



Acquiring Canadian citizenship: Trends, narratives, barriers and supports

Centre for Migration Studies (UBC)

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Written in accessible language

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<https://migration.ubc.ca/publications/research-briefs/migration-insights-series-nov-2024/>

Beyond Political Polarization: Finding Common Ground on Immigration in the United States

Matthew Wright

Research brief prepared by Nadia Almasalkhi



Andres Mejia | stock.adobe.com

Key Ideas

- Despite what the extremist positions of many political leaders and pundits might suggest, **the American public is not so polarized on immigration issues.** Most Americans' attitudes toward immigration are centrist. On the aggregate, most Americans have slightly positive views of immigration and immigrants.
- People's **preferences on immigration policy are motivated largely by civic values**, which are widely-shared moral beliefs about what is desirable in the public realm, and their perception of how well a given policy aligns with civic values – not by feelings of economic or ethnocultural threat.
- **Americans' stances on immigration issues can change.** Immigration attitudes change over time, and rhetorical framing strategies can increase support for specific policies.

Recommendations

- **Politicians should adopt more pragmatic, centrist immigration policy positions.** Few U.S. citizens support extremist policy measures. Political elites are often out-of-step with the majority of voters, even within their own party, on immigration.
- **Advocates of immigration reform should emphasize how their proposed policies align with core American values.** Value-based arguments are effective in shifting people's attitudes on immigration. It can help to dive into policy details.

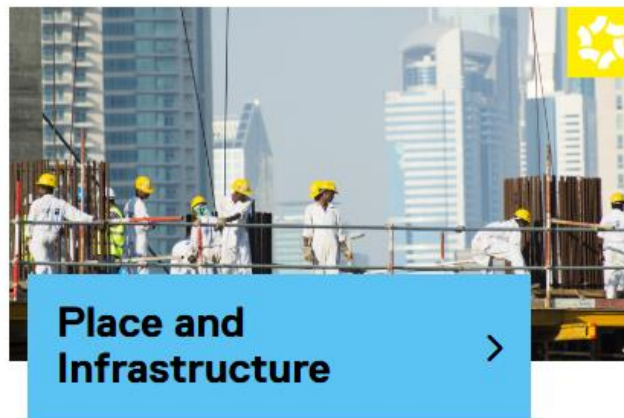
Analysis of public opinion data suggests that there may be more common ground and flexibility in Americans' immigration attitudes than headlines and politicians' rhetoric imply.

The loudest voices in politics and media create the impression that immigration is a highly contentious and polarizing issue in the United States – an issue that deeply divides the country along immovable, identity-based lines. Indeed, the rhetoric of U.S. Congress members on immigration has become more and more polarized along party lines over the last forty years, and this trend is accelerating in the twenty-first century.¹ But do headlines and political rhetoric reflect a similar degree of polarization within the American citizenry?

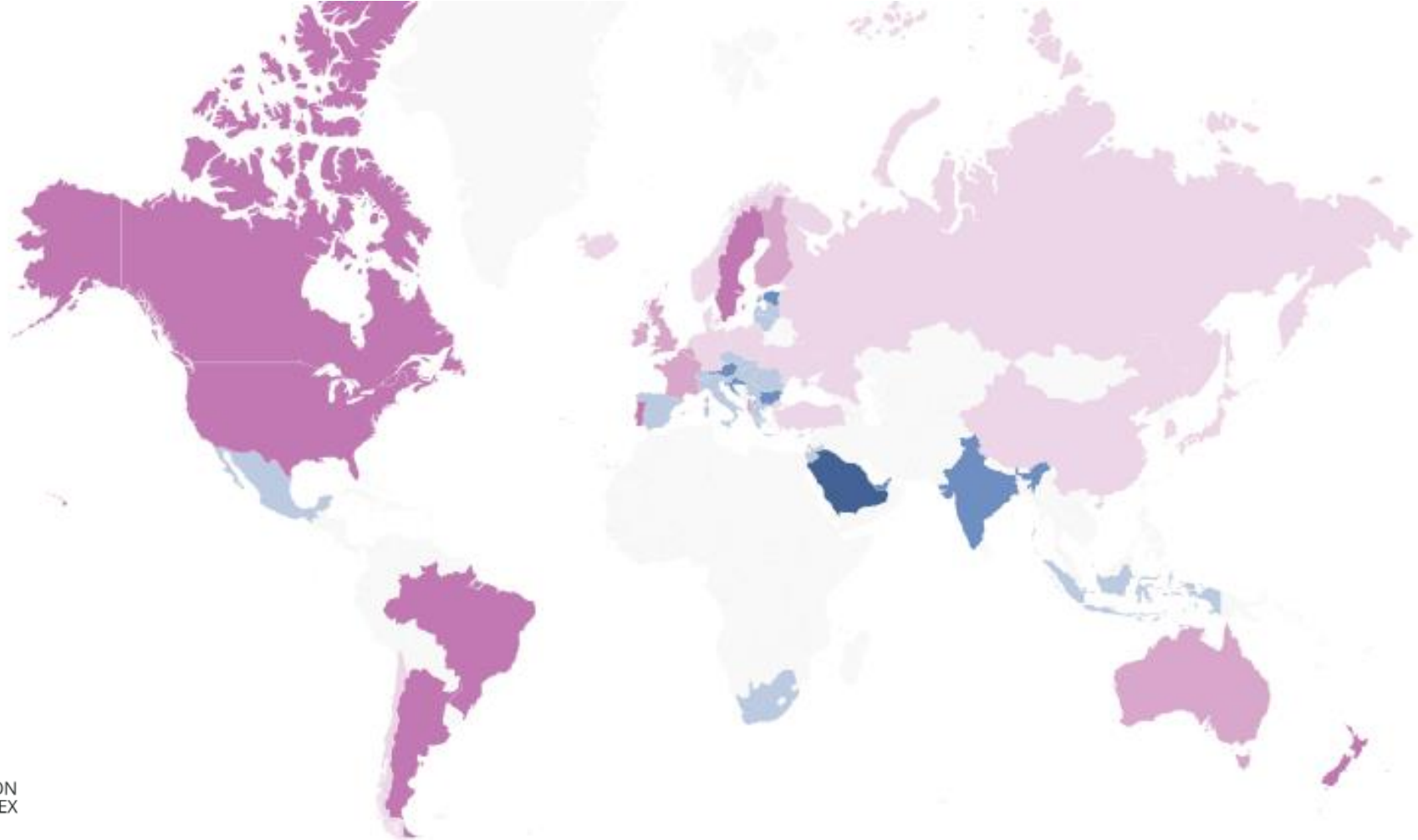
Research by Dr. Matthew Wright, a political scientist at the University of British Columbia and affiliate of UBC's Centre for Migration Studies, indicates that this conventional wisdom may be wrong: analysis of public opinion data suggests that there may be more common ground and flexibility in Americans' immigration attitudes than headlines and politicians' rhetoric imply.² Professor Wright and his collaborators tackle questions like, how polarized is the American public on the topic of immigration, actually? What are Americans' immigration policy preferences? What drives their views? And how stubbornly set are Americans in their immigration attitudes? The research suggests that most Americans are relatively centrist, moderately pro-immigrant, supportive of immigration policies driven by pragmatism and civic values, and open to changing their views.

Bridging Divides (CFREF project)

A national research program building new understanding of the challenges and opportunities that migrant integration poses for Canada, locally and across borders.



Global Citizenship Picture: Canada has relatively accessible naturalization

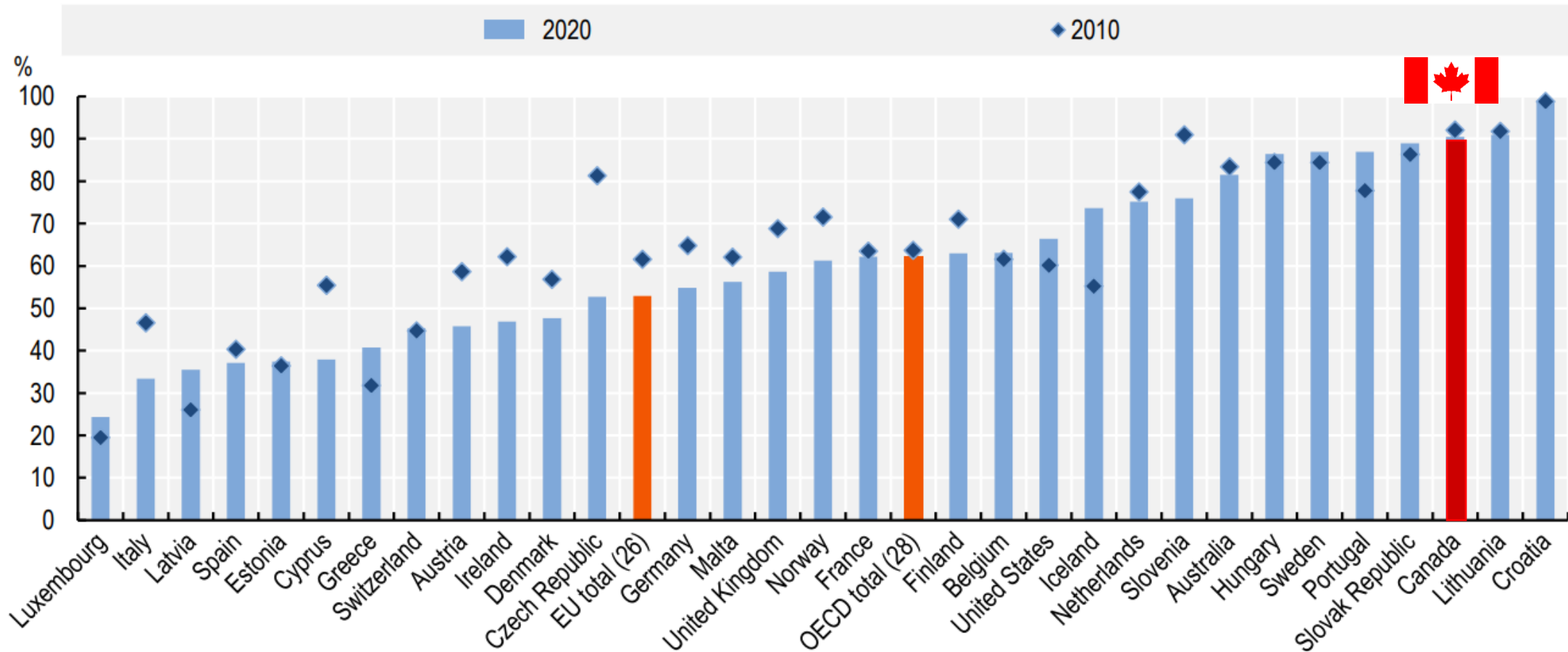


LEGEND ↑

- 80-100 - Favourable
- 60-79 - Slightly favourable
- 41-59 - Halfway favourable
- 21-40 - Slightly unfavourable
- 1-20 - Unfavourable
- 0 - Critically unfavourable

Citizenship acquisition in Canada remains high:

Immigrants (15yrs+ old), at least 10 years of residence



Citizenship
can boost
income
by **2-10%**
in Western countries.





**Naturalized migrants
express greater
identification
with the country
than those without citizenship.**

People engage in
**more local
voting**
with citizenship,
even if not needed.



Citizenship
premiums
are not equal.



They are **higher** for
younger and recent
immigrants, & from
Non-Western nations.



The effects of pre-admission experience on naturalization rates in Canada

Dr. Sandra Schinnerl, CMS

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The Geo-Politics of Citizenship

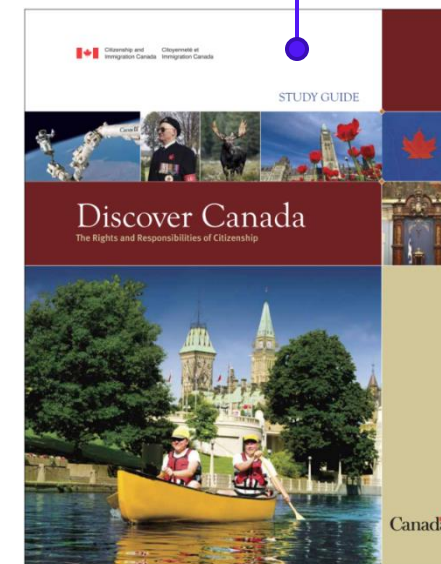
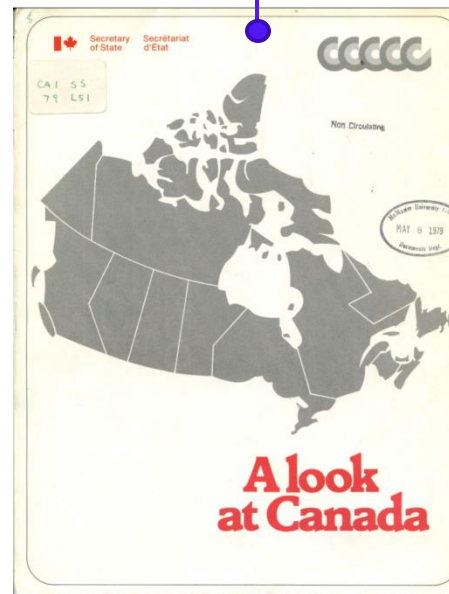
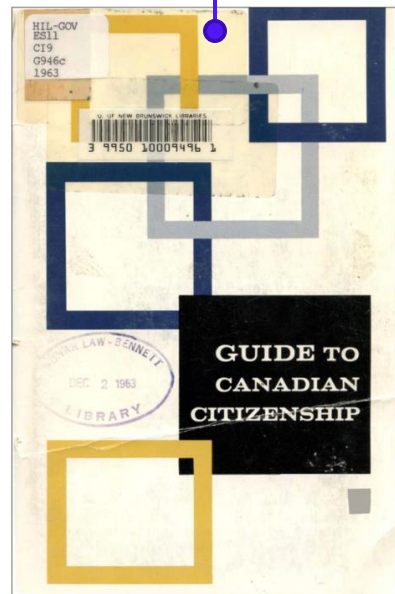
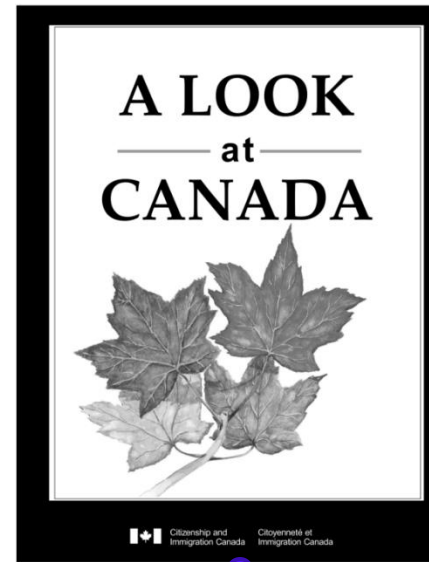
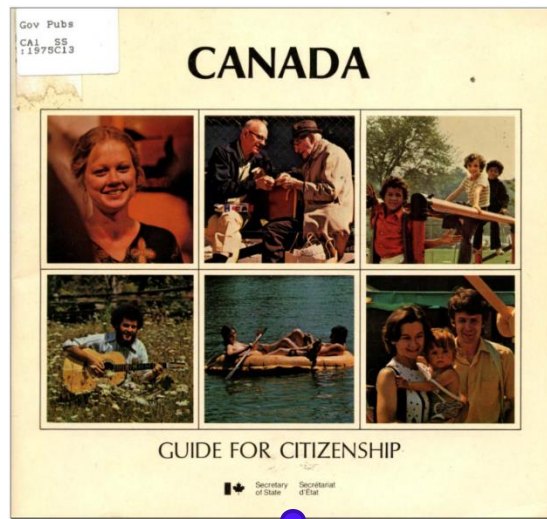
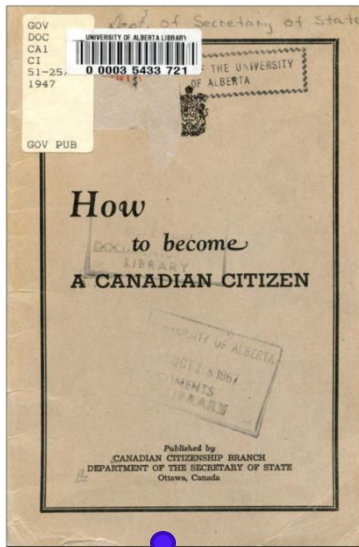
Taylor Jackson, U of Toronto

Other CMS Projects

Citizenship Guides

Belonging in Unceded Territory





The effects of pre-admission experience on naturalization rates in Canada

Dr. Sandra Schinnerl, CMS

The Geo-Politics of Citizenship

Taylor Jackson, U of Toronto

Representations of Black Migrant and Refugee Experiences in Citizenship Guides

Elizabeth Semowo, UBC

Why are Canadian citizenship rates declining?

Research initiatives on the barriers, supports, and demographics driving citizenship acquisition trends in Canada

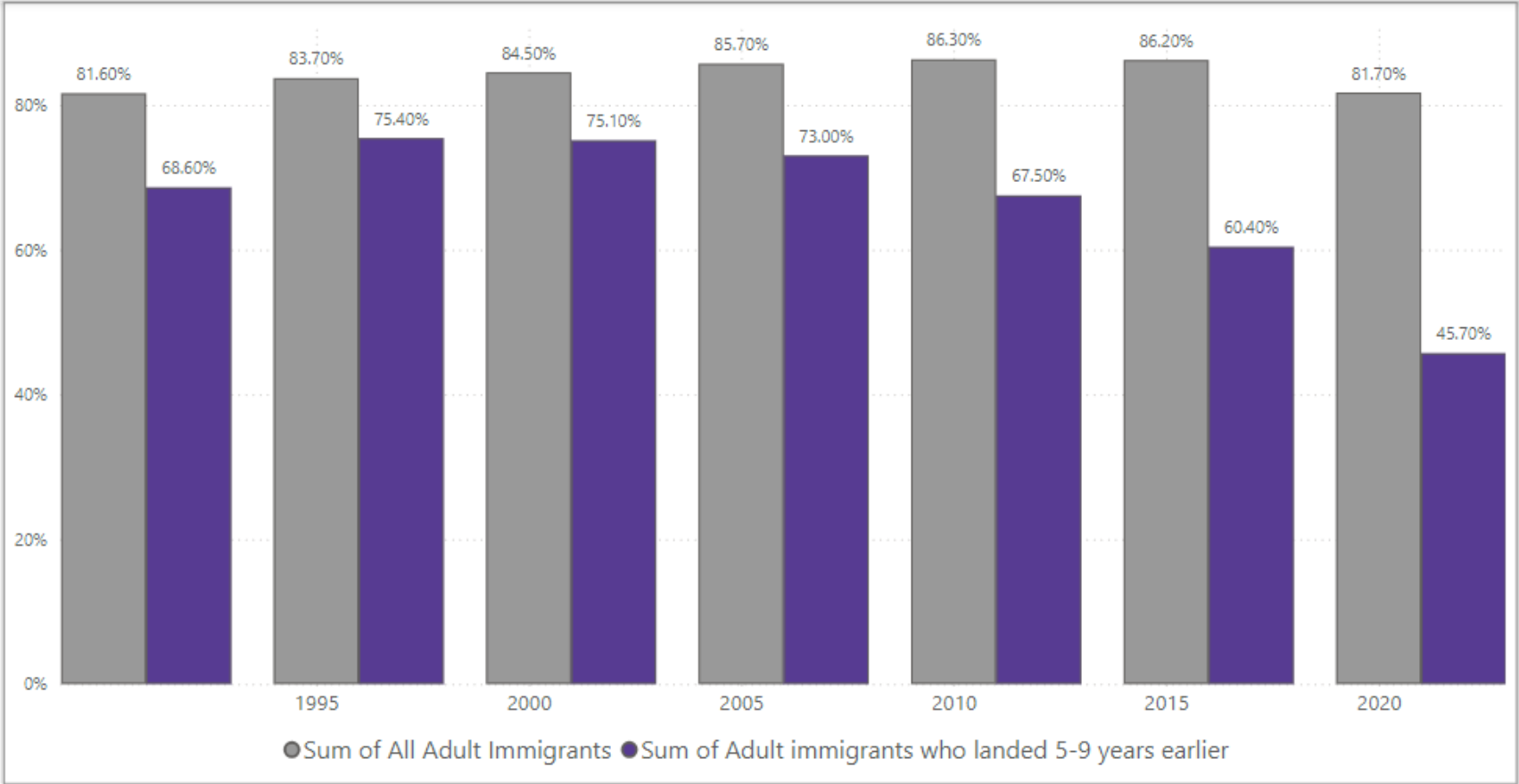
Vince Hopkins, Assistant Professor, UBC
Irene Bloemraad, Professor, UBC
Antje Ellermann, Professor, UBC
Taylor Jackson, Doctoral candidate, UofT
Sandra Schinnerl, Post-doctoral fellow, UBC

Research questions

- Why are Canada's naturalization rates declining?
- Has the shift to two-step immigration contributed to the decline in Canada's naturalization rate?
- To what extent do administrative burdens weaken access to citizenship in Canada?
- To what extent does settlement support strengthen citizenship acquisition?
- How can governments promote inclusive, low-burden pathways to citizenship?



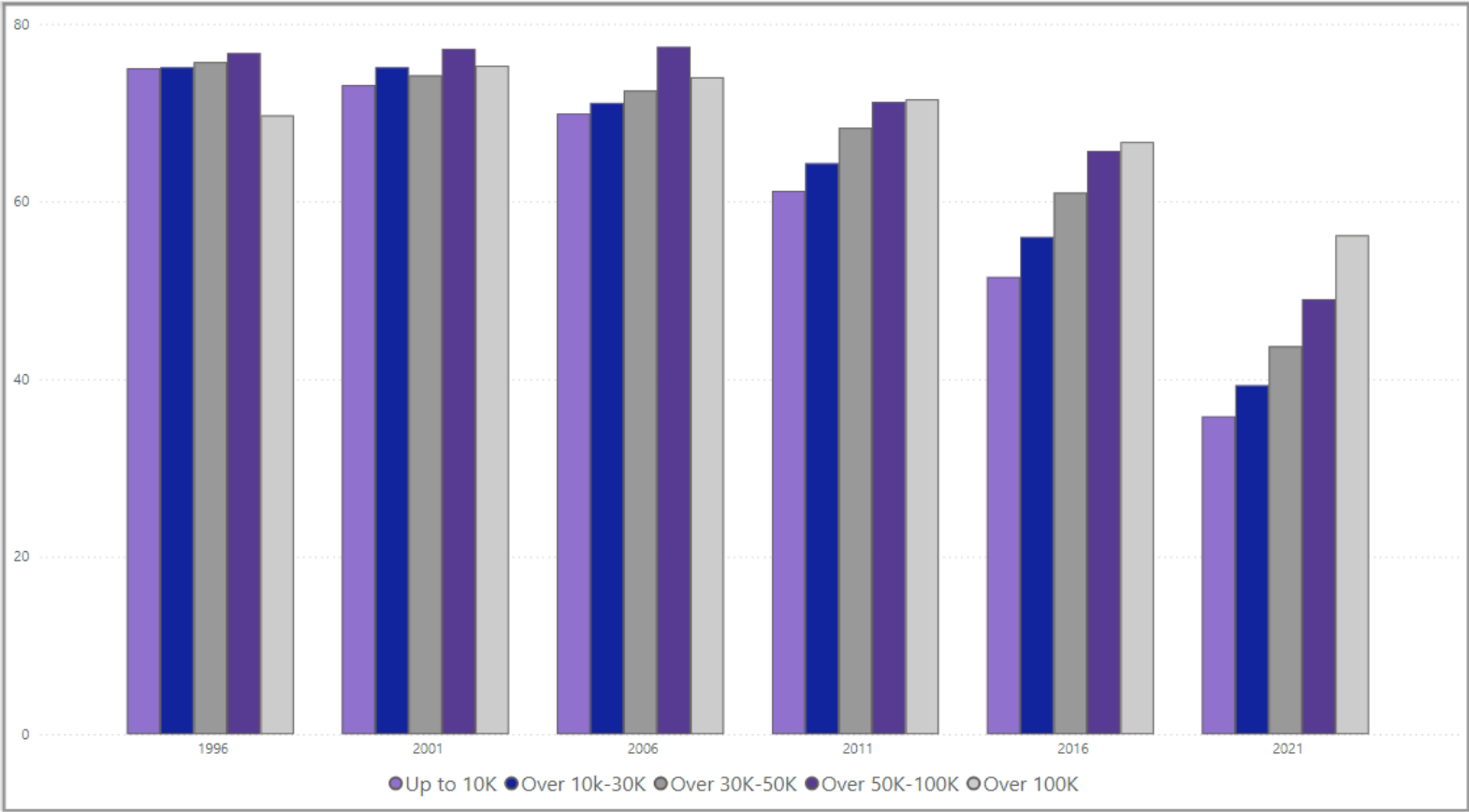
Citizenship Trends 1991-2021



Source: Statistics Canada, 2024



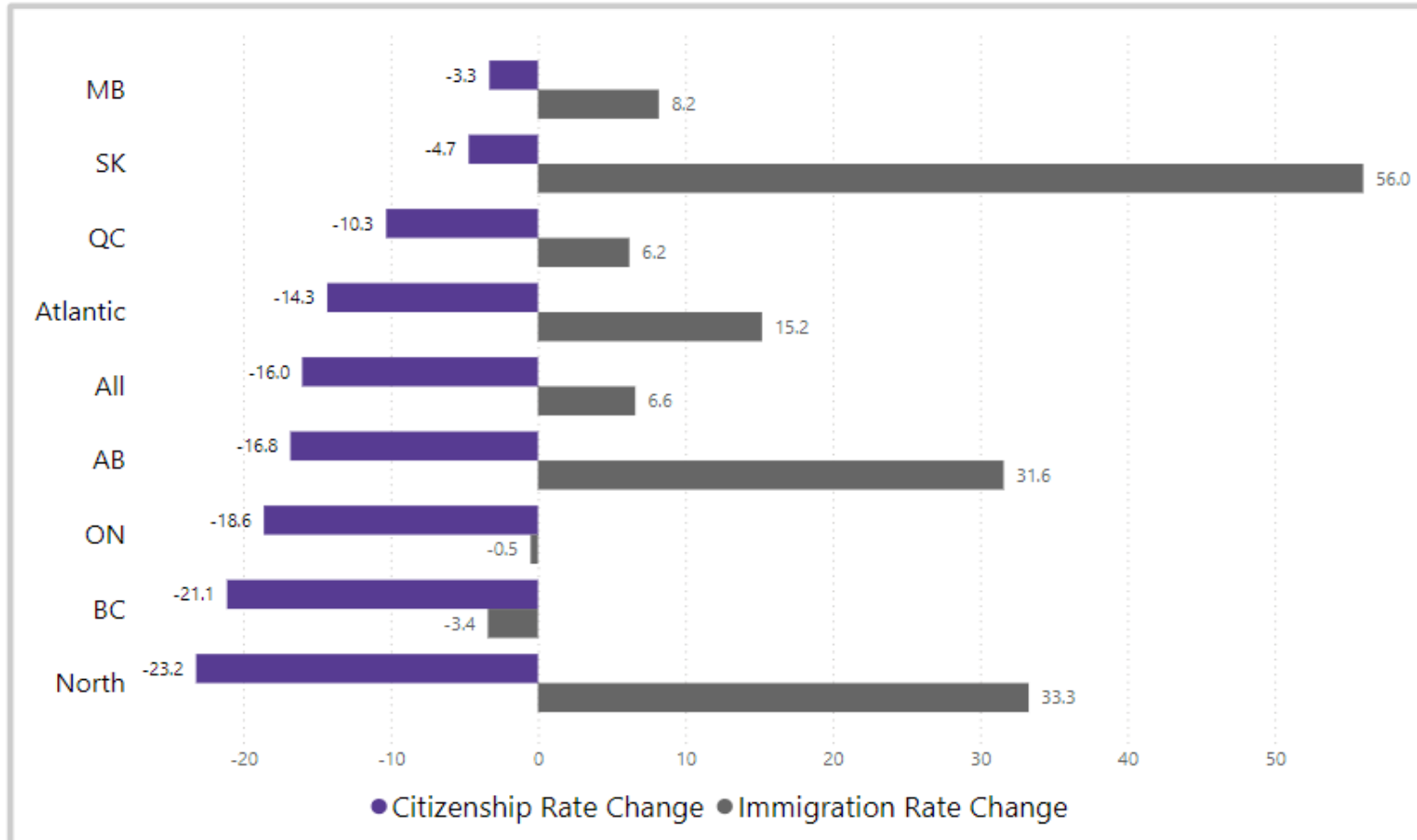
Citizenship rates by family income 1996-2021



Citizenship rates of recent landed immigrants in 2015 dollars by family income adult equivalent adjusted
Source: Statistics Canada, 2024



Rates of change in Citizenship and Immigration between 2006-2010 and 2011-2015 by province/region



Source: Statistics Canada and presented by the Institute for Canadian Citizenship, 2024



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Why it matters

- Citizenship facilitates the civic and political participation of immigrants— including voting
- It fosters a sense of social belonging and national identification (Bloemraad & Sheares, 2017)
- Citizenship impacts on immigrants' economic integration
- Immigrants who are citizens have higher employment rates, are more likely to work in higher-status occupations, and have higher earnings than immigrants who have not naturalized (Hainmueller, Hangartner & Ward, 2019)
- Decline is especially pronounced among disadvantaged newcomers, such as those who are low-income, lack proficiency in either official language, and possess lower levels of education (Hou & Picot, 2019; Hou & Picot, 2024)



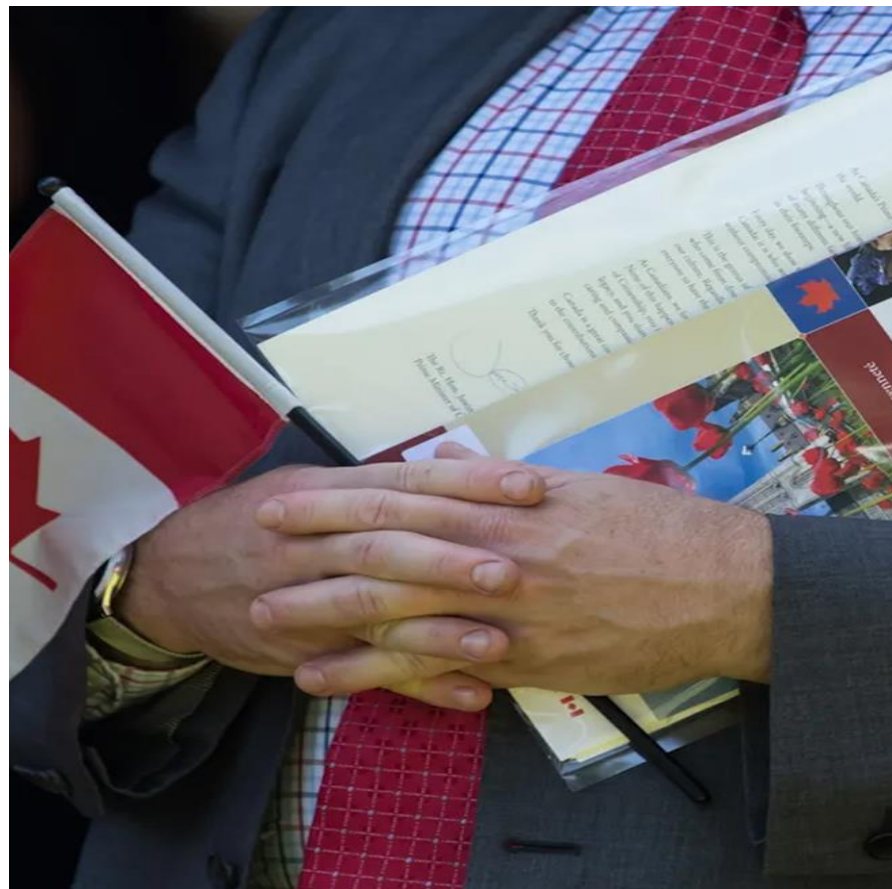
Explaining the decline in citizenship rates

Administrative burdens

- Fees
- Processing times
- Policy changes
- Navigating two-step migration

Administrative supports

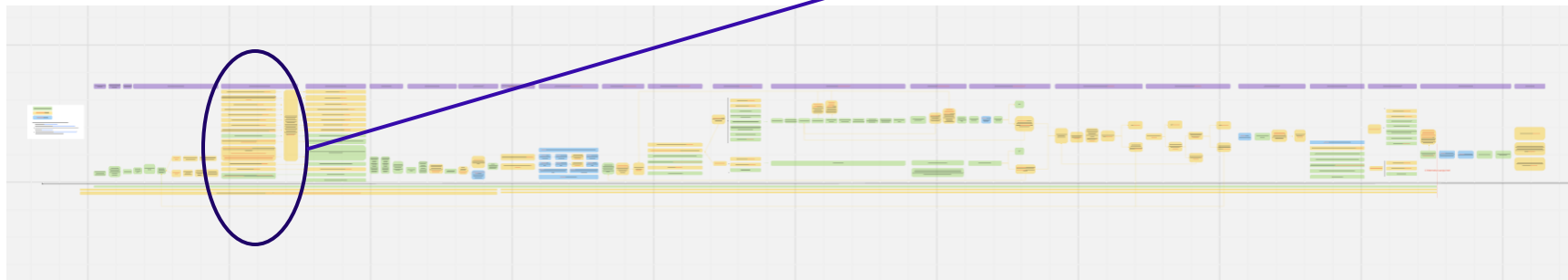
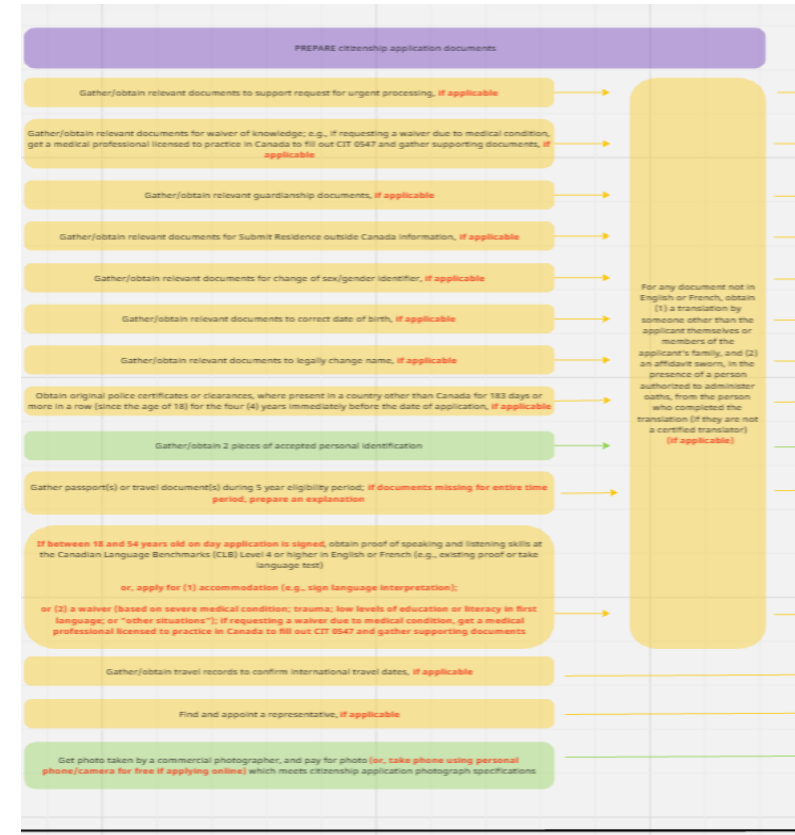
- Settlement services
- Civic engagement
- Citizenship test classes
- Citizenship guides and resources



Administrative Burdens

The complexity of eligibility requirements and the process of application for citizenship may constitute an administrative burden

A Journey Map exercise shows the complexity of the steps involved in the citizenship application process



Source: Lisa Ruth Brunner, PhD



Administrative burdens

Pre-landing experience and its influence on citizenship acquisition

- The Provincial Nominee Program (PNP) and the introduction of the Canadian Experience Class drove expansion of two-step migration in the early 2000s
- Meant to improve the match between labour market demand and the skills of economic migrants
- Changed the characteristics of economic immigration
 - Younger
 - Higher language levels
 - Slightly lower levels of education, but still high
 - Higher proportions coming without spouse/family

87% of principal economic stream applicants moving to permanent residence had pre-landing experience in 2021

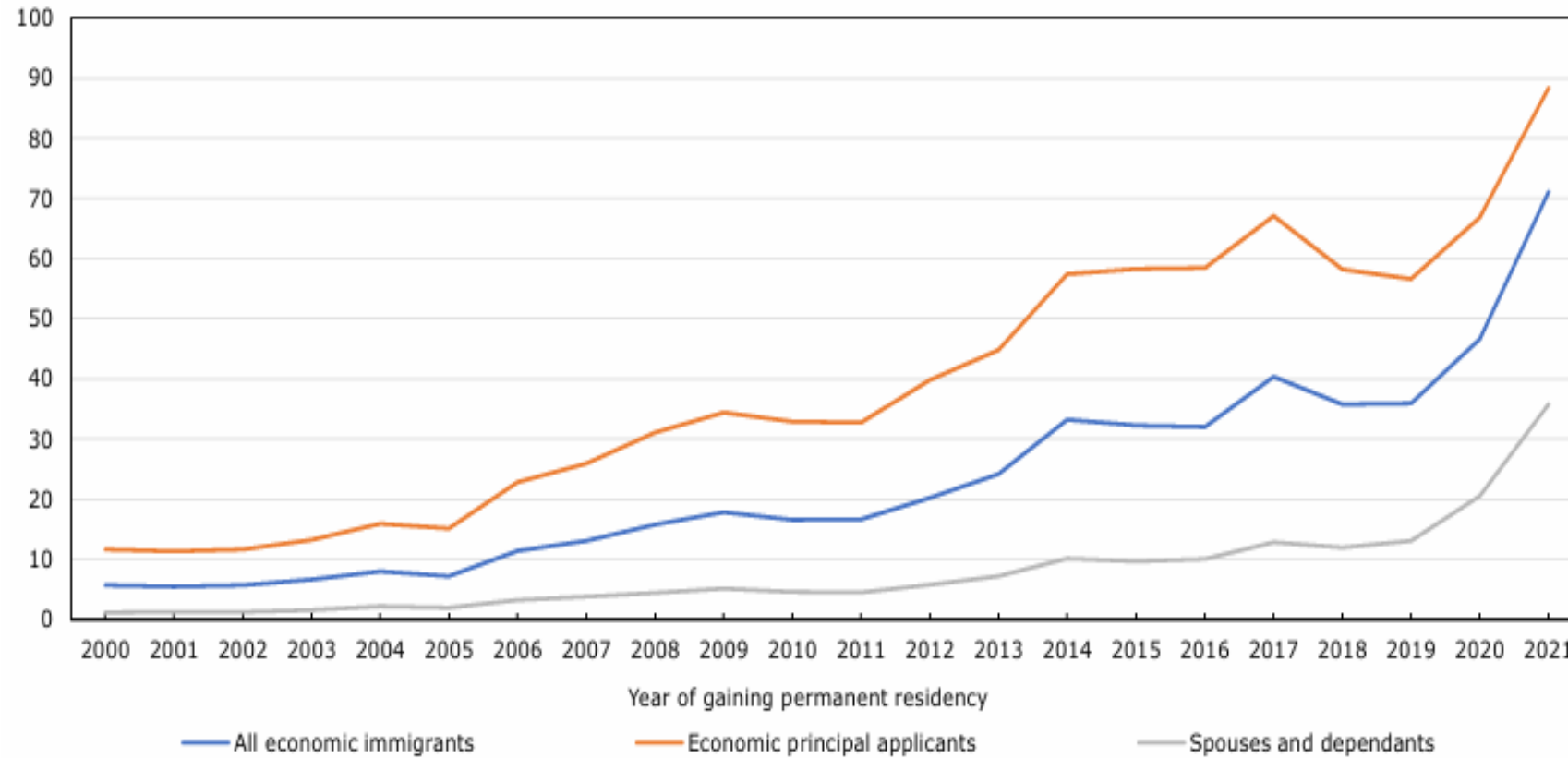
- Is this shift in two-step migration a factor in recent citizenship rate declines?



Large growth in pre-landing experience for economic immigrants

Percentage of economic immigrants with pre-immigration Canadian earnings, 2000 to 2021

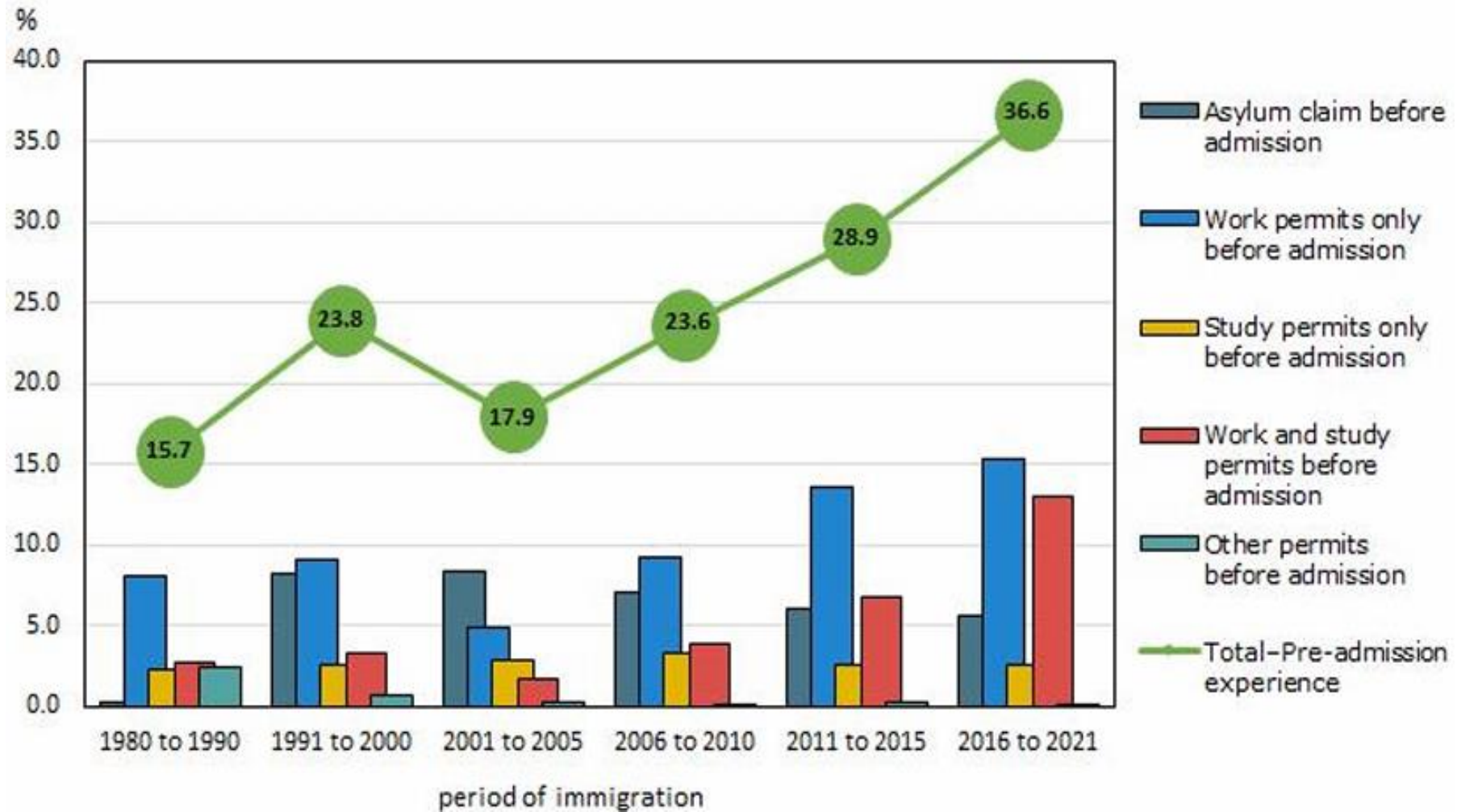
percent



Source: Statistics Canada, Longitudinal Immigration Database.



Pre-landing experience of all immigration categories



Administrative Supports

- An interest in understanding whether administrative “supports” like programs offered by settlement institutions related to citizenship acquisition may improve or reduce the administrative burdens of the application process
- Programs related to:
 - preparing for the citizenship test
 - participation in civic engagement through citizenship
 - language support

These supports may facilitate greater interest and resolve in overcoming the administrative burdens of the citizenship application process.



Data sources and methodology

- Longitudinal Immigration Database (IMDB)
 - Non-permanent resident file (NPRF)
 - Immigrant Landing File
 - Citizenship file
 - Data on the month and year of citizenship
 - Data available from 2005 onwards
 - T1FF Tax file
- iCARE Settlement data
- Population: Landed immigrants from 2000 onwards with pre-admission experience who qualify for citizenship between 5 to 9 years after landing
- Various regression analyses to isolate variables with a statistical effect on the likelihood of citizenship acquisition



Summary

- A mixed methods approach to support the qualitative work done by other CFREF immigration scholars
 - Interviews of instructors and participants of citizenship programming
 - Citizenship guides
 - Citizenship ceremonies
- Using regression analysis to isolate variables of interest may provide quantitative evidence of factors influencing citizenship acquisition
- Working with Statistics Canada microdata and microdata linkages can provide interesting research opportunities
- Stay tuned for results and findings in 2025



References & resources

- Statistics Canada
 - Trends in the Citizenship Rate (2019)
 - The decline in the citizenship rate (2024 update)
 - Census data from 1991 to 2021
 - Recent immigrants in Canada for five to nine years
 - Pre-landing experience effects on short, medium, and long-term post landing earnings (2020)
 - Which immigration selection factors best predict the earnings of economic principal applicants? (2024)
- UBC Centre for Migration Studies – Research
- Institute for Canadian Citizenship



Representations of Blackness in Canadian Citizenship Guides from 1947 to 2021

Elizabeth Semowo

Graduate Research Assistant | MPPGA Class of 2025



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Study aim

- To what extent, and in what ways, do narratives of national identity in Canadian citizenship guides present Blackness
- Examine representations of:
 - The theme of **absence and silence** of black contributions to the Canadian multicultural national fabric
 - The concept of **tokenism** of Blackness and Black representation
 - **Celebratory participation** of Blacks
- In:
 - Government-issued Canadian citizenship guides (1947 to present)



Research Question

- How have Canadian citizenship guides represented blackness over time?
- What does this tell us about constructions of diversity in state-sponsored narratives of National identity and belonging?



Context

- Blackness, in this context, refers to the **collective and individual identities** of people of African descent, **reflecting their historical presence, cultural richness, and resilience amidst systemic challenges.**
- It is a dynamic construct influenced by **historical injustices, social contributions**, and the ongoing negotiation of belonging within Canadian multicultural and citizenship frameworks



Citizenship study guides

- Citizenship **tests** = public policy instruments with symbolic & performative roles (Paquet, 2012)
- Citizenship test **study guides** = key education mechanisms for the transmission of state-sponsored narratives and values underlying national identity (Bishop, 2013; Yoshida, 2014)
- Primarily for newcomers...
- ...but also "an important source of citizenship education material for Canadians of all ages" (IRCC, 2020, p. 1)
- Demonstrate state narratives of citizenship and national identity **changing over time**



Why centre the analysis on Blackness?

- Affirming Multiculturalism and Multicultural Ideals
- Creating | Fostering a sense of belonging
- State-sponsored narratives shaping public understanding of who belongs in Canada.
- Diversity is framed as assimilation into a white-centric Canadian identity
- Silence of authenticity of national identity



***It's not just about being represented;
it's about being heard, valued, and
given the space to thrive.***

Rosemary Brown, first Black woman elected to a Canadian provincial legislature



Methodology

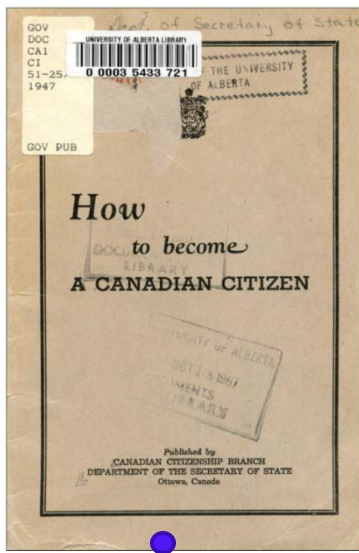
- Content Analysis
 - Deductive coding
 - Inductive coding



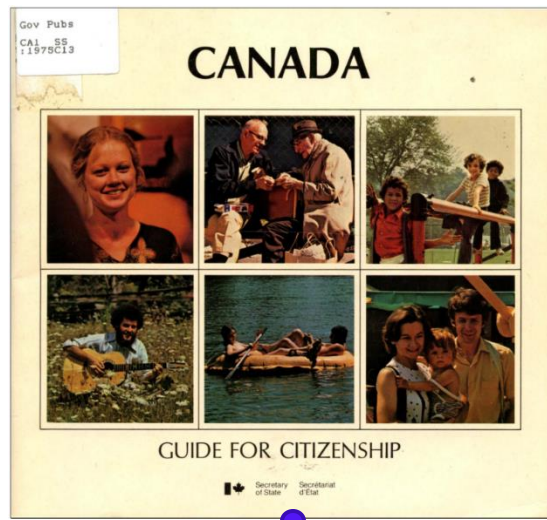
Codes

- Black Representation
 - Any mention of Africa, African or related ethnic groups
- Ethno cultural Citizenship
 - Culture, race, culture in an ethnic sense ...
- Forced Citizenship
 - Asylum claims, refugees, Canada as a safe space
- Good Character Citizenship





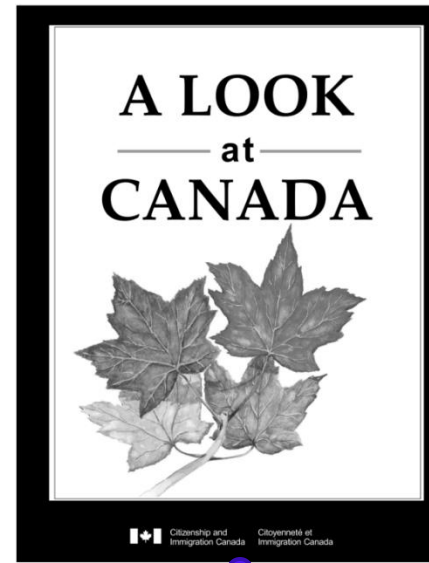
1947



1963

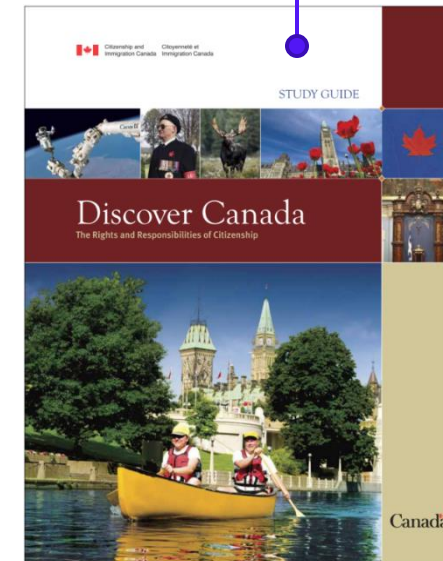
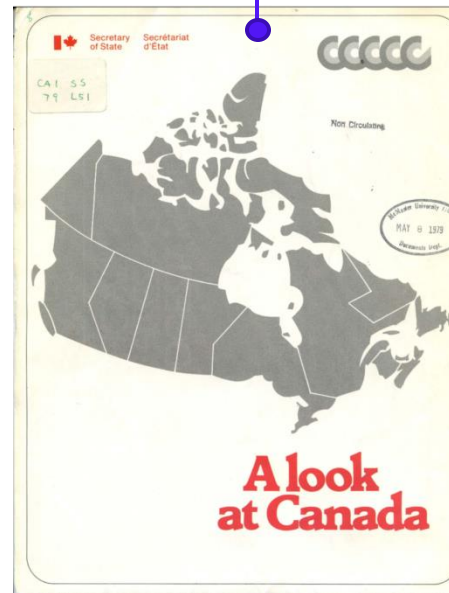
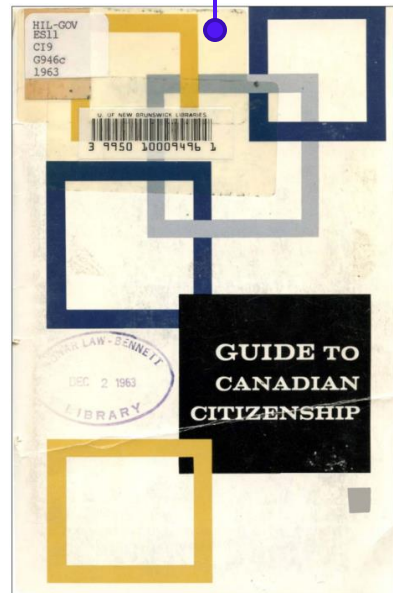
1975

1979

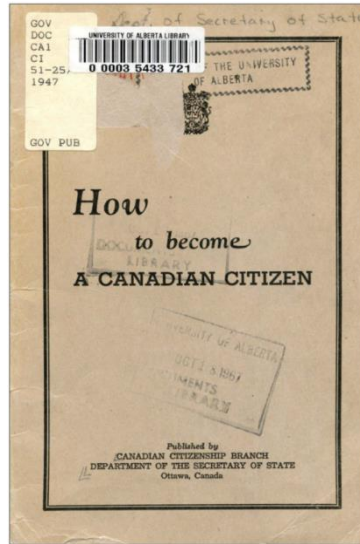


1995

2009
| 2021



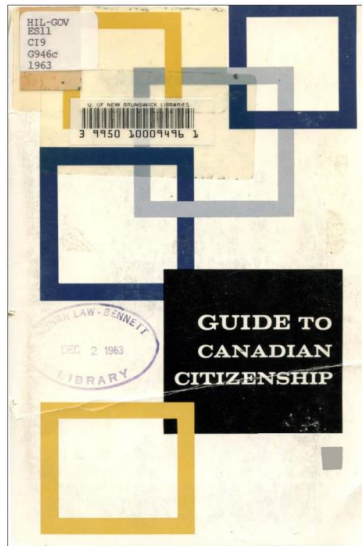
Analysis in Citizenship Guides



1947

- Total exclusion of black Canadians
- White-centric focus
- Images- 0

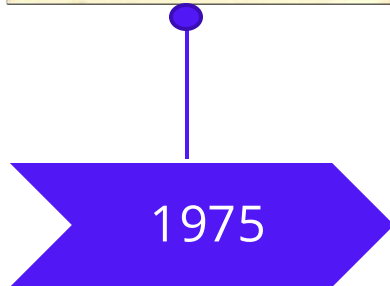
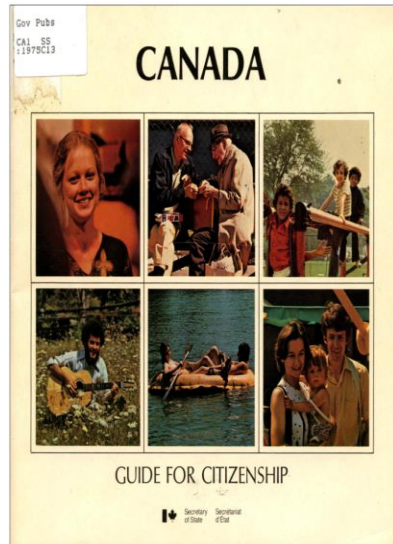
Analysis in Citizenship Guides



1963

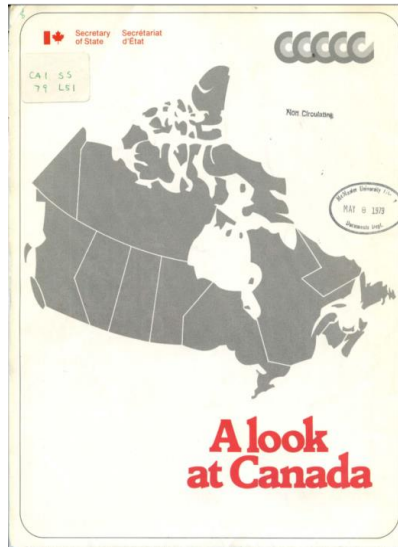
- Slight acknowledgement of ethnic diversity
- No mention of Black Canadians
- Focused on European contributions
- Images: 0

Analysis in Citizenship Guides



- Incorporating multicultural connotations
- Black Canadians not integral in multicultural narrative

Analysis in Citizenship Guides



1979

- No inclusion of Black Canadians in text and imagery
- Slight reflection of diversity
- Language remained mainly focused on Eurocentric achievements
- Multiculturalism begins to take root

Analysis in Citizenship Guides

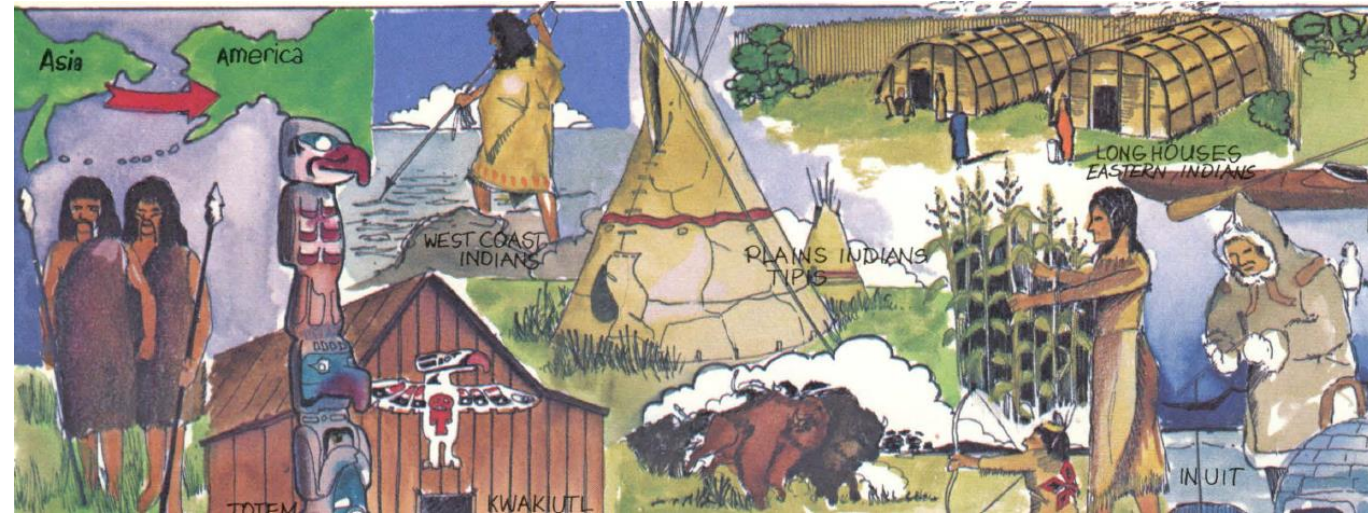
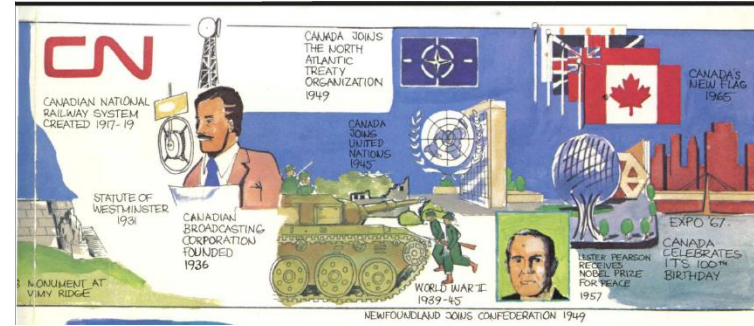
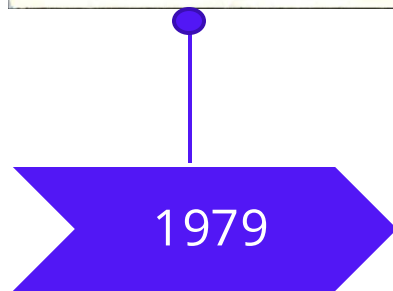
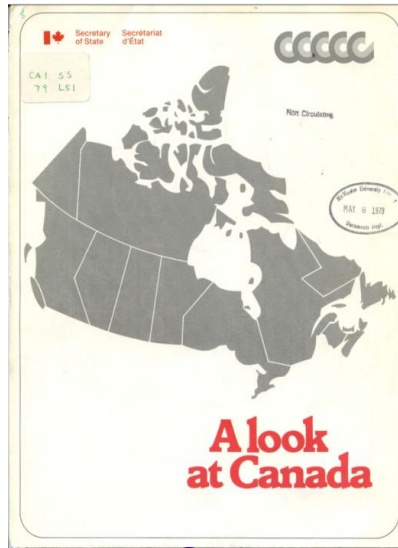
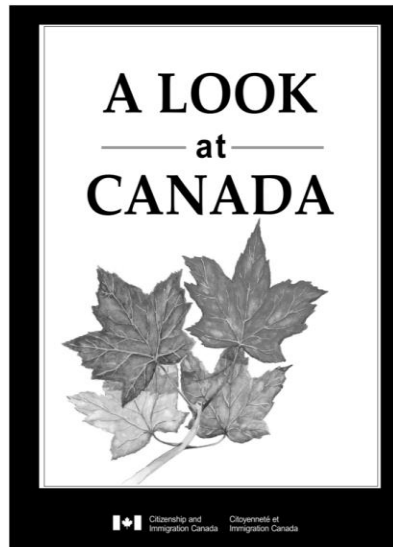


Fig. 1&2 from 1979 “A Look at Canada” Guide

Analysis in Citizenship Guides



1995

- Incorporating multicultural language e.g. Multicultural society, diverse heritage and inclusion of all Canadians regardless of race
- Limited black representation
 - Gender
 - Economic Participation
 - Sports
- Black not integral in multicultural narrative
- Image - 1

Analysis in Citizenship Guides

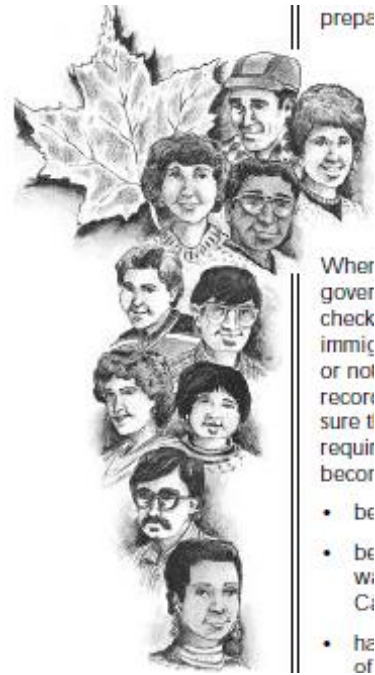
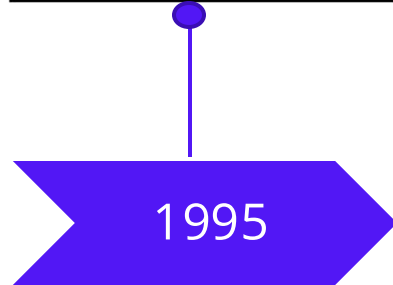
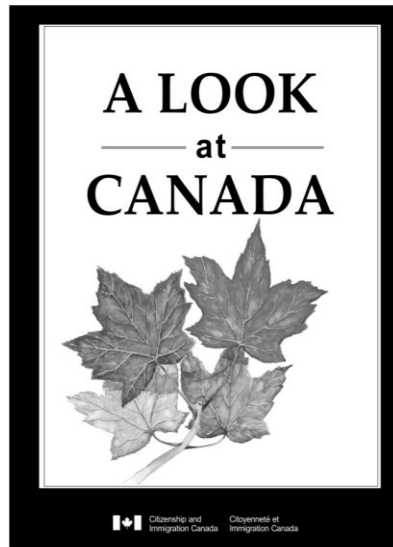
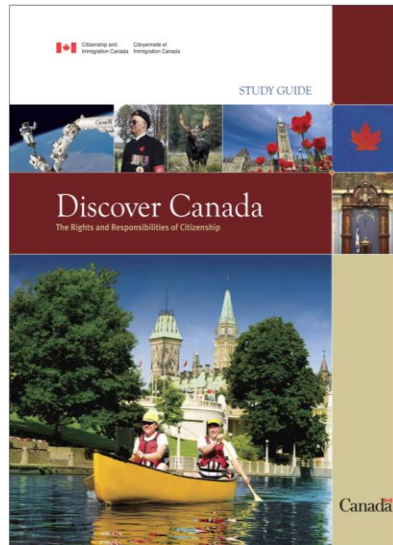


Fig. 1&2 from 1995 "A Look at Canada" Guide

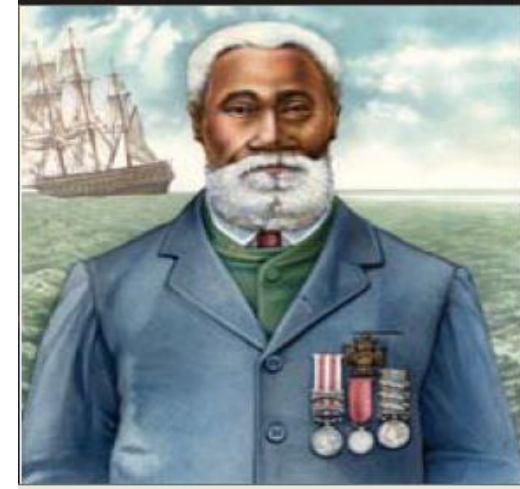
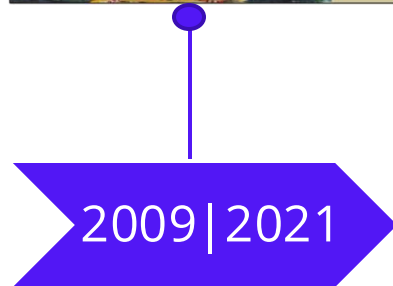
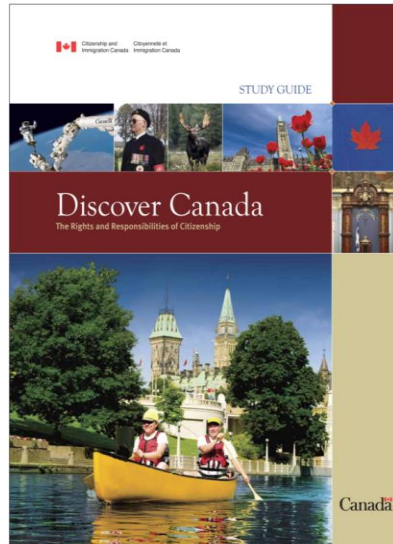
Analysis in Citizenship Guides



2009 | 2021

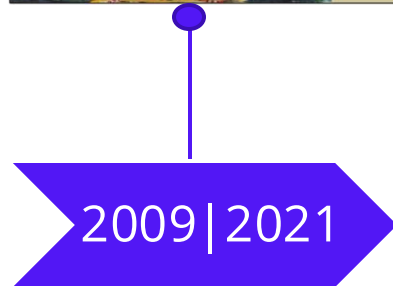
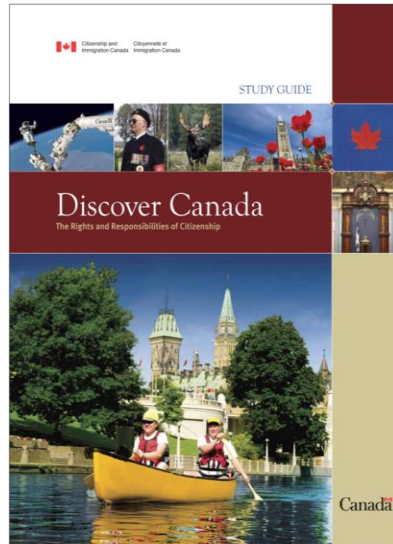
- Greater focus on diversity
- Black Canadians tokenistic positioning
- Celebratory participation over deep-seated issues
- First substantive mention of Black loyalists

Analysis in Citizenship Guides



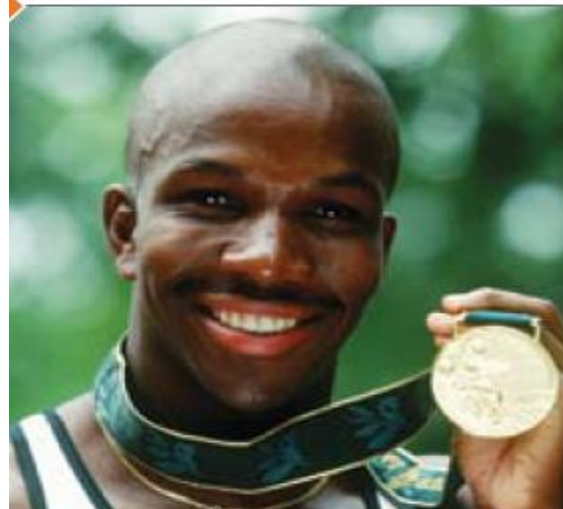
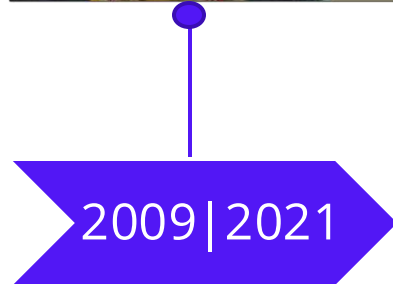
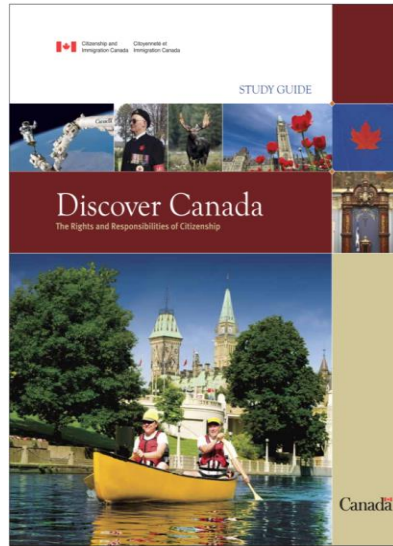
Military

Analysis in Citizenship Guides



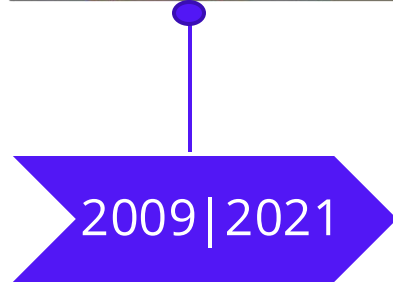
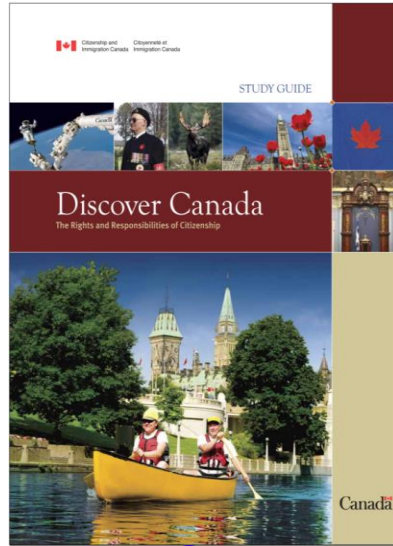
Family

Analysis in Citizenship Guides



Sports

Analysis in Citizenship Guides



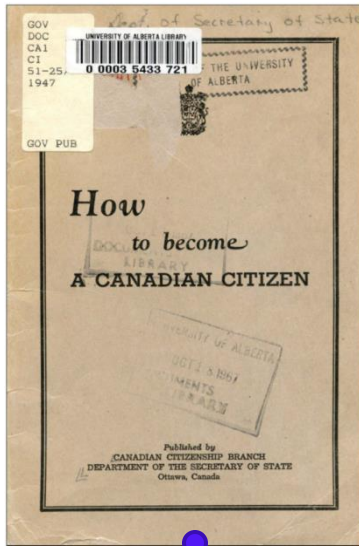
Economic and Civic Participation

Cultural Participation

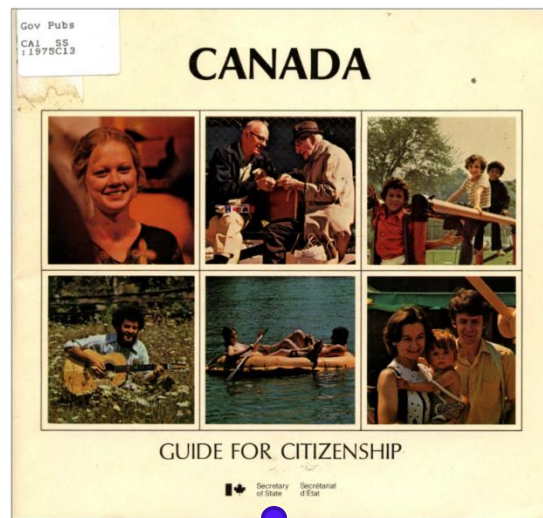


Findings

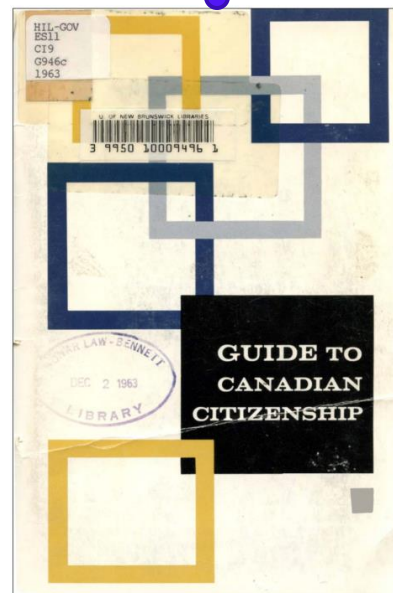




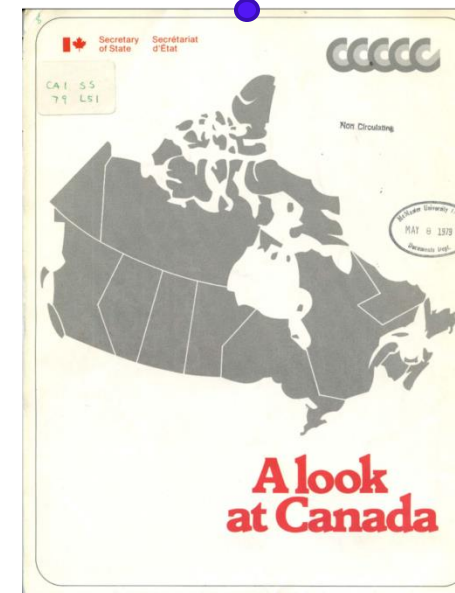
1947
Absence



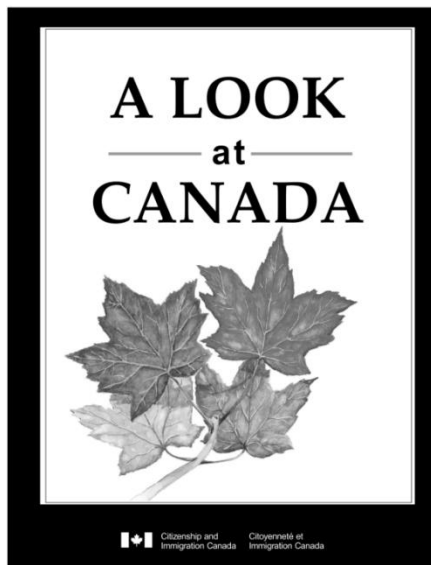
1975
Absence



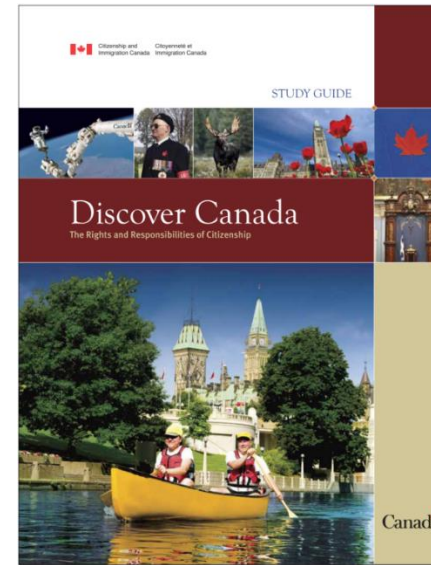
1963
Absence



1979
Absence



1995 Limited
Acknowledgement



2009 | 2021 Increased
Acknowledgement



Recommendations



- A dedicated chapter to Black history and contributions to the Canadian national fabric
- Acknowledgement of social cohesion and integration challenges
- Increased representation in text and images
- Language use should indicate Black Canadians as a part of Canada not an afterthought in the multicultural agenda



Thank you
Discussion and questions



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