

Does Britain's Sleepwalking into a Racist Two-tier Citizenship System Serve the UK's Interest?

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The UK is sleepwalking into a racist two-tier system of citizenship following the revelation that Home Secretary, Priti Patel, had quietly introduced a highly controversial plan last week to strip people of citizenship without giving them notice to appeal. The question is, is this really about combatting Daesh terrorists or does Patel have a new target in mind?

New proposals smuggled into the Nationality and Border Bill, will give power to British officials to deprive a person of their citizenship while exempting the government from having to give notice if it is not “reasonably practicable” to do so.

Revoking someone's citizenship is generally seen as a highly controversial move and a feature of extremely repressive authoritarian regimes. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights enshrines having a nationality as a right and forbids governments from arbitrarily depriving someone of their citizenship. A UN convention from 1961 goes further, and bans the withdrawal of citizenship based on race, religion or someone one's political views.

Governments that have included revocation of citizenship in their authoritarian arsenal usually justify it on the grounds of combatting terrorism, a term which, in recent years, has been abused to include political opposition and, in Israel, human rights groups that have been exposing the occupation state's many violations. Critics point out that, not only is revocation of citizenship a modern form of banishment, it also inadvertently hampers global security by leaving terrorists abroad, rather than imprisoning—or at least controlling—they domestically.

As is often the case with draconian laws, justified invariably on the grounds that they will be used in exceptional circumstances, the revocation of citizenship has become a standard practice uniting autocrats and dictators across the world with democracies.

In the UK, where the power to strip British nationals of citizenship was introduced as far

back as 2005 following the terrorist attack in London, the practice has been constantly on the rise. Though this power was used on rare occasions at the beginning, a decade later it became a feature of the Tory government. In the five years during which former Prime Minister, Theresa May, served as Home Secretary, 33 individuals were stripped of their British nationality, a report by the [Bureau of Investigative Journalism found](#). These numbers continued to increase, reaching to as high as one hundred in 2017 that were stripped of their citizenship in a single year.

With the new proposals introduced by Patel, the Tory government is set to remove all constraints and weaponise citizenship in a manner not seen in the UK. Under current rules, the Home Office must make some effort to notify the person before revoking citizenship. This is no longer the case. The proposal also grants powers to strip citizenship retrospectively to cases where an individual was stripped of citizenship without notice before the clause became law, raising questions about their ability to appeal.

Unsurprisingly, the proposal has been met with strong condemnation. “This clause would give Priti Patel unprecedented power to remove your citizenship in secret, without even having to tell you, and effectively deny you an appeal,” Maya Foa, the Director of Reprieve is reported saying. “Under this regime, a person accused of speeding would be afforded more rights than someone at risk of being deprived of their British nationality. This, once again, shows how little regard this government has for the rule of law”.

Arguing that the proposal violated the basic principle of the rule of law, a [Guardian editorial](#) described the move as an “unfair and draconian measure that MPs ought to be ashamed to pass into law.” It also raised concerns over the proposal’s targeting of British Muslims saying that “despite being born and brought up in the UK and having no other home, their citizenship is far from secure.”

[A petition](#) to block the proposal coming into law is nearing 100 thousand signatures. Pointing out that even the worst criminals are allowed the right of appeal, the petition warned that the proposal is “especially problematic to British Asian Muslims against whom this law has been used.” It also stressed that Muslims born in the UK will be living in constant fear and that their protected status as a citizen will no longer carry the same value as the protected status of all other groups in society. Interestingly, [a petition which ran for six months](#) urging the UK government to revoke citizenship only received eight signatures.

Patel’s timing of the proposal, which coincides with her [designation of Palestinian resistant movement Hamas as a terrorist organisation](#), has also raised suspicion over the intended target of the proposal. “The quick succession in which the government’s right to remove anyone’s citizenship without notice, and the designation of Hamas as a terrorist organisation, were passed, could not have been a coincidence” said British political commentator, Dr Anas Al-Tikriti.

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This govt has taken a huge stride towards making the UK a fascist state.

— Anas Altikriti أنس التكريتي (@anasaltikriti) [November 22, 2021](#)

It does not take much imagination to see how the designation of Hamas as a terrorist group could pave the way for the Tory government to target pro-Palestinian activists and aid workers raising money for the two million besieged Palestinians living under Israel's brutal siege and strip British activists of their citizenship over alleged support of another group added to the ever-growing list of terrorist organisations.

Patel is, after all, a great friend of Israel. She [sparked controversy](#) in her previous role as British aid minister when she asked officials within her department to look into whether UK development aid money could be funnelled into serving the Israeli army; conducted 12 secret meetings with high level Israeli officials, discussed British government business with former Israeli Prime Minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, without Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) officials being present and ignored strict government ministerial guidelines demanded of her office.

When details of her unauthorised meetings with Israeli officials were uncovered, Patel [apologised](#) for misleading the public. She initially claimed she had gone on a family holiday to Israel when, in fact, her trip was organised by the Conservative Friends of Israel lobby (CFI). Not only was Patel accused of running a private parallel foreign policy, [senior Conservative MP's also complained](#) that the British media were turning a blind eye to the corrupt relationship that has allowed Israel to "buy access" in Westminster. Israeli opposition politician, Isaac Herzog, and the current President described Patel's fall from grace as a "great loss for Israel."

To repeat Al-Tikriti "Who gets to benefit from over 4 million British citizens constantly worrying whether or not a letter will come through declaring them non-nationals and ordering them to leave?"

It's hard to see how Patel's attempt to drag UK further to the right and align the country with Arab autocrats and an apartheid Israeli regime that labels peaceful human rights advocacy groups as terrorists, serves in any shape or form Britain's interest.

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