

## **Urban Citizenship: Enhancing Non-citizen Settlement and Integration in Global Cities**

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**Abstract.** From Toronto to Milan, London to Barcelona, and San Francisco to Istanbul, major metropolitan centers have witnessed increased population movements in the last few decades. Various academic and non-academic studies indicate that a growing number of foreign nationals live within the territories of nation-states of which they are not citizens (Stahl 2020; de Graauw 2014). The presence of both undocumented and legal immigrants has led to a situation that Varsanyi (2005) has described as “an emerging urban political crisis” Using Toronto as a case study, this article explores the contemporary tensions caused by the disconnect between individuals’ country of physical presence and the place of their political and civic membership. By unpacking the exclusionary and discriminatory aspects of nation-state membership, the article critically examines how citizenship has been used to construct “insiders” and “outsiders”. Furthermore, surveying the academic and grey literature, the article contextualizes the problem of disenfranchisement and describes the different integration strategies designed by global cities specifically for their non-citizen populations. By interrogating such strategies and aspects of newcomer integration pursued at the local level, the paper seeks to understand whether global cities could adjust to increasing human mobility by accepting residence as a primary principle for membership. The article identifies the uses and limits of the increasingly widespread discourse on subnational forms of membership, with a particular focus on urban citizenship, as a way to create alternative spaces for claim-making and access to rights in Canada and beyond.

**Keywords:** *newcomers, political incorporation, urban citizenship, right to the city*

### **Introduction**

The twenty-first century has witnessed a growth in the number of documented and undocumented resident non-citizens in cities worldwide. A recent International Organization for Migration (IOM) report revealed that the number of international migrants now exceeds 272 million globally, of whom 181 million are labor migrants (IOM 2020). While it is hard to provide an accurate estimate of undocumented migrants globally, the number of individuals without legal status had reached 10.5 million in the United States in 2017, according to the same report. In



Canada, according to various estimates, there are between 20,000 to 500,000 undocumented migrant residents (Villegas 2018). Unlike the United States and European countries, where unauthorized border crossings account for most undocumented migration, the majority of undocumented individuals in Canada originally entered through legal channels: for example, rejected refugee claimants, expired student permit or work visa holders, and sponsored immigrants (Magalhaes et al. 2010; Morehouse and Blomfield 2011). Both overall admissions, and admissions of various categories of migrants through legal channels, have significantly increased in the past few years. In 2019 alone, Canada admitted over 341,000 permanent residents and issued 402,000 student permits and 404,000 temporary work permits (IRCC 2020).

Research on immigration has also found that most international migrants reside in urban areas. Along with urbanization and population growth, such movements have contributed to social and cultural transformations in urban neighbourhoods (Stahl 2020; Siemiatycki 2015; Tossutti 2012). Regardless of the immigration category or stream, once new migrants arrive in their destination countries, they tend to settle in urban centers because of the higher likelihood of finding employment and suitable accommodation and better access to ethnic, social, and cultural networks (Lee 2017). Evidence drawn from a qualitative study conducted in Vancouver and its suburbs indicated that, while the concentration of newcomers in certain suburban neighbourhoods increased in the past years, the quality of newcomer settlement services funded by the federal and provincial-level governments in these suburban areas “lagged behind” compared to the urban centers (Zuberi 2018, 450).

Major Canadian cities Toronto, Vancouver, and Montreal have become the places of initial destination and permanent residence for over half of all immigrants and recent newcomers to Canada (Paquet et al. 2022). Whereas such groups are in most cases welcomed into labor markets and socially invested in their respective neighborhoods and communities, they are excluded from civic and political membership in their host societies due to the exclusionary nature of the national political system. In addition to the lack of access to electoral decision-making and other channels of claim-making, in most cases, migrants do not feel confident accessing services or speaking up against discrimination and injustices because they fear legal consequences. A growing proportion of these urban residents continue to be deprived of adequate socio-political inclusion,

representation, and participation in the municipalities to which they have moved owing to various push and pull factors. Not surprisingly, visible minorities residing in Toronto and the Greater Toronto Area are underrepresented in elected bodies (Davidson et al. 2020; Siemiatycki 2016; 2011).

Siemiatycki and Saloojee (2002), who examined the implications of the civic and political disenfranchisement of non-citizens on domestic political structures in Toronto, argued that underrepresentation of visible minorities and declining degrees of electoral turnout indicated low and “declining public confidence” (270). Non-citizen disenfranchisement has significantly contributed to lower voter turnouts in Canadian metropolitan centers. For instance, Toronto’s 2018 voter turnout fell sharply to 41 percent, compared to 60 percent in the 2014 municipal election (Toronto Star 2018). A population roughly the size of London, Ontario, did not participate in the 2018 municipal elections in Toronto due to lack of Canadian citizenship status. The local voter turnout was 33 percent and 39.36 percent in Vancouver, respectively (CBC 2018). Almost twenty years later, the restrictive regime that institutionalizes exclusion and discrimination in urban populations is still in place. The 2020 report developed by the Migrant Integration Policy Index (MIPEX) revealed that, while Canada’s policies concerning family reunification, education, anti-discrimination, and access to nationality were generally favorable toward migrants, voting rights and participation in local consultative structures were not accessible for non-citizens, unlike other major immigrant destinations (MIPEX 2020). Even in the local elected offices such as school boards, racialized and visible minority candidates are significantly underrepresented compared to their share of the population. The study by Davidson et al. (2020) has discovered that the representation gap in Ontario’s school boards is linked to a broad array of structural and social factors, including but not limited to the underrepresentation of female and racialized candidates in professions that enable access and networks to political activism, perceptions towards the different aspects of minority integration, and the higher number of incumbent white and male trustees compared to those of their racialized counterparts.

Non-nationals’ political incorporation has a number of benefits, including stronger cohesion, commitment to principles of democracy, empowerment, a sense of belonging, and direct participation in decision-making processes (Lee et al. 2006). Remarkably, New Zealand was the first country among the established democracies to grant non-citizens full voting rights at national and



local elections after one year of legal residency. New Zealand's initiative not only enforced the principles of non-discrimination and diversity but also contributed to the establishment of an "inclusive political community" (Barker and McMillan 2014, 63). As the immigrant population in liberal-democratic states grows, non-citizen groups are increasingly being granted access to voting and other possibilities associated with citizenship. Typically, local governments and advocacy groups have been at the forefront of these initiatives. Stahl (2020) argued that in the United States, several cities, including San Francisco and Detroit, have granted voting rights to non-citizens in certain elections. While the question of non-citizen enfranchisement is yet to be legally and practically defined, many municipalities across the country are actively exploring the possibility of extending such rights to their non-national residents.

Using a qualitative exploratory research approach, the article examines the different integration strategies designed by cities specifically for their non-citizen populations. Situated within a critical perspective, the present study contextualizes the problem of alien disenfranchisement in the context of global migration through the lens of intersectionality. Kimberlé Crenshaw coined intersectionality in 1989 with the purpose of critiquing the structural inequalities based on the individuals' class, race, gender, and sexual identities in relation to racialized women. While all forms of critical research interrogate the expressions of power in relation to marginalized groups and communities in one way or another, intersectionality is characterized by challenging asymmetrical power relations embedded in societal and institutional structures and provides "the means for dealing with other marginalizations as well" (Kimberlé 1991, 1299). Consistent with the methodology, the systematic review and analysis of the literature involved the relevant peer-reviewed and non-peer-reviewed publications.

### **Unpacking, Conceptualizing and Criticizing Citizenship**

Contemporary citizenship is a complex concept that encompasses a range of rights, responsibilities, and values held by individuals. Also referred to as nation-state membership, citizenship was conceived as a contract between an individual, territory, and state and regarded as a "democratic form of political membership" (Schinkel 2008, 15). From this perspective, the emphasis of formal nation-state citizenship remained primarily on rights, duties, and participation in the polity.

However, formal avenues of participation, such as voting, which is at the heart of democratic participation, remained accessible only to citizens.

*Why does citizenship matter so much?* The British sociologist Thomas Humphrey Marshall's essays on citizenship have been highly influential in conceptualizing this phenomenon. Marshall stated that citizenship comprised three core elements: civil, political, and social rights, which collectively implied "full membership of a community" (1950, 49). By civil rights, Marshall refers to the rights associated with individual freedoms, such as freedom of speech, thought, conscience, and religion; the right to own property and conclude contracts; and the right to justice. Social rights denote the rights to economic security and welfare. Among such rights, access to education and social services are the most noteworthy. Finally, political rights enable individuals to participate in the exercise of political power. The promises of citizenship can be fulfilled once an individual has direct and unconditional access to those rights (Marshall 1963). While Marshall's conceptualization of citizenship has made a crucial contribution to scholarship on citizenship, it has been criticized for focusing mainly on white, male, and bourgeois British communities and dismissing the complex and evolving nature of citizenship (Turner 2009).

For Bloemraad (2000), dimensions of citizenship such as legal status, rights, identity, and participation are intertwined and mutually reinforcing. Elsewhere, Bloemraad and Sheares (2017) underlined that, while such formal status may be less practically significant in poor or non-democratic states, citizenship in Western liberal democracies offers many benefits and privileges. While responsibilities such as obeying the law and paying taxes apply to all individuals regardless of their legal status, benefits such as electoral participation and representation apply mostly to formal members (Lee et al. 2006). At the same time, nation-state citizenship is the most obvious source of categorical inequality in modern liberal democracies, which has contributed to the production of inequality (Brubaker 2015). The transmission of citizenship as a legal status through blood or soil has been described as "inherited property" (Hoover 2013, 26) and "exclusionary practice" (Bloemraad and Sheares 2017, 830).

As mentioned previously, conventional nation-state citizenship has been criticized on several counts, including its failure to ensure the freedoms and rights of non-nationals and marginalized groups. Moreover, citizenship has been used to endorse inclusion and exclusion based on individuals' nationality, race, gender, and

class. Historically, various population groups, such as women and racialized communities, were deprived of suffrage rights (Glenn 2002). Critics argued that allowing those who were privileged by virtue of their parents' nationality, place of birth, or status to become full members, while rejecting non-members' access to equal participation, reinforces the hierarchy of individuals within wider society. Proponents of alien enfranchisement have stated that by excluding non-citizens from the electoral process, nation-states deprive them of the capacity to hold elected officials accountable to all constituents (Hayduk and Koll 2018; Garcia 2011).

### **Supra- and Sub-national Forms of Citizenship**

As various models and frameworks of membership have emerged in recent decades, the academic and grey literature has witnessed growing interest in supra-national citizenship. As Auvachez (2009) suggested, the link between political authorities and individuals is not necessarily exclusive. Referring to European Union (EU) citizenship examples, which coexist with national citizenship, Auvachez indicates that membership frameworks can be multiple. In their elaboration of citizenship, Kivisto and Faist highlighted two central themes: dual citizenship and post-national citizenship. Dual citizenship recognizes the possibility of having formal membership status in more than one country (2007, 103). Drawing on empirical data from different states, the authors claim that dual citizenship practices and norms have been established in over 60 states, including Canada. Post-national citizenship implies the emergence of various models and forms of citizenship. The literature is rich with studies examining global, urban, environmental, sexual, social, intimate, economic, cultural, and cosmopolitan models of citizenship (Anderson 2014; Hampshire 2013).

Along with the articulation of supra-national membership, various expressions of urban-level membership have been observed. In the face of global mobility, some social science and urban scholars have developed convincing arguments in support of territorial citizenship and made calls to acknowledge residency as the primary criterion for formal membership (Bauder 2014; Birnie 2020). Increasingly popular discourse on "the right to the city" has been viewed as one of the ways of establishing alternative political spaces in which disenfranchised groups of urban residents seek opportunities. One of the pioneers of the idea of the right to the city was a French sociologist and philosopher Henri Lefebvre. Lefebvre's

conceptualization of space has become widely acknowledged in urban geography and urban studies, and has resonated with migrant rights advocates. In particular, Lefebvre's famous elaboration on space (2000 [1974]) involved three complex and intertwined levels at which people produce space: physical, mental, and social. Rafesstin (1980, 129) indicates that by the production of physical space, the author suggests that space is a "pre-existing reality which is subsequently transformed into territory through various political mechanisms" (as cited in Brennar and Elden 2009, 363). During the transformation process, the state and city have developed a relationship where the state "has the city as its center" (Lefebvre 2009, 224). Lefebvre's account of mental (cognitive) space is constructed around the "knowledge and logic, of maps and mathematics, of space as the instrumental space of social engineers and urban planners" (Elden 2001, 815). The social process of production of space involves "hierarchically ordered institutions, of laws and conventions upheld by "values" that are communicated through the national language" (Lefebvre 2009, 224).

In Lefebvre's vision, social space is a dynamic realm where relationships can be produced and modified over time. While the state is viewed as a main political actor in which the powers of control were nested, the author points out the challenges the states encountered as a result of *autogestion* of urban life or "a movement for self-management, or workers' control —a revolt against control and management from above" (Elden 2004, 157). In general terms, Lefebvre argued that urban inhabitants should have the right to participate centrally in all decisions that produce urban space. The powers embedded in the given territorial and bounded structure, i.e., the nation-state, are being challenged and reconfigured by popular debates about circulations of people and the right to the city framework. Nevertheless, Lefebvre's theorization of the right to the city did not follow a clear and straightforward definition, and hence, was open to many interpretations. Urban geographer Mark Purcell (2002) indicates that Lefebvre's ambiguous definition has given rise to a range of different interpretations in writing on citizenship, urban studies, human rights, and development. Purcell argues that the right to the city is to be exercised in the most immediate sense, as a right to configure the urban space in all its manifestations. In its institutionalized form, this right would involve, for example, the participation of urban residents in the board meetings of a corporation when the latter involves making decisions that are to affect life in the city.

Scholars who drew parallels between ancient Greek city-states and modern



urban citizenship movements have argued that urban citizenship is not a new idea but has resurged due to global human movements (Stahl 2020; Foerster 2019). In “Reinventing Urban Citizenship,” Bauböck (2003) argues that restricting citizenship to nationals of the state is unjustifiable. As political communities, cities need to emancipate all residents by granting full local citizenship to all residents within their jurisdiction after a specified duration of residence. Considering that immigrants generally have specific interests in local politics, granting them the franchise at the local level may ensure a political voice in decisions that affect their most immediate interests. Some scholars have expressed their disagreement with the discourse on supranational and subnational citizenship in the wake of predictions about the devaluation or erosion of nation-state citizenship. Hansen (2009), for instance, attaches great importance to national citizenship and argues that only those foreign nationals who deserve to become members should be naturalized by the nation-states. With regard to the identity dimension of citizenship, Hansen argues that “[c]itizenship ... plays a role in fostering solidarity” (13), whereas liberal multiculturalism weakens cohesion among members of the host country and newcomers.

Urban citizenship has been viewed as a practice that can address the democratic deficit in destination countries. Despite the views that urban citizenship undermines national citizenship, Bosniak (2006) suggested that national citizenship is being supplemented by other forms of citizenship practices. Bauböck (2020) claimed that urban citizenship should not be an alternative to nation-state membership. Regardless of scope and scale, urban-level membership could complement or replace national citizenship. As Rodríguez (2010) puts it, the extension of the franchise in national and subnational elections to non-citizens in New Zealand hardly seems to reflect an undervaluing of the vote and, in fact, reinforces the nation's conceptualization of its political culture.

### **The Canadian Context**

Toronto, the largest Canadian city, has been “a majority-immigrant city” since the early 2000s (Landolt 2020, 78). The city has become “a remarkably diverse ethnocultural, linguistic and religious community” (Siemiatycki and Isin 1997, 75). Presently, avenues for formal political participation in Toronto and other Canadian municipalities are largely based on national citizenship. Despite the surge of support



for non-citizen voting at the local level, mostly from immigrant labor and social justice organizations (Siemiatycki and Marshall 2014), and growing scholarly interest in recent years, proponents have faced significant backlash. Moreover, the Canada-Ontario-Toronto Memorandum of Understanding on Immigration, despite being seen as a significant step toward creating “more effective collaboration between federal, municipal and provincial governments” in relation to immigrant settlement and integration, has limited the Toronto municipal authority to a consultative role (Rose and Preston 2017, 29).

As many have witnessed, some immigrant-receiving countries have gone further and provided voting rights to third-party nationals, such as in Ireland, New Zealand, and parts of the United States. Some immigrant-dense cities in the Americas and Europe have pursued various initiatives that contribute towards establishing good practice in empowering non-citizen urban habitants, for example by improving equitable access to city services. While most policies concerning migrants are made and regulated at the federal and regional levels, sub-national forms of membership are expressions of policy interventions that emerged as a response to past or emerging social injustice that affects communities at the local level. Drawing on the case studies of Barcelona, Milan, and other European cities, Garcia (2006) argued that urban citizenship hence encourages the formulation of policies and instruments to respond to local communities’ and people’s needs, notwithstanding their legal status:

Urban and regional forms of citizenship develop when: policy instruments are introduced locally and regionally in order to maintain and/or create social entitlements as a result of citizens’ demands or as a result of local institutions’ innovative practices; and when the mechanisms for political integration provide an open sphere for participation and contestation not only for established citizens, but also for denizens (754).

In the context of the increasing legal and political weight of American cities, “don’t ask, don’t tell” policies with regard to immigrants have been gathering momentum since the late 1980s. The claims of urban inhabitants have been diverse, ranging from affordable housing to healthcare, better job opportunities, and fair and equal pay (Blokland et al. 2015). One common aspect of these claims and mobilizations is that urban inhabitants use local spaces, i.e., cities, to access services and make claims. Among the diverse migrant-friendly and human-rights-based initiatives, sanctuary city movements have been the most noteworthy ones. While a precise definition or conceptualization of “sanctuary” does not necessarily exist in



legal glossaries or scholarly works, it may refer to “public and private safe spaces for unauthorized immigrants because sanctuary policies, for the most part, are still implemented by local governments and private groups such as churches” (Villazor 2008, 135). O’Brien, Collingwood, and El-Khatib (2019) defined a sanctuary city as “a city or police department that has passed a resolution or ordinance expressly forbidding city or law enforcement officials from inquiring into immigration status and/or cooperation with Immigration and Customs Enforcement” (4).

Sanctuary movements vary significantly between states and localities by scope and scale. Nevertheless, they share common characteristics of promoting urban centers as a space of belonging for all residents regardless of migration status and challenging exclusionary “national policies and practices regulating migration and belonging attitudes and practices” (Bauder 2017, 175). Toronto became the first sanctuary city in Canada in 2013. Other immigrant-dense Canadian cities adopted similar sanctuary policies: for example, Hamilton and Vancouver in 2014 and 2016, respectively. The primary goal of this policy was to ensure that all residents, regardless of immigration status, could access social services without fear of detention or deportation. While the symbolic significance of this initiative was high, in practice it did not produce many recognizable results (Hudson et al. 2017).

Notably, global cities often act as “first responders for migrants’ well-being” (Paquet et al. 2022, 86). Some migrant cities have already adopted space- and issue-specific local bureaucratic membership models, with the objective of facilitating undocumented migrants’ access to local services. According to de Graauw (2014), local bureaucratic membership is a pragmatic concept because it acknowledges national authority over immigration and citizenship. The city is understood to be the lowest administrative level, and local bureaucratic membership capitalizes on cities’ discretionary administrative powers over their non-citizen populations. By introducing urban or municipal identification cards, such cities have enabled irregular migrants to identify themselves to relevant local authorities and frontline staff, including municipal authorities, police, schools, hospitals, libraries, or local businesses. These identification papers are valid in the jurisdictions that issue them, but do not confer legal status on the holder. Empirical evidence from the United States indicates that, in navigating jurisdictional restrictions imposed by the Constitution, cities such as New Haven

and San Francisco developed local identification cards to enable undocumented migrants to access city-run services (310).

As the COVID-19 pandemic has further exacerbated the disadvantages faced by non-citizen populations in global cities, urban-level governments and stakeholders need to create more inclusive and equal conditions to integrate their marginalized communities into the public and political realms. In light of the ongoing pandemic, evidence drawn from Canada suggested that the COVID-19 outbreak has taken an unequal toll on racialized communities and migrants. Federally-funded settlement support programs are not accessible to undocumented individuals, refugee claimants, temporary foreign workers, and study permit holders (Praznik and Shields 2018). While social inequality is not a new phenomenon, the pandemic has disproportionately impacted the health of minority communities and diminished their access to health services, housing, employment, and financial support (ICES 2020). In the context of the pandemic, migrant groups were exposed to increased levels of racism and xenophobia (Lee and Johnstone 2021). Likewise, unemployment and economic challenges have disproportionately impacted migrant populations and racially marginalized groups in the United States and Europe. Despite entitlements to healthcare and other public services, some minority communities and migrant groups across the European states were excluded from the COVID-19 response as a result of administrative, linguistic and cultural barriers (Kumar et al. 2021; Berntsen and Skowronek 2021; Perry et al. 2021; OECD 2020). The citizen/non-citizen division has been particularly concerning with regard to urban residents' access to healthcare (Landolt 2020).

While research on responses to COVID-19 driven inequalities is still ongoing, some positive ad-hoc initiatives have been documented at the subnational level. As noted by Paquet et al., three Canadian provinces - Ontario, British Columbia, and Quebec - have adjusted their policies to accommodate the Covid-19 related healthcare needs of all individuals regardless of their immigration status (91). While local municipalities across Canada are nearly powerless in relation to immigration policy-making, they continue to be primary responders for the needs of citizens, permanent residents, temporary residents, and undocumented migrants alike. Ultimately, cities with larger immigrant populations should advocate for greater non-citizen empowerment and incorporation using the right to the city framework.

## **Conclusion**

One of the ongoing dilemmas of the contemporary nation-state has been the desire to define its territory and members, while providing rights and privileges to all populations within its boundaries. Unfortunately, national citizenship has come under scrutiny for not being able to balance these needs. Subsequently, in some European and American municipalities, urban citizenship has been seen as a means to address the democratic deficit. Worldwide, a number of global cities have already pursued various strategies toward reinstating urban-level citizenship, primarily by providing access to city-wide services and - to a lesser degree - recognizing voting rights for permanent residents in local elections and consultative bodies. In addition, some urban centers have introduced permanent and temporary policy responses and targeted support mechanisms to ensure non-citizen inhabitants could access city services on par with the citizens.

The purpose of this article was to review the literature on the urban citizenship framework and present recent empirical findings on its practical benefits. Integrating an intersectionality lens and a critical perspective, the article discussed the issue of alien disenfranchisement in the context of Canada. The literature suggests that non-citizens, especially undocumented migrants, continue to be disadvantaged based on their legal status. In the case of Canada, major metropolitan centers such as Toronto have not been able to create a truly equal and fair environment for all community members, despite being committed to the principles of diversity, equity, and access and promising equal rights and access to all urban residents, regardless of their racial characteristics, place of origin, or immigrant status<sup>1</sup>. The evidence highlights how the oppressive national policies and practices, coupled with the individuals' race and identity, have created asymmetrical power relations between citizens and non-citizens.

As evidenced by the 2021 Annual Report of the Canadian Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship to Parliament, the federal government has set the newcomer intake to 1.3 million in the years 2022-2024 (Government of Canada 2022). As the number of immigrants needed to address the country's labor market needs and population growth will continue to grow, the question of the right

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<sup>1</sup> City of Toronto. (n.d.). Equity, Diversity & Inclusion. Accessed February 12, 2002, <https://www.toronto.ca/city-government/accessibility-human-rights/equity-diversity-inclusion/>

to the city remains highly relevant. In line with the literature on urban citizenship, the paper argued that the urban citizenship debate could offer an important framework for developing more inclusive and progressive policy frameworks, including that of non-citizen voting, in an era of increased human mobility. Urban citizenship holds the potential to ensure equal access to local services and facilities for all urban inhabitants. Hence, by embracing the principles and practices of urban (local) membership, Canadian municipalities like Toronto should offer policies and programs specific to the needs of their large non-citizen populations.

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