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Citizenship status is meant to be secure, that is, inviolable. Recently, however, several democratic states have adopted or are considering adopting laws that allow them the power to revoke citizenship. This claimed right forces us to consider whether citizenship can be treated as a “conditional” status, in particular whether it can be treated as conditional on the right sort of behavior. Those who defend such a view argue that citizenship is a privilege rather than a right, and thus in principle is revocable. Participating in a foreign state’s military, treason, spying, or committing acts that otherwise threaten the national security of one’s state may all warrant revocation. This article assesses the justifications given for the claimed power to revoke citizenship in democratic states and concludes that, ultimately, such a power is incompatible with democracy.

I begin with a brief account of the claims given by contemporary democratic states for the “right to revoke.” Democratic citizenship is today commonly understood to be *egalitarian*, that is, it protects an equal basic package of rights for all citizens; and to be “the highest and most secure legal status,” that is, it is meant to be secure from unilateral withdrawal by the state. Formally, many democratic states have revocation laws on the books, but most of these have long been in disuse. Although I argue in this article that all revocation laws are inconsistent with democratic citizenship, I focus on the recent surge in proposed and implemented revocation laws, which are justified as essential to protecting national security.

In the second section I outline three reasons to object to revocation laws. First, revocation laws discriminate between citizens based on their citizenship status. Second, since they single out those who are eligible for revocation, they apply unequal penalties for the same crime. Third, they are inadequately justified, in general, but also particularly to those who may be subject to them, because they are not adequately connected to the policy goal they are said to fulfill. I conclude with some brief observations concerning the ways in which revocation permits states to abrogate their shared responsibility for protecting the global community from dangerous individuals.

### Keywords: immigration; citizenship; revocation; ethics; democratic theory; egalitarianism.