

Municipal Voter Turn-Out In Ontario

An Analysis of Community Theories and Their  
Application to a Prescription for Higher Voter Turn-Out in Municipal Elections

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**Abstract**

*“whether you are a newcomer to the country or your family has been in Canada for generations, there are few substantive responsibilities associated with belonging to one of the world’s great democracies. We tolerate turnout rates in federal elections of less than two-thirds of eligible voters and less than a quarter of first-time voters. Similarly, although we are quick to describe ourselves as a caring society, only a small percentage of us are responsible for most formal volunteer work and civic-minded activity, such as joining community associations, attending a political rally or writing to a Member of Parliament. Not only are the duties of citizenship almost ethereal, but the lack of meaningful civic commitment and engagement suggests many of us have a deep-seated apathy towards the very kinds of democratic values and practices that previous generations thought were fundamental to sustaining our collective way of life”.*

*Rudyard Griffiths (2009) . Who We Are. A Citizen’s Manifesto. P.18*

Community and community engagement are important to democracy and to the sustainability of Canadian society. The observed low and declining level of voter turn-out over the past three decades is a concern, both as a potential indicator of loss of confidence in democratically elected government and as an indicator of weak levels of civic engagement. Civic engagement is generally in decline across North America, and volunteerism is trending lower as is voter turn-out. In this research paper I examine voter turn-out as a proxy for civic engagement, and apply the analytical lenses of “Social Capital Theory” (as postulated by Putnam) and “Creative Capital Theory” (as postulated by Florida) to testing critical assumptions regarding the impact of size (population), diversity (immigration), creativity (education and employment), and mobility (length of residency) on voter turn-out in a sample of 30 Ontario municipalities. In my conclusion, I offer several prescriptive initiatives for increasing voter turn-out and fostering increased levels of civic engagement.

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## **1. Introduction. Community Matters**

What is a community? How do we know a community exists? Is it a series of addresses or a place name for a part of town that everyone is familiar with? The works of early anthropologists such as Margaret Mead made reference to such terms as 'society', 'culture' or 'peoples' more frequently than 'community'. According to Vered Amit, "community appears to have obtained greater analytical prominence when anthropologists began to shift their research to cities...when they converged onto the terrain of complex societies they had hitherto been consigned to sociologists" (Amit, 2002, p. 2). Therefore the emergence of cities or municipalities necessitated that new descriptors of society be adopted, and terms like 'community' are now more frequently relevant to analyzing urban life.

Today, the term 'community' is frequently used in everyday conversation, in the media, and certainly in academic papers. While it is apparently well understood in everyday conversation, "when imported into the discourse of social science however [it] causes immense problems" (Cohen, 1985, p.11). We may think that when we speak about 'community' we are referring to a concept that is well understood and simple, but this is an incorrect assumption. While the term 'community' is well known, its definition remains complex and oftentimes presents a problem in achieving consensus. What does 'community' really mean and why is it particularly germane to developing an understanding of the challenges of low voter turn-out? A definition developed by George Wood and Juan Judikis suggests that 'community' can be defined as a group of people "who have a sense of common purpose and or interests for which they assume mutual responsibility, who acknowledge their interconnectedness, who respect the individual differences among members, and who commit themselves to the well-being of each other and the integrity and well-being of the group" (Wood and Judikis, 2002, p.12).

Community engagement and a civil society are behaviors that are manifestations of this definition. Likewise, the concepts of well-being and inter-connectedness are inherent to the definition. It therefore follows that 'place' and 'happiness' (or self-fulfillment) are important factors in the consideration of community, and importantly in the decision to become engaged in community. "In *Stumbling on Happiness*, Harvard psychologist Daniel Gilbert writes that 'most of us make at least three important decisions in our lives: where to live, what to do, and with whom to do it'...Gilbert and other happiness researchers have mainly ignored the 'where'. But it's clear that many elements of a happy life – how much we make, how much we learn, how healthy we are, how stressful we feel, the job opportunities we have, and the people we meet – are in large part determined by where we live" (Florida, 2008, p. 148).

"Place plays a fundamental role in our endeavours to be happy. In many ways, it is the precursor to everything else" (Florida. 2008. p.148). The personal decision to move, to remain, or to relocate from a community is a complex one. This decision is sometimes dictated by economic circumstance, but is also

potentially motivated by personal needs, opportunities, values, and also the reputation and stature of the community. This is illustrated by a list of decision factors published by Richard Florida in his book *Who's Your City?*

**Exhibit One. Decision Factors in Choosing Place to Live**

<b>5 KEY DECISION FACTORS</b>	<b>DESCRIPTION</b>
Job and Career Prospects	Many kinds of jobs cluster in particular locations. Look at how location matches up with your short-run and long-run career goals.
Proximity to Family and Friends	How far away is too far away for you?
Lifestyle Needs	What kind of place best suits the lifestyle that brings you true joy?
Personality Type	How well does the place you choose match your personality?
Life-stage	Make sure the place you choose best fits your particular life-stage.

Source: Florida (2008), p. 289.

It would be wrong to assume that an individual is limited to membership in one community at any one time. To the contrary, it is easily observed that most, if not all people, are members of multiple communities based on their work (e.g., professional or vocation community), their interests (e.g., hobbist community), their affinity for professional sports (e.g., ‘Leaf Nation’), their political leanings (e.g., party membership), and/or their religious affiliation, etc. This observation is validated by ‘multiple communities theory’ which proposes that every adult holds memberships in several communities simultaneously and must balance the influences and relationships (sometime harmonious, sometime conflicting) of these communities. There are many categories of community, as indicated in the following chart.

**Exhibit Two. The Five Types of Community**

<b>Community Category</b>	<b>Descriptor</b>	<b>Motivators</b>
Nuclear	Immediate family, extended family, surrogate family, or any group functioning as family; legally, financially and/or emotionally interdependent on an ongoing basis; having an intimacy not found in other categories.	Need for intimacy/bonding

Tribal	Racial, ethnic, gender, or social class group; membership comes from physiological or lifetime social characteristics held in common.	Physiological/sociological characteristics
Collaborative	Peer groups, collectives, associations, public/private places of employment, collegial groups, political parties, special interest groups (civic, social, or fraternal), etc.; having inter-relationships among members based upon common goals, purposes, interests, or circumstances. Collaboration is the ultimate reason for existing.	Common, agreed-upon purposes and goals
Geopolitical	Political, educational, social, or economic entities defined by geographic boundaries.	Immediate and ongoing basic living needs
Life	The sum total of family, friends, acquaintances, and other significant individual directly affecting the member (subject) across a lifetime.	A holistic sense of who one is and what purpose(s) one's life serves

Source: Wood and Judikis (2002), p. 47.

Despite the recognition that ‘geopolitical community’ remains a category of community (as per Exhibit Two), the notion that ‘community’ is rooted in place and defined by political or physical boundaries seems dated and blind to the growth of on-line and virtual communities. It is observed by anthropologists and sociologists alike, “that community remains under threat of extinction from the unrelenting forces of industrialization, urbanization, and westernization” (Dyck, 2002, p.106). Historically long-standing centres of farming, mining, finance, and even scholarship are under siege by globalization. Amit argues that whereas ‘community’ may once have been understood as categorizing a scalar or spatial phenomenon, it has now shifted toward describing an idea or quality of sociality that may be better understood as a ‘collective identity’ (Amit, 2002, p. 3). In other words, the interaction among people (in speech and in action) is the new basis for defining and understanding ‘community’; as opposed to seeking to use addresses, place/location, and size as the defining criteria. The increased mobility of society (particularly in immigration centres and employment growth centres such as the Greater Toronto Area), the ascendancy of the nuclear family and of non-family households, and the stress and segmentation generated by work related demands are all forces in the de-stabalization of traditional communities. This de-stabalization is accompanied by a flow of individuals across and between multiple communities.

The fluidity of ‘community’ is well understood by Studdert, and he asserts that it is always the outcome of sociality as an action, and should therefore be considered a verb and not a noun. The five elements of Studdert’s definition of ‘common sense community’ include:

**Exhibit Three: Elements of Common Sense Community**

- |  |
|--|
| <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Multiplicity</li><li>2. Hybridity</li><li>3. Action, not thought as creative of community</li><li>4. Communality as something constructed by some form of conscious or unconscious agreement, and</li><li>5. Community as something more than the individual.</li></ol> |
|--|

Source: Studdert, 2005, p. 3.

Rapidly growing suburban municipalities in the Greater Toronto Area (GTA) are places characterized by high mobility (residents tend to move once every 4-5 years), significant diversity (over 50% of residents of the City of Toronto and of the Town of Markham are foreign-born), and declining rates of voter turnout. Studdert’s definition of ‘common sense community’ is an excellent reflection of contemporary life in a rapidly growing and culturally diverse, ambitious municipality like Markham. Residents live multiple existences (e.g., work, family, culture, etc.), experience hybrid phenomena (e.g., multi-culturalism in: food, fashion, entertainment, family, etc.), have access to community initiatives (e.g., Character Community, diverse business and cultural associations, community events and celebrations, etc.), demonstrate communality (e.g., celebration of multi-cultural diversity, fundraise for cross-cultural, disaster-relief, and religious causes, etc.), and many GTA residents identify themselves by their global address (‘I live in Toronto’ as opposed to referring to a local neighbourhood or to their precise municipality).

In the research conducted by Richard Florida, place still matters but it is now characterized by mega regions and economic communities that are dynamic and feature high rates of social and physical mobility. “In today’s spiky world, social cohesion is eroding within countries and across them... Only by understanding that the spiky nature of our world’s economy is one beset by growing disparities and tensions can we begin to address them. Managing the disparities between peaks and valleys worldwide –

raising the valleys without sacrificing the peaks – is surely the greatest political challenge of our time.” (Florida. 2008, p. 38)

In a rapidly growing community where residents are new to the country, and even newer to their immediate municipality (e.g., their municipality is Toronto, but their immediate municipality is Leaside or Willowdale), the development of community pride and a sense of belonging takes time to develop and sometimes may exceed a generation. The way in which new residents become engaged in their new home can inspire affinity to community based on services received, travel to work and shopping, and/or the location of social and cultural resources. Therefore place is a function not only of where you sleep or work, but where you live. The ease and manner in which local information is made available and the strength of a community’s reputation or ‘brand’ (reputation) are also of great importance to the creation of community.

The challenge to developing strong and vibrant municipalities in which the population feels a pride of belonging and a shared destiny cannot be addressed by asserting territorial sovereignty, or through the ballot box. The assault on national and local/municipal structure by the forces of globalization, and the resulting loss of integrity on structural boundaries, makes it apparent that ‘community’ must be “asserted or imagined symbolically rather than structurally” (Amit, 2002, p. 10). There is a school of thought that asserts that ‘community’ can be a key contributor to economic success. In his work on social capital and trust, Francis Fukuyama suggests that strong bonds that encourage people to trust one another contribute to economic success. “The key point here is that community is portrayed as not only compatible with economic logic but also fundamental to the formation of a culture in which capitalist economies can flourish” (Little, 2002, p. 103). Following Fukuyama’s theory, developing community by inspiring community members to play a positive and active role in community life will enhance the success of the active community members and also contribute to the success of the broader community. Voting and political engagement are two examples of how individuals can become engaged and contribute to their community.

The negative implications of a loss of 'community' is challenging, if not actually threatening. Studdert eloquently writes that "in 2005 our public life at every level is increasingly distinguished by an alienating, empty, legalized formality, while our sociality is contained within the narrow, fragmented dictates of our own desires and the contrived sociality of the market and consumer choice. Relationships of any sort are increasingly mediated, defined and expressed solely through the instrumental reasoning of rewards and personal satisfactions" (Studdert, 2005, p.4). To build a strong and cohesive community and municipality it is essential that residents and citizens be inspired to play some positive role in public life and contribute to the community's well-being through volunteering, engagement, and other activities.

"Proponents of citizen participation often claim that it allows individuals to more fully develop as authentic citizens. That is, participation itself provides a learning experience about the needs and circumstances of others and about the qualities of leadership, compromise, and tolerance that are necessary in a democratic society. In the process, participation replaces the alienation of the disconnected individual with a sense of empowerment" (Sharp, 2003, p. 69).

At a time when violence and crime are of growing concern to society as a whole, and to leaders in government in particular, the role and function of 'community' in our lives can play a very positive role. Educator Robert Starratt has stated that "participation in the life of the community teaches individuals how to think about their own behavior in terms of the larger common good" (Wood and Judikis, 2002, p. 1). Without a strong sense of 'community' and without any method for understanding ourselves as members of a community, "our ability to change the public world is also diminished, and increasingly the world 'out there' appears as an object beyond our ability or even imagination, to challenge, change or engage within any meaningful or positive manner" (Studdert, 2005, p. 5). It is therefore important to impress upon citizens that voting in municipal elections is both meaningful in achieving their personal objectives and effective in securing a quality of life and community that are reflective of their needs and expectations.

In a fast-growing, highly mobile society we can anticipate the emergence of a variety of community types. The definition of community as being rooted in a sense of long-standing belonging, a pride in place, a recognition of boundary and privilege, and the strength of emotionally charged and personal

relationships is typical of historically stable, non-mobile societies. They may not be reflective of contemporary life in the dynamic and multi-cultural municipal landscape that exists in Southern Ontario. The motivations of many of the new residents in the GTA may vary, but a percentage may be described as being motivated by economic advantage and the quality of investment as primary reasons. Their commitment is primarily to securing a well-paying job and maximizing their investment (generally in a home, condo, or real estate), and they may not be committed to participating or to remain in the municipality beyond the time necessary to optimize their real estate investment.

According to Florida, “Where we live is increasingly important to every facet of our lives. We owe it to ourselves to think about the relationship between place and economic future, as well as our personal happiness, in a more systematic – if different – way” (Florida, 2008, p.4). The results of the “Place and Happiness Survey” conducted by Dr. Florida and the Gallup Organization demonstrates that economic considerations are only one of four major groups of factors that contribute to a person’s sense of well-being.

**Exhibit Four. Key Results from Place and Happiness Survey**

FACTOR	MEAN RANKING	Correlation			
		OVERALL PLACE HAPPINESS	CITY SATISFACTION	RECOMMEND TO FRIENDS AND FAMILY	OUTLOOK FOR THE FUTURE
<b>Aesthetics and Lifestyle</b>	<b>3.65</b>	<b>0.622</b>	<b>0.581</b>	<b>0.579</b>	<b>0.503</b>
Aesthetics	3.88	0.560	0.534	0.510	0.456
Beauty & physical setting	4.00	0.499	0.475	0.463	0.395
Outdoor parks, playgrounds, trails	4.06	0.445	0.424	0.413	0.355
Air quality	3.76	0.389	0.371	0.341	0.333
Climate	3.70	0.373	0.358	0.340	0.300
Lifestyle	3.35	0.457	0.412	0.438	0.367
Meet new people, make friends	3.65	0.528	0.486	0.500	0.422
Cultural offerings	3.38	0.342	0.309	0.329	0.272
Nightlife	3.08	0.289	0.254	0.281	0.233
<b>Basic Services</b>	<b>3.46</b>	<b>0.603</b>	<b>0.545</b>	<b>0.558</b>	<b>0.509</b>
Primary & secondary education	3.55	0.468	0.443	0.427	0.384
Health care	3.83	0.410	0.383	0.380	0.334
Job offerings	3.15	0.401	0.365	0.380	0.327
Faith institutions	4.23	0.346	0.324	0.334	0.265
Higher education	3.93	0.321	0.292	0.305	0.261

Housing	3.03	0.310	0.257	0.278	0.293
Traffic	3.33	0.306	0.266	0.257	0.299
Public transportation	2.77	0.188	0.161	0.179	0.162
<b>Openness</b>	<b>3.03</b>	<b>0.509</b>	<b>0.455</b>	<b>0.475</b>	<b>0.427</b>
Families with children	3.75	0.558	0.506	0.516	0.466
Senior citizens	3.49	0.466	0.432	0.418	0.394
Young singles	2.94	0.384	0.337	0.373	0.310
Recent college graduates	2.69	0.375	0.322	0.361	0.314
Racial & ethnic minorities	3.19	0.252	0.219	0.236	0.218
Immigrants	3.00	0.201	0.177	0.188	0.175
Gay & lesbian people	2.75	0.176	0.156	0.171	0.140
Living in poverty	2.49	0.169	0.142	0.153	0.155
<b>Economic and Personal Security</b>	<b>1.72</b>	<b>0.497</b>	<b>0.454</b>	<b>0.441</b>	<b>0.437</b>
Overall economic security	0.66	0.440	0.393	0.390	0.395
Economic conditions	3.24	0.548	0.514	0.495	0.458
Good time to find a job	NA	0.294	0.265	0.267	0.256
Economy getting better	NA	0.256	0.206	0.221	0.260
Personal security	3.54	0.409	0.394	0.354	0.352

Note: Mean score is based on 1-5 scale where 1 is the lowest and 5 the highest. N=27,885  
Source: Florida (2008), p. 319.

Location does matter, but the desirable attributes of location (community) include a wide range of grouped factors of which aesthetics and lifestyle are ranked highest, ahead of basic services, openness, and higher than economic and personal security. This is not to suggest that basic services are not important or valued. To the contrary, the survey proves that in rating their communities, residents assume that these services are already provided and will always be in place, and so they reveal their true expectations which tend to be geared to lifestyle, natural beauty, and people considerations (openness). It should be noted that while the “Economic and Personal Security” category received the lowest combined score (largely a reflection of when the survey was conducted prior to the commencement of the 2008 recession), the specific factors of Personal Security (3.54) and Economic Conditions (3.24) received very high ratings of importance.

## **2. Through the Theoretical Lens. Social Capital Theory vs Creative Capital Theory**

Canadian municipalities and their civic leadership groups have a vested interest in understanding and addressing the condition of their communities and the level of community engagement within them. As discussed in the preceding chapter, community matters and has demonstrable impacts on local economic development and prosperity, on social well-being, and on electoral politics. The observed declines in community engagement (e.g., lower voter turn-out rates, lower levels of volunteerism, etc.) are the source of concern and inquiry as they relate to the observed decline, and the implications on community. Two contemporary theories, Social Capital theory, and Creative Capital theory, help us to understand these community trends and offer contrasting interpretations regarding the implications of the observed changes in community behaviors and in civic engagement trends.

The diversity of Canada's population (particularly within the GTA – Canada's leading immigration receptor) makes community life and civic engagement challenging and rewarding. How people function as individuals, interact within their social and work groups, and become engaged (or not) in their communities, have a bearing on the quality and integrity of the community or municipality in which they live and work. "Social capital is the lattice of informal networks and shared norms that allow individuals from different backgrounds to formulate and advance common objectives, be they economic, cultural or political" (Griffiths, 2009, p.42). These networks need not be limited to familial and ethnic linkages.

Robert Putnam, a leader in the study of social capital, has demonstrated that when social capital is actively shared through social networks these networks can inspire norms of reciprocity, mutual assistance, and enhanced trustworthiness. "The central insight of this approach is that social networks have real value both for the people in those networks...as well as for bystanders" (Putnam, 2003, p. 2).

This reflects very closely the observation made by Fukuyama about strong bonds of trust contributing to economic success.

Putnam's research shows that "the benefits of social capital spill beyond the people immediately involved in the network and can be used for many other purposes. The more neighbours who know one another by name, the fewer crimes a neighbourhood as a whole will suffer....Society as a whole benefits enormously

from the social ties forged by those who choose connective strategies in pursuit of their particular goals. We know from many studies that social capital can have what economists call ‘positive externalities’. That is, quite apart from their utility in solving the immediate problem, interpersonal ties are useful for many other purposes” (Putnam, 2003, p. 269). As expressed by Richard Florida, “for Putnam, social capital essentially means reciprocity. If you do something for someone, they are more likely to do something for you. To some degree, it hinges on mutual respect, trust and civic-mindedness. Decline social capital means that society becomes less trustful and less civic-minded. Putnam believes a healthy, civic-minded community is essential to prosperity (Florida, 2002, p.268). In the following exhibit, 5 specific benefits of social capital are enumerated.

#### **Exhibit Five. Benefits of Social Capital**

Social Capital...

- has many features that help people translate aspirations into realities
- allows citizens to resolve collective problems more easily
- greases the wheels that allow communities to advance smoothly. Where people are trusting and trustworthy, and where they are subject to repeated interactions with fellow citizens, everyday business and social transactions are less costly.
- widens our awareness of the many ways in which our fates are linked. People who have active and trusting connections to others...develop or maintain character traits that are good for the rest of society. (e.g., fewer random acts of violence by loners)
- operates through psychological and biological processes to improve individual’s lives (e.g., people rich in social capital cope better with traumas, etc.)

Source: Putnam (2000), p. 288

However, Putnam’s research has shown that social capital is in decline in America as families become nuclear, individuals become more insular from one another and from their neighbourhoods and municipalities. “This decline is evident in everything from the loosening bonds between family, friends and neighbours to declining participation in organizations of all sorts – churches, neighbourhood organizations, political parties and recreational leagues” (Florida, 2002, p. 267). Putnam’s research has led him to conclude that the erosion of social connectedness and community involvement can be attributed to four factors:

#### **Exhibit Six. Factors Behind Erosion of Social Capital in USA**

10% explained by:	The downturn in civic engagement coincided with the breakdown of the traditional family unit (i.e., more divorce, more single parent families, more single person households)
10% explained by:	Suburbanization, commuting, and sprawl also played a supporting role
25% explained by:	The effect of electronic entertainment – above all, television, in privatizing our leisure time
50% explained by:	Generational change – the slow, steady, and ineluctable replacement of the long civic generation by their less involved children and grandchildren

Source: Putnam (2000) p. 277.

Similar trends have been observed in Canada, where “...markedly uneven levels of meaningful community involvement among all Canadians and the concentration of civic participation among an ever dwindling number of older citizens suggest that the country’s reserves of social capital are anything but unlimited, and may, in fact, be in rapid decline” (Griffiths, 2009, p. 42). Based on data (published in Griffiths) for the period 1987-2006, evidence of decline in social capital in Canada includes: 10% of Canadians are responsible for 80% of all volunteer hours; 20% of Canadians are responsible for 80% of all money donated to charities; and only 10% of Canadians belong to service clubs vs. 20% thirty years ago. Griffiths is alarmed by this trend and states that “the majority of us are civic slackers who participate either marginally or not at all, in the kinds of formal activities that sustain a vibrant and effective volunteer sector, a participatory political culture and an enriched community life” (Griffiths, 2009, p. 42).

The diminished level of Social Capital in Canadian society is not only a concern for social scientists, political commentators, and economic development professionals. Urban planners and community development experts also regard this negative trend as a threat to maintaining and growing high quality and desirable communities in which to live, work and play. “If democracy is to be a force for equity and opportunity, the formation of social capital must keep pace with global economic growth and wealth creation. Social capital is a critical community asset – the attitude, ability, and willingness of people to engage in collective and civic activities” (Evenson, 2008, p. 9).

The decline in social capital (in Canada and the USA) has been paralleled by a decline in voter turn-out as well. Voter turn-out is generally at levels below 40% in Canada, the USA, and in many parts of Western Europe. In Southern Ontario the voter turn-out rate in municipal elections is often below 35% (AMCTO). Voter turn-out is regarded as a valuable proxy for measures of civic engagement. As expressed by Putnam “...like the canary in the mining pit, voting is an instructive proxy measure of broader social change. Compared to demographically matched non-voters, voters are more likely to be interested in politics, to give to charity, to volunteer, to serve on juries, to attend community school board meetings, to participate in public demonstrations, and to cooperate with their fellow citizens on community affairs. It is sometimes hard to tell whether voting causes community engagement or vice versa, although some recent evidence suggests that the act of voting itself encourages volunteering and other forms of good citizenship” (Putnam, 2000, p.35).

My statistical research (Chapter 3) will examine municipal election voter turn-out decline in a sample of Ontario municipalities through the lens of Social Capital theory. I have also designed my statistical research inquiry around the theoretical concept of Creative Capital as advanced by Richard Florida. Creative Capital is one of several theories that seek to explain the importance of place (community) in economic and social life. The geographical location of firms in clusters or agglomerations in order to achieve increased productivity and market competitiveness has been espoused and documented by leading economists such as Michael Porter and Alfred Marshal. However whereas many economists have regarded this clustering of firms as being predicated on reducing the costs of business, Richard Florida argues that “...the real force behind this clustering is people. Companies cluster in order to draw from concentrations of talented people who power innovation and economic growth” (Florida, 2002, p. 220). This observed pattern of economic growth occurring in places (communities) that have highly educated and creative people (i.e., the holders of creative capital) has led Florida to seek out answers as to why these talented and often mobile people choose to locate themselves in certain places (communities) and not others?

As explained by Dr. Florida, “Economic growth is driven by the location choices of creative people -- the holders of creative capital --- who prefer places that are diverse, tolerant and open to new ideas. Creative Capital theory differs from the human capital theory in two respects: [1] it identifies a type of human capital, creative people, as being key to economic growth; and [2] it identifies the underlying factors that shape the location decisions of these people, instead of merely saying that regions are blessed with certain endowments of them” (Florida, 2002, p. 223).

Members of the Creative Class are not seeking the community connectedness that Putnam describes. Florida’s research concludes that members of the Creative Class actually prefer weak community ties to strong, and desire “quasi-anonymity”. This is not a criticism of traditional community values as lauded by Putnam, but rather a distinction of the community and social values held by members of the Creative Class. Contemporary society, in particular high-tech communities, are now typified by people who are more individualistic, more diverse, and more connected than ever to virtual communities (i.e., Internet enabled, limited physical contact/proximity).

The Creative Class places greater importance on maintaining networks with larger numbers of loose ties, rather than focusing on a life featuring “close families and friends, tight neighbourhoods, civic clubs, vibrant electoral politics, strong faith-based institutions and a reliance on civic leadership” (Florida, 2002, p. 277). To members of the Creative Class, social capital can represent negative potentials including barriers to entry, and established networks that may be resistant to change or innovation. “The kinds of communities that we desire and that generate economic prosperity are very different from those of the past. Social structures that were important in earlier years now work against prosperity. Traditional notions of what it means to be a close, cohesive community and society tend to inhibit economic growth and innovation....Where old social structures were once nurturing, now they are restricting....People want diversity, low entry barriers and the ability to be themselves” (Florida, 2002, p. 269).

Social network research conducted by Mark Granovetter provides supportive evidence that despite the intuitive logic of the belief in the positive value of strong social ties (as in Putnam), “...weak ties, often

denounced as generative of alienation are ... seen as indispensable to individuals' opportunities and to their integration into communities; strong ties, breeding local cohesion, lead to overall fragmentation" (Granovetter, p.1378). In simple terms, in some circumstances weak ties contribute to greater overall social cohesion and influence than strong local ties. An example used by Granovetter is an analysis of labour markets and how the power of weak ties enables workers to find out about new jobs more through broad, but shallow networks of personal contacts than through any other method.

Is there a link between the decline in voting (i.e., a proxy for declining social engagement), the rise of the Creative Class (i.e., a community that exhibits the strength of weak links), and the decline in Social Capital (i.e., the decline of traditional social structures and of close-knit community engagement)? This is a research inquiry that will be addressed in the next chapter. The purpose of my research is to examine the link between the decline in voting (as a proxy for community engagement) and societal shifts including: the role of community population size (does size matter? Social Capital theory suggests a negative correlation); the diversification of municipal residents (immigration at record levels; both Social Capital and Creative Capital theories suggest there may be barriers to overcome); the rise of the Creative Class (is there a negative correlation between the presence of the Creative Class and community engagement?); and the increased patterns of mobility of Ontarians (does relocation to a new home inhibit community engagement?). These questions are the subject of the research and further discussion presented in the next chapter.

### **3. Voter Turn-Out: A Statistical Analysis of Four Central Questions**

The purpose of my research is to examine voter turn-out as a proxy for civic engagement, and to apply the analytical lenses of “Social Capital Theory” and “Creative Capital Theory” to identifying correlations between voter turn-out (the dependent value) and a set of specific independent values drawn from the respective theories. More specifically, I am seeking to address four central questions regarding voter turn-out:

#### 1. How is size of community related to voter turn-out?

The size of a community is often presumed to have a bearing on community engagement. A common perception is that the smaller the community, the more likely it is that residents will have some level of personal familiarity with neighbours, and be more aware of newcomers and strangers, thus likely resulting in greater potential for interaction and social contact. In contrast, high density major urban centres with multitudes of potential contacts may be less likely to spawn social networking and high rates of voter turn-out. According to Putnam, “researchers have repeatedly found that social capital is higher in smaller settings – smaller schools, smaller towns, smaller countries, and so on”. The reasons being that: listening and trusting are easier in smaller settings; one-on-one, face-to-face communication is better at building empathy and relationships than remote, impersonal communication; smaller groups enable members to get to know each other more easily; smaller groups work better because they can be more homogeneous; smaller size makes it easier to have more

intensive interchange and the ability to discover unexpected mutuality; and smaller is better for forging and sustaining connections (Putnam, 2003, pp. 275-276).

2. How is diversity of community related to voter turn-out?

Diversity is often perceived to be an inherent obstacle or challenge to engaging in the broader community (i.e., beyond one's own language or ethnic community), particularly for persons of non-western European origin. The struggle by many new immigrants to find employment in the fields of their choosing, and the inability by some to navigate the legal and electoral systems are all potential constraints to broader community engagement and possibly lower levels of voter activity. On the other hand, research has demonstrated that "citizens born outside of the country (Canada) attached more value to electoral participation than Canadian-born citizens from the same community" (Tossutti, 2005, p. 54).

3. How is creativity of community related to voter turn-out?

As discussed in the preceding chapter, members of the Creative Class are not seeking the community connectedness that Putnam describes. Richard Florida's research concludes that they prefer weak community ties to strong, and desire the "quasi-anonymity" that allows them to choose to partake in community experiences without feeling encumbered or confined. "Our evolving communities and emerging society are marked by a greater diversity of friendships, more individualistic pursuits and weaker ties within the community. People want diversity, low entry barriers and the ability to be themselves" (Florida, 2002, p. 269).

4. How is mobility of community related to voter turn-out?

Moving residence can be a disruptive force in a person's life, making it difficult to build lasting relationships, to take an active interest in local politics, or to make a commitment to volunteer or to participate in local projects. This would suggest that there may be a latent negative relationship between frequent mobility (change of residence) and voter turn-out.

In addressing these questions, I chose to design my research around the comprehensive database published by Statistics Canada, specifically the 2006 Census of Canada, and the results of the November 2006 municipal elections in Ontario. The year 2006 presented a rare opportunity to draw on the results of two seminal events that rarely occur in the same year, let alone in this case within six months of each other. The Census of Canada is conducted on a five year cycle in years ending in '1' and '6'. In contrast, Ontario municipal elections have traditionally been held at the end of a 3-year term of Council, but are now held at the end of a 4-year term. Serendipitously, in 2006 both events occurred in the same year, and the comprehensive data results were released in 2008 making this research possible.

Specifically, I focused my research on a sample of 30 Ontario urban municipalities drawn from the 2006 Census, and selected at random on the basis of the following three criteria:

1. **Must be an incorporated Town or City.** This is a control factor to eliminate the possibility of the sample including rural townships or Native reserves neither of which are urban in character, nor Regional Municipalities or the City of Toronto which are amalgamated municipalities and would serve as "outliers" as they tend to be much larger in size and more diverse in character from the population of towns and cities I have chosen to focus on.
2. **Must include a range from small urban centre to major metropolitan size centre.** In order to achieve a reasonably balanced sample of urban municipalities ranging from very small (i.e., under 10,000 population) to very large (i.e., above 250,000 population), I eliminated any municipalities with populations 1.0 million or larger.
3. **Must have held a municipal election on November 13, 2006 in which the Mayor's position was contested.** Total municipal election turn-out can be constrained if the position of Mayor is not being contested (i.e., as a result of acclamation). The election of at-large or local Ward

Councillors or School Trustees tend not to attract as high a level of electoral attention as the race for the Mayor’s position. Therefore, I have screened my sample of 30 municipalities to ensure that none of them featured the election of the Mayor by acclamation.

The resulting sample of 30 municipalities is summarized on the following page and features a reasonably balanced set of very small (7 under 25,000 population), small (8 between 25,000 and 100,000 population), medium size (8 between 100,000 and 200,000 population), and large size (7 of 200,000+ population) centres. The total sample of 30 municipalities draws from locations across Ontario including 4 from eastern Ontario, 5 from western Ontario, 2 from the north, 12 from within the Toronto Census Metropolitan Area (CMA), and 7 from other locations within the south-central part of the Province. The list of the 30 municipalities with their respective 2006 Census populations, November 13/06 municipal election turn-out rates, and status of Mayoral elections is presented in the Appendix B to this report.

**Exhibit Seven. Sample of 30 Ontario Municipalities**

<u>Very Small</u>	<u>Small</u>	<u>Medium</u>	<u>Large</u>
Hanover, T	Orangeville, T	Cambridge, C	Vaughan, C
Renfrew, T	Orrilia, C	Barrie, C	Markham, T
Thames Centre, T	Stratford, C	St. Catharines, C	London, C
Pembroke, C	Aurora, T	Oshawa, C	Brampton, C
Wasaga Beach, T	Belleville, C	Greater Sudbury, C	Hamilton, C
E. Gwillimbury, T	Milton, T	Richmond Hill, T	Mississauga, C
Whitchurch	North Bay, C	Burlington, C	Ottawa, C
-Stouffville, T	Newmarket, T	Oakville, T	

Legend: C = City T = Town

Note: In Ontario the use of the terms “City” or “Town” does not confer any size or status other than label a municipality. Both terms are used by lower tier municipalities and are a reflection of local community history and values, rather than elevated status or privilege. Witness the fact that in the sample of 30 municipalities, the City of Pembroke (pop. 13,930) is among the smallest of the sample municipalities while the Town of Markham (pop. 261,573) is among the largest.

The sample mean of 38.2% was virtually identical to the 38.6% average turn-out rate for the entire province (AMO). The voter turn-out experienced within this sample of 30 municipalities ranges from a high of 54.0% in the City of Ottawa to a low of 24.7% in the City of Mississauga, a spread of 29.3 percentage points or 118%! Interestingly, these two cities are characterized by two very different Mayoral

conditions: the Mayor race in Ottawa was hotly contested (Larry O’Brien won with 47% of the vote), whereas the Mayor race in Mississauga featured only token opposition to the long-serving and highly regarded incumbent, Hazel McCallion (winner of 90% of the vote).

In seeking to address the four central questions regarding voter turn-out, I turned to the results of the 2006 Census and for each of the 30 municipalities in my sample I selected a wide-ranging and relevant set of population-based indicators that may have a bearing on these questions.

**Exhibit Eight. Categories of Population-Based Census Indicators**

Age	Occupied Dwellings	Mother Tongue	Occupation
Household Size	Immigrant Status	Mobility Status	Field of Study
Educational Attainment	Labour Force	Unpaid Work	

The full data set is presented in the Appendix C to this report. From this larger data set, I selected two indicators (i.e., each of these will serve as the independent variable) for each of the four central questions, the purpose of which is to apply regression analysis to identify the statistical relationship between the two interval variables (i.e., the dependent variable being the observed level of voter turn-out). In six of the eight cases, the indicators were taken as published by Statistics Canada in the Census. However, in the case of “creativity” I derived two indicators by developing a meaningful measure from a combination of published Census data (described more fully in findings 3a and 3b below). The total of eight regression analyses (employing two forms of regression analysis: linear (i.e., line) and quadratic (i.e., curve), and the observed findings are as follows:

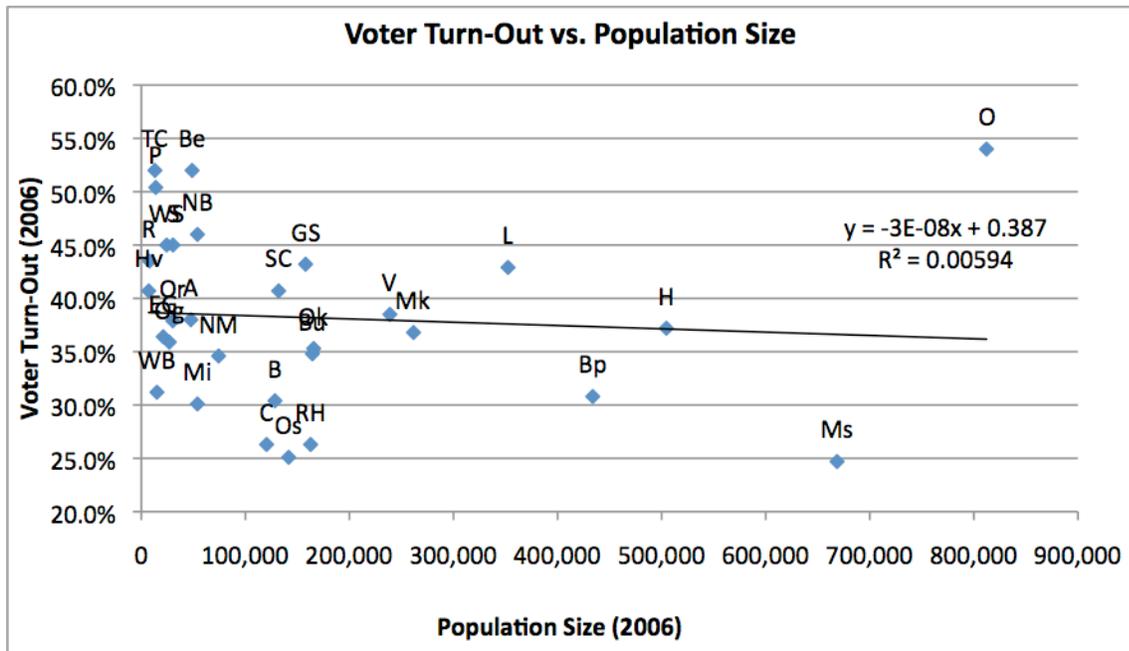
**1. How is size of community related to voter turn-out?**

The Census of Canada provides 100% survey sample data related to two meaningful measures of population size: the actual total municipal population in 2006, and the density of population (expressed as population density per sq. km.). Population size provides an absolute measure of size, whereas density provides a measure of dispersion of population. In the following statistical analysis it is possible to

contrast the impact of absolute population size vs. the density of population versus the municipal turn-out rate experienced in 2006.

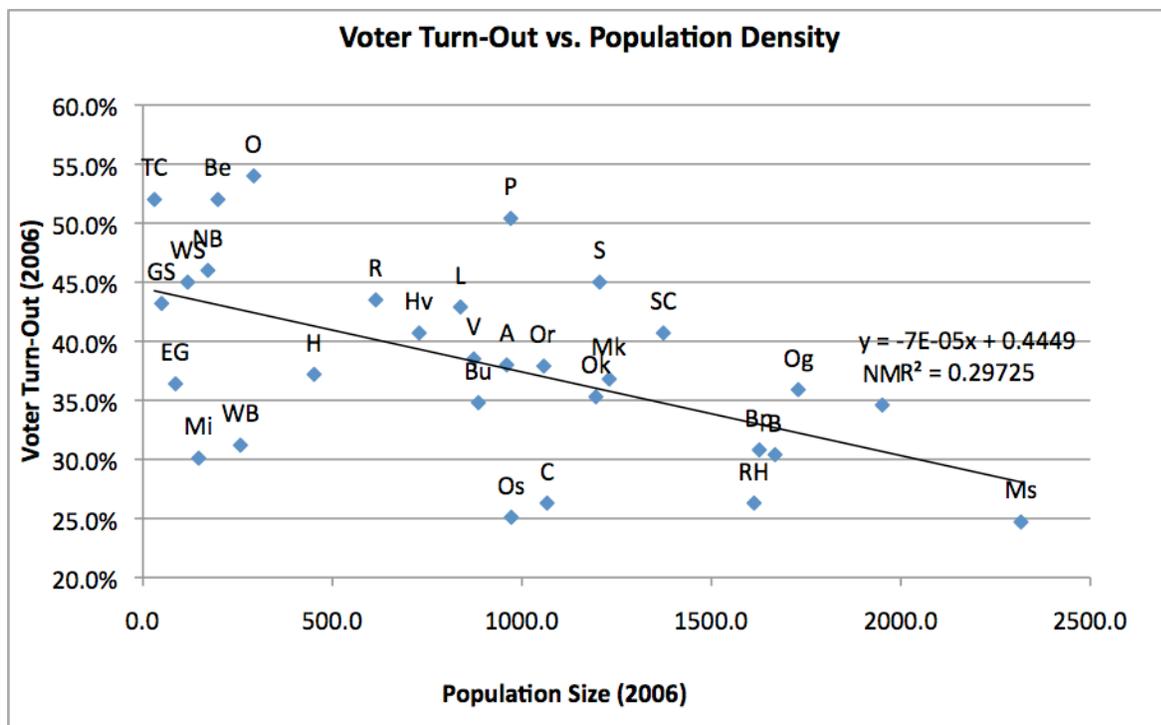
### 1.1. Voter turn-out vs. population size

The results show that there is a negative correlation between voter-turn-out and population size. In other words, as the size of municipality (community) increases, voter turn-out tends to decrease. The linear correlation is weak with a correlation coefficient  $r = -0.08$  and a coefficient of determination  $r^2 = 0.01$



### 1.2. Voter turn-out vs. population density

The results show that there is a negative correlation between voter-turn-out and population density. As the population density of municipality (community) increases, voter turn-out tends to decrease. This is a stronger negative relationship than that witnessed for population size. The correlation coefficient  $r = -0.55$  and a coefficient of determination  $r^2 = 0.30$

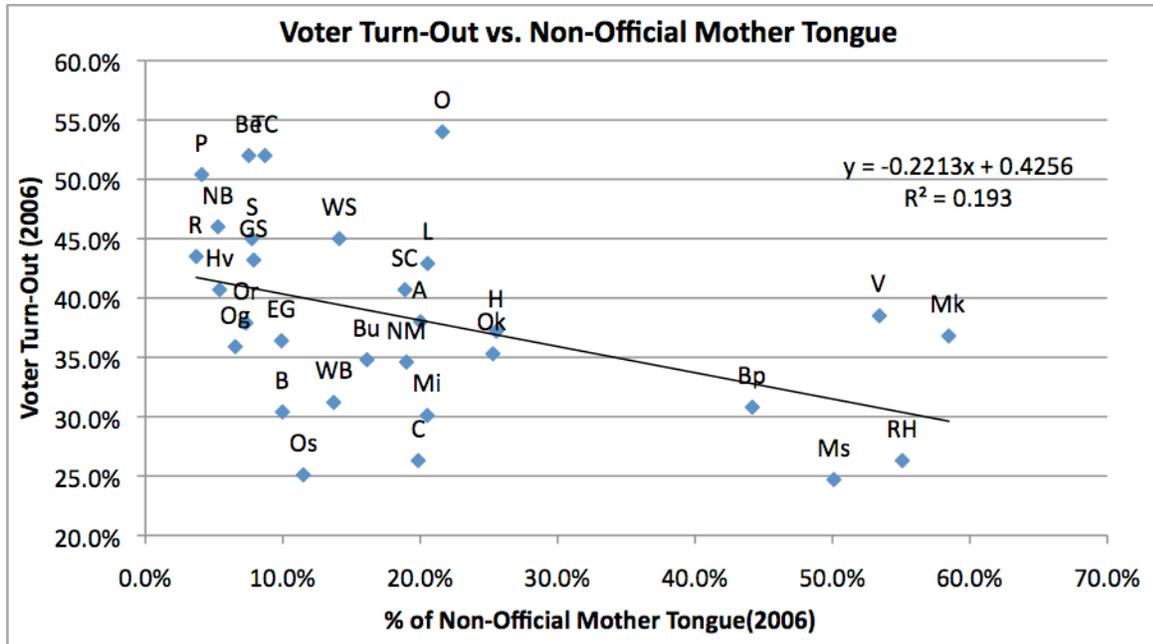


## 2. Is diversity of community related to voter turn-out?

The Census of Canada provides several indicators of ethnic diversity that is helpful to this research, i.e., language and foreign birth. Two indicators in particular are very precise: “mother tongue”, the only language question asked of 100% of the population, can be used to discern diversity by zeroing in on all residents whose mother tongue is a language other than the two official languages; and “immigrant status”, also asked of 100% of the population.

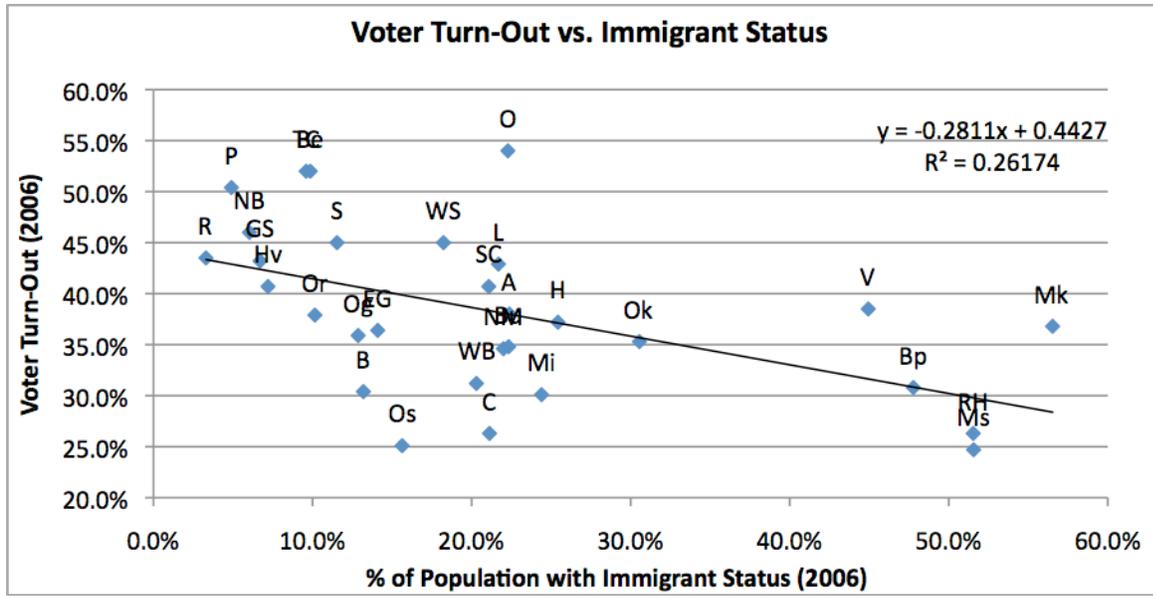
### 2.1. Voter turn-out vs. non-official mother tongue

The results show that there is a negative correlation between voter-turn-out and non-official mother tongue. As the number of municipal residents with a mother tongue other than English or French increases, voter turn-out tends to decrease. This is a stronger negative relationship than that witnessed for population size, but slightly less than for population density. The correlation coefficient  $r = -0.44$  and a coefficient of determination  $r^2 = 0.19$



**2.2. Voter turn-out vs. immigrant status**

The results show that there is a negative correlation between voter-turn-out and immigrant status. As the number of municipal residents born outside of Canada increases, voter turn-out tends to decrease. This is a stronger negative relationship than that witnessed for mother tongue, and is almost as strong as for population density. The correlation coefficient  $r = -0.51$  and a coefficient of determination  $r^2 = 0.26$ . This result is at variance with a study of non-voters in Canada that reported that voter turn-out is higher among non-Canadian born voters than for Canadian born (67.7% vs. 62%). (Kushner)



This negative correlation is consistent with other Canadian research that showed that municipal voter turn-out is lower among immigrants who are visible minorities (Tossutti). Within the survey of 30 Ontario municipalities, the significant presence of Asians and South Asians may result in the observed negative correlation between levels of voter turn-out and immigrants present in the municipality. These Asian immigrants tend to be relatively newer to Ontario municipalities than non-Asian immigrant populations that were more characteristic of pre-1980's migration to the province. The recency of this new source of highly diverse immigrants to Ontario municipalities may have a greater bearing on voter turn-out (as evidenced by Tossutti's data presented in Exhibit 9) than does immigrations as a whole.

**Exhibit Nine. Municipal Voter Turn-out by Immigrants**

<u>Immigrants</u>	<u>Voter Turn-Out</u>
Non-visible	71.0%
South Asian	59.3%
Black	57.0%
Chinese	50.5%

Source: (Tossutti, 2005, p. 55)

**3. Is creativity of community related to voter turn-out?**

The Census of Canada provides several data sets that can be used to derive indicators of creativity that I have applied to this research, i.e., to what extent are persons with “creative capital” present in the municipality. Two data sets in particular are very relevant (although they are based on a 20% sample of the population aged 15 years and over): “major field of study” (i.e., what subjects/sectors are persons educated or trained in?), and “occupation” (i.e., what sectors of the economy are persons currently working in?). From each data set I was able to derive a measure of creative capital as follows:

### **Exhibit Ten. Proxy Measures for Creative Class**

#### Derived from Census of Canada, “Major Field of Study”

% of Population **trained in** Creative/Innovative sectors = sum of following 5 fields:

- Visual + performing arts; & communications technologies
- Humanities
- Physical & life sciences & technologies
- Mathematics; computer & information sciences
- Architecture; engineering; & related technologies

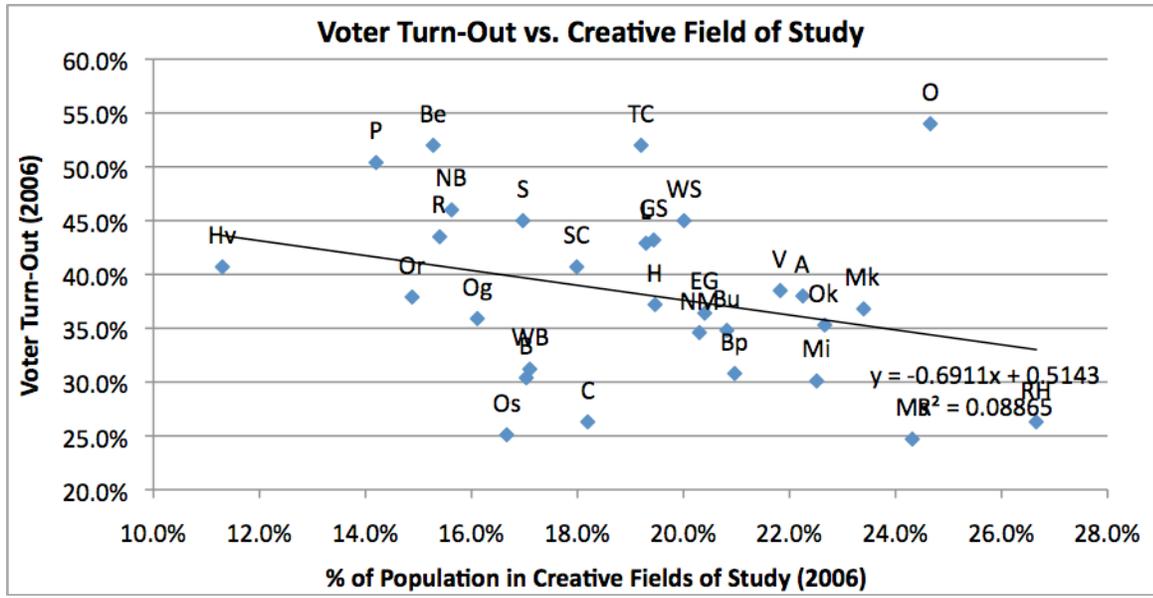
#### Derived from Census of Canada, “Occupation”

% of Population **working in** Creative/Innovative sectors = sum of following 2 fields:

- Natural & applied sciences and related occupations
- Occupations in art; culture, recreation and sport

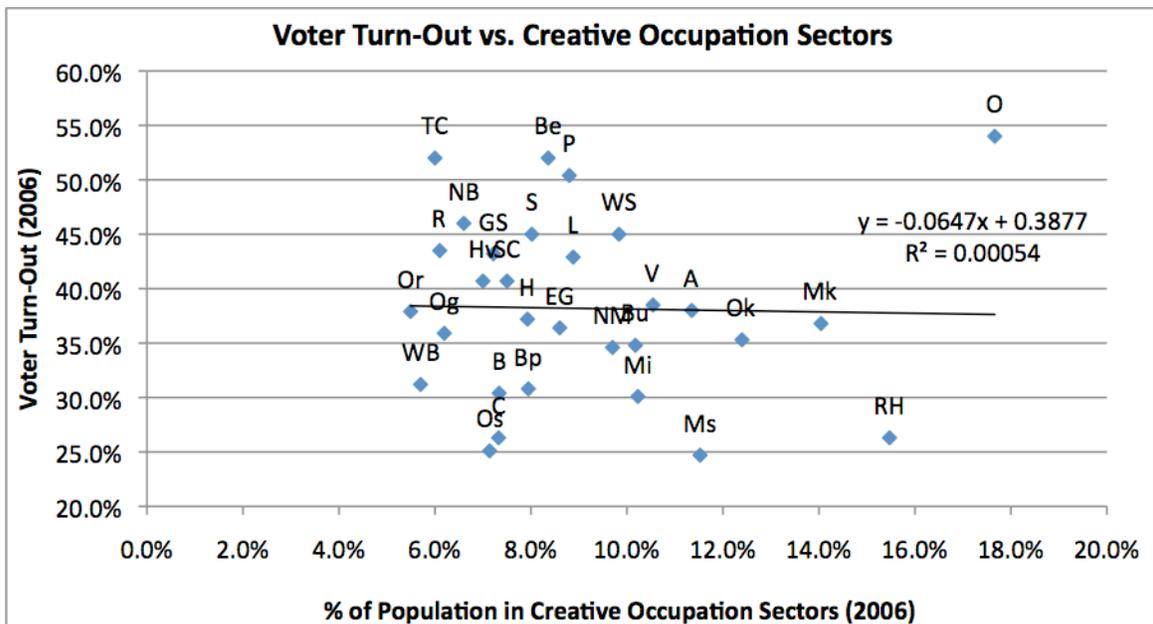
### **3.1. Voter turn-out vs. creative field of study/training**

The results show that there is a negative correlation between voter-turn-out and the creative field of study. As the number of municipal residents educated in the creative field of study increases, voter turn-out tends to decrease. This result is in line with the finding of a study of non-voters in Canada that shows that voting turn-out rates fall as educational attainment increases (Kushner, 2008). The correlation with creative field of study is a weaker negative relationship than that witnessed for mother tongue, and much weaker than for population density. The correlation coefficient  $r = -0.30$  and a coefficient of determination  $r^2 = 0.09$



**3.2. Voter turn-out vs. creative occupation sector/employment**

The results show that there is a very weak negative correlation between voter turn-out and persons engaged in creative occupations/employment. This turns out to be the weakest of the eight correlations tested in this research report. The correlation coefficient  $r = -0.02$  and a coefficient of determination  $r^2 = 0.01$

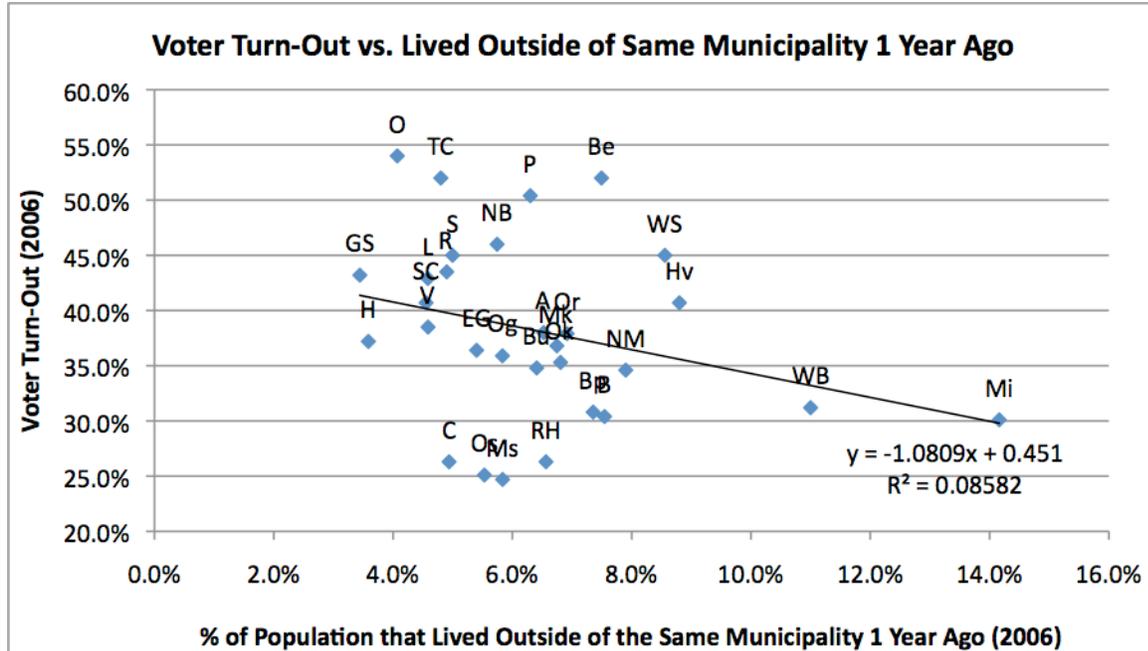


#### 4. Is mobility of community related to voter turn-out?

The Census of Canada provides two data sets (based on a 20% survey sample) that identify the extent to which municipal residents move their residence (i.e., where you lived one year prior to the Census year, and five years prior to the Census year). In this sample of 30 municipalities, the range of persons who were resident in another municipality just one year previously ranges from 3.6% to 14.2%. The level of mobility (i.e., lived outside of this municipality) over a five year period is even higher, reaching as high as 47% in Milton (a booming suburb in the Greater Toronto Area).

##### 4.1. Voter turn-out vs. lived outside of same municipality 1 year ago

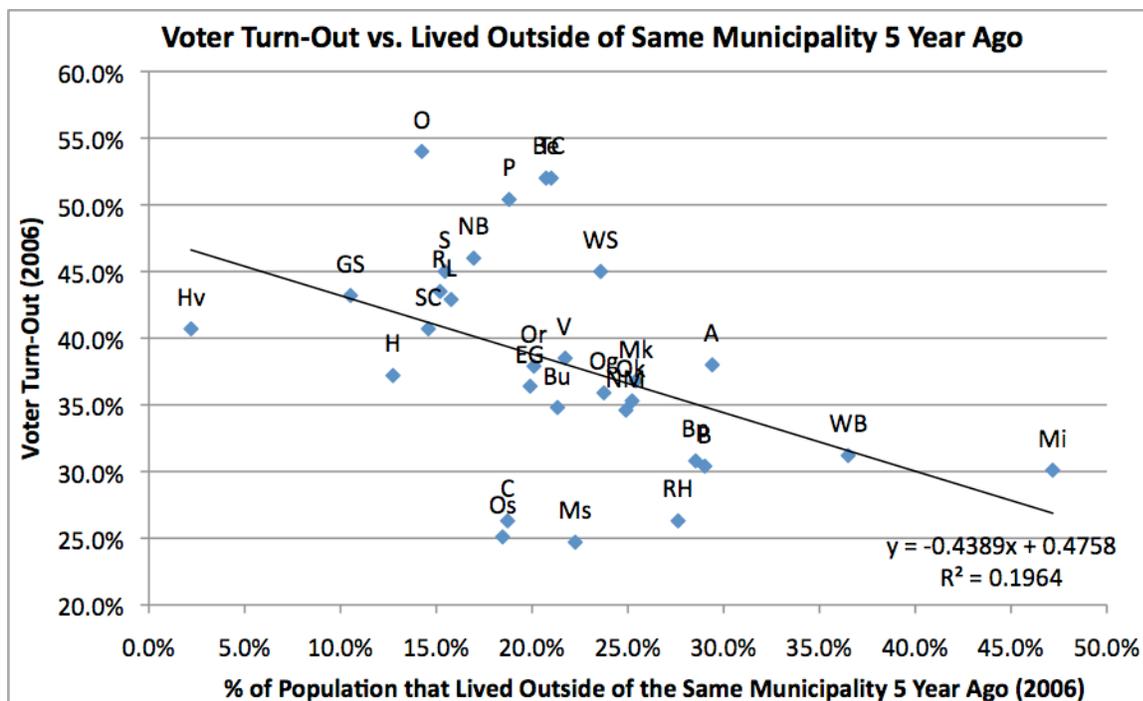
The results show that there is a negative correlation between voter-turn-out and the number of residents who lived outside of the municipality one year ago. As the number of these new residents increases, voter turn-out tends to decrease. This is a weak negative relationship similar to creative field of study. The correlation coefficient  $r = -0.29$  and a coefficient of determination  $r^2 = 0.09$



##### 4.2. Voter turn-out vs. lived outside of same municipality 5 years ago

The results show that there is a stronger negative correlation between voter-turn-out and the number of residents who lived outside of the municipality five years ago. As the number of residents who did

not live in the same municipality five years ago increases, voter turn-out tends to decrease. This is a significant negative relationship similar to non-official mother tongue. The correlation coefficient  $r = -0.44$  and a coefficient of determination  $r^2 = 0.20$ . This result is consistent with the results of research into non-voting Canadians reported by Kushner and Siegel. In their report, Kushner and Siegel indicated a positive correlation between voting and the number of years the respondents lived in the community. The turn-out for persons with less than two years residence in the community was 40.7% whereas persons resident 2-10 years in the same community had a 59% turn-out rate.



The results of the linear regression research is presented in Exhibit Eleven. The results are presented in descending order of strength of correlation between the independent variables and 'voter turn-out' (the dependent variable). Based on the results of this analysis, it is clear there exists a negative correlation in each instance, and that this negative correlation is strongest in the case of population density, population mobility (five years), and the presence of new Canadians (immigrants). The results of this mathematical analysis is not to suggest that there is a proven level of causation between the observed level of voter

turn-out and the independent variables tested. To demonstrate greater evidence of causation would require time series analysis (difficult if not impossible to obtain the required data due to lack of concurrence between Census timing and timing of municipal elections), and more sophisticated proxy measures of the creative class (perhaps based on custom data runs from Statistics Canada). However, despite these limitations, the linear regression research findings to point to an obvious negative correlation right across the board, and further distinctions in the level of association among the eight independent variables.

**Exhibit Eleven. Results of the Linear Regression Research in Descending Order**

<b>Independent Variables in Descending Order</b>	<b>Correlation Coefficient</b>	<b>r<sup>2</sup> Coefficient of Determination</b>	<b>r<sup>2</sup> Standard Deviation</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Median</b>
Population density	-0.55	0.30	628.27	889.20	922.55
Immigrants	-0.51	0.26	0.15	0.22	0.21
Lived outside of same municipality 5 years ago	-0.44	0.20	0.08	0.21	0.21
Non-Official Language as Mother Tongue	-0.44	0.19	0.16	0.20	0.15
Creative Field of Study	-0.30	0.09	0.04	0.19	0.19
Lived outside of same municipality 1 year ago	-0.29	0.09	0.02	0.06	0.06
Population in 2006	-0.08	0.01	202463.47	163787.90	97333.00
Creative Occupation Sector	-0.02	0.01	0.03	0.09	0.08

**4. Conclusions and Prescriptive Actions**

Voter turn-out in Ontario’s municipal elections is currently at very low participation levels (average of 38.6% in 2006). In Markham (one of Ontario’s most prosperous and best educated communities, population 261,573 (2006 Census) only 36.8%% of eligible voters actually cast a vote in the November

2006 election, 27% in 2003, and 29% in 2000. There are initiatives that municipalities have taken to improve voter turn-out. In a survey conducted by the Association of Municipal Clerks and Treasurers of Ontario (AMCTO) following the 2006 municipal election, it was reported that local governments across the province deployed a variety of voting systems to facilitate voter access and ease of voting. These initiatives are summarized in the Exhibit below.

**Exhibit Twelve. Voting Mechanisms Deployed by Ontario Municipalities**

	<u># Municipalities</u>	<u>%Municipalities</u>
<b>Vote Casting Methods in 2006</b>		
Paper ballot	222	59%
Mail-in ballot	108	28%
Vote by phone	18	5%
Vote by Internet	18	5%
Touch screen	6	2%
Other	4	1%
Total	376	100%
<b>Type of Voter Identification Required in 2006</b>		
Any document		
Showing name & address	140	41%
Photo identification	135	39%
Two documents		
Showing name & address	33	10%
Other	34	10%
Total	342	100%
<b>Vote Counting Methods in 2006</b>		
Manual count	215	59%
Poll tabulators	66	18%
Central tabulator	44	12%
Internet system	17	5%
Telephone system	16	4%
Touch screen system	7	2%
Other	=	0%
Total	365	100%

Source: AMCTO.

As indicated in the preceding Exhibit, 59% of Ontario municipalities continue to administer voting in an historically traditional manner via the written ballot deposited in a ballot box at an electoral station (constrained by opening and closing hours and access considerations). While mail-in voting is provided by 28% of municipalities, this electoral system is most typical of ‘cottage country’ jurisdictions to serve the needs of non year-round residents. Only 5% of Ontario municipalities offer their voters access via through the Internet or by telephone. Clearly Ontario municipalities have a long way to go to optimize the

voting process for the convenience of a 21<sup>st</sup> Century electorate that is tight for time, resistant to inconvenience, and may not regard voting as a priority.

In Toronto, a lively community debate has arisen regarding the advisability of permitting non-citizens to vote in municipal elections. Toronto Mayor David Miller and other community leaders including Alan Broadbent (Maytree Foundation) are advocates of extending voting rights to all residents of the city, regardless of citizenship status. They argue that the exclusion of non-citizens is a factor that contributes to social alienation and weak community structure, particularly among young non-citizens (Broadbent et al., 2009, p. A21). Former Ontario Cabinet Minister Mary Anne Chambers regards the move to permit non-citizens to vote in municipal elections as ill-advised. “The right to vote and stand for election should be a precious, cherished privilege bestowed on Canadian citizens and should never be conferred lightly....Instead of supporting a short cut to the ballot box, advocates should be calling for the education of citizens and non-citizens to better appreciate the rights and responsibilities of full participation in citizenship” (Broadbent et al., p. A21).

Ryerson Professor Myer Siemiatycki has studied the results of the 2003 Ontario provincial and Toronto municipal elections in depth, and found that both youth and immigrants who did hold the right to vote had significantly below-average rates of actually voting. In his paper on fostering increased social inclusion in Toronto, Siemiatycki concludes “that there is no automatic carry-over from expanded voting rights to deeper civic democracy....a broadened municipal franchise is a necessary – though not sufficient – condition for more equitable political inclusion” (Siemiatycki, 2006, p. 1). This conclusion is backed up by research conducted by Bevelander et al. (2008) which found that in Sweden (where non-citizen residents have had the right to vote in municipal elections for the past 30 years) immigrants who obtain citizenship are far more likely to vote than those who are not citizens. Among the measures that Siemiatycki prescribes to improve social inclusion (and higher voter turn-out) are:

- Reduce the voting age in municipal elections from 18 to 16, accompanied with reinvigorated civics education and practice in high schools

- Extend voting rights to non-citizen permanent residents of the municipality (this would enfranchise landed immigrants and non-status residents)
- Conduct active neighbourhood-based campaigns through local libraries and community centres
- Provide tangible neighbourhood incentives to boost voter turn-out (e.g., city could commit bonus funds for the 10 neighbourhoods which register the highest voter turn-out)
- Diverse communities should organize a ‘New Voices’ assembly charged with establishing a policy platform addressing issues of particular concern to newcomers and racialized minorities.

Beyond addressing the technological and customer service strategies that will help to facilitate higher voter turn-out rates, it is necessary to understand the context, behaviors, and values of the eligible voting population or the community in question. Voter turn-out rates are only one of several key indicators of community engagement. As demonstrated in this report, community does matter, especially in the life and operations of local government. While it is individual voters who cast a vote (or not) at election time, their individual and collective participation in the democratic process are indications of the health and nature of the community(ies) that comprise the municipality. Therefore, how municipal leaders define ‘community’, how they discern a community’s needs, its values, and expectations, and ultimately how well a community participates (or not) in local government all have a bearing on the quality of life and the quality of local government.

The research findings and the exploration of Social Capital and Creative Capital theories presented in this report demonstrate that residents of urban municipalities live multiple existences, and therefore may regard their responsibility to vote in a municipal election – not as a civic and personal obligation – but, as an elective choice or demand on their time to opt for, or not. Based on the results of linear regression research, there is an inverse relationship between voter turn-out and each of the eight independent variables tested. In other words, it appears that none of the following factors is in itself the ‘hot button’ or key stimulus to spur increased voter turn-out:

- Correlation of coefficient -0.55 Population Density
- Correlation of coefficient -0.51 Immigrants

- Correlation of coefficient -0.44 Lived elsewhere 5 yrs ago
- Correlation of coefficient -0.44 Non official mother tongue
- Correlation of coefficient -0.30 Creative field of study
- Correlation of coefficient -0.29 Lived elsewhere 1 yr ago
- Correlation of coefficient -0.08 Population size
- Correlation of coefficient -0.02 Creative occupation

The findings to emerge from this research are of value not only to students of public administration and research methods, but will also inform community leaders (elected and non-elected) about the factors that have a bearing on the “civic condition”. That is, it identifies a few of the factors that play a role (negatively or positively) in influencing community engagement as viewed through the observed experience of the act of municipal voting. In the remaining pages of this report I provide three prescriptive recommendations regarding ways to potentially increase civic engagement, and voter turn-out in particular. These recommendations are: building new social capital by harnessing the Internet; building renewed social capital from traditional sources; and leveraging diversity by bridging social capital.

### **Harnessing the Internet**

The Internet is the source of considerable attention, both as a channel or means of community engagement, as well as a technology to facilitate voter turn-out. As indicated in the AMCTO study referenced at the beginning of this chapter, only 5% of Ontario municipalities are making use of this technology for voting purposes, well below the presence of Internet in households across the province. There exists a latent potential to both harness the Internet and to make use of it as both a ‘virtual community’ and as an enabler of more effective citizen engagement. Putnam recognizes that Internet-enabled virtual communities are often more egalitarian than the real world and neighborhoods in which we live. “Anonymity and the absence of social cues inhibit social control – that is, after all, why we have a secret ballot – and thus cyberspace seems in some respects more democratic” (Putnam, 2000, p. 173). However, Putnam continues to have doubts about whether a virtual community can truly be an authentic community.

“...we think that craigslist has elements of community to a surprising degree and that its community nature has a great deal to do with elements that we see in other forms of community: localness, member participation in defining the norms of the group, aims and purposes beyond that of simply being together. This example does not imply a future in which masses of people will migrate from

local, traditional communities to communities of interest in cyberspace – quite the contrary – but it does suggest a role for the Internet in the mix of ways that people come to know, trust, and connect with one another” (Putnam, 2003, p. 240).

Research conducted about the Canadian experience with the Internet by Veenhof, Wellman, Quell and Hogan points to hopeful signs that youth and young adults are volunteering more and becoming more engaged in their communities as a result of their use of the Internet. “Contrary to perceptions of youth disengagement, it is young Canadians who most actively use the Internet to search for volunteer opportunities [17.6% for persons age 15-24]” (Veenhof et al., 2008, p. 16). Similarly, young adults have the highest incidence rate of volunteering, but their time spent on volunteering is lower than older adults. Despite the persistent (but incorrect) perception that the Internet is a domain characterized by isolated, asocial individuals, the research by Veenhof et al. points out that the Internet is spawning new community networks, and helping to foster greater participation in community activities. “The theories of people becoming closed-in or socially withdrawn are not supported by the evidence presented here...the reality is that people are talking to other people – whether to the person next door or to someone thousands of miles and time zones away. Thus it is not that people are becoming anti-social; it is that people are becoming differently social” (Veenhof et al., 2008, p. 22).

The Internet has the potential to be a very effective convenor of community engagement. It is virtually ubiquitous in Ontario’s urban locations. It is relatively user friendly and poses very few barriers to use (unlike the physical and transportation barriers that confront tens of thousands of Ontarians daily). It is supportive of exchanges by individuals and groups regardless of language, age, religion, colour, ethnicity, sexual preference, or culture. The Internet has the capacity to be instantaneous (e.g., inspire and hold an on-line meeting) and unconstrained by time or place. It can inspire decisive action (e.g., stage a protest or conduct a poll), and be transparent (potentially more democratic due to reduced likelihood of in-camera meetings and restricted information). Its origins as a passive medium used to post and share information is being surpassed by its capacity and growing popularity as a medium for exchange, communication and interactivity. As noted by Veenhof et al., the Internet is inspiring new and greater community engagement,

and while this is accompanied by a diminished level of participation in the specific traditional social capital activities lauded by Putnam, the Internet is breeding new forms of democratic expression and greater participation in community living.

“Its [the Internet’s] present and future impacts should be judged on their own merit and must be clearly separated from nostalgic notions of pre-Internet community living, where people sat around pubs, cafes and parlours communing – something that has not really been the case for a very long time.... Thus the advent of the Internet is breeding a more social era, with active communication and information seeking activities compared to the more passive traditional forms of entertainment such as television” (Veenhof et al., 2008, p. 23).

### **Renew Traditional Sources of Social Capital**

Putnam provides a detailed set of prescriptive strategies and measurable objectives that are helpful in addressing declining civic engagement and voter turn-out. As indicated in the following exhibit, he recommends a holistic approach that covers diverse aspects of public life and public engagement. His prescription includes a return to fundamentals such as a renewed emphasis on civics education in schools, an emphasis (if not mandatory) on community service and volunteerism for youth and also for the corporate sector. He places new emphasis on corporate responsibility to provide employees with flexible work arrangements and more time to be with families and be available to participate in community life. Putnam identifies the importance of the public realm, its design being a critical factor in providing people-friendly environments and reduced travel time. He is alert to the inherent value to society of increased diversity, and therefore promotes increased participation in the arts, and tolerance and observance/celebration of faith/religion. Putnam targets the year 2010 as his reference date for the achievement of these objectives.

Ironically, following eight years of Republican government in the USA during which social capital appears to have declined, the election of President Obama in 2008 (with a high level of turn-out) may signal the launch of a renewed emphasis and investment in the very factors that Putnam has prescribed. As well, data just released in June 2009 by the Canadian Institute of Wellbeing suggests that contrary to Putnam’s *Bowling Alone* findings, “more Canadians are now joining group activities. By 2003, 61% of us (i.e., Canadians) were members of non-profit, voluntary organizations, up from 51% in the late 1990s. We

also provide more help to others, with 83% of Canadians extending unpaid care and assistance to family, friends and neighbours in 2004, compared with 73% in 1997” (Kidd, 2009, p. A6).

### **Exhibit Thirteen. Putnam’s Six Spheres Strategy**

#### **Sphere/Vision/Tests/Strategies**

##### **1. Youth and Schools**

“Let us find ways to ensure that by 2010 the level of civic engagement among Americans then coming of age in all parts of our society will match that of their grandparents when they were that same age, and that at the same time bridging social capital will be substantially greater than it was in their grandparents’ era.” volunteerism, extra-curricular activities

**Tests:** electoral turn-out, participation levels in group activities

**Strategies:** civics education in schools, community service programs, Volunteerism, extra-curricular activities

##### **2. The Workplace**

“Let us find ways to ensure that by 2010 America’s workplace will be substantially more family-friendly and community-congenial, so that America’s workers will be enabled to replenish our stocks of social capital both within and outside the workplace.”

**Tests:** stronger families, safer neighbourhoods, more vibrant public life

**Strategies:** flexible work arrangements, encourage community volunteerism, corporate investment in the community (enviro projects, building funds, etc.)

##### **3. Urban and Metropolitan Design**

“Let us act to ensure that by 2010 Americans will spend less time travelling and more time connecting with our neighbours than we do today, and that we will live in more integrated and pedestrian-friendly areas, and that the design of our communities and the availability of public space will encourage more casual socializing with friends and neighbours.”

**Tests:** commute time, leisure time, more volunteerism, reduced urban sprawl

**Strategies:** “new urbanism” design attributes (pedestrian friendly, reduced car dependency, mixed use, increased parks and green space)

##### **4. Religion**

“Let us spur a new, pluralistic, socially responsible great awakening, so that by 2010 Americans will be more deeply engaged than we are today in one or another spiritual community of meaning, while at the same time becoming more tolerant of the faiths and practices of other Americans.”

**Tests:** attendance at religious/spiritual services, self-identification with a spiritual community, inter-faith events and engagements

**Strategies:** facilitate establishment of faith institutions, promote ecumenical and inter-faith processes/linkages, celebrate diversity of faith-based community

##### **5. Arts and Culture**

“Let us find ways to ensure that by 2010 significantly more Americans will participate (not merely consume or appreciate) cultural activities from group dancing to songfests to community theatre to rap festivals. Let us discover new ways to use the arts as a vehicle for convening diverse groups of fellow citizens.

**Tests:** citizen participation, attendance levels, diversity of events/exhibitions

**Strategies:** events and performances to unite and bridge diverse communities/groups

##### **6. Politics and Government**

“Let us find ways to ensure that by 2010 many more Americans will participate in the public life of our communities – running for office, attending public meetings, serving on committees, campaigning in elections, and even voting.”

**Tests:** meeting turn-out, voter turn-out, numbers of candidates in elections

**Strategies:** decentralization of decision-making, civics education

Source: Putnam, 2000, pp. 404-412

Putnam appears prescient in his thinking (published in 2000 during the height of the Bush administration)

when he made the following recommendation:

“Policy designers of whatever partisan persuasion should become more social capital-savvy, seeking to do minimum damage to existing stocks of social capital even as they look for opportunities to add new stocks. How about a ‘social capital impact statement’ for new programs, less bureaucratic and legalistic than environmental impact statements have become, but equally effective at calling attention to unanticipated consequences?”  
Source: Putnam, 2000, pp. 413.

### **Bridging Social Capital**

A third area for prescriptive action is the recognition that within our increasingly diverse and heterogeneous urban communities there is a particular need to address the ‘bridging’ of social capital. Increased diversity in our urban communities presents a potential economic advantage as well as a challenge to community building. “The uncomfortable truth for Canada today is that highly diverse societies traditionally experience lower levels of interpersonal trust and less faith in the efficacy of civic groups and institutions” (Griffiths, 2009, p. 45). Yet, despite the challenge to social connectedness that accompanies increased diversity, “it can be a big asset when it comes to driving productivity and innovation...the different ways of thinking among people from different cultures can be a boon” (Jonas, 2007). Integration of new immigrants into municipal community life is a growing and increasingly vital part of addressing voter turn-out and civic engagement. Perhaps even more important than political involvement, newcomers should be encouraged and assisted to participate in activities that directly benefit themselves and their families. Involvement in local amateur sports, school councils, and community agencies can help introduce newcomers to community life and ease the process of integration into broader community networks. “Indeed, there is far more to civic participation than political involvement, and meaningful engagement in the political process is in fact often the longer-term outcome of other kinds of civic participation” (Birjandian, 2005, p. 24).

The challenge of developing social capital is relatively easy, in contrast to the challenge of building bridging capital. Building social capital takes time and focused effort. When Putnam published his Six Spheres Strategy, he assigned a 10 year target for his action plan. It takes at least that long to effect and demonstrate societal change. In an increasingly diverse society like Canada’s that celebrates multiculturalism and is supportive of maintaining distinct societies, it is especially relevant to forge bridging

strategies so that community strength can be built through diversity. As expressed by Griffiths, not to achieve the bridging of social capital is to put our country and communities in peril.

One can easily imagine a Canada where we continue to neglect our social capital and civic literacy and as a result lose not only the capacity to forge common goals between diverse groups but also the common reference points required to communicate and articulate these goals. ... a future Canada could see its once rich regional and linguistic tapestry unravel as individuals retreat into communities dedicated first and foremost to the interests of their immediate families or their ethnic and cultural groups.

Source: Griffiths, 2009, p. 49.

Finally, in closing this research paper I would like to underline the importance of a continuing role for government in fostering community development and civic engagement. If there are two principles that help to distinguish the mission of the public service from other walks of life they are: democratic governance, and integrity. As opposed to the more singular mission of the marketplace (driven by self-interest and/or profit), Pal suggests that “Democratic governance is clearly about working through differences...”, and “democratic politics is also about working through those differences, or reaching beyond them to some common ground”. Building and maintaining high quality communities also requires integrity: integrity of persons, integrity of process, integrity of purpose, and integrity of government.

While local government, like business, has a renewed emphasis on service-client relations, local governments serve a more important role in addition to being an instrument to getting things done, Pal says that government serves “as a public space wherein we fulfill and enjoy our responsibilities and privileges as citizens” (Pal, 1997, p.278). Leading the process of community building and civic engagement is a role unique to government (i.e., elected officials and the public service) and if done well, it helps to distinguish local government as not merely another form of business or service provider.

\* \* \*

## **APPENDIX A: REFERENCES/BIBLIOGRAPHY**

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Topic	Thames																												Wasaga																												East																												Whitchurch-																												St. Catharines																												Greater																												Richmond																											
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Age	65 years and over	1625	1765	1575	3040	3745	2150	3690	2710	4230	4490	4230	4490	4990	6655	7075	13600	13975	23630	19150	23475	16425	25350	19365	23270	27865	48375	75395	65700	100875																																																																																																																																																																						
Age	% of the pop.	22.70%	22.40%	12%	21.80%	24.90%	10.20%	15.10%	10.10%	19.20%	16.40%	8.90%	18.10%	8.30%	16%	9.50%	11.30%	10.90%	18.10%	13.50%	14.90%	10.10%	15.40%	11.70%	9.70%	10.70%	13.70%	7.80%	14.90%	9.80%																																																																																																																																																																						
Age	Median age of total population	44.5	45.4	41	43.9	48.8	40.5	42.2	35.4	42.7	41.1	37.2	41.8	34.4	40.8	37.2	36.4	35.4	41.7	39.4	41.1	37.8	40.3	38.4	35.9	38.1	38.2	33.7	39.6	36.7																																																																																																																																																																						
Occupied dwellings	Total private dwellings	3045	3545	4590	6010	6235	6890	8530	9420	12225	12880	15655	20490	18465	22650	25090	43290	46515	54725	54920	64940	51000	63260	56580	69535	77195	145525	125925	194455	214925	321100																																																																																																																																																																					
Occupied dwellings	Number of occupied dwellings	1985	2280	4125	3675	5615	6120	7280	7535	8020	8770	13425	12870	16260	13875	20690	32090	35535	37800	38390	43490	44005	50330	47595	64495	68505	90640	102625	132785	161190	211850																																																																																																																																																																					
Occupied dwellings	% Number of occupied dwellings	65.10%	64.30%	89.80%	61.10%	90%	88.80%	85.30%	80%	65.60%	68.10%	85.80%	62.80%	88.10%	61.30%	82.40%	74.10%	76.40%	69.10%	69.90%	67%	86.30%	79.60%	84.10%	92.80%	88.70%	62.30%	81.50%	68.30%	75%	66%																																																																																																																																																																					
Occupied dwellings	Average value of occupied dwellings	\$160,631	\$142,291	\$279,026	\$154,231	\$245,103	\$398,741	\$495,718	\$263,056	\$229,134	\$224,259	\$421,051	\$187,927	\$364,417	\$186,548	\$349,378	\$252,502	\$254,083	\$208,031	\$231,151	\$164,900	\$466,376	\$348,041	\$472,244	\$473,569	\$440,755	\$212,059	\$333,591	\$252,248	\$377,116	\$297,718																																																																																																																																																																					
Household characteristics	St. Catharines, C	131989	131989	40,70%	x																																																																																																																																																																																															
Household characteristics	Total private households	3045	3550	4590	6010	6235	6890	8525	9420	12220	12880	15655	20490	18465	25085	43295	46515	54725	54920	64940	51000	63260	56580	69535	77195	145525	125925	194455	214925	321100																																																																																																																																																																						
Household characteristics	One-person households	985	1300	685	2060	1310	845	1460	1830	3535	4035	2415	5955	2620	6595	4460	8860	9645	16255	13500	17515	7070	14670	9725	6345	8410	43645	15425	51730	35070	88105																																																																																																																																																																					
Household characteristics	% of total households	31.70%	36.60%	14.90%	34.30%	21%	12.30%	17.10%	19.40%	28.90%	31.30%	15.40%	29.10%	14.20%	29.10%	17.80%	20.50%	20.70%	29.70%	24.60%	27%	13.90%	23.20%	17.20%	9.10%	10.90%	30%	12.20%	26.60%	16.30%	27.40%																																																																																																																																																																					
Household characteristics	Average household size	2.3	2.1	2.8	2.2	2.4	3	2.8	2.8	2.4	2.3	3	2.3	2.9	2.3	2.9	2.7	2.7	2.4	2.5	2.4	3.2	2.6	2.9	3.4	3.4	2.4	3.4	2.5	3.1	2.5																																																																																																																																																																					
Household characteristics	Median income	\$44,771	\$39,511	\$79,299	\$40,560	\$54,161	\$87,913	\$86,364	\$69,154	\$46,722	\$54,128	\$89,177	\$48,567	\$86,604	\$46,628	\$81,640	\$65,311	\$64,832	\$50,497	\$61,514	\$55,019	\$78,976	\$74,969	\$92,394	\$86,616	\$79,924	\$53,684	\$72,402	\$55,312	\$71,393	\$69,743																																																																																																																																																																					
Household characteristics	Median income	\$23,855	\$21,254	\$32,527	\$20,537	\$27,198	\$32,364	\$32,784	\$31,983	\$24,523	\$27,316	\$41,452	\$26,429	\$41,191	\$22,622	\$33,527	\$30,346	\$31,673	\$26,915	\$32,383	\$25,449	\$36,298	\$39,117	\$42,357	\$32,611	\$39,925	\$28,342	\$35,692	\$26,492	\$37,419	\$38,161																																																																																																																																																																					
Mother tongue	Markham, T	261573	261573	36.80%	x																																																																																																																																																																																															
Mother tongue	Total population	6965	7585	13085	13445	15010	20685	24100	26695	29165	30025	47030	47880	53405	53235	73370	119405	126830	130005	140240	155995	161690	162480	164485	238005	260755	348690	431575	497400	665655	801275																																																																																																																																																																					
Mother tongue	Other languages	375	280	1140	550	2060	2055	3400	1745	2135	2325	9415	3600	10955	2810	13950	23705	12650	24555	16115	12290	89060	26195	41595	127125	152440	71615	190610	127045	333495	173145																																																																																																																																																																					
Mother tongue	% other languages	0.054	0.037	0.087	0.041	0.137	0.099	0.141078838	0.065368046	0.073204183	0.07743547	0.200191367	0.07518797	0.205130606	0.052784822	0.19	0.198526025	0.099739809	0.188877351	0.114910154	0.078784576	0.5508071	0.161219842	0.252880202	0.534127434	0.584610075	0.205383005	0.441661357	0.255418175	0.501002772	0.216086862																																																																																																																																																																					
Immigrant status & period of immigration:	Total population	6960	7585	13085	13445	15005	20685	24105	26695	29165	30025	47030	47880	53405	53235	73370	119410	126830	130005	140240	155995	161690	162480	164485	238000	260755	348690	431575	497400	665655	801275																																																																																																																																																																					
Immigrant status & period of immigration:	Immigrants	500	250	1250	665	3040	2920	4395	3435	2960	3465	10525	4720	13030	3210	16120	25225	16740	27405	21925	10450	83335	36280	50250	106960	147400	75620	206190	126485	343250	178545																																																																																																																																																																					
Immigrant status & period of immigration:	% immigrants	0.072	0.033	0.096	0.049	0.203	0.141	0.182327318	0.128675782	0.101491514	0.11540383	0.223793323	0.098579783	0.243984646	0.060298676	0.22	0.211246964	0.1319877	0.210799585	0.156339133	0.066896927	0.515399839	0.22328902	0.305498982	0.449411765	0.565281586	0.216688852	0.477761667	0.51565751	0.222826121																																																																																																																																																																						
Immigrant status & period of immigration:	Immigrants	90	55	135	95	270	365	825	810	820	865	4375	1350	5605	720	5540	6660	4985	7780	4555	1550	46235	10810	18540	40115	77555	28885	111510	43505	185680	82340																																																																																																																																																																					
Immigrant status & period of immigration:	% immigrant	18%	22%	10.80%	14.30%	8.90%	12.50%	18.80%	23.60%	27.70%	25%	41.60%	28.60%	43%	22.40%	34.40%	27.20%	29.80%	28.40%	20.80%	14.80%	55.50%	29.80%	36.90%	37.50%	52.60%	38.20%	54.10%	34.40%	54.10%	46.10%																																																																																																																																																																					
Mobility status - Place of residence 1 yr ago and 5 yrs ago:	Total population	6895	7500	12940	13355	14875	20505	23900	26440	28840	29715	46450	47370	52390	52665	72535	117745	125180	128705	138675	154530	159820	160425	162540	234720	257995	344970	425050	491935	657795	792240																																																																																																																																																																					
M.S. - Place of res. 1 yr ago	Lived outside	610	370	620	845	1630	1105	2045	1995	1485	3030	3550	7420	3025	5710	5815	9445	5860	7670	5320	10490	10280	11065	10765	17405	15810	31260	17640	38390	32250																																																																																																																																																																						
M.S. - Place of res. 1 yr ago	% Lived outside	0.088	0.049	0.048	0.063	0.11	0.054	0.085564854	0.058333333	0.069174757	0.04997476	0.065231432	0.074941946	0.141630082	0.057438527	0.079	0.049398696	0.07545135	0.045530477	0.055309176	0.034426972	0.065636341	0.064079788	0.088075551	0.045863156	0.067462548	0.045830072	0.073544289	0.035858396	0.058361648	0.040707361																																																																																																																																																																					
M.S. - Place of res. 5 yrs ago	Total population	6575	7270	12400	12800	14410	19665	22880	24865	27615	28375	44125	45365	48820	50645	69060	111600	118535	123640	132705	148260	152070	153105	154065	221360	246515	330105	399035	470175	625580	756745																																																																																																																																																																					
M.S. - Place of res. 5 yrs ago	Lived outside	1440	1105	2610	2400	5260	3910	5395	5905	5550	4385	12975	9405	23030	8585	17185	20895	34395	18035	24500	15600	42000	32655	38855	48100	62650	52075	113880	59895	139210	107790																																																																																																																																																																					
M.S. - Place of res. 5 yrs ago	% Lived outside	0.022	0.152	0.21	0.188	0.365	0.199	0.235795455	0.237482405	0.200977729	0.154537445	0.294050992	0.207318417	0.471732896	0.169513279	0.249	0.187231183	0.290167461	0.145867033	0.184620022	0.105220558	0.276188597	0.213285	0.252198747	0.217293097	0.254142275	0.157752836	0.2853885	0.127388738	0.222529493	0.142438999																																																																																																																																																																					
Educational attainment	Total population	5825	6415</																																																																																																																																																																																																	