

Multicultural Integration Policy:
A Comparison of Canadian Policies to the United States

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Abstract

In the United States, debate over immigration often ignores the importance of integration policy. This paper establishes the current climate surrounding immigration in the United States, specifically as it relates to integration of newcomers. It then moves into the history of integration policies in both the United States and Canada, using Canada as an example of multiculturalism. The full details of current policies in both countries are then fleshed out, providing context to the following analysis. Using the established literature in the field, it looks at how effective the United States has been at integrating immigrants in both socio-economic and civic-political areas when compared to multicultural regimes. Once the effectiveness of these policies is established, recommendations are provided for policy changes to adopt in the United States. These recommendations, which mostly include returns to previous American policy and some contemporary examples from Canadian policy, would aid in providing immigrants an easy path to participation in all aspects of American culture.

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Definition of the Problem

Merit-based immigration has become an increasingly popular proposal for reforming the American immigration system. Two Republican Senators, Tom Cotton and David Perdue, introduced the RAISE Act in August 2017, which would reform the current lottery system in favor of a points-based system, and found vociferous support from President Donald Trump (Vitali & Sarlin, 2017). The inspiration for a points-based system comes from various countries around the world, including Australia and Canada. However, what these proposals ignore is the strong multicultural policies these countries have implemented (Berry, 2016, p. 10). In both Australia and Canada, multicultural integration policies forge paths for immigrants to better integrate into the host country while still retaining aspects of their native culture. Comparatively, while the United States has a history of multicultural policies, today, no coordinated national integration policy exists (Bloemraad & de Graauw, 2011; Berry, 2016).

The detriments of this lack of formal policy are evident across the United States. In a study published by Pew Research Center in 2018, researchers found that only half of immigrants in the United States could speak English proficiently, down from the peak of 57% in 1980 (López, Bialik, & Radford, 2018). Additionally, although college attainment is roughly equal between immigrants and U.S. born citizens, almost 30% of foreign-born individuals do not graduate high school, compared to 10% of native born (López, Bialik, & Radford, 2018). A 2016 report released by the Center for Immigration Studies showed that labor force attachment for immigrants from ages 25-55 was 3 percentage points lower than for natives, while the poverty rate was approximately 5 percentage points greater (Camarota & Zeigler, 2016). Such

disparities between the foreign- and native-born populations of the United States demonstrate the necessity of a clear-cut integration policy which raises immigrants onto an equal footing, both socially and economically.

Background and Overview

According to Ersanilli and Koopmans (2011), a multiculturalist approach to integration is characterized by “easy access to individual legal equality combined with a high degree of accommodation of diversity” (Ersanilli & Koopmans, 2011, p. 214). The United States government has made no official commitment to multiculturalism, although the “melting pot” ideal has played a large rhetorical role in politics for the last half century or so (Schain, 2010, p. 214). However, due to the lack of cohesive national policies, the United States is difficult to typify in this scheme, with different authors placing the country on different ends of the spectrum. Canada, on the other hand, has a historic and current commitment to multiculturalism, with many national policies a direct result of this commitment.

According to Bloemraad and de Graauw (2011), in the United States “social integration is achieved when we see an absence of significant difference between immigrants and the native born,” a system which could be described by either ethnic- or civic-assimilationist. However, the general consensus is that the lack of a cohesive national policy has made for a muddled understanding of immigrant integration in the United States, with some jurisdictions embracing exclusion above inclusion (Bloemraad & de Graauw, 2011, p. 2). Schain (2011) documented the shift in American policy from an assimilationist model in the 19th century to a more multiculturalist model in the 20th century. However, he too recognized that in spite of the general public philosophy of multiculturalism, “[t]he United States does not have an explicit integration policy . . . at the national level” (Schain, 2011, p. 220). Thus, although the United

States has a general commitment to multiculturalism, the lack of federal policy presents a significant barrier to immigrant integration.

Since 1971, Canada has endorsed an official multicultural policy which the government and many scholars believe lies behind the Canada's success in integrating immigrants (Harles, 2004). Will Kymlicka, in his 1998 work *Finding Our Way: Rethinking Ethnocultural Relations in Canada*, is foremost among these scholars, as he "cites growing rates of naturalization, the lack of ethnically-based political parties, expanding immigrant demand for courses in English and/or French as a second language, ethnical residential dispersion, and an increasing incidence of ethnic intermarriage" (Harles, 2004, p. 223) as examples of the success of this multicultural policy. More specifically, Babuta, Lien, and Anisimov (2015) point to the establishment of the Ministry of Multicultural Affairs (now the Canadian Council on Multiculturalism) in 1972, the passage of the Canadian Multiculturalism Act in 1988, and the establishment of the Canadian Heritage Department in 1993 as examples of Canada's multicultural policy in action.

Description of Policy

Although the United States has a history of multicultural policy, since the 1990's the policy has moved to a more laissez-faire, broadly assimilationist system. Canada has mostly maintained their historic commitment to multicultural policy over that same time period. While language access is fairly comparable across the two nations, the United States allocates far fewer resources to language acquisition and has a far more stringent public benefits system. Canada also has a broader education program for incoming children, providing more support for bilingualism than the United States.

Current United States Policy

According to Bloemraad and de Graauw (2011), the current federal integration policy in the United States consists of a rough historical patchwork reminiscent of many different guiding ideologies. Most of the multicultural policies identified by Bloemraad and de Graauw (2011) were adopted in the wake of the Civil Rights movement, and have since been repealed.

One of the major goals for a multicultural integration policy is to ensure that immigrants have the ability to speak the native language well enough to integrate both socially and economically, or that the host country provide accommodation for immigrants through language access. The Civil Rights Act of 1964 states that:

[n]o person in the United States shall, on the ground of race, color, or national origin, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any program or activity receiving Federal financial assistance.

This has traditionally been interpreted to mean that the President has the right to require administrative agencies to “hire bilingual personnel and translate forms, notices, and applications for limited-English proficient (LEP) individuals” (Bloemraad & de Graauw, 2011, p. 18). This interpretation was reinforced in President Clinton’s Executive Order 13166, which required “any agency or program that receives federal funding to provide meaningful access for LEP individuals” (Bloemraad & de Graauw, 2011, p. 18). In 2006, the United States Congress extended until 2032 the 1975 amendment to the Voting Rights Act of 1965 which “mandates that a state or political subdivision must provide language assistance to voters if more than five (5) percent of voting age citizens are members of a single-language minority group” (Census Bureau, 2016). Thus, the federal government has consistently demonstrated a commitment to language access policies which allow immigrants to access the political realm of the United States.

The same cannot be said for programs which promote English acquisition for immigrants. Bloemraad and de Graauw (2011) reported that in FY 2004, the Adult Education and Family Literacy Act (AEFLA), the primary program to promote adult English as a second language (ESL) instruction, received \$561 million. In FY 2018, this amount had dropped to slightly less than \$543 million (Keenan, 2018, p. 1), a roughly 28% decrease in funding when adjusted for inflation. Bloemraad and de Graauw (2011) also pointed out the cognitive dissonance of the American public on this issue, as “91 percent of Americans polled felt it very or somewhat important that immigrants speak English . . . [h]owever, only 30 percent felt that the government should pay” (p. 20). The lack of governmental support in immigrant acquisition of English is a defining feature of integration policy in the United States.

While there is little federal support for adult immigrants to learn English, there is more support for children in school. Currently the primary piece of legislation regarding ESL education in schools is the English Language Acquisition Act, part of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, which “prioritizes English-only instruction by measuring the success of school programs in English language proficiency alone” (Bloemraad & de Graauw, 2011, 21). This is a marked departure from multicultural integration policy; while it promotes English language acquisition, it does not promote the maintenance of the culture of origin. Such a policy does not promote multiculturalism, but is more aptly described as assimilation.

The final piece of modern legislation which has departed from America’s recent history of multiculturalism is the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996. This act instituted a citizenship criterion which restricted non-citizens from accessing any public benefits, placing a significant socio-political barrier in the way of full integration of immigrants. In 2009, Congress adjusted the requirements to allow immigrants “who have been

in the country for at least five years” (Bloemraad & de Graauw, 2011, 26) access to food stamps. However, many legal immigrants are still barred from accessing other benefits, such as public housing, social security, and Medicare and Medicaid, as all of these still maintain strict citizenship requirements. Not only does this place a social gap between immigrants and the native-born population, it also puts immigrants at an economic disadvantage.

Multicultural Policy

According to Banting and Kymlicka (2004), a multicultural policy is one which “provide[s] some additional form of public recognition or support or accommodation of ethnic groups, identities, and practices” (p. 12). They argue that there are eight main policies which constitute multicultural integration policy:

- (1) constitutional, legislative or parliamentary affirmation of multiculturalism, at the central and/or regional and municipal levels;
- (2) the adoption of multiculturalism in school curriculum;
- (3) the inclusion of ethnic representation/sensitivity in the mandate of public media or media licensing;
- (4) exemptions from dress-codes, Sunday-closing legislation etc. (either by statute or by court cases);
- (5) allowing dual citizenship;
- (6) the funding of ethnic group organizations to support cultural activities;
- (7) the funding of bilingual education or mother-tongue instruction;
- (8) affirmative action for disadvantaged immigrant groups (p. 14-15)

Policies similar to these can be seen in Canada, as highlighted above. More specifically to integration, however, Canada provides most of the same legal rights to non-citizens as to

citizens, only restricting them from voting and allowing them to be deported (Liston & Carens, 2008, p. 289), while becoming a naturalized citizen in Canada requires only three years of residence, a basic grasp of English or French, and no serious criminal record (Liston & Carens, 2008, p. 289).

In Canada, the federal government provides funding for “[o]fficial language acquisition handled by Language Instruction for Newcomers to Canada (LINC)” (Mulholland & Biles, 2004, p. 9), a program which provides free language acquisition education for adult immigrants. This program is coordinated through the Immigration, Refugees, and Citizenship Canada agency, which has received \$747 million in funding over the next two years (Smith, 2018). The Canadian government also allows for more natural ways for immigrants to learn English through the Host Program, which allows them to “practice language skills . . . becoming familiar with English or French” (Mulholland & Biles, 2004, p. 12). In terms of language access, the Immigrant Settlement and Adaptation Program funds organizations that provide “interpretation to make it easier for newcomers” (Mulholland & Biles, 2004, p. 11). Additionally, translation services are provided on “documents related to employment, health, education and legal matters that are necessary for immediate settlement” (Mulholland & Biles, 2004, p. 11). Not only does Canada provide classes to aid in immigrants’ acquisition of language, but they have considerable language access efforts as well.

For education, Canada has the Settlement Workers in Schools initiative, which “facilitates the integration of newcomer children into Canadian schools” (Mulholland & Biles, 2004, p. 12). They achieve this not through English language classes, but rather through providing settlement workers who “act as cultural brokers and facilitators between students, parents and administrators” (Mulholland & Biles, 2004, p. 11). While this is not provided

nationally, it is a demonstration of Canada's commitment to a multicultural policy which encourages immigrants to retain their native culture while building cultural understanding of the host country.

Unlike the United States, immigrants are eligible for most public benefits, including "health care coverage under the *Canada Health Act*" (Mulholland & Biles, 2004, p. 21). In addition, the Canadian Mortgage and Housing Corporation, which provides assistance to low-income individuals interested in homeownership, also "undertakes research, development and information transfer to improve the quality of housing and living environments" (Mulholland & Biles, 2004, p. 23). Although there are few separate programs specifically meant to deal with the issues commonly faced by immigrants, the Canadian government makes no explicit effort to exclude immigrants from social benefits. This removes most socio-political barriers to participating in the economy and society at large, allowing immigrants to remain non-citizens if they so please and encouraging a multicultural society.

Policy Analysis

To fully analyze the effectiveness of a formal multicultural integration policy, it is necessary to look at a variety of studies which comparatively analyze the success of multicultural regimes against those of other countries. This section will draw upon a wider literature of policy analysis of both integration regimes in other countries to shed light on the specific comparison of the United States and Canada. It is important to note the limitations of this approach due to differing demographics and social conditions in these countries. The analysis looks at both socio-economic integration and civic-political integration.

Socio-Economic Integration

Socio-economic integration refers to the ability of immigrants to integrate into the society and economy through job participation, wage earning, language acquisition, and other areas. Integration is measured through looking at the areas of education and labor participation, and language acquisition.

Education and labor. In his 2010 paper, Martin A. Schain found that the United States successfully integrated immigrants in all areas, reporting a lower unemployment rate among immigrants versus the native-born population, a trend which did not exist in the other three countries he investigated (p. 225). Moreover, he showed that immigrants in the United States had higher rates of high school graduation than in Great Britain and France, and comparable or higher rates of university graduation (Schain, 2010, p. 225). Despite that, immigrants still had much lower rates of high school completion than native-born individuals in the United States, although the two groups finished college at roughly the same rate (Schain, 2010, p. 225). In terms of wages, Wu, Lee, Hou, Edmonston, and Carmichael (2017) found that Canada's integration policy did not improve the earnings gap of Chinese immigrants to native-born citizens in comparison to the earnings gap in the United States.

Language acquisition. Harles indicated in his 2004 paper that Canada has "impressive rates of official language acquisition" (p. 233) compared to the United States, with a little over 10% of the population speaking a non-official language at home, versus 17.8% of the American population. However, Ersanilli and Koopmans (2011) found that in a cross-country analysis of Turkish immigrants, those in a multicultural regime had the lowest rates of language acquisition (p. 223). They also found that language acquisition is higher among more highly educated and currently employed immigrants, which would again provide reason to integrate newcomers into the country effectively.

Civic-Political Integration

Civic-political integration refers to the ability of immigrants to integrate into the political and cultural realm through rights, access to benefits, political participation and involvement, feelings of patriotism and belonging, and other areas. Integration is measured by looking at how multicultural policy affects the political interest and participation of immigrants, and the general attitudes of both newcomers and the native-born population toward immigration.

Political involvement. In their 2012 paper on the effects of multiculturalism on socio-political integration, Wright and Bloemraad found that in a multicultural regime immigrants have higher absolute levels of political trust and more political trust than natives (p. 86). Not only that, but native-born individuals have higher levels of political trust in a multicultural regime (Wright & Bloemraad, 2012, p. 87). However, Wright and Bloemraad (2012) did not find that this increased interest necessarily translated to increased political participation. In his 2010 paper, Martin Schain backed up this lack of political participation, finding that while Great Britain and France had comparable rates of immigrant representation at local levels of governance, the United States was far more successful in integrating these individuals into representation at the national level.

Immigrant and native-born attitudes. In 2010, Martin Schain found that the United States population had a slightly better perception of immigration than four European countries, as well as a generally better perception of Muslims (p. 228). Meanwhile, Harles (2004) reported that a 2002 poll by Public Agenda had found that 96% of immigrant in the United States were happy with life there (p. 238). This same poll found that only 23% of immigrants thought of themselves as equally American and their home nationality, whereas a similar poll in Canada found that 12.8% of immigrants identified the same way (Harles, 2004).

These results are supported by Ersanilli and Koopmans (2011), who found that ethnic retention did not significantly vary across three different regimes of integration (p. 219). Rather, the level of ethnic identification with the host country was actually a variable of where in the host country the immigrant originated from (Ersanilli & Koopmans, 2011). However, they also found that Dutch (a multicultural regime) immigrants from Turkey had the highest retention of their religion compared to France and Germany (Ersanilli & Koopmans, 2011). This would imply that, although multiculturalism does not have a measurable effect on ethnic retention, it does help immigrants retain other aspects of their cultural identity such as religion. Ersanilli and Koopmans (2011) also found that the increased cultural retention in a multicultural regime was accompanied by higher levels of identification with the host country.

Recommendations

As evidenced above, there is very little consensus on the benefits of a multicultural integration policy. However, as Berry (2016) pointed out, the established cultural majorities in European countries are an effective barrier to true immigrant integration, which makes some of the research above less applicable. More research on the success of Canada's formal multiculturalism versus the United States more patchwork assimilationist-multiculturalist mixture is needed to truly analyze the effectiveness of each country's integration policy. That being said, the following are recommendations for the future of federal integration policy in the United States.

Formal Commitment to a Multicultural System

To bring an end to the laissez-faire system of integration in the United States Bloemraad and de Graauw (2011) write about, it would be beneficial for the legislature to formally establish a guiding principle of American policy. The increased trust citizens have in multicultural

systems would be a boon to the United States, where trust in institutions is rapidly collapsing. At the current moment, it is undeniable that the assimilationist federal policy and multicultural local policy are causing confusing and conflicting effects. For the United States to truly integrate immigrants as is necessary to cultivate a thriving society, there must be a single guiding principle from the top down.

More Funding to AEFLA

More funding to AEFLA would be a huge boon to language acquisition in the United States. The highest years of funding align with when Harles (2004) was writing, and even then the United States lagged behind Canada in immigrant language acquisition. Based off Ersanilli and Koopmans's (2011) research that better educated and currently employed individuals have a better grasp on the host language, language acquisition is vital to fully integrate immigrants. Since Americans also believe highly in the necessity of language acquisition for full immigrant integration (Bloemraad & de Graauw, 2011), funding to AEFLA should be restored at least to the levels of the early 2000's to better prepare immigrants for life in the United States.

Recommitment to Bilingual Education

The replacement of the Bilingual Education Act with the English Language Acquisition Act in the early 2000's was the United States' most explicit move away from multiculturalism on the federal level. The English Language Acquisition Act does not encourage immigrant children to retain their culture and native language, but rather takes an assimilationist bent of teaching English alone and basing testing only on English proficiency. By recommitting to bilingual education, not only for immigrants but for native-born children as well, the United States will better prepare its residents for the future workforce. As the world becomes more intertwined, the ability to speak multiple languages will be an asset. By focusing only on English language

education, the United States is limiting investment in human capital that could harm long term economic growth.

Restoration of Benefits to Non-Citizens

The lack of higher naturalization rates in the United States has marked the failure of the attempt to incentivize citizenship by limiting access to benefits. In order to rebalance the poverty and labor-force participation rates between the native-born and immigrant populations, the United States should repeal PRWORA and reinstate benefits to all residents, regardless of citizenship. Doing so would help to eliminate the economic gap between immigrants and the native-born, which in turn promotes greater cultural and economic integration.

Conclusion

The United States has a long history of informally embracing the tenets of multiculturalism, specifically through rhetorical devices. In the late 20th century, politicians began to shift toward a more formal multicultural policy through the Bilingual Education Act, the inclusion of immigrants in the social support net, and increasing language access and education through the Civil Rights Act of 1964, the Voting Rights Act of 1965, and the passage of AEFLA. However, the last 20 years have revealed a shift away from this ideology, in conjunction with growing racial and ethnic tensions toward immigrants. While the research surrounding the benefits of multiculturalism do not yield clear results, what is truly needed is further investigation into the difference of Canada and the United States' integration policies. Since Canada is the most similar nation of immigrants to compare the United States to, it would be beneficial to follow the lead of multiculturalism set by Canada. By following the recommendations provided in this paper, the United States can help to effectively integrate

immigrants into society, the economy, and the political system, benefitting all through the growth of wealth and opinions that will follow.

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