

# STRIPPED:

The Citizenship Divide

REPRIEVE

RUN NYMEDE

## ABOUT THE AUTHORS

### The Runnymede Trust

For more than 50 years, Runnymede have worked tirelessly for racial justice in Britain, through groundbreaking research, collaboration with grassroots organisations, the production of educational assets and policy briefings, and by influencing decision makers. <https://www.runnymedetrust.org/>

The Runnymede Trust is a registered charity in England and Wales (no: 1063609).

### Reprieve

Reprieve is a legal action NGO, composed of investigators, lawyers and campaigners fighting for justice. Reprieve defends people who are facing extreme human rights abuses, often at the hands of powerful governments. We work on behalf of communities directly affected by citizenship deprivation. <https://reprieve.org/uk/>

Reprieve is a company limited by guarantee (no. 05777831) and a registered charity in England and Wales (no. 1114900).

December 2025

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New research from the Runnymede Trust and Reprieve, which analyses the most recent census and population demographic data and government policy, has found that

**9 million** people in the UK could be stripped of their British citizenship – 3 million more than were previously estimated to be at risk.<sup>1</sup>

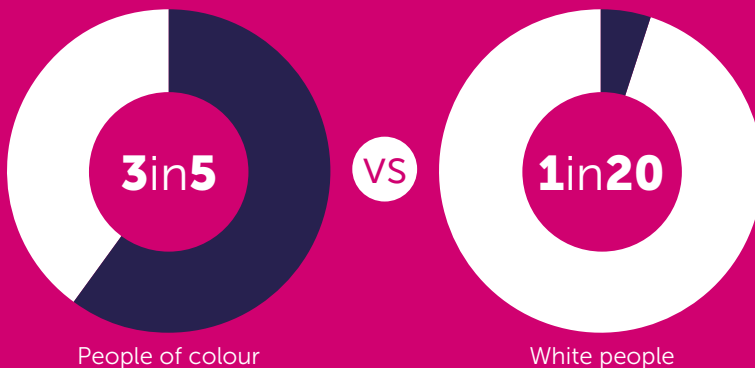
**People of colour are 12 times more likely to be at risk** than their white counterparts.

This means that

**around 13% of the  
UK's population  
could be stripped  
of their citizenship,**

including **3 in 5 people of colour**, compared  
with just **1 in 20 of their white neighbours**.

At risk



The Runnymede Trust and Reprieve's analysis finds that legislation and government practice have created a **fundamentally racist, two-tier citizenship regime** that undermines community strength and is at odds with the foundational British principle of equality before the law. **Under this regime, the legal rights of people with a connection to another country are less secure than those without such connections** and can be taken away with a stroke of the Home Secretary's pen.

## **For at-risk communities, this is of grave concern.**

The Conservative Party has floated proposals to deport large numbers of legally settled people from Britain,<sup>2</sup> the Reform party has promised to deport more than half a million people if elected,<sup>3</sup> and prominent nationalist voices have called for “a massive increase in the use of this power to revoke citizenship.”<sup>4</sup>

This Report examines the context behind citizenship stripping and provides an analysis of the new figures.

Note on terminology: the term citizenship stripping is used to refer to deprivations made on the basis that they are “conducive to the public good”, as opposed to the removal of citizenship found to have been obtained through “fraud” or other reasons.<sup>5</sup>

## HISTORICAL BACKGROUND: FROM DISUSE TO ABUSE



Mass deprivation of citizenship by the UK Government is a modern development, reviving a practice which had been rejected as extreme and contrary to the rule of law following World War Two.

Deprivation of citizenship was first enshrined in UK statute in 1914 with the outbreak of the First World War.<sup>6</sup> However, it fell almost completely into disuse across Europe following the Second World War, in revulsion at the Nazis stripping the citizenship of Jewish citizens of Germany.

From 1973-2002 there were no deprivations of UK citizenship, other than for fraud.<sup>7</sup> Mass citizenship stripping began in 2010, and since then more than 200 people have been stripped of their citizenship on “public good” grounds.<sup>8</sup> The only countries to remove citizenship more often than the UK during this period were Bahrain and Nicaragua.<sup>9</sup>

### Evolution of British citizenship stripping law



The UK has signed and ratified both the 1954 Convention Relating to the Status of Stateless Persons and the 1961 Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness, treaties that place obligations on Governments to protect the right to a nationality and to prevent statelessness<sup>10</sup>. However, the UK maintains several reservations to these treaties, and neither Convention has been fully incorporated into domestic law. This has allowed the UK to enact laws that mean some people have a form of British nationality that can be stripped, leaving some with no right of abode in any country.<sup>11</sup>



Section 40 of the British Nationality Act 1981 provided for removal of citizenship if it had been obtained by fraud. Citizens by registration or naturalisation could also be stripped for disloyalty or disaffection, assisting the enemy during wartime and receipt of a custodial sentence of at least 12 months in the first five years of naturalisation.<sup>12</sup> All four grounds were dependent upon the Secretary of State also establishing that the person’s ongoing citizenship was not “conducive to the public good”. Deprivation of citizenship required a combination of the specific grounds and the general test to be satisfied. In addition, the power could not be used in circumstances where deprivation would lead to statelessness.<sup>13</sup>





**In 2002, the Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Act extended the deprivation powers to those born British, as well as naturalised and registered citizens, provided they had another citizenship.** It also replaced the list of specific grounds set out above with a catch-all criterion of doing “anything prejudicial to the vital interests of the UK”.<sup>14</sup> The test no longer required an individual to have committed a defined set of acts in addition to the general test – the broad catch all sufficed to remove citizenship.



**The 2006 Immigration and Asylum Act further lowered the legal bar for being stripped of citizenship,** reducing the threshold for deprivation of citizenship from doing “anything prejudicial to the vital interests of the UK”, to its being merely “conducive to the public good” – a broader and less

precise test.<sup>15</sup>



**The 2014 Immigration Act for the first time allowed citizenship to be removed from naturalised Britons with no other citizenship** who had done “anything prejudicial to the vital interests of the UK,” provided the Home Secretary had “reasonable grounds for believing that the person is able, under the law of a country or territory outside the United Kingdom, to become a national of such a country or territory.”<sup>16</sup> This reintroduced the

language from the 2002 Act, but now applied it to a much broader group of people with some connection to a second nationality. **It allowed the Government to leave people effectively stateless** in such instances, introducing a considerable risk of deprivation for those with foreign heritage, whether or not they had taken any steps to obtaining or retaining dual nationality. Those who were British born or British by descent, under the legislation, could not be stripped if they did not hold dual nationality anywhere else and accordingly would be rendered stateless by such a decision, creating the two-tier system. These provisions are still in force today.



**In 2022, Section 10 of the Nationality and Borders Act allowed for citizenship to be revoked without those affected being notified.**<sup>17</sup>

**In 2025, the Deprivation of Citizenship Orders (Effect during Appeal) Act<sup>18</sup> further expanded these powers,** preventing people stripped of their British citizenship from exercising their rights as British citizens, even after the courts have ruled that the Home Secretary’s actions were unlawful. A person successfully challenging their deprivation now does not get their citizenship back until all appeals by the Government have been exhausted, a process which can, and often does, take many years.



**Citizenship deprivation decisions are made by the Home Secretary, making this a concentrated executive power.**<sup>19</sup> There is no requirement that the person deprived be convicted of any offence prior to the deprivation.<sup>20</sup>



**The vast majority of those deprived are Muslim people with South Asian, Middle Eastern or North African heritage.**<sup>21</sup>

## DATA AND METHODOLOGY

### Method



To estimate populations potentially eligible for citizenship deprivation, we developed a multi-layered statistical model combining UK census tabulations, the Annual Population Survey (APS), and Home Office parental records. Census tabulations provided population counts by age and ethnicity across hundreds of specific regional categories (e.g. Kashmir, Punjab, Arab) but did not directly indicate country of birth. Conversely, the country of birth census variable did not directly indicate ethnicity. To reconcile these two sources, we mapped the detailed ethnic categories onto the harmonised country of birth list using proportional weights, creating heritage-based population groups which retained ethnic composition. Where the remapped counts were lower than the original census totals for a country, the shortfall was redistributed from the White British population to account for UK born individuals who may have identified differently on the census.

Once heritage groups were established, the populations were split into UK and foreign born groups using the original census country of birth variable. For foreign born residents, APS data on nationality and age were used to calculate the probability of holding British citizenship, which was applied as a weight across age brackets. Where data for older groups were missing, these weights were scaled using patterns from younger cohorts.

For UK-born residents, Home Office data on parental country of birth were used to estimate the likelihood of having at least one foreign-born parent, with maternal country of birth prioritised to avoid overestimation when combining mother and father counts. The final modelled estimates were benchmarked against census passport counts to ensure consistency with observed populations.

## Scope and Limitations



While this model provides detailed estimates of populations eligible for citizenship deprivation, it relies on several assumptions and has inherent limitations. Granular census data were remapped to a harmonised country of birth list, which may imperfectly capture true heritage distributions.

Citizenship probabilities from the APS were extrapolated for older groups, assuming similar patterns across cohorts, and parental country of birth weights were primarily based on maternal origin, which may under or overestimate eligibility in some cases. Benchmarking against census passport counts helps maintain consistency but underreporting or errors could affect accuracy. Further, the model assumes relatively static migration and naturalisation patterns over time because detailed historical data are not available. As a result, older cohorts may not fully reflect past migration waves, changes in naturalisation rules, or historical variations in citizenship acquisition, which could lead to under or over estimation in some groups. These limitations mean that while estimates are robust at the population level, caution is warranted for interpreting small groups or individual cases.

Additionally, nationality law is complex, and interpretations of different countries' nationality laws is a matter of fierce debate. This complexity plays out in citizenship stripping cases, which typically take years to conclude.

In many of these cases, courts will be tasked with interpreting and applying another country's national law as a question of fact. Often, the court has to determine between conflicting interpretations of a country's nationality law to decide whether an individual who has been stripped of British nationality holds the right to another nationality. This is often complex. There is also often a debate about whether an individual has *de jure* or *de facto* status. Our courts have held that only the former matters; i.e., it only matters whether or not under the law of another country as it stands the individual has or should be able to claim citizenship. The fact the country may not apply its own law correctly, refusing citizenship (i.e., the individual is *de facto* stateless) is not treated as rendering the individual stateless.

In such cases, a court will rule that an individual has a right to a secondary nationality, but experts or officials from the country in question will disagree with this. See, for example, the case of Shamima Begum, who was born in the UK to Bangladeshi parents. In February 2020, a tribunal ruled that removing her citizenship was lawful because she was "a citizen of Bangladesh by descent."<sup>22</sup> However, Bangladeshi officials explicitly stated that she was not a Bangladeshi citizen and would not be welcomed.<sup>23</sup>

In other cases, the Government will erroneously assess that an individual has a right to a secondary nationality and strip the individual of their British citizenship, only to have to regrant citizenship after a court examines the evidence. For example, in the recent cases of C3, C4 and C7, the court found that at the time of their deprivation, the appellants were citizens of no other nation and had therefore been left unlawfully stateless.<sup>24</sup> This was also true in the cases of E3 and N3.<sup>25</sup> These grave errors were only corrected more than a year after the deprivation orders when the cases were examined by a special tribunal.

It is also of note that some deprivation appeals are stayed and unable to proceed, due to the individual concerned being held outside the UK in conditions of detention such that they are unable to instruct legal representatives. In these cases, a court has been unable to rule as to the legality of the deprivation, but we believe several have been left stateless by the Government's actions.<sup>26</sup>

The amendment to the Nationality and Borders Act which allows for citizenship to be revoked without those affected being notified (discussed above),<sup>27</sup> compounds the potential for confusion, error and delay.

In light of the complexity in interpreting the law and the way the citizenship stripping powers have been used in practice over recent years, for the purposes of the analysis, a person is deemed to be exposed to a 'risk' of citizenship stripping where they have a known connection to another country by dint of having a foreign-born parent, without prejudging whether a court might ultimately uphold or revoke such a decision were it to eventually be challenged. The figures thus reflect an upper-bound estimate of exposure to deprivation risk, based on census data and demographic weighting, rather than definitive legal eligibility.

# FINDINGS

Using data from the most recent 2021 census, the Runnymede Trust and Reprieve's analysis shows that **9 million people risk being stripped of their British citizenship**. This is a stark **increase of 50 per cent on a previous estimate of 6 million** derived from the 2011 census figures.<sup>28</sup>

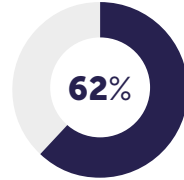
When broken down by ethnicity, relative to the percentage of the UK population, **62% of Black British people** (1.6 million), **62% of people of 'Other' ethnicity** (0.7 million) and **60% of Asian British people** (3.3 million) could risk being deprived of their citizenship, compared with just **5% of White British people** (2.4 million).

**Prior estimates showed that non-white ethnic minority residents were eight times more likely to be at risk of deprivation compared to white residents of all backgrounds.**<sup>29</sup>

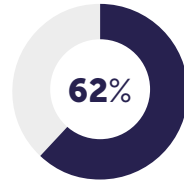
**The new analysis shows vulnerability to deprivation among people of colour is in fact 12 times higher than that of white people.**

**This means that 3 in 5 people of colour, compared with just 1 in 20 of their white neighbours, are at risk of being stripped.** This is up from 2021 estimates that found 2 in 5 people of colour were at risk.<sup>30</sup>

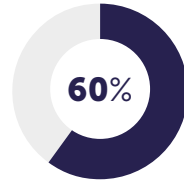
Black British people



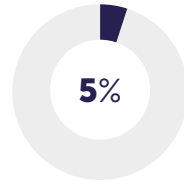
'Other' ethnicity



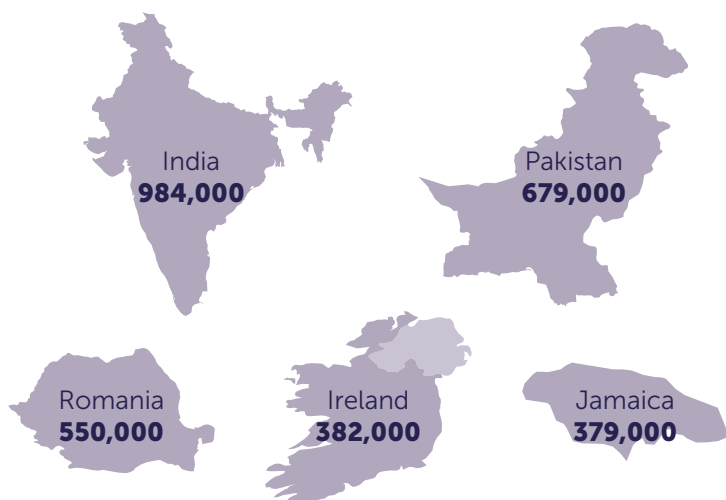
Asian British people



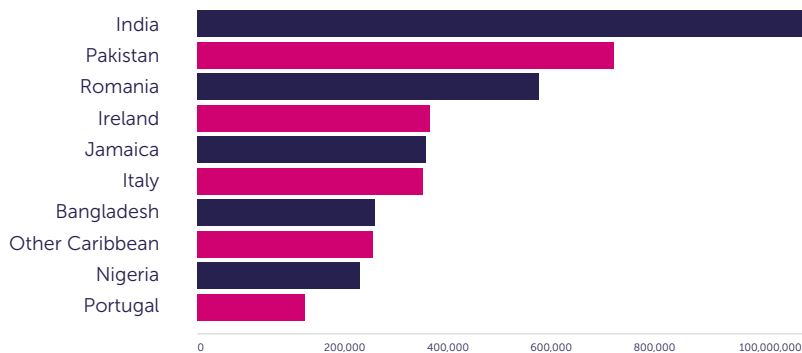
White British people



The largest groups of people eligible for deprivation of citizenship are those connected to India (984-000 people) and Pakistan (679-000 people). Other sizable groups include people linked to Romania (around 550,000), Ireland (382,000) and Jamaica (379,000).



The ten nationalities most affected can be found below.



## Implications

These figures demonstrate that people of colour are at significantly heightened risk of their citizenship being stripped. The current two-tier legal regime discriminates against people with a connection to another nationality, causing a significant and racialised disparity of rights. The right to citizenship in the UK for racialised groups – and all the legal rights that come with it – is conditional and continually under threat.

This echoes the differential treatment of citizens who acquired citizenship through a colony rather than through British ancestry following decolonisation in the 1960s, and the dilution of the right of citizenship by birth in the UK, which were among the factors that contributed to the Windrush scandal.<sup>31</sup>

This disparate treatment is enshrined in the legislation itself. As discussed above, for example, the 2014 Immigration Act allowed for citizenship to be removed from naturalised British citizens who have no other citizenship, provided it is believed they may be able to acquire one.<sup>32</sup> This is not the case for non-naturalised citizens, who may not legally be stripped of citizenship unless they hold another citizenship.<sup>33</sup> What this means in practice is that naturalised British citizens are at a greater risk of being rendered stateless as a result of a citizenship stripping decision than British born citizens.

# POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

In light of these concerning findings, The Runnymede Trust and Reprieve are calling for the following policy changes:

1. Introduce an immediate moratorium on the use of citizenship deprivation powers in section 40(2) of the British Nationality Act 1981.;
2. Abolish 40(2) of the British Nationality Act 1981, which allows the UK Home Secretary to strip citizens of nationality for 'the public good'.; and
3. Reinstate the British citizenship of all those who have been deprived for the 'public good', in view of the discriminatory nature and arbitrariness of the deprivation regime.



# ENDNOTES

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- 21 Webber, F., (2022). Citizenship: From Right to Privilege. [Viewed 24 October 2025]. Available from: <https://irr.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/Deprivation-of-citizenship-Final-LR.pdf>, p. 8; The vast majority of the people Reprieve supports in the context of citizenship deprivation are British Muslims with South Asian, Middle Eastern or African heritage.
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