

A party for new Canadians?

The rhetoric and reality of neoconservative citizenship and immigration policy

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Introduction

THE 2011 FEDERAL election saw the Conservatives complete their long march from Reform Party roots to majority government. With this victory former citizenship and immigration minister Jason Kenney declared them the “party of new Canadians.”² Former Conservative and Reform stalwart Tom Flanagan wrote that the party had found a new “ethnic pillar” of electoral support.³ While the extent of these claims has been challenged, some have argued they offer a positive model to other conservative parties worldwide.⁴ In some ways, the Conservatives have accommodated the party to Canada’s modern demographics. In government, they have maintained immigration levels for permanent residency and reached out to new Canadians and “ethnic voters” in a variety of ways⁵ as they seek to achieve Stephen Harper’s goal of making the Conservatives Canada’s “natural governing party.”⁶

However, rather than serving as a positive model, the party is better viewed as having taken a creative yet cynical, incremental approach to achieving a majority government and shifting the gravity of Canadian politics to the right. The Conservatives have fostered and in other ways maintained and even deepened exclusionary inclinations held over from their Reform (1987–2000) and Canadian Alliance

(2000–2003) predecessors. Theirs is a highly ideological and *disciplinary* approach to politics aimed at gaining a stable “minimum connected winning coalition”⁷ rather than seeking social consensus. The Conservative victory and time in power is best seen as the long-term culmination of a process of “Invasion from the Margin” — the right margin — of Canada’s political system, as Flanagan once framed the Reform project.⁸ The Conservative government’s policies adversely affect many actual and aspiring immigrants and have weakened democracy in policy-making in these fields. It has also attempted to change the nature of public debate on citizenship, immigration and Canadian identity in troubling ways. Such trends are evidenced in the 2014 *Strengthening Canadian Citizenship Act*.

The politics of forging a “minimum winning coalition”

The Conservatives’ approach to achieving a majority government and a “minimum winning coalition” has involved a great deal of strategic thinking and a creative form of neoconservative politics by Canada’s political right. By the late 1990s, Stephen Harper argued that the “three sisters” of Canadian conservatism needed to be reunited: Western populists, traditional Tories of Central and Eastern Canada, and Quebec nationalists.⁹ But even after forming the new Conservative Party in 2003 their efforts in Quebec have foundered. In the 2000s, they gradually increased their efforts to incorporate “ethnic voters” into the Conservative political tent. Such voters in the 2011 election were ultimately counted by Flanagan — who served as a Conservative campaign manager to the mid-2000s — as a new “third and essential pillar” of electoral support to replace that of Quebec.

The party’s inherited baggage and policy stances from the Reform days had alienated many “ethnic voters.” According to Flanagan, however, the Conservatives’ electoral success is attributable to hard work rather than any significant policy innovations. This work involved “the patient effort of establishing contact — visits...to ethnic events; recruiting multicultural candidates and political organizers; printing political materials in [other] languages.” These, Flanagan noted, were steps “easy to enumerate,” but took years to achieve.¹⁰ Flanagan remarked that they may “have a different skin colour” and different first language than “core” Conservative voters. But he touted the character of some new Canadians for their religiosity and their economic and social conservatism.¹¹ Perhaps best of all, he asserted that they make few demands on government, allowing a coalition of such voters with the party’s traditional base to be “connected.”¹² Thus the political project on offer by the Conservatives is that of assimilation to neoconservative and social-conservative thinking, with nods to diversity and multiculturalism.

In the same piece, Flanagan outlined the exclusionary nature of politics for the Conservative Party in a way that helps to account for the nature of many of their policies. Flanagan argued that “rational actors” – basically intelligent and strategic politicians – will seek “a minimum winning coalition (MWC), that is, a coalition barely large enough to win,” noting that the “theorem is counterintuitive, for politicians normally speak as if they would like to have everyone’s support.” However, Conservative strategy runs counter to the notion of brokerage politics, whereby one would feel the need to reach out to most of the Canadian population to win votes by appealing to or seeking to generate social consensus. Instead, Flanagan argues, “if the purpose of a coalition is to deliver *benefits to the included at the expense of the excluded*, it follows that the winning coalition should be as small as possible if it is to maximize benefits to the participants per capita” (emphasis added). Under this logic the new “coalition” the Conservatives had achieved in 2011 was “ideal.” Canada’s first-past-the-post political system and its multiple parties gave the party a majority government with 39.6% of the popular vote. It was the perfect size because larger coalitions would be too difficult to manage, having to accommodate too many members.¹³ Rather than attempt to balance complex policy areas, winners and losers could and must be chosen.

Flanagan noted the party had focused much of its efforts on relatively few seats in the suburban Greater Toronto Area (GTA). He remarked that in such areas this “increase in ethnic support released a treasure trove of seats.”¹⁴ Indeed, as Soroka et al note, nationally the Conservative base in 2011 had not changed greatly from 2008 in terms of the source of its votes or its proportion of the popular vote. However, the Conservatives achieved “fundamentally different” results in terms of seats. And there had been a marked pre-2008 shift in vote intentions in their favour, similar to other groups of Canadians.¹⁵ However, casting their message narrowly in specific ridings unlocked their “treasure trove.” They did this in part by shifting significant financial resources for communications and polling from safe Conservative ridings to those they sought to win.¹⁶ In addition, as Kenney had long argued they should, the Conservatives decided to “show up” to this political contest after decades on the sidelines and sought to forge strong interpersonal relationships with diverse communities.¹⁷ There was more marketing to this conservative populist approach than a progressive shift in party thinking.

The party’s long-term project in the 2000s has been painted in highly instrumental and even paternalistic terms. Flanagan notes that the Conservatives’ task was not to offer “a potpourri of new benefits” to new Canadians. Rather, it was “*to help them realize* that their convictions and interests would be better represented by the Conservatives than by any other party” (emphasis added).¹⁸ Flanagan has framed these efforts as a top down and “clientalist” form of politics revolving around rela-

tionships with community leaders. These relationships require a process of “cultivation” to mobilize “ethnic voters” at election time.¹⁹ This attitude might help explain how the Conservatives occasionally find themselves in hot water. In one instance they were criticized for a patronizing campaign event where they asked people to arrive “in costume” to ensure better photo-ops.²⁰ They also unwittingly invited an anti-immigrant group to a meeting of the standing committee on citizenship and immigration, as the group’s discourse apparently rang true to some of their constituents.²¹ These efforts built upon an exclusionary foundation. One of the party’s first major outreach efforts came in 2005 by appealing to “conservative values” opposing marriage equality. In this instance, Stephen Harper sought a divisive “wedge issue” to reach out to “ethnic voters” through their own media outlets.²²

Conservative documents and statements present the need to reach out to such voters for predominantly electoral reasons. For the Conservatives, it is all about the numbers. An accidentally shared 2011 PowerPoint presentation by the party entitled *Breaking Through: Building the Conservative Brand* presents diversity as “the new reality,” even though Canada has been a diverse society for decades. In the presentation, ridings targeted for a potential media buy are described as “Target Ridings – Very Ethnic” with a message that “There Are Lots of Ethnic Voters,” that “There Will be Quite a Few More Soon,” and that “They Live *Where We Need to Win*” (emphasis added). The key message for the party has been the “Need to Positively Brand CPC [Conservative Party of Canada] in Target Communities.” The party would do this through paid media advertising in the “ethnic press.”²³ Such an approach grafts support onto the party’s base rather than changing core principles. For the Conservatives, “ethnic voters” are units to be moved or won, although at least one slide does acknowledge a need “to develop mutual trust, respect and understanding.”²⁴

Unfortunately large numbers of (im)migrants and refugees have been perceived by the Conservatives as groups that can be excluded or their lives and existence made more difficult and precarious. The Conservatives’ overall preference for a “winner-take-all” coalition is emblematic of their divisive approach to governing. For example, they have euphemistically asserted that 20% of the “ethnic vote” is inaccessible to them²⁵ because of “foreign policy issues.”²⁶ The federal government’s unequivocal and uncritical support for the state of Israel, despite the suffering of Palestinians, has troubled many Canadians, particularly those of Arab and Middle Eastern background. Groups representing such Canadians have seen their organizations targeted by the government both verbally and in terms of funding cuts (see Eliadis chapter).²⁷ With such an approach perhaps it is not surprising that according to an exit poll the Conservatives only received the support of 12% of Muslim voters in the last election.²⁸ As described later in this section, refugee claim-

ants have also been subject to an unrelenting series of discursive and legislative attacks. When taken together, it can be seen that these are not the calculations of consensus or brokerage politics in the fields of citizenship and immigration.

Forging a new “Canadian common sense” and reconfiguring Canadian nationalism

The Conservatives recognize and in many ways have accommodated themselves to a popular consensus and demographic realities favouring expansionary immigration policies and multiculturalism. Such perspectives are considered by many to be central to Canadian identity.²⁹ But within this context they have taken the initiative to shift popular understandings of Canada to make it a more hospitable place for neoconservative policies and practice. The Reform Party had been held back by its reputation and the vocal intolerance of some of its members.³⁰ But over the course of the 1990s, the leadership of the party, particularly Stephen Harper and Tom Flanagan, worked to cleanse the party’s platform of its most offensive statements on immigration and multiculturalism.³¹ Nonetheless, as Kirkham noted, though the party became “less vitriolic” about immigrants and refugees, it continued to foster a belief that the system was “out of control”³² and thus in need of some form of remedy or reform to restore order. Important elements of this tone remained through the Canadian Alliance and Conservative incarnations of the party.

By 2000, the Alliance version of the party recognized the positive contributions of immigrants and promised to maintain immigration levels in their platform.³³ This policy remains, but it also obscures other significant policy shifts. It is one that helps to inoculate the party from criticisms of being “anti-immigrant,” despite the negative impacts of their policies on many immigrants and migrants, particularly the most vulnerable. They have maintained a law-and-order discourse, though cleansing it of its most openly xenophobic elements. By 2004, the Conservatives became even more publicly bullish on the benefits of immigration to Canada. Their platform presented the Conservatives as a party that “recognizes Canadian society has been built by successive waves of immigration from all sectors of the globe, and that immigration tremendously enriches our economy and national life.” As the party sought to court immigrants and the “ethnic vote” more aggressively, their 2004 platform’s right-populist discourse was shifted to target “special interests” that “prevent immigrants from contributing their best to Canadian society.”³⁴ Their claims against special interests had shifted from those in favour of immigration during the Reform period *to those who stand in the way of immigrants’ success.*

Potential Conservative voters have been invited to see themselves as “legitimate” and “hard working” immigrants and citizens. They are asked and encouraged to accept the scapegoating and marginalization of other groups. This approach marks a major change in tone from Reform’s early days where immigration itself was a core concern, to the detriment of the party’s electoral prospects.³⁵ But the Conservative discourse still functions within the realm of right-wing populism, as it maintains and even deepens a vision of “criminals and false refugees who are abusing the system”³⁶ and who pose a security risk (see Banack chapter). The Conservatives couple these strategies with aggressive assertions of Canadian nationalism. In 2008, their platform was called “True North Strong and Free,” and in 2011, the platform “Here for Canada” struck similar tones.³⁷ The party also asserted their proactive duty to reframe Canadian identity in a manner that emphasizes a highly Anglicized and militaristic reading of Canadian history.³⁸

The party’s efforts to redefine Canadian nationalism and to define the party and Canada itself along neoconservative lines have been highly significant for contemporary citizenship, immigration and multiculturalism policy. In 2000, Harper bluntly expressed his rejection of Pierre Trudeau’s “Just Society” vision of Canada. He argued that it “defies the nature of our culture, our economy and our geography and is inexorably failing as our history unfolds.”³⁹ However, as Abu-Laban and Gabriel have noted, whatever its limitations, part of that vision of Canada saw the recognition of collective demands of underserved and underrepresented groups, including those outside the dominant Anglophone and Francophone culture.⁴⁰ It represented both a more inclusive vision and definition of Canadian citizenship than the norms of Anglo-conformity that had preceded it.⁴¹ For Harper, however, Canada needed “to reassert the fundamentals of its true nationhood” based on the Anglo-American experience. He urged Canada to “no longer be obsessed by a narrow statism at home or an insecure neutralism abroad.”⁴² Harper’s Conservatives have since sought to place Canada firmly within a community of English-speaking nations, emphasizing traditional ties to Britain and the United States, instead of its connection to the larger and more diverse global community. This latter position would reflect the demographic shifts Canada has undergone, but a key theme of Conservative governance is to reassert such a lost heritage aggressively. It is consistent with nativist imperial visions of Canada as the heir to a distinct Anglo-nationalism or culture that both harkens back to nostalgia for the British Empire and sees the United States as a model.⁴³

Such appeals reveal an attempt to construct a highly regressive form of Canadian nationalism, which new and old Canadians are invited to share. Many of these were well summarized and epitomized in Kenney’s speech as citizenship and immigration minister to the 2011 Conservative convention. Canadians are encouraged, for

example, to ignore the fate of Afghan detainees, dismissed as “Taliban prisoners,” despite the controversy around the handover of detainees by Canadian soldiers to likely torture.⁴⁴ We are encouraged to forego any critical appraisal of Canada’s actions abroad in favour of blind nationalism. We are asked to dismiss “left-wing elites” in favour of hard-working Canadians. The Conservatives have worked assiduously to incorporate new Canadians within this imaginary. The party’s Reform predecessor once rejected immigration for its asserted negative effects on Canada’s demographics. In Kenney’s speech, the transition from this position is evidenced in immigrants joining Canada’s list of heroes. They are now among the “practical visionaries who united our country,” “brave soldiers, in every generation,” as “immigrants who have left everything to help build it.”⁴⁵ However, such claims and constructions of Canadian identity underplay if not ignore Canada’s colonial past and its contemporary legacies. The Conservatives’ desire to assert a dominant Canadian identity from an idealized past has strongly permeated the party’s political imaginary, together with its citizenship and immigration policies.

These efforts form part of what Arat-Koc has described as a “re-whitening” of Canadian identity, particularly after September 11, 2001. They are influenced by and perpetuate the “clash of civilizations” discourses popularized by Samuel Huntington after the end of the Cold War. In this view, “the West” is pitted against “the rest”⁴⁶ in a manner that downplays dissent within countries. Such themes are visible in the “Discover Canada” citizenship guide’s rhetoric concerning “barbaric cultural practices.”⁴⁷ The enforcement of a monarchical patriotism is also seen in citizenship ceremonies as officials police oaths to the Queen more strongly than before. Despite having their dictates overturned in court, the government has also sought to ban those swearing the citizenship oath from wearing any form of face covering despite little evidence of a widespread practice or problem.⁴⁸ These, as well as recent changes to the *Citizenship Act*, further militarize Canadian identity. They draw stark ideological lines and obscure changes in policy that are detrimental to new and potential Canadians’ interests.

Neoconservative governance in citizenship and immigration policy

Divisive polemics and policies have been constant, emanating from Kenney’s and, subsequently, Immigration Minister Chris Alexander’s Twitter feeds, speeches, government press releases, and in legislation. For example, Canada Border Services Agency (CBSA) recorded raids on undocumented workers for the television program *Border Security*.⁴⁹ In addition, the government has falsely labelled those

on a highly publicized “most wanted” list as “war criminals” who should be deported.⁵⁰ It exerted intense pressure on departmental officials, despite the misgivings they expressed about both initiatives.⁵¹ The Conservatives have also sought to sow outrage about the rights of some children born in Canada to non-citizen parents. They have identified these children as “anchor babies” to be used to gain advantage for their families. While investigating and promoting the possibility of removing birth-right citizenship, the Conservatives say this is a major societal problem, despite little evidence to that effect.⁵² The mix of themes of abuse, criminality, patriotism and societal risk are further expressed in the names of government legislation under the Conservatives. These bills include:

- *C-4: Preventing Human Smugglers from Abusing Canada’s Immigration System Act*
- *C-31 Protecting Canada’s Immigration System Act*
- *C-43 Faster Removal of Foreign Criminals Act*
- *C-24: Strengthening Canadian Citizenship Act*
- *S-7: Zero Tolerance for Barbaric Cultural Practices Act*

The Conservatives’ discourses are designed to restructure debate and include a mix of appeals to immigrants, divisive language and a reframing of Canadian identity along militaristic, neoliberal and neoconservative terms.

While the Conservatives have maintained overall immigration levels above 250,000 per year in terms of permanent residents, there have been significant shifts in the immigration system overall. There was a stark decline in the number of refugees offered protection. The decline was greater than 26% from 2006 to 2013 in terms of permanent residents. This reduction would be far steeper were it not for the government’s decision to work through the claims backlog that it created by refusing to appoint claims adjudicators to the Immigration and Refugee Board earlier in the Conservative’s mandate in order to manufacture a crisis in the refugee system, which was then used to help justify draconian changes, some of which the courts have since ruled unconstitutional. The number of claims made within Canada per year declined more than 50% from 2006 to 2013. The Conservatives have also overseen an explosion in the temporary categories of residents in Canada, most notably through the Temporary Foreign Worker Program (TFWP). While these areas are explored separately later in this section, they are worth briefly considering together.

Citizenship and immigration policy is not just about those permitted to become citizens. It is also about those who cannot make it to Canada, whether to seek ref-

TABLE 1 Permanent Residents, New Asylum Claims and Temporary Foreign Workers in Canada

Permanent Residents							
Category/Year	2006*	%	2010*	%	2013**	%	% change (2006 to 2013)
Economic Class	138,248	54.9%	186,916	66.6%	148,037	57.2%	7.1%
Family Class	70,516	28.0%	60,223	21.5%	79,586	30.8%	12.9%
Refugees	32,499	12.9%	24,697	8.8%	23,968	9.3%	-26.3%
Other (a)	10,375	4.1%	8,846	3.2%	7,028	2.7%	-32.3%
Total Permanent Residents (b)	241,640		280,689		258,619		7.0%
New asylum claims submitted in Canada***	22,910		23,350		10,380		-54.7%
Temporary Foreign Workers(TFWs)*	2006		2010		2012 c)		% change (2006 to 2012)
Entries of TFWs to Canada	138,450		179,075		213,573		54.3%
On Canadian Soil Dec. 1st	160,743		281,928		338,221		110.4%
On Canadian Soil Dec. 1st, Low Skill Pilot Project	2,277		29,067		30,267		1229.2%

Sources *CIC Facts and Figures 2012; <http://www.cic.gc.ca/english/pdf/research-stats/facts2012.pdf>

**CIC Preliminary data for 2013 ; i. <http://www.cic.gc.ca/english/resources/statistics/facts2013-preliminary/01.asp>;

***UNHCR <http://www.unhcr.org/5329b15a9.html>, p. 22 and UNHCR <http://www.unhcr.org/4d8c5b109.html> , p. 15

Notes (a) By far the largest category of "other" are humanitarian and compassionate grounds cases; the other categories never exceed a total of 159 (2006) in any of these years

(b) Due to rounding totals may not equal 100%; Each year there are 1 to 7 permanent residents under "category not stated"; These have been omitted from the categories listed but are included in the total

c) 2012 data is used for temporary foreign workers as the totals in the 2013 preliminary data are not readily comparable with prior years' figures

uge, to work or to reunite with their family. It is also about those who are here with diminished rights and protections. Unlike temporary foreign workers, many of whom are filling permanent labour market needs, a permanent resident accrues rights including freedom from fear of deportation or visa expiry, the right to live and work without being confined to a single employer or sector, and the right to access social services. Citizenship adds to that greater security of tenure, the right to vote or run for office, and to hold a Canadian passport. In the case of temporary residents, many if not most of these freedoms and rights are denied. The Conservatives have greatly eroded a more permanent model of settlement and made pathways to citizenship more difficult to achieve.

Under the Conservative government, growing numbers of people live in Canada with immigration statuses that offer them less than a secure existence despite contributing to Canada in homes, workplaces and communities. Growth in temporary categories of entry greatly exceeds the modest growth in the number of permanent residents. Such changes represent a further shift away from a pro-

ject of nation-building, where immigrants arrive as permanent residents, to one of temporariness and precarity.⁵³ There has been particularly strong growth in what have been characterized as low-skill categories in which workers have no access to permanent residency in Canada despite permanent labour market needs.⁵⁴ These dynamics are not unique to Conservative policy, but this government has entrenched and expanded them greatly — in some cases exponentially. Thus, conservative populist discourses of acting in the interests of “ordinary people” and “hard working immigrants” often founder against the reality of policies that make (im)migrants’ lives unnecessarily more difficult. In some cases these policies suit the needs of business at the expense of labour and human rights for many on Canadian soil.⁵⁵ Discourses of fraud, immigration abuse and militarism obscure rather than address these realities.

The *Strengthening Canadian Citizenship Act*

Several of the themes discussed above are illustrated in the Conservatives’ *Strengthening Canadian Citizenship Act*. With a nod to Canada’s armed forces, and while invoking the War of 1812, Immigration Minister Alexander introduced major changes to Canada’s *Citizenship Act* at Fort York, Toronto in February 2014. The bill changed terms of citizenship that had been relatively constant for more than 30 years. It addressed the problem of “lost Canadians” who, for technical legal reasons to do with prior legislation, unexpectedly found themselves not to be Canadian citizens. Overall, however, the bill increases the barriers to acquiring citizenship and formally introduces inequalities among those who possess it. It increases ministerial power and includes a symbolic attempt to marry Canadian citizenship to militarism, juxtaposing it to terrorism and related acts in the popular imagination. These measures are supported by rhetoric about “strength” and values, though their main attributes weaken access to citizenship. The significance of this rhetoric can be broadly grouped under the following headings:

Making citizenship and its associated rights more difficult to obtain

- Increasing the length of time one must have legally resided in (been physically present) Canada to qualify to apply for citizenship to four out of the previous six years, rather than three of the last four years.
- Increasing residency requirements by eliminating any credit for legal residency in Canada prior to being granted permanent resident status. Previously, up to one year of residency could be credited.

- Broadening the age of the population required to be tested on knowledge of Canada and language ability from persons aged 18–54 to those aged 14–64 years.
- Requiring proof of language proficiency as part of the application for citizenship. Previously language proficiency was tested at the end of the process, allowing new immigrants to use the processing time, which averages two to three years, to continue to improve their language ability.

Increased ministerial power and reduced ability to challenge government decisions

- Reducing the discretion and role of citizenship judges, who once were able to grant citizenship on a flexible basis to those demonstrating a practical understanding of English or on compassionate grounds. Formal written tests are now entrenched as the primary proof of language ability, to the disadvantage of those not educated primarily in English, and affecting the most vulnerable due to the difficulty and expense of such testing.
- Giving the minister more power to revoke citizenship for reasons of fraud. Those affected have less recourse to dispute government decisions. Previously such decisions were taken by citizenship judges, and those the government sought to strip citizenship from had the right to have their case heard in Federal Court.⁵⁶
- Eliminating appeal to the Federal Court as a right when a citizenship application is refused. All challenges to ministerial decisions or those of civil servants can only proceed to the Federal Court if leave is granted for judicial review based on an error of law in the decision, which is discretionary. Such applications for leave are very complex, costly to prepare, and lengthen the process considerably. If leave is granted and judicial review is unsuccessful, the matter could only proceed to the level of the Federal Court of Appeal if the judge refusing the judicial review certifies a question of general importance, a very stringent legal test.
- Granting the immigration minister rather than governor-in-council appointees the power to grant citizenship unilaterally to alleviate hardship or reward exceptional service to Canada.
- Granting the government the power to strip citizenship from dual citizens as outlined below.

Inequality of citizenship and potential “banishment” of dual citizens

- Introducing an “intent to reside in Canada” clause that implies reduced mobility rights for Canadian citizens who have been granted citizenship through naturalization. In applying for citizenship, one must satisfy decision-makers that you intend to reside in Canada. New Canadians run the risk of later revocation if their career or life circumstances take them abroad. Those born in Canada face no such requirement, and no such threat of revocation of citizenship due to residency abroad.
- Permitting the revocation of citizenship for dual citizens, including dual citizens who are Canadian by birth or parentage, for serving as a member of a group in an armed conflict against Canadian forces. Those losing their citizenship in this way are rendered a “foreign national” and face deportation from Canada. This would be subject to a judicial revocation process, but no criminal conviction is required in the case of such group membership.
- Allowing the immigration minister to revoke citizenship for convictions of “treason or high treason,” a terrorism offence, or aiding the enemy in battle or espionage.⁵⁷ Citizenship may be stripped if the minister “has reasonable grounds” to believe that a person might have another citizenship, putting the onus on the person whose citizenship is being removed to prove they do not have another citizenship.

The Conservative government is creating tiers of citizenship based de-facto on birth, as one set of standards will exist for those with a single citizenship — mostly those born in Canada — and another for those with multiple nationalities. Prominent immigration scholar Audrey Machlin has argued this marks the retrieval of the medieval practice of “banishment.” It is both arbitrary and without a positive social purpose given that all citizens are subject to criminal law. Its arbitrariness is in selecting only a few crimes that “offend Canadian values” while excluding many others.⁵⁸ For his part, former citizen and immigration minister Kenney has introduced the notion of “de facto renunciation of Canadian citizenship.” Minister Alexander declared citizenship a “privilege, not a right.” However, it is the rights of dual citizens that are most at risk.

Symbolic change

The *Strengthening Canadian Citizenship Act* also continues a trend of attaching Canadian citizenship to the military. The government is reducing the length of

time to acquire citizenship by one year for those that serve in the armed forces, although citizenship is generally considered a prerequisite for such service.⁵⁹ This link, which would likely involve few cases, is consistent with earlier changes to citizenship ceremonies. These ceremonies are designed now to encourage the formal recognition of a member of the armed forces, which is invited to attend, if not to formally oversee, citizenship ceremonies.

When considered in the context of the more militarist and monarchist vision of Canada promoted by the government more generally, it is clear that the new *Citizenship Act* is also part of a symbolic reordering of the country. It is a reordering that emphasizes a more exclusionary vision of unquestioning conservative patriotism rather than responding to genuine issues of public policy and social integration. In fact, it does the opposite. It delays and even prevents the inclusion of many immigrants as full members of Canadian society. And the Conservatives are already using the act's provisions around the stripping of citizenship as an ideological weapon against opposition parties. Kenney's ministerial staff generated and circulated simplistic graphics on Twitter attacking opposition leaders for their lack of support for citizenship-stripping provisions, implying the parties are "soft" on terrorism.⁶⁰ Such political tactics only diminish debate about important societal questions.

These changes compound other regressive trends when it comes to citizenship acquisition for new Canadians. As Elke Winter has noted, prior changes by the Conservative government have already seen applicants spend hundreds of dollars to obtain expensive private sector certification of language skills up front for their applications. No longer does the government accept the passing of the citizenship exam or an interview with a citizenship judge as sufficient proof of language attainment. These provisions add years to processing times, in part due to often arbitrarily distributed and complex residency questionnaires. The Conservatives in government have also introduced a more complex citizenship guide and set of test questions, and have made the passing grade more difficult to achieve. While Canada is still considered a world leader in naturalization of its citizens, these decisions have predictably increased the failure rates among vulnerable populations and for groups for whom English is a second language.⁶¹

While the Conservative government previously cut the permanent resident landing fee in an effort to court immigrant voters and their families, changes brought in 2014 saw fees for a grant of citizenship triple from \$100 to \$300. In January 2015, these fees rose yet again to \$530. There is, in addition, a \$100 "right of citizenship" tax on successful applicants.⁶² No waivers are offered for refugees or those in financial need. Overall, citizenship has become an ideological battleground and Canada a less welcoming place. Those whose citizenship will be delayed or denied are left unable to join any electoral "coalition," Conservative or otherwise.

Conclusion

In an effort to grasp the nature of the governing Conservative Party, this chapter has traced the shifts of neoconservative discourses and policy concerning citizenship and immigration in Canada. Turning to its title, are the Conservatives a party *for* immigrants? There is more continuity with the party's Reform and Canadian Alliance predecessors than generally assumed. There have also been significant innovations. The Conservatives have promoted a form of conformist, militarist nationalism coupled with the rhetorical inclusion of new and "ethnic" Canadians. They have creatively adapted nationalist-neoconservative discourses to Canada's multicultural context. This, along with their aggressive outreach efforts helped them achieve a "minimum winning coalition" large enough to achieve a majority government for the first time in 2011.

The Conservatives' political project does not necessarily need majority support among the Canadian population. They do not aim at social consensus, but rather to define and shift the country's common sense and political direction in a divisive and rightward direction. On the one hand, the Conservatives have invited immigrants to see themselves as part of an outwardly confident multicultural conservative political imaginary. On the other, new and "ethnic" Canadians are also invited to ignore predecessor party histories and contemporary policy impacts. These are histories that betray some of the base instincts and negative impacts Conservative policies have and will likely continue to have on many immigrants and migrants, particularly the most vulnerable.

These policies, in particular the SCCA, make citizenship harder to obtain and easier to take away. They emphasize temporary over permanent migration, and express constant harsh rhetoric about the nature of many new and aspiring Canadians as fraudulent or even terrorist (or "bogus" in the case of refugee claimants).

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Endnotes

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