

CanadaWatch

PRACTICAL AND AUTHORITATIVE ANALYSIS OF KEY NATIONAL ISSUES

EDITORIAL

Multiculturalism and its feet of clay

THE QUESTION: AM I BETTER OFF THAN MY PARENTS?

It is false to think that multiculturalism, Canada's signature program, should make us a more tolerant, open, and just society. There is always a deep and jagged fault line in nation-building policies. Some individuals get on board and catch the train. They send their children to school, become integrated into Canadian society, and feel they belong.

The operative word is "feel," because historians and demographers tell us that immigrants face huge boulders on their path when they arrive resource-poor, with few networks and little support. They are stigmatized as strangers in our midst and made to feel like outsiders because they are newly arrived. In every society the immigrant lives initially at the margin for a generation or more. A better

BY DANIEL DRACHE

Daniel Drache is the associate director of the Robarts Centre for Canadian Studies at York University.

measure is what happens to immigrants over a period of three generations. Children of Italian, Portuguese, Serbian, Chinese, Middle Eastern, and African families inevitably ask: am I better off than my parents?

The answer is not always upbeat. Many immigrants cannot catch the multicultural train because they don't have the skills and connections or the support from governments to take the huge step to economic and cultural security. For instance, immigrant women are often kept out of the labour market or forced to work in the most menial parts of the economy. Others are disadvantaged by

race, class, and belief. So multiculturalism's promise of a better life does not reach them in the least, for they are outside of the integration process. Many of the contributors to this issue argue passionately and with reason that multiculturalism has feet of clay. The boulders on the path seem to become larger, more exclusionary, and systemic for many new Canadians as well as for older, established communities.

THE DARK SIDE OF DIVERSITY

Recent census data read like an indictment of Canadian multiculturalism and the practice of diversity. There is a correlation between income inequality and racial and ethnic origin. So if you are of European descent, the Canadian multiculturalism story reads like a success. If

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ASK A POLLSTER: Is multiculturalism working as part of our value system?

Multiculturalism ain't broke

A LOSE-LOSE PROPOSITION?

It sometimes appears that multiculturalism has very few friends in this country. Pundits tell us that we Canadians, like citizens of other Western countries, are too "tolerant" for our own good. Multiculturalism, once seen as a fair-minded, idealistic vision that Canadians could be proud of, is now commonly blamed for a host of social ills: civic apathy, loss of identity, gender inequality, fragmentation, ghettoization, even racism and terrorism. Whereas multicultur-

BY MICHAEL ADAMS

Michael Adams is president of Environics Research Group and author of *Unlikely Utopia: The Surprising Triumph of Canadian Pluralism* (Viking Canada, 2007).

alism was once seen as good for immigrants and good for Canada, it is now a lose-lose proposition. Or so some commentators tell us.

When ordinary Canadians are surveyed, however, another picture emerges. Canadians do have concerns about their

country's immigration and refugee policies, and they have concerns about the social integration of newcomers. On the whole, however, Canadians remain proud of their country's diversity and of

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redefine THE POSSIBLE.

schools at times veered dangerously off course, and the doctrine of reasonable accommodation seemed to hold very little currency. The Harper government has imposed visa restrictions on Mexicans, claiming that too many Mexicans are applying for political refugee status. In her article for this issue of *Canada Watch*, Barbara Jackman puts her finger on the central dilemma. An Ontario Court of Appeal ruled in 2003 (*R v. Brown*) that racial profiling by the police is not acceptable, but police in Canada's major cities continue to use these and other techniques. So the question that we have to ask is whether Canada, despite the dramatic impact of the global flow of immigrants, has constructed silos of exclusion and racism. Are we going backwards into the future?

It is no coincidence that Canada's great experiment with diversity occurred during two decades of economic expansion and unprecedented wealth creation. Economic research makes the fundamental point that inclusion can only be sustained when the majority does not feel threatened by newly arrived immigrant communities and the immigration process provides safe passage for new Canadians and their families. At these times, families save, buy houses, and send their children to college or university. The perennial questions asked are: Am I better off than my parents? Can I take care of them? What is my future?

COMPLACENCY AND MELANCHOLY

In a strange way the Canadian psyche appears to be drawn to melancholy about both the successes and shortcomings of multiculturalism. In the left assessment, system and structure are blamed for racializing Canadian society. Its fiercest critics call multiculturalism a sham. In the conservative critique, it has become a source of danger and instability. The right demands that immigration stop and immigrants assimilate.

Many Canadians are shocked to learn that the northern model of Canadian

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capitalism is distinct and that the differences between Canada and the United States have become larger in an era of free trade. So far, integration pressures have not supported any new holistic environment or given birth to a set of loyalties that transcends national, class, and ethnic divisions. What happens behind the border makes a fundamental difference to a strong social bond, vital public authority, and the dynamic practice of citizenship. These differences among Canadians and between Americans and Canadians continue to haunt and bewilder us.

Public intellectuals like Michael Adams, John Ralston Saul, and Linda McQuaig have explained the growing divergence between the United States and Canada as a result of Canadian val-

ues and institutions. Seymour Martin Lipset, the eminent American sociologist, has provided a more powerful explanation of the long-term trajectory of these two societies and the way they each chose to exploit their human and physical geography.

He notes that the United States favoured limited political interference in the conduct of social and religious affairs and privileged individual enterprise. Canada favoured large-scale bureaucratic forms of organization and widespread intervention by the state. The Confederation was collectivist in our founding moment, while the Republic was rights-based as befitted a Lockean world of property and civic virtue.

It is not unimportant to look at the origins of Canadian multiculturalism in these defining moments of political culture from the past. They are instructive about Canada's political culture. Canada has done better than the United States in reconciling the efficiency of markets with the values of social community, but this sort of generalization remains highly problematic and obscures our understanding of this transformative program. We are too self-satisfied and smug about multiculturalism's discontents. In a global age where diversity is now the rule everywhere, our myopia is indeed worrisome. 

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the way that diversity is managed—of the approach we call multiculturalism.

Over the past four decades multiculturalism has become central to Canadians' sense of themselves and their country. In 2003, 85 percent of Canadians said that multiculturalism was important to Canadian identity.¹ More Canadians cite multiculturalism as central to the national identity than bilingualism or hockey. Also in 2003, four out of five Canadians (81 percent) agreed that multiculturalism has contributed positively to the national identity.

A SOURCE OF IDENTITY AND PRIDE

Not only do Canadians feel that multiculturalism is a central part of their country's identity; it's also increasingly a source of pride. In 1985 we asked Canadians to tell us in their own words what made them proud to be Canadian. Multiculturalism was in tenth place. People were more likely to cite the beauty of the land, Canada's natural resources, and even the physical size of the country. By 2006, multiculturalism had climbed to second place. Only Canada's democracy was

more often named as a source of national pride.

Immigrants themselves are especially likely to take pride in Canada's multiculturalism and to feel that it's an important part of Canada's identity. But immigrants, still at only 19 percent of the population, are not the only Canadians who are driving this trend; native-born Canadians increasingly see their country as being defined and enriched by its diversity and by the official response to that diversity: multiculturalism.

As political philosopher Will Kymlicka puts it in the *Constitutional Forum* (13:1, 2003), Canadians aren't unique in living in a diverse society. Rather, "Canadians are distinctive in the way that they have incorporated Canada's policy of accommodating diversity into their sense of national identity."² Public opinion data certainly suggest that multiculturalism holds an ever more central position in the imagined community that is Canada.

Canadians' support for multiculturalism is strongly linked to their positive feelings about immigrants and immigration. Canadians consistently express the most positive attitudes in the world toward newcomers. In 2006, an international Ipsos MORI study found that 75 percent of Canadians believe that, overall, immigrants have a positive influence on the country. In Australia, the country with the second most positive attitudes, slightly over half (54 percent) of the people felt this way, with the United States not far behind (52 percent). In Western Europe, Germans (47 percent) were the most positive about immigrants' influence on their country, with Spain (45 percent), France (45 percent), Italy (44 percent), and Great Britain (43 percent) hovering just below.

SUPPORT FOR IMMIGRATION

Remarkably, as immigration rates have increased, the proportion of Canadians believing there is too much immigration to this country has actually diminished. In 1977, when Canada's immigration rate was only 3.5 people per thousand population, about two-thirds of Canadians

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believed the rate was too high, while about a third were satisfied. Today those proportions are roughly reversed: as of 2006, only about a third of Canadians believe there is too much immigration to this country, while about two-thirds think it's about right or too low. Recall that at present Canada has one of the highest immigration rates in the world: 6.6 per 1,000. Even given this exceptional practice, Canada achieves a level of support for immigration that many countries with lower rates of intake can only dream of.

One common anti-immigrant sentiment is the idea that immigrants come to a new country and take jobs from the native-born. Most Canadians aren't buying that old saw. As of 2008, four out of five (82 percent) believe that, overall, immigrants have a positive effect on the Canadian economy. Just one in five (20 percent) believe that immigrants take jobs away from other Canadians.

FLAWS IN THE SYSTEM

It's true that Canadians have some concerns about the way the immigration and refugee system is administered: in 2006, only a minority (40 percent) agreed that the existing system does a good job of keeping criminals and suspected criminals out of Canada, and a slim majority (54 percent) believed that many refugee claims aren't legitimate. (Notably, suspicion of refugee claimants was highest among immigrants themselves, who may suspect that others managed to jump the

queue in which they themselves waited honestly for months or years.) But these perceived flaws in the system clearly do not undercut Canadians' belief in the overall project of accepting up to a quarter of a million newcomers to our shores every year.

Moreover, the fact that Canadians believe their own immigration system to be flawed doesn't translate into negative opinions of immigrants themselves. For example, although only a minority believe that the system is good at keeping criminals out of the country, Canadians see that as a problem with the system, not with most newcomers: only 15 percent believe that immigrants commit more crime than native-born Canadians. In fact, in the 2006 Ipsos MORI survey of eight Western countries, Canadians were the least likely to see immigrants as more prone to criminal behaviour—less likely than Americans (19 percent), Australians (22 percent), Britons (25 percent), French (26 percent), Germans (35 percent), Spaniards (40 percent), or Italians (41 percent).³

Canadians express some concern about the cultural integration of newcomers. A modest majority of Canadians agree with the statement, "Too many immigrants do not adopt Canadian values." This proportion has been in gentle decline since 1993, when 72 percent of Canadians agreed. By 2005, the proportion of Canadians who believed immigrants were not doing enough to fit in was down to 58 percent. In 2006, amid a flurry of news stories about "ethnic enclaves" and young Muslims allegedly plotting terrorism, this number spiked to 65 percent.

At the time, my colleagues and I were uncertain whether we were witnessing a mere fluctuation that would disappear in the next survey wave or the beginning of a sea-change in Canadian attitudes toward newcomers. But, as was the case on a number of diversity-related questions we have tracked over time, the 2006 results on this item proved to be historic outliers. By 2008, the proportion of Canadians who believed that immigrants are

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too slow to adopt “Canadian values” had ticked back to 60 percent—just a couple of points away from the number we found in 2005.

Given Canadians’ concerns about immigrants’ socio-cultural adaptation to Canadian society, Immigration Minister Jason Kenney’s recent talk about immigrant integration may prove savvy. But to position an emphasis on integration as a movement away from multiculturalism (commentators have made more of this false dichotomy than the minister himself has) makes little sense: multiculturalism has always been geared toward official language acquisition and other drivers of integration. It operates on the premise that being proud of a heritage culture and proud of being Canadian are complementary, not mutually exclusive.

INEQUALITY AND THE FUTURE SUCCESS OF MULTICULTURALISM

In the end, it is not the name we give to our policy framework—call it multiculturalism, integration, even absorption, as the Israelis do—but the fairness of our economic landscape that will ultimately make or break Canada’s ambitious diversity project. If anything is likely to reverse the relatively positive trends I have sketched here, it will be chronically poor economic outcomes for immigrants. Recent numbers from Statistics Canada are disappointing: an immigrant who arrived in Canada in 1980 could expect to earn about 85 cents for every dollar his or her Canadian-born counterpart took home. As of 2005, the gap between recent immigrants and the Canadian-born had grown, with immigrants earning less than two-thirds of the Canadian-born average: 63 cents on the dollar. The position of highly educated immigrants relative to highly educated Canadian-born workers is even worse: a university-educated man who recently immigrated to Canada on average earns less than half (48 percent) of his Canadian-born counterpart.

Inequality is always a serious issue. But when it comes to immigrants, par-

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ticularly racial-minority immigrants, the seriousness of the problem is compounded. It is one thing when differences in education or ingenuity yield inequality; it is quite another when economic differences are rooted in racial discrimination or the failure of employers to recognize legitimate qualifications from abroad—especially when immigrants have been admitted to Canada precisely because of those qualifications. Economic struggle compounded by a sense of betrayal is a state of affairs too many new Canadians encounter

upon their arrival in this country. Governments, NGOs, and private businesses are beginning to pay more attention to immigrants’ difficulties in the labour market, and some important new measures (such as the creation of the federal Foreign Credentials Referral Office) have been taken in the years since the disheartening data regarding bias against immigrants were gathered. Canadians new and old should be reminding their leaders of the urgency of this issue and monitoring progress closely. Open, tolerant values do not exist in a vacuum; they are fed by feelings of material security. Social harmony and economic exclusion cannot coexist for long. ❁

- 1 Unless otherwise noted, polling data are drawn from Focus Canada, Environics’ quarterly omnibus survey which polls a random sample of 2,000 Canadians.
- 2 Kymlicka, Will. “Canadian Multiculturalism in Historical and Comparative Perspective: Is Canada Unique?” *Constitutional Forum*, 13:1 (2003).
- 3 “International Social Trends Monitor.” Ipsos MORI, May 2006.

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