**[Dual nationality](https://www.dawn.com/news/1691559/dual-nationality)**

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DUAL nationality, according to Pakistani law, devolves naturally to anyone who has been a Pakistani national and his or her progeny, even after they have acquired the nationality of another country. This means that theoretically, generation after generation of descendants of Pakistani immigrants can still call themselves Pakistani nationals even if they have little idea where Pakistan is.

The issue of dual nationality, of course, arises only for those Pakistanis settled in countries which allow immigrants to acquire their nationality, which means mostly countries of Europe and North America. Pakistanis living and working in the Middle East are not dual nationals but overseas Pakistanis, as most of these countries do not allow workers to acquire nationality, irrespective of the length of time they have lived in those countries. Dual nationals enjoy all the rights of citizenship, including the right to vote and run for elected office.

More importantly, very few of them ever intend to return to Pakistan. In the UK, many immigrant families are now well into their fourth or fifth generations and any prospect of their relocating to Pakistan ever is virtually out of the question. In other words, their stake in Pakistan is practically nil. In the UK, their Pakistani identity only comes to life when a Pakistani cricket team visits England, but in other European or North American countries, even this bond is not there.

There are a few questions that arise from this state of affairs. Firstly, as people who have little or no stake in Pakistan, or for that matter, knowledge of the issues facing Pakistan, on what basis are they going to decide which way to vote? On what information will their vote be based — or, more appropriately, given the overwhelming preponderance of the social media, on what sort of disinformation will their vote be based?

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Secondly, Pakistani diplomatic outlets will be burdened with the almost impossible task of determining who is a Pakistani, with many turning up to claim Pakistani nationality based on flimsy documents, perhaps going back decades, that can easily be ‘duplicated’, thus opening the door to a level of corruption that will be impossible for foreign missions to handle given their very limited resources and powers in foreign countries.

So before this thing can be implemented, Pakistan has to tighten up its citizenship and nationality rules, especially for those who have taken a dual nationality, and the current absurd situation of automatic devolution of nationality from one generation to the next needs to be revisited — and not merely for the purpose of deciding whether dual nationals should be given the vote. The infinitely more important aspect is the terrorism side of things, especially after the decision of the UK government refusing to allow Shamima Begum, a UK-based dual national, to return to the UK after reportedly going to Syria to join the Islamic State effort there.

She herself was born and raised in the UK but had a notional Bangladeshi citizenship because her grandfather had come from there, although she had never in her life been to Bangladesh.

Most important of all, voting rights will only lead to greater divisions in the expatriate community and greater involvement of overseas Pakistanis in the politics of Pakistan as opposed to the politics of what is now their home country and will, in all likelihood, remain the homes of their children, grandchildren and future generations. Speaking specifically of the UK where I live, even without voting rights, perhaps more people of Pakistani origin are involved in Pakistani politics than they are in British politics, thus accounting for the heavy lack of representation of the Pakistani community in mainstream British political life.

By contrast, two of the most important portfolios in the current British cabinet are occupied by people of Indian origin and it cannot be a coincidence that there are no branches of Indian political parties here in the UK.

On the other hand, the case of overseas Pakistanis living and working in the Middle East, is entirely different. The overwhelming majority of them will be returning to Pakistan at some stage and therefore one can see why they would like to have a say in Pakistani politics. Since dual nationality is not an issue in these countries, it is only right that they be given the right to vote especially in view of the huge remittances they send home.

The issue therefore needs more examination in the light of our own ground realities. Comparison with positions adapted by the UK or the US may not be entirely relevant due to the very different culture of politics in those countries.

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