# 'CANADIAN EXCEPTIONALISM': BORDER CONTROL ALSO MATTERS

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Canada stands as something of an outlier when it comes to global anti-immigrant politics. Though Canadians do not speak with one voice about immigration and refugee matters, there are no explicitly anti-immigrant political parties in Canada. The current Liberal government is committed to increasing the number of immigrant arrivals over the next few years, and many people continue to have positive attitudes towards immigration. Many Canadians also see immigration, diversity and multiculturalism as central to our national identity. Demographic factors and electoral politics, business support for immigration, the policy of multiculturalism, and our geographical separation from major refugee producing regions of the world help account for Canada's seemingly unique level of public support for immigration. But a neglected aspect of public support for immigration stems from the perception that Canada is in control of its borders. Border control efforts are central to maintaining public confidence in the immigration system, and broader support for immigrants and immigration.

Canadá es una especie de caso aparte en el tema de la política global anti-inmigrante. Aunque los canadienses no comparten todos la misma opinión sobre la inmigración y los refugiados, no existen partidos políticos explícitamente anti-inmigrantes en Canadá. El gobierno liberal actual está comprometido con el aumento en la cantidad de inmigrantes en el país a lo largo del próximo par de años, y mucha gente mantiene actitudes positivas hacia la inmigración. Muchos canadienses también consideran que la inmigración, la diversidad y el multiculturalismo son fundamentales para nuestra identidad nacional. Los factores demográficos y la política electoral, el apoyo empresarial a la inmigración, la política del multiculturalismo, y nuestra separación geográfica de las grandes regiones productoras de refugiados en el mundo, ayudan a dar cuenta del nivel aparentemente único que tiene Canadá en cuanto al apoyo público a la inmigración. Empero, un aspecto desatendido del apoyo público a la inmigración, parte de la percepción de que Canadá controla sus fronteras. Los esfuerzos de control fronterizo son centrales para mantener la confianza pública en el sistema de inmigración, así como un mayor apoyo para los inmigrantes y la inmigración.

**Le Canada se présente comme un cas particulier en matière de politique anti-immigrants à l'échelle mondiale. Bien que les Canadiens ne parlent pas d'une seule voix au sujet des questions relatives à l'immigration et aux réfugiés, il n'y a pas de partis politiques explicitement anti-immigrants au Canada. Le gouvernement libéral actuel s'est engagé à augmenter le nombre d'arrivées d'immigrants au cours des prochaines années et de nombreuses personnes continuent d'avoir une attitude positive à l'égard de l'immigration. De nombreux Canadiens considèrent également que l'immigration, la diversité et le multiculturalisme sont au cœur de notre identité nationale. Les facteurs démographiques et la politique électorale, le soutien aux entreprises en matière d'immigration, la politique du multiculturalisme et notre séparation géographique des principales régions du monde sources de réfugiés contribuent au niveau de soutien public élevé du Canada concernant l'immigration. Cependant, un aspect négligé du soutien public à l'immigration découle de la perception que le Canada contrôle ses frontières. Les efforts de contrôle aux frontières sont essentiels au maintien de la confiance du public dans le système d'immigration et à un soutien plus large aux immigrants et à l'immigration.**

The Liberal's 2015 pre-election commitment to admit 25,000 Syrian refugees by the end of that year resonated with many Canadians. Though there were concerns about whether that target could be reached with proper screening of refugee applicants, many ordinary Canadians and advocacy groups held the Liberal's feet to the fire and pressured them to keep their promise after they were elected. The Department of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC), which is a slow-moving bureaucracy at the best of times, rather impressively mobilized resources and helped the government deliver on its commitment. Canadians, via the Private Sponsorship of Refugees Program, responded with open arms to Syrian refugees in 2015 and 2016.

Though Canadians do not speak with one voice about immigration, and support for expanding the number of refugees and immigrants admitted to Canada is mixed (Nickel and Ljunggren 2017), Canada remains relatively bullish about immigration. In the government's immigration plan for 2018, Immigration Minister Ahmed Hussen indicated that the department planned to admit 310,000 immigrants and refugees. He also signaled that the annual immigration target would increase to 340,000 by 2020 (Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada 2017). As part of the 2018 immigration plan, Canada expects to admit 48,700 refugees and protected persons, which is more than double the average of about 23,000 refugees admitted per year under the Conservatives between 2011 and 2014.

In a time when immigrants and refugees are vilified by populist governments, political parties and politicians in other parts of the world, Canada stands as something of an outlier. From a state policy perspective, Canada is open to the arrival of more immigrants and refugees. Moreover, many Canadians see the country's generosity toward refugees and its continued commitment to a relatively open immigration system in positive terms. But why is the reception context for immigrants and refugees seemingly more favourable in Canada than in other countries? Canada's positive attitude towards immigrants and refugees is, at least in part, contingent on the perception that the state remains in control of the border. When Canadians feel like the government is losing control of the border, attitudes towards immigration and refugees tend to harden. The border control regime, and efforts on the part of IRCC, The Canadian Border Services Agency (CBSA), the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) and other agencies to maintain the integrity of the immigration system, helps account for Canada's ability to maintain an expansive immigration program.

The usual reasons for 'Canadian exceptionalism' in immigration policy include a mix of variables (Bloemraad 2012). Clearly, demographics and electoral politics are at play. First and second-generation immigrants make up about 40% of the population. Citizenship take-up rates in Canada are high, and they continue to grow. In 2006, the take-up rate for immigrants with five or more years since landing in Canada was 88.3%, up from about 80% in 1986 (Xu and Golah 2015). Immigrant voting rates tend to approximate those for the Canadian born the longer they live in Canada (Uppal and LaRochelle-Cote 2012). Even though immigrants and members of particular ethnic communities do not vote as a block, or only on the basis of 'immigrant' or 'ethnic' issues (Chignall 2015), federal political parties in Canada must pay attention to so-called immigrant or 'ethnic' voters in order to achieve electoral success. Most Canadian politicians are reluctant to jump on the populist, anti-immigrant train because they know how to do electoral math.

Big and small businesses in Canada also have a love affair with immigrants and Temporary Foreign Workers. In a 2016 letter to Navdeep Bains, the Minister of Innovation, Science and Economic Development, the Business Council of Canada urged the federal government to 'make recruitment and retention of international talent — including international students — a top priority' (Manley, 2016). Businesses in Canada have consistently been one of the biggest supporters of Canada's expansive approach to immigration because immigrants are an important source of their labour force; immigrants are also consumers of a wide variety of goods and services. One does not have to be a Marxist to understand that business interests and government policies are often closely aligned.

Some credit ought to also go the federal policy of multiculturalism. For all of its apparent shortcomings, that policy has helped create a public discourse that is positive towards immigration, refugees and diversity. Even though national identity is hard to define, multiculturalism is nonetheless one of the key ways that Canadians define who they are (Fleras 2015).

Canada's geography is also significant. Canada is separated from many of the major refugee producing areas of the world by large bodies of water. This makes it hard, but certainly not impossible, for refugees and undocumented migrants to show up unannounced on our doorstep. The Safe Third Country Agreement with the U.S. provides Canada with a buffer from refugee claimants coming from Central America. Of course, this has changed over the past year as the White House's approach to managing migration has gotten harder, and more chaotic. Though our neighbour to the south is not normally the source of refugees or large numbers of undocumented migrants, its immigration policies are posing new challenges for how Canada responds to those who cross the border into Canada outside of an official port of entry.

The above are undoubtedly important pieces of the puzzle to explain Canadian exceptionalism. Another part of the explanation, though, is arguably related to immigration control. Positive attitudes to immigration are contingent on the perception that Canada is in control of its borders. This in turn helps the current Liberal government, and indeed past governments, maintain an expansive immigration program.

The Canadian immigration bureaucracy, along with their political masters, are obsessed with maintaining the integrity of the immigration system. This involves trying to ensure that individuals receive the visas for which they are eligible and preventing the arrival of individuals who are not eligible to visit, study or settle permanently in Canada. But immigration officials are also obsessed with preventing individuals from using the visitor visa system to make a refugee claim in Canada. They are intimately concerned about preventing the arrival of 'jumpers.' The term is the sub-cultural shorthand for 'cue-jumper' and includes visa overstayers and asylum claimants who manage to enter Canada on the basis of a visitor or other temporary resident visa. In their view, there is a right way of immigrating to Canada and a wrong way. There is also a right way to be a refugee and a wrong way to be a refugee; using the visitor visa system to set foot in Canada and then make an asylum claim is not seen as the right way (Satzewich 2015). But immigration bureaucrats also understand that their efforts to uphold the integrity of the immigration system helps to maintain public confidence in the immigration program (Satzewich 2015), and hence an expansive immigration program. I do not think they are wrong about this.

Canada has a rather mixed history of reception of different kinds of refugees, which lends weight to the view that there are right and wrong ways of being a refugee. At its simplest, Canada accepts two types of refugees. United Nations High Commission for Refugees screened Convention Refugees who are selected by Canada from abroad, and asylum seekers who make a refugee claim upon setting foot in Canada. Both are perfectly legal and legitimate ways to become a refugee in Canada but there is a difference between the ways that some politicians, the immigration bureaucracy, and members of the Canadian public regard these two kinds of refugees. Canadians seem more favourably disposed to Convention Refugees selected abroad than they are to asylum seekers. Arguably, the right way to be a refugee in Canada is to be stuck in a refugee camp overseas, screened by the United Nations High Commission for Refugees, screened again by a Canadian visa officer and resettled in an orderly, planned manner via an official sponsorship program.

Much has been made of the way in which Canada was able to successfully resettle 60,000 Vietnamese boat people in 1978 and 1979. The story of the resettlement of Vietnamese refugees is complex (Molloy, Duschinsky, Jensen and Shakla 2017). Nonetheless, this was perceived as 'the right way' to be a refugee. Refugees were located overseas and Canadian authorities had the opportunity to determine whether they met Canada's definition of a refugee, screen them for inadmissibility, and select those who it deemed to be the potentially most valuable contributors to Canadian society.

The good news story of Canada's resettlement of Vietnamese (and Syrian refugees more recently) contrasts with how Canadians tend to regard asylum seekers. Canada has, on occasion, faced the unannounced arrival of boatloads of migrants on its borders seeking asylum, and both the public and governmental response has not been particularly positive. In May, 1939 Canadian authorities refused to allow the SS. St Louis to disembark its 907 Jewish refugees; the ship was forced to sail back to Europe, where 254 of the passengers subsequently died in the Holocaust (Abella and Troper 1982). Fast forward to 1999 when four boats carrying 590 people from Fujian province in China arrived on the shores of British Columbia, and to 2009 and 2010 when two ships containing Tamils from Sri Lanka landed on our shores. The ships, and their 'irregular migrant' passengers generated considerable public discussion and debate and social scientists have studied that reaction in depth, particularly the way that the Canadian media framed and defined who these people were, and how and why they were coming to Canada. Though the overarching story line in 1999 was about human smuggling, the sub plots focused on the Chinese as illegal migrants, how they could not possibly be refugees, that they were economic migrants pretending to be refugees, the tax burden imposed on Canadians to support the refugee claimants while their cases were processed, and the subsequent tax burden if their cases were successful. The latter was driven by the belief that because they were poor and uneducated, they would have trouble making it in Canadian society, and so would be a burden on the country for the rest of their lives. As one study found, the arrival of the

first boat was met with skepticism about their being genuine refugees but by the time the last boat arrived, the arrival of the boats was seen as a full-fledged 'crisis' that had the potential of undermining the integrity of the immigration system (Hier and Greenberg 2002). In short, Canada was going to be 'flooded' with refugees if it did not do something, and quickly. The storyline was similar for the Tamils.

Significant portions of Canadians continue to believe that individuals who make asylum claims in Canada are not 'real' refugees. In a 2018 Environics poll, 38% of respondents indicated agreement with the statement 'most people claiming to be refugees are not real refugees.' Another 17% were ambivalent (Environics Institute for Survey Research 2018). The fact that nearly four in ten Canadians continue to think that most people claiming refugee status are not genuine refugees suggests that Canadians' support for, and confidence in the immigration and refugee determination system remains fragile.

To the extent that populist anti-immigrant sentiments are rooted in perceptions that immigration is out of control, that states have lost control of their borders, and that immigration systems are broken, what role do immigration experts have to play in reassuring the public that the immigration system is not in fact broken? In other words, whose side are we on? The perhaps uncomfortable answer is that being supportive of immigration may also mean that we have to be supportive of government efforts to maintain the integrity of the immigration system. This is not to suggest that immigration experts ought to be apologists for government enforcement policies and practices, but it is to suggest that there is a delicate relationship between maintaining the integrity of the immigration system and Canada's ability to maintain an active, open and expansive immigration system.

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