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WHAT'S SO SPECIAL ABOUT CANADA? UNDERSTANDING THE RESILIENCE OF IMMIGRATION AND MULTICULTURALISM

By Daniel Hiebert

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Table of Contents

Executive Summary	1
I. Introduction	2
II. Canadian Views on Immigration	4
III. Framing Immigration to Canada in Economic and Demographic Terms	5
IV. Building a Consensus on Immigration	9
A. Fostering a Multicultural View of Diversity	9
B. Political Convergence on Immigration.....	10
C. Immigration and Integration Through Other Policy Lenses	12
V. Involving Many Stakeholders in Migration Governance	13
A. Selecting Which Immigrants Should be Admitted to Canada.....	13
B. Providing Settlement and Integration Services	14
VI. Conclusion: Lessons from the Canadian Consensus	16
Looking Ahead.....	18
Works Cited	19
About the Author	21



Executive Summary

Canada has in recent decades occupied a privileged place among the world's top immigrant-receiving countries. Despite weathering many of the same economic and political challenges that have buffeted support for immigration in other countries—from recession to threats of terrorism—Canada has managed to maintain a consistently positive public consensus around its immigration system. Recent surveys have found that Canadians generally see immigration as beneficial to both the economy and society at large.¹

Canadians' broadly positive outlook on immigration is built on a very specific narrative and immigration history. While Canada has a long history of immigration, since the 1980s policies governing new arrivals have, to a large degree, been tied to demographic and economic considerations. Permanent residents admitted for economic reasons comprised roughly 60 percent of all admissions to Canada over the past five years.² Polls suggest that this is in line with public preferences: in a 2011 survey, for example, 69 percent of Canadians thought immigration policy should prioritize nationally relevant education and skills.³ Canada's geographic isolation from global conflicts or extreme poverty has safeguarded its selection system from mass arrivals or large-scale unauthorized flows.

Canadians' broadly positive outlook on immigration is built on a very specific narrative and immigration history.

Furthermore, the diversity of immigrant arrivals to Canada—in 2014, new permanent residents came from nearly 200 countries—has ensured that any conception of “the immigrant” is not reduced to one ethnic, racial, or religious identity. This has further enabled the country to fully adopt and maintain support for a policy of multiculturalism that recognizes cultural differences within a national identity. The sizeable share of the population of immigrant origin (that is, in the first or second generation), meanwhile, has prompted all of the major political parties to maintain broadly similar, and positive, views of immigration as they compete for the immigrant vote.

While some share of Canada's success is attributable to factors that are impossible to emulate—including its immigration history and geographic location—certain policy choices underpinning the Canadian immigration and integration model may offer lessons for policymakers in other countries:

- **Take a whole-of-government and whole-of-society approach to immigration and integration policy.** The devolved nature of Canada's immigration system—with provincial governments and employers given a significant voice in certain decisions⁴—has ensured that multiple levels of government and society have buy-in to the immigration system. The national government also relies heavily on civil-society actors to inform and implement integration measures. When a broad range of actors are given a stake in immigration policy and the integration process, immigration becomes “everybody's business.”
- **Develop neutral narratives around immigration policy.** Canada has so far managed to avoid the toxic mix of immigration and highly charged security concerns that have plagued European

1 See, for example, IPSOS Global @dvisor, “Global Views on Migration,” August 2011, www.ipsos.fr/sites/default/files/attachments/globaladvisor_immigration.pdf; Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC) private polls conducted by Environics Institute (2012) and 2013 polling performed by Forum Research, the Gandalf Group, the Association for Canadian Studies, IPSOS-Reed, and Léger, which CIC generously shared with the author.

2 CIC, “Facts and Figures 2014—Immigration Overview: Permanent Residents,” updated August 1, 2015, www.cic.gc.ca/english/resources/statistics/facts2014/permanent/02.asp.

3 IPSOS, “Global Views on Migration.”

4 Provinces are, for example, able to recruit immigrants directly through their own provincial visa nomination schemes.



and U.S. politics. By keeping these two issues separate, policy leaders have been able to debate immigration issues in a relatively neutral environment.

- **Implement thoughtful selection policies and maintain diverse flows.** Canada's immigration system has largely developed in a way that is aligned with existing public perceptions of immigration, namely by selecting newcomers based on their potential contributions to Canada's economy and society. Selection policies have also kept flows diverse, both in terms of type of arrival and country of origin. The functioning of the immigration system has therefore reinforced, rather than undermined, the overarching public and political narrative about immigration.
- **Match commitments with action, and alter course as needed.** Governments need to follow through on policy promises, and communicate their actions and decisions in clear language. At the same time, they should demonstrate they are willing and able to adapt policy to changing circumstances or in response to evidence of unintended effects. Canadian policies on temporary work, for example, have been adjusted several times in response to accounts of abuse and lack of enforcement.

Canada has so far managed to avoid the toxic mix of immigration and highly charged security concerns that have plagued European and U.S. politics.

I. Introduction

Over the past several decades Canada has received a larger share of immigrants than most other destination countries in the global north, admitting roughly 250,000 permanent residents per year (0.7 percent of the national population) since the mid-1980s.⁵ In 2011, 21 percent of the Canadian population was foreign born, and another 17 percent had at least one foreign-born parent. In the country's primary metropolitan areas, meanwhile, these figures were even larger. These high rates of immigration have been backed by a national consensus that has largely prevented the rise of anti-immigrant sentiment seen in many other destination countries. Further, the political project of multiculturalism is largely intact in Canada, despite its declining salience in many other countries.

Canada's national consensus on immigration has taken time to develop. While immigration has played an integral part in forging the nation throughout its history, certain kinds of immigration have polarized domestic politics in the past. Just as the 19th century was coming to a close, the government instituted a policy to attract unprecedented numbers of immigrants. For the most part these newcomers came from Europe, but there were incipient signs that immigration to Canada could become global, drawing people from as far as India and China. Vancouver, as the gateway city to the Pacific region, was the first to see this change. By the turn of the century it had a burgeoning Chinatown and microsettlements of migrants from India and Japan. The popular response to these communities was as negative as it was decisive. Persistent calls, supported by the media, for Canada to curtail this "invasion" from Asia culminated in a riot in 1908 that saw white supremacist gangs devastate the city's Chinatown. Rather than bringing the perpetrators to justice, the Canadian government chose to appease anti-Asian sentiment and redoubled its efforts to deter immigration from Asian countries, eventually barring entry from India and China.

⁵ Statistics in this paragraph are gathered from Statistics Canada, "Immigration and Ethnocultural Diversity in Canada," updated January 14, 2014, www12.statcan.gc.ca/nhs-enm/2011/as-sa/99-010-x/99-010-x2011001-eng.cfm.



A century later, the situation could hardly be more different. The legislation excluding Asians was repealed in 1947, and in the 1960s, Canada's old immigrant selection system—which privileged people of European ancestry—was replaced by a points system that favored people with high levels of human and financial capital. In the 1980s Canada once again enacted a policy to attract more immigrants, but by this time the vision of immigration had shifted from a tool for building a white settler nation to one that would address profound demographic change (owing to declining fertility) and propel the economy. Immigrants from Asia were seen as essential to this new vision.

The city of Vancouver exemplifies the subsequent change. In 1981, 104,000 people out of a metropolitan population of 1.3 million had been born in Asia. By 2011, this figure had jumped to approximately 627,000 out of a total of 2.3 million (979,000, or 43 percent of the metropolitan total, claimed Asian ethnic ancestry).⁶ In contrast to the violent reaction a century earlier, this profound shift in the ethnocultural profile of Vancouver has not generated any organized anti-immigrant or anti-Asian political movement. Vancouver's Asia-Pacific character has been "normalized" as an ingredient in the everyday life of the city. This is not to say that racism is absent from Vancouver or, more broadly, Canada, but that in the contemporary era, cultural complexity and change are no longer considered exceptional developments to be feared.

Canadian attitudes sympathetic to immigration and globalized cultural diversity took time—and, arguably, political will—to develop.

In 2014 Canada admitted permanent residents from nearly 200 countries.⁷ These diverse and global flows mean that Canadians do not have a singular conception of "the immigrant." In contrast, many EU countries receive large numbers of immigrants from specific, often Muslim, countries (e.g., people of Turkish descent in Germany, or those from the Maghreb region in France),⁸ and anti-immigration political movements portray immigration as a "clash of civilizations."

Canadian attitudes sympathetic to immigration and globalized cultural diversity took time—and, arguably, political will—to develop. This report explores the evolution of Canada's apparently unique attitude toward immigration and diversity. It begins by presenting a snapshot of Canada's largely positive public opinions on immigration. It then discusses the matrix of social policies, institutions, and institutional practices that have driven this positive consensus: presenting immigration as a solution and framing it in economic terms; promoting multiculturalism and diversity; avoiding implicit associations of immigration and integration with security concerns; and involving a large number of stakeholders in migration governance. Finally, the report draws out lessons for other destination countries on transforming exclusionary attitudes into inclusionary ones.

6 Note that this figure includes all those who declared Asian ancestry, whether as a single origin or as part of a combination of origins. See Statistics Canada, "NHS Profile, Vancouver, CMA, British Columbia, 2011," updated December 19, 2014, www12.statcan.gc.ca/nhs-enm/2011/dp-pd/prof/details/page.cfm?Lang=E&Geo1=CMA&Code1=933&Data=Count&SearchText=Vancouver&SearchType=Begins&SearchPR=59&A1=All&B1=All&Custom=&TABID=1.

7 In 2014, the top ten sending countries of permanent residents to Canada were the Philippines, India, the People's Republic of China, Iran, Pakistan, the United States, the United Kingdom, France, Mexico, and South Korea. This list reveals vestiges of Canada's colonial relationships (with the United Kingdom and France), its proximity to the United States, and the fact that most of its immigrants come from the world's most populous countries. These data are derived from CIC, "Facts and Figures 2014."

8 For a breakdown of migrant countries of origin in major immigration countries, see Migration Policy Institute (MPI), "International Migrant Population by Country of Origin and Destination, Mid-2015 Estimates," accessed June 3, 2016, www.migrationpolicy.org/programs/data-hub/charts/international-migrant-population-country-origin-and-destination?width=1000&height=850&iframe=true.



II. Canadian Views on Immigration

Over the past decade, there have been at least five major global comparative opinion surveys on attitudes concerning immigration, integration, and diversity, including those conducted by IPSOS, Pew, and Gallup. In all of these surveys, Canadians have generally expressed more positive opinions about these issues than their counterparts in other countries of the global north.

The most recent survey was conducted by IPSOS in 2011.⁹ Of the 23 countries surveyed, Canadians were the second-most likely to agree that immigration has generally had a positive impact on their country (39 percent, with only residents of India rating higher). Fewer than 10 percent of respondents from Turkey, Hungary, and Belgium answered the same. Canadians ranked third in their disagreement with the proposition that there are too many immigrants in their country (29 percent disagreed, behind Poland and Sweden). When asked whether immigration is good for their country's economy, 43 percent of Canadians voiced a positive view (behind Brazil and India). Canadians were the most likely to agree with the statement "immigration policy should prioritize education and skills relevant to the national economy" (69 percent, or more than double the response in the United States). Finally, Canadians were ranked second in agreeing that immigrants make their country a more interesting place (49 percent, behind Brazil; by contrast, only 12 percent of respondents in Russia believed this to be true).

Since 2004, multiple surveys commissioned by Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC; renamed Immigration, Refugees, and Citizenship Canada in November 2015) suggest that roughly half of all Canadians believe that the number of immigrants admitted to Canada is "about right."¹⁰ In 2012, this figure was 53 percent, with another 11 percent stating that the number is "too low" and 27 percent that it is "too high."¹¹ In the same survey 78 percent of respondents indicated that they believe "immigration is necessary if Canada is to sustain its economic growth,"¹² 83 percent agreed with the statement that "immigration has a positive impact on the economy of Canada," and 72 percent disagreed with the view that "immigrants take jobs away from Canadians."¹³ Note, however, that Canadians evinced a less positive view of asylum claimants: 55 percent agreed with the statement "many people claiming to be refugees are not real refugees." Public opinion fluctuated somewhat in the last year or so of the Conservative mandate, and particularly during the early weeks of the 2015 electoral campaign. While the polls cited here were conducted before this volatility occurred, the results of the election suggest that Canadians continue to demonstrate a robust level of support for immigration and the Canadian approach to multiculturalism (see the "Looking Ahead" section of this report).

In 2013 an extensive survey was undertaken to understand Canadian attitudes toward national security.¹⁴ Of respondents, 53 percent stated that they were "worried about the possibility of a terrorist attack in Canada," and 54 percent supported the statement "there is an irreconcilable conflict between Western societies and Muslim societies." Yet a clear majority supported immigration, suggesting that Canadians do not conflate the two debates. It is also worth noting that Canada has been spared the dramatic terrorist attacks that have happened in recent years in Europe.

9 IPSOS, "Global Views on Migration."

10 CIC routinely commissions private surveys on these issues (conducted by private-sector marketing firms), and has provided the author access to polls conducted by Environics Institute (2012) and 2013 polling by Forum Research, the Gandalf Group, the Association for Canadian Studies, IPSOS-Reed, and Léger.

11 Environics Institute, *Focus Canada 2012* (Toronto, ON: The Environics Institute, 2012), www.environmentalinstitute.org/uploads/institute-projects/environics%20institute%20-%20focus%20canada%202012%20final%20report.pdf.

12 In a different survey conducted in 2013, 85 percent of executives in Canadian corporations agreed that "immigration is critical to meet the labor market needs of Canada."

13 The reasons for this lack of fear are beyond the scope of this report, but include the stringent credentialing process that newcomers intending to work in regulated professions must navigate, as well as the long-standing preference among Canadian employers for individuals who have Canadian work experience.

14 The survey was conducted in early 2013 by the Léger Marketing group as part of a contract between CIC and the Association of Canadian Studies, and is based on a sample of just over 2,000 respondents.



The development of the Canadian consensus on immigration can in part be explained by how immigration policy is portrayed by policymakers, who tend to frame it in economic and demographic terms as a component of “building the nation,” a pillar of economic prosperity, and an antidote to declining fertility. Of course, this framing also has some questionable consequences, notably that the rationale for immigration does not easily lend itself to humanitarian concerns, with the implication that Canadians need not support immigration unless it generates positive economic outcomes.

The development of the Canadian consensus on immigration can in part be explained by how immigration policy is portrayed by policymakers.

III. Framing Immigration to Canada in Economic and Demographic Terms

Canada’s long history of framing immigration in economic terms and presenting it as a solution to the nation’s problems has led to a mutually reinforcing set of outcomes: Canadians expect immigration to be coordinated with economic need and, as a result, they have typically supported immigration mainly when it is aligned with economic concerns.

This framing has been particularly apparent in three major episodes of Canadian history. The first occurred at the turn of the 20th century, as part of an effort to populate the western region of the country and to bolster the emerging industrial economies of the larger cities of Ontario and Quebec. That phase of large-scale immigration ended with the onset of the Great Depression, and a lull in immigration continued through the Second World War. Following the war, amid fears of a labor shortage, immigration was again encouraged and largely propelled that period’s shift to mass production. This second major period of immigration lasted until the oil-price shocks and economic stagnation of the 1970s. Finally, in the 1980s the Canadian government initiated a third wave of immigration that reflected demographic and economic considerations. Approximately 250,000 permanent residents have been admitted each year for the past 25 years (the longest period of consistent immigration policy in Canadian history). Despite the brutal recession of the early 1990s, the heightened security concerns after 9/11, and economic circumstances (such as the crisis that started in 2008), the overall numerical target for permanent residents hardly fluctuated over these years.¹⁵

Canada’s permanent residents are admitted through three main channels: economic, family, and refugee/asylum (see Table 1).¹⁶ Over the past five years, immigrants selected for their potential to make an economic contribution to Canada (principal applicants and their accompanying family members) have tended to account for about 60 percent of all admissions.¹⁷ Approximately 25 percent have been admitted through family reunification programs, while about 10 percent have been refugees. The remainder (typically 2-3 percent) arrived for “other” reasons.

15 Each year, typically in November, the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration Canada presents targets for the following year. Once approved by Parliament, the report is made public and the treasury releases funds to CIC to enable it to execute the plan. Statistics for this paragraph have been extracted from both these annual Parliamentary reports and the annual compendium of statistics released by CIC. The most recent release is CIC, “Facts and Figures 2014.”

16 Note that figures for Quebec are incorporated into this table, even though that province is responsible for the selection of these individuals. Also note that the ratio of economic immigrants in 2013 was surprisingly low compared with other recent years, largely due to an effort to clear the backlog of family reunification cases.

17 CIC, “Facts and Figures 2014.”

**Table 1. Permanent Residents Admitted to Canada, by Admission Category, 2012-14**

	2012		2013		2014	
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
Total All Categories	257,903	100	259,023		260,404	100
Family	65,012	25.2	81,843	31.6	66,661	25.6
Spouses and partners	39,536	15.3	42,747	16.5	42,124	16.2
Sons and daughters	2,716	1.1	2,769	1.1	3,265	1.3
Parents and grandparents	21,814	8.5	32,322	12.5	18,150	7.0
Others	946	0.4	4,005	1.5	3,122	1.2
Economic	160,793	62.3	148,155	57.2	165,089	63.4
Skilled workers	91,434	35.5	83,108	32.1	67,485	25.9
Canadian Experience Class	9,359	3.6	7,216	2.8	23,786	9.1
Business class	10,077	3.9	9,095	3.5	8,351	3.2
Provincial/territorial nominees	40,910	15.9	39,920	15.4	47,628	18.3
Live-in caregivers	9,013	3.5	8,799	3.4	17,692	6.8
Skilled trades	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
Refugees	23,079	8.9	23,831	9.2	23,286	8.9
Government assisted	5,412	2.1	5,661	2.2	7,573	2.9
Privately sponsored	4,225	1.6	6,269	2.4	4,560	1.8
Asylum granted (principal applicant)	8,586	3.3	8,036	3.1	7,749	3.0
Asylum granted (spouse/dependent)	4,856	1.9	3,712	1.4	3,227	1.2
Other	9,014	3.5	5,194	2.0	5,367	2.1

Note: Both principal applicants and accompanying family members are included in the economic categories. For example, in 2013, 34,156 principal applicant skilled workers were admitted, plus 48,952 family members.

Source: Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC), "Facts and Figures 2014—Immigration Overview: Permanent Residents," updated August 1, 2015, www.cic.gc.ca/english/resources/statistics/facts2014/permanent/02.asp.



Box I. Economic Channels for Migration to Canada

Canada's economic channels for permanent residents include the following subcategories:

- **Skilled workers.** Skilled workers compose the majority of those who enter through the economic channel. Most applicants in this category are evaluated based on their human capital, through a points system that privileges language fluency (in English or French), education, training in specific occupations and professions, and labor market experience.
- **Skilled trades.** This recently introduced category applies to trades that are in relatively high demand in Canada. Workers in this category typically do not have sufficient education to be admitted as skilled workers. A small category at present, it is expected to grow in the future.
- **Canadian experience.** Temporary foreign workers (TFWs) and international students who have gained work experience may apply for permanent residence. The significance of this category is projected to increase over time.
- **Business.** Canada has had an extensive business immigration program in the past that was designed to attract self-employed individuals, entrepreneurs, and investors. The latter two categories were terminated in 2012 amid criticism that economic outcomes for individuals arriving through these channels were poor (note that individuals continued to arrive in 2013-14, although new applications were no longer being accepted). Citizenship Immigration Canada (CIC) has recently established small, experimental programs to attract business immigration; a large-scale one is not expected in the foreseeable future.
- **Provincial and territorial nominees.** These nominees account for approximately 15 percent of all permanent residents admitted to Canada, and are generally selected for their economic potential.
- **Live-in caregivers.** TFWs providing care for children, the elderly, or the disabled in private homes may apply for permanent residence after two years of full-time employment.

There are three main types of temporary visas for migration to Canada: work, education, and those granted on humanitarian grounds. Though more people receive a temporary visa on an annual basis than a permanent one, temporary visas will be considered only briefly since, by definition, the long-term impact of temporary residents is limited (i.e., they typically come and go within a one- to four-year period).

Nearly 280,000 individuals were granted temporary work visas in Canada in 2013.¹⁸ This group can be subdivided into two main categories. The first and largest, at approximately 62 percent, is mainly comprised of a large number of individuals who fall under reciprocal agreements (e.g., “working holiday programs” and the North American Free Trade Agreement, NAFTA), individuals deemed important to the Canadian economy (e.g., intracorporate transfers and their family members, and postdoctoral fellows), and individuals nominated by provincial or territorial governments.¹⁹

The second category (just over 40 percent of the total) are given the formal designation temporary foreign workers (TFWs). These visas are intended to enable employers to find workers outside the country, but only when they can make a credible case that they cannot find qualified Canadians. The visa thus

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Similar to the free movement allowed between European countries, the Canadian national government has limited control over these categories of admission. These visas are for the most part governed by reciprocal agreements with many countries, the provisions of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) and the World Trade Organization (WTO) agreements, as well as the memoranda of understanding (MOUs) signed with provincial and territorial governments.



requires a “Labor Market Opinion” from the human resources branch of the Canadian government. Many recent investigative reports suggest that the procedures for verifying the claim that employers cannot find suitable workers in Canada are followed loosely.²⁰ CIC has responded with a number of adjustments intended to improve enforcement that have, predictably, prompted criticisms from the private sector.²¹ The number ultimately admitted to Canada as TFWs represents a kind of balance between these competing voices and is, on occasion, a hotly contested political issue.

Canadians see immigration and migration primarily through an economic lens and not as a humanitarian issue.

The other two major categories of temporary visas receive much less attention from the Canadian media. In 2013, just under 400,000 international student visas were granted to individuals enrolled in programs that ranged in duration from six months to four years.²² Finally, the number of humanitarian temporary visas (for asylum seekers) granted in 2013 was just over 10,000—a decline from a peak of approximately 45,000 in 2001.²³ This is a result of a concerted effort by the Canadian government to deter this form of migration through a variety of means:

- An automatic review process is initiated whenever there is an appreciable increase in the number of asylum seekers from any particular country. This process often leads to enhanced visa requirements, as in the case of the Czech Republic and Mexico in 2009.
- Carrier sanctions are imposed on airlines that fly passengers who lack proper documentation (that is, if a decision is made to deport the passenger, the airline is liable for all associated costs).
- Canada has negotiated a “safe-third-country” agreement²⁴ with the United States that gives Canada the right to return an asylum seeker to the United States if the person traveled through that country on the way to Canada.
- Canada has also instituted a “safe countries” list that makes it very difficult for asylum claimants from places (such as EU Member States and Mexico) that are believed to offer their citizens full human rights.

Advocacy organizations active in contesting these new policies have not typically received a great deal of public sympathy, as Canadians see immigration and migration primarily through an economic lens and not as a humanitarian issue. To illustrate, the former Minister of CIC, Jason Kenney, when justifying the proposed safe countries legislation in 2009 to the Parliamentary Committee on Citizenship and Immigration,²⁵ insisted that Canada must “open the front door” to regular immigration, which would

20 See, for example, Daniel Tencer, “Widespread TFW Abuses Revealed as Industry Group Makes Stunning Assertion,” *Huffington Post*, May 5, 2014, www.huffingtonpost.ca/2014/05/28/restaurants-canada-100-hour-wage_n_5406308.html; Vivian Luk, “Are B.C. Employers among Those Addicted to Temporary Foreign Workers?” *The Globe and Mail*, June 26, 2013, www.theglobeandmail.com/news/british-columbia/are-bc-employers-among-those-addicted-to-temporary-foreign-workers/article12834482/. There are many dozens of media stories like these.

21 A full description of reforms to the Temporary Foreign Worker Program is available at Employment and Social Development Canada, “Overhauling the Temporary Foreign Worker Program: Putting Canadians First,” updated February 25, 2015, www.esdc.gc.ca/eng/jobs/foreign_workers/reform/index.shtml?_ga=1.250833167.88035096.1433270516.

22 CIC, “Facts and Figures 2014.”

23 *Ibid.*

24 Such legislation limits access to asylum systems for individuals who have transited through third countries where they might have applied for asylum, when such countries are considered to be safe.

25 Evidence of Jason Kenney, Minister of Citizenship, Immigration, and Multiculturalism, before the Parliament of Canada, Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration, 40th Parliament, 2nd sess., October 6, 2009, www.parl.gc.ca/HousePublications/Publication.aspx?DocId=4125746&Language=E&Mode=1.



benefit the country, while “closing the back door” to “false” refugee claims. The Liberal pledge, during the 2015 electoral campaign, to make 25,000 resettlement places available to refugees is a slight shift, though it should be noted that resettlement and asylum are markedly different—the former controlled, and the latter much less so (see the “Looking Ahead” section of this report). While some may feel discomfort with the shrinking space for humanitarian principles in Canadian immigration, the government of Canada is in fact giving the electorate what it wants in its resolute determination to prioritize economic immigration. The immigration policy can thus be defended as being aligned with the democratic will of the Canadian public, a perspective reinforced by the private sector and the media.

IV. Building a Consensus on Immigration

Canada’s history of framing immigration in a positive light and as a solution to economic and demographic challenges—rather than as a test of the integrity of the nation—sets it apart from other affluent countries. A number of factors underpin this positive portrayal of immigration, including Canada’s multicultural approach to diversity, and a political discourse that is broadly supportive of immigration and avoids the associations with security concerns that are prevalent in many other destination countries.

A. Fostering a Multicultural View of Diversity

Canada was the first country to fashion a multicultural approach to diversity—promoting integration while enabling minority groups to maintain their cultural practices (see Box 2). Since its introduction in 1971, Canadian multiculturalism has had multiple objectives, reflecting an unresolved tension between the concepts of difference and belonging. The policy acknowledges that Canadians of all cultural backgrounds make a contribution to the nation and that the maintenance of a variety of cultures does not undermine the nation; it is an invitation for people to feel a sense of belonging while giving them the freedom to be different. Multiculturalism is not just about members of minority groups; nor is it simply a matter of the majority’s largesse toward minorities, essentially saying, “You are okay because *we* accept you.” It is about the nation as a combinatorial culture.²⁶ Though it hasn’t prevented cultural conflicts from arising in Canada, multiculturalism provides a fundamental framework for their resolution.

Multiculturalism is not just about members of minority groups; nor is it simply a matter of the majority’s largesse toward minorities, essentially saying, “You are okay because we accept you.”

²⁶ It is of great help that even prior to multiculturalism, there was no singular Canadian culture, as the nation has always been the amalgam of indigenous peoples (though it took a long time for this fact to be officially acknowledged), two distinct colonial cultures, and others. There is no acknowledged Canadian cuisine, for example.



Box 2. Integration Paradigms

Societies that accept immigrants must make two fundamental choices in their approach to integration: they must decide on a basic goal for the integration process, and following this, they must establish regulatory frameworks and programs to achieve that goal. Broadly speaking, societies have framed four different kinds of integration paradigms:

- Many national governments elect to *exclude* migrants, deliberately withholding integration services or any expectation that migrants will stay permanently (e.g., postwar European guest worker programs; Singapore’s approach to unskilled temporary migrants).
- Some governments, notably the United States, decide not to provide integration services at the national level and frame a *laissez faire* approach, hoping that this task will be undertaken by lower orders of the state.
- Many governments (e.g., France and the Netherlands) make it clear that immigrants are expected to conform to a predetermined set of social norms and, to the extent possible, require that newcomers *assimilate* to national values. This may be done through mandatory integration programs, with permanent residence dependent on passing tests.
- Finally, some societies have pursued official *multicultural* policies (e.g., Canada and Australia) that promote integration while also enabling minority groups to maintain their cultural practices (provided they are legal).

In fact, it seems the ambiguities within the concept of multiculturalism have, ironically, been strengths that enable the policy to adapt to changing circumstances. The policy has evolved through several stages and, from time to time, the emphasis on “difference” or “belonging” has shifted. Thus it has been able to adapt to changing needs. Nevertheless, multiculturalism is firmly embedded in the national fabric. It is specifically included in the Canadian Charter of Rights and Values (i.e., the *Constitution Act of Canada*) and enshrined in the *1988 Multiculturalism Act*. Multiculturalism has been endorsed by both major political parties: the concept was first put forward as a policy and included in the Charter by Liberal governments, but was passed into law by a Parliament led by a Conservative government.

B. Political Convergence on Immigration

Outside Canada, immigration is a forefront issue in political debate, especially during elections. In the United States, Republicans and Democrats are bitterly divided on the issue of immigration reform and whether unauthorized migrants should be regularized; in the United Kingdom there appears to be a contest to see which party can adopt less immigration-friendly policies; and in Australia, elections in the 1990s featured sharp disputes over the government’s response to asylum seekers arriving on boats, an issue that re-emerged in the 2013 electoral campaign. However, this is simply not the case in Canada.

In Canada, three political parties dominate the political scene. They can be described as mildly conservative (the Conservative Party), centrist (the Liberal Party), and somewhat left-of-center (the New Democratic Party or NDP). As in other countries, elections bring out their stridently partisan positions, with attack advertisements dominating the media. Though on most issues these parties stake out and defend their political stand, there has typically been virtually no difference in their views on immigration and how they are incorporated into electoral platforms. All three parties agree that the current scale of immigration is approximately correct (in concert with more than 50 percent of Canadians), and that immigration should



contribute to Canada's economy (also in concert with popular sentiment). Each criticizes the other for its lack of vision on how to better incorporate immigrants into the labor market, but this is not exactly the kind of argument that is seized upon by the media.²⁷

This relatively sanguine attitude toward immigration has led to political convergence on immigration. In fact, the three parties have all devised strategies to reach Canada's numerous "ethnic" voters, particularly in and around the largest metropolitan areas. Since 40 percent of voters in Canada are either first- or second-generation immigrants, any party that questions the value of immigration for Canada would either sink in the polls or have to quickly revise its message.

This is demonstrated in the Conservative Party of Canada's rather unique approach to immigrants and minorities. In the 1990s the party temporarily disintegrated into three separate factions, resulting in a decade of electoral insignificance. This situation was resolved in the early 2000s when the party renamed itself, changing Progressive Conservatives to, simply, Conservatives. After the excision of the "Progressive" moniker, many believed that the party would take a sharp turn to the right and lose any appeal it might have for immigrant voters (akin to the Tea Party movement within the Republican Party in the United States). Though there has been a strong emphasis on issues that energize the political right—removal of the registry of guns held by members of the public, a shift toward unequivocal support for Israel, more emphasis on the military, fiscal constraint, and so on—this has not led to an erosion of support from minority populations.

This relatively sanguine attitude toward immigration has led to political convergence on immigration.

In 2006 the Conservatives won a narrow victory and formed a minority government. In 2008 the Prime Minister appointed Jason Kenney as Minister of CIC and also Secretary of State for Multiculturalism, encouraging him to forge better links with minority communities. Kenney came to be known within the Canadian media as "Minister for curry in a hurry," a phrase that acknowledged his punishing pace of meetings with minority groups across the country (said to exceed 20 separate appearances during a typical weekend). In these encounters, Kenney emphasized his belief that Conservatives best represent the interests of newcomers to Canada. For example, his party maintained the same level of immigration as its Liberal predecessors, doubled the budget for settlement and integration services, was tough on crime, and consistently advocated "family values." This message (and related actions) produced the intended effect. In the 2011 election, for the first time in Canadian history, immigrants were slightly more prone to vote Conservative than Canadian-born voters (this would compare to the U.S. Republican Party gaining the majority of African American votes in a national election). Many commentators believe that this

27 In the 2011 election, the Conservative Party released its platform in a document called "Here for Canada." It did not include a separate section on immigration, implying that its party members' record in office was sufficient for people to judge its policy. The Liberal Party platform, "Your Family. Your future. Your Canada," included a section on immigration stating an intention to speed up refugee determination, consult relevant stakeholders to develop programs to accelerate the participation of immigrants in the labor market, increase the share of immigrants admitted through the family reunification program, and expand language training services. Similarly, the New Democratic Party (NDP) platform ("Giving Your Family a Break: Practical First Steps") called for accelerating the immigration and refugee application processes and increasing spending on integration. None of the major opposition parties questioned the fundamentals of Canadian immigration policy. See Conservative Party of Canada, "Here for Canada: Stephen Harper's Low-Tax Plan for Jobs and Economic Growth," accessed June 9, 2016, <http://celarc.ca/cppc/227/227776.pdf>; Liberal Party of Canada, "Your Family. Your Future. Your Canada," 2011, www.liberal.ca/files/2011/04/liberal_platform.pdf; New Democratic Party, "Giving Your Family a Break: Practical First Steps," accessed June 9, 2016, <http://xfer.ndp.ca/2011/2011-Platform/NDP-2011-Platform-En.pdf>.



unprecedented success in gaining the minority vote was the key ingredient in the party winning its first majority government in well over a decade in the 2011 election.²⁸

This lesson was definitely not lost on the opposition parties; as they prepared for the election in 2015, each framed its own “immigrant-friendly” strategy intended to appeal to both Canadians generally in general (“immigration is essential for your future prosperity”), as well as immigrants particularly (“our party cares about your situation and will find better ways to help you”). The complexities of this process became more visible and challenging during the election, as the parties were forced to reconcile their campaign messages on immigration, cultural diversity, and national security (see the “Looking Ahead” section).

C. Immigration and Integration Through Other Policy Lenses

Canada shares with other states of the global north a growing concern regarding radicalization and terrorism. The devastating incidents in Oklahoma City, New York, Bali, Madrid, London, Boston, Paris, and Brussels have all left their mark on the Canadian psyche. Canada has also suffered many instances of “homegrown” terrorism, most notably in the form of two attacks in 2014, one of which involved an individual assaulting the Parliament buildings. The issue of foreign fighters is also relevant in Canada; more than 100 Canadian youth are believed to have left the country to join the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS).²⁹

At the same time, Canada—surrounded on three sides by oceans and with only one border (which is with another affluent country)—does not face many of the fundamental tests of humanitarian principles seen elsewhere. In EU Member States and the United States, for example, the public imagination is affected by almost daily media coverage of nearby wars, catastrophes, failing states, clandestine means of entry, and unauthorized populations. These issues are far more muted in Canada, though not entirely off the political radar (e.g., the last maritime mass arrival occurred in 2010, with 492 unauthorized passengers arriving on Canada’s west coast, from Sri Lanka). Generally speaking, the Canadian public does not fear an “uncontrolled” border or a large unauthorized population.³⁰ Rather, when Canadians consider immigration they think of a “controlled” system, and their opinions are not inflected by a sense of threat.

In many countries, particularly in Europe, the policy fields of integration and national security have become increasingly intertwined—a legacy of the 2001 riots in Britain, the Madrid and London bombings, the recent attacks in Paris and Brussels, and other such incidents. As these policy fields merge, national culture is increasingly defined as an either/or proposition (“You are with us or against us and, if you are against us, we worry that you may be violent and we will treat you as suspicious”). The perception by the majority that the minority population (especially members of visible minority groups) is a source of risk may actually be the worst outcome of terrorism.

Public attitudes on migration and diversity in Canada, therefore, are to some degree linked with national security concerns, but not with the under-siege mentality that exists in many other affluent countries

28 See, for example, Joe Friesen and Julian Shur, “How Courting the Immigrant Vote Paid Off for the Tories,” *The Globe and Mail*, May 3, 2011, www.theglobeandmail.com/news/politics/how-courting-the-immigrant-vote-paid-off-for-the-tories/article578608/. It is also rumored that Jason Kenney has been invited to speak to right-of-center parties that are hoping to emulate his tactics, and achieve his electoral success, in many countries. In the lead-up to the 2015 election, there was media discussion about the key role the “immigrant vote” was expected to play. See, for example, Susan Delacourt, “Immigrants a Key Bloc for All Parties in the 2015 Election,” *The Toronto Star*, December 26, 2014, www.thestar.com/news/canada/2014/12/26/immigrants_a_key_bloc_for_all_parties_in_2015_election.html.

29 Agence France-Presse (AFP), “Canadian Teen Is Country’s Second Person Convicted of Seeking to Join Isis,” AFP, December 17, 2015, www.theguardian.com/world/2015/dec/17/canadian-teen-second-person-convicted-isis-terrorism.

30 For example, in numerous private conversations with the author over the past 20 years, senior officials have typically suggested that the size of the unauthorized population in Canada is on the order of 100,000 to 200,000 people, and not practically or politically significant.



around the world. While public opinion polls suggest that a slight majority of Canadians perceive a gulf between Western and Muslim societies, and are worried about the prospect of a terrorist attack in Canada, these concerns do not spill over into negative attitudes about immigration.³¹

V. Involving Many Stakeholders in Migration Governance

In Canada's devolved immigration system, a significant number of stakeholders are included in the selection and integration of immigrants—a factor crucial to building consensus. Provinces and territories and the private sector play an important role in the selection process, while integration services are provided through partnerships across government and with civil society. The federal government has proved willing to involve state and local governments and nongovernmental actors in its most fundamental decisions on which people to admit. At first this process involved only Quebec, but now incorporates all of the provinces and territories and, increasingly, the private sector. The same dynamic has been at play in the integration process, which involves an expanding list of stakeholders, including substantial numbers of institutions and individuals in civil society.

This decentralized approach has created a wider sense of ownership over immigration and integration, and may help explain why attempts to portray immigration in negative terms have failed to resonate in Canada. As the number and type of stakeholders multiplies, it becomes more difficult for a national government to fully control the immigration and integration process. But this widespread involvement also greatly facilitates the legitimacy of immigration policy and provides a kind of insulation against the potential demands of populist groups (i.e., “You haven’t been listening to the people”).

In Canada's devolved immigration system, a significant number of stakeholders are included in the selection and integration of immigrants—a factor crucial to building consensus.

A. Selecting Which Immigrants Should be Admitted to Canada

The systems governing Canadian immigration, which assign joint jurisdiction to the federal and provincial orders of government, may be the most complex of any country. The national government has generally consulted provinces annually when setting its immigration targets. But the degree of provincial involvement profoundly changed in 1991, when the province of Quebec was granted virtually complete autonomy in its immigration policy, including a guarantee that it would retain its share of the national system of immigration (roughly one-quarter of the annual target) as long as it wishes to do so. Quebec, therefore, has an independent selection system for immigrants and administers settlement and integration services for all newcomers.³²

³¹ See public opinion data cited in Section II.

³² This report concentrates for the most part on national policy in Canada; to do justice to the policy choices of every province and territory would be an exhaustive undertaking outside the present scope.



Almost as soon as this agreement was negotiated, other provinces began to lobby for similar powers. Since the early 1990s, the national government has signed memoranda of understanding (MOUs) with every province and territorial government across the country, though these are not as far-reaching as the Quebec case. On the selection side, each province and territory has been granted a share of the national target for immigrants, through special nomination programs. In an effort to distribute the settlement of immigrants across the country, the nomination allowances are larger for provinces with relatively low levels of population growth. Since provinces and territories have a great deal of autonomy in shaping the selection criteria, potential immigrants have the opportunity to scan more than a dozen separate sets of requirements and find the one that best suits them. Upon arriving in Canada and gaining permanent residence status, they also have the right of mobility within the country, so they need not remain in the province that nominated them.

The national government has also experimented with devolving integration services to provinces, with Manitoba and British Columbia serving as test cases. For reasons that have never been fully clarified, this idea was abandoned in 2012 and these arrangements were “refederalized” over the following two years. At this point, only Quebec retains both the selection and integration provisions granted to it in 1991.³³

Canada has ... taken a number of steps to involve the private sector in immigrant selection.

This devolved system has two major consequences. First, it is extremely cumbersome to make any universal changes to the immigration system, since one or more provinces or territories may elect not to accept those changes, and may then operate at cross-purposes with them. Second, by enabling provinces and territories to nominate permanent residents, the Canadian government adds significantly to the number of stakeholders who are included in the development of immigration policy and the immigration program more generally.

Canada has also taken a number of steps to involve the private sector in immigrant selection. In 2015, CIC adopted the expression of interest system³⁴—first introduced by New Zealand—which applies to most prospective immigrants in the economic channel. In an “Express Entry” system, applicants initially submit a brief statement of interest and, if invited to do so, a formal application at a second stage. Significantly, applicants at the expression of interest stage are required to register on Canadian-approved employment-search websites. A job offer from a Canadian employer is the single-most important criterion in a fundamentally revised points system for deciding which individuals will receive an invitation to make a formal application at the second stage of the process. This is the first time that the private sector has been so deeply involved in the Canadian Experience Class (CEC) selection system and therefore represents a major policy shift.

B. Providing Settlement and Integration Services

Over the years, Canadian integration policy and programming have shifted from a stance of minimal intervention to a hands-on, whole-of-society approach (see Box 3), and civil society has played an

33 In 1991 the Canadian government passed the jurisdiction for this set of activities to Quebec, and also awarded the province with a particularly generous allocation of funds to deliver these services (on a per capita basis, the amount allocated to Quebec was several times larger than what was being spent in the rest of the country). This led to consternation and a sustained lobbying campaign for an equal amount to be assigned for settlement and integration services throughout the country—a process that was not successful until the mid-2000s.

34 For more information on the new expression of interest system, see Maria Vincenza Desiderio and Kate Hooper, *The Canadian Expression of Interest System: A Model to Manage Skilled Migration to the European Union?* (Brussels: Migration Policy Institute Europe, 2016), www.migrationpolicy.org/research/canadian-expression-interest-system-model-manage-skilled-migration-european-union.



important role in this evolution. Now the largest portion of the Immigration, Refugees, and Citizenship Canada (IRCC)³⁵ budget goes toward settlement and integration services—in 2014-15, some CAD\$1 billion of its nearly \$1.4 billion global budget.³⁶ This figure represents a per capita investment of roughly \$4,000 for each permanent resident landing in Canada. Across Canada (including in Quebec), settlement and integration services are delivered by educational and nonprofit organizations. Meanwhile, IRCC is increasingly convinced that immigrants would benefit from some elements of the settlement and integration system before they actually leave for Canada (or what may be called “predeparture services”).

Civil society initially took the lead in offering settlement and integration services in the postwar period. Sympathetic individuals (often with social work or psychiatric training) began to create small institutions in some of the larger cities to reach out to newcomers and assist them with basic settlement needs. The Canadian government had no appetite to build the capacity to offer these services itself; instead, it formed partnerships with this embryonic nonprofit sector (through funding its activities) and educational institutions to provide courses in English and French. This model was expanded and increasingly institutionalized through the 1970s and 1980s; a branch of what is now IRCC was dedicated to integration services and forged longstanding relationships with nonprofit agencies across the country.

Box 3. Options for Integration Policy and Programming

There is a spectrum of options available to governments considering integration policy and programming. These include:

- **No government intervention.** Governments may ignore the issue and simply hope that integration will occur.
- **Assigning responsibility to a single part of government.** Governments can assign jurisdiction for integration to a single unit, branch, or department of the bureaucracy (and funding levels may be small, medium, or large for this function).
- **Whole-of-government approach.** The issue of integration can be seen as so fundamental for a society that it is assigned to multiple units or, even more comprehensively, to the whole government. It is likely that in this case a large financial commitment would be made to integration programming.
- **Whole-of-society approach.** Governments may also include society in the process of integration, working in partnership with civil-society organizations, media, and other institutions. In the most complete case of this type of cooperation, integration comes to be seen as everyone’s responsibility, with a financial investment by the state leveraging a much more widespread social investment.

There are now hundreds of service-providing organizations (SPOs) for immigrants across the country, and some of them have become relatively large enterprises. For example, Immigrant Services Society of British Columbia (ISSo/BC) is one of the largest SPOs in British Columbia and operates with 400 staff and more than 1,000 volunteers. It had an annual budget of \$22.4 million in 2013.³⁷

35 In November 2015, CIC was named Immigration, Refugees, and Citizenship Canada (IRCC).

36 The dollar value used throughout the report is in Canadian currency. The 2014-15 CIC global budget assigned CAD\$81 million to economic immigrant selection, \$35 million to temporary economic migrants, \$47 million to family immigration, \$35 million to refugee protection, \$1.003 billion to settlement and integration services, \$110 million to citizenship, and \$85 million to migration control and security. See CIC, *Reports on Plans and Priorities, 2014-15* (Ottawa, ON: CIC, 2014), www.cic.gc.ca/english/pdf/pub/rpp-2014-2015.pdf.

37 See Immigrant Services Society of British Columbia (ISSo/BC), “Backgrounder,” updated April 2013, http://issbc.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/02/Welcome_House_Backgrounder-April_19.pdf.



A portion of the settlement and integration funds are used to prepare Canadian society for the newcomer population. These funds are allocated competitively, and most are granted to municipal governments and nonprofit agencies. Outside Quebec, this process is organized under the rubric of Local Immigration Partnerships (LIPs), whose core principle is to foster “welcoming communities” and whose goal is to help localities develop relevant institutional capacity. Immigrant settlement and integration agencies are heavily involved in LIPs, but in concert with other local institutions with broader agendas, such as schools, youth clubs, community centers, and law enforcement agencies.³⁸

While IRCC holds jurisdiction for immigrant integration in Canada, it makes key decisions about service provision in consultation with other branches of the federal government. For example, IRCC cochairs the Immigrant Integration Director-General Forum with the ministry responsible for human resources, which meets roughly eight times a year to “[articulate] policy goals, benchmarks and measures of successful immigrant integration.”³⁹ Settlement and integration services are provided through contracts with educational and nonprofit agencies, under a set of regulations defined by IRCC in consultation with the Canadian government.

Canada’s overall vision of integration is based on a multicultural framework, and especially the invitation to “belong.” While it would be an exaggeration to say that immigration and integration in Canada has become everyone’s responsibility, the Canadian system has evolved toward a *whole-of-government* approach to these topics and is in the process of building key partnerships beyond government as well.

National policy has clearly demonstrated the government’s willingness to align immigration with public priorities by giving precedence to economic considerations.

VI. Conclusion: Lessons from the Canadian Consensus

Canada has managed to maintain a remarkably positive public consensus on immigration over recent decades, despite weathering recessions, security crises, and economic downturns. A continuous history of immigration and its past results have contributed to this positive view. Canada’s openness to multiculturalism and the fundamentally combinatorial nature of its culture have allowed Canadian conceptions of national identity to absorb multiple cultural identities. It has also helped that immigration has brought in highly diverse populations, and that Canadians do not have a particular image of “the immigrant” in mind. Positive narratives have been further reinforced by public perceptions of a strong link between immigration and efforts to counter declining fertility and aging and to ensure future economic prosperity. Since Canada’s borders are remote from global conflict zones and places of intense poverty, the country has not been tested by mass arrivals of destitute or persecuted peoples—or large unauthorized populations.

At the level of policy and politics, Canada’s decentralized approach to immigration and integration has ensured broad public buy-in to the policy development and implementation process. Furthermore, national policy has clearly demonstrated the government’s willingness to align immigration with

³⁸ For example, the Local Immigration Partnership (LIP) that is managed by the city of Vancouver has some 70 institutional partners.

³⁹ This passage is quoted from the Mandate section of the Terms of Reference of the Director-General Forum, which were provided to the author by CIC.



public priorities by giving precedence to economic considerations in its approach to immigration and integration and by actively involving regional governments and employers in this process. Some would argue that this deference to consensus and public priorities has not come without a cost, as immigration policies have given more priority to economic goals than to humanitarian principles.

Are there broader lessons that can be drawn from Canada's experience to bolster public trust in other countries? Certain aspects of the Canadian situation cannot be replicated, of course. No country can, for example, surround itself with oceans or change its history. It would also be exceedingly difficult to replicate Canada's comprehensive "policy matrix," by which immigration is a vital component of all social policies.

Having said that, there are some elements of the Canadian narrative on immigration that could be incorporated in the communication strategies of other governments, and some aspects of Canadian policy worth pursuing. To construct more positive narratives around immigration, governments may want to consider the following approaches:

- ***Build a "firewall" between the issues of immigration and integration on the one hand, and national security on the other.*** These policies should never be part of the same narrative, or there will be negative consequences for minority groups as well as for intercultural relations more generally. Integration should be portrayed as an effort to promote social cohesion, *not* as an effort to promote safety and security. Arguably, one of the most corrosive messages a government can articulate is that "we face security risks because some members of our minority populations refuse to accept our values."
- ***Be more forthcoming about the potential impact of long-term fertility decline.*** Although this is a highly challenging topic in many countries, and one that politicians have studiously avoided, governments should make more of an effort to portray immigration as a means to help diminish the severity of this challenge, if effectively managed (on both the selection and integration sides). Governments may also want to consider educating the media in the gravity of the situation.
- ***"De-center" immigration and integration policy.*** Governments that wish to increase immigration and maintain their legitimacy should seek to "de-center" policy in some of the ways Canada has done, by bringing more stakeholders into the policy formation and implementation processes.

Narratives alone, of course, are not sufficient to maintain public confidence. The public is unlikely to trust a government unless it appears responsive and competent in the fundamental process of defining the members of the nation. Canada's experience suggests a number of policy actions that may help governments demonstrate their trustworthiness:

- ***Communicate policy decisions clearly, and follow through on them.*** It is important to ensure that the narratives surrounding immigration match relevant policies. If a government says, "We are doing everything we can to ensure good outcomes," this must actually be so. Governments should also announce policy changes in clear terms, and explain their rationale.
- ***Demonstrate that the government is attentive to policy outcomes.*** The government should engage in real-time monitoring of policy outcomes, and commit to a high degree of transparency in the dissemination of these statistics. Where policies are found to have unintended consequences, they should be reshaped to improve outcomes. Selection and integration policies should, for example, be complementary, and be built or adapted to work toward the same ends.



- ***Diversify immigration across categories and source regions.*** For Canada, this has been a major asset in the development of a receptive public climate for immigration. The more that immigrants are seen as a homogeneous category (however defined), the greater the possibility that the public will reject that category.

Looking Ahead

As Canada's new Liberal government passes the half-year mark and observers around the world monitor Europe's ongoing struggle with the large-scale arrival of refugees and migrants, the Canadian consensus continues to evolve. While it is too early to fully measure their impact, several election-year events stand out, reinforcing most of this report's arguments and calling for special attention to other aspects going forward.

In the run-up to the October 2015 election, as before, the three main political parties developed similar platforms with respect to immigration. On September 2, however, the distressing photograph of Aylan (Alan) Kurdi, the Syrian refugee child who was found dead on the coast of Turkey, was released and some news sources reported that his family was trying to reach Canada. The Conservatives initially responded defensively, maintaining that their policy of gradually accepting a modest number of Syrian refugees (11,300) was fully justified in light of national security concerns, and that it would remain unchanged. The other two parties argued for the expedited admission of more Syrian refugees, and chose that moment to advance a general proposition to rebalance Canada's immigration system more towards the humanitarian dimension (i.e., diminishing, somewhat, the priority given to economic immigration).

The Canadian consensus continues to evolve.

This difference of electoral strategies was amplified by the Conservative party's unexpected decision to politicize the wearing of facial coverings during citizenship ceremonies and to propose the establishment of a telephone hotline for Canadians to report "barbaric cultural practices"—both moves that were universally understood to refer to Muslim Canadians and seen as appeals to the party's more socially conservative base. Together, these two proposals signaled an unprecedented move in postwar Canadian politics: using the politics of cultural identity in such a negative way during an election.

While many factors influenced the electoral outcome, it is clear that these positions were important. The Conservatives were soundly defeated as Canadians elected a majority Liberal government. Significantly, Liberal leader Justin Trudeau promised to admit the largest number of Syrian refugees (25,000); made a point of emphasizing cultural inclusiveness throughout the election; and when forming the new cabinet renamed Citizenship and Immigration Canada to Immigration, Refugees, and Citizenship Canada (IRCC).

These outcomes reinforce the conclusion that Canadians largely support immigration and cultural diversity. While the Conservatives' departure from the tradition of consistently pro-immigrant electoral strategies is noteworthy, in the end the party with the most immigrant-friendly platform won the election. As the new government establishes itself—and particularly when the Minister of IRCC announces his multiyear immigration targets in the fall of 2016—it will be important to monitor whether the electoral debates over the Syrian refugee crisis result in a longer-term challenge to the argument that Canadians prioritize economic potential over humanitarian concerns in immigration narratives and policy.



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For more on MPI's Transatlantic Council on Migration, visit:
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The Migration Policy Institute is a nonprofit, nonpartisan think tank dedicated to the study of the movement of people worldwide. MPI provides analysis, development, and evaluation of migration and refugee policies at the local, national, and international levels. It aims to meet the rising demand for pragmatic and thoughtful responses to the challenges and opportunities that large-scale migration, whether voluntary or forced, presents to communities and institutions in an increasingly integrated world.

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