

2008 Expert Roundtable on Canada's Experience with Pluralism

The Models in Our Minds: Conceptions of Social Integration and Immigrant Integration

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Summary

This paper considers two different concepts of social integration. In the first concept, social cohesion flows from a common culture, including a shared sense of national identity and cultural values. The second concept places less emphasis on shared identities and values and more emphasis on a common commitment to democratic rights and participation. Assessments of pluralism in Canada vary based on which concept frames the analysis. Using a cultural definition rooted in shared identity, values and sense of history, leads to the conclusion that significant weaknesses exist in Canadian cohesion. In contrast, the participative concept of social integration leads to a more optimistic conclusion. Analysis based on this concept finds that while members of minority groups may not feel they fully belong to Canadian society, they participate well in Canada's democracy and institutions. Canadian experience suggests that "who is us?" is the wrong question, and that social integration can be sustained by focusing on how we live together in a pluralist world.