ASK WHAT YOU CAN DO FOR YOUR COUNTRY AND NOT WHAT IT CAN DO FOR YOU

Is Canadian Citizenship Really Being Taken for Granted?

ABSTRACT

A majority of Canadians – both immigrants and non-immigrants – agree that citizenship is taken for granted in their country. However it remains unclear what it is about citizenship that is being taken for granted and which group(s) of Canadians are doing so. This article contends that the failure to define the meaning of citizenship underlies the idea that it is taken for granted. Those equating citizenship with a weak sense of belonging to Canada – in particular among immigrants – need to rethink such affirmations in view of considerable evidence that foreign-born Canadians possess relatively strong attachment to the country.

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Baby boomers will likely recall the passage in the inauguration speech of United States President John F. Kennedy, "Ask not what your country can do for you – ask what you can do for your country." Since the President immortalized this phrase, it has been frequently used to refer to the duties of citizens and often, in turn, refers to the responsibilities of new citizens.

According to the Institute for Canadian Citizenship[1] (ICC) and as stated on the homepage of its Website, citizenship is something that most Canadians take for granted. An important majority of Canadians concur. According to a survey conducted in 2005 for Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC) by the firm Ipsos, some eight in ten persons agree that "many Canadians take their citizenship for granted (some 52% strongly agree with the statement)." Some 70% of immigrants were likely to agree that citizenship is taken for granted compared with 80% of Canadian-born respondents. In 2007, 80% of respondents again agreed that citizenship was being taken for granted (Ipsos Reid for CIC, September 2007). However, the survey does not ask respondents which Canadians are taking their citizenship for granted. Perhaps more importantly, it is not clear what exactly is being taken for granted.

Why then is there such widespread feeling that citizenship is being taken for granted? In part, it is explained by the various meanings attributed to citizenship. It is cautiously assumed in this article that many individuals expressing concerns over citizenship equate it with the degree of belonging to Canada and are preoccupied with what they regard as a weak attachment to the country, notably amongst newcomers. This despite the fact that nearly every survey conducted over the past decade reveals that the vast majority of Canadians – non-immigrant and immigrant alike – have a strong sense of attachment to Canada. Other surveys reveal that 95% of Canadians believe it is important to have Canadian citizenship (International Social Survey Programme, 2003).

Others seem preoccupied by the presumed failure on the part of "citizens" to assume responsibilities that accompany the benefits associated with being Canadian. That it is not apparent what such responsibilities entail is reflected in our ongoing debate over the matter. To mark the 60th anniversary of the *Canadian Citizenship Act*, CIC commissioned a report on the attitudes and perceptions of Canadians on the issue of citizenship. The report asked the following question, "What is the meaning of citizenship for citizens and governments, as well as the responsibilities of each?" (Ipsos Reid for CIC, January 2007). It seems widely assumed that too many "citizens" refuse to assume responsibilities that we often seem to be in the process of defining.

What follows will examine the various meanings associated with the term "citizenship" and attempt, via analysis of the results of a number of focus groups commissioned by the Government of Canada and national public opinion surveys, to determine whether indeed citizenship is being taken for granted. A number of international surveys will also be analyzed to situate Canada's performance in a global context on the basis of various indices of national identity and civic consciousness.

Not just passports? Multiple meanings of citizenship

Citizenship is employed to mean a variety of things that do not easily connect. In addition to the dimensions of legal status, the term citizenship is used to refer to civic and national identity and

Table 1
Level of agreement on the question "Many Canadians take their citizenship for granted" and responses to the question "What are the requirements of citizenship?" 2005

Many Canadians take their citizenship for granted.					
What are the requirements for becoming a Canadian citizen?	**Strongly disagree**	**Somewhat disagree**	**Neither agree nor disagree**	**Somewhat agree**	**Strongly agree**
Don't know/not sure	27.8%	28.8%	13.6%	19.6%	24.7%
Having knowledge/background information about Canada	11.4%	–	6.8%	6.7%	6.0%
Being born in Canada/by birth	10.1%	6.8%	20.5%	14.4%	11.3%
Having residency for so many years/ living in Canada for a number of years	8.9%	8.2%	6.8%	11.4%	10.0%
Clean background/criminal check/no criminal record	7.6%	11.0%	4.5%	6.5%	7.2%

Source: Ipsos Reid for Citizenship and Immigration Canada, August 2005.

civic practice – people's interest and participation in Canadian society and institutions. This term has become a trendy way of packaging such things as people's knowledge of Canadian history and politics, their attachment to the country, the extent to which they vote in elections and their level and type of volunteer activity. In the case of newcomers, just about anything that relates to becoming Canadian can be considered part of discussions about citizenship.

It remains unclear whether a broadly defined notion of citizenship is resonating with the population. In 2006, members of CIC-commissioned focus groups were asked what they thought about when they hear the word citizenship. The things most frequently mentioned were travel, passports, singing the national anthem, place of birth and a sense of belonging and responsibility to your country and community. Focus group participants in Toronto associated citizenship with the adaptation of immigrants and new Canadians. When the term "good citizenship" was evoked, participants referred to the fulfillment of one's rights and obligations such as exercising the right to vote, paying income tax and respecting the laws of the land. Some extended this to include mutual respect, supporting Canada's diversity and environmental protection.

The government of Canada has also looked into the degree of knowledge among Canadians related to the requirements of citizenship. According to a 2005 Ipsos survey conducted for CIC, the population is by no means certain of citizenship requirements, with the most frequently mentioned response to that question being "I don't know" (22%). The next most frequent response is "having residency in Canada" (21%). Just over one in ten say "being born in Canada" (14%) is a requirement of citizenship, and slightly fewer say "having a clean background/criminal check and no criminal record" (12%). All other mentions are offered by less than one in ten Canadians. Only 8% of immigrants said they didn't know when asked about the requirements of citizenship compared with 18% of second generation and 27% of third generation respondents.

As observed in Table 1, Canadians who strongly agree that citizenship is being taken for granted are just as likely to acknowledge that they do not know about the requirements of Canadian citizenship as those who believe that citizenship is not being taken for granted.

Figure 1
Ipsos survey results on rights and responsibilities associated with citizenship, 2005

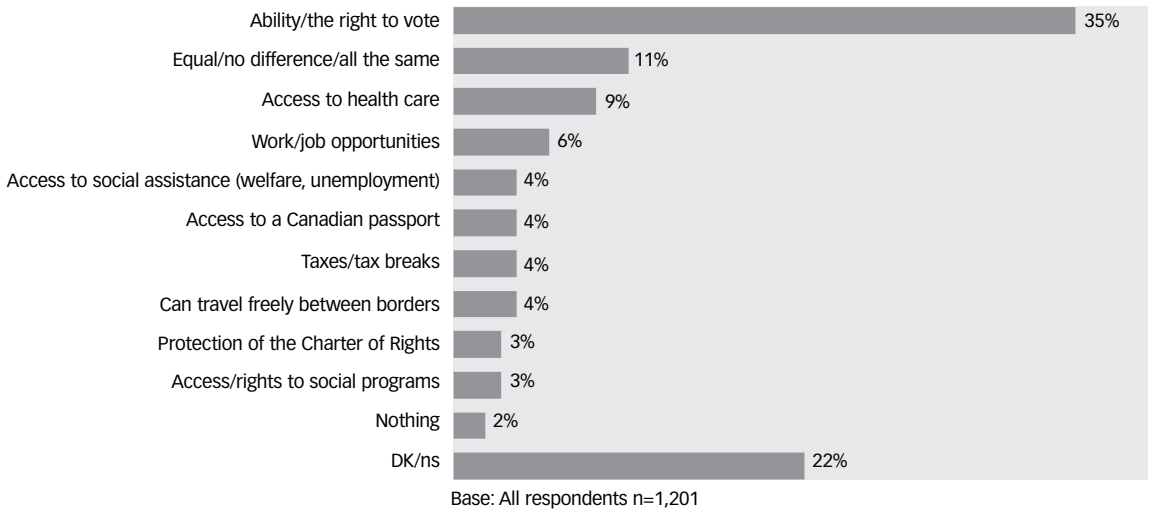


Table 2
Level of agreement on the question "Many Canadians take their citizenship for granted" and responses to the question "What rights and responsibilities do citizens have that non-citizens living in Canada do not have," 2005

Many Canadians take their citizenship for granted					
What rights and responsibilities do citizens have that non-citizens living in Canada do not have? (First Mention)	Strongly disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Strongly agree
Don't know /not stated	22.8%	21.9%	20.5%	22.6%	21.2%
Ability/right to vote	41.8%	34.2%	36.4%	37.2%	38.2%
Equal/ no difference/all the same	11.4%	12.3%	11.4%	10.0%	8.4%
Nothing	1.3%	2.7%	2.3%	2.6%	1.5%

Source: Ipsos Reid for Citizenship and Immigration Canada, August 2005.

Rights and responsibilities of citizenship

In 2007, nine out of ten (92%) Canadians said that there ought to be responsibilities associated with being a Canadian citizen (Ipsos for CIC, September 2007). The ICC concurs, saying "it (citizenship) requires that we share certain rights and fulfill our reciprocal obligations."

However, the July 2005 Ipsos survey (Figure 1) revealed that, with the exception of the right to vote, Canadians do not appear knowledgeable about the rights and responsibilities associated with citizenship. For example, 35% of Canadians are unable to offer an opinion on the rights and responsibilities that may be unavailable to Canadian non-citizens. Further analysis reveals that those most likely to say "the right to vote" include foreign-born Canadians (69%) compared with third-plus generation Canadians (32%).

Interestingly, as Table 2 indicates, when asked about the rights and responsibilities of citizens and non-citizens, those Canadians who think that citizenship is being taken for granted give relatively similar responses to those who do not think so.

Separating the responsibilities from the rights gives rise to a somewhat different set of responses. When asked about the responsibilities of new Canadian citizens, all respondents agreed that they should respect the laws of the land (95% strongly agreed). Somewhat fewer (62%) strongly agreed that new Canadians should be expected to learn Canadian values and traditions. Still nine in ten agreed with this principle.[2]

> When the term "good citizenship" was evoked, participants referred to the fulfillment of one's rights and obligations such as exercising the right to vote, paying income tax and respecting the laws of the land. Some extended this to include mutual respect, supporting Canada's diversity and environmental protection.

It is perfectly legitimate and laudable to encourage immigrants and non-immigrants alike to be civically engaged. It is, however, uncertain that such encouragement is the remedy in Canada for citizenship being taken for granted. Again, this would require a demonstration that citizenship is being taken for granted. If citizenship is defined by the degree of civic-mindedness when compared with other countries, it would be difficult to make the case that the Canadian people take it for granted. A 2004 international survey (ISSP 2004) conducted across some 35 countries revealed that Canadians perform well on various indicators of civic consciousness – often referred to as good citizenship. As shown in Table 3, Canada ranks third when it comes to the importance attributed to voting, fourth in the belief that one should never try to evade taxes, third when it comes to obeying the law and first when it comes to keeping watch on government.

Citizenship and national identity

Evidence is also lacking that the population doesn't value citizenship, at least insofar as citizenship is assessed by

Table 3
Importance of selected indicators of citizenship, 2004

Important (rank 6 and 7 on 7 point scale) %	Canada	United States	Great Britain	France	Total (34 Nations)
Always vote in elections	84.0 (3)	78.0	58.0	80.0	**68.0**
Never try to evade taxes	82.9 (4)	84.3	83.8	68.3	**73.2**
Active in associations	27.1 (13)	29.6	10.5	28.1	**25.9**
Always obey the law	87.8 (3)	85.1	86.6	66.6	**78.3**
Help less privileged in the world	37.6 (22)	37.1	34.2	34.9	**44.1**
Keep watch over government	81.1 (1)	74.5	48.4	47.4	**55.2**
Serve in the military	41.2 (21)	59.7	38.4	33.2	**42.8**

Source: International Social Survey Program, "Citizenship" (for Canadian respondents it was conducted in Canada by the Carleton University Survey Centre), 2004.

Table 4
Rating the performance of our immigration program in promoting a sense of belonging and pride among new Canadians by generational status of respondent, 2005

Rating the performance of our immigration program in promoting a sense of belonging and pride among new Canadians					
Immigrant or children of immigrants	**Immigrant**	**Immigrant and child of immigrants**	**One immigrant parent**	**Both parents are immigrants**	**Parents are Canadian born**
Very good	10.6%	8.5%	8.0%	13.6%	11.1%
Good	31.7%	47.5%	31.9%	28.8%	35.9%
Fair	23.1%	20.3%	31.0%	38.1%	28.2%
Poor	19.2%	13.6%	18.6%	11.0%	14.6%
Very poor	11.5%	6.8%	6.2%	5.1%	5.6%
Don't know/refused	3.8%	3.4%	4.4%	3.4%	4.6%

Source: Ipsos Reid for Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 2005.

the belief that holding citizenship is important (Canada placed fourth overall among the nearly 35 countries surveyed on this). Moreover, there is little evidence in support of the idea that a lack of civic consciousness demonstrates that citizenship is being taken for granted. What then contributes to such widespread sentiment that it is taken for granted?

International surveys confirm that there is a relationship between feeling that one would rather be a citizen of Canada than of any other country and strength of belonging to Canada. Both immigrants and non-immigrants responded similarly. Such questions, however, use the term "citizenship" when referring to pride in one's country. It is common in many countries for the majority of "citizens" to say they have a strong sense of belonging to their country, while also affirming that it is problematic for the population on the whole when it comes to the degree of belonging to country. In other words, an individual might say "I have a high sense of attachment to the country, but my neighbours don't." As shown in Table 4, when rating the performance of Canada's immigration program in promoting a sense of belonging and pride among new Canadians, the majority – whether immigrant, second generation or third generation or more – feel that Canada's immigration program is doing a fair or poor job in promoting belonging or pride among new Canadians.

> Perhaps those who insist that we take our citizenship for granted believe that there are other countries where citizenship is far more appreciated. One often hears this anecdotally, particularly in comparison with the United States where there is a sense that patriotic sentiments are more openly expressed.

Moreover, in the case of Canada, it does not appear as though immigrants possess a weaker sense of belonging to the country than the Canadian-born population. A July 2008 survey conducted by the firm Leger Marketing involving 600 immigrants shows that they possess a powerful sense of belonging to their adopted country – an attachment that generally runs deeper than linguistic, ethnic or regional identity. Some 87% of those surveyed expressed a "very strong" or "somewhat strong" attachment to the country. The results are consistent with several other opinion polls evaluating the degree of attachment on the part of immigrants to Canada (Boswell 2008, Dominion Institute 2007, Statistics Canada 2002).

There remains, nonetheless, a persistent view that new citizens need particular assistance to better appreciate Canada and more strongly identify with it.

Table 5
Level of agreement on the question "Many Canadians take their citizenship for granted" and responses to the question "Rating the performance of our immigration program on promoting a sense of belonging and pride among new Canadians," 2005

Many Canadians take their citizenship for granted					
Promoting a sense of belonging and pride among new Canadians	**Strongly disagree**	**Somewhat disagree**	**Neither agree nor disagree**	**Somewhat agree**	**Strongly agree**
Very poor	3.8%	2.7%	2.3%	1.5%	5.5%
Poor	13.9%	13.7%	11.4%	13.2%	13.8%
Fair	20.3%	20.5%	43.2%	28.7%	27.0%
Good	41.8%	46.6%	22.7%	42.5%	37.0%
Very good	20.3%	13.7%	15.9%	11.7%	14.1%

Source: Ipsos Reid for Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 2005.

Table 6
Rating the performance of our immigration program – Encouraging newcomers to apply for Canadian citizenship correlated with rating the performance of our immigration program in promoting a sense of belonging and pride among new Canadians

Rating the performance of our immigration program – Encouraging newcomers to apply for Canadian citizenship						
Promoting a sense of belonging and pride among new Canadians	**Very good**	**Good**	**Fair**	**Poor**	**Very poor**	**Total**
Very good	35.3%	9.4%	5.6%	5.8%	9.8%	**10.8%**
Good	35.3%	51.7%	25.9%	21.9%	15.7%	**35.1%**
Fair	19.4%	22.7%	49.0%	24.1%	13.7%	**28.6%**
Poor	7.2%	9.7%	14.0%	36.5%	19.6%	**14.9%**
Very poor	2.2%	3.6%	4.9%	9.5%	31.4%	**6.2%**
Don't know/refused	0.7%	2.9%	0.7%	2.2%	9.8%	**4.4%**
Total	**100%**	**100%**	**100%**	**100%**	**100%**	**100%**

Source: Ipsos Reid for Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 2005.

Table 7
Importance, closeness and agreement on selected indicators of national identity

Importance, closeness and agreement on selected indicators of national identity %	UK	USA	Canada	France	Rest of the world (30 other nations)	Total
Important to feel [country nationality]	79.4	92.0	91.9 (14)	92.0	89.7	**89.7**
Close – How close do you feel to your country	78.9	89.5	86.6	90.5	88.4	**88.3**
Agree – I would rather be a citizen of my country than of any other country in the world	72.2	90.0	86.1 (5)	58.3	76.5	**76.4**
Agree – The world would be a better place if people from other countries were more like Canadians	32.8	40.6	57.5 (1)	18.8	35.0	**35.2**
Agree – Generally speaking, my country is a better country than most others	49.4	78.7	79.6 (3)	41.9	53.4	**54.3**

Source: International Social Survey Program "National Identity" (for Canadian respondents it was conducted in Canada by the Carleton University Survey Centre), 2003.

A slight majority (51.1%) of those who strongly agree "many Canadians take their citizenship for granted" think that the government of Canada is doing a good job of promoting a sense of belonging and pride among new Canadians.

There is little doubt that the public makes a connection between the acquisition of citizenship and attachment to Canada. As observed in Table 6, those Canadians who believe that the government immigration program is doing a good job encouraging newcomers to apply for Canadian citizenship are most likely agree that the state is doing a good job in promoting a sense of belonging and pride among new Canadians.

Perhaps those who insist that we take our citizenship for granted believe that there are other countries where citizenship is far more appreciated. One often hears this anecdotally, particularly in comparison with the United States where there is a sense that patriotic sentiments are more openly expressed. The 2003 International Social Survey reveals that Canada is below the international average on the issue of how close we feel to our country (though we rank at a very respectable 86.6%). It should be noted that the average is lower due to the disproportionate number of Quebecers that do not feel as close to the country as persons in the rest of Canada. Again, however, it is not by definition a problem of citizenship. Quebecers may indeed value their Canadian "citizenship" without necessarily possessing a strong sense of belonging to Canada. As shown in Table 7 on other indicators of national identity, Canada ranks rather high. Only Venezuela and Australia ranked ahead of Canada on the following question: "generally speaking, my country is a better country than most others." Canadians were more likely than residents of any of the other countries surveyed to agree that the world would be a better place if people from other countries were more like Canadians.

Conclusion

Many Canadians hold the view that citizenship is taken for granted. Yet evidence from various surveys does not help determine what aspects of citizenship are being taken for granted. On the contrary, much of the evidence offered to date suggests that Canadians do value their citizenship. None of this detracts from the value of pursuing programs designed to assist immigrants and non-immigrants alike in deepening their awareness of Canada and their appreciation for the country. It does, however, invite more precision on the part of those who insist that Canadian citizenship is being taken for granted, in order to better define what this assertion means. By not doing this, a potentially legitimate concern could be characterized as a gratuitous affirmation, which supports unwarranted generalizations directed primarily at newer Canadians.

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Notes

[1] The Institute for Canadian Citizenship is a non-profit organization that initiates projects to help new Canadians integrate more quickly. The organization is co-chaired by former Governor General of Canada Adrienne Clarkson and author John Ralston Saul.

[2] In 2007, when unprompted, the Ipsos Reid survey respondents who believed that being a Canadian citizen entails responsibilities identified things such as abiding by the law (50%), exercising the right to vote (14%), adhering to Canadian cultural norms (12%), being a productive member of society (12%), paying taxes (10%), making a positive contribution to the community (9%), working hard (8%), learning one of the country's two official languages (5%), being proud to be Canadian (5%) and learning about Canadian culture and history (5%).

