NEW AVENUES FOR DEFINING NEWCOMER INTEGRATION: LOOKING BEYOND THE TWO-WAY STREET IN ASSESSING IMMIGRANT OUTCOMES

Jack Jedwab is President and CEO of the Association for Canadian Studies and the Metropolis Institute. He holds a Ph.D. in Canadian History from Concordia University. Prior to 1998, he served as executive director of the Quebec branch of the Canadian Jewish Congress. He is an author and contributor to academic publications, government reports and newspapers across the country in the fields of immigration, multiculturalism, diversity, human rights and official languages. Following three decades of wide-ranging research on public opinion and demographics, he is regularly consulted by media and government bodies alike for his expertise and insights on issues of import in the public sphere. He has taught and lectured at McGill University, the Université du Québec à Montréal and Concordia University, offering courses ranging from public policy to the history of immigration and minority groups, to sports in Canada.

INTRODUCTION

A clear and comprehensible conceptual framework is essential towards measuring and/or tracking socio-cultural and economic changes. Building an index that undertakes such measurement requires a defined concept(s) that justifies the selection of themes/dimensions and indicators. Doing so further necessitates that the concept(s) refers to the objectives to be attained via the migrant's integration. In the case of the Canadian Index for Measuring Immigrant Integration (hereafter CIMII), integration indicators seek alignment with the Index's conceptual framework. The four dimensions of the CIMII are economic, social, civic, and democratic participation and health.

Biles and Winnimore observed that Canada's process of immigrant integration is perhaps best understood as a continuum that stretches from initial selection, settlement,t and adaptation through to formal acquisition of citizenship. They employed the metaphor of the "two-way street" to illustrate a process where newcomers and the host society meet in the middle, with the newcomer eventually moving closer to the host's side.[1]

Indeed, this description was also reflected in the early iteration of the CIMII as the concept put forth by the Index's expert advisory committee proposed that "Immigrant integration is visualized as a "two-way street", where there is a metaphorical meeting of the immigrant and the receiving population somewhere in the middle of the street. This integration process targets the attainment of relative parity with the broader population in key areas (i.e., economic, social, health, and civic and democratic participation). It further presumes that the receiving population will adjust to facilitate the process of integration"

At the beginning of the 21st century, Citizenship and Immigration Canada (now Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada) introduced the term "two-way street" to emphasize that successful integration requires

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accommodations and adjustments from both newcomers and Canadians. Aside from assisting newcomer learning about Canadian values (customs, rights, and obligations) Canadians were encouraged to understand the diverse backgrounds of newcomers. While the "two-way street" can be applied to other dimensions of integration, it's fair to say that the concept was considered especially pertinent to better understanding the social integration of newcomers.

A 1994 United Nations discussion paper on social integration describes it as a "...complex idea which means different things to different people." In some cases, social integration may conjure up the image of an unwanted imposition or conformity. Nonetheless, efforts to establish an empirical basis for measuring community and national belonging have become increasingly popular in plural democracies.

The concept of social integration is grounded in a particular vision of diversity and its management with pluralistic democracies like Canada. The following discussion will explore the relevance and applicability of this concept in measuring and indexing immigrant integration in Canada.

ON AND OFF THE STREET: RETHINKING THE "TWO-WAY STREET" METAPHOR

The diversity of groups involved in the integration process complicates the metaphor of a "two-way street" where immigrants and non-immigrants meet in the middle. While all newcomers are immigrants, not all immigrants are newcomers, which makes this metaphor challenging to apply universally. The time required for a newcomer or immigrant to "cross the street" toward integration can vary significantly. Some immigrants may have made it across the street within five years while others that have been in Canada for a decade may still waiting for the green signal.

Indeed, some of those born in Canada may find themselves on the "other side" of the street. For example, if educational attainment were used as an indicator of integration (it is seen as a control or filter in the CIMII rather than an indicator), immigrants – who tend to have higher educational attainment than Canadian-born individuals – might appear more "integrated" by this metric.

Underlying these conversations is the definition of who constitutes the "host" or "receiving" society in the context of newcomer integration. It is sometimes assumed that the host society comprises the domestic-born population. However, this binary distinction between immigrants and non-immigrants can misrepresent the integration process, particularly by failing to account for the length of time migrants have lived in the country. Many immigrants, especially those who have lived in Canada for extended periods, are integral members of the host society, further blurring the lines of this traditional dichotomy.

Hence, a change in direction seemed necessary when it came to the two-way street concept as defining successful integration outcomes or in thinking about what has been described as an integrated society. The metaphor increasingly encounters limitations, akin to a street congested with too much traffic. As a result, there has been discussion about adopting a more nuanced metaphor, such as a multi-lane street or even a roundabout, to better reflect the complex and dynamic process of immigrant integration.

THE END OF THE ROAD FOR THE TWO-WAY STREET?

Both immigrants and non-immigrant populations respectively include a considerable degree of linguistic, ethnic, racial, and religious diversity, amongst others. The CIMII addresses this diversity by employing controls and filters to ensure that comparisons are made between immigrants and non-immigrants with similar socio-demographic characteristics essentially aiming to compare apples to apples.

By contrast with the first iteration of the CIMII, the current version moves away from the two-way street metaphor and proposes the following conceptual description: "The integration of immigrants into society can be broadly defined as the process of immigrants achieving relative parity with the broader population with regards to participation in or outcomes within key dimensions of society. While the economic dimension is vital to ensuring integration, social, health, and civic participation are also important. Often the dimensions of integration are interrelated."

Nonetheless, as the concept of integration tends to be a proverbial work in motion or progress there is a need to pay more attention to how migrant identities impact the process of integration. Despite the use of socio-demographic controls, including visible minority status, it is essential to determine how and where identities and specific identity markers should be incorporated into the index so as to assess integration outcomes.

INTEGRATION VS ASSIMILATION

Although the term integration is widely used across immigrant-receiving countries, its definition may vary based on differing models of diversity and their associated criteria. Such criteria may be related to divergent socio-demographic contexts or the societal norms of the host country. Integration measures in several immigrant-receiving countries have been

described as falling into a few distinct categories, with the multicultural model and the assimilation model being the most prominent.

In the multicultural model, migrants are encouraged to retain their cultural heritage. Conversely, assimilation calls for some abandoning of cultures of origin to adopt the cultural norms of the host country. Canada and Australia tend to be associated with the multicultural model of integration while France and Germany are more often associated with assimilation. For example, France's model of integration is often referred as Republican integration – emphasizes the primacy of national identity over other cultural markers or expressions. Despite these differing frameworks, the decline in migrants' cultural ties to their countries of origin may not occur as uniformly as these models suggest. The extent to which immigrants maintain or lose their cultural heritage often depends on factors beyond state discourse or integration policies. These include community dynamics, individual experiences, and transnational connections.

As revealed by the survey results below, Canadians react far more favorably to the term integration than they do to the term assimilation with the latter likely viewed more negatively owing to the country's troubled colonial past.

TABLE 1. PLEASE TELL US IF YOU HAVE A POSITIVE OR NEGATIVE OPINION OF THE FOLLOWING TERMS.

	Integration	Assimilation
Net Positive	**71.2%**	**42.9%**
Very positive	25.7%	14.7%
Somewhat positive	45.5%	28.2%
Net Negative	**14.7%**	**29.8%**
Somewhat negative	11.5%	19.6%
Very negative	3.2%	10.2%
I don't know	**13.0%**	**25.9%**
I prefer not to answer	1.3%	1.4%
Total	100.0%	100.0%

Some Quebec policy-makers and thought leaders reject the "Canadian" multicultural model, and instead describe their approach as interculturalism which is purportedly situated somewhere between multiculturalism and assimilation. Similarly, the United States, traditionally described as a melting pot, has a model of integration that is often seen as falling somewhere between multiculturalism and assimilation.

It's difficult to establish the extent to which these models respectively impact the immigrant's trajectory or experience. Underlying these models are complex patterns of policy interventions with varying jurisdictional responsibilities and government/state investments in immigrant integration via such things as newcomer language training, vocational training, and a range of other services that address the needs of immigrants with diverse knowledge and skills upon arrival.

Models of integration, including multiculturalism, are not static and frequently evolve over time in response to society's changing economic or socio-cultural priorities. This is the case for Canada where since its introduction in the 1970's the multicultural model has been modified on several occasions. In the appendix, you'll find a table constructed in 2001 that attempts to describe the evolution of multiculturalism in light of changing priorities from the period 1970's through 2000. I've attempted to build on the prototype by suggesting dominant themes for the period 2010 and 2020.

SOCIAL INTEGRATION IN THE CIMII

In the CIMII, five indicators were selected by its expert advisory committee to measure the social dimension of integration: a sense of belonging to Canada, belonging to the province, belonging to the local community, the number of close friends, and the number of close friends living in the same community or city. Some models of integration view national and regional identities as conflicting or competitive rather than complementary. In the case of Quebec, several analysts will suggest that there is a conflict between belonging to Canada and belonging to a province. Consequently, immigrants in Quebec will have a higher sense of belonging to Canada than the domestic-born francophone population.

Paradoxically a sense of ambiguity towards Canada on the part of immigrants may be viewed in Quebec as a better indicator of integration. In contrast, in the rest of Canada, such ambiguity might be viewed less favourably. Language acquisition by newcomers is widely seen as a key facet of integration from both an economic and social standpoint. Given Canada's linguistic duality and two official languages, the process of integration also has a regional dimension. In Quebec, the integration process prioritizes knowledge of the French language.

The CIMII considers these issues in its selection of indicators within the dimensions and the choices of what to control for to ensure the measurement of immigrant and non-immigrants with similar socio-demographic characteristics. However, the framework highlights the necessity for some degree of asymmetry when constructing a national model for measuring newcomer integration. In short, adjustments are needed to measure integration where there is a divergent socio-cultural context.

INTERDIMENSIONALITY ON IMMIGRANT INTEGRATION

The CIMII's four dimensions, encompassing 22 selected indicators, can be described as minimalist compared to other similarly themed indexes, which often contain a much larger number of indicators and adopt a broader perspective on immigrant integration. However, combining all the things that are associated directly or indirectly with immigrant integration doesn't in and of itself justify combining them in a single index. In some instances, doing this may obfuscate more than clarify outcomes by bringing together aspects of the integration process that are not easily connected.

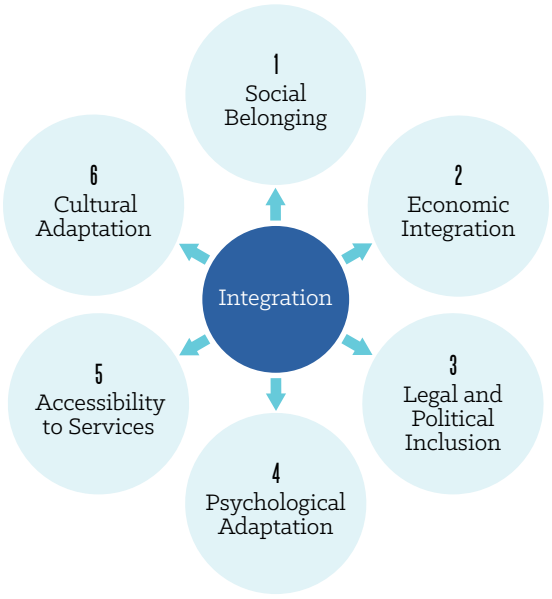
For instance, when it comes to migrant economic outcomes, it is relatively safe to assume a desire on the part of the government to maximize migrant contributions to economic well-being, their participation in civil society, and their ability to access necessary services without barriers. Furthermore, the construction of a cumulative index requires some justification for the weighting that is assigned to dimensions and indicators. For example, in assessing migrant outcomes, should the income disparity between the immigrant and non-immigrants be assigned the same value as their respective rates of belonging to Canada? There is no simple answer, but too often indexes do not address such questions.

This challenge underscores the importance of understanding the relative significance of economic and social dimensions – or their individual indicators – in the broader process of migrant integration. For example, a 2024 survey of immigrant service providers asked respondents to define integration, and their top responses reflected themes in a ranked order. However, when asked about immigrant priorities upon arrival, respondents often highlight finding a place to live and securing employment as the top concerns. (See Figure 1)

The CIMII provides some opportunity for users to shift dimensional weights and thereby allow for a certain degree of flexibility in assessing overall migration outcomes based on the relative importance assigned to the four dimensions. Dimensions or index themes are often assessed in silos rather than looking at the degree of interdependence between the various aspects of integration. In other words, there is insufficient attention directed toward say how migrant health outcomes are affected by economic outcomes.

While data availability currently limits the ability to fully explore the relationships between dimensions, future iterations of the CIMII aim to address this gap. Examining the interplay between economic, social, civic, and health outcomes will be an essential step in providing a more comprehensive understanding of immigrant integration.

FIGURE 1.



CONCLUSION

While integration has been the dominant concept for the process of immigrant settlement for the past few decades, policymakers are increasingly adopting the term inclusion to describe the objectives for newcomers and equity-seeking or equity-deserving groups. What the discursive shift implies concerning support for newcomers remains to be seen.

For more insights into the relationship between integration and inclusion see Paul Holley's essay in this edition of *Canadian Diversity*.

APPENDIX

	1970's	1980's	1990's	2000's	2010's	2020's
Multicultural Thematic	Ethnicity	Equity	Civic	Integrative	**Intercultural**	**Intersectional**
Focus	Celebrating Differences	Managing Diversity	Constructive Engagement	Inclusive Citizenship	**Accommodation**	**Equity**
Reference Point	Culture	Structure	Society Building	Canadian identity	**Reconciliation**	**Inclusion**
Mandate	Ethnicity	Race Relations	Citizenship	Integration	**Rapprochement**	**Diversity**
Magnitude	Individual Adjustment	Accommodation	Participation	Rights and Responsibilities	**Solidarity**	**Connectedness**
Source of Challenges	Prejudice	Systemic Discrimination	Exclusion	Unequal Access, 'clash' of cultures	**Radicalization**	**Polarization**
Solution	Cultural Sensitivity	Employment Equity	Inclusiveness	Dialogue/Mutual Understanding	**Cohesion**	**Eliminating Hate**
Key Metaphor	Mosaic	Level Playing Field	Belonging	Fusion/Jazz	**Living Together**	**Allyship**

Source: Augie Fleras and Jean Kunz, Media and Minorities: Representing Diversity in a Multicultural Canada. Thompson Education Publishing, 2001 in Understanding Canada's "3M" (Multicultural, Multi-linguistic and Multi-religious) Reality in the 21st Century FINAL REPORT, Policy Research Initiative, 2009

(https://publications.gc.ca/collection_2009/policyresearch/PH4-56-2009E.pdf)

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