

**“We Value your Money but Not your Vote”:
The (Dis)Enfranchisement of Permanent Residents and the Right to Vote in
Municipal Elections**

By

Piper Larsen

A Practicum submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies of

The University of Manitoba

In partial fulfillment of the requirements of the degree of

MASTER OF HUMAN RIGHTS

Faculty of Law

University of Manitoba

Winnipeg

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Abstract:

Immigrants and individuals without permanent resident status make up 29.1 percent Winnipeg's population (Census of Canada, 2022). In Winnipeg, and across Canada, permanent residents (PRs) and those with precarious status, do not have the right to vote in municipal elections. This paper investigates the possibility of granting PRs the right to vote in Winnipeg by drawing from recent examples within Canada and in the global north. I am guided by a comparative case study approach which allows me to identify, then compare and contrast, the municipalities that have already granted the right to vote to those who do not currently hold citizenship. Grounding itself in Anne Schneider and Helen Ingram's social construction of target population, this paper examines the continued disenfranchisement of newcomers and imagines a more equitable policy landscape where all newcomers have the chance to vote in municipal elections. While Canada is celebrated multiculturalist deeply embedded policies on multiculturalism and inclusion, a large portion of our population is prevented from voting and having their voices be heard. This disenfranchisement is fundamentally inequitable and impedes integration. While permanent residents are not eligible to vote in most municipal elections, they are required by law to pay municipal, provincial, and federal taxes in exchange for access to city services such as the bus, libraries, or garbage and recycling services. Despite enjoying these municipal "perks", not having a voice on municipal politics and decision making creates a sense of exclusion and inferiority, that although individuals without citizenship are abiding by the laws and using city services, they are not receiving the same rights as individuals with citizenship. Implementing the right to vote to all permanent residents not only promotes better integration, it may encourage the next generation of newcomers to run for political office.

Acknowledgements

There are many individuals who I would like to thank for their ongoing support in my research and work. Firstly, I would like to thank the University of Manitoba Faculty of Graduate Studies Travel Award and the University of Manitoba Graduate Student Association for assisting financially, allowing me the opportunity to present my research at the 25th Metropolis Conference in Ottawa.

I would like to thank Dr. Lori Wilkinson and Dr. Lindsay Larios respectively, both of whom have hired me throughout my graduate studies on different research projects. The ongoing Afghan Survey and research on International Students Access to Health Care in Manitoba have been monumental for my growth and research in the field. Thank you both for the continued support and conversations on topics pertaining to migration.

I would like to extend my deepest gratitude to my faculty advisor, Dr. Lori Wilkinson, who has been instrumental in my practicum placement, paper topic, and continued research interested in migration. I am immensely grateful for our meetings and conversations, thank you for making academia fun. I also want to thank Dr. Chris Adams for your support as my second reader, your comments and questions have been impactful.

I most certainly would not be in this position without the tireless efforts of the Immigration Partnership Winnipeg team with whom I did my practicum. Thank you, Jessica Praznik, for taking a chance with me and taking me on as a practicum student. Thank you, Rueben (Mayen) Garang, the one who introduced me to this topic and for your continued dedication to the field. Thank you, Erika Frey for our conversations, and of course Kathleen Vyrauen, my boss, who has supported me through this process. Thank you IPW, ECCM and SPCW staff and friends for your work and support.

To the MHR program, Dr. Anderson, Dr. Reimer, Dr. Derejko and Lexa Moorehouse thank you. To my classmates, professors and friends who have supported me and continue to encourage me, my gratitude for you is immense.

Lastly, to my family, thank you for your support, your confidence in me and your continued words of encouragement.

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Glossary of Terms

Asylum Seeker: A person who has fled their country and is asking for protection in another country.

(Dis)Enfranchisement: the act of a government preventing a group of people from voting who are otherwise qualified to vote; or the removal of voting rights from a group of people who are otherwise qualified to vote.

Ethnocultural Community: Community or group is defined by shared characteristics unique to, and recognized by, that group. This can include characteristics such as ancestry, country of origin, cultural traditions, language, national identity and or physical traits. Sometimes encompassed by the term ethnocultural are groups that identify as ethnoracial or racialized.

Immigrant: refers to a person who is, or who has ever been, a landed immigrant or permanent resident of Canada. Such a person has been granted the right to live in Canada permanently by immigration authorities. Immigrants who have obtained Canadian citizenships by naturalization are included in this group.

Migrant: A person who is outside their country of origin. Sometimes this term is used to talk about everyone outside their country of birth, including people who have been Canadian citizens for decades. More often, it is used for people currently on the move or people with temporary status or no status at all in the country where they live.

Newcomer: is an immigrant who has been in Canada for a short time, usually less than five years. Newcomers have access to settlement agencies, such as those for language and employment.

Non-permanent Resident: is a person from another country with a usual place of residence in Canada and now has a work or study permit or who has claimed refugee status (asylum claimant). Family members living with work or study permit holders are also include unless these family members are already Canadian citizens or landed immigrants or permanent residents.

Non-Citizen: a person who lives in Canada but has not yet gained the rights of citizenship, including the right to vote.

Permanent Resident: A person granted the right to live permanently in Canada. The person may have come to Canada as an immigrant or as a refugee. Permanent residents who become Canadian citizens are no longer permanent residents.

Person without status: a person who has not been granted permission to stay in the country, or who has stayed after their visa has expired. The term includes refugee claimants who have not removed from Canada because of a situation of generalized risk in the country of origin. You may also hear... “illegal migrant/illegal immigrant/illegal/alien” these terms are problematic as they criminalize the person rather than the act of entering or remaining irregular in a country.

List of Acronyms

- CEDAW – Committee on Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women
- CESCR – Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights
- COPE – Coalition of Progressive Electors
- CRPD – Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities
- ICCPR – International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights
- ICERD – International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination
- IPW – Immigration Partnership Winnipeg
- IRCC – Immigration, Refugees, and Citizenship Canada
- IRPA – Immigration and Refugee Protection Act
- LIPS – Local Immigration Partnerships
- MANSO – Manitoba Association of Newcomer Serving Organization
- MPNP – Manitoba Provincial Nominee Program
- OHCHR – Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights
- PR – Permanent Residents
- UBCM – Union of British Columbia Municipalities
- UDHR – Universal Declaration of Human Rights
- UNHCR – United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

1. Introduction

On October 26, 2022, Winnipeggers voted in the 2022 Municipal Council and School Boards Elections. According to the City of Winnipeg, 195,530 votes were cast, which accounts for only 37.5 percent of the eligible voters in Winnipeg (City of Winnipeg, 2022). Voter turnout in the 2022 election was the lowest since 1989 (MacLean, 2022). In Winnipeg, eligibility to vote in elections requires that voters must be 18 years of age on or before election day, have lived in Winnipeg for least 6 months, and be a Canadian citizen (Elections Manitoba, 2022). Across Canada, in respective municipalities, rules are similar.

Permanent residents and individuals with precarious status are excluded from municipal voting yet comprise a substantial proportion of Winnipeg's population. Immigrants and those without permanent resident status (PRs) make up 29.1 percent of Winnipeg's population (Statistics Canada, 2022). The exclusion of PRs from political decision making that directly affects their daily lives is discriminatory.

This paper examines the possibility of PR voting in cities and jurisdictions in the global north, and questions to what extent will introducing PR voting rights in Winnipeg increase not only civic engagement and participation, but also the integration of newcomers to the city. To answer this question, this paper grounds itself in Anne Schneider and Helen Ingram's social construction of target populations to better understand the continued disenfranchisement of particular target populations and the (lack) of proper policies. Three arguments are examined in favour of the enfranchisement of PR voting. These arguments draw from the legal aspect (both international and domestic), the Canadian provincial approaches, and the benefits of economic integration in a Winnipeg context. I conclude that providing PRs with voting rights will increase a sense of belonging among newcomers and aid in the integration process.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Defining Permanent Resident

Permanent residents (PRs) have the right to live, work or study anywhere in Canada, receive *most* social benefits that Canadian citizens receive, including health care coverage, the ability to apply for Canadian citizenship. They are also granted protection under Canadian law and the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms*. PRs “must pay taxes and respect all Canadian laws at the federal, provincial and municipal levels” (Immigration Refugee and Citizenship Canada, 2022). Permanent residents are not permitted to hold jobs that require high-level security clearance, *vote*, or run for political office.

2.2 History of the Right to Vote in Canada

The Canadian government has always exercised considerable control over the right to vote in federal elections. When the British and the French colonized Canada, they introduced a form of government which discredited and abandoned Indigenous communities’ governance practices. In the preface of Elections Canada’s, *A History of the Vote in Canada*, the researchers write that Canada “has always been an electoral democracy” as “we haven’t had to fight for the right to vote” (Elections Canada, 2021); however, the ways that we understand democracy today are continuously changing and adapting. There was and continues to be immense discrimination and the denial of the right to vote for different groups throughout history. In 1874, Canada introduced a secret ballot, however, the government severely restricted who was allowed to vote in these elections. Matthew McRae (2019) writes that before the secret ballot was introduced, Catholics were banned from voting, a rule which was removed in the 1830s. Similarly, enslaved people were banned from voting until 1834 (McRae, 2019). Men were required to own property in order to vote in federal elections, which was not eliminated 1920. However, in some provinces, such as Prince Edward Island, these requirements lasted until 1964 (McRae, 2019).

Under the British North America Act, women were also excluded from voting, even if they owned property. In Manitoba, some women won the right to vote provincially in 1916 with other provinces following suit shortly after. Women who had the right to vote in the 1917 federal election “could only vote if they were serving in the armed forces or had relatives that were serving in the armed forces” (McRae, 2019). By 1918, a law was passed which ensured that “no one could be denied the right to vote in a federal election due to their gender” (McRae, 2019). In Quebec, however, it was not until 1940 when women gained the right to vote provincially (McRae, 2019).

Historically, three ethnic groups have been specifically prevented from voting, Chinese, Japanese and Indigenous Peoples. For nearly half of the 20th century, Chinese and Japanese Canadians were prohibited to vote (This Toronto, 2014). Chinese Canadians were denied the vote until 1947, and Japanese Canadians were denied the vote until 1949. The racist restrictions were supported by the federal government due to fear mongering over the Second World War. Japanese Canadians who had fought on behalf of Canada in the First World War were prevented from voting (McRae, 2019).

In 1867, the Canadian government passed the *Indian Act* which was a means of control and a tool of assimilation. The Act disregarded all Indigenous governance and control of the land pre-confederation. As part of the Act, it declared that in order for Indigenous peoples to vote they would be required to give up their status through a process known as “enfranchisement.” Elections Canada notes that “this requirement to give up status was not imposed if they joined the military”, “although until 1924, any First World War veterans who returned to their reserves lost the right to vote” (Elections Canada, 2021, p. 110). Conversely, enfranchised Indigenous peoples lost access to Treaty rights as a result. It was not until 1960, merely 70 years ago, that

status Indian card holders gained the right to vote without having to be enfranchised. Inuit men and women gained the right to vote in 1950 “but ballot boxes were not in all communities until 1962, and communities without a ballot box were unable to vote” (McRae, 2019).

Most recently in the mid 1990s there were disability reforms throughout Canada which strived for reforms that would make voting accessible for all. While those with disabilities had the right to vote, there were immense physical barriers to exercise this right (This Toronto, 2014). Until 1993, the *Canadian Elections Act* excluded “every person who is restrained of his liberty of moment or deprived of the management of his property by reason of mental disease” this provision was amended and eliminated by Bill C-114 (Elections Canada, 2004). Legislation was subsequently passed, which required all polling stations to be wheelchair accessible. More recently, Elections Canada began to use mobile polling stations to bring the ballot box to voters. Special templates were created for voters with visual impairments, and for those who are unable to mark their ballots due to a physical disability, government officials, under new rules are allowed to make the ballot for them in the presence of a witness. The government has expanded the use of mail-in ballots so Canadian citizens have the right to vote regardless of where they are in the world. In 1981, Canadians with intellectual disabilities gained the right to vote and most recently, in 2020 the Supreme Court of Canada ruled that prisoners have the right to vote, which is guaranteed in the Charter of Rights and Freedoms (McRae, 2019).

Despite these positive advances, the right to vote is restricted depending upon the time and the group under consideration. One long excluded group consists of newcomers with permanent residence status. Over 3.2 million people living in Canada do not have the right to vote because they are not citizens (Statistics Canada, 2022). In 2021, 80.7 percent or every four in five eligible immigrants are naturalized Canadian citizens. Of Canada’s total population of 38.25 million, 6.1

million are Canadian citizens by naturalization, roughly 3.2 million people are not Canadian citizens but are either PRs/landed immigrants or non-permanent residents (Statistics Canada, 2022). During the time between landing and becoming a citizen, this group works, is educated, and pays taxes. Given the high naturalization rates, isn't it time that the Canadian government considered giving voting rights to newcomers?

2.3 Looking Outside of Canada

While my suggestion may seem extreme, there are several examples from other countries where newcomers have voting rights. There are currently no municipalities in Canada which allow PRs the right to vote in municipal elections. Outside of Canada, over 50 countries, including Australia, Belgium, New Zealand, and several jurisdictions in the United States, including Chicago and Maryland allow PRs (or their equivalents) the vote in municipal elections (Fresh Voices, 2023; Canadian Civil Liberties Association, 2019).

In Australia, those who have lived at a current Australian address for more than 30 days and are 18 years old and older, are eligible to enroll to vote in local council elections. This includes visitors on a working visa, visitors on a holiday visa, temporary or permanent residents, and international students (Local Government Association of South Australia, 2023). While PRs are able to vote locally in Australia, they do not have the right to vote nationally. Pickering (2016) argues that “permanent residents should be given full voting rights just as any Australian citizen. The prejudice against enfranchising non-citizens residents sits in stark contrast to democratic principles” (Pickering, 2016). He notes that a fundamental principle of democracy insists that all members of a community should have a space at the decision-making table (Pickering, 2016). He also notes that democracy is about membership not citizenship and there is nothing inherent about being a citizen that makes it exclusionary for voting rights.

In recent years, numerous European states have “reassessed the relationship between residency and political participation in light of increased immigration, generally extending voting rights to resident non-citizens for local (but not national) elections” (Lappin, 2016, p. 860). In the European multilevel system, there are shifts towards further inclusivity and enfranchisement, as well as continued questions surrounding voting rights for non-citizens. The enfranchisement of “aliens” is a “reflection of traditions of political and social inclusion, and relevant differences exist in the vision of the polity embedded in national, EU and ECHR law” (Fabbrini, 2011, p. 395), which is one model for inclusivity in voting rights for non-citizens. For example, the United Kingdom and Ireland grant voting rights to “selected classes” in local and national elections for anybody who “is either a Commonwealth citizen or a citizen of the Republic of Ireland and *permanently resides in the UK*” (Fabbrini, 2011, p. 395). In the United Kingdom, this tradition dated “to the time of the British empire and codified in the Representation of the People Act” (Fabbrini, 2011, p. 395). To reciprocate, in 1984, Ireland engaged a constitutional revision bill, “which, by overruling a contrary opinion of the Supreme Court, allowed UK citizens residing in Ireland to cast their votes for the Irish legislative assembly” (Fabbrini, 2011, p. 395)

Since 1970, an alternative model for including newcomers has emerged. A growing number of other EU member states adopted laws “which enabled foreigners to participate in the democratic process but have restricted the franchise for permanent resident aliens at the local level” (Fabbrini, 2011, p. 396). In Switzerland, several cantons allow non-citizens to vote locally, as long as residency requirements are fulfilled (usually one to five years of residence). Sweden requires that non-citizens are registered for at least three years before voting in municipal and county/council elections. In Finland, non-citizens have the right to vote at the local level after two years of permanent residency (Fabbrini, 2011). In the Netherlands and

Luxembourg, non-citizens can vote in municipal elections after living in the country with a “residence permit” for at least five years. Belgium also allows non-Belgium citizens to vote (Canadian Civil Liberties Association, 2019).

A third model for inclusive voting has also emerged. While these states currently do not extend voting rights to non-citizens, there is nothing in their legislation that prevents it (Fabbrini, 2011, p. 396). In Italy for example, they could enact a bill to enfranchise (Fabbrini, 2011).

Lastly, there is the more restrictive member states where “voting rights are constitutionally restricted to nationals and any expansion of the franchise to non-citizens requires the burdensome process of a constitutional amendment” (Fabbrini, 2011, p. 397). Germany, for example, while it is known for its welcoming immigration policies in light the ongoing civil war in Syria and subsequent mass-migration movements, expanding the vote to non-residents was declared unconstitutional by the *Bundesverfassungsgericht*. This made clear that electoral rights were for German nationals, and that the expansion to non-citizens required a constitutional change. Nearly 14 percent of the population of Germany consists of immigrants. Of that number, about 5 million are citizens of the EU and have the right to vote in some local elections regardless (Abdelaziz, 2021).

Malawi, Uruguay, New Zealand, Chicago, New York, and Maryland all allow some degree of voting amongst non-citizens. Malawi allows non-citizen residents the ability to vote in the national election after seven years of residence, in Uruguay, non-citizen residents can vote in national elections after fifteen years of residence (Canadian Civil Liberties Association, 2019). Between 1968 and 2003, New York allowed non-citizens to run and vote in school board elections, which Chicago introduced in 1989 and continues to support (Canadian Civil Liberties Association, 2019) (Chason, 2017).

In 2017, College Park, Maryland “became the largest U.S. city to allow noncitizens to cast ballots in municipal elections” (Chason, 2017). Maryland allows cities and towns to decide who can vote in municipal/local elections. College Park joins towns such as Hyattsville, Mount Rainier, Takoma Park, and other American small towns that have extended the right to vote to non-citizens. In August 2022, the United States Court of Appeals ruled that the San Francisco non-citizen voting program was constitutional. San Francisco voters approved a referendum to allow non-citizens who have children in public schools the right to vote in school board elections in 2017 (KQED, 2017).

3. Policy Framework: Social Construction of Permanent Residents

To aid in grounding research regarding the PRs’ right to vote in Canada, this paper draws from Anne Schneider and Hellen Ingram’s social construction of target population theory. The social construction of target population “has a powerful influence on public officials and shapes both the policy agenda and the actual design of policy” (Schneider & Ingram, 1993, p.334). Additionally, the theory “helps [to] explain why some groups are advantaged more than other independently of traditional notions of political power and how policy designs reinforce or alter such advantages.” (Schneider & Ingram, 1993, p.334).

Developed in 1993, Schneider and Ingram’s theory argues that the construction of a target population “refers to the cultural characterization or popular images of the persons or groups whose behaviour and well-being are affected by public policy” and note that these characterizations are normative, portraying different groups as either positive or negative, through stories, metaphors, and symbolic language (Schneider & Ingram, 1993, p.334). Social constructions are stereotypes of a particular target group. Positive constructions include sentiments and notions of “deserving,” “public-spirited,” “honest,” and “intelligent,” whereas, negative constructions are seen as “undeserving,” “dishonest,” “stupid,” and “selfish,”

(Schneider & Ingram, 1993, p.335). Social constructions are imbedded in policy. Different target populations receive different messaging regarding policies, which, as is noted can have a detrimental impact on that respective target group or can be ineffective in improving policies. Policy, therefore, “sends messaging about what government is supposed to do, which citizens are deserving (and which not), and what kinds of attitudes and participatory patterns are appropriate in a democratic society” (Schneider & Ingram, 1993, p.334).

There are four types of target populations: the *advantaged groups* who are perceived to be positively constructed and powerful (e.g., businesses or the elderly), *contenders* who while are powerful, they are negatively constructed – often times as undeserving (e.g. the wealthy or unions), *dependents* are understood generally to be politically weak, but generally positively constructed (e.g., mother or children), lastly, *deviants* who are categorically the most disadvantaged are perceived both weak, and negatively constructed (e.g., criminals) (Schneider & Ingram, 1993, p.335). Schneider and Ingram argue that it is to the advantage to public officials to provide “beneficial policies” to those who are perceived as “deserving.” It is argued that the “deserving group” will respond favourable to policy, and the group as a whole are perceived as a benefit to society. Alternatively for negatively constructed groups who have little power, public officials often “inflict punishment” “because they need fear no electoral retaliation from the group itself and the general public approves of punishment for groups that it has constructed negatively” (Schneider & Ingram, 1993, p.336).

Using this framework, newcomers broadly – including PRs – would be considered as *dependents*. Schneider and Ingram argue that the messaging towards dependents is “that they are powerless, helpless, and needy” and they do not have the autonomy to solve their own “problems” as they are unworthy (Schneider & Ingram, 1993, p.342). Policy indicates to the

dependent group that “it is not in the public’s interest to solve their problems” (Schneider & Ingram, 1993, p.342). When beneficial policies are provided to the dependent group, “it is accompanied by labelling and stigma. Policy sometimes attempts to overcome negative stereotyping by replacing one label with another, such as using *disabled* instead of *handicapped*, which, itself, was used as a replacement of *crippled*” (Schneider & Ingram, 1993, p.342). Distrust is further created between target populations who are not members of the advantaged or positive groups. Schneider and Ingram (1993: 342) note that “the dominant messages are that they are bad unless they change their behavior or avoid contact with the government.” The social construction of target population theory is an important tool as it provides insight as to how politicians, officials and policy makers behave – and why some choose to support policy that unevenly distributes services (Schneider & Ingram, 1993, p.346).

Marginalized groups such as newcomers, become increasingly alienated in society as well as among their own target group, “often they are unable to recognize their legitimate political interests or take political action that would protect their interest” (Schneider & Ingram, 2005, p.2). Differences are amplified “and, perhaps, institutionalize into permanent lines of social, economic and political cleavage” (Schneider & Ingram, 2005, p.2), and unless challenged by alternative public policies, disadvantaged groups continue to be viewed as incapable and underserving (Schneider & Ingram, 2005, p.2). The theory of social construction of target populations highlights the inequity in the social construction of target groups and allows us to better situate and frame newcomers.

4. Methodology

To gather information regarding PRs’ right to vote in municipal elections, I used a case study comparative analysis drawing on other cities and countries that have implemented the PR

right to vote. This case study approach examines several European countries and Australia, New Zealand, and the United States which all allow PRs the right to vote.

To position Winnipeg in this debate, my research uses qualitative and quantitative data. For the quantitative data, this research draws from Statistics Canada. Qualitatively, this research examines the policies and frameworks from cities who grant the right for PRs to vote. The analysis and examination of other policy frameworks grounds the recommendations regarding how Winnipeg can properly fund and implement PR right to vote.

5. Findings

Immigrants and newcomers make our societies more diverse. Nearly one in four people in Canada are former immigrants or refugees. This is the highest proportion of immigrants in Canada in 150 years, and the highest proportion of immigrants among G7 countries (Statistics Canada, 2022). While our country is celebrated for being multicultural, the systemic frameworks in place prevent a large portion of our population from voting and having their voices heard locally. In this section, I present four different arguments in favour of PR voting in municipal elections. These arguments take different perspectives drawing from the legal frameworks, both international and domestic law, the approaches of different provinces, the specific demography of Winnipeg and the economic integration of newcomers in society.

In order to vote in Winnipeg, voters must be at least 18 years of age, have lived in Winnipeg for at least six months, and be a Canadian citizen (City of Winnipeg, 2022). While permanent residents are not eligible to vote in the municipal election, they are required by law to pay taxes and are able to access city services such as the bus, libraries, as well as garbage and recycling services (Immigration Partnership Winnipeg, 2019). This creates a sense of not

belonging, that although individuals without citizenship are abiding by the laws and using city services, they are not receiving the same rights as individuals with citizenship.

5.1 Legal Argument: International Law

When justifying the exclusion of PRs from the ability to vote in municipal elections, reviewing domestic and international legal frameworks provides useful information. Looking at the international frameworks on voting, Article 21 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights states that:

1. Everyone has the right to take part in the government of his [or her] country, directly or through freely chosen representatives;
2. Everyone has the right of equal access to public service in his [or her] country;
3. The will of the people shall be the basis of the authority of government; this will shall be expressed in a periodic and genuine elections which shall be by universal and equal suffrage and shall be held by secret vote or by equivalent free voting procedures (United Nations, 1948).

Canada is one of the member states of the United Nations (UN) who have signed the 1948 *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* (UDHR). The UDHR is non-binding soft law, and the provisions “are not accepted *in toto* as international law” (Kirshner, n.d). While some articles of the UDHR have status in international law, and therefore have become customary international law, Article 21 which pertains to the rights of people enjoy universal suffrage and the right of people to participate in government is not enforceable customary international law (Kirshner, n.d).

Article 25 of the *1966 International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights* (ICCPR) states that “[e]very citizen shall have the right and the opportunity, without any of the distinctions mentioned in article 2 and without unreasonable restrictions” to

- (a) To take part in the conduct of public affairs, directly or through freely chosen representatives;

- (b) To vote and to be elected at genuine periodic elections which shall be by universal and equal suffrage and shall be held by secret ballot, guaranteeing the free expression of the will of the electors;
- (c) To have access, on general terms of equality, to public service in his [or her] country (United Nations, 1966).

As Article 25 states, the right to vote is exclusive to citizens, rather than all persons residing in the respective state. The distinctions in Article 2 include “race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status” (United Nations, 1966). The distinctions in Article 2 are not exclusive. One can argue non-citizen status, or permanent residency status could fall under the “other status” category of unreasonable distinctions. Examining these notions further, the reference to “universal suffrage” and “every citizen” “underpins the inclusive and non-discriminatory nature of the right to vote” which affirms not only the innate right “but also the ‘opportunity’ establishes that it should not only be guaranteed as *de jure* right but that the State is also required to take positive measures to realize the right” (Lappin, 2016).

The Human Rights Committee Has provided interpretation of the ICCPR. In the 1996 “General Comment 25: Participation in Public Affairs and the Right to Vote” paragraph 3 goes into further detail of the rights of “every citizen” remarking that “distinctions between those who are entitled to citizenship by birth and those who acquire it by naturalization may raise questions of compatibility with article 25” (OHCHR, 1996). State reports should indicate whether groups such as PRs “enjoy these rights on a limited basis, for example, by having the right to vote in local elections or to hold particular public service positions” (OHCHR, 1996).

There are several conventions worth mentioning, that reference voting rights without discrimination they include Article 5(c) of the *International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination* (ICERD). Article 7 of the *Convention on the Elimination of All*

forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and Article 29 of the *Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities* (CRPD). These three treaties highlight the importance of voting rights and to ensure that “voting rights should not be subject to conditions that have a disproportionate impact on women, national minorities, or persons with disabilities” (Lappin, 2016). The Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (CESCR) echoes this in paragraph 34 of the General Comment No.20 in which they state that:

The exercise of Covenant rights should not be conditional on, or determined by, a person’s current or former place of residence; e.g. whether an individual lives or is registered in an urban or a rural area, in a formal or an informal settlement, is internally displaced or leads a nomadic lifestyle (UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (CESCR), 2009).

Additionally, treaty bodies have called for non-citizens to have the ability to vote in local elections in their host country (Lappin, 2016). It is of note that Canada has ratified each of the treaties mentioned above (OHCHR, 2023), therefore are bound by these treaties.

5.2 Legal Argument: Domestic Law

In 1982, Canada passed the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms*, which sets out rights and freedoms “that Canadians believe are necessary in a free and democratic society” (Government of Canada, 2022). Section 3 of the *Charter of Rights and Freedoms* which upholds the democratic rights reserved for all Canadian citizens “every Canadian citizen has the right to vote in an election of members of the House of Commons or of a legislative assembly and to be qualified for membership therein” (Government of Canada, 2022). The Supreme Court has interpreted the purpose of Section 3 “to protect the right of each citizen to play a meaningful role in the electoral process” (Figueroa v Canada, 2003). The Supreme Court goes on to note that there are a broad range of factors, such as social or physical geography in order to determine if the current legislation infringes on the right of the citizen. The current constitutional framework

limits voting rights to Canadian citizens; however, it does not limit municipalities to extend votes to non-citizens, especially if there is political will.

The 1985 *Citizenship Act* governs who does and can have access to formal citizenship in Canada. The Citizenship Act states that individuals are citizens to Canada if, they are born in Canada, are born outside of Canada to one or more parent who holds citizenship in Canada or are naturalized in Canada (Citizenship Act C-29, 1985). Canada's naturalization process is available for PRs who as mentioned above, have resided in Canada 1,095 days during the previous five years, filed income taxes, met official language requirements, have passed the citizenship test (Immigration Refugee Citizenship Canada, 2022).

The 2001 *Immigration and Refugee Protection Act* (IRPA) sets out principles that govern Canada's immigration and refugee protection programs, which includes sponsorships and removals, detention reviews and admissibility hearings, provisions relating to refugees and lastly jurisdiction and powers of tribunals (Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, 2023). The objectives of IRPA are "(a) to permit Canada to pursue the maximum social, cultural and economic benefits of immigration" as well as "(e) to promote the successful integration of permanent residents into Canada, while recognizing that integration involves mutual obligations for new immigrants into Canadian society" (IRPA, 2001). One can argue that to integrate into Canadian society fully and successfully, it would be beneficial for PRs to have the right to vote in municipal elections.

Across Canada, provinces and territories have established fairly standardized voter eligibility. Cities, as political scientist Dr. Myer Siemiatycki notes, enforce voter eligibility which have been established by the provincial governments, "reflecting the constitutional supremacy of provinces over municipal institutions in the Canadian federal system"

(Siemiatycki, 2015). Ontario expands voting eligibility by allowing those who *either* reside in the municipality *or* own or rent property in a municipality but do not reside in that municipality (Settlement.org, 2022). The non-resident, property-based franchise dates back to the nineteenth century “privileged norms” which limited voting rights exclusively to those who owned property (Siemiatycki, 2015). The continued effect today, reflects the reliance on property taxes, as we recall in Winnipeg, while there is not a voting eligibility for non-residents who own property, PRs continue to pay property taxes and are excluded from the vote. Siemiatycki writes that “it affirms the broader principle that stakeholders with significant affected interests (defined as payment of property tax) merit municipal voting rights” (Siemiatycki, 2015). Which ultimately begs the question of who is deemed to be deserving or undeserving of having their voices heard in a democracy.

5.3 Provincial Approaches

The debate surrounding the enfranchisement of PRs or non-citizens on the provincial level is not something new. Many cities and two provinces throughout Canada have been actively campaigning for the extension of voting rights for newcomers. Within the PR voting rights debate, there are three examples in particular: Toronto, British Columbia, and New Brunswick, I end with an overview of the efforts Winnipeg has taken to date.

5.3.1 Toronto

Toronto has been at the forefront of the debate surrounding PR voting rights and citizenship. In 1998 the City of Toronto adopted “Diversity our Strength” as their official slogan (Siemiatycki, 2015) and continues to be the migration hub of Canada (Statistics Canada, 2016). In 2006, Toronto pushed for and “secured” a *Canada-Ontario-Toronto Memorandum of Understanding on Immigration and Settlement* “affording it a seat at the table in immigration discussions impacting on Toronto” (Siemiatycki, 2015, p. 88). Siemiatycki notes that Toronto is

the only Canadian city with this recognition in discussions surrounding immigration, which allows the city to “leverage its gateway immigration status into recognition as a distinct order of the government” (Siemiatycki, 2015, p. 88).

In 2007, Toronto passed a policy ensuring that the city services are provided to all residents regardless of their immigration status, signalling that the city “regarded all residents as equally entitled to municipal services” (Siemiatycki, 2015, p. 88). In 2013, Toronto declared itself a ‘sanctuary city’¹ for non-status residents. Mayor David Miller was one of the leading advocates for non-citizen municipal voting rights in Toronto. He believed that the disenfranchisement of non-citizens was “the biggest single challenge facing Toronto” along with the growing inequality across neighbourhoods (Siemiatycki, 2015, p. 90).

In 2008, the campaign titled “I Vote Toronto” was introduced to mobilize support for non-citizen municipal voting rights. Between 2008-2010, over 65 organizations in the city supported the campaign (Siemiatycki, 2015, p. 91). The enfranchisement of non-citizens became a widespread debate among politicians at the municipal and provincial levels of government but was largely unsuccessful. While many community advocates support this policy change, the program was quashed by then premier Dalton McGuinty who believed that voting is “a right that comes with citizenship” (CTV News, 2007). Municipalities cannot change voting rights without provincial approval (Siemiatycki, 2015).

In 2013, Toronto City Council voted to extend the municipal voting rights to all permanent residents in the city. Toronto City Council also unanimously adopted a newcomer strategy framework to support the integration of newcomers in the city, and in June 2013 Council

¹ Known as Access TO in Toronto. Sanctuary Cities ensure that those with precarious status, or non-status immigrants have access to certain services provided by the city and city officials (including the police) cannot ask for status when providing assistance and cannot report them to Immigration Canada including Canada Border Services Agency (CBSA) (CASSA, n.d.).

voted for the Ontario government to pass legislation allowing PRs to vote in municipal elections (Siemiatycki, 2015). At present, the *Municipal Elections Act* has not yet been amended.

5.3.2. British Columbia:

In 2021, British Columbia immigration reached 100,797 people, the highest annual total since 1961 (Government of British Columbia, 2022). The online #LostVotesYVR campaign involves petitioning the provincial government to make the appropriate amendments to allow PRs to vote in local elections. In Vancouver, there are approximately 60,000 permanent residents (Fresh Voices, 2023), which is equivalent to 30 percent of all municipal voters (Fresh Voices, 2023). The #LostVotesYVR “is a campaign to make our local government inclusive and accountable to everyone who lives in Vancouver” (Fresh Voices, 2023). On April 18, 2018, the City of Vancouver Council unanimously passed a motion asking the province to allow PRs the right to vote in local elections (Fresh Voices, 2023). In 2019, several local municipalities including Port Moody, Vancouver Island and Victoria have passed motions to change legislation (Martisius, 2019). The Union of BC Municipalities (UBCM), mayors adopted three resolutions in 2019 to approve PR voting noting:

Whereas the Province of British Columbia has the governing authority to implement electoral legislative changes including allowing for Permanent Residents to vote in municipal elections; [and] whereas more than 45 countries have granted Permanent Residents some form of voting rights – including seven jurisdictions in the in the US and 25 European Union countries; and 11 municipalities in Canada are working toward extending local election voting rights to Permanent Residents: Therefore be it resolved that UBCM request the Province of British Columbia make the necessary changes to allow Permanent Residents to vote in local government elections in British Columbia (UBCM, 2019).

While there have been several resolutions, the Province of British Columbia has not yet made the necessary changes to provide PRs the right to vote. *Coalition of Progressive Electors* (COPE) currently has an online petition to extend voting rights to PR in the Vancouver

municipal elections and they note that “all that has to happen, legally, is for the province to add the simple words ‘... Canadian permanent residents’ to the relevant sentence in the Vancouver Charter” section 23 [Resident Electors] (1)(b) (COPE, 2022). The reasoning they provide to extend voting rights is that “an individual who lives in Vancouver should not have less say than someone who owns property but does not live here” (COPE, 2022).

5.3.3 New Brunswick

On December 17, 2020, a bill to change the *Municipal Elections Act* to include PRs was introduced to New Brunswick legislature by the Liberals in Opposition (Burgos, 2021). They noted that while the number of PRs is relatively small compared to other provinces, the inability to vote “has become a concern, as the province works to attract more newcomers and become more diverse” (New Brunswick Commission on Electoral Reform, 2017). In New Brunswick, PRs had the right to vote in municipal elections until 1998 due to changes in the *Municipal Elections Act* to comply with the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms*. On December 17, 2020, a bill to change the *Municipal Elections Act* to include PR voting rights was introduced to New Brunswick legislature by the Liberals (Burgos, 2021). In the spring of 2022, CBC News reported that no MLAs objected to legislation proposed by Opposition to extend the right to vote to PRs (Poitras, 2022). The latest New Brunswick Municipal reform release which included a section on PR vote recommendations for the 2026 Municipal elections. In section 1.8 “Voting in Municipal Elections” states that:

prior to the next municipal general election in 2026, the provincial government will consult with stakeholders and interested parties to consider allowing permanent residents to vote in municipal elections. The necessary legislation would be amended in advance of those elections, if required (Government of New Brunswick, 2021).

If passed, PRs will have the right to in the New Brunswick general election in 2026. In order to do so, amendments will need to be made by the Provincial Government, “because municipalities

are created by provincial law, the province can define who gets to vote in those elections” (Poitras, 2022). Politicians and representatives from different parties are in support with Conservative MLA Jeff Carr “signall[ing] there’s no strong feeling against the change” (Poitras, 2022). The New Brunswick government is prepared to look into the changes by 2024, to ensure changes could be in place for the 2026 election, “this is a closely watched Canadian first” government deputy minister Ryan Donaghy told MLAs (Poitras, 2022).

The scope of this paper does not allow for a municipal or provincial analysis of voting rights, and there is no one pager that notes each municipality that has considered expanding the right to vote to PRs, however, from general internet searches between 2017 and 2023 when issue became more widely debated in Toronto and Vancouver, the following cities have been cited among those who are considering extending the vote to newcomers:

Table 1: Voting considerations for PRs by City of Residence, Canada, 2017-present

	Considering Changes	Passed Motions in City Council	Amendments in the Provincial Elections Act
Winnipeg, MB	NO		NO
North Bay, BC		YES	NO
Port Moody, BC		YES	NO
Vancouver, BC		YES	NO
Vancouver Island, BC		YES	NO
Victoria, BC		YES	NO
Calgary, AB	YES		NO
Edmonton, AB	YES		NO
Hamilton, ON	YES		NO
Ottawa, ON	NO		NO
Toronto, ON		YES	NO
Montreal, QB	YES		NO
Dieppe, NB		YES	NO
Edmundston, NB		YES	NO
Fredericton, NB		YES	NO
Moncton, NB		YES	NO
Saint John, NB		YES	NO
Halifax, NS	YES		NO
St. John’s PEI	YES		NO
Yellowknife, NWT	YES		NO

5.4 Disenfranchisement and Economic Integration: Framing Winnipeg

Ahead of the most recent municipal election in 2022, the question regarding PR voting was addressed in Winnipeg. In 2018, a working board began to discuss the implementation of a

policy framework which would strive to create a more welcoming and inclusive city (City of Winnipeg, 2019). In 2020, the City of Winnipeg adopted the *Newcomer Welcome and Inclusion Policy* which was co-created by Immigration Partnership Winnipeg and the City of Winnipeg (City of Winnipeg, 2020). In October of 2019, a Stakeholder Engagement session was held which determined that support for PR voting rights was strong. The results of the workshop and subsequent Council Considerations and the Human Rights Committee of Council Review and Approval noted that community members argued in favour of voting for non-citizens (City of Winnipeg, 2020). However, that motion was removed before the *Newcomer Welcome and Inclusion Policy* was adopted in 2020. Now, nearly three years later, the policy which was intended to provide resources for newcomers has not been fully implemented or funded.

Winnipeg's new mayor, Scott Gillingham, has publicly agreed to fully implement the policy prior to his election at the "Got Citizenship? Go Vote Mayoral Forum". After his election, however, Mayor Gillingham stated that he requires more information regarding PR right to vote. While there have been no motions passed in the municipal or provincial governments, there is momentum among community members and settlement-providing organizations. Current Executive Director of Immigration Partnership Winnipeg, Reuben (Mayen) Garang recognizes the process it will take to change legislature, and notes that "if the government accepts and acted on [voting rights], it would be something that would be useful – not just to those individuals that are exercising the right to vote, but to Winnipeg" (Geary, 2018).

In Winnipeg, immigrants and individuals without permanent resident status make up 29.1 percent of Winnipeg's population and across Canada, immigrants make up 23 percent of the Canadian population (Statistics Canada, 2022). This effectively means that a large number of adults living in the country have no say in municipal politics that directly affect their lives and

that politicians, at all levels of government are disregarding a quarter of the population who will be future voters. This, I would argue, relates to comments that Councillor Kristyn Wong-Tam has made in Toronto, who believes that newcomers and non-citizens alike become constructed, both positively and negatively, based upon narratives in the media that continue to fuel the debates surrounding the deservingness of immigrants. For example, Lina Newton describes the social constructions of Mexican Americans immigrants and parallels can be drawn to newcomers in Canada. While newcomers are recognized as ambitious, brave, and hardworking “willing to suffer the deprivation of dangerous, illegal border crossings to get to this country” and are willing to accept low wages and “undesirable” jobs to support their families. They are also constructed negatively as “illegal aliens” or as “unentitled freeloaders” who receive welfare, health, and education benefits while “not paying taxes” – even though newcomers all pay sales taxes, and in some cases property taxes (Newton, 2005). These constructs create biases and negatively influence policies including the right to vote for PRs.

One of the critiques surrounding the debates on PR voting rights is the belief that pre-citizen voting disincentives PRs from attaining citizenship. Phil Triadafilopoulos (2010) argues that political participation is attained through naturalization. This period allows newcomers to acquire language skills and to understand the political systems before fully participating in all levels of government. However, among newcomers who have fulfilled the residency requirements to become citizens, as mentioned earlier, Canada has the highest rate of naturalization in the world (Siemiatycki, 2015). The fear of the “other” relates to the idea that providing PRs the right to vote in municipal elections means that “they would be receiving something previous without having demonstrated a commitment to Canada” (Siemiatycki, 2015).

Other criticisms of the right to vote are that it could become a precedent for non-citizens voting in provincial and federal elections and that it enfranchises “ill-informed” voters who have not been in the country long enough “to fully grasp our political system and issues” (Siemiatycki, 2015). Evidence suggests, however, that allowing PRs to vote in municipal elections aids in the integration process and encourages new citizens to vote in provincial and federal elections. This in fact is echoed by Olufemi Adedeji, an employment facilitator at Immigrant Centre in Winnipeg. Adedeji notes that PRs “use the same amenities: We pay the same taxes, we walk on the same road, we go to the same store. Our children go to the same... schools” (Geary, 2018). When society fails to account for a quarter of the population who is disenfranchised, we miss out entirely on the needs of that community to fully integrate into society, community members who will become voters, however, voters who continue to feel underrepresented and disenfranchised by their representatives.

6. Recommendations

Immigration is a multijurisdictional responsibility between all levels of government. While the municipal governments responsibility is to sustain settlement and successfully integrate newcomers to the city, the provincial and federal government, share responsibility in terms of funding programs and policies regarding resettlement and integration (Immigration Refugee and Citizenship Canada, 2022). Agreements are negotiated with each province or territory “to address unique needs and priorities” (Immigration Refugee and Citizenship Canada, 2022). Manitoba, for example, has a comprehensive agreement with IRCC which covers a broad range of immigration issues as well as a more specific agreement in response to the provinces own needs – such as the Manitoba Provincial Nominee Program (MPNP) (Immigration Refugee and Citizenship Canada, 2022).

The provincial government in each respective province, must change their individual *Elections Act*. As in British Columbia, the current *Manitoba Elections Act* need only to add the words “permanent residents” to make the change that would allow PRs to vote. The change in legislation, moreover, can be framed as using the municipal voting as an introduction to vote in a democracy, therefore, adding in the integration of newcomers to Canada.

Sadly, in reality, it is not as simple as changing the wording of legislation. Rather, there are social, economic, and political misinformation and misconceptions regarding this specific target group (PRs) that prevent these policy changes. This framing of permanent residents by policy makers and levels of government in turn factors into the provincial government and municipal governments (un)willingness to change legislation.

As our theory reminds us, certain target groups are framed as deviant. Immigrant and refugee communities face immense stigmatization and “othering”. The fear of change (in a settler country) fuels the anti-immigration rhetoric which has the ability to control and shape policy changes. Quebec Premier, François Legault for example, “has long maintained the cultural practices of immigrants, particularly from Muslim countries, pose a threat to Quebec’s values” as well as stated in his party’s plan in 2016 which would force immigrants to pass a values test “or be kicked out of the province” (Montpetit, 2022). As well, leader of the Conservative Party of Canada, Pierre Poilievre, recently suggested building a wall at the Quebec border to close Roxham Road (Aiello, 2023). Through this continued anti-immigration and fear of the other, newcomers, immigrants and refugees are framed as a “deviant population” as Ingram and Schneider describe which results in unequal policies that continue to disenfranchise the target group. Immigration and specifically the integration of newcomer policies are therefore not properly created, and when they are not implemented fully due to lack of funds or staffing.

Additionally, due to the shared obligations and responsibilities of immigration, while municipalities and jurisdictions may support PR voting rights in their elections, if the province does not view this as a necessary or beneficial policy, it will not be amended. As discussed earlier, Toronto City Councillor Kristyn Wong-Tam stated that even though the city was in favour of PR voting rights, the political climate and policy agenda of Premier Doug Ford, the appropriate amendments would not be changed (Pelley, 2018).

The “buy in”, anti-immigration and polarized politics aside is rather simple, permanent residents are future voters. The short-sighted political stances and policies that continue to frame non-citizens as “other” “less than” and “deviant” neglect to view the benefits of early inclusion in the civic process such as accelerated integration and a sense of belonging. Why are government and policy makers are ignoring 25 percent of the national (and Winnipeg’s) population? Is the entrenched fear of other, and the lack of representation in levels of government and policy makers that cause them to reject voting rights? Are politicians afraid they will be voted out by the “other”? By reframing non-citizens as future voters and the benefits of early engagement through municipal voting can be seen as a benefit to municipal society as a whole and in the long term will increase voter turnout and newcomer inclusion.

7. Conclusion

Newcomers, refugees, and immigrants are not just objective numbers in which governments can celebrate and claim they are “inclusive” and “welcoming”. The continued discrimination of denying non-citizens voting rights throughout the world can be and should be elaborated on in further work. As it pertains to this research, I ask: what is the difference between me, a settler born citizen and a community member neighbour who is a permanent resident? Our streets are both cleared of snow, our buses are late on the same days, we comply

with city taxes, and send our children to the same schools. More than a quarter of Winnipeg's population, and nearly 25 percent of Canadian residents are newcomers. The continued disenfranchisement of non-citizens as it pertains to municipal voting is only a start to the need to reevaluate governments integration of newcomers. Several countries and municipalities across the world have already extended voting right to permanent residents. Cities across Canada for years have been campaigning to extend voting rights to permanent residents. Winnipeg, sadly, has been one of the later provinces to demand for these changes. Relationships must be further developed with the province of Manitoba. Relationships and connections must be made with newcomer serving organizations, both direct and indirect service providers such as the Manitoba Association of Newcomer Serving Organizations (MANSO) and other Local Immigration Partnerships (LIPS) in other areas of the province to campaign for the Manitoba *Municipal Elections Act* Reform. No longer can we allow PR voting to be a campaign which gains traction near election time and goes quiet after an election. When will all residents of Winnipeg have an equal voice in decisions that directly affect their daily lives? Will Winnipeg and Manitoba be at the forefront of these changes, or watch as other municipalities fight and achieve the policy amendments?

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