CHAPTER 50

Voting across Immigrant Generations

Monica Boyd and Emily Laxer

Introduction

Interest in the voting patterns of successive **immigrant** generations rests on two rationales. First, voting is an important indicator of political participation and second, political participation is widely considered a crucial mechanism in securing immigrants' economic, social, and political foothold in the host society (Ramakrishnan 2005). In recent years, a similar rationale has directed attention to the political participation of immigrants' children. The focus also reflects the recent rapid growth in the numbers of immigrant offspring as a result of sustained post–World War II migration. Most immigrants to Canada are adults; they bring young children with them and they bear Canadian-born children. Census data for 2006 tell us that these offspring (those arriving before age 15 and those who are born in Canada) represent nearly one-third (32 per cent) of the population aged 15 and older. The size of this sector of the population is almost twice that of the foreign born who come as late adolescents or as adults (17.5 per cent of those aged 15 and older).

The growing research on immigrant offspring brings an additional lens to discussions of political participation. It is commonly acknowledged that the integration of immigrants takes time; indeed, integration—defined as the notion that diverse members of a society have equal access to resources by virtue of being incorporated into core institutions—may take more than one generation to be achieved. The question of whether and to what extent immigrant offspring participate in political institutions thus becomes framed within the larger context of immigrant integration. In particular, do immigrant offspring participate more, or less, compared with immigrants who arrived in adulthood or compared to those whose ancestors have been in Canada for several generations? Using information from the 2002 Ethnic Diversity Survey (EDS), we answer this question by looking at generational differences in voting.

Generation Status, Political Participation, and Voting Patterns

In discussing variability across generations in the propensity to vote, a specific vocabulary is employed. In the vast North American literature on immigrant offspring, immigrants and their offspring are classified according to the distance of each generation from the original migration experience. The *first generation* to arrive in a country is identified by that label. Their children, born in the same destination country, are called the *second generation*; their children in turn are referred to as the *third generation* and so on. In actuality, refinements can be made within these broad categorizations; we discuss these sub-categories later.

How do these generational distinctions relate to voting? According to the orthodox accounts of acculturation and integration (Alba and Nee 1997; Gans 1992), participation progressively increases as successive generations of immigrant origin groups become more acculturated to dominant host society values and become increasingly indistinguishable, in their socio-economic status

and behaviours, from the average person in the host society. With respect to political participation, immigrants are thought to be the *least* likely to vote, either because the emphasis on economic integration leaves them little time for political activities (Mollenkopf et al. 2006) or because impediments exist, including low proficiency in the official language(s) (Baer 2008), lack of familiarity with the political norms and processes of the host society (Jedwab 2006; White et al. 2006), and restricted access to occupational networks promoting civic engagement due to poor labour market outcomes. Scholars adhering to this view expect second and third generations to exhibit higher rates of political engagement than the foreign born.

This scenario is called the 'straight line' model since it depicts the level of political participation as incrementally increasing with each successive generation. The second generation has higher rates of voting than the first; the third generation has higher voting rates than the second, and so on. However, the voluminous literature on immigration offspring points to at least two additional possibilities (for others, see Ramakrishnan 2005). Fuelled by higher levels of education, rapid acculturation, and a drive to have a higher stake in election outcomes, the second generation may actually have the highest voting rates of all generation groups. Here, the model is one of an inverted V, in which the second generation, and perhaps the 1.5 generation, are more likely to vote than are immigrants arriving as adults or the third and later generations. Alternatively and in contrast to this 'second generation advantage' model, under conditions of structural impediments and strong hierarchical stratification systems, the second generation may be denied opportunities to participate in the larger society. Consequently, they may be far less likely to vote. In this scenario, called the 'second generation decline' or the 'segmented assimilation' model (Zhou 1997), the generation-specific voting rates are represented by a V, where voting rates for the second generation are the lowest for all generational groups.

To date, studies of voting behaviour across immigrant generations in Canada do not support the straight line model. But which of the other models hold is less certain. In their analysis of the 1984 Canadian National Election Survey, Chui et al. (1991) find that the second generation offspring are more likely than both their parents and members of more established generational cohorts to vote, contact politicians, and volunteer in election campaigns. This support for the second generation advantage model contradicts the expectation derived from the straight line model that deeply rooted Canadians are the most participatory. A more recent analysis of the 2004 Canada Election Study finds no difference in federal voting rates between the second generation and the third-plus generation after controlling for age, religion, and ethnic origin groups (Soroka, Johnston and Banting 2007). A third study offers support for the second generation decline model by finding that visible minority second generation offspring have lower voting percentages, reporting that they voted less in the 2000 federal election compared to immigrants arriving before 1991 and compared to the third-plus white generation (Reitz and Banerjee 2007). However, the findings of the third study should be tempered by the fact that the visible minority second generation is very young when compared to the age composition of immigrant visible minority groups or the third-plus white population (see Jedwab 2008; Palmer 2006). Young persons generally have lower voting rates. In the 2000 federal election, the voter turnout for those aged 18–24 was approximately 25 per cent, compared with nearly two-thirds of the general population (Elections Canada no date).

Our Study and Findings

These studies indicate that although the straight line model appears not to hold in Canada, the jury is still is out with respect to which of the remaining two models best describe voting patterns across immigrant generations. To shed additional light on this debate, we conducted a multivariate analysis of the 2002 Ethnic Diversity Survey (EDS) for persons aged 25 and older. The EDS asks respondents if they voted in the last federal, provincial, and municipal elections; it also collects a large amount of information on the social and economic characteristics of these respondents. This information

is used to assess if differences in the likelihood of voting across generational groups simply reflects differences between generations with respect to factors known to influence voting propensities. For example, highly educated persons are more likely to vote than less educated persons. If generations that are the most removed from the migration experience are better educated than recently arrived immigrants, education compositional differences across generations might underlie the observed generational differences in voting.

Unlike previous Canadian studies that focused on a limited number of generations, the EDS allows us to study variations across eight generational groups: the first generation (immigrants arriving as older adolescents or as adults), distinguished by three periods of arrival; the 1.5 generation (foreign born arriving before the age of 15); the second generation (those born in Canada to two foreign-born parents); the 2.5 generation (those born in Canada with one foreign-born parent); the third generation (those born in Canada to two native-born parents); and the fourth-plus generation (those born in Canada to two native-born parents and four native-born grandparents. Compared with previous studies, we also have a greater number of demographic, social, and economic variables known to differ between generations and also to influence voting propensities.

We adjust for the influence of these factors using logistic regression analysis (DeMaris 1992) in which the outcomes are 'voted in the past election' versus 'did not vote'. (Individuals who are not citizens of Canada are excluded from the analysis.) Although we use the survey weights to obtain a representative population, we apply normalized weights where the mean is 1. We then use inferential statistics, applying a bootstrapping methodology to adjust for the sampling design, to determine if the differences between the logits are statistically significant for our sample, using the voting patterns of the fourth-plus generation as our reference group. The (ns) notation indicates that logit differences from the fourth-plus generation are not statistically significant.

We report these results in Table 50.1, showing logits and the hypothetical percentages that would be observed if all the generations were alike with respect to age, provincial and large Census MetropolitanArea residence, marital status, composition of the nine visible minority groups and the non-visible minority group, home language, dual versus single Canadian citizenship, education, and income. When logits are not statistically significant, we do not present the percentages since the analysis tells us there is no real meaningful difference from the fourth-plus generation.

After the existing demographic, social, and economic differences between generations are taken into account, few differences exist across generations, relative to the voting rates of the fourth-plus generation. Overall, the voting patterns weakly support a second generation advantage model. In terms of voting in the last federal election, both the second and the 2.5 generations have higher calculated percentages of voting, relative to the fourth generation, and this also occurs for the second generation at the municipal election level. Throughout, the most recently arrived immigrants continue to have substantially lower percentages of voting in the past federal, provincial, and municipal elections.

Discussion

We use the term 'weak support' to describe the second generation advantage model for two reasons: first, the pattern whereby the percentages voting are higher for the second generation is observed at the federal and municipal level, but not in provincial elections. Second, the likelihood of voting among many other generation groups is similar to that observed for the fourth-plus generation. This means that there is not an incremental increase in voting from those most recently arriving to the second generation, followed by incremental declines for successive generations. Instead, the pattern is one in which the likelihood of voting is very similar among most generational groups, with the exception of the second generation and immigrants who recently arrived.

Although space constraints limit a full discussion, somewhat greater variation is found when looking at the actual voting rates without taking compositional differences into account. But

Table 50.1 Loqistic Regression Logits[a,b] and Calculated Hypothetical Percentages of Voting in the Last Election by Generation, Persons Age 25 Years and Older, Canada, 2002

	LOGITS[a] (1)	PERCENTAGES (2)
Federal Election		
4th-plus generation	(RG)	84
3.0 generation	0.172 (ns)	(ns)
2.5 generation	0.194*	86
2.0 generation	0.329***	88
1.5 generation	0.128 (ns)	(ns)
1.0 generation – arrived before 1981	0.275 (ns)	(ns)
1.0 generation – arrived 1981–1990	-0.091 (ns)	(ns)
1.0 generation – arrived 1991+	-1.020***	65
Provincial Election		
4th-plus generation	(RG)	85
3.0 generation	0.118 (ns)	(ns)
2.5 generation	0.108 (ns)	(ns)
2.0 generation	0.198 (ns)	(ns)
1.5 generetion	-0.097 (ns)	(ns)
1.0 generation – arrived before 1981	0.008 (ns)	(ns)
1.0 generation – arrived 1981–1990	-0.088 (ns)	(ns)
1.0 generation – arrived 1991+	-0.986***	67
Municipal Election		
4th-plus generation	(RG)	72
3.0 generation	0.060 (ns)	(ns)
2.5 generation	0.070 (ns)	(ns)
2.0 generation	0.165*	75
1.5 generation	-0.137 (ns)	(ns)
1.0 generation – arrived before 1981	0.104 (ns)	(ns)
1.0 generation – arrived 1981–1990	-0.144 (ns)	(ns)
1.0 generation – arrived 1991+	-0.733***	55

*p<.05 **p<.01 ***p<.001

(RG) Reference group. All logits are expressed in relation to the 4th-plus generation.

(a) Net of sex, age, age squared, province & city of residence, marital status, visible minority status, home language, citizenship (dual versus sole Canadian citizenship), highest level of education, and income.

(b) Logistic regressions run separately for voting yes/no in most recent federal, provincial, or municipal elections.

Source: Master File of the Ethnic Diversty Survey, housed in the University of Toronto Research Data Centre

here the variation is mostly between the foreign born who have arrived in different decades. Our research finds that much of the variation across generations can simply be attributed to group compositional differences in characteristics that are associated with voting or not.

Overall, there is no evidence for the second generation decline model, in which immigrant

offspring are less likely to be politically engaged, at least in terms of voting. However, different origin groups may have different norms, expectations, and practices regarding political participation generally and voting in particular (Jedwab 2006; White et al. 2006). If these norms are transmitted to offspring, then there may be voting patterns across generations that are specific for country of origin groups. Clearly more research remains to be undertaken if we are to understand the full complexity of voting patterns across immigrant origin generations in Canada.

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