# Citizen, Customer, Community:
# Changing Attitudes to Political Membership

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## 1. The Rise of the Nation State

The occasion of this conference – the fiftieth anniversary of Australian citizenship on 26 January 1949 – is testament to the recency of the nation-state and the complexity of our concepts of state, nationality and citizenship.

The fifty years we are celebrating here today – the period since the Second World War – have been the high point of the nation-state. More than seventy percent of the nation-states in the world today, did not exist in 1945 when the United Nations was created. Until some time in the 1930s – legal experts are unclear as to the precise date – Australia did not have separate standing in the international community and thus was not truly sovereign. And while it was not true of the Second World War, it was certainly the case that the majority of Australians who went off to fight in the First World War, did so on behalf of a territorially non-contiguous state known as the British Empire.

In our simplicity, we have judged the men and women of that generation of being less Australian than ourselves. But in doing so, we have failed to grasp the profound changes that have taken place this century in our concepts of nation, state and political membership. As we approach the end of the century, those concepts are changing once again.

The marriage of state and nation is under pressure, and we are being forced to think about the two phenomena in isolation from one another. It was the nation-state which made us into citizens. It had a profound impact not only on our vertical relations with government, but also on horizontal social relations and our concepts of self. In the time that I have available this morning, I want to explore briefly the unbundling of the nation-state and the associated concept of citizenship that is once again transforming those relations.

## 2. The Unmarked Citizen

Yale academic, James C. Scott has recently published a study of the state and the unique (and quite limited) ways in which this particular social institution experiences the world. Scott argues that the state is blind to cultural diversity and historical anomaly. He argues that in order for peoples to be recognised by the state, they first had to be settled, named and counted. In order for the state to comprehend the world, the world had to be standardised and simplified. And it is in this context that Scott refers to the emergence in the late eighteenth century of the revolutionary concept of ‘uniform, homogeneous citizenship’.

To begin with, at least, ‘unmarked’ citizens of this kind did not exist, and it was necessary to create them. The estates, the cities and provinces and the other mediating institutions that had formed the basis of national governance until the late eighteenth century, were progressively disenfranchised. As Hamilton argued in The Federalist Papers, citizens were the only proper objects of government.

The creation of uniform, homogeneous citizens did not take place without considerable suffering on the part of minorities. In the United Kingdom, one need only refer to the highland clearances over the second half of the eighteenth century. In the United States, one would refer to the treatment of native Americans, Chinese immigrants and Mormons in the final decades of the nineteenth century. In this country, one would have reference to the treatment of the Aboriginal peoples and Chinese and Japanese immigrants at roughly the same time.

Jonathan Sacks, who is Chief Rabbi of the Hebrew Congregations of the Commonwealth, has commented on the contribution of Enlightenment thinking to the triumph of universal man ('man-as-such') over 'particular human beings set in specific traditions, each with its own integrity.' He recounts the difficulty which the French National Assembly had in 1789 in dealing with the Jewish question. The Declaration of Rights proclaimed that 'All men are born, and remain, free and equal in rights.' What then was the Assembly to do about the anti-Jewish riots that had broken out in Alsace? In December of that year, the Count of Clermont-Tonnerre rose in the Assembly with the answer:

The Jews should be denied everything as a nation, but granted everything as individuals . . . It is intolerable that the Jews should become a separate political formation or class in the country. Every one of them must individually become a citizen; if they do not want this, they must inform us and we shall then be compelled to expel them.

It was less the fact that the Jews were different, Sacks says, but that they were collectively different: 'They had allegiances to one another as well as to the state, and this opened them up time and again, in one country after another, to charges of dual loyalties, despite endlessly repeated acts of patriotism and despite the tragic fact that they had nowhere else to go.'

Without a doubt, this concept of the unmarked citizen (and the associated concept of national membership) had powerful appeal to men and women through the twentieth century. It gave us a new sense of identity and neatly defined the boundaries of life's responsibilities. It was also efficient from the state's perspective, facilitating the acceptance of historically-high levels of taxation and providing the state with the huge armies of volunteer soldiers needed to fight its battles in an age of industrialised warfare.

3. The Unsustainability of Uniform, Homogeneous Citizenship

But I want to argue that this concept of uniform, homogeneous citizenship was ultimately unsustainable:

(i) Standardisation and simplification

A certain amount of standardisation is necessary in a mass society, but there are limits. Twentieth century politics is replete with examples of nationality and citizenship being used for the oppression of ethic and religious minorities. In fact, very few nations in the world today manifest the kind of cultural uniformity assumed by traditional concepts of citizenship; only around 10 percent of UN member states are ethnically homogeneous.

The violence and human rights abuse that was necessary to create the nation-states of Western Europe and North America is no longer acceptable to the international community – as the leaders of the Balkan states have recently discovered. While nation-states are reluctant to debate the issue openly, there are now real questions about the sustainability of traditional nationality-based concepts of citizenship.

We have also learned a great deal from the ecological sciences about the importance of complexity and diversity in social organisation. It has been argued that in a globalised environment, societies which permit their people to have dual citizenship may have a competitive advantage.

(ii) Free-standing individualism

Concepts of human rights (a common characteristic of citizenship in the modern world) have reinforced the atomisation of society, strengthening the belief that we are capable of surviving as free-standing individuals. And welfare entitlements – another incident of citizenship in the modern world – have reinforced this belief that we are capable of standing on our own, free of obligations to the community.

There is a great deal that is attractive about free-standing individualism, but questions are now being asked as to whether a society is sustainable on these terms. Except in times of war, the nation-state is too large a unit for intelligent social regulation. But the individual is too small.

(iii) Multiple interests

In the place of real-world communities, we have created 'communities of interest'. This is partly the by-product of nationalisation, but it has also been facilitated by urbanisation and by technological innovations such as the telephone, the automobile, television and the Internet.

As long as these communities of interest were primarily sub-national in scope, they served the nation-state. James Madison wrote in The Federalist Papers of the advantages of an extended republic where society was 'broken into so many parts, interests, and classes of citizens, that the rights of individuals or of the minority, will be in little danger from interested combinations or the majority.'

But communities of interest which cross national boundaries have a completely different effect, as authoritarian states discovered in the late 1980s and throughout the 1990s when democracy movements used telephones, fax machines and the Internet to communicate abroad.

Social capital theorists are also concerned about the qualitative difference between real-world communities and these communities of interest, which may have the effect of closing us off from people who are different from us. They also reinforce our preference for 'exit' over 'voice' as a means of resolving differences. After all, one of the advantages of a community of interest (such as Greenpeace) over a real world community (such as your local neighbourhood), is that you are unhappy, you just let your membership lapse.

It has been argued that the formal order of the nation-state is dependent on the informal order of society, which the upward movement of social and economic space (the creation of the nation-state together with national and international markets) has undermined.

4. New Challenges to Traditional Concepts of Citizenship

In short, even if there had not been any changes in the external environment, it is possible that traditional concepts of citizenship were inherently unsustainable. But the world has not stood still, and the nation-state is facing challenges which were not apparent fifty or one hundred years ago.

(i) The triumph of the market

Capitalism's success has changed the way in which we relate to each other. Market transactions are more impersonal than other social relations. Kenichi Ohmae has commented on the distinction that we seem to draw between market transactions, which are largely undertaken without regard to nationality, and political ones, which continue to be focused around our membership in the national community.

At the cash register, you don't care about country of origin or country of residence. You don't think about employment figures or trade deficits. You don't worry about where the product was made. It does not matter to you that a 'British' sneaker by Reebok (now an American-owned company) was made in Korea, a German sneaker by Adidas in Taiwan, or a French ski by Rossignol in Spain. What you care about most is the product's quality, price, design, value, and appeal to you as a consumer.

But consumerism is also creeping into our dealings with government. We like being treated as customers by public service providers such as Optus and Telstra. We find it difficult to understand

why the Roads and Traffic Authority cannot manage its queues in the way that McDonalds does. And with some reservations, we are prepared to go along with the commodification of public resources such as water.

The impact of these changes is manifold, but one of the consequences for citizenship is that market choice reinforces our preference for exit as a means of resolving differences. Dual citizenship is a classic example of modern men and women seeking to preserve the right of exit, and as Hirschman observed in his 1970 classic, the threat of exit profoundly alters the nature of an organisation and the loyalty of its members.

(ii) Post-materialism

A large body of social research over the past two or three decades, from right around the world, has identified a trend away from so-called material values such as strong defence, public safety and economic growth, and towards values that have been described as post-material – freedom of speech, participation in government decision-making, environmental amenity.

When you pause to reflect, there is nothing surprising about these results. They merely confirm what many of us have privately observed: that the generation that grew up during the Great Depression and the Second World War is passing away, and that those of us who did not have these formative experiences are less concerned about physical and economic security.

Significantly, it was these same concerns – physical and economic security – that caused the citizenry to identify most strongly with the nation-state. While post-materialists are more interested in participating in government decision-making, they are less inclined to identify strongly with the state and its institutions.

Indeed, this same body of research has found a decline in respect for institutional authority. With long-enduring security, 'the public gradually sees less need for the discipline and self-denial demanded by strong governments. A postmaterialist emphasis on self-expression and self-realization becomes increasingly central.'

However, while postmaterialists have manifest a loss of authority in hierarchical and authoritarian institutions, interpersonal trust has actually increased. And the one large institution to have shown any increase in trust over recent decades, albeit from a low base, was the corporation (probably because our dealings with major corporations in the marketplace are not usually hierarchical.)

(iii) Privatisation

For much of the past century, there has been a close relationship between national citizenship and state ownership. Eva Cox pointed to this in her Boyer Lecture on 'The Companionable State':

Government became significant in developing social cohesion through providing citizens with public education, health care and other public services. Universal access replaced . . . scattered and often inadequate informal service provision. . . . These social services then became essential to maintain people's sense of belonging and helped to enforce the obligations of citizenship. They were part of social harmony and cohesion.

When they wrote in the 1920s, Sidney and Beatrice Webb used the word 'nationalisation' to describe not only the takeover by the state of privately-owned public services, but also the centralisation of public services in the hands of a national government. It is not a coincidence that nationalisation of public services in Britain took place in 1946, right at the beginning of the half century we are celebrating here today, nor that, in Australia, the nationalisation of private electricity utilities in South Australia (1946) and New South Wales (1950), and the attempted nationalisation of banking occurred around this same time.

The oldest surviving state-owned enterprise in the world is the Post Office. We used to feel warmly about red pillar boxes, even those of us (like myself) who grew up in the country and never saw them

except in story books. The red pillar box was one of the most enduring icons of the national community. In late 1994, in the midst of the debate over privatisation of the British Post Office, a full-page advertisement appeared in The Spectator, portraying the multicultural residents of a typical London neighbourhood clustered around a red pillar box. Beneath this heart-warming image were the words: ‘Who’s the pillar of the community? With more than 100,000 pillar boxes nationwide, there’s always someone close you can rely on. Royal Mail.’

The Post Office dominated the civil service which emerged over the course of the nineteenth century. It was the exemplar of centralised, synchronised public service. So great was its authority that in most parts of the world, the Post Office was allowed to take over the telegraph and the telephone as soon as they emerged from the technological frontier.

But for all of its symbolic power, the red pillar box is disappearing. New technology has generated new expectations. It has destroyed the monopoly once held by the Post Master General and opened up the postal system to aggressive competition from telephones, fax machines and email, from international couriers and remailing companies. Sweden and the Netherlands have already privatised their postal services. Others such as Germany are to follow. A public service that was present at the birth of the modern state and played a key role in the creation of a standardised industrial society, is being progressively dismantled. It is not happening because of ideological opposition to state ownership because through technological innovation and changing public expectations.

One of the factors driving the privatisation of telecommunications around the world is that this particular industry has escaped the boundaries of the nation-state. In Europe, much the same is true of electricity and rail. The interconnection and economies of scale arguments which once worked to the advantage of nation-states, now serve to undermine them.

There is some recognition of the importance of cross-subsidies and universal service obligations in the privatisation process, but far too little consideration has been given thus far to the impact that the de-nationalisation of public services will have on our concepts of membership.

(iv) Globalisation

Finally, we are witnessing an unprecedented assault on the autonomy of the nation-state from global markets and from emerging institutions of global governance. This is not the place to pursue the implications of those developments, but one of the consequences of a weakening of the boundaries of the nation-state, has been an increase in ethnic nationalism. It is almost as if, with a decline in the importance of functional nationalism, symbolic nationalism has acquired greater significance.

5. Unbundling the Nation-State

Increasingly, in a post-industrial world, states and nations do different work and I have argued that these two social institutions may function more independently in the future. David J. Elkins has referred to an ‘unbundling’ of the nation-state. He has raised the possibility that:

. . . ‘nation’ may become a more private concept analogous to family on a grander scale, while the state will be essentially public. The complication in such a hypothesis, of course, is that it seems likely that some of the state functions now assumed to be governmental may be performed by institutions (like transnationals, voluntary communities, and specialized ‘police’) which look more like the private sector to our current way of thinking.

Elkins argues that, ‘Instead of an all-purpose organisation of a fixed territorial size, one can more easily create types and sizes of organizations suited to the particular nature of the problem.’ Others have used the terms ‘polycentric order’ and ‘multilevel order’ to describe the overlapping and interlocking forms of governance which are beginning to emerge.

This kind of unbundling opens up a whole new field of organisational possibilities. It is possible to imagine new mixtures of political institutions of differing scale and scope. Like most people, I have

difficulty imagining all of the institutions that might emerge with this unbundling, but let me explore the limits of what is possible with some contemporary case studies:

In most countries of the world, social insurance has been nationalised to some extent, thereby becoming one of the incidents of citizenship. National risk pools 'broke through the collective solidarities and territorializations obstructing the free circulation of skills, commodities and capitals'.

With an increasing number of 'transnationals' – people spending a significant part of the year in more than one country – there is a growing demand for social insurance schemes that are non-territorially based. For these people, the social and economic advantages of a national risk pool are fading. While governments may still demand that residents and income-earners have an adequate level of social insurance, 'transnationals' may find it more beneficial to insure through multinational schemes. Membership in the national risk pool is breaking away from the bundle of citizenship rights that we have traditionally identified with the nation-state.

Another kind of 'unbundling' that we have begun to witness is the growing protection of individual rights outside of the context of the nation-state. Saskia Sassen has pointed out that:

Human rights are not dependent on nationality, unlike political, social, and civil rights, which are predicated on the distinction between national and alien. . . International human rights, while partly rooted in the founding documents of certain nation-states, are today a force that can undermine the exclusive authority of the state over nationals . . . Membership in territorially exclusive nation-states ceases to be the only ground for the realization of rights.

The most powerful example of this in Australia in recent years was the successful challenge in 1994 before the UN Human Rights Committee, brought against Tasmania's laws on homosexuality by Tasmanian gay activist, Nick Toonen. Toonen had exercised his democratic right to representation and failed to change the law. Having failed to achieve his ends through the exercise of his civic rights, he sought protection of his human rights in an international forum.

In a sense, these human rights are implicit in Australian citizenship, since the Australian government is a signatory to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. But the case does demonstrate the growing tensions between notions of citizenship and nation-states.

I am not convinced that Sassen is correct when she claims that social rights are predicated on notions of nationality. A fascinating development of recent years has been the willingness of states to extend social rights to non-citizens such as permanent residents and guestworkers. In effect, membership of the social and economic community has been extended to temporary residents, while membership of the political community has been withheld.

There is evidence of some discomfort at this development, with nation-states periodically threatening to cut back on welfare entitlements to these groups. But the cuts are rarely significant, suggesting that the majority of citizens are capable of drawing a distinction between the political and social communities.

Several European states have taken steps towards representing their citizens on a non-territorial basis. In 1995, the Italian parliament was considering legislation that would have created a new electoral district, based on Rome, with parliamentary representatives elected by Italian citizens scattered around the world. (The bill lapsed with the dissolution of parliament and to my knowledge has not been introduced.) For some years, Italy and Greece have had consultative committees to their respective legislatures, elected or appointed from their citizens scattered abroad.

In an attempt to resolve the problem of ethnic minorities such as the Kurds, Gidon Gottlieb has proposed that the international community give formal recognition to stateless nations:

Nations that do not have a state of their own should be granted a formal non-territorial status and a recognized standing internationally, albeit one that differs from the position of states.

Elkins himself has suggested that a solution to the Canadian problem may well be 'non-territorial federalism'. He imagines a non-territorial francophone province incorporating all Canadian francophones living outside Quebec and another territorially-based, but non-contiguous Aboriginal Peoples Province.

The constitutional changes made between 1970 and 1993 which coverted Belgium into a federation provide an example of the cultural 'unbundling' imagined by Elkins. Under the 1970 reforms, four territorially-defined linguistic regions were created: a Walloon region, a Flemish region, a small German region in the south-east, and a bilingual Brussels region. At the same time, three 'cultural communities' were created, made up of members of the national parliament with the respective linguistic and cultural backgrounds.

Two of these cultural communities – the French and Dutch-speaking ones – now have administrative responsibility for cultural affairs, including broadcasting, education, health care, social welfare and tourism, while the regional councils have responsibility for territorially-defined matters such as economic affairs, employment, urban planning, environmental regulation, water use and housing.

The arrangements for Brussels are extremely complex, with Dutch-speaking and Flemish members elected by their respective communities to the executive of the regional government, and separate French and Dutch community commissions having responsibility for cultural and educational matters. These two commissions meet together and separately, making decisions respectively on 'bi-community' and 'uni-community' issues.

Under the most recent changes in 1993, the Senate was converted into a body representative of the regional and community governments, and sub-state governments were given treaty-making powers within their respective competencies. As a result, the Belgian federation is partly cultural and thus not entirely territorial in nature.

If this structure sounds complicated and confusing, you are right, to which I would add, Welcome to the future. While states and nations will survive, it seems that the bundle of rights and obligations traditionally associated with the nation-state may not. David Elkins argues that 'As identities and loyalties become more varied and distinct, the concept of citizenship unbundles.'

The other condition necessary for a significant unbundling of citizenship is a willingness on the part of individuals to demand this kind of flexibility. One of the defining characteristics of post-materialism is its eclecticism. Post-materialists appear to be reluctant to be confined within the constraints of traditional loyalties. They seem more content to hold mutually inconsistent positions, to hold memberships in several organisations, each of which demands absolute loyalty.

It is unsurprising, then, that we are seeing an increase in dual citizenship. Immigrants insist that they are incapable of expressing their full identity through sole membership of the adopted community. This has recently surfaced as a problem in France, where immigrant groups are challenging the ideology of the Declaration of Rights which, for two hundred years, has rejected distinctions based on race, class or sex. Marcel Desailly, a Ghanaian-born member of the so-called 'Rainbow Squad', the multi-racial French soccer team which won the World Cup, recently told the press, 'My origins are African and that's something I'll never forget. France gave me the opportunity to defend its colours, but my roots are my roots.'

The decline of vertical trust and the increase of horizontal trust also suggests an increased willingness to engage with a number of political organisations at once, rather than confining membership narrowly.

Research several years ago into the attitudes of Australian high school students towards 'What makes a good citizen?' found that issues of interpersonal trust ranked much higher than traditional concepts of patriotism and political involvement. Thus respect for the rights of others and treating others equally regardless of gender, ranked much higher than obedience to the laws of the community or respecting the Australian flag.

Research undertaken in 1994 on behalf of the Primes Minister's Civics Expert Group, found similar attitudes among the Australian community more generally. While 62 percent mentioned obedience to society's rules, the next most prominent mentions were 'care and consideration for others' (38%) and 'community/voluntary activities' (30%). Paying taxes (10%) and voting responsibly (5%) were mentioned much later.

## 6. Conclusion

To summarise my arguments: there is some evidence to support the proposition that the bundle of rights, obligations and relationships associated with traditional concepts of citizenship is being broken up.

In part, this reflects a separation of state and nation. We have seen arguments for the recognition of stateless nations, with the possibility of different state membership and national membership. In part, this involves a separation of cultural government from territorial government, and we have seen an example of this emerge in Belgium in recent decades. Analysts have begun to explore the possibility of non-territorial governance and territorially non-contiguous governance.
We have witnessed a significant separation of human and social rights from the citizenship bundle. And it is not difficult to foresee a growing demand for social insurance which crosses national boundaries: in effect, the decline of the national risk pool as a defining characteristic of citizenship. We have also seen widespread de-nationalisation of some public services, particularly those which have the effect of reinforcing international linkages. State ownership was used to provide many of the incidents of citizenship, but this is becoming increasingly difficult.
We are seeing the emergence of multi-layered, polycentric forms of governance, with increased opportunities for multiple membership.
There would seem to be an increasing expectation of choice in memberships, with the growing popularity of exit over voice.
Of course, some clustering of these incidents of citizenship is necessary for social cohesion, but is would seem that it is nowhere near as much as we traditionally assumed.
Individuals are able to cope with a great deal more fragmentation, mixing and matching and conflicting memberships than states.
It is to be expected that nation-states will find this unbundling process highly threatening and to the extent that they are aware of it, we must expect them to resist.



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