

2008 Expert Roundtable on Canada's Experience with Pluralism

Canadian Pluralism in Comparative Perspective

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Summary

This paper explores the reasons behind the success of pluralism in Canada and concludes that the country's unique circumstances are major contributing factors. Canada's federalist, bilingual framework, for instance, predisposes the country to accommodate diversity, while Canada's geography precludes rapid mass migrations from neighbouring countries (particularly poorer countries). Timing is another important factor. Canada's multiculturalism policies arose in the 1970s, out of attempts to accommodate Quebec nationalism without alienating long-resident ethnic groups – such as Italians, Ukrainians, and Chinese – whose members had largely adopted Canadian values and were fluent in one of Canada's official languages. Canada's long history of successful integration of immigrants into mainstream society is also important. The author believes that Canada's multiculturalism policies are not necessarily any better than those of other countries; they just work better because of Canada's unique historical, political and social circumstances. The paper concludes with a call for Canada to strengthen international norms for and the protection of minority rights.