

# Citizenship

Concept: Citizenship

Author: Adrian Jones , McMaster University

Date Entered: 2005-05-09

Description Citizenship may be conceived of as the identities, rights, and loyalties held by individuals toward their political communities, together with the corresponding responsibilities they hold in relation to other members of such communities and to the community itself. These components may be formally prescribed by the community and/or subjectively understood by individuals. The notion of citizenship as a singular, bilateral relationship between the individual and the state, however, has attained a taken-for-granted quality in common understandings of the concept (Heater 1999). The historic reference point for contemporary state-based citizenship, and the related principle of state sovereignty, is the 1648 Peace of Westphalia. With the continued erosion of religious and monarchical authority in the nineteenth century, and the corresponding consolidation of state authority, state citizenship became the primary formal basis of political allegiances. The state stressed nationalism as the overarching basis of citizenship and identity, though such sentiments were not uniformly held or endorsed by individuals and groups within states.

Some critics reject the state as a fundamentally repressive social construct and/or as an obstacle to more effective global governance. However, the overall trajectory of evolving notions of citizenship does not signal an imminent or outright demise of state-based citizenship. It is more consistent with a complex mixture of state-based and other rights and obligations, increasingly encompassing a cosmopolitan ethic which de-emphasizes geographical and other arbitrary distinctions between peoples (Held 1995). The concept of "post-Westphalian citizenship" captures this partial dislodging of citizenship from the state (Linklater 1998). Though state sovereignty and formal state citizenship remain the primary legal reality, individuals have increasingly expanded their autonomy by creating political, social, and cultural space beyond the state. However, these opportunities vary greatly across socio-economic levels and geographic locations. Such affiliations may bypass the state (e.g., global civil society), rest above the state (e.g., the European Union), or exist within the state (e.g., sub-state diaspora communities). Equating citizenship with nationalism is increasingly problematic as mass migration continues to alter states' demographic compositions.

Given the foregoing, sovereign states should perhaps no longer be regarded as the exclusive, or even pre-eminent, unit of global social relations. That designation may now properly belong to individuals themselves, with the normative evolution of "international human rights." Such protections bear directly upon core aspects of traditional sovereign

statehood and the state's jurisdiction over internal matters, including citizens and residents. Moreover, as democracy is progressively conceptualized to include the participatory right of citizens concerning all aspects of decision-making which affect their lives, popular input into formal global governance is increasingly demanded (Held 1995).

In summary, globalization's implications for citizenship and individual autonomy are complex, and neither uniform nor entirely consistent. States and individuals are often perceived to be in a zero-sum relationship in this respect where increased autonomy for one is commonly understood to directly and necessarily imply decreased autonomy for the other. In fact, most individuals' physical, economic, and emotional well-being, and their prospects for personal fulfillment remain significantly contingent upon their states retaining the requisite autonomy and capacity to provide sufficient enabling conditions. However, as states have tended to enthusiastically embrace the global market economy, they have arguably failed to fulfill core responsibilities toward their citizens, such as ensuring political equality, economic opportunity, and social security and cohesion. State legitimacy may be undermined as entrenched or outside economic actors and forces override the representation and reflection of popular-level sentiments. The concept of "corporate citizenship" critically describes the privileged status of market interests in possessing the most basic of citizenship entitlements — namely, the effective capacity to hold states accountable for their policies (Sassen 1995). Moreover, democratic citizenship may be fundamentally undermined as business interests become entrenched within the very legal framework within which state policies are devised (e.g., international trade agreements) (Gill 2002).

Finally, a strict conception of state-based citizenship implies that states bear the sole responsibility and capacity to ensure their citizens' security, conventionally equated with the territorial integrity of the state against enemy invasion. That notion is increasingly deficient in the midst of contemporary transnational threats, including physical (e.g., environmental degradation) and psychological (e.g., anxiety relating to nuclear weapons). Thus, individuals increasingly confront a broader and more complex range of "risks and dangers" which inherently transcend the capacity of independent states to mitigate them (Giddens 2000). Hence, many citizens now demand state involvement in cooperative global governance initiatives to address these novel threats. The normative emergence of human security in global politics — a concept which encompasses a broad range of risk factors — embodies the notion of individual autonomy, and supplements conventional notions of collective security. Contemporary citizenship is further complicated by the paradox that states remain both the principal protectors, and potential violators, of human rights.

Work Cited: **Giddens, Anthony.** 2003. *Runaway world: How globalization is reshaping our lives*. New York: Routledge.

**Gill, Stephen.** 2002. Constitutionalizing inequality and the clash of

globalizations. *International Studies Review* 4 (2): 47-65.

**Heater, Derek.** 1999. *What is citizenship?* Cambridge, UK: Polity Press.

**Held, David.** 1995. *Democracy and the global order: From the modern state to cosmopolitan governance.* Stanford: Stanford University Press.

**Linklater, Andrew.** 1998. *The transformation of political community.* Cambridge, UK: Polity Press.

**Sassen, Saskia.** 1995. *Losing control? Sovereignty in an age of globalization.* New York: Columbia University Press.