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# The Political Resocialization of Immigrants

## Resistance or Lifelong Learning?

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Theories of political socialization contain competing expectations about immigrants' potential for political resocialization. Premigration beliefs and actions may be *resistant* to change, *exposure* to the new political system may facilitate adaptation, or immigrants may find ways to *transfer* beliefs and behaviors from one political system to another. This analysis empirically tests these three alternative theories of resocialization. The results indicate that both transfer and exposure matter; there is little evidence that premigration beliefs and actions are resistant to change. Moreover, how immigrants adapt depends on which orientation or behavior is being considered and on what kind of political environments migrants come from.

**Keywords:** *political socialization; voting behavior; immigrants; Canada*

Immigrants are a crucial source of population replacement in advanced industrial states, where birthrates have declined dramatically in the past half century. The demographic and consequent economic effects of immigration seem to be well understood. Flows of immigrants revitalize aging labor forces and offset swelling ranks of pensioners in advanced industrial countries. Understanding the dynamics of social and political adaptation seems to be more challenging because, perhaps, large segments of new immigrants come from countries with dramatically different political cultures.

How do citizens adjust their political beliefs and behaviors upon moving to new political environments? Do they engage in the politics in their new environments, or are they bystanders, withdrawn from political life? Research on the political resocialization of immigrants is optimistic about the prospects for immigrants' adaptation, arguing that immigrants' political orientations and behaviors are quite flexible. Prevailing theories of political socialization, by contrast, are more pessimistic. The conventional wisdom is that early political learning deeply conditions later political learning,

and so the expectation is that citizens have difficulty adapting to radically different political environments.

This research uses data from one immigrant-rich country, Canada, to probe two sets of questions about the adaptation of immigrants to new political environments. First, how do immigrants adjust? To what extent do their prior experiences matter? Do immigrants learn from exposure to the new political system? Or do they simply resist new political orientations and behaviors? Second, to what extent are the patterns of immigrants' adjustment influenced by the kinds of political environments in which they were originally socialized?

## Theory and Empirical Expectations

Two strands of resocialization theory, the theory of *exposure* and the theory of *transferability*, contain

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optimistic expectations about the adaptability of immigrants to new political environments. Both are rooted in research on native-born citizens: as Converse pointed out nearly forty years ago, “significant increments of political learning are visible over almost the whole course of adult participation in the electorate” (Converse 1969, 142).<sup>1</sup> A substantial body of cross-national empirical evidence convincingly demonstrates that levels of political interest and participation (Milbrath and Goel 1977; Teixeira 1987; Rosenstone and Hansen 1993), as well as the intensity of such orientations as partisanship (Converse 1969, 1976), continue to increase and deepen throughout the life course.

The theory of exposure focuses on how much exposure immigrants have had to their new host country’s political system: the more exposure they have, the more they adapt. The evidence is that voter turnout among Latino and other immigrant groups increases with years of residence in the United States (Arvizu and Garcia 1996; Ramakrishnan and Espenshade 2001). Exposure also seems to have a significant impact on partisan attitudes: the longer Latino immigrants have lived in the United States, the more likely they are to be strong Democratic partisans, while Republican partisanship increases with length of residence for Chinese, Korean, and Southeast Asian immigrants (Cain, Kiewiet, and Uhlaner 1991; Wong 2000).

The empirical findings concerning the effects of political exposure to the new host country, however, are not entirely consistent. For example, in their study of newly enfranchised electorates in three countries, Niemi and colleagues demonstrate, contrary to the exposure hypothesis, that both partisanship (Niemi et al. 1985) and voter turnout (Niemi, Stanley, and Evans 1984; Niemi and Barkan 1987) increase with age rather than with firsthand experience with electoral politics.

Unlike the theory of exposure, the theory of transferability contends that immigrant adaptation is geared by more than just exposure to new political system. The claim is that immigrants are able to draw on past experience and transfer the lessons learned from their old environment, applying them to the new host environment (Black, Niemi, and Powell 1987; Black 1987; Finifter and Finifter 1989). According to Black (1987, 739), “More important than the specific context in which political involvement takes place is the question of whether it takes place at all—that is, it is the accumulation of experience with, and interest in politics per se that is more important.” In other

words, greater exposure to any political environment (new or old) makes it easier to engage in politics; individuals find ways to effectively draw on the political skills developed in different environments.

One empirical implication of the transferability hypothesis is that immigrants’ attitudes and behaviors will be associated with the same basic demographic indicators as they are for native-born populations. And because age captures cumulative political experiences of immigrants, age turns out to be an important determinant of immigrants’ political engagement regardless of how long they have lived in a new country. Thus immigrants’ past interest in politics and their prior patterns of participation emerge as strong predictors of engagement in the new host country regardless of country of origin (Black 1982, 1987). Black, Niemi, and Powell (1987) similarly report a strong relationship between age and political engagement in the new country, even after controlling for length of residence in the new country, country of origin, and levels of prior political engagement in the country of origin. Furthermore, the kinds of political orientations immigrants transfer from one political system to another may well include both prior party identification and ideological outlooks (Finifter and Finifter 1989).

A third perspective, *resistance* theory, is grounded more in classic political socialization theory and is less sanguine about the prospects for immigrant adaptation. From that perspective, the expectation is that “people acquire relatively enduring orientations toward politics in general and toward their own particular political systems” (Merelman 1986, 279). Political socialization is seen as cumulative: orientations that are acquired earlier in life filter subsequent information, and new knowledge is incorporated in ways that typically conform to existing orientations.

The crucial point is that most political predispositions are acquired early in life during the “formative years.” These political predispositions may be shaped by such highly salient exogenous political, social, or economic shocks as wars, economic depressions, and political crises that occur during the formative years, but the conventional wisdom is that these orientations deepen over a relatively short period, they become stable as the formative years end, and they are resistant to change (Jennings 1987; Green and Palmquist 1990; Sears and Valentino 1997; Valentino and Sears 1998; Sears and Funk 1999; Jennings 2002).<sup>2</sup>

Because prior social and political learning deeply conditions all later learning, people tend to avoid or reject environmental messages that are inconsistent

with orientations accumulated during the formative years (see, for example, Festinger 1957; Zaller 1992; Pomerantz, Chaiken, and Tordesillas 1995). For immigrants, then, the expectation is that adaptation to a new political system will be difficult: immigrants' political orientations will be resistant to change the longer immigrants have spent in their country of origin.

The core assumptions driving these three theories, and the resulting expectations about immigrants' adaptability, are clearly quite different. The resistance perspective emphasizes the importance of premigration learning: because old and new political environments are different, and because prior learning makes it harder to internalize new political norms, resocialization is not easy. The exposure perspective, by contrast, has nothing to say about prior learning. Indeed, upon arrival in new host countries, immigrants are regarded almost as *tabula rasa*. The implication, however, is that it is the new environment that is important: how well immigrants adapt to their new environment depends on length of exposure to that new environment. According to the transferability perspective, premigration political learning can actually help immigrants adapt to their new environment. From this vantage point, the fundamental aspects of political learning are not context specific. Rather, the focus is on the continuity of immigrants' life experiences; thus, the shift from one context to another is more fluid than either the resistance or exposure perspective implies.<sup>3</sup>

The challenges of adaptation may also depend, of course, upon such other considerations as the extent to which there are similarities, or discontinuities, between an immigrant's old and new environments. Black (1987) finds that immigrants of British origin are more likely than those from elsewhere to participate in Canadian politics. And there is evidence indicating not only that orientations of immigrants come to resemble those of the native-born population as their length of residence in the new host country increases but also that the greater the similarities between immigrants' new and old environments, the easier it is for them to transfer experiences from the old to the new settings (Bilodeau 2004; Bueker 2005). These same dynamics also seem to apply to internal migrants; interregional migrants in Britain quickly adopt the vote preferences of the majority in their new region of residence (McMahon et al. 1992).

Most empirical research on the resocialization of immigrant populations focuses on what impact age and exposure to the new host country's political system have on political participation and the acquisition of

partisanship. But the results are somewhat inconsistent. Research that considers age and exposure typically reports that both factors are positively related to political engagement among immigrants. Arvizu and Garcia (1996) find that both age and exposure have independent positive effects on voter turnout among Latino immigrants in the United States. By the same token, Wong's research (2000) shows a strong relationship between exposure and immigrants' acquisition of partisanship; age, however, has no discernable effect. And Black (1982, 1987) and colleagues (Black, Niemi, and Powell 1987) demonstrate that older immigrants are more politically engaged and active, regardless of length of residence in the new host country.

A combination of factors might explain these uneven findings. First, there is considerable variation in what researchers take to be the primary focus of adaptation. Some focus on such orientations as the acquisition of partisan identification or interest in politics, while others focus on such behaviors as the decision to vote or not. There is no reason to presume that the pathways to adaptation will be identical for each dimension of engagement. Second, some investigations test hypotheses that are grounded in one strand of socialization theory but not in others. Third, the unevenness in research findings may also reflect the fact that some studies focus on single immigrant populations in local settings. It is not clear whether the adaptive dynamics of some immigrant groups, such as Latinos in the United States, are generalizable to immigrant subgroups more broadly construed.

Despite these variations in theoretical focus and empirical application, the single finding that most consistently emerges from these research efforts is that time matters to adaptation. Precisely how time is conceptualized, we argue, is critical for empirical and theoretical reasons. In practice, the time variable is usually measured by either an immigrant's age or how many years he or she has spent in the host country. With that specification, however, it is not clear whether time captures accumulated political experience, accumulated political experience in a new setting, or the moment in the life cycle at which immigrants left their country of origin.

## Hypotheses and Measures

A fair test of these three theories of resocialization clearly requires greater conceptual precision in how time is operationalized. Indeed, ideally what is needed is a strategy that simultaneously takes into



account an immigrant's age, length of residence in his or her country of origin, and length of exposure to the new host country. To focus only on length of residence in the new host country is problematic, because that approach ignores the impact of prior learning and may lead to unwarranted conclusions about transferability and exposure. Length of residence in the new host country might have quite different effects depending on how long immigrants have lived in their countries of origin. Taking into account only the effects of age on immigrants' political engagement and behavior does not solve the problem either, because when length of residence in the host country is controlled, an immigrant's age may reflect two pieces of information: transferable life cycle effects (as per Black, Niemi, and Powell's [1987] hypothesis) and length of residence in a different political system. As Niemi and his colleagues (1985) demonstrate, passage through the life cycle generally leads to increased political engagement. But resistance theory suggests that the longer an immigrant lives in his or her country of origin, the more difficult new political learning should be. The conflation of these two effects under a single age variable may explain why different studies have reached different conclusions about the impact of age on political resocialization.<sup>4</sup>

Likewise, when only length of residence and age are considered in analyses, the length of residence also conflates the effects of early socialization and exposure to the new system. To be sure, less prior socialization and more resocialization may well produce the same effect, namely, more learning in the new host political system. But the theoretical explanations for this phenomenon are quite different. Resistance theory expects that less time spent in another country prior to migration will make resocialization easier. More time spent in the new host country, however, means greater exposure to new orientations, which also makes resocialization possible. Neglecting the impact of prior experience in empirical analyses of political resocialization therefore may amplify the effects of exposure while understating the effects of transferability.

Distinguishing between life cycle effects, length of residence in the country of origin, and length of residence in the host country is problematic, because any two of these variables are a perfect function of the third. One solution is to develop an alternative measure that captures more precisely how much experience immigrants have had in their "old" country versus their "new" one.

The most suitable approach is to use the natural log of age, years in the country of origin, and years in the new host country to estimate the effects of transfer, resistance, and exposure, respectively. Additional years of experience are certainly important to social learning, but more social learning occurs in earlier years, and experience-based gains in social learning decrease with additional years of experience (see Baltes, Staudlinger, and Lindenberger 1999). Using the natural log transformations assigns decreasing weight to additional years of experience.

These measures have several advantages. First, they allow us to isolate statistically the effects of prior and new experiences as well as age. These measures are not collinear, and so they provide meaningful estimates in multivariate setups.<sup>5</sup> Second, this alternative specification avoids conceptually conflating life cycle, prior socialization, and resocialization effects and does so without sacrificing analytical precision. More particularly, they allow us to evaluate comparatively the relative merits of resistance and lifelong-learning perspectives on immigrant political adaptation.

An essential first step toward political resocialization is political engagement. Most theories of political socialization agree that those who are actively engaged in politics are more likely to support both the dominant values of the mass public and the rules of the political system (e.g., Searing 1986). Political engagement, according to Nie, Junn, and Stehlik-Barry (1996, 15), "requires attentiveness to and knowledge of politics. Citizens must then also be capable of pursuing and protecting their interests by electing and petitioning representatives in democracy." Three dimensions of political engagement are examined here. The first pair of dependent variables, interest in federal elections in the host country and partisan intensity, capture immigrants' psychological engagement with politics, while the third dependent variable, voting, is taken to be a basic behavioral indicator of engagement.<sup>6</sup>

The resistance and lifelong-learning approaches produce three sets of hypotheses concerning voter turnout, strength of partisanship, and interest in federal election campaigns among immigrants in their new host country. The theories of resistance, exposure, and transferability are tested by exploring the following hypotheses:

*Hypothesis 1:* The longer an immigrant has lived in his or her country of origin,<sup>7</sup> the less likely it is that he or she will vote, develop strong partisan ties, or express interest in the federal election.

*Hypothesis 2:* The longer an immigrant has lived in his or her new host country, the more likely it

is that he or she will vote, develop strong partisan ties, or express interest in the federal election.

*Hypothesis 3:* The older the immigrant, the more likely it is that he or she will vote, develop strong partisan ties, or express interest in the federal election.

A second set of expectations concerns immigrants' countries of origin. If premigration socialization matters, then the kind of political system in which immigrants spent their formative years should also be relevant. Immigrant respondents are classified according to whether their country of origin was an advanced industrial democracy (Western Europe, the United States, Australia, New Zealand, Japan) or not prior to migration to Canada. Following Bilodeau (2004), one expectation is that because advanced industrial states share broadly similar political norms and institutions, people migrating between these countries will find it easier than immigrants from dissimilar political contexts to transfer prior orientations to their new environment.<sup>8</sup> Consequently, the impact of both resistance and exposure to the Canadian political system on immigrants' orientations should be weaker among immigrants from advanced industrial democracies than among immigrants from elsewhere.

*Hypothesis 4:* Age has a stronger effect on voter turnout, strength of partisanship, and interest in election campaigns among immigrants from advanced industrial democracies than among immigrants from other countries.

*Hypothesis 5:* Prior experience and exposure to the new host political system has a weaker effect on voter turnout, strength of partisanship, and interest in election campaigns among immigrants from advanced industrial democracies than among immigrants from other countries.

## Data

Examining immigrants' political attitudes and behavior using national, cross-sectional, random samples is a challenge, because there are often too few cases for reliable analysis in any single cross-sectional national survey. Consequently, we use data from a pooled sample of immigrants from the 1988, 1993, 1997, 2000, and 2004 Canadian Election Studies (CES) (Johnston et al. 1991, 1995; Blais et al. 1997, 2000, 2004).<sup>9</sup> The CES data are useful for a combination of reasons. First, the CES yields a larger

number of immigrant cases than is typically available, because Canada is an immigrant-rich country (in 2001, about 18 percent of the population qualified as immigrants), and because the typical CES samples are larger than most other national election studies. Second, these cross-sectional, random-sample surveys of the Canadian electorate contain a core set of common questions that have been repeatedly asked in multiple federal elections. Third, in addition to standard sociodemographic indicators, these surveys also contain data on the respondents' country of origin and length of residence in their new host country. Where possible, we analyze responses from each survey year. Measures of party identification and voter turnout, for example, are included in all five surveys. However, consistent measures of political interest are available only in the 1997, 2000, and 2004 studies, and so the analysis of political interest is restricted to data from those survey years. Because we are interested in the effects of resistance and lifelong learning, the sample is limited to immigrants who moved to Canada after the age of twelve.<sup>10</sup> The resulting weighted subsample of immigrants yields 1,503 cases between 1988 and 2004 and 1,045 cases between 1997 and 2004.<sup>11</sup>

## Findings

The place to begin is with political interest, which is measured by interest in, and attentiveness to, Canadian federal election campaigns. The independent effects of age, prior experience, and exposure to the Canadian political system on political interest from 1997 to 2004 are analyzed using least squares regression with robust standard errors. All immigrants are analyzed first, and we then proceed to separate regression estimations for immigrants from advanced industrial countries and for new citizens from other source countries. Controls for the effects of gender, education, income, and residence in three immigrant-rich urban centers (Toronto, Vancouver, and Montreal) are included in the model, because some of the impact of prior experience, exposure to the Canadian system, and age might be attributable to such other factors as place of residence, income, and education, which are commonly associated with greater political engagement (Milbrath and Goel 1977; Wolfinger and Rosenstone 1980; Schmitt and Mannheimer 1991). Dummy variables for the year of the survey are also included. (See appendix for variable construction.)

**Table 1**  
**Predictors of Political Interest among Immigrants from Advanced Industrial Democracies and Other Countries, 1997-2004 (Least Squares Regression with Robust Standard Errors)**

Variable	All Immigrants		Advanced Industrial Democracies		Other Countries of Origin	
	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>
Log age	0.22***	-0.08	0.27	-0.18	0.23***	-0.09
Log years prior to migration	-0.02	-0.02	-0.01	-0.04	-0.02	-0.02
Log years in host country	0.00	-0.03	-0.03	-0.08	-0.01	-0.04
Female	-0.02	-0.02	0.02	-0.03	-0.04*	-0.02
Advanced industrial democracy	0.00	-0.02				
High income	0.00	-0.02	-0.02	-0.04	0.00	-0.03
Low income	-0.04*	-0.02	-0.04	-0.03	-0.03	-0.02
Large urban area	0.04**	-0.02	0.07***	-0.03	0.02	-0.02
University educated	0.03*	-0.02	0.03	-0.03	0.04	-0.02
High school dropout	-0.01	-0.03	-0.02	-0.04	-0.01	-0.04
1997 election	0.05**	-0.02	0	-0.03	0.07**	-0.02
2000 election	0.07***	-0.02	0	-0.03	0.09***	-0.02
Constant	-0.36*	-0.19	-0.50*	-0.43	-0.37*	-0.21
<i>R</i> <sup>2</sup>	0.11		0.09		0.12	
<i>N</i>	976		375		601	

\* $p < .10$ . \*\* $p < .05$ . \*\*\* $p < .01$ .

The results, reported in Table 1, provide support for the transferability hypothesis. Age is a strong and positive predictor of political interest among all immigrants. The mean estimated score on the political interest index increases by .22 points with each one-unit increase in the natural log of the respondent's age. Similar results are obtained when immigrants from advanced industrial democracies and other countries are considered separately; the coefficients for the natural log of age are .27 and .23, respectively.<sup>12</sup>

The effects of age, premigration experiences, and postmigration experiences become clearer when the results are reconverted into the more meaningful unit of years. The regression estimates in Table 1 are used to obtain estimated values on the political interest scale for each year of age, year prior to migration, and year in Canada.<sup>13</sup> The estimates for all immigrants are illustrated in Figure 1. The impact of age on political interest is most pronounced: eighteen-year-olds, for example, score an estimated .23 on the political interest index, whereas thirty-eight-year-olds score .39, and seventy-three-year-olds score .54. Notice that neither premigration experiences nor exposure to the Canadian political system have any discernable effects on engagement among either group of immigrants. Those who spend fifty-one years in their countries of origin after the age of thirteen score an estimated mean of .05 lower on the political interest index than those who move to

Canada at the age of thirteen. Similarly, those with a great deal of exposure to Canadian politics fare no better than novices.

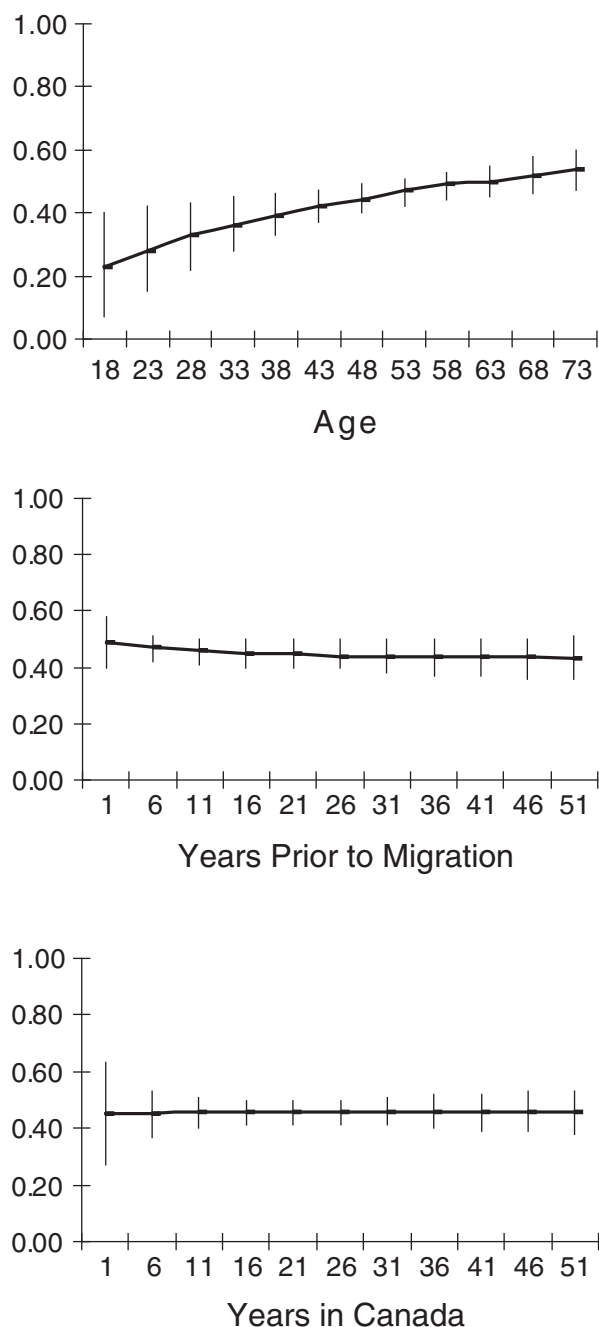
This evidence suggests that immigrants are able to transfer their interest in politics prior to migration and apply it to their new political environment. Not surprisingly, then, we find that immigrants' general interest in politics (regardless of the political system being considered) is linked to their interest in Canadian federal elections ( $r = .55$ ). And once general interest in politics is taken into account, the impact of age on interest in Canadian federal elections disappears.<sup>14</sup>

When it comes to the second dimension of psychological engagement, partisanship, we assume that even citizens who are relatively inattentive and have little interest in politics may nevertheless feel loyal to one political party. Does resistance, exposure, or transferability also condition immigrants' attachments to Canada's federal political parties? To explore these possibilities, immigrants are ranked according to whether they identify *very strongly*, *fairly strongly*, *not very strongly*, or do not identify with any federal party. And ordered logit is used to estimate the effects of age, years prior to migration, and years in Canada on partisan strength.

The ordered logit results for all immigrants, reported in Table 2, show that age, prior experience, and exposure have no significant impact on the



**Figure 1**  
**Political Interest among Immigrants by Age,**  
**Years Prior to Migration, and Years in Canada,**  
**1997-2004 (Estimated Values)**



Note: CLARIFY simulations derived from the results in Table 1. The solid lines represent point estimates, and the vertical bars represent 95 percent confidence intervals. Years prior to migration and years in Canada refer to years after the age of twelve.

strength of immigrants' partisan attachments. But stark differences do emerge when immigrants from advanced industrial democracies are compared to those from other source countries. Among immigrants from

advanced industrial states, both resistance and transfer seem to influence partisan strength. Immigrants from advanced industrial countries who lived outside of Canada for more years are significantly less likely than those with fewer years of premigration experience to be very strong partisans. They are also significantly less likely to report any party identification. At the same time, the positive relationship between age and strength of identification indicate transferability among immigrants from advanced industrial countries; at least some immigrants from this group who are politically engaged in one setting transfer that prior learning to their new environment.

Because logit coefficients are awkward to interpret, we also estimate the independent impact of age, premigration experience, and postmigration exposure on the probability of identifying very strongly with a federal party, as in figure 1. Among immigrants from advanced industrial countries, the estimated mean probability of acquiring a very strong party identification is 12 points lower among those with fifty-one years of premigration experience over the age of thirteen (predicted probability [ $pr$ ] = .28), compared with those who migrated to Canada at the age of thirteen ( $pr$  = .40). Conversely, age has a significant positive effect on partisan attachments for this group of immigrants: the estimated mean probability of acquiring partisanship is 11 points higher among seventy-three-year-old immigrants ( $pr$  = .25) when compared to eighteen-year-olds ( $pr$  = .36). Exposure, however, has no meaningful impact on immigrants from advanced industrial countries.

Among immigrants from other countries, by contrast, length of exposure to the Canadian political system does have a marked positive impact on partisan strength. The estimated mean probability of acquiring a party identification is 33 points higher among immigrants from other countries with the fifty-one years of exposure to the Canadian system ( $pr$  = .45), compared with immigrants from other countries who are new to the Canadian political system ( $pr$  = .12). But there is no clear evidence that age or prior experience matters.

The evidence thus far shows that prior experiences in countries of origin, new learning in the host country, and political learning throughout the life course all have independent effects on immigrants' psychological engagement with politics in the new host country. Do similar patterns emerge when the focus turns to voting?

The same control variables as before are used, but binary logit is now employed because the dependent variable in this case is dichotomous. The results

**Table 2**  
**Predictors of Partisanship among Immigrants from Advanced Industrial Democracies and Other Countries, 1988-2004 (Ordered Logit with Robust Standard Errors)**

Variable	All Immigrants		Advanced Industrial Democracies		Other Countries of Origin	
	$\beta$	SE	$\beta$	SE	$\beta$	SE
Log age	0.13	-0.63	1.76*	-0.96	-0.43	-0.81
Log years prior to migration	0.00	-0.13	-0.31*	-0.19	0.15	-0.19
Log years in host country	0.37	-0.26	-0.16	-0.44	0.54*	-0.32
Female	0.01	-0.11	0.34**	-0.17	-0.19	-0.15
Advanced industrial democracy	-0.04	-0.12				
High income	-0.13	-0.14	0.27	-0.22	-0.33*	-0.19
Low income	-0.46***	-0.16	-0.54**	-0.25	-0.44**	-0.21
Large urban area	0.08	-0.12	0.34*	-0.18	-0.10	-0.17
University educated	-0.18	-0.13	-0.19	-0.2	-0.17	-0.17
High school dropout	0.25	-0.18	0.33	-0.26	0.19	-0.26
1988 election	-0.26	-0.18	-0.03	-0.29	-0.43*	-0.23
1993 election	-0.29	-0.19	-0.37	-0.31	-0.23	-0.25
1997 election	0.04	-0.17	0.10	-0.24	0.00	-0.23
2000 election	0.01	-0.19	-0.21	-0.29	0.07	-0.24
Thresholds						
No party identification	0.56	-1.53	4.76	-2.41	-0.92	-1.97
Not very strong identification	1.15	-1.53	5.64	-2.4	-0.46	-1.97
Fairly strong identification	2.68	-1.54	7.31	-2.41	1.02	-1.97
Initial log likelihood	-1782.25		-720.87		-1049.04	
Model log likelihood	-1751.34		-701.9		-1028.97	
Model $\chi^2$	41.48***		34.06***		26.88**	
Pseudo $R^2$	0.02		0.03		0.02	
N	1,338		535		803	

\* $p < .10$ . \*\* $p < .05$ . \*\*\* $p < .01$ .

reported in Table 3 show that exposure to the Canadian political system has a substantial impact on immigrant voter turnout. And once again, we use the results in Table 3 to estimate the mean probability of voting for each age, year of premigration experience, and year of postmigration exposure, all else being equal. Regardless of whether immigrants come from advanced industrial states or not, the amount of time immigrants have lived in their new environment is a strong and significant predictor of turnout. Among all immigrants, the estimated mean probability of voting is 70 points higher among the most seasoned immigrants, those with more than fifty years in Canada ( $pr = .93$ ), than their counterparts with virtually no experience with the Canadian political system ( $pr = .23$ ). The odds of voting increase as immigrants spend more years in Canada, controlling for other factors. Similar effects obtain when immigrants from advanced industrial countries and other countries are considered separately. By contrast, neither age nor years experienced prior to migration have a significant impact on turnout for either group of immigrants. Age has a positive impact on turnout among

both groups of immigrants, but the standard error is quite large. When it comes to voter turnout, then, the data provide no support for the resistance hypothesis: there is no evidence indicating that earlier learning in a different political context is a barrier to voter turnout. Nor are there any strong empirical grounds for believing that immigrants transfer prior voting experience from one context to another.

## Concluding Discussion

Different strands of political socialization theory produce different expectations about the adaptability of immigrants to new political settings. The plausibility of these different strands, however, are difficult to evaluate, because they are rarely analyzed simultaneously or across multiple dimensions. Empirically disentangling these different theoretical alternatives is complicated by two factors: first, data on the premigration experiences of immigrants are in short supply, and second, such key indicators as age and length of residence in old and new countries are used and

**Table 3**  
**Predictors of Voter Turnout among Immigrants from Advanced Industrial Democracies**  
**and Other Countries, 1988-2004 (Binary Logit with Robust Standard Errors)**

Variable	All Immigrants		Advanced Industrial Democracies		Other Countries of Origin	
	$\beta$	SE	$\beta$	SE	$\beta$	SE
Log age	1.00	-0.96	0.92	-1.69	0.63	-1.17
Log years prior to migration	0.19	-0.25	0.31	-0.35	0.26	-0.33
Log years in host country	1.07***	-0.39	1.75**	-0.86	0.98**	-0.44
Female	0.24	-0.22	0.04	-0.37	0.37	-0.27
Advanced industrial democracy	-0.39	-0.26				
High income	0.02	-0.28	-0.28	-0.46	0.33	-0.39
Low income	-0.22	-0.27	-0.54	-0.43	-0.17	-0.32
Large urban area	0.09	-0.22	0.25	-0.38	-0.06	-0.29
University educated	0.40*	-0.23	0.15	-0.42	0.45	-0.28
High school dropout	0.24	-0.38	0.30	-0.6	0.17	-0.49
1988 election	0.61*	-0.35	1.21*	-0.69	0.38	-0.41
1993 election	0.81**	-0.39	0.73	-0.59	0.89*	-0.49
1997 election	-0.17	-0.32	-0.08	-0.47	-0.14	-0.42
2000 election	-0.18	-0.31	0.11	-0.66	-0.23	-0.37
Initial log likelihood	-443.78		-151.16		-281.86	
Model log likelihood	-378.60		-124.06		-243.84	
Model $\chi^2$	91.56***		38.49***		57.73***	
Pseudo $R^2$	0.15		0.18		0.13	
N	1,095		469		626	

\* $p < .10$ . \*\* $p < .05$ . \*\*\* $p < .01$ .

interpreted unevenly. A fair evaluation of these competing perspectives on immigrant resocialization, we argue, requires precise indicators that make it possible both to conceptually distinguish between these rival contextual considerations and to test empirically the different implications that flow from the resistance, exposure, and transfer theories, which rely on quite distinct assumptions about how easily immigrants become engaged in the politics of their new host country. The resistance hypothesis suggests prior experience with a different political system may well be an obstacle to engagement in the new host country. The transfer hypothesis, by contrast, implies that political engagement in a new host country should come relatively easy to immigrants. The exposure hypothesis occupies the middle ground: when compared with their well-established counterparts, recent immigrants are at a distinct disadvantage when it comes to political engagement in the new host country, but they can compensate for this with accumulated exposure to politics in the new host country.

Most analyses of political engagement among immigrant populations rarely focus on the differences between diverse forms of engagement. They explore,

typically, only one form of engagement or emphasize the similarities between how immigrants adapt to different kinds of engagement. The evidence presented here, however, suggests that whether immigrants transfer prior experiences to their new country, learn from exposure to new political environments, or resist engagement in their new setting depends on what form of political engagement is under consideration. This point is critical to understanding how immigrants become resocialized in their new host country.

There is strong support for the transfer hypothesis when it comes to political interest: only age (and not years prior to or years after migration) turns out to be a strong positive predictor of interest in federal elections among immigrants. That finding holds regardless of whether migrants come from advanced industrial democracies or other countries. Interest in politics, of course, may entail little more than paying attention to politics in the news media; it is the least demanding form of political engagement, since paying attention to politics is often a by-product of other common activities (Fiorina, 1990). It should come as no surprise to discover that many of these basic habits carry over easily from one political context to another.

Voting and acquiring partisanship, however, are more demanding. Both involve judgment and decision making, and voting requires at least minimal active participation, if even only occasionally. It takes time to accumulate and sort information to make the vote decision, just as it takes time to go to the polls (Downs 1957). Certainly, few voters base their vote decisions on large stocks of information about parties and candidates; rather, they rely on cognitive shortcuts (Brady and Sniderman 1985; Kinder et al. 1980; Kinder 1986; Rahn et al. 1990; Popkin 1991). But these shortcuts are honed through direct experience with the political system (Lupia and McCubbins 1998). What new immigrants lack is direct experience. Thus, for immigrants, voting is largely a function of exposure to the host country's political system.<sup>15</sup>

Acquiring partisanship also requires cognitive effort. The earliest studies conceived of partisanship as a stable, socially acquired identification, but the intensity of partisanship reflects people's accumulated judgments about the performance of parties over the long haul. And, once again, the bases of those judgments come from long-term experience (Fiorina 1981; Franklin and Jackson 1983; Achen 1992, 2002; Gerber and Green 1998). Thus, the evidence shows that exposure, rather than resistance or transfer, is the strongest determinant of partisan strength among immigrants from other countries.

Immigrants from advanced industrial countries are a different matter. When it comes to the acquisition of partisanship, age turns out to be a robust predictor of partisan intensity among that subset of immigrants. The implication is that this group is able to transfer some of its political experiences from the country of origin to another advanced industrial state. Finifter and Finifter (1989) similarly demonstrate that immigrants from other advanced industrial countries may use their prior experiences with political parties in their countries of origin to develop partisan attachments in their new host country.

A seemingly counterintuitive finding emerging from this analysis concerns the impact of years of premigration experience on the strength of partisan ties among immigrants from advanced industrial democracies. After age and length of time in the host country are taken into account, immigrants from other advanced industrial democracies who spent more time in their countries of origin prior to migration generally exhibit weaker partisan ties than those who spent less time in their countries of origin. That relationship, perhaps, would seem more likely to emerge among immigrants from countries other than advanced industrial democracies.

One reason evidence of both resistance and transfer emerges among immigrants from advanced industrial countries might be attributable to their premigration partisan orientations. Finifter and Finifter (1989) demonstrate that partisanship in the country of origin does have distinct postmigration effects. One possibility is that those who resist acquiring strong partisanship upon migrating to the new host country might have actually been enduring nonpartisans in their countries of origin, while those who transfer their attachments from one context to another may have been strong partisans prior to migration.

Years of experience in the country of origin do matter, although their direct effects on political engagement are rather modest. The significant conceptual point, however, is that failing to take prior experience into account encourages misleading conclusions about the dynamics of immigrant adaptation. For example, age is positively correlated with turnout among both groups of immigrants when the effect of years prior to migration is not controlled, a finding that is consistent with the transfer hypothesis. Recall that when premigration experience is held constant, however, it turns out that it is not age that matters but rather exposure to the host country. Similarly, ignoring the premigration experience of immigrants from advanced industrial democracies effectively masks evidence of transfer effects on the strength of partisan ties. It is only by empirically and conceptually distinguishing between age, years prior to migration, and years in the new host country that these separate effects can be teased out.

If years of experience in the country of origin have only a minor impact on immigrant adaptation, the kinds of countries from which immigrants come seem to be even less substantively important to political engagement. When it comes to interest in elections and voting, immigrants from quite different political systems appear to adapt to their new host political environment in remarkably similar ways. Politically experienced older immigrants from advanced industrial democracies and other countries are more interested in, and attentive to, politics in their new country than their less experienced counterparts regardless of how much time they have spent in their new political setting. Moreover, exposure to the politics of the host country appears to be a prerequisite for voting among both groups of immigrants.

These findings contribute to the broader debates about the adaptability of immigrants in at least two ways. First, there is no single pathway to political learning; which pathway applies depends upon which orientation, or which particular behavior, is under



consideration. The challenges presented by some kinds of engagement seem to systematically affect whether and how immigrants adapt. If the cognitive and opportunity costs of engagement are relatively low, as they are when it comes to sheer interest in elections, then we should expect to find evidence consistent with the transfer hypothesis. If, on the other hand, the form of engagement is relatively complex, novel, or time-consuming, then exposure to the host country's political system should matter.

Other studies of immigrants that investigate multiple forms of engagement do not attend to these differences. A close reexamination of the findings from those previous investigations, however, suggests that immigrant adaptation varies from one form of political engagement to another. Black (1987, 742), for example, finds a strong correlation between political interest in the country of origin and interest in Canadian politics, but the impact of premigration politicization on such other forms of postmigration engagement as contacting politicians or public officials and political knowledge is quite modest. Indeed, Black and his colleagues conclude elsewhere that "transferability seems to vary with the type of activity" (Black, Niemi, and Powell 1987, 81). Variations across activities is also observed by Junn (1999), who finds that immigrants are significantly less likely than their native-born counterparts to participate in such system-directed political activities as voting and working on a political campaign but that there is no difference between the two groups when it comes to such direct forms of activity as political protest and community involvement. In fact, the findings presented here are quite consistent with conclusions drawn from research on the development of political orientations among native-born populations, but they also demonstrate that when it comes to resocialization, not all political orientations are of a piece.<sup>16</sup>

Second, when it comes to political engagement in the new host country, early learning may not condition later learning to the extent that classic socialization theory supposes. Unlike other studies of political engagement among immigrants, this analysis has deliberately aimed to isolate, and empirically examine, how years prior to migration affect engagement in the new host country. The results provide no evidence that political experience prior to migration inhibits engagement in the new host country, regardless of country of origin and regardless of how long immigrants lived there before migrating.

Political engagement is of central importance to political resocialization. One obvious extension of this line of investigation is to ask whether these same

dynamics of adaptation apply to a wider variety of domains. Some political attitudes and behaviors may pose fewer or greater challenges to resocialization than do political interest, partisanship, and voter turnout. More complex values and attitudes, we suspect, might be more susceptible to resistance, while less complex ones should be more amenable to exposure and transfer. What also needs to be determined is whether the differences between immigrants from advanced industrial democracies and elsewhere are also larger when the challenges are greater.

## Appendix Variable Construction

*Interest in the election:* An index (Cronbach's alpha = .73) was constructed from the following items:

Using a scale from 0 to 10, where 0 means no attention and 10 means a great deal of attention, how much attention have you paid to news about the federal election (1) on TV over the last few days? (2) on the radio over the last few days? and (3) in the newspaper over the last few days? and (4) Using the same scale, how interested are you in the federal election? These four items were combined and divided by 40. The index ranges from 0 (*uninterested*) to 1 (*interested*).

*Partisan intensity:* Respondents who identify with a federal party very strongly = 1, fairly strongly = 0.66, and not very strongly = 0.33, and respondents who do not identify with any party = 0.

*Turnout:* Respondents who voted = 1, and those who did not vote = 0.

*Country of origin:* Prior to the 1997 Canadian Election Studies, many immigrants' countries of origin were coded in broad geographic categories. The coding of country of origin was more precise in the 1997 study and subsequent studies. Western Europe and the United States are classified as advanced industrial democracies in 1988 and 1993. The United States, the 15 EU member states as of 1995, Norway, Switzerland, Japan, Australia, and New Zealand are classified as advanced industrial democracies from 1997 to 2004. All other respondents are classified as immigrants from other countries.

*Large urban area:* Respondents in 416, 905, 514, or 604 area codes (Toronto, Montreal, and Vancouver) = 1, and all others = 0.

*Female:* Males = 0 and females = 1.

*Income:* Two dummy variables for those in the bottom income quartile in any year and those in the top income quartile in any year. Missing values = 0 for each dummy variable, because nonresponses to the income

(continued)



## Appendix (continued)

items were highly correlated with a number of other variables in the models.

*Education:* Two dummy variables for those with less than a high school diploma and those with some university education or higher.

*Year of survey:* Four dummy variables for 1988, 1993, 1997, and 2000.

*General political interest:* Using a scale from 0 to 10, where 0 means no interest at all and 10 means very interested, how interested are you in politics in general?

## Notes

1. See also Searing, Wright, and Rabinowitz (1976), who provide empirical evidence indicating that "zeitgeist" (period) effects have a greater impact on political attitudes and behavior than socialization effects. They suggest that learning through the life course may be more important than socialization.

2. The first empirical investigations placed the crystallization of political orientations at childhood and early adolescence (Greenstein 1965; Hess and Torney 1967; Easton and Dennis 1969), while later analyses suggest the formative years extend to encompass early adulthood (Niemi and Jennings 1991; Beck and Jennings 1991).

3. There is some evidence that that transfer hypothesis extends to native-born citizens. Langton (1984), for example, contends that early socialization structures how people adjust their attitudes when they experience significant environmental changes throughout the life cycle.

4. Cho's (1999) research on voter turnout among foreign-born Asian Americans and Latinos, for instance, shows that turnout declines with age, but the effects of length of residence in the United States are not considered. Cain, Kiewiet, and Uhlaner (1991), conversely, demonstrate the positive effects of immigrants' exposure on partisanship, but they do not control for the independent effect of age.

5. A measure of collinearity typically used in multivariate analyses is the variance inflation factor (VIF). All but one of the VIFs for the logs of premigration experience, host country experience, and age are lower than the commonly accepted threshold of 10 in each of the nine multivariate analyses we perform (the sole exception is the age coefficient in the regression model for interest in federal elections among immigrants from advanced industrial democracies (VIF = 10.1). The VIFs for each of these three variables are remarkably consistent for each regression we tested: the age variable exhibits the highest collinearity (VIFs range from 8.3 to 10.1), and the years of premigration experience exhibits the lowest (VIFs range from 3.1 to 4.5). The VIFs for years of postmigration experience range from 6 to 9.4. The implication is that any substantial differences in the statistical significance of the coefficients for each of the three time variables we find among the different dimensions of political engagement, and among different groups of immigrants, are not likely attributable to collinearity.

6. None of these three dependent variables is treated as a predictor variable in any of our analyses. Although these three forms of engagement are certainly related to one another, the precise causal links between different types of political engagement is

unclear (see Finkel 1985; Verba, Lehman Schlozman, and Brady 1995). Consequently, each is analyzed separately.

7. More precisely, we measure the difference between the respondent's year of birth and the year he or she migrated to Canada. The measure does not take into account possible migration to other countries in intervening years; the data are not available.

8. A common strategy for classifying countries of origin is to use the annual Freedom House scores to classify countries as either democratic or undemocratic. This is not possible with these data, however, because categories for immigrants' countries of origin across the five data points are not consistent. We therefore rely on a simplified version of this strategy.

9. The studies are funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, with additional funding provided by Elections Canada (2000-2004 surveys) and the Institute for Research on Public Policy (2000 survey). Fieldwork for the studies was conducted by the Institute for Social Research at York University (1988-2004 surveys) and Jolicoeur et Associés (2000 survey). In each study, data were gathered in three waves: a campaign period survey, a postelection survey, and a subsequent mail-back survey. The response rates for the campaign period surveys were 57 percent in 1988, 63.5 percent in 1993, 59 percent in 1997, and 60 percent in 2000. The reinterview rates for the postelection surveys were 81 percent in 1988, 88 percent in 1993, 80 percent in 1997, and 78 percent in 2000 (see Northrup 2003). Mail-back surveys were not used in this analysis.

10. Immigrants who migrated at twelve or younger are excluded from the analysis, because the preadult political socialization literature indicates it is highly unlikely that immigrants who arrived in Canada before adolescence should have any lasting premigration experiences (Greenstein 1965; Hess and Torney 1967; Easton and Dennis 1969). We find no substantial difference in the pattern of relationships between political engagement and age, years in the country of origin, or years in Canada when higher age cutoffs (thirteen to seventeen years old) are employed. Not surprisingly, the standard errors of some of the coefficients increase (and, consequently, their statistical significance decreases) in tandem with the reduced sample size as higher age cutoffs are employed.

11. There are 277, 181, 333, 303, and 409 immigrant cases in the 1988, 1993, 1997, 2000, and 2004 studies, respectively. Cases are subsequently weighted using the national weight from the five studies, which adjusts for regional over- and undersampling and household size.

12. Among immigrants from advanced industrial democracies, the regression coefficient for age is statistically insignificant. This is probably a consequence of the small sample size ( $N = 375$ ).

13. Estimates were obtained from simulations ( $M = 1,000$ ) using Tomz, Wittenberg, and King's (2001) CLARIFY software (see King, Tomz, and Wittenberg 2000). Dummy variables are held constant at 0, and all other variables are held constant at their means.

14. The coefficient for the natural log of the respondents' age decreases from .22 to .06.

15. Recent evidence suggests the impact of experience on turnout is not limited to immigrant populations. Gerber, Green, and Shachar (2003) demonstrate that voters are more likely to turn out to vote if they have voted in the past and that the effects of past voting are greater than the effects of age.

16. Sears and Valentino (1997) demonstrate that different political predispositions of (largely native-born) preadults in the United States develop in different ways.

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