

Title: Community Context and Civic Participation in Immigrant Communities
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WP Number 08-03

Research Questions: How do levels of civic engagement among first-generation immigrants compare across immigrant groups? Are immigrants more likely or less likely to become involved in voluntary organizations if they live in a community with higher proportions of recent immigrants from the same country of origin?

Importance: Past research has focused mostly on differences in voluntary association activity among different ethnic groups, using self-identification measures. This research looks directly at the question of first-generation immigrants to Canada, and works with a survey (GSS 2003) with a sufficiently large sample size to distinguish between major immigrant groups.

Research Findings: Immigrants who do not speak English or French at home are much less likely to get involved in voluntary organizations of all types. Official language usage at home is low among immigrants from Italy, Poland, Portugal, and China/Hong Kong, but very high among immigrants from the Caribbean, the United Kingdom, the United States, Germany, the Netherlands and France. Even accounting for language use differences, levels of involvement (membership in a voluntary association, attend meetings, volunteer) are lower among immigrants from India, the Philippines, Vietnam, Poland and China/Hong Kong. Group density – the proportion of individuals in a community who are immigrants from the same country – matters in the case of UK immigrants, Jamaican immigrants and immigrants from China/Hong Kong, but in opposite ways: for the first two groups, immigrating into a community with a high group density leads to *lower* levels of civic engagement, while for Chinese immigrants, more civic engagement is expected if there is an existing Chinese community.

Implications: Social integration takes different forms for different types of immigrant communities and policies devoted to the encouragement of civic participation need to take these into account. For one group, Chinese immigrants, the presence of an existing Chinese community appears to be particularly important.