



Stormont Justice Bill permits the state to keep your data for a lifetime

## Description

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### Justice bill

The Justice Bill [currently passing through the Northern Ireland Assembly](#) will allow the police to retain a person's biometric data for a massive 75 years. This is despite the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) [previously ruling](#) that indefinite holding of such information is a violation of privacy.

75 years may not be indefinite, but it's essentially a lifetime, meaning the difference is largely moot. More worryingly, the bill allows the state to keep information such as fingerprints and DNA for most of a century in cases of "terrorism-related" offences. This could include cases of inviting "support for a proscribed organisation".

Such legislation has been grotesquely abused to [criminalise peaceful supporters](#) of anti-genocide group Palestine Action. The direct action collective sought to halt Zionist atrocities by [smashing up the arms factories](#) making the weapons used to murder Palestinians.

Legitimate protest is further undermined by the bill granting authorities the power to retain data for "breach of the peace" offences. These are typically minor matters stemming from low-level civil disobedience. In Stormont, Gerry Carroll of People Before Profit [questioned whether this](#)

"quite loose term [breach of the peace] could be used to keep people's data for quite a long length of time when, by most people's definition, the person might not have committed a serious crime.

**Carroll: "biometric surveillance being smuggled in through the back door"**

The current plan is to operate biometric data retention [on a 75/50/25 model](#). That means for offences such as murder, rape, severe violence and the aforementioned *terrorism*, data can be held for 75 years. It'll be 50 for offences that result in a custodial sentence of 5 years or more, and 25 for those not involving time in jail.

Carroll has [introduced an amendment](#) to ensure people are informed that their data is being held, something not previously part of the bill.

The West Belfast MLA also criticised how the bill permits the Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI) to create a *facial-image database*. He said in a press release sent to the *Canary*:

This is the architecture of biometric surveillance being smuggled in through the back door, with a promise to fill in the detail later.

The legislation does not treat photographs as biometric data in the same way as fingerprints and DNA. The PSNI are therefore permitted to hold images indefinitely, including those of suspects photographed at a police station. That means people who have committed no crime will potentially sit on a police database forever.

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The Northern Ireland Commissioner for Children and Young People (NICCY) expressed alarm at this in its [June 2025 briefing](#), saying it could be used as part of rights-violating live facial recognition systems (LFR). The PSNI have previously expressed interest in introducing such a system, [saying the police service](#)

fully recognises the value this could bring to investigations and public safety.

Big Brother Watch [have said such technology](#)

discriminates against women and people of colour. 80% of people misidentified by facial recognition in London in 2025 were Black.

NICCY suggest the use of photos may again be a violation of European law. They cite the case of *Gaughran vs UK*, where the ECHR found that retention of photographs is a violation of the:

right to respect for private and family life.

## Justice Bill - DUP want to keep jailing 10 year olds

The north of Ireland Policing Board's human rights reviewer [said in 2024 that](#)

the PSNI continue to hold biometric data (fingerprints, photographs, and DNA profiles) on hundreds of thousands of people in Northern Ireland unlawfully and has been doing so since 2008.

Another contentious aspect of the bill is whether it will alter the minimum age of criminal responsibility (MACR). The north of Ireland has one of the [lowest MACR levels in the world](#) (see under "United Kingdom"), at an outrageous 10 years old. That means children not yet in secondary school can be put behind bars.

There are [various amendments](#) seeking to change this via the Justice Bill. Carroll has asked that it be set at 16, while Alliance MLA Sian Mulholland has introduced an amendment setting the level at 14 years. Doug Beattie of the Ulster Unionist Party (UUP) has sought to set it to 12, [leading to a clash with UUP leader and ex-PSNI man Jon Burrows](#) Beattie has [since resigned](#) from the party.

The dinosaurs of the [Democratic Unionist Party](#) and [Traditional Unionist Voice](#) are determined to ensure dealing with youth offenders is kept firmly in the 19th century. They favour maintaining the status quo; i.e. jailing 10 year olds whose forebrain has barely started developing.

A [June 2023 consultation](#) on raising the MACR found overwhelming support for the obviously sensible and humane approach of raising the age to 14. MLAs will continue debate on this aspect of the bill next week.

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