

Realizing the potentials—and facing the challenges—of multiculturalism in Canada*

A RETREAT FROM MULTICULTURALISM

Multiculturalism has been a cornerstone of Canadian policy for almost 40 years, but internationally it remains controversial. Particularly since 9/11 and in light of European experiences where inter-ethnic conflicts resulting from immigration seem to threaten social cohesion, there has been a “retreat” from multiculturalism. Should Canada keep multiculturalism despite problems elsewhere? Or should our multiculturalism policies be changed, or perhaps even abandoned?

Debate over multiculturalism is partly a question of political principle, as discussed, for example, by Canadian philosophers Will Kymlicka and Charles Taylor. But today, the debate is mostly about the impact of diversity and the conditions under which its impacts are positive and negative. Whether there is “unity in diversity,” as advocates say, or whether diversity leads to isolation, mistrust, and disunity, as critics suggest, is a question for social and psychological analysis based on the evidence.

ANALYZING THE IMPACT OF DIVERSITY

Our analysis of the impact of diversity is based on evidence from a unique and comprehensive source, Statistics Canada’s 2002 Ethnic Diversity Survey. This survey of over 40,000 Canadians represents all cultural groups across the country, both visible minorities and those of European origin, and includes recent immigrants, earlier immigrants, and the children of immigrants. We focus on the social integration of these groups as a key to social cohesion.

Four specific topics are of particular interest. First, when immigrant minorities and their children retain ethnic attachments over time, what is the impact on their social integration? Sec-

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ond, how do inequality and discrimination affect the dynamics of inter-group relations for visible minorities? Third, what is the impact of the new religious diversity? And fourth, are there significant regional differences, such as between Quebec and the rest of Canada? Our conclusions, summarized below, suggest multiculturalism policy in Canada can be improved to address key challenges of diversity, while its positive potentials are kept and enhanced.

IMPACT OF ETHNIC ATTACHMENTS

Analysis of the Ethnic Diversity Survey shows that ethnic attachments—strong ethnic identity and involvement in the ethnic community—have both positive

and negative effects on social integration, depending on different dimensions of social integration.

To see the effects of ethnic diversity on social integration, it is necessary to consider the process as it occurs over time. Recent immigrants often establish strong attachments to their ethnic community while they are only beginning to become integrated in Canada. Over time, ethnic attachments weaken, and participation in Canada strengthens. This happens to immigrants, and continues for their children. The real question is how ethnic attachment and social integration are related to each other in this process of adjustment to life in Canada. Does the maintenance of strong ethnic attachments affect the pace of social integration in Canada over time?

Positive effects of strong ethnic attachments are found when we look at a person’s sense of belonging in Canada, and their overall life satisfaction. These positive effects hold for recent immigrants, earlier immigrants, and for second generation youth, taking account of time in Canada. They hold for different origins: European or visible minority. Ethnic attachments also have positive effects when it comes to voting, a telling indicator of social integration.

Strong ethnic attachments are found to have negative effects on rates of citizenship acquisition for immigrants, and on their acquisition of a sense of Canadian identity. These effects are particularly strong for immigrants, less so for those born in Canada. There is also a clear negative effect of strong ethnic attachments on feelings of trust. This recalls the much discussed finding of Robert Putnam that diversity undermines social capital, which he measured in terms of trust.

So the answer to this first “multiculturalism” question is mixed; the answer depends on the dimension of integration.

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Ethnic attachments appear to enhance the quality of life for many, but they also mean weaker attachment to Canada and greater social isolation based on less trust in others. So, in this respect, the two apparently opposing views of the social impact of diversity are not really contradictory. Rather, they capture different aspects of a single reality.

DIVERSITY AND THE EXPERIENCE OF DISCRIMINATION AND DISADVANTAGE

Clearly the potential for diversity to enhance cohesion depends in part on a degree of equality in inter-group relations. Visible minorities in Canada experience significant inequality and often report instances of discrimination. What role does such inequality play in the social dynamic of diversity for visible minorities?

Visible minorities have the lowest household incomes and the highest poverty rates—about double the rates for whites—but their experience definitely improves with time in Canada. The children of visible minority immigrants have high levels of education, and much improved household income levels.

On the other hand, many visible minority respondents report experiences of discrimination in Canada, and their concerns appear to intensify with greater time in Canada. For recent immigrants, 34 percent of visible minorities reported experiences of discrimination in the previous five years, compared to 19 percent for whites. Visible minorities also more often report discomfort in social situations, and even fear becoming the target of an attack. And over time, these concerns become more frequent for visible minorities, whereas among white immigrants reports of discrimination decline.

For the children of immigrants, the rate of reported experiences of discrimination among visible minorities is up to 42 percent—and over 60 percent for blacks—whereas among whites the rates decline to about 10 percent. The reasons

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for increased sensitivity to discrimination over time likely include a changing frame of reference. Whereas immigrants may compare their circumstances favorably to what they experienced in their homeland, over time their expectations increase. Their children, as Canadians, expect full equality. They may feel greater frustration if it is denied.

Partly as a result of experiences of discrimination and a sense of exclusion, visible minorities are less socially integrated into Canadian society than their white counterparts. They are clearly slower to acquire a “Canadian” identity. Most other indicators show more negative trends for racial minorities than for whites. For example, among recent immigrants racial minorities actually express a stronger sense of belonging in Canada than do whites; among the children of immigrants it is the reverse. The positive outlook of newly arrived racial-minority immigrants fades considerably with experience in Canada.

At the psychological level, for visible minorities, ethnic attachments may serve as a kind of refuge against social exclusion. The sense of threat experienced by racial minorities reinforces attachments within the ethnic community. At the same time, the ethnic community provides a kind of psychological shield against the stress of discrimina-

tory experiences, offsetting its negative impact on life satisfaction. This dynamic clearly slows the process of integration into mainstream society.

THE NEW RELIGIOUS MINORITIES: MUSLIMS, HINDUS, SIKHS, BUDDHISTS

The debate over multiculturalism has focused increasingly on religion, as recent immigration from Asia and the Middle East has increased the numbers of Muslims, now almost 2 percent of the population in Canada. The question is whether specific Muslim values, beliefs, or practices such as those concerned with gender equality and the enforcement of religious codes, may undermine social cohesion because they clash too much with mainstream Canadian society. These issues were reflected in the Ontario debate on Sharia law in family tribunals, and in the Quebec debate over what is “reasonable accommodation,” leading to the Bouchard-Taylor commission.

In the Ethnic Diversity Survey data, the social integration of Muslims can be compared to that of other religious groups, including Christians and Jews, and other new religious groups such as Hindus, Sikhs, and Buddhists, who each now comprise about one percent of the population. By this comparison, Muslims do not stand out as experiencing distinctive problems of integration. In fact, for the new religious groups, problems of integration arise not from religion but from the fact that most of them are visible minorities.

Religion was related to only a few group differences in social integration. For example, Canadian identity is slower to develop for visible minorities, and this is least likely for the Hindus and Sikhs; other groups are more similar to one another—for example Protestants, Catholics, and Muslims. Regarding trust, the proportion with the lowest level of trust is found among Catholics and Muslims; among visible minorities, the level of trust is lowest among the Protestants (who are mostly blacks), the Catholics,

and the Sikhs. Rates of reported life satisfaction for visible minorities overall were lower, but Muslims are not distinctively unhappy with their lives in Canada, by this measure.

Muslims also do not stand out if we focus only on those who have the strongest religious beliefs. Greater religiosity seems to reflect greater ethnic affiliation and community involvement, and Muslims are not different from other religious groups in this regard. The conclusion underscores that fears about Muslim integration based on individual cases publicized in the media are not borne out by broad-based survey data.

DIFFERENCES BETWEEN QUEBEC AND THE REST OF CANADA?

Generally we find little difference in the social integration of minorities in Quebec as compared with the rest of Canada. However, most ethnic, racial, and religious minorities do report somewhat lower rates of discrimination in Quebec. In fact, the findings suggest that Quebec may be the most “multicultural” region in Canada.

Our analysis identifies four subgroups, based on the strength of ethnic attachments and broader social integration. Two of these represent the assimilation paradigm: an “ethnic orientation” with strong ethnic attachments and weak attachments to society, the other a “mainstream orientation” with weak ethnic attachments and strong attachments to the mainstream. In the multicultural ideal one may have both strong ethnic *and* mainstream attachments, and persons in this situation are put in the “pluralist” category. Finally, there is also the possibility that neither set of attachments is very strong, and these people are put in “marginal” category.

Most Canadians are in either the “ethnic” or the “mainstream” category. However, many persons are in the pluralist category, and it is noteworthy that this pluralist category is more prevalent in Quebec. This reflects in part the French-English duality of Quebec, leading more people to have complex and multiple identities.

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Another observation is that the marginal category is far from insignificant. This finding points to an important issue, that for many Canadians the question of choosing between mainstream and ethnic does not reflect their experience because, for them, neither is relevant. Some may become marginal because they do not want to maintain an ethnic attachment, and yet for a variety of reasons may feel weak attachments to the rest of society.

CONCLUSIONS AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS

In sum, our conclusions are as follows. First, minority ethnic and cultural communities—reflected, for example, in the formation of residential enclaves—perform positive functions for the integration of immigrants, but also show tendencies toward isolation from mainstream society, and slower integration into the wider Canadian community.

Second, visible minorities experience less integration with time in Canada, partly because of social exclusion and their own retreating into an enclave. Visible minorities experience a sense of social exclusion which grows with the length of time spent in Canada and is more salient for the children of immigrants than for the immigrants themselves.

Third, the newer religious minorities experience less integration into Canadian society mainly because they are visible minorities, not because of their religion. Muslims do not stand out in this regard from other new religious groups such as Hindus, Sikhs, or Buddhists.

And, fourth, we find that the impact of diversity is much the same across Canada, and in particular is not less in Quebec despite the greater media attention to the issue there.

Our most general policy conclusion is that multiculturalism has strengths in Canada but also certain weaknesses. Celebrating diversity has positive effects, but there is a need also to address inter-group isolation and inequality. Multiculturalism policy should embrace a more authentic and socially active commitment to developing positive relations between groups.

EQUALITY, ENCOUNTERS, AND INTERCHANGE

It is worth recalling that these issues were emphasized in Pierre Trudeau’s original speech on multicultural philosophy in 1971. Multiculturalism, he said, involved supporting minority communities. But it also required resources for integration, including equal access to full participation in Canadian society, as well as learning an official language. And he added a fourth objective: to “promote creating encounters and interchange among all Canadian cultural groups, in the interest of national unity.”

Regarding equality, existing policy promotes the idea of racial equality, but the impact has been small. Minority groups’ concerns about inequality grow with greater experience in Canada, and equity policies evidently have been insufficient to counter this trend. Minorities with greater experience in Canada become more concerned about the issue, and as Canadian-born generations of racial minorities emerge, the issues of equality will become more significant. Inter-group exchanges could help Canadians address issues that include not only culture, but also inequalities.

Minority communities can play a positive role in the integration of immigrants and members of minorities into the larger society. They can act as a sort of “social bridge” between the two. Under certain circumstances, they may isolate some of their members from the larger society.

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the underlying concept was building Canada by attracting new citizens—people who would settle into the economic, social, and cultural life of the country.

THE TWO THEMES OF DISCONTENT

At most other times in Canada's history, particularly since 1900, we've had discontents that centre on two themes: they'll take our jobs and they'll worship their own god.

They'll take our jobs is based in the belief that the economy is relatively finite and inflexible, and with high unemployment rates among "Canadians," immigrants would just become a burden on public budgets. This fear ignores entrepreneurship, the ability to create new value and wealth. Tell an entrepreneur that you want to bring in a million immigrants, and they'll say, "Goody, more customers!" Tell a beleaguered public official, trade unionist, or policy wonk, and they'll see shortages and costs, even if they run a transit system which will get lots of new riders or a university which will get new students.

And *they'll worship their own god*, eat their own food, wear their own clothes, and otherwise engage in behaviour absolutely different from that the British brought from Britain and the French from France. It will, we are still warned, ruin everything this country was built on!

So we have discontents, and we have young people with history degrees running programs to tell us Canada is failing because we haven't memorized our prime ministers in order of appearance, or our provincial capitals from east to west. They urge us to have public education campaigns to stop the ebb of our history and our values along with it. Without it, they say, we'll wake up one day with a theocracy and dietary laws.

ENRICHED LIVES

Not everyone has discontents about immigrants and multiculturalism, of course. A Pew Trust poll a few years back found that Canada was one of three

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countries in the world where a majority of the population favoured immigration: the US was 53 percent, Australia 55 percent, and Canada a whopping 75 percent. We tend to like the idea in theory, and from what one can see of life on the streets of our cities, where most of the immigrants live, we seem to like it in practice. Most of us tend to know and work with Asians, Africans, South Asians, and people from around the planet. Most of us seem to have our lives enriched in this way.

But what about our values? Canada is a nation of laws, with one of the most dynamic legal systems in the world. Our basic values are expressed in the body of law, and they get tested every day across the country as we challenge each other and push the boundaries of the present. Through our legal system we test behaviour and thought, and through our appeals process we turn important

questions over relentlessly. And our parliaments change the law, to make sure that it expresses current consensus. We change it to allow women to vote or gays to marry. Our values are robust and secure.

The Harper government has all but abandoned immigration and multiculturalism as an instrument of nation building. It views immigrants as cogs in a machine, as their burgeoning temporary worker program shows. It is an approach that has failed everywhere else, where it has created an underclass of workers in hiding, who don't want to go back to where they came from, but cannot surface and act like citizens for fear of prosecution and removal. These days, multiculturalism seems simply a way for political parties to segment voting blocs.

MAKING INTENTIONAL AND INSTRUMENTAL CHOICES

Nations have choices to make, and immigration can be seen as a liability or an asset. Liabilities need to be limited, to have boundaries put around them, constraints imposed, and costs tallied. But assets are invested, and given every chance to succeed, because they will pay dividends for a long time into the future. How you choose makes all the difference to how you behave, and to the sum of your discontents.

The way to defeat the discontents before they kill you is to be intentional and instrumental in the embrace of multiculturalism and immigration. More Sifton, more Kent, fewer amateur historians. 🍀

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The experience of social exclusion and discrimination can be a critical factor in generating such isolation. Also, the regular flow of new immigrants into the community and the resulting increase in the size of the community may make it possible for many individuals and families to function well within the community.

In addition to promoting equality, it would be important to foster interchanges among Canada's cultural groups in cultural, economic, and social areas

of activity. These are challenging tasks, but they are important steps to assuring all groups that they are fully Canadian, and that we can be as united as our multicultural ideals assert. 🍀

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