

George Friedman discusses what it means to be a citizen of a country.

- 1 Many factors affect the changing relationship of the individual to the nation and the state, most notable among them being the increasing global trend of multiple citizenship. This trend is obviously linked to the question of immigration, but it also raises a deeper question, namely, what is the meaning of citizenship and therefore political identity in the 21st century? It is difficult to make sense of such issues without first making sense of the nation-state. 5
- 2 The idea of nationhood is not always clear. At root, a nation is a group of people who share a fate, and with that fate, an identity. Nations can be consciously created, as the United States was. Nations can also exist for hundreds or thousands of years, as seen in parts of Europe or Asia. However long a nation exists and whatever its origins, a nation is founded on 'love of one's own,' a unique relationship with the community in which an individual is born or to which he chose to come. That affinity is the foundation of a nation. If that dissolves, the nation dissolves, which is something that has happened on numerous occasions in history. Some might say that such disappearances are for the better, even if they result in massive shifts to the international system. 10 15
- 3 In contrast to the nation, the idea of the state is much clearer: It is the political directorate of the nation. How the leaders are selected and how they govern varies widely. The relationship of the state to the nation also varies widely. We know that not all nations have states. Some are occupied by other nation-states. Some are divided between multiple states. Some are part of an entity that governs many nations. And some are communities that have developed systems of government that do not involve states, although this is increasingly rare. Ultimately, the relation to the nation is personal while the relation to the state is legal. Although a distinction does exist between nationality and citizenship, they may coincide easily, as when a person is born in a country and becomes a citizen simply through that fact, or they may develop, as when an individual is permitted to immigrate and become naturalized. 20 25
- 4 In the United States, the following oath is administered when one is permitted to become a citizen, generally five years after being permitted to immigrate: 'I hereby declare, on oath, that I absolutely and entirely renounce and abjure all allegiance and fidelity to any foreign prince, potentate, state, or sovereignty of whom or which I have heretofore been a subject or citizen; that I will support and defend the Constitution and laws of the United States of America against all enemies, foreign and domestic; that I will bear true faith and allegiance to the same; that I will bear arms on behalf of the United States when required by the law; that I will perform noncombatant service in the Armed Forces of the United States when required by the law; that I will perform work of national importance under civilian direction when required by the law; and that I take this obligation freely without any mental reservation or purpose of evasion; so help me God.' 30 35

- 5 For the United States, the idea of immigration was inherent in the very idea of the nation, as was the above oath. Immigration and naturalization required a commitment of this magnitude since naturalization meant taking on not only a new state identity but also a new national identity. If immigrants were unprepared to meet all the requirements set out in the oath, the American enterprise would fall into chaos. The new immigrant could not selectively claim the benefits of full citizenship while refusing to abandon prior obligations. 40
- 6 The tidy distinctions we've just made between nationhood and statehood (distinctions that I hazard to say would raise few eyebrows) do raise an immediate question, though – are they too tidy for their own good? Isn't the overlap between these categories actually greater and more complicated than it seems, particularly in the case of naturalized citizens? Well, if the American oath of allegiance is so unequivocal, isn't it odd that the US, along with many other nation-states, permits its nationals to be citizens of other countries? This practice raises a fundamental question. Is citizenship a license to live and earn a living in a country, or is it equally or more so a set of legal and moral obligations? There are many ways legally to reside in a country without becoming a citizen. But the American oath, for example, makes it appear that the naturalized citizen (as opposed to just the legal resident) has an overriding obligation to the United States that can require substantial and onerous responsibilities within military and civilian life. The individual, in other words, might very well be able to juggle multiple obligations until they come into conflict, but the decision to embrace citizenship may indeed represent that inevitable collision point. 50 55
- 7 Blurring things further is the reality that in many cases citizenship is seen less as a system of mutual obligations and rights than as a convenience. In the case of the dual citizenship holder, this not only creates an obvious tension between the individual and his oath-based obligations, but it also creates a deep ambiguity between his different nationalities. Yes, the concept of immigration involves the idea of movement to a new place. It involves the assumption of legal and moral obligations. But it also involves a commitment to the nation, at least as far as citizenship goes. This has nothing to do with retaining ethnicity. Rather, it has to do with a definition of what it means to love one's own. And yet, if you are a citizen of multiple nations, which nation is yours? 60 65
- 8 When conflicts or disagreements arise, however, the blurring of the line between nationalities becomes a bigger potential threat for the immigrant country than it does for the country of origin. The sense of national identity is often stronger in countries whose nationhood is built on centuries of shared history and fate than it is in countries that must manage waves of immigration. These countries have less room for manoeuvre on these matters, unless they have the fortune to be secure and need not ask much of their citizens. But in those countries that are built on immigrants and that do need to call for sacrifice, this evolution is potentially more troublesome. 70 75
- 9 I acknowledge that there are those who regard nationalism as divisive and harmful, thereby leading to conflict. I am of the view, however, that nationalism has endured because it provides individuals with a sense of place, community, history and identity. It gives individuals something beyond themselves that is small enough to be comprehensible but far greater than they are. 80