

# 'I've already lived under Stalin!' Anti-government Protests Spread Across Israel

By [Gilad Meiri](#)

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It is worth noting that the protest movement in Israel described in the article does not in any way address the issue of the Rights of Palestinians.

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*As Wednesday marked a huge day for protests all over the country decrying the judicial reform, Holon is the latest city to join the list of local municipalities where people, waving flags and chanting aloud, are taking to the streets by the thousands.*

Up until now, Israelis, who wanted to make their disapproval of the government's judicial reform known, traveled to major cities like Tel Aviv, Haifa, Be'er Sheva or Jerusalem, but as the massive nationwide protests enter their third month, smaller municipalities are also having their say.

One such locale is the city of Holon, 190,000 strong, which lies just south of Tel Aviv and where thousands of flag-wielding adults, teenagers and toddlers all turned out Wednesday night, honking their horns, shouting slogans through their loudspeakers, playing their drums, singing songs, dancing or just standing in solidarity with the spirit of the demonstration.

Image: Elderly woman holding sign saying she's had enough of dictatorships back in Stalin's time (Photo: Gilad Meiri)



People showed up equipped with some interesting signs. An elderly woman carried a sign that said “I’ve already lived under Stalin”, evoking the Soviet despot in concern the reform might be a step toward absolving the government of all accountability.

A group of young women carried a sign bearing the inscription “They can take our lives, but they will never take our freedom!”, an iconic quote from Mel Gibson’s 1995 epic historical drama Braveheart.

Another sign addressed Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu directly: “Bibi, you’ll go down in history as the one who ruined Israel!”

The chants, much like the signs, were varied. Some simply shouted “Democracy” over and over while others chanted “havurat mushchatim lo tivhar et hashoftim”, meaning they won’t allow a group of corrupt politicians to pick their judges, eluding to one of the more polarizing provisions in the reform which would give the government greater control over the judge selection process.

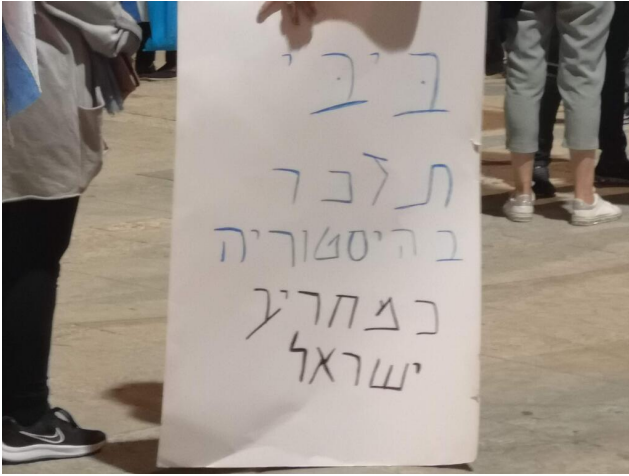
One of the reform opponents’ gravest concerns is that **Netanyahu would use it to reshape the judiciary in a way that would allow him to avoid his corruption trial.**

Shelly David is a 62-year-old Holon native who shares that concern.

“I actually made a sign that urges calm between both sides but my husband didn’t think it’s a good idea for me to bring it,” she said.

“I’m also a bit worried about the idea that Netanyahu is using it to get out of his legal trouble. I don’t have all the proof for this, but it is a concern.”

Image: A sign saying Netanyahu will be remembered as the one who ruined the State of Israel (Photo: Gilad Meiri)



Shelly Atzmon, a 37-year-old mother of two, was more adamant. “We can’t allow this reform to happen. We just can’t.”

What provision from the overall reform package bothers you the most?

“The fact that 61 Knesset members that have a political agenda are going to overrule Supreme Court justices? How can this be? We’re no longer a democracy if we just stand by and let this go on. This isn’t Syria.”

How do you respond to those who want accountability for the Judiciary?

“Don’t make me laugh. Their version of accountability is that they’ll use the status in the Knesset to make their interests the law of the land. That’s not accountability. I don’t trust any of them.”

Regardless of how you feel about it, do you think the reform will pass?

“I don’t know. The only thing I can say is that we’ll keep fighting to the end, and with some help from above, we’ll win in the end.”

And the protest seemed to also erode boundaries between left and right. Mordechai Kirilinsky, 67, is a proud Likud voter. “I’ve always liked Netanyahu.”

How many times did you vote for him?

“Pretty much every time he ran, including when he beat (former prime minister Shimon) Peres after Rabin was assassinated.”

So this really goes back a long time for you.

“Not just for me. My grandfather was in the Haganah (a pre-state Zionist paramilitary that served as a precursor to the IDF) and was a big fan of Menachem Begin. He wouldn’t have stood for this.”

Weren’t there signs before the elections that Netanyahu might be inclined toward supporting such a reform?

“You know what he once said? That the existence of a strong and independent judiciary is the key to all other institutions in a democracy. How could I have known he’d suddenly change his tune like that?”

A politician is a politician, right?

“Sure, but there has to be a limit. This is too big of an issue to flip-flop on.”  
Does that mean that in the next elections, you might vote for someone like Lapid?

“I’m disappointed,” he smiled. “Not insane.”

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*Featured image: Protesters waving flags in Holon (Photo: Gilad Meiri)*

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