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DATA REPORT AUGUST 6, 2026

Which Israeli Laws Are Called Jewish Supremacist, and What Do They Say?

Seven Israeli laws carry the label. One is a Basic Law, passed 62 to 55 in July 2018 and upheld 10 to 1 by the Supreme Court in July 2021.

Nation-State Law

Basic Laws

Israeli Supreme Court

Judicial review

Knesset

Apartheid framing



The phrase turns up on placards, in Knesset floor debate, and in the title of a position paper by an Israeli monitoring organisation. It rarely arrives with a statute

number attached. Behind it sits a short list of laws, the same seven that appear in Adalah's published database of laws it describes as discriminatory and in B'Tselem's position paper of 12 January 2021: the 2018 Nation-State Law, the Law of Return, the citizenship and entry restrictions, the Admissions Committees Law, the Absentees' Property Law, the land arrangements involving the Jewish National Fund, and the budget amendment known as the Nakba Law. So what do those laws actually say, who applied the label to them, and what happened when the label was tested in court?

All three answers are on the public record. One of the laws on the list is a Basic Law: the Knesset passed it on 19 July 2018 by a recorded vote of 62 to 55 with 2 abstentions, and Israel's Supreme Court, sitting with an expanded bench of 11 justices, rejected the petitions against it 10 to 1 on 8 July 2021.

Key Findings

- **Basic Law: Israel; The Nation-State of the Jewish People** runs to 11 articles and was passed by the 20th Knesset on 19 July 2018 by a recorded vote of **62 to 55**, with 2 abstentions. Article 1(c) of the Knesset's published English text states that "the exercise of the right to national self-determination in the State of Israel is unique to the Jewish people." The enacted text contains no equality clause.
- The Supreme Court of Israel, sitting as the High Court of Justice in HCJ 5555/18 Akram Hasson v. Knesset, rejected the consolidated petitions **10 to 1** on 8 July 2021, holding that Article 7 on Jewish settlement must be read consistently with the principle of equality and does not authorise allocating state land on the basis of religion or nationality. Justice George Karra dissented.
- Of the seven laws named together in those lists, **one** is a Basic Law. The rest are ordinary statutes or amendments, and ordinary statutes are subject to judicial review under Basic Law: Human Dignity and Liberty.
- B'Tselem published the "Jewish supremacy" formulation in a position paper on **12 January 2021**; Adalah, the Legal Center for Arab Minority Rights in Israel, maintains a

database it describes as listing more than 65 discriminatory laws. Both are published legal and political positions from organisations with a stated advocacy mission.

- Israel's Central Bureau of Statistics recorded **2.157 million** Arab residents in its preliminary Independence Day estimate for 2026, 21.1% of a population of 10.244 million.

What does the Nation-State Law actually enact?

Basic Law: Israel; The Nation-State of the Jewish People contains 11 articles and was passed by the 20th Knesset on **19 July 2018** by a recorded vote of 62 to 55 with 2 abstentions.

The Knesset's own published English text opens by declaring in Article 1(b) that the State of Israel "is the national home of the Jewish people, in which it fulfills its natural, cultural, religious and historical right to self-determination," and in Article 1(c) that "the exercise of the right to national self-determination in the State of Israel is unique to the Jewish people."

Three further articles carry most of the argument. Article 4 provides that "Hebrew is the State's language," that "the Arabic language has a special status in the State," and, in subsection (c), that "this clause does not harm the status given to the Arabic language before this law came into effect." Article 5 states that "the State will be open for Jewish immigration and for the ingathering of exiles." Article 7 states that "the State views the development of Jewish settlement as a national value, and will act to encourage and promote its establishment and consolidation."

Two features of the enacted text govern how it can be changed and how it reads against the rest of Israeli constitutional law. Article 11 provides that the Basic Law may not be amended except by another Basic Law passed by a majority of Knesset members, which sets the threshold at 61 of 120. And the text contains no equality clause and no reference to the state's democratic character, a drafting choice that named Israeli officials raised before the vote: then-President Reuven Rivlin wrote to members of the Knesset on 10 July 2018 objecting to a draft clause that would have permitted a community to establish a separate residential settlement on the basis of religion or nationality, a clause dropped before the vote, warning that it could harm Jewish communities worldwide and could be used as a weapon against Israel.

The law is declaratory in form. It creates no criminal offence and allocates no budget. Article 10 is the one clause phrased as an entitlement, and it runs to non-Jews: it establishes the Sabbath and the festivals of Israel as the state's days of rest, and provides that non-Jews have a right to maintain days of rest on their own Sabbaths and festivals, with the details to be set by law. Otherwise the law's legal weight comes from its status as a Basic Law, which in Israel's system functions as constitutional material and is used by courts to interpret ordinary legislation.

Has the law been tested in court, and what did the court hold?

The Supreme Court of Israel, sitting as the High Court of Justice with an expanded bench of **11 justices**, rejected the consolidated petitions against the Nation-State Law on 8 July 2021 in HCJ 5555/18 Akram Hasson v. Knesset, by 10 to 1.

The lead petitioner was a serving member of the Knesset from the Druze community. Adalah appeared as counsel for petitioners.

The majority opinion, written by then-President Esther Hayut, addressed two questions in sequence. On the limits of the Knesset's power, the judgment held that its authority as a constituent assembly is not unlimited and does not extend to denying or facially contradicting Israel's core character as a Jewish and democratic state, and held that this Basic Law does not do so. Whether the court may itself strike down a Basic Law that crossed that line was left open in 2021. On substance, the judgment held that the Basic Law does not negate the democratic character of the state, because it operates alongside the other Basic Laws, including Basic Law: Human Dignity and Liberty of 1992, and must be read together with them.

The most consequential passage concerns Article 7. The majority held that the clause on Jewish settlement is to be interpreted in accordance with the principle of equality and does not authorise the allocation of state land on the basis of religion or nationality, nor the establishment of communities that exclude Arab citizens. Justice George Karra dissented, taking the position that Article 7 should be struck down.

That reading did not appear for the first time in 2021. In HCJ 6698/95 Ka'adan v. Israel Lands Administration, decided in March 2000, the Supreme Court held that the state may not allocate land in a way that excludes Arab citizens, including through an intermediary body. The 2021 judgment situates the new Basic Law inside that existing line of authority rather than displacing it.

Two limits belong with this finding. The judgment is a holding on constitutional interpretation and on what Article 7 authorises; it is not a measurement of how land is allocated in practice. And the quotations here are from translated records of a Hebrew-language judgment, so the wording is a translation and not the operative text.

Which of the named laws are Basic Laws, and which are ordinary statutes?

The Knesset's index of Basic Laws lists **19** entries enacted between 1958 and 2018, and exactly one of the seven appears on it.

The others are ordinary statutes, temporary orders, or amendments to existing legislation, and the difference governs how each can be challenged: an ordinary statute can be struck down for violating Basic Law: Human Dignity and Liberty of 1992, while for a Basic Law the court has held only that the Knesset's constituent authority has an outer limit, without deciding in 2021 what it may do about a Basic Law that crossed it.

Law (year)	Legal status	Judicial review outcome	Source type
Basic Law: Israel; The Nation-State of the Jewish People (2018)	Basic Law	Petitions rejected 10 to 1 , HCJ 5555/18, 8 July 2021	Knesset published text; Supreme Court judgment
Law of Return (1950), amended 1954 and 1970	Ordinary statute	Not covered in the judgments read for this report	Knesset published text
Citizenship and Entry into Israel Law (Temporary Order) (2003)	Temporary ordinary statute, lapsed July 2021, re-enacted 2022	Petitions rejected 6 to 5 , HCJ 7052/03, May 2006; rejected again 6 to 5 , HCJ 466/07, January 2012	Knesset published text; Supreme Court judgments
Admissions Committees Law (2011), amending the	Ordinary statute	Petitions dismissed as premature by a divided bench,	Knesset published text; Supreme

Law (year)	Legal status	Judicial review outcome	Source type
Cooperative Societies Ordinance		HCI 2311/11, September 2014	Court judgment
Budget Foundations Law (Amendment No. 40) (2011), known as the Nakba Law	Ordinary statute	Petitions dismissed as premature, HCI 3429/11, January 2012	Knesset published text; Supreme Court judgment
Absentees' Property Law (1950)	Ordinary statute	Not covered in the judgments read for this report	Knesset published text

Three patterns sit in that table. The citizenship and entry restrictions have been to the Supreme Court twice and survived both times by a single vote, in 2006 and again in 2012, which is the narrowest recorded margin among the judgments read here. Two of the 2011 laws were challenged and the petitions were dismissed on the ground that the challenge came too early, so no ruling on their substance exists in those cases. And the two oldest statutes on the list, both from 1950, predate Israel's Basic Laws on human rights by four decades.

Who says these laws are supremacist, and when did they say it?

Adalah, the Legal Center for Arab Minority Rights in Israel, founded in 1996, maintains a public database it describes as listing **more than 65** Israeli laws that discriminate directly or indirectly against Palestinian citizens of Israel or Palestinian residents of the occupied territories. That count is Adalah's own, produced on Adalah's own inclusion criteria, and it is a published legal position rather than a measured statistic.

The specific formulation in the question has a traceable origin. B'Tselem, the Israeli Information Center for Human Rights in the Occupied Territories, published a position paper on 12 January 2021 titled "A regime of Jewish supremacy from the Jordan River to the Mediterranean Sea: This is apartheid." Human Rights Watch followed on 27 April 2021 with "A Threshold Crossed," which described what it called an overarching Israeli government policy to maintain the domination by Jewish Israelis over Palestinians. Amnesty International published "Israel's Apartheid against Palestinians" on 1 February 2022. Each of the three is an advocacy organisation stating a legal characterisation, and each names the Nation-State Law among its supporting material.

The positions on the other side are equally on the record and equally datable. Then-Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu described the vote on 19 July 2018 as a defining moment in the annals of Zionism and the history of the State of Israel. Israel's Ministry of Foreign Affairs publicly rejected [the apartheid characterisation](#) on publication of the Amnesty report in February 2022. The Attorney General defended the Basic Law before the High Court in HCJ 5555/18, and the state's position, reflected in the 2021 judgment, was that the law is declaratory and does not alter the rights framework established by the earlier Basic Laws.

The internal disagreement is documented too. President Rivlin's letter of 10 July 2018 was written by a sitting head of state from the same party as the bill's sponsors, and the lead petitioner against the law was a sitting member of the Knesset. What the record shows is a dispute conducted in named documents with dates attached, on both sides.

What does the peer-reviewed literature say about the law?

The academic literature does not converge on one classification. Sammy Smooha of the University of Haifa published the "ethnic democracy" model in *Israel Studies* in **1997**, arguing that Israel combines genuine democratic procedures with structural preference for one ethnic group and that this places it in a distinct category.

Oren Yiftachel of Ben-Gurion University published a competing reading in *Constellations* in 1999 and developed it in "Ethnocracy: Land and Identity Politics in Israel/Palestine" (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006), which argues that the land and settlement regime is the defining feature rather than the electoral one.

The disagreement runs in the other direction as well. Alexander Jakobson and Amnon Rubinstein, the latter a law professor and former Israeli education minister, argued in "Israel and the Family of Nations" (Routledge, 2008) that a state defined by the national identity of a majority people sits within, and not outside, the constitutional practice of European nation-states. Mazen Masri of City, University of London argued the opposite case in "The Dynamics of Exclusionary Constitutionalism: Israel as a Jewish and Democratic State" (Hart Publishing, 2017), locating the exclusion in the constitutional structure itself rather than in any single statute. All four are peer-reviewed or university-press works, and all four predate

the 2018 Basic Law, which means the scholarly dispute the law entered was already 20 years old when the Knesset voted.

One government-commissioned review bears directly on the question of whether to legislate at all. Professor Ruth Gavison of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem was appointed in 2013 by then-Justice Minister Tzipi Livni to advise on constitutionally anchoring Israel's identity as a Jewish and democratic state. Gavison submitted her recommendation in 2015, advising against enacting a Basic Law on the subject at that time. The Knesset legislated three years later.

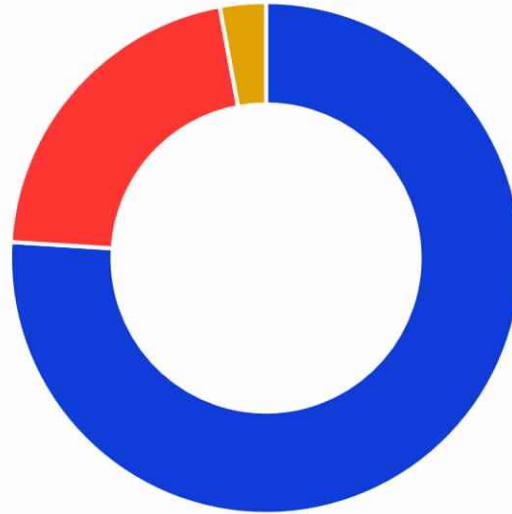
What do official statistics record about these populations?

Israel's Central Bureau of Statistics recorded **2.157 million** Arab residents in its preliminary Independence Day estimate for 2026, 21.1% of a total population of 10.244 million.

The same release records 7.790 million Jews and Others (76%); its foreigner figure, 296,000 (2.9%), relates to the end of 2025 rather than to the April 2026 estimate. These are the Bureau's own compiled counts, preliminary and based on the 2022 census. The Bureau's category "Arabs" covers Moslems, Arab Christians and Druze.

Israel's population by group

PRELIMINARY ESTIMATE, EVE OF INDEPENDENCE DAY 2026



■ Jews and Others ■ Arabs ■ Foreigners

Source: Israel Central Bureau of Statistics, Independence Day 2026 media release. Preliminary, based on the 2022 census; the foreigner share relates to end-2025.

The subgroup series come from separate Bureau releases with separate reference dates. The Bureau counted 1.707 million Moslems at the end of 2021, 18.1% of all residents, with labour force participation of 39.3% among Moslems aged 15 and over that year. Its December 2025 release put the Christian population at about 184,200, roughly 1.9% of residents, with labour force participation of 67.7% among Christians aged 15 and over in 2024 and matriculation eligibility of 87.7% among Christian 12th-grade students in the 2024/25 school year. Its February 2024 release put the Druze population at about 152,000, with 5,859 Druze students in higher education in 2022/23 against 1,600 in 1999/2000.

Two scope choices in [how these populations are counted](#) matter for the question. The Bureau counts residents of the East Jerusalem neighbourhoods annexed after 1967 inside Israel's total: its Jerusalem Day release for 2024 recorded the city at over one million residents at the end of 2023, 39.5% of them Arabs. And B'Tselem, a monitoring organisation drawing on Israeli Central Bureau of Statistics and Interior Ministry data, publishes its West Bank settlement count and its count for the annexed East Jerusalem neighbourhoods as separate series, a convention that splits what the Bureau reports as one total. The Palestinian Central

Bureau of Statistics counted 4,780,978 residents of the West Bank and Gaza in its 2017 census, the population to which the citizenship and entry restrictions apply.

Methodology

This report assembles the record on one question from five source types, each labelled where it appears.

Primary and official records supply the statutory material: the Knesset's published English text of Basic Law: Israel; The Nation-State of the Jewish People, its recorded vote of 19 July 2018, and its index of Basic Laws. Judicial outcomes come from Supreme Court judgments read in translation, including HCJ 5555/18 (2021), HCJ 466/07 (2012), HCJ 7052/03 (2006), HCJ 2311/11 (2014), HCJ 3429/11 (2012) and HCJ 6698/95 (2000). Because the operative texts are in Hebrew, every quotation here is from an official or project translation and the Hebrew governs.

Official statistics come from Israel Central Bureau of Statistics media releases: Independence Day 2026, the 2022 Moslem population release, Christmas 2025, the 2024 Druze release and Jerusalem Day 2024. Figures marked preliminary by the Bureau are reported as preliminary, and reference dates differ between releases, so the subgroup figures are not one series and must carry their own years. The Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics 2017 census is the most recent full enumeration of the West Bank and Gaza; later totals in any series are projections off that base.

Peer-reviewed articles and university-press monographs are labelled as such, as is the 2015 government-commissioned review by Ruth Gavison. Positions published by Adalah, B'Tselem, Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International are labelled as positions published by organisations with a stated advocacy mission; Adalah's count of more than 65 laws is Adalah's own count on Adalah's own criteria. Statements by Israeli officials and ministries are that party's own reporting and are attributed as such.

Three limitations. No source assembled here measures the effect of any listed law on outcomes for any population: the official statistics report population size, education and labour force levels, and none of those levels is attributable to a statute. Two of the six laws in

the comparison table have no judgment among those read here, and two more were dismissed without a ruling on substance, so the judicial record on the list is partial. And statutes enacted after 2022 fall outside the set examined.

Conclusion

So what laws are being named? The seven this report set out, assembled and published by identifiable organisations on identifiable dates. Every one of them exists, is public, and can be read in the Knesset's own text.

One is a Basic Law, passed 62 to 55 in July 2018, with 11 articles, an entrenchment clause requiring 61 members to amend it, and no equality provision. The rest are ordinary statutes and amendments, three of which have been to the High Court: one survived by a single vote twice, in 2006 and again in 2012, and two were dismissed as premature without a ruling on their substance. The one Basic Law on the list was upheld 10 to 1 in July 2021 by a bench of 11, in a judgment that simultaneously held its settlement clause cannot be used to allocate state land by religion or nationality. Israeli scholars have been arguing over the classification since Smootha's 1997 article and have not agreed on one, and the Israeli jurist the government itself commissioned in 2013 advised against passing such a law at all.

That is the record with its dates, votes and margins intact. Strip those out and something else remains: a phrase without a statute number, which travels faster than any of the documents it came from and lands in places none of them describes. Which version of this list is the one people actually encounter, and what happens to it on the way?

Frequently Asked Questions

Does Israel have a written constitution?

No single document. Israel's constitutional material is a series of Basic Laws, and the Knesset's index lists 19 entries enacted between 1958 and 2018. Basic Law: Israel; The Nation-State of the Jewish People, passed 19 July 2018, is the most recent of them.

Can Israel's Supreme Court strike down a Basic Law?

In HCJ 5555/18, decided 8 July 2021, the majority held that the Knesset's authority as a constituent assembly is not unlimited and does not extend to denying or facially contradicting Israel's core character as a Jewish and democratic state, and that this Basic Law does not do so. It left open whether the court may itself strike down a Basic Law that crossed that line. The petitions were rejected 10 to 1, with Justice George Karra dissenting.

Did the Nation-State Law remove Arabic as an official language?

Article 4 of the Knesset's published text states that Hebrew is the State's language and that Arabic has "a special status in the State." Article 4(c) states that the clause "does not harm the status given to the Arabic language before this law came into effect."

What did the court say about the clause on Jewish settlement?

The majority in HCJ 5555/18 held on 8 July 2021 that Article 7 must be interpreted in accordance with the principle of equality, and that it does not authorise allocating state land on the basis of religion or nationality or establishing communities that exclude Arab citizens.

Is there an earlier ruling on land allocation?

Yes. In HCJ 6698/95 Ka'adan v. Israel Lands Administration, decided in March 2000, the Supreme Court held that the state may not allocate land in a manner that excludes Arab citizens, including through an intermediary body.

How many laws does Adalah list, and on what basis?

Adalah, founded in 1996, maintains a database it describes as listing more than 65 Israeli laws that discriminate directly or indirectly against Palestinian citizens of Israel or Palestinian residents of the occupied territories. The count and the inclusion criteria are Adalah's own.

How does Israel's Central Bureau of Statistics count East Jerusalem?

It counts residents of the East Jerusalem neighbourhoods annexed after 1967 inside Israel's population total. Its Jerusalem Day 2024 release recorded the city at over one million residents at the end of 2023, 39.5% of them Arabs. B'Tselem, drawing on Israeli government

data, publishes its count for those neighbourhoods as a separate series from its West Bank settlement count.

Which of the laws on the list are oldest?

The Law of Return and the Absentees' Property Law, both enacted in 1950. Both predate Basic Law: Human Dignity and Liberty of 1992, the instrument under which ordinary Israeli statutes are now reviewed.

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