

Electoral Politics and the Geography of Demographic Change: Explaining the Absence of Anti-Immigrant Parties in Canada

Jacob Robbins-Kanter

Queen's University

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What explains the relative absence of anti-immigrant rhetoric in Canadian party politics? This paper argues that the geography of immigrant settlement patterns under Canada's single-member-plurality electoral system constrains anti-immigrant messaging and political parties. The concentration of immigrants in suburban areas elevates the political importance of the immigrant vote for right-wing parties, relative to those who settle in urban ridings, which are typically safe seats for left-of-centre parties. The paper suggests that conservative political parties changed their political messaging on immigration and diversity issues in the early 2000s, due to the necessity of winning suburban constituencies. Further, it is argued that the concentration of immigrant voters in these politically competitive ridings results from competition for public resources in major urban areas, which reflects immigrants' socioeconomic marginalization.

The paper begins by explaining that the lack of anti-immigrant rhetoric is a recent fixture of Canadian politics. It examines three potential causes of its decline. First, parties may be incentivized by shifts in public opinion towards more favourable views on immigration and diversity. Second, parties may be responding to an overall increase in the immigrant population regardless of geographic distribution. These explanations are critiqued with reference to public opinion data and instances of immigrant-skeptic political parties in other countries.

Subsequently, the paper proposes a third possible cause of this decline, explaining its core argument surrounding the importance of the geographic distribution of the immigrant vote. It begins by arguing that most suburban ridings in Canada are *not* competitive electoral battlegrounds, and instead favour parties of the right. In fact, only the suburbs of Toronto and Vancouver feature politically competitive ridings. Not by coincidence, these are the suburbs where Canadian immigrants are heavily concentrated. Here, the paper relies on the literature on immigrant and suburban voting behaviour to highlight the tension between suburban environments which foster a conservative worldview, and immigrant voters who are inclined to vote for parties of the left. The changes in the demographic compositions of certain suburban ridings necessitate different political messages, other than fiscally conservative themes which typically enable right-wing success in suburban constituencies. Further, the paper investigates the causes of these migration patterns. It suggests that the political geography of Canada's multiethnic suburbs stems not from the upward mobility of immigrants seeking increased consumption possibilities in the suburbs, but rather from resource competition surrounding public infrastructure. In other words, the socioeconomic marginalization of many immigrants excludes them from desirable public infrastructure, leading them to settle in peripheral suburban areas.

Lastly, the paper explains how the concentration of immigrants in suburban ridings produced changes in political messaging and party strategy, with evidence from Canada's right-of-centre political parties. It examines party messages from the Reform Party, Canadian Alliance, and the Conservative Party, in the 1990s and early 2000s, during which time the rising importance of ethnically diverse suburban ridings became apparent.

## The Decline of Anti-Immigrant Party Messaging

Even in recent decades, Canada's right-wing political parties did not always espouse pro-immigrant views. While Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau presided over the liberalization of Canadian immigration policy and the development of official multiculturalism, these policies were not without controversy. Among right-leaning parties, skepticism towards immigration and multiculturalism was most evident in the early activities of the Reform Party. Founded in 1987 by a collection of disaffected right-leaning politicians from Western Canada, Reform was a powerful force in Canadian politics during the 1990s, winning official opposition status in 1997. The party was also the intellectual pre-cursor to the current Conservative Party of Canada and the home of prominent figures such as Stephen Harper and Jason Kenney, as well as numerous long-serving Conservative Party MPs.

On the themes of multiculturalism and diversity policy, Reform's first official platform in 1988 suggested that there is, "perhaps no area of public policy where the views of Canadians have been more systematically ignored."<sup>1</sup> A policy document from the same year expressed concerns that immigration policy seems "explicitly designed to radically or suddenly alter the ethnic makeup of Canada."<sup>2</sup> In the 1993 election, Reform ran on a platform to end multiculturalism policies.<sup>3</sup> Further, Carol Johnson et al. highlight an,

official policy, a resolution stating that it is 'the responsibility of the state to promote, preserve, and enhance the national culture' and, furthermore, that immigration and cultural policies should 'encourage ethnic cultures to integrate into the national culture...' in a moment of candour...one Reform activist explained that Canada is 'derivative of white European culture, this is our identity.'<sup>4</sup>

Lavcock notes that these views were manifested in convention resolutions and activists' statements opposing non-white immigration."<sup>5</sup> Further, the party's 1995 official principles and policies 'Blue Sheet' endorsed cutting immigration rates and tying them to the employment rate, restricting sponsorship privileges, tougher policing of refugee claimants, and opposition to multiculturalism policies and funding.<sup>6</sup> Subsequently, in 1996 Reform proposed removing section 27 from the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, which states that the Charter should be applied in a manner consistent with Canada's multicultural heritage.<sup>7</sup> Lavcock recounts that the party opposed multiculturalism and "ridiculed idea that federal government should provide support for any efforts to avoid full assimilation." Racist sentiments were clearly provoked, as

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<sup>1</sup> "The West Wants In!" Election Platform of the Reform Party of Canada. 1988 (Edmonton: Reform Party of Canada). As cited in Carol Johnson, Steve Patten, and Hans-Georg Betz. 2005. "Identitarian Politics and Populism in Canada and the Antipodes," in Jens Rydgren ed. *Movements of Exclusion: Radical Right-wing Populism in the Western World* (New York: Nova Science Publishers), 85-100: 88-9.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid, 88.

<sup>4</sup> "The Blue Book: Principles and Policies." 1990. (Calgary: Reform Party of Canada) as cited in Johnson et al, "Identitarian Politics," 88-9.

<sup>5</sup> David Lavcock. 2001. *The New Right and Democracy in Canada: Understanding Reform and the Canadian Alliance* (Toronto: Oxford University Press), 90.

<sup>6</sup> "Blue Sheet: Principles, Policies," 1995. Calgary: Reform Party of Canada.

[https://www.poltext.org/sites/poltext.org/files/plateformes/can1995r\\_plt\\_blue\\_sheet\\_en\\_12072011\\_124953.pdf](https://www.poltext.org/sites/poltext.org/files/plateformes/can1995r_plt_blue_sheet_en_12072011_124953.pdf)

<sup>7</sup> Lavcock, *The New Right*, 86.

white supremacist support had to be disavowed and the party's unofficial organs in BC and Alberta "regularly run stories depicting Asian immigrants in particular in a bad light...even suggesting (they) would overrun the Western provinces."<sup>8</sup>

Simultaneously, in the mid-1990s, the centrist Liberal Party was reluctant to defend immigrant rights. In 1994, the Chretien Liberals lowered the annual admission target, announced an intention to increase the number of European immigrants admitted, and refocused Canada's immigration program away from family reunification and towards the independent/economic class.<sup>9</sup> Furthermore, the Liberals even disbanded the Department of Multiculturalism and Citizenship.<sup>10</sup> Despite these contentious moves, immigrant voters remained loyal to the Liberal Party. As Kanji and Bilodeau explain, there was no logical alternative, as the Bloc was focused on sovereignty, the NDP remained unviable, and Reform and the Canadian Alliance were perceived as anti-immigrant.<sup>11</sup>

As recently as the late-1990s, these trends were mirrored at the provincial level. In Ontario, Progressive Conservative Premier Mike Harris developed a political alliance with Reform.<sup>12</sup> According to Lavcock, Harris presented an anti-minority message in the 1995 election.<sup>13</sup> Sears emphasizes the racialized aspects of Harris' neoliberal agenda, which include limiting the powers of human rights commissions, stripping equity legislation, and reducing social citizenship benefits to refugees and immigrants. Welfare cutbacks and Harris' Ontario Works (OW) program disproportionately burdened immigrants and racial minorities: "OW has become less accessible for racialized communities-evident in the language barriers in the two-step application process...(they) experience racism and discrimination at all levels of OW including the application process, interactions with caseworkers and job placements."<sup>14</sup> In Sears' words, Harris sought "to increase (immigrants) vulnerability and to permit states more discretion in selecting among them."<sup>15</sup> Notably, Mike Harris dominated the 905 region, referred to as "Tory heartland" or, "the very heartland of the Common Sense Revolution."<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid, 90.

<sup>9</sup> Bilodeau and Kanji, "The New Immigrant Voter," 80.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Bradley Walchuk. 2013. "The Party Starts Here: Intra-Party Federalism and the Making of the Conservative Party of Canada," *Canadian Political Science Review* 7(1), 47-57.

<sup>13</sup> Lavcock, *The New Right*, 90

<sup>14</sup> Krystle Maki. 2011. "Neoliberal Deviants and Surveillance: Welfare Recipients under the watchful eye of Ontario Works," *Surveillance and Society* 9(1/2), 47-63.

<sup>15</sup> Alan Sears. 1999. "The "Lean" State and Capitalist Restructuring: Towards a Theoretical Account," *Studies in Political Economy* 59(1), 91-114.

<sup>16</sup> Reg Whitaker. 2001. "Virtual Political Parties and the Decline of Democracy," *Policy Options*, June 2001.

<http://policyoptions.irpp.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/assets/po/political-dissent/whitaker.pdf>

See also Gene Desfor, Roger Keil, Stefan Kipfer and Gerda Wekerle. 2006. "From Surf to Turf: no Limits to Growth in Toronto?" *Studies in Political Economy* 77, 131-155.

*Public opinion and population growth*

By the mid-2000s, anti-immigrant sentiments seem to have disappeared from party rhetoric, and right-wing politicians went to great lengths to appeal to immigrant voters. What caused the abatement of anti-immigrant messages at this time? In response to this puzzle, two intuitive possibilities are apparent. First, conservative politicians may have simply been appealing to a more pro-immigrant Canadian electorate which had embraced multiculturalism. However, lingering skepticism surrounding multiculturalism and immigration casts doubt on this notion. Soroka and Robertson's exhaustive review of public opinion data finds "strong, but conditional, support for multiculturalism and immigration." For example, "a majority agree that laws and norms should not be modified to accommodate minorities, and disagree that minority groups need special rights; and a considerable minority believes that immigrants should blend into Canadian society rather than be free to maintain religious/cultural practices."<sup>17</sup> Along these lines, Angus Reid argues that Canadians are less accepting of cultural diversity than popular myths might indicate. He notes that,

On immigration, the vast majority of Canadians prefer a policy that will enhance our economic prosperity over one that emphasizes the needs of people in crisis around the world. On multiculturalism, by a factor of almost two-to-one, Canadians say they would prefer that minorities "do more to fit in" with mainstream Canada, rather than encourage cultural diversity in which groups keep their own customs and language. ([...versus] 25 years ago, and fewer Canadians actually support multiculturalism as a concept today.) Asked the same question today, Americans are actually more likely than Canadians to say minority groups in their country should keep their culture and language.<sup>18</sup>

While Bilodeau et al. find that native-born Canadians have become increasingly accepting of immigration and diversity, such responses depend on question wording.<sup>19</sup> Ambivalent public attitudes are evidenced in polls finding that 68.4 percent of Canadians agree that "there are too many immigrants coming into this country who are not adopting Canadian values."<sup>20</sup> More recent events such as the Conservative Party's 2015 campaign proposal for a barbaric cultural practices phone hotline and the high levels of support for Conservative leadership candidate Kellie Leitch's 'Canadian values test' emphasize that there is no clear pro-immigrant consensus in Canada.<sup>21</sup>

Second, during this time-period, the Conservatives may have been responding to significant growth in the foreign-born population and repositioned their messaging accordingly. Yet it is unlikely that this outcome is simply an inevitable result in a country with a large foreign-born population. OECD data demonstrates that Canada does indeed receive more immigrants than most of its' OECD peers. Canada's 20% foreign-born population stands just

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<sup>17</sup> Stuart Soroka and Sarah Robertson. 2010. A literature review of Public Opinion Research on Canadian attitudes towards multiculturalism and immigration, 2006-2009. Citizenship and Immigration Canada, Research and Evaluation. <http://www.cic.gc.ca/english/pdf/research-stats/2012-por-multi-imm-eng.pdf>

<sup>18</sup> Angus Reid. 2016. "Canadians aren't as accepting as we think — and we can't ignore it." *CBC news*. October 4, 2016. <http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/angus-reid-poll-canadian-values-immigration-1.3789223>

<sup>19</sup> Bilodeau et al., "Small Worlds of Diversity."

<sup>20</sup> Reitz, "Multiculturalism Policies," 117-8.

<sup>21</sup> "Most Canadians favour values test for immigrants: poll." 2017. *Montreal Gazette*, March 13, 2017. <http://montrealgazette.com/news/local-news/most-canadians-favour-values-test-for-immigrants-poll>

above Austria (16.7%), Ireland (16.4%) and Sweden (16%).<sup>22</sup> Yet Canada has substantially fewer foreign-born residents than Australia (27.6%), New Zealand (28.2%), and Switzerland (28.3%). These countries have featured higher levels of anti-immigrant mobilization than Canada, despite their large immigrant populations.<sup>23</sup> Although it has certainly played a role in moderating anti-immigrant rhetoric in Canada, it seems that a large foreign-born population is not in itself a sufficient condition for doing so.

### The Geography of Demographic Change

The aforementioned explanations for the decline in anti-immigrant rhetoric tell an incomplete story, since public opinion on these questions remains mixed and general increases in the foreign-born population have not attenuated anti-immigrant messages and political parties in other countries. Therefore, the geographic distribution of immigrant voters, rather than their absolute numbers, must be considered as an important electoral incentive. Indeed, Canada's single-member-plurality electoral system rewards parties' strategic gains in targeted constituencies. Ridings that are perceived as either safe seats or unwinnable typically receive less consideration for party strategy and political messaging.<sup>24</sup> In this regard, a tension arises when immigrant voters, who tend to support left-of-centre parties, settle in suburban constituencies, which are typically held by right-leaning parties. Conversely, if immigrants largely settled in the urban core, this may simply further consolidate the advantage for left-wing parties in urban ridings already written off by right-leaning parties, maintaining the homogeneity and conservatism of suburban areas. Moreover, increased diversity is not a feature of all major Canadian suburbs. Rather, in the specific cases of suburban Toronto and Vancouver, immigrant voters have transformed elements of the suburban landscape which otherwise imbue suburbs with conservative tendencies, and force different requirements for right-wing parties seeking their votes.

#### *Immigrant voting behaviour*

Immigrant voters in Western countries tend to vote for left-of-centre parties. This trend may result from ideological and instrumental factors, since numerous right-wing parties have mobilized against full citizenship rights and social benefits for immigrants, leading to stagnation

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<sup>22</sup> "Foreign-born Population (indicator)." 2013. *OECD*. <https://data.oecd.org/migration/foreign-born-population.htm>.

<sup>23</sup> For example, as indicated by the presence of the far-right parties such as One Nation in Australia, the Swiss Peoples Party, and New Zealand First. An extensive body of work examines right-wing populism in Western Europe. For example, Many studies have examined anti-immigrant populism in Western Europe. For example, see Wouter Van Der Brug, Meindert Fennema, and Jean Tillie. 200. "Anti-immigrant Parties in Europe: Ideological or Protest Vote?" *European Journal of Political Research* 37(1), 77-102. For the Australian case, see Anthony Mughan and Pamela Paxton. 2006. "Anti-Immigrant Sentiment, Policy Preferences and Populist Party Voting in Australia," *British Journal of Political Science* 36(2), 341-358.

<sup>24</sup> Louis Massicotte. 2006. "Canada: Sticking to First-Past-the-Post, for the Time Being," in Michael Gallagher and Paul Mitchell eds. *The Politics of Electoral Systems* (Toronto: Oxford University Press).

or decline in their inclusiveness.<sup>25</sup> On balance, “the empirical evidence clearly supports the claim that mainstream left parties hold more liberal positions than the mainstream right when it comes to immigration policies.”<sup>26</sup> Moreover, the appearance of extreme-right parties highly critical of immigration may push mainstream right-wing, as well as populist left-wing parties to harshen their positions on diversity and immigration issues.<sup>27</sup>

In the Canadian case, immigrants have traditionally supported the centrist Liberal Party. This trajectory features elements of path dependency; during the 1960s, the Liberals were the first major pro-immigration party, presiding over the liberalization of immigration policy, and holding power when most immigrants arrived in Canada.<sup>28</sup> The establishment of official multiculturalism in 1971 lent state sanction for the preservation of immigrants’ diverse cultural identities.<sup>29</sup> Other research attributes immigrants’ affinity for the Liberal Party to the party’s organizational resources, which include an extensive outreach network based in immigrant communities at the riding association level. Harell notes that the Liberals make efforts to be ever-present in ethnic communities.<sup>30</sup> Similarly, Triadafilopoulos et al. suggest that “the Liberal Party’s success in attracting immigrant voters depended less on specific matters of policy than on maintaining a continued presence and contact with immigrant communities.”<sup>31</sup>

Conversely, scholars have suggested more instrumental reasons for immigrants’ allegiance to the Liberals. Blais notes that immigrant voters may “perceive the Liberal party to better defend or represent their views and or interests. They are more likely to think that more should be done for racial minorities, Canada should admit more immigrants, and aid to developing countries should be increased.”<sup>32</sup> Consistent with comparative research, Henderson observes that immigrants to Canada may be inclined towards parties of the left, due to “their more favourable attitudes towards immigration, or their approach to social policy.”<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Ruud Koopmans, Ines Michalowski and Stine Waibel. 2012. “Citizenship Rights for Immigrants: National Political Processes and Cross-National Convergence in Western Europe, 1980–2008,” *American Journal of Sociology* 117(4), 1202-1245.

<sup>26</sup> Tarik Abou-Chadi. 2016. “Political and institutional determinants of immigration policies,” *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 42(13), 2087-2110. Joppke notes that while right-wing parties call for tighter border controls, the left is more supportive of migrant rights. Christian Joppke. 1999. *Immigration and the Nation-State: The United States, Germany, and Great Britain* (New York: Oxford University Press), 5.

<sup>27</sup> Sonia Alonso and Sara Claro daFonseca. 2012. “Immigration, left and right,” *Party Politics* 18(6), 865-884.

<sup>28</sup> Andre Blais. 2005. “Accounting for the Electoral Success of the Liberal Party in Canada,” *Canadian Journal of Political Science* 38(4), 821-840.

<sup>29</sup> Jeffrey Reitz. 2014. “Multiculturalism Policies and Popular Multiculturalism in the Development of Canadian Immigration” in *The Multiculturalism Question: Debating Identity in 21<sup>st</sup> Century Canada*, Jack Jedwab, ed. (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press). See also, Will Kymlicka. 2007. “Ethnocultural Diversity in a Liberal State: Making Sense of the Canadian Model(s)” in Keith Banting, Thomas Courchene, and Leslie Seidle, eds. *Belonging? Diversity, Recognition and Shared Citizenship in Canada* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press), 39-86: 46.

<sup>30</sup> Allison Harell. 2013. “Revisiting the ‘Ethnic’ Vote,” in Amanda Bittner and Royce Koop, eds. *Parties, Elections, and the Future of Canadian Politics* (Vancouver: UBC Press), 140-161: 144.

<sup>31</sup> Phil Triadafilopoulos, Inder Marwah and Steve White. 2013. “Immigration, Citizenship, and Canada’s New Conservative Party,” in David Rayside and James Farney eds. *Conservatism in Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press), 106.

<sup>32</sup> Blais, “Accounting for the Electoral Success,” 832.

<sup>33</sup> Alisa Henderson. 2005. “Ideal Citizens? Immigrant Voting Patterns in Canadian Elections,” *Canadian Issues/Themes Canadiennes*, Summer, 57-60.

Nevertheless, consistent support for the Liberal Party appears to contradict the apparent volatility of the immigrant vote in recent elections, as well as the political competitiveness of Canada's multiethnic suburban ridings. A more nuanced view of immigrant voting behaviour disaggregates ethnic diversity to better conceptualize cleavages in vote choice. Within this heterogeneous voting bloc, the Liberals dominate among most visible minority groups, especially South Asians, as well as more recent immigrants.<sup>34</sup> Conversely, the Conservatives have an advantage with white immigrant voters and those who have lived in the country for longer time periods.<sup>35</sup> Moreover, there is volatility in vote choice across ethnic groups, and most notably with East Asian immigrants, as witnessed in a Conservative and NDP surge among visible minority voters in the 2011 election.<sup>36</sup> Although immigrant voters may hold social policy preferences to the left of the Canadian average, many are simultaneously more aligned with socially conservative values.<sup>37</sup> These features of immigrant voting behaviour must be integrated with research on the politics of suburbia to assess their simultaneous effects, as well as the implications for party competition.

### *Suburban voting behaviour*

If immigration and visible minority status orients voters towards left-wing parties, suburban residency tends to produce the opposite effect. In terms of research on the relationship between place of residence and voting behaviour, Alan Walks' suggests that an increasingly significant territorial divide in voting behaviour is found between inner city and suburban residents.<sup>38</sup> Walks notes that in the 2000 election,

inner city residents were almost three times more likely to vote NDP and only about a third as likely to vote for the Canadian Alliance, as those in the rest of Canada. The outer suburbs on the other hand became even less likely (about three times less likely) to vote

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<sup>34</sup> Allison Harell. 2013. "Revisiting the 'Ethnic' Vote" in Amanda Bittner and Royce Koop eds. *Parties, Elections, and the Future of Canadian Politics* (Vancouver: UBC Press), 140-161. See also Selina Chignall. 2015.

"Immigrants are not a monolithic voting bloc," *iPolitics*. September 22, 2015.

<http://ipolitics.ca/2015/09/22/immigrants-are-not-a-monolithic-voting-block/>

<sup>35</sup> Ibid. See also April Lindgren. 2014. "Toronto-area Ethnic Newspapers and Canada's 2011 Federal Election: An Investigation of Content, Focus and Partisanship." *Canadian Journal of Political Science* 47(4), 667-696: 692.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> See Faron Ellis and Peter Woolstencroft. 2011. The Conservative Campaign: Becoming the New Natural Governing Party? in *The Canadian Federal Election of 2011*, Jon Pammett and Christopher Dornan eds., (Toronto: Dundurn), 15-44. Social issues typically have less political salience for immigrant voters, and are thus rarely determining factors in vote choice. On the topic of issue salience, see Elisabeth Gidengil, Neil Nevitte, Andre Blais, Joanna Everitt, and Patrick Fournier. 2012. *Dominance and Decline: Making Sense of Recent Canadian Elections* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press), 16.

<sup>38</sup> This research agenda was also initiated by American evidence, which suggested that place of residence has an independent effect on voting behavior and some political attitudes, such as welfare spending preferences. See Juliet Gainsborough. 2001. *Fenced off: The Suburbanization of American Politics* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press); Thad Williamson. 2008. "Sprawl, spatial location, and politics: How Ideology Tracks the Built Environment," *American Politics Research* 36(6), 903-933. Wendy Tam Cho, James Gimpel, and Iris S. Hui. 2013. "Voter Migration and the Geographic Sorting of the American Electorate," *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 103(4), 856-870.



NDP... The emerging pattern of political polarization would appear to lie between the inner cities and the outer suburbs.<sup>39</sup>

These results are echoed by Roy et al., who disaggregate community type and vote choice by province, finding clear evidence that suburban voters are differentiated from both urban and rural voters in their political preferences. Suburbanites are more conservative than both urban and rural respondents in all provinces except Quebec, Alberta, and PEI. These differences cannot be explained away by socio-demographic characteristics.<sup>40</sup>

Walks also explains the factors which make suburbanites more likely to vote for parties of the right. He emphasizes the importance of public versus private modes of consumption and self-selection processes. Mode of consumption signifies that inner city residents benefit more directly from public provision of services such as transit, schools, and parks.<sup>41</sup> Conversely, a suburban mode of living is based on private space and automobile dependency; the low densities of Canadian suburbs “inhibits more collective modes of consumption.”<sup>42</sup> Thus, for example, while tax reductions will undermine collective consumption on which urban residents depend, suburban residents will logically support tax cuts and privatization, since these will translate to increased consumption possibilities.<sup>43</sup>

Moreover, spatial landscapes and experiences of daily life in the suburbs are imbued with ideological and cultural messages, consistently recreated through routine. Agnew notes that settings for social interaction foster an overall “structure of feeling.”<sup>44</sup> In practice, the low densities of modern subdivisions stress self-reliance and protect residents from interactions with strangers and the existence of social problems such as homelessness. Similarly, automobile reliance reinforces individualism and competition. By contrast, the higher densities and public spaces of the inner city force people from diverse backgrounds to mix and respect each other’s

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<sup>39</sup> Alan Walks. 2004. “Place of Residence, Party Preferences, and Political Attitudes in Canadian Cities and Suburbs,” *Journal of Urban Affairs* 26(3), 269-295: 288.

<sup>40</sup> Jason Roy, Andrea Perrella, and Joshua Borden. 2015 “Rural, Suburban and Urban Voters: Dissecting Residence Based Voter Cleavages in Provincial Elections,” *Canadian Political Science Review* 9(1), 112-127.

<sup>41</sup> Initial research on mode of consumption by place of residence was conducted by Dunleavy (1979), who points to a divergence in modes of consumption in the UK during the expansion of the welfare state in the postwar years. According to Dunleavy, as the government expanded its provision of public services, this created a new division between those who benefit from such services and those who do not. The low-densities and diminished accessibility characteristic of most suburbs is inhospitable to certain government services, which depend upon the higher densities that facilitate economies of scale in service provision. Patrick Dunleavy. 1979. “The urban basis of political dealignment: Social class, domestic property ownership, and state intervention in consumption processes,” *British Journal of Political Science* 9(4), 409–443: 419.

<sup>42</sup> Walks, “Place of Residence,” 290.

<sup>43</sup> Walks also underlines the importance of self-selection, meaning that city-suburban differences will lead to intra-urban migration based on lifestyle self-selection and personal convictions. For example, Walks finds that urban core residents base their housing choice heavily on neighbourhood characteristics, seeking out a sense of community and a lifestyle that aligns with their values. Alan Walks. 2006. “The causes of city-suburban political polarization? A Canadian case study,” *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 96, 390-414.

<sup>44</sup> John Agnew. 2015. *Place and Politics*, 3<sup>rd</sup> Ed. (New York: Routledge), 28. See also, Henri Lefebvre. 1991. *The Production of Space* (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell), 44.

differences, just as the experience of public transportation reminds participants of the larger community and shared goals therein.<sup>45</sup>

Absent from this literature is the incorporation of immigrants in suburban environments. Indeed, the apparent conservatism of Canadian suburbs seems to contradict their competitive nature during Canadian federal elections. Here, an important distinction arises between types of suburban constituencies. In this respect, categorizing suburban ridings by total size of their metropolitan area demonstrates that it is only in Canada's three largest cities where multiparty competition is a fixture of recent elections.<sup>46</sup> In all other suburban areas, the Conservatives handily dominate these constituencies. It is not by coincidence that the most politically competitive ridings are also the most diverse.

### *The immigrant vote in suburban Toronto and Vancouver*

By settling in the suburban periphery around Vancouver and Toronto, immigrants have transformed their new environments, as well as the previously enumerated characteristics which produce a conservative worldview.<sup>47</sup> The effects of immigrant settlement patterns for these neighbourhoods are evidenced in features which include intensified development, higher densities, multi-unit and multi-family housing, greater dependence on public services, public transit, and greater socio-economic diversity.<sup>48</sup> As Boudreau et al. argue, immigration has transformed Toronto's inner suburbs to the extent that it is difficult to even call them suburban: "Their aging high-rise apartment blocks, diverse immigrant populations, and lower-than-average incomes suggest inner city."<sup>49</sup> Under these conditions, the divides between those who benefit from privatization and those who benefit from public service provision does not follow the urban-suburban cleavage. In this respect, "parts of the 905 are beginning to demonstrate some of the characteristics of 416."<sup>50</sup> Therefore, many of the features which typically foment conservatism in the suburbs have been obscured. Traditional fiscally conservative, low-tax messages may not resonate with these voters: "People may be responsive to an argument that they are going to have more money in their own pocket, but if quality of life is suffering because of inadequate transportation, they may warm to call of major increases in infrastructure spending — something Liberals are gambling on."<sup>51</sup> Indeed, the Liberals succeeded overwhelmingly in winning back these 905 ridings from the Conservatives during the 2015 election.

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<sup>45</sup> John Sewell. 1991. "Old and New City," in Kent Gerecke ed. *The Canadian City* (Montreal: Black Rose Books), 34.

<sup>46</sup> Montreal and the province of Quebec are excluded from this analysis because the national question, cultural identity, and the protection of French detract from traditional left-right divisions, and complicate immigrant voting behaviour. Quebec also has a distinct system for recruiting and integrating immigrants to the province.

<sup>47</sup> Although living in suburban areas may also make some immigrants embrace more conservative beliefs, their support for the Liberal Party and endorsement of left-of-centre social policy attitudes, as well as the transformation of suburban spatial environments make such an outcome difficult to discern.

<sup>48</sup> James Rusk. 2007. "Political leanings of 905 beginning to look like 416," *The Globe and Mail*, October 12, 2007. <http://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/national/political-leanings-of-905-beginning-to-look-like-416/article695389>

<sup>49</sup> Julie-Anne Boudreau, Roger Keil, and Douglas Young. 2009. *Changing Toronto: Governing Urban Neoliberalism* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press), 35.

<sup>50</sup> Rusk, "Political leanings of 905 beginning to look like 416." Rusk quotes Nelson Wiseman.

<sup>51</sup> Chignall, "The battle for the 905." Chignall quotes Zach Taylor.

Two examples illustrate the nature and timeline of the transformation of suburban Toronto and Vancouver. Brampton, Ontario is Canada's 9<sup>th</sup> largest municipality, as well as a suburban city to the West of Toronto. Fast-paced growth in the immigrant population of Brampton, Ontario transformed the city during the late-1990 and early 2000s. Brampton witnessed population growth of 14 percent between 1991 and 1996. This growth accelerated to 21 percent between 1996 and 2001, and to 33 percent between 2001 and 2006. By comparison, the city of Toronto grew by just 9 percent in each of these five-year time horizons. During this same time-period, the immigrant population grew from 96 115 to 206 190. The percentage of growth in Brampton's immigrant population between 1991 and 2011 stands at 233.51 percent.<sup>52</sup> Right-wing politicians such as Mike Harris were able to succeed in the 905 belt around Toronto, despite faring poorly among immigrant and minority voters, since this area then featured a smaller proportion of these voters.<sup>53</sup> Even by the start of Harris' second term as Premier in 1999, this situation had changed considerably.

Richmond, British Columbia is described by the Vancouver Sun as "a once-sleepy, semi-rural municipality suddenly (turned) into a buzzing city of more than 200,000 in which more than six out of 10 residents are born outside the country."<sup>54</sup> Indeed, residents of Chinese origin constituted 34 percent of Richmond's population in 1996. This figure rose to 40 percent in 2001, 45 percent in 2006 and 49 percent in 2011. Moreover, "in Richmond in 2011, 70.4% of the population is a visible minority."<sup>55</sup> The implications for electoral politics are evident, as Hiebert notes, "Chinese-origin Canadians have become a crucial factor in the electoral politics of Greater Vancouver."<sup>56</sup> Under these circumstances, anti-immigrant messages can become politically untenable for conservative parties who rely on votes in suburban constituencies.

### *Why do immigrants move to the suburbs?*

These demographic trends point to a related puzzle: what causes immigrants to settle in the suburbs of Toronto and Vancouver? Historically, Canadian immigrants established themselves in city centres of major urban areas. Hiebert describes settlement patterns in Vancouver in 1971: "most immigrants initially settled in the urban core... they imply a diffusion to suburbs over time - presumably as incomes rose."<sup>57</sup> This situation has changed, as affluent immigrants and native-born Canadians congregate around the city centre. Many newly arrived

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<sup>52</sup> "Demographic Overview," City of Brampton: Brampton Economic Development Office – Business Information and Policy Branch. Accessed May 11, 2017. <https://www.brampton.ca/en/Business/edo/business-knowledge/Economic-Reports-Papers-Statistics/Documents/City%20Profile/Population.pdf>

<sup>53</sup> Anti-immigrant sentiment was also present at the local level. In 1995, the deputy mayor of Markham, Ontario remarked that a "growing concentration of ethnics is causing conflict in some communities in Markham...(and) are chasing residents of other races away from the city." Shuguang Wang. 1999. "Chinese Commercial Activity in the Toronto CMA: New Development Patterns and Impacts," *The Canadian Geographer* 43(1), 19-35.

<sup>54</sup> Douglas Todd. 2015. "Richmond, global centre of a demographic explosion," *Vancouver Sun*, June 16, 2015. <http://www.vancouversun.com/technology/part+three+richmond+global+centre+demographic+explosion/11129562/story.html>

<sup>55</sup> "Ethnicity Hot Facts," City of Richmond. Accessed May 3, 2017. [http://www.richmond.ca/\\_\\_shared/assets/2006\\_Ethnicity20987.pdf](http://www.richmond.ca/__shared/assets/2006_Ethnicity20987.pdf)

<sup>56</sup> Daniel Hiebert. 1999. "Immigration and the Changing Social Geography of Greater Vancouver," *BC Studies* 121 (Spring 1999), 35-82.

<sup>57</sup> Hiebert, "Immigration and the Changing Social Geography of Greater Vancouver," 39.

immigrants and low-income residents are instead relegated to the suburbs, such that there “is a clear suburbanization trend for the most socially disadvantaged areas.”<sup>58</sup>

Ley and Lynch track these settlement patterns in the Metro Vancouver area. Whereas most immigrants in 1971 settled in Vancouver proper, by 2006, the top immigrant receiving-areas were the sprawling suburbs of Burnaby, Richmond, and Surrey.<sup>59</sup> This trend was such that Abbotsford, a small community 72 kilometers east of Vancouver grew from 18 864 to 105 403 residents between 1991 and 1996, and features Canada’s third-highest proportion of visible minority residents.<sup>60</sup> Along these lines, Revington and Townsend note that Vancouver is Canada’s least affordable housing market: “the supply of affordable housing is distributed unevenly across space, both within and between metropolitan areas. Housing was more affordable in outer zones of each metropolitan area, consistent with the suburbanization of poverty in Canadian cities.”<sup>61</sup> The central city of Vancouver increasingly houses affluent immigrants, native-born Canadians, and tourists, leading observers to speculate that the city is becoming a playground for the rich.<sup>62</sup> This process embodies rising socioeconomic segregation, as the wealthy colonize desirable public infrastructure. Indeed, these affluent census tracts are increasingly found in close proximity to the city centre. In examining property values in Vancouver, Montreal, and Toronto, Skaburskis and Moos note that a transfer of wealth has taken place from older suburban areas to the inner city, as well as more distant new suburbs.<sup>63</sup> Such trends were noted by Walks in the case of Toronto as early as 2001: “economic restructuring as evidenced in the Toronto urban region is linked to a tendency toward increased sociospatial inequality and polarization.”<sup>64</sup> This signified “polarization in spatial distribution of income, the poorer tracts become poorer while the wealthier ones become richer... census tracts increasingly fall into either lower- or higher income categories.”<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> Nicole Foth, Kevin Manaugh, and Ahmed M. El-Geneidy. 2013. “Towards equitable transit: examining transit accessibility and social need in Toronto, Canada, 1996-2006,” *Journal of Transport Geography* 29 (May 2013), 1-10. See also Josefina Ades, Philippe Apparicio, and Anne-Marie Séguin. 2012. “Are new patterns of low-income distribution emerging in Canadian metropolitan areas?” *Canadian Geographer* 56(3), 339-361.

<sup>59</sup> David Ley and Nicholas Lynch. 2012. “Divisions in Lotus Land: Socio-Spatial Income Polarization in Greater Vancouver, 1970-2005,” *Cities Centre: University of Toronto*, 31-2.

<sup>60</sup> On population growth, see “Municipal Census Populations (1921-2011).” 2011. *BC Stats* (Victoria: B.C. Government) Accessed May 2, 2017.

<http://www.bcstats.gov.bc.ca/StatisticsBySubject/Census/MunicipalPopulations.aspx?>

On visible minority statistics, see “B.C. is nation's most ethnically diverse province: StatsCan” 2008. *CBC News*, April 2, 2008. Accessed May 10, 2017. <http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/british-columbia/b-c-is-nation-s-most-ethnically-diverse-province-statscan-1.759993>

<sup>61</sup> Nick Revington and Craig Townsend. 2016. “Market Rental Housing Affordability and Rapid Transit Catchments: Application of a New Measure in Canada,” *Housing Policy Debate* 4-5, 864-886.

<sup>62</sup> Jon Azpiri. 2017. “New high-end retailers another sign Vancouver has become a playground for the rich,” *Global News*, January 21, 2017. <http://globalnews.ca/news/3216002/new-high-end-retailers-a-sign-vancouver-is-increasingly-becoming-playground-for-the-rich/>

<sup>63</sup> Andrejs Skaburskis and Markus Moos. 2008. “The redistribution of residential property values in Montreal, Toronto, and Vancouver: examining neoclassical and Marxist views on changing investment patterns,” *Environment and Planning* 40, 905-927.

<sup>64</sup> Alan Walks. 2001. “The Social Ecology of the Post-Fordist/Global City? Economic Restructuring and Socio-spatial Polarisation in the Toronto Urban Region,” *Urban Studies* 38(3), 407-447: 436.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid*, 437.

The spatial landscapes of Toronto and Vancouver are notably different from American city centres, which feature higher concentrations of immigrants and minority populations, as well as greater levels of poverty and urban degradation. This result may be traced the efforts of progressive reformers who fought against the residential hollowing out of Toronto and Vancouver in the 1970s. Boudreau et al. note the efforts of municipal reform councils and activists who “saved the city from being de-cored, as so many American counterparts –with their suburban sprawl and mega-malls had been.”<sup>66</sup>

Following this, the established urban middle classes presence increased significantly in the city centre, during the 1980s and 1990s “at the expense of the traditional working classes and new immigrants.”<sup>67</sup> The 1990s also brought “value transfer to the inner city while residential property values grew at a slightly lower rate in most of the new suburbs.”<sup>68</sup> Waves of immigrants continued to arrive as competition for desirable space in the city centre intensified and prices increased. These immigrants increasingly settled in the suburbs, so that, in Toronto “surrounding regions grew more than the city between 2001 and 2006.”<sup>69</sup> Gentrification accelerated as immigrants living in rental housing in the city centre were priced out of their established areas. Pre-existing ethnic neighbourhood labels were used as real estate marketing tools. For instance, Little Italy in Toronto retained this moniker despite being home to fewer than 10 percent Italian speakers.<sup>70</sup> Given the geographic discrepancies in median income, the relegation of immigrants and visible minorities to the suburbs stems from socioeconomic marginalization. Indeed, the city is “increasingly comprised of downtown-centred high-income residents – most living near subway lines – and a concentration of low-income families in less dense, service- and transit-starved inner suburbs... a predominantly middle-class metropolis just three decades ago, is increasingly dominated by two opposite populations – one with an average income of \$88,400, and another of \$26,900.”<sup>71</sup> As population growth spurred increased congestion, wealthy residents moved to avoid crushing commute times. As the CBC reports, some suburban residents face commutes of two hours each way every day, “the city is one of the worst in North America for commute times... as the recent City Institute study claims, the longest commutes are endured by people in low-income neighbourhoods in the suburbs.”<sup>72</sup>

Despite images of Canada’s largest cities as diverse melting pots, the unfolding demographic geography of Toronto belies the clustering of immigrants and visible minorities in suburban fringes. Therefore, Toronto’s oft-cited moniker as the world’s most multicultural city may be changing.<sup>73</sup> In fact, the portion of the megacity containing the greatest diversity is found

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<sup>66</sup> Boudreau et al., *Changing Toronto*, 40.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid, 47.

<sup>68</sup> Skarbursis and Moos, “The Redistribution of Residential Property Values,” 923/

<sup>69</sup> Boudreau et al., *Changing Toronto*, 44

<sup>70</sup> Jason Hackworth and Josephine Rekers. 2005. “Ethnic Packaging and Gentrification,” *Urban Affairs Review* 41(2), 211-236.

<sup>71</sup> Anna Mehler Paperny. 2010. “Shrinking middle class makes Toronto a city of socioeconomic extremes,” *Globe and Mail*, December 15, 2010. <https://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/toronto/shrinking-middle-class-makes-toronto-a-city-of-socioeconomic-extremes/article1319878/>

<sup>72</sup> “Crushing commutes make Toronto's suburbs intolerable for some.” 2016. *CBC News*, February 10, 2016. <http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/toronto/programs/metromorning/crushing-commutes-make-toronto-s-suburbs-intolerable-for-some-1.3441023>

<sup>73</sup> Noor Javed. 2010. “‘Visible minority’ will mean ‘white’ by 2031,” *Toronto Star*, March 10, 2100. [https://www.thestar.com/news/gta/2010/03/10/visible\\_minority\\_will\\_mean\\_white\\_by\\_2031.html](https://www.thestar.com/news/gta/2010/03/10/visible_minority_will_mean_white_by_2031.html)

in the suburban areas –and formerly independent municipalities– of Scarborough, North York, and Etobicoke. Conversely, Toronto’s pre-amalgamation urban area is more affluent and less diverse. As of 2006, while 46 percent of residents of Toronto and East York were immigrants, the figures were 59, 64, and 68 percent for Etobicoke, North York, and Scarborough respectively. Similarly, only 33 percent of Torontonians and East Yorkers were visible minorities, versus 45 percent for Etobicoke, 47 percent for North York, and 64 percent for Scarborough.<sup>74</sup> Moreover, all but one of Canada’s 30 most ethnically-diverse ridings are found in suburban areas.<sup>75</sup> The city centre continues to attract largely white high-income earners seeking easy access to the city’s business district, transit, and the leisure amenities. As *The Globe and Mail* reports, “‘It’s only going to become worse,’ Prof. Hulchanski said. If the trend continues... Toronto in 2025 will have a concentration of high-earners along the lakefront and the city’s subway lines surrounded by low-income areas – with almost nothing in between.”<sup>76</sup>

Conversely, if Toronto’s ethnic diversity becomes concentrated in its suburban outskirts, social isolation may increase further, as it has in many European cities with sprawling ethnically-diverse suburbs.<sup>77</sup> The incentives political parties face to court immigrant voters in these areas– and the related comparatively more inclusive political discourse on issues of diversity and immigration– may currently help buffer the more conspicuous symptoms of social exclusion.

## **Multiethnic Suburbs and Their Perceived Importance to Conservative Parties**

### *Party Strategy*

Conservative parties now perceive the suburban ridings surrounding Toronto and Vancouver as crucial electoral prizes. Evidence of this trend is found in the allocation of campaign resources and formulation of party strategy. Indeed, the use of substantial party resources in multiethnic suburban ridings is an indication of their political importance. Shaped by a single-member-plurality electoral system, Canadian elections are regionalized contests whereby parties carefully stretch limited resources across a vast country. As Carty and Eagles argue, leader visits are finite resources that ought to be deployed strategically as part of a party’s

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<sup>74</sup> 2006 is the most recent census year for which the city of Toronto makes this data available. These demographic trends appear to have further increased since 2006.

“City of Toronto Community Council Profiles: North York,” *City of Toronto*: Published 2008. (Source: Statistics Canada, 2006) [http://www1.toronto.ca/city\\_of\\_toronto/city\\_planning/sipa/files/pdf/northyork\\_2006\\_cc\\_profiles.pdf](http://www1.toronto.ca/city_of_toronto/city_planning/sipa/files/pdf/northyork_2006_cc_profiles.pdf)

“City of Toronto Community Council Profiles: Etobicoke,” *City of Toronto*: Published 2008. (Source: Statistics Canada, 2006) [https://www1.toronto.ca/city\\_of\\_toronto/city\\_planning/sipa/files/pdf/etobyork\\_2006\\_cc\\_profile.pdf](https://www1.toronto.ca/city_of_toronto/city_planning/sipa/files/pdf/etobyork_2006_cc_profile.pdf)

“City of Toronto Community Council Profiles: Scarborough,” *City of Toronto*: Published 2008. (Source: Statistics Canada, 2006) [https://www1.toronto.ca/city\\_of\\_toronto/city\\_planning/sipa/files/pdf/scarboro\\_2006\\_cc\\_profiles.pdf](https://www1.toronto.ca/city_of_toronto/city_planning/sipa/files/pdf/scarboro_2006_cc_profiles.pdf)

“City of Toronto Community Council Profiles: Toronto and East York” *City of Toronto*: Published 2008. (Source: Statistics Canada, 2006)

[http://www1.toronto.ca/city\\_of\\_toronto/city\\_planning/sipa/files/pdf/toronto\\_eyork\\_2006\\_cc\\_profiles.pdf](http://www1.toronto.ca/city_of_toronto/city_planning/sipa/files/pdf/toronto_eyork_2006_cc_profiles.pdf)

<sup>75</sup> Andrew Griffith. 2015. *Multiculturalism in Canada: Evidence and Anecdote* (Ottawa: Anar Press), 343-44. The one exception is Vancouver-Kingsway.

<sup>76</sup> <https://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/toronto/shrinking-middle-class-makes-toronto-a-city-of-socioeconomic-extremes/article1319878/>

<sup>77</sup> Visible minority and immigrant voters remain underrepresented under the current distribution of ridings by population. See Matthew Mendelsohn and Sujit Choudry. 2011. “Canada’s Unequal Voters,” *Toronto Star*, October 30, 2011. [https://www.thestar.com/opinion/editorialopinion/2011/10/30/canadas\\_unequal\\_voters.html](https://www.thestar.com/opinion/editorialopinion/2011/10/30/canadas_unequal_voters.html)

coordinated effort to maximize the number of seats it captures.<sup>78</sup> In recent elections, many campaign observers have noted party leaders' efforts to be present in the suburbs of Toronto and Vancouver.<sup>79</sup> In 2015, no part of Ontario was as competitive as the 905.<sup>80</sup> Similarly, the Conservative Party launched its election platform in Brampton, Ontario during the 2011 election.<sup>81</sup> At the start of the 2011 campaign, one journalist reported that, "Stephen Harper made more public appearances in Liberal-held ridings in the 905 than he did in all the Prairie provinces combined... Harper and Ignatieff have been playing a game of back-and-forth in the 905."<sup>82</sup> A similar pattern is evident in Greater Vancouver, as John Ibbitson writes, "As goes Greater Toronto, so goes the Lower Mainland."<sup>83</sup> Similar trends of Conservative-Liberal competition were evidenced during the 2015 federal election.<sup>84</sup>

Moreover, candidates have concentrated a great deal of financial resources in these suburban ridings. In the 2011 election, six of the ten highest spending Conservative candidates were competing for constituencies in suburban Toronto or Vancouver.<sup>85</sup> Altogether, these trends suggest that the perceived importance of immigrant-rich suburban ridings has increased over the last two decades. As one Conservative strategist noted, "It is key to winning a federal election, to do as well as you can in that [905] region."<sup>86</sup> The parties' campaign activities corroborate this sentiment.

#### *Party messaging and political rhetoric*

Observers have credited the Conservatives' change in tone and substance on immigration and diversity issues to Stephen Harper's campaigns in the 2008 and 2011 elections. As evidence, they note the party's pivot to targeting immigrant suburban voters after failing to sufficiently expand their Quebec base in attempting to build majority government support. Ellis and Woolstencroft argue that prior to 2008 the Tories planned to court soft nationalists in Quebec but eventually redirected this approach to focus almost singularly on an urban outreach strategy

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<sup>78</sup> Kenneth Carty and Munro Eagles. 2006. *Politics is Local: National Politics at the Grassroots* (Toronto: Oxford University Press Canada), 100.

<sup>79</sup> For example, see John Ivison. 2015. "Battle for Vancouver suburbs reflects much of Canada," *National Post*, October 18, 2015. <http://news.nationalpost.com/full-comment/john-ivison-battle-for-vancouver-suburbs-reflects-much-of-canada>; John Ivison. 2015. "Tight election battles in Toronto-area suburbs show no party has a lock on immigrant votes," *National Post*, October 2, 2015. <http://news.nationalpost.com/full-comment/brampton-shows-suburbs-and-the-immigrants-who-live-there-are-as-diverse-as-their-electoral-choices>

<sup>80</sup> Chignall, "The Battle for the 905," 2015.

<sup>81</sup> Joe Friesen. 2011. "In Brampton, a suburban boom city grows on fertile electoral ground," *The Globe and Mail*, April 14, 2011. <http://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/politics/in-brampton-a-suburban-boom-city-grows-on-fertile-electoral-ground/article4268470/>

<sup>82</sup> Brett Popplewell. 2011. "Harper and Ignatieff make 905 their battleground," *Toronto Star*, April 24, 2011. [https://www.thestar.com/news/gta/2011/04/24/harper\\_and\\_ignatieff\\_make\\_905\\_their\\_battleground.html](https://www.thestar.com/news/gta/2011/04/24/harper_and_ignatieff_make_905_their_battleground.html)

<sup>83</sup> John Ibbitson. 2015. "Canada's electoral geography: Where parties are likely to gain seats," *The Globe and Mail*. August 2, 2015. <https://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/politics/canadas-electoral-geography-where-parties-are-likely-to-gain-seats/article25816225/>

<sup>84</sup> Ivison, "Tight Election Battles."

<sup>85</sup> "Candidate's Electoral Campaign Return, 41<sup>st</sup> general election," *Elections Canada*. Modified May 2, 2016. <http://www.elections.ca/WPAPPS/WPF/EN/CC/SelectCandidates?act=C2&eventid=34&option=1&queryid=fa51b250f7b34b8b8659d9ada0d75dff>

<sup>86</sup> Chignall, "The Battle for the 905."

aimed at tirelessly promoting the party in “heavily ethnic urban ridings outside Quebec.”<sup>87</sup> Indeed, Harper and Citizenship and Immigration Minister Jason Kenney relentlessly courted immigrant voters, and attempted to be ever-present in these communities including outside of campaign periods.<sup>88</sup>

Yet this change towards pro-immigrant messaging among right-leaning parties began many years earlier. Hoping to expand support in central Canada, Reform was reincarnated as the Canadian Alliance in 2000. At this stage, the party already appreciated the need to soften its tone on diversity issues, and dampen anti-immigrant rhetoric.<sup>89</sup> Notably, the Alliance’s 2000 party platform had just one section on immigration which states that: “Canada is a nation of immigrants. We have always been enriched by new arrivals to our shores. A Canadian Alliance government will maintain the current level of immigration. We will make it easier for immigrants who possess advanced skills and training to enter Canada, and will make the family reunification process truly responsive.”<sup>90</sup> This message was a striking contrast to rhetoric emanating from Reform only a few years prior.

Following the merger of the Alliance and the Progressive Conservatives, party leader Stephen Harper and his strategists initially believed that re-creating the three sisters coalition of Prairie populists, Ontario Tories, and Quebec nationalists would bring the Conservatives back to power.<sup>91</sup> By 2004, Flanagan writes that the party perceived the necessity of courting a fourth sister, immigrant voters. Indeed, in her analysis of the 2004 election, Gerber suggests that Harper attempted to endear his party to immigrant voters by reaching out “on same-sex marriage, Air India, recognition of credentials, and recruitment of minority candidates.”<sup>92</sup> Harell adds that in 2004, “the Conservatives ran the highest number of visible minority candidates (twenty nine) of any party... (and) has made concerted efforts to mobilize the so-called ethnic vote.”<sup>93</sup> The

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<sup>87</sup> Faron Ellis and Peter Woolstencroft. 2011. “The Conservative Campaign: Becoming the New Natural Governing Party?” in Jon Pammett and Christopher Dornan eds. *The Canadian Federal Election of 2011* (Toronto: Dundurn) 15-44: 20. See also, Bilodeau and Kanji, “The New Immigrant Voter.”

<sup>88</sup> Kenney became known as the Minister of “Curry in a Hurry.”

<sup>89</sup> Lavcock, *The New Right*, 90

<sup>90</sup> The section also mentions the need to keep dangerous criminals out of Canada. “A time for change: An agenda of respect for all Canadians.” 2000. Election Platform of the Canadian Alliance. Accessed May 12, 2017. [https://www.poltext.org/sites/poltext.org/files/plateformes/can2000all\\_plt\\_en\\_14112008\\_173717.pdf](https://www.poltext.org/sites/poltext.org/files/plateformes/can2000all_plt_en_14112008_173717.pdf)

<sup>91</sup> Jonathan Malloy. 2013. “The Relationship Between the Conservative Party of Canada and Evangelicals and Social Conservatives,” in James Farney and David Rayside eds. *Conservatism in Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press), 192

<sup>92</sup> Linda Gerber. 2006. “The Visible Minority, Immigrant, and Bilingual Composition of Ridings and Party Support in the Canadian Federal Election of 2004,” *Canadian Ethnic Studies* 38(1), 65-82.

<sup>93</sup> Harell, “Revisiting the Ethnic Vote,” 145. Abu-Laban argues that the Conservatives’ newfound embrace of immigrants belied a stealthy reconfiguration and defunding of multiculturalism policies, as well as redefining the ideal Canadian as a virtuous male warrior. This liberal multiculturalism also provides provides a thin justification for the acceptance of diversity. If immigrants are accepted largely due to their economic benefits, an anti-immigrant backlash is more likely if these benefits decline. Yasmeen Abu-Laban. 2014. “Reform by Stealth: The Harper Conservatives and Canadian Multiculturalism,” in Jack Jedwab, ed., *The Multiculturalism Question: Debating Identity in 21st-Century Canada* (Montreal McGill-Queen’s University Press). 149-172. See also, Yasmeen Abu-Laban and Christina Gabriel. 2002. *Selling Diversity: Immigration, Multiculturalism, Employment Equity and Globalization* (Toronto: Broadview Press).



importance of winning these votes was such that the party contravened its electoral base in the populist prairies, where skepticism towards immigration and diversity remains strongest.<sup>94</sup>

Crucially, party strategists put forth the necessity of winning, suburban-dwelling immigrants, rather than immigrant voters in general. Flanagan notes,

The suburbs of Toronto, Vancouver, and to a lesser extent of other cities are now filling up with people who, based on their social values and capitalist work ethic, should be natural Conservative voters, but who are still emotionally tied to the Liberal Party. Conservatives must break the Liberal hegemony...getting a bigger share, in order to win the suburban ridings that a conservative party would ordinarily expect to win.<sup>95</sup>

Here, Flanagan underlines not only the necessity of enticing immigrant voters but their perceived favourability to the Conservatives based on their values and work ethic. The role of suburban residency is absent from this analysis, yet it does imply that diverse urban ridings are unwinnable for the Conservatives. Beyond their softer tone towards diversity and immigration, it is important to note the geography of Conservative strategy. As Griffith argues, the Conservatives intervened in an unprecedented one-sided manner in international affairs touching on Canadian diaspora communities. This demonstrates that the Tories favoured vote shopping in specific “ethnic ridings,” while potentially alienating voters in other ridings. This is evidenced for example, with the courting of Sri Lankan Canadians in Scarborough and Israeli Canadians in York Region. Seligman argues that Harper re-oriented his party’s foreign policy as critical towards the Sri Lankan regime, in order to court the Tamil in suburban Toronto.<sup>96</sup> Similarly, the Conservative party’s pro-Israel position was vaunted in direct mail campaigns targeting Jewish voters north of Toronto.<sup>97</sup> Altogether, a Conservative Party which largely began as a coalition of immigrant-skeptic Reform activists orchestrated a major shift in messaging on immigration and diversity issues. The necessity of this strategy was understood by strategists prior to the 2000 election, and it was fully implemented by the 2004 federal election.

### *Conclusion*

This paper has examined the electoral implications of demographic change in Canadian suburbs. The inability of parties to make electoral breakthroughs with anti-immigrant platforms is conventional wisdom in Canadian politics. Yet the pro-immigrant orientation of major parties did not always prevail in Canadian politics; such an outcome was not pre-ordained, but rather constructed in part by the geography of demographic change in Canadian suburbs. Canada’s right-of-centre political parties changed their messaging on diversity issues in the late 1990s-early 2000s, coinciding with the increased ethnic diversity of politically important suburban ridings. The growth of Canada’s multiethnic suburbs produced population centres in unusual

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<sup>94</sup> Antoine Bilodeau, Luc Turgeon, and Ekrem Karakoc. 2012. “Small Worlds of Diversity: Views toward Immigration and Racial Minorities in Canadian Provinces,” *Canadian Journal of Political Science* 45(3), 579-605.

<sup>95</sup> Tom Flanagan. 2007. *Harper’s Team: Behind the Scenes in the Conservative Rise to Power* (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press), 280-81.

<sup>96</sup> Steven Seligman. 2016. “Explaining Canadian foreign policy toward Sri Lanka under the Harper government,” *International Journal: Canada’s Journal of Global Policy Analysis* 71(2), 249-265.

<sup>97</sup> Glen McGregor. 2007. “Many Jews Unsettled Over Harper Holiday Greetings,” *Ottawa Citizen*, October 8, 2007.

places, where right-of-centre parties typically dominate. As these areas became highly competitive electoral battlegrounds, this necessitated atypical responses from right-wing parties courting the new voters in these constituencies. Further, many immigrants were relegated to suburban areas due to competition for public resources in major urban areas. While this result has produced changes in political rhetoric, it remains to be seen whether policies to address underlying socioeconomic issues are forthcoming.