INTRODUCTION

Demography Diversity and Identities in a Changing Canada

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Canada's demographic future feels as though it's in a constant state of flux. It is being negotiated now through decisions about immigration, housing, public services, regional development and the meaning of belonging. Population growth has slowed after an exceptional post-pandemic surge, public support for immigration has become more conditional, and governments are reassessing admissions and temporary-resident programs. Yet the underlying demographic realities have not disappeared. Canada remains an aging society with very low fertility, an unevenly distributed population and a labour force whose future growth will depend heavily on immigration. At the same time, the population is becoming more racially, religiously and culturally diverse, while the ways Canadians describe their identities are becoming more multiple, fluid and contested.

This edition of Canadian Issues seeks to inform the parameters of the current conversation. Its central contribution is to connect demographic change to the institutions, identities and political narratives through which that change is understood and managed. The contributions move from a historical account of Canada's demographic transformation to the policy challenge of sustaining immigration, from regional lessons about integration to new forms of racial and religious diversity, and finally to the changing meaning of multiculturalism and the politics of demographic anxiety. Taken together, they show that demography is not simply a matter of population outcomes. It is also about where people live, whether institutions can respond, how identities are measured, whether newcomers can participate fully, and whether Canadians retain confidence in both diversity and the country's capacity to oversee and effectively manage the changes.

The edition opens with my essay entitled "Looking Back to Look Forward: Canada's Demographic Revolution, 1951–2026." Comparing Canada across seventy-five years, Jedwab establishes the historical baseline for the issue. The country has moved from a population sustained primarily by natural increase and understood largely through British, French and Christian identities to one whose growth depends overwhelmingly on migration and whose population is far more ethnically and religiously diverse. His contribution also identifies a parallel transformation in measurement. Census categories have shifted from assumptions of singular, inherited identity toward the

recognition of multiple origins and more complex affiliations. Looking forward therefore requires attention not only to who Canadians are, but also to the categories through which they are counted and come to understand themselves.

Anil Arora then turns from the scale of transformation to the policy choices it demands. In "Canada's Demographic Future Depends on Immigration—and on Rebuilding Trust," he argues that the current reduction in immigration levels does not change Canada's demographic math. Aging, low fertility and labour-force renewal ensure that immigration will remain central. The challenge is to align population growth with housing, infrastructure, health care, education and labour-market opportunity. Arora places public trust at the centre of this task. Support for immigration, he suggests, increasingly depends on whether governments can demonstrate competence, transparency and coordination. His call for place-based planning, stronger information systems and durable settlement capacity provides the national policy framework for the essays that follow.

Tony Fang and Graham King give that framework a regional test in "Towards a New Canadian Model of Immigration: A View from Atlantic Canada." Atlantic Canada has confronted aging, outmigration and labour shortages earlier and more intensely than much of the country. Its experience demonstrates both the economic benefits of immigration and the limits of treating admissions as an end in themselves. Meaningful employment, recognition of international credentials, language supports, social networks and employer engagement determine whether newcomers remain and prosper. Fang and King draw three national lessons from the Atlantic experience: Canada needs more coherent credential-recognition standards, a stronger strategy for engaging employers, and immigration planning that reflects regional differences in needs and settlement capacity. Their chapter makes concrete Arora's wider argument that immigration succeeds only when it is embedded in a broader development strategy.

The next two contributions examine how these demographic forces are changing the composition and self-understanding of the population. Jane Badets's "Canadians with Multiple Racial Identities: Diversifying Canada's Multicultural Mosaic" explores a dimension of diversity that conventional categories can obscure. More than one million Canadians reported multiple racial identities in the 2021 Census, with particularly high representation among younger and second-generation Canadians and significant variation across metropolitan areas. Badets shows that the growth of mixed identities complicates simple distinctions between population groups and raises important questions about belonging, inclusion, well-being and the future design of census categories. Her analysis deepens the issue's central insight: demographic change and the measurement of identity evolve together.

"Religion and Immigration in Canada" adds another dimension to this changing landscape. Drawing on census and social survey data, Sarah Wilkins-Laflamme traces the transition from historically European and predominantly Christian immigration to more globally diverse flows that have contributed to the growth of Islam, Hinduism and Sikhism, while also adding substantial numbers to the religiously unaffiliated population. Wilkins-Laflamme places immigration alongside disaffiliation as the two major forces reshaping religion in Canada. Reduced immigration levels may moderate the pace of growth among several minority religions, but they may also accelerate Christianity's declining share as disaffiliation continues. The result is a Canada that is becoming more religiously diverse and more secular at the same time.

Arjun Tremblay's "How Can We Assess Canada's Multiculturalism Brand in Canada's Changing Demographic Landscape?" asks what this growing

diversity means for one of the country's most familiar national narratives. He distinguishes among multiculturalism as demographic reality, political philosophy, public policy and international brand. That distinction matters because a country can be diverse without ensuring equal inclusion, and it can celebrate multiculturalism symbolically while failing to sustain the institutions and democratic commitments on which it depends. Tremblay invites readers to assess whether Canada's multicultural reputation remains credible as demographic diversity deepens and anti-diversity movements gain influence internationally. His chapter shifts the discussion from the existence of diversity to the standards by which Canada's response to it should be judged.

Howard Ramos closes the edition by examining the language through which demographic and political change is increasingly framed. In "Canada in Existential Times," he argues that immigration, fertility, artificial intelligence, climate change, foreign interference and national unity are often described as existential threats even when they do not meet that threshold. Such language heightens urgency, encourages polarized responses and creates space for conspiracy theories, including the "Great Replacement" narrative. Ramos links these developments to separatist grievances, social-media dynamics and political identities defined more by opposition than by a shared sense of purpose. His response is not to deny genuine pressures, but to convert diffuse fears into practical problems with policies, budgets and timelines—and to renew a positive account of what Canada is and what it is building.

Taken together, the essays make clear that Canada's demographic debate cannot be reduced to a choice between more or less immigration. The more consequential question is whether population policy, economic planning, settlement institutions and public services can be brought into alignment—and whether the national conversation can distinguish real capacity pressures from narratives that risk taxing demographic change as identity threats. The edition also reveals just how demographic change is lived differently across regions, cities, generations, racial identities and religious communities. Policies that overlook these differences risk weakening both integration and public confidence.

This is where the edition contributes most directly to ongoing national conversations about demography, diversity and identity. It places questions often debated separately into a shared framework. Immigration is connected to aging and labour-force renewal; integration is connected to regional development and institutional capacity; racial and religious diversification is connected to changing forms of identification; multiculturalism is connected to democratic practice; and public concern is connected to the narratives through which change is interpreted. The future described here is neither predetermined nor adequately addressed by nostalgia for an earlier Canada. It will depend on choices about capacity, fairness, measurement, inclusion and nation-building. Understanding those connections is essential if Canada is to manage demographic change while sustaining both.