

# Becoming Canadian: Intent, process and outcome

by Kelly Tran, Stan Kustec and Tina Chui



Canada has a large and varied immigrant population, a diverse culture and vast distances. But whether individuals are Canadian citizens by birth or by naturalization, they are granted the same rights and responsibilities. Canadian citizenship may thus be viewed as something that creates a shared sense of belonging or an indication of allegiance to Canada. For the foreign-born, acquiring citizenship may be symbolic of the final stage of the migration process, their inclusion into the electoral process and a declaration of their commitment to Canada, their adopted homeland.

As a country built on accepting people from around the world, Canada is home to many different ethnic and cultural groups. Over the past 100 years, waves of immigrants from diverse countries have come here to forge a new life for themselves and their families. In the process, they have helped to shape the rich cultural and ethnic diversity that is Canada today. While the early part of the 1900s saw the vast majority of immigrants arriving from Europe, the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century witnessed a shift to newcomers largely from Asia, Africa and the Middle East.

## **CST** What you should know about this study

While data in this study come mainly from the 2001 Census of Population, previous censuses were also used to compare the citizenship take-up rates over time. In addition, supplementary data were used from the Longitudinal Survey of Immigrants to Canada (LSIC) and administrative data from the Department of Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC) which links the records of citizenship applications from the Citizenship Registry System (CRS) to those of permanent residency applicants from the Permanent Resident Data System (PRDS). The PRDS contains detailed information on immigrant landing characteristics, while the citizenship registry yields data on the citizenship process, such as date of application and the granting of citizenship.

Citizenship refers to the legal citizenship status of the respondent. Canadian citizenship is obtained either by birth or by naturalization. A small number of individuals who were born outside Canada to at least one Canadian parent are considered Canadian citizens by birth. Only those landed immigrants who have met certain criteria are eligible for Canadian citizenship by naturalization.

Since 1977, Canada has recognized multiple citizenships, that is, Canadian citizens have the right to hold citizenship of another country. Immigrants who obtain Canadian citizenship also have the right to retain their previous nationality. Similarly, Canadian citizens who become citizens of another country do not lose their Canadian citizenship. In the 2001 Census, those who were citizens of more than one country were instructed to provide the name of up to two other countries of which they were citizens.

Landed immigrants, or 'immigrants', are those who have been granted the right to live in Canada permanently by immigration authorities. Some immigrants have resided in Canada for many years, while others have arrived only recently.

Citizenship bestows certain benefits and privileges not enjoyed by non-citizens, such as the right to vote, hold public office, be employed in the public service and carry a Canadian passport. However, not having citizenship does not bar an individual from moving freely inside Canada, nor from obtaining education, employment or government services (such as health care). Still, citizenship acquisition is a choice made voluntarily by some and not by others. This study explores the characteristics associated with becoming a Canadian citizen among immigrants who have resided in Canada for various periods of time.

### The decision to naturalize happens soon after arrival

Several factors influence citizenship intentions, such as the anticipated length of residence (whether or not

one intends to settle permanently in Canada or eventually move to another country); rules in the source country governing dual citizenship; attachment to both the source and the host countries; source country tax regimes and legislation on the transfer of assets; time, cost and knowledge of the process of naturalization. In addition, those wanting to obtain Canadian citizenship must demonstrate some knowledge of Canada's history, geography, and the rights and responsibilities of being a Canadian citizen, as well as an ability to converse in at least one of Canada's official languages.

The decision to naturalize appears to be one that is considered early on in the migration process. Even after just 6 months of residence, before becoming eligible for citizenship, and at a time when many are still adjusting to their new country, the

vast majority of immigrants indicate their intention to naturalize once they become eligible. In fact, according to data from the Longitudinal Survey of Immigrants to Canada (LSIC), more than 9 in 10 (92%) immigrants who arrived in Canada between October 2000 and September 2001 intended to become Canadian citizens. The remaining were not sure, or did not intend to naturalize. A comparable survey in Australia found that 81% of recent immigrants wanted to become Australian citizens after just a few months of residence.<sup>1</sup>

### More than 8 in 10 eligible immigrants have become Canadian citizens

The vast majority of people residing in Canada (95%) are Canadian citizens—81% by birth and 14% by naturalization. The remaining 5% are



## Eligibility requirements vary from country to country

	Canada	United States	Australia	United Kingdom
<b>Residency requirement</b>	3 of the 4 years prior to application	5 years of continuous residence (i.e. no more than one year absent, resided in one state for at least 3 months)	2 years of permanent residence	5 years of residence, with the last year being continuous
<b>Language requirement</b>	Knowledge of basic English or French	Ability to read, write, speak and understand ordinary English	Understanding of basic English	Sufficient knowledge of English, Welsh or Scottish Gaelic
<b>Knowledge requirement</b>	Basic knowledge of Canada — geography, history, government	Knowledge and understanding of U.S. history and government	Knowledge and understanding of the responsibilities and privileges of Australian citizenship	N/A
<b>Dual citizenship for naturalized citizens</b>	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
<b>Foreign-born as a percentage of the population</b>	18%	11%	22%	8%
<b>Percent of naturalized citizens among eligible immigrants</b>	84%	40%	75%	56%

Sources: Citizenship and Immigration Canada, Statistics Canada, U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, U.S. Census Bureau, Australian Citizenship Council, Australian Bureau of Statistics, and British Home Office: Immigration and Nationality Directorate.

Moving from permanent resident status to Canadian citizen may be interpreted as an indicator of integration into society in general, and the labour market in particular. According to the 2001 Census, some socio-economic characteristics of naturalized citizens resembled more closely those of the general population than the characteristics of their non-naturalized counterparts.

In 2001, the employment rate for naturalized citizens aged 25 to 54 was 84%, while the rate for those who were eligible, but did not have Canadian citizenship, was 80%. In comparison, the employment rate for the general population was 85%. Similarly, the unemployment rate was higher among those who did not naturalize: 6.9% versus 5.7% among the population who became citizens.

Nonetheless, the occupations of naturalized Canadians were similar to the occupations of those who were eligible, but have not yet taken up citizenship. Among the top occupations in 2001 for naturalized Canadian citizens were clerical, sales and service, and professional occupations in natural and applied sciences. For those who did not have Canadian citizenship, the most frequent occupations

comprised clerical, sales and service, and machine operators in manufacturing.

Naturalized citizens had higher income levels than those who did not have citizenship. For example, about 20% of naturalized Canadian citizens had a personal income under \$10,000 in 2000, compared with 26% of those who were eligible, but did not have Canadian citizenship. Correspondingly, naturalized Canadian citizens were more likely to have personal incomes of at least \$60,000 in 2000 than those who did not have citizenship: 11% versus 8% respectively. The income profile of naturalized citizens more closely resembled that of the total population (10% of the total population over the age of 15 years had an income of \$60,000 or more).

Naturalized Canadian citizens had a small edge in terms of educational attainment. Nearly one-quarter (23%) had a university degree or higher, compared with 21% of those who did not have citizenship. This level of educational attainment is likely related to the immigration program, which has increasingly emphasized human capital, such as education, as a part of the entrance criteria into Canada.

either not yet eligible for citizenship, are eligible but have not taken the steps to naturalize, or they are non-permanent residents. Based on the 2001 Census, some 84% of all eligible immigrants (those who have resided in Canada for at least three years) are Canadian citizens.

The proportion of eligible immigrants who naturalize is larger in Canada than those of other major immigrant-receiving countries. For example, in Australia, where a minimum two years of residency is required for eligibility for citizenship, 75% of eligible immigrants are naturalized. In the United States, where a five-year residency requirement is in effect, 40% of foreign-born residents are American citizens.<sup>2</sup> Finally, in the United Kingdom, 56% of immigrants who have resided there for at least five years are British citizens.

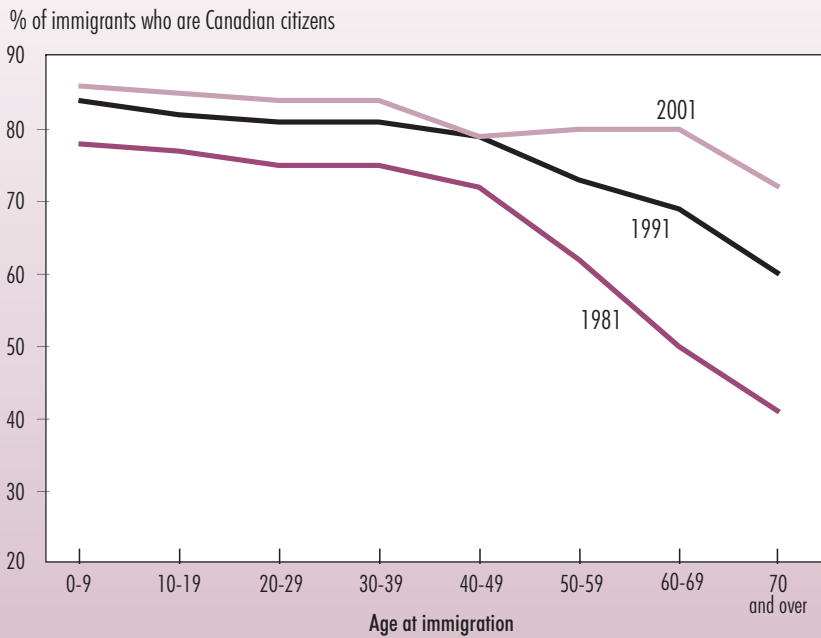
### **Younger immigrants more likely to become citizens**

Younger immigrants have more to gain from the benefits that citizenship provides than their older counterparts. For example, younger immigrants are more likely to be in the labour market and so may be attracted to citizenship because it can give them access to certain occupations that are available only to Canadian citizens. In addition, younger immigrants have more time to integrate into society. Conversely, older immigrants, whose language skills are often weaker and who may not be in the labour force, may view citizenship as less important. According to some researchers, immigrants who are older at the time of entry do not have as much time to enjoy the benefits of citizenship and, consequently, are not as likely to embrace it.<sup>3</sup> As a result, the rate

of naturalization is higher among immigrants who arrived in Canada at a younger age: about 85% of those aged less than 20 years at the time of entry are now citizens versus 72% of those aged 70 years or over.

### **The longer newcomers stay in Canada, the more likely they are to become citizens**

In addition to the age at immigration, the length of residence in Canada also affects naturalization rates. Time affords more opportunity for acquiring citizenship and adapting to or integrating into the cultural, economic and social landscape of the country. Indeed, in 2001, the proportion of immigrants who had become Canadian citizens increased from 57% of those who had been residents for 4 to 5 years to 79% of 6- to 10- year residents to 90% of immigrants who had been in the country for 30 years or more.



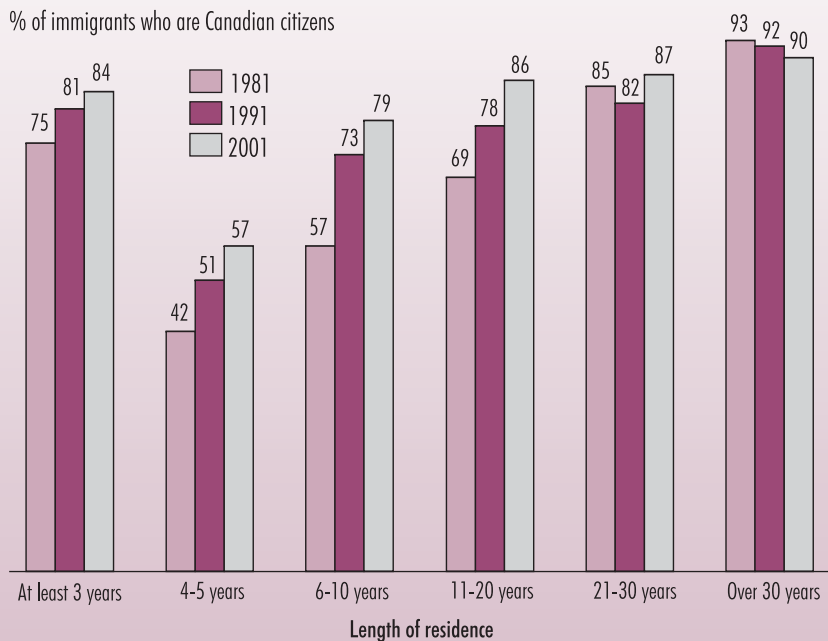
Source: Statistics Canada, Censuses of Population, 1981-2001.

It is interesting to note that recent groups of newcomers are taking less time to become citizens than previous groups. In addition, the proportion of eligible immigrants who naturalize is higher for recent than for earlier groups of immigrants. For example, 57% of newly eligible immigrants (those who have resided in Canada for 4 to 5 years) became citizens in 2001, compared with 51% of their counterparts in 1991 and 42% in 1981. This trend may be a result of the countries of origin of immigrants, whereby more recent groups tend to be from regions with a higher propensity to naturalize.

**Immigrants from different origins naturalize at different rates**

Recent immigrants have very different origins than those who had landed in earlier years. Newcomers entering Canada in the last decade were more likely to have been born in Asian countries such as China, India or the Philippines. Conversely, those who came before the 1960s tended to be from the United Kingdom, Italy, Germany and other European countries.

Data from the Census of Population shows that newly eligible immigrants from Africa or Asia are more likely to become Canadian citizens than those from Europe and the United States. According to the 2001 Census, 38% of those who were born in the United Kingdom and 48% of those born in the United States who had arrived in Canada in 1996 or 1997 were citizens by 2001. The proportion increases to about 50% after 6 to 10 years of residence. These source countries are politically democratic and economically capitalist with social, political and economic structures similar to those of Canada.



Source: Statistics Canada, Censuses of Population, 1981-2001.

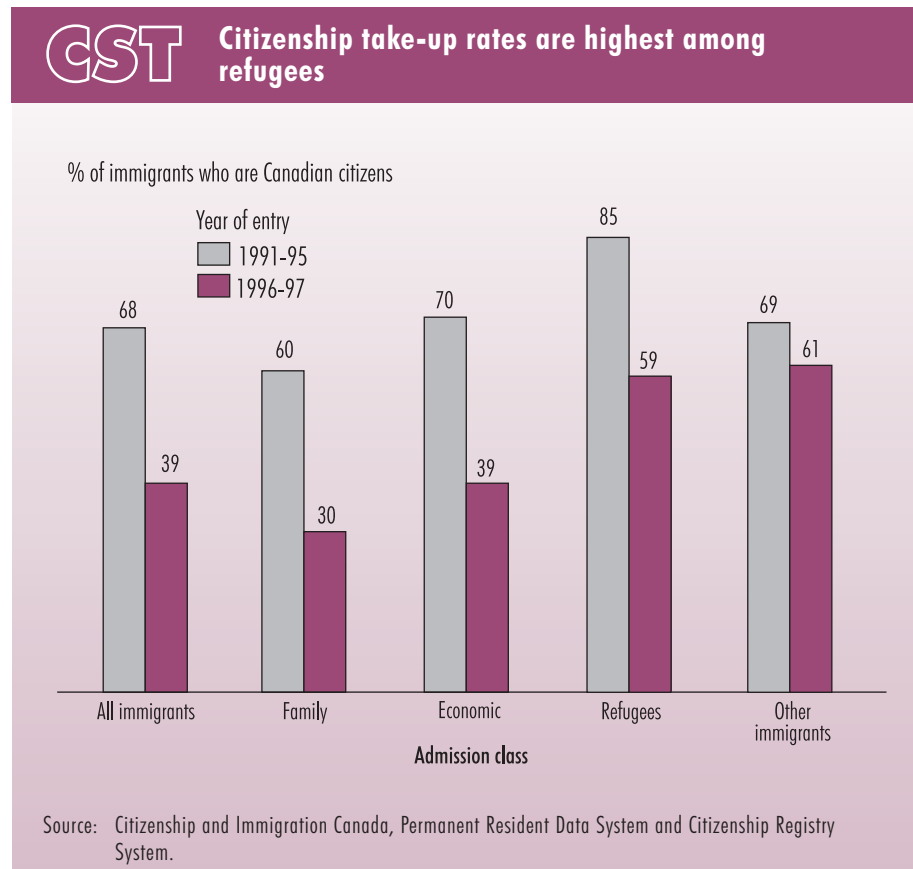
On the other hand, immigrants from China were more likely to have taken up Canadian citizenship by 2001: 62% of 4- to 5-year residents and nearly 90% of 6- to 10-year residents. Similarly, newcomers from Africa had high naturalization rates. In 2001, some 64% of newly eligible immigrants and 86% of 6- to 10-year residents were Canadian citizens. It appears that immigrants who came from countries with developing economies, and political and social systems different from Canada's, are becoming Canadians at a higher rate, perhaps because they are more likely to want to settle in Canada permanently.

Although immigrants from less economically developed countries tend to naturalize faster and in greater proportion than other immigrants, as the length of residence in Canada increases, the citizenship rates of immigrants from all regions of the world rise and converge.

### Who does not take up citizenship?

While the vast majority of eligible immigrants in Canada have naturalized, 16% have yet to take up Canadian citizenship. The reasons for not becoming a citizen are complex and varied. They may be related to laws in the source and the adopted countries prohibiting dual citizenship. Emotional or economic ties, such as taxation or property ownership in the source country, may also sway the decision one way or another, as may barriers such as language ability, time, financial cost or lack of general knowledge of the process.

Citizens of economically developed countries such as Japan or the United States, which do not allow dual citizenship, also tend to retain their pre-migration citizenship status and do not become naturalized



Canadian citizens:<sup>4</sup> about 4 in 10 individuals from these countries who were eligible to become Canadian citizens have not done so. Indeed, even after more than 30 years in Canada, United States-born residents of Canada continued to be the least likely to hold Canadian citizenship (in 2001 32% were non-citizens). In contrast, citizens of developing countries or countries with different political systems that do not allow dual citizenship (i.e. Viet Nam, the People's Republic of China) tend to renounce their former citizenship status and become Canadian citizens. In 2001, 93% of immigrants from Viet Nam and 89% from the People's Republic of China who were eligible for Canadian citizenship had adopted it.

### Refugees most likely to become Canadian citizens

Citizenship take-up rates differ depending on the admission class (family, economic or refugee) at time of landing. Refugees who arrived between 1991 and 1995 (6 to 10 years in Canada in 2001) recorded a citizenship take-up rate of 85%; those who landed in 1996 or 1997 had a take-up rate of 59% by 2001. In contrast, family class immigrants — who tend to be older at the time of landing than other immigrants — recorded the lowest citizenship take-up rates: 60% among those who have lived in Canada for 6 to 10 years and 30% among the newly eligible.

The differences in take-up rates by admission class can be explained in large part by the source countries, the circumstances leading to immigration, and age at admission. For instance, the vast majority of refugees come from developing countries, and are most likely to become naturalized Canadians. As well, immigrants who enter as refugees are likely to leave their source country under adverse conditions and hence are more likely to migrate on a permanent basis. Becoming Canadian could be seen as the final step of their migration.

### Summary

Migrants first choose their destination and eventually decide whether or not to become citizens of their adopted homeland. While a number of factors come into play with both choices, the majority do become Canadian. By doing so, they obtain the rights, privileges and responsibilities associated with being Canadian and, in a sense, make the symbolic transition from permanent resident to citizen. Citizenship take-up rates, however, vary by admission class, place of birth, age at immigration and length of residence in Canada. Naturalization occurred the fastest and take-up rates were the highest among refugees, who came mostly from developing countries. In terms of age, younger immigrants were more likely to become citizens than their older

counterparts. And finally, those who had lived in Canada for a longer period of time had higher citizenship take-up rates than more recent arrivals. Those who do not acquire Canadian citizenship, despite being eligible, tend to be older or from countries with comparable economic or social structures.



**Kelly Tran** is an analyst with Housing, Family and Social Statistics Division, Statistics Canada; **Stan Kustec** is a research officer with the Strategic Research and Statistics Division, Citizenship and Immigration Canada; and **Tina Chui** is a senior analyst with Housing, Family and Social Statistics Division, Statistics Canada.

1. VandenHeuvel, A. and M. Wooden. 1999. *New Settlers Have Their Say – How Immigrants Fare over the Early Years of Settlement*. Canberra: Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs, Government of Australia.
2. In the United States, census data are available only on foreign-born individuals, rather than documented immigrants who were granted permanent residency status. Data for the other countries are for immigrants who have been granted the right to live and work in that country.
3. Yang, P.Q. Autumn 1994. "Explaining immigrant naturalization." *International Migration Review* 28: 3.
4. The Southern Cross Group. April 2002. "Which countries allow/prohibit dual citizenship?" *Frequently Asked Questions on Dual Citizenship*. [http://www.southern-cross-group.org/dualcitizenship/faq\\_II.html](http://www.southern-cross-group.org/dualcitizenship/faq_II.html) (accessed March 11, 2004).

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