

**In Defense of Democracy:
An Oral History Archive of the
Israeli Democracy Protest Movement**

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Introduction

If we are to understand the extent to which ordinary people are (or are not) responsible for democracy's undoing, we must analyze the connections between citizen action and regime breakdown. How were ordinary people acting when democracies fell on hard times?¹

—Nancy Bermeo

Citizens need to be trained as constitutionalists—to understand the point of constitutionalism, to recognize threats to self-sustaining democracy, and to care about defending liberal values. Liberal and democratic constitutionalism is worth defending, but first we need to stop taking for granted that constitutions can defend themselves.²

—Kim Lane Scheppele

Winston Churchill's famous statement, "Democracy is the worst form of Government except for all those other forms that have been tried from time to time," has become a cliché over the years, perhaps because, at the end of the 20th century, it seemed that liberal democracy had indeed assured its victory. However, at the beginning of the 21st century, the grip of the democratic idea in many countries around the world is slipping. "Given the right conditions, any society can turn against democracy. Indeed, if history is anything to go by, all of our societies eventually will," writes Anne Applebaum.³ It appears that such conditions have emerged on a large scale, as democracy has been increasingly contested across the globe over the past decade, leading to instability in the global geopolitical landscape.

We have seen clear examples of this process in Poland, Hungary, Belarus, Turkey, Brazil, Argentina, and Ecuador, among others. Recent years have also seen a rise in coups in African countries, such as Mali, Burkina Faso, Niger, and Gabon. However, this issue is not confined to low-income countries in Africa or Latin America, or to those with limited democratic heritage, such as Eastern European nations emerging from the Soviet regime. It also affects what is

¹ Nancy Bermeo, *Ordinary People in Extraordinary Times: The Citizenry and the Breakdown of Democracy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2003), 4.

² Kim Lane Scheppele, "Autocratic Legalism," *University of Chicago Law Review* 85, no. 2 (2018): 583.

³ Anne Applebaum, *Twilight of Democracy: The Seductive Lure of Authoritarianism* (New York: Doubleday, 2020), chapter 1.

considered “the greatest democracy in the world,” the United States. This thesis essay was written during the summer and fall of 2024, as the U.S. presidential election campaign was gaining momentum. Amidst extreme political polarization and escalating tensions, the former president and leading candidate, Donald Trump, made repeated statements suggesting a shift toward a more authoritarian approach.⁴ This has heightened concerns about the future of American democracy. With his presidential victory in November 2024, these concerns are naturally rising even more. This struggle for democracy is critically important given the influential role of the U.S., but it too is just one piece of a larger global puzzle.

Israel has not been immune from these democratic convulsions. In January 2023, its newly elected far-right government presented its overarching judicial reform, which would effectively transform Israel’s political system, reducing it to democratic majoritarianism. This approach, which has become increasingly common in the past decade with the rise of populist and autocratic regimes, views democracy as a system facilitated to enforce the majority’s will—often disregarding minority rights and protections, and risking a “tyranny of the majority.”⁵ This led to the creation of the Israeli Democracy Protest Movement, the largest grassroots protest movement in Israeli history and one of the most persistent in recent global history.

My thesis project for Columbia’s Oral History Program explores these events by creating an oral history archive of this protest movement. This collection covers the story of the past two years, which have been among the most dramatic and tumultuous periods in Israel’s history. In that time, Israeli citizens have witnessed their newly elected government attempting to undermine the country’s democratic system. A major part of Israeli society responded by consolidating an unprecedented mass movement, taking to the streets for 40 consecutive weeks to protest the

⁴ Here are just two examples as published in the media:

Jill Colvin and Bill Barrow, “Trump’s vow to only be a dictator on ‘day one’ follows growing worry over his authoritarian rhetoric,” *Associated Press*, December 7th, 2023, <https://apnews.com/article/trump-hannity-dictator-authoritarian-presidential-election-f27e7e9d7c13fabbe3ae7dd7f1235c72>; Michael Gold, “Trump Tells Christians ‘You Won’t Have to Vote Anymore’ If He’s Elected,” *The New York Times*, July 27th, 2024, <https://www.nytimes.com/2024/07/27/us/politics/trump-votes-christians.html>

A more substantial expression to this trajectory, with clearer goals in terms of government policy, is “[Project 2025](#)”. A product of the joint work of a broad coalition of conservative organizations, “Project 2025” is an extensive policy proposed agenda for the next Republican president, that would expand presidential power and impose an ultra-conservative social vision.

⁵ This approach often aligns with the concept of “electoral democracy,” which emphasizes the importance of elections as the primary mechanism of democratic governance, while not necessarily guaranteeing full democratic practices or protections. That is why having a majority is the fundamental factor for the ruling leader/party in such regimes. This could be a convincing majority, a majority by a margin, or, depending on the election system (such as in the case of the U.S., where the popular vote does not necessarily determine the winner), not even an actual majority. The essential thing is the ability to confirm with confidence the enactment of “the will of the people.”

government's actions. Then—partially owing to the rupture in Israeli society—Israeli public suffered the attack and massacre by Hamas terrorists on October 7th, 2023. This was the deadliest attack in Israel's history, and the deadliest attack on Jews since the Holocaust, with more than 1200 murdered and 250 people kidnapped to Gaza.⁶ The attack led to a protracted war in Gaza, resulting in thousands of casualties for Israeli forces and tens of thousands of deaths, as well as immense destruction, for Palestinians. Throughout this period, factions of the Israeli Democracy Protest Movement, in various configurations, have remained active in protesting against the government as its attempts to dismantle Israeli democracy continued.

Israel is a small nation with distinct characteristics and unique challenges. While this archive carries importance for documenting a period that will surely interest future historians due to its political and military impacts on Israel and on the broader region, its focal point—a grassroots movement struggling to maintain a democratic regime and promote democratic values—should be seen as part of the broader narrative of the erosion of democracy. This narrative will shape the global democratic order in the years to come, making it a crucial topic for scholarly investigation.

The Oral History Archive of the Israeli Democracy Protest Movement aims to contribute to the scholarly effort of understanding both democratic backsliding and strategies for resisting it through civil engagement. By conducting in-depth interviews with some of the Israeli protest movement's leading organizers, the project aims to document the movement's historical formation and activity and to analyze their methods of organization, the dilemmas and challenges they encountered, and the key factors contributing to the movement's achievements.

This essay introduces the archive by outlining its key components and summarizing my work. I describe the contents of the archive, including the narrators and the main topics they address; explain the methodology and decisions involved in my work; provide relevant background on the global state of democracy and its associated struggles, with a particular focus on the Israeli protest movement; and finally, discuss the discourses with which the collection engages, identify potential audiences for the archive, and explore potential themes for further investigation.

⁶ In late November 2023, Israel and Hamas signed a ceasefire deal in which 80 Israeli hostages (mostly women and children) were released in exchange for 240 Palestinian prisoners and humanitarian aid. In separate agreements, Hamas also released 23 Thai hostages, one Filipino hostage, and a dual citizen Russian-Israeli hostage. Over time a few hostages were rescued in IDF operations, and some hostages' bodies were found by forces and brought for burial in Israel. At the time of submitting this essay, in late December 2024, 100 hostages remain in captivity in Gaza.

About the Archive

This Archive includes over twenty oral history interviews. The interviewees are all leading figures in the protest movement, each representing diverse backgrounds and organizations, thereby providing a range of perspectives and approaches within the movement.

The interviews are comprehensive in both content and length, ranging from an hour and a half to four hours, with most averaging about two and a half hours. They explore interviewees' life histories as well as thoroughly examine their political activism within the democracy movement. I detail the structure and themes of these interviews in the Methodology chapter.

To keep the conversation as authentic and natural as possible, I conducted the interviews in Hebrew, the native language of both me (the interviewer) and the interviewees,⁷ primarily via digital platforms, Zoom or Riverside. This mode of communication was necessitated by logistical constraints, as the narrators were mostly located in Israel while I was based in New York City. However, it provided flexibility for meeting that in-person sessions might not have afforded during this time of ongoing emergency. Interviews consist of a video and audio recording. To assist users, I aim to produce in the future transcriptions in Hebrew and in English and to create an abstract for each interview, including a brief biography of the narrator and a summary of the main topics discussed.

Additionally, I compiled a metadata sheet, summarizing all relevant information about the interviews. This sheet is intended for the use of collaborating repositories, namely the National Library of Israel and the Judaica and Hebraica Collections at Stanford University, which will host and showcase this archive among their other collections.

The Archive's Historical Significance, Audience, and Relevant Discourses

Oral history projects often offer a glimpse into specific realities, shedding light on the socio-political conditions of their unique time and place and their impact on the people living through them. However, most events don't carry historical importance per-se, at least in the broad sense—that is, they don't affect and shape entire societies. Moreover, understanding what will come to be considered "historical" can be challenging while events are still unfolding, as the perspective of temporal distance is often needed for such judgement. In this regard, it is important to note that this project is quite an exception, as it documents events of national

⁷ The first two interviews, with Shani and Omer Granot-Lubaton, were held in English and in-person, as part of OHMA's assignments.

historical magnitude despite the fact that they only recently occurred. Since the movement's activity has not yet been formally documented by historians, and given its potential value for different audiences with diverse interests, I found it to be an ideal oral history project for me to take on as my thesis project in the Oral History Program at Columbia University.

I created this archive with a few key audiences and discourses, both academic and public, in mind. It engages and hopefully contributes to research on and understandings of Israeli politics and society, cross-national democratic backsliding, and grassroots movements:

1. **Israeli Politics and Society.** The Israeli Democracy Protest Movement (IDPM)⁸ is, regarded as one of the most significant and influential grassroots movements in Israel's history, notable for both its scale and achievements.⁹ Grappling with continued severe internal political rifts and threats to its democratic order, major security challenges, and unprecedented international criticism, Israel—in the post-October 7th era—now faces a historic crossroads, with existential implications. Given these circumstances, this period is likely to be of great interest to historians studying Israel and the region in the decades to come. This archive offers valuable insights into a critical aspect of this pivotal national and geopolitical moment. The archive discusses issues that Israeli society has been wrestling with over the past two years and, in some respects, for decades. Key questions include: What deep-rooted processes led to the political rift and the emergence of the movement? What does it reveal about the shared or fractured "Israeli story" and ethos? What were the impacts of the judicial overhaul attempt and the movement's response on Israeli society and politics? Additionally, how can we understand the government's significant failure to prevent the October 7th attack and to handle the subsequent crisis in

⁸ The term "The Israeli Democracy Protest Movement" refers to the collective of organizations and initiatives that participated in protesting the judicial reform in Israel from January to October 2023. However, this does not imply that it is an official name, nor that the movement should be viewed as a single, monolithic entity. Similarly, the acronym IDPM is my own (i.e., it is not in common use when referring to the movement within Israel) and is intended solely to facilitate reading throughout this essay.

⁹ As Adam Shinar notes: "Since its announcement on January 4, 2023, much ink has been spilled on Israel's constitutional overhaul. Lauded as necessary judicial reforms by its proponents, derided as a constitutional coup by its detractors, the constitutional overhaul has received much attention from scholars, journalists, think tanks, and civil society organizations, both in Israel and abroad. For about nine months, it was the most important policy issue amongst the Israeli public. It triggered mass demonstrations that persisted weekly and sometimes daily for over seven months, generating the largest civic mobilization the country has ever witnessed since its establishment in 1948." Adam Shinar, "Constitutional Overhaul, the War in Gaza, and the Puzzle of Civic Mobilization in Israel," *German Law Journal* 25 (2024): 1-21.

the context of the preceding year and the movement's critiques? Addressing these questions, among others, will be crucial for Israel's public and its historical record.

2. **Cross-National Democratic Backsliding.** Equally important as the specific Israeli context is the broader framework that situates the IDPM within the global struggle for democracy. Over the past decade, democracy has faced a global decline, marked by the rise of populism and autocratic legalism.¹⁰ This global trend, evident in countries such as Poland, Hungary, Turkey, Brazil, and to some extent, the U.S., as well as various other nations in Europe and South America, presents a significant and ongoing threat to pluralist democracies and also to international stability. As interest in this topic grows among scholars and journalists, the Israeli movement presents a compelling case study in civil resistance, potentially offering insights for a comparative study with other countries' democracy-focused civic struggles. Beyond academic circles, the archive could also be a valuable resource for activists and organizers confronting democratic backsliding in their own nations. Knowledge of this kind is often gained through the experiences of others; just as the organizers of the Israeli movement drew lessons from Polish and Hungarian case studies, others might benefit from examining the Israeli experience. While other struggles have been documented, none, to my knowledge, has been explored through oral history, and I hope this novel approach will meaningfully contribute to movements in other countries.
3. **Grassroots Movements.** Somewhat less particular than the first two frameworks, this perspective suggests looking at the archive as part of a body of work documenting grassroots movements, engaged in various social and political struggles of any kind, and specifically in relation to other movements' oral history documentation. Like similar works, the archive delves into the creation and evolution of the movement, its organizational structure and operational mechanisms, the profiles of its leaders, its goals, activities, internal conflicts, and achievements. This approach will be valuable to scholars interested in grassroots movements, even those not focused solely on democracy. An intriguing question to explore could be what specific factors are essential for a successful democratic protest movement compared to other types of grassroots movements. Additionally, the archive will benefit the IDPM itself and the participating narrators by providing a comprehensive record of their efforts.

¹⁰ I discuss this in detail on The State of Democracy chapter.

Methodology

Addressing the subjects discussed above involved grappling with numerous methodological questions. Here, I outline my primary dilemmas and the methodological decisions I made in constructing the archive. Some of these questions are likely common to any oral history project, while others are more unique to this specific study, due to its nearly real-time documentation, the limited historical perspective it offers, and the crisis context in which it was recorded.

Narrators

Like many other grassroots movements, the IDPM contained a diverse array of interviewees. At its height, the movement encompassed hundreds of thousands of people, and dozens of organizations with varying foci and locations across Israel.¹¹ Without a clearly defined leadership structure, even the core organizing circle could comprise many dozens, if not hundreds, of individuals (depending on definitions). This raised one of the project's main questions: Who should be interviewed? In other words, who can or should tell this story?

The first option could be taking a bottom-up approach, interviewing a variety of “ordinary people.” In *Ordinary People in Extraordinary Time: The Citizenry and the Breakdown of Democracy*, Nancy Bermeo explores the role citizens have in the face of democratic backsliding and breakdown:

The term “people” draws our attention to the individuality of the group’s membership and the adjective “ordinary” underscores the fact that they have no extraordinary powers vis-à-vis the state in which they live. They are neither politicians nor military officers. They spend most of their lives in personal endeavors—earning money, supporting families and pursuing whatever leisure activities their social status allows. They are the people who compose the vast majority of the citizenry in virtually every country in the world. Their sheer force of numbers makes them worthy of close attention—but what is most interesting about ordinary people is what they do in extraordinary times. What do they do when times get hard? How often do they abandon the normally exhausting pursuit of private security and comfort and take actions that contribute to forming a new political landscape with a new political regime?

¹¹ I expand on this topic in the chapter about the IDPM.

How often are they moved to defend democracy and how often do they embrace dictatorship instead?¹²

The IDPM mobilized individuals who had not been politically active before and managed—perhaps one of its greatest successes—to create and consolidate a new political faction, that of Israeli liberals (not necessarily defined by traditional left/right categories).¹³ Thus, it could have been both interesting and instructive to interview those who were not directly involved in organizing but were “minor actors” in the protest, simply involved in the protest and affected by it. Such interviewees could provide valuable insights into the enduring question of what motivates people to become politically engaged. Specifically, they could shed light on what drives individuals to not only support a protest but also take to the streets, or, conversely, what causes them to remain passive. Understanding the emotions that drive action—whether fear or hope—and how participation in the protest movement affected their lives, feelings, and political consciousness is highly relevant. This exploration is particularly significant in the current discourse on democratic backsliding, as it helps identify effective modes of resistance and strategies for confronting attempts to undermine democratic processes.

In a different approach, nearly every organization within the movement could warrant its own oral history project, delving deeply into its unique characteristics, organizational structure, decision-making processes, areas of focus, and challenges. While some similarities in operational modes might benefit from comparative analysis, foci, challenges, and conflicts varied greatly among groups such as the High-Tech protest organization, the Israeli Defense Force veterans/reserves organization “Brothers and Sisters in Arms,” and the academic scholars’ organization, to name just a few examples. Each group played a highly significant and unprecedented role in its respective field, and the involvement of all in the political sphere will likely have ripple effects that are worthy of further study.

However, since my primary goal was to create an archive that would be valuable both to scholars and to activists studying civil engagement in contexts of democratic erosion, I chose to take a top-down, wide-angle approach. Specifically, I decided to interview key figures—leading organizers, some of whom were founders and leaders of protest organizations, and others who

¹² Bermeo, *Ordinary People in Extraordinary Times*, 3.

¹³ This issue remains a subject of debate and will require historical perspective for deeper examination. Shinar claims that the post-October 7th reality in Israel, which has seen a decline in protests despite a continued and heightened threat to the rule of law and to individual rights, raises questions about the effectiveness of the movement in creating a long-term change. He writes: “Although the protests have been heralded as a consolidation of liberal values in Israel, doubts remain as to their success in instilling liberal values. In its quest for universality and consensus, the anti-overhaul protests largely bypassed real and deep conflicts in Israeli society, which resurfaced with vigor once the war began.” Shinar, “Constitutional Overhaul,” 2.

held significant roles in various aspects of the movement—who were able to provide an insider perspective on the consolidation and inner workings of the movement. In many ways, most of them can still be considered to be Bermeo’s “ordinary people,” but with the distinction that they are the ones who took on a more significant role within the movement, thus becoming “extraordinary.”¹⁴ Additionally, I sought to include a broad range of perspectives by interviewing narrators from different organizations and sectors within the movement, with diverse backgrounds and viewpoints. I hope this approach offers future users of the archive a comprehensive understanding of the movement as a whole.

Content

Once I established the defining characteristics of the narrators, questions arose regarding the content of the oral histories. This, in turn, prompted a few fundamental questions:

1. **Time Framework.** Defining a time frame is crucial for any historical project, involving the establishment of both a starting and ending point for the period in question. In this particular project, this task was especially challenging due to its unique characteristics, leading to a somewhat unsatisfying resolution. The starting point was theoretically straightforward: The announcement of the judicial reform on January 4th, 2023 by Justice Minister Yariv Levin, which sparked the protest movement. A more flexible approach might set the starting point at the elections on November 1st, 2022, which led to the formation of the far-right government that produced the judicial reform itself. I considered these two dates as foundational for understanding the movement as a whole, despite variations in specific organizational histories, a view shared by most of the narrators. However, for some interviewees, the story began much earlier. They had been protesting against Netanyahu and his governments for years, dating back as far as the 2011 Social Justice Movement protests (Israel’s version of the American Occupy Wall Street movement).¹⁵ The IDPM followed on several smaller protest movements starting

¹⁴ Bermeo touches on this distinction as she writes: “The political preferences of ordinary people are best assessed in private space, for the vast majority of ordinary people never mobilize in public space. Those who do use public space become, by their very actions, “extraordinary.” Whether they are so extraordinary that they no longer represent the majority of their fellow citizens is an empirical question with an answer that varies from case to case.” Bermeo, *Ordinary People in Extraordinary Times*, 6.

¹⁵ Benjamin Netanyahu was first appointed as Israel’s Prime Minister in 1996, shortly after the assassination of Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin. His first term lasted until 1999. He returned to power in 2009 and has remained in office since, with the exception of one year, from 2021 to 2022, when a unity government was led by Naftali Bennett. While Netanyahu faced significant criticism during his first term, major demonstrations against his

in 2016, and its infrastructure, according to many participants, was built upon the Balfour protests of 2020, which had called for Netanyahu's ousting following his indictments in three corruption cases—a mission in which they succeeded.¹⁶

Interviewees with backgrounds in these earlier protests provided valuable context and comparative insights into the 2023 protests. As a result, I extended the time frame to include these earlier years, despite their not being the primary focus of the study.

Determining the ending point posed an even greater challenge. I began working on this project at the end of September 2023, shortly before the October 7th massacre and the subsequent war. At that time, it was unclear what the ending point of the movement might be, or if an ending point even existed. As I write this essay, the protest movement is still active but has undergone multiple changes in its identity, focus, demands, and modes of operation since October 7th. This has led me to document these ongoing reconfigurations throughout 2024, and at the same time, while analyzing these changes' effects over the narrators and the movement's story, slightly adapt my interviews content as well.

Over time, my approach evolved to focus the archive and interviews on the democracy protest movement's activities up to October 7th, with a separate segment covering the period from October 7th to the date of the interview. While this method provides invaluable real-time documentation, in line with the crisis oral history sub-genre, it also lacks some historical perspective. Given the significant events occurring throughout this year, the timing of an interview had unique importance: Interviews conducted in November 2023 may portray a different reality and offer alternative insights compared to those from July 2024, for example. To address this, I begin each interview with an introduction detailing the date and the current state of the war and the situation in Israel. I hope this approach assists historians in understanding the specific context and conditions in which these conversations occurred.

2. **Professional/Personal Focus.** My main focus in the project is the protest movement as a whole—exploring how it was organized, what made it effective, and the barriers to its impact. However, its participants present another important area of study, raising highly relevant questions for future research that rely on the organizers' identities and personal experiences. For instance, who are the individuals who set aside all other

government began in his second term, in 2011, and became increasingly focused on him personally starting in 2016, following his investigations and eventual indictments on corruption charges.

¹⁶ This government, with Netanyahu as Prime Minister, was formed on May 17th, 2020, and was dismantled on June 13th, 2021.

concerns to dedicate themselves to a democratic protest? What are their backgrounds and how diverse are they? What motivates them to make such a commitment, and how does leading a protest like this affect their lives and worldviews in various ways?¹⁷

Generally speaking, when in-depth interviews focus on individuals' professional capacities, a common question arises: Should personal aspects be included, to what extent, and from what angle? In this case—one that might be seen as emblematic of a democratic protest movement led by “ordinary civilians”—the distinction between professional and personal boundaries becomes quite blurred. Most of the interviewees for this project—leading figures within the movement—had not been involved in political activism before the IDPM. That is, activism or protest organizing were far from their professional careers, fields of expertise, or points of interest. Moreover, since their involvement in the IDPM stemmed primarily from being “concerned civilians,” at a fundamental level, all their activities can be viewed as “personal.” However, during 2023, their activity within the IDPM, took over their lives. For many, it became not only the main focus of daily life but also a professional occupation and area of expertise. This, in turn, strongly impacted diverse aspects of what could still be considered their “personal lives” (including their regular jobs, family life and parenthood, social life, physical and mental health, daily routines and more). It was clear that this shift—where activism transitions from “personal” to “professional” and blends the two—deserves attention and examination.

With all of this in mind, I decided to include more personal information and introspection than initially planned, though it remains secondary to my larger focus. Each interview features an opening biographical segment where interviewees discuss their personal and familial backgrounds, and how they became politically conscious and active. In the main segment of the interview, concerned with the movement's activity, I also asked interviewees to reflect on how this activity impacted their personal lives and the emotions they experienced during this tumultuous period.

3. **Topic Foci.** Following the previous points, there still remained the question of what would be the main topics the oral histories cover and whether to adopt a specific framework for the interviews. Similar to many journalistic interviews, this involves the dilemma of whether to address a broad range of topics superficially or to delve deeply into a narrower set of issues (a little about a lot/a lot about a little). I decided early on that the primary goal of this project is not to serve a specific research agenda of my own but to establish a knowledge foundation for other researchers—particularly historians of

¹⁷ I will touch on this also in the segment on “The Protestors” in the Future Research chapter.

Israel, social and political scientists focusing on grassroots movements, and scholars studying democratic backsliding. With this in mind, I aimed to conduct interviews that are extensive and rich enough to provide for a range of perspectives and research possibilities.

The analytical framework I aimed for focused on the creation and operation of a grassroots protest movement, covering key topics such as: The movement's goals and role, its mechanisms and strategies, dilemmas and conflicts, and a reflective analysis of its impact (successes and failures). However, these interviews can be examined through numerous additional, more specific, perspectives and questions relating, for example, to identity, professional, and political background, among others. I will elaborate on these possibilities in the Future Research chapter.

Interview Approach

I joined Columbia's Oral History Program after working for many years as a senior content editor across various media platforms in Israel, particularly in radio. My journalistic schooling and extensive experience in media have significantly shaped my approach to interviews—encompassing their goals, structure, content, dynamic and rhythm. This project, however, presented an opportunity to explore and experiment in a field new to me that, while sharing some traits with journalism, differs notably in its objectives, methods and ethical considerations. As Mark Feldstein writes in his essay "Kissing Cousins: Journalism and Oral History": "Ultimately, the two have different purposes, different standards and norms, different techniques. Yet at the same time, similarities abound; both must grapple with parallel issues of empathy, ethics, and evidence. Like kissing cousins, with similar family roots and genetic material, they are related but separate; and each has much to teach the other."¹⁸

Starting this work required me to examine my professional perceptions and habits, and to determine how this project and its conversations could/should be distinguished from other projects, especially interview-based radio programs that I produced as a journalist. Added to this personal question was one arising from the broader media landscape context: With numerous podcasts and other media platforms interviewing some of the same narrators as I throughout the same time period, what would differentiate my conversations and what would be my unique added value.

¹⁸ Mark Feldstein, "Kissing Cousins: Journalism and Oral History," *Oral History Review* 31, no. 1 (2004): 1-22.

I will outline here some key-elements of my interview approach in this project, with journalistic/oral history differences in mind. To begin with, as I mentioned earlier, the **goal** of this project was to create an archive—a source of knowledge, with the specific means of oral history testimonies—about the protest movement. As such, my **desired audience** is not the general public, but rather a more targeted group, primarily researchers. Consequently, while the interviews should still be engaging and well-produced, there is no attempt to boost ratings by appealing to a wide listenership. Instead, I focused on presenting a useful resource for information.

Other characteristics derive from this main decision. Since I don't intend the project as a consumer product for a media platform, its **production value** could be somewhat negotiated. Without access to a professional studio, the technical aspects—audio sound and particularly video quality—may not be ideal. On the other hand, this approach allowed for greater production **flexibility** and the opportunity to record long-form conversations that would typically not make the cut in a standard journalistic setting, unless—excuse the pun—they would be cut. Here, unlike my usual practice, I left these interviews unedited to preserve **authenticity**, which is an aspect that oral history values much more than journalism.

Following this, since I did not design the project for immediate publication, there was more room and freedom in the conversations to explore topics in depth, without the pressure of addressing the current news cycle or putting effort in manufacturing well-defined/newsworthy headlines, which also contrasts with common media practices.

At the same time, despite these interviews being research-oriented and my attempt to lean-in to an oral history approach, applying some journalistic principles and methods seemed useful. I balanced broad, open-ended questions with more specific ones, offering space for the narrator's story yet pushing for concrete answers on significant issues. I tried to provide clarity and organization for listeners (even if it sometimes affected the flow), occasionally interfering with a question or a comment in order to explicate the context/time/place of a certain event or topic. And, most importantly, I sought to combine storytelling (facts) with analysis (interpretation). With this, each interview, and the collection as a whole, attempts to offer a more comprehensive and coherent chronicle of the democracy movement, constructing a narrative that may not yet exist and providing a reflective, critical account at a personal level, the movement's level, and the level of the state of Israel.

In terms of **authority**, an oral history approach views the interview as a collaborative process where both participants share authority,¹⁹ and, very much opposed to journalism, the interviewer is expected to follow the interviewee's lead to a great extent. I adopted this approach to a limited extent. As in the classic journalistic approach, I still came with the perception that I have the responsibility to lead the interview and guide the interviewee to the topics I perceived as valuable for researchers. However, in pre-recording conversations with the interviewees, I made it clear that this is a platform for them to share their knowledge and experiences as they see fit, and I encouraged them to steer the conversation and highlight what they considered crucial. This attitude seemed to have worked quite well, as it managed to effectively balance my research objectives and the interviewees' agency, resulting in a process that was both informative and respectful.

Another difference lies in the approach to **objectivity** and **criticism**. While I intentionally sought to challenge interviewees on key points that seemed crucial, maintaining an objective position and a highly critical stance was not a primary focus, as it would be in a traditional journalistic setting. Instead, I aimed to encourage them to share as much as they felt comfortable sharing, without attempting to catch them off guard or press too hard on issues they preferred not to discuss.²⁰

Finding a balance between these two approaches proved challenging. For a while, I felt the work was too journalistic for an oral historian and simultaneously too oral historic for a journalist. Ultimately, I believe I ended-up finding a sweet spot, blending elements of both practices and benefiting from the best of both worlds.

¹⁹ As Portelli writes: "The interview, then, is a historical and social event that creates a bivocal dialogical linguistic construct and wreaks significant changes both in the narrator and in the interviewee. [...] In the interview, we are the coauthors, the cocreators of a document that, to some extent, is about us as well as about the persons we interview." Alessandro Portelli, "Living Voices: The Oral History Interview as Dialogue and Experience," *The Oral History Review* 45, no. 2 (2018): 239–248.

²⁰ It should be noted that although this is not intended for immediate publication nor for wide distribution, since these events are quite fresh, and to a certain degree are still constantly unfolding, there are still certain behind-the-scenes details that the interviewees do not feel comfortable revealing (partially out of solidarity, and partially in order not to supply material to government smear campaigns and propaganda). I assume that conversations such as these—whether in an oral history or journalistic framework—held a decade or more from now, will open the possibility for more transparency on some specific issues.

Interview structure

Each interview in this collection includes three main parts:

1. **Personal/Political Background.** This segment, reflecting oral history’s “life history” approach, covers the narrator’s family background, early childhood, and personal and professional life chronicle. This part emphasizes the social/political values and the political awareness within each narrator’s family and biography, exploring questions such as: Was the family politically involved? Was it a politically conscious home? What shaped the narrator’s worldview during their formative years?

Additionally, it addresses any previous involvement in politics, protest, and activism—growing up and in adulthood. Since the democracy protest movement brought forth many organizers with little to no prior activism experience, alongside those with a long history of political involvement, it seemed important to explore when/how their political consciousness was shaped and whether they had previously participated in or organized protests. Depending on each narrator’s political or activist background, the interview may focus on earlier protests (particularly since some organizations active in the democracy movement were originally formed during earlier protest rounds, notably the Balfour protests in 2020).

2. **The Judicial Reform/Overhaul and the Democracy Protest Movement.** As the focal point of the collection, this segment serves as the “main course” of the interviews, covering the period from the November 1st, 2022 elections to October 7th, 2023. It traces the narrators’ chronicle of events—starting with their reaction to the election’s results, the formation of the far-right government, and the announcement on the judicial overhaul made by Minister of Justice, Yariv Levin, on January 4th, 2023, and the emergence of the protest movement. In this segment we delve into the formation of the movement, including its various organizations—some of which predated the movement and others that were established in response—and their activities. Key areas of exploration include:

- Why and how did they build/join the protest movement.
- Major events/specific anecdotes, that carry importance for the narrators.
- Political demands/strategic planning/messaging/movement dilemmas/conflicts/ collaborations between organizations.
- Criticism—within the movement/from its opponents (government/media/public).

- How did the political events/the protest affect narrators' lives during the nine months of the protest movement until October 7th, particularly the personal prices they paid.
 - Reflection on the movement—what were its achievements, was it a success/failure.
 - Key lessons for other democracy protest movements.
3. **October 7th and its Aftermath.** In the final part of the interview, I explore the impact of the October 7th massacre on each narrator, their organization, and the protest movement as a whole. The narrators describe the initial civil response following the attack, analyze the changes the protest movement went through over time ever since, and discuss its current objectives. The conversation concludes with a brief section on the future—their plans, hopes, and fears for the near and long term, as well as their level of optimism regarding the movement's goals and Israel's ability to overcome its current crisis.

Historical Background

The Judicial Reform

The judicial reform—the catalyst for the creation of the democracy protest movement, which would come to be defined and known by many in the Israeli public as “The Constitutional Overhaul” or “The Regime Coup”—is a legislative initiative promoted by the thirty-seventh government of Israel to make fundamental changes in the legal system in Israel.

The origin story of the reform and the movement starts with the elections on November 1st, 2022. The elections bring to power once again the Likud party, and its leader, Benjamin Netanyahu, after one year of absence in which there was broad coalition government—known as “The Change Government”—with parties from the political left, center, and right, and historically including an Arab party (Ra’am). With the major left-wing party, Meretz, slightly missing the electoral threshold, the right-wing camp received more seats in the Knesset (the Israeli parliament) than it would otherwise, creating a power map that did not reliably reflect the turnout and popular vote. Netanyahu, who was given the mandate by the president, Isaac Herzog, to form a government,²¹ built the most extreme government in all his years in office, and in Israeli history, by including Otzma Yehudit (Jewish Power)—a far-right, anti-Arab, party led by Itamar Ben-Gvir. This scenario was partially created by the fact that moderate right-wing parties refused to sit specifically under Netanyahu because of his legal indictments.²²

Netanyahu informed the president on December 21st that he had managed to form a government. The coalition agreements were finally signed on December 28th and the inauguration date was December 29th, on which the government was sworn into office. A few days later, on January 4th, 2023, Minister of Justice and Deputy Prime Minister Yariv Levin presented the judicial reform plan in a Knesset speech. Levin spearheaded the initiative, along with Simcha Rothman, Chair of the Knesset's Constitution, Law and Justice Committee, with the support of Prime Minister Netanyahu. The reform was intended to address the “discontent among right-wing, conservative, and religious elements” that “has been festering since at least

²¹ In the Israeli system, after elections, the president grants a mandate to form a government to the party leader deemed most capable of doing so, based on the number of parliament seats their coalition has won, thereby effectively appointing them as Prime Minister. Following this appointment, the Prime Minister has forty-five days to assemble a government. The Knesset must then collectively approve the cabinet members. This electoral system, inherited from the Yishuv (the Jewish settlement organization during the British Mandate), makes it difficult for any single party to secure a working majority in the Knesset, leading to the formation of coalition-based governments.

²² They asserted that they would sit under other Likud MKs appointed with the task of building a coalition.

the late 1980s,” as Shinar writes.²³ The source for this discontent was their impression that “the Supreme Court sought to increase its power vis-à-vis the legislative and executive branches, making it an ever more important actor in Israeli politics. The overhaul was thus an attempt to ‘restore the balance’ that was supposedly lost as a result of judicial aggrandizement, leading to a democratic deficit according to overhaul proponents.”²⁴

The reform consisted of five proposed changes aimed at reshaping the judiciary and the balance of power in Israel. These measures sought to reduce the judiciary's impact on legislation and public policy by curbing the Supreme Court's ability to conduct judicial reviews, giving the government greater control over judicial appointments, and restricting the powers of its legal advisors.

The gravity of these changes can be fully appreciated only when the limitations of the Israeli government system are considered. The Israeli system is a parliamentary democracy with a unicameral legislature. Unlike other democracies, Israel does not have an entrenched constitution (although it does have some Institutional Basic laws, which some see as the foundations for a constitution),²⁵ nor two legislative houses, a federalist structure, or a presidential veto—each of which could act to restrain the government. Despite separation of powers, in recent years the government controls the parliament *de-facto* through restrictive coalition agreements, which makes the Supreme Court the main agent in restricting the government and maintaining checks and balances.²⁶ For this reason, the suggested “reform” as

²³ Shinar, “Constitutional Overhaul,” 3.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ Although Israel's Declaration of Independence called for the drafting of a constitution “not later than October 1, 1948,” no formal constitution had been ratified by June 1950. Religious parties opposed any constitution other than the Torah, particularly one that might grant civil liberties conflicting with Jewish law. After more than a year of debate, the First Knesset reached a compromise on June 13, 1950. Known as the “Harari Resolution,” this compromise, sponsored by Knesset Member Yizhar Harari, established that instead of a single document, Israel's “constitution” would consist of a series of Basic Laws to be developed over time by a special committee and approved by the Knesset.

²⁶ As Shinar writes: “Being a parliamentary democracy, the government dominates the Knesset, making the Court a crucial brake on government power. And, unlike other jurisdictions, Israel has only one house of parliament, does not decentralize executive power, is not part of a supranational body such as the EU, and is not subject to any international tribunal such as the European Court of Human Rights. This makes the overhaul even more dangerous, as it consolidates more power in the executive, but with fewer restraints on that power.” Shinar, “Constitutional Overhaul,” 8.

viewed by legal experts as a dangerous and blatant attempt to give the government unlimited power.²⁷

The Major Components of the Proposed Judicial Reform

Formally, as mentioned, the judicial reform consisted of five major changes, concentrated on reshaping and restricting the judicial branch. Over time, some of these were altered or abandoned: “During the nine months since the plan was introduced, some elements of the plan changed, some were toned down due to public pressure, and others were temporarily abandoned, only to wait for a more opportune moment.”²⁸ At the same time, the government introduced additional plans and actions aimed at limiting different gatekeepers and political opponents and were considered part of the overarching reform. However, the following legislative components remained the reform’s core:

1. **Politicizing judicial appointments.** Changing the composition of the committee for the selection of judges, granting the governing coalition absolute control over the appointment of judges and justices to all courts.
2. **Undermining judicial review of legislation and prohibiting judicial review of Basic Laws.** changing the required majority in Israel Supreme Court for review on legislation; every law can be enacted as a Basic Law, which will immunize it from Judicial Review.

²⁷ Here are just two examples out of many warnings published by legal experts about the reform’s potential harm, from its initiation through the next nine months: On January 20th, 2023, two weeks after the announcement of the judicial reform, the “Israeli Law Professors’ Forum for Democracy,” an ad-hoc and voluntary group of experts on Israeli law, which includes a large portion of Israel’s academic law professors, among them prominent legal scholars—published one of many public statements in which they analyzed the reform’s proposed legal changes and concluded that it represents a “revolutionary regime transformation.” See: <https://www.lawprofsforum.org/post/the-revolutionary-regimetransformation-a-summary-opinion-5>. On January 24th, only a few days later, they published a public statement signed by 198 senior faculty members at law schools in Israel. In it, they wrote: “In aggregation, these proposals suffocate the independence of the judiciary, dissolve the separation of powers between the branches of governments, and eliminate the rule of law. No recognized democratic country in the world operates under such conditions. The combination of the proposed changes is alarming and dangerous. It will bring far-reaching infringements of human rights, and strip Israel’s system of government of fundamental features of its structure as a democracy.” See: <https://www.lawprofsforum.org/post/public-statement-by-198-senior-faculty-members-at-law-schools-in-israel>.

²⁸ Shinar, “Constitutional Overhaul,” 6.

3. **Override Clause.** A minimum majority of 61 Knesset members (out of 120) who vote for a law immunizes it from Judicial Review.
4. **Diluting judicial review of the Executive.** Canceling the Unreasonableness clause; no restriction to government appointments.
5. **Politicizing and weakening Attorney General.** Diminishing the role of the Attorney General; making government lawyers' opinions nonbinding; politicizing their appointment.

Additional Plans that Undermine Accountability

Although the attempted overhaul concentrated on the judicial system, it should be emphasized that this was only one of the spheres in which the government was seeking significant changes through highly controversial actions. Besides taking over the judicial system, the attempted transition from democracy to autocratic (hollowed-democratic) rule was carried out simultaneously in other channels:

1. **Strengthening the hold of politicians over the police.** Undermining the position of the professional level and politicizing professional appointments.
2. **Strengthening the hold of politicians over the military.** Undermining the position of the Chief of Staff and senior military officials, politicizing security issues, and altering the values of the Israeli Defense Force (IDF) to align with the government's agenda.
3. **Taking over the media.** Attempting to shut down the public broadcasting corporation, redirecting funds to a pro-government right-wing channel, and appointing politically favorable figures as executive directors of media channels.
4. **Taking over the centers of knowledge, research and information.** Promoting legislation that restricts academic freedom and pushing for the appointment of politically aligned figures as executive directors of the National Public Library, Yad Vashem, and the Central Bureau of Statistics.
5. **Restricting the activities of civil society organizations.** Imposing sanctions on their public-facing activities, limiting by legal manipulation their ability to receive donations, promoting smear campaigns against them, and threatening or attempting to shut them down entirely.
6. **Weakening/dissolving the government ministries and the public service.** Defunding ministries and public services institutions, eroding the position of professionals,

especially in influential positions, and mechanisms of internal criticism, and instead promoting the appointment of politically aligned figures.

The dangers of the government's plans are, according to the majority of Israeli legal experts, fatal: They would give almost exclusive power to the government; there would be no effective rights-protection, especially minority rights (women; LBGTQ; Arabs); they would open the door for high level corruption; and they would lead, almost by default, to democratic backsliding.²⁹

It is crucial to note that these channels of influence and the attempted changes within them are all part of the common playbook of the modern legalistic-autocracy overhaul attempt. The new autocrats, as Kim Lane Scheppele explains in her seminal essay "Autocratic Legalism," will maintain the overall facade of a democracy, while emptying the system of all of its essential components. She writes:

The new autocrats will therefore not look like your father's authoritarians who want to smash the prior system in the name of an all-encompassing ideology of transformation. Portraying themselves as democratic constitutionalists is absolutely essential to their public legitimation; what is missing in the new democratic rhetoric is any respect for the basic tenets of liberalism. They have no respect for minorities, pluralism, or toleration. They do not believe that public power should be accountable or limited. In short, liberalism is gutted by the new autocrats while they leave the facades of constitutionalism and democracy in place. Election opponents may be harassed with nuisance criminal charges, but they do not wind up in jail, or at least not for long. Civil-society groups may be defunded, but they are not closed by the government. The press that supports the opposition is not censored, but it may be starved of advertising and then bought out by oligarchs connected to the winners. The elections that keep the new autocrats in power are rigged in technical ways behind the scenes rather than through obvious tactics that can be spotted by observers, such as ballot-box stuffing. Through these nonviolent means, democracy is transformed into brute majoritarianism.³⁰

This is the point where the attempt to erode Israeli democracy meets the larger, global, framework, which I will touch on in The State of Democracy chapter.

²⁹ Some of these effects are analyzed in the public statement published by the "Israeli Law Professors' Forum for Democracy" on January 20th, 2023. See: <https://www.lawprofsforum.org/post/the-revolutionary-regimetransformation-a-summary-opinion-5>

³⁰ Scheppele, "Autocratic Legalism," 578-579.

The Democracy Protest Movement

The Israeli Democracy Protest Movement is a grassroots movement active against the thirty-seventh Israeli government's judicial reform plan, which protesters argue would grant unchecked power to the executive branch, effectively turning Israel into a hollow democracy and, in practice, a dictatorship. The movement, which organized mass demonstrations and various other disruption activities from January 7th until October 7th, 2023, is considered the largest in the history of the State of Israel. According to a July 2023 survey, about one in five Israelis, or approximately two million people, participated in at least one demonstration.

The protest erupted in January 2023, a few days following the announcement of the reform by the Justice minister, Yariv Levin, on January 4th. As Doron Shultziner writes, in "The Movement Against Democratic Backsliding in Israel":

Levin's dramatic announcement created new grievances and widespread protest motivation based on moral shock and anger. The concerns that many Israelis already had over the potential dangers of the new ultra-right coalition, headed by an indicted prime minister, have been too quickly realized by Levin's announcement. Common perceptions were that the coalition is turning democracy into the infamous "tyranny of the majority" by changing the rules of the game and tempering with the basic liberal-democratic norms on which Israel was established. Many Israelis felt that their basic values are being attacked by the government. The main chant of the protests was therefore "democ-ra-cy!". These common perceptions triggered immediate and widespread fears that Israel would not remain a democracy following such changes and therefore the terminology to describe it was that of "regime change," "coup d'etat," and "dictatorship".³¹

For nine months, the movement held protests across the country, with the main locations being Tel Aviv's Kaplan St. intersection (which gained it the nickname "Democracy Square"), the President's House and the Knesset in Jerusalem, and Horev Square in Haifa. By February 2023, demonstrations were held in approximately 150 locations across Israel, and the number of demonstrators reached hundreds of thousands weekly. In addition to weekly mass demonstrations, resistance to the reform took many other forms and were carried out by a variety of participants:

³¹ Doron Shultziner, "The Movement Against Democratic Backsliding in Israel," *Sociological Forum* 38, no. 3 (2023): 896-903.

When the full overhaul was announced, it was met with fierce public mobilization, which included mass protests, road blockades, including around the Israel's national airport, threats of strike, and even international pressure. Moreover, the protests were not limited to existing civil society organizations, but included the high-tech and finance sectors, academia, students, journalists, labor unions, new organizations established to fight the overhaul, and unaffiliated individuals. The scope, intensity, and duration of these protests was unprecedented in Israeli history.³²

Beyond opposing changes to the legal system, the protest also criticized the proposal to establish a National Guard under Minister of National Security Itamar Ben-Gvir, the ultra-Orthodox community's refusal to enlist in the IDF, the threat to women's rights, the government's attempt to shut or influence media organization, and many other related issues.

After 40 weeks of consecutive demonstrations, the October 7th massacre brought the protest to a halt. However, the movement wasn't dispersed from that moment on. Immediately on that Saturday morning, the movement's infrastructure quickly shifted to a civil effort focused on rescuing people, locating missing persons (many of whom were murdered or kidnapped), and assisting the attacked communities. Following this initial phase, which lasted a few months, the movement resumed protesting, although with different force, tone, and objectives. Initially, the focus was on advocating for a deal with Hamas to secure the return of the hostages, but eventually it expanded to include protests against the government, calling for elections and a state inquiry commission to investigate the failures that led to the attack.³³

The Movement's Structural Organization

As a truly grassroots movement, the democracy protest was decentralized and operated without a monolithic organizational structure. It encompassed over 200 different organizations and initiatives, with protests occurring in approximately 150 locations. Despite this decentralized nature, several key groups played a significant role in organizing the movement as a whole: A steering committee provided strategic guidance and fundraising; a central "Headquarters" organization, offered support in terms of budgeting, logistics, legal matters,

³² Shinar, "Constitutional Overhaul," 7.

³³ One of the significant questions that arise in my oral history interviews is whether the protest phases following October 7th are a direct continuum and could still be defined as part of the same protest movement, or whether it is an entirely different and separate story. The answers among narrators vary. Future historians looking into this period and archive might have a better perspective and insight on this point.

and public relations; and a few dozens of “leaders” — prominent organizers who coordinated among the various active organizations.

The steering committee, composed of prominent figures from Israeli society,³⁴ was established after the elections, in preparation for the new government's tenure and the implementation of its plans as outlined in the coalition agreements. As the movement came to life in January, it assisted mainly in strategic, political, policy and management consulting. Simultaneously, as protests were ignited, “The Protest’s Headquarters” organization was formed,³⁵ with the objective of providing support to the protest organizations that began to emerge throughout the country through three main channels: Fundraising, logistics and legal advice. Although the organizations were never subordinated to the Headquarters’ decisions, the Headquarters aimed to provide a framework for collaborative work and to develop a unified strategy for the movement. Functioning as the connective arm between the movement’s various entities, the Headquarters did not initiate activities on its own but focused on supporting field organizations. Its role included managing budgets, sharing information and coordinating between organizations, and assisting in facilitating local activities in various cities and towns.

The “Leaders’ Forum” comprises about 50 individuals, including staff from the protest’s Headquarters, leaders of the major protest organizations, and heads of protest communities in Israel’s major cities. Key organizations represented in the forum include “Brothers and Sisters in Arms” (IDF reservists), “The High-Tech Protest,” the women’s group “Building an Alternative,” “The Students’ Protest,” “The Academic Institutions’ Protest,” “The Parents’ and Teachers’ Protests,” the lawyers’ group “Black Robes,” the doctors’ group “The White Coats,” “Kaplan Force,” “Pink Front,” the “Yalla Tikva” content project, and various other prominent figures unaffiliated with specific groups. Most of these organizations have had a representative contribute to the oral history archive.

Depending on the events, the Leaders’ Forum would meet primarily to provide updates and coordinate activities. Additionally, several dedicated WhatsApp groups facilitate the exchange of information, including activity updates, discussions, and operational decisions. Crucially, the movement’s decentralized structure — unlike the centralized Social Justice Protest Movement of 2011 — allowed each organization, whether national or local, to operate independently without needing permission. The various forums primarily served to foster collaboration, provide consultation, and request support such as financial, logistical, media, and digital advertising

³⁴ It included, among a few others, the former Chief of Staff Dan Halutz, former Chief of Staff and Defense Minister Bogi Ya’alon, and former head of the Security Council, Amos Malka.

³⁵ The Headquarters organization was initially called simply “The Protest’s Headquarters”, *Mate Ha’Maavak* in Hebrew, and later adopted its current official name *Hofshi Be’Artzenu*, “Free in Our Land” in Hebrew.

assistance. Regarding the protest’s financing, which amounted to millions of shekels each month, the funds were sourced from three main channels: Widespread crowdfunding by Israeli citizens, significant contributions from major Israeli donors, and support from American Jewish donors.

The following network map sheds light on the IDPM’s widespread influence across various significant spheres of Israeli society. Shortly after the announcement of the judicial reform, many leading institutions and prominent figures—including academic scholars, economists, legal experts, entrepreneurs, and veterans—published public letters detailing the effects of the reform on their respective fields and warning against its potentially disastrous impacts. This helped explain to both the Israeli public and an international audience what is problematic about the proposed reform, while also solidifying the various affinity protest groups within each field, each with its unique focus and activities.³⁶



³⁶ Created by “[Restart-Israel](#)”, the Democracy Protest Movement’s unofficial website, documenting the government’s regime overhaul actions and the movement’s activities. This map was originally posted on January 12th, 2023, just a week after the announcement of the reform, and was later updated, during the months of January and February, to include more groups and institutions that published open letters and petitions. The map, therefore, reflects the early stages of the movement’s creation.

The State of Democracy

What we may be witnessing is not just the end of the Cold War, or the passing of a particular period of postwar history, but the end of history as such: that is, the end point of mankind's ideological evolution and the universalization of Western liberal democracy as the final form of human government. This is not to say that there will no longer be events to fill the pages of *Foreign Affairs's* yearly summaries of international relations, for the victory of liberalism has occurred primarily in the realm of ideas or consciousness and is as yet incomplete in the real or material world. But there are powerful reasons for believing that it is the ideal that will govern the material world in the long run.³⁷

About three decades after Francis Fukuyama declared the victory of liberal democracy in his influential essay *The End of History?*, the political reality of the 21st century made it clear that "the long run" Fukuyama predicted has run its not so long course. International organizations that measure the democratic level of countries all show the hold of the democratic idea in various nations across the world is weakening. According to the 2024 report of V-Dem, one of the leading organizations monitoring democratic state worldwide, the quality of democratic regimes has eroded significantly in recent years: "The level of democracy enjoyed by the average person in the world in 2023 is down to 1985-levels," and "Since 2009—almost 15 years in a row—the share of the world's population living in autocratizing countries has overshadowed the share living in democratizing countries."³⁸ Similarly, the *Economist's* 2023 Democracy Index states that the average global score of democracy has fallen to its lowest level since the index began in 2006. The report asserts that conflict and polarization drive a new low for global democracy, presenting the current state: "Less than 8% of the world's population live in a full democracy, while almost 40% live under authoritarian rule—a share that has been creeping up in recent years."³⁹ It should be noted that many countries are deteriorating in the ranking of their freedom and liberty indicators, not only countries whose democratic history is

³⁷ Francis Fukuyama, "The End of History?", *The National Interest* 16 (1989): 4.

³⁸ V-Dem Institute's 2024 Democracy Report: https://v-dem.net/documents/43/v-dem_dr2024_lowres.pdf

³⁹ EIU's 2023 Democracy Index: https://pages.eiu.com/rs/753-RIQ-438/images/Democracy-Index-2023-Final-report.pdf?version=0&mkt_tok=NzUzLVJJUS00MzgAAAGUPLCOHpi55mpEtsr3j1-YLhCtg1L3JMPvxBel1mphqx-6L8jo1Ut14x4SPjFot2nw5sCK50wyk2_1Q_GPB-4-Se9NRPPgTOfEIJGwm7vykGM3Sw

For a short introduction, see: <https://www.economistgroup.com/press-centre/economist-intelligence/eius-2023-democracy-index-conflict-and-polarisation-drive-a-new-low-for>

short, such as Poland and Hungary, but also older democracies, such as the United States, and India, which is considered the largest democracy in the world, as measured by population size.

Researchers point to a variety of factors that led to the retreat of democracy and accelerated its weakening: Globalization and its accompanying economic and human challenges; the rise of identity politics and the strengthening of multicultural perceptions; the digital revolution and the development of social networks and artificial intelligence technologies; the weakening of traditional mediating factors, such as political parties; and the difficulty of democracies in dealing with crisis situations.⁴⁰

“All of us have in our minds a cartoon image of an autocratic state. There is a bad man at the top. He controls the army and the police. The army and the police threaten the people with violence. There are evil collaborators, and maybe some brave dissidents. But in the twenty-first century that cartoon bears little resemblance to reality,” Anne Applebaum explains in *Autocracy, Inc.*⁴¹ The erosion of democracy is reflected in the transformation of liberal democracies into hollow democracies, which sanctify the principle of majority rule and ignore the essential aspects of democracy, such as equal rights and protection of minorities. The rise of populist regimes and the ascending popularity of authoritarian leaders also show the crisis in which liberal democracy lies. In many of the democracies, a parallel process of a fundamental change in the democratic “game rules” is evident, including the weakening of the democratic institutions, and especially the judiciary system; expropriation of powers from the hands of the legislative branch and the judicial branch by the executive branch; an attack on the gatekeepers—law enforcement and the media; and an open attack on the arenas of free thought and discourse, such as civil society institutions, academia, culture, and art. This often slow, gradual and ambiguous process poses a real challenge in confronting backsliding, as Levitsky and Ziblatt write in *How Democracies Die*: “Because there is no single moment—no coup, declaration of martial law, or suspension of the constitution—in which the regime obviously ‘crosses the line’ into dictatorship, nothing may set off society’s alarm bells. Those who denounce government abuse may be dismissed as exaggerating or crying wolf. Democracy’s erosion is, for many, almost imperceptible.”⁴²

⁴⁰ In 2022, I co-edited with Dr. Dana Blander an anthology of essays on the current state of democracy, written by researchers from The Israel Democracy Institute. This paragraph details some of the main causes described by the researchers throughout the book for democracy’s erosion.

מאיה גייר ודנה בלאנדר, עורכות, דמוקרטיה עכשיו: סוגיות ואתגרים במאה ה-21] *Democracy Now: Issues and Challenges in the 21st Century* [תל אביב: מודן והוצאת משרד הביטחון, 2022).

⁴¹ Anne Applebaum, *Autocracy, Inc.: The Dictators Who Want to Run the World* (New York: Doubleday, 2024), 8.

⁴² Steven Levitsky and Daniel Ziblatt, introduction to *How Democracies Die* (New York: Crown, 2018).

Given the increasing trend of democratic backsliding, particularly within the context of autocratic legalism, it is important to examine this specific form of governance more closely.

On the Authoritarian Regime of the 21st Century

Buried within the general phenomenon of democratic decline is a set of cases in which charismatic new leaders are elected by democratic publics and then use their electoral mandates to dismantle by law the constitutional systems they inherited. These leaders aim to consolidate power and to remain in office indefinitely.⁴³

According to Scheppele the most significant issue in this new form of authoritarianism is its attempt to still maintain a democratic facade, appearing as if no severe damage is being done to the democratic order. This new form of dictators—“Legalistic Autocrats”—presents a false representation of compliance with the law and pro-liberal arguments to achieve anti-liberal goals and it uses subtle methods of operation, trying not to arouse suspicion. These dictators:

- Pretend to be democrats as much as they can.
- Do not crush democracy openly: They continue to hold elections and rule based on the seemingly apparent democratic mandate given to them.
- Do not abolish state institutions, such as the parliament or the court, but change their purpose and function.
- Carry out anti-democratic coups by changing laws, institutional reforms and constitutional amendments, not by military force.
- Do not declare a rigid and extreme ideology—on the contrary—often their ideology is flexible according to the political need.

⁴³ Scheppele, “Autocratic Legalism,” 545. This sub-chapter relies on Scheppele’s already mentioned essay “Autocratic Legalism,” and its Hebrew translation. The essay’s translation was transformed into a short booklet, titled רודנות בחסות החוק (*Autocracy Under the Law*), which included an enlightening epilogue by Yonatan Levi, an Israeli scholar studying populism and social movements who presented an analysis on the Israeli case in light of Scheppele’s essay. This booklet was particularly influential for the protest movement in that it was created following the judicial reform/overhaul in Israel and was being sold in stands during the democracy movement’s protest rallies.

קים ליון שפלי, רודנות בחסות החוק [*Autocracy Under the Law*], תרגום מיטל שרון (ישראל: תלם – במה לשיחה פוליטית אחרת, 2023).

- Do not eliminate the entire opposition, but allow a limited number of political opponents to express themselves, in order to maintain the appearance of tolerance.
- Do not close all critical media or all civil organizations, but leave a few of them, but in a weakened form.
- Do not usually carry out mass human rights violations in an attempt to maintain public legitimacy, despite lacking respect for minorities or pluralism.

In her essay and lectures, Scheppele summarizes key steps in taking over the democratic regime, presenting the operational pattern of modern autocrats, which has been repeated in different countries over the past two decades, as an eight-stage list:

1. **Winning legitimately in democratic elections.** Unlike undemocratic seizing of power, as in coups, this victory is a consequence of a fair and free procedure in a democratic regime.
2. **Removing regulations on the government.** Once in power, the leader and his allies dismantle the mechanisms that limit the executive authority.
3. **Taking over the House of Representatives.** This is crucial for dismantling opposition and consolidating power—either by directly taking charge of the institution or by rendering it irrelevant.
4. **Subordinating the courts to the executive branch.** This takeover, which is also key for total consolidation of power, is done through alleged “reforms” and appointing people who are loyal to the government.
5. **Placing “loyalists” in key positions.** Such key positions exist in different arenas, all functioning as different gatekeepers, for example: The Attorney General, those in charge of the Central Election Committee, the members of the Committee for the Selection of Judges, etc.
6. **Taking over the media space.** While it may not be immediately recognized as part of the political takeover, establishing a media arena in which most of the platforms and institutions will align with the government’s messages—without criticism—is both significant and common.
7. **Delegitimizing opponents.** In a more direct effort to suppress dissent, restrictions are imposed on opposition parties and civil society organizations.

8. **Changing the election laws.** This final and crucial change is the most significant, as it seeks to guarantee victory in all future elections.

According to Levi's analysis of the Israeli case study using Scheppele's framework, stage number eight—changing the election laws—is the only section in the list in which the anti-liberal right in Israel has not yet recorded any significant achievement.⁴⁴ In the late months of 2024, Israelis have seen for the first time attempts at this direction as well. This framework is also useful in analyzing current events in the U.S.: After winning the elections, and even before his inauguration, President-elect Donald Trump operated in a manner that seems to align with some of this playbook, particularly with a clear agenda to appoint “loyalists” to key positions.⁴⁵

In correlation with this systematic pattern of deceit and pretense, Scheppele presents the unique difficulties for democratic societies facing backsliding by autocratic legalists:

- Civilians are educated and used to recognize signs of backsliding only when they are very clear; they are less trained to recognize more subtle methods of operation.
- Civilians tend to look for warning signs of tyranny relying on typical stereotypes, while the new autocrats mask these specific typical signs of tyranny.
- There is a tendency to ignore warning signs and consider dangers only when they actually occur.
- Courts often don't engage with minor human rights violations, while leaders intentionally avoid brutal tyrannical acts and mass violations.

Finally, Scheppele argues that citizenship education should include studying the new and relevant warning signs and strategies for countering them.⁴⁶ For instance, it should address when and how to trust the political system responsible for appointing judges, as well as why proposals to rewrite constitutional arrangements should raise red flags. She writes:

Those of us who work in the field of constitutional law have to stare into the face of the new autocracy to track in detail how it works. We need to learn to recognize the new signs of danger, which means that we need to get better at

⁴⁴ יונתן לוי, מבוא ל-רודנות בחסות החוק [Autocracy Under the Law], 73.

⁴⁵ See: David E. Sanger, Jonathan Swan and Maggie Haberman, “Want a Job in the Trump Administration? Be Prepared for the Loyalty Test,” *New York Times*, December 7th, 2024, <https://www.nytimes.com/2024/12/07/us/politics/trump-administration-loyalty-test.html?smid=nytcore-ios-share&referringSource=articleShare>.

⁴⁶ Scheppele, “Autocratic Legalism,” 583.

documenting the trouble cases and learning from them. Then, we need to educate others. Civic education needs to teach people to recognize the new signs of danger.⁴⁷

This notion, that combating democratic backsliding begins with attaining crucial and relevant knowledge, speaks to the mission of this oral history project—to support and contribute to this essential educational work.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

Future Research

As previously mentioned, this archive aims to provide a deeper understanding of the events that unfolded in Israel in 2023. It documents the attempt to undermine Israel's democratic foundations that would lead to a significant backslide and, mostly, the extensive campaign to resist these efforts. Additionally, it sheds light on the factors that contributed to the events of October 7th and explores its immediate aftermath.

By making this archive accessible to the public, I hope it will serve as a valuable resource for anyone interested in Israeli history or in the phenomenon of democratic backsliding. While it is primarily intended for academic study, it can also support activist efforts—especially since these often rely on insights from other case studies, while organizational knowledge is rarely preserved. Additionally, the archive can provide a foundation for journalistic and creative projects, such as podcasts and documentaries.

To achieve the archive's goal of preserving and making the interviews accessible to the public, I am collaborating with several professional repositories, including Israel's National Library, Stanford University's Judaica and Hebraica Collections, and the Hebrew University of Jerusalem Oral History Collections. To make the interviews more accessible, I have gained funding to transcribe and translate them into English.

This essay, functioning as an introduction to the archive, does not have the capacity for an in-depth analysis of its contents. However, I would like to briefly outline a few potential avenues for future research—topics and themes I believe researchers may find worthwhile to explore within the collection.

Potential Topics for Analysis

1. **Grassroots Movements.** The interviews provide an in-depth look at the Israeli Democracy Protest Movement, the largest grassroots movement in the country's history. This offers a unique opportunity to investigate the movement's establishment and organizational development, either as a stand alone study or compared to other grassroots movements. A relevant reference for such comparative analysis could be the expansive oral history project on the Act UP movement, established to fight for governmental and social recognition of the AIDS crisis in the U.S.⁴⁸

⁴⁸ Sarah Schulman, *Let the Record Show: A Political History of ACT UP New York, 1987-1993* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2021).

Key areas for exploration include:

- **Organizational Structure:** Examine how the movement developed its operational and decision-making mechanisms. This includes the interplay between the decentralized nature of the broader movement and the more hierarchical structures of individual organizations within it.
- **Strategic Development:** Analyze the strategies and activities employed by the movement, focusing on how these evolved over time.
- **Challenges and Dilemmas:** Identify the major challenges and dilemmas faced by the movement, assessing how these influenced its trajectory.
- **Interaction with State Institutions:** Explore the movement's complex relationship with state institutions, such as the government, parliament, Supreme Court, police, and the IDF. This mutually influential dynamic involved not only protests but also negotiation and occasional collaboration.
- **Factors of Success and Failure:** Investigate the key factors contributing to the movement's successes and setbacks, providing insights into what worked and what didn't.

This framework allows for a comprehensive understanding of grassroots movements, particularly the IDPM, and highlights the complexities of organizing for social and political change.

2. **Technology in the Service of Protest Movements.** Within this larger framework, an intriguing area for deeper exploration is the role of technology in protest movements. As Victoria Carty explains, the rise of digital technology and social media has had, unsurprisingly, a significant impact on contentious politics, just as it had on the organization and participation in social movements.⁴⁹ She writes: "In essence, the media ecology can either accelerate—or, conversely, impede—serious political discussion and debate, and ultimately facilitate displays of collective behavior. With new digital technology at their disposal, social movement actors have access to innovative media outlets that help nurture a new political terrain within which they can discuss grievances, disseminate information, and collectively make demands."⁵⁰ While much has been discussed about the influence of Facebook during the 2011 Arab Spring and the

⁴⁹ Victoria Carty, *Social Movements and New Technology* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2015), 3.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 5.

Occupy Wall Street movements, the Israeli Democracy Protest Movement presents a unique case where WhatsApp played a crucial role. WhatsApp, a widely used messaging app in Israeli society, was instrumental in the movement's development. It facilitated the spontaneous formation of many of the movement's organizations and became a vital tool for:

- **Infrastructure Building:** WhatsApp helped establish the organizational framework necessary for coordinating activities and efforts.
- **Communication:** The app enabled seamless communication between various organizations, fostering collaboration and information sharing; additionally, the app was a platform for discussion and decision-making for each individual organization.
- **Mobilization and Information Dissemination:** The app served as a powerful platform for mobilizing protesters, quickly disseminating calls to action and updates, ensuring that participants were well-informed about events and developments.

By examining the role and impact of WhatsApp and other social media platforms such as Facebook, X, and Instagram, on the activity of the IDPM, we can gain valuable insights into how technology shapes grassroots movements and enhances their effectiveness. However, this analysis can also reveal limitations of relying solely on such tools for developing a more robust organizational strategy.⁵¹

3. **Confronting Democratic Backsliding.** The interviews provide a deeper understanding of the unique challenges societies and protest movements face when confronting democratic backsliding. The archive makes possible an analysis that examines the Israeli case study alongside other democracy-oriented protest movements, such as those in Poland, Hungary, and Milošević's Serbia. Some of the leading Israeli organizers met with Polish experts early on to learn from their experience, while others testified that they were inspired by the strategies employed by the Serbian protest group "Otpor" after watching the documentary *Bringing Down a Dictator*, which chronicles their successful campaign from 1998 to 2000. As Levitsky and Ziblatt write, in a plea to Americans:

We must learn from other countries to see the warning signs—and recognise the false alarms. We must be aware of the faithful steps that

⁵¹ For more on this topic, see Micah L. Sifry, "WhatsApp and the Micro-Organizing of Israel's Protest Movement," *The Connector*, Substack, August 29th, 2023, https://theconnector.substack.com/p/whatsapp-and-the-micro-organizing?r=agmxs&utm_campaign=post&utm_medium=web&triedRedirect=true.

have wrecked other democracies. And we must see how citizens have risen to meet the great democratic crisis of the past, overcoming their own deep-seated divisions to avert breakdown. History doesn't repeat itself. But it rhymes. The promise of history [...] is that we can find the rhymes before it is too late.⁵²

In this context, key areas for exploration may include challenges faced, strategies employed, and impact on society. By investigating these elements, we can gain valuable insights into the dynamics of democratic erosion and the effectiveness of grassroots movements in countering it.

Additionally, an important avenue for further research is the uniqueness of advocating for democracy itself compared to specific policies. Understanding the distinct role of a democratic movement requires a different approach, as it involves the entire society. For instance, this situation often necessitates creating broad coalitions with ad-hoc agreements among otherwise opposing groups. This dynamic can shift the traditional activist paradigm: A right-wing populist government may pursue radical changes despite its conservative platform, while a politically progressive public is called to defend a conservative cause. This complexity demands a clear understanding of the movement's goals and the roles of its leaders and organizations. It also requires a willingness to compromise on certain issues while maintaining a steadfast commitment to non-negotiable principles, posing a significant challenge for activists.⁵³

⁵² Levitsky and Ziblatt, introduction to *How Democracies Die*.

⁵³ This "requirement" of a broad coalition in the face of threats to democracy has both benefits and costs. Shinar describes this dynamic in the IDPM's activity: "By choosing to focus on 'neutral' or 'procedural' values such as the rule of law or separation of powers without attending to their distributive outcomes, protest leaders could bring together under one tent disparate groups that differed sharply on substantive issues. The protests, therefore, were more about the "rules of the game" than the policy choices these rules generate." Shinar, "Constitutional Overhaul," 9.

Examples of this dynamic can also be found in American politics, with the endorsement and collaboration of Republican figures with the Democratic Party—surprising in any other scenario—during the 2020 and 2024 elections, in opposition to Donald Trump and "Trumpism." The activity of "The Lincoln Project" PAC, founded by moderate conservatives and former Republican Party members in support of democracy and opposition to Trump, is a prominent example. Similarly, Kamala Harris' campaign collaboration with Republican Congresswoman Liz Cheney in the recent elections aimed "to make a bipartisan appeal" and garner support from moderate conservatives. Whether this strategy has proven effective overall, and what the costs were, is a significant question that requires a case-by-case analysis. See: Colleen Long and Chris Megerian, "Liz Cheney helps Harris seek moderate votes as they paint Trump as a dangerous choice," *AP*,

Naturally, a key focus of the interviews was the significant “lessons” learned throughout the movement’s activities which could be valuable for other societies. In “The Movement Against Democratic Backsliding in Israel”, Doron Shultziner outlines several of these critical factors for the movement’s successful campaign: The establishment of resistance headquarters, direct pressure on politicians, involvement of army veteran volunteers, engagement of experts in the public sphere, favorable media coverage, and pressure from international actors.⁵⁴

4. **Professional Experts Groups in a Pro-Democracy Movement.** A more focused research effort could investigate the unique role and significance of professional protest groups within the Israeli movement and their contributions to the pro-democracy cause. This includes various organizations such as the Economists Forum, the Israeli Law Professors Forum for Democracy, the lawyers’ group “The Black Robes,” and the doctors’ group “The White Coats,” as well as protest groups of Hi-tech entrepreneurs, academic scholars, psychologists, and social workers.

These groups played a crucial role in leveraging their expertise to educate the public about the potential disastrous implications of the proposed judicial reform across multiple aspects of Israeli life. Their contributions include drafting professional papers, advising the opposition on relevant issues, signing petitions, holding teach-ins and participating in strikes. By examining these professional organizations and their activities, we can better understand the effects of democracy and its breakdown on various fundamental issues, such as health, economy, and education). This analysis also provides valuable insights into how specialized knowledge enhances grassroots movements and strengthens democratic advocacy.

5. **The Protestors.** Another avenue of research is analyzing individuals in key positions within the movement, focusing on their backgrounds—ethnic, economic, geographic, and, most importantly, political. This inquiry is relevant to the broader framework of political grassroots movements, as it seeks to understand what motivates a person to become an activist and a leader. As Nancy Bermeo writes in *Ordinary People in Extraordinary Time: The Citizenry and the Breakdown of Democracy*, common civilians haven’t received enough scholarly attention in the attempt to understand what leads to democratic collapse:

October 21st, 2024, <https://apnews.com/article/kamala-harris-election-2024-gop-c584f9860260f48ddff90ab2dca0433a>.

⁵⁴ Shultziner, “The Movement Against Democratic Backsliding in Israel,” 896-903.

What role do ORDINARY PEOPLE play in the making of popular government? What role do they play in its collapse? The scholarly community has given a great deal of attention lately to the drama of democratization but the spotlight has fallen most often on political elites. Though there can be little doubt that professional politicians, interest groups leaders and military officials play key roles in the creation and the maintenance of any democratic state, the role of ordinary people deserves close attention too. This is true first and most obviously because democracy is supposedly “rule by the people,” but it is also true because much of what elites attempt to do is conditioned by their judgments of how ordinary people will behave.⁵⁵

The Israeli Democracy Protest Movement, through these interviews, offers a case study for the crucial role citizens play in maintaining democracy. A closer personal background analysis is significant within the specific Israeli socio-political context and its identity politics, where the movement has faced criticism for being perceived as a privileged, leftist, Ashkenazi campaign, despite its actual diversity. Whether the movement was driven by Israeli elites, to what extent, if so—why, and what the implications were, are questions deserving examination. This analysis can include an investigation of the sectors in Israeli society that did not engage with the movement. Specifically, the notable absence of Israeli Arabs from participation in the movement, which has been a subject of internal criticism, should also be explored.⁵⁶

As previously mentioned, the democracy protest movement was unique in that it attracted many organizers with little to no prior activism experience and who were not heavily politically engaged. This presents another interesting avenue for exploration: How did their lack of experience serve as an advantage, freeing them from established biases, and when did it become a challenge? How did these newcomers learn to operate as activists, and what was the dynamic between them and more experienced organizers? It may also be worthwhile to examine how rising to prominence as leading activists—sometimes becoming well-known figures in Israeli society—affected their personal lives, especially given the public support and animosity they faced.

⁵⁵ Bermeo, *Ordinary People in Extraordinary Times*, 3.

⁵⁶ Shinar touches on this issue in his essay, pointing out that this was one of the main costs of protesting for structural issues rather than on substantial and concrete policies, and specifically those which are most contentious in Israeli society, such as the occupation. Shinar, “Constitutional Overhaul,” 9.

6. **Emotions, the Effects and Affects of Democratic Backsliding and Opposing It.** Related to the previous research focus could be the emotional dimensions of the judicial overhaul and the democracy protest movement. Recent years have seen a growing interest in the study of emotions, offering a valuable lens through which to view a society grappling with democratic backsliding. Emotions have also been previously explored in relation to protest activity, realizing the central and significant role they play in the process. Deborah B. Gould suggests in *Moving Politics: Emotion and ACT UP's Fight against AIDS* the possible insights such a perspective allows for:

[W]hat role do affects, feelings, and emotions play in generating, and foreclosing, political horizons? To get at questions of feeling and political (in)action, I analyze how political feelings are generated, sustained, and altered, or not; the ways in which power is exercised through and reproduced in our feelings; the processes through which ostensibly individual feelings take on a more collective character; and how affect, feelings, and emotions—individual and collective—articulate with more frequently studied factors that shape activism and movements (e.g., political opportunities, resources, ideology, frames). I explore as well a perhaps prior question: what are the processes through which the boundaries of “the political” are continually made, unmade, and remade, and the roles of affect, feelings, and emotions in those processes?⁵⁷

All these issues are acutely relevant for the creation of the Israeli Democracy Protest Movement and for the drive of citizens to participate in it. As Shultziner writes:

While anger is known as an emotion leading to protest, emotions such as anxiety, frustration, and helplessness tend to be related to inaction. Yet, in this case, many Israelis sought to alleviate those negative emotions by acting and joining protest initiatives. Protest not only became a source of direct action against a concrete political threat, but also an important therapeutic measure for people to cleanse their negative emotions, feel empowered, enhance self-efficacy, and regain positive self-esteem.⁵⁸

An even more concrete and recent research touching on this issue is the book *The Emotional Life of Populism: How Fear, Disgust, Resentment, and Love Undermine Democracy*.

⁵⁷ Deborah B. Gould, *Moving Politics: Emotion and ACT UP's Fight against AIDS* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009), 3-4.

⁵⁸ Shultziner, “The Movement Against Democratic Backsliding in Israel,” 897.

Here, Israeli writers Eva Illouz and Avital Sicron analyze why it is that emotions play such a central part in the relationship between citizens and their regimes, and what do feelings teach us about the global democratic erosion in recent years.⁵⁹ In Israel, as in other countries, a pressing question emerges: Why do political parties which do not hesitate to harm the well-being and rights of citizens receive such broad support? The answer, they suggest, lies in emotions, which can drive people to act against their own interests. They argue that the populist politics in Israel utilizes four specific feelings—fear, disgust, resentment, and love—thus making them dominant factors in shaping the political sphere. In this way, despite Israel’s unique geography and problems, it can serve as a representative example of the nationalistic-populist political trend gaining momentum worldwide.⁶⁰ In this context, the interviews in the archive reveal a spectrum of emotions—ranging from rage, fear, and sorrow to love, hope, purpose, and solidarity—toward the country, the government, Israeli society, and the movement itself. This emotional landscape provides a rich avenue for exploration. What is the emotional toll of democratic backsliding? Does engaging in activism foster a sense of optimism? How can a movement cultivate hope? These are important questions that warrant further investigation.

7. **The Prologue to/the Aftermath of October 7th.** The events of 2023, leading up to October 7th and its aftermath, will undoubtedly be remembered as one of the most dramatic years in Israel’s history, becoming a focal point for historians’ examination. The archive may be explored through this lens, providing a before-and-after perspective across all interviews.

The interviewees’ narratives illuminate how the judicial overhaul created a profound rift in Israeli society, contributing significantly to the circumstances surrounding the attack. As interviewees shared their personal reactions to the events of October 7th, and their immediate and long-term response within the capacity of the IDPM and its various organizations, future users—especially historians—will be able to reflect on how these events impacted Israeli society as a whole and specifically affected the protest movement’s ability to achieve its goals for political change.

Only time will reveal whether the movement succeeded in its mission to halt Israel’s deterioration and safeguard its democracy. However, these interviews offer an invaluable glimpse into the minds and hearts of Israelis during this critical post-October

⁵⁹ Eva Illouz and Avital Sicron, *The Emotional Life of Populism: How Fear, Disgust, Resentment, and Love Undermine Democracy* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2023).

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

7th moment. The participants' reflections on the movement—whether they view it as a success or failure—and their outlook on the future of the continued resistance, its dilemmas, and the future of Israel more broadly, serve as a testament to this intensely transformative period. Did they have any regrets about the movement's strategy or activities in light of October 7th? What changes in the movement did the events require? Can the impressive impact of the movement be consolidated into political power, and more specifically—transformed into parliamentary power? into parliamentary power? What are their hopes and fears about the future? All of these questions, which emerge in the interviews, may offer valuable insights for historians examining this pivotal moment.

These are just a few of the relevant perspectives through which to examine and analyze the movement's activity, appealing to scholars from different fields. As Shultziner writes:

The movement against democratic backsliding in Israel is a fertile ground for further research on protest motivation, strategies, tactics, and innovation, from multiple disciplines. This is also a classic test case for the interplay between social movements, public opinion, legislation, and decision-making. This case can also be studied in the context of liberal democracies facing democratic backsliding, as in Poland, Hungary, and recently in the United States under Trump. The Israeli case may join other success stories in which civil society managed to prevent and reverse democratic backsliding processes initiated by authoritarian leaders. Strengthening previous lessons, civil society must act quickly and decisively against democratic backsliding when it starts because reversing it after the fact is much harder.⁶¹

⁶¹ Shultziner, "The Movement Against Democratic Backsliding in Israel," 902.

Epilogue

We are living in a time that urges a new understanding of the democratic idea and a deep reckoning with the dilemmas and challenges facing democratic countries. For civilians wishing to safeguard their democratic regime, this requires a willingness to learn and become more involved. In *Autocracy Inc.*, Applebaum highlights the various and significant ways in which authoritarian rulers worldwide cooperate and learn from one another.⁶² To effectively resist such threats, a similar approach should be adopted by the global “democratic front,” because, as Levitsky and Ziblatt argue, opposing democratic backsliding is, in many respects, a global effort. This effort begins with learning from the experiences of other societies:

Studying other democracies in crisis allows us to better understand the challenges facing our own. For example, based on the historical experience of other nations, we have developed a litmus test to help identify would-be autocrats before they come to power. We can learn from the mistakes that past democratic leaders have made in opening the door to would-be authoritarians—and, conversely, from the ways that other democracies have kept extremists out of power. A comparative approach also reveals how elected autocrats in different parts of the world employ remarkably similar strategies to subvert democratic institutions. As these patterns become visible, the steps toward breakdown grow less ambiguous—and easier to combat. Knowing how citizens and other democracies have successfully resisted elected autocrats, or why they tragically failed to do so, is essential to those seeking to defend American democracy today.⁶³

It should be acknowledged that the necessary learning process isn’t simple, as it doesn’t provide ready-made solutions. The rise of illiberal forces in many countries over the past decade and a half has led to the emergence of liberal counter-movements. As Yonatan Levi analyzes, each country has its own unique socio-political conditions, making it difficult to identify universal mechanisms for combating democratic backsliding, especially since the battle has yet to be

⁶² She writes: “Instead of ideas, the strongmen who lead Russia, China, Iran, North Korea, Venezuela, Nicaragua, Angola, Myanmar, Cuba, Syria, Zimbabwe, Mali, Belarus, Sudan, Azerbaijan, and perhaps three dozen others share a determination to deprive their citizens of any real influence or public voice, to push back against all forms of transparency or accountability, and to repress anyone, at home or abroad, who challenges them. [...] Their bonds with one another, and with their friends in the democratic world, are cemented not through ideals but through deals—deals designed to take the edge off sanctions, to exchange surveillance technology, to help one another get rich. *Autocracy, Inc.*, also collaborates to keep its members in power.” Applebaum, *Autocracy, Inc.*, 9.

⁶³ Levitsky and Ziblatt, *How Democracies Die*, introduction.

decisively won anywhere. Consequently, determining what is effective remains challenging, and requires an ongoing willingness and ability to make adjustments. More than anything, this struggle demands stamina for the long haul:

It would be irresponsible to treat these (illiberal) movements as a passing phenomenon. Instead, they should be treated as representing an established political current—populist, nationalist and anti-liberal—that dealing with will require a long-term struggle. In the recent past, mainly due to the collective trauma of the Second World War, the anti-liberal right existed on the fringes of world politics; the goal of the defenders of democracy is to bring it back there. There is no exact winning formula at the moment. The whole world is now in the midst of this crisis, so formulating the coping methods is done through trial and error, by learning on the go. But the cumulative global experience of the past 15 years can offer us some important lessons.⁶⁴

This oral history project aims to contribute to this mission by providing a glimpse into what a governmental attempt to overcome its own democracy looks like and what can be done to prevent it—serving both as a warning and as a road map to successful resistance. Just as Israelis have learned from the case studies of Hungary and Poland, so could others benefit from studying the Israeli case. In an August 2023 article in *The Atlantic*, Susie Linfield discussed such lessons Americans can learn from the Democracy Protest Movement in Israel. These insights remain relevant today as Americans prepare for a second Trump presidency. She asserts that American social justice movements' current estrangement from democratic patriotism often casts the U.S. and the West as eternally burdened by an “original sin”:

The Israelis, in contrast, have unashamedly put themselves forth as patriots: They are organizing for the country, which means for their neighbors, not against it or them. They have seized the flag back from the racist hooligans who terrorize local Palestinians in Jerusalem in the annual flag parade. They have refused to be intimidated by the right's traditional accusations of treason. They have proudly declared that democracy *is* patriotism, and vice versa. In short, the Israeli movement is a model for what it means to despise your government but to love your country. It shows that creating a welcoming sense of civic identity—open to all who prize democracy rather than to an enlightened few—

⁶⁴ Yonatan Levi, “כך תנצח הדמוקרטיה הליברלית” [This is How Liberal Democracy Will Win], *Telem Magazine*, September 26, 2024, <https://telem.berl.org.il/11033>. My translation.

is the sine qua non of a mass movement. This is the Israelis' gift to us, and their lesson—one that I hope we can learn, not for their sake but for ours.⁶⁵

It is important to acknowledge that while this project is coming to an end—at least in its phase within Columbia University—the story itself is still ongoing. Since this project began in October 2023 and continues to the present day, significant changes have occurred in Israeli society. At this stage, it is impossible to fully assess the impact of the October 7th massacre and its aftermath on Israeli society and politics. Initially, many in Israeli society believed the horrific events would lead to a genuine reckoning and atonement process by the government and its supporters. However, it soon became clear that this expectation would not be realized. Despite the war, the Netanyahu government has continued to pursue its goal of transforming Israel's liberal democracy, using the chaos as a distraction and a shield.

While the government has abandoned transparent and official efforts to pass the judicial reform that sparked the protest movement, it has pursued its agenda through other means: Taking control of the police and the Civil Service Commission, undermining the judicial branch by refusing to convene the committee for selecting judges, and delaying the appointment of a chief justice for the Supreme Court. Additionally, there have been attempts to advance a politicized reform of the media market. As Levi concludes: "Therefore, the liberal camp must realize that nothing—not even a national emergency of historical proportions—will stop the anti-liberal right on its way to changing the face of the country. [...] Precisely now, when uncertainty is increasing and the temptation to give in to despair is greater than ever, the liberal camp must prepare for a long-term campaign for the survival of Israeli democracy."⁶⁶ With this in mind, it is still too soon to also determine the long-lasting impact of the Democracy Protest movement, and whether this new solidification of the liberal faction of Israeli society will succeed in fundamentally reshaping the political landscape. The challenge lies in transitioning from a mode of resistance to offering a positive vision for the future and gaining genuine political power in the Knesset and other critical civil arenas in Israeli society. What is clear is that while the movement achieved a significant victory in halting the judicial overhaul, the struggle over Israel's identity is far from over.

These are extremely difficult days for Israelis. For many, the present is terrifying, and the future feels uncertain and bleak. Imagining a hopeful future seems nearly impossible. Yet, creating an

⁶⁵ Susie Linfield, "Israel's Democracy Movement Has Something Important to Teach Us," *The Atlantic*, August 14th, 2023, <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2023/08/israel-democracy-protests-2023-netanyahu-occupation/674977/>.

⁶⁶ Yonatan Levi, "כך תנצח הדמוקרטיה הליברלית" [This is How Liberal Democracy Will Win].

oral history archive in such challenging times is, in itself, an act of hope. It requires imagination and faith—envisioning a future where this documentation holds significance. This endeavor embodies the movement’s spirit: A hopeful effort amidst despair, dedicated to the future. I hope that, regardless of what lies ahead, those who listen to these interviews in years to come will recognize the tremendous effort people made to preserve Israel’s democracy and identity.

Personal Note

In closing, it is important for me to highlight a personal aspect that was especially significant in creating this project at Columbia University during the current moment.

Following the October 7th massacre, there has been a sharp rise in anti-Israel sentiment and antisemitism worldwide. This has been especially true on American campuses, with Columbia at the forefront of an aggressive anti-Israel campaign in academia. In a time when the term “Zionist” has become a derogatory label—often used as a substitute for “Jewish,” shielding users from accusations of antisemitism—many who simply believe in Israel’s right to exist, whether Israelis or Jewish Americans, are silenced and vilified, most disturbingly within Columbia University and the OHMA program itself.

Amidst this environment, I found that the archive carries significant meaning beyond what I’ve discussed in the thesis. This collection of interviews showcases the diverse faces of Israeli society, highlighting the courage and solidarity of those struggling through great hardship to make it a better and more just place. It reflects the broad spectrum of political views in Israel, underscoring that Israelis—whether they define themselves as “Zionists” or not—are not a monolith. It also serves as a reminder that governments do not necessarily represent their people—at least not all of them. Through the personal life histories shared by the project’s narrators, the historical “Zionist Project” comes to life as the story of individuals from various backgrounds and circumstances coming together to create an independent democratic nation meant to end centuries of persecution. At the same time, Israel’s many flaws and profound injustices are also evident in the interviews. This complex perspective, which holds contradictions—as in any nation and society—is something that many today, both globally and within academia, seek to erase or distort.

While working on this project, I faced continued hostility and silencing, both within the university and the program. In this context, documenting and amplifying the voices of Israeli liberals became a source of pride for me, serving as a form of resistance against ignorance and hatred, as well as a way to support the movement’s activities by creating and preserving its historical record. Oral history aims to document firsthand human experiences, and, so, just as the archive stands as a testament to Israel’s persistent fight for democracy, let this final note serve as my own testimony to my experiences at Columbia University.

I would like to express my heartfelt gratitude to the project’s advisor, Prof. William McAllister, for his unwavering support, kindness, as well as for the invaluable insights and enriching conversations throughout this process. I would also like to thank Dr. Dana Blander from The

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Appendix

The Narrators (in alphabetical order)

- **Prof. Itai Ater.** Founder and leader of “The Economists Forum,” the protest organization of economists, and co-leader of the “Academia Protest,” the protest organization of scholars from across Israel’s academic institutions. Ater is a professor of business economics and strategy at the Coller School of Management at Tel Aviv University.
- **Or-ly Barlev.** An independent journalist and activist. She is an on-the-ground reporter for the Democracy Protest Movement and one of its leading public-facing figures. Barlev has been reporting independently and actively opposing government corruption since the Social Justice Protest Movement of 2011.
- **Dr. Rani Barnea.** A leader and co-founder of “The White Coats” (*Ha’Halukim Ha’Levanim*), the protest organization of physicians and healthcare workers. He is a neurologist in the vascular neurology unit and the director of the Stroke Prevention Center at Beilinson Hospital.
- **Ami Dror.** One of the Democracy Protest Movement’s leading organizers and figures. As an independent organizer, he operates WhatsApp groups with tens of thousands of followers. Dror is a businessman and entrepreneur in the field of education, and he lectures on leadership in the Aspen institute.
- **Nadav Galon.** A leading figure in the democracy protest movement’s “Headquarters,” and co-founder of the protest group “Kaplan Power” (*Koach Kaplan*). A prominent political advisor and strategist, Galon was also a key figure in the “Crime Minister” movement and the Balfour protests of 2020.
- **Shany Granot-Lubaton.** Founder and leader of the NYC branch of “UnXeptable,” a grassroots movement protesting for Israeli democracy—the largest protest community outside of Israel. Following October 7th, she co-founded “The Hostages Families Forum” in NYC. She was previously the chief-of-staff and spokesperson of the former head of the labor party, MK Shelly Yechimovich, and deputy-director of the “Darkenu” movement.
- **Offir Gutelzon.** Founder and leader of “UnXeptable,” a grassroots movement launched in 2020 by a group of Israelis residing in the San Francisco-Bay Area in support of Israeli

democracy. The movement operates as the international arm of the democracy protest movement, with branches worldwide. Gutelzon is the primary organizer of the protests in the Silicon Valley/San Francisco region. He is a High-Tech entrepreneur.

- **Ishay Hadas.** A political activist, co-founder and co-leader of the “New Contract” (*Hoze Hadash*) movement, better known as the “Crime Minister” movement. The movement has been protesting against Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu since 2018 and was a key organizer of the Balfour protests in 2020. Hadas is a commercial and television producer.
- **Offer Lapidot.** Co-founder and co-leader of “Group 555,” the protest group of IDF’s pilots, and a leading organizer, in charge of special operations, in the Democracy Protest Movement’s “Headquarters.” Lapidot is a reserve pilot and lieutenant colonel in the IDF. He served as commander of the IDF’s flight school and Ramon base and was head of the Planning and Organization Department in the Air Force.
- **Dr. Ronit Levine-Schnur.** Founder and leader of “The Israeli Law Professors’ Forum for Democracy,” an organization of legal scholars from across Israel’s academic institutions, which played a key role in disseminating legal knowledge about the government’s judicial overhaul. Levine-Schnur is a Senior Lecturer at the Tel Aviv University Faculty of Law and, following October 7th, has founded “The Day After the War Forum.”
- **Omer Lubaton-Granot.** Leading Organizer of the NYC Branch of the NYC Branch of “UnXeptable,” a grassroots movement protesting for Israeli democracy—the largest protest community outside of Israel. Following October 7th, he co-founded “The Hostages Families Forum” in NYC. He was previously the chief-of-staff and spokesperson of MK Stav Shaffir and a public policy strategist and campaign advisor for a variety of organizations.
- **Atar Mandel.** One of the leading organizers of the Democracy Protest Movement’s branch at Gome junction, the largest protest branch in the northern region of Israel. Mandel is an architect and interior designer.
- **Prof. Karine Nahon.** One of the Democracy Protest Movement’s leading organizers and figures. As an independent organizer, she operates WhatsApp groups with tens of thousands of followers. Nahon is one of the founders of the post-October 7th “Civilian Headquarters”. She is an information scientist, currently the Dean of the School of

Communication and Head of Data, Government and Democracy program in Reichman University and was formerly the president of The Israel Internet Association.

- **Nadav Oz-Salzberger.** Co-founders and co-leader of “The Students’ Protest,” a protest organization of students from across Israel’s academic institutions, which was one of the leading forces in the Israeli Democracy Protest Movement. Oz-Salzberger, formerly an educator and social activist, is now leading the organization “The Wrong Gen” and calling for elections and new leadership in Israel.
- **Nava Rozolyo.** One of the protest movement’s leading organizers and figures. She is the leader of “The Shame Brigade” initiative (*Mishmarot Ha’Busha*), mobilizing for spontaneous civil protests against government members. Rozolyo is a lawyer and accountant.
- **Noga Rubinstein.** Co-leader of “The Black Robes” (*Ha’Glimot Ha’Shhorot*), the protest organization of lawyers. Rubinstein is a founding partner and head of Regulation and Competition at KRB law firm, and she was formerly the Legal Advisor of the Ministry of Communications.
- **Dr. Ilan Samish.** A leading figure and organizer in the Democracy Protest Movement, active in “The High-Tech Protest” and in the “Brothers and Sisters in Arms” protest organizations. Samish is a biochemist, formerly a scholar and currently a High-Tech entrepreneur and CEO of a FoodTec company, and a captain in reserve in the IDF.
- **Ron Scherf.** Co-founder and co-leader of “Brothers and Sisters in Arms” (*Ahim La’Neshek*), a protest organization of the IDF’s reserves and veterans. The organization was one of the leading forces in the Israeli Democracy Protest Movement. Scherf, who served in an elite unit, is a Lt. Colonel in the IDF reserves.
- **Eran Schwartz.** CEO of the Democracy Protest Movement’s “Headquarters” organization (*Mate Ha’Maavak-Hofshi Be’Arzenu*), which provided support and a collaborative framework for all of the movement’s various organizations and initiatives. Schwartz previously served as a pilot in the IDF, Deputy CEO of the Ministry for Social Equality, and CEO of the Yigal Allon Center.
- **Esty Segal.** Established and operates the website “Restart Israel”, which functions as the “Information Center” of the Democracy Protest Movement. The website gathers all the practical information about demonstrations and related initiatives, donations and aid

sources, and presents critical data about the judicial overhaul and the movement. Segal is a data designer.

- **Kalanit Sharon.** Co-founder and co-leader of “The Pink Front” (*Ha’Hazit Ha’Vruda*), a protest grassroots organization established in the Balfour protests in 2020, utilizing artistic means and performance to strengthen Israeli democracy. The organization was one of the leading forces in the Israeli Democracy Protest Movement. Sharon is an actress, dancer, and theater creator.
- **Moran Zer-Katzenstein.** Founder and leader of “Building an Alternative” (*Bonot Alternativa*), a women’s grassroots organization promoting women’s rights and defending democracy in Israel. The organization was one of the leading forces in the Israeli Democracy Protest Movement. Zer-Katzenstein is a strategist and media expert and was formerly a marketing and creative strategy director.

Interview Title	Audio File Name	Narrator Name	Affiliation/Title	Age	Interviewer's Name	Interview's Date	Interview's Location	Language	Interview's Length	Release?	Video Recording?
Shany Granot-Lubaton OH Interview	Shany Granot-Lubaton - OH 19.10.23	Shani Granot-Lubaton שני גרנות-לובטון	Founder and leader of the NYC branch of "UnXeptable," a grassroots movement protesting for Israeli democracy—the largest protest community outside of Israel. Following October 7th she co-founded "The Hostages Families Forum" in NYC. She was previously the chief-of-staff and spokesperson of the former head of the labor party, MK Shelly Yechimovich, and deputy-director of the "Darkenu" movement.	33	Maya Gayer מאיה גייר	19.10.23	In person - New York, NY	English	1:19:35	Yes	Yes
Omer Lubaton-Granot OH Interview	Omer Lubaton-Granot - OH 31.10.23	Omer Lubaton-Granot עומר לובטון-גרנות	Leading Organizer of the NYC Branch of the NYC Branch of "UnXeptable," a grassroots movement protesting for Israeli democracy—the largest protest community outside of Israel. Following October 7th he co-founded "The Hostages Families Forum" in NYC. He was previously the chief-of-staff and spokesperson of MK Stav Shaffir, and a public policy strategist and campaign advisor for a variety of organizations.	33	Maya Gayer מאיה גייר	31.10.23	In person - New York, NY	English	1:41:28	Yes	Yes
Ronit Levine-Schnur OH Interview	Ronit Levine-Schnur - OH 30.11.23	Ronit Levine-Schnur רנית לוי-שנור	Founder and leader of "The Israeli Law Professors' Forum for Democracy," an organization of legal scholars from across Israel's academic institutions, which played a key role in disseminating legal knowledge about the government's judicial overhaul. Levine-Schnur is a Senior Lecturer at the Tel Aviv University Faculty of Law and, following October 7th, has founded "The Day After the War Forum."	44	Maya Gayer מאיה גייר	30.11.23	Online (Zoom) - New York, NY//Tel Aviv, Israel	Hebrew	2:49:16	Yes	Yes
Ami Dror OH Interview	Ami Dror - OH 26.12.23	Ami Dror עמי דרור	One of the Democracy Protest Movement's leading organizers and figures. As an independent organizer he operates WhatsApp groups with tens of thousands of followers. Dror is a businessman and entrepreneur in the field of education, and he lectures on leadership in the Aspen institute.	50	Maya Gayer מאיה גייר	26.12.23	Online (Riverside) - New York, NY//Tel Aviv, Israel	Hebrew	2:28:45	Yes	Yes
Moran Zer-Katzenstein OH Interview - Part 1	Moran Zer-Katzenstein - OH 1.1.24 - Part 1	Moran Zer-Katzenstein מורן זר-קצנשטיין	Founder and leader of "Building an Alternative" (Bonot Alternativa), a women's grassroots organization promoting women's rights and defending democracy in Israel. The organization was one of the leading forces in the Israeli democracy protest movement. Zer-Katzenstein is a strategist and media expert and was formerly a marketing and creative strategy director.	41	Maya Gayer מאיה גייר	1.1.24	Online (Zoom) - New York, NY//Tel Aviv, Israel	Hebrew	0:57:46	Yes	Yes
Moran Zer-Katzenstein OH Interview - Part 2	Moran Zer-Katzenstein - OH 16.1.24 - Part 2	Moran Zer-Katzenstein מורן זר-קצנשטיין	Founder and leader of "Building an Alternative" (Bonot Alternativa), a women's grassroots organization promoting women's rights and defending democracy in Israel. The organization was one of the leading forces in the Israeli democracy protest movement. Zer-Katzenstein is a strategist and media expert and was formerly a marketing and creative strategy director.	41	Maya Gayer מאיה גייר	16.1.24	Online (Riverside) - New York, NY//Tel Aviv, Israel	Hebrew	1:20:26	Yes	Yes
Ron Scherf OH Interview	Ron Scherf - OH 4.1.24	Ron Scherf רון שרף	Co-founder and co-leader of "Brothers and Sisters in Arms" (Ahim LaNeshet), a protest organization of the IDF's reserves and veterans. The organization was one of the leading forces in the Israeli Democracy Protest Movement. Scherf, who served in an elite unit, is a Lt. Colonel in the IDF reserves.	51	Maya Gayer מאיה גייר	4.1.24	Online (Riverside) - New York, NY//Rehovot, Israel	Hebrew	1:33:46	Yes	Yes
Nadav Oz Salzberger OH Interview	Nadav Oz Salzberger OH 28.1.24	Nadav Oz Salzberger נדב עוז זלצברגר	Co-founders and co-leader of "The Students' Protest," a protest organization of students from across Israel's academic institutions, which was one of the leading forces in the Israeli Democracy Protest Movement. Oz-Salzberger, formerly an educator and social activist, is now leading the organization "The Wrong Gen", calling for elections and new leadership in Israel.	28	Maya Gayer מאיה גייר	28.1.24	Online (Riverside) - New York, NY//Tel Aviv, Israel	Hebrew	2:54:05	Yes	Yes
Atar Mandel OH Interview	Atar Mandel - OH 30.1.24	Atar Mandel עטר מנדל	One of the leading organizers of the Democracy Protest Movement's branch at Gome junction, the largest protest branch in the northern region of Israel. Mandel is an architect and interior designer.	36	Maya Gayer מאיה גייר	30.1.24	Online (Zoom) - New York, NY//Merom Golan, Israel	Hebrew	2:41:42	Yes	Yes
Ishay Hadas OH Interview	Ishay Hadas - OH 27.5.24	Ishay Hadas ישי הדס	A political activist, co-founder and co-leader of the "New Contract" (Hoze Hadash) movement, better known as the "Crime Minister" movement. The movement has been protesting against Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu since 2018 and was a key organizer of the Balfour protests in 2020. Hadas is a commercial and television producer.	68	Maya Gayer מאיה גייר	27.5.24	Online (Riverside) - New York, NY//Ramat Hasharon, Israel	Hebrew	2:24:37	Yes	Yes
Nava Rozolyo OH Interview	Nava Rozolyo - OH 6.6.24	Nava Rozolyo נאוה רוזוליו	One of the protest movement's leading organizers and figures. She is the leader of "The Shame Brigade" initiative (Mishmarot Ha' Busha), mobilizing for spontaneous civil protests against government members. Rozolyo is a lawyer and accountant.	38	Maya Gayer מאיה גייר	6.6.24	Online (Riverside) - New York, NY//Tel Aviv, Israel	Hebrew	2:08:42	Yes	Yes

Interview Title	Audio File Name	Narrator Name	Affiliation/Title	Age	Interviewer's Name	Interview's Date	Interview's Location	Language	Interview's Length	Release?	Video Recording?
Offir Gutelzon OH Interview - Part 1	Offir Gutelzon OH 7.6.24 - Part 1	Offir Gutelzon אופיר גוטלזון	Founder and leader of "UnXeptable," a grassroots movement launched in 2020 by a group of Israelis residing in the San Francisco-Bay Area in support of Israeli democracy. The movement operates as the international arm of the democracy protest movement, with branches worldwide. Gutelzon is the primary organizer of the protests in the Silicon Valley/San Francisco region. He is a High-Tech entrepreneur.	49	Maya Gayer מאיה גייר	7.6.24	Online (Riverside) - New York, NY//Palo Alto, Israel	Hebrew	2:05:56	Yes	Yes
Offir Gutelzon OH Interview - Part 2	Offir Gutelzon - OH 13.6.24 - Part 2	Offir Gutelzon אופיר גוטלזון	Founder and leader of "UnXeptable," a grassroots movement launched in 2020 by a group of Israelis residing in the San Francisco-Bay Area in support of Israeli democracy. The movement operates as the international arm of the democracy protest movement, with branches worldwide. Gutelzon is the primary organizer of the protests in the Silicon Valley/San Francisco region. He is a High-Tech entrepreneur.	49	Maya Gayer מאיה גייר	13.6.24	Online (Riverside) - New York, NY//Palo Alto, Israel	Hebrew	1:46:06	Yes	Yes
Esty Segal OH Interview	Esty Segal - OH 23.6.24	Esty Segal אסתי סגל	Established and operates the website "Restart Israel", which functions as the "Information Center" of the Democracy Protest Movement. The website gathers all the practical information about demonstrations and related initiatives, donations and aid sources, and presents critical data about the judicial overhaul and the movement. Segal is a data designer.	67	Maya Gayer מאיה גייר	23.6.24	Online (Zoom) - New York, NY//Tel Aviv, Israel	Hebrew	3:15:27	Yes	Yes
Kalanit Sharon OH Interview	Kalanit Sharon OH 24.6.24	Kalanit Sharon כלנית שרון	Co-founder and co-leader of "The Pink Front" (Ha'Hazit Ha'Vruda), a protest grassroots organization established in the Balfour protests in 2020, utilizing artistic means and performance to strengthen Israeli democracy. The organization was one of the leading forces in the Israeli Democracy Protest Movement. Sharon is an actress, dancer and theater creator.	35	Maya Gayer מאיה גייר	24.6.24	Online (Riverside/Zoom) - New York, NY//Tel Aviv, Israel	Hebrew	Part 1 - 48:01 Part 2/3 - 1:26:33 Part 4 - 25:31	Yes	Yes
Ilan Samish OH Interview	Ilan Samish - OH 27.6.24	Ilan Samish אילן סמיש	A leading figure and organizer in the Democracy Protest Movement, active in "The High-Tech Protest" and in the "Brothers and Sisters in Arms" protest organizations. Samish is a biochemist, formerly a scholar and currently a HiTech entrepreneur and CEO of a FoodTec company, and captain in reserve in the IDF.	51	Maya Gayer מאיה גייר	27.6.24	Online (Zoom) - New York, NY//Tel Aviv, Israel	Hebrew	2:57:21	Yes	Yes
Eran Schwartz OH Interview	Eran Schwartz OH 1.7.24	Eran Schwartz ערן שחרץ	CEO of the Democracy Protest Movement's "Headquarters" organization (Mate Ha'Maavak-Hofshi Be'Arzenu), which provided support and a collaborative framework for all of the movement's various organizations and initiatives. Schwartz previously served as a pilot in the IDF, Deputy CEO of the Ministry for Social Equality, and CEO of the Yigal Allon Center.	42	Maya Gayer מאיה גייר	1.7.24	Online (Zoom) - New York, NY// Israel	Hebrew	1:15:36	Yes	Yes
Offer Lapidot OH Interview	Offer Lapidot - OH 2.7.24	Offer Lapidot עופר לפידוט	Co-founder and co-leader of "Group 555," the protest group of IDF's pilots, and a leading organizer, in charge of special operations, in the Democracy Protest Movement's "Headquarters". Lapidot is a reserve pilot and lieutenant colonel in the IDF. He served as commander of the IDF's flight school and Ramon base and was head of the Planning and Organization Department in the Air Force.	74	Maya Gayer מאיה גייר	2.7.24	Online (Zoom) - New York, NY//Yavne, Israel	Hebrew	2:37:05	Yes	Yes
Itai Ater OH Interview	Itai Ater - OH 11.7.24	Itai Ater איתי אטר	Founder and leader of "The Economists Forum," the protest organization of economists, and co-leader of the "Academia Protest," the protest organization of scholars from across Israel's academic institutions. Ater is a professor of business economics and strategy at the Collier School of Management at Tel Aviv University.	50	Maya Gayer מאיה גייר	11.7.24	Online (Zoom) - New York, NY//Tel Aviv, Israel	Hebrew	1:42:50	Yes	Yes
Rani Barnea OH Interview	Rani Barnea - OH 12.7.24	Rani Barnea רני ברנע	A leader and co-founder of "The White Coats" (Ha'Halukim Ha'Levanim), the protest organization of physicians and healthcare workers. He is a neurologist in the vascular neurology unit and the director of the Stroke Prevention Center at Beilinson Hospital.	47	Maya Gayer מאיה גייר	12.7.24	Online (Zoom) - New York, NY//Tel Aviv, Israel	Hebrew	2:29:16	Yes	Yes
Nadav Galon OH Interview	Nadav Galon - OH 16.7.24 - Part 1	Nadav Galon נדב גלאון	A leading figure in the democracy movement's "Headquarters," and co-founder of the protest group "Kaplan Power" (Koach Kaplan). A prominent political advisor and strategist, Galon was also a key figure in the "Crime Minister" movement and the Balfour protests of 2020.	42	Maya Gayer מאיה גייר	16.7.24	Online (Zoom) - New York, NY//Tel Aviv, Israel	Hebrew	2:11:40	Yes	Yes
Nadav Galon OH Interview	Nadav Galon - OH 11.8.24 - Part 2	Nadav Galon נדב גלאון	A leading figure in the democracy movement's "Headquarters," and co-founder of the protest group "Kaplan Power" (Koach Kaplan). A prominent political advisor and strategist, Galon was also a key figure in the "Crime Minister" movement and the Balfour protests of 2020.	42	Maya Gayer מאיה גייר	11.8.24	Online (Zoom) - New York, NY//Tel Aviv, Israel	Hebrew	1:19:36	Yes	Yes

Interview Title	Audio File Name	Narrator Name	Affiliation/Title	Age	Interviewer's Name	Interview's Date	Interview's Location	Language	Interview's Length	Release?	Video Recording?
Or-Iy Barlev OH Interview	Or-Iy Barlev - OH 19.7.24 - Part 1 Or-Iy Barlev - OH 19.7.24 - Part 2	אורלי בר לב Or-Iy Barlev	An independent journalist and activist. She is an on-the-ground reporter for the Democracy Protest Movement and one of its leading public-facing figures. Barlev has been reporting independently and actively opposing government corruption since the Social Justice Protest Movement of 2011.	52	מאיה גייר Maya Gayer	19.7.24	Online (Riverside) - New York, NY//Israel	Hebrew	4:08:46	Yes	Yes
Noga Rubinstein OH Interview	Noga Rubinstein OH 23.7.24	נוגה רובינשטיין Noga Rubinstein	Co-leader of "The Black Robes" (Ha' Glimot Ha'Shorot), the protest organization of lawyers. Rubinstein is a founding partner and head of Regulation and Competition at KRB law firm, and she was formerly the Legal Advisor of the Ministry of Communications.	53	מאיה גייר Maya Gayer	23.7.24	Online (Zoom) - New York, NY//Savion, Israel	Hebrew	1:30:58	Yes	Yes
Karine Nahon OH Interview - Part 1	Karine Nahon - OH 12.9.24 - Part 1	קרין נהון Karine Nahon	One of the Democracy Protest Movement's leading organizers and figures. As an independent organizer she operates WhatsApp groups with tens of thousands of followers. Nahon is one of the founders of the post-October 7th Civilian Headquarters. She is an information scientist, currently the Dean of the School of Communication and Head of Data, Government and Democracy program in Reichman University and was formerly the president of The Israel Internet Association.	52	מאיה גייר Maya Gayer	12.9.24	Online (Zoom) - New York, NY//Ramat Gan, Israel	Hebrew	1:40:08	Yes	Yes
Karine Nahon OH Interview - Part 2	Karine Nahon - OH 30.9.24 - Part 2	קרין נהון Karine Nahon	One of the Democracy Protest Movement's leading organizers and figures. As an independent organizer she operates WhatsApp groups with tens of thousands of followers. Nahon is one of the founders of the post-October 7th Civilian Headquarters. She is an information scientist, currently the Dean of the School of Communication and Head of Data, Government and Democracy program in Reichman University and was formerly the president of The Israel Internet Association.	52	מאיה גייר Maya Gayer	30.9.24	Online (Zoom) - New York, NY//Ramat Gan, Israel	Hebrew	1:18:16	Yes	Yes