

Gender-Based Violence in Demonstrations

Israel Police Harm Women's Freedom of Protest

Author: Adv. Nitzan Caspi Shiloni

Collection and Processing of Testimonies from Alimut Israel Project:¹ Liora Nir

A comprehensive UN report on the suppression of freedom of protest rights in crisis situations across the globe published in May 2022 drew attention to the use of policing strategies that disproportionately threaten women, with sexual and gender-based violence frequently employed by law-enforcement authorities to silence female demonstrators:

"Sexual and gender-based violence has reportedly been used by State agents as a weapon to discourage women and communities from taking part in protests and as a tactic of control and domination."²

We should begin by noting that the use of excessive force against demonstrators may be directed at both women and men. Moreover, it is entirely possible that men absorb more violent responses from police officers, as the higher number of complaints filed by male demonstrators would seem to suggest.³ However, the purpose of this document is to highlight **the unique gendered characteristics** of the efforts to suppress protest targeting women.⁴ Similar to the conclusion of the aforementioned UN report, the central argument underlying this document is that women endure distinct forms of police violence when they protest against government policy. Severe practices include sexual assault, verbal violence, sexual degradation, questioning the protester's normativity, and unjustified strip-

* English-language reference. All other references in this document are in Hebrew.

¹ [Alimut Israel](#) ["Violence Israel"] is a project that compiles testimonies from victims of law-enforcement violence during anti-government protests, and in most cases includes visual documentation of these incidents. All events and quotations cited in this paper are based on this password-protected database, unless otherwise noted.

² Special Rapporteur Clément Nyaletsossi Voule, ["Protection of Human Rights in the Context of Peaceful Protests During Crisis Situations"](#), *United Nations Human Rights Council*, 16 May 2022.

³ Alimut Israel has to date recorded reports by 580 women and 1,080 men who were victims of violence during protests, which would seem to indicate that men are injured by police violence at almost twice the rate of women. However, we do not have data on the gender breakdown of protest attendance, and therefore this assessment is based solely on the incidence of complaints.

⁴ In several places we use the term "gender-based violence," a phrase commonly used in academic literature, even though our document deals exclusively with violence against women and not with gender-based violence in its broader sense, such as violence against LGBTQ+ individuals, not to mention that gender-based violence might also be directed at male protesters.

searches. It should be noted that this unique violence occurs against a social context where roughly one-third of women are exposed to sexual violence in their lifetime.⁵

This violence has severe consequences for the victims, but its broader impact extends to other women who may be deterred from taking part in protests. Moreover, as discussed below, gendered forms of repression profoundly affect their participation as citizens and political activists and shape societal perceptions of women.

Most of this document will be devoted to reviewing the ways in which the police mistreat female demonstrators and suppress their freedom of protest. Subsequently, in the final chapter, we will present policy recommendations aimed at preventing gender-based violence during civil demonstrations.

Background: Abuse of Power Against Demonstrators

A protest movement against the government's policy, primarily against Justice Minister Yariv Levin's plan to advance a regime revolution, had been under way throughout Israel since January 2023. However, the character and content of the protests changed after the October 7 Hamas massacre, in response to the protracted war, the government's policy regarding the hostages, and its perceived responsibility for the fiasco. Women's involvement in the protests, particularly of distinct groups, has been a prominent feature of the waves of protest since early 2023.⁶ For example, Bonot Alternativa ["Women Building an Alternative"], which seeks to promote women's rights in the public sphere, stood out in the demonstrations against the regime revolution, while mothers and spouses of hostages, such as Einav Zangauker and others, were at the forefront of the protests demanding the return of the hostages and dead bodies held by Hamas. Yet another group was Ima Era ["Wide Awake Mother"], which advocated for ending the military operations in Gaza.

The Israeli government's response to the protest has consisted of extensive attempts at suppression, which fits in with its general policy of promoting anti-liberal and anti-democratic practices and views. One method is to create a public discourse that portrays

⁵ According to World Health Organization data, [approximately 35% of women worldwide experience physical and/or sexual violence in their lifetime](#).

⁶ Roni Dori, ['Women Are Not Only Leading This Protest, But Are the Ones Who Will Sustain It Over Time'](#), *Calcalist*, 30 March 2023.

the protesters as unpatriotic, anarchists, and even enemies,⁷ while another is to use excessive physical force and crowd-control measures during demonstrations.

This policy aligns with the sweeping politicization of the Israel Police advanced by National Security Minister Itamar Ben-Gvir, as reflected in the adoption of Amendment No. 37 to the Police Ordinance upon the government's formation. The amendment grants the minister extensive authority to shape Israel Police's policy and overarching operational principles, enabling actions that may advance his and the government's political interests at the expense of the public interest.⁸ It should be noted that although approval of the amendment was made contingent on restrictions on his interference, Ben-Gvir blatantly violated the terms set by the Supreme Court,⁹ according to an affidavit submitted by the Attorney General. Clear-cut examples of the efforts to politicize the suppression of the protest include Ben-Gvir's 9 January 2023 directive to the police to arrest anti-government protesters if roads are blocked,¹⁰ his assertion on 1 March 2023 that "zero tolerance must be shown toward anarchists who attack police officers,"¹¹ and his attempt to meddle with the police's attitude toward protesters by hiring and firing officers according to their views about suppressing demonstrations.¹² Yet another example is video footage released in October 2025 showing Justice Minister Levin voicing his approval, as the right-wing activist and convicted felon Mordechai David threatens to block "leftists at demonstrations."¹³ David subsequently made good on his threat, clashing with protesters in Tel Aviv's Hostage Square.

In parallel, the government has been advancing additional measures designed to impair the independence of law enforcement authorities. For instance, Article 115 of the coalition agreement between Likud and Otzma Yehudit grants police officers full immunity from

⁷ For example: Itamar Eichner, [*Smotrich on Day of Protests: 'Bad Campaign Playing Into Hamas' Hands, The Country Is Not Striking'](#), *ynetnews*, 17 August 2025; Noa Shpigel, [*Netanyahu: Hostage Deal Protests Guarantee Repeat of Oct. 7 Atrocities and Forever War](#), *Haaretz*, 17 August 2025; Michael Shemesh, [Likud MK Vaturi: Hamas Has Several Tentacles, One of Them Is the Protests'](#), *Kan*, 18 June 2024.

⁸ Eitay Mack, [*The Legal Infrastructure for the Suppression of Protests and Demonstrations in Israel](#), *Zulat*, 3 May 2024.

⁹ Ben-Gvir interfered with the Israel Police's operations at the anti-government demonstrations and published a "policy proposal" banning various forms of protest. See: Jeremy Sharon, [*AG Tells Ben-Gvir He's Overstepping Boundaries With Planned Crackdown on Protests](#), *The Times of Israel*, 1 September 2025.

¹⁰ TOI Staff, [*Ben Gvir: Police Must Arrest Protesters Who Block Roads at Rallies](#), *The Times of Israel*, 9 January 2023.

¹¹ Josh Breiner, [Ben-Gvir Holds Situation Assessment at Police HQ 'After Rioting by Anarchists'](#), *Haaretz*, 20 February 2023.

¹² Josh Breiner, [*Tel Aviv Police Chief Quits: I Paid a Price for Choosing To Prevent a Civil War](#), *Haaretz*, 5 July 2023.

¹³ Eli Bar-Eli, [Yesterday He Jumped Into a Cage of Crocodiles, Today a Thug in the Service of the Justice Minister. What's Happening in Likud?](#), *TheMarker*, 5 October 2025.

legal liability for actions taken "in the context of fulfilling their operational duties," so long as they are not deemed to have acted "maliciously."¹⁴ Moreover, the government is advancing a bill that would allow the politicization of Mahash (Israel Police's Internal Investigations Department) by subordinating it to the Minister of Justice.¹⁵ Such harm to the department's independence could result in a lack of deterrence vis-a-vis police officers who employ violence in demonstrations.

As it is, according to the Alimut Israel database, the number of incidents of police violence toward demonstrators totaled 1,230 in 2024, as opposed to 506 in 2023. It should be noted that indictments were filed only in three of the 307 investigative cases opened by Mahash in 2023-2024.¹⁶ Alongside this lenient approach, the police have often failed to take the necessary actions to effectively protect demonstrators from violence perpetrated by fellow civilians.¹⁷

Gender-Based Violence Toward Female Protesters and Its Consequences

As noted, this document focuses on the various forms of mistreatment of women demonstrators as a means of suppressing their protest. The data and testimonies detailed in this document originate primarily from the Alimut Israel database,¹⁸ which contains hundreds of first-person testimonies as well as eyewitness accounts of incidents of police brutality during protests against the 37th government. Most of the testimonies are accompanied by video footage documenting the violence, and most (though not all) of the testimonies cited in this document are corroborated by videos or photos. In addition to the database, we used media reports and first-person accounts collected directly.

¹⁴ [Coalition Agreement for Formation of Israel's 37th Government Between Likud and Otzma Yehudit Faction Headed by Itamar Ben-Gvir](#), *Knesset*, 28 December 2023.

¹⁵ Eitay Mack, [*Subordination of Mahash to Minister of Justice: Proposal for Government Takeover of Prosecution Authorities](#), *Zulat*, 18 May 2025.

¹⁶ 210 cases were closed, 42 were forwarded for disciplinary action, and 52 cases are still pending. See: Moshe Steinmetz, [Over 300 Mahash Cases, Only 3 Indictments](#), *i24News*, 25 March 2025.

¹⁷ For example, consider the backing given by the Justice Minister to the aforementioned Mordechai David. See also the extensive discussion about the right to protest in Israeli law in a study published by Zulat, which finds that the protections for this right are fundamentally weak: on the one hand, Basic Laws do not list it as a protected right, while on the other hand, a series of norms (some dating back to the British Mandate era) grant the police draconian powers to enforce 'public order' and suppress demonstrations (such as requiring a permit to hold a protest, the use of crowd-control measures, and arrests or release of detainees under restrictive conditions). See: Eitay Mack, *Legal Infrastructure for Suppression of Protests and Demonstrations* in footnote #8.

¹⁸ See footnote #1.

Drawing on an in-depth review of the database material, along with other publicly available sources, our analysis identified five distinct practices through which gender-based violence is used to suppress protest.

1. Blatant sexual violence during demonstrations
2. Sexual and gender-based degradation
3. Body searches and forced stripping of female demonstrators during arrests
4. Questioning of their motherhood
5. Physical violence with severe consequences due to women's greater physiological vulnerability

Below we elaborate and clarify the implications of each of the category.

A. Blatant Sexual Violence During Demonstrations

The database contains a variety of accounts about sexual assaults, forced touching of intimate body parts, and sexual harassment of female demonstrators by police officers. Some describe assaults during arrests, while others refer to the actions of officers during a demonstration unrelated to the arrest or detention of the victim. Below are several testimonies of women who were sexually assaulted during anti-government protests:

1. Incident on 1 September 2024, testimony of a demonstrator at a protest in Tel Aviv:¹⁹ "Another officer (a thickset detective who was wearing, I think, a dark gray shirt and a police cap, but no name tag either) violently pushed me in the chest while my hands were up. When I yelled at him that he was touching my breast, he looked me in the eye and punched me in the face."
2. Incident in January 2025 at a demonstration in Tel Aviv, testimony of A.K.:²⁰ "I've been assaulted and injured at demonstrations several times before... but that's nothing compared to what happened this time. It was extremely upsetting. I always hold a sign against my chest, but I never raise it. This time it was crowded, so I lifted the sign, and then it happened. After the names of the hostages were read aloud, protesters lit a fire. I was in the outer circle surrounding the fire, not close [to the flames]. The police tried to break in. I stood there holding the sign up in front of them; one of the policemen made his way inside the circle and groped my

¹⁹ [Alimut Israel's database](#).

²⁰ Transcription of a conversation held by the author on 12 August 2025. Although the victim agreed to publish her name, only her initials appear in this document.

breast as he went by. I was standing in the outer ring and he walked past me and that's what he did. I was in shock. A protester next to me saw what happened and was shocked too; I was completely stunned. I held the sign high. It took me a while to understand what had just occurred.... I looked around for the officer in command, told him that one of his men had assaulted me, but I was totally ignored. This felt different from the other assaults I experienced. I thought I wasn't someone who freezes, but it turns out that I am."

3. Incident on 8 August 2025, Tel Aviv, testimony of N. (recorded on video, victim's full name and face visible):²¹ "I came to today's demonstration in support of releasing the hostages, and encountered very severe police violence. They tried to break my arm several times; I was sexually harassed by policemen. An officer put his hand under my shirt, under my bra, and that's how they dragged me aside."
4. Incident on 27 September 2025 in Ness Ziona, at a reading of the names of the hostages near Minister Gideon Saar's home:²² The police arrested two female demonstrators and confiscated megaphones. It bears noting that the previous day, in a hearing on extending the detention of another detainee, a district court had ruled that a protest consisting of reading aloud the names of hostages using a megaphone "does not justify the police imposing restrictive conditions." In footage of the arrest of a demonstrator named Paula Keusch, a policeman is seen slamming her to the ground and crouching over her as she screams twice, "He's touching my chest," and another protester shouting the same. Nevertheless, the officer remains in the same position, sitting on the lower part of her body, as he arrests and handcuffs her. Interviewed the next day, Keusch said: "He ran toward me, grabbed my left arm, grabbed my breast and pulled it. When I screamed at him to let go, he again crushed me and pulled my breast, and after that there's footage showing that I'm covering the breast area so he won't touch it.... I yelled at him that I don't want him touching me, so he put his foot on me and stepped on my groin.... It felt like rape, like an assault, like there was no one there to save me."²³

²¹ [Facebook page of Meshanim Kivun](#) ["Changing Direction"], 8 August 2025.

²² Bar Peleg, [*Thousands Rally in Israel Demanding Netanyahu Accept Trump's Gaza Cease-Fire and Hostage Deal](#), *Haaretz*, 27 September 2025.

²³ [Alimut Israel's X account](#), 29 September 2025. See also Paula Keusch's op-ed, [A Policeman Sexually Assaulted Me at a Demonstration and Then Arrested Me. It Only Made Me More Determined](#), *Haaretz*, 7 October 2025.

Another practice that exploits gendered power imbalance and vulnerability involves arresting a woman by surrounding her with multiple police officers, even when there is no operational need for it. Such behavior may cause a woman to feel threatened and scared, especially if she has been a victim of sexual violence in the past. One such case occurred on 17 June 2024 in Jerusalem, when an officer arrested a young woman by choking her as two other policemen surrounded her, and all three then dragged her without any evident justification.²⁴ A similar incident occurred on 22 September 2025 near Minister Gideon Saar's home with the mother of a soldier who was protesting in favor of ending the war.²⁵ A case was documented in Tel Aviv on 22 June 2024, when three officers significantly heavier than the demonstrator walked her away trapped in between them.²⁶ Another severe incident was documented on 27 January 2025 during a protest in Modi'in, as an officer sought to snatch away a drum held by a woman demonstrator, and to that end used a knife right next to her body to cut the straps.²⁷

B. Sexual and Gender-Based Degradation

Beyond physical sexual violence, numerous cases have been reported of policemen using sexually derogatory language toward female demonstrators. For example, on 31 May 2025 an officer yelled at a demonstrator in Tel Aviv: "I will fuck you."²⁸ On 30 September 2024 an elderly woman reported: "M. is a police officer in Jerusalem. Yesterday, at the demonstration outside MK Simcha Rothman's home, he and his colleagues beat a demonstrator. Others dragged her. They jabbed their fingers in her ribs and waist, and hissed to her 'you ugly old woman.'"

There are also accounts of female demonstrators being disparaged with gendered stereotypes, suggesting that women who protest against the establishment or who are politically active are abnormal or even mentally unstable. For example, here is the testimony about the arrest of Dr. Yolanda Yavor at a protest in Caesarea on 6 April 2024: "According to her attorney from the Protest Detainee Legal Support Front, the Menashe District commander told Yavor at the police station as she awaited legal counsel: 'You are a crazy anarchist, I'm taking you on as a personal project. I will break your bones, you will not become another Shikma [alluding to Dr. Shikma Bressler, a physicist at the Weizmann

²⁴ Footage posted on [Hanna Kuperman's X account](#), 17 June 2024.

²⁵ Footage posted on [Alimut Israel's X account](#), 22 June 2025.

²⁶ Footage posted on [Alimut Israel's X account](#), 26 June 2024.

²⁷ Meshanim Kivun's footage posted on [Alimut Israel's X account](#), 27 January 2025.

²⁸ [Alimut Israel's database](#).

Institute of Science who went on to become a prominent leader of the protest movement]. I will make sure you end up in Shikma Prison.' In last night's footage of the protest, the same commander is seen grabbing Yavor's hand and helping to drag her forcefully over a fence."²⁹ It should be noted that research from around the world shows that labeling women activists as "deviant" is a documented practice used by the authorities to portray them as non-normative and to deter other protesters.³⁰

Furthermore, the Israel Police's sexist conduct is strikingly manifest in the actions against MK Naama Lazimi (Democrats party), who regularly attends protests and has more than once seen her parliamentary immunity breached when police officers denied her access to certain places. MK Lazimi recounted that on 20 September 2025, the Jerusalem District Police commander violently blocked her way as she tried to help a disabled woman and her guide dog to get back home by taking a shortcut through a checkpoint during a demonstration calling for the release of the hostages near the Prime Minister's residence. Despite the commander's repeated insults, including telling her 'you are a zero' at least four times, MK Lazimi ultimately ensured that the woman was safely escorted home.³¹ After the incident was publicized, Minister Ben-Gvir backed the police officer.³² It should be noted that the same officer had two weeks earlier clashed with Labor MK Gilad Kariv and told him to "go shout in the Knesset,"³³ but the belittling and degrading phrase "you are a zero" was directed specifically at a female MK.

C. Stripping of Female Demonstrators During Arrests

A further instance of law enforcement leveraging women's sexuality to suppress protest occurs after a demonstration ends, during the arrest process. Since June 2025 and up to the publication of this document, at least eight women have reportedly been required to undress and subjected to a nude body search following their detention. It should be emphasized that we found no reports about stripping and nude searches of female demonstrators in earlier stages of the protest (such as during the rallies against the regime revolution, from January 2023 until 7 October, or during the first year of the war). Therefore,

²⁹ Footage of Yolanda Yavor's arrest posted on [Bar Shem-Ur's X account](#), 7 April 2024.

³⁰ Helen Monk, Joanna Gilmore, and William Jackson, *[Gendering Pacification: Policing Women at Anti-Fracking Protests](#), *Feminist Review*, 1 July 2019.

³¹ Unattributed report, *['None, You Are None': A Confrontation Between MK Naama Lazimi and the Commander of the Moria Police Station](#), *Haredim10*, 21 September 2025.

³² Shiela Fried and Liran Tamari, [Ben-Gvir Backs Officer, Police Needles Lazimi: 'You're Supposed To Set an Example'](#), *Ynet*, 21 September 2025.

³³ Idan Bloemhof, *[Gilad Kariv Confronts Police Officer: 'Go Shout in the Knesset'? You Won't Talk Like That](#), *Ynetnews*, 6 September 2025.

the practice of forced stripping and nude searches may have expanded as of June 2025. Below are reports published regarding this practice:

1. On 18 June 2025, two women who were arrested at a demonstration opposite the Prime Minister's residence in Jerusalem underwent a nude body search. According to the description one of them gave to Haaretz, she was required to shift into a squatting position while naked: "My friend went to the bathroom and I stayed with the police officer. She asked if I had anything on me that I shouldn't have, and I refused to answer her, so she informed me that I would undergo a strip search. She took me to a meeting room and told me to undress." According to the woman, the officer yelled at her during the search and asked her to hand over her clothes so that she could search them. "When I was totally naked, she asked me to bend over. When the search was over and I put on my underwear, she had already opened the door and was speaking with male police officers outside."³⁴
2. On 22 June 2025, Dr. Renana Keydar and Shoshan Dolgopolsky Geva were arrested at a quiet demonstration outside Minister Nir Barkat's home in Jerusalem. It should be noted that Keydar, who lives on the same the street but was not in any way participating in the protest, had just arrived to check on her underage daughter.³⁵ At the detention facility, both women were required to undress and were subjected to a nude body search. Dr. Keydar described the event: "I was taken into some office which, I later realized, had a see-through glass wall and a window facing the street. She told me to undress. I took off my clothes. She looked at me and said, 'get dressed'.... What was I arrested for, drugs? Possession of a knife? What exactly would they have found? A poster of hostages? There was no logic to it and no explanation whatsoever."³⁶
3. On 9 August 2025, three women and a man were arrested at a demonstration in Tel Aviv.³⁷ According to the report, one by one, the three women were required to go into a restroom with a policewoman and undress, at which point a body search was conducted. The man who was arrested with them was not asked to undress (only to lift his shirt). Here is the testimony of P., one of the victims (recorded on

³⁴ Bar Peleg and Josh Breiner, [*Israel Police Strip-Search Anti-War Protester Demonstrating Outside Netanyahu's Residence](#), *Haaretz*, 20 June 2025. It transpires from the letter dated 30 June 2025 dealing with "protest events during Operation Rising Lion" [Israel's 12-day military campaign against Iran in June 2025] sent by Israel Police's legal adviser to Zulat and others that two women were strip-searched in this incident.

³⁵ This emerges from a video clip posted by the journalist [Nir Hasson](#) on his X account, 22 June 2025.

³⁶ Dr. Renana Keydar, [On Protest and Remembrance After 7/10](#), *YouTube* channel of Habayit Hameshutaf ["The Collective Home"], 1 July 2025.

³⁷ [Michal Peylan's X account](#), 12 August 2025.

video, her face and full name visible): "They took us to the police station and there we were asked to go one by one into a toilet stall with a policewoman. She asked us to undress. I stood there for a moment in the toilet with the policewoman, naked, and then she said, 'get dressed.' She conducted no body search on me (it's summer, I was wearing a thin tank top. What could I possibly be hiding there?). He just stripped me as an act of humiliation and intimidation."³⁸

4. An activist named Naama Cohen reported on her Facebook account on 27 August 2025 that she was arrested during a demonstration for the hostages and released to five-day house arrest (apparently for blocking roads). In the post describing her arrest, she noted that she was asked to undress but refused.³⁹

Legality of Strip-Searching Female Protesters

The legal infrastructure empowering police officers to conduct bodily searches on detainees stems from Article 3(a) of the Criminal Procedure Law (Enforcement Powers - Bodily Search and Fingerprinting), 1996, which states:

"Were a police officer to have reasonable grounds to suspect that evidence proving the commission of an offense or a connection between the suspect and an offense is to be found on the suspect's body, he is permitted to conduct an external search... but only if the suspect has consented to it."

The Supreme Court viewed this power as having the potential to violate the most basic human rights, such as the right to autonomy, privacy, and dignity, and therefore sought to limit it and allow its use only when no alternatives exist.⁴⁰

As noted, the law requires "reasonable grounds to suspect the existence of evidence" that can be discovered only through a bodily search (in this case, a strip-search), and that this evidence would link the suspect to the offense for which they were detained. In this context, a ruling on a case dealing with circumstances similar to the strip-searching of the female protesters affirmed:

"While there may be numerous cases where there are reasonable grounds to suspect that a prison inmate is concealing a prohibited item on their person or under their clothing with the intent to smuggle it into jail, there are also many circumstances where such a suspicion is highly unlikely. **This is particularly true**

³⁸ [War Room's Telegram channel](#), 13 August 2025.

³⁹ [Naama Cohen's Facebook account](#), 27 August 2025.

⁴⁰ [Criminal Appeal 10141-09 Ben Haim v. State of Israel](#), *Supreme Decisions*, 6 March 2012.

when a person is arrested unexpectedly, with no opportunity to anticipate or prepare for the arrest, and has been under constant police supervision from the moment of detention” [our emphasis].⁴¹

Where the arrest of women protesters is concerned, there is no doubt that “reasonable grounds to suspect the existence of evidence” does not apply. First, there are no reasonable grounds to suspect the concealment of evidence linking protesters to an offense (most likely they were detained on charges of “disturbing the public order”) given that they could not have anticipated their arrest, in line with the court decision cited above. Second, it is unclear what physical evidence could possibly link them to the offense of “disturbing the public order,” and certainly none that could be hidden in their intimate parts. Or as Dr. Renana Keydar put it: “What exactly would they have found? A poster of hostages?”

Additionally, the law requires consent for a search, and court rulings have reiterated that a suspect’s consent must be given only after it has been clearly explained to them that they may refuse, and that this refusal will not harm their rights or raise suspicion against them.⁴² However, it clearly transpires from all the testimonies of the women who were strip-searched that their right to refuse was not explained to them as required.

Additional circumstances reinforce the conclusion that the police are abusing their authority through the practice of forced strip-searching. For instance, the fact that the frequency of this practice increased significantly and inexplicably starting in June 2025 adds weight to the possibility that this reflects a change in policy dictated by higher levels and has to do with the subject of the protest. In other words, the fact that the practice was directed mainly at women protesting the government’s policy on the hostages and the war attests to selective enforcement. Notably, three women and one man were arrested in the incident of 9 August 2025, yet only the women were strip-searched. This may point to a gender-based directive or policy primarily targeting women.⁴³

⁴¹ This ruling has to do with a prison inmate, whereas our case has to do with detentions. See Civil Case 35744-12-12 Jerusalem Magistrates Court Hanamel Dorfman v. State of Israel, Israel Police, Israel Prison Authority, *Nevo*, 22 February 2015.

⁴² Criminal Appeal 10141-09 Ben Haim v. State of Israel (see footnote #40).

⁴³ It should be noted that on 6 November 2025, a man who hurled catcalls (including “racist” and “Kahanist”) at Minister Ben-Gvir during a graduation ceremony at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem was arrested and subjected to a full strip search at the police station. See: Josh Breiner, [“Probe Launched After Israel Police Strip-Search Teacher Who Confronted Ben-Gvir,”](#) *Haaretz*, 6 November 2025. However, from June 2025 and up to the publication of this document, aside from this incident, all publicly reported cases involved strip-searches of women.

Moreover, according to the testimonies, most women were told to get dressed immediately after being stripped, without any actual search being performed, which strongly suggests that there was no real necessity for the procedure. As Dr. Renana Keydar testified: "They told me: undress, get dressed." It should also be noted that all the protesters were released the same day (Naama Cohen was placed under five-day house arrest), and none were indicted. This further supports the conclusion that the purpose of the strip-searches was to punish or intimidate the women rather than to enforce the law.

It should be noted that Zulat, the Association of Rape Crisis Centers in Israel, and other organizations contacted the Attorney General and the Israel Police in June 2025 following the first two strip-search incidents. The Israel Police's response, in a letter from the Legal Adviser's Office received on 30 June, stated that the protesters of 18 June underwent a bodily search "in accordance with the law" and "consistent with the concerns and suspicions the female officers held at the time of the search, which due to privacy considerations will not be detailed here."⁴⁴ The 22 June search was also conducted in accordance with the law, the letter added, without specifying any reasonable suspicion or evidence that might have linked the protesters to an "offense" (in this case, "disturbing the public order"). The legal adviser concluded by affirming that "the officers conducted themselves in accordance with the law. Nevertheless... guidelines will be clarified."

Thus, despite failing to cite a single legal basis for the strip-searches, the Israel Police's legal adviser nevertheless insists that they were lawful. This response is troubling because it legitimizes the practice, as long as the Attorney General does not direct otherwise. If this is a top-down policy intended to humiliate female protesters, as the evidence would seem to suggest, then this practice amounts to sexual assault of protesters by the Israel Police under protection of the law.⁴⁵

D. Threats to Female Protestors' Motherhood

The aforementioned arrest of Keydar and Dolgopolsky Geva included yet another means of pressuring women protesters: questioning their motherhood.⁴⁶ When the police arrived on the scene, the two women and their underage children were taking part in a peaceful protest featuring communal singing. Dolgopolsky Geva was sitting on the sidewalk with

⁴⁴ Israel Police's letter on "protest events during Operation Rising Lion" (see footnote #34).

⁴⁵ Zehava Galon, [*Israel Police Use Sexual Assault as a Protest-Dispersal Tactic](#), *Haaretz*, 25 June 2025.

⁴⁶ Nitzan Caspi Shiloni, [Good Mothers Don't Protest, And Those Who Do Will Be Forced Back Into Their Natural Place](#), *Haaretz*, 25 June 2025.

her young son, while Keydar had not been attending the event at all and had just come to check on her 14-year-old daughter. In one video clip posted online, an officer is seen scolding the mothers attending the event with their children and Dolgopolsky Geva retorting: "I make a very conscious choice, I choose to bring my children here."⁴⁷ In response, the officers are heard threatening the women that they will report them to the social services. Later on, the two women are arrested in front of their frightened and sobbing children, and Keydar is asked whether she would consent to have her 14-year-old daughter come to the police station to give testimony.⁴⁸ This is clearly a problematic procedure, since Israeli law prohibits children from testifying against their parents and imposes diverse restrictions on the testimony of minors.⁴⁹ It seems that raising this possibility was intended as a psychological pressure tactic on the detainees. The baseless threat of involving the social services, the separation of the women from their children, and the framing of their motherhood as non-normative exploit the fact that the protesters are mothers to deter them (and other mothers) from participating in demonstrations.

E. Police Violence Against Women and Female Body's Vulnerability

As noted at the beginning of this document, the prevalence of physical (non-sexual) violence by police toward male protesters is likely higher than against women. However, an additional dimension of this violence needs to be considered: the vulnerability of the female body. Women are generally more susceptible to physical injury resulting from the use of force due to inherent physiological and anatomical differences between the sexes.⁵⁰ In other words, even when police apply the same degree of force to a man and a woman, the consequences for a woman will often be more severe due to bodily disparities. For example, women on average have lower muscle mass protecting organs and the skeleton and lower bone density, which increases the risk of internal injuries and fractures resulting from blows with batons or fists.⁵¹

Due to their typical anatomical build, women are at greater risk of serious knee and ankle injuries when violently thrown to the ground,⁵² and their relatively weaker neck muscles

⁴⁷ Video clip posted on [Meshanim Kivun's Facebook page](#), 22 June 2025.

⁴⁸ Renana Keydar, see footnote #36.

⁴⁹ [Article 4 of Evidence Ordinance \[New Version\], 1971, Nevo](#), last updated 29 September 2025.

⁵⁰ Naturally, this refers to averages rather than to specific cases. There also are other populations with heightened vulnerability, such as people with disabilities, the elderly, sick persons, etc.

⁵¹ Cordelia W. Carter et al., [*Sex-Based Differences in Common Sports Injuries](#), *Journal of the American Academy of Orthopaedic Surgeons*, 1 July 2018.

⁵² Thomas Kernozek et al., [*Gender Differences in Frontal and Sagittal Plane Biomechanics During Drop Landings](#), *Medicine and Science in Sports and Exercise*, June 2005.

make head trauma from shaking or impact more likely.⁵³ It should be noted that certain crowd-control measures, such as water cannons⁵⁴ and mounted police,⁵⁵ pose a heightened risk of serious injury as they are difficult to regulate and are deployed forcefully and indiscriminately toward the crowd.

The Alimut Israel database contains numerous accounts of women whose injuries required hospitalization, as well as of the painful and humiliating practice of dragging female protesters by their hair. Hair-pulling has been documented in several cases, including in a confrontation with MK Naama Lazimi,⁵⁶ during arrests at a Tel Aviv demonstration on 22 June 2024,⁵⁷ and at a protest in late June near the Prime Minister's residence in Jerusalem where both a woman and a man were forcibly dragged by the hair.⁵⁸ Although this latter incident would seem to indicate that the practice is not used exclusively against women, it is more likely to be employed against people with long hair and is therefore less prevalent among men. Below are several of those testimonies:

1. Woman's account after a demonstration in Tel Aviv on 24 July 2023: "I was standing at the protest on the Ayalon North highway when I was hit from close range by a water cannon. The impact of the water jet threw me backward and made me roll on the road, and then a horse stepped on me. I came to when some protesters lifted me by the arms and legs and moved me aside. A medic checked me and evacuated me by ambulance to Ichilov Hospital. I was hospitalized overnight, and was diagnosed with a fractured rib."
2. Woman's testimony after a demonstration in Tel Aviv on 25 July 2023: "I found myself alone on the road during the protest on Kaplan Street. The flag I was holding fell and I bent down to pick it up, and then a water cannon hit me directly. From the pressure of the water jet, I flew backward and landed on my tailbone on the road. The physical assault resulted in an injury that required hospitalization."

⁵³ Gustavo P. Carmo et al., [*Biomechanics of Traumatic Head and Neck Injuries on Women: A State-of-the-Art Review and Future Directions](#), *Biology*, 4 January 2023.

⁵⁴ See debate on bill proposing to restrict use of water cannons held by the [Knesset National Security Committee](#), 30 June 2025.

⁵⁵ [*Use of Mounted Police in Protests](#) (ACRI's legal letter to Israel Police, 18 December 2024) and [*Mounted Police Should Not Be Used as Crowd Control for Demonstrations](#) (Supreme Court Petition 44742-08-25, ACRI v. Israel Police, 18 August 2025), *Association for Civil Rights in Israel*. As for the symbolism of the use of mounted police, see: Dror Burstein, [Sometimes It Just Takes One Song To Look at Horses Differently](#), *Haaretz*, 19 July 2023.

⁵⁶ Josh Breiner, [*Officers 'Choked Me, Pulled My Hair, Kicked Me': Police Violence Spikes at Anti-Government Rallies, Opposition MK Attacked](#), *Haaretz*, 30 June 2024.

⁵⁷ [Alimut Israel's X account](#), 26 June 2024.

⁵⁸ Bar Peleg, [Mahash Closes Investigation Against Policemen Filmed Punching and Pulling Protester's Hair](#), *Haaretz*, 6 December 2024.

3. At a demonstration in Tel Aviv on 7 December 2024, a protester who was pushed by a policeman was evacuated by ambulance to the hospital with suspected fractures in the pelvis and shoulder. The physical assault resulted in an injury with long-term damage.
4. The following report was received after a demonstration on 24 August 2024: "At a protest installation with a woman standing on a tall ladder... an officer went straight for the ladder, shook it, and caused her to fall to the ground. The protester was evacuated for medical treatment. The physical assault resulted in an injury that required initial medical care at the hospital."
5. The following report was received after a demonstration in Tel Aviv on 31 August 2024: "An officer on horseback trampled Natalie Zangauker [sister of Matan Zangauker, a hostage held in Gaza who was recently released after two years in Hamas captivity]. The physical assault resulted in an injury that required hospitalization."⁵⁹
6. Peni Pasi, a disabled IDF veteran, testified before the Knesset National Security Committee on 22 May 2025: "In February 2023, I attended a demonstration against the regime revolution outside the Prime Minister's residence on Gaza Street in Jerusalem, and afterward we set out on a march. When we reached the corner of Eliash and Ben-Yehuda Streets, a phalanx of police officers would not let us through. I approached one of the officers and asked why they were not letting us pass, and in response he pushed me hard. I landed on my right hand, and the pain was excruciating. They took me to the emergency room, put my hand in a cast, and was told I had a complex fracture that required surgery. The next week I underwent an operation, and then another one a few months later. I am still undergoing physical and occupational therapy, and there's talk about a third surgery.... My hand hasn't recovered; it's my right hand, my dominant hand. I suffer constant electric shocks and things fall from my hands. I have a disability in my right hand."⁶⁰

It should be stressed that pregnant, disabled, and elderly women are especially vulnerable, yet testimonies describe physical violence directed at them as well. Here are some examples:

⁵⁹ Footage of mounted police's trampling of protester posted on [Bar Shem-Ur's X account](#), 31 August 2024.

⁶⁰ [Minutes of meeting of Knesset National Security Committee](#), *Knesset*, 22 May 2025.

1. On 21 September 2024 a disabled woman who uses a walker was reportedly attacked by a policeman during a demonstration in Tel Aviv, and her injury required hospital care.⁶¹
2. On 4 November 2023 a disabled woman was injured during a demonstration in Jerusalem. Her account: "I am a disabled woman who uses a walker. At the protest on Gaza Street, I was pushed violently by police officers. As I tried to fend them off and steady myself, one policeman got angry, grabbed my arm, twisted it behind my back, and slammed me onto a crowd of protesters. I landed on the road and hurt my back; I needed help to be able to stand up again. I shouted at him that he was hitting a disabled woman, and he was about to attack me once again but was stopped by his fellow officers."⁶²
3. On 20 April 2025 an elderly woman was injured during a protest in Moshav Mazor. Here is the testimony recorded in the Alimut Israel database: "Police officers forcefully pulled and pushed an elderly woman out of a backyard until she fell to the ground. During the clash her glasses flew off her face. When she went back to try to find them, one of the officers again shoved her backward. Only after he realized she had lost her glasses did he try to help her look for them."⁶³
4. A violent arrest of an elderly woman during a protest in Tel Aviv was documented on 5 November 2024: "Two female Border Police officers knocked down an elderly protester and dragged her on the ground."⁶⁴
5. A particularly violent arrest of a disabled woman was filmed on 20 September 2025 in a shopping center. The protester was knocked off her walker and police dragged her along the floor.⁶⁵

It should be clarified that the police are forbidden to use force against civilians, other than in specific circumstances warranted by law.⁶⁶ In any case, the use of force, be it lawful or unlawful (as is often the case in anti-government protests), must take into account the higher vulnerability of the female body.

⁶¹ Footage posted on [Alimut Israel's X account](#), 22 September 2024.

⁶² Footage of incident posted on [Alimut Israel's database](#).

⁶³ Footage of incident posted on [Alimut Israel's X account](#), 20 April 2025.

⁶⁴ Footage of incident posted on [Alimut Israel's X account](#), 5 November 2025.

⁶⁵ Footage of incident posted on [Liri Burak Shavit's X account](#), 20 September 2025.

⁶⁶ Nurit Yachimovich-Cohen, [Data on Police's Use of Force and Guidelines on Detention, Arrest, Release, and Medical Treatment of Detainees: Background Material for Knesset National Security Committee's Debate](#), *Knesset Research and Information Center*, 8 June 2023.

Analysis: Consequences of Gendered Attacks on Women Protestors

Women protesting Israeli government policies are subjected to specific forms of violence by police officers. This violence is political and systematic, rather than isolated misconduct by individual officers. This is evident from the recurring patterns across incidents and from the rise in the use of such practices as strip-searching female protesters during certain periods, seemingly as a result of orders from above.

Moreover, the phenomenon is not unique to Israel but well-known around the world. Obviously, most of the cases reported worldwide involve protest suppression in nondemocratic countries or dysfunctional democracies. For example, feminist activists in Mexico who since 2016 have been demonstrating for women's rights (the right to abortion and the eradication of femicide and domestic violence) tell of arbitrary arrests during which police officers sexually assault them.⁶⁷ In Colombia, an Amnesty International report revealed that police troops used sexual violence, including rape, against women during mass demonstrations in 2021.⁶⁸ In the past year, Amnesty International has also reported increased sexual violence (ranging from degrading and sexist epithets such as "whore" to strip-searching protesters, and even rape) against women protesters in Georgia.⁶⁹ An extreme example is what happened during the Arab Spring revolution in 2011 in Egypt, when the army stifled the women's protest in Tahrir Square using such practices as nude searches and "virginity tests."⁷⁰

Alongside the incidence of police sexual violence in countries that routinely violate human rights, reports surfaced recently of similar violence in Italy targeting anti-government protesters. Amid allegations that female climate activists were made to take off their underwear and perform squats during questioning, the Italian interior minister was urged to open an investigation into the police's conduct.⁷¹ Another case of systematic sexual

⁶⁷ Paulina García-Del Moral, [*Police Do Not Protect Me, My Female Friends Do: Police Repression Against Feminists in Mexico](#), *Georgetown Journal of International Affairs*, 17 February 2021.

⁶⁸ [*COFEM Statement of Solidarity: Police Brutality and a Feminist Critique of the Criminal Justice/Police System](#), *Coalition of Feminists for Social Change*, 14 February 2022.

⁶⁹ [*From Insults to Assaults: Weaponizing Gender-Based Violence Against Women Protesters in Georgia](#), *Amnesty International*, 23 May 2025.

⁷⁰ Sofie Marianne Gilbert, [*Correlates of Sexual Violence in Protest Spaces: Evidence from the Egyptian Revolution](#), master's thesis, *Department of Political Science, University of Oslo*, spring 2021.

⁷¹ Angela Giuffrida, [*Italian Police Accused of Making Female Activists Remove Underwear and Do Squats](#), *The Guardian*, 15 January 2025.

violence used against demonstrators in a democracy was reported in England, at the anti-fracking protests held in 2013-2014.⁷²

Separate from the gender issue, physical violence by police officers who abuse their authority generally acts as a deterrent that keeps citizens from taking part in demonstrations. Indeed, the aforementioned practices directed at women (sexual assault, degradation, strip-searching, and physical violence) contain an inherently deterrent element. In other words, police violence signals and warns other women that they are better off staying away from protests. Given the uniquely traumatic nature of sexual violence, reports of such incidents can significantly discourage other women from participating in demonstrations. As one of the victims quoted above said regarding the sexual assault she experienced at demonstrations: "I've been assaulted and injured at demonstrations several times before... but that's nothing compared to what happened this time."

Beyond its deterrent effect, yet another consequence of gender-based violence in protest suppression is its wider and systemic impact on women as a group and on their participation in the public sphere.⁷³ The demeaning and delegitimizing language used by police officers toward women in demonstrations and political actions suggests that women are still viewed as transgressing traditional social norms, and that the "punishment" for such behavior is reflected in the response of law enforcement.⁷⁴ This conduct (attacking female protesters and dismissing the legitimacy and normalcy of their participation) ultimately reinforces existing inequalities in society, which as it is causes fewer women than men to take part in civic and public struggles. Thus, police violence not only infringes on the rights of individual victims or discourages others from participating, but also erodes the broader principle of women's equal participation in protest. As a result, women may become less engaged in democratic life.

In conclusion, the freedom of protest of Israeli citizens demonstrating against government policies has been harmed since the formation of the 37th government.⁷⁵ It is entirely possible that women's active participation and prominent attendance in these protests

⁷² Monk, Gilmore, and Jackson, Gendering Pacification: Policing Women at Anti-Fracking Protests (see footnote #30).

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Tal Hilel and Eitay Mack, *[Unjustified Use of Force and Crowd Control Weapons](#), *Zulat*, 11 July 2024

have also contributed to the increase in the police's gender-based violence, which may deter and reduce the future presence of women in anti-government protests.

Policy Recommendations

In light of this paper's conclusion that the police employ distinct types of violence against anti-government female protesters, Zulat is submitting the following policy recommendations aimed at preventing gender-based violence:

1. Restrict Option of Strip-Searching Protesters

As this paper demonstrates, one method used to suppress protests is to subject female protesters to bodily and strip-searches following their detention at police stations, despite the absence of any substantive justification for such invasive measures. First, the women have no advance indication that they might be arrested, so there is no reasonable basis to suspect that they would be concealing any 'evidence' on their bodies. Second, most arrests are made under the vague charge of "disturbing the public peace," a catch-all offense that does not allege any concrete threat (such as assault, violence, or possession of dangerous materials) and therefore does not support suspicions of hidden evidence. Third, in all reported cases, police provided no explanation of what supposed evidence they believed might be found on the women's bodies. Finally, none of the detainees who underwent strip-searches were ever indicted. Given the understanding that the charge of "disturbing the public peace" functions as a catch-all justification for detaining protesters and that bodily searches are being used to intimidate and deter female demonstrators, we recommend restricting the use of such searches in these circumstances. Specifically, we propose to amend the Criminal Procedure Law (Enforcement Powers) to categorically prohibit any strip-search of suspects or detainees arrested for "disturbing the public peace" (Article 151 of the Penal Code) when the arrest occurs during an assembly, procession, or demonstration.

2. Mandatory Superintendent-Level Approval, Written Documentation for Bodily Searches in Non-Felony Cases

To limit the leeway of lower-ranking officers to order bodily searches, we propose to stipulate that searches based on suspected non-felony offenses be permitted only with the authorization of a police officer holding the rank of superintendent or higher. We also propose to require written documentation for any bodily search, including the

grounds and the reasonable suspicion justifying it. The Criminal Procedure Law-1966 (Enforcement Powers - Bodily Search and Fingerprinting) should be amended accordingly.

3. Annual Report to Knesset's National Security Committee

For the purpose of oversight, transparency, and effective remediation, we propose that the head of Mahash submit an annual report to the Knesset's National Security Committee detailing the number of sexual-assault complaints filed each year against police officers and specifying the steps taken in each case. The report should include a separate category listing incidents that occurred during demonstrations.

4. Toughen Penalties for Gender-Based Violence Against Civilians

Sexual violence perpetrated by police against female protesters constitutes an unlawful abuse of authority that exploits the inherent power imbalance between officers and civilians. It is therefore comparable to other forms of misconduct involving the abuse of power over subordinates, only it is more serious and should thus be regarded as particularly severe. Accordingly, we propose to toughen penalties in cases of gender-based violence committed by police against civilians. Article 348 of the Penal Code should be amended so that an indecent act carried out through the abuse of policing authority (as defined in Article 280) would carry double the penalty prescribed for this type of offense.

5. Introduce Sexual Assault/Harassment of Civilians as Disciplinary Offense

We propose to add abuse of the authority granted to police officers by virtue of their job in a manner that constitutes sexual assault or harassment of civilians to the list of disciplinary offenses enumerated in the Israel Police Commissioner's Directives.

6. Sexual Harassment Training for Police Officers

Amend the Israel Police Commissioner's Directives to include training of police officers on the topic of sexual harassment in civic protest events.

7. Submit Gender-Impact Assessments on Legislation About Policing at Protests

As discussed above, there are distinct aspects to the suppression of women's protest by the police, including the generally greater physical vulnerability of the female body. For this reason, gender considerations should be incorporated into every discussion or decision concerning policing at protests. Under Article 6C2 of the Equal Rights for Women Law-1951, the Authority for the Advancement of the Status of Women (AASW)

must provide a gender-impact assessment on any legislation that affects equality between women and men or falls within its purview. Accordingly, we propose that the AASW submit such an assessment for any bill related to policing at demonstrations (such as the use of water cannons or mounted police), given women's heightened physical vulnerability in this context.