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Israeli politicians vote to reinstate apartheid family law

On the 10th March Israel's parliament, the Knesset, voted to reinstate a law that, over the past twenty years, has prevented thousands of Palestinian couples from living together in a place of their own choosing. The *Citizenship and Entry into Israel Law*, widely known as 'the family reunification law', bars Palestinians with Israeli citizenship or East Jerusalem residency rights from extending their legal status to spouses holding Palestinian Authority (PA) passports, denying them the ability to live together inside Israel or East Jerusalem.

The measure was first introduced in 2002, during the second intifada, when the Israeli cabinet suspended naturalisation of West Bank Palestinians married to Israelis, citing bogus security reasons. In 2003 this cabinet resolution was enacted into law as 'a temporary measure' that was later extended to include partners from 'hostile states' – Iran, Iraq, Lebanon and Syria. Estimates say it has affected 25,000 to 30,000 Palestinian families.



This 'temporary measure' was renewed every year until July 2021 when the newly-formed Knesset failed to approve it. This time, however, half of the Knesset's 120 members abstained, allowing the bill to pass with a majority of 45-15.

Following the vote, the Israeli interior minister Ayelet Shaked said that 'the combination of forces between the coalition and the opposition led to an important result for the security of the state and its fortification as a Jewish state.' Later, she tweeted: 'A Jewish Democratic country : 1. - A state of all its citizens : 0.'

Despite claims that the measure was introduced for 'security reasons', Shaked has previously admitted, 'We don't need to mince words, the law also has demographic reasons.' Legislation preventing naturalisation serves to maintain the current demographic balance within Israel. The Israeli *Law of Return* allows only one ethno-religious group the right to immigrate and receive Israeli citizenship. Jewish foreign spouses of Israeli Jews are granted Israeli citizenship automatically, while non-Jewish spouses can obtain citizenship after a maximum of five years. Such couples are free to live in Israel or in Israeli settlements across the occupied West Bank and East Jerusalem.

Writing in [+972 Magazine](#), its editor, Amjad Iraqi, said, 'The international community has long taken it as an article of faith that Israel will forever be a *Jewish state*. What it didn't ask — or didn't question — was what it would take to fulfill that vision. The answer lies in this horrific law, one of many that invade and dispossess the most intimate spaces of Palestinian life in order to preserve the supremacy of one group over another.'

On March 13th, the Haifa-based legal centre, Adalah, filed a petition in the Israeli Supreme Court against the law's reenactment, calling it 'one of the most racist and discriminatory laws in the world. There is no country in the world that restricts the right of its citizens or residents to family life with spouses from their own people.'

For further analysis read Jonathan Ofir: [Israel's ban on Palestinian spouses becomes permanent law— a triumph for 'Jewish state'](#)