



ZU-LAT
Equality and Human Rights

The Regime-Driven Erosion of Women's Rights in Israel

Under the 37th Government

Adv. Nitzan Caspi Shiloni

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Author

Adv. Nitzan Caspi Shiloni

Editor

Nili Aleksandrowicz

Design

Einhar Design

Translation

Shoshana Michkin

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INTRODUCTION

The rights and well-being of women in Israel have substantially regressed under the tenure of the 37th government, closely and intrinsically linked to the regime change it has advanced. As reflected in a report published by Zulat in January 2026, this government has effectively brought about a fundamental transformation in the character of the regime, to the point that it is no longer merely a flawed democracy but is closer to a competitive authoritarian system.¹ In such a regime, formal democratic institutions still exist but are subject to a systematic assault aimed at hollowing them out and at the same time used by the government to entrench its power. This regime change creates a political and legal context where the protection of human rights in general, and women's rights in particular, is structurally and persistently weakened.

The regime change and the ideology of the outgoing government – populist, nationalist, and conservative – constitute a breeding ground for regression in the status of women. The rise of right-wing populism and nationalism, along with intensified undermining of women's rights, are global phenomena;² however, in Israel these trends have taken on a distinctive form in the outgoing coalition: ever stronger ultra-Orthodox parties that systematically exclude women from centers of political leadership, alongside far-right parties seeking to strengthen the religious establishment and expand its authority, as well as the penetration of a nationalist Kahanist ideology that promotes, among other things, the unchecked arming of civil society. These developments have weakened the protections afforded to women's rights, deepened women's institutional subordination to religious systems, and restricted their scope for choice and autonomy.

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

¹ Eitay Mack and Michal Evron Yaniv, **My Country Has Changed Her Face: Israel's Regime Becomes Competitive Authoritarian*, Zulat (22 January 2026).

² The link between populism and harm to women's bodily autonomy is well documented in regimes of this kind around the world. During the Law and Justice Party's term in power (2015–2023), Poland advanced conservative policies that undermined women's welfare, such as cancelling funding for in vitro fertilization, restrictions on access to contraception, cuts to budgets for combating domestic violence, and even withdrawal from the Istanbul Convention on preventing violence against women. In Finland, the Finns Party promoted a campaign to abolish affirmative action mechanisms for women in the public service, while Hungary under Viktor Orbán's government shut down gender studies programs in higher education institutions. These examples illustrate a recurring pattern whereby populist-nationalist regimes tend to target feminist achievements and institutional infrastructures designed to promote gender equality and protect women's rights. See: Rebecca Sanders and Laura Dudley Jenkins, **Special Issue Introduction: Contemporary International Anti-Feminism*, *Global Constitutionalism* (November 2022).

This document analyzes the harm to women's rights and well-being caused by the outgoing government's policies and the ideology it promoted, from the beginning of its term until the announcement of the dissolution of the Knesset and the October 2026 elections. The review will focus on six areas:

- Transition to a competitive authoritarian regime: harm to democratic institutions and their independence
- Reduced representation of women in the political sphere and in public systems
- Gender segregation and exclusion of women
- Decline in women's personal security
- Strengthening of the religious establishment
- Promotion of an anti-liberal public discourse

An examination of these areas will show how government policy is translated into concrete harms affecting the lives of all women in Israel, particularly those belonging to marginalized or vulnerable groups.

TRANSITION TO COMPETITIVE AUTHORITARIAN REGIME AND WEAKENING OF DEMOCRATIC INSTITUTIONS

Since its establishment in early 2023, the government's efforts to weaken democracy and advance a regime revolution have focused on eroding and undermining the independence of democratic institutions whose role is to oversee and limit the power of the executive branch. Oversight and accountability mechanisms in a democratic system, such as an independent judiciary, an Attorney General, civil society organizations, and a free press, are intended to prevent the tyranny of the ruling power. Dismantling these mechanisms, as well as the very erosion of the principle of separation of powers, is meant to enable the government to act arbitrarily, harm equality, encroach on minority rights and unrepresented groups, and make decisions based on corruption and abuse of power.

Distinct characteristics can be identified upon examination of the implications of the harm to democratic institutions for women's rights as a group. First, given that women suffer from historical and cultural discrimination reflected in underrepresentation in politics, wage gaps to their detriment, and distinct forms of violence,³ the protections provided by oversight bodies are clearly essential and necessary. Second, in addition to overt and formal discrimination, spheres where it is legally permissible to explicitly and institutionally discriminate against women have existed in the State of Israel since its inception.⁴

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The first of these is the legislation governing marriage and divorce, which is subordinate to religious law. Under this legislation, Jews are required to marry and divorce through the religious establishment, which excludes women from judicial roles and applies Jewish religious law that imposes an unequal standard on women.⁵ Similarly, Muslim women are subject to Sharia law, Druze women to Druze law, and Christian women to ecclesiastical law.⁶ Another religion-related area concerns norms pertaining to the ultra-Orthodox minority and the accommodation of its leaders and activists' demands for gender segregation and exclusion of women, particularly in light of this group's political power. Another area is military service, since security bodies are

³ *[International Women's Day 2025](#), Central Bureau of Statistics (5 March 2025).

⁴ This is the reason why despite having ratified it, Israel lodged reservations to certain provisions of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), specifically with regard to the obligation to ensure equality in matrimonial and family law and in appointments to religious positions.

⁵ See Sections 5 and 7(c) of the Women's Equal Rights Law 1951, which emphasize that the principle of equality does not apply to marriage and divorce matters, nor to the possible appointment of women to public religious positions. It should be noted that Israeli Muslim women are subject to Sharia law in the context of family law and women of other religions are similarly subject to their respective religious laws, in accordance with Article 51 of the King's Order in Council for Palestine 1922-1947.

⁶ On the injustice wrought by ecclesiastical law upon Christian citizens, see: Nitzan Caspi Shiloni, [One-Way Street: Women and Men Trapped in Marriage in Israel](#), Minerva Center for Human Rights at Hebrew University of Jerusalem (20 July 2022).

permitted to deny women admission to a particular role "if this is required by the essence or nature of the position."⁷ It should be noted that in Israel, army service de facto opens employment opportunities in both the private and public sectors, as well as in political leadership.

The judicial system plays an important role in protecting women's rights in these three areas due to, among other things, the fact that the relevant authorities tend not to prioritize the right to equality over other interests. This is especially true for women from minority or socially marginalized groups (such as Arab women, women living in poverty, and ultra-Orthodox women) who are more vulnerable and therefore particularly in need of the protection of democratic institutions.⁸

Following are the main pieces of legislation weakening key democratic institutions that have been enacted and are still being advanced.

Legislation To Weaken Judiciary

The amendment to Basic Law: The Judiciary, which was published in the official gazette on 1 April 2025, significantly bolsters the power of the coalition in the process of appointing judges, thereby harming the independence of the judiciary.⁹ The amendment is set to come into effect at the beginning of the Knesset's next term. At this stage, several constitutional petitions to annul the amendment are pending before the Supreme Court, in its capacity as the High Court of Justice, which issued interim injunctions in December 2025.¹⁰

The damage caused by the politicization of the Judicial Selection Committee is extensive. Due to the removal of professionals from the committee, the government's increased say in the appointment and promotion of judges, as well as to a large extent in their dismissal, will inevitably lead to the weakening of the judicial system and its dependence on political actors. The protection afforded by the judiciary extends beyond ruling on petitions and claims; the very existence of a strong, independent judicial system acts as a deterrent against abuses of power and violations of fundamental rights.

⁷ Section 4(d) of the Women's Equal Rights Law.

⁸ See ruling requiring Agudat Yisrael party to amend its bylaws so that gender discrimination would no longer be explicit: Supreme Court Case HCJ 1823/15 Ben-Porat v. Registrar of Political Parties, Nevo (10 January 2019); ruling invalidating Finance Minister Avigdor Lieberman's decision to immediately halt subsidies for daycare funding for families of yeshiva students: Supreme Court Case HCJ 5782/21 Zilber v. Finance Minister, Nevo (21 January 2022); ruling revising the criteria for eligibility for income support benefits: Supreme Court Case HCJ 10662/04 Hassan v. National Insurance Institute, Nevo (28 February 2012).

⁹ Amendment No. 4 to Basic Law: The Judiciary, Knesset (1 April 2025).

¹⁰ Jeremy Sharon, *"High Court Orders Government to Justify Law Upping Political Influence Over Judicial Appointments"*, *The Times of Israel* (2 December 2025).

In addition, the Supreme Court plays a central role in protecting women's rights, and its rulings mandating the application of the principle of equality have altered the balance in ways that have substantively impacted the status of women. For example, in the Alice Miller case, it opened the Israel Air Force pilot course to women despite the opposition of the IDF top brass; it banned the relegation of women to the back of public buses in response to a petition against the Ministry of Transportation and the Egged bus company, and in numerous petitions it barred rabbinical courts from ruling on the division of property between divorced spouses according to religious law, requiring them instead to apply civil law. The politicization of the courts, particularly when accompanied by a strengthening of the religious establishment, signals severe harm to women's rights.

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Moreover, a law passed on 4 March 2025 effectively gives the coalition control over the appointment of the Judiciary Ombudsman (contrary to past practice, when this official was picked by the Judicial Selection Committee).¹¹ This politicization opens the door to abuse of the broad powers already granted to the Ombudsman under the law.¹² This shift is already evident in the current choice: although the degree of autonomy to be enjoyed by Judge Asher Kula has not yet been fully ascertained (he was only appointed in November 2025), the way his nomination came about and the fact that Justice Minister Yariv Levin tried to assign him to head the investigation into the Military Advocate General's Affair (and failed)¹³ raise questions regarding the independence of the institution.

This has been compounded by the onslaught of coalition members aimed at undermining public trust in the Supreme Court. For example, cabinet members such as Justice Minister Levin have to this day refused to acknowledge Yitzhak Amit as the Chief Justice, while Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich harshly lashed out at him: "Yitzhak Amit is a violent megalomaniac.... We will trample

¹¹ Bill for Amendment No. 6 of Judiciary Ombudsman Law (Selection of Ombudsman) 2024, Knesset National Legislation Repository (4 March 2025); Jeremy Sharon and Sam Sokol, [*Coalition Passes Judicial Overhaul Law Taking Over Appointment of Judges' Ombudsman](#), The Times of Israel (4 March 2025).

¹² Eitay Mack, [*Political Appointment of Judiciary Ombudsman Harms Independence of Courts](#), Zulat (1 October 2024).

¹³ The affair in question related to the investigation launched against former Military Advocate General Yifat Tomer-Yerushalmi, after she admitted to having authorized the leak of a video purporting to show the abuse of a Palestinian security detainee by IDF soldiers at the Sde Teiman military facility in July 2024. See: Jeremy Sharon, [*Court Says Levin Can Choose Sde Teiman Investigation Supervisor but Disqualifies Kula](#), The Times of Israel (16 November 2025).

him.”¹⁴ In January 2026, a group of senior coalition figures even demanded from Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu not to comply with Supreme Court rulings in the context of its expected decision on a petition to fire National Security Minister Itamar Ben-Gvir.¹⁵

Weakening of Attorney General

Alongside the legislative efforts to weaken the court system, in August 2025 the government announced the firing of the Attorney General. Ruling the decision unlawful,¹⁶ the Supreme Court annulled the move.¹⁷ In addition, in July 2026, just days before its dispersal, the Knesset passed a law that significantly weakens the role of the Attorney General and effectively strips it of substance.¹⁸ Alongside it, the government has advanced several legislative proposals that would severely harm the rule of law: subordinating legal counsels in government ministries to the political echelon,¹⁹ amending the Government Regulations to enable it to legislate without requiring the Attorney General’s opinion,²⁰ altering the composition of the committee that selects the Attorney General in a way that enables its politicization, expanding the mandate of the Judiciary Ombudsman (whose appointment has already been politicized, as noted above) to include oversight of the Attorney General, and subordinating the Military Advocate General solely to the IDF Chief of Staff rather than to the Attorney General.²¹

Politicization of Israel Police

Subordination to the political echelon and intensified politicization of their purview directly undermines the Israel Police’s ability to function as a professional, independent, and impartial body.²² When political loyalty considerations and directives from the political leadership replace

¹⁴ Ariela Karmel and Jeremy Sharon, **Smotrich Vows To ‘Trample’ Supreme Court President in Blistering Attack*, *The Times of Israel* (29 December 2025).

¹⁵ Sarah Ben-Nun and Keshet Neev, **Coalition Leaders Call on Netanyahu to Disobey High Court, Block Ben-Gvir Firing*, *The Jerusalem Post* (13 January 2026).

¹⁶ Yuval Shany and Amichai Cohen, **Back into the Abyss: Israel’s Government Fires Attorney General, Supreme Court Blocks the Move*, *Lawfare* (19 August 2025).

¹⁷ Jeremy Sharon, **High Court Annuls Firing of Attorney General; Cabinet Ministers Urge Defiance of Ruling*, *The Times of Israel* (14 December 2025).

¹⁸ *Attorney General Law (Legal Opinions, Representation, and Oversight) 2026*, *Knesset National Legislation Repository* (13 July 2026).

¹⁹ Nili Aleksandrowicz, **Law to Neutralize Legal Counsels in Government Ministries: Seeks Subordination to the Political Echelon*, *Zulot* (20 July 2025).

²⁰ See Assistant Attorney General Gil Limon’s response to the proposal: *Draft Resolution on Amending Government Regulations, Office of Legal Counsel and Legislative Affairs* (25 January 2026).

²¹ Noa Shpigel, **Ministers to Debate Three Bills Curbing Attorney General’s Powers, Politicizing Legal Counsel*, *Haaretz* (11 January 2026).

²² Eitay Mack and Michal Evron Yaniv, **My Country Has Changed Her Face: Israel’s Regime Becomes Competitive Authoritarian*, *Zulot* (22 January 2026), pp 47–50.

professional judgment, equal enforcement of the law is compromised and the protection of vulnerable populations is weakened. For women, this means diminished ability to receive an effective response to complaints of domestic violence, sexual harassment, threats, and gender-based violence, as well as a growing sense of distrust in the system meant to protect them. This situation may lead to systematic under-enforcement of offenses against women, deter women from filing complaints, and deepen the cycle of violence. As will be detailed below, police conduct may in practice contribute to a rise in the rate of femicide.

Paralysis of Civil Society Through Promotion of NGO Law

The bill proposing to tax donations received by non-profit organizations from foreign state entities was in preparatory discussions ahead of its first reading when the Knesset dissolved, and therefore the continuity rule will not apply to it.²³ According to the proposal, an 80% tax would be imposed on donations received from foreign states, and NGOs would also be denied the right to file court petitions on any matter. It should be noted that state-funded non-profits would be exempt from this measure. The bill was intended to dry up the funding sources of civil society organizations critical of the government and to harm their right of access to the courts and freedom of association. Had the bill been enacted, some civil society organizations would in effect have been forced to close. An active civil society plays a crucial role in safeguarding human and civil rights and in balancing and limiting governmental power. It serves as a watchdog overseeing government actions, provides independent criticism of policy, and prevents excessive concentration of power in the hands of the authorities. Another important role of civil society is to give voice and representation to marginalized population groups.

The interests of women as a discriminated group, particularly of women from vulnerable groups, are often supported by civil society organizations: a wide range of NGOs dealing with gender equality, equality in employment, family law, support centers, efforts to combat domestic violence, advocacy for women denied a religious divorce, and the advancement of vulnerable populations such as Palestinian women, single mothers, women living in poverty, and others. The tangible assistance these organizations provide to women in situations where the state fails to provide the necessary support and services, and even imposes restrictions and institutionalizes inequality, is critical.

²³ Bill for Amendment of Non-Government Associations Law (Donation from Foreign Political Entity) 2024, Knesset National Legislation Repository (13 January 2026). For further discussion, see: Eitay Mack, **Amendment to Associations Law: Spells Elimination of Civil Society Organizations*, Zulat (19 February 2025).

In addition, many of the breakthroughs in the advancement of women's rights and change of their status in the public discourse have been spearheaded by NGOs. The bill was intended to harm some of these organizations to the point of bringing about their closure, thereby halting the provision of services, restricting criticism of the government, preventing legal advocacy to advance women's rights, and more. Furthermore, women's organizations have been identified in various places around the world as playing a significant role in the resistance to and struggle against populist governments seeking to undermine democracy,²⁴ which is why impeding their activity would also spell the suppression of protest against the regime revolution.

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To conclude this chapter, the continuing erosion of the foundational components of the democratic regime in Israel poses a real threat to women and may lead to a significant rollback of achievements attained after many years of struggle. The weakening of an independent judicial system and the restriction of civil society activity undermine the essential mechanisms for protecting women's rights and promoting gender equality. Without a strong system of democratic checks and balances, and in the absence of independent and professional oversight bodies, women are more exposed to discrimination, exclusion, and violations of their basic rights.

²⁴ Conny Roggeband and Andrea Krizsán, *Democratic Backsliding and the Backlash Against Women's Rights: Understanding the Current Challenges for Feminist Politics*, *UN Women Discussion Papers* (June 2020).

REDUCTION OF WOMEN'S REPRESENTATION IN POLITICAL AND PUBLIC SPHERES

The 25th Knesset brought about a sharp drop in the number of women serving as MKs: whereas 45 women served in the 24th Knesset, only 31 women were serving in the 25th Knesset when it was dissolved.²⁵ Similarly, of a total of 32 government ministers, only five were women.²⁶ In addition, not a single party or list slated to run in the next Knesset elections is headed by a woman. This rate has pushed Israel into the bottom decile of OECD countries in the World Economic Forum's 2025 index.²⁷

The number of women serving as directors-general of government ministries is extremely low as well. Only one woman was appointed director-general under the outgoing government, and not until April 2026. Moreover, while women constitute 64% of civil service employees, only 9% of senior management positions are held by women.²⁸

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In light of this situation, the Supreme Court accepted a petition filed by the Israel Women's Network over the lack of adequate representation as required by the Appointments Law and the Women's Equal Rights Law.²⁹ Following this ruling, in December 2025 the Civil Service Commissioner published a new directive mandating adequate representation in the civil service, but it is still too early to draw conclusions regarding its impact.³⁰ As for political representation in local authorities, only 16 are headed by women compared to 240 men,³¹ a situation unchanged by the 2024 elections.³²

Similarly, there has been a significant decline in women's representation on the boards of government companies over the past decade. While women made up 47% of board members in 2015, their representation dropped to 34% in 2025. In fact, in 2025, 31% of government companies had no women directors at all, compared to 17% in 2015.³³ In addition, an initiative to anchor in legislation adequate representation for women on the boards of public companies was rejected

²⁵ All Women Members of 25th Knesset by Alphabetical Order, *Knesset*.

²⁶ Israel's 37th Government: Composition of Current Government, *Knesset*.

²⁷ *Global Gender Gap Report 2025, *World Economic Forum* (11 June 2025).

²⁸ Jerry Almo-Capital, *Representation of Women in Senior Level of Civil Service*, *Knesset Research and Information Center* (3 November 2025).

²⁹ Supreme Court Case HCJ 1363/23 *Israel's Women Network v. Government* (published in Haaretz, 24 February 2025).

³⁰ Guideline No. 1.3: Modus Operandi of Appointments Committee, *Civil Service Commissioner* (25 December 2025).

³¹ Hagar Tzameret, Hadass Ben Eliyahu, Naomi Chazan, Hanna Herzog, and Ronna Brayer-Garb, *Gender Index: Gender Inequality in Israel 2025*, *Van Leer Jerusalem Institute* (2025).

³² Ariel Finkelstein, *Analysis of the 2024 Local Elections, *Israel Democracy Institute* (17 April 2024).

³³ Hagar Tzameret, Hadass Ben Eliyahu, Naomi Chazan, Hanna Herzog, and Ronna Brayer-Garb, *Gender Index: Gender Inequality in Israel 2025*, *Van Leer Jerusalem Institute* (2025).

and will not be included in the proposed amendment to the Companies Law, which was in preparatory discussions ahead of its second and third readings when the Knesset disbanded, despite the obvious justification for such a measure.³⁴ It should be noted that women's representation is particularly important in companies without a controlling shareholder, which are the focus of the proposed amendment, since in practice most of their shares are held by the public (in pension, provident, and investment funds).

This state of affairs has been compounded by the government's attempts and intentions to abolish the Recruitment Database, which lists potential candidates for boards of government companies selected through a transparent process that factors in the principle of equality. The Knesset Constitution, Law and Justice Committee has advanced a bill introduced by MK Avichai Boaron that seeks to bolster the government's say in the selection of directors, as well as to effectively abolish the Recruitment Database (in Orwellian fashion, the bill is titled "Expanding Representation and Diversity in Government Companies").³⁵ Not only could such an amendment harm proper administration and lead to the concentration of power in the hands of the government, but it could severely affect equality in the gender context. A situation where directors are selected by a small circle of powerful cronies is likely to harm adequate representation of women, as clearly reflected in the low proportion of women directors in public companies. This effect would be even more pronounced if power were to be concentrated in the hands of a conservative and anti-liberal government.

Despite the above, one caveat should be added on the question of adequate representation of women. Research conducted in Israel, the United States, and Germany indicates that anti-liberal conservative groups tend to include women representatives as a way of tempering liberal opposition and that these women may themselves promote conservative and anti-feminist policies.³⁶ Indeed, such a pattern would occasionally appear to characterize women MKs in the outgoing coalition as, for example, in the case of the Lobby for Religious and Ultra-Orthodox Women headed by MK Limor Son Har-Melech, which will be discussed below. Adequate representation of women is a value in its own merit, which reflects the status of women in society. However, it should also be remembered that such representation does not necessarily guarantee the protection of women's interests as a group.

³⁴ Tal Hilel, ["To Solve the Problem: Adequate Representation of Women on Boards of Directors of Public Companies Should Be Anchored in Law"](#), Zulat (5 November 2024). It should be noted that private members' bills seeking to anchor in legislation adequate representation for women on the boards of public companies were voted down by the coalition in July 2024 and March 2025. Another private bill on the subject was submitted by Yisrael Beiteinu MKs: [Bill for Amendment of Companies Law \(Quotas for Representation of Women on Boards of Public Companies\) 2025](#), Knesset National Legislation Repository (29 December 2025).

³⁵ [Bill for Amendment of Government Companies Law \(Expanding Representation and Diversity in Government Companies\) 2025](#), Knesset National Legislation Repository (21 July 2025).

³⁶ Julia Elad-Strenger, Lihi Ben-Shitrit, and Sivan Hirsch-Hoefler, ["Mainstreaming Democratic Backsliding: The Role of Gender Stereotypes"](#), *European Journal of Political Research* (7 March 2024).

GENDER SEGREGATION AND EXCLUSION OF WOMEN

The principle that "separate is not equal" has long been recognized in Israeli law, from which it follows that separation is considered a practice that violates the right to equality.³⁷ The liberal assumption is that separation inherently creates hierarchy and produces unequal distribution of resources between the separated groups. As part of an anti-liberal policy, the outgoing government challenged this principle and promoted legislative proposals and initiatives aimed at enabling gender segregation in the public sphere.

Segregation in Academia and Exclusion of Women Faculty

In July 2026, just days before its dissolution, the Knesset passed a law that significantly expands gender segregation and the exclusion of women in academia.³⁸ Before the law was enacted, gender segregation in higher education institutions was permitted only in undergraduate programs, under a 2021 Supreme Court ruling.³⁹ The new law, sponsored by MK Limor Son Har-Melech of the Otzma Yehudit party, permits gender segregation in any private or public academic institution that chooses to implement it.

Just days before its dissolution, the Knesset passed a law significantly expanding gender segregation and the exclusion of women in academia

The establishment of separate tracks may harm women's right to equality in employment, since under this format women would be permitted to teach only in tracks designated for women, while men would be allowed to teach in all tracks.⁴⁰ The sweeping legitimization of gender segregation in academia will facilitate its spread to other spheres, such as workplaces and vocational training, and may also channel women into "pink-collar" occupations.⁴¹ Furthermore, the law is expected to harm the academic standards and standing of Israeli institutions by prioritizing segregation over professionalism and excellence.

³⁷ In this context, see: Report of Ministerial Team Examining Exclusion of Women in the Public Sphere (Submitted to the Attorney General), Ministry of Justice (7 March 2013).

³⁸ Student Rights Law (Amendment No. 12) 2026, Knesset National Legislation Repository (13 July 2026).

³⁹ The Supreme Court's ruling in Case HCJ 6500/17 Yofi Tirosh v. Council for Higher Education (4 March 2019) allowed limited gender segregation, only within undergraduate programs and subject to ensuring women's right to equality in employment. For further discussion, see: Yofi Tirosh, *Thus We Were Segregated*, Berl Katznelson Foundation Publishing (2025).

⁴⁰ Rinat Benita, Nitzan Faibish, and Adi Cohen Aharonov, Academic Studies Under Gender Segregation, Knesset Research and Information Center (19 June 2025).

⁴¹ See: Knesset Education Committee Discussion: No to Gender Segregation in Academia, Zulat (21 February 2025).

Promoting higher education in the ultra-Orthodox community, especially for women, is an important value, but the cost of implementation is clearly unjustifiable. First, experience shows that segregation does not achieve the desired outcome. Despite the state's decade-long investment to encourage integration into higher education and the establishment of separate tracks, the results have been negligible and the rate of ultra-Orthodox individuals completing academic degrees has failed to meet targets, according to a State Comptroller's report.⁴²

Second, legitimizing segregation in the public sphere and harming women's rights to equality and employment is too high a price. While the rights of minority groups should be recognized in order to allow them to prosper, a viable democratic society cannot sanction harming its core values. Legislation of this kind would entrench a norm of separation and could create demand for segregated tracks even in sectors where this was not previously required (for example, in stricter strands of Religious Zionism), thereby expanding exclusion and discrimination.

It should be emphasized that the harm to women is particularly severe given that the right to equality in academia was achieved relatively recently, and the substantial gender gaps in appointments to senior academic positions are still far from having been closed.

Assault on Right to Equality in Women's Service in IDF and Security Forces

Against the backdrop of the public debate over a law to exempt ultra-Orthodox men from conscription, the stringent lifestyle of some soldiers from the Religious Zionist community who served during the war, and in the face of data released by the IDF Personnel Directorate showing that the proportion of women in combat roles has doubled since 2020 and that the rate of enlistment among religious women is rising,⁴³ coalition members launched a head-on attack on the subject of women's service in the IDF, as well as their right to dignity and equality.

Coalition members launched a head-on attack on the subject of women's service in the IDF, as well as their right to dignity and equality

A new directive recently issued by the IDF General Staff mandates the exclusion, and effectively disappearance, of women from the proximity of ultra-Orthodox soldiers.⁴⁴ This directive is expected to have implications for the advancement and integration of women in the IDF. It is

⁴² [Accessing Higher Education to Haredi Society](#), State Comptroller Report (May 2025).

⁴³ Yossi Yehoshua, [*Thousands of Women Take the Frontline as Combat Service Hits Record Highs](#), Ynetnews (14 January 2026).

⁴⁴ Aaron Rabinowitz and Yaniv Kubovich, [*IDF Formalizes Ultra-Orthodox Draft Policy With Gender Segregation, Barring Women From Some Units](#), Haaretz (3 February 2026).

part of a broader public debate that has emerged regarding women's service: actors within the coalition and their supporters frame women's service as an obstacle to ultra-Orthodox service in the IDF, among other things to justify their support for legislation promoting draft evasion.

In addition, a campaign is underway within the Religious Zionist community against women's service in the IDF, which Minister Orit Strock has defined as a "violation of the right to equality" of religious individuals. Not only women's combat service is targeted in this context, but any form of women's service is portrayed as a "problem" for religious soldiers. During a discussion in the Knesset Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee in January 2026, Strock argued that the very presence of female soldiers in officers' training courses violates the rights of religious male soldiers, and she even made the degrading and offensive claim that a religious soldier does not want to "find a female soldier in his shower."⁴⁵

An incident where dozens of Golani Brigade soldiers walked out of an event due to "women's singing" and the image of a woman displayed on stage exemplifies the changing reality on the ground. There have been sporadic instances of soldiers avoiding⁴⁶ "women's singing" in the past, but this time it was an in-your-face walkout by a large number of soldiers. What is even more troubling is the IDF's response to the incident, as the army spokesperson apologized to the soldiers without any reference to the obligation to prevent discrimination against female soldiers. It should be emphasized that leaving a venue during women's singing may harm women's opportunities to perform at cultural events in the IDF, beyond the problematic message conveyed by such a practice in disregard of women's humanity.

In this context, the open refusal of the new head of the Shin Bet, David Zini, to shake hands with women subordinates carries public significance.⁴⁷ In the past, religious men who held senior positions did not give such public expression to this religious observance. The accumulation

⁴⁵ Yitzhak Bialik, *Minister Strock Against Inequality: Religious People's Rights Lesser Than Women's Rights*, 04 (8 January 2026).

⁴⁶ Dvir Amar, **Yeshiva Students Walk Out of Tribute Over Women's Singing*, Arutz Sheva (11 January 2026); Ran Boker and Sheila Fried, *IDF Apologizes for 'Revealing' Clip at Lior Narkis's Performance; Singer's Entourage: 'We Were Not Forewarned, We Gave 300,000-Shekel Show for Free'*, Ynet (12 January 2026).

⁴⁷ Yehuda Dov, **Feminists Slam Shin Bet Head for Refusing to Shake Hands with Female Employees*, VINnews (18 January 2026).

of these incidents indicates a shift in the relationship between the security forces and the participation of women therein and raises concern about their status.

Bill on Fulfillment of Jewish Identity in Public Sphere Law

This particularly draconian bill, introduced by MK Galit Distel Atbaryan, passed a preliminary reading in late 2025 and was being prepared for its first reading when the Knesset dispersed, meaning that the continuity rule will not apply to it.⁴⁸ It grants the executive branch extraordinary powers to fire a person, impose fines, make salary deductions, and cut state funding at a minister's "sole discretion" if the latter believes that the aforementioned person (broadly defined as anyone in a position of authority in a public institution, including any NPO awarded a tax benefit under Section 46 of the Income Tax Ordinance) has interfered with "tefillin laying" or "prayer in the public sphere," and even designates such interference as a criminal offense. The bill also mandates affixing mezuzahs in all public institutions and requires all candidates for judgeships in various courts to pass a knowledge exam in Jewish law.⁴⁹ The bill was drafted and promoted by the Yachin Institute, whose declared aim is to promote a theocracy.⁵⁰

Beyond its authoritarian character, the bill has several gender-related aspects. First, the obligation to permit prayer everywhere, without limitation, coupled with severe sanctions against those who obstruct it, may lead to situations where women are effectively compelled to leave virtually any public space (public transportation, shops, event halls, restaurants, conference rooms, and workplaces) when a prayer service is declared to be underway. Second, Section 4 of the bill defines which types of prayer will be protected and in practice excludes non-traditional prayers, such as women's prayer, non-Orthodox prayer, services of Women of the Wall (organization fighting for women's right to pray aloud, with Torah scrolls and tefillin, at the Western Wall in Jerusalem), and the like. In other words, religious rituals in which women are actively involved would not receive the law's "protection," thereby effectively legitimizing the obstruction of such services. Finally, the bill expands the powers of the religious establishment and the applicability of Jewish law within Israeli law, with a range of gender-related implications.

The obligation to permit prayer everywhere, without limitation, coupled with severe sanctions against those who obstruct it, may lead to situations where women are effectively compelled to leave virtually any public space

⁴⁸ Bill on Fulfillment of Jewish Identity in Public Sphere Law 2025, Knesset National Legislation Repository (12 May 2025).

⁴⁹ It should be noted that the bill includes additional unconstitutional aspects, such as stripping the Supreme Court of its authority to review the law.

⁵⁰ Yoeli Brim, Pro-Theocracy Rabbi's Vision: 'Israeli State To Be Governed by Torah Law Sooner Than People Think', Reshet 13 (6 January 2026).

DECLINE IN WOMEN'S PERSONAL SECURITY

The personal security of women in Israel has seen a sharp deterioration in the past year. According to the latest data, 2025 was the deadliest year in terms of violence against women: 46 women were murdered, compared to 35 in 2024 and 32 in 2023.⁵¹ Of the victims, 22 were killed with firearms, in a sharp increase over 2024, when 13 women were thus murdered. This trend is directly linked to the government's policy of expanding the issuing of gun licenses and flooding the civilian space with firearms, as detailed below.

According to the latest data, 2025 was the deadliest year in terms of violence against women

Flooding Civilian Space with Firearms

Following the October 7 massacre, National Security Minister Itamar Ben-Gvir launched a comprehensive plan to ease the criteria for distributing firearms in Israel. As a result, the National Security Ministry issued gun permits on an unprecedented scale, bringing the number of licensed gun holders to over 300,000.⁵² In addition, in October 2024 the Knesset National Security Committee expanded the criteria for obtaining firearms, reduced the minimum training requirement, approved the automatic renewal of firearm licenses, and authorized the police to distribute weapons without any criteria.⁵³

At the same time, a bill to amend the Firearms Law submitted by MK Limor Son Har-Melech passed the committee preparation stage and was placed before the Knesset for its second and third readings.⁵⁴

This bill primarily seeks to change the policy under which security guards at private facilities are allowed to carry guns only during working hours. Grounded in the principle of minimizing the presence of firearms in the civilian sphere, this policy has been in place and enshrined in law since 2008 but may now be undermined, with women likely to pay the consequences. A second bill proposed by Har-Melech offers a modest improvement: it seeks to amend the Firearms Law enacted in May 2025 by granting social workers greater discretion to notify the Ministry of Welfare and Social Affairs when a gun license applicant is deemed dangerous and should be denied

⁵¹ Ran Shimoni and Josh Breiner, **More Guns, More Murders: 2025 Was a Deadly Year for Israeli Women*, Haaretz (15 January 2026); Hagar Tzameret, Hadass Ben Eliyahu, Naomi Chazan, Hanna Herzog, and Ronna Brayer-Garb, *Gender Index: Gender Inequality in Israel 2025*, Van Leer Jerusalem Institute (2025); Jerry Almo-Capital, *Women Murdered With Licensed Weapons*, Knesset Research and Information Center (2 February 2025).

⁵² Hagar Tzameret, Hadass Ben Eliyahu, Naomi Chazan, Hanna Herzog, and Ronna Brayer-Garb, *Gender Index: Gender Inequality in Israel 2025*, Van Leer Jerusalem Institute (2025).

⁵³ *National Security Committee Approves Regulations Easing Minimum Requirements for Obtaining Gun License*, Knesset (15 October 2023).

⁵⁴ *Bill for Amendment of Firearms Law (Reversing Default on Firearms-Carrying by Security Guards Nationwide) 2024*, Knesset National Legislation Repository (28 October 2024).

access to a weapon.⁵⁵ Nevertheless, in light of the growing presence of firearms in civilian settings, this proposed amendment remains limited and largely insufficient.

Indeed, as noted, the number of firearms held by civilians under license skyrocketed in 2024, rising by 48% compared to the previous year. The inundation of the civilian space with weapons amid inadequate oversight mechanisms dramatically increases the risk to women within the family and domestic sphere, where a major part of the lethal violence toward women occurs. To wit, in 80% of the homicide cases solved in 2015–2025 the murder was committed by a family member.⁵⁶ Empirical studies worldwide also indicate that firearm possession has a direct impact on women's safety within the home.⁵⁷ In this context, it is important to note that there has been a dramatic increase in the number of women requesting that their partners be denied a gun license: 90 requests in 2024 compared to 5 in 2023.⁵⁸

Policy on Combating Domestic Violence

Against the backdrop of the war in 2023–2025, the incidence of domestic violence committed by servicemen spiked and took on unique characteristics. According to a report by the Israel Women's Network, referrals to welfare services due to domestic abuse rose by 65%, alongside an increase in both the severity of cases and the length of women's stays in shelters.⁵⁹ At the same time, the number of domestic violence cases opened by the police declined, a gap that points to barriers in reporting and a lack of trust in law enforcement. The report emphasizes that exposure to combat, psychological distress, easy access to firearms, and the lack of adequate therapeutic responses for servicemen and their partners created conditions that increased the risk of domestic violence toward women, and that the

The inundation of the civilian space with weapons amid inadequate oversight mechanisms dramatically increases the risk to women within the family and domestic sphere

Exposure to combat, psychological distress, easy access to firearms, and the lack of adequate therapeutic responses for servicemen and their partners created conditions that increased the risk of domestic violence toward women

⁵⁵ Firearms Law (Amendment No. 26) 2025, Knesset National Legislation Repository (5 June 2025).

⁵⁶ Jerry Almo-Capital, *Data on Femicides 2015–2025*, Knesset Research and Information Center (24 November 2025).

⁵⁷ April M. Zeoli, Rebecca Malinski, and Brandon Turchan, **Risks and Targeted Interventions: Firearms in Intimate Partner Violence*, *Epidemiologic Reviews*, Volume 38, Issue 1 (5 January 2016).

⁵⁸ Tal Shalev, **Women's Rights Are on a Sharp Decline in Israel. Advocates Blame Netanyahu's Far-Right Government*, *CNN* (25 December 2025).

⁵⁹ Tomer Maron, *'Quiet Battlefield': Intimate Partner Violence Among Men Who Served in IDF During Iron Swords War*, *Israel Women's Network* (November 2025).

remedies in terms of mental health and couples therapy provided to reservists and their families were limited, temporary, and incommensurate with the scale and severity of the phenomenon.

Conceptual Shift Regarding Domestic Violence

Besides the impact of the war, the government's policy has been to avoid serious and effective engagement with the issue and to reinforce the erstwhile prevalent view that domestic violence is a sporadic private matter with no public or political dimensions. For example, the government decided not to join the Istanbul Convention on preventing and combating violence against women, in accordance with Section 106 of Prime Minister Netanyahu's coalition agreement with the Religious Zionism party, which stipulates that "the government will not accede to join the Istanbul Convention."

The Istanbul Convention, which asserts that violence against women and domestic violence are not "private" matters but phenomena that the state is required to eradicate through a comprehensive and integrated policy, is based on four principles: prevention, protection, prosecution, and monitoring. Since entering into force in 2014, it has been signed by some 40 countries, and more than 30 have ratified it.⁶⁰ The demand not to join the treaty as a requisite in the coalition agreement makes it plain that the government does not view gender-based violence as an urgent problem requiring a comprehensive response and reflects its priorities on the issue. At the same time, an amendment to the Domestic Violence Prevention Law enabling electronic monitoring of violent men was enacted in August 2024,⁶¹ offering added protection in cases where offenders are considered highly dangerous or likely to violate restraining orders. This important reform was initiated under the previous government and advanced under the principle of legislative continuity. However, changes introduced to the original version, such as an annual quota on the use of tracking devices, significantly narrowed its scope. Capping the annual number of ankle bracelets at 200 seems a puzzling limitation given the high volume of applications for restraining orders.

In addition, it should be noted that the narrative advanced by Minister Ben-Gvir throughout the legislative process was that false complaints by women were a major phenomenon, comparable in scale to the problem of domestic violence, and that his role was to strike a balance between the two. He wrote in a press release:

The narrative advanced by Minister Ben-Gvir throughout the legislative process was that false complaints by women were a major phenomenon, comparable in scale to the problem of domestic violence

⁶⁰ Reut Gelblum, "Fighting Violence Against Women: Support for Israel's Signing of the Istanbul Convention," *Zulat* (7 June 2022).

⁶¹ Domestic Violence Prevention Law (Amendment No. 19: Temporary Provision) 2023, Knesset National Legislation Repository (13 August 2025).

"The law will be balanced, between bringing to justice scumbags who hurt women and preventing harm to any man by means of a false complaint."⁶² In other words, the minister responsible for protecting individuals, including women victims of violence, reinforced the unfounded perception that women tend to make false accusations against men, characterizing such accusations as no less harmful than violence against women despite the absence of any evidentiary basis to that effect.⁶³ In any event, since the law came into force it has been used only sparingly, and by November 2025 only 39 electronic monitoring orders had been issued, a very low number relative to the incidence of domestic violence.

Violence Against Women and Government Policy Toward Crime in Arab Society

Femicide in Arab society has been closely associated with under-enforcement by the police, including failure to effectively collect illegal weapons. Since 2019, Arab women have accounted for more than half of all femicide victims (51%–59%), a proportion that far exceeds their share of the population. Moreover, the rate of unsolved murder cases in Arab society is markedly higher than in Jewish society (46% versus 9%, respectively).

These findings are undoubtedly linked to the scale of crime in Arab society and government policy on the issue. Crime rates among the Arab public, which had begun to moderate during the Bennett-Lapid government, surged during the tenure of the 37th government: the number of murder victims in Arab society totaled 220 in 2024 and a record 252 in 2025,⁶⁴ compared to 109 in 2022.⁶⁵ Most murders in 2025 were committed with firearms (214 cases),⁶⁶ which clearly demonstrates the impact of the proliferation of guns on rising violence and murder.

As noted, the surge in violence, crime, and homicides is the result of government policy. The outgoing government has repeatedly displayed its position that eradicating crime in Arab society is not among its interests or priorities. To wit, the special parliamentary committee for combating crime in the Arab sector has yet to be assigned a chairperson and remains inactive, Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich decided not to transfer equalization grants to Arab

⁶² Sivan Hilaie, *Despite Ben-Gvir's Demand: Ministerial Committee to Discuss Electronic Tagging Law on Sunday*, Ynet (15 March 2023).

⁶³ Nitzan Caspi Shiloni, *Conservatives and Their Opposition to the Struggle Against Domestic Violence*, *Deot* 102 (October 2022).

⁶⁴ Charlie Summers, **Arab Society Marks Deadliest Year on Record With 252 Murder Victims in 2025*, *The Times of Israel* (31 December 2025).

⁶⁵ **Homicides in Arab Society Continue to Climb*, Taub Center for Social Policy Studies in Israel (10 February 2025). See also: Jerry Almo-Capital, *Women Murdered With Licensed Weapons*, *Knesset Research and Information Center* (2 February 2025).

⁶⁶ Charlie Summers, **Arab Society Marks Deadliest Year on Record With 252 Murder Victims in 2025*, *The Times of Israel* (31 December 2025). See also: Ephraim Lavie, Meir Elran, and Mohammed S. Wattad, **Neglecting the Struggle Against Crime in Arab Society Is a Threat to Israel's National Security*, *Institute for National Security Studies* (26 June 2024).

local authorities in 2024,⁶⁷ and budgets for five-year plans meant to address crime were never disbursed. Under the cover of the war, budgets for Arab society were slashed at three times the rate of the across-the-board cuts in government ministries,⁶⁸ while in December 2025 it was reported that Ministers Ben-Gvir and May Golan planned to divert NIS 2.5 billion that had been designated for Arab society.⁶⁹ This deliberate neglect endangers the lives of innocent citizens, including women suffering from domestic violence.

Police Violence Against Women Protesters in Anti-Government Demonstrations

Another issue directly affecting women's personal security is the policy adopted by the Israel Police and the National Security Minister for the suppression of anti-government protests. A Zulat policy paper from November 2025 showed that women have been subjected to distinct forms of police brutality as part of the violent practices employed against demonstrators since the beginning of the public protest against the 37th government and the regime revolution.⁷⁰

An analysis of documented cases reveals gender-based practices that include sexual assault, humiliation and degradation, unjustified strip searches and forced undressing, as well as physical violence with particularly severe consequences for women due to the physiological vulnerability of the female body. These practices are not incidental but show a pattern of using gender-based violence to deter and suppress women's political participation. This violence affects not only its direct victims but also generates a broader chilling effect, discouraging other women from engaging in protests and public life for fear of sexual harm, humiliation, and injury. Women's personal security is thus undermined not only at the individual level but also collectively, as a social group.

An analysis of documented cases reveals gender-based practices that include sexual assault, humiliation and degradation, unjustified strip searches and forced undressing, as well as physical violence with particularly severe consequences for women

⁶⁷ TOI Staff, **Smotrich Reportedly Freezes Millions Earmarked for Arab Towns*, *The Times of Israel* (6 August 2023).

⁶⁸ Yuval Lekach, *Local Authority Heads Warn: 'Government Undermining Five-Year Plan for Arab Society'*, *Davar* (20 February 2025).

⁶⁹ Haim Rivlin, **Pillaging the Five-Year Plan: Ministers Seek To Divert Funding From Arab Society to the Police and Shin Bet*, *Shomrim* (3 December 2025).

⁷⁰ Nitzan Caspi Shiloni, **Gender-Based Violence in Demonstrations*, *Zulat* (27 November 2025).

STRENGTHENING OF RELIGIOUS ESTABLISHMENT

Expanding Authority of Religious Courts

In stark contrast to its stated rationale for limiting the authority of the judicial system, the outgoing government set out to vilify it and create a competing religious system by expanding the status and powers of the religious courts, even though religious law infringes on women's right to equality.⁷¹

We are talking about at least four pieces of legislation with clear gender implications aimed at expanding the powers of the religious establishment:

1. Arbitration in Civil Matters: The Religious Courts Jurisdiction Law (Arbitration) was passed by the Knesset in March 2026, during the campaign against Iran.⁷² The law grants religious courts (Rabbinical and Sharia) authority to adjudicate a broad range of civil matters – such as contracts, torts, corporate law, and certain labor-related disputes – through arbitration proceedings.

In principle, granting religious courts jurisdiction over civil matters effectively creates a dual and fragmented legal system, contrary to the modern law concept of a single body of law applying to all individuals. Furthermore, such a move will significantly and tangibly harm women's rights in the following ways:

a. Expanding women's exclusion from public roles, particularly judicial appointments: Women are altogether excluded from judicial positions in rabbinical courts (in Sharia courts, only one woman was appointed as a qadi in 2017).⁷³ The new law enhances the authority of these courts to henceforth also adjudicate civil matters, thereby expanding both symbolic and concrete discrimination against women in public institutions. It should be noted that according to Jewish law, women are not necessarily

barred from serving as judges, and certainly not from arbitration roles. However, the religious establishment in Israel takes a particularly strict interpretation in these contexts.

While seeking to limit the judiciary's powers, the government is expanding the authority of religious courts that undermine women's equality

b. Application of substantive and procedural law that discriminates against women: Under Jewish law, gender is a relevant category for applying different substantive and procedural rules. Among other things, women are at times disqualified from giving testimony, and monetary laws treat married women unequally. The new law does not expressly reject procedural rules that discriminate against women (although in principle it is subject to the

⁷¹ Nitzan Caspi Shiloni, [Populist Right Fights Judiciary While Promoting Religious Legal Establishment](#), *Haaretz* (18 November 2025).

⁷² [Religious Courts Jurisdiction Law \(Arbitration\) 2023](#), *Knesset National Legislation Repository* (23 March 2026).

⁷³ Hassan Shaalan, [*Muslim Clerics Spurn First Female Appointment as Qadi](#), *Ynetnews* (26 April 2017).

Women's Equal Rights Law, 1951), nor does it require the courts to refrain from discriminating against other minorities, including LGBTQ persons and Arabs.

c. Consent to arbitration under power imbalances does not reflect free will: Under the new law, the arbitration arrangement applies to litigants only if they have signed an arbitration agreement. However, it does not exclude cases involving unequal power relations, such as between employer and employee, where consent to arbitration cannot be regarded as an expression of free will. In addition, one provision allows an application for arbitration to be submitted to the court even without the parties' prior consent, after which the court secretariat may send the other party a notice stating that they may sign such an application. This ostensibly technical step may confuse people who receive an official letter bearing the State of Israel logo and lead them to mistakenly believe that participation in arbitration proceedings is mandatory.⁷⁴

d. Arbitration is inherently detrimental to the weaker party: Arbitration proceedings are not transparent; the ruling is not published and is unappealable in most cases. Unlike other arbitrations, the new law does not require a court to approve the arbitration award, thereby further increasing the religious court's power in these proceedings.

e. Arbitration proceedings at the expense of divorce-refused women: The rabbinical courts adjudicate divorce cases where women are trapped in unwanted marriages due to their spouses' refusal to grant them a religious divorce ("gett"). The addition of arbitration powers may increase the workload of judicial panels at the expense of the time devoted to the cases of these women, who already are victims of injustice.

2. Child Support: Amendment No. 6 to the Rabbinical Courts Jurisdiction Law (Marriage and Divorce) passed its second and third readings and was published in the official gazette on 18 November 2025.⁷⁵ This amendment alters the relationship between civil and Jewish religious courts with regard to family law in Israel and grants rabbinical courts authority to adjudicate child support even without the consent of both parties, subject to a "race for jurisdiction": namely, whichever spouse files first determines whether the case will be heard in a family court or a rabbinical court.

The amendment effectively overturns the Supreme Court's "Shragay Ruling," in force since 1969,

Jewish religious law applies different legal standards to men and women, including discriminatory rules on testimony and property rights. The new law does not prohibit such discrimination

⁷⁴ Nitzan Caspi Shiloni, *The Illusion of Choice: The Stories Behind the Decision To Expand the Powers of the Religious Courts*, *Israel Hayom* (24 March 2026).

⁷⁵ *Rabbinical Courts Jurisdiction Law (Marriage and Divorce) (Amendment No. 6: Temporary Provision) 2025*, *Knesset National Legislation Repository* (18 November 2025).

which held that rabbinical courts cannot adjudicate child support except with the consent of both parties. The rationale behind the ruling was that women might be coerced to waive child support in exchange for obtaining a gett. To protect children and keep them out of the divorce conflict, primary jurisdiction was granted exclusively to family courts.

The gender implications of the new law are therefore dramatic. Not only does it expand the power of a religious tribunal that excludes women from judicial roles and applies traditional and conservative policies, but it increases the likelihood of extortion of women in exchange for a divorce.⁷⁶

The change increases the risk of women being extorted in exchange for a religious divorce

3. Equal Powers for Rabbinical and Civil Courts Even After Divorce:

A draft law amendment initiated by the government and published by the Justice Ministry in July 2025⁷⁷ proposes to grant rabbinical courts far-reaching procedural powers currently held only by civil courts: enforcement of divorce agreements after a gett is granted, supervision over the division of property currently under the Bailiff Office, imposing restraining orders, adjudication of cases involving minors (outside divorce disputes), hearing appeals by Bailiff Office officials, and the authority to hear cases of third parties uninvolved in the divorce dispute. This would in effect elevate rabbinical courts to the same status and authority as civil courts across multiple areas.

The unique danger for women lies in their subjugation to a judicial system that does not uphold liberal values or recognize the right to equality

Beyond their exclusion from these tribunals, the unique danger for women lies in their subjugation to a judicial system that does not uphold liberal values or recognize the right to equality.

4. Establishing Jewishness: A draft amendment circulated by the Rabbinical Courts Administration in September 2025 proposes to grant these courts broad authority to establish Jewishness, which they do not currently enjoy under the law.⁷⁸ Some of the provisions may violate the rules of natural justice as well as fundamental principles of the legal system, such as authorization to include third parties whose case has not been heard by a court in a database of suspected "non-Jewish" persons. Such a law would disproportionately affect women, given that women are the subject of most proceedings to establish Jewishness and that Judaism follows a matrilineal principle.

⁷⁶ Nitzan Caspi Shiloni, *Another Step Toward a New and Dangerous World for Women*, *Ni2* (17 July 2023).

⁷⁷ *Memorandum of Amendment of Rabbinical Courts Law (Enforcement of Compliance and Procedures) 2025*, *Government Legislation Website* (30 July 2025).

⁷⁸ *Memorandum of Amendment of Rabbinical Courts Jurisdiction Law (Establishing Jewishness and Marriage Eligibility) 2025*, *Government Legislation Website* (30 September 2025).

Unlimited Appointment of Rabbis

An amendment to the Jewish Religious Services Law ("The Rabbis Law"), introduced by MK Erez Malul (Shas) and passed in January 2025,⁷⁹ allows for the unlimited appointment of rabbis and religious service employees at the discretion of the Minister of Religious Services, including the creation of new positions and the adjustment of rabbis' salaries. Although the opposition sought to condition the minister's decision on the consent of the finance minister, the final version of the law requires only consultation and does not mandate the latter's approval. The estimated cost of the law is around NIS 40 million per year.⁸⁰

To soften and perhaps even to "launder" public perceptions of the law, proponents went to great lengths to emphasize that the minister's authority would also include appointing and setting the salaries of female ritual bath ("mikveh") attendants. However, unlike rabbis who enjoy respectable salaries as well as political stature and power, these women perform a physically demanding, unprestigious, and low-paid job (supervising women during immersion and cleaning bathing facilities and restrooms). Moreover, unlike rabbis who under the new law may be appointed without any numerical restriction, the number of women bath attendants is limited to the number of existing mikvehs in local authorities, and there is no guarantee that the minister will choose to raise their wages.

Accordingly, beyond the fact that the law is designed to dish out jobs and salaries as the minister sees fit, thereby raising concerns about potential corruption, it also carries clear gender implications. It is likely to further entrench the appointment of men to prominent religious positions using public funds, thus deepening the relegation of women from public religious roles.

The class and gender dimension is further illustrated by another amendment to the Chief Rabbinate Law passed in December 2024 with regard to the body responsible for selecting the Chief Rabbis and the Chief Rabbinate Council (the so-called "board of directors").⁸¹ While the latter consists only of men, the selecting body comprises various groups (rabbis, heads of local authorities, politicians, and more), some of which may include women. The amendment set a 20% quota for women, slightly improving their representation in this body, but at the same time introduced a provision requiring that members of the "rabbis" category should hold formal certification from the Chief Rabbinate. The purpose of this provision is to exclude women, thereby circumventing a Supreme Court ruling requiring the Chief Rabbinate to consider the integration of women scholars and further entrenching the non-recognition of women's expertise as religious leaders and pundits.⁸²

⁷⁹ Jewish Religious Services Law (Amendment No. 27) 2025, Knesset National Legislation Repository (19 January 2025).

⁸⁰ Noa Shpigel, **New Law Allows Israeli Cities To Appoint Rabbis and Increase Salaries Without Restriction*, Haaretz (16 January 2025).

⁸¹ Chief Rabbinate Law (Amendment No. 8) 2024, Knesset National Legislation Repository (5 December 2024).

⁸² Supreme Court Case HCJ 7583/22 Bar-Ilan University's Ruth and Emanuel Rackman Center v. Israel's Chief Rabbis, Supreme Decisions (14 January 2024).

PROMOTION OF ANTI-LIBERAL PUBLIC DISCOURSE

Value Shift in Status of Right to Equality in Public Debate

In addition to reshaping formal norms through legislation and government policy, the outgoing coalition sought to cultivate a new public mindset where gender equality is no longer self-evident or universally viewed as an unassailable value worthy of protection.

The principle of equality, even if not always fully implemented in practice, has been perceived as part of the core values of the State of Israel. The basic guidelines of Israel's first government declared that "full and complete equality of women shall be upheld: equality in rights and duties, in the life of the state, society, and economy, and throughout all laws."⁸³ Accordingly, one of the first laws submitted to the Constituent Assembly was the Women's Equal Rights Law. Although the struggle to secure equal rights for women has persisted since the founding of the state, the path pursued by the outgoing government reflects a shift toward an anti-liberal discourse in which women's right to equality is no longer self-evident.

The outgoing government has shifted toward an anti-liberal discourse in which women's right to equality is no longer self-evident

Thus, for example, in her aforementioned attack on women's service in the IDF, Minister Strock positioned women's right to equality on an equal footing with the "right" of religious soldiers not to encounter women during their service. Similarly, segregation in academia has been framed as a "right to separation" and segregation in public events has been described as a "right to culture." Unlike in the past, when conservative actors relied on essentialist rhetoric and religious language, they now convey their ideas to the broader public through pseudo-feminist and liberal rhetoric, such as a group's right to self-determination or cultural rights. This language promotes a relativist discourse where the right to equality is on par with the "right to discriminate."

This value shift is also advanced through concrete proposals to weaken the protection of the right to equality. MK Simcha Rothman, chair of the Knesset Constitution, Law and Justice Committee, has promoted legislation under which rights not explicitly anchored in Basic Laws, such as equality, would no longer receive judicial protection.⁸⁴ Justice Minister Levin has likewise emphasized that the purpose of this legislation is to strip the courts of their authority to protect values and to transfer normative decision-making to the political majority.

⁸³ *Women's Equal Rights Law 1951*, Knesset National Legislation Repository (26 July 1951).

⁸⁴ Yuval Yoaz, *Rothman's Next Law: Even Basic Rights Such as Equality and Freedom of Expression Will No Longer Be Protected*, *Zman Israel* (24 February 2023).

Shift in Discourse on Sexuality and Women's Bodily Autonomy

The legal and social perception of sexual violence and of women's right to control their bodies, sexuality, and reproduction that developed in Israel, in line with feminist concepts from the 1980s onward, emphasized that gender oppression operates largely through regimentation of the female body, sexuality, and sexual power relations and is not limited to the denial of formal rights. The Prevention of Sexual Harassment Law enacted in 1998, an advanced piece of legislation by international standards, recognized sexual harassment as a violation of human dignity, equality, and women's autonomy.⁸⁵ This development reflected an understanding that sexual violence is not merely a criminal issue nor a private problem of the victim, but a structural and political phenomenon tied to gendered power relations, and that protecting women's bodily integrity and sexual freedom is a fundamental component of gender equality.

However, a regression in this discourse can be identified in the context of the regime revolution in Israel. One manifestation is the appointment of individuals suspected of sexual offenses to senior public positions, signaling tolerance toward offenders and undermining the norm that sexual violence constitutes a moral and public red line. For example, the appointment of MK Hanoch Milwidsky in November 2025 as Chair of the Knesset Finance Committee, despite being suspected of rape, undermines this norm. Although Milwidsky is still only a suspect and therefore presumed innocent under criminal law, criminal law is not the appropriate lens for public norms, particularly when it comes to a high public office such as chairing a parliamentary committee. When the government and the Knesset show indifference to the appointment of a person suspected of serious offenses against women, they effectively establish a norm that reflects societal values. This is especially notable given that in the past, society demonstrated less tolerance toward individuals suspected of sexual misconduct in the public and political arenas.⁸⁶

Alongside the normalization of sexual offenders in the public sphere, a conservative ideological movement is discernible seeking to reshape the discourse on women's bodies, sexuality, and reproduction, emphasizing values of purity, modesty, and childbirth at the expense of autonomy, bodily control, and the struggle against gender-based violence. The Lobby for Religious and Ultra-Orthodox Women, established by MK Limor Son Har-Melech in May 2023, aims to promote these values.

⁸⁵ Prevention of Sexual Harassment Law 1998, Nevo (last updated 26 January 2025).

⁸⁶ For example, the case of Yinon Magal resigning from his position as an MK following allegations by four women that he sexually harassed them. See: Lahav Harkov, "MK Yinon Magal Resigns From Knesset in Light of Sexual Harassment Allegations", *The Jerusalem Post* (30 November 2015).

This lobby advances a conservative discourse seeking to regiment women's bodies through practices related to reproduction and sexuality. For example, in early 2026 it promoted egg freezing procedures for single women, not as an expansion of choice but as a means of preserving a conservative family structure, and omitted any discussion about embryo freezing, single parenthood, or alternative family models.⁸⁷ The most extreme and even grotesque event staged by the lobby occurred in November 2025: under the title "Until Marriage," members of the lobby, activists, and rabbis discussed the importance of abstaining from physical contact until marriage and of unmarried secular women abstaining from sexual relations.⁸⁸

In addition, the lobby promotes the "right" to gender segregation in public and academic spaces and opposes women's military service. Its discussion of sexual violence has focused mainly on "nationalistically motivated sexual crimes," thus framing the issue as a national struggle rather than a universal gendered one.⁸⁹ Such context appropriates women's bodies as "national property," diminishes the severity of most sexual violence occurring within the group, and erodes feminist concepts of sexual harm as a structural and political phenomenon.

Taken together, the normalization of individuals suspected of sexual offenses in positions of power, alongside the promotion of a conservative discourse about celibacy, modesty, and reproduction, reflect a profound retreat from liberal gender values with regard to the body, sexuality, and sexual violence. It weakens recognition of women's autonomy over their body, erodes social norms of zero tolerance for sexual violence, and deepens gender inequality.

The normalization of individuals suspected of sexual offenses in positions of power, alongside the promotion of a conservative discourse about celibacy, modesty, and reproduction, reflect a profound retreat from liberal gender values

⁸⁷ Information About Fertility Preservation Must Be Clear and Accessible to Every Woman, Based on Transparent Criteria, *Knesset News* (6 January 2026).

⁸⁸ Eli Zilberberg, *Outlandish Knesset Debate: Sexual Abstinence Until Marriage, Initiators Claim to Be Restoring Profoundness*, *Hayom* (19 November 2025).

⁸⁹ Hezki Baruch, *Chilling Testimonies at 'Nationalistically-Motivated Sex Crimes Conference'*, *Arutz 7* (21 July 2024).

SUMMARY: AHEAD OF 2026 ELECTIONS

The dispersal of the 25th Knesset and the launch of the October 2026 election campaign mark the end of a period where unprecedented measures weakened the protection of women's rights in Israel. As this report shows, women's rights and well-being have significantly deteriorated under the 37th government due to, first and foremost, the transition to a competitive authoritarian regime, which undermines the independence of democratic institutions and the protection of human rights, including women's rights; the conservative and anti-liberal character of the coalition, which prevents adequate representation in public positions and around the decision-making tables; the surge of the religious-conservative component in the coalition, which led to legislation that discriminates against women, excludes them, expands the powers of religious institutions that are inherently unequal, and shifts liberal discourse toward one that seeks to protect a "right to discriminate"; and, finally, traditional and nationalist approaches that sideline women's safety and well-being within the family compared to protection from other types of violence.

The harm to women's rights described in this document is not an incidental side effect of security, political, or economic crises, but an integral part of the regime change advanced by the government. International experience shows that other countries that have shifted to a competitive authoritarian regime in recent years, such as Hungary, Poland, and the United States, have also seen a rollback in women's rights and a groundswell of a conservative-religious agenda seeking control over women's bodies and lives, as central components in the process of consolidating power and weakening democracy. In Israel as well, as this document demonstrates, the moves to expand the powers of the religious establishment, erode liberal values, reshape the public sphere, and deepen control over women's bodies and autonomy are not incidental to the regime change, but constitute an essential part of it.

Despite this connection, public opposition to the regime change does not always fully reflect the close link between authoritarianism and the rollback of women's rights. Moreover, in an era of militarization, war, and an urgent security agenda, there is a risk that issues relating to women's equality will be pushed aside, even by the opposition, ahead of the elections to be held in October 2026.

It should be emphasized that the upcoming election campaign will be taking place in a context fundamentally different from previous election cycles. Unlike in the past, when efforts at regime change were concealed or not fully revealed to the public, the upcoming elections will come after a long series of legislative actions, policies, and statements (some of which were outlined in this document) highlighting the extent to which both the nature of the regime and the liberal value system are openly at stake. The upcoming elections will determine whether Israel continues to be grounded in principles of equality, liberty, and human dignity, or deepens its shift toward a conservative, patriarchal, and authoritarian order.

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Against this backdrop, the fact that issues concerning the unique status of women are almost absent from the political and public debate is cause for concern.

This is compounded by the political reality within the party system itself. As of now, not a single party running for the Knesset is headed by a woman, and it appears that none of the major parties will place women's rights, gender equality, women's welfare and social concerns affecting their lives at the center of their election campaigns. The lack of female representation in political leadership, alongside the exclusion of gender and social issues from the election discourse, is not incidental but reflects the normalization of women's marginalization in politics.

In light of all this, Zulat seeks to place this correlation at the center of the public debate ahead of the elections: it is impossible to fight the regime change without simultaneously fighting the rollback of women's rights. Strengthening authoritarianism means reinforcing control over women's bodies and lives, and protecting women's rights means defending the very foundations of democracy.