TRUST, SOCIAL CONNECTEDNESS AND CIVIC ENGAGEMENT:

A Comparison of the Immigrant and Native-Born Populations

ABSTRACT

This article presents some of the results from a study conducted by Neil Nevitte (with Antoine Bilodeau) entitled "Trust, Tolerance, and Confidence in Institutions: Evidence from the Canadian World Values Surveys, 1990-2000." Part of this study compares immigrant and native-born populations with respect to trust over time, as well as with respect to the relationship between trust, social connectedness and civic engagement.

A substantial body of evidence suggests that trust is an important orientation that shapes people's social relations in profound ways (Gabriel 1996). Trust mediates relations between social groups; it is related to how people navigate their institutional environment (Listhaug andWiberg 1995), and it is a foundation for individual-level reciprocal transactions (Coleman 1987; Putnam 1993). However, trust is not an undifferentiated concept and levels of trust are likely to vary depending upon what social object is under consideration. The World Values Survey (WVS) contains a variety of indicators of trust and constitutes a good place to begin an assessment of how respondents, both immigrant and native-born, are distributed across various dimensions of trust. Five dimensions will be considered:

- *Trust in family.* This indicator measures trust in primary relationships, and as such, it can serves as a benchmark indicator. There is no reason to expect immigrants and native-born Canadians to differ on this dimension.
- *Trust in Canadians.* This indicator has a communal dimension; it measures levels of trust in the broader political community.
- *Whether "most people can be trusted"*. This indicator is now routinely used to measure social capital (Coleman 1987, 1988; Putnam 1993; Norris 1999). It will be referred to in this study as General Trust I and it is a standard indicator of interpersonal trust.
- *Whether respondents anticipate that others will "take advantage of you".* This indicator is referred to as General Trust II and is a new addition to the WVS.
- *Trust in recent immigrants.* This dimension of community trust is particularly relevant to the focus of this study.

The basic WVS 1990 and 2000 results from all five measures of trust are reported in Table 1. That summary reports the data for each time period and, in the case of the 2000 WVS data, the results for immigrants according to length of residence in the country. At issue is the question: Is length of immigrants' residence in Canada related to any changes in levels of trust? There are several core findings worth noting:

1) All respondents, regardless of whether they were born in Canada or not, exhibit very high levels of *trust in their own family.* Since family is a basic social unit, these results come as no surprise. Nor is it surprising that length of residence in the country has no bearing whatsoever on levels of family trust. These results correspond to expectations.

2) When it comes to *trust in Canadian people,* there is evidence of some change between 1990 and 2000. However, there is no evidence, at either point in time, of significant differences between native-born Canadians and immigrants. By most comparative benchmarks, Canadians' 1990 levels of trust in their co-nationals rate as high (Nevitte 1996; Newton 1999). The percentage point decline is statistically significant but not large and, by cross-national standards, the levels of trust that Canadians had in their fellow co-nationals in 2000 still qualifies as relatively "high." In this regard, people born in the country and immigrants appear to rise and fall on the same tide.

3) The pattern of response is somewhat different when it comes to *General Trust I,* relating to whether *most people can be trusted.* Immigrants are more trusting than native-born Canadians in this case, and this finding is consistent across the decade. Also, length of residence in country is a significant source of variation for immigrants. When immigrants

NEIL NEVITTE
Neil Nevitte is Professor at the Department of Political Science, University of Toronto.

first come to the country their levels of trust are quite high but those levels erode quite quickly. After 5 years of residence in Canada, immigrants' levels of interpersonal trust gravitate to the mean. With respect to interpersonal trust, then, immigrants seem to learn communal standards, which in this case means a progressive lowering of levels of interpersonal trust.

4) Response patterns for *General Trust II,* relating to whether *most people would try to take advantage of you* are somewhat different. In this case, there are no substantial differences between the proportion of new immigrants who say that people would not try to take advantage of them if they had a chance but would rather try to be fair, and that of native born Canadians (65% vs. 67% respectively). Nor is there evidence of variation with length of residence in Canada.

5) Results for *trust in recent immigrants* are in line with expectations. People are more likely to trust the familiar than the unfamiliar; they are more likely to trust people who are more like them. Thus we find in both 1990 and 2000 that immigrants' levels of trust in "recent immigrants" is higher than that found among respondents born in Canada. Furthermore, native-born Canadians exhibit higher levels of trust in "the Canadian people" than in immigrants. It is also worth noting that, in both 1990 and 2000, immigrants' trust in "the Canadian people" is higher than their levels of trust in recent immigrants. Immigrants' trust in recent immigrants is unrelated to length of residence in Canada.

The most significant finding emerging from Table 1 concerns the evidence of a substantial overall drop in levels of interpersonal trust between 1990 and 2000. In 1990, 53% of native-born Canadians (and 59% of immigrants) thought that "most people can be trusted." By 2000 only 39% of native-born Canadians said this (compared to 42% of immigrants). Native-born Canadians and immigrants, once again, seem to rise and fall on the same tide. To the extent that interpersonal trust is a vital pillar of social capital, the potential implication of this finding is clear. If the norms of reciprocity are eroding, the corresponding expectation is that such a shift could have substantial reverberations for, among other things, inter-group relations, evaluations of how democratic practices are working, and possibly, confidence in institutions (see Nevitte and Bilodeau, 2003 for further analysis of these issues).

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Trust and Civic Engagement

Central to contemporary research on social capital is the important argument that there is a link between civic engagement and interpersonal trust (Putnam 1993, 2000). The broader cross-national findings on the nature of that linkage, however, are somewhat uneven (Newton 2000). Furthermore, these alternative findings have prompted debates that fix on both conceptual and measurement concerns. First, there is the question of whether interpersonal trust is conducive to a more cooperative society (Fukuyama 1997; Levi 1997, 1998) or the other way round (Putnam 1993, 1995). Gellner (1988), for one, sidesteps the problem of causal direction and simply argues that social cohesion is only possible in a civil society where there are thick, embedded relationships (Levi and Stokes 2000). Even so, there is no clear consensus about what is the best measure of civic engagement.

What qualifies as 'engagement'? Is simple (passive) membership in civic associations a sufficient indicator, or does engagement entail more active involvement? Does it require that an individual's investment of time in civic associations be taken into account? The most open-ended empirical approach to that question, perhaps, is to compare the connection between inter-personal trust and a) simple membership in civic associations, and b) active involvement in those associations. To explore that matter empirically we rely on indices that measure respectively a) the number of types of groups in which respondents are members (and members only), and b) the number of types of groups in which respondents are actively involved. It is not entirely clear that these measures of civic engagement adequately capture all the relevant dimensions of the phenomenon. These indicators may be inadequate and partial for two reasons. First, they tap only the number of 'types' of groups in which respondents are involved. They provide no information whatsoever about the number of groups in each category in which respondents might be involved. Second, they do not provide any information about the amount of time respondents spend in those groups. An alternative indicator, a more encompassing measure of what might be called "general social connectedness" of individuals, could be constructed from WVS data to provide a richer measure of the density of respondents' social network in which norms of reciprocity and inter-personal trust might be expected to flourish. The 2000 WVS asks respondents:

> *For each activity, would you say you do them every week or nearly every week; once or twice a month; only a few times a year; or not at all: spend*

time with parents or other relatives, spend time with friends, spend time socially with colleagues from work or your profession, spend time with people at your church, mosque or synagogue, spend time socially with people at sports clubs or voluntary or service organizations?

These WVS indicators allow one to capture dimensions of social connectedness that are broader than just formal engagement in civic associations and to take into account how much time respondents invest in those social networks. The research question to be explored, then, is does this broader measure of respondents' social connectedness exhibit a stronger association with interpersonal trust, and is the relationship between them the same for both the native-born and the immigrant population?

Indicators of Civic Engagement and Social Connectedness

Differences in the level of civic engagement of immigrants and native-born Canadians are quite modest. On average, native-born Canadians belong to about 1 type of civic association compared to 1.4 types for immigrants. The figures are quite similar for the types of groups in which respondents are actively involved (1 for native born Canadians and 0.9 for recent immigrants). Immigrants' level of civic engagement with the passage of time hardly varies at all, and there is no evidence of any significant cross-time changes in respondents' levels of civic engagement between 1990 and 2000, for either native-born Canadians or immigrants.

Moreover, there is clear evidence that the composition of immigrant social networks do shift with the passage of time. The longer immigrants live in Canada, the more their social network habits come to resemble those of native-born Canadians.

As for social connectedness, on average, immigrants and native-born Canadians spend about the same amount of time in clubs and associations. About 41% of immigrants say they spend time in clubs and associations at least once per month compared with 39% of native-born Canadians. On balance, then, immigrants and native-born Canadians are similarly engaged; they are involved in about the same numbers of groups and spend about the same amount of time in those groups. There are no substantial variations between recent and long time immigrants with respect to this indicator. Significant differences do emerge, however, when it comes to the patterns of social networks in which these two groups are involved. Immigrants spend more time socially with colleagues or with people in religious organizations than do native-born Canadians. Upon arrival in Canada, 64% and 49% of immigrants respectively spend time socially with colleagues and in religious organizations at least once per month compared to 40% and 26% of native-born Canadians. Moreover, there is clear evidence that the composition of immigrant social networks do shift with the passage of time. The longer immigrants live in Canada, the more their social network habits come to resemble those of native-born Canadians. The proportion of immigrants who spend time socially with colleagues and in religious organizations at least once per month declines after immigrants have lived more than 5 years in Canada.

Immigrants and native-born Canadians spend about the same amount of time with friends. More than 90% of immigrants and native-born Canadians say they spend time with friends at least once per month. In addition, the pattern is stable regardless of how long immigrants have lived in Canada. It comes as no surprise at all to find that when immigrants first arrive in the country, they spend less time with their family and relatives than do their native born counterparts; 80% of native-born Canadians say they spend time with their parents and other relatives at least once per month compared to 58% for recent immigrants. However, these differences erode the longer immigrants have resided in Canada. The explanation for why new immigrants spend less time with their family might be quite straightforward: upon first arriving in Canada, some new immigrants may not yet have family in the country or the city where they live. Aside from the case of family and relatives, immigrants are either as socially connected, or more connected, than native-born Canadians.

The Connection Between Civic Engagement and Interpersonal Trust

How, then, are civic membership, civic involvement and social connectedness linked to the three indicators of trust? For native-born Canadians, civic membership is as strongly correlated with each of the three indicators of trust, as is civic involvement. Significantly, however, the social connectedness index (that combines all 5 indicators of social connectedness) is more strongly correlated with each of the three trust indicators than with either measure of civic engagement. It is also significant that, overall, both civic engagement indicators and the social connectedness index are more strongly correlated with General Trust I than with the other measures of trust. The correlation coefficients are slightly weaker for General Trust II and weaker still for "trust in Canadians." The pattern of linkages is substantially different in the case of immigrants, however. Overall, both civic engagement indicators and the social connectedness index are weakly correlated with each measure of trust. Civic involvement is the indicator that presents the strongest correlation with all three measures of trust; the strongest correlation being General Trust I.

Once the estimations take into account the socio-economic characteristics of native-born Canadians, the social connectedness index is a significantly more powerful predictor of trust than either civic engagement indicators. This finding holds across all three measures of trust. Native-born Canadians who spend more time with other people are more likely to say that they can trust other people, that people would not try to take advantage of them if

they had the chance, and that they trust other Canadians. However, the conventional measures of civic membership and civic involvement do not seem to be associated with an increase (or decrease) in respondents' levels of trust regardless of which indicator of trust is considered.

Findings show that immigrants who spend more time with other people are more likely to say that people would not try to take advantage of them if they had the chance, and to say that they trust other Canadians. Civic membership and civic involvement have no impact on immigrants' levels of trust for these two indicators. The findings are somewhat different for General Trust I. In this case, immigrants' level of civic involvement decreases the likelihood of saying that other people can be trusted, whereas civic membership increases the likelihood. Putnam's version of social capital would lead us to expect that civic engagement increases trust in other people. Intriguingly, the two measures of civic engagement provide inconsistent results. However, it is worth noting here that the social connectedness index is not significantly related to General Trust I for immigrants and the reason seems to have to do with the specific influence of time spent with people in religious organizations. This last indicator of social connectedness is, when examined separately, negatively related with General Trust I. When time spent with people in a religious organization is removed from the social connectedness index, the newly formulated index exhibits results consistent with those observed for other indicators of trust; immigrants who spend more time with other people are more likely to say that they trust other people. For reasons unexplained, time spent with people in a religious organization is negatively related to this particular trust indicator only, and only for immigrants.

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Conclusions

There is evidence of a significant decline in interpersonal trust in Canada (Trust in Canadians and General Trust I) and this decline is observed among both native-born Canadians and immigrants. In fact, the decline is of the same magnitude for both groups. One possibility, suggested by Putnam's version of social capital theory, is that such a decline could be attributable to a corresponding fall in rates of civic engagement. However, that explanation is not compelling for two reasons. First, we have shown that civic engagement is a weak direct predictor of interpersonal trust. Second, there was no decline in the rates of civic engagement over the 1990-2000 period. One possibility is that variation in interpersonal trust is due to factors other than civic engagement. Another possibility is that interpersonal trust may lag behind civic engagement. Determining more precisely the origins of this substantial decline would require a more detailed and focused investigation.

While differences between immigrants and native-born Canadians were found with regard to levels of trust (immigrants having higher levels in some dimensions), these differences decreased as length of residence in Canada increased. Differences between these two populations were also found with regard to the nature of their social connections. However, as with trust, immigrants' outlooks and behaviour adjust with the passage of time in Canada. As they settle down in Canada, immigrants adopt levels of trust and social networks that come to resemble those of native-born Canadians. In this respect, the process of immigrants' adaptation to the new environment can be characterized as one of integration.

Social connectedness increases interpersonal trust (all three indicators) for native-born Canadians but it only increases levels of "trust in Canadians" for immigrants. Especially in the case of native-born Canadians, social connectedness has a stronger impact on levels of trust than either civic involvement or membership; this was expected. For the most part, both civic involvement and membership nonetheless affect levels of trust for native-born Canadians. However, only civic membership affects the trust levels of immigrants.

When variation in the socio-economic characteristics of the native-born and immigrant populations is taken into account, the impact of social connectedness and civic engagement or membership on levels of trust in the two populations is still different. When socio-economic characteristics are controlled, social connectedness remains more important for levels of trust in the native-born population than the immigrant one and neither civic membership nor involvement affect the trust levels of native-born Canadians in a statistically significant fashion as social capital theory would lead one to expect. However, civic membership and involvement did have an affect on General Trust I for the immigrant population. Further research is needed to explain the variation in these effects.

The 2000 round of the World Values Survey (Canada) has a boosted sample of immigrant respondents, which is called the New Immigrant Survey. The latter is a replica of the core questions of the WVS, asked to an additional 600 new immigrants. This means that together with the number of immigrants in the core sample, there are now enough cases to undertake meaningful analysis of immigrant subpopulations and to compare the immigrant subpopulations to the native-born one. One of the subpopulation elements of special interest here, which was explored in the 2000 round, concerns the impact of length of residence in Canada.

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Table 1 – Stability and Change in Levels of Trust 1990-2000

	1990		2000			
	Native born Canadians	Immigrants	Native born Canadians	Immigrants		
Dimensions		>10 yrs		1-5 yrs	6-10 yrs	>10 yrs
Trust in Own Family (% saying they trust completely or a little)	98	99	96	99	98	98
Trust in Canadian People (% saying they trust completely or a little)	80	80	75	78	77	75
General Trust I Generally speaking, would you say that most people can be trusted or that you need to be very careful in dealing with people?	53	59	39	47***	39	38
(% saying people can be trusted)						
General Trust II Do you think most people would try to take advantage of you if they got a chance, or would they try to be fair?	N/A	N/A	67	65	62	63
(% saying people would try to be fair)						
Trust in Recent Immigrants (% saying they trust completely or a little)	44	55	46	58**	48	56
N =	1423	206	1551	397	217	329

*** p<.001, ** p<.05, * p<.10: significant differences for native born Canadians when controlling for socio-economic situation of respondents (Number of children, number of children still living at home, religious affiliation, identification with Canada, employment status, occupation, income, gender, education, age and province of residence) based on Logit estimates. Number of cases may vary for each item.

Note: These are weighted data.

Source: World Values Surveys 1990 and 2000 (including 2000 NIS)