

CITIZENSHIP LEARNING AND POLITICAL PARTICIPATION: THE EXPERIENCE OF LATIN AMERICAN IMMIGRANTS IN CANADA

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Abstract. This research note presents a study in progress that explores the continuities, tensions, and ruptures in the lifelong citizenship learning and the political engagement experienced by Latin American immigrants to Canada. The authors are particularly interested in the extent and nature of “civic changes” that occur among members of this community through the process of becoming Canadian. By means of in-depth interviews with Latin American-Canadians in Toronto and Montreal, they aim at examining the barriers and enabling factors for citizenship learning and political participation, as well as the relationships between immigrants’ political agency and institutional/social structures.

Résumé. Cette note de recherche présente une étude en cours qui explore les continuités, les tensions et les ruptures dans l’apprentissage citoyen et dans l’engagement politique des immigrants d’origine latino-américaine au Canada. Les auteurs s’intéressent particulièrement à la portée et à la nature des “changements civiques” qui se produisent chez les membres de cette communauté à travers le processus les amenant à devenir Canadiens. Par le biais d’entrevues en profondeur réalisées auprès de plusieurs Latino-américains résidant à Toronto

et à Montréal, ils cherchent à analyser les facteurs qui favorisent et qui entravent l'apprentissage citoyen et la participation, ainsi que les rapports entre l'action politique des immigrants et les structures sociales et institutionnelles.

This research note presents a study in progress that explores the continuities, tensions, and ruptures in the lifelong citizenship learning and the political engagement experienced by Latin American immigrants to Canada.¹ We are particularly interested in the extent and nature of “civic changes” that occur among members of this community through the process of becoming Canadian residents (either as refugees or landed immigrants) and eventually Canadian citizens. By means of in-depth interviews with Latin American-Canadians in Toronto and Montreal, we aim to examine the barriers and enabling factors for citizenship learning and political participation as well as the relationships between immigrants’ political agency and institutional/social structures.

The political integration of immigrants is a particularly significant issue when we take into account the fact that the multicultural character of Canadian society is far from properly reflected in the formal political system. Indeed, only a few elected officials at the federal, provincial, and municipal levels are members of ethnic minorities. Montreal and Toronto, two of the most diverse cities in North America, are not exceptions to this situation. The political engagement of immigrants, however, can take many forms and shapes, and should not be thought to be confined to electoral politics and the official politics of the state (Simard 2003; Siemiatycki and Saloojee 2002; Stasiulis 1997). While some immigrants venture into host society political affairs, others direct most of their energies toward home country politics, and others become involved in “transnational” or in “third country” politics. Likewise, participation in host society civic life can take the form of electoral politics, but it can also be centred in hometown associations. The intensity, quality, form, and language of participation varies significantly according to particular combinations of individual, social, and structural factors. We hope that this research note will contribute to the incipient body of academic research on the political learning and participation of Latin American-Canadians by bringing to light the views of immigrants about themselves.

In the first section of this note, we describe some aspects of the theoretical framework that guides our research and discuss the notion of citizenship and the challenges regarding civic and political participation of newcomers. In the second section we address the issue of civic integration and participation of immigrants in Canada. In the third section we review several studies that have been carried out on the experience of Latin American immigrants in other countries, particularly in the United States. Although the US case differs in many respects from the Canadian, it still represents the most relevant benchmark for a comparison. In the fourth section we summarize some preliminary data from our own research, and we discuss some of the questions regarding the Canadian case and the way in which we plan to address them.

Civic Learning and Citizenship

Citizenship is a complex and multidimensional concept. It consists of legal, cultural, social, and political elements, and provides citizens with defined rights and obligations, a sense of identity, and social bonds (Frazer 1999; Hébert and Wilkinson 2002; Kymlicka and Norman 1994; Ichilov 1998; Marshall 1950). Citizenship is even more complex in the case of immigrants, who have identities and lives with multiple dimensions and roots in at least two countries. This complexity is compounded in highly multicultural societies like Canada, in which citizenship is conceptualized in relation to integration policy. Latino youth in Canada, for example, have overlapping identities: they see themselves as Hispanics, as Latin Americans, and to a lesser degree as Canadians (Simmons, Bielmeier, and Ramos 2000). These overlapping identities are increasing with the expansion of global communication, which potentially allows entire communities to be more connected with their countries of origin than with Canada. Monkman (1997) suggests that linear models of immigration and acculturation must be replaced with more complex analyses of transnational social relations and their role in adults' lives and learning processes. Likewise, a recent study on the influence of transnationalism on the civic participation of newcomers to Canada (with the cases of Croatian and Sri Lankan Tamil communities in Toronto) suggests that only through a comprehensive understanding of the complex role of home-

land affiliation is it possible to develop policy directives that more effectively address the realities of immigrant group experiences, thus cultivating a sense of political efficacy and ultimately greater levels of civic engagement (Winland and Wayland 1999). Moreover, immigration dynamics are closely related to issues of economic motives, political exclusion, and social stratification (Israelite et al. 1999; Joshee 1996). Although the usual indicator of successful settlement and integration (particularly from the perspective of the federal government) is the acquisition of formal citizenship, it is not self-evident that formal citizenship status increases the levels of meaningful participation and integration of immigrants in Canadian society (Hébert 1998).

Citizenship education for newcomers is one of the few direct strategies through which the host society can prepare immigrants to participate in the new polity and the new economy, and can instill a sense of belonging in Canadian society. Among the issues identified in the research on adult citizenship education in Canada are the lack of coherent federal policies, linguistic barriers experienced by immigrants, the focus on passing a test as the main indicator of civic competencies, and the low emphasis placed on the promotion of active citizenship. In spite of evidence suggesting that experiential learning (in which the curriculum promotes practical applications for theoretical material through real-life projects) is not only more effective for adult immigrant citizenship learning, but also more appealing (Hahn 1998; Soukup 1996; Stiles 1990; Westheimer and Kahne 1998), adult citizenship education programs are driven largely by memorization of information in order to pass a 20-question multiple choice test. The classes usually follow a lecture format, and the content focuses on geographical, historical, and “constitutional” data, organized around 200 possible questions. The majority of instructors are untrained volunteers, and there is a high turnover rate (Derwing and Munro 1998). Little research has been conducted about the real impact of these courses on civic and social participation. The main available evidence of success is based on the fact that a majority of the people who take the course pass the exam, but this is not necessarily a sign of effectiveness because many other immigrants who do not take the course also pass the exam. The already limited impact of these programs has probably decreased in recent years, because the availability of courses has dwindled due to budgetary cuts.

Moreover, the reduction of services formerly provided by cultural organizations, information services, settlement services, English and French language programs, and multilingual social assistance and cultural interpreter programs can seriously affect the settlement experience and the successful integration of immigrants in Canada (Israelite et al. 1999). As the focus has intensified on making the naturalization process more cost-effective, less attention has been paid to clarifying our expectations of Canadian citizenship and to developing the best strategies to assist immigrants in meeting those expectations (Derwing and Munro 1998; Hébert 1998). For instance, one of the key indicators of the adaptation of newcomers to host societies is civic engagement, or participation in public institutions and community organizations. Such a goal is part of the mandate of most governmental institutions in Canada, ranging from the federal government to city halls. The City of Toronto, for example, adopted in 1999 four key principles of civic participation: collaborative decision-making; accessibility; continuous improvement in citizen participation; and community capacity building. However, immigrants are still underrepresented in politics, and it is difficult for newer immigrants to find spaces and ways to participate, as they are not familiar with the community and political decision-making processes in the Canadian context. Thus, the question that remains is how, when, and where do new citizens—once the language barrier has been overcome—learn to participate effectively in Canadian democratic institutions? We believe that this question can be answered in the context of their lifelong civic learning, their past and current civic engagement, and the quality and inclusiveness of enabling structures.

In contrast to theories asserting that immigrants must be assimilated into the national polity, Canadian multiculturalism policy maintains that assimilation is unnecessary for political integration. Studies on this topic, however, have drawn differing conclusions on the effectiveness of Canadian multiculturalism for political integration. A qualitative study of 30 Lao immigrants in Ontario conducted in 1992 suggests that Canadian multicultural policy may provide the means to bring about the successful political integration of immigrants in the future. The study indicates that immigrants can be successfully integrated and acquire high levels of political commitment as a result of the process of immigration (Harles 1997). A sense of belonging

and the assumption of civic duties are used as basic indicators of political integration. The author adopts the model of “push and pull” forces to explain Lao immigrants’ political integration practices and points out that political changes in the original countries and economic hardship are the crucial “pushing” factors. The generosity and social solidarity of Canada are important “pulling” elements. In the long term, however, the author suggests that Canada’s uncertain national identity contributes to making integration unpredictable. It is further suggested that these benefits are best seen in the short term, and that in the long term the Canadian political system may have difficulties resulting from its multicultural policies.

A study of the Indo-Caribbean community in Canada supports the thesis that multicultural policies undermine political integration. It indicates that multicultural policies have prevented the formation of a unified Indo-Caribbean political association due to its emphasis on ethnic identity over participation in mainstream politics (Singh 2000). Multicultural policies were found to fragment national identity, which is assumed to be necessary for maintaining the political system. Contradicting these findings, Kymlicka (1997) used data collected on elections to show that immigrants are integrating into the Canadian polity. He found that since the introduction of a formal multiculturalism policy in 1971, there has been an increase in immigrant political participation and that non-British and non-French ethnic groups have political representation nearly proportional to their population, which signals that they vote for national political parties (rather than for ethnic-based parties). However, some authors do not share this optimistic perspective. In Canada, the romantic ideal of multiculturalism has led to unequal relations and participation in the Canadian state as well as the outright exclusion of specific groups of immigrants at various historical moments (Giles 2002, 120).

The 1971 multiculturalism policy has also been criticized for emphasizing ethnic differences and for encouraging immigrants to pursue separate ways rather than embrace the “Canadian way of life.” However, a recent study on immigrant adjustment or assimilation (Li 2003) shows that, as time passes, immigrants, and especially their children, adopt behavioural patterns similar to native-born Canadians. These findings suggest that immigrants are not fragmenting Canada or undermining Canada’s traditions. Li’s findings suggest that

the problems of diversity are sometimes exaggerated while its global possibilities are not always properly recognized. Indeed, diversity has acquired a negative connotation for some observers, who fail to see it as a possible resource to connect Canada with the rest of the world in global commerce, cultural exchanges, and political dialogues.

Ethnic Identity and Participation in Canada

The political experiences and integration of immigrants has been and continues to be an understudied topic in Canada (Black 1991; Stasiulis 1997; Simard 2003). When ethnic differences in politics are considered, they have typically been dominated by Anglophone and Francophone categories (Mishler and Clarke 1995). Other ethnic groups are often either ignored or aggregated as a single group described as “other.” This situation is complicated by the lack of a clear standard for successful integration, political or otherwise; instead, the behavioural standards of native Canadians are used (Li 1996). When ethnic differences other than Anglophone and Francophone groups are addressed, there is a common belief that immigrants’ cultural and value differences make their political integration difficult (Weinfield 1994). This was the case in a review of articles published in three prominent academic journals between 1970 and 1991: the *Canadian Journal of Political Science*, *Canadian Ethnic Studies*, and the *Canadian Review of Sociology and Anthropology* (Laponce 1994). During this period, only Ukrainians, First Nations, West Indians, Japanese, Dutch, Icelanders, and Jews were studied more than once.

It is pertinent to note that the civic and political participation of newcomers may take different shapes and forms. It may range from direct actions in projects, to following events in the media, to making financial contributions. It may be pursued through activities requiring membership (e.g., voting in unions or in political parties) or without membership (e.g., electoral campaigns, volunteering in a nonprofit organization). It may be performed through formal organizations or through informal networks. It may be pursued to accrue primarily private benefits or for more altruistic reasons, to assist society as a whole, or promote social change (Breton 1997). For the case of Latin American immigrants, civic and political participation also includes a linguistic dimension. Sometimes by choice, sometimes by neces-

sity, and sometimes by competence, participation may occur in Spanish, in English, and/or in French. The language used will determine to a large extent the type of community in which the involvement will take place.

Although immigration policy has primarily been addressed at the national level of policy making, municipalities also have become involved in the social and political integration of immigrants. A study of local integration policies and the social and political integration of upper professional immigrants in Brossard, Quebec, reveals that the municipalities follow the national integration models (Berthet and Poirier 2000). In a comparison of Sydney, Australia, with Vancouver, Canada, Edgington et al. (2001) found that multicultural policies are generally less developed in metropolitan Vancouver than in Sydney's municipal government, possibly due to a lack of resources and compulsory social services. The authors assert that the relatively limited commitment of local authorities to multiculturalism in Vancouver represents a formidable barrier to full citizenship for new immigrants, particularly insofar as Canadian municipalities are responsible for policy making and service delivery of local social services.

Hometown associations also play an important role in the settlement and political integration of immigrants in Canada at the local level by providing a wide range of economic, cultural, social, and political functions for individuals in their new communities. A study in Toronto demonstrated that Ghanaians have created a large network of township, ethnic, and national associations that can encourage civic participation (Owusu 2000). Membership in Ghanaian associations was associated with length of residence, level of education, income, and residential location. Political and cultural issues indigenous to the home country may also carry over to immigrant communities and act to disrupt the solidarity of immigrant communities. This is the case with the Pakistani and Indian communities in Canada and the United States, where clashes between Asian American and Muslim American politics continue to occur (Leonard 2000).

Prior research on the impact of ethnic identity on immigrants' participation in Canada suggests that Canadian immigrants who maintained a strong ethnic identity through ties to their ethnic group were found to be less likely to participate in political meetings and voting and were less aware of political issues (Reitz 1980). Additionally,

immigrants with lower socioeconomic status had stronger ethnic identification and thus lower participation rates, while higher-status immigrants were associated with weaker ethnic identification and higher participation. In analyzing the effects of previous political involvement in the former country on immigrants' political participation in Canada, Black, Niemi, and Powell (1987) found that those immigrants with previous political experience were much more likely to develop partisanship, interest, and political activity in their new environment.

On the other hand, some studies indicate that minorities do not systematically participate less than native-born Canadians, but rather are just as likely to affiliate with a political party, and that when they do participate less in certain activities, this discrepancy narrows with time as immigrants become more established (Black 1982, 1991). This suggests that immigrants experience a significant learning process about politics through their networks of family and friends (Black 1982). Whether the immigrants came from majority or minority ethnic groups was found to be a less salient factor in shaping their political participation than was immigrant status, as a study of British majority immigrants and four ethnic minority immigrant groups in Toronto indicated (Black 1987, 1991). There was little difference between the groups in terms of their ability to transfer their past political experiences to the Canadian political context. In addition, factors related to ethnic organizing do not hinder political participation (Black 1982; Chui, Curtis, and Lambert 1991). Exposure to ethnic media in Toronto was not found to restrict immigrants' political integration in Canada but, in fact, supported their participation by supplying information on Canadian political issues (Black and Leithner 1988). Simard (1991) found that visible minority community leaders had high levels of political interest and knowledge, and that this was associated with the length of time in Canada, although this study used a small and non-representative sample.

When immigrants were compared with Canadian-born regarding political participation using data from the *1984 Canadian National Election Study* (Chui et al. 1991), there were no statistically significant differences for six of seven measures of political participation. In this study, political participation was assessed in terms of involvement in a campaign, contact with politicians, voting, political organizational membership, exposure to political stimuli, interest in the 1984

election, and paying attention to politics in general. The only statistically significant difference was that immigrants were less likely to contact politicians. Moreover, it was noted that political involvement usually peaked in the second generation, and did not necessarily increase with the number of generations in the country. This trend contrasted with the belief that political involvement increases in accordance with the number of generations of residence in the new country. Political alienation was also found to be about the same for immigrants and Canadian-born in a study of South Asians in Vancouver (Wood 1981). Chui et al. (1991) point out that their analysis is based on political activities accessible to the general public, which could explain why immigrants' and native-born Canadians' participation is similar, and that there might be differences in more specialized activities, such as running for political office, gaining public office, and involvement in policy-making.

While immigrants are often classified together as the "other" in relation to Canadian-born, significant inter-ethnic differences have been found among immigrant groups in terms of political and social participation. In a survey of over 18,000 Canadian- and foreign-born respondents from the National Survey of Giving, Volunteering, and Participating, there were differences among immigrant groups in their charitable giving (Mata and McRae 2000). Place of birth and sociodemographic and residential characteristics were most closely associated with these patterns, especially the length of residence. Moreover, some immigrant groups were more likely to make charitable donations than were Canadian-born groups.

In brief, despite the common belief that immigrants' cultural distinctiveness makes their civic and political integration difficult, most studies show that minorities do not systematically participate less than native-born Canadians, even when they hold a strong ethnic identity and maintain active ties to their ethnic group. Some studies show evidence of a significant learning process about politics and citizenship. This learning process is accomplished in part through family and community networks, and can be strengthened by the existence of hometown associations and local integration policies. While ethnic identification does not seem to hinder political participation, significant inter-ethnic differences have been found among immigrant groups. Certain factors, such as place of birth and socioeconomic sta-

tus, appear to play a role in determining a higher or lower level of immigrants' civic engagement in the host society.

The Experience of Latin Americans in the United States

Key issues in the political socialization literature specific to Latin American immigrants in the United States include the impact of the processes of integration/assimilation and naturalization, and the intercultural and inter-ethnic differences in the socialization of diverse Latin American immigrant groups. A central issue is whether approaches to integration and naturalization are supportive of or harmful to immigrants' capacities for developing political values, attitudes, and participation. Studies of specific Latin American ethnic immigrant groups reveal that there are inter-group differences, and that integration into the American political system has had a negative effect on some political attitudes.

The political integration of Mexican immigrants has been found to be a slow and irregular process in which there are three main political orientations: individual/system blame; perceived discrimination; and support for collective activities (Garcia 1987). Structural relations and immigration policies influence these orientations. A recent study of Mexican and Puerto Rican immigrants (Michelson 2001) supports the assimilationist theory that integration into the American electorate decreases political trust among immigrant groups. Mexican American citizens were compared with Mexican non-citizens, and Puerto Ricans born in Puerto Rico were compared with those born in the US. Both of the groups that are US citizens (either native-born or naturalized) were less trusting of the US government than the groups that were non-citizens.

Latino immigrants who were newly naturalized in California during 1996 had higher levels of political participation than other groups of Latinos in California, and higher levels than Latinos in Florida or Texas. Latinos who became naturalized in the politically charged environment of California politics during the early 1990s had a greater voter turnout, which suggests that political issues targeting Latino immigrants encourage naturalization as a political statement and as a means for enfranchisement. This conclusion is based on a multivariate

logit model of individual turnout of Latino citizens in the three states for the 1996 national election (Pantoja et al. 2001). Furthermore, anti-immigrant legislation has been found to positively influence political participation for first- and second-generation immigrants (Ramakrishnan and Espenshade 2001).

Socioeconomic factors have been found to correlate with aspects of immigrants' political participation and socialization. The number of years of residence in the US, naturalization status, gains in English-language skills, and exposure to the media all positively influence the acquisition of partisanship (Wong 2000). An analysis of English proficiency in the second generation found that Asians achieve a significant level of English proficiency while one in five Latinos is still not proficient in English, a finding explained by differences in socialization processes for each group (Cho 1999). It can be argued that the socialization process in education that is associated with the time spent in the US is the main factor in determining levels of participation rather than these (or other socioeconomic) variables themselves. Similarly, exposure to the political system was found to support the development of political attitudes for diverse immigrant groups (Wong 2000). Coming from a country with a repressive regime and having access to Spanish-language ballots were not found to have a significant effect on immigrants' voting (Ramakrishnan and Espenshade 2001). Lastly, increasing age was correlated with increasing political involvement, contradicting the theory that age is a factor in immigrants' resistance to the acquisition of political interests and behaviours (Black et al. 1987).

Portes and Mozo (1985) found that naturalization depended differentially on the country of origin. Specifically, they found that Cuban immigrants had a faster rate of naturalization than other immigrant groups studied and that Mexican naturalization was the slowest. The authors found that the difference depended on three factors: geographical distance from places of emigration; reasons for departure; and educational and occupational background of each immigrant group. Immigrant groups who left their countries for political reasons acquired US citizenship earlier than those whose reasons were not political. Portes and Mozo also found that immigrant groups with high levels of education and occupational status acquired their citizenship earlier than those with low levels.

Identification with the new homeland is another salient issue in the immigrant political socialization literature. Political allegiance is considered an important indication of individuals' desire to be involved in the political system of their new communities and nations. This is relevant considering that the National Latino Immigrant Survey reported that nearly half (49.5%) of legal resident immigrants self-identify with their countries of origin (Pachon and DeSipio 1994). For immigrants, the question of self-identification has been expressed in terms of political allegiance and cultural preference. Immigrants can maintain a desire to be politically involved independent of whether they self-identified with their home country or with their new country, as was the case with a study of Hispanic immigrants in 1995 (Monsivais 2001). Many of the Hispanic immigrants who took part in focus groups for this study did not intend to become "American." On the whole, identification expressed cultural or ethnic/racial concepts rather than political preferences.

In his 2001 study, DeSipio explored the connections between naturalization and political engagement and concluded that the likelihood of naturalization increases for individuals with more education and higher incomes and for older immigrants. Contemporary immigrant political incorporation occurs primarily at the individual level and offers more opportunities to participate to individuals with greater educational levels, higher income, and greater age (DeSipio 2001).

Renshon (2001) analyzed contemporary naturalization from the perspective of dual citizenship and explored how it might affect immigrant political participation and identification with American values. In the past, it was assumed that immigrants would identify with American culture, but today dual citizenship is more controversial because it encourages the retention of attachments and commitments of immigrants to their home country. Given this new context, Renshon questions the value in having an increasing number of citizens with multiple loyalties living in the United States.

It is also important to mention that several authors have argued that gender is crucial for understanding immigrant political socialization (Grasmuck and Pessar 1991; Hardy-Fanta 1993; Hondagneu-Sotelo 1994; Jones-Correa 1998). A recent study of Latin American immigrants in New York City revealed that male Latino immigrants showed greater support for continuity patterns of

socialization, while female Latino immigrants more often supported change in patterns of socialization (Jones-Correa 1998). In their study on the political dimension of Mexican migration to the US, Calderón and Martínez (2002) showed that immigrants constantly negotiate their values and conceptions of authority, power, plurality, and order in a dynamic and fluid dialogue between the codes of the home and host societies. They found that immigrants maintain active networks in both societies and an increasing interest in participating in the electoral politics of both countries. For instance, 13% thought it most important to vote in Mexico, 18% in the US, and 48% found it important to vote in both countries (though 12% did not think it important to vote in either). The authors also showed that immigrants develop and redefine their political values, attitudes, and positions through regular processes of comparison, evaluation, and adaptation, and this goes well beyond electoral politics.

The US case is relevant for the Canadian situation, for both the parallels and the contrasts that can be drawn. Some findings about the Latin American community in the US converge with data obtained in Canada: for example, the existence of significant inter-group differences, and the influence of socioeconomic factors and number of years of residence in the host country on naturalization, political participation, and civic learning. In terms of research, this means that more studies should be conducted on the immigrants' personal trajectories, patterns of self-representation, group affiliation, and informal civic learning processes. On the other hand, two extremely important elements differentiate the United States from Canada. First, the Latino community in the US represents an old and very large minority. Latin American-Canadians form a relatively recent community, and their demographic weight is feeble compared to other ethnic populations. Second, the American political system favours the assimilation of newcomers, or at least a higher degree of integration into the dominant culture than the Canadian multicultural model (in which dual citizenship is far less controversial than in the United States). Again, this should lead researchers in Canada to focus not only on political participation indicators, but also on the immigrants' personal experiences and on problems such as the complex interaction between layered or competing identities, an issue that becomes even more intricate in Quebec, where the French-language Quebecois identity is actively promoted by provincial government policy.

Preliminary Findings and Working Hypotheses

The sample of our research will include 200 Latin American adult residents in two Canadian cities: Toronto and Montreal. The rationale for the choice of these settings is twofold. First, these cities receive the largest proportion of immigrants from Latin America to Canada.² Second, each one represents a distinct dominant political culture (Anglophone and Francophone). Approximately half of the final sample will be selected from Latin American landed immigrants and refugees with five or more years of residence in Canada, and the other half from Latin Americans who are Canadian citizens. The sampling method is a combination of snowballing and quota sampling. In recruiting participants, we announced the research within the local Latin American community using different strategies; we also relied on our own personal acquaintance with the Latin American community and on settlement agencies providing services to Latin American immigrants. Our final sample should be reasonably balanced in terms of gender, country of origin, and age groups.

Semi-structured interviews have been used to collect data. Interviews have usually been conducted in Spanish, although interviewees also have the option to express themselves in English or French if they prefer. For some questions (especially those related to community participation, identity, connections to source country, integration, civic interests, networks, political engagement, and civic change) we have adapted the instruments used by Michalski and George (1997) with immigrants in Canada, and by Calderón and Martínez (2002) with Mexican immigrants to the United States. Our interview complements those surveys by providing an in-depth exploration of the lifelong civic learning and engagement (both pre- and post-migration) experienced by interviewees, with a focus on the factors promoting and inhibiting civic participation in mainstream Canadian social and political life. All interviewees were at least 18 years of age when they immigrated to Canada. The rationale behind this choice is to interview immigrants whose primary political socialization took place in their home country. We have already completed about a quarter of the interviews. While we have not yet begun the data analysis, we can report some preliminary findings. At this stage, they provide us with clues about some interesting trends and help us formulate certain hypotheses.

Thus far, most interviewees seem to have participated in several community groups, religious organizations, political parties, school councils, advocacy committees, and so on since their arrival in Canada. While we consider the possibility that people exaggerate their level of participation, we have observed in their discourse a normative perception of civic participation, that is, a positive image of participation as feasible and socially valued. In some cases, individuals engage in associational activities in order to further their integration into the host society, others participate in organizations concerned with their own community, and a third group is involved in groups that maintain a link to their country of origin. Interviewees who expressed less interest in Canadian political and civic life than in their country of origin focused mainly on personal reasons, while those who expressed more interest often referred to the better conditions of Canadian democracy and civil society. On the other hand, many respondents mentioned the lack of information, lack of time, lack of resources, linguistic barriers, and cultural gaps as obstacles to integration. This response has led us to formulate the hypothesis that the Latin American immigrants' discourse tends to focus on the process of integration into the host society, rather than on any inherent barrier.

When asked about perceived changes in their behaviour since their immigration to Canada, many respondents referred to a heightened awareness, respect, and appreciation of cultural diversity. Several immigrants mentioned an evolution in attitudes toward the environment, citing the practice of recycling as the main behaviour change. Some respondents also perceived a change in their personal habits in matters such as politeness, punctuality, and concern for others. A few pointed to changes in their family life and in their relation with their partners, particularly regarding gender relations. While some aspects of Canadian society appear to be highly valued and embraced by Latin American immigrants, other perceived aspects (e.g., individualism, consumerism, etc.) are seen as detrimental to the preservation of community values and practices. Our research will further explore this interesting phenomenon.

In broad terms, the responses that we have obtained so far suggest that Latin American immigrants do not perceive a clear Canadian identity. Unable to distinguish what a strong Canadian national identity would look like, immigrants find it difficult to develop a sense of

belonging. At the same time, this lack of a clear Canadian identity can also be an enabling factor for civic learning. While there is no unifying Canadian-Latin American identity, most respondents feel that one should be constructed or given voice. In other words, self-representation was mostly positive and focused on good education, a work ethic, strong motivation for advancement, sense of community, solidarity and family, a common language, a shared collective memory, social and political experience, and a rich and diverse culture as the traits shared by Latin Americans in Canada. The desire for enhanced organization and participation expressed by many interviewees can be seen in itself as an indication of potential civic involvement. The conditions for civic learning appear thus to be rather favourable, at least at the subjective level. At the same time, several weaknesses were identified, including the Latin American community's low levels of unity, organization, leadership, and participation.

This study will test the general hypothesis that immigrants experience significant learning about politics and citizenship in host societies, and that this learning process is connected to their own culture, past experiences, and personal networks. Even though ethnic identification does not seem to prevent civic learning, some studies show significant inter-ethnic differences among immigrant groups and among different socioeconomic groups. Further analysis of the Latin American community in Canada should help us obtain a better understanding of its particularities vis-à-vis other minorities. Are Latin Americans more politicized than immigrants from other regions, as first impressions would suggest? Are there differences between the Latin American community in Montreal and in Toronto, given the cultural Latin character of Quebec society, and the effects of the Quebec national question and French-language protection laws on majority-minority relations? We have already observed some intriguing trends. It would seem, for instance, that immigrants feel entitled—even empowered—by multiculturalism, but, paradoxically, this can delay the process of integration, as the discourse of multiculturalism does not convey a distinct image of what being a Canadian means, particularly but not solely in Quebec, and all the more so when compared to the US context. Our research should allow us to draw a clearer picture of the processes of identity construction in Canada, a key factor in citizenship learning and political participation.

Notes

1. This project is supported by a grant from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada. The authors wish to acknowledge John P. Myers, a doctoral student at OISE/UT, for his assistance with the literature review.
2. The immigrant population is concentrated in Canada's largest cities. In 1996, 52.4% of all immigrants lived in the metropolitan areas of Toronto, Montreal, and Vancouver. Immigration represents the largest single component of urban population growth. In contrast, other areas and small cities of Canada receive only a few newcomers. This trend is not likely to change in the future, regardless of modifications in immigration policy. The concentration of immigrants in a few cities has generated an increase of the social and cultural differences within Canadian urban areas, and between these urban areas and the rest of the country (Bourne, 1999).

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