

# Does Israel need the nation state law? Yes

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Like many other aspects of Israeli politics, public debate on the proposed law - which has different forms - to re-emphasise the Jewish dimension of the country's democratic framework is often highly distorted, and stripped of both complexity and context.

This initiative cannot be understood without considering the ongoing campaigns to erode and eventually erase the essential Jewish framework of Zionism. For a number of years, anti-Zionist political groups and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) have sought to reverse the definition of Israel as the nation-state of the Jewish people, and replace it by a state "of all of its citizens".

Many of these NGOs receive major foreign government funding, both directly and through church aid agencies, to promote this objective under the facade of human rights and democracy.

For example, Adalah, an Arab-Israeli NGO funded by the EU, Germany, Sweden, Christian Aid, as well as the New Israel Fund, promotes this agenda through statements and appearances before United Nations committees, and sends numerous "reports" to journalists and diplomats.

Pushing the law: Elkin

Adalah condemns the Law of Return, the Israeli flag, Hatikvah, the Menorah as the national symbol, the Jewish National Fund, and other items that reflect the Jewish history and culture. According to Adalah and its allies, financial benefits for former soldiers are discriminatory because they effectively exclude Israeli Arabs, who do not serve in the military. However, this is their choice: members of other Israeli minorities, such as Druze, Bedouin, and an increasing number of Christian Arabs, serve and get benefits identical to those received by their Jewish counterparts. The misleading allegations of discrimination against non-Jewish citizens in these contexts are a form of political warfare.

Other NGOs, with budgets totalling millions of pounds, bombard the Israeli media and courts with similar allegations, covering a wide range of issues. For example, a number of lawsuits have been filed seeking to overturn the law dealing with land held by the JNF on behalf of the Jewish people, again claiming discrimination. In some cases, judges citing the 1992 Basic Laws (a form of constitution emphasising individual rights) have endorsed these arguments and, in the view of many Israelis, contributed to the erosion of the Jewish and Zionist identity.

Furthermore, claims that a Jewish state is somehow racist or a theocracy ignore the fact that the 28 members of the EU (plus Norway and Switzerland), are Christian societies, with symbols, flags, calendars, and, as in Britain, an established Church.

Similarly, there are over 55 countries that define themselves as Islamic, and a number are theocracies. The attempts to single out Israel for criticism are themselves highly discriminatory.

For all of these reasons, public support has grown for measures designed to re-emphasise Israel's fundamental Jewish and Zionist identity, based on the 1948 Declaration of Independence, which defines Israel clearly and repeatedly as "the Jewish state". And, as in any democratic society, Israel's political leaders, including coalition chairman Ze'ev Elkin, are responding to the concerns of their constituents.

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