

# Contemporary citizenship debates

## *The search for firm footing on shifting terrains*

In many ways, the sociopolitical events of 2016 and 2017 have brought to life many of the conceptual debates surrounding the nature and importance of citizenship. The election of President Donald Trump in the United States (US), the rejection of the peace agreement between the Colombian government and the FARC, and the vote on Brexit in the United Kingdom (UK), amongst other significant world events, have in many ways indicated a “crisis of citizenship” as disenchanted voters rejected their countries’ political establishments as much as they rejected specific policy proposals or platforms. Even the 2017 election of Emmanuel Macron as president of France over the nativist/populist candidate Marine Le Pen (which may have saved the European Union) represented an important realignment of the French political system.

The fallout of these events, however, has been equally interesting. The US has witnessed citizen mobilization/social protests around policy positions—such as migration, health care, and climate change—in ways that have indicated healthy and proactive citizen participation in public affairs. Similarly, anti-Brexit movements in the UK contributed to a significant rebuke of nativism as the Conservative government of Prime Minister Theresa May lost its majority of seats in the House of Commons. Public protest and social mobilization in the US and the UK, amongst other parts of the world, have clearly indicated that citizenship is changing not only in terms of rights and responsibilities but above all in terms of forms of manifestations of social participation.

This raises an important question: Could the “crisis of citizenship” be a misunderstanding of a “crisis of representation” and/or “crisis of accountability”? It seems that citizens are not necessarily abdicating their roles in politics; they are instead rejecting political parties and a class of political elites that have traditionally represented citizens in public affairs, and they could possibly be reacting against limits placed on them by the structure of traditional party systems and electoral debates. If this schism is indeed verified and citizens are focusing on new or alternative forms of



political expression, what will be the fallout? Will the rejection of a political system lead to increased support for populism? Will increased participation in new forms of citizenship, such as transnational movements, ethnic identities, or economic communities undermine social contracts in nation-states? What of the impact of cyber communities on citizenships? In fact, one could argue that citizenship is not in crisis. Instead, citizenship could be viewed as passing through a period of transformation and de-territorialization. Many traditional discussions of citizenship focus on the relationships between citizens and the State. This seems to be misguided as governments are not States. This difference is often lost in public discussions. Instead, citizens are the State and governments are political institutions that manage society. New forms of mobilization could indicate a reaffirmation of citizenship and a reminder to political leaders of these important differences.

*Regions & Cohesion* is pleased to publish this special issue entitled "At the margins of the State: Political participation and the emergence of citizenships in Latin America." We view this special issue as a valuable contribution to academic discussions of citizenship because it does not focus on social/political divisions in Latin America, many of which have received prominent attention (such as recent scandals in Brazil and Mexico) or so-called citizenship crises related to public protest (such as the recent violence in Venezuela). Instead, the guest editors of this special issue, Catherine Alès and Claudia Puerta Silva, present a series of articles that examine the emergence of new forms of mobilization and analyze the processes that inform "new citizenships" in Latin America. Consequently, the special issue constructively highlights important points in contemporary citizenship debates that go beyond the simple indication of political crises and citizen disenchantment.

The Editors