

Conceptions of citizenship and criteria for naturalisation

Iseult Honohan

University College Dublin



EMN/ESRI Conference:
Supporting Integration: Access to Citizenship in Ireland and the EU
December 8 2020

Overview

Aspects of citizenship

Conceptions of citizenship

The rationale for citizenship

Who should have citizenship in a specific country?

Criteria for naturalisation

Citizenship tests

Conclusion

Aspects of citizenship

- Status (legal and political rights and duties)
- Activity-practice (participation, engagement, commitment to common good)
- Membership (belonging)

These are connected in practice - but separable

Different conceptions of citizenship combine and prioritise these differently

Conceptions of citizenship

Citizen =holder of a *legal status* – a ‘liberal’ model

Based on freedom and equality of individuals

Citizen =active *participant in society and politics* - a ‘civic’/ ‘republican’ model

Based on interdependence of those subject to political authority

Citizen =*member* of a political community – a ‘communitarian’/‘nationalist’ model

Based on spectrum of groups from choice to a common identity

- Also overlaps and hybrids of these possible

These imply different contrast terms to ‘citizen’

- Status (equal legal rights, duties)

A ‘citizen’ \leftrightarrow a ‘subject’

Citizenship - equal status, protection

- Activity (participation, commitment)

A ‘citizen’ \leftrightarrow a consumer, client, ‘free rider’

Citizenship – practice, engagement

- Membership (belonging)

A ‘citizen’ \leftrightarrow an ‘outsider’, ‘alien’, ‘non-national’,

Citizenship – ‘identity’

Status/liberal

Emphasises rights/protections in laws, institutions

Identifies limited obligations – to obey laws, be tolerant of diversity, optional political activity

Civic/republican

Adds activity and dispositions - participation in self-government, public spirit, commitment to common good, suggests education of citizens

Communitarian/nationalist

Emphasises shared identity with other citizens

(ranging from thinner to thicker: values, cultural, national, ethnic, racial)

The rationale for citizenship

In practice today legal citizenship gives:

right to remain, to re-enter,

more secure access to other rights (e.g education, welfare),

right to participate in national politics,

protection abroad,

symbolizes full membership

Why should someone hold citizenship of a *specific* country?

Liberal conception

A universalist approach - no immediate answer

Republican conception

Those interdependent in continuing subjection to a political authority

Communitarian conception

Those who share a common (national, pre-political) identity

What follows for criteria for specific citizenship acquisition?

Contemporary citizenship laws are both inclusive and exclusive – regulate membership in particular states

Most people are citizens from birth through descent/birth in the territory of a state
- acquired involuntarily, independent of activity, character, and diversity of beliefs and values

Most states offer naturalisation is possible under certain conditions

Even if states are free to determine their own membership, their criteria for including and excluding people may be more or less justifiable

Citizenship is essential for those subject on a continuing basis to a particular political authority - risks of over-exclusive or oppressive naturalisation conditions

Criteria for naturalisation

Continuing residence

Integration - economic, social, cultural, political

Good character

Knowledge

Skills, capacities

Values and attitudes

Comparing the implications of different conceptions for naturalisation

Communitarian – a spectrum

May exclude those who do not share identity - or
have stringent requirements – very long residence, cultural integration
in national language, culture, knowledge, values – to confirm identity

Liberal – a spectrum

Inclines to include those who would otherwise be ‘subjects’ - residence

May require thin commitment to liberal/democratic institutions

or

‘Liberal nationality’ – integration into (thinner) public culture, especially language/skills – but less demanding than communitarian (the ‘civic’ turn)

‘Social-democratic’ liberal – support for redistributive policies requires social cohesion rooted in cultural commonality

Republican

Inclines to include those who are interdependent in subjection – residence

Arguably supports mandatory citizenship after a certain period

Sees language, skills and civic knowledge as important to political engagement

Emphasises opportunities, encouragement rather than requirement

Citizenship tests

Language

Civic knowledge, skills

Values and attitudes

Levels of difficulty?

Tests vs courses?

We can distinguish between characteristics, capacities and attitudes that are desirable in citizens, which states may encourage, and fixed requirements of particular levels of achievement that applicants must reach in order to qualify for membership

Conclusion: Conceptions of citizenship and approaches to integration

- A communitarian approach emphasises identity (pre-political) – high integration requirements – tests of language, culture, or values
- A liberal approach emphasises protection, legal rights and thin duties – less demanding integration requirements
 - but may seem to require some cultural underpinning (thinner or thicker) – tests of language or civic knowledge (contested re values)
- A republican approach emphasises more substantial participation and engagement – but integration is less a requirement, more to be encouraged – participation in language courses rather than tests

Citizens may share a thin political identity rather than anything more substantial – a by-product rather than a prerequisite of membership