

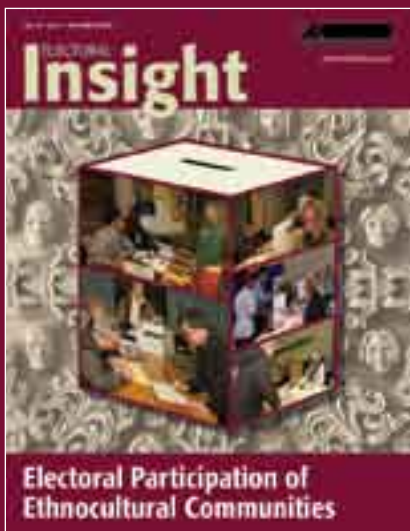
# ELECTORAL Insight



## Electoral Participation of Ethnocultural Communities

# Contents

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Eleanor Milne, Chris Fairbrother  
and Marcel Joanisse  
*The Vote* (1979–1980)  
Indiana limestone, 121.9 x 182.8 cm,  
House of Commons, Ottawa

Sixth in a series of sculptures on the east wall of the House of Commons chamber, *The Vote* is a wheel-shaped high relief with a central “X,” the traditional mark made on the ballot when voting. The spokes of the wheel represent Canada’s rivers, symbolizing the great distances Canadians once travelled to exercise their franchise. The faces represent the various races and the two sexes in the population, all of whom now have the right to vote. The base stone shows four heads with flowing hair whose mouths shape, in song, the first syllables of Canada’s national anthem, “O-Ca-na-da.”



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Submissions that might be of interest to *Electoral Insight* readers are welcome, although publication cannot be guaranteed. If used, submissions may be edited for length and clarity.

Please address all contributions and letters to *Electoral Insight*, Outreach, Communications and Research, Elections Canada, 257 Slater Street, Ottawa, Canada K1A 0M6 (EI-PE@elections.ca).

## Chief Electoral Officer's Message



Jean-Pierre Kingsley  
Chief Electoral Officer of Canada

# Electoral Participation of Ethnocultural Communities

While nearly one fifth of Canada's population is foreign-born, relatively little has been known about the attitudes and federal voter turnout of new citizens and ethnocultural communities. It was therefore important for me to obtain a better understanding of this phenomenon to ensure that Elections Canada's services respond to their needs. It is widely thought that immigrants vote less than the Canadian-born electorate. This issue of *Electoral Insight*, however, presents a considerably more complex picture.

According to the contributors to this issue, the participation of the members of Canada's many diverse ethnocultural groups, whether born in Canada or not, is influenced by their cultural heritage, ethnic origin, interest in politics, sources of information, education, income, age and length of residence here. It is also important to note that just as participation and attitudes may vary between the Canadian-born and immigrant populations, so do they vary among ethnocultural groups, including visible minorities.

I wish to thank the many authors for their contributions to this issue. In their articles, Jack Jedwab of the Association for Canadian Studies, and the Canadian Election Studies group, compare the turnout of immigrant groups and native-born Canadians, and they explore why there are differences. A survey of the views of federal candidates about visible-minority representation in Parliament is analyzed by Jerome H. Black of McGill University and Bruce M. Hicks of the Université de Montréal.

This issue contains three case studies of great interest. Andrew Matheson (M.A., Immigration and Settlement Studies, Ryerson University) examines South Asian political representation in Canada, particularly in Toronto's suburbs. Carolle Simard of the Université du Québec à Montréal reports on the political involvement of several groups of new Canadians in Montréal. The print media portrayal of Muslim Canadians during recent federal elections is examined by Yasmeen Abu-Laban and Linda Trimble, both of the University of Alberta.

The scope of this issue widens with the inclusion of articles from Antoine Bilodeau and Mebs Kanji of Concordia University, about the political engagement of immigrants in several Anglo-democracies, and international electoral consultant Rafael López-Pintor, about measures to encourage electoral participation in post-conflict countries with ethnic divides.

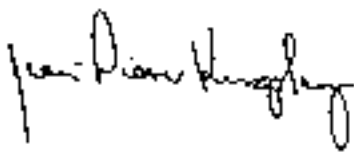
Elections Canada's initiatives for ethnocultural communities, which date back to 1988, are part of its larger outreach program. The agency has adopted a five-pronged approach to outreach, comprising leadership, partnerships, research, communications and operational initiatives.

Beginning with ads in community newspapers in 10 languages, Elections Canada's communications initiatives for ethnocultural communities have greatly expanded over the years. "My future, my vote" served as the central theme of the advertising program used at the 2006 election. Messages in 25 languages were placed in ethnocultural newspapers and in 23 languages on ethnocultural radio stations. Mainstream English and French television ads were voiced over in 12 additional languages. We also filled requests for almost 80,000 copies of our voter information guide, which was produced in 26 languages. Our distribution network has widened with the assistance of community associations and citizenship courts.

On the operational front, returning officers can appoint community relations officers to help identify and address the needs of individual ethnocultural communities and encourage their participation. For the 2006 general election, 64 community relations officers were hired in 53 electoral districts with significant ethnocultural populations. They partnered with ethnocultural groups to conduct outreach drives and distribute information about registering and voting. Returning officers also hired staff who were representative of the populations being served, poll officials who spoke the languages represented in their communities and, in some cases, interpreters.

As part of its research program, Elections Canada recently commissioned a concept paper examining the electoral participation and outreach practices targeted at ethnocultural communities in Canada and other national and international jurisdictions. The paper was prepared by Dr. Livianna Tossutti of Brock University. This study, based on an analysis of Statistics Canada's Ethnic Diversity Survey of 2002, puts forth a nuanced perspective. It reveals that when all other factors were controlled, newcomers voted less than established immigrants in the 2000 general election. As well, immigrants from certain visible minority groups voted at higher rates than Canadian-born members of these communities. Concerning outreach practices, while Tossutti regards Canada as a world leader in voter education, she recommends customized outreach initiatives for non-European ethnocultural communities and Canadian-born visible minorities. Elections Canada intends to publish this study in spring 2007.

Recognizing the growing importance of facilitating the participation of ethnocultural communities in the electoral system, Elections Canada is using the findings and recommendations of Dr. Tossutti's study to refine its outreach initiatives through a long-term strategic plan. We will continue to increase our consultations and partnerships with ethnocultural communities and organizations. Our ultimate objective is to implement a proactive and effective outreach strategy – one that ensures that all eligible voters, regardless of ethnicity or mother tongue, have every opportunity to cast their ballots. The research and findings of the authors in this issue of *Electoral Insight* will be of great assistance. ✎



Jean-Pierre Kingsley



# The “Roots” of Immigrant and Ethnic Voter Participation in Canada

Jack Jedwab

*Executive Director, Association for Canadian Studies*

*It is widely held that voter turnout among immigrants is lower than among the Canadian-born electorate. But this view fails to account sufficiently for the diverse pattern of voter participation among Canada’s many ethnocultural and ethno-racial groups. For example, there are differences between some communities of European and non-European origins in self-reported levels of voter participation. The extent to which ethnic attachment influences participation is more the object of speculation than empirical testing. Relatively few data sets have permitted such analysis. The Ethnic Diversity Survey of Statistics Canada provides useful insights in this area. The data reveal that people who settled in Canada between 1991 and 2001 were far less likely to report they voted than those arriving before 1991. Yet they also show that rates of voter participation are higher among foreign-born than Canadian-born members of visible minorities. Such results raise questions about the extent to which “rootedness” increases voter participation. More survey respondents with strong ethnic identities reported they voted in federal elections than those with weaker identification. Therefore, such attachment does not appear to undercut participation. This essay suggests the need to rethink certain notions about the relationship between ethnicity and voter participation.*

Canada’s foreign-born population is largely comprised of persons whose ethnic origins are neither British nor French. As it is widely held that immigrants are less inclined to vote than non-immigrants, minority ethnic communities have become the objects of increasing attention among those concerned with declining voter turnout in democratic countries. And since nearly one in five Canadians is foreign-born, it is not surprising that there is considerable interest here in voter participation among immigrants and ethnic communities.

Those who use the non-immigrant/immigrant dichotomy to explain differences in voter participation sometimes pay insufficient attention to the diverse ethnocultural and ethno-racial backgrounds of foreign-born Canadians. In fact, it is not apparent that immigrants vote less than non-immigrants. But certain ethnic groups are more likely to

vote than others, and frequently the difference is associated with how recently the immigration of a given community occurred. With some exceptions, there are differences in self-reported levels of voter participation between communities of European and non-European origin. Even so, in several non-European groups, self-reported rates of voter participation are higher among foreign-born than Canadian-born members.

Employing data from Statistics Canada’s 2002 Ethnic Diversity Survey, we examine reported differences in federal voter participation for several European and non-European groups. Findings for Canadians of non-European origins are most effectively analyzed by using data on visible minorities. (Statistics Canada defines visible minorities as persons who are identified under the *Employment Equity Act* as being non-Caucasian in race or non-white in colour.)



To further understand the immigrant/non-immigrant electoral dichotomy, we analyze self-reported voter participation among immigrant and non-immigrant members of visible minorities. Analysts of voter turnout have established strong correlations between age and participation rates, and some insight will be provided into whether ethnic identification also plays a role.

Many Canadians believe that voter choices are frequently connected with ethnic identification. A January 2006 survey conducted by Ipsos Canada found that some three in four Canadians agree that “members of certain ethnic minorities in Canada tend to vote as a bloc for specific parties or candidates.”<sup>1</sup> On the other hand, in the same survey two thirds disagreed that they would be more likely to vote for a candidate who shared their ethnic or religious background. It is worth noting that immigrant and non-immigrant respondents, visible minorities and others were equally unlikely to vote for a candidate on that basis.

### Literature on ethnicity and voter turnout

It remains unclear to what extent ethnic attachments encourage minority voters to participate in elections.

Photos: Elections Canada



*Finding a relationship between ethnicity and participation in voting is complicated by the multi-dimensional definition of ethnic identity, which includes factors such as origin, ancestry, language and religion.*

How ethnic attachments influence such participation has more often been the object of speculation than empirical testing. In effect, to date relatively few data sets permit us to causally relate the complex expression of ethnic identity to aspects of democratic participation. Analysis of the relationship between ethnicity and voting is further rendered complex by the multi-dimensional definition of ethnic identity, which includes elements such as origin, ancestry, identity, language and religion.

In studying the participation rates of ethnic groups, Black measured the relative impact of ethnicity and place of birth on voter turnout. Controlling for

socio-economic status, age, political attitudes and organizational involvement, he found that only the West Indian respondents (all of whom were foreign-born) vote significantly less than the reference group – Canadian-born British.<sup>2</sup> According to Black, it is interesting to note that controlling for length of residence in Canada weakens, but does not eliminate, the West Indian vote differential.

Lapp, on the other hand, stresses that both the Canadian-born and foreign-born populations possess a diverse ethnocultural makeup.<sup>3</sup> In her study of Montréal’s ethnic communities, Lapp notes that voter turnout in some ethnic groups is higher than the provincial average. She suggests that this is the case for the Greek community, though not for Montréal’s Chinese and Jewish communities. In the case of the Italians and Portuguese, group rates of voter participation were on par with those of the broader population. Lapp points out that variations occur despite controls for citizenship, period of immigration and home language. In effect, turnout is not merely a function of length of time spent in Canada. Consequently, Lapp contends that immigrant adaptation is not always the best predictor of voter participation.

Often underlying the perceived immigrant/non-immigrant voter dichotomy is the question of identification with Canada. In this context, some assumptions may be made about the extent to which ethnic group attachments undercut participation in the electoral process. Electoral analyses that have focused on cultural integration suggest that newcomers are less knowledgeable about Canadian political norms and values than native-born Canadians.<sup>4</sup> The fact that immigrants come from different cultures also may differentially affect their political participation in Canada. They may encounter difficulty in transferring their political experiences in their countries of origin to the political process in Canada. Explanations of limited voter participation based on problems of cultural integration have come under increasing scrutiny. Contrary to findings on the role of knowledge in the formation of public opinion, Bilodeau and Nevitte contend that factual knowledge about the host environment plays no significant role in how immigrants develop trust in host political institutions. Immigrants who knew more about the host democratic environment did not exhibit higher or lower levels of confidence than those who knew little.<sup>5</sup>

Lapp maintains that the level of interest in politics may be an important consideration in explaining rates of voter turnout. Montréal Chinese community leaders interviewed by Lapp said that it was difficult to convince people to vote due to their lack of interest in politics. On the other hand, Greek community leaders attributed disproportionately high turnout to strong interest in politics.

An Environics survey, conducted for the Association for Canadian Studies during July and August 2004, made an

effort to determine the degree of interest in federal politics. The survey revealed that 73% of respondents felt that there was no change in their interest in politics in the aftermath of the 2004 federal election. However, among the other respondents, more said their interest increased (19%) than said that it declined (8%). The immigrants surveyed were far more likely on average to report rising interest in politics. This was particularly true for the non-European immigrants, with some 30% indicating growing interest in politics in the aftermath of the 2004 contest, 60% declaring no change and 10% reporting a decline in interest.<sup>6</sup>

## Immigrant concentration and voter turnout: Federal elections of 2004 and 2006

Results of the 2004 and 2006 federal elections reveal that ridings with high concentrations of immigrants had lower than average rates of voter participation. In 2001, nearly 90% of all immigrants resided in the provinces of Ontario, Quebec and British Columbia – notably in the Toronto, Vancouver and Montréal areas. As shown in Table 1, the ridings with the largest percentage of immigrants are located in these metropolitan areas.

**Table 1**  
**Voter Turnout in the 2004 and 2006 Federal Elections for 15 Federal Ridings with the Largest Immigrant Populations**

Location	% of riding population born outside Canada	Voter turnout in 2004 federal election	Voter turnout in 2006 federal election
Canada overall	–	60.9	64.7
Scarborough–Rouge River	66.7	51.1	57.0
Scarborough–Agincourt	64.0	56.4	61.7
York West	61.2	48.5	57.9
Markham–Unionville	60.0	56.1	61.7
Don Valley East	59.6	59.4	63.8
Mississauga East–Cooksville	58.0	52.4	58.3
Vancouver South	57.7	55.8	56.4
Richmond	57.2	56.7	56.3
York Centre	57.0	56.8	61.1
Etobicoke North	55.8	51.0	59.0
Davenport	55.5	52.9	60.6
Vancouver Kingsway	55.0	58.0	58.7
Mississauga–Brampton South	53.6	53.8	60.0
York South–Weston	53.5	51.7	60.0
Saint-Laurent–Cartierville	46.9	54.3	55.3
Burnaby–New Westminster	46.0	59.0	60.1

Sources: Statistics Canada, Census of Canada, 2001; and Elections Canada, Official Voting Results, 2004 and 2006

While a poll-by-poll analysis would shed greater light on the degree to which immigrant groups participated in the 2004 and 2006 federal elections, the overall results suggest that ridings with higher numbers of immigrants have rates of voter turnout that are at least below the average in the rest of their respective provinces. The national participation rate in 2006 was 64.7% (in 2004, it was 60.9%); in the province of Ontario, federal voter turnout was 66.6% in 2006 (61.8% in 2004), in British Columbia, it was 63.7% in 2006 (63.3% in 2004) and in Quebec, it was 63.9% in 2006 (60.5% in 2004). Consistent with the overall increases in voter turnout between 2004 and 2006, Table 1 demonstrates that the 15 ridings with the largest numbers of immigrants generally followed the trend. Indeed, in several Ontario ridings with significant immigrant populations, the percentage increases in turnout for the 2006 federal election were greater than those for the province as a whole.

### Canada's immigrant and ethnic groups: Reported rates of voter turnout

When surveyed, Canadians tend to collectively report higher rates of voter turnout than are shown by actual election outcomes. This is frequently attributed to the social desirability of indicating that one cast a ballot. Still, there is insight to be gained by looking at people's intentions, which provide an indication of the importance and value they attach to voting. Over 27,000 people describing themselves as eligible voters in the 2000 federal election took part in the 2002 Ethnic Diversity Survey (EDS).<sup>7</sup> Data from the EDS reveals that there is little difference in the extent to which eligible non-immigrants (78.8%)

and immigrants (77.6%) reported voting in federal elections. However, the survey does show a substantial gap between self-reported federal

voter participation on the part of immigrants who arrived before 1991 (83.4%) and those arriving between 1991 and 2001 (53%). Underlying

**Table 2**  
**Self-Reported Rates of Voter Participation for Selected Minorities in the 2000 Federal Election, by Place of Birth**

Place of birth	Voted	Did not vote	Total eligible voters surveyed	Reported voter turnout %
Canada	21,290	5,738	27,028	78.8
Europe	3,067	519	3,586	87.6
Africa	267	69	336	79.4
United States	305	86	391	78.0
Central America, South America, Caribbean and Bermuda	607	220	827	73.3
Asia and the Middle East	1,713	722	2,435	70.4

Source: Ethnic Diversity Survey, Statistics Canada and Department of Canadian Heritage, 2002

**Table 3**  
**Self-Reported Rates of Voter Participation in the 2000 Federal Election, by Selected Place of Birth**

Place of birth	Voted	Did not vote	Total eligible voters surveyed	Reported voter turnout %
Canada	21,290	5,738	27,028	78.8
Italy	470	34	504	94.0
Netherlands	210	14	224	93.7
United Kingdom	731	115	846	86.4
Germany	318	52	370	85.9
Poland	245	66	301	81.6
India	292	68	360	81.1
Portugal	194	49	243	79.8
United States	305	86	391	78.0
Philippines	220	71	291	75.6
People's Republic of China	263	110	373	70.5
Hong Kong Special Administrative Region	277	151	428	64.7

Source: Ethnic Diversity Survey, Statistics Canada and Department of Canadian Heritage, 2002





Members of the Filipino-Canadian community greet Queen Elizabeth II in Toronto, during her 2002 tour of Canada.

Table 3 further illustrates the differences in self-reported voter turnout in the 2000 federal election between persons born in a number of European countries and those born in certain Asian countries. Those born in India are an exception to the difference between the European- and Asian-born populations.

born and foreign-born members of the same groups. With the exception of Japanese respondents, immigrants tend to self-report higher levels of participation than non-immigrants. These results suggest that more analysis needs to be directed at the relationship between immigrant and minority status in influencing voter participation.

Lower voter participation among younger Canadians has been widely documented. As the average age of visible minority groups is lower than that of the white population, it is useful to look at the reported levels of participation on the basis of age cohort. As observed in Table 5, there

these results are diverging patterns of reported participation between European and non-European immigrants. Table 2 reveals that immigrants born in Asia, the Middle East and Latin America report lower rates of voting in federal elections than the Canadian-born electorate. Immigrants born in European countries tend to report higher rates of such participation than the native-born group.

The differences shown above are reflected in the EDS data on self-reported visible-minority participation rates. Eligible voters who are not members of visible-minority groups generally report higher than average turnouts. But most striking in Table 4 are the differences between Canadian-

*Immigrants born in Asia, the Middle East and Latin America report lower rates of voting in federal elections than the Canadian-born electorate.*

are wide differences in reported participation between survey

**Table 4**  
**Self-Reported Rates of Voter Participation for Selected Visible Minorities in the 2000 Federal Election, by Immigrant Status**

Group	Total voter participation	Born in Canada	Born outside Canada
Not a visible minority	81.8	80.9	83.6
South Asian	70.9	60.4	78.2
Filipino	69.7	59.6	75.6
Arab	65.5	55.9	75.1
Black	61.8	53.2	74.6
Chinese	64.9	62.8	65.8
Japanese	75.8	77.1	60.8

Source: Ethnic Diversity Survey, Statistics Canada and Department of Canadian Heritage, 2002

**Table 5**  
**Self-Reported Rates of Voter Participation in the 2000 Federal Election, for Selected Visible Minorities, by Selected Age Cohorts**

Group	18-24	45-54
Not a visible minority	50.0	88.9
Japanese	49.0	85.7
South Asian	49.2	85.0
Black	32.8	85.0
Filipino	52.2	79.7
Chinese	37.0	73.9
Arab	40.0	ns
<b>Total</b>	<b>47.7</b>	<b>87.6</b>

Source: Ethnic Diversity Survey, Statistics Canada and Department of Canadian Heritage, 2002

ns = numbers of respondents are not sufficient for analytical purposes

**Table 6**  
**Importance of Ethnic Identity and Belonging to Ethnic Group and Self-Reported Voter Participation in the 2000 Federal Election**

Level of Importance	Ethnic identity – % who voted	Ethnic belonging – % who voted	Level of belonging
1 – not important at all	66.8	77.3	1 – not strong at all
2	67.2	77.8	2
3	72.5	78.1	3
4	75.1	78.2	4
5 – very important	82.3	80.7	5 – very strong

Source: Ethnic Diversity Survey, Statistics Canada and Department of Canadian Heritage, 2002

respondents in the 18–24 and 45–54 age categories.

### Ethnic attachment, national identification and voter turnout

At least three quarters of EDS respondents regard ethnic identity as important (31,377 out of 41,695 surveyed rated its importance at 4 or 5 on a 5-point scale). The EDS offers no support for the idea that strong ethnic attachments result in lower rates of voter participation. As seen in Table 6, whether the factor considered is

identity or belonging, those with strong connections to ethnicity tend to report higher voter turnout. The EDS reveals that more than 8 in 10 Canadians who declared their ethnic identity is important reported voting in the 2000 federal election, compared with approximately two thirds who described ethnic identity as not important at all. Hence, ethnic attachments do not appear to undercut participation. Table 6 also reveals that a strong sense of belonging to an ethnic or cultural group has little effect on lowering reported voter turnout rates.

The EDS reveals that more of those indicating higher levels of belonging to Canada tend to report that they voted in federal elections. However, EDS data also indicate that strong attachment to ethnic communities does not imply weaker attachment to Canada and therefore

it would be wrong to assume that minority ethnic groups participate less because of insufficient national identification. Employing the data, Jantzen<sup>8</sup> notes that among the various minority ethnocultural and ethno-racial groups a significant share reports a strong sense of belonging to Canada.

### Conclusion

The EDS findings raise several questions about the voter participation of immigrants and members of ethnic communities. On the surface, one may be struck by contradictory empirical evidence when it comes to rates of participation. Data from federal ridings with high immigrant concentrations imply that turnout rates are lower among foreign-born Canadians. The

*Age, ethnocultural background and place of residence, among other factors, all contribute somewhat in modifying rates of voter participation.*

EDS data reveal that people who settled in Canada between 1991 and 2001 were far less likely to report they voted than those arriving before 1991. And since many recent immigrants reside in the urban ridings listed in Table 1, the lower than average turnout rates do not seem surprising. Yet the idea that “rootedness” in Canada contributes to higher voter turnout is thrown into question by the EDS figures on visible-minority Canadian-born youth, who often report dramatically lower rates of participation in federal elections than their immigrant counterparts.

An Environics survey found that 41% of Canadians think the main reason for reduced electoral participation is that their votes have no impact. It is

**Table 7**  
**Self-Reported Voting in the 2000 Federal Election, by Reported Sense of Belonging to Canada, 2002**

Sense of belonging to Canada	% who voted
1 – not strong at all	62.5
2	69.1
3	70.0
4	75.5
5 – very strong	82.7

Source: Ethnic Diversity Survey, Statistics Canada and Department of Canadian Heritage, 2002

by far the single most important reason given by survey respondents.<sup>9</sup> How questions of identity influence voter turnout needs to be further examined. It is likely that age, ethnocultural background and place of residence, among other factors, all contribute somewhat in modifying rates of voter participation. Some expressions of identity may carry more weight in affecting rates of voter turnout. It is widely agreed that age significantly influences voter participation. It is contended here that certain ethnic attitudes further undercut such participation, as they potentially create another layer in the feelings of voter indifference and/or the sense of disempowerment. If the EDS findings cited here are accurate, then

it is vital to comprehend why Canada's visible-minority youth in particular report such low involvement in the election process. It is an area that merits much further inquiry. ❌

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## NOTES

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9. Jedwab, "Apathy, Protest and Convergence."



# Making Up for Lost Time *Immigrant Voter Turnout in Canada*



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*This article uses data from pooled samples of foreign-born and native-born Canadians from the 1988, 1993, 1997, 2000 and 2004 Canadian Election Studies (CES) to compare the determinants of voter turnout in these groups. There are reasonable grounds for speculating that levels of voter turnout might be different among immigrant Canadians than their native-born counterparts. The evidence presented here paints a more complex picture of voter turnout among immigrants than might otherwise have been expected. The CES data show that similar numbers of foreign-born and native-born Canadians turn out to vote. The data also indicate that the political learning curve is steeper for immigrants, but they do compensate for lost time.*

The 2006 Canadian federal election saw a concerted effort by the Conservative Party to gain a greater foothold in a traditionally strong area of Liberal Party support, namely, among immigrant communities.<sup>1</sup> The strategies of the federal parties in the 2006 election underscored the fact that this large, diverse constituency of voters has not really been at the centre of party competition before. Although nearly one fifth of Canada's population is foreign-born, relatively little is known about the electoral participation of these citizens.

This article explores two questions concerning electoral turnout among immigrants to Canada. First, is voter turnout among immigrant Canadians higher, lower or about the same as that of native-born Canadians? And second, are the factors that explain variations in voter turnout among the foreign-born and native-born the same or are they different? These questions are explored using data from pooled samples of foreign-born and native-born Canadians from the 1988, 1993, 1997, 2000 and 2004 Canadian Election Studies.<sup>2</sup> The evidence is that immigrants confront a steep

political learning curve; they face a shortfall of relevant political experience in the Canadian setting. The data show, however, that immigrants can, and do, make up for lost time.

## Facilitative and motivational resources and voter turnout

Most analysts of electoral behaviour concur that voter turnout is determined by a combination of what are called facilitative and motivational factors. “Motivational” factors refer to levels of interest and perceived political efficacy, while “facilitative” factors include such resources as greater income, more education and more experience with politics. The weight of the evidence shows that an abundant supply of these resources increases the likelihood that people will vote.<sup>3</sup>

*It turns out immigrants are neither more nor less likely than native-born Canadians to vote.*

The question of whether immigrant Canadians, because of these facilitative and motivational factors, turn out to vote in relatively greater or fewer numbers than their native-born counterparts is not a settled one. On one hand, there are reasonable grounds for speculating that voter turnout may be lower among immigrant Canadians than their native-born counterparts. After all, migrants to Canada were socialized in different, sometimes radically different, political systems, and they have less experience than most native-born Canadians with the Canadian political system. For this group of citizens, the political learning curve is consequently much steeper than it is for native-born Canadians and therefore more of a barrier to

electoral participation. Many foreign-born Canadians may also lack such socio-economic resources as time and money, which also facilitate political participation.

On the other hand, there is also a straightforward logic pointing to the contrary intuition that immigrant Canadians could be more likely than native-born

Canadians to vote. Growing numbers of immigrants come from countries where there was no opportunity to vote, and these immigrants may be

less likely than other Canadians to take the right to vote for granted. Moreover, even if many immigrants are short on the

time, money and first-hand experience needed to participate in Canadian politics, they are well endowed with the basic cognitive resources that facilitate voting. On balance, immigrants tend to have significantly higher levels of formal education than their native-born counterparts because Canada’s immigration policy since 1967 has favoured well-educated migrants and skilled labourers.<sup>4</sup>

## Evidence from the Canadian Election Study

The place to begin is with the core finding concerning differences in voter turnout between native-born and foreign-born Canadians. The aggregate evidence is somewhat anticlimactic:

Photo: Elections Canada



*University education, high income and political interest have a greater impact on pushing up voter turnout among Canadian-born citizens than among immigrants with similar resources.*

it turns out immigrants are neither more nor less likely than native-born Canadians to vote. But just because levels of voter turnout among foreign-born and native-born citizens are relatively similar, it does not follow that the factors that motivate these two groups of citizens to vote or not are necessarily exactly the same. To explore this possibility, we analyze separately the independent effects of age, income, education and interest in the election on voter turnout for immigrants and native-born Canadians. We estimate statistically what the impact of each factor on voter turnout would be, while holding all other characteristics constant: for example, differences in turnout between voters with no high school diploma and those with a university education are estimated assuming that they are the same age, in the same income group and have the same level of interest in the election.<sup>5</sup>

These facilitative and motivational resources are a strong determinant of turnout among native-born Canadians, but they exert a far more modest influence on turnout among immigrant

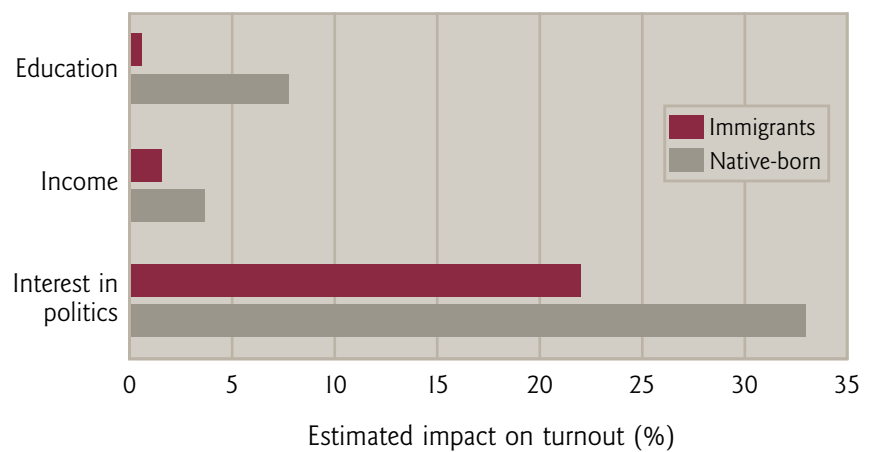
Canadians. The estimated independent effects of education, income and political interest on voter turnout among native-born Canadians are robust and statistically significant, and they dwarf the equivalent estimates for immigrant turnout (see Figure 1). Native-born Canadians with university education are about eight percentage points more likely to vote than those with no high school diploma. By contrast, less than a percentage point separates those two groups for immigrants. The differential impact of income on turnout for native-born and foreign-born citizens is less dramatic, but it operates in the same direction: among native-born Canadians, those with high incomes are three and a half percentage points more likely to vote than those with low incomes. Among immigrant Canadians, however, the high/low income voting gap is a meagre one and a half percent. The same pattern holds for interest in politics. Native-born Canadians with a great deal of interest in politics are 33 percentage points more likely to vote than those who are least interested. Once again, among foreign-born Canadians, the corresponding difference is in the same direction but a more modest 22 percentage points. Immigrants from different educational and economic backgrounds, and those with varying levels of interest in politics and elections, turn out to vote in similar numbers.

A more intriguing picture emerges when the impact of experience with Canadian politics on voter turnout is considered.<sup>6</sup> For native-born Canadians, age is a perfect measure of exposure: older citizens have simply been exposed to more elections in Canada than younger citizens. For immigrants, of course, age is a less certain measure of exposure to the Canadian system.

By definition, immigrants have prior experience in other countries and the extent of that prior experience may vary from one immigrant to the next. Accumulating exposure to Canadian politics over time is certainly an important determinant of turnout among native-born voters. But the striking finding in this case is that age appears to be an even more powerful predictor

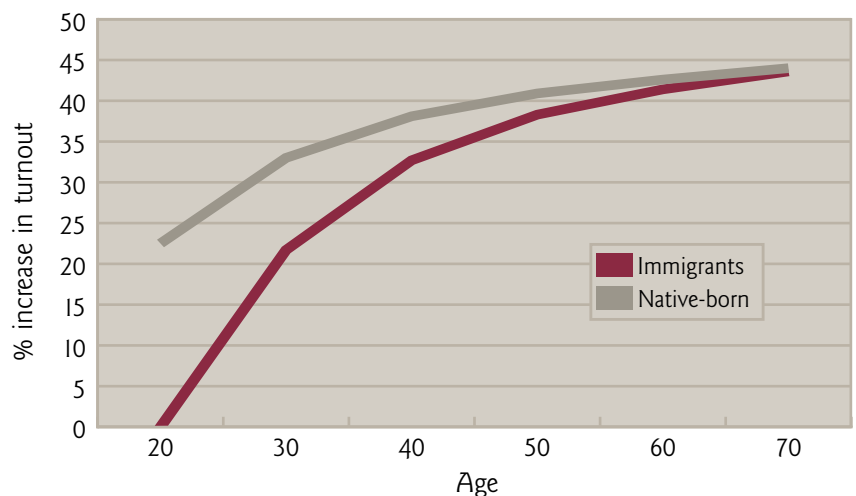
of turnout among immigrant voters. By our estimation, the gap in voter turnout between a 20-year-old and a 50-year-old immigrant Canadian is nearly 40 percentage points when all other factors are held constant. By contrast, the gap in turnout between native-born Canadians at those same ages is less than 20 percentage points (see Figure 2).

**Figure 1**  
**Estimated Impact of Facilitative and Motivational Factors on Turnout**



Source: 1988–2004 Canadian Election Studies

**Figure 2**  
**Estimated Increases in Turnout by Age**



Note: The turnout among 20-year-old immigrants is used as the benchmark.  
 Source: 1988–2004 Canadian Election Studies

That finding immediately raises another question: why does age matter more to voter turnout among immigrants? There is a well-documented generational divide when it comes to Canadian voter turnout. Not only are younger Canadians less likely to vote than older Canadians, but more recent generations of young Canadians are even less likely to vote than their predecessors at the same age.<sup>7</sup> Is it possible that the data presented here really reflect generational differences, rather than differences between more and less experience with Canadian elections? The short answer is no. To the extent that there are generational differences, we would expect the negative relationship between age and turnout to be stronger among native-born Canadians rather than foreign-born Canadians:

*Experience with Canadian politics is the main determinant of turnout among immigrant Canadians.*

after all, foreign-born Canadians are more likely to have spent their formative years in another country.

### Disentangling the effects of experience

Even if the generational hypothesis can be discounted, providing a reliable interpretation of the effect of age on immigrant voter turnout remains a challenge because it is difficult to determine conclusively just what an immigrant's age really measures. Does age indicate accumulated political experience in Canada? Does it represent accumulated political experience in both Canada and in the country of origin? Or does age reflect the moment in the life cycle at which immigrants left the country of origin?

It is entirely plausible that immigrants' total accumulated political experiences, both their experiences in Canada and in their countries of origin, might be an important determinant of whether or not they vote. These different effects clearly need to be disentangled. From one perspective, how well immigrants adapt to the Canadian political system depends on how much exposure they have had to the system: the more experience they have with Canadian elections, for example, the more likely they are to vote. Evidence that voter turnout among a variety of immigrant groups increases with years of residence in the United States certainly supports that line of interpretation.<sup>8</sup>

At the same time, an immigrant's age captures how much pre-migration experience he or she has had. And from a different standpoint, adaptation to the Canadian political system might be more difficult, the greater the amount of time immigrants have spent in the country of origin. Most political predispositions are acquired early in life during the "formative years," and these predispositions deepen over a relatively short period, becoming resistant to change as the formative years end. Thus political orientations developed earlier in life encourage people to avoid or reject environmental messages that are inconsistent with those orientations.<sup>9</sup> This perspective suggests



Photo: Ablestock

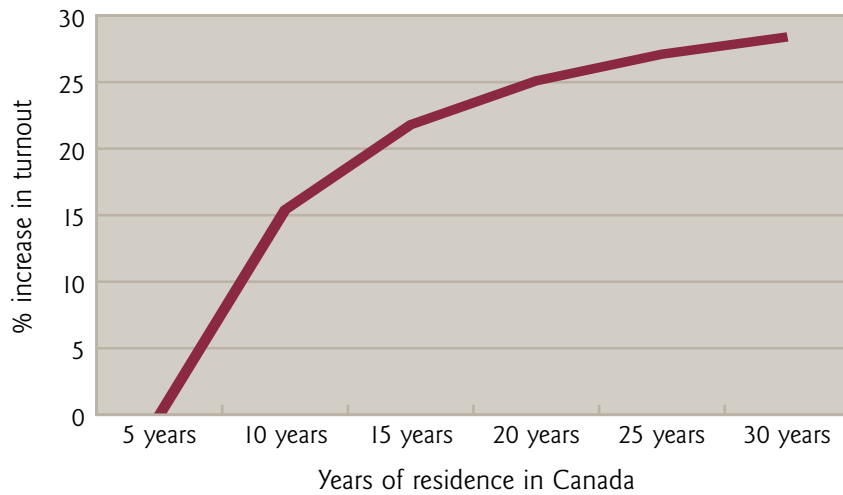
*The well-established trend that younger Canadians are less likely to vote than older citizens is even more pronounced among some groups of immigrant Canadians.*

that the longer immigrants have lived in the country of origin, the less likely it is that they will vote.

An alternative perspective suggests, however, that the shift in environments in which political learning takes place has only a minimal impact on the development of political norms and behaviours. Individuals find ways to effectively draw on the political skills developed in different environments. More specifically, the implication is that immigrants are able to draw on all past experience and transfer the lessons learned from their old environments, applying them to the new host environment.<sup>10</sup> According to Jerome Black, "more important than the specific context in which political involvement takes place is the question of whether it takes place at all – that is, it is the accumulation of experience with, and interest in, politics per se that is more important."<sup>11</sup> This perspective implies that age, as a measure of total experience of politics, is what really matters.

To determine what really drives older foreign-born Canadians to vote in greater numbers than their younger counterparts, we develop a second line

**Figure 3**  
**Estimated Increases in Turnout by Years of Residence**  
**(immigrant Canadians only)**



Note: The turnout among immigrants who have lived in Canada for five years is used as the benchmark.  
 Source: 1988–2004 Canadian Election Studies

of analysis that explicitly takes into account the separate effects of immigrants' age, length of residence in country of origin and length of exposure to the Canadian political system.<sup>12</sup> These findings show that experience with Canadian politics is the main determinant of turnout among immigrant Canadians (see Figure 3). When age, length of residence in the country of origin, and all of the other variables included in the previous analyses are held constant, time of exposure to Canadian politics has a strong and positive impact on turnout. According

After about 20 years in Canada, the impact of exposure on turnout levels off. Intriguingly, however, neither age nor length of residence in the country of origin has a statistically significant independent impact on turnout.

### A steeper learning curve for immigrants

The evidence presented here paints a more complex picture of voter turnout among immigrants than might otherwise have been expected. The Canadian Election Study (CES) data indicate that the political learning curve is steeper for immigrants, but they clearly can make up for lost experience. In the end, lack of exposure to the

Canadian political system does little to deter immigrant Canadian voters. However, many of the other resources that usually facilitate and mobilize turnout – socio-economic resources, education and interest in politics –

have a weaker impact among immigrants than native-born Canadians.

## Conclusion

Immigrants face a number of challenges upon arriving in Canada, and it is certainly understandable that political participation may not be their highest priority. The integration of immigrant Canadians into formal politics, as with native-born Canadians, turns out to be incremental: their stock of first-hand political experience accumulates only gradually. But immigrants face an additional barrier: when they arrive in the country, they have no reservoir of first-hand experience with the Canadian political system from which they can draw. The CES data suggest that immigrant Canadians compensate for that lack of experience more quickly and completely than might be supposed. Even if politics is not a high priority, immigrants eventually do gather enough information to have an idea of when, whether and for whom they should vote.

There are at least two questions about the electoral participation of immigrant Canadians that remain to be answered, however. First, why is it that foreign-born Canadians meet the challenge of a steeper political learning curve when it comes to voting? One important motivation for turning out to vote that could not be measured here is immigrants' feeling that voting is a civic duty.<sup>13</sup> This sense of obligation may be the crucial determinant of whether or not naturalized Canadians go to the polls, particularly so if immigrants come from countries where democratic rights are fragile at best. A related motivation for turning out to vote could be the desire to "fit in." Immigrants take up the prevailing norms and behaviours of the local

*This sense of obligation may be the crucial determinant of whether or not naturalized Canadians go to the polls.*

to our estimates, the likelihood of voting among immigrants who have been in Canada for 10 years is 15 percentage points higher than the probability of voting among immigrants who have been in the country for only 5 years.





Immigrants from Asia arrive at the Vancouver International Airport immigration hall.

community in an active effort to integrate.<sup>14</sup>

The second unanswered question is: why do such other determinants of voting as education, income and political interest matter less for immigrants than for native-born Canadians? One possibility is that because immigrants possess a stronger sense of voting duty than other Canadians, they may be

more inclined to vote regardless of their level of interest or their socio-economic status. Another possibility is that strong social ties within immigrant communities help to mobilize turnout. After all, strong community ties are a primary explanation for why African Americans in the U.S. are more politically active than would be expected, given their socio-economic backgrounds.<sup>15</sup>

This article began by noting that such resources as education, income, interest in politics and prior experience with politics are vital to electoral participation. The act of voting is relatively straightforward, but citizens generally require a basic stock of skills and knowledge to participate. As it turns out, immigrants to Canada with low levels of education, income and interest in politics tend to turn out to vote just as much as immigrants who are abundant in those resources. However, one resource, experience with the Canadian political system, is particularly crucial to immigrants. Foreign-born Canadians take full advantage of this resource. ✂

## NOTES

1. Unweighted preliminary data from the 2006 Canadian Election Study indicate that 50% of immigrants who arrived in Canada after the age of 12 voted for the Liberal Party. In the five federal elections from 1988 to 2004, 48% of immigrants who arrived in Canada after the age of 12 voted for the Liberal Party.
2. Cases were weighted using the national weight from the five studies. Because we are interested in the effects of pre- and post-migration political learning, the immigrant sample is limited to those who moved to Canada after the age of 12. There are 308, 209, 371, 354 and 437 immigrant cases in the 1988, 1993, 1997, 2000 and 2004 studies, respectively. The studies are funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, with additional funding from Elections Canada (2000–2006) and the Institute for Research on Public Policy (2000). Field work for the studies was conducted by the Institute for Social Research at York University (1988–2006) and Jolicoeur et Associés (2000). The principal investigators are André Blais (1988–2006), Henry E. Brady (1988–1993), Jean Crête (1988), Joanna Everitt (2004–2006), Patrick Fournier (2004–2006), Elisabeth Gidengil (1993–2006), Richard Johnston (1988–1993), Richard Nadeau (1993–2000) and Neil Nevitte (1993–2006).
3. See Steven J. Rosenstone and John Mark Hansen, *Mobilization, Participation, and Democracy in America* (New York: Macmillan, 1993); Russell J. Dalton, *Citizen Politics: Public Opinion and Political Parties in Advanced Industrial Democracies*, 4th ed. (Washington: Congressional Quarterly, 2006); Sidney Verba, Kay Lehman Schlozman and Henry E. Brady, *Voice and Equality: Civic Volunteerism in American Politics* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1995).
4. Peter S. Li, *Destination Canada: Immigration Debates and Issues* (Don Mills, Ontario: Oxford University Press, 2003).

5. Estimated probabilities of voting were obtained from Monte Carlo simulations (M=1000) using binary logit estimations. In addition to the variables of interest (age, education, income and interest in the election), geographic location (residence in Vancouver, Toronto, Montréal), gender and year of survey are controlled in each model.
6. Although additional years of experience are certainly important in social learning, psychologists show that more social learning occurs in earlier years, and experience-based gains in social learning decrease with additional years of experience (see Paul B. Baltes, Ursula M. Staudinger and Ulman Lindenberger, "Lifespan Psychology: Theory and Application to Intellectual Functioning," *Annual Review of Psychology* Vol. 50 (February 1999), pp. 471–507). It is for this reason that we use the natural log transformations, which assign decreasing weight to additional years of experience.
7. See, for example, Elisabeth Gidengil, André Blais, Neil Nevitte and Richard Nadeau, "Turned Off or Tuned Out? Youth Participation in Politics," *Electoral Insight* Vol. 5, No. 2 (July 2003), pp. 9–14.
8. See John R. Arvizu and F. Chris Garcia, "Latino Voting Participation: Explaining and Differentiating Latino Voting Turnout," *Hispanic Journal of Behavioral Sciences* Vol. 18, No. 2 (May 1996), pp. 104–128; S. Karthic Ramakrishnan and Thomas J. Espenshade, "Immigrant Incorporation and Political Participation in the United States," *The International Migration Review* Vol. 35, No. 3 (Fall 2001), pp. 870–909.
9. See, for example, Leon Festinger, *A Theory of Cognitive Dissonance* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1957) and John Zaller, *The Nature and Origins of Mass Opinion* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Cambridge University Press, 1992).
10. See Jerome H. Black, "Immigrant Political Adaptation in Canada: Some Tentative Findings," *Canadian Journal of Political Science* Vol. 15, No. 1 (March 1982), pp. 3–27; Jerome H. Black, "The Practice of Politics in Two Settings: Political Transferability Among Recent Immigrants to Canada," *Canadian Journal of Political Science* Vol. 20, No. 4 (December 1987), pp. 731–753; Jerome H. Black, Richard G. Niemi and G. Bingham Powell, Jr., "Age, Resistance, and Political Learning in a New Environment: The Case of Canadian Immigrants," *Comparative Politics* Vol. 20, No. 1 (October 1987), pp. 73–84.
11. Black, "The Practice of Politics," p. 739.
12. The same method of estimation (Monte Carlo simulation using binary logit estimates) is repeated for the immigrant sample, with natural log transformations for years of prior experience in the country of origin and years of experience in Canada incorporated in the model. None of the tolerance coefficients for the logs of age, prior experience or host country experience falls below .10 in this analysis.
13. André Blais, *To Vote or Not to Vote? The Merits and Limits of Rational Choice Theory* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2000).
14. Michael MacKuen and Courtney Brown, "Political Context and Attitude Change," *American Political Science Review* Vol. 81, No. 2 (June 1987), pp. 471–490; James M. Glaser and Martin Gilens, "Interregional Migration and Political Resocialization: A Study of Racial Attitudes Under Pressure," *Public Opinion Quarterly* Vol. 61 (1997), pp. 72–86.
15. Sidney Verba and Norman H. Nie, *Participation in America: Political Democracy and Social Equality* (New York: Harper & Row, 1972); Carole J. Uhlaner, "Rational Turnout: The Neglected Role of Groups," *American Journal of Political Science* Vol. 33, No. 2 (May 1989), pp. 390–422.



# Visible Minorities and Under-Representation *The Views of Candidates*

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*The under-representation of visible minorities in the Canadian Parliament, the potential impact of various electoral reform proposals on that representation and the unique perspective that visible minorities might possibly bring to a legislature have all been the subject of research and debate to varying degrees. Drawing on data collected as part of the 2004 Canadian Candidate Survey, this article uses the opinions of visible minorities on electoral democracy to shed new light on these subjects. Among other things, it finds that visible minorities are more likely than other candidates to find the current single-member plurality electoral system unacceptable, are more supportive of certain electoral reform initiatives, and have somewhat stronger and more polarized opinions on whether quotas and affirmative action should be used to redress their under-representation. The article concludes that, while party affiliation is a greater determinant of a candidate's position on democratic reform, visible minorities still do bring somewhat different perspectives to their political parties and to public discourse.*

This paper draws upon a survey of candidates who ran in the 2004 general election to examine how visible minorities<sup>1</sup> feel about reforming selected aspects of representational and electoral politics in Canada. In particular, it compares the attitudes of visible-minority candidates with those of other candidates toward the under-representation of visible minorities in Parliament and various aspects of the current electoral system and democratic reform.

That visible minorities continue to have a relatively limited presence in elite-level politics is an obvious justification for this focus. While it is true that more minorities than ever before have been winning their way into Parliament, they still make up a percentage of the legislature that is much

smaller than their incidence among the Canadian population. For instance, based on Statistics Canada definitions and analysis of the 2004 Canadian Candidate Survey, visible minorities comprised 7.1% of all MPs elected in 2004 (22 of 308); yet visible minorities accounted for an estimated 14.9% of all Canadians at that time.<sup>2</sup> In short, the number of visible-minority MPs was only half of what would be necessary to make Parliament reflect the Canadian population. A representational deficit also occurs at the candidate level, though that gap in 2004 was not as large as it was for MPs. Among the parties that won seats in Parliament, visible minorities comprised 9.3% of all candidates who ran in 2004; taking into account the Green Party, the figure is 8.3%.<sup>3</sup>

The debate about whether effective representation requires the election of legislators who share group characteristics is another basis for the current inquiry. A well-known argument in that debate on the “affirmative” side holds that group-based politicians bring and communicate alternative political perspectives that might not be articulated and debated in their absence. Underlying this idea is the belief that only legislators who share the defining characteristic(s) of a group have the necessary experience, empathy and resolve to truly advance the group’s interests – all the more so if the group has traditionally been at the margins of Canadian society. In the present context, this notion translates into the contention that visible-minority candidates and MPs are more likely to care about and represent matters that are of particular concern to their communities.

At the same time, variations in visible-minority identification and politics are to be expected and suggest the need for caution against monolithic characterizations. Not all members of minorities will, in fact, regard their origins as central components of their self-identity; some will have alternative or additional reference points. Furthermore, people who identify strongly with their minority may not necessarily consider their backgrounds to be relevant in their approach to politics. They might view their ancestral origins and ties with their community as essentially matters of private concern.

These complexities, no doubt, overlap with differences in political party affiliation. Given the fundamental reality that office seekers typically migrate toward a party with which they share the same general orientation, it is expected that inter-party differences

will have a marked effect on the relationships between candidate origins and sentiments about democratic change. Party differences are well known in many areas

of democratic reform considered here, such as the strong preference on the part of the N.D.P. and the Greens for proportional representation. Additionally, there is the impact of party officials and members, typically at the local level, who may recruit persons from under-represented groups who will defend specific values and policies. For instance, the Conservative Party’s general opposition to group-based identities and politics might make visible-minority candidates who specifically share this perspective important additions to their team. In light of the importance of party affiliation, this paper also considers

whether distinctions between visible minorities and others matter, after party ties are taken into account.

## The survey

The 2004 Canadian Candidate Survey was conducted during and following the general election that took place on June 28, 2004.<sup>5</sup> The survey’s subjects were the 1,307 candidates from the four federal political parties that ran candidates in all 308 ridings (the Conservative, Green, Liberal and New Democratic parties), and from the Bloc Québécois, which contested all 75 ridings in Quebec. A short questionnaire asking for biographical information was distributed by fax and e-mail during the election period. The main questionnaire, which this analysis primarily draws upon, was sent out by mail in the fall of 2004, and an on-line version was provided as an alternative. Altogether, 577 candidates completed the questionnaire, which translates into an effective response rate of 44.1%.<sup>6</sup> This survey specifically considered the ancestry of the candidates, with close to 95% of the candidates responding to the census-like question that was used to determine origins.<sup>7</sup> The specific categorization of individuals as visible minorities followed the classifications used by Statistics Canada.<sup>8</sup>

The study picked up only 36 visible-minority candidates in the sample, or 6.2% of the candidates who participated. The small number of cases does suggest caution with respect to the inferences that can be generated, something even more necessary when the party-differentiated results are viewed. However, it is important to bear in mind that the small sample of visible-minority candidates is a reflection of reality, namely that

*The survey’s subjects were the 1,307 candidates from the four federal political parties that ran candidates in all 308 ridings and from the Bloc Québécois.*

From this perspective then, both office seekers and community members are expected to be sensitive to the historical and continuing disadvantaged position of visible minorities in Canadian politics and, consequently, to be more preoccupied with their under-representation and more supportive of remedial measures. It might also be anticipated that they are more likely to be dissatisfied with the current plurality system and more in favour of proportional representation, either in whole or as part of a mixed system, since it is generally regarded as facilitating greater diversity in the legislature.<sup>4</sup>

they are under-represented in the candidate pool. As relatively little research has been done in this area, the present contribution is an important starting point.<sup>9</sup>

## The under-representation of visible minorities

Candidates were asked what they thought about the fact that “there are relatively few members of visible minorities in the House of Commons.” Table 1 indicates that members of visible minorities were somewhat more concerned about under-representation, but that party affiliation had the largest impact on responses. To begin with, the singular impact of candidate origins is most apparent in the different levels of intensity of concern. While a majority of both visible-minority and other candidates regarded the deficit in representation as either a very serious or serious problem (66% vs. 59%), twice as many visible-minority candidates regarded the problem as a very serious one (46% vs. 22%). This does suggest a greater sensitivity to their historic absence from Canadian politics.

Origin-based variations do persist with party allegiances factored into the analysis, but most are modest in size and the data are more generally shaped by inter-party differences. While Liberal and Conservative visible-minority candidates,

Photo: CP (Tom Henson)



*Twenty-two visible-minority members of Parliament comprised only 7% of those elected to the 308-seat House of Commons in 2004. The number rose to 24 in 2006.*

relative to their colleagues, are more likely to regard the problem as very serious, in the case of the Liberals, however, the difference is

not particularly large (14% vs. 7%) and virtually disappears when adjacent percentages are incorporated. The impact of party is more apparent for

**Table 1**  
**Concern over Relatively Few Visible Minorities in the House of Commons (row percentages)**

		<b>A very serious problem</b>	<b>A serious problem</b>	<b>Not a very serious problem</b>	<b>Not a problem at all</b>	<b>n</b>
Visible-minority candidates		46	20	26	9	35
Other candidates		22	37	32	9	514
Liberal	Visible minorities	14	29	43	14	7
	Others	7	38	48	7	100
Conservative	Visible minorities	17	-	67	17	6
	Others	1	19	53	26	103
N.D.P.	Visible minorities	90	10	-	-	10
	Others	43	40	15	3	129
Green Party	Visible minorities	33	33	22	11	9
	Others	30	44	22	4	165
Bloc Québécois	Visible minorities	67	33	-	-	3
	Others	6	53	35	6	17

Source: Canadian Candidate Survey (2004)

the other three parties, but in different ways. For the Green candidates, origins did not matter much; about one in three candidates in both ancestry categories thought the problem was very serious. Concern about under-representation is slightly higher among N.D.P. candidates, with 43% of the party's non visible-minority candidates categorizing the limited presence of visible minorities as a very serious problem – but this number goes up to 90% for visible-minority candidates. There is a strong origin effect for the Bloc, though the very small number of the party's visible-minority candidates needs to be kept in mind.

Candidates were also questioned about possible reasons for the paucity of visible minorities in Parliament.<sup>10</sup> Few candidates of either origin category thought that visible-minority candidates “lose votes” or lack the “right experience and education.” Relatively more candidates agreed that visible minorities did not have “the necessary confidence,” but response levels did not vary across the two ancestry categories. Some modest differences were detected with regard to the statement: “Too few visible minorities are given the opportunity by

*Visible-minority candidates were more likely to be critical of the current electoral system.*

parties.” Among visible-minority candidates, 63% agreed (26% strongly so), while 55% of those of other origins were in agreement (17% strongly so). Visible-minority candidates in all of the parties, except the Greens, were more likely to agree strongly about the lack of opportunities given by parties, though the differences are not large

and generally party seemed to matter more than origin.

Candidates were also asked about whether they approved or disapproved of some steps that might be taken to deal with the shortfall in representation. For two of the measures, visible-minority candidates were modestly more likely than other candidates to approve of “training programs” (77% vs. 71%) and “special financial support” (53% vs. 42%). The differences were slightly stronger after considering intensity of approval or disapproval – 44% vs. 28% for training programs and 32% vs. 16% for financial arrangements. The largest differences occurred with regard to the possibility of “party quotas and affirmative action,” which might be regarded as the most contentious of measures suggested to enlarge visible-minority representation. Fifty-seven percent of visible-minority candidates approved of this approach (20% strongly), while only 37% of other candidates approved (13% strongly). Here too, party differences are both noticeable and variable.

When one looks at intensity of opinion in Figure 1, visible minorities held stronger views on this question than their party colleagues and these views were more polarized based on party. While more non visible-minority candidates for both the Liberal and Green

parties expressed opposition to quotas, there were more visible-minority candidates who were strongly opposed. The N.D.P. candidates were the most likely to support quotas and affirmative action, but here visible minorities were more supportive (80% vs. 66%) and more intensely in favour (50% strongly approving). Divisions in the Bloc are

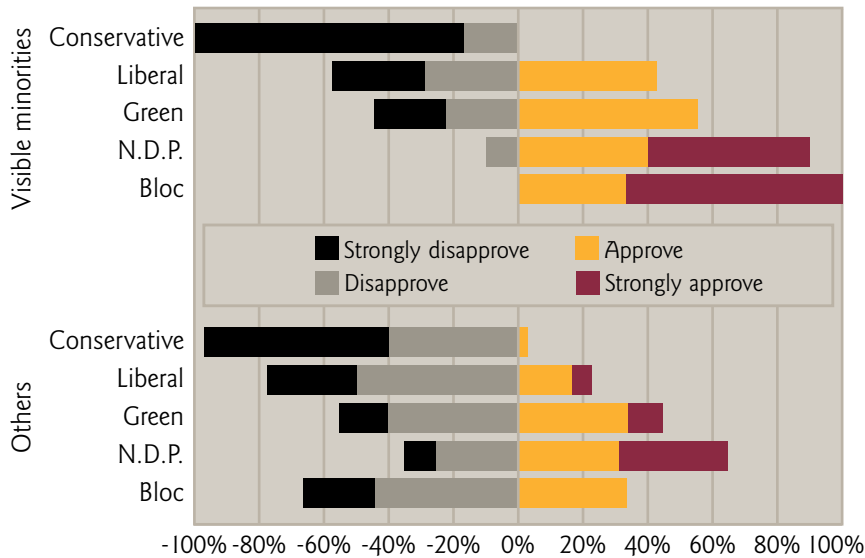
most pronounced and must again be viewed with caution, due to the small numbers involved. The results associated with the Conservative Party are in stark contrast to the N.D.P., with virtually all their candidates opposing such proactive measures and the visible-minority candidates being strongest in their opposition (83% strongly disapproving). Given the party positions on these issues, this may suggest that visible-minority candidates are being selected (by self or by party) based on core values.

## Electoral system reform

We asked candidates the following: “Under our present system, a party can win a majority of seats without winning a majority of votes. Do you find this acceptable or unacceptable?”

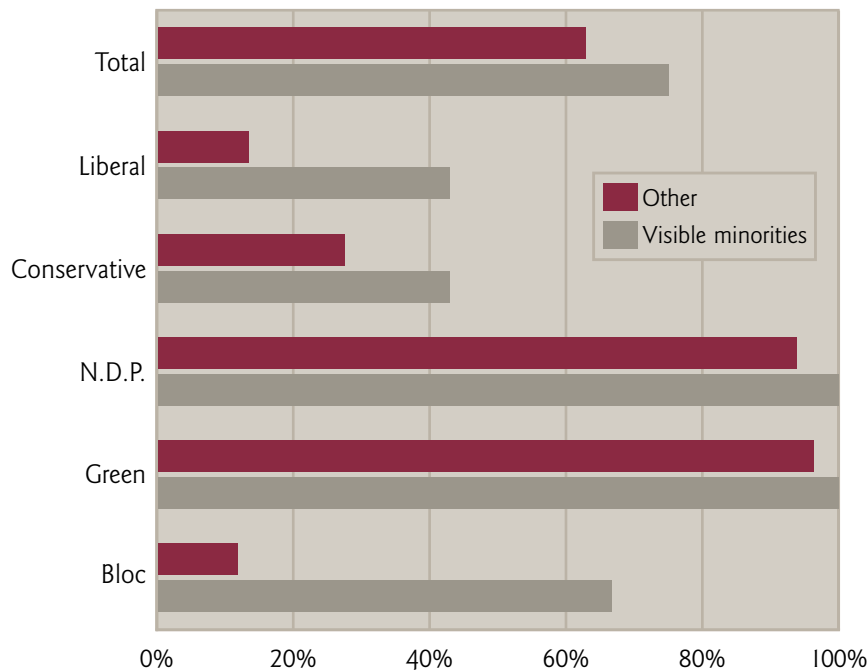
Figure 2 illustrates that visible-minority candidates were more likely to be critical of the current electoral system. Among them, 75% found the system to be unacceptable, a 13-point margin over other candidates. This implies a greater sensitivity to the system's constraining effects on minority representation. As expected, the impact of party labels is substantial, and this is particularly evident in how origin differences are of only minor consequence among N.D.P. and Green candidates, who overwhelmingly indicated dislike of the first-past-the-post system. Their visible-minority candidates unanimously found the plurality system unacceptable, as did over 90% of their other candidates. The lower levels of antipathy by other parties' candidates reveal the partisan divide on electoral reform, though for the other parties, the impact of origin is more significant. Visible minorities who ran for the Liberals were more dissatisfied

**Figure 1**  
**Support for Quotas and Affirmative Action to Increase Visible-Minority Representation**



Source: Canadian Candidate Survey (2004)  
 Note: n = 567 (top to bottom: 6, 7, 9, 10, 3; 105, 102, 166, 131, 18)

**Figure 2**  
**Unacceptability of the Current First-Past-the-Post Electoral System**



Source: Canadian Candidate Survey (2004)  
 Note: n = 561 (top to bottom: 525, 36; 104, 7; 105, 7; 132, 10; 167, 9; 17, 3)

with the plurality system than were the party's other candidates (43% vs. 14%), a division also evident among Conservative contestants, but with a somewhat reduced margin (43% vs. 28%). Origin has an effect for the Bloc, though the normal caveat applies. In short, while party affiliation matters the most with regard to judgments about the current electoral system, there is support for the notion that visible minorities regard the system as especially problematic.

We also asked candidates to consider a possible "solution" rooted in the idea of proportionality, and we analyzed strength of agreement or disagreement with the statement: "A party that gets 10% of the vote should get 10% of the seats." Interestingly, the opposition to the current system and the divisions noted above did not carry over to this question. Table 2 indicates that visible-minority candidates as a group were not particularly more likely than other candidates to agree that a party that receives 10% of the vote should receive 10% of the seats (67% vs. 64%; and only 50% vs. 45% in the case of "strongly agree"). Only for N.D.P. and Green candidates did origin make much of a difference (for the N.D.P., 90% of visible-minority candidates vs. 67% of other candidates, and for the Greens, 100% vs. 83%). Most importantly, variations by ancestry among the Liberals and Conservatives concerning the unacceptability of the plurality system were not evident. There are a number of reasons that might explain the divergent responses on this second question,<sup>11</sup> but if taken at face value, the results suggest that some candidates who found the current system objectionable did not necessarily agree that proportional representation is the solution or, alternatively, did not agree

**Table 2**  
**“A Party that Gets 10% of the Vote Should Get 10% of the Seats”**  
**(row percentages)**

		<b>Strongly agree</b>	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Strongly disagree</b>	<b>n</b>
Visible-minority candidates		50	17	28	6	36
Other candidates		45	19	27	9	521
Liberal	Visible minorities	-	14	71	14	7
	Others	1	12	63	25	104
Conservative	Visible minorities	-	29	57	14	7
	Others	4	25	56	16	102
N.D.P.	Visible minorities	90	10	-	-	10
	Others	67	29	3	1	131
Green Party	Visible minorities	100	-	-	-	9
	Others	83	15	2	-	166
Bloc Québécois	Visible minorities	-	67	33	-	3
	Others	6	11	67	17	18

Source: Canadian Candidate Survey (2004)

that vote-to-seat equivalency should be set at the 10% level.

## Conclusion

Clearly, party affiliation strongly shapes the way candidates, visible minorities included, approach minority under-representation and electoral reform. Nevertheless, visible-minority candidates show significant differences from their colleagues over such questions as whether the current electoral system is unacceptable, and visible minorities are more supportive of certain democratic reform suggestions. There is also some interesting evidence that, on more controversial or core value issues, visible minorities have stronger and more divergent opinions. While one must be

cautious about conclusions drawn from what is, by definition, a small pool of candidates, it does appear that visible minorities bring differing perspectives to their respective parties and to public discourse. ❌



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## NOTES

1. Visible minorities are individuals who, for the purpose of the *Employment Equity Act*, are defined as “persons, other than aboriginal peoples, who are non-Caucasian in race or non-white in colour”. Statistics Canada identifies the following categories of visible minorities: Chinese, South Asians, Blacks, Arabs and West Asians, Filipinos, Southeast Asians, Latin Americans (except Chileans and Argentinians), Japanese, Koreans and Pacific Islanders.
2. Jerome H. Black and Bruce M. Hicks, “Visible Minority Candidates in the 2004 Federal Election,” *Canadian Parliamentary Review* Vol. 29, No. 2 (Summer 2006), pp. 26–31.
3. Black and Hicks, “Visible Minority Candidates.”
4. See, for example, Brian Tanguay and Steven Bittle, “Parliament as a Mirror to the Nation: Promoting Diversity in Representation through Electoral Reform,” *Canadian Issues* (Summer 2005), pp. 61–63.
5. The survey was conducted out of McGill University and was partially funded by Metropolis Canada and Citizenship and Immigration Canada. For more information about the survey, see Jerome H. Black and Bruce M. Hicks, “Strengthening Canadian Democracy: The Views of Parliamentary Candidates,” *IRPP Policy Matters* Vol. 7, No. 2 (March 2006).
6. Of the 577 candidates who participated, 414 did so by mail and 163 through the Internet. The response rates by party are as follows: Green Party, 58.4%; N.D.P., 47.1%; Conservative, 38.0%; Liberal, 37.0%; and Bloc Québécois, 28.0%.
7. The ancestry question in the long questionnaire took the form: “To which ethnic or cultural group(s) did your ancestors belong? (List as many groups as applicable.)” To minimize the occurrence of “Canadian” as a response, this questionnaire also had a preamble: “We are all Canadians, but our ancestors come from all over the world.” For those who did not respond to the ancestry questions on either the short or long questionnaire, a variety of other sources and methods were employed, including party and published biographical information, news stories, photos, videos and surname analysis.
8. See note 1.
9. See also Jerome H. Black, “Representation in the Parliament of Canada: The Case of Ethnoracial Minorities,” in Joanna Everitt and Brenda O’Neill, eds., *Citizen Politics: Research and Theory in Canadian Political Behaviour* (Don Mills, Ontario: Oxford University Press, 2002), pp. 355–372.
10. Tables of these results and other study data are available from the authors upon request.
11. One explanation for response variation can be found in the wording of this question. The 10% statement comes from a national election study, where it continues to be used to facilitate multi-year comparison. It was included in our survey to facilitate elite-mass analysis (though it is likely a more effective question at the mass level).



# Seeking Inclusion South Asian Political Representation in Suburban Canada

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*This study sets out to explain the variables that have created a political opportunity structure more favourable for visible-minority politicians and candidates in Canada's suburban peripheries than in urban centres. The research analyzes the rates of visible-minority representation with special attention to South Asian politicians in the Toronto suburbs of Mississauga and Brampton, who, after the 2006 general election, achieved some of the highest rates of visible-minority political representation in the country. The study concludes that a variety of factors have led to this more favourable suburban political opportunity structure, including dense residential concentrations, strong socio-economic status and acculturation variables, and lower incumbency rates.*

Most people think of North America's major cities as hubs of ethnocultural diversity surrounded by the blanket whiteness of the suburbs. Yet in Canada, federal electoral ridings in suburban centres have proven to be the most receptive to visible-minority politicians. In the most recent 2006 general election, 24 visible-minority candidates were elected to the 308-seat House of Commons. While 8 of these politicians represent ridings in Canada's three largest urban centres – Montréal, Toronto and Vancouver – a surprising 12 represent suburban constituencies surrounding these cities. Furthermore, the overwhelming majority of these suburban representatives are of South Asian descent.

Using the suburban cities of Mississauga and Brampton as a case study, this paper sets out to answer two important questions: Why have the political opportunity structures in suburban centres proven to be more favourable for visible

minorities than those in major urban centres such as Toronto and Vancouver? And why have South Asian politicians succeeded in achieving levels of political representation proportional to their presence in the general population, while so many other visible-minority communities, especially Canada's Chinese and Black populations, have not?

## **Measuring visible-minority political representation**

Measuring ethnicity and race is by nature a complicated problem, and one that has no easy solution. For the purpose of this study, the definition of "visible minority" adheres to that used by Statistics Canada during the 2001 Census – a generally accepted definition, albeit with its own complications. Statistics Canada defines visible minorities as people

who are “non-Caucasian in race or non-white in colour.”<sup>1</sup> Excluded from this definition are members of Aboriginal nations. With this definition in mind, extensive biographical and photographic analysis was conducted to reach the figure of 24 visible-minority politicians; a number that includes South Asians, Chinese, Blacks, Arabs, Japanese and Latin Americans, but excludes the Aboriginal members of the 39th Parliament. It also includes two politicians of mixed Chinese and European ancestry.

The relationship between statistical representation and substantive representation has shown itself to be relatively ambiguous and unpredictable. In their 2002 study, Siemiatycki and Saloojee argue that the presence of

all communities, regardless of race, ethnicity or country of origin feel they have access to the political system, as well as any other aspect of Canadian society, if they so choose; such is the mandate set out in the *Canadian Multiculturalism Act*. Drastically unrepresentative political bodies, therefore, need to be viewed as partial indicators of social exclusion and disenfranchisement, as well as a “serious threat to our shared notion of participatory democracy.”<sup>4</sup>

### Where they are getting elected – the suburbs

Toronto, traditionally viewed as Canada’s most diverse city, is being outperformed by its suburban neighbours when it comes to electing visible-minority politicians. While 9 of the 24 visible-minority MPs in the 39th Parliament were elected in the Greater Toronto Area, only 2 were victorious in the City of Toronto proper, while 5 were victorious in the suburban cities of Mississauga and Brampton, and another 2 in rural/suburban ridings in the outer regions of Halton and

Durham. Only York Region, containing both suburban cities and rural areas north of Toronto, elected a lower percentage of visible-minority MPs than the City of Toronto did.

With one third as many seats as the City of Toronto, the suburbs of Brampton and Mississauga still managed to elect more than twice as many visible-minority candidates as Toronto. So why are Toronto’s suburbs outpacing their big city neighbour?

Canada’s suburbs have witnessed dramatic population explosions over the course of the last decade. Increasingly more immigrants are choosing to settle in Canada’s suburbs instead of its major cities. In 1998, for example, 82.4% of new immigrants to the Greater Toronto Area and Hamilton settled in the City of Toronto, while 9.7% chose to settle in the Region of Peel (made up of Mississauga, Brampton and the largely rural town of Caledon).<sup>5</sup> By 2003, however, 20.9%, or one fifth, of all new immigrants to the area were deciding to make Peel Region their home, a more than twofold increase, while 63.7% chose Toronto, a decrease of almost one quarter.

*Increasingly more immigrants are choosing to settle in Canada’s suburbs instead of its major cities.*

visible minorities in political bodies does not necessarily lead to diversity-friendly policy measures.<sup>2</sup>

In spite of this possibility, Simard argues that political representation is still “an issue of the utmost importance for the future of democracy,”<sup>3</sup> especially a democracy in which visible minorities are expected to become the statistical majority, if they are not already, in most of Canada’s major metropolitan areas. Beyond the creation of policy measures and the drafting of legislation, political representation also carries with it symbolic importance, especially in a nation of immigrants. With wave after wave of immigrants arriving in Canada and the resulting demographic changes that have occurred, it is crucial that

**Table 1  
Visible-Minority MPs Elected in Greater Toronto Area**

Location	No. of ridings	No. of visible-minority MPs elected	% of seats held by visible minorities
Brampton	3	2/3	67
Mississauga	5	3/5	60
Durham Region	4	1/4	25
Halton Region	4	1/4	25
Toronto	23	2/23	9
York Region	6	0/6	0

Data on MPs supplied by author

One of the most daunting variables for new faces in the political system is the incumbency factor.<sup>6</sup> The effects of recent growth rates in the suburbs on the distribution of federal electoral districts have served to loosen incumbent strongholds that make most of Toronto's federal ridings inaccessible to new visible-minority candidates.

The rapid growth of the cities of Brampton and Mississauga over the last few decades has led not only to a

*High campaign costs make it more difficult for those with lower income to mobilize the necessary funds to run for political office.*

constant reshuffling of federal electoral districts, but also to the addition of brand new ridings, making incumbent footholds far less rooted in the suburbs than they are in the City of Toronto.

In fact, not one of the current visible-minority MPs in Mississauga or Brampton had to run against an incumbent to secure a seat in the House of Commons.

Mississauga and Brampton held eight federal ridings during the last general election of 2006 – a far cry from the three federal ridings that existed in the two cities in 1980. The same cannot be said for the City of Toronto, where in the last 25 years the number of federal ridings has grown by only one. Although riding boundaries were often readjusted, this did not occur simultaneously with any significant increase in the number of ridings, therefore making new candidates

in the cities more reliant upon incumbent retirement and party sweeps.

Even in a participatory democracy such as Canada, socio-economic status is

Photo: CP



*Elected in 1957, Douglas Jung served two terms as Canada's first member of Parliament of Chinese descent.*

also often considered to be one of the key variables in political participation. High campaign costs make it more difficult for those with lower income to mobilize the necessary funds to run for political office.<sup>7</sup> Furthermore, with voting participation closely linked to home ownership,<sup>8</sup> higher rates of poverty will inevitably have a negative effect on a community's mobilization and reduce that community's numbers at the polls. Although Peel Region's Planning, Policy and Research Division is concerned with growing income gaps between recent immigrants and non-immigrants, generally speaking, the socio-economic disadvantage that burdens so many ethno-racial groups in the City of Toronto does not exist in the suburbs.<sup>9</sup> These are socially mobile communities more readily able to gain access to a political system that often associates political success with the accumulation of wealth.

### Who is getting elected – South Asian Canadians

In 1993, three politicians simultaneously became the first members of Parliament of South Asian descent in the Canadian House of Commons. While this was a monumental first for



Canada's South Asian community, the event was somewhat tardy in relation to milestone political firsts of Canada's other visible-minority communities. Some 25 years earlier, in 1968, Canada's first Black MP (Lincoln Alexander) and Arab MP (Pierre De Bané) first entered the House, and more than three and a half decades earlier, Canada's first MP of Chinese descent (Douglas Jung) was victorious in securing his place among the members of Canada's 23rd Parliament in 1957.

During the most recent general election of 2006, South Asian candidates held strong and repeated their electoral success of 2004 by securing 10 seats in Canada's lower house. With 8 of these 10 South Asian politicians able to speak

Punjabi, the language is the fourth most widely spoken in the House. Only Rahim Jaffer (Edmonton–Strathcona) and Yasmin Ratansi (Don Valley East), both Ismaili-Muslims from the South Asian diaspora in continental Africa, do not speak Punjabi.

In spite of their laggard debut, in less than a decade and a half Canada's South Asian community has made the transition from being completely under-represented to achieving a level of representation in the House of Commons proportional to their numbers in the general population. Holding 3.3% of the seats in the House of Commons, and comprising 3.1% of Canada's population, South Asians have become the largest visible-minority community in Canada to achieve such a level of representation at the federal level. They create a stark contrast to Canada's Chinese community, which, at 3.7% of the general

*Why has Canada's South Asian community been more successful in entering the halls of Parliament than other visible-minority communities?*

population, holds a mere 1.6% of the seats in the House of Commons. Interestingly enough, as Table 2 highlights, Canada's Arab and Japanese populations are the only other visible-minority communities that have achieved representation in the House

of Commons proportional to their populations, although their numbers are on a smaller scale.

Why has Canada's South Asian community been more successful in entering the halls of Parliament than other visible-minority communities? Factors such as residential concentration, socio-economic status, language ability and community mobilization in the face of perceived societal discrimination have all heavily influenced the representation rates of South Asian Canadians.

Canada's South Asian population, and more specifically Canada's Sikh population, live in heavily concentrated communities, which may help explain why the majority of Canada's South Asian politicians are Sikh, comprising 7 of the 10 South Asian MPs in the House of Commons. Of these seven politicians, two represent ridings in suburban Mississauga and two in suburban Brampton. None are from the City of Toronto. If we compare the residential concentrations of Sikhs in these three communities, the connection between residential concentration and electoral success becomes clearer.

In the City of Toronto, numerous ethnic and visible-minority groups live in similar concentrations. For example, the three largest visible-minority communities in the City of Toronto comprise relatively similar percentages of the total population: the Chinese stand at 10.6%, South Asians at 10.3% and Blacks at 8.3%. Although 21.5% of Ontario's Sikhs live in Toronto, they have been unable to use these numbers to their advantage as well as their suburban counterparts have, since they do not constitute a single dominant minority group.

**Table 2**  
**Visible-Minority Representation in House of Commons**

Minority community	MPs in 39th Parliament	% of seats in Parliament	% of general population
South Asian	10	3.3	3.1
Chinese	5	1.6	3.7
Black	4	1.3	2.2
Arab	3	1.0	0.7
Latin	1	0.3	0.7
Japanese	1	0.3	0.3
Filipino	0	0.0	1.0

Data on MPs supplied by author; population statistics from 2001 Census, Statistics Canada

**Table 3**  
**South Asian MPs and South Asian Residential Concentration**

Location	No. of Sikh MPs	Total population	% of South Asian residents	% of Sikh population (provincially)
Brampton	2/3	325,428	19.5	32.9
Mississauga	2/5	612,925	14.9	22.4
Toronto	0/23	2,481,494	10.3	21.5

Data on MPs supplied by author; population data from 2001 Census, Statistics Canada

Meanwhile, both Brampton and Mississauga boast high concentrations of Sikh Canadians. Such residential concentrations typically result in an extensive system of community organizations and common places of gathering. This dense social network, centred around Sikh temples (known as gurdwaras) and cultural groups, has a strong impact on the political socialization and mobilization of the Sikh community and increases the likelihood that a Sikh politician will emerge victorious due to the increased political clout of the community.<sup>10</sup>

Traditional socio-economic and cultural factors also help explain the increased rates of Sikh political representation at the federal level. Canada's Sikh community is one of the most affluent visible-minority communities in Canada, which makes it more likely that candidates will be able to afford higher campaign costs. In addition, knowledge of the English language and familiarity with democratic processes also tend to be higher among Sikh immigrants from India, than among immigrants from other countries without British colonial pasts, such as mainland China, making transitions into the Canadian political system easier. This familiarity helps explain why foreign-born South Asians, including Sikhs, are more likely to vote than their Chinese counterparts<sup>11</sup>

and why, although they constitute Canada's largest visible-minority group, the Chinese community has half as many representatives in Parliament as Canada's South Asian community.

Finally, political events outside Canada may have had an effect on the social identity of Sikhs, which resulted in a greater incentive to involve themselves in the political process.

Writer Tarik Ali Khan argues that the storming of the Golden Temple of Amritsar in 1984 and the subsequent political fallout from this event were the root causes of increased Sikh

political participation in Canada.<sup>12</sup> After the temple was stormed under the orders of Indira Gandhi, the Khalistan movement pushing for the independence of the state of Punjab gained momentum. Ali Khan argues that this movement, coupled with the Air India bombing in 1985, led to the stereotyping of Sikhs as "terrorists" and to racial profiling by Canadian authorities of Sikh refugee claimants. He believes that, to shed this negative stereotype, Canada's Sikh community mobilized and began working to show the Canadian public that they were model citizens.

It is perhaps then not coincidental that the history of South Asian Canadians in legislatures and Parliament began shortly thereafter, when Moe Sihota became the first Indo-Canadian elected to the Legislative Assembly of British Columbia in 1986, and the first Sikh Canadian elected to any provincial legislature. His victory was repeated by Ismaili Murad Velshi in 1987 and Gulzar Cheema in 1988, who became the first South Asians to enter

Photo: CP/The Toronto Star (Richard Lautens)



At a stadium in Toronto, thousands of Sikhs celebrate Baisakhi, one of their most important religious and cultural festivals.



In 1986, Moe Sihota was the first Indo-Canadian elected to a legislature in Canada (British Columbia).

the Ontario and Manitoba legislative assemblies, respectively. Community mobilization based on fear of pending societal exclusion may have led to the increased political participation of Canada's Sikh community.

## Conclusion

In spite of these recent successes, and all the variables that have led to the increased representation of South Asians in the Canadian political system, it cannot be forgotten that the general picture of visible-minority political representation in Canada is bleak. Across the nation, and in the House of Commons, the most prevalent trend is that of visible-minority under-representation. As our country continues to diversify, it becomes more and more crucial to ensure that our elected political bodies diversify alongside them. The governance of one of the most diverse countries in the world by predominantly homogeneous political bodies runs counter to the *Canadian Multiculturalism Act*, which calls for the equality of all Canadians in all aspects of society, whether it be

economic, social, cultural or political. Canada still has a long way to go before the vision set out in the Act is realized, although the suburbs, at least in the case of the Greater Toronto Area, seem to be the trailblazers in promoting greater levels of inclusion in the Canadian political system. Far from demanding Anglo-conformity, Brampton and Mississauga have emerged from the suburban stereotype and have become rare sites of visible-minority proportional representation in Canada. ✖

## NOTES

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# The Political Involvement of New Canadians *An Exploratory Study*

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*In this article, I present the findings of an exploratory study carried out among new Canadian citizens from non-democratic countries and discuss variables that may explain their perceptions and political behaviour. In particular, I focus on how three groups of political, psychological and socio-demographic variables are interrelated. My study analyzes 20 semi-directed interviews conducted with Montréal respondents who are originally from Peru, Lebanon and Haiti. The study finds that many new Canadian citizens associate democracy, at least in part, with the act of voting. Furthermore, they rely on social networks to help them develop social capital, which will enable them to acquire the skills to become active in political life. They also seem convinced that a high level of political efficacy goes hand-in-hand with strong political participation. Lastly, among respondents from visible-minority groups, I noticed the distinctiveness of minority identities. Inevitably, future research on political participation will have to take into account these new perspectives, which are presented here in exploratory form.*

## **Background and selection of respondents**

Political cynicism is now part of Canada's political landscape. In this context of weariness of politicians and the system that churns them out, the issue of the political socialization of newcomers to Canada deserves some attention. When they become involved in Canada's political community, new Canadians are affected by a context in which a wide variety of issues are at play, such as the age-old constitutional question, Canada's role in the war on terrorism, reduced funding for public services, and the lack of transparency among political officials. In other words, new Canadian citizens do not form their political vision of Canada and the problems assailing Canadian society in a vacuum. Indeed, quite the opposite is true. Just like all other Canadians, their political

sensibilities are made up of inconsistencies and their political involvement is marked by the complexity of the world in which they live.

This article tries to understand the processes that help newcomers who have become Canadian citizens learn how democratic institutions operate and play the game of civic and political participation by focusing on how three groups of variables – political, psychological and socio-demographic – are interrelated. My study analyzes 20 semi-directed interviews conducted with respondents originally from Peru (16 people), Lebanon (7 people) and Haiti (7 people). All of them are first-generation immigrants who came to Canada as adults. At the time of the study, they were all Canadian citizens living in the Montréal area. They had come to Canada under widely varied



circumstances and most of them had been living in Canada for at least five years. They were chosen for the study using a contact system – we asked respondents to name acquaintances who met our immigration and length of stay criteria. The three groups selected are visible minorities and belong to ethnic groups that continue to increase in size both in Quebec and in Canada. Lastly, they were selected because a large number of Peruvians, Lebanese and Haitians reside in the greater Montréal area.

The Lebanese left Lebanon because of the war and the religious divisions that still exist there today. The majority of the Haitians fled a country struggling with extreme poverty and harsh political oppression under the regime of Baby Doc Duvalier. And the Peruvians emigrated to flee a country that, in the 1980s, was experiencing one of the most difficult economic situations in Latin America.

The sample is exploratory and is made up of individuals from non-democratic countries. This selection was made because Canada is welcoming more and more people who immigrate without the political skills required to participate in the democratic process, which is based on respect for institutional and parliamentary rules.

Many observers in Canada are concerned about the drop in voter turnout. Conscious that lack of political participation by a growing segment of the Canadian population poses a threat to the legitimacy of democratic institutions, Elections Canada and the Office of the Chief Electoral Officer of Quebec have undertaken to make all citizens of voting age aware of the importance of going to the polls. In fact, over the past few years, people

born in Canada have been participating less than ever in the electoral process; furthermore, certain groups have a higher abstention rate than Canadians overall, namely the majority of citizens belonging to visible-minority groups and young people between the ages of 18 and 35.

Before outlining the findings of my exploratory study, I will discuss some variables that may explain the perceptions and political behaviour of new Canadian citizens, particularly those from non-democratic countries.

## Variables

One of my research questions refers to the concept of political efficacy and its dynamic ties to political participation. Aaron Cohen (2001),<sup>1</sup> after studying the effects of the mediation of psychological variables on socio-demographic<sup>2</sup> and political<sup>3</sup> variables, developed a model of interaction among these variables.

According to Cohen, socio-demographic variables seem to affect self-esteem and the feeling of control over one's environment, which, in turn, favour a high level of confidence in the political system and increase faith in one's ability to have an impact on that system.

According to Cohen, the concept of political efficacy refers to an individual's perception that the actions of members of a community can have an impact on the political system. This perception comes from the feeling of having some control over both one's personal life and one's environment. Such a feeling is based on perceiving the political system and

its representatives as being able to take citizens' concerns and demands into account in the process of governing and developing public policy. To that end, Cohen points out that an individual must have the cognitive skills to understand the country's political habits and customs.

Marc A. Zimmerman (1995)<sup>4</sup> echoes those observations when he places emphasis on active participation, and the personal certainty of being able to change things and of having the skills required to do so. He uses the concept of *psychological empowerment*, which involves two dimensions: the first being interpersonal (self-esteem, feelings of control, personal skills) and the second being interactive (understanding of the surrounding environment). Zimmerman places great importance on socialization and networks.

*New Canadian citizens who come from non-democratic countries see voter participation as one of the foundations of democracy.*

However, another author, Günter Krampen (1991),<sup>5</sup> says that an individual's expectations of the political environment are often closely related to personality traits that are part of what the author calls the *action-theory model of personality*, which involves both psychological conditioning and sociological characteristics.

Of course, it is difficult, as yet, to show that there is a causal link between the psychological variables, as defined by these authors, and political participation. On the other hand, and taking into account that political participation always involves pursuing and defending differing interests, it can be

logically supported that those psychological variables are going to play out in a dynamic relationship,<sup>6</sup> where a series of factors relating to socialization and political habits intertwine.<sup>7</sup> The impact of such variables is also going to depend on identity-driven characteristics that develop throughout the immigration process and the sense of belonging felt towards the new community. Lastly, psychological variables influence our analysis of events such as the sponsorship scandal or the constitutional debate.

## Analysis

In the following section, the study's main findings are discussed. They deal with voting, civic and political participation, and social change.

### Voting

*I vote most of the time. It is my responsibility as a citizen. In my country, that responsibility was taken away from me. (Woman of Lebanese origin)*

What emerges from the study with regard to voting is particularly interesting. In fact, all the participants said that they exercise their right to vote during elections, especially at the federal and provincial levels. New Canadian citizens who come from non-democratic countries see voter participation as one of the foundations of democracy. For them, democracy pertains as much to the rule of law, freedom of expression, a free press, and redistribution of wealth to the have-nots, as it does to exercising one's right to vote. The fact was also emphasized that in Canada "every vote counts" and that its value does not change whether a person is rich or poor.

Furthermore, over half the new citizens who took part in the survey believe

that a democratic society is defined by much more than the right to vote. They say that without responsible citizens who join forces and hold elected officials accountable and put an end to their corruption, a democratic society cannot exist. In brief, our findings indicate that the meaning attributed to civic engagement refers back to the psychological determinants that I mentioned earlier and to the positive interactions they create for political participation.

Voting is not merely a symbolic act. This fundamental action, which many respondents were deprived of in their home countries, represents a type of "democracy in action." That being said, that new citizens are showing up at the polls is not an indication of blind trust in politicians and the political system. Rather, voting makes it possible for the principles that underpin democratic society to be renewed, regardless of the individual or collective meanings associated with it.<sup>8</sup>

### Civic and political participation

*I began to get involved in various boards of directors and community groups. I am involved because I want to help bring about change. (Man of Haitian origin)*

It is known that an interest shown in politics does not always translate into active participation in political parties or into concrete actions<sup>9</sup> aimed at influencing politics. However, what Cohen qualifies as *psychological involvement* constitutes a level of politicization that can lead to more active participation.

Besides formal political participation, which boils down to involvement in electoral politics and government

policy, researchers also study another area of participation – often referred to as civic – the borders of which are often poorly defined, and which particularly involves the community sector, as well as socio-cultural and sports associations. While this type of participation is not always directed towards government policy, it is indeed a type of civic engagement which, through daily interactions, makes the acquisition of social capital that can be transferred to the political arena much easier.<sup>10</sup>

According to Peter S. Li, the feeling of belonging to an ethnic group is a way

*Participation in civil society favours the acquisition of political skills.*

of acquiring social capital, which in turn contributes to the economic integration of newcomers. The concept of social capital, developed by Robert D. Putnam,<sup>11</sup> is illuminating, in that newcomers to Canada often seek out their ethnic network to help them enter the labour market. My study of new Canadian citizens shows the high level of importance that they place on economic integration, which is part and parcel of a successful immigration process. There seems to be a causal relation between acquiring social capital, the employment conditions that new Canadian citizens face and their level of civic and political participation.

Cohen, in his study mentioned above, shows how socio-economic status positively or negatively affects psychological attributes such as self-esteem and a feeling of control over one's environment. Furthermore, according to Cohen, the more an individual believes that his or her commitment



Canada's Haitian-born Governor General Michaëlle Jean returned in May of this year to visit with the people of the town of Jacmel, in Haiti, where she spent part of her childhood.

and actions will help change things, the more that individual will have a tendency to become involved politically. What Cohen refers to as *political efficacy* largely explains how the most politically active people in the three sample groups are also the most convinced of the importance and benefit of their actions; they are also more critical of politicians and the political system.

### **Social change**

*People must get involved so that things work as they should, so that the parties are also aware of people's needs.*  
(Woman of Peruvian origin)

Several of my respondents acknowledge that they are active in community life so that they can better understand their socio-political environment. Participation in civil society favours the acquisition of political skills (analytical ability, development of critical thinking, understanding of institutions), in connection with a series of factors relating to socialization networks.

While this is only an exploratory sample, I have noticed certain trends regarding the respondents' political behaviour. It appears that their level of politicization falls into a broad spectrum between status quo and change. Greater political involvement seems to give rise to actions that strengthen qualities involving self-esteem and a sense of control, which in turn pave the way for actions that promote social change.

### **Conclusion**

What information can be drawn from this exploratory study, and what can one conclude about future research on the political participation of new citizens? In brief, I will reiterate the four most promising avenues. Many new Canadian citizens associate democracy, at least in part, with the act of voting. However, they rely on social networks to develop social capital, which enables them to acquire the skills to be involved in political life. They also seem to support the idea that a high level of political

efficacy goes hand-in-hand with strong political involvement. Lastly, I noticed the distinctiveness of minority identities among respondents from visible-minority groups.

These trends, which will have to be checked empirically on a representative sample, reveal a perceptual universe that is much more complex than the model proposed by political scientists – a model that generally ignores a number of psycho-political elements, including the impression that newcomers have of the host society and avenues for integration. Such elements, in turn, help form the perceptions that newcomers have of majority groups.

Future research on political participation, if aimed at perfecting existing models, will have to factor in these new perspectives, which have not yet been explored in depth. In that context, an exploratory qualitative approach, combined with a pan-Canadian quantitative approach including other ethnic groups, should make it possible to establish other operational models for the political participation of new Canadian citizens. ✖

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## NOTES

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3. Including the level of politicization and active political participation.
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6. Rather than linear, in that the complexity of social relations is taken into consideration.
7. It is a matter of highlighting the hidden dimension of political perceptions, which are often internalized at a very young age; often they are also the result of underlying life paths and social networks.
8. In that regard, I noticed differences among the three groups in this study. In an expanded version of this article, I will provide a more detailed outline.
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# Print Media Coverage of Muslim Canadians During Recent Federal Elections



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*Traditionally, neither political scientists nor journalists have paid much attention to religion and electoral politics in Canada. However, the September 11, 2001, attack on the United States brought religious differences to the forefront, focusing attention on Muslims. Despite the diversity of Muslims, both globally and in Canada, stereotypes that homogenize Muslims and equate Islam with extremism persist. This article analyzes English-language print media coverage of the 2000, 2004 and 2006 Canadian general elections, with attention to both the quantity and nature of coverage given to Muslim Canadians.<sup>1</sup> Our findings suggest that there was more coverage of Muslim Canadians during the 2004 and 2006 elections than in 2000. However, we also find that the dominant “game frame” approach to media election coverage, which treats elections as a horse race, creates few opportunities for the kind of substantive coverage that would challenge stereotypes about, and reveal the diversity of, Canadian Muslims.*

Traditionally, Canadian political scientists have paid only sporadic attention to religion in electoral politics in Canada, and likewise, religious groups have not been a sustained focus of attention for the print media’s coverage of Canadian federal elections. As religious studies professor Paul Bramadat observes, “the tendency in our society is to ignore religion only until some religious individual or group behaves, well, rather badly.”<sup>2</sup>

The September 11, 2001, attack on the United States of America, though perpetrated by a handful of individuals, was an event that brought religious divisions to the

forefront, focusing attention on a large, heterogeneous and transnational religious community: Muslims. This article examines the heightened awareness of religious differences as it played out in Canadian media accounts during electoral campaigns. Specifically, we analyze English-language print media coverage of the 2000, 2004 and 2006 Canadian general elections that includes discussions of Canadian Muslims.

In addition to assessing the quantity of coverage before and after September 11, 2001, we also assess the nature of the coverage. The media form a lens through which most



Muslims pray at a Toronto mosque in memory of lives lost in the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks in the United States.

citizens view Canadian society and politics. More specifically, the media are instrumental in shaping, if not constructing, the beliefs people come to form about groups with whom they may infrequently interact,<sup>3</sup> such as religious minorities like Muslims. In his analysis of the role of the U.S. media in covering the Middle East after the Iranian revolution of 1979, Edward Said critiqued what he saw as an escalating tendency to treat Muslims as homogeneous, and to equate Islam with fundamentalism and a global threat.<sup>4</sup> Misleading stereotypes, frequently drawn from American global coverage, may also be found in the Canadian media's treatment of Islam and global politics. Indeed, Karim H. Karim, in his analysis, asserts an "Islamic peril" has come to replace the "Soviet threat" of the Cold War years.<sup>5</sup>

Our focus on three national elections centres on the quantity of coverage given to Muslim Canadians, whether this coverage treats Muslim Canadians in a homogeneous and stereotyped way

and the implications of "framing" for minorities. Media studies suggest that the dominant frame for election coverage is the "game frame," which focuses

on who's winning, who's losing, and why. As a result, rather than being driven by issues, election coverage is driven by the "horse race" aspects of the campaign.<sup>6</sup> In light of the preceding discussion, we expect to find more coverage of Canadian Muslims during the 2004 and 2006 elections than in 2000. However, we also expect that the dominant game frame creates few opportunities for substantive coverage that would challenge stereotypes and reveal diversity.

## Background

Muslim Canadians are a heterogeneous community, marked by generational and demographic diversity. Sustained through distinct waves of immigration dating back to the late nineteenth century,<sup>7</sup> Muslim Canadians exhibit important cohort differences,<sup>8</sup> belong to a variety of branches within Islam (e.g. Sunni, Shi'i, Druze, Ismaili, etc.),

and vary by country of origin, ethnicity, language and culture, along with class and gender.<sup>9</sup> As illustrated in Table 1, Muslims today comprise the largest non-Christian community in Canada, standing at 2% of the Canadian population.

Since September 11, 2001, there has been a revival of essentialist arguments positing a "clash of civilizations" between Christianity and Islam. Muslim Canadians (and those perceived as Muslim) have faced an increased risk of discrimination and violence from some co-citizens.<sup>10</sup>

**Table 1  
Major Religious Denominations in Canada, 2001 (as % of population)**

<b>Christian faith communities</b>	
Roman Catholic	43.2
Protestant	29.2
Christian Orthodox	1.6
Christian, not included elsewhere	2.6
<b>Non-Christian faith communities</b>	
Muslim	2.0
Jewish	1.1
Buddhist	1.0
Hindu	1.0
Sikh	0.9
<b>No religious affiliation</b>	
No religion	16.2

Source: Statistics Canada, 2001 Census: Analysis Series Religions in Canada, Catalogue No. 96F0030XIE2001015 (2003)



This article's authors examine coverage of Muslim Canadians in eight newspapers at recent federal elections. They conclude that election coverage creates few opportunities to challenge stereotypes and reveal the diversity of this heterogeneous and transnational religious community.

Since 2001, Muslim Canadian organizations and community leaders have mobilized to counter stereotypes, fear, hate crimes and racial profiling directed at Muslims generally and to attempt to broaden dialogue both among Canadian Muslims and between Muslim and non-Muslim Canadians.<sup>11</sup> In relation to Canadian elections, comparative forms and rates of participation of Muslim Canadians are difficult to establish accurately because of the relatively small numbers captured through standard survey designs. However, Hamdani estimates that voter turnout in federal elections has been lower for Muslim Canadians than that for Canadians overall, standing at only 42% in the 2000 election (compared to 61.2% of all Canadians) and improving somewhat in 2004 to 46.5% (compared to 60.9% of all Canadians).<sup>12</sup> Compared to their numbers in the overall population, Muslim Canadians are under-represented as elected officials.<sup>13</sup>

As shown in Table 2, Canadian Muslims are concentrated in certain provinces. They are most numerous in the province of Ontario, followed by

Quebec, British Columbia and Alberta. Within these provinces, Muslim Canadians are further concentrated in Toronto, followed by Montréal, Vancouver, Ottawa, Calgary and Edmonton. Combined, these six Canadian cities are home to 85.2% of the Canadian Muslim population, with Toronto alone housing 43.8% of Muslim Canadians.<sup>14</sup>

## Methodology

Our selection of newspapers relates to the demographic concentration of Muslim Canadians in specific cities. Thus, in addition to addressing the two English-language "national" papers, *The Globe and Mail* and *The National Post*, we chose the largest English-language dailies in the cities with the largest Muslim populations. These are

*The Gazette* [Montréal], *The Toronto Star*, *The Ottawa Citizen*, *The Calgary Herald*, *The Edmonton Journal* and *The Vancouver Sun*. Our coverage for each election runs from the day the writ was dropped, until one week after each election.<sup>15</sup> Any story with the word Muslim or Islam (or variation of Islam) was included in the sample if the topic was the Canadian election, regardless of whether or not it identified Muslims in Canada as "Muslim Canadians." This search yielded 67 articles.

A detailed coding instrument was used to provide a systematic description of the location (in the paper) and content of these news stories. The "demographic" characteristics of each news story were classified based on the

*Muslim Canadians are a heterogeneous community, marked by generational and demographic diversity.*

newspaper in which it was published, the date of publication, the location in the newspaper, the type of story (e.g. news, column, editorial), and the main focus of the story. As well, each article was coded based on where it mentioned Muslims or Islam – in the headline or lead paragraph for

**Table 2**  
**Concentration of Muslim Canadian Population by Province, 2001**

Canada	579,640
Ontario	352,530
Quebec	108,620
British Columbia	56,220
Alberta	49,045

Source: Statistics Canada, 2001 Census: Analysis Series Religions in Canada, Catalogue No. 96F0030XIE2001015 (2003)

instance – and the role of Muslims or Islam in the story (integral, important or tangential) was assessed. By applying critical discourse analysis techniques<sup>16</sup> to the coding, we gauged whether Muslims were depicted as homogeneous, identified only as a religious group, or cast as socially conservative or extremist in orientation. Finally, we looked at the extent to which the news stories conveyed a message of inclusion of Muslim Canadians by identifying them as Canadians or

Canadian citizens, and participants in federal elections.

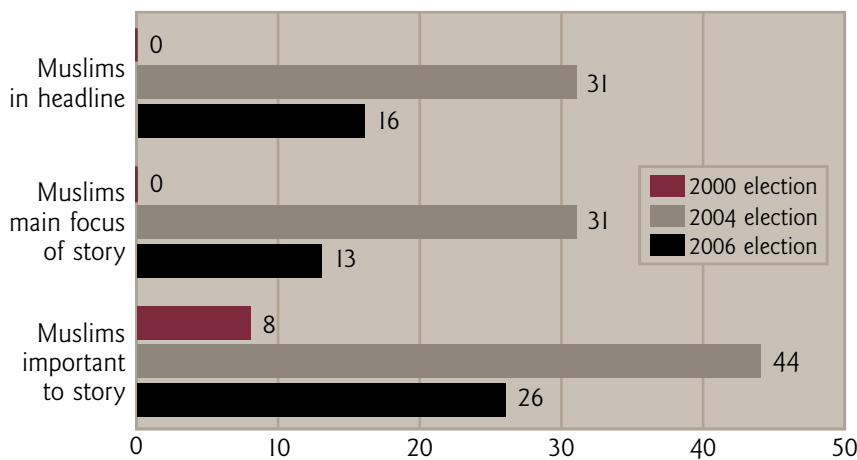
### Amount and placement of coverage

Table 3 indicates which of the newspapers in our sample considered Muslim Canadians important to election coverage. The majority of the attention came from two newspapers, the *Globe and Mail* and the *Toronto Star*, which accounted for almost two thirds of the

stories overall, and 94% of the articles mentioning Muslim Canadians published during the 2004 election. While the overall number of articles is not large, the pattern over time confirms our expectation that there was significantly more coverage after September 11, 2001, than before. Table 3 shows that there were only 13 stories published in 2000 (19% of the sample); this increased to 16 in 2004 (24%) and more than doubled, to 38, in 2006 (57%). However, more news stories mentioning “Muslims” do not by any means equal more substantive coverage.

As Figure 1 shows, Muslim Canadians were simply not in the election news frame in 2000; indeed, Muslims were tangential to the story in 92% of the newspaper articles – merely mentioned in passing, as one of many religious groups, in a discussion about the role of religion in politics – and were never named in the headlines. As well, Muslims were neither the focus of, nor important to, many of the 2006 news stories that mentioned them. In the 2006 election, Muslims were important or integral to 39% of the news stories,

**Figure 1**  
Percentage of Stories Mentioning Muslims with a Substantive Focus on Muslims, by Election



**Table 3**  
Number (%) of Stories Mentioning Muslims by Newspaper and Election

Newspaper	2000 election n (%)	2004 election n (%)	2006 election n (%)	Row totals (%)
<i>Globe and Mail</i>	3 (23%)	9 (56%)	10 (26%)	22 (33%)
<i>Toronto Star</i>	3 (23%)	6 (38%)	12 (32%)	21 (31%)
<i>National Post</i>	7 (54%)	1 (6%)	4 (10%)	12 (18%)
<i>Ottawa Citizen</i>	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	6 (16%)	6 (9%)
<i>Edmonton Journal</i>	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	3 (8%)	3 (5%)
[Montréal] <i>Gazette</i>	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	2 (5%)	2 (3%)
<i>Vancouver Sun</i>	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	1 (3%)	1 (1%)
<i>Calgary Herald</i>	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
<b>Column totals</b>	13 (19%)	16 (24%)	38 (57%)	67 (100%)



and recognized in only 16% of the headlines. However, as Figure 1 shows, it was during the 2004 election that the newspapers provided a substantive focus on Muslims. In almost one third of the stories mentioning Muslims in 2004, they were named in the headline, a powerful signifier of their importance to the news story.<sup>17</sup> As well, in 2004, Muslims were either the main focus, or an important focus, of the story in 75% of the coverage. This kind of placement and distribution of the coverage begs the question: why were Muslim Canadians considered by the media to be “in the game” in 2004?

### Game framing of election news: When are Muslim Canadians in the game?

That the main topic of 67% of the news stories mentioning Muslims or Islam during these three elections was the electoral game, or “horse race,” is demonstrated in Table 4. A play-by-play commentary on who is ahead in the polls, or on patterns of voter support for various political parties, puts the spotlight on leaders, parties, candidates and voters. Muslim Canadians were in the frame in 2004 because they were identified as, and appealed to, as Canadians, and as voters.

Figure 2 highlights the dramatic changes in the portrayal of Muslims by election news coverage over time. In the 2000 election, very few of the stories mentioning Muslims identified them as Canadian citizens (only 15%) or discussed their role as voters (8%). In contrast, post-9/11 election coverage has described Muslims as Canadians by referring to their organizations by name or mentioning their participation in Canadian elections as voters or candidates. In particular, the 2004 coverage represents an attempt by the

**Table 4**  
Main Topic of News Story by Election (reported as percentages of all election stories mentioning Muslims)

Main topic of story	2000 election n (%)	2004 election n (%)	2006 election n (%)	Row totals n (%)
Domestic issues	0 (0%)	2 (13%)	6 (16%)	8 (12%)
Foreign policy or security issues	1 (8%)	3 (18%)	7 (18%)	11 (16%)
The campaign game*	9 (69%)	11 (69%)	25 (66%)	45 (67%)
Other	3 (23%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	3 (5%)

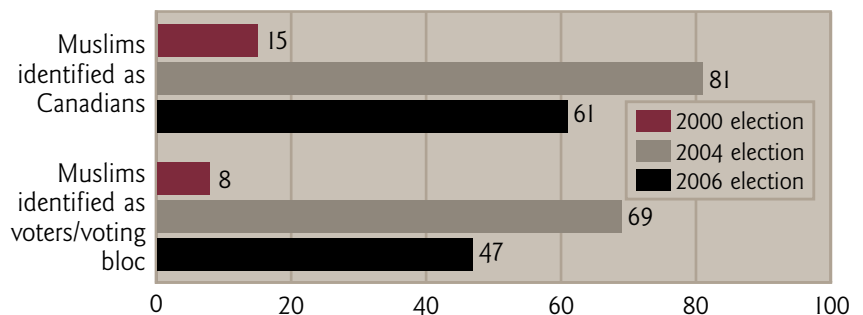
\*This category includes stories focusing on polling data, voting blocs, regional distribution of party support, and/or party appeals to particular groups of voters.

*Globe and Mail* and the *Toronto Star*, which produced 15 of the 16 articles mentioning Muslims during the 2004 election, to make gestures of recognition towards this community. Muslims were explicitly identified as Canadian citizens by 81% of the coverage in the 2004 election. Moreover, 69% of the articles mentioning Muslims in 2004 identified them as voters, or as a voting bloc, and several of these articles suggested Muslim Canadians had the power to shape electoral outcomes in key constituencies. Headlines such as “Why Muslims should vote”<sup>18</sup> and “Muslims urged to go to the polls”<sup>19</sup> indicated the role of Muslim Canadian

voters was taken seriously by the *Globe and Mail* and *Toronto Star*. A news story in the *Globe and Mail* about the importance of the “immigrant vote” to the 2004 election noted the growing size of the Muslim Canadian community and quoted political scientist Henry Jacek: “I think, since 9/11, they are extraordinarily political. They are sensitive to the security measures in North America .... I think a lot of them are going to vote.”<sup>20</sup>

While Muslim Canadians may be included in the frame as voters under particular circumstances, such as

**Figure 2**  
Percentage of Stories Identifying Muslims as Canadians/Voters, by Election



post-9/11 appeals to the community to exercise its franchise strategically, the dominance of the game frame tends to divert attention from substantive campaign issues or policy claims. Indeed, we found that less than a third of the coverage mentioning Muslims focused on domestic or foreign policy debates (see Table 4). Consequently, the news stories mentioning Muslim Canadians afforded little opportunity to educate Canadians about the heterogeneity of this community, or to challenge negative stereotypes of Muslims.

### Portrayal of Muslim Canadians in election coverage

Based on the literature about media coverage of Muslims, we examined each of the news stories for damaging mischaracterizations and stereotypes. One of the dominant misconceptions about Muslims is that they are homogeneous in their faith, ethnicity, language and culture. Table 5 indicates that this one-dimensional portrayal of Muslims was firmly embedded

in the election news stories, particularly for the 2000 election, in which every story mentioning Muslims approached them as a homogeneous group. As noted, Muslims were merely mentioned in most of these stories, as one of many religions with members whose views were relevant to the campaign. The 2004 and 2006 elections feature a very different portrayal of Muslim Canadians, as illustrated in Table 5. While the complexity and diversity of Muslim Canadians continued to be largely ignored by news reports, election news articles did not just position Muslims as a religious community, as they did in 2000. Approximately two thirds of the coverage in 2004 and 2006 characterized Muslims as voters, as members of political organizations, as candidates, or as concerned citizens.

Photo: CP/The St. John's Telegram (Keith Gosse)



A family originally from Bangladesh takes the citizenship oath at a ceremony in St. John's, Newfoundland and Labrador.

**Table 5**  
**Portrayal of Muslims in Canadian Election News Stories, by Election (reported as percentages of election articles mentioning Muslims)**

Portrayal of Muslims in the news story*	2000 election n (%)	2004 election n (%)	2006 election n (%)	Totals n (%)
Muslims portrayed as a homogeneous group	13 (100%)	13 (81%)	30 (79%)	56 (84%)
Muslims described only as a religious group	10 (77%)	5 (31%)	14 (37%)	29 (43%)
Muslims depicted as socially conservative	1 (8%)	1 (6%)	8 (21%)	10 (15%)
Muslims associated with extremism	3 (23%)	1 (6%)	11 (29%)	15 (22%)

\*Note that these are not mutually exclusive portrayals, as Muslims may have been depicted in more than one, if not all, of these ways within a single news story.

Very few of the articles cast Muslim Canadians as socially conservative, with the highest percentage (21%) published during the 2006 election, when Muslims and other religious groups reacted to the same-sex marriage issue. However, the association of Muslims and Islam with extremism comes out sharply in 2000 and particularly 2006. While in 2004 Muslims were linked with extremism in only one article (6%), three articles (23%) associated Islam with religious fundamentalism during the 2000 election.<sup>21</sup> In 2006, 11 articles, almost a third of the total number of articles mentioning Muslims, depicted them as radicals, even as terrorists. Much of this increase in 2006 came from seven articles (almost a fifth of the coverage) that focused on the false accusation

that a candidate described his nomination win as a “victory for Islam.”<sup>22</sup> Similarly, two articles identified a political party supporter as a “suspected terrorist.”<sup>23</sup> More ominously, a *National*

*There was very little space devoted to contesting negative portrayals and reflecting the diversity of a community with deep historical roots in Canada.*

*Post* column declared that “radical Islamists have declared war on all secular democracies, including Canada” and thus constitute a “world-wide Islamo-fascist threat to democracy” courtesy of “a war the jihadists deliver to your doorstep.”<sup>24</sup> This example is indicative of the *National Post*’s approach to the Muslim Canadian community, as 42% of this paper’s election articles associated Muslims/Islam with extremism, compared with 9% of *Globe and Mail* stories and 14% of *Toronto Star* stories.

## Conclusion

Our analysis of the 2000, 2004 and 2006 elections demonstrates that there has been an increase over time

in the amount of newspaper coverage given to Muslim Canadians during federal election campaigns, which we suggest can be related to the impact of September 11, 2001. Overall, our findings indicate that while increased media attention has afforded new recognition of Muslim Canadians as voters and candidates, the dominant game frame of election coverage presents both opportunities and constraints for portraying the complexity of Canadian Muslims. As such, while the English-language treatment of Muslim Canadians during elections, particularly the 2004 election, opened up modest opportunities to contemplate their role as voters, there was very little space devoted to contesting negative portrayals and reflecting the diversity of a community with deep historical roots in Canada. In fact, the 2006 coverage stands out for reinforcing long-standing stereotypes.

Analysts like Karim H. Karim have shown that in covering global events, the Canadian media have homogenized and stereotyped Muslims, and in the process constructed an

“Islamic peril.” As it stands, at least in the English-language Canadian electoral press coverage we addressed, the game frame presents mixed results for re-examining this misleading portrayal. Given the importance of the media in shaping the views Canadians hold of each other, the limitations of the game frame need to be considered by journalists, community activists, politicians and citizens seeking better understanding of Canadian society. ❌

## NOTES

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9. Sheila McDonough and Homa Hoodfar, "Muslims in Canada: From Ethnic Groups to Religious Community," in Paul Bramadat and David Seljak, eds., *Religion and Ethnicity in Canada* (Toronto: Pearson Education Canada, 2005), pp. 133–153.
10. Yasmeen Abu-Laban, "Liberalism, Multiculturalism and the Problem of Essentialism," *Citizenship Studies* Vol. 6, No. 4 (December 2002), pp. 459–482.
11. McDonough and Hoodfar, "Muslims in Canada," pp. 137–141.
12. Daood Hamdani, *Muslim Women: From Polling Booths to Parliament* (Canadian Council of Muslim Women: March 2005), pp. 1–9.
13. Hamdani, *Muslim Women*, pp. 1–11.
14. Adapted from Peter Beyer, "Appendix: Demographics of Religious Identification in Canada," in Paul Bramadat and David Seljak, eds., *Religion and Ethnicity in Canada* (Toronto: Pearson Education Canada, 2005), p. 240.
15. Specifically, utilizing the Factiva Database, our search dates for the 2000 election were from October 22 to December 4, 2000; for the 2004 election, May 23 to July 5, 2004; and for the 2006 election, November 30, 2005, to January 30, 2006. The search terms employed were "election and federal and Muslim"; "election and Muslim"; "candidate and Muslim"; "vot\* and Muslim"; "election and federal and Islam\*"; "election and Islam\*"; "candidate and Islam\*"; "vot\* and Islam\*".
16. Teun A. van Dijk, *Racism and the Press* (New York: Routledge, 1991), p. 6.
17. van Dijk, *Racism and the Press*, pp. 50–51.
18. *The Globe and Mail*, June 7, 2004, p. A19; column by Mohamed Elmasry, National President of the Canadian Islamic Congress.
19. *The Globe and Mail*, June 4, 2004, p. A8.
20. Gloria Galloway, "Sikhs reach beyond Liberals as political influence grows; Canadian-born children of immigrants are switching allegiance, poll suggests," *The Globe and Mail*, May 25, 2004, p. A9.
21. Two articles discussed a Liberal candidate who allegedly attended an "Islamic rally with signs reading 'Death to Israel'." This was discussed in a *National Post* editorial (November 16, 2000, p. A19) which declared, "Every party attracts its share of nuts."
22. Glen McGregor, "'Mixing of religion and democracy' stirs controversy: Group claims Liberal Toronto-area candidate said nomination was 'victory for Islam,'" *The Ottawa Citizen*, December 21, 2005, p. A5. Despite the controversy, which Omar Alghabra feared would "derail" his campaign, he was elected in Mississauga–Erindale.
23. Elizabeth Thompson, "Suspected terrorist endorses Bloc," *The Ottawa Citizen*, December 6, 2005, p. A4; also, Tu Thanh Ha, "Duceppe dances around questions," *The Globe and Mail*, January 5, 2006, p. A6.
24. Robert Fulford, "Do not disturb," *The National Post*, December 31, 2005, p. A17.



# Political Engagement Among Immigrants in Four Anglo-Democracies

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*Since the 1960s, immigrants to Canada and other Western democracies increasingly come from countries with political cultures very different from those in the host country. This paper examines whether these new waves of immigrants now living in Canada and three other Anglo-democracies (the United States, Australia and New Zealand) become interested in, attentive to and knowledgeable about the politics of their host country. This brief review of political engagement among immigrants offers some reassuring findings. The new waves of immigrants appear to have adapted successfully. They have developed levels of interest in, attention to and knowledge of politics that are at least as high as those of the local population. Moreover, these results are not unique to Canada and are replicated within the three other Anglo-democracies examined.*

Immigration patterns in Western democracies have changed significantly since the 1960s, Canada being no exception. Up to the 1960s, immigrants originated mainly from Western, Northern and Southern Europe; immigrants nowadays, however, originate from Eastern and Central Europe, Asia, Africa and Latin America. There are reasons to suppose that these new waves of immigrants may experience greater challenges integrating into their new political environment than the older waves of immigrants. Whereas immigrants in the past originated from democracies with political cultures resembling those in the host country, newer waves of immigrants come from countries with political cultures that are very different, most even non-democratic.

In this paper, we examine how immigrants from such non-traditional source countries are adapting to their new

political environment. In particular, we investigate three key questions. First, how interested are immigrants in the politics of their host country? Second, how attentive are they to politics in the mass media? And third, how much do they know about the politics of their host society? Our aim is to compare the political engagement of immigrants from non-traditional source countries to that of earlier waves of immigrants and members of the local population. Our primary concern is with immigrants in Canada. However, in the latter part of the paper, we briefly compare the Canadian situation to that of other Anglo-democracies that have experienced similar changes in their immigration, namely the United States, Australia and New Zealand.

The data for our investigation are drawn from election studies in each of these countries.<sup>1</sup> Such studies, when pooled over several years, provide a rich resource for

exploring the political orientations and behaviours of immigrants. The limitation of working with these data, however, is that they do not permit us to examine how immigrants adapt to their new political environment immediately upon arrival. Because

*Immigrants from traditional source countries have a greater degree of interest in politics than immigrants from non-traditional source countries.*

the samples of the election studies are representative and obtained using a random process, the immigrant respondents included in the samples have lived in the host countries for many years. For instance, in our Canadian sample, immigrants have lived in Canada for an average of 31 years. Our analysis, therefore, focuses on immigrants who are presumed to have settled down and are not in the initial process of adapting to their host society. Also, there is an important difference between our samples of immigrants from traditional and non-traditional source countries, in that the former have resided in Canada for an average of 38 years and the latter for 24 years. While this difference needs to be kept in mind, it is important to note that for the most part it does not explain the differences in political engagement between the two groups of immigrants that are presented below.<sup>2</sup>

### Why should we care if immigrants participate in politics?

To this point, little attention has been given to the question of how well immigrants adapt to their political environment. After all, why should we care if immigrants participate in

politics? This might not be such an important concern, were we certain that the needs and preferences of immigrants were already adequately represented within the host society. However, because the new waves of immigrants come from societies with different cultures, there are reasons to suppose that their needs and preferences may be different from those of earlier immigrants and native-born citizens.

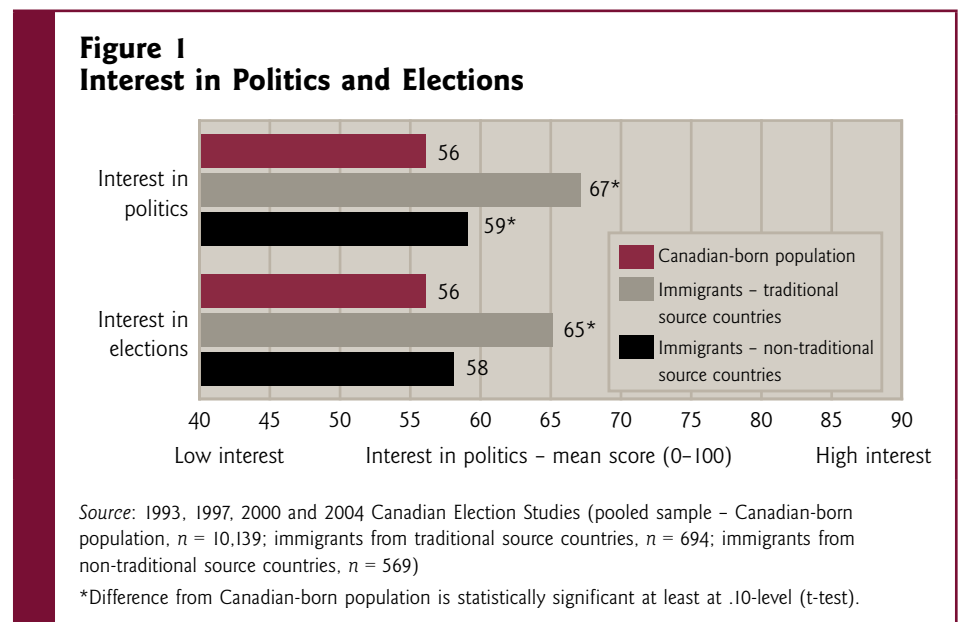
Consequently, there is a very real possibility that immigrants from non-traditional source countries may not see their views adequately represented in the host society if they do not participate in the political process.

Participation in politics, such as voting, attending political meetings or working for a party or local candidate, is contingent on a host of important factors, including interest in politics, exposure to information and political knowledge, to name a few.<sup>3</sup> Without these basic essentials, citizens may not have the necessary motivation to partake in politics, nor the wherewithal to make

the connections between their needs and concerns, and the best choices to help them attain desired policy outcomes. In examining how immigrants adapt to politics in the host society, the way to start, therefore, is by studying the extent to which immigrants are interested, informed and knowledgeable about politics.

### Interest in politics in Canada

The data in Figure 1 indicate that not all immigrants share the same degree of interest in politics. Immigrants from traditional source countries have a greater degree of interest in politics than immigrants from non-traditional source countries, but what is more striking is that both groups of immigrants turn out to be somewhat more interested in politics than the Canadian-born population. More specifically, on a scale that ranges from 0 to 100, where 0 indicates low interest in politics and 100 indicates high interest, the average interest in politics for immigrants from traditional source countries is 67. For immigrants from non-traditional source countries, the average is 59. And for citizens born in



Canada, the average level of interest in politics is 56.

The findings for interest in elections closely resemble those for politics more generally. Immigrants from non-traditional source countries manifest a more modest level of interest in elections than those from traditional source countries, but no less interest than the Canadian-born population. Hence, regardless of whether we examine interest in politics more generally or interest in a specific aspect of politics, we find similar trends.

### Attention paid to political information in the media

Being interested in politics is an important step toward being politically engaged; however, participating in politics also requires being adequately informed. The next part of our analysis, therefore, examines how much attention Canadians pay to political information in the media.

The findings reported in Figure 2 indicate that, regardless of the specific medium they use – television, newspapers or radio – immigrants, including those from non-traditional source countries, pay either as much or greater attention to information about politics as does the Canadian-born population. However, the findings also show that immigrants from traditional source countries generally pay greater attention to politics than those from non-traditional source countries.

Moreover, these data show that most Canadians, regardless of where they were born, have similar preferences when it comes to their favourite media for acquiring political information. The source of political information most often identified is television,

newspapers are the second most preferred information source and radio is the least preferred. More specifically, on a scale ranging from 0 to 100, where 0 means little attention to political information and 100 means maximal attention, Canadian-born respondents score an average of 55 on attention paid to politics on TV; 43 on attention paid to politics in newspapers; and 40 on attentiveness to politics on the radio. Similarly, for immigrants from traditional source countries, the average scores are 62, 53 and 48. And for immigrants from non-traditional source countries, the average scores are 58, 48 and 42.

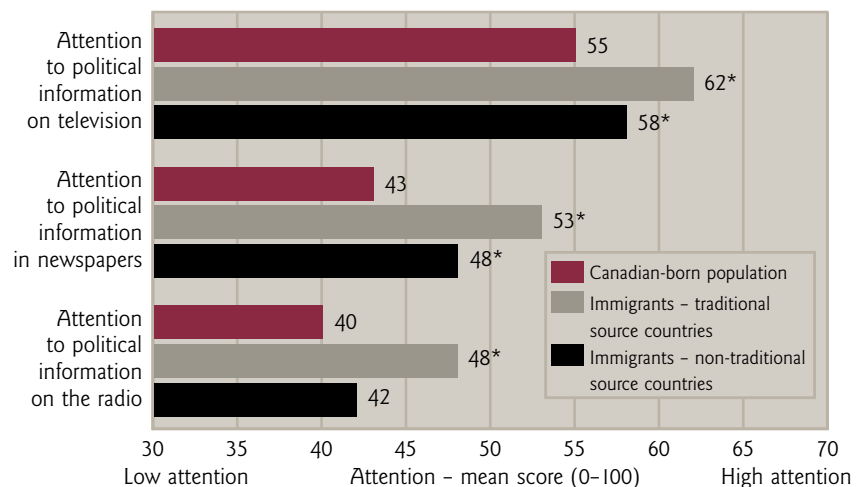
Another intriguing finding is that, although the Canadian-born population lags behind most immigrants on attention paid to politics in various

news media, the gaps are the largest in attentiveness to politics in newspapers. This is an interesting finding because newspapers are a rich source of information, especially in terms of analysis and editorial content. What these data suggest, therefore, is that immigrants are not only more exposed to political information than the Canadian-born



Using various information sources, immigrants, particularly those from traditional source countries, pay as much attention to politics and elections as those born in Canada – and often more.

**Figure 2**  
**Attention to Political Information in Mass Media**



Source: 1993, 1997, 2000 and 2004 Canadian Election Studies (pooled sample – Canadian-born population, n = 11,906; immigrants from traditional source countries, n = 819; immigrants from non-traditional source countries, n = 615)

\*Difference from Canadian-born population is statistically significant at least at .10-level (t-test).



respondents score an average of 49 on the knowledge index, and immigrants from traditional and non-traditional source countries score 51 and 47, respectively. When it comes to recollecting different political figures, therefore,

population, but that they are also more exposed to information of better quality.

### Knowledge of Canadian politics

The findings presented so far suggest that immigrants from non-traditional source countries are no less interested in or attentive to politics than their Canadian-born counterparts. But what about knowledge of politics?

To measure knowledge of Canadian politics, we rely on a battery of questions that ask respondents to identify various political figures, such as the Minister of Finance in Ottawa, the premier in the respondent's province and the first woman to be prime minister. The average knowledge scores reported in Figure 3 range from 0–100, where 100 represents strong knowledge of Canadian politics and 0 represents weak knowledge.<sup>4</sup>

Surprisingly, although they are more interested in and attentive to politics, immigrants are not more knowledgeable than the local population. The evidence shows that there are no significant differences in knowledge levels among the three groups of respondents. Canadian-born

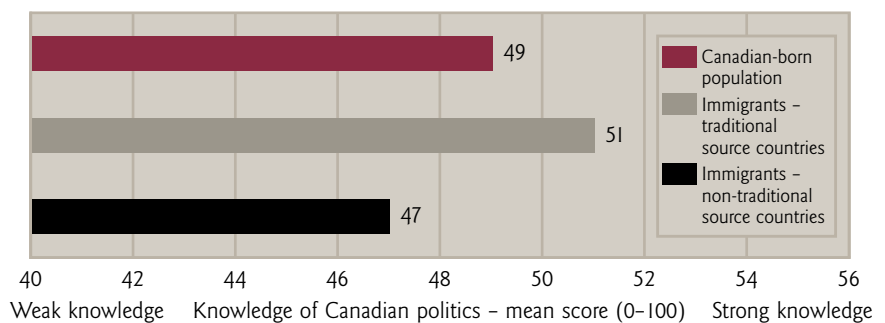
our findings indicate that immigrants, including those from non-traditional source countries, are no less knowledgeable than their Canadian-born counterparts. It is striking that, despite their higher levels of political interest and attention to media (especially newspapers), immigrants are not more knowledgeable about politics than are members of the local population. It is plausible that immigrants' levels of knowledge might be weaker than those of the local population if it were not for their greater interest in and attention to politics. More in-depth analysis is required to further investigate this possibility.

### Interest in politics in four Anglo-democracies

The findings presented above seem to suggest that immigrants from non-traditional sources adapt remarkably well to their new political context, despite coming from societies with different political cultures. However, Canada is not the only country that hosts large proportions of immigrants. Are immigrants in other Anglo-democracies (the United States, Australia and New Zealand) also adapting as successfully to the new political cultures in their respective host societies?

Due to space limitations, our analysis in this instance is limited solely to an examination of interest in politics. Still, the findings are revealing in several respects. First, the cross-national perspective provided in Figure 4 suggests that Canadians are among the least interested in politics when compared to citizens in other Anglo-democracies. This finding is consistent for the local populations as well as for both groups of immigrants. Only immigrants in the United States are

**Figure 3**  
**Knowledge of Canadian Politics**



Source: 1997, 2000 and 2004 Canadian Election Studies (pooled sample – Canadian-born population, n = 6,831; immigrants from traditional source countries, n = 462; immigrants from non-traditional source countries, n = 350)

The differences between either group of immigrants and the Canadian-born population are not statistically significant.



less interested in politics than immigrants in Canada.

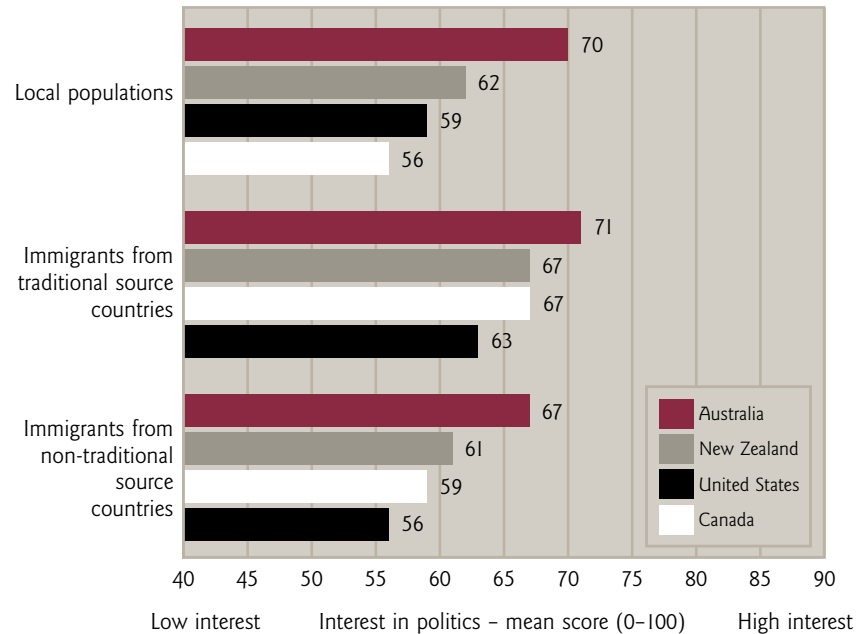
Second, when we compare the results for immigrants against local populations, we find that the gaps in interest levels between Canadian-born respondents and immigrants stand out from those in other countries. Immigrants from traditional source countries typically exhibit more interest in politics than local populations (see Figure 5). And immigrants from non-traditional source countries have broadly the same levels of interest in politics as members of the local population. Note, however, that immigrants from traditional source countries in Canada exhibit higher levels of interest in politics relative to the Canadian-born population than do immigrants from similar points of origin in other Anglo-democracies. More specifically, the gap between immigrants from traditional source countries and the local population is 11 points in Canada, 5 points in New Zealand, 4 points in the United States, and there is only a 1-point difference in Australia. Note also that only in Canada do immigrants from non-traditional source countries exhibit higher levels of interest in politics than the local population. These latter differences are not as large as those between immigrants from traditional source countries and local populations, but it is revealing nonetheless that this particular difference is positive only in Canada.

There may be several explanations for these differences. First, immigrants in Canada may appear more interested in politics than immigrants in other Anglo-democracies because the Canadian-born population is less interested than local populations in other countries. Second, there may be differences in the pools of immigrants that

settle to different societies and these distinct pools of immigrants could explain higher levels of interest in

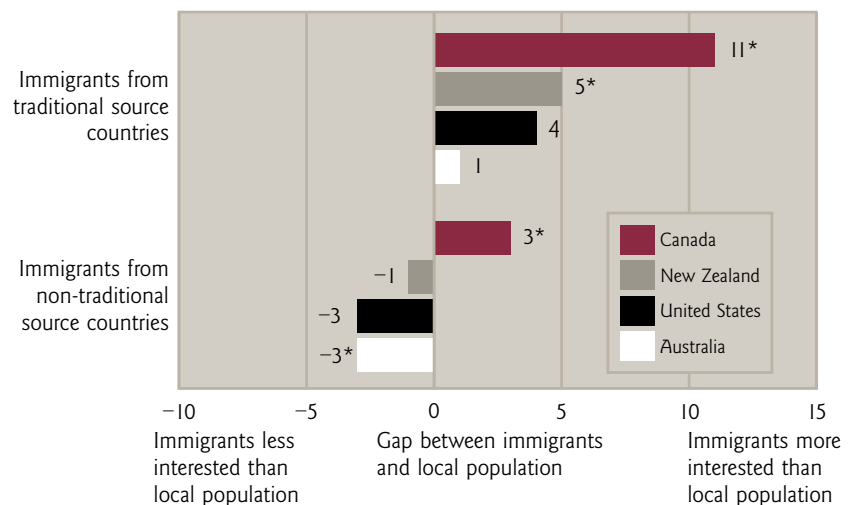
politics among newcomers in Canada. Immigrants, even within our subcategories (traditional and non-traditional),

**Figure 4**  
**Interest in Politics in Four Anglo-Democracies**



Sources: Canadian Election Studies (1993–2004); American Election Studies (1986–2000); Australian Election Studies (1993–2004); New Zealand Election Studies (1990–2002)

**Figure 5**  
**Interest in Politics in Four Anglo-Democracies**  
**(comparison of immigrant and local populations)**



Sources: Canadian Election Studies (1993–2004); American Election Studies (1986–2000); Australian Election Studies (1993–2004); New Zealand Election Studies (1990–2002)

\*Difference from local population is statistically significant at least at .10-level (t-test).



A young woman serves as an information officer at an Ottawa polling station during the 2006 election.

do not form a homogeneous group and it is possible, therefore, that differences in demographic background and varying socialization experiences may be partly at work. Third, it is possible that immigrants in Canada have better integrated into their host society

democracies offers some findings that run contrary to our initial expectations. Immigrants from non-traditional source countries who have been settled in their host-society for an average of more than two decades are not as politically engaged as immigrants from

more traditional source countries, but they are nonetheless as engaged in politics as local populations are. In short, immigrants from non-traditional source countries appear as

interested in politics, as attentive to politics in the news and as knowledgeable about politics as locals who were born and socialized in the host societies.

Based on these findings, therefore, should we conclude that new waves of immigrants adapt successfully to the politics of their host societies once they have been settled for an extended period of time? Adopting such a conclusion, at this stage of the analysis, would be premature. This paper provides some optimistic evidence about immigrants' political

integration in Canada and in other Anglo-democracies, but much remains to be learned. The road to political integration is long and complex. Basic questions remain to be answered, such as, how long exactly must newcomers be in a host society before they start to engage in politics? And, what settlement issues do they need to tackle before they start participating? Other crucial questions concern whether new waves of immigrants become actively involved in the political process and which channels of participation they prefer and are most able to use. These and other important matters still need to be examined. At stake is not only the vitality of our democracy but access to a political voice for an increasing proportion of new Canadians. ✖

*Only in Canada do immigrants from non-traditional source countries exhibit higher levels of interest in politics than the local population.*

than immigrants in other Anglo-democracies in terms of education, income and employment, factors that are associated with a greater interest in politics. These possibilities would need to be considered in future research.<sup>5</sup>

## Conclusion

New waves of immigrants are settling in Canada and other Western democracies. Because these new immigrants come from countries with political cultures that are very different from those in the host country, we expected that they would encounter some

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## NOTES

1. For each country, several election studies were pooled together: Canada: 1993–2004; United States: 1986–2000; Australia: 1993–2000; New Zealand: 1990–2002. The pooled sample in Canada includes 12,267 people born in Canada, and 850 and 631 immigrants from traditional and non-traditional source countries. The samples are respectively 9,922, 153 and 395 for the United States; 7,938, 1,596 and 964 for Australia; and 15,785, 2,372 and 529 for New Zealand.
2. That most immigrants have lived many years in the host countries does not imply that they are older than the local population. The average age for immigrants from traditional and non-traditional source countries is 55 and 46 years old, while that for the local population is 45. Multivariate analyses demonstrate that these age differences do not explain the differences in political engagement between the three groups of respondents (results not presented).
3. Sidney Verba, Kay Lehman Schlozman and Henry E. Brady, *Voice and Equality: Civic Voluntarism in American Politics* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1995).
4. The knowledge index ranges from 0 to 100 and indicates the number of correct answers to three factual questions: 0 for no correct answer, 33 for one correct answer, 67 for two correct answers and 100 for three. The numbers reported in Figure 3 are the average scores for each of our three groups of respondents.
5. Are immigrants in Canada also doing better than immigrants in other Anglo-democracies in terms of attention to politics in the media and knowledge of politics? It is difficult to answer this question, not only because of the limited space provided here, but also because of methodological considerations. With regard to knowledge of politics, the other countries examined do not offer satisfactory indicators of political knowledge. And concerning attention to politics in the media, significant variations in the questions asked in the four countries make it difficult to answer the question with certainty. However, a brief examination of the data suggests that the findings for interest in politics are not replicated for media attention (not presented). Relative to the local population in their host country, immigrants in Canada do not do better than immigrants in other Anglo-democracies in their attention to politics in the media. This finding makes the previous question even more salient: why are immigrants in Canada relatively more interested in politics when compared to the local population than are immigrants in other Anglo-democracies?



# Post-Conflict Elections and Ethnic Divides

## *Measures to Encourage Participation*

Rafael López-Pintor

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*This article looks at the effects of constitutional and legal reform on ethnic divides in transitional and post-conflict elections. Useful legal provisions for an electoral system that accommodates ethnic divisions may include power-sharing arrangements and representation formulas with quotas or reserved seats, out-of-country registration and voting, inter-ethnic composition of electoral commissions, and use of minority languages in polling forms, civic education and voter information programs. Examples are presented from transitional and post-conflict around the world. The main conclusion is that obstacles to inter-ethnic accord can be removed more easily than incentives can be offered, especially through the electoral system. However, an electoral process during or after a civil conflict in itself translates ethnic grievances to a political scenario, mitigating or displacing armed confrontation. Post-conflict elections may widen existing ethnic divisions, since factionalism may and usually does materialize in the distribution of the vote along lines of ethnic loyalty; however, this should not be seen as a negative effect of elections but as a reflection of prevailing social reality.*

The evidence summarized in this article comes from a review of scarce available literature and the direct experience of the author and some of his colleagues for the past 20 years in countries where elections were held amid severe inter-ethnic conflicts, or where such conflict was a component in the political process.<sup>1</sup> This piece contains mainly secondary analysis of evidence, which was assessed at first hand by the author or other researchers. The article relies heavily on and summarizes some of the main findings of a broader piece of research, which was recently commissioned from the author and published by USAID.<sup>2</sup> Where no specific reference is made to any author or the USAID paper after a conclusion, it should be assumed that it is my own individual assessment of the

*status questionis*, pending stronger evidence for a different interpretation.

### **Ethnic divides and political conflict**

Inter-ethnic confrontation has been of paramount importance in shaping the current map of civil and international conflicts. It has also conditioned intervention by the international community, both as peacemaker and technical assistance provider, for elections, as for other fields.<sup>3</sup>

By feeding on one of the most deeply rooted social identities, ethnic divides tend to persist even after one or more elections. In fact, post-conflict elections are frequently

envisaged as a first step toward democracy, and as an exit strategy from armed conflict. Consequently, the ethnicity factor is usually taken into consideration when devising the legal provisions under which the elections are to be held. An effective electoral system should address the need of society to accommodate its political cleavages: territorial, ethnocultural, social class or other.

## Alleviating ethnic divides through electoral rules

A standard electoral assistance package in countries with ethnic cleavages would include a component for devising electoral rules to accommodate ethnic concerns. Such concerns have been brought to the agenda of peace negotiators at least since the pacification of Namibia and Nicaragua in the 1980s. Many other countries around the world followed in the 1990s and 2000s.

The number and kind of legal provisions dealing specifically with ethnicity and elections vary among countries, mainly depending on the depth of inter-ethnic confrontation, the political will of the contenders, and the extent and effectiveness of the international presence in the field. The following list summarizes seven main legal measures enacted during the last couple of decades, with examples of countries where they were applied. Later, some cases of transitional and post-conflict elections are discussed more extensively.

### 1. Constitutional provisions for the system of government and power-sharing arrangements, signed before the first elections

The constitution may provide for a federation of ethnically based republics

(Bosnia and Herzegovina) or special arrangements for provinces (Quebec at Confederation in 1867). An administrative division of the country with ethnically defined territories may have been traditionally preserved or recently established (Iraq, Spain). Power-sharing arrangements may include a national unity government with the participation of all main parties (e.g. South Africa in 1994, Afghanistan in 2004 and Iraq in 2006); a cabinet with president and prime minister from majority and minority parties, respectively (Kosovo in 2002); a formally tripartite presidency (Bosnia and Herzegovina); or a collegial body of president and several vice-presidents, who will guarantee

*The number and kind of legal provisions dealing specifically with ethnicity and elections varies among countries.*

inter-ethnic representation in the political executive in some unwritten consensus among constitution makers. In Iraq, the constitution establishes a form of tripartite presidency, with a president and two vice-presidents (the Presidential Council), which de facto if not by law is meant to integrate the three main ethnic or religious groups at the top of executive power (Sunnis, Shiites and Kurds).

### 2. Inclusive representation formulas that provide for list-proportional representation (PR) in sub-national constituencies

This mechanism has been historically used in a number of European countries (Switzerland, the Netherlands, Belgium and Spain). In multi-ethnic Latin American countries – mainly Bolivia, Ecuador, Guatemala, Mexico, Nicaragua and Peru – ethnic cleavages

are alleviated by PR in provincial and municipal constituencies, though sporadic upsurges triggering political revolt have occurred (Mexico's Chiapas in the 1990s, Ecuador in 2000, and today's Bolivia). In Africa, also, representation for strong territorially based ethnic groups is legally ensured by PR in provincial constituencies (e.g. South Africa), or by simple majority rule (first past the post) in ethnically more homogeneous small constituencies (e.g. Ethiopia and Nigeria).

### 3. Quotas and reserved seats for ethnic minorities, similar to gender balance mechanisms

Recent examples of reserved seats are found in Afghanistan (for certain minorities, like the Kuchi), Albania (for the Southern Greek minority), Kosovo (for non-Albanian minorities) and Palestine (for

Christians and Samaritans). Nicaragua has quotas for each minority on the Atlantic Coast.

### 4. Voter registration provisions that encourage minority ethnic groups

Voter registration provisions are often used to mobilize and integrate ethnic minorities into the political process. This is usually done by permitting registration from outside the country; and facilitating voter and candidate registration with flexible regulations that reduce political and logistical barriers.

Voter registration and voting from third countries was successful in 1990 post-war Nicaragua, when exiles registered and voted at the border with Honduras and Costa Rica. In this case, ethnic conflict was only partly the cause of the displaced populations;



*Afghan election workers count ballot papers in Kabul after Afghanistan's landmark parliamentary elections on September 18, 2005.*

in the other examples below, it was the main reason for exile.

In Kosovo, municipal elections in 2000 could not overcome the reluctance by Kosovan Serbs to register and participate. They did, however, come on board for the parliamentary elections of 2001, probably due to incentives offered by the international community and by legislation. All Serb factions were encouraged to register under the banner of only one party, which they did; and legal provisions ensured a high level of representation through the mechanisms of PR plus reserved minority seats. Nevertheless, and though they registered massively in 2001, the Serbs withdrew again in the second municipal elections in 2002 and before the general election in 2005.

External registration and voting was applied in Afghanistan and Iraq (2005); particularly among populations displaced into Pakistan and Iran in the case of the Afghani elections, and

into Iran, Syria, Lebanon, Jordan and Egypt in the Iraqi case. In both elections, citizens living abroad voted in large numbers, although considerable operational costs were incurred. By contrast, in Angola in 1992, Mozambique in 1994, and Liberia in 1997, similar projects were prepared by international agencies and national actors, but were never put into practice despite the sizable communities living in neighbouring countries. Independently of its costs, out-of-country registration and voting can be considered a successful tool for inter-ethnic harmony – so long as actual turnout of the relevant population is encouraged and facilitated.

#### **5. Adding ethnic sensitivity to electoral procedures by inter-ethnic composition of electoral commissions at national and sub-national levels**

Structuring the electoral administration on a multi-ethnic basis has been used as an integrative mechanism in Afghanistan, Bosnia and Herzegovina,

Ecuador, Iraq, Kosovo, Macedonia, Nigeria and South Africa. During peacekeeping operations, elections tend to be managed by international officials, with national officers playing a secondary role. This notwithstanding, it should be recognized that multi-ethnic composition of the national component of the electoral administration has generally played a positive role in balancing both internal functions and public confidence in the electoral authority.

#### **6. Use of minority languages for polling and educational materials**

Most often, minority languages are limited to voter information materials, rather than being extensively used in election documents. Examples can be found in most of the countries mentioned in this section. The author was recently involved in drafting such materials in countries like Afghanistan, Ethiopia, Guatemala, Iraq and Nicaragua.

#### **7. Efforts to eliminate hate speech, through media development projects (funded mainly by the UN, OSCE and USAID) and media monitoring**

Projects develop local media, support international media operations, mainly radio and television, or support media monitoring, using standard methodologies and publicizing the results. Monitoring involves systematic quantitative and qualitative daily analysis of print, TV and radio content through statistical sampling and automatic data processing. Periodic public reports feed open debate on the issues. Simply exposing certain information in a professional manner can have beneficial effects. Media monitoring exercises have been implemented in almost all the countries mentioned in this article, and this practice should be considered

both generally informative and strategically useful as a tool to control hate speech and expenses during campaigns, among other uses.<sup>4</sup>

It goes without saying that measures like the seven described above are no guarantee of success at integrating ethnic minorities or even building bridges between them. Again, experience shows that it is easier to remove legal barriers than to offer real incentives for political and social integration among ethnically confrontative populations.<sup>5</sup>

*Voter registration provisions are often used to mobilize and integrate ethnic minorities into the political process.*

### Three cases from transitional elections, and elections in wartorn societies

As described above, examples of accommodating ethnocultural cleavages through the ballot box abound in early democratic transitions as well as in wartorn environments. Three cases are presented with more detail here: post-Franco Spain, post-war Nicaragua, and Bosnia and Herzegovina.

#### *Spain*

Ethnocultural cleavages are part of the history of Spain, especially in the Basque country and Catalonia. They escalated after the absolute centralization policies of the House of Bourbon in the late 18th century, and again with the civil war (1936–1939) and Franco's subsequent 40-year dictatorship. In the Basque country and Catalonia, people were deprived of a number of historical rights, including the use of their native language. The armed ETA of the Basques declared a

permanent ceasefire only in May 2006, after more than 30 years of violent attacks. In Catalonia, public outcry and massive demonstrations against the national government and centralization became routine at the end of the Franco regime and during the first few years of democratization after Franco's death in 1975.

The 1978 constitution drastically changed the institutional architecture of Spain by establishing, among other measures, an asymmetric federation of 17 "autonomous communities," ranging from the Basque country and Catalonia with a quasi-federal status to other communities with a lower degree of autonomy. There is a common official language (Spanish) and three other official languages in the corresponding territories (Catalan, Euskera and Galego). Autonomous governments manage some 40% of all public expenditures, with the remainder handled by

the national government (35%) and local governments (25%). A parliamentary system of government, with the political executive emerging from the legislature, was established at all three levels.

Since 1977, Spanish legislation has established PR at the provincial level, enabling relevant political forces to obtain seats in the national legislature and allowing Basque and Catalan communities solid parliamentary representation in Madrid.<sup>6</sup> Later devolution statutes empowered autonomous governments to legislate their own parliamentary elections and the kind and number of constituencies for legislative elections inside the community. For example, the Basque statute established that each of three provinces elects the same number of representatives (20 each) independently of population, so that the different Basque communities as defined by old historical boundaries are equally represented. Electoral campaigning is conducted in the local language as well

Photo: AP (Paul White)



Spain's Prime Minister, José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero, bottom right, listens as the Basque regional President, Juan José Ibarretxe, left, speaks in the Spanish Parliament in Madrid, in February 2005.

as in Spanish, and voter information and election materials are available in both languages.

Attesting to the effectiveness of the constitutional and legal framework described above in mitigating and integrating deep historical ethnocultural differences in Spain is the maintenance of a wide consensus around the 1978 constitution, the vitality of self-rule in general, and the progressive pacification of the Basque country, where the political arm of ETA (under varying labels) never fully withdrew from the polls and the Basque and municipal assemblies. As for the legal framework, the current electoral law (in fact a special majority law) is but an updated and expanded version of a provisional executive decree of April 1977, enacted one month before the first democratic elections were held. Such was the negotiating and technical ability of those who made it possible, some-times in clandestine meetings between the transitional government and the still outlawed opposition parties.

### Nicaragua

Nicaragua offered an early example of bridging ethnic divides after an armed conflict by legal measures favouring ethnic minorities in its two Atlantic Coast regions, where indigenous populations are Miskitu, Creole, Sumo, Garifuna, Rama and Mestizo. The Miskitu had strongly resisted and been repressed by the Sandinista government in the early 1980s. After the civil war, the 1987 devolution statute for those regions (*Ley de Autonomía*) established PR for each regional legislature, with the provision that the first candidate of all party lists in 10 out of 30 multi-member constituencies should be a member of the ethnic minority predominant in the constituency.<sup>7</sup>

The main ethnic party is YATAMA, although it has never won the largest plurality in either of the two regions, which are governed by either the Sandinista FSLN or the older Liberal PLC. A historical demographic trend in these regions has been the increasing population of *criollo* people from the west of the country. They constitute the overwhelming majority of the electorate. The devolution statute of 1987 was meant precisely to guarantee the civil and political rights of minorities by making sure, among other measures, that they obtain parliamentary and municipal representation.

Electoral rules of PR and minority quotas

have been consistently applied since then. Representation of ethnic minorities has been guaranteed, although not without some recurrent problems, which have repeated the confrontation between national and indigenous parties. Given population movements, conflict frequently relates to the allocation of seats to certain constituencies and the later allocation of some seats to a given party. Such conflicts have been traditionally resolved by written agreement (neither legal nor illegal) between the political and electoral authorities.

Recently, conflict arose around the allocation of a disputed seat between the indigenous YATAMA party and the main national parties after the March 2006 regional council elections.



A woman casts her vote in Nicaragua's November 4, 2001, national election.

YATAMA resorted to mass demonstrations and violent action against the regional electoral authority; activists surrounded its headquarters and detained its chairman for several days. After days of mounting tension and intense mediation, the decision was made by the national electoral body, and accepted by all political parties, that the disputed seat should go to YATAMA. Setting aside the specifics of the situation, this decision was taken in the spirit of the law privileging minority electoral rights in those regions, rather than the letter of the law on constituency boundaries. Further legal clarification is clearly desirable, since the conflict tends to re-emerge at every election. But still the point can be made that legal measures ensuring ethnic minority



representation have been working effectively: the former violent conflict between the national government and regional minorities has ceased since 1987, and representation has been guaranteed to the satisfaction of all electoral contenders.

### *Bosnia and Herzegovina*

The Balkans, and Bosnia and Herzegovina in particular, offer a complex constitutional and electoral legal framework for addressing inter-ethnic issues. First, an institutional design was created that included a federal republic (Srpska) within a confederated state. Second, a tripartite presidency for the federation represents the three main ethnic communities (Serbs, Albanians and Croats). The ethnically based tripartite presidency was intended to have an integrating effect. It may not have worked that way, though, as ethnic tensions abetted paralysis.

List PR and reserved seat provisions ensured electoral representation of all ethnic groups; the possibility of inter-ethnic alliances also exists, among other provisions, although such alliances have never formed.

The electoral administration was structured on a multi-ethnic basis. Before the international electoral authority ended in 2003, a professional association of electoral officers without any ethnic distinction among participants was created, and it started functioning with the support of IFES, a U.S.-based international agency specializing in technical assistance to electoral bodies. The transfer of authority from international to domestic management happened progressively during 2002 and 2003, more than five years after the first election in 1998. By comparison, East Timor made its transfer two years after the first election, but

Kosovo has not yet completed it, six years after the first election in 2000.

Voter and candidate registration was greatly eased for Croats and Albanians in Bosnia and Herzegovina, as it was later for Serbs in Kosovo, by facilitating out-of-country registration and voting. This involved not only adequate legal provisions, but also immense investment in security and logistics.

Minority languages were widely used as an integrating tool in Bosnia and Herzegovina, where all minority languages were used for all official forms. Not doing so could be considered a disenfranchisement, in effect, of certain populations – those that would have difficulty reading a ballot not in their language. With somewhat less inclusiveness, materials for civic education and voter information were printed or narrated in only the more widely spoken languages.

Support for civic education campaigns encouraging participation for all communities is invariably a component of most donor agencies' democracy programs. Such support in Bosnia and Herzegovina was directly provided by the intervening international electoral administration, and extensively implemented by domestic non-governmental organizations, many of which formed around these activities.

The results in Bosnia and Herzegovina should be considered positive. Although the early elections under the Dayton accords widened ethnic divides by pushing the different communities to organize along ethnic lines, they did stop the fighting, as the factions had to concentrate on electoral preparations. As it happened, elections proved a mechanism to bring ethnic communities to the more civilized game of democratic politics, although full reconciliation remains elusive

Photo: AP (Hidajet Delic)



Members of the newly elected multi-ethnic state presidency of Bosnia and Herzegovina, (left to right) Bosnian Croat, Dragan Cavic; Bosnian Serb, Mirko Sarovic; and Bosnian Albanian, Sulejman Tihic, take the oath of office during the inauguration in Sarajevo, in October 2002.

to this day. The transfer of electoral authority from international to domestic hands was implemented gradually but effectively, and successive elections have been taking place since 1998 in an orderly and transparent manner.

## Conclusion

The international community has been supporting electoral processes in transitional and post-conflict societies as a tool for national reconciliation and democracy building. There are areas where democratic and electoral assistance has proved effective. One is the building of a professional electoral administration and helping it become sustainable; another is supporting civic education campaigns alongside the electoral process. These are among the few areas of democratic assistance where observers have unanimously reported positive results.<sup>8</sup>

Electoral experts, field practitioners and analysts of democratic assistance have assessed the effects of elections and electoral rules on ethnic divides as moderately positive, more often than as neutral or negative.<sup>9</sup> Experience shows that adequate legislation and other election-related measures can help, but inter-ethnic tensions cannot be easily overcome by electoral measures alone. Elections do not aim to bridge deep-rooted ethnocultural cleavages; rather, they seek to help rivals cope with those differences in an enlightened democratic manner.<sup>10</sup> Examples can also be offered of countries where the ethnic divide was deepened by the electoral experience (Angola, Liberia and Ethiopia). Particularly in Africa, the risk exists that political parties will

make ethnic divisions more rigid. There, parties have formed along ethnic lines, reflecting the underlying social pluralism.<sup>11</sup>

A number of conclusions have been drawn from recent research about steps taken to minimize the effect of elections on ethnic polarization. The following deserve transcription here.<sup>12</sup>

- As in other areas of social conflict, obstacles to inter-ethnic accord can more easily be removed than incentives can be offered, especially through the electoral system. Obstacles that have more often been

*Obstacles to inter-ethnic accord can more easily be removed than incentives can be offered, especially through the electoral system.*

removed include, among others, constitutional and legal barriers to citizen participation and representation; legal or actual barriers to the use of minority languages in civic education, voter information and electoral materials; hate speech practices in the mass media; and mechanisms or structures that make electoral administration non-transparent and untrustworthy to political actors and voters.

- Moreover, post-conflict elections may have a widening effect on existing ethnic divisions, if only by crystallizing ethnic polarization at the ballot box. In fact, an electoral process during or after a civil conflict in itself translates ethnic grievances to a political scenario, as opposed to warfare. If electoral politics mitigates or displaces armed confrontation, ethnic factionalism may and usually does materialize in the distribution

of the vote along lines of ethnic loyalty. Even if electoral legislation attempts to mitigate this effect by allowing multi-ethnic lists and alliances, such legal instruments may not appeal to the political elites (as in Bosnia and Herzegovina), who may decide not to use them. This should not be seen as a negative output of elections, but as a reflection of prevailing social reality.

- All measures aiming to deactivate or alleviate conflict should be seen as parts of an integrated approach, rather than as separate courses of action. Removing obstacles to participation and inter-ethnic reconciliation should include the following:
  - constitutional and legal provisions, e.g. power-sharing arrangements, inclusive formulas of representation and inter-ethnic composition of the electoral management body
  - facilitation of voter and candidate registration, including out-of-country registration and voting
  - civic education campaigns encouraging participation by all communities
  - use of minority languages in voting procedures and civic education
  - elimination of hate speech through democratic media development projects and media monitoring with standard methodologies, followed by periodic publication of the results 🗳️

## NOTES

1. These countries include, among others, the author's own country of Spain, in Europe; Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo and Macedonia in the Balkans; Afghanistan, Iraq and Palestine in Central Asia and the Middle East; Cambodia in South Asia; Angola, Comoros, Côte d'Ivoire, Ethiopia, Lesotho, Liberia, South Africa, Mozambique and Nigeria in Africa; Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala and Nicaragua in Central America. In some of these countries, the author served as chief electoral officer for an observer mission of either the United Nations (Mozambique, El Salvador) or the European Union (Côte d'Ivoire, Ethiopia, Nicaragua, Ecuador, Guatemala). In the remaining countries, he provided senior consulting support to either the national electoral authority or an international organization. Focused conversations with senior expert colleagues holding high field executive and consultative responsibility in relevant countries brought information and insight that academic literature or field reports, at the moment, are in no condition to provide. My gratitude goes especially to Jeff Fischer, Ron Gould, Peter Erben and Jarrett Blanc, as colleagues and good friends, who always responded to my queries with talent and generosity.
2. The research assessment project covered 14 different countries with elections conducted in a post-conflict situation. It included a comprehensive review of the scarce academic literature on a number of topics relating to international electoral assistance, one of which was elections and ethnic divides. After the main research findings were compiled and analyzed, a policy paper was published and made available on the USAID Web site ([www.usaid.gov](http://www.usaid.gov)). See Rafael López-Pintor, *Postconflict Elections and Democratization: An Experience Review* (Washington, D.C.: USAID, 2005). Moreover, there is an excellent global source on the legal specifics of different electoral systems, including countries with deep ethnic differences in Andrew Reynolds, Ben Reilly and Andrew Ellis, eds., *Electoral System Design: The New International IDEA Handbook* (Stockholm: International IDEA, 2005). Some country case studies of different instruments that deal with inter-ethnic conflicts can be found in Peter Harris and Ben Reilly, eds., *Democracy and Deep-Rooted Conflicts: Options for Negotiators* (Stockholm: International IDEA, 1998).
3. For more details, see Rafael López-Pintor, "Reconciliation Elections: A Post-Cold War Experience," in Krishna Kumar, ed., *Rebuilding Societies After Civil War: Critical Roles for International Assistance* (Boulder, Colorado: Lynne Rienner, 1997), pp. 43–61.
4. An excellent media monitoring handbook was recently produced by the National Democratic Institute for International Affairs and is available free at [www.ndi.org](http://www.ndi.org).
5. For a comprehensive list of these legal mechanisms, see OSCE/ODIHR, *Guidelines for Reviewing a Legal Framework for Elections* (Warsaw, 2001); Guy S. Goodwin-Gill, *Free and Fair Elections* (Geneva: IPU, 2006).
6. The Provisional Decree of April 1977 was translated in essence into the 1978 constitution, the 1985 electoral law, and the devolution statutes of the Basque country and Catalonia, which are currently undergoing upgrading and revision.
7. Article 142 of the electoral law.
8. Thomas Carothers, *Aiding Democracy Abroad: The Learning Curve* (Washington, D.C.: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 1999); Krishna Kumar, ed., *Postconflict Elections, Democratization, and International Assistance* (Boulder, Colorado: Lynne Rienner, 1998); Marina Ottaway and Thomas Carothers, eds., *Funding Virtue: Civil Society Aid and Democracy Promotion* (Washington, D.C.: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2000), pp. 77–104.
9. Thomas D. Sisk, *Power Sharing and International Mediation in Ethnic Conflicts* (Washington, D.C.: United States Institute of Peace Press and Carnegie Commission on Preventing Deadly Conflict, 1996), pp. 27–45; Ben Reilly and Andrew Reynolds, eds., *Electoral Systems and Conflict in Divided Societies* (Washington, D.C.: National Academy Press, 1999); Harris et al., *Democracy and Deep-Rooted Conflicts*, pp. 118–201; Krishna Kumar, "International Assistance for Post-Conflict Elections," in Peter Burnell, ed., *Democracy Assistance: International Co-operation for Democratization* (London: Frank Cass, 2000), p. 205; Karin Von Hippel, ed., *Democracy by Force: U.S. Military Intervention in the Post-Cold War World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp. 202–204. A more critical view is found in Marina Ottaway, *Democracy Challenged: The Rise of Semi-Authoritarianism* (Washington, D.C.: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2003), pp. 202–203.
10. López-Pintor, *Postconflict Elections*, pp. 16, 17.
11. Marina Ottaway, "Social Movements, Professionalization of Reform, and Democracy in Africa," in Ottaway and Carothers, *Funding Virtue*, p. 80.
12. López-Pintor, *Postconflict Elections*, p. 27.