

2008 Expert Roundtable on Canada's Experience with Pluralism

Pluralism and Public Decision-making in Canada: What Does Success Look Like?

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Summary

The success of a pluralist society depends in part on institutions with capacity to assess “identity claims” – that is, claims made by minorities for entitlements, resources, or opportunities on grounds that appeal to something distinctive and important about the group’s identity. A pluralist society also depends on the capacity of public decision-makers to assess these claims in a fair and transparent manner. It does not require the accommodation of every identity claim, but it does require agents of state institutions to distinguish fairly between those claims that merit special entitlements or resources and those that do not. In turn, the capacity of public decision-makers to assess identity claims fairly fosters institutional humility, combats stereotypes and racism, and requires respect to persons. State institutions – as bodies of public decision-making – have played an important role in the success of Canadian pluralism, especially institutions such as the courts which handle identity claims. More generally, the author attributes Canada’s success to widespread public support for multiculturalism and the accommodation of differences.