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NEWS RELEASE

Harmonizing Immigration Policy Would Stifle Canada's Flexibility, Focus and Innovation

***Institute for
Research on
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Study finds that immigration has long-term impact on economic and social development.

Montreal – The Institute for Research on Public Policy (IRPP.org) today released a study by Alan Green entitled “Beyond Harmonization: How US Immigration Rules Would Have Worked in Canada.” The study looks at what the long-term implications would have been had Canada harmonized its immigration policy with that of the US.

The author, an emeritus professor at Queen’s University, argues that adopting our southern neighbour’s regulations to govern the admissions of immigrants would have adversely affected Canada’s economic and social development.

Green builds an historical simulation with the following question: “What if Canada, at the start of the twentieth century, had adopted the American model of regulating immigration?” He concludes that harmonization would have decreased the benefits that flow from three key features of Canadian policy: flexibility, focus and innovation.

The study demonstrates that Canada’s small and open economy requires **flexibility** to manage the costs of technological change and external demands. Harmonizing with the more rigid American system “would have raised adjustment costs and lowered the standard of living [in Canada],” writes Green.

The author highlights how the thrust of immigration policy in the two countries differs. The US model has a humanitarian rather than an economic **focus**. “If Canada had followed a kinship model like that of the US,” says Green, “then the country’s structural transformation would have been severely hampered.”

The study reveals how an independent immigration policy has allowed Canada to be **innovative** and develop instruments such as the point system, which shifted the composition of immigration to reflect the requirements of the economy. “Because the US never adopted it, the benefits bestowed on the Canadian economy by the point system would have been lost if Canada had adopted US immigration regulations,” concludes the author.

Looking ahead, Green argues that Canadian and American priorities differ significantly. The US is concerned about the infiltration of undocumented migrants from Mexico and Central America and worries about dealing with the rising tide of unskilled workers. Canada's concerns centre on attracting young, skilled workers and addressing the needs of the world's refugees.

The study notes that immigration has had a profound influence in shaping long-term economic and social development in this country. And, says the author, "as immigration plays an increasingly important role in shaping Canada's future, it is imperative that Canadians maintain sovereignty over this vital area of national policy."

"Beyond Harmonization: How US Immigration Rules Would Have Worked in Canada" is the latest *Policy Matters* study to be released as part of the IRPP's Immigration and Refugee Policy series. It is now available on-line in Adobe (.pdf) format on the Institute's Web site (www.irpp.org). Please find the summary attached.

For more information or to request an interview, please contact the IRPP.

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