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The Harper Immigration Agenda: Policy and Politics in Historical Context

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How Ottawa Spends, 2011–2012

Trimming Fat or Slicing Pork?

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Preface

This is the 32nd edition of *How Ottawa Spends*. As always, we are especially indebted to our roster of contributing academic and other expert authors from across Canada and abroad for their insights and for their willingness to contribute to public debate in Canada.*

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Christopher Stoney and Bruce Doern
Ottawa,
May 2011

* The opinions expressed by the contributing authors to this volume are the personal views of the authors of individual chapters and do not necessarily reflect the views of the editors or of the School of Public Policy and Administration at Carleton University.

13 The Harper Immigration Agenda: Policy and Politics in Historical Context

NEIL BRADFORD AND CAROLINE ANDREW

Canadian immigration policy is presently in a period of considerable change and uncertainty. Over the past three decades a complex set of economic, social, and cultural dynamics has challenged some of the key pillars of Canada's renowned postwar "diversity model."¹ Today, federal policy-makers face new pressures in adapting and renewing Canada's historical commitment to large-scale immigration. The challenges cut across each of the three major components of immigration policy – selection and recruitment; settlement and integration; and multicultural identity and belonging. Taking stock of the "dramatic changes in our immigration regime," many experts now voice concern about the capacity of governments to respond creatively to new conditions.² There is talk of "mission drift" in Canadian immigration policy, and calls for experimentation with new strategies and instruments to inform longer-term innovations that will reposition Canada for global leadership in managing unity and diversity.³

The aim of this chapter is two-fold: first, to offer some context for these evolving challenges, and second to interpret recent Harper government policy responses. We begin with a broad discussion of immigration as a policy field in Canada, highlighting several features that have long made it an especially complex and significant area of federal intervention. Acknowledging the full range of federal government activities in selection, settlement, and integration, Ottawa remains only one of many actors in the policy field. According to the constitution, immigration is a shared jurisdiction with federal paramountcy, but it increasingly involves provinces in leadership roles and municipal governments are becoming pro-active in the recruitment and retention of newcomers.

Tracking the evolution of federal immigration policy over the post war period, we bring into focus the major challenges of recent decades and key shifts in governance that have shaped policy design and delivery. We then explore the Harper government's efforts to place its own stamp on Canadian immigration policy. Under the active leadership of the Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism, Jason Kenney, the Conservatives have clearly grasped the significance of immigration policy and their initiatives reveal both continuity and change with the approaches of their predecessors. As we will describe later, these changes are motivated both by political considerations – building an electoral base among new immigrants – and by policy considerations. Immigration thus engages both the policy and politics of the Harper administration.

The chapter also underlines the central importance of an emerging policy leadership style that has come to be known as "metagovernance."⁴ Scholars of public administration have introduced the concept of metagovernance to capture how governments attempt to provide direction and maintain accountability in highly networked "societal endeavours" such as immigration.⁵ The key insight of this literature is its recognition that multi-level, collaborative networks are neither wholly self-organizing nor self-governing. Rather, there is an ongoing, important 'steering' role for government, calling on new forms of leadership from both politicians and administrators. As Guy B. Peters explains, metagovernance represents "an emerging style of governing from the center that ... recognizes the need for some delegation and devolution of governing but at the same time recognizes the need for greater central direction."⁶ Given the numerous players and perspectives shaping immigration policy in Canada, we conclude that metagovernance offers a useful vantage point from which to interpret contemporary federal activism.

SITUATING IMMIGRATION POLICY: A CANADIAN FIELD UNLIKE THE OTHERS

Immigration policy is sometimes seen as a second-tier policy field in Canada and one with fairly discrete boundaries that remain fixed over time and therefore amenable to clear departmental ownership at one level of government. However, there are grounds for recasting this image. Indeed, immigration policy has always held enormous significance to Canadian national development and in recent decades has become one of the most complex areas of public administration, involving not just 'joined-up government' but also collaborative governance as state and societal actors each engage the issues.

Immigration is a central theme in the construction of the Canadian story. Although not always properly recognizing the status and position of Aboriginal peoples, the Canadian narrative has basically been that of migrants who have come here and stayed here. Of course, there have been critical accounts of

these immigration movements from the perspective of the settler experience, and other analyses that emphasize the racist and classist orientations of immigration policy.⁷

Yet, even these critical accounts basically reinforce the main storyline – Canada is a country built by those who came and chose to stay. Linked to this central idea has been the corresponding theme that newcomers have been welcomed. This welcome has been framed by both an economic or instrumental motivation, and a moral or intrinsic motivation. The instrumental interpretation links to an understanding of the economic benefits of immigration while the moral account highlights compassion. In fact, these two themes often co-exist in the minds of Canadian governments and citizens, and inform self-understandings of the country. The interplay is nicely captured in the conclusion of a recent comprehensive stock-taking of Canadian immigration, settlement, and integration. The editors summarize: “Canada has long been a world leader in welcoming and accepting immigrants, which in turn has contributed to Canada’s growth and prosperity, as well as helping to shape our current society.”⁸

Certainly, the economic argument for immigration found particularly strong expression in the early post-World War Two period. The immigration of skilled workers from Europe had a major impact on Canadian industrial and urban development as skilled immigrants found work in the expanding industrial workplaces. One of the reasons for their success was that the Canadian education system was oriented to university pathways rather than the production of skilled workers. Indeed, the capacity of post-war Canadian immigration to bring in large numbers of skilled workers enabled the Canadian education system to postpone adaptation to the technological economy. By the same token, the subsequent development of a network of community colleges, by producing a large number of Canadian born skilled workers, has had a negative impact on the employment opportunities for the more recently arrived immigrants.

Of course, the economic rationale for immigration has become ever stronger in recent years with demographic projections showing that Canadian population growth will soon depend entirely on newcomers. Canada’s future economic development – its labour markets, its knowledge flows, its marketing and so forth – in the global age is increasingly tied to a continuous flow of immigrants. Moreover, the global competitiveness rationale for immigration now links to another key domestic pressure point: with an aging population, immigration also plays an important role in the workforce population growth necessary to support an increasingly large elderly population and therefore to sustain major social investments in health care and pensions that are also fundamental to the Canadian story. These social policy connections cut two ways: newcomers require timely access to a host of culturally appropriate social services, from education, housing, and health care to labour market, if they are to progress in their new country.⁹

The above discussion brings into view one facet of the significance of large-scale immigration: its interface at a macro-level with education, employment, and social policies. Attention to the ongoing needs of newcomers and their different integration pathways also underscores the dimension of complexity briefly alluded to above – the inter-governmental dynamics of immigration policy. As we will detail later, immigration policy is now on the front lines in Canadian policy experimentation with multi-level joined-up government.

In addition to these vertical relationships, there is an equally complex horizontal governance dimension.¹⁰ Most federal settlement programming is delivered by local non-governmental organizations, and the nature of this assistance will be impacted by the particular organization providing the services and by funding terms and conditions. Settlement agencies can be ethno-specific or more ‘mainstream’ in their orientations, and focused on specific immigrant populations such as women or youth or more general in scope. Differences also arise in relation to the mission and mandate of the agency in question, its leadership, relations between staff and board, and within the staff. To help ensure consistency and control, the Department of Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC) has typically relied on quite prescriptive funding models (that are themselves a source of tension among different players), but the sheer number of agencies and networks in the sector produces complex policy and program interactions.

Finally, as has been long observed in Canadian election research, immigration flows and immigration policy carry considerable political significance in Canada, specifically in terms of partisan competition and coalition formation. Foreign-born Canadian citizens vote and historically, Canada’s “government party,” the federal Liberals, drew wide support from the urban, immigrant dominated ridings in the post-war period. In turn, this support has been seen as related to the federal government’s pro-active immigration policy in the decades from the late 1940s to the 1980s. The fact that the Liberal Party formed the government for the pivotal early post-war period (until the late 1950s) and then dominated federal politics during the late 1960s and 1970s, another period of high immigration and policy activism, solidified the link between foreign-born Canadians and that party.

However, as we mentioned earlier, this link is now being challenged by the Conservative Party who build on their own partisan multicultural legacy through Prime Minister John Diefenbaker, and who now actively court the immigrant vote. Like the economic rationale, the political significance of immigration will only grow as more newcomers become Canadian citizens. With metropolitan centres the overwhelming choice for immigrant settlement, Canada’s larger city-regions become the key electoral battlegrounds among political parties.

For all of the above reasons, then, we situate immigration as a Canadian policy field that in its ‘centrality and complexity’ is quite unlike the others.

From a high-level symbolic perspective, immigration is central to narratives of nation-building and identity formation. At a macro-policy level, immigration impacts directions across the education, employment, and social fields. In more programmatic terms, immigration policy covers multiple, and very distinct, kinds of interventions from selection rules and regulations to information services outside the country and longer term community-based support for integration. Not only are these program elements varied, they engage multiple actors, only some of whom are federal officials, with many more coming from the settlement sector, ethnic associations and provincial and municipal governments. Finally, the political salience of immigration policy cannot be overlooked: the issues at stake speak to fundamental questions of national identity, economic and social development, and they engage a host of state and societal forces. Not surprisingly, federal parties with governing aspirations take very seriously the politics of immigration policy.

The above elaboration of the extraordinary significance of immigration policy in Canada provides essential context for the remaining sections of the chapter that offer more detailed discussions of federal policies and governance practices. We begin with the construction of Canada's postwar diversity model, the emerging challenges to its viability, and policy and governance adaptations in the 1990s and 2000s.

CONSTRUCTING AND CHALLENGING CANADA'S "DIVERSITY MODEL"

The model of Canadian diversity grew incrementally across the post-World War II years.¹¹ A Settlement Service was initiated in 1949 within the then Immigration Branch of the Department of Mines and Resources. In a rapid reorganization, the next year marked formation of the Department of Citizenship and Immigration, with the Settlement Service moved to the new structure. The basic framework for what has come to be known as the Canadian diversity model came into place during the 1950s and 1960s. For immigrants, the key elements included: language training, extensive use of voluntary associations and religious groups for service delivery, and broader access to income assistance and other social programmes that could assist with integration. Language training was the foundation on which other services would build. The 1959 Immigration and Citizenship section of the *Canada Year Book*, in an article on "Integration of Postwar Immigrants," set the direction for federal policy leadership in partnership with other players: "The primary step in the integration process is to learn the language ... The Citizenship Branch, under arrangements with the provincial departments of education, provides free textbooks and pays 50 p.c. of the amount expended by the provinces towards the teaching costs of language classes ... Many voluntary organizations, immigrant aid societies, and church groups also

provide language instruction."¹² Indeed, the role of the voluntary or third sector in the settlement process remains a distinctive feature of the Canadian diversity model.

At the same time, in relation to the provinces, the federal government began to open access to welfare state programs of income assistance. During the 1950s and 1960s, Ottawa persuaded the provinces to extend welfare services to immigrants, leaving federal responsibility for support to refugees. It was widely assumed in these years that the job creating engine of the postwar mass production industrial economy would supply entry-level employment for newcomers, thereby limiting the pressures on both federal and provincial income security programs. Further, Ottawa introduced its 'points system' to favour skilled economic immigrants with the best prospect for rapidly achieving self-sufficiency.

In the mid-1970s, another bureaucratic reorganization occurred, this time designed to better coordinate federal economic, social, and cultural integration while also recognizing that each involves different time frames. The Department of Manpower and Immigration was assigned what was viewed at the time as the shorter term integration challenges, related to the labour market, and the Secretary of State would focus on the longer term aspects of social, cultural, and political integration. This division of policy labour set the terms for the development of the three core federal settlement policies that define the field into the present day – the Language Instruction for Newcomers to Canada (LINC), the Immigrant Settlement and Adaptation Program (ISAP) and the much smaller Host program. The largest amount of money goes to language training, largely basic level English or French, and to ISAP which funds third sector organizations for reception and orientation services, translation and interpretation services, referrals, employment assistance and counselling. The Host program operates to match individual immigrants with established Canadians who can assist in settlement and integration. The final turning point in the postwar immigration framework was the incorporation of the idea of the "two-way street" linking newcomers and their host communities.¹³

As immigration increased and became more urban in the 1970s, it was hoped that immigrants would adapt to their new environment, and equally, that the Canadian-born population and institutions would embrace diversity. In 1971, this aspiration was formally expressed through federal multicultural policy that combined recognition and accommodation of cultural diversity with support for inter-cultural exchange. Of course, much has been written about the image of the two-way street, and the extent to which the ideal of equal adaptation has been practiced by the Canadian-born population. Yet, it is certainly notable that Canadian public opinion over the post-war period – in contrast to many other OECD countries – has remained supportive of immigration and immigrants.¹⁴

The principles and practices associated with the Canadian diversity model established in the early post-war period, and adapted through the 1960s and 1970s as immigration increased, have been widely seen as a Canadian success story. However, the more recent past has given rise to a series of difficult challenges that calls into question traditional approaches. These challenges are rooted in the changing demographic nature of immigration to Canada; in the concentration of newcomers in particular urban centres and often high poverty neighbourhoods; and the declining economic outcomes of immigrants.

Immigration to Canada has become increasingly metropolitan and predominantly non-white. There has been a dramatic increase in visible minorities in the largest Canadian cities: Toronto and Vancouver experienced an almost threefold increase in the visible minority population between 1981 and 2001.¹⁵ In relation to these settlement patterns, several trends are worrisome. To begin, there are declining economic outcomes for recent newcomers, especially racial minorities, despite higher levels of education than earlier immigrant cohorts.¹⁶ Acknowledging the complexity of issues at play, several factors stand out, including changes in French and English language ability, a decline in the return on pre-Canadian education and labour market experience, the long lasting impact on immigrants who arrive in periods of recession, and the associated transformation from an industrial economy that supplied relatively high wage labour market entry points to a service economy where job growth clusters around low paid, part time work.

A related concern has been the growing spatial concentrations of immigrant poverty. This has been documented across metropolitan areas. In Toronto, the landmark study *Poverty by Postal Code* by the Greater Toronto United Way first clarified the links between recent immigrants and distressed neighbourhoods.¹⁷ Subsequent analyses have confirmed these spatial dynamics and mapped the emergence of "three cities" in metropolitan Toronto with the third city one of concentrated poverty and recent immigrant settlement.¹⁸ At a national level, there is now evidence of a widening income gap between richer and poorer areas in all larger metropolitan centres, with three groups – recent immigrants, Aboriginal people and lone-parent families – much more likely to live in poorer neighbourhoods.¹⁹ While researchers agree there is not yet evidence of ethno-racial ghettos in Canadian city-regions, problems of social exclusion are evident as newcomers find themselves isolated not only from economic opportunity but also other forms of civic and social engagement crucial to the sense of belonging.²⁰

At the same time, the very heavy concentration of recent immigrants in Canada's three largest metropolitan centres frames a different set of concerns about social cohesion at the national level, specifically, the uneven distribution of the benefits from immigration across an urban-rural divide.²¹ There are some recent signs that immigrants are beginning to move out of the

largest metropolitan areas to the second and third-tier cities but it is far from a trend. More progress in non-metropolitan immigrant settlement will require at a minimum greater investment in the capacity of smaller cities and rural communities to provide culturally appropriate services to attract and retain newcomers.

All of the above dynamics pose significant challenges to Canadian immigration policy. For example, CIC's concentration on the first three years of settlement for program eligibility is increasingly out of step with the reality of much longer term, multi-faceted processes of integration. The tension is experienced most acutely on the front lines where settlement service agencies find many of their clients have been in Canada for more than three years yet continue to face daunting obstacles to integration. Understandably unwilling to turn them away, agencies must devote time and resources to private fund raising and other bridging activities that might fill the gaps. Such work involves forging holistic services across program silos customized to individual and family needs, as well as brokering new relationships among immigrant communities, mainstream organizations, and other levels of government. Compounding the challenges, the settlement agencies are not funded for networking, planning and innovation. They are funded only to deliver the existing service menu despite recognition that its offerings impose obstacles to building coherent pathways for immigrant integration.

Not surprisingly, recent reviews and evaluations of immigration policy report evidence of policy failure.²² This is true in the economic and labour market realm, and it also appears the case in wider social, cultural, and political dimensions of integration. The political representation at federal, provincial and municipal levels in the large Canadian cities dramatically underrepresents visible minorities, Aboriginal people, youth and women. As one recent study summarized: "There is an archetype of the Canadian elected official – white, middle-class, middle-aged, Christian, Canadian-born and majority-language speaking."²³ More broadly, research documents the racism and discrimination and feelings of social exclusion experienced by recent immigrants.²⁴

In sum, the period since the 1980s has given rise to a range of challenges that have led to growing recognition of the need to update the policy foundations of Canada's diversity model. Beginning in the 1990s, the federal government introduced a series of changes to the design and delivery of immigration policy. These changes involve three basic reorientations: first, toward a more holistic policy approach and integrated programming; second, toward more place-based policy that would offer greater flexibility to community-based service provider networks; and third, renewed emphasis on multiculturalism's two-way street to encourage greater integration between immigrants with mainstream organizations such as employer associations, educational institutions, health and housing providers. The next section explores these shifts.

RENOVATING THE MODEL? GOVERNANCE
AND POLICY CHANGE IN THE 1990S AND 2000S

Implementation of these new orientations in federal immigration policy began in the 1990s. Two sets of changes were key, each reflecting a broader view of the immigrant experience and its policy challenges. On the one hand, the federal government looked internally to reorganize its policy and programming activity to encourage horizontal integration across departments and within CIC's various interventions. On the other hand, Ottawa looked outward – or downward – to connect better with other levels of government and community organizations for vertical coordination that responds to regional and local variation.

The first horizontal thrust was to engage a variety of federal departments in issues related to immigrant integration. In addition to CIC, Heritage Canada has been heavily involved in programs that relate to immigrant integration and sense of belonging such as the Official Languages Program and the government's anti-racism framework. Since 2008, Heritage Canada's role in immigration policy has diminished as the multiculturalism file was moved to CIC in a further push for greater horizontality. Other departments playing important roles include Human Resources and Skill Development Canada in the critical area of foreign credential recognition, Health Canada in addressing the particular health needs of immigrants and the so-called immigrant "health effect," the Status of Women focusing on immigrant women, Public Safety doing work on immigrant youth gangs and the roots of violence, and the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation in housing. Helping to align these various departmental thrusts has been the Metropolis Project, an action-research community, that brings an 'immigrant lens' across government policy priorities.

Alongside the inter-departmental coordination, CIC has been restructuring its own settlement and integration programming through what it calls "modernization." Launched in 2008, this approach aims to reduce the silos and rigidities between the three key CIC programs (ISAP, LINC, Host) to enable community networks and settlement agencies to combine a "suite of services" to meet different immigrant needs. In the modernized approach, the federal programs maintain the same goals, but front-line agencies acquire both greater flexibility in making "community connections," and more accountability for the results of their service suites.

The same horizontality now informs CIC's evolving relationship with Francophone minority communities. These developed in 2002 following amendments to the *Immigration and Refugee Protection Act*. In 2003 these relationships strengthened with the adoption of the "Action Plan for Official Languages" which argued for increased federal support for promoting French-language immigration to francophone minority communities. These

links resulted in large part from the mobilization of non-governmental organizations, and CIC responded by setting up governance structures at the federal and provincial levels. A "Horizontal Management Framework" was established to oversee federal activities and monitor progress. And several of the provincial agreements (British Columbia, Alberta, Manitoba and Ontario) specifically refer to minority francophone communities and their needs in immigrant recruitment and settlement.

In some ways complementing the efforts at horizontal coordination, Ottawa began in the 1990s to decentralize immigration policy through new forms of vertical collaboration. Devolving responsibility to the provinces, it was argued, might better align settlement services with regional priorities and also facilitate immigrant access to the range of social and labour market services necessary for longer term integration. It also provided a partial solution to the large backlog in CIC's permanent resident processing system by allowing provinces to recruit immigrants to meet evolving labour market needs. While the first example of such devolution was conflictual in nature, that between Quebec and the federal government in 1991, the next round of decentralization was initiated by the federal government eager to have provincial governments take over settlement services and play a role in immigrant selection through a new Provincial Nominee Program.

The context, of course, was the intense concern in the mid-1990s about the federal deficit. As part of the 1994 Federal Program Review, settlement services were identified as the most expendable (and expensive) parts of the Department's mandate. In the late 1990s, Manitoba and British Columbia negotiated agreements that included both the nominee program and the full range of federal settlement services with CIC funding transfers. Evaluations of the two devolution experiences reveal both advantages in enabling creative experimentation and local responsiveness and concerns about the loss of national standards and the diversion of settlement funds to non-immigration priorities.²⁵ Table 1 below illustrates the various arrangements that have evolved between CIC and the provinces. The overall trendline is one of decentralization.

In the mid-2000s a third major example of vertical collaboration came in the Canada-Ontario Immigration Agreement (COIA) that did not pursue decentralization per se but rather tri-level co-management. Negotiated against the backdrop of the Martin government's New Deal for Cities and Communities, the COIA broke new ground in explicitly recognizing a role for municipal governments in immigration policy-making, and also acknowledging the needs and contributions of settlement service providers. The COIA's innovations were expressed in tri-level governance mechanisms and in a substantial infusion of federal funding for settlement services.

Through the COIA several innovative community-based projects were launched such as the placement of settlement workers in schools and in

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