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How Canadian are you? Visible-minority immigrants and their children identify less and less with the country, report says

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MARINA JIMENEZ IMMIGRATION REPORTER Visible-minority immigrants are slower to integrate into Canadian society than their white, European counterparts, and feel less Canadian, suggesting multiculturalism doesn't work as well for non-whites, according to a landmark report.

The study, based on an analysis of 2002 Statistics Canada data, found that the children of visible-minority immigrants exhibited a more profound sense of exclusion than their parents.

Visible-minority newcomers, and their offspring, identify themselves less as Canadians, trust their fellow citizens less and are less likely to vote than white immigrants from Europe.

The findings suggest that multiculturalism, Canada's official policy on interethnic relations since 1971, is not working as well for newer immigrants or for their children, who hail largely from China, South Asia and the Caribbean, conclude co-authors Jeffrey Reitz, a University of Toronto sociologist, and Rupa Banerjee, a doctoral candidate.

It is also a warning that Canada, long considered a model of integration, won't be forever immune from the kind of social disruption that has plagued Europe, where marginalized immigrant communities have erupted in discontent, with riots in the Paris suburbs in the fall of 2005.

"We need to address the racial divide," Prof. Reitz said. "Otherwise there is a danger of social breakdown. The principle of multiculturalism was equal participation of minorities in mainstream institutions. That is no longer happening."

The sense of exclusion among visible-minority newcomers is not based on the fact that they earn less than their white counterparts. Instead, the researchers found integration is impeded by the perception of discrimination, and vulnerability -- defined as feeling uncomfortable in social situations due to racial background and a fear of suffering a racial attack.

That is why even as the economic circumstances of newcomers improve over time, the path to integration does not necessarily become smoother for visible minorities.

The study found that 35 per cent of recent immigrants of Chinese origin reported experiences of perceived discrimination, 28 per cent of South Asians, and 44 per cent of blacks, compared with 19 per cent of whites.

The gap didn't narrow, but widened, with the next generation, with 42 per cent of all visible minority second-generation immigrants reporting discrimination, compared with 10.9 per cent of their white counterparts.

"There is a perception among minority communities that discrimination is part of their lives. Yet if you ask Canadians in general, they discount discrimination," Prof. Reitz noted.

The study, released yesterday by the Montreal-based Institute for Research on Public Policy, was based on the Ethnic Diversity Survey, which asked seven specific questions about integration. It is considered the best source of information on the topic because of the huge sample size (more than 40,000 respondents).

The study's authors found that only 33 per cent of first-generation visible-minority immigrants identified as Canadians, compared with 64 per cent of white immigrants, while 70 per cent voted in the last federal election, compared with 82 per cent of white immigrants. Seventy-nine per cent of visible-minority immigrants had Canadian citizenship, compared with 97 per cent of white immigrants.

Regarding interpersonal trust -- trust of one's fellow citizens -- the response of blacks was markedly lower. Thirty per cent of blacks trusted their fellow citizens, compared with 50 per cent of white immigrants and 60 per cent of Chinese immigrants.

As for the children of visible-minority immigrants, 44 per cent of them felt a sense of belonging, compared with about 60 per cent of their parents. In contrast, 57 per cent of the children of white immigrants felt a sense of belonging, compared with 47 per cent of their parents.

While Canadians in general remain supportive of immigration, they also maintain a "social distance" from minorities, reflected in the study's findings, the authors noted.

"When you study the trend over time, visible minorities who were born here feel less like they belong than their parents," Prof. Reitz said.

The research highlights an urgent issue: the failure to engage immigrants as full members of society, said Ratna Omidvar, executive director of the Maytree Foundation, a Toronto organization that works with immigrants. "Good multicultural policy must not only protect our rights to equality, but it must also create real opportunities," she said.

Added Prof. Reitz: "Multiculturalism doesn't have specific goals and objectives. The majority population thinks too much is being done already, while minorities think the policy lacks credibility."

CANADIAN IDENTITY

Do you identify as Canadian?

| | Immigrants Recent* | Immigrants Earlier** | Second Generation |
|--|-----------------------|-------------------------|-------------------|
| Immigrant Third Generation and higher | | | |
| Whites 63.4% | 21.9% | 53.8% | 78.2% |
| Total visible minorities | 21.4 | 34.4 | 56.6 |
| Chinese | 30.6 | 42.0 | 59.5 |
| South Asian | 19.1 | 32.7 | 53.6 |
| Black | 13.9 | 27.2 | 49.6 |
| Other visible minorities | 17.4 | 32.8 | 60.6 |

* Arrived in Canada between 1991 and 2001 ** Arrived in Canada before 1991

SOURCE: JERRREY G. REITZ AND RUPA BANERJEE

DISCRIMINATION?

Have you experienced discrimination in the past 5 years?

| | Immigrants Recent* | Immigrants Earlier** | Second Generation |
|--|-----------------------|-------------------------|-------------------|
| Immigrant Third Generation and higher | | | |
| Whites 9.9% | 19.2% | 10.2% | 10.9% |
| Total visible minorities | 33.6 | 35.5 | 42.2 |
| Chinese | 35.4 | 30.9 | 34.5 |
| South Asian | 28.2 | 34.1 | 43.4 |
| Black | 44.8 | 47.7 | 60.9 |
| Other visible minorities | 32.5 | 34.8 | 36.2 |

* Arrived in Canada between 1991 and 2001 ** Arrived in Canada before 1991

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