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Summary of: The Initial Destinations and Redistribution of Canada's Major Immigrant Groups: Changes over the Past Two Decades

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1. Introduction

In 1981, about 58% of immigrants who had come to Canada in the previous 10 years lived in Toronto, Vancouver, and Montréal; by 2001, this had increased to 74% (Statistics Canada 2003), triggering debate on the merits of a more “balanced geographic distribution of immigrants” (Citizenship and Immigration Canada-CIC 2001). Policies aimed at directing immigrants away from major gateway cities in many western countries have focused on the choice of initial destination, and little effort has been made to affect subsequent mobility. But such policies will work only if other, non-gateway regions, can keep immigrants or maintain balanced in- and out-migration. To this end, this study examines how Canada’s major immigrant groups arriving over the past two decades have altered their geographic concentration through time, comparing immigrants arriving in the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s, in the concentration levels of their initial destinations, and in their subsequent geographic dispersal. It pays attention to the dispersal pattern of groups whose initial settlements were influenced by government policies and questions the role of pre-existing immigrant communities in geographic distribution.

2. Past Research and Theoretical Framework

Geographic concentration of immigrants does not appear to change with time. This is often explained by the group affinity hypothesis: pre-existing ethnic communities have a strong effect in both attracting and retaining immigrants (Gurak and Kritz 2000; Kritz and Nogle 1994; Lieberman and Waters 1987; Newbold 1999), partly because of social networks and institutional resources. However, previous studies have not revealed whether group affinity reflects mostly the size of pre-existing immigrant populations or the presence of a network of kin and close friends. This distinction has important policy implications. If it is the size that matters the most, areas with larger pre-existing communities would attract more newcomers, and continuing immigration would further increase the geographic concentration of immigrants from the same source country. On the other hand, if it is the existence of a kinship network that matters, individual immigrants will move to and stay in non-gateway regions, as long as they have relatives or friends there.

This study examines to what extent the size of pre-existing immigrant communities affects the geographic distribution of immigrant groups in three unique ways: it examines how successive cohorts of immigrants from a source country differ in their choice of initial destination; it examines the role of pre-existing immigrant communities by tracing changes in the geographic distribution of immigrants in the years following their arrival; and it statistically isolates the effects of the size of pre-existing immigrant communities from other locational attributes using pooled data from five consecutive censuses, and applying conditional logit choice modeling.

3. Data and methods

The study uses the data from five consecutive Canadian censuses, 1981 to 2001, from which it is possible to examine changes in the geographic concentration of a given cohort of immigrants. Immigrants are grouped into cohorts by five-year periods: 1976–80, 1981–1985, 1986–1990, 1991–1995, and 1996–2000. The study focuses on 15 immigrant groups from the top 10 source countries in either the 1981 or the 2001 census, based on the number of immigrants who arrived in the preceding five years. The US, China, India, and Philippines were among the 10 top source countries

in both the 1981 and 2001 census.¹ The UK, Portugal, Guyana, Haiti, Vietnam, and Jamaica were only in the top 10 in the 1981 census, and Pakistan, Iran, South Korea, Sri Lanka, the former USSR, and Romania were only in the 2001 list.² Sri Lanka was not selected, as the number of immigrants before 1981 was small. Together, the selected 15 groups account for about 65% of total recent immigrants (living in Canada for 5 years or less) in 1981 and 63% in 2001.

The analysis looks at the distribution of immigrants across 8 geographic locations: Toronto, Montréal, Vancouver, the rest of Ontario, the rest of Quebec and Atlantic region, the rest of British Columbia (plus Territories), the Prairies (Manitoba and Saskatchewan), and Alberta.³ To establish a time ordering for the effect of a pre-existing immigrant community on the current distribution of an immigrant population, both the absolute and relative size of pre-existing immigrant communities are derived from the previous census (McDonald 2003). As distribution is highly skewed, the natural log of the group size is used to measure the absolute size of the pre-existing community (Kritz and Nogle 1994). The relative size of immigrants from a source country, measured as the share of an immigrant group in the total local population, reflects the importance of the group relative to the total local population (Moore and Rosenberg 1995). Further, since immigrant communities may grow at different rates across localities, the absolute and relative size measures are calculated for each census and have a time-varying nature.

The study considers such possible confounding factors as the population size (natural log) of the census metropolitan area (CMA, or the mean size of CMAs in regions outside the three major centres), and unemployment rate. Individual-level factors are included in the multivariate models to control for cohort differences in population characteristics: sex (men=0, women=1), age, education, home language, and family structure. Education level includes: university degree, some post-secondary, high school graduation, and less than high school. Home language includes: English, French, and all others. Family structure includes: unattached individuals, two or more adults without children, two or more adults with children, and lone-parent families.

In this study, the author uses a Conditional Logit Choice Model (McFadden 1973) to estimate the distribution of immigrants across geographic locations. For each group, two conditional logit choice models are estimated sequentially. The first includes seven dummy variables for the choice of geographic location; it examines whether successive arrival cohorts differ in the choice of initial destination, if distribution changes over time, and if cohorts differ in their redistribution. The second adds individual characteristics, population size, unemployment rate, and the size of pre-existing immigrant communities at alternative locations; it estimates the effect of a pre-existing immigrant community, controlling for changes in population characteristics, and variations in local demographic and economic conditions. The author estimates the distribution of immigrants by arrival cohort and year since immigration, based on the estimation of each model. The author then summarizes distribution across the 8 regions, in an index of dissimilarity, to compare the difference in distribution between a cohort of immigrants in a certain year after immigration, and the native-born.

1. Chinese immigrants were from People's Republic of China, Hong Kong, Taiwan.

2. Countries of the former USSR are combined since they were not coded separately prior to the 1996 Census.

3. Finer groupings produce a sample size too large to handle in estimating the conditional logit models.

4. Results

4.1. Changes in the choice of initial destination among major immigrant groups: From 1981 to 2001, immigrants became more concentrated in Toronto and Vancouver (Table 1). This trend resulted primarily from changes in the choice of initial destination by more recent immigrants. Overall, immigrants who arrived in the 1980s and 1990s are more concentrated in their initial destinations than are those who arrived in the 1970s (Table 2). New arrivals choosing Toronto and Vancouver as their initial destination increased from 42.7% in the late 1970s, to 55.5% in the late 1980s. About 67% of the total increase results from the general trend of increased concentration among immigrant groups, the remaining 33% to shifts in source regions.

But changes in the distribution of initial destinations were smaller in the 1990s, and the tendency of arrivals to increasingly congregate in major centers subsided. Only Vancouver had a substantial gain in immigrants, replacing Montréal as Canada's second largest immigrant city, and reflecting the preference for Vancouver among recent immigrants from China, Philippines, Eastern Europe, Iran, and South Korea. Montréal's share actually declined. Between the late 1980s and the late 1990s, the share of arrivals choosing Toronto and Vancouver increased only 5.6 percentage points, about 31% of which is attributable to the general trend of increased concentration, and 69% to the shift in source regions.

4.2. Redistribution after immigration: Upon arrival, about 44% of total immigrants arriving between 1976 and 1980 were located in regions outside the three major gateway centres, and redistribution over 10 years produced a difference of only 5 percentage points (Table 2). The effect of redistribution was different across successive arrival cohorts. In the late 1970s and early 1980s, redistribution reduced the proportion of new immigrants in Montréal and non-gateway regions; in the late 1980s, it reduced the proportion of immigrants in Montréal, but had no effect on the proportion in non-gateway regions. In contrast, in the early 1990s, redistribution increased the proportion of immigrants in non-gateway regions.

An exception is the Vietnamese, who arrived in the 1976–1980 cohort, the majority of whom (93%) were refugees whose initial placement was assigned by government agents or private sponsors. Many who were initially located in non-gateway regions quickly moved to Toronto and Vancouver. Non-gateway regions initially received more than 60% of this cohort, but five years later these regions retained only about 47%, further reduced to 40% after another five years. By way of contrast, about 37% of the 1991–1995 cohort of Vietnamese, only a small fraction of whom were refugees, lived in non-gateway regions upon arrival: this proportion remained the same 5 years later.

This result is consistent with studies showing that refugees whose initial destinations were assigned have very high mobility (Desbarates 1985; Simich 2003). Not shown by these studies, however, is that despite high mobility, most refugees initially settling in non-gateway regions remained long after their initial placement. In the case of the 1976–1980 Vietnamese cohort, 57% of those placed in non-gateway regions remained in non-gateway centres 15 years after their initial placement.

Table 1. Percentage distribution of immigrants by geographic regions, 1981 and 2001

		Toronto	Vancouver	Montreal	Rest of Quebec, and Atlantic provinces	Rest of Ontario	Prairies	Alberta	Rest of B.C.
Canadian-born	1981	9.2	4.6	12.3	26.4	23.8	8.6	9.1	6.0
	2001	10.7	5.0	11.4	23.4	24.4	7.8	10.3	7.1
All immigrants	1981	29.7	10.0	11.9	3.6	23.3	5.9	9.3	6.4
	2001	37.3	13.5	11.4	2.6	18.7	3.3	8.1	5.1
<u>By country of birth</u>									
China	1981	32.8	31.0	5.4	1.5	8.9	4.1	12.3	4.2
	2001	41.1	36.6	4.6	0.8	6.3	1.5	7.6	1.6
India	1981	33.4	20.4	7.2	2.0	13.3	3.2	9.0	11.6
	2001	46.5	21.6	4.4	0.8	8.8	2.0	7.9	7.9
Philippines	1981	40.0	16.2	6.0	1.0	8.7	16.0	9.8	2.3
	2001	44.3	19.8	5.7	0.5	7.0	9.7	10.6	2.3
Former USSR	1981	27.3	7.2	9.8	0.9	21.8	17.3	11.3	4.5
	2001	46.6	7.1	10.6	1.0	15.6	7.0	7.9	4.2
Pakistan	1981	45.8	4.4	15.3	2.0	15.0	3.9	11.3	2.3
	2001	64.4	6.3	8.1	0.6	11.8	1.3	6.9	0.8
Iran	1981	32.8	21.3	19.8	1.6	13.0	0.8	6.1	4.7
	2001	48.6	24.2	10.0	0.9	10.7	1.1	3.4	1.2
U.S.A.	1981	12.3	8.7	7.1	13.8	23.0	8.8	14.1	12.2
	2001	15.8	9.7	6.4	11.9	25.7	5.3	11.6	13.6
South Korea	1981	51.9	16.4	3.3	0.8	11.2	2.9	12.1	1.4
	2001	44.2	29.4	3.8	1.0	10.3	1.1	7.3	2.8
Romania	1981	22.5	5.5	25.7	1.4	24.8	7.0	9.5	3.8
	2001	34.4	7.8	22.0	2.3	22.2	2.6	6.3	2.3
U.K.	1981	26.0	11.7	4.2	3.6	30.4	5.5	9.2	9.4
	2001	23.6	11.4	2.4	3.7	33.1	3.9	9.8	12.1
Jamaica	1981	71.1	2.0	8.0	0.4	11.2	2.3	4.1	0.8
	2001	76.7	1.8	4.9	0.3	11.0	1.6	3.1	0.7
Vietnam	1981	17.5	7.5	18.7	6.4	17.7	9.9	17.6	4.8
	2001	35.5	14.9	14.3	1.4	13.3	3.3	14.8	2.5
Guyana	1981	71.9	2.0	5.6	0.4	12.6	2.8	4.2	0.5
	2001	80.1	1.2	3.7	0.4	10.0	1.6	2.6	0.4
Haiti	1981	0.6	0.1	90.9	4.8	3.2	0.2	0.3	0.0
	2001	1.4	0.3	85.7	4.1	7.3	0.2	0.5	0.4
Portugal	1981	47.2	4.0	13.2	1.2	22.7	4.5	3.1	4.0
	2001	51.4	3.5	12.8	1.0	21.9	3.5	2.9	3.0

Source: 1981 and 2001 Censuses, 20% sample micro files.

Similar patterns were observed among Iranians and Romanians who arrived in the late 1980s, about half of whom were refugees. Compared with those coming before and after that period, they were more likely to locate in non-gateway regions. Even though they showed a stronger tendency than other groups to shift concentration towards Toronto and Vancouver, over two-thirds of those who initially settled in non-gateway regions remained there 10 years later.

Of the Korean immigrants who arrived near the end of the 1980s, and whose initial destination was strongly influenced by Quebec's aggressive recruitment of business or investment immigrants, a much higher proportion (13%) initially settled in Montréal than cohorts arriving in the late 1970s or late 1990s. The number of Koreans in Montréal from this cohort declined about 40% over a period of 10 years, but a decade after immigration, the proportion located in Montréal was still much higher than earlier cohorts. This suggests that high mobility after immigration does not completely alter the distribution of initial destinations, even for groups whose initial destinations were influenced by government interventions.

The estimated dissimilarity indexes by cohort and year since immigration, derived from the first conditional logit choice model for each immigrant group, confirm that the scale of redistribution was small for most groups. The dissimilarity index also compares the estimated geographic distribution with the concurrent distribution of the Canadian-born. In most cases, the dissimilarity index changed no more than 0.05 in value 15 years after immigration, suggesting that redistribution led to a difference of about 5% of immigrants who would need to change locations in order to have the same distribution as the Canadian-born. There were only four cohorts of immigrants whose index increased over 0.05 in value. Of these four, three were related to refugees. Although redistribution was small in scale, it increased the geographic concentration of Chinese and Vietnamese, but reduced that of immigrants from the US, the UK, and South Korea. For immigrants from other major source countries, redistribution did not have a consistent effect across cohorts, but did reduce concentration among arrivals in the late 1990s.

4.3. *The role of the size of pre-existing immigrant communities:* Two observations cast serious doubt on the group affinity hypothesis: one is the subsiding tendency of new arrivals to congregate in major gateway centres during the 1990s; the other is the fact that redistribution is small in scale and actually reduces the concentration in the initial destination of some immigrant groups, suggesting that a large pre-existing immigrant community does not necessarily increase a place's ability to attract those already in the country. When the effect of the relative and absolute size of a pre-existing immigrant community is estimated without controlling for location fixed effects, results show that the locational choices of individual immigrants are significantly associated with the size (both absolute and relative) of pre-existing immigrant communities, with two exceptions: first, the relative size of a pre-existing immigrant community is negatively associated with the locational choice of immigrants from the US; second, the absolute size for Vietnamese in a location is not significantly associated with their locational choices.

When location fixed effects are accounted for, the relative size of the pre-existing immigrant population does not have a significant effect on locational choices for most groups. Only among immigrants from the US and the UK, the least concentrated groups, does a large share of previous immigrants attract additional immigrants. Nor does the absolute size of a pre-existing immigrant community have a significant effect on locational choice for most groups. When significant, it tends to reduce rather than increase the likelihood of choosing a location. Results suggest that the size of a pre-existing immigrant community does not have a strong effect on immigrants, once other locational attributes are accounted for. Accounting for location fixed effects has a smaller impact on the significance of the total population size of the metropolitan area(s) and regional unemployment rates. Before controlling for location fixed effects, the population size of the metropolitan area(s) has a positive and significant association with locational choice for all groups in the study. This association remains significant after accounting for location fixed effects for all groups, except for

the former USSR and Jamaica, for whom the association becomes statistically insignificant, suggesting that immigrants were attracted to urban areas experiencing population growth. Before controlling for location fixed effect, regional unemployment rate has a negative and significant association with locational choices for groups from China, Philippines, Iran, the US, South Korea, the UK, Vietnam, and Guyana; a positive and significant association with the choices of those from Romania and Haiti; and is not significant for the remaining five groups. After controlling for location fixed effects, the effect of regional unemployment rate remains negative and significant for immigrants from China, Iran, the US, the UK, and Guyana, but is not significant for other groups.

Table 2. Percentage distribution of immigrants by source country, cohort and year(s) since immigration

	Arrival cohort	1-5 years after immigration				11-15 years after immigration			
		Toronto	Vancouver	Montreal	Other	Toronto	Vancouver	Montreal	Other
China	1976-1980	35.6	29.2	4.9	30.2	39.8	30.1	4.3	25.8
	1986-1990	47.4	31.3	5.0	16.3	49.0	32.7	3.7	14.6
	1996-2000	39.9	38.1	5.3	16.7				
India	1976-1980	34.0	21.7	6.5	37.8	37.1	26.1	5.7	31.1
	1986-1990	50.0	22.0	5.3	22.7	50.1	23.0	3.1	23.8
	1996-2000	56.4	17.0	4.5	22.1				
Philippines	1976-1980	39.2	15.6	5.6	39.6	39.2	17.3	4.7	38.7
	1986-1990	46.8	17.1	6.3	29.7	48.6	17.0	5.9	28.5
	1996-2000	41.3	26.1	6.3	26.2				
Former USSR	1976-1980	45.8	6.3	11.1	36.7	55.6	5.6	11.4	27.3
	1986-1990	65.1	3.6	8.7	22.6	61.9	5.0	9.1	24.0
	1996-2000	57.2	9.4	13.0	20.4				
Pakistan	1976-1980	47.8	4.0	13.7	34.4	56.8	3.5	10.4	29.2
	1986-1990	59.2	8.0	10.0	22.9	58.2	10.0	8.6	23.1
	1996-2000	70.3	5.1	6.5	18.1				
Iran	1976-1980	33.5	26.1	18.8	21.6	35.7	26.9	16.4	21.1
	1986-1990	43.3	15.2	15.5	26.0	48.4	21.2	10.6	19.8
	1996-2000	50.1	26.9	7.2	15.8				
U.S.A.	1976-1980	14.9	8.1	6.9	70.2	14.9	9.1	6.6	69.4
	1986-1990	18.0	12.3	8.2	61.4	16.6	10.2	8.0	65.2
	1996-2000	24.6	12.2	8.0	55.3				
South Korea	1976-1980	50.1	16.8	3.8	29.3	49.6	21.2	2.9	26.4
	1986-1990	39.8	26.3	13.1	20.9	45.9	21.9	8.8	23.4
	1996-2000	41.0	34.5	2.4	22.0				
Romania	1976-1980	40.5	7.0	21.7	30.8	32.7	5.9	28.3	33.1
	1986-1990	30.7	4.9	20.5	44.0	33.2	8.8	19.9	38.2
	1996-2000	41.4	8.1	21.7	28.8				
U.K.	1976-1980	26.7	11.8	4.4	57.1	24.7	12.8	2.5	59.9
	1986-1990	27.9	13.9	2.9	55.3	27.2	12.1	2.0	58.6
	1996-2000	24.8	14.1	3.3	57.8				
Jamaica	1976-1980	70.6	2.6	7.5	19.2	72.9	2.3	6.0	18.8
	1986-1990	79.4	0.7	6.6	13.3	79.2	1.1	6.6	13.2
	1996-2000	84.3	1.0	2.8	11.8				
Vietnam	1976-1980	18.3	7.9	12.5	61.4	32.6	13.4	14.1	39.9
	1986-1990	34.9	10.9	11.2	43.1	36.2	16.4	11.1	36.3
	1996-2000	39.5	14.6	12.4	33.5				
Guyana	1976-1980	74.3	1.5	3.8	20.4	77.7	0.9	3.7	17.7
	1986-1990	83.8	0.3	4.4	11.4	86.2	0.3	3.8	9.6
	1996-2000	89.5	0.8	1.5	8.2				
Haiti	1976-1980	0.5	0.0	93.6	5.8	1.0	0.2	91.2	7.6
	1986-1990	0.9	0.1	85.8	13.2	1.4	0.5	84.2	14.0
	1996-2000	1.6	0.4	81.1	16.9				
Portugal	1976-1980	46.5	4.2	12.9	36.4	50.1	2.6	15.4	31.9
	1986-1990	58.8	1.3	11.1	28.9	58.6	1.3	13.9	26.2
	1996-2000	65.1	3.2	7.8	23.9				
Total	1976-1980	31.1	11.6	13.1	44.2	34.4	13.3	13.0	39.3
	1986-1990	42.0	13.4	13.6	30.9	43.4	13.9	11.9	30.8
	1996-2000	43.2	17.8	11.7	27.2				

Source: 1981 and 2001 Censuses, 20% sample micro files.

5. Summary and Discussion

Even though new immigrants are more likely to choose Toronto and Vancouver as their initial destination today than two decades ago, there are indications that the rise in concentration levels at the initial destinations of immigrants observed in the 1970s and 1980s subsided during the 1990s. The rising concentration in the 1970s and 1980s was attributable to the increase in the concentration of initial destination among most groups, reflecting the tendency of immigrants to be drawn to cities because of a demand for both high-skilled and ancillary workers (Massey et al. 1994). In the 1990s, any rise in the concentration level of immigrants at their initial destination results from a shift in immigrant source regions. Changes in source countries have stabilised since the early 1990s, and the source country's effect on overall immigrant concentration will not likely continue to increase. In fact, there was little increase in the tendency of immigrant groups to concentrate in Toronto and Vancouver between the 1980s and 1990s. Both experienced a slower employment growth from 1991 to 2001 than in the previous decade, and recent immigrants' earnings relative to non-immigrants deteriorated during the 1990s (Aydemir and Skuterud, 2004; Reitz 2001). Since most of Canada's recent immigrants live in major gateway centres, their poor performance in the labour market may discourage the further concentration of new arrivals in these centres.

Over the past two decades, changes in the concentration level of immigrants at their initial destination were the major factor in the geographic distribution of immigrants. Redistribution after immigration increased geographic concentration for some, and reduced it for others. For immigrants as a whole, redistribution increased concentration towards Toronto and Vancouver among those who arrived in the 1970s and 1980s, but not for arrivals of the 1990s. Overall, redistribution was small in scale for most immigrant groups. This was true even for those whose initial settlement was influenced by government intervention: most who first settled in non-gateway regions remained there 15 years later, but large, non-gateway cities had higher retention rates than small cities or rural areas. Mobility after initial placement was high among refugees, but did not completely alter the distribution of their initial destinations, probably due either to return migration or to the exchange of out- and in-flows.

Finally, this study finds that the size of the pre-existing immigrant community does not have an independent effect on increasing the geographic concentration of immigrants when location fixed effects are controlled for. For some immigrant groups, a large absolute size of the pre-existing immigrant community even discourages further concentration. These results suggest that a location's overall attractiveness to immigrants plays a major role in location choices, rather than the sheer size of pre-existing immigrant communities. Immigrant communities develop and grow in major gateway cities because of economic and non-economic opportunities. The size of pre-existing immigrant communities correlates very strongly with size of the city of settlement, and the latter is virtually collinear with presence of amenities and opportunities. The size of pre-existing immigrant communities is actually a poor measure of group affinity effects, but social networks of families and friends do attract immigrants, whether in gateway or non-gateway regions.

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