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ORIGINAL ARTICLE

"We are a Generation of Slaves. We Support the Protests But do not Take to the Streets": Why Older Immigrants From the Former Soviet Union are not Part of the Protests Against the Judicial Overhaul in Israel

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Abstract

Beginning in 2023, Israel has been the site of extensive protests against a proposed judicial overhaul, drawing widespread participation. However, there is a notable absence of older individuals from minority groups, particularly older immigrants from the Former Soviet Union (FSU), within these protests. This study aims to explore the perspectives of this group on the judicial overhaul and to reveal the reasons behind their non-participation in the protests. The study involved semi-structured interviews with 20 older FSU immigrants (age 65+). Through thematic content analysis, two main themes emerged: the attitudes of FSU older immigrants towards the proposed judicial overhaul and the factors contributing to their non-involvement in the protests. Participants exhibited diverse opinions on the judicial overhaul, ranging from outright disapproval to ambivalence or indecision. The lack of participation in the protests was attributed to multiple factors, including (1) older age and age-related limitations, (2) unique historical experiences and characteristics of the FSU immigrant cohort, and (3) a lack of unified stance and organization within the FSU immigrant community. The study provides insights into the challenges and barriers faced by older individuals in FSU immigrant minority groups in engaging with political processes and decision-making. These findings are of significant importance to policymakers, researchers, and professionals working with immigrant communities. Understanding these dynamics can aid in developing more inclusive and representative political processes and support engaging mechanisms for older minority immigrants.

Keywords Older Adults · Political Activism · Older Immigrants · Protests · Political Engagement · FSU Immigrants

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Introduction

Global mass protests have emerged as a prominent and increasingly prevalent phenomenon in recent decades, with a notable upswing in scope, size, and frequency. Driven by collective resentment, frustration, and mistrust in leadership, these protests have gained momentum and significantly influence politics and societal policies (Zlobina & Gonzalez Vazquez, 2018; Brannen et al., 2020). From the beginning of 2023, Israel witnessed nationwide protests against a proposed judicial overhaul. These protests garnered substantial attention, with tens of thousands of Israelis taking to the streets, week after week for almost ten months, to express their opposition to the planned overhaul of the courts (BBC News - Israel protests: Drone footage shows thousands in Tel Aviv).

Despite the significance of mass protests as a form of social-political activity, the involvement of older individuals in politics remains an area that has not received sufficient attention in the research, particularly regarding older citizens from minority groups (Serrat et al., 2017a, 2020). In this study, we explored the attitudes of older immigrant citizens from the Former Soviet Union (FSU) in Israel toward the proposed judicial reform. Our aim was to gain a deeper understanding of the intersection between age and belonging to a minority group who had gone through the experience of immigration within the context of political activities and uncover the reasons behind their conspicuous absence from the judicial overhaul protests. By doing so, we sought to provide insights into the intricate dynamics of political engagement among older people from minority groups.

Participation of Older Citizens in Public Protests

Older individuals are entitled to participate in decision-making processes and should be given the opportunity to engage meaningfully in policymaking. According to the participatory policymaking approach (Blomkamp, 2022), they should actively take part in political activities in general and in those aimed at bringing about social change (UNECE, 2021). Political activism provides older individuals with a platform to utilize their abilities, wisdom, and life experiences for the betterment of society as a whole (Serrat & Villar, 2016). However, this cohort is usually underrepresented at political protests (which is also a form of political participation) and frequently encounters exclusion from mainstream policy development and political activities (UNECE, 2021a). Thus, for example, a recent study (2020) in the U.S. showed that those aged 50 and older were underrepresented among the public protesters, whereas about 41% of those who said they recently attended a protest were younger than 30 (and they only make up 19% of all U.S. adults) (Barroso & Minkin, 2020).

Older individuals face various barriers that hinder their participation, including social isolation, digital exclusion, gender roles, ageism, cultural beliefs, ingrained habits, etc. Furthermore, obstacles such as lack of political will and insufficient financial or human resources also contribute to limiting their involvement (Pinto & Neri, 2017). As a result, their fundamental rights are undermined, and their chances of making valuable contributions to society are limited (UNECE, 2021a).

The older population is not a homogeneous group. The experiences of aging are shaped by various characteristics that have been influenced by their unique life journeys. Factors such as gender, age, health and disability status, ethnicity, cultural background, location, education, and socioeconomic status intersect to create distinct challenges, particularly for those belonging to minority groups, including immigrants (UNECE, 2021a). Incorporating older individuals from diverse backgrounds into political and public activities, policy discussions, and decision-making is crucial as it brings forth a wide spectrum of perspectives and ideas for addressing policy issues. This inclusive approach ensures that policy development takes into account the multifaceted realities of aging and works toward addressing the specific needs and concerns of different older populations.

Protests Against the Judicial Overhaul in Israel

The proposed judicial overhaul in Israel, put forth by Prime Minister Benjamine Netanyahu and Minister of Justice Yariv Levin in January 2023, has sparked widespread concern. The proposed changes pose a significant threat to the principles of democracy by undermining the separation of powers, which is the foundation of a democratic system. Specifically, the overhaul aims to limit the power of the Supreme Court to exercise judicial review, grant the government control over judicial appointments, and restrict the authority of legal advisers. As a result, the proposed reform would diminish the influence of the judicial branch on legislation and state politics. In response to the proposed reform, hundreds of thousands of Israelis have taken to the streets in protests across the country, with major demonstrations occurring in Tel Aviv, Jerusalem, Haifa, and other cities (Staff, 2023). These protests align with a worldwide trend, signifying a growing inclination among citizens worldwide to voice their discontent and lack of trust in their governments and authorities by taking to the streets in pursuit of change (Brannen et al., 2020).

According to recent data from the Viterbi Center for the Study of Public Opinion and Policy at the Israel Democracy Institute (2023), the ongoing protests in Israel have been primarily driven by Israeli Jews, with a prominent presence of older citizens (ages 65+). However, these findings do not extend to minority groups, for example, Israeli Arab society, where older Arab individuals are noticeably absent from the demonstrations. Furthermore, there is currently no available data regarding the participation of citizens with immigration backgrounds, particularly older immigrants from the FSU, in these protests.

Older Immigrants from the FSU in Israel

Israel is a multicultural country that since its creation has accepted millions of Jews from all over the world (Knayfel, 2022). One of the largest immigrant groups in the country comprises immigrants from the FSU. They came in the largest wave of migration in the country's history and increased Israel's Jewish population by about 16% (Konstantinov, 2015). Nowadays, FSU immigrants comprise 13% of the Jewish population and 9% of the entire Israeli population and are considered the biggest ethnic minority group in Israel (ICBS, 2015).

The worldview of immigrants to Israel from the FSU has been shaped by two special factors: extensive socialization under the Soviet regime over generations and a cultural emphasis on collectivism (Mirsky, 2001). These influences have generated mixed feelings toward authorities and institutions, encompassing both fear and suspicion on the one hand and dependency and an external locus of control on the other. Such ambivalence stems from their experiences in a totalitarian socialist society that aimed to foster unity and equality through oppressive measures (Knaifel, 2022).

Older immigrants from the FSU constitute about 20% of the immigrant population and 18.2% of the total 65 + years old in Israel (Schnoor & Cohen, 2021), and although they come from different parts of the FSU, they exhibit several common characteristics. They often have limited proficiency in Hebrew (Remennick, 2003, 2004), live modestly by relying on welfare allowances and low-paying, beneath-their-capacity jobs (Remennick, 2003; Litwin & Leshem, 2008), report a lower subjective sense of well-being (Amit & Litwin, 2010), and have relatively high rates of mental distress, psychiatric disorders (Mirsky et al., 2008) and lower overall health status (Lerner et al., 2005; Ritsner & Ponizovsky, 2003).

FSU Immigrants' Activities in the Political Arena

Since the onset of large-scale immigration from the FSU to Israel in the 1990s, the Russian-speaking community has exerted a significant influence on Israeli politics. Some argue that they have played a decisive role in determining the outcome of several elections, thus, in 1992, the "Russian vote" played a pivotal role in securing Yitzhak Rabin's electoral victory. Fast forward to four years later, in 1996, this same demographic was instrumental in propelling Netanyahu to his election triumph (Svetlova, 2019). However, older immigrants tend to see themselves as less effective politically (Horowiz, 2003), supporting fairy regularly Avigdor Liberman—a Soviet-born Israeli politician, the founder, and leader of the secular nationalist "Yisrael Beiteinu" (Israel Is Our Home) party, which have become part of political life in Israel (Al-Haj, 2019). In general, the community of FSU immigrants, along with ultra-Orthodox Jews and Arab minorities, is often considered a separate sector within Israeli society, evident not only in political-electoral matters but also in areas such as consumer behavior, media, entertainment, education, and other aspects of daily life (Knaifel, 2022).

The Present Study

In this study, we sought to examine the perspectives of a minority immigrant group, specifically older immigrants from the FSU, regarding the proposed judicial overhaul and the ensuing protests. By doing so, we aimed to gain a deeper understanding of how older age intersects with minority immigrant group affiliation in the context of protests, specifically emphasizing the underlying reasons for their non-participation. By focusing on this cohort – older individuals from the FSU – we sought to understand the barriers preventing older people from immigrant minority groups from actively engaging in social protests, decision-making and thus forfeiting their potential to influence society's policies as social activists.

The choice to focus on older FSU immigrants in Israel was made for several pivotal reasons: They represent a prominent segment of Israel's demographic and have experienced life under a totalitarian regime in the past, potentially influencing their political activism and attitudes toward democracy in Israel. Thus, we aimed to shed light on the interplay between their past and current political behavior. Moreover, the insights from this study might be beneficial to other countries, given the global nature of immigration and the extensive Russian-speaking diaspora. This understanding is vital for crafting inclusive policies that encourage active political participation across all societal strata.

Methods

We conducted qualitative research via semi-structured interviews with older immigrants from the FSU living in Israel. The selection of this approach was driven by the need for exploration and sensitivity and the desire to allow participants to share their perspectives and experiences openly. The researchers used semi-structured interviews to gain a profound comprehension of the subject under investigation (Kakilla, 2021).

Participants

This study included 20 Israeli Russian-speaking older immigrants, all of whom immigrated to Israel between the years 1990–1998 from the European republics of the FSU, such as Russia (25%), Belarus (45%), Ukraine (20%), Moldova (5%) and Lithuania (5%) and are now living in the northern part of Israel in several large and small cities.

We conducted semi-structured face-to-face and telephone interviews. Most of the participants were women (60%) and married (70%), secular jews (90%) and their mean age was 73.1 (SD = 6.33, range 65–89). According to participants' subjective evaluations, 65% of them had "average-for-their-age" health conditions, and 75% had an average socioeconomic status. For detailed information, see Table 1.

Sampling and Procedure

The study's protocol received approval from the ethics committee of Bar-Ilan University (February 2023). The interviews were conducted in March-May 2023 over the phone ($n = 11$) or via face-to-face interviews at participants' homes ($n = 9$), in accordance with participants' preferences and until saturation was reached (Krueger & Casey, 2009). We used purposive sampling based on pre-determined criteria of age (65+) and country of origin (FSU republics). First, participants for the interviews were recruited via one of the researchers' connections within the Israeli FSU immigrant community. Recruitment was then expanded via snowball sampling and daycare centers for older people in northern Israel with the assistance of social workers working in these centers.

In accordance with an interview methodology recommended for qualitative research (Kallio et al., 2016), a semi-structured interview guide was developed and

Table 1 Socio-demographic characteristics of the sample ($n=20$)

	Mean (SD)
Age	73.1 (6.33)
Number of years of education	15.7 (2.05)
Number of children	1.9 (0.64)
Number of grandchildren	4.65 (3.31)
Gender	**n (%)**
Male	40
Female	60
Marital status	
Single	5
Married	70
Divorced	5
Widowers	20
Place of immigration	
Russia	25
Belarus	45
Ukraine	20
Moldova	5
Lithuania	5
Economic status (subjective)	
Below average	5
Average	75
Above average	20
Health condition (subjective)	
Below average	20
Average	65
Above average	15
Religious status (Jewish Religion)	
Secular	90
Traditional	10

consisted of questions regarding (1) participants' interest and involvement in Israeli and FSU politics in general; (2) participants' attitudes regarding the judicial overhaul and its impact on older people from FSU community; (3) participants' involvement in the protests against the judicial overhaul, including reasons for their involvement and non-involvement in the protests.

All participants were informed about the aims and importance of the study and were assured of their anonymity and confidentiality. All of them signed informed consent before participating or gave verbal consent. The average interview length was between 30 min and one hour. The interviews were conducted in Russian by a Russian-speaking researcher who was skilled and experienced in qualitative methodology. To ensure intercoder reliability, the interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed verbatim, translated to Hebrew, and anonymized.

Analysis

Several steps described by Braun and Clark (2012) were followed to analyze the interviews. As a first step, all interview transcriptions were read by the researchers several times. In the second step, we more thoroughly categorized each interview into thematic categories that would represent descriptive themes in accordance with the main study topic – older immigrants' attitudes toward the judicial overhaul – focusing on the reasons for participants' participation/non-participation in the protests against it. In the next step, we reread all interviews to arrive at more interpretive thematic categories, which in turn were combined into overarching themes. Coding sheets enabled quotations to be organized by themes and categories and were discussed by the two researchers, along with discrepancies, until a consensus was reached.

Findings

The analysis revealed two main themes: (1) the attitudes of older immigrants regarding the proposed judicial overhaul and (2) the reasons for their non-activism in judicial overhaul protests.

Theme 1. What do Older Immigrants Think and Feel About the Political Situation in Israel and the Proposed Judicial Overhaul?

Overall, the research participants expressed significant concerns about the current political situation in Israel, particularly the lack of agreement regarding the judicial overhaul. They described the current situation (lack of consensus and protests) as leading to an alarming abyss, causing feelings of insecurity, uncertainty, worry, anxiety, and sleepless nights: "I can't sleep at night thinking about it" (P6, a woman, age 89). The participants' primary concern seemed to be about the internal division among different groups within the country that arose as a result of the current situation:

> *[It creates] anxiety for the future of Israel because it creates a rift between those who are in favor of the reform and those who are enemies of the reform, and those who are religious and the Soviets [FSU immigrants] … of course, I feel anxiety. It increases my sense of anxiety that I have as an old person (P15, a woman, age 68).*

Regarding the judicial overhaul, participants' opinions varied. Whereas some clearly expressed disapproval and a lack of support for the proposed reform, others remained ambivalent or undecided. This ambiguity for some participants stemmed primarily from a lack of in-depth understanding of the proposed changes (to be further detailed). However, several participants highlighted explicitly that the reform could lead to the loss of democracy and the emergence of dictatorial rule similar to that in Russia or Belarus:

It is concerning because we are heading down the same path as Putin, Lukashenko [President of Belarus], and we might end up… We are moving in that direction. (…) These are just the "early signs" - what we see now as flowers will eventually turn into fruits… (P18, a man, age 75).

When asked about the judicial overhaul's influence on their lives, the majority of participants felt that they wouldn't be directly affected. Instead, they perceived that the reform would have extensive consequences for society at large, triggering ripple effects both immediately and in the future across various domains such as the economy, development, and healthcare. Notably, they expressed concerns about the implications it might have for the lives and futures of their children and grandchildren.

I am particularly concerned about the potential outcomes of the reform. I fear that as a result of the changes, young people might choose to leave Israel, and even high-tech investors could stop investing in the country. The impact of this reform will not only affect older people like myself, but it will have far-reaching consequences for everyone (P11, a woman, age 76).
As older individuals, we also have children and grandchildren, and their future is equally significant. My worry extends beyond just myself because other crucial factors are at stake. The reform's repercussions will harm not only us, the older generation but, more importantly, it will negatively affect our children and grandchildren (P4, a woman, age 83).

However, unlike their active participation in elections, as mentioned during the interviews, none actively participated in protests against the judicial overhaul, neither in physical nor virtual spaces.

Theme 2. Why are Older Immigrants not Taking Part in the Protests Against the Judicial Overhaul?

According to the participants, the non-participation of FSU older immigrants could be attributed to various reasons: (1) the old age of the participants and age-related limitations, (2) cohort history and characteristics, and (3) lack of comprehensive opinion and organization among FSU expatriates.

"The Young People Determine the Future, and at Our Age, We Watch From the Sidelines": Old Age and its Related Limitations

Many participants felt that their (older) age influenced their lack of active participation in the protests. According to them, younger individuals, with many years ahead of them both generally and specifically in Israel, are often more motivated to actively engage due to concerns about their future. In contrast, older individuals may feel less inclined to participate, believing they have less at stake.

Young people, middle-aged people… the young people, of course, are those who need to think about it, and people of our age? Let's say we are against the

reform, so what? It hardly touches us. It's a matter of young people (P1, a man, age 71).
The young people, first of all, should determine the future of the country… in which direction it will develop and go… what democracy should be, and we at our age? We watch over it from the sidelines (P5, a woman, age 76).

Some participants intentionally distanced themselves from the political events, especially considering their age. They perceived the current situation as alarming and potentially harmful to their physical and mental well-being, fearing it could shorten their lives. Consequently, they opted for an emotional defense mechanism: repression, where an individual pushes distressing thoughts and feelings out of their conscious awareness to avoid painful or traumatic experiences.

It doesn't affect me too much. While it's unpleasant to witness and hear about everything, I consciously decide not to let it get to me. If it does affect me, well… it's like accelerating the process of shortening one's life. As they say, we don't have a lot of time left in our lives considering our age. So, I attempt not to let these things affect me (P18, a man, age 75).

In addition, the health conditions associated with old age also emerged as an explanation for non-participation in protests. As individuals get older, they often face a higher prevalence of health problems, potentially making it physically challenging for them to engage in protests actively. The difficulties of being in crowded spaces, standing for extended periods, and enduring the physical demands of protests pose significant obstacles for older individuals.

Everyone I know, all the people are against the reform, but they just don't have the strength anymore to go to demonstrations. Indifference and lack of interest come with diseases (P20, a man, age 81).

"We are a Generation of Slaves": Cohort's History and Characteristics

Another reason for their non-participation in the protests seemed to stem from this group's unique characteristics and historical context. Many participants, having immigrated to Israel later in life after extended periods in the FSU, feel a weaker connection and sense of belonging to Israel than do long-term residents. Their lack of local education, limited professional achievements, and generally lower socioeconomic status compared to that of Israeli-born citizens further diminishes their engagement in state affairs. Consequently, they often feel they have limited influence and a lesser stake in the country's political decisions.

It seems that if a person has achieved something in life here through their own efforts and strength, they will fight for it. Many people here [older people from the FSU] have struggled while living on allowances. Well, we provide them, and that's okay. The higher the socioeconomic status, the more likely they will

be active. Of course, because people earned it themselves. Have you seen the demonstrations? Look at what's unfolding – people discuss this situation with such pain (P14, a woman, age 66).
There is a difference between a grandmother who arrived at the age of fifty-eight, never worked a single day and received an allowance, and lives in subsidized housing, and… when you have children here, raised, started a family, and have your graves, then this is already your country, and that's it, you can't be indifferent and passive" (P7, a woman, age 68).

Moreover, participants emphasized the enduring effects of the history of their cohort, specifically their years living under the FSU's dictatorial regime. This "different mentality," molded by their experiences under oppressive communist rule, has influenced their reluctance to participate in protests. Having previously faced severe penalties, including potential imprisonment for dissent in the FSU, they have become cautious about challenging authorities. This deep-rooted caution significantly contributes to their hesitation in joining activities that might oppose or confront the governing powers:

We have a different mentality… in the former USSR, the less you participate, the more relaxed you live. Once you start participating, people could end up in prison. That's why it was better to stay as far away as possible. Russians, Belarusians, Ukrainians, those who came from these countries, from those governments, I don't think they participate, but the young people, yes. The young people were born here, and I think it's not about age but more about mentality… Because we came from countries with a dictatorship, we didn't take to the streets. God forbid it would end up on the streets; no one wants their mother, father, or children to be in jail. It was like that- we didn't have freedom… it was closed off to us… Israelis are going to demonstrations and are seventy and eighty years old. They have a different mentality; they could always say what they wanted, and we couldn't. (P3, a woman, age 66).

Another participant added his explanation, referring to the generation of FSU immigrants, especially older people, as the "generation of slaves":

We were slaves, we were slaves… we are a generation of slaves… the fear that existed in the former Soviet Union remains until now. Forty years should pass until the generation that came from the Soviet Union dies.[1] *I do not distinguish myself from this generation. We are a generation of slaves… who grew up in that totalitarian country…. And you ask why we are passive [spoken in an ironic way] … I also followed the instructions like everyone else. They gave me the order to go there - I went there… (P2, a man, age 65).*

[1] A reference to the Biblical Exodus from Egypt, where Moses led the Israelites in the wilderness for 40 years before they entered the Land of Israel. This period allowed for the passing of the generation that had been enslaved in Egypt.

Interviewer: Do you think this is one of the reasons why former Soviet Union immigrants do not participate in the protests?
P2: 100% yes.

"If there are Many People who are Against it, Then They are Likely Correct": Lack of Comprehensive Opinion and Organization Among FSU Expatriates

The majority of the participants expressed a keen interest in the political situation in Israel; however, a significant number admitted to not fully grasping the reasons behind the protests and the opposition to the reform. Consequently, this lack of comprehension also led to their limited involvement in the protests.

Many things are not understood…and it is not clear who is right and who is guilty (P9, a woman, age 72).
I am not familiar with the specifics of the reform, but if there are many people who are against it, then they are likely correct, and I align myself with their opinion. Regarding my personal stance on it, I cannot provide one as I lack an understanding of this issue (P3, a woman, age 66).

The absence of organization and coordination among FSU expatriates was mentioned by several participants as contributing to their non-activism in protests. The lack of a cohesive network or platform to mobilize and engage the community hindered their participation.

I'm going to vote, but to go with flags and signs to protest, I won't go. If they had called me, I might have gone. No one calls me. Well, I'm unmotivated myself. That's how it is (P17, a woman, age 76).

One participant also noted that in contrast to the way participation in elections had always been organized, there was no organization of protest participation.

When someone wanted us to participate in the elections, they organized transportation for us, everything was organized… we all went together… and here - how will we go? Even if we want to - how will I go alone? (P12, a man, age 76).

Discussion

In this study, we explored the perspectives of older Israeli citizens from the FSU immigrant minority, toward the proposed judicial overhaul and the subsequent protests. Our focus was on understanding the reasons for their absence from these protests. Our findings indicated that the majority of participants were deeply concerned and had feelings of insecurity, uncertainty, and anxiety regarding the current political situation and the protests against the judicial overhaul. These findings are consistent

with findings from other studies highlighting how political turmoil can profoundly affect a citizen's mental well-being. For instance, a 2022 survey by the American Psychological Association revealed that 76% of Americans viewed the nation's future as a significant stressor. Additionally, 66% were stressed by the prevailing political climate, while 40% reported experiencing symptoms such as anxiety, insomnia, and even suicidal ideation linked to political distress (APA, 2022).

Although the majority of the study participants actively vote in elections, none of our participants had engaged in the protests, and they indicated that only a very small segment of FSU expatriates generally participate in such demonstrations. This non-involvement is perplexing for two primary reasons. First, given the participants' historical context of living under the FSU's authoritarian regime, one might have anticipated a more proactive stance against any potential threats to Israeli democracy. Second, as mentioned previously, the ongoing protests in Israel have seen significant participation from older individuals. This observed disparity between expectations and reality suggests underlying reasons, which we will delve into in the subsequent section.

Why do Older Immigrants from the FSU Refrain From Participating in Protests Against the Judicial Overhaul?

A primary consideration is the influence of age and age-related limitations. Although the impact of chronological age on political activism has recently garnered increased attention (De Moor et al., 2021; Renström et al., 2021), a knowledge gap still exists concerning the participation of older individuals, especially from minority groups, in political protests (Guillemot & Price, 2017). Some studies have suggested that younger people tend to challenge social norms and institutions more vocally, facing fewer barriers and risks in protest participation, whereas older individuals often lean toward the status quo (Wiltfang & McAdam, 1991; Wike & Castillo, 2018). That said, older participants can play pivotal roles in protest movements, leveraging their extensive knowledge, experience, and available time (Quintelier, 2007). Notably, older individuals often hold formal political power. In many countries, including Israel, governments predominantly comprise middle-aged and older individuals despite having significantly younger civic populations (Atella & Carbonari, 2017; Magni-Berton & Panel, 2021; Stockemer & Sundström, 2022; Stockemer et al., 2023). However, the dynamic is different for minority groups. In the Israeli Arab community (a large minority group in Israel), for instance, participation in ongoing protests has been minimal, with older Arab citizens underrepresented (Israel Democracy Institute, 2023). Regarding older FSU immigrants, to our knowledge, there is a lack of specific statistical data on their protest participation. Furthermore, most of our research participants believed that the judicial reform would predominantly impact younger generations. Although they expressed concern for the future of their grandchildren and great-grandchildren, they felt it was primarily the responsibility of these younger generations to protest and demonstrate. They cited both objective and subjective reasons as underpinning this belief. Objectively, they acknowledged that younger individuals would likely live longer, implying a more extended exposure to the outcomes of such reforms. Subjectively, participants viewed themselves and

their same-age peers as more passive, less ambitious, and having reduced aspirations. Such perceptions might stem from ageism, a pervasive phenomenon across cultures and societies (Officer & de la Fuente-Nunez., 2018). Ageism can negatively impact the self-esteem of older individuals (Bergman, 2022), potentially diminishing their belief in their ability to instigate societal or political change. In addition, age-related health conditions and limitations mentioned by participants might impact their (non) participation in protests. This is in line with studies that showed health problems and disabilities can limit the mobility and energy of older persons, and might be a barrier to participation in political activities (Carey, 2019; Serrat et al., 2017b).

The second reason older immigrants refrain from participating in protests against the judicial overhaul seems to lie in the history of their cohort's distinctive experiences and influences. First, their time in the FSU under an authoritarian regime fundamentally molded their political perceptions and behaviors. Life in the FSU, a totalitarian state where the government wielded complete control over virtually every life facet—including the economy, media, and education—has had enduring effects. In such an environment, people had minimal freedoms and frequently feared expressing dissent. Zinovyev (1985), a Soviet sociologist, introduced the term "Homo Soveticus" to depict a distinctive sociocultural archetype that evolved during the Soviet era (Sharafutdinova. 2019). This term encapsulates the prevailing attitudes and behaviors of a typical Soviet citizen. Characteristics often attributed to "Homo Soveticus" include passivity—showing reluctance to take the initiative or question authority—and conformity, a reticence to voice personal opinions, and prioritizing blending in over authentic self-expression. Despite critiques that this term might be overly reductionist or perpetuate stereotypes about Soviet individuals, it serves to illustrate the profound effects of living in an oppressive society. This sentiment resonates with one study participant's stark description of older immigrants as a "generation of slaves," a feeling echoed by others, albeit in less harsh terms. Second, the unique characteristics of this cohort further explain their reluctance to engage in protests. These include a shorter time having lived in Israel compared to that of native-born older citizens, potentially leading to weaker feelings of belonging and an unfamiliarity with the Israeli political system. Further compounding these issues is their often-limited proficiency in Hebrew, reliance on Russian-speaking media, and generally lower socioeconomic status. Socioeconomic standing and education play crucial roles as individuals are more inclined to participate when they feel informed and empowered and believe they can impact valued outcomes (Petriwskyj et al., 2017).

The third reason centers on the absence of a unified stance and organizational efforts by FSU immigrants, arguably stemming from the previous two reasons and resulting in the essential absence of older FSU immigrants in the protests. Lack of invitations or advertising, along with poor coordination of activity timing, were mentioned as barriers to older people's participation in political activities (Petriwskyj et al., 2017). These factors also pointed to "external exclusion" described by Yong (2000). Interestingly, despite their coordinated efforts during elections, they have lacked a unified platform during protests. This discrepancy implies that different factors drive their involvement in these activities. Protests, often spontaneous and emergent in response to immediate events, offer limited room for comprehensive organizational undertak-

ings. Conversely, election campaigns are pre-planned, allowing methodical strategies to mobilize voters. A further consideration is the perceived influence these immigrants wield. Politicians might not view older individuals, especially from minority groups such as FSU expatriates, as instrumental in achieving their political aspirations. Thus, their energies might shift to other demographics deemed more potent in swaying protests results. Moreover, if the political agendas do not resonate with the concerns of older FSU immigrants, their motivation to partake in protests diminishes. This misalignment could further distance them from organized political activism.

In sum, our study underscores that a tapestry of unique factors, combined with intersecting contexts (minority group immigration experience and older age), culminated in participants' choice to abstain from the protests. Understanding these nuances should be pivotal for policymakers and community stalwarts, ensuring that this demographic's concerns are effectively addressed and encouraging their proactive role in molding Israel's political horizon.

Limitations

The current study had several limitations. First, the sample size precludes the generalization of findings to broader populations or groups. Nevertheless, it is essential to emphasize that the goal of this research wasn't broad generalizability. Instead, we sought to explore, in-depth, our specific participant group's experiences, attitudes, and perceptions, a hallmark of qualitative studies (Adhabi & Anozie, 2017). Second, as the interviews were carried out either face-to-face or on the phone by the primary researcher, participants could potentially have been induced to offer socially acceptable answers. Yet the influence of social desirability was likely limited as the researcher emphasized the assurance of confidentiality and anonymity to all participants. Finally, our sample predominantly encompassed immigrants from the European republics of the FSU, with a significant number hailing from smaller cities. Consequently, the insights might not holistically encapsulate the sentiments or experiences of the broader older FSU immigrant community.

Despite these limitations, the present study has several meaningful contributions and implications. First, the study underscores the intersection of aging and the immigrant experience, revealing how these dual contexts shape political attitudes and behaviors. Such understandings can inform outreach and engagement strategies tailored to this social group. Second, although the reasons for political engagement have been examined in many studies, fewer have focused on gaining an understanding of non-participation, especially among minority immigrant groups. The current study fills that gap, elucidating the multifaceted reasons behind the lack of active involvement of older FSU immigrants in protests. By understanding the reasons behind the non-participation of older FSU immigrants in political protests, policymakers can better craft strategies and policies to encourage greater involvement and representation of this group in the country's political processes. Furthermore, the findings may also be relevant in understanding the factors influencing political activities among older FSU immigrants in other countries with significant Russian-speaking populations, such as the USA and Canada. The importance of the unique context of each

group (Haski-Leventhal, 2009) also underscores the need for more comprehensive research on other minority groups in Israel and other countries.

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Declarations

Competing Interests The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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