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Political Participation and Representation of South Asian and Chinese Canadians: Evidence from the Greater Toronto Area

Shuguang Wang

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Abstract

Using the Political Opportunity Structure thesis as the analytical framework, this paper examines the political participation and representation of the South Asians and the Chinese in the Great Toronto Area – the largest and the most diverse metropolitan region in Canada. The study found that the South Asians have achieved a higher level of representation in both the federal and provincial governments than the Chinese, but they are under-represented in municipal governments. The Chinese are consistently under-represented in all three levels of government with a 'democratic deficit'. The differences between the two groups can be explained by their variations in Canadian official language proficiency. The results also seem to support White's (2017) hypothesis that immigrants from autocratic countries of origin have a lower propensity to vote and stand for election.

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Introduction

The level of political participation and representation of ethnic minorities and immigrants is a strong indicator of two parallel occurrences: an incorporating and inclusive legal system of the state, and the degree of political integration of the ethnic minorities and immigrants in the host country. This paper examines the political participation and representation of the South Asians and the Chinese in Canada.

The South Asians and the Chinese are the two largest groups of ethnic minority in Canada. Together, they account for 62 percent of all Asian Canadians in the country. Despite their economic achievements and significant contributions to the making of multicultural cities and to the diverse social fabric in Canada (Wang and Wang, 2012; Wang and Du, 2013), their contributions are not always understood and appreciated, and their presence in Canada has unfortunately caused discomfort among some concerned Canadians. In its 2010 November issue, the Maclean's magazine featured an article with such a provocative title as "Too Asian?" Following up the widely held concern in the U.S. that many elite colleges and universities may have moved towards race-based admission policies, and some of them may even be redlining Asian students simply because there are too many of them on their campuses (Miller 2010), the two authors of the Maclean's article set out to speak to students, professors and administrators in a number of Canadian universities, to find out if they feel their campuses are also "too Asian". The article starts with an interview of two (presumably white) students, who told the authors that when some of their high school classmates "were deciding which university to go, they didn't even bother considering the University of Toronto", because "the only people from [their] school who went to University of Toronto were Asian". As to why some white students turn away from the University of Toronto, the University of British Columbia, and the University of Waterloo, the article cites some high school guidance counselors as saying that these top-tier universities enjoy international profiles in such disciplines as math, science and business, to which Asian students flock and in which they do well; whereas white students are more likely to choose universities and build their school lives around social interaction, athletics and self-actualization. When the two lifestyles collide, the result is separation rather than integration (Findlay and Köhler, 2010).

The discomfort with increased presence of Asians in Canada is not limited to university campus, as is evidenced in a web posting by a deeply concerned Canadian, "I just went to the Superstore; and out of the hundred or so people I saw, most of them were Asian. I only saw a small handful of whites, what's the deal? Are we destined to be a minority in our country? When was this decided? When did Canadians vote that they wanted their country to become multicultural and to evidently become a minority?" Another grumbling Canadian citizen is even blunter, "[in the past 20 years,] Asian immigrants have moved from a small fraction of Canada's population to a group that wants to claim power." The same Canadian citizen continues, "All Canadians should take note of the following: any country which does not protect its majority population through limitations on immigration invites the contempt of the immigrants who have entered its territory and who have become a majority in a part or whole of its territory" ("CBC Manager of Diversity: Vancouver is part of Asia", 2010).

Since the breakout of the Covid-19 pandemic in 2020, anti-Asian racism has resurfaced and exacerbated. The recent rise in anti-Asian racism has prompted wide mobilization of Asian Canadians and concerted actions to fight the discrimination and prejudice. Recognizing that anti-Asian racism still exits and is on the rise in various parts of the country, governments of all levels took the lead to promote awareness of the harms. For example, in alignment with the 2021 Asian Heritage Month (i.e., the month of May), the Office of the Federal Anti-Racism Secretariat sponsored a series of public discussions to commemorate the Asian Heritage Month, in a dedicated effort to shine a spotlight on current issues and reflect the lived experiences of peoples of Asian descent in Canada. One such discussion (held on May 26, 2021), with the theme of "Recognition, Resilience & Resolve", convenes members from the Asian communities to discuss

their bold programs and new initiatives, to be employed across the country and aimed at supporting communities and combatting anti-racism. In the same month, the Honourable Mary Ng, (Federal) Minister of Small Business, Export Promotion and International Trade, spoke at a forum sponsored by the Empire Club of Canada, to reflect on her own experience, share her perspectives, and discuss how all Canadians can come together to fight anti-Asian racism.

When a large group feels discrimination and exclusion, they are more likely to mobilize for political participation to voice their concern and be involved in decision making to make changes (Kuo et al, 2017). Therefore, political participation is also a form of solidarity and group defense against discrimination. Through active participation and representation, immigrants and ethnic minorities can bring their concerns to the attention of the local and national decision-making institutions. Conversely, the lack of representation can increase feelings of alienation among minority groups (Jones-Correa, 1998; Pantoja and Segura, 2003). Previous studies show that Asians in both the U.S. and Canada were historically passive and accommodating, exhibiting low levels of political participation and representation (Lien, 2001 & 2004; Diaz, 2012).

This paper examines the current state and extent of political participation and representation of the contemporary South Asians and Chinese in a Greater Toronto Area (GTA) case study. The GTA is the largest metropolitan area in Canada, consisting of the City of Toronto and the four surrounding region municipalities of York, Peel, Durham and Halton (see Figure 1). More South Asians and Chinese live in the GTA than in any other metropolitan areas in the country. The GTA also has a large number of electoral districts (i.e., ridings), more than most of the provinces, making it the most important center of electoral and political activities. This case study therefore allows for an in-depth analysis of the political participation and representation of the South Asians and Chinese at three levels of elective institutions – the federal, provincial, and municipal, filling a research gap in the existing literature.

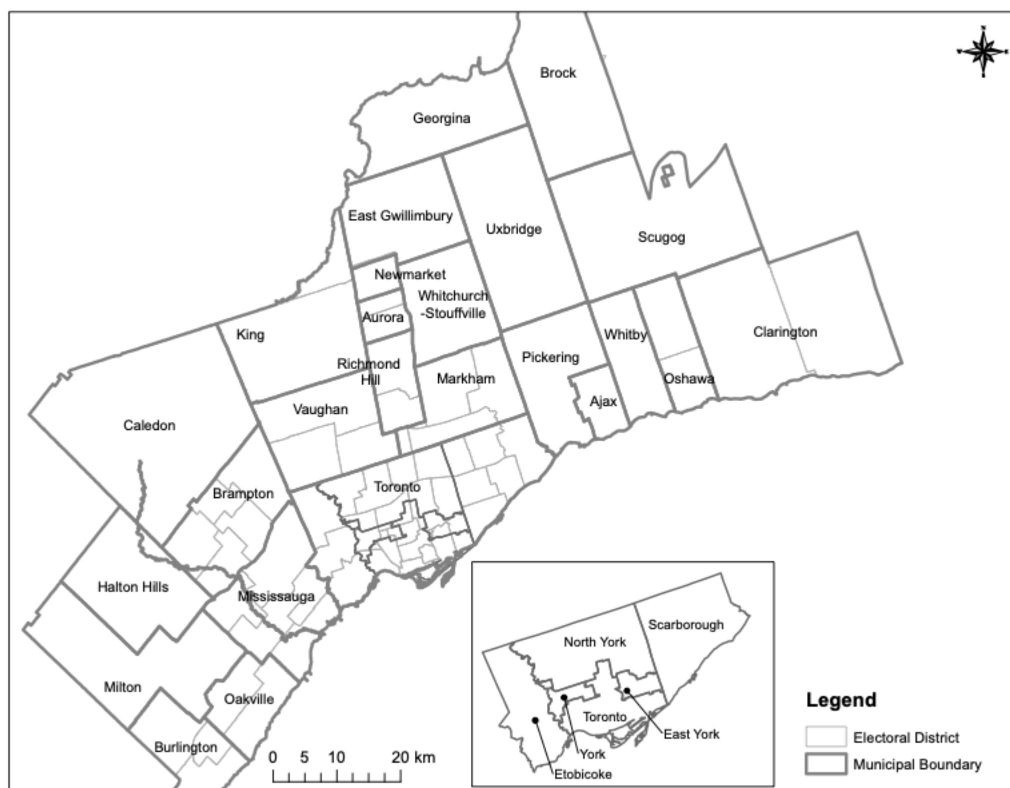

Figure 1 The Greater Toronto Area and component municipalities

There are four forms of political participation: (1) petition signing, civic demonstration, and protesting; (2) voting at elections; (3) standing for election, and (4) serving as an elected representative. In most immigrant-receiving countries (Canada included), the first form of participation (also known as non-conventional and extra-parliamentary forms of political participation) does not required citizenship; whereas the latter three forms require citizenship for eligibility. There are two forms of political representation: numeric (or descriptive), and substantive. The former is measured by the number of elected office holders, whereas the latter requires that the policy preferences of the electorate be translated into legislative behaviour (Phillips, 1995). Once elected, these representatives are expected to provide 'substantive representation' for ethnic minorities, speaking on their behalf and pursuing policies in their interest. Since elected officials do not speak for their own ethnic community only, the form of substantive representation is often difficult to measure. Because data on voting patterns and behavior are not available, this paper is limited to examining the participation of the South Asians and Chinese in standing for elections as candidates and the degree of success. In other words, the focus is on their numerical representation, instead of substantive representation.

This paper is divided into six sections. After this Introduction, Section 2 presents the theoretical framework that is adopted to guide the analysis. Sections 3 and 4 provide a narrative, in the Canadian context, of the two general factors and the associated explanatory variables that influence political participation and representation. Section 5 reports on the results of three elections (the 2019 federal election, the 2018 provincial election, and the 2018 municipal elections) and discusses their implications. The paper ends in Section 6 with a few concluding remarks.

The Analytical Framework

According to the Political Opportunity Structure thesis, two broad factors influence the level of political participation and success in representation of immigrants and ethnic minorities. These are (1) opportunities afforded by the political system of the state, and (2) collective identity and capacity of the immigrants and ethnic minorities to mobilize (Bird, et. al., 2010). Each factor includes several explanatory variables, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1 Factors and explanatory variables of political participation and representation

Factor	Explanatory variables
Opportunities afforded by the political system	• Rights of citizenship • Electoral rules • Openness of recruitment • Party competition and selection rules
Collective identity and capacity to mobilize	• Length of settlement • Group size and spatial concentration • Social and economic status • Institutional completeness and social network • Solidarity and leadership • Financial resources • Political and cultural background of the country of origin

Source: adapted from Bird et al., 2010 p13.

In most democratic countries, citizenship is required for voting at elections and running for public office. Citizenship not only offers immigrants the opportunity to transfer loyalty from one sovereign to another, but also grants immigrants with the rights to vote and run for election. With citizenship bestowed on them, immigrants adopt the democratic norms and values, and develop

a feeling of belong in the host country. More importantly, citizenship largely eliminates the risk that immigrants could face deportation for activities engaged in after the award of citizenship (DeSipio, 2011). Conversely, a lack of citizenship forms an institutional barrier that inhibits political participation (Masuoka et al., 2019).

Electoral rules that are accommodating and open are also necessary conditions. Such rules work favorably in incorporating immigrants and ethnic minorities both as voters and as running candidates. Recruitment of ethnic minority candidates also enhances political parties' appeal to diverse electorates and the overall legitimacy of the political system. The symbolism of more ethnic minorities from diverse backgrounds in political parties can have a powerful effect on minorities by showing that minorities belong in public debate and consultation (Pietsch, 2017). Accommodating electoral rules and openness of recruitment tend to be highly related to the nature and level of party competition. In a state with intense multi-party competition, political parties are more likely to reach out to immigrant communities, as they need to strive for greater legitimacy by more fully reflecting the heterogeneity of society. Candidates are typically selected by the local party membership. Relative to the U.S., money plays a much lesser role in Canadian elections because election expenses are heavily regulated and limited in Canada (Black, 2011).

A group's identity can translate into political cohesion and solidarity. Political participation becomes effective only when the size of an immigrant group reaches a critical mass. Yet, numbers alone do not guarantee that immigrants will be able to regularly elect the candidates of their choice, or to influence public policy to have their concerns addressed. Spatial concentration is also critically important. The effect of voting bloc is most salient in electoral districts with concentrations of ethnic minorities (DeSipio, 2011). A study by Pietsch (2017) reveals that one of the main reasons for the low representation of Asian migrants and ethnic minorities in the Australian Parliament is the lack of geographical concentration of Asian migrants and the declining importance of the ethnic vote.

Immigrants' socialization is distinctive from that of their native-born counterparts in that it occurs twice and in two different settings: first, the initial political socialization in their country of origin; then, the political re-socialization in the host country (White, 2017). Since it may take a long time for immigrants to undergo political re-socialization (i.e., re-learning), the length of settlement is relevant as well. For example, as immigrants spend more years in Canada, they acquire higher levels of Canadian official language ability and achieve higher social economic status. Accordingly, their participation rates decidedly converge toward those of the native born (Black, 2011). Studies in the U.S. found that first-generation immigrants lack explicit party preference, while the U.S.-born descendants of immigrants are more likely to seize these opportunities for elective office than are naturalized U.S. citizens (Leung, 2021).

Political participation and representation is also facilitated by the institutional completeness and social network of the immigrant and ethnic communities. Studies have shown that group-based ethnic organizing is an important means of political incorporation, and factors such as ethnic group consciousness and membership in organizations are correlated with high levels of political participation (Wong et al, 2005; Masuoka et al., 2019). In the form of solidarity and leadership, group-based resources are considered more important than individually-possessed socioeconomic resources (Diaz, 2012).

Finally, the level of political participation varies among immigrants from different countries of origin. Each national origin group may have experienced different forms of cultural and political socialization in their homeland (Lien 2001; Lien et al., 2004). Those from non-English speaking countries may have a longer cultural distance to overcome in acquiring the necessary re-socialization, and those from authoritarian regimes could be less likely to participate in democratic practices in Canada and the U.S. (Ramakrishnan, 2005). As for the country-of-origin effect, White (2017) poses two hypotheses for testing: H1: immigrants from autocratic countries of origin have a lower propensity to vote than those from democratic countries of origin; H2: immigrants from autocratic countries of origin who arrived in Canada as adults have a lower propensity to vote

than those from democratic countries of origin. For this GTA case study, these hypotheses can be extended to posit that immigrants from autocratic countries of origin have a lower propensity to stand for election; and similarly, immigrants from autocratic countries of origin who arrived in Canada as adults have a lower propensity to run for public office than those from democratic countries of origin. Homeland influence also varies between adult immigrants and young immigrants who receive most of their formal education in the host country (Nguyen and Garrand, 2009).

Evolution of an Open and Participatory Democratic System in Canada.

Canada is a country built by immigrants, but the early immigrants were mostly whites from Europe. For many years after the confederation in 1867, Canada was ruled by the white elites, who were also the law makers. Immigrants from other continents of the world, despite their various contributions to Canada’s nation building, were merely marginalized laborers with no or very limited citizenship rights.

Like in the U.S., Asians in Canada have faced a long history of racial discrimination. The most notorious examples were the Chinese Head Tax, the Order in Council passed on January 8, 1908 intending to restrict immigration from East India, and the Japanese internment during the Second World War. In 1885, immediately after the completion of the trans-Canada railway, the federal government of Canada passed the Chinese Immigration Act, which stipulated that, with almost no exceptions, every person of Chinese origin immigrating to Canada had to pay a fee of $50, called a head tax. The head tax was increased to $100 in 1900, and again in 1903 to $500, which was equal to two years' pay at that time. In 1914, a Japanese steamship (with the hull name of Komagata Maru) carrying 376 passengers from Punjab Province in East India arrived in Vancouver. Only 24 passengers were admitted to Canada; the other 352 were denied entry and forced to return to Calcutta – another incident in the early 20th century in which exclusion laws in Canada were used to exclude immigrants of Asian origin. Beginning in early 1942, the Canadian government detained and dispossessed more than 90 per cent (nearly 21,000) of the Japanese Canadians who lived in British Columbia at the time. They were detained under the War Measures Act and were interned for the rest of the Second World War (Robinson, 2017). Affected by the discriminative immigration laws, the number of Asian immigrants in Canada grew very slowly in the first half of the 20th century. Due to the small number of them and a lack of citizenship, the early Asian immigrants had no opportunity for political participation, let alone for representation. For example, at federal elections, Chinese and Indo-Canadians were not granted franchising until 1947, while Japanese Canadians were not permitted to vote until 1948 (Andrew et al., 2008).

The discriminatory practice of selecting immigrants based on ethnicity or nationality ended practically in 1967 with the introduction of the Points System. With this selection system, points were assigned to prospective applicants based on education, age, official language proficiency, and occupational skills (Green & Green, 1995; Troper, 1993; Knowles, 2007). Since then, immigrants from the traditional source countries in Europe decreased substantially, and those from other continents, particularly Asian, increased significantly. Between 1980 and 1995, one million immigrants landed in the Toronto Census Metropolitan Area, of which only 10 percent were from the traditional source countries of Western Europe, the U.S. and Australia; whereas 51 percent were from Asia (Wang and Lo, 2000). As a result, the Canadian voter base diversified considerably.

Multiculturalism became the official policy of the Canadian government in 1971, but the initial purpose of the policy was a narrow response to the growing francophone nationalism in the Province of Quebec. At the request of other ethnic groups, the policy was expanded and made more inclusive. In 1982, multiculturalism was affirmed in Section 27 of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, instructing that the Charter shall be interpreted in a manner consistent with the

preservation and enhancement of the multicultural heritage of Canadians (Berry 2020). In 1988, the Canadian Multiculturalism Act was passed, enshrining the policy into law as the commitment of the federal government to promoting and maintaining a diverse, multicultural society. The Act affirmed Canada's status as a multicultural nation and encouraged all government departments to take responsibility for the implementation and support of multicultural policies, specifically by encouraging diverse involvement in Canada's major institutions (Department of Canadian Heritage, 2001). It also led to the creation of the Department of Multiculturalism and Citizenship (superseded later by the Ministry of Canadian Heritage), which worked more specifically to address barriers to equal opportunity and integration. Indeed, the Act has provided further opportunities for the political engagement of the immigrants and ethnic minorities in Canada. By constitution, every citizen of Canada who is at least 18 years old has the right to vote in an election and run for public office. Relative to other immigrant receiving countries, Canada also has a shorter "probation period" for citizenship: that is, an immigrant is eligible for citizenship after three years of continuous presence in Canada from when he/she becomes a permanent resident. (In the U.S. and UK, it takes 5 years; in Australia, it takes 4 years.) Compared with the U.S., Canada actively promotes naturalization among the eligible immigrants and dedicates government resources to assist them in obtaining citizenship (Bloemraad, 2006).

Canada is also a country with multiple political parties. Five parties are represented in the House of Commons. These are the Liberal Party, the Conservative Party, the New Democratic Party (NDP), Bloc Québécois, and the Green Party. In most of Canada's history, the federal government has been formed by the two largest parties: the Liberal and the Conservative; while the provincial governments have been formed by the Liberal, the Conservative, and the NDP. Bloc Québécois is a regional party, existing in the Province of Quebec.

Canada follows the British Parliamentary system of government, in which citizens vote for a Member of Parliament. The party with the most votes gains control of the government and its leader wins the position of Prime Minister. In Canada, ethnic communities appear to have been critical sites for political mobilization as well as important wellsprings for political candidates (Bloemraad, 2005 & 2006) At the federal and provincial levels of election, most candidates are recruited by a political party, which nominates candidates in potentially winnable ridings, though nominated candidates must be elected by the registered party members in a particular riding (or electoral district). In such ridings, political parties often strategically present ethnic candidates to not only show their engagement in the minority citizens but also increase the responsiveness of the potential voters. Such deliberate choice is usually more obvious in a competitive party system and in ridings with concentration of ethnic minorities. Municipal elections are not party-based, so candidates do not need the endorsement of a political party.

Collective Identity and Capacity of the South Asian and Chinese Canadians

The Canadian census aggregates visible minority peoples into ten groups, based on self-reported ethnicity. These are South Asian, Chinese, Black, Filipino, Latin American, Arab, Southeast Asian, West Asian, Korean, and Japanese. Except for the group of Black, all the others are associated with a geography of origin outside of Canada. Except for the groups of Black and Latin American, all the others are associated with a geography of origin in Asia. The Asian visible minorities, as counted in the census, include both immigrants and the offspring of immigrants born in Canada, but the majority of them are first-generation immigrants who arrived in Canada after the 1980s.

According to the 2016 census, there are 5.6 million Asian visible minority persons living in Canada, accounting for 15 percent of the national population. They heavily concentrate in the major census metropolitan areas (CMA), with 40 percent of them in the Toronto CMA alone (see Table 2). The largest groups are the South Asians and the Chinese: together, they account for 62

percent of all Asians in Canada. Besides their sheer numbers, the contemporary Asian immigrants possess much greater financial and human capital than their predecessors and made significant imprints on the social, economic and cultural fabric of the Canadian cities (Wang and Wang, 2012; Wang and Du, 2013).

Table 2 Distribution of Asian Canadians in Canada and the Toronto CMA, 2016

Asians by visible minority	**Canada**		**Toronto CMA**	
	#	%*	#	%**
Chinese	1,577,060	27.8	631,050	40.0
South Asian	1,924,635	34.0	973,225	50.6
Filipino	780,125	13.8	254,475	32.6
Arab	523,235	9.2	105,610	20.2
Southeast Asian	313,260	5.5	83,535	26.7
West Asian	264,305	4.7	123,760	46.8
Korean	188,710	3.3	69,670	36.9
Japanese	92,920	1.6	20,655	22.2
Total Asian	5,664,250	100.0	2,261,980	39.9

*percentage of total Asians in Canada
**Toronto CMA share of the visible minority group in Canada

Even the South Asians and the Chinese are far from homogeneous. They consist of groups that differ in country of origin, language, culture, religion, and education. Table 3 shows the number of South Asian and Chinese immigrants who landed in the Toronto CMA between 1980 and 2010. They are disaggregated by country (or place) of origin to closely match the census definition of visible minorities. The South Asian immigrants are composed of those from four different countries: India, Pakistan, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka. The Chinese immigrants include those originating from mainland China, Hong Kong, Macao and Taiwan.

Table 3 Asian immigrants in the Toronto CMA, aggregated by categories of visible minority, 1980-2010

Asian immigrants	Number of Immigrants (all ages)	% of adult immigrants with Canadian official language ability (22 years and above)	% of adult immigrants with university degrees (22 years and above)
South Asian	**580298**	**69**	**47**
India	308,229	66	53
Pakistan	134,658	76	59
Bangladesh	32,242	84	69
Sri Lanka	105,169	68	10
Chinese	**456520**	**48**	**36**
Mainland China	254,150	37	47
Hong Kong	174,713	64	18
Macao	2,370	40	12
Taiwan	25,287	59	42

Source: Landed Immigrant Data System

Using a combination of age, Canadian official language ability and education qualifications as an organizational framework, Table 3 also shows the percentage of the adult immigrants (22 years of age and older at the time of landing) who came to Canada with the ability of speaking one or both of the Canadian official languages and with a university degree (bachelor or higher) – the two strong predictors of political participation as identified in political science literature. Clearly, the South Asians have higher levels of Canadian official language ability and education qualifications than the Chinese by large margins: 69% and 47% vs. 48% and 36%. Among the South Asian immigrants, those from Pakistan and Bangladesh exhibit the highest levels of Canadian official language ability and education qualifications; the Sri Lankan immigrants had the lowest level of education qualifications. Of the Chinese immigrants, those from Hong Kong possessed the highest level of English proficiency (64%), but the lowest level of education qualifications (18%). While those from mainland China have the highest level of education qualifications (47%), they have the lowest level of Canadian official language ability (37%), a factor that may affect their effective participation in Canadian politics.

Also relevant for this study is that all four South Asian countries have a democratic political system. Immigrants from these origins tend to have a certain degree of familiarity with civic participation in general elections. Those from mainland China, Hong Kong and Macao do not have previous exposures to general election. Taiwan introduced a democratic electoral system in the early 1990s, with which the leaders of Taiwan have since been elected directly by popular votes.

Within metropolitan areas, visible minorities tend to concentrate in certain municipalities, or in areas across adjacent municipalities, where they form ethnoburbs. Coined by Wei Li (1997 & 1998), the term ethnoburb refers to suburban clusters of ethnic residential areas and businesses in large metropolitan regions. They differ from the traditional ghettos and (the old type of) enclaves in many ways. While they may extend across several municipalities, their boundaries are fuzzy and largely arbitrary. They are also multi-ethnic communities, in which one ethnic minority group may have a significant concentration, but does not necessarily comprise a majority. Population plurality in the ethnoburbs, where two or more ethnic groups live in the same riding to form an effective majority, amplifies the influence of minorities in political election (Wang and Zhong, 2013).

Within the GTA, the Chinese heavily concentrate in a large and contiguous area across northeast Toronto, Markham and Richmond Hill, with Mississauga being a secondary concentration (see Figure 2). Of the South Asians, the Punjabi Sikhs congregate in Brampton and Mississauga, while Sri Lankan Tamils concentrate in eastern Toronto (mainly in Scarborough) (see Figure 3). The concentrations have reached such an extent that the community of Springdale in Brampton is nicknamed “Singhdale”; and the community of Agincourt in Scarborough is dubbed as “Asiancourt”. As Quadeer and Kumar (2003) explain, people of the same ethnic origin concentrate in the same geographic areas as a defense against discrimination, to support each other, to preserve cultural heritage, and even to join forces for political actions and lobbying.

The South Asians and the Chinese have also achieved high levels of institutional completeness. Within the GTA, the South Asians developed more than 50 Indo temples. These temples are not just places of worship for the South Asian immigrants, but are symbols of their new home in Canada (Porter, 2007). The Chinese have formed more than 100 associations (Wang and Du, 2013). The largest is the Chinese Professionals Association of Canada (CPAC) with 26,000 members. These modern associations are fundamentally different from the old-day clansmen organizations; they have a much larger ability to mobilize their members.

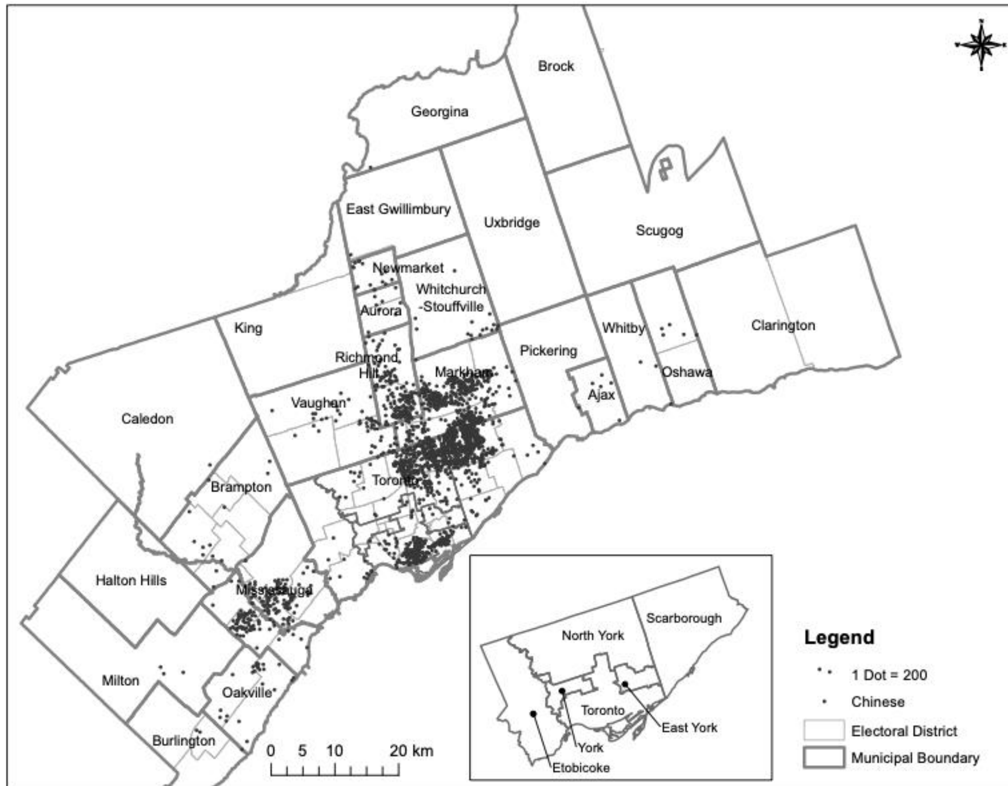

Figure 2 Distribution of Chinese Canadians in the Greater Toronto Area

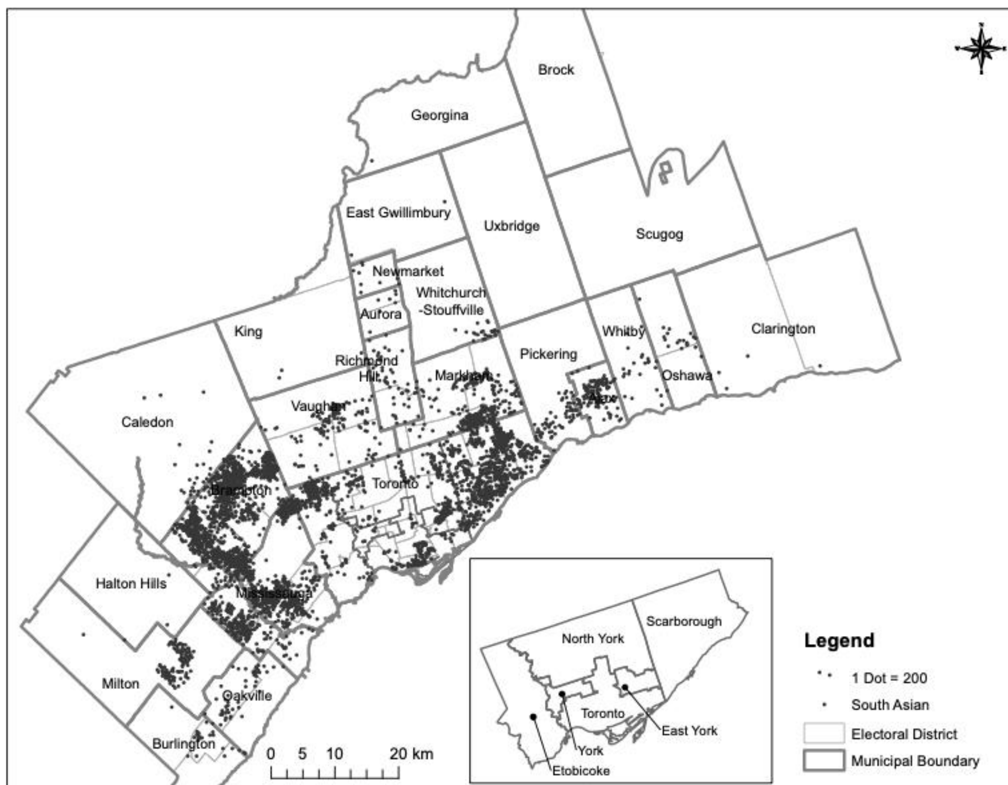

Figure 3 Distribution of South Asian Canadians in the Greater Toronto Area

In sum, these geographical concentrations imply that the South Asians and the Chinese began to achieve critical masses in some electoral districts to mobilize for political participation and have caught the attention of the political parties. Politicians now see the areas of Asian concentration as important sources of political capital, and party leaders often take time to attend ethnic festivals to solicit ethnic votes. Many mainstream incumbents and new candidates distribute their annual newsletters and campaign fliers to constituents in multiple languages. Some even give themselves a Chinese name for recognition (Wang and Du, 2013)

Political Participation and Representation of South Asians and Chinese

There are 338 federal electoral districts in Canada, of which 57 are located in the GTA. This is more than the number of districts in any other province except Ontario and Quebec. The Province of Ontario is divided into 124 electoral districts, 57 (or 46%) are in the GTA, which are the same as the federal electoral districts in size and boundaries. The number of federal and provincial electoral districts in the GTA signifies its importance for this case study. The South Asian and Chinese candidates are identified by their surname. The background information of most of them is collected from various websites. This section is divided into two parts. The first part reports the results of three most recent elections: the 2019 federal election, the 2018 provincial election, and the 2018 municipal election. The second part discusses the participation patterns and interprets the implications of the election results.

Election Results

During the 2019 federal election, 348 candidates ran for the 57 seats in the GTA. Of the 348 candidates, 73 (or 21%) were South Asians, but only 17 (or 5%) were Chinese (see Table 4). The South Asian candidates were running in 11 municipalities, but most of them were in Brampton (21), Mississauga (11) and Toronto (28). Within the City of Toronto, the majority were in Scarborough. These are all areas with high concentrations of South Asians (see Figure 3). The Chinese candidates were running in only two municipalities: Markham (6) and Toronto (11), which are also areas of Chinese concentration (see Figure 2).

As Table 5 shows, all major parties staged South Asian and Chinese candidates. In other words, the South Asian and Chinese candidates do not show clear partisanship: similar proportions of the South Asian candidates ran for the three major parties of Conservative, Liberal and NDP (23%, 22%, and 18%); so did the Chinese candidates (29%, 29% and 24%). Sixteen (or 22%) of the South Asian candidates were successful in the election and became a member of the parliament (MP); but only 4 (24%) of the Chinese candidates were successful. A proportionality index is also calculated to measure numerical representation. Such an index is calculated by taking the proportion of a particular demographic group within elected office and dividing that by the proportion of that demographic group in the general population of the GTA (Andrew et al., 2008). A score of 1.00 indicates perfect proportionality; a score of above 1.00 indicates over-representation; while a score of less than 1.00 indicates under-representation. As the index shows, the South Asians were over-represented in the 2019 federal election (with a score of 1.75), while the Chinese were under-presented (with a score of 0.64).

Table 4 South Asian and Chinese Candidates in the 2019 Federal Election and the 2018 Provincial Election, by municipality in the Greater Toronto Area

	Federal				Provincial		
	total	South Asian	Chinese		total	South Asian	Chinese
Ajax	7	2	0		7	0	0
Aurora	6	1	0		10	1	0
Barrie	10	0	0		16	0	0
Brampton	34	21	0		31	18	0
Burlington	5	0	0		7	0	0
Durham	5	0	0		5	0	0
Gwilimbury	6	0	0		5	0	0
Markham	23	2	6		25	3	1
Milton	5	1	0		6	3	0
Mississauga	36	11	0		41	9	0
Newmarket	7	0	0		9	0	0
Oakville	11	2	0		11	0	0
Oshawa	6	0	0		6	0	0
Pickering	5	1	0		9	1	0
Richmond Hill	6	2	0		5	0	1
Toronto	160	28	11		176	22	12
King-Vaughan	11	1	0		12	0	0
Whitby	5	1	0		6	0	0
GTA Total	348	73	17		387	57	14

During the 2018 provincial election, 387 candidates in the GTA put their name on ballots to run for the 57 positions of Member of Provincial Parliament (MPP), among which, 57 (or 15%) were South Asians, but only 14 (or 4%) were Chinese (see Table 4). The South Asian candidates were running in 7 municipalities. Once again, most of them were running in the Brampton ridings (18), Mississauga (9) and Toronto (22). Within the City of Toronto, most of them were in Scarborough – the same areas of high concentrations of South Asians depicted in Figure 3. One Sri Lankan immigrant (Vijay Thanigasalam) won the Scarborough-Rouge Park riding for the Conservative Party. The Chinese candidates were running in only three municipalities: Markham (6), Richmond Hill (1), and Toronto (12) – the same areas of Chinese concentration as shown in Figure 2.

All major provincial parties staged South Asian candidates: 25% for the Conservatives, 29% for the Liberal, and 24% for NDP. However, more Chinese candidates were recruited by the Conservatives (43%) than the other parties: 28% for the Liberal, and no candidate ran for the NDP. This is a clear difference from the participation pattern in the 2019 federal election. There were also more South Asian candidates winning the provincial election and became a MPP than the Chinese: 12 (or 21%) vs. 5 (9%). Like in the 2019 federal election, and the South Asians are over-represented (with proportionality index being 1.31) and the Chinese were under-represented with proportionality index of 0.82 (see Table 5).

Table 5 South Asian and Chinese candidates in the 2019 federal election and the 2018 provincial election, by party affiliation

Party	federal			provincial		
	All party	South Asian	Chinese	All party	South Asian	Chinese
Conservative	57 (16%)	17 (23%)	5 (29%)	57 (15%)	14 (25%)	6 (43%)
Green	57 (16%)	5 (7%)	1 (6%)	57 (15%)	5 (9%)	1 (7%)
Liberal	57 (16%)	16 (22%)	5 (29%)	57 (15%)	15 (26%)	4 (28%)
New Democratic	56 (16%)	13 (18%)	4 (24%)	57 (15%)	14 (25%)	0 (0%)
others	121 (35%)	22 (30%)	2 (12%)	159 (40%)	9 (15%)	3 (21%)
total candidates	348 (100%)	73 (100%)	17 (100%)	387 (100%)	57 (100%)	14 (100%)
Total elected	57	16 (28%)	4 (7%)	57	12 (21%)	5 (9%)
Proportionality index		1.75	0.64		1.31	0.82

To reiterate, municipal elections in Canada are not tied to party-affiliation, and all candidates run as independents without a party label. So, registration threshold is lower. During the 2018 municipal elections in the GTA, a total of 2,084 candidates registered to run for the 227 positions of mayor, regional councilor, and municipal councilor (see Table 6). Among those candidates, 246 (or 12%) were South Asians, but only 102 (or 5%) were Chinese. Again, more South Asian candidates were running in wards in Peel Region than in any other region, and almost all of them were in Brampton (35) and Mississauga (19). It is also worth mentioning that another Tamil immigrant from Sri Lanka got elected in Scarborough-Rouge Park (Ward 25) – the same riding where Vijay Thanigasalam was elected a member of provincial parliament (MPP) in the same year. In comparison, only two Chinese were running in Peel Region: both in Mississauga, but none in Brampton. Instead, the Chinese candidates were heavily based in York Region and the City of Toronto: with 35 in the former (particularly in Markham and Richmond Hill) and 10 in the latter. The Chinese candidates seem to be more successful than the South Asians in municipal elections: with 10 of the 102 candidates (nearly 10%) winning a seat, compared with only five South Asian candidates (a mere 2%) winning. Both South Asians and the Chinese were poorly represented in municipal governments of the GTA, with proportionality index of 0.13 and 0.40, respectively (see Table 6).

Discussion

The two largest groups of visible minority in the GTA, and also in Canada, have demonstrated a high level of enthusiasm in political participation, and they have achieved a certain level of success. Their group size and spatial concentration have made them a powerful, albeit localized, political force and a new source of political capital. Most South Asian and Chinese candidates use the communities with a concentration of co-ethnics as their bases for participation.

Table 6 South Asian and Chinese candidates in the 2018 municipal elections in the Greater Toronto Area

Region *municipality*	Candidate			Elected		
	Total	South Asian	Chinese	Total	South Asian	Chinese
Durham	**221**	**7**	**2**	**57**	**0**	**0**
Halton	**141**	**20**	**2**	**37**	**2**	**0**
Peel	**178**	**55**	**2**	**30**	**2**	**0**
Brampton	*76*	*35*	*0*			
Caledon	*27*	*1*	*0*			
Mississauga	*75*	*19*	*2*			
Toronto	**242**	**25**	**10**	**26**	**1**	**3**
Etobicoke- York	*43*	*4*	*0*			
North York	*54*	*1*	*4*			
Scarborough	*59*	*18*	*4*			
Toronto-East York	*86*	*2*	*2*			
York	**260**	**16**	**35**	**77**	**0**	**7**
Markham	*77*	*9*	*28*			
Richmond Hill	*35*	*2*	*5*			
Vaughan	*43*	*3*	*1*			
Rest of York	*105*	*2*	*1*			
GTA Total	**2,084**	**246**	**102**	**227**	**5**	**10**
Proportionality index					**0.13**	**0.40**

All major parties now recruit and present South Asian and Chinese candidates strategically in ridings with concentrations of South Asians and Chinese, to increase not only the representativeness but also chances of winning the seats there. For example, in the three ridings of Brampton Center, Brampton East, and Brampton South, all three major parties – Liberal, PC and NDP – presented South Asians candidates in the 2018 provincial election. Similar party strategies are seen in staging Chinese candidates in Markham, Richmond Hill and Toronto. In the Markham-Thornhill riding, an ethnic Tamil candidate complained about her own party – the Liberal Party – for favoring a Chinese candidate Mary Ng, a former senior staffer to Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, who did not even live in the riding (Smith, 2017).

Understandably, more ethnic candidates run at municipal elections than the federal and provincial elections, due to the many more available positions; but it is also because of the lower registration threshold, as candidacy does not require party endorsement and membership approval. To stand for the federal and provincial elections, personal qualifications and leadership image of a candidate is closely scrutinized during the selection and nomination process. These include a good level of social capital and campaign skills, such as the use of persuasive language to answer community questions during the campaign (Zha, 2009).

Ethnic candidates have the advantage of using their mother tongue to connect with the co-ethnic voters and disseminate campaign messages. It is commonly seen that Chinese candidates distribute bilingual campaign fliers and use Chinese language (either Cantonese or mandarin, or both) to speak to Chinese voters during door-to-door visits. Besides their ethnicity, the nominees must also share the ideology of the party that they affiliate with, and be able to communicate the ideology clearly to the electorates. Once elected, they will represent the

interests of all the constituents, not just those of their co-ethnics. Therefore, a high level of English proficiency is required.

This study also shows that the South Asians are more active and more successful than the Chinese in political participation. This is reflected in both the number of candidates standing for elections and the representation in the three levels of elective institutions. Furthermore, the South Asians seem to be more interested in serving in high levels of government, which make decisions and legislations that affect larger geographies and large population. As to why South Asian candidates have been more successful than their Chinese counterparts, Siemiatycki and Matheson (2005) explain that South Asians come from countries of multiple political parties and regular elections; they are also more likely to arrive in Canada with facility in English.

Nonetheless, the Chinese have been making concerted efforts in group mobilizing. In 2006, a nationwide organization – the Chinese Canadian Civic Alliance – was established. The main purpose of the alliance is to encourage participation among the Chinese Canadians in elections, through which to voice and amplify community concerns, such as immigration for family unification, settlement support and integration, and foreign education credential recognition.

Chinese representation in Canadian politics is not new. The first Canadian of Chinese origin Douglas Jung, a lawyer in Vancouver, was elected to the House of Commons in 1957. In the past, most Chinese candidates were born in Hong Kong, or were born in mainland China but came to Canada at an early age. In the recent decade, mainland Chinese candidates have emerged and achieved success. In the 2015 federal election, Geng Tan, a mainland Chinese immigrant who came to Canada in 1998 as an international student and obtained a doctoral degree from the University of Toronto, was elected a Liberal MP with 51 percent of popular votes in the riding of Don Valley North in North York of Toronto, where there is a considerable concentration of ethnic Chinese. Han Dong, also a mainland Chinese immigrant, who came to Canada at the age of 13 and received high school and university education in Canada, was elected a MPP in the 2015 provincial election representing the Trinity-Spadina riding in the central-city of Toronto (which includes the central-city Chinatown). In the 2018 provincial election, Dong was unsuccessful in seeking re-election, mainly because the incumbent Liberal provincial government lost the confidence of the voters. In the 2019 federal election, Dong was enlisted and parachuted by the Liberal Party to run in the Don Valley North riding vacated by Geng Tan (who for personal reasons decided not to seek re-election), where Dong easily won the seat. In the exact same riding, another mainland Chinese immigrant, Vincent Ke, ran in the 2018 provincial election for the Conservative Party and won the seat by beating a seasoned politician, Shelley Carroll, who served as a city councilor for many years. This is a testimony that the Don Valley North riding has a strong voter base to consistently elect ethnic Chinese representatives. Interestingly, Ke actually lives in Brampton, not in Toronto; but obviously, Brampton does not have the required voter base to support Ke's candidacy.

In the federal government, a South Asian Canadian, Harjit Sajjan, recently served as the Minister of National Defense, and is now the Minister of International Development (he is elected from Vancouver, not from the GTA); a Chinese Canadian, Mary Ng (representing Markham-Thornhill of the GTA), has been serving as the Minister of Small Business, Export Promotion and International Trade. In the provincial government, a South Asian Canadian, Prabmeet Singh Sarkaria (representing Brampton South in the GTA) currently serves as the President of the Treasury Board. It is worth noting that so far, no South Asian nor Chinese candidate has been elected mayor in any of the GTA municipalities, large or small. During the 2018 municipal elections, three South Asians were running for mayor in Brampton, but the highest vote they received was 5 percent. Two South Asians were running for mayor in Mississauga, but neither got more than 2 percent of the popular votes. Two Chinese candidates were running for mayor in Markham; one of them – Steven Chen – was able to garner 16 percent of the total votes, but he was placed a distant second. Before Steven Chen, Olivia Chow, a seasoned Chinese Canadian

politician, who served as a city councilor between 1991 and 2006 and a federal MP from 2006 to 2014, ran in the 2014 Toronto mayoral election, placing only the third.

The fact that major parties in Canada run ethnic candidates in corresponding ridings with higher proportions of ethnic voters is a result of the psyche of group identification assumption that voters from ethnic groups may unconsciously or consciously choose "one of their own people" to support (Zha, 2009).Yet, this is not always the case. While bloc vote effect does play an important role, there is no clear evidence that today's ethnic voters have strong partisan affiliation; therefore, they may not vote in solidarity for the same candidate, especially where there are more than one candidate of the same ethnicity. For example, in Ward 5 in Markham, five Chinese candidates ran for city councilor in the 2018 municipal election, but none of them was elected. The successful candidate was actually a non-Chinese who won the seat with only 17% of the popular votes. This implies that in ridings with multiple candidates of the same ethnicity, there is often no single voice for the entire community, and ethnic votes can be split, reducing the bloc vote effect.

Concluding Remarks

Active political participation of immigrants and ethnic minorities is a higher level of incorporation than economic integration for two reasons. First, political participation offers individuals the opportunity to influence the outcomes of the decision-making processes; thereby, these same individuals can defend their interests or the interests of groups to which they belong. Second, participation in commonly binding decisions has a 'socialization' function in terms of enriching citizens' feelings of belonging and shared identities (Zapata-Barrero et al., 2013). As a commentator at the public discussion (sponsored by the Office of the Federal Anti-Racism Secretariat on May 26, 2021) articulates, a lack of fair representation in electoral institutions itself is a form of exclusion.

For many years in the past, Asian immigrants in both the U.S. and Canada had extremely low overall rates of voter registration (Ong and Nakanishi, 1996; Lien 1997 & 2004). This has clearly been changing. As evidenced in this GTA case study, the South Asians and Chinese have made big strides and have now become major political forces.

The GTA case study confirms the influence of the two general factors and many of the explanatory variables stipulated in the Political Opportunity Structure thesis. After a long and progressive journey of political reform, Canada now has a legislative framework that provides opportunities for political participation and accommodates visible minority representation. The size and spatial concentrations of ethnic minorities represent considerable electoral power and often enable them to gain official representation within the institutional framework of urban politics (Knox and Pinch, 2000). Within the GTA, increased political participation and representation of peoples of color in mainstream politics have taken place in the areas of ethnoburbs, which tend to have a larger pool of minority candidates. As is found in a study by Siemiatycki and Matheson (2005), the most significant electoral gains by immigrant and visible minority candidates are now occurring not in the central city, but in suburban constituencies. They therefore conclude that the suburbs may lead the way in promoting greater electoral equity in Canada. Given their group size, the South Asians and the Chinese in many suburban ridings in the GTA are no longer marginalized groups of citizens.

The proportionality index suggests that the South Asians in the GTA have achieved a higher level of representation in both the federal and provincial governments, but they are under-represented in municipal governments. The Chinese are consistently under-represented in all three levels of government with a 'democratic deficit'. The differences between the two groups can be well explained by their variations in Canadian official language proficiency. These differences also seem to support the hypothesis, as posed by White (2017), that immigrants from autocratic countries of origin have a lower propensity to vote and stand for election. This is especially true for adult immigrants.

Given the limited space of the working paper, this case study examines the results of only one (and the most recent) election for each of the three levels of government in one metropolitan area in Canada. While the South Asians and the Chinese have become more enthusiastic and active in political participation, more can be achieved in their political representation, especially the Chinese group. They should also strive to increase their level of representation beyond the small number of ethnoburbs. This requires further efforts to be made jointly by both the South and Chinese communities and the political parties. Their success will encourage other groups of minorities to follow.

As a final note, a high level of political participation and representation should not be viewed as a force of weakening Canada's ability to control its border and people; instead, it should be seen as a high level of incorporation and loyalty on the part of the immigrants and their co-ethnics.

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