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[India Passes a Controversial Bill Regarding Naturalization Policy](#)

Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi and his ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) proposed a controversial bill that would alter India's naturalization policy by creating a religious test for migrants who are trying to become citizens. The bill, named the Citizenship Amendment Bill, was passed in both houses of Parliament – first on Tuesday in India's lower house, the Lok Sabha, and then on Wednesday in the upper house, the Rajya Sabha. With it passing in both houses, the legislation is now set to be signed into law. The Modi Government has defended the bill by saying it aims to protect persecuted Hindus, Buddhists, and Christians who migrate from other countries in Southeast Asia. However, Muslims in India fear it is yet another attempt by the Modi Government to create a hierarchical society in which Muslims are second-class citizens.

The Citizenship Amendment Bill is the second example of Prime Minister Modi enacting legislation to alienate Muslim Indians. The first instance was an effort in the state of Assam in which people had to prove their Indian lineage with documentation to prevent being left off a census list of Indian citizens in the region. This was particularly controversial due to the high population of migrants from Bangladesh in the region, who have lived in India for generations but are undocumented. 1.9 million people ended up being left off of official citizen lists as a result, and those people are now stateless. This action by the Modi Government specifically targeted Muslims, as Assam state is the only state in India to have an official list of citizens. Uncoincidentally, Assam state is also the most populous Muslim state in India.

Many have argued that the Citizenship Amendment Bill is designed to make it more difficult for Muslims living in India to obtain Indian citizenship. Correspondingly, the bill would also make it easier to incarcerate and deport people who are unable to prove their citizenship. Supporters of the bill have defended it as protecting Indian identity. Staunch supporter of the bill and BJP member of Parliament Ravi Kishan said, "we must have our own identity." Kishan also echoed a popular talking point from Hindu nationalist groups, saying that Indian Muslims were originally Hindus and are only recent converts to Islam. This is despite a great deal of evidence showing Islam has been prevalent in the Indian subcontinent for centuries.

Members of the opposition Congress Party have attacked the bill as being unconstitutional. Upon Indian independence from Great Britain, its founding leaders Mohandas Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru decided that India would be a secular state. Despite Hindus comprising 80% of the country, Gandhi and Nehru were adamant that minorities should have equal protection under the law. Specifically, Article 25 of India's Constitution guarantees, "the right to freely profess, practice, and propagate religion." This clause seems to make the Citizenship Amendment Bill unconstitutional. The leader of the Congress Party, Rahul Gandhi, called the proposed law an "all-out assault on the very idea of India." Sanjay Jha, spokesperson for the opposition, called the bill a distraction meant to polarize India and galvanize support for Modi in the wake of an economic downturn.