allowing for real engagement and discourse" (Alboim and Kohl 2012). Clearly, their description has remained relevant since then.

Government by surprise may keep critics off balance. But there are costs to this style of decision-making. First, it raises the level of uncertainty and lowers predictability for all involved. It does not provide a secure basis to plan if you are an applicant, a stakeholder group, or a provincial government. Second, such a closed and unpredictable process can only erode trust in government. Much has been written by Robert Putnam and others about the problems of sustaining interpersonal trust in our increasingly diverse societies. But more recent analyses have emphasized the importance of trust in government as a key to managing the strains that diversity brings. Countries with high levels of public trust in government are less prone to the decline in social cohesion and solidarity that many worry about. Government by surprise, unpredictable government, government that does not honour commitments by phasing in changes, cannot be good for trust in government. Just ask international graduate students who watched the Canadian Experience Class folded into the Express Entry pool without much notice.

Third, and most importantly, government by surprise erodes the vibrancy of democracy. The majoritarian model is a legitimate conception of democratic government. And there is nothing new in diagnoses of the centralization of power in Canadian government; such assessments have been a consistent refrain throughout my entire professional career. But what gives concentrated power its legitimacy, the minimum condition that qualifies this model as a democratic form of governance, is open and informed public debate in civil society, in the media, in the people's House, in its committees. Such vigorous informed debate is crippled by government in the shadows.

One might argue that the federal government faced unprecedented problems in the Federal Skilled Workers program, that decisive action was needed, and that the process can revert back to a more traditional pattern in the future. But power is addictive. The danger is that public servants will become accustomed to this way of doing business; and the new Liberal governments might also find government by ministerial instruction and its equivalents to be convenient. After all, parliamentary processes are so messy, so time-consuming, so unpredictable.

We seem to manage it elsewhere. Witness the legislation and intense parliamentary debates about citizenship, refugees, and security. Parliament should not be reduced to a platform for wedge politics. It's time for a higher quality of democratic governance throughout the immigration and settlement sector as a whole. It's time to retire government by surprise.

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PICK A NUMBER: THE VALUE OF ANNUAL CONSULTATIONS ON IMMIGRATION LEVELS

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The annual or multi-year planning consultations on levels of immigration have been regarded as an essential conversation in determining the numbers of immigrants coming to the country. Since there has been very little change in the annual level of immigration over the past two decades the author questions whether the object of the exercise is indeed about numbers. He also points out that in the absence of any shift in the numbers the evidence occasionally offered by analysts about the impact about any such modification is generally reduced to a theoretical discussion. Finally given the relatively low level of public knowledge about numbers of immigrants the author recommends a greater investment in augmenting public literacy about immigration.

From the beginning of the twentieth century to the present day, the growth of Canada's population through immigration has contributed immensely to its emergence as a country respected for its economic, social and cultural achievements. Indeed Canada is often described as a nation of immigrants as the one in five foreign-born Canadians represents the 2nd highest such ratio in world after Australia. Canada's population growth is based on natural increase and net international migration (provincial and territorial population estimates also factor in interprovincial migration). As an example, in the second quarter of 2015 natural increase was 33,000 almost half the total of 64, 000 for international migration. Barring an unlikely baby boom immigration will soon account for the country's entire population growth.

The annual level of immigration is described as one of the most critical components of a country's immigration policy. Whether the actual level of immigration is appropriate for the Canadian economy and society is the object of ongoing debate. But it has largely been a discussion between experts as the broader public has not been especially engaged in debate about immigration numbers. Since there has been very little change in the annual level of immigration over the past two decades it's difficult to determine with any certainty whether the numbers have any meaningful impact on the economy. Hence, since the 1990's it is not possible to surmise in practice the economic impact of changes to the annual numbers of immigrants. Therefore it's only in theory that observations can be made about what a change in levels might mean. There have been several studies that have examined the economic performance of newcomers over selected periods after time of

arrival. Such studies are certainly important but they can't tell us about the outcome of the change in levels.

It's also worth noting that over the past decades while governments have not reduced immigration levels, there actually has been a reduction in the share that the annual intake represents within the overall Canadian population. In 1992, Canada's intake was 30,000 short of one per cent of the population (a historic target for Liberal governments). To attain the one percent figure today, the Government would have to admit about 350 000 people and is thereby between 80 000 and 100 000 persons short of the target.

It is contended here that the annual consultations on levels of immigration are somewhat of a misnomer and need to be re-described and/or reinvented so it is less centered on numbers and more about resources aimed at improving settlement. This has become an important element in such consultations but it needs to be made more explicit. It's also contended that there is real need to augment what might be described as immigration literacy amongst Canadians as there is evidence to suggest that knowledge about the issues of settlement and selection are insufficient. The consequence of inadequate public knowledge is conversations around immigration that are not always based on sound information.

Is there really a debate about the numbers of immigrants that should be admitted to Canada?

Most economists agree that Canada needs to welcome more skilled immigrants. What is referred to as a debate is about how many immigrants Canada should admit. The Royal Bank, the Ontario Coalition of Agencies Serving Immigrants, the Conference Board of Canada and the Canada West Foundation have called for immigration to proximate the 1% target. But there is a gap between such their respective recommendations and their application.

A May 2012 Globe and Mail essay suggested that Canada needed a "flood of immigrants". It contended that over the next decade a million jobs risked going unfilled. With population aging, immigration would likely become the sole source of workplace growth. The Globe added that the ratio of working age Canadians to seniors was narrowing and the inevitable outcome would be a shrunken tax base and acute labour shortages. While immigration was not the only way to meet this challenge it could diminish the problem.

Some economists have legitimately urged caution. Christopher Worswick has argued that "…in determining whether, or how, to raise immigration levels it is vital to consider average labour market outcomes of newly arrived immigrants – outcomes that in recent years have been poor when compared to those of the Canadian born."

The solution that most observers have proposed is to improve the immigrant selection process by revising the skilled immigrant point system to better attract younger immigrants with higher levels of language fluency. While immigration policy addresses family reunification as well as humanitarian considerations, the economic focus is prevalent with over 60 percent admitted to the country under an economic category.

Over the past two decades adjustments have been made to match market needs with the skill set of immigrants admitted to the country via the economic categories but that has not resulted in meaningful modification of numbers (with the exception of the substantial increases in the entry of temporary foreign workers). Immigration levels averaged 220,000 per year in the 1990s and just over 240 000 over the first decade of the 21st century. Going back to 1992, Canada welcomed about the same number.

It's true that some analysts insist that immigrant numbers should be reduced when the economy is uncertain, since it is more difficult for immigrants to find work in Canada and they are less able to establish themselves economically and socially. They point out that there are limits to the number of immigrants that can be successfully integrated and the ability of public services to meet the expansion of population.

In sum therefore while much of the national conversation over immigration has touched on whether Canada should target higher numbers those recommending increases have seen their proposition fall relatively flat for the better part of the last quarter century. It is legitimate to ask whether in fact the government consultation about levels has been little more than an exercise in public relations as regards the annual quantity of newcomers to be received.

THE CHALLENGE OF CHANGE: OBSTACLES TO ADJUSTING IMMIGRANT NUMBERS

In his 1981 annual report the auditor general called for the Minister of Immigration to better justify their reasons for announcing a particular figure or range each year. Since then Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC) has typically asked for public feedback on immigration to Canada and specifically on levels of immigration. National immigration planners consult with the provinces and groups and agencies from the voluntary and private sectors as well as a small group of academics that have an interest in the composition of the immigrant flow to Canada.

Canada's immigration legislation puts forth the country's major goals as follows:

- developing a strong and prosperous Canadian economy, in which the benefits of immigration are shared across all regions;
- reuniting families;
- fulfilling Canada's international legal obligations with respect to refugees, and to assisting those in need of resettlement; and
- protecting the health, safety and security of Canadians.

When referring to levels, CIC asks three questions: *1)* what is the right level of immigration to Canada? *2)* how should this overall level be divided among the three main permanent resident classes: economic, family, and refugee/humanitarian? (which it refers to as the "mix."). And *3)* what role can immigration play to support Canada's economy?

The levels plan must also balance such things as:

- the Government of Canada's current priorities and commitments;
- the extent that our economy and communities can integrate newcomers;
- current and future economic conditions, as well as labour market needs;

A growing consideration in planning levels is security issues as adequate consideration needs to be given to whether CIC and its security partners (the RCMP, CBSA and the Canadian Security and Intelligence Service) have the financial resources to process applications for effective program delivery.

In theory as mentioned by officials at CIC, the department could process as many applications as possible and then report on the outcome at the end of the year. If it undertakes the planning exercise it does so because it is required under Canada's immigration law. But officials add that the planning exercise is needed to "run a system as big and complex as immigration…to allocate resources across a vast processing network in Canada and around the globe…to help settle and integrate newcomers [they] must know what kind of volumes to expect.

The levels plan is further justified as a matter of public policy as the Government of Canada must balance the costs and benefits of maintaining public confidence in the country's immigration program. Planning the level and the mix is described as the best tool to manage the immigration system for Canada's benefit. Undoubtedly, as CIC officials point out, maintaining public confidence is a key goal of the planning exercise.

CIC correctly notes that there is a degree of uncertainty in planning immigration levels. CIC can plan for and control many things but when it comes to migration flows, there are indeed several imponderables.

For example, as officials observe when permanent resident visas are extended, it cannot control exactly when, or even if, a person uses that visa to come to Canada. Given this, specific targets for each class of immigrant need to be established so as to include the number of applications that must be processed to ensure admissions fall within the planning range. There is also a need to take into account the varying labor needs across provinces and territories, rural and urban areas, and sectors of the economy. For this reason, the Government of Canada must work with the provinces and territories (not to mention the cities) to properly manage the immigration program.

Provinces have been setting out there specific economic, social and labour market needs. And in the case of Quebec there is an agreement in place (the Canada-Quebec Accord-(1991) that gives the province power to set its own admission targets (though humanitarian considerations fall outside their purview). The province also manages its own economic immigration programs. The government of Quebec also holds its own annual or multi-year immigration levels consultation and indeed has used this forum to justify recent increases in numbers. In the years ahead there will be a unique opportunity to test the increase in immigrant numbers on economic and social changes.

In short the very idea of establishing a global admission number on an annual basis seems a complex task with several potential obstacles to effecting change. But it raises the question of what such consultations are really about and if in effect there are more about justifying existing numbers rather than moving them on to some other "level".

If it's not about levels what is the annual Consultation really addressing?

One of the key dimensions of the national conversation over immigration numbers that gets considerable public attention is the issue of integration. The CIC planning process raises the issue of how well society can integrate newcomers. It suggests that it depends on several factors which include:

- policies, programs and services that support immigrant integration;
- labour market conditions that let them take part in the Canadian economy; and
- how willingly the newcomer and the local community take part in the integration process.

In the criteria established by CIC in the determination of annual levels there is no explicit reference to social or cultural concerns or more specifically the extent to which newcomers are seen as adapting to societal values (however defined) and/or whether intergroup harmony would be upset by augmenting numbers of immigrants. If such explicit references are less apparent in the annual consultation process they occupy a rather important place in the political arena and in the national media discussion and discourse around immigration. There is much talk about immigrants adapting to Canadian values, the need to maintain social cohesion (however defined) and the more recent variant on this idea, the equally vague notion of living together (proponents of this concept that they are examining "the living together" as opposed to "living together").

Since there has been very little change in annual level of immigration over the past two decades it's difficult to determine with certainty whether the numbers of immigrants has any meaningful impact on intergroup tension or harmony. Yet this hasn't prevented much of the broader public debate to be framed in such terms and therefore something the levels planners can ignore since the country's decision-makers contribute to the discussion being framed this way. Elected officials can't ignore public opinion when it comes to issues of immigration as CIC officials note that maintaining public confidence in the immigration system is essential.

THE "LEVEL" OF PUBLIC IMMIGRATION LITERACY IN CANADA

How much importance should the state attach to public opinion when it comes to the annual levels of immigrants? Ideally if public opinion were to be regarded as a key element in the conversation over levels of immigrants it should be based on a proper knowledge of the numbers of immigrants. In the ideal situation one might also hope for a good number of people informed about the impact of immigration on the economic and social condition (keeping in mind it's too much to ask for everyone to be an economist).

CIC has demonstrated some interest in the degree of literacy amongst the population when it comes to immigration. The government commissions annual tracking surveys that often focus on public awareness of the numbers of immigrants Canada receives and the perception around whether immigration generates economic benefits. On the question of numbers as observed below the CIC commissioned 2015 tracking survey of 3028 Canadians saw a narrow majority agree that the annual number is just about right. However some one in four Canadians believes that there are too many immigrants.

TABLE 1: IN YOUR OPINION, DO YOU FEEL THERE ARE TOO MANY, TOO FEW, OR ABOUT THE RIGHT NUMBER OF IMMIGRANTS COMING TO CANADA?

	TOTAL	Atlantic	QC	ON	MB/SK	AB	BC
Total number	3,028	216	726	1,161	196	322	407
Too many	26%	22%	21%	30%	31%	30%	24%
Too few	12%	22%	9%	13%	9%	12%	14%
About the right number	52%	46%	62%	49%	52%	48%	50%
Don't Know	8%	10%	7%	8%	7%	9%	10%
Refuse	1%	0%	0%	0%	1%	2%	2%

Underlying the question of whether there are believed to be too many or too few immigrants is how many the country receives in a given year? Canadians are at the very least somewhat unsure about this. Some 47% believe that the country takes in less than 150 000 immigrants annually. Only one in five think that the country takes in over 150 000 and some in three say they don't know. In short the vast majority of Canadians seem unaware that the country receives about 250 000 immigrants per year.

TABLE 2: IN TOTAL, APPROXIMATELY HOW MANY IMMIGRANTS DO YOU THINK CANADA ALLOWS INTO THE COUNTRY EACH YEAR?

	TOTAL	Atlantic	QC	ON	MB/SK	AB	BC
Fewer than 10,000	12%	18%	11%	12%	13%	10%	11%
10,000 to 24,999	12%	13%	12%	10%	20%	12%	11%
25,000 to 49,999	5%	6%	7%	3%	4%	6%	3%
50,000 to 99,999	8%	10%	12%	6%	8%	8%	4%
100,000 to 149,999	10%	8%	9%	11%	7%	14%	10%
150,000 to 299,999	11%	5%	9%	13%	7%	9%	12%
300,000 or more	9%	6%	7%	10%	9%	12%	11%
Don't know/Refused	34%	33%	32%	35%	33%	31%	39%

The underlying question behind the public perception of levels is how many immigrants are too many? When the CIC commissioned survey presents Canadians with the actual numbers there is a ten point increase in the share that thinks that there are too many newcomers with some 37% in agreement.

TABLE 3: IN TOTAL, APPROXIMATELY HOW MANY IMMIGRANTS DO YOU THINK CANADA ALLOWS INTO THE COUNTRY EACH YEAR?

	In your opinion, do you feel there are too many, too few, or about the right number of immigrants coming to Canada?	In fact, in the last few years approximately 250,000 new immigrants came to Canada each year. Knowing this, do you feel there are too many immigrants, too few…
Too many	26%	37%
Too few	12%	11%
About the right number	52%	47%
Don't know	8%	4%
Refuse	1%	1%

If most Canadians are unfamiliar with the numbers there is also no consensus around which categories of immigrants that should be the priority as regards entry into the country. A March 2015 Leger survey for the Association for Canadian Studies found that the largest plurality of respondents favors facilitating entry for skilled workers. Although they have seen substantial growth in numbers over the past five years temporary workers are not the public's priority when it comes to facilitating entry. Nor do refugees rank especially high in this regard. Again public education could have a potentially important impact on public perceptions so as to help explain how and why government makes certain decisions around immigrant admission.

TABLE 4: RANK THE FOLLOWING GROUPS OF MIGRANTS FOR WHICH CANADA NEEDS TO FACILITATE ENTRY IN THE COUNTRY FROM 1 (THE GROUP THAT CANADA SHOULD FACILITATE THE MOST) TO 5 (THE GROUP THAT CANADA SHOULD FACILITATE THE LEAST)

	TOTAL	Atlantic	QC	ON	MB/SK	AB	BC
Skilled workers for permanent settlement	32%	35%	26%	34%	33%	39%	30%
Reuniting family members	24%	22%	24%	22%	24%	27%	31%
Investors and entrepreneurs for permanent settlement	23%	19%	29%	23%	24%	21%	20%
Refugee claimants	15%	10%	15%	16%	14%	11%	14%
Temporary workers	6%	12%	7%	6%	5%	3%	5%

WHAT UNDERLIES THE VIEW AMONGST THOSE WHO FEEL THAT THERE ARE TOO MANY IMMIGRANTS TO CANADA?

The March 2015 ACS-Leger survey commissioned by the Association for Canadian Studies it is observed that it is access to jobs that is regarded as a key concern expressed by those Canadians that feel that there are too many immigrants coming to the country. Many also cite cultural integration as a factor when asked to identity reasons why they feel there are too many newcomers. That's the main reason evoked by the largest plurality of respondents in Quebec and to a lesser degree in Alberta.

TABLE 5: REASONS GIVEN BY CANADIANS THAT FEEL THERE ARE TOO MANY IMMIGRANTS COMING TO CANADA AS TO WHY THAT'S THE CASE

	TOTAL	Atlantic	QC	ON	MB/SK	AB	BC
Limited access to jobs / employment	20%	23%	9%	25%	23%	16%	18%
No effort in integrating within Canadian values / customs	13%	1%	23%	10%	5%	18%	13%
Immigration quotas / laws / regulations are too lenient	12%	15%	16%	10%	12%	4%	18%
Unreasonable demands for accommodations	9%	8%	13%	9%	3%	7%	7%
Increase in reverse discrimination / affirmative action (i.e. taking our jobs)	8%	6%	2%	10%	18%	10%	5%
Immigrants come to take advantage of Canadian rights, freedoms & social safety net	7%	3%	5%	8%	3%	11%	5%
Over-saturation of social service network (i.e. welfare, food banks, etc.)	6%	4%	4%	8%	7%	8%	6%
Canadian-born citizens are becoming a disadvantaged underclass	6%	7%	4%	7%	14%	4%	5%
Safety threat / Circumvention of federal and provincial laws	4%	4%	6%	3%	5%	7%	2%

The cultural concerns amongst the segment of the population that feels there are too many immigrants are further confirmed when looking at how Canadians with varying views on levels respond to selected questions about assimilation and intergroup conflict. As observed below those Canadians that believe there are too many immigrants are far more inclined to agree that "religious/Cultural groups such as Jews, Muslims and Sikhs should abandon their customs and traditions and become more like others and that "there is an irreconcilable conflict between Western societies and Islamic text and practices in the world." Those concerns are also apparent to a lesser-though not insignificant-degree amongst Canadians that are comfortable with the levels of immigration (independent of whether they know the actual number).

TABLE 6: IN YOUR OPINION, DO YOU FEEL THERE ARE TOO MANY, TOO FEW, OR ABOUT THE RIGHT NUMBER OF IMMIGRANTS COMING TO CANADA?

	Too many	Too few	About the right number
Religious/Cultural groups such as Jews, Muslims and Sikhs should abandon their customs and traditions and become more like others	45.9%	22.1%	23.7%
There is an irreconcilable conflict between Western societies and Islamic text and practices in the world	68.3%	44.3%	48.3%

CONCLUSION

Aside from the legislative requirement to do so, there are sound reasons to hold annual consultations about immigration. The focus on numbers however gives rise to the idea that there might be series modifications to levels based on input from those bodies engaged in the process. That the levels have shifted very little over the past twenty –five years suggests that the consultations are much less about actual numbers. By consequence it is difficult to make more than theoretical observations about the impact of changing numbers on economic and social conditions in Canada. As Canada approaches its 150th anniversary a meaningful public debate about levels of immigration would be a welcoming part of any visioning exercise that looks at the country's future. Doing this would ideally entail greater public knowledge about immigration something in which a greater investment needs to be made. The annual consultations on levels of immigration which could benefit lifting the reference to levels could serve that purpose to a much greater extent than is currently the case.