Immigrant Status and Voluntary Association Membership in Canada:

Individual and Contextual Effects

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10 August 2007

This paper was prepared for presentation at the RC 28 Conference on Cumulative Advantage: Education, Health, Wealth and Institutional Contexts, Montreal, 14-17 August 2007. Data used for the paper were provided by the Statistics Canada Data Research Centre at McMaster University. We thank Michael Boyle and Kathy Georgiades for their comments on an early draft of the paper.
Abstract

Using multilevel models applied to individual-level survey data and
neighbourhood-level information from the Canadian Census, this paper assesses: (1) the
impact of immigrant status on voluntary association membership, (2) how characteristics
of neighbourhoods affect membership, and (3) whether the effects of immigrant status
differ according to these neighbourhood characteristics. Consistent with spatial-
assimilation theory, we find an increasing tendency towards holding a membership as the
time grows since immigration. The community in which one lives also matters, with
membership being positively related to the proportion of immigrants in the
neighbourhood, and negatively related to the median income and proportion of visible
minorities in the neighbourhood. These context effects persist after controlling for
important individual-level characteristics, including ethnicity. We found no evidence that
the effect of immigrant status varies according to these neighbourhood characteristics,
however. Finally, we provide possible explanations for these findings and discuss their
implications.
Introduction

Understanding patterns of immigrant integration, and related ethnic relations, has been an important objective of both social research and social policy since the 1960s (Hero and Tolbert 1996; Helmes-Hayes and Curtis 1998; Iganski and Payne 1999; Olzak and Shanahan 2003; van Tubergen et al 2004; Qian and Lichter 2007; Walters et al 2007). An important way in which the transition to the new society can be made easier is through involvement in voluntary associations (see, for example, Hagan 1998). How the transition to the new society is helped may differ according to the type of association, however. For example, Breton (1964) argues that ethnic-based community organizations can create bonds that provide social support, especially to recently arrived immigrants. Similarly, Chavez (2005) found that immigrants from marginalized ethnic groups develop “communities of need” to help the newly arrived cope with the transition to the new society. On the other hand, Putnam (2000) suggests that immigrants are more likely to bridge with members of their new society if they participate in more general voluntary associations that are unrelated to their specific ethnic group (see also Eckstein 2001; Skopol 2003; Halpern 2005).

Despite evidence that voluntary associations help build social connections—and thus increase an individual’s social capital—there is little empirical research on how the involvement of immigrants in voluntary associations differs from the involvement of non-immigrants. There are some noteworthy studies, however. Eckstein’s (2001) study of an Italian immigrant community in the Boston area found that, compared to long-term immigrants, new immigrants were typically less integrated into their adoptive
community, and less likely to participate in voluntary associations. Studies of ethnic
differences in participation also provide some insight. Using a national sample of
Canadians, Breton et al (2004) found that French Canadians, Southern Europeans,
“visible minorities,” and “Others” had low levels of community involvement relative to
Western and Eastern Europeans and those of British background. Nonetheless, this study
focused entirely on differences between ethnic minorities, and thus we can only
speculate about how immigrants differ from native-born Canadians. Grabb et al (in press,
2007) found similar ethnic patterns for Canada, but also did not examine immigrants
specifically.

Although growing quickly, there is still relatively little research regarding
contextual influences on voluntary participation (Wilson 2000). While several studies
examine cross-national differences in volunteerism (e.g. Baer et al 2001; Curtis et al
2001; Freitag and Bühlmann 2005; Andersen, Curtis, and Grabb 2006; Lam 2006, Ruiter
and De Graaf 2006), neighbourhood effects have seldom been explored. Understanding
the role of neighbourhood context is important considering Bühlmann and Freitag’s
(2004) finding that individuals with strong ties to their neighbourhoods were significantly
more likely than others to be members of voluntary associations. One might expect
neighbourhood influences to be especially important for immigrants, whose social
networks in the new country are unlikely to reach very far outside their local
neighbourhood. To our knowledge, however, no previous research has examined the
connection between neighbourhood context and the volunteering activities of immigrants.
The present paper builds on previous research by examining differences in voluntary membership between immigrants (both recent and long-term) and native-born Canadians, while controlling for ethnicity. We also explore whether neighbourhood context plays a role in membership generally, and more specifically, whether it affects the relationship between immigrant status and membership. In this respect, we explore the role of three important neighbourhood context variables: median income, proportion of immigrants, and proportion of visible minorities. Its high number of immigrants from many varied cultures (Moore and Pacey 2003) and relatively high levels of volunteering (Curtis et al 2001), make Canada an excellent case for which to explore the effects of immigration and neighbourhood on voluntary association membership.

The following sections discuss relevant research on the individual and societal benefits of voluntary associations, how association membership can smooth the transition for immigrants to a new country, and possible contextual influences on membership. We then discuss the hypotheses to be tested. We follow this with a description of the data and statistical methods that we employ. Finally, we then discuss our findings, followed by possible implications for future research and policy that arise from these results.

Individual and Societal Benefits of Voluntary Associations

The study of participation in civil society has a long tradition in sociology and political science (Tocqueville 1960; Almond and Verba 1963). The benefits of participation are clear for both the local community (Oliver 1984; Molotch et al 2000; Swaroop and Morenoff 2006; Small and McDermott 2006) and the broader society
(Skocpol et al 2000; Crowley and Skocpol 2001; Gannett 2003; Hechter 2004; Knoke 1990; Wilson and Musick 1997; Putnam 2000; Wilson 2000; Eckstein 2001; Hechter 2004). It has been suggested, for example, that volunteerism leads to strong communities with a commitment to democratic principles (Putnam 2000; Swain 2001; Kirlin and Kirlin 2002; Hill and Matsubayashi 2005). There is also some evidence that civic engagement may reduce social and economic inequality in society as a whole (see, for example, Curtis et al 1992; Schofer and Fourcade-Gourinchas 2001; Riley 2005).

Other research provides evidence of individual-level benefits to belonging to voluntary associations (McAdam and Paulson 1993; Brady et al 1995; McPherson and Rotolo 1996; Podolny and Baron 1997; Oesterle et al 2004; McFarland and Thomas 2006; Bekkers 2007). Volunteering can build human capital through the acquisition of new skills necessary to carry out the association’s duties (Wilson and Musick 1997), and social capital through the increased networks gained simply by participating in the association (Knack 2002; Sampson et al 2005; Hill and Matsubayashi 2005; Keele 2007). Although causation probably goes both ways, people who volunteer generally have greater socio-economic status and occupational success (cf Granovetter 1973; Astin et al 1999; Wilson 2000), and better physical and mental health (House et al 1988; Oman et al 1999; Wilson 2000), than those who do not volunteer. Volunteers are also more likely to vote and to be politically engaged (Knoke 1990; McAdam and Paulsen 1993; Wilson 2000).

Although little is known about the impact of immigrant status, much is known about other individual-level predictors of association membership. Research is quite clear
that some ethnic and racialized groups are much more likely to volunteer than are others (Boyd 1989; Hagan 1998; Wilson 2000). Moreover, generally speaking, the likelihood of belonging to a voluntary association increases with religiosity (Lam 2006, Loveland et al 2005, Cassel 1999). It is also well-known that age, social class, marital status, and education are related to the amount of time that individuals spend on voluntary activity (Smith 1975; Knoke 1986; Curtis et al 1992, 2001). Some research also indicates that those with limited capital and time resources face substantial barriers to active engagement (Bolland and McCallum 2002; McBride et al 2006). In contrast, however, other research suggests that individual income and SES has a negative relationship with volunteerism (Hackl et al 2007).

**Immigrant Integration and Volunteering**

The benefits to belonging to volunteer associations are perhaps most pronounced for immigrants. There is evidence, for example, that integration is easiest for immigrants with many social ties or social resources (Korinek et al 2005, Hagan 1998). It follows logically, then, that integration will be quickened by membership in voluntary associations. Aside from simply helping the new arrivals get used to the way of life in the new society, association contacts could lead to better knowledge of the government and economy of the new society, helping them with a wide range of things—such as finding employment and how to manoeuvre within the government bureaucracy—that could have economic benefits. Consistent with this line of reasoning is the idea that voluntary associations would be less necessary if immigrants are well informed and integrated into
their neighbourhood. Still, a high level of integration into the neighbourhood does not imply integration in the larger society as a whole. In fact, it is possible that those living in neighbourhoods with many immigrants are less likely to integrate in society as a whole, and also less likely to join voluntary associations. On the other hand, immigrants living in areas with very few other immigrants may be more likely to look for ways of integrating into the larger society, with voluntary associations being one of them.

Insight on how immigrants integrate can be gained from spatial-assimilation theory (Alba et al 2000; Portes and Zhou 1993), which suggests that immigrants increasingly develop ties in their adopted society as their social and economic resources build over time. According to Massey and Denton (1985: 94; see also Gross and Massey 1991), immigrants “attempt to convert their socioeconomic achievements into an improved spatial position, which usually implies assimilation with the majority groups.” This assimilation is likely to start in an immigrant’s own ethnic community but eventually extends to the broader society outside the ethnic and immigrant community (Fong and Wilkes 1999). Related research indicates that the assimilation is more likely if the new community is wealthier and has a relatively small proportion of visible minorities or immigrants (Guest and Weed 1976; Alba et al 1999; Alba et al 2000).

Others argue, however, that while immigrants and the successive generations establish ties with members of their new culture, there is always a tendency for ethnic enclaves to form and persist (Guest and Weed 1976; Logan et al 2002; Myles and Hou 2004; see also South and Crowder 1997; Clark and Drinkwater 2002; Crowder and South 2005). As Guest and Weed write, “the organization of associational and residential ties
on the basis of ethnicity may counterbalance some of the less agreeable aspects of urban life” (1976: 1109). Simply put, then, if spatial-assimilation occurs, immigrants should become increasingly similar to non-immigrants as time goes on. On other hand, if ethnic enclaves persist, we would expect that immigrants would integrate to a certain level but would continue to be significantly different from the native born population, regardless of how long they live in their adopted country.

**Impact of Social Context**

There is a relative dearth of research that considers the impact of both immigrant status and neighbourhood composition on volunteering. An exception is Chavez’s (2005) ethnographic study of a rural California community, which found that the proportion of immigrant residents in a neighbourhood influences membership activity. More specifically, volunteerism changed as the demographic make-up went from predominantly white to having a large migrant Mexican population highly segregated from the white population. The white population traditionally had an active spirit of volunteerism which had maintained the community in the face of a collapsing agricultural sector. With the influx of the itinerant Mexican population, the participation rate of the white population dwindled while the rate of Mexican volunteerism flourished.

Although not concerned with immigrant status, a few more general studies consider neighbourhood influences on volunteering. In a multilevel-spatial analysis of residents in Chicago neighbourhoods, Swaroop and Morenoff (2006) found that “expressive” participation—i.e., participation motivated by a sense of duty to one’s
neighbours—was highest in neighbourhoods with high levels of residential stability over time. In the much different social setting of Nang Rong Thailand, Entwisle et al (2007) show that network structures are largely determined by social setting. Other research shows that neighbourhoods with lower levels of SES are associated with low levels of voluntary activity (Wuthnow 1998; Wilson 2000; Small and McDermott 2006). Nevertheless, given that these neighbourhoods tend to be populated largely by poorer individuals who have a lack of organizational capabilities, financial resources, or time available to contribute to voluntary associations, much of these differences may simply be compositional, with individual-level factors being largely responsible.

Although not specifically about volunteer associations, other related research indicates that the most advantageous neighbourhoods in which to live are those with high levels of collective social capital (MacDonald et al 2005; Hipp and Perrin 2006; Healy et al 2007; Sundquist and Yang 2007). Educational attainment, the risk of being unemployed, committing crime, and becoming a teenage parent, have all been shown to be affected by community characteristics (Wilson 1980; Crane 1991; Brooks-Gunn et al 1993; Klebanov et al 1998; South and Baumer 2000; Cardak and McDonald 2004). Other research also shows a link between neighbourhood income and wealth and individual health outcomes (see, for example, Gordon et al 2003; Wen et al 2003; Wilkinson and Pickett 2006). Moreover, a great deal of research on US attributes some of the wage differentials among immigrant groups to the socio-political environment of the country migrants left behind (Borjas, 1987; Guarnizo et al 2003).
More closely related to voluntary association involvement, contextual surroundings have also been found to influence political and social attitudes. Blake (2003; see also Qullian 1995; Walks and Bourne 2006), for example, found racial tolerance to be highest in neighbourhoods with high levels of socio-economic status. Similarly, several articles suggest that voting is influenced by the social class composition of the neighbourhood (Curtice 1995; Heath et al 1996; Andersen and Heath 2002; Andersen, Yang and Heath 2006). It is sensible to assume that some of the same community influences—e.g., economic conditions and ethnic composition—also influence volunteering. As implied earlier, we might expect this to be especially true for immigrants, whose personal networks in the new country are unlikely to reach very far.

Research Questions

The present research is driven by three large research questions related to the previous discussion:

1. We seek to determine whether or not immigrant status effects membership in voluntary associations. Controlling for ethnicity, we expect that newly arrived immigrants will be the least likely to be members because they have yet to be integrated in the larger society. To the extent that spatial assimilation occurs, we would expect fewer differences between long-term immigrants and native-born Canadians relative to the differences between recent immigrants and native-born Canadians. If ethnic enclaves persist, however, we would expect continual differences between native-born Canadians and immigrants, regardless of length of residence.
2. We are concerned with whether or not the neighbourhood in which people live influences voluntary association membership. More specifically, we assess if various neighbourhood contextual factors—specifically the median income, the proportion who are immigrants, and the proportion who are visible minorities—can account for neighbourhood differences in the average number of memberships.

3. We explore if the impact of immigrant status differs according to these neighbourhood characteristics. In other words, we test for interactions between immigrant status and the three contextual variables in their effects on membership. As discussed earlier, previous research is contradictory about whether we might expect positive or negative effects for the context variables and their related interactions.

We address these questions using a multilevel framework that employs individual-level survey data collected from the Canadian population by Statistics Canada linked to neighbourhood-level data derived from the Canadian Census.

**Data and Methods**

*Individual-level Data*

The survey data are from Cycle 2.1 of Statistics Canada’s *Canadian Community Health Survey (CCHS)*. Although the primary focus of the CCHS is health, it also contains rich socio-demographic variables and information regarding voluntary associations. The data were collected using telephone interviews conducted between January and December of
2003. The CCHS targets persons aged 12 years or older who are living in private dwellings in the ten provinces and the three territories of Canada.\(^1\) The overall response rate for the survey was 78.9%. The complete sample size is 134,072 respondents, though after removing a small proportion of missing cases the analytical sample size we employ is 125,356.

Given its large sample size and representative sampling design, the CCHS is an ideal data source to capture information about immigrants, ethnic communities and neighbourhood characteristics. It is also ideal for multilevel analysis because it contains information on the Census subdivisions (CSDs) defined in the 2001 Canadian Census. Census subdivision (CSD) is the general term used to represent municipalities (or areas considered as municipal equivalents), which is the second smallest geographic area for which all census data are disseminated (Statistics Canada 2001). We use these CSDs to define neighbourhood. Although there are 5,600 distinct CSDs across Canada, only 3,149 CSDs were included in the CCHS sample.

Our dependent variable is a simple binary variable tapping whether or not the respondent belonged to a voluntary association. The main independent variable is immigrant status, which was divided into three categories: (1) Canadian-born (the baseline category in our statistical models), (2) long-term immigrants, defined by having lived in Canada for at least 15 years, and (3) short-term immigrant, which includes those who have lived in Canada for less than 15 years.

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\(^1\) Persons living on Indian Reserves or Crown lands, residents of institutions, full-time members of the Canadian Armed Forces and residents of certain remote regions are excluded from this survey.
Our statistical models also control for several other important predictors of voluntary association membership. Given its relationship with both immigration patterns over time and voluntary association involvement, it was especially important to control for a fairly detailed measure of ethnicity. As a result, ethnicity was divided into 18 categories (see Table 1), with Anglo-American specified as the reference category in our statistical models. More details of how the ethnicity variable was constructed from the CCHS data are shown in Appendix A. We also control for household income, highest level of educational attainment, age, marital status, and sex. Unfortunately religion and religiosity were not reported in the CCHS, so they could not be included in our analysis. Also problematic, though not insurmountable, was the large percentage of missing cases (29.9%) for household income. Rather than remove the observations with missing income, we imputed values using multiple imputation (see Dempster et al 1977; Schafer 1997 for a description). The small proportion of cases missing on other variables was removed from the analysis, resulting in an analytical sample of 125,356 respondents. In summary, the data we employ contain 125,356 respondents who were clustered within 3,149 neighbourhoods.

[Table 1 about here]

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2 We employed the EM (expectation-maximization) algorithm to predict income for missing cases from 13 other variables in the dataset: age, education (10 categories), highest level of education in household (10 categories), marital status, home ownership, number of rooms in dwelling, job status over past year, normal hours worked per week, personal income all sources (dollars), personal income all sources (bands), household income all sources (dollars), household income all sources (bands), and median neighbourhood income. Our results are based on five imputed datasets.
Neighbourhood-level Data

Data for the neighbourhood level variables were calculated from the 2001 Canadian Census (Statistics Canada 2001) and matched to the CCHS by Census subdivisions (CSD). As mentioned earlier, we include the following neighbourhood variables: (1) median income, (2) proportion of residents who are immigrants, and (3) proportion who are visible minorities. Descriptive statistics for each of the context variables, and the bivariate correlations between them, are shown in Table 2.

[Table 2 about here]

Statistical Methods

We employ both regular single-level logit models and multilevel logit models in our analyses. We start by fitting regular logit models to explore whether there are any immigrant status and ethnic differences in membership to be explained. Model 1 predicts membership from immigrant status, controlling only for ethnicity. Model 2 extends the model to include the other individual-level social background control variables. We then move to the multilevel models to assess neighbourhood differences. All of the multilevel models include immigrant status, ethnicity and the other individual-level socio-demographic control variables as predictors. Model 3 extends Model 2 by specifying a random intercept to test for neighbourhood differences in association membership. Model 4 extends this model to include the contextual variables as predictors. Model 5 extends Model 4 to further include random effects for immigrant status. Finally, we also fitted
other models that allowed immigrant status and ethnicity to interact with the three context variables. In all cases the interaction effects were not statistically significant, however, and hence these models are not reported.

**Results**

We start with Model 1, which explores whether or not there are, in fact, differences in voluntary association membership according to immigrant status and ethnicity in Canada as a whole. This is a single-level logit model that does not consider that the survey data were clustered in neighbourhoods; it also does not control for any other predictors. The findings in Table 3 suggest that there is no significant difference in the likelihood of belonging to a voluntary membership between long-term immigrants and native-born Canadians. Nonetheless, short-term immigrants (those with less than 15 years residency in Canada) are far less likely to be members. More specifically, the odds of belonging to a volunteer association are \(0.755 (e^{-0.255}=0.775)\) times smaller for short-term immigrants than the odds of belonging for those born in Canada.

[Table 3 about here]

Model 1 also shows marked differences in membership according to ethnic group, with Anglo-Americans appearing to occupy the middle position in terms of the likelihood of having a membership. Consistent with previous findings (e.g. Grabb et al 2007),
French Canadians are much less likely than Anglo-Americans to be members of voluntary associations (the odds ratio for the two groups = $e^{-0.327} = 0.721$). First Nations respondents are also significantly less likely to hold memberships relative to Anglo-Americans ($e^{-0.267} = 0.766$). On the other hand, the odds of those of Jewish ($e^{0.365} = 1.44$) and Northern European ($e^{0.169} = 1.18$) ethnicities holding memberships are significantly higher than the odds for Anglo-Americans. Among the Asian ethnic groups, only Koreans demonstrate patterns of voluntary association membership that differ from those of Anglo-Americans. In fact, Koreans are more likely than any other group to hold a membership, with the odds of belonging being 1.50 ($e^{0.408} = 1.50$) times as large at the odds for Anglo-Americans.

We now turn to Model 2, which controls for the other important individual-level variables (their coefficients are not shown in Table 3 because they are not important to our research questions). Even after these controls are added to the model, the impact of immigrant status remains. In other words, the greater likelihood of native born Canadians, relative to immigrants, of having a voluntary association membership does not appear to stem from differences in the socio-economic conditions of the groups. This does not rule out the possibility of socio-economic conditions in the neighbourhood from playing an important role, however.

We now turn to the multilevel models. Recall that, like Model 2, Model 3 includes all of the individual-level predictors, including the control variables. It extends from Model 2, however, by specifying a variance component for the intercept to capture differences in participation according to neighbourhood. As indicated in Table 3, the
neighbourhood variance in the intercept is statistically significant for this model. Given that neighbourhood differences are present despite controlling for important individual-level controls, it is likely that they largely represent contextual effects rather than simply compositional differences. The intercept variance decreased to 0.067 for this model from 0.144 for the null model (not shown in Table 3) that included only a random intercept and no predictors. Simply put, the socio-demographic variables accounted for a substantial proportion of the neighbourhood differences in membership, but there is still much to explain.

Comparing the coefficients from Model 3 and Model 2, we see that allowing for neighbourhood differences does not substantially change the estimated effects of ethnicity, but it does change the substantive findings with respect to the impact of immigrant status. Recall that the single-level logit models suggest that long-term immigrants differed little from native born Canadians. In contrast, Model 3 indicates that native born Canadians participate more than both immigrant status groups. Long-term immigrants are still significantly more likely to hold memberships than short-term immigrants, however. Compared with the odds of holding a membership for native born Canadians, the odds differ by a factor of 0.87 \((e^{-0.138}=0.87)\) for long-term immigrants and \((e^{-0.313}=0.73)\) for short-term immigrants.

Model 4 explores the impact of the contextual neighbourhood variables on the likelihood of being a member of a voluntary association. Recall that this model is identical to Model 3 except for the inclusion of the contextual variables. The coefficients in Table 3 indicate that although though slightly muted after the addition of the context
variables, the impact of immigrant status remains. Just as important, the context effects are quite strong and statistically significant. Starting with median neighbour income, the findings suggest that people living in rich neighbourhoods are substantially less likely than those living in poor neighbourhoods to have an association membership. More specifically, as the median income in the neighbourhood rises by $1,000, the odds of an individual belonging to a voluntary association decline by a magnitude of 0.368 ($e^{-0.001x1,000}$). The proportion of visible minorities in the neighbourhood also has a negative effect on membership: As the number of visible minorities increases by 10 percentage points, the odds of belonging decline by a factor of 0.867 ($e^{-1.432x10}$). On the other hand, the density of the immigrant population in the neighbourhood has a positive effect on voluntary association membership. An increase of 10 percentage points in the immigrant population in the neighbourhood is associated, on average, with an increase in the odds of an individual having a membership by a factor of 1.108 ($e^{1.03x10}$).

Model 5 allows the effects of immigrant status to vary randomly across neighbourhoods. In both cases, the neighbourhood-level variance in the intercept is essentially the same as for Model 4. The fixed estimates for immigrant status are also very similar (although the standard errors have become slightly larger). The coefficients for the ethnicity dummy regressors are also quite similar. In summary, the substantive findings with respect to the effects of immigrant status, ethnicity and the contextual variables, are essentially the same regardless of whether or not the effects of ethnicity and immigrant status are allowed to vary across neighbourhoods. Nonetheless, the random components for the immigrant status effects are quite large and statistically significant,
indicating that there are differences in how immigrant status impacts on voluntary association involvement that our model has failed to distinguish. Although we also tested for cross-level interactions between immigrant status and the contextual variables, none of these effects was statistically significant. In summary, then, our final results pertain to Model 5.

In order to better understand the impact of immigrant status and neighbourhood context, we have plotted their effects in Figure 1. Displayed in this figure are fitted probabilities of holding a membership for the various immigrant status groups at varying levels of the three context variables. These fitted probabilities pertain to “typical” respondents—i.e., all variables not shown in the plots were set to their means (for quantitative variables) and proportions (categorical variables) when calculating the fitted values from the regression equation. In all three graphs we see that the line representing native born Canadians is highest, followed by the lines for long-term immigrants and then short-term immigrants. We also see the negative relationship between membership and median neighbourhood income. More striking, however, are the positive effect of the proportion immigrants and the negative effect of visible minorities.

[Figure 1 about here]

**Discussion and Conclusion**

This paper’s main interest was with the impact of immigrant status and neighbourhood context on voluntary association membership. We found that recent immigrants are much
less likely than those born in Canada to have association memberships. This finding held despite controlling for a very detailed measure of ethnicity. Controlling for important individual-level predictors, we also found that individuals are more likely to belong to a voluntary association if they live in neighbourhoods that are less affluent, have fewer visible minorities, and have a large proportion of immigrants. The effects of immigrant status on association membership were unaffected by the neighbourhood characteristics we explored, however.

The differences in volunteer association membership according to immigrant status suggest several interesting conclusions. We found a significant difference with respect to the propensity to be a member of a volunteer association between native-born Canadians and immigrants—the longer immigrants are in Canada, the more likely they are to participate in voluntary associations. While this finding is consistent with theories of assimilation, we cannot be conclusive without further evidence of the types of organizations to which immigrants belonged, information that was non-existent in the CCHS. It is possible that a large proportion of immigrants join religious or ethnically-based organizations, and thus they may be no more integrated within the broader community than those who don’t belong at all. Still, even these bonds can have positive societal effects in that they lead to increased economic activity and encourage feelings of belonging and cohesion (Chandler and Lalonde 1998; Kotler-Berkowitz 2001). These feelings of belonging could, in turn, eventually pave the way to bridges with the larger society. Furthermore, there is some evidence that communities where these types of
associations are common have increased levels of tolerance and civic-mindedness (Alesina and La Ferrara 2000).

Consistent with previous research, our results clearly show that the tendency to hold a voluntary association membership is linked to personal characteristics, but they also demonstrate that neighbourhood context has a strong influence. We found a high degree of variation between neighbourhoods. One-half of this between-neighbourhood variation could be explained by individual compositional characteristics. This is certainly a significant amount, but it also means that half of the neighbourhood variation went unexplained. Despite having found important context effects, these did not significantly change the level of neighbourhood variation in the model intercept. Some of this remaining variation undoubtedly reflects the omission of important individual-level predictors—e.g., religion and religiosity—but it is unlikely that such variables could account for a vast majority of it. We are confident, then, that the contextual effects we uncovered are meaningful.

Perhaps most striking is the positive relationship between the density of the immigrant population in the neighbourhood and an individual’s likelihood of having a membership. This may simply reflect ethnic similarity in neighbourhoods that have high levels of immigrants, which leads to joining associations that represent the interests of a particular group. In other words, high levels of neighbourhood cohesion do not necessarily equal a greater tendency to be civic-minded with respect to the broader society (c.f. Hipp and Perrin 2006). On the other hand, neighbourhoods with many immigrants can also be diverse. In such cases, it is possible that people feel compelled to
reach out to the wider society because they have little in common with those in their
neighbourhood. One way to reach out is through membership in associations that
represent society as a whole rather than one particular ethnic group. As mentioned earlier,
however, the data we employed do not allow us to distinguish the type of memberships to
which people belong.

Also striking is the negative relationship between the proportion of visible
minorities in the neighbourhood and membership. This may suggest that people in
neighbourhoods with many visible minorities have fewer contacts who are not visible
minorities, and thus fewer opportunities to join mainstream, non-ethnic specific,
associations. We failed to find a statistically significant interaction between this context
variable and an individual’s immigrant status, suggesting that the effect is the same for all
members of society regardless of immigrant status. Nevertheless, since a large proportion
of new immigrants to Canada are visible minorities—e.g., the 2001 Census reports that of
an approximately 5.5 million immigrants in Canada, 2.7 million were visible minorities
(Statistics Canada 2003)—and immigrants are more likely to live in such
neighbourhoods, the implications are probably stronger for them than for others.

The fact that the median income of the neighbourhood also negatively affects
participation is an interesting finding. It is important to remember that this finding held
despite controlling for individual-level income, indicating that it is not due to
compositional differences in individual-level income in the neighbourhoods, but rather
there is a contextual effect at work. The mechanisms for this contextual effect are likely
two-fold. Firstly, the general community culture of affluent neighbourhoods is one of less
attachment and engagement with neighbours than is the atmosphere in less affluent neighbourhoods (cf., Parkin, 1967; Teather 1997; Eckstein 2001; Woldoff 2002; Entwisle et al 2007). Secondly, many voluntary associations are less necessary in affluent neighbourhoods than they are in poor neighbourhoods, and thus participation is also less necessary. Many volunteer associations have the goal of providing services not given by the state. Richer neighbourhoods, which tend to be better serviced by the local government, are less likely to need such services (see, for example, Bielefeld et al 1997; Wuthnow 1998; Docherty et al 2001).

Our findings with respect to the impact of ethnicity have important implications for research on immigration that is concerned with the balance between maintaining one’s native cultural identity and integration into the new culture (Breton 1964, 2005; Driedger and Church 1974; Reitz 1980; 2003; Reitz and Breton 1994; Helmes-Hayes and Curtis 1998). In line with previous research (e.g. Grabb et al 2007, Hwang et al 2007), we found that French-speaking Canadians and Southern Europeans have relatively low levels of participation in volunteer associations. A partial explanation for these low levels probably lies with religion. Quebec, where the majority of most French Canadians reside, and Southern Europe have in common a history characterized by the strong influence of the Roman Catholic Church. Considering the encompassing nature of the Catholic Church, there may be little time left for memberships outside of church activities. Unfortunately, however, the data we employed did not allow for us to control for either religious affiliation or religiosity. Nevertheless, given that our main concern is with the effects of immigrant status, controlling for such a detailed measure of ethnicity should be
sufficient to ensure that our main findings have not been unduly influenced by the omission of religion from the model.

Our findings also suggest other directions for research on ethnic differences in voluntary association participation. For example, we found that First Nations Canadians are much less likely than nearly any other ethnic group to be members of voluntary associations. This finding is consistent with research on First Nations communities that shows poor health is, at least partly, related to low levels of social capital defined in a general way (Mignone and O’Neil 2005; Chandler and Lalonde 1998). Still, no prior studies have explored how First Nations peoples volunteer in Canada, suggesting it as an important avenue for future research. We also found that Koreans and Jewish Canadians are much more likely than others to be members. This may indicate that these groups tend to be better integrated than other groups into mainstream society, though more information about the types of memberships to which they belong is needed in order to be conclusive. The finding with respect to Jewish Canadians is consistent with recent research by Grabb et al (in press 2007).

Before concluding, it is helpful to address the generalisability of our findings to countries outside of Canada. It is well-documented that the pattern of immigrant integration in Canada is somewhat different from patterns in other Western countries like the US and Australia. It is commonly argued, for example, that the Canadian policy of multiculturalism encourages diversity, while US policy encourages a “melting pot” (Gennaro Lerda 1990). How this difference might effect participation in voluntary associations is unclear without further research. There are so many other cultural
similarities between Canada and other countries characterized by large immigrant populations, however, and especially the US, that it seems likely that the effects we have found also apply in these countries. For example, aside from some particular issues related to lifestyle and religion, research suggests that Canadian and American values are very similar (Grabb and Curtis, 2005). Just as important, other research indicated similarity between the two countries in terms of the general level of volunteering activities (Andersen, Curtis, and Grabb 2006). Nonetheless, only future research can confirm whether these findings apply to the US and other similar countries.

In conclusion, voluntary associations are an important vehicle for social integration and cohesion. Their importance is even greater for immigrant societies that continually accept many new people from diverse cultural backgrounds. Our finding that immigrants are less likely to participate is cause for concern if the goal is to integrate new arrivals as quickly as possible. This, combined with the fact that neighbourhood context also matters, suggests that a useful approach to promote bridges between new immigrants and their adopted communities is to encourage means through which they form solid relationships within the general community.
Appendix A: Method for Constructing the Ethnicity Variable

The CCHS data did not contain one single satisfactory measure of ethnicity, and thus we needed to derive the variable from several others. Our initial starting point was a questionnaire item that simply asked respondents to state their ethnicity, but exceptions were made as follows.

For those who reported a single ethnicity (which included a response for “Canadian”), we typically used this stated ethnicity. There were exceptions, however. More specifically, some ethnic categories contained too few respondents to be able to employ the category in our statistical analysis. In such cases, responses were aggregated by geographic proximity (e.g. Western European) and/or cultural similarity (e.g. Arabic) approximately following United Nations and World Bank norms for grouping countries.

When multiple ethnic origins were stated, we employed two criteria to define a single ethnicity. Firstly, for those not born in Canada, native country was used. Secondly, for those born in Canada, we first used the measure constructed by Statistics Canada to describe “cultural/racial origin” when it was clear that it was an ethnic category. This derived variable included the following ethnic categories: Korean, Filipino, Japanese, Native/Aboriginal, South Asian, Southeast Asian, Arabic, West Asian, and Latin American. The item also had the categories “white” and “black”, however, which do not represent meaningful ethnic categories (see Phoenix 1998). For such cases, we used the respondent’s first language spoken in the home and still understood. To differentiate between French and English Canadians, we considered French Canadians to be those
born in Canada or who claimed Canadian as their ethnicity and whose first language was French. Similarly, English Canadians are those born in Canada or who claimed Canadian as their ethnicity but whose first language spoken and still understood was not French. English Canadians were then grouped into a category we refer to as Anglo-American.

The list below provides illustrative examples of the source-country components of the ethnic groups. Note that a respondent’s claimed ethnic origin takes precedence over country of birth.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Countries</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Anglo-American</td>
<td>Australia, English Canada, New Zealand, United States, United Kingdom</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aboriginal</td>
<td>Respondents claiming First Nations ancestry in Canada</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African</td>
<td>Any country on the African continent unless an Arabic state</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arabic</td>
<td>Algeria, Egypt, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Morocco, Somalia, Syria</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chinese</td>
<td>China</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>East European</td>
<td>Estonia, Hungary, Poland, Czech Republic, Russia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Filipino</td>
<td>Philippines</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>French Canadian</td>
<td>French Canada (see text)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Japanese</td>
<td>Japan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jewish</td>
<td>Israel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Korean</td>
<td>South Korea</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latin American</td>
<td>Bolivia, Brazil, Caribbean countries (e.g. Jamaica, Cuba),</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Colombia, Chile, Guyana, Mexico</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North European</td>
<td>Denmark, Finland, Norway, Sweden,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South East Asian</td>
<td>Cambodia, Laos, Thailand, Vietnam</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Asian</td>
<td>Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South European</td>
<td>Greece, Italy, Portugal, Spain</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West Asian</td>
<td>Azerbaijan, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Turkey, Uzbekistan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West European</td>
<td>Austria, Belgium, France, Germany, Netherlands, Switzerland</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
References


Oliver, Pamela. 1984. “‘If you don’t do it nobody else will’: Active and token contributions to local collective action.” *American Sociological Review* 49: 601-610.


Table 1
Descriptive statistics for individual-level variables. Weighted to adjust the sample to represent population characteristics.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Mean/proportion (standard deviation in parentheses)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Immigrant status</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Native-born</td>
<td>0.798</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Long-term immigrant</td>
<td>0.119</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Short-term immigrant</td>
<td>0.083</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Ethnicity</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anglo-American</td>
<td>0.471</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aboriginal</td>
<td>0.015</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African</td>
<td>0.0073</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arabic</td>
<td>0.0062</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chinese</td>
<td>0.034</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>East European</td>
<td>0.068</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Filipino</td>
<td>0.010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>French Canadian</td>
<td>0.126</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Japanese</td>
<td>0.0022</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jewish</td>
<td>0.0074</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Korean</td>
<td>0.0029</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latin American</td>
<td>0.0193</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North European</td>
<td>0.0211</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South East Asian</td>
<td>0.0072</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Asian</td>
<td>0.0032</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South European</td>
<td>0.0586</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West Asian</td>
<td>0.0029</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West European</td>
<td>0.106</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Education</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post-secondary graduate</td>
<td>0.480</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some post-secondary</td>
<td>0.079</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High school graduate</td>
<td>0.182</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less than high school</td>
<td>0.259</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Gender</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>0.512</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>0.488</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Marital status</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Married</td>
<td>0.499</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Common-law</td>
<td>0.081</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Divorced/separated</td>
<td>0.067</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Never married</td>
<td>0.303</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Widowed</td>
<td>0.047</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Household income ($1,000s)</td>
<td>65.58 (54.05)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>42.09 (18.4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>N (individual-level)</strong></td>
<td>125,356</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 2
Descriptive statistics and correlations between neighbourhood-level variables. Weighted to adjust the sample to represent population characteristics.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Mean (standard deviation)</th>
<th>Bivariate Correlations between the neighbourhood-level variables</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Median household income ($1,000s)</td>
<td>Proportion of immigrants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Median household income ($1,000s)</td>
<td>22.94 (4.50)</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proportion of immigrants</td>
<td>0.194 (0.163)</td>
<td>0.276</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proportion of visible minorities</td>
<td>0.137 (0.156)</td>
<td>0.190</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N (Neighbourhoods)</td>
<td>3,149</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 3
Logit models predicting voluntary association membership from immigrant status and ethnicity. All models except Model 1 control for age, education, household income, marital status, and sex.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Single-level Logit Models</th>
<th>Multi-level Logit Models</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Model 1</td>
<td>Model 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Individual-level</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intercept</td>
<td>-0.492 (0.008)***</td>
<td>-0.352 (0.016)***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Immigrant status</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Canadian born</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Long-term</td>
<td>0.028 (0.022)</td>
<td>0.007 (0.023)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Short-term</td>
<td>-0.255 (0.038)***</td>
<td>-0.273 (0.038)***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Ethnicity</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anglo-American</td>
<td>-0.267 (0.036)***</td>
<td>-0.191 (0.037)***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African</td>
<td>0.295 (0.096)**</td>
<td>0.265 (0.097)**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arabic</td>
<td>-0.257 (0.114)*</td>
<td>-0.215 (0.115)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chinese</td>
<td>-0.114 (0.051)*</td>
<td>-0.12 (0.052)*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>East European</td>
<td>-0.01 (0.024)</td>
<td>-0.003 (0.024)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Filipino</td>
<td>0.173 (0.085)*</td>
<td>0.104 (0.086)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>French Canadian</td>
<td>-0.327 (0.019)***</td>
<td>-0.324 (0.019)***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Japanese</td>
<td>0.028 (0.14)</td>
<td>-0.046 (0.141)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jewish</td>
<td>0.365 (0.085)***</td>
<td>0.296 (0.086)***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Korean</td>
<td>0.408 (0.132)**</td>
<td>0.418 (0.133)**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latin American</td>
<td>-0.078 (0.067)</td>
<td>-0.088 (0.067)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North European</td>
<td>0.169 (0.036)***</td>
<td>0.164 (0.037)***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South East Asian</td>
<td>-0.194 (0.103)</td>
<td>-0.19 (0.104)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Asian</td>
<td>-0.091 (0.056)</td>
<td>-0.098 (0.056)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South European</td>
<td>-0.155 (0.033)***</td>
<td>-0.156 (0.033)***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West Asian</td>
<td>-0.348 (0.175)*</td>
<td>-0.302 (0.176)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West European</td>
<td>0.217 (0.018)***</td>
<td>0.219 (0.019)***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Neighbourhood-level</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Median income</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(in 1000s)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proportion of</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>immigrants</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proportion of</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>visible minorities</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Random Effects</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Variance)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intercept</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Immigrant status</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Canadian born</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Long-term</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Short-term</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Model Fit</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AIC</td>
<td>164,760</td>
<td>162,819</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individual-level N</td>
<td>125,356</td>
<td>125,356</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neighbourhood-level N</td>
<td>3,149</td>
<td>3,149</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*P-value<.05; **P-value<.01; ***P-value<.001
Figure 1
Effects of neighbourhood context variables by immigrant status derived from Model 5. All variables except those for which the effects were calculated were set to typical values (i.e., means for quantitative variables and proportions for categorical variables) in the fitted equation.