

The Measurement of Ethnic Diversity in a Post 9-11 World

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SHORT ABSTRACT

In April 1992 Statistics Canada and the United States Bureau of the Census organised a conference on the measurement of ethnic diversity. The title “Challenges of Measuring an Ethnic World: Science, politics and reality” is an indication of the scope of the content covered during this conference. The published proceedings of the conference represent the state of the knowledge and thinking about measuring ethnic diversity in the early 1990s. We are now just over 15 years older and hopefully wiser. Applying what we have learned during the 15 years that has passed since the 1992 conference, this paper will address the following questions:

- Is Canadian society more ethnically diverse at the start of the 21st Century than 15 years ago?
- To what extent is ethnic mobility a measurable phenomenon in Canadian society?
- What factors contribute to ethnic retention (or loss) across generations and across ethnic groups?

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

While the multicultural character of Canadian society has been enshrined in legislation and Canada’s constitution since the 1980s, debate on cultural and ethnic differences and rights continues today. It is evident in the educational system¹. It is part of the ongoing debate in 2007 elections in Ontario². It is not clear whether these debates have intensified since the unfortunate events of 9-11. However, it is clear that ethnic diversity is important in all aspects of Canadian society.

The measurement of ethnicity is an issue that has been the focus of activity for many national statistical agencies. In April 1992 Statistics Canada and the United States Bureau of the Census jointly organised an international conference on the measurement of ethnic diversity. The title “Challenges of Measuring an Ethnic World: Science, politics and reality” speaks to the scope and impact of the issue in western democratic societies 25 years ago. The analysis presented in this paper begins where the 1992 conference ended, taking into account seminal events such as the 9-11 tragedy.

¹ Current questions and debates include: Should female Muslim students be permitted to wear a hijab in public schools? Is it appropriate for students who are of Sikh descent to carry a kirpan to school?

² The question on public funding for religious and cultural schools is one of the major points of debate in the 2007 elections in Ontario.

Data from four national censuses – 1991, 1996, 2001 and 2006 – and from the 2002 Ethnic Diversity Survey are analysed to address the following questions:

1. Is Canadian society more ethnically diverse today than it was 15 years ago?
2. To what extent is ethnic mobility a measurable phenomenon in Canadian society?
3. What factors contribute to ethnic retention (or loss) across generations and across ethnic groups?

Isajiw (1993: 417) draws a distinction between old and young ethnic groups. He bases this classification on the generational composition of the group. Ethnic groups that consist primarily of first generation individuals (i.e. the immigrants) are designated as “young” whereas those composed largely of second and third generation individuals are considered to be “old”. Since Isajiw does not offer an empirical measure to distinguish between old and young groups, one will be developed in this paper. A selection of specific ethnicities will be made from each of these groups as the subject for the analysis³. Descriptive profiles will be created for the selected ethnic groups for each census for which data are available. Birth cohorts will be used to synthetically age a population from one census to the next. The characteristics and distribution of the aged population will be compared with the true population (controlling for immigration over the five year period) to determine to what extent the two populations resemble each other. For example, has the ratio of single to multiple responses changed significantly over the 5 year period between two successive censuses?

Data from the 2001 Census show that over 18% of the population is foreign born and more than 16% of the population aged 15 years and older who are born in Canada is the direct descendent of immigrant parents (Statistics Canada, 2007). While one might expect that first generation immigrants are likely to report an ethnic origin that concords with their ancestral heritage, the same may not be true for the children of these immigrants (the second generation). Longitudinal data are required to measure true ethnic mobility for an individual since one can only detect this phenomenon by examining repeated observations for the same individual over time. However, ethnic transfer across generations can be considered a form of ethnic mobility at the level of the group since it results in either a loss or a gain in membership. The second stage of the analysis presented in this paper will examine the extent to which ethnic transfer has occurred among the second generation for the selected ethnic groups. Data on the birth place of parents make it possible to identify this generation and to determine their ancestral (or cultural) origins with a reasonable degree of precision. This analysis will be limited to the 2001 Census since the required variables do not exist in the other censuses that are referred to above.

The final stage of analysis will explore the factors that contribute to ethnic loss or retention across generations. The list of dependent variables in the logistic models will include demographic characteristics such as age, sex and marital status, spatial characteristics such as whether or not they live in a metropolitan area, and cultural characteristics such as religion, mother tongue and home language.

It is anticipated that ethnic transfer will be more pronounced for people belonging to ethnic groups that have a longer migration history in Canada (the “old” ethnic groups). It is also

³ It is important to note that this analysis excludes all Aboriginal groups.

expected that people belonging to groups whose communities tend to be more institutionally complete will be less likely to exhibit ethnic transfer. Similarly, it is anticipated people who declare a religion that tends to promote endogamy are less likely to transfer.

This work complements similar analysis performed by the author on language transfers for ethnic groups in Canada.

References

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