

# Why does Multiculturalism Work in Canada?

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Photo credit: Ali Tawfiq

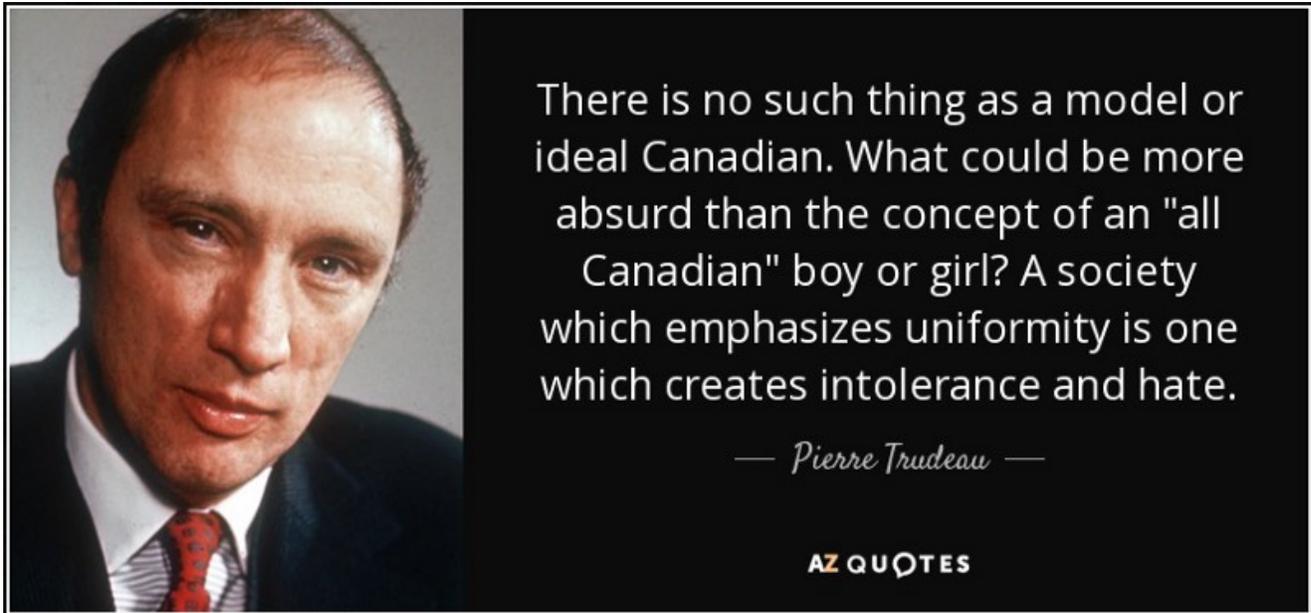
From reading news headlines during the past three years in the United States and Europe, it appears that for the most part, multiculturalism hasn't lived up to its expectations.

Even worse, it's been blamed for accelerating the rise of ethnic nationalism and far-right movements on both sides of the Atlantic.

In the midst of this tempest, Canada remains a relative oasis of calm, free of the racial and ethnic tensions (and violence) witnessed in America and in Europe.

So why does multiculturalism work in the Great White North? What has Canada done right in implementing its policy of multiculturalism?

## A Brief History



Multiculturalism became official Canadian policy under the government of the late Pierre Elliot Trudeau (Justin's father) in 1971. In doing so, Canada was the first country in the world to adopt multiculturalism as official policy.

What "multiculturalism" means in the Canadian context is that:

Canadian multiculturalism is fundamental to our belief that all citizens are equal. Multiculturalism ensures that **all citizens can keep their identities, can take pride in their ancestry and have a sense of belonging. Acceptance gives Canadians a feeling of security and self-confidence, making them more open to, and accepting of, diverse cultures.** The Canadian experience has shown that multiculturalism encourages racial and ethnic harmony and cross-cultural understanding.

**Mutual respect helps develop common attitudes.** New Canadians, no less than other Canadians, respect the political and legal process, and want to address issues by legal and constitutional means.

Through multiculturalism, **Canada recognizes the potential of all Canadians, encouraging them to integrate into their society and take an active part in its social, cultural, economic and political affairs.**

This policy was implemented to counter the Quebec separatist movement which had reached its apex one year earlier in 1970. To the uninitiated, Quebec is the French speaking province in Canada, founded by ethnic French settlers in 1608. It remained French territory

until the French were defeated by the British in 1759, leading to the surrender of Quebec to the British.

Quebec eventually became one of many Canadian provinces, but the resentment by the French speaking peoples of Quebec against “English Canada” had always simmered just beneath the surface, and this eventually led to the Quebec sovereignty movement.

During October 1970, a Marxist/Leninist paramilitary group named the Front de libération du Québec, had kidnapped Quebec cabinet minister Pierre LaPorte and British diplomat James Cross in the Montreal metropolitan area. They had eventually murdered Laporte, but released Cross after negotiations led to his release and the kidnappers’ exile to Cuba.

**In this context, the primary impetus for Canada’s multiculturalism policy was to combat ethnic nationalism.**

The concept of multiculturalism was again acknowledged in the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms of 1982, which states that the Charter itself “shall be interpreted in a manner consistent with the preservation and enhancement of the multicultural heritage of Canadians.”

On 21 July 1988, the Progressive Conservative government of Brian Mulroney passed the Canadian Multiculturalism Act, which formalized the government’s commitment to “promote the full and equitable participation of individuals and communities of all origins in the continuing evolution and shaping of all aspects of Canadian society” by establishing legislation to protect ethnic, racial, linguistic and religious diversity within Canadian society.

## A Key Factor for Success: Canada’s Immigration Policy

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Photo credit: Jan Kahanek

Canada's immigration policy sets out to attract the best skilled workers from around the globe. As such, Canada gives skilled immigrants priority to receive permanent residency, based on criteria such as their age, work experience, language ability, education and much more.

They list these attributes in the application system and federal workers review their profiles and rank them based on an applicant's chance of economic success and integration. Ranking is done with a Comprehensive Ranking System, a points based system. Canada has had a points based system since 1967.

The system awards the most points to those it considers the best candidates. People get points if they already have a job offer. They can also rack up points depending on how well they speak English and French, whether or not they are young, and whether or not they have work experience in a high-demand field. Potential immigrants with high rankings are invited to apply for permanent residency. Upon obtaining permanent residency, he or she can sponsor a spouse and children to immigrant to Canada.

Now when the Canadian economy requires workers that *don't* meet eligibility criteria for permanent residency (fruit pickers, janitors, factory workers) both business and government draw upon the services of "temporary workers", who come to Canada under its Temporary

Foreign Worker Program. Most workers under this program are limited to working in Canada for four years before having to return to their home country. They do however, have the opportunity to apply for permanent residency status should they choose to do so.

**I cannot emphasize enough how important a merit-based immigration system has been to the success of multiculturalism in Canada:** it protects the wages of those at the bottom of Canadian society who don't have to compete with the global labour market and suffer the destructive race to the bottom.

In contrast, uncontrolled immigration in the United States and Europe has negatively impacted the most economically vulnerable members of those societies. This has made them susceptible to the appeals of far-right ethnic nationalists, whose political movements promise them jobs and economic security.

## A Model for the World

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Photo credit: Nicole Harrington

Canada's success in integrating disparate peoples from around the globe through its policies and immigration system has been held up as a model for the world. Australia's own point-based system, formalized in 1989, was modelled on Canada's. And like Canada, Australia has become a *de facto* multicultural society.

More recently, several Scandinavian countries have emulated Canada's immigration and integration policies to deal with social problems within immigrant communities. It has been held up as an alternative to humanitarian and family migrants, which has contributed to a significant immigrant-native employment gap in Scandinavia.

Finally, the Trump administration has expressed great interest in reforming its immigration system to emulate Canada's, giving priority to skilled workers.

## Conclusion: A Picture is Worth A Thousand Words

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This video about the City of Toronto encapsulates the essence of Canada's multicultural vision: a clean, safe and prosperous city of 200 ethnic groups living side by side and speaking 160 languages. With half of its population born outside of Canada, Toronto is the most multicultural city in the world.

We are living in dangerous times where demagogues and ethno-nationalists have entered into the mainstream in both North America and Europe. **Canada destroys their narrative that people from different cultures cannot live along side each other in peace and prosperity**. But multiculturalism will only work under sensible immigration policies administered by competent governments.