



*This report is a summary of the second phase of a two-year Royal Society Marsden-funded project that aims to test theoretical assumptions about the impact of neoliberal reform upon understandings of social citizenship. Called 'Understanding New Zealand Social Citizenship', the research is being conducted by Dr Louise Humpage from the Department of Sociology at the University of Auckland, with the assistance of Lis Cotter in the Canterbury region.*

## THE RESEARCH

The first phase of the research mapped changes in public attitudes towards social citizenship based on existing public opinion data. The second phase reported on here involved 38 participants who took part in seven exploratory focus groups between March and November 2007. A third phase of 30 interviews with a wider range of New Zealanders in 2008 will further broaden the research's scope.

The focus groups were held in Christchurch and Auckland and targeted selected groups based on income source, gender or ethnicity. Two groups were held with waged individuals, two with beneficiaries, one with super annuitants and students, one with women and one with participants who identified as Māori. In general, women, those aged 30-45, those born in New Zealand and those earning under \$30,000, Māori and Pākehā were over-represented. Two additional focus groups are planned to ensure this sample is better aligned with the general New Zealand population.

## CITIZENSHIP KNOWLEDGE AND BELONGING

New Zealand has a notoriously weak understanding of citizenship compared to many countries, having established a separate national citizenship only in the 1940s and even then maintaining strong ties to British national identity/citizenship for several decades. In addition, migrants require only permanent residency to access the rights of citizenship (with the exception of a New Zealand passport). New Zealand-

ers also receive little in the way of citizenship education. Given this context, it was important that before considering social rights of citizenship specifically the research gained a sense of what participants knew about their rights and responsibilities as citizens and what relevance being a 'New Zealand citizen' had for them.

## 'Family' and 'community' are more important than 'citizenship' in New Zealand

Most focus group participants had never thought about 'citizenship' before and said they did not know anything about this topic. Not surprisingly, they did not consider being a 'citizen' of New Zealand particularly important to their sense of belonging and identity. One reason appears to be that 'citizenship' is associated mostly with immigration and politicians/government, with neither perceived very favourably. The Māori focus group also indicated how the word 'citizenship' could hinder a shared sense of belonging with other New Zealanders due to Māori associating it with the 'equal treatment' discourse evident in Article Three of the 1840 Treaty of Waitangi. This sits in tension with Article Two, which is commonly interpreted as recognising the rights of Māori to self-determination over all things Māori. For all participants, 'family' and 'community' provide the greatest sense of belonging and are where they see themselves having rights and duties.

## There is a high level of agreement about the key elements of citizenship and what characterises a 'good' and a 'bad' citizen

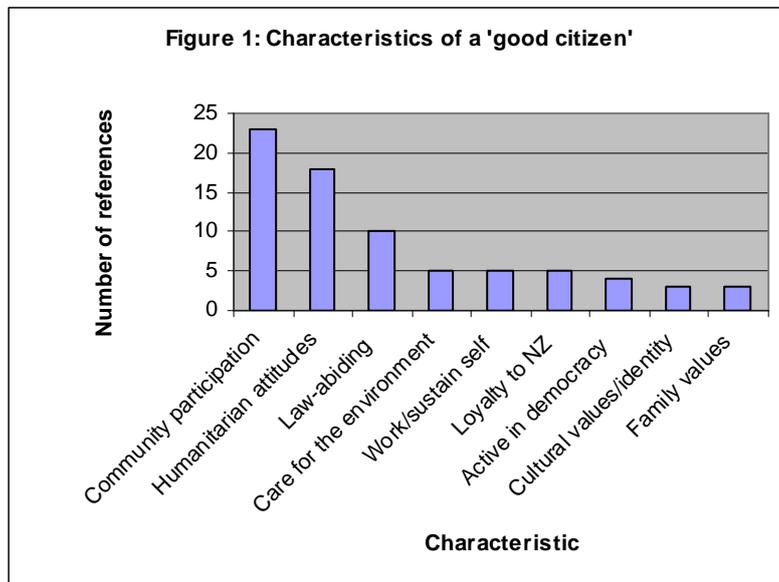
Although indicating that citizenship was not an important identity for them, participants demonstrated a surprisingly high level of knowledge about the rights of citizenship and of policy/politics more generally given declining levels of civic engagement and reported disinterest in political issues amongst New Zealanders generally. Each focus group was collectively able to name most, if not all, the key elements of citizenship, including the right to vote, apply for a New Zealand passport, speak freely and be tried by a jury of peers.

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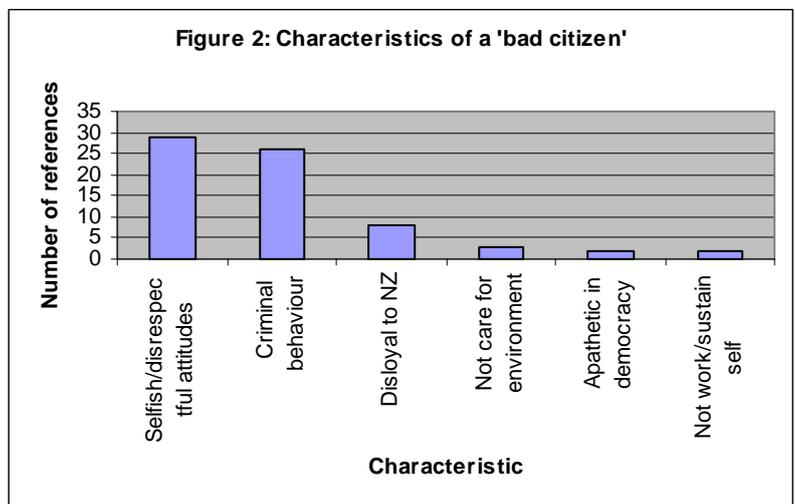


*Beneficiary participants in Auckland* (who were Māori or Pasifika with mostly low levels of education and income) were less likely to mention the *rights* of citizenship than other participants, although they could identify some *duties*.

Aside from paying tax, the duties they named all related to the obligations placed upon benefit recipients (including sole parents and the ill and disabled) to find work and participate in job-search activities. Failure to mention the rights of citizenship in focus groups should not *necessarily* be taken as a sign of lack of knowledge, but it does raise concern that some of New Zealand's most marginalised groups may not be fully aware of their rights as citizens.

Participants also demonstrated a high level of agreement about what characterises a 'good' and a 'bad' citizen, as Figure 1 and 2 demonstrate.

Interestingly, paid work (or more broadly, the ability to sustain oneself) registered with participants as a sign of good citizenship but only mildly compared to community participation and humanitarian attitudes. This contrasts with government's very strong focus on work as *the* core means by which individuals should take responsibility for themselves. These findings suggest that this government focus on individual responsibility has not significantly diminished the collective consciousness of most New Zealanders.



There were few noticeable differences in responses regarding 'good' and 'bad' citizens by participants of different ages, gender and ethnicity, but it is noteworthy that it was mainly Māori participants who made references to 'cultural values/identity', such as passing on the language and culture of an ethnic group to children, as being a sign of a good citizen.

### Knowledge about the rights and responsibilities of citizenship is not evenly distributed amongst New Zealanders

Although participant knowledge about the rights and duties of citizenship was greater than expected, the focus groups indicate that such knowledge is distributed unevenly amongst the New Zealand population.

*Participants under 30 years* (particularly those Pasifika or Māori) appeared to have much less historical knowledge about political/policy changes, particularly those impacting upon social citizenship rights. Indeed, some did not appear to know that these rights had existed, limiting their ability to imagine an alternative to the more limited social rights that still exist in New Zealand (see later discussion).

### Different groups of New Zealanders experience citizenship differently

One of the most disturbing findings of the focus group phase was that full access to citizenship rights is conditional for some groups and not others. Three groups were named as being treated as 'second-class' citizens.

*Benefit recipients:* Current policy tries to encourage individual responsibility by obligating benefit recipients to perform certain activities



(e.g. fill in a job-search diary and accept all jobs offered) or risk having their income support payment suspended or cancelled. Many scholars argue that this makes the social right to adequate income conditional on benefit recipients jumping a number of administrative 'hoops' even if they already hold positive attitudes towards work and without taking into account the broader availability of jobs. This issue of conditionality was invoked by participants in their discussion about the treatment benefit recipients receive from Work & Income officials and processes. Numerous cases were cited where beneficiaries had been regularly treated without adequate respect, trust and compassion, particularly (but not exclusively) if they were perceived less 'deserving' (such as being on the Unemployment or Domestic Purposes benefit, rather than New Zealand Superannuation). Only three participants, who had little or no experience of the benefit system, felt they either did not have enough knowledge to respond or did not believe stigmatisation of beneficiaries occurred.

*Māori:* The Māori focus group provided historical examples of Māori being treated as 'second-class', such as the differential treatment of Māori returned servicemen after World War II, but the 2007 'terror raids' upon members of the Tuhoë tribe, the foreshore and seabed legislation and a continuing lack of recognition of tikanga Māori were cited as more recent instances of Māori not being treated with the status they deserved as 'first peoples'. The South Auckland beneficiary group also indicated a racialised dimension to Work & Income's treatment of clients living 'Southside'.

*Women:* Mentioned only in two focus groups, most references were historical; for example, men getting the right to vote before women and the stigmatisation of sole mothers as 'loose women' prior to the Domestic Purposes benefit being introduced in 1973. Indeed, when asked whether they felt like 'first-class' citizens, female participants were more likely to respond in the affirmative, apparently because they appreciated the rights that they were able to access today with the knowledge that earlier generations of women had not been so lucky.

### **Many New Zealanders do not feel like 'first-class citizens'**

Following discussion about whether beneficiaries are treated as second-class citizens, participants were asked: 'So, do you feel like a first-

class citizen?'. Only about a quarter answered with a categorical 'yes'. Most had never thought about ranking themselves in this way, so some hesitance was expected. But many participants – even those waged, well-educated and relatively well-off – clearly felt uncomfortable indicating that they might feel 'first-class' and often only admitted this might be the case by default because they did not feel 'second-class'. This hesitancy may reflect New Zealand's 'egalitarian' attitudes, with some participants indicating that they thought everyone *should* feel first-class, even if they realised this was not the reality. But 'middle New Zealand' has also been heavily affected by growing income inequality and diminishing housing affordability in recent years and it is possible many New Zealanders feel 'hard done by' in some way.

Ironically, although indicating that Māori were often treated like 'second-class' citizens, Māori participants were much more likely than other participants to say that they felt 'first-class', specifically because of their status as indigenous peoples. This highlights the very situational nature of belonging, which is associated with whether people feel respected and valued in society. Māori participants, as well as many on benefits, indicated that they felt 'first-class' amongst their own families, communities and, for some, in their jobs. However, they felt 'second-class' in other situations, most notably when dealing with Work & Income.

### **Feeling like a 'first-class' citizen requires more than just money**

Responding to questions about what people might need access to feel 'first-class', participants indicated that there are four inter-linked components:

*Money:* This was named mainly by participants on benefits and/or low incomes although, interestingly, many of the waged, higher income participants also did not feel 'first-class'.

*Respect:* While acknowledging it is often associated with work and wealth, participants indicated that respect is also demonstrated through compassion, humanitarian attitudes and recognition of rights. As noted earlier, Work & Income officials were perceived as often treating benefit recipients without sufficient respect.

*Human rights:* Three participants used this term specifically, while many others spoke of the importance of information about and access to health services, education, housing and food as essential to feeling like a 'first-class' citizen.

*Belonging*: Feeling valued, realising your full potential and contributing to society were factors seen as important to feeling 'first-class'. Work and money were often considered important for this because they allowed for adequate social participation.

## SOCIAL RIGHTS OF CITIZENSHIP

Participant responses about what it takes to feel 'first-class' invoke the 'social rights of citizenship', which include the right to decent education, health, housing, income and assistance in times of need. From the 1930s to the early 1980s, New Zealand governments made a strong commitment to these rights through (mostly) free health and education, a system of wage regulation and a well-developed system of social support for the needy. These rights were challenged during the 1980s and 1990s and the introduction of user-pays in health and education, the abandonment of wage regulation and the cutting back of social support means access to social rights is more limited than two decades ago.

### Social rights of citizenship are still important to New Zealanders today

The focus groups confirmed trends in existing public opinion data which suggest that New Zealanders have come to support (or at least accept) many of the *economic* reforms of the 1980s and 1990s but still strongly believe that New Zealand citizens should have *social* rights to decent education, health, housing and income assistance in times of need.

However, those with little knowledge or experience of the income support system were less likely to offer strong or unconditional support for social rights. When responding to the statement 'Government should be responsible for ensuring everyone is provided for', several participants also indicated that only the 'deserving' (the elderly, students, mothers, the sick and disabled) should receive assistance. There was less support for those named 'undeserving', such as criminals, those able to work but who choose not to and new immigrants (with the latter mentioned especially by Māori participants). This clearly reflects the distinction between the 'deserving' and 'undeserving' that has historically been a significant feature of New Zealand's welfare system.

## New Zealanders want a better balance between individual, community and government responsibility

Participants largely believed that individuals and communities should take responsibility for themselves. But most stressed that this required favourable social and economic conditions. Despite the high level of political distrust expressed in focus groups and New Zealand generally, participants considered it *government's* responsibility to ensure such conditions existed. Most felt that this was often not the case at present and many were nostalgic for the time when:

- ◇ Government provided free health and education services;
- ◇ There was a stronger community spirit and a lesser focus on individualism and consumerism;
- ◇ There was less regulation of families/parents by the state. This issue always emerged from unsolicited discussion about the 2007 repeal of Section 59 of the Crimes Act (referred to as the 'anti-smacking bill');
- ◇ Māori were able to be self-determination and self-sustaining. This issue was discussed solely by the Māori focus group and usually referred to a time prior to colonisation when Māori were able to hunt and forage without restriction.

The last two examples demonstrate participant awareness that government policy's strong emphasis on individual responsibility sits in tension with what they perceive to be an equally pervasive emphasis on further regulating and restricting the lives of individuals.

There were, however, two key areas where participants thought individuals should be responsible:

*To each other, either as a collective society or within a local community*: This was illustrated by the way in which participants characterised a 'responsible citizen' as one that supports the needy, is caring and compassionate and protects the environment by treating property and resources (like water) respectfully.

This finding would seem to contradict any prediction that two decades of neoliberalism, which has strongly promoted individual choice and responsibility, has made New Zealanders more individualistic.

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*To participate in democracy.* This includes keeping themselves informed about current affairs so they can make balanced decisions and ensure elected officials are doing their job properly. This again would seem to contradict the declining civic engagement reported amongst New Zealanders more generally.

Surprisingly, given government policy has stressed the importance of paid work as a key responsibility of individuals, only a handful of participants thought employment was a key factor in 'being responsible'. Although they believed paid work valuable, most thought it possible to show responsibility by other means, for example, bringing up children. Participants in the Māori group also stressed that it is possible to be *self-sustaining* (providing food and sustenance for one's family by foraging and hunting) without necessarily working in the conventional sense. They indicated that this is what Māori had traditionally done prior to colonisation.

### **Responsibility is best learned within the home or community rather than via coercive policies**

In thinking about how government might encourage greater individual responsibility, participants who had experienced being on a benefit themselves were critical of the assumption that government can *force* people to be more responsible through Work & Income sanctions and penalties. They believed this removed the agency that makes self-responsibility possible.

Although they did not talk about this issue in terms of rights, many participants were also affronted by a seeming lack of government recognition that most New Zealanders *already* take responsibility for themselves, especially those caring for children or were paying for health insurance and other user-pay services. More broadly, participants emphasised that responsibility is 'a state of mind' that needs to be learned within families and communities where trust and respect encourage responsible behaviour – rather than be imposed from above.

Alternatives offered for encouraging individual responsibility all involved the teaching of life skills that enable individuals and families to be self-sustaining, including cooking, growing fruit and vegetables, sewing, budgeting and saving. However, several participants indicated that a focus on improving an individual's life skills is not enough to overcome the significant social and economic changes that have taken place in

New Zealand society. For example, budgeting is difficult when legislative changes making credit easier to access have fuelled consumption and private debt. This again stresses the importance of acknowledging that broader structural conditions affect the ability of individuals to take responsibility for themselves.

## **POLICY IMPLICATIONS**

The preliminary findings summarised indicate four important issues for policy-makers:

- ◇ Social rights are still strongly supported and, against predictions, neoliberal reforms have not eliminated New Zealanders' belief in community spirit and collective solutions to social problems. There is a desire for a greater emphasis on social rights and, in an election year, hope that New Zealand's social issues might be better addressed.
- ◇ The policies and processes implemented by Work & Income appear to have a negative effect on the sense of citizenship and belonging experienced by benefit recipients. Although waged participants were reluctant to regard themselves as 'first-class' citizens, the many examples given by benefit recipients suggest that neoliberal reforms (which include tightening up the income support system) may be having a more detrimental effect on their sense of belonging compared to other New Zealanders.
- ◇ Māori feel marginalised by the language of 'citizenship' because they associate it with denial of their special rights as indigenous peoples. Māori participants felt particularly disgruntled by government emphasis on individual responsibility because they regarded government legislation and policy as having progressively undermined the responsibilities traditionally carried out by Māori within whānau and communities.
- ◇ There is significant public distrust of government and politicians – yet New Zealanders still want them to take the lead in ensuring individuals are able to take up the responsibilities of citizenship. This suggests there is potential for improving New Zealand's declining level of civic engagement, both in terms of formal activities (like voting) and in terms of the community participation participants suggest are central to citizenship. But policy makers may find it more useful to use the language of 'family' and 'community' rather than 'citizenship' to convey messages about belonging, rights and duties.

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