

The Challenges of Citizenship in a Small European State

ICELAND

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Defining Citizenship

- Citizenship in Iceland includes
 - Right to residence, voting (age 18) and standing for office
 - May not be revoked, but may be surrendered
- Many believe Icelandic citizenship is based on place of birth (jus soli) but is based on blood (jus sanguinis)

Routes to Citizenship

- Citizenship is acquired:
 - By blood – anyone born to parents with Icelandic citizenship is automatically a citizen
 - Children born abroad must be registered in Iceland
 - By adoption if registered/petitioned in Iceland
 - By residence – varying length of time required (Nordic 4yrs, others 7yrs) and application to Directorate of Immigration
 - Language test, no criminal record
 - By petition to parliament – petitions processed twice per year – may take special circumstances into account
 - Athletes, children born to bi-national parents before gender equality adjustment
 - Investors may petition, but has never happened

Types of Citizenship

- Only one type of citizenship exists
- Dual citizenship is allowed by Iceland
- Citizenship can only be acquired through application or petition to parliament (no military service or such)

Challenges to Citizenship (1)

- Reduced fertility rate means fewer native born citizens
- Limited reactions to encourage immigration

Challenges to Citizenship (2)

- Smallness means flexibility, community reactions to perceived unfair treatment (families with young children) often get preferential treatment
- Traditional homogeneity – fear of “foreign” influence

Responses to Citizenship

- Xenophobic responses to increased numbers of immigrants & refugees
 - Former Minister of Justice indicated interest in limiting parliament's ability to give citizenship by petition

Flashpoints

- Bobby Fisher
 - Grand champion of chess, stateless in Japan after losing US citizenship
 - Granted citizenship in absentia, lived in Iceland until death
- Bala Kamallakharan
 - Entrepreneur living in Iceland 11 years
 - Application rejected due to unresolved speeding tickets/fines
 - After media coverage it emerged that his wife had most of the tickets, fines were below threshold of the law

Conclusion: Prospects

- Looking forward, what can one expect of citizenship policies and practices in your country?