Manifestation of Social Trust among Migrants: The Case of Iranian Residents in Toronto, Canada

Mahmood Ketabi[1]
Vahid Ghasemi[2]
Mojtaba Mahdavi[3]

Abstract

This paper is excerpted from a research project titled "A Sociological Analysis of Socio-economic Situation of Iranian Migrants in Canada (Case Study: Toronto). This survey research has been carried out in 2005. Its main goal is to answer the following questions: What is the trust level among Iranian migrants residing in Toronto? What is the difference between the in-group social trust level (trust among Iranians) and the out-group trust level (confidence toward Canadians living in Toronto)? In an attempt to answer these questions a sample of 182 Iranians were interviewed on the basis of a standardized questionnaire. The findings reveal that the in-group social trust level – as measured against the defined scale – is slightly below the average, whereby the difference from the middle point of the scale is statistically significant. Moreover, it demonstrates that the mean figure for out-group social trust is significantly higher than the average defined on the scale. The results also suggest that the most important cause for lower in-group trust should be sought for in the pre- migration period. Researches carried out on social confidence indicate that weakness of social trust in home country is often transferred to other countries – after migration – and is intensified due to problems of the migrant community and increase of social risk.

Introduction

Immigration of Iranians to foreign countries as well as difficulties and complexities surrounding it, has caught the attention of the Iranian mass media, which has embarked on a wide discussion of crucial issues such as the problem of brain drain and expenses imposed on the country. In fact, migration trend that began in 1989 and got momentum in 1999 has provided much concern. Statistics shows that approximately 180,000 applications for migration have been filed in the Canadian Embassy in Tehran, a great part of which is related to middle-range levels of management at present more than 150,000 Iranian physicians and engineers are living in the United States. There are indications that all those ranking from 1-100 in very competitive entrance examinations of Iranian universities receive – already in their second academic year – acceptance letters from the best universities of the world, offering them outstanding opportunities to continue their study after B.S or B.A. About 90 out

---

[1] Department of social sciences, University of Isfahan, Isfahan, Iran, mketabi@ualberta.ca

[2] Department of social sciences, University of Isfahan, Isfahan, Iran v.ghasemi@Itr.ui.ac.ir

[3] Department of Political Science, University of Alberta, Edmonton, Canada, mojtaba.mahdavi@ualberta.ca

of 135 pupils who ranked high in student Olympic examinations are now studying at one of the highly ranked universities of the United States. The chance for such students to return to Iran after finishing their study is only 3 percent.

During the last two or three decades Iran had to deal with the phenomenon of permanent and extensive international migration especially to the United States, Canada and various European countries. The main goal of such migrations has generally been promotion of the quality of life in different cultural, social, and economic aspects. There are very few studies carried out on the quality of life of Iranian migrants in the countries mentioned, through which one could evaluate how far their pre-migration desires and ideals, have been fulfilled. This study is an attempt to shed new light on the problem by showing the situation of Iranian migrants in Toronto (Canada) in respect to one of the socio-cultural aspects, i.e. social trust. This study has been carried out at three levels of description, classification and explanation in an attempt to find scientific answers for the following three questions:

1. What is the level of in-group and out-group social trust? (Descriptive questions)

2. How do the levels of in-group and out-group social trust of individuals –belonging to different socioeconomic statuses – differ? (Classification question)

3. In case of difference between the two levels of trust, what are the social origins? (Explanatory question)

The primary hypothesis of the authors – based on studies carried out in Iran – was that the level of in-group trust among internal migrants was higher than that between in-groups and out-groups. According to this hypothesis, which was based on the survey of values and attitudes of Iranians (Mohseni, 2004), the level of generalized trust (confidence in people whom we don't know), transferred by migrants to other countries, was low. Hence, the majority of Iranian migrants, despite their similar and identical incentives, in regard to migration, displayed low levels of trust in their interactions with other Iranian migrants.

Definition of Social Trust

Social trust is a characteristic of social relations at micro level (individual/individual, individual/group), intermediary level (group/group, nation/state) and macro level (state/state, state/international organizations). Based on this characteristic, actors involved in social relations expect behaviors and practices to be in accordance with social norms at all the above-mentioned levels. Social trust is an appropriate expectation in regard to actions of others whose commitments are taken for granted.

Anthony Giddens distinguished two kinds of trust: Trust in particular others like friends and relatives. In social trust literature it is also termed as informal trust. Trust in (other) individuals or abstract systems: trust in other members of society (generalized other) and abstract systems such as institutions, specialized organizations and their representatives (institutional level of trust). In the social sciences literature, the former is called 'generalized trust' and the other 'formal trust' (Giddens, 1380: 94-105). Though social trust is fundamental for the construction of social capital, it tends to disappear easily.

Within the framework of this study two kinds of social trust – in-group and out-group – are distinguished. Since this study is about the Iranian migrants living in Toronto, trust in the social relationships among Iranians has been considered as in-group trust and trust in social relationships between Iranians and Canadians residing in this city has been regarded as out-group trust.

Based on Gidden's classification, both kinds of social trust belong to the generalized type of social trust. Social trust, as an independent variable, plays an essential role in the efficiency of social systems – from the standpoint of its relationship to other social variables. Shortage of trust in a society (that is the existence of higher risk levels in establishing relationships with others) decreases the volume of relationships among individuals and the level of social participation among them. Under these circumstances, the exchange of information and other transactions would cost more to be effective and social processes would need longer time and a more complicated path to be realized. In order to reach to a social system, which enjoys a high level of social capitals, higher levels of social trust are needed in regard to in-group and out-group relationships.

Table 1: Interaction between in-group ties and inter-group trust

Trust and in-group ties		Combination of in and out group relations	
Much	Little		
Social capital decreases within society. In general negative consequences for the society	Low level of social capital	Little	Trust and inter-group relations
Social capital increases positive consequences for society can be expected	A situation that emerges scarcely	Much	

Source: Share'poor, 2001/1380

Significance: Social Trust and Social Capital

Social capital is defined as the total characteristics of a social system that facilitates the possibility of gaining collective   goals through voluntary participation. Social trust is among the constructive elements of social capital (Bolan and Unix, 1999; Cohen and Prosak, 2001; Australian Center of Statistics, 2003). Robert Putnam's focus of analysis on social capital lies in culture and the elements of trust, participation and cooperation. In his book titled: "construction of efficient democracy: civil traditions in modern Italy, published in 1993, he observes a positive interdependence between people's trust and the rate of their participations in social affairs, existence of social stability and a high rate of growth. According to Cohen and Prosak (2001) social capital is combined with affective relations among individuals. These relations are based on trust, mutual understanding, common values and behaviors that link social elements and human webs, making cooperation possible. According to Coleman, social trust is the most fundamental element that can create social capital – in the process of inter-individual relations.

Previous Researches: Social Trust in Iran

In a research titled "values and attitudes of Iranians" which was carried out in 28 provinces in winter 2004/1382 by the national project section of the ministry of culture and Islamic Guidance, attitudes and values of statistical population including all individuals over the age of 15, living in the center of provinces, were analyzed. The study included 4581 samples and covered various areas like politics, family, religion, economy, identity, leisure time and cultural commodities as well as social trust. The following three points are the summary of the results concerning social trust:

First, as to the question "what is your opinion about trustworthiness of people" 4441 individuals who answered the questions chose the following options: 28.8% little, 56.9% medial and 14.3% much. Comparison of groups differing from each other on the basis of gender, age, education and marriage status reveals that general trust to others is less among women as compared to men, age group of 15-29 as compared to older age groups, individuals having medial

education as compared to those having higher or/and low levels of education and singles as compared to married. Second, among 20 occupational groups mentioned teachers, university professors and sportsmen were more trusted than retailers, businessmen, housing agents and car dealers. Third, in regard to 'trust' in news sources, the following question was asked: How far, in your opinion, are the following news sources trustable? Computed percentages are as follows

Table 2. Trust level of Iranians in various news sources of Iran

News Source	Little	Medial	Much	Don't know	Valid answer
Radio & T.V	22.6	33.7	43.7	79	4502
Press	31.4	45.1	23.5	274	4307
Foreign Radios	53.6	26.4	20	580	4001
Satellite	50.6	24.1	25.2	1114	3467
Internet	28.2	26.3	45.5	1345	3226
Other People's Versions	78.2	19.2	2.6	242	4339

Source: Values and attitudes of Iranians, 2004/1382

Methodology

This article is partly the result of a survey research carried out in Toronto/Canada in 2005. Questionnaires were used as a means for gathering data. The questionnaire was designed to measure variables such as in-group social trust, out-group social trust, family integration, use of mass media, causes of migration, tendency to return to Iran and some other variables. The questionnaire was designed in Iran and in order to determine its validity, some sociologists and temporary migrants who had recently visited Iran were consulted. Also upon arrival and residing of one of the authors in Toronto, few questionnaires were completed and studied. Vague points of some questions were removed and a number of questions were increased. To measure the reliability a preliminary sample of 30 was used, Alpha Cronbach Coefficients were computed for evaluating in-group and out-group social trust. The figures were 0.84 and 0.68 respectively.

A summary of results for each item is as follows. In this study sampling was judgmental. This method was used because no certain statistical framework was available about Iranians living in Toronto. Making use of local experts' knowledge, the author tried to select the sample from different communities in which Iranian immigrants lived. The size of the sample was determined by consideration of limited time and research aids available. A total number of 200 questionnaires were completed of which 18 were cancelled – due to lack of considerable answers – and consequently 182 questionnaires were used for date analysis.

Table 3. Cronbach alpha coefficients for measuring in/out-group trusts

Variables	Items	Alpha if item deleted	Cronbach's Alpha
In-group Social Trust	Few Iranians (in Canada) consider money as everything	.81	.84
	Most Iranians are correct in their business connections with others	.84	
	Most Iranians respond goodness with loyalty	.85	
	You can hardly find a real friend among Iranians	.83	
	You can hardly find an Iranian who can be trusted	.77	
	Many Iranians are your friend because they want to benefit from you	.81	
Out-group Social Trust	It is easy to find Canadian friends over here	.69	.68
	Canadian friends are more loyal	.68	
	You can easily integrate yourself in the Canadian society	.65	
	You can scarcely find people among Canadians who are sympathetic to you	.60	
	I have no trust to Canadian friends	.61	
	We are experiencing more and more constraints over here and less and less freedoms	.62	

The scale used for measuring two types of in-group and out-group social trust was Likert scale. Based on this in order to measure each type of trust, 6 items (3 positive and 3 negative items) were designed. Grading (reverse grading for positive and negative items) was in a way that higher grades implied higher trust. Taking the 4-grade option for each item into consideration (from a minimum of 1 to a maximum of 4), minimum grade for each respondent would be 6 and maximum grade would be 24. Total grades of each respondent in respect to each in-group and out-group social trust scale have been considered as interval variable and appropriate statistical methods for this kind of measurement have been used.

Figure 1: Social Trust Measurement Scale based on Total Grades for the 6 Items

Minimum Grade	Relatively Low Trust									Relatively High Trust										Maximum Grade
	06	07	08	09	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	
	Very Low				Low				Medial		High				Very High					

In addition to computing respondents' total grade, individuals are classified – according to their grades into 5 social trust categories (in-group and out-group) in a range from very low to very high.

Description of Sample

Age and Sex Distribution

Out of a sample of 182, 53% were female and 47% men. Age groups 30-39 and 40-49 claimed the majority of respondents. Younger and older age groups formed smaller shares of the sample. The mean age of respondents was 41.5 whereby the mean age for woman was 40.3 and that of men 42.9.

Distribution by Education in Iran and Canada

Majority of individuals in the sample had a bachelor degree prior to immigration to Canada (41.2%). The same educational status is approximately true for the post immigration period (44.5%). The lowest and highest educational groups (both in the pre- and post immigration periods) claimed the lowest share of the sample. Approximately two thirds of the respondents showed no change in educational status after immigration and only the level of education of 25.9 percent of the sample was increased only by one grade. People possessing higher education degrees claimed the major share of Iranian immigrants. About 60% of persons studied enjoyed higher education (Bachelor degree and higher).

Table 4: Distribution of sample by level education in Iran & Canada

Level of Education	Degree	In Iran		In Canada		Increase in the Level of Education	Percent
		Count	Percent	Count	Percent		
First	Lower than Diploma	17	9.3	4	2.2	No Change	65.4
Second	Diploma	33	18.1	22	12.1	1 Level	20.9
Third	2 Year College	22	12.1	20	11	2 Levels	6
Fourth	B.A. or B.S.	75	42.1	81	44.5	3 Levels	3.3
Fifth	Master	22	12.1	33	18.1	4 Levels	1.6
Sixth	Doctorate	9	4.9	20	11	5 Levels	0.5
No Answer		4	2.2	2	1.1	--	2.2
Total		182	100	182	100	--	100

Findings

In-Group Trust

In order to measure in-group trust, 6 items (including 3 positives and 3 negatives) have been designed. The designed items together with the amounts related to relative distribution of respondents are demonstrated in the following (table 3). One considerable point is that in regard to computed percentages most respondents are concentrated in the middle sections (agree and disagree). Radical answers (like complete agreement or total disagreement) are scarcer. Two thirds of respondents have disagreed or totally disagreed with the item "most Iranians are correct in their business connections".

Percentage of those disagreeing or totally disagreeing with the item "you can hardly find an Iranian who can be trusted", equals with that of those agreeing or completely agreeing with the same item (about 45% for each group of respondents). About 10% of respondents either gave vague answers or avoided answering.

Table 5: Sample distribution about items of in-group trust

Type of Item	Items	Percent					Mean out of 4
		Completely Agree	Agree	Disagree	Totally Disagree	No Answer	
Positive	Few Iranians (in Canada) consider money as everything	3.8	46.7	29.7	8.8	11	2.49
	Most Iranians are correct in their business connections with others	2.2	17	52.2	14.3	14.3	2.15
	Most Iranians respond goodness with loyalty	3.8	47.3	31.3	7.7	9.9	2.48
Negative	You can hardly find a real friend among Iranians	14.8	33	36.3	9.9	6	2.44
	You can hardly find an Iranian who can be trusted	15.9	3.2	37.4	7.1	9.3	2.40
	Many Iranians are your friend because they want to benefit from you	8.8	34.6	44.5	2.7	9.3	2.46

In order to determine each respondent's trust grade, total of his/her grades gained from 6 items has been computed. Based on a designed continuum for measuring in-group trust level (minimal trust being 6 and maximal 24 with an average of 15), computed mean for 182 respondents were 14.4 and a standard deviation of 3.2.

The following was the first hypothesis of the research: The mean in-group trust with the statistical population is below the average.

H0: $\mu = 15$ H1: $\mu < 15$

The computed mean is very close to the middle of the scale, however statistically it is significantly less than the middle point of the continuum. Based on one-sample t-test it can be evaluated with a high level of confidence that the in-group trust average the statistical population (of Iranians living in Toronto/ Canada) is lower than the average.)

Table 6: One-sample t-test for testing the hypothesis that the mean in-group trust among Iranians in Toronto is lower than the average level

One-Sample Test

	Observed Mean= 14.43				Test Value = 15	
	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
					Lower	Upper
Within Group Trust	-2.440	181	.016	-.5714	-1.0335	-.1094

Table 7: Distribution of sample by the sum of in-group trust grades acquired (on the basis of measurement continuum)

Trust Level	Grade Sum	Count	Percent	Total Count	Total Percent
Very Low	6	1	0.5	17	9.3
	7	3	1.6		
	8	0	0		
	9	13	7.1		
Low	10	6	3.3	55	30.2
	11	10	5.5		
	12	18	9.9		
	13	21	11.5		
Medial	14	10	5.5	56	30.8
	15	26	14.3		
	16	20	11		
High	17	16	8.8	52	28.6
	18	26	14.3		
	19	9	4.9		
	20	1	0.5		
Very High	21	2	1.1	2	1.1
	22	0	0		
	23	0	0		
	24	0	0		
Total		182	100	182	100

Out-Group Trust

In order to measure out-group trust 6 items (including 3 positives and 3 negatives) were designed. In table 8, percentages computed for each item are demonstrated, accompanied by the means for each item (higher means = higher trust). The most interesting computed percentage is related to the following item: "I put little trust in my Canadian friends". No respondent agreed completely with the item and 90% opposed or totally opposed it. In connection with most of the items percentages demonstrate an over average trust in Canadians. The item "it is easier to find Canadian friends over here", makes an exception. A higher percentage of respondents opposed this item. The mean figure for the 6 items is significantly more than the defined average of the scale (2.5) which on the whole confirms a higher than average out-group trust.

Table 8: Distribution of sample by agreement or disagreement with items measuring out- group social trust

Type of Item	Items	Percent					Mean out of 4
		Completely Agree	Agree	Disagree	Totally Disagree	No Answer	
Positive	It is easy to find Canadian friends over here	2.2	35.2	46.2	8.2	8.2	2.35
	Canadian friends are more loyal	4.9	48.9	26.4	4.9	14.8	2.61
	You can easily integrate yourself in the Canadian society	4.4	48.9	37.9	3.3	5.5	2.57
Negative	You can scarcely find people among Canadians who are sympathetic to you	6.6	16.5	61	10.4	5.5	2.78
	I put little trust in my Canadian friends	-	2.7	20.9	68.1	8.2	3.61
	We are experiencing more and more constraints over here and less and less freedoms	8.8	5.5	48.4	28	14.3	3.08

For each respondent, out-group trust is computed on the basis of the sum of 6 items. The mean for respondents equals to 17.01. The second hypothesis of the research has been as follows: The mean of out-group trust among statistical population is higher than the average:

H0: $\mu = 15$ H1: $\mu > 15$

The data shows that one can reject the null hypothesis with a confidence level of 95%. Consequently the research hypothesis is approved. Lower and higher borders of confidence interval shows that the means of inter group trust in the statistical population is at least 1.7 more than the amount of 15.

Table 9: one-sample t-test for testing this hypothesis: The mean of out-group trust among the Iranian immigrants residing in Toronto is higher than the average.

One-Sample Test

	Observed Mean= 17.01			Test Value = 15		
	T	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
					Lower	Upper
Between Group Trust	12.942	181	.000	2.0082	1.7021	2.3144

Table 10: Distribution of sample by the sum of out-group trust grades acquired on the basis of measurement continuum

Trust Level	Grade Sum	Count	Percent	Total Count	Total Percent
Very Low	6	0	0	0	0
	7	0	0		
	8	0	0		
	9	0	0		
Low	10	0	0	12	6.6
	11	1	0.5		
	12	2	1.1		
	13	9	4.9		
Medial	14	12	6.6	56	30.8
	15	17	9.3		
	16	27	14.8		
High	17	38	20.9	109	59.9
	18	30	16.5		
	19	26	14.3		
	20	15	8.2		
Very High	21	2	1.1	5	2.7
	22	3	1.6		
	23	0	0		
	24	0	0		
Total		182	100	182	100

Table 10 in which classification of trust levels is shown in 5 categories, also shows that no individual lies within the very low category of out-group trust level. The main share belongs to the group level designated as 'high level' that claims approximately 60% of respondents. Also close to one-third of respondents claim an intermediate level of trust. Individuals who have low trust make 7% and those enjoying very high trust make up for only 3% of total respondents.

Comparison of in-group and out-group trust

The hypothesis in this regard was as follows: The average of out-group trust is higher than that of in-group one. H0: $\mu 1 = \mu 2$ H1: $\mu 1$ $\mu 2$

Paired Samples Statistics

	Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pair 1 Ingroup Trust Outgroup Trust	14.4286 17.0082	182 182	3.1593 2.0934	.2342 .1552

Paired Samples Test

	Paired Differences						
			95% Confidence		t	df	Sig. (2-taile)
	Mean	Std. Deviation	Lower	Upper			
Pair 1 Ingroup Trust – Outgrup Trust	-2.580	2.8750	-3.0002	-2.1592	-12.105	181	.000

Computed results show that the mean for out-group trust (17.01) compared to that of in-group trust (14.43) is 2.58 grades higher. Results also reveal a significant difference of the two means. Based on the computed level of significance one the null hypothesis is rejected with a high confidence level (at least 95%) and the research hypothesis expressing a higher mean for out-group trust – as compared to that of in-group – is appeared.

Conclusion

The findings of this research show that out-group trust is significantly higher than that of in-group. The mean for in-group trust was significantly lower than the average of the scale. This difference is significant, though its intensity is not high and the mean for out-group trust is significantly higher.

The results gained on in-group and out-group trust can be generalized to the Iranian community living in Toronto at a confidence level of at least 95 percent. The most important cause for lower in-group trust should be sought for in the pre- migration period in Iran. Researches carried out on social confidence (among them the one by the authors of this paper in counties of Isfahan Province) generally indicate weakness of social trust. This weakness is transferred to other countries –after migration – and (in some cases) is intensified due to specific situations and problems of the migrant community and increase of social risk.

References

Brettell, Caroline and James Frank Hollifield. Eds. 2000. *Migration Theory: Talking Across Disciplines*. New York and London: Routledge.

Castles, Stephan and Marl J. Miller 2003. *The Age of Migration: International Population Movements in the Modern World*. UK: Palgrave Macmillan.

Cohen, Robin. Ed. 1995. *The Cambridge Survey of World Migration*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Dilmaghani. 1999. *Who are We? The Iranians in Toronto Today: Profile Contributions and Issues*. Toronto: Family Service Association of Toronto.

Dossa, Parin Aziz. 2004. *Politics and Poetics of Migration: Narratives of Iranian Women from the Diaspora*. Toronto: Canadian Scholars' Press.

Ertler, Klaus-Dieter and Martin Loschnigg. Eds. 2004. *Canada in the Sign of Migration and Trans-Culturalism: From Multi to Trans-Culturalism*. Peter Lang Publishing Inc.

Garousi, Vahid. 2005. *Iranians in Canada*: *A Statistical Analysis*. Ottawa: Carleton University Press.

Hirschman, Charles, Kasmit. 1999. *The Handbook of International Migration: The American Experience*. New York: Russel Sage Foundation.

Kazemi, M. S. 1986. *Iranians in Ontario*. Toronto: Mihen Publishing Inc.

Li, P.S. 2003. *Destination Canada: Immigration Debates and Issues*. Oxford University Press.

Douglas, S. Messey. 2005. *World in Motion: Understanding International Migration at the End of the Millennium*. England: Oxford University Press.

Messina, Anthony, M. and Gallya Lahav. 2006. *The Migration Reader: Exploring Political Policies*. Lynne Rienner Publishers.