

Racial Inequality, Social Cohesion and Policy Issues in Canada

Jeffrey G. Reitz (University of Toronto) and Rupa Banerjee (University of Toronto)
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In this chapter from a forthcoming IRPP book entitled *Belonging? Diversity, Recognition and Shared Citizenship in Canada*, Jeffrey G. Reitz and Rupa Banerjee examine a wealth of data from the 2002 Ethnic Diversity Survey (EDS) to assess the degree to which racial inequality exists in Canada and its impact on the cohesion of Canadian society. The marked shift toward non-European immigrants since the early 1970s has increased the share of visible minorities to 13 percent of Canada's population in 2001, compared with less than 1 percent in 1971. Their population shares are much higher in Vancouver and Toronto, the two principal destinations of new immigrants. For example, racial minorities accounted for 36.8 percent of Toronto's population in 2001.

Major Findings

- Generally speaking, visible-minority groups have much lower incomes and higher poverty rates than those of European origin. While their employment rates and earnings rise with time spent in Canada, the gap with native-born Canadians has widened in the past two decades.
- Children of immigrant minorities do quite well with regard to educational attainment, having higher graduation rates than Canadians of European origin. The authors point out, however, that this may be due more to the relatively high education levels of their parents than the absence of racial bias.
- Within certain minority groups (notably Blacks, Chinese and South Asians), perceptions of racial discrimination are widespread. In the EDS, 50 percent of Blacks and 33 percent of Chinese and South Asians reported having experienced discrimination or unfair treatment based on their ethnicity. Children of visible-minority immigrants (as well as first-generation immigrants who came to Canada as young children) are more likely than their parents to report such discrimination — perhaps because of greater expectations of equality.
- The authors examine seven indicators of social integration using data from the EDS: sense of belonging in Canada, trust in others, self-identification as Canadian, acquisition of citizenship, life satisfaction, volunteering and voting. For nearly all of them, visible-minority immigrants score significantly lower than do those of European origin. Moreover, the racial gap in social integration is larger for groups with greater experience in Canada — earlier immigrants and those born in Canada.

In summary, the authors conclude that incomes of visible minority immigrants are rising, but that this is insufficient to assure their integration into Canadian society. The perception and reality of discrimination slows integration, thus calling into question the adequacy of current policies to address this challenge to social cohesion.

Policy Implications and Prescriptions

Reitz and Banerjee note that Canada's existing multiculturalism and diversity policies emphasize laudable ideals of equal opportunity and opposition to racism, but lack coordination and clear objectives with regard to racial minori-

ties. Furthermore, they are spread throughout agencies and layers of government. All of this contributes to the lack of focus and clarity.

- To improve coordination and promote consistent and effective policy-making, the authors suggest creating a cabinet-level agency within the federal government that would be responsible for all immigration-related policies (including settlement, employment, antidiscrimination, bridge training and foreign credentials recognition) and would have authority to initiate discussions with other levels of government.
- Increasing the participation of visible minorities in policy-making is also important, given the distinctive problems they face. In particular, the authors suggest establishing a national advisory council, with broad participation of visible-minority communities, to address concerns about the impact of race relations on social cohesion.

IRPP Comment

The thorough analysis of Reitz and Banerjee serves as a wake-up call for policies on race relations and social cohesion. Their work shows that, contrary to the general feeling among Canadians, both the perception and the reality of discrimination against visible minorities are alive and well in Canada, and they are contributing to the weakening of social cohesion in Canada. The fact that the sons and daughters of visible-minority immigrants feel a weaker sense of belonging in Canada than do their parents bodes ill for the future.

The fundamental purpose of existing policies under the rubric of multiculturalism is to formally recognize, protect and preserve Canada's multicultural character. Issues of discrimination and social cohesion require a broader policy response, including measures to improve labour market access and incomes, ensure equality of opportunity and encourage political and civic participation in addition to those proposed by the authors. At the same time, some of these policies need to be tailored to specific minority groups, recognizing the different situations and needs of each.