MEASURING THE MESSAGE OF CANADIAN MULTICULTURALISM

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ABSTRACT

Survey results are often held up as an indication of widespread endorsement in Canada of the multicultural ideology and the policy arising from it. Since it was introduced in 1971, the multicultural policy and the message conveyed to Canadians around diversity have encountered a persistent group of detractors who blame multiculturalism for societal inequities, weak national identity and problems of cohesion. Evidence in support of such criticism has been very thin and hence it is based primarily on conjecture. Moreover, while critics suggest the object of their preoccupations, rarely is explicit reference made to the policy and rather focus often appears to be on the message or ideology of multiculturalism. While there is a lack of strong empirical evidence to measure the outcomes of multicultural policy, there is much evidence to support the connection between the message of multicultural and principal values and concerns shared by most Canadians. Such evidence is presented here and offered as background for the special edition on thirty-five years of Canadian multiculturalism.

Last year marked 35 years since the introduction of Canada's policy of multiculturalism. As reflected in public opinion polls, multiculturalism has remained popular amongst Canadians both as an ideology and as public policy over much of that period. Continued evidence of this was provided in a survey conducted in the fall of 2006 by the firm Leger Marketing, which revealed that some three-quarters of Canadians agree that multiculturalism supports national identity and citizenship, the identification of common values, equal participation in society, the integration of immigrants and a sense of belonging to Canada. Some two-thirds of Canadians also agree that multiculturalism supports social cohesion and the preservation of the French language in Canada. Younger Canadians react even more favorably when asked to comment on whether multiculturalism supports such objectives, with 80% of persons between the ages of 18 and 24 in agreement (Source: Leger Marketing for the Association for Canadian Studies, September 2006). Such survey results are fairly consistent with similar inquiries conducted over the last ten years. Indeed, when asked in 2003 what best describes the story of Canada, some 40% of persons between the ages of 18 and 29 said it was increasing multiculturalism. By contrast in the same survey, those over the age of sixty contended that it was "…coming to terms with two languages and two cultures that best describes the story of Canada." (Environics for the Association for Canadian Studies, 2003).

Survey results are often held up as an indication of widespread endorsement in Canada of the multicultural ideology and public policy. Nonetheless, from the very outset multiculturalism has confronted an influential group of detractors who insist that Canadians have serious objections to the ideal of multiculturalism and that the policy has had negative consequences on a variety of fronts. In presenting their respective points of view, it is not always obvious whether supporters and critics are referring to the message conveyed by multiculturalism – the ideology or philosophy behind it – or the policy of multiculturalism as it is reflected in the Act of Multiculturalism of 1988 (see page 3 in this publication – we have provided the official definition offered by the Department of Canadian Heritage and the details of the legislation).

In her text in this publication, Eisenberg makes the important observation that: "the difficulty is less about the actual policy impact of multiculturalism than it is about how Canadians from diverse cultural backgrounds can successfully reflect upon and interpret its meaning."

While the message and policy of multiculturalism are no doubt intertwined, it frequently seems that debate centers on the former as it is understood by the public and/or respectively interpreted for them by its supporters and detractors. Put simply, while some understand the message of multiculturalism as one of respect of difference and openness to others, some believe that instead it incites certain segments of the population to purposely avoid meaningful participation in mainstream Canadian society. There are also related issues about the segments of society at which the message is directed. Hence the challenge has been how researchers and policy-makers go about unpacking and/or measuring the message. Attempts to empirically measure it depend very much on assessing the way the message influences the

attitudes and behavior of the population or selected segments of it (i.e. members of ethnocultural minorities). Yet further underlying such inquiries involves some assessment of the relationship between the identities and values of Canadians, thereby explaining at least in part the heavy use of public opinion surveys in generating "empirical" evidence as to the impact of multiculturalism's message.

In public opinion surveys that touch on the issue of multiculturalism, the formulation of questions is as important as the results generated. Critics that grudgingly acknowledge the positive survey results often contend that the term multiculturalism is not well understood by respondents. Hence in presenting evidence to critique multiculturalism, they frequently prefer to sets of questions that do not use the term or in some ways qualify multiculturalism. A survey question that some national media recently held up as evidence of opposition to multiculturalism reads as follows: "some immigrant and minority ethnic communities have very traditional practices and beliefs when it comes to the role and rights of women. Some people say Canada should accept and accommodate these traditional beliefs about the rights and role of women. Other people say that immigrants and ethnic minorities should adapt to mainstream Canadian beliefs about the rights and role of women. Which one of these two points of view is closest to your own?" (Environics for the Trudeau Foundation, October 2006). As nearly all Canadians chose the latter, it was interpreted by critics as reflecting the prevalent concern of Canadians over the possible ill effects of multiculturalism. However to the extent that this question bears on multiculturalism (a term it doesn't mention) requires the acceptance of its suggestion about the message of multiculturalism. In effect, it assumes that certain cultures, or more precisely religions – without mentioning them – explicitly discriminate against women and do so by virtue of the multicultural message. It raises the issue of whether the respect for ethnic and religious difference so fundamental to the message of multiculturalism implies the trumping of respect for difference on the basis of gender. Clearly the message of multiculturalism in Canada is part of a broader ethos that encourages respect for fundamental rights and that prioritizes gender equality. Hence the preservation and enhancement of the multicultural heritage of Canadians is situated within a Canadian Charter of Rights that prioritizes gender equality.

Most critics opt for a definition of multiculturalism that they feel is designed to better reflect what they believe to be its "true" meaning. For example, in his article in *The Walrus*, pollster Allan Gregg declares that: "…for multiculturalism to work, the native born must accept immigrants as equals, new arrivals must demonstrate a willingness and desire to join mainstream society by adopting the fundamental mores and values of the prevailing culture, and there must be a high degree of cross-fertilization between ethnic groups" (*Walrus Magazine*, March, 2006). In many ways this perspective sounds more like the vision associated with the melting pot model that tends to be more "assimilationist" (immigrants and their descendants must abandon their cultures and take on the characteristics of the dominant culture) than the multicultural model that is more integrationist (immigrants can retain their cultures while developing a strong sense of attachment to Canada).

One of the questions most commonly employed in debates around the message of Canadian multiculturalism asks whether a higher priority for Canada should be "To encourage Canadians as a whole to try to accept minority groups and their customs and languages or to encourage minority groups to try to change to be more like most Canadians?" It can be legitimately argued that the very ethos of multiculturalism suggests that one can be more like most Canadians while maintaining their customs and languages. Leaving that aside however, many analysts refer to this type of question in debate around the message that multiculturalism conveys. In a March-April 2004 Environics survey, some 45% of Canadians said that the priority should be "to encourage minority groups to try to change to be more like most Canadians", while 43% preferred that Canadians as a whole be encouraged to accept minority groups and their customs and languages" (see also Jedwab, July 19, 2004). However, a variation of the same question asked by Environics in the fall of 2006 saw the number of respondents supporting the "multicultural" view rise to 49%, while the more "assimilationist" view yielded 41%. What is particularly interesting in both surveys is the substantial gap in the perspective held along generational lines. Over 60% of those Canadians between the ages of 18 and 29 endorse the "multicultural view", while a majority of those over the age of 60 prefer the "assimilationist" view.

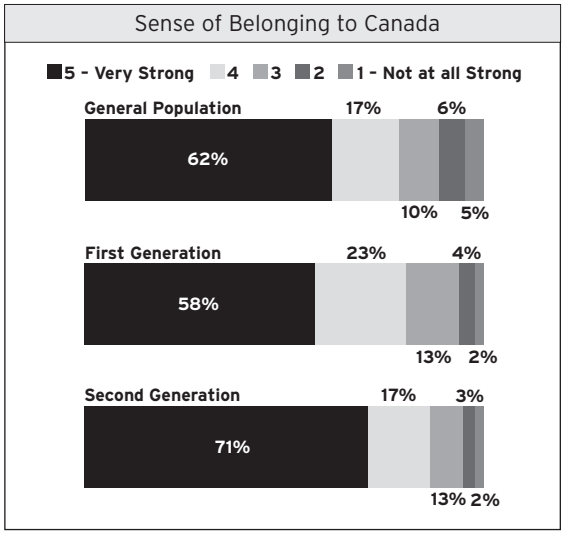
The absence of empirical findings to test the impact of the message of multiculturalism invites analysis that is often rooted in observations about the attitudes and behaviors of those identifying with ethnocultural groups and the overall population. It would be wrong to dismiss these observations, as they help shape the public debate over the message of multiculturalism. Indeed empirical tests are often based on the observations made by analysts around that the impact of the message. That said, while caution needs to be exercised in an approach to the issue that is too empirically based for a set observations to achieve greater legitimacy, it will ultimately require some causal demonstration. For example, the idea that high unemployment and/or income gaps between visible and non-visible minority groups and/or immigrant and non-immigrant demonstrates that the multicultural policy doesn't work requires some proof that the message, program and/or policies directly contribute to this situation. In the absence of any causal demonstration of this linkage, the credibility of those who make such claims risks being placed on the line. Conversely, those who contend that multicultural polices have resulted in narrowing such gaps without furnishing evidence in support of such affirmations also risk a loss of credibility. Later in this edition of *Canadian Diversity*, David Ley provides thoughtful and constructive commentary on the challenge of measuring the outcomes of multicultural policy.

In this particular case and in various others, it is critical to properly consider vertical and horizontal relationships of multiculturalism to other policies, programs and messages delivered elsewhere within the Canadian federal state

and/or by other levels of government. For example, on the ongoing concern over recognition of foreign credentials, a factor believed to contribute to employment and income inequities for recent immigrants, few if any observers have attributed the problem to multicultural policy. Yet the same logic that contends that income inequities between immigrant and non-immigrant Canadians are the fault of multiculturalism might just as well offer up the same line of reasoning for the credentials issue. Examining the socio-economic challenges confronted by groups of immigrants and their children quite obviously requires looking at several policies amongst them immigration policies, language policies, human resource policies, taxation policies, education policies and others.

The absence of empirical evidence to evaluate the impact of multiculturalism has been an important feature of the debate over its first thirty-five years. Criticisms of multiculturalism that have dominated debate can be summarized as follows: (1) although multiculturalism was situated within the framework of Canada's official language policy, it is said to diminish the position of the French language both outside and within Quebec (McRoberts, 1997). Paradoxically, some ethnocultural group representatives argued that the policy undercuts the preservation of ethnocultural heritage by not providing any meaningful support for non-official languages. In neither instance has any empirical evidence been offered in support of such affirmations. (2) Multiculturalism diminishes attachment to Canada amongst ethnic communities by encouraging them to preserve their cultures of origin and not inducing them to develop a sense of belonging to Canada. Underlying this view is the idea that ethnic attachments by definition contradict national identification. Though one of the objectives of the message and policy of multiculturalism is to reinforce Canadian identity, its detractors insisted that by definition it had the opposite effect. Perhaps the most widely cited critic in this regard is writer Neil Bissoondath (1994), who insists that the message of multiculturalism represents an obstacle to integration into the Canadian mainstream – however defined – and prevents attachment to Canada. Paradoxically, Bisoondath questions whether there is indeed a Canadian culture in which to integrate and blames its purported absence on multiculturalism. Evidence of Bissoondath's principle assertion that strong ethnic minority identification implies weaker attachment to Canada has proven unfounded as over the course of the 1990's, numerous surveys revealed that there was no contraction between the two and that immigrants and their descendants expressed a stronger than average sense of belonging to the country. In March 2007, Ipsos released a study providing yet further confirmation for the notion that immigrant status does not obstruct identification with Canada. The study conducted for the Dominion Institute amongst English speaking Canadians reveals that the sense of belonging to Canada among first generation Canadians is similar to the overall Canadian population. Second generation Canadians expressed a stronger sense of belonging to Canada (88% overall) than immigrants (81%), and the general population (79%).

Using a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 is not strong at all and 5 is very strong, how strong is your sense of belonging to Canada?



Source: Ipsos Canada for the Dominion Institute, March 2, 2007

(3) Since September 2001, some critics have maintained that the message multiculturalism poses a threat to national security. According to this view, in giving legitimacy to political grievances imported from the host countries of some groups, multiculturalism risks providing certain individuals with justification for acts of violence. Again however the causal evidence for this is shaky at best and its detractors have increasingly referred to incidents in Europe in support of the idea that multiculturalism is at the root of potential intergroup tensions which will inevitably arise here if the message and policy of multiculturalism is not modified. The paradox in this regard is that several of the countries in Europe that are preoccupied with security matters do not disseminate the multiculturally-oriented message.

(4) That multiculturalism is a threat to Canadian values has become perhaps the most oft-repeated mantra of multiculturalism's detractors. Proponents of this view insist that multiculturalism encourages illiberal practices amongst certain religious minorities and more specifically does so in the area of gender inequality. In this case, it would be important to demonstrate that those who embrace the message of multiculturalism also support illiberal practices and related inequalities. However, this demonstration has yet to be made by detractors of multiculturalism. In fact, the reality may be quite the opposite as it may indeed be that those rejecting the message of multiculturalism are more inclined to endorse illiberal practices. In this regard, it is worth correlating the views of those who favor the more multiculturalist message versus those preferring the more "assimilationist" perspective around issues that reflect liberal values. As observed below in a 2006 Environics survey, nearly half of Canadians that favor the latter approach agree that we should be screening the religious beliefs and values of potential immigrants – an idea endorsed by less than one-fifth of respondents that opt for the multicultural message.

Table 1. Which of these points of view is closest to your own? Immigrants should blend into Canadian society or be free to maintain their religious/cultural practices both equally.			
Do you strongly / somewhat agree / disagree that: People who want to immigrate should have their religious beliefs / values screened / approved before they are allowed in?	**Blend into Canadian society n=849**	**Be free to maintain their religious/ cultural practices n=938**	**Both equally n=181**
Strongly agree	28.3	8.9	8.2
Somewhat agree	20.8	10.6	13.2
Somewhat disagree	18.7	18.0	20.9
Strongly disagree	29.7	60.7	54.6

Source: Environics for the Trudeau Foundation Conference on Muslims in Western Societies "Special Tabulation" October 2006.

And although the question of immigration levels does not have a direct bearing on liberal values, a clear majority of those favoring the multicultural message disagree that there is too much immigration to Canada, while a clear majority of those that prefer the assimilationist perspective agree that there is too much immigration to Canada.

Table 2. Which of these points of view is closest to your own? Immigrants should blend into Canadian society or be free to maintain their religious/cultural practices both equally.			
Do you strongly / somewhat agree / disagree that: Overall, there is too much immigration to Canada?	**Blend into Canadian society n=849**	**Be free to maintain their religious/ cultural practices n=938**	**Both equally n=181**
Strongly agree	33.6	12.1	18.2
Somewhat agree	25.0	17.5	17.1
Somewhat disagree	20.9	28.1	33.1
Strongly disagree	16.3	39.5	25.4

Source: Environics for the Trudeau Foundation Conference on Muslims in Western Societies "Special Tabulation" October 2006.

Perhaps the broader question raised by the current debates over the message of multiculturalism involves the degree to which the values it reflects are compatible with the values that matter to a majority of Canadians (as opposed to what some refer to as "Canadian values" – an idea that suggests that there is something uniquely Canadian about the values favored by the population). A central question therefore is whether the values arising from the message of multiculturalism and to a significant degree that have been transmitted to the younger generation of Canadians are interconnected with the fundamental values that are essential to the well-being of a pluralist democracy. A survey conducted by the firm EKOS Research for the Government of Canada in 2004 amongst some 2000 respondents age 16-30 provides strong evidence for the idea that instilling adherence to multiculturalism and diversity is closely connected to a series of other values that are widely supported by the broader population. The results also provide insight into how Canadian youth understand and interpret the message of multiculturalism.

The tables below identifies three groups within the National Survey: (1) the High Multiculturalists – for whom Diversity and Multiculturalism are "completely important" to them (432 respondents); (2) Multiculturalists – for whom diversity and multiculturalism are "important" (1155 respondents) and; (3) Non Multiculturalists – for whom diversity and multiculturalism are not that important or unimportant.

Table 3						
	High Multiculturalists - 432		**Multiculturalists - 1155**		**Not Multiculturalists - 419**	
% Completely Important and Important Combined	**Completely Important**	**Important**	**Completely Important**	**Important**	**Completely Important**	**Important**
Freedom	79.0	19.2	59.4	39.1	46.7	48.9
I will definitely vote in thenext federal election if I am old enough to do so	70.0	12.9	68.4	13.2	68.8	11.4
Keeping your word	66.3	31.5	50.7	46.9	48.3	47.6
I believe Canada has a unique and distinct culture	63.5	23.4	54.0	2.6	38.9	33.8
Tolerance	55.7	40.0	27.7	63.9	19.0	63.4
Helping others worse off than you	55.2	41.2	30.7	64.7	20.2	67.3
Having a sense of belonging to Canada	39.5	46.2	20.3	62.1	11.9	57.4
Being patriotic	29.0	48.0	13.4	57.7	10.7	46.4

EKOS Research, Reconnecting Government with Youth, Special Tabulation, October 2004. See also Jedwab, J. Values of Multiculturalism and Identity, February 12, 2007.

Those respondents that affirm most strongly that they are proud to be Canadian are most likely to declare that diversity and multiculturalism are "Completely Important" (91.3%), compared with those saying that diversity and multiculturalism are unimportant for whom 71.4% agree that they are very proud to be Canadian.

As observed in the table 3, the High Multiculturalists are the most likely to describe as "Completely Important" such things as freedom, keeping your word, "I believe Canada has a unique and distinct culture", tolerance, "helping others worse off than you", having a sense of belonging to Canada and being patriotic. Only when it comes to voting intentions does the adherence to diversity and multiculturalism have no apparent impact.

Multiculturalism and Official Languages

Although it might not be described as a "Canadian value", support for official language minorities, bilingualism and youth exchanges between language communities are strongly supported by Canadians according to various surveys (more recently see CROP for the CBC and Radio-Canada, December 2006). As observed below, it is those who feel that multiculturalism is completely important that are most likely to strongly endorse support for language minorities, to value bilingualism, promote interaction between language communities and learn more about Canada. Hence the survey unequivocally demonstrates the link between attaching importance to the ideal of multiculturalism and support for Canada's linguistic duality.

Table 4

	High Multiculturalists - 432		Multiculturalists - 1155		Not Multiculturalists - 419	
% Completely Important and Important Combined	Completely Important	Important	Completely Important	Important	Completely Important	Important
Anglophones / Francophones from other countries are welcome in my linguistic community	71.6	20.8	55.8	23.3	49.8	32.8
I think that government services (federal, provincial and municipal) should be available in English and French across the country	70.0	18.3	48.0	27.6	41.0	26.6
I think that all high school graduates should have a working knowledge of English and French	50.2	25.1	39.1	26.2	33.7	22.4
I would or would have been interested in participating in school-based language exchanges to interact with young people from the other official language communities	44.7	31.3	33.3	31.6	25.8	25.6
I am interested in learning more about Canada	44.5	32.3	34.9	39.6	23.7	39.6
Canada's two official languages are an economic asset to Canada	42.2	32.2	31.6	35.6	25.2	27.7
Having two official languages (English and French) is important to my sense of what it means to be a Canadian	41.2	24.3	27.6	30.6	17.1	16.9
The federal government has an important role to promote and protect the status and use of the French language in Canadian society	38.4	39.3	26.5	42.2	21.2	42.2

EKOS Research, Reconnecting Government with Youth, Special Tabulation, October 2004. See also Jedwab, J. Values of Multiculturalism and Identity, February 12, 2007.

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