



Western

Centre for Research on
Migration and Ethnic Relations

**Winter Colloquium
Series 2019**

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“The state and immigrant civil society: friends or foes?”

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In democracy, governments are formally in charge of making decisions. However, all those affected by these decisions should be able to influence governments' actions, and punish them when policy decisions do not align with their preferences. Because there is strength in numbers, groups are better able to keep democratic governments accountable than single individuals. A crucial question for democracy is, thus, whether governments can enhance democratic accountability by helping individuals solve the problem of collective action.

Historical determinists argue that states neither help nor hinder collective action, which is rooted in stable cultural repertoires. Institutionalists contend that public policies lead to a thriving civil society by providing organizations with financial and organizational resources. Critics of institutions, by contrast, claim that, because public policy tends to social problems that would be otherwise left to private actors' initiative, government stifles civil society. In this paper I build on these theoretical comparisons by identifying and then testing five causal mechanisms about the process through which states shape civil society. Three and two of these mechanisms focus respectively on the size and composition of civil society.

Based on a focused comparison of immigrant civil society in Toronto (Canada) and in Silicon Valley (United States), this paper uses original archival and survey data to test across these theories and their associated mechanisms. The findings show that overall size of immigrant civil society is similar where government supports civic organizations (Toronto) and where private actors do (Silicon Valley). However, immigrant civil society is more inclusive of the worse-off in Toronto. The differences in types, and membership, of civil society organizations we observe across different policy contexts have important implications for participatory inequalities in advanced democracies.

Thursday, February 28, 2019

4:00 pm, SSC 6210

Refreshments at 3:30pm in SSC 6256

All Welcome!

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