

Challenge Paper: Rethinking Citizenship

“We reject the ideology of globalism and accept the doctrine of patriotism.” - Donald Trump

What is the Purpose of this Challenge Paper?

This Challenge Paper should serve two purposes:

First, to help prepare us to engage in an efficient, effective dialogue—a conversation that (a) starts now, (b) receives a powerful stimulus at an in-person meeting on November 14, and (c) continues until mid-December to shape some concrete, “Everest-worthy” opportunities for action.

Second, to help us to find those concrete action steps. this topic is so important...and can so easily descend into hand-wringing about broad social forces beyond our control. For this dialogue to be worth our while, I want us to push one another toward practical, scalable ideas.

Sponsor of this Paper

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Andrew was born in [Montreal, Quebec](#). He studied political science at [McGill University](#) and then took graduate degrees in journalism and international relations at [Carleton University](#). From 1991 to 1993, he was a Visiting Fellow at the [University of Cambridge](#). He also spent a year at the [German Institute for International and Security Affairs](#) in [Berlin](#).

He has worked as a journalist for [The Ottawa Citizen](#), [United Press International](#), [Time](#), [The Financial Post](#), [Saturday Night](#) and [The Globe and Mail](#). At the *Globe and Mail*, he was a member of the Editorial Board and a columnist and foreign correspondent in Washington. Andrew has won two [Canadian National Newspaper Awards](#), three [National Magazine Awards](#) and the [Queen's Golden Jubilee Medal](#).

He has written and co-edited six books, among them *The Unfinished Canadian: The People We Are*, and [While Canada Slept: How We Lost Our Place in the World](#), which was a national bestseller and a finalist for the [Governor General's Literary Award](#) for Non-Fiction. His other

publications include *Extraordinary Canadians: Lester B. Pearson*, and *Lost Beneath the Ice: The Story of [HMS Investigator](#)*.

Andrew currently lives in [Ottawa, Ontario](#), Canada with his wife, Mary and his two children, Rachel and Alexander.

What is the Key Challenge to be Addressed?

I hope our conversation will discuss **citizenship and the world**, so that we do not seem parochial. But I also hope that we will address Canada, too, where citizenship may be the easiest to gain and the hardest to lose in the entire world. (I call this **the incredible lightness of being Canadian**, suggesting very weak attachment to the country. I am not sure it is something to boast about, although many politicians do. “Hotel Canada”, Yann Martel called us.)

For me, the key challenge to be addressed is simple, and profound: Where should our sense of “citizenship” go from here? And how can we take it there?

“Citizenship” is a concept that does a lot of (opposing) work: it can create relationships and it can create tensions. It includes and it excludes. And, precisely because it is a concept about how people relate to one another, we ask it to do **more** work whenever our relationships come under strain (like right now, due to rapid and uneven technological change, environmental strains, economic inequality, demographic shifts, the list goes on).

Right now, “citizenship” is being used as the duct tape that holds communities together and as the saw to carve up humanity.

“We reject the ideology of globalism and accept the doctrine of patriotism,” said Donald Trump in [his speech to the UN General Assembly](#) this September.

Is citizenship **a strength**? A necessary tie that binds us into a meaningful community? Citizenship is certainly relevant to politicians and diplomats, particularly in Europe, which is putting up walls, not taking them down. In many ways, globalization may continue apace, but that trend has not stopped countries from sinking into their own identities, exemplified by Brexit and Donald Trump's lively anti-multilateralism.

Or is citizenship **passé** in the post-modern era, a relic of the 19th century and its nation-state nationalism? To many philosophers and political scientists, who hope for a unitary world of common humanity, “citizenship” is an anachronism. “Citizenship” is a limited view of our place in the world, of history, of moral community. A limitation to be overcome.

Is there a healthy way out of this paradox of simultaneous inclusion and exclusion? And if so, how do we make it something real? Something lived out, in the world and in our communities?

A global challenge

What is the meaning of citizenship in today's world? How does it differ – on the lyrical scale of pride, purpose and patriotism – to be a citizen of one country as opposed to another? Is citizenship for some peoples of the world still an ember of empire and emblem of cultural superiority (as it was for the Greeks and Romans in the ancient world, the British and French centuries later, or for the Japanese, Germans and the Russians in the 20th century)? Or, is citizenship today a celebration of a post-imperial ideal – democracy, freedom, human rights, the rule of law, diversity, the free market – as it is, at its best, for a citizen of the United States or the European Union in the 21st century?

A neighbourhood challenge

“Citizenship” also has powerful consequences for how we relate to our neighbours. What are my rights and responsibilities toward “my fellow citizens”? What are the benefits citizenship confers and the obligations it demands? Does that answer vary depending on whether I was born into my citizenship or gained it through immigration? (What if I purchased my citizenship, through a government immigrant investor scheme?)

What are the Background Issues and Events Which Have Led Us To Take On This Challenge?

I see at least three deep transformations underway in society that challenge our old pretenses about “citizenship” and force us to think and act deliberately and urgently to shape what “citizenship” becomes for us going forward. Very briefly, these are:

The shattering of the “public sphere” (where we discover the “community interest”)

This is much deeper than “fake news” and the fragmentation of our information space on social media. Almost since the day it first came into being, the “public sphere” has been losing its claim to be a place for similarly situated citizens to reach reasonable agreement through free conversation. Instead, it's fractured into a field of competition between plural, conflicting interests—big conflicts (like capital versus labour) that (history suggests) might *not* rationally fit together again. It's the Humpty Dumpty problem. And if nothing like rational consensus can possibly emerge from debate between these competing interests, then the whole exercise can, at best, only produce an unstable compromise, one that reflects the present temporary balance of power.

By consequence, the press and media have been losing their claim to be organs of public information and debate. Instead, they've become technologies for manufacturing consensus and promoting consumer culture—long before “social media” became a thing.

At the heart of our democracy, there lives a growing contradiction. On the one hand, the public sphere—that elegant place of rational, public discourse—has shattered. It's been replaced by “a staged and manipulative publicity,” (Jurgen Habermas) performed by organized interests before an audience of idea-consumers. But on the other hand, we “still cling to the illusion of a political public sphere,” within which, we imagine, the public performs a critical function over those very same interests that treat it as a mere audience.

What politicians like Donald Trump have done is dare to drop the pretense. He uses media technologies not to inform public opinion, but to manipulate it. By his success in doing so, he forces us to recognize that, yes, that is in fact what these technologies are good for. And he forces us to recognize that, no, one does not need to be armed with facts or rational argument to use them for that purpose.

The corruption of citizenship virtues as they are turned into market goods

Money and markets have now penetrated many areas and activities of society where, previously, they didn't belong. Small examples: in many amusement parks, premium passes are now sold that permit you to jump the queue (“Cut to the FRONT at all rides, shows and attractions!”); scalping tickets for campsites at Yosemite; and giving ghost-written toasts at your best friend's wedding. Larger examples: paying drug-addicted women cash incentives to undergo sterilization or long-term birth control; public programs that pay kids who raise their test results in school; selling permanent residency or citizenship to foreign investors; or selling pollution permits and carbon offsets, i.e., selling the right to indulge in pollution.

Many of our *moral choices* have now been converted into *market exchanges*. Perhaps this is a good thing. After all, the market is an efficient way of allocating society's resources. Many things in society—from Yosemite campsites to hospital beds to residency visas—are scarce, so the question becomes *who should get them?* The market is one way of answering that question, by holding an endless auction that distributes them by willingness to pay.

Or perhaps, our moral choices have not just been converted, but *downgraded*. Whenever we use markets to solve the problem of *who gets what*, then we need to be on guard for two new problems. The first, obviously, is **inequality**. “The more money can buy, the more affluence (or the lack of it) matters.”

The second problem is that we run the risk of **corrupting** the thing itself. If we pay kids to get better grades, are they *internalizing* a love for learning, or are we training their brains to respond to *external* incentives? If citizenship is sold to wealthy foreigners, do they approach their new community with a citizen's sense of duty and responsibility—or with a property owner's sense of entitlement?

Said the Harvard economist [Greg Mankiw](#): “There is no mystery to what an ‘economy’ is. An economy is just a group of people interacting with one another as they go about their lives.” When we convert our choices from moral logics into market logics, *we are changing the nature of our interactions with one another.*

The global financial crisis, which strained bonds at home and shattered illusions abroad

Yes, it happened 10 years ago, but that is why we can now look back and see its consequences more fully. Domestically, there is little doubt that the global financial crisis strained the bonds of citizenship, of belonging. While some people weathered the crisis (or were even enriched by it), many were pushed toward poverty and precariousness — in the multidimensional sense: financial, mental health, physical health, again the list goes on.

Hannah Arendt once wrote: “The vehement yearning for violence is a natural reaction of those whom society has tried to cheat of their strength.” Jonathan Sacks (formerly Chief Rabbi in the UK) wrote: “Those who are *confident* in themselves are not threatened but *enlarged* by the differences of others.”

The global financial crisis shook many people’s confidence, and made many people feel threatened. In many dimensions of their being. One way to understand the conflicts within our communities and within our politics today is as an attempt by people to restore their confidence.

The global financial crisis also shattered (or at least, has terribly weakened) one of the most powerful narratives in world affairs: namely, that liberal democracy = progress. Today, it’s easier to see that a large part of that narrative’s appeal has been that the liberal democracies weren’t just “freer”, they were also richer, and technologically more advanced. Now, China is powerfully demonstrating that it is possible to get rich and become technologically advanced without liberal democracy.

In 1990, after the fall of the Berlin wall, the end of the Cold War, and China’s embrace of market economics, it was easy to imagine a world in which liberal democratic notions of “citizenship” would one day become universal. Today, it’s easy to imagine a world in which liberal democratic notions of “citizenship” retreat, in many parts of the world, as more people become “subjects” of autocratic regimes.

What are the Expected Outcomes From This Conversation, and from Our Day Together?

By engaging in this dialogue together, I expect we will all enjoy substantial opportunities to:

- Provide input on theme issues and initiatives we are involved in and care about
- Find new and powerful allies, supportive ideas and contacts for ourselves
- Gain access to content and contacts from other Table-mates, which can serve as morale boosters for us in our ongoing engagement with the big challenges that society faces

- Function as part of a high-performing team, which collaborates well, and quickly co-creates a useful product/service/initiative toward Rethinking Citizenship

I expect us to come up with at least one big “expedition”, as an action-oriented idea/opportunity, whose rough outline we can share with the wider basecamp on November 14. I don’t expect we will all sign up to it. I don’t expect anyone to run with it — unless you feel a personal calling or commitment to do that. But that room is going to be a unique space in which ideas like that can suddenly take on a life of their own. And I think it is one of our tasks to give back to that room at least one exciting possibility: something for the youth, the elders, the influencers, the entrepreneurs or the wealthy philanthropists in the room to pile into.

I expect that you will all share with me a sense of accountability to produce some meaningful progress at our table, over these next two months of asynchronous conversation, and in the room on November 14.

But I also respect that each of us is sovereign over where we choose to focus our time and energies. I expect that we’ll have multiple opportunities on the 14th to make new decisions about where to focus next, as that day unfolds. I expect us to be generous and playful toward the people who leave this Table and the people who join it on that particular day. In the end, that fluidity can only enrich this conversation.

What are the Initial Assumptions Behind Our Thinking and Actions?

I’m assuming that citizenship is rooted in people and place.

Citizenship is a sense of blood and belonging, an attachment to people and to place. It is geography, history and demography, too. It begins with a reverence for the land. This may be steppes in Russia, jungles in Brazil, deserts in China, marshes in Iraq. In *This Land is Your Land*, an ode to America written in 1940, folk singer Woody Guthrie rhapsodizes over a continental country stretching from “California to the New York Island, from the Redwood Forests to the Gulf Stream Waters.” Guthrie sings: “This land was made for you and me.” Yet as much as citizenship is about the land, it is also a respect for its people – their traditions, customs and institutions. These make them a nation. They are proud to belong. In any country, people and place remain the pillars of citizenship.

I’m assuming that the task isn’t to erase difference; it is, rather, to find the dignity in our differences.

We are social beings. We are meaning-seekers. Group association is an important part of how we become ourselves—and become good citizens. (“The universality of moral concern is not something we learn by being universal but by being particular.” - Jonathan Sacks)

I'm assuming that a key part of the "answer" is to somehow figure out how to do a better job of keeping politics and identity separate.

Precisely because so much of our meaning and identity arises from experiences within our *particular* group, our own meanings and identities will never be *universally* shared.

So: living together requires a layer of cooperation that straddles these differences. That layer is "politics." Society starts to get ugly whenever these two spheres of social life (the space where we *belong*, and the space where we *cooperate*) collapse into one.

When religion is politicized, God takes over the system. When politics turns into a religion, the system turns into a God.

Either way, respect for difference collapses. When religion is politicized, outsiders (*non-believers*) are denied rights. The chosen people become the master-race. When politics turns into a religion, outsiders (*non-conformers*) are granted rights if and only if they conform (and thus cease to be an outsider). The truth of a single culture becomes the measure of humanity.

In terms of how we will work together at this Table, I'm assuming that:

- You have a strong interest in sharing your expertise freely with our group and with the broader community.
- You are all instinctive collaborators eager to join in a high-level dialogue aimed at co-creating ambitious, action-oriented outputs.

I'm assuming that, if you are joining me on the day on November 14, that you will have read this paper and, if you have any reactions, you will have shared them with the Group.

I'm assuming that any of these assumptions that go uncontested, we can confidently adopt as "operating principles" for our conversation together.

I'm assuming that this is a dialogue in three parts:

(a) Starting now, and which

(b) Receives a powerful stimulus at an in-person meeting on November 14, and (c) Continues until mid-December to shape some concrete, "Everest-worthy" opportunities for action.

I'm assuming that we will disagree, perhaps forcefully, on some things. And I am assuming that part of what will make us an unusually efficient and effective group is that we are going to be good at explicitly stating our assumptions, our expectations, our background understanding to one another.

And I am assuming that we are all great people and that we will enter this dialogue with a spirit of generosity and play. For myself, I certainly look forward to November 14 as being enormously impactful, yes—but also enormous fun.

What Are Some Potential Action Options To Consider?

I know that there are already some powerful actions taken around the table: e.g.

- Taylor Owen is writing a book on these topics. So is Chris Kutarna. How can we support those efforts?
- Nadia and Faisal are reshaping the landscape of Arabic discourse by translating important books from English into Arabic—how can we support that?
- Some of you have positions of influence in media and politics—how can we be helpful to you, as sources of information and insight on these issues?

Start at tough conversation about “Hotel Canada”?

One of the dangers of living in a society that has “moved past” its European colonialism and is now “reconciling” with First Nations is that the people who honestly *haven’t* “moved past” or honestly **aren’t** reconciling don’t say so publicly. They say so privately. Or they mask their thoughts about citizenship and identity behind more accepted topics of public discourse, like job security or crime. Can we proactively create a healthy conversation about the ugliness inside ourselves before things get ugly?

Launch some big, new engine of civility in our society?

many of the ways that we used to develop a shared sense of civility are disappearing. There is no mandatory military service (which, whatever our views on that, did serve to socialize a diverse cohort of society into a sense of civic duty). Religion is a much weaker shared experience than it used to be. “Civics” is being crowded out of compulsory education, to make room for more math and science and so on. And even compulsory education is becoming less and less shared, and more and more personalized. That is certainly the case in the information we consume via social media. “Public spaces” are being taken over by market forces. (Sport stadiums, which used to be named after publicly important people and places, are now named by corporations that buy the naming rights.) Decades of suburban development thinned out the marketplaces where we used to meet. Amazon Delivery has emptied them entirely. And so on. Is it time to create a big new engine of community feeling and responsibility toward one another, where we meet across the boundaries of social media and economic class and race and language that divide us? What might that engine be? And how does it avoid being parochial or paternalistic?

Let’s be “roofless” in our thinking about possible actions.

Next Steps

Get to Know the Table Group.

The simplest way is in [our Table-specific discussion area](#), on fireside.rebase.camp

Respond to this Challenge Paper by Oct 29, if you can.

Please provide initial feedback (comments, questions, concerns, suggestions) on the Challenge Paper ASAP in The Map Room. Receiving and sharing this feedback prior to Nov 14 will help us maximize the productivity from the face-to-face opportunities on that day.

The Challenge Paper will also be a springboard for us to discuss more broadly, with one another:

1. Why our theme is an urgent, systemic issue.
2. Our draft Assumptions as to how we might best work together to achieve some useful and action-oriented outputs.
3. What Expected Outputs we might hope to achieve by mid-December.

To make things easy, and to keep the volume of emails manageable, I've already setup these three discussion threads on Fireside at [our Table-specific discussion area](#).