

2008 Expert Roundtable on Canada's Experience with Pluralism

Dimensions of Diversity: Canadian Responses

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Summary

This essay comments on the themes emerging from the four papers examining the dimensions of Canadian diversity by Karim, Arneil, Gagnon and Banting. All papers posit that pluralism is generally viewed as a positive force in Canada and as a defining characteristic of the Canadian identity. Each paper also considers, to varying degrees, whether there are specific lessons that other societies might glean from the Canadian experience and whether a “Canadian model” for pluralism exists. Upon closer scrutiny, no single model or framework for pluralism in Canada emerges. Instead, the Canadian approach to diversity has been shaped by history, context, and political choices. This approach is further defined through principles and institutions of liberal democracy. These institutions strive to foster both pluralism and a shared sense of citizenship, serve as access points for minorities seeking greater recognition and voice, and act to manage tensions. The author concludes that while some elements of Canada's approach to pluralism might work well in other countries, these must be applied in ways that honour the unique circumstances of each jurisdiction.