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Immigration

Fewer immigrants are deciding to become Canadian citizens: study

By **Quinn Patrick, True North Wire** | July 20, 2024

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Hamilton Citizenship Ceremony / Copyright: JOEY COLEMAN / THEPUBLICRECORD.CA

Fewer immigrants are choosing to become Canadian citizens, according to a study from the Institute for Canadian Citizenship, which found that interest in naturalization has plummeted by 40% in recent years.

The citizenship group's study found that a growing number of immigrants are still choosing not to become citizens up to 10 years after arriving in Canada.

The organization's analysis builds on findings from Statistics Canada, which revealed "a sharp decline in naturalization rates among immigrants within 5 to 9 years of arrival, dropping from 75.4% in 1996 to 45.7% in 2021."

A spokesperson for the federal immigration department told True North there are a range of explanations for this, from education levels and income events, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as the citizenship policies and socio-political and economic conditions of the country of origin of the individual who is seeking citizenship," the spokesperson said.

The decision not to take the oath is made most often among highly educated economic immigrants, who have options outside of Canada.

"Higher education levels correlate with lower naturalization rates; citizenship uptake is lowest among university-educated immigrants, who represent a growing proportion of recent immigrants across census periods," the Institute for Canadian Citizenship study said.

The organization warned that the Trudeau government must "avoid diminishing the value of citizenship."

"It can achieve this by making citizenship a more visible and celebrated part of the immigration journey, such as highlighting the meaningful impact of in-person ceremonies to immigrants and the greater public," it said.

This is something the Trudeau government should take note of, as it has toyed with the idea of replacing the oath of citizenship ceremony with a virtual "click of a mouse" procedure last year to deal with the backlog.

Conservative immigration critic Tom Kmiec said that if elected, his party plans on "returning to in-person citizenship ceremonies to celebrate those Canadians to take their oath of citizenship virtually."

Kmiec said that the NDP-Liberals have been "undermining the value of becoming a Canadian by introducing click citizenship and forcing new

According to the immigration think tank's analysis, despite record high immigration levels, citizenship rates "have declined across all major source countries, education levels, and provinces of residence," read the study.

"For immigrants who arrived between 2011-15, naturalization rates vary significantly – up to 45% – across the top 10 source countries; immigrants from Iran have the highest rates while those from China have the lowest."

Countries which have prohibitions on dual citizenship also affect naturalization rates.

Family class immigrants hold the lowest naturalization rates and refugees the highest.

Those admitted under the family category are the least likely to seek citizenship, whereas naturalization rates within the economic class and among refugees were the highest.

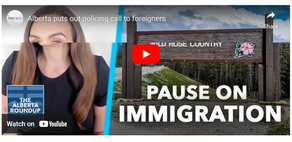
Immigration lawyer Sergio Karas told True North that highly educated immigrants would likely find better opportunities in the U.S., whereas those entering Canada with a lower skill set are more likely to be content

Canadian citizenship because they come from countries whose passports require visas to travel almost anywhere, or they are war-thorn, or unstable, so a Canadian passport is a door opener," said Karas.

However, even those categories experienced 10% and 5% declines respectively across the timeframe analyzed.

Alberta, Ontario and British Columbia, the three provinces which have seen the most significant spike in immigration numbers, "experienced the largest declines in naturalization."

Factors like Canada's high cost of living are undoubtedly linked to immigrants being less inclined to become citizens, with the trend of 'onward migration' steadily increasing since the 1980s.



Onward migration refers to immigrants who arrive in Canada and then subsequently leave for a myriad of reasons.

The Institute for Canadian Citizenship published a study on immigrant retention last fall that found many newcomers "may not be seeing the benefits to Canada," due to its strained healthcare system, unaffordable housing, and underemployment.

"To reverse the trend of declining citizenship rates, the government should allocate a larger portion of its settlement services budget to programs that

"Furthermore, to maintain focus on the issue, governments should adopt meaningful performance targets focused on the naturalization rates of recent immigrants – those who arrived within 5-9 years – and expand the availability of data on the citizenship process to enable better tracking."

Kmiec said that under Trudeau's administration "it comes as no surprise that the best and brightest are discouraged from making a permanent commitment to Canada."

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