
UNDERSTANDING “CANADIAN EXCEPTIONALISM” IN IMMIGRATION AND PLURALISM POLICY

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Executive Summary

Despite having a much greater proportion of immigrants in its population than other Western countries, Canada is far more open to, and optimistic about, immigration than its counterparts in Europe and the United States. According to a 2010 survey, about two-thirds of Canadians feel that immigration is a key positive feature of their country. Indeed, those Canadians who most strongly identify themselves as patriotic are also the most supportive of immigration and multiculturalism. A frequently cited reason for this Canadian exceptionalism is the fact that a majority of Canada's immigrants are selected through a points system that admits people with skills that are thought to contribute to the economy. This, coupled with the fact that Canada's geography makes it difficult for unauthorized immigrants to enter, helps alleviate the concerns often expressed in other countries about illegal entry or immigrants becoming a drain on the welfare state.

Economic selection and geography alone do not explain Canada's unique experience, however. The Canadian view of immigration as nation building, backed by supportive institutions and policies, is critical. Canada has reinvented its national identity away from that of a British colony or a shadow of the United States to one that embraces immigration, diversity, and tolerance. This national ethos is supported by government policies of multiculturalism, anti-discrimination laws, and settlement programs that promote integration through public-private partnerships. Such initiatives are mostly about helping migrants find jobs and integrate into society, not about instilling a set of cultural norms and values. While many Canadians express a strong desire that immigrants integrate into society, their support for multiculturalism implies a broader understanding of immigrant integration than that found in the United States and Europe.

About two-thirds of Canadians feel that immigration is a key positive feature of their country.

Although immigrants in Canada express stronger ethnic identities than those in the United States, they also express a stronger affiliation with their host country. Canada's focus on facilitating permanent, rather than temporary, migration has been crucial because it gives both immigrants and the receiving society a stake in promoting favorable long-term outcomes. The sizeable number of immigrant voters also provides a check on political parties that might seek to exploit anti-immigrant sentiment. The major political parties in Canada all court immigrants' votes, and unlike many countries in Europe, there are no anti-immigrant parties on the fringes of the political mainstream receiving public support.

Nonetheless, as in other countries, new immigration flows prompt a certain disquiet, notably around religious accommodation. Incidents of unauthorized migrants seeking asylum get occasional media attention, stirring controversy. The recent move to increase temporary migration has also raised significant concerns. Temporary visas, if overstayed, open up the possibility of a larger population of unauthorized immigrants. Canadians are not especially sympathetic to unauthorized immigrants, and a rapid increase in this population could have a significant effect on public opinion on immigration.



I. Introduction

In many transatlantic countries we find evidence of significant anti-immigrant sentiment and opposition to multicultural policies directed at immigrants and settled minority groups. Whether among the general public, as measured in opinion polls and votes for far-right parties, or articulated by elected leaders and other elites, such views are found across the political spectrum in Europe and the United States.¹

Against this backdrop, Canada is a striking outlier. Compared to the citizens of other developed immigrant-receiving countries, Canadians are by far the most open to and optimistic about immigration. In one comparative poll, only 27 percent of those surveyed in Canada agreed that immigration represented more of a problem than an opportunity. In the country that came closest to Canadian opinion, France, the perception of immigration as a problem was significantly higher, at 42 percent. The most widespread objections came from the United Kingdom, where 65 percent of people surveyed saw immigration as more of a problem than an opportunity.²

As striking, Canadian public opinion has been supportive of immigration for a long time and support has been increasing over recent decades, a time of economic uncertainty and concerns over foreign terrorists. Asked whether they favor decreasing, increasing, or keeping immigration levels the same, a stable plurality of Canadian respondents, about 45 percent, have favored the status quo between 1975 and 2005.³ Significantly, the number who wanted to reduce immigration, 43 percent in 1975, declined over this period while the number favoring more immigration went up. By 2005 roughly equal fifths of respondents held these two positions.⁴ Another series of polls, asking slightly different questions, indicate that since 2005, the number of Canadians who feel that there are too many immigrants entering Canada has continued to decline. A significant majority of Canadians surveyed, about two-thirds, said that the number of immigrants coming to Canada was “about right” in 2010.⁵

Canadian public opinion has been supportive of immigration for a long time.

These attitudes have no correlation to the underlying proportion of immigrants in the general population, or even the public perception of that proportion. Increasing support for immigration has occurred as Canada has admitted more and more new immigrants. Among transatlantic countries surveyed in 2010, Canada had by far the highest percentage of foreign-born residents, about 20 percent of the population; by comparison, immigrants were only 11 percent of the population in the United Kingdom.⁶ Canadian optimism about immigration thus exists in a context of high mass migration, with the foreign born making up a far greater proportion of the population in Canada than in countries such as the United States, France, Germany, and Italy.⁷

- 1 For more on the relationship between immigration and support for far-right parties in Canada, the United States, and Europe, see Cas Mudde, *The Relationship Between Immigration and Nativism in Europe and North America* (Washington, DC: Migration Policy Institute, 2012), www.migrationpolicy.org/pubs/Immigration-Nativism.pdf.
- 2 German Marshall Fund of the United States (GMFUS), *Transatlantic Trends: Immigration, Key Findings 2010* (Washington, DC: GMFUS, 2010), http://trends.gmfus.org/immigration/doc/TTI2010_English_Key.pdf.
- 3 Survey data are from the same question asked by Gallup polls in Canada from 1975 to 2005. For an analysis of these data, see Rima Wilkes, Neil Guppy, and Lily Farris, “‘No Thanks, We’re Full’: Individual Characteristics, National Context, and Changing Attitudes toward Immigration,” *International Migration Review* 42, No. 2 (2008): 302–29, 312–14.
- 4 Ibid.
- 5 Survey data from EKOS Research, as reported in Jeffrey G. Reitz, *Pro-immigration Canada: Social and Economic Roots of Popular Views* (Montreal: Institute for Research on Public Policy [IRPP], 2011): 9, www.irpp.org/pubs/IRPPstudy/IRPP_Study_no20.pdf.
- 6 GMFUS, *Transatlantic Trends: Immigration, Key Findings 2010*, 19–20.
- 7 In the analysis of Canadian public opinion by Wilkes, Guppy, and Farris, they find no statistical relationship between anti-immigrant attitudes and the number of new permanent residents over the 1975–2000 period.



Canadian exceptionalism is also evident when we consider the competition among Canadian jurisdictions for more immigrants. Not only is the federal government bullish about migration — and has been for quite a while — but every Canadian province and two territories have struck agreements with the federal government so that they can select migrants directly into their jurisdictions through the provincial nominee program.⁸ In 2010, 36,428 new permanent immigrants gained entry through provincial nomination, representing 13 percent of all new permanent residents in Canada.⁹

In comparison, subnational jurisdictions in other federal states — in the United States and in Germany, for example — exhibit significant differences in their reactions to immigration, as evident in subnational legislatures' efforts to discourage or encourage migrants' settlement. In Canada such regional variation is modest.¹⁰ Asked in a 2010 poll whether they agreed or disagreed with the statement that immigration is “a key positive feature of Canada as a country,” 67.2 percent of respondents — the highest level of support — agreed that immigration is positive in the province of British Columbia; this percentage only dropped to 63.3 percent in the Prairies, the provinces with the lowest level of support.¹¹

Why is Canada such an outlier?

II. Immigration Policy, Economic Growth, and Geography

One frequently cited answer to the question of Canadian exceptionalism is the Canadian points system, which actively selects immigrants based on their potential to join the labor force and contribute to Canada's economy. In the first decade of the 21st century, the majority of new permanent immigrants arriving in Canada, 59 percent, were economic migrants. Economic-class migrants¹² apply for permanent residence papers and are selected by Canadian governments based on their education, language skills, occupational training, work experience, and age, while an additional, smaller group is chosen based on ability to invest in business and job creation in Canada. A further 26 percent of new permanent migrants over the 2001-10 period entered through family sponsorship, and 11 percent were refugees.¹³

The points system has its critics and the current government has been keen to modify it — in particular to reduce the number of immigrants selected for their skills but unable to find highly skilled work. Nonetheless, the economic thrust of Canadian immigration policy presumably alleviates worries about immigration being a drain on the welfare state, a central concern in various European countries. Indeed, Canadians express very high levels of support for the idea that migration is good for the Canadian economy. Seventy percent consider immigration a key tool for Canada to strengthen its economy, while only 32 percent believe that immigrants take jobs away from native-born workers.¹⁴ Over the period

8 For more information on federal-provincial agreements to bring in new immigrants and to fund settlement services, see F. Leslie Seidle, *The Canada-Ontario Immigration Agreement: Assessment and Options for Renewal* (Toronto: Mowat Center for Policy Innovation, 2010), www.mowatcentre.ca/research-topic-mowat.php?mowatResearchID=12.

9 Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC), *Facts and Figures: Immigration Overview Permanent and Temporary Residents* (Ottawa: CIC, 2011): 6, www.cic.gc.ca/english/pdf/research-stats/facts2010.pdf.

10 We find wider regional variation in attitudes toward cultural diversity and multiculturalism policy, as discussed below.

11 Nik Nanos, “Canadians Strongly Support Immigration, But Don’t Want Current Levels Increased,” in *Policy Options* July-August 2010 (Montreal: IRPP, 2010): 11, www.irpp.org/po/archive/jul10/nanos.pdf. See also Reitz, *Pro-immigration Canada*, 11, who reports regional data for a question with slightly different wording, but comes to a similar conclusion.

12 CIC refers to economic-class migrants as distinct from those in family reunification and refugee and humanitarian categories. Economic-class migrants include the Federal Skilled Worker Class, the Quebec Skilled Worker Class, the Provincial Nominee Class, the Canadian Experience Class, the Live-in Caregiver Class, the Business Immigration Classes (Investor, Entrepreneur, and Self-Employed Persons), and their immediate family members.

13 Author’s calculations from annual figures reported in CIC, *Facts and Figures: Immigration Overview, Permanent and Temporary Residents*. The remaining percentage included other pathways to legal permanent residence, including those who move from temporary work or study visas to permanent status.

14 Survey data on the economy comes from Nanos, “Canadians Strongly Support Immigration, But Don’t Want Current Levels



1993 to 2010, the proportion of Canadian residents agreeing with the statement that immigration has an overall positive impact on the economy rose from 56 percent to 80 percent.¹⁵ Even among those who are unemployed, an overwhelming majority — 68 percent — agree with the notion that immigration is beneficial to the economy.¹⁶

Canadians are not inoculated against fears of migration, however.

There is, of course, some variation in people's attitudes toward immigration. The most determinative factor explaining such variation is an individual's level of education. Whereas 69 percent of those who have completed university support current rates of immigration, this drops to 43 percent among individuals with a high school degree or less.¹⁷ A positive correlation between education and attitudes toward immigration is found in other countries, but arguably carries extra significance in Canada, given a selection process that favors high-skilled migrants. The possibility that these migrants will compete with highly educated Canadians does not undermine such Canadians' pro-migration attitudes. In countries with less emphasis on high-skilled migration, one can imagine that the educated native-born population faces less competitive pressures.¹⁸

The economic orientation of Canada's immigration system probably also communicates a sense of control over immigration policy absent in places such as the United States, where just under a third of foreign-born residents do not have legal papers and where many perceive the federal government as incapable of dealing effectively with immigration. In a 2010 comparative survey, 48 percent of people in Canada said that the national government was doing a very good or good job on immigration, the highest among all countries surveyed — and double the 24 percent in the United States who said the same.¹⁹

Canadians are not inoculated against fears of migration, however. Analysis of changes in Canadian attitudes from 1975 to 2000 shows that the proportion of those favoring more restrictive migration has increased somewhat in economically difficult times, regardless of the respondents' own economic situation, though this relationship might be less apparent in the past decade.²⁰ A survey experiment, in which respondents were asked whether a fictive immigrant should be able to move to and gain citizenship in Canada, found that Canadian respondents were more likely to agree when a person was described as high skilled rather than low skilled.²¹ Canadians also express some ambivalence about refugee admissions. Environics polls show a significant decline in the proportion of those agreeing with the statement "many people claiming to be refugees are not real refugees," from a high point of 79 percent in 1987 to 59

Increased," and on jobs from GMFUS, *Transatlantic Trends: Immigration, Key Findings 2010*.

15 Environics Institute, *Focus Canada 2010* (Toronto: Environics Institute, 2011), www.environicsinstitute.org/PDFFocusCanada2010.pdf.

16 Reitz, *Pro-immigration Canada*, 13.

17 Ibid., 11.

18 Reitz, *Pro-immigration Canada*, 12, also finds greater support for immigration among the young, those employed full time, and men, but few statistical differences by income (once controlling for education) or between those living in urban or rural settings.

19 While an approval rating of 48 percent seems modest, it is close to the 54 percent of Canadians who expressed general approval of government. In comparison, 39 percent of Americans approved of the job their government was doing in general, but only 24 percent with the steps taken to manage immigration. See GMFUS, *Transatlantic Trends: Immigration, Key Findings 2010*, 16.

20 See Wilkes, Guppy, and Farris, "No Thanks, We're Full!" on the 1975-2000 period, and Reitz, *Pro-immigration Canada*, on more recent trends.

21 Allison Harrell, Stuart Soroka, and Shanto Iyengar, "Attitudes toward Immigration and Immigrants: The Impact of Economic and Cultural Cues in the US and Canada" (paper presented at the American Political Science Association meetings, Seattle, WA, 2011). The difference between respondents given the profile of a low-skilled construction worker or landscaper or a high-skilled computer programmer or engineer was significant, but not dramatic, a 10 percentage point drop in average approval (p. 16).



percent in 2010, but a majority of respondents still agree that many claimants are not “real” refugees.²²

Fears over uninvited migrants, especially false asylum seekers, are readily apparent in periodic public outcries — spurred, for example, by media coverage of ships smuggling foreigners off the Canadian coast. In the summer of 2010, approximately 500 Tamils were found aboard the MV Sun Sea; once discovered, the group made claims to refugee status. According to a survey taken at the time, 48 percent of Canadians felt that the boat’s passengers should be deported back to Sri Lanka.²³ Two months later, in October 2010, the minority Conservative government introduced a bill to target human smuggling; a revised version became law in June 2012 after the Conservatives became a majority in Parliament.²⁴ Opposition groups, including refugee advocates, denounced the legislation, in part because the bill would allow the government to put certain refugee claimants in mandatory detention for up to 12 months. Those opposing the law claim the government is pandering to anti-refugee sentiment, such as that expressed following the MV Sun Sea incident.

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much to geography: illegal migration laps gently onto
Canadian shores.*

Despite fears of “false” asylum seekers, it is relatively hard for unauthorized migrants to get to Canada. Incidents such as the MV Sun Sea controversy occur on an occasional basis, and the number of migrants involved is modest, at most a few hundred people. Indeed, Canadian support for immigration probably owes much to geography: illegal migration laps gently onto Canadian shores, it does not come in large waves. There are no authoritative tallies of the unauthorized population in Canada, although media reports regularly cite between 200,000 and 400,000 individuals, which would constitute 3 to 6 percent of the foreign-born population. These figures are highly speculative but, if roughly accurate, would place the number of migrants without required papers far below figures in the United States, estimated at 11.5 million individuals in 2011.²⁵

Thus, illegal migration is not a particularly salient public or political issue in Canada. As in other countries, more Canadians are concerned about illegal immigration than legal migration, but at 50 percent of respondents, their proportion is still quite a bit lower than in the United States, where 61 percent of those surveyed express worry, or in Europe, at 67 percent in 2009.²⁶ The contrast with Europe is especially noteworthy given that, in some European countries, the proportion of people without required papers might be comparable to Canada, yet concern about the issue is much greater in Europe.²⁷

If irregular migration were to become a salient issue, Canadians’ support for immigration might decline. Asked explicitly to consider whether public services, such as state-sponsored health care and public

²² Environics Institute, *Focus Canada 2010*, 30.

²³ See Petti Fong, “3 Months on the MV Sun Sea: Tamil Migrants Describe Their Journey,” *Toronto Star*, August 21, 2010, www.thestar.com/news/canada/article/850885--3-months-on-the-mv-sun-sea-tamil-migrants-describe-their-journey.

²⁴ The proposed legislation, Bill C-49, did not become law, but a similar bill, C-31, became law on June 28, 2012.

²⁵ Michael Hofer, Nancy Rytina, and Bryan Baker, *Estimates of the Unauthorized Immigrant Population Residing in the United States: January 2011* (Washington, DC: Department of Homeland Security, Office of Immigration Statistics, 2012), www.dhs.gov/xlibrary/assets/statistics/publications/ois_ill_pe_2011.pdf.

²⁶ GMFUS, *Transatlantic Trends: Immigration, Key Findings 2009* (Washington, DC: GMFUS, 2009): 10.

²⁷ For estimates of irregular migrant numbers in European countries, see Clandestino Project, *Clandestino Project Final Report* (Athens: Hellenic Foundation for European and Foreign Policy, 2009), <http://clandestino.eliamep.gr/wp-content/uploads/2010/03/clandestino-final-report-november-20091.pdf>. Taking 200,000 and 400,000 as the estimated upper and lower bounds of the number of irregular migrants in Canada yields higher values, as a percentage of a country’s total population, for the irregular migrant population in Canada than the estimates for Austria, Denmark, France, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, and Sweden; similar to Belgium, Ireland, and the United Kingdom; and lower than Greece.



schooling, should be provided to all migrants, legal or not, Canadian respondents tended to express more exclusionary attitudes than populations in a number of European countries.²⁸ In 2005, when media coverage of unauthorized migrants in Toronto and Montreal put the issue in the news for a brief period, one survey sponsored by the federal government found that nationally 21 percent of respondents strongly opposed giving legal status to “undocumented skilled workers,” 14 percent opposed it “somewhat,” 35 percent supported it “somewhat,” and only 25 percent strongly supported legalization.²⁹ Given that the wording of the survey probably privileged attitudes favoring legalization, it seems that Canadians are not particularly open to clandestine migration.

Are economic selection, geography, and a relatively small population of unauthorized migrants enough to explain Canadian exceptionalism?

In this context, the current Canadian government’s turn to greater use of temporary work visas for migrant laborers carries the danger of increasing anti-immigrant sentiment in the country. Temporary migration goes against the expressed desire of Canadian residents, who favor permanent migration: compared to eight other countries, respondents in Canada were much more likely, at 80 percent, to favor permanent over temporary migration.³⁰ Furthermore, if substantial numbers of temporary residents remain in Canada after their visas expire and thus become unauthorized, resentment might rise. As will be argued further in this report, trust in and support for Canadian immigration policy rests in no small measure on a strong preference for permanent over temporary migration.

But are economic selection, geography, and a relatively small population of unauthorized migrants enough to explain Canadian exceptionalism? The British Isles are geographically apart from the continent and share no border with a less-developed country, but public opinion there is decidedly against further migration. In the United States, most migrants work, including the unauthorized, and despite a modest welfare state, Americans are divided about the economic benefits of migration. Indeed, the native born in any country can easily resent rich, highly educated migrants. In Canada, this can be seen in periodic flare-ups in the Vancouver area, where some residents blame well-off Chinese immigrants for making it difficult for ordinary Canadians to enter the exorbitantly priced housing market.

Such flare-ups are quite brief, however; they play out in media commentaries and public debates but almost never result in violence. Riots over immigration and minority issues have occurred in France, the United Kingdom, and Australia over the past decade, but not in Canada. In fact, no riots or incidents of street violence have broken out over diversity issues since the liberalization of immigration laws in the 1960s ushered in massive non-European migration.³¹ It is remarkable how peacefully Canada’s major cities have transitioned from being predominantly Christian and white to highly multicultural and multireligious.³²

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- 28 Fifty percent of Canadian respondents would provide state-sponsored health care to all migrants, both legal and unauthorized, and only 33 percent would provide access to public schools to all migrants.
- 29 The question states that these unauthorized workers “possess skills that are needed in the Canadian marketplace” and focuses on “skilled workers” rather than all unauthorized residents. See CIC, *Freeze Frame: Public Environment Overview on Undocumented Workers* (Ottawa: CIC, 2005).
- 30 This was in contrast to the 67 percent of American respondents and 62 percent of Europeans favoring permanent visas over other alternatives; GMFUS, *Transatlantic Trends: Immigration, Key Findings 2010*, 23.
- 31 In the early 20th century, white residents of British Columbia engaged in violent acts against Chinese and Japanese residents and in 1933 the Christie Pits riots put Torontonians’ anti-Semitism on display.
- 32 Arguably, a partial exception to this claim is the bombing of Air India Flight 182, which resulted in the deaths of over 320 people, the vast majority of whom were Indo-Canadians. But this was about political conflict in India, not Canada, as the bombing was perpetuated by Sikh separatists, some who allegedly were operating in Canada. There have been other, more recent cases of planned terrorist plots attempted by Canadians of immigrant backgrounds, but strikingly these have not generated sustained backlash in the general population against minorities, nor have they provoked anti-immigrant violence.



This quiet transition can be understood only if one recognizes that the Canadian model rests on more than economic selection and favorable geography.

III. Immigration, Multiculturalism, and Integration Policy as Nation Building

A key aspect of the “Canadian model” lies in the view that immigration helps with nation building. Bolstered by the federal government, this view goes beyond political and intellectual elites to be embraced by a significant proportion of ordinary Canadians. Indeed, one recent paper found that, in Canada, those who expressed more patriotism were also more likely to support immigration and multiculturalism.³³ In the United States this correlation went in the opposite direction: those expressing greater patriotism were more likely to express anti-immigrant attitudes.³⁴

The Canadian immigration-as-nation-building paradigm is rooted in a particular set of policies and institutions: it is about permanent settlement and integration into a diverse citizenry, where legal systems, public policy, and political structures encourage engagement and membership.

Historically, Canada has had modest and limited temporary migration programs.

In this way, what at first seems a paradox — high support for immigration in a country with very high levels of new and existing migration — becomes an explanation. Immigrants to Canada generally feel welcomed. Given the predominantly permanent nature of Canadian immigration, government policy promotes integration (often in partnership with community organizations) because it is presumed that both sides are together for the long haul. At the same time, integration does not mean assimilation, given the policy and ideology of multiculturalism articulated by the government. Finally, the overwhelming majority of immigrants acquire citizenship, making it hard for anti-immigrant politicians to gain a foothold. Immigrant votes have consequences for electoral outcomes.

A. Permanent Immigration and Settlement

The immigration-as-nation-building paradigm rests on specific features of Canadian policy. As noted earlier, there is very high support for permanent rather than temporary immigration in Canada, with 80 percent of residents preferring the former. One can well imagine that the native-born population has little incentive to see temporary foreigners as future members of the society, or for migrants to feel a sense of inclusion and investment in that society when migration is supposed to be temporary. Historically, Canada has had modest and limited temporary migration programs. Thus, unlike the Bracero program in the United States — arguably a catalyst of today’s substantial unauthorized population — or guest worker programs on the European continent, the vast majority of Canadian migration has been explicitly about permanent settlement.³⁵

Indeed, various temporary labor programs in Canada, such as the live-in-caregiver program, offer visa

³³ Richard Johnston, Jack Citrin, and Matthew Wright, “National Identity in Canada and the United States: Where Do Immigration and Multiculturalism Fit in?,” *Canadian Journal of Political Science* (in press).

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ For more on the Bracero program, see Deborah Waller Meyers, *Temporary Worker Programs: A Patchwork Policy Response* (Washington, DC: Migration Policy Institute, 2005), www.migrationpolicy.org/ITFIAF/TFL_12_Meyers.pdf.



holders a relatively clear and short pathway to permanent residence. Under the “Canadian Experience Class,” introduced in 2008, workers with two years of skilled work experience — which includes work in a skilled trade or technical occupation — can apply for permanent residence based on their experience and demonstrated language skills. Similarly, foreign students who graduate from a Canadian postsecondary institution and who work for a year can also adjust their status to that of a permanent resident. Most analogous programs in other countries, from Japan to the United States, keep migrants temporary. In Canada 32,827 people transitioned from foreign temporary worker status to permanent residence in 2010, and another 8,667 people moved from temporary student status to permanent residence. This means that 15 percent of total permanent admissions — numbering 280,681 — were individuals already in Canada with a temporary work or study visa.³⁶ The proportion of people transitioning from temporary to permanent residence has been increasing over the past decade. In 2001 only 8 percent of permanent residents had previously held temporary work or study visas.³⁷

The move to greater use of temporary visas may also lead to problematic outcomes for the migrants involved.

Looking to the future, the recent ballooning of temporary visas heralds a new and alarming trend that could upset the pro-immigrant consensus in Canada. The absolute number of temporary residence visas has skyrocketed. In 2001, 186,798 people held temporary work permits in Canada; by 2010 this number stood at 432,682.³⁸ The number of foreign students also increased, though more modestly, from 185,948 in 2001 to 278,146 in 2010.³⁹ Given the historic reliance on permanent migration as a cornerstone of nation building, the rapid increase in temporary work visas may be a problem for maintaining public support for migration.

The problem is compounded, in the eyes of some commentators, by the sense that the shift to more temporary visas constitutes a hidden change in immigration policy that has occurred with little public consultation or debate in Parliament. The move to greater use of temporary visas may also lead to problematic outcomes for the migrants involved, especially if they move into the underground economy after their visas expire.⁴⁰

B. Canadian Multiculturalism

Multiculturalism has played a critical role in reorganizing the symbolic order of membership in Canada. The Bilingualism and Biculturalism Commission of the 1960s, which helped shape what eventually became the multiculturalism policy, still talked about the two “founding races” of Canada: the English (British) and the French. Given the stickiness of national ideologies, it is extraordinary that within a generation, Canadians have shed these views and that many now support the idea of a diverse citizenry. Indeed, more residents of Canada say that multiculturalism is a key part of Canadian identity than hockey: in 2010, 56 percent of respondents agreed that multiculturalism was “very important” to Canadian identity, compared to just 47 percent for hockey.⁴¹ This shift has arguably gone further in English-speaking Canada than in Quebec, but even there, Quebecers’ embrace of Michaëlle Jean — a Francophone former governor-general who migrated from Haiti to Quebec at a young age — shows that traditional notions of the French-Canadian nation have widened substantially.

36 Author’s calculation from CIC, *Facts and Figures*.

37 *Ibid.*

38 CIC, *Facts and Figures*, 53.

39 *Ibid.*

40 Jeffrey G. Reitz, “Selecting Immigrants for the Short Term: Is It Smart in the Long Run?” *Policy Options* 31, no. 7 (2010): 12–16, Institute for Research on Public Policy, Montreal, www.utoronto.ca/ethnicstudies/Reitz2010IRPP.pdf.

41 Environics Institute, *Focus Canada 2010*, 17.



Support for multiculturalism and immigration go hand in hand. In 2010, of those who said that multiculturalism was “very important” to Canadian national identity (56 percent of all respondents), 68 percent supported existing levels of immigration. In comparison, only 42 percent of the small group who thought multiculturalism was “unimportant” (12 percent) supported existing immigration.⁴²

Why and how has this transformation of national identity — one that includes immigrants — occurred? In part, it is due to the fortuitous timing of multiculturalism’s birth. In the 1960s and 1970s, Canadians were searching for a sense of national cohesion that was not British and not American, and one that could in some way accommodate the growing separatist movement in Quebec. Multiculturalism served to distinguish Canada from the perceived American melting pot and from images of a homogenous, Protestant Britishness. It also acknowledged (though insufficiently) Quebecois nationalism, which rests on the cultural specificity of Francophones.⁴³

While it is often argued in Europe that traditional immigration countries such as the United States and Canada are more able to incorporate an “immigrant” story into their national identities, this greatly underestimates the Britishness of Canadian society until the late 20th century.⁴⁴ Government recognition and celebration of diversity, within an overarching Canadian nation, has provided a doorway through which new Canadians can enter into the national community. On the ground, initiatives such as multicultural curricula in schools incorporate a history of migration and the contributions of longstanding minorities into the national narrative.

*In an important sense, the Canadian story is based on
“multicultural integration” rather than an ethnic or
civic assimilation strategy.*

Of course, multiculturalism is not a panacea. While there may be no widespread or strong backlash against public recognition and celebration of diversity, there have been controversies about the use of Sharia during arbitration in the Ontario judicial system, the right of Sikhs to wear turbans in the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, and the accommodation of religious minorities in Quebec. Asked whether ethnic groups “should try as much as possible to blend into Canadian society and not form a separate community,” 76 percent of Canadian respondents agreed with this sentiment in a 2010 poll. The proportion was the highest in Quebec, where an overwhelming 88 percent agreed that ethnic groups should blend in.⁴⁵

Canadians’ expressed desire that immigrants integrate into the receiving society, rather than maintain separate communities, has been a constant in public opinion polls since the 1970s.⁴⁶ Such a view should

42 Reitz, *Pro-immigration Canada*, 15. Between these two positions, among those who felt that multiculturalism was “somewhat important” to Canadian identity, 50 percent supported current immigration levels.

43 In fact, many Francophone Quebecers interpreted multiculturalism as undermining their claims to special status within Canada. Thus, rather than being acknowledged as a national minority, they fear that multiculturalism renders them just a small tile, similar in importance to Somali Canadians or Vietnamese Canadians, in the larger mosaic. The Quebec government has consequently articulated its own diversity policy, called “interculturalism,” which places more emphasis on French language integration and is seen as distinct from multiculturalism. The actual differences in the two policies are not, however, large.

44 The view of North America as “naturally” more able to incorporate diversity due to its immigrant past also might underestimate the way national histories can be re-imagined even in Europe. For example, in the Dutch case, the migration of persecuted religious minorities dates back centuries and was likely critical to the Netherlands’ emergence as a world power during the Golden Age. In Portugal the spirit and courage of Portuguese explorers is celebrated, and could easily be interpreted to celebrate the courage of modern-day migrants.

45 Enviro-nics Institute, *Focus Canada 2010*, 31.

46 Reitz, *Pro-immigration Canada*, 16.



not necessarily be read as opposition to multiculturalism or diversity in the Canadian context. Indeed, the original government pronouncement on multiculturalism, articulated by then Prime Minister Pierre Elliott Trudeau in a 1971 speech to federal Parliament, promoted multiculturalism precisely because cultural recognition and accommodation were presumed to help facilitate peaceful integration and two-way adjustment by immigrants and the native-born majority. According to an analysis of public opinion conducted by Jeffrey Reitz, a favorable attitude toward multiculturalism “bolsters support for immigration by fostering a more open or flexible standard for assessing immigrant integration, leading people to believe more often that immigrants are meeting that standard.”⁴⁷ In an important sense, the Canadian story is based on “multicultural integration” rather than an ethnic or civic assimilation strategy or a program of cultural separatism.

It is in Quebec that we see the greatest skepticism toward diversity and multiculturalism policies and a greater preference that immigrants assimilate into the dominant Francophone culture. For example, asked in 2010 whether head scarves worn by Muslim women should be banned in public places, including schools, a majority of Canadians outside Quebec, 52 percent, said this was a bad idea; in Quebec, however, 64 percent of respondents considered it a good idea.⁴⁸ Concern over immigrant integration is distinct from attitudes toward migration more generally; as noted above, Quebecers are similar to other Canadians in their support for current Canadian immigration policy.⁴⁹

Quebecers’ distinct views on multiculturalism and accommodation lie partially in a centuries-old concern about Francophones’ place in overwhelmingly English North America. Pride in French Canadian history has also, traditionally, rested on the Catholic faith, although today Quebecers are among the least practicing of any of Canada’s faith communities. These two elements — historic Catholicism, but contemporary secularism — make Francophone Quebecers arguably more sensitive about religious accommodations for orthodox Jews, Sikhs, and practicing Muslims. In addition, it is likely that the greater links between Quebec and French intellectuals might color Francophone Canadians’ approach to diversity, especially around issues of Islam, in a way distinct from Anglophones. This is especially apparent in debates around the veil, which some Francophone elites interpret (as do some feminists in France) as an issue of women’s subjugation, while among Anglophone Canadians, it is seen more as a debate about freedom of religion.

Among advocates for immigrants and minorities, concerns over multiculturalism take a different form. Some scholars and community groups have suggested that public multiculturalism has provided national and provincial governments with a smoke screen to appear tolerant and inclusive without taking aggressive action on issues of racial discrimination. They point to evidence of unequal economic outcomes for “visible minorities” compared to those of European origins. Statistical analyses of Canadian census data over the past three decades show that visible minorities tend to earn less than Canadians who are not visible minorities, even after controlling for education, age, and similar determinants of economic outcomes, and even among those born in Canada.⁵⁰ Audit studies of job hunting, in which identical résumés are submitted for the same job, but where researchers vary the ethnic origins of candidates’ names and place of birth, find that job applicants with “Anglo” names have an advantage despite identical credentials.⁵¹

47 Ibid, 17.

48 Environics Institute, *Focus Canada 2010*, 33.

49 According to an analysis by Reitz, *Pro-immigration Canada*, 11, support for immigration policy among Francophones is higher, at 64 percent, compared to Anglophones, at 57 percent, based on a 2010 Focus Canada survey.

50 Krishna Pendakur and Ravi Pendakur, “Color by Numbers: Minority Earnings in Canada 1995–2005,” *Journal of International Migration and Integration* 12 (2011): 305–29. Income inequality varies somewhat by gender, location in Canada, and ethnic background, with some evidence of larger gaps for those with origins in South Asia and the Caribbean, and smaller gaps for those from East Asia. It also appears that inequality is greater in the private sector and much smaller in the public sector, and that it is greater in smaller compared to larger businesses.

51 Philip Oreopoulos and Diane Dechief, “Why Do Some Employers Prefer to interview Matthew, but Not Samir? New Evidence from Toronto, Montreal, and Vancouver” (Metropolis British Columbia Working Paper Series No. 11-13, Vancouver, Metropolis British Columbia, 2011), <http://mbc.metropolis.net/assets/uploads/files/wp/2011/WP11-13.pdf>.



Inequality in incomes or job prospects based on race or national origin sets off alarm bells, not only for the wasted human capital, but also because economic inequality might undermine minorities' sense of belonging and their subsequent integration into Canadian society — and it might undermine the majority's belief in the economic benefits of migration. Indeed, there is evidence that second-generation visible-minority Canadians perceive higher levels of discrimination than their immigrant parents, perhaps because they expect, but do not receive, equal treatment and opportunities. Thus, whereas 35.5 percent of visible minority immigrants who had lived in Canada more than ten years perceived discrimination against people of color, the proportion rose to 42.2 percent among those in the second generation.⁵² Increases in perceived discrimination were especially noteworthy among those with parents from South Asia or African or Afro-Caribbean origins. These perceptions are disquieting, especially when we consider that Canadians are divided as to whether a problem actually exists. In one opinion poll from 2010, 52 percent of respondents disagreed with the statement that “it is more difficult for non-whites to be successful in Canadian society than it is for other groups.”⁵³

Discrimination and inequality of outcomes thus remain serious issues in Canada. On one hand, Canada has established a broad anti-discrimination infrastructure — it ranks, alongside the United States, as the country with the most developed anti-discrimination policies, according to the Migrant Integration Policy Index (MIPEX) survey of 31 countries.⁵⁴ A recent survey experiment also suggests that Canadians do not make ethnically based distinctions in their preferences for one group of migrants over another as potential future citizens.⁵⁵ But it is also clear that Canadian governments and the general population can do more to ensure that origins and ethnoracial backgrounds do not impede economic integration, given strong evidence of unequal outcomes.

C. Institutionalized Inclusion: The Charter and Integration Policies

Permanent migration and ideologies around diversity probably would not matter as much if these notions of inclusive citizenship were not institutionalized. To this end, we find a relatively robust legal structure. The enshrinement of a Charter of Rights and Freedoms in 1982 — which outlawed discrimination, affirmed equality guarantees, protected equity hiring, and even instructed justices to keep the multicultural heritage of Canada in mind when rendering decisions — is one of the top three things that Canadians name as foundation stones of Canadian identity. According to a poll conducted in 2010, 85 percent of respondents rate the health care system as “very important” to Canadian identity, 78 percent say the same thing about the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, and 73 percent name the Canadian flag.⁵⁶ Institutions that facilitate immigrants' inclusion, such as the charter, are thus both a source of national pride and a resource that minorities can use to combat unequal treatment.

Other universal public policies, notably health care, also matter. The importance of the health-care system to Canadian identity and integration might seem strange to outsiders, but it has to be understood in terms of Canada's relationship to the United States. Since a part of Canadian nation building is about making distinctions from Americans, Canadians celebrate their universal health-care system as compared to the US system that leaves millions of Americans uninsured. Once more, this is a point around which a majority of native-born Canadians and new Canadians can rally, and thus serves as a source of inclusion.

There are also targeted policies and programs that help explain Canadian exceptionalism. In the 1970s,

52 Jeffrey G. Reitz and Rupa Banerjee, “Racial Inequality, Social Cohesion, and Policy Issues in Canada,” in *Belonging? Diversity, Recognition and Shared Citizenship in Canada*, eds. Keith Banting, Thomas J. Courchene, and F. Leslie Seidle (Montreal: IRPP, 2007), 480–545.

53 Environics Institute, *Focus Canada 2010*, 32.

54 For more on the Migrant Integration Policy Index, see www.mipex.eu/anti-discrimination.

55 Harrell, Soroka, and Iyengar, “Attitudes toward Immigration and Immigrants.” This was especially true of Anglophone respondents; Francophone respondents were slightly less likely to favor immigration and citizenship for an immigrant from a Middle Eastern country.

56 Environics Institute, *Focus Canada 2010*, 17.



when Canadian governments began to elaborate an ideology and policy of multiculturalism, they also expanded immigrant settlement and integration policies, including programs to facilitate immigrants' transition into the labor market and to help newcomers learn one of Canada's two official languages. The messages of cultural recognition and the value of diversity are thus accompanied by messages of integration. According to one estimate, projected spending for Citizenship and Immigration Canada's integration programs, including transfers to provincial counterparts, stood at slightly over \$1 billion in the 2010-11 fiscal year.⁵⁷ Remarkably, the amount has been increasing despite the recent global recession.

Importantly, public funding for integration initiatives gets channeled to community-based organizations. Public-private partnerships are behind the success of Canadian settlement policy. By contracting with community-based organizations, governments send a message that they want to partner with immigrant communities, and that they trust them with public funds. They also allow different migrant communities to offer language training, employment services, and other programs in culturally appropriate ways suited to community needs. Such public-private partnerships help frame integration programs as about helping immigrants find jobs or assisting with social inclusion, rather than as a project by which the majority society "teaches" newcomers proper values, an approach which is predicated on the idea that immigrants come with problematic beliefs.

There are also targeted policies and programs that help explain Canadian exceptionalism.

The lesson from Canada, therefore, is that public and private sectors can work together toward economic and social integration. Such partnerships generate feelings of attachment and membership among immigrants in Canada.⁵⁸ Comparative survey data about the relative importance of ethnicity and the national community in forming identity show that immigrants in Canada are more likely to report that their ethnicity is important to their identity than in the United States — but this does not come at the expense of a sense of national belonging. Indeed, they are also more likely to report attachment to the nation than immigrants in the United States.⁵⁹ Ethnic and Canadian attachments are complementary, not opposing.

It is important to note that settlement funding and diversity policies provide resources that build the political capacity of immigrant communities. This is because such policies fund community organizations and foster community leaders who can speak up and mobilize community members around immigrant issues. In this way, immigrants become engaged in public debates and can attempt to shape future policies.

What evidence do we have that this matters? If we look at citizenship acquisition, we find that an astounding 85 percent of foreign-born individuals who had lived in Canada at least three years (the minimum residency requirement for citizenship) reported Canadian citizenship in the 2006 Census.⁶⁰ They became citizens despite the fact that, as a matter of costs and benefits, the advantages of Canadian citizenship are modest: you do not need it for most jobs, to access public health insurance, or to sponsor relatives entering the country. In addition, despite concern in some Canadian corners that certain immigrants acquire citizenship as a passport of convenience, a 2010 poll found that almost four out of

57 Seidle, *The Canada-Ontario Immigration Agreement*, 4.

58 See, for example, Irene Bloemraad, *Becoming a Citizen: Political Incorporation among Immigrants and Refugees in the United States and Canada* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2006).

59 Matthew Wright and Irene Bloemraad, "Is There a Trade-off between Multiculturalism and Socio-Political Integration? Policy Regimes and Immigrant Incorporation in Comparative Perspective." Forthcoming in *Perspectives on Politics* (2012).

60 Author's calculation of 2006 Canadian Census data, www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2006/rt-td/immcit-eng.cfm.



five immigrants (78 percent) reported stronger attachment to Canada than their country of birth, and another 7 percent felt attached to both equally.⁶¹

High immigration and high levels of citizenship have created feedback loops that make it difficult for anti-immigrant politicians to gain a foothold in Canadian politics.⁶² There is no Canadian Geert Wilders or Pat Buchanan. The early Reform Party, the closest to anti-foreigner populism in contemporary Canadian politics, is now part of the governing Conservative Party, one that actively sought immigrants' support in the 2011 federal election.⁶³

There is no Canadian Geert Wilders or Pat Buchanan.

Indeed, the remarkable transformation of the Canadian political right is a striking case in point. At its founding in 1987, the Reform Party was antagonistic to multiculturalism and suspicious of immigration. These concerns stemmed from fears of rapid ethnic and cultural change; opponents of the party branded it as racist. In its 1988 “Blue Book,” which outlined the nascent party’s platform on a myriad political, economic, and social issues, the party proclaimed that “immigration should not be based on race or creed, as it was in the past; nor should it be explicitly designed to radically or suddenly alter the ethnic makeup of Canada, as it increasingly seems to be.”⁶⁴ The 1991 Blue Book moderated this stance, dropping language over the “ethnic makeup” of Canada, but it committed the party to opposing “the current concept of multiculturalism and hyphenated Canadianism” and to abolishing the program and ministry dedicated to multiculturalism.⁶⁵

Twenty years later, key activists from the old Reform Party — including the current prime minister, Stephen Harper — form the majority Conservative government in power. To win the 2011 federal elections, the party actively, and successfully, sought out new Canadians, including those termed “visible minorities” in Canada. The Conservative government, apparently in a bid to keep wooing immigrant-origin voters, is staying course with significant numbers of new immigrants admitted annually, and it has not made any moves to eliminate multiculturalism policy or rescind the 1988 *Multiculturalism Act*.

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These actions by right-wing politicians in Canada are all the more remarkable given that one recent analysis of Canadians’ attitudes toward immigration and multiculturalism show significantly less enthusiasm for either policy among people with strong partisan ties to the Conservative Party.⁶⁶ Thus, Canada is unlike many other countries where political elites seem to be setting the tone for stronger anti-

61 Environics Institute, *Focus Canada 2010*, 16. Only 13 percent report greater attachment to their country of birth and 3 percent of respondents said “neither” or “don’t know.” Percentages do not necessarily add up to 100 percent due to rounding.

62 The Canadian electoral system, where districts with a single representative win by getting a plurality of the votes, also impedes the success of anti-immigrant parties.

63 As Reitz (2011: 4) comments, “In the party leaders’ debate preceding the May 2011 election, a voter posed a question on immigration and multiculturalism. Each of the four prime ministerial candidates attempted to adopt the most proimmigration position, defending policies that aimed to facilitate immigration and promote the interests of immigrants in Canada.”

64 Reform Party, “Platform and Statement of Principles of the Reform Party of Canada,” 1988, 23, <http://contentdm.ucalgary.ca/cdm4/document.php?CISOROOT=/reform&CISOPTR=197&REC=9>.

65 Reform Party, “Reform Party of Canada: Principles and Policies,” 1991, 35, <http://contentdm.ucalgary.ca/cdm4/document.php?CISOROOT=/reform&CISOPTR=2212&REC=6>.

66 Reitz, *Pro-immigration Canada*, 20.



immigrant and anti-minority discourse.

In fact, all of the federal Canadian political parties count at least one foreign-born member of parliament (MPs) among their ranks. Based on unofficial election results, 11 percent of MPs in the House of Commons are foreign born. The proportion of foreign-born MPs in each party ranges from 100 percent (the lone Green Party MP was born in the United States) to 9 percent for the Conservative Party. Even the separatist Bloc Québécois (BQ) has a foreign-born MP (Maria Mourani, born in the Côte d'Ivoire of Lebanese parents), which means a quarter of the BQ's representation is "immigrant." Because so many immigrants have citizenship, and so many feel part of Canadian society, they vote and shape politics. This means that those on the right (and left) must moderate anti-immigrant or anti-minority rhetoric in order to win office.

IV. Conclusions

In Canada citizens' support for immigration is widespread among almost all segments of the population and, remarkably, support has been increasing over the past decade, despite significant inflows of new migrants, the global recession, and fears over foreign terrorists. Unlike the situation in many other countries, the demographic transformations and diversity brought into Canadian society by immigration have spurred no violence and very little political backlash. The populist and anti-multiculturalist Reform Party, established in the late 1980s, is today incorporated into the majority ruling party, a party that is actively reaching out to visible minority Canadians and retaining the Canadian policy of mass migration. Among immigrants, identification with Canada is very high and echoes the majority's support for such things as universal health care, the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, and the Canadian flag.

The success of the Canadian model is due in part to the economic orientation of immigration policy; the vast majority of Canadians view immigrants as beneficial to Canada's economic future. The relatively small group of unauthorized migrants, in no small part thanks to Canada's isolated geography, certainly helps cement the pro-immigrant consensus.

As this report has argued, however, economic selection and geography are not sufficient to explain Canadian exceptionalism. The Canadian view of immigration as nation building is key. Canada has reinvented its national identity away from that of a British colony or a shadow of the United States to one as a society that embraces immigration, diversity, and tolerance. This national project is supported through government policies and ideologies of multiculturalism, anti-discrimination law, and settlement programs that promote integration through public-private partnerships. The focus on permanent, rather than temporary, migration has also been critical, since it gives both immigrants and the receiving society a stake in promoting favorable long-term outcomes. Supportive institutions and policies are thus an important part of the story.

The success of the Canadian model is due in part to the economic orientation of immigration policy.

We must also recognize the engagement of immigrants and their children in forging a place in Canadian society. Immigrants have revitalized urban spaces, they are working in myriad industries and businesses, and they become citizens at incredibly high rates. The second generation is even more likely to go to university than the children of native-born Canadians, and is making inroads in all areas of life, from membership in the House of Commons to winning the top Canadian literary prizes. Canada might have followed the turn — witnessed in other nations — against diversity and immigration if it were not for the fact that most immigrants acquire citizenship and participate in electoral politics, and that the second generation receives automatic Canadian citizenship at birth.



Canada is no utopia, however, and some storm clouds might be gathering on the horizon. To the extent that the Canadian model rests on a firm belief that immigration is good for the economy, reports of inequality between people of different national origins or racial backgrounds is a cause of significant concern. Not only might this undermine majority Canadians' faith in the system if certain immigrant groups are doing badly, but it could generate resentment among the Canadian born of minority background.

The recent move to increased temporary migration also raises significant concerns. Canadians overwhelmingly favor permanent migration. Temporary visas also open up the possibility of a ballooning population of unauthorized migrants, if people stay in the country past the expiration date on their visas. There is little evidence that Canadians are particularly sympathetic to unauthorized migrants, and a rapid increase in this population could have a big effect on public opinion.

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Finally, Canadian support for diversity and multiculturalism goes hand in hand with the assumption that newcomers will integrate and blend into Canadian society. As in other countries, new migration prompts a certain disquiet. In particular, concerns over religious accommodation — primarily, but not exclusively, centered on Muslim migrants — erupt in periodic media controversy. If a group of political entrepreneurs were to stoke such fears, it is possible that attitudes against immigrants might become more negative. Immigration is both an economic and cultural issue.

At present, however, such concerns appear unlikely. Because immigration and multiculturalism have become part of Canadian nation building and identity, a radical turn against migrants and diversity would necessitate a dramatic change in Canadian nationalism. In addition, unless established immigrant Canadians completely turn their backs on would-be migrants, the significant share of immigrants in the voting population will likely mitigate radical anti-immigrant politics. Time will tell whether Canada continues to be an exception in the area of immigration, or whether other transatlantic societies will also modify their national identities in the face of growing immigrant and second-generation populations.



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