MUSLIMS AND MULTICULTURAL FUTURES IN WESTERN DEMOCRACIES

Is Kymlicka's pessimism warranted?

ABSTRACT

In a recent edition of *Canadian Diversity* (volume 4.1, winter 2005), respected philosopher Will Kymlicka admits to hastily predicting a growing convergence across Western democracies towards liberal multiculturalism. He observes that rising opposition to multiculturalism in western democracies is often a function of the relative size of their Muslim populations. Jack Jedwab attempts to test the hypothesis by looking at demographic data on Muslims and opinion surveys on multicultural issues.

In a recent edition of Canadian Diversity (volume 4.1, winter 2005), respected philosopher Will Kymlicka admits to hastily predicting a growing convergence across Western democracies towards liberal multiculturalism. Accordingly public institutions would better accommodate ethnocultural diversity within a larger framework of a liberal-democratic constitution with firm protection of individual rights and non-discrimination. While acknowledging different experiences across democratic countries he now maintains that his prediction was inaccurate. While it takes a big person to admit such an error, Kymlicka's new forecast may also be a bit too rash as the 'ideal' may take more time to reach.

He attributes his purported error to three factors: illegal migration (he believes that the higher the proportion of illegal migration the more public antagonism to multiculturalism). At one end of this continuum, he says, would be a country like Canada, which has probably the lowest level of illegal immigration amongst the Western democracies. Hence it sustains a strong level of public support for multiculturalism. Second he refers to liberal versus illiberal practices when it comes to the sort of "culture" that is being recognized and accommodated by multiculturalism policies. It is very difficult to get public support for multiculturalism policies if the groups that are the main beneficiaries of these policies advocate illiberal cultural practices. In the West today, he points out that it is primarily Muslims who are seen as raising this risk. Kymlicka contends that "…Muslims are not only seen as potentially bringing with them illiberal practices, but also as having a strong religious commitment to them, and hence as more likely to try to use the ideology of multi-culturalism as a vehicle for maintaining these practices." Thus on Kymlicka's continuum the proportion of immigrants who are Muslim may be a good predictor of growing public opposition to multiculturalism. Canada, he argues, is at one end of the spectrum as Muslims account for less than 2 per cent of its overall population hence multiculturalism remains popular in the country.

It is hard to establish the causal relationship between the rise of Muslim populations and the erosion of support for multiculturalism. While it is clear that there is a rising concern across Western democracies with the rise of Islamic identity it is still unclear that this has been steadily eroding support for multiculturalism. In some jurisdictions this presupposes that the support was there prior to Kymlicka making his projection and that it since plummeted. Moreover the other question is whether it is the share of Muslims in a given democracy or their percentage increase. If it is the latter than it is worth noting that in the past decade the percentage increase in Muslim populations has been as significant in Britain and Canada than it has been in many other Western democracies.

Of course Kymlicka is not providing ammunition to political movements that want to curb Muslim immigration to western democracies. To say the least it would be ironic to hear right-wing political leaders demand the elimination of Muslim immigration in the name of preserving multiculturalism. And Kymlycka concludes-I think correctly- that:"…it is precisely when immigrants are perceived as illegitimate, illiberal and burdensome that multiculturalism may be most needed."

JACK JEDWAB

Jack Jedwab is the executive director of the Association for Canadian Studies.

Easier to predict demographic future than Multicultural one

Predictions about future social conditions are always very risky. Forecasting our demographic future is somewhat less so. Once considered a predominantly Christian country, according to Statistics Canada the country is in for a dramatic shift in the religious composition of its population as it approaches its 150th birthday in 2017. Of the scenarios issued by Statistics Canada for 2001-2017 the most probable outcome has the Muslim population in Canada rising by approximately 160 per cent, the number of Buddhists by 35 per cent, Sikhs by 65 per cent and Jews by 10 per cent.

In Montreal by 2017 there will be more Muslims than all other non-Christian groups combined and it is very likely that there will be more Muslims in the metropolitan area than Protestants of school age-that is under the age of 15. There is no doubt that the evolution of the country's religious composition has had an impact on Canadian perceptions of the state of intergroup relations. Until recently when asked about the most important conflicts between communities, Canadians have referred to either tension between English and French populations, aboriginal and non-aboriginal or more recently friction between white and non-white. However a large-scale survey conducted in 2004 by the firm Environics for the Association of Canadian Studies (March 29-April 18, 2004) revealed that Canadians' concern over language and aboriginally-based conflicts has diminished and for the first time in several decades it is conflict between religious groups (43 per cent) that are seen as the most important source of tension in the years ahead. The poll had interethnic tensions as the second greatest concern of Canadians (18 per cent) with English and French (13 per cent), Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal (12 per cent) and White and non-White (7 per cent). But the rise in concern over intergroup tension on the basis of religious identification has not resulted in erosion in public support for multiculturalism according to opinion surveys conducted over the past few years.

Evolution of Canada's Major Religious Groups, 2001-2017

	2001	2017
Muslim	579.7	1421.4
Jews	340.8	375.1
Buddhist	304.2	413.9
Hindu	303.6	583.9
Sikh	289.0	495.7
Other	105.0	135.2
Total	1922.0	3425.3
Rest of Population	28 694.0	31 157.0
Total	30 616.0	34 582.0

Source: Statistics Canada, Scenario B-Projections 2001-2017

According to a May 2004 Ipsos poll there is widespread acceptance of the benefits of religious pluralism with Europeans more divided than North Americans about the desirability of a society with shared values and customs and Canadians by far most favourably disposed towards immigration.

Demographic Change and Multiculturalism

The relationship between rising opposition to multiculturalism in western democracies and growth in Muslim populations is reminiscent of the link made between poor economic performances and diminishing support for immigration. In either case the hypothesis is difficult to test without time-series data that correlates these respective trends in this case as regards the growing presence of Muslims with evolving public opinion around multiculturalism and the related degree of openness to various aspects of cultural pluralism. Moreover assuming a direct relationship may prevent other factors from being considered that contribute to diminishing multiculturalism. Amongst these is the degree of demographic diversity and the extent to which religious identification is important amongst the population.

Kymlicka notes that the Canadian share of Muslims is less than two per cent and thus infers that it is substantially higher numbers and shares of this group in Europe that may result in reduced support for multiculturalism. Islam is now the second-largest religion in Europe and it has become increasingly visible in the public domain (see Appendix for figures on Muslims in selected countries). But Kymlicka's hypothesis deals more with the collective perception of the rise in Muslim population irrespective of its internal diversity. There are many ethnic communities within the Muslim group with diverse historic experiences across Europe. In Britain, Pakistani Muslims are the largest group, in Germany and the Netherlands, Turkish Muslims are largest, in the Netherlands there are significant numbers of Moroccan and Surinamese and in France and Spain they are mainly from the Maghreb.

Some insights about the purported erosion in support for diversity can be drawn from recent polling in Western democracies around concerns over Islamic identity. Opinion surveys in North America and Europe continue to point to what might be regarded as contradictory tendencies around issues of diversity. According

Estimated percentage of Muslims and following questions; it is better for a country to have a variety of people with different religions? Is it better for a country if almost everyone shares the same customs and values? Overall would you rank immigrants as having a good or bad influence on the way things are going in you country?

	Estimated Percentage of Muslim populations (2001-) -	Acceptance of religious pluralism pluralism (combined strongly and somewhat agree)	Better with same customs and values (combined strongly agree and somewhat agree	Influence of Immigrants on your country is good (Very or Somewhat good)	Influence of immigrants on your country is bad (Somewhat or very bad)
Canada	1.9	83	40	73	20
United States	3.0	90	27	42	47
Great Britain	2.7	77	46	32	60
France	7.5	71	52	39	53
Germany	3.7	56	48	39	56
Spain	1.2	70	53	36	47

Source: Globus-IPSOS-Public Affairs, Interview Dates, May 7-17 (the Netherlands was not included in the poll)

Muslim Population Statistics in Selected Countries Institute of Islamic Information and Education Shaik Musheer, www.iiie.net/Intl/PopStats.html; Islam and Muslims in Europe at http://euro-islam.info/pages/nether.html and *Statistics Canada, 2001*

to a May 2004 Ipsos poll there is widespread acceptance of the benefits of religious pluralism with Europeans more divided than North Americans about the desirability of a society with shared values and customs and Canadians by far most favourably disposed towards immigration.

It is worth noting that support for religious pluralism is mush softer in Europe than North America with countries like Germany (13 per cent), France (28 per cent) and Spain (30 per cent) not expressing as 'strong agreement' with the idea that it is better for a country to have a variety of people with different religions as does Canada (46), the US (61) and Great Britain (36). The acceptance of religious pluralism may also be related to the degree of importance attributed to religious identity and the extent of its practice. In this regard when asked between 2003 and 2004 whether they attended Church at least once a week percentages were highest in the United States (43 per cent), Canada (27 per cent), Spain (21 per cent), with Netherlands and the UK between 10 per cent and 15 per cent and less than 10 per cent reporting such attendance in France and Germany.

> To say the least it would be ironic to hear right-wing political leaders demand the elimination of Muslim immigration in the name of preserving multiculturalism.

In May 2005 (prior to the terrorist bombings in London), the Pew Research's Global attitudes survey inquired into the degree of concern over the perceived domestic and international threat arising from Islamic extremism. Concerns over its domestic expres-sion were highest in Spain despite a lower share of Muslims in other parts of Europe or North America. It is worth keeping in mind that Spain was

Estimated Percentage of Muslim populations and results to questions about Islam in selected countries

	Estimated Percentage of Muslim populations (2001-)	In your opinion how a strong a sense of Islamic identity do have-percentage very strong	Islamic identity on-the rise Percentage saying yes	Concerned about the rise of Islamic extremism in our country-Percentage Very Concerned	Unfavorable Views of Muslims Percentage Unfavorable	Banning Muslim Head Scarves-Percentage Agree
Canada	1.9	20	51	22	26	37
United States	3.0	20	50	31	22	33
Great Britain	2.7	29	63	34	14	29
France	7.5	19	70	32	34	78
Germany	3.7	33	66	35	47	54
Spain	1.2	30	47	43	37	43
Netherlands	6.0	32	60	32	51	51

Source: Global Attitudes Project: Pew Research, 2005

Estimated Percentage of Muslim populations and following questions; percentages that think that rise of Islamic identity if a bad thing and reasons they give for this opinion? Which one of the following worries you most about Islamic identity in our country today? It can lead to violence; it can lead to a loss of personal freedoms; it will prevent Muslims from integrating into our society.

	Estimated Percentage of Muslim populations	Rise of Islamic identity a bad thing %	Leads to Violence	Loss of Freedoms	Prevent Integration
Canada	1.9	52	29	27	40
United States	3.0	48	47	23	23
Great Britain	2.7	56	30	12	55
France	7.5	89	50	25	25
Germany	3.7	85	41	12	46
Spain	1.2	76	48	18	30
Netherlands	6.0	87	26	27	47

Source: Global Attitudes Project: Pew Research, 2005

the most recent victim of a terrorist attack prior to the Pew survey.

Furthermore such levels of concern do not easily correlate with either the perceived rise in Islamic identity or the percentage respectively agreeing with the banning of the Muslim head scarf (something that receives greater support in Europe than in North America). In Spain though the perceived rise in Islamic identity is lower extremism is highest. In France where the population is least inclined to think that Muslims have a strong sense of Islamic identity the banning of the head scarf obtains the most support of the countries examined. In Canada and the U.S. where opinion on rising Islamic identity is at levels similar to that of France the banning of the Muslim head scarf secures far less support.

What does appear to correlate is the presence of Muslims with the perception that there is a stronger sense of Islamic identity and with banning Muslim headscarves.

With the exception of Canada, a majority in the other countries think that rising Islamic identity is a bad thing (amongst Canadians a near majority felt that way). Amongst those who believe so Canadians, Brits and Germans are most preoccupied with such a tendency obstructing integration while French, Spanish and Americans are most worried by it leading to violence. Concern is somewhat less that the rise of Islamic identity will lead to a loss of freedom than is the preoccupation with violence or integration.

Caution needs to be exercised when making predictions about the collective mind set of national populations around issues of diversity. Tragic events can sharply modify opinion but may not have a sustained effect. After the terrorist attacks of September 11th there was a decline in public support within Canada for immigration. But within a few months public opinion reverted to pre-September 11th levels.

For some observers the growth of Muslim populations will result in ongoing challenges as governments address issues associated with the place of religion in schools and in public institutions more broadly. In many Western democracies, guidelines/ national norms (i.e. rights charters or policy statements) are often in place for determining where conflicts may arise between the promotion of cultural pluralism and citizens rights. Caution needs to be exercised when making predictions about the collective mind set of national populations around issues of diversity. Tragic events can sharply modify opinion but may not have a sustained effect. After the terrorist attacks of September 11th there was a decline in public support within Canada for immigration. But within a few months public opinion reverted to pre-September 11th levels.

And, despite Kymlicka's pessimism, surveys conducted a month following the terrorist attacks in London did not appear to have meaningfully influenced opinion about multiculturalism in that country. In a survey conducted by the firm MORI (August 10, 2005) one month after the bombings in London, some 62 per cent of respondents agreed that multiculturalism makes Britain a better place to live. Some 86 per cent disagreed that their area no longer felt like Britain any more because of immigration. While it is true that some opinion leaders in that country have called for an end to multiculturalism that view seems more like a death

wish in light of continued public support of the ideal. It remains difficult to predict whether our futures will be multicultural. But as to getting there, Kymlicka correctly observes that:"…the path…in many countries will not be smooth or linear. "

References

GLOBAL ATTITUDES PROJECT: Pew Research, 2005

GLOBUS-IPSOS-PUBLIC AFFAIRS, Interview Dates, May 7-17

Islam and Muslims in Europe at http://euro-islam.info/pages/nether.html

KYMLICKA, Will. "The Uncertain Futures of Multiculturalism" Canadian Diversity volume 4.1, winter 2005

MANCHIN, Robert. "Religion in Europe: Trust Not Filling the Pews" in The Gallup Poll, September 21, 2004

MARKET OPINION RESEARCH INTERNATIONAL (BBC Multiculturalism Poll) August 10th, 2005

Muslim Population Statistics in Selected Countries Institute of Islamic Information and Education Shaik Musheer, http://www.iiie.net/Intl/PopStats.html

STATISTICS CANADA, General Social Survey 16, 2003

STATISTICS CANADA, Scenario B-Projections 2001-2017

Appendix 1 – Total National Populations and number and percentage of Muslims, 2001-

Country	Total Population	Number of Muslims	Muslim Percentage
Canada	30, 616 000	579, 700	1.9%
France	59,551,227	4,466,342	7.5%
Germany	83,536,115	3,090,836	3.7%
Netherlands	16,318,199	979,092	6.0%
Spain	40,037,995	500 000	1.2%
United Kingdom	58,489,975	1,579,229	2.7%
United States	293,027,571	8,790,827	3.0%

The data was reproduced from Shaik Musheer, The Institute of Islamic Information and Education http://www.iiie.net/Intl/PopStats and from Islam and Muslims in Europe at http://euro-islam.info/pages/nether.html. and for Canada from Statistics Canada. In Spain an estimate if offered and it should be noted that in the Netherlands there is a discrepancy between the two sources of information to which we refer with the Islam and Europe figures at 700 000 Muslims thus lowering the percentage.