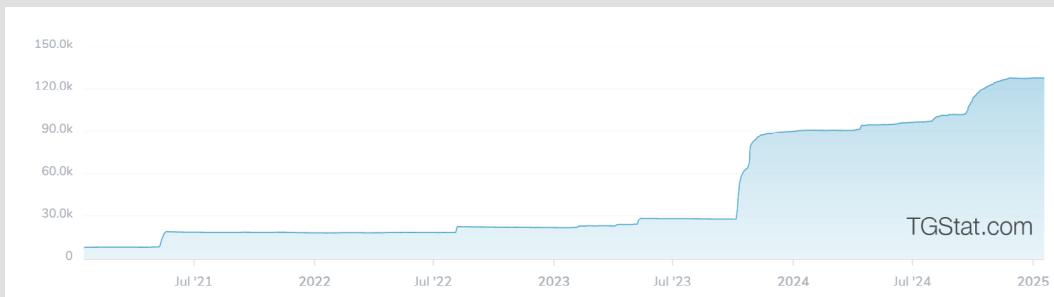
Source: TGStat Data

An example of official state engagement with Telegram in a time of war can be found in Ukraine. As in Israel, Ukraine also saw a significant rise in the use of Telegram channels for news updates following the Russian invasion in 2022. However, unlike in Israel, Telegram was widely used at the onset of the war by authorized sources for disseminating official information. COVID-19 Telegram channels were repurposed to provide war-related updates. These channels became a direct and verified source of information for civilians.

For example, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky's Telegram channel grew from 65,000 followers on the eve of the war to 1.2 million by early March 2022

– about ten days into. Official Ukrainian channels served as mechanisms for distributing reliable, verified information, publishing defense instructions and real-time alerts, and countering Russian disinformation efforts by refuting false information circulating online. Telegram bots enabled citizens to report Russian forces and equipment.

Of course, the platform's prevalence has negative consequences as well. As in Israel, Telegram was also exploited by hostile actors to undermine morale and disseminate harmful, false information. In September 2024, Ukraine banned the use of Telegram by key personnel due to evidence of Russian intelligence accessing user data. [44] [45] [46] [47]

3. The Paradox of Reliability and Popularity in News Consumption

The survey data reveals that when examining how frequently respondents consume news on different channels and platforms, a distinct gap between perceived reliability and usage emerges. Despite being perceived as the most reliable platform, radio is among the least used, with only 18.3% of respondents using it several times a day for news consumption. Similarly, television channels, though perceived as highly reliable by 54.3%, are used several times a day by just 27.4% of respondents.

In contrast, social media platforms, which are perceived as the least reliable (with only 17.9% of respondents rating them as highly or very highly reliable), are the most frequently accessed for news, with 55.6% of respondents using them several times a day. WhatsApp groups, also viewed as unreliable (only 20.1% rating them as highly or very highly reliable), are accessed several times a day by 49.0%. Telegram channels, whose reliability ratings fall in between , are used several times a day by 32.0%, reflecting their position as a hybrid platform offering both immediacy and a degree of structure.

This gap between reliability and usage underscores the tension between trust and convenience in media consumption, highlighting how **individuals often prioritize ease of access and immediacy over credibility in their choice of news sources.** Traditional platforms such as radio and television maintain their reputations for credibility but are no longer the primary sources of high frequency news consumption for many respondents. Conversely, digital platforms like social media, WhatsApp, and Telegram, while trusted

44 When War Struck, Ukraine Turned to Telegram | WIRED

45 Telegram channel "Zelenskiy / Official" — @V_Zelenskiy_official statistics — TGStat

46 HOW NON-INSTITUTIONALIZED NEWS TELEGRAM-CHANNELS OPERATE AND CAPTURE THE AUDIENCE IN UKRAINIAN SEGMENT

47 Украинским военным и госслужащим запретили использовать Telegram. Буданов заявил, что это "вопрос нацбезопасности"

less, dominate in frequent news consumption due to their accessibility and immediacy.

This paradox highlights a critical challenge for media organizations: balancing credibility with accessibility – a challenge shared by liberal democracies worldwide.

4. Lack of Digital Media Orientation

The research findings emphasize the **urgent need to improve public digital media literacy in evaluating and sharing news published on social media platforms**.

The findings underscore the inherent challenges posed by platforms like Telegram, where anonymity, speed, and unfiltered content create a fertile environment for misinformation and the spread of rumors, uncensored, and unverified information.

Approximately 18.8% of respondents indicated that they trust the content they consume without engaging in attempts to verify it , highlighting a significant vulnerability to unreliable information. Indeed, 28.5% of participants admitted to regularly sharing news observed on Telegram without confirming its reliability.

The reliance on self-reported survey data necessitates caution in interpreting respondents' responsible sharing behaviors, as social desirability bias may affect responses. This implies that in practice, the prevalence of sharing unverified information from Telegram may in fact be even higher than survey responses indicate.

The absence of robust verification practices among users, coupled with their reliance on trust over fact-checking, underscores the need for targeted interventions. Media literacy programs and increased public awareness campaigns could play pivotal roles in addressing these gaps.

The rise of Telegram underscores another significant issue: the absence of journalistic ethics and accountability in messaging applications like Telegram, and in social media at large. Unlike traditional media, which is in principle adheres to journalistic standards meant to ensure that content is verified and reliable, Telegram lacks any such mechanisms. This highlights the critical need to enhance public media literacy, enabling individuals to critically assess the information they encounter and identify potential falsehoods, psychological terror, and disinformation.

This challenge is amplified by a psychological tendency to view censored

information as more credible[48]. Due to this phenomenon, individuals may attribute higher reliability to content on Telegram simply because it is unavailable on traditional news platforms. Thus – somewhat paradoxically – the very fact that Telegram disseminates content not shared on television channels or news websites can lead to increased trust in the platform, despite the lack of verification or reliability of its content.

As social media continues to grow as a primary platform for news updates, it is increasingly important to educate the public, both young people and adults, in media literacy and critical thinking skills. Addressing these gaps in digital literacy is essential to fostering a more informed public and mitigating the risks posed by misinformation on social media platforms.

5. Political Affiliation Shapes Media Trust and Perceptions in Israel

The data reveals polarization in media trust between coalition and opposition supporters[49] in Israel.

As mentioned before, there has been a significant long-term decline in overall Israeli public trust in the media. This decline, however, is not uniform: **opposition supporters demonstrate higher trust in traditional media, while coalition supporters are more skeptical, believing that media organizations conceal critical information from the public**.

Conversely, **coalition supporters exhibit a greater reliance on Telegram as an alternative source of information, despite its perceived limitations, while opposition supporters approach the platform with considerable skepticism**.

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48 Cialdini, Robert B. Influence: Science and Practice. Matar Publication, 2021 (Israel).

49 Coalition and opposition supporters were identified based on the parties they voted for in the most recent round of elections. This categorization reflects their alignment with either the current governing coalition or opposition parties.

Table 1

Trust in Traditional Media and Telegram (% of respondents by political affiliation)

Media Trust/Perception	Coalition Supporters	Opposition Supporters
Trust in traditional media (television or newspapers) (very/extremely reliable)	39%	59%
Suspicion that "media organizations are hiding important information from the public" (agree to a large or very large extent)	51%	32%
Trust in Telegram (very/extremely reliable)	45%	25%
There is a lot of fake news on Telegram (agree to a large or very large extent)	55%	67%
Describe Telegram as a "source of rumors"	35%	49%
Describe Telegram as an "irresponsible media channel"	31%	43%
Concern over not knowing "who runs the Telegram channels I follow"	36%	45%

A significant divide emerges in trust toward traditional media (TV channels and newspapers) between opposition and coalition supporters. Among opposition supporters, 59% trust traditional media to a large or very large extent, compared to only 39% of coalition supporters. Coalition supporters' skepticism is evident in the finding that 51% suspect media organizations of concealing important information, compared to 32% of opposition supporters.

As this research has shown, Telegram has emerged as a significant alternative source of information during the war. However, this popularity is not universal, and perceptions of Telegram's reliability and credibility are sharply divided between the two political groups. **Coalition supporters exhibit substantially higher trust in Telegram, with 45% rating it as very or extremely reliable, compared to only 25% of opposition supporters.**

Opposition supporters, who are more inclined to trust traditional media, approach Telegram with greater skepticism. Among opposition respondents,

67% believe there is a lot of fake news on Telegram, compared to 55% of coalition respondents. Additionally, 49% of opposition supporters describe Telegram as a "source of rumors", compared to 35% of coalition supporters. Furthermore, 43% of opposition supporters view Telegram as an "irresponsible media channel", compared to 31% of coalition supporters.

Finally, coalition supporters appear less concerned about its transparency, with only 36% agreeing that "it bothers me I don't know who runs the Telegram channels I follow", compared to 45% of opposition supporters.

The rise in Telegram usage during the war is likely driven by its real-time, unfiltered information-sharing capabilities, which appeal to those seeking alternatives to traditional media. However, the differing levels of trust in Telegram reflect concerns over misinformation and reliability, particularly among opposition respondents. **Both sides of the political spectrum express significant concerns about media transparency, albeit in different ways: Coalition supporters focus their suspicion on traditional media, believing it withholds critical information, while opposition supporters highlight issues of misinformation and anonymity in Telegram channels.**

These findings highlight the complex dynamics of media trust during crises, underscoring the need to address issues of transparency and reliability across platforms. Furthermore, the disparities in perceptions reflect the polarized discourse prevalent today, which, at its extremes, can lead to phenomena such as conspiracy theories.

This shift in media trust and reliance on alternative platforms in Israel mirrors global trends observed in other democracies. Similar trends can be observed globally, marked by declining trust in traditional media and a growing reliance on alternative information sources. One notable example is the social network Truth Social, established by Donald Trump and owned by the Trump Media & Technology Group, emerged as an alternative to mainstream social media platforms from which Trump was banned following the Capitol Hill events in January 2021.

6. Is Censorship Relevant in the Telegram Era?

The increasing use of Telegram raises **the question of whether, in the age of social media and smartphones, it is still possible to control and restrict the flow of information** during either emergency or routine circumstances.

In the past, the Israeli Military Censor, whose authority includes prohibiting the publication of information that poses a near-certain risk of causing significant harm to national security, public safety, or public order, could effectively regulate security-related information in Israel and prevent its publication. The

role of the Military Censor involves balancing the public's right to know and freedom of information with the imperative to safeguard national security.

However, in an era where every individual carries a recording device in their pocket, this task has become significantly more challenging.

The growing reliance on Telegram as a news source, and the reasons users cite for using it, suggest that the public is actively seeking ways to access information – even, and perhaps especially, when it is censored or deliberately omitted by mainstream media outlets. Ultimately, in many cases, the public finds ways to obtain such information regardless of attempts to restrict it.

Under the current regulatory framework and given the public's level of digital literacy, it is difficult to prevent the continued dissemination of such content. This remains true even when the content violates individuals' privacy (e.g., announcing deaths before families are notified), exacerbates anxiety during already tense emergencies, or contributes to the spread of disinformation and misinformation.

Managing information in the digital era is far more complex due to the global reach, immediacy, and accessibility of digital platforms.In many instances, it cannot be fully controlled. For example, a video restricted from broadcast in Israel may still be disseminated through Hamas distribution channels, reaching Israeli viewers in unregulated and potentially harmful ways.

This new reality, defined by the "Telegram Era" and the prevalence of social media, necessitates a profound reevaluation of existing concepts surrounding military censorship and the withholding of information. It also requires consideration of cases where controlled exposure of sensitive content by traditional media may be preferable, given that such information will inevitably reach a large audience through alternative platforms like Telegram.

7. The Rise of Israeli Subscriptions to Hostile Telegram Channels

Alongside the growing use of Hebrew-language Telegram channels for news updates, many Israelis have also subscribed to channels linked to foreign entities like Hamas and Hezbollah. According to the survey data, 8.8% of respondents are subscribers of Telegram channels affiliated with hostile entities, such as *Gaza Now* and other channels linked to Hamas, Hezbollah, or Iran.

These channels expose Israeli users to enemy influence campaigns, disinformation, and premature reports of harm to IDF soldiers or hostages. Hamas's supporters' awareness of its Israeli audience is evident in its occasional distribution of Hebrew-language content on channels like *Gaza Now*. Notably, this channel achieved nearly two million subscribers during

the war, with a growth pattern similar to that of Hebrew-language Telegram channels. Subscribing to such channels allows Hebrew-speaking audiences to receive unmediated messages directly, without interpretation by Israeli media or official entities such as the IDF Spokesperson's Unit. The subscription to Hamas-affiliated and similar channels reflects a desire to access uncensored information not provided by mainstream Israeli media or Hebrew-language Telegram channels.

In the digital era, governments and state institutions should recognize the challenges of controlling information flow without resorting to draconian measures that conflict with democratic principles. Therefore, **these entities have to anticipate that citizens will access and be exposed to information distributed by hostile actors, whether true or false, and prepare accordingly**. For example, they could publish counter-information, address claims made by such sources, and take additional appropriate measures. Ignoring such content or banning its publication in local media could further weaken trust in mainstream outlets that adhere to censorship guidelines, only prompting the public to turn to alternative sources in even greater numbers.
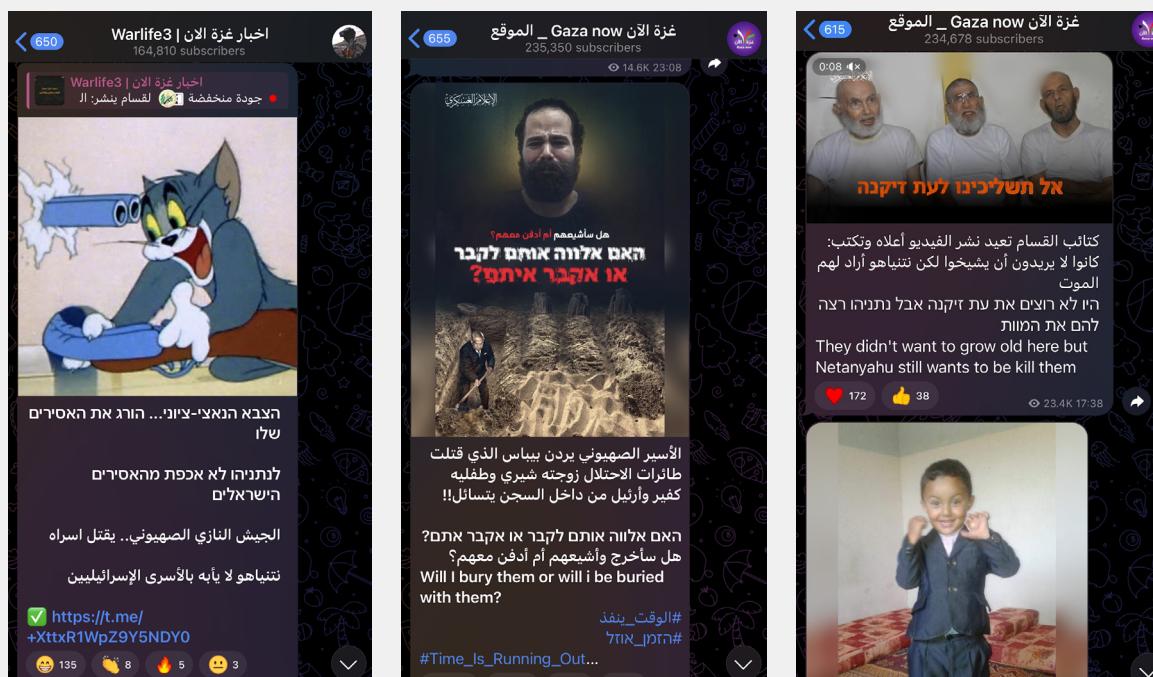
Examples: Messages in Hebrew Posted in Telegram Channels Affiliated with Hamas

Figure 30

Number of subscribers to the Gaza Now Telegram channel (Arabic)
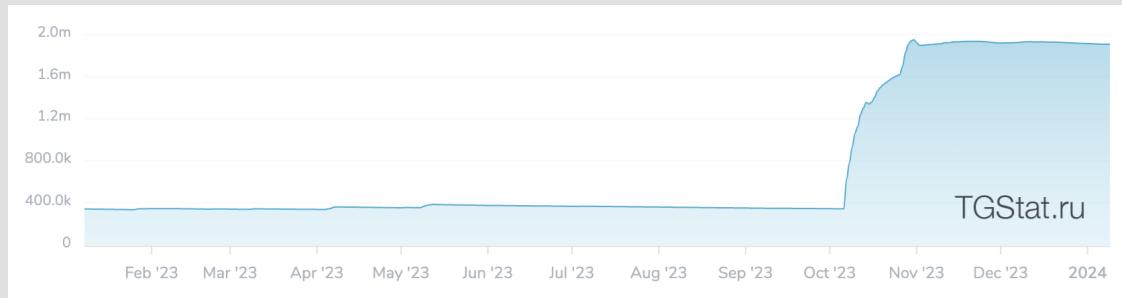
Source: *TGStat Data, January 2024*

Recommendations

The previous section, which comprised the discussion and insights segment of this research, focused on two key areas: challenges arising from Telegram usage and broader implications for liberal democracies. It also proposed specific actions to address these challenges, targeting governments, authorities, policymakers, media organizations, civil society organizations, and others.

This section builds on those insights by offering additional recommendations for different stakeholders involved. It also presents survey respondents' suggestions for social media regulation and strategies to reduce the spread of disinformation, particularly on platforms like Telegram.

Public Perceptions About Required Action to Prevent Disinformation

Survey respondents were asked to indicate their agreement level on a 1-5 scale regarding actions that tech companies, governments, and the public should take to prevent the spread of misinformation. The findings show **strong support for improving the public's ability to identify fake news, alongside a consensus for technology companies to take responsibility for controlling the spread of misinformation**. Lastly, **Government intervention is expected but debated**, as detailed below.

Figure 31

To what extent do you agree with each of the following statements?

Statement	1 - Not at all	2	3	4	5 - To a very great extent
Technology companies should do more to stop false or harmful information from spreading	2.6%	3.2%	9.9%	30.0%	54.3%
The government should take strict measures against individuals spreading false rumors on social media	1.6%	4.2%	15.2%	27.9%	51.1%
The public's ability to identify fake news needs to be improved	0.8%	2.8%	11.1%	37.2%	48.1%
The government should take more action and remove false or harmful information from social media	3.4%	8.4%	19.7%	33.5%	34.9%
The government should not intervene in the information published on social media	24.2%	17.2%	31.4%	18.2%	9.0%

Source: Filling the Information Gap" Study Survey, October 2024

The public's ability to identify fake news needs to be improved.

According to the survey data, there is a perceived need for capacity-building among the public. 85.3% agree to a great or very great extent that public education or awareness on identifying fake news is necessary.

Technology companies should do more to stop false or harmful information from spreading.

The findings show high public support for technology companies actively addressing misinformation, with 84.3% of respondents agreeing to a great or very great extent that they should do so.

Government intervention is supported but debated.

79% support strict governmental measures against individuals spreading false rumors on social media and 68.4% think that the government should take more action through removal of false harmful information from social media. However, 41.4% disagreed with the statement that the government should not intervene

in the information published on social media. In other words, many respondents reject a "hands-off" government approach. This reflects nuanced opinions on the extent of power the government should exercise.

Enforcement and Punishment

Next, survey respondents were presented with an open-ended question: "What additional solutions do you think could help address the problems caused by the spread of false information on social media?". Their responses were manually analyzed and categorized into key themes by identifying recurring patterns and grouping similar suggestions together. Some responses fit more than one category.

Figure 32

What additional solutions do you think could help address the problems caused by the spread of false information on social media?

Category	Value
Enforcment and punishment against channels and users spreading fake	34%
Don't know, no solution	27%
Monitoring and blocking content	10%
Education & Awarness	9%
Blocking users/accounts /channels	7%
Fact Checking	7%
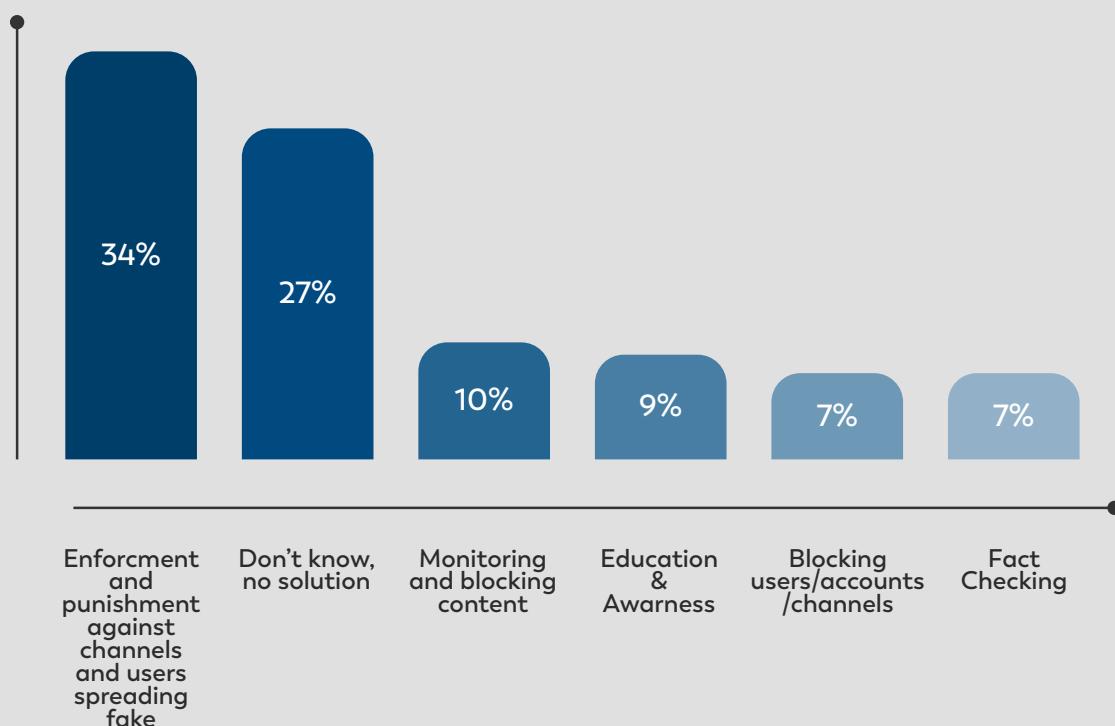
Source: Filling the Information Gap" Study Survey, October 2024

Notably, **one-third of respondents believe that enforcing rules and punishing individuals or channels responsible for spreading fake news is essential** –

making it the most popular solution mentioned. As one respondent noted: "Only legislation on the matter will help. Once everyone knows that those who spread fake news will be severely punished, people will think twice before spreading it". Another emphasized: "Significant fines should be imposed on those who publish false information". These responses highlight the public's demand for legal and financial deterrents.

Findings suggest a **public demand for accountability and consequences for "malicious entities"**, emphasizing enforcement or deterrent measures. Some participants called for "draconian punishments of fines and imprisonment for anyone spreading false rumors", while others advocated for "greater involvement of the censor and significant removal of inciting and one-sided violent content".

A significant portion of respondents (23%) were unsure or could not identify actionable solutions. This reflects a sense of helplessness or limited awareness of effective strategies among some, underlining the complexity of the misinformation issue.

Some respondents proposed monitoring and blocking harmful content directly, possibly by tech companies or automated systems. One respondent suggested, "Block all those who easily spread lies", reflecting a desire for proactive content moderation measures. Another stressed the importance of sharing reliable information without interpretation on news channels to counter misinformation at its source. Some respondents also recommended directly blocking offending users or channels as a reactive measure.

In the bottom line, **addressing misinformation requires an integrated approach. Governments and technology companies should collaborate to balance the need for regulation with the protection of democratic freedoms**. Public education campaigns, alongside transparent content moderation policies, are essential tools in building a resilient digital information ecosystem.

Age Restriction

The data highlights societal concerns over youth exposure to unrestricted digital platforms, emphasizing a need for policies or features such as age-verification systems and parental controls specifically tailored for users under 18. A significant majority (70.5%) of survey respondents believe that individuals should be at least 18 years old to use Telegram without restrictions. This suggests a strong consensus around the need for age-based limitations. These concerns are best understood in the context of the characteristics of Telegram presented in this paper. An additional 18.3% think that Telegram use without restrictions is appropriate for those aged 15-18.

Figure 33

At what age do you think it is appropriate for individuals to use Telegram without restrictions?

- 10 or under: 4.1%
- 10-14: 7.1%
- 15-18: 18.3%
- 18 or above: 70.5%

Source: Filling the Information Gap" Study Survey, October 2024
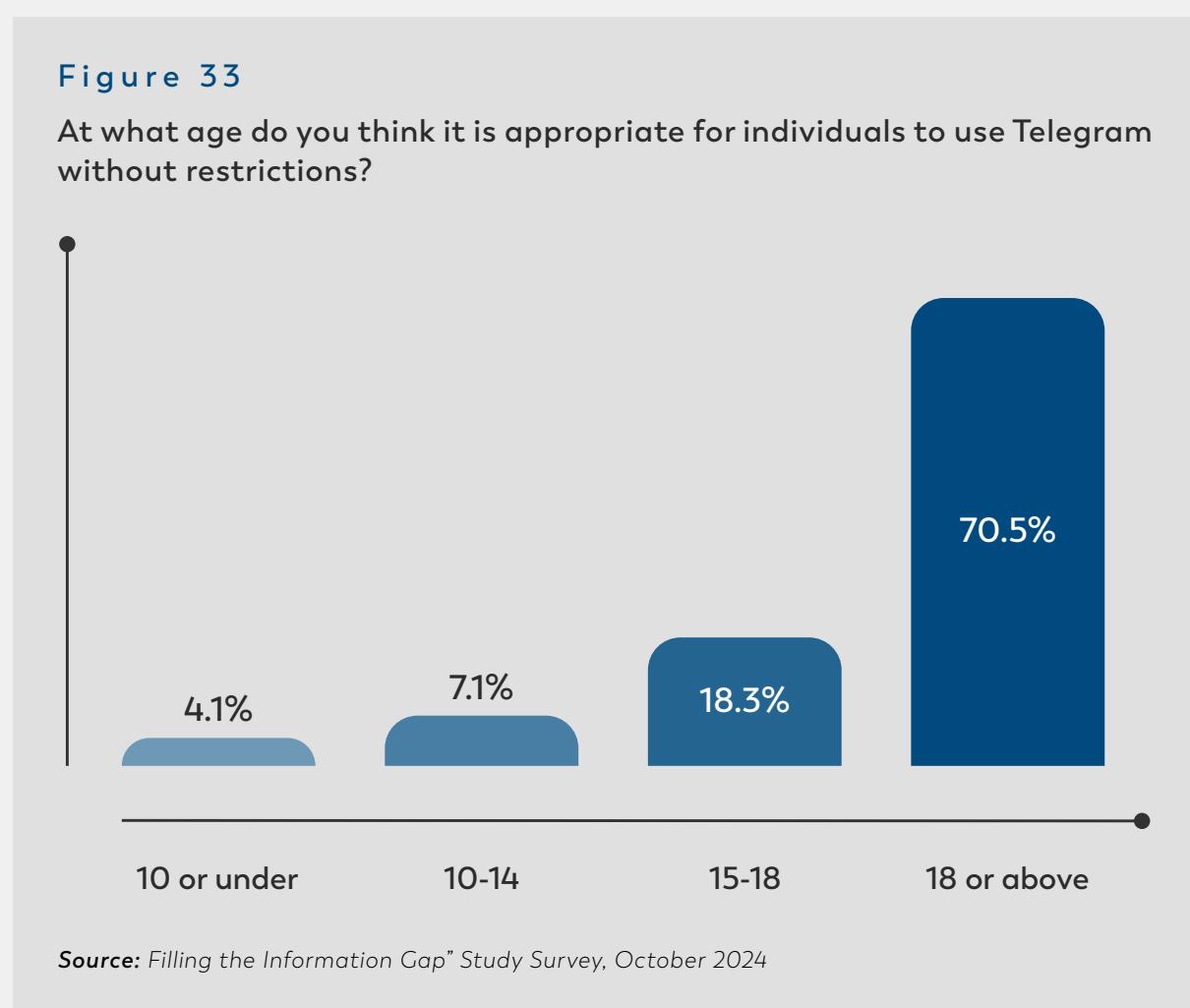
Key Recommendations for Stakeholders

The paper concludes with a set of recommendations for key stakeholders, including policymakers, governments, civil society, media organizations, and digital platform operators. These recommendations aim to address the challenges and opportunities presented by the significant rise in Telegram usage in Israel since October 7th. By addressing issues such as misinformation, transparency, and public resilience, these proposals outline actionable steps that stakeholders can take to enhance public trust, ensure accurate information dissemination, and mitigate the risks associated with the platform.

1. Improve Public Digital and Media Literacy

Essence: Educate citizens about evaluating information on Telegram and other social media platforms, focusing on distinguishing between verified news and misinformation. Additionally, emphasize the need to mitigate exposure to manipulative or distressing content. Promote the importance of cautious, informed sharing practices to avoid spreading rumors, ensuring that shared content is fact-checked and credible.

Desired Outcome: Foster a well-informed and resilient public that is less vulnerable to disinformation and psychological harm.

2. Leverage Telegram for Critical Information Dissemination by Official Entities

Essence: Leverage Telegram's growing popularity, especially in emergency situations, by establishing official Telegram channels for governments and emergency services to distribute verified, real-time updates, particularly during crises.
Government offices and authorities should ensure their content is tailored to Telegram's characteristics, such as concise updates, visual aids, and interactive formats, rather than simply repurposing material from websites or other platforms. Tailoring content to the platform's unique dynamics will enhance engagement and ensure effective communication.

Desired Outcome: Ensure timely and accurate information reaches the public, enhancing trust in official sources while reducing reliance on unverified channels.

3. Advocate for Transparency, Training, and Professionalism in Telegram Channel Operations

Essence: Encourage major Telegram channels operated anonymously to disclose the identities of their administrators and adopt journalistic standards to enhance credibility. Channel managers with significant audiences, particularly those without journalistic training, can receive targeted guidance on responsible information sharing, ethical reporting, and content management in high-stakes situations. Such training will address gaps in journalistic awareness and enhance administrator capacity to serve as credible and reliable sources of information for their audiences.

Desired Outcome: Reduce the spread of disinformation and bolster trust in reliable information sources by increasing accountability and improving content quality.

4. Promote Collaborative Efforts to Improve Media Trust

Essence: Encourage governments, NGOs, and private entities to work together on initiatives that promote responsible use of Telegram for information dissemination and public engagement. These collaborations can leverage diverse expertise to ensure balanced and effective communication strategies, rebuilding media trust. Special attention should be given to fostering transparency and ethical content curation practices, which can help bridge the trust gap between the public and media organizations, particularly in high-stakes scenarios.

Desired Outcome: Develop informed policies that protect sensitive information while respecting democratic values and ensuring public safety.

5. Facilitate a Societal Discussion on Censorship

Essence: Facilitate discussions on the implications of censorship in the digital age, with a focus on balancing security, privacy, and freedom of expression. These discussions should involve diverse stakeholders, including policymakers, civil society groups, digital platforms, and media organizations. Special attention should be given to how censorship affects public trust, the flow of information during crises, and individual privacy, particularly on platforms like Telegram. Furthermore, emphasize the need for newsrooms to adapt to the speed demanded by digital media while maintaining journalistic integrity and accuracy.

Desired Outcome: Develop informed policies that protect sensitive information while respecting democratic values, ensuring public safety, and maintaining

high standards of journalistic rigor.

6. Engage Tech Companies in Platform Governance

Essence: Collaborate with Telegram and other tech companies to improve moderation tools, transparency in algorithms, and user reporting mechanisms to manage content effectively.

Desired Outcome: Foster safer and more trustworthy digital spaces by aligning platform governance with societal needs and ethical standards.

7. Strengthen Enforcement and Penalties for Harmful Content

Essence: Develop and implement clear enforcement mechanisms to penalize the dissemination of harmful or intentionally misleading content on Telegram. Collaborate with legal authorities and digital platforms to monitor violations and take appropriate action.

Desired Outcome: Deter harmful behavior and enhance the overall reliability of information shared on the platform.

8. Address the Psychological Impact of Telegram Usage

Essence: Develop tools and resources to limit exposure to distressing content while offering mental health support, framing these efforts within the broader goal of digital wellness. Raise awareness about the psychological harm and increased anxiety that can result from prolonged exposure to distressing content. Given that media consumption often surges during emergencies, design targeted campaigns that promote healthy media habits and foster a balanced digital environment during times of crisis.

Desired Outcome: Mitigate trauma and enhance societal resilience in the face of graphic and emotionally taxing material.

9. Investigate the Situation of Arabic-Language Telegram Channels

Essence: Expand the analysis to understand the usage and influence of Arabic-language Telegram channels within Israel, exploring their potential for communication and their security implications.

Desired Outcome: Enable targeted and inclusive communication strategies while addressing risks associated with disinformation in these channels.

Appendix 1: Survey Questionnaire

Digital Media and News Consumption Survey

Introduction

This anonymous survey examines news and digital media consumption habits in Israel. It takes only a few minutes to complete. We appreciate your participation.

Screening Question:

1. *What is your age?* (Must be 18 or older)

   — Page Break, Backward navigation disabled —

Section: News Consumption Habits

2. *In the event of breaking news, the first source I would turn to for updates is:*
   [*Survey setup: Randomize answer order, allow only a single answer*]

   a. Telegram channels

   b. Television channels (e.g., Kan 11, Keshet 12, etc.)

   c. WhatsApp groups

   d. Social media networks (e.g., Facebook, X - Twitter, Instagram, TikTok, etc.)

   e. Print newspapers (e.g., Yedioth Ahronoth, Israel Hayom, etc.)

   f. News websites of major media outlets (e.g., Ynet, Walla, etc.)

   g. Radio (e.g., Reshet Bet, Galei Tzahal, etc.)

   h. Other: _____

3. *For each of the following platforms, please indicate how frequently you consume news content from it:*
   [*Options: Several times a day, once a day, several times a week, several times a month or less, not at all, not relevant*]

   a. Telegram channels

b. Television channels (e.g., Kan 11, Keshet 12, etc.)

c. WhatsApp groups

d. Social media networks (e.g., Facebook, X - Twitter, Instagram, TikTok, etc.)

e. Print newspapers (e.g., Yedioth Ahronoth, Israel Hayom, etc.)

f. News websites of major media outlets (e.g., Ynet, Walla, etc.)

g. Radio (e.g., Reshet Bet, Galei Tzahal, etc.)

4. *For each of the following platforms, please indicate how reliable you consider the information on the platform for consuming news content. You may also rate platforms you do not use if you have an opinion about them, or select "Don't know".*

   [Scale: 1-Not reliable at all, Slightly reliable, Moderately reliable, Highly reliable, 5-Very highly reliable, not relevant].

   a. Telegram channels

   b. Television channels (e.g., Kan 11, Keshet 12, etc.)

   c. WhatsApp groups

   d. Social media networks (e.g., Facebook, X - Twitter, Instagram, TikTok, etc.)

   e. Print newspapers (e.g., Yedioth Ahronoth, Israel Hayom, etc.)

   f. News websites of major media outlets (e.g., Ynet, Walla, etc.)

   g. Radio (e.g., Reshet Bet, Galei Tzahal, etc.)

5. *To what extent do you agree with the following statements?*

   [Scale options: 1 - Not at all; 2 - To a small extent; 3 - To a moderate extent; 4 - To a great extent; 5 - To a very great extent, not relevant/do not wish to answer. Survey setup: randomize answer order]

   a. Overall, I trust the news information that comes from major TV channels and newspapers.

   b. I prefer to receive news reports immediately, even if they are not always accurate.

   c. Consuming news causes me strong negative emotions.

d. I prefer to consume raw news content, such as videos or images, without mediation or interpretation.

e. I trust news disseminated on social networks more than those from established media organizations.

f. I want to receive news quickly to be the first to tell my friends before anyone else.

g. I suspect that the media organizations are hiding important information from the public.

6. *Typically, how much time per day do you dedicate to consuming news? (Across all platforms, including watching television, reading news websites, checking Telegram channels, etc.)*

   a. A few minutes or not at all

   b. Up to an hour a day

   c. 1-2 hours a day

   d. 3-4 hours a day

   e. More than 4 hours a day

7. *Has the volume of your news consumption changed due to the current conflict (security situation)?*

   a. I consume more news than before.

   b. I consume the same amount of news as before.

   c. I consume less news than before.

8. *As a result of the security situation, how has the variety of sources from which you consume news changed?*

   a. I consume news from more sources than I did in the past.

   b. I consume news from the same sources I did in the past.

   c. I consume news from fewer sources than I did in the past.

9. *Do you fact-check (verify the accuracy of information) news content received from unofficial channels (e.g., WhatsApp groups, Telegram, social media) before sharing it? [Multiple-choice question]*

a. I rarely share news updates.

b. I don't fact-check because I trust the content.

c. I check if it's been published by official sources as well.

d. I check if videos/images have been used in other contexts before.

e. Other, please specify: _____

10. *Are you familiar with the Telegram application?*

a. I am familiar with it and I use it a lot.

b. I am familiar with it and I use it a little.

c. I am familiar with it and have used it in the past, but I no longer do.

d. I am familiar with it, but I have never used it.

e. I am not familiar with it.

11. *You previously indicated that you either used the Telegram app in the past but no longer do, or that you are familiar with it but have never used it. Please specify why. [Open-ended question]*

[Display Logic: Show this question only to respondents who, in Question 10, answered either "I am familiar with it and have used it in the past, but I no longer do" or "I am familiar with it, but I have never used it."]

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[Display Logic: The following page will be shown only to respondents who indicated they currently use Telegram or have used it in the past (i.e., selected answers a, b, or c in Question 10).]

Section: Telegram Usage

12. *When did you start using the Telegram app?*

a. I started using it several years ago.

b. I started using it immediately after the war began.

c. I started using it several months ago.

d. I started using it in the past month.

13. *Why did you start using the Telegram app? [Open-ended question]*

14. *What is your primary purpose for using the Telegram app?*

    [Display Logic: Show this question to respondents who answered 'a' ("I use it frequently") or 'b' ("I use it occasionally") in Question 10]

    a. For communicating with friends

    b. For consuming content on news channels

    c. For marketing purposes (e.g., coupons, loyalty clubs)

    d. For consuming information from official channels (e.g., Ministry of Health, IDF Spokesperson)

    e. For other uses, please specify: _____

15. *What was your primary use for the Telegram app?*

    [Display Logic: Show this question only to respondents who answered 'c' ("I am familiar with it and have used it in the past, but I no longer do") in Question 10]

    a. For communicating with friends

    b. For consuming content on news channels

    c. For marketing purposes (e.g., coupons, loyalty clubs)

    d. For consuming information from official channels (e.g., Ministry of Health, IDF Spokesperson)

    e. For other uses, please specify: _____

16. *How often do you check news updates on Telegram?*

    a. Every few hours or more

    b. Once a day

    c. Several times a week

    d. Several times a month

    e. Once every few months or less frequently

    f. Only when there is a news event I am interested in

    g. I do not check updates on Telegram

    h. Other, please specify: _____

17. *To what extent do the following statements accurately reflect your use of Telegram?*

[Scale options: 1 - Not at all; 2 - To a small extent; 3 - To a moderate extent; 4 - To a great extent; 5 - To a very great extent, not relevant/do not wish to answer]

[Display logic: Show this question to respondents who answered 'a' ("I use it frequently") or 'b' ("I use it occasionally") in Question 10]

    a. I often share news information that I saw on Telegram with friends or family.

    b. Before I share information from Telegram with friends or family, I check if the information is correct.

    c. If rumors are published on Telegram, I won't share them with friends or family until they are verified by official sources.

18. *From which types of Telegram channels have you consumed news updates in the last two years? [Multiple-choice question]*

    a. Hebrew-language news updates channels (e.g., "Israel News on Telegram," "Israel News Uncensored," "Abu Ali Express," etc.)

    b. Hebrew-language new updated channels run by influencers (e.g., "The Shadow" [HaTzel], Daniel Amram, etc.)

    c. Hebrew-language news updates channels run by media personalities (e.g., Amit Segal, Michael Shemesh, etc.)

    d. Channels of official Israeli entities (e.g., IDF, Home Front Command, etc.)

    e. Channels from media outlets in English or other foreign languages

    f. Channels affiliated with hostile entities (e.g., Gaza Now or channels identified with Hamas, Hezbollah, or Iran)

    g. Other, please specify: _____

19. *Why do you consume information from non-Israeli channels? (Multiple-choice question)*

[Display logic: Show this question only to respondents who selected option 'e' or 'f' in the previous question]

a. They publish information not available on Hebrew Telegram channels

b. They publish information not available in Israeli media outlets

c. It's convenient to consume information in other languages

d. Interested in what the enemy is publishing

e. Important war information is published there (e.g., hostages, soldiers)

f. Other reasons, please specify: _____

20. *To what extent do you agree with the following statements regarding information on Telegram?*

   [Scale options: 1 - Not at all; 2 - To a small extent; 3 - To a moderate extent; 4 - To a great extent; 5 - To a very great extent, not relevant/do not wish to answer]

   a. Most of the information on Telegram is reliable.

   b. Telegram is the best way to get news updates quickly.

   c. There is a lot of fake news on Telegram.

   d. When I see a video on Telegram that might contain graphic violence, I usually watch it.

   e. I trust the information published by Telegram channel admins.

   f. It bothers me that I don't know who manages the Telegram channels I follow.

   g. Telegram meets my need to access information that isn't published in other media outlets.

21. *To what extent would you recommend using the Telegram app to people around you?*

   [Scale 1–10, where 0 = Not at all]

   — Page Break, Backward navigation disabled —

[Display Logic: This page will be shown to all respondents, including non-Telegram users]

22. *Which of the following statements do you think best describes Telegram?*

    [Survey setup: Multiple-choice question, randomize answer order]

    a. Reliable information

    b. Uncensored information

    c. Real-time news

    d. Exclusive reports ("scoops")

    e. Source of rumors

    f. Irresponsible media channel

    g. A threat to the country

    h. Polarizing discourse

    i. None

23. *At what age do you think it is appropriate for individuals to use Telegram without restrictions?*

    a. 10 or under

    b. 10-14

    c. 15-18

    d. 18 or above

24. *To what extent do you agree with the following statements?*

    [Scale options: 1 - Not at all; 2 - To a small extent; 3 - To a moderate extent; 4 - To a great extent; 5 - To a very great extent, not relevant/do not wish to answer]

    a. The government should not intervene in the information published on social media.

    b. The government should take more action and remove false or harmful information from social media.

    c. The public's ability to identify fake news needs to be improved.

d. Technology companies should do more to stop false or harmful information from spreading.

e. The government should take strict measures against individuals spreading false rumors on social media.

25. *What additional solutions do you think could help address the problems caused by the spread of false information on social media? [open-ended question]*

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Section: Demographics

26. *Which party did you vote for in the 2022 elections?*

   a. [List of major parties that ran in the election]

   b. Other, please specify: _____

   c. Blank ballot

   d. Prefer not to say

27. *To what extent do you trust the government?*

   a. Not at all

   b. To a small extent

   c. To a moderate extent

   d. To a great extent

   e. To a very great extent

Additional demographic data provided by the panel: Gender, religion, religiosity, income, marital status, education level, and city of residence.

Appendix 2: Respondent Demographics

The demographic composition of the survey sample, compared to the general Israeli population, is summarized below.

- **Age:** Older age groups are underrepresented, likely due to lower rates of online usage and digital survey participation among these demographics.
- **Gender:** The gender distribution is balanced, with 51% female and 49% male respondents.
- **Education:** The sample includes a higher proportion of individuals with academic and vocational education compared to the general population..
- **Income:** The income distribution in the sample is broad, with most respondents reporting average or slightly above-average incomes. However, direct comparison with the general population is challenging due to differences in reporting methods.
- **Religiosity:** The survey captures secular, traditional, religious, and ultra-orthodox groups in proportions that align closely with national averages.

Age:

Compared to the general Israeli population[50], the sample underrepresents older age groups. This discrepancy is likely explained by lower online accessibility and digital participation in online panels among older age groups .

Figure 34

Distribution of Israeli population and sample respondents by age group

■ Israeli Population (CBS)   ■ Survey (% of Respondents)

| Age Group	Israeli Population (CBS)	Survey (% of Respondents)
20-24	7.3%	12.0%
25-29	6.7%	16.1%
30-34	6.5%	11.6%
35-39	6.4%	10.8%
40-44	6.1%	11.8%
45-49	5.7%	9.3%
50-54	4.8%	10.6%
55-59	4.3%	7.3%
60+	16.3%	10.4%

Age Group

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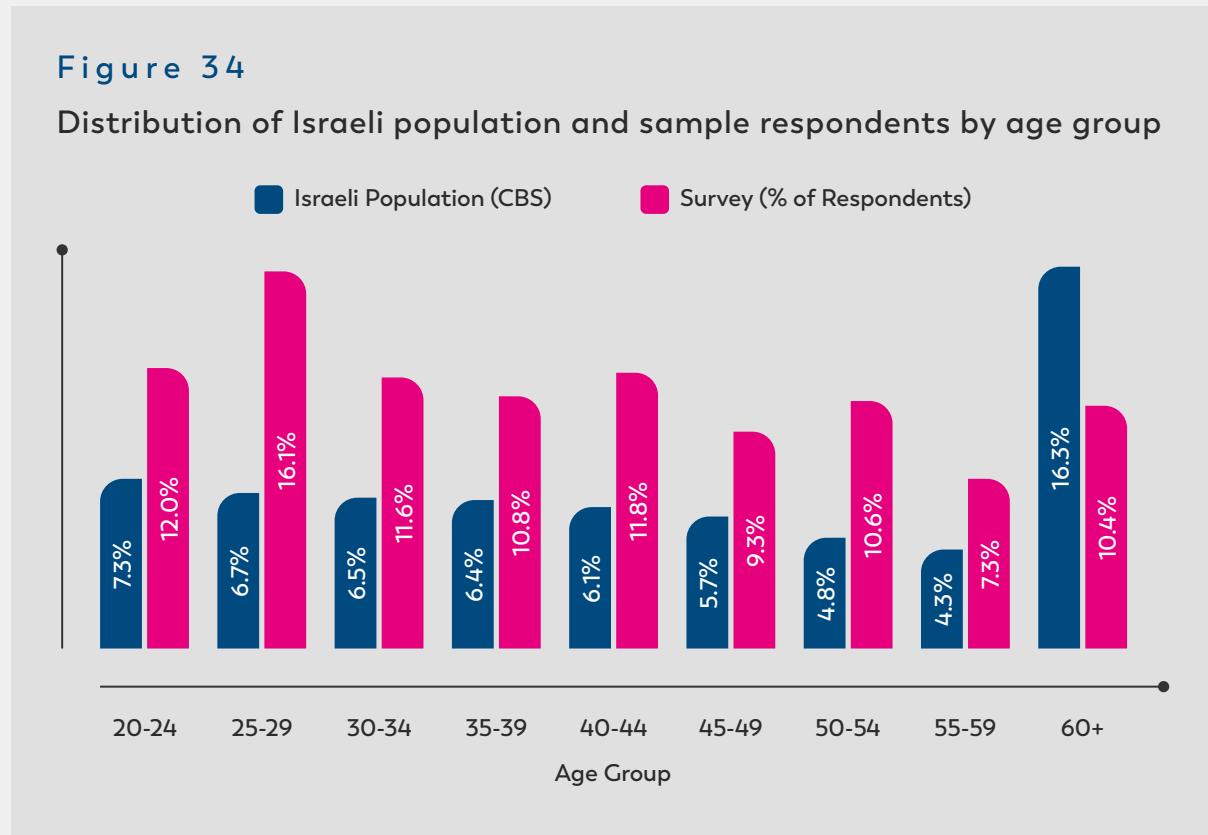
50 Source: CBS media release

Income:

The chart below illustrates the self-reported income distribution among survey respondents. The largest group, 32.5%, reports income levels similar to the national average. However, there is no accurate means of quantifying income representation compared to the population since the CBS measures income in absolute or quantiles, whereas the survey uses a subjective measure of the respondent's self-reported income level relative to the average income.

Figure 35

Survey Respondents' Distribution of Self-Reported Income Relative to the Average

| Under avg.	Slightly Under avg.	Like avg.	Slightly Above avg.	Above avg.
18.1%	16.9%	32.5%	23.6%	8.9%

Filling the Information Gap
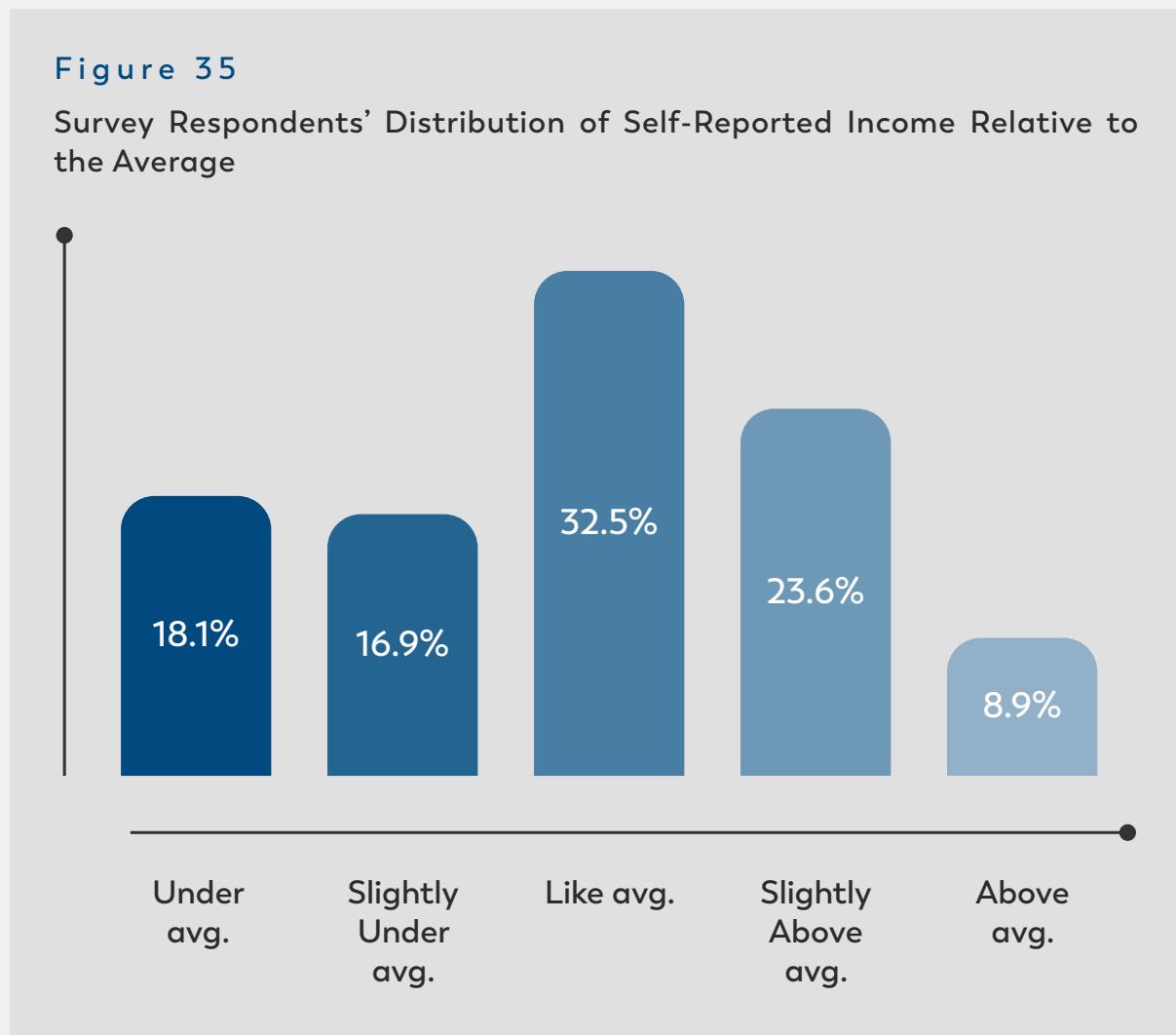
Education:

The survey sample overrepresents individuals with academic and vocational education, and underrepresents those with lower education levels, relative to the general population.

Comparing the survey respondents to the general population, according to the 2021 CBS report for ages 25-66 in Israel[51], the survey sample has a higher representation of Academic education (46%, compared to the national statistic of 33%), and a higher representation of vocational education (19%, compared to 7.1% in the population).

Figure 36

Survey Respondents' Distribution of Education Levels

| Academic	Vocational	Highschool	Elementary
46%	19%	30%	5%

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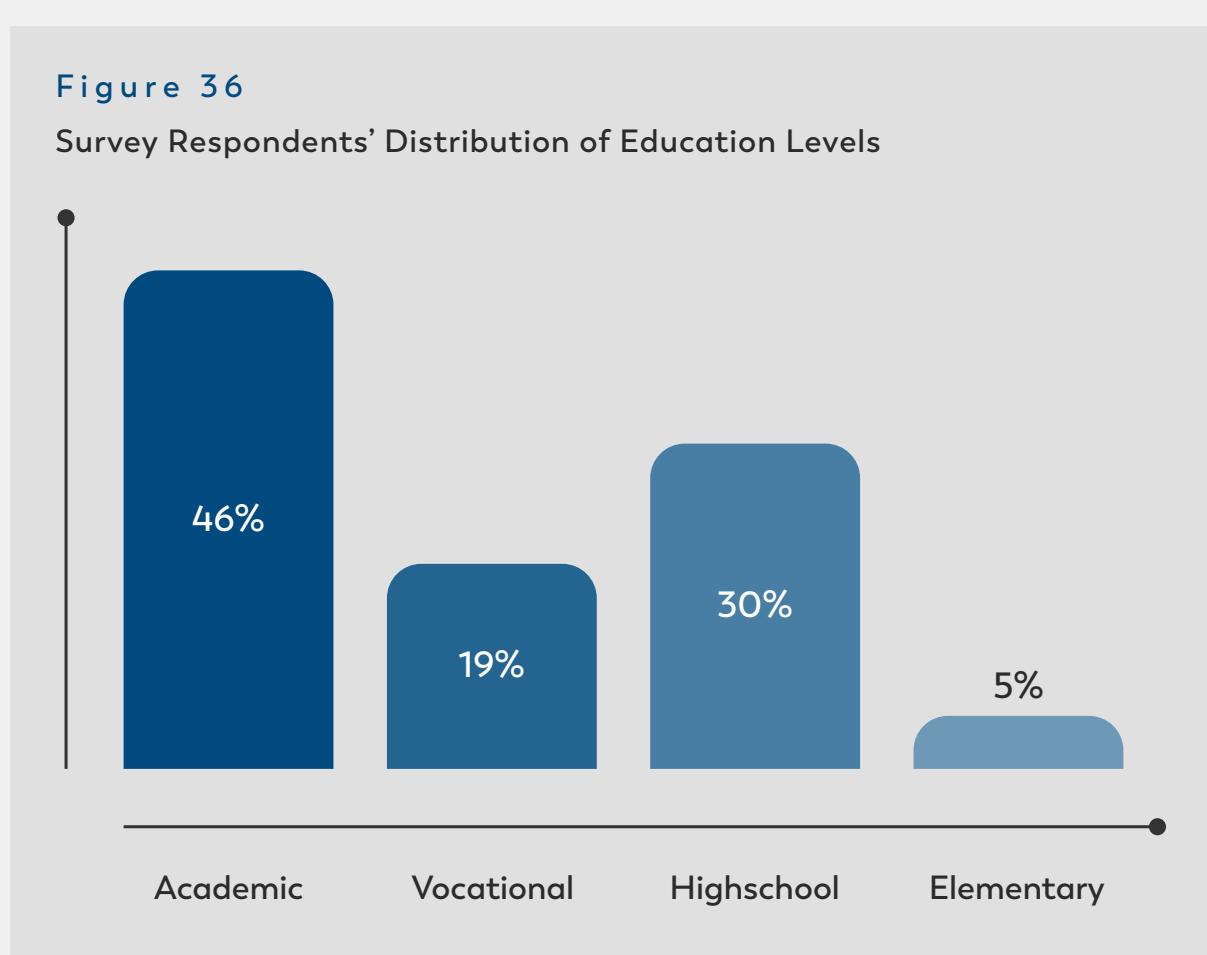
51 See: https://www.cbs.gov.il/he/mediarelease/DocLib/2024/039/06_24_039b.pdf

Religiosity:

The chart below presents the religious self-identification of survey respondents. Official CBS records as of 2024 show the Israeli Jewish population is 43.5% secular, 32% traditional, 12.5% religious, and 11.3% ultra-orthodox[52]. The sample is closely representative of these proportions.

Figure 37

Survey Respondents' Distribution of Religiousness Levels (self reported)

| Secular	Traditional	Religious	Ultra Orthodox
45%	35.1%	11.4%	8.5%

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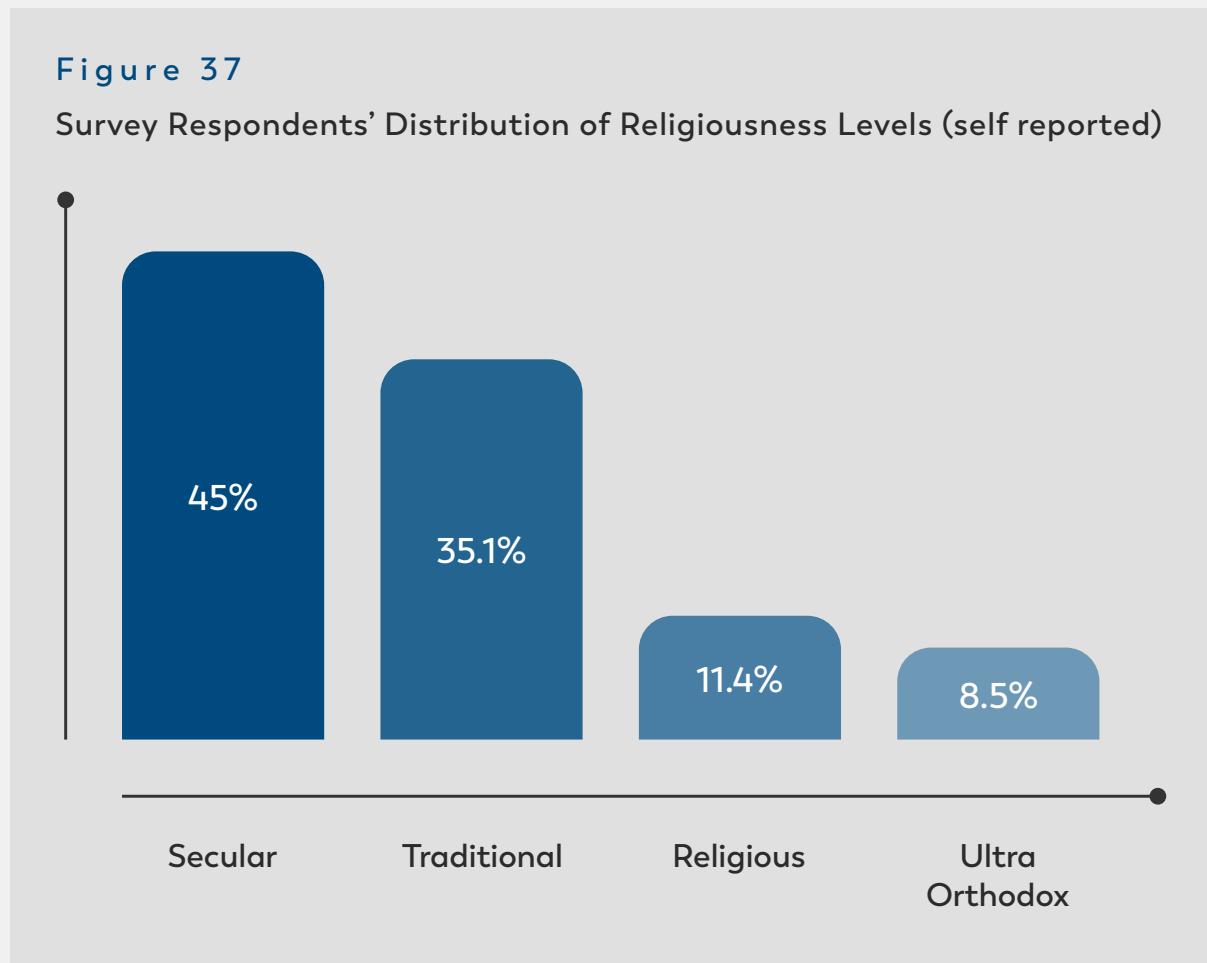
[52] CBS Media release: https://www.cbs.gov.il/he/mediarelease/DocLib/2024/308/11_24_308b.pdf, September 2024.

Voting:

Comparing the (self-reported) voting patterns of survey respondents to the actual results of the most recent Israeli elections shows that Likud support's representation in the sample is broadly consistent with its national electoral performance.. In contrast, parties such as Yisrael Beiteinu, Shas, and United Torah Judaism appear underrepresented, suggesting potential biases which may result from sampling limitations. These discrepancies underscore the inherent limitations of the sampling methodology, such as challenges in effectively reaching certain segments of the population, particularly online sampling of the Haredi society,, thereby compromising the sample's validity in accurately reflecting the broader electoral landscape (e.g., the challenges associated with online sampling within the Haredi community).

Figure 38

Who did you vote for in the last elections?

Party	Percentage
Did not vote	11%
The Jewish Home	1.7%
Meretz	2.1%
Other	2.7%
Yisrael Beiteinu	2.7%
Israeli Labor Party	2.9%
United Torah Judaism	3.5%
Shas	4.2%
Religious Zionism / Otzma Yehudit	10.8%
National Unity	12%
Yesh Atid	16.6%
Likud	29.7%

Filling the Information Gap
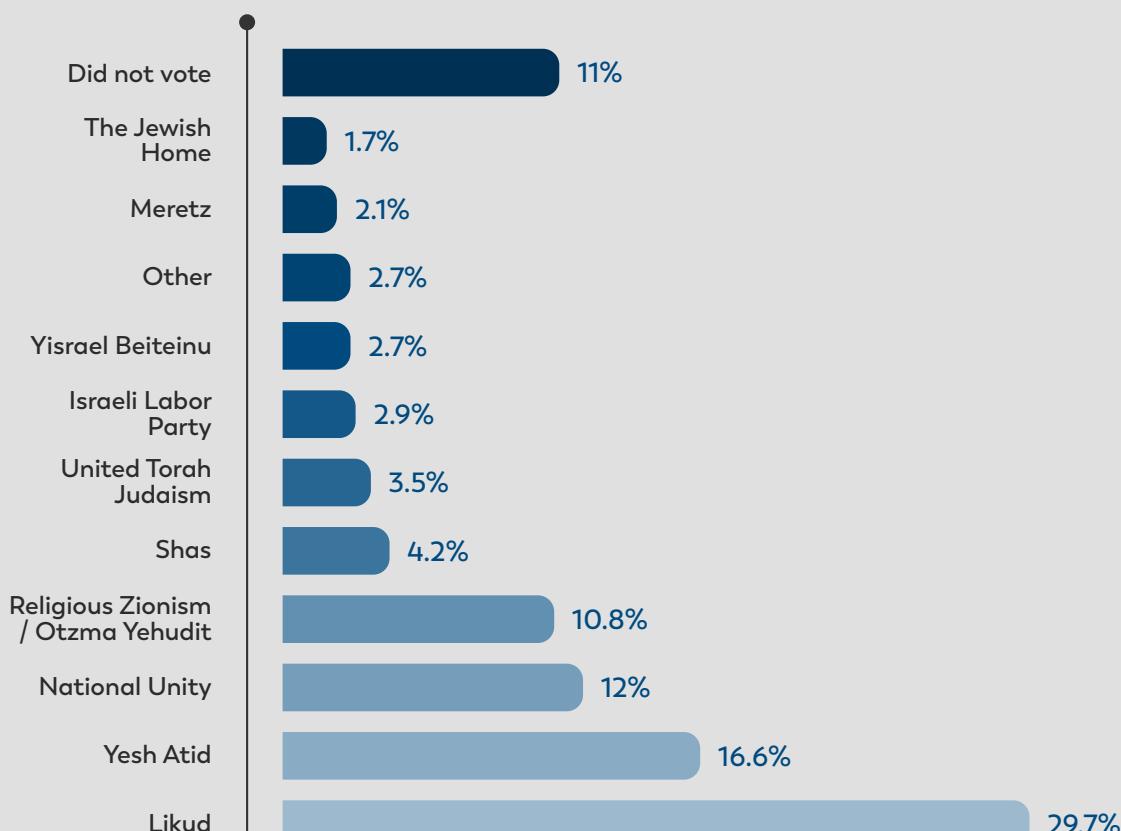
Trust in Government:

The distribution of respondents' trust levels in the government indicates a widespread sense of skepticism, with the majority expressing low to moderate trust.

Figure 39

To what extent do you trust the current government?

- 5 - A lot of trust
- 4
- 3
- 2
- 1 - No trust

11.8%
20.1%
18.3%
22%
27.8%