



TRACKING THE NETANYAHU GOVERNMENT: A RECORD OF FAR-RIGHT ACTIONS

September 18, 2023

Since taking office on December 29, 2022, the government of Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has moved quickly to enact radical changes within Israel and across the Green Line in the occupied West Bank. This document provides a synopsis of key measures taken by the government in the areas of:

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1) OCCUPATION, ANNEXATION, AND INCITEMENT

The government of Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu was expressly established with the [guiding principle](#) that “the Jewish people have an exclusive and indisputable right to all parts of the Land of Israel” – encompassing not just the State of Israel, but also the occupied West Bank. In addition to intensifying de facto annexation – expanding Israeli settlement in areas of the West Bank in ways that intrinsically tie them to Israel – the ultra right-wing government is taking incremental steps that formally extend Israel’s domestic laws and government over those areas (i.e., de jure annexation). Prominent members of the government have engaged in incitement – both in their rhetoric and actions – that has contributed to the intensifying cycle of violence between Israelis and Palestinians.

- **Transferring authority over most aspects of civilian life in the occupied West Bank to Bezalel Smotrich:** In his capacity as an additional minister in the Ministry of Defense, Smotrich has essentially become the [first civilian governor](#) of the West Bank. He now oversees the Civil Administration and the Coordinator of Government Activities in the Territories (COGAT), as well as a new Settlement Administration. [Reports specify](#) broad powers for Smotrich, including: authority over the planning and construction bureaucracy that authorizes settlement construction; land purchases, surveys, and registration of state land in Area C; declaration and development of nature reserves; and enforcement against unauthorized construction in Area C. Consistent with international law governing belligerent occupation, the General in charge of Israel’s Central Command had served as the governing authority of the West Bank since Israel captured it in 1967. Transferring authority to Smotrich is highly [significant](#) as a move toward de jure annexation of the West Bank.
- **Adoption of expedited process for approving new settlement activity, under Smotrich’s authority:** On June 18, 2023, the Cabinet [adopted](#) new regulations governing the approval and promotion process of new settlement activity. These new rules eliminate some of the key points at which elected decision makers have, until now, been able to intervene to stop or delay approvals, which they have done at times for security reasons or due to international pressure. Under the

previous procedure, there were numerous stages of authorization at which the Defense Minister had to approve. That will be reduced to one approval from Smotrich in his role as a minister within the Defense Ministry. This will enable the expansion of settlements, which has already reached a [record pace](#) under the Netanyahu government, to move forward even more quickly.

- **Advancing large-scale settlement expansion:** In the Netanyahu government's first half-year in office, Israel's Civil Administration in the occupied West Bank advanced the planning and building of [nearly 13,000 new settlement housing units](#), making 2023 the highest year on record in terms of settlement expansion – and in only six months. Alongside outpost “legalizations,” a major settlement expansion announcement in February 2023 was condemned internationally, including by the [UN Security Council](#) and the [foreign ministers](#) of the US, France, Germany, Italy, and the United Kingdom. Despite its pledges at [Aqaba](#) and [Sharm al-Sheikh](#) for a temporary moratorium on settlement expansion, Israeli authorities also approved plans for [6,500 housing units in East Jerusalem](#). The government's coalition agreements contain measures to facilitate large-scale migration of Israelis to the West Bank, including: tax breaks, removal of barriers to settlement construction, and incentives for Israeli farmers. Its [budget](#) contains [7 billion shekels](#) (\$1.9 billion) over five years for West Bank roads.
- **“Legalizing” settlement outposts:** In February 2023, Israel's Security Cabinet [approved](#) regularizing [ten West Bank outposts](#), which are illegal under both Israeli and international law, to convert them into authorized settlements. The government's coalition agreements [indicate commitment](#) to “regularize” all outposts and additional illegal Israeli construction in the West Bank – including farms and extensions to settlements. It was also agreed in February that Prime Minister Netanyahu would head a new ministerial team for regularizing outposts. “Legalizing” all outposts would significantly extend the amount of the West Bank consumed by settlements. Smotrich has indicated specific [plans](#) to “legalize” an additional 155 outposts throughout the West Bank.
- **Repealing key parts of the 2005 Disengagement Law:** By [repealing the ban](#) on Israelis living in the northern West Bank area where four evacuated settlements are located, the Netanyahu government is paving the way for “legalizing” the outpost at Homesh and taking a [major step](#) to transform the region by populating it with settlements. The repeal also [breaks multiple commitments](#) to US administrations. [See “[Why the Netanyahu Government's Disengagement Repeal Is So Problematic for the Biden Administration.](#)”]
- **Connecting illegal outposts to infrastructure:** The Security Cabinet authorized connecting dozens of still-illegal outposts to Israeli state-provided infrastructure like water and electricity. This is consistent with its “[humanitarian solution](#)” of allowing illegal outposts to connect to electricity infrastructure prior to their “legalization.”
- **Applying Israeli laws to settlers:** Among the functions of the new Settlement Administration is speeding the process of “[pipelining](#)” the application of Israeli laws to settlers. This will further institutionalize a dual legal system which affords settlers broad rights and protections, while their Palestinian neighbors continue to live under military law. Under the guise of “equal citizenship” reform, the new Settlement Administration is also [charged](#) with streamlining the provision of services to settlers by government ministries.
- **Planning for demolitions in Palestinian-controlled areas of the West Bank:** In July 2023, Smotrich [stated](#) at a meeting of the Knesset Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee that he is developing a plan according to which Israel could demolish buildings in Areas A and B, if it deems

them “national security threats.” This would mark a significant shift in Israeli policy, since Israel agreed to full Palestinian Authority (PA) control over Area A and partial PA control over Area B when it signed the Oslo Accords. Smotrich indicated that the plan, which he hopes to finish within a month, will also declare PA activities to be foreign hostile activity in order to confiscate funds from the PA.

- **Visit to Temple Mount/Haram al-Sharif by National Security Minister Ben-Gvir:** In the “[first international incident](#)” sparked by the Netanyahu government less than a week after coming to power, National Security Minister Itamar Ben-Gvir visited the Al-Aqsa Mosque compound on January 3. The move was seen as an attempt to undermine the critical “Status Quo” on the Temple Mount, according to which Muslims would enjoy freedom of access and prayer, while Jews would have freedom of access to the Temple Mount platform, but worship at the base of the Western Wall (where Palestinians are not permitted). While prime minister in 2015, Netanyahu had [directed](#) Israeli police to bar Israeli politicians from entering the site. Previous visits by senior Israeli political figures to the Temple Mount and other perceived challenges to the Status Quo have triggered clashes and even sustained rounds of violence. Ben-Gvir’s visit provoked [international condemnation](#) and led to a [special meeting](#) of the UN Security Council.
- **Police raids on al-Aqsa mosque during Ramadan, followed by escalating violence:** On the evenings of April 4 and 5, Israeli police broke into al-Aqsa Mosque atop Temple Mount/Haram al-Sharif (TM/HAS), [beating protesters](#) that had barricaded themselves inside the mosque with rocks and fireworks. Palestinians had gathered at the mosque following calls by a radical religious Jewish movement (“Return to the Mount”) to hold a Passover goat sacrifice on TM/HAS in violation of the “status quo” there. Following widespread dissemination of the video of the beatings inside al-Aqsa, missiles were fired on Israel from not only the Gaza Strip, but also from southern Lebanon. Israel launched retaliatory airstrikes on both territories. The raids sparked a crisis in relations between Israel and Jordan, whose monarch is the custodian of Muslim and Christian holy sites in Jerusalem. Other countries condemning Israel for the raids included Saudi Arabia and UAE.
- **Jerusalem Day Flag March and coalition MKs’ visit to Temple Mount/Haram al-Sharif:** Tens of thousands of right-wing Israeli Jews participated in the [Jerusalem Day Flag March](#). The Netanyahu government greenlighted the march and its route through the Muslim Quarter of the Old City, where police instructed Palestinian shopkeepers to [close their stores](#). [Chants](#) by Jewish participants included “Death to Arabs,” “A Jew is a soul, an Arab is the son of a whore” and “May your village burn down.” Some marchers physically assaulted Palestinians and journalists. National Security Minister Ben-Gvir participated in the March and gave a [keynote speech](#). Coalition lawmakers were among hundreds of Jews to visit the Temple Mount/Haram al-Sharif (TM/HAS), from which National Security Minister Ben-Gvir later [proclaimed](#), “We are in charge here... We are in charge in Jerusalem and in all of the Land of Israel.” The State Department [stated](#) its concern with Ben-Gvir’s “provocative visit” and “the accompanying inflammatory rhetoric,” while reaffirming “the longstanding US position in support of the historic status quo at Jerusalem’s holy sites...” Jordan, Egypt, UAE, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, and Qatar also denounced the visit.
- **Incitement-laden speech delivered by Finance Minister Smotrich in Paris:** Bezalel Smotrich [stated](#) in a speech that “there’s no such thing as Palestinians,” as he stood at a podium covered with a [map](#) that depicted both Jordan and the occupied Palestinian territory as part of Israel. State Department spokesman Vedant Patel [said](#), “The latest comments by Mr. Smotrich, which were delivered at a podium adorned with an inaccurate and provocative map, are offensive. They are deeply concerning, and candidly, they’re dangerous.” In addition to the US and Jordan, Abraham

Accords signatories [UAE](#) and [Morocco](#) condemned Smotrich's remarks, as did [Saudi Arabia](#), [Egypt](#), and [Qatar](#).

- **Response to settler rampages against West Bank Palestinian villages:** Following a Palestinian terror shooting in the settlement of Eli that killed four Israelis, hundreds of ultranationalist Israeli settlers attacked several Palestinian villages in the West Bank – including Turmus Ayya, where the majority of residents are US citizens. A [US permanent resident](#), the husband of an American citizen, was [killed](#) by Israeli police. In a statement, the IDF, Shin Bet, and Israel Police [condemned](#) the attacks as “nationalist terrorism,” though few settlers were [arrested](#). National Missions Minister Orit Strock [reacted](#), “I’m against these events, but it’s a disgrace to call this nationalist terror.” Settlers established several new unauthorized [outposts](#) following the Eli attack and no enforcement measures were taken against them. Dozens of settlers [entered](#) the evacuated outpost of Evyatar. National Security Minister Itamar Ben-Gvir visited Evyatar and called on settlers to establish a “full settlement” there and “in all the hills around us.”
- **Imposition of sanctions on Palestinians over ICJ appeal:** In response to the Palestinian Authority’s formal request for an advisory opinion from the International Court of Justice (ICJ) on Israel’s occupation of the West Bank, the Netanyahu government imposed [expansive punitive sanctions](#) against Palestinians and their leadership. The announced measures include diverting millions of dollars of Palestinian taxes [collected by Israel on behalf of the PA](#) to a fund for Israeli victims of terror attacks by Palestinians, prohibiting any new construction by Palestinians in Area C of the occupied West Bank, revoking Palestinian officials’ VIP privileges, and taking action against human rights organizations operating in the occupied territory. Finance Minister [Smotrich remarked](#) that he was not concerned that the move could bring about the PA’s collapse and had “no interest for it to continue to exist.” [More than 90 countries signed a statement](#) expressing “deep concern” and “reject[ing] punitive measures in response to a request for an advisory opinion by the International Court of Justice.” Subsequently, the Security Cabinet [decided](#) to “prevent collapse of the Palestinian Authority” but did not approve any concrete measures to do so.
- **Ban on bereaved Palestinians entering Israel for joint Memorial Day ceremony:** Defense Minister Yoav Gallant [rejected](#) a request to allow bereaved Palestinian families to attend the annual joint Israeli-Palestinian ceremony commemorating Israel’s Memorial Day. Subsequently, the Supreme Court [rebuked](#) Gallant and ordered him to allow roughly 150 Palestinians who had been invited to the joint memorial ceremony into Israel for the event.

2) ASSAULT ON ISRAEL’S DEMOCRATIC INSTITUTIONS

Upon taking office, the Netanyahu government moved ahead quickly with a package of bills forming the core of its assault on democracy, harming Israel’s democratic institutions and the rights and freedoms of Israeli citizens. It has focused on neutralizing Israel’s judiciary, the main check on the governing coalition. Preventing the Supreme Court from interfering in the government’s push toward annexation of the occupied Palestinian territory is a central motivation for the anti-democratic push.

- **Advancement of legislation to radically weaken Israel’s judiciary:** The government [advanced](#), in initial readings in February 2023, three bills forming the core of the Netanyahu government’s plan to neutralize Israel’s judiciary. The first bill would allow the governing coalition to pack the judiciary with judges of its own choosing, in contrast to the [current system](#) which requires judges and politicians to achieve a consensus. The government later “[softened](#)” the proposed law

slightly. A second bill would functionally [terminate](#) the Supreme Court's power of judicial review on foundational issues by preventing the Court from considering the validity of Israel's Basic Laws – which set out civil rights and the powers and functions of Israel's governing bodies – or amendments to them. A [third bill](#) requires unanimity among all 15 Supreme Court justices in order to strike down unconstitutional laws in those cases in which the Court retains the ability to conduct judicial review. (The Court will be able to review “regular” laws and not “basic” laws.) In addition, this bill would institute an “override clause” for cases in which the Supreme Court does strike down legislation. This would allow a bare majority of Israel's 120-member Knesset (61 MKs) to overturn Supreme Court decisions. The government had indicated its [intention](#) to pass the first law – altering the composition of the committee on judicial appointments – during the Knesset session that ended in early April. Following massive protests and a [general strike](#) (after he [fired](#) Defense Minister Yoav Gallant for [calling](#) on the government to pause the judicial overhaul), Netanyahu [relented](#) and [announced](#) a “timeout for negotiations.” Meanwhile, the government [placed](#) its bill to change the composition of the judicial selection committee on the Knesset table, allowing for an expedited vote.

- **Passage of amendment to limit the Supreme Court's ability to invalidate certain administrative decisions:** On July 24, the government [passed](#) into law an amendment to the Basic Law on the judiciary that limits judicial review by barring the Supreme Court from invalidating decisions made by the Prime Minister or other elected officials on the grounds that they are “extremely unreasonable.” All 64 MKs from the governing coalition voted for the bill and all opposition MKs boycotted the vote. [Protests](#) intensified in the lead up to passage of the amendment and in its aftermath. The Supreme Court agreed to hear eight petitions against the law, and that [hearing](#) began on September 12, with an unprecedented panel of all 15 Supreme Court judges hearing the cases. During the hearing, Knesset Constitution, Law, and Justice Committee Chairman Simcha Rothman questioned the Court's ability to judge the case without bias and argued that the Knesset is permitted to legislate any Basic Law – even hypothetical laws denying Arab citizens of Israel the right to vote and delaying elections by a decade – without the possibility of judicial review. Prime Minister Netanyahu has [refused](#) to commit to abiding by the ruling of the Supreme Court. [See “[The Netanyahu Government's Dangerously Unreasonable Amendment.](#)”]
- **Passage of law to prevent the High Court from ordering a prime minister to recuse himself due to a conflict of interest:** In March, the Knesset [passed](#) into law an amendment to the Basic Law on the Government which would bar the High Court from hearing a request to declare the prime minister unfit to serve. It will now only be possible to declare incapacitation for physical or mental inability – rather than for conflicts of interest. The legislation is widely [seen](#) by Israelis as a reaction to the governing coalition's “fears that the High Court of Justice could force Netanyahu to step down, due to the potential conflict of interest created by him overseeing his coalition's bid to dramatically overhaul the judiciary while he is himself on trial for multiple corruption charges.” The Court [ordered](#) the government to justify immediate implementation of the law, to which coalition heads responded, “The court does not have the authority to annul Basic Laws or to rule that a Basic Law will enter into force at a later date.”
- **Advancement of a law barring the Supreme Court from invalidating ministerial appointments:** The Netanyahu government [advanced](#) the ‘[Dery Law](#),’ which would enable PM Netanyahu to reinstate Aryeh Dery to Cabinet posts following the Supreme Court's ruling that the Shas Party Chairman's appointments as both Health and Interior Minister reflected “extreme unreasonableness” given his recurring corruption convictions and violation of his 2022 plea bargain.

- **Advancement of bill to bring police investigations under government control:** The Knesset plenum [approved in a preliminary reading](#) a bill that would bring the Police Internal Investigations Department (PIID) under the direct control of the justice minister – potentially making it subject to political influence. The PIID’s powers will be expanded to allow it to conduct probes into the State Attorney and state prosecutors.
- **Advancement of bill to transfer powers from the Israel Bar Association:** After Israeli lawyers elected Amit Becher (who opposes the Netanyahu government’s attempted judicial overhaul) to be the head of the Israel Bar Association (IBA), the Knesset [passed](#) in its first reading a bill that would strip key powers from the IBA – including its two seats on the nine-member judicial selection committee. According to the bill, sponsored by Likud MK Hanoach Milwidsky, a new Lawyers Council would be formed that would take over IBA’s authority to grant licenses, administer the bar exam, and sanction lawyers for misconduct. The Council would be chaired by a district court judge, appointed by the Justice Minister.
- **Submission of bill to allow National Security Minister Ben-Gvir to order administrative detention of Israeli citizens:** The Jewish Power Party [submitted](#) a [bill](#) to give its chairman, National Security Minister Itamar Ben-Gvir, the power to order the administrative detention of Israeli citizens. The bill was introduced in the context of a spike in murders in Israel’s Arab communities. Administrative detentions – in which suspects are held without trial or being shown evidence against them for up to six months, renewable indefinitely – would be approved by Ben-Gvir based on request of the Police Chief and approval of additional officials. The State Attorney’s office warned that the bill “presents a deep and fundamental threat to the democratic character of the country.”
- **Submission of bill to heavily tax donations to civil society organizations by foreign governments:** The [bill would](#) levy a tax of *almost two-thirds (65 percent)* on funds received by non-profit civil society organizations from “a foreign state entity.” Such a tax would have a profound impact on human rights and pro-peace groups that depend on these donations, many of which come from European countries and intergovernmental organizations. The bill could impact the implementation of the Middle East Partnership for Peace Act ([MEPPA](#)), Middle East Regional Cooperation (MERC), and public diplomacy funding by the State Department. The legislation described in the coalition agreement would not impact right-wing organizations (such as the [Kohelet Policy Forum](#)), since their overseas donations come from private individuals and organizations. Amid strong [international pressure](#), including [from the US](#), the Committee deferred advancement of the bill.
- **Attempted ouster, and subsequent resignation, of Tel Aviv police chief:** Angered that Tel Aviv police were not enacting his policies against pro-democracy protesters, Ben-Gvir [ordered](#) Police Commissioner Kobi Shabtai to oust Tel Aviv district police commander Ami Eshed from his position on March 9. Attorney General Baharav-Miara froze the decision, leaving Eshed in place due to [concerns](#) that Ben-Gvir was acting according to political motives. In July, Eshed resigned from his position. Referring to Ben-Gvir’s demands, Eshed said: “I sinned by not being able to meet the expectations of the ministerial level, which included violating the rules, protocols, organizational structure and culture in decision-making and in operational judgment... Regrettably, for the first time in three decades of service I encountered the illusory reality in which achieving peace and order is not a required achievement, but exactly the opposite.”
- **Approval by the Cabinet of Ben-Gvir’s push for establishment of new “national guard”:**

Netanyahu signed an agreement with Ben-Gvir in which he [pledged](#) to bring the creation of a new “national guard” up for a Cabinet vote. The Cabinet subsequently [voted](#) to form the new, approximately 2,000-member force and passed a 1.5 percent budget cut across ministries to raise NIS 1 billion (\$278 million) to fund it. Former senior police commanders have [denounced](#) the plan, with one warning that Ben-Gvir could use his own armed force to launch a coup. Current Police Commissioner Kobi Shabtai [warned](#), “Establishing a national guard that will be subordinate to [Ben Gvir’s] office is an unnecessary move that will have a very heavy price, to the point of harming the personal security of citizens” and could “lead to the disintegration of the Israel Police from within.” Ben-Gvir [mentioned](#) La Familia, “[infamously racist ‘ultras’](#) who support the [soccer] team Beitar Jerusalem,” as the kind of people he’d like to see enlist in the new national guard.

- **Ban on programming in schools by bereaved Israeli and Palestinian families of Parents Circle-Families Forum:** The Education Ministry announced it had removed [Parents Circle – Families Forum](#) (PCFF) from the list of approved external programs in Israeli schools, [stating](#) that its goals “are in contradiction to the values of the Education Ministry.” It stated, “Any comparison between the bereavement of families of soldiers or victims of terror and the bereavement of victims of defensive IDF operations is unacceptable. It seriously hurts the memory of the fallen and the feelings of their families.” Of the roughly 8,000 organizations whose educational programs are currently approved by the Ministry of Education, PCFF is “the [only one](#) that deals directly with content related to casualties of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, soldiers and civilians alike.”

3) DISCRIMINATION AGAINST PALESTINIAN CITIZENS OF ISRAEL AND RESIDENTS OF EAST JERUSALEM

Netanyahu’s ultra-right wing government has passed laws and taken actions that discriminate against Palestinian citizens of Israel, neglect and cut off resources to Palestinian communities, and attack the national identity and freedom of expression of Palestinians on both sides of the Green Line.

- **Passage of a law enabling deportation of some Palestinian citizens of Israel convicted of terrorism:** The [new law](#) gives Israel’s interior minister the ability to revoke the citizenship and residency status of Arab citizens of Israel and Palestinian [permanent residents](#) of East Jerusalem who are convicted of terrorism as defined by Israel’s 2016 Counter-Terrorism Law, serve a prison sentence, and have received funding from the Palestinian Authority. The law is designed to not apply to Jewish Israelis who commit terrorist acts. When MK Ahmad Tibi stated that the law should also apply to Yigal Amir (the Jewish Israeli who murdered Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin), a Likud lawmaker [replied](#), “I prefer Jewish murderers to Arab murderers and as a general rule in the Jewish state I prefer Jewish to disloyal Arabs here.”
- **Passage of a bill expanding the discriminatory “Admissions Committees” Law:** Among a [number of steps](#) to encourage Jewish families to move to the Galilee, a region in northern Israel with a large Arab population, the Knesset [passed](#) a bill to expand the 2011 Admissions Committee Law. That law allows towns of up to 400 households to screen those who want to move there; the government’s bill expands the law so that communities of up to 700 families may set up “admissions committees.” The existing law was [conceived](#) as a way to get around a Supreme Court ruling banning communities from leasing land only to Jews. While it does not allow for disqualifying applicants for residents on the basis of their race, religion, nationality, sexual orientation, or political affiliation, it allows admissions committees to reject candidates they find to be “inappropriate for the social and cultural fabric” of a community. National Missions Minister Orit

Strook of the Religious Zionism Party, who promoted an alternative version of the bill, [referred](#) to it as a means to “Judaize the Galilee.”

- **Passage of a law adding harsher penalties for ‘nationalistically’ motivated sex crimes:** The new law [amends](#) the penal code to make terrorist, nationalist, or racist motivations an aggravating factor in crimes of sexual assault and sexual harassment to enable harsher sentences and [double compensation fines](#) when perpetrators are judged to harbor such motivations. Jewish Power MK Limor Son Har-Melech made clear that the law is intended to target Palestinians who commit sexual crimes against Jews, providing “proper and correct treatment to female Jewish victims.” The bill was opposed by the Association of Rape Crisis Centers in Israel and the ultra-Orthodox feminist group Nivcharot, which indicated its support for “harsher sentences for all sexual harassers and rapists, but for everybody, with no distinction between religion, race or gender.”
- **Failure to address violent crime in Israel’s Arab communities:** Homicides and gun violence have experienced an [unprecedented spike](#) in Israel’s Arab communities. These areas are neglected by authorities, leading to a lack of trust and forcing residents to rely on local gangs and [crime syndicates](#) for protection. [Demonstrations](#) have been held across the country protesting the lack of government action amid the violence, and Jewish and Arab pro-democracy protesters are increasingly [highlighting](#) the crisis together. The new government has also abandoned previous programs addressing socioeconomic issues, gun violence, and crime. National Security Minister Ben-Gvir [terminated](#) funding for “Stop the Bleeding,” a violence reduction program in the Palestinian Arab communities in Israel.
- **Attack on funding for Israel’s Arab municipalities:** A dispute within the Netanyahu government emerged following the [refusal](#) of Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich to distribute funds for Israeli Arab municipalities. Smotrich claimed, without proof, that the funds “often fall into the hands of crime and terror organizations which have taken over the tenders and budgets in many of the Arab municipalities.” Prime Minister Netanyahu [pledged](#) to transfer the funds budgeted for the Palestinian citizens of Israel after unspecified monitoring mechanisms are put into place. Opposition leader Yair Lapid excoriated Smotrich for “mistreat[ing] Arab citizens simply because they are Arabs.”
- **Attacks on funding for, and programming in, Palestinian schools in East Jerusalem:** East Jerusalem preparatory schools [face](#) the risk of closure due to Smotrich’s decision to cut funding. Israel’s defense establishment [maintains](#) that funding to promote higher education in East Jerusalem decreases terrorism and facilitates Arab integration. Closing the preparatory programs would likely reduce future participation by East Jerusalem schools in the Israeli curriculum, according to officials in the Education Ministry. Meanwhile, members of the governing coalition are [sponsoring a law](#) that would end funding to schools in East Jerusalem that teach the Palestinian curriculum, defunding most East Jerusalem schools as a result. The explanatory notes to the bill allege that the official Palestinian curriculum includes “incitement to terrorism,” despite the fact that Jerusalem municipality supervises, censors, and reprints the textbooks before distributing them to schools. Some Israeli officials in the Jerusalem municipality [criticized](#) the bill as likely to harm efforts to get more Palestinian schools in East Jerusalem to switch to the Israeli curriculum.
- **Removal of Palestinian flags from public spaces:** On April 26, Israeli police raided the Nazareth branch of the Hadash Party and [confiscated Palestinian flags](#). Police sources said they removed the flags because waving them on Israeli Independence Day would be “provocative.” Hadash responded that the “only purpose” of the confiscation of Palestinian flags “is to defy and suppress

and harm freedom of political expression.” National Security Minister Ben-Gvir had [announced](#) shortly after the Netanyahu government took office that he had “directed the Israeli police to enforce the prohibition of flying any PLO [Palestinian Liberation Organization] flag that shows identification with a terrorist organization from the public sphere and to stop any incitement against the State of Israel.” Flying the Palestinian flag is [not illegal](#) under Israeli law.

- **Advancement of bill to ban displaying the Palestinian flag and impose jail time for offenders:** This [bill](#) would ban flying the Palestinian flag in public and make it an offense punishable by up to a year in prison. Gatherings of three or more people at which the Palestinian flag is waved would be forbidden. In addition, the Knesset passed in its preliminary reading a [separate bill](#) to impose fines of 10,000 shekels (over \$2,700) for waving the flags of terrorist groups. The bill eliminates oversight of the Attorney General and thus “will [allow](#) arbitrary abuse of citizens by the police,” curbing freedom of expression. The second bill does not apply to the Palestinian flag, but that would change if the Defense Ministry were to designate the Palestinian Authority as a terrorist organization.
- **Submission of bill to expel university students who display the Palestinian flag:** In a dramatic move to curtail academic freedom, this [bill](#) would [prohibit](#) students from waving the Palestinian flag, providing for a 30-day suspension for violators and expulsion from university by repeat offenders. The bill indicates these actions are necessary in order to deal with “terror-supporting” students and for “breaking up terror-supporting cells.” Israel’s Attorney General opposed the bill and university chiefs [condemned](#) it as “fascistic,” stating that the bill’s goal is “to turn academic institutions into branches of the Israeli Police and the Shin Bet” obliged to “monitor hundreds of thousands of students while imposing penalties on actions that are currently under the protection of freedom of expression.”
- **Advancement of bill to establish death penalty for Palestinian terrorists (but not for Jewish ones):** In a preliminary Knesset reading, the government [advanced](#) a bill to impose a death sentence on those who commit nationalistically motivated murders of Israeli citizens. The death penalty would not apply to Israelis who murder Palestinians. In order for the death sentence to apply under the proposed law, the perpetrator must be acting with the goal of “harming the State of Israel and the rebirth of the Jewish nation in its homeland.” Israeli law professors associated with the Israel Democracy Institute [commented](#), “Not only does this bill degrade the sanctity of life and human dignity, it is also racist and discriminatory, in that the death penalty would only apply based on ethnic-nationalist criteria. Such a bill has no place in a democratic country.”
- **Submission of bill to translate the Nation-State Law into policy:** A Cabinet Minister from the Jewish Power Party [announced](#) that he would promote a bill to make Zionism “a guiding and decisive value” in shaping law, policy, and all actions by every part of the government. It is the first attempt by a member of the Netanyahu government to translate Israel’s highly problematic [2018 Nation-State Law](#) into policy. The sponsor stated that the law “will enable us to give preference to IDF soldiers and army veterans, entrench the Jewish people’s connection with its land and strengthen the Negev, the Galilee and Judea and Samaria [the West Bank].” The bill would enable preferential treatment for Jewish Israelis in planning and housing construction inside Israel, while providing further impetus for expansion of Israel’s illegal settlement enterprise in the occupied West Bank at the expense of its Palestinian residents. The proposal [fulfills](#) a clause in the coalition agreement which pledges that “a government decision will be made according to which Zionism, as defined fundamentally, will be considered a primary value, guiding and having decisive weight in shaping public administration policy, domestic and foreign policy, legislation and the actions of

the state and all its units and institutions.” Dr. Amir Fuchs of the Israel Democracy Institute [warned](#) that the bill would contradict both Israel’s Declaration of Independence and its basic law on human dignity and liberty if it granted “unique benefits to Jews in budgets or land allocations.” Attorney General Baharav-Miara [opposed](#) the bill, as did ultra-Orthodox parties in the government because of the preferential treatment it would give to soldiers in the IDF (in which most ultra-Orthodox Jews do not serve).

- **Submission of bill to outlaw the Higher Arab Monitoring Committee:** The Knesset’s National Security Committee [debated](#) a bill to outlaw the Higher Arab Monitoring Committee (HAMC). Composed of Arab MKs, representatives of political movements, members of local Arab authorities, and civil society organizations, the HAMC is considered to be the umbrella organization for Palestinian civil society within Israel. The bill claims that the HAMC “covers for terror organizations through its work.” Former MK Mohammed Barakeh, HAMC’s Chair, responded that such bills “narrow Arab society’s space for discourse and political activity by delegitimizing it among the public in general.”
- **Advancement of “Arnona Fund” plan to redistribute local taxes and benefit right-wing constituencies:** The government’s Economic Arrangements Bill contains an “Arnona Fund” plan that led [several major municipalities](#) to strike. [Arnona](#) is property tax, set and managed by each municipality. With the stated goal of lowering housing prices by incentivizing localities to earmark land for residential properties instead of commercial use, the Israeli government will oblige “wealthy local authorities” to contribute to the Fund a portion of the taxes they collect on commercial real estate. The executive committee of the Fund will then reallocate money to the localities by giving them a set amount for each residential housing unit they market. Economically disadvantaged ultra-Orthodox communities stand to gain from the redistribution. So will West Bank [settlements](#), which will receive money from the Fund but are not obliged to contribute. Meanwhile, Arab cities and towns, while financially struggling, do not have the urban planning needed to market many residential housing units, and thus will receive less from the Fund. Cities with commercial centers and many local businesses (like Tel Aviv, Haifa, Eilat, and Ashdod) will be [among the losers](#). Another [concern](#) raised by the Arnona Fund plan is that nationalizing municipal tax revenues will strip localities of their autonomy and [increase](#) their dependence on the central government.

4) RELIGIOUS ENTITLEMENT, COERCION, AND EXCLUSION

Religious Zionist and ultra-Orthodox parties are using their powerful positions in the Netanyahu government to introduce legislation that would dramatically strengthen rabbinic courts and give preferential treatment to ultra-Orthodox Jews, while violating freedom of religion.

- **Advancement of legislation to give vast new powers to rabbinic courts and attempts to enforce sex segregation:** Under the proposed legislation, which [passed](#) a preliminary vote, the powers of rabbinical courts would expand beyond family disputes to enable them to rule on a wide range of civil matters. In effect, rabbinical courts would achieve a status equal to that of civil courts, creating a parallel legal system governed by Jewish religious laws. The rabbinical courts stand to gain a massive increase in their budget as a result. Every aspect of rabbinic courts is controlled by ultra-Orthodox Jewish men. [Critics fear](#) that “the first to be harmed will be [religious women](#),” who will be pressured into consenting to have cases involving them heard in rabbinic court. Netanyahu’s ultra-Orthodox allies have also made [proposals](#) that include sex segregation at some public events and allowing businesses to refuse their services based on their religious

beliefs. The Supreme Court has ruled against legal segregation by sex in public in the past. Incidents around the country of discrimination against women are [leading](#) to growing fears for women's rights.

- **Submission of new Basic Law to exempt Haredim from conscription:** MKs from the United Torah Judaism Party proposed a new basic law to exempt Haredim from conscription by identifying Torah study as a “critical service” of “fundamental value in the heritage of the Jewish people.” Likud [denied](#) that it would advance the bill to a vote, though the coalition agreements between Likud and the ultra-Orthodox parties pledged to pass the bill. In 2017, the Supreme Court [invalidated](#) the current conscription law, which exempts full-time religious scholars. The Knesset has not passed a new enlistment law, and the government's fifteenth extension of the deadline to do so expired at the end of July.
- **Passage of law banning all leavened bread products in hospitals during Passover:** Knesset [passed](#) a controversial law banning “chametz” (leavened bread products that are not kosher for Passover) from hospitals during the Jewish holiday. In 2021, the High Court ruled that hospitals were not permitted to ban bringing chametz into hospitals on Passover. Attorney General Gali Baharav-Miara determined that the bill violates Israelis' rights and “raises considerable constitutional difficulties.” Labor MK Gilad Kariv, a reform rabbi, warned that the law “is the first harbinger of an unprecedented wave of religious legislation...that violate[s] freedom of religion and conscience.” Israel Hofshit, an NGO dedicated to advancing religious freedom, has filed a [petition](#) with the High Court against the law.
- **Restrictions on Christians and failure to halt increasing attacks against them:** After a [series of religiously targeted attacks](#) in the beginning of the year, the Vatican-appointed Latin Patriarch to the Holy Land [expressed concern](#) over “the most rightwing government in Israel's history emboldening extremists who have harassed clergy and vandalized religious property at a quickening pace.” The Israeli government has done little to address the attacks by ultra-Orthodox and ultranationalist religious Jews, remaining largely [silent](#). Church officials also [criticized](#) Israeli police for restricting attendance at the Holy Fire celebration at Jerusalem's Church of the Holy Sepulchre during Orthodox Easter. Roughly a third the number of worshipers were allowed in and outside the church as had been admitted in previous years. Police [clashed](#) with, and in some cases “violently beat worshipers trying to make their way through their barricades.”