

# research snapshot

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## Canadian Society Is Not Just Multicultural; It Is Multiversal

### What is this research about?

For years, Canada has defined itself as a multicultural country. But multiculturalism, as an idea, can be a problematic one. In attempting to unite cultures under the banner of a common Canadian identity, multiculturalism tends to paper over differences. At its worst, it creates a kind of hierarchy. It locates white Canadians at the centre of society and immigrants at the margins.

Even in a multicultural country that tends to favour certain groups, many Canadians remain anxious about differences. Some continue to try to pin down the nature of Canadian identity. 'Who are we?' is a commonly asked question. But Canada is so much more than just a multicultural society; it is composed of different races, genders, classes – the list goes on. Indeed, many Canadians view themselves in a complex way. They see their identities as being shaped by factors like locale, consumption, and sexual preference. And most important of all, an ever increasing number of Canadians live bi-national lives, whether it is across the border to the U.S or an ocean to Asia. Sometimes what connects them is a short term job, a second home, or family members living abroad. As a result, policymakers need to consider new ways to think about Canadian identity. They need to go beyond limited terms like 'ethnic culture' and 'majority/minority group.' They need to move beyond multiculturalism in a positive way; to build on that innovation by taking many elements of identity

### What you need to know:

Multiversalism is a positive alternative to multiculturalism. Canada is a multiverse made up of many different identities and realms, which intersect and overlap. Canadian identity isn't fixed or homogenous. Viewing Canada as a multiverse is ultimately more honest and comprehensive. Modern life already tends to be multiversal in nature. Canada has an opportunity to create the first truly transnational society.

into consideration including especially transnational ones.

### What did the researcher do?

Robert Latham, Director of the York Centre for International and Security Studies (YCISS) at York University, explored alternatives to multiculturalism in Canadian society. More specifically, he proposed a new way of thinking about Canadian society: the multiverse. He outlined his ideas in a paper entitled "What are we? From a multicultural to a multiversal Canada."

### What did the researcher find?

The idea of the multiverse presents a more honest and comprehensive way to think about Canadian society. Although multiculturalism suggests that we can contain the complexity of society under

one umbrella, the idea of the multiverse frees us from such efforts. Societies like Canada aren't orderly places; they are complex, inconsistent, and overlapping. We don't need to accept Canada as unified or multicultural. We can accept it as made up not just of many identities and viewpoints but also many sites of action – from health and education to the environment. In other words, a multiverse, like Canada, is made up of many universes, including those that reach out across its borders into many corners of the world. And diversity doesn't exist in just one universe; diversity exists within and across many overlapping and intersecting universes. A multiverse allows for more choices in the ways and places in which we might live our lives – from rural to urban, gay to straight, traditional to experimental, collective to individualistic. There is a lack of hierarchy in the multiverse. But in order to view Canada as a multiverse, we don't need to get rid of the state. On the contrary, in the Canadian multiverse, the state is all the more central – the common element that joins the universes. Indeed, the multiverse reinforces the political robustness of Canada.

### How can you use this research?

Policymakers who want to keep Canada on the forefront of innovative public policy should consider the idea of the multiverse as a model for Canadian society. The multiverse holds the promise of opening the way toward important social and political innovations. It could help to establish Canada as a global leader in rethinking the way we organize life in the increasingly transnational 21st century.

Policymakers should organize policy around the more expansive multiversal – rather than simply multicultural – framework. They should consider creating what might be called 'multiversal citizenship.' A multiversal citizen would have citizenship in one or more provinces. He or she would have secure status in any province in which he or she is a resident. And, keeping the important transnational dimension in view, they should create an environment in which multiple citizenship is the norm and thereby expand

the meaning of Canadian civic identity. This can not only enrich our understanding of what being Canadian means; it can also open the way to a more secure status for those individuals who are new to Canada. But multiversal citizenship will need to be protected on an international level. An international regime for multiple citizenship would help support this effort. Canada can take the lead in fostering this innovation in international affairs.

### About the Researcher

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