A Tradition of Social Capital in Minority Communities

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Members of Canada's ethnocultural communities have long recognized that 'social capital', or the voluntary connections between individuals and families (Putnam, 2000), imbues both public benefits to the host country and minority groups, as well as private benefits to individuals. These connections can be both formal (membership in organized associations such as ethnic clubs, sports leagues, youth groups, community service associations, etc.) and informal (contacts with families and friends) in nature.

Studies in the United States, Italy and Great Britain have shown that communities rich in social capital enjoy benefits ranging from reduced crime, improved child welfare and economic prosperity, to effective government performance and innovative public policy. Social capital has also been linked to higher levels of involvement in public life, reciprocity and interpersonal trust (Putnam, 1993; 2000: 19,20, 41-9, 296-349; Hall, 2002).

International scholarship is increasingly looking to voluntarism as a building block for more just, inclusive and democratic societies. That this has always been the case would come as no surprise to Canadian historians who have chronicled how early immigrant communities drew upon their homeland experiences with associational principles to establish rich networks of voluntary organizations in a new setting (Burnet, 1988: 185-95; Harney, 1985).

Early ethnic organizations included the credit-raising associations, reading clubs, libraries and athletic clubs established by rural Chinese, Ukrainian or Icelandic settlers. German, Italian and Polish immigrants in mining and construction camps set up mutual aid societies to provide emergency financial assistance to family members. With the growth of the welfare state during the Second World War, the mission of these earlier mutual aid and philanthropic associations was transformed into informing and directing recent immigrants toward public sources of aid (Burnet). More recently, voluntary lobby organizations representing visible minorities have emerged as advocates on issues ranging from redress for the property expropriation and deportation of Japanese Canadians during the Second World War, to addressing the religious and racial backlash that some Muslim and Arab Canadians have experienced in the wake of the September 2001 attacks on the Pentagon and the World Trade Centre.

Throughout Canadian history, voluntary organizations have helped new arrivals satisfy their immediate material needs, protect their civil and legal rights, and preserve their language and traditions. Their varied missions speak to the efforts of immigrants to integrate into Canadian society, as well as to state reliance on these intermediary organizations to ease that transition process.

Long-term declines in social capital in the United States and Australia (Putnam, 2000: 19-21, 31-147, 252; Cox, 2002) have raised questions about the nature of social capital in contemporary, multicultural Canada. Attempting to quantify the immigrant presence in the voluntary sector raises several thorny issues concerning what might be considered an 'acceptable' level of involvement, 'desirable' forms of voluntary participation, as well as the appropriate frame of reference for the foreign-born. These legitimate questions cannot be resolved here. Nevertheless, debates emanating from these questions must be premised upon a reliable database on rates of voluntarism.

This objective will be furthered through a statistical analysis of survey evidence drawn from the 2000 Canadian Election Study. The analysis will explore the extent to which foreign-born Canadians fit into a multidimensional characterization of social capital. It will also propose some explanations as to why immigrants are attracted to some forms of voluntarism and examine the role of selected socio-demographic characteristics in accounting for those participation rates.

The first dimension of social capital distinguishes between *formal and informal* connections. Membership in organizations such as parents' organizations or labor unions are '...formally organized with recognized officers, membership requirements, dues and regular meetings...' (Putnam and Goss, 2002: 10). Informal networks would include family dinners or gatherings at pubs.

Thick and *thin* forms of social capital are determined by the frequency and closeness of contacts between individuals (10). A nod to acquaintances or strangers in public places would be one way of engaging in 'thin' voluntary connections. Working with a group of individuals every day, and then socializing with them on a regular basis, would constitute a 'thick' connection.

The third dimension demarcates *inward-looking* from *outward-looking* forms of social capital. Inward organizations are concerned with promoting the material, social or political interests of their members. Outward forms are concerned with public goods. Examples of the former would include chambers of commerce, labor organizations and credit unions set up by new immigrants. Charitable groups such as the Red Cross and environmental movements would fall into the second category (11).

The fourth dimension distinguishes between *bonding* and *bridging* social capital (11-2). The former type brings together people who share common socio-demographic characteristics (including ethnicity), whereas bridging social capital refers to networks whose participants are drawn from dissimilar backgrounds.

Methodology

The Canadian Election Study (CES) 2000 consists of three waves of surveys that were administered to 3,648 English and French-speaking Canadians aged 18 and over, during and following the 2000 federal election campaign. Fortunately, it features a series of questions probing the *formal* voluntary connections of the respondents. There were, however, several limitations associated with the survey. First, it did not contain measures of *informal* and '*thick* and *thin*' social capital. Second, the wording of the *formal* participation items did not measure *current* participation in *Canada*. Respondents were asked whether they had *ever* joined certain voluntary associations *during the past five years*. Despite these limitations, the CES can serve as an important benchmark for understanding networks of social capital.

After comparing the voluntarism rates of foreign-born and native-born Canadians, I assigned the foreign-born respondents to three smaller groups representing individuals who have lived in Canada ten years or less (n=102), 11 to 20 years (n=80); and more than 20 years (n=363). This was done because previous research on immigrant involvement in political and electoral activities has shown that participation rates tend to converge with those of the Canadian-born after longer periods of residency (Black, 1987; 1991). Historical research also suggests that the forms of voluntary activities in which immigrants engage, undergo changes with the passage of time (Burnet).

After comparing the rates and types of *formal* voluntarism reported by the Canadian-born and different waves of immigrants, I examined the relationship between country of birth and voluntarism for sub-sets of respondents divided along sex, age, education and household income lines.[1] These characteristics were selected for closer inspection because they have been reported to influence social capital in other settings (Putnam, 2000; Young, 2002: 118)

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A Multidimensional Portrait of Formal Social Capital

Participation rates for both the Canadian and foreign-born in most formal, voluntary organizations tended to be low, with inter-group differences emerging as statistically significant for just five of the nine indicators of associational life (Table 1). While community service, professional associations, sports associations and religious associations that cover both aspects of the *inward-outward* and *bonding-bridging* dimensions of voluntarism were the most popular choices for both the Canadian-born and immigrants, community service groups were the only organizations that close to half of the respondents in each group joined. Between 26 and 42 per cent of the survey respondents reported belonging to religious and sports associations, while very few reported joining outward-oriented environmental or women's groups.

While immigrants were significantly more likely to join professional (inward), ethnic (bonding) and religious (bonding) associations than native-born Canadians, the Canadian-born were significantly more likely to join sports associations (bridging) and labour unions (inward).

The relatively stronger attachment of immigrants to religious associations might be traced to their key role in helping new arrivals settle and adapt to a new country (Burnet: 125-50). Explanations for the stronger presence of immigrants in professional associations are less intuitive. While one might attribute this to their need to establish job-related credentials and contacts, it is problematic to argue that native-born Canadians are not under the same pressures to do so. The fact that just three respondents who had lived in Canada for 10 years or less had joined a professional association might reflect the challenges they face in meeting Canadian qualifications for their profession.

Within the immigrant sub-sample, recent arrivals were significantly less likely than more established immigrants to join cross-cultural (bridging), community service,

Table 1- Formal Voluntary Association (% indicating had joined group in last 5 years)*

Association/ Group	Canadian-Born	Foreign-Born	Residency: 10 yrs or less	Residency: 11-20 yrs	Residency: 21+ yrs
Community Service	48.4 (535)	43.3 (68)	**23.5 (4)**	**23.8 (5)**	**48.2 (55)**
Business	15.2 (168)	12 (19)	0 (0)	14.3 (3)	14 (16)
Professional	**23.4 (259)**	**36.9 (58)**	**18.8 (3)**	**57.1 (12)**	**36.8 (42)**
Environmental	9.3 (103)	12.7 (20)	0 (0)	4.8 (1)	15.8 (18)
Women's	8.8 (97)	7.6 (12)	0 (0)	4.8 (1)	7.9 (9)
Labour Union	**19.2 (212)**	**11.4 (18)**	0 (0)	9.5 (2)	13.2 (15)
Ethnic	**2.8 (31)**	**13.4 (21)**	29.4 (5)	4.8 (1)	13.2 (15)
Sports	**34.7 (383)**	**25.9 (41)**	**5.9 (1)**	**4.8 (1)**	**32.5 (37)**
Religious	**34 (376)**	**41.8 (66)**	58.8 (10)	38.1 (8)	40.7 (46)

Source: *Canadian Election Study, 2000 (weighted)*.

*Statistically significant differences between the foreign-born and Canadian-born, and between different arrival groups, are indicated in bold. All differences sig. ≤ .05

Table 2 - The Intersection of Immigrant Status and Other Identity Markers

Association/Group	Sex	Age	Education	Income
Community Service		35-50 years*		
Business Association				<$40,000*
Professional Association		18-34 years**	High School or Less**	
Labour Union	Male, Female**	18-34 years; 51 years+**	High School or Less**	
Sports Association		51 years+**	Post-secondary or more**	<$70,000**
Religious Association	Female**	35 years and over**	Post-secondary or more**	$70,000+**

* Statistically significant differences between Canadian and Foreign-born emerge for that group.
** Statistically significant differences between Canadian and Foreign-born disappear for this group.

professional and sports associations than immigrants who had lived in Canada for more than 10 years (Table 1). Community-based, ethnic and religious associational memberships were the only organizations which recent arrivals joined at higher rates than the more established immigrants (inter-group differences were insignificant). These patterns confirm Burnet's observation that recent arrivals gravitate to bonding organizations in order to meet immediate settlement needs such as the maintenance of their language and culture, or needs that can't be met by bridging associations as a result of 'language barriers, discrimination and other obstacles' (185). As was the case in earlier studies, the appeal of ethnic associations diminishes for more established immigrants.

I then examined whether these relationships changed for sub-groups of all respondents (Table 2). Age emerged as the most powerful factor in distinguishing between the voluntarism rates of the native and foreign-born. Initially inconsequential differences in community service group participation became significant for respondents aged between 35 and 50 years old. Just 29.6 percent of immigrants in this age group, compared to 51.2 per cent of native-born Canadians, reported having joined a community service group in the previous five years (data not shown). On the other hand, initial, statistically significant differences in participation rates in professional associations, labour unions, sports and religious associations became *insignificant* for certain age groups (Table 2). On two of these measures, the Canadian-born held the participatory advantage; on two others, the foreign-born.

Education and income also accounted for some of the initial differences in voluntarism (Table 2). Amongst respondents with a high school education or less, membership rates in professional associations converged at just under 10 per cent for both the Canadian and foreign-born (data not shown). Interestingly, the best-educated immigrants held a 16 per cent advantage over the Canadian-born with respect to professional association membership (data not shown). Amongst respondents who had attended a post-secondary institution, the initial immigrant advantage in religious organization membership disappeared. Religious groups continued to be popular avenues for the acquisition of social capital for immigrants with a high school level of education or less. Just over 53 per cent of less educated immigrants, compared to 35.4 per cent of their Canadian-born counterparts, reported having joined these organizations in the past five years (data not shown).

At first glance, there were no significant differences between Canadian-born and foreign-born involvement rates in business associations (Table 1). Upon closer examination, it was found that immigrants reporting household incomes of less than $40,000 were significantly more likely to join business associations than their Canadian-born counterparts (27.3 percent versus 7.4 per cent). This finding, when considered with the comparatively strong presence of the best-educated immigrants in professional associations, speaks to the importance of *inward* social capital in ethnocultural communities.

Finally, immigrants were more drawn to religious organizations than the Canadian-born, and that remained the case for individuals in the lower and middle income groups. However, inter-group differences in religious associational life disappeared and *reversed* for individuals reporting incomes of $70,000 or more. Just over 35 per cent of the relatively well-heeled immigrants, compared to 43.5 per cent of the wealthiest Canadian-born respondents, participated in religious organizations (data not shown). Thus, in the same way that length of residency contributes to the diminishing appeal of *bonding* organizations (Table 1), foreign-born Canadians appear to distance themselves from these organizations as their socio-economic status improves.

The Intersection of Varied Forms of Social Capital and Other Identity Markers

There were few large differences in the voluntarism rates of native-born and foreign-born respondents in formal voluntary organizations. Immigrants were more prone to join *bonding* than *bridging* organizations, but this trend subsided as they spent more time in Canada. *Outward*, *bridging* groups such as women's and environmental organizations held relatively little appeal for both the Canadian and foreign-born. Sports organizations (bridging and outward) only drew relatively large numbers of immigrants who have lived in Canada for 20 years or more. Foreign-born Canadians were active in some *inward* associations (professional organizations), but less so in others (labour unions). The analysis of sub-samples of immigrants demonstrated that an understanding of social capital in Canada's ethnocultural communities is often contingent on how immigrant status intersects with other identity markers.

[34] See, for example, Alain Pelletier, "Politics and Ethnicity: Representation of Ethnic and Visible-Minority Groups in the House of Commons," Ethno-cultural Groups and Visible Minorities in Canadian Politics, Kathy Megyery, ed. Volume 7 of the Research Studies for the royal Commission on Electoral Reform and Party Financing (Toronto: Dundurn Press, 1991) p. 101-160; Simard, "La representation des groupes ethnoculturels dans la région montréalise."

[35] See, for example, Black, "Representation in the Parliament of Canada"; and Political Participation Research Network.

[36] Henry Milner, "Civic Literacy in Comparative Context," Policy Matters 2.2 (2001); also, this magazine.

[37] See www.torontoyouth.com.

[38] See Philip Haid, Elder C. Marques and Jon Brown, "Re-focusing the Lens: Assessing the Challenge of Youth Involvement in Public Policy," (June 1, 1999) www.iog.ca.

[39] See Sylvia Bashevkin, Toeing the Lines: Women and Party Politics in English Canada, 2nd ed. (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1993).

[40] Sayers and Jetha's interviews with ethnic minority politicians point to "the permeability of Canadian parties."

[41] Daiva Stasiulis, "'Deep Diversity': Race and Ethnicity in Canadian Politics," Canadian Politics in the 1990s, 4th ed., Michael S. Whittington and Glen Williams, eds. (Peterborough: Nelson, 1995) p. 203-204.

[42] Stasiulis, p. 201.

[43] Tossutti, p. 23; See, also, Sayers and Jetha.

[44] See, for example, Anver Saloojee and Myer Siemiatycki, "Formal and Non-Formal Political Participation by Immigrants and Newcomers," Canadian Issues (April 2003) p. 42-44.

[45] Kymlicka, p. 120.

[46] See Erin Tolley, "Supplement, Substitute or Stepping Stone?: Understanding the Electoral and Non-Electoral Participation of Immigrants and Minorities" paper presented at the Sixth National Metropolis Conference, Edmonton, Alberta (March 21-24, 2003).

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[1] Respondents were divided into the following groups: sex (male, female); age (18-34, 35-50, 51 years and over); education (high school or less; some post-secondary or more); and annual household income (less than $40,000; $40,000-69,999; $70,000 or more).

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[1] Kymlicka,. Norman, (2000), in their article "Citizenship in Culturally Diverse Societies: Issues, Contexts Concepts", distinguish between "common citizenship" and democratic citizenship Kymlicka,. Norman, 2000: 10).

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