

2008 Expert Roundtable on Canada's Experience with Pluralism

Pluralism as Process: The Role of Liberal Democratic Institutions

Yasmeen Abu-Laban

Political Science, University of Alberta
Edmonton, Canada

Summary

This paper traces the evolution of Canada's experience with pluralism, particularly in the wake of the significant social changes of the 1960s. Founded as a colony of France and Great Britain and with a sizable indigenous population, Canada has a long history of diversity. Throughout its history, diverse groups have continually emerged and shifted, with each experiencing power and resources differentially. During the 1960s, a series of changes – for example, Quebec's Quiet Revolution, the recognition of group rights, and the evolution of the federalist model – led to an approach to pluralism based on multiculturalism. Large increases in immigration to Canada from non-European countries after 1967 resulted in unprecedented growth of ethnic, racial and religious diversity. Since then, federal and provincial governments, along with municipalities and civil society groups, have all shaped the institutions, practices, policies and symbols that govern diversity. Today, Canada's pluralist ethos is an ongoing and evolving process involving state and societal actors. The author identifies a series of elements from Canada's approach to pluralism that might relate to the experiences of other countries.