

# **ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY, MULTICULTURALISM, AND THE ROOTS OF POPULAR SUPPORT FOR HIGH IMMIGRATION IN CANADA<sup>1</sup>**

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Canada, which has traditionally welcomed immigrants, has remained strongly pro-immigration. This is reflected in policies mandating comparatively high immigration levels and in the fact that public opinion generally supports it. Clearly this makes the country an exception to prevailing attitudes about this issue across most industrial nations, attitudes that have received much attention, particularly in the United Kingdom, the United States, France, and the Netherlands. This “Canadian exceptionalism” on immigration is reflected in cross-national comparisons of public opinion, most recently by the German Marshall Fund (2010, 7), which also indicated that Canadians were more likely to see immigration as an opportunity than as a problem. What accounts for the generally quite positive Canadian approach to this issue? Why have anti-immigrant views such as have been seen in other countries not become more prominent in Canada? Are there indications that Canadian attitudes might turn in a more negative direction in the future? To address these questions, this chapter examines available Canadian public opinion data, including a recent national opinion survey, to attempt to clarify the social roots of popular support for high immigration levels in Canada.

Canadian immigration levels, strong throughout the nation’s history, have been particularly high for the past 20 years, when Canada has received about 250 000 permanent immigrants annually, representing between 0.7 and 0.8 percent of the total population. As a result of relatively high immigration, the Canadian population has a substantially greater foreign-born component compared to the United States and most European countries (United Nations 2006). Much of this immigration has been concentrated in the major cities of Toronto, Montreal, and Vancouver, and in the recent period, Toronto alone has received nearly 100 000 new immigrants each year, making it one of the world’s most immigrant-intensive large cities.

In this context of high immigration, it is particularly remarkable that there has been such widespread acceptance of and support for it in Canada, with relatively little of the acrimonious debate seen elsewhere. Public opinion polls show that almost

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without exception, for the last several decades, a majority of the Canadian population has either supported immigration levels or has even wanted them increased. In most countries, the reverse is true: there is less immigration, and a majority still wants reductions. Most telling, there is rarely any debate on immigration during Canadian election campaigns. Canadian federal political parties today all espouse pro-immigration policies; the public rarely asks them to defend their policies. The word “immigration” is seldom even mentioned in the nationally-televised leaders’ debates. In the debate preceding the recent May 2011 election, a question on immigration and multiculturalism was posed by a voter, and each of the four prime ministerial candidates responded with a pro-immigration position.

There are immigration critics in Canada, but in the Canadian context, even the critics can turn out to be actually pro-immigration by international standards. For example, in his book *Who Gets In: What’s Wrong with Canada’s Immigration Program - and How to Fix It* (2002), Daniel Stoffman proposed that immigration in Canada be reduced to about 175 000 per year. On a per capita basis, this reduced level of would be higher than that advocated by supporters of immigration in other countries. Implementing Stoffman’s proposal would still leave Canada as one of the industrial world’s leading pro-immigration countries.

The issues articulated in the debate over Canadian immigration policy include both economic and socio-cultural dimensions. On the economic side, proponents of immigration have argued that it is a great economic benefit to Canada, boosting development and stimulating employment, as well as increasing tax revenues and contributing to the public welfare. They also argue that immigrants are needed to offset population aging. Opponents argue that its economic benefits are exaggerated, and that immigrants depress wages levels, undercutting the position of many native-born workers. They also suggest that immigrants tend to rely on welfare and become a burden to the country.

Immigration also raises social and cultural issues, and here the debate focuses on the challenges posed by increased cultural diversity, and the impact of racism and racial discrimination. Proponents of immigration argue that as a multicultural country Canada benefits from increased diversity, and that its identity is strengthened by further immigration. Opponents argue that immigrants often bring cultural standards that are incompatible with Canadian traditions, and that immigrant groups tend to isolate themselves in enclaves, detracting from Canadian unity. The most visible debates have been in Quebec, and led to the appointment of a commission to examine what constitutes “reasonable accommodation” of cultural differences (Bouchard and Taylor 2008).

To gain further insight into Canadian attitudes, the present chapter examines trends and patterns in attitudes about immigration in Canada, based on public opinion data. I use published time series on support for immigration, which show that Canadian support for immigration has been substantial over a number of years, and remains so today. I also draw upon a recent national survey conducted by the Environics Institute in November 2010 (N=2020) to explore the popular views in greater depth.

The analysis provides insight into both economic and socio-cultural views and perceptions of immigration, and their relationship to broader characteristics of the Canadian population. Two viewpoints, belief in the economic benefits of immigration and pride in the policy of multiculturalism, are both quite widespread and important in boosting strong support for immigration in Canada. On the economic side, fears that immigrants pose an economic threat do exist, but the belief that immigration helps with the economy, reflecting a basic economic optimism, is clearly more widespread. On the socio-cultural side, many Canadians express concern that too many immigrants, perhaps particularly Muslims but other groups as well, are not adopting Canadian values. They want immigrants to blend into the society, and not to become isolated in enclaves. However, a majority of Canadians also supports the policy of multiculturalism, and expresses considerable pride in multiculturalism as part of the Canadian identity. This has the effect of moderating concerns about immigrant integration, and as a result, support for multiculturalism is associated with support for immigration policy. This support is underpinned by attachment to a variety of related “socially progressive” positions such as gun control, access to abortion, and gay rights; all of these seem to be associated with support for high levels of immigration. More conservative undercurrents seem to threaten the prevailing consensus on immigration, but on many issues they are a minority.

These elements of public opinion have interesting implications for the political dynamics of immigration policy. Immigration supporters are predominant in all political parties; however, the Conservative Party has attracted significantly more of the anti-immigrant vote. Yet, in power, the Conservatives have maintained a high-immigration policy. The Conservatives under Mulroney supported the previous Liberal policies of immigration and multiculturalism. The current Harper government approach is somewhat different: to adjust immigrant selection to display concern with the economic contribution of immigration, while also attempting to underscore the need for cultural assimilation, yet at the same time avoiding outright abandonment of multiculturalism.

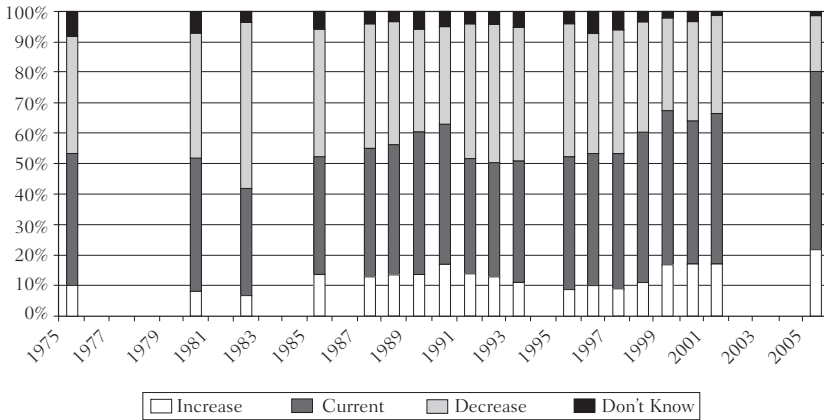
### **Trends in Canadian Attitudes to Immigration**

A review of public opinion polls conducted in Canada over recent years and decades clearly shows strong support for high immigration levels. In most years between 1975 and 2005, Gallup Canada has asked nationally representative samples of Canadians the following question: “If it were your job to plan an immigration policy for Canada at this time, would you be inclined to increase immigration, decrease immigration, or keep the number of immigrants at about the current level?” In every year but one, 1982, a recession year, the majority of the population has responded that they would support either keeping the number of immigrants at the current level, or increasing immigration (see Chart 1). In fact the highest level of support was found in the most recent year in the series, 2005. And the positive trend continued to 2010, according to polls between 2004 and 2010 by EKOS Research

Associates (2010, 4), based on responses to a similar question. In 2004, the proportion agreeing with current levels or higher was 63 percent compared to 31 percent who thought there were too many immigrants. In 2010, the proportion agreeing with current levels or higher was 67 percent, compared to 23 percent who thought there were too many immigrants.

CHART 1  
CANADIAN PUBLIC OPINION ON IMMIGRATION LEVELS

“If it were your job to plan an immigration policy for Canada at this time, would you be inclined to increase immigration, decrease immigration, or keep the number of immigrants at about the current level?”

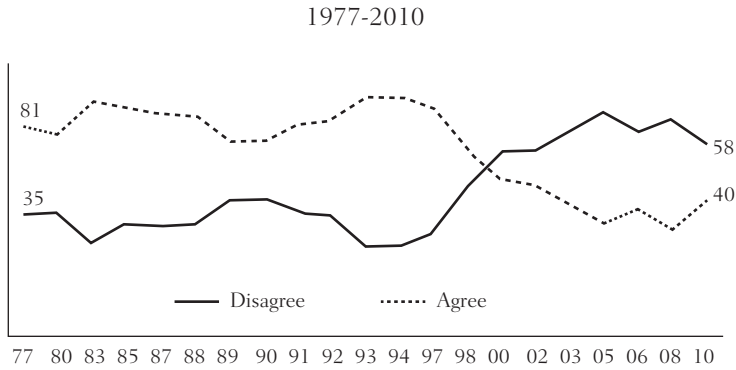


SOURCE: Gallup Canada (2001).

A somewhat different question has been asked by Environics Canada over the period 1977 to 2010 (see Chart 2). It puts the issue in a more negative way, asking, “Do you strongly agree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree, or strongly disagree with the following statement: Overall there is too much immigration to Canada.” From the late 1970s to the early 1990s, majorities agreed, either strongly or at least somewhat, presumably indicating negative attitudes to immigration. However, since the mid-1990s, respondents have begun to disagree more strongly with the statement, and since 2000 clear majorities have disagreed. The most recent poll, in 2010, showed a slight upward trend in agreement that there is too much immigration, but still a clear majority disagreed that there were too many immigrants.

For the period since the mid-1990s, the sources all show majority support for immigration, which is remarkable since this period registered the highest immigration levels. During the first part of the period since 1975, however, the sources

CHART 2  
CANADIAN PUBLIC AGREEMENT THAT THERE IS TOO MUCH IMMIGRATION



SOURCE: Environics Institute (2010).

seem to show somewhat conflicting trends. The Gallup and EKOS polls show majority support over three decades, while the Environics polls show majority support mainly during the most recent decade or decade and a half. The discrepancy may be related to the different wording of the questions in the two sets of polls. The Gallup and EKOS polls present respondents with a neutral choice between various options, whereas the Environics polls requests agreement with a negative opinion that there is “too much” immigration. To some extent, a “positive response bias” might be at work in the Environics interviews. Positive response bias refers to the tendency of some survey respondents to agree with any statement offered by an interviewer, as a simple gesture of politeness rather than an expression of a genuine opinion. If such a source of bias is discounted, it might be suggested that over the past three decades, actual Canadian attitudes toward immigration have been more positive than the Environics poll data indicate. However, this would not explain why the Environics polls showed more significant change over time than appears in the Gallup-EKOS series. In any case, there is agreement among the polls that Canadians have been generally positive on immigration over the past decade, a period during which immigration stayed at quite high levels.

Some analysts in the media have suggested there has been a turn away from support for immigration. This has been based on the very recent downturn shown in Environics polls. However, the more complete data reviewed above show clearly that any recent negative trends are relatively small and have not overturned the majority support for high immigration levels. One particular point sometimes made by critics of immigration is that in Canadian public opinion, the proportion supporting *reduced* immigration is larger than the proportion supporting *increased* immigration (this was noted by Collacott [2002, 39], and also emphasized on the website

of the Centre for Immigration Policy Reform [n.d.] in attempting to argue that Canadians' support for high levels of immigration is what they call a "myth"). However, in analyzing public opinion on any policy, it is clearly inappropriate to focus only on those who want change and ignore the segment of the population that supports the policy as it is, particularly when this proportion is as large—roughly 50 to 60 percent—as it is in the case of immigration policy in Canada. In fact, there can be no doubt that those who want to reduce immigration levels are a minority in Canada, and have been for some time.

### **Analysis of Support for Immigration: Environics National Survey, November 2010**

The most recent survey in the Environics series examined above includes many questions about immigrants and multiculturalism and may be scrutinized in more detail to find social patterns underlying support for high levels of immigration in Canada. As noted above, the survey question on immigration policy had a negative bias; respondents were asked for agreement or disagreement that "Overall, there is too much immigration in Canada," and 58.2 percent disagreed, 26.7 percent strongly so. These views are taken as support for Canada's immigration policy. Another 41.3 percent agreed there was too much immigration, 19.5 percent strongly so. These are the opponents. The survey also tapped a series of attitudes and perceptions specifically related to immigration and also broader social and economic perspectives on Canadian life, as well as a standard series of demographic variables. The first column in Table 1 presents correlations between support for immigration on the one hand, and each of these various demographic variables, economic viewpoints, and social viewpoints. In the case of variables representing region, employment status, and birthplace, they are dummy variables, with omitted categories of Ontario (as a region), full-time employment, and Canadian birthplace, respectively. Subsequent columns present a series of regression models with selected groups of variables entered. These various analyses enable us to examine how the variables are related to each other in the processes underlying support for the present policy of high immigration levels in Canada.

Reviewing the demographic categories, it is clear that support for immigration to Canada is quite widely distributed across the country. In Table 1, the first column indicates zero-order correlations between support for immigration and various social categories and variables. There is majority support not only across Ontario (51.5 percent), but also in Quebec (59.8 percent), Alberta (53.0 percent), and British Columbia (54.5 percent), as well as in the Prairie and Eastern regions. None of the correlation coefficients for region or urban area are statistically significant at the 0.05 level; support is somewhat higher in Quebec and in Eastern Canada. The data also show that majorities favor immigration in the major cities with very high immigration (the figures are Toronto, 60.2 percent; Montreal, 62.6 percent; and Vancouver, 56.4 percent), and in the smaller cities and towns with fewer than

one million inhabitants. Ethnicity and language have only minor if any correlation to support for immigration. As might be inferred from strong support for immigration in Quebec, support among Francophone Canadians is, if anything, higher than among Anglophones. And there is majority support for immigration both among immigrants themselves and among the Canadian-born; immigrants differ little regardless of whether they are born in Europe or the U.S., or outside Europe and the U.S., and would be more often recent immigrants and visible minorities. Based on these patterns, it would be expected that the most important determinants of attitudes about immigration would be issues of national rather than local or immediate personal concern.

The most important personal characteristic related to support for immigration is high educational levels. Highly educated Canadians tend to favor immigration. Of those who completed university, 69.3 percent supported current levels, and only 30.8 percent did not express support. Of those who had a high school education or less, a majority (57.1 percent) felt there was too much immigration, and only 43.0 percent supported current levels. Persons with high income also favor immigration; however the regression result (model 1, standardized betas with all demographic variables in the equation) shows that the effect of income is entirely related to educational level. Net of education and other demographics, the coefficient for the effect of income on support for immigration is close to zero. When education is controlled, persons living in the regions of eastern Canada, Quebec, and the Prairies are seen to be more supportive of immigration. Younger Canadians also support it more strongly, a pattern partly explained by their higher educational levels.

Those employed full-time are much more supportive of immigration, particularly compared to the unemployed. Among the latter, 57.0 percent felt there is too much immigration, compared to only 37.4 percent of those employed full-time. Students and the self-employed were more supportive of immigration. Retirees are less supportive of immigration, associated with the fact they are older rather than with retirement in itself. Men are more likely than women to support immigration; the regression result in model 1 shows this has little to do with employment status.

Overall, immigration is most strongly supported by the highly educated, and also by men, the young, and those employed full-time. Support is distributed widely across the country, and in both urban and rural areas, but, relative to demographics, is more pronounced in Eastern Canada, Quebec, and the Prairies. Ethnic and linguistic group affiliations do not stand out as determinants of attitudes toward immigration in Canada.

TABLE 1  
SUPPORT FOR IMMIGRATION (DISAGREE ON “TOO MANY IMMIGRANTS”), OLS REGRESSION

	<i>Correlation</i>	<i>Mod.1</i>	<i>Mod.2</i>	<i>Mod.3</i>	<i>Mod.4</i>	<i>Mod.5</i>	<i>Mod.6</i>	<i>Mod.7</i>	<i>Mod.8</i>	<i>Mod.9</i>	<i>Mod.10</i>
<i>N=2020 (missing values at mean)</i>											
<b>Demographic variables</b>											
Young	.10***	.05†				.03				-.04	-.04
Male	.08***	.07***				.05**				.06***	.06***
Educated	.23***	.22***				.11***				.07***	.07***
High income	.11***	.01				-.01				-.00	-.00
Eastern Canada	.04†	.10***				.06**				.04*	.04*
Quebec	.04†	.09***				.02				.00	.00
Prairies	.03	.08***				.05*				.05***	.05***
Alberta	-.02	.03				.02				.04*	.04*
British Columbia	-.01	.05†				.04†				.03	.03
Part-time	-.03	-.02				-.03				-.02	-.02
Unemployed	-.08***	-.06*				-.02				-.03	-.03
Self-employed	.08***	.06**				.03†				.04†	.04†
Stay at home	-.01	.02				.03				.03	.03
Student	.06**	.05*				.04*				.02	.02
Retired	-.09***	-.02				-.03				-.04	-.04
Urban	.04†	.03				-.02				-.03	-.03
U.S./European born	.03	.03				-.01				-.00	-.00
Non-European born	-.02	-.02				-.06***				-.04*	-.04*
<b>Economic views</b>											
Immigrant-Specific											
Positive econ. contribution	.41***		.28***			.27***				.20***	.20***
Don't take jobs away	.51***		.42***			.41***				.32***	.31***





## Viewpoints Supportive of High Immigration Levels

### THE ECONOMIC BENEFITS OF IMMIGRATION

Canadians tend to see immigration as an economic opportunity for the country. Most (82.0 percent according to the Focus Canada 2010 survey) agree that it has a positive impact on the economy. Relatively few (25.0 per cent) think immigrants “take away jobs” from other Canadians. The first of these perceptions relates to the broader impact, and the second to the potential impact on individuals who might be displaced. The data show that these two beliefs are related to each other ( $r = 0.35$ ), and both are important sources of support for Canada’s immigration policy; together, they account for a third of variations in attitudes ( $\beta = 0.28$  for positive economic impact;  $\beta = -0.42$  for taking jobs away from others;  $R^2 = 0.32$ ; see Model 2).

The perception that immigration has a positive economic impact is common to all major regions of Canada, both English and French Canada, including the most prosperous regions that receive a lot of immigrants, like Ontario, Quebec, and British Columbia, and those less prosperous such as Atlantic Canada, where unemployment is relatively high and immigrants are sought as a way of stimulating the economy and creating employment. Although perceptions of a positive economic impact are less pervasive among the unemployed, according to the Focus Canada survey, even they have a generally positive view. Among the unemployed, 68 percent see immigration as having a positive effect on the economy, and only 36 percent agree that immigrants take jobs from other Canadians.

Whether immigration does in fact benefit the economy, or at least the size of the benefit, is a matter of debate among economists, including Canadian economists. Many economists in the U.S. believe that the benefits tend to be small, although the specifics are debated. The same views apply also to Canada, according to a frequently-cited report by the Economic Council of Canada (1991). On the other hand, a more recent and up-to-date analysis by Dungan, Gunderson, and Fang (2010) provides a more optimistic analysis.

Whatever the analysis among economists, Canada’s general public adheres to the positive side of this issue, and has done so over a considerable period of time. There may be several reasons for this. One is that the government management of the program has emphasized economic objectives, and has done so consistently over many years. Canada’s so-called “points system” for selecting immigrants on the basis of education, work experience, language knowledge, and other indicators of employability and labor market value, has served to create an image of the immigrant as a valuable economic asset to the country. Over time, the emphasis on the selection of highly-educated immigrants has increased, translating into a considerably degree of employment success. Positive employment outcomes in turn lead to perceptions that immigration has a positive economic impact, with minimal social costs or impact on expenditures required to maintain the welfare state. As well, the children of these highly educated immigrants from China, India, and other Asian countries, and from Latin America and the Caribbean, have in turn become high-

ly educated and have attained employment success. Although recent cohorts of immigrants have struggled, overall their education and human capital assets have played an important role in fostering successful integration into society.

The government's ability to manage immigration successfully to enhance economic benefits is undoubtedly aided by Canadian geography. Its geographic isolation from all countries other than the United States has limited illegal immigration and made legal immigration more attractive. Geographic isolation has been important in sustaining the political perception of Canadian immigration as being controlled in the national interest. And the strong negative reactions to the arrival of small numbers of illegal immigrants from Asian in boats off the coast of British Columbia give a clear indication that public opinion could turn negative if larger numbers of illegal or non-status immigrants were entering the country.

Behind these perceptions of immigration are more general views about the general direction of the Canadian economy, and whether one's own position has been improving or not. These perceptions also appear to create positive views of immigration (see Table 1, Model 3). Those who feel confident about the national economy, and those who see their personal "standard of living" as having improved over the past decade, are more frequently found among supporters of immigration ( $r = 0.11$  and  $0.13$ , respectively, column 1 of Table 1). The multivariate analysis (Model 4) shows that this effect is mainly or even entirely because these optimistic views foster the idea that immigration is having a positive impact. By the same token, those who are not doing well and think the economy is off track may be less inclined to think immigration has a favorable impact. (Model 5 includes demographic variables; the basic patterns remain the same.)

The economic impact of immigration is also related to the welfare state, since, if immigrants contribute to boosting the economy, they would also be expected to pay taxes and help bolster publicly-funded programs. We might therefore expect to find supporters of the welfare state taking a more positive view of immigration. This expectation is in fact confirmed by the fact that those who view taxes as important for maintaining the Canadian quality of life—the survey question mentioned health care, education, and roads as representative tax-funded amenities—are more likely to support immigration ( $r = 0.17$ ). This also implies that opponents of the welfare state oppose immigration, possibly on the ground that immigrants may be likely to exploit the welfare system and add to an already unwanted burden. In either case, the overall perception of immigrants' economic status might be the key. In fact, the multivariate analysis (Models 4 and 5) indicates that the fact that supporters of the welfare state actually have more positive views of the economic impact of immigration is what makes them more supportive of it. The same is true of those who have a more positive view of economic conditions in Canada generally: they are more likely to support immigration because they believe in its positive benefits. Once these effects are taken into account, the more general economic viewpoints have much less weight.

The significance of economic factors in the support for immigration in Canada suggests that an economic downturn might undermine that support. However, in

the recent past, economic recessions in Canada have not produced a backlash against immigration. It is interesting to consider how the belief in its economic benefits may have been affected by the Mulroney government's decision in the early 1990s to maintain high levels of immigration during a severe recession. Traditionally, immigration levels in Canada had been moderated during recession years, in deference to a belief that immigrants would be less welcome when jobs are scarce. However, during the recession of the early 1990s, which was particularly severe in Canada, the decision was made to keep levels more or less unchanged to maintain program stability. As it happened, there was no backlash, and, in fact, as we have seen, the perception that immigrants take jobs from other Canadians actually faded during this period.

#### PRIDE IN MULTICULTURALISM

Canadians' views on the social and cultural side of immigration also affect their attitudes about immigration policy. First, support for multiculturalism appears to be a strong force supporting high immigration levels in Canada. Canadians support the national multiculturalism policy and regard it as a key feature of the national identity; the Focus Canada data show that this reinforces support for immigration. The correlation analysis in Table 1 (column 1) shows the positive relation between support for multiculturalism and support for immigration ( $r = 0.26$ ). Since it was first announced in 1971, Canadians have come to see multiculturalism as a positive feature of the Canadian identity. Most polls show majority approval of multiculturalism (for an analysis of data over several decades, see Dasko [2005]). A recent Angus Reid poll (2010) also showed that 55 percent of respondents regarded multiculturalism as having been good for Canada, while 30 percent believe it has been bad. Fully 85 percent of Focus Canada respondents felt that multiculturalism was very or somewhat important to the national identity, and when they pointed to important national symbols, multiculturalism was in the top group, after health care, the flag, and the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, but ahead of hockey, bilingualism, and the RCMP. And in the survey, those who felt multiculturalism was important to national identity were much more likely to support high immigration levels. Of those who felt that multiculturalism is "very important" to national identity (a clear majority), 67.7 percent disagreed that there was too much immigration, compared to 49.6 percent among the smaller group who thought it was "somewhat important," and only 41.8 percent among the even smaller group (11.8 percent) who thought it was unimportant.

Multiculturalism policy could create a more positive view of immigration for several reasons. The most obvious is that it encourages the view that immigration creates positive cultural as well as economic benefits. A second, possibly related, reason is that multiculturalism may lead to a perception that if minority groups retain their culture, this does not necessarily mean they do not share or are not adopting Canadian cultural values. In fact, one of the tenets of multiculturalism

and cultural pluralism generally is that integration into society and cultural retention are not opposed to one another and are expected to occur at the same time. A third reason why multiculturalism may encourage a positive view of immigration is that its prevalence in Canada may actually enhance social inclusion for cultural minorities, smoothing their integration and supporting both socio-cultural and economic benefits. And fourth, the simple fact of asserting multiculturalism as a national policy may create a perception that immigration is an essential feature of Canadian tradition, which should be upheld as a point of national pride. In this way, multiculturalism may serve as a kind of public relations campaign supportive of immigration.

Despite support for multiculturalism, it is also clear that Canadians want immigrants to blend into the mainstream. They are concerned that many immigrants are not adopting Canadian values and worry about the implications. In the Focus Canada survey, respondents were asked whether or not they agreed that “ethnic groups should try as much as possible to blend into Canadian society and not form a separate community.” Nationally, an overwhelming 80 percent agreed with this statement, 51.3 percent “strongly.” The percentages were even higher in Quebec (90.4 percent), but they were also strong in the rest of Canada (76.6 percent).

The expectation that immigrants should “blend” into society does not necessarily imply an expectation for complete conformity to mainstream culture. Most Canadians do feel more comfortable if immigrants make the effort to become part of the mainstream society, and there are strong concerns that immigrants are not doing so. Majorities of Canadians (nearly 70 percent) agree that “there are too many immigrants coming into this country who are not adopting Canadian values,” and over 40 percent “strongly agree.”

Both the preference that immigrants should blend in, and the belief that they may not be doing so, tend to be associated with less enthusiasm for immigration (in Table 2,  $r = 0.22$  for disagreeing that blending is important, and  $r = 0.45$  for disagreeing that too many immigrants are not adopting Canadian values). These are quite strong effects, and the fact that majorities actually agree with these statements indicates that desire for immigrant blending and the concern that they are not blending are very important factors in qualifying support for immigration in Canada. Racial difference also matters to some Canadians, who object to immigration as a result ( $r = 0.31$ ), but only a small group expressed this concern in the interviews. More are concerned that many refugee claims may not be valid, and this, too, is associated with less support for immigration ( $r = 0.39$ ).

Concerns about questions of immigrant integration are clearly expressed in the Focus Canada survey specifically regarding Muslims. The survey asked, “Do you think most Muslims coming to our country today want to adopt Canadian customs and way of life or do you think they want to be distinct from the larger Canadian society?” Most respondents felt they “want to be distinct” (55.3 percent), while only 27.9 percent thought they wanted to adopt Canadian customs; 3.3 percent thought they wanted to do both, and 13.4 percent expressed no opinion. Another question asked about the ban on wearing head scarves by Muslim women in public

places, including schools, and respondents were about equally divided on whether it was a good or bad idea. There was perhaps a slightly greater proportion who thought it was a good idea (47.6 percent), compared to 43.9 percent who thought it was a bad idea. Generally, concern about the cultural integration of immigrants does not vary markedly by region; however, the controversy regarding Muslims has been particularly notable in the case of Quebec, and this is reflected in the Focus Canada survey interviews. In Quebec, 60.4 percent think Muslims want to be distinct from the larger Canadian society, compared to 53.7 percent in the rest of Canada. And in Quebec, 66 percent think banning head scarves worn by Muslim women in public places is a good idea, compared to 41.5 percent in the rest of Canada.

It should be remembered that an emphasis in public opinion on “blending” and the integration of immigrants is far from new. Although it is possible that these concerns may have intensified in recent years, with the increased attention to Muslims in particular, similar views have been found in many public opinion surveys throughout the period since the 1970s when multiculturalism policy was put in place. For example, a poll conducted by Decima Research just over two decades ago, in 1989, showed substantial majorities of Canadians supporting the idea of immigrant “blending.” Respondents were asked, “What do you think is better for Canada, for new immigrants to be encouraged to maintain their distinct culture and ways, or to change their distinct culture and ways to blend into the larger society?” Only 34 percent of Canadians at the time favored the maintenance of “distinct cultures and ways.” Comparison with a parallel poll conducted in the United States at the same time showed that this preference for blending was actually more prevalent in Canada than in the United States (Reitz and Breton 1994, 27-28). And even earlier, a national survey conducted in 1976 (Berry, Kalin, and Taylor 1977), when most immigrants were of European background, showed that although most Canadians accepted cultural retention by minorities, the emphasis was on cultural practices that did not affect mainstream society significantly. So, from the 1970s to the present time, Canadians have definitely favored the idea of immigrants becoming an integral part of mainstream society.

The two viewpoints —support for multiculturalism and support for immigrant “blending”— are different and not necessarily contradictory. Certainly in principle, they are not inconsistent, since multiculturalism in Canada was always intended to accomplish the goal of integration of minorities into the mainstream. Nevertheless, the issue has caused confusion. A *National Post* story on the November 2010 Angus Reid poll reported that more than half (54 percent) thought Canada should be a “melting pot” rather than a “mosaic” (Selley 2010). The article suggested that the public had repudiated multiculturalism, despite the fact (as cited above) that the same poll found a majority (55 percent) thinking multiculturalism was good for Canada, compared to only 30 percent who thought it was bad. To its author, it seemed that Canadians were confused and had “no idea” what multiculturalism actually is.

In interpreting such poll results, care should be taken to consider the actual meaning of the questions asked of respondents. First, the questions do not provide respondents with a definition of either multiculturalism or terms such as “melting pot,” “mosaic,” “blending,” or “separate communities.” So, they are free to attribute any meaning to any of them. Second, and more significantly, when questions present respondents with a binary choice between opposites such as “melting pot” vs. “mosaic,” or “blending” vs. “separate communities,” supporters of multiculturalism may have difficulty. In fact, multiculturalism is intended to overcome precisely this binary choice; it offers the potential for both integration and maintaining one’s culture. So, faced with what might be viewed as a philosophically inappropriate request to choose between them, many come down on the side of blending. But this response choice does not necessarily imply a demand for complete immigrant assimilation or a repudiation of multiculturalism (though of course for some it may mean that). And third, the desire for immigrant “blending” refers to the outcomes people would like to see; support for multiculturalism influences the criteria people may bring to the assessment of whether immigrant integration is working. The criteria may be less exacting for supporters of multiculturalism than for others. In short, support for multiculturalism may be quite consistent with an emphasis on blending, if the latter is understood to include a degree of minority cultural maintenance. What is clear is that Canadians support both multiculturalism and a pattern of immigrant integration into mainstream society.

The multivariate analysis helps clarify how these viewpoints affect support for immigration. It suggests that one way multiculturalism impacts is that it translates into a more open or flexible standard for assessing immigrant integration. This leads to immigrants more often being seen as meeting that standard. The impact of a positive view of multiculturalism on public expectations and perceptions of immigrant cultural conformity is clearly evident in the multivariate analysis (see Table 1, Models 6 and 7). The coefficient for importance attached to multiculturalism and the one representing the expectation that immigrants need not blend into society are both reduced and virtually eliminated when the perception of how well immigrants are adopting Canadian values is introduced into the analysis. The importance attached to multiculturalism appears to moderate the impact of the desire for blending and concerns about whether it is occurring.

Actually, in addition to multiculturalism, a number of other broader social values are related to support for immigration. Many of these involve what is sometimes called “social progressivism,” including support for the ban on capital punishment, gun control legislation, same-sex marriage, and access to abortion. All of these items are associated with support for immigration. By the same token, the so-called “social conservatives,” who hold opposite views on these topics, and also share a perception that crime rates are increasing, tend to oppose immigration and to think too many immigrants are coming into the country. The multivariate analysis suggests that these items reflect a general discomfort with diversity in society and seem to be associated with a desire for conformity, which includes cultural conformity by immigrants. The effect of these cultural values items is significantly

reduced when perceptions and expectations regarding cultural conformity are included in the analysis (Models 8 and 9).

Canadian pride in multiculturalism is also to some extent reinforced by its role in defining Canadian identity *vis-à-vis* the United States. The Canadian discourse on multiculturalism frequently underscores a presumed contrast between Canadian multiculturalism and the American melting pot. Multiculturalism is viewed as one concrete manifestation of a greater Canadian tolerance for diversity and openness to cultural inclusion, unlike the United States' supposedly traditional emphasis on assimilation and cultural conformity as patriotic duties. The juxtaposition of the American melting pot and the Canadian cultural mosaic is one of the most frequently invoked symbols of Canadian distinctiveness, along with hockey and a few others such as universal health insurance and gun control. In the Focus Canada survey, it is no surprise to find that 89.9 percent of respondents state that in comparing Canada and the U.S., Canada "maintains a better quality of life for its citizens." Only 3.6 percent preferred the U.S., with another 1.7 percent saying there is no difference. What is worth noting is that, of those who state that multiculturalism is "very important" to the national identity, the proportion of respondents who prefer Canada is 95.4 percent; whereas, of those who feel that multiculturalism is not at all important, the figure drops to 83.1 percent. As determinants of support for immigration in Canada, both multiculturalism and pride in Canada's quality of life are significant.

The multivariate analysis suggests the following causal sequence. Persons with stronger expectations for immigrants to blend into society are applying a more restrictive standard and, as a result, are more likely to view immigrants as falling short. They therefore conclude that immigration is creating problems and more often favor reductions in immigration levels. In this context, one possible effect of support for multiculturalism is to relax expectations for immigrants' cultural conformity. Supporters of multiculturalism thus apply less restrictive standards to immigrants in terms of cultural conformity, and immigrants are therefore more often perceived as meeting those standards. Immigration is thus seen as contributing to a more unified society, and this leads to support for higher immigration levels. In this way, popular support for multiculturalism translates into increased support for immigration, even in a society in which the predominant view is an expectation for immigrants to blend in and become part of the mainstream society.

Concerns about so-called "bogus" refugee claims constitute one quite controversial element in Canadian immigration. This topic appears in the news regularly, and the analysis here indicates that the validity of refugee claims is a significant issue for those who feel Canada has too much immigration ( $r = 0.39$ , first column in Table 1). The multivariate analysis (Model 10) shows that this matter is nearly as significant as immigrants' not adopting Canadian values and has a significant net effect on support for immigration. Put differently, a favorable view of refugee claims may be seen as one on the list of socially progressive views held by those who favor immigration. The analysis shows it is a fundamental issue related to support for immigration policy.



## Political Parties and Canadian Immigration Policy

Although all major Canadian political parties have pro-immigration policies, one organization, the Conservative Party of Canada, is generally perceived to be the most reluctant to support immigration, and the least supportive of multiculturalism. Under Brian Mulroney (1984-1993), the Conservatives maintained high immigration numbers, and introduced legislation in support of multiculturalism and also employment equity. However, after the Conservative defeat in 1993, they merged with the Reform Party, which had been seen as representing social conservatism and reluctance to support immigration; and Stephen Harper (2006-present) has in fact made significant changes to immigration policy, and emphasized cultural adaptation of immigrants more than multiculturalism. Therefore, it is of interest to examine some of these issues in terms of political party support in Canada.

The data show that Conservative supporters are significantly less likely to support immigration than supporters of other major parties ( $\beta = -0.09$ , with Liberal Party support as the reference category). The New Democrats and Bloc Québécois are relatively strong supporters of immigration ( $\beta = 0.06$  and  $0.04$ , respectively). The data also suggest some of the reasons for this, related to social and economic viewpoints as analyzed above. Demographic variations, linked to education, region, or employment status, are not major explanatory variables. However, although economic perspectives on immigration are important in explaining attitudes about it, Conservative Party supporters' positions appear to be related to their social views. They are less enthusiastic about multiculturalism, and express stronger views that immigrants should blend into society. They more often worry that immigrants are not adopting Canadian values. The multivariate analysis shows that these variables explain the greater opposition of Conservative Party supporters to immigration policies.<sup>2</sup>

## Conclusions and Discussion

Canadian public opinion supports immigration for two main reasons: confidence in its positive economic benefits and pride in multiculturalism as a socially progressive policy. Immigration continues to be an important nation-building strategy for Canada. Immigrants are seen in fairly pragmatic terms as major building blocks for the future, keeping the country prosperous and enabling its expansion. This seems to contrast not only with countries in Europe, which are latecomers to immigration and may see it either as unwelcome, or at best as a way to fill specific needs arising from time to time, but also with the United States, which is also a traditional country of immigration but is a superpower that no longer sees itself as needing immigrants to grow and reach its destiny. Immigration issues in Canada are often discussed in terms of multiculturalism, and the analysis here confirms that support

<sup>2</sup> The author would be happy to provide this analysis to anyone who requests it.

for multiculturalism is indeed a major factor boosting the country's immigration program. Support for multiculturalism does not mean that Canadians do not want immigrants to blend in or become part of a national "melting pot," although this conclusion is often drawn in both media and academic discussion of immigration. Even among supporters of multiculturalism, there is a desire for immigrants to become part of mainstream society; this is part of the meaning and purpose of multiculturalism in Canada, as a strategy encouraging the incorporation of immigrants. Multiculturalism in Canada fosters support for immigration by encouraging a more open or tolerant view of the process of immigrant integration.

These views of immigration are rooted in more basic opinions and outlooks prevalent in Canada. On the economic side, Canadians tend to take an optimistic and expansionist view of their economic future, both at the national level and in terms of their own personal situations. This optimism is a basic feature of their positive opinion of immigration. On the social and cultural side, Canadian multiculturalism is related to other socially progressive viewpoints that tend to prevail in the country. Canada was one of the first countries to recognize gay marriage; and its laws on abortion, gun control, and capital punishment distinguish it from those of its more socially conservative southern neighbor. Many Canadians are proud of this distinction, and national pride plays into support for multiculturalism as well. The result is that the country's expansionist immigration program has become part of the mix of progressive public policies that for many are linked to the Canadian identity and what it means to be Canadian.

These findings raise the question of what factors might tend to undermine popular support for immigration in Canada in the future. The primary importance of the economic agenda, and the fact that it carries so much weight in both English and French Canada and across many social groups, suggests that expansionist immigration will probably be part of Canada's policy for some time to come. It seems likely that major economic changes would be necessary to upset this pattern, such as, for example, a very prolonged recession, or a much more visible sign of immigrants experiencing economic difficulty and requiring attention and possibly significant public expenditures. The fact that immigrants' employment situation has become more difficult might seem a possible source of such a changing view of the economics of immigration. This does not appear to have happened, and the evidence based on experience during recessions, including the most recent recession as well as the one in the early 1990s, suggests that belief in immigration as an opportunity is quite resilient and not vulnerable to rapid change. The issues of culture and multiculturalism are important but perhaps somewhat less critical. Major developments in terms of social conflict or breakdown in immigrant minority communities might have the effect of eroding the confidence that multiculturalism helps foster Canadian unity, and this could affect attitudes toward immigration.

Predictions of a weakening of Canadian support for immigration and multiculturalism have often been wrong. Such forecasts have figured prominently in the media several times over the past two decades. One was on the publication of Neil Bissoondath's book *The Selling of Illusions: The Cult of Multiculturalism in Canada*

in 1994. Another was in the immediate aftermath of the 9/11 terrorist attacks, and yet another when the plot by a group of Muslim youth to bomb Parliament Hill was uncovered. None of these have had the predicted effect. In fact, Canadians have been relatively unconcerned about terrorism, compared to people in other countries. However, a more important reason may be that the economic agenda behind Canadian immigration sustains overall support and is more important than these other concerns.

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