



# “You messed up with the wrong generation”: Intergenerational relations from the perspective of Israeli older protesters

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## ABSTRACT

Given the overrepresentation of older Israelis in political protests and the growing number of political protests worldwide, the present study aimed to examine older persons' perspective on their involvement in the protests and how they view age and older age in the context of political protests. In total, 30 protesters over the age of 65 were interviewed, while employing a maximum variations methodology for the selection of the sample. Interviews were analyzed thematically. Older persons were described in the interviews, as leaders, the ones who started the protests because they were raised on the right values. Moreover, older persons viewed themselves as having the time and at times, the money to immerse themselves in the protests. Despite the perceived advantages that older protesters have to offer, the protests were seen as ineffective, incomplete, or simply lacking without the involvement of younger persons, who were seen as bringing with them the energy and stamina, but also the added symbolic value which have made the protests meaningful, important, and relevant. The findings are interpreted from the perspective of intergenerational solidarity and ambivalence. It is suggested that intergenerational solidarity and collaboration can foster older persons' participation in political activism.

## Introduction

The judicial overhaul proposed by the Prime Minister of Israel, Benjamin Netanyahu and Minister of Justice Yariv Levin in January 2023 has sparked widespread concern due to its potential impact on democratic principles. Specifically, the proposed overhaul aimed to reduce the influence and power of the judicial branch on legislation and state politics and grant an almost infinite amount of power to the government and its representatives. This was coupled by many other contested legislations and rulings promoted by the 37th government of Israel, which was characterized by its extreme, right-wing, fundamental nature and aspirations. In response, hundreds of thousands of Israelis have taken to the streets in protests across the country (Medina, 2023).

“You messed up with the wrong generation” is the slogan used by hundreds of thousands of Israelis who have been fighting the judicial overhaul proposed by the 37th government of Israel. The slogan does not necessarily characterize a single generation or age group, instead, many Israelis, young and old, shout this slogan on the streets and pose to the camera forming intergenerational groups, with the slogan in the background. In the context of this harmonious or idyllic picture of all generations on deck, it is important to examine intergenerational relations

in political activism and more specifically in political protests. The present study aimed to examine older persons' perspective on their involvement in the protests (e.g., marches, demonstrations) and how they view intergenerational relations in the context of political protests.

## Political participation, political activism, and political protests

It is common to differentiate between formal, normative forms of political participation such as voting or campaign work for parties or political figures and protest politics, which involves but is not limited to strikes, boycotts, signing petitions, mass demonstrations, and even political violence. This division is now seen as artificial, especially given the fact that nearly half of the public in different European countries has participated in demonstrations (Van Aelst & Walgrave, 2001).

Researchers have long explored the motives behind political activism, which is a form of political participation, with the goal of bringing about social change. In general, people of better socioeconomic status and education level tend to feel more informed, efficacious, and engaged to make a difference about an outcome they value. Political activism also is impacted by institutional and social contexts (Verba & Nie, 1987). According to the integrative social identity model of

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collective action, the three components that characterize political activists are a sense of injustice associated with actions taken by authorities, a conviction that the situation can be modified, and a social identity which differentiates the activists from other groups in society (van Zomeren et al., 2008).

Past research has shown that relative, rather than absolute deprivation is an important factor instigating individuals for action. Hence, the perception that one's group is being discriminated against or is unfairly treated may result in collective political action, which can be either peaceful or violent (Smith et al., 2011). It has been argued that perceived threats, rather than opportunities are more likely to promote political activism (Miller & Krosnick, 2004). Yet, research also has shown that people engage in political activities also to promote social values they feel strongly about, indicating that people have a need to feel valued, significant, and meaningful, which is being fulfilled via political activism (Jasko et al., 2019).

### Mass protests and chronological age

Worldwide, mass protests have become a growing part of our lives, increasing in scope, size, and frequency over the past few decades. For instance, between 2009 and 2019, the number of anti-government protests has increased, worldwide, by an annual average of 11.5 %. Reportedly, protests are increasingly being characterized by public resentment, frustration, and disbelief in its leaders (Brannen et al., 2020).

The role of chronological age in political activism, including political protests, has received a growing attention (De Moor et al., 2021; Renström et al., 2021). Older persons are more likely than younger persons to be formally represented politically. Many countries worldwide, including Israel are characterized by governments composed of middle-aged and older persons even when their civic population is substantially younger (Atella & Carbonari, 2017; Magni-Berton & Panel, 2021; Stockemer & Sundström, 2023). However, whereas older persons tend to be more engaged in formal political activities such as voting, they are less likely to be participating in protests (Carney & Nash, 2020; Melo & Stockemer, 2014). In contrast, according to the Israel Democracy Institute, the recent protests in Israel have been characterized by many protesters over the age of 65. Specifically, as of March 2023, 23 % of all Israeli Jews over the age of 18 but as many as 39.5 % of all Israeli Jews over the age of 65 participated in the protests.

Research has shown that older persons often derive a renewed sense of self-efficacy and meaning in life from political activism and political protests (Fox & Quinn, 2012). It is considered an effective tool, which assists older persons to adjust to their retirement years by allowing older persons to keep their legacy and collaborate with younger generations (Blanche & Fernández-Ardévol, 2022; Serrat et al., 2023). Political activism serves as an opportunity for older persons to use their ability, wisdom, and experience for the benefit of society at large and as a way to demonstrate intergenerational compassion and solidarity (Chazan & Baldwin, 2019; Ayalon & Okun, 2024; Serrat & Villar, 2016).

### The present study

Given the overrepresentation of older Israelis in political protests and the growing number of political protests worldwide, the present study aimed to explore intergenerational relations from the perspective of older protesters. Specifically, we examined older persons who are actively protesting against the Israeli government by querying about their experiences and reflections on intergenerational relations in the protests. As people of different generations participated in the protests, we viewed the experiences of older protesters from the perspective of intergenerational relations, with a particular emphasis on intergenerational solidarity and ambivalence. Intergenerational solidarity is defined as the degree of support and closeness between the generations (Bengtson & Roberts, 1991). To supplement the overly optimistic and

positive picture provided by this framework, the concept of intergenerational ambivalence was added. Intergenerational ambivalence reflects the cooccurrence of positive harmonious aspects of solidarity as well as negative aspects of conflict and tension in intergenerational relations (Lowenstein, 2007; Lüscher & Pillemer, 1998).

Although this perspective originated in reference to family relationships, it has been applied in other contexts in the past. Research on intergenerational relations in political protests has emphasized the divide between the generations, as in the case of the COVID pandemic (Ayalon & Okun, 2024), the Brexit (Nouvellet, 2017), or the climate change movement (Ayalon & Roy, 2023). However, there also have been reports of intergenerational solidarity and compassion in political protests, including in the case of the climate change movement (Chazan & Baldwin, 2019; Ayalon & Okun, 2024) as well as other local protests worldwide (Schwarz, 2019; Tang & Cheng, 2021).

### Research design and methods

#### *The present sample*

The ethics committee of the PI's institute approved the study. Respondents provided a verbal, recorded informed consent after receiving information about the study and its goals. Respondents were recruited via personal networks as well as via social media. We specifically targeted older persons' protest organizations and older protest leaders and approached them directly via Facebook or WhatsApp, inviting them to participate in the study.

The sample was restricted to Hebrew-speakers over the age of 65, who participated in the protests. Table 1 presents the characteristics of the sample. We interviewed 30 protesters with an average age of 73 (range 65–91). The majority ( $n = 17$ ) were women. Protesters were selected to represent different political groups, though the majority identified with the center/left wing. Most of the sample was retired ( $n = 18$ ). The sampling was led by the principle of maximum variations regarding age (>65 years), past involvement in protests, geographic location, profession, and political views. Although some respondents were the leaders of the protests (e.g., #1, #23), others reported varied levels of involvement, mainly restricted to attending protests.

#### *Procedure*

Interviews were conducted between March and April 2023. Interviews were conducted online and lasted from 45 min to an hour and a half. We followed a funnel approach, starting with broad, open-ended questions, such as “tell me about your involvement in the protests” or “tell me about your involvement in past protests” to more specific questions which queried about respondents' perspective on chronological age and intergenerational relations in the context of the protests, “how do you perceive the involvement of older/younger persons in the protests.” See Appendix 1 for the interview guide. All interviews were transcribed verbatim.

#### *Analysis*

Interviews were read and analyzed by two independent reviewers (the two co-authors), who repeatedly read and reread each of the interviews, employing thematic analysis. This method was selected specifically because of the theoretical freedom it allows (Clarke et al., 2015). In our analysis we transitioned from descriptive categories to more interpretative categories of meaning, moving back and forth within and across interviews. As part of the analysis process, each of the authors identified the main themes which captured the role of intergenerational relations in the protests. Following discussion, the themes were consolidated. The initial purpose of the study was to explore the role of age and aging in respondents' perceived experiences. Following thematic analysis, we decided to focus the present paper around the

**Table 1**Respondents' demographic data ( $n = 30$ ; participant #1-17-women; #18-30-men).

Interviewee number	Age	Family Status	Education	Economic Status	Residential Area	Religious status	affiliation with a specific movement	Political view	Profession	Employment Status	past involvement in protests
1.	70	Married	Academic	Very good	North	I don't define myself	Grandmothers for democracy.	I don't define myself	Fundraising	Retired	No
2.	66	Married	Academic	Good	Center	National religious	Municipal-general protests (in her city) The protest of the national religious sector	Center	Teacher	Retired	No
3.	79	Married	Academic	Average	Center	Secular	Regional-general protest (near her city) The grandmothers' protest	Center/left	Teacher	Retired	Started participating in political protests 3 years ago
4.	75	Married	Academic	Good	South	Secular	Municipal-general protest (near her city) The main protest on Kalpan Street (Tel-Aviv)	Left	Biology teacher	Part-time employment	Participated in a few demonstrations in her youth
5.	66	Married	Academic	Good	Center	National religious	The protest of the national religious sector	Center/right	Optics	Part-time employment	No
6.	65	Married	Academic	Good	North	Secular	Regional-general protest (near her city) Municipal-general protest (in her city)	Center/left	Occupational Therapy	Retired	No
7.	71	Married	Academic	Good	North	Secular	Municipal-general protest (in the north)	Center	Education	Volunteer	No
8.	70	Relationship	Academic	Very good	Center	Secular	The grandmothers' protest. The main protest on Kalpan Street (Tel-Aviv)	Left	Lawyer	Retired	Started participating in political protests 3 years ago
9.	76	Divorced	Academic	Very good	South	Secular	The grandmothers' protest	Left	Lawyer	Retired	She has already participated in political protests
10.	70	Married	Academic	Good	North	Secular	The women's protest The main protest on Kalpan Street (Tel-Aviv) The grandmothers' protest	Center	Nanny	Retired	No
11.	69	Married	Academic	Good	North	National religious	The women's protest Municipal-general protest (in the north) Municipal-general protests (in the north)	Center	Academic advisor	Retired	She has already participated in political protests
12.	76	Married	Academic	<b>Average</b>	South	National religious	Israeli-occupied territories	Left	Rabbi and educator	Part-time employment	Activist, with extensive experience in political protests
13.	66	Divorced	Academic	Very good	Center	Secular	Municipal-general protests (in the south) The main protest on Kalpan Street (Tel-Aviv) Israeli-occupied territories	Left	English teacher	Part-time employment	Activist, with extensive experience in political protests

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Table 1 (continued)

Interviewee number	Age	Family Status	Education	Economic Status	Residential Area	Religious status	affiliation with a specific movement	Political view	Profession	Employment Status	past involvement in protests
14.	71	Married	Academic	Very good	Center	Secular	The main protest on Kalpan Street (Tel-Aviv) The grandmothers' protest	Center/left	Academic secretary	Part-time employment	Participated in an economic protest in 2011
15.	91	Widow	Academic	Good	Center	National religious	The main protest on Kalpan Street (Tel-Aviv) Municipal-general protests (in her city)	Left	Clinical psychology	Retired	Participated in demonstrations in her youth in the USA
16.	69	Married	Academic	Very good	Center	National religious	Municipal-general protests (in her city)	Center	Researcher	Retired	No
17.	72	Married	Academic	Good	Center	Secular	Municipal-general protests (near her city)	Left	Computing	Retired	Started participating in political protests 3 years ago
18.	72	Divorced	Academic	Very good	South	Secular	The Fighters of 1973 For Democracy	Center	Jewish National Fund, JNF	Part-time employment	No
19.	72	Married	Academic	Very good	North	Secular	Municipal-general protests (in the south) The Fighters of 1973 For Democracy	Center	Architect Ministry of the Environment	Part-time employment	No
20.	84	Married	Academic	Average	Center	Secular	Municipal-general protests (in the north) Municipal-general protests (near her city)	Center/left	Israel Aerospace Industries, IAI	Retired	Started participating in political protests 3 years ago
21.	65	Married	Academic	Very good	Center	Secular	"Brothers in Arms" protest	Center	Hi-Tech	Full time employment	Activist, active Started participating in political protests 3 years ago
22.	78	Married	Academic	Not reported	South	Secular	The protest of the reservists The "Paratroopers for Democracy" protest	Center	Agriculture	Retired	No
23.	70	Married	Academic	Not reported	Center	Secular	Protest "no way"	Left	A senior commander in the IDF	Retired	Activist, started participating in political protests in 2016
24.	68	Married	Academic	Very good	Center	Secular	The protest of the reservists Goes between protests The pilots' protest	Left	Pilot	Part-time employment	Started participating in political protests 3 years ago
25.	73	Married	Academic	Good	South	National religious	The main protest on Kalpan Street (Tel-Aviv) National religious protest for democracy	Right	Farmer	Retired-volunteer	No
26.	88	Married	Academic	Very good	Center	Secular	Israeli-occupied territories	Left	International Bank	Retired	Activist, active for many years in the protest
27.	85	Married	Academic	Very good	עומר	Secular	The main protest on Kalpan Street (Tel-Aviv) Israeli-occupied territories	Left	Physicist	Retired	Activist, active for many years in the protest
28.	66	Married	Academic	Very good	Center	Secular	Municipal-general protests (near his city) Municipal-general protests (in his city)	Center	Social Worker	Part-time employment	Few demonstrations in the past

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Table 1 (continued)

Interviewee number	Age	Family Status	Education	Economic Status	Residential Area	Religious status	affiliation with a specific movement	Political view	Profession	Employment Status	past involvement in protests
29.	74	Married	Academic	Average	North	Secular	The protest of the reservists (IDF) Municipal-general protests (in his city)	Center/left	Farmer/Driver	Retired	Few demonstrations in the past
30.	76	Married	Academic	Very good	Center	National religious		Right/center	Academic director	Part-time employment	No

Interviews #1-#17-women; #18-#30-men.

topic of intergenerational relations. Several additional themes which were identified via thematic analysis include the perceived impact of the protests on older persons’ mental health and wellbeing (Okun & Ayalon, 2024), and the intersection between age and gender in political protests (Ayalon & Okun, 2024). We also interviewed non-protesters of varied sectors in Israeli society, including Israeli Arabs (AboJabel & Ayalon, 2024) and older immigrants from the Former Soviet Union (Ulitsa & Ayalon, 2024) to explore their experiences.

The trustworthiness of the findings (Shenton, 2004) was strengthened through our examination of relevant social media, including online verbal and visual messages. As both authors actively participated in the protests, we also relied on observational data to confirm or dispute our thematic analysis, while immersing ourselves in the data and in the protests that have been ongoing for almost 6 months by the time of writing this paper. For instance, the inspiration for this paper was brought by our active participation in the protests and the realization that there was a high participation of older protesters as well as a growing presence of younger generations in the protests over time. Observational data also assisted in framing the paper and in fact, the title of the paper (e.g., “You messed up with the wrong generation”) was determined based on a popular slogan often used during the protests. We maintained an audit trail (Rodgers & Cowles, 1993) and provided a thick description of the findings to ensure their interpretability (Denham & Onwuegbuzie, 2013). To ensure the anonymity of respondents, we provide excerpts, using serial numbers.

Findings

Based on the interviews, two main themes were identified via thematic analysis. These themes broadly discuss older persons views of intergenerational relations during the protests. Older persons described themselves and/or other older persons as leaders, the ones who started the protests because they were raised on the right values. They viewed themselves as those who have the wisdom and the understanding of what should be done to save the country. Moreover, older persons have the time and at times, the money to immerse themselves in the protests. These advantages were particularly noticeable when compared to the situation of younger persons, who were seen as lacking the time and energy to protest, given their engagement with everyday life demands. Moreover, compared with older persons, younger persons were seen as being raised on inadequate values and thus, having a hard time telling right from wrong and therefore, depending on the guidance of older persons. Despite the perceived advantages that older protesters have to offer, the protests were seen as ineffective, incomplete, or simply lacking without the involvement of younger persons, who were seen as bringing with them the energy and stamina, but also the added value and symbolic prestige which have made the protests meaningful, important, and relevant. These findings are illustrated within the broader framework of intergenerational relations, with a particular attention to intergenerational solidarity and ambivalence.

Older persons are an asset and the bearers of values

In the interviews, older persons were described as the leaders who instigated the protests. Indeed, the leadership of older persons has started already in 2016, when mainly older persons started protesting Benjamin Netanyahu, the prime minister, who has been on trial for bribery, fraud, and breach of trust, while refusing to cease his position of power (Haskel, 2022).

#27(man, 85 years-old) described his experience as a local leader. Reportedly, he started the protests in his hometown, standing alone with his wife, but was able to bring younger and older persons together after a while:

I’ll give you an example, when I started demonstrating 3 years ago, I decided that I was coming to a certain intersection that was close to

my home. No one would come. For the first time, my wife and I went and stood there for an hour and a half and that was it. Over time, people began to come, until in the end they reached close to 200 people who gathered in the same place.

#15(woman, 91 years-old) attributed the success of the protests to the strong moral values and mental strength of the older persons, involved in the protests:

I don't know if that's true, but I think that because of the older adults, who hold onto the ideals of "the beautiful Israel of the past," that's what they fantasize. They have a picture in their heads of what used to be in Israel and that is what will be lost to them. I wasn't in the protests at first, but someone told me that the first few times everyone was older adults.

Related to this notion, of older persons as the bearers of knowledge and values concerning right and wrong, #25(man, 73 years-old) differentiated between younger and older persons. According to him, younger persons simply lack the knowledge and understanding of what democracy is because they have not experienced it firsthand: "Maybe it's because of what we said earlier – we (older persons) feel that our country has been taken away. And young people don't feel it so much. "This statement not only enhances the value of older persons, but also devalues younger persons. Thus, #25 makes a clear distinction between his in-group of older persons and the out-group, composed of younger persons. This statement possibly reflects ageist stereotypes not only of older persons, but also of younger persons.

In the same spirit, #16(woman, 69 years-old) viewed the protests as an educational tool, which can be used to instill moral values in the younger generations, which were raised in the absence of such values and have not experienced mass protests in the past. Accordingly, it is the role of the older generations, who know what democracy is, to instill values and motivation in younger persons:

I think it's a very powerful tool to protest. The fact that the demonstrations achieve something. It won't be in 1 day or two, but the demonstrations are catching up. Without demonstrations, we would be in a completely different place today. They are also a very important educational tool. I think it's an important educational tool for children and the younger generation. They don't know what it was before. Many of the young people here today have never experienced any protest in their lives and certainly have not experienced demonstrations of this magnitude and intensity week after week. I think that many more doctorates will be written on this protest.

Basically, those who are 18 didn't experience any protest and they don't remember, they were 7–8 years old at the cottage protest (protests concerning the cost of living in Israel, which took place in 2011). They don't know what a protest is. An educated civil society is a great thing. I often thank Bibi Netanyahu because he did something fantastic, but in terms of our future, if it doesn't work then we're lost here.

Older persons attributed their involvement in the protests, not only to their strong value system, but also to the fact that they have the time and money to devote their lives to the protests. #23(man, 70 years-old), one of the most prominent leaders of the protests, who has started his involvement already in 2016 acknowledged his privileged status, as a retired person, who is entitled to a pension and has abundant time to devote to the protests:

By the way, I'm a pensioner, okay? It's much easier for me to act than for someone who has a job, who has a family, who has to deal with building a career, and so on and so forth. Ok? So look, let's put it this way, I spent nine and a half months in Balfour (the location where the 2016- protests took place) on a daily basis. It's not every day that I stayed to sleep there, but it was the hardest nine and a half months of my life. So, there were a lot of people, some of them core people, that they came on a Saturday night. By the way, one of the reasons young people joined Balfour on Saturday nights was a purely

practical reason. Because I remind you, we were in the Corona, the highest unemployment rate was among young people, some of whom had to go back to live with their parents. People after the army couldn't go out and travel the world, which is common among Israelis and there were no places of entertainment, the best place to hang out on a Saturday night was Balfour. There were specific things there for that time. But what? From among these young people, they began to realize that they had the ability to move something forward.

#4(woman, 75 years-old) stated that in contrast with older persons, younger persons, simply do not have the time to devote to the protests:

As you say, education, we (older persons) have this awareness and this attempt to get up from the armchair and go to a demonstration. Younger persons didn't pay attention at first, it was strange to them. My children have a hard time getting out of the couch because they don't have an couch because they come home from work and put the kids to bed completely exhausted. So, the protests are more relevant to students, young people, the unmarried. But let's say in Tel Aviv, one of the partners does go to Kaplan (the location where the protests take place).

Hence, these statements reflect not only perceived moral superiority, but also structural superiority, which results in older persons having more resources and opportunities to engage in political activism compared with younger persons.

### **The perceived importance of younger persons' participation in the protests**

Despite the many advantages which come with age, and which were explicitly noted by older protesters, most respondents stressed the symbolic importance of younger persons' involvement in the protests. Younger persons were portrayed as the true leaders of the protests and as the ones who show to the world that there is public resistance. Most respondents stressed the significance of younger persons' involvement in the protests whereas older persons were seen as "nice to have," or as supporters of the struggle but not as a central, necessary component. This possibly attests to the importance of intergenerational solidarity and support provided not only from the older generations to the younger ones via older persons' life experiences and moral guidance, but also from younger generations to older generations, who by joining the protests give it symbolic meaning and strength.

#11(woman, 69 years-old) viewed older persons as the ones who support the fight of younger persons. Accordingly, the strength of the protests comes from the involvement of younger persons:

I don't know, I don't know if we are, if we set an example, I can't tell you if older adults give an example. I feel that it strengthened us that young people joined. First of all, as I said, the speakers incorporate a young guy or girl who excites us very much. Because it's as if the feeling is that the youth don't care about anything, they only care about having fun, and suddenly you see young people who do care about the future of the country and what will happen. It's exciting to me in that respect. I can't tell you if it was us who brought them or something else.

Likewise, #9(woman, 76 years-old) described younger persons as the fighters at the front, whereas older persons were seen as providing the support at the background:

Look, the greatness of these demonstrations is in the numbers. That means that when we're 100,000 it's one story and when we're 300,000 or half a million it's a different story, so it's very important to me that they (younger persons) come. But I have no doubt that the intensity of the demonstration, the intensity of the demands for change, the real struggle, we are so-called combat supporters. The fighting force is the young people. They must be there, otherwise nothing. I notice, you know I notice these things, so when I see in



Kaplan half young or even two-thirds young and one-third old, I say what a beauty. Great combat support, great fighting force. When I come to my hometown, to the bridge and 90 % of the population with white hair or dyed for the benefit of women, it's fine, we're nice and it's important that we came to wave the flag, but we lack the fighting strength.

Hence, #9 gives great symbolic value to the presence of young people, whose contribution to the protests goes beyond their numerical quantity. Reportedly, younger people bring with them symbolic value, which older persons are lacking.

Likewise, #4 (woman, 75 years-old) viewed the joining of the young people to the protest as a turning point, which has made the protests meaningful and influential:

It was after Gallant's (the minister of defense) dismissal. There were demonstrations at 12 a.m., 1 a.m. and then suddenly it was a demonstration of young people. And from there started things like 'you messed up with the wrong generation' (a popular slogan). There were young people before that, but the percentages have changed.

Hence, in her view, the presence of younger people is necessary to raise the value of the protests and turn them into meaningful acts of political resistance. #6 (woman, 65 years-old) also stated that the joining of younger persons to the protests has strengthened them:

I can't tell you if older adults give an example. I feel that it strengthened us, the joining of young people. First of all, as I said, the speakers incorporate a young guy or girl who excites us very much. Because it's as if the feeling is that the youth don't care about anything, they only care about having entertainment and that, and suddenly you see young people who do care about the future of the country and what will happen. It's exciting to me in that respect. I can't tell you if it was us who brought them (to the protests).

However, a minority, like #30 (man, 76 years-old), thought that the involvement of both young and old was required for the success of the protests and no one generation was seen as superior to the other:

Of course, the diversity of the entire population is important, if it were a sectoral demonstration, it would have been good for the workplace, but in terms of the character of the country and its future, I think it should be all ages. Not just young people.

This opinion, however, was less frequently shared, with most respondents adamantly stressing the important symbolic role that younger people take as the drivers behind the protests.

## Discussion and implications

The judicial overhaul in Israel has resulted in an unprecedented uprise in the number, frequency, and size of mass protests. These protests are part of a global trend, thus represent a general tendency of citizens around the world to express their dissatisfaction and distrust in formal institutions by marching the streets and demonstrating in hopes for change (Brannen et al., 2020). The significance of intergenerational relations in the protests is clearly acknowledged by Israeli older protesters, who use the slogan, "you messed up with the wrong generation," to express their determination and disapproval of the current government. The exact generation is not explicitly named, thus ensuring that all generations can unite around this slogan.

Worldwide, several important political debates have been characterized by tension between the generations. For instance, in the United Kingdom, Brexit has demonstrated a generational gap, with the older generations voting for Brexit, which has been impacting mainly the younger generations' employment and educational prospects (Nouvellet, 2017). The climate change also has a generational component, which can be characterized in tension between the generations, with younger persons often blaming older generations for failing to act and for depriving them of their own voice and ability to influence (Roy &

Ayalon, 2022). Likewise, the COVID-19 pandemic has resulted in substantial tension between the generations (Ayalon, 2020).

The present findings, in contrast, are interpreted within the overall framework of intergenerational solidarity, and ambivalence (Bengtson & Roberts, 1991; Lüscher & Pillemer, 1998). The present study adds by showing how perceived differences in upbringing and values can result not only in criticism and reproach of the younger generations, but also in solidarity between the generations. It is older persons who are seen (in their own eyes) as the bearers of knowledge and value and as the ones who can provide moral leadership and guidance to the younger generations, who have been brought up in a chaotic environment, characterized by declining values and moral. Although older persons expressed some implicit criticism about the younger generations, thus, demonstrating some intergenerational ambivalence, they also reported excitement about the opportunity to transfer their values and knowledge to the younger generations via their active, collaborative participation in the protests. Hence, the present findings reveal a sense of connection between older and younger generations by stressing older persons' attempts to engage with the younger generations out of a strong sense of solidarity. This corresponds with past research which has stressed the often unexplored potential of older persons as the bearers of traditional knowledge in the case of the changing climate (Hosen et al., 2020; Rakshit & Bhowmick, 2012). This also resonates with past protests in other parts of the world which have been characterized by a strong sense of intergenerational solidarity (Schwarz, 2019; Tang & Cheng, 2021).

According to the social identity theory, to establish positive self-esteem, individuals attempt to belong to highly valued groups and distinguish themselves from outgroups. If the ingroup is not a source of positive self-worth, one may either distance him/her self from that group or devalue outgroups (Tajfel & Turner, 1978). The present study clearly shows how older persons view themselves as a prominent social group, actively involved in the protests. In doing so, they identify both their symbolic power in the form of experience and values and structural power in the form of time and money. Both sources of power are not evenly distributed in society and are considered to be associated with the disempowerment of younger persons in society (Bratt et al., 2020).

While underscoring intergenerational solidarity, the present findings also demonstrate older persons' sense of ambivalence not only towards younger generations, but also towards their own role in the protests. Statements which stress the important role of younger persons as the leaders or the "engine" of the protests despite the fact that it is older persons who started the protests (Haskel, 2022), highlight older persons' sense of ambivalence towards themselves as older protesters. Despite claims of a "gray power" in reality, neither in Israel nor elsewhere in the world, have older persons formed strong political power to advocate for their own rights and needs (Gilleard & Higgs, 2009). Instead, they are more likely to protest for the benefits of future generations, supposedly putting their own needs and interests on the side (Ayalon & Okun, 2024).

Although innovative, the study has several limitations. Our respondents are unique. They all actively participated in the protests. This requires physical and mental energy as well as commitment to the cause. Moreover, several of the interviewees were national leaders, who have brought together younger and older Israelis as part of the protests. Hence, as reported in past research regarding political activism, this group is likely characterized by high levels of agency and self-efficacy and a strong sense of social identity (van Zomeren et al., 2008). It is possible that older persons who do not take an active role in the protests report lower levels of intergenerational solidarity. We discuss the somewhat different experiences of non-activists in other papers (Ayalon & Okun, 2024; Okun & Ayalon, 2024). It also is important to note that this study did not interview younger generations about their perceptions of intergenerational relations during the protests. Hence, we bring a one-sided angle from the perspective of older protesters. In addition, the present study largely relied on online interviewing methods. Although this has gained increasing popularity and has shown to be a valuable tool

(Gray et al., 2020), it has its limitations and likely has resulted in a more educated and technologically savvy sample. Nevertheless, relying on Zoom has allowed us to recruit interviewees from geographically remote areas at a relatively low cost. Finally, the choice of focusing our research attention on this group of protesters was not a coincidence. At the time of conducting the study, there were also demonstrations in support of the government. However, because of our political ideology and involvement in the protests, we explicitly selected to focus only on political protests against the judicial overhaul.

To sum up, this study proposed a fresh outlook on the role of older persons and their perspective on intergenerational relations in political protests. Past research has highlighted intergenerational solidarity ambivalence within the family realm (Bengtson & Roberts, 1991; Lüscher & Pillemer, 1998). This study adds by highlighting intergenerational solidarity as well as intergenerational ambivalence of older persons regarding their own role and that of younger generations in political protests. Although the older persons interviewed in this study, certainly valued their contribution to the current protests, and expressed a strong sense of solidarity with the younger generations, they also reported some ambivalence, which was manifested mainly in the importance they attributed to the involvement and leadership of younger versus older generations in the protests. The findings underscore the importance of intergenerational solidarity and support as a means to enhance political participation among older persons.

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### Ethics and consent statement

The study was approved by the ethics committee of the Louis and Gabi Weisfeld, School of Social Work at Bar Ilan University # 032305, March 2023.

All participants provided an informed consent prior to participating in the study.

### Transparency openness promotion

Data are not available openly. However, once we finish the analysis, it can become available to other researchers upon request. The study was not pre-registered.

### CRediT authorship contribution statement

**Liat Ayalon:** Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, Resources, Methodology, Investigation, Formal analysis, Conceptualization. **Sarit Okun:** Writing – review & editing, Formal analysis, Conceptualization.

### Declaration of competing interest

None.

### Data availability

The data that has been used is confidential.

### Appendix A. Interview guide

- Are you interested/following developments in the political arena in Israel? What sources of information do you rely on? (News/ Newspapers/ TV Shows/ Internet...)
- Are you exercising your right and going to vote? (Have you voted in elections in recent years)? \*If not, what are the reasons you didn't participate in the elections?

- What do you think in general about the political situation in the country? What do you think has led to this situation?
- What feelings does the political situation evoke in you? (Ask to elaborate – disappointment? worry? stress? anxiety? etc..) Does it affect your mood in your daily life?
- I'd love to know what you think about the legal overhaul/anti-overhaul protest?
- What do you do about it? Why so? Why not?
- If the interviewee spoke of any involvement, we will continue to ask:
- What motivated you to engage in this involvement?
- How is this protest different from/like other protests in which you have been involved?
- Tell us about previous protests in Israel – what was your involvement in them?
- What is the involvement of older persons in the protests? What is their role compared with younger people.
- In what way do you use social media to express your opinions?
- Do you think the overhaul affects the multigenerational ties in the country? (I mean whether it has an impact on the relationship between children/adults/older persons in Israel)
- Do your family members (children/grandchildren) have different/similar opinions? How has this affected the quality of relationships within your family? Have ties strengthened or weakened as a result of the current protests?
- How has it affected the ties between your friends and peers: strengthened or weakened by the current protests?
- Given the current situation and looking forward, how do you see the future of older persons and future generations in the State of Israel?
- Is there anything else you'd like to tell me about what we've been talking about?

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