

# The Political Integration of Immigrant and Visible Minority Women<sup>i</sup>

Brenda O'Neill<sup>a</sup>, Elisabeth Gidengil<sup>b</sup> and Lisa Young<sup>c</sup>

<sup>a</sup> University of Calgary. E-mail address: [bloneill@ucalgary.ca](mailto:bloneill@ucalgary.ca)

<sup>b</sup> McGill University. E-mail address: [elisabeth.gidengil@mcgill.ca](mailto:elisabeth.gidengil@mcgill.ca)

<sup>c</sup> University of Calgary. E-mail address: [lisa.young@ucalgary.ca](mailto:lisa.young@ucalgary.ca)

**Abstract.** This article examines how immigrant and visible minority status, and the intersection of the two, affect women's ability and willingness to participate in conventional and unconventional political activities. Using a telephone survey undertaken with English-speaking women in nine of Canada's ten provinces, we find that women's political integration varies by the type of political activity in question but that it is particularly weak for immigrant women from an ethnic minority. We also find that resource and socio-demographic profiles are limited in their ability to explain participation deficits, especially for unconventional political activity, and that mobilizing networks offer some possible insight into women's propensity to participate politically.

**Keywords.** political behaviour, women, immigrants, ethnicity, Canada.

## Introduction

Citizen participation remains a fundamental tenet of democratic legitimacy. For immigrants and members of ethnic minorities, in particular, political participation can serve as an important element in their overall integration into society. Political participation offers a direct mechanism for voicing concerns and interests, and for joining with others to bring into place needed changes at the community level; it also provides an important indirect mechanism for change by providing opportunities for selecting elected representatives who can voice those concerns and interests in turn. While the political participation of immigrants and minorities has received increased research attention in recent years, significant gaps in our understanding, nevertheless, remain.

The political integration of minorities is particularly salient in Canada. Twenty percent of the Canadian population is currently foreign-born and three-quarters of those who arrived within the past five years are members of a visible minority (Bird, 2011:25). Canada's formal support for multiculturalism through federal laws and policies has

**Résumé.** Cet article analyse comment le statut d'immigrant et de minorité visible, ainsi que le croisement des deux, affecte la capacité et l'empressement des femmes à participer à des activités politiques conventionnelles et non conventionnelles. En utilisant une enquête téléphonique avec des femmes anglophones dans neuf des dix provinces du Canada, nous trouvons que l'intégration politique des femmes varie en fonction du type d'activité politique en question, mais qu'elle est particulièrement faible pour les femmes issues d'une minorité visible. Nous trouvons par ailleurs que les profils sociodémographiques et nous trouvons par ailleurs que les profils sociodémographiques et de ressources sont limités pour expliquer les déficits de participation, en particulier concernant l'activité politique non conventionnelle, et que la mobilisation de réseaux offre explication possible au sujet de la propension des femmes à participer dans la vie politique.

**Mots clefs.** comportement politique, femmes, immigrants, ethnicité, Canada.

played a role in assisting with the integration of minorities (Kymlicka, 2007). More specifically, Irene Bloemraad (2006) argues that Canadian multicultural policies have provided for greater *political* integration for ethnic minorities when compared to the United States. Political integration, according to Bloemraad, is "the process of becoming a part of mainstream political debates, practices, and decision-making ... incorporation is generally achieved when patterns of immigrant participation are comparable to those among the native-born" (2006: 6). While we may take comfort in the comparison with our southern neighbours, political integration is far from complete.

We further the investigation of immigrant and visible minority integration in Canada by focussing specifically on women. The constraints and challenges faced by immigrant and ethnic minority women have been found to be especially acute (Jacobs, Phalet, and Swyngedouw, 2004; Tillie, 2004). These challenges include cultural values and proscriptions that limit women's economic, social and political integration as well as socio-economic challenges stemming from discriminatory and other practices specifically targeting women, immigrants and ethnic minorities. Given this combina-

tion, immigrant and minority women's political integration ought to be especially difficult. Understanding the degree to which socio-economic factors limit their political integration provides the possibility for overcoming these types of constraints. Understanding the role of social networks and community engagement for overcoming existing constraints and barriers to political integration is equally promising. As such, the key questions guiding this investigation are first, to what extent are immigrant and visible minority women less politically integrated into Canadian society than other women? Second, do existing theories help to explain these participation gaps? And finally, to what extent do networks, and in particular feminist networks, help immigrant and minority women overcome any resource or cultural barriers to participation?

Our investigation employs an original telephone survey conducted with women in English-speaking Canada in 2007. The survey provides important insight into women's political participation and its determinants, insight that is not often provided by existing survey data (Bird, 2011). We find that political integration is dependent on the type of political activity in question; that it varies by ethnic background, immigration status and the intersection of the two; and that resource and network explanations only provide a limited explanation for patterns of political integration among Canadian women.

### The Political Integration of Immigrants and Ethnic Minorities

Immigrants can face a particular set of challenges in their adopted countries, which can include learning a new language, finding suitable employment and learning to navigate new political and cultural environments. As a result, their levels of political participation or *participatory citizenship* (Bloemraad, 2006; Gidengil and Stolle, 2009) can be limited, especially in the years immediately following the move. Ethnic minorities, and in particular, visible minorities, similarly face a number of challenges. These are often associated with the labour market and wage differentials that may stem from discrimination and unfair treatment (Hum and Simpson, 1999, 2004; Reitz et al., 2009; Tran, 2004) although not all minorities are similarly disadvantaged (Kymlicka, 2007). The intersection of immigrant status and visible minority status appears to be especially important for understanding the level of constraint faced by these groups.

Three broad explanatory approaches have examined the political participation of immigrants and ethnic minorities (see Bird, Saafeld and Wüst, 2011). The first, which has been termed *ethnic approaches*, points to unique cultural and socialization processes within immigrant and ethnic minority groups that help to explain variations in participation from majority groups. For immigrant communities, pre-migration socialization processes might exert an influence on post-migration political behaviour particularly for those emigrating from countries with significantly different political and social environments (Black, 1987; White et al.,

2007). Such pressures are likely to become less influential as the time spent in the adopted country increases and as acculturation takes place (Berry, 2001; White et al., 2007). For ethnic minorities, strong group norms and practices that push towards participatory behaviour that differs from the dominant culture could exert sufficient pressure to lead to different behavioural practices than found in the majority population.

A second approach focuses on *socio-economic status* as a potential explanation for differences in participation. Income, education and occupational status are each linked to the skills, social and other networks, and resources such as time, money and energy required for political participation (Gidengil et al., 2003). To the extent that immigrants and visible minorities are disadvantaged in this regard (Hum and Simpson, 2004), their participation levels are likely to be lower. Although not all Canadian immigrants and members of visible minorities suffer economic disadvantage, many do. This may explain their limited political integration patterns.

A more recent area of inquiry has focused on the connection between *social capital* and ethnic diversity and its impact on political participation. There are two opposing hypotheses in this regard. On the one hand, participation in ethnic associations and organizations is seen as providing a foundation for political participation. Alternatively, others argue that increased ethnic diversity – especially evident in large urban centres – can lead to social fragmentation and decreased trust, both key elements of political participation (Putnam, 2007). Some have focussed on the distinction between bonding and bridging capital and their unique impact on political participation. Still others look to the importance of strong ties for collective mobilization and political identity for political participation (McAdam et al. 2001).

### Immigrant and Visible Minority Women in Canada

Given the explanations for immigrant and visible minority differences in political participation, the importance of focusing on women's participation in these groups is clear. As of 2001, foreign-born women made up almost one in five females living in the country (Statistics Canada, 2007). Canadian immigration policies have meant that over the past 25 years immigration trends have shifted from European countries to non-European ones. The importance of this shift for the integration of immigrant women is profound as research suggests that cultural and other challenges can be especially difficult for women to overcome (Gidengil and Stolle, 2009; Kam, Zechmeister, and Wilking, 2008). If examinations of immigrant and ethnic political participation fail to consider gendered differences in integration patterns and practices, they will likely overestimate women's political participation patterns and their levels of political integration.

As argued by Inglehart and Norris (2003), culture plays a primary role in shaping beliefs and subsequent behaviours related to gender equality. According to the authors,

Perceptions of the appropriate division of roles in the home and family, paid employment, and the political sphere are shaped by the predominant culture – the social norms, beliefs, and values existing in any society, which in turn rest on levels of societal modernization and religious traditions. (p. 8)

Where the social norms, beliefs and values regarding gender roles of a culture differ significantly from the dominant culture, women are likely to exhibit significant differences in their political integration. Given that immigration trends have shifted away from Western Europe towards Asia, Africa and Central and South America, the degree of disconnect between pre- and post-migration culture among Canadian immigrants is likely to have increased (Statistics Canada, 2007). Cultural norms around gender roles tend to be more traditional in some, but not all, of the countries that are the major sources of immigration to Canada.

Tied to these immigration shifts has been an increase in the female visible minority population in Canada. In 2001, 14 percent of Canadian women overall identified themselves as a member of a visible minority (Ibid.). Importantly, almost half of the foreign-born female population in Canada is now a member of a visible minority (Ibid.). Membership in a visible minority<sup>ii</sup> or ethnic minority has been found to play a role in shaping political participation, and is especially important for understanding gender differences in participation (Jacobs et al., 2004). If constraints on one's political integration are tied to one's gender, immigration status and ethnic minority status, then their intersection ought to create significant constraints.

Culture is not, however, the sole determinant of women's levels of political integration. Equally important are the resources and skills that they can draw upon for participation. Income, education and occupation are three key elements of an individual's overall resource stocks. Immigration policy in Canada is such that a points system is employed to make decisions regarding entry, with points being offered on the basis of such factors as education, language skills, employment history, and proof of funds, and more often than not, it is the male breadwinner of the family who meets these criteria. Many immigrant women, fewer than eight in ten, enter the country as a family class immigrant or as the spouse or dependent of an economic immigrant (Statistics Canada, 2007). Not surprisingly, they are less likely to be employed than native-born women, and those who are employed are likely to be concentrated in traditional female jobs. Women who accompany their spouses, especially when the family includes children, are unlikely to find the time, energy or resources to pursue higher education or to find well paying jobs, both of which are likely to lead to greater levels of political participation. These differences are also very likely to parlay into participation gaps across women.

Visible minority women in Canada also reveal resource differences when compared with other women. According to Statistics Canada (2007, 259), 63 percent of visible minority women aged 25 to 64 were employed or self-employed in

2001, seven percentage points lower than the average for non-visible minority women. Their employment earnings are also lower by comparison; in 2000, the average gap was 10 percent, just over \$3,000 less per year, from the earnings of non-visible minority women (Ibid., p.252).

In addition to cultural and resource-based explanations for levels of political integration, the degree to which the community assists in this integration has been argued to be worthy of examination. In the Canadian context, Irene Bloemraad has identified the importance of ethnic communities for political mobilization (2006), as has Miriam Lapp (1999). Less is known about the degree to which particular communities might be of importance for the political mobilization of ethnic minority and immigrant women more specifically. One exception is the work of Gidengil and Stolle (2009), which has examined the role that social networks – and the bridging and bonding capital they embody – play in immigrant women's political incorporation. They find that associational involvement is conducive to immigrant women's political incorporation, but contrary to the social capital literature, ties with casual acquaintances are not necessarily more useful than friendship ties and bridging ties are no more helpful than bonding ties. What matters is simply avoiding social isolation. Their work is limited, however, to two metropolitan centres, and it is unclear the degree to which these findings can be generalized more broadly.

One type of network can be hypothesized to play an especially important role for women's political participation: feminist organizations. Feminist organizations have been argued to play a particularly important part in encouraging political participation among women who identify with the movement's goals (Beckwith 2005). The 1980s saw a significant increase in feminist organizing in Canada, particularly among immigrant women and women of colour (Adamson, Briskin and McPhail, 1988; Vickers, Rankin, and Appelle, 1993). The Visible Minority Women's Coalition, for example, was established in 1983 and constituted "the first consciously political (as opposed to service or cultural) group bringing together women of colour from a variety of backgrounds" (Adamson, Briskin and McPhail, 1988: 84). Similarly, the National Organization of Immigrant and Visible Minority Women of Canada was established in 1986 "with a focus on forming a united national voice to ensure equality for immigrant and visible minority women within bilingual Canada" (NOIVMWC, n.d.). Feminist groups such as these are very likely to facilitate the political incorporation of the most marginalized of women, through the resources they provide and the explicit focus on collective mobilization as an instrument for bringing about political change. Their overall importance for minority women's political integration is not yet fully understood.

## Methodology

The data for the investigation is from the 2007 Women's Political Participation Survey (WPPS). The Institute for Social Research at York University conducted the telephone survey between July 18 and October 2.<sup>iii</sup> In total, 1,264

telephone interviews averaging approximately 18 minutes in length were completed with a random sample of women 18 years of age and older in nine of Canada's ten provinces (Quebec was excluded from the sample).<sup>iv</sup> The response rate for the survey was 59 percent. Data in this analysis is weighted to reflect provincial populations and household size. This weighting brings the sample size up to 1,277. Only women interviewers were employed to control for gender-of-interviewer effects (Huddy et al., 1997).

The key social divisions in this investigation are ethnicity and immigration status, two important sources of social division in Canada. The small size of the sample limits the degree to which the first variable, ethnicity, can be examined in detail. As a result the sample is broken down into two main ethnic groups: minority and majority groups. Our survey asked respondents to identify up to four ethnic or cultural groups to which they and their ancestors belonged, a strategy that mirrors that employed in the Census<sup>v</sup>. All respondents who indicated one non-European ancestral group were coded as part of a minority population. All others, with the exception of Aboriginal women who were removed from the analysis, were coded as part of the majority.<sup>vi</sup> With this grouping, 89.5 percent of the sample is included in the majority group and 10.2 percent in the minority group, a distribution that closely mirrors that in the general population.

The second key division, immigration status, is a simple measure constructed from responses to a question on country of birth. Our sample of women is composed of 80 percent native-born women and 20 percent immigrants, a figure that also closely mirrors figures obtained in the 2006 Canadian Census.

Our goal is not, however, simply to examine each of these social divisions in isolation, but rather to ascertain the degree to which their intersection results in unique effects on political integration. From these two variables, then, a third variable was created with four categories: native-born majority; native-born minority; immigrant majority; and immigrant minority. The first group, consisting of those of European ancestry born in Canada, makes up 77.1 percent of all cases and is the reference category against which the others will be compared.<sup>vii</sup> The second group, consisting of those of non-European ancestry born in Canada, makes up 2.4 percent of the sample. The third group, consisting of those of European ancestry who immigrated to Canada, makes up 12.3 percent of the total sample. The final group, those of non-European ancestry who immigrated to Canada, makes up the final 8.2 percent. The small number of respondents in the latter three categories (30, 151 and 101 respondents respectively) means that our results should be considered preliminary rather than conclusive. They nevertheless provide an important first look into the degree to which intersectionality shapes women's political participation practices.

Our key dependent variables assess participation in various types of political activity. The types of activities that we tap with our data are broad, for as noted by White et al. (2008), not all participatory acts are equivalent in the investigation of immigrant and visible minority integration.

Much research in this area focuses on voting, which is but one element of political participation (Howe, 2007). Our survey asked respondents about voting in the most recent federal, provincial and municipal elections<sup>viii</sup>, membership in a political party and membership in an interest group. These five activities were combined into a single scale of conventional political participation with one point awarded for each activity undertaken.<sup>ix</sup>

A second scale was created to measure less conventional forms of political participation. We asked women whether they had signed a petition, participated in a demonstration or protest, or boycotted and/or buycotted products for political, ethical or other reasons. These four activities were combined into a single scale of unconventional political participation with one point awarded for each activity that was undertaken.<sup>x</sup>

Included among our possible explanations for participatory gaps are resource and network differences across women. Several measures were created to evaluate the effect of resources on political participation, with a view to determining whether resource differences might account for differences in political integration across the groups of women. The first category of resources relates to socio-economic status. As such, a set of dummy variables for education was created with four categories: did not complete high school, completed high school (reference category), completed college, and completed university. A second set of dummy variables for occupation was created with three categories: not working for pay (reference category), non-professional occupation and professional occupation. Although income is often included as a measure of resource availability, its strong correlation with education and the fact that a significant percentage of women in our sample failed to answer the question meant that it is not included in this analysis.<sup>xi</sup> In addition to the variables measuring socio-economic status, two additional variables were included as potential resources that could help to explain differences in political integration. The first is age, which is a significant determinant of political participation levels. A set of dummy variables for age was created with the following categories: under 35 years, between 35 and 54 years (reference category), and over 54 years. The second is the number of children in the home, which can have negative implications for the time available for women's political participation but which may also draw women into certain forms of political participation (Burns et al., 2001). The children in the home variables ranges from 0 'no children' to 3 'three or more children in the home.'

To evaluate mobilizing and network memberships, two dummy variables were created. The first asked women whether they have ever worked with others to bring about some kind of change in their local community; the second asked whether they considered themselves to be a feminist. The first is coded so that 1 indicates having worked with others; the second so that 1 indicates the woman identifies as a 'strong feminist.' The first taps what can be argued to be relatively strong neighbourhood ties; participation in an activity of this type is likely to have required a certain level of integration in one's community, if not prior to the experi-

ence then likely after it was completed. The latter, on the other hand, taps a unique type of network, one that can be argued to provide strong pressures for political mobilization and the link to a network with strong resource and knowledge stores.

## Results

The first step is to identify differences in political activity between the four groups. Table 1 provides the results of this analysis. The results are particularly instructive in that they do not always confirm expectations. The table is broken into two sections, with the top section assessing conventional political activities and the lower section assessing non-conventional activity. A conventional political activity is that which seeks to influence government decision making through conventional political channels: via elections, political parties and/or interest groups. Unconventional political activity refers to those activities that seek to influence government decisions but in a more direct or less traditional manner.

Not surprisingly, the results of conventional political activity reveal that both ethnic background and immigration status shape participation. The reference group – native-born majority women – scores highest overall on the scale of conventional political participation: 2.49 out of 5. The second highest score is recorded for immigrant majority women, 2.33, only slightly lower overall than the reference group, a statistically insignificant difference. When we turn our attention to minority women, however, both immigrant and native-born, the participatory deficit increases significantly. Native-born minority women engage in roughly 1.71 of 5 activities overall and immigrant minority women in only 1.28 on average, both statistically significant differences from the participation level recorded for native-born majority women. Put differently, minority women engage on average in roughly one less conventional activity than majority group women. It should be noted that this difference cannot be attributed to differences in voting eligibility, as any respondents who indicated they were ineligible to vote were removed from the analysis.

When we turn our attention to the individual activities, however, we see that this pattern is not consistent across all activities. For one activity in particular, membership in an interest group, majority immigrant women (17.2 percent) reveal a slightly higher membership rate than the reference category, majority native-born women, at 13.2 percent. Native-born minority women reveal a somewhat lower level of participation in interest groups, at 10.3 percent. Minority immigrant women, on the other hand, reveal very little in the way of interest group membership, with only 2.0 percent reporting this form of political participation. Interest group participation appears to follow a somewhat different set of criteria than other conventional political activities.

The second half of the table reports on differences across the groups in unconventional political activity. Unlike the significant participation deficits uncovered in conventional political activities, the only significant deficit in unconventional political activities is between minority immigrant

women and all other women. Women in the former group are likely on average to engage in one-third of an activity less than other women. Explanations for political integration in unconventional activities would appear to vary from those explaining it in conventional political activity.

When each activity is examined separately, minority women are found to anchor the two ends of the unconventional political activity scale. Unlike the case for conventional political activity, minority native-born women lead the groups with their heightened levels of activity in each of the unconventional political acts recorded: signing petitions, demonstrating, boycotting and buycotting. Immigrant minority women, on the other hand, rank last in their level of participation in each of the recorded activities. Women in the majority groups, both native-born and immigrant, are very similar in their participation in many unconventional political acts – participating in a demonstration and boycotting in particular – at levels between the high of native-born minority women and the low of immigrant minority women. Clearly, any conclusions regarding political integration are highly dependent on the type of political activity in question.

The next step is to assess the degree to which participatory deficits are explained by differences in resources and motivation and by mobilizing networks. Table 2 reports the variation in these factors across our groups. In many instances, these differences are large and, as such, hold significant potential for explaining differences in political activity. There are, for example, significant age differences across the groups, a key factor in explanations for levels of political activity. Some political activities such as voting are much less likely to be undertaken by the young than is the case with other activities. The relatively young average age of both native-born and immigrant minority women might very likely provide some explanation for depressed levels of participation among them. Two thirds of native-born minority women are under 35 years of age while over a third of immigrant minority women are in this youngest group. By comparison, almost half of immigrant majority women are over 54 years of age, while over a third of native-born majority women are found in this oldest age group.

In a similar vein, a look at the number of children in the home would also seem to provide some potential for helping to understand differences in political participation. Except for immigrant minority women, the norm is that a majority of women find themselves without children in the home, a factor that could increase participation by freeing up time or alternatively decrease it by removing a particular incentive for some forms of participation. Immigrant minority women, however, are more likely to have children in the home than the remaining women in our sample; while a plurality, 36.0 percent, have no children in the home, almost half (49.0 percent) have two or more. This undoubtedly plays a role in their political integration. The findings for education and occupation are also informative. Within our sample, a larger percentage of immigrant women, both from majority and minority ethnic groups, have obtained university degrees than is true of native-born women. Among immigrant minority women, a full 53.5 percent has a university degree

**Table 1: Conventional and Unconventional Political Activity by Group**

	<b>Native-born Majority</b>	<b>Native-born Minority</b>	<b>Immigrant Majority</b>	<b>Immigrant Minority</b>
<i>Conventional Political Activity</i>				
Voted – Federal	80.6%	55.6%	77.3%	43.5%
Voted – Provincial	76.4	55.6	60.0	39.4
Voted – Municipal	62.6	40.7	57.5	30.4
Member- Political Party	14.9	3.4	18.7	7.0
Member – Interest Group	13.5	10.3	17.2	2.0
Mean Number of Conventional Political Acts	2.49	1.71	2.33	1.28
Participation Deficit	--	-0.79**	-0.16	-1.22***
<i>Unconventional Political Activity</i>				
Signed Petition	28.7%	36.7%	35.3%	18.8%
Participated in a Demonstration	18.6	30.0	18.7	13.9
Boycotted	22.9	46.7	31.5	15.8
Buycotted	40.6	46.7	39.3	30.0
Mean Number of Unconventional Political Acts	1.11	1.59	1.25	0.78
Participation Deficit	--	0.48	0.14	-0.33**
Valid N	942/949	27/30	132/151	92/101

Note: The participation deficit is calculated as the difference between the mean number of activities for a given group and that of the native-born majority; negative values indicate that a group participates in fewer activities on average than the native-born majority. Respondents who reported that they were too young or ineligible to vote for any of the elections were removed from the analysis. Sample size entry provides the maximum and minimum number of respondents across the variables in the table. \*\*\* indicates difference from the native-born majority group is significant at  $p < .001$ , \*\* at  $p < .01$ , and \* at  $p < .05$ .

**Table 2. Socio-economic and demographic characteristics by group**

	Native-born Majority	Native-born Minority	Immigrant Majority	Immigrant Minority
<b>AGE***</b>				
Under 35 years	23.7	66.7	12.3	34.3
35 to 54 years	41.5	23.3	38.4	52.5
Over 54 years	34.8	10.0	49.3	13.1
<b>EDUCATION***</b>				
Did Not Complete HS	11.5	7.1	10.1	3.0
Completed High School	30.3	57.1	24.2	19.8
College Graduate	34.0	25.0	29.5	23.8
University Graduate	24.2	10.7	36.2	53.5
<b>OCCUPATION***</b>				
Not Working for Pay	37.6	27.6	44.4	33.7
Non-Professional Occupation	46.4	62.1	35.1	29.7
Professional Occupation	16.0	10.3	20.5	36.6
<b>CHILDREN***</b>				
No Children at Home	56.9	65.5	63.0	36.0
One Child at Home	18.8	10.3	12.3	15.0
Two Children at Home	17.8	13.8	16.4	34.0
Three or More	6.5	10.3	8.2	15.0
<b>NETWORK TIES</b>				
Strong Feminist**	22.9	30.0	32.9	34.7
Neighbourhood Network***	68.7	79.3	57.3	52.5
n	924/949	28/30	146/151	95/101

Note: \*\*\* indicates difference from the native-born majority group is significant at  $p < .001$  and \*\* at  $p < .01$ . Sample size entry provides the maximum and minimum number of respondents across the variables in the table.

whereas only 10.7 percent of native-born minority women have a similar level of education. As education is a key factor in the accumulation of skills, resources and networks that facilitate political participation, these educational differences may not help explain *low levels of participation among immigrant women*. Research has shown, for instance, that the impact of education on participation among immigrants is dependent on whether it was obtained in the host country (Cho, 1999). While education most definitely provides the cognitive resources necessary for participation, it can also provide a reinforcing political socialization that encourages participation, a result that is clearly dependent on whether the education occurred in a political system that encourages a democratic ethos. By this same logic, however, the low education levels among native-born minority women could help to explain low participation levels among native-born minority women.

The results for differences in occupation are similarly instructive. Both majority and minority native-born women are *less likely* to hold professional occupations than is true of immigrant women. Where the percentages of women holding professional occupations within the two native-born groups are 16.0 and 10.3 percent respectively, the percent-

ages are 20.5 and 36.6 percent among majority and minority immigrant women. However, immigrant majority women are the least likely to be working for pay, at 44.4 percent. To the extent that working for pay and holding a professional occupation provides a significant boost to women's political participation, the mix of findings across the groups suggest a less than a straightforward explanation for the role of occupational status in explaining women's political integration.

The two final rows in Table 2 provide the findings for women's networks and collective mobilization. The first provides the percentage of women who identified themselves as strong feminists. And again, the differences are significant. Whether they belong to the majority or a minority, immigrant women are more likely to identify as strong feminists, at 32.9 and 34.7 percent respectively. Native-born minority women, at 30.0, are only slightly less likely to identify as a feminist. The outliers are clearly native-born majority women, with only 22.9 identifying as a strong feminist. If feminist identification is linked to stores of information, resources and incentives that increase political participation, then the greater identification of immigrant and native-born minority women is unlikely to help explain participation deficits but might help to explain their absence on some activities.

The second measure, the neighbourhood network measure, also reveals variation across the four groups of women. Perhaps unsurprisingly, the percentage of women who have participated in a neighbourhood project is higher among native-born than among immigrant women. Over two-thirds of native-born women have participated in such a project; by comparison, just over half of immigrant women have done the same. As an indicator of social ties to the neighbourhood, the variable could help to explain the relatively low level of political integration on some activities among those with lower neighbourhood ties.

Given these socio-economic and demographic differences, the next step is to investigate how well these factors help to explain participation deficits among immigrant and minority women. Table 3 provides the regression results for conventional political participation and Table 4 for unconventional political participation. The first column in the two tables (model 1) shows the effect on participation of the respondent's group membership: immigrant majority, immigrant minority and native-born minority women. The coefficients in this column can be interpreted as an estimate of the size of the participatory deficit or surplus: how many fewer or more activities members of the identified group engage in, when compared to native-born majority women. The next column (model 2) introduces several resource and network controls that could help to explain existing political participation deficits. To the extent that they do, the size of the deficits identified in the first column ought to be reduced. The final column (model 3) introduces our measures for mobilizing networks in order to determine the degree to which they also help to explain participatory deficits.

The ability of resource and network differences to explain participation deficits is directly measured by a reduction in the size of the coefficients in column 1 in columns 2 and 3.<sup>xii</sup>

A significant reduction in column 2 suggests that resources play an important role in explaining participation deficits. A significant reduction in column 3 suggests that networks are similarly important. If the coefficients remain substantial in size and statistically significant, resource and network differences are insufficient explanations for the lack of political integration for some women. As noted above, cultural differences can help to explain variation in participation levels; to the extent that any participation deficits remain after having controlled for resource and network effects, culture remains a potential explanation for them.<sup>xiii</sup>

Model 2 in Table 3 suggests that resource deficits provide a significant measure of explanatory power vis a vis women's conventional political participation. When compared with majority native-born women (model 1), our three comparison groups participate less in conventional political activities, although this difference is small and not statistically significant for immigrant majority women. The substantive and significant impact of controls for age and education (model 2) shrinks the original gap between native-born majority and minority women substantially, taking it from -0.92 activities to -0.24 activities and rendering it statistically insignificant. This tells us that the participatory deficit between native-born majority women and native-born minority women is due largely to differences in age and educational attainment. Native-born minority women were significantly younger and less likely to have obtained a university degree than native-born majority women, two factors that help to explain their more limited participation in conventional political activities.

The drop in the size of the deficit for immigrant minority women is virtually non-existent, going from -1.17 activities to -1.13. The more limited explanatory punch offered by the resource explanation is no doubt linked to their higher educational attainment overall; half of the women in this group, we are reminded, possessed university degrees. Their relatively young age, however, a key factor in explaining low voter turnout, likely affects their participation levels but is likely swamped by the impact of education.

Interestingly, the deficit grows in size for immigrant majority women, from -.08 to -.35 activities, and becomes statistically significant. This suggests that resource differences between native-born and immigrant majority women help to mask larger underlying participatory differences between the two groups. As a reminder, immigrant majority women were more educated than native-born majority women; since increased education likely provides a participatory boost, controlling for its impact results in a larger participatory deficit overall. They were also somewhat older than the reference group, and since age is associated with higher levels of participation, controlling for this factor also results in an increased deficit. In other words, the political integration of immigrant majority women is assisted by their educational and age profiles; were it not for these, their participation in conventional political activities would be lower.

When the additional set of variables tapping mobilizing resources is added to the mix (model 3), participatory

**Table 3. Resource and Network Sources of Women's Conventional Political Participation**

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
Native-born minority	-.92 (.26)***	-.24 (.24)	-.31 (.23)
Immigrant majority	-.08 (.13)	-.35 (.12)**	-.32 (.11)**
Immigrant minority	-1.17 (.15)***	-1.13 (.14)***	-1.05 (.14) ***
Under 35		-.94 (.09)***	-.92 (.09)***
Over 54		.68 (.10)***	.63 (.10)***
Less than High School		-.40 (.12)***	-.31 (.12)*
College		.30 (.09)***	.28 (.09)***
University		.69 (.10)***	.62 (.10)***
Professional occupation		.13 (.11)	.02 (.11)
Other occupation		.03 (.08)	-.01 (.08)
Children at home		-.02 (.04)	-.05 (.04)
Strong feminist			.18 (.08)*
Neighbourhood network			.43 (.08)***
Constant	2.46 (.04)***	2.21 (.11)***	1.95 (.11)***
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	.055	.274	.296
N	1158	1158	1158

Note: \* p<.05, \*\* p<.01, and \*\*\* p<.001.

**Table 4. Resource and Network Sources of Women's Unconventional Political Participation**

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
Native-born minority	.37 (.23)	.55 (.22)**	.43 (.21)*
Immigrant majority	.13 (.11)	.05 (.10)	.10 (.10)
Immigrant minority	-.42 (.13)***	-.66 (.13)***	-.58 (.12)***
Under 35		-.14 (.09)†	-.11 (.08)
Over 54		.02 (.09)	-.04 (.09)
Less than High School		-.37 (.12)**	-.27 (.11)*
College		.17 (.08)*	.15 (.08)†
University		.65 (.09)***	.55 (.09)***
Professional occupation		.32 (.10)**	.17 (.10)†
Other occupation		.12 (.08)	.07 (.08)
Children at home		.02 (.04)	-.01 (.04)
Strong feminist			.44 (.07)***
Neighbourhood network			.50 (.07)***
Constant	1.1 (.04) ***	.84 (.10)***	.50 (.11)***
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	.011	.104	.165
n	1197	1197	1197

† p<.10, \* p<.05, \*\* p<.01, \*\*\* p<.001

deficits change very little. Although both participation in a neighbourhood project and a strong feminist identification are positively and significantly associated with conventional political participation, neither helps much in explaining participatory deficits in conventional participation among the groups of women. The one exception is the small increase in the deficit among native-born minority women; their heightened participation in neighbourhood networks



could help explain the increased size of the deficit between models 2 and 3.

Turning to unconventional political participation (Table 4), the differing results underscore the importance of the type of political activity under consideration when examining political integration. Immigrant minority women reveal a substantial and statistically significant participation deficit, participating on average in one half fewer activities than native-born majority women (a deficit of -.42). Immigrant majority and native-born minority women, on the other hand, reveal a level of participation in unconventional political activities that is indistinguishable from the reference group.

When we control for resource differences in model 2, the participation deficit for immigrant minority women increases to -0.66 while the participation *surplus* for native-born minority women becomes substantial and statistically significant, going from 0.37 to 0.55. The model reveals that resource explanations are, however, less straightforward when evaluating unconventional political participation. Age, education and occupational status each plays a role in shaping unconventional political participation decisions, but not always in a substantive or statistically strong manner. Young women are only somewhat less likely to engage in unconventional political activities. Women in a professional occupation are somewhat more likely to engage in these types of activities than other women. And a university education provides a substantial participatory boost for participation in these activities, while less than a high school education significantly depresses it.

Controlling for resource factors among the native-born minority group produces a participation surplus in unconventional political acts compared with native-born majority women. This finding is to be anticipated given that the native-born minority group reveals lower levels of education, a younger age profile, and fewer women in professional occupations, which all depress their participation in unconventional political activities; as such, controlling for these in the model increases their participation level relative to the reference group resulting in an overall increase in the participation surplus. The finding suggests that as a group, native-born minority women would engage in unconventional political activity at even higher levels if they possessed the resource levels of native-born majority women.

The increase in the participation deficit among minority immigrant women after the introduction of controls for resource factors is similarly instructive. Minority immigrant women are relatively younger than the reference group of women, which should help to partly explain their lower participation levels. Once we include controls for their relatively high education and professional occupation levels, however, the deficit increases given that both are positively associated with participation. In short, their occupational and educational profiles help to mask a lower tendency or willingness to engage in unconventional activities than is true of native-born majority women.

Adding controls for network and mobilizing resources has a small negative effect on both the deficit and surplus in

unconventional political activity (model 3). Both a strong feminist identification and participation in a neighbourhood organization have a positive effect on a woman's participation in unconventional political activities. A smaller share of immigrant minority women had participated in a neighbourhood organization compared to native-born majority women, and so controlling for this factor helps to reduce the size of the participation deficit. At the same time, a greater percentage of immigrant minority women identified themselves as strong feminists, which is positively associated with unconventional political activity. Controlling for this factor has the opposite effect on the participation deficit, thus leading to only a minor change in the deficit overall.

As a group, the native-born minority women in our sample were the most likely to report having participated in a neighbourhood organization designed to bring about some kind of change. Given its positive association with unconventional activity, controlling for it in the model reduces the overall size of the group's participatory surplus. Their willingness to identify as strong feminists plays a similar role.

## Discussion

One goal of this investigation was to determine the levels of political integration for immigrant and ethnic minority women and, in particular, to what extent the intersection of these two demographic characteristics was relevant. Our conclusions on this score are twofold. First, the political integration of women is dependent on the type of political activity in question. Whether a woman participates by voting in an election, a rather conventional form of participation, appears to involve a very different set of determinants than if she is deciding to participate in a demonstration, a decidedly less conventional activity.

Second, the intersection of immigrant status and ethnic background is relevant to political integration. When focusing on conventional political activity, women from an ethnic minority and immigrant women are less likely to engage than native-born majority women. The lack of political integration is particularly acute, however, for immigrant women from an ethnic minority.

Importantly, these findings are not paralleled when the focus shifts to unconventional political activity. While immigrant women from an ethnic minority reveal levels of participation below those found for native-born majority women, immigrant women from an ethnic majority and native-born minority women reveal no visible differences in participation levels.

If political integration implies mirroring the behavioural patterns of native-born majority women, then we must generally conclude that the full political integration of immigrant and ethnic minority women has yet to take place. There are exceptions, however, to this general rule. Immigrant majority women, both in terms of their conventional and unconventional political activity, have achieved political integration. And native-born minority women are politically integrated in terms of their level of unconventional political

activity, one that is indistinguishable from native-born majority women.

A second goal of this investigation was to determine whether existing theories helped to explain any differences in levels of participation that were uncovered. And to some extent they do, although here too the findings differ for conventional and unconventional political activity.

Part of the explanation for participation differences is found in the levels of resources and socio-demographic profiles of these groups of women, especially for conventional political activity. Participation deficits in conventional activity for native-born minority women would likely be significantly reduced if their age profile and educational background mirrored that of native-born majority women. This is not the case, however, for immigrant women. Their already stronger educational and occupational profile limits the degree to which changes in either could increase their political integration in conventional activity.

Resource and socio-demographic profiles are less helpful in understanding unconventional political activity. Native-born minority women mirror native-born majority women in their unconventional political activities, despite their resource deficits and age profile. For these women, the motivation to engage in unconventional political participation is strong, and largely independent of socio-economic or demographic motivators. For immigrant minority women, on the other hand, their participatory deficit in unconventional activity is reduced by their educational and occupational profile. If these mirrored those found for native-born majority women, their participation levels would drop.

Our attempts to determine whether mobilizing network explanations were helpful for understanding women's participation patterns suggests that they ought not be dismissed too quickly. Despite the use of fairly simple measures and a relatively small sample size, both feminist identification and participation in a local neighbourhood activity were positively associated with women's levels of political activity. Disentangling the role of networks in explaining participation differences, as a result, deserves further investigation, especially given their variation across Canadian women.

One additional element of immigrant women's experiences also deserves further attention: length of settlement in Canada. Integration has been shown to vary with the length of time that an immigrant has spent in the host country (Bird et al. 2011, Howe 2007, White et al. 2008). Put simply, immigrants are more likely to integrate the longer their exposure to the host country's political system. Although the small sample size precludes investigating the impact of length of settlement in this study, its importance for immigrant women's political integration deserves further study.

## References

- Adamson, Nancy, Linda Briskin and Margaret McPhail. 1988. *Feminists Organizing for Change: The Contemporary Womens Movement in Canada*. Toronto: Oxford University Press.
- Berry, J.W. 2001. "A Psychology of Immigration." *Journal of Social Issues* 57(3): 615-31.
- Beckwith, Karen. 2005. "Conclusion: Between Participation and Representation: Political Women and Democracy in the United States." In *Political Women and American Democracy*, ed. by Christina Wolbrecht, Karen Beckwith and Lisa Baldez.
- Bird, Karen. 2011. "Voter turnout among immigrants and visible minorities in comparative perspective: Canada." In *The Political Representation of Immigrants and Minorities: Voters, Parties and Parliaments in Liberal Democracies*, ed. By Karen Bird, Thomas Saalfeld and Andreas M. Wüst. New York: Routledge.
- Bird, Karen, Thomas Saalfeld, and Andreas M. Wüst. 2011. "Ethnic Diversity, Political Participation and Representation: A Theoretical Framework." In *The Political Representation of Immigrants and Minorities: Voters, Parties and Parliaments in Liberal Democracies*, ed. By Karen Bird, Thomas Saalfeld and Andreas M. Wüst. New York: Routledge.
- Black, Jerome. 1987. "The Practice of Politics in Two Settings: Political Transferability among Recent Immigrants to Canada." *Canadian Journal of Political Science* 20(4): 731-754.
- Bloemraad, Irene. 2005. "The Limits of de Tocqueville: How Government Facilitates Organizational Capacity in Newcomer Communities." *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*. 31(5): 865-887.
- Bloemraad, Irene. 2006. *Becoming a Citizen: Incorporating Immigrants and Refugees in the United States and Canada*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Burns, Nancy, Kay Lehman Schlozman and Sidney Verba. 2001. *The Private Roots of Public Action: Gender, Equality, and Political Participation*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Cho, Wendy K. Tam. 1999. "Naturalization, Socialization, Participation: Immigrants and (Non-) Voting." *The Journal of Politics*. 61(4): 1140-55.
- Gidengil, Elisabeth, André Blais, Neil Nevitte and Richard Nadeau. 2003. *Citizens*. Vancouver: UBC Press.
- Gidengil, Elisabeth and Dietlind Stolle. 2009. "The Role of Social Networks in Immigrant Women's Political Incorporation." *International Migration Review* 43(4): 727-763.
- Howe, Paul. 2007. "The Political Engagement of New Canadians: A Comparative Perspective." In *Belonging? Diversity, Recognition and Shared Citizenship in Canada*, ed. by Keith Banting, Thomas J. Courchene and F. Leslie Siedle. Montreal: Institute for Research on Public Policy.
- Huddy, Leonie, Joshua Billig, John Bracciodieta, Lois Hoeffler, Patrick Moynihan, and Pat Pugliani. 1997. "The Effect of Interviewer Gender on the Survey Response." *Political Behavior* 19(3): 197-220.
- Hum, Derek and Wayne Simpson. 1999. "Wage Opportunities for Visible Minorities in Canada." *Canadian Public Policy* 25(3): 379-394.
- Hum, Derek and Wayne Simpson. 2004. "Economic Integration of Immigrants to Canada: A Short Survey." *Canadian Journal of Urban Research* 13(1): 46-61.
- Inglehart, Ronald and Pippa Norris. 2003. *Rising Tide: Gender Equality and Cultural Change around the World*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Jacobs, D., K. Phalet, and M. Syngedouw. 2004. "Associational Membership and Political Involvement Among Ethnic Minority Groups in Brussels." *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 30(3): 543-559.
- Kam, C.D., E.J. Zechmeister, and J.R. Wilking. 2008. "From the Gap to the Chasm: Gender and Participation Among non-Hispanic Whites and Mexican Americans." *Political Research Quarterly* 61(2): 205-218.

- Kymlicka, Will. 2007. "Ethnocultural Diversity in a Liberal State: Making Sense of the Canadian Model(s)." In *Belonging? Diversity, Recognition and Shared Citizenship in Canada*, ed. by Keith Banting, Thomas J. Courchene and F. Leslie Siedle. Montreal: Institute for Research on Public Policy.
- Lapp, Miriam. 1999. "Ethnic Group Leaders and the Mobilization of Voter Turnout: Evidence from Five Montreal Communities." *Canadian Ethnic Studies* 31(2): 17-31.
- McAdam, Doug, Sidney G. Tarrow and Charles Tilly. 2001. *Dynamics of Contention*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- National Organization of Immigrant and Visible Minority Women of Canada (NOIVMWC). n.d. *Homepage*. Accessed on January 19, 2011. <http://www.noivmwc.org/noivmwcn/index.php>
- Putnam, Robert. 2007. "E Pluribus Unum: Diversity and Community in the Twenty-first Century." *Scandinavian Political Studies*, 30(2): 137-74.
- Reitz, Jeffrey G., Rupa Banerjee, Mai Phan, and Jordan Thompson. 2009. "Race, Religion, and the Social Integration of New Immigrant Minorities in Canada." *International Migration Review* 43(4): 695-726.
- Statistics Canada. 2007. *Women in Canada*. 5<sup>th</sup> edition. Ottawa: Minister of Industry.
- Tillie, J. 2004. "Social Capital of Organizations and Their Members: Explaining the Political Integration of Immigrants in Amsterdam." *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 30(3): 529-541.
- Tran, Kelly. 2004. "Visible Minorities in the Labour Force: 20 Years of Change." *Canadian Social Trends* Summer: 7-11.
- Vickers, Jill, Pauline Rankin and Christine Appelle. 1993. *Politics As If Women Mattered: A Political Analysis of the National Action Committee on the Status of Women*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.
- White, Stephen, Neil Nevitte, André Blais, Elisabeth Gidengil and Patrick Fournier. 2008. "The Political Resocialization of Immigrants: Resistance or Lifelong Learning?" *Political Research Quarterly*. 61(2): 268-281.

## Endnotes

- i The authors wish to thank an anonymous reviewer for helpful comments on the paper. Any errors remain our own.
- ii Visible minority is the terminology adopted by the Canadian government that refers specifically to persons other than Aboriginal who are non-white or non-Caucasian.
- iii The WPPS questionnaire can be obtained from the authors.
- iv Funding for the survey was obtained from several sources including the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (Grant #410-2003-1822), the University of Calgary and McGill University.
- v As with the Canadian Census, a minority of respondents responds "Canadian" to the ethnic identifications probe. Those respondents who provided this response to the first request to identify their ethnic or cultural background were given a follow-up question that asked for their background "in addition to being Canadian." The Canadian category was coded as part of the majority group.
- vi Fifty-six women in the sample identified as Aboriginal. They were excluded from the analysis because the historical, cultural, political and socio-economic constraints faced by Aboriginal women differ fundamentally from those faced by immigrant and visible minority women. Although their political integration is equally worthy of investigation, it remains a topic for a future examination.
- vii It is a standard methodological practice to select the category with the largest number of cases as the reference category when creating dummy variables.
- viii Respondents who indicated that they were not eligible to vote in one of the elections were removed from the analysis altogether.
- ix The scale has a reasonably high measure of reliability (Cronbach's alpha = 0.677) and a fairly even distribution.
- x The scale has a reasonably high measure of reliability (Cronbach's alpha = 0.609) and a relatively even distribution.
- xi Twenty-seven percent of the women in our sample failed to provide a response to the household income question. Given the small size of our sample, including income as an explanatory variable would significantly reduce the generalizability of our findings. Fortunately the strong correlation between income and education (in our sample it is 0.41, a relatively strong result given that both variables are coded at the ordinal level) suggests that including education alone is unlikely to significantly underestimate the impact on participation of the resources accruing from education and income combined.
- xii The use of interaction terms in the regressions could help to identify the key explanations behind participatory deficits between the groups; unfortunately, the small sample sizes eliminate this as a viable statistical option.