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Equality and Human Rights

The Speech Police Silencing of The Arab Public in Wartime

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Introduction

Though discrimination and displays of racism toward the Arab public in Israel are not new phenomena, these intensified and reached unprecedented levels after the start of the war on 7 October 2023. Over the past two years, a perception has taken hold that the exercise of freedom of expression and protest by the Arab public constitutes a security threat that must be preempted, or at the very least significantly restricted. This perception has not been confined to marginal actors but has been adopted by state authorities (such as the Israel Police, the State Attorney's Office, the Attorney General, the Supreme Court, the government, and members of the Knesset) and has also been legitimized in academia, the labor market, the media, and among considerable segments of the Israeli public.

A broad suppression of the Arab public's freedom of expression and protest began already in the first months of the war.¹ Voicing a critical position was perceived as support for terrorism and betrayal and exacted a heavy price, often involving harm to personal safety, social exclusion, suspension or termination from work, disciplinary proceedings in universities, or the launch of a criminal investigation. This message, and the actions taken by various authorities to enforce it, had a clear chilling effect: demonstrations and protests, as well as the volume of public statements by the Arab public on social media and in the public arena in general, declined significantly during the war.

The Orr Commission, a state commission of inquiry established to investigate the circumstances surrounding the killing of 13 Arab Israeli citizens by police officers at the outset of the Second Intifada in October 2000,² warned against viewing the entire Arab public as an enemy. It noted in its recommendations that "there are aspects of the police's conduct toward the Arab sector that are not just a question of budget. It is important to instill the importance of measured and moderate conduct in relations with the Arab sector within all levels of the police. In this context, it is important to root out negative prejudices revealed even among veteran and highly regarded officers. The police must ensure that its officers understand that the Arab public as a whole is not an enemy and must not be treated as one."³ As this report shows, that is exactly how state authorities treated the Arab public during the war.

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

¹ This report does not address the violation of freedom of expression and protest in the West Bank or the Gaza Strip, where Israel does not recognize these rights at all, and where repression is therefore far more severe. See: [Military Court of Appeals in Judea and Samaria 1913/06 Abdallah Mahmud Muhammad Abu-Rahma v. the Military Prosecutor](#), Nevo (10 Apr 2006); Military Commander's Order No. 101 Regarding Prohibition of Incitement and Hostile Propaganda (published in *Btselem*, 27 Aug 1967).

² [Full Version of Report of State Commission of Inquiry Into Clashes Between Security Forces and Israeli Citizens in October 2000](#) (Aug 2003).

³ *ibid*, [Sixth Chapter: Orr Commission's Conclusion and Recommendations](#).

Shortly before the start of the war, Zulat for Equality and Human Rights, the Akevot Institute, and the Public Committee Against Torture in Israel released a report titled *The Legal Infrastructure for the Suppression of Protests and Demonstrations in Israel*,⁴ published amidst Amendment No. 37 to the Police Ordinance that granted the Minister of National Security broad powers to intervene in police work (some of which were revoked on appeal by the Supreme Court) and the protests against the regime revolution. The examples cited in the report concerned the tools used by the police to suppress anti-government protests by both minorities and sidelined groups, and by groups seen belonging to Israel's majority. A position paper published by Zulat in February 2024 concerning the measures used since the start of the war, particularly against the Arab public, presented recommendations for reinforcing protection of the freedom of protest in Israel.⁵

This report is a direct continuation of those publications. It describes the systematic silencing and exclusion of the Arab public over two years of war, from 7 October 2023 until the signing of the ceasefire agreement on 9 October 2025. This policy, which was implemented most forcefully during the first months of the war, created a chilling effect evident in the reluctance to voice opinions freely and to take part in demonstrations. Consequently, the erosion of the freedom of expression and protest persists and continues to shape the ability of the Arab public to express itself politically.

The first part of the report examines changes in policy toward the Arab public with regard to freedom of expression and protest. The second part presents examples of these changes and examines their implications for the Arab public.

⁴ Eitay Mack, [*The Legal Infrastructure for the Suppression of Protests and Demonstrations in Israel](#), *Zulat* (3 May 2024).

⁵ Eitay Mack, [*Ben-Gvir's Police Exploits Law Deficiencies To Suppress Protests](#), *Zulat* (4 Mar 2024).

Part One: Policy

Israel Police: Portrayal of Arab Public's Exercise of Freedom of Expression and Protest as Security Threat

Israeli legislation, which is partly based on laws dating back to the British Mandate era, provides only limited protection for the right to demonstrate, while leaving the police with broad powers to restrict freedom of expression and protest.⁶ The Israel Police fully exploited these powers upon the outbreak of the war.

Already at the very outset, National Security Minister Itamar Ben-Gvir declared that allowing the Arab public to exercise its freedom of expression and protest amounted to legitimizing support for Hamas, which could lead to the outbreak of clashes in mixed Arab-Jewish cities similar to those that occurred during Operation Guardian of the Walls in 2021. For example, in an interview with Channel 14 on 20 October 2023, conducted at an arms distribution center in southern Israel, Ben-Gvir said: "When I spoke about a Guardian of the Walls scenario, people told me it was 'delusional.' I think any scenario is possible and must be taken into account. We see a variety of actors seeking to fan the flames, spoiling for a fight, and provoking.... I think Israeli society today realizes that we are facing cruel enemies. I'm not saying all Arabs, but there are cruel enemies among Israel's Arabs as well, and we must remain vigilant."⁷

At a press conference in Sderot on 11 November 2023, Ben-Gvir argued that an escalation was highly likely and that he had therefore instructed the Police Commissioner to prepare for an "Operation Guardian of the Walls 2" scenario of incursions into southern communities, which he believed was imminent.⁸ A few days later, on 16 November 2023, following a petition to the Supreme Court (see below), the police approved a demonstration organized by Hadash in Tel Aviv. After MK Simcha Rothman (Religious Zionism) criticized the decision, Ben-Gvir hastened to clarify that "at my instructions, the Israel Police has so far prevented displays of solidarity with the Nazis of Hamas," adding that the State Attorney's Office [SAO] had coerced the police to approve the demonstration.⁹

Then-Police Commissioner Kobi Shabtai conveyed similar messages. On 17 October 2023, he praised the Investigations and Intelligence Division and the Cyber Division for their performance and said that "anybody inciting against the State of Israel, its symbols of

⁶ Eitay Mack, [*Ben-Gvir's Police Exploits Law Deficiencies To Suppress Protests, Zulat](#) (4 Mar 2024).

⁷ Yaron Moshe Tanami, [Ben-Gvir: 'There Are Cruel Enemies Among Israeli Arabs Too', Channel 14](#) (20 Oct 2023).

⁸ Ran Shimoni, [*Israel's Ben-Gvir: From Now on Every Resident of Southern City Sderot Can Bear Arms, Haaretz](#) (11 Oct 2023).

⁹ Avishai Grinzaig, [Supreme Court v. Ben-Gvir: Refrain From Issuing Operational Orders Concerning Demonstrations to the Police, Kan](#) (10 Jan 2024).

government, elected officials, soldiers, and police officers should know that the Israel Police will deal with them harshly and with zero tolerance.... The Israel Police see paramount importance in halting support for Hamas and ISIS, certainly when such support comes from among Israel's Arabs, who are citizens of the state whose soldiers and police officers protect them year-round just as they protect and fight for the security of the entire population.... Support for any terror organization will not go unnoticed by me. You have been warned."¹⁰

In no time it transpired that Shabtai was not referring to the relatively narrow legal definition of incitement offenses, as established in law and interpreted narrowly in case law, but rather to any criticism by an Arab citizen regarding the management of the war, the conduct of the security forces, or any allusion to the suffering inflicted upon the Palestinian residents of the Gaza Strip. Already the next day, he imposed a sweeping ban on demonstrations in Arab localities and on any protest against the government's management of the war, which was published on the police's Arabic-language accounts on X¹¹ and TikTok.¹² Shabtai noted in his remarks: "We are in a state of war. From our perspective, the instructions are unequivocal: zero tolerance for any incident. No incitement of any kind, not by a nurse, not by a doctor, not by a singer. There is no approval for staging protests.... Whoever wants to be an Israeli citizen is welcome. Whoever wants to identify with Gaza is welcome. I'll be only too pleased to put him on the buses heading there now."

In this climate, on 22 October 2023, the Knesset's National Security Committee held a discussion at the request of Chairman Zvi Fogel (Otzma Yehudit) on "Israel Police's preparedness for a Guardian of the Walls scenario."¹³ Several MKs objected as they viewed such a discussion as a provocation that could become a "self-fulfilling prophecy." MK Eliyahu Revivo (Likud) asked to postpone it or hold it behind closed doors: "There is no need to put ideas or triggers into people's heads posing yet another challenge to the Israel Police, which I doubt they can handle." MK Gilad Kariv (Labor) described the debate as "delusional and dangerous, intended to serve Otzma Yehudit's nationalist and extremist agenda." However, MK Amit Halevi (Likud), the acting chair presiding over the meeting, responded that "this is a very important discussion. We all lived through Guardian of the Walls. It is not something our grandmother told us or harking back to generations past.... My only concern is not what happened in the past but to prevent future funerals, God forbid."

¹⁰ Jack Khoury, [Arab Singer Arrested Over Social Media Post: 'There's No Victor Except Allah'](#), *Haaretz* (17 Oct 2023).

¹¹ Israel Police, [post on X](#) (17 Oct 2023).

¹² Israel Police, [post on TikTok](#) (18 Oct 2023).

¹³ [Minutes of Session No. 80 of Knesset National Security Committee](#), *Knesset* (22 Oct 2023). See also: TOI Staff, [*Police Chief Hails 'Exemplary Behavior' of Arab Israelis Amid War With Hamas](#), *The Times of Israel* (23 Oct 2023).

Speaking at the discussion, the police commissioner praised the Arab Israeli community: "We have to say a good word about their exemplary behavior, with zero incidents." He noted that while there had been no real signs of intercommunal violence, police were better prepared than in 2021, were working closely with leaders in mixed cities and towns, and manpower had been significantly boosted.

The possibility of a Guardian of the Walls scenario was also raised by the police in proceedings before the Supreme Court. In response to a petition, an affidavit submitted by the commander of the Northern District stated that, based on the police's experience with "mobs seeking to attack residents of small Jewish communities scattered throughout the area, the current assessment is that dangerous unrest may ensue. There is real concern that incited youths may gather and independently spark riots that could ignite the area and spread to other regions as well."¹⁴

As the examples below illustrate, the tone set by the Minister of National Security and the Police Commissioner had an immediate effect, as the police proceeded to adopt the premise that the exercise of these freedoms should be prevented, or at the very least significantly restricted. One prominent example was the cancellation of a Jewish-Arab conference titled "Our Partnership in the Struggle for Justice and Against War," scheduled to take place in Haifa on 26 October 2023 and feature former Knesset Speaker Avraham Burg and Mohammad Barakeh, head of the High Follow-Up Committee for Arab Citizens of Israel [HFC]. The venue owner backed out after the police warned that hosting the event could lead to "various consequences," including closure of the venue.¹⁵

The ban did not apply only to utterances pertaining to the current war, but also to references to past events. Thus, the screening of *1948-Remember, Remember Not*, a documentary produced by the Israeli Public Broadcasting Corporation that also presented the Palestinian perspective, was repeatedly postponed.¹⁶ On 10 October 2024, the police also banned the screening of *Lyd*, a documentary on the massacre and expulsion of the city's Palestinian residents during the 1948 war, which was scheduled to take place at the Al-Saraya Theater in Yaffo in the presence of its director Rami Younis.¹⁷ Minister Ben-Gvir hastened to welcome the decision: "Very good that the police do not allow the screening of a film that incites against IDF soldiers in the Jewish state. I back the Police Commissioner and the Israel Police in their actions against incitement."¹⁸

¹⁴ Paragraph 8 of [Supreme Court Case HCJ 8007/23 Hadash-Democratic Front for Peace and Equality v. Police Commissioner Yaakov Shabtai](#), *Supreme Decisions* (8 Nov 2023).

¹⁵ Jack Khoury, ["Arab-Jewish Conference Canceled After Israel Police Warn Venue Owner of 'Consequences'"](#), *Haaretz* (26 Oct 2023).

¹⁶ Nirit Anderman, ["1948-Remember, Remember Not To Be Screened After Two Years of Right-Wing Persecution"](#), *Haaretz* (28 Aug 2025).

¹⁷ Josh Breiner, ["Israel Police Prevent 1948 Documentary Screening in Arab Town by Threatening Ben-Gvir Budget for Crime Prevention"](#), *Haaretz* (6 Nov 2025).

¹⁸ Itamar Ben-Gvir, [post on X](#) (10 Oct 2024).

State Attorney and Attorney General: Legitimization of Israel Police's Policy

The State Attorney and the Attorney General play a central role in shaping law enforcement policy with regard to freedom of expression and protest, among other things by setting the guidelines for prosecuting demonstrators over incitement offenses and by interpreting the law regulating the licensing of protest activities. In the past, based on recognition of the special status of these freedoms and their importance in a self-proclaimed democratic regime, both adopted a relatively liberal enforcement policy.¹⁹

This position changed upon the outbreak of the war, as both the State Attorney and the Attorney General failed to ensure that the guidelines they had set were fully and equally implemented in practice. Moreover, they defended the Israel Police's position in petitions submitted to the Supreme Court about the suppression of freedom of expression and protest of the Arab public and ruled that preventing or restricting demonstrations was justified because they endangered public order and public safety,²⁰ thus legitimizing the Israel Police's policy on the matter.

Nor did the State Attorney and the Attorney General exercise the full extent of their powers to prevent the phenomena detailed later in this report. Among other things, they took no effective steps to change the policy on displays of the Palestinian flag and anti-war signs, nor on the steps to silence Arab elected officials, workers, students, academics, and artists, which often involved humiliating arrests, after which the detainees were released without further proceedings.

Their conduct is especially striking when contrasted with the considerable attention they devoted to the suppression of protests against the regime revolution and in support of the release of the hostages held by Hamas. The government, particularly Minister Ben-Gvir, took a range of steps to quash these protests, such as encouraging police violence against demonstrators and conducting a disinformation campaign against protest organizers and the families of the hostages.²¹ The State Attorney and the Attorney General insisted that these demonstrations and protests were legitimate actions that needed to be protected.

The unequal treatment of protests by the Jewish and the Arab public is evident in documents sent by Attorney General Gali Baharav-Miara to senior police and government officials, as well as in her responses to petitions to the Supreme Court against Amendment 37 to the Police Ordinance and Ben-Gvir's tenure, where she discussed at length law enforcement and rejected attempts at political interference in the demonstrations against

¹⁹ See, for example: [SAO Directive No. 2.40: Policy on Prosecution of Cases Opened in Connection with Demonstrations or Protest Events](#) (25 Aug 2020); [SAO Directive No. 14.12: Approval To Open Investigation and Prosecute in Specially Sensitive Offenses or Matters](#) (3 Dec 2023); [Attorney General Directive No. 3.1200: Freedom of Demonstration](#) (Sections 21.561, 21.566) (1 Apr 1983, updated 23 Mar 2003).

²⁰ See, for example: [Reaction of Respondents](#) in Supreme Court Case HCJ 8007/23 Hadash–Democratic Front for Peace and Equality v. Police Commissioner Yaakov Shabtai (published in *Adalah*, 7 Nov 2023).

²¹ Eitay Mack, [*Ben-Gvir's Police Exploits Law Deficiencies To Suppress Protests](#), *Zulat* (4 Mar 2024).

the regime revolution and in support of the release of the hostages, yet failed to make any substantive reference to the suppression of protests by the Arab public.

For example, in her response to the Supreme Court on 1 January 2026, the Attorney General referred to a tweet posted by Ben-Gvir, to the effect that he had instructed the police to prevent "displays of solidarity with the Nazis of Hamas." She noted that "the minister's directive to deny permits based on the views voiced by protesters constitutes clear interference with the police's delicate task of approving demonstrations and a serious violation of the freedom of expression and protest." However, in petitions concerning in-advance prevention or restriction of Arab demonstrations and joint Jewish-Arab anti-war rallies, the Attorney General supported the police's position. This likely explains why her response failed to cite concrete cases in which she demanded that the police change their position and allow demonstrations by the Arab public.²²

One of the most prominent examples of the suppression of freedom of expression and protest and of selective enforcement is the broad expansion of the definition of incitement by Arab citizens, along with the shift of responsibility for dealing with such offenses to the police. Recognizing the preeminent status of freedom of expression, it was determined in 2006 that the state's investigation and prosecution policy on incitement offenses must be uniform and applied consistently. To this end, and to prevent unwarranted probes, opening an investigation into such offenses required prior approval from the SAO, which also assessed the likelihood that the criminal process would ultimately be pursued.²³ However, at the beginning of the war, State Attorney Amit Eisman allowed Israel Police's Investigations Division to order the interrogation of suspects of incitement offenses without the SAO's approval "in cases of a one-off and clear-cut expression of support for terrorist organizations and their murderous acts, given the fact that Israel is at war and in a state of emergency."²⁴

This temporary authorization was revoked in the summer of 2024.²⁵ However, by then it had already led to over 100 interrogations and arrests, most of them of Arab citizens, mainly during the first weeks of the war.²⁶ In a discussion held in the Knesset on 22 October 2023, two weeks after the outbreak of the war, the SAO's Attorney Galit Shoham referred to this policy as a success: "There has been a deluge of incitement cases, dozens have been arrested for incitement on social media. More than 10 persons have been arrested for

²² [Attorney General's Preliminary Response](#) in Supreme Court Case HCJ 9037-08-24 Gilad Cohen v. Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu (published in *Haaretz*, 1 Jan 2026). See also: [State's Response to Petitioner's Request for Interim Injunction](#) in Supreme Court Case HCJ 8987/22 Movement for Quality Government v. Knesset (published in *Ynet*, 1 Jan 2024).

²³ Chen Maanit, [Permit for Police To Investigate Incitement Without Prosecutorial Approval Remains in Effect Since Start of War](#), *Haaretz* (21 May 2024).

²⁴ Chen Maanit, [State Attorney: Police Opened Incitement Investigations Without Approval in Several Cases During the War](#), *Haaretz* (11 Jul 2024); Eitay Mack, [Arabs Dance, MKs Incite](#), *The Seventh Eye* (10 Oct 2024).

²⁵ Chen Maanit, [State Attorney: Police Opened Incitement Investigations Without Approval in Several Cases During the War](#), *Haaretz* (11 Jul 2024).

²⁶ Unattributed, [110 Arrested on Suspicion of Incitement to Violence and Terror](#), *Israel Police* (25 Oct 2023).

incitement in the Jerusalem District. The policy is to take a hard line on these arrests, even if we are talking about a one-off post but one that is severe, brazen, and incites to war."²⁷

According to a report by the Knesset Research and Information Center based on SAO data, 301 cases of incitement to terrorism were opened in 2023, resulting in 160 indictments against 168 defendants,²⁸ while in 2024 there were 238 cases and 62 indictments against 68 defendants. The SAO acknowledged that the 2024 indictments targeted mainly Arabs, but claimed no breakdown by nationality was available for 2023. However, data from the human rights organization Adalah show that in just the first month of the war (early October to mid-November 2023), 70 indictments were filed against Arabs for incitement to terrorism.²⁹ The SAO has not yet released the data for 2025, but media reports suggest that this pattern has likely continued.

Haaretz journalist Gidi Weitz reported that this policy "drew criticism also from officials in the Justice Ministry, who claim that these are far-reaching measures and that it would have been enough to file only a few indictments for particularly extreme statements."³⁰ At a conference on 11 July 2024, State Attorney Eisman acknowledged that in some cases the police had indeed exceeded the temporary authorization he had granted.³¹

Nevertheless, the SAO was well aware of the unusual scale of the arrests carried out by the police after these investigative powers were transferred to them. Moreover, the SAO itself authorized investigations based on an extremely broad interpretation of the incitement offense, as in the case of Professor Nadera Shalhoub-Kevorkian, a case that came to symbolize the silencing of Arab citizens during the war (to be detailed below).³²

At the same time, the State Attorney and the Attorney General decided not to open criminal investigations into at least 80 anti-Palestinian statements by Israeli ministers and MKs directed particularly against the population of the Gaza Strip, including videos and posts on social media urging to burn, destroy, or erase Palestinian localities, defining all Palestinians as the enemy, and explicitly or implicitly calling for killing civilians.³³

²⁷ Unattributed, [Police Commissioner Kobi Shabtai at Meeting of Knesset National Security Committee on Preparedness for 'Guardian of the Walls' Scenario: We Have Enough Troops To Respond If Necessary, I Suggest They Do Not Test Us](#), *Knesset* (22 Oct 2023).

²⁸ Roni Hershkovitz, [Data on Offenses of Incitement to Terror or Violence and Racist-Motivated Offenses](#), *Knesset Research and Information Center* (17 Dec 2024).

²⁹ *[Interrogations, Arrests, and Indictments of Palestinian Citizens of Israel Since 7 October](#), *Adalah* (15 Nov 2023).

³⁰ Gidi Weitz, *[Israel's State Prosecutor Warns Police: Unjustified Arrest of Dissenters Harms the Rule of Law](#), *Haaretz* (21 Nov 2023).

³¹ Chen Maanit, [State Attorney: Police Opened Incitement Investigations Without Approval in Several Cases During the War](#), *Haaretz* (11 Jul 2024).

³² Amnon Brownfield Stein, *[Arrested for 'Statements Against Zionism': The Worrying State of Free Speech in Israel](#), *Haaretz* (26 Apr 2024).

³³ Chen Maanit, *[AG Advises Against Investigating Remarks by Israeli Ministers, MKs on Suspicion of Inciting to Harm Gaza Civilians](#), *Haaretz* (25 Nov 2024).

Indictments against Jews for such utterances were reportedly filed only in a handful of cases during the two years of the war.³⁴

This hardline and discriminatory enforcement policy toward the Arab public had serious consequences on freedom of expression. A study published by Dr. Hama Abu-Kishk of Sapir Academic College's Department of Communication examined patterns of social media use by Israel's Arab society during the war. Some 70% of respondents reported changing their online behavior, mainly refraining from sharing content and expressing opinions for fear of sanctions such as arrests and legal proceedings. As will be detailed below, the digital space, which had previously served as a central outlet for Arab society to express authentic perspectives and access information due to its exclusion from mainstream media, saw a contraction in freedom of expression, with activity increasingly constrained by a combination of self-censorship, silence, and silencing.³⁵

Supreme Court: Legitimization of Restrictions on Freedom of Expression and Protest

After the start of the war, the Supreme Court sitting as the High Court of Justice, departed from its traditional stances regarding the elevated status of the freedoms of expression and protest and the need to protect them to the greatest extent possible. In petitions concerning the exercise of these rights by the Arab public, it adopted an approach reminiscent of its handling of security cases: it relied on classified intelligence presented ex parte or on general security claims, accepted the police's position regarding the inherent risk posed by the exercise of these rights, and granted the police broad discretion to prevent or restrict protests on the grounds of public safety and public order. In one hearing, Justice Daphne Barak-Erez said "it is unacceptable that a demonstration should be a luxury limited to Tel Aviv."³⁶ In practice, however, the Supreme Court's position led to a result that very closely resembled such a reality.

Before the war, the Supreme Court had repeatedly ruled that the right to demonstrate could be restricted only when there was a near certainty of serious and significant harm to public order or public safety, and even then, only to the extent necessary to prevent such harm. The justices emphasized that, given the elevated status of freedom of expression and protest, not every possibility of harm to public order or public safety justifies restricting the right to protest, and the fact that a demonstration causes inconvenience, even considerable inconvenience, is not sufficient grounds to prohibit it. Moreover, the police are also obligated to assist in the exercise of the right to demonstrate. The justices

³⁴ Yoav Etziel, [*Israeli Man Charged for Inciting Terror, Rape, Genocide of Palestinians](#), *The Jerusalem Post*, (19 Dec 2023).

³⁵ Hama Abu-Kishk, [Silence or Silencing? The Use of Social Media Within the Arab Society During the October 7 War](#), *Sapir Academic College* (2025).

³⁶ Lior El-Hai, [Clashes at Haifa Anti-War Rally: Police Remove Installations, Right-Wing Activists Protest](#), *Ynet* (20 Jan 2024).

clarified that if Israelis wish to live in a democracy, they must develop, as is the case in any proper state, a level of tolerance and the capacity to accommodate demonstrations, despite the disruption to daily life and the inconvenience they entail at times.³⁷

During the war, the Supreme Court heard several petitions concerning the exercise of freedom of expression and protest of the Arab public. The rulings issued in these petitions, as well as in petitions concerning joint Jewish-Arab rallies, indeed reiterated the Supreme Court's traditional positions. In practice, however, the justices ultimately approved the Israel Police's restrictive policy and left intact their broad discretion. Thus, these rulings contributed to creating a chilling effect within the Arab public, which significantly reduced the volume of demonstrations.

The first such ruling was issued in November 2023 and concerned the decision to prevent demonstrations by Hadash and Maki (Communist Party of Israel) in the towns of Umm al-Fahm and Sakhnin.³⁸ Supreme Court President Yitzhak Amit's ruling began with a description of the events of October 7, noting that "these are difficult days for the citizens of Israel, who are mourning the victims of the bloody massacre and the fighting and are following with concern and anxiety the fate of their loved ones battling in the Gaza Strip and on the northern border and guarding the state's borders."

He then reiterated the Supreme Court's traditional position regarding freedom of demonstration and procession, emphasizing that they are part of the freedom of expression, which is recognized as a fundamental constitutional right: "Freedom of expression does not belong to only one camp or one side of the political map, and it is intended to protect not only accepted and popular opinions but also 'unorthodox, offensive, and infuriating views voiced in the aftermath of turbulent events and in blunt and harsh language.'" He concluded by emphasizing that a permit to hold a demonstration may be denied or restrictions imposed only when there is "near certainty of real, severe, and serious harm to public safety or public order."

In its response to the petition, the SAO cited two grounds for the police refusal to grant a permit, the first of which was a "near-certainty concern about serious and severe harm to public order and public safety." To substantiate this claim, the state submitted security and intelligence assessments, which the justices reviewed *ex parte* with the consent of the petitioners. Referring to the latter, Chief Justice Amit affirmed: "As of the writing of these lines, warnings and alerts that Guardian of the Walls 2 is imminent have proven unfounded.... A distinction must be drawn between expressions of support for the enemy in wartime, encouragement, praise, and sympathy for acts of terror in general and for the

³⁷ See, for example: [Supreme Court Ruling on Administrative Petition Appeal 1775/20 Movement for Quality Government in Israel v. Jerusalem Municipality](#), *Supreme Decisions* (24 Sep 2020).

³⁸ [Supreme Court Case HCJ 8007/23 Hadash-Democratic Front for Peace and Equality v. Police Commissioner Yaakov Shabtai](#), *Supreme Decisions* (8 Nov 2023).

massacre perpetrated in the Gaza Envelope in particular on the one hand, and legitimate criticism of government policy or solidarity with the suffering of Gazans uninvolved in terrorist activity who were hurt in the fighting on the other.”

However, Chief Justice Amit accepted the second cause cited by the police: a manpower shortage due to “the current security reality.” He emphasized that “given the heavy load they have been shouldering in the past month, we are convinced that at this time the police are unable to allocate the manpower required to ensure public order at the demonstrations that are the subject of this petition.” He went on to assert that this manpower shortage is what “brings the concern about harm to public order and public safety to the threshold of near certainty.” Justice Yael Ronen likewise added that “the police are responsible for determining the amount of manpower required to maintain public order at a demonstration, as well as for appropriately allocating their forces to fulfill all their tasks.”

On the face of it, the Court appears to express reservations about the police’s risk assessment regarding the rally in question. In practice, however, it indirectly accepts that assessment: although it rejects the claim that an immediate and concrete danger exists, it nevertheless allows the police to rely on the same risk scenario to justify a manpower shortage, and then to invoke that shortage as grounds for dismissing the petition. It is hard to reconcile this reasoning: if the alleged danger is not real at this point in time, the manpower required to secure the demonstration would necessarily be far smaller, and the ban on the demonstration cannot reasonably be justified on that basis.

The justices stressed that their ruling was confined to the case at hand and that “this does not mean that demonstrations have no place at any time during war or throughout the entire period of fighting.” They also accepted the state’s “unequivocal clarification” that the Police Commissioner’s remarks that all anti-war demonstrations would be categorically banned had been taken out of context and that “no directive imposing such a sweeping and general ban had been issued.” Nevertheless, the justices ultimately gave the police extremely broad leeway, and the ban remained in effect.

Another petition was filed a few days later, after the police banned a demonstration in Tel Aviv initiated by Hadash (whose supporters are primarily Arab), even after the organizers announced that it would call for a ceasefire and a prisoner-exchange agreement and pledged to “ensure there is no display of flags or harsh messages given the sensitivity of this moment.” Following the court hearing, the police withdrew their sweeping refusal but imposed major restrictions on the number of participants (700) and its duration (two hours).³⁹ The state’s representative had invoked the police’s “triumph” in the ruling concerning the rallies in Umm al-Fahm and Sakhnin, emphasizing that the approval was

³⁹ [Supreme Court Case HCJ 8211/23 Noa Levy v. Israel Police’s Tel Aviv District Commander](#), *Nevo* (16 Nov 2023).

given "despite the severe manpower constraints and complex circumstances faced by the police."

Acknowledging difficulties in the police's conduct, Chief Justice Amit stated during the hearing that "it is very important that this rally should take place in order to remove the stain that demonstrations are not allowed for the Arab public or for this side of the political map."⁴⁰ However, the "stain" was not removed: the ruling merely granted legal validity to the agreement reached by the sides, as the justices refrained from throwing light on the problems in the police's conduct, the way they should act in the future, and the importance of freedom of expression and protest, including that of the Arab public.

On 3 December 2023, the justices rejected a petition submitted by Mohammad Barakeh, head of the High Follow-Up Committee for Arab Citizens of Israel [HFC], who sought to organize a rally against the ongoing war and in favor of a ceasefire. Barakeh explained the purpose of the rally as follows: "Our position has always been against harming civilians of any kind. What happened on October 7 must not give Israel legitimacy to brutally attack a civilian population in Gaza.... The struggle should not be about revenge but about how we end the causes of all this for the Palestinians who also wish to live like human beings."⁴¹ Nevertheless, the police repeatedly prevented this rally from taking place, leading to the filing of the petition.

The justices rejected it on technical grounds, ruling that the Police Commissioner had not been given enough time to respond before the petition was submitted. They noted the police's position that "the petitioner must obtain a permit, and in light of the totality of circumstances and a situation assessment we carried out, it is not possible to allow the gathering." They added that the petitioner had presented no factual basis proving that he did not require a permit from the police.⁴²

A second petition submitted by Barakeh was rejected on 14 December 2023. The justices suggested that he compromise and hold the rally subject to restrictions, but he refused, arguing that these would "tie his hands and not allow the HFC to express its position." The police again sought permission to present ex parte "classified intelligence material to substantiate their position regarding the serious concern for public safety and security," but Barakeh's counsel declined to consent.⁴³

On 9 January 2025, the justices again accepted the police's position in another petition by the HFC, this time against the decision to ban a protest march in the center of Sakhnin

⁴⁰ Chen Maanit, [Pressured by Supreme Court Petition, State To Allow Hadash To Hold Antiwar Protest in Tel Aviv](#), *Haaretz* (16 Nov 2023).

⁴¹ Jack Khoury, [Arab Public Torn Between Gaza Envelope and Gaza Strip, Lowers Profile for Fear of Bearing Cost of War](#), *Haaretz* (12 Oct 2023).

⁴² [Supreme Court Case HCJ 8510/23 HFC Head Mohammad Barakeh v. Israel Police Commissioner](#) (published in *Adalah*, 3 Dec 2023).

⁴³ [Supreme Court Case HCJ 8808/23 HFC Head Mohammad Barakeh v. Israel Police's Nazareth Station Commander](#), *Supreme Decisions* (14 Dec 2023).

demanding an end to the war. The police refused to approve the march on the grounds that the speeches to be delivered would "contain incitement that weakens the security forces who are risking their lives these days."⁴⁴ Once again, after reviewing classified intelligence material and hearing explanations from the commander of the Northern District in a closed session, the justices proposed a compromise that became their ruling, allowing the march to take place on the town outskirts rather than on the main street, as the organizers had sought: "The plan presented by the petitioners poses a high-probability risk of harm to individuals. Since the alternative plan we recommended fulfills their primary goal of concluding the march with a rally in the municipal square, we approve the march and rally under the conditions specified above," the justices wrote.⁴⁵

Following the Court's ruling, the HFC postponed the march and called for small protest rallies to be held at intersections and on major roads throughout the country. Attorney Myssana Morany of Adalah, which filed the petition, stated in response that "the Court's decision makes it clear that there are two separate legal systems: one for Jews, which allows them to demonstrate and block streets, and another for Arabs, whose purpose is to suppress them and the expression of any position against the war."⁴⁶

Another petition was filed following the police's refusal to allow a demonstration on a Saturday night in downtown Haifa, "calling for an end to the war, a deal for the return of the hostages, and the advancement of a political process," organized by Hadash and other groups. Instead, the police allowed it to take place only on a weekday, near the International Convention Center, far from the city center, and with up to 450 participants. Following the court hearing, the police agreed to allow the demonstration, restricting it to the hours of 13:30 to 15:30 and capping the number of participants at 700. The ruling granted legal validity to the agreement reached by the sides, with the justices asserting that the police retained full discretion to review the plan "in light of their assessment of the situation and the security conditions at the time of the demonstration."⁴⁷

These rulings present a clear picture: the justices go to great lengths to emphasize the preeminent status of freedom of expression and protest, particularly during wartime, and repeatedly stress the importance of protecting expressions that may be considered provocative. In practice, however, they push petitioners toward compromises that restrict their rights, accept the police's position, and above all, leave the police with broad discretion.

⁴⁴ Josh Breiner, [Police Ban Anti-War Protest on Grounds That Expected Speeches Would 'Weaken the Security Forces'](#), *Haaretz* (5 Jan 2025).

⁴⁵ [Supreme Court Case HCJ 18461-01-25 Mohammad Barakeh v. Israel Police's Misgav Station Commander, Toledano](#) (9 Jan 2025).

⁴⁶ Jack Khoury, [Supreme Court Accepts Police's Position, Bans Antiwar Protest in Center of Sakhnin](#), *Haaretz* (9 Jan 2025).

⁴⁷ [Supreme Court Case HCJ 557/24 Amjad Shbita v. Israel Police's Coastal District Commander](#), *Supreme Decisions* (17 Jan 2024).

Part Two: Violations Of Arab Public's Freedom of Expression and Protest

Restrictions on the freedom of expression and protest of the Arab public prevail across a wide range of areas of life. Below are examples illustrating various aspects of these restrictions.

From the very start of the war, Arab citizens who sought to exercise their rights paid a heavy price, resulting in a sharp decline in protest activity. Accordingly, many of the examples presented below relate to the first months of the war. Other examples concern Jewish left-wing activists, as the restrictions imposed on them were also used by the authorities to send a deterrent message to the Arab public.

Sweeping Ban on Displays of Palestinian Flags

Displaying a flag is part of the freedom of expression, and its protection has been recognized in rulings of the Israeli courts as well as in international law.⁴⁸ Section 82 of the Police Ordinance empowers the Police Commissioner to ban the display or unfurling of a flag that may "provoke a disturbance of the peace." However, since 1993, following the shift in relations between the State of Israel and the PLO upon the signing of the Declaration of Principles and the Oslo Accords, the display of the Palestinian flag has no longer been considered a criminal offense.

This position is anchored in the rulings of the Supreme Court. A petition challenging the Attorney General's decision not to prosecute for displaying the Palestinian flag except in exceptional cases was rejected,⁴⁹ and it was stipulated that election propaganda broadcasts featuring the Palestinian flag are protected under freedom of expression.⁵⁰ In addition, a document issued in September 2014 by the Deputy Attorney General for Criminal Law clarified that enforcement for displays of the Palestinian flag would occur only when there is tangible suspicion of the offense of identification with a terrorist organization or expression of sympathy toward it, or when there is a high probability of a serious disruption of the peace.⁵¹

Nevertheless, acting on Minister Ben-Gvir's instructions, the police pursued a policy of confiscating Palestinian flags even before the war. On 8 January 2023, shortly after the

⁴⁸ Eitay Mack, [*The Legal Infrastructure for the Suppression of Protests and Demonstrations in Israel](#), *Zulat* (3 May 2024).

⁴⁹ [Supreme Court Case HCJ 5883/93 MK Shaul Yahalom v. Israel Police Commissioner Rafi Peled](#), *Nevo* (26 May 1994).

⁵⁰ [Supreme Court Case HCJ 651/03 ACRI v. Chairman of Central Elections Committee to 16th Knesset](#), *Supreme Decisions* (23 Jan 2003).

⁵¹ Deputy Attorney General Raz Nizri's letter to MK Miri Regev, chair of Knesset Internal Affairs and Environment Committee: [Legal Situation Concerning Display of Flags of PLO and Terrorist Organizations in State of Israel](#), *Ministry of Justice* (1 Sep 2014).

government was sworn in, Ben-Gvir announced: "Today I instructed the Israel Police to enforce the ban on the public display of any PLO flag, which denotes identification with a terrorist organization, and to stop any event of incitement against the State of Israel. We will fight terrorism and the encouragement of terrorism with full force!"⁵²

That same day, the Police Commissioner instructed commanders to enforce the ban.⁵³ It was later revealed that then-head of the Coastal District, Superintendent Danny Levy (Ben-Gvir's preferred candidate to lead the Tel Aviv District and later on to replace the Police Commissioner, which is what eventually happened), prohibited the display of Palestinian flags across the Coastal District, including in Haifa.⁵⁴ A few months later, on 27 April 2023, police raided the Hadash office in Nazareth, removed the Palestinian flag flown above it, and detained the branch secretary after he refused to take down the flag himself.⁵⁵

On 17 May 2023, the Knesset approved in preliminary reading a bill by MK Almog Cohen (Otzma Yehudit) that prohibits the public display of the flag of a hostile entity and allows for a penalty of one year's imprisonment. Fifty-four MKs voted in favor of the bill, and 16 opposed it.⁵⁶

Three months before the war, in July 2023, the Supreme Court rejected a petition filed by the Association for Civil Rights in Israel [ACRI], which included numerous testimonies and videos indicating that despite the police's commitment in an earlier Supreme Court proceeding, officers routinely banned the display and confiscated Palestinian flags. Since the police had not formally withdrawn their previous commitment, the justices refused to intervene and merely stated that "the phenomenon about which the petitioners complain, if it indeed exists, should not be taken lightly.... It behooves the relevant authorities to continue to hone the procedures regarding the display of such flags during protests and to examine individual complaints should they be submitted in accordance with the law."⁵⁷

Despite these statements, the ban expanded even further after the start of the war, and in some cases the display of the flag also led to arrests. Police confiscated flags from Jewish left-wing activists as well. However, whereas in the case of a Jewish person the concern is at most that the flag will be confiscated or that they will be detained and released shortly thereafter, in the case of an Arab person there is a risk of being charged with incitement

⁵² Itamar Ben-Gvir, [post on X](#) (8 Jan 2023).

⁵³ Josh Breiner, [*Under Ben-Gvir's Orders, Israel Police To Effectively Ban Palestinian Flags in Public](#), *Haaretz* (8 Jan 2023).

⁵⁴ Josh Breiner, [*Israel's National Security Minister and Police Commissioner Brawl Over Next Tel Aviv Police Chief](#), *Haaretz* (29 May 2023).

⁵⁵ Jack Khoury and Adi Hashmonai, [*Police Take Down Palestinian Flag Flying Over Israeli Political Party Branch in Nazareth](#), *Haaretz* (26 Apr 2023).

⁵⁶ Noa Shpigel, [*Israel Advances Law Imposing One-Year Jail Term for Public Display of Palestinian Flags](#), *Haaretz* (18 May 2023). The law is currently being prepared for its first reading and has yet to undergo final approval: [Bill for Penal Law-2022 \(Amendment: Prohibition on Displaying Flag of Hostile Entity\)](#), *Knesset* (17 May 2023).

⁵⁷ [Supreme Court Case H CJ 5442-23 Salim Abbas v. Israel Police Commissioner](#), *Supreme Decisions* (20 Jul 2023).

or support for terrorism. Another fundamental difference concerns the rights that are violated: preventing a Jew from displaying the flag infringes on their freedom of expression, whereas preventing an Arab from doing so also harms their human dignity and their right to express their collective and cultural identity.⁵⁸

In November 2024, National Security Ministry officials boasted about the change in policy, asserting that "enforcement regarding the display of flags has shot up hundreds of percent, based on the minister's view that the flag must not be displayed in the public space.... When the minister sought clarifications about the legality of the flag and failed to receive them, he decided to adopt a different policy from the one that existed before.... He shifted from doing nothing to doing 100% to enforce the issue."⁵⁹

The following are several examples of this policy:

- On 15 April 2024, the police forbade the display of Palestinian flags at a rally marking Nakba Day at the entrance to Tel Aviv University, which was attended by only a few dozen people. Instead, many participants held a watermelon or a drawing of a watermelon.⁶⁰
- On 26 April 2024, one day before a march to mark May Day, the police raided the offices of Hadash and Maki in Nazareth. They arrested Mansour Dahamshe and Wared Kubati (former secretary of Hadash and secretary of the local Maki branch, respectively), claiming that "Palestinian flags and displays constituting incitement material were present at the location."⁶¹
- On 25 May 2024, a march was held in the center of Lod calling for an end to racism and the war in the Gaza Strip. Mayor Yair Revivo (Likud) boasted that "for the first time the police enforced the ban on Palestinian flags and there wasn't a single flag."⁶²
- On 29 May 2024, police officers stormed into a group of anti-war demonstrators at a protest in downtown Nazareth's Spring Square to confiscate a Palestinian flag. The protest was organized by local branches of Hadash, Maki, and the Communist Youth League.⁶³

⁵⁸ Eitay Mack, [No to Investigation, Yes to Confiscation: The Police's Obsession With Palestinian Flags](#), *Mekomit* (27 Apr 2023).

⁵⁹ Lidor Sultan, [Display of PLO Flag in Israel: What Does the Law Say?](#), *Israel Hayom* (20 Nov 2024).

⁶⁰ Shira Kadari-Ovadia, [Dozens Attend Nakba Day Rally at Tel Aviv University After Police Bans Display of Palestine Flags](#), *Haaretz* (15 Apr 2024).

⁶¹ [Thousands Attend Nazareth May Day Protest Against Gaza War and Occupation Despite Police Raid](#), *Zo Haderekh* (27 Apr 2024).

⁶² [Protest Against Gaza War and for Justice for Murder Victim Musa Hasuna in Lod](#), *Zo Haderekh* (25 May 2024).

⁶³ [Police Raid Antiwar Protest Vigil in Downtown Nazareth, Clash With HFC Head](#), *Zo Haderekh* (30 May 2024).

- On 31 July 2025, the police arrested two women who waved a Palestinian flag at a protest in Haifa attended by five people. Judge Avishay Kaufman rejected the police request to remand them in custody for five days and ruled that displaying a Palestinian flag was not grounds for arrest or for stopping a protest.⁶⁴

Ban on Signs Against War, Killing, and Starvation in Gaza Strip

Under the law and Supreme Court rulings, the police are not permitted to prevent the display of signs containing critical or provocative content.⁶⁵ Over the years, justices have ruled that the police are not in charge of ideology,⁶⁶ and that they must disregard the content of a protest, the ideological background of its organizers, and the identity of its participants as long as there is no suspicion of a criminal offense.⁶⁷ They have reiterated that freedom of expression is intended to protect not only accepted and popular opinions, but unorthodox, offensive, and infuriating views voiced in the aftermath of turbulent events and in blunt and harsh language.⁶⁸ "The emphasis in a protest vigil is not only on the physical presence of demonstrators, but also on the means by which they convey their messages.... It bears noting that signs are a cheap, convenient, and accessible means for much of the population, both for those who wish to deliver a particular message and for their audiences," former Deputy Chief Justice Hanan Melcer wrote in one of his rulings.⁶⁹

In practice, however, the reality is different. In April 2024, six months after the start of the war, ACRI filed a petition with the Supreme Court listing a long series of incidents in which police officers confiscated signs against the war and against the killing in the Gaza Strip.⁷⁰ Following are some of them:

- On 15 December 2023, police officers pounced on demonstrators on Hanevi'im Street in Haifa, violently confiscated signs bearing the slogans "Stop the Killing in Gaza," "Freedom for Gaza," and "Stop the Bombing in Gaza," and arrested two protesters.

⁶⁴ Adi Hashmonai, [*No Grounds for Arrest: Court Releases Protesters Who Waved Palestinian Flag in Haifa](#), *Haaretz* (3 Aug 2025).

⁶⁵ Eitay Mack, [*The Legal Infrastructure for the Suppression of Protests and Demonstrations in Israel](#), *Zulat* (3 May 2024).

⁶⁶ [Supreme Court Case HCJ 148/79 Zvi Saar v. Minister of Interior and Police, Nevo](#) (31 May 1979).

⁶⁷ [Supreme Court Case HCJ 153/83 Alan Levy v. Israel Police's Southern District Commander, Nevo](#) (13 May 1984).

⁶⁸ [Supreme Court Case HCJ 2888/97 Yaakov Novik v. Second Authority for Television and Radio](#) (published in *The Seventh Eye*, 17 Aug 1997).

⁶⁹ Paragraph 50 of Deputy Chief Justice's ruling in [Supreme Court Case HCJ 1775/20 Movement for Quality Government in Israel v. Jerusalem Municipality, Supreme Decisions](#) (24 Sep 2020).

⁷⁰ [Petition for Interim Injunction](#) in Supreme Court Case HCJ 3139/24 Noa Noy et al v. Police Commissioner, *Instagram* (11 Apr 2024).

- On 23 December 2023, police officers in Tel Aviv tore down a large placard reading "Stop the Genocide in Gaza" and confiscated other signs carried by protesters near the Kirya government compound.
- On 2 January 2024, police confiscated signs reading "There Are Civilians in Gaza" and "Stop the Massacre" from demonstrators at Habima Square in Tel Aviv.
- On 9 January 2024, police confiscated anti-war signs from protesters on Kaplan Street in Tel Aviv and threatened to confiscate any sign that contained the word "massacre."
- On 16 January 2024, police violently confiscated signs during a protest on Kaplan Street in Tel Aviv.
- On 21 March 2024, police violently confiscated signs from demonstrators in Emil Habibi Square in Haifa. Superintendent Erez Amar, operations officer in the Carmel area, commented: "There will be no incitement against the State of Israel. The State of Israel does not murder anyone. Anyone who raises a sign here against the State of Israel, we will take the sign down and arrest them if necessary."
- On 29 March 2024, at a protest in Paris Square in Jerusalem, police demanded that demonstrators remove signs against the war and within minutes proceeded to make violent arrests, which included pushing protesters and dragging them along the sidewalk.

In its response to the petition, the state emphasized that the police are working to impress upon officers the importance of protecting the freedom of expression and protest of demonstrators, and asserted that there was no directive banning the hoisting of signs against the war. However, it acknowledged that although the Police Commissioner's directive on this matter had already been circulated widely six times, it had been ignored by officers on the ground.⁷¹ The Israel Police's legal counsel had also instructed the Operations Division to forbid officers from confiscating signs bearing political messages at demonstrations, "even when these are critical or provocative."⁷² These assertions correspond with the clarification provided by a police source, acknowledging that the confiscation of signs continued "despite a series of orders and guidelines" to the contrary.⁷³

Nevertheless, the justices decided to strike down the petition and made do with a general statement that "anyone who considers themselves harmed by the police's conduct in a specific case may approach the relevant bodies within the Israel Police and its Internal

⁷¹ [State's Response](#) in Supreme Court Case HCJ 3139/24 Noa Noy et al v. Police Commissioner, *Supreme Decisions* (25 Aug 2024).

⁷² [Legal Counsel's Directive on Display of Flags and Signs at Protests](#), *Israel Police* (28 May 2024).

⁷³ Josh Breiner, [*Israeli Police Continue Confiscating Anti-War Protest Signs Despite Repeated Orders Not To](#), *Haaretz* (8 Aug 2024).

Affairs Department (known by the Hebrew acronym Mahash),” in the hope that this would “close the gap between the directives and the way they are implemented by field-level officers, as described by the petitioners in the petition and in their contacts with the respondent.”⁷⁴

ACRI again turned to the Supreme Court a year later, on 29 May 2025, this time filing an urgent petition after the police informed the Jewish-Arab organization Standing Together that they would not be permitted to display photographs of children from the Gaza Strip who had been killed in the war at a planned protest, and that if they did so the permit granted for the demonstration would be revoked.⁷⁵ Once again, the justices rejected the petition, this time without holding a hearing, on the grounds that “this Court does not issue orders to state authorities ‘to act in accordance with the law.’”⁷⁶

Similarly, in August 2025 the chief officer of the Haifa police station and the commander of the Coastal District decided to forbid the display of protest signs carrying messages against the government and against the war during the city’s Pride Parade. The guidelines issued to the organizers prohibited the display of placards or Palestinian flags on the grounds that they could disrupt public order. The police added that any protest signs would be confiscated, that those bearing them could be arrested, and that “a protest area will be allocated near the gathering zone, and only there will protests be permitted.”⁷⁷

Following a petition to the Supreme Court by the Association for LGBTQ Equality, the police retracted their position and claimed that the guidelines were “unofficial.” The justices ruled that this “brings an end to the handling of the petition, one that ideally should never have had to be filed.” They added that “imposing restrictions on freedom of expression at demonstrations and revoking them shortly thereafter gives rise to concern about creating a chilling effect on protest.”⁷⁸ However, once again the justices ignored the fact that this had been a consistent pattern of conduct by the Israel Police since the beginning of the war.

Silencing of Elected Arab Officials

Incitement against Arab elected officials and efforts to silence them are not new phenomena in Israel’s political life. However, during the war they became part of the consensus: Arab officials, both in the Knesset and outside it, were repeatedly and falsely

⁷⁴ [Supreme Court Case H CJ 3139/24 Noa Noy et al v. Police Commissioner](#), *Supreme Decisions* (25 Aug 2024).

⁷⁵ Josh Breiner, [Akko Police Bans Display at Protest Rally of Pictures of Children Killed in Gaza](#), *Haaretz* (29 May 2025).

⁷⁶ [Supreme Court Case 78425-05-25 Standing Together v. Israel Police’s Coastal District Commander](#), *Supreme Decisions* (29 May 2025).

⁷⁷ Josh Breiner, [*Israel Police Bans Anti-Gaza War and Anti-Government Protest Signs at Haifa Pride Parade](#), *Haaretz* (25 Aug 2025).

⁷⁸ [Supreme Court Case H CJ 65857-08-25 Hagai Ayad v. Israel Police](#), *Supreme Decisions* (26 Aug 2025).

accused of being terrorist operatives or of supporting terrorism. Some opposition parties and MKs joined the chorus of incitement, while others stood by silently.

Former Supreme Court President Miriam Naor once wrote in a ruling that "freedom of political expression is of particular importance for a member of Knesset, since through it the MK expresses the views of their electorate. This is all the more true when the MK represents a minority group."⁷⁹ These principles lost much of their validity with respect to Arab elected officials during the war, as slander and accusations against them intensified.

On 2 December 2023, Minister Ben-Gvir tweeted that Ra'am party leader MK Mansour Abbas is "a terror supporter."⁸⁰ He further wrote that "Abbas and the Muslim Brotherhood party are distinct terror supporters. The heretofore prevailing mindset has collapsed and the conclusion is clear: zero tolerance for terror supporters in Israel's Knesset. A self-preserving country must remove the Ra'am party from the Knesset and outlaw it."⁸¹ On 21 January 2025, Yisrael Beiteinu leader MK Avigdor Liberman posted that MK Ayman Odeh, head of the Hadash-Ta'al list, "once again proves that he is the Hamas spokesman in the Knesset."⁸²

These attacks on Arab MKs were accompanied by attempts, some of which proved successful, to sabotage their parliamentary work. For example, in November 2023 MK Aida Touma-Sliman (Hadash) tweeted: "From testimonies at Gaza's Shifa Hospital: operating rooms bombed, smell of phosphorus in the air. Out of 48 surgeons, only 7 remain. Live fire at displaced people in humanitarian corridors, and still people here insist that 'the most moral army in the world' does not harm civilians and does not attack hospitals." Following this tweet, more than 2,200 complaints were filed against her with the Knesset Ethics Committee.⁸³

Its decision to suspend her from the Knesset for two months and to withhold her salary for two weeks read: "The committee believes that an MK accusing the IDF of a war crime contributes to the efforts of Israel's enemies to undermine the legitimacy of the State of Israel, whether intentionally or not.... The committee regrets that MK Touma-Sliman chose to stick to her position and did not retract her words, apologize or qualify them, even after the official statement issued by the IDF Spokesman." Touma-Sliman responded: "The committee's decision is intended not only to silence me personally, but the entire public I represent and anyone who dares to voice an opinion that is not part of the consensus... and lends a hand to the crushing of freedom of expression both inside and outside the

⁷⁹ [Supreme Court Case H CJ 6706/14 MK Hanin Zoabi v. Knesset Ethics Committee](#), *Supreme Decisions* (10 Feb 2015).

⁸⁰ Itamar Ben-Gvir, [post on X](#) (2 Dec 2023).

⁸¹ Itamar Ben-Gvir, [post on Facebook](#) (2 Dec 2023).

⁸² Unattributed, [*SICK: MK Ayman Odeh Compares Hostages to Terrorists](#), *Matzav* (20 Jan 2025).

⁸³ Hezki Baruch, [Over 2,200 Complaints Against MK Touma-Sliman](#), *Arutz 7* (13 Nov 2023).

Knesset. I believe it is necessary to warn about the grave consequences this will have for representatives in parliament and for the public as a whole, including the Arab minority."⁸⁴

In January 2024, with the backing of 70 MKs, proceedings were initiated to impeach MK Ofer Cassif of Hadash after he signed a petition to the International Court of Justice [ICJ] in The Hague accusing Israel of genocide.⁸⁵ In the plenary debate prior to the vote on his expulsion, Knesset House Committee chairman MK Ofir Katz stated: "Ofer Cassif supports terrorism, praises terrorists, condones attacks on IDF soldiers, and harms the legitimacy of the State of Israel. Every minute he remains in the Knesset is a disgrace to our parliament and to the State of Israel. His deed during such a harrowing and painful war, which Hamas prayed would succeed, is a betrayal of the State of Israel and support for a terrorist organization and its goals."⁸⁶ MK Hanoch Milwidsky of Likud said: "Ofer Cassif is an enemy of the state. Ofer Cassif should not be in the Knesset. Ofer Cassif is a full-fledged supporter of terrorism." MK Elazar Stern of Yesh Atid asserted: "Ofer Cassif should not be here. There is no place here for his utterances.... I will do everything so that Ofer Cassif will not be here. If his immunity is removed, I will support such a move."

MK Cassif responded: "This impeachment motion is based on a blatant lie: that I support Hamas's armed struggle. Nothing could be further from the truth, there could be no more repulsive lie. Behind the falsehood underlying this motion lies a clear malicious intent: political persecution and muzzling of every critical voice in general and of Arab citizens and their representatives in the Knesset in particular, with the ultimate goal of completely excluding them from the public and parliamentary discourse."

The attempt to expel MK Cassif ultimately failed. Impeachment requires the support of 90 MKs, but only 85 voted in favor while 11 opposed the motion. Nevertheless, the Knesset Ethics Committee decided to bar him from plenum and committee discussions for six months. The committee stated that his signing of the ICJ petition "constitutes an extremely serious violation of the ethical rules, amounting to a real breach of an MK's loyalty to the good of the state and a violation of public trust in MKs and in the Knesset," and that he had "failed to meet the responsibilities of a leader in society and his duty to serve as a personal example of proper conduct."⁸⁷

In June 2025, proceedings were initiated to impeach MK Ayman Odeh. Once again, 70 MKs joined the motion based on a deliberate distortion of two political comments he made:⁸⁸ a post on X that he was "happy about the release of both hostages and prisoners. From here

⁸⁴ Sivan Hilaie, [Sanctions Against MK Who Accused Israel of War Crimes and MK Who Denied Atrocities](#), *Ynet* (15 Nov 2023).

⁸⁵ Noa Shpigel, [*70 Israeli Lawmakers Sign Motion To Expel MK for Supporting ICJ Genocide Charges](#), *Haaretz* (9 Jan 2024).

⁸⁶ [Minutes of Session No. 150 of 25th Knesset Plenum](#), *Knesset* (19 Feb 2024).

⁸⁷ Noa Shpigel, [Knesset Ethics Committee Suspends MK Ofer Cassif From Plenum and Committees for Six Months](#), *Haaretz* (11 Nov 2024).

⁸⁸ Yoni Gabay, [70 MKs, From Opposition Included, Support Expulsion of MK Ayman Odeh](#), *Kikar Hashabat* (5 June 2025).

on, we must free both peoples from the yoke of occupation. We were all born free,⁸⁹ and a speech where he said that "Gaza has won" and that the right-wing ideology, which had turned Israel into "a pariah state worldwide," had been defeated, and called for an end to the war and the occupation.⁹⁰

During the plenary debate on his impeachment, MK Avichai Boaron of Likud said: "Odeh does not simply speak off the cuff but advances a clear doctrine rife with explicit statements in support of an armed struggle against the State of Israel and its citizens. Freedom of expression ends where Israel's security begins to be harmed. Odeh's words come from a public leader, are not isolated, and form a critical mass. If we do not expel Ayman Odeh, how will we look the bereaved families and the families of hostages in the eye?" MK Idan Roll of Yesh Atid said: "Perhaps it is time we saw an alternative: an Arab party advocating integration and coexistence replacing the handful of terror supporters we have in the Knesset, and there are quite a few of those here."

MK Odeh responded: "I will not retract a single sentence, word, or letter. A huge opportunity has emerged from this crisis, a unique opportunity that must be built upon and expanded. They want to expel someone who believes that both peoples deserve the right to self-determination. You extremists choose impeachment, discrimination, and silencing. We have a dream, and that dream is equality, partnership, and peace." Ultimately, this attempt did not succeed either: 73 MKs supported the impeachment motion, while 15 opposed it.⁹¹

Although both impeachment attempts failed, the very discussion of expelling two MKs severely violated the constitutional rights of all Israeli citizens to vote and be elected, as well as the freedom of expression of Arab elected officials. These sham disqualification and impeachment proceedings, riddled with defamations, humiliations, and false accusations of terrorism without any factual or legal basis, went on to serve the campaign of incitement and delegitimization waged against Arab elected officials since the start of the war in Knesset committee discussions, plenary debates, and in statements by MKs in the media and on social networks.

It is against this climate that far-right activists attacked MK Odeh during an anti-government protest in Ness Ziona on 19 July 2025. They struck his car and smashed the rear window, threw objects at him during his speech, and again hit his car as he left the scene. The protest organizers had warned of impending violence and the police had promised to

⁸⁹ Yaki Adamker and Tal Shalev, [MK Odeh in Infuriating Tweet: 'Happy About Release of Both Hostages and Prisoners'](#), *Walla* (19 Jan 2025).

⁹⁰ Adi Hashmonai, [Some 2,000 Protesters in Haifa Call for Ending War, Odeh: 'Gaza Has Won and Gaza Will Win'](#), *Haaretz* (31 May 2025); Lior El-Hai, [Ayman Odeh in Haifa Protest: 'Gaza Has Won, And Gaza Will Win'](#), *Ynet* (31 May 2025).

⁹¹ [House Committee's Motion To Terminate MK Ayman Odeh's Tenure Rejected](#), *Knesset News* (14 Jul 2025).

reinforce their troops, but the few officers deployed to the scene were unable to prevent it and took their time arresting the attackers.⁹²

Alongside the silencing of and incitement against Arab elected officials, Netanyahu's government used the war to advance legislation in the Knesset that would expand the grounds for barring participation in elections and eliminate the requirement for Supreme Court approval to disqualify candidates.⁹³ The government also sought to advance bills restricting the right to be elected and allowing for the removal of council members and deputy mayors in local authorities.⁹⁴

These legislative proposals, which have to date passed only preliminary readings,⁹⁵ normalize the exclusion of the Arab public from the political arena at both the national and local levels and strengthen the infrastructure for political and racist persecution and for nationalist and incendiary campaigns under the pretext of "fighting terrorism." If enacted into law, these bills would push Arab candidates out of the political arena.

Silencing of Arab Workers, Artists, and Academics

After the outbreak of the war, Arab workers, professionals, artists, and academics were exposed to pressures and threats from state authorities, including the police, as well as from private and public employers. Any social media post could be taken out of context and interpreted as support for terrorism in general, or for the October 7 Hamas massacre in particular, distorting the author's intentions and exposing them to the loss of livelihood and freedom. The silencing campaign largely relied on ordinary citizens, who hastened to report comments made by Arabs to the authorities and called for ostracizing them and firing them from their jobs.

There are myriad examples of this type of silencing. For instance, Dalal Abu-Amneh, a singer and neuroscientist, published a post on Instagram on 7 October 2023 with an image of the Palestinian flag and a verse from the Quran: "There is no victor but God." In an interview with *Haaretz*, Abu-Amneh described how immediately afterward she started suffering "a daily ritual of harassment just outside her home in Afula. Dozens of demonstrators, led by the city's mayor, show up every evening at her home, make her life a misery and demand her expulsion from the city together with her family. The main water

⁹² TOI Staff and Sam Sokol, [*Right-Wing Protesters Assault MK Ayman Odeh, Attack His Car, Chant 'Death to Arabs'](#), *The Times of Israel* (19 Jul 2025).

⁹³ Eitay Mack, [*Implementation of Rabbi Kahane's Ideology: Bar Arab Candidates and Skew Elections](#), *Zulat* (11 Nov 2024).

⁹⁴ Eitay Mack, [*Law on Local Authority Elections: Racist Onslaught on Democracy](#), *Zulat* (12 Dec 2024).

⁹⁵ Ofer Livnat, [Approved in Preliminary Reading: Bills To Restrict Candidacy in Local Elections for Anyone 'Acting Against the State of Israel'](#), *Shakuf* (27 Nov 2024); [Approved in Preliminary Reading: Grounds for Disqualifying Participation in Knesset Elections To Be Expanded](#), *Knesset News* (30 Oct 2024).

pipe of the house has been repeatedly closed, and a large, foul-smelling public refuse container was placed next to the house, into which a dead cat was thrown."⁹⁶

When she arrived at the Nazareth police station to file a complaint, she was handcuffed, shackled, and arrested. The police rushed to issue a press communique boasting about the arrest as an example of "the struggle by the police against incitement and support of terrorism," noting that Abu-Amneh was suspected of "manifestations of praise, incitement, and hate speech," although she claims she was never questioned about such charges. She was released three days later. Demonstrations were also staged outside Haemek Hospital, where her husband, Dr. Anan Abbasi, was the deputy director.⁹⁷ On 12 February 2024, the SAO announced that "after an examination of the circumstances," it had decided to close the case against Abu-Amneh.⁹⁸

On 18 October 2023, Dr. Abed Samara, head of the cardiac intensive care unit at Hasharon Hospital in Petah Tikva, was suspended from his position. The hospital management told the media that "following complaints about a post purportedly in support of terrorism published by one of our physicians on his private Facebook page, the doctor was summarily removed from his job and the hospital management filed a complaint with the police."⁹⁹ Health Minister Uriel Buso hastened to comment: "I contacted the director-general of Clalit Health Services following a serious incident where an employee of Hasharon Hospital emblazoned his profile with Hamas flags and wrote words in support of the terrorist organization that massacred and murdered hundreds of Jews in cold blood. The employee was removed from the hospital and a complaint was filed with the police. We will continue to show zero tolerance toward supporters of terrorism in the health system."¹⁰⁰

Dr. Samara published a clarification on his Facebook page stating that these were false allegations: "The photo is from two years ago and does not mean that I support terrorist activity.... Anyone who knows me knows well that I did not, do not, and will not support terrorist activity or anything that leads to the loss of life of innocent people." In a conversation with *Haaretz*, he added: "All sorts of groups and people are apparently on the lookout these days. I am an observant Muslim and my account contains posts related to Islam but not to the current situation. I was not aware of the hullabaloo, everything was done behind my back, and the hospital's response was automatic. No one from the hospital management called to ask me anything."¹⁰¹

⁹⁶ Hilo Glazer, [*Dalal Abu-Amneh Is a Successful Singer and Neuroscientist. Israel Is Out To Destroy Her Life, Haaretz \(3 Feb 2024\).](#)

⁹⁷ MEE Staff, [*Israeli Forces Arrest Palestinian Singer Dalal Abu-Amneh, Middle East Eye \(17 Oct 2023\).](#)

⁹⁸ Jack Khoury and Chen Maanit, [*State Closes Case Against Arab Israeli Singer Who Was Arrested Over October 7 Post, Haaretz \(12 Feb 2024\).](#)

⁹⁹ Ido Efrati, [Without a Hearing: Hasharon Hospital Department Head Suspended for Alleged Pro-Terror Post, Haaretz \(19 Oct 2023\).](#)

¹⁰⁰ Uriel Busso, [post on X \(18 Oct 2023\).](#)

¹⁰¹ Ido Efrati, [Without a Hearing: Hasharon Hospital Department Head Suspended for Alleged Pro-Terror Post, Haaretz \(19 Oct 2023\).](#)

A year after the war, on 8 October 2024, Minister Ben-Gvir posted that “a teacher in Nazareth uploaded to social media footage of herself dancing to the song *Another Good Time*, with the caption ‘On This Day 7/10/2023’ flashing in the background. I forwarded the footage to the Israel Police’s Cyber Unit, which I established, and she was immediately arrested at her home in Tamra. Zero tolerance for incitement and supporters of terror!”¹⁰² He attached a photo of Intisar Hijazi’s arrest, showing her blindfolded and sitting in a police car with bars. In another image circulated on social media she appeared handcuffed and blindfolded, with an Israeli flag behind her and a sticker reading “Together We Will Win! The People of Israel Live!”¹⁰³

The police confirmed that she had been arrested on suspicion of incitement offenses, but Hijazi had merely shared a Facebook memory from the previous year and had posted a video on TikTok expressing sorrow over the death of Yonat Or, a resident of Kibbutz Be’eri who was murdered on October 7, with the caption “Heartbroken.”¹⁰⁴ On the night of her arrest, the police spokesperson announced that “a police officer decided to release the suspect under restrictive conditions” and that “the investigation into her case is ongoing.”¹⁰⁵

The website *Local Call* published a series of similar cases. For example, Attorney Sari Khoury, a political activist, was arrested for 10 days in November 2023 after posting on social media. The police photographed him during the arrest and later both the police and Ben-Gvir published the photos. The case against him was closed. Rasha Karim Harami, owner of a body-sculpting and fitness studio, was arrested in May 2024 after publishing posts expressing sadness and solidarity with Gaza following an Israeli bombing of a refugee camp in Rafah. In her case as well, officers took pictures of her arrest and circulated the images showing her handcuffed and blindfolded on social media.¹⁰⁶

Haaretz also reported numerous cases of Arabs arrested because of social media posts, all of which ended in nothing.¹⁰⁷ For example, after Israel began bombing the Gaza Strip, the stand-up comic and influencer Muhannad Taha posted on Instagram: “The eye weeps for the residents of Gaza.” He described what happened next: “Forty minutes after I posted the story, 20 police officers showed up at my house.... They took me to the Tamra station and told me I was suspected of supporting a terrorist organization. At first I laughed: What do I have to do with a terrorist organization? I’m a stand-up comic, I have no connection with politics. But things began to get scary. I was remanded in custody and they wanted

¹⁰² Itamar Ben-Gvir, [post on X](#) (8 Oct 2024).

¹⁰³ Hassan Shaalan, Tova Zimuki, and Netael Bandel, [Night Raid To Arrest School Instructor Who ‘Danced To Celebrate the Massacre’: The Question Marks](#), *Ynet* (8 Oct 2024).

¹⁰⁴ Josh Breiner and Jack Khoury, [*Arab Israeli Arrested for Social Media Post Allegedly Celebrating October 7](#), *Haaretz* (8 Oct 2024).

¹⁰⁵ Josh Breiner and Jack Khoury, [*Arab Israeli Educator Released After Arrest Over Video Allegedly Celebrating October 7 Attack](#), *Haaretz* (10 Oct 2024).

¹⁰⁶ Oren Ziv, [Portrait of an Arrest: Special Photographic Project](#), *Mekomit* (8 May 2025).

¹⁰⁷ Hilo Glazer and Itay Mashiach, [*Systematic Witch Hunt’: What Persecution of Arab-Israelis Looks Like Amid Gaza War](#), *Haaretz* (2 Nov 2023).

to send me to the Megiddo Prison (a facility for security prisoners). My lawyer raised hell, and in the end I was in custody for only two days. I was released on condition that I publish nothing on social media for 10 days. They got what they wanted. I will never again publish anything about the situation.”

In another case, the artist and social activist T. was detained for questioning on suspicion of incitement and identification with a terrorist organization after publishing three posts: a photograph of graffiti with the words “The Heart Is With Gaza,” a graphic showing the number of children killed in Gaza with the caption “140 Children. 140 Dreams. A Scar on the Heart,” and a quote from a well-known Arab writer: “When a fence falls, the builder of the fence falls.” After about five hours of questioning, focusing on whether she supported Hamas and how she defined her identity, she was released to five days of house arrest without any criminal proceedings being opened against her.

An Arab nurse at Wolfson Hospital was suspended and later fired after sharing a post showing Gazan children with the caption “Israel’s Bank of Targets” and under it the words: “Nine children of the Abu-Daqa family were killed in the bombing of their home in Khan Younis.” The hospital management explained that the post “overstepped the bounds of legitimate freedom of expression and was tantamount to incitement” against the State of Israel, which is why it subsequently decided to terminate her employment in accordance with the law.

In response to a series of similar cases in hospitals, Nihaya Daoud, chair of the Follow-Up Committee for Health Affairs in Arab Society, explained the severity of the situation: “A nurse could make racist remarks and the senior physician in the unit would not be able to say a thing, because she is Jewish and he’s an Arab.... That’s the situation. It’s a witch hunt.... All the Arabs who work in the health system are looking at these incidents and saying, ‘Okay, I work there, but in a minute I could be tossed out, like the shell of a sunflower seed.’”

The silencing efforts, which also included arrests, reached academia as well. In June 2024, coalition chair MK Ofir Katz introduced a bill to amend the Council for Higher Education [CHE] Law, which would allow the termination of academic staff and the denial of severance pay “due to incitement or support for terrorism,” as well as slashing the budgets of institutions that failed to dismiss staff on these grounds. The bill passed a preliminary reading.¹⁰⁸

On 18 April 2024, Prof. Nadera Shalhoub-Kevorkian of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem was arrested on suspicion of incitement to terrorism. According to the police, the arrest followed statements she made in March 2024 in a podcast addressing the October 7 Hamas

¹⁰⁸ [Bill for CHE Law-2024 \(Amendment: Termination of Academic Staff Due to Incitement or Support for Terrorism and Budget Reduction\)](#), *Knesset* (24 Jun 2024).

attack and the war in the Gaza Strip. The following day, the police applied for her remand in custody for a week. During the hearing, a police officer claimed that posters were seized from her home that "depicted IDF troops as occupation soldiers." The posters were in Arabic and had not yet been translated, he said,¹⁰⁹ adding that she had also been questioned about academic articles she had published.¹¹⁰ Jerusalem Magistrate Court Judge Dov Pollok rejected the request, ruling that the material presented did not justify her arrest. An appeal to the District Court was likewise rejected.¹¹¹

Simultaneously with the criminal proceedings against her, Prof. Shalhoub-Kevorkian was suspended from her position at the Hebrew University. Some 73 Palestinian academics at higher-education institutions in Israel sent a letter to the university's management describing the serious consequences of the affair for academic freedom and freedom of expression: "We, the undersigned Palestinian faculty (current and former) at Israeli institutions of higher education, find your recent suspension of our dear colleague, Prof. Nadera Shalhoub-Kevorkian, highly alarming and disturbing. Your decision does not only amount to an assault on her personally, and on her internationally esteemed scholarship, but also on all members of the academic community in Israel who aim to think freely, unrestricted by state agendas and ideologies.... Your decision serves to censure Prof. Shalhoub-Kevorkian's voice, along with the voices of other scholars and students who legitimately and rightfully question Israel's policies and actions. Such critical voices participate in important conversations with academics, legal experts, humanitarian organizations, and NGOs around the world."¹¹²

Dr. Warda Sada, a lecturer at Kaye Academic College and a longtime peace activist in Jewish-Palestinian organizations, published posts during the first week of the war addressing Palestinian suffering and the occupation, expressing opposition to the war and its futility, and in support of negotiations for the release of hostages. On 15 October 2023, her Facebook profile photo was circulated with the caption: "A lecturer is dancing on our blood. Kaye College: Deal with this immediately!" That same day she was suspended and summoned to a pre-termination hearing. According to her, "the hearing was humiliating.... It pains me so much that I have to justify myself in front of the people with whom I've worked, shared meals, and embraced so many times." At the end of the hearing, the college president said he was very offended by Dr. Sada's "criminal and despicable" statements, stressing that he is a dedicated Zionist and reserve combat officer, who "represents the most moral army that exists and has ever existed in the world." Shortly thereafter she was fired after 28 years of work at the college.¹¹³

¹⁰⁹ Nir Hasson, [post on X](#) (19 Apr 2024).

¹¹⁰ Nir Hasson, [post on X](#) (19 Apr 2024).

¹¹¹ Eitay Mack, [Good Morning China](#), *The Seventh Eye* (19 Apr 2024).

¹¹² *[Silencing, Censorship, and Free Speech Violations in Israeli Academia](#), *Academia for Equality* (16 Jun 2025).

¹¹³ Hilo Glazer and Itay Mashiach, *[Systematic Witch Hunt: What Persecution of Arab-Israelis Looks Like Amid Gaza War](#), *Haaretz* (2 Nov 2023).

A study conducted by Dr. Maha Sabbah-Karkabi and Prof. Sarab Abu-Rabia-Queder, based on in-depth interviews with a representative sample of 27 Palestinian faculty members at Israeli universities, examined their experiences during the war. Among other findings, the study revealed that universities have overt and covert monitoring mechanisms that define acceptable and unacceptable discourse. It showed that surveillance of Palestinian faculty intensified during the war, including explicit and implicit demands to condemn Hamas and even "loyalty" tests from colleagues and the universities themselves. This created a hierarchy of pain in which only Jewish suffering was considered legitimate to express, producing an atmosphere that generally led to silencing.¹¹⁴

In another article, Dr. Manal Totry-Jubran argued that Palestinian faculty members faced systemic persecution during the war, including disciplinary proceedings and police enforcement due to comments on social media, even when these were ambiguous remarks or expressions of solidarity with Palestinian victims. This reality deterred researchers and lecturers from speaking, publishing, conducting research, or writing academically on aspects related to the war or that could be interpreted as such.¹¹⁵

Silencing of Arab Students

Even before the war, Arab students in academia could face serious consequences for comments viewed as political. The violation of academic freedom and the right to free expression and protest, alongside pressure from the government and coalition and collaboration of universities and colleges, intensified after the start of the war.

Section 5 of the Student Rights Law states that "every student has the right to express their opinions, positions, and perspectives regarding the content of the syllabus and the values expressed therein." Section 6 states that "every student has the right to organize and demonstrate on any subject or issue, including those relating to students and their rights."¹¹⁶ Yet Arab students attempting to exercise these rights risked arrests and blatant silencing attempts.

A few days after the war began, Education Minister Yoav Kisch sought to compel universities and colleges to immediately expel or take strict disciplinary action against students who voiced support for terrorism or identification with terrorist organizations, threatening sanctions against institutions that failed to comply.¹¹⁷ On 17 October 2023, CHE

¹¹⁴ Maha Sabbah-Karkabi and Sarab Abu-Rabia-Queder, [*The Politics of Silence: Palestinian Faculty and the Struggle for Voice in Israeli Academia in Times of War](#), *Ethnic and Racial Studies* (3 Oct 2025).

¹¹⁵ Manal Totry-Jubran, "Escalating Suppression: The Silencing of Palestinians in Israeli Academic Institutions During Wartime," in Adam Shinar and Mordechai Kremnitzer, [Are the Muses Silent? On Freedom of Speech in Wartime](#), pp 150-167, *Israel Democracy Institute* (2026).

¹¹⁶ [Student Rights Law-2007](#), *Nevo* (last updated 28 Jul 2024).

¹¹⁷ Lior Dattel, [Kisch Approves Mandatory Expulsion of Terror-Supporting Students Even Though Universities Already Do It](#), *TheMarker* (18 Oct 2023); Education Minister Kisch's letter to presidents and heads of academic institutions in Israel: [Handling Cases of Incitement by Students and Staff in Academic Institutions](#) (12 Oct 2023).

passed a resolution compelling institutions to report how they handled incidents of identification with acts of terror.¹¹⁸ Following widespread public and academic criticism and announcements by university heads that they would not comply,¹¹⁹ the decision was frozen.¹²⁰

The government also advanced a bill proposed by MK Limor Son Har-Melech to amend the Student Rights Law to allow the expulsion from educational institutions of "students supporting terrorism" and the dismantling of "cells supporting terrorism."¹²¹ Addressing a meeting of the Knesset Education Committee, Yanal Jabarin of the NGO Abraham Initiatives asserted that the proposed law undermines academic freedom and the right to organize politically, and "aims to intimidate the Arab public in Israel, especially students, and democratic Jews who express their opinions on political, social, and economic issues."¹²² Prof. Oded Rabinovitch, senior vice president of the Technion and chair of the Forum of Rectors of the Council of University Heads (VERA), said the bill "tries to turn academia into a body that spies on students and faculty, effectively making it a policing arm investigating the activities of students and staff.... This bill coerces academia to step into the shoes of Israel's law enforcement and penal authorities."¹²³

At a committee meeting on 27 January 2025, the Shin Bet clarified that "generally speaking, we are not aware of a phenomenon whereby students' mere enrollment in academia gets them involved in terrorism. There are a few cases each year of Arab students arrested for incitement or terrorism, but their activities are unrelated to their studies. We are not aware of any significant link between educational institutions and actual incitement. Individual cases are handled by the police with the approval of the SAO. On its face, there is no clear security need that the proposed law would address."¹²⁴ The proposal is awaiting its second and third readings in the Knesset plenum.¹²⁵

Despite their opposition to the bills and CHE's oversight, universities implemented a policy of persecution and silencing that was supported by many Jewish students. As part of this move, the National Student Union set up a special hotline for reporting "support for terrorism," explaining the rationale as follows: "The hotline for reporting supporters of terror in academia was established at the beginning of the war following instances of

¹¹⁸ [CHE Resolution: Denouncing Support and/or Identification With Terrorist Actions of Hamas and Islamic Jihad](#), *Council for Higher Education* (17 Oct 2023).

¹¹⁹ Tamar Trabelsi-Hadad and Roni Green-Shaulov, [University Heads to Minister Kisch: 'We Will Not Report Expressions of Support for Hamas'](#), *Ynet* (18 Oct 2023).

¹²⁰ Shira Kadari-Ovadia, [*Israeli Minister Suspends Order Requiring Universities To Report on Handling Students Suspected of Supporting Terrorism](#), *Haaretz* (6 Nov 2023).

¹²¹ [Bill for Student Rights Law-2025 \(Amendment No. 10: Prohibition of Incitement to Terror and Illegal Organized Public Student Activity](#), *Knesset* (25 Feb 2025).

¹²² [Minutes of Session No. 369 of Knesset Education, Culture, and Sports Committee](#), *Knesset* (4 Feb 2025).

¹²³ [Minutes of Session No. 236 of Knesset Education, Culture, and Sports Committee](#), *Knesset* (2 Jul 2024).

¹²⁴ [Education Committee Debates Bill To Prohibit Activity by Student Groups Supporting Terrorism. Shin Bet: 'There Is No Clear Security Need. If the Knesset Enacts the Law, the Shin Bet Sees No Objection'](#), *Knesset News* (27 Jan 2025).

¹²⁵ [Bill for Student Rights Law-2025 \(Amendment No. 10: Prohibition of Incitement to Terror and Illegal Organized Public Student Activity](#), *Knesset* (9 Jul 2025).

support for the murderous terrorist organization Hamas-ISIS and the horrific massacres of October 7 and attacks on the IDF. There is no room in Israeli academia for students or lecturers supporting terror, regardless of religion, race, or gender. At a time when residents of the Gaza Envelope were massacred and kidnapped and when IDF soldiers risk their lives for the State of Israel and our right to live here, supporters of terror cannot be part of academia."¹²⁶

A report by the organization Academia for Equality said "a permissive atmosphere in which informing on others is encouraged emboldens those who support the war to harass their classmates or colleagues who oppose it.... Palestinian students who share or 'like' certain posts find themselves under a barrage by classmates, usually Jewish students, who report them to one of the extreme right-wing groups on campus.... The majority of Palestinian students and faculty experience silencing. They avoid expressing their opinions, or sharing or 'liking' social posts that have to do with the war in Gaza. They are aware that such actions could result in arrest, social isolation, school suspension, or other disciplinary actions by their universities."¹²⁷

A report by Adalah presented cases of persecution and silencing in Israeli academia from October 2023 to March 2024. During this period, 160 Arab students faced disciplinary measures (124 of them sought legal assistance from Adalah), 66 were expelled or suspended without proper procedure, and 25 were acquitted. An analysis of the disciplinary proceedings found that "any publication that did not align with the Israeli narrative of the Hamas attack on October 7 and the events leading up to it posed a risk to its publishers in disciplinary proceedings. For instance, articles criticizing the actions of the Israeli military or casting doubt on the accuracy of some descriptions of the events in the Gaza Envelope were often the basis for some complaints, even if the source was Israeli media in Hebrew. Effectively, the use of terms like 'ethnic cleansing,' 'massacre,' or 'genocide' to describe the events in Gaza was banned. Even publications expressing solidarity with Gaza residents, including prayers for their well-being or photos of destruction in the Strip, sometimes served as the basis for complaints. Similarly, Quranic verses, prayers, and other religious texts were labeled as support for terrorism regardless of their cultural or social context." Adalah concluded that "there is a clear pattern of racist viewpoints which attribute charges of 'support for terrorism' solely based on the identity of the publishers. Effectively, they have assumed that every Arab student is a terrorist unless they prove themselves otherwise."¹²⁸

¹²⁶ Shabi Gatenio, Yanal Jabarin, and Dafni Lidor-Tel Paz, '[I Wrote on Instagram That Every Child Is a Child, And I Was Told That Is Support for Terrorism](#)', *The Hottest Place in Hell* (19 Dec 2023).

¹²⁷ *[Silencing, Censorship, and Free Speech Violations in Israeli Academia](#), *Academia for Equality* (16 Jun 2025).

¹²⁸ *[The Persecution of Palestinian Students in Israeli Universities and Colleges During the War on Gaza](#), *Adalah* (25 Mar 2024).

Yousef Taha, head of the Arab Student Union in Universities and Colleges, noted that "the proceedings and discussions in the disciplinary committees worked like Shin Bet interrogations.... Students were not asked about the content of their posts, but instead faced questions such as, 'What do you think about October 7? Do you condemn the massacre?' The vast majority of those questioned were first- and second-year students, 20- or 21-year-olds who do not yet understand politics well enough to engage in the kind of in-depth discussion from which their views could be inferred."¹²⁹

Attorney Mai Diab from Adalah explained that "academics were complicit in the surveillance and snitching mechanisms of the National Union of Israeli Students and right-wing organizations. They invaded the most private and intimate spaces without authority, and even though those students committed no ethical or disciplinary offenses, they initiated proceedings that resulted in disproportionate punishments, including permanent expulsion and revocation of academic achievements.... The space where academic freedom is supposed to be guaranteed was harsher than that of the police and the SAO."¹³⁰

In addition to disciplinary measures, calls to expel Arabs from student dormitories increased at the start of the war. For example, on 28 October 2023, hundreds attempted to evict Arab students from the dorms of Netanya College, shouting racist slogans and death threats. An eyewitness recounted: "One cannot overstate the fear we experienced.... I genuinely believed my life was in jeopardy. We were trapped in our dormitory rooms for over three hours with a hostile crowd outside, chanting 'Death to Arabs,' while the police seemed unable to intervene.... We escaped to the rooftops and witnessed from there hundreds of Israelis attempting to enter the building, while police forces tried to block them."¹³¹

A survey comprising 809 Arab students conducted by the Arab Student Union in December 2023 attests to the consequences of these events: 61% said they seriously considered or are considering stopping their studies due to concerns for their personal safety, only 12% said they felt safe in the dorms, 72% reported feeling monitored and persecuted because of their social media activity, and 86% said the attitude of their academic institution toward Arab students had been unfair since October 7.¹³²

Dr. Totry-Jubran concluded in her article that Israeli academia had since October 7 become "an arena of repression of freedom of expression for Palestinian citizens of Israel.... It is a selective and asymmetric mechanism, operating primarily against Palestinians, which is part of a broader trend of over-surveillance, institutional silencing, and delegitimization of

¹²⁹ Shabi Gatenio, Yanal Jabarin, and Dafni Lidor-Tel Paz, '[I Wrote on Instagram That Every Child Is a Child, And I Was Told That Is Support for Terrorism](#)', *The Hottest Place in Hell* (19 Dec 2023).

¹³⁰ Ari Libsker, '[Every Arab Expressing an Opinion Is Labeled a Terror Supporter](#)', *Calcalist* (30 Jan 2025).

¹³¹ Zahra Saeed, '[Palestinian Students Were "Trapped" in a College Dorm as Israeli Mobs Chanted "Death to Arabs"](#)', *Middle East Eye* (30 Oct 2023).

¹³² Orly Noy, '[Poll: 61% of Arab Students Fear for Personal Safety](#)', *Mekomit* (28 Dec 2023).

minorities, even within institutions meant to encourage free thought and critical dialogue."¹³³

Silencing of Arabs in the Media and of Arab Journalists

Much has been written and published about the silencing in Israeli media of criticism regarding the management of the war in Gaza and its severe consequences, the attendant suffering, killing, and hunger. This included the suspension of *Al-Jazeera* broadcasts from Israel¹³⁴ and the ban on foreign and Israeli journalists entering Gaza endorsed by the Supreme Court.¹³⁵

At the same time, Arab speakers were almost totally excluded from news studios, and when they did appear, they were humiliated and silenced. Representation Index, a survey conducted regularly by the NPO Sikkuy-Aufoq and *The Seventh Eye* website, found acute exclusion of Arab interviewees and commentators in Israeli television and radio broadcasts during the first half of 2024: there were only 1,089 items featuring Arab speakers during this period, and only 1.3% of all interviewees and commentators were Arab. This represents a sharp decline compared to any half-year period examined since 2016.

Mahmud Awad, Sikkuy-Aufoq's coordinator for Arab society representation in Hebrew media, said that "the findings point to the disappearance of the Arab community's voice from the media.... Representation had been low in previous years as well, but during the war it reached an unprecedented nadir. This stark lack of representation in Hebrew-language media does not reflect our grim reality, but rather constructs a reality of racism and exclusion that directly shapes relations between Jews and Arabs." Referring to Yoseph Haddad, the most prominent Arab voice in the media, Awad added that "the hyper-presence of a single commentator, as if one person can represent a large and diverse society, is particularly troubling, especially since the media repeatedly chose to amplify a voice that appeals to Jewish audiences, given that he is a PR activist who supports the war."¹³⁶

Other Arab speakers were often asked by interviewers to condemn the massacre carried out by Hamas on October 7. Even then, interviewers often questioned the sincerity of their

¹³³ Manal Totry-Jubran, "Escalating Suppression: The Silencing of Palestinians in Israeli Academic Institutions During Wartime," in Adam Shinar and Mordechai Kremnitzer, [Are the Muses Silent? On Freedom of Speech in Wartime](#), pp 150-167, *Israel Democracy Institute* (2026).

¹³⁴ [Temporary Provision Enabling Closure of Foreign Broadcaster Harming State Security Gets Final Approval](#), *Knesset News* (1 Apr 2024); Jason Burke, [*Israel Shuts Down Local Al Jazeera Offices in 'Dark Day for the Media'](#), *The Guardian* (5 May 2024).

¹³⁵ Oren Persico, [Ban on Journalists' Entry Into Gaza Strip: State's Foot-Dragging Continues](#), *The Seventh Eye* (24 Nov 2025). For further discussion, see: Ayala Panievsky and Ido Benbaji, [Eyes Wide Shut: When the War on the Media Met the War in Gaza](#), *Molad Center* (Sep 2025).

¹³⁶ Ido David Cohen, [Study: Unusual Exclusion of Arab Interviewees and Commentators From Broadcasts Following the War](#), *Haaretz* (12 Sep 2024); Oren Persico, [2024: Sharp Decline in Arab MK Appearances in the Media](#), *The Seventh Eye* (25 Mar 2025).

condemnation and at times even echoed the inflammatory rhetoric of government and coalition members against the Arab public.

In addition, after the outbreak of the war, Arab journalists faced violent harassment at the hands of both police and civilians. Mohammad Magadli, head of the news division at Radio Al-Nas and a Channel 12 News analyst, told *The Seventh Eye*: "After the war started, we often made do with remote interviews because the most important thing for me was to protect my reporters." Amir Bawirat of the website *Arab48* recounted that while covering a demonstration in Umm al-Fahm, a police officer approached him and told him to leave. "I told him I was a journalist covering the protest and showed him my press card.... He hit me with his weapon on the chest and I left. I didn't file a complaint because we know nothing will be done," Bawirat said.¹³⁷

The Aalam Center collected more than 30 incidents of violation of the rights of Arab and Palestinian journalists in Israel in just the first month of the war, and 96 cases throughout it.¹³⁸ These included a civilian attacking Arab photographers at the northern border¹³⁹ and a security officer threatening an *Al-Arabi* reporter in Ashdod. One incident that received broad international attention was an attack on a *BBC Arabic* crew.¹⁴⁰ According to the journalists, police in Tel Aviv pulled them out of their vehicle at gunpoint, dragged them, lined them against a wall, and frisked them. When one journalist tried to film the event, the officer smashed his phone on the ground and struck him.¹⁴¹

According to the Aalam Center, journalists "are no longer willing to cover scenes of fighting and prefer to report only from Arab towns, which harms their mission as well as press freedom and the public's right to know. We hope this situation will change, and that journalists at large will receive the proper support and treatment according to international conventions. A journalist in a conflict zone should be given protection to do their work."¹⁴²

Journalist Baker Zoabi wrote: "The feeling among journalists and social media activists is that restrictions here have come to resemble those in most dictatorial countries, and that any criticism of the army, or more precisely, any narrative contrary to the dominant Israeli one, may now be considered a threat to national security and potentially inflict serious harm to its author."¹⁴³ Photographer and reporter Muhammad Khalilia added: "The problem is not just the police or the establishment. Everybody in the field knows that after October 7, any Arab journalist has become exposed to attacks by Israeli citizens everywhere.... Dozens of people confront us every time we are in the field, especially at the

¹³⁷ Oren Persico, [Under Cover of War: Arab Journalists Routinely Face Attacks and Harassment](#), *The Seventh Eye* (12 Nov 2023).

¹³⁸ Sheren Falah Saab, [*Ignored by Police, Attacked by Mobs: Arab Journalists in Israel Work in Constant Fear](#), *Haaretz* (25 Jun 2025).

¹³⁹ Oren Persico, ['You Will Not Film Here! I'm in Charge of This Area!'](#), *The Seventh Eye* (23 Oct 2023).

¹⁴⁰ Oren Persico, ['I Really Hope You're Saying Good Things'](#), *The Seventh Eye* (15 Oct 2023).

¹⁴¹ Unattributed, [*BBC Journalists Held at Gunpoint by Israeli Police](#) (15 Oct 2023).

¹⁴² Oren Persico, ['I Really Hope You're Saying Good Things'](#), *The Seventh Eye* (15 Oct 2023).

¹⁴³ Baher Zoabi, [Threats, Investigations, and Self-Censorship](#), *Mekomit* (7 Dec 2023).

demonstrations by the families of the hostages in Tel Aviv. Time and again people ask us who we are and for which channel we report, and the recurring question is always, '*Al-Jazeera* or *Al-Mayadeen*?' We say we report for the local media, but it is clear that some do not welcome us, on the contrary. One time I tied to my car the yellow ribbon of the campaign for the hostages so that right-wing activists nearby would not attack me."

Conclusion

Former Chief Justice Aharon Barak once wrote that "the justification for freedom of expression is complex and multifaceted. It is the individual's freedom to realize himself and shape his worldview and opinions by giving free rein to his creative and receptive mind, to his impressive and impressionable spirit. It is the freedom of the individual and of the collective to bring the truth to light through a free and constant contest between truth and falsehood. It is the freedom of a society to exchange views and ideas in a spirit of tolerance, without fear, and out of respect for the autonomy of every individual, view, and opinion, and to persuade one another in order to sustain, entrench, and develop a democratic regime."¹⁴⁴

After the outbreak of the war on 7 October 2023, these principles were all but absent in relation to the Arab public. This report examines how freedom of expression and protest within this community was hollowed out over the course of two years of war. Even before the war, these rights were only partially protected and frequently violated, often with the approval of the Supreme Court. During the war, however, such infringements came to enjoy broad consensus and reached unprecedented levels.

This policy was implemented with the support and encouragement of state authorities, including the Israel Police, the Knesset, the government, the State Attorney's Office, and the Supreme Court. The message to the Arab public was clear: it is forbidden to oppose the war, express grief over the killings and starvation in Gaza, question the government or security forces, or show solidarity with Palestinian victims. Anyone doing so risked being labeled a supporter of terror or a traitor, with potential consequences to their personal safety, employment, or legal standing. This policy effectively silenced the Arab public.

The Israel Police, under the stewardship of National Security Minister Itamar Ben-Gvir and then-Commissioner Yaakov Shabtai, adopted early in the war the view that giving Arabs leeway to protest was equivalent to legitimizing support for Hamas and could lead to a repeat of a Guardian of the Walls scenario. Based on this view, extensive restrictions were imposed on Arab demonstrations and protests, as well as on social media comments.

The State Attorney and the Attorney General legitimized this policy. In response to petitions to the Supreme Court, they supported the police's position and accepted the argument that Arab protests posed a threat to public order and public safety. A key aspect of their policy was the dramatic expansion of the offense of incitement and empowering the police to investigate suspected violations without the need for SAO approval, contrary to previous restrictive guidelines. Soon, hundreds of cases were opened and dozens of indictments

¹⁴⁴ [Supreme Court Case H CJ 399/85, MK Rabbi Meir Kahane v. Broadcasting Authority's Executive](#) (published in *The Seventh Eye*, 27 Jul 1987).

filed against Arabs, while incendiary comments by Jewish citizens, politicians, and far-right activists against the Palestinian population were rarely investigated.

The Supreme Court, which had previously limited the police's authority and held that demonstrations may be restricted only where there is near certainty of serious harm to public order, shifted at the outset of the war to prioritizing security considerations in relation to the Arab public. The justices accepted the police's position that the exercise of freedom of expression and protest by Arabs posed a security risk, and effectively granted the police near-total discretion to prevent or restrict such demonstrations. As a result, rallies in Tel Aviv with tens of thousands of participants occurred weekly, while Arab protests, if allowed at all, were pushed to city outskirts and limited in size and venue.

The silencing extended beyond demonstrations and protests. This report describes persecution and silencing of Arab workers, professionals, artists, and academics that included dismissals or suspensions, as well as high-profile arrests of teachers, doctors, artists, and business owners, most of which ended without consequence. The chilling effect deepened in academia through the CHE's decisions, snitch hotlines about "support for terrorism," and numerous disciplinary procedures applied almost exclusively to Arab students for social media posts expressing solidarity with residents of Gaza.

Israeli media showed acute exclusion of Arab voices, with research indicating historically low representation of interviewees and commentators. Arab journalists described an environment where nearly any criticism of the army or presentation of a Palestinian narrative could result in accusations of harming national security. Numerous cases of violence, threats, and detentions by police and civilians were documented, leading Arab journalists and photographers to avoid coverage outside Arab communities.

Similarly, the display of the Palestinian flag, which had long been permitted with the approval of the Supreme Court, was criminalized even before the war by order of Minister Ben-Gvir, with police instructed to seize and prevent its exhibition. After the war began, the situation worsened significantly. Police repeatedly confiscated signs against the war and the killings in Gaza, including signs reading "Stop the Massacre" or "There Are Civilians in Gaza."

A report published by Zulat in January 2026 concluded that Israel is no longer a democracy but has become a competitive authoritarian regime.¹⁴⁵ Such regimes are characterized by weakening and politicization of the judiciary and law enforcement, their subordination to the government, diminished protections for human rights, particularly for minorities, erosion of press independence and transformation of the media into a government mouthpiece, and undermining of free and fair elections and genuine political competition.

¹⁴⁵ Michal Evron Yaniv and Eitay Mack, [*My Country Has Changed Her Face: Israel's Regime Becomes Competitive Authoritarian](#), *Zulat* (22 Jan 2026).

Our report also addresses government efforts to undermine the legitimacy of Arab participation in elections, aimed at significantly reducing their presence in the political arena and secure a permanent right-wing majority in the Knesset. This issue is particularly relevant these days, given the upcoming elections. The sweeping restrictions imposed on the Arab public, especially on its elected officials, regarding political expression, public gatherings, events, and campaigns severely undermine their ability to participate equally and effectively in elections. Therefore, calls for Arab voter participation must be accompanied by a demand to fully uphold their political rights.

The government's efforts to consolidate its power also extend to denying the legitimacy of Arab participation in public and political life. In this context, restricting Arab participation, including the right to vote and run for office, as well as freedoms of expression and protest, is not merely a minority rights issue but part of a broader effort to shrink the democratic space.

It thus follows that the deterioration in the protection of freedom of expression and protest described in this report cannot be addressed separately from the broader question of the type of regime that exists in Israel given that recognition and protection of these rights are fundamental prerequisites for a democratic system. Hence, if and when a return to democracy occurs in Israel, Zulat will recommend to enact laws that enshrine the right to equality and freedom of expression and protest in Basic Laws.

Zulat institute works to promote a policy of equality and human rights and to restore the legitimacy of the human rights discourse in Israel.

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